

Contents

LIST OF FIGURES	xi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xv
INTRODUCTION	3
<i>Paradigms in the Study of Maya Hieroglyphs, Past and Present</i>	5
<i>Toward a New Paradigm</i>	9
<i>Contrast and Complementarity in Language</i>	10
<i>Contrast and Complementarity in Mythology</i>	14
<i>Contrast and Complementarity between Text and Image</i>	18
<i>The Composition of a Classic-Period Monument</i>	19
<i>The Organization of This Book</i>	23
CHAPTER I	
The Creator Grandparents and the Place of Duality	27
<i>The Nomenclature and Manifestations of Maya Deities</i>	28
<i>The Multiple Manifestations of Deities and Humans</i>	29
<i>The Chahk Deities</i>	30
<i>The Triad of Thunderbolt Gods</i>	30
<i>The Thunderbolt Deity GI</i>	32
<i>The Thunderbolt Deity GIII</i>	34
<i>The Thunderbolt Deity GII</i>	35
<i>K'awiil</i>	37
<i>The Meteor Deity Tlaloc</i>	37

<i>Avian Avatars</i>	38
<i>The Creator Grandparents and Complementary Opposition</i>	38
<i>The Waters of the Place of Duality</i>	40
<i>The Waterlily Bird-Serpent and the Waters of the Place of Duality</i>	45
<i>Water Shrines</i>	48
<i>The Sky</i>	50
<i>The Quadrilateral World of the Creator Deities</i>	51
<i>House Metaphors</i>	53
<i>The Hearthstones</i>	54
<i>Heat</i>	55
<i>The Place of Duality in the Sky</i>	56
<i>The Sun and the Place of Duality</i>	59
<i>The Sun God</i>	59
<i>The K'inich and K'inich Ajaw Titles</i>	61
<i>The Number Four God</i>	62
<i>Flower Motifs and the Place of Duality</i>	63
<i>Sky and Earth Gods as a Class of Deities</i>	66
<i>Summary</i>	67

CHAPTER 2

<i>The Family of the Creator Grandparents and Complementary Opposition</i>	68
<i>The Second Generation of Creator Deities</i>	68
<i>The Third Generation of Creator Deities</i>	73
<i>The Wisdom and Knowledge of the Creator Deities</i>	75
<i>The Complementary Opposition of the Deities</i>	77
<i>The Moon and Complementary Opposition</i>	82
<i>Impersonations of One Moon and Lady Moon</i>	86
<i>Summary</i>	87

CHAPTER 3

<i>The Calendar and the Narrative Time Frame</i>	89
<i>The Divination and Solar Calendars</i>	90
<i>The Long Count</i>	92
<i>The Glyph G Series</i>	94

<i>The Lunar Series</i>	94
<i>Patron Gods of the K'atun Period</i>	95
<i>The Mythological Period Ending Event of 4 Ajaꜜw 8 Kumk'u</i>	98
<i>Periods of 900 Days</i>	99
<i>The Narrative Time Frame</i>	100
<i>Variation</i>	101
<i>Summary</i>	107
CHAPTER 4	
The Literary Nature of Mayan Texts, Ancient and Modern	109
<i>Categories of Speech</i>	111
<i>Poetry in a Modern Maya Text</i>	114
<i>Narrative Structure of Modern Texts</i>	115
<i>The Sarcophagus Lid Text of the Palenque Temple of the Inscriptions</i>	118
<i>The Palenque Palace Tablet of House A-D</i>	125
<i>Distance Number Treatment</i>	133
<i>Topical Divisions of the Text</i>	134
<i>Distance Number Introductory Glyphs</i>	135
<i>Elaboration and Relative Weight</i>	137
<i>Summary</i>	138
CHAPTER 5	
Text and Image	142
<i>Semantic Markers in Maya Art</i>	142
<i>Text and Image Interchange in Headdress Motifs</i>	146
<i>Text and Image Interchange in Place Names</i>	148
<i>Text and Image Placement: Framing and Bracketing</i>	151
<i>Visual Focus</i>	159
<i>Verbal Couplets</i>	161
<i>Visual Couplets</i>	163
<i>The Poetic Structure of Co-Essences Vessels</i>	166
<i>Other Forms of Visual Couplets</i>	169
<i>Chiasmus Structure</i>	169

<i>Text and Image Couplets</i>	171
<i>Sequential Couplets on the Palenque Temple XIX Platform</i>	176
<i>The Couplet Structure of the Palenque Temple XXI Bench</i>	178
<i>Reversed Texts as Chiasmus Structure</i>	183
<i>Summary</i>	190
CHAPTER 6	
The Palenque Tablet of the 96 Glyphs	193
<i>The Historical Background of the Protagonist</i>	193
<i>The Setting of the Monument</i>	194
<i>The Tablet of the 96 Glyphs Narrative</i>	195
<i>The Protagonist</i>	200
<i>Literary Devices: Focus</i>	200
<i>Literary Devices: Fronting and Promotion</i>	201
<i>Visual Variations</i>	202
<i>Summary</i>	203
CHAPTER 7	
The Narrative of the Palenque Temple of the Inscriptions Sarcophagus	206
<i>The Setting</i>	206
<i>The Tomb</i>	208
<i>The Sarcophagus Lid Scene</i>	209
<i>The Sarcophagus Lid Text</i>	213
<i>Two Alternative Analyses</i>	215
<i>The Sarcophagus Box</i>	216
<i>The Secondary Lords of the Sarcophagus Lid</i>	220
<i>The Death and Afterlife of K'inich Janaab Pakal I</i>	221
<i>Summary</i>	225
CHAPTER 8	
The Palenque Cross Group Narrative	228
<i>The Setting</i>	228
<i>Peripheral Cross Group Texts</i>	230
<i>The Alfardas</i>	232
<i>The Sanctuary Jamb</i>	235

<i>The Sanctuary Piers</i>	236
<i>The Sanctuary Tablets</i>	238
<i>The Tablet of the Cross</i>	238
<i>The Main Text of the Tablet of the Cross</i>	242
<i>The Main Texts of the Temples of the Sun and Foliated Cross</i>	244
<i>The Reading Order of the Three Cross Group Tablets</i>	247
<i>The Place Names in the Cross Group Narrative</i>	249
<i>The Location of the Tablet of the Cross Scene</i>	250
<i>The Location of the Tablet of the Sun Scene</i>	255
<i>The Location of the Tablet of the Foliated Cross Scene</i>	259
<i>GII and the Jester God</i>	263
<i>Summary</i>	264
CHAPTER 9	
Conclusions	269
REFERENCES	275
INDEX	301

Introduction

This book treats domains of Classic Maya language, art, and culture that at first glance might seem to be unrelated. One is narrative structure in text, dealing with the way stories (including history) are presented to the reader and the manipulations of language that constitute the text genres and rhetorical devices that are recorded on Classic period monuments. This domain is partly linguistic and partly hieroglyphic, entailing how language is used to achieve the purposes of the writers (*pragmatics*) as well as the written forms the texts may take (*epigraphy*). The second domain involves the structure of art forms and conventions, and how these principles relate to the narrative structure of the text. The third domain is cognitive and mythological, the belief systems that form the context in which stories were written and illustrated, including the ways in which history is portrayed in monumental text and image. This domain is partly iconographic and partly ethnographic, and entails the ways in which personal and social relations were conceived as well as the ways in which such relationships were represented in Classic Maya art.

Our approach to these matters draws on many different kinds of sources. We take into account the archaeological record, including site layout and building construction, since these form the background against which monuments are displayed, and inform us about chronological alterations to the context. We follow epigraphic advancements to the degree possible, although

DOI: 10.5876/9781607327424.c000

we maintain an independent perspective. A combination of archaeology and epigraphy provides us with a sketch of Maya history. We are informed by the increasingly comprehensive linguistic studies of individual Mayan languages and the Mayan language family in general. We make use of ethnohistorical records where they are available, and rely on modern ethnographic studies for insight into Maya culture. It is our contention that these varied domains are not unrelated, and we believe that our understanding of Classic Maya culture and society must be based on an integration of all accessible data, and that while models drawn on single domains may be useful, they are useful as suggestions and not as conclusions.

In modern Maya studies the narrative structures of language and art have been largely ignored in favor of extracting the historical data from the inscriptions (as concisely summarized by Martin and Grube 2000). But to extract the history from the monuments requires neither an appreciation of how the story is told nor a sophisticated view of Classic Maya society and culture. One need not have an intimate acquaintance with Mayan languages to read that a particular ruler was born on a certain date, took the throne on another, and died on a third. Indeed, the foundational studies of Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1960, 1963, 1964), in which she established the historical nature of the inscriptions and the hieroglyphic verbs that refer to these life stages, made no explicit use of Mayan linguistics.

It is one of the paradoxes of modern Maya studies that one can extract the data from an inscription without knowing any Mayan language at all, including Epigraphic Maya, as the language of the inscriptions is now called. Likewise, there is no need to understand the details of costuming and ceremony to record that a ruler engaged in ceremonial activity. History is not necessarily concerned with this level of detail. What is important to the historian is that the ruler performed these acts and then went out and took his rival prisoner, extending his domain. On the other hand, there was some reason why the carvers of Classic monuments chose to dress their protagonists in certain ways and show them engaged in particular activities. It had meaning to the contemporary population, and if we are to fully understand Maya art, iconography, and epigraphy, we must develop at least hypotheses about these matters, many of which have to do with Classic conceptions of the pantheon and its manifestations.

Our principal focus here is the relation between narrative text and narrative art. We find that underlying many areas of Classic Maya belief and action is a philosophical complex of structural oppositions that define the surface units of expression, and that not only are the units of text and image defined by

dimensions of contrast and complementarity, but the two domains are played against each other on Classic monuments in yet another manifestation of the principles of structural opposition. Our approach is empirical and inductive; we do not attempt to impose these binary oppositions on the data as a justification for our theories. Rather, we believe that we are exposing them in the data to build our theories. We readily admit that we are in the initial stages of this process, but we hope that the exposition that follows will encourage others to take up the task.

PARADIGMS IN THE STUDY OF MAYA HIEROGLYPHS, PAST AND PRESENT

The study of Classic Maya texts and their accompanying images as illustrated literature constitutes a new chapter in Maya epigraphy. Pioneer studies were produced as early as the 1980s, but the field has yet to achieve prominence, and Classic inscriptions continue to be valued mainly for the historical data they provide. However, as our understanding of the Classic language has improved and we can read many inscriptions essentially verbatim, our ability to analyze the texts as literature has also greatly improved. The written language is referred to as Epigraphic Maya, and is understood to be a variety of the Cholan branch of Western Mayan. Work on modern narratives in the Western Mayan languages, especially Ch'ol, has contributed to our understanding of Classic literature. The historical texts are not simply lists of events; they are narratives of history that conform to established (and discoverable) norms of the narrative arts.

We seek to exemplify the utility of treating texts as literature—that is, identifying the literary structures that characterize Classic narratives and discussing the effects of the use of such structures. Rhetorical devices emphasize some events, suppress others, and suggest parallels between sets of events that give these events new meanings. We illustrate here the productivity of such analyses by comparing the results of current conventional analyses with innovative ones. In addition to the narrative structures of the texts themselves, we also discuss the placement of texts with respect to the accompanying images, a line of study that also dates to the 1980s.

Our approach is empirical and inductive, constructing our models from observed data. This is distinct from the deductive approach that derives models from theory and then attempts to exemplify them by selecting appropriate data. Nonetheless, after the fact, we do find theoretical support for our approach, which we discuss in terms of the relevant theories, namely the

model of scientific revolutions put forth by Thomas Kuhn (1962), especially the concept of *paradigms*, and the theory of *semiotics*, the study of signs, as laid out by its founder, Charles Morris (1946).

The concepts of “paradigm” and “paradigm shift” were popularized in a very influential book by historian of science Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 1962. Kuhn noted that when a science textbook discusses the history of the science, it generally presents the process as a steady march forward, each step leading inexorably to the next, a simple matter of accumulation of knowledge. But as Kuhn points out, that is not the way things happen. The road forward in any science is a tortured path with lots of side roads leading nowhere, ultimately abandoned in favor of stepping back and beginning a new path. Rather than a straight line leading to enlightenment, the history of a science looks a lot more like a dead tree. But the historians ignore the unsuccessful side roads and straighten out the path, noting only the discoveries that ultimately led to the present state of knowledge.

In fact, said Kuhn, science did not march steadily forward, it staggered along with significant interruptions, when the lines of thought shifted from one model to another and things began to take a new direction. The advance of science is not a steady accumulation of knowledge, but a sociological phenomenon that involves “the society of scientists, and the culture of science.” To describe this phenomenon, Kuhn coined the term *paradigm*, a term that has moved from the history of science to the world of business. By this, Kuhn meant what is usually referred to as a “school” of science or research, like wave optics or molecular physics, or structural linguistics and transformational grammar. Progress comes about when there is a *paradigm shift*, the abandonment of one paradigm in favor of a more powerful one.

A paradigm is characterized by the following: there is a central idea or concept that explains a wide field of phenomena, a concept that accounts for most of the observations that have been made. That central idea defines research questions, and it promotes some questions as being interesting and others as being devoid of interest. Since new lines of research are opened up, the new paradigm attracts adherents. Little by little the new paradigm comes to dominate employment, publications, research grants, and so on. Those who do not adopt the new paradigm are displaced to refuge areas, away from the center of the profession. Inevitably, as the major problems are solved, the research questions posed by the paradigm become narrower and narrower. The paradigm turns inward and ignores the world outside its bounds. Finally, the observations that the paradigm is not concerned with

accumulate to form a critical mass, and someone rises to the occasion and comes up with a new central idea that not only explains the old data, but also accounts for the data that are being ignored. A new paradigm is born, and the process continues.

As discussed below, Maya epigraphy has passed through two dominant paradigms in its march toward its current state. These are best understood by examining them in terms of semiotics, since they illustrate two of the parts of the semiotic framework proposed by Charles Morris.

Morris (1946) divided the field of semiotics, the study of signs and sign systems, into three parts. The first he called *syntax*, the study of signs apart from their meanings. (Note that this is not the sense in which linguists use the term *syntax*, the order of elements and their combinations.) Morris's syntax involves questions such as how many signs there are in a system, how they are distinguished from one another, and what variants they have. Leonard Bloomfield, an early modern American linguist and a founder of structural linguistics (Bloomfield 1933), would agree that the study of signs need not make reference to meaning.

These were the concerns of the first paradigm of Maya epigraphy, encompassing the work done in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from the initial discoveries of Constantine Rafinesque, Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, Cyrus Thomas, Leon de Rosny, Charles Bowditch, and Ernst Förstemann to the epoch-marking summary of results and catalog of hieroglyphs of Eric Thompson's *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: An Introduction* (1950) and *A Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs* (1962).

Note that the *Catalog* is concerned with grouping hieroglyphic variants into numbered sets (the numbers now referred to as *Thompson numbers*, or *T-numbers*); the question of the meanings of these sets was left for future research based on the concordance provided for each set. However, in this period scholars did work out the mathematics and calendrics of the inscriptions and related topics like astronomy. The basic nature of the writing system was discovered, the chronology worked out, major sites were identified, and the relationship to the Mayan languages established. The text between the dates was largely undeciphered, although the reading of some individual glyphs had been proposed. Thompson famously remarked that there was no history to be found in the inscriptions.

The second part of Morris's semiotics is called *semantics*, the study of what the signs and their combinations mean (more or less corresponding to linguistic usage). In Maya epigraphy, this is called *decipherment* and was the focus of the second paradigm, from Thompson to the present. The first

paradigm came to an end with Tatiana Proskouriakoff's publication of what is sometimes called "the historical hypothesis." In a tour de force article, Proskouriakoff (1960) demonstrated convincingly that the inscriptions did, in fact, relate history, and that they did so in sentences with regular syntax (in the linguistic sense). Her initial work on the inscriptions of Piedras Negras (1960) was followed by her work on Yaxchilán (1963, 1964) and David Kelley's derivative study of the inscriptions of Quiriguá (1962). The paradigm shift was not immediate, but had to wait until enough scholars had adopted the new "historical" paradigm to have enough weight to change the direction of work.

Contributing to the paradigm shift, Heinrich Berlin, a frequent correspondent of Proskouriakoff's, tied history to specific sites through Emblem Glyphs, signs that related to specific sites (Berlin 1963). Yuri Knorosov (whose work was translated to English by Proskouriakoff and Sophie Coe) showed how the Maya were writing syllabically, a major key to decipherment (Knorosov 1958, 1967, 1982), and Kelley laid out the procedures of the "structural method" of decipherment in a much-neglected manual, *Deciphering the Maya Script*, published in 1976 but written much earlier.

With the shift to the new paradigm, research questions moved away from calendric and astronomical interests. Now, work focused on identifying the events associated with dates and identifying the actors named, in order to reconstruct history as it had been recorded by the Maya, and then interpret this history in light of external data from archaeology, linguistics, ethnohistory, and so on. Apart from the effort to reveal the history, the study of the writing system itself was advanced, partly by increased knowledge of the hieroglyphic corpus, and partly by increased knowledge of Mayan languages. As a result, scholars could now proclaim with some confidence that they knew what specific words were being written and how they were pronounced. It became possible to propose oral readings of Classic texts and imagine that the Classic Maya would have understood the language of our readings.

A summary of the results of the historical paradigm can be found in Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube's *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens* (2000), which discusses what is known about the rulers of specific Maya sites and the events over which they ruled. On the other hand, the debate about the nature of the language being written continues. While there is little disagreement over the contents of the inscriptions, the history being related, and the events recorded, linguists continue to quibble over points of grammar and the precise pronunciation of words. Issues in the linguistics of the inscriptions are discussed in Søren Wichmann's *The Linguistics of Maya Writing* (2004); Hopkins

2006b). These two works are for the historical paradigm what Thompson's *Introduction* and *Catalog* were for the first paradigm.

At this point Maya writing can be said to be "deciphered" in the sense that we can "read" most of the texts and we have advanced ideas about the grammar and vocabulary of the language being written. As Kuhn would predict, now that the major research questions have been answered, research has turned inward, and is dedicated to smaller and smaller issues.

TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM

The third part of Morris's semiotics is called *pragmatics*, the study of how a sign system is used—that is, how the sign system is manipulated to achieve social ends. There has been some attention devoted to the placement of monuments (e.g., Proskouriakoff's discussion of the arrangement of historical monuments at Piedras Negras in series, each devoted to the career of a single ruler), and some discussion of biases in the relation of site histories—although Marcus's dire accusation of constant falsehood seems to be without basis (Marcus 1993; see Hopkins 1994). However, there has been little attention to the discourse nature of the texts themselves.

The central concept of this new paradigm is that, while they largely relate history, the Classic Maya inscriptions do so in a traditional narrative style, and they use specific rhetorical devices to manipulate the text. Research questions thus revolve around the nature of the narrative style and the rhetorical devices. And since we are aware that the placement of texts and monuments with respect to images and surrounding architecture is also a meaningful art, questions of the relation of text to image and context are also relevant. How did the Maya artists choose between alternatives to do things like identify more- and less-important protagonists and events, and call the reader's attention to some but not all events? How did they amplify the meanings conveyed by relating the text to the accompanying images?

We know the Maya were largely concerned with recording and promulgating the history of their societies from the viewpoint of the elite. As in every history, this involved the selection of facts to be recorded and the manner in which they were to be presented. To understand this process, we have to go beyond the decipherment of the sentences and the compilation of the presented facts. That is, we have to go beyond the grammar of the sentences and the list of events we can read. We need to know how the language is being used and how the events are being presented to the public. This entails the literary analysis of the texts and the art historical analysis of the monumental

contexts of the inscriptions. The next paradigm should be concentrated on discourse analysis of the texts and the relation between the texts and their accompanying monuments, including individual images, iconographic programs, the architecture of buildings, and site layout (an expanded form of text and image studies). This shift has begun. At the 2008 American Anthropology Association annual meeting, Kerry Hull and Michael Carrasco organized a session on verbal art in honor of Kathryn Josserand. With additional contributions, they published the papers of this session in a 2012 volume titled *Parallel Worlds: Genre, Discourse, and Poetics in Contemporary, Colonial, and Classic Maya Literature*. The chapters of this collection demonstrate the impressive retention of literary forms and rhetorical devices over some 2,000 years. The topic of the 2012 Maya Meetings hosted by the Mesoamerican Center of the University of Texas at Austin was ancient Maya texts as literature. The themes addressed were genres and subcultures of writing, rhetorical structures, and analysis of text and message in the context of physical and architectural presentation. If these literary forms are so central to Maya culture that they have survived centuries of turbulence, from the Classic period to the Spanish conquest and modern forces of assimilation, we ignore them at our own peril. If we truly wish to understand Classic inscriptions, we have to begin to see them as literary creations, and treat them as such.

CONTRAST AND COMPLEMENTARITY IN LANGUAGE

In his pionerring study of Nahuatl texts, Ángel María Garibay (1953) identified various types of parallelisms and other rhetorical devices such as couplets, triplets, and metonyms that are also found in Mayan and other Mesoamerican literature. Miguel León-Portilla (1969) initiated the study of Maya poetics when he organized examples of various colonial period texts into verse form. He was followed by Edmonson (1971, 1982, 1986), who arranged the entire text of the *Popol Vuh* (a sixteenth-century K'iche' manuscript) and two colonial period Yucatec books into parallel lines and demonstrated their couplet structure. Such poetic forms are still found in the oral stories, chants, and prayers recorded by numerous ethnographers across the Maya region (Fought 1972, 1985; Gossen 1974a, 1974b; Laughlin 1977; Edmonson and Bricker 1985; Hofling 1991; Hopkins and Josserand 1990, to name but a few).

Couplets are parallel words, phrases, or lines that differ minimally. They are ubiquitous in Maya formal speech and prayer, and prayers consist almost entirely of coupleted lines, as in this opening to a Tzeltal curing chant (Pitarch 2013:91, our translation):

- A God Jesus Christ, father,
- A God Jesus Christ, my lord,
- B I have come with a sincere mind,
- B I have come with an open heart,
- C to place in order now,
- C to place in a line now,
- D two sacred bouquets of flowers, father,
- D two sacred bouquets of lilies, my lord.

Couplets (AA, BB, etc.) are the most common rhetorical device in Mesoamerican literature. Edmonson stated that “the Popol Vuh is in poetry, and cannot be accurately understood in prose. It is entirely composed in parallelistic (i.e., semantic) couplets” (Edmonson 1971:xi). Tedlock (1983:220–229) importantly noted that the Popol Vuh also includes triplets as well as single phrases that begin or end various groupings of couplets and triplets. He compared these examples to the well-known couplet and triplet forms found in Nahuatl texts.

Another important rhetorical feature of the Popol Vuh first recognized by Christenson (1988, 2003a, 2003b, 2012) is chiasmus structure (inverted parallelism). In this literary device, two clauses (half couplets) or couplets (AA and BB) are contrasted by inversion—that is, by inserting one inside the other such that AABB becomes the chiasmus form ABBA. Christenson noted that chiasmus structure occurs on a small scale in the paired titles of the creator grandparents. For instance, when the creator grandparents Xpiyacoc (male) and Xmucane (female) act together, they are named using paired titles such as Framer and Shaper, White Great Peccary and White Great Coati, Possum and Coyote, where Xpiyacoc is the first member of the pair (Framer, White Great Peccary, Possum) and Xmucane the second (Shaper, Great White Coati, Coyote). However, in the paired titles that refer to their status as parents and elderly office holders (Alom and K’ajolom, I’yom and Mamom), Xmucane (Alom, K’ajolom) is always named first. This reflects the K’iche’ metonym for ancestor (mother–father) in which mother always precedes father. When paired titles from the former kind are combined with the latter kind, they form a chiasmus structure of ABBA such as this example (Christenson 2003a:29):

- A Our Grandmother
- B Our Grandfather
- B Xpiyacoc
- A Xmucane

Another passage also gives their names in chiasmic form:

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|------------|
| A | Twice She Who Has Borne Children | (Xmucane) |
| B | Twice He Who Has Begotten Sons | (Xpiyacoc) |
| B | Great Peccary | (Xpiyacoc) |
| A | Great Coati | (Xmucane) |

A more elaborate chiasmus structure is seen in this example (Christeson 2003b:30):

- | | | |
|---|---|------------|
| A | They said therefore the One Grandmother | (Xmucane) |
| B | One Grandfather to them | (Xpiyacoc) |
| B | This the grandfather | (Xpiyacoc) |
| | This master of <i>tz'ite</i> | |
| | Xpiyacoc his name | |
| A | This therefore the grandmother | (Xmucane) |
| | Mistress of Days | |
| | Mistress of Shaping at its foot | |
| | Xmucane her name | |

Christenson also discussed grander scales of chiasmus structures where entire sections of the Popol Vuh were presented in this form. In addition, he identified such structures in a variety of other K'ichean documents and demonstrated its widespread usage.

The use of couplets and parallelisms is not just to enhance the poetic elegance of a text. It has real power. In his study of Tzeltal shamanic curing chants, Pedro Pitarch notes that “the use of *difrasismos*—semantic parallels—is not just a mnemonic resource, but also a means of increasing the efficacy of the text through sustained persistence” (Pitarch 2013:24, our translation).

Another common rhetorical device found in Mesoamerican literature is a *metonym* in which two typical members of a class are juxtaposed to stand for the whole domain. While we prefer this term, such compounds are also referred to as *diphrastric kenning* and (Spanish) *difrasismos* (Garibay 1953; Norman 1980; Hull 1993, Knowlton 2002). Metonyms are common in the Popol Vuh and other colonial period texts as well modern tales and prayers. This form is also found in hieroglyphic texts, demonstrating its great antiquity (Riese 1984; Edmonson 1985; Hull 1993, 2002, 2003, 2012; Hopkins 1996; Knowlton 2002, 2010, 2012; Stuart 2003a). Other rhetorical devices that have been identified in hieroglyphic texts are parallelism, chiasmus, anaphora, metaphor, hyperbole, synonymy, ellipsis, and hyperbaton (Lounsbury 1980:107–115;

Fought 1985; Hopkins and Josserand 1987; Josserand 1991, 1995, 1997; Josserand and Hopkins 1991; Hull 2002, 2003; Carrasco 2005, 2012; Lacadena 2009, 2010).

In our present volume, we focus on the importance of couplets as not only a literary but also a visual device employed by the Classic Maya in their illustrations of various events. Many of these couplets represent complementary opposition, and we argue that this principle was the underlying organizational principle of Maya worldview.

On the language side, contrast and complementarity are present in linguistic structures ranging from word composition to text structure. A common technique for coining metonyms is to juxtapose two members of a lower order to form the name of a higher order. A well-known example is the term for “ancestors,” composed of the juxtaposing of “father(s)” and “mother(s)” —for example, Ch’ol *tyaty-na’-äl-ob* (*tyaty* “father,” *n̄a’* “mother,” a generalizing suffix *-äl*, and a plural suffix *-ob*)—that is, a class of persons that includes fathers and mothers. In the Tzotzil and Tzeltal areas, the ancestors are called the *totilmé’iletik* (“fathers-mothers”) and *me’tiktatik* (“mothers-fathers”), respectively (as noted earlier, the K’iche’ term is “mother-father”). The term for “ancestors” is paralleled by the term for “descendants,” juxtaposing “child of woman” and “child of man,” Ch’ol *’al-p’eñel-ob’* (Aulie and Aulie 1998:5). An early attestation of such terms was Metzger and Williams’s (1963) elicitation of a Tzeltal term for “animals,” *chan-balam*, combining “snake” and “jaguar” to represent the class that includes both reptiles and mammals. Some examples in the Popol Vuh are the terms for the world (sky-earth), the earth (mountain-valley), water (lake-sea), and warfare (arrow-shield) (Tedlock 1987:148; Christenson 2003b).

In Classic Maya inscriptions, *tok’-pakal* “flint-shield” juxtaposes weapons of offense and defense to signal weaponry in general, and by extension, warfare (Genet 1934; Houston 1983; Hull 1993, 2003, 2012; Stuart 1995; Hopkins 1996). Another example of such opposition is seen in the *tz’ak* “whole, complete” glyph (Hull 1993, 2002, 2003, 2012; Hopkins 1996; Knowlton 2002, 2012; Stuart 2003a). The standard form of this sign is often replaced with a complementary pair of signs such as day-night, sun-moon, star-moon, cloud-water, wind-water, unripe-ripe. Hopkins (1996) has noted that many of the *tz’ak* pairs have not only a complementary opposition relationship, but a sequential one. For example, *k’in* “day” is followed by *ak’ab* “night” and unripe corn turns into ripe corn. This principle of opposing two members of the same order to imply something of a greater order is basic to the phenomena that we present below.

Beyond lexical composition, the principal element of Maya formal speech is the couplet, a pair of lines that contrast in at least one part, the contrasting parts functioning like the juxtaposed elements in the compound nouns cited above. A

Ch'ol prayer published by Vázquez (2001) includes the couplet *kpasel tyi yeb'al 'awok, tyi yeb'al ak'äb'* "I come beneath your feet, beneath your hands," where the play between "feet" and "hands" implies "in your presence." A similar construction was reported in Tzotzil formal speech by Cancian (1965:223), preceded by another couplet (in English translation): "has your earth arrived, has your mud arrived, here beneath the foot, here beneath the hand, of Señor Esquipulas?" The play between earth and mud is a deferential reference to the petitioner.

Couplets can also be used to imply parallelism between two events. An early epigraphic example is found in the text of the Leiden Plaque, a jade celt dating from the fourth century AD (Schele and Miller 1986:129, plate 33; 320, fig. A.3; Lounsbury 1989:208; Josserand 1991:16–17; Josserand and Hopkins 1991:38; 2011:21). The recorded event is the "seating" (enthronement) of a king, and this is played against the "seating" (eve of) a particular month: "it was the seating of Yaxk'in, the seating of the king." The implication is that the succession of rulers is as natural and inevitable as the succession of time periods. Yaxchilán Stela 12 (figure 0.1) reports the death of a ruler in the left two columns of the inscription, and contrasts this point for point in the right two columns with the succession of his son:

[*Left*] 6 Ix 12 Yax. Died the *Ch'ajom*, five-*k'atun* Lord Shield Jaguar, Captor of Ah Ajual. Ten years and six days later, it came to be

[*Right*] 11 Ajaw 8 Tsek. Was seated as lord Tekuy, Noble, Captor of Aj Uk, Bird Jaguar, Lord of Yaxchilán, *Bakab*.

The play between two elements of speech can be extended to whole sections of text. For instance, the Palenque Cross Group panels contrast a block of text concerning mythology on the left side of a scene with a block of text on the right that deals with history (see the Cross Group monuments discussed in chapter 8). The implication is not only that the historical actors are following the model established by their ancestral deities, but that there is a greater scheme that both deities and humans are participating in.

These structural oppositions can be extended further. Beyond complementary wall panels, architecture and city planning may also participate in the design of a ceremonial complex, with buildings played against buildings and building complexes played against each other.

CONTRAST AND COMPLEMENTARITY IN MYTHOLOGY

The Classic Maya pantheon is an excellent example of the kinds of structures created by binary oppositions. The structure is complex, as befits a pantheon.



FIGURE 0.1. *Yaxchilán Stela 12, after Ian Graham.*

However, an examination of the repertory of major deities shows that they are defined by a series of features that include some of those established by Kroeber (1909) for the definition of kin types in different ethnographic settings: sex, relative age, generation, and lineality (figure 0.2). Omaha-type patrilineal Maya kinship systems (Hopkins 1969, 1988, 1991) are relevant here,

since the major Classic (and colonial) deities, from the creator grandparents to the Hero Twin grandchildren, are related by cross-cousin marriage, uniting the descendants of a celestial and an Underworld lineage (another important binary opposition).

The paternal and maternal creator grandfathers, Xpiyacoc/Itzamnaaj and Gathered Blood/God L (their colonial and Classic names) head contrasting lineages joined by marriage (of Xpiyacoc to Xmucane/Ix Chel, sister of Gathered Blood) (Bassie-Sweet 2008). Both lineages give rise to a contrasting generation of children, again joined by (cross-cousin) marriage. The triad formed by the children (One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu), their parents (Xpiyacoc and Xmucane), and the mother's brother (Gathered Blood) constitutes what Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949) called the "elementary structure of kinship," since it contains the oppositions of generation (parents, children), sex (brother, sister), and direct relations (ancestors and descendants) versus collaterals (uncle, aunt).

The Maya pantheon adds relative age (elder brother, younger brother), as well as the proliferation of the senior line through polygamous marriages that generate four potential patrilineages headed by the brothers One Chouen and One Batz and their cousins Hunahpu and Xbalanque. With only a few deities, all of the critical oppositions of Maya kinship are present (Romney 1967:222–228; Hopkins 1988): direct versus collateral relatives, male versus female, generation versus generation, and elder versus younger siblings.

There are many more deities in the popular Maya pantheon, including most prominently the Earth and Sky gods. Earth Lords abound, from the generalized figures of the rain/storm/earth lord known as (native) Chahk or (introduced) Tlaloc, to specific local mountain and cave gods related to a particular polity. The Sun and Moon dominate the celestial lords, and in the mythology are related by kinship to Venus as well. As is characteristic of Mesoamerican deities, many members of the Maya pantheon are bivalent, manifesting as male in some instances and female in others, for instance, or as young and old.

The distant ancestors of humans also take their place in the pantheon. Ancestors are frequently depicted floating in the air above living descendants or conjured by blood sacrifice. The relevance of the pantheon to Maya history lies in the fact that historical figures are often portrayed in the guise of deities: they are shown in scenes that are framed by celestial and terrestrial deities, they perform acts that are reminiscent of those performed by the ancestors and deities, and they take titles that relate them to their gods and ancestors. The meaning of the scenes in monumental art cannot be fully appreciated

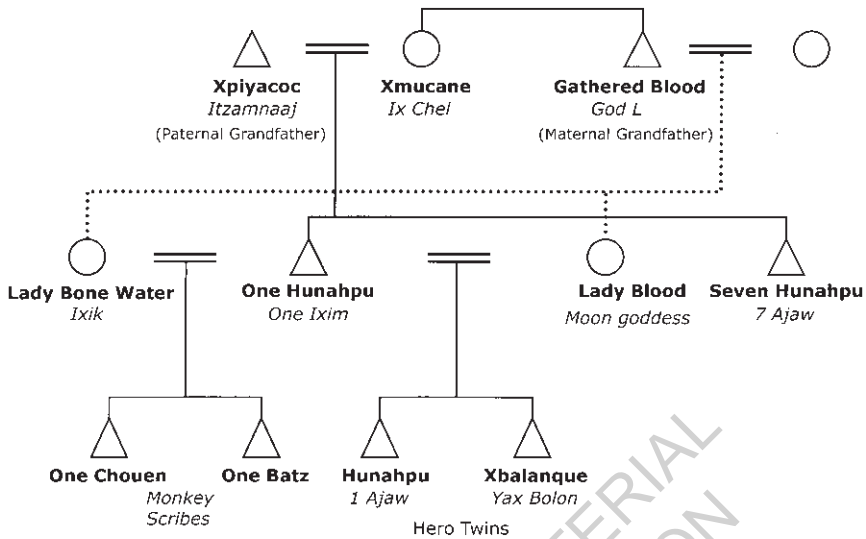


FIGURE 0.2. Genealogy chart of primary deities

without an understanding of these subtle clues manifested in the iconographic designs of the artists.

Sets of binary oppositions form many of the cognitive systems of the Maya. The four directions (actually, the four quadrants)—east, north, west, and south—exemplify these structures (Bassie-Sweet 1996; Josserand and Hopkins 2011). The major axis is east–west, and Mayan languages typically refer to these with reference to the sun’s path through the sky: for example, Classic Maya “east” and “west,” *lak’in* and *chik’in*, from **elab’ k’in* “the sun’s exit” and **ochib’ k’in* “the sun’s entrance” (because the sun comes out of the Underworld in the east and reenters it in the west). North and south are default categories, the quadrants between the eastern and western quadrants defined by the rising and setting ranges of the sun along the horizons. In fact, it is difficult to find native terms for “north” and “south” in Maya vocabularies. However, the north and south axis represents variation in the annual path of the sun. Thus the binary opposition east–west defines one axis, and north–south forms another, resulting in a four-way contrast.

Colors are also associated with the directions: red (east), white (north), black (west), and yellow (south). In addition, there are animal associations, as seen in the Dresden Codex: east (mammals, especially deer), north (birds), west (reptiles), and south (fish), and these correspond to the four major categories of animals in Maya taxonomies: mammals, birds, reptiles/amphibians, and fish

(Hopkins 1980). Note that there are again two contrasting binary axes: the terrestrial (mammals and reptiles/amphibians) versus the non-terrestrial (birds and fish). The four classes are effectively defined by their modes of locomotion: walkers, crawlers, fliers, and swimmers.

Maya plant taxonomies typically feature another four-way contrast defined by two opposing axes (Hopkins 2006a, 2009; Breedlove and Hopkins 1970–1971). A hypothetical reconstruction of the life-form taxa features the opposing categories of trees, herbs, vines, and grasses. Again, there is a major axis, trees versus herbs, whose taxa include the majority of plant names. Contrasting with this axis is another, vines versus grasses, and there are typically only a few members of each. Parallel to the animal classes, the minor axis features plants with unusual climbing and spreading habits. A hypothetical reconstruction is necessary to show the underlying nature of the classes, because the reported systems vary in how plants are treated: some contrast domesticated versus wild plants (with the four categories replicated within each), some replace grasses with maize and wheat (relegating the other grasses to the herb category), and so on. As Cecil Brown (1977) has noted, only the “tree” term can be reconstructed to proto-Mayan. The ethnobotanical system may have evolved during the Classic period as the Maya sciences developed, the system then being imposed on languages that had independently labeled the other life forms. This may be an example of the extension of an ideological principle (that binary oppositions combine to form four-way contrasts) on disparate preexisting local ethnobotanical taxonomies.

When a modern Highland Guatemalan prayermaker lays out his or her altar, the colored candle arrays represent these categories: red candles to the east, white candles to the north, black candles to the west, and yellow candles to the south. Having thus defined the terrestrial universe and represented its animals and plants, a fifth color is placed in the center of the circular array: the combined fields of blue and green (*yax*). This stands for humans (vs. animals), the center (vs. the directions), and by putting both blue (sky) and green (earth) candles together in the center of the terrestrial universe, the celebrant defines an opposing axis, up–down. That is, the universe is formed by a series of binary oppositions.

CONTRAST AND COMPLEMENTARITY BETWEEN TEXT AND IMAGE

Classic Maya images often depicted members of the elite acting in their official roles, often dressed in the guise of mythological figures, wearing

symbolically significant apparel and handling significant objects. They may be framed by sets of deities and ancestors. Apart from these symbolic aspects, they are also carrying out actions and interactions that represent historical events. The combined images tell a story of their own. Another, complementary story is told in the texts that surround and impinge upon the images. The play between these two domains is an art in itself.

There are several levels on which texts and images interact. First, there are physical interactions. Caption texts, which may be either short text segments that simply identify actors in the images or lengthy statements, are placed within the scene. Conversely, elements of the images may impinge on the texts in significant ways, as when the feathers of the bloodletter being held by the ruler on Quiriguá Stela J curl around the corner of the monument to touch the glyphs reporting his accession, in the text. On Yaxchilán Stela 11, Bird Jaguar's headdress extends into the text above to touch his name, and the toes of Shield Jaguar III, at the base of the image, touch the latter's name in the inscription. Less-intrusive text may be manipulated simply to locate ruler's names close to their faces, verbal glyphs close to the corresponding action in the images, and so on.

Text segments may frame the images of the actors being referred to, as on Palenque's Tablet of the Cross, where the image of the young Kan Bahlam on the left panel is framed by an L-shaped caption text that states his pre-accession name and parentage, and the figure of the older Kan Bahlam on the right-hand panel is framed by a text that records his accession and later events (Bassie-Sweet 1987, 1991). The lintels of Yaxchilán offer numerous examples of such text placement.

On the other hand, there are interactions between text and image that are not physical. The image on a monument does not necessarily represent the events related in the text. Rather, the two can be in complementary opposition, evoking a third element of meaning.

THE COMPOSITION OF A CLASSIC-PERIOD MONUMENT

Looking first at the texts, we can postulate three stages in the production of the inscriptions of a Classic monument. First, a text must have been composed that met the standards of the literary norms of the society. As we discuss below, the texts are carefully crafted narratives.

Second, a choice of hieroglyphic representations had to be made. There was not just one way a given sentence could be written in Classic script. Words could be written logographically, phonetically, or in a combination of both,

and both offered the artist an incredible degree of freedom, since there was not just one way in which any logograph or phonetic glyph could be rendered. For the same meaning, the choice of hieroglyphic variants might include an abstract geometric representation, a *head variant* (the glyph personified as the head of a human or animal), or a *full-figure variant*, the personified glyph shown full figure, possibly interacting with other such variants representing other words (see Montgomery 2002:41–52 for examples). The representation of human and animal forms also gave the artist the opportunity to draw on the iconography of mythology to introduce subtle meanings having nothing to do with the literal reading of the text.

The inscription on the back of Copán Stela D, for instance, is entirely composed of full-figure glyphs, and a simple statement of the date of the dedication of the monument is converted into sixteen panels of interactive pairs of figures, with the numbers carrying or wrestling with the time periods, or the ruler's name sitting with his Emblem Glyph, for example. Elsewhere, a simple pronoun prefix for third person, transcribing the syllable 'u, could be represented by at least nine variants (each with idiosyncratic treatment), ranging from abstract geometric forms to personified head variants (Montgomery 2002:143). This almost infinite flexibility was necessary to carry out the third and final stage of inscriptional composition.

Finally, the hieroglyphic inscription had to be placed in a meaningful way on the monument. The text should frame its referents, placing important words near their corresponding images, and making sure that prominent sections of text occupied prominent locations. Peak events, for instance, are almost always in or near the “hot corner,” the upper right-hand corner of a text. To accomplish these locational constraints, sentences, phrases, even words, could be expanded or contracted to move segments of the text into the desired positions. An Emblem Glyph, for instance, composed of three elements (“holy,” “lord,” and a polity name) could be compacted into a single *glyph block*, one of the squares by which glyphs are arranged into a grid of rows and columns. In fact, this was the norm, with a central glyph representing the polity and with the other two elements attached as affixes. For compositional purposes, however, the phrase could be broken out into three glyph blocks, as on Piedras Negras Lintel (Wall Panel) 2, where three successive glyph blocks read *k'uh* (or *ch'uh*) “holy (God C),” *Yochib* (Piedras Negras), *ajaw* (“lord”). Manipulating these choices made it possible for the artists to move text elements up, down, right, and left to place significant elements in the most meaningful locations with respect to the images.

On a larger scale, related texts could be divided between separate monuments in the same context, as in the mythological versus historical sections in

the Palenque Cross Group panels. Furthermore, the texts of the three structures of the Cross Group were intended to be read as a unit, three chapters of the same story (see chapter 8). An interesting example is found in Structure 22 of Yaxchilán (Tate 1992:200–202). Five lintels were set over the doorways of the building. Four of the lintels (Lintels 18, 19, 20, and 22) were ancient, inscribed in Early Classic script. The fifth lintel (Lintel 21) is in a later style, but bears an Initial Series date of 9.0.19.2.4 2 Kan 2 Yax, an Early Classic date (October 16, AD 454) (see chapter 3 for a discussion of Initial Series dates). The event is the dedication of a named building by a ruler whose name phrases indicate he is a member of the Skull clan. The text then moves forward with a Distance Number (15.1.16.5, just under 300 years) that brings events into the Late Classic: 9.16.1.0.9 7 Muluc 17 Tzek (March 12, AD 752). The new event is the dedication of a building with the same name by Bird Jaguar. Thus Bird Jaguar has had four ancient lintels reset in a new (or reconstructed) building to honor an ancient ruler who just happens to be of the same clan as Bird Jaguar's wife, Lady Great Skull.

Another example of the integration of several lintel texts into a single program comes from Yaxchilán's Structure 12 (Tate 1992:168–170), another building with a set of ancient lintels as well as newer ones. The building had seven doorways along its front wall, and at least one doorway on a side wall. The reading order of the lintels apparently began with the central doorway's Lintel 36 and proceeded leftwards through Lintels 48, 47, and 34, all ancient lintels difficult to decipher but featuring beautiful calligraphy. Reading resumed with Lintel 60, on the surviving side wall, and then turned the corner to the front wall again to the other more recent Lintels 49, 37, and 35, the latter adjacent to the central lintel, Lintel 36. The historical content of these last four lintels concerned the seating of rulers, numbered from one to ten in order of their accessions, with notes on either visitors witnessing the accessions or captives of the rulers (epigraphers differ in their interpretations of a critical verb). In any case, on the first lintel, Lintel 60, the first four accessions are noted. On Lintel 49, the next three accessions are recorded. On Lintel 37, the following two accessions are noted, and on the final lintel, Lintel 35, only one accession is mentioned, no doubt that of the ruler who commissioned this monumental display. The decreasing number of accessions leaves room for more and more details, so the tenth ruler is given four times the amount of text as the founding rulers of the site.

Classic Maya artists faced a world of options that included much more than the content of the inscriptions. There were decisions to be made about which hieroglyphs to use to represent the language of the text and how to distribute

the text across a monument in the most strategic fashion with respect to the accompanying images, and even the option of dividing the text into discrete units and placing them on adjacent monuments. A similar set of alternatives must have faced the artists in the composition of the images: what scenes to represent, what personages to portray, and what actions to show, as well as what costumes to dress participants in, what stances to place them in, and what paraphernalia to include. The production of a Classic monument, then, was concerned with manipulating language (drawing on literary traditions) and images (drawing on history and mythology). Both were concerned with creating integrated works of art that met the demands of the rulers and conveyed messages to the general public.

An excellent example of the complexity of monument creation is Structure 33 of Yaxchilán (Tate 1992:213–225). The structure itself sits high above the river terrace where the majority of the site's buildings lie, with a broad staircase leading up from the terrace plaza to the Structure 33 platform (Graham and von Euw 1977:7–8). At the foot of the structure is a set of hieroglyphic stairs depicting the ruler Bird Jaguar as a ballplayer, and his image was also displayed above the doorways. As with many of the site's buildings, there are three doorways, each with a carved lintel, in this case Lintels 1–3. Again, these feature Bird Jaguar, in ceremonial dress and holding ritual objects, with his wife (Lintel 1), his son (Lintel 2), and a named subordinate lord (a *sabal*, Lintel 3) (figures 3.1–3.3).¹

Texts are placed to frame their subjects and note their ceremonial activities (Bassie-Sweet 1991:55–60). The principal actor is Bird Jaguar, the subject of the performance verbs, and lengthy title phrases accompany his names. Secondary actors are identified in short caption texts, with limited titles, including the note that the wife, Lady Great Skull, was the mother of Shield Jaguar IV (also known as Chel Te'). The events depicted on Lintel 1 occurred on Bird Jaguar's inauguration date, 9.16.1.0.0 11 Ajaw 8 Tzek (May 3, AD 752); Lintel 2 depicts activities on the five-*tun* anniversary 9.16.6.0.0 4 Ajaw 3 Sootz' (April 7, 757), when the child Chel Te' was five years old, and Lintel 3 bears an earlier date, the four-*tun* anniversary on 9.16.5.0.0 8 Ajaw 8 Sootz' (April 12, 756).

A similar set of lintels adorned Structure 54, on the river terrace plaza. Lintel 57 depicts Chel Te' with Lady Great Skull; the only text is the caption that identifies her as "the mother of Chel Te'." Lintel 54, with the date 9.16.5.0.0 8 Ajaw 8 Sootz', shows Bird Jaguar in ceremonial activity with Lady Great Skull, and the undated Lintel 58 depicts the unnamed Bird Jaguar facing an axe-bearing warrior identified as "the uncle [*yichan* "mother's brother"] of Chel Te',

Shield Jaguar.” Sets of three, four, and more lintels characterize the inscriptions of Yaxchilán and contrast in rhetorical style with the longer wall panel texts of Palenque, for instance, or the stelae of other sites.

Within the confines of lintel sets and wall panels alike, there were almost infinite opportunities to index mythology while reporting history by making certain choices of hieroglyphic variants. Likewise there were numerous ways in which text could be manipulated to create literary structures that emphasized some events and downplayed others. All these elements could be played against the accompanying images. A full appreciation of the art of the Classic Maya requires not only knowledge of the Epigraphic Maya language, the workings of the script and Maya iconography, but also Classic Maya history and its protagonists as well as the mythological background against which the recorded events are played out. Such references to mythology add layers of meaning to the monuments that cannot be appreciated without detailed knowledge of that mythology. For that reason, although our principal goal is to discuss the narrative arts of the Classic Maya—both linguistic and visual—we devote considerable space below to Classic Maya mythology. In all aspects of our research we make use of all available sources, including not only Classic materials but colonial documents and modern ethnography. We justify the use of the latter sources by pointing out the demonstrated continuity in Mayan narrative arts (Hull and Carrasco 2012).

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

This introductory essay has laid out the principal concerns of the authors and illustrated some of the application of their models to Classic Maya monuments. What follows is a much more detailed discussion, beginning with background material (chapters 1–5), and proceeding to the analysis of individual monuments from the Classic period site of Palenque in Chiapas, Mexico (chapters 6–8).

In the first chapter, “The Creator Grandparents and the Place of Duality,” basic concepts of Maya cosmology are introduced along with notes on the iconography with which these mythological elements are portrayed on Classic monuments. While linguistic affairs are hardly mentioned in this and the following chapter, the complex of conceptual principles fundamental to the mythology also foreshadows the rhetorical principles discussed later.

The second chapter, “The Family of the Creator Grandparents and Complementary Opposition,” extends the mythological genealogy to succeeding generations, again illustrating the principles of opposition and complementarity

that are basic to Maya art and literature. Many of the personages introduced here figure later in the art of Classic monuments.

The third chapter, “The Calendar and the Narrative Time Frame,” introduces the reader to the chronological framework of Classic Maya inscriptions, an essential part of the narrative text. Almost every sentence in the Classic corpus contains elements of chronology, since the primary purpose of most inscriptions was to record history (or, from the point of view of the contemporary reader, recent and current events).

The fourth chapter, “The Literary Nature of Mayan Texts, Ancient and Modern,” lays out the basic structures of Maya rhetoric, from word structure and poetic forms to the devices of long narrative texts. Examples of discourse from modern Maya sources are shown to be related to the discourse style of the Classic Maya, and the analysis of several Classic texts illustrates the application of our model.

The fifth chapter, “Text and Image,” does for Classic visual arts what chapter 4 did for language. The basic structures of the interplay between text and image are outlined and illustrated by ample references to the monumental repertory.

The sixth chapter, “The Palenque Tablet of the 96 Glyphs,” analyzes a text that is unillustrated, but whose internal iconography—as well as its carefully constructed narrative—gives credit to the creativity of the Classic Maya artist. This text was the first to be subjected to a modern attempt to read a Classic text in a semblance of its original language, but we decline to include here a still imperfect version of that reading, knowing that if we were to be magically transported to the Palenque court and asked to perform the text, the listeners would probably react in dismay and exclaim, “Holy Itzamnaaj! Where did these people go to school?”

The seventh chapter, “The Narrative of the Palenque Temple of the Inscriptions Sarcophagus,” continues the detailed discussion of one of the best-known Classic Maya monuments. The discovery of the tomb of the ruler Pakal opened the modern era of Maya archaeology, and the enclosed sarcophagus is one of the most famous artifacts in the Classic Maya world. Nevertheless, the nature of its inscriptions was not fully understood until the model of narrative text was applied.

The eighth chapter, “The Palenque Cross Group Narrative,” deals with another famous set of buildings from Palenque, three temples that contain a plethora of inscriptions, all integrated into a single narrative. Combined, the texts constitute one of the longest and most complex narrative texts of the Classic Maya world.

Finally, a brief chapter of “Conclusions” returns to our principal concern, the holistic interpretation of Classic Maya monuments.

In the chapters that follow this Introduction, the discussion alternates between the analysis of specific Classic Maya monuments, especially those of Palenque, and the mythology, iconography, chronology, and discourse traditions that underlie our analyses. We believe that the former cannot be adequately understood without a good foundation in the latter. The conventional approach to a Classic monument is to work out its chronology, decipher the text, and identify the personages and objects depicted in the accompanying images. This information about dated events and royal careers is then added to the corpus of Maya history.

How much deeper our understanding can be if we dissect the structures and rhetorical strategies of the inscriptions, take note of the iconography and visual layout of the images, and relate the imagery to the mythology that much of it represents! Not only is our understanding deeper, it is also closer to that of the creators and contemporary viewers of these narrative arts, who would have been sensitive to all these features. Readers are thus advised that they will be subjected to a seemingly endless array of deities and deity impersonators, mythological beings and associated folklore, costume elements, ritual activities, and esoteric calendrics, as well as literary texts in an unfamiliar language that responds to alien norms of discourse. (Nobody said this would be easy!)

However, a degree of familiarity with the cultural background against which these works of art were composed and executed is necessary if we are to comprehend the messages their creators intended to convey. While the nature and history of the gods, the titles and functions of ceremonial office, the vagaries of the calendric cycles, the norms of formal discourse, and the details of costuming are all new to the modern observer, they were not new to the Classic Maya, but were taken for granted. A contemporary audience could be expected to be sensitive to the details of an inscription and the related images, as well as the interaction between the two. It is our task to unravel the tangle of clues with which we are presented, and to do so requires more than one guide book to the relevant domains.

It is in that spirit that we discuss a wide range of factors both verbal and visual. It is our contention that the only way to fully understand Classic Maya monuments is to see them as holistic creations that incorporate diverse concerns. These creative works of public art and literature were intended to impress the viewer/reader, not just to record history. They certainly do the latter. It is hard to think of Maya events as “prehistory,” given the extensive written record they left behind. But while they were concerned with reporting

and recording that history, they did it in the most creative way possible, by incorporating it into truly impressive works of art and literature. To begin to appreciate just how meaningful those works were, we offer the following introduction to the narrative arts of the Classic Maya.

NOTE

1. The redrawn illustrations in this book are for illustrative purposes only. The reader is directed to Harvard University's Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions website for photographs and documentation-quality drawings.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION