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THE MAYA STATE: CENTRALIZED OR SEGMENTARY?

I

Questions of Political and Economic Integration

Segmentary versus Centralized States among the Ancient Maya

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The Maya have posed classificatory problems for social taxonomy since *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (Stephens 1841) introduced the ruins of Palenque, Copan, and Utatlan to a fascinated world. Views concerning the organization and composition of ancient Maya society have vacillated between the notions of relatively decentralized kinship-based theocracies and centralized class-organized states with powerful bureaucracies. While such polarized views date to the 1880s, debate among the first professional Mayanists began in the 1920s.[1] Morley (1924:272) proposed that Tikal and small nearby sites made up a city-state and that all the Maya were linked within an Old Empire during what became known as the Classic period (A.D. 250–850; cf. Gann and Thompson 1931:58). J. Eric Thompson (1927; 1931:334) believed that the large sites were ceremonial centers for more ritually bound theocracies.

Today, while all Mesoamericanists seemingly accept the existence of some sort of hierarchy of settlements, there is wide disagreement about how autonomous, populous, and centralized such polities might have been. Basically, one group sees bureaucratic (or unitary) states with centralized organization of people and activities, whereas another group reconstructs decentralized segmentary states, in which ritual integrated fairly autonomous kinship groups. Accordingly, this inaugural forum has four parts. This paper sketches the historical background for interpreting Maya states. In the paper to follow, "More Than Kin and King," the Chases present a case from archaeology that Classic-period Caracol, in Belize, evolved a centralized, bureaucratic state. In a third paper, "Constructing Maya Communities," Fox and Cook argue from ethnography and ethnohistory that the Maya in highland Guatemala and in Yucatan/Belize, from this century back through the Postclassic, employed flexible rules of segmentary lineage organization to construct successively larger layers of political amalgamation, from the hamlet to the segmentary state. Then, in a closing comment, Arthur Demarest assesses the implications of the two models for ongoing research in epigraphy and archaeology from the perspective of attempts at political reformulation during and immediately after the Classic Maya collapse.

The controversy between the two models, then, has major implications for framing research on the Maya. It also takes on new connotations in a postmodern academic milieu; for example, progressive and hierarchical evolutionary models are deconstructed with models of heterarchy from ethnographic analogy (e.g., Crumley 1995, Potter and King 1995, Brumfiel 1995) and within a postprocessual archaeology ethnographic models and analogies are particularistic and restricted to cases of direct continuity (e.g., Hodder 1986, 1987) or even superseded in favor of archaeologically derived paradigms (e.g., Yoffee 1994).

Background

By the middle of the 20th century Redfield's folk/urban continuum had divided the Classic Maya into an urban elite and a peasantry (Morley 1946; Thompson 1954; Borhegyi 1956; Kurjack 1974:6). Using settlement-pattern data (Willey, Bullard, and Glass 1955; Willey 1956*a*, *b*; Bullard 1964), Evon Vogt (1961; 1964; 1969:588–605; 1983) reconstructed Classic Maya ceremonial centers as "vacant towns" like those in modern highland Chiapas, where political offices rotated among families. This vacant-town construct was eventually refuted by settlement data documenting large populations (Haviland 1970, Kurjack 1974) and by excavations demonstrating that the central sites were continuously inhabited (Adams 1974; Harrison 1969, 1986). However, Classic Maya centers were seen to have maintained

1. These opposed views can be traced to Lewis Henry Morgan (1880), who favored a tribal interpretation for the archaeological Maya, and Edward H. Thompson (1886), who offered a more urban reconstruction (Ashmore and Willey 1981:5–6).

small resident populations (e.g., Tikal, with 12,000 persons [Sanders and Price 1968]). During the 1970s the necessary infrastructure for more sizable Maya populations was identified in the form of intensive agriculture (Harrison and Turner 1978) and fortified moats and walls (e.g., at Tikal and Becan). According to the most recent estimate (Culbert and Rice 1990), some 62,000 people resided within the 90 km^2 of Tikal. While much of archaeological reconstruction has focused on single sites and the grandiose complexes at their centers, more representative views have recently emerged. Attention is now focused on how various communities or parts of communities were articulated into larger political wholes.

Deciphering hieroglyphic writing, Proskouriakoff (1960, 1963, 1964) demonstrated that the carved stelae were dynastic records. Recent epigraphers have shown that the stone texts commemorated birth and death, accession, parentage, and battle victories and the patrilineal ancestry of individual rulers. This historiography adds the Classic Maya to the ranks of literate civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China. An issue is the meshing of this new historical specificity of actual persons, marriage alliances, and political events with the archaeology from the preceding two generations. Thus, we ask whether combining ethnohistory/epigraphy with archaeology (1) supports a single set of Maya social organizational principles from the Preclassic through the Postclassic or (2) indicates different political organizations simultaneously among large and small polities during the Classic and/or disjunctions in organizational principles between the Classic and Postclassic.

Numerous "city-states" have been identified with emblem glyphs (Berlin 1958; Mathews 1985, 1991), and their "official" interactions have been read (Schele and Mathews 1991). Yet, epigraphic findings have been used to support both centralist and decentralist positions, with the possibility of fluctuating political formations during the six centuries of the Classic period. Some researchers view each site with an emblem glyph as a single political entity for at least one point in time and believe that the number of political units increased as new emblem glyphs were introduced (Houston 1987, Dunham 1990, Mathews 1991). However, others (Culbert 1991:140–44; Marcus 1993; Martin and Grube 1995) see substantially larger multistate polities with more fixed political hierarchies, which may have incorporated some of the smaller polities. Still others envision clusters of allied centers (de Montmollin 1989; Fox 1993*b*:203).

Beginning in the 1960s, settlement-pattern archaeology described monumental centers of differing size within a single region; however, there were differences of opinion about how to interpret the settlement data. According to Willey and Sabloff (1993:280), "W. R. Bullard (1960) proposed a model of major-center, minor-center, hamlet organization, with the implication that such a settlement model also recapitulated a sociopolitical hierarchy." Hammond (1975) proposed a hierarchy of sites of different importance within a single region (Marcus 1973, 1976); some may have been functionally differentiated (Shafer and Hester 1983, 1986). A number of archaeologists opt for a more complex and hierarchical form of political organization with different orders of nonreplicative administrative centers (Marcus 1993, A. Chase 1992, Chase, Chase, and Haviland 1990, Culbert 1991). Classic Maya states were not organized as many "big families" but rather were complex polities riddled with internal factions and conflicts (McAnany 1995:144).

Sabloff and Andrews (1986) and Schele and Freidel (1990:56–57) follow the city-state concept, applying predominantly peer-polity models (Renfrew and Cherry 1968) with segmentary principles to Maya interactions. Others argue that a gradient of successively smaller versions of a similar site pattern occurs among the Classic as well as the Postclassic Maya (Willey 1980). For example, John Fox (1981:330–31), a decentralist, posits that linear regressions in lineage house size, increased numbers of plazas per site, and increased spatial separateness of plazas reflect successively less highly ranked segments of kindred as distance increases from the capital of the Quiché, Utatlan. Supporters of a decentralized model see this as corroborating Richard Fox's (1977:41) ethnological and ethnohistorical observations from India, showing that smaller replicating administrations are spaced at successively greater distances from regal-ritual centers.[2]

Today there is general agreement that Classic sites had royal dynasties and residential populations at least in the tens of thousands. But just how were the various sectors of Maya society connected? As a heuristic exercise, we can distinguish dichotomous positions of centralist and decentralist—although both may reconstruct heterarchical relationships[3] Assuming heterarchy rather hierarchy—a situation in which "coalitions, federations, and other examples of shared or counterpoised power abound" and "interactive elements in complex systems need not be permanently ranked relative to one another" (Crumley 1995:3)—decentralists argue that the Maya had evolved feudal states (Adams and Smith 1981), segmentary states (Ball and Taschek 1991, Carmack 1981, Sanders and Webster 1988, Dunham 1990, Schele and Freidel 1990, Tourtellot, Sabloff, and Carmean 1992, Henderson and Sabloff 1993), or galactic polities (Demarest 1992*a*, Houston 1993). Centralists (Chase, Chase, and Haviland 1990, Culbert 1991, Folan 1992, Folan, Marcus, and Miller 1995, Marcus 1993), in contrast, would see the Maya as combining hierarchy and heterarchy in nonstatic states. Maya cities are envisioned as the capitals of bureaucratic states covering

2. Fox (1993*a*:fig. 14.6; Cook and Fox 1994) notes that the Thiessen polygons roughly match the design wherein the Quiché state ascribed ritual significance to outlying communities fairly regularly spaced at the cardinal and intercardinal points.

3. We caution that the actual positions of individual researchers are often not as clear-cut as this dichotomy might suggest.

large regions similar to complex societies known from the Old World (Claessen 1978, 1992).[4]

The Contemporary Centralist Position

Emphasizing a difference in political organization between the Classic-period and the historic Maya, contemporary centralists (Culbert 1991; D. Chase 1992:119; Sharer 1993:92) believe that ethnohistory should be used with great caution, since the end of the Classic period is separated from the first European records of the Maya and the transcription of native-written ethnohistory in the mid-1500s by 600 years. In this view, Classic epigraphic texts may be biased, like the documents of ethnohistory, in favor of the groups that sponsored their writing (Marcus 1992). While hieroglyphics do deal with warfare, secondary elites, bureaucracies, and administrative matters (Chase, Grube, and Chase 1991, Schele 1995), archaeology is the mainstay of any social reconstruction (A. Chase 1992:22; Sharer 1993; Webster 1993). Centralists contend that large-scale, populous, and hierarchical organizations are evident in the archaeological record and are more appropriate descriptions of the ancient Maya than the less-complex ethnographic-analogy–based alternatives.

As the centralists have argued, combined archaeological and historical work can lead to acceptance, rejection, or modification of models. For example, Diane Chase (1986; 1992:133; D. Chase and A. Chase 1988) argues that archaeological data refute the concentric class-based residential pattern suggested by Landa's interpretation of aboriginal Yucatec site layouts. The Maya, the Zapotec of Monte Albán, and the Teotihuacanos and Aztecs of the Valley of Mexico all had nucleated urban populations divided into barrios composed of households that differed in status and wealth, suggesting distinct social strata (A. Chase and D. Chase 1992:10; Marcus 1983*a*). Marcus (1993) in her "dynamic model" sees Maya polities as alternating between phases of centralization and decentralization. Such pulsation is seen by many centralists as normal for the long-term histories of most polities.

The attention of the centralists has also been directed to studies of land and water management, such as irrigation canals, raised fields, and *aguadas*, or small reservoirs (Puleston 1978; Scarborough 1991, 1994; Folan 1992; Scarborough 1993; Scarborough et al. 1995; see Wittfogel's [1957:184–88] classification of the Maya as a hydraulic civilization). Attention has also been directed toward understanding Maya urbanism as an ecologically adaptive landscape form as complex as that found in highland Mexico (Drennan 1988). According to "necessity theory" (Fox 1993*b*), a managerial hierarchy was necessary for handling the trade and distribution of basic goods to support high population densities (Rathje 1973, Andrews 1983).

Centralists currently see the major Classic Maya centers as the urban loci for administered economies integrated by organic solidarity. These states were characterized by large and relatively dense populations, social stratification, bureaucracy, and differentiated economic activity. Different socioeconomic levels and occupational groups enacted market-related roles.[5] A middle "class" of entrepreneurs (Morley, Brainerd, and Sharer 1983:226), perhaps even a "bourgeoisie" (A. Chase and D. Chase 1992:11, 16), analogous to the Aztec *pochteca* (Sanders 1992), promoted and benefited from the workings of the state. In this view, state organizational structure went beyond ideology, ritual, and kinship; centralized states evinced substantial administrative and economic control. Most centralists argue, however, that Maya development must be understood within its particular context, pointing to problems in using Old World models in a New World situation (Marcus 1983*b*, 1995; see Service 1971:139–49).

The contrast between "unitary" and "segmentary" states was first explicated by Aidan Southall (1956). Southall formulated the segmentary state to describe the Alur of Africa, clearly neither a stateless segmentary lineage society (Evans-Pritchard 1940, Fortes 1945) nor a unitary state like Mesopotamia or China. Moreover, he contended that segmentary states, unlike chiefdoms, would not evolve into unitary states. A unitary state exhibits a "hierarchical power structure" in which "powers are delegated from the top" because "similar powers are not repeated at all levels," while in a segmentary state powers are found "at several different levels" (p. 251). The strong central authority and bureaucracy of the unitary state contrast with the "motives of tradition or of expediency" of a segmentary state (p. 252), which lacks strong political control outside of a core area (Southall 1988:52). While centralists in the Maya area reject Southall's segmentary state, they are hesitant to employ the concept of unitary state (D. Chase and A. Chase 1992:308), suspecting that Southall's bipolar dichotomy may not reflect the diversity of Classic Maya organizational forms.

Wittfogel (1957:1) noted that theorizing about centralized bureaucracies occurred with the industrial revolution (e.g., Service 1978:21–22) and contrasted the fledgling European nation-states with the earlier monolithic states of Asia. Fried (1967), Service (1975), and Cohen and Service (1978) related various aspects of Wittfogel's

4. Haviland (1970) and Becker (1973) have made this argument for Tikal, Kurjack (1974) for Dzibilchaltun, Folan, Kintz, and Fletcher (1983) for Coba, and Folan, Marcus, and Miller (1995) for Calakmul.

5. "Market economy or not, the recorded distributions of patterns of luxury items and architecture within the Valley of Mexico, the Valley of Oaxaca, and the lowland Maya area during the Classic and Postclassic periods are indicative of a complexity conforming to Carol Smith's (1976) expectations of an extremely advanced economic system representing a high level of state organization" (A. Chase and D. Chase 1992:10). Chase and Chase caution, however, that Maya markets were unlike those of market-driven capitalism.

"Asiatic despotism" to the centralized bureaucracies of large states. In essence, bureaucratic overseers managed the flow of goods, though initially through a redistributive "temple economy" modeled on Sumerian Mesopotamia (R. M. Adams 1966). Bureaucrats also oversaw the plenipotentiary powers of encoded laws, efficient taxation, a police force, a judiciary to resolve disputes, and a standing army to maintain territorial boundaries. The centralized state is characterized minimally by two endogamous classes, elite and commoner (peasant). However, subsequent developments include "occupational specialists" of intermediate statuses for producing a wide variety of goods for market. Large and dense populations correlate with states; whether population in and of itself is a prime factor in state development is still debated (Boserup 1965, Sanders and Price 1968).

The Contemporary Decentralist Position

Given the complexity of Maya social organization and our uncertainty about the ways in which it was crosscut by kinship, applying a strictly class-divided society label may be inappropriate (Fox 1987, 1989; Henderson and Sabloff 1993:447, 452). For decentralists, key theoretical issues are determining (1) the way in which centripetal kingship interacted with centrifugal-tending kinship and (2) the extent of organic solidarity (the degree to which social classes and occupational groups displayed mutual interdependence) versus mechanical solidarity (the degree to which shared rituals and intermarriage linked replicated social units). Therefore, the decentralist perspective focuses on identifying the key institutions and structural units of aboriginal Maya society, favoring the use of analogies and homologies drawn from ethnohistory. Documents written by the natives themselves, such as those from the highlands, are likely to reveal behaviors that reflected identifiable principles of political organization. A search for social "internal constraints" (Trigger 1991) would not be accessible to unguided archaeology. In support of analogical models, decentralists tend to emphasize the likelihood of commonalities among the Maya of all periods. Thus, since Postclassic Maya societies lacked "either market economies or fully professional (Weberian) bureaucracies, . . . the logic of historical evolutionary development . . . makes it extremely unlikely that earlier predecessor societies (Classic) might be interpretable in formalist terms" (de Montmollin 1989:48, 94).

Classic-period kings worked as ritualists, politicians, and marriage brokers to hold together polities with kin-based cleavage, while complex systems of ranking disseminated power among their supporters. Maya states appear to have structured the assemblage of local, internally ranked communities at several discernible levels. Each level was ranked, perhaps led by a dominant lineage, and ritually bound to a dominant center. However, since individual polities seem to have risen and collapsed with some regularity, segments seem to have had a capacity to disassociate that was not overcome by dynastic kingship. In Postclassic Yucatan, there was shared power (*multepal*) for about three centuries at a time (Schele and Freidel 1990:346–49). In the decentralist view, hieroglyphic texts emphasize ritual matters and lineage alliances but make little mention of bureaucracies, standing armies, or formal codes of law.[6]

Segmentary lineages are present when descent groups form alliances based on genealogical closeness. Lineages divide into smaller descent groups—with a more recent common ancestor—when opposition diminishes (Sahlins 1961) and "nest" within increasingly larger aggregations as opposition escalates. Kuper (1982:80) argues that "these segments had no absolute existence, but emerged in specific situations, called into being in opposition to like units."

The layering of Maya groups recalls the lineage alliances based on degrees of descent among African pastoralists such as the Nuer and Tallensi (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Fortes 1945, 1953; Smith 1956; Sahlins 1961). Independently of each other, Carmack (1976) and Ball (1977) argued that the Preclassic and Postclassic Maya replicated kinship groupings on successively more inclusionary levels. However, Kuper (1982:92) contends that the segmentary lineage model from Africa and Polynesia is too idealistic to describe actual behavior, noting that no societies exhibit "vital political or economic activities organized by a repetitive series of descent groups."

Yet the patrilineage exists among the highland Maya, where it is called *sna* in Zinacantan (Vogt 1969; 1970:42) and *alaxik* in Momostenango (Carmack 1966). Local minimal lineages linked by marriage are seen as forming the Postclassic *chinamit* or the colonial *parcialidad*—a communal plot often named for a dominant lineage. Lineages figure prominently in native documents as political bodies and as the owners of lands and offices. Segmentary dynamics frame many historical episodes and structure the Quiché state (see Carmack 1976, 1977, 1981; Fox 1987, 1989).

However, the roles of lineages remain ambiguous in the Maya lowlands. The Yucatec Maya have been interpreted as lacking corporate descent groups at the time of the conquest (Haviland 1968:101; 1972) and during the colonial period (Farriss 1984:136, 137). Wilk (1988:142) maintains that "corporate descent groups like those found in Africa are missing" and "the household is the most important social unit below the level of the community." Much discussion has arisen over why descent groups are present in the mountains and apparently absent in the lowlands. However, Farriss (1984:163) notes that the divisions of nucleated towns (called *cuchteel, tzucut,* and *tzucub*) could be considered collections of exogamous lineages. Similarly, McAnany (1995:91–96) points to lineages in Yucatan, interpreting the terms *ah kuch kabob* as "lineage heads" and *tzucul,*

6. The ethnohistories do, however, mention lineages that performed war functions, such as the Nijaib and Cakchiquel within the early Quiché state.

kuchteel, and *kuchkabal* as lineage or corporate lands like the *parcialidad* of the highlands.[7] The Codice de Calkine recounts the block movements of lineages in the lowlands.

For the highlands, Hill and Monaghan (1987) argue that both lineages and states were absent among the Postclassic Quiché. They see the Quiché as organized into small regional confederacies (*amak*), at the opposite end of the spectrum from centralized states. Lineages seem to be ambiguous entities organized within the local corporate landholding group known as the *chinamit* or *calpul*, which joined with other such groups to form an *amak*.[8] Hill and Monaghan reject as revisionism the political roles of lineages identified in the native *títulos* that figure prominently in the reconstructions of Robert Carmack and John Fox. Hill (1989) has also postulated rapid and locally differential change in the social and political organization of the Cakchiquel under Spanish *congregación*, suggesting that no one-to-one correlation may be assumed between present-day and precolonial Maya. Barbara Tedlock (1989:498–99), however, criticizes Hill and Monaghan, suggesting that investigation of the roles of lineages within the *calpul*, the *chinamit*, or the *parcialidad* is essential.

Lowland polities have been classified as ranging from kin-based "revved up" chiefdoms to contemporaneous full-blown states in the "Peten heartland of kings"; McAnany (1995) infers that lineages were basic social units for both centralized and decentralized polities, noting (pp. 123–24) that large multifamily dwellings became the norm only after ca. 400–200 B.C., which suggests the emergence of a form of centralization for channeling tribute payments. Emergent social stratification is related to concentration of landownership and ancestor worship (pp. 7–8). Over time land-based stratification crosscut lineage membership. Decentralists contend that ranking may be understood in terms of social dynamics still enacted by rural Maya.

For decentralists, temple plaza groups and large centers are simply enlarged versions of the mortuary shrine complexes of local patrilineages (McAnany 1995:113, 116). The ancestors were interred in temples and altars and under the benches of lineage houses and the floors of dwellings, indicating a proprietary function of ancestor veneration. Decentralists view Maya cities, in some measure, as monuments to the genealogies of leading lineages. Accordingly, if the architectural and artistic creations were dominated by ancestral themes, then descent must have been the main organizing force even for the large-scale Maya polities of the Peten.

Segmentary states arise when lineages form enduring linkages, usually cemented through marriage, in political environments with continually threatening foes outside of the alliances within the state. In contrast to the situation in the unitary state, authority is duplicated as smaller versions of the same pattern throughout the segmentary state (Southall 1956:146–47; R. Fox 1977:42), and lineages may be ranked on degrees of descent from a common ancestor (Southall 1956).

Southall (1956:248–49) observes that a gradient in successively smaller and less powerful replications of the central administration runs outward from the capital through the provinces of the Alur and that (1) authority premised on "ritual hegemony" is strongest in the center, (2) the centralized government exercises limited control over provincial administrative centers, (3) such provincial centers are "reduced images" of the capital, (4) "every authority has certain recognized powers in a decreasing range over the subordinate authorities articulated to it," and (5) peripheral authorities are more likely to change allegiances, with the result that segments of the state may be added or subtracted—the state is flexible and fluctuates in size. Carmack (1981) and Fox (1987, 1989) follow Southall in reconstructing nested lineages for Utatlan and for the entire Quiché state respectively. Dunham (1990) has applied Southall's model to Classic-period southeastern Belize. Schele and Freidel (1990: 56–57, 422) note that "early kings were exalted patriarchs, heads of lineages who viewed themselves as brothers because they had all descended from the same mythical ancestors." McAnany (1995) interweaves Maya lineages into a radial-state model and an evolutionary framework for the Classic Maya.

Roughly contemporaneously, Tambiah (1976), Richard Fox (1977), and Geertz (1980) analyzed ritual integration in scaled centers of authority ranging outward from the capital. Many of these South or Southeast Asian analogs of fully sedentary societies have been viewed as comparable in their duration and grandeur to the monumental architecture of the Classic Maya (e.g., Vijayanagara, India, with 25 km^2 of standing architecture [Fritz, Michell, and Rao 1984:5]). The Thai capital, located at the geographic center of the state, modeled spatial and political relations with the provincial administrative centers on the yearly movements of the sun (Tambiah 1976, 1985). Kindred of the king were ritualists in the administrative centers of the 13 provinces of the state and were united by shared descent from the sun. Agricultural production, however, was controlled by regional kinship groupings. While the king ruled by de jure divine right, political authority was negotiated at each level of administrative linkage and thus de facto balanced competition with cooperation between the various administrative loci (Tambiah 1985).

For Richard Fox (1977), the regal-ritual city of the segmentary state is tied to rituals of state and production of cult paraphernalia. Urbanites are thus mainly official ritualists, their families, and attached artisans. In contrast, the administrative city of the unitary state maintains a powerful centralized bureaucracy that obtains its

7. However, Farriss (1984:63) does not believe that these terms were lineage-related, and Marcus (1993:116–33) provides alternative interpretations.

8. *Amak* implies dependency on a wider political body (see Fox and Cook below), but the term lacks sufficient specificity, since an *amak* could be of various sizes. Fox and Cook argue, contrary to the interpretation of Hill and Monaghan, that the *amak* was not a fixed entity like the province but a nested entity at one of several levels of amalgamation.

sustenance via tithing or taxation from peasant agriculture (Wolf's [1982] "tributary mode of production").

Fox's model is quite influential among Mayanists. Sanders and Webster (1988) argue for its close fit with Copan, a polity of some 18,000–25,000 people at its height ca. A.D. 800 and primarily a community of consumption of ritual materials. "Middle-status" families or lineages of lapidaries and weavers, perhaps attached to the households of high functionaries, produced elite goods in the center, while part-time craftspeople produced more mundane items (e.g., manos and metates) in outlying areas. Such an interpretation recalls the creation myth for lineage distinctions in the *Popol Vuh*, an emic model. The skilled craftspersons 1 Monkey and 1 Artisan are offspring of the same father (patriliny) and reside in the same household (virilocality) as the younger but eventually more elite Hero Twins, Junajpu and Ixbalanque, but the two sets of brothers have different mothers. This myth may charter, then, a "middle status" through bilateral genealogical calculations.

Fox (1977:41–42) further argued that the Swazi (Africa), Rajput (India), and Carolingean (France) states were segmentary; each replicated smaller "sacred administrative centers" in the provinces staffed by younger kindred of the king as functionaries of state. After a generation or so, these regional chieftains developed local power bases and controlled the area on their own terms. In mechanical solidarity, "power is dispersed and . . . the rule of the central figure is duplicated in type if not extent at many lower levels of state administration." Since the king is an "image of the state society," his symbols of authority "are duplicated by lesser chiefs . . . down the scale of state organization." But how were vassal populations tied to each of the provincial administrative centers? And how were provincial populations, each with its own civic center and agricultural production, obligated to higher-order capitals? Both Carmack (1981) and Adams and Smith (1981) argue that a feudal analogy may offer some resolution.[9]

Geertz (1980) focuses on power implied in ritual. The propensity for pomp and circumstance encoded in ritual sacralizes an authority that is lacking in bureaucratically organized police, judiciary, and military, wherein compliance is a product of religious subservience and genealogically rationalized loyalties and obligations. Authority might be couched in genealogical terms, as in the office of Nacxit (Feathered Serpent) at Chichen Itza. In this regard, Sanders and Webster (1988:534) posit that "the intense use of royal display found at Copan and other centers, especially as expressed in stelae, altars, and heavily embellished monumental architecture, is evidence for the essential weakness of Maya centralized rule rather than its strength."[10]

Bridging Arguments

The segmentary-state model has gained adherents because it allows a range of sociopolitical classification, bridging Service's (1975) idealized societies of state and chiefdom and binding the Maya to a preexisting general body of theory. The Maya then seem less distinctive among world civilizations. Yet, the segmentary and unitary models for Maya society are two ends of a spectrum of many organizational possibilities. This dichotomy may prove useful for resolving several pressing issues for the Classic Maya: (1) Did polities reach such economic complexity that conical clans (Michels 1977) organized families within endogamous classes and lineages as corporate entities disappeared? (2) Were households directed primarily by class or kin interests? and (3) Did organic solidarity integrate polities of the Peten heartland? Whatever theoretical constructs eventually prove to match the Maya situation most closely, they must help resolve the collapse of the Classic Maya. At this point, many centralists focus primarily on external constraints and variations of "necessity theory" such as demographic pressure, disruption of trade, and environmental catastrophe (Culbert 1973:24). In contrast, the segmentary model focuses primarily on internal constraints of groups at a multitude of levels pitted against one another. However, no amount of politico-ritual theater could bind lineages when thwarted in their anticipated division into new estates in a saturated demographic landscape.[11]

Olivier de Montmollin (1989) argues for replacing simplified formalist evolutionary typologies with settlement-patterning indices of degrees of stratification, centralization, and societal integration. As a case in point, with regard to the Rosario polity, bereft of epigraphy, of Late-to-Terminal Classic lowland Chiapas, he addresses to what degree (1) the political structures featured loosely integrated constituent districts, (2) political regimes were pyramidally arranged, (3) corporate groups controlled political offices, (4) organic versus mechanical solidarity characterized polities, and (5) strong secessionist tendencies existed. Significantly, he reports that tendencies toward centralization and decentralization coexisted (pp 138, 196, 205, 219). While "there was a generally more mechanical than organic economic solidarity in the Rosario polity," it was "associated with a more unitary than segmentary political structure" (pp. 205, 226).[12]

9. Wilk's (1988:146) critique of Adams and Smith (1981) compares Maya households to the feudal Japanese stratified household, the *fudai*.

10. Chase, Chase, and Haviland (1990) argue that such display is either situation-specific, as with Copan's attempt to impress non-Maya neighbors to the south, or simply a normal part of religion and iconographic adornment unrelated to political strength or weakness.

11. Fox and Cook believe that a collapse of some peer polities would lessen the need to participate in galactic polities. Marcus (1993) reminds us that the Maya have always voted with their feet. Thus, in the late A.D. 800s new communities were established on the outer edges of the Classic Maya world. Cook and Fox (1994) note that Quiché ritualists will journey to the edges of the highlands at "uncertain" times of the solar calendar.

12. The notions of "tribute-drawing centralization," "tribute-imposition centralization," "differentiation of tribute base size,"

Summary

Two general perspectives on ancient Maya political organization persist. Decentralized models portray kinship-based states undergirded by religion, fluctuating political alliance, and regal-ritual centers of various sizes. Centralized models portray hierarchical states with bureaucracies, urbanism, and populations with political and economic differentiation. Population counts are relevant, but they may not resolve the issue.[13] While economic specialization and social status may be assessed archaeologically, fine-grained analyses of social organization and its variability over space and time seem to present a viable approach for future investigation (Peebles and Kus 1977, Feinman and Neitzel 1984, Earle 1987, Upham 1987).

The appeal of segmentary or unitary models is not limited to a particular subdiscipline of Mesoamerican research; in fact, they are both accepted and rejected by archaeologists, epigraphers, and ethnographers alike. At this point, archaeological perspectives on the issues seem to vary with the kind of site an archaeologist has worked and the nature of the field strategies employed. Archaeologists who have worked on the most populous Classic sites—such as Caracol, Tikal, and Calakmul—tend to reject segmentary states (A. Chase and D. Chase 1992, Culbert 1995, Folan 1992, Folan, Marcus, and Miller 1995), while those who have investigated smaller sites such as Buena Vista and Copan appear more likely to accept them (Ball and Taschek 1991; Sanders 1989:104; Sanders and Webster 1988). There is more agreement for a segmentary-state model among those who work in the highland Postclassic, although with notable exceptions (Hill and Monaghan 1987). The issue has yet to be debated for the lowland Postclassic (Chase and Rice 1985, Sabloff and Andrews 1986, Chase and Chase 1988).

Decentralists have gradually shifted from feudal models to segmentary analogies from Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa that seem to match the kinds of alliances and dynastic machinations known from Maya epigraphy. Centralists increasingly temper their commitment to a unitary-state model originally derived from Rome and Mesopotamia during the Englightenment. A new generation of Mayanists argues for close scrutiny of analogical approaches and of the imposition of typological models in general. The divergent views on whether the aboriginal Maya had a unitary or a segmentary state are now leading all parties to be more explicit about their theoretical and methodological perspectives.

and "vertical integration" remain problematic (de Montmollin 1989:219). Nonetheless, tribute was collected by the Quiché through kin conduits to propitiate the patron deity of the Quiché ruling lineage.

13. Gluckman (1956) describes African "segmentary" communities in excess of 100,000 persons.