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## "The Only True People"

Bethany J. bin Beyette

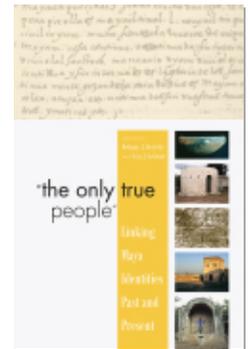
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## He's Maya, but He's Not My Brother

*Exploring the Place of Ethnicity in Classic Maya Social Organization*

DAMIEN B. MARKEN, STANLEY P. GUENTER, AND DAVID A. FREIDEL

Ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built. Interaction in such a social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence. (Barth 1969:10)

Several years ago, while excavating a large temple at Palenque in Chiapas, Mexico, a local workman asked one of the authors, "What happened to the Maya?" Slightly confused, Marken asked what he meant. He said he was curious as to why the Maya "disappeared." So Marken explained, in general terms, that while the large Classic period centers such as Palenque and Tikal were largely abandoned, the Maya as a people did not really go anywhere. In fact, Marken pointed out, the man himself was Maya, as were most of the project's workmen. With an odd look, he responded adamantly that no, he was not Maya, he was Tzeltal. So were the other workmen from his *ejido*. A few workmen from another *ejido* were Chol. He did finally concede that maybe the Lacandon selling wares at the site entrance were Maya, but he certainly was not.

This conversation, experienced by many archaeologists working throughout the Maya area, illustrates contemporary ethnic boundary maintenance in the Maya lowlands. But who or what does the term *Maya* describe? Although a seemingly simple

question, it is anything but, and answers are greatly dependent upon one's own subjective perspective.<sup>1</sup> Despite the best efforts of the pan-Maya movement, numerous "Maya" groups still refuse to recognize a common ethnic ancestry (Samson, this volume). Linguistic and cultural differences continue to separate communities, even those located in spatial proximity.

With Fredrik Barth (1969:11) as a starting point, we define an ethnic group as a population that recognizes itself "as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order." As this implies and as the Maya case demonstrates, ethnic affiliation can also be ascribed to a group by others. The emic and etic identifying markers of difference may or may not diverge widely, which can carry strong implications for analysis (e.g., Eidheim 1969). Differentiating ethnic groups from other forms of social identity is the emic perception that members share a culturally constructed common ancestry that includes groups larger than family, lineage, or "house" (Emberling 1997:302–3).

To incorporate the greatest overlap and disjunction between potential emic and etic criteria, we envision "the Maya" as a macro-ethnic group composed of numerous smaller and localized ethnic groupings. As applied here, this "macro-ethnicity" is of necessity a simplified and academic etic designation based on a common linguistic family, rough geographic contiguity, and broadly shared similarities in subsistence techniques, including the centrality of maize to the diet. In contrast, the localized ethnic groups that jointly form Maya macro-ethnicity are defined emically and do not necessarily recognize a common ethnic affiliation with each other.<sup>2</sup> Often, a shared connection to a specific physical or mythic place and bonds created by speaking a specific Mayan language forms the basis of these localized identities (e.g., Siverts 1969; Vogt 1993). A critical aspect of localized Maya ethnicities is that they are defined not only by inclusion but also by those excluded from membership (see Barth 1969).

Considering Colonial, as well as post-Colonial, attempts to assimilate and integrate Maya groups as a whole into "modern" society, it seems unlikely that the existence of ethnic divisions between various Maya peoples is a recent phenomenon (Watanabe 2004:38). Assuming that Maya ethnic differentiation does have its roots in the deep past, the ancient social and political landscape would have been far more complex than currently conceived by most Mayanists. In this chapter we attempt to enhance current models of ancient Maya social organization by evaluating the potential input from perspectives of ethnic group formation and maintenance. The often-unexplored theoretical potential of ethnicity in archaeology can open new interpretive doors into the material interpretation of processes effecting intra-polity social bonds (influencing elite-elite, elite-commoner, and commoner-commoner relations). In this vein, our goals are twofold: (1) to demonstrate the

interpretive benefits and pitfalls of incorporating conceptions of ethnic identity in modeling the social relations comprising Classic Maya polities, and (2) to begin inquiry into the interplay between ethnic and class identity at the Classic site of Palenque, Chiapas. These goals expand the theoretical territory for explaining the increasingly apparent regional variability across the Maya lowlands.

### ETHNICITY IN THE MAYA LOWLANDS

Research on ethnicity in several world regions demonstrates the great difficulty in identifying ethnic groups archaeologically (e.g., Aldenderfer and Stanish 1993; Bernardini 2005; Emberling 1997; Emberling and Yoffee 1999; Hegmon 1998; Jones 1997; Stanish 1989). Ethnic identifications and boundaries can shift and change rapidly (though see Wilson [1993:122]). Furthermore, they can often be expressed in media that preserve poorly (e.g., Schortman 1989:56). Theoretically, the multifocal and situational nature of ethnicity hampers the scope with which any single perspective can inform *all* aspects of ethnic identity. Primordialist, instrumentalist, subjectivist, and objectivist perspectives each focus on different relational dimensions of the form of social groupings cataloged under the rubric of ethnicity (Banks 1996; Barth 1994; Eriksen 1991; Jones 1997:13; Wade 1997; Wilson 1993).<sup>3</sup>

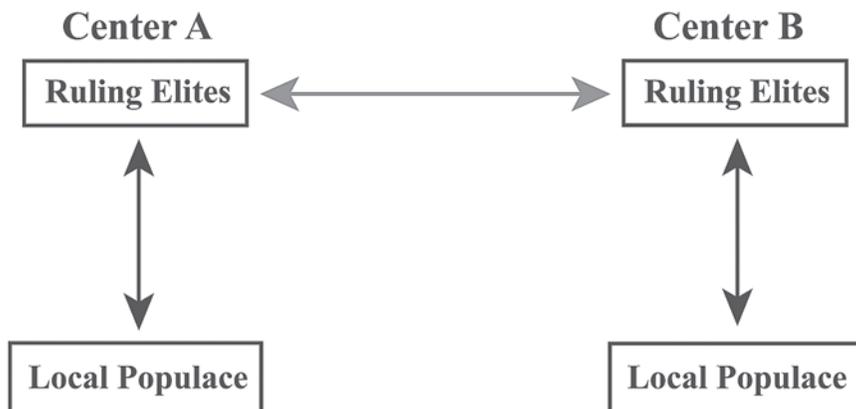
In attempting to circumvent these theoretical difficulties, several researchers advocate documenting changes and differences in *habitus* between and within archaeological spatial groups (Bourdieu 1977; see Aldenderfer and Stanish 1993; Janusek 2003; Jones 1997:88–96; Stanish 1989; Stark 2008). Jones (1997:13, 96) in particular emphasizes the importance of intersections between habitus and social context. While this chapter focuses largely on ways particular cultural symbols are manipulated to advance group-specific interests, their interpreted impact is nevertheless grounded in a *potentially* shared habitus between multiple, hierarchically organized local populations (ibid.:75; McAnany 1995). The difficulty in generalizing about polity-wide material processes generated by habitus in the tropical lowlands somewhat mitigates the applicability of giving primacy to practice theory in reconstructing ancient Maya ethnic categorizes. There have been relatively few systematic comparative studies of the social import of daily activities in constructing identities—as reconstructed from archaeological data—between multiple residential groups at a particular Maya site (e.g., Gerstle 1988; Hendon 1991; LeCount 2001; Piehl 2005; Sheets et al. 1990; see also Janusek 2003, 2008).

Moreover, the opening anecdote unfortunately typifies several potential limitations to simplistically distinguishing ethnic habitus materially, even among contemporary Maya groups. While Lacandon dress is visibly distinct, Tzeltals and Chol individuals dress similarly, perform the same jobs, and eat the same foods. Their

houses are built of similar materials and contain many of the same general items. Instead, cultural elements such as language, place of residence, and a sense of common history define group identity.<sup>4</sup> Recent diachronic theoretical and empirical considerations of ethnic differentiation in Mesoamerica support the significance of “place” in defining prehispanic ethnic and political affiliations (e.g., Berdan 2008a; Stark and Chance 2008; see also Grosby 1995). Ethnohistoric and ethnographic data confirm the continuing weight specifically given to conceptions of common history and geographic origin in defining ethnic group membership (e.g., Berdan 2008b; Montejo 1999; Roosens 1994:85; Wade 1997:18; Watanabe and Fischer 2004:13). Extensive textual data from inscriptions indicate that Palenque’s ruling family shared similar concerns in communicating its local roots and connections.

Previous research incorporating ethnicity theories in the Maya lowlands has concentrated on interactions between elite Maya and ethnically distinct foreign groups. Studies have been largely restricted to two analytical foci: (1) investigation of ethnic enclaves within sites and regions and (2) reconstructions of inter-societal interactions at the peripheries of the Maya lowlands. Possible ethnic enclaves and foreign intrusions into the lowlands have been the topic of recurring debate and will not be dealt with here (see Braswell 2003; Kidder, Jennings, and Shook 1946; Kowalski and Kristan-Graham 2007; Spence 1989, 1992, 1996; Stark 2008; Stark and Chance 2008:15–18; Stuart 2000; Wright 2005). Meanwhile, research on Maya and non-Maya interaction within a region has been almost exclusively restricted to the southeastern periphery of the Maya area (e.g., Canuto and Bell, this volume; Gerstle 1988; Schortman and Nakamura 1991; Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001). These studies however, have done little to confront the possibility of ethnic interaction *between* Classic Maya groups.

This is not to say that regional variability has gone unrecognized in the Maya lowlands. Maya scholars acknowledge the great diversity in local material culture from region to region. However, this diversity is often downplayed or attributed to political or ecological factors. Beyond the work of Schortman and his colleagues, little discussion has been devoted to the inherently conflicting balance of affiliations affected by the Classic elite to maintain their prominence both locally and among elites from other centers (figure 8.1; Sharer and Golden 2004:42). On the one hand, Maya elites needed to participate in the shared elite culture linking them into spatially expansive salient identity networks (see Blanton et al. 1996; Clark and Blake 1994; Schortman 1989:60). Manipulation and monopolization of this horizontal network were necessary for elites and rulers to differentiate themselves locally from non-elites and exclude them from positions of authority (*ibid.*). Conversely, Maya rulers and elites could not entirely distance themselves from their local supporting population in an agrarian-based economy.



**FIGURE 8.1.** Schematic of vertical and horizontal interaction networks operating across the Maya region

#### MODELING THE ROLE OF ETHNIC IDENTITY IN CLASSIC POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

General descriptions of Classic Maya civilization highlight the shared aspects of elite high culture, what Schortman (*ibid.*:58) describes as a class-based salient identity (see also Baines and Yoffee 1998). Key characteristics marking this horizontal affiliation between elites are a common written language, similar art styles and architectural elements, and related political structures, including the *ajaw* concept (Andrews 1975; Freidel and Schele 1988; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993; Houston, Robertson, and Stuart 2000; Kubler 1975; Martin and Grube 2000; Roys 1934; Sharer 1993; Sharer and Golden 2004). A shared cosmology is often cited as another trait defining the Classic high culture, despite the fact that no unified cosmological tradition existed across the lowlands. Certain deities held a critical place in the ideologies of particular cities but were absent at other centers.

The fact that interaction between elites from different centers occurred within this shared framework in a sense diverts attention from investigation of horizontally distributed, *ethnic* divisions within the Maya lowlands through interaction, as advocated by Barth (1969). Furthermore, clear evidence for interaction between geographically separated non-elite groups—individuals excluded from elite class identities—is sparse across the Maya lowlands.<sup>5</sup>

In most interpretations of Classic Maya society, vertical integration is conceived as a system of basic community identities, sometimes contested, often generated through shared ritual spectacle. While a well-documented class-based elite shared culture existed, the regional variation in material culture across the lowlands likely

also reflects the manifestation of distinct Maya ethnicities. But identifying group membership by specific, “intrinsic” criteria is both theoretically and analytically suspect (e.g., *ibid.*; Jones 1997). To circumvent the pitfalls of cultural trait lists, we concentrate on (largely elite) expressions of both class and ethnic practice and boundaries (Berdan 2008b:6; Stark and Chance 2008:27).

#### CLASS, ETHNICITY, AND PLACE

Although theoretical and analytical disagreements remain, well-established criteria define “social classes” in Mesoamerican scholarship (e.g., Berdan 2008b; Chase and Chase 1992; Clark 2000; Schortman and Urban 2003; Sharer 1993:95; Willey and Leventhal 1979). Prehispanic class differences are noted by material differentials in wealth and power structures (e.g., Rick 2005). Archaeologically, ancient Maya classes are most easily identified by the social context of, and quantitative differences in, access to labor, wealth, imports, and cultural capital<sup>6</sup> (e.g., Abrams 1989; Blanton et al. 1996; Chase 1992; DeMarrais, Castillo, and Earle 1996; Haviland and Moholy-Nagy 1992; Hendon 1991; Marcus 1993; Sanders 1992:280; Scarborough 2005; Sharer 1993:94; Willey et al. 1965; Willey and Leventhal 1979; also White [1999] for additional dietary evidence). These studies indicate that Classic Maya society was in general composed of at least two social classes: elites and commoners.<sup>7</sup>

Investigation of “class” in Maya archaeology has been especially profitable in interpreting vertical stratification at the local level and elite interactions at the polity level (cf. Sharer and Traxler 2006). While forming the initial basis to define ancient class divisions, quantitative measures of social status are more easily simplified analytically than are interpretations of differential access to cultural capital (table 8.1). However, distinctions based on raw quantitative data may lack marked divisions and represent merely the analytical beginning. Linking wealth-based variation in practice to materializations of power and authority (Anderson 1983; Bourdieu 1977; DeMarrais, Castillo, and Earle 1996; Stark and Chance 2008:7) elucidates cognitive aspects of class identity formation and maintenance (e.g., Houston et al. 2003; Yaeger 2000; Yaeger and Canuto 2000). Furthermore, tracking how elites and rulers manipulated aspects of cultural capital—ideology, history, and political authority—highlights its multidimensional potential. In particular, specific symbols and rituals can activate both class and ethnic group identities across multiple social contexts.

Recent discussions of ethnic identity in prehispanic Mesoamerica indicate the significance of “place” in defining group membership (e.g., Berdan 2008a; Brumfiel 1994; McAnany 1995; Stark and Chance 2008; see also Roosens 1994). It is the centrality of “place” in Maya ethnic identity formation that distinguishes ethnicity from class. Although incomplete and fragmentary, empirical evidence supports

**TABLE 8.1.** Common archaeological measures to distinguish class

| <i>Context</i>                        | <i>Archaeological Measure</i> | <i>Social Implication</i>               |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Mortuary                              | Grave goods                   | Greater access to material wealth       |
|                                       | Health and nutrition          | Greater access to subsistence resources |
| Architecture: domestic/<br>monumental | Building size                 | Greater ability to conscript labor      |
|                                       | Masonry quality               | Greater access to specialized labor     |

envisioning numerous Maya ethnic groups organized across the lowlands during the Classic period. Moreover, the manifestation of ethnic identity significantly influenced local political structure, despite often being suppressed in inter-polity elite interactions.

By recognizing that social group markers are not arbitrary (Bentley 1987; Wilson 1993), it may be possible to distinguish the function(s) of particular symbol types. Primacy should not, however, be attributed to any particular potential practice or symbol.<sup>8</sup> The ways markers/symbols actively or passively fostered class and ethnic group membership should instead be examined to define their communicative import. Moreover, the historical and polity-specific significance of potential identity-confirming practices and symbols needs to be viewed as part of a process by which elites maintained bonds with, yet justified their domination over, local populations.

#### EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY: ETHNICITY VERSUS CLASS

Myriad strategies were available for ruling families to establish and maintain an ethnic affiliation with their local populations. The most effective manner likely involved creating shared notions of history, values, and place as materialized in habitus (e.g., Berdan 2008a; Jones 1997). However, as mentioned, reconstructing and comparing habitus across the entire Maya lowlands is well beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, we evaluate how some symbols may have been employed by Palencano rulers to communicate affiliation and distinction with local groups (sometimes simultaneously). Assessing the potential of particular classes of archaeological data to mark group identity is a first step to better comprehend Palencano social organization. As will be seen, some commonly invoked material classes to distinguish between Maya groups fall short of the necessary criteria to identify ethnicity (Banks 1996; Barth 1969, 2000; Jones 1997). In particular, simple typologies of architecture style and *written* language are unfortunately inadequate archaeological indicators of ethnic group affiliation. The focus should instead be on how aspects of material culture were employed to communicate and affirm group identities (Aldenderfer and Stanish 1993; Jones 1997; Rapoport 1988).

Maya rulers went to great lengths to legitimize their power locally, continually reinforcing local roots and emphasizing the temporal depth of their dynasties. These practices served to create and maintain local identities affiliating rulers with their resident elite *and* non-elite populations. Recurrent themes connecting “place” with “people” associated with certain elite symbols strongly suggest their ethnic qualities. As noted, recognizing the multidimensionality of these symbols is critical. Ethnic and class markers can overlap, potentially communicating multiple or variable meanings to different individuals. This necessitates considering audience when interpreting the social import of practices and symbols. Archaeologically, audience can be inferred from the spatial context and distribution of social markers and inform the intertwined meanings communicated by specific markers (Inomata and Coben 2006; Moore 1996).

The extensive public and private declaration of the ties between rulers and local deities in ritual, sculpture, and writing indicates a dynastic preoccupation with demonstrating a long-standing connection to place and local history. In writing, often in restricted visual contexts, the Palenque sovereigns used emblem glyphs, toponyms, and relations to local deities to connect with local elites (e.g., Baudéz 1989, 1996b; Stuart 2005). To demonstrate their ethnic affiliation to non-elites, rulers employed highly visible monumental sculpture and spectacle (e.g., Baudéz 1989, 1996a; Greene Robertson 1983, 1985a, 1985b, 1991; Griffin 1978; Pollock 1965; A. Smith 2003). At the same time, by emphasizing the temporal depth of their local roots, these markers also differentiated the rulers from the ruled.

#### PALENQUE, CHIAPAS

Nestled in the foothills of the Sierra de Chiapas, the Classic period site of Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico, is most celebrated for its extensive hieroglyphic corpus, elegant stucco sculpture, delicate architecture, and the impressive tomb of its most renowned ruler, K'inich Janaab' Pakal I. As the largest center of the western periphery of the Maya lowlands, Palenque has been the focus of considerable archaeological investigation since the early 1900s (Mathews 2007:3–5). Over the years, several scholars have commented that Palenque's material culture is distinctive among Classic Maya sites. Beyond basic technological similarities, Palenque's architectural, sculptural, and ceramic traditions have little in common with contemporaneous traditions to the east. In this regard, the work of Robert Rands and his colleagues with Palenque ceramics has been the most systematic. Rands has convincingly demonstrated the region's ceramic isolation throughout much of the Classic period (e.g., Rands 1967, 2007; Rands and Bishop 1980). However, few scholars have viewed these data with the intention of identifying clues that suggest ethnic diversity across

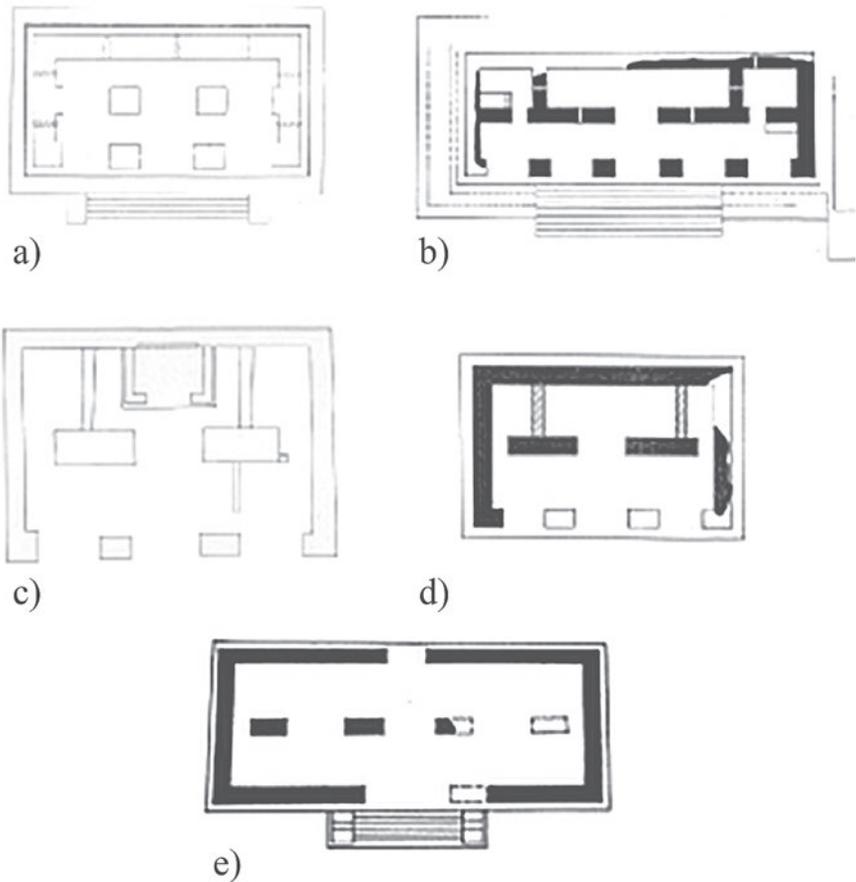
the Maya lowlands. We argue that elite expressions and, more important, use of cultural symbols indicate that Classic period Palencanos were ethnically distinct from other lowland Maya groups.

Although we choose not to discuss in detail Palenque's ceramic isolation (see Bishop 1975, 1994; Rands 1967, 1969, 1987; Rands and Bishop 1980), the apparent low importance of ceramic vessels as mortuary offerings at Palenque, especially polychromes, is suggestive. Royal Palencano tombs, lavishly decorated with art and jade, were ceramically impoverished compared with their Petén contemporaries. Pakal's tomb, for example, contained only five vessels, two with geometric polychrome designs. Non-royal burials throughout the site also contain few vessels (López Bravo 2003; Marken 2003; Rands and Rands 1961), indicating that, at least in death, the inhabitants of Palenque did not regard pottery as particularly valuable. This stark contrast with much of the rest of the Maya lowlands suggests that an alternate value system regarding pottery was at work in Classic Palenque. While difficult to reconstruct archaeologically, such systems—linked to reconstructions of habitus—may be productive indicators of ethnic affiliation.<sup>9</sup>

## ARCHITECTURE

Since the reports of the earliest explorers, scholars have remarked at length on how Palenque's architectural and sculptural traditions differ from those at other Maya sites. Architecturally, the wide galleries and lattice-type roofcombs of Palenque are distinctive of what George Andrews (1995) has called the Northwestern Maya architectural tradition. Some of these architectural traits are also seen at several other centers of the western lowlands, including Tonina, Piedras Negras, and Yaxchilan (see Marken and Straight 2007:291–94). However, while the architectural styles of Tonina and the Usumacinta sites share elements with Palenque's tradition, their floor plans and vaulting have more in common with Petén architecture. To the west, much has been made of similarities to Palenque in the vault and roofing styles of Comacalco temples (Andrews 1975, 1989; Gallegos Gomora 1997). It would thus appear that a particular architectural tradition, or sets of traditions, characterizes the western Maya lowlands, with perhaps some blending of styles along the Usumacinta.

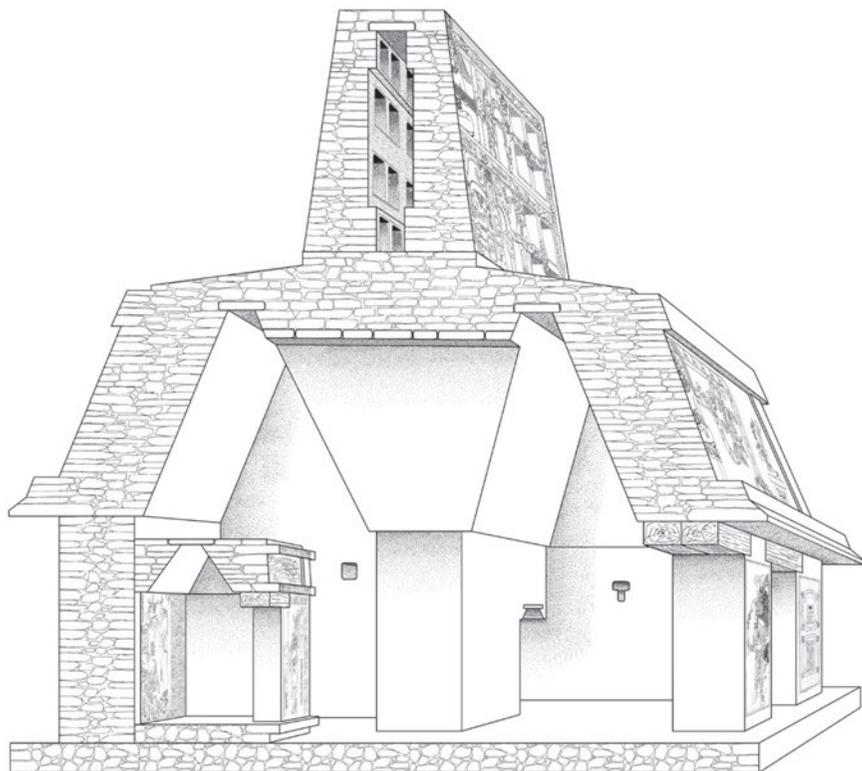
Though suggestive, monumental architecture is not as secure a line of evidence to identify ethnic diversity across the Maya lowlands as it may seem. By now we should be wary of simple stylistic comparisons to define particular Maya ethnic types. The nature of Maya constructions, not to mention the expense of large-scale excavation and restoration, often limits archaeologists' capability to fully investigate the development of a particular architectural style from beginning to end. This is the



**FIGURE 8.2.** Temple plans at Palenque through time (after Marken 2007): (a) Temple Olvidado, (b) Temple V, (c) Temple XVII, (d) Temple XII, (e) Temple XXI

case at Palenque, where the known architectural sequence appears fully developed and spans a mere 150 years (Marken 2007). Moreover, the architectural traditions of individual sites, such as Palenque, are generally more diverse and varied than we often admit. Architectural forms rarely remain static through time (figure 8.2).

The regional distribution of particular building types may instead provide a more fruitful research avenue to examine Maya ethnic differences. Along these lines, Mark Child (2007) has suggested that a sweatbath cult operated in the western Maya lowlands during the Classic period. Although sweatbaths have been identified archaeologically throughout the Maya lowlands, the architectural form saw its



**FIGURE 8.3.** Perspective cross-section of Temple of the Sun, Palenque, showing interior symbolic sweatbath (after Holmes 1896)

greatest refinement in the west, namely at the sites of Palenque and Piedras Negras (Child 2006). Specifically at Palenque, architects constructed symbolic sweatbaths within the inner galleries of several temple structures. These are small, vaulted structures situated within the rear vaulted galleries of larger temple structures (figure 8.3). Associated inscriptions identify these structures, called sanctuaries by numerous scholars, as post-natal “sweatbaths” or “ovens” used to heat specific Palenque deities after their mythological births (Houston 1996). Symbolic and functional sweatbaths were also paired in two excavated elite residential compounds (Marken and González Cruz 2007). The distribution of these symbolic sweatbaths is limited to the western lowlands; other examples are known from Comalcalco, Xupa, and El Retiro, all within the Palenque realm (Andrews 1989; Liendo Stuardo 1999). While more abundant and diverse data sets would be necessary to connect

this architectural form to ethnic practice (as opposed to class-based, elite practice), the confinement of this structure type to an isolated geographic zone does suggest some form of shared regional belief/ritual system.

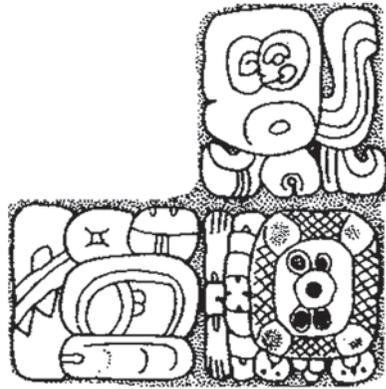
#### HIEROGLYPHS AND LANGUAGE

While monumental architectural style may be a poor marker of Maya ethnic identity, a number of scholars have attempted to recover ethnic affiliation through linguistic analyses of the hieroglyphic texts carved in stone and recorded in stucco inscriptions. Although early epigraphers debated whether the hieroglyphic inscriptions recorded the broad language families of either Yukatek or Ch'olan (Schele 1982; Justeson and Campbell 1984), Houston and colleagues (2000) have presented evidence that almost all Maya texts are recorded in a single, particular prestige language whose most direct descendent is modern Ch'orti, which they term "Classic Ch'olti'an." This proposal has met with general acceptance in the epigraphic community (Wichmann 2004) but significantly complicates the use of inscriptions to determine ethnic identity. Just as medieval German, French, and English authors wrote in Latin, ancient Maya scribes apparently wrote in a class-confirming prestige language, despite whatever vernacular languages they may have spoken day to day in their home communities.

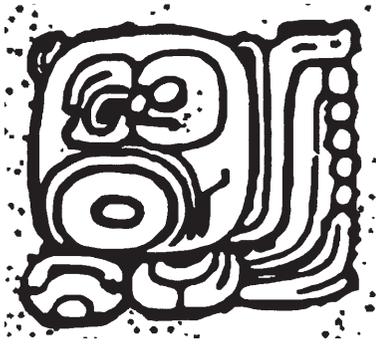
While Maya inscriptions as a whole appear to have been written in a prestige language, a number of epigraphers have noted that local variant spellings may provide clues as to the vernacular languages spoken at specific sites, a phenomenon known elsewhere in which aspects of the vernacular languages "percolate" into the prestige language of official texts (see Macri, this volume). Zachary Hruby and Mark Child (2004) examined the influence of one of these Classic period vernacular languages by focusing on grammatical peculiarities in texts, in particular the *-wa-ni* verbal suffix, an intransitive positional affix. Houston and colleagues (2000) noted that since this *-wan* suffix could not be reconstructed back to Common Mayan or Classic Ch'olti'an, it was most likely adopted from another language, which they propose was Chontal, where it is well attested from the early Colonial period. Hruby and Child tracked the adoption of this suffix across the southern Maya lowlands in the Late Classic period and detected a pattern where the earliest attestation of the *-wan* suffix is at the sites of Tortuguero and Palenque and sites in the Chontal region as discovered by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century (figure 8.4). According to Hruby and Child, the *-wan* suffix made its way up the Usumacinta River, progressively adopted at the sites of Yaxchilan and Cancun in the middle and late eighth century, respectively, even appearing at distant Copán. Hruby and Child interpret this pattern as reflective of Palenque's social and political influence in the eighth century and, by extension, suggest that Palenque was a center of Chontal speakers.

There are a number of problems with this proposal. First, the data used by Hruby and Child are fragmentary, and their pattern of adoption of the *-wan* suffix ignores several examples that invalidate their claim of a progression from the Palenque region (figure 8.5). One of the earliest attestations outside of Palenque and Tortuguero is at Dos Pilas, in the Pasión region of southwest Petén, and dates to, or prior to, AD 727 (Stela 8). This example comes before the *-wan* suffix is attested at sites on the Usumacinta between Palenque and the Pasión region. Skepticism can also be raised regarding the emphasis on a late date provided for the first use of *-wan* at Cancuen. There are no early texts from Cancuen, the earliest inscriptions not carved until after the mid-eighth century, and so data from this site will be of little use for the types of diachronic analyses attempted by Hruby and Child.

Even more problematic is the basic notion that the *-wan* suffix was a Chontal invention. Alfonso Lacadena Garcia-Gallo and Søren Wichmann (2002) have suggested that the *-wan* suffix is actually an invention of Classical Western Ch'olan and not specifically Chontal. To some this may appear little more than a matter of semantics, but it is actually a very important distinction, especially considering arguments that Palenque was a Chontal-speaking region. The modern Ch'olan languages Ch'orti', Ch'ol, and Chontal all derive from the same proto-Ch'olan language spoken about 2,000 years ago. When these languages diverged is uncertain, but in examining the percolation of vernacular languages into the hieroglyphic inscriptions that occurred during the Classic period, Lacadena Garcia-Gallo and Wichmann have identified clues that there was a dialectical difference between Eastern and Western Ch'olan. As both modern Ch'ol and Chontal descend from this Western Ch'olan of the Late Classic, it is not certain that the *-wan* suffix originated in and was adopted from the Palenque region. In fact, Lacadena Garcia-Gallo and Wichmann suggest that Calakmul may have been the center from which Western Ch'olan linguistic features such as the *-wan* suffix derived. Unfortunately, Calakmul's monuments are so badly eroded that this suggestion cannot as yet be



**FIGURE 8.4.** Early attestation of the *-wan* suffix from Palenque's Temple of the Inscriptions East Tablet, in a passage relating the accession of K'inich Janaab' Pakal I. The first glyph is the verb *chum*, "was seated," with the suffix *waniiy* spelled *-wa-ni-ya*. Drawing by Linda Schele



**FIGURE 8.5.** Early attestation of *-wan* suffix from Dos Pilas Stela 8. Drawing by Ian Graham

confirmed, but this proposal is more parsimonious than deriving this linguistic feature from the Palenque region, given its known political relationships during the Late Classic period (Marken and Straight 2007:296–304). There is little evidence for Palenque having had as wide an influence as would be suggested by the spread of the *-wan* suffix, while there is plenty of epigraphic information for Calakmul’s broad political sway during the Late Classic period (Martin and Grube 2000). What this means is that, at least for the present, the best-known

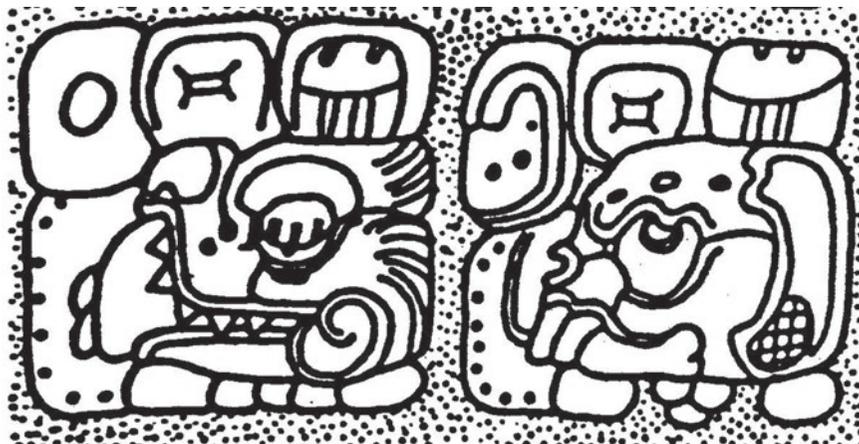
linguistic analysis of hieroglyphic texts at Palenque provides little concrete data for inquiry into ethnic identity (although see Macri, this volume, for future avenues of investigation). Instead, they confirmed both inter-elite class identity and elite-commoner distinctions.

#### HIEROGLYPHS AND PLACE

There are other ways, however, in which the inscriptions may provide clues as to how elites evoked class and ethnic identities. One potential avenue, introduced here, is the active use of Emblem Glyphs by Maya rulers. At Palenque, rulers, like those of a number of ancient Maya states, carried two Emblem Glyphs (figure 8.6).

Emblem Glyphs are titles carried by rulers that identify them as lords of named polities (Berlin 1958). As Stuart and Houston (1994) have shown, many polity names derive from local toponyms. The more common of Palenque’s two emblem glyphs is K’uhul Baakal Ajaw, or “Divine Bone (Kingdom) Lord,” and it follows this pattern. While the local Palenque toponym was Lakam Ha’ (meaning “Big Water”), a passage referring to the year AD 353 on Monument 6 from the nearby site of Tortuguero<sup>10</sup> records an event occurring at a specific location in Baak, demonstrating the toponymic nature of this Emblem Glyph.

The K’uhul Baakal Ajaw title was the most important title of the rulers of Palenque, and it is significant that this is a regional title based on an ancient toponym. This contrasts with the most important titles of the rulers of many other ancient states across the world. For example, Egyptian royal titles refer only obliquely to the two major divisions of the country, Upper and Lower Egypt, through reference to titular deities of these regions, but there seems to have been little ethnic identity



**FIGURE 8.6.** Two Palenque Emblem Glyphs from the Palace Tablet. The first is K'uhul Matwiil Ajaw and the second is K'uhul Baakal Ajaw. Drawing by Linda Schele

associated with these broad subdivisions of the Egyptian nation (Gauthier 1907–17). In ancient Cambodia, rulers did take royal titles based on the names of the polities they ruled over, but these polity names were derived from the names of their capital cities, which in most cases seem to have simply been named after the kings who founded them or after Hindu deities (Briggs 1951:39–52; Vickery 1998:24–25). The K'uhul Baakal Ajaw title of Palenque, then, is likely a prominent title that references a connection to a specific place, one that does not simply identify rulers as the highest-ranking members of the upper class but that would also connect them to, while elevating them above, local populations.

Palenque's second emblem glyph is K'uhul Matwiil Ajaw, where Matwiil is a word that incorporates the name for cormorant, *mat*, and a suffix *-wil* of unknown function. While the translation of Matwiil is unclear, it is named as a supernatural location where the patron gods of Palenque touched down after their births in the mythological past. It is possible that the mountain behind the Temple of the Inscriptions was considered the earthly portal to this location (Freidel and MacLeod 2000; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:283–84). The labeling of a conch shell from which the Maize God emerges as Matwiil on the Tablet of the Foliated Cross seems a particularly explicit reference to this supernatural location as a place of origin (Stuart 2005:169). The use of Matwiil as an Emblem Glyph indicates that Palenque's rulers considered this location a source of their identity.

Central Mexican parallels may provide insight as to how the Matwiil identity functioned at Palenque. The Mixtec lords of Oaxaca believed their ancestors

emerged from sacred trees in particular valleys, especially Apoala (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez Gabina 2007:124). However, while the Mixtec lords claimed descent from these ancestral trees, the commoners, who spoke the same languages as their lords and by western terms would be considered part of the same ethnicity, were believed to have emerged from the earth itself and had a completely separate and autonomous origin from the elite (ibid.:135). In contrast, the various groups that formed the Aztecs of the Valley of Mexico claimed to have emerged as tribes from the seven caves of Chicomoztoc in Aztlan (M. Smith 2003:38–39). The Aztecs did not have a separate origin story for their elite, as did the Mixtec.

If we accept that the lords of Palenque identified themselves through an association with the Matwiil location, the question remains as to whether the commoners of Palenque shared in this identity, following the Aztec analogy, or whether they, like Mixtec commoners, were thought to have had a separate origin. Unfortunately, no firm evidence is presently known to determine which of these Mexican analogies, if either, is applicable to the Maya case.

#### GODS AND PLACE

Another manner in which the rulers of Palenque may have attempted to emphasize their inclusion in local ethnic identities is indicated through their manipulation and display of the patron gods of their city and polity. Heinrich Berlin (1963) was the first to identify the three principal gods of Palenque, whose main shrines were the three major temples of the Cross Group.<sup>11</sup> While early scholars were prone to view the “Palenque Triad” as a pan-Maya set of deities worshipped throughout the lowlands, it has since become evident that the Triad is a set of local deities (Stuart 2005, 2007). These gods, while manifestations of more universal deities, such as the gods of the sun, maize, and rain, were incarnated at Palenque in very local forms (ibid.). Investigations throughout the site of Palenque have uncovered evidence of the worship of these gods, indicating that these deities were worshipped not just by the site’s ruling elite but by a large portion of the city’s population (López Bravo 2000).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the gods’ prominently displayed association with rulers on highly visible temple facades and roofcombs suggests that elite identification with local deities served multiple purposes (e.g., Rapoport 1988).

Numerous studies have examined the ways Palenquano rulers evoked their intimate association with the Triad Gods to assert their dominant political status, especially through highly visible monumental sculptural programs (e.g., Baudez 1996a; Schele and Miller 1986). Beyond the legitimization of authority, however, these monumental sculptures, as well as rituals as materialized by recovered *incensarios* (Cuevas García 2007), also likely communicated messages of common affiliation

bonding rulers to the ruled. Palencano rulers used their access to and control of the city's patron gods to signal both their privileged and exclusionary position over the site and their common identity with the other residents. The rulers commemorated not just any gods but a set of deities specific to the site of Palenque (Stuart 2007). The restriction of certain gods to particular locales suggests their strong connections to place and thus, in a Mesoamerican context, to ethnicity as well.

The worship of specific deities has long been known as a manner in which groups of people formed a new ethnic identity. We suspect that the worship of the Palenque Triad Gods by a wide swathe of Palenque's population would have served to form a specifically "Palencano" ethnic identity that could span class divisions. Thus, while Palenque's ruling elite likely maintained class-based connections with contemporary rulers of other sites, even going so far as intermarrying with other royal families (Schele and Freidel 1990:320), concomitantly they would have continued to differentiate themselves from foreign elites by their devotion to a specific set of deities worshipped along with the other citizens of Palenque, regardless of social rank.

### CONCLUSION

Studies of ethnicity and ethnic difference in several ancient complex societies have benefited tremendously from the analysis of written texts. In some areas, historic documentation is often the best or even the only indicator of ethnic divisions in the past (e.g., Emberling and Yoffee 1999). In the Maya lowlands, carved and painted hieroglyphic texts should ultimately serve as a vital data source to differentiate distinct Maya ethnic types. At present, subtle linguistic variations within Maya texts only seem to follow broad language divisions, as we have discussed. The inscriptions can, however, potentially identify other means by which ethnic affiliation is commonly established and maintained, in particular a common place of origin and ancestors. Unfortunately, unlike the case in some other areas of the world, Maya texts primarily deal with elites, precluding easy textual demonstration of vertical connections between elites and local populations in the inscriptions. If we are able to identify subtle ethnic divisions between various Maya elites, however, we can then begin to examine how elites were able to integrate local populations into cohesive social units in a broader perspective than political and economic control.

We have clarified some potential misconceptions regarding how the Palenque data may demonstrate a distinct ethnic affiliation and, at the same time, highlighted particular cultural phenomena we feel reflect potential ethnic diversity among the Classic Maya. It is becoming clear that traditional methods to identify disparate ethnic groups in the archaeological record of the Maya lowlands may be largely inadequate. Clear-cut ethnic markers are difficult to discern between Classic Maya

sites, and simple comparisons of multiple types of material culture are unlikely to advance our understanding. It is not enough to note differences in architecture, pottery, verbal endings, or other cultural materials between sites. But by identifying differences in how these cultural items were used, we may gain some insight into Maya ethnic types. In this vein, we have mentioned how epigraphic, iconographic, and ritual “symbols” could have been used by elites to highlight both class and ethnic identities. The dual and perhaps competing elite maintenance of their local connection to place and their extra-polity relationships with other elite individuals suggest these conclusions:

1. Inter-polity elite relationships operated in a class-based network, fostered by shared access to wealth, political authority, ideology, and social status. Ethnic distinctions may or may not have been suppressed or overlooked in this arena, but considering the political, social, and economic broadness of inter-polity elite interactions, it appears that class-based requirements dominated inter-elite group membership.
2. Depending on context and audience, intra-polity elite relationships, to varying degrees, were likely structured by both ethnic and class identities. Internal elite competition and cooperation must have been negotiated within complicated networks of ethnic and class affiliations.
3. Without sufficient data to examine class-cutting connections as embodied by habitus, local elite-commoner relationships are more difficult to reconstruct. Class identities certainly framed a large portion of interactions, especially those in which hierarchical authority structures played a prominent role. Nevertheless, simple economic and ideological power relationships strike us as inadequate and overly one-sided explanations for the multigenerational sustainability of Maya polities. Numerous studies indicate that Maya rulers exerted limited influence over local subsistence, or utilitarian, economic systems (e.g., Bishop 1975; Clark 2003; Rands 1967; West 2002), while there is abundant evidence for their control of ideology. However, if couched within a shared ethnic framework, ideological and religious messages can create more concrete integrative bonds across class divisions.

It is acknowledged that much of this could indeed be deemed largely theoretical speculation from a pure scientific perspective. Yet despite decades of research and interpretation (much of which is also speculative), the internal organization of Classic Maya polities has eluded reconstruction (Marken and Fitzsimmons 2015). Our hope is that the present work will foster new interpretive frameworks that incorporate more nuanced theoretical approaches recognizing the inherent social dilemma(s) facing rulers and their subjects: how and why are class distinctions sustained while maintaining some semblance of integrated social unity? Internal ethnic

affiliation, coupled with constructed perceptions of external ethnic difference, may provide Mayanists with one solution to this question. It is hoped that new research will attempt to empirically confirm or disprove its applicability to the Maya case.

### NOTES

1. In contemporary discourse, the cultural designation “Maya” is generally used to describe the indigenous peoples (and their ancestors) of the Yucatán Peninsula, encompassing the modern nations of Guatemala and Belize; the states of Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Campeche, Chiapas, and Tabasco in Mexico; and the western portions of El Salvador and Honduras (e.g., Sharer and Traxler 2006). While many members of these groups may speak a Mayan language, this is not always a necessary prerequisite, especially when government or academic authorities are the designators. As this definition illustrates, there is often a strong underlying etic tone to the term *Maya* as an ethnic or cultural classification. Beginning with European contact, *Maya* has been a term employed for disparate groups within larger states who nevertheless often lacked an overarching group identity (see Emberling 1997:297–98, 304). Moreover, the degree to which Maya individuals and communities identify themselves as “Maya” and recognize a common ethnicity with other Maya varies widely between individuals and can be highly situational (Montejo 1999; see also Barth 1969).

2. The degree to which these localized identities are “nested” within a Maya macro-ethnic identity is subject to debate and should be evaluated case by case (e.g., Montejo 1999; see also Ferguson and Mansbach 1996).

3. Fortunately, primordialist/instrumentalist and subjectivist/objectivist approaches can be paired to create four distinct theoretical expectations. However, the applicability of each perspective to a particular archaeological case will vary and will always be somewhat dependent upon levels of preservation and the manner and societal contexts used to express specific identities.

4. These elements leave difficult-to-specify material residues with which to differentiate ethnic versus other local groups in the archaeological record (see also Bowser 2000). Most researchers thus argue that multiple lines of archaeological evidence must be brought to bear upon issues of ethnic interaction (e.g., Bernardini 2005; Hegmon 1998; Jones 1997; Stark and Chance 2008). Among the available forms of archaeological data, written records, settlement patterns, material and osteological data from burials, household organization, and ritual practices provide potential evidentiary classes with which to identify ethnic identities (Aldenderfer and Stanish 1993). In the Maya area, research has unfortunately tended to overly stress similarities in cultural traits across the lowlands. The application of the type-variety system to Maya ceramics is a complicated example of the inclination among Maya scholars to search for similarities and connections between sites as opposed to differences (e.g., Henderson and Agurcia 1987; Willey, Culbert, and Adams 1967).

5. Regional utilitarian ceramic distribution patterns suggest that highly localized economies existed across the southern lowlands (e.g., Bishop 1975, 1994; Drennan 1984; Fry 1969; McAnany 1989; Rands 1967, 1969, 1987). The strong support for economic explanations of *utilitarian* ceramic distribution largely precludes applying the same data to certain aspects of social identities, namely ethnicity. Nevertheless, compositional and stylistic sourcing of *prestige* vessels, likely distributed within a complex gifting system, demonstrates the political importance of class-confirming, elite inter-polity interactions (e.g., Reents-Budet 1994, 2001).

6. Cultural capital is principally defined by the ability to manipulate controllable cultural “assets” encompassing ideology, ritual, and history (writing, monumental architecture, ritual practice). Displays of quantitative differences in wealth (housing, diet, pottery—i.e., conspicuous consumption) also enhance cultural capital.

7. Debate continues as to the nature of Classic Maya stratification (see Chase and Chase 1992; Lohse and Valdez 2004). Despite the apparent disagreement, however, most researchers who advocate a two-class system (as opposed to a more complex system of three or more classes) accept that these classes can be further subdivided and were likely internally ranked or stratified (e.g., Hammond 1991:270; Jackson and Stuart 2001; Marcus 1993; Sharer 1993).

8. The term *symbol* is meant in its broadest definition. Culturally derived symbols include not only material objects but actions, including those associated with habitus and the memory of past rituals and historical events (e.g., Berdan 2008b; Jones 1997; Stanton and Magnoni 2008; Stark and Chance 2008; Wilson 1993).

9. Also beyond the scope of this chapter, comparison of dental mutilation and cranial deformation styles and rates across class lines could also prove fruitful in elucidating other sets of shared or dissimilar aspects of habitus between and within elite and commoner groups.

10. The lords of Tortuguero shared the use of the Baak Emblem Glyph with Palenque’s rulers, indicating some sort of relationship between the two polities, although that relationship is not yet clear.

11. However, recent research has demonstrated that several monumental structures at Palenque, not only the Cross Group temples, were dedicated, or “belonged,” to individual Triad Gods (Stuart 2005, 2007).

12. Incensarios depicting these deities have been discovered in similar elite and non-elite ritual contexts across the site (Cuevas García 2007), suggesting these objects signified some shared meaning(s) for elites and commoners.

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