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Changes in Maya Rulership at the End of the Classic Period

An Introduction

M. CHARLOTTE ARNAULD, TSUBASA OKOSHI, ARLEN F. CHASE,
AND PHILIPPE NONDÉDÉO

From 760 to 810 CE, one-fourth of the Classic Maya cities (among those that have been investigated) suddenly lost their royal dynasties. Palaces were abandoned; no more stone monuments were erected; no more inscriptions were carved using a calendric date in the Classic Long Count notational system. Even though most of these cities were not immediately depopulated, their inhabitants ceased to build large masonry temples and residences; and, within one hundred years, the residents of these sites gradually emigrated to other settlements as the cities themselves were returned to the forest. While this was happening, even more cities saw the abrupt demise of their own dynasties and their own eventual abandonment. A few cities survived, but generally, by 950 CE, the entire system of capitals, towns, and villages throughout much of the Maya area had been displaced. Some populations resettled around lakes, on the shores of rivers, and on seacoasts and their proximate hinterlands in the Yucatan Peninsula. Thus, during those disastrous times (750–950 CE) between the Classic (250–950 CE) and Postclassic (950–1540 CE) periods, a widespread political collapse occurred (Culbert 1973; Demarest et al., eds. 2004; Houston and Inomata 2009:288–319; Turner and Sabloff 2012; see also Aimers 2007; Arnauld and Breton 2013; Arnauld et al. 2017) from which only limited parts of the Maya Lowlands ever fully recovered (Turner 2018).

Much attention has been given to the general causality of this major disjunction, highlighting the advent of droughts in a climatic change (e.g.,

Douglas et al. 2016; Gill et al. 2007; Hodell et al. 1995; Iannone 2014; Kennett et al. 2012; Lucero 2002). A subsequent Postclassic settlement system that was concentrated on coasts and lakes (Chase and Rice 1985:6) suggests that, while droughts may have impacted Maya societies, climate alone was not responsible for the political turmoil at the end of the Classic period (Haldon et al. 2018; Turner and Sabloff 2012). Other often mentioned causes for this diaspora are social unrest (Hamblin and Pitcher 1980; Lowe 1982), generalized environmental degradation (e.g., Diamond 2005; Dunning et al. 2012; Heckbert 2013; McNeil et al. 2010), and possibly economic collapse (D. Chase and A. Chase 2017; Demarest et al. 2014). Demographic trends during this era have been assessed (e.g., Culbert 1988; Culbert and Rice 1990; Roman et al. 2018); anthropological models have been applied (Tainter 1988); and multifactorial models have been built that make the most of available data (e.g., Chase and Scarborough 2014; Demarest 2013a). All of these discussions are compromised by a lack of tightly controlled chronological data before 1000 CE; the newer data that we do have highlight the problems in simply using ceramic cross-dating (e.g., Hoggarth et al. 2014).

The goal of this book is to concentrate on the political collapse. After long-held debates on the “collapse of civilizations, cultures, or societies,” it is generally admitted that only political regimes really collapse, while societies disintegrate and cities decrease until their final desertion. Most Classic period Maya archaeological sites were deserted cities, but not all their political systems had collapsed. What occurred during the late eighth and early ninth centuries was the political collapse of Classic Maya kings, and possibly of kingship as well. An increasing amount of evidence is now available on detailed aspects of this process, allowing us to raise and answer many questions about the timing, the spread, and the mechanisms of the demise. Who were the protagonists of this drama, and how did they make decisions and act? How much can be discerned as definitive rupture and loss in the rulership systems or regimes? What happened by 800–830 CE in the Maya area? Were there a series of successive wars or revolutions? Did some political components survive? Did the entire lowlands undergo a political transformation during the transition from the Classic to the Postclassic periods? Did the demise of kings mean the end of divine or sacred kingship?

OUR PRESENT UNDERSTANDING

Classic Maya kingship has been defined in three complementary ways following disciplinary approaches. Epigraphers have explored the concept of

the “king as person” in his capacity to embody deities and to be a “ruler of time” (Fields and Reents-Budet 2005; Houston and Stuart 1996; Schele and Miller 1986; Stuart 1996; Wright 2011). Iconographers have studied Maya sacred or divine kings relevant to aspects of their bodies (Baudez 2000; Gillespie 2008), their relation to the sun or maize deities (Baudez 1985; Salazar 2015; Tokovinine 2013), and their symbolic regalia (Principal Bird Deity headdress, K’awiil scepter, serpent bar; Rice 2012; Sharer and Traxler 2006:737–740; Stone and Zender 2011; Taube et al. 2010). Archaeologist Patricia McAnany (1995) has shown how the kings pertained to the places and social groups in which they revered their ancestors. Those three disciplinary approaches consistently define the Classic Maya king as a human being profoundly different from other society members due to his special relation to the gods, supernatural entities, and ancestors.

Archaeologists have studied the monumental architecture and the placement of certain kinds of structures in Classic period centers in order to gain an understanding of the practices of royal governance (e.g., Barrientos 2014; Inomata 2006; Inomata and Houston, eds. 2001; Lamoureux-St-Hilaire 2018; Tsukamoto and Inomata 2014). In a more regional and geopolitical perspective, epigraphers Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube (1995, 2000, 2008) have reconstructed a hierarchy of kingdoms under the “hegemony” of one or more rival capitals in the southern lowlands; these politics engaged the cities of Tikal, Calakmul, Dzibanche, and Caracol during most of the Classic period (Figure 1.1).

No single unitary kingdom ever existed in this area. Regional states may have existed (A. Chase and D. Chase 1998a, 2021; Chase et al. 2009), but much of this region was probably composed of city-states (*sensu* Grube 2000b) loosely integrated into the southern lowland geopolitical system (*sensu* Tokovinine 2013). In brief, any deep interrogation on the end of the Classic Maya kingship must address the pragmatics and geopolitical reconstructions of the lowland kingdoms as much as the definition of the divine-sacred king. Does the demise of Classic royal dynasties represent the collapse of sacred or divine kingship? Did the disintegration of the southern geopolitical system also deeply impact or transform the northern lowlands?

This volume takes the stance that the sacred or divine qualities of the king were part of governance pragmatics, modifying his agency and relation to elites and commoners. More than despotic or absolute power (rarely present as such in ancient societies), these qualities gave the king an ontological position in the universe not easily amenable to negotiation. Thus, “rupture” may have been the main mechanism of political change available to Maya



Figure 1.1. Map of the Maya area (drawing by Jean-François Cuenot and Sylvie Éliès, ArchAm, CNRS).

societies at the end of the Classic period—a rapid, brutal disjunction ending forms, effigies, and style, even persons, and operating a “revolution” after which nothing “could ever be the same.” We have many signs (archaeological and others) that such breaks did occur in the Maya Lowlands from the end of the eighth century through the first years of the tenth century. The entire hierarchy of kingdoms was deeply affected, but with different rhythms over space and through the times of repeated ruptures during a long crisis. Through conscious and also unconscious intervention of agents—by substitution, reform, repetition, recursivity, and other successive manipulations of traditional systemic elements—overall transformation of the Maya universe may have developed gradually, arising not so much as a system per se but rather as the operation of different temporal rhythms in agency, both regionally and locally. “Rupture” introduces rapid discontinuity; “transformation” gradually reconfigures extant elements into a system in which continuity may not be easy to detect.

Analytical scrutiny of the Maya collapse frequently leads to an emphasis on regional–local variability in conditions and trajectories. But variation must also be considered in the temporal dimension. We propose that a political collapse can be singled out from other processes that developed later within different causality systems. By the ninth century CE, political rupture and transformation in many cities opened the way to variability in existing regimes (and governance) of Maya urban communities—at least for the ones that survived into the following century. The urban collapse had its own distinct rhythms and timing. Too frequently subsumed in the moment of dynastic failure, chronologies of urban desertion instead had their own logic. A third stage of demographic collapse plausibly followed with a slower, more gradual rhythm that was not necessarily articulated with political and urban dynamics—the result being almost total abandonment of the southern lowlands between 1000 and 1100 CE. Droughts and other environmental degradation certainly would have affected the earlier urban collapse, but the long, eleventh-century series of deep droughts (e.g., Kennett et al. 2012) would have completed the demographic collapse.

The present collective contribution seeks to answer academic curiosity over the paradox between political collapse, a large part of which took place during the 760–810 CE interval, and the overwhelming literature on non-political causalities that focus on environmental degradation and climate change (a paradox also raised by Aimers and Iannone 2014 and by Chase and Scarborough 2014). As a result, Charlotte Arnauld and Philippe Nondédéo

organized an initial symposium at the *Décimo Congreso Internacional de Mayistas* at Izamal, June 26–July 2, 2016, in which 15 scholars took part. Although too short, the half-day session highlighted the need to explore the political agency of Maya kings and subroyal elites in the context of several sequential historical crises. With most of the same participants and a few more who could not attend the Izamal session, Tsubasa Okoshi, Charlotte Arnauld, and Philippe Nondédéo organized the international symposium “Rupture or Transformation of Maya Kingship? From Classic to Postclassic Times,” held November 11–14, 2017, at the Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, Kyoto, Japan. The chapters in this volume derive from the second meeting. Our approach in this book is multidisciplinary; it encompasses archaeology, epigraphy, iconography, and ethnohistory. At the Kyoto symposium, Japanese, American, and European Mayanists assembled representing eight nations (now 10 in the present volume). As members of their own historical societies, participants had divergent collective experiences of past politics, including two long-term, still living traditions of royalty—the Japanese and the European ones. Classic (and Postclassic) Maya kingship can be viewed as part of the Belizean, Guatemalan, and Mexican national and historical traditions. These varied perspectives result in a unique effort to understand the past, even though complete adherence to shared concepts could not be warranted—a point we address later in this introduction.

Unfolding the chains of processes and events that developed through the ninth and tenth centuries in the southern and, then, the northern lowlands is an ambitious historical focus that is necessary if we are to understand one of the most radical political shifts that ever occurred in America. In fact, as recently documented by David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins (2017a), this might be only one among the many trajectories that premodern kingship regimes universally underwent. This volume continues the trend of instilling history into the anthropological model of sacred or divine kingship through exploring the political agency of kings and subroyal elites in the context of several sequential, Late Classic to Postclassic crises. This book focuses on the internal processes of political changes: the way successive generations of actors, kings, courtiers, and commoners performed and acted in the broader context of the Maya Terminal Classic and the Mesoamerican Epiclassic periods.

Beginning with the chapter by Chloé Andrieu, the first part of the volume focuses on the theories of sacred–divine kingship that may well be at the heart of our reflection about rupture. The second and third parts of the book assemble studies of Maya kingdoms situated in the central-southern lowland

tradition, whereas the fourth part deals with the northern lowlands. Five chapters then explore the potential of warfare for rupture and transformation in Classic kingship, and six chapters analyze disjunctions and changes in noble–dynastic relationships as well as political economies. Four other chapters develop the northern trajectory that strongly contrasts with that of the south. The volume ends with two final chapters that both summarize and offer a general discussion of the events in the transition from the Classic to Postclassic eras.

To provide a firmer background to this broad consideration of political process, the remainder of this introductory chapter recapitulates: first, some explanations of the collapse in which Classic Maya kingship had a prominent part; second, general theories of sacred–divine kingship and Maya political organization (related to sovereignty, space, warfare and economy); third, the words for “king” used in the four languages spoken at the Kyoto conference; and, finally, the data, methods, and proxies that can be applied to the study of Maya political ruptures and transformations.

THE MAYA COLLAPSE AND KINGSHIP

Political crises and dynastic changes occurred frequently in many regions of the Maya Lowlands during their two thousand years of social and urban evolution (500 BCE–1500 CE). Even in some later Postclassic polities, strong rulers with paraphernalia and ideology derived from the canonical Classic era occasionally existed. But never before, nor after, had the disjunction been so deep, so rapid in some of its aspects, and so generalized in terms of space. The collapse process began early—at least by 760 CE in the western lowlands (i.e., around the Usumacinta River to the west of Tikal and Caracol and southwest of Calakmul), but it expanded in a swirling pattern from west to east and south to north (Ebert et al. 2014). In the political epicenter of the lowlands, Tikal and Caracol rulers resisted until the extreme end of the ninth century, whereas peripheries had been swept aside by a most rapid phenomenon of dynastic demise. By 860–920 CE new capitals had emerged in the north, specifically at Uxmal and Chichen Itza. New political regimes then took shape, definitely inaugurating the Postclassic period (Cobos 2016; Volta and Braswell 2014). The advent of the Early Postclassic era is not fully understood (see A. Chase and D. Chase 2008; D. Chase and A. Chase 2004a, 2006) and has been referred to as a “dark age” in the past (Proskouriakoff 1955; see also Andrews et al. 2003). However, Late Postclassic Maya Lowland

and Highland societies were thriving anew across an immense area when the Spaniards arrived on the Yucatan coast early in the sixteenth century.

Even though Classic kingship has not always been at the heart of hypotheses built to discern the causes of the ninth-century collapse, a number of researchers have raised important insights that are directly linked to specific features of this political regime. Initially the dated monuments of Maya rulers were used to model the collapse (Lowe 1982), but other relevant approaches were also suggested. Robert Sharer (1977) drew on the deep ritualism engrained in Maya kingship to propose that a late Late Classic “revitalization” movement would have strained people and resources until reaching a critical threshold. George Cowgill (1964b) proposed that warfare impacted Maya rulers and their followers and that large migrations might have played a role in ending the Classic polities. Dennis Puleston (1979) developed an idea, originally advanced by Sylvanus Morley, that the Late Classic stone monument focus on *katun* endings (a calendric period of 20 years) in the Classic lowlands was combined with a fatalistic view of prophecies that foretold the time of the collapse in accord with the use of the Postclassic Katun Round (of 13 *katuns*) found in the Books of Chilam Balam (Edmonson 1982; Roys 1933, 1954). More recently, once the early evidence of Terminal Classic droughts had been published (Hodell et al. 1995), the capacity of the Classic kings to “rain” (an Africanist pun) has been at the center of collapse models (Lucero 2002, 2006; Lucero and Fash 2006; Scarborough 1998; Scarborough et al. 2012).

Those early ideas have never been fully disproved, and they still deserve consideration. However, there are some chinks in the armor. We now know that the various Maya polities used different strategies for water control at different sites and that some Maya kings would not have controlled the “rain” (e.g., A.S.Z. Chase 2016; Chase and Cesaretti 2019). The importance of warfare and population movements in the collapse of the western lowlands has largely been demonstrated by Demarest and his colleagues (Demarest 1997; Demarest et al., eds. 2004). Although applying different assumptions and methods, several scholars have also resumed work on the temporal and spatial distribution of dated monument erections across the lowlands to investigate the collapse (see Ebert et al. 2014:338–341). Without following the Puleston line of thought, Stephen Houston and David Stuart (1996) have developed various aspects of what they call the Maya “rulers of time” and have amply showed the importance of calendrical science in Classic political practices (Stuart 2011a; see also A. Chase 1991 and Rice 2004).

SACRED OR DIVINE KINGSHIP

Undoubtedly, the intricate articulation of sacred or divine power (i.e., the unique relation of the ruler to deities and nonhuman entities) and political ritualism with particular concepts of time gave shape to a rich field of investigation centered on Maya rulers. More recently, the archaeology of material culture, as contextualized in ritual vestiges like some peri-abandonment deposits (e.g., Aimers et al. 2020, but see A. Chase and D. Chase 2020a), has raised new perspectives on one particular aspect of the Classic kingship—specifically, violence and its meanings—that was explored in a volume edited by Gyles Iannone, Brett Houk, and Sonja Schwake (2016a). Their volume examines the scapegoat theory of divine or sacred kingship in terms of the demise of Classic Maya regimes. This theory essentially holds that kingship was responsible for any divine risk, like rain. While it may explain certain aspects of the Maya archaeological record during the 760–830 CE moment, it can neither be applied to all polity trajectories nor elucidate how political rupture and transformation were connected to wider historical and socio-economic changes in the Maya world. However, following the line of inquiry in this important contribution, our volume represents the first collective effort to effectively concentrate the collapse research on the Maya kingship dynamics in structures, institutions, and agency that spanned the Late Classic and Postclassic periods.

The question of a change in, or loss of, sacrality or a relationship with gods is only one among many questions that can be asked and examined in detail with archaeological evidence pertaining to the ninth-century dynastic demise. Our multidisciplinary approaches do not give the issue particular salience (but see Chapter 16, by D. Chase and A. Chase, in this volume), even though the rapidity and broad spatial spread of the demise must certainly be correlated to those particular qualities (Iannone et al. 2016a). Maya kingdoms were also engaged in “regional hierarchically ordered fields of interacting societies” (Sahlins 2017a:162) and in long-term local trajectories. The chapters of this volume are thus more concerned with issues of interactive and historical developments specific to Maya Lowland societies at the turn of the ninth century during the termination of what has been called their “Classic splendor.” More than cosmic position and ontological essence per se, we are interested in the way those qualities modified the capacity for action by the Maya king and how the ruler eventually profited from them (see Brisch 2008a; Gillespie 2008). The idea that sacred or divine kings disappeared from the Maya area at the end of the Classic period stands in contrast

to Postclassic Aztec kings, who enhanced those qualities to their advantage (Dehouve 2017; Gillespie 1989; Graulich 1998). Such a contrast may deserve historical, more than evolutionary, scrutiny (see Graeber 2017:416–417).

The relationships of Classic Maya Rulership with “Political Organization” have raised some degree of controversy. In Mesoamerican archaeology the “kingship” concept has situated the thinking and guided research away from the “band-tribe-chiefdom-state” evolutionary framework. Caricaturing, we might say that kingship undermines the sequence since as an institution it does not apply to societies that were bands or tribes; it frequently works at a chieftom level and, minimally, paves the way for a future state (the autonomous Leviathan machine or super-king). This is a most superficial perspective on the topic, one with strictly typological concerns.

More fruitful is the dichotomy that envisions supposedly static political regimes embedded in social kinship, on the one hand, and dynamic regimes adapting and reacting to historical processes, on the other hand. This dichotomy has grounded several processual and postprocessual archaeological controversies in Maya research on politics (Iannone 2002; see also Hansen and Stepputat 2006:297–299). In her book *Living with the Ancestors: Kinship and Kingship in Ancient Maya Society*, McAnany (1995) articulates a clear anthropological model creating a dual perspective that combines both ends (Iannone 2002:74). Thus, a focus on ancestrality may have been among the elements that Maya kingship lost by the end of the Classic period (see Chapter 16, by D. Chase and A. Chase, and Chapter 15, by Ringle et al., in this volume).

Two not so different dual perspectives also emerged in 1996: first, the exclusionary versus corporate framework, as articulated by Richard Blanton and his colleagues (1996); and, second, the segmentary versus centralized framework, as debated by John Fox, Garrett Cook, Arlen Chase, and Diane Chase (1996) in a *Current Anthropology* forum entitled “The Maya State: Centralized or Segmentary?” A supplementary comment by Arthur Demarest advocated a temporal “cycling” of both trends, following an earlier exposition by Joyce Marcus (1992a). If indeed viewed as entailing complementary rather than exclusive poles, both dual perspectives provided pertinent theoretical frameworks for research focusing on the dynamics of kingdoms (see Iannone 2002). Both helped envision realistically how distinct elitist sectors had divergent interests and developed different strategies internally and externally. By the time these two frameworks had emerged, two earlier cross-cultural works had explored relevant complex topics related to factional

competition and the role of ancient Mesoamerican elites (Brumfiel and Fox 1994; D. Chase and A. Chase 1992).

However, royal sovereignty, power, its legitimation, and its dissolution raise issues that differ from the sociology of political regime formation and reproduction. Even earlier, *Society against the State* by Pierre Clastres (1977 [1974]) had provided ethnographic evidence from South America documenting how societies largely organized by kinship can develop elaborate political agency structured by the very resistance of people against the power of one human person appropriating divine authority. Graeber and Sahllins (2017a) have expanded on this line of thought, developing two models of political struggle (or resistance), one opposing local social groupings or “owners of the land” to the “stranger king” and the other model involving subjects who sacralize the king to protect themselves from his divinity. Maurice Godelier (2007) insists on the (now consensual) view that no kinship organization can by itself create and support political structures; only religion with ritualized practices engaging human and nonhuman entities can weave the threads of creative and reproductive institutions for societies, one of them being kingship, “a distinct and centralizing institution, reproduced through public ritual, constituting a symbolic center of society” (Hansen and Stepputat 2006:298). This formulation is in line with the much earlier, yet still influential works of Arthur Hocart (1936), and of later anthropologists like Stanley Tambiah (1976, 1977) and Clifford Geertz (1980) working on Southeast Asia kingdoms and their galactic conception of space where the ruler’s authority is a function of his or her physical presence (see Demarest 1992; see also Andrieu [Chapter 2] and Ringle et al. [Chapter 14] in this volume).

Anthropological and theoretical formulations on political space have guided archaeological research on Maya polities and have helped envision them as hierarchized societies more than controlled territories (“[the king] rules the people, the clans rule the land,” Sahllins 2017a:193, citing Beattie 1971; see also Chase et al. 2009). Maya epigraphers are currently refining the Classic nonterritorial politics with new definitions of geopolitics (e.g., Beliaev 2000; Helmke et al. 2015; Stuart and Houston 1994; Tokovinine 2013), and this line of research must be kept in mind when studying the role of warfare during the collapse. Decipherment of royal titles, including the famous emblem glyphs (Berlin 1958), continues to provide further insights on the spatiality of Classic royal authority (e.g., Helmke 2012) and, against all prescribed autochthonous ancestry, on the propensity of royal dynasties to relocate their seats of power (e.g., Gronemeyer 2012; and Martin and Velasquez García 2016; see also Okoshi 2012a about authority and territory).

It remains to be seen whether the marked religious and ritual conception of kingship, its emergence and shaping, redefines warfare through theories of sacrifice (Bloch 1992; Iannone et al. 2016a; Sahlins 1985; Scubla 2002) and reformulates “political economy” through the dichotomy of local land production against exotic luxury imports (Feinman 2001; Hansen and Stepputat 2006; Helms 1993; Sahlins 2017a:193–197). Warfare and material resource control would thereby not be given the autonomy they have as specific fields of practice in Western modern polities. Yet Maya researchers acknowledge that kingly authority must be understood in its materialist dimensions (control of war and labor forces) while conceiving of these as enacted and materialized by structurally religious relations, from monumental construction to human sacrifice to tribute and slavery (McAnany 2010; Ringle 1999). Earlier debates on royal “propaganda” in Maya stone inscriptions (e.g., following Marcus 1992b) have little relevance in this framework—but the notion is not to be dismissed too lightly, especially considering the troubled times of rapidly dissolving geopolitics. Relevant to the collapse issue—and probably a good illustration of the complex linkages between warfare, economics, and religion—is a consideration of the diplomatic, trade, and military relationships of Maya polities with those of the Central Mexican Highlands extending from the Early Classic domination of Mesoamerica by the Teotihuacan state to the Epiclassic Mesoamericanization process witnessed at Chichen Itza (Schwartz and Nichols 2006; see also Arnauld [Chapter 8], Ringle et al. [Chapter 14], and Nondédéo et al. [Chapter 6] in this volume).

KINGS AND RULERS

The words we use in the four languages spoken by the participants to the Kyoto international symposium deserve some attention, especially as they convey the cultural nuances of considering kingship.

The word corresponding to “king” in Japanese is “Ou”; this refers not only to the governmental action as the ruler or sovereign but also to the moral-ethical principles embodied in him (Shogakukan’s Editorial Committee of the Great Japanese Dictionary 2006:2:834; see Okoshi, Chapter 17, in this volume). Historically, from the second half of the fifth century, the highest ruler began to be called *Ookimi* (Great Ruler), and later *Tenshi* (emperor, literally “Son of Heaven”), which was replaced soon by *Tennô* (emperor, literally “Heavenly Sovereign”), although the former denomination (*Tenshi*) continued to be used until the nineteenth century. In the Japanese context, *Ten*, or heaven, also means the highest and omnipotential ruler of all

creation and Tennô, Tenshi are considered as the sovereign who rules by the order and in the name of Ten (heaven) (Shogakukan's Editorial Committee of the Great Japanese Dictionary 2006:9:745, 789, 845). Tennô is considered a transmitter of the divine voices as it is indicated in his honorific expression Sumera-mikoto (Shogakukan's Editorial Committee of the Great Japanese Dictionary 2006:7:1070).

From the twelfth century, due to the establishment of the Shogunate, the emperor's rulership was delegated to the Shogun who administrated *daimyos* (feudal lords) through his Bakufu (governmental office). Therefore, the Japanese rulership was divided into two mutually dependent sectors. The Shogun represents the secular rulership whose authority depends partially on the Tennô. This means that the Tennô always had played a ritual role to sustain the moral-ethical and spiritual framework for all the available institutions and the people of Japan, and the Shogun and his Bakufu were responsible for materializing it. In this regard, both the Tennô and the Shogun acted in a sense as a corporate being, and for this reason Japanese scholars make no distinction between the two aspects of the kingship, "sacred" and "divine," but also consider them as the same (Takeshi Inomata, personal communication 2017).

The French word of common use is *roi*, avoiding the feudal-connoted *seigneur*, and the modern *gouvernants* or *gouverneurs*, which refer to effective governmental action. *Roi* (as the Spanish *rey*) originates from the Indo-European *rex* (Latin) and *raj-(an)* (Sanskrit), both terms referring to religious priests more than sovereigns (Benveniste 1969:9–15). *Royauté* is preferred to *monarchie*, as we do not know whether all Classic (or Postclassic) kingdoms had only one king ruling. English-speaking Maya researchers, while not discarding the words "king" and "queen"—which are perhaps mostly used by epigraphers (e.g., Houston and Stuart 1996; Martin and Grube 2000; Stuart 1996)—tend rather to stress concepts pertaining to governing, legitimacy, and agency with the term "ruler"; many times these researchers use the plural "rulers," thus leaving open the issues of the number of persons involved in ruling and of their distinct status as "royal," "subroyal" or "noble" (a "ruler" as a straight line may have a similar semantic field as *rectus* in Latin, Benveniste 1969:11). Some researchers have even proposed that there was no single ruler but rather a secular and a sacred ruler (see Becker 1983; and Rice 2004). Whatever the case, "rulership" is definitely preferred to "kingship"; "royalty" is generally used to connote status with "lords" and "princes" sometimes being used to convey a sense of an encompassing hierarchical order more or less detached from effective functions of governing (although

Maya titles like *sajal* and *lakam* are also used to connote lesser status nobles and functionaries). Reference is also made to an “overlord” (or emperor) to designate a higher-status king (e.g. Houston 2008a, 2012), again using epigraphic referents. The Spanish-speaking Mayistas almost carefully avoid the word “*rey*,” to which they prefer *gobernante*, possibly to avoid colonial-time connotations. Most Spanish scholars rather opt for the Maya titles, *kalo'mte'* for “emperor,” *ajaw* for “ruler,” or *k'uhul ajaw* for “divine ruler,” and *yajaw* for “overlord” (e.g., Lacadena García-Gallo and Ciudad Ruiz 1998). This could be a more convenient option.

This simple lexical revision points to several interesting semantic overlaps between the existence and the action of the king; his reigning and his governing both unilaterally and plurally; ontological distance and functional multiplicity; and superiority and hierarchy, among others. All of these fields are useful for investigation, especially as comparative work starts where we researchers speak (utter words) and share notions.

DATA AND THEIR FRAMEWORKS, METHODS, AND PROXIES

Evidence bearing on the agency of Late Terminal Classic Maya kings and nobles has been accumulating relatively recently (post 2005) due to a renewed emphasis on Mesoamerican rituals, warfare, and trade, along with more detailed epigraphic decipherments (e.g., Helmke, Hoggarth et al. 2017, Chapter 7, this volume) based on better archaeological data. This is why this book is one of the very few works to adopt such a definite historical perspective focusing on what actions and strategies destroyed, yet also transformed, Maya Lowland polities and institutions (but see Foias 2013). We build not only on the essential data synthesis produced by Arthur Demarest, Prudence Rice, and Don Rice (2004) in their edited volume on the Terminal Classic as a critical period, but also on Glenn Schwartz and John Nichols's (2006) cross-cultural collective work dedicated to postcollapse “regeneration” of complex societies. Lisa Lucero's (2006) research on the role of the Maya king as a ritual and effective purveyor of water and Gyles Iannone's (2014) collective contribution on *The Great Maya Droughts* also provided us with critical data series and interpretations. Also, as previously mentioned, Iannone et al.'s (2016a) *Ritual Violence and the Fall of the Classic Maya Kings* concentrates on late archaeological signals of violence. The “stranger king”—not a new concept in Mesoamerica (A. Chase and D. Chase 2020a; Gillespie 1989; Sahlins 1985; see Ringle et al. this volume)—received a broader treatment in Graeber and Sahlins's (2017a) *On Kings*, published a month after the Kyoto

symposium. From this book, the amply documented historical scenarios labeled “galactic mimesis” and “serial stranger kingship structure” may help account for both sudden ruptures and gradual changes in the sequence of late Maya political scenarios.

In ancient Mesoamerica, particularly in the Maya area, the use of a historical approach has long been subsumed under a “conjunctive approach” (see Maca 2010 for an assessment) that combined first archaeology with ethnohistory and ethnography (e.g., Hammond and Willey 1979) and then also added the Maya script to the mix once it was sufficiently deciphered (e.g., Houston and Martin 2016). Simultaneous advances in script and linguistic knowledge of the various Maya literate productions and in archaeological understanding of material culture have led researchers to examine the ways ancient Maya people perceived circumstances, acted in contexts, and memorialized events. The agency theoretical framework stimulated many studies of rituals and ritualized action, giving unity to otherwise separate research efforts developed in ideology, political organization, economy, and subsistence activities (e.g. D. Chase and A. Chase 2004a; Flannery 1999; Inomata 2006; Lucero 2006; McAnany 2010).

One methodological advance that we can rely on is the chronological sequence of three distinct moments of collapse, each possibly with different causal systems: the rapid kingship collapse, then the more gradual “urban crumble,” followed by a transformation related to demographic failure or depression (Culbert 1988) extending well into the Early Postclassic period, possibly until 1250 CE. The advances that chronological refinements can bring to this sequence are illustrated in one specific example: the history of the complex demise of the Ceibal kings (Bazy and Inomata 2017; see also Demarest et al. [Chapter 18] and Inomata [Chapter 4] in this volume). At least in the second moment, and most certainly in the third one, droughts of variable intensity and length no doubt impacted Maya societies and rulership but cannot be the ultimate reason for the collapse (e.g., Haldon et al. 2018; Turner and Sabloff 2012). But the sequence in itself resulted in highly variable impact types, justifying that each moment be investigated by itself and also in relation with the others.

In a recent archaeological essay on sovereignty, Adam Smith (2011:419) elicits specific practices of polity reproduction, like performances or “spectacles in co-presence of kings and subjects,” with the material mediation of “political landscapes” and objects (e.g., see Campbell 2009). The Classic Maya royal trinity of monumental courtly architecture, stone carved inscriptions, and Long Count calendrical concepts of historical recording amply

materialize and illustrate performances, as well as landscapes and objects, producing detailed evidence on the historical contexts, decision-making, and strategies of Classic kings, their contemporaneous leaders, or the newly installed councils (see chapters by A. Chase and D. Chase [13], Demarest et al. [18], Grube [3], Nondédéo et al. [6], and Ringle et al. [14]). How those architectural and intellectual achievements were discontinued, resumed, or modified (e.g., masonry to wooden architecture, or images carved on stone to images carved in wood or modeled on ceramic vessels) is of utmost interest to specify changes in institutions, economic practices, trade routes, and geopolitics (see chapters by Demarest et al. [18], Helmke et al. [7], and Žračka et al. [12] in this volume). In the long Maya collapse sequence, economic practices must be explored in relation not only to political agency but also to changing urban conditions (e.g., Hutson 2016, 2017), including mobility and migration patterns.

As discussed at the Kyoto symposium, “peri-abandonment rituals” (sensu Helmke et al., Chapter 7, this volume; also called “above-floors deposits” [Freidel 2016:275–280] or seen as the products of “rapid abandonment” [A. Chase and D. Chase 2004a]) do not reach (yet) the status of well-defined proxies to political change, in spite of recent advances in interpretation of the enormous number of such deposits excavated in the Maya area (e.g., Aimers et al. 2020; A. Chase and D. Chase 2020a). The issue remains whether these material vestiges are directly related to ritual and violence or whether they are simply the result of rapid abandonment in the face of warfare. No matter the case, still to be answered is by whom and against whom? This is possibly one of the most intricate questions lying at the heart of the concept of sacred kingship and its link to sacrifice (e.g., Bloch 1992; Scubla 2002), but otherwise it also simply asks what were the types of ritualism used by Maya people when revolting, when abandoning their masonry dwellings, and when reverting from sedentism to mobility (Inomata 2004). Those immensely variable deposits in content and wealth also represent good, although ambiguous, proxies to economic prosperity, long-distance exchanges, and levels of subsistence (see the chapters by Helmke et al. [7] and Tsukamoto and Esparza Olguin [11]).

Diachronic studies on developmental issues like ours do not easily accommodate cross-cultural comparative research (but see Schwartz and Nichols 2006). Synchronic analyses of individual societies more directly incorporate wide-scale comparisons bearing on some specificities of their kingships (e.g., Foias 2013; Gillespie 2008; Iannone 2016; Inomata 2001; Miller and Martin 2004). Yet Nicole Brisch (2008a) succeeds in assembling comparative

chapters on diverse ancient societies in which kings “became divine” at some moment, and her section devoted to “divine kingship and empire” compares interesting models of “punctuated” or “ephemeral” divine kingships consciously proclaimed in what seems to be imperialistic rather than shamanistic or animist contexts (see Brisch 2008b).

FINAL COMMENT

Sacred or divine kingship was described by James Frazer (1922) and Hocart (1936) well before the development of neo-evolutionist anthropology and archaeology. Mayanists were probably not the sole archaeologists who relegated this “type” of political regime to being an archaism of limited interest. However, we should be aware, on the one hand, of the strong but somewhat indirect influence of Hocart’s work on Maya studies and, on the other hand, of the renewed interest political theory gives to certain aspects of power relations, sovereignty, or concepts relative to leaders in countries that have been colonized but that still retain components of their precolonial political regime (Feeley-Harnik 1985; Hansen and Stepputat 2005). It is well known that, in the New World, colonialism disintegrated and ended the indigenous ancient regimes, yet the degree to which traces of ancient kingships survived is still an important issue (Wolf 1982, 1998).

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