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Constructing Maya Communities

Ethnography for Archaeology

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Given that millions of traditional Maya live today, it is surprising how little ethnography has figured into reconstructions of their ancient societies. Early Mayanists pointed out many continuities between the present and the past. For example, de Borhegyi (1956) argued that a conservative Maya folk culture had adapted to state institutions on its own terms in the course of being dominated for successive 500–600-year intervals by its own elite (the Classic period), a Mexicanized elite (the Postclassic), and a European elite (the colonial period to the present). While the living Maya of Chiapas and Guatemala provided homologies for interpreting the Classic Maya during the 1960s, the continuity approach has had relatively little impact on mainstream archaeology. What cultural lens is appropriate for interpreting the residue of Maya civilization? Certainly epigraphy and ethnohistory written by the Maya themselves temper modernist Western perceptions, but it is recent uses of ethnography that have resulted in breakthroughs such as the discoveries that Classic rulers called forth their ancestors (Schele and Freidel 1990) in shamanic rituals like those enacted by lineage heads on hilltop altars in Guatemala today, that basic iconographic elements and cosmological principles have endured since the Classic period (Friedel, Schele, and Parker 1993, Fox 1996), and that ancestor veneration like that of today is expressed in the design of Classic-period ceremonial centers (McAnany 1995).

We examine the continuity between the present-day emic social organization of local communities (Carmack 1966, Vogt 1969) and the earlier principles of lineage alliance that allowed the construction of successively larger blocs of communities nested within the aboriginal segmentary state. The organizational formats are culled from colonial dictionaries, conquest-period native chronicles, present-day oral narratives, and ethnography. We suggest that Classic Maya archaeology would benefit from the guidance of ethnography just as epigraphy has complemented and corrected some of the excesses in interpretation from the materialist theoretical perspective.

In this study, segmentary lineages in highland Guatemala and Yucatan are traced from the Classic-Postclassic transition (ca. A.D. late 800s–900s) to the present to show how they aggregated into egalitarian and hierarchical polities. Lineages split, migrated long distances to fuse with conquered peoples in new localities, and amalgamated with scattered fraternal lineages when threatened (on rebellions, dispersals, and shifting states, see Tambiah 1985:322–6; Kelly 1985:72). The Maya community was made up of intermarrying patrilineages that shared a patron deity and replicated this pattern within successively larger aggregations. Lineages competed for rank and special prerogatives; such political struggles constitute much of the dynamics expressed in Classic-period epigraphy and Postclassic ethnohistory. Accordingly, from ethnography, ethnohistory, archaeology, and mythology we summarize lineage alliances for the Postclassic, ca. A.D. 900–1520, political roles of lineages within land-sharing sodalities from the colonial period to the present, and evidence for status and wealth differentials between lineages.¹

Case studies of segmentary lineages in the Quiché municipality of Momostenango in the densely populated highlands of Guatemala and the Yucatec village of Ox Mul in the frontier rain forest of Belize delineate nearly opposite ends of the spectrum of community size and traditionalism and may speak to pan-Maya commonalities, past and present.² Our survey begins in the highlands, where lineages are better documented.

A Quiché Model for Lineage Sodalities

AMAK, TINAMIT, AND CHINAMIT

The Quiché lineages were organized in communities called amaks and chinamits. In the colonial dictionaries, both are equated with “hamlet” [aldea] [see Villacsas 1692, de Coto 1983, Zuniga ca. 1610]. Ximenez [1939, vol. 1:130] calls amaks “small rural communities” extending from a fortified central town [tinamit] “like the legs of a spider,” though “unified as single body” [u xe amak [Popol Vuh 1971 ca. 1554]:228]. Amak seems to be a general term meaning a community segment tied through kinship to other such bodies. A rural amak owed allegiance to the capital (amak tecpan) and maintained obligations across the state (de Coto 1983:262).

1. Cook and Fox investigated Ox Mul, a Yucatec village in western Belize, during 1991–93 under the auspices of the Department of Archaeology, Belmopan, Belize. Ox Mul translates as “Three Hills,” a reference to the altar-sized pre-Hispanic mounds there. Fox and Melinda A. Goetz mapped Ox Mul [fig. 1] and Goetz drafted figures 2–4 with funding from the Baylor University Research Council.

2. Ox Mul is the name used by its Yucatec-descended villagers; its official name is omitted here. Ox Mul lies 6 km from Tipu, founded ca. A.D. 1300 and the capital of the semi-autonomous polity Dzulunicic ["Foreign People"] during the 17th century [Graham, Jones, and Kauz 1985:207; Jones 1989:3].
Gradations of generational depth (le’el) from common ancestors within the lineage (alaxik [Popol Vuh 1971 [ca. 1554]:214]) defined duties and obligations between amaks. Thus patriliney ranged from a minimal lineage, with allied brothers and their children, through a principal lineage including at least grandparents and grandchildren in a single amak or chinamit to a major lineage, with shared descent more than five generations removed, often extending over several amaks or chinamits as a result of fission (see C’oyoi 1973 [ca. 1560]: 292).

For the Quiché, each centrally placed town (amak tinamit) in the provinces was surrounded by rural amaks originally settled by “little segments” (ch’uti amak [Popol Vuh 1971 [ca. 1554]:219, 247; C’oyoi 1973 [ca. 1560]: 299]). The amak “lords/spokesmen” convened “within the walled town of buildings covered in lime plaster” (Popol Vuh 1971 [ca. 1554]:163; C’oyoi 1973 [ca. 1560]: 294–95). There, the a’ovaram (ajawarem or “lordly”) amak, based upon seniority of descent, formed a governing council (Popol Vuh 1971 [ca. 1554]:170, 228; C’oyoi 1973 [ca. 1560]:273, 276, 292). Together, the urban and rural kindred comprised the nimam akak (“major segment”) or nimagual amak (“greatest segment”), which in turn massed into the onojel amak (“all together” [Popol Vuh 1971 [ca. 1554]:157, 170, 226, 235; C’oyoi 1973 [ca. 1560]:273], 13 segments conjoined, ox laju u ka amak [Popol Vuh 1971 [ca. 1554]:155]). Therefore, various gradations of amaks were distinguished by adjectives and by context. Occasionally the levels of amaks are consecutively listed (e.g., ch’uti amak, nimam akak, onojel amak [e.g., Yax 1989 [1562]:53]) when the nested segments massed together for particular events.

A chinamit consisted of two or more minimal or principal lineages plus perhaps several families of recent arrival who shared lands and a temple or shrine complex; thus the term chinamit is used when referring to territory (e.g., Yax 1989 [1562]:55, 82). Often an original intruder patrilineage married into the autochthonous one and came to control corporate religious symbols, thus asserting dominance. The coresident in-law lineages (ji, ji’a, iatz, or iatz [Popol Vuh 1971 [ca. 1554]:215; de Coto 1983:130; Ximenez 1985:273]; see Carbonell Pastor’s [1973] concuucado and Munson [1991:320] for iatz’ul held lesser power. The senior-ranked lineage also married into other amaks across the state (Hill and Moynagh 1987:47, 58, 74). The term chinamit and its post-conquest equivalent, calpul, also referred to either a hamlet or its head (aj t’z’alam [C’oyoi 1973 [ca. 1560]: 322; Alvarez Arévalo 1987:27, 37]) or even to the nim ja (“big house”) or dominant lineage (Carmack 1977:10; Tedlock 1989:498–99). The chinamits’ external affairs were guided by the ascendant lineage, which spoke for the coresident in-law lineage[s] under a gloss of reciprocity.

The early regal-ritual capital in the center of the state modeled the rural landholding chinamit, composed originally of two minimal/principal lineages. It eventually grew to four major lineages by adding two nearby lineages but retained the chinamit scheme by dividing into “sun” and “moon” moieties. This “royal chinamit” was conceptualized as a talan or sacred city [Uutal; cf. Chichen Itza and Mayapan] and was the focal point of the solar calendar, integrating the provincial chinamits. Thus, instead of a single royal lineage there were four major lineages counterpoised, although one lineage was superordinate in power and ritual authority for as long as three centuries. Full quadripartition denoted the four cardinal points [R. Fox 1977:53]; J. Fox 1989:668–69]. But political organization was an ongoing process; lineages vied for symbols of cosmic authority and occasionally switched alliances and calendric identities. Lineages were thus political players in their own right.

LINEAGES IN MYTHOLOGY AND IN PROXEMICS

Complementary oppositions structure mythology. The myth of the Hero Twins in the Popol Vuh of the Quiché, some of whose characters and scenes are depicted on polychrome ceramics of the Classic period, includes episodes of complementary opposition between fraternal lineages. In synopsis, the first brothers, 1 Junajpu and 2 Junajpu, are the father and uncle of two sets of sons. The elder sons, 1 Monkey and 1 Artisan, emblematic of the Ajaw and Sakic lineages at Uutal, are born of a woman of their own community, Ixbaquiyalo. The younger Hero Twins, Junajpu and Ixbalanque, emblematic of the Cakchiquel and Nijaiq lineages, are born of a mother [Iqquic] from an elite lineage in an enemy community. Their father, 1 Junajpu, represents the line of the celestial warriors and their mother the underworldly lords of Xibalba [e.g., xibinel ‘patrilinesal kinsmen of one’s wife’]. The spittle of the sacrificed 1 Junajpu impregnates Ixquic, who takes refuge with her in-laws [virilocality]. Eventually, the Twins overcome their rival stepbrothers and vanquish the enemy in-laws who killed their father. Thus, it is progeny of elite parents from antithetical chinamits (e.g., the amak of Xibalba) who are sanctioned to form the “royal chinamit.” The myth structures “our lineage” against rivals in ascending order of consanguineal and affinal distance. The victorious Twins, emblematic of the dualism underlying Quiché social organization, rise as the sun and moon—the apical ancestors. Then, in the Fourth Sun of the Popol Vuh, the first humans are formed, and their descendants disperse to amak, chinamit, and tinamit. These three terms first appear at this point in the epic and only after the “celestial royal chinamit” has been established, making the new state safe for humankind.

Segmentary dynamics are manifested spatially at the pioneer Quiché tinamit, Jakawitz [A.D. 900] of the
Fourth Sun. The two lineages, the Ajaw and the Cawek, maintained small temples and initially one lineage house [Carmack, Fox and Stewart 1975:116], which in various contexts is referred to as an amak [e.g., Yax 1989 [1562]:49, 80]. Upon abandoning Jakawitz for Utatlan (A.D. 1100s), the Nijaib and Sakic lineages joined the original two through complementary opposition, so that the Cawek and the Sakic became the moiety of the sun whereas the Ajaw and the Nijaib were the moiety of the moon. Each of the four major lineages replicated the basic building configurations [Popol Vuh 1971 (ca. 1554):214; e.g., Wallace 1977:31–39, 47].


The Annals of the Cakchiquels also tell how vanquished peoples were incorporated into an expansive Quichéan polity. When the four confederated Cakchiquel segments conquered the Akajal, the Cakchiquel split and relocated [Xajil 1953:89–90; Carrasco 1963, 1971]. Each intrusive Cakchiquel segment intermarried with an indigenous Akajal segment on a newly apportioned estate; thenceforth the Akajal were termed “vassal kindred” [Xajil 1953:104]. At the capital, Ixmiche, the Cakchiquel organized 13 chinamits, headed by 13 caciques, who fought as 13 divisions of warriors [Xajil 1953:74, 91, 95; Carrasco 1988:4]. Three Cakchiquel-style plazas were built among three Akajal-style plazas at Chupec Quecjal Nimaibaj, corroborating union of Cakchiquel with the Akajal vassals; similarly, two Cakchiquel plazas were paired with two Pokom plazas at Mixcu, the archaeological Chimala Viejo [Fox 1978a:205; 1978b:16–23].

ONE MILLENNIUM OF NIJAIB SEGMENTATION

To delineate segmentary behaviors through time, we trace the Nijaib lineage from its formation ca. A.D. 975, outside Jakawitz, through its relocation to Utatlan ca. A.D. 1150 to its division within the pueblo of Momostenango ca. 1300s–1700s and the competition to control the integrating patron saints that followed. The ethno-histories retroactively historicize the Nijaib’s migration from the lowlands as one of the four original Quiché minimal lineages—a small group of young men under the cacique Balam Aqaab [Totonican 1953:172]. From conjunctive lines of evidence, however, we offer a less memorable beginning. The Nijaib gain historical visibility only several generations after the Ajaw and Cawek had settled at Jakawitz and married local women [ixoqil amak [Popol Vuh 1971 (ca. 1554):215; C’oyoi 1973 (ca. 1560):288]]. They may in fact have formed when Ajaw women from the fortified Jakawitz [onojel amak [Popol Vuh 1971 (ca. 1554):64, 196, 208–9] virilocally relocated to the Vuk Amak center Chuyuyup, 2.5 km away [Fox 1989:664–65]. We have seen that intrusive amaks married subordinated indigenes [e.g., Chomi Jup [Xajil 1953:86]]. Outsider males eventually could join the amak as low-status newcomers on the basis of descent from a patrilineal ancestor of their mothers [Popol Vuh 1971 (ca. 1554):251–52]—a hint at possible bilateral descent among elites with otherwise patrilineal rules of descent. Jakawitz and Chuyuyup continued to be occupied through the A.D. 1000s [Brown 1985:274–75] as a two-tiered chinamit with the Ajaw and their patron deity, Jakawitz/1 Junajpu, superordinate. [This was the counterpart of the first-born god of the Classic Palenque triad, G-1]. With growth, the Nijaib elevated Awilix as their new patron “hidden on a mountaintop” [Totonican 1953:178–80] adjoining Chuyuyup [still called “Place of Awilix”], whereas the earlier site Chuyuyup at its foot became the chinamit of Aj Nijaib [Nijaib 1 A 1957 [ca. 1550]:73]. In mythology, Awilix’s avatar, Ixbalanque (moon), was the last-born of the triad, following Junajpu of the Cawek, the second-born.

Nijaib translates as “great houses,” perhaps in reference to the large size of the seven early sites identified with the indigenous communities of the Quiché basin, the Vuk Amak [Carmack, Fox, and Stewart 1975]. On the basis of their earlier ties in and about Jakawitz, the Nijaib and the Ajaw joined in a moiety at Utatlan [Wallace 1977:35]. Yet the Nijaib [also known as “warriors of the night”] surpassed the Ajaw (‘ritualists of Venus’) in power and size as the Cawek’s comrades-in-arms. Each of the Nijaib principal lineages held a separate ritual function under the highest-ranked office of Ajopp Galel Nijaib [Popol Vuh 1971 (ca. 1554):231, 251–52].

Minimal lineages divided and relocated short distances to the 30-some chinamits surrounding Utatlan [tzam chinamital [C’oyoi 1973 [ca. 1560]:294; Carrasco 1981:249–56]]. Where preserved, they contain a small temple for the patron cabawal, an image of wood or of stone [Xajil 1953:119; Popol Vuh 1971 (ca. 1554):160, 183], and a lineage house [nim ja]. This masonry structure, covered in lime plaster, was usually built close to an earlier earthen-mound site, suggesting complementa-

4. Chuyuyup was linked with the hamlet of Quilaba 2 km directly north (originally Quilaja, “where the sun rises”), both being under the jurisdiction of the aldea Santa Rosa Chuyuyup, at the foot of Jakawitz. Thus Quilaba would have been a local kinship group receiving wives from the Cawek. Both Quilaba and Chuyuyup have small sites with mounds.

5. Later, Chuyuyup and PaAwilix were called the chinamit Aj Ni-
jaib, suggesting their place of origin [Nijaib 1 A 1 1957 [ca. 1550]:73]. The two other parcels were distinguished as Quilaba [A] Quiliyay/ Equiya/ and Jakawitz [A] Tinamit [Nijaib 1 A 1957 [ca. 1550]:72–73; C’oyoi 1973 [ca. 1560]:38] or Chitamitan today.

6. At Utatlan, two other Vuk Amak lineages may have been added to the Nijaib, for local ceramics dating from the A.D. 700s–1100s and two single mound sites, radiocarbon-dated about A.D. 900 [Freter 1981:62–63], underlie the Quiché horizon there. Freter (1981:66) argues that the intrusive Quiché reorganized the Vuk Amak already there as their forebears had incorporated the Vuk Amak of Chuyuyup and of Quilaba.
rily opposed intrusive and local lineages [J. Fox 1977:91–92]. Next, Nijiaib and Cawek secondary segments [ka amak] migrated about 40 km west to Chuwa Tzak, the aboriginal Momostenango [C’oyo’i 1973 [ca. 1550]:280, 299]. The four Nijiaib documents (1542–58) recount that battles led by one Ixquin Nijiaib were the basis for claiming land fields; 22 chinamits came to be headed by Nijiaib and Cawek caciques [e.g., Nijiaib I 1557 [ca. 1550]; Nijiaib II 1557 [1558]; C’oyo’i 1973 [ca. 1560]:275, 292]. In their own words, “their engendered sons captured mountains” as “military contingents of brothers,” so that the “first-born sons could take titles after their own benches/lineage houses” [the interiors of lineage houses were enclosed with council benches [Popol Vuh 1971 (ca. 1554):231, 251–52; C’oyo’i 1973 [ca. 1560]:293, 296]. The “conquerors of the towns” thus “inserted themselves among the vanquished” [C’oyo’i 1973 [ca. 1560]:278, 297]. A single west-facing temple for Awilix and two lineage houses suggest that the Nijiaib initially dominated Chuwa Tzak, the chi-amak-chi-tinamit (“lineage town” [Nijiaib II 1557 [ca. 1550]:98]), as the administrative center for “all of the surrounding rural amak” [Chua Tzak ruc’ ronjoel amak [C’oyo’i 1973 [ca. 1560]:23]. Apparently the local population was held in check by proximity to the “older brothers,” the nima amak centered at Ulatlan, which could furnish warriors within two days [C’oyo’i 1973 [ca. 1560]:299].

In modern Momostenango [Cook 1981], the chinamit model of Hill and Monaghan [1987] describes the aldea, where endogamy is the general rule; some lineages can be traced back 10–12 generations. Shamanic ritual integrates the various levels of the community, beginning with the “mother/father of the lineage” [chuch kajaw rech alakix] and passing through the aldea [cf. chinamit] level to paired ritualists for the entire municipality [cf. tinamit]. A lineage descended from a colonial cacique often leads an aldea and oversees a communalistic cult honoring the image of a saint [which replaced the pre-Hispanic cabawil]. Incassent control to control the patron saint among the elite lineages/aldeas is manifested in different mythic charters. The cofradias were once sodalities for individual chinamits—indeed, a cofradia is still called a calpul, and the cofradia system is called the “13 divisions” [oxlajuj chop].

Descendants of the Nijiaib lineage, the Vicentes, and the Herreras, probably descendants of the Cawek lineage, remain contentiously opposed in controlling the town’s patron image, Santiago, and maintain different historical sagas and rituals to support their respective claims [see appendices 1 and 2]. This patron image has been kept in the Catholic church since the 1920s; it is referred to as the “morning star” [nima ch’unil [Cook 1981, Tedlock 1982]]. The morning star is conceptualized by Quiché informants as the small red harbinger of the sun [José Fernandez, personal communication]; in Momostenango, both the Red Dwarf and the first Mam first appear over the easternmost mountaintop shrine, Iqulla [Tedlock 1982:99–104, 147]. Recinos [1957:74] pointed out that in Nijiaib I Iqulla is the namesake of the earlier chinamit on Cawek-held lands near Jaka-witz. Rival female patrons held by the Nijiaib descendants as syncretized versions of Awilix [Nijiaib II 1557 [1558]:99] are kept in a western aldea; they are said to be Santiago’s women. The Nijiaib major lineage subdivided many times in Momostenango.

The contradictory Vicente and Herrera narratives suggest that during the early-colonial-period episodes attributed to Diego Vicente, three separate Vicente splits formed new chinamits. The Vicentes intermarried with local lineages in each, forming the three parcialidades. When outmaneuvered, lineage segments sought new territories. The new parcialidades had similar patron images, perpetuating astronomical and lineage identities. The pre-Hispanic “Toltec” mythico-legendary migration model conferred legitimacy on emigrant lineages throughout the colonial period and still persists in oral history. Lineage leadership was genealogical and charismatic. Intergenerational conflict linked cohorts from several lineages. A coalition of Herrera lineages eventually outmaneuvered the Vicentes, displacing them from Pueblo Viejo. There was little centralized linkage of the 13 (emically) or 22 (etically) aldeas prior to the 1920s. Several major lineages combined to accomplish short-term goals, but no single cacique permanently led more than a chinamit. Fission and relocation thwarted dominance by any single major lineage. The prominence of Spanish saints that syncretized pre-Hispanic deities rose or fell with the political fortunes of their lineages. A ladino caudillo and his indigenous allies centralized the town administratively in the 1920s and elevated Santiago as its overarching icon. The 13 patron images were ago is also honored each year by a similar visit to the Herrera chapel in aldea Pueblo Viejo, near the ruins of Chuwa Tzak.

3. Three sites immediately south of Cerro Iquilaja may relate to a Cawek presence ca. A.D. 1500s [J. Fox 1978:128–30].
10. The main trunk was headed by Francisco Ixquin Nijiaib, the cacique of Chuwa Tzak, who controlled Santa Cecilia. A new minimal lineage was headed by Francisco’s brother, Juan Galez Nijiaib [Nijiaib I 1557 [ca. 1550]:70–76]. Next, Francisco’s grandson, Diego Vicente, founded Momostenango 6 km east of Chuwa Tzak. Continued competition within the Vicente major lineage and within the tinamit of Momostenango pressed Diego to found the parcialidad of San Vicente Buenabai [Alvarez Arévalo 1987:9], complete with titulos and a new patron, Maria Concepcion, which was later replaced by Santa Isabel.
11. According to oral history, the Vicentes failed to unite Momostenango. In fact, the younger generation of Vicentes later sided with the coresident in-laws within the parcialidad and pushed them from power. The Herreras also suffered a setback when the image of Santiago was transferred from Pueblo Viejo (Chuwa Tzak) to a lineage segment in the town center.
moved from the rural lineage god-houses (armitas) to
the central cathedral, symbolizing the dominance of the
cabecera, and the cofradías ceased to represent rural
sodalities.

The Yucatec Case

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

The Quiché and the Yucatec founders of Ox Mul may
descend from migrants from the western Maya frontier
at the close of the Classic period [Sabloff and Willey
ers” led an expedition north to Chichen Itza [Landa
1941], while three or four kindred males led minimal
lineages south to Jakawitz whose descendants eventual-
ly colonized Chuwaw Tzak/Momostenango [Carmack
1981:141–43]. Mayapan was also colonized from Chichen

The states of Postclassic Yucatan rose and fell cyclic-
ally like those of the Quiché and Calakmul. In Yuca-
tan, 13 regional groups, called the 13 petals of the plum-
ería, also organized segmentary states [Xiu n.d.
[1557–1819]:45; Mani 1979:80, 87]. The provinces were
administered by deities [ai calas [Xiu n.d. [1557–
1819]:51–52] impressed on the solar katun cycle. Ac-
cordingly, the Chilam Balam of Mani [Mani 1979:82]
prophesies centralization “when rivalries end in Katun
1 Ajaw [ca. 1304], when brotherhood will return,” and
also predicts the collapse of Mayapan in A.D. 1461. Ma-
yapan’s smaller successor was Mani, which translates
as “finished or completed cycle,” or “now that it is
passed” [e.g., Xiu n.d. [1557–1819]:71; Edmonson
1986:53, 298].

The villagers of Ox Mul assert that four families mi-
gressed in 1847, at the onset of the Caste War, about 500
km from Mani to found Ox Mul in 1876.12 The warring
Santa Cruz Maya took refuge along the headwaters of
the Rio Hondo [Reed 1964:141], and the opposing Chan
(“Serpent”) Maya secluded themselves along the Macal
branch of the Belize, the next river-drainage south. Thus
the two warring factions became neighbors again.13 Like
the confederated village triads of the Santa Cruz [Jones
1977b], Ox Mul of the Chan Maya allied itself with the
villages of Socotz and Bullet Tree Falls, each 12 km
away.14 However, the abandoned nearby site of Tipu,

12. At least a dozen place-names are remembered as stopovers in
the migration. Patronymics in Ox Mul—Tzib [Tzib], Mai [May],
Howe [Hau], and Cantu [Kantu/Kantan]—are listed for Tekit,
Mani, adjacent to the abandoned Mayapan, in 1688 [Roys 1957:66–
67]. However, the Tzib and Mai families also moved to the Be-

13. Ox Mul’s location away from the river was selected for security
from the Santa Cruz partisans [Cervantes 1990:12; Tzul 1993:10].

14. Was Socotz, founded in the 1860s [Massarelli 1972], related to
its nearby namesake, the 1655 Zaczuuz? Tipu and Zaczuuz inter-
marrined between 1615 and 1622 [Jones 1989:287; Scholes and
Maya mixed intruders from successive migrations. The Matricula
de Tipu [1655] lists Mai, Hau, and Panti, which figure prominetly
at Ox Mul.

15. Ox Mul mirrors the earlier Tipu, with an equivalent-sized Cath-
olic church, a few municipal buildings, and a population that grew
to approximately 1,000 over 130 years [Jones 1989:116].

16. The genealogies of all of the families from the village from the
1920s on are recorded.
ary, founded each of the churches. Three churches [Rey de Reyes, Familia de Dios, and Fuente de Agua Vive] exhibit two lineages balanced in membership, and in two others [Rey de Paz and Cristo Vive] one lineage numerically dominates the other [fig. 5].

Initially, the Catholic church and two Pentecostal churches, Rey de Paz and Rey de Reyes, were spaced like the points of an isosceles triangle and served as foci of factional conflict. Later churches subdivided and were built on the village peripheries. Autonomy and rivalry are pervasive. The Pentecostal churches convene simultaneously so that the electrically amplified preaching and music of each drowns the competition. However, since membership shifts in only the occasional exogamous marriage, the more intensive rivalries arise within each congregation.

The office of alcaldé rotated among the four earlier lineages [Cervantes 1990:28]. In 1990, the Pentecostal Council of Pastors emerged as a new theocratic authority, undermining the civic office of chairman/alcaldé. The Council of Pastors, in essence, is the local govern-

17 Of the 40 marriages recorded in three churches during the past decade, 33 [82%] were within the church. In exogamous church marriages, women "virilocally" join the churches of their husbands.

ment, recalling the "representative governance" of the 19th-century Santa Cruz Maya [Jones 1989] and the approximately half-dozen spokesmen for assembled lineages, the Pokom molam [Miles 1957:777–81].

Individuals who construct chinamit-like churches enlist the support of their cogenerational kin. Rey de Paz was founded in 1962, when a young Tzib prophet persuaded his younger brothers to support his vision of a new way of life and broke away from the Catholic church [agent-centered change that reduced his marginality and empowered his lineage]. About 20 years later, the next generational cohort of Tzib and Mai males rebelled against the aging prophet and his brothers to establish Cristo Vive after an elder had publicly prophesied the founding of a new church.

Lineage segmentation occurs, then, when younger men feel that their aspirations are thwarted by the senior generation and enlist the support of their peers. The cohort breaks from the major lineages and relocates with persons bearing the patronymics of the parental bodies. This quest by younger power brokers and their clientele is rationalized as a "calling." If land is available, out-migration is also an option.

18 The original major lineages split to form Pentecostal congregations based on the egalitarianism of "Christian brotherhood."
FIG. 2. Distribution of Mai households in the southeastern barrio, Ox Mul.

FIG. 3. Distribution of Tzib households within the northeastern barrio, Ox Mul.
Mayan Principles of Segmentation

Our two contrasting cases of unranked village lineages and ranked state lineages demonstrate alliance, fission, and fusion at different scales in Maya societies. Similar lineage scaffolding in the two cases ranged from just dozens of persons but allied within regional village triads, in frontier enclaves at Jakawitz or Ox Mul to hundreds of thousands in Postclassic states. And segments could disarticulate, migrate, or realign themselves. The fact that actions were constrained by norms that were similar in very different environments and historical periods argues against environmental necessity theories, and ethnography makes the actions of individual actors clearly visible. In contrast, the archaeology of the Classic period extends into a 2d millennium removed from the actual social behaviors.

Complementarily opposed lineage groupings spurred competition. Factionalism promoted segmentation, as when the sons of Quik'ab plotted against him or when Diego Vicente was forced from power by his sons and their allies (Brumfiel and Fox 1993). Two lineages vied for control of the rituals of a chinamit, and chinamits competed among themselves to have their patron deities represent larger collectivities. Ultimately, moieties contended to control the regal-ritual offices of state and to make their patron gods paramount. For example, the Cawek patron, Tojil, became the god of state and received “gifts” from throughout the realm. This tribute transferred to Utatlan was fashioned by the Aj Toltecay into symbols of rank [Nijaib I 1957 [ca. 1550]:107]. Therefore, the Cawek spokesman for the ancestral god was the de facto head of state.

Individual segments may be seen in the pairing of the Ajaw and the Cawek in separate plazas at Jakawitz, the pairing of the chinamits of Chujuyup and Quilajá respectively with the Ajaw and the Cawek, and the division of the four major lineages into moieties and their sharing of a plaza at Utatlan. At Mayapan the rival Xiu, Itza, Cocom, and Canel cooperated in the mutepal government, though they openly fought in other contexts (e.g., Mani 1979:82–83; Xiú n.d. [1557–1819]:45–48, 75; Landa 1941:40), as did their descendants, the Chan and Santa Cruz Maya, during the Caste War.

Alliances allowed segmentation to occur in predictable and manageable episodes, but overbearing hierarchy spurred flight. The Chilam Balam of Mani [Mani 1979:83–87] says that “the farmers threw off the yoke of the overlords” late in aboriginal times and migrated south. These disassociations were framed within the 20-year katun prophecies, so that the calendrical rationale for amalgamation could instantaneously change and the segments could relocate. Thus migration was an effective political strategy. Aspirations for autonomy and land motivated generational cohorts—lineages divided when the chinamit membership reached some 175–250,
Recalling the calpulli in Acalán (see J. Fox 1987a:104). Three or four allied musical lineages migrated en masse, and communities partitioned into three or four barrios. The four-part royal chinamit was divided according to the cardinal directions. Lineages transported images of individual deities to represent both old and new identities. The local gods were subordinated to the tutelary god of a group that achieved the most power.

The smallest possible self-reproducing social unit was the chinamit/calpulli, which was a political entity in its own right but constructed of lineages. Superordination of one lineage over another was ritualized by control of the communalistic god cult, the god-house, and the patron deity’s fiesta. The higher-status lineage brokered external relations and exogamously allied itself with other elite lineages. Aboriginal historiography recounted the ancestral owners of land.

Once new communities were militarily subjugated, the state elite maintained fairly loose center-periphery control through ritual and kinship. Elite lineage exogamy was simply transposed from the nima amak of the royal chinamit to the geographically removed ch’uti amaks, which had intermarried with the indigenous lineages to form chinamits. A time-proven pattern was merely transferred to new localities. Thus the nima amak served as an umbrella for the ch’uti amaks dispersed throughout the provinces, as the ch’uti amaks there bound the lineages (alaxiks) into rural chinamits.

The amak system also organized the military. "Older
and younger brothers” united the nima amak with the various ch’uti amaks [e.g., C’oyoi 1973 [ca. 1560]:96]. Correspondingly, each of the 13 provinces of the state was led by one of 13 heads of the chinamits [Nijaib I 1957 [ca. 1550]:93]. Perhaps 13 provinces surrounded the royal tinamit of Utatlán, just as Chuwa Tzak, a provincial tinamit, was surrounded by “13” chinamits. Following this scheme, the capital was divided into moieties, each linked to a lineage within a chinamit; for example, at Utatlán the Cawk/Sakic moieties included the Nijaib/Ajaw moieties, as both the Cawk and the Nijaib dominated their own partners.

Nonetheless, in only four generations the provincial ch’uti amak grew into nima amaks themselves; larger numbers and their long-standing local alliances allowed them to stand on their own. But after about eight generations, provincial tinamits rebelled in the north [Balamija, Sacapultec; cf. the rebellion of the outermost provinces [Southall 1956:249, 252–60]]. However, the tinamits of about five generations’ depth in the south-west remained firmly bound to Utatlán.

The Postclassic chinamit scheme depended upon complementary opposition to assemble a state polity that was not effective at binding two states; one royal lineage would always be subordinate. True to form, four states in the Guatemalan highlands were complementarily opposed on the eve of the conquest: the Quiché and Tzutujil were allied against the Cakchiquel and Pipil [Carmack 1981:140].

Yet larger Maya segmentary states may have existed pairing elite with lesser-ranked lineages—the chinamit principle—on each level of amalgamation. Within the Postclassical realm, the more senior “spokesman” lineage at Chichen Itza ritually dominated its Quiché counterpart; together at least symbolically, these states acted like a two-lineage chinamit. Accordingly, the Quiché lineages sent their first-born sons to render homage to the Feathered Serpent god-image administered by Aj Nacxit at the lowland tulan [e.g., Relaciones de Yucatán 1898 [1579–81]:120–21, 176; Popol Vuh 1971 [ca. 1554]:215–16].

Did the Classic Maya utilize segmentary principles? We note that 13 provincial dependencies [tzul [Schele 1992]] surrounded Tikal, as at Utatlán, Ixmiche, and Mayapan.

Appendix 1: The Diego Vicente Saga

The following summarizes an oral narrative of a Vicente principal and chuch kajaw of the canton San Vicente Buenabaj recorded in 1976 [Cook 1981:678–85]:

Diego Vicente came from Mexico to Pueblo Viejo [i.e., Chuwa Tzak], which he found to be an aldea and nothing more [supporting the idea of descent through an Ajaw ancestor virilocally dwelling at Chujuyup, who would have brought to her children the “pedigree” of Tulan Zuyua]. Diego persuaded the four principales [for four segments at Pueblo Viejo] to accompany him to Spain to be granted a charter to establish a town. He obtained the image of Santiago on a hill in the City of Spain [an adaptation of the Popol Vuh’s three lineage princes’ returning to Tulan to obtain the symbols of statecraft from Nacxit]. Diego moved the cabecera from Pueblo Viejo to its present location. He surveyed the land, purchased the land from Malacatancito with his own money, and obtained titles. [His mother was from Malacatancito, bordering Momostenango, and therefore this suggests that cacique lines practiced exogamy and that the mother’s lineage conveyed certain property rights and alliances.] Diego led the principales around looking for the best place to found the new town center and was instructed in his dreams by Santiago to locate it in its present place. There he was joined by his sister, Ana María Vicente Masariec, who brought an image of Santa Isabel that she had found on a riverbank. They built the first church. As a result of enmity that developed in the new pueblo, Diego left with his sister. [He relocated to form a parcialidad with affinal kin, his wives and the husband of his sister, representing two or three intermarrying minimal lineages.] They settled briefly at Pasayap in the aldea Tierra Colorado, leaving Vicente settlers there as they moved on. [The lineage split once again, though some of the patrilineage, among them Diego’s brother[s], remained at Pasayap.] Finally, they established a new parcialidad in the high country west of Momostenango, and in his anger he buried the títulos to Momostenango [presumably the Nijaib I–IV chronicles] in a hidden place. [The image and títulos are controlled by the patriarch of an elite lineage.] In the new parcialidad, San Vicente Buenabaj, Diego established a church for María Concepción, having lost the two patron saints earlier. [An outmaneuvered elite lineage lost control of the original icon of incorporation and relocated to a new parcialidad organized around another patron image whose identity was a “spin-off” of the previous patron’s.] He revived a religious cult around a cabawil kept in a cave and took sacrificial victims from passersby on the highway. A group of neighbors including the Little Captain destroyed the cabawil with the aid of Diego’s sons, and this brought about the death of Diego Vicente. [The cacique succumbed when his sons joined with partisans of the nagual of Santiago, the Little Captain, to destroy the embodiment of Diego’s personal power, the cabawil—that is, the members of the parcialidad rejected the cacique’s charismatic authority. This paralleled the overthrow of the ruler Quik’ab by his sons. At this time Santiago may have been the Cawk’s/ Herraras’ patron. This narrative parallels part 4 of the Popol Vuh [Cook 1981:501].]

Appendix 2: The Origins of Patrón Santiago

The following is a summary of an oral text recounted by an Herrera elder in 1976. The full text is in Cook [1981:685–86]:

The old people say that the Herreras came from Spain originally and brought the image of Patrón Santiago. [The Herreras also assert a foreign pedigree, on the tulan
model, to justify “speaking” for other lineages.] The image was kept in a shrine house in Pueblo Viejo, but in the morning it was gone. They found it in Momostenango and brought it back, but in the morning it was gone again. This happened several times, and finally the Herreras of Pueblo Viejo let it stay in the town center [suggesting that struggles for control of patron images are interpreted in folklore as traveling images, e.g., paralleling the reappearance image of Santa Cecilia in PaNajjít (Carmack 1981:358), which may have also been a Nijai estate [cf. traveling Buddhists in “galactic states” (Tamble 1985:329)].] Diego Vicente founded Momostenango and ordered the building of a church. The original church [which was destroyed in an earthquake] stood where the municipal palace (cabildo) is now. Sixty years ago Santiago was kept in my grandfather’s brother’s house in the town center, but it wasn’t well cared for. The chickens roosted over it. In the time of General Teodoro Cifuentes, he ordered that the cofradies take it to the church [the new church that the ladino caudillo Cifuentes built about 1920]. It left the Parcialidad Herrera and became patron of the pueblo.

Closing Comment

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It is both exciting and frustrating to participate in the ongoing debate on the nature of Classic Maya political organization. The intellectual excitement comes from our access to archaeological, ethnohistorical, and epigraphic data on the ancient Maya which is detailed enough to allow us to draw upon the rich world ethnographic record for comparative models. Archaeologists find themselves able—for once—to participate in general anthropological debates on “chieftdoms,” “segmentary states,” “ethnicity,” and even the nature of political identity. Fox and Cook’s paper here exemplifies this ability to debate and discuss a wide range of comparative ethnographic data and current issues. Even more satisfying is the fact that we are generating models which can be immediately tested in the field, as exemplified by the ongoing archaeological researches that the Chases describe.

Yet our frustration in this debate arises from the protean nature of Maya social and political formations and the tendency of archaeologists to mistake that variability in the data itself for disagreement about approaches to its interpretation. The principal source of disagreement, although not the only one, about modeling ancient Maya political organization arises from the fact that the scholars are deriving and/or testing their models using different segments of the range of Maya state forms. These political forms varied across a huge geographical area and a temporal span of at least two millennia. Thus, I consider it not improbable that both the segmentary model of Fox and Cook and the unitary model of the Chases may accurately portray the societies they describe (though both require further archaeological and historical testing).

The kinship-based segmentary structure proposed by Fox and Cook does seem to describe Maya political organization in certain periods and places. They make a cogent argument for such organizational principles in the expansionist Postclassic highland Maya states [see also J. Fox 1987, 1989], and it seems probable that many small Classic-period polities may have relied upon such kinship-based political structures [cf. McAnany 1995]. It may be that segmentary, kinship-based organization represents a fundamental aspect of Maya society—an initial basic set of organizing principles. Equally convincing, however, is the Chases’ interpretation of Classic-period Caracol as a more centralized, non-kinship-based, unitary state [see also Chase, Chase, and Haviland 1990].

They may both be correct, and I suspect that yet other forms of political organization were present among the Classic-period Maya. Different sets of organizational principles seem to underlie different Maya formations; for example, the massive polities at Tikal and Calakmul, with their wide networks of political alliance [e.g., Culbert 1991: Marcus 1993; Folan 1992; Martin and Grube 1994, 1995], the vigorous but short-lived conquest states at Chichen Itza and Seibal [e.g., Andrews 1990, Andrews and Robles 1985, Willey et al. 1975, Sabloff and Willey 1967, Demarest and Escobedo 1996], the intrusive expansionist dynasty of the Petexbatun region [e.g., Demarest et al. 1991; Mathews and Willey 1991; Houston and Mathews 1985; Demarest 1992b, 1993, 1996], and the council-based political structures of Yaxuna, the Puuc sites, and 8th-century Copan [e.g., Freidel 1983, 1992; Freidel, Suhler, and Krochock 1990; Andrews and Sabloff 1986; Fash 1988, 1991] may each reflect a differing set of organizing principles. Our task as archaeologists and historians is to plot this variability and then look for common threads—not to argue about which data set represents the “true” form of Maya political organization.

The principal thing to keep in mind as we conduct our researches is not only the variability but also the instability of Maya social organization over time and space. Indeed, during certain periods Maya polities and Maya dynasties may have been consciously or unconsciously experimenting with different political formations as they coped with periods of intense external pressure or influence. In such unstable periods the Maya Lowland political situation may have been like that of late medieval Europe, in which polities ranged in size from tiny fiefdoms to the sprawling [but poorly integrated and unstable] Holy Roman Empire [see Hammond 1991]. Even the rationale for local control varied, and there was constant experimentation with forms of polity and modes of legitimation throughout the late Middle Ages. In the Maya world such periods of experimenta-
tion and heightened variability include the early transition to statehood and shift in political ideology at the end of the Preclassic, the century preceding the Classic Maya collapse, and the radical attempts to reformulate Maya societies in the Terminal Classic and Early Postclassic periods. Indeed, what Mayanists should seek is not so much a model of ancient Maya political organization as an explanation for the failure of the Maya to achieve stable, cumulatively developing political economies.

In this regard, the proponents of the segmentary-state model are correct in seeking a model that explains both the great variability in scale and extent of Maya political formations and the failure to achieve nucleated forms with long-term stability in development. The Chases have mischaracterized the segmentary model in their assertion that it does not accommodate variability, fluctuations in scale and great instability over time are very characteristic of segmentary states, and the model specifically addresses the issue of variability. In contrast, the unitary-state model that the Chases propose for Caracol may be a successful negative challenge to the segmentary model, but it does not better address the issue of variability. It also fails to explain why lowland Maya civilization did not develop into the hegemonic but economically powerful conquest states characteristic of Postclassic Mexico and the Andes. Caracol, Tikal, and other polities may have achieved unitary-state structure, but they represented short-lived exceptions rather than the rule (cf. Marcus 1993; Freidel 1986, 1992; Demarest 1992a; Martin and Grube 1994).

At the same time, while I believe that Fox, Cook, and other advocates of the segmentary-state model are asking the right questions, they have slightly fudged their answers. The Chases are correct in arguing that many Classic-period Maya polities were not organized on principles of kinship and lineage. It is difficult to envision a segmentary-state model without the central organizing feature of lineage organization. As the Chases have argued, the existence of nucleated, urban states such as Caracol, Calakmul, and Tikal is hard to reconcile with the centrifugal nature of lineage-based segmentary organization. Moreover, some of the best-understood Maya polities were constructs in which the elite was unrelated in terms of kinship to the population. For example, on the southern periphery of Maya civilization at Copan and Quirigua, Classic Maya dynasties dominated a non-elite population that is archaeologically and was probably ethnically not Classic Maya (e.g., Schortman 1986, Demarest 1988). In the Petexbatun we have documented how a foreign dynasty from Tikal imposed itself on that region and established an expanding polity over an unrelated local population (Houston and Mathews 1985; Houston 1993; Demarest and Valdes 1991, 1993, 1994a, b). In the Terminal Classic period at Seibal and Chichen Itza warlords established brilliant and eclectic but short-lived conquest states that may have pulled together a diverse population from the surrounding area (Andrews 1990, Freidel 1986, Demarest and Escobedo 1996). In these cases and probably many others, it is difficult to envision segmentary structure because the states were initially organized from diverse populations on principles unrelated to kinship.

An even more fundamental problem with the model is that it purports to solve the central question referred to above—why Classic Maya states did not evolve into more centralized polities like those of the Postclassic elsewhere. The segmentary-state model in its original form (Southall 1956, 1988) and in these subsequent versions posits that because of internal structural constraints “segmentary states, unlike chiefdoms, would not progressively evolve into unitary states” [Fox et al., above]. The concept of a self-inhibiting or “nonevolutionary” political structure has long been debated in reference to Marx’s flawed musings on “the Asiatic mode of production” and attempts by Wittfogel and others to revive this concept (e.g., Wittfogel 1957). This “Oriental despotism” model and aspects of the segmentary-state model share the flaw of failing to recognize that culture change—including political change—often takes the form of radical reorganization. Historical developments, like evolution in general, often involve radical structural reformulations. “Punctuated-equilibrium” models have been used to explain many of the critical transformations in pre-Columbian history, including the formation of the Teotihuacan and Classic Maya polities, Terminal Classic political experiments in Yucatan, at Copan, and at Seibal, and the formation and expansion of the Aztec and Inca hegemonic empires (e.g., Freidel 1981, 1986, 1992; Andrews and Sabloff 1986; Fash 1988, 1980; Demarest and Escobedo 1996; Conrad and Demarest 1984).

To argue that a form of political or social organization prevents further development is implicitly to assume that change must always take the form of gradual evolution from preexisting earlier forms. This assumption ignores the more complex understanding of change that has developed in all of the sciences and social sciences in the past several decades. So, while I agree that Fox, Cook, and others are addressing the central mystery of the limited development of Maya polities, I believe that they cannot correctly address that problem through assumptions about self-limiting political structures.

The Chases’ article raises a simple and direct empirical challenge not only to the segmentary-state model but to any model of decentralized Maya political organization. They argue for vast nucleated populations at Caracol on a scale well beyond previous estimates for Maya states (cf. Culbert and Rice 1990). Of even greater theoretical importance, they posit state control of fundamental aspects of economic infrastructure, specifically a vast system of agricultural terraces and utilitarian roadways. I have long argued that the principal problem in Maya archaeology was our failure to demonstrate any connection between the basic economic infrastructure of Maya society and its political leadership (e.g., Demarest 1992a). The Chases in their article and ongoing researches have directly responded to this challenge. If they are correct in their archaeological interpretations, Caracol and possibly other Classic Maya states were far too large, economically powerful, and nucleated to fit
easily into a segmentary-state or any other decentralized model of Maya political organization. Their empirical findings from and interpretations of Caracol will be judged by the results of future researches and review by other archaeologists of the specifics of the Caracol data. Given the scale they propose for the Caracol polity, the scrutiny will be intense.

Beyond the empirical questions, one can disagree with several aspects of the Chases’ theoretical proposal of unitary-state organization as an alternative to decentralized models. With an appreciation for the variability of Maya political organization, Caracol, Calakmul, and other nucleated and powerful states could be accommodated as one end of a range of forms of the Maya state. The large scale and unitary state structure that they propose for Caracol certainly does not apply to most of the Maya polities recovered archaeologically or recorded ethnographically.

Another objection to their discussion is that it does not address the causes of the instability and variability in Maya political form and the failure of Maya society to achieve cumulatively evolving political structures like those of Central Mexico, the Andes, and Mesopotamia. As I have said, I believe that the challenge to archaeologists is not to find the “true” form of Maya political organization but to try to understand the causes of the great variability in Maya political structures in time and space. Any such understanding of Maya political history also must address the meaning of the Classic Maya collapse and the failure of the Maya world—nearly half of Mesoamerica—to develop any type of cumulatively evolving, hegemonic conquest state. Other core areas for the rise of early civilization did develop such polities. Yet in the southern lowland region, the Peten, most Maya states [whatever their nature] disintegrated at the end of the Classic period into simpler political formations with much smaller populations and a radically reduced investment in power-enhancing elite architecture, monuments, and ritual [e.g., Culbert 1973, Culbert and Rice 1990, Freidel 1986, Demarest and Escobedo 1996]. The unitary-state model as the Chases present it here fails to address these central issues. While Fox and Cook’s segmentary-state model can easily address these issues directly [see, e.g., Dunham 1990], the answers given overemphasize the role of kinship in Classic Maya politics and imply logically unacceptable internal structural constraints on culture change.

I have attempted to create a bridge between such models by proposing the application of a form of Tambiah’s galactic-polity model to the Classic Maya. This model, developed originally for the historical kingdoms of Southeast Asia, sought to explain the dynamics of those kingdoms by noting the redundant structure of political hierarchies, their resulting tendency toward usurpation and instability, the extreme dependence of leadership on ideology and ritual, and the difficulty, given these features, of sustaining cumulatively evolving states [Tambiah 1976, 1977; Demarest 1984, 1992b]. I have also noted that such instability is increased by the pressures for dispersion caused by the brilliant adaptation of the Classic Maya to their rain-forest environment [Demarest 1992a, b; 1996; Demarest and Valdes 1991, 1993, 1994a; Valdes and Demarest 1993].

The Chases are correct in noting that this model differs greatly from the segmentary-state model, as does Richard Fox’s regal-ritual city concept [R. Fox 1977], in that galactic polities were not organized along lines of kinship. It shares with segmentary-state models, however, an appreciation for the hierarchical redundancy and instability of Maya political formations. Furthermore, the galactic-polity model stresses the dependency for power of leaders on theater-state ritual and ideology rather than control of infrastructure [Demarest 1992a; cf. Geertz 1980]. Together the problems of a redundant hierarchy and ideological dependency help to explain the instability and volatility of galactic polities. All of these aspects of the model apply well to the Classic Maya and could help to explain their volatile political history.

The galactic-polity concept does not represent “the” model of Classic Maya political formations; there is no such model. However, it does address several of the major problems of understanding Classic Maya polities, especially the expansion and contraction of their spheres of influence. It should join segmentary-state and unitary-state models as a guide to understanding different specific segments of the long political history of the Maya world.

In their concluding remarks the Chases incorrectly dismiss the galactic-polity model as overly dependent on epigraphy, with the result that it overemphasizes charismatic leadership. I first applied this model to the Maya area in the early 1980s to try to explain some of the initial findings regarding the Late Preclassic [preepigraphic] histories of early Maya centers such as Mira-
dor and Preclassic Tikal [Demarest 1984, 1986]. I used no epigraphic data, nor did I emphasize any aspect of individual histories. The Chases’ criticism seems to have little to do with my applications of the model or Tambiah’s original major points and much more with later considerations of it by Maya epigraphers [e.g., Houston 1993]. I proposed Tambiah’s model as one possible explanation for the inversely correlated trajectories of florescence and decline of early Maya states as seen in their periods of architectural activity [Demarest 1984]. The expansion and contraction of Maya hegemonies, their emphasis on public theater-state rituals, the weakness of the leadership’s managerial functions or infrastructural control, and many other features seemed comparable to the Southeast Asian polities and political dynamics as described by Tambiah, Geertz, and others [Tambiah 1976, 1977, 1985; Geertz 1980; Demarest 1992a].

The Chases also argue that many aspects of the Southeast Asian states described by Tambiah, Geertz, and others differ in specific important characteristics from Maya civilization. This argument is spurious and potentially isolationist, since any use of comparative ethnography or history involves the selective comparison of similar aspects of different societies to yield some insights into the one under study. Models and the data
bases that generate them do not need to be imposed wholesale to be of use in comparative history and anthropology. I would only argue that aspects of the galactic-polity model do lead us to focus on structural characteristics and dynamics central to an understanding of the variability and the instability of Maya states. Even with the new rich epigraphic data, we need comparative ethnography and history to provide alternative interpretations of Maya culture history and to provide historiographic guidelines for the interpretation of the propagandistic elite “emic” perspective of Maya monumental inscriptions. Unlike some cynics, I agree completely with Marcus, Schele, Freidel, Mathews, Stuart, Houston, Grube, and others that the inscriptions provide our best data for the interpretation of Maya political organization [see, e.g., Marcus 1976, 1983b, 1992, 1993; Mathews 1985, 1988, 1991; Culbert 1988; Schele and Freidel 1990; Stuart and Houston 1989]. They can do so, however, only when this historical record is skeptically processed by historiographic interpretation guided by comparative history and ethnography. Mayanists should not isolate themselves from comparative anthropology and history.

In the coming decades, models of Maya political dynamics should be generated from epigraphic data and comparative studies and then tested, as the Choses and others are doing, by archaeological and ethnohistorical researches. Such projects, instead of seeking to discover the true form of the Maya state, should focus on the central issues of Maya political history: the instability and variability of Maya politics, the phenomenon of the collapse, and the failure of any of the Classic period’s lowland political formations to give rise to urban, nucleated, and economically powerful Postclassic states. As we wrestle with these issues we should remember that our greatest challenges—and our frustrations—come from the precon nous nature of the Maya state itself.

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