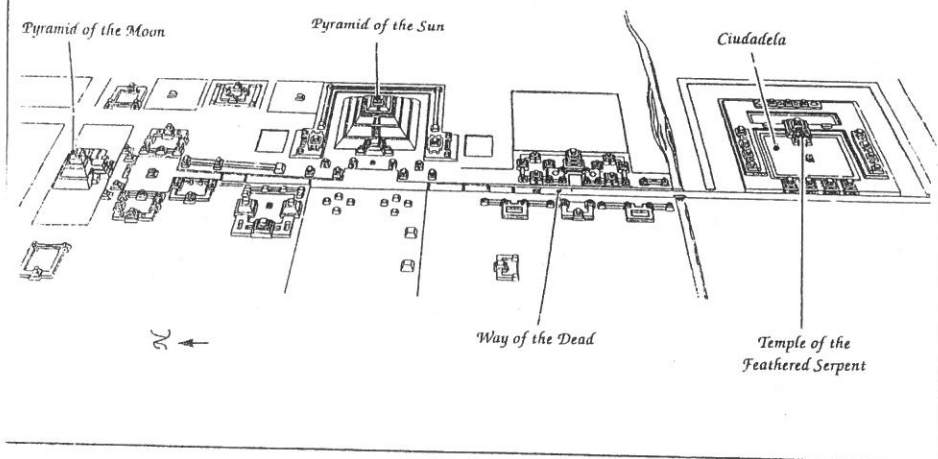
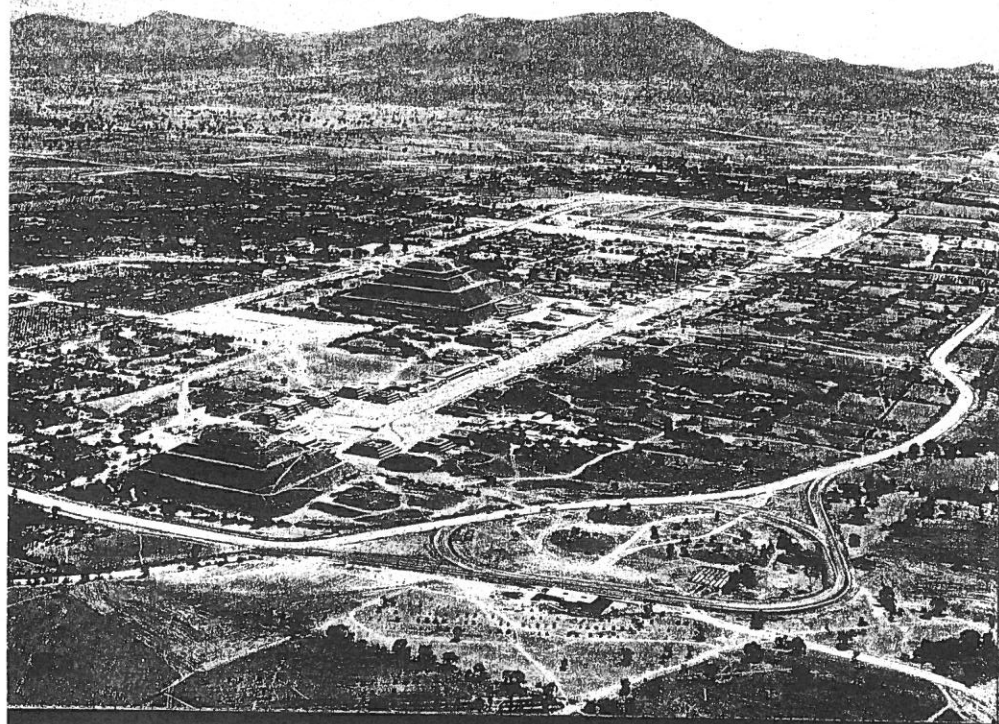


Teotihuacan



14, 45 Teotihuacan: an isometric view (above) of the main north-south axis, the Way of the Dead; and an oblique airview (below) from the north. The interstices of the grid were completely filled with buildings near the center of the city.



The great city of Teotihuacan – a metropolis in the Valley of Mexico of perhaps 125,000 people at its height – had an impact on both commerce and art in the ancient New World comparable with that of Constantinople in the Old. It was a city of prestige and influence rivaled only by the later Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztecs, and may have been the first great Tollan, or 'place of reeds,' a place of civilization, emulated by cultures all across Mesoamerica. Even as a ruin, Teotihuacan retained great importance, and it was never 'lost.' For the later Aztecs it was a setting for cosmic myth, and their last ruler, Motecuhzoma II, made regular pilgrimages to the site.

Decades of archaeological research have produced the single most detailed map in existence of a Mesoamerican city, but profound questions remain about Teotihuacan, including the very ethnicity of its powerful, urban population. Names of the city and buildings all come down from the Aztecs, and some of them may well be the names once spoken at the city, including 'Teotihuacan' itself, which means 'the place of those who have the road to the gods,' according to Thelma Sullivan. Recent investigations have begun to penetrate the complexity of its religion. A female deity, the 'Great Goddess,' dominated cave and mountain ritual, divination, and may have also had solar associations, while a male god, the 'Storm God,' presided over water and violent weather, like his later Aztec counterpart Tlaloc.

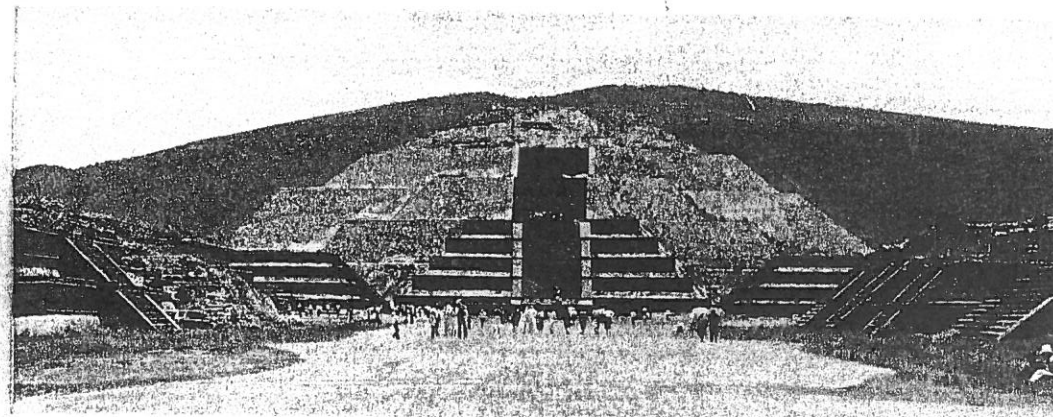
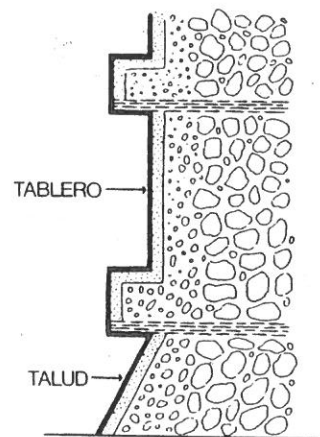
The notion of a 'Classic' era was first conceived to define the span of time during which the Maya used Long Count inscriptions, or about AD 250 to 900 – a period originally thought of as peaceful and theocratic throughout Mesoamerica. Though the idea of peaceful theocracy has since been abandoned, the term Classic remains in use, if only to characterize the richness, variety, and growth of the art and society of the time. Recent archaeological studies have shown that the Classic era in fact began by at least AD 150 in Central Mexico with the rise of Teotihuacan. The Classic era survived the burning of Teotihuacan in AD 650, and Classic traditions were sustained for at least two more centuries, particularly at Cholula, in the Valley of Puebla.

ARCHITECTURE

Random settlement during the Late Formative to the northwest of the city included elaborate cave precincts, particularly at the site of what would become the Pyramid of the Sun in future years. By the time of Christ, Teotihuacanos had begun to modify every aspect of the cave, from widening its entryway to lining the chambers with a mud mortar. From the cave entry, a siting line to the west was drawn that linked the cave, the rising of the Pleiades during the two annual passages of zenith, and the arc of solar passage at that same occurrence, forming a powerful east-west axis. Perpendicular to this was drawn another great axis, terminating at the mountain today known as Cerro Gordo, and by the end of the first century AD, these two axes had determined the grid that informed all positioning at Teotihuacan, with ritual focussed at the Pyramid of the Moon (by AD 150), Temple of the Feathered Serpent (by AD 200), and the Pyramid of the Sun (by AD 225). Low-lying apartment complexes filled the interstices in the ensuing centuries, and the great cosmopolitan center flourished, reaching its apogee c. AD 400–600. Archaeology has produced evidence of ethnic neighborhoods and barrios of craft specialists, but all lived along the immutable grid. Miles away, isolated structures still conformed to the city's right-angle geometry and the orientations determined by its grid. (With a population that archaeologist René Millon estimates at 125,000 or so, Teotihuacan would have been the sixth largest city in the world in AD 600, in an era when the half-million souls of Constantinople formed the world's largest urban center.)

At Teotihuacan, the architecture is of both mass and space – mass in the great temples, open space in plazas, temple enclosures, ritual walkways, and interior space within the palace compounds. Although it is often difficult to distinguish palatial or bureaucratic structures from reli-

46 The vertical *tablero* sits on the sloping *talud*. This schematic drawing shows the sort of workmanship typical of many Teotihuacan structures. The exterior is finished with fine plaster and polished.



47 The Pyramid of the Moon at Teotihuacan, framed by Cerro Gordo, a dead volcano, in the distance.

gious edifices or domestic dwellings in ancient Mesoamerica, the distinctive profile known as '*talud-tablero*' delineates much sacred architecture at Teotihuacan, particularly among the smaller structures and within palace compounds. The sloping *talud* (talus) supports the vertical *tablero* (entablature), which is often the surface for architectural ornament or stucco paintings. Perhaps more than any other aspect of its culture, *talud-tablero* architecture marks the presence of Teotihuacan abroad, and the execution of such profiles in adobe at Kaminaljuyú, for example, nearly 700 miles to the south, is a provincial manifestation of the great city.

The axes themselves took on architectural qualities, not only in orienting the city, but in ordering particular views of the city for participants in ritual. The north-south axis, called '*Miccaotli*,' or Way of the Dead, by the Aztecs, may refer to the ancestral shrines that line it, and some may yet hold undiscovered tombs and offerings to the dead. Often thought of as a 'street,' the Way of the Dead changes elevation several times, forcing pedestrians up and down stairs and commanding attention as a two-dimensional architectural feature. This processional requirement recalls the passage in the cave under the Pyramid of the Sun, where supplicants shifted from kneeling and crawling to walking upright.

The Way of the Dead leads to the Pyramid of the Moon, and then beyond to Cerro Gordo, a vast clefted mountain, a dead volcano with a sunken cone. Slightly smaller than the Pyramid of the Sun, the Pyramid of the Moon also features a huge open courtyard in the rough configura-

(a symbol functioning like our "zero")

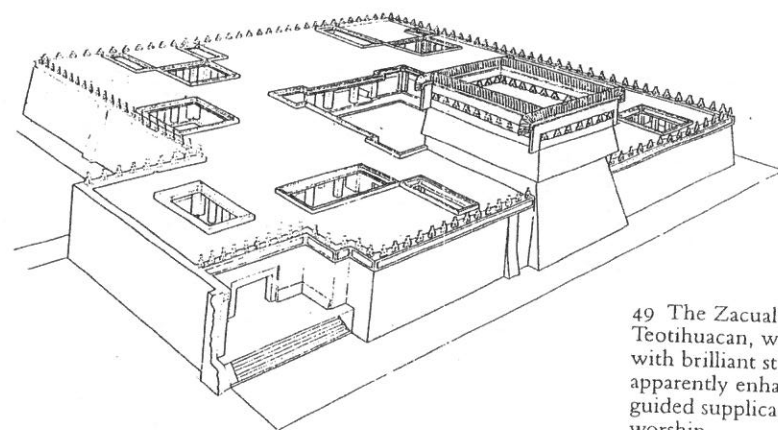
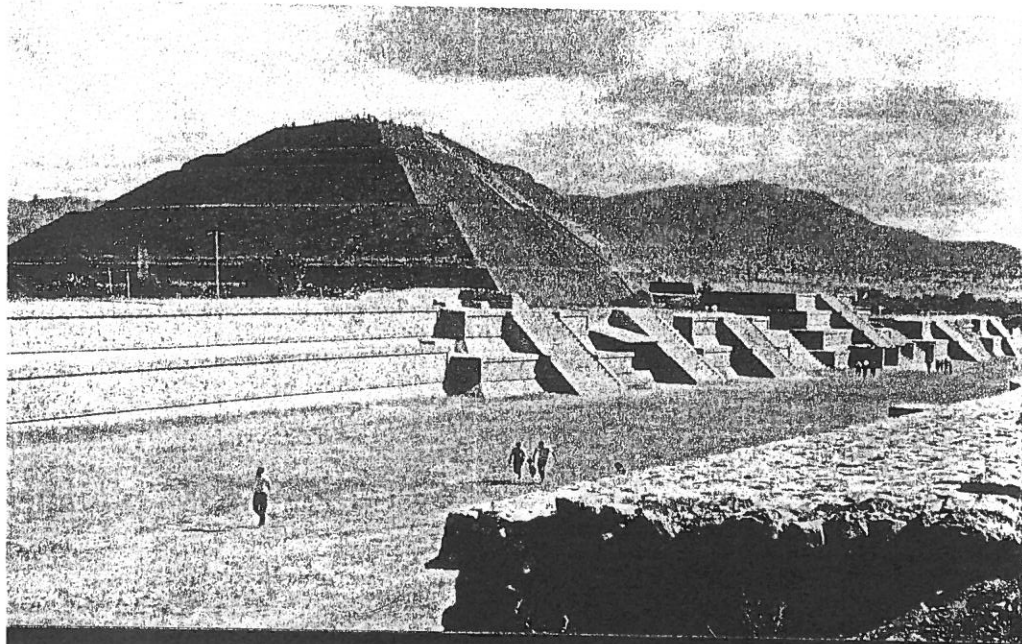
tion of the Mesoamerican completion sign that flows from the smaller talud-tablero structure that abuts the pyramid. Dedicated to the Great Goddess and her cult, the pyramid appears to possess the mountain and channel her forces to the city, acknowledging and calling upon the greater rainfall and abundance at the still-gurgling volcano. The setting of mountain and pyramid is visually compelling at Teotihuacan, as if humans sought to place their works in perfect harmony with the landscape. Intersections of such striking topography formed portals to the sacred in ancient Mesoamerica, points of liminal transformation, and the Teotihuacanos made the most of them, focussing cults on mountains and caves and celebrating them with architecture.

Volcanos
+
Caves
=
door to
Sacred

Although later partly covered by a plain pyramid, the original Temple of the Feathered Serpent always remained in view, with its elegant display of severe, frontal War Serpent headdresses floating atop the undulations of a Feathered Serpent. At the center of the large compound called the Ciudadela, once perhaps the palace of an early charismatic ruler, the Temple of the Feathered Serpent celebrates and commemorates warfare. Recently, archaeologists have explored the structure and found over 100 skeletons, almost all victims of what must have been massive human sacrifice rituals, apparently dedications to the cult of war.

48 The Pyramid of the Sun is one of the largest structures of Precolonial Mesoamerica – in fact, at some 61 m (even without the perishable superstructure that undoubtedly crowned it!) one of the tallest

48 The Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan.



49 The Zacuala compound at Teotihuacan, whose walls were lined with brilliant stucco paintings. May apparently enhanced devotion, and guided supplicants to chambers for worship.

and largest structures in North America until the twentieth century. Built over the multi-chambered cave that may have first galvanized the religious practice and civic order of Teotihuacan, the Pyramid of the Sun perhaps commemorated human creation and emergence from caves. The later Aztecs claimed to have come to Tenochtitlan from a mythic place called 'Chicomoztoc,' or Seven Caves: might not the underground chambers of Teotihuacan have entered into memory as a sacred place of origin? Built at least twice, the Pyramid of the Sun rises in five distinct and giant levels. The broad staircase is the focus of the building. A single flight of steps divides into two and then merges together again: as attendants progressed up the stairs, they would have vanished and reappeared several times to the viewer on the ground. Like all Mesoamerican architecture, Teotihuacan structures formed specific backgrounds for rituals and public events. Scholars have not agreed on just what cult is celebrated at the Pyramid of the Sun, but it may have been the center for the Storm God, or perhaps another locus for the Great Goddess, who may have been honored in the caves below. (OR BOTH?)

"inspired"

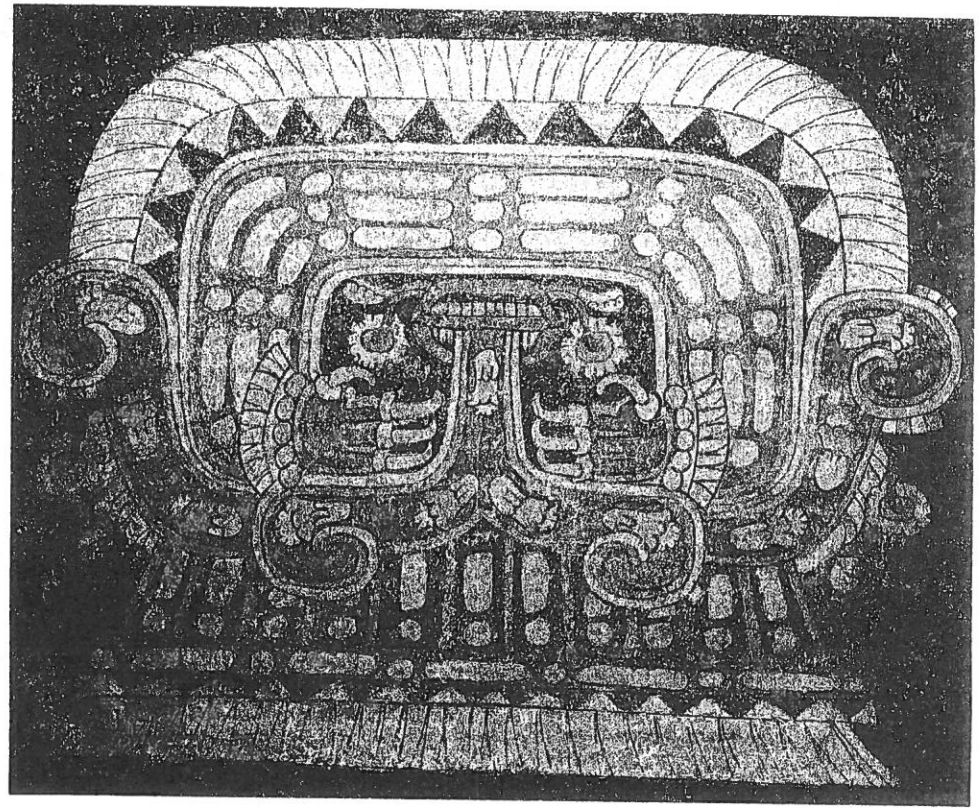


Residential compounds of various size fill out the Teotihuacan quadrants. Access to these compounds was extremely restricted, often through a single door, providing security and privacy within. Given the inevitable noise and confusion in this city of busy merchants and craftsmen, the inhabitants must have felt relief at escaping from the hubbub of the street to the seclusion of their quiet residences. Such urban life can be com-

49

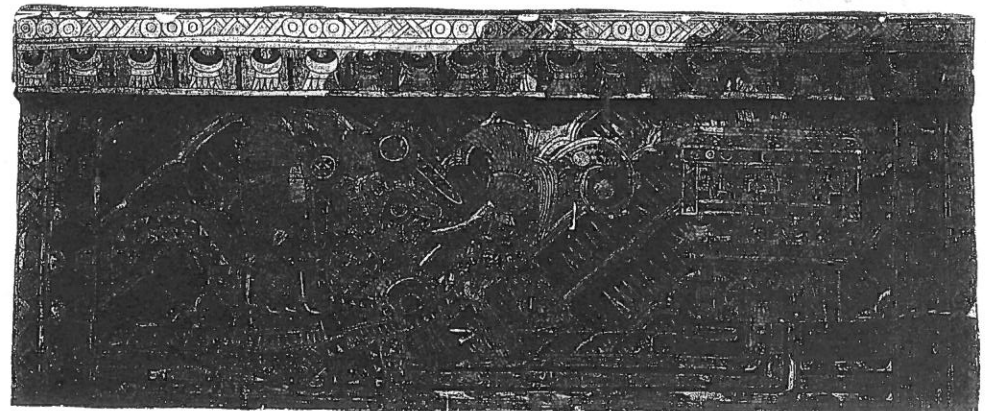


54 Mass-produced of standardized parts large and small, this large urn with its owl imagery served the Teotihuacan war cult. Across Mesoamerica, the Teotihuacan owl entered the inventory of war iconography.



55 Representations of a clawed goddess from late Teotihuacan present her head upside-down and flung backwards, perhaps even severed like those of later Aztec earth goddesses. Flowers issue from her that symbolize fertility renewed by sacrifice.

56 A stucco wall painting from Tetitla, Teotihuacan. A human in a netted jaguar suit kneels on a path marked by footprints that lead to a temple.



The Early Classic Maya

Classic Teotihuacan had already become an important center and cultural force by AD 150, but it was not until a hundred years later – about AD 250 – that the Maya entered upon their period of greatest prosperity and influence. By this time, Maya temples with corbeled vaults were being constructed, and stone stelae with Long Count dates and ruler portraits erected. All these elements appeared independently long before AD 250, but it was the beginning of their combined, continuous, and widespread use that roughly establishes the Classic era among the lowland Maya.

During the first 300 years of the Maya Early Classic (AD 250–550), major growth of cities was limited to the Central Petén, particularly at the sites of Tikal and Uaxactún. Contacts with Teotihuacan were strong, and local elites adopted Teotihuacan modes of dress and burial. Toward the end of the Early Classic, however – in the sixth century – many other Maya sites started to expand, Calakmul, Yaxchilán, Caracol, and Piedras Negras among them. The resulting competition led to warfare, and the largest and most powerful among them, Tikal, suffered terrible devastation at the hands of lesser polities. Simultaneously, the profound influence of Teotihuacan waned, and Teotihuacan motifs and costume elements, although they did not vanish, became so thoroughly incorporated into the Maya repertoire that they ceased to be foreign. By Late Classic times (AD 600–900), Tikal was only one of many well-established Maya cities, from Palenque in the west to Uxmal in the north, Altun Ha in the east, and Copán and Quiriguá in the south. At its height, Tikal may in fact have had a population of only 50,000, so these Maya cities were much smaller than Teotihuacan. They were united by the common use of the hieroglyphic writing system, but their monumental carvings and architecture reflect both regionality and innovation.

ARCHITECTURE

At Tikal, many years of large-scale archaeological exploration in the grandest of all ancient Maya cities has revealed an intricate pattern of architecture and urban planning. Like Uaxactún, Early Classic Tikal featured a massive radial pyramid with badly damaged stucco masks at the center of what is today called the Mundo Perdido ('Lost World') complex. A row of small temples flanks one side, while addressing the

radial construction from the northwest is a large building constructed in something like Teotihuacan-style talud-tablero but in proportions that are unknown at Teotihuacan itself. Was this the focus for worship of foreign gods or a shrine constructed for resident foreigners?

Before AD 250, the North Acropolis and the Great Plaza were laid out to define the strong opposition of mass and space, north-to-south, that prevailed for the rest of the city's history. (The equally strong east-west axis created by Temples I and II was not established until Late Classic times.) Massive temples clustered on the North Acropolis functioned primarily as funerary monuments of Early Classic rulers of Tikal. Structure 34, for example, housed the richly furnished tomb of the king archaeologists have nicknamed Curl Nose. After his death, Stela 4 (his accession monument) was placed in front of the tomb. Once completed, the North Acropolis must have embodied the spirit of ancient kingship.

Typical features of these Early Classic funerary pyramids are their squat proportions and the massive apron moldings that wrap around corners. As archaeologists tunnel into the most ancient constructions at Copán, within the Great Acropolis, massive early buildings have been uncovered that retain almost perfectly preserved stucco ornament. On the exterior of what may be the most ancient structure to be discovered yet is the glyph for the founder of the Copán dynasty, Yax Kuk Mo', and his tomb may lie within.

In these Early Classic Tikal and Uaxactún structures, we see the most prevalent types of architecture to survive from the Classic Maya era: great chronographic markers, memorials to ancestors (probably religious structures), and bureaucratic structures. Were we to examine buildings of such different function from another part of the world, we would probably find that they were executed using different forms, perhaps separate architectural orders. Among the Classic Maya, there was no architectural style linked exclusively to religious structures that differentiated them from civil buildings. All Maya architecture was composed of elevated platforms and corbel-vaulted chambers, organized in a variety of configurations. This makes the precise identification of function not always an easy task.

The corbel vault has sometimes been disparaged as a false arch, but the true keystone arch was not a goal of Maya architecture. To form a corbel, masonry walls were built to the desired height. At the spring of the vault, flat stones were placed closer and closer together until they could be spanned by a single capstone. The weight and mass of the walls helped



prevent collapse, as did cross-ties, many of which remain in place today. They were probably useful in raising the vaults. Exterior mansard roof profiles often followed the lines of the corbel, resulting in a stone architecture almost perfectly reproduced by the forms of Maya thatched houses today. The stone capstones conform to the hip roof of the thatched house, as if both to sanctify and exploit the domestic space. At Palenque, the conceit of the thatched house was emphasized in the buildings of the Palace, where sheets of shale were sheared off to look like thatch at the overhang of the mansard. On Late Classic buildings throughout the Puuc region, where sleek vertical lines supplanted the mansard profile, the architectural ornament at vault level featured thatched Maya houses, as if to inform the viewer of the relationship of permanent stone constructions to the humble, perishable dwelling. Almost all Maya interior spaces, then, repeat the forms of the Maya house. It is not a 'false' anything, but a 'true' Maya transformation of simple forms into elevated permanent ones.

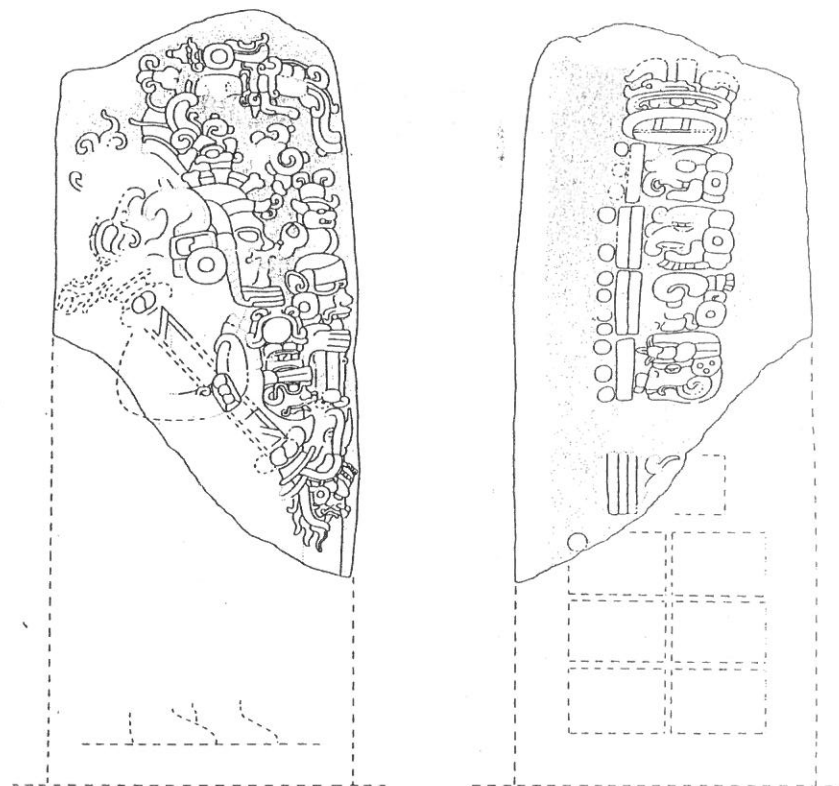
SCULPTURE

At about the time that the Maya began to use the corbel vault, they also started to erect stone monuments carved with portraits of rulers and writings of their deeds. Royal individuals now commanded the power to have themselves honored in a permanent medium during their lives, and probably to be commemorated posthumously as divine. The earliest of these new monuments with secure date and provenance is Stela 29 at Tikal, recovered from an ancient garbage dump in 1959 by archaeologists. (Other stelae were found tossed into piles of refuse or cut into building stone, but some had been reverentially buried and still others had evidently never been removed from public view in Maya times.) The roughly hewn shaft of Stela 29 was carved on one surface with a portrait of a seated Tikal ruler; the other face records a Long Count date, 8.12.14.8.15, or AD 292. Such dates denote important events and the names of their protagonists; unfortunately in this case the butt of the stela was broken off and lost in antiquity, thus depriving us of the complete record.

Typical of the representation of these early Maya lords are the very round and irregular forms. The right hand is drawn curled, as if in a mitten, and it presses a ceremonial bar to the body – many Maya kings throughout the Classic period are shown carrying this object. An ances-

stelae

84



84 Stela 29, Tikal, records the earliest contemporary Maya Long Count date, 8.12.14.8.15, corresponding to a day in the year AD 292. This early king wears a deity mask and holds out another god, while his father's portrait faces downward in the upper margin. Drawing by William R. Coe.

tor figure looks down from the upper portion of the stela, in a manner similar to the deities in the upper margin of late La Venta stelae. With his left hand, the ruler supports an image of a supernatural figure generally known as the Jaguar God of the Underworld, identified by his tau-shaped tooth, jaguar ear, and 'cruller' over the nose. All early Tikal rulers carry this deity, and he is probably a patron of the city. The king himself wears a mask as well, and his hair is shaved into a 'mohawk' and studded with bones.

~~Stela 4, perhaps reset on the Great Plaza in Late Classic times, records the accession to power in AD 380 of the ruler known as Curl Nose. Technically, the monument is very similar to Stela 29, with its uneven~~



103 Plan of the central part of Tikal. The abbreviation TPG refers to the Twin Pyramid Groups or Complexes erected in the Late Classic. The early so-called Lost World pyramid is marked here as Str. 5C-54.

Pyramids I and

11 dramatically altered the core of Tikal, changing the old north-south axis (conveyed by accretions of buildings with rounded corners and fussy moldings) to an east-west one, defined by just two towering structures with clean lines.

14 Temple I, like the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque, is a nine-level pyramid, and – again like the Palenque building – it was conceived from the first as a complete memorial, from the carved wooden lintels



104 Temple I, Tikal and the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque (ill. 99) are the two most splendid funerary pyramids of the Late Classic Maya that archaeologists have yet explored. Both structures rise in nine distinct levels, as if a reference to the notion of nine levels of the underworld were incorporated into architectural iconography.

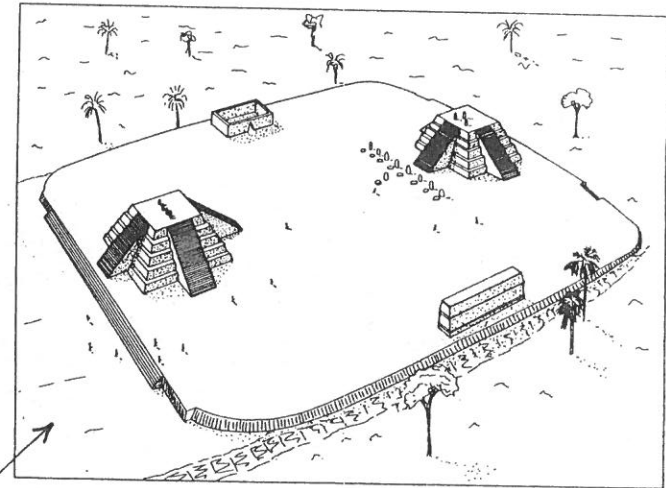
^{temple} spanning the doorways to the funerary chamber below. Such an elaborate building must surely have been planned before Ruler A's death. Unlike the Palenque temple, however, none of the construction work can have started until the body of the ruler was sealed in the tomb at the base of the temple. Temple II was presumably dedicated to Ruler A's wife (though no tomb has been found), in which case husband and wife would have faced each other through eternity, framing their ancestors to the north.

Like great beacons rising above the jungle, other temples surround the original pair of the Late Classic dynasty. These unexcavated pyramids appear to be funerary monuments of later rulers who respectfully address their forebears. Temple IV is the greatest in both mass and height, rising to 65 m – or roughly the height of the Temple of the Sun at Teotihuacan. The Tikal pyramids remain visible 12 miles to the north, from the last great rise before Uaxactún.

Although freestanding and devoid of many of the ornamental moldings typical of Early Classic Tikal, these pyramids of the Late Classic retained characteristics of the North Acropolis that are not limited to their funerary nature. In Temple I, for example, a heavy roofcomb was set over the narrow, dark chambers that are accessible through a single doorway, and its weight runs down the spine of the structure. Inset moldings, more streamlined than those of the North Acropolis, both cover the corners of the structure and create a play of light and shadow across the surface.

105 The strong east-west orientation dominated not only the Great Plaza in Late Classic times but also the rest of the site, in outlying groups known as Twin Pyramid Complexes. At least six of these architectural clusters were erected in sequence, presumably to celebrate the twenty-year katun cycle which is recorded in each group. The elevated platform of each cluster has the shape of the Maya symbol for completion, and the two radial pyramids on the east-west axis recall the chronographic marker at Uaxactún, E-VII-sub. With a range structure to the south and a shrine to a ruler in the open structure on the north, this repeated and well-defined Tikal configuration would seem to reproduce the Great Plaza at its every appearance along the causeways.

No sculpture and little architectural ornament remain *in situ* to help us understand the function and meaning of the Central Acropolis. Its gal-
leried chambers do, however, resemble a palace like that of Palenque, even if organized with less concern for overall plan. Furthermore, the



105 Reconstruction of a Twin Pyramid Complex, Tikal. Limited to Yaxha and Tikal only, these complexes were erected in the eighth century to celebrate *katun* endings. Although they might have been painted in antiquity, all the altars and stelae are plain today.

presence of a victor and his captive in eroded stucco – recorded on one of the structures flanking a trapezoidal court at the core of the Acropolis – hints that it may have been a place of sacrifice, like the East Court at Palenque, where humbled captives are depicted. A bank of four large hearths sustained a sort of institutional kitchen for the scribes, traders, priests, scholars, and nobles at work in the Central Acropolis.

Using the same fundamental elements of Maya architecture – platform, stairs, and corbel vault – the architects of Copán, Honduras, developed a distinctive aesthetic. The local stone is an easily worked volcanic tuff, ranging from pink to brown to green, so that building stones could be cut and fitted together with a precision rare in the limestone structures of Palenque or Tikal. (The stone, of course, was cut with stone tools.) At Copán, however, as elsewhere, stucco coatings would have hidden any imperfections. Emphasis was placed on tuff architectural ornament, in full three-dimensional relief, and it is the best-preserved iconographic guide to the meaning of Mesoamerican architecture. Surviving façades retain a sheer vertical profile, rather than the usual mansard roof. These clean lines are echoed in the façades of Central Yucatán and the Puuc region, and may in fact originate at Copán.

Calendar cycles marked by clusters of buildings
Again, like our "Zero"