

CLASSIC MAYA POLITY, IDENTITY, MI- GRATION AND POLITICAL VOCABULARY: RECONCEPTUALISATION OF CLASSIC PE- RIOD MAYA POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Peter Biro

The Classic Maya (AD 250-900) civilisation was one of the few Mesoamerican cultures which have developed a full writing system. The texts give a unique window to examine the ideal image created by the elite for consumption to themselves and to the non-elite. Researchers from different disciplines used various anthropological and evolutionary theories to interpret Classic Period political organisation. The proposed interpretations suggested either a 'weak' or a 'unitary state' model, while a third proposal envisioned the existence of two 'hegemonic states' which ruled and fought over the Maya Lowlands. While the critique of the 'weak' and 'unitary' state models has been strong and they are hardly accepted by archaeologists or epigraphers, the 'hegemonic state' model is generally held valid among researchers. By the analysis of more than 1,000 inscriptions from the Western Maya Region I have arrived at the conclusion that the 'hegemonic state' model needs substantial revision and I will suggest an alternative interpretation of Classic Period political processes. In my paper I shall present that through the analysis of the conceptualisation of polity, identity formation, the migration of dynasties and political vocabulary documented in the literary inscriptions, it is possible to reach a new understanding of Classic Period political organisation and historical development in general and the process of the Classic Maya collapse in particular.

The Classic Period Maya (figure 1) is one of the few Mesoamerican civilisations that had developed a full writing system which has been deciphered in the last 100 years¹. Also, it is one of the very few civilisations which had developed in a tropical environment.

The question from the first explorers is always the same: how indeed was the combination of civilisation and rainforest possible? What are the similarities and differences of this particular human cultural phenomenon to other organisations, even to our own culture?

From Aristotle originates two assumptions of the humanities and social sciences. First humans are *zoon politikon* (or political animals) who live in communities, and second they are *zoon logon ekhon* who speak language. Polity (community formation) is communication, and if a researcher is interested in Classic Period Maya political organisation then he/she should try to find a way to language. One possible route is through writing, which is a form of communication and a repository of ideas about a given community. In this paper I examine the texts of the Classic Period from several angles which are all connected to political organisation. This presentation is more a series of reflections than a well-defined model, hoping to open some new avenues in the understanding of one aspect of Classic Period Maya civilisation.

Antecedents

From the 1970's, scholars from anthropology and archaeology departments developed models to fit the Classic Period Maya political organisation into their conceptual schemes. The models were the result of the combination of theory, and archaeological and epigraphic information; they were forming part of a passionate debate where ideas crystallised into two opposite

stances².

Joyce Marcus, Richard Adams and Diane Chase and Arlen Chase explicitly argued for the existence of 'regional states' where one territorial and non-kin based political entity with a centre ruled over a well-defined territory with multiple second, third and fourth-tiered order centres (figure 2)³.

The entities were relatively stable and lasted during the entire time of the Classic Period. Although not always said explicitly, the model implies the existence of a pre-industrial bureaucratic system and administration with territorial divisions. The role of archaeological data and geographical theories are much more important than any other data set in the formation of these models.

A contrary view of Classic Period political organisation was presented by Peter Mathews, Stephen Houston and various archaeologists who maintained that polities were small and basically consisted in one main centre and its hinterland (figure 3)⁴.

While Mathews' original description was devoid of any explicit anthropological categorisation, later both 'segmentary state' and 'galactic state' models were used explicitly to locate Maya polities in the science of anthropology⁵. According to these conceptualisations, Classic Period polities were territorially small. Lineage or other kin-based corporate organisation were the bases of politics, administration was relatively underdeveloped, and they were unstable entities with frequent fluctuations of powers, factional conflicts within the elite, especially the royal and non-royal families. This latter suggestion derived from the model and interpretations of texts led scholars to propose a status rivalry model which explained the collapse of the Classic Period civilisation⁶.

The debate about 'weak' vs. 'regional' states was never resolved as the attacks on neoevolutionary theory made the problem non-relevant to understanding political organisation⁷. Also, with the advancement of the decipherment it became possible to translate the entire corpus of inscriptions. As a consequence of these intellectual changes a third model of Classic Period polity has been proposed in the 1990's by Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube⁸.

Avoiding to answer the questions referring to the internal organisation of polities, they investigated the interactions of political entities, or those phenomena which were represented in the inscriptions by 'emblem glyphs', an assumption of Maya studies built in the former models. They have proposed that in the Late Classic period (600-900) two powerful entities centred in the Northeast Peten cities of Tikal and Calakmul, fought a continuous war in which most of the other emblem glyph bearing entities participated, either as allies, or as direct dependencies⁹. They called these entities 'hegemonic states' or 'superpowers' and suggested that this particular form of political process was similar to the formation of the Postclassic Mexica Empire.

In this system, the 'hegemonic states' ruled indirectly the constituent dependencies. Nevertheless, in specific cases evidence was found that armed conflict was also involved when explicit attempts to secession occurred. They have proposed that the 'hegemonic states' were more stable than the polities according to the 'weak state' models, but no bureaucracy was present as in the 'regional state' models. Also, they have explicitly accepted the equations of emblem glyphs with territorial entities, but suggested that the 'hegemonic states' were non-contiguous territorial formations. This new model was accepted by most of the archaeologists and epigraphers, and various reconstructive scenarios were created about the situations of polities in the hegemonic matrix¹⁰.

Recently, this consensus is breaking apart as epigraphers and archaeologist are hard to find the proposed hegemonic systems in other regions of the Maya Lowlands. They are also still trying to understand the internal organisation of polities¹¹. As an alternative to the previous models, I suggest that a philological and historical investigation about politics in the inscriptions can open new avenues for scholarship. This statement derives from the assumption about the role of the elite in organising the Classic Period society.

If this is valid, then I can begin to investigate one aspect of elite expression, namely the Classic Period inscriptions. I do not contend, of course, that the elite represented all of the society, or that the remaining inscriptions make a complete assessment about politics, however I maintain that they give substantial information about some basic concepts which can be helpful to understand some facets of Classic Period political organisation.

In the following, I try to reflect on several issues concerning Classic Period political organisation concentrating on some neglected questions which are all connected to the self-referential image presented in the inscriptions. Before this however, I shall briefly introduce some theoretical standpoints, a framework which helps to situate my reflections.

Writing, Self-Representation, Collective Memory and Collective Identity

Pierre Bourdieu in his treatment of dominance and domination, points to the role of self-representation in writing, gestures and everyday speech¹². It is by language and its capacity to represent that symbolic domination is achieved. In every culture there are socially legitimate ways to perceive and represent the world. An individual or a group of individuals is dominant if they are able to impose a way to being seen. In turn an individual, or a group of individuals is dominated if they are less successful to impose their self-perception. In Classic Period Maya culture, the content of the writing and the narratives only mention individuals and groups who hold certain titles and perform some political functions. Thus far, epigraphers have not found any texts which write about the non-elite part of the society. Therefore, what one finds in Classic Period texts is an ideational self-image of one segment of the society to the total exclusion of other segments. Indeed, this dominance was so pervasive that not even artistic representations show any sign of non-elite persons.

In this sense, Classic Maya writing and iconography form part of the 'public transcript' of the elite¹³. Or as Adam Smith¹⁴ has suggested inscriptions are 'imaginative aesthetic guiding representation of the world at hand'. Also, texts are the collective memory of the elite¹⁵. Collective memory is a frame to which every individual adjusts him/herself in a society. To be retrievable, collective memory has to be connected to specific spaces and times; it is group-connected and cannot be transferred to another group freely. These figurations of memory are always 'models, examples and teachings' and they reflect the general behaviour of the group creating them¹⁶. A group who is organised as a community of collective memory retains its past according to the community's difference and endurance. Thus the group emphasises its difference from outsiders but its similarity to insiders. The events, actions and behaviours are therefore reconstructed to be a certain way, the 'ideational aesthetic'.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that this is not propaganda in the sense of convincing others to 'join' and 'participate' but a constraint on outsiders to join, and insiders to depart from the group. Also, insiders have to adjust themselves to the image in actual behaviour especially in 'public' when both insiders and outsiders can perceive whether a certain individual is appropriately follows the 'public transcript' of a given community. Collective memory is inherently connected to collective identity, or the belief in the existence of a 'we-consciousness'¹⁷. Identity is strongly connected to politics and political organisation; by the creation of various identities organisation becomes possible. Classic Period Maya writing is therefore a repository of collective memories and collective identities, a form of organising and presenting the elite to themselves and to outsiders, other parts of the society.

As a consequence of this theoretical framework various questions can be asked about politics and political organisation during the Classic Period. First and foremost: was there a 'Classic Period Maya polity' ever? This is a question which was never asked by former researchers. Other possible points of reflections revolve around the identity formation of the elite, their conceptualisation of the past (what to be remembered) and political actions expressed by agency formulas. All these are forming part of what researchers understood under the fluid matrix of politics and political organisation, however they are not exhausting it.

Classic Period Maya Polity

One possible definition of polity is given by Adam Smith according to which it is a 'bounded territory within which a sovereign regime rules the community of subjects integrated by a shared sense of identity that binds them together in place'¹⁸.

Where are the bounded territories in the Classic Period Maya landscape? What was a sovereign regime? Who constituted the community of subjects? What identity did they share? If there was a 'Classic Maya polity' as such, was there any change in it during the centuries?

If inscriptions are self-representations of a dominant group then a researcher cannot find out from them the 'Classic Maya polity'; rather he/she can make inferences about the self-referential ideal concepts referring to practices concerning the 'politic'. In a simple way, it is equally important what is perceived and what is not. In light of this I think there was a general conceptualisation of the political landscape which was used all over the Southern Maya Lowlands. This can be imagined as a pool, which contains concepts that in turn were applied differently both in space and time. However, I do not think that there were multiple ways of polities, or multiple sets of conceptualisation as some suggested in the case of mythological narratives (as does Pharo¹⁹, but see Carrasco²⁰ who argues to the contrary), only that there were multiple ways of representation which can indicate applications. The main concepts of this pool were *ch'e'n* (and its combinations) and *ajawil/lel*. On this single dyad a whole political idea was built.

A general concept of the political landscape can be ascertained to have existed with one well-defined spatial category, the *ch'e'n* and its multiple varieties combined with *kab'* and *chan*. It is hard to discern an evolving change in the conceptualisation of this particular entity and its reference is not very clear. I have argued elsewhere that all of its varieties refer in a general sense to 'inhabited places' not only by humans but also by non-human deities²¹. There is not any concept which would refer to the landscape as 'forest', however there are many natural phenomena which are named such as *ha'* ('water' or in a narrow way 'river'), *witz* (mountain, hill), *naahb'* ('pool' or 'bajo'), *k'ahk'naahb'* ('ocean', or even some 'primordial water') and *palaw* ('ocean' or 'lake') etc.

While *ch'e'n* is certainly a natural phenomenon with a semantic field of 'cave, pool' thus referring to empty or filled cavity, it went into the semantic construction of 'inhabited place'. This can be 'high' or 'heavenly' or 'low' and 'earthly', but sometimes both at the same time which concurs with the notion that there is no discernible difference in the use of the *diphrasismos* according to events or different type of beings. From the very first time, it is recorded alone and with *chan* and *kab'*, but regional differences can be discerned. It is important to make a difference between *chan/kab'-ch'en* and various suffixes such as *-u'ul* and *-il* which form place names, and probably have a very general meaning of 'place'.

Indeed, I have argued that *che'n* could have had a connotation of 'built place' as possibly is attested by the derived noun *ochch'e'n~* '[built] place-entering'. Interestingly, I have not found any evidence about grade-distinction within *ch'e'n* such as 'big' or 'small' *ch'e'n*, or anything similar to the western concept of 'city', 'town', 'village', 'hamlet' etc. It does not mean that such a gradation did not exist, however it was not significant enough to be mentioned, which in turn leaves a quite different conceptualisation of the landscape from the one used by archaeologists. A slight difference between *kab'-che'n* and *chan-che'n* is that the first refers to 'property' and is frequently connected to buildings (or *naah* and *otoot*) while the latter exclusively refers to every built place, thus the first is a more exclusive term than the last. The Classic Period imagined landscape therefore consisted in 'built inhabited places' and natural phenomenon, and parallels between the two are not as significant as was once suggested by epigraphers²². The creation of 'built space' which can be 'inhabited' was one of the main tasks of the ruler of any Classic Period polity. When David Stuart noted that Classic Period texts are narratives around dedications, he discovered an important nature of the being of a ruler²³. Adam Smith noted the 'heroism' invoked in text by constructing new buildings on the landscape in the 8th century BC Urartu polity²⁴. While Urartu kings had a unique prerogative to build and transform the landscape, and

made it very conscious in their inscriptions, Classic Period Maya rulers were less concerned with recording transformations of natural features or with the emptiness of the previous landscape. Indeed, there are no records of constructions that can be interpreted to be 'public' in the sense of current western thinking (canals, granaries or public schools). Nevertheless, from archaeological evidence it is well known that water management was important and played a part in the transformation of the natural landscape²⁵.

The importance of plazas as 'public spaces' were also attested in the archaeological record²⁶, however in the inscriptions there is no mention of their dedication (or not yet discovered). There is also archaeological evidence which attest to the constructions of defensive walls around settlement, nevertheless save some records of *pa~`fortress, walled enclosure`* and two mentions of *kot~`wall`* which implies their constructions, these 'public features' are also unattested in the inscriptions.

Therefore, constructions mainly refer to structures called *naah* and *otoot*, the planting of *lakamtun* and altars, and other inter-building elements such as panels, tablets, thrones and so on. The rulers were not the only ones who built, non-royal nobles were not just participating in the building dedications but sometimes they were the main actors.

The record of special structures built for deities is an important feature of the texts-they can be *naah*, *otoot*, *pibnaah*, *wayb'il* etc. Constructing places to deities is one of the most important tasks of the builder, and the construction of residences delimits plazas, thus restructures places formerly not inhabited. Therefore, a polity is a built landscape which does not have boundaries only by the natural features waiting to be transformed.

To have a polity, it is necessary to have an *ajaw* who proclaims, fights and builds. Although the importance of the word *ajaw* was always known to epigraphers, recent etymological suggestions which connects its origin to 'shout, proclaim' shed new light on his 'public' role²⁷. To have a polity it is necessary to have *ajawil* or *ajawlel*, a descent of lines of *ajaw* into which somebody can insert him/herself. Although it refers to the 'kingdom', it does not refer to its territorial entity but to its descent line. According to Classic Period sources, every *ajawlel* claimed to be a polity, nevertheless it is difficult to assess this assertion. Contrary to the general opinion of epigraphers there is no evidence that *ajawlel* is conceptualised as a territory or anything spatial²⁸. In the inscriptions, there are only two verbs connected to *ajawil/ajawlel* namely *chum~`to sit`* and *joy~`to appear`*. These are verbs which never stand with words referring to spatial entities or polity names. On the other hand, verbs connected to these latter words, such as '*huli`*, '*tali`*, '*ochi`*, *e[h]meey*, *lok'ooy*, *t'ab'aay* etc. do not stand with *ajawil/ajawlel*. Therefore, while you can enter, leave, construct, return, destroy etc. a spatial entity, *ajawil/ajawlel* is never such an entity according to the textual evidence.

Every *ajawil/ajawlel* was connected to an inhabited built place, but not necessarily to the place where the actual descent line resided. This is one of the most important characteristics of the conceptualisation of the Classic Period polity. The original *che'n* is the name of the royal house, its origin place, which can be easily transported to other built places. Emblem glyphs are 'places of origin' transported over the landscape with the movement of a royal line. The most conspicuous example of this process can be found in cases of Mutu'ul, Xukalnaah and B'akV(V)'l, however the example of the Kanu'ul dynasty is also significant.

Emblem main signs were originally toponyms, sometimes referring explicitly to one particular building which was claimed by the descent line²⁹. Emblem glyphs did not refer explicitly to dominion, or named the polity, only said explicitly that this particular person originated from a place. Mutu'ul thus cannot be equated with a geographical concept such as 'France' and say that the seat of this geographical place was also called Mutu'ul.

This matrix of *ch'en* and *ajawil/lel* (and the derivations) combined one spatial and an institutional concept for polity formation. It did not involve demarcation or territorialisation, but building plazas, temples and palaces in a manner to transform the landscape. Where buildings stood humans were formed into a polity but in turn construction meant a descent line of elite persons who claimed dominance.

Collective Identity

How was identity formed in this matrix of *ch'en* and *ajaw*? To create a polity supposedly involves some manner of identity connecting ruler and ruled. In the case of the Southern Maya Lowlands, identity is a thorny issue because thus far nobody has been able to convincingly prove the existence of an overarching identity, a term, which would embrace the territory where the Classic Period sites are located. Nevertheless, the first and foremost identity creating factor is a *che'n*, a built place, and most of the time this appears in cases of ambiguity, that is where the origin of a person has to be spelled out. Frequently, the *aj* agentive prefix and a toponym referring to a specific site are the usual way to form these identifying constructions. Nevertheless, it is there where wider-than-site identities can be detected, such as *hux te tuun* which at least embraced Calakmul and Oxpeul, and *huklaju'n tzuk* and *huxlaju'n tzuk* which referred to the Eastern Peten (and the lakes region) and to the area west of it, respectively³⁰. As Alexandre Tokovinine has pointed out regional identities were always overshadowed by local connections³¹. Another regional title was *hux haab' te'* which is connected to Rio Azul and Copan with different partition numbers (5 and 6). Indeed, one of the impressions of the regional identity referents is the evocation of completion by the use of numbers referring to partition (figure 4; see the inscription of Altar de los Reyes with *k'uhul kab' huxlaju'n [kab'?)* and possibly 13 emblem glyphs).

However, the mention of these regional terms does not alter the general image about Classic Period identity formation where emblem glyphs remained the cornerstone of belonging for the elite. Non-royal elite participated in the identity of emblem glyphs by constantly connecting themselves to the emblem glyphs of their rulers by accepting subordination. A particular *sajal* can be hailed from El Cayo and thus could have been from *yaxniil* and was a stable subordinate of the rulers in *yokib'*. Nevertheless, he was never designated a *yokib' sajal*. It is exactly this record which is missing from the inscriptions and which indicates strongly that emblem glyph main signs, though they referred to places (*che'n* or *kab'*) never formed the base of polity and identity formation.

Another indication of the narrow reach of Classic Period identity formation is the infrequent use of the suffix *-naal* which may have the connotation of 'born in/at', a concept superficially similar to etymology of 'native'. In the known cases, this suffix is affixed to emblem glyph main signs and never to regional toponyms. Ethnic denominations are equally missing and the inscriptions omit any reference to the non-elite population.

How was this non-elite segment of the society integrated into polities? One probability is that it was more a pragmatic than ethnic decision, that is the population of a given polity voted to stay with the best time and place-structuring ruler who was able to defend. The number of special studies which try to investigate this specific question is small and most of them explicitly assume economic integration as the only factor in the relation between the elite and the non-elite within Classic Period polities³². The connection between the elite and non-elite most probably was not based on ethnic or territorial fixity. There is nothing similar in the inscriptions that can be conceptualised as such, and this lends support to a view, which posits that the elite did not have to prove their managerial and common origin role to the commoners because probably it was quite apparent. What the elite tried to achieve through its public transcript was showing the non-evident, or the successful time and space structuring, and emphasising the capacity to attack and defend. A helpful concept to describe this particular polity is not ethnicity or territoriality but morality recently introduced into Maya studies by various authors³³.

The authority in this descriptive interpretative framework is moral and is connected to a strategy more to induce and cajole than to force³⁴. The *k'uhul ajaw* (the sacred head of the polity) plays a central role, a referential place to which all social actors are positioned, even the deities who are clearly on a higher plane. These deities were constantly evoked and fused pan-Classic Period elite characters and probably narratives with local expressions creating what modern investigators call tutelary deities.

Migration

The identity formation centred on emblem glyphs or origin places made it possible for corporate groups to fission and move on the landscape and still retain their cohesion. The inscriptions are constantly evoking by various ways the non-local origins of the ruling lines. Indeed, archaeology attests to the phenomenon of population movement connected to the appearance of inscriptions in a specific place as happened in the cases of Yaxchilan, Piedras Negras, Palenque, Copan, Dos Pilas, just to mention the most well known examples.

To invoke non-local origin is a general phenomenon of the Classic Period texts which they achieve by the concrete narration of arrivals, the use of titles, and other subtle ways of representation such as the use of non-Classic Period Maya cultural elements³⁵. Migrations of groups are never mentioned, only that of individuals, nevertheless sometimes the rare word *yita-huli* is attested which refers to the entourage³⁶.

The first arrival was recorded at the beginning of the 5th century (in Tikal) while the last was recorded in the middle of the 9th century (in Seibal; see figure 5). Sometimes the arrival is considered a new foundation (Dos Pilas) and sometimes a refoundation (Seibal). Fission was so pervasive that offshoots of one *ajawlel* residing in many places constituted whole regions (such as the Lacandon area or the Mirador Basin). Similar configurations were created in the case of Tikal and Dos Pilas, or between Palenque and Tortuguero, Tres Islas and Cancuen etc. Indeed, the expansion of Classic Period elite culture and identity with all its trappings can be reduced to the constant 'entourage' movement on the landscape. The cases of Dos Pilas, Zapote Bobal³⁷ and Seibal indicate that the process of migration was a constant phenomenon of the Classic Period, where various factors (war, internal strife, or simply an opportunity to move) resulted in the settlement of previously non-occupied or abandoned areas. The Classic Period is an ever growing process of foundations of *ch'e'n* where rulers reside and gather people around.

Interactions and elite

Maya politics for the elite consisted in the interactions of individuals. Texts are none other than documentation of special roles in rituals, and most elite persons had a well-defined position to each other according to participation and presence. The Maya scribes used at least five morphemes and their derivations to express these joint actions. Three among them, *kab'*, **ila* and **ita*, are derived transitive stems, almost unanimously in perfect status³⁸ while the fourth and fifth (*ichnal* and *e(b)te*) are possessed nouns³⁹. All stems can stand with the names of humans and supernatural beings which further confirms the mixing of 'myth' and 'reality' during the Classic Period.

My investigation suggests that *kab'* is connected to the main actor in a given ritual, be it a higher or lower ranked person, and an active participation. A translation congruent with the Colonial Tzotzil *chabi~/gobernar/* is appropriate in the sense 'to govern, it makes to happen'. Although the rank of the main actors are in most cases higher than that of the others, however the *kab'* stem does not indicate rank in itself.

**ita* has the same connotations, although it is in a lesser scale. The person connected by the **ita* is present in the ritual, and even does the same action as the main actor. He/she joins the ritual but the role is unequivocally less, which mostly indicates his/her lower rank in a given ritual action. Furthermore, there is no reason to say that he/she was not in the presence of the visual field of the acting person.

The meaning of **ila* is more difficult to say but generally it conveys a more passive participation and a mere presence of the given person in a ritual. When it is connected to period ending ceremonies, perhaps it has a different meaning, like 'divine or foresee' as suggested by Karen-Bassie Sweet⁴⁰. The action of 'witnessing' by the ruler was enough to make something legitimate and in this way, the 'witnessing' of the secondary elite does the same with a ceremony conducted by the ruler himself.

The translation of *ichnal* is very plausibly 'presence' and it has the same role as **ila*, it legitimates an action, however there is no direct participation. Maybe it has a connotation of 'place' and I argued that it could have

meant, depending on the context, 'home or habitual place' similarly to William Hanks'⁴¹ analysis of *iknal* in Modern Yukatek.

The agency expression **e(b')tej* connected the actual person with direct action, emphasising his active participation, probably more so than **kab'*. It does not involve much hierarchical associations, however, it is mostly constrained to indicate captive taking. Outside of captive taking context, it is used in house dedications where a non-royal elite individual undertakes the actual ritual event.

In a hypothetical narrative describing an event and connecting actors by the agency expressions, the actors have the role according to participation and presence as the following:

	1 st Presence	2 nd , 3 rd etc. Presence
Active participation	<i>e(b')tej/*kab'i</i>	<i>*itaa</i>
Passive participation	<i>*ichVn</i>	<i>*ila</i>

Classic Period politics was a constant struggle to be connected to these expressions, or better said to be in a position where status is recognised by participating in rituals and events where position in a text was formed around these five words. Rulers tried to amass events where they have done something and this action is connected to their names by the verb *kab'*. Subordinate persons mainly reached the narrative level as secondary participators, witnesses, or companions, not the head of ceremonies but still somebody worthwhile to be noticed and preserved in the collective memory. Classic Period politics is therefore a constant interconnection of individuals within one segment of the society who always wanted to hold more and more other elite individuals as their possession (the linguistic expression of this is clear as attested by the *yajaw*, *usajal*, *yajk'uhu'n* etc. possessed titles).

Those who are left out

A 'time and space structuring ruler in a built space with an origin-indicating named corporate group', probably that is how I can sum up the specific conceptualisation of the Classic Period polity. This was a minimum ideal, which was always necessary to form a political entity. Nevertheless, some parts of the Maya Lowlands did not conform to this ideal, and it is not known what their status was. Any map that presents solid lines as boundaries probably misrepresents geopolitics where empty-zones, non-controlled but inhabited zones and contested zones existed side by side.

One such unresolved problem on any map is the substantial area roughly among the sites of Palenque, Tonina, Agua Escondida, Plan de Ayutla, La Mar, Piedras Negras and Chinikiha. It is a zone with the highest-cost distance according to Armando Anaya Hernández⁴² and there is no report on any major site in this region. It is assumed that relation between Palenque and Piedras Negras, or Palenque and La Mar, or indeed between Tonina and Chinikiha would necessitate crossing this particular area, or the control of it. Nevertheless, it is not borne out by any evidence, almost as if this particular zone was maintained as a huge buffer among the competing polities. Another possible interpretation is that it was a refuge for those populations that did not want to participate in the Classic Maya polity, and here successfully managed to take a hold.

Summary

Thus, Classic Period polity was something quite different from a nation-state in formation from the 19th century where homogenisation was reached by instrumental bureaucratic strategies which emphasised a fixed territory with absolute boundaries, an ethnic community, a historical consciousness generated from

above and massively disseminated in public institutions and recreated and remembered in various ways.

The Classic Period polity was basically a matrix around a specific institution (*ajawlel*) which was implemented in the landscape by building a location to house the representative (*ajaw* or *k'uhul ajaw*) of this given entity. By way of its time and place structuring activity, the *ajaw* created a *che'n* 'an inhabited and built place' where deities (*k'uh*) could be conjured. As a reference point, others collected around his/her personality and office, and received various titles which were not well-defined ranks but rather summaries of specific tasks (an *anab'*, an *aj k'uhu'n* and an *aj uxul* all left their 'signature' on monuments, so which is the sculptor?). There were borders and polity maintenance by leaving refuge and buffer zones among main centres and shorter or longer periods of supremacy over other communities (from 10 to 140 years).

Nevertheless, this was not a 'theatre-state' because obligations for living in the community could be onerous. They had to repair and built, and dedicate, and produce. What was received is more a common belief in order than enforcement. This system was quite stable and enchanting enough to expand continually and result in the organisation of higher and a higher number of persons. There is no indication, contrary to other assertions, that the Maya Lowlands became overpopulated at the end of the 8th century. Rather, the 'side-effects' of the 'forest of kings' resulted in a conflict upon conflict situation. With time it was not the frequency of conflicts which increased, but the participants and thus there was less time to recuperate with diminishing areas where one could escape, survive or migrate. A much populated landscape did not leave as many opportunities for a strategy of hit-and-sack then recuperate, neither for nobles (who recorded this particular tactic in their inscriptions) nor to the non-elite.

A reconceptualisation of the polity ideal on the line of a unified *cosmopolis* with one main reference point could have helped in the aggravating situation but almost 600-hundred years of identity formation was not easy to overcome.

Endnotes

¹ Stephen D. Houston, Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos and David Stuart, *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001)

² Hans J. Prem, "Modelos de entidades políticas: una síntesis". In *Modelos de entidades políticas mayas*, ed. Silvia Trejo (México: INAH, 1998), 17-34.

³ Joyce Marcus, *Emblem and State in the Classic Maya Lowlands: An Epigraphic Approach to Territorial Organization*, (Washington D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1976) and "Ancient Maya Political Organization". In *Lowland Maya Civilization in the Eighth Century*, eds Jeremy A. Sabloff and John S. Henderson, (Washington D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), 111-171. Richard Adams, "Rio Azul, National Geographic" 169 (1986):420-51. Diane Chase and Arlen Chase, "More than Kin and King: Centralized Political Organization among the Late Classic Maya", *Current Anthropology* 37 (1996):803-810.

⁴ Peter Mathews "Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs". In *Classic Maya Political History: Epigraphic and Archaeological Evidence*, ed. Patrick T. Culbert, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 19-29. Stephen D. Houston, "Classic Maya Politics". In *New Theories on the Ancient Maya*, eds. Cecil E. Danien and Robert Sharer, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 65-69.

⁵ Arthur C. Demarest, "Ideology in Ancient Maya Cultural Evolution: The Dynamics of Galactic Polities". In *Ideology and Precolumbian Civilizations*, eds. Arthur C. Demarest and Geoffrey W. Conrad (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1992), 137-157. Stephen D. Houston, *Hieroglyphs and History at Dos Pilas: Dynastic Politics of the Classic Maya*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

⁶ William Fash, *Scribes, Warriors and Kings: The City of Copán and the Ancient Maya*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991. David Webster, "Warfare and Status Rivalry: Lowland Maya and Polynesian Comparisons". In *Archaic States*, eds. Gary M. Feinman and Joyce Marcus (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1999), 311-351.

⁷ Adam Smith, *The Political Landscape: The Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Norman Yoffee, *Myth of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States and Civilizations*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2003).

⁸ Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Evidence for Macro-Political Organization Amongst Classic Maya Lowland States*, (unpublished manuscript, 1994); *Chronicle of Maya Kings and Queens: Deciphering of the Ancient Dynasties of the Ancient Maya*, (London, Thames and Hudson 2000).

⁹ Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Evidence for Macro-Political Organization Amongst Classic Maya Lowland States*, 1994.

¹⁰ Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Maya Kings and Queens*, 2000.

- ¹¹ Damien B. Marken and Kirk D. Straight, "Conclusion: Reconceptualizing the Palenque Polity". In *Palenque: Recent Investigations at the Classic Maya Centre*, Damien B. Marken ed. (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2007), 279-324.
- ¹² Pierre Bourdieu, *Questions de sociologie*, (Paris: Minuit 1986), 86-94.
- ¹³ James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).
- ¹⁴ Adam Smith, *The Political Landscape*, 2003, 10.
- ¹⁵ Jan Assmann, Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen [Hungarian edition: *A kulturális emlékezet. Írás, emlékezés és politikai identitás a korai magaskulturákban*, Budapest: Atlantisz 1992 [2004]]
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*:129-132
- ¹⁸ Adam Smith, *The Political Landscape*, 2003, 151.
- ¹⁹ Lars K. Pharo, *Rituals of Time: An Analysis of the Ritual Practice of Time of the Long Count Calendar, the 260-Day Calendar, the 365-Day Calendar and the 52-Year Calendar in Mesoamerica*, (PhD Thesis, Department of Culture and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo, Norway, 2006).
- ²⁰ Michael Carrasco, *The Mask Flange Iconographic Complex: The Art, Ritual, and History of a Maya Sacred Image*, (PhD Thesis, University of Texas, Austin, 2005).
- ²¹ Biró Péter, *History, Politics, and Polity: The Classic Period Western Maya Region*, (PhD Dissertation, La Trobe University, Australia, 2007)
- ²² Linda Schele and David Freidel, *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*, (New York: William Morrow, 1990)
- ²³ David Stuart, *A Study of Maya Inscriptions*, (PhD Thesis, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, 1995).
- ²⁴ Adam Smith, *The Political Landscape*, 2003, 160-162.
- ²⁵ Lisa J. Lucero, *Water and Ritual: the Rise and Fall of Classic Maya Rulers*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).
- ²⁶ Sethra M. Low, *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).
- ²⁷ Stephen D. Houston and David Stuart, Of Gods, Glyphs, and Kings: Divinity and Rulership among the Classic Maya, *Antiquity* 70 (1996):289-312, 295.
- ²⁸ *pace* Alfonso Lacadena Garcia-Gallo and Andrés Ciudad Ruiz, "Reflexiones sobre estructura política maya clásica". In *Anatomía de una civilización. Aproximaciones interdisciplinarias a la cultura maya*, Andrés Ciudad Ruiz et al., eds. (Madrid: Sociedad Española de Estudios Mayas, 1998), 31-64.
- ²⁹ Alexander Tokovinine, Classic Maya Place Name Database Project, Mesoamerica, FAMSI, <http://www.famsi.org/reports/06054/index.html>, 2007.
- ³⁰ Alexander Tokovinine, Classic Maya Place Names, 2007; Dimitri Beliaev, *Wuk Tsuk and Oxlahun Tsuk: Tikal and Naranjo in the Late Classic*, (unpublished manuscript, 1998).
- ³¹ Alexandre Tokovinine Classic Maya Place Names, 2007, 9-10
- ³² Takeshi Inomata, "The spatial mobility of non-elite populations in Classic Maya society and its political implications". In *Ancient Maya Commoners*, Jon C. Lohse and Fred Valdez, Jr. eds., (Austin: University of Texas Press 2004), 175-196.
- ³³ Stephen Houston et al., "The Moral Community: Maya Settlement Transformation at Piedras Negras, Guatemala". In *The Social Construction of Ancient Cities*, Smith Monica ed., (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003), 212-253.
- ³⁴ *ibid.*:231-239)
- ³⁵ Andrea Stone, "Disconnection, Foreign Insignia and Political Expansion: Teotihuacán and the Warrior Stelae of Piedras Negras". In *Mesoamerica after the Decline of Teotihuacán, AD 700-900*, Richard D. Diehl and Janet C. Berlo eds., (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection 1989), 153-172. Davis Stuart, "The Arrival of Strangers: Teotihuacan and Tollan in Classic Maya History". In *Mesoamerica's Classic Heritage*, David Carrasco et al. eds., (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 465-523. Erik Boot, *Continuity and Change in Text and Image at Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico: A Study of the Inscriptions, Iconography, and Architecture at a Late Classic to Early Postclassic Maya Site*, (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2005).
- ³⁶ Barbara MacLeod, "A World in a Grain of Sand: Transitive Perfect Verbs in the Classic Maya Script". In *The Linguistics of Maya Writing*, Søren Wichmann ed. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2004), 291-326.
- ³⁷ James Fitzsimmons, Kings of Jaguar Hill: Monuments and Caches at Zapote Bobal, FAMSI, <http://www.famsi.org/reports/05047/index.html>, 2006.
- ³⁸ Barbara MacLeod, *A World in a Grain of Sand*, 2004.
- ³⁹ Stephen Houston and Karl Taube, "An Archaeology of the Senses: Perception and Cultural Expression in Ancient Mesoamerica", *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 10 (2000):261-294.
- ⁴⁰ Karen Bassie-Sweet, Maya Creator Gods, Mesoweb, www.mesoweb.com/features/bassie/creatorgods.pdf, 2001.
- ⁴¹ William Hanks, *Intertexts: Writings on Language, Utterance, and Context*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 2000).
- ⁴² Armando Anaya Hernández, *Frail Alliances, Shifting Boundaries: The Growth and Wane of the Usumacinta Region Kingdoms*, paper presented at the XXXI Annual Maya Meetings at Texas, Austin, 2007.

Bibliography

Adams, Richard, "Rio Azul, National Geographic" 169 (1986):420-51.

Anaya-Hernández, Armando, *Frail Alliances, Shifting Boundaries: The Growth and Wane of the Usumacinta Region Kingdoms*, paper

presented at the XXXI Annual Maya Meetings at Texas, Austin, 2007.

Assmann, Jan, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* [Hungarian edition: *A kulturális emlékezet. Írás, emlékezés és politikai identitás a korai magaskulturákban*, Budapest: Atlantisz 1992 [2004]]

Bassie-Sweet, Karen, *Maya Creator Gods, Mesoweb*, www.mesoweb.com/features/bassie/creatorgods.pdf, 2001.

Beliaev, Dmitri, *Wuk Tsuk and Oxlahun Tsuk: Tikal and Naranjo in the Late Classic*, (unpublished manuscript, 1998).

Bíró, Péter, *History, Politics, and Polity: The Classic Period Western Maya Region*, (PhD Dissertation, La Trobe University, Australia, 2007)

Boot, Erik, *Continuity and Change in Text and Image at Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico: A Study of the Inscriptions, Iconography, and Architecture at a Late Classic to Early Postclassic Maya Site*, (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2005).

Bourdieu, Pierre, *Questions de sociologie*, (Paris: Minuit 1986), 86-94.

Chase, Diane and Arlen Chase, "More than Kin and King: Centralized Political Organization among the Late Classic Maya", *Current Anthropology* 37 (1996):803-810.

Carrasco, Michael, *The Mask Flange Iconographic Complex: The Art, Ritual, and History of a Maya Sacred Image*, (PhD Thesis, University of Texas, Austin, 2005).

Demarest, Arthur C., "Ideology in Ancient Maya Cultural Evolution: The Dynamics of Galactic Polities". In *Ideology and Precolumbian Civilizations*, eds. Arthur C. Demarest and Geoffrey W. Conrad (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1992), 137-157.

Fash, William, *Scribes, Warriors and Kings: The City of Copán and the Ancient Maya*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991.

Fitzsimmons, James, *Kings of Jaguar Hill: Monuments and Caches at Zapote Bobal, FAMSI*, <http://www.famsi.org/reports/05047/index.html>, 2006.

Hanks, William, *Intertexts: Writings on Language, Utterance, and Context*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 2000).

Houston, Stephen D., "Classic Maya Politics". In *New Theories on the Ancient Maya*, eds. Cecil E. Danien and Robert Sharer, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 65-69.

Hieroglyphs and History at Dos Pilas: Dynastic Politics of the Classic Maya, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

Houston, Stephen D., Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos and David Stuart, *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001)

Houston, Stephen D. and David Stuart, *Of Gods, Glyphs, and Kings: Divinity and Rulership among the Classic Maya*, *Antiquity* 70 (1996):289-312, 295.

Houston, Stephen D. and Karl Taube, "An Archaeology of the Senses: Perception and Cultural Expression in Ancient Mesoamerica", *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 10 (2000):261-294.

Houston, Stephen D. et al., "The Moral Community: Maya Settlement Transformation at Piedras Negras, Guatemala". In *The Social Construction of Ancient Cities*, Smith Monica ed., (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003), 212-253.

Inomata, Takeshi, "The spatial mobility of non-elite populations in Classic Maya society and its political implications". In *Ancient Maya Commoners*, Jon C. Lohse and Fred Valdez, Jr. eds., (Austin: University of Texas Press 2004), 175-196.

Lacadena Garcia-Gallo, Alfonso and Andrés Ciudad Ruiz, "Reflexiones sobre estructura política maya clásica". In *Anatomía de una civilización. Aproximaciones interdisciplinarias a la cultura maya*, Andrés Ciudad Ruiz et al., eds. (Madrid: Sociedad Española de Estudios Mayas, 1998), 31-64.

Low, Sethra M., *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

Lucero, Lisa J., *Water and Ritual: the Rise and Fall of Classic Maya Rulers*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

MacLeod, Barbara, "A World in a Grain of Sand: Transitive Perfect Verbs in the Classic Maya Script". In *The*

Linguistics of Maya Writing, Søren Wichmann ed. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2004), 291-326.

Marcus, Joyce, *Emblem and State in the Classic Maya Lowlands: An Epigraphic Approach to Territorial Organization*, (Washington D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1976)

“Ancient Maya Political Organization”. In *Lowland Maya Civilization in the Eighth Century*, eds. Jeremy A. Sabloff and John S. Henderson, (Washington D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), 111-171.

Marken, Damien B. and Kirk D. Straight, “Conclusion: Reconceptualizing the Palenque Polity”. In *Palenque: Recent Investigations at the Classic Maya Centre*, Damien B. Marken ed. (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2007), 279-324.

Martin, Simon and Nikolai Grube, *Evidence for Macro-Political Organization Amongst Classic Maya Lowland States*, (unpublished manuscript, 1994);

Chronicle of Maya Kings and Queens: Deciphering of the Ancient Dynasties of the Ancient Maya, (London, Thames and Hudson 2000).

Mathews, Peter, “Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs”. In *Classic Maya Political History: Epigraphic and Archaeological Evidence*, ed. Patrick T. Culbert, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 19-29.

Pharo, Lars K., *Rituals of Time: An Analysis of the Ritual Practice of Time of the Long Count Calendar, the 260-Day Calendar, the 365-Day Calendar and the 52-Year Calendar in Mesoamerica*, (PhD Thesis, Department of Culture and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo, Norway, 2006).

Prem, Hans J., “Modelos de entidades políticas: una síntesis”. In *Modelos de entidades políticas mayas*, ed. Silvia Trejo (México: INAH, 1998), 17-34.

Scott, James, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).

Schele, Linda and David Freidel, *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*, (New York: William Morrow, 1990)

Smith, Adam, *The Political Landscape: The Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

Stone, Andrea, “Disconnection, Foreign Insignia and Political Expansion: Teotihuacán and the Warrior Stelae of Piedras Negras”. In *Mesoamerica after the Decline of Teotihuacán, AD 700-900*, Richard D. Diehl and Janet C. Berlo eds., (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection 1989), 153-172

Stuart, David, *A Study of Maya Inscriptions*, (PhD Thesis, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, 1995).

“The Arrival of Strangers: Teotihuacan and Tollan in Classic Maya History”. In *Mesoamerica's Classic Heritage*, David Carrasco et al. eds., (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 465-523.

Tokovinine, Alexander, Classic Maya Place Name Database Project, Mesoamerica, FAMSI, <http://www.famsi.org/reports/06054/index.html>, 2007.

Webster, David, “Warfare and Status Rivalry: Lowland Maya and Polynesian Comparisons”. In *Archaic States*, eds. Gary M. Feinman and Joyce Marcus (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1999), 311-351.

Yoffee, Norman, *Myth of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States and Civilizations*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2003).