After Collapse

The Regeneration of Complex Societies

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Framing the Maya Collapse

Continuity, Discontinuity, Method, and Practice in the Classic to Postclassic Southern Maya Lowlands

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Despite substantial new research on both the Classic (AD 250–900) and the Postclassic (AD 900–1542 [1697]) period Maya, views of the Classic Maya collapse and of the changes that took place in the subsequent Postclassic period are very little changed from paradigms established more than thirty years ago. While the Postclassic Maya are no longer viewed as a decadent and declining population, explanations for a regenerated Maya society continue a traditional focus on causal factors such as environmental change or destruction, internal or external warfare, and the rise of mercantilism. We suggest that viewing the Maya from the perspective of "frames"—a methodological approach that is used in other disciplines (see Goffman 1974)— provides a different and potentially more holistic view of the transformation and restructuring of Maya society. Our archaeological research at the sites of Caracol (Belize), Nohmul (Belize), Santa Rita Corozal (Belize), and Tayasal (Guatemala) provides the data for a multiframe analysis. We believe that this perspective not only is more dynamic, but also more clearly indicates the disjunctions of the Terminal Classic (AD 790–900) with bordering time periods and highlights the aspects of Classic period society that are incorporated into the regenerated Postclassic period.

The Classic Maya collapse, defined by the cessation of erecting carved and inscribed stone stelae and altars and by the depopulation of Classic Maya cities in the southern lowlands during the ninth century AD, has been viewed as resulting from a variety of factors. Possible causal explanations include peasant revolts and warfare, ideological predilections, environmental degradation, drought, epidemic disease, and natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes (see Culbert 1973a, 1988). The subsequent reconstituted Postclassic society has been portrayed as more focused on warfare, water, and trade (Chase and Rice 1985). Some have suggested that the Post-

classic Maya can be characterized by decentralized and privatized worship (Freidel and Sabloff 1984). Other archaeologists, following Jeremy Sabloff and William Rathje (1975), consider a defining characteristic of the Postclassic Maya to have been mercantilism (e.g., Masson 2002). While there is a long history of publication on the collapse and on the transition between the Classic and the Postclassic period, no single viewpoint is overwhelmingly supported by hard archaeological data, leaving most archaeologists to avoid the question and to note the probability that complex multiple causes were responsible for the collapse (e.g., Sharer 1994; Webster 2002).

There have been critical advances in our knowledge base relative to the Classic Maya collapse. Investigations have revealed key facts that we were unaware of thirty years ago. Importantly, it is now apparent that the collapse was not a single uniform event but rather took place at different times throughout the sites of the southern Maya lowlands (fig. 11.1). Hieroglyphic inscriptions ceased at Dos Pilas at AD 760, when the site was under siege (Demarest 1997), and at Tikal at AD 889, when that site's palaces were being infilled with trash (Harrison 1999). Complicating this picture, however, are the many Maya sites that were occupied past their last monument dates (such as Caracol [A. Chase and D. Chase 2004a:345]). Other sites, which were not overt participants in the Late Classic Maya stela-altar cult, had substantial populations that continued into the Postclassic era (e.g., Lamanai [Pendergast 1986] and Tayasal [A. Chase 1990]). Thus, population decline is not necessarily correlated with a cessation of monument erection or a lack of monuments (see also Webster 2002:187 for Copán and A. Chase and D. Chase 2006 for Caracol). A focus on monument erection alone likely provides a skewed picture of the Maya collapse (e.g., Lowe 1985), but without the monuments as a guide, dating of the latest archaeological occupation at any site can prove difficult. Even advances in radiocarbon dating and in obsidian hydration dating have not resolved the timing of the collapse; instead, these absolute dating methods have been used to argue (somewhat controversially, e.g., Braswell 1992) for lingering populations that lasted for two centuries beyond the dates on the latest stone monuments at sites such as Copán, Honduras (Webster 2002; Webster et al 1993).

However, our knowledge of the latest Classic period (or "Terminal Classic") Maya has been expanded. It is now apparent that the final monuments in the southern Maya lowlands are often distinct stylistically and iconographically (A. Chase 1985; Laporte and Mejía 2002; Proskouriakoff 1950), although the iconographic themes are not always expressed in the same way at every site. At Seibal and Machaquila, for example, there are changes in
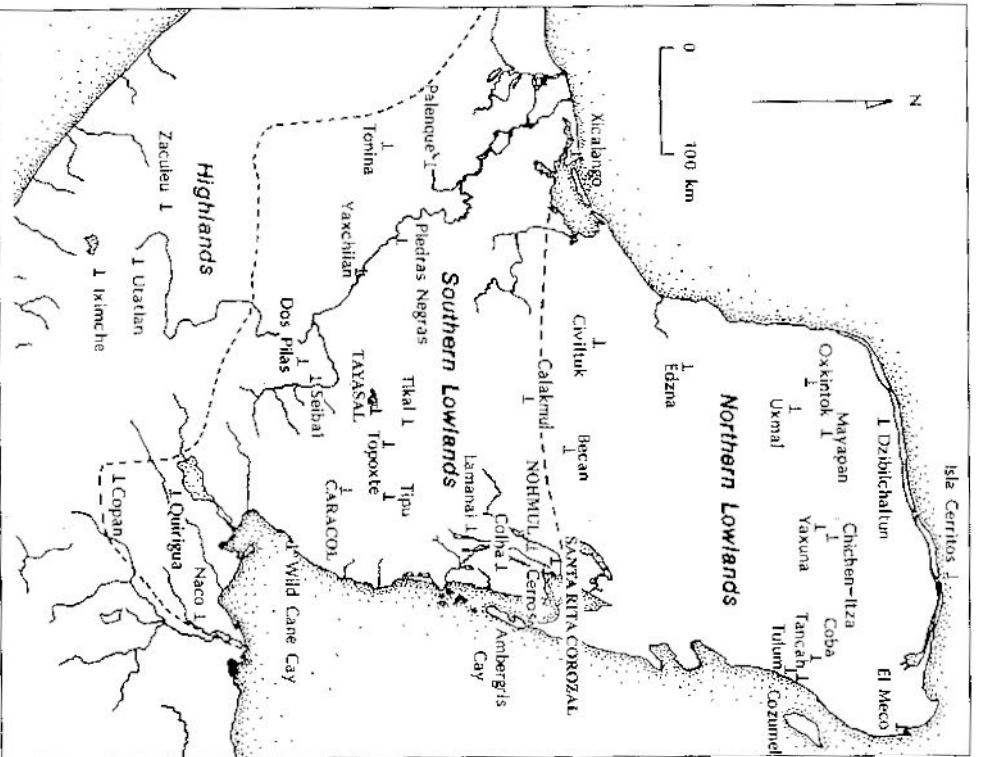
Figure 11.1 Map of the Maya lowlands showing sites discussed (drafted by D. Z. Chase and A. F. Chase).

the dress of rulers (I. Graham 1967; I. Graham 1990), and at Caracol, dual figures engaged in a common action are depicted on the monuments (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981; A. Chase et al. 1991). Terminal Classic ceramics share some similar iconography with these latest monuments (e.g., Adams 1973), and other artifacts, such as spindle whorls and lithic points, provide additional information. They indicate pan-Maya ties and local variation along

with tremendous ranges in access to goods, implying substantial status differentiation. Excavations at many sites have also yielded unfinished building efforts, on-floor debris, and burning—suggesting that site abandonment, when it did occur, may have been rapid (D. Chase and A. Chase 2000; Webster 2002).

We also know more about the Postclassic Maya than we did thirty years ago. Postclassic period Maya settlements are found in substantial numbers but often in strikingly different places than their Classic period counterparts. Postclassic occupation has a focus on low-lying constructions. The barely elevated nature of many of these late buildings and their easy obfuscation in a tropical environment (often being found in "vacant terrain") has not only made the discovery of Postclassic occupation more difficult archaeologically, but has also led to the incorrect characterization of these later sites as being less complex or less stratified than their Classic-era counterparts. However, there are Postclassic interments with substantial indications of status differentiation—even though these, again, are distinct from earlier counterparts. Yet we continue to be hampered in our interpretation of the Postclassic Maya, for despite an increased interest, there has not yet been the same quantity of excavation of Postclassic sites as exists for the earlier Classic period.

Excavation and analytic methodologies may also pose barriers to the study of the regeneration of Maya society. Many Postclassic constructions were not built on elevated platforms; because these buildings employed only line-of-stone base walls, they are almost invisible to archaeological survey in tropical environments. Even late monumental architecture often employed impermanent building materials that had once been covered in thick coats of stucco—stucco that erodes and building materials that decompose under harsh tropical conditions. These same late buildings are frequently also not abundant at the mounded Classic Maya sites that continue to be the prime focus of research for most archaeological projects in the Maya area. Thus, identifying Postclassic occupation using Classic period perspectives usually proves difficult. Excavations undertaken at Tayasal, Guatemala, in 1971 illustrate this point. The excavation strategy adopted at Tayasal initially concentrated on mounded remains and thus resulted in the recovery of largely Classic period artifacts and architecture. Only after the excavation strategy was shifted to vacant-terrain lakeside locales were the sought-after Postclassic buildings and artifacts recovered (A. Chase 1990). Initially, Tayasal excavators also were perplexed by crude lines-of-stone that appeared in the humus levels of several narrow trenches into mounded buildings;

only later in the season—after areal clearing excavations had been undertaken in what had appeared to be vacant-terrain locales—were these crude lines recognized as base walls of buildings.

A focus on ceramic markers or preconceived ideas of style sometimes also can lead to problems in identifying Postclassic and Terminal Classic occupation. At Barton Ramie, Belize, Gordon Willey and his colleagues (1955) initially thought that no Postclassic remains had been found at that site; however, subsequent ceramic analysis showed that Postclassic pottery had been recovered in more than 95 percent of the excavations (Willey et al. 1965:384). Postclassic pottery was not identified in the field; it was only recognized later in laboratory analysis. Similarly, our identification of Terminal Classic occupation may also be clouded, especially as it is primarily based on known ceramic markers. Much Late Classic pottery now appears to have continued in use through the Terminal Classic period without significant modification; only the elite ceramic markers changed from the preceding Late Classic period, and their use was largely restricted to very specific contexts (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004a, 2006). Yet these markers are the ones that traditionally have been used to identify the existence of the Terminal Classic (e.g., Culbert 1973b for Tikal; Adams 1973 for Altar de Sacrificios; Sabloff 1973 for Seibal), potentially resulting in the misdating of non-elite Terminal Classic contexts. Estimates of population levels based solely on the presence or absence of these known Terminal Classic markers likely do not accurately reflect ancient reality. Thus, our current view of the Classic Maya collapse is impeded by methodological shortcomings.

Significantly, high-status Terminal Classic ceramic markers appear in the Maya archaeological record at the same time as substantial changes in burial practices. These changes do not appear to have occurred uniformly throughout the southern Maya lowlands. For example, while the lack of Terminal Classic period burials in traditional eastern mortuary buildings has been confirmed at many sites (Ciudad Ruiz et al. 2003; see also Becker 1999 for Tikal and D. Chase and A. Chase 2004b for Caracol), a new burial locus is not always apparent. Juan Pedro Laporte (1996) has demonstrated a Terminal Classic predilection for interring the dead in western structures—at least in the southeastern Petén region of Guatemala. Thus, major differences also exist between Late Classic and Terminal Classic burial patterns—differences that may not always be identifiable by research using preconceived Late Classic period excavation perspectives.

Approaches to the transformation of Maya society have tended to focus on simple comparisons of Classic and Postclassic material remains (see A. Chase and P. Rice 1985; D. Chase 1981; D. Chase and A. Chase 1992b,

2001, 2004a). As has been pointed out previously by many researchers, the Postclassic Maya generally are described in negative terms relative to their Classic counterparts: no stela and altar erection, no long-count dates, no slipped polychrome pottery, and no monumental architecture. This focus on contrasts is not surprising given that descriptions and modeling of the Maya have tended to emphasize heuristically useful extremes. In-built black-and-white contrasts include whether Maya political organization can be described as a chiefdom or a state and, if a state existed, whether it was centralized or segmentary (Fox et al. 1996; Iannone 2002). Maya cities are described alternatively as urban or as regal-ritual centers (A. Chase et al. 2001; D. Chase et al. 1990; Sanders and Webster 1988; Webster 2002). Classic polities are viewed as balkanized (Dunham 1988; Mathews 1991) or as integrated into "super-states" (Martin and Grube 1995, 2000). In general, the focus of Maya research on the collapse also has been on identifying heuristic polar opposites rather than on exploring continuities or regeneration. These contrastive approaches tend to rigidify theoretical positions and make perceptions of the Maya more static than dynamic.

We suggest that using a different approach—one borrowed from organizational studies—permits a more holistic and dynamic view of the ancient Maya and of the transformation of Maya society.

Organizational Frames

In *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (1997) proposed the use of a four-frame model to provide a more effective overview of organizations. While this four-frame approach was not created for analyzing archaeological cultures, we believe that it can be modified for archaeological purposes and that the combined multiple-frame perspectives can provide useful insight into both the Classic Maya collapse and the Postclassic period regeneration of Maya society (fig. 11.2). The four frames defined by Bolman and Deal (1997) are structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Each frame is a tool based on distinct assumptions, and each provides a somewhat different perspective from which to view an organization. No frame is "the" frame; rather, each constitutes one "image of reality" (Bolman and Deal 1997:15). "Frames are both windows on the world and lenses that bring the world into focus. Frames filter out some things while allowing others to pass through easily" (Bolman and Deal 1997:12). The hope is that the combined frame perspectives can provide a more holistic view of an organization.

The structural frame defines "social architecture" (Bolman and Deal

Structural Frame

Human Resource Frame

Political Frame

Symbolic Frame
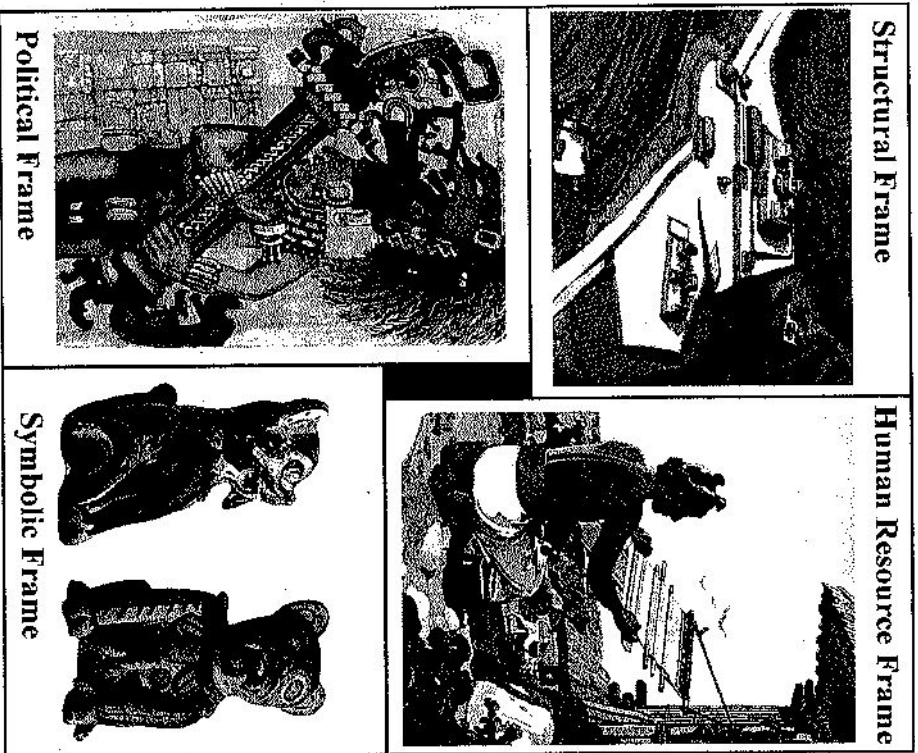
Figure 11.2 Organizational frames for consideration of changes in Classic to Postclassic Maya society. *Upper left:* Caracol Archaeological Project (painting by Michael Rothman [copyright held by A. F. and D. Z. Chase]); *upper right:* National Geographic Image Collection (painting by H. M. Herget [1935:559, Plate VII]); *lower left:* Caracol Archaeological Project (painting by Barbara Stahl [copyright held by A. F. and D. Z. Chase]); *lower right:* after Gann 1900:Plate 36.

1997:50)—the different units of the organization. Key to the structural frame are specializations and relationships—the division of labor as well as vertical and lateral units and coordination. Thus, the structural frame focus would be concerned with heterarchy and hierarchy as well as rules, policies, and procedures.

The human resource frame perspective is that "organizations serve human needs," that "people and organizations need each other," and that "when the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer" (Bolman and Deal 1997:102). Human resource-focused organizations are democratic in that individuals have greater control over their activities or work; there also may be some rotation in leadership (Bolman and Deal 1997:132–33). An emphasis on human resources would involve "investing in people," allowing for autonomy and empowerment, providing rewards for efforts, and sharing in success (Bolman and Deal 1997:123, 126–29). Thus, the human resource frame focuses on viewing the organization much like an extended family and is concerned with the degree to which an organization is tailored to people, making individuals feel good about their individual roles.

The political frame considers organizations as composed of coalitions of people (Bolman and Deal 1997:163). Following this perspective, organizational goals are established in ongoing negotiation among stakeholders, and power can derive from various sources—authority, expertise, knowledge, or ability to provide rewards. These multiple sources of power can lessen any single base of authority. Likewise, conflict can come from many directions and sources (cultural, horizontal, or vertical; Bolman and Deal 1997:173). Thus, the political frame focuses on the different interest groups that compete for power and resources, as well as on conflicts and coalitions.

The symbolic frame is concerned with symbols, beliefs, myths, rituals, ceremonies, and metaphor (Bolman and Deal 1997:215–17). Symbols are seen as embodying the culture of the organization and are repeatedly created, re-created, and passed on. Thus, the symbolic frame focuses on organizations as cultures characterized and unified by traditions, rituals, symbols, and ceremonies.

By conscientiously applying these frames to existing archaeological data for the Classic, Terminal Classic, and Postclassic Maya, we can make inroads into understanding what was (and what was not) regenerated in later Maya society.

The Structural Frame

The Late Classic Maya are easily viewed from the structural frame. There are clear units that can be identified, as well as functional groups, such as the specialists that produced distinct artifact classes. There are also status divisions and spatially distinct occupation locations for different status groups. At Caracol, a group of low-status individuals lived immediately outside, but adjacent to, the monumental epicentral architecture. An epicentral royal palace is larger than all the other known palaces at the site (A. Chase and D. Chase 2001a). However, because some of the elite (although not royal) palaces were located in the outlying residential core of Caracol, we can infer that high-status individuals were embedded at widely separated points in the site's urban landscape. At some sites, the structural organization of the city is also evident in public works—causeways that connect parts of the site together or terraces for agricultural production (A. Chase and D. Chase 2001b). Population numbers approached a hundred thousand or more at several sites; however, most sites were substantially smaller. Sites were connected to each other in hierarchical and heterarchical ways. A site hierarchy focused on regional capitals is evident in settlement patterns and hieroglyphic texts. Each of the Classic-era regional capitals in the southern lowlands had its own emblem glyph; however, emblem glyph sites could be subordinate to other emblem glyph sites. We believe that polity size could approximate seven thousand square kilometers (or more; A. Chase and D. Chase 1998).

There is also structure to the economic system. Production was localized in households within sites as well as in specialized sites (such as the chert production at Colha; Shafer and Hester 1983). The economic system incorporated both long-distance trade and household distribution so that at some sites (e.g., Caracol), virtually all households had access to imports such as obsidian, regardless of the status of the household members. At other sites, such as Calakmul, obsidian was not as available or as well distributed (Braswell et al. 1997; Folan et al. 1995). The argument can be made that there was little control exercised on most production but that there was greater control over distribution (A. Chase 1998); however, standardization in production is evident in items, such as ceramics, that have strikingly consistent rim diameters and heights. Functional variation within and standardization among Classic period household groups is also apparent; within residential plaza groups, eastern buildings functioned as the locus of ritual and mortuary activity for most households in the eastern part of the southern lowlands.

Terminal Classic Maya society also contains clear structural elements;

however, the smaller database of household information derived from excavations provides less detail than exists for the preceding Classic period. Nevertheless, certain differences are apparent. Most evident are status distinctions, which are less graded than in the Classic era and more polarized: there are clear "haves" and "have-nots." This is apparent in all material culture but is perhaps most evident in ceramic distributions. Trade items, such as modeled-carved pottery, which often have been used as temporal markers, appear instead to be status-linked items that are only infrequently found in other than elite contexts (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004a, 2006). Standardization in household functional units is also not as evident as in the preceding Classic period; no longer are the eastern structures reserved for ritual purposes and the interment of the dead. Although continuity is evident with the earlier Late Classic occupation at many sites, the Terminal Classic Maya often used existing architecture and spaces in different ways. This can be seen in buildings that close off access to existing structures (e.g., Nohmul Str. 20 [D. Chase and A. Chase 1982]) or in the accumulation of household trash inside buildings that once had ritual, residential, or administrative functions (e.g., Tikal Central Acropolis [Harrison 1999] or Caracol Str. A6 [D. Chase and A. Chase 2000]).

The Postclassic Maya maintained dense populations, but generally in different locations than those occupied by the preceding Late Classic or Terminal Classic period Maya—sometimes in distinct areas within the same locality and other times at a distance. There also were new seats of power; significantly, these did not overlap with the emblem glyph sites of the Classic period. Historic descriptions indicate that movements of people within the southern lowlands also occurred. Specializations continued, as did short- and long-distance trade in chert, obsidian, and other exotic items (such as copper, gold, and Spondylus shell). Some unification of art styles may have resulted from population movement, enhanced communication, and trade. Standardization is evident in some pottery. Certain cache figures from Mayapán, Lamanai, and Santa Rita Corozal are nearly identical; significantly, these sites are beyond the area of a single region or state. However, there also was substantial variety in the decorative elaboration of ceramics. Even items as mundane as red-slipped tripod plates are less standardized than in the preceding Classic and Terminal Classic periods (which contradicts one of the arguments for Postclassic mercantile trade and stackable vessels—e.g., Sabloff and Rathje 1975). There are status differences; multiple-room palaces, upright flexed burials covered by small shrines, and elaborate jewelry all can be used as indicators of high status. The elites, however, were not located solely or even predominantly in the cen-

ter of the site. This is seen in the distribution of multiple-room structures at Santa Rita Corozal and of colonnaded halls at Mayapán. Generally, no one palace was grander or more important than the others. The size of Late Postclassic political units, however, is in question. If Ralph Roys (1957) is correct (but see also Restall 1997) the size of a Postclassic polity was approximately the same as a Classic period regional state, averaging twelve thousand square kilometers (A. Chase and D. Chase 1998:14). Regional capitals are distinguishable at Mayapán, Santa Rita Corozal, and Lamanai and have a distinctive archaeological signature—they are characterized by a greater number of multiple-room constructions and ritual caches. There was standardization in the deposition of ritual items (but not replication, as in Late Classic Caracol), and there were caches located in residential *plazuela* groups. However, the deposition location within Postclassic households was not the same as in the Late Classic; ritual activities generally were not centered on an eastern mortuary construction.

The Human Resource Frame

Elements of the human resource frame have been incorporated in some of the explanations for the Maya collapse, such as in the postulation that there was a peasant revolt. However, this frame is not always easy to identify in the archaeological record, even though the possibility exists for assessing the distribution of resources and/or the degree to which there appears to be democracy or symbolic egalitarianism (e.g., Bolman and Deal 1997:134; see also Blanton 1998).

The Late Classic Maya, at least at Caracol, appear to have maintained a human resource perspective. The site is characterized by symbolic egalitarianism. Virtually all households had eastern shrines that contained interments and caches; ancestor veneration was not solely a prerogative of the royalty (D. Chase and A. Chase 2004b). All households had access to obsidian, shell, chert, and polychrome ceramics (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004b; D. Chase 1998). The prosperity of the site appears to have been shared by all, at least symbolically. Furthermore, during the height of the Late Classic era, neither were iconographic representations of rulers in great evidence on stone monuments nor were their exploits recounted in any detail in hieroglyphic texts. That this egalitarianism was symbolic rather than actual is suggested by stable isotope analysis that shows the presence of distinctive status-linked diets (A. Chase et al. 2001).

The Terminal Classic Maya, in contrast, could not be characterized as

human resource oriented. Status distinctions are marked. For known Terminal Classic sites such as Seibal, Ucanal, and Caracol, there appears to have been a purposeful refocus on dynasty in the monuments. In terms of the artifactual record, there is nothing approaching symbolic egalitarianism. Burials and de facto refuse all point to distinctions in access to nonlocal items.

The Postclassic period Maya reestablished symbolic egalitarianism. Household *plazuela* groups are similarly set up regardless of status. Caches and burials are associated with household groups and are not restricted to elite contexts. There are the same kinds of artifacts in most locations. Contrary to popular opinion (Webster 2002), some Postclassic sumptuous elite burials were made (D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:54–56 for Santa Rita Corozal; Pendergast 1984, 1992:75 for Lamanai), but these tended to be placed within elaborate line-of-stone residential groups and "palaces" rather than in civic architecture. Status differentiation is present; however, as in the Late Classic, the basic contexts of interments are similar among residential groups. Multiple, equivalent-sized palaces also occur at many Postclassic sites, but these structures are somewhat dispersed in the settlement layout rather than being concentrated solely in a site's epicenter (e.g., D. Chase 1986). Ethnohistory suggests that "democracy" might have been realized with joint leadership through something called *multepal*.

The Political Frame

All organizations are composed of coalitions of people that vie for resources with other groups. Conflict and politics become emphasized in difficult times but can follow different trajectories depending on a given political system (Bolman and Deal 1997:164). Following Clayton Alderfer (1980) and L. David Brown (1983), Bolman and Deal (1997:171) note that there are "overbounded systems" with concentrated power and regulations and "underbounded systems" that are loosely controlled; conflict is differentially expressed in these two systems. Alternatively, authority's power in some circumstances may be limited to "zones of indifference" or to "areas that few people care about."

Late Classic society appears to have been overbounded and tightly controlled. However, for Caracol there is a monument gap during the eighth century when no rulers are portrayed (at a time during which other sites experience their greatest monument erection; Webster 2002:209). The archaeological record for Caracol indicates that precisely during this time,

when dynastic rulers are less evident, the site experienced its greatest prosperity (as indicated in both the extensive construction of monumental architecture and the presence of artifactual materials that occur in household groups for this time; e.g., D. Chase and A. Chase 2002). Following this Late Classic monument lull—and leading into the Terminal Classic—there are increased depictions of warfare and captives (A. Chase 2002). The monument texts suggest that the conflicting coalitions were mostly external to the site but within the polity, at a twenty-five-kilometer radius from Caracol. Earlier conflict, in contrast, was at a greater distance (A. Chase and D. Chase 1998).

Terminal Classic Maya politics can be gleaned from the stone monuments. While initial Terminal Classic monuments show captives and a continuation of local warfare (A. Chase et al. 1991; Dillon 1982), this quickly changed to an iconography signaling alliances (rather than warfare) with neighboring sites. For the first time at Caracol, more than one person of seemingly equivalent status could be portrayed on a monument. Modeled-carved pottery similarly depicts scenes of alliance. Thus, in the Terminal Classic, external coalitions appear to have been prominent.

Politics and coalitions are also apparent among the Postclassic Maya. No single dynasty appears to have emerged at any site or region (e.g., Roys 1957), in spite of colonial documents created to claim land, titles, and status (such as those of the Xiu; Roys 1943). Ethnohistory suggests that joint rule occurred and that knowledge was power. Archaeology also suggests the existence of multiple elite families and politically shared or rotated leadership. There is no indication of a single grand palace; rather, there are multiple dispersed "palace" residences with elite burials. Unfortunately, however, there are no stone monuments with coeval political history.

The Symbolic Frame

All of Maya culture can be viewed from a symbolic frame. Late Classic Maya society is characterized by monumental architecture—palaces, temples, and large plazas lined with carved stelae and altars. The architecture speaks to the grandeur of each city and the power of its rulers, positioning each dynasty within a cosmological metaphor (e.g., Schele and Mathews 1998). The stone monuments and iconography record the great feats (primarily conquests and captives) of rulers. At the same time, however, Late Classic society, at least at Caracol, is characterized by symbolic egalitarianism. Virtually all household plazuela groups had eastern mortuary shrines and associated caching. Thus, all households had a symbolic location for the interment of

ancestors who could be venerated; ancestor veneration was not restricted to the ruling dynasty. Monumental architecture was a relatively constant symbol from site to site in the southern Maya lowlands—with some allowance for stylistic variation. Household ritual appears to have been more locally distinctive within communities and regions. At Caracol, face caches (lidded ceramic urns with an exteriorly modeled human face) and finger bowls (small lip-to-lip bowls containing extracted human fingers) were the norm (D. Chase and A. Chase 1998), as were collective burial locations for select members of the family (D. Chase and A. Chase 1996; a pattern also noted for Tikal [Haviland 1988]).

The Terminal Classic Maya, as mentioned, did not practice symbolic egalitarianism, and the east-structure ritual focus of households (as evidenced by burials and caching) disappeared. Efforts were initially expended, however, at rebuilding and remodeling monumental architecture. At many sites, though, these efforts stopped midstream with site abandonment. At Caracol, rebuilding continued minimally for forty years past the cessation of monument erection and is evident throughout the site epicenter. Initially, rulers were depicted and written about prominently on monuments; they also portrayed themselves with mythical symbols (snakes, sky figures) to bolster their importance. Stucco masks on epicentral pyramids can be related to warfare and central Mexican deities. Thus, the iconography found carved on the stone monuments, modeled in stucco on late architecture, and molded on some ceramics suggests broadened Mesoamerican contacts. These symbols boasted of the grandeur of dynastic rulership but simultaneously placed this rulership within the context of wider coalitions. In fact, there may have been attempts at establishing one or more Terminal Classic empires that were eventually foiled by local squabbles.

The Postclassic period symbolic frame contrasted with the symbolic frames employed during the Late and Terminal Classic periods in that it was characterized by a lessened emphasis on monumental architecture. The symbolic egalitarianism of the Late Classic, however, reappeared. Household rituals, as indicated by caching and incense-burner deposition, were similar throughout a given site. These rituals, in fact, have been interpreted as community-integrating devices for Santa Rita Corozal (D. Chase 1985a, 1985b, 1986; D. Chase and A. Chase 1998). Symbolism was overt in these caches; images and offerings were clearly depicted—dogs, jaguars, people, and gods. Cache contents and deities were personified, and cache contents varied depending upon the calendrical ritual being undertaken. Rather than being replicated in each residential group, cache locations rotated

among these groups within the site, thus effectively integrating the community (and not simply extended families) in shared symbolic activity. However, there was not an east-structure focus to ritual. Instead, shrines were located in northern, western, and southern buildings. Shrines were used to mark individual graves as opposed to collective burial locations. Significantly, nearly identical cache figures and incense burners were found at sites a great distance apart, beyond the boundaries of a single state or region. The shared symbolism, when combined with ethnohistoric descriptions of migration, suggests a substantial overlap of culture and population. The widespread presence of a pan-Mesoamerican art style also supports this conclusion, visually emphasizing the broader integrative networks and cultural ties that once existed (Nicholson 1982; Robertson 1970).

Multiframe Interpretations of the Regeneration of Ancient Maya Society

When one views the Postclassic regeneration of Maya society, direct continuity, broken traditions, and resynthesis are all visible. The Late Classic everywhere has clearly identifiable horizontal and vertical structural elements. However, in the archaeological data at Caracol, all frames are evident. In the structural frame, there is a Classic period emphasis on one palace complex (probably related to the ruling dynasty) above all others that is not found in the Postclassic (at least at Santa Rita Corozal). However, a Late Classic Caracol identity and symbolic egalitarianism is also evident in household layout, artifacts, burials, and caches, and this is reflective of both the human resource and the symbolic frame. This combined-frame focus may have been the reason for Caracol's successes and Late Classic prosperity.

During the Terminal Classic, changes in all frames can be identified. Perhaps most evident are variations in the political frame. Initial Terminal Classic monuments focus on veneration of rulers and the re-creation of dynasty. There is increased iconographic evidence for, first, warfare and, then, symbolic ritual alliance with the same nearest neighbors in the Terminal Classic. At the same time, Caracol's Late Classic shared identity and symbolic egalitarianism disappeared in the Terminal Classic, indicating substantial changes in the symbolic and human resource frame. Excavations in Terminal Classic contexts show clear status variation and the polarization of the elite from the rest of society. At Nohmul, a nonlocal elite residence was inserted into a central public plaza (D. Chase and A. Chase 1982). At Caracol, on-floor trash indicates that the site's epicentral palaces continued to be occupied by an elite using a specialized ceramic subcomplex for some forty years after the

erection of the site's final stone monument (D. Chase and A. Chase 2000). Eastern-structure mortuary and ritual focus also vanished.

Postclassic Maya organization may be seen as a rejection of the Terminal Classic Maya and as a regeneration of certain aspects of the Classic period organization. The Postclassic is characterized by symbolic egalitarianism and shared rule as opposed to dynasty. This is indicative of a human resource frame focus and is similar to the emphasis found in Late Classic Caracol, but it contrasts with the extreme status distinctions evident among the Terminal Classic Maya. The Postclassic Maya shifted their most populated centers to different locations than their Classic counterparts. There was also great movement of people and blending of traditions—as seen in the "international style" of the Late Postclassic and in historic documents relating to migrations. Importantly, however, no identified Late Postclassic regional capital was placed on top of a Classic period emblem glyph site; this is politically and symbolically significant. The rejection of Classic period dynastic seats of power and monumentality is seen further in the absence of the eastern focus found in Classic-era households. Evidence from Santa Rita Corozal suggests that the idea of a collective ancestral shrine also disappeared—in favor of a Postclassic emphasis on either the individual or the wider community.

Applying frame analysis to the transition from the Classic to the Postclassic period Maya permits us to see that Maya society was continuously regenerating itself through the varied emphasis of different frames in changing situational contexts. Maya society regenerated structurally following the Late Classic period pattern, with the notable loss of the dynastic overlay. Postclassic society existed with more crosscutting mechanisms in place, which have caused it sometimes to be characterized as "heterarchical" or "community oriented." This emphasis on the human resource frame also has been referred to by others, such as Richard Blanton (1998:149–54), as a "corporate strategy." The human resource frame is emphasized in both Late Classic and Postclassic society but not in the Terminal Classic, within which status distinctions are emphasized while local community identities are minimized.

The political frame shows changes on a temporal level, although polity size appears to be roughly similar between the Classic and Postclassic eras. Coalitions always existed. In the Terminal Classic, coalitions appear to have been most prominent not within a site proper but rather within the broader political unit. The emergence of Terminal Classic coalitions may have resulted from imbalances in the overbounded Classic system and

likely represent other political changes, perhaps related to postmonument attempts at empire building. The Postclassic period political frame is characterized by intracommunity coalitions without evidence of dynasty. The concept of dynasty, while present, was deemphasized in some Late Classic polities, such as Caracol, although even there attempts were made to reestablish the importance of dynasty in the subsequent Terminal Classic period. Mercantilism was present in Maya society from at least the Late Preclassic period and cannot be credited in and of itself as a causal factor for Postclassic change (with the possible exception of introduced worldviews via trade contacts). Thus, although we have tended to think of Maya society as having devolved, a frame analysis suggests that this was not the case—at least in political and economic terms.

The symbolic frame also witnesses major changes between the Classic and the Postclassic period, particularly in the absence of overt dynastic representations (monumentality, east-structure focus, and stone texts). However, burials and caches were placed in households in both time frames. While Classic period burials in households emphasize the idea of collective ancestral membership within a single family line (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003, 2004b), Postclassic burials in households normally focus on the individual rather than the collective (D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:75–76); during the Classic period, interment in a residential group was ritually timed and highly selective (D. Chase and A. Chase 2004c), often combining the remains of multiple individuals in a single chamber or graves; during the Postclassic, in contrast, family cemeteries of individual graves can be located. Household caching in both the Classic and the Postclassic fostered a sense of unified community; for Late Classic Caracol, similar containers were placed within the same residential venues throughout the urban landscape (D. Chase and A. Chase 2004b), indicating participation by individual descent groups in community-wide rituals; for Late Postclassic Santa Rita Corozal, figurine caches placed within residential groups replicate community-wide rituals that have been recorded ethnohistorically (D. Chase 1985b), thus linking descent groups to community ceremonies. However, the overt symbolism and rarity of the Postclassic figurine assemblages indicates that multiple descent groups participated in the residential ceremonies, thus suggesting that aspects of household caching were regenerated into an even greater integrating mechanism during the Late Postclassic period (D. Chase and A. Chase 1998). While Late Classic Caracol households were unified in their adoption of similar caching practices regardless of status or location, these practices were directly related to honoring ancestors of members of individual household groups. Postclassic

period caching, in contrast, seems to have been part of a more public, community-related ritual activity; it was conducted not in conjunction with ancestor veneration but rather in concert with calendrical ritual. Thus, major shifts occur in the symbolic frame in the realms of public symbolism and ancestor veneration.

There are lessons to be learned from utilizing organizational frame analysis. As is readily evident, some material indicators may have varied meanings that can be missed without a multiple-frame perspective. Symbolic egalitarianism and the human resource strategy of sharing wealth and successes may be mistaken for a lack of hierarchy or centralization, if care is not exercised in archaeological interpretation (see also Blanton 1998:149–54). Carol Smith (1976) noted similar interpretational problems related to the identification of complex economic and market systems that mimic simple systems in their more evolved form (D. Chase and A. Chase 1992a:313). At Caracol, diet is perhaps the clearest marker of status (A. Chase et al. 2001), which is not surprising if stratification implies differential access to basic resources (as suggested by Morton Fried [1967]). Overemphasizing one frame in an analysis and mixing frames interpretationally are also possible. For instance, ancient Maya monumental architecture is predominantly a symbolic (not a political) indicator. Thus, the lack of monumental temples in the Late Postclassic should be viewed through the symbolic frame and cannot be taken to be directly indicative of political decentralization.

Organizational Change and Regeneration of Postclassic Maya Society

The regeneration of Maya society in the Postclassic period can be seen as a return to certain elements of Classic period society and organization and a rejection of other aspects. It is not just a recombination of existing features; it is also a transformation of the old order. The Terminal Classic period Maya were a major catalyst for this transformation, and many aspects of the Maya Terminal Classic period were distinctive from both the earlier and the later period.

A frame analysis evinces that the Postclassic Maya, rather than being characterized by the presence or absence of physical things such as monumental architecture or stelae, can be better distinguished by delineating organizational changes. The Postclassic period Maya rejected the hereditary ruling dynasty of the Classic period in favor of a system of shared governance. The shared identity of the Late Classic period was replaced by broad-based participation within a single Postclassic period commu-

nity. The rejection of dynasty and the corresponding focus on shared government and community was likely an outgrowth of the Terminal Classic period attempts at reasserting dynastic leaderships and the deemphasis of symbolic egalitarianism (at least at sites such as Caracol).

Archaeological data suggest that the Terminal Classic Maya focused on structural changes in the organization of Maya sociopolitical organization without sufficient concern for the impact of the human resource perspective. The structural shift witnessed in Postclassic Maya society—with the lack of dynastically oriented monumental architecture and stelae and with the movement of population away from major Classic centers—may be viewed as a negative reaction to the Terminal Classic structure. The depopulation of major centers began at the onset of the Terminal Classic period (Culbert and Rice 1990; Demarest 1997) and is not a purely Postclassic period phenomenon. No known emblem glyph sites were continuously occupied through this transition into the Postclassic era. With the lack of an overarching dynasty came changes in patterns of ancestor veneration. The Postclassic period Maya may have venerated individual ancestors as opposed to the collective group. No longer was there a focal eastern mortuary structure in residential plazuela groups; in fact, the dead were frequently interred individually (as opposed to within family mausoleums). Other evidence of ritual activity confirms a change in focus. Caching returned to prominence during the Postclassic period, and—as was the case during the Late Classic period (at least at Caracol)—caches were found in residential plazuela groups. However, unlike their Classic period counterparts, Postclassic period caches were neither redundant in content nor located in conjunction with eastern mortuary shrines. Community building was strengthened by the overt symbolism of these caches: objects inside them are clearly identifiable, and their placement demonstrates a community-wide focus on directional symbolism and calendric ritual. The caches were not merely replicated, they were functionally interdependent.

In summary, the Postclassic period regeneration of Maya society is both more complex and more continuous than has often been suggested. The Terminal Classic Maya, in contrast, provide evidence of substantial disjunction between the earlier and later periods. We believe that the transformation of Maya society was an intentional move from the more autocratic Terminal Classic organization to a more democratic Postclassic structure—with a concomitant focus on human resources (as exhibited by symbolic egalitarianism) and a symbolic frame that confirmed the focus on community integration. Only by viewing the Maya diachronically and contextually

through multiple perspectives or frames can we gain a more holistic and complex view of the collapse and regeneration of Maya society.