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CLASSIC MAYA POLITICAL
HISTORY:
HIEROGLYPHIC AND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVIDENCE

EDITED BY
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A SCHOOL OF AMERICAN RESEARCH BOOK



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Contributors

T. PATRICK CULBERT, editor
Department of Anthropology
University of Arizona

WILLIAM L. FASH
Department of Anthropology
Northern Illinois University

NORMAN HAMMOND
Department of Archaeology
Boston University

CHRISTOPHER JONES
University Museum
University of Pennsylvania

PETER MATHEWS
Department of Archaeology
University of Calgary

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Contributors

LINDA SCHELE
Department of Art
University of Texas

PETER SCHMIDT
Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia

ROBERT J. SHARER
University Museum
University of Pennsylvania

DAVID S. STUART
Department of Anthropology
Princeton University

GORDON R. WILLEY
Peabody Museum
Harvard University

LINNEA H. WREN
Department of Art
Gustavus Adolphus College

NORMAN YOFFEE
Department of Anthropology
University of Arizona

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Preface

The idea for the School of American Research Advanced Seminar that gave rise to this volume originated with Douglas W. Schwartz, who suggested to me the possibility of a seminar that would deal with Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions. In discussing the best manner to approach the topic, we decided that it would be exciting to bring together a group of specialists in epigraphy, archaeology, and art history to combine their different data and viewpoints in a new approach to understanding Classic Maya civilization. The time seemed ideal for such an effort. Glyphic decipherments had accumulated so rapidly that epigraphers were inundated by a sea of new data to which researchers not actively engaged in decipherment had had almost no exposure. Nothing could be more logical as a continuation of the S.A.R.'s tradition of ground-breaking seminars on the Maya than to combine the new mass of epigraphic data with the more traditional material from archaeology and iconography.

The first step in implementing the idea was to form an organizing committee consisting of Richard E. W. Adams, Christopher Jones, Norman Hammond, and me. The committee refined the scope and objectives of the seminar, made a list of potential participants, and prepared a proposal entitled "Elite Interaction in Classic Maya

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Civilization.” The proposal was accepted and the seminar was held at the School of American Research, Santa Fe, on October 20–24, 1986. Participants at the seminar were Clemency C. Coggins, William L. Fash, Norman Hammond, Christopher Jones, Peter Mathews, Linda Schele, Robert S. Sharer, Gordon R. Willey, Linnea H. Wren, and Norman Yoffee; I participated and served as chair of the seminar sessions.

Because so many new ideas were generated during the seminar discussions, the preparation of the manuscript for this volume involved an unusual amount of revision, sometimes even complete rewriting, of the papers that had been prepared before the seminar. Clemency Coggins, whose seminar paper (1986) covered both elite burials and the associated ideology, decided that her major interest lay in ideological matters outside the scope of the volume and that her paper should be published separately in shortened form (Coggins 1988). Linda Schele, whose original paper (1986e) had examined in detail all historical inscriptions across the lowlands between 9.12.0.0.0 and 9.13.0.0.0, changed her focus to the western region when it became clear that this region needed to be included for the volume to present the full political history of the Classic period. My own seminar paper, which had espoused a Tikal regional state, was drastically altered to provide regional coverage for the northeast Peten to complement the very full data on Tikal provided by Jones. Norman Hammond’s original material was divided into two separate sections when he accepted two additional assignments needed to make the volume complete. One was the preparation of the Introduction to the volume (chapter 1). The second (chapter 11) is an overview of the structure of Maya polities that integrates the data on elites derived from inscriptions with information on other segments of society derived from archaeological sources. Hammond’s holistic perspective which ties together all levels of Maya society is juxtaposed with Yoffee’s, which focuses primarily upon elite interaction from the comparative viewpoint that his specialization in Mesopotamia makes possible.

Readers unfamiliar with Maya studies may be mystified by the profusion of different kinds of names applied to Maya individuals. Some researchers prefer sober lists of letters or numbers: Rulers A, B, and C of Tikal or Rulers 1, 2, 3, and 4 of Dos Pilas, for example. A second method simply describes Maya name glyphs in English, giving

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such intriguing appellations as Bird-Jaguar and Smoking Frog. Sometimes when the Maya *name* (not necessarily the phonetic value) of a glyph is known (e.g., the names of days or months), the name will be used, often in combination with an English term for a second name glyph. Cauac Sky and Cauac Shield are examples of such combinations. Another system, introduced at Palenque, uses only Maya words. Sometimes these are the same descriptive glosses for pictures in the glyphs as comparable English terms. Sometimes, they are actual phonetic readings, although the correctness of such readings is often a matter of dispute among experts. Suffice to say, there has been no accepted attempt to systematize Maya naming and the free-flow result is that some rulers have been tagged with a number of different names. The penultimate ruler of Copan, for example, has variously been called “Sun-at-Horizon,” “New Sun-at-Horizon,” “Madrugada” (Spanish for dawn), Yax Sun-at-Horizon, and Yax Pac (a phonetic reading that is the matter of some dispute). Rather than engage in lengthy and tortuous debates about the “best” or “correct” name variants, we have generally accepted the name favored by the author in this volume who deals primarily with the site in question, but have allowed other authors to use variants with the “primary” name mentioned occasionally in parentheses.

Throughout the volume, we have followed Maya calendrical dates with their equivalents in the Christian (Gregorian) calendar. In deriving equivalents, we have followed the Goodman-Martínez-Thompson correlation of the two calendars (see Hammond, this volume, chapter 1), the correlation favoured by all the participants. Although there is residual debate about the correctness of this correlation, we are, in essence, dealing with Maya time so that an alternative correlation would have no effect upon our deliberations.

To facilitate our interactions, we agreed upon definitions for some of the key concepts we would use. We defined *polity* as an autonomous political unit. A multi-center or complex polity (called regional state by some) may have more than one major center of population, and may result from amalgamation of formerly autonomous polities. An *elite* is a small group within the upper echelon of a society that exerts ideological political, social, or economic power or any combination of these. Finally, the *dynastic monument complex*, often called the “stela cult,” is the assemblage of monumental art and

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inscriptions recording dynastic history, propaganda, and associated rituals. It may include any or all of stelae, “altars,” lintels, architectural embellishments, and complete buildings.

Our participation at the seminar proved to be both an exciting professional enterprise and a warm collegial experience. We were stimulated by the sharing of ideas, disagreed (when we did so) amicably, and were heartened by the surroundings and hospitality of the School of American Research. We are deeply indebted to Douglas W. Schwartz for his original idea for the seminar and for his contributions over the years in fostering Maya studies in the Advanced Seminar series. We are grateful to Jonathan Haas for professional arrangements and his wise advice on the conduct of seminar sessions. We thank Cecile Stein for her help with a variety of matters and Jane Barberousse for her skill in arranging meals and seminar facilities. Finally, we are grateful to Jane Kepp for her advice and encouragement in preparing the manuscript for publication.

T. PATRICK CULBERT