Mesoamerican Archaeology

Theory and Practice

Edited by

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Blackwell
Publishing
2004

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Social Diversity and Everyday Life within Classic Maya Settlements

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What was life like for people in the past? As a discipline archaeology has always sought to answer questions about the diversity of human life in past societies. With 150 years of archaeological research in the Maya area now complete, Maya archaeologists have uncovered the evidence to document that Classic Maya society was large, diverse, and complicated. Given this complexity how are we to understand the myriad peoples that inhabited and constructed the ancient Maya world? What roles did different people play in society? How did they live their lives? What can we learn about the inner workings of ancient Maya society by examining the lives of its diverse constituency?

The social world is constructed by and for people. By accessing archaeological evidence on ancient social life we can document the diverse lives and roles of people in the past. Two classes of evidence – *representations of people* and *people's living spaces* – can provide particularly rich information on ancient social life. By studying Classic period representations of people we can learn how the creators of these representations depicted social differences in their society (e.g., Joyce 2000; Reents-Budet 2001). By studying Classic period living spaces we can learn how the various members of Classic Maya society actually lived their lives (e.g., Ashmore 1991; Folan 1969; Gonlin 1994; Hendon 1991; Marcus 1995; Robin 2001a, 2002a).

As philosopher of science and archaeologist Alison Wylie (1985, 1992) has cogently noted, the more lines of evidence that a researcher can bring together on a given topic, the more richly textured their understanding of that topic will be. In this regard, Maya archaeology is particularly well suited to the study of ancient social life because we have access to a plethora of human representations and the remains of living spaces. Ancient Maya people represented themselves in both *words* (the Maya *hieroglyphic texts*) and *images*. Rosemary Joyce (1993, 1996, 2000) has compared two groups of Classic Maya imagery: *small-scale ceramic figurines* and *monumental images*. Small-scale figurines are largely found in noble Maya residential

contexts (Hammond 1975; Hendon 1991; Willey 1972, 1990). Monumental images carved in stone are usually commissioned by Maya royalty. These images typically adorn *stelae* – two-sided, freestanding stone monuments located in the open, public plazas of Maya cities or the less accessible doorway *lintels* of royal residences. Images and hieroglyphic texts are often found together on the same monuments.

The archaeological evidence for people's living space encompasses an even more diverse range of evidence including *buildings*, *artifacts*, *human burials*, *plant and food remains*, and even other "invisible" data sets such as the *soil chemical remains* of a garden or field (e.g., Ashmore 1991; Gonlin 1994; Hendon 1991; Middleton and Price 1996; Robin 2001a, 2002a). By studying the remains of living spaces, archaeologists can learn about ancient *everyday life* – the ordinary, and often routine, daily practices of people's social, economic, and ritual lives. By bringing together these "multiple lines of evidence" (in the sense defined by Wylie 1985, 1992) we can piece together a picture of the diverse roles and lives of ancient Maya people.

I argue that in the history of Maya archaeology there have been three critical turning points which have enabled Maya archaeologists to gain detailed insights into the diverse lives of ancient Maya people: *the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphs*, *the development of household archaeology*, and *the development of feminist archaeology*. In the 1950s and 1960s, after a century of debate over whether the Maya hieroglyphs recorded historical information about people or ahistorical information about celestial bodies and deities, scholars such as Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1963, 1964) explicitly demonstrated that Maya hieroglyphs included historical information about actual royal individuals and their lives. Research such as this led the way to an explosion of new work on Maya hieroglyphs which has enabled us to understand what Maya royalty wrote about their history, worldviews, family relations, and political agendas (e.g., Houston 1993; Martin and Grube 2000; Schele and Freidel 1990). But beyond this upper royal echelon of Maya society the vast majority of people in the Classic period were non-royal nobles or commoners. The terms *royal* and *royal court* refer to the ruling families and group of people who surround rulers and perform courtly activities (as defined by Inomata and Houston 2001). The term *noble* (following Joyce 2000) refers to the asserted high status of non-royal families, and the term *commoner* refers to the vast and diverse bulk of ancient Maya society (farmers, laborers, craftspeople, etc.) who were never discussed in Classic Maya writing and presumably had lower status than other members of Maya society (as discussed by Valdez and Lohse n.d.).

Developments in the fields of household archaeology in the 1980s and feminist archaeology in the 1990s have been critical for increasing our understanding of the lives of all people in Classic Maya society. Initially, and perhaps unsurprisingly, much of the archaeological work in the Maya area focused on the impressive Maya temples and the monumental remains of Maya city centers. Household archaeology brought to the Maya area a research focus on the places where Maya people lived – the households of both the rich and the poor (e.g., Ashmore and Wilk 1988). The study of ancient households developed alongside the fields of settlement and landscape archaeology (Chapter 7). Feminist scholars working with household

archaeology and other data sets drew further attention to the diversity of ancient experiences based on gender as well as other lines of difference such as age, status, and occupation (e.g., Joyce 1993, 2000). Given the complementary focus of household and feminist archaeologists on understanding the diversity of people's lives, we can integrate the questions these researchers ask to more successfully demonstrate the dynamics and meanings of people's varied actions and experiences in the past (Hendon 1996). Information from hieroglyphic texts and images complements household data – particularly for Maya royalty and nobility – by allowing us to assess the purposeful representations (both textual and iconographic) that certain segments of Maya society created and used to represent themselves and others. It is important to be aware of both representational and household evidence when trying to understand ancient Maya social life, because:

1 these data sets provide windows into different segments of Maya society (representational data largely relate to royal and noble lives and household data to all people's lives depending on the household that was excavated);
2 these data sets provide different types of information about ancient social life from purposeful representation of people (located in either the public plazas of cities or the intimate confines of households) to the often unintentionally discarded or left-behind ordinary remains of people's everyday lives.

Given the wealth of archaeological evidence on ancient Maya social life, Maya archaeologists are in a good position to answer a key question of contemporary social theory: what is the relationship between representations of social life and people's experiences of living in a social world (e.g., Bourdieu 1979; Butler 1990; de Certeau 1984)? As Classic period representations of social life are largely authored by royal and noble (and often male) individuals, we must question the relationship between the highly conventionalized human representations and the everyday practices and experiences of people's lives (e.g., Hendon 1997; Joyce 1993, 2000, 2001). By comparing representations and everyday living spaces we can assess the intersections and disjunctions between the ways people represented their world and they ways they lived in their world. As historian James Scott (1985, 1990) has suggested, *the public transcripts* – the overt and public representations in writing, art, and architecture of society's dominant groups – which historians (and archaeologists) have traditionally studied, may not "represent" the living experiences of all members of that society. Stated this succinctly, Scott's assertion seems quite obvious. To what extent did ancient Maya representations of social life, which were largely created by royalty and nobility, represent or pervade the everyday lives of the different people in Maya society – commoners, nobles, or royals? To answer this question and understand social diversity in the Classic Maya past I will first discuss research on royal and noble representations of Classic Maya social life and then compare and contrast analyses of everyday life within three strata of Maya society: the royal court at the city of Calakmul, noble residential complexes at the city of

Copan, and common farmers in the village of Chan outside of the city of Xunantunich.

Royal and Noble Representations of Classic Maya Social Life

Classic Maya rulers manipulated monumental images, art, and architecture in public settings within their cities to express their power. Rulers, who were mostly men, but occasionally women (e.g., Hewitt 1999; Marcus 2001) commissioned the majority of the hieroglyphic texts and visual representations that adorn the building interiors and façades within Classic Maya cities. Some other royal and noble men and women did commission texts and images (e.g., Hendon 1991; Tate 1992), but the perspective on Maya society that we can ascertain from these media is largely that of the male ruler at the top of the social hierarchy. As Wendy Ashmore has demonstrated through her own work (e.g., 1991, 1998) and discusses in Chapter 7, Classic Maya rulers arranged and manipulated monumental architecture in meaningful ways throughout Maya cities which represented their worldviews and position in society. Royal residences were often located in central, elevated, and/or northern positions within cities, plausibly to represent the ruler and royal family's power as a zenith of power, as these cardinal (north) and relative (central, elevated) locations are associated with power in Classic Maya cosmology.

Of the wide array of people who comprised Maya society, a very few were mentioned in hieroglyphic texts: rulers (*ajaw*), secondary rulers (*sajal*), royal women, scribes, singers, musicians, and dancers (e.g., Houston and Stuart 2001; Inomata 2001). Completely omitted from the hieroglyphic texts were most nobles and all commoners. Where lower-status people were documented in hieroglyphic texts they were usually captives who literally and figuratively represented the ruler's power over others (as rulers were often depicted standing on top of captives: Marcus 1974). Spatial conventions (such as up/down, right/left, front/back, and cardinal directionality) in the arrangement of Classic Maya monuments and the arrangement of images within compositions also emphasized the separate but complementary roles of men and women in Maya political ideologies (e.g., Joyce 1996, 2000; Robin 2001b; Stone 1988).

Rosemary Joyce's (1992, 1993, 1996, 2000, 2001) comparisons of royal monumental images of people and small-scale human figurines have illustrated differences and similarities in royal and noble Maya portraits of social diversity – particularly gender, age, and occupational differences. In monumental images royal men and women were typically depicted in regal ritual rather than productive roles. In these rituals royal women often presented cloth bundles and ceramic bowls (Fig. 6.1). Cloth and food are the two products most associated with women's productive activities in small-scale figurines. Rosemary Joyce suggests that the absence of productive activities in monumental images and the presence of images of royal women using and offering the products of other women's labor may represent

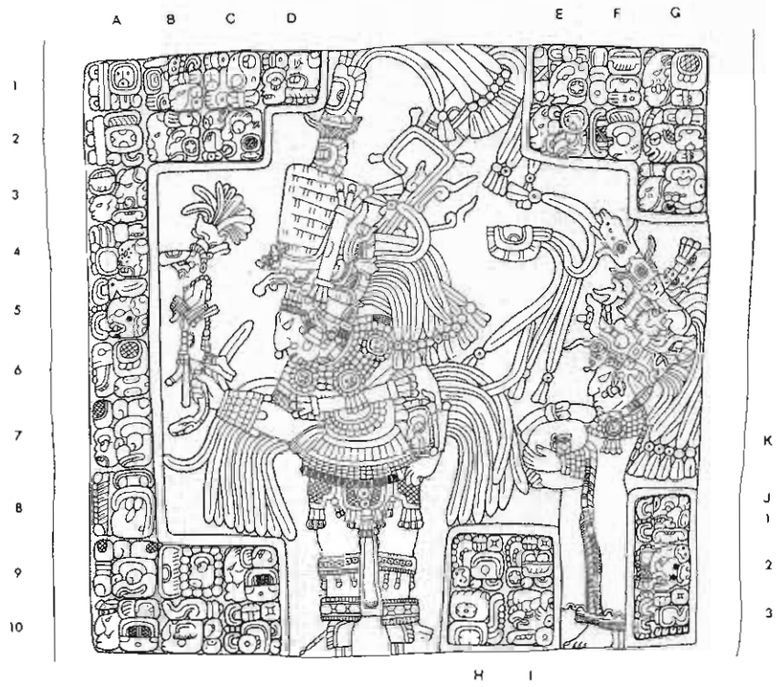

Figure 6.1. Paired male and female figures, Yaxchilan Lintel 1. Ian Graham and Eric von Euw, *Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions*, vol. 3, part 1: *Yaxchilan*. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Copyright 1977 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Used with permission

royalty's interests in controlling and thus de-emphasizing the economic production and potential economic importance of other households' production.

Royal men were typically portrayed in a wider range of regal roles than royal women, including engaging in political events, warfare, and dancing. Where images of royal males and females are paired, these images relate the interdependence or complementarity of separate male and female actions in completing ritual performances and military and marriage alliances (Fig. 6.1). In monumental images, royal persons – be they a young male heir coming of age or an aged royal female – were all depicted at a single youthful age in the life cycle. The dress of royal individuals (both males and females) often combined elements of typical male and female wardrobes. By encompassing male and female identities through dress, de-emphasizing age differences, and co-opting the production of other people, royal Maya persons (both male and female) seem to have been depicting themselves as the pinnacle and unification of the differences within their society.

In contrast with monumental representations of people, small-scale figurines portrayed men and women across their life course. Although the roles of men in small-scale figurines were consistent with those of men in monumental depictions, female roles were quite different. Small-scale figurines of women portrayed them in productive roles as food preparers, weavers, caretakers of animals, and caretakers of children (Fig. 6.2). As Rosemary Joyce suggests, these images appear to celebrate

Figure 6.2. Ceramic figurines from Maya lowlands: (a) woman grinding corn, Lubaantun, Belize (courtesy of Norman Hammond); (b) woman holding child and pot of tamales, Altar de Sacrificios, Guatemala (Willey 1972: fig. 34b); (c) woman holding dog and ceramic vessel, Altar de Sacrificios, Guatemala (Willey 1972: fig. 34f). Used with permission

the role of women as producers, the very productive activities that royal individuals sought to control to promote a unified and totalizing royal identity.

Everyday Life within Classic Maya Settlements

By comparing representations of people in monumental art and small-scale figurines we are able to document both similarities and differences in royal and noble representations of social difference in Classic Maya society. There was no unified notion of social life in Classic Maya society and no singular means of representing social differences. But how do these representations of social diversity relate to the lived experiences of people in Classic Maya society? To what extent did these representations constrain the variability in people's practices (Joyce 2000, 2001)? To answer these questions I turn to household archaeology and studies of the places where Classic Maya people lived and worked.

Living in the royal court in the city of Calakmul

The place

The city of Calakmul is located in Campeche, Mexico immediately west of a large 34 × 8 km *bajo* (a natural depression that is a major chert and water source). Calakmul was founded in the Middle Formative period and became one of the largest urban centers in Mesoamerica. With at least 117 stelae, Calakmul's rulers may have erected the most carved stone monuments of any Maya royal group. Calakmul reached its political peak during the Late Formative to Late Classic periods. During the Late Classic period its population rose to 50,000 people. The

1.75 km^2 monumental center of the city (called the Central Plaza) consists of an elevated plaza surrounded by temple-pyramids, royal palaces, and other public and ritual buildings. The largest building in the Central Plaza is Str. II, a 55 m high temple-pyramid. There are seven *sacbeob* (raised plastered roads) at Calakmul. Five lead from the Central Plaza to other nearby cities and two are internal to the city leading to nearby noble residential complexes. Like many Maya cities, including Copan and Xunantunich, Calakmul is laid out in roughly concentric zones with the royal court at the center of the city, surrounded by noble complexes with commoner residences further beyond these. The archaeological research discussed here is drawn from the Calakmul Project directed by William Folan between 1982 and 1994. Ceramic specialist María del Rosario Domínguez Carrasco and lithic specialist Joel Gunn analyzed the artifacts from the excavations at Calakmul (e.g., Folan 1992; Folan et al. 1995, 2001a, 2001b). Joyce Marcus (1987; see also Folan et al. 1995) undertook the epigraphic study of Calakmul's inscriptions.

To understand the everyday lives of Calakmul's royal court we can draw on the interpretations of archaeologist William Folan and his colleagues, based on detailed excavations of the final Terminal Classic phase occupation of Calakmul's 86-room temple-pyramid, Str. II, and the 12-room royal palace, Str. III. Three monumental stairways lead from the plaza area to the summit of the Str. II temple-pyramid. The multiroom buildings that line the lower terraces of the Str. II pyramid were constructed with cut-stone walls and vaulted stone or thatch roofs. Two building complexes surmount the summit of the pyramid. The upper and southernmost complex is a triadic temple complex. The lower and northernmost complex is dominated by a nine-room palace. Northeast of Str. II, the 12-room freestanding royal palace Str. III stood on a 5 m high platform. Palace Str. II had cut stone walls and a vaulted stone roof with painted stucco bas-relief roof combs. The larger and more elaborate Str. III palace had two large stucco masks on its façade.

The people

Project epigrapher Joyce Marcus has interpreted the texts and images on monuments that were commissioned on stelae throughout the city between at least A.D. 435 and A.D. 830. Many of the hieroglyphic texts on these monuments are now quite eroded, but their narratives told of political and ritual events in the lives of at least 15 male rulers and five royal women. The prevalent paired or single stelae depicting royal men and women highlight the complementary roles of men and women and the importance of royal marriage at Calakmul. Spatial conventions were employed to represent the separate but complementary roles of men and women, as images of women were placed on the left stela of a stela pair or the back of a single stela, and vice versa for men. Like other Classic period inscriptions, the names, positions, and productive actions of lower-status members of the Calakmul royal court went unnoted. Calakmul's royalty portrayed themselves engaged in political and ritual actions. They showed themselves as the consumers of the goods produced by the faceless people absent from the texts. The people of lower standing mentioned or depicted on Calakmul's monuments were captives upon which royal men and women stood.

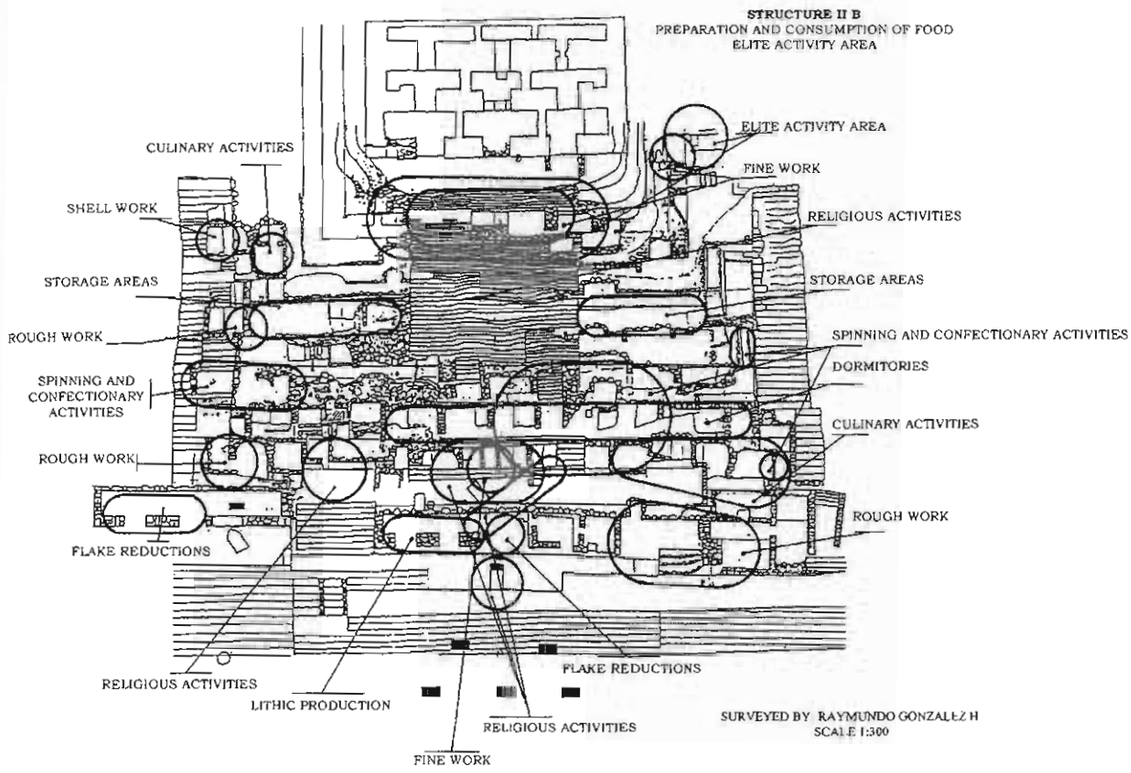

Figure 6.3. Plan of Str. II, showing activity areas. Used by permission of William Folan

Even though the social diversity within Calakmul's royal court was omitted from its inscriptions it was quite well marked by the activities, material possessions, and architecture of the different residents of Str. II and III. Based on their excavations, the archaeologists document that the unadorned buildings on the lower terraces of the Str. II pyramid contained residential and production areas. Each room within these multiroom buildings tended to be used for a single function – sleeping, preparing food, cooking, eating, flake reduction, stone tool and jewelry production, storage, cloth production, bone object production, or shell working (Fig. 6.3). At the base of the pyramid people produced utilitarian items such as stone tools. Higher up on the terraces people produced higher-status items such as shell ornaments and cloth.

The various artisans of Calakmul's royal court lived and worked along the lower terraces of Str. II. The close spatial association of their places of residence and places of production contrasts with the relative absence of productive activities beyond food preparation and cooking in the royal palace on the summit of Str. II. Individual rooms within the royal palace were used largely unifunctionally for sleeping, or ritual activities, or eating, preparing food and cooking. Unlike the artisans living below them, palace residents had access to a wide range of imported items including chert, ceramics, obsidian, marine shell, jade, manta ray spines, and jasper.

The residents of the Str. II palace were likely high-status members of the royal court involved with overseeing the production ongoing below their residence. They seem to have had a lower social status than the royal family residing in the larger and more elaborate palace Str. III, which contained the burial of the ruler nicknamed Long-Lipped Jawbone, who Joyce Marcus has suggested is possibly Calakmul's dynastic founder, and who died around A.D. 350. In addition to the types of rooms found in the Str. II palace, the Str. III palace had a sweat bath and tool production room. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the royal family had access to greater quantities of imported goods than the residents of the Str. II palace.

Experiencing life at Calakmul's royal court

The pomp and circumstance of royal ceremonies, political negotiations, military and administrative affairs are the aspects of life in the "public" monumental center of a Maya city that are most apparent from its imposing temple-pyramids and open plazas. Indeed these are the types of events that the royalty inscribed in their "public transcripts," the hieroglyphic texts and images that they commissioned in their cities. The central open plazas of Maya cities are often likened to stages because the texts describing these areas emphasize ritual activities (also see Ashmore's discussion in Chapter 7 of the ritual nature of cities). The archaeological record at Calakmul provides a window into another side of life around the Central Plaza – a secular life of day-to-day domestic and productive living.

The domestic and productive socio-spatial world constructed by Calakmul's architects replicated the political-ideological order represented in monumental images. As William Folan and colleagues have shown, at the base of the temple-pyramid Str. II labored the most common of artisans in the royal court, the producers of utilitarian stone tools from local chert. As one proceeded up the pyramid, higher-status artisans produced items such as cloth and imported shell objects. At the pinnacle of the pyramid was a palace and temple complex, where some of the most important families of the royal court oversaw other people's production, consumed the products of their labor, and expended these goods in the name of politics and ritual for the gods.

The Central Plaza architecture is far from a passive remnant of the past, but was actively constructed and used to structure and circumscribe the lives of the diverse members of the royal court. By largely excluding productive activities from their palaces, Calakmul's royalty set their homes (their palaces) apart from other people's homes in a quite vivid way – a royal home consumed a distinctive lifestyle enabled by the labor undertaken in other people's homes. Although the royal palace-dwellers lived in quite close proximity to lower-status members of the royal court, Folan and colleagues note that palace residents built their world to keep their exclusive lifestyles quite separate from the daily lives of those around them. Their palaces were elevated on high platforms and had restricted inner access to guard their privacy. The various artisans who lived and worked on Str. II, also did so in quite close proximity to each other. While Folan and colleagues did document some artisan work occurring on exterior terraces and stairways of Str. II, most produc-

tion took place inside its many buildings. As each daily task was segregated into its own interior room bounded by stone walls, people would have spent their days working alongside others whose status, occupational skills, and possibly gender (particularly in the case of gender-specific crafts, such as cloth production) were most similar to their own. While the ultimate outcome of the work of the royal court combined the work of all these different individuals, the everyday lives of the diverse members of the royal court was quite segregated by status, occupation, and gender along spatial divisions that replicated the royal political-ideological ordering of the world.

Living in a noble complex in the Sepulturas area of the city of Copan

The place

The city of Copan is located in the Copan river valley of western Honduras. During the Classic period Copan reached its political and population peak and was a major city in the southeastern Maya region. The 1 km^2 monumental center of the city (called the Main Group) consists of elevated plazas surrounded by temple-pyramids, a ball court, royal palaces, and other public and ritual buildings. The largest building in the Main Group is Str. 10L-26, a temple-pyramid which has a central hieroglyphic stairway that records the history of Copan's rulers. A *sacbe* leads from the Main Group to nearby areas of noble residential complexes called Sepulturas. Further beyond the noble complexes were commoner residences.

Archaeologist Julia Hendon (1987, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1997, 2000) investigated three noble complexes in the Sepulturas group as part of the larger Proyecto Arqueológico Copan, phase 2, directed by archaeologist William Sanders (1986) which investigated the relationship between Sepulturas and the Main Group at Copan. The Sepulturas noble complexes 9M-22, 9M-24, and 9N-8 were occupied during the Late Classic from A.D. 600 to A.D. 1000. Typical of Classic period noble complexes, each complex consists of one or more residential courtyards (groups of buildings surrounding an elevated courtyard: Fig. 6.4). 9N-8 is one of the largest noble complexes in the Copan valley, with 15 residential courtyards; 9M-22 has 3 courtyards, and 9M-24 has one.

Three different types of buildings surround each courtyard: (1) residences (which were used for sleeping as well as most other daily activities); (2) ancillary buildings (which were multifunctional as well, but only used for food preparation and storage); and (3) ritual buildings. These buildings were elevated on stone platforms that varied in height from 30 cm to 4.75 m. Most residences had cut stone walls and one of three types of roofs: (1) a vaulted stone roof; (2) a beam and mortar roof; or (3) a thatch roof. The interiors of each residence had from one to ten rooms per building. Some of the rooms had stone "benches" for sleeping and sitting, and others were used multifunctionally for preparing food, storage, and producing utilitarian and status items (cloth, shell ornaments, bone objects, and/or obsidian tools). Ancillary and ritual buildings differed from residences as they consisted of simpler, usually one-room, buildings with wattle and daub walls.

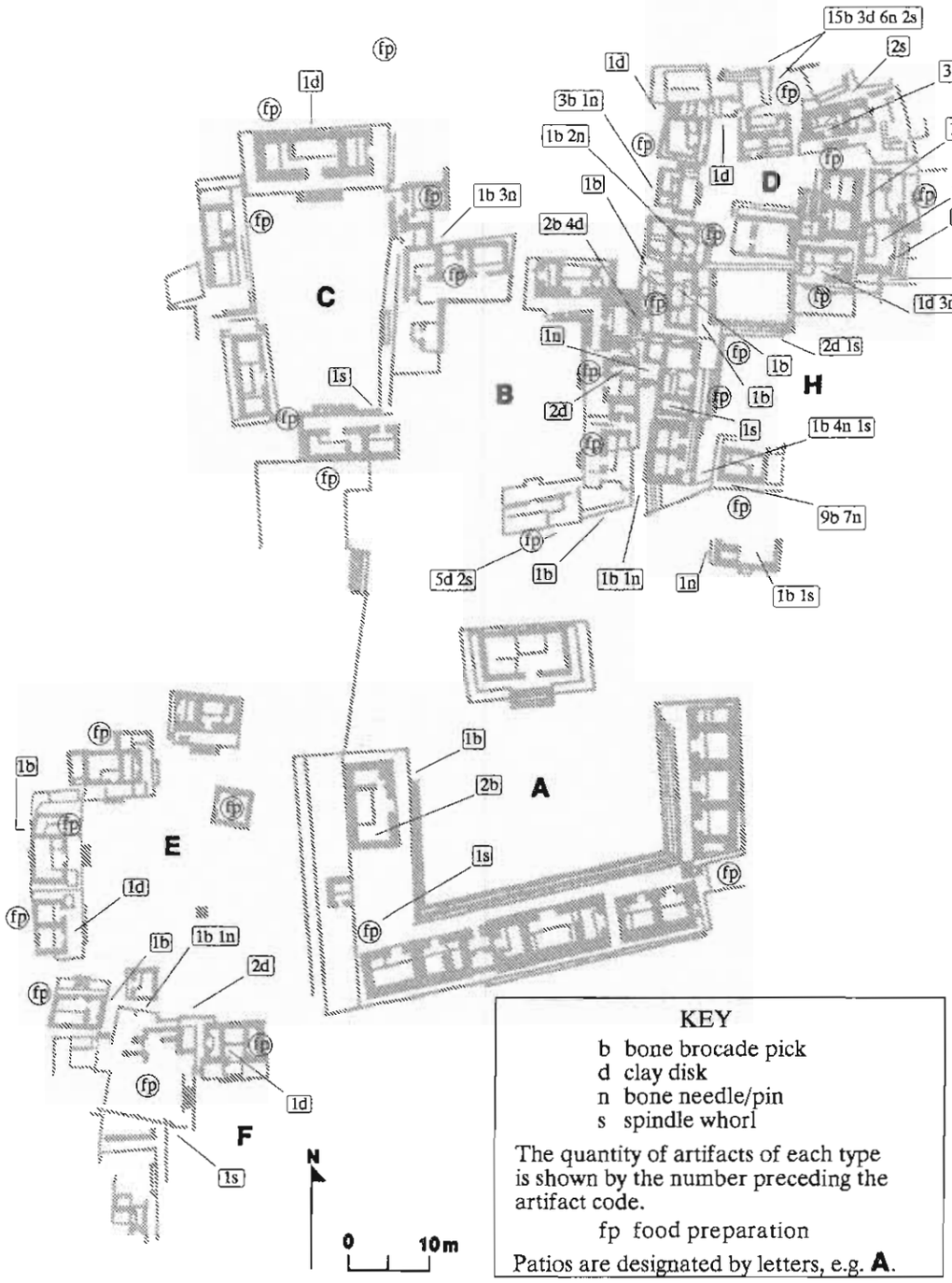

Figure 6.4. Distribution of evidence for women's labor in Group 9N-8, Sepulturas, Copan (figure by Julia A. Hendon). Used with permission

The people

Within each courtyard at Sepulturas noble families prepared food, cooked, ate, stored their possessions, produced utilitarian and status items, observed rituals, and slept. Given the redundancy of domestic activities within each courtyard, Julia Hendon concludes that each courtyard housed a large extended family household and possibly other non-related persons or families working for the noble household. These noble families performed their day-to-day activities within Sepulturas' enclosed buildings, but food preparation, cloth production, and rituals also occurred outside of buildings. Hendon notes a particularly high frequency of outdoor food preparation activities.

Beyond the basic similarities of everyday domestic life in Sepulturas there were wide differences in the production activities, wealth, and status of the families that lived around a courtyard. Each courtyard typically had one more elaborate residence. These elaborate residences resembled smaller versions of royal places described above for Calakmul. They tended to be the largest, on the highest platform, constructed entirely with stone, and decorated with relief sculpture and hieroglyphic texts. Their hieroglyphic texts discussed the same themes that royalty discussed in their texts, but focused on noble male Sepulturas residents. The elaborate residences tended to have a central room with a larger open floor space which could accommodate a meeting of important dignitaries. Hendon suggests that noble extended family households seem to have been internally ranked around a senior family that had greater access to resources, cultural symbols, and political opportunities.

Beyond these inter-courtyard differences, there were also clear socio-economic distinctions between the three noble courtyard complexes. Noble families at Sepulturas had access to a wide variety of local and imported material possessions. The imported items included greenstone ornaments, obsidian, marine shell, and some figurines and ceramic vessels. Ceramic vessels were the most common possession, and overall 30 percent of the ceramics used in day-to-day life at Sepulturas were "fancy" polychrome vessels. Most of these were locally made, but most extended families (except for the group living around courtyard B at 9M-22) had some imported polychrome vessels. While most families in the Copan area had access to local polychrome vessels, noble families residing at the largest and most elaborate complex 9N-8 had greater quantities of imported polychrome vessels and other imported items than other noble families living elsewhere. Through these non-local objects the residents of complex 9N-8 created a distinctive world of material objects that contributed to their creation of a distinctive social identity for themselves at Sepulturas.

Along with these differences in architecture and material possessions, noble families did not all produce the same quantities of status items. Cloth production, which would have been undertaken largely by women, was the most widespread productive activity at the Sepulturas noble courtyards. Julia Hendon identified a clear correlation between the intensity of cloth production and the highest-status residences at 9N-8 (Fig. 6.4). Here the "mute" archaeological record of spindle whorls and weaving tools seems to be voicing what hieroglyphic texts commissioned by noble

men left out – the important role of Maya noble women as weavers in the Classic Maya economy. Weaving archaeological and epigraphic data together, we can see the different yet complementary roles played by noble men and noble women.

Experiencing life at Sepulturas

Day-to-day working and living around Sepulturas occurred both within enclosed buildings and outside of buildings. Working outside of buildings, residents could see or even talk with one another. The people working inside buildings would have been separated and invisible to the people in other buildings and the people outside of buildings. While within the walls of their residences, the families that were living in quite close proximity to other families around a courtyard would have had the privacy to develop the family-oriented practices and identities that we can still see as differences in the archaeological record. As they walked, worked, and relaxed outside each day they would have been constantly aware of, if not actively engaged in, the lives of their neighbors.

Within Sepulturas' buildings the work areas where women prepared food and made cloth were in close proximity and often even within the same room as the work areas where people (men and/or women) produced obsidian tools, shell ornaments, and bone items, and performed rituals. As Julia Hendon concluded, differing from the conventionalized spatial structuring of gender and work represented on royal political monuments, there was no exclusive partitioning of gender and work areas in noble residential complexes.

In terms of architecture, material possessions, certain cultural symbols, and political activities, the Sepulturas noble residences, particularly those of Sepulturas' highest-status residents, resembled smaller versions of royal palaces. But, as Hendon notes, in other ways day-to-day life in a noble complex was quite difference from that of the royal court – there was less spatial separation of noble men's and women's work by gender, production type, or production vs. consumption. Sepulturas' highest-status residents may have lived on the highest platforms, but the spatial ordering of residences of different status around the horizontal space of the courtyard was quite different from the dramatic vertical replication of status hierarchy in lived space across the façade of temple-pyramid Str. II at Calakmul.

Living in the Chan Noohol farmsteads in the environs of the city of Xunantunich

The place

Chan Noohol is just one of many small clusters of farmsteads located in the environs of the mid-sized city of Xunaṇtunich in the Belize river valley of western Belize. Chan Noohol was a southern sector of a farming village called Chan (*nòohol* means south in Yucatec Maya). It was situated 4 km east-southeast of Xunantunich. Xunantunich's 0.6 km^2 monumental center consists of elevated plazas surrounded by temple-pyramids, three ballcourts, royal palaces, and other public and ritual buildings. The 40 m high temple-pyramid nicknamed "El Castillo" located at the

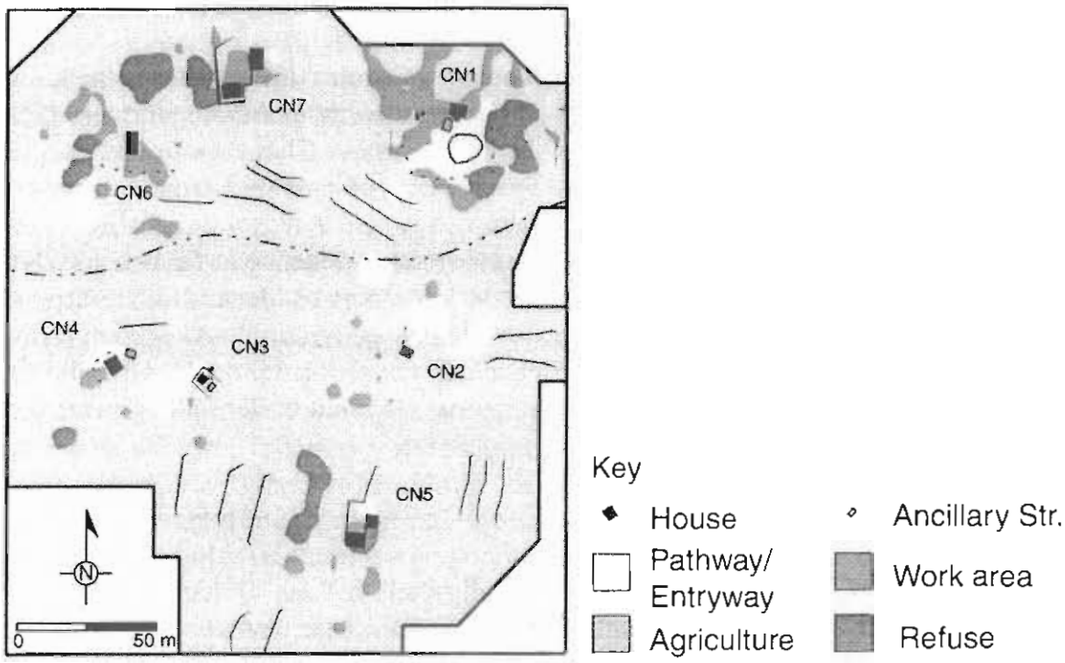

Figure 6.5. Plan view showing activity areas at Chan Noohol

center of the city could be seen from far across the countryside. Each day, from their homes and fields, the residents of Chan Noohol could see this monumental temple-pyramid in the distance. Given the proximity of Chan Noohol and Xunantunich, Xunantunich was most likely the center of major ceremonial celebrations and other political and administrative activities for the residents of Chan Noohol. As they viewed "El Castillo" each day, Chan Noohol's farmers would have had a constant reminder of the broader society in which they were participants. This distant image of monumental construction, that was unlike any construction at Chan Noohol, may also have reminded Chan Noohol residents of the limits of their social world and of the social differences that existed in their society.

My archaeological research on Chan Noohol (e.g., Robin 1999, 2001a, 2002a, 2002b) was part of the larger Xunantunich Archaeological Project directed by archaeologists Richard Leventhal and Wendy Ashmore which investigated the interrelationships between the city of Xunantunich and the surrounding settlement (e.g., Ashmore 1993, 1998; Ashmore et al. 2003; Leventhal and Ashmore forthcoming). Chan Noohol's seven small farmsteads (CN1–CN7: Fig. 6.5) were occupied for only a short period of time, between A.D. 660 and A.D. 790 at the end of the Late Classic period. During this time period many other small clusters of farmstead like Chan Noohol were constructed and occupied throughout the Xunantunich region. This boom in agrarian populations occurred parallel with Xunantunich's rather short-lived regional political apogee. This correlation is not surprising because the scale and intensity of construction at Xunantunich certainly required a large labor force to build. And, possibly even more critical, this

part of the Belize river valley had always been an important area of agricultural production for Maya society.

The commoner architecture at Chan Noohol was quite different from the royal and noble architecture just discussed. In contrast with elaborate and elevated masonry residences, residences and ancillary buildings at Chan Noohol were constructed close to the ground surface, on low stone platforms that ranged in height from 10 cm to 1.1 m. Chan Noohol's houses were constructed of perishable materials: pole walls and thatch roof. Only one side of one residence at farmstead CN6 had a wattle and daub wall like those of the lowest-status residences at Sepulturas. Residences and ancillary buildings were encircled by agricultural areas. Each farmstead consisted of only one or two residences. Given the redundancy of domestic and agricultural activities within each farmstead, farmsteads were likely inhabited by one or two related families.

The people

The people of Chan Noohol were farmers. By constructing agricultural terraces and adding nutrients such as phosphorous to the soil, these farmers intensified the majority of the land around Chan Noohol to enhance its agricultural production. Modern soil surveys in Belize have classified Chan Noohol's soils as Vaca suite, Cuxu subsuite soils which have marginal agricultural potential under today's mechanized agricultural practices because of the sloping and rocky nature of these soil formations. But Chan Noohol's farmers were not constrained by the same limitations that constrain modern farmers; they transformed the land to create a productive agricultural landscape that supported centuries of habitation.

At Chan Noohol's farmsteads people prepared food, cooked, ate, stored their possessions, produced stone tools and cloth, observed rituals, slept, and produced foodstuffs. Low frequencies of remains associated with stone tool and cloth-making indicate that these activities were only done for household-level provisioning. The majority of artifacts and activity areas at Chan Noohol were associated with the food production process – from sowing to serving – indicating that farmwork was the primary intra- and extra-household production activity for the entire farm family – men, women, and children. When agricultural production is technologically intensive and situated near the house, as was the case at Chan Noohol, collaborative participation of all family members in agricultural work tends to be high.

Unsurprisingly, people at Chan Noohol had few material possessions. The majority of their possessions were utilitarian ceramic vessels for preparing, serving, and storing food and water. People recycled their possessions at Chan Noohol. If a ceramic pot was broken one of the fragments might be crafted into a spindle whorl. If a stone axe was broken it might be re-used as a pounding implement. Like their residences, their possessions were relatively undecorated. With the exception of hard granite grinding stones and a few sharp obsidian cutting tools, most possessions at Chan Noohol were made of locally available materials. With few exceptions, instead

of imported ornaments, Chan Noohol residents wore ornaments made of locally available materials such as gray slate which were shaped to look like simple greenstone ornaments.

Despite the limited possessions of Chan Noohol's farmers and the uniform focus of their production on agriculture, life at Chan Noohol was far from homogeneous. The residences at the two-residence farmsteads (CN5 and CN7) were constructed on the highest platforms and gave onto low courtyard areas – resembling much smaller versions of the Sepulturas courtyards. While roughly 8 percent of the ceramic vessels from farmsteads CN5 and CN6 and a one-residence farmstead (CN1) were volcanic ash-tempered ceramics, a ceramic type that is commonly finished with "fancy" polychrome decoration, none of these ceramics was found at other farmsteads. Only the residents of CN5 and CN7 had access to any imported status items (jade fragments and marine shell beads). Although the residents of CN5 and CN7 neither made grand modifications to residences nor had many imported items, through these non-local items and residential modifications plausibly made in reference to the residences of higher-status members of Maya society, the residents of CN5 and CN7 created materially distinctive living places that contributed to their distinctive social identity at Chan Noohol.

Experiencing Life at Chan Noohol

The natural forest setting of Chan Noohol's residences encircled by fields would have been quite a visually different place from the crowded, bright-red-painted, cut stone buildings, plazas, and courtyards of Classic royal courts and noble complexes such as at nearby Xunantunich. Separated by their fields, different farm families lived dispersed from one another. Despite the openness of their pole-walled buildings and outdoor work areas, this distance between families would have allowed them a certain amount of privacy to develop the family-oriented practices and identities that we can still see as differences in the archaeological record. Beyond Chan Noohol's houses much daily domestic and agricultural work took place out of doors. Agricultural work is of course outside work, but women also prepared food and men and/or women made stone tools on outdoor domestic work surfaces and in ancillary buildings.

Within Chan Noohol farmsteads the people who were making tools and the people who were preparing food were doing these activities in the same space, regardless of whether or not they were the same people or were working there at the same time. Similarly the people who were involved in agriculture were working within seeing, talking, or yelling distance of the people who were preparing food and making stone tools. As domestic and agricultural activities were largely undertaken in outside spaces, this allowed communication between persons working on these activities (even when people were working in "enclosed" buildings, they could peer or talk through the pole walls). Since the majority of people's work took place in spaces that were neither rigidly enclosed nor divided by great distances, people's separate as well as collaborative daily work was organized spatially in such a way

that it could facilitate interaction and communication rather than division. The spatial and social commingling of agricultural and domestic work created through people's practices promoted situated experiences where work around the house involved consumption and production and the input of male and female, old and young. In contrast with royal political ideologies and living experiences, the practices and experiences of day-to-day living and working around Chan Noohol emphasized the collaborative rather than segregated efforts of members of farmsteading families.

Conclusion

What was life like for the diverse Maya peoples of the Classic period? How did they represent their social world? How did they live and experience their lives? Classic Maya royalty constructed and conventionalized representations of gender, age, status, and work through texts, images, and city planning. Using spatial conventions they represented social differences as spatially separate. Royal personages (men, women, and children) manipulated these conventions to present themselves as the pinnacle and totality of these differences. Perhaps unsurprisingly, daily life within the Classic Maya royal court at Calakmul was very much structured along similar socio-spatial lines as political-ideological representations. As Pierre Bourdieu (1979) has noted, societies' upper echelons are most invested in and able to emulate and control their social world along the lines that they themselves are promoting as defining their distinction and high culture.

While the Maya nobility, like the residents of Sepulturas, were quite well situated socially and economically and they adopted and acquired many of the materials and symbols of high Classic Maya culture, their daily lives were in many ways quite different from royal lives. In part, this difference may have been created by their ability to control their own production of items of high Maya culture within their households. They seem to have celebrated this control through the creation of representations that portrayed their own productive activities, the very activities that the royalty left out of their representations.

Conversely, the social and economic situation of Chan Noohol's farmers did not allow them to take advantage of the materials and symbols of high Classic Maya culture. Although they produced no representations of themselves, the intensity of their agricultural production has left many traces in the archaeological record. Despite quite dramatic differences in the possession of materials and symbols, some aspects of day-to-day experiences of living and working at Chan Noohol and Sepulturas seem to have had more in common than either had with living experiences within the royal court at Calakmul. Daily living at Chan Noohol and Sepulturas was less marked by a spatial segregation of different people's lives and work along cosmological and political-ideological lines than at Calakmul's royal court. To an even greater extent at Chan Noohol than at Sepulturas, spatial arrangements and living experiences highlighted the complementary and/or collaborative aspects (rather than separate aspects) of people's lives.

With 150 years of archaeological research in the Maya area now behind us, we have the archaeological evidence to people the diverse and complex world of Classic Maya society. Bringing together our multiple lines of evidence we can now see an active and vibrant Maya world, with socially and economically distinct creators and inhabitants. The more Maya archaeologists can learn about the diversity and meaning of social life in Classic Maya society the closer we will come to understanding what it was like to be human in another time and place.

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