

PREHISPANIC ARCHITECTURE AND SCULPTURE IN CENTRAL YUCATAN

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Analysis of the style of architecture and related sculpture, contemporaneous with part of the Late Classic period, prevalent in what have traditionally been designated as the Rio Bec and Chenes regions of the Maya lowlands, suggests the advisability of reconsideration of these regional designations. The Rio Bec and Chenes styles cannot readily be differentiated either in time or space and are, therefore, appropriately no more than substyles in a wider Central Yucatan regional style. In this style, internal distinctions are markedly less than those between other regional styles of the Maya lowlands. Further, on the basis of these same architectural and sculptural considerations, the Central Yucatan style is more appropriately the first phase of the Florescent period of Yucatan than the middle of the Late Classic period of the Petén with which it is contemporaneous.

THE CENTRAL YUCATAN PENINSULA is among the least studied parts of the Maya lowlands. The Chenes portion has been known since the time of John Lloyd Stephens (1843) and studied most notably since then by Ruz (1945), Robina (1956), and Pollock (1970). Partly as a result of its location, remote from centers of population, the Rio Bec portion was not even known until the expedition of Perigny (1908). Until recently, the subsequent studies were also limited to surface explorations with extremely minor exceptions (Merwin 1913; Hay 1935; Ruppert and Denison 1943).

The resemblances of Chenes to Rio Bec and Puuc architecture are described by numerous writers. Some of these ally the Chenes style more closely to that of the Puuc style and others to the Rio Bec style. Pollock displays the latter view on his map where the dashed line between the Chenes and Rio Bec areas suggests indecision as to whether these should be separate regions or not. The solid line between the Chenes and Puuc areas indicates not only greater separation of styles but also suggests that this is a geographical separation (1965:379, 1970:80-81).

Stylized open-serpent-mouth and corner long-nosed god motifs are seen on Rio Bec, Chenes, and Puuc buildings. However, ornamental towers simulating temple-pyramids are present only in Rio Bec architecture. Chenes towers are somewhat different. Puuc stonework is impressive for its sharpness of line, seldom equalled elsewhere. Chenes wall and vault masonry techniques are said by Pollock to be similar to early Puuc work and less like those of Rio Bec architecture although all three utilize veneer wall techniques. The crispness characteristic of Puuc buildings is achieved largely by this use of well-cut stone; whereas Chenes buildings frequently use a heavy overlay of stucco, and Rio Bec buildings are said by Pollock to make even greater use of stucco (1965:431, 1970:81).

Knowledge has been vastly increased by research at Becan and nearby Chicanna (Fig. 1), starting in 1969, which included both architectural excavations and studies leading to the establishment of ceramic and lithic sequences for the locality (Ball 1972, 1974a, 1974b; Eaton 1972, 1974; Potter 1973, 1974; Rovner 1974). It is this new knowledge from the first intensive excavations done in the southern portion of Central Yucatan which provides the basis for the reconsideration of previously held ideas regarding the architectural and related sculptural style in this region.

BECAN

A medium-sized site, Becan is most distinctive because the central portion of about 46 acres (9.76 ha) is surrounded by a dry moat (Fig. 2). This was constructed for defensive purposes during the local Chacsik ceramic phase contemporaneous with the first part of the Maya Early Classic period or earlier (Webster 1972, 1974; Ball and Potter 1974).

The buildings now visible at the site, however, are from a later time. Most are grouped around

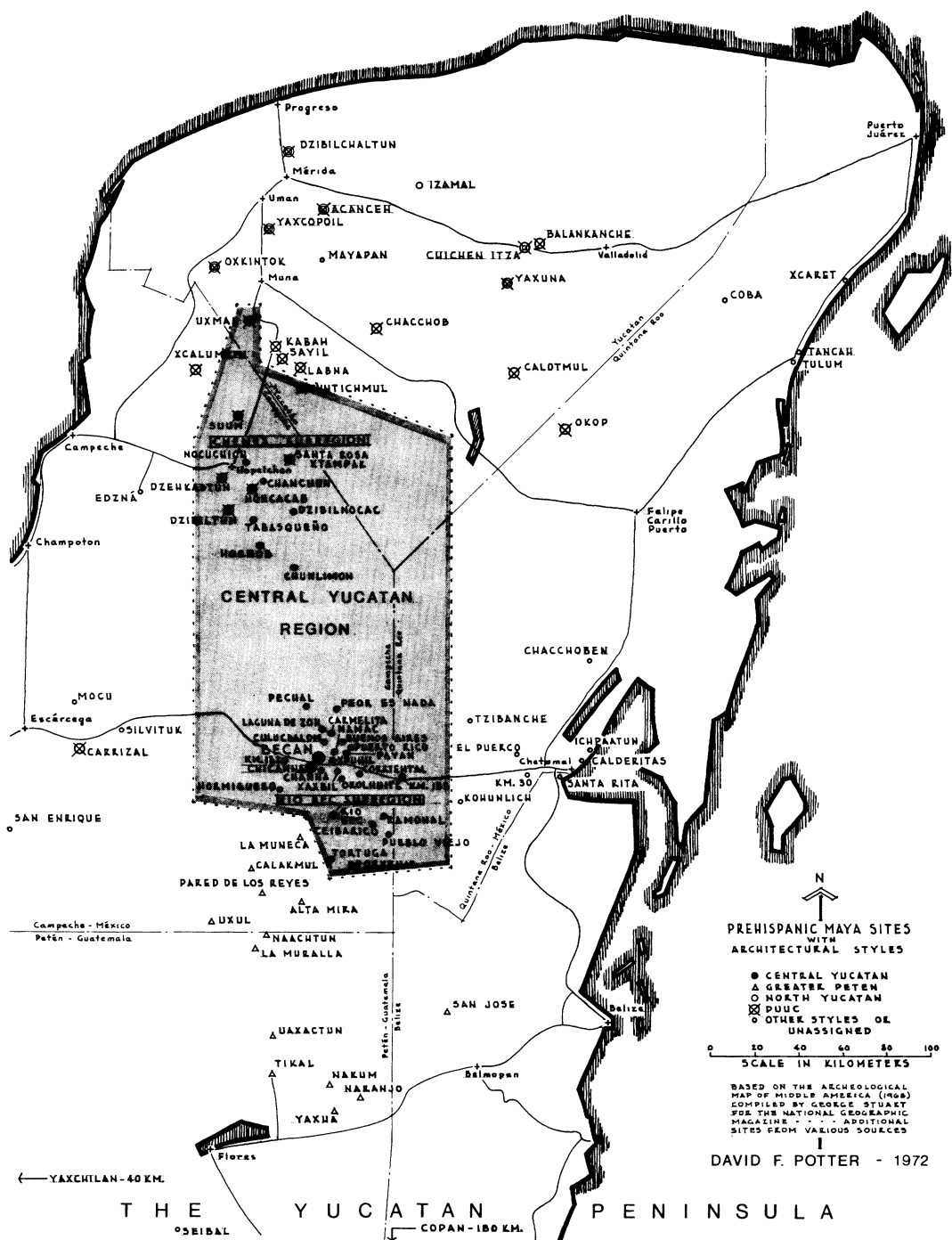


Fig. 1. Map of the Yucatan Peninsula showing selected prehispanic Maya sites and major present-day communities. The shaded Central Yucatan region suggests the approximate extent of the proposed stylistic region.

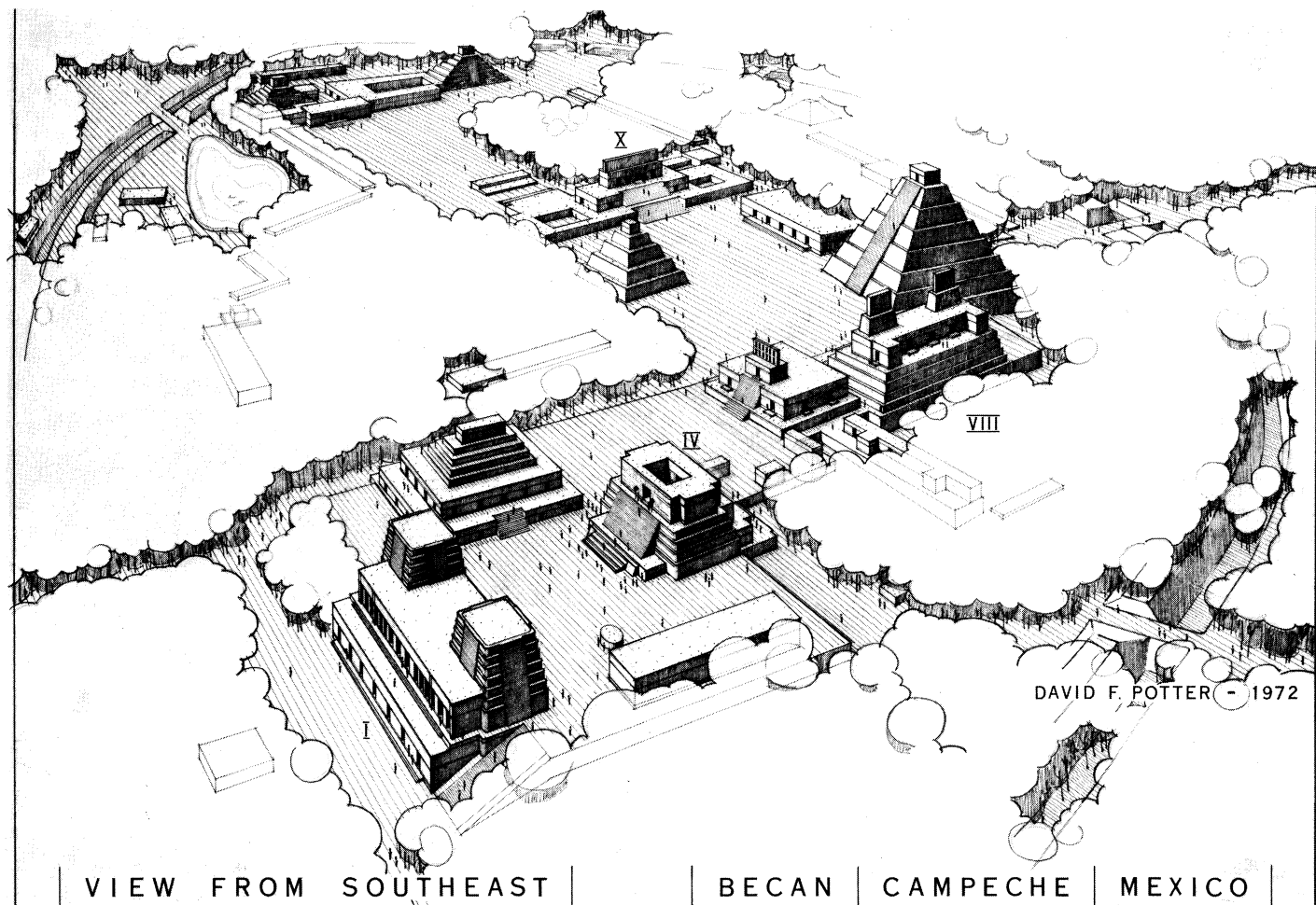


Fig. 2. Birdseye view of Becan from southeast. This drawing shows the elite center of the community at about A.D. 800, shortly prior to cessation of major building construction. At this time, most of the buildings shown were being actively used but the dry-moat, built centuries before, was probably no longer being maintained for its original defensive purposes.

the central and southeastern plazas and are notable for their wide variety in form, presumably reflecting the specialization of their functions in a complexly organized society. Of the structures where major standing architecture is observable, all differ widely from one another, yet none is the high pyramidal form generally designated as a pyramid-temple nor the low range structure usually thought to have been a palace. Both these forms are present at Becan, however, most notably represented by the bulkiest structure at the site, which was undoubtedly a pyramid-temple.

Structure IV

The only large structure at Becan which has been intensively excavated, Structure IV, has a south monumental stairway facing the southeast plaza (Figs. 2, 3). This leads to an upper facade with remnants of relief sculpture in stone and plaster. Centered on this facade is a doorway leading into a small courtyard surrounded on other sides by large corbel-vaulted rooms. These, with smaller rooms at the level just below, suggest a residential suite suitable for elite occupation. The arrangement of rooms around the courtyard and the large number in the suite—probably 18—demand this explanation rather than that of ceremonial function suggested by the monumental stairway and the general pyramidal shape of the structure. The north side of Structure IV has additional lower levels of rooms of which the more important one faces a terrace approximately at the same level as the plaza on the other side (Figs. 4, 5).

Veneer wall construction at Structure IV is of impressively well fitted stones, especially on exterior surfaces, but vault stones are generally only roughly rounded on the exposed surface. The core at both locations is cemented stone rubble. Surfaces, including floors, are generally of plaster, and the walls often show signs of having been brightly painted. Despite the monumental character of the conception and the often impressive workmanship, the seemingly symmetrical structure lacks the precise symmetry one might expect. Therefore, it may have escaped the rigid, static quality that such structures often have. By our standards, variability in wall thickness, lack of truly



Fig. 3. South side of Structure IV, Becan in 1970 after some reconstruction had been done. The monumental stairway was originally about four times the reconstructed width shown here. (Photo Richard Stewart (©) National Geographic Society)



Fig. 4. North side of Structure IV, Becan during 1970 excavations. There is an additional minor level of rooms below the three levels shown here. (Photo Richard Stewart (©) National Geographic Society)

square corners, and omission of masonry bonding at corners are curious shortcomings for such otherwise pretentious construction, but not out of character for the Maya.

Architectural sculpture at Structure IV is separable into categories, the most conspicuous and perhaps most distinctive of which is that of worked stone with a generally thin covering of plaster (Fig. 5). The latter originally provided only the finer details of the design. The result is a pattern in relief, either in panels or over large wall areas, of what are generally rectilinear conceptual motifs, the meanings of which can often not be deciphered. Not to be overlooked is another category of sculpture which at Structure IV is mostly badly destroyed but which must originally have been very prominent in the upper courtyard. Here, one largely intact human form, in-the-round or almost so, plus numerous fragments of carved or moulded plaster, suggests that ornate, generally curvilinear decoration covered the upper walls (Figs. 6, 7). The human form is highly perceptual, or representational, but the extent to which the remainder was similar is uncertain because of its present extreme fragmentation. Three plaster masks having partly simian characteristics are grotesques based on the idea monkey rather than attempts to portray real monkeys (Fig. 8). A final category of sculpture is that of simple geometric motifs which seem to have no connotations

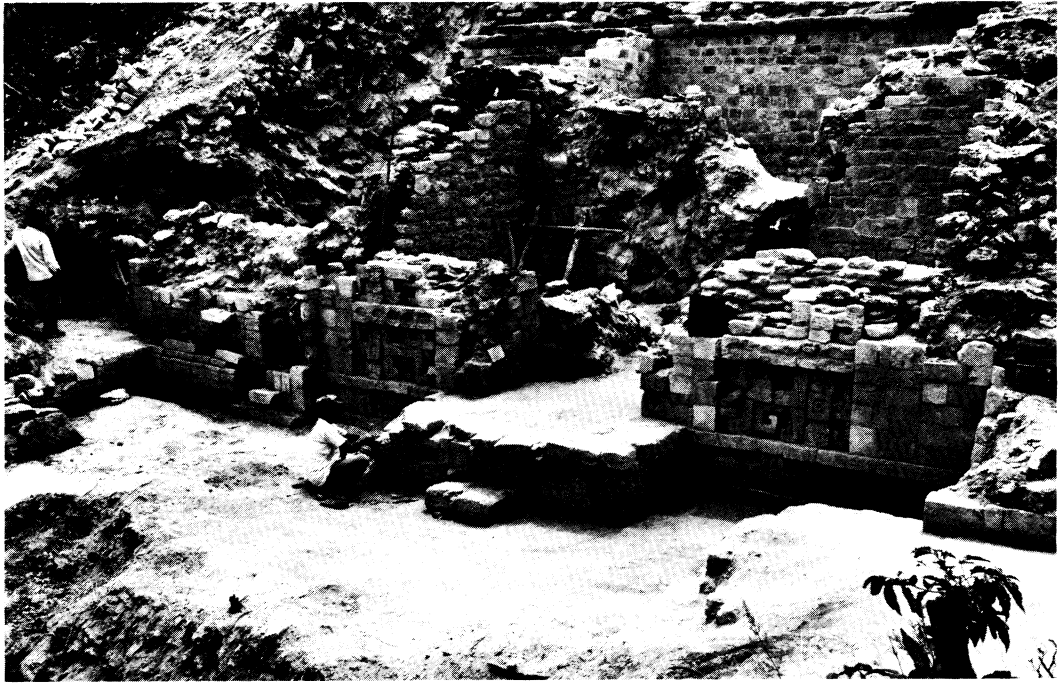


Fig. 5. Terrace at north side of Structure IV, Becan showing results of further excavation after Fig. 4 was taken. (Photo Richard Stewart (©) National Geographic Society)

beyond those of decoration but may, in fact, symbolize ideas of which we are not aware. These include applied columns in the center of the basal moulding, recessed cross motifs, and stepped T-forms (Fig. 9).

Structure I

The tower complex characteristic of the Rio Bec subregion is represented at Becan by Structure I, across the plaza from the monumental stairway side of Structure IV (Fig. 2). Each of the towers of Structure I has the typical tiers with rounded corners, but the towers are proportionally lower and wider than those at other sites. Also unusual are the blank facade between towers and the levels of rooms on the opposite side, the upper having wide openings to the exterior with rectangular intermediate piers. The lower rooms here have bevelled vault stone faces unlike those sometimes said to be characteristic of construction in the Rio Bec subregion (Pollock 1970:81).

Structure VIII

Facing the central plaza, Structure VIII has a monumental stairway leading, like that of Structure IV, to a complex of rooms at the top (Fig. 2). Structure VIII also has some strange rooms at a single general level within the lower mass. These are very rough and unplastered, except for the floors, with immensely high vaulted ceilings. Some of the vault capstones are more than 8 m above the floor. One upper room retains plaster having a double offset at the vault spring line, demonstrating how a thick plaster covering was used to conceal the roughness of slab vaulting.

Structure X

The open-serpent-mouth sculptured motif preserved so beautifully at Structure II, Chicanna, is certainly present at Structure X, which faces Structure VIII at the other end of the central plaza

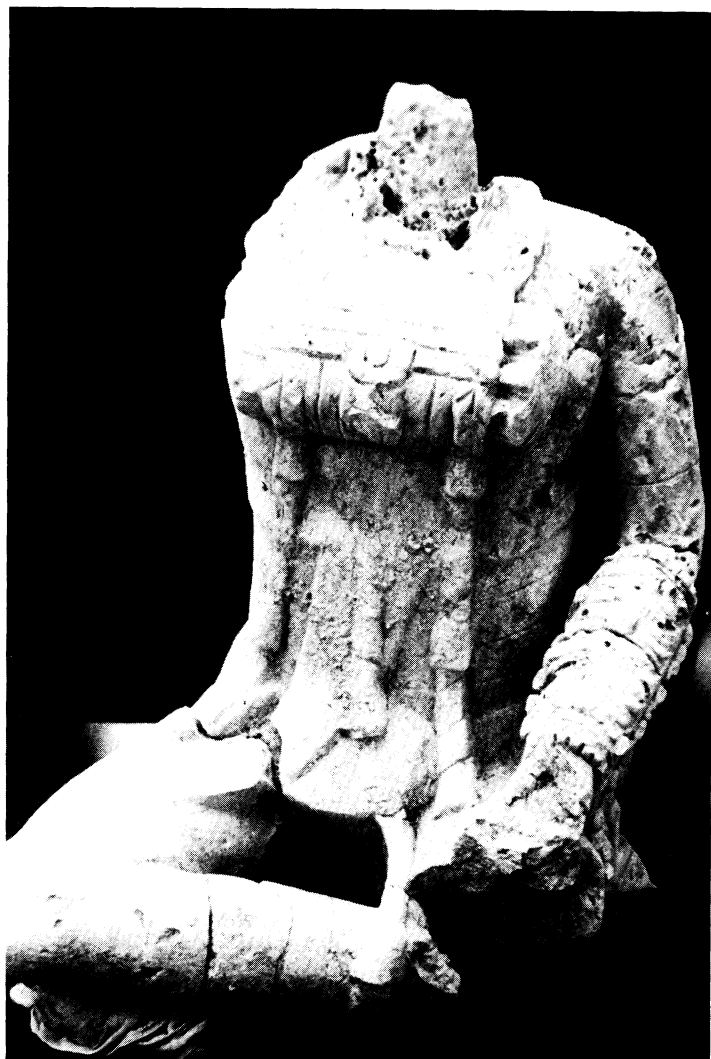


Fig. 6. Human figure found in debris at the north side of upper courtyard at Structure IV, Becan. The extant portion of this largely plaster figure is about 68 cm high and has remnants of red-brown paint on the surface. (Photo E. W. Andrews V)

(Fig. 2). Here, it is in poorer condition and clearly simpler in design. It is located on the facade of a multi-roomed upper structure reached by a set of monumental stairs. The wood lintel of the central, inner doorway here is intact and probably represents the method by which most important doorways were originally spanned in this locality.

CHICANNA

Smaller than Becan and located less than 3 km southwest, Chicanna must have had a close relationship with that site during the period of time represented by most of the buildings now visible at both places. In light of this, the contrast between the relatively plain but massive Becan structures and the sometimes remarkably ornate, smaller ones at Chicanna is interesting. Some of this contrast is probably the result of differential preservation, but some must have been real at the time they were in use.



Fig. 7. Plaster decoration from Structure IV, Becan. Piece is about 28 cm high with remnants of red paint. (Photo Richard Stewart (©) National Geographic Society)

Structure I

The Rio Bec tower complex is represented at Chicanna by Structure I, which is more like the buildings with slender towers at Xpuhil I and Rio Bec B than is Structure I, Becan (Andrews IV 1965, Fig. 16; Pollock 1965, Fig. 38; Gendrop 1970, Fig. 199b). Lest the comment about ornateness at Chicanna and the general reputation of Rio Bec architecture be misleading, it should be noted that the west wall of Structure I, Chicanna, below the medial moulding is very plain. It probably always was.

Structure II

Facing the towered structure across the one major plaza at Chicanna, Structure II was intensively excavated in 1970 and partially restored in accordance with photographs taken in 1966 when it was discovered by Eaton. This is a low, linear structure of numerous rooms. The west facade has a center section with a remarkably well preserved open-serpent-mouth motif in



Fig. 8. Plaster mask showing monkey characteristics which was found near base of south stairway of Structure IV, Becan. Including headdress, this figure is a little more than 41 cm tall. (Photo E. W. Andrews V)

beautifully executed relief sculpture of stone with thin overlying plaster (Fig. 10). The virtual identity of this with the facade at Structure 2, Hochob, has to be considered significant (Fig. 1). The differences seem more like those which might be expected between buildings at the same site than like differences between what have been described—I think mistakenly—as two stylistic regions, Rio Bec and Chenes. Each has a frontal monster mask, probably the god Itzamna (Thompson 1942), with rectilinear eyes, although those at Hochob have a somewhat curved scroll within. Both have a mouth which is the center doorway of the building, upper teeth, and various lateral elements representing ears and ear ornaments. There are large serpent-mouth profiles at each side of the doorway in each instance as well as vertical stacks of small, stylized serpents at the lateral extremes of the main motif (Robina 1956; Gendrop 1970, Fig. 200; Pollock 1970, Fig. 10a).

The lateral portions of this facade at Chicanna have doorways forming part of stylized, small Maya houses (Fig. 11). On the other hand, at Hochob, this motif is compressed into a narrow, vertical space adjacent to the central serpent-mouth panel. Although the outer portions of facade

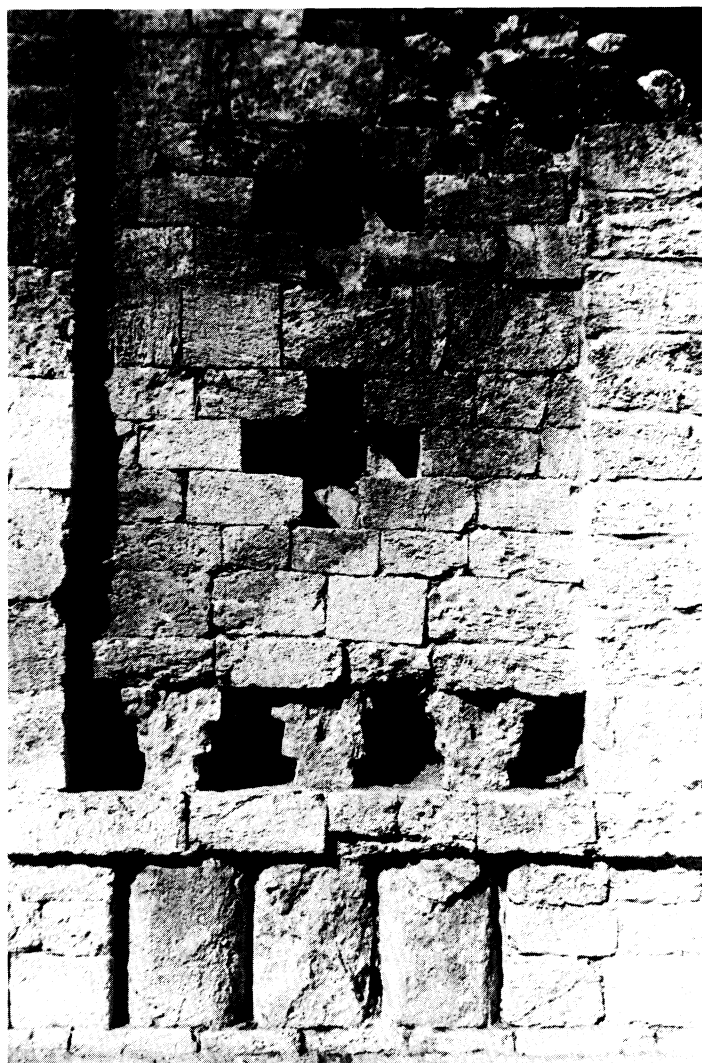


Fig. 9. North side of the courtyard at the top of Structure IV, Becan showing the simple geometric decoration typical of the lower walls in this area. The overall dimension of the recessed crosses is about 40 cm.

at the structures differ markedly, the stylized house located here at Chicanna has its counterpart at Hochob, thus reinforcing the sense of similarity imparted by the central motifs of the facades.

Structure VI

This small structure has a panel of relief sculpture similar to those panels of sculpture at Structure IV, Becan. Perhaps more important are the best preserved remains of a roof comb known at either Becan or Chicanna. Its single wall construction is typical in the region. The plaster sculpture between the slots in the roof comb, known at similar locations at other sites, no longer exists at this structure. However, protruding stones tenoned into the comb are still in place and probably supported sculpture.

Structure XX

Discovered by Eaton in 1970, Structure XX is about 300 m northwest of the main plaza at

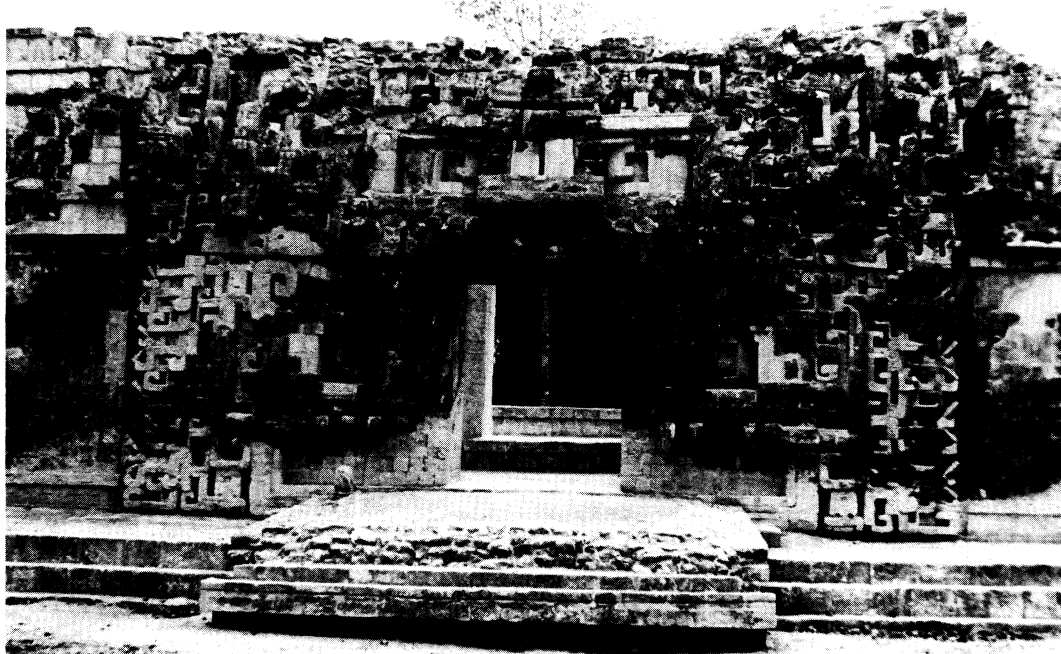


Fig. 10. Center of main facade at Structure II, Chicanna after 1970 reconstruction based on photographs taken when building was discovered in 1966. Surfaces are mostly limestone with remnants of covering plaster. Facade has remains of red, blue and blue-green paint.



Fig. 11. North portion of main facade at Structure II, Chicanna in 1970 showing very little reconstruction.

Chicanna. It is a relatively small but complex building having upper and lower levels of rooms, the latter of which is largely buried or destroyed. The upper level has fantastically elaborate and well preserved sculpture, both in panels and in an overall design of the open-serpent-mouth motif (Figs. 12, 13). Two corners of this upper structure have vertical stacks of stylized long-nosed gods so similar to those at Hochob as to be difficult to distinguish (Robina 1956; Pollock 1970, Fig. 7c).



Fig. 12. West portion of south facade at Structure XX, Chicanna as it was discovered in 1970. This shows corner masks at left and part of the profile serpent mouth characteristic of the open-serpent-mouth motif at right. Surfaces visible are largely limestone with remnants of covering plaster. This building has traces of red paint.

STYLISTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Rio Bec Subregion

Comparison of Becan and Chicanna with data available from other sites in the Rio Bec subregion suggests a shared style of architecture and architectural sculpture having considerable diversity within sites as well as between sites.

The Rio Bec style has among its most obvious characteristics the Chenes open-serpent-mouth motif, often associated with corner masks of the long-nosed god, carried out in a distinctive sculptural style based on relief in stone overlaid by a thin coat of plaster which provided the detail (Figs. 10, 12, 13). Besides those described for Becan and Chicanna, these motifs occur surely at Rio Bec, Group I, and twice at Hormiguero (Ruppert and Denison 1943, Pls. 8, 11-13). Several other facades known in this still incompletely explored subregion probably have the same motif. The prominence of this sculpture when it does occur and its fair frequency make it difficult to consider the open-serpent-mouth as being other than an intrinsic part of the local style, whatever its origins.

A second obvious subregional characteristic is the tower complex with its essentially solid towers simulating steep-sided pyramidal platforms with small temples at the top. There are



Fig. 13. South portion of east facade at Structure XX, Chicanna as it was discovered in 1970 showing corner masks at left and one of several sculptured panels.

stairways which are, however, entirely too steep to be climbed and the temples are solid with pseudo-doorways. The towers are characteristically built in tiers with rounded corners. Including those at Becan and Chicanna, there are ten surely identified tower complexes of this sort in the subregion plus several badly destroyed towers which may have been similar. The close relationship of the tower complex with the open-serpent-mouth motif is demonstrated by their co-occurrence at Structure II, Hormiguero, and by the psuedo-temples atop the towers at Xpuhil, which seemingly have open-serpent-mouth designs (Ruppert and Denison 1943, Pl. 11; Pollock 1965, Fig. 38).

Less obvious now than these, probably more because of greater fragility than original scarcity, is sculpture in a more curvilinear style done largely in heavy plaster. This is often perceptual in nature. It has been described for Structure IV, Becan (Figs. 6-8) and exists in fragmentary condition at several sites. The protruding stones, tenoned into the wall, at Structures II and VI, Chicanna, are interpreted as having been backing for this type of sculpture. At the latter structure, such stones on the roof comb are probably remnants suggesting a frequent position for such

decoration which is now better preserved at Structure I, Culucbalom (Ruppert and Denison 1943, Pls. 41, 43).

In addition, there are simple geometric motifs which occur at several sites in the subregion. These include partially cylindrical applied columns, most often in sets in the center member of a basal moulding as at Structure IV, Becan (Fig. 9), but sometimes in the lower wall zone. Step-frets, lattice panels, and recessed cross motifs are reported from enough sites to be considered characteristic of the style. Medial and cornice mouldings as well as those at the base are almost always multi-membered with a recessed center framed by protruding upper and lower members and with a probable additional outleaning member above the others at the cornice.

Construction techniques throughout the subregion are generally similar to those described for Structure IV, Becan. A significant exception concerns the exposed surface of vault stones, which are by no means always rounded as they are there. In a sizable minority of instances, vaults have stones which are more carefully cut and the exposed surface bevelled. Sometimes, as at Rio Bec B, this bevelling is done with considerable precision (E. W. Andrews V, personal communication).

Central Yucatan Region

Chenes architecture may most appropriately be considered to represent another subregion which along with that at Rio Bec constitutes the Central Yucatan region (Fig. 1). Ball refers to Rio Bec-Chenes as one style in a paper submitted in February 1972 (1974:86) but elsewhere refers to Rio Bec architecture which merely "bears some striking resemblances to that of the Chenes region" (1972:39, 1974:117). Pollock somewhat hesitatingly insists on a distinction between Rio Bec and Chenes styles (1970:81-82). It seems to me that the hesitations about this distinction should cease. A review of Pollock's stylistic regions within the Maya lowlands (1965, Fig. 1) results in the conclusion that there are markedly fewer differences between Rio Bec and Chenes architecture than between them and any of the other regions. My study of the data, both new and old, leads me to support the opinion of Ruz (1945:89) that, with the exception of the towers, the architecture of the Chenes is essentially the same as that of Rio Bec and its decoration identical in theme and realization.

The conceptual relief sculpture on building facades is similar and sometimes virtually identical as has been described for Chicanna and Hochob. These are representative of numerous instances of prominent and elaborately decorated facades in each subregion, probably as many in the Rio Bec as in the Chenes.

Pollock's impression that Rio Bec buildings use more, presumably meaning thicker, plaster in their relief sculpture seems unwarranted. The plaster on portions of the facade sculpture at Structure IV, Becan, proves to be 0.2 cm thick. Significantly, the ornate designs visible at Structures II and XX, Chicanna (Figs. 10, 12, 13), are largely carved in stone. Obviously they were covered with plaster originally, but the remnants are thin and indicate that plaster could never have been essential to any but the finest details of the conception. Therefore, plaster on some Rio Bec sculpture seems to have approached the irreducible minimum. The curvilinear, sometimes perceptual sculptures at Structure IV, Becan (Figs. 6-8), are largely of plaster as are others in this subregion, but so are similar fragments in the Chenes subregion such as those on the roof comb at Structure 2, Hochob (Pollock 1973:13, Fig. 10a).

Subregional construction differs primarily in the techniques of vault surface construction. There is a tendency toward rounded surfaces on Rio Bec vault stones and bevelled surfaces on those in the Chenes, but the distinction here is not clear-cut. There are numerous vaults with each type of surface in each subregion and many of intermediate form resisting classification. It is crucial in discussion of vault construction techniques in the Chenes subregion to recognize that many of the buildings there are of a style not thought representative of the Central Yucatan region. According to Pollock's descriptions (1970), many buildings at so-called Chenes sites are wholly, or partly, in the Puuc style. I consider the Puuc style chronologically rather than spatially distinctive from the Central Yucatan style. With these buildings discarded from consideration, the differences between Rio Bec and Chenes techniques—even those of vault surface—become minimally significant.

Central Yucatan and Puuc Stylistic Relationships

The Puuc style owes more to motifs and techniques from Central Yucatan than it does to new ideas from highland Mexico or elsewhere.

The elaborate relief sculpture of Central Yucatan is developed into the similar but much finer mosaic for which Puuc is noted. In her analysis of the placement of motifs in Puuc mosaic sculpture, Sharp lists as the basic designs: long-nosed masks, applied columns, lattice patterns, step-frets, and T-forms or step-pyramids (1972:13-21, Figs. 1-12). These are all characteristic of the Central Yucatan style.

Construction techniques in Puuc architecture are a reasonable progression from those of Central Yucatan with stonework more finely done and more definitely a veneer for what is now essentially concrete construction. The most apparent change is at the vaults where the truly corbelled and often rough-surfaced Central Yucatan vault becomes, in Puuc construction, carefully bevelled and boot-shaped veneer stones which lend nothing to the structural strength of the vault. The offset at vault spring line which is sometimes distinguishable in Central Yucatan vaults is standard in Puuc vaults and is accompanied by a similar offset at the same level of the adjacent end walls (Andrews IV 1965, Fig. 22).

CENTRAL YUCATAN IN MAYA DEVELOPMENT

Chronology

Radiocarbon dates from samples taken at Becan and Chicanna do not consistently support either the Goodman-Martínez-Thompson or the Spinden correlations of the Maya calendar with our own. As a matter of convenience, I will use the former.

A new ceramic sequence developed by Ball (1972, 1974b) using material from Becan and Chicanna makes it possible to establish that most of the known buildings there date from the Bejuco and Chintok phases; Structure XX, Chicanna, is probably slightly later. These phases together are roughly contemporaneous with the Tepeu 1 and 2 subphases at Uaxactun. Construction in another style at one building excavated at Chicanna (Eaton 1974:136) and dated to the early Bejuco phase suggests the hypothesis that the Central Yucatan style can be narrowed in time to correspond to the late Bejuco and Chintok phases only. By this reasoning, Central Yucatan architecture would be contemporaneous with the Tepeu 2 subphase, which is the middle portion of the Late Classic period at Uaxactun, between approximately A.D. 690 and 830 (Smith 1955:107).

It is clear from ceramic data obtained from excavations at Becan and Chicanna that neither the tower complex nor the serpent-mouth relief sculpture generally precedes the other there. Each occurs both early and late during the period of construction of buildings in the Central Yucatan style. This supports the contemporaneity suggested by their occurrence on the same buildings at Xpuhil and Hormiguero.

Various data indicate the general contemporaneity of construction in the Central Yucatan region with that now securely dated at Becan and Chicanna. By far the majority of this evidence, however, remains that of stylistic similarity of the architecture and related sculpture.

Smith places maximal Puuc development in the locality of Uxmal at A.D. 800-1000 (1971:3). Andrews IV indicates that the Puuc style at Dzibilchaltun comes after Tepeu 2 construction in the south (1960:256), and his son is now convinced that the vast bulk of construction in the Puuc style postdates the end of Tepeu 2 (Andrews V 1972:7). His recent study, done with Ball, of trade polychrome ceramics from Dzibilchaltun confirms this general timing for the beginning of Puuc construction (Andrews V and Ball 1975:235, 244).

The views of Smith and Andrews V both allow for a small amount of construction in the Puuc style before the end of Tepeu 2, suggesting that it overlaps with late Central Yucatan construction. The overlap would appear to lengthen somewhat if Structure XX, Chicanna, proves to postdate the Chintok ceramic phase or if other Central Yucatan structures, when better known, turn out to be later but still within the stylistic limits of the postulated Central Yucatan style. However, despite Pollock's belief that "the Chenes and Puuc architectural remains are at least in part contemporary"

(1970:84), which seems to imply an appreciable length of time, present knowledge suggests that the overlap is of short duration and fully compatible with what one would expect in the development of one style out of another. In other words, the Puuc style appears to be generally subsequent to that of Central Yucatan.

It is sometimes claimed that the Adivino at Uxmal provides evidence that construction in the Puuc style started much earlier. This building has an upper facade with the Central Yucatan serpent-mouth motif above, and therefore postdating, what is clearly construction in the Puuc style. Pollock dismisses the upper sculptured facade as merely a Puuc copy of the earlier style (1970:83). There is a single radiocarbon determination from a sample taken at the base of the structure which appears to date its beginnings several hundred years earlier than other suggestions about the beginning of Puuc construction. To support this, Sáenz has a small ceramic collection from this same part of the building which he interprets as predating most of the ceramics known from Uxmal (Sáenz 1969:12-13). It is reasonable to agree with Pollock about the upper serpent-mouth facade and even easier to dismiss the radiocarbon date as being just one determination. It has been amply demonstrated elsewhere that a single radiocarbon date is not conclusive evidence. Additional consideration of the Adivino data is necessary but, at this point, it can be considered only as a challenge, not as a refutation of an otherwise well-supported chronological framework.

Period Terminology

The Central Yucatan style may properly be thought to represent the Late Classic period, but only if this is thought of in its restricted sense as the time span between roughly A.D. 600 and 900. Often, however, this terminology is applied to the entire Maya lowlands by archaeologists for whom it implies additional meanings. It is generally recognized that these do not apply with any precision to other areas in Mesoamerica. In fact, this period designation was established for the southern Maya lowlands and, when viewed as anything other than strictly a span of time, does not fit the situation in the northern Maya lowlands much better than it does that in most non-Maya areas.

A traditional view of the Classic period of southern Maya lowland development is that suggested by Morley and Brainerd (1956:40) in which it is defined by dated inscriptions, polychrome pottery and corbel-vaulted masonry buildings and is, in fact, a developmental stage. These have been recognized for years as arbitrary but more or less acceptable markers. By these definitions, it is doubtful if the civilization of the Maya in Central Yucatan should be regarded as Classic. Dated inscriptions and polychrome pottery, although present, are notable for their scarcity. Corbel-vaulted masonry buildings exist in abundance but, if this criterion is expanded into that of architectural style in general, it is clear there is a significant difference between this style and that considered to be truly Classic Maya.

The designation "Classic period" having these connotations, it is important that the Central Yucatan style be placed in a category more closely expressing its own identity in time and space.

The Puuc style is said by Andrews IV (1965:289) to represent the first phase of what he calls the Florescent period in the Yucatan Peninsula followed by the style manifested almost entirely at Chichen Itza which he calls the second phase. Brainerd calls these the Florescent stage (1958). Consideration of the Central Yucatan architectural style, including related sculpture, suggests its much closer relationship to the subsequent Florescent developments of Yucatan than to the contemporaneous Classic of the Petén. Despite reservations about the value-laden implications of the designation but recognizing advantages in terminology for which there is precedent, I urge that the Central Yucatan style be thought to represent the first phase of a Maya Florescent period in Yucatan followed by the phases defined by Andrews IV. This Florescent is obviously related to, but distinguishable from, the Maya Classic.

Implications

It is of interest to consider how the definition of a Central Yucatan stylistic region contributes to our understanding of Maya society.

If it is recognized that the style existed in Central Yucatan by about the end of the seventh century A.D. and that the later Puuc style developed largely from it, direct influence from Central Mexico need not be thought especially strong at the beginning of Puuc development. Instead, stylistic similarities suggest a continuing close relationship between Yucatan and portions of Central Mexico starting no later than the end of the seventh century A.D. The step-fret motif serves as an example of the evidence for this. Prominent in the Puuc style as well as in Central Mexico at such places as El Tajín, Veracruz, and later at Mitla, Oaxaca, the step-fret was used earlier during the seventh or eighth centuries A.D. at Lambityeco, Oaxaca. Its similar early occurrence in the Central Yucatan style at Rio Bec, Okolhuitz, and Xaxbil establishes that the relationship started early without making clear where the step-fret originated.

Willey, who distinguishes between Classic and non-Classic developments at Altar de Sacrificios in the southern Maya lowlands, sees a first wave of the latter in the ninth century A.D. which he suspects as having originated from Becan or related sites. This inference is based on similarities in style of sculpture. Based on architecture and architectural sculpture, the Central Yucatan region can be proposed as the geographical area related to Becan from which such influence may have come. It is speculated by Willey that the people involved were Putun Maya with obvious implication that those associated with the Classic developments were not (1973:61).

Kaufman, on the other hand, suggests the possibility that civilization in Yucatan was developed by Yucatec-Maya speakers as contrasted with the Classic civilization in the Petén which was developed by Chol-Maya speakers (Vogt 1971:431).

Either way, there is a suggested language boundary, probably developing distinctiveness through time. This boundary and the closer relationship of the area north of it with Central Mexico, starting by the end of the seventh century A.D., help explain the divergence of the northern area societies from the Classic societies farther south. The placement of Coba and other such north Yucatan sites in this model awaits further research.

The Classic-Florescent distinction in terminology has the virtue of reminding us of a boundary which seems significant. In terms of research design, it suggests the probability that such things as the interesting epigraphic and other evidence for four regional capitals in the Maya lowlands during Late Classic times, proposed by Marcus (1973:911), should be interpreted as indicative of such organization for the southern area only. The north, by then, probably had a separate, though possibly similar system, the nature of which should be investigated independently. Future studies of the prehispanic Maya lowlands should take into account this long-recognized but sometimes-ignored distinctiveness.

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