

Maya Royal Ritual: Architectonics as a Key to Political Organization

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This study considers the spaces occupied by Maya royal rituals as a means of testing the application of models of political organization. Investigation of the architectonics of several temple pyramids at the sites of Copan, Tikal, and Seibal indicates that Maya political organization does not resemble that required by either the galactic polity or segmentary state models. Comparison with large Mesopotamian temples from Early Dynastic levels at Khafaje and al-'Ubaid suggests that the royal rituals of the Classic Maya are indicative of a city-state political organization.

Two models of state level political organization have recently been forwarded as appropriate characterizations of Classic Maya polities: the segmentary state (Houston 1992) and the galactic polity (Demarest, n.d.). Both of these models derive from a growing awareness within anthropology and sociology that the rituals of rulers are not epiphenomenal to the governance of society but rather are central to the structure of power. This brief study looks to the spaces that royal rituals occupied as a means of testing the application of models of political organization. Investigation of the architectonics of the spaces they occupied demonstrates that Maya royal ritual praxis does not resemble that required by either the galactic polity or segmentary state models. Comparison with large Mesopotamian temples from Early Dynastic levels at Khafaje and al-'Ubaid suggests that the royal rituals of the Classic Maya are indicative of a city-state political organization.

This investigation considers monumental religious architecture from the sites of Copan, Tikal, and Seibal—three Maya cities of different sizes—and attempts to define the major aspects of ritual praxis preserved in the architectonics of their large temple pyramids. The sample of temple pyramids examined from each site is limited by the detail of published information and by a concern to limit the inquiry to those temples used in ritual involving the monarch. Therefore, most of the temples selected for this study are adjacent to large plazas and central to the site plan, but it is also

important to note the distribution of large temple pyramids within the site as a whole. The method of description, previously defined in an ethnoarchaeological analysis of religious spaces in Tucson (Smith 1992), delineates spheres of ritual action, their relationship to each other, and any areas of mediation among them in reference to the flow of circulation defined by temple architecture.

Apart from embracing the description of large temple pyramids as the sites of royal ritual (Schele and Miller 1986), this investigation eschews discussion of Maya inscriptions¹ for two reasons. First, the available inscriptions describe only the king's behaviors in ritual contexts without extensive reference to either the remainder of the elite or the congregants. Second, any written description is biased by the point of view of the author (or sponsor, as is probably the case with Maya inscriptions) but the architectural setting of ritual presents a view on behavior removed from the singular perspective of historical sources.

Several terms used in this analysis need to be clearly defined. Ritual praxis is the action of ritual directed to a goal (such as influencing the cosmos) that takes place within defined ritual spaces. Ritual praxis has a distinct circulation pattern—regulated movement of actors—that is defined by the architectonics within and among ritual spaces. It is distinct from "ritual" in that ritual praxis includes no assumptions as to the meaning of the actions within a cosmological sphere. Analysis of ritual praxis confines interpretation to the level of the manifest relations among actors.

The architectonics of a ritual structure (or set of related structures that comprise a single unit of ritual architecture) are the material (architectural) manifestations of the unified set of concepts or beliefs elaborated in ritual. The architectonics of ritual space reify socially real roles and power inequalities and express them in the arrangement of space and the regulation of circulation among spaces. Ultimately at issue within all religious architectonics is the sacred and its opposite, the profane. As defined by Eliade (1959), this opposition lies at the heart of religion universally, providing an ontological organizing principle for ritual, and the architectonics of religious structures. This inquiry is concerned to test models of political organization in reference to the Classic Maya and does not attempt to reconstruct the meaning of Maya belief beyond the basic sacred/profane dialectic.

THE SEGMENTARY STATE MODEL

The segmentary state model, as developed by Southall (1953:248-249; 1988), was developed to contrast with descriptions of the "unitary" state. The unitary state is characterized by "territorial sovereignty, centralized government, specialized administrative personnel, and a monopoly of legitimate force" (Stein 1977). Although we may debate this definition (particularly based on post-structuralist accounts of power and faction within modern unitary states), it serves as a foil to a description of the segmentary state.

The segmentary state is a political organization "in which the spheres of ritual suzerainty and political sovereignty do not coincide. The former extends widely towards a flexible, changing periphery. The latter is confined to the central, core domain" (Southall 1988: 52). Here, ritual suzerainty refers to sovereignty based upon an individual's control over the mystical or supernatural elements upon which the populace depends. In contrast to the unitary state, the ruler of a segmentary state leads not by his monopoly of the implements of coercion but by his monopoly of the means to control the supernatural. Specifically, the power of the ruler lies in his use of ritual and charisma to demand the fealty of local elites. As such his power is hegemonic and dissipates with increased distance from the seat of authority. The king's lack of direct control over the administrative bureaucracy creates tensions between local elites and the ruler, lending segmentary states a settlement pattern with a high degree of architectural redundancy.

Ritual suzerainty, then, is the central aspect of a ruler's power within the segmentary state formulation. Senior lineage members create such suzerainty through the progressive acquisition of privileges and power, which are eventually elaborated into a permanent office. The king, supported by his kin, can extend his authority into the political realm, using his personal authority to command tribute. This authority derives from his power to use ritual performance to influence the supernatural and thus bring death, disease and misfortune to those who refuse his demands.

Southall describes the segmentary state as both fragile and flexible. Centripetal tendencies rooted in the elite to overturn central authority conflict with centrifugal tendencies rooted in the ruler to extend his control and create a unitary state, and these

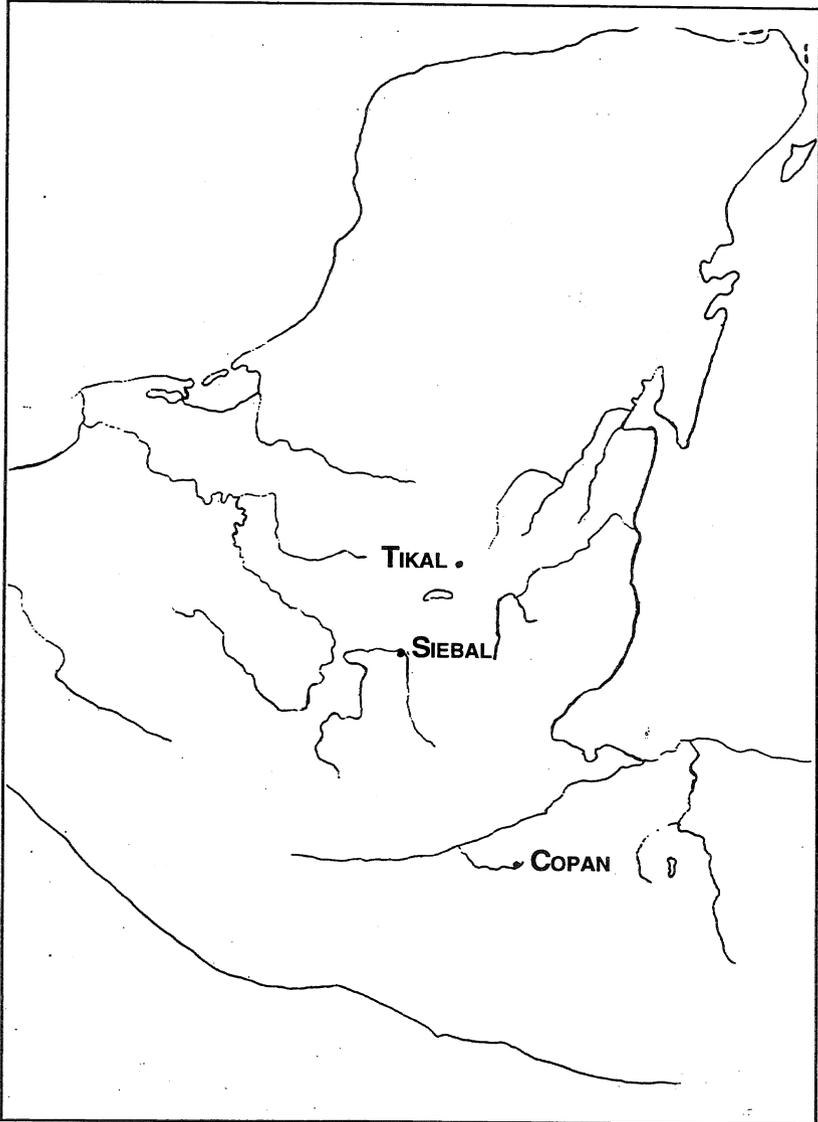


Figure 1: The Maya Area

tensions result in a fragile state. But history has proven, both Southall and Stein contend, that the segmentary organization has a durability derived from its flexibility in accommodating swings in power between elites and rulers without great disruption to the

organization of production or the administrative bureaucracy.

Royal ritual is central to the segmentary state but it must be of a specific nature. The necessary attributes of royal ritual in a segmentary state that follow from Southall's description include: (1) they must be public since the king's eminence relies on the constant affirmation of his power; (2) they must focus on the king in order that a class of religious professionals does not co-opt the power of ritual performance, which could be used by competing elites to undermine royal control of the supernatural; (3) they must be directed toward the populace and not toward the elites since ritual suzerainty requires a broad-based belief in the efficacy of the king's power; (4) they must be redundant—superior to local rituals, but rather than abrogating the local temple's power, the royal ritual must co-opt it and use it as a platform for disseminating royal hegemony; and (5) the king's palace must be placed within or adjacent to the most sacred spaces since access to them is the source of his legitimacy.

THE GALACTIC POLITY MODEL

The galactic polity model is similar to the segmentary state model in that it also describes a "weak" state lacking the thorough integration of political, ideological, and economic authority that marks the unitary state. In his analysis of Southeast Asian kingdoms, Tambiah argues that these polities were "arranged according to a galactic scheme, and that this scheme was conceptualized and actualized in ways that are best elucidated in terms of certain key indigenous concepts" (Tambiah 1977: 73). These concepts, although culture specific in form, are employed to guarantee the authority of a center (geographic, political, ritual, etc.) over the surrounding periphery. The galactic polity is characterized by organization along cosmological lines, redundancy of functions between center and periphery, the absence of an overarching bureaucracy, fluidity in political boundaries, and struggle between royals and local elites.

In both the galactic polity and segmentary state models, ritual is a central element in royal power, but the relationship between the king and the supernatural is significantly different. In the segmentary state model, a ruler's power derives from his direct control over the supernatural. In the galactic polity, the king embodies

myth and performs ritual but he cannot command the supernatural. The king's control over the galactic polity is more explicitly political in that provinces (arranged along cosmological lines, e.g., along the cardinal directions) are administered by members of the royal family (sons and grandsons) as well as other nobles in return for their oath to provide the king with the resources necessary to wage war. Coercion in the galactic polity is explicitly militaristic, but the instruments of force are not directly available to the king; instead, they must be solicited from local elites. The overall organization of the galactic polity emulates a cosmological model. Both the city and countryside are constructed so as to emulate the world view set forth in myth and belief, and thus they legitimate the rule of the king at the center of the world view.

The galactic polity model demands that royal ritual possess the following distinctive traits: (1) they must publicly demonstrate the unity of kingship and the cosmological order; (2) they must involve the king with the natural order rather than placing him above it in a position of control; (3) similarly, they must involve nobles and lesser royals but with an emphasis on their obeisance within the cosmological order; and (4) major ritual spaces should be disseminated throughout the city so as to provide a sacred map of the important cosmological dimensions (e.g., large temples placed at the compass points of the settlement).

The requirements of royal rituals within the segmentary state and galactic polity models shape the architectonics of ritual spaces. I will now turn to a description of the Maya ritual spaces chosen as a sample to test the application of these two models to Classic Maya political organization.

MAYA ROYAL RITUAL SPACES

The three sites selected for this sample—Copan, Tikal, and Seibal—represent three different types of sites that flourished during the Classic Period (see Figure 1). Tikal was the largest of the three with a peak population during the Late Classic Period (A.D. 600-800) between 35,000 (Sanders 1973) and 49,000 (Haviland 1969) and a site area that probably extended beyond the 555 square kilometers of national park dedicated to it today. The Copan pocket, the center of an urban settlement that sprawled along the Copan river valley, comprised only 24 square kilometers but at its peak (A.D. 700-850) contained 80 percent of the estimated 18,000-

20,000 people in the region (Freter 1992: 128). Seibal, the smallest of the three sites, enjoyed a Late Classic Period building boom on both acropoli that comprise the main groups (A and D) of the site. Major construction projects seem to have shifted from Group D to Group A around A.D. 830. The nucleus of the site covers just over 1 square kilometer. Although apparently under the rule of Dos Pilas for some period of time during the Late Classic, the site was an autonomous polity deeply involved in the politics of the Pasión region for most of the Classic Period (Schele and Freidel 1990).

The temple pyramids built throughout the Classic periods at these sites are most likely the products of diverse motivations, but the roles and interactions interpolated into the circulation patterns and architectonics of these monumental structures reflect not only the common culture of the Maya lowland polities, but also their common sociopolitical organization.

I. Copan²

Large temple structures at the site of Copan are limited in their distribution to the main group at the center of flanking residential enclaves (Sanders and Webster 1988: 532; see Figure 2). Access to the division I acropolis is primarily via two wide gateways on the east and west sides of the middle plaza. The main group contains two large stepped pyramids—Temples 26 and 16.

Temple 26

The most famous landmark of the Copan acropolis, this temple is marked by the hieroglyphic stairway, which runs up its west façade (see Figure 3). The dedication date of this monument is given in the hieroglyphics as 9.16.4.1.0 (A.D. 755) during the reign of Smoke Shell, the 15th ruler of Copan. With a basal area of 3025m², Temple 26 rises approximately 24 meters to a 16m-by-7.5m (120m² in area) platform. At the base of the western face of the structure is an altar and stela pair placed just in front of the stairway. The area available for ritual praxis at the base of the temple is limited to the west face in the court of the hieroglyphic stairway. Although there is open area on the north side of the temple, the enclosure is not oriented in this direction. The altar suggests that ritual praxis occurred around the base of the hieroglyphic stairway as well as at its summit. The stairway itself, with hieroglyphs that recount

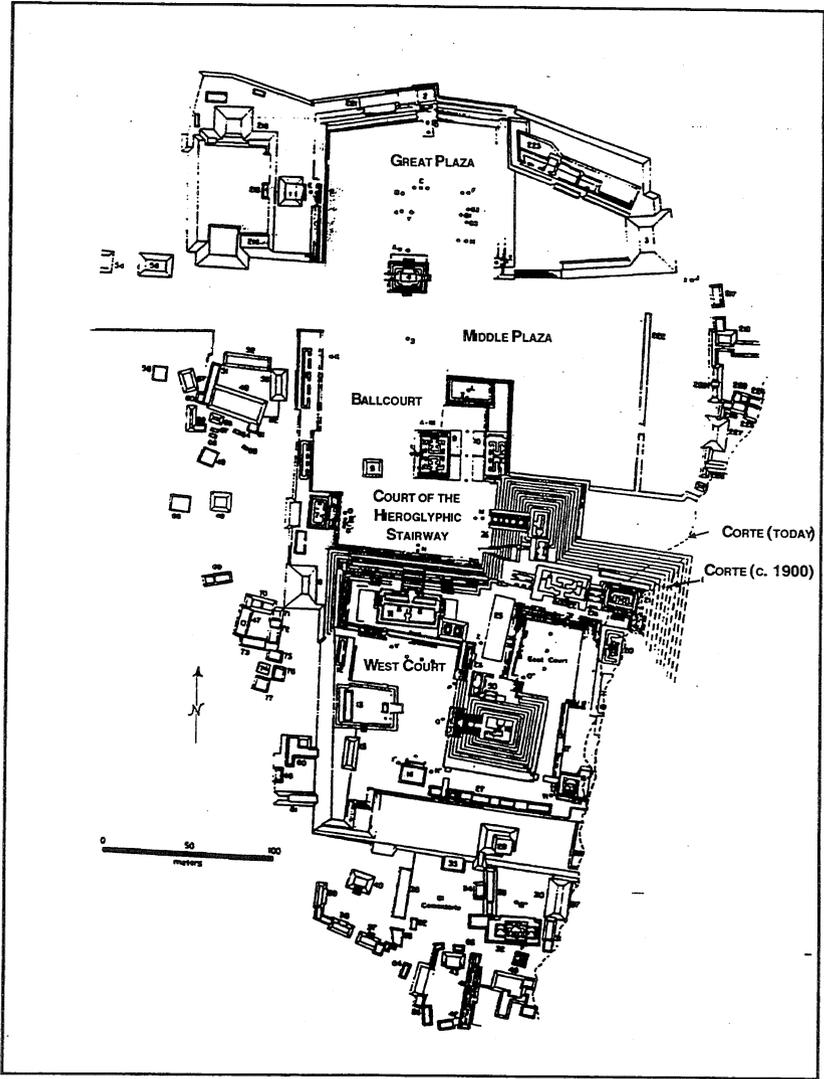


Figure 2: The Copan Acropolis

Copan's rulers, is the only means of surmounting the temple.

The entire platform is covered by an enclosure with thick masonry walls, which most likely defined a single, undivided room. Access to the enclosure is only through narrow doors on the west (front) or the south sides. Adjacent to Temple 26 is structure

22 and its associated buildings (str. 17-21), which the excavators describe as a palace, perhaps of Rising Sun, Copan's 16th king (Sanders and Webster 1988).

A set of stairs off the south side of the platform leads to a second enclosure, denoted separately as structure 230 (10L230). This is also a temple enclosure, clearly a part of the larger architectural context of 10L26. Within this enclosure, space is divided by masonry walls into three chambers: a central room that is the largest of the three and the first entered, and two side rooms of equal size.

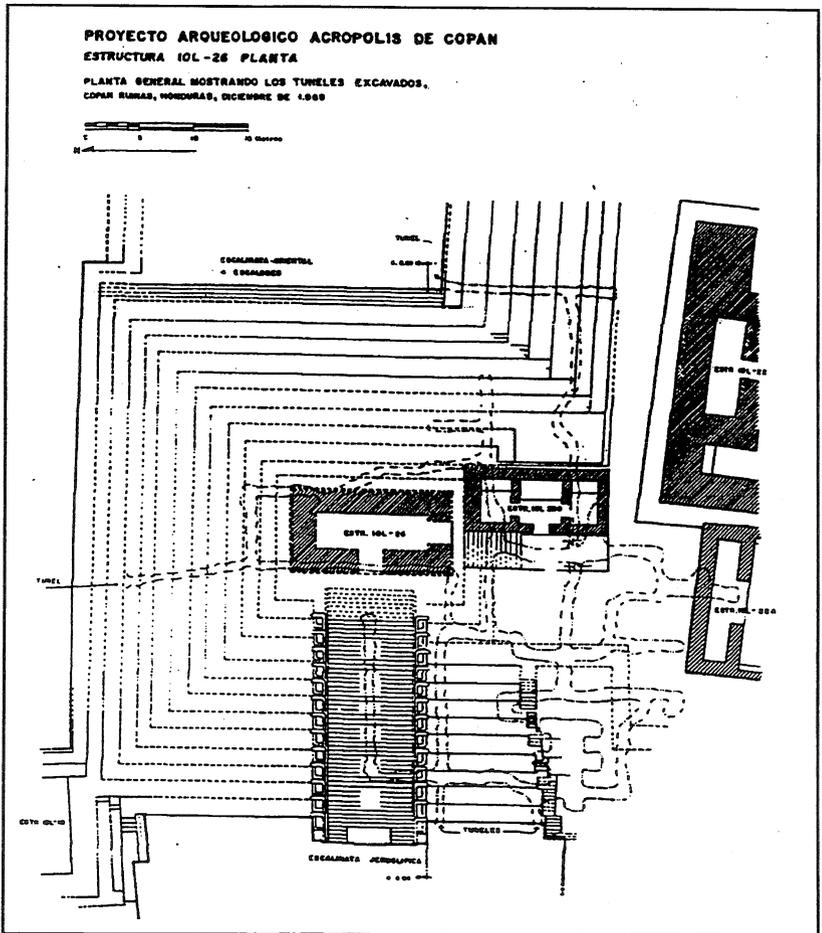
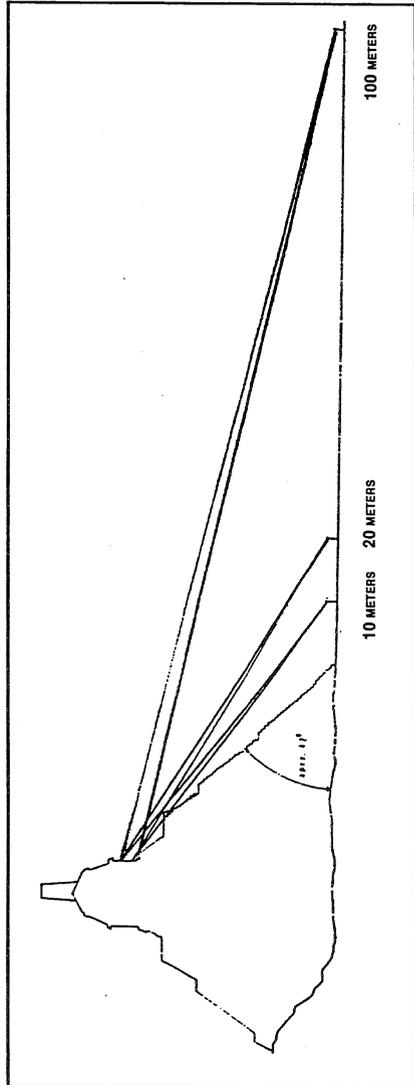


Figure 3: Plan — Temple 26, Copan

Lastly, the tunnels that burrowed underneath Temple 26 reveal the location to be a palimpsest of temple architecture with at least five major building phases (Fash 1992). This suggests that the sacrality of a single place was retained throughout the long history of the site.

The architectonics of Temple 26 define two distinct spheres of ritual praxis—the top of the stepped pyramid (internally subdivided by the two enclosures) and the base. The relevant dimension separating the two is most clearly height. Following Eliade's basic formulation, this axis of separation defines a gradient between the most sacred and the profane. The structural regulation of access to the upper platform defines those spaces within the enclosure as the most sacred while those below are less so. The constriction of ritual space from base to platform suggests the leader(s) of the ritual occupied the enclosures while a congregation occupied the courtyard below. There is no possibility for mediation (interaction on an equal architectural and power level) between these two groups within the defined ritual space short of dissolving the one ritual group into the other. We can suggest a differentiation of ritual activity within the elites with a secondary group of ritual leaders charged with performing the activities



**Figure 4: Lines-of Sight
of Temple Pyramids
(Temple of Inscriptions, Palenque)**

around the altar. The architecture of Temple 26, therefore, defines a power relationship among ritual participants, conditioned by access to the enclosures on the platform and within the ritual elites.

The obscurity of the performances within the enclosures to a participant at the base of the temple reinforces the separation of the congregants' ritual, focused around the altar, and the ritual of the elites focused in the enclosure. Research into the lines-of-sight of large Maya temple pyramids suggests that the visibility of activities atop the pyramid diminishes as one nears the base (see Figure 4). The dual nature of ritual praxis—one atop the platform, one around the altar—conditioned by the architecture of Temple 26 suggests the necessity of a class of ritual specialists since the king cannot be involved with both.

Temple 16

Dividing the west court and the east court, on the south end of the acropolis is Temple 16, a stepped pyramid connected, on the north face, to the main palace group. Temple 16, in its basic architectural form, is similar to Temple 26. With a basal area of 2750 square meters, Temple 16 rises 18m from the level of the west court (see Figure 5). Like Temple 26, it is oriented to the east with a narrow stairway along the eastern façade and an altar (altar Q, dedicated A.D. 775 by Yax-Pac) at the base of the stairs.

Temple 16 is joined to the palace group about halfway up the northern face and the temple's east face defines the narrow passage into the east court, the center of Copan's royal complex. The small platform that joins Temple 16 is oriented into the east court, with structures blocking its view into the west court. Therefore, it is not part of the ritual space of Temple 16. Like Temple 26, there is no stage for ritual between the base and the platform and the single staircase is the only route between them.

The platform of Temple 16 is surmounted by an enclosure that probably had two floors. The dimensions of the Temple 16 platform—19.5m by 14m (273 square meters area)—are larger than Temple 26, but unlike Temple 26, the broader dimension of the platform of Temple 16 is the depth, not the width. The enclosure is entered from the west side only (confirming the temple's westward orientation). Circulation within the enclosure continues to reinforce height as the primary axis of differential access to the sacred.

The presence of several levels within the enclosure suggests that not only was there a class of ritual specialists, but that this class was hierarchical with restrictions on members' proximity to the sacred within ritual praxis.

The architectonics of Temple 16 also delineate two primary ritual spaces—base and enclosure—separated along a vertical axis. These two spaces suggest two ritual groups—elites and

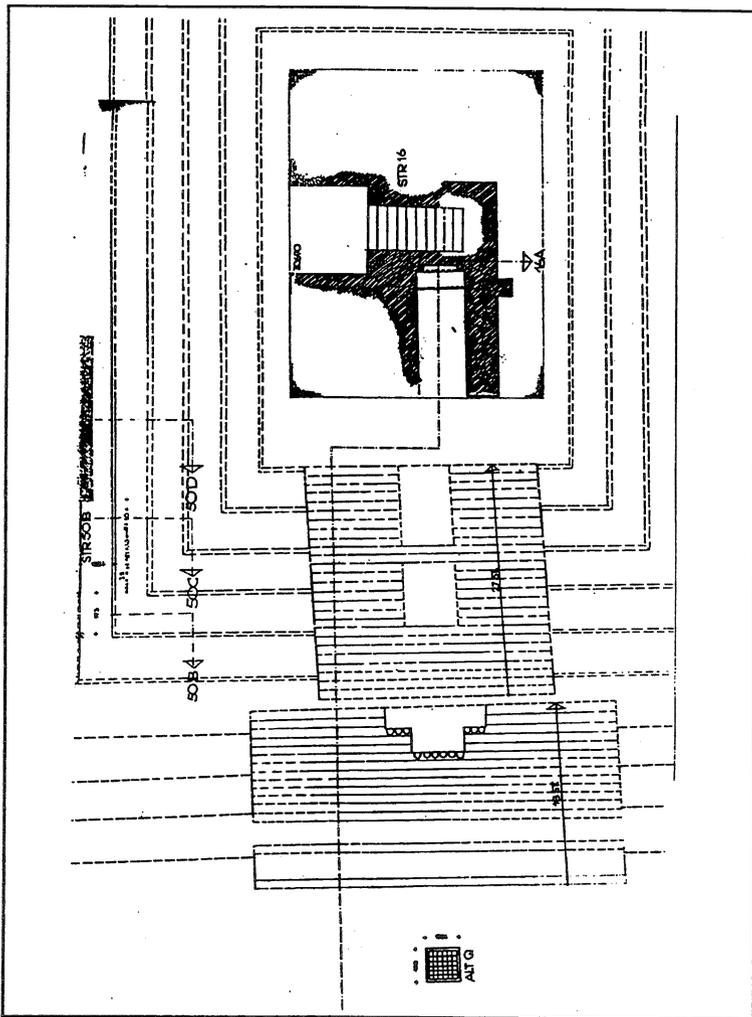


Figure 5: Plan — Temple 16, Copan

congregants—separated by their ability to gain access to the sacred. There is no space for this relationship to be mediated within the available ritual space. Within the elites who control the ritual, there seems to be a hierarchy that is also graded along the vertical axis ranging from the lowest (in status and in elevation) who administer the rites on the altar at the base of the pyramid to the highest elites, which undoubtedly includes the king, within the upper level of the enclosure.

In sum, the architectonics of the large temple pyramids at Copan define a power gradient between a group of elites who perform ritual within the confines of the enclosure and a group of congregants whose ritual praxis is focused on an altar at the temple's base. The elites' power is based on their regulation of access to the sacred and is materially expressed by both the height of the structures and the secrecy of the enclosures, which remove their ritual from general view. This dual organization of ritual suggests a hierarchical organization within the group of religious specialists as the action focused around the altars at the base of the temples place these elites farther from the sacred than those whose actions take place in the enclosure. Lastly, the tunneling at Copan has revealed temple architecture underneath Temple 26 suggesting a commitment to the sacrality of a single place.

II. Tikal³

Unlike Copan, not all of the large temples are adjacent to the palace complex (see Figure 6). Large temple pyramids are located in the outlying residential areas as well as the central part of the site. While most large temple pyramids at Tikal are focused around the three acropoli at the center of the site (Temples I, II, III, and V), wide causeways link the central area to Temple VI (the Temple of the Inscriptions, approximately 950 meters southeast of the center) and Temple IV (less than 400 meters west of the center). This discussion will look at Temples I and II of the central pyramid pair and more briefly at the North Acropolis temple complex.

Temples I and II

Located on the east and west sides of the Great Plaza, Temples I and II are mirror images of each other and so should be considered

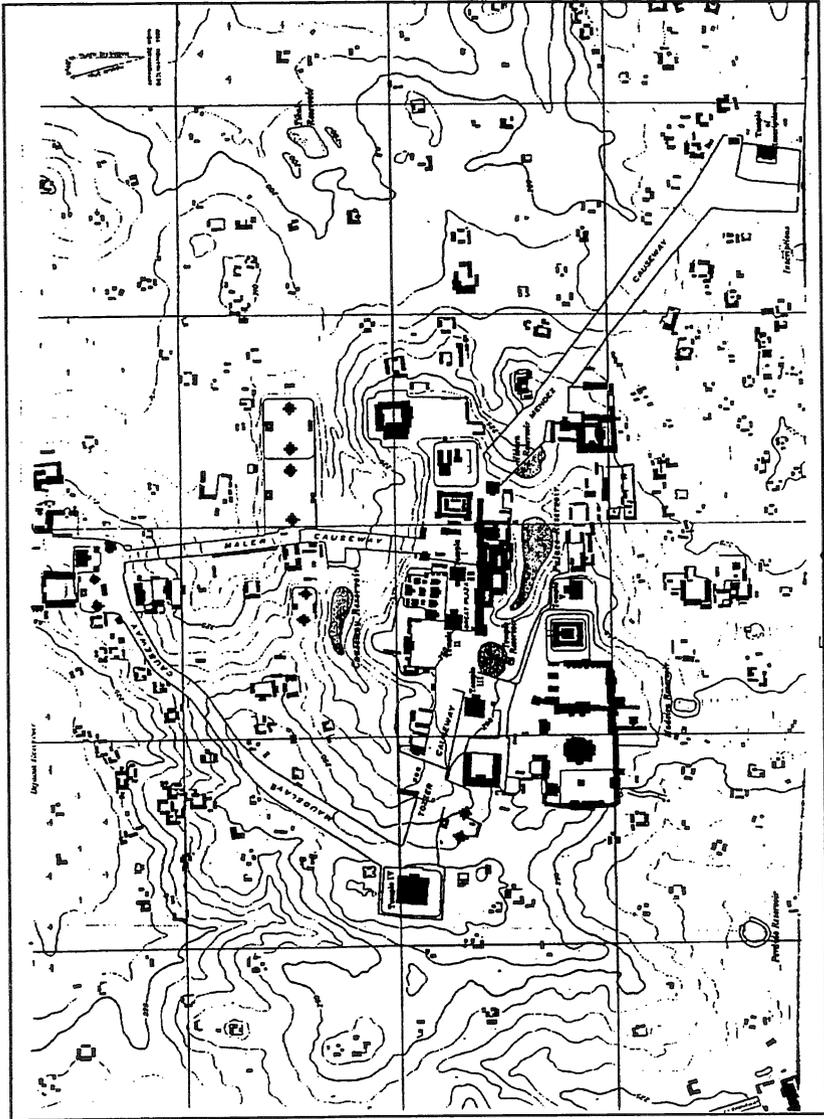


Figure 6: Central Tikal Plan

together. Their basic form—a square-based, stepped pyramid topped with an enclosure—is identical to Temples 26 and 16 at Copan (see Figures 7 and 8). Temple II has a slightly smaller basal area than Temple I as well as fewer stepped levels but a larger

enclosure caps the summit. With bases of approximately 1290m² in area, these temples culminate over 30m in the air in platforms with areas of approximately 225m².

Temples I and II are oriented toward each other, into the Great Plaza. At the base of Temple I are two altar and stela pairs, whereas the base of the stairway to Temple II features a single altar and stela pair. Both temples are freestanding, although they are adjacent to the elite residential compounds of the central acropolis.

The stairways funnel circulation between the platform and the base with no middle level. The summits of Temples I and II are comprised of two distinct areas: an elevated enclosure and a surrounding open terrace. The main staircase terminates on the terrace, a narrow promontory which is wide enough on the side that faces the great plaza to have been used in ritual praxis, although, as mentioned previously, the lines of site reduce the view of the terrace as one nears the base. The enclosure is elevated approximately 5 meters above the ledge and is made of thick masonry walls that subdivide the available space into three chambers. In Temple II, these chambers diminish in size as one proceeds from the front (east) of the enclosure to the back (west) (Totten 1926). In Temple I, the middle chamber is the narrowest, but the floor of the enclosure steps up as one proceeds into it, so that the back chamber is the smallest in total volume (Stierlin 1964).

The architectonics of Temples I and II at Tikal are very similar to those of the temples at Copan. There is a distinct architectural separation of two spheres of ritual praxis. One is at the base, focused around the altar(s) in the Great Plaza. The other is atop the pyramid subdivided by the chambers of the enclosure. Like at Copan, height is the primary architectural elaboration of the elites' power as it provides the means to limit access to the sacred. The large temple pyramids at Tikal, however, have a much clearer gradation in the space of the elites atop the platform. The axis of this gradation is not height but rather front-back. The entire flow of circulation from the base—up the staircase, which narrows as it reaches the top, to the platform, up the smaller staircase and into the enclosure through a series of shrinking chambers—is designed to restrict access progressively. The division of ritual space reflects hierarchical divisions within the group of ritual leaders. Ritual status (position within the hierarchy) is denoted by one's proximity to the "most sacred" inner chamber of the enclosure.

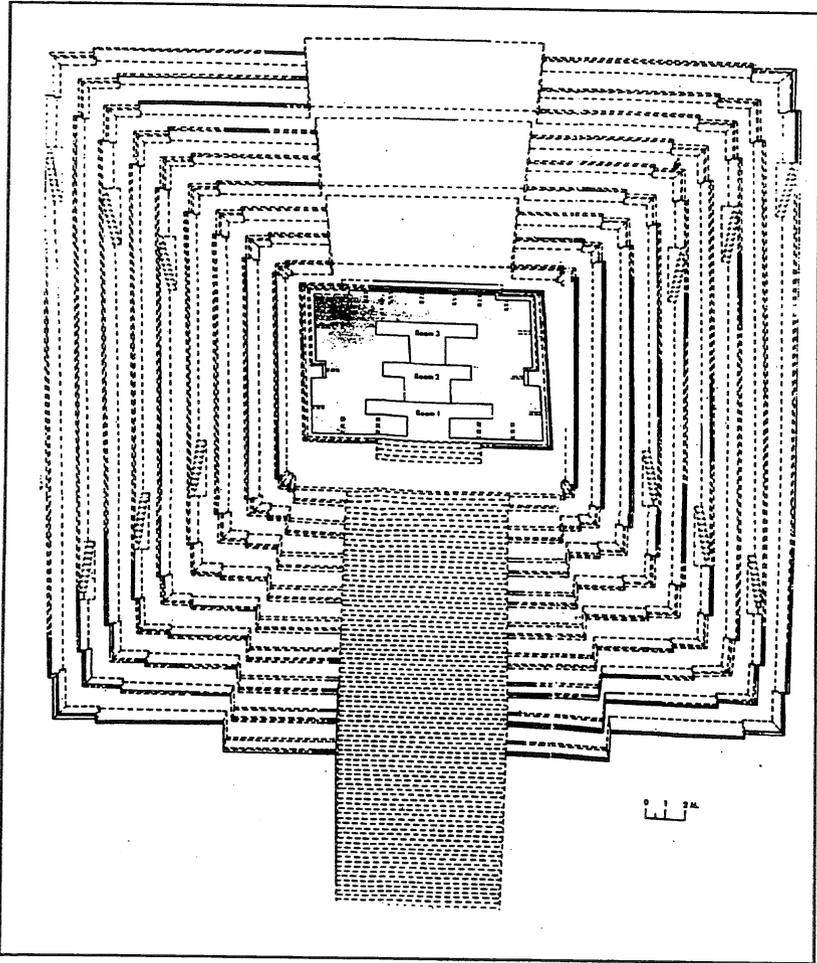


Figure 7: Plan — Temple 1, Tikal

The terrace just below the enclosures may be ritual spaces, but it is unlikely that they are areas of direct mediation between the congregants and the elites. It is more likely that they are the locus of activities that tie the ritual below to the ritual in the enclosure. Heretofore, it has been stressed that the architectonics of the temples examined define two separate spheres of ritual praxis, but undoubtedly the activities in this sphere, although distinct in their personnel, were intimately related and directed toward the same ends.

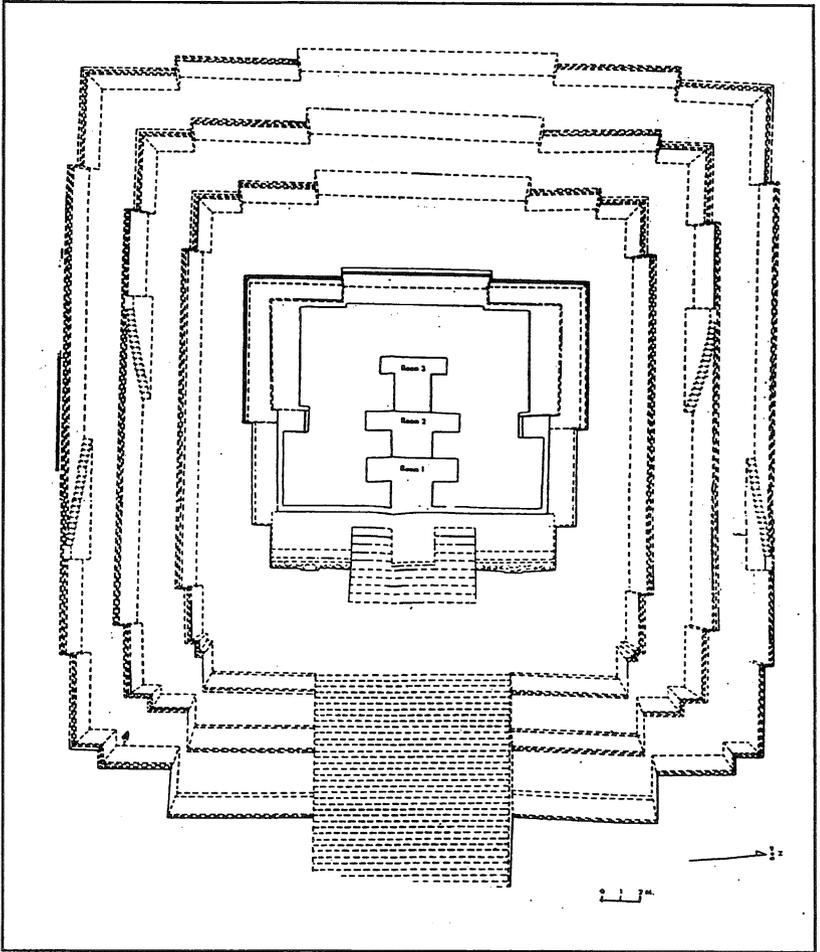


Figure 8: Plan — Temple 2, Tikal

The North Acropolis

The North Acropolis of Tikal is comprised of five temple pyramids and several smaller platform structures. All of the pyramids are oriented south, into the Great Plaza, even those which are not directly adjacent to the plaza (e.g., Str. 5D-22). Access to the north acropolis is via a short, broad stairway from the Great Plaza. The primary open ritual space is a wide but shallow strip bordered on the north side by the base of four pyramids and on the east by three platform structures. The boundary area between the Great

Plaza and the North Acropolis contains the densest concentration of altars and stelae in Tikal, a lavish attention to the area of congregants unparalleled at most other ritual areas. Like other pyramids, access to the high platforms is via a narrow staircase. Atop the platforms are enclosures that are divided into two (str. 33, 35) or three (str. 22, 34, 32) chambers. All of the chambers decrease in volume from front to back although the specific dimensions vary.

Movement into the northern areas of the acropolis is restricted by the sheer density of the structures. Only two narrow alleys allow circulation into the secondary (northern) area of the complex. The structures at the north end of the acropolis are unique in their organization and so deserve special comment. It is clear from the restrictions on access to the area that even the open area at the base of the structures was not available for everyone. Structure 22, the only pyramid in this secondary area of the North Acropolis, has little room for ritual at the bottom of its stairway. The enclosures atop all of the structures have two or three rooms but they are generally larger than those atop the pyramids adjacent to the Great Plaza.

It is difficult to interpret these structures definitively, but the presence of a ritual area without great potential for ritual activity suggests this may be the compound of the temple elite. As a center for a temple institution it could have served administrative or specialized ritual purposes. This can, however, only be speculation for now.

The ritual structures of the North Acropolis seem to be divided into two groups. The first is an exterior group along the southern flank of the Acropolis. These temple pyramids are closely tied to the rituals of the Great Plaza. The second group is on the interior, or north flank, of the Acropolis. This group does not have much ritual space but does have a plethora of smaller platform structures that may be specialized structures for a temple institution.

III. Seibal⁴

At the site of Seibal along the Pasión river, large pyramid temples are found only in Groups A and D atop the two highest acropoli, which overlook the settlement (see Figure 9). In Group A

(see Figure 10) are at least five different temple pyramids ranging in size from the smallest (A-3) with a basal area of approximately 400 square meters to the largest temple pyramid (A-24) with a basal area of approximately 4550 square meters (45m by 50m). I will discuss only A-24 below as it was certainly a focal point of many rituals involving the king, but it should be noted that epigraphers

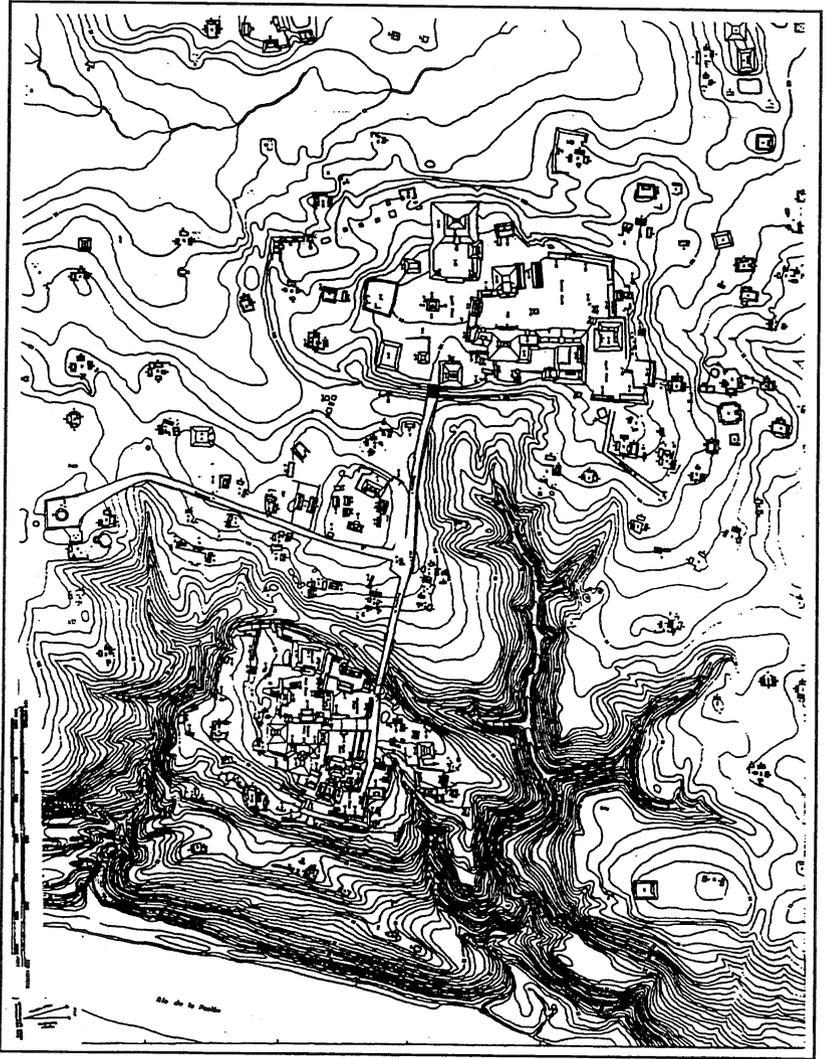


Figure 9: Seibal Site Plan

have been more drawn to Temple A-3 due to its inscriptions. In Group D (see Figure 11) there are many medium-sized temple pyramids but few of great size (D-34 and D-32 are the largest in the group). On the east side of the central plaza of Group D, however,

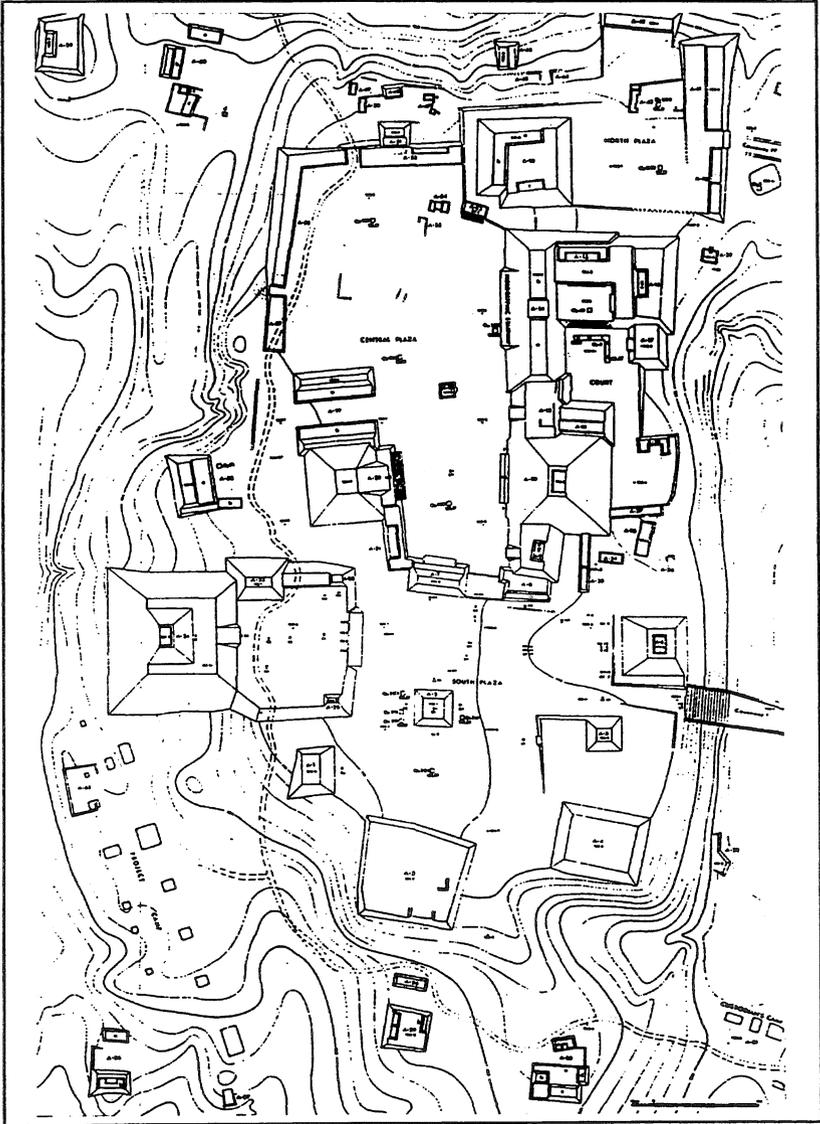


Figure 10: Group A, Siebal

is an intriguing set of three temple pyramids of variable size that present a novel challenge for interpretation.

Temple A-24

Located on the west side of the south plaza, the platform of Temple A-24 is one of the highest points at the site, rising 18.5

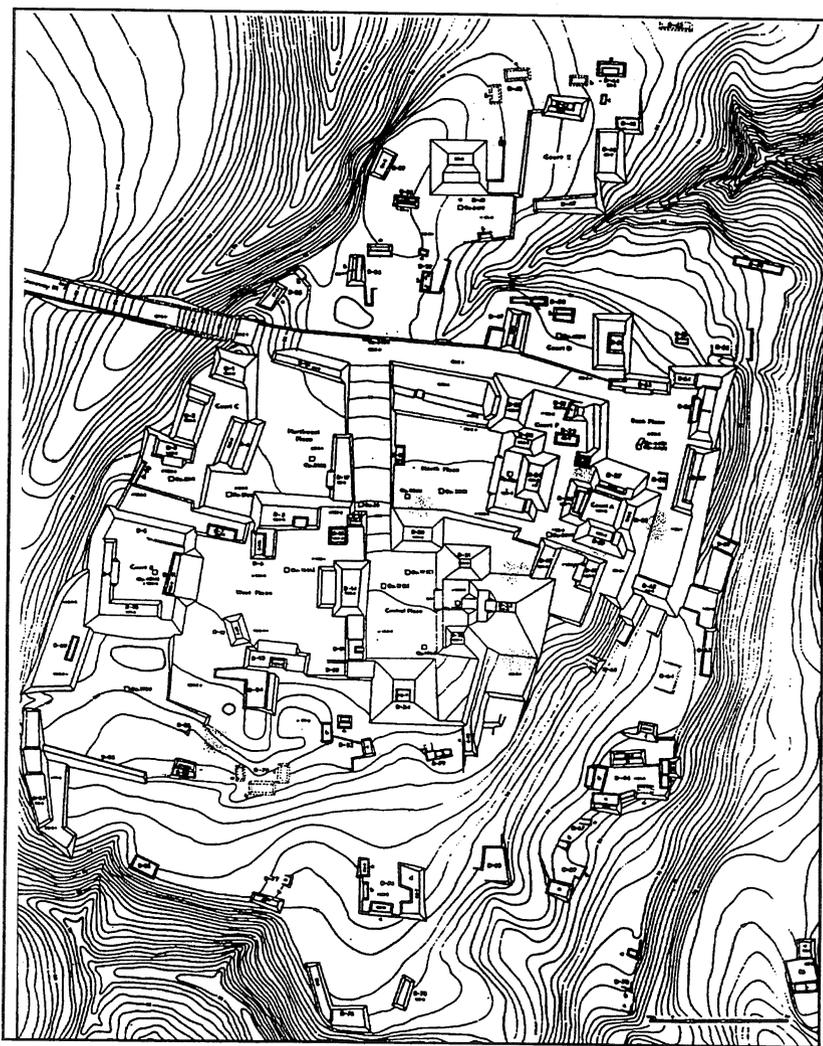


Figure 11: Group D, Seibal

meters above the surface of the plaza. The temple is oriented eastward, into the plaza, with an 8-meter-wide projecting staircase, interrupted by an intermediate platform that provides access to the platform. At the base of the staircase is a stela (stela 20) but no altar. (This may be attributable to site formation processes.) The temple was built in two stages, which make it unique among this sample. The first building episode created a platform 6.5 meters above the plaza. The second stage resulted in a second pyramid atop the first, raising the entire structure to its full height. The base of the second structure does not cover the entire platform of the first, thus creating an intermediate terrace. On this terrace is a stela.

The high platform, which measures 7-by-10 meters, supported a masonry enclosure with a corbelled vault (Smith 1982: 100; Stierlin 1964). The excavations on this temple summit have, unfortunately, been limited to a single 1-by-1 meter test trench so it is impossible to determine the circulation within the enclosure.

Lastly, more extensive excavations associated with the stela on the intermediate terrace uncovered a series of earlier floors and associated stairs, suggesting that an earlier stepped structure occupied this site. This was most likely a temple; however, confirmation must be left until further excavation.

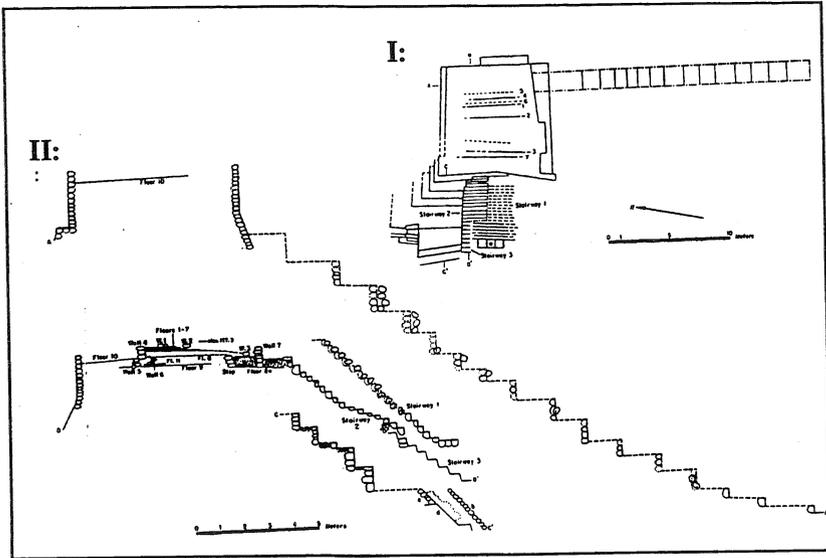
The conclusions available to us from the incompletely excavated Temple A-24 depart from our analysis of Tikal's and Copan's ritual spaces in only one element. Although two clear ritual spaces still define a circulation pattern that restricts access to the most sacred areas atop the structure, an intermediate terrace presents a third ritual space—a status confirmed by the presence of a stela on this level. While the dimensions of the space clearly require limits on access to it, the space was open and visible and possibly represents an area for elites and congregants to interact. The structure of the other ritual spaces we have looked at suggests an interpretation of this terrace as a reflection of the elite hierarchy, and this may indeed be the best interpretation. But action atop the intermediate platform of Temple A-24 is clearly visible from the base of the temple and thus represents a significant departure from the line-of-site configurations of platforms at Copan and Tikal. Ritual interaction of the two groups within this space cannot be ruled out.

Temples D-31, D-32, D-33

These interlocking temples form a composite structure that defines the eastern edge of the central plaza of the D group. The largest structure, D-32, is flanked by a medium-sized temple on its north side (D-31) and a small temple (D-33) to the south. All three are built on top of a 3-meter-high terrace, which runs the length of the eastern side of the plaza. The platform of D-32 is the highest point in the D group, rising 13.5 meters above the central plaza. D-32 is surmounted by a projected staircase on its east face interrupted by an intermediate terrace halfway up it. The apex of Temple D-31 is 6 meters lower than that of D-32. It is oriented not toward the plaza but south toward Temple D-33. Temple D-33, the smallest of the three pyramid temples, rising only 3 meters above the main terrace (9 meters above the plaza) is likewise oriented towards the others in the group with a single staircase connecting the main terrace to the summit of the temple.

This complex of ritual structures has six possible ritual spaces of varying height. The first and lowest is in the central plaza. Although no stela or altar marks this area as a ritual space, Temple D-32 is oriented toward it. The second ritual area is the main terrace upon which all three temples are built and into which they are oriented creating, in effect, a raised courtyard adjacent to the central plaza. The summit of Temple D-33 is the next highest. No excavations have been undertaken on this platform so it is not clear what kind of structure enclosed this space, if any.

At approximately the same height are the summit of Temple D-31 and the intermediate terrace of structure D-32. Structure D-31 has also not been excavated so the entirety of our more detailed analysis must come from structure D-32, which has been the object of several test excavations. One operation that focused on the intermediate terrace discovered a stone altar at the base of the stairs leading to the summit. Underneath the latest levels were earlier floors, some associated with the fragmentary remains of stairs, but it seems that old constructions at this location were destroyed prior to the erection of a new building. On the platform at the apex of Temple D-32, excavations revealed a series of lateral walls superimposed upon each other (see Figure 12). Walls 1, 2, and 3 belonged to the latest structure. The slope of the floors (1-7) associated with these walls suggests the spaces these walls separated grew shorter (like Temple II at Tikal) from front to back. This gradation in height



**Figure 12: Temple D-32: I = Plan of Upper Half
II = Section of Upper Half**

is more dramatic for the earlier construction phase associated with floor 8, where a step raised the back room above the front. In addition, the back chamber (delineated by walls 1 and 2) was much narrower than that of the front chamber (defined by walls 2 and 3).

The circulation of ritual within the complex of Temples D-31, D-32, and D-33 is complex due to a plurality of ritual spaces along the height gradient. But the analysis we have already accomplished provides an excellent guide for interpreting the architectonics of this temple group. The main terrace, not the plaza, appears to be the primary point of orientation for the entire complex. We can therefore designate it as a congregants' sphere as we have the open spaces toward which all the previous temples have been oriented. The summit of D-32, the highest and therefore most sacred space, is the primary elite sphere and it is itself internally graded from front to back, like the Tikal temples' enclosures. The terrace of Temple D-32, and the summits of D-31 and D-33, cannot be intermediate areas of interaction since access to all of these is restricted by their narrow staircases (the main terrace is accessed by a 10-meter-wide flight of stairs) and the small size of their summits (particularly if surmounted by a masonry enclosure). It seems most

logical that these areas were elite ritual spheres as well but of lower status than the summit of D-32. Thus the multiplicity of ritual spaces in this temple complex is simply a more fully elaborated expression of the hierarchy of ritual elites we have described at Copan and Tikal.

Although the ritual architecture of Seibal has some unique elements, the architectonics of the structures is similar to Tikal and Copan but with a more fully elaborated gradation of ritual elites. Up-down and back-front are the predominate spatial axes utilized to express ritual power. The rituals of the congregants and of the highest elites are only intertwined by the performances of the middle-level elites as circulation is not constructed so as to allow the congregants to flow toward the sacred, or for the sacred to come out to them (the intermediate terrace of Temple A-24 is an ambiguous space and difficult to interpret).

Having looked at several Maya temple structures in depth and reconstructed their ritual architectonics, we can deploy the data as a test for the application of the segmentary state and galactic polity models to Classic Period Maya political organization.

THE MAYA AS A SEGMENTARY STATE

The temple architecture and the behaviors they circumscribe from all three sites fit only two of the criteria for ritual within a segmentary state. First, the architectonics of the large sites, such as Tikal and Copan, are the same as at Seibal but writ large. This could be interpreted as an expression of redundancy of functions within Maya religious organization if we assume the sites are part of larger regional states. Second, the largest temples of Copan are indeed adjacent to the palace complex. But at Tikal the distribution of temples extends out of the core to include Temple IV to the west and Temple VI nearly a half mile to the southeast. And at Seibal, while the palace complex has been located on the east side of the A group's central plaza, the largest temple pyramid, part of an architectonically complex temple group, in Group D over 500 meters to the east.

The other ritual requirements of the segmentary state that establish the king as ritual leader with power over the supernatural are not fulfilled by the large temple architecture at Tikal, Copan, or

Seibal. Belief may well be focused on the king and the rituals performed within the most sacred chambers of the enclosures, but ritual praxis is divided into two spheres of action, which focus the congregants' activities around the altar(s) at the base of the pyramid and the elites' activities high above in separate ritual spaces. The evidence of a graded hierarchy of elites suggests that a class of temple specialists controlled access to the sacred realm. There is great potential for religious authority to be co-opted by the religious specialists in direct contact with the congregants. This raises the possibility that the "temple" was a sociopolitical institution entwined with kings and governance but not the source of a rulers authority.

Although Maya royal rituals have a public aspect, the ritual praxis of the king within the most sacred spaces are hidden from public view and lifted well above the congregation. Lastly, Maya ritual praxis does not explicitly circumvent lesser elites in a display of kingly power directed toward the general populace. On the contrary, it is the lesser elites who are directly involved with (or at least in closer proximity to) the ritual praxis of the congregants. The king, the ritual leader, is insulated from all but other high-level elites by the height of the structures and the thick walls of the enclosures. In addition, it is not clear that the class of ritual elites includes any political elites other than the king. Only the complex of Temples D31-33 at Seibal has a proliferation of stages suitable for involving lesser elites.

An analysis of ritual praxis clearly does not support a categorization of Classic Maya political organization as a segmentary state. Control over the ritual praxis of the congregants' sphere of action is in the hands of a hierarchically divided religious elite while the king is insulated from all but the highest priests in the sacred chambers of the enclosure out of the congregants' view. There is no clearly delineated public space for a kingly expression of his ritual suzerainty. Instead, it seems more likely that the king's ritual authority is bureaucratically organized disseminating downward to the populace through a class of religious elites.

THE MAYA AS A GALACTIC POLITY

The architectonics of the large Maya temple pyramids in this sample argue against describing Maya political organization as a galactic polity. Only one of the conditions for the ritual spaces of

galactic polities is fulfilled by the Maya temple pyramids. Lesser elites (although not necessarily political elites) are certainly involved with the ritual, and the circulation patterns do reinforce the ritual power of the king to access the sacred to the exclusion of some elites. But this does not in itself confirm that access to the sacred is the king's only power over other elites. It could be an expression of a politically real distribution of power.

The overall distribution of large temples at Copan, Tikal, and Seibal does not suggest they were part of a cosmological map placed over the settlement. The pattern of Maya settlements "typically creates three zones: (1) the center itself with the most elaborate residences and other monumental construction; (2) an adjacent area of large, well-built, and often decorated residences; and (3) an outer zone of smaller and more dispersed residences" (Hendon 1991: 895). This pattern is clearest, in the sample discussed here, at Copan where the large temple pyramids are limited to the acropolis. But at Tikal, two large pyramid temples are located off of the central acropoli, and Seibal seems to have had two centers, one on each acropolis. Both Groups A and D have sizable temple pyramids and other monumental architecture. These sites have three different patterns of distribution for the large temple pyramids within zones 1 and 2 of Hendon's description. Given this variation, it seems unlikely that the distribution of large temples could be a reflection of a general Maya cosmology. Furthermore, the large temple pyramids do not relate various parts of the city to each other as they must do within a settlement planned along the lines of a cosmic map (Kostoff 1991).

Although Ashmore (1989) finds an "active" mapping of the cosmos within Maya settlement patterns, she does not clearly define the difference between self-conscious site planning and mapping the cosmos onto a city. There must be a clear distinction or else most state-level societies would qualify as a type of galactic polity—an obviously absurd reduction of the model. Although Ashmore does show how the analysis of spatial arrangements gives archaeologists a method to uncover Classic Maya ideology—a signal contribution in itself—she concentrates on demonstrating correlations between the cosmology described in inscriptions and settlement plans rather than attempting to interpret the information on Maya social organization preserved in the settlement pattern data.

As discussed in reference to the segmentary state model, the rituals that intimately relate the king to the sacred are not public. The intimate association of the king with the natural order central to maintaining authority within the galactic-polity model cannot be fostered within ritual spaces which obscure the king's ritual praxis. Indeed the king's power can only be legitimated with the constant public reaffirmation that the king is indispensable to ritual. With the rigid separation of ritual spaces within Maya temple architectonics, a king risks becoming ritually superfluous within a galactic-polity model if the defining rituals of his authority are held in secret.

The architectonics of Maya temple pyramids are not reflective, therefore, of the ritual requirements of a galactic polity. But if neither of the weak state models discussed here fit the Maya, what type of political organization has ritual requirements which do? In the next section we turn to the city-state model and two temples from Early Dynastic Mesopotamia in order to propose an alternative.

THE CITY-STATE MODEL

The city-state is a type of centralized, unitary state focused on a single polity and its surrounding countryside (Griffith and Thomas 1981; Yoffee 1992). Although an overarching culture or "civilization" may unite a larger area, struggles for power are focused within the single settlement. Political, ideological, and economic power are institutionalized (e.g., as king, temple, and bureaucracy) and thoroughly integrated, acting reflexively on each other. Kings depend upon temples for legitimacy and temples depend upon kings for the resources to build new ritual spaces. Bureaucracies regulate the flow of goods within royal, temple, and often private economies but are dependent upon the more charismatic institutions (king and temple) for their livelihood. Lastly, there is often an assembly composed of high-status individuals that exerts considerable power over both the king and the bureaucracy. In the prototypical examples of city-states, such as Classical Greece and Early Dynastic Mesopotamia, the king's authority derived from the city assembly.

Ritual praxis within a city-state may be led on important occasions by the monarch, but it is not dominated by him. The temple of a city-state not only represents a shared system of belief,

but also a powerful faction organized by a class of ritual specialists. As the focus of community identity, the temple is central to the organization of settlement within the city-state. Rituals are practiced on several levels from the family to the polity, but the most sacred rituals that entangle kings and priests are hidden from general view. Since the king's authority does not emanate from the performance of ritual (although his legitimacy often does), ritual specialists increase their own power by regulating access to the sacred. Priests thus gain the formidable power of translating numinous experience for the populace. Architecturally, this rigid separation of the "holy of holies" from public view manifests in ritual structures that obscure the participants' access to the sacred.

Within the "clergy" of unitary states is a hierarchy of offices differentiated by their access to the sacred. This gradation is manifested architecturally as a progressive restriction of space as one nears the most sacred locales in the temple. Certain ranks of officials are allowed to advance to different places along this hierarchy internal to the elite ritual actors. Lastly, as the centers of community identity, sacrality has a deep temporal dimension assigned not only to the building, but to the location as well. Thus when new temples are built within the city-state, they are either built on top of the old temple or as additions to it along appropriate dimensions (e.g., up-down, north-south).

Large temple architecture indicative of ritual praxis within a city-state organization of power should display the following characteristics: (1) centrality within the overall settlement plan of the city; (2) architectonics that exclude the general public from viewing the most sacred rituals; (3) ritual space for various authorities within a class of religious specialists; and (4) a strong commitment to the same locality, creating a palimpsest of temple architecture over time.

MESOPOTAMIAN RITUAL SPACES AND THE CITY-STATE

The largest Mesopotamian temples of the Early Dynastic period usually occupy a central position in the settlement, often raised high above the level of the settlement (Postgate 1992). Archaeological explorations at sites throughout Mesopotamia (e.g., Ur, Warka, Eshnunna) reveal that the large ziggurat temples are composite structures that either stratigraphically cover earlier temples and/or are themselves the product of multiple building

episodes. Postgate suggests that these long-hallowed sites provided a focus for community identity (Postgate 1992: 109). In order to elaborate the architectonics of ritual spaces within a city-state, this section describes two large ziggurat temples of the Early Dynastic Period in southern Mesopotamia: the Temple Oval at Khafaje and the Temple of Nin-Khursag at al-'Ubaid (see Figure 13). These temples are best taken together as a composite picture of an "ideal type" of Presargonic ritual architectonics.

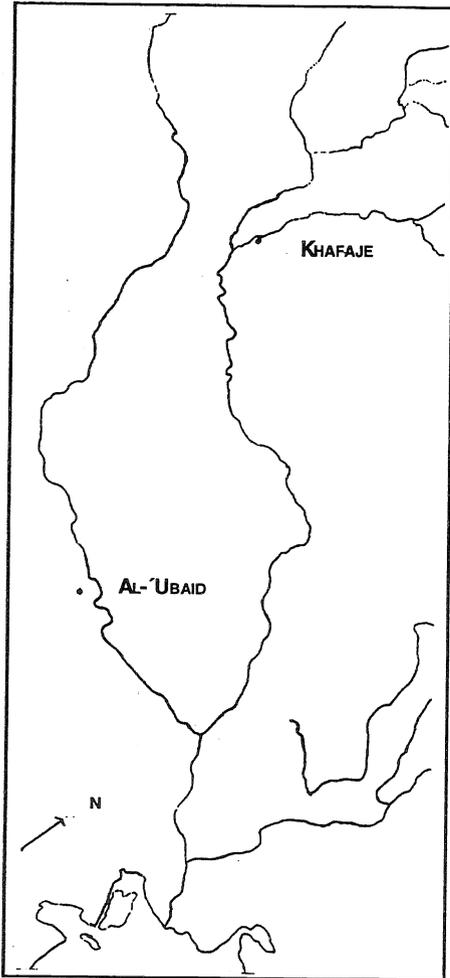


FIGURE 13:
SOUTHERN MESOPOTAMIA

The Temple of Nin-Khursag at al-'Ubaid

This ziggurat temple is the largest ritual space to have been uncovered during Woolley's excavations in the field seasons of 1919 and 1922-23 (Hall and Woolley 1927). The site is approximately 72km² in area. The platform of the Temple of Nin-Khursag is the highest point of the settlement, reaching 9 meters above the level of the surrounding plain (Tunca 1984:95). The temple area is enclosed by a roughly circular wall just under 80 meters in diameter (defining a total ritual area of approximately 250 square meters). One gateway in this wall was discovered on the southeast of the circle. The ziggurat itself is set in this oval, leaving the largest amount of open space within an arc in the southwest of the area. At the base of the long staircase that con-

nects the base of the temple to the platform above, a square masonry altar was discovered (see Figure 14). The top of the platform was incompletely excavated (and badly deteriorated) leaving little indication of the type of structure that sat atop the platform. It is clear, however, that after climbing the main staircase, one entered a large reception room, which directed circulation along the northeast wall of the platform. This room was certainly not the most sacred space on the platform as it was not an end in itself but a step on the way further into the temple.

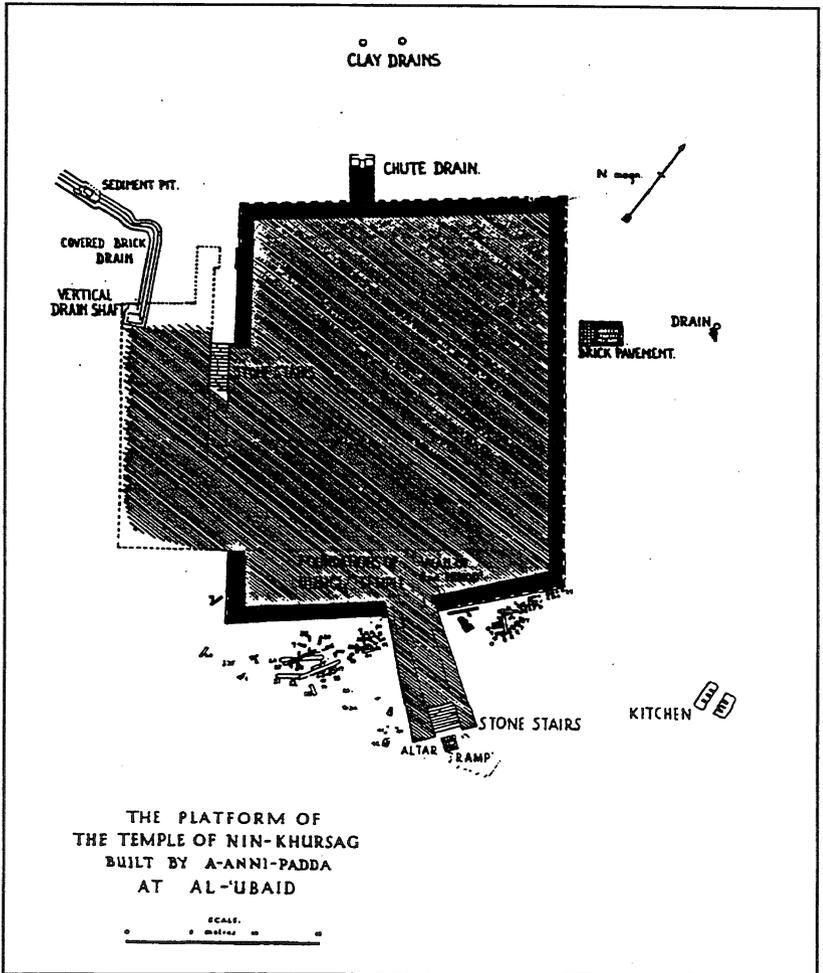


FIGURE 14: DETAIL TEMPLE OF NIN-KHURSAG

The Temple Oval at Khafaje

The site of Khafaje, located on the Diyala plain, covers approximately 320 square kilometers. The Temple Oval of Khafaje, also built during the Early Dynastic Period (first building period), covers approximately 700 square meters in area (Delougaz 1940). It has essentially the same design as the Temple of Nin-Khursag except that this temple is surrounded by two oval enclosure walls instead of one (see Figure 15). The double walls subdivide the congregants' ritual space, suggesting a hierarchy of power within the group participating in the ritual at the base (broadly construed) of the temple platform. An altar was discovered set into the wall of the ziggurat that faces into the courtyard, clearly defining the inner courtyard as ritual space. A single narrow staircase connects the courtyard with the elevated platform.

Centered on this platform was an enclosure entered by a doorway directly in front of the top of the staircase. The excavators

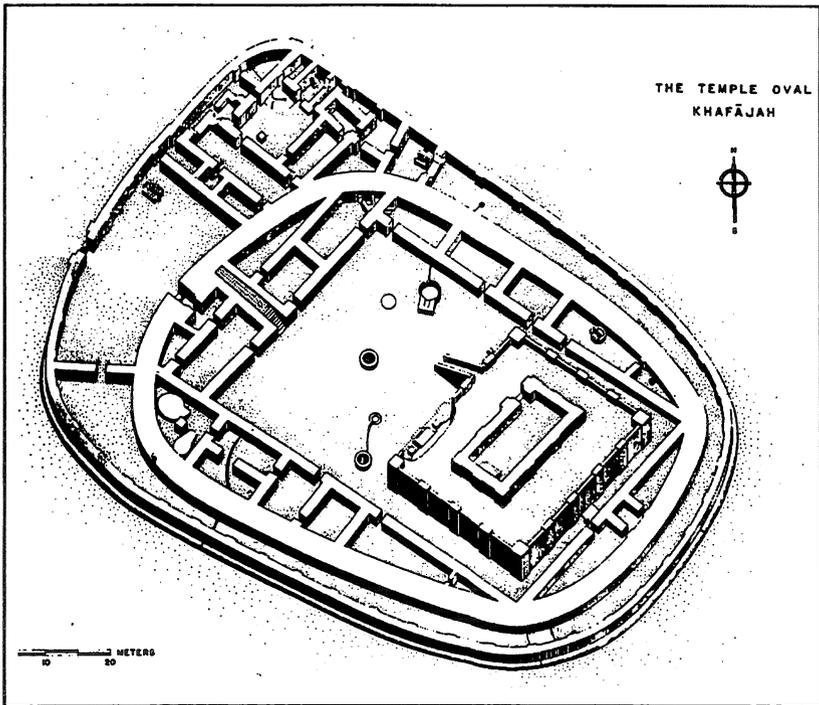


FIGURE 15: ISOMETRIC RECONSTRUCTION— TEMPLE OVAL

have reconstructed the shrine atop the platform as a single room with a stepped altar against the southwest wall (Delougaz 1940). In this respect, the Temple Oval at Khafajah bears a greater resemblance to the enclosure atop Temple 26 at Copan than to the Temple of Nin-Khursag. The single narrow door at the opposite end of the enclosure from the altar suggests a gradation in sacrality even within this open space. The altar is located at the end of a long pattern of circulation through various levels of the oval, onto the platform, and at the greatest distance from the entrance to the enclosure.

Both of the Early Dynastic temples discussed above fit the criteria for ritual spaces within a city-state. The temples are placed in the center of the site plan, providing a focus for the settlement and, as the primary relief on the landscape, for the community's identity. The architectural palimpsest created by continuous temple building and rebuilding indicates a commitment to place that belies the sacrality associated with the location as well as the structure. The circulation patterns limit the congregants to the base of the temple where altars served as a primary focus of ritual praxis within this ritual space.

Atop the platform, the second sphere of ritual praxis, enclosures shield the most sacred ritual spaces from public view. Gradations within this ritual space suggest a hierarchy of ritual power defined by the proximity of one's ritual praxis to the most sacred chamber. Mesopotamian ziggurats therefore elaborate two crucial dimensions of sacrality, which provide an ontology for the architectonics of ritual space—height (vertical dimension) expressed a gradient between high and low ritual space, and depth (horizontal dimension) expressed a gradient within the elite ritual space between front (or outside) and back (inside). These materially real dimensions unify the actions within various ritual spaces into a single ritual praxis.

The administration of ritual along these dimensions required a religious elite who administered ritual praxis and was empowered by their access to the sacred. The king, whose authority does not derive from ritual, assumes the role of ritual leader for legitimacy. Thus does the political entwine itself with the religious within a city-state, creating a dynamic between an institutionalized class of religious specialists and the ruler of the polity. Power in the

city-state is thus dispersed over specialized institutions (rather than over a set of nobles) that must be integrated in order to govern.

CONCLUSIONS: MAYA POLITIES AS CITY-STATES

At this point it should be clear that the architectonics of Classic Maya large pyramid temples are the same as those for the Early Dynastic ziggurats of Mesopotamian city-states; the organization of ritual spaces is identical as are the relations among the areas. A broadly construed exterior yields to the first area of ritual praxis. Both are spheres of ritual praxis dominated by a large congregation. Intermediate spaces mark the end of congregants' movement and begins the elite spheres of praxis. These intermediate spaces are not always present. Within the sample discussed above, the D group temple complex at Seibal had the most intermediate ritual spaces between the congregants' sphere of action and the sacred enclosure atop Temple D-32. In Early Dynastic Mesopotamia, the intermediate spaces usually took the form of side temples with separate altars accessed directly from the congregants' sphere of ritual praxis. The platform and enclosures represent the final restriction of circulation between the profane and the sacred spaces. The most sacred areas are ends in themselves, to which the temple's circulation leads and where it necessarily ends.

Ritual praxis within and between these spaces is controlled by a class of ritual specialists whose power must be integrated with that of the king (a relationship elaborated within the relationship of their ritual roles) in order to ensure legitimate authority. The power of this ritual elite derives from their control over access to the sacred. The sovereignty of the king does not derive from his ritual praxis, but his involvement is still necessary for his legitimacy due to the substantial powers of the temple elites. Maya ritual, therefore, suggests that the Maya political organization was not weak, but unitary with a powerful king thoroughly integrated with an institutionalized, hierarchical religious elite.

The interpretation of Maya ritual forwarded in this study is at odds with the interpretations of some epigraphers (in particular Schele and Freidel 1990) who prefer to see the Maya king as essentially alone in his control of Maya religion and the center of ritual praxis. This perspective derives from a literal reading of the inscriptions, but the architectonics of large temple pyramids suggest such an interpretation to be untenable given the broad separa-

tion of the spheres of ritual action. If the Maya kings' authority depended upon their ritual praxis, the great cities of the Lowlands would probably not have been built. The king's authority must have derived from secular sources although it was complexly intertwined with that of the religious elites. Maya inscriptions must be contextualized as politically committed instruments of authority rather than as distanced reflections on the actions of rulers.

This study has pursued only one aspect of the Classic Period Maya archaeological record looking for clues to the nature of their political organization; thus its conclusions must be employed within a larger archaeological perspective on the Maya that views the spaces they created not as inert vessels of activity but as actively shaped artifacts whose architectonics are closely tied to the organizing principles of Maya society. With this perspective, archaeologists will most likely find that the architecture of the Maya speak more clearly and with greater breadth than their stelae.

ENDNOTES

- ¹Epigraphic information and the view of the Maya polity it seems to suggest can be found in several sources including Ashmore (1986) and Schele and Friedel (1990).
- ²The description of Copan's temples in this section has been compiled from the following sources: Fash et al. (1992), Ferguson and Royce (1984), Freter (1992), Hellmuth (1978), Hohmann (1982), Hunter (1974), Proskouriako (1946), Stierlin (1964), and Totten (1926).
- ³The description of the temples of Tikal in this section has been compiled from the following sources: Coe (1988, 1990), Ferguson and Royce (1984), Hellmuth (1978), Hunter (1974), Jones (1991), Proskouriako (1946), Stierlin (1964), and Totten (1926).
- ⁴The description of Seibal and its temples which follows has been compiled from Smith (1982).

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SOURCES FOR THE ACCOMPANYING FIGURES

- Figures 2 and 3: (Fash et al. 1992)
Figure 4: (Robertson 1983)
Figure 5: (Hohmann and Vogrin 1982)
Figure 6: (Carr and Hazard 1961)
Figures 7 and 8: (Coe 1990)
Figures 9-12: (Smith 1982)
Figure 14: (Hall and Woolley 1927)
Figure 15: (Delougaz 1940)

