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The Rupture of Classic Maya Divine Kingship from the Perspective of Postclassic Archaeology, Iconography, and Ethnohistory

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With the disintegration of infrastructure and political order in the southern Maya Lowlands at the end of the Classic period (largely before 900 CE), Maya governance was transformed. Perhaps most notably, during the Postclassic period (900–1542 CE) the emphasis on divine kingship that was present during the Classic period (250–900 CE) appears to have ceased, disappearing in some areas during the Late and Terminal Classic periods. With the Classic Maya collapse around 900 CE, the southern Maya Lowlands faced substantial population movements and a massive reduction in population from which it never fully recovered (Turner 2018), whereas the northern Maya Lowlands witnessed some population continuity and potentially in-migration from the southern lowlands (e.g., Cowgill 1964b; Schele and Freidel 1990; Tozzer 1941:29). There likely was at least some differentiation between the northern and southern Maya Lowlands during the Classic period based on differences in architectural traditions, ceramics, hieroglyphic texts, and language spoken (e.g., Arnauld et al., Chapter 1, this volume; Brainerd 1958; A. Chase and D. Chase 1992; Grube 1994a; Pollock 1980; Wichmann 2006). Yet the iconography found on Late Classic carved stone monuments throughout the Yucatan Peninsula suggests that both areas practiced divine kingship during the Late Classic period (Grube, Chapter 3, this volume). And in neither area did the practice of divine kingship survive the collapse (Inomata, Chapter 4, this volume).

Evidence for the rupture of Classic Maya divine kingship may be found in various archaeological remains but is particularly notable in iconographic depictions of Maya rulers. The Classic period southern Maya Lowland

collapse is traditionally linked to the cessation in erection of dated stone monuments depicting Maya rulers and containing texts related to their activity (e.g., Lowe 1985). While some monument erection did continue into the Postclassic period, these stelae do not strictly reflect human figures but also portrayed deities and other imagery that is not consistent with Classic period iconography, strongly suggesting a shift away from Classic period kingship. Other Postclassic period material remains also point to changes in governance. Archaeological data from sites like Santa Rita Corozal and Mayapan indicate the existence of multiple contemporary multiroom, palace-like residential structures that are distributed throughout the site rather than simply being concentrated within the city's epicentral architecture. Postclassic period ritual deposits are also different from their Classic period counterparts, often being placed throughout the settlement with easy-to-understand imagery that suggests broader community engagement. Additionally, ethnohistoric records suggest that the shift away from divine kings and dynastic kinship coincided with a movement toward more collective forms of government involving a separation between secular and sacred offices.

Some of the impetus for a change in governance may have to do with the introduction of different forms of political organization and religious practice from other parts of Mesoamerica (e.g., Cobos, Chapter 15, this volume; Ringle et al. 1998). Throughout their history, the Maya were in contact with other populations in Mesoamerica, and it is likely that the worsening political conditions in the southern lowlands invited interlopers from coastal and central Mexico who took advantage of the political instability, spelling the death knell for divine rulers. However, the loss of divine kingship may also have resulted from a reversion by the Maya to their own underlying principles of collective governance.

While previous models for the Maya collapse once attributed it to Mexican mercenaries who entered the southern lowlands looking for spoils and easy conquests (see Adams 1977; see also Binford 1968; Sabloff and Willey 1967), it is now clear that this transition and the impetus for it were far more complex (Turner and Sabloff 2012). Long-term social stresses and abandonments affected portions of the southern lowlands differentially over more than 140 years; instability and warfare may have enhanced the adoption of new religious practices by the remaining populace, ones that did not accord with the principles of divine kingship. William Ringle, Tomás Gallareta, and George Bey III (1998) have argued that a Quetzalcoatl cult entered the Maya area in association with the more general collapse. Elizabeth Graham, Scott Simmons, and Christine White (2013) have argued that the introduction of

new burial practices in northern Belize signaled a change in religion and probably other parts of society. The suggestion is that religion focused on a sacred office that was not held by the secular ruler (see Ringle 2004:211). The split between secular and sacred would have effectively nullified divine kingship.

Thus, the degree to which changes in governance and the collapse itself were internally as opposed to externally driven is a subject of debate. Ethnohistory, iconography, and archaeology together provide us with a more nuanced perspective on changing governance and the demise of divine kingship among the ancient Maya.

Ethnohistory

Providing us with substantial information on Maya political organization (Figure 16.1), ethnohistoric literature relating to Postclassic Yucatan is fairly explicit that the area's elite had ties to central Mexico. The inference to be drawn from these accounts was that the political vacuum created by the Maya collapse was occupied by outsiders to the area, yet there is evidence of Maya continuity as well. In speaking about the "hereditary aristocracy" of Maya nobles known as *almehen,* Ralph Roys (1957:5) notes that "although most of its members had Maya names, they all considered themselves to be descended from Mexican invaders." According to Roys (1943:59, 1957:3), these Mexican invaders appeared in the Yucatan during the tenth century and were responsible for the political unification of Maya provinces or *cuchcabals* at two points in time—the first centered on Chichen Itza and the second centered on Mayapan. His reconstructions imply that, with the break-up of the Classic Maya world, new forms of political and religious organization were introduced to the northern Maya Lowlands.

To a large extent, the ethnohistorically based interpretation about Mexican presence in the Maya area has led to a conundrum regarding our understanding of the transition between the end of the Late Classic and the onset of the Early Postclassic in the northern Maya Lowlands. Much of the research focus has been targeted on Chichen Itza regarding its relationship to central Mexico (particularly with the site of Tula, Hidalgo) and to its temporal placement within the archaeological record (see Cobos 2006; Wren et al. 2018), with arguments over both issues. Chichen Itza was initially positioned as the only known large city spanning the Early and Middle Postclassic periods in the northern lowlands (Tozzer 1957), a placement that was openly questioned by other researchers (Pollock 1965:393). However,
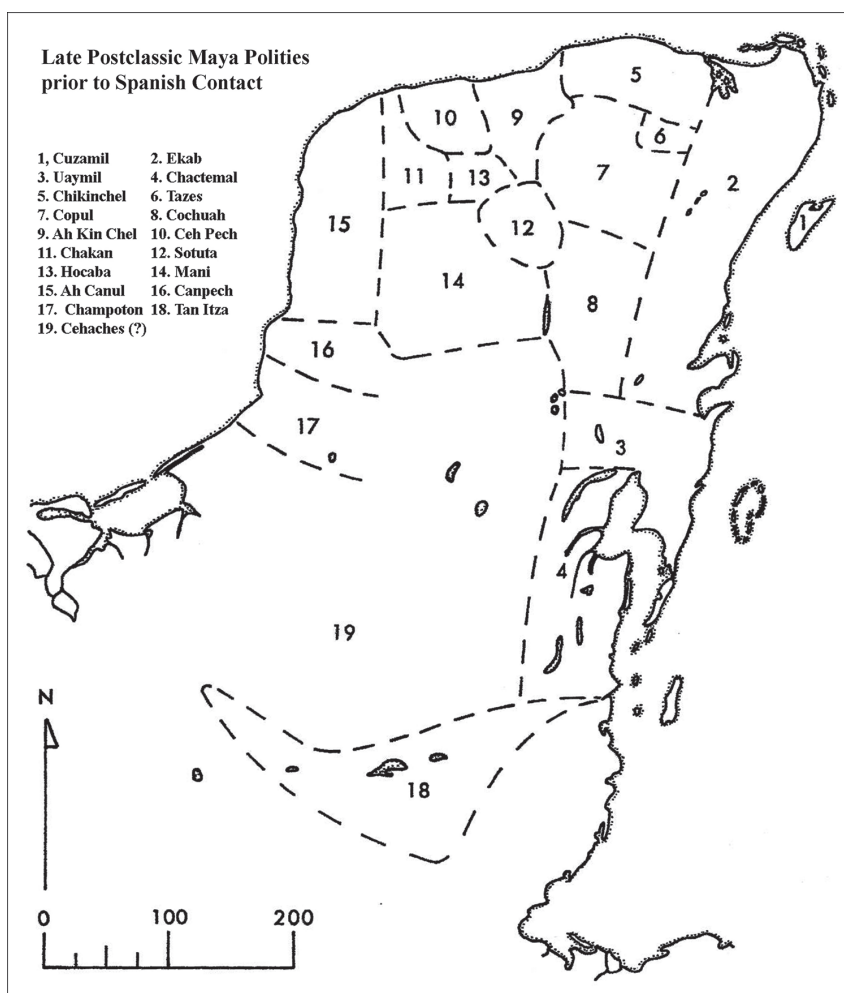
Figure 16.1. Maya Postclassic polities derived from ethnohistoric sources (modified after Roys 1957).

the precise dating of Chichen Itza was difficult to establish because of the loss of archaeological context for the materials excavated by the Carnegie Institution of Washington (the paper tags containing the context information for most artifacts were destroyed before any analyses could be done [see Brainerd 1958]). Because Chichen Itza was architecturally and ceramically different than other sites in the northern Maya Lowlands, its exact temporal dating remained problematic. However, excavations in northern Belize at the site of Nohmul in 1979 and 1980 revealed Chichen-related architecture (a gallery patio residence and circular building) and Chichen-related ceramics

in clear Terminal Classic context, strongly suggesting an earlier placement (D. Chase and A. Chase 1982; D. Chase et al. 2008). Eventually, the transcription of hieroglyphic texts from the various monuments at Chichen Itza fostered a dating of the entire site as being Terminal Classic (Grube 2003; Grube and Krochok 2007; Schele and Freidel 1990:356–358). More recently, however, there has been an attempt again to place the bulk of Chichen Itza's development within the Early Postclassic period (Volta and Braswell 2014; Volta et al. 2018), something effectively argued against by Ringle (2017). But, as Cynthia Kristan-Graham and Linnea Wren (2018:9) have noted, "Chichen Itza's chronological issues are far from settled." Additionally, there are different perspectives on the direction of impact between the Maya Lowlands and central Mexico.

Alfred M. Tozzer (1941) wrote the seminal treatment of Maya ethnohistory, footnoting and cross-referencing Diego de Landa's written account of Maya lifeways shortly after the Spanish conquest of the Yucatan Peninsula. It is clear that Tozzer adopted the ethnohistoric claims for Mexican origins for the Maya Postclassic elite because his next major work was a treatment of the iconography and archaeology of Chichen Itza as a verification of the amalgamation of Maya and "Toltec" peoples in the Postclassic period (Tozzer 1957). Tozzer's (1941, 1957) two studies subsequently formed the backbone for work at the Late Postclassic city of Mayapan by researchers of the Carnegie Institution of Washington (Pollock et al. 1962), who used the ethnohistoric, iconographic, and stylistically derived dating as a framework to interpret the archaeology.

Regardless of dating, the ethnohistoric documents make it clear that there was still an almost divine aspect to Maya nobles at the time of contact. The Maya nobles, or *almehen,* met with the Spanish and were accorded very differential treatment. In situations of communication, the Spaniard in charge of the conquest of the Yucatan had to speak to a lesser Maya lord or "cacique" through the shielding of a cloth, indicating a perception on the part of the Maya of severe status differences. As Charles Erasmus (1968:181–182) has pointed out: "The cacique of Loche received Montejo in a reclining position and would speak to him only through a cotton cloth suspended between them like a curtain" (see also Roys 1943:63). The ethnohistory also reports that Maya subject to the cacique also bowed to him, moved so as not to block his passage, and spread "their mantles in front of him" during visits; they also "protected his head from the sun with great fans of bright feathers" (Roys 1943:63). When the *halach uinic* ("real man") of the Tutul Xiu visited Montejo in Mérida in 1542 CE, he was carried in a litter and accompanied by

"an imposing retinue" (Roys 1943:61). Thus, while these lords may not have been divine, they were still treated with the highest respect.

The ethnohistoric documents also provide information on the political organizations that existed within the Yucatan Peninsula at the time of contact (Figure 16.1; see Marcus 1993:117–121 for a more detailed discussion). The documents imply that all of Yucatan had been under the control of Mayapan until its destruction at some point before the Spanish conquest. With the fall of Mayapan, somewhat varied forms of governance came to be used by the nonunified "provinces" that occupied the Late Postclassic landscape. The most centralized form of governance was one that had a *halach uinic* in charge. There were *halach uinics* in the provinces of "Mani, Sotuta, Ceh Pech, Hocoba, Cochuah, Champoton, and Cozumel" as well as "probably Ah Kin Chel, Tazes, and Tayasal" (Roys 1943:59). The role of this individual did not appear to have a religious aspect; "the *halach uinic* seems to have been primarily a war chief, like the head of the Mexican confederacy" (Roys 1943:59). The *halach uinic* could appoint *b'atab's* to rule over other communities within a given province, or the communities (*ah cuchcab*) themselves could appoint a *b'atab'* to answer to the *halach uinic;* thus, governance was both top-down and bottom-up. Towns in other provinces formed confederacies, as was the case in the provinces of Ah Canul and "probably in Chakan" (Roys 1943:62). Finally, at least one province, Copul, does not seem to have been unified, instead being noted as composed of an independent group of towns (Roys 1943:62).

The secular political rule was separated from the role of religion in Postclassic society. Tozzer (1941:27) notes that there was a high priest named Ah Kin Mai or Ahau Can Mai. This individual occupied an office and could be succeeded by his son or nearest relative. The political function of the religious leader was to give advice to the lords and to supply priests to the various towns; they were also likely allied with physicians and with sorcerers. They were responsible for learning and "books" or codices. They had specific costuming that included a feather jacket, long feather and cotton "tails," a pointed cap or miter (possibly related to Classic period headgear [see A. Chase and D. Chase 2001:Figures 4.12 and 4.13]), and an "*aspergillum,* made of a short stick finely worked" (Tozzer 1941:105). Both the miter and the aspergillum appear to have antecedents in the Late to Terminal Classic periods; similar headgear appears in iconographic scenes both on stucco and pottery at Caracol (see A. Chase and D. Chase 2001:Figs 4.12 and 4.13) and an "aspergillum" is probably shown (as a symbol of authority) on Caracol Altars 12 and 13 (A. Chase 1985a:Figures 2a,2b), on Machaquila Stela 5 (Figure
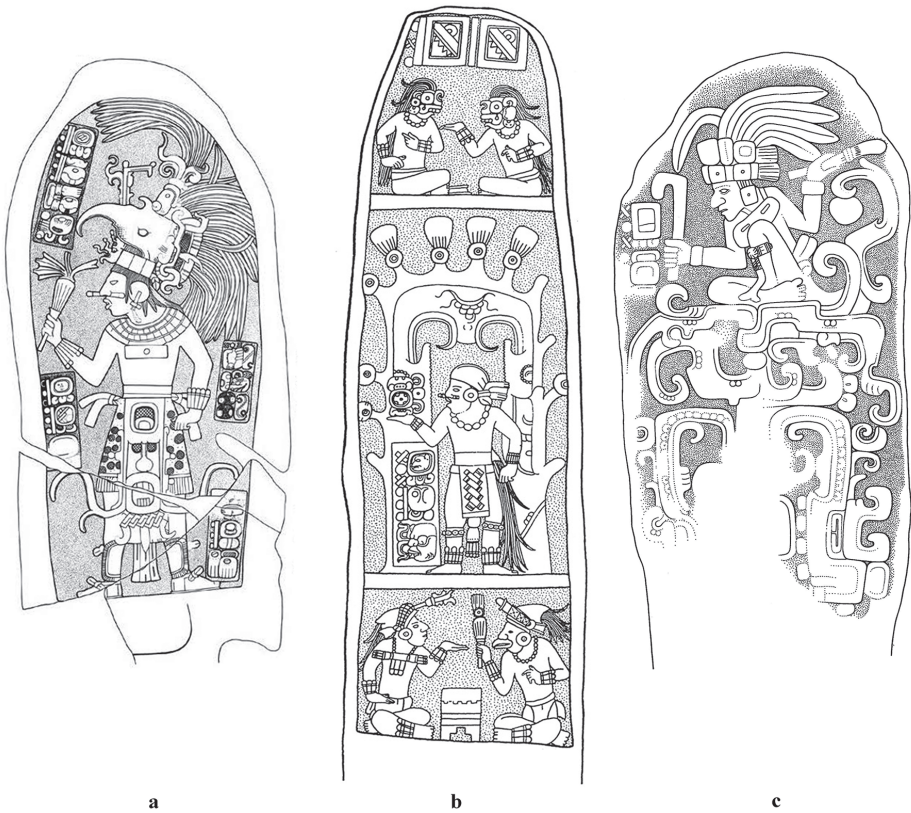
Figure 16.2. Aspergillums as symbols of authority in the Terminal Classic southern lowlands: (*a*) Machaquila Stela 8, dating to 10.0.5.0.0 / 835 CE (after Graham 1967); (*b*) Ceibal Stela 3, aspergillum in hand of wind god in lower register (after Graham 1996); (*c*) Ceibal Stela 18, aspergillum in left hand (after Graham 1996).

16.2a; see A. Chase 1985a:Figure 3 for full transition of this ruler), and on Ceibal Stelae 3 and 18 (Figures 16.2b and 16.2c; see also Graham 1990). However, in these Late and Terminal Classic scenes, both the potential miters and the staffs are associated with images of divine dynastic rulers rather than with specialized sacred leaders, indicating that the full shift in governance had not yet taken place.

Among the best studied part of the contact period Maya Lowlands are the peoples that occupied the central Peten of Guatemala, where the various entradas have provided an excellent outline for governance and religion (Avendaño y Loyola 1987 [1696]; Jones 1998). These documents separate the secular (Kan Ek' Ajaw) and sacred (Kan Ek' AjK'in) offices. The secular leader had a ruling council of 22 members that "included the high priest, eight

senior-junior district/provincial governors (*b'atab'*) plus thirteen individuals called "*ach-kat,*" who were "*k'atun* priests" (Rice and Rice 2018:30–31). Prudence Rice and Don Rice (2018:25) see "political continuities or structural equivalencies" in the central Peten data between the Classic and Postclassic periods, but it is also evident here that there has been a significant break between any combined secular and sacred divine king.

Iconography

Postclassic iconography, in contrast to the earlier Classic period, does not generally illustrate rulers carrying out ritual ceremonies. Deities are shown on some of the carved stone monuments that span the Terminal Classic and Postclassic periods (e.g., A. Chase 1985b:Figure 9; Proskouriakoff 1962:Figure 12; Ruppert and Dennison 1943:Figure 55b), and other monuments show multiple individuals engaged in negotiation or ceremony (see A. Chase and D. Chase, Chapter 13, this volume). Late stelae from Mayapan, Yucatan show the principle individuals holding aspergillum, similar to the Terminal Classic monuments in the southern lowlands (Figure 16.3). It would appear the roles of priest and secular ruler separated during this transition and that the investiture of secular rulers, while quite important and ritually complicated, was fairly standardized throughout Mesoamerica and did not place these individuals in a divine status. Ringle (2004) has specifically argued that many of the buildings at Chichen Itza that contained carved iconographic scenes were used for investiture ceremonies that were common throughout the rest of Mesoamerica. Claude-François Baudez and Nicolas Latsanopoulos (2010:3) note the lack of specific portraiture relating to a ruler at Chichen Itza and suggest that there was rule by "a paramount king" and by "a high priest, probably the second-ranking figure in the state," who "shared power" with a "political and military elite." However, Rafael Cobos (Chapter 15, this volume) uses the iconography and archaeology to parse the existence of a series of late rulers at Chichen Itza, while noting changes in the nature of governance at the site.

By all indications, during the transition between the Classic and Postclassic periods, secular rule was separated from religious rule, something that continued until Spanish contact. While respect and status were accorded to the Maya rulers of the Postclassic period, with the separation of secular and sacred rule, they lost the divine aspects afforded to rulers during the Classic period. Individuals were integrated into broader Mesoamerican systems through contact and trade (e.g., Masson and Peraza 2010; Smith and Berdan
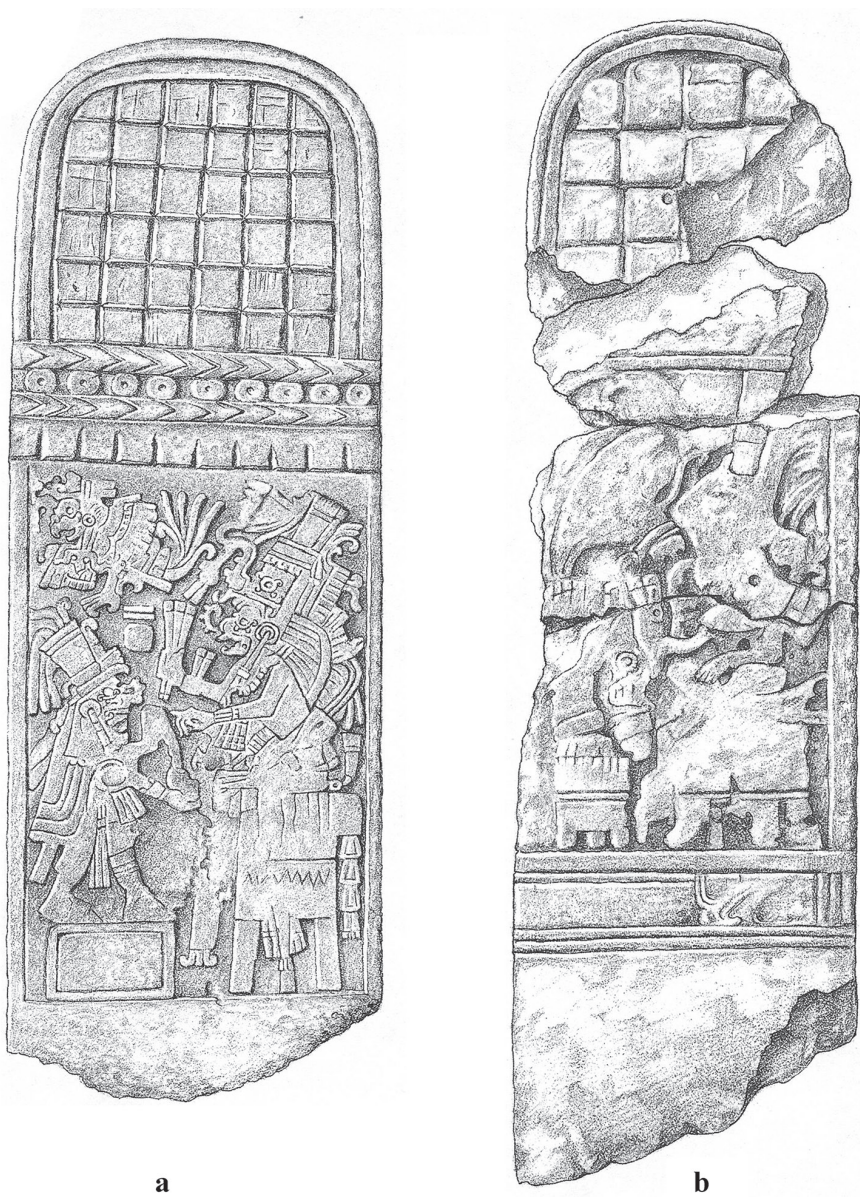
Figure 16.3. Aspergillums as symbols of authority in the northern lowlands at Mayapan: (*a*) Hacienda Xcanchakan Stela 1 (after Proskouriakoff 1962:Figure 12a); (*b*) Mayapan Stela 9 (after Proskouriakoff 1962:Figure 12d).

2003). At the same time, central Mexican deities like Ehecatl, Tezcatlipoca, Tlalchitonatiuh, and Xipe Totec were introduced into the Maya area and can be seen in art (Thompson 1942, 1943) and in ceramics (Thompson 1957). Additionally, central Mexican iconography is displayed on a stucco altar from the public architecture excavated next to Cenote Itzmal Ch'en Group at Mayapan (Chowning 1956). Yet there is clear continuity in architectural, iconographic, and material culture at Mayapan from earlier Yucatec traditions (e.g., Milbrath and Peraza 2009).

That the adoption of central Mexican deities and iconography was not done in a wholesale way can be seen in the known Maya codices. As Elizabeth Hill Boone (2003:217) has noted, Maya "almanacs are structured differently than the Mexican ones, and they feature distinct texts, in the form of glyph blocks, that pair with images." Yet, even though "correspondences are few," "they show that the Maya were attuned to Mexican divinatory and religious traditions, and referenced or borrowed from them on occasion" (Boone 2003:217). Boone (2003:217) points out that Mexican gods are shown within the Dresden Codex (Thompson 1971:220, 1972:68–69) and that they are accompanied by hieroglyphic texts that "give phonetic soundings for Nauhatl deity names (Riese 1982; Taube and Bade 1991; Whittaker 1986:56)." The "Madrid Codex has two Mexican-style almanacs of the kind found in the Borgia Group codices" that "must be derived from a central Mexican source" (Boone 2003:219–220). Thus, the iconography and hieroglyphs in these codices provide evidence for a shared belief system, in spite of geographic distances, but one that was still distinctly Maya. However, this integration was certainly dictated by Maya traditions as can be seen in the continuity of mostly Maya iconography in their codices (Boone 2003). Thus, while it is clear that there was significant change in the cosmological view that was used by the Maya during the Postclassic period, it was still continuous with Maya past practices.

Archaeology

Archaeologically, it is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate Postclassic rulers. There are, however, several markers that could be used to identify them. One would be the location and nature of residence. Another would be the presence of elaborate burials. Yet another would be the presence of prestigious artifactual materials. While there is evidence for elite individuals and residences during the Postclassic period, these are not localized in centrally
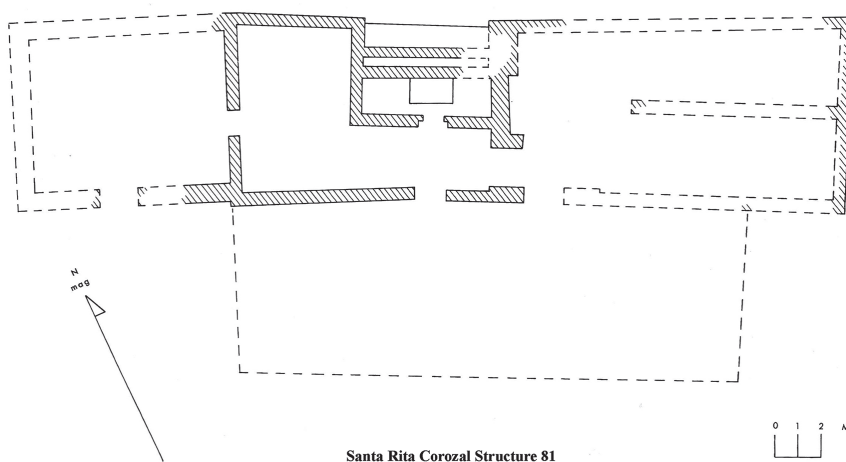
Santa Rita Corozal Structure 81

Figure 16.4. Santa Rita Corozal Structure 81, an example of a Postclassic *principal* house, showing both the plan of the building and a photograph of the interior shrine room (after D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:Figure 7).

located temples and palaces, as was the case for Classic period dynastic rulers (see D. Chase 1992).

While multiroom structures that could be termed as "palaces" exist at the Postclassic capitals of Mayapan (Pollock et al. 1962) and Santa Rita Corozal (Figure 16.4; see also D. Chase and A. Chase 1988), they are multiple in number and distributed throughout the city. There does not appear to be one single royal palace. Archaeology instead appears to correlate with ethnohistoric descriptions of several high-ranking lords or "*principales*" or *ah cuchcabs* being associated with specific wards within a town (D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:69; Roys 1957:7–8). Shrines were located either within palace structures or in separately constructed buildings within high-status residential groups.

Importantly, it would appear that most Postclassic multiroom buildings had multiple functions (A. Chase and D. Chase 2013a; D. Chase 1986)—potentially more than was the case for their Classic period counterparts.

Burials are similarly problematic. The ethnohistoric documents for the Yucatan indicate that the highest-status individuals were cremated when they died and then had their ashes placed within idols (Tozzer 1941:36, 62). Excavations at Mayapan have produced a large number of burials that occur in both residential and ritual locations; there are skull burials and mass burials associated with ritual (e.g., Masson and Peraza 2007), but cremations are not well documented in the archaeological record. No burial at Mayapan has been identified as a high-status ruler. At Santa Rita Corozal a very high-status individual was excavated within Structure 216 (D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:54–56). Although not visible before excavation, the Structure 216 interment was placed directly beneath the remains of a low shrine located within a multiroomed line-of-stone building within the west-central part of the city. In standard practice for Santa Rita Corozal, the two individuals in this burial had been wrapped in cloth coverings that had been held together by copper clasps. They were interred in a seated position next to each other. The southern individual was sickly at death, and his body had been perforated by a dozen stingray spines and long copper needle. The northern individual was the primary interment, as indicated by a spondylus and jadeite necklace, by a spondylus platelet bracelet, and by gold and turquoise earrings set on an obsidian backing with decorative gold bells (Figure 16.5). A large square block of red hematite was set in front of them to the east. This is the highest-status individual uncovered at Santa Rita Corozal; whether he was a ruler cannot be ascertained.

At least for Santa Rita Corozal, there is discontinuity in burial practice between the Classic period and the Postclassic period. Classic period Santa Rita Corozal follows the general burial dictums that are known for the rest of the Maya area in that individuals are placed within graves, crypts, or tombs usually on a north–south axis. An Early Classic ruler's tomb has also been excavated at the site that shows strong relationships to the traditions found within the southern Maya Lowlands (A. Chase 1992; D. Chase and A. Chase 2005). Postclassic burials are found in a variety of poses (both flexed and extended), but the highest-status individuals are usually found seated upright and are often situated beneath small shrines that mark their locations (D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:16, 44). This burial position is not found in the Classic period at the site and represents a break with the earlier traditions;
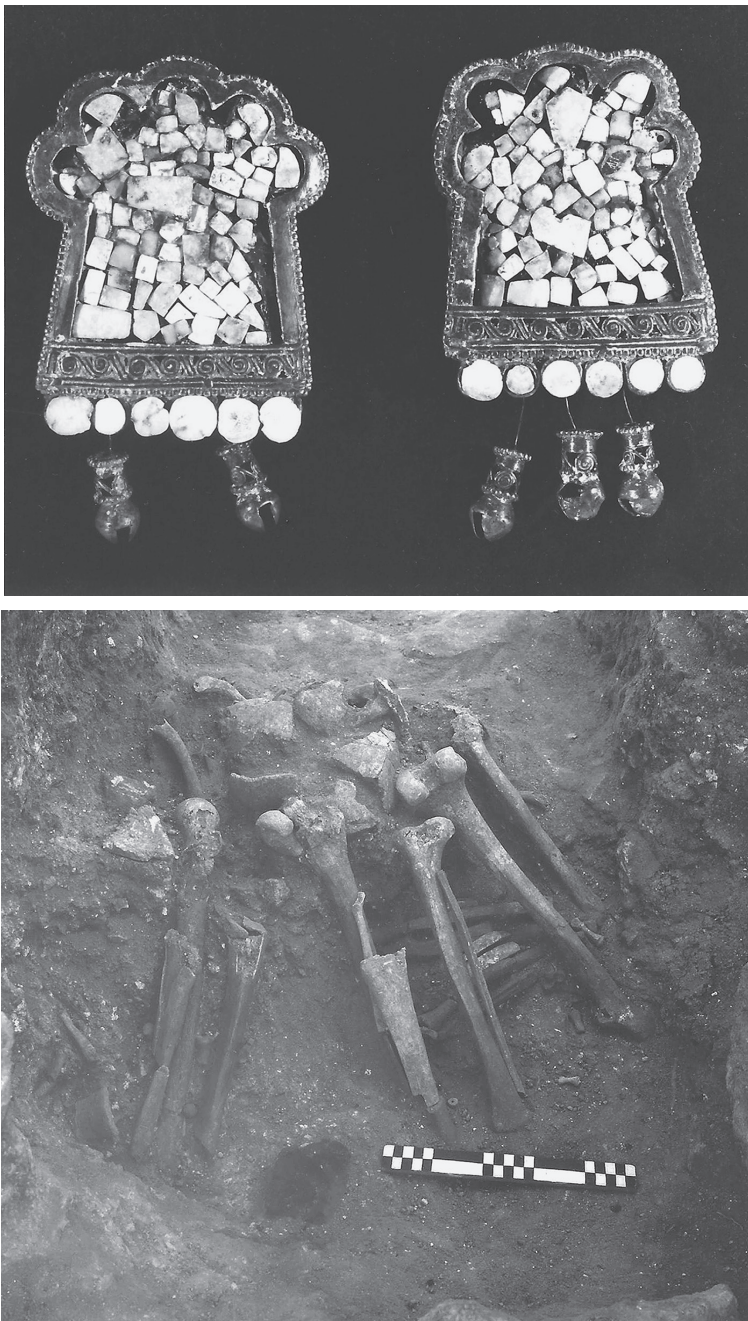
Figure 16.5. Gold and turquoise earrings from Santa Rita Corozal Structure 216 and a photograph of the burial with which they are associated (after D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:Figures 29 and 30; main body of earring is ca. 5 cm in height).

indeed, seated burials are quite rare during the Classic period (e.g., Welsh 1988).

However, while there is seemingly discontinuity in elite burial practice, there is evidence for cosmological continuity found in many of the Postclassic caches from Santa Rita Corozal. These caches were distributed throughout the city of Santa Rita Corozal, usually in higher-status residences (D. Chase 1992:Figure 8.2). They come in multiple forms, and many of the Santa Rita caches portray deities that are both known and unknown from Classic period iconography. Some of the cache containers may be related to diving figures (Figure 16.6); they look most like *yahui* (supernatural beings) known from Oaxaca that come down to received offerings (see Nuttall 1902:69), but diving figures are also known from Lowland Maya art dating to the Classic (see upper mask on Tikal Structure 5D33–2nd; Miller 1986:Figure 18) and Postclassic periods (see diving figures in Tulum Structures 5, 16, and 25; e.g., Miller 1982:Figure 81). Other cache containers represent earth monsters with snakes emanating from the corners of their mouths, iconography similarly found in the Classic period (see middle stucco masks associated with Tikal Structure 5D33–2nd; Miller 1986:Figure 16) as well as in Postclassic art (e.g. D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:Figure 15b). Also present are representations of God N, generally thought to symbolize rebirth (Miller 1982:Plate 28, lower register; Schele and Miller 1986:Figure 47).

Still others are figures that were likely assembled in caches to illustrate a specific ceremony and its offerings. The figure caches of Santa Rita Corozal are perhaps the most interesting in this regard in that they provide evidence for both *uayeb* (5 days at the end of the ancient Maya year) ceremonies (D. Chase 1985a, 1985b) and for creation mythology (D. Chase and A. Chase 1988, 2008a). There is also a focus on Maya cosmology. One of the figure caches from Santa Rita Corozal Structure 213 contains an explicit view of Maya creation mythology. The four *b'acab's* or *pauahtuns* (aged earth deities who held up the sky) are placed at the corners of the world, represented by a lidded urn (D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:Figure 24a); they are all in the act of bloodletting through their penises while on the back of giant sea turtles (Figure 16.7). Their predicament is an illustration of how they survived the current world destruction (the Maya believed that the world had been destroyed three times and that they lived in the fourth version of the world; Schele and Freidel 1990:430) and helped to usher in a new day. A dozen deer, dogs, and *pisotes* (four of each) were situated south of the urn around the southern *pauahtun*. Within the urn an individual wearing a miter with long cloth tails was seated on a portable stool (Figure 16.8)—the Postclassic

Figure 16.6. Painted cache vessel from Santa Rita Corozal Structure 81 (after D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:Figure 8c; figure is 14.5 cm in length).
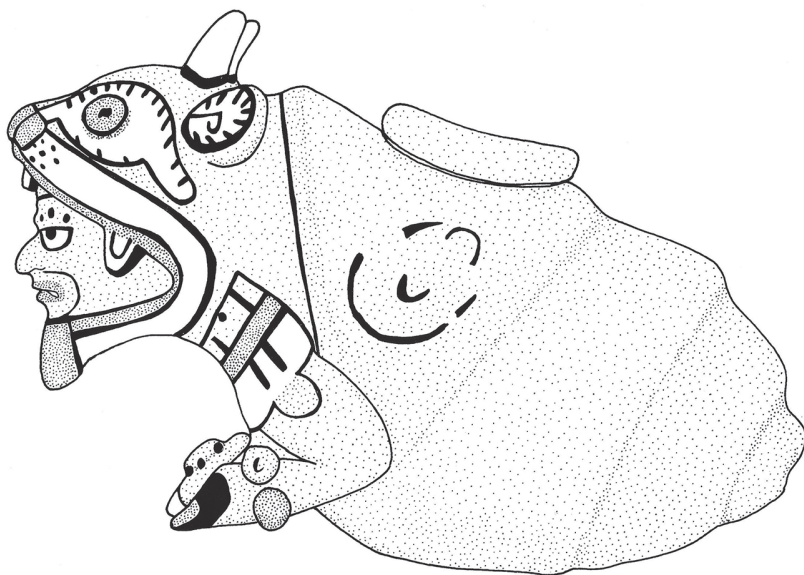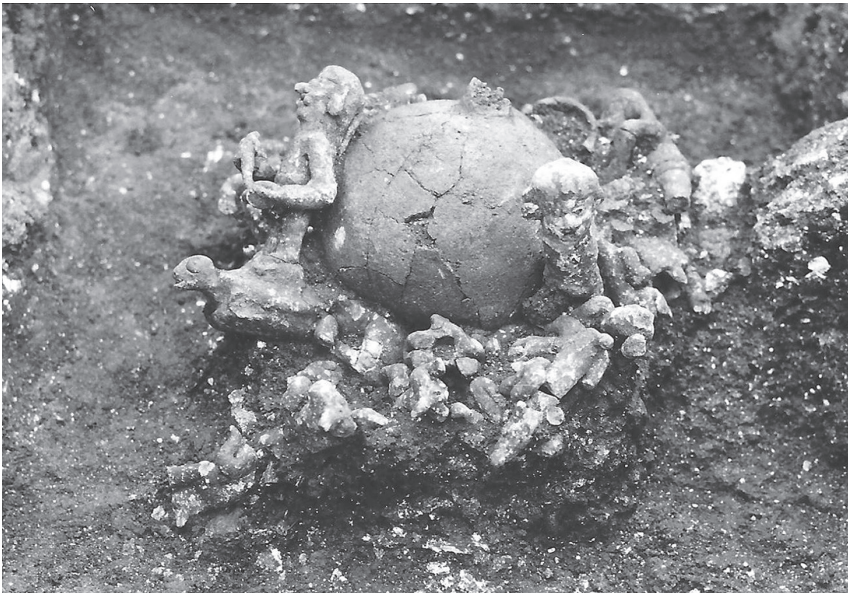
Figure 16.7. Figurine cache representing the creation of the Maya world from Santa Rita Corozal Structure 213, showing two (of four) *bacab* blood-letters and the cache in situ in the fill of the building (see also D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:Figures 24 and 25; *bacabs* are ca. 16 cm high).

Figure 16.8. Photograph of central figure from the creation cache in Santa Rita Corozal Structure 213; the individual is seated on a stool, wears a miter, and blows a horn (see also D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:Figure 25b; figure is 9.5 cm high).

equivalent of a throne and also seen associated with deities on Mayapan stelae (Figure 16.3a)—blowing through a conch shell to usher in the new world (D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:Figure 25b); beneath the stool was a small triangular piece of jadeite surrounded by four white shells, representing the Maya "quincunx"; eight other figurines (four male monkeys and four other "receptive" animals) surrounded the figure within the urn, representing the potential for fertility and procreation.

It is perhaps significant that some of the male human figurines that are known from the Santa Rita caches wear miters. Besides the central figure in the Structure 213 creation scene, miters are found on two of the four seated warrior figures (Figure 16.9) from another figurine cache in Santa Rita Corozal Structure 183 (D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:58–59); the miters are found on the two warriors that are deities while the other two warriors have human faces and flattish helmets. If the ethnohistoric descriptions of priests are applicable, this would indicate that warrior deity figures (D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:Figure 33g) were viewed as religious figures and that the human bloodletters for the Postclassic period were likely Maya priests. In the Classic period the Maya king assumed this role of letting blood for world continuity; in the Postclassic period, this function appears to have been associated
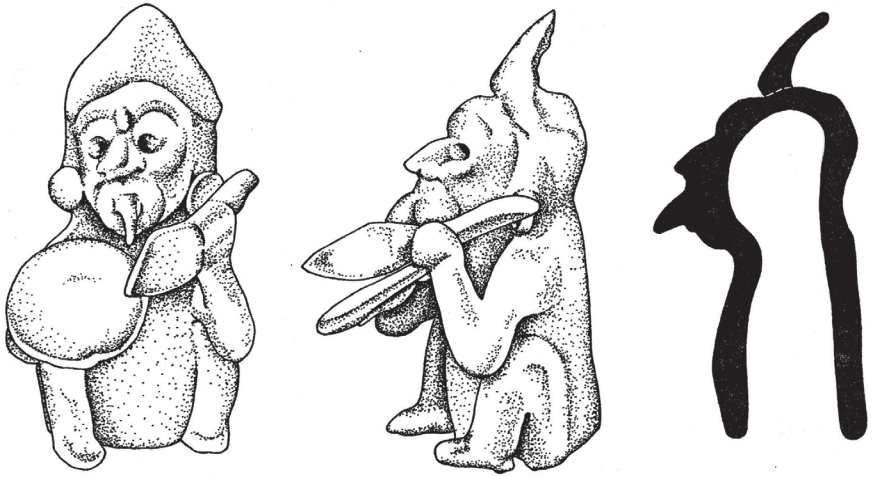
Figure 16.9. Drawing of a seated warrior figure with deity markings, wearing a miter, from Santa Rita Corozal Structure 183 (after D. Chase and A. Chase 1988:Figure 33g; figure is 9.1 cm in height).

with the deities and priests. Thomas Gann (1918:59–63) found an elaborate figurine cache in Santa Rita Structure 24. Among the 49 modeled images in the urn were three seated individuals with human faces who were wearing miters and were seated on stools while carrying out bloodletting (a single ceramic penis in the urn probably completed this set of four); there were also four upright individuals in this cache with helmet-like headgear who likely represented the *pauahtuns,* but they were not bloodletting, in contrast to the cache from Santa Rita Corozal Structure 213; none of the warriors in the Structure 24 cache wore miters. Rice and Rice (2018:30–31) have identified "a kind of soldier-priest" with oversight of prophecies having to do with warfare; they were called *ach-kat* in the ethnohistoric record of Peten, Guatemala; in Yucatec, *ach* or *aat* is "penis," so the figurine associations between warriors, priests, and bloodletting found at Santa Rita Corozal are appropriate.

What is significant in this discussion is the fact that the act of sacrificial bloodletting (D. Chase 1991), so central to the role of Classic period divine kings, appears to have been appropriated by deities and priests rather than rulers in the Postclassic period, at least in the iconography of Santa Rita Corozal. In our estimation, this fact alone indicates the breakdown of divine kingship after the Maya collapse. However, as important as changes in bloodletting customs are continuities in practice related to the materialization of

time and in evidences of collaborative or collective action (D. Chase and A. Chase 2021). While not necessarily consistent across the entire Classic period Maya Lowlands, certain Classic period sites showed use of ritual offerings that were linked to temporal cycles. In Late Classic period Caracol, Belize, caches were deposited in concert with temporal cycles (*katuns;* A. Chase and D. Chase 2013b). Significantly, like their Postclassic period counterparts, these caches were located in residential groups throughout the site and were not only associated with epicentral temples or high-status households (D. Chase and A. Chase 2001), indicating that rituals were household-based and not tied to any epicentral ruler.

Conclusion

While it is convenient to assume that foreign contact helped lead to the change in governance and the rupture of Classic period divine kingship in the Maya Lowlands, it is possible to take a slightly different stance. Rather than assuming that divine kingship and Classic period Maya culture was the standard norm, it may be useful to think of it as an accentuated anomaly— a failed experiment within Maya history and within Mesoamerica. In this case, foreign elements were blended with underlying Maya culture and belief systems to create the collective governance models of the Postclassic and Historic periods.

Although inferred to exist in the Late Preclassic period with proponents pointing to the San Bartolo murals for potential confirmation (Freidel 2016:274; Taube et al. 2010), divine kingship has been clearly documented for only one portion of Maya history—the Classic period (250–900 CE). And for this time, there have been suggestions that numerous divine kings existed (e.g., Schele and Freidel 1990), sometimes located in polities with capitals within relatively close proximity to each other—some 76 km in the case of Caracol and Tikal. Classic period warfare appears to have functioned as a mechanism for removing divine kings from their previously esteemed positions (A. Chase and D. Chase 2021). Small-scale provincial polities with divine rulers could occupy relatively small kingdoms, perhaps as small as 315–865 square kilometers during the Classic period (e.g., a polity radius of no more than 10 to 15 km, such as Minanha, Belize; Schwake and Iannone 2016). However, this system of microcosms of divine kings appears to have disintegrated at the end of the Classic period when faced with greater war-fare, trade, and globalization in the Mesoamerican world. Thus, the focus on a singular central figure representing the divine king on carved monuments

was replaced by portraits of multiple individuals of similar stature at sites like Caracol during the Terminal Classic period, suggesting the end of divine kingship before the proposed Mexican incursions of the Postclassic period.

The population levels for the Late Classic period Maya Lowlands (e.g., Culbert and Rice 1990) are also high enough to indicate that successful governance would have had to have relied upon bureaucracies to manage day-to-day functions; these bureaucrats would also have likely threatened divine kingship. That the Classic period Maya could exist without divine kings within their capital cities is also clear in the archaeological data. Caracol existed successfully and in fact flourished while its divine kings were occupying the conquered city of Tikal; even when Caracol lacked evidence for divine kingship in the eighth century, its population flourished (D. Chase and A. Chase 2017). While the demise of divine kingship occurred at some places in the Maya Lowlands during the Terminal Classic period, changes to kingship continued to evolve into the Postclassic period. This was further fueled by greater contacts with others outside the Maya area, specifically in central Mexico.

In sum, we would argue that divine kingship reached the end of its productive lifespan during the end of the Classic period. While nearby sites could each claim divine status, the increasing population of the Late Classic period led to more conflict, which in turn led to the removal of various rulers from divine status. As greater integration and communication occurred throughout Mesoamerica and as Maya cities grew in size, becoming more urban and complex, pressure was also placed upon governance systems. At this same time population movement among sites was significant (e.g., Price et al. 2010; Wright 2012), also potentially undermining the divinity of any one ruler. By the Terminal Classic period divine kingship was no longer tenable. The iconography related to the transition to the Maya Postclassic period illustrates the adoption of other forms of governance and religion. Postclassic political and religious organization merged aspects of underlying and older Maya principles of governance with fundamental elements from broader Mesoamerica. Divine kings, the hallmark of a polarized series of feudal-like Maya states that lasted over 500 years, ultimately did not adapt with the times and failed.