



John Edward Staller
Editor

Pre-Columbian Landscapes of Creation and Origin

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The Field Museum
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Front cover, top left:

(Figure 6.5 in book) The Toboroche, a common tree with a swollen trunk, stands in mid-road here. This is the type of tree that figures in the Fox story about the origin of the Parapeti River (Photo courtesy of CPI-Chaco, Santa Cruz, Bolivia).

Front cover, background:

(Figure 6.9 in book) Parapeti River dunes, created and moved by fierce winter winds, are shown below a typical summer sky. (Photo courtesy of CPI-Chaco, Santa Cruz, Bolivia).

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“Draw not nigh hither;” said the Lord to Moses, “put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exodus 3, 5).

Mircea Eliade on the heterogeneity of geographic space...

“... some parts of space are qualitatively different from others... this spatial non-homogeneity finds expression in the experience of an opposition between space that is sacred — the only real and real-ly existing space — and all other space, the formless expanse surrounding it.” The realization of the heterogeneity of space is “... a primordial experience... It is not a matter of theoretical speculation, but of a primary religious experience that precedes all reflection on the world. For it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation. When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse. (1959 pp. 20–21)

This volume is dedicated to Claude Levi Strauss and the late Mircea Eliade, for their inspiration and many profound insights into the cultural and mythic landscapes of creation and origin, both in the Americas and throughout the world.

Contents

An Introduction to Pre-Columbian Landscapes of Creation and Origin	1
John E. Staller	
1 Ballcourt Rites, Paradise, and the Origins of Power in Classic Veracruz.	11
Rex Koontz	
2 Landscape and a Visual Narrative of Creation and Origin at the Olmec Ceremonial Center of La Venta	31
Carolyn E. Tate	
3 Maya Caves Across Time and Space: Reading-Related Landscapes in K'iche' Maya Text, Ritual and History	67
Duncan Earle	
4 Places of Emergence: Sacred Mountains and Cofradía Ceremonies	95
Allen J. Christenson	
5 Over Distant Waters: Places of Origin and Creation in Colonial K'iche'an Sources.	123
Frauke Sachse	
6 Fox Walker on the Parapeti River, Bolivia: The Origins of How We Guarani Live in Íví.	161
Elio Ortiz, Antonio Mendez, Alejo Zarzycki O., and Janis Bristol Alcorn	
7 Where the Land and the Ocean Meet: The Engoroy Phase Ceremonial Site at Salango, Ecuador, 600–100BC	203
Richard Lunniss	

8	The Astronomical Significance of Ritual Movements in the Calendar of Cuzco	249
	R. Tom Zuidema	
9	Dimensions of Place: The Significance of Centers to the Development of Andean Civilization: An exploration of the <i>Ushnu</i> Concept	269
	John E. Staller	
10	High Altitude <i>Ushnu</i> Platforms in the Department of Ayacucho Peru, Structure, Ancestors and Animating Essence . . .	315
	Frank M. Meddens, Nicholas P. Branch, Cirilo Vivanco Pomacanchari, Naomi Riddiford, and Rob Kemp	
11	Representation, Memory, and Power: Pre-Columbian Landscapes of Creation and Origin	357
	Brian Stross	
	Index	379

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An Introduction to Pre-Columbian Landscapes of Creation and Origin

John E. Staller

The contributions presented in this volume explore the various ways in which Native Americans related to their natural surroundings and how these associations were at various levels, linked to their mythological beginnings, their cultural identities, political power, right to rule, and to providing meaning to their cultural traditions and to those values and beliefs that gave their lives purpose. This volume on pre-Columbian landscapes is in part a product of long-standing research interests on the symbolic significance of landscapes and flora and the role of the geography to early plant domestication (Staller, 2001, 2006a,b). The scholarly essays presented in this volume should be of interest to anthropologists, archaeologists, folklorists, art historians, and cultural geographers, particularly those familiar with the Mesoamerican and Andean literature, as well as students and scholars of Pre-Columbian Studies. For the past two decades, landscape approaches have become increasingly popular in the classics and prehistoric literature both in North America and abroad. Most of the recent published research on ancient landscapes has been focused upon the placement and interrelationships of monuments and monumental architecture through phenomenological constructs, viewing space, and how such places are perceived and experienced by the analyst (Bradley, 1998; Bender and Aitken, 1998; Tilley, 1993, 1994, 2004). These scholarly analyses have, with few exceptions, reported upon ancient Eurasian landscapes where a lack of written accounts has challenged art historians and archaeologists to develop methodological approaches to understand the ambiguities of ancient monuments and how they relate to ancient political and religious ideology (Williams, 1985; Bradley, 2000; Tilley, 1991, 2004; Tilley and Miller, 1984). The contributions herein provide methodological and analytical examples of how research on ancient landscapes can be carried out where historical written records are available for some parts of the region and where the indigenous descendants of these ancient cultures in some cases continue to practice rituals and make pilgrimages or offerings to such places. Such cultural practices speak to an intrinsic link between such cultures and their natural surroundings.

The Western epistemological distinction between culture and nature has to a large degree hindered the social sciences in general and anthropology in particular in effectively addressing the consequences of ideology and cosmology to human behavior (Tilley and Bennett, 2001:335–336, 360–361). Enlightenment constructs

that view cultural and nature in opposition, that is, a general perception of humans as distinct and separate from, or acting in a certain way upon the social and natural environment with rationalized outcomes is generally rather different from indigenous concepts, where this dichotomy is essentially reciprocal rather than oppositional (see e.g., Denevan, 2001). The interrelatedness of the cultural and natural environment to many indigenous cultures in this hemisphere is made more comprehensible when we consider that most ancient Latin American religions were inherently telluric, that is naturalistic and spatial (Sullivan, 1984). Our philosophical biases predispose the social sciences to materialistic and biological reductionism (Sahlins, 1976:57–60, 1981). This is particularly apparent in the tendency of Western science to examine the movements and interactions of biologically based systems as static rather than interrelated and dynamic expressions of history, economics, or politics (Sullivan, 1988:264). Our inherent biases have, to some extent, limited our ability to effectively deal with the role of ideology and religion in understanding past and present indigenous cultures (Tilley and Bennett, 2001). Such ancient societies saw time as cyclical and generally reckoned periodicity (the beginnings and ends of temporal and cosmological cycles) through ceremonial rituals involving dancing, music, feasting, and ritual sacrifice (Sullivan, 1984, 1987; Schwartz, 2000). An emphasis upon the culturally imbued periodicity in the landscape provides an ontological basis for a clearer understanding of the significance of ritual ceremony to complex sociocultural development.

Landscape approaches to ancient cultures in the New World have historically analyzed monumentality and architecture. However, access to ethnohistoric records, iconography and hieroglyphic writing, provided many of these studies with an emphasis upon the cosmologies and mythologies associated with such places in order to gain a clearer understanding of the rationale behind their construction and destruction (Reinhard, 1985; Paternosto, 1996; Townsend, 1992; Bauer, 1998; Lentz, 2000). This volume makes significant strides in providing contributions that present multiple lines of evidence, from ancient iconographies, linguistics, ethnohistoric accounts and ethnographic informants, archaeological remains, as well as architectural and landscape features. The methodological approaches being presented in this volume will provide a basis for future research.

The previous published research has been focused geographically on specific regions and on questions of how and why certain sacred centers played such important roles in ancient history (Benvenisti, 2000; Midgley, 2003). One of the overriding patterns revealed from all the contributions in this volume is that the landscape was culturally defined by ruling political and/or religious specialists from a certain place, usually major cultural centers that also had important symbolic significance to ethnic identity and social order. Moreover, these chapters suggest that certain remote places or landscape features away from the heartland or ceremonial center are often provided with cultural and mythological significance and meaning by the cultural center (Helms, 1988, 1991, 1993).

In some desolate and remote areas, the construction of architectural features or landscape modifications allow a society to apply ancient forms of esoteric knowledge or cultural memory to reckon temporal cycles and presumably more effectively

adapt to their environment (Helms, 1991). Places that provided cultural connections between the celestial and terrestrial world are, for obvious reasons, particularly critical to agricultural societies. However, research presented herein suggests that in some cases such places may have also been used to calculate mythological and world cycles from which creations and origins are reckoned.

Pre-Columbian Landscapes of Creation and Origin includes contributions that explore places in the natural world, such as caves, mountains, and bodies of water, as well as locations in the geography that were modified by Native populations because they were perceived to be endowed with spiritual life force or animating essence (see e.g., Bauer, 1998; Moore, 2005). Landscapes provide meanings through a time-honored connection with origin myths, folklore, legends, and rituals performed to venerate and animate the specialized spiritual forces or powers of such places, keeping their symbolic and metaphorical associations alive, and at the same time adjusting them as cultural histories and identities changed (Sahlins, 1981). The chapters presented herein indicate that places associated with origins and creations reveal a great deal about the cultures that defined them and the rituals and modifications to those places can tell us not only about how they modified the world around them, but why they transformed their natural surroundings. Such concepts as a sacred landscape are therefore critical to understanding human behavior. Landscape and religion are very large topics and this volume documents how they are related analytically through an emphasis on places and cultural beliefs surrounding “ultimate sacred beginnings,” the origin myths and cosmologies of indigenous New World peoples. As these chapters show, places of origin and creation play a fundamental role in how the surrounding landscape is understood symbolically at the center, and where and what kind of rituals were practiced in these places. Some research on sacred landscapes has been confined to regions of the world where many of these beliefs are still practiced, and where written holy texts and documents remain, like the Himalayas or Mesoamerica and the Andes (Koontz et al., 2001; Gutschow, 2003; Moore, 2005). Pre-Columbian scholars have the advantage over historians and social scientists working in the Old World in that in many case studies, the descendents of the archaeological record are still among us, and early descriptions and accounts of their beliefs, ritual practices, and use of monumental architecture can be documented and projected back in time (Lentz, 2000; Lane, 2002). The analytical approaches presented in this edited volume will provide students and scholars a basis for documenting such data in their own research.

In a narrow and literal sense, native people throughout the Neotropics have understood their identity and those places their ancestors emerged through mythology, ideology, and rituals. These origin places represented in most cases a symbolic as well as literal connection between these societies and their surrounding landscape. The contributions included in this volume identify specific physical places—as well as imagined places such as Tollan, a name applied to multiple locations as well as being a concept used and redefined by most Mesoamerican peoples (Christenson and Sachse, this volume). Myths and legends of these places have been told and retold and they are symbolically represented in art, iconography, and recreated in ritual performance.

This volume draws together origin places from diverse landscapes in the Neotropics. Some chapters explore their cosmogony, how such places come into being (Earle, Lunniss, and Staller, this volume). Mythological origins and creations occur from original conditions (*creato ex nihilo*), through transformation of preexisting conditions, or through the destruction or annihilation of preexisting conditions or earlier world cycles (Eliade, 1977:83; Sullivan, 1984:25–26). Various chapters relate how ancestors and mythological events often become fixed to a specific place in the landscape, and then later provide symbolic and sometimes timeless reference points that are transformations of the destruction of previous conditions or original states (Koontz, Ortiz et al., and Lunniss, this volume). In a wider sense, societies in all succeeding generations often redefine the natural world around them and in so doing they not only renew their ancestral past, but also transform it by adjusting it to present circumstances often through ritual enactments that have symbolic reference to original sacred beginnings (Tate, Christenson, Lunniss, and Sachse, this volume). These analyses suggest that cosmogony can become cosmology, which is recreated and reenacted in ritual and oral accounts, visual narratives (Tate, this volume). Most reference to such original conditions and places is through metaphorical referents that provide a culture or society with a language of the sacred which is meaningful to the participants and therefore is a reassertion of cultural or ethnic identity (Earle, Sachse, and Ortiz et al., this volume).

Memory plays an important role in the creation of cosmologies that are often directly linked to a mythic landscape. Memory in Native American cultures is not solely confined to the past, the present, or to predicting future events, but is closely tied to the reckoning of primordial, mythological, and temporal cycles. The contributions by Zuidema, Staller, and Meddens focus upon how places in the landscape play a primary role in demarcating time and bringing cultural meaning with reference to the natural world. Memory and oral accounts of history and past and future events also have reference to venerated ancestors, whose legendary accomplishments provide a basis for what is possible and meaningful within the culture (Christenson and Sachse, this volume). Memory and oral accounts often have direct reference to eschatological imperatives—that is, they refer to the end of time or world cycles and are generally accompanied by ritual performance and the recreation and transformation of legend and history (see e.g., Wilbert, 1975:172–173). Rex Koontz demonstrates how ritual human sacrifice played a central role in defining dynastic power and creation through the fecundity and fertility of the natural environment. Various chapters in the volume explore how memory, time, and venerated ancestors are linked to the surrounding landscape from sacred centers, which provide meaning and symbolic associations between spiritual and corporal, among cultures, their political power, and their natural surroundings (Staller, this volume).

In Native oral accounts, on the other hand, people talk about the past as a way of making sense of the present and of projecting toward the future. Creation myths of transformation such as the Popol Vuh are more than rational explanations of first causes of physical processes or justifications of existing social conditions (Earle, Christenson and Sachse, this volume). Such myths are also cultural rationalizations of prevailing cosmic, sociopolitical, or existential orders. In the contribution by

Frauke Sachse, we learn how the K'iche Maya traveled through their mythic landscape to arrive where they exist in the present. The mythic history of the K'iche Maya is an account of their creation as a people, their genealogy, their place in the mythic landscape, and their ultimate sacred beginnings. The K'iche Maya, like many indigenous societies in the New World have readapted, symbolically represented, and recreated their origin stories (Christenson, this volume). As part of a group's collective memory, origin stories and myths also can become powerful political tools that can erase other social memories, and reaffirm sacred rationales to a society's right to rule, for example as in the contribution by Koontz, among the ancient Gulf Coast societies of El Tajin. Original creation myths and accounts provide the basis for imagination, thought, and reflection—that is for the ordering processes that make the cosmos and the social world intelligible.

Landscape is a powerful factor in the operation of memory because of the associations narrators make between the local landscape and the events of the myths, legends, and histories they relate. In this continual interaction between the past, the present, as well as the future, time is subordinate to place, and history as defined in Western academic terms does not exist. Time is, however, understood and charted by the movements of the sun and moon, and some indigenous cultures coded it into a calendar as, for example, the Maya do in the contribution by Sachse, the Bolivian contribution by Elio Ortiz and his colleagues and the Inca chapters by Tom Zuidema and Frank Meddens.

Another theme surrounding pre-Columbian landscapes of creation and origins that shows up in many Native societies is that origin places can be reconstructed and reproduced physically at other locations in the landscape as well as symbolically represented in iconography and/or through reenactment in ritual performance (Tate, Earle, Christenson, Lunniss, this volume). Landscapes as origin places can also have references to distinct scales, as among the Guarani, flooding rivers and distant mountains have meanings that can refer to the ethnic, communal, and regional scale (Ortiz et al., this volume).

From this perspective, landscape has been analyzed as a process during which societies temporarily leave their daily routine and secular existence to partake through rituals and/or pilgrimages in the power of the spirits and ancestors active in the landscape. The contributors address the above and related theoretical issues and how they were lived by pre-Columbian cultures and are still being practiced. Still other contributors compare existing indigenous beliefs with what appeared in the ethnohistoric accounts, and reveal syncretism, how ancient beliefs have been modified through acculturation and where there is continuity with the ancient past (Christenson and Ortiz et al., this volume). Some focus on sacred places, how the history of these places can be renewed and reconstructed, and how natural and manmade places can organize time in a system of ritual movements and processions (Earle and Zuidema, this volume). The conclusions attempt to isolate patterns regarding landscape features people consider origin places, and ways in which these locations affect societies.

It is significant that Andean people sometimes created and recreated sacred places *in situ* in the landscape, while ancient societies in the Veracruz lowlands at

El Tajin or Maya highlands and lowlands represented them in pictorial art in public arenas within their sacred ceremonial centers (Koontz, Tate, Lunniss, and Meddens, this volume). This may have to do in part with the predominance of origin and creation myths among Andean cultures in which the original mythological ancestors were either stone or turned into stone (living rock) in the process of creation and origin (see e.g., Urton, 1999). There are however striking similarities as well. The Olmec and Engoroy ceremonial centers with their partially emerging ritual artifacts and sculpture dispersed along a central axis, no doubt evoked memories, music, and rituals that spoke directly to ultimate sacred beginnings (Tate and Lunniss, this volume). The extraordinary ideological similarities symbolically expressed in the use of ritual artifacts and sculpture from these disparate regions, evoke recollections of the many scholars who have seen similarities in other forms of material culture between the Olmec and the Late Formative cultures of coastal Ecuador.

Despite the diversity of cultural and natural landscapes represented in this volume, there appear to be currents or threads that continue to reappear throughout the chapters (Stross, this volume). One of the striking characteristics of creation and origin narratives, whether taken from sacred ancient text, or represented symbolically in the built landscape is their mutability, the ability of societies both ancient and modern to adjust and transform them to reflect changing historical conditions and social realities. A number of these contributions show that in most cases such narratives and concepts of creation and origin are built upon earlier models, or they are transformed in ways that are to varying degrees intelligible to the cultures within the different regions under consideration (Koontz, Tate, Staller, and Meddens, this volume).

The transformations of origin and creation narratives, are through ritual performance and allegory, which take those involved out of linear and even cyclical time, and present such myths as eternal and self-evident. Despite the similarities and differences of their symbolic and iconographic representation and their physical characteristics and the memories they no doubt evoked, all of the landscapes of creation and origin were at some level referring either symbolically or literally to ethnic identity, right to rule, and to culturally conceptualized concepts of power (Stross, this volume). The spiritual power perceived to be residing in the natural world, venerated ancestors, the divine ancestors of lords and powerful dynastic rulers reinforce ethnic and cultural identity. The esoteric knowledge and memory associated with the physical characteristics of built and natural landscapes, place a society within embedded temporal cycles, and are another reflection of the interrelatedness of the corporal and natural in indigenous thought and belief.

In the summary chapter, Brian Stross ties together the threads that run through these various contributions and brings his insights into how landscapes of creation and origin are categorized at different levels (ethnic group, local, regional). How they are at once transformed, and at the same time, receive identity through the local or place deity believed to be residing in such landscapes. Such metaphorical references are not solely restricted to the horizontality of the terrestrial realm but

also embody a vertical dimension with regards to “communication” between the so-called cosmic layers (Staller, this volume). Centers of the world or *axis mundi* are also part of the pre-Columbian landscape, although they do not necessarily denote Euclidean space. These contributions suggest that among indigenous cultures the night sky can also be a sacred landscape and that access to the world below, particularly through natural features like caverns and caves, or the built landscapes of ceremonial centers can provide the basis for esoteric knowledge of ultimate sacred beginnings, and also by possessing such knowledge, for social inequality.

The power of the natural world is repeatedly seen as being embodied in certain places, caves, mountain peaks, rivers, etc., yet the symbols of creation and origin among different cultures are most often perceived of as representing ultimate sacred beginnings, when they are in their proper context. In other words, they are spatial, associated with certain places in the landscape, as well as contextual, associated with particular ceremonial rituals and rites that generally occur at specific times within the annual cycle. This is in part because of the very nature of such narratives. In dealing with beginnings, with creations and origins, they are intrinsically embodied in concepts of time and those concepts often refer to world cycles and not solely the annual cycles associated with calendars and the sowing and harvesting of crops. One of the predominant patterns that may be noted in the chapters is that in most all cases, the origins and creations are from previous conditions or states, and not out of nothing (*creato ex nihilo*) or first beginnings (Eliade, 1959). It is perhaps for this reason that the interrelatedness of the cultural and natural world among indigenous population has historically been difficult for Western scholars to grasp, particularly with regard to its effects upon human behavior. Despite the fact that indigenous ritual ceremonies, offerings, and religious practices with regard to the surrounding landscape were and are generally perceived of as based upon groundless superstition, these chapters show that there is an inherent logic behind such narratives and their associated ritual and religious practices. The fundamental difference in cultural perceptions is primarily related to time and spatial associations. In exploring, discovering, and analyzing what some of those concepts and associations are and were, their underlying rationale and logic become more comprehensible. For prehistorians and anthropologists, these data provide a basis for understanding human behavior past and present, and also bring meaning to the incredible complexity and array of diversity to cultural expression and association with the natural surroundings, particularly those places related to creation and origin.

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Chapter 1

Ballcourt Rites, Paradise, and the Origins of Power in Classic Veracruz

Rex Koontz

Introduction

As this volume makes clear, origin places are much more than the spaces in which humans first appeared. The first instance of certain critical practices are often just as important as the creation of humans. For Mesoamericans in particular, the first fire, the first sunrise, and the first sacrifice are often major events in sacred narratives (Hamann, 2002). Tales of the origins of practice complement human creation tales by modeling behavior that is seen as integral to the functioning of human society (López Austin, 1996:17–18). This chapter explores one such originary act, that of ballcourt sacrifice, in a specific Ancient Mesoamerican setting—the Classic Veracruz site of El Tajín.

El Tajín was the capital of a regional culture that flourished in north central Veracruz (Mexico) from c. A.D. 650–1000. During that period, ballcourt construction and ballgame-related accouterments were a major facet of the regional culture. The center of El Tajín contained 11 masonry courts, and the regional culture produced large quantities of finely carved stone objects called yokes, palmas, and hachas that were closely associated with ballcourt ritualism. The imagery associated with these objects and courts emphasize the decapitation of a sacrificial victim in a ballcourt context.

Numerous depictions of ballcourt sacrifice in Classic Veracruz public art show the victim dressed in ballplayer equipment, seated in the middle of the court, and decapitated. While the practice of decapitation associated with the ballgame can be traced back to the Late Preclassic in Central Veracruz (Daneels, 2006), during the Epiclassic (c. 650–1000), this codified ballcourt imagery featuring the decapitation ceremony appears on some of the most important ballcourt and ballcourt-related programs in the region, including Las Higueras and Aparicio as well as El Tajín. Interestingly, several other areas of Mesoamerica also participate in this specific ballcourt decapitation iconography at this time (Pasztor, 1972, 1978:138; Taube, 1994:228–229). In all these regions, the decapitation scene is often paired with signs of lush vegetation or large amounts of water. In the specific case of El Tajín, we also have depicted an elaborate round of ceremonies that framed the sacrificial act. These ceremonies led to the investiture of the ruler, and thus the right to govern

in Classic Veracruz was directly linked to the sacrifice of a victim in the ballcourt (Wilkerson, 1991). This sacrifice was in turn linked to the memory of the creation of humans by the gods. It is in the link between ballcourt sacrifice and the creation of humans that political legitimacy was forged.

While the relationship between ballcourt sacrifice, political power, and human creation in Classic Veracruz iconography is clear, this iconographic sketch leaves largely unexplained how the decapitation rite is related to the creation imagery it draws upon for legitimacy. Exploring these questions requires going beyond Classic Veracruz depictions to texts from other regions of Mesoamerica that describe ballcourt sacrifice as part of creation epics. Glyphic documents from the roughly contemporary Classic Maya as well as later Contact-era writings describe the mythic contexts of the ballgame. These narratives inevitably involve the sacrifice of primordial heroes or enemies in the ballcourt. Scholars early in the twentieth century interpreted these creation tales as movements of celestial phenomena, often seeing the triumph (rising) of the sun in the final victory and sacrifice at the court (Seler, 1990–1998:IV:158). The Contact-era K'iche Maya epic *Popol Vuh* (Tedlock, 1996), in which heroes descend to the Underworld to be sacrificed and reborn in the Underworld ballcourt, has had the most profound influence on more recent interpretations of ballcourt sacrifice. Allusions to these heroes and the narrative of heroic rebirth may be found in Classic Maya courts (Kowalski, 1989; Freidel, Schele and Parker, 1993:345–355). Researchers have found significant stellar symbolism in several of these tales (Tedlock, 1991; Freidel, Schele and Parker, 1993), but the major message turns out to be the rebirth of a hero who is likened to the growth of maize. Numerous Classic period images show the Maya Maize God or his avatar reborn (Taube, 1985; Coe, 1989:177–178; Miller, 2001). More than simple invocations of fertility, however, these narratives and their ballcourt associations were deployed by Maya elite for clearly political ends: to bolster specific rulers, increase prestige and humiliate enemies, or serve as a reunion place for allied elite, among other uses (Tokovinine, 2002). The Late Postclassic Aztec told of the birth of their patron deity and his triumph over enemies, several of whom were immolated in the ordinary ballcourt sacrifice (Alvarado Tezozomoc, 1992). Previously this ballcourt had been the site of rich plant growth. As we will see, like the Aztec and Maya, the narratives of El Tajín associate human sacrifice in the ballcourt to both political power and plant growth (Pasztor, 1972; Kowalski, 1998). At El Tajín the plant is not maize but maguey, an important fact that will lead us to examine the associations of maguey in Classic Veracruz imagery and politics as well as in Mesoamerican ideas of paradise.

Origin of Humans and Political Power at El Tajín

El Tajín is the major Epiclassic (c. A.D. 650–900/1000) site along the Veracruz Gulf Coast. The site's urban core is characterized by monumental stone architecture with niches and flying cornices, range-type structures of unusual complexity, and a

large number of ballcourts (11 in the urban core alone) for the playing of the pre-Columbian rubber ballgame and its attendant rites.

While there are many ballcourts in the urban core of El Tajín, they vary significantly in their decoration. Most courts have a minimal amount of sculptural decoration that includes relief figures on each bench corner and at times a relief figure marking the center of the bench (Raesfeld, 1991). Two courts, however, are decorated with a series of six elaborate relief panels. These panels are distributed in the same locations (corner and center) as the decoration in the other ballcourts. Unlike the simpler decorations found on other courts, the sculpture of these two ballcourts includes multi-figure narrative compositions in elaborate rectangular frames (Spinden, 1933; Kampen, 1972:73–74). Because these narrative images have been shown to treat directly of ballcourt rites (Ekholm, 1949; Wilkerson and Jeffrey, 1991), they are crucial to any definition of the meaning of the courts themselves.

Of the two courts with elaborate narrative, the South Ballcourt is by far the largest and most intricately decorated. The six relief panels describe a series of rites that may be divided into two groups: human protagonists dominate the corner panels, while supernaturals are the chief actors in the central panels (Wilkerson, 1991:58–65). The corner panels recount the rites leading to the decapitation of a sacrificial victim in the ballcourt. A detail of the final panel in that sequence (Fig. 1.1) shows the victim with eyes already closed in allusion to his coming death. The sacrificer stands immediately before the victim, holding the lanceolate sacrificial blade immediately over the victim's neck. This same lanceolate blade appears in numerous depictions of the decapitation rite throughout Mesoamerica during this period. Both figures wear the garb associated with the ballgame and ballcourt rites, which here includes a heavy belt (yoke), an associated piece projecting from the top central portion of the belt (*palma*), and kneepads.

The ballcourt decapitation sacrifice described above opens the path for a meeting of gods and humans in the two central panels of the South Ballcourt. In the first of these (Fig. 1.2), the human is seen pointing to a reclining figure while facing two supernaturals. The latter are marked by supraorbital plates, the diagnostic trait of divinities at El Tajín. The reclining figure is marked by a large hank of hair over the forehead, which elsewhere at El Tajín designates the decapitated heads of sacrificial victims. Thus the human is pointing out the sacrificial victim to the deities, and one may assume that this is a reference to the decapitation sacrifice that took place on the previous panel. In return for this sacrifice, the deity closest to the human offers a baton and a long piece of cloth, both held in the left arm. These two objects are manipulated in El Tajín investiture rituals seen elsewhere at the site, and may be thought of as the most important El Tajín regalia (Koontz, 2006). The exchange is clear: human sacrifice for the divine regalia of the El Tajín ruler.

Important regalia was often considered a gift of the gods in Mesoamerica. Humans obtained this gift through sacrifice. It should not surprise us that the exchange of ballcourt decapitation sacrifice for the regalia of rulership functioned not only at El Tajín but also in the larger sphere of Classic Veracruz imagery. A Classic Veracruz *palma* like those worn by the El Tajín ballcourt sacrifice participants



Fig. 1.1 Ballcourt decapitation, El Tajín, South Ballcourt Panel 4, detail (after Kampen, 1972: Fig. 23)

illustrates on its two sides this equation (Fig. 1.3): on one side is a figure clutching the severed head of the victim, while on the other is the standing ruler with baton in hand. The standing figure wears a specific cape that is seen also in El Tajín accession images (Fig. 1.4), thus assuring the connection between the baton, decapitation, and accession to power.

Directly across the El Tajín ballcourt from the image of regalia donation is a scene of cosmic import: the creation of humans. Here (Fig. 1.5) the same deity that donated the baton and cloth now squats over a structure filled with liquid. In the liquid sits an anthropomorphic figure with a large headdress in the shape of a fish. This squatting deity is creating humans by performing an autosacrificial ritual involving penis perforation, with the resulting blood flow moving toward the figure with the fish helmet (Taube, 1986; Delhalle and Luckyx, 1986). In Early Colonial Central Mexican descriptions of the creation of humans by Quetzalcoatl, that god bleeds his penis on the bones of a previous generation of humans. This previous

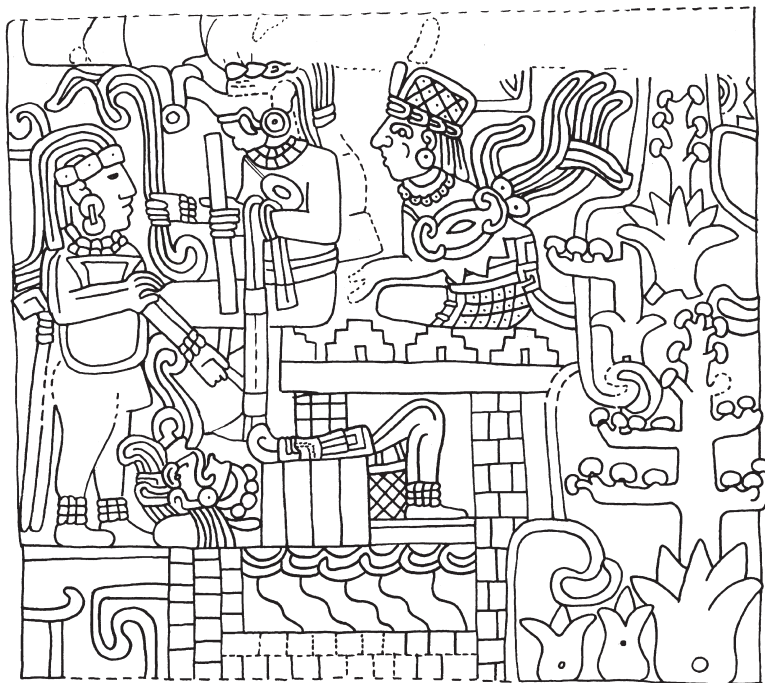


Fig. 1.2 Decapitation sacrifice offering and donation of sash and baton, El Tajín, South Ballcourt Panel 6 (drawing courtesy of Daniela Koontz)

generation in the Central Mexican tales is often identified as fish-men, just as the figure receiving the autosacrificial blood at El Tajín wears a large fish headdress. In addition, the pose of the sacrificing god resembles conventions for the depiction of female parturition (Fox, 1993:59), further emphasizing the idea that the (male) god is here giving birth to humans.

Around the scene describing the creation of humankind are other probable allusions to primordial time, specifically the “raising” or setting of the sky in place at the beginning of time, indicated by a star band near the top of the scene. This is not surprising given the context, for raising or setting the sky is a principal activity in many major Mesoamerican origin narratives. In the *Leyenda de los Soles*, one of the later Nahuatl texts already cited above as an analogy for the creation of humans, the establishment of the sky is referred to in the passage immediately preceding the creation of humans through supernatural sacrifice (Bierhorst, 1992:144–145). Other Nahuatl origin narratives, such as the *Histoire du Mechique* (Garibay, 1965:105–106) and the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* (Garibay, 1965:25, 32) also link human genesis with the setting of the sky by deities.

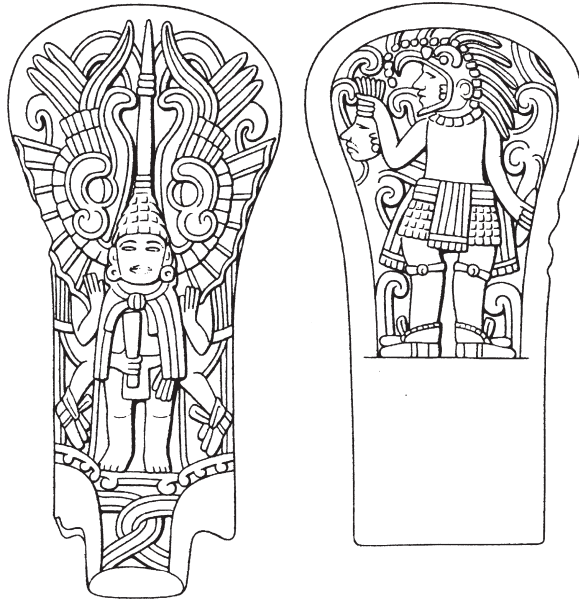


Fig. 1.3 Baton held after decapitation sacrifice, Palma, Coatepec (from Proskouriakoff, 1954:Fig. 6)

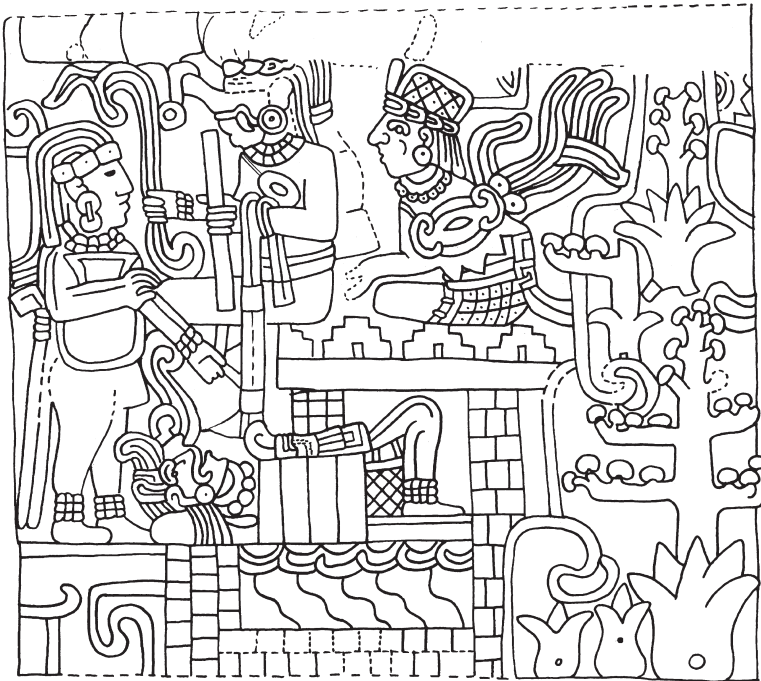


Fig. 1.4 Baton ceremony with cape, El Tajín, Mound of the Building Columns Sculpture 8, detail (after Ladrón de Guevara, 1999: 85, drawing courtesy Daniela Koontz)



Fig. 1.5 Creation of humans, El Tajín, South Ballcourt Panel 5, detail (drawing courtesy Daniela Koontz)

Originary Debt

Thus far we have seen how the two central panels discuss human accession to power and the creation of humans and the raising of the sky by gods. The two scenes are related not only by their placement directly across from each other at the center of the court but also by a unique framing system, the appearance of a specific pair of gods, and the toponym that includes a mountain with flowering maguay plants. None of these traits appear in the corner panels. In addition, both central scenes require the action of the same central deity, who in this sense becomes the fulcrum for the entire program. These significant correspondences strongly suggest that the designers of the El Tajín ballcourt program were equating these two scenes. This begs the question, of course, of just what is similar in the two scenes and how the equivalence was seen.

Perhaps the most important similarity is the need for sacrifice: in the devolution of power objects scene, the sacrifice involves a decapitated human victim (the reclining figure with the hank of hair denoting a decapitated sacrificial victim), while in the creation scene it is the autosacrifice of the god that provokes the creation. What was the meaning of these mirrored sacrifices? Many Mesoamerican languages

contain a conception of sacrifice as debt payment to the gods. Monaghan (1995, 2000:32) has shown that in ancient and contemporary Mixtec sacrifice is a kind of work or tribute payment to the gods; the Nahuatl term *nextlahualtin* refers specifically to human sacrifice as payment to the gods (Carrasco, 1999:6), while the K'iche term *patan* refers to all sacrificial and ritual action as “work” performed for the gods.¹ In its simplest form, the gods have sacrificed to create the human world, so it is incumbent on humans to acknowledge that sacrifice with sacrifices of their own to assuage the humans’ originary (and in the end unrepayable) debt. The examples could be multiplied, but the important point here is the recognition of the contractual and instrumental nature of these ritual exchanges, for the humans must merit the sacrifices and donations of the gods through human sacrifice (Carrasco, 1990:107–109; Monaghan, 2000:38). In the case of El Tajín, the return for work done on behalf of the gods includes the divine legitimation of human power. As we have seen, in the central panels at El Tajín the work necessary for legitimacy takes on a similar form to work done by the gods at the originary moment: divine autosacrifice is paired directly with human sacrifice, with the equation immediately apparent for anyone viewing the rites in or around the ballcourt.

Thus far we may say that ballcourt rites as imaged in the central El Tajín ballcourt established legitimate power by connecting humans and creator deities, revealing the logic of sacrifice, and serving as the arena for the reception of divine objects. The creation of humans was directly compared to the investiture of the ruler, as congruent sacrifices were necessary for each, and both took place in the same environment.

Flowering Maguey Mountain

The environment for both central panels consists of two large elements: a structure filled with liquid and a mountain covered with maguey (*agave sp.*) plants, many in full flower (Figs. 1.2 and 1.3). I discuss this toponym at length elsewhere (Koontz, n.d.), but it would be helpful to recount the relevant major points here and expand on the originary landscape theme I have argued for previously. García Payón (1973:34–53) originally associated these plants with the production of the mild intoxicant, pulque. Wilkerson, (1984:126) later extended the pulque reference by identifying the El Tajín flowering maguey mountain with the Nahuatl “Mountain of Foam”, the place of pulque’s origin in Late Postclassic narratives. Wilkerson (1984:126–127) proposed that a pulque cult was central not only to the religion of El Tajín but was operative throughout Classic Veracruz culture. For this the author cited evidence of the importance of pulque for the later Huastecs to the north. Far to the south, in the Mixtequilla, the enigmatic “Smiling Figures” were seen to

¹The latter term may also mean mundane work or tribute. The definition of this term is based on fieldwork the author conducted in Choquiac Cantel, 1992 and Ximénez 1985:447. The K'iche term may be a borrowing from Nahuatl (see Macri andLooper 2003:289–290) although the derivation has little effect on the argument.

display the effects of ritual drunkenness also associated with this cult. Returning to the El Tajín scenes with maguey in the central panels of the ballcourt, then, the central liquid-filled structure identified as a pulque vat could now be seen as a part of a fundamental religious cult through the region.

The pulque interpretations above are not based on regional pulque symbolism or known Veracruz cult activity, but on analogies between the visual evidence at Tajín and sixteenth-century Central Mexican documentary sources in Nahuatl. It may be helpful here to examine those sources more closely and analyze to what degree they relate to the much earlier El Tajín narratives. The most important Nahuatl narrative for our purposes is the origin of pulque recounted by Central Mexican informants to Sahagún (1950–1982: Book 10:194–195), where Mayahuel (the goddess of pulque) discovers the boring of the plant to obtain the sap, while other pulque-associated deities discover the additions of roots and the fermentation processes necessary for the drink. The preparation of the first batch of pulque on Mount Chichinauhia, which is then renamed Mount Pozonaltepetl (Mountain of Foam) in commemoration of the froth on the head of the drink. As Jiménez Moreno (1942:133) pointed out, there is an actual Chichinauhia near Tepoztlan, in a region that was much given to pulque deities. Tepoztecatl, a pulque deity, was the patron of this polity in the Late Postclassic (Nicholson, 1991:171).

A great feast was held for all the rulers and elders. Everyone was given four cups of pulque, but the Huastec ruler demanded five and became drunk. The ruler's drunkenness created such shame that the Huastec people were forced to leave the area and migrate to their present location on the Gulf Coast. The Huastec region is just north of the former Tajín realm, and it is of some importance that later Aztec stories locate a strong tradition of pulque drinking there. Two scholars of the ceramic sequence at Tajín, Du Solier (1945:43–44) and Wilkerson (1976), have suggested that the ceramic tradition of Tajín may even be partially traceable to earlier Huastec traditions, thus tying Huastec ethnicity and the population of Tajín. However, the ceramic ties cited in support of a Huastec presence at Tajín are general, and there are numerous indications that Tajín ceramic practice and other elite artistic indicators was distinct from the contemporary Huastec. Here, I wish to focus not on the ethnic tie that identifies Tajín as Huastec or any other ethnicity, but instead I wish to explore how these statements on origins and the originary landscape compare with similar statements in the region and across Mesoamerica. To return to the problem of the originary landscape then, it is important to note that the Late Postclassic Nahuatl informants locate the discovery of pulque and Mount Pozonaltepetl at Tamoanchan, an originary paradise founded after the building of the pyramids of Teotihuacan.

The *Histoire du Mechique* recounts that Ehecatl (Wind God, avatar of Quetzalcoatl) discovers Mayahuel in the sky and brings her to earth. Once on the ground, the two deities transform into intertwined trees (Garibay, 1965:106–107). Relatives of Mayahuel (the Tzitzimime) find she is missing, descend from the sky, tear her apart, and eat her. The remaining bones of Mayahuel were collected by Ehecatl and buried at Tamoanchan, and from these bones maguey grew. This important variant associates not only Mayahuel but also Ehecatl with the origin of pulque while placing the action once again in Tamoanchan.

In the *Histoyre du Mechique*, the origin of pulque is immediately preceded by the creation of humans by Ehecatl, in which that deity perforates his tongue to let blood on the bones of a previous generation of humans (Garibay, 1965:106). As we have seen in another variant of the creation of humans (*Leyenda de los Soles*), Quetzalcoatl bleeds not his tongue but his penis on the bones (Bierhorst, 1992:146), closely mirroring the El Tajín image of the deity perforating his penis to create humans (Taube, 1986; Delhalle and Luckyx, 1986). Crucial to this argument is the association of blood sacrifice, creation, and pulque, all three of which are also related in the imagery of the central ballcourt at Tajín. Again the location in the Nahuatl version is Tamoanchan. The imagery of El Tajín also places both the creation of humans and the appearance of maguey in a distinct space: that of the Flowering Maguey Mountain.

Flowering Maguey Mountain as a Pre-Columbian Paradise

Thus the origins of pulque and the creation of humans relate El Tajín's Flowering Maguey Mountain and Nahuatl narratives of Tamoanchan (Delhalle and Luckyx, 1986). In the most extensive comparison to date of Tamoanchan and Tajín paradisaical imagery, Delhalle and Luyx (1998:243–247) propose that the lush growth and humid nature found in Central Mexican descriptions of Tamoanchan refer specifically to the Gulf Coast. Further, the authors argue that the earlier depictions of this paradise come from the Gulf Coast. While the linking of Tamoanchan with the generally fecund character of the Gulf Coast is not new, the placement of the earlier tradition of Tamoanchan imagery is. The resemblance between earlier Gulf Coast imagery, specifically that found at Tajín, and the later Nahuatl descriptions of Tamoanchan is not exact; however, and the differences between the elements of paradise in these two traditions warrant investigation here. Perhaps most important is the relation of the maguey-covered mountain at Tajín and the Nahuatl mythology surrounding pulque. Many of the Tajín maguey plants are shown with elaborate flowering stalks, a situation that would make the plants unfit for pulque production. The budding flower of the plant must be cut just as it begins to sprout in order that the sap may be harvested (Parsons, 2001:6). Although there are a few maguey plants in the El Tajín panels depicted without flowers—and thus candidates for sap harvesting and pulque production—the flowering plants take up a majority of the compositional field inside the outlines of the mountain. While some reference to pulque is probable, the presence of flowering maguey plants that the designers of the El Tajín program were alluding to more than just the production of pulque.

Another aspect of the representation of maguey that suggests more than a simple pulque reference is the “twisted-root” element depicted on the lower portion of several maguey plants in one of the central ballcourt panels (see Kampen, 1972: Fig. 24). Karl Taube (2000:9) identified the twisted-root motif on maguey and other plants at Classic Teotihuacan as well as Epiclassic Xochicalco. In both instances that author suggests that the twisted-root motif marks the sign to which it is

attached as a locative. If the Tajín designers are using the motif in the same way, and the specificity and central location would suggest that they are, the Tajín mountains are marked not simply as a place for the production of pulque, but as a specific maguey mountain, where the emphasis is on the flowering of that plant.

Thus the relationship between pulque and other aspects of the Tajín image is not completely understood, suggesting that the direct correlation between Tamoanchan and the maguey mountain at Tajín is not as transparent as others have argued. That said, the nature of the Nahuatl Tamoanchan may still help us interpret El Tajín's Flowering Maguey Mountain. In a fundamental sense these, two landscapes of origin share a flowery, fecund nature. López Austin (1997:104) discussed the floral, paradisaical nature of the place through other Nahuatl terms for the place: *Xochitl Icacan* "Where the Flowers Arise," *Xochincuahuitl* "Flowering Tree" and *Tonacaxochincuahuitl* "Flowery tree of our sustenance." It is to this ideal "flowery" place, and not to pulque production, that the El Tajín designers refer when they depict flowering maguey.

It is important to note that these conceptualizations of paradise in the originary landscape were not simply a dialog between the Gulf Coast and later Nahuatl-speaking peoples of the Highlands. Taube (2004) has shown that earlier Mesoamerican cultures, including both Classic Teotihuacan and Classic Maya, developed the concept of a Flower Mountain as a core element of the paradisaical environment. This motif was often represented simply as a mountain with flowers emerging, but more complex images could include "breath" serpents emerging from the mountain or a floral headband attached to the personified mountain glyph. That breath imagery is central to the complex from early times is not surprising, given that López Austin (1997:163) discussed Nahuatl conceptualizations of the flowery paradise as the residence of the honored dead and the station of the breath soul, a crucial constituent of personhood. More fundamentally for this argument is the fact that these early conceptions of a paradisaical "flowering mountain" predate the Tajín images. Thus El Tajín's Flowering Maguey Mountain takes its place between the earlier, Classic renditions of the paradisaical flowering mountains identified by Taube for the Classic Teotihuacan and Maya cultures and later Postclassic Nahuatl visions of Tamoanchan.

The Place of the Skull at El Tajín and in Nahuatl Narratives

Recall that the central flowering mountain at Tajín is associated directly with a ballcourt. I have argued earlier (Koontz, 2002) that the center of this court is defined by water and skull motifs. Skulls and water are important motifs in a group of Nahuatl narratives involving ballcourts. The Place of the Skull that is also a water well is a location in the center of the court in Nahuatl tales of another sort of paradise, that of Snake Mountain (Leyenaar and Parsons, 1988:100–101). In these tales, the initial urban center is constructed and its parts given their originary meanings (Durán, 1994:26). The ballcourt serves as the source of fecundity, with a

well in the center of the court that supplies the fields around the city with water (Alvarado Tezozomoc, 1992:32–33). Various plants are said to have grown around these canals in descriptions reminiscent of Tamoanchan. A body of water in the center of the court that is associated with decapitation sacrifice is not limited to Epiclassic El Tajín and the Late Postclassic Central Mexico. Classic Maya writing and imagery describe a hole filled with water in the court (Schele and Freidel, 1991:304). For the Classic Maya, the watery place in the ballcourt is associated with decapitation sacrifice. These Mesoamerican narratives have a fundamental structural similarity that is far from negligible: they all locate the place of watery fecundity at the ballcourt and associate that fecundity with severed heads.

A Nahuatl narrative tradition maintains that the first ballcourt decapitation sacrifice was held at this Place of the Skull in the originary ballcourt (*Teotlachco*, or Ballcourt of the Gods) (Alvarado Tezozomoc, 1980:227–229). This originary ballcourt sacrifice occurs at the end of a violent sequence of clashes between the patron deity and his treacherous half brothers and half sister. After defeating his enemies, the patron deity sacrifices the most notable in the ballcourt. Traditionally, this narrative has been interpreted as the defeat of the stars and the moon of the night sky (the enemies) by the dawning sun (the patron deity) (Seler, 1990–1998:IV:161; Caso, 1958:13). Without negating this sky-based explanation, recent authors have stressed the exhibition of military power by the deity, and the paradigmatic character of this martial power for the warriors who followed the cult (Carrasco, 1987:137). In a larger sense, the victory of the patron deity foretold the military might of this Nahua group (the Mexica) (León-Portilla, 1987:38–42). In effect, the Nahuatl narratives illustrate the covenant between humans and gods discussed above. Here the covenant was between their patron deity and his people, and consisted in military power donated by the deity in exchange for the sacrifices he receives on the ballcourt and elsewhere. For our purposes, it is enough to note that in the Nahuatl narratives the originary ballcourt sacrifice is directly related to martial prowess and the imposition of political power by the patron deity. This emphasis on military and political might surrounding ballcourt sacrifice in these Nahuatl narratives meshes well with the El Tajín images of political investiture by the chief or patron deity at El Tajín after ballcourt sacrifice. In both traditions, ballcourt sacrifice may be seen as directly related to the imposition of political power. This relation is not limited to the Nahua and El Tajín peoples in Mesoamerica, for there is a general consensus that the Classic Maya ballgame was also used extensively to dramatize political power (Miller and Houston, 1987; Freidel, Schele and Parker, 1993:356–362).

The relation of political power and ballcourt rites seen in the Snake Mountain narratives point up the difference between these narratives and the Tamoanchan tales treated above. In the Snake Mountain narratives, we do not have an originary flowering environment, as in the Mesoamerican Flowering Mountain images and Tamoanchan tales, but instead the model city and ballcourt are first set out. The ballcourt provides civilized fecundity—waterworks and fields—instead of the more luxuriant, less cultivated vegetation associated with Tamoanchan. The tutelary deity reveals his martial power for the first time on Snake Mountain, and in victory he performs the first ballcourt decapitation sacrifice. All these elements are also

closely associated in the earlier El Tajín court imagery: the source of fecundity at the middle of the ballcourt (the skull and water motifs), the ballcourt decapitation sacrifice, and the power of the tutelary deity (who holds the items of legitimate power). Unlike the Nahuatl tales, which separate paradise tales and the urban ballcourt saga, the imagery of the El Tajín court combines the floral mountain paradise with the urban water source and sacrificial function of the ballcourt in the Snake Mountain narratives.

Flowering Maguey as the Plant of Paradise

El Tajín is not the only Mesoamerican site at the time to closely connect fecundity and ballcourt sacrifice. Contemporary Mesoamerican ballgame imagery is rife with references to fecundity. Pasztory (1978:138) noted that the related ballgame imagery of Chichen Itza, Bilbao, Escuintla, and El Tajín all depicted fecundity emerging from ballcourt decapitation sacrifice, but the plants used to symbolize the fecundity were distinct at each site. While all shared an association of serpents with decapitation sacrifice, Chichen Itza merged these with blooming vines of multiple flowers, Bilbao depicted similar vines but also featured cacao, and much of the Gulf Coast featured only serpents (Las Higueras and Aparicio). El Tajín is unique among these related Mesoamerican ballgame image systems in linking maguey with the fecundity brought by ballgame sacrifice.

The flowering maguey motif appears in two other instances in the art of El Tajín that may help us understand the ritual contexts of the plant (Tuggle, 1970). Both of these examples occur on the entry columns of the Mound of the Building Columns complex. The imagery on these columns describe the rites of political investiture surrounding a ruler of El Tajín (Koontz, 1994). In one of the maguey scenes, this ruler, named glyphically as 13 Rabbit, conducts a rite with a rope (Tuggle, 1970). Beneath him are two maguey plants, one of them in flower. In the other maguey scene (Fig. 1.6), two figures face each other across a standard. Here the plant is flowering while the figure to the right emits liquid from his penis onto the plant. The liquid dripping from the human has been interpreted as several substances, including semen (Kampen, 1972:Fig. 33c).

While the combination of liquids falling from male members and maguey plants is rare in Mesoamerican iconography, this same combination also appears in a rich iconographical context at Teotihuacan (Aguilera and Cabrera Castro, 1999; Rivas Castro, 2001:58–60). Here (Fig. 1.7) an ithyphallic figure seems to irrigate the maguey plants directly below. The drops falling from the end of the oversize phallus are clearly white, suggesting that the substance is semen, one of the several materials proposed for the analogous El Tajín scene. However, another stream of liquid emerges from the penis and moves toward a drain carved into the patio floor directly in front of the figure (Zuñiga, 1995:189). This liquid is marked with the “eye” motif that often indicates water at Teotihuacan (von Winning, 1987:II:69). Further, the drain that is the end point of the Teotihuacan stream is real, not a



Fig. 1.6 Figure with flowering maguey and penis rite, El Tajín, Mound of the Building Columns Sculpture 5, detail (after Kampen, 1972:Fig. 33c, drawing courtesy Daniela Koontz)



Fig. 1.7 Figure with maguey and penis rite. Patio de los Glifos, La Ventilla, Teotihuacan (drawn after photograph in Zuñiga, 1995:184)

representation. The water imagery thus moves into a real drain, imitating the flow of water in the patio itself. The Teotihuacan imagery seems to indicate that the liquid flowing from the penis in this scene of maguey fertilization may be conceived of as both water and semen. These two vital and life-giving liquids may be related to the general theme of human and vegetal fecundity that we noted probably also applies for the related El Tajín panel imagery.

Tuggle (1970) noted a similar pattern of the conflation of life-giving liquids (specifically blood and semen) and the male member in the El Tajín panels. We have seen that this set of fecund liquids must also include water, as seen in the closely related Teotihuacan image and in the central panels of the El Tajín ballcourt. What is crucial to understand is the interrelationship of these liquids at El Tajín, their fundamental relationship to fecundity, and the fact that they form a rather ambiguous set, where shared perceived characteristics may have led to shared identity. Further, many of these same associations are already in place in the La Ventilla area of Teotihuacan by Late Tlamimilolpa (c. A.D. 350–400). These associations are almost certainly based on the analogies of primary liquids that run through living bodies: aguamiel (agave sap) through the maguey, blood through the human, and water through the earth. The close symbolic relationship of water and pulque was made clear later in Central Mexico, where the pulque deity *Mayahuel* displayed attributes of the water goddess, *Chalchiutlicue* (Bye and Linares, 2001:39; Nicholson, 1971:420) and other pulque deities were associated with rain/mountain deities (Nicholson, 1991).

Conclusions

It will come as no surprise that the ballcourt imagery of El Tajín contains numerous narrative elements found in other Mesoamerican ballgame narratives. The El Tajín region was a major center of ballcourt construction and ballgame-related imagery throughout the period of its apogee and would have certainly participated in wider Mesoamerican conceptions surrounding the game. This paper has attempted to identify the narrative elements that refer to the originary landscapes engendered by ballcourt practice. At that court the act of ballcourt sacrifice was placed in both a cosmic and a political setting. The cosmic setting relates ballcourt sacrifice to the creation of humans in one central panel while in the other the creator deity is shown investing the human supplicant with political power.

The location of both creation and investiture, Flowering Maguey Mountain, is a variant of paradisaal environments found throughout Mesoamerican narratives of origin. Interestingly, the Tajín paradise is focused on maguey, a plant not native to the area. Moreover, while luxuriant plant growth is associated with ballcourt decapitation in several areas of Mesoamerica at this time, no other area features maguey as the central plant. Instead, very similar rites featuring maguey may be found earlier in the La Ventilla area of Teotihuacan, but here the imagery is not associated with ballcourts or obvious ballgame imagery.

The idea of a fecund, originary paradise does not fully explain the Flowering Maguey Mountain imagery, however, for the ballcourt imagery also associated the center of the court with the Place of the Skull, a reference to the fecundity that springs specifically from ballcourt decapitation. This latter motif is concerned with the place and meaning of the ballcourt in urban construction, as opposed to the wilder, principally nonurban flowery paradise. While in other Mesoamerican narrative traditions the two sources of fecundity—one the urban ballcourt and the other the flowering mountain—are kept distinct, in Tajín these two are merged into an especially rich and fecund locale centered on the ballcourt and its primary sacrificial rite. Thus ballcourt sacrifice, an important rite in many Mesoamerican cultures, takes its place as the central act in both Tajín mythos and statecraft, in which origins, political power, and boundaries are all located.

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Chapter 2

Landscape and a Visual Narrative of Creation and Origin at the Olmec Ceremonial Center of La Venta

Carolyn E. Tate

Landscape and Narrative in Mesoamerica

As they designed their ceremonial and civic urban centers, ancient Mesoamerican artists and architects often made visible their culture's creation-and-origins story.¹ When building pyramids or siting temple complexes it was not unusual to replicate certain natural features that they considered to be the places that gave birth to their original ancestors. Such structures conceptually collapsed the distance between primordial and present time as well as the space between mythic places and the one in which the temple stood. For example, the two shrines of the Great Temple of the Aztec (AD 1325–1521) capital emulated two mythical sacred mountains. One side represented Tonacatepetl, the Mountain of Sustenance that held the seeds and water that would become human food. The other stood for Coatepec, Serpent Mountain, upon which the tribal deity was re-born and where he defeated the female of the old regime, his elder sister. In the past few decades, Aztec specialists have been able to reconstruct this kind of integration among origins stories, mythical landscape, and actual urban constructions because of the convergence of archaeological remains with surviving pictorial and written texts from the early sixteenth century.

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the College Art Association Annual Meeting in New York in 2006. I want to thank Maria Elena Bernal-Garcia, the co-organizer (with the present author) of our CAA session "Olmec Art: Can There Be an Art History of a Pre-Literate Society" for her insightful comments on this topic. Also, I extend my sincere appreciation to the many students who have explored with me the nature of Mesoamerican narratives, including Megan M. Grann, Jordann Davis, Victor Grafe, and not least, Corey Escoto. I have benefited from each of them. Thanks also to Jennifer Ahlfeldt, Joe Arredondo, David Carrasco, Allen Christenson, Constance Cortez, Sam Edgerton, Michael Ann Holly, John Justeson, Cecelia Klein, Christer Lindberg, Allan Maca, Esther Pasztory, Francesco Pellizi, Bodil Persson, and Rebecca Stone, all of whom have generously provided either a forum in which I could share my development of these ideas or valuable criticisms. I appreciate very much the helpful comments of the editors, John Staller and Brian Stross, and their invitation to contribute to this remarkable collection. Finally, I want to dedicate this article to the memory of my very great friend, an artist who called himself an amateur of the Aztec, Stuart Gentling.

Understanding the relationships between landscape and origins has been harder for earlier civilizations. Nevertheless, this topic has fascinated many scholars, some of whom have investigated even the oldest civilizations. Beatriz de la Fuente (1996) and F. Kent Reilly (1999, 2002) have written about certain Olmec (1200–400 BC) sculptures and urban constructions as evidence for a much earlier creation story. They have provided provocative views of how parts of ancient sites seem to prefigure later stories. But, given the lack of a fully developed system of writing prior to 600 BC, it has seemed impossible that we would ever have a good sense of the scope of an Olmec creation-and-origins narrative. However, by reconstructing the “find” locations of the now-removed monuments of the site called La Venta and considering their forms and symbols in relation to later creation narratives, I propose that we may catch a glimpse of one of the first times a cosmogonical vision was integrated into urban form in Mesoamerica. Such a glimpse is the goal of this chapter. It seeks to determine whether at a specific moment in La Venta’s existence, its designers organized monuments and landforms in a visual narrative of creation-and-origins.

Creation-and-origins narratives had many functions in Mesoamerican societies. They described the cosmogony of the sky and earth and the numerous attempts, over spans of time, by creators to perfect the human being. These templates of primordial activities served as the basis for local histories, royal genealogies, and claims to land and legitimate rulership. However, creation myths were more than political tools. They formed the basis of concepts of individual and group identities. Through the deeds of heroic characters, who, by trial and error learned the power to create and destroy life, these stories instantiated the attitude that the highest ethical value is that which regenerates life by honoring and nourishing natural forces. The exemplary heroes and the primordial couples who created them established a repertoire of ritual practices by which humans should interact with the cosmos. And in all the extant creation stories, specific features of the landscape are established. In each story, the earth’s surface, with its springs and volcanoes, its caves and mountains, and its verdant flowering mantle, is alive. Each natural feature possesses willful powers that interact with humans in ways that depend more on the attitude of the human than the whim of the powerful entity. Thus we know that creation narratives in Mesoamerica explained how the world and humans came into being (always through a sacrifice of life energy in order to regenerate a new form of life).² They described the origins of the power objects that became the regalia of heroes and rulers. Each cosmogony accounted for the existence of the geographic features of its region and the origin of local lineages. Through its integration of

²For sacrifice involved in cosmogony, see the Aztec *Leyenda de los Soles*, (Bierhorst, 1992), in which two deities jump into a fire in order to feed the sun of the imminent creation. See also the death of the Hero Twins in the Maya *Popol Vuh*, in which they leap into a fire (knowing that they will soon resurrect themselves). For the establishment of sacred features of the landscape, see *Leyenda de los Soles* (Ibid.), *Codex Vindobonensis* (Boone, 2000), and the *Palenque Cross Group* (Tate, 2002).

metaphors referring to astronomical bodies, the earth's surface, and food, each creation story spins human beings into the dynamic webs of being and metamorphosis.

Because of the performative, oral nature of creation narratives, there were multiple variations for each city and for each culture. Quite a few survive in written forms. Several Aztec creation stories recorded alphabetically have been known since the sixteenth century, primarily the *Leyenda de los Soles* (Bierhorst, 1992) and the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas*, (Olmos, 1965) which are different local versions of a similar narrative, as well as several quite different stories. From Guatemala, the Maya story, *Popol Vuh*, was first recorded alphabetically in the sixteenth century (Edmonson, 1971; Tedlock, 1996; Christenson, 2003 are recent translations to the English). These were post-conquest performances of earlier pictorial manuscripts, which unfortunately, are now lost. A few pre-conquest pictorial manuscripts or inscriptions do survive, however, including a screenfold Mixtec creation tale in the *Codex Vindobonensis* (circa AD 1450) (Anders et al., 1992; Boone, 2000; McKeever-Furst, 1978; Melgarejo Vivanco, 1980) and the Classic Period Maya hieroglyphic and pictorial creation cycle in the three Temples of the Cross Group at Palenque (AD 692) (Bassie-Sweet, 1991; Baudez, 1996; Schele, 1992; Tate, 2002).

And rather amazingly, previously unknown versions of creation stories are still coming to light. In some cases, objects that functioned as elements of creation stories existed, but their significance had not been *recognized*. For example, as Maya hieroglyphic decipherment and iconographic studies have been refined, scholars have *recognized* that existing monumental complexes contain creation stories as the underlying "truth" to which political and ritual statements point. In other cases, archaeological exploration has revealed the existence of whole new monuments, buildings, and cities. In 2001, a shockingly early pictorial creation narrative, dating about 100 BC and peppered with a few incipient glyphs was *discovered*. It had been painted on the interior walls of a small temple at a Maya site in Guatemala, San Bartolo (Saturno, 2006; Saturno and Taube, 2004). With a growing corpus of creation-and-origins stories, comparative analyses such as Maria Elena Bernal-García's *Carving Mountains in a Blue-Green Bowl* (Bernal-Garcia, 1993) are beginning to trace the commonalities the stories contain as well as how each story uniquely reflects its landscape and its own people's heroes and ethics.

La Venta

My art historical approach to the Olmec site of La Venta, which flourished between about 900 and 400 BC, examines monumental sculptures that have been excavated over the past century. This analysis documents the existence of what may be the earliest complete narrative of a creation story in Mesoamerica. Unlike the later stories, it is not confined to a codex, to the murals in a single room or to sculptures in a single building complex. Instead, the sculptures that illustrate moments of the

story traverse an entire site and are of enormous scale. The following brief description of the site and its investigation forms the basis for an analysis of how the Olmec used sculpture and earthen architecture to narrate the creation of the land and people of the world as they knew it.

Currently in the Mexican state of Tabasco, the ceremonial center³ called La Venta once occupied the eastern periphery of the Gulf Coast Olmec region (Fig. 2.1). During its apogee, around 500 BC, this ceremonial center was unique in the Mesoamerican world. It contained vast quantities of stone that had been imported from at least a dozen distant sources. Given its population, never more than about 2,000 (González Lauck, 1994), it is impossible that its own inhabitants walked the

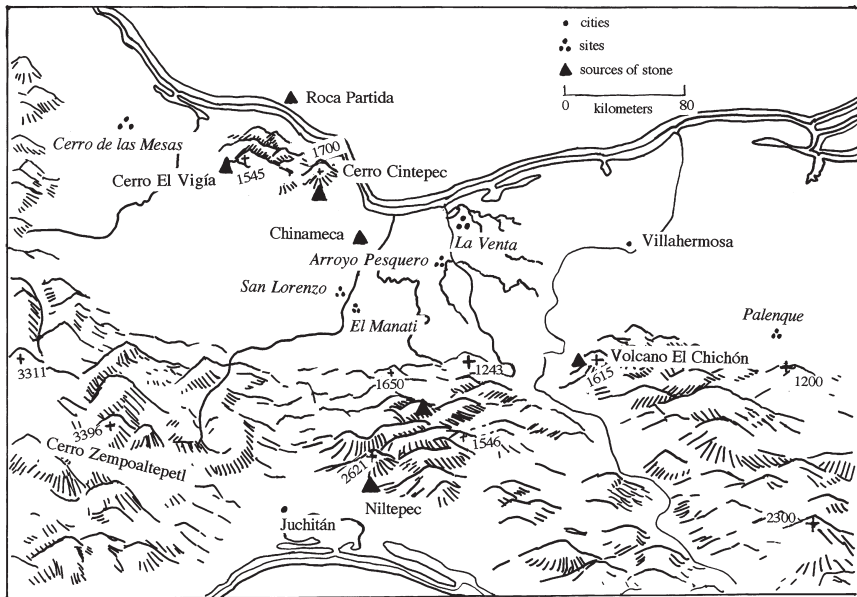


Fig. 2.1 Map of southern Mexico showing the sources of stones transported to La Venta. Author drawing

³ What to call these places known to us today as archaeological sites vexes archaeologists and art historians. Were the Formative Period (1400–400 BC) sites of Mesoamerica truly urban, so that they can be called “city?” What forms of government existed? Were there kings (or queens), such that we could refer to the place as a “regal” center or kingdom? Were they states or chiefdoms instead? Have we been able to identify elite residences? Is there evidence for stratified society? What happened in these places? Government, trade, routine habitation? How were any residents supported? Where did the food come from? We have a fair idea of subsistence issues and that the society was stratified, but not many of the other questions have firm answers. Most specialists have developed their own positions and so use specific terms for the ancient sites. This debate is beyond the purview of the present paper, however, so I’m using an old-fashioned term that corresponds to the subject of the paper, ceremonial center.

200km to the Pacific slope to quarry and transport the hundreds of tons of serpentine that was ritually deposited in the “Massive Offerings” of La Venta. In addition, there were basalt columns from Roca Partida, basalt boulders from the Tuxtla mountains, schists from Oaxaca as well as hundreds of jade beads, figurines, and celts, fashioned with stone originating as far as 800km away (Tate, 1999; Williams and Heizer, 1965). Most scholars involved in Olmec studies consider that La Venta’s hoards of stone were the result of long-distance trade, and that was probably one mechanism for its accumulation. But this assertion begs a question regarding what La Ventans were able to export that would have had similar quantity or comparable value, and no one has satisfactorily answered that question. Cacao grew along the Gulf Coast, and is attested in the reconstructed proto Mixe-Zoquean language (Campbell and Kaufman, 1976) which was likely the language spoken by the Gulf Coast Olmec,⁴ but it is hard to imagine that the whole city was financed by the chocolate trade. Sea products, tar, and jaguars were also available (not that they were easy to obtain). There is room for more consideration of this problem. I will return to it below.

Since it was first documented by explorers Franz Blom and Oliver La Farge (1926), La Venta has been the subject of sporadic archaeological investigation. Intermittently from 1939 to 1968, Matthew Stirling, funded by the National Geographic Society, and Phillip Drucker, Robert Heizer and Ephraim Squier, supported by the National Geographic Society, the Smithsonian Institution, and the University of California, excavated at La Venta. These early investigators discovered dozens of caches, including evidence of five Massive Offerings of serpentine in multi-colored clay-lined pits, thirty stone figurines, numerous offerings of royal regalia and several tomb-like configurations that contained crafted offerings but no bodies (Drucker, 1952; Drucker et al., 1959; Stirling, 1940, 1941, 1943, 1947). A salvage effort sponsored by University of California at Berkeley (Clewlow and Corson, 1968) and recent archaeological work by Rebecca González Lauck of Mexico’s Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia have brought the total number of monumental sculptures to around one hundred (González Lauck, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1997). González has also defined the extent and form of the city center through the production of a topographic map (González Lauck, 1990). Thanks to the work of these archaeologists, and despite the fact only a fraction of La Venta’s sculptures have been located, it is clear that monumental sculptures populated its platforms and plazas and that stone representations of life forms, including many from the sea (such as jade clam shells and stingray spines) as well as images of humans, were occulted in significant arrays below its colored clay floors.

Until now, the existence of a coherent pattern that governed the monuments on the surface of La Venta (as opposed to its subterranean caches) has not been recognized. This is largely because La Venta has suffered depredation by many interests. Not the least of these is Petroleos Mexicanos, which built an oil refinery a mile from the

⁴Soren Wichman and other scholars think it is possible that the Gulf Coast Olmec spoke proto- or pre- proto- Zoquean (Wichmann, 2006).

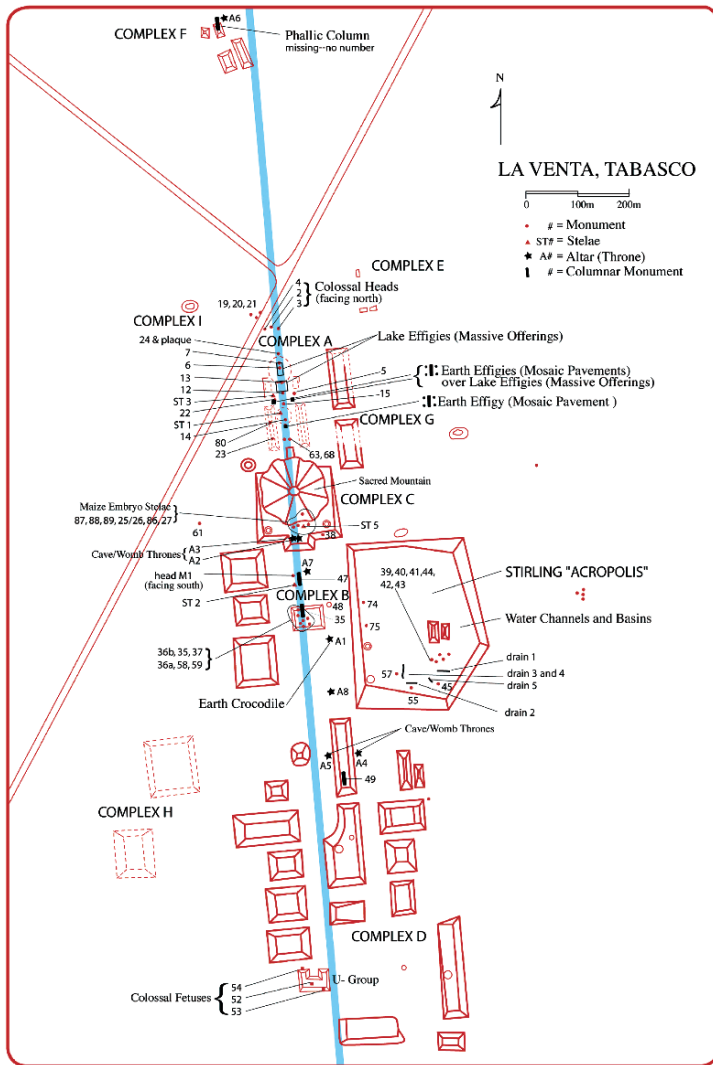


Fig. 2.2 Plan of La Venta, based on González 1990. Drawing by Corey Escoto and Carolyn Tate

site. Over the decades, many sculptures have been removed from the site with little documentation of their original locations. By combing through the above-mentioned reports, however, I have been able to situate about 70 monuments on González' site plan (Fig. 2.2).⁵

⁵I don't pretend to know more about the original locations of the monuments than does González. She has addressed other important issues in her research publications. As an art historian, I'm interested in the crafted forms and the ideas they convey.

Based on this reconstitution, I propose that certain sculptures formed stations in a processional narrative, and furthermore, that the narrative simultaneously told the creation of the earth and time, the origin of humans, and a tale of local hero-ballplayers. If this is so, then La Venta's sculptural creation narrative predates any other such record yet known. To test whether these hypotheses are sustainable, I shall query them through the lenses of three questions. As I explore possible answers to each question, I'll use distinct analytical or methodological strategies. My overarching contention is that if we use multiple analytical strategies to examine the art and architecture of this literate site, and if the findings intersect, the reliability of resulting interpretations is substantially increased.

Did a Syntax Govern the Distribution of Monuments at La Venta?

Before we consider the distribution of monuments at La Venta, it is useful to look at an earlier Gulf Coast Olmec site, San Lorenzo. The monuments date to between 1250 and 900 BC, and while there is a north-south orientation for several earthen plazas, the majority of monuments are not aligned on an axis. Exceptions may be several colossal heads, which follow two ragged north-south lines (Grove, 1999). Other than these, several monuments were erected in what San Lorenzo archaeologist Ann Cyphers calls "scenic displays" near water features (Cyphers, 1999). Each scenic display contained a colossal head wearing a helmet, which was probably the image of a ruler-ballplayer, a monument in the form of a feline, a large rectangular throne containing a human adult emerging from a cave-like niche, and a water conduit and trough. Cyphers (1999:157) contends that each scenic display documented the origins and deeds of an individual ruler. She points out that the context of a monument includes "not only [that of] the single object, but those objects found together with it, including constructed architecture and/or modified landscapes, [whether] immediate or more remote."

As San Lorenzo declined about 900 BC (whether of natural causes or a violent intervention), monumental construction accelerated at La Venta, about 60 miles or 100 km to the northeast. At the later city, we find two distinct patterns of placement, which I call "clusters" and "sets." At least three clusters of diverse monuments are very similar to San Lorenzo's "scenic displays." One, near the very center of the site, includes a colossal head, a zoomorphic jaguar throne with an embryo face, a stela, and several other heavily battered pieces (Monuments 1, 36a, 36b, 47, 58, 59, Altar 7, Stela 2). Within such a cluster, each monument bears distinctive iconography.

However, in contrast to La Venta's several clusters are sets of nearly identical monuments. The sets are clearly intended to make a statement strengthened by repetition. Slight differences among the sculptures in a set served to differentiate individuals who occupied a specific role. For example, on a set of three colossal heads, insignia on headdresses provided names, a device that was common in

later Mesoamerican art. It is also possible that such repetition-with-variation was intended as a poetic device, a topic I hope to develop further.

At La Venta, each set is comprised of three, four, or five multiples of a single subject. These numbers relate to essential spatio-temporal concepts in Mesoamerica. There was a tripartite division of the cosmos as sky-earth-underworld, four intercardinal directions, and five referred to the number of digits on a hand, eminently important in Mesoamerican counting and calendrical systems (Closs, 1986; Coggins, n.d.).

La Ventans situated the sets and clusters differently too, making a clear distinction between the two types of monuments and how they should be seen within the spatial organization of the site. Among Gulf Coast Olmec sites, La Venta was the first to have a bilaterally symmetrical plan organized around a central axis. The axis runs 8 degrees west of north (Drucker et al., 1959). The importance of this organizing principle was recognized when the early excavators, Drucker and his crew, found buried offerings along the axis, or centerline, or arrayed symmetrically on either side. However, although platforms and mounds on the surface also ran parallel to the centerline, or were placed right on it, no one has noticed that it was marked by visible sculptures as well. In researching the locations of sculpture, I recognized that five stone columns penetrated the site along the central axis⁶ (Monuments 35, 47, 49, 62, and an unnumbered one [now lost] that was found by Stirling (1943). The central one was red, the rest were green. The tall columns (two smaller ones were ~3.50-m high) were on low platforms surrounded by open plaza space (Fig. 2.3). They rose from the site *between* the other five sets of monuments, serving as visual markers that beckoned people from one set to another.

Given their prominence, I propose the columns formed a set that, through its visual impact, marked a processional route. In addition to their symbolic penetration of the earth surface, or in other words, their function as cosmic pillars, world trees, or symbols of the union of sky and earth, they probably served to keep the procession on track and possibly to mark places for the staging of performances. The northernmost and southernmost monuments at the site are part of the first and last sets and their architectural features. This extends the concept of “context” for La Venta monuments to the entire site. In contrast to this linear organization of sculptural sets along the centerline, the scenic displays (or clusters) tend to be asymmetrically situated on one side of the axis or the other.

Based on these observations, we have a reasonable answer to the first question. Sometime between 600 and 400 BC, the La Ventans placed monuments in a configuration that extended over the length of the site in order to create relationships

⁶ Actually, there seem to have been two central axes during the site’s history. They are parallel to each other, so both are oriented 8 degrees west of north. The northernmost and southernmost monuments, the lost phallic column on its conical mound and the U group and its fetuses, respectively, are on one axis and the rest of the site’s monuments and structures are on the other. Given the published archaeological data, I’m not sure which was older. But spatially they are not too far apart, and both are integrated into the fabric of the site in such a way that they have not yet been noticed by other scholars.



Fig. 2.3 Monument 49, a column. From the south end of the Long Mound (D-8). Ht: 467 cm. Author photo

of meaning among them.⁷ They used several patterns of syntax, including clusters of disparate monuments (or scenic displays), located off-axis, and sets of identical ones along a central axis prominently marked with towering columns of stone. Each set was associated with a specific architectural feature, such as a U shaped platform,

⁷It is difficult to ascertain how long the monuments were in this configuration. At present, I think the following are the two most likely scenarios. Either the monuments that I see as “sets” were distributed in another way before they were moved to the “stations” or locations in which they were abandoned or the “stations” initially had only one or two monuments.

the Great Mound, or a plaza. Furthermore, as we shall see, the subjects and associated symbols of each sculptural set contributed to larger meanings, becoming more than the sum of the individual elements.

Did the Sets Form a Processional Visual Narrative?

Now that we are reasonably certain that the placement of sculptures contributed to their meanings, let us further examine the proposal that the columns and sets formed stations in a processional visual narrative. By using this term, I mean a series of images, deliberately placed so as to allow people to move among them as a story is performed. In this case, the images are symbolically incised, naturalistic, three-dimensional forms. Art historian Richard Brilliant provided some insightful definitions of and ways to analyze visual narratives (Brilliant, 1984). Those he considered were two-dimensional graphic images or low relief sculptures but his points seem relevant to three-dimensional forms in space as well. He distinguished between images that illustrate a written text and those that completely bear the burden of narrativity by writing:

A truly visual narrative has no visible text to which it must defer. In visual narratives descriptive detail and compositional devices, such as scene making, substitute for the elements of speech or thought, which figure so largely in oral or textual narratives. Such detail serves to identify the protagonists of the action and set the action in space and time and therefore must be recognizable. Thus, visual narratives... must offer enough information to the eye if they are to represent a specific story successfully

(Brilliant, 1984:17)

Brilliant developed his discussion of visual narratives by pointing out that they require the same devices that structure oral or textual narratives. These include a beginning and end, although Brilliant observes that often the artist can't control where the viewer begins looking at a visual narrative. Hence, a more circular structure functions well, such that, "the beginning is connected with the promise of the end, and retrospectively the end is connected with the promise of the beginning" (*ibid.*:18). Close visual descriptions of persons and events help identify protagonists and major elements of plot. "Temporal succession" can be achieved by the "planned dislocation of the principal characters" (*ibid.*:18). And elements of setting for the story must be provided, either through representation or by being set in actual spaces. In other words, Brilliant pointed out that successful visual narratives must include duration, protagonists, actions, pacing of dramatic episodes, and setting. These must be "connected by a network of overlapping descriptions bound up in an eternal present that incorporates both the past and future, experienced together" (*ibid.*:18). Let us consider whether, and if so how, La Venta's creators deployed these elements. If all the elements of a visual narrative were present, we can reasonably assume that one was intended.

The idea that certain La Venta sculptures might have had a narrative function is not new. In the late 1980's Rebecca González proposed that a narrative relationship existed between two sets of sculptures. She had just excavated the three immense sandstone blocks that Stirling discovered in 1941 but which did not extricate from the ground. Drucker, who worked with Stirling, described them as "great sandstone

blocks... boldly but so crudely carved that their motifs could not be made out from the sections exposed by tunneling under them” (Drucker, 1952). Once González moved them from the U shaped platform, D-7, at the southernmost end of the site, one could observe that they represented squatting figures holding their heads, which were fitted with tight helmets (Gallegos Gómora, 1990). The only other monuments that included such helmets were the three colossal heads, which formed a row on the opposite end of the site, suggesting a narrative relationship between the two sets (González Lauck, 1996). Subsequently I demonstrated that the three colossal sandstone monuments were representations of human fetuses (Tate and Bendersky, 1999). This suggested the possibility that the southern fetuses were related to the northern colossal heads in a narrative continuum (Fig. 2.4).

Other authors have offered theories that the monuments of La Venta might have figured in a processional arrangement. Two independent, 1999 publications explored this idea. Archaeologist David Grove compared La Venta, San Lorenzo, and



Fig. 2.4 This fetus sculpture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art has an identical pose and helmet to the three colossal sandstone fetuses from La Venta. Ht: 26.4 cm. Author drawing

Chalcatzingo, finding meaningful but distinct spatial arrangements at each site. He thinks that Mound C segregates La Venta into a southern zone in which processions between publicly accessible monuments could have occurred, and a northern zone (Complex A) of restricted access, in which surface monuments were little more accessible than the buried caches and tombs (Grove, 1999). F. Kent Reilly (1999) proposed a processional route from the large plaza (Complex B), where worship of a “Maize God” and performance of creation events like those of the Maya occurred, along the east side of the Great Mound (C) to the enclosed court (Complex A). The latter location, with its tombs and a stela showing a human with an elaborate head-dress grasping a vertically-extended snake which towers above him (Monument 63), is the locus of cosmogonical and world-centering events. In this exclusive setting, rulers sought access to supernatural power. Once buried, they glided into the primordial seas below them before regenerating (Reilly, 1999). While both authors have made important and valid contributions, they chose not to discuss the northernmost and southernmost ends of the monumental zone, and so did not see the patterns of placement that governs the whole.

By doing so, I think we can amplify and contextualize these observations. Based on the distribution of monuments and the various proposals that the Olmec at La Venta were creating narratives, let us extend a consideration of the sculptures to the entire site and think about them through the lens of narrative strategy.

Which Came First? Sex in the City

Because Olmec at La Venta positioned sculptural groups at intervals along a linear axis, it is obvious that they controlled the elements of beginning, end, and pacing of the narrative — its temporal rhythm. The narrative path extended about 2900 m, or about 1¾ mile. The stations occurred at intervals that are between 600 and 700 m apart (Fig. 2.5). The question remains, however, did the story begin at the south or the north end? The northernmost element was a phallic column and the southernmost a U-shaped platform symbolizing a womb (Milbrath, 1988) with fetuses. An imminent connection existed between the phallic column and the womb platform, so the concepts of circularity and timeless repetition were also embedded in this narrative. Perhaps the story could be told either way. Alternatively, perhaps it was never told all at once but over several days or even at intervals over a 260 or 365-day calendrical period. This chapter will deal with the story as if it began with the southern monuments, but other strategies are equally possible.

Settings, Characters, Action, Foreshadowing

In terms of characters, the six sets include statues of humans at specific stages of life as well as abstract earth forms. Even if they seem relatively naturalistic, as in the case of the colossal heads with their furrowed brows and fleshy cheeks that

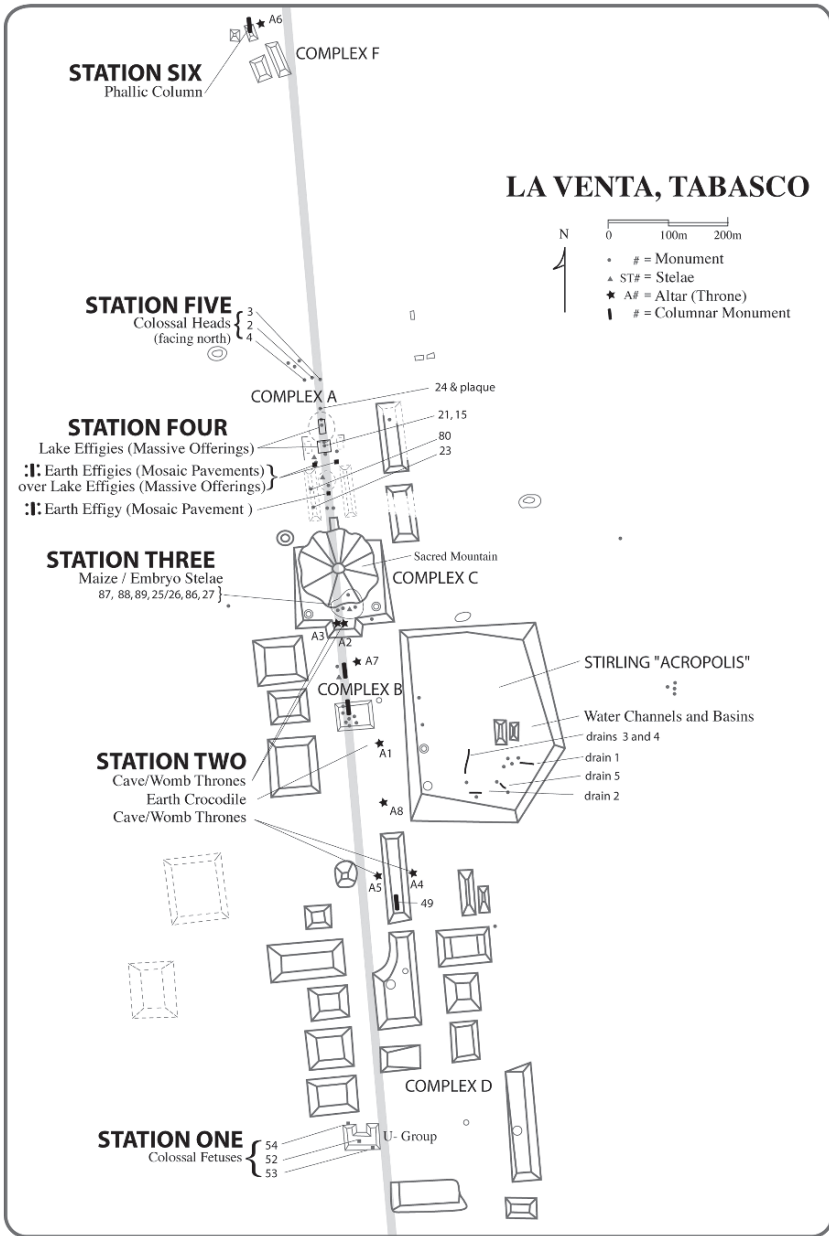


Fig. 2.5 Plan of La Venta showing the narrative stations. Drawing by Corey Escoto and Carolyn Tate

indicate a mature age, these features are more standardized than individualistic. There are many complex issues regarding representationality in Olmec sculpture that can't be fully addressed here. For now, let us provisionally agree with Beatriz de la Fuente (1996), who suggested in an insightful essay that these are conventionalized portraits of a character in a story, possibly conflated with just enough specificity of appearance or regalia to overlay the identity of an actual individual with that of the character. Although we don't know the names of the Olmec characters or heroes, their actions resonate with those of actors in many Mesoamerican creation stories. As we look at each character, I provide examples of similar protagonists for comparative purposes. Although it is true that the later stories have stimulated awareness about what to focus upon, my intention is not to "read backward" from the later stories, insisting that the later elements must be present in the earlier story. Instead, it seems clear that the Olmec developed specific characters and themes that did *not* become elements of later stories, at least not without being radically reconfigured, and that later peoples also developed elements that suited their needs. My goal is to point out human roles, ideas about life processes, cultural and ritual practices, and ideas about landscape that were expressed visually for the first time in the Formative Period.

Beginning in the south of La Venta, following what was the principal land route to the site (González, 1996:80), one entered a plaza defined by the U group on the west, near the center line, and a long rectangular mound to the east. The only sculptures found here were on the U group. They took the form of three colossal standing fetuses wearing helmets and grasping their heads (Fig. 2.6). Various authors have associated these helmets with the ballgame (Bradley, 2001; Gillespie, 1991), implying that the fetuses were involved in a supernatural ballplaying saga, like the two small helmeted beings portrayed on ballgame stair 7 from Yaxchilan Structure 33. The text on this later Maya monument mentioned three primordial ballgames, each ending in decapitation (Schele and Friedel, 1991). Similarly decapitated was Hun Hunahpu from the first generation of the two sets of hero ballplayer-twins in the Post Classic Maya creation myth, the *Popol Vuh*. The gesture with which these three fetuses grasp their heads may have indicated a self-decapitation or self-sacrifice, an explanation for why these fetuses were ever visible. If they were born prematurely and soon died, we could consider them to be self-sacrificers. Such a sacrifice could have been considered an initiatory act for creation to occur.

In the Aztec *Leyenda de los Soles*, two primordial beings sacrificed themselves by leaping in a fire, after which the Sun was created. In the Maya *Popol Vuh*, after the elder twin Hunahpu was decapitated then restored, the Hero Twins allowed the Lords of the Underworld to kill them, burn them, and to throw their ashes in a river. Since they had learned to control the vital force of life, they simply resurrected themselves in order to accomplish their ultimate task, which was limiting the powers of the Lords of the Underworld. Given the emphasis on self-destruction, decapitation, and resurrection in the two later stories, it is possible that the colossal fetuses played a similar role as self-sacrificing heroes who initiated the process by which true humans (of locally-defined ethnic identity) arose. The three fetuses with their outsize heads and ballgame helmets foreshadowed the three colossal heads, not yet

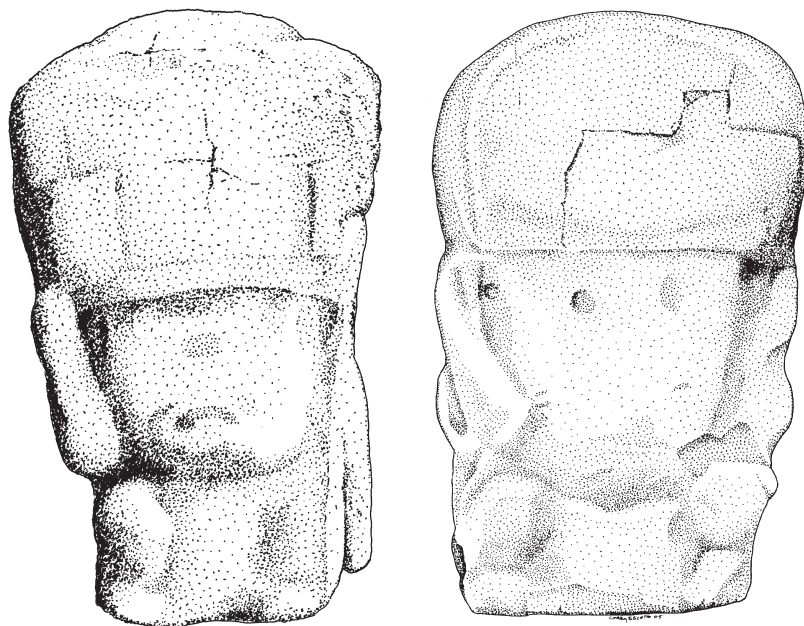


Fig. 2.6 Station 1, the highly eroded Monuments 54 and 53 from La Venta. Compare with Metropolitan Museum fetus figure. Drawings Corey Escoto

visible. The performance of a narrative involving the fetuses could have occurred within the arms of the U-shaped mound, where there was a space about 10×10 m, or in the adjacent plaza, which at over 200×200 m would have accommodated many people.⁸

From the U group (D-7), one could proceed northward about 170 m past some low platforms toward a green column rising from a long rectangular mound⁹. Straight ahead at ground level was Altar (Throne) 5.¹⁰ This is one of four similar thrones that were set on the periphery of the Complex B plaza. Each throne consisted

⁸ Several scholars have noted that the north-south running alleyways between the southern mounds at La Venta resemble the north-south Avenue of the Dead at Teotihuacan (Proskouriakoff, 1971:142; González, 1996:79).

⁹ Scholars have proposed that this column and mound were part of an astronomical-architectural group. There is a small mound on the west at the center of the long mound to its west. If there had been two columns on the long mound, one on the north in addition to the one on the south, they may have marked the solstitial sunrise points on the eastern horizon, although the accuracy of the assemblage would be a function of the distance between the western mound and the columns. However, this proposal remains unsubstantiated simply because another column was not found here.

¹⁰ As David C. Grove (1973) these large blocks with overhanging upper edges like “tabletops” probably functioned as thrones. There are several such sculptures that include human figures seated on similarly-shaped blocks. However, on the maps in this chapter, these thrones are labeled A 1–A 8. This is to retain consistency with all earlier maps of La Venta.

of a large block into which was carved a niche. Emerging from each niche was a seated male figure. On the southwest and northeast thrones (A5 and A2), the seated figure held an infant (Fig. 2.7). On the opposite two thrones, the seated figure held a rope (Fig. 2.8). Thus although the “set” was dispersed, the thrones clearly related to each other across the large space of the plaza. They portrayed figures emerging from caves located in the four directions.

In the center of the space defined by the four thrones were two more thrones (A 1 and A 8). These two, equally as large as the cave-niche thrones, formed a north-south line. If one views these six thrones on the plan, they form an approximate quincunx, in the elongated shape characteristic of Olmec quincunxes. (Bear in mind that the “find” location of most La Venta monuments is a best-guess situation, so the quincunx originally could have been more-or less-regular).



Fig. 2.7 Station 2, Throne 5. This and the throne on the northeast corner of the quincunx of thrones show an adult emerging from a cave holding an infant. Drawing by Corey Escoto

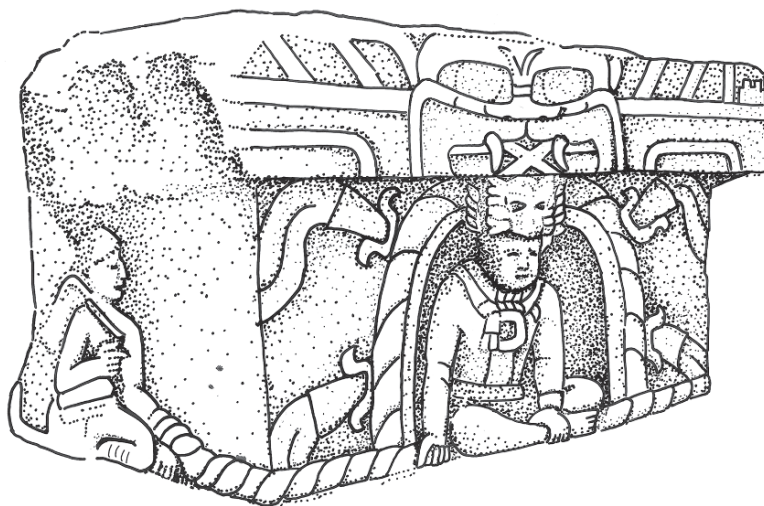


Fig. 2.8 Station 2, Throne 4 shows an adult emerging from a cave holding a rope that attaches to an adult. It pairs with Throne 3 on the northwest corner of the quincunx. Author drawing

What appears on the central thrones? The subject of A8 is difficult to discern (Fig. 2.9).¹¹ Throne 1 (A1), however, has been interpreted as representing a crocodilian or dragon-like earth monster.¹² Several Aztec stories indicate that a primordial crocodilian or caiman was the very substance of an initial creation of the earth. In the *Histoyre de méchique*, the brothers Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl, in the form of serpents, coiled themselves around a crocodilian (or other aquatic creature) earth goddess, Cipactli, as she floated in the primitive waters. They tore her into two parts. Her upper body became the sky and her lower parts the earth. In another version of the story, four lesser beings traveled on the four roads to the center of the earth, or the center of Cipactli's body, and having raised her upper



Fig. 2.9 Station 2, center, Throne 8. Author photo

¹¹ Altar / Throne 8 was either partially recarved or is extremely eroded but one can detect a tabletop breadth at the top and some long ropes or strips falling down the front, so it may be similar to La Venta Mon. 80.

¹² Donald Lathrap saw caiman in the category of Olmec images that Peter David Joralemon called "God 1." Joralemon agreed but thought his category was more "polymorphic" and should be referred to as a dragon. (Joralemon, 1976:37, Fig. 2.10e.) F. Kent Reilly provided further information on the crocodilian and its habits and also related this image to a polymorphic being, largely crocodilian (1994:94 ff). Reilly sees a "sky dragon" and an "earth dragon" (1995) but has not to my knowledge related the Olmec creature to the Cipactli story. He sees teeth or their absence as setting up a tamed/uncontrolled earth dichotomy (1994:98).

part, they supported it with two trees. Then the four beings went to the four corners of the sky-earth to act as supporters or separators (Jonghe, 1905; Olmos, 1965). The body of Cipactli became the surface of the earth—her hair its trees and grasses, her mouth its caves and rivers, and so on. These stories bear remarkable similarity to the Complex B thrones in terms of their subjects and distribution. The crocodilian is at the center and is dismembered. The head is on the front of the throne and two of the four-toed feet are on the sides (Fig. 2.10). We may propose the analogy that the crocodilian on the throne refers to an early creation of the earth. The cave-thrones at the four directions were supports for human actors, much as the four mythic Atlantean beings separated the sky and earth at their corners in the Aztec myth (Figs. 2.11, 2.12). Also, if some parallelism is present, the thrones contain the caves that were created from the crocodilian's parts. Even serpent-like ropes are featured on three of these monuments (A 4, A3, A 8). The interpretation of these thrones is certainly more complex than the representation of a primordial earth female and the separation of sky and earth that resulted from her dismemberment. Obviously this considers only a small portion of their significance, but one that has not been addressed previously. Also important for the present discussion are the infants on A 5 and A 2. They have usually been interpreted as either scenes referring to the birth of the human race or scenes of infant sacrifice.¹³



Fig. 2.10 Station 2, center, Throne 1, the crocodilian in the center of the four world-supporting thrones. Author photo

¹³ See Tate, 1995 for a discussion and evaluation of several possible interpretations of these infants.



Fig. 2.11 Station 2, Throne 3. Author photo

The drama reenacting the dismemberment of the crocodilian creature, the establishment of the four directions and their caves, and the emergence (or sacrifice) of infants from these primordial caves could have unfolded in multiple places in this vast space. It may well have involved a ritual circumambulation, since a “fourfold staking, a fourfold centering” forms part of terrestrial creation in the *Popol Vuh* and in the classic Palenque Cross Group cosmogony (Tate, 2002). In the Aztec *Leyenda de los Soles*, Quetzalcoatl, having retrieved the bones of his ancestors, escaped from the underworld only after circumambulating it four times. Once he mixed the ancestral bone in his wife’s green jade bowl with red blood from his penis, “Holy ones, humans, [were] born” (Bierhorst, 1992:145–146). Even the colors of this Aztec version of the creation of humans are present in the La Venta plaza. The north part of the Complex B plaza contains a square platform surmounted by a 3.5-m high



Fig. 2.12 Station 2, Throne 2, figure in niche holds infant. Author photo

red column.¹⁴ About halfway between the red column and the base of the Great Mound is a green column. Both columns are 3.5-m high, forming a pair. (This is the only red column at La Venta so its presence here seems significant).

The next section of the Aztec story involves the discovery of corn at Food Mountain. Similarly, the next characters of the La Venta narrative were four human-maize seedlings. They took the form of stelae at the foot of the Great Mound (Fig. 2.13). In recent collaborative work with physicians, I have identified these characters as stylized human embryos wearing maize regalia (Tate, in press). Here they functioned as four human-maize seeds, or the originators of the true human race (Fig. 2.14). The huge constructed Mound C is the next character. Since the human-maize seeds are displayed in front of it, this seems to be a Formative Period version of the Mesoamerican Mountain of Sustenance, or Food Mountain, found in Maya and Aztec creation stories. Reilly (1999) proposed this interpretation as well, based on a different line of reasoning. Since the site centerline points directly to the nearest high mountain on the southern horizon, and some of the stone used to build La Venta

¹⁴ A “cluster” of different monuments surrounds this column on the platform. With the exception of Monument 59, a small throne composed of a jaguar wearing an embryo mask, the monuments are in poor condition. Around the next column to the north, also 3.5-m high but green, were clustered a colossal head (monument 1), a stela (2) and large oval stone bearing a variety of relief carvings referred to as Altar 7. In my opinion, both clusters were associated with individual rulers, or told a story that was not inherent to the site-length narrative. Such clusters may have been commissioned by rulers or lineages who wished to place their political monuments within the scope of the creation narrative.



Fig. 2.13 Station 3, Mound C-1, south side. Author photo

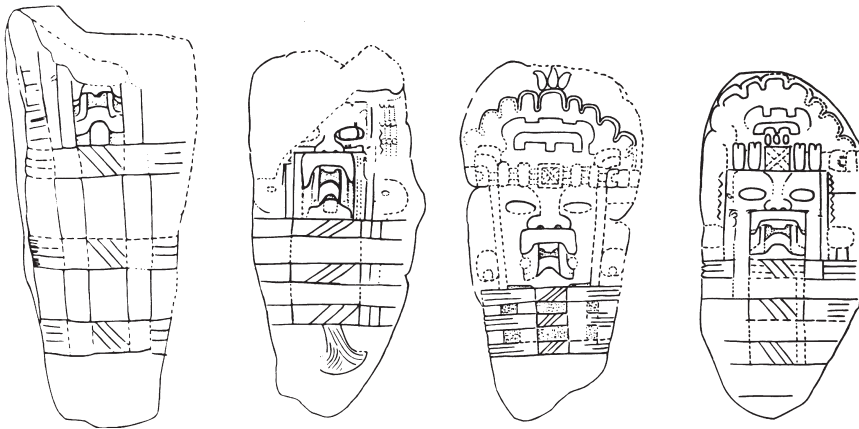


Fig. 2.14 Station 3, Four stelae on the south side of Mound C. Not to scale. Author drawing

came from that mountain, Mound C probably refers to that specific peak (Tate, 1999). Beyond the mountain were low plazas bounded by parallel low mounds. Graham and Heizer (1971) have proposed that these functioned as ballcourts although that idea has not met with universal acceptance. Since ballcourts that pre-date this one have been found since Graham's publication, as well as actual balls at the Gulf Coast site El Manatí, these parallel long mounds may have been symbolic if not actual courts.

North of the ballcourt were five gigantic formations of buried green stone (Fig. 2.15). Reilly (1994) first proposed that these were sea or lake effigies. La Venta

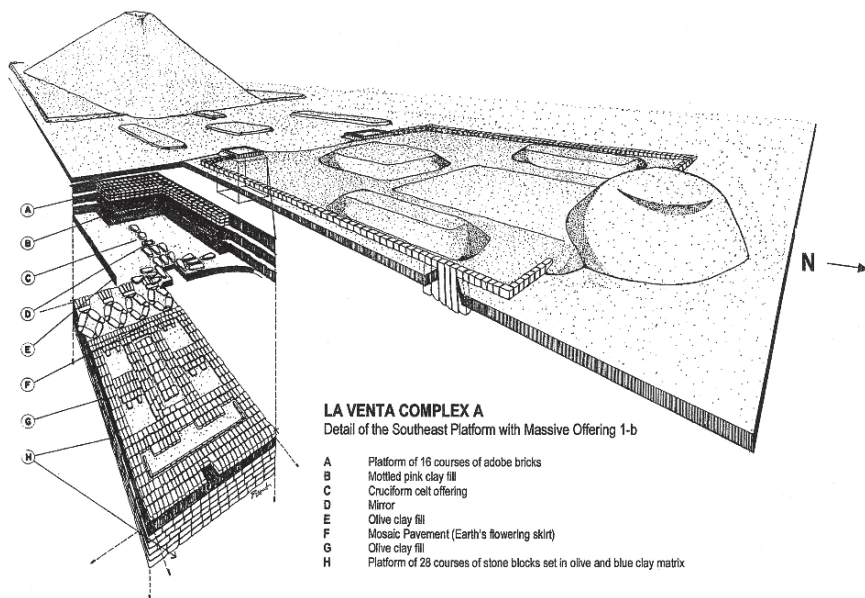


Fig. 2.15 Station 4, on the east side of the enclosed court, at which the stories connected with the Earth and Water goddesses were told. Drawing by Richard Cavallin-Casma

is the Olmec site with the closest proximity to the sea, and was “embedded in a complex network of rivers, streams, elevated ridges and oxbow lakes that provided excellent transportation routes, rich river levee farmland and abundant aquatic foods” (Diehl, 2004). This dynamic riverine environment was unusual, so it is not far-fetched to think that the Olmec paid respect to the life-giving bodies of water through making such effigies. Subsequently, I amplified Reilly’s work in an article that drew ethnographic analogies between La Venta and the beliefs of the Mixe, descendants of the Olmec.¹⁵ I proposed that the Massive Offerings of hundreds of tons of greenstone blocks, placed into huge pits and imbricated with colored clays, were created as effigies of a female lakes-and-rivers supernatural, who likely controlled childbirth and fishing (and canoes). Among the Mixe, her calendar name is One Fontanelle. The Mosaic Pavements (Fig. 2.16), which consist of a quincunx for the surface of the earth and a green stone skirt in a diamond pattern with fringe, to refer to the flowering mantle of the earth (like Cipactli’s hair), were effigies of an earth surface female, called by the Mixe Nashwini¹⁶, or (Mother) Earth Surface (Lipp, 1991; Tate, 1999). In other words, the Massive Offerings and Mosaic

¹⁵ As noted above, Soren Wichmann and other scholars have more recently proposed that the people of La Venta’s region spoke Zoque, not Mixe. Nevertheless, the two languages stem from a common source, proto-Mixe-Zoquean.

¹⁶ I have regularized the spelling for an English speaking audience. For the International Phonetic Alphabet spelling see Lipp, 1991:27.



Fig. 2.16 Station 4, a buried Mosaic Pavement. Author photo

Pavements referred to actual aspects of the local environment and to an array of life-giving powers believed to be inherent in them. It was over these huge Massive Offerings and Mosaic Pavements, or the Water and Earth goddesses, that the hundreds of phallic celts, thirty stone figurines, and thousands of pieces of regalia were cached in offering. These buried offerings, especially the northernmost ones in the court that was originally sunken were closed off by platforms and eventually by a wall of basalt columns (Drucker, 1952; Reilly, 1994). Although access to the Enclosed Court was restricted, its buried features may have been honored in a performance in the plaza to the east, between Complexes A and G.

The penultimate characters were three colossal heads that wore ballgame helmets like those of the colossal fetuses 800m to the south (Fig. 2.17). These have long been considered as representations of rulers and/or decapitated ballgame heroes. They looked northward toward the northernmost monument, a green column set on a high conical mound (Fig. 2.18).¹⁷ This phallic image referred back to the first group of sculptures, the fetuses, which were set on a U-shaped mound that symbolized the womb.

¹⁷I have been hoping that a publication of the monumental vulva found in the early 1990's would reveal where it was located. It is possible that this was the monument near the column on Cerro Encantado or the conical mound to which Drucker (1952:10) referred as follows: "Local reports have it that there used to be another stone, and quite a large one, somewhere on the south side of this mound, but is 'has disappeared' and our probing did not locate it."

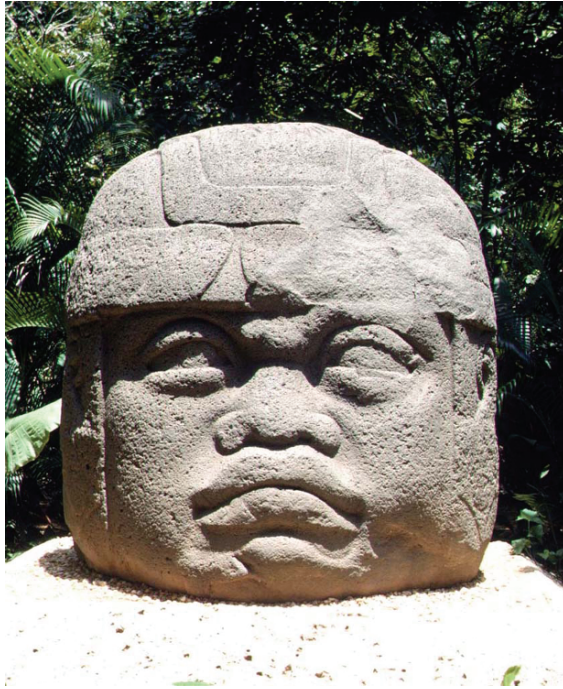


Fig. 2.17 Station 5, Monument 1, one of three colossal heads here, looking north. Author photo

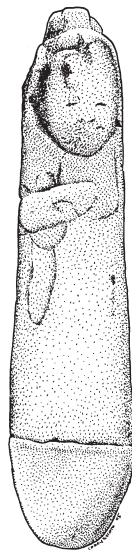


Fig. 2.18 Station 6, phallic/human-seed-face column discovered by Stirling on a high conical mound. Drawing by Corey Escoto

Temporality

Obviously the categories used in this study, such as characters and setting, are derived from the study of Euro-American literature. Their usefulness to ancient Mesoamerica may be aided by a little translation. The “characters” in Mesoamerican creation narratives are prototypical beings. Their “actions” are not interpersonal so much as inter-natural. If Olmec concepts of agency were similar to how later cultures constructed them, agents activated a node of cause and effect in a web of pre-existing possibilities generated by the energies that control days, places, meteorology, and the movements of the sky. They were aware that their success requires acknowledging that they were objects of agency and receivers of energies that they could successfully manipulate only within the bounds of reciprocity. The “settings” are primordial sacred places, which may have been based on real places, and were charged with agency as well. These categories are not very different from those in European narrative. It is in the unfolding of the story, its temporal aspect, that La Venta’s narrative may differ most from Western stories.

Like other Mesoamerican creation stories, this one seems to involve at least one and maybe two previous creations. The primordial crocodilian earth supernatural who was dismembered probably represents the earth of a previous creation. So in linear time, she could be considered “first” or “earliest” but she was not placed at one end of the axis. Instead, she was near the center, and space-time unfolded around her in the four directions. In this way, she was not unlike the central image on the Aztec calendar stone, who was shown with only face and feet as well.

Another previous attempt to create humans might be represented by the colossal fetuses, who at the same time foreshadow the decapitated ballplaying hero-heads, and so operate in the liminal time of heroes. Dennis Tedlock observed that the adventures of Xpiyacoc and Xmucane, the Maya creator couple,

... are presented in two different cycles, with the episodes divided between the cycles more on the basis of where they take place in space than when they take place in time... If the events of these two cycles were combined in a single chronological sequence, the above-ground episodes might alternate with those below, with the heroes descending into the underworld, emerging on earth again, and so forth. These sowing and dawning movements of the heroes, along with those of their supporting cast, prefigure the present-day movements of the sun, moon, planets, and stars

(Tedlock, 1996:33–34)

Similarly, the fetuses seem to be on the surface of the earth, since they were literally on a platform, while the infants on the two thrones were either entering or emerging from the cave/wombs. The embryo-maize stelae sprout or dawn. The colossal heads are decapitated so they are transitioning between life and death as well, or between earth and underworld. In addition to such mythic temporal eras, more specific calendrical counts were encoded into the space-time of the La Venta narrative as well.

In order to consider the calendrical associations in the processional narrative, let us return to the south end and work northward. This demonstrates how the overlapping

rhythms of time were juxtaposed with a (possible) linear sequence (the narrative stations). At the south end is the U-group festooned with fetuses. This represented the primordial womb, similar to that depicted in the Aztec *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*. Since the length of human gestation cycle is ~260 days, the womb and fetuses metaphorically represent the 260-day Mesoamerican ritual calendar. The four thrones with their caves were situated at the corners of a large quincunx, referring to the four sacred intercardinal directions, and the solstitial sunrise and sunset positions of the solar year. The Cipactli-like crocodilian throne must have referred to the earth of a previous creation. In the Aztec stories, “The year count, the day sign count, and the count of each twenty-day period were made the responsibility of those known as Oxomoco and Cipactonal...” who made Cipactli, as a first creature, the initial day (Bierhorst, 1992:24). Once that was done, the other days were generated (Brundage, 1979:12). And the northern fringe of the Cipactli-cave-throne plaza (Complex B plaza) is the row of embryo-maize seed stelae, which also refers to the 260-day cycle as well as to maize planting-to-harvesting cycles. At the mid-point between the U-group/womb and the northern phallic column rose the Great Mound, the primordial mountain of sustenance, still visibly supporting the dawning of the human-maize race. The human-maize plants are also metaphoric trees. As Reilly (1994b) pointed out, among the cached offerings of the northern courtyard were twenty jade axes in the cruciform arrangements that represented primordial trees. These twenty celts likely related to the day names that could be assigned to babies born through the powers of the water “goddess.” The celts were placed directly over the sea-earth effigies, the powerful female entities who controlled childbirth, fishing, and earth surface activities. Such references to calendrical cycles apparently preceded the depiction of calendars in a graphic format at La Venta. Other relatively non-literate places, such as Teotihuacan, used their knowledge of the 260- and 365-day calendars as they designed architectural forms and intervals, as Clemency Coggins (1996) suggested.

This exploration of the visual narrative among the centerline sets of monuments at La Venta has clearly recognizable characters operating in settings that evoke mythical time and space as well as specific topographic features (the peak to which La Venta’s centerline points, the lakes and sea near the site, and the locales from which its stones were transported). The columns that punctuated the axis provided focal points for the narrative and its performance. Furthermore, the visual narrative encompassed the entire site. This approach accounts for *all* the sets of sculpture without having to omit anything that does not fit the hypothesis.¹⁸ Finally, symbols at each sculptural station interwove with each other to create a story that is rich with foreshadowing, resonance, and possibilities for expansion. I think we can reasonably conclude that the sculptural groups of La Venta formed a visual narrative in real space. Participants physically experienced the characters in the settings, and supplied conceptual interconnections as they moved through the performance space. Since so many of the elements seem to refer to cosmogony, gestation, or origins, it is worth exploring how this narrative relates to other creation stories.

¹⁸ See Note 9.

Is the Narrative One of Creation?

Thus far, this chapter has approached the visual narrative as if it were erected all at once. I do not however believe this to be the case, yet it is difficult to detect how this version of La Venta's story was negotiated, and by whom. In order to determine whether the narrative conveyed a creation-and-origins story, the best approach may be to compare the elements of this narrative with those of the better-known creation stories. This is part of an ongoing project, so just a few of many examples of parallels must suffice for the present. I adapt the historian Alfredo López-Austin (1993) method of locating the "solid nucleus" of a myth as well as its "variable elements" to perform such a comparison. This method demands that consistencies and alterations be tracked through time and space, and I have done so, but will abbreviate these findings now. Several important "solid nuclei" are insemination, male and female creator pairs, humans made of ground corn or bone, and sacrifice.

An emphasis on insemination, or a sexual union of sky and earth, forms a "solid nucleus" in most Mesoamerican stories. The five columns that pierce the centerline at La Venta suggest sexual union between earth and sky. Over 700 stone celts in the form of maize cobs and seeds were set within subterranean caches, further conceptually inseminating the site. The notion of a stone axe dropping from the sky to inseminate or bring human life to the earth appeared in several Mesoamerican creation narratives. For example, in the Mixtec *Codex Vindobonensis*, a pictorial manuscript, Hero 9 Wind is born from sacred flint. Later he descended to earth on a rope, or umbilical cord, so the birth-flint must have been in the sky. Similarly, an Aztec text tells of a celestial creator goddess, Citlalinicue, Stars-Her-Skirt, whose celestial womb emits a flint that falls to earth, cleaving it and penetrating into the cave-womb Chicomoztoc (Fig. 2.19). This act caused the birth of the primordial gods and eventually led to the creation of humanity (Jonghe, 1905:29–34). In Maya stories, two sets of male Hero Twins had to descend into the underworld from the earth surface in order to defeat the Lords of the Underworld through several means, one involving the explosion of a gourd which scattered seeds into the underworld's womb (Christenson, 2003, I:176), and the other a series of sacrifices and decapitations, which placed their bones, or conceptual seeds, in the uterine rivers of the Underworld (*ibid.*:177–179).

A pair of Male and Female Creators forms another solid nucleus of Mesoamerican creation stories. From the Classic Period we have the primordial earth mother in the Palenque Cross Group and her consort (Schele, 1992; Tate, 2002).¹⁹ In the Post

¹⁹In David Stuart's recent book, he argues against Schele's interpretation that the primordial being of the Palenque Cross group, whose name glyph is avian, is female (Stuart, 2005:158 ff.). This being gave birth to three offspring. If the Progenitor is instead a male Maize God, then why does the Palenque creation tale differ so much from every other Mesoamerican creation story? In the *Popol Vuh*, the creators are not maize. They take the maize seeds from the mountain/earth/cave/womb and fashion humans from them. In the *Leyenda de los Soles*, Quetzalcoatl visits the Underworld, circumbulates, gets the bones of the ancestors, emerges, and lets red blood in a green bowl given to him by his wife, a celestial-womb goddess. Maize is not the creator. Two genders are involved. And it is clear to any maize planter that the plants are monoecious—that they have both male and female parts. The concept of dual-gendered maize is attested in abundant ethnographic literature. Therefore, I think there is plenty of evidence to support this aspect of Schele's and my own work.

Classic Maya *Popol Vuh*, the creators of the world were male and female: *Xmucane* and her partner *Xpiyacoc*. Among their names are “He Who has Begotten Sons” and “She Who has Borne Children” (see Christenson, 2003:63, n. 27). An aged male and female pair initiates the creation sequence in the Mixtec *Codex Vindobonensis*. Among the Aztec stories, several male and female pairs appear, as Bernal-Garcia has shown (Fig. 2.19). To create humans, Aztec hero-twin Quetzalcoatl brought the ground white bones of the previous race of humans from the Underworld to the surface of the earth, placed them in a green jade bowl provided by his wife Cihuacoatl, and perforated his penis to drop red blood on the bones, creating the dough of humanity. At La Venta, I propose, these male and female supernaturals were represented by architectural-scale sculptures: the red and green columns and the earthen U-shaped mound represented a creator pair. Of the five columns, only the northernmost one had any relief carving. A “face” was carved on the upper section of the monument. If this were the sculpture of a penis the face would be in the region of the glans penis. A diagonal line below that may have represented an arm.



Fig. 2.19 An Aztec creator couple within a celestial, U-shaped womb. From Codex Borbonicus. Author drawing

In other words, it seems to have polysemically represented both a penis and an embryo or human seed. And, there are several other archaeologically excavated columns that are similarly decorated, including three from San Lorenzo (Monuments 41, 42, 103). Although I acknowledge that it is impossible to make a compelling argument by relying on looted objects, it is interesting that two ceramic forms (Guthrie, 1995) depict the same combination of a phallus incised with an embryo image. The carved columns represent the penis and its ejaculate, seed. Clearly they refer to fertilization of the earth. The U-shaped mound with fetuses on it refers just as clearly to the uterus. Supportive of this contention that gendered supernaturals were portrayed in highly stylized representational modes at large scale at La Venta is a recently discovered monument that portrays female genitalia (Fig. 2.20; see Note 14).

Although they are not the primordial creators, but subsidiary aspects of them, the mountain, earth and sea effigies (the Great Mound, the Mosaic Pavements and the Massive Offerings, respectively) seem to have represented gendered supernatural entities that govern resources (seeds, soil and plant growth, and aquatic resources, respectively).

In addition to cosmogonical narratives, Mesoamerica's creation stories include the origins of the human race from maize. In the Maya *Popol Vuh*, the seeds for the human race were brought out of the Mountain of Sustenance by animals to a grandmother, who ground the seeds of maize nine times for the nine lunations of gestation, then shaped them, along with water and fat, into human beings. The co-identity between humans and maize is a principal subject in Olmec and Maya art and narrative, and is shown in a central Mexican classic period mural from Cacaxtla. At La Venta, four human embryo images with maize regalia, referring to the 260-day calendar and gestation cycle, stood in front of the Mountain of Sustenance. These human-maize seeds, portrayed as human embryos, may have been thought of



Fig. 2.20 A monumental vulva from La Venta, discovered in the early 1990's. Author photo

in a similar manner as the tiny bags of maize dough attached to a cloth used in child-naming ceremonies among the Maya of Santiago Atitlan. These bags of maize dough are referred to as “the original seeds of the human race, or the “root of children.” They are decorated with long colorful ribbons, called their “umbilical cords” (Tarn and Prechtel, 1986:175–176).

Sacred life-giving trees seem to have been major elements in many creation-and-origins narratives from the recently discovered San Bartolo murals of 100 BC to the well-known Mixtec codices of AD 1400, in which trees gave birth to human ancestors, who lived in a historical era and continued to communicate with the living. The trees of La Venta were abstract in form, as were the Earth and Water “goddesses” but they were laboriously made of the sacred green stone, jade. The celts were self-reflexive in terms of function, too, as the celts were ceremonial versions of the stone axes that were used to cut trees.

Finally, sacrifice as the necessary mechanism for the generation of life force is another solid nucleus of creation mythology. At San Bartolo, five primordial beings perforated their penises in sacrificial preparation for the creation of the flowering earth. In the *Popol Vuh*, a Hero Twin was decapitated in the Underworld, leading to the scene in which he substituted a squash for his head in order to play ball against the Lords of the Underworld but tricked them by spilling the squash seeds and thus creating fertility. Then the Hero Twins jumped into a fire, killing themselves to gain power over forces of regeneration. And at La Venta, the decapitated Colossal Heads with their ballgame helmets referred to the sacrifices these heroes made in their fight against the forces of Anti-Life or Underworld.

Thus, in answer to our third question, even the brief synopsis presented here indicates that several important “solid nuclei” of mythic motifs found at La Venta are consistent with those found in other Mesoamerican creation stories.

From Flexibility to Fixity

Scholars have long realized that La Venta, with its buried offerings and precocious Mound, was unique. When we recognize that its built environment constituted a processional creation narrative, we begin to appreciate its conceptual influence among its contemporaries and on later societies. The Olmec at La Venta and their constituents marshaled the knowledge and ideas produced in villages and primary urban centers across Mesoamerica in the previous millennium and crafted a creation story that guided Mesoamerican civilization for the next 1900 years. This process must have entailed countless trips to carry the hundreds of tons of stone from dozens of locations. Were some made by pilgrims who found the land among the waters sacred? Were the residents of the lower Gulf Coast serving political and social “cargoes” as they bore actual cargoes of rock? Did villages from far away form teams to haul stone in return for being able to participate in negotiating the story of origins that would link Mesoamerican peoples? Were the burdens of stone relayed over shorter distances, establishing myriad trade relationships that networked

southern Mesoamerica? These questions have assumed a voluntary labor system, but can we rule out some sort of conscription or slavery? To me it seems that there are numerous clues that suggest disparate people arriving with stone.

One is the sheer volume and another is the far-flung sources. Basalt columns and boulders (or worked objects; see (Gillespie, 1994) from the Tuxtlas or even from San Lorenzo itself, serpentine from the Pacific slope, andesite and schist from the north slopes of Oaxaca and Chiapas (Williams and Heizer, 1965), jade from the Río Motagua or possibly the Balsas drainage, the magnetite mirrors and bits of amethyst and crystal are all clear evidence of how wide spread these sources were. Another clue is Offering 4. Among the sixteen standing figures (who were not looking at one individual, please examine the excavation photo), not only are the heights and proportions a little different, so is the treatment of the faces, the pose, and so are the stones. This suggests that the concept of a standing figure with a straight spine and flexed knees was communicated to many groups. Why else would the genre of “small stone standing figure, straight spine, flexed knees, no gender distinction” be as widespread as it is in Mesoamerica (Tate, 1995, 1996)? I suspect numerous groups commissioned such a figure from their stone carvers and transported the small figures to La Venta in Phase II (around 900–800 BC, see González, 1990:120) for ceremonial deposit in the sunken court’s eastern platform. It was important for these sixteen groups to be represented in the ceremonial court at La Venta by the presence of a crafted figure that represented a certain kind of knowledge or belief. Once there, the representatives from various places must have engaged discussions and disputes regarding the characters, the places, the processes of natural cycles, and all aspects of the belief system they were negotiating.

I suggest that this visual narrative was an important step in the development of writing along the Gulf Coast. Scholars have focused on graphic symbols, incised in stone or painted on objects, as major steps toward writing, and such symbols are certainly essential components in its development. But with the sculptures of La Venta, we can see an early version of the *content* of some later written texts writing as well as the *concept* of a narrative that helped to establish group identity. However, the La Venta visual narrative was polysemic. The identities of actors, places, and actions were generic enough to allow any group of people participating in the negotiation of the narrative to arrive and perform the story in its own way and in its own language. Even the order was probably not fixed. It was a flexible story, one that included anyone who earned the right to be there (at minimum, please bring stone). In contrast, once Harvest Mountain Lord of La Mojarra began to fix dates and names in text, he was clearly fighting for his own version of history and his own right to territory. Later, Maya texts named individuals and fixed their genealogies, locking people into place for many *katuns*. It is not my intention to propose that the Olmec were uninvolved in warfare and grisly deeds. I do see the visual narrative manufactured from ideas and materials from across Mesoamerica as part of a relatively open exchange, in contrast to written texts, which exclude all those who are not speakers of a language or who are illiterate.

This chapter has identified only a skeleton of the last draft of a Middle Formative creation-and-origins story, the one in place as the site was left around 400 BC.

It did not yet integrate the ideas of Reilly and Grove, or even those of the present author into a single version of the story. There was much more to the tale than is included here. I hope that scholars continue to develop the idea that several of us share that La Venta's sculpture constituted a processional creation-and-origins story. As we have seen at Palenque, Izapa (Guernsey Kappelman, 2001), and elsewhere, it was within this context of cosmogony and human origins that rulers erected their political monuments. The visual creation narrative that coalesced at La Venta was so compelling that nearly every later culture in Mesoamerica seems to have adopted some aspect of it.

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Chapter 3

Maya Caves Across Time and Space

Reading-Related Landscapes in K'iche' Maya Text, Ritual and History

Duncan Earle

First Words

Then they went within the house of bats, just bats were in this house, the “death bats” monstrous beings, with snouts that served as the tools of death.To avoid being bitten they slept inside their blowguns. But then one of the twins gave himself up, because a death bat appeared, arriving just as he showed his face (out of the blowgun). The two did this because it was actually what they were asking to happen, it was what they had in mind from the start.and then his head was taken off by the death bat, leaving Junajpu's body still tight inside. (Popol Vuh, my translation¹)

The Castilian conquerors of Mexico and Central America were quite effective in their efforts to destroy documents that might reflect a complex culture with a deep understanding of history and place. When Pedro de Alvarado came to and burned the capitol of the second largest empire of Mesoamerica, along with its kings, we can only speculate what else was committed to those flames. But among those who survived were well-educated bards in service to the court, who some scholars suspect kept the contents of the burned books in their heads, only to later commit them to European paper in Latin letters, in secret, over a generation later (Tedlock, 1985.) The book thus produced is most commonly called the Popol Vuh, or Book of Council. While the original remains hidden or lost, a Spanish friar made a copy from that original K'iche' over a 150 years later, and a variety of translations began to emerge in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is now the national book of Guatemala, there are numerous translations, and a rich field of interpretation, to which in a small way this chapter contributes (also see Earle, 1983b.)

A central theme of the book's mythic tales involves decent by heroic twins from the surface of this holy earth into the underworld, where they meet with challenges from the lords of death and sickness. The first generation is defeated, after a series of travails. The second pair, miraculous offspring of the skull of one of the first,

¹I use Tedlock (1985) and Recinos (1950) as well as other translators, but also my own understanding of K'iche' and the orthography based upon Castilian, with J in place of the English H, X for SH, and so on. Tedlock translates the Kamatzotz as “snatch bats,” but a more obvious prefix is “death (Kamik) bat.”

make a better go of it, despite being sent to many of the same life and death trials, an excerpt of which is quoted above. Of all the intimidating places to survive in the deadly territory of Xibalbaj, I have always wondered what was the danger of the house of bats. The others were clear. Cold, knives, jaguars, fire all seemed inherently fatal, but this danger I assumed, as did Dennis Tedlock, was that these bats were “monstrous beasts” of another dimension, bats out of hell, so to speak. Yet my doubts remained.

Rarely does this mythic Maya tale invent classes of beings so at variance with their descendents in nature today, in fact they mostly go the other way. One explicit meta-narrative purpose of the text is explaining nature’s peculiarities (e.g., why the rat has a hairless tail, why owls announce death, etc.). It never struck me until my own personal encounter with the lords of illness as a result of being in a Maya cave, that this may well be metaphoric not of mythical beasts but of the psychic implications of their feces. Bat guano and the spores it carries, are legend in the tropics for imparting a deadly strain of histoplasmosis. For this fungus infection frequently imparts in its victims a kind of “loss of one’s head” in the form of fever and powerful hallucinations, as well as serious cognitive disorientation and for most of the untreated, eventual, gruesome death.²

The Xibalba scene that follows the cave episode quoted above starts with Junajpu’s rolling head bouncing about the ball court, suggestively referencing the idea of ball court sacrifice, but also indicating and foreshadowing the repetitious pattern of the paternal hero twin’s decapitation followed by tricky, shamanic recovery. The first Junajpu tricked a daughter of the Xibalbans to come admire his skull hanging from the gourd tree, getting her pregnant with his spittle (so as to live on through his offspring—and gain revenge against his carnal demise). The second generation does the same only Junajpu the son is restored directly this time by his magical brother. While the father symbolizes corn that must die and become dried out before it can engender new life, like corn itself, his sons are the true trickster-warrior-gods who make the universe in all its particulars, and restore each other from certain death. This is parallel to the diurnal solar cycle, where the demise of the sun into the darkness of the earth (the twin associated with sun meets the one aligned with night, moon, the holy earth and the underworld jaguar³) is followed

²This illness and its association with caves, shamanism and witchcraft are exactly spelled out by Timothy Knab in his ethnographic novel, *War of Witches* (1995). I contracted it in a Chiapas cave.

³*Ixbalamque*, the name of the second of the second pair of twins, involves the calendar name IX, also known as IXBALAM, which diviners associate with the Holy World, ruled over by the night jaguar. Many Late Postclassic pottery depict a compound animal with human, jaguar, and deer features, deer being *Kiej* or *Kej* in K’iche’. If IX is the first day of a count, the number 7 falls with his twin, Junajpu, and as seven, has Junajpu follow with I, suggesting their calendric hegemony, unlike their father and uncle.

closely by restoration, dawn.⁴ The father partly emerges from the earth, in the place of ball court sacrifice (and the ball court comes to be associated with the underworld and the West), while the sons ascend skyward to inaugurate K'iche'an history, what constitutes the dawn of THIS current creation, bearing the two principal astral bodies that give order to the Maya universe, and laying out the layered nature of the Maya cosmos.

While all the Popol Vuh "houses" may represent caves, and the "trials of the caves" may well be a reference to Pre-Columbian shaman initiation rights, the threat of the bat house suggests both the dangers of descent into the underworld—exemplified by loss of reason, high fever, and the proximity of death—and the power of transformation through "ritualized death," subterranean enlightenment, and reemergence as healed and as healers. In this mythic tale of death and life, the challenge that defeats the first set of twins, and sorely tests the second, are these trials in the "houses," not the actual ball game with the lords of death. Caves in the text serve not just as places to fight off death for life, a place to emerge from. For the twins, both sets, it is they must first descend, where they must die to be reborn. What hallucinatory bat guano fever has taught me is that the cave serves as more than just an entry into the holy Earth, it is also an "active" tomb inside a spiritually activated underworld domain, from which one emerges changed. It is where the Maya ancestors and ancient culture heroes await rituals of visitation and offerings, in order to oversee the processes of death and resurrection. The text and its tale also suggest a pattern of shamanic initiation, which may have been quite obvious to the book's authors, but less so today (Such a reading would be clear to contemporary Chol Mayas of Tila, Chiapas, where traveling to a cave is part of their initiation rite.

From an ethnographer's perspective, one who has spent a great amount of time with living K'iche' calendar diviners (called day/sun/time keepers, *aj q'ij*), and witnessed initiation, the parallels appear to be powerful. The hero twins went into their caves of trial and tribulation, in their journey through the underworld (as solar and lunar avatars), to later emerge through transformation, performance, and trickery, to overcome the powers of uncontrolled death and illness, vindicate their father and uncle, and bring forth the dawn of time. As the sun and moon twins, they are the first keepers of the day, because they perform the first day of K'iche' history. They had the power their father's side of the family lacked, because they conjoined the lineages of this world with the underworld, for their wily mother was a daughter of a Lord of Sickness. Conjoining mother and father lineages gave them power over life and death, and made them the model and first mother-fathers, keepers of the

⁴In my work with K'iche' daily life (Earle, 1986, 2000), I note how much cycles of time and space connect with the daily movements of the sun; one calendar diviner notes, "We die every night, to be resuscitated each new morning by one of our souls." This suggests that night is experienced as a temporary death, and the sun rising each day serves to bring us back to life, having emerged from the underworld alive.

days, the Maya shaman.⁵ This journey to the cave is to intentionally die, to make sacrifice to the death houses for life's sake, with those two elements (sun and night) joined in the form of the transformed self, as the shaman, the day-keeper, the calendar diviner. The fact that shamanic initiation involves caves as central places in the ritual process, in the very region where this volume was written so long ago, is more than suggestive.

Today, as we shall see, the role of caves in the initiation of K'iche' shamans follows a similar logic centuries later. It is from the cave that the initiate will emerge at dawn, revived and prepared to heal through the management of holy time and sacred spaces. And like the two sets of mythic twins, he or she must go within twice, once to a cave in the West, addressing the dead rulers, mythic history, and the ancestral heroes, and then at the end of the pilgrimage a second time in the East, to later emerge with the dawn of the next calendar cycle. In the circuit of shrines that makes up the all-day affair, this last stop in a remote cave high on a mountain, I strongly suspect, is the very place where the first dawning was said to have happened in the Popol Vuh. This dawning ritual so dramatically described there in the ancient text also served as a template for local dawning rituals associated with settlements, a rite of ritual reenactment of dawning carried out by the Late Postclassic K'iche' and their allied neighbors at critical calendric dates. As such, the dawning mountain served as the primordial place of origin of creation, the place where historical time itself was born.

The axis of West-East followed by initiates also marks the ancient pattern of connecting the ancient ceremonial center, then as now, with the surrounding natural topography, and ties history, myth and ritual practice together, in highly significant space. The archaeological site persists as a current cave and altar shrine, and both are tied to sacred shrines on the dawning mountain, and its cave complex. Caves serve as the starting and ending places for this pilgrimage, serving as complementary cultural and natural portals, and tying settlements to the holy hinterlands. This analysis also ties the current ritual of initiation to sacred practices of the past, guided by the Popol Vuh.

Making Connections: Edges in the Center

It was while exploring the iconography of the Honduran Classic Maya site of Copan with Linda Schele back some years ago that the idea came back to me in full force. Linda in her inspired way had come to find a reading on certain pyramids that said these grand structures were named mountains, "stone mountains," in the language

⁵Note that the advantage of the second twins, apart from their calendar names, derives from their exogamy, having a mother from the enemy camp, which seems to have aided them in gaining the talents of trickery. One common name for day-keepers and other K'iche' shamans is *chuckkajau*, our mother-father.

of the hieroglyphs. Knowing from my training under Gary Gossen that Mayas speak in couplet metaphors, and also aware that divisions between complementary opposites is a common cultural theme for some Mayas (Earle, 1986), I suspected that the stone label would be set opposed to something in nature. In this case clearly these were “cultural” mountains over and against the topographic, natural ones on the horizon. My confirmation of this cultural association was affirmed by her other reading, that from the writing on the veritable forest of stone stelas commemorating grand rituals of great rulers in the plaza below the kings in the middle of the public plaza at the ceremonial center of the (local example of the) world.⁶ These groves of greatness are surrounded by the cultural version of scared mountains where dwelt the ancestral gods and souls, and which usually housed the tomb of the founders and their kin.

These Honduran Mayas were most obviously making a miniature of the visible holy topography that surrounded them, and were using that stone version of their sacred landscape for their ceremonial spaces of the central sacred sectors of the city. The Center, we might surmise, reiterated the shape and names and space relations of the edge of the immediate world of most people’s experience, precisely so as to “map” the known macrocosm to the owned microcosm. In theocratic societies it is common to find such linkages, serving as a kind of urban appropriation of the sacred landscape of the region, as a part of their ideological bid for power and legitimacy. It was as if they attempted to replicate the sacred in nature so as to gain political and theological control over the shared religious system. These ancient Mayas, along with many other Mesoamericans, seemed to be appropriating the very ancient regional belief in the powers that reside in the sanctified landscape, and this landscape becomes the central locus of city-states and empires. It has been likened to a stage, the central system of pyramids, plazas, stelas and ball-courts in most Mesoamerican cities, but the themes of this dramaturgic iconography are highly oriented toward the hinterlands and the common shared beliefs regarding the sacred that can be found there. It could be called an architecture of intensification, taking the sacred landscape of the rural and re-mapping it into an urban center, smaller in scale, plastered and pained, alive with ritual activity, intensely occupied, ritually regulated, in short, intensified. The setting contrasts with the typical rural household, more like the earthly abode of the Twins in the *Popol Vuh*.

Evidence suggests this cultural capturing of sacred geography was going on not just in Copan, or just with the Classic Maya, but nearly everywhere in Mesoamerica and at every period in Mesoamerican history. This claim is strengthened here by ethnographic study of current Maya cosmology, and especially ritual practices in the sacred landscape by K’iche’ calendrical specialists, practices tied to current beliefs about center and edge (this is based on work I have carried out over the last quarter century in Guatemala). To further complicate matters, I bring in the ethnohistoric record, dating mostly from the first decades after the arrival of Europeans, especially Kiche’ documents. These vantage points also suggest the role of mountains and their

⁶This is an allusion to Schele and Freidel, *A Forest of Kings* (1990).

caves in the origins of the K'iche' Maya people, and give temporal depth to the current practices of diviner initiation in the same locations as suggestive of ancient, mythic events. Finally it integrates caves into a larger system of beliefs about how urban centers and holy landscapes are to be ritually tied together, and what culturally significant caves may have served as in ancient times. This is especially revealing when the caves are modified or fully built, as this shows the cultural shape of an idealized cave. This is the case of the citadel center of the late postclassic K'ich'e, known as Utatlan. Under the ideological sway of the Toltecs, they also followed traditions that embrace the belief in the myths of cave origins. Tula, a Toltec capital, was a place of caves, and they are to be found within the base of the largest pyramid of Teotihuacan (Heyden and Gendrop, 1975; Heyden, 1981). Aztec myths link the seven caves of Atzlan (Chicomoztoc) with the origins of the Mexica, which they ritually attempt to revisit in a well-known account (Duran, 1967.) There exists much evidence throughout the ethnohistoric record, and in ethnographies as well, to suggest that caves hold special meaning associated with place of origins, rites of renewal, and as a portal to the Other world of the ancestors, culture heroes, idols, and powerful spirits. They are also widely feared, as doorways to the underworld, with its powerful cast of dangerous characters, today. Further, they are frequently viewed as emergence places for rain-bearing clouds, as well as for the daily return of the sun itself.

Elements of linking edge with center through periodic ritual practices, mythic tales, and notions of cosmology, continue to manifest themselves in many Mesoamerican ceremonial practices of the shamanic-like Maya calendar diviners of the central K'iche' region, many of whom use some of the same ancient sacred landscape, including its caves, for current ceremonial purposes related generally to the ancient K'iche' tradition. The analysis that follows examines the patterns of both the present and the past to suggest some understandings of Maya sacred landscapes, their arrangements of structured space, the relations of these spaces with the Popol Vuh, and its places of dawning and origins. In this context, I explore the central role caves played in the sacred landscapes of the Maya. The discussion involves both natural and built cave structures, and considers the evidence for continuous ceremonial usage of specific and named sacred spaces involving caves for at least 700 years. It attempts to identify these places and give a brief description, with maps. Last, it suggests various themes familiar to those who have studied Maya caves, themes such as origins, rebirth, and the journeys of descent and reemergence, and it shows how these themes served the political and religious designs of the K'iche's in the capitol of a grand post-classic Empire, as well as how they also reappear in current shamanic practice (a practice perhaps quite old indeed.)

Regularities in Mesoamerican Geomancy: Capturing Sacred Landscapes

My revelation on the (stone) mountain in Copan resonated with an earlier experience tracing the architectural patterns of Tenochtitlan, the Venice-like contact-period capital of the Aztecs, with Peter Townsend. According to his analysis, the city and

especially its ceremonial precinct, serves as a geomantic model not only of the spiritual cosmos in the abstract sense, but also as a replication of the very concrete immediate landscape at hand, in this case the surrounding the valley of Mexico. As was the case many Mesoamerican sites, the mountains of the sacred edge of the immediate sanctified universe served as nature's spatial arrangement to be reproduced (in a smaller and more ordered form) in the architecture of the center. Sacred topography was reiterated in miniature, linking the edge to the middle. The pyramids at the center come to represent the "cultural mountains" of the city once again showing the ancient pattern. The architecture of this great island serves to create a mapping of the cosmos and the theo-topography in the heart of the settlement, tying the settlement center to the holy surrounding formations at the "corners" of the visible world, interconnecting the near and far domains of space. The generality of the pattern was clear.

Bassie-Sweet (1991) posits that many of the Classic Maya rituals depicted in their art are ceremonial circuits linking mountains, and caves within them, to the center of the site. Her reading of it suggests the cave location of the rites as being primary, and then the replication of these highly sacred rites in the centers as derivative religious theater that reiterates these earlier events for the masses. She points to Vogt's description of Zinacantan ceremonial circuits that serve to mark off property rights and demarcate the social space of the Zinacanteco universe (1969:179–180). This same phenomenon exists in many other Maya communities (B. Tedlock, 1982.) The heart of her argument addresses a reason for the replication of the natural landscape in the cultural landscape of the ceremonial center: the rulers utilize their shamanic spiritual capacities to connect the proximate world of the center with a holy landscape that lies beyond the space of everyday life. This landscape, highly dangerous to the uninitiated, includes caves, high mountain shrines, and other remote locations that have been commonly recognized as being some sort of portal or window between this world and another. Most people fear these openings, even today. This other place connects with deities who control rain and lightning, the souls of the ancestors and their "sacred settlements," positive and negative elements of the earth deity, and directional powers involved with holding up or apart the edges of the universe. As Barbara Tedlock (1982:82) notes in her work in Momostenango, the ritual visitation to the directional mountains in a circuit serves to stabilize and fertilize the town. These crucial rites of periodic demarcation, Bassie-Sweet suggests, are reiterated at certain calendric intervals through ritualized reenactment in the center, where the remote sacred site are duplicated for that purpose. Caves serve as a focal point in the ritual round for the elite shamans.

What arises in her argument, as well as in data located in the ethnographic literature, is that these remote locations are to be visited only under special circumstances, at specific times, by spiritual specialists, sanctified individuals who link these otherwise dangerous places back to the town centers. The Chamula ceremony in Chiapas, Mexico, of Kin Kurus, or "Day of the Cross" follows this pattern (I witnessed it as an invited guest in 1984.) It involves ceremonial movement in a circuit by households and their musicians, moving from house to local graveyard, then proceeding to the water hole, then on to the cave-like rock overhang altar (called the "window"

of San Juan, their patron saint,) that looks west from the summit of towering Tzontevitz, the chief mountain of the township and the highest mountain in Chiapas. Finally, after a midnight visit to the town church, tracing the path of the Chamula patron saint from his mountain home to his town house, or *chul na* (“sacred house,”) the processioners return to the local water hole and home for dawn. Here the ceremony of asking for rain and its complement, ground water (to fill the water holes), must include the township’s most sacred mountain and the ceremonial center. In the area of the K’iche’, Santa Rosa Chujuyup (see Fig. 3.1) is a small township where certain elder shamans go in search of rattle snakes and vipers in the forested mountains (*K’iche’laj*, “forests,” from whence the name of the people,) after appropriate *costumbre* (ritual actions of permission and gratitude), to bring to the town center for the celebration of their patron saint, Candelaria. I have witnessed this ceremonial dancing, as well as ceremonial circuits and rituals connecting mountain shrines with K’iche’ town centers in Chichicastenango, Zacualpa, Joyabaj, Chiche, and other townships, as well as a number of towns around Lake Atitlan. The wilds are brought to town in this connection of the edge and center, in rites that actively and periodically bring nature (snakes, flying pole trees, pine needles, bromeliads, crystals, and pine pitch) to culture.

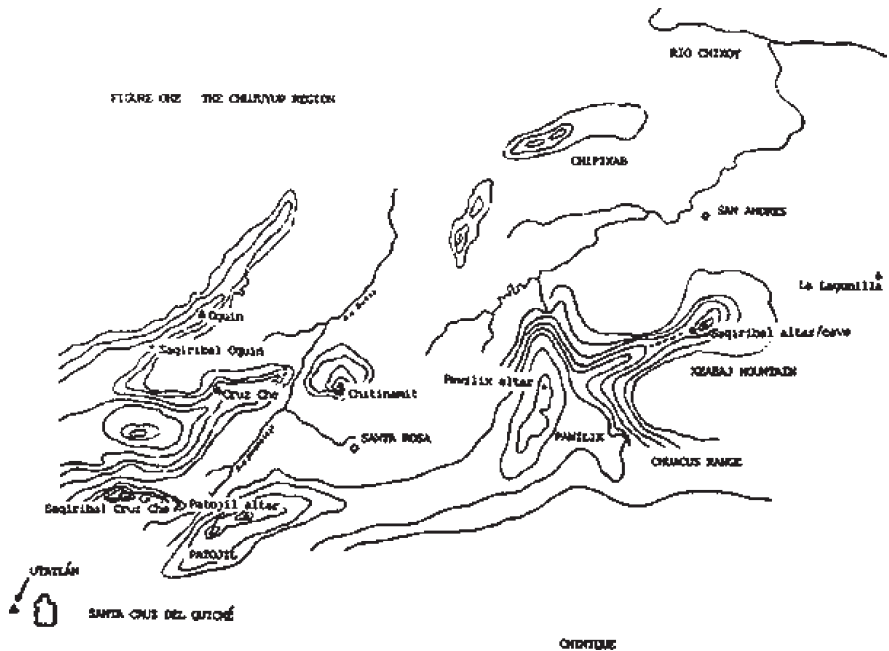


Fig. 3.1 The Chujuyup region, showing the town of Santa Rosa and the surrounding “sacred” topography described in the text

The Ancient K'iche' Kingdom: A Tale of Two Cave Complexes

I had first seen some aspects of the connection working with the archaeology of the late post-classic K'iche' (Quiche' in the old orthography; I was a student of archaeology at this site in 1974), and to this we now turn. Locating in the urban design replicas of the patterns of rural sacred geography is dramatically demonstrated in at the site of Utatlan, (*Q'umarcaj*, "old reeds" in K'iche'), once the wondrous fortress capitol of the great K'iche' Maya empire that was observed by Cortez's hot-headed second, Pedro de Alvarado, at the time of initial military conquest. It was destroyed by Alvarado in 1524, under the paper-thin excuse the place was a robber's nest and that the people were about to ambush them by surprise. Later, much of the stone from the city was hauled off to the nearby departmental capitol of Santa Cruz del Quiche'. The sacred nature of the surrounding valley, also called Quiche', and the mountain ranges overlooking it, has been documented in some detail in the sacred sixteenth-century text previously mentioned, the *Popol Vuh*. It describes the movements of the K'iche' in the centuries leading up to contact with Europeans, from a vantage point just a generation or so after the fall of the city. Some of the places mentioned in the text serve as locations or features in nature where important mythico-historical events took place in the K'iche' past (Carmack, 1981).

Carmack and his students (I was one) found that many of the places mentioned in the *Popol Vuh* were in fact real locations, and that they could be located either by searching on the official 1:50,000 maps, or by eliciting the names from the memories and general local knowledge of people living in the area. Often these two coincided perfectly. Or as in one case mentioned below, the similarities make it clear the different derivations were from one source. Some of the most significant named rural locations in the ethnohistoric text have urban counterparts in the form of pyramids in the city center, linked by the name of the deity associated with it (e.g., Tojil with Patojil; Awuilix with Pawilix) and a lineage affiliation. This spatial arrangement expressed both unity and difference, a balancing of power among allied lineage political structures, whose distinct pyramid shrines shared the central space of the city, although they were ranked in status, with Tojil and the Kavek first (Carmack, 1981). Each had its holy place in the wilds and an "historical" settlement recognized as the ancestral place of the lineage, all of them located in the Chujuyup region (Fig. 3.1), the place where the *Popol Vuh* says the gathered tribes, K'iche's and their allies, awaited the dawn to commemorate the first emergence of the sun. What I will argue is the actual setting for this mythic emergence can be identified by this method that Carmack pioneered, and exact identifications reinforced by current usage. What is more, the significance of the sacred landscape as currently employed enriches our understanding of why this specific theo-topography was chosen as the setting for creation's dawn in the sacred book of council. This understanding in turn sheds light upon a curious feature of Utatlan, a cave complex that was built along with the site, and built with its own meaningful architectural features. For those seeking to understand what the Maya "saw" in natural caves, built ones provide a rich ideal type.

It is important to note several things at this point. One is that some of the mountains where the K'iche' gods were first hidden, that later become the pyramid names at Uatlan, are actual parts of or peaks in mountains that can be seen on a clear day from the K'iche' capitol, some ten miles to the northeast of the citadels' valley location. The shrines are located on part of a complex range that includes a major, stand-alone peak called the dawning place, or Saqiribal, not far from the other sacred sites just mentioned, but further to the east (see Fig. 3.1), connected by a narrow causeway. This shrine sits atop a mountain that serves as the eastern-most peak of a ridgeline that tops the Chuacus range, the mountains that produce the rain-giving clouds of the rainy season, and separate the central K'iche' proper (the descendants from the ruling lineages) from other closely related Maya groups to the north. This east-most altar of the great series of "mesas" (altars) then and now I believe to be the imagined place where "it dawns" in the Popol Vuh, where the many related highland Maya lineages are described as having come together for the mythical moment of the start of time (see e.g., Townsend, 1982). The "dawning" I believe is the event marking the initiation of what essentially constitutes the transition from the time of myth to the time of political history, in the document. It is where lineage and linear history begins, as it depicts in this pivotal section the time of the first political relations with other groups of Mayas, and where in space the K'iche' imagined the Popol Vuh's most fundamental event to have happened, at the Place Where It Dawns, *Saqiribal*. I suggest here that this particular "dawning place," on a mountain called Xeabaj just south of San Andres Sajcabaja, is the one actually mentioned in the Popol Vuh, and that all the other "dawning" sites mentioned in the text are derivative (again, local appropriations of sacred natural sites), sites overlooking the particular settlements with which they are associated (see Fig. 3.1). Prior to this time in the text, the authors note again and again, "it had not yet dawned."

Dennis Tedlock's reading of the Popol Vuh suggests that when the K'iche' return from the mythic place of Tulan Zuyua, Seven Caves, Seven Canyons, which he places as going back originally to the seven cave lobes under the Temple of the Sun at Teotihuacan (rather than the post-classic Toltec land of reeds,) they move almost immediately to the top of a low mountain four miles west of San Andres Sajcabaja, called Chipixab (see Fig. 3.1). Here the tribes recalled having crossed over the sea after their exodus from Tulan, which Tedlock locates in the Laguna de Terminos region to the northwest. However, they say they went to Tulan in the east, and came from the east to get to the place where they would see it dawn. My reading of the text suggests that at this time before the first dawn, we are not talking about an accurate geography, despite some recognizable place names, but rather in a symbolic language, far closer to dream landscapes than 1:50,000 maps. How can K'iche' history in the political sense really be mapped out if it has not yet dawned? The Tulan in the east is a mythical place where there is "sun" (as part of a whole civilization, a city) before it dawns, that is, a prior sun, in the Mexica sense of a prior creation. Mesoamerican cultures, including the Maya, are characterized by multiple creations (Gossen, 2002).

The key to this reading is the sea-crossing. Chamulas and K'iche's are alike in seeing the edge of this creation and this time-period to be the ocean. Crossing the

ocean on the stepping stones I read as leaving the previous creation, a necessity in preparation for this one, the dawn of the current “sun.” It is the lineage heroes and their still animate gods who leave the prior creation, emerging from the seven caves, seven canyons (these are K’iche’ similes in couplet) to guide the allied tribes out of the mythic world of the previous era, emerging into the light of a new day, and making a bridge between the mythical prior period (which validates their gods as originating in holy Tulan, in the late post-classic more a concept than a place), and the times of the political glory of the K’iche’ Empire. In other words, they emerge from mythic time to embrace a political existence, by means of crossing the sea with their gods and their blood-allies. They take council on this hill (foreshadowing the council book) and begin to name themselves. This is the first human political act, and they this while, “still waiting for the dawning.”(Tedlock, 1985:177.) Then the gods spoke, telling them to get off the exposed hill and to go into the mountains, to hide them, so they would be safe from capture. This hill, Chipixab, is already on the edge of their post-classic geographic homeland, only one valley to the south, separated by a cloud-bound range (the Chuacus Mountains) in which most of the place-names occur associated with the birth and development of the early K’iche’ polity, and where the gods are soon to be hidden. This in the structure of the text is the “set up” for the dawning, as they move toward their (soon to be) sacred landscape, where their gods will be hidden. When the “dawn” arrives, and the sun comes up, these animate lineage gods transform themselves into stone, the idols that will later serve as the new State deities down in Utatlan, inside the temples of the same names, Tojil, Awilix, and Jakavitz (see Fig. 3.2).

From Chipixab, one can see all of the north side of the Chuacus range, including the small Santa Rosa Chujuyup plateau on which is the early K’iche’ archaeological site of Chitinamit, (believed by Carmack, 1981, to be the citadel of Jacavitz,) and also, closer and far more prominent, the pyramid-shaped mountain called both Xeabaj (below the rock) and at the peak, Saqiribal (“Scarbal,” in a 1:50,000 map-maker’s rendition.) The text takes us into this range, saying that each god is placed in its hiding spot, the names of which still remain the same at the time the Popol Vuh was written. For the first two deity hiding places, it is still the current functioning altar-site name, Pawilix and Patojil (see Fig. 3.1.)

Jakavitz is more complicated. While Carmack (1981) has made a very credible claim for an archaeological site near Santa Rosa on a low hill on the flank of the plateau to be the early fortress of Jakavitz, I do not think this is where the god was hidden. Awilix, the lowest and most southern, has feminine associations and is logically first to be installed. The text goes on, “And then Hacauitz (as with all my K’iche’ language terms, I write it *Jakavitz* in keeping with the new Guatemalan official Maya languages orthography, while Tedlock keeps to the original) was placed above a great red river (Tedlock, in his endnote on this passage says, “Given that the writers of the P.V. usually transcribe both “house”(ha) and “water (or river)” (haa) as *ha*, this could also be “great red house.” Red was perhaps the commonest color for the stuccoed exteriors of Mayan public buildings, going all the way back to the pre-classic, Tedlock, 1985:303.) Hacauitz is the name of the mountain today, and it became their citadel (This is Carmack’s early settlement, Chitinamit). . . .Hacauitz

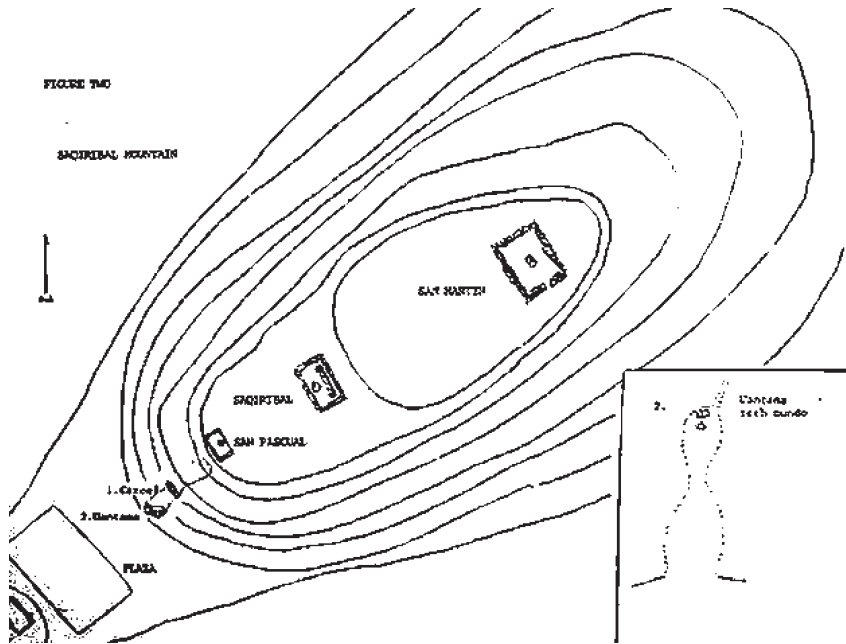


Fig. 3.2 Plan view Saqiribal Mountain where the lineage deities are believed to emerge from mythic time and begin to name themselves, their first political act, and with the dawn, transform themselves into stone

(the god) didn't stay in the forest. It was on a bare mountain that Hacauitz was hidden." (Tedlock, 1985:178) Now "bare" is Tedlock's reading of the literal term "white" (*zaki*), so a more direct translation would be "white mountain", and other metaphoric uses of white such as clear, illuminated, unadorned and wise. It is also a play on words, for the word for dawning, Saqiribal, is derived from the same root, literally, "whitening" (*saq*). The hiding place for the mountain god (*vitz/uitz* is Chol and probably proto-Maya for mountain; *Jaca* means open) was not a low hill, but as with the other two god-hiding places, a mountain. Xeabaj is the most prominent and rocky mountain in the area, where the dawning shrine/cave are located. What is more, if the reading is "above the red house", a likely candidate would be the pre-classic and Classic Maya site of La Lagunilla, directly below and to the east of the mountain (see Fig. 3.1.) If it is referring to above the red river, this works as well, as it rises above a tributary of the Chixoy, a river also known as the Black River presumably due to the soil content when it rains.

As is the case with the other related lineage groups, there is both a settlement below, and a shrine-site above. What would confuse the reader today but not when this was written, is that Jakavitz as the place of god-ensconcing, and Jakavitz as the first citadel of the K'iche'an alliance, are not the same location, but rather in "mountain-plane" relationship of above and below. This pattern is also visible in the other two settlements

close by today, Cruz Che, and Oquin, both of which have their local dawning places up above them (see Fig. 3.1). This concept of each settlement having its own dawning place is ubiquitous among K'iche' in Highland Guatemala, and I have come across it among the Kaqchikel around Late Atitlan as well. To my knowledge, only the main dawning site has caves as a part of the sacred space used in ritual. Further inquiry is necessary to see if the other, lesser dawning places have caves, but they are not noted to have them in the extant literature.⁷ The point is that these are altar sites for local settlements' commemorating the mythic dawning, but they are replicas of the first, single place in the K'iche' imaginary.

To sum up, for those not deeply familiar with K'iche' and this challenging document, there were three central deities who were carried to their Chujuyub-region hiding places in preparation for the dawn of K'iche' political history, and two of them still have altars named after them (Pawilix and Patojil) functioning today, whereas there is no "Pajacavitz", and the Jacavitz identification made by Carmack (Chitinamit) is not the same place as the place where the god Jakavitz was placed on the eve of the dawning. The most obvious candidate for this third god's hiding place is the cozy caves of Saqiribal. This fact is important for a number of reasons. First, it delineates a geography of creation in keeping with general Mesoamerican trends, a mountain with caves rising above and surrounded by waters and other rain-bearing peaks, a natural model for the primordial pyramid. In addition, it clarifies our understanding of the arrangement of space in the Utatlan site and its cave, as we shall see, and links closely to the initiation rites of current shamans in this same region, and in this same cave complex.

⁷The text, after explaining how the culture heroes each stayed with their god in their place of hiding and penitence, says something that contradicts this, seemingly: "So they stayed there in unity... in unity they waited for the dawn, there on top of the mountain named Hacauitz" (Tedlock, 1985:179). Then it states that the other clans and allies have their gods hidden close by, but that they are together for the dawning. "In unity they stopped there, and in unity they had their dawning there. In unity they waited for the rising of the great star named daybringer (Venus)" (Tedlock, 1985:180). Here "in unity" they share their great pain about how they all once had one identity, and "one mountain," and how they are now in exile. By contrast, the text explains that the gods feel instantly at home in their hideouts. And while it next says each god had his own dawning place, I see this as a reference to the place where dawning is reenacted for each lineage group (as with Cruz Che and Oquin, see Fig. 1). The rest of the text, before and after, treats the dawning as something happening in a single place—with all the gods present together with the tribes. It goes on, "there was only one dawn for all the tribes," and later on it describes how the people on the Hacauitz mountain are not yet numerous: "their dawning was there and they burned copal there, incensing the direction of the rising sun. They came from there, "the east: it is their own mountain, their own plain." This is key to the next sentences, where they say the place became their citadel, because I think the citadel is the plain that matches the mountain. Such couplets not only designate one's home territory, but emphasize the contrast and connection between the mountain shrine for dawning rituals and the fortified town in the flatter lands below (*Juyup-taq'aj*, or "Mountain-plain" in K'iche', a phrase that also designates a town, and is used thus in prayers). Clearly the text does not take us to three dawns, but one, as it goes on to say they are all sad and wondering where their brothers are who they knew in Tulan, "We left them behind. They said. It was a great weight on their hearts, up there on Hacauitz." (Tedlock, 1985:183) (Fig. 3.4).

The Dawning of the Day-keeper

What follow is a summary of a contemporary rite of passage and initiation, as practiced by K'iche' Maya diviners in the very same region in which the Popol Vuh was written four and a half centuries ago. This is the kind of circuit-traveling rite that involves the ceremonial use of caves, archaeological sites, mountains and circuits of ritual visitation determined by specialists in Maya calendar calculations. It involves the archaeological site of Utatlan and the above mentioned Dawning Place, as the starting place and ending place of this cycle of initiation, a circuit whose beginning and ending place are to be found in a cave. The ritual has been observed only a few times by this author, but informants assured me that it is the norm for initiation of calendar specialists, called *Aj Q'ij* (day/time/sun-keeper, diviner), in most parts of the nine *municipios* (townships) of the Central Quiche Basin region (Earle, 1982, 2000). What makes this initiation ritual remarkable derives from its current use of sacred space that appear to have associations to places and uses that can be traced back long into the past. I am not suggesting little has changed in the centuries since European invasion, but it is apparent that we can better understand both the past and its relation to the present by examining this contemporary religious appropriation of natural and cultural (that is, built) caves as part of Maya sacred space—space that is meaningful as it is enacted in ceremony.

The previous discussion of the Dawning Place and my assertion that it is identical to the one in the Popol Vuh comes in part from the fact that the site currently serves as the ending point of the day-keeper/diviner initiation circuit for the nine *municipios* of the region, and that this is roughly the same as area encompassed by the contact-period K'iche' principal lineages (see maps in Carmack, 1981:76, 185, 363). Another suggestive element lies with the shrines themselves. While clearly the current “tables” are of recent vintage, the foundations of these raised masonry platforms appear pre-Columbian, and are reminiscent of some of the altar shrine sites found by Alan Ichon above Canilla' to the east. So the Dawning Place is both an ancient stage for the ritual of beginning of creation for the K'iche', replication the mythic moment on periodic occasions, and at least today, also the place where the initiate's spirit is reborn as a holy diviner, in a spiritually transformative “new dawn” ceremony. So for the novitiate, the ending of the 260 days of initiation training takes him of her to the mythical beginning place, where the ancestors awaited the first dawn, and where the initiate awaits the new 260 day cycle. This initiation day for this region is the day name 8 Deer (not 8 Monkey as it is farther to the west, as in Momostenango, B. Tedlock, 1982). Deer are of special importance symbolically to the post-classic K'iche' elites, and given great attention in the ethnohistoric documents (Carmack, 1981:80). And there is more.

The final day of initiation, utilizes prominently the ruins of Utatlan. It involves both ceremony in and among the ancient temple foundations, and a major ceremony in the cave complex below the temples, directly under the site. In fact, one might well imagine the entire day as a kind of pilgrimage from the house to the man-made cave and ruined site of the post-classic K'iche' kings, then traveling further back in time, passing both current and ancient towns and altars, to the dawn of (this) creation.

Caves as Sacred Space: Coming and Going

We know that in all of Mesoamerica, caves have sacred meaning, and we know something of about what it is. For Toltecs and surely before, caves speak to notions of birth, origins, and emergence (Heyden and Gendrop, 1975). The seven caves myth that filtered down from the Toltecs no doubt goes farther back. The caves inside of the great temple at Teotihuacan also have their seven-lobed, human-modified cave, and there are many other examples of this idea of caves or canyons as places associated with origins. I concur with the point made by Bassie-Sweet (1991:173), as well as Doris Heyden, that the cave was the epitome of the emergence location, as exemplified by the pan-Mesoamerican notion of the sun, moon, sky, and planets (all gods) coming out of caves, and as the origin and emergence place for winds and rain. Numerous Maya ethnographies confirm this. But the cosmology itself, I see as parallel to if not generated from, the spatial and practice parameters of daily life (Earle, 1986, 2000). Caves and emergence, as well as its complementary counterpart, descent, return, have a quotidian template in birth and death, and in the shorter time-frame of 24h, waking day and the dark of night.

The most obvious cave-like structure in the K'iche' home, beyond the house itself, is the sweat bath (Houston, 1996 suggests the Temple of the Foliated cross at the Maya archaeological site of Palenque functioned as a sweat bath, and had many cave glyphs associated with it.) In this structure several times each week the family enters the dark hot chamber to bathe, apologizing always to the owner of the earth and sweat baths upon entering its sacred space. This is moreover where the midwife prepares the client for child-birth. The *tuj* is intimately involved with the birthing process, not so much as the actual site of birthing (this is more often in the kitchen, where there is more room), but where the client is treated for the critical 40-day period of external version massage before it, and the equally critical 40 days of quarantine and recovery after it. In some ways, the movement between the kitchen and the sweat bath are analogous to the initiation rite, involving movement between two enclosures, the fire site in the house and the place of cleansing and birth preparations. The two fires parallel the two shrines associated with the house, the first inside (the tiered house altar), and the second out on the edge of the fields (Earle, 2000). The shamanic initiate first visits these inside-outside house altars, before going to the cave and the altars of Utatlan, and finishing with the cave and altar complex at Saqiribal.

I would also concur with Bassie-Sweet that caves are recipients of earthy departures (the dead) as well, as a part of the larger system of complementary oppositions that always make major contrasting elements of the cosmos dual (Earle, 2000). One aspect of that dualism connects humanity with the sun and its path; another leads to the idea of caves as exits, too, as characterized by the descent of the sun at the end of the day in the west. As I have noted, human life can be metaphorically expressed in the daily cycle of the sun (Earle, 1986, 2000). One's sun has set serves as a polite euphemism for death in K'iche'. Birth is like the sun's emergence, death its return into the earth. And so, likewise, our souls (Bassie-Sweet, 1991:175–176). In this abstracted sense, caves are the place from where people all emerge, and to

which all return at the end, following the path of the ancestors. As we shall see, caves are also associated with ancestors, in the current K'iche' rites I reference here. Moreover, while Christianity has imposed the municipal graveyard as the post-contact setting for the dead, they continue to retain small enclosed altars located at one end of the grave that serve as places for the shamans to make contact with those passed on. One could argue these resemble miniature caves. In any case, caves are entwined with notions of death as well as birth, and the larger rites of diviners are closely tied to practices and concepts embedded in everyday life.

Initiation Rite of Passage as Descent, Transformation, and Emergence

As we crawled through the tight passageway in the darkening cave, it opened up into a small room with a well-used altar at the far wall. I could dimly see the remains of a chicken offering, wax and incense offerings. Others had been here, and recently. A large diagonal crack ran behind the altar going down into blackness, and there was air emerging from it, leaving a flickering breeze among the last sputtering candles. Flashes of lightning danced at the door, barely visible through the narrows. Rain clouds were gathering in the mountain peaks of the Chuacus just to the south. We got out offerings, and Don Lucas began the prayer. He mentions the parts of the place by name, this the dawning place, that the place of the jail of souls, he says the names the owners of the shrines above our heads maybe fifty feet, including dawning place shrine, and the altar of the scribe of the dawning place, Don Pascual of the Stone, then the shrine of Holy World Martin, where we have just given offerings, and then finally, naming where we were, here now, on our knees, the altar at the window of the Holy World, Uantana rech mundo. With that done, as we watched the candles flickering in the earth-emergent breeze, we heard the noise, all of a sudden. It sounded to my ears like old propeller plane engines, or big old house fans. I thought maybe the exhaustion I suffered from the climb was making me hear things. But noting the noise at the same instant, Don Lucas, turned slowly with a smile and a twinkle, and said in a hushed voice, "That is the sound of the machines from inside the sacred world." He pointed with his lips. Oh no, was it that the urban sounds typical back in traffic-clogged Santa Cruz were now emerging from up in the sacred mountain cave? I could not really find an explanation. Don Lucas continued, "Yes and they have some pretty big machines in there, and cars, busses, everything like up here. (from field notes, 1977)

The shrine complex of Saqiribal serves as the end-point of the initiation process for new calendar diviners, and also marks a location used for this same purpose by related *municipios*, all of them direct descendants of the K'iche' people who supported the K'iche' Empire, as documented in the Popol Vuh. The survivors have kept up the ancient tradition of greeting the dawn, but instead of investing a polity, they are investing a shaman, one who will, "keep the days." Perhaps the earliest model for politically legitimate power was the shaman, master of power for other purposes. It seems they outlived the lineage-based authorities of empire by quite a few centuries, as well they must have preceded them by many, many more.

Here I would like to suggest that the cave serves as a vital piece of a rite of passage that transforms the initiate, through the manipulation of culturally powerful

and polyvalent symbols. The edge is linked to the center through physical travel within a temporarily charged, that is, ritually transformed landscape. The transformation process involves leaving the daily surroundings of home, and “in its place” going back in time, to the edge of this creation. The pilgrimage begins at the house altar and outside home altar (called the *warabalja*), and then goes directly to the *ruinas*, within the “*ojer tinamit*” or ancient ancestral “town” of Uatlan, the initiate and his teacher will supplicate at the many shrines both in the ceremonial center of the site, and down inside the main cave (here the cave offerings are first). In the cave, the two will call forth the ancient heroes of the Conquest who are believed to reside in a kind of out-of-time primordial city deep inside the cave, a city replicating and updated Late Post Classic Imperial city. Rey K’iche’ is there, with his queen, as well as *Rey Tzunun* (King Hummingbird), and *Rey Tep* (Tepew?), *Rey Miul* (King Cloud), *Capitan Tecun Uman*, and a court of other luminaries, along with the red or silver dwarf, the one who gives the chop of lightning knowledge to the attentive and dedicated diviner, sending the *c’aypa* or body lightning into him or her (B. Tedlock, 1982, 1986). This child-like fellow (called *Tzitzimit* or *k’oxol*) is said to be very tricky and extremely quick of movement, tongue, and thought. His unpredictable nature can bring wealth or disaster, insight or the feared lightning bolt. He is believed to call the lightning and then move away at the last instant, and who ever was with him at the time is struck. But he can also indicate where a treasure has been buried, or indicate some power object, and most relevant for my theme, he is the principal deity who “owns” the power of the divining bundle. As with so many of the characters supposedly dwelling about the cave, they are to be feared normally and entreated, embraced, and gifted now in shamanic initiation, in this alternate time in the dark of day.

From this alternate, separated, and intensified time that the Maya calendar stipulates as ideal for the great pilgrimage of initiation, one of moving within the various networks of sacred spaces associated with the ancient site, separated as it all is as a shine and archeological park from everyday life. Only day outing groups of students, an occasional tourist, and K’iche’ shamans come to this place, especially into the cave. The ceremonies of the cave are followed by those above ground. In a pairing of above and below ground space that resonates with the vertical dualism, in a pairing of above and below ground space that resonates with the vertical dualism of altars in daily life, the two levels at Saqiribal, and the larger Maya pattern of doing powerful rituals twice in contrasting spatial fields (Earle, 1986, 2000). The journey down, off the north side of the ruined city, and into over a hundred and fifty feet of cave passages represents an entrance into a place in its own time zone, so to speak. The initiate is thrust into the land of the K’iche’ kings, queens, warriors and magicians, as well as nearly every other non-ordinary, nocturnal and/or cave or canyon-dwelling spirit creature, while the diviner who is initiating narrates the trespass (see more detail below).

Once the initiate is presented before the many cave residents (ancient K’iche’ heroes, the huge earth serpent, the dwarf, and the owners of all the local sacred geography, and the altars to be visited in the initiation circuit, among others), once he or she is shown the tunnel to the volcano in the next valley, and introduced

to the many male and female earth spirit-deities or “*mundos*” that live in their underground city; once he or she is inundated in the senses with copal smoke, the strong impact of home brewed rum, the drone of prayer and the flicker of candle, one emerges to the surface altars blackened by soot in the face, hair and nostrils.

In the central plaza at Utatlan, the most important shrine is in the center, operating directly on top of what Carmack believes to be the Feathered Serpent shrine (*quk'umutz*) (Carmack, 1995). This altar lies directly between the two main facing pyramids of the site, named after two lineage deities hidden in two mountain peaks in the same spatial arrangement (see Figs. 3.1 and 3.2). Today diviners use this place as a central part of the giving of offerings, a major “*mesa*” or altar place. Don Lucas, my ritual relation and principal source for the ethnographic information here, sees this large circle traced in the weathered plaster plaza as a kind of stairway down into the world. He also sees it as connected to the sky domain, via the hole in the face of the western pyramid, that Carmack identifies as Tojil and which is now called the Primary, or “principal”. Here and in the facing temples, and again next to the ball court, additional ceremonies are enacted at shrine sites to inform the various parts of the world that the initiate has taken up the bundle of shamanic healing and seeing (active shrines are marked with an X, see Fig. 3.4). There are in theory 13 above shrines in all, and 12 below (not all are typically used however, usually no more than 4 above and from one to 7 in the cave.) Many of the above shrines appear to have matching ones below, inside what Don Lucas calls the *nimajul*, the big cave, as will be discussed more below. The ceremonies are also parallel, involving elaborate and lengthy naming of the sacred geography, invocation, supplication, thanks and promises to saints, earth powers, cloud “owners”, animal and plant “owners” and many other unseen powers, calling forth and addressing diverse entities with whom the diviner has affinity, and locating the prayer-maker between the “heart of earth” and “heart of sky”, central deity concepts.

This “big” cave, one of at least four artificially constructed caves carved into the volcanic tuff underneath Utatlan, is by far the most sizable and significant of them. It goes over 50 m in, beginning over 3 m to the ceiling, and slowly shrinking to the height of a man. The cave has a distinctive floor plan, a system of altar sites, and other complexities that reveal its prehispanic origins (see Fig. 3.3). The cave immediately below the main one is far shorter, without any branchings, and is associated with the “*camahuiles*” or sacred stones, and is also a resting place for the spirits that oversee “witchcraft (*itzel*), and is not discussed here. The other two caves over to the southwest, are also much smaller and not generally in use. From the standpoint of initiation, it is the upper cave on roughly the north side that is of significance. This cave is approached and entered from the northwest moving southeast, with the main altars “looking” west and northwest, a similar spatial arrangement of the altar outside the home, and the cave in Dawning Place mountain to the northeast (nearly all K'iche' altars are faced looking east or north, with one's back to the west or south). This ceremony places the initiate at the “center” of the initiation transformation process, after the household double altar, and before the arduous trip to the dawning place (Fig. 3.4).

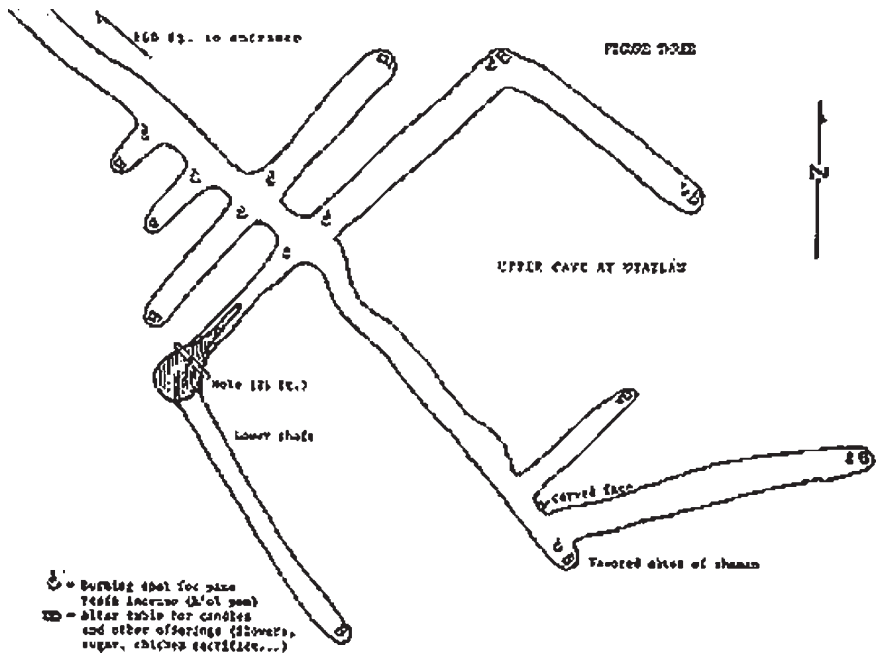


Fig. 3.3 Upper cave at Utatlán showing the various altars and locations, which are the focus of modern rituals. The floor plan, system of altars, and other complexities in this cave reveal a pre-Hispanic origin

It is as if to say in ritual the place to start the rite of passage and reintegration lies at the home of the household spirits, in the local home site of house, patio, field and forest. Then one journeys away from the home to the *ojer tinamit*, the ancient city, the realm of history, to a cave below where the ancestors were killed fighting the Conquest, a history every K'iche' knows about and which is annually reenacted in the "Dance of the Conquest" in most of the township centers of the region. Utatlan is where tradition has it that the survivors of the ancient K'iche' civilization, transformed into mythic beings, have become the spirits that still reside in the ruins and its caves. The trek then goes to the church and cofradia houses of San Pedro Jocopilas, a town some five miles away where two of the old K'iche' lineages still reside. This is obligatory because the two church saints, San Pedro and San Pablo, also give permission to divine. Then one passes by an early archeological site near Santa Rosa, to find divining tools, and ends at the Dawning Place to be presented before the Holy Earth at the World Window.

In the dualistic division of symbolic temporal labors, the 260-day round is the one to carry personal fate. The day of conception, seen as the day the menstrual period should have arrived but was prevented by the moon grandmother, and the day of birth, represent about one round later on the calendar's double wheels of 20 days and

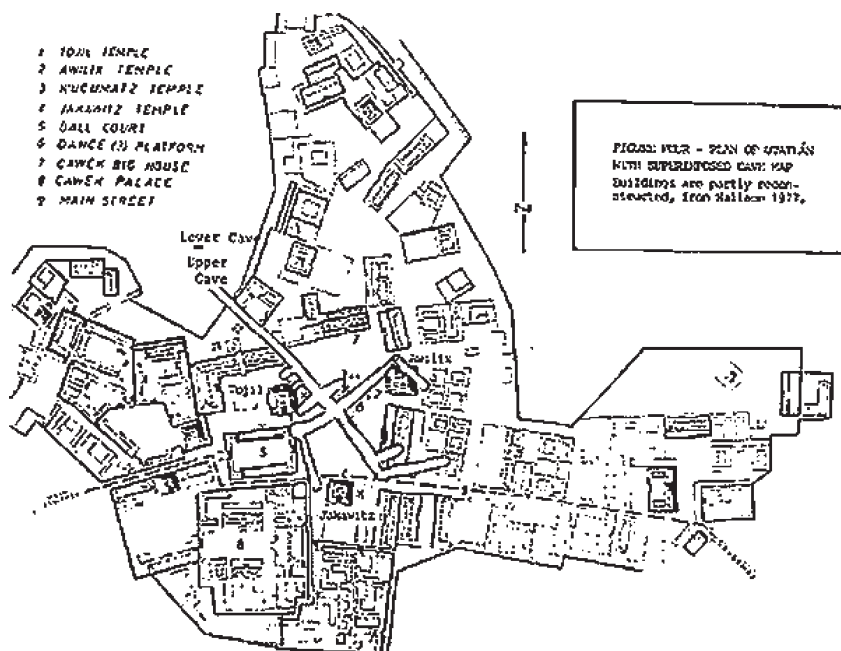


Fig. 3.4 The site of Utatlán as it is situated over the cave

13 numerical companions (260 days). Today for the traditionalists who follow the ancient calendar, the day of birth determines many aspects of one's personality and fate, just as it did in ancient times. Since the initiation of a new diviner requires a symbolic "marriage" to the sacred bundle that serves as the instrument for enacting divination, one is transforming one's prior social position, as if reemerging as a different kind of person, born anew into this new social and spiritual status. To be able to gain this new status, the initiate has to ritually leave home, descend into the world of dead ancestors and transcendent powers, making offerings and pleading with forces of the world for the correct path, and then, after reiterating the same in the above-ground site, travel to the East to go do it all one final time there. This final time it is not done in the crumbling ruins that are still known to be the ancient city of the K'iche', nor in the township center where the saints of the divining bundle are said to rule, but in the edge place in the East, far from towns, roads, churches, and farms, where the municipal boundaries converge.

By edge I mean the edge of where people live. But I also mean the edge of the visible spiritual universe, as Saqiribal becomes one of the many mountains that delimit the valley of the Central K'iche', and this one in the same east by northeasterly direction from which we know the K'iche' claim they arrived centuries ago. Then as now it was called, the Dawning Place. It may have always been a place for shamanic initiation for the region. With no archeological excavation of the shrine

region on top of the mountain, we do not know how long it may have been venerated, but just below and to the northwest is a large site that goes back to the Early Classic, the already mentioned La Lagunilla. In that site, at the earliest level (middle pre-classic) Dr. Alain Ichon excavated a simple burial at the bottom of a large pyramid containing an elderly male. In his folded-over hand was what the local excavating workers immediately recognized as the equipment of a calendar diviner, including rock crystals and smooth river pebbles (Alan Ichon, personal communication). That man may also have been initiated at Saqiribal.

On the day of initiation, the novice accompanies his or her teacher to the cave at Utatlan early, with many offerings for below and above, so as to be able to continue the journey to the East. The prayers announce the circuit that will take them to the Dawning Place, and its “World Window” (*uantana rech mundo*) as the last cave is called. Before getting to the Dawning Place, but after San Pedro, the two must stop at a place close to the archaeological site of Chitimamit, the first K’iche’ settlement in the region. But the journey is actually to another archeological site about a mile away, that Ken Brown believes to go back much further in time (Brown personal communication). At this site, the novitiate seeks out anything unusual, especially a rock crystal is considered appropriate, and this goes into the initiate’s divinatory bundle. These crystals are later used in healing and divining (Tedlock, 1982; Earle, 1986, 2000). After this stop, one either moves generally east along the ridge or one goes northeast, and approaches the shrine from the north side, by San Andres (see Fig. 3.1).

From this little town the Dawning Place rises like a huge pyramid, with natural levels or steps of fifty to a hundred feet in height, until one has climbed some three thousand feet. Coming down the series of shrines from the west, one arrives at a trail on a flat, narrow spit of land, with every fifty feet or so supporting another small shrine, some in use and others not. After nine of them, one comes to a slight rise where the area widens out to form a small plaza, a space large enough for dancing and a marimba, which some initiates have as sacred entertainment during the night of initiation. Above this is a face of stone and atop that, a flat area on which perch two little shrine plazas, at the very top of the mountain (see Fig. 3.2). The higher one to the east, called San Martin Mundo, is one of the non-Christian “saints” that occupies a “corner” of the world, and with three other “mundos” (San Salvador, San Creador, and Santo Dios) stakes out the four corners of the earth. Then on the southwest side, there is the second altar site, with two shrines, one to Saqiribal itself, and a second “*secretario*” or assisting shrine called San Pascual Abaj, the *santo* of stones and any number of other issues too notorious for other more saintly personages. Below this altar plaza in the direction of the plaza is a cliff face, almost sheer. On the face of this drop, half way between the two shrine complexes and the plaza, are two caves.

The first, small and shallow, is the soul jail, called *carcel* from the Spanish for “prison.” The second is the Window of the World, *uantana rech mundo*, and this is the place where the petitioning and offering activities of the initiation comes to a close. After entering a chamber the size of a small room, one has to squeeze through a narrow middle area, not unlike a ritual birthing canal, and then one comes into a larger room, just high enough to stand in. Running up left to down right, on

the far wall, is a gaping dark crack, out of which a light breeze of air blows. How far in the crack goes in, I do not know. But it is at this place the final offerings are given, and the initiate, now presented formally at the start of time and in the narrowest confines of space, begins to be a day-keeper, a healer and religious specialist for her or his community. Emerging from this last cave, carefully climbing back up to the double platform, all there is left to do is await the new day. As one might imagine, the place has a great and dramatic view of the rising sun.

Caves, Ritual, and History: The Utatlan Axis

There is much more to this specific ritual not relevant to this discussion. I give brief accounting of this ethnographic experience of the cave as sacred space so as to suggest possible conceptual and embodied similarities with other practices in caves in other Maya areas or in other Maya times (as with Brady and Prufer, 2005). Conceptually, I see the cave serving as a K'iche' metaphor for birth (emergence) and death (re-entrance), reiterating at a sacred level practices in daily life, as well as a location understood to connect this time/place with another. The cave as experienced introduces darkness into the day (especially the deep one at Utatlan) and suggests penetration into the holy Earth by a subterranean pathway akin to the road to Xibalbaj, the underworld domain in the Popol Vuh. It was to this domain the two sets of hero twins had to go in order for the sun (and moon) to eventually emerge, and for sickness to fall under the control of shamanic healers. As in any typical Mesoamerican cosmos, it is layered, and the cave is the door between this level and the one below. It is from that level that the sun, the wind, and the rain-bearing clouds all emerge from the innards of the sanctified orifices of the earth, as the twins did. The new agricultural year is born with the emerging rain clouds, from these mountain caves. The sun returns, the corn seed emerges from the Maya house, the new born child emerges in birth, ending one round of 260 days and initiating a new one, beginning the fate-count of that child. The new initiate emerges from the two house altars to the above and below altars of center and cave at Utatlan, invoking the ancestors and heroes of K'iche' history, and asking for the power of time from them, there in the midmost location.

From this place in the land of the west, the movement is ever to the east, reversing the solar path (or imitating its nocturnal counter-move, the night sun direction of death) to the place of reemergence, at the very doorstep or window of the holy earth, the generative power of all life (Earle, 2000), and the home of death. Emergence from this cave by the initiated, the culmination of the rebirth of 260 days, commits the novice to follow the dictates of the sun, to count its days, to read its powers on the table of time (Earle, 2000). It is the initiate's rebirth, after a gestation of 260 days of training (Earle, 1983b) Returning to his or her house, the new day keeper has retraced the path of the hero twins, the sun and moon, and relived their mythic, transformative journey. But she or he has also revisited the history of the ancestors, and with that enacted and embodied in ceremony a path of historical awareness.

So it has been, I suspect, for centuries. The building of the Utatlan caves by the Late Postclassic K'iche' suggests an urban reiteration of natural formations known for many years before the imperial capitol, an appropriation of a then already ancient practice of shamanic initiation transmogrified to the bowels of their mountain citadel, a remaking of the sacred close at hand. This practice of building an artificial cave to sanctify a site is not unique to this one. Zaculeu, Mixco Viejo, and the already mentioned La Lagunilla are other archaeological examples in the Western Highlands of Guatemala, and others exist elsewhere in Mesoamerica. It temporally echoed the Mesoamerican myth of caves of origin that under gird such sites as Teotihuacan, the Mexica myth of Atzlan's swampy caves, as well as the caves of the Toltecs (Heyden and Gendrop, 1975), and spatially captures the place of origins locally, tying the local place of emergence in the "K'iche'laj" or wilds of nature with the K'iche' empire and its central place. One might even conceptualize the Utatlan upper cave lay-out as a copy of the seven caves of the Toltecs (excluding the descending tunnel as a separate complex), a compelling position given how much the Popul Vuh harkens back to things Toltec for its own legitimacy.

Holland, working in Chiapas with Tzotzil Mayas of San Andres, notes of the sacred landscape in this township, "Conceptually then, the sacred mountains may suggest the family tree and mythological places of origin of their respective patrilineages" (Holland, 1961). He also suggests that this may be in part historical memory, citing the archaeological record: "Archaeological survey shows that the Classic Maya migrants into highland Chiapas settled on steep ridgelines, bluffs, hilltops, and sharp pinnacles, probably for defensive reasons. In late Post-Classic times there was a shift from these headland settlements to the more concentrated settlements around the larger valleys, probably accompanied by the dispersed settlement pattern. As this happened, the original headland settlements may have evolved into the sacred mountains and places where ancestor worship developed" (Holland, 1962:6-8.) A review of the post-dawning historical accounts in the Popol Vuh suggest a very similar pattern, as the ancestors of the K'iche' first settled defensively on ridgelines and hilltops in the Chuacus range, only much later to drop down into the valley to build their city, once they had defeated their enemies (Carmack, 1981:123-124.) What Holland suspected a half century ago in Chiapas is amply confirmed for the K'iche'; the recreation of the altars above their earlier rough scrabble settlements in the mountains to the east, in the arrangements of their pyramids and caves at Utatlan is more than intensification and appropriation. It is the spatial arrangement of history, an architectonic remembering of what the Popol Vuh recalls, turning the seat of their empire into a "spatialized" story of origins tied to the east/East, to both where they came from historically as well as mythically. This connecting of origins and history to the citadel served to powerfully legitimate the politically dominant lineages of the K'iche', as they reiterated and sanctified their prior mountain settlements (around Santa Rosa, see Fig. 3.1) in their most sanctified central place. That the living shamans still refer to this same plaza and adjacent pyramid (Tojil, according to Carmack, 1981) as "central" and "principal" again are more than suggestive.

Brady (1997) has commented on an aspect of the cave my *compadre* and I have shared since 1977, that the cave complex is laid out in some sort of connection with what is above it. While the associations now may not be identical to the past, they have an order to them with some correspondences. Returning to the north rim of the site, one enters past a circular altar at the mouth, where ceremony is done upon exiting the cave. The edge of the opening is the *carcel*, the jail of trapped souls (like the upper cave in Saqiribal). The cave is straight, with the floor rising, for about 50m, long enough to get really dark. Here one encounters the first side tunnels, three on the right, one on the left, each longer than the last. The ones on the right are associated with the name of the site, "*Q'umarcaj*" (which meets old or rotting reeds, a possible reference to Tulan, place of reeds), and the ones on the left side are associated with Santa Maria, the lunar lady. This area is invoked for *permisos*, permission to proceed, where one pays for entrance, and contact with the site itself. This place, some 50m in, is below *Tojil*, the principal deity of the ruling lineage of the K'iche' at contact, and is associated with payment, as is the day name in the K'iche Maya calendar from whence his name, *toj*. There were three major lineages under Tojil's hegemony, which may explain the three passages, since Tojil was the hegemonic cult of the state (Carmack, 1981:405). It is also worth note that the Tojil temple is where the shamans say there is a stairway up into the heavens, as just beyond the three is a passageway that goes definitively straight down.

This next right turn off the main axis quickly drops down into a vertical shaft 7-m deep. A beam and a rope to descend with were present above this shaft when I mapped the site in 1979, but are now gone. Into the south side a few meters below the axis is a tunnel that runs in over 20m to the southeast, right under the ball court. This cave inside a cave is believed by many shamans I have spoken with to be a tunnel that goes a huge distance to the west, to such places as the volcano Santa Maria above Quezaltenango and to the valley of Totonicapan, opening to various destinations (always places to the west) for those who know the correct prayers. "It only appears to stop for your flashlight, *compadre*," says Don Lucas, "because you do not know how to open the door." This is reminiscent of the original ball game portal in the Popol Vuh, that takes the two sets of twins into the Underworld. It has an altar at its terminus, but I have never witnessed it used, though evidence of its use is common. Don Lucas calls it one of the two most important altars in the cave complex, associated with Don Diego, a trickster figure about which there are many stories. This suggests that the axis of the portal and the shaft move between the ball court and the Tojil temple. *Patojil*, the place of Tojil, is the west-most or "first" of the line of shrines leading toward Saqiribal (see the Chujuy Region map). We are in the west and down going east and up. Left of the axis goes east, and "up", right of the axis goes west and "down".

Returning to the central passage, the cross intersection is under the "centro" that Carmack identifies with the feathered serpent (*q'ukumatz*). There is no altar directly in the axis, although seven of the offering sites are at its edge. The entire cave complex is said to be visited by a giant serpent from time to time when *costumbre*, rituals of ceremony, are not performed correctly, however. The next left passageway is long and takes a right turn half way along its length, and is associated with Pascual

Abaj, a stone being well known in nearby Chichicastenango, and who also appears as an altar site adjacent to the cave at *Saqiribal*. That is to say, the opposite shrine to the cave in the cave is the shrine that is above it on the mountain. This tunnel passes directly under the temple called Awilix, according to Carmack. Note that on the Chujuyup Region map, the most proximate shrine and god hiding place is *Pawilix*, place of *Awilix*. It too is still an active shrine in both locations.

The next left passage is to the other altar accompanying the dawning altar, San Martin, a shaft that does not go far in. Then we arrive at the principle altar of the cave, at the farthest south in straight-line form the mouth. Here one always offers candles and *pom* incense and prayers, and even when other altars are visited, this altar must be opened first. It is from here that one sends offerings off to Pascual, Martin, and all the other altars. The principle altar is located below, and just east of, the temple Carmack associates with the deity Jakawitz. This is the mountain site I associated above, earlier in this paper, with *Saqiribal*. So we see that each of the three main pyramids, tied to an altar close to *Saqiribal* in the eastern mountains, is above a significant cave altar. The only one that is not, which lies beyond the main altar. It is also “owned” (as is the mountain cave) by *Tzitzimit*, the small gold or silver dwarf being who resides in the cave and shakes his *zoktz’o* rattles when disturbed. He is the spirit owner of the diviner’s bundle, also known as *k’oxol*. He always appears accompanied by the sound of laughing children, and like the snake, he appears “everywhere”, not just at his altar site. But here he can be called to announce an initiation, as he “owns” the powers that direct the divining outcome. His shrine is not under any major temple, but it is east-most, heading in the direction of the Dawning complex to the northeast.

A few final thoughts on this cave under the site; Carmack paraphrases Las Casas as saying that, “...temple shrines lack doors and therefore sometimes the stone (or wood) deity icons were kept hidden in caves and secret places outside the town. The high priest used a special sign to signal those times when the icons were to be brought from hiding and placed in the temples. (Carmack, 1981:186). Could the cave complex been the replacement place of hiding for the stone icons of Tojil, Awilix, and Jakavitz, reminiscent of their earlier “hiding” described in the *Popol Vuh*? Could this have been a defensive element in a highly defensive site, to keep the gods hidden in time of war? Could certain elite ceremonies have gone on down there in the privacy of the build cave complex, along the lines Bassie-Sweet has suggested for the Classic Maya? Certainly, these are among the possible motivations for the considerable effort that was put into the construction. There were stories told me in the 1970s of stone idols (*camajuil*) still venerated in the Utatlan caves and in the caves up on *Saqiribal*, before they were stolen by non-believers, and such stones are closely tied to beliefs associated with the deity of the earth (Earle, 2000).

I have traced back from the Dawning Place to Utatlan, following the movement some seven or eight centuries by the ancestors of my *compadre* Lucas from the east/East, reversing the pilgrimage of initiation. Now there is only to make point again that the build temple “mountains” and caves at Utatlan reflect creatively and purposively the remapping of their sacred landscape of the east/East, sacred in the sense of mythical origins in the sunrise, and historical origins in the high ridges and intermountain

crevasses of the Cuachus mountains. The mountain shrine altars of Saqiribal, San Martin and San Pascual, and the caves of *carcel* and *uantana rech mundo*, Window of the World, are tied in content, lay-out, and direction to Utatlan (see Fig. 3.2). Up at these towering heights there are no longer present the kings and warriors of the ancestral empire, only the *juyuptaq'aj*, the world deity who, with the Tzitzimit, “owns” the bundle, the instrument of divining (see Barbara Tedlock, 1982, 1985; Earle, 2000), and the deity in charge of bringing forth life and taking it away.

Final Words

Following their sacred book of “the dawn of life and the glories of gods and kings” as Dennis Tedlock aptly names the Popol Vuh on the cover of his translation, the K'iche' trace their most central mythic event of dawning from the elevated mountain to the east (and from where they came in their mytho-historic migrations), down into the fertile valley of their imperial history, their political hegemony, their military power, and what would later be the site of their political death, in the West. Above this built cave complex they mapped out in their great city intensified copies of their spaces of myth, the mountain shrine sites where their lineage gods once hid amid the forests, places at the eastern edge of what can be seen from their once glorious temples, and the mountain range where the rain clouds form that indicate imminent rainfall in the agricultural season. In this intensified and meaning-laden cultural geography, they recounted their tales of origin, their accounts of gods and creation, how it was that life dawned in the East, and then recalled the glories of their kings, bringing them back to their present, in the center of their world. The caves they carved out of volcanic tuff sanctified their political glory, as the mountain of the dawning was tied to the citadel of the dawning empire, and perhaps served as a substitute place of sacred sequester for their speaking stone idols. The sun has set on that time of K'iche' Maya imperial greatness, but not so the calendar diviner. The unlikely survival of the millennial document guides the ethnographer to read the richness of contemporary ritual in the shadow of history, as the axis of dawn and history is ritually traveled, back from the present to the glories of gods and kings, and farther, to the East, to the very dawn of life, within the womb of the world. Here, unchanged by history, the shrines and caves still receive the new generations, as they ritually die and are birthed up into the light of a new sun, a new day, starting their count at the beginning, emerging from the cave of first illumination, on the mountain where it first dawned.

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Chapter 4

Places of Emergence: Sacred Mountains and Cofradía Ceremonies

Allen J. Christenson

When I first began working in the Guatemalan highlands in the late 1970s as a linguist and ethnographer, traditional K'iche'-Maya homes in the more remote regions often lacked electricity. Lamps and candles were expensive or difficult to obtain. As a result, evenings were frequently spent without light. Maya families in such circumstances sometimes gathered to tell stories in the darkness before going to bed. These might be humorous stories about talking animals, or parents telling their children what it was like when they were young. But a favorite way to spend the evening was for the elderly members of the family to talk about how things began—their village, their traditions, early ancestors, or even the birth of gods or Maya versions of Roman Catholic saints. In the Maya view of the world, how things begin their existence, to a great extent, determines their power and relevance in the present.

This fascination for the origin of things carries over into the more public Maya ritual offerings, processions and ceremonies. Nearly all their major ceremonies deal with creation and rebirth in one way or another. The world in which the Maya live is difficult, sometimes cruel. It is a source of great hope that through prayer, sacred ritual, and offerings, the world and its sacred guardians can return to the moment of their first creation in order to be reborn to new life in a pure, uncorrupted form. It is this periodic renewal, which allows life itself to continue. If these rituals are not performed in the proper way and under the proper circumstances, the Maya believe that they and all creation would simply slip back into primordial darkness, chaos and perpetual death. For the Maya who continue to practice their ancient traditions, storytelling and sacred rituals in the night are not simply the idle retelling or reenactment of events from long ago. Words and movements that follow ancient precedent have the power to make those present witnesses and participants in the events described. As Houston and Stuart note with regard to the ancient Maya, kings who performed sacred drama clothed in the garments of deity were not merely engaged in mummery, but shared in the divinity of those gods. They were not “theatrical illusion but a tangible, physical manifestation of a deity” (Houston and Stuart, 1996:299). When the modern Maya storyteller begins his tale with the phrase, “let us spend this night with our ancestors,” in a sense, he or she means it quite literally. Such experiences have the power to transport those present back to the moment of first beginnings. The darkness of the room and the silence of the sparsely populated mountain terrain of such communities resonate with the soft

sounds of the storyteller's voice—leaving the listeners with the almost palpable sense that they are in an ancient place that once existed before the first dawning of the sun.

In Santiago Atitlán, one of the most important rituals during the year takes place in mid-November when the *nab'eysil*¹ extracts the garments of a god named Martín (the patron deity of life, maize, and sacred mountains) from a large cloth bundle wrapped in green velvet, housed in one of the *cofradía*² houses in town. He then wears these garments one after another in succession as he dances to the four cardinal directions to re-establish the limits of the world (Fig. 4.1). The ceremony takes place around midnight with all the doors and windows of the small house where the bundle is kept closed and bolted shut. One elderly *ajkun*³ told me that noon and midnight are particularly powerful times of day for ceremonies and prayers because this is when the other world is closest to our own, and the ancestors and gods that live there can be approached more directly. The only light in the room was that of tiny white candles held by each of the thirty or so participants—mostly members of the *cofradía* and their families, along with their invited guests.

Throughout the ceremony, which lasted a little over an hour, an incense brazier periodically fed with copal resin poured out great clouds of aromatic smoke that soon filled the room, making it impossible to see from one side of the room to the other. The effect was at once disorienting and compelling. As the *nab'eysil* priest danced toward the opposite end of the room, he seemed to disappear into the smoke and darkness, only to reemerge a few moments later as if out of thin air. Following the performance of this dance in 1997, the *nab'eysil* sought me out to ask if I had seen “the ancient *nuwals*⁴ giving birth to the world.” I told the *nab'eysil* how moved I was to see him dance so beautifully within the smoke, and how it seemed that he vanished in the darkness. He said that was because he was raised up into the clouds themselves to the place where the gods and sacred ancestors dwell. He said, “I was not really here with you. I was in their world. They filled my soul with their presence and guided my steps. I danced in their world and now the world is new again just as it was when it was first born.” In the eyes of the *nab'eysil* the dance was not just a symbol of the rebirth of the world, but a genuine creative act in which time folded back on itself as he retraced the same steps of the first ancestors of his

¹ The *nab'eysil* is a powerful traditionalist priest or shaman dedicated to the care and ceremonies surrounding Martín the patron deity of maize, rain, sacred mountains, and life itself.

² A *cofradía* house is a one room structure dedicated to the worship of a particular saint or other deity. Although ostensibly Roman Catholic in origin, in practice in traditional Maya communities these are independent of the Church and in fact have become a place where traditional Maya ceremonies are conducted outside the strictures of orthodox Roman Catholic ecclesiastical authority.

³ An *ajkun* (literally he/she of medicine or healing) is a shaman or ritual specialist of a lesser rank than a *nab'eysil*. There are quite a few *ajkuns* in the community of Santiago Atitlán. They generally deal with ceremonies, prayers and offerings intended to heal or comfort a petitioner.

⁴ In the Atiteco understanding of this term, a *nuwal* is a great ancestor or shaman-priest of the past who had the power to work miracles (Mendelson, 1957:42).



Fig. 4.1 Nab'eyzil performing a world renewal ceremony on the Day of Martín

community in the primordial world. This is possible because the Maya bear the blood, and therefore the souls, of their ancestors within their veins. At appropriate times, that ancient part of themselves has the power to manifest itself in the present. It is not that the *nab'eyzil* priest *became* his ancestors or danced *with* them. For him, the ancestors are an ever-present part of who he is because their blood is also his.

The *nab'eyzil* went on to tell me that the real place of the ancestors is in the mountains surrounding town. He said that these have always existed, long before any people or animals. There are three volcanoes and several chains of high mountains that encircle Santiago Atitlán (Fig. 4.2). These are considered sacred, possessing the power to protect the community in times of danger. I was told that this happened once during the recent civil war when Santiago Atitlán and its dependent communities suffered from a series of violent episodes culminating in the massacre of dozens of men, women, and children. A friend of mine in town said, however, that on one occasion when the soldiers came to kill the people they couldn't find them because the three volcanoes moved so close together that they became one mountain, hiding them from their enemies. When the soldiers came, they could not find them and went back home.



Fig. 4.2 Two of the three volcanoes surrounding Santiago Atitlán

Throughout the highlands of Guatemala, Maya traditionalists believe that mountains and associated cave openings are the “mouths of the world” giving access to spiritual realms inhabited by sacred beings that have influence over natural phenomena of importance to the outside world. It is the place where rain clouds are formed, as well as the winds that bear them across the sky to bring fertility and new life (Thompson, 1970:267–276; Vogt, 1969:387; Bassie-Sweet, 1991:79; Hill, 1992:6, 91; Stone, 1995:39–41; Brady, 1997; Brady and Pruffer, 1999). For this reason, caves occupy a privileged place in the theology of the Maya. This may be expressed through ritual offerings and prayers within actual caves. Although in most communities such activities are performed at effigy caves in the form of small clefts in naturally-occurring stones, artificial excavations in the ground, altars with cave-like recesses constructed of stones or pottery shards, or even church altarpieces conceptualized as mountains with cave-like niches for the community’s patron saints (Christenson, 2001).

Caves and shallow recesses are rather common in the mountains surrounding Santiago Atitlán (Fig. 4.3). Many are heavily stained with incense smoke and littered with the remains of candles, flower petals, alcohol bottles, and other ritual offerings (Lothrop, 1933:83; Mendelson, 1957:283–284; Carlsen and Prechtel, 1994:91). The most important of these local caves is called Paq’alib’al, meaning “at the place of revelation or appearance.” Nicolás Chávez Sojuel, a prominent member of the community, described it to me as the place where the sacred *nuwals* (deified ancestors with the power to bring blessings such as rain and fertility to the world) live:



Fig. 4.3 Sacred cave in the mountains above Santiago Atitlán

All the great saints and *nuwal* ancestors live in Paq'alib'al. Their spirits live there in the center of the mountain. This is also where the south wind is born. Strong rains come from this cave because that is where the clouds are formed. There is always the sound of wind coming out of the cave because this is where the ancients live. The entrance is guarded by two pumas and two jaguars and is adorned with abundant fruits such as corozos, bananas, melacotones, plantains, zapotes, cacao and pataxtes to show that the heart of the *nuwals* are present inside and that they have power to give abundance and fertility. Inside is a gigantic snake 1-m thick and 50-m long that watches over the saints.

Many times, there is a woman named María Castelyan standing at the entrance who gives food, or perhaps she is the Virgin Mary. There is also a stone statue of Mary set on a jade base that shines like a light. At other times only jaguars and deer circle around the entrance. At New Year's a light appears in the cave. Near the cave in a small ravine is a giant *po'j* tree where angels rest when it rains, and inside the branches are clouds. The branches are covered with squirrels and birds. A peccary circles the trunk when it is about to rain because clouds and the first rays of dawn begin at this tree. Tremors shake the earth every five minutes there because this is where the *nuwals* live when they leave Paq'alib'al. Two young men went to see the tree and put a hoe beneath it to get power. They went to the fields and the hoe worked without them having to hold it. Juan Calavoz was one of the boys. From this tree he cut out a wooden plank which he used in the belltower of the church. It continued to grow new sprouts for many years afterward and never got old. It is still soft as if it were newly cut, yet the church was built many centuries ago.

My great grandfather did not believe in this tree and wanted to cut it down. When he began to cut the *po'j* tree, it bled. Immediately he had a stroke and he remained half-paralyzed for the rest of his life. Another man who didn't believe in the tree tried to climb it and became a monkey. During the rainy season people gather leaves from the tree at full moon because they are good for medicine. Some Germans tried to take gold from the cave some years ago, but they were frightened by the animals that guarded it and they found their food filled

with snakes and were forced to leave. They came back in a helicopter, but the cave kept moving on its own so they could not get near to it.

Nicolás' son, Diego, had visited the cave with his grandfather and said that there was a hole in front, filled with ashes and encircled with stones, which represented one of the principal *muxux* (navels) around which the world is centered. His grandfather told him that incense smoke always comes out of this hole, as well as from the interior of the cave, even if there is no one there to tend it. He suggested that this proved that rain clouds are related to copal incense smoke because Paq'alib'al is where the clouds are formed. In his opinion, that is why Paq'alib'al is the most important of the caves around Santiago Atitlán, and why it is here that all the ancestors meet to discuss the affairs of the world.

The presence of María Castelyan, a divinity who appears in many Atiteco myths dealing with creation events (or the foundation of current ritual practices), further suggests that Paq'alib'al is a cosmic location related to the birth of the world. In one important cycle of myths, María Castelyan is an aged grandmother figure, also known as María Batz'b'al (María "Thread Maker"), who participated in the first planting of maize as well as the first grinding of its grains (Fig. 4.4).

The tree near Paq'alib'al recalls the pan-Maya notion of a world tree that grows out of the underworld to center creation (Miller and Taube, 1993:57; Freidel et al., 1993:55). Prechtel and Carlsen note that in Tz'utujil belief, there is an ancestral deity known as R'tie Chie ("Mother Tree") that exists at the center of the world. From this tree, "all things derive their life-giving sustenance" (Prechtel and Carlsen, 1988:126). As seen in the above account, the tree growing near Paq'alib'al is sacred and many people have stories of people going there without proper ceremonies or respect and falling under terrible curses for doing so. An aged traditionalist told me this story about a group of friends from his youth who visited the cave and tried to cut down the tree to make a *cayuco* (plank canoe):

Many years ago, when I was younger, four of my companions went to Paq'alib'al to cut down the tree and use its wood to make a *cayuco*. They tried to cut it from the base of the tree where it was more than 3-m in circumference. When they were about to cut the trunk of the tree, clouds began to come out of the upper branches. They didn't know, but this is the *mesa* (table) of the angels where lightning is born. This is the power of the ancient ancestors and the tree is their symbol. When the tree was completely wrapped in cloud, they heard a shout, and a trumpet blared, and lightning and flocks of singing birds, including guardabarrancas (canyon wrens), and many others flew out from the upper branches. Rain began to fall heavily, but only around the tree.

They became frightened, but one of them nevertheless began to cut the tree. When a few pieces were cut away, the tree made a sound as if it were breaking. He went on cutting the tree with an axe even though the others were now very frightened. Some yellowish water soon came out. All day they cut and still they were not even partly through the trunk. They stopped for the night and made a fire under the tree and all night long they heard shouts coming from the cave. When they awoke in the morning, all four had been separated and were far from each other. None of them remembered moving during the night and didn't know how they had become separated. They picked up the axe again and started to cut and a blood-like liquid began to flow. They ran away when this happened and left the tree. The blood still flows from the tree and it is used to cure all kinds of ailments. It has great power because it is the blood of the tree. The tree has grown even larger since then and it cannot



Fig. 4.4 Effigy of creatrix deity, Cofradía San Juan, Santiago Atitlán

be cut down for its great size. Clouds still come out of its branches. At the very top of the tree is a mirror, very round, that reflects light at night. It is from this mirror that the clouds come.

Clouds and rain represent life itself, the power of nature to germinate the crops and replenish the soil. Both Paq'alib'al cave and the tree that grows nearby are said to be the place where such clouds are born, making them the focal point of regenerative and creative power. The name of the cave, Paq'alib'al, means "place of emergence, manifestation, or revelation." It is the place where the creative powers inherent in the other world, or the interior of sacred mountains, can be accessed. The following account comes from an elderly catechist who as a young man had been an *ajkun* and had accompanied his grandfather occasionally on his visits to Paq'alib'al. The following account was a story he remembered from his grandfather

about visiting the cave with Marco Rohuch, another of the most prominent culture heroes of the community, second only to Francisco Sojuel:

My great grandfather didn't like my grandfather when he was young, and he beat my grandfather often. So he spent much of his time with Marco Rohuch, who had known Francisco Sojuel. My grandfather once went with Marco Rohuch to Paq'alib'al. When they arrived he warned my grandfather that if he saw any wild animals not to be afraid as he would not let them hurt them and that he would ask for permission to enter. In front of the cave he saw a great garden of flowers. When they went inside he heard the distant sound of animals as if they were playing further back in the cave. My grandfather was very frightened, but Rohuch said nothing would happen if they continually offered incense and lit candles.

Once inside, the cave opened into a great hall with a floor of white sand. The walls were of a shiny yellowish-brown stone. After making a turn they came to a series of rooms, each with animals inside. In the second room was a horse. In the third, there were many animals. My grandfather was very frightened of each of these rooms, but they were able to pass through in peace. Finally, Marco Rohuch told my grandfather to wait for him because he had to go on alone to meet with the "king" in the fourth room. Afterward, Rohuch described the king as an elderly Atiteco wearing the traditional short pants embroidered with bird designs characteristic of the town. He also wore a white shirt without buttons which the ancestors wore before they adopted the red shirts that they wear today.

Rohuch took with him a small gourd with homemade liquor and a bit of maize gruel to give to the kings. My grandfather didn't see the kings because he stayed behind in the third room. On the walls of the third room were drawings of animals, maize, beans, and fruits. My grandfather looked at these and realized that they were actually carved into the stone, not painted. They were dark brown to yellow and shiny, and somewhat translucent like crystal or amber. There was no paint. He asked Rohuch what the meaning of the animals was and he said that they move about when the people are in trouble in town and that they have meetings to decide what to do to help them. He said that the kings themselves don't leave the cave so they send the animals to keep watch over the town, determine what is needed, and carry out their orders. The hummingbird in particular is a *k'exel* (substitute) for the kings and can travel very fast. There are three caves in the same mountain: (1) *Xuk'uxuel* (ajitz) which is the red cave; (2) *Saq'iq'*, or the white wind; and (3) *Paq'alib'al*, which is yellow (place of emergence, revelation, appearance). The first two are like the red and white dancers in the Baile (Dance) of the Conquista.

The drawings on the cave were the representatives of the kings. They give signs to those who enter if they are powerful and know how to read them. Each has its power. On one side of the room is a hollowed out stone like a basin with blue water. On the other side is another with white water. The water flows out onto the floor where there is a large pool lined with reeds. These are like the reeds that are placed over the entrances to the *cofradía* houses. The carvings on the walls and floors are the same as the real fruits and animals inside the *cofradías*. The pool was filled with fish and crabs just like the lake.

They were gone for fifteen days but it seemed like only an hour. My grandfather asked Marco Rohuch what he had asked the kings about, and he said that he had asked for rain. Every fifteen days or seven days the kings can be asked.

An *ajkun* who told me that he visits the cave periodically gave me a description that agrees for the most part with this account and adds some important details with regard to the *nuwal* ancestors who live there:

Before the *nuwals* Francisco Sojuel and Marco Rohuch disappeared, for they did not die, they said that they would leave a sign in front of their home at the cave of Paq'alib'al to

show that they still live. This sign was the presence of great piles of fruit—bananas, melacotones, pataxtes, and cacao. The last time that I was there I saw beautiful maize fields and bean plants all around it which grew to a miraculous degree. Peach trees and apple trees also grew nearby which were full of parakeets.

Ajkuns go to Paq'alib'al to ask for rain and to speak to the old ones that live there. When you go inside you may be gone for three days, but it only feels like a few minutes. The entrance to the cave is half a meter high, but when an *ajkun* goes there he knows how to ask the mountain to make the hole large enough to walk in without stooping over. Inside are five pumas that guard the cave. The largest puma is named Francisco, the second Diego, the third Juan, the fourth María, and the fifth Marco. These are the animal substitutes for the ancient ones. When the cave opens they roar, but if one is pure of heart and holds up his hand, they allow him to enter without biting him. For the first few meters, the cave is dark and cramped, but then it opens into a large chamber that is brightly lit as if in daylight and it is never cold or hot. Inside is a room with a throne guarded by two giant snakes with limitless length because there is no end to their tails. Sometimes a man is there wearing Atiteco clothes and an old straw hat like Atitecos used to wear a long time ago and asks what the person wants. This is Francisco Sojuel. There is always incense and smoke coming out of the cave and candles burning at the entrance even when there is no one there. Clouds are born from the cave and light rain falls constantly at the entrance because rain comes from the deepest part of the mountain. Did you notice that it rained all last week even though it is the dry season? That is because two *ajkuns* went to Paq'alib'al to ask for rain. At noon, a bell is often heard inside louder than the one in the church and earthquakes shake the earth every five minutes.

The jaguars and pumas associated with Paq'alib'al are typical of Maya cave imagery. Evon Vogt reports that Zinacantecos, dressed as jaguar impersonators, perform rituals in sacred caves in the hills above their town (Vogt, 1981:130; Stone, 1995:23, 43). Barbara Tedlock also notes that jaguars are closely identified with mountain deities among the K'iche's, and that the "particular association jaguar-mouth-cave-earth is so widespread as to be considered a pan-American mythic invariant" (B. Tedlock, 1986:128). The pumas in the *ajkun*'s description are named, being the "animal *k'exel* (substitutes, replacements, counterparts) for the ancient ones." He later listed the same five names in a ritual prayer at the Cofradía of San Juan and explained that they are five of the greatest *nuwals* who once lived in Santiago Atitlán—Francisco Sojuel, Juan Kiju, Diego Kiju, María Castelyan, and Marco Rohuch, all of whom now live inside the mountain where they watch over the people. The appearance in human form of Francisco Sojuel and the other great founders of Atiteco ritual practices in the cave is consistent with the role of Paq'alib'al as a place where deified ancestors may be consulted.

In the mythology of Santiago Atitlán, Francisco Sojuel is the pre-eminent named ancestor who founded many of the ritual practices of the community, and even carved many of its most sacred images—including, in many accounts, participating in the formation of the figure of Rilaj Mam. It is likely that Francisco Sojuel was a historic figure living sometime in the late nineteenth century, but he is also in many ways the symbolic embodiment of ancestral power. Thus, stories about the historic Sojuel become conflated with the birth of the world, the conquest of Guatemala by the Spaniards in the early sixteenth century, the first foundation of the town and its church in the early Colonial period, etc. He is the archetypal culture hero who is credited with what must have been centuries of innovations in the ritual life of the

community. Most other named figures are viewed as successors or apprentices to Francisco Sojuel. The following account of Francisco Sojuel was given to me in 1997 by Nicolás Chávez who set this version of the story 100–150 years before our conversation:

Francisco Sojuel was a great *nuwal*. The people always consulted him for rain. He would go up into the mountains to ask for rain at the time of planting and within half an hour the rain would come. He would take people with him to the mountains to ask for rain and give offerings. He would then tell them to hurry back down to town or they would get soaked. The sky would be perfectly clear without a cloud in the sky, but then a little cloud would form when he prayed and gave offerings and burned his incense and it would quickly grow to fill the sky. Even if they hurried, the people would get soaked before they could get back to their homes. But Francisco Sojuel never got wet. He could walk through pouring rain, but when he arrived at his home he would be completely dry. He was a very powerful *anti-gual* (ancient person, generally with great powers). The *ajkuns* today don't have that kind of power. They say they can bring the rain but they really can't. The last great *ajkun* was Diego Kiju. I knew him when I was young. He could make it rain like Francisco Sojuel. He always had a little gourd of water and would always be drinking from it, but it would last for months. He could also walk for hours in the rain and never get wet.

But the authorities arrested Francisco Sojuel because of his many miracles. They considered him just a worthless Indian. They arrested him and threw him in jail in Sololá, and even tried to kill him, but they couldn't. They asked him to show them a sign that he could really do miracles. They told him to send rain to them like he did in Santiago Atitlán because the people there said he could bring rain. There was a terrible drought in those days and they wanted him to bring rain for them. So he took the strap from a horse saddle, the part that passed below the belly of the horse, and stood on it. Immediately he pulled himself high into the sky where he caused a great storm to begin. He made the wind to blow in great gusts and the rain to fall heavily, and he made lightning and hail. It rained for days until houses fell from the wind and flood and people demanded that the authorities save them. They tried to lure Francisco Sojuel down but he was high in the mountains and only after humbly offering incense and candles and other offerings did he finally come down from the mountains. He asked them why they were so amazed by the rain since they had asked him to call for it.

They let him go back to Santiago Atitlán but he was so popular that they arrested him again. They tried to kill him by crucifying him on top of a round kiosk with a thatched roof that used to stand in the park. But he didn't die. While he was being tortured great baskets of fruit appeared around him. He lives in the cave of Paq'alib'al and people still go to consult with him and the other ancestors there. The fruit in front of the cave appears magically when he is willing to meet with people and help them when there is trouble.

According to this account, the presence of Francisco Sojuel and other revered ancestors is symbolized by the appearance of an abundance of tropical fruits at the entrance. Some important cave shrines in the mountains surrounding Santiago Atitlán have a pole hung horizontally at the entrance strung with the remains of fruit. Such caves are also littered with piles of incense wrappings and ash (Fig. 4.5).

Incense smoke is frequently equated with rain or life-bearing clouds, another indication of the importance of caves as the birthplace of clouds. A member of the Cofradía of San Juan once told me a similar story about the fruit in front of Paq'alib'al:

The entrance to Paq'alib'al has a small place filled with flowers and fruit. Trees also grow in abundance there because this is where rain comes from. The spirits of the *nuwales* come

out when it rains and you can see their clothing flying across the mountains in the wind. There are also constant earthquakes and tremors and mist there which shows that they have power. At the entrance is an image in the form of the Virgin, and fruits of all kinds. When a person comes with power and a good heart he can enter and see all the things of the other world—it is like this world with light, and people, and houses. If one wants to be an *ajq'ij* (a daykeeper priest who works with the traditional Maya calendar in his or her ceremonies) he must go there to receive protection from the *nuwals* because it is very dangerous to be an *ajq'ij*. The entrance to the cave is about 3-m wide and surrounded by flowers and fruit when the *nuwals* wish to show that they are there. Vines grow all along the sides of the cave, which are actually snakes with fruit above and around them.

Time is different in Paq'alib'al. When a person goes in he thinks he is there for only a few minutes, but he is really there for weeks or months. The serpent in the cave is called *rukab' ruwachiliw*: "the head winding of the earth." This is the one that forms the rainbow of rain and covers the *cedrillo* tree where clouds form. The clouds form from the cave and the snake forms a circle around the cave. Clouds then climb the tree to form rain there. The serpent is green, red, and orange like the ancient kind of *xkab'* that women used to wear on their heads. A half hour is three months in *Paq'alib'al*. Inside is the *rey* (lord, king) of the other world seated on a throne with lions, jaguars, and a great snake guarding him.

Myths concerning Paq'alib'al and the tree nearby are widely known in Santiago Atitlán although few other than *ajkuns* go there. This is partially because of the distance, and partially because it is considered a dangerous place. A favorite story among Atitecos is to tell of unbelieving teenagers, greedy treasure hunters, or ignorant tourists who get their come-uppance when they fail to show proper respect at the cave. This version comes from an *ajkun*:

Inside Paq'alib'al is a small town. The mayor and officials are *Apla's* (Francisco) Sojuel and other *nuwals*. The inhabitants are the most powerful *nuwals*, But only the good ones. Two young men went there once who didn't believe and tried to go in the cave without permission. They disappeared for several days and when they came to their senses, again they were surrounded by fruit and flowers. They said they looked up and saw many fruits that they had never seen before. And there was a band playing and spirits dancing. Now they believed and ran down to town to bring back others to see. But when they arrived they saw nothing inside. On other occasions, people have said that they saw the fruit but when they reached out to touch it the fruit moved away from them. Few go to Paq'alib'al. Only powerful *ajkuns* and *nab'eyils* go there. The place is guarded by two pumas. When *Apla's* Sojuel appears he isn't like an ordinary man but a spirit. I don't know where the dead go. The great *nuwals* like *Apla's* Sojuel don't die. They go to Paq'alib'al.

Sometimes the offenders are unbelieving youths. In other stories it is due to greedy persons, particularly in the form of gold-hungry Germans or Japanese (perhaps a result of distant recollections of World War II). In other stories, the offenders are simply ignorant Protestants, Mormons, tourists or other outsiders who go where they don't belong and don't understand the significance of Paq'alib'al. An example of this latter type appears in an account told to me by Diego Chávez Petzey:

Ten years ago, some local people went to Paq'alib'al to show it to some tourists. Two of the tourists were Mormons. I don't know who the others were. Just as they went around a stone near Paq'alib'al one of them stepped over a *bejuco* (dry vine) on the ground and disappeared. Never step over a *bejuco* as this can be very dangerous. They searched everywhere but couldn't find him. Finally, after several days he showed up but far away. Everyone blamed it on stepping over the *bejuco* and not treating the cave with proper respect. Diego Kiju and Francisco Sojuel and the other *nuwals* live there and it is very



Fig. 4.5 Remains of candles and incense in a sacred cave near Santiago Atitlán

dangerous. When they are meeting inside, no one can find the cave. A sign will appear that the *ajkuns* can understand, or a light will appear over the chest where the bundle of Martín is kept in town and this will warn people to stay away. But if you don't know the secrets of the cave you can be in trouble. Pumas and jaguars guard the entrance on November 11, which is the Day of the Martín Bundle and if you go then you could be killed by them.

Last year on the Day of San Martín a group of fifteen teenagers went up near the cave to get firewood. When they approached the cave of Paq'alib'al they heard a drum and flute and marimba. They thought there was a fiesta so they went toward the sound to see if there was anything to drink. But there was nothing there, only the sound. A great wind came up and they began to hear the roar of pumas and ran away. When they got to town they were very frightened. They were told to give offerings at the Cofradía of San Juan in front of the Martín Bundle or they would die. They didn't want to because they were Protestants, but the mother of one of the boys forced them to and they burned incense in front of the Martín Bundle. They went back to Paq'alib'al a few days later to get back their souls because they had left them behind there. They were told that if they didn't they would die. Nevertheless, one of them died six months later.

Although there is likely one principal cave called Paq'alib'al, others may go by that name. Each is considered the center of the world and creation. In a sense, every cave may be considered a central portal to the other world. Such portals are, after all, liminal places that may or may not present themselves to the casual visitor. Notice that in the above accounts, one has to have a good heart and have power or the cave will not open up into the other world. Such apparently was not the case when I went with a good friend to visit a small cave shrine on the hill of Chutinamit, the site of the ancient capital of the Tz'utujils located just across the north bay from town. Although my friend had been to the cave several times, we hiked around for hours and never did find it. At last we gave up and he casually remarked, "either the *nuwals* are too busy with other things today or the cave simply doesn't wish to be seen. It

happens all the time.” It isn’t the size of the cave or its impressiveness that matters. Indeed I once participated in a pilgrimage to what I was told was an important shrine, the very “heart of the world, the entrance into the place where the world gods and saints live.” I was expecting something visually impressive. It turned out to be a small cleft in a rock with a shallow space scooped out of the dirt beneath it to accommodate offerings of pine needles, incense, candles, etc. (Fig. 4.6).

When I remarked to a friend that I thought it would be large enough for a person to enter, he said:

But people do go inside. But one has to have power, and a “white” (pure) heart or the *nuwals* won’t let him enter. If he does, he is able to open the space and walk in without ducking and there he can see that it is very spacious inside and the *nuwals* will meet with him. In the time of Francisco Sojuel people used to do this all the time, but people seldom have that kind of power now. Now they just come to do ceremonies and burn incense. It used to be more powerful. But still people can do miracles sometimes. I know people that can go inside.

Actually there are many “hearts,” or “navels” or “centers” of the world in and around Santiago Atitlán. When I asked a friend where the true entrance to the other world is located, he explained that there were many, and that they all lead to the same place. Among these he mentioned Paq’alib’al, the ocean, Lake Atitlán, a cave near Antigua, a cave near Esquipulas, a cave near the ruins of Chutinamit, the cave near where Rilaj Mam was first formed, another near the town’s cemetery. The hole in the nave of the town’s church where the Easter Cross is raised, another hole in the baptistry below the church’s belltower, another under the fountain in the cloister, another in the plaza in front of the church, etc.,



Fig. 4.6 Ceremonial offerings given at an “effigy” cave

were all centers of world. All of these he said were not only access points to the other world but were interconnected. Entering into one, you could instantly, or very quickly, find yourself at any of the others because within them is “the same place.” He said anciently, the *nuwals* knew how to travel quickly because they could enter one of these holes and almost instantly emerge again wherever they wished. This was why they were such good tradesmen, because they could travel great distances in no time at all.

Each of these caves or watery portals is a world center. They are not considered rival claimants to be the “true” center. Each may be just as powerful as a place of emergence or the birthplace of clouds, rain, germination of seeds, etc. It is the ritual actions that take place there that make it life engendering, not its physical location. Thus, each cave is the central axis point of all things because they lead to the same world of the *nuwals*, saints and deities. Every maize field planted by traditionalist farmers has a central hole or space where offerings are given to a successful harvest. Each is the *rumuxux ruwachiliw* (the navel of the world), despite the fact that there are countless maize fields. Each mountain is the first mountain; each maize field is the world in miniature. But these are not considered to be merely symbolic or effigies, they are the world writ small.

The practice of cave worship tends to marginalize public Maya ceremonialism by removing traditional rites and practices from the community proper, a phenomenon which Cervantes claims often resulted in the old gods losing relevance to society over time (Cervantes, 1994:50). Mendelson wrote that in the early 1950s, only younger shamans and apprentices regularly go to the hills or caves to perform their divinatory rituals so as not to be heard by their elders. Instead, ceremonies once associated with caves have been transferred to the *cofradías* in the town itself (Mendelson, 1957:284–285, 471; Carlsen and Prechtel, 1994:91). In Santiago Atitlán, small one-room *cofradía* houses dedicated to the worship of saints and deities associated with traditional Maya theology are conceived and decorated as sacred mountains, with their doorways giving access to the interior as if they were cave-portals into the otherworld.

Traditional Atiteco religion is centered in the *cofradía* system, a network of ten voluntary associations dedicated to the veneration of individual saints and associated deities. The *Cofradía* of San Juan, where the *nab’eysil* dances the Martín bundle, is one of these. The ceremonies conducted in the *cofradía* houses, like creation dance of the *nab’eysil*, often retain significant elements of ancient Maya cosmology that run counter to European notions of Christian orthodoxy. Some of the ceremonies once performed in caves are still performed within the *cofradías*, thus perpetuating elements of traditional Maya worship as a regular part of traditional community life rather than being limited to clandestine cult activity far from the lives of its adherents. With some exceptions, the town’s official clergy, particularly its priests, avoid the *cofradía* houses as places that openly violate Roman Catholic orthodoxy and challenge the authority of the Church. In most cases, priests ignore the *cofradías*, although there have been instances in the past where these houses have been violently attacked. This occurred most recently in 1950 when a visiting priest from Sololá named Godofriedo Recinos banned the public display of one

prominent *cofradía* image, known locally as Maximon (Grandfather or Ancient One Who is Bound) or Rilaj Mam (Revered Grandfather or Ancient One), from his usual appearance during Easter Celebrations near the town's Colonial era church. From Wednesday to Friday this image is believed to oversee the death of Christ and receives offerings and prayers while Jesus is "dead" in the underworld (Fig. 4.7).

Recinos refused to allow the image to be placed anywhere near the church and even threatened it and its attendants with a pistol if they didn't immediately take it away. On June 6 of the same year he returned with two other priests and an armed band. They broke into the *cofradía* house where Rilaj Mam was kept during the night, destroyed the head of the image and carried away two of its sacred masks (Mendelson, 1965:66–70; Carlsen, 1997:124–125). A similar incident regarding Rilaj Mam took place in 1912/13. According to Samuel Lothrop, who visited the town 15 years or so after the event took place, a bishop ordered that the image be burned as a "pagan idol." An assembly of men armed with clubs and machetes saved the image from destruction and soon drove the bishop out under threat of his life (Lothrop, 1929). For the most part, the town's resident priest and the *cofradía* leaders have reached a peaceful accommodation in which neither interferes directly with the other. Rilaj Mam continues to make an appearance each year in his small shrine on the church plaza during Easter week with the grudging acquiescence of the resident priest.

The fact that *cofradía* houses are located within the heavily populated center of town does not preclude their association with mountain cave shrines. The two are analogous entities in that the *cofradía* houses are conceived as the dwelling places of the ancestors. Both are the *k'ux*, or heart, of the world, located in sacred interiors. When worshippers enter such houses, they conceptually pass into a symbolic cave where sacred beings reside and carry out their work.



Fig. 4.7 Rilaj Mam (Maximon) being borne in a procession during Easter week

Nicolás Chávez explained that many of the objects and rituals conducted in the *cofradía* houses actually came from Paq'alib'al, and thought that Francisco Sojuel and the people of his day were the first to establish *cofradía* worship:

Many years ago there were no *cofradías*. People only gathered at the house of the *nab'eysil* or in the homes of the principals of the community to find ways to protect the people. They used to sacrifice turkeys and roosters to ask for rain or to stop a plague. Now they don't do it very often unless they want to follow the old ways. When they burned sacrifices, they only burned the blood. They did this in town, but mostly they did it in the mountains above town.

Then the principals of the town got together to decide what was best to protect the people. They formed the *cofradías*. They began to do their ceremonies in the *cofradías* but they were the same ceremonies they did before. This was in the time of Francisco Sojuel. Sojuel, along with others like Marco Rohuch who was his apprentice, decided where these protections should go. All of the great things were in Paq'alib'al and they went there to get protection or to cause it to rain. All the bundles, like the Martín Bundle and the María Bundle that we have in the Cofradía of San Juan were once kept in Paq'alib'al. Francisco Sojuel and the others would go there and give offerings of incense, candles, and seeds when they needed rain. They would first offer sacrifices in their homes, then they would go to Paq'alib'al to give more offerings and sacrifices. There the ancient kings lived and kept watch over the bundles.

The kings in Paq'alib'al would greet Francisco Sojuel and Marco Rohuch in the cave. When they asked for rain a rainbow would appear over the entrance and they knew there would be rain. If the rainbow begins with red, they know it will be dry. If it is more green or blue, this is a sign there will be rain.

But Francisco Sojuel and Marco Rohuch thought, "What will happen when we die? What will happen to the bundles? The people will have no protection." So they brought the bundles to the Cofradía of San Juan on the day of San Martín which is on November 11. The bundles for the Cofradía of San Juan were brought on the backs of deer who came down out of the mountains from Paq'alib'al along with jaguars, pumas, peccaries, armadillos, and other animals. The deer circled around the *cofradía* where the bundles would go. This is why they keep the skins of deer on the table in the *cofradía*—because they are the animals of the Martín bundle. When people kill animals in the mountains, they bring their skins there and they hang them from the ceiling because Martín is the lord of the mountains.

Francisco Sojuel and Marco Rohuch decided this, but it was actually the people who founded the Cofradía of San Juan that provided the place for the bundles and they started a list of all the people who have been charged with taking care of the bundles and other things that came from Paq'alib'al since then. Each *cofradía* has this kind of list. The first *cofradía* was provided by Juan Pakay who was also the first *nab'eysil*. Thus the *cofradías* began. Each head of the *cofradía* made a different image and put it into the *cofradía*. Each has a different power. Each of the images was asked what it could do and each told them what power they had. These images then reunited at night to discuss how to protect the people and give them what they need. They still do this in the night when everyone's asleep.

Each *cofradía* thus has an altar for its images of saints and other gods along with a silver flag given to them by Francisco Sojuel. The *nuwals* served as the first leaders of the *cofradía* houses. They also chose from among themselves the first members and *nab'eysil*s. When they died, others took their places. This is how it began. Every Tuesday and Sunday you can still hear the animals in the Cofradía of San Juan crying out. On those nights, you don't go inside at night because they become alive and will hurt you because they are wild.

This association of ritual houses with ceremonies that once took place in the mountains is also a prevalent notion among other living Maya groups. Vogt notes that among the people of Zinacantán, private houses are small scale versions of mountains where ancestral gods live:

This mountain part of the universe is mirrored in the structure of the house roof, not only in the obvious visual similarity between mountain and roof shapes, but, more significantly, in the use of identical descriptive terms for the two: YOK (its foot) refers to the foot of a mountain and the foundation of a house; SC'UT (its stomach) is the midpoint of a mountainside as well as a wall of a house; SCIKIN (its ear or corner) refers to corners of mountains and houses; and SHOL (its head) can be a mountaintop or a housetop (Vogt, 1993:58).

The *Cofradía* of San Juan, where the Martín Bundle mentioned earlier is kept, is one of the principal ritual houses in Santiago Atitlán. Although many *cofradías* pass frequently from one house to another on an annual basis, the *Cofradía* of San Juan has remained in the same location, for many years. The house is oriented in such a way that when standing in front of its eastern facade, the massive outline of San Pedro Volcano looms directly behind and above it, centered over the principal doorway (Fig. 4.8).

Vessels filled with flowers and cypress boughs are often placed before the altar and chests within the house as a reminder of the abundance characteristic of the sacred cave shrine of Paq'alib'al. Before the altar is a small table with incense. When ceremonies are conducted within the *cofradía* (which is nearly constant in the busiest such houses), incense is kept perpetually burning, similar to the incense smoke that is described as constantly burning within Paq'alib'al and which is related to the rain clouds that are formed there (Fig. 4.9).



Fig. 4.8 Cofradía San Juan, Santiago Atitlán



Fig. 4.9 Incense and other offerings, *Cofradía* San Juan

Flowers, stone carvings, and other ritual objects are placed on and below the incense table (Fig. 4.10). When I first visited the *cofradía* in 1993, there was a stone carving of a coiled snake, possibly Pre-Columbian in origin, that one of the *cofradía* officials told me represented the serpents that guard the throne of the ancestors within their mountain homes at Paq'alib'al. There was another small stone carving of a jaguar's paw, a reminder of the felines that guard the cave's entrance. I haven't seen these objects since 2001, and I've been told that they may have been sold. The owner of the house complex in which the *cofradía* is located isn't well liked by other *cofradía* leaders who are constantly accusing him of greediness and corruption. This may just be rivalry, as *cofradía* heads are constantly criticizing one another for this or that and alliances shift constantly. It is possible that the objects are merely bundled for safekeeping. Such bundles are ubiquitous in *cofradía* houses.

The ceiling trellises of the *cofradía* house of San Juan are adorned with the symbolic bounty of a fertile mountainside (Fig. 4.11). These decorations are set in a grid-like framework composed of small bundles of *pixlaq*, a plant with small round leaves brought from the nearby mountains. With time these leaves shed and fall, which Atitecos liken to the fall of rain or, less frequently, dripping water inside caves. Set amid the *pixlaq* sprigs, and in a dense line above the altar, are hung numerous ears of split-cob maize (*yo'x*—"twins") as a sign that maize is born here (Fig. 4.12). Small yellow fruits called *tz'um tz'um* with a number of small protrusions



Fig. 4.10 Incense table and stone carvings, Cofradía San Juan

at the bottom are also scattered about the ceiling. *Cofradía* members told me that they represent a pure form of split-cob maize eaten by the spirit beings in the mountains and that their presence in the house stimulates the maize fields to produce more abundantly.

Also hanging from the ceiling are examples of tropical fruits—gourds, corozo, pataxte, and cacao (chocolate) pods. These not only reinforce the notion that the *cofradía* house is a source of fertility, but also indicate the presence of Francisco Sojuel and other powerful ancestors who continue to use their influence to bring rain and abundance to the earth.

Hanging from the framework of fruit and split-cob maize ears in the rafters of the *cofradía* house are a number of stuffed wild animals, including five peccaries,



Fig. 4.11 Adornments in the rafters of Cofradía San Juan



Fig. 4.12 Stuffed animal and split-cob maize hung from the rafters, Cofradía San Juan

six *pizotes* (a large, squirrel-like rodent), a raccoon, and a mountain cat (Fig. 4.13). Some of these appear to be very old while others are relatively recent. I could not discern any pattern to the number or placement of these animals. *Cofradía* members said the pattern changes when hunters bring new animals as offerings. They represent all the wild creatures that inhabit the mountains around town. Traditionalist



Fig. 4.13 Stuffed animals in the rafters, Cofradía San Juan

Atitecos believe that on festival days, these animals come to life, dancing and speaking to one another in human voices.

In contrast with the grid-like pattern of these decorations, eight garlands of artificial pine boughs radiate downward and outward from the center of the ceiling to the corners and walls of the interior. The ends of these garlands are oriented to the cardinal and intercardinal directions; an indication that the power generated in the *cofradía* extends to the edges of the world. The geometric configuration of the *cofradía*'s ceiling decoration does not reveal itself unless one stands at the center of the room and looks directly upward. From any other location, the hanging plants and stuffed animals overlap and obscure their very precise and systematic arrangement. From this central vantage point, however, the rafters give the viewer the impression of being in the heart of a mountain, or more specifically the base of a cone-shaped volcano with its verdant slopes encompassing him/her on all sides. The floor beneath this center point is devoid of furnishings of any kind so that visitors are free to experience the illusion without obstacle. The second highest member of the *cofradía* in 1996 told me that the ceiling decorations represent the trees, animals, and fruits of the mountains, which is the true dwelling place of the *nuwal* ancestors, as well as of Martín himself: "Martín is the god of all life on the mountains. He is the very *k'ux* (heart) of the mountains. All the animals belong to him. All the trees, the fruit, the rivers, and the orchards belong to him. His true home is in the mountains where he

walks constantly at night looking out for the people. Paq'alib'al is his true home. It is the place where all the *nuwals* live; where Francisco Sojuel and Marco Rohuch live. They live there in the mountain but they also live here in the *cofradía*. That is why we hang the fruits and animals as a sign that he is here."

The interior of both sacred mountains and *cofradía* houses are conceived as the birthplace of life-giving power. Maize, incense smoke/rainclouds, water, fertility, earth, all combine to give birth to life itself. Soon after the Spanish Conquest, the more prominent aspects of ancient Maya worship were abruptly curtailed. Nevertheless traditional Maya ritual remained a parallel system, practiced on sacred mountains as well as cave shrines that were a prominent part of Pre-Columbian worship. In some communities, where orthodox Catholic ecclesiastical influence was more direct and long-standing, these peripheral cults eventually became irrelevant to society, or died out completely. In other communities, such as Santiago Atitlán, traditional Maya worship practices once associated with caves were transferred to the *cofradía* system where they could continue to serve as a vital aspect of community life.

Many of the contemporary Maya notions concerning sacred caves predate the Spanish Conquest in the early sixteenth century. Prior to this time, caves were often the focus of important deity cults centered on patron gods as well as deified ancestors. According to the *Popol Vuh*, the progenitor god of the highland Maya people, named Hun Hunahpu, descended into the underworld realm of Xibalba to confront the lords of death and disease (Christenson, 2003:70–86). After a number of trials, the death lords succeeded in defeating and sacrificing him by beheading. The lords of death then placed the head in the branches of a dead tree, which immediately sprang to life bearing fruit that resembled the fleshless skull of Hun Hunahpu. The lords of the underworld were so astonished and fearful of the power of this tree that they forbade anyone to approach it.

Eventually tales of the miraculous tree and the sweetness of its fruit reached the ears of a daughter of one of the underworld lords named Xkik' (Lady Blood). She followed the path to the tree and was about to pluck one of its fruits when the skull of Hun Hunahpu spoke to her, cautioning her to eat of the fruit only if she was certain of her desire. She assured Hun Hunahpu that this was indeed her wish. Before she could touch the fruit, however, she became impregnated by a drop of the saliva of Hun Hunahpu, which he spat into her uplifted palm. The young woman was then admonished that by this action life would be renewed through her, never to be lost again. To escape the wrath of the underworld lords, Xkik' climbed through "a hole" in the earth, giving access to the outside world where she bore twin sons named Hunahpu and Xbalanque (Christenson, 2003:86).

These boys eventually grew to maturity and returned to Xibalba where they defeated the lords of death and attempted to revive their father. In this they were only partially successful; therefore they left Hun Hunahpu in the underworld, promising that there he would be remembered: "Thus, here you will be called upon. It shall be so.... They who are born in the light, they who are begotten in the light, shall go out to you first. They shall surely worship you first. Your name shall not be forgotten. Thus be it so," they said to their father when they comforted his heart" (Christenson, 2003:126).

The day Hunahpu, one of twenty named days on the traditional highland Maya calendar still used in many communities today, is dedicated to rituals honoring deceased ancestors (La Farge and Byers, 1931:157–165; 173–175; Bassie-Sweet, 1991:88–89). Caves, or effigy caves in the form of mountain shrines, are commonly used for such observances (La Farge and Byers, 1931:157, 161, 165, 173–175; La Farge, 1947:128; Vogt, 1969:302, 387; B. Tedlock, 1982:124). It is likely that caves constitute major portals giving access to the underworld realm of Xibalba where deceased ancestors reside and may be approached directly, just as the Hero Twins promised would be the legacy of Hun Hunahpu.

This practice follows ancient precedent. According to the *Título de Totonicapán*, the gods of the various highland Maya lineages called on the first men to place their carved images in mountain caves before the first dawn, and that there they could be consulted (Carmack and Mondloch, 1983:184; Fuentes y Guzmán, 1932-33:44). Las Casas wrote that the Maya were accustomed to keep their deity images in “rugged places, dark and secret caves” in order to keep them in greater reverence by not having them constantly on public display. On special occasions, the images were carried in procession to the temples where they were placed in sanctuaries (Las Casas, 1967:III.clxxvii.216). It is likely that the ancient temples themselves were conceived as effigy mountains and that their elevated sanctuaries represented the cave-like homes of the gods (Hill, 1992:6, 91; Stone, 1995:27, 35–36; Bassie-Sweet, 1996:111–131; Schele and Mathews, 1998:43, 417). In this way the cult images might have an “underworld” place to reside within the sacred precincts of ancient Maya communities.

Certainly, the facades of many Maya temples bear the symbolic imagery of anthropomorphic caves. The four corners of Copan Structure 10L-22 are marked by stacks of masks bearing the glyphic markings *tun witz* (stone mountain), indicating that the building was conceived by the Maya as a sacred mountain, specifically the first mountain of creation (Freidel et al., 1993:149) (Fig. 4.14). The principal entrance to this structure on the south is adorned with the open jaws of a massive earth deity, or cave, leading into the recesses of the “mountain” where ruling lords sought access to ancestral deities (Fash, 1991:122–123). The doorway leading into the inner chamber of Structure 22 is framed by a massive serpent whose writhing body consists of a series of lazy-S scrolls representing clouds. Freidel, Schele, and Parker interpret these clouds as metaphors for both rain clouds as well as ceremonial incense smoke burned in honor of deities and deceased ancestors. Both incense smoke and rainclouds are conceived by the Maya as analogous in substance, bearing life-giving power (La Farge, 1947:121; Vogt, 1969:387; Thompson, 1970:264; Freidel et al., 1993:152).

With the destruction of such temples in the Guatemalan highlands at the time of the Spanish Conquest and the subsequent evangelization efforts by Christian missionaries, the more obvious public forms of Pre-Columbian ceremonialism ceased abruptly in most communities. This did not however preclude the continued veneration of traditional Maya deities in cave shrines and other remote locales (Bassie-Sweet, 1991:78–79; Peterson, 1993:175–177; Cervantes, 1994:35). Fuentes y Guzmán lamented in the seventeenth century that the innumerable gods that were



Fig. 4.14 Structure 22, Copán, Honduras

once worshiped in highland Maya temples and houses were still venerated in mountain caves where they were given offerings of incense and animal sacrifices (Fuentes y Guzmán, 1932–1933:44). Thomas Gage discovered one such deity image in 1635 while serving as a priest in Mixco, Guatemala. The image was sequestered in a cave near a spring and a large pine tree:

In the morning we prayed unto God, beseeching him to guide us that day in the work we went about, and to discover unto us the cave of darkness and iniquity where lay hid that instrument of Satan, that so by his discovery glory might be given unto our true God, and shame and punishment brought upon his enemies.... When we came to it, we made very little more search, for near at hand was the cave, which was dark within, but light at the mouth. We found there more earthenware, with ashes in them, which assured us some frankincense had been burned. We knew not how far the cave might reach within, nor what might be in it, and therefore with a flint we struck fire and lighted a couple of candles and went in. At the entrance the cave was broad, and went a little forward, but when we were in, we found it turn on the left hand towards the mountain, and not far, for within two rods we found the idol standing upon a low stool covered with a linen cloth. The substance of it was wood, black shining like jet, as if it had been painted or smoked; the form was of a man's head unto the shoulders, without either beard or mustachios. His look was grim with a wrinkled forehead and broad startling eyes. We feared not his frowning look, but presently seized upon him (Gage, 1958:280–281).

The image was surrounded by offerings of money, plantains and other fruits, candles, pots of maize, honey, and little dishes of incense, the same offerings the Maya gave to the saints' images in the community church. Gage noted that had it been dressed as one of the saints, or had borne one of their Spanish names, the

image might have been accepted within the church without suspicion. Gage noted that following the Spanish Conquest, Roman Catholic missionaries forcibly replaced the images of native gods with those of Christian saints. These adopted, in the eyes of the Maya, the powers and status of the older pagan deities:

They yield unto the popish religion [Roman Catholicism], especially to the worshiping of saints' images, because they look upon them as much like unto their forefathers' idols; and secondly, because they see some of them painted with beasts ... and think verily that those beasts were their familiar spirits ... The churches are full of them.... Upon such saints' days, the owner of the saint maketh a great feast in the town (Gage, 1958:234–235).

Upon inquiry, Gage discovered that the people of Mixco and the surrounding region considered the image he had found to be greater than all the Christian saints in the country. The following Sabbath, Gage surprised the congregation at Mixco by presenting the confiscated image to the side of the pulpit. He declared that it belonged to the “Prince of Darkness,” and afterward publicly chopped it apart with an axe and cast it into a fire. This action was greeted by cheers from the Spaniards present, although Gage noted that thereafter a number of the Maya “conspired day and night to get me at some advantage, and to kill me” (Gage, 1958:285). Soon after, Gage narrowly escaped death when members of a prominent local Maya family set upon him with clubs and knives (Gage, 1958:288–289).

Maya cave rituals remained for centuries a parallel theological system with that of the Roman Catholic Church's pantheon of saints and deities and it continues to be an important element of traditional Maya worship in many communities (La Farge, 1947:124–128; Oakes, 1951:7; Vogt 1970:13; Tedlock, 1986:128). In traditional Maya worldview, the creation of the world is not a singular event set in the far-distant past. Like the agricultural cycle of maize and the movement of the sun, the cosmos goes through orderly phases of birth, maturity, death, and rebirth. For the traditionalist Maya of Santiago Atitlán, ceremonies are conducted in mountain shrines as well as “otherworld” *cofradía* houses decorated in such a way that they represent the abodes of sacred ancestors and gods. These are not just symbolic representations of sacred mountains. They are, in a sense, the first mountain where creation first took place. Each of the ten *cofradía* houses in Santiago Atitlán is the center of the world, the underground place where sacred beings live and carry out their work to keep the world perpetually in a state of rebirth and renewal. It is a focal point for regenerative power, charged with the same animative presence that caves possess as divine houses.

Ceremonies conducted in either *cofradía* houses or mountain shrines have the same power to regenerate the world because they are conceptually the same, both giving access to the other world beyond the earth's surface. Each is a place of origin in the sense that ritual activity conducted there opens a portal not only into sacred space, but also into sacred time. Participants in these ceremonies consider themselves to be present at the moment of first beginnings when their gods and ancestors set the pattern for the world's existence. Such regeneration allows the Maya to periodically re-birth their world, making it pristine, uncorrupted, and conducive to life as it was meant to be lived in harmony with divinely sanctioned order. Such ceremonies are considered essential to the very existence of the world. If such

ceremonies are not carried out properly, the world, as any other living thing, would age, sicken, and die without hope of re-birth. Those who carry out such ceremonies describe this cycle of rituals as “sacred work” or a “burden,” and so it is. Ritual meals and drinks, candles, incense, musicians, and a host of other necessities are a heavy financial burden for the Maya who, in many cases, can ill-afford it. One elderly traditionalist complained in a prayer that he could not really afford to organize a particular ceremony, but “what can I do? My children are now all Protestants and if I don’t do this what will happen to the world. We would all die. I will always do my prayers and ceremonies because I must. Someday my children will see this.”

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Chapter 5

Over Distant Waters: Places of Origin and Creation in Colonial K'iche'an Sources

Frauke Sachse

Mesoamerican myths of origin typically involve the concept of migration. Colonial sources and modern oral traditions of Aztec, Maya and other Mesoamerican groups relate that the people made the journey into their current territory from a distant place of creation on a route that involved several stages of travel.

This paper will explore the concepts of origin places in Colonial K'iche'an text sources from Highland Guatemala. The accounts of origin places in the K'iche'an sources have thus far been interpreted literally, which led to various suppositions about the historical basis and actual geographical setting of these locations. Combining comparative ethnohistoric, ethnographic, and precolonial evidence from various types of sources, it will be argued that in the references to places and directions of origin historicity is subordinate to ideology. It can be shown that the concept of migration and origin has become an independent *topos* which on the one hand functions within the framework of Maya cosmology and relates to creation as the central paradigm of Maya mythology, and on the other hand acts as a principal means of legitimizing power by deriving authority from remote supreme centers.

The analysis will focus on the interpretation of the metaphor "on the other side of the sea" which can be demonstrated to refer to a place of creation, a concept which may have deep roots in the cultural memory of the Mesoamerican past and calls for a re-analysis of Mesoamerican migration myths.

Accounts of Origin Across the Sources

All of the major colonial K'iche'an sources are consistent in relating that the mythological founder-fathers of the K'iche'an nations, originated from somewhere "across the sea." According to the *Popol Vuh* the forefathers *Balam Quitze*, *Balam Acab*, *Mahucutah* and *Iqui Balam* came from *ch'aq'a palo* "across the sea," *releb'al q'ij* "where the sun emerges," that is from the east.

keje' k'u kisachik	Thus was the disappearance
kima'ixik	and end of
Balam Quitze Balam Acab	Balam Quitze, Balam Acab,

Mahucutah Iqui Balam e nab'e winaq xepe chila' ch'aca palo chi releb'al q'ij ojeroq ke'ul waral	Mahucutah and Iqui Balam. They were the first people who came from across the sea where the sun emerges (east). Anciently they came here.
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(*Popol Vuh*, fol. 48r)

Earlier in the text, it is described how the first mother-fathers, and thus human-kind, were created in *Paxil Cayala* and how these people multiplied there “where the sun emerges,” before they decided to leave and move to a mountain named Tulan Suywa (*Tulan Zuyva*), Wuqub' Pek Wuqub' Siwan (*Vvcub Pec Vvcub Zivan*) “Seven Caves, Seven Canyons” to obtain their gods (cf. Christenson, 2003:193–210). While in the *Popol Vuh* the East and Tulan Suywa, Wuqub' Pek Wuqub' Siwan are at first clearly distinguished as two different locations, a later passage refers to both places as a common point of departure:

They came in crowds from the East. They were alike in the hides that they wore as coverings, for their dress was very poor. They had nothing of their own, but they were enchanted people in their essence when they came from Tulan Zuyva, the Seven Caves and the Seven Canyons, as they are called in the ancient account. (Christenson, 2003:213)

The *Título de Totonicapán* likewise merges Paxil and Tulan as the place of origin, the *paraíso terrenal* named Wuqub' Pek Wuqub' Siwan, Siwan Tulan, *Panparar*, *Panpaxil* and *Panc'aeala'* (Carmack and Mondloch, 1983:174). The text describes that the leaders of the *wuqub' amaq'* “Seven Nations” were *nawal* people with great capacities who arrived *ch'aca choo ch'aca palow* “across the lake, across the sea” from Tulan Siwan.

ta xkik'uxlaj kipetik e nawal winaq' naj xopam wi kimuqub'al chi kaj chi ulew mawi k'o ta kujunamaj ruk' xkimuquj ronojel xe kaj e nimaq' etamanel e k'amol ub'e ronojel wuqamaq' tleqpan keje k'ut kipetik wae ch'aca cho ch'aca palow pa tulana pa sewan	Then they remembered their arrival, they were nawal people. Far away arrived their vision in the sky, in the earth there was nothing equal to what they have seen all below the sky. They were great “knowers” they were leaders of all seven nations of Tecpan. Like this was their arrival, across the lake, across the sea from Tulan, from Siwan.
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(*Título de Totonicapán*, fol. 8r)

The Kaqchikel version of the story of origin in the *Memorial de Sololá* differs from the K'iche' myth, but shows conformity with the other sources in that the forefathers of the Xajila'-lineage, Q'aqawitz and Saqtekaw, arrived *ch'aca palow*

“across the sea” from Tulan, thus, likewise associating Tulan with the place of creation names Paxil (*Memorial de Sololá*, Otzoy, 1999:155).

... kecha' k'a	... they said.
ch'aa palow xojpe wi	Across the sea we came,
pa Tulan	from Tulan
rub'i' juyu'	as was called the mountain where
xojaläx xojk'ajoläx wi pe	we were born and engendered
ruma qate' qatata'	by our mother, our father,
ix qak'ajol kecha'	you are our sons, they said,
ri ojer tata' mama'	the ancestral father and mother,
Q'aq'awith Saqtekaw	Q'aq'awitz and Saqtekaw
kib'i'	were the names
ri qi xepe pa Tulan	of those who truly came from Tulan

(*Memorial de Sololá*, transcription after Otzoy, 1999:§2, 155)

The gloomy Kaqchikel narrative describes the forefather's departure from Tulan as accompanied by negative omen and the presaging of death and dismay. The account of the crossing of the sea bears some similarity with the description in the *Título de Totonicapán* in that the Kaqchikel forefathers Q'aq'awitz and Saqtekaw part the sea by the help of the red staffs they brought with them from Tulan and from which they derive their name (see *Memorial de Sololá*, Otzoy, 1999:158). The *Memorial de Sololá* specifies that the people traveling from Tulan came from four directions and that there were four Tulans—one in the east, one in the west, one called Xib'alb'a and another one which is the abode of K'ab'owil:

... kecha' Q'aq'awitz Saqtekaw	... Q'aq'awitz and Saqtekaw said:
kaji' k'a xpe wi	“It was four (locations),
winäq pa Tulan	where people came from Tulan:
chi releb'al q'ij jun Tulan	in the east is one Tulan,
jun chik k'a chi Xib'alb'ay	another one there in Xib'alb'ay,
jun chik k'a chi ruqajib'al q'ij	another one where the sun descends (west),
chi ri' k'a xojpe wi	the one where we come from
chi ruq'ajib'al q'ij	is where the sun descends (west),
jun chik wi k'a chi K'ab'owil	another one there in K'ab'owil.

(*Memorial de Sololá*, transcription after Otzoy, 1999:§4, 155)

The *Memorial de Sololá* contrasts with the *Popol Vuh* and other sources in that it relates that the Kaqchikel forefathers came to Tulan *ch'aa palow* “across the sea” from *r(i) uqajib'al q'ij* “where the sun descends, the west.”

chi ruqajib'al q'ij	From where the sun descends (west)
xojpe wi	we came
pa Tulan	from Tulan,
ch'aa palow	across the sea
k'a k'o wi Tulan	where there is Tulan.

(*Memorial de Sololá*, transcription after Otzoy, 1999:§4, 155)

The *Historia de los Xpantzay de Tecpan Guatemala* fuses the locations Wuqub' Pek Wuqub' Siwan "Seven Caves, Seven Canyons" and Ikim Tulan Ajtz'ib' Tulan (*Quim Tulan Ahzib Tulan*) "Southern Tulan, Writer's Tulan" into one single place of origin. It is worth mentioning that this document specifies the place of origin as *niqaj palo* "the center/midst of the sea."

... ub'inatisaxik kan kumal	... it was named by them
ri niqaj palo	the midst of the sea
(W)uqu' Pek,	Seven Caves,
(W)uqu' Siwan	Seven Canyons
ri (i)kim Tulan	Southern Tulan,
r(i)'Ajtz'ib' Tulan	Writers Tulan,
xecha' chire ri	they called it

(*Historia de los Xpantzay*, Recinos, 1957:123)

In some sources, the account of the place of origin is conflated with biblical concepts which has given rise to assumptions that the entire myth of origin and creation from the sources has been influenced by Christian ideology (cf. Carmack and Mondloch, 1983:18–19, 210). In this way, the *Historia de Don Juan de Torres* includes the biblical concept of Babylon in its description:

chila' k'ut xe pe wi	From there they came
chi releb'al q'ij	from where the sun emerges (east)
ch'aqa cho ch'aqa palow	across the lake, across the sea,
ta xe xelik	when they left
chila' nay puch	there as well
Babilonia ub'i	it is named Babylon.

(*Historia Quiche de Don Juan de Torres*, Recinos, 1957:24)

The fusion with biblical places is indeed in contextual accordance with the given directions of this place in "the east" and "across the sea." In the *Título de Totonicapán* such accordance is less explicit, but nevertheless present, since the text refers to Tulan as a form of paradise, alluding to the biblical place of the "true Sinai" in one passage, and defining the location of Tulan in the "east" and "on the other side of the sea" in another:

chupam <i>paraiso terenal</i>	In the terrestrial paradise
xojtz' aq wi	we were formed
xojb'it wi	we were shaped
rumal <i>dios</i> nima ajaw	by god the great lord.
mawi xutzin chi	Not was completed
ub'i kumal	his name by them
rumal k'ut kimak	because of their sin.
are k'u ri Sewan Tulan	This was the Siwan Tulan
xkib'ij	they had named
cha k'ut usuk'ulkil <i>Sineyeton</i>	it is said, the true Sineyeton.

(*Título de Totonicapán*, fol. 7v)

The *Popol Vuh* recounts a journey by the forefathers' sons who go back to Tulan to receive the insignia of the lordship from the mythical lord Nacxit—one of the titles of Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. In this account, it is again specified that Tulan and the east are “on the other side of the sea.”

We go to the East from where our fathers came.” Thus said the three sons when they began their journey. Co Caib was the name of the first, the son of Balam Quitze of the Cavecs. Co Acutec was the name of the son of Balam Acab of the Nihaihs. Co Ahau was the name of the other, the son of Mahucutah of the Ahau Quichés. These, then, were the names of the three who went across the sea. They had wisdom and knowledge. They were more than ordinary people in their nature. They left behind their counsel to all their older brothers, and their younger brothers.

They rejoiced when they left: “We will not die. We will return,” they said when the three of them left. Thus they passed over the sea, arriving there in the East. They went there to receive their lordship.

... They also brought the writings of Tulan from the other side of the sea. These were the writings, as they were called, that contained the many things with which they had been invested. (Christenson, 2003:256, 259)

The *Título de Totonicapán* recounts basically the same story. It describes how two sons of *Balam Quitze* went to the east to the lord *Nacxit* to ask for peace. The *Título* specifies further that *Co Caib* went directly to where the sun rises and *C'o Cavib* to where the sun sets, namely and explicitly Mexico, returning along the sea shore (Carmack and Mondloch, 1983:181; fol. 14r-1v).

Interpretations and Their Critique

Although the sources may vary in detail and differ with respect to the precise direction of the journey, they are consistent in their statement that the K'iche'an people of the Guatemalan highlands originate from a place “on the other side of the sea.”¹ This place is referred to as *Tulan*, *Tulan*, *Vvcub Pec Vvcub Zivan*, *Paxil*, *Cayala* (or various other combinations of these toponyms). And with the exception of the *Memorial de Sololá*, the sources agree that this alleged homeland is located somewhere in the east, “where the sun emerges.”

The fact that various independent sources correspond in their account of a place of origin “across the sea,” in the east that was named Tulan left room for interpretation and hypothesis. The distinction of historical and mythological information

¹The phrase *ch'aaq palow* has found several translations in the past, such as “near the sea” (Edmonson, 1971) or “besides the sea” (Tedlock, 1996:16). Yet, its etymological meaning is clearly “across the sea” or “on the other side of the sea” as colonial dictionaries as much as modern usage confirm: *chaca-haa-ubic* “de la otra parte del río,” *chaca-haa-uloc* “de esta parte del río” (Bastea, 1698:fol. 178r); *Ahaka ya-* “allende el río o el mar, ribera de río” (Smailus, 1989:186); *Ahaya-* “a la otra parte, o de la otra par[te] del río, o laguna,” *Ahaka ulya-* “de esta parte” (Vico, 1555:fol. 216v); *qha3a* “de la otra parte” (Coto, 1983[1650]:CCLI). In its contemporary usage in Modern K'iche', it means “other side, distant land,” e.g., *ch'aaq ja'* “otro lado (país lejano)” (Ajpacajá et al., 1996; see also Ajpacajá and Pedro, 2001:158).

within the colonial sources of Guatemala has been troubling ethnohistorians for some time (see among others Carmack, 1973:43ff.; Akkeren, 2000; Yamase, 2002:91ff.). With respect to the question of origin it has been generally accepted that the colonial sources have to be understood as historical accounts and mythological narratives that would work along the same lines as our western perception of history and mythology (see e.g., Carmack, 1981:43–44). Being so widespread in all the sources, there has been little doubt that the concept of an origin from “the other side of the sea” is a historical fact, which has found its way into Maya mythology. This assumption led scholars to ponder about the geographical whereabouts of an actual place of origin and about an immigration of foreign ethnic groups into the Guatemalan highlands (cf. Carmack, 1981:43ff.).

Besides the attempts of Ximénez (*Historia* cf. Libro I, cap. xxiv) to use the myth about the crossing of the sea to prove an Old World origin of the K’iche’, the most prominent interpretation is that the K’iche’ lineages immigrated from Mexico. The earliest Spanish accounts state that contemporary K’iche’ understood themselves as originating from the province of Nueva España. Las Casas writes:

El reino más poderoso que habia en muchas leguas del circuito de lo que nosotros llamamos Guatimala, especialmente hácia los altos y sierras, era el reino de Utlatlan. Este reino tuvo origen desta manera: que vinieron cuatro hermanos de hácia las provincias de la Nueva España, y así parece por los ídolos y dioses que adoraban, y por decir que vinieron de las siete Barrancas, puesto que difieren ambos lenguajes, si no es algunos vocablos, por lo cual dicen algunos viejos que fueron ambas una los tiempos pasados. (Las Casas, Apologética, cap. CCXXXIV)²

This interpretation became the most common and widely accepted one that is to date little disputed:

... most of the Highland Guatemala traditions concur in naming Tollan as the homeland of the ancestors of various ruling dynasties in this predominantly Mayance-speaking region ... Even without these explicit statements, the patently Nahuatl names (e.g., Chimalacat, Iztayul, Tepepul, Acxopil, Ixcaquat, Ucelut, Chicumcuat, Atunal, etc.) of certain of these dynasts would in themselves point to an ultimate Central Mexican origin for their lineages. (Nicholson, 2001:169)

Archaeological data have been interpreted as providing evidence for foreign influence from Central Mexico in the southern Maya area in the Postclassic period. Sudden changes in settlement patterns, ceramic types such as Fine Orange and Plumbate pottery, as well as architectural and sculptural style otherwise known from the Gulf Coast area which spread along the Motagua and Usumacinta River drainages into the highlands, have been seen as indicators for cultural influence, if

²English translation: “The most powerful kingdom that existed within a radius of many leagues of what we call *Guatimala*, especially in the heights and ranges, was the kingdom of *Utlatlan*. This kingdom had its origin like this: four brothers came from the provinces of New Spain, which is suggested by the idols and gods that they worship, and by the fact that they came from the seven ravines; (it is) given that both languages differ, and not only in a few words, which is why some old people say that both were once one in former times.”

not invasion of Mexicanized Chontal Maya speakers from that region in the Early Postclassic (see Sharer, 2000:485–486; 488–489).

Based on ethnohistoric accounts, Carmack defined these immigrants as Epi-Toltec warlords or “small military bands” from the Tabasco-Veracruz region who started to subdue the local groups of the Highlands by means of advanced military technology (atlatl, *macana*, cotton-quilted armor) around 1250, which marked the beginning of the Late Postclassic era (cf. Carmack, 1981:43). Using indications from the ethnohistoric sources, Carmack argues that the mythological founders came from a place “near the sea with many rivers and lagoons” where fishermen and farmers live, “who grew such lowland crops as cacao, *zapotes*, and *pataxte*” (1981:44–46). Drawing on linguistic evidence to identify non-K'iche'an place names mentioned in the sources as toponyms in the Gulf Coast area (including Cayala, Tepew Oliman, Zuiwa etc.) as well as along the possible migration route, Carmack sees the description of the individual stations of the migration tales as evidence for a Gulf Coast origin. He argues that the K'iche' forefathers were nahuatized Chontal Maya speakers who were in some way related to the Nahuaspeaking *Tepew Oliman*, as suggested by the following paragraph from the *Popol Vuh* (see Carmack, 1981:48–49):

“Alas we were lost! At Tulan we split ourselves apart. We left behind our older brothers and our younger brothers. Where did they see the sun? Where were they when it dawned?”

This they sang concerning the bloodletters and sacrificers of the Yaqui people. Tohil is the god of the Yaqui people, who they call Yolcuat Quitzalcuat.

“We were separated there at Tulan Zuyva. We left them to come here. But we were complete before we came here.”

This they said among themselves when they remembered their older brothers and their younger brothers, the Yaqui people. These dawned there in Mexico, as it is called today. Thus surely a portion of them remained there in the East, they whose names are Tepeu [...] Oliman. “We left them behind,” they said. (Christenson, 2003:230–231)

Tepew means “conqueror” according to Simeón (1996:355; see Akkeren, 2000:126) and *Oliman* is likely derived from *oloman* “place of rubber” (Christenson, 2003:203) or *ollamani* “ballplayer” (Akkeren, 2000:126). The “Place of Rubber” was the way Nahuaspeakers referred to the Gulf coast area at the time of the conquest. This identification of the name has led scholars to see connections of the K'iche' forefathers with the inhabitants of the Gulf Coast region, foremost the Olmeca-Xicalanca (Schele and Mathews, 1998:293, 383—note 4; Christenson, 2003:203). The description in the *Memorial de Sololá* that the Kaqchikel founders on their way to the east entered into severe battles with the Nonohualca Xulpiti who inhabited this region called Suywa, came to be understood as evidence for a Gulf Coast relation since these people were fighting in canoes (cf. *Memorial de Sololá*, Otzoy, 1999:§19–20, 159–160). This hypothesis is supported by Lyle Campbell's linguistic analysis of K'iche'an who identifies the majority of Nahuaspeaking loans in K'iche'an languages to come from the Tabasco-Veracruz area (Campbell, 1977:103, 109). However, given that “Nonohualca” derives from Nahuatl *nontli* “mudo” and “Xulpiti” from *xolopiti* “tonto, idiota,” van Akkeren (2000:126) points out that the ethnonym might equally refer to any non-Maya speaking people populating a coastal area.

The *Popol Vuh* text mentions the Yaqui as a people who are culturally related to the K'iche' in that they are of the same origin and worship the same god. The question remains whether this statement can be taken literally and interpreted as a true historical fact or whether it was an attempt of the local elite to link up with the dominant and influential culture of Postclassic Mesoamerica in Central Mexico.

In the Late Postclassic, significant elements of political legitimacy were derived from the Toltecs. Ruling lineages all over Mesoamerica tried to establish some form of connection with the legendary Tollan—either by origin and descent or by travel and contact (Christenson, 2003:209). According to the colonial sources of Central Mexico, Tollan was founded by the priest-ruler Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. The ancient Toltecs were regarded as the creators and bearers of culture, as the inventors of sciences, calendrics, writing, and craftsmanship (León-Portilla, 1980:207; Cowgill 2000:292). In post-Conquest K'iche' the term *tulan* refers to a city or house that has been abandoned; Basseta translates it as a “palace, or manor-house” (Christenson, 2003:209). The original meaning of *tollan* in Nahuatl is “Place of Cattail Reeds.” In Central Mexican sources the term was used as a categorial title given to actual cities that were powerful religious centers and were perceived of as places of origin and creation, such as Tenochtitlan, Tula in Hidalgo, Teotihuacan, Cholula and Chichen Itza. But many references to Tollan in the Central Mexican sources cannot be related to any concrete specific place (Schele and Mathews, 1998:38–39; Akkeren, 2000:61–62, 88; see Christenson, 2003:209; see also Cowgill, 2000:292).

The migration-tale about an origin from Tollan became the ideal and model feature of political legitimacy in the Postclassic throughout Mesoamerica, and it has always been an issue of debate to what extent the traditions indicate actual migrations of real people (cf. Carmack, 1981; Akkeren, 2000:60–62).

There have been various efforts to locate Tollan in the archaeological record. In the Guatemalan sources, the place of origin is generally referred to as *Tulan Suywa*³ or *Tulan Siwan* (see above, cf. also Tedlock, 1996:45). The suggestions for an actual location of this Tulan Suywa or Tulan Siwan include Chichen Itza and Mayapán (Recinos, 1950:63–69; Recinos and Goetz, 1953:65; Fox, 1978:1–2, 119–121; Carmack, 1981:43, 46–48; see Christenson, 2003:209–210) as well as Kaminaljuyú (Tedlock, 1996:45) and Copán (Tedlock, 1996:45; Sharer, 2000:487).

The interpretation of Tulan Suywa as Chichen Itzá has been primarily based upon the statement in the sources that it was to be found “across the sea,”—and that this was “referring to a route eastward down the Motagua Valley to the Caribbean,

³The meaning of *Suywa* (*zuywa*) is not entirely clear. It may equally be derived from Nahuatl *suyua* “Bloody Water” or from Yukatek “Confusion” (see Christenson, 2003). Tedlock translates it as “twisted” or “deceptive” (Tedlock, 1996:45) which bears sense with respect to the concept of *suywa t'an* “figurative or rhetorical language” which in the *Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* refers to riddles and word plays by which true lords were to prove their legitimacy (Roys, 1993, 1967:88–98). In the Yucatec *Maya Books of Chilam Balam*, *Suywa* is identified with Xicalanco, an ancient port city on the shores of the Laguna de Términos in the Mexican state of Tabasco (Recinos and Goetz, 1953:53, 216; Campbell, 1970:7; Carmack, 1981:46; cited after Christenson, 2003:210—note 548).

then by boat along the coast to the peninsula” (Sharer, 2000:487; see Tedlock, 1996:221, 255–256, 259).

Christenson (2003:91–92, 209) has suggested that the Tulan from which the ancestors of the K'iche' rulers derived their authority to rule might have been identical with Chichen Itza, Mayapan, or other “Toltec-influenced” sites which were most likely recognized as centers of pilgrimage during the Postclassic period.

Despite the fact that the sources are quite consistent with respect to Tulan Suywa and the place of origin being located *chi relib'al q'ij* “where the sun emerges,” the aforementioned proposals all point to places in the north (Yucatán) or west (México). The *Memorial de Sololá* is the only source that gives an origin from a Tulan in the west, however at the same time clarifying the existence of four Tulans—one for each cardinal direction. Looking eastward from the Guatemalan highlands, we would have to assume the origin of the founder-fathers to be somewhere in present-day Honduras, rather than any place in Yucatán or in the Gulf Coast area. It has therefore also been suggested that Copán might be the enigmatic Tulan Suywa from the sources, and archaeological evidence for an Early Postclassic occupation of the Classic Maya city might be an indication for this (see Tedlock, 1996:45–47; Sharer, 2000:487). However, there is no sea one would have to cross to reach the highlands from Copán.

It is hard to imagine that text sources produced by the members of a culture that ever since Preclassic times paid utmost attention to astronomical appearances and cardinal directions are not more specific about the exact location of a major centre of pilgrimage or an important political power. Trying to find a way out of the dilemma by assuming that the eastward location given in the sources refers to the forefather's perspective at their place of departure, i.e., the Gulf Coast area (cf. Christenson, Carmack), would only be convincing if we followed the text of the *Memorial de Sololá* which explicitly states that the founders came from the west and moved eastward from Suywa (see above). The *Popol Vuh* instead mentions their leaving the east, i.e., the place of creation (Paxil), when moving onwards to Tulan—and again equates Tulan with the east—so the mentioned directions do not seem reliable in any geographical sense. Given that it is indeed likely that the Postclassic center of Chichen Itza was a destination for pilgrims from the Guatemalan highlands (cf. Kubler, 1985:315), the imprecision of direction poses even more questions, if we consider the statements as immediate references to these doubtlessly powerful and recognized places.

To complicate the matter even further, the colonial Yukatek Maya likewise believed their forefathers to have come from across the sea where the sun emerges. However, Diego de Landa's statement has been thus far mostly interpreted as an instance of Christian ideology, which relates the Maya to the lost tribes of Israel:

Some of the old people of Yucatan say that they have heard from their ancestors that this land was occupied by a race of people, who came from the East and whom God had delivered by opening twelve paths through the sea. (Tozzer, 1941:16–17)⁴

⁴Que algunos viejos de Yucatán dicen haber oído a sus (ante)pasados que pobló aquella tierra cierta gente que entró por levante, a la cual había Dios librado abriéndoles doce caminos por el mar... (Landa, *Relación de las cosas...*, cap. v; 1986:1)

Landa's account and the Guatemalan sources are just too similar to be conceptually unrelated—and eastward from Yucatán lies the Caribbean Sea.

The interpretive problem arises from the assumption that the K'iche'an and Yucatek sources may be taken as literal and relating historical fact. The mention in the highland sources of a place called Tulan that was located *ch'aaq palow* "across the sea" and *relib'al q'ij* "where the sun comes out" is in fact more cogent, if not understood literally but metaphorically.

Hypothesis

This paper puts forward the hypothesis that the concept of "the other side of the sea" conveys a religious concept of Maya cultural tradition that has been misinterpreted thus far. It has generally been taken quite literally to refer to the geographical location of Tulan as a former center of political authority. The evidence presented in this analysis will demonstrate that "the other side of the sea" is a metaphor which refers to an otherworldly place of creation. The evidence further suggests that the Tulan from the written sources may be best understood as a mythological rather than an actual place of origin. The following analysis will take into account that archaeological and linguistic evidence that point to close cultural connections between the Guatemalan highlands and Central Mexico, or the Gulf Coast, but will not enter into the discussion whether there ever was an actual immigration to the Maya area.

Cultural horizons have shown that ideology and belief are elements that may "travel" back and forth without physical migration being involved. Prestigious or status related cultural items—artifacts as well as ideology—are likely to be copied and adopted. The biblical story of creation, for instance, or the Passion of Christ, have been syncretized into local cultural myths all over the globe. Mythology may be acquired, including names and toponyms. A wide range of mythical elements that we find in the *Popol Vuh* and other highland sources are principally known to us from Aztec traditions, such as the migration story itself, the description of the émigrés covering up in hides, the taking of local wives etc. (see e.g., Motolinía *Epístola Proemial*). Although mythological parallels can be identified, the direction of borrowing, or source of common origin, is not always clear.

The Aztec sources describe the place of the origin of humanity or mankind generally as a mountain with a network of caves named *Chicomoztoc* "Seven Caves" (see Miller and Taube, 1993:60). The concept clearly corresponds to the reference to Wuqub' Pek Wuqub' Siwan in the highland sources. Archaeological evidence of artificial caves underneath pyramids and settlements from Postclassic and Classic times—the caves underneath the Sun Pyramid in Teotihuacan and underneath the K'iche' capital Q'umarkaj are certainly the most prominent examples—shows that we are dealing here with a rather old concept with roots deep in pan-Mesoamerican tradition (Miller and Taube, 1993:56). According to Aztec tradition, Tollan is a concept as mythological and intricate as in the Guatemalan sources—a place of allegedly

historical episodes as much as a paradise-like place of creation and abundance where power and legitimacy is bestowed (Miller and Taube, 1993:170). However, in *Aztlán*, the legendary place of Aztec departure, there is a telling resemblance to the concept of Tulan Zuyva in the *Popol Vuh* (see Yamase, 2002:91, 101).

These mythological parallels in addition to the term *tollan* being etymologically Nahuatl seem to suggest that we are dealing with a mythological concept that was borrowed from Aztec tradition rather than with a real political center called Tollan from where the K'iche' forefathers emigrated to take political control of the Guatemalan highlands. If we accept Tollan as a borrowed concept, then we have to assume that the references to the direction of origin, i.e., "where the sun emerges" and the "other side of the sea," have been borrowed as well. However, Aztec sources relate that people came from the north, or even the west, where the sun goes down (e.g., *Crónica Mexicayotl*, § 9c, Riese, 2004). Such information is consistent with what we can reconstruct about the immigration of Uto-Aztecan speakers into Mexico (see Smith, 2003:37).

Connected with the borrowed concept of a supposedly mythological place called Tulan, the concepts of the "east/where the sun emerges" and the "other side of the sea" do not appear in Central Mexican sources and do therefore need more detailed consideration as possibly proper concepts from the Maya area.

Comparative Concepts

To show that the phrase "on the other side of the sea" is to be understood as a metaphor for some kind of otherworld, we may construct a line of evidence that combines the mythological narrations from the colonial sources with stunningly parallel concepts from modern oral traditions, ethnography, and Classic Maya iconography. All these sources are interpreted within the semantic context of the life-cycle of the maize plant, which is the archetypal metaphor for Mesoamerican creation mythology. The analogy explains the origin and creation of human life and the purpose of human death; it pervades modern Maya oral traditions and finds expression in Classic Maya iconography in form of the narrative that pictures the death, rebirth and resurrection of the Maize God (see Taube, 1985, 1986; Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991:28; Quenon and Le Fort, 1997; Bassie-Sweet, 2000).

The concept of "the other side of the sea" appears in oral traditions from the Guatemalan highlands, which are rich source for *emic* explanations of Maya cultural practices and world-view. Many thematic contents of oral traditions have roots in the Maya past and can thus give us access to their ideological underpinnings and cultural continuities.

A well-known tale from the Guatemalan highlands is the story about a man on the seashore who is swallowed by a large fish-like animal that takes him to the other side of the sea where he can free himself from the body of the creature using a knife. Upon arriving at the other seashore, he finds a rich maize field. As he feels very hungry, he breaks an ear of corn to eat it but the corn starts crying out. The

crying out of the corn alerts the lords of the maize field who approach the man wondering how he is able to eat the corn. They never eat, but only feed on the smell of corn because they have been created without an anus. The man tricks these lords by seducing them to allow him to slit them open with a machete where their anus should be, thus allowing them to eat corn as well. When the lords realize they are dying the man again tricks them asking them to provide him with a deer so that he may return and get a remedy for them. In this way, he returns to Guatemala and leaves his victims to die (cf. Mondloch, 1978:192–203; Weisshaar and Hostnig, 1995b:9–11; 18–20).

There are various versions of this story: sometimes the animal is a whale, sometimes an alligator. In another version, the journey across the sea is made by plane and the people he encounters on the other side of the sea are evil Russians (cf. Weisshaar and Hostnig, 1995a:vii).

The main recurring elements to be found in most versions are the following:

- the man is swallowed or eaten by an animal on the sea shore
- he frees himself or emerges again from the animal in a distant land
- he eats the corn in that distant land
- he deceives the inhabitants of that land how to eat corn by slitting them open
- finally, he escapes this place by the help of a deer

These narrative elements find overt and intriguing analogies in the colonial sources as much as in Classic Maya iconography and modern ethnography.

A Motif of Rebirth

The narrative element of being swallowed and traveling through the sea inside of an animal ostensibly reminds one of the biblical tale of Jonah and the whale. But biblical citation seems not to be involved here, as there is an antecedent for this episode in Classic Maya iconography that neatly fits the overall conceptual context. In a general sense, the animal and the journey may be understood as a *rite-de-passage* by which the man transcends from this world into another. In the most literal sense, the concept of *rite-de-passage* involved seems to be death. Yet, the act of swallowing leaves the man unharmed and “bodily intact” as he is taken on the journey through the sea to a place that he could not otherwise have reached on the basis of his own physical ability. The man frees himself by force, using a knife to slice open the belly of the animal from the inside—a narrative image that clearly alludes to a concept of birth.

In Classic Maya art, we find several images that depict the “birth” of anthropomorphic beings, or gods, from fish-like creatures. In their paper about rebirth and resurrection of the Maize God, Michel Quenon and Le Fort (1997) commented on this iconographic convention. In most contexts, the creature has fish- as well as snake-like attributes which facilitated the confusion of this image with that of a vision serpent (see Freidel et al., 1993:92; cf. Quenon and Le Fort, 1997:886).

Quenon and Le Fort identified the image of the young and handsome god emerging from the fish-monster as the Maize God. In some instances, the Maize God has the typically reclined position that identifies scenes of birth, or rebirth (see Fig. 5.1a, detail from K3033, see Reents-Budet, 1994:274); most images, however, show him emerging head-first from the fish-monster (Fig. 5.1b–e). A carved shell in the Dumbarton Oaks collection even depicts the Maize God breaking through the back of the fish (see Fig. 5.1f).⁵

If we take the fish-monster as an equivalent to the animal from the story, we may connect the *rite-de-passage*-concept with the Classic iconographic concept of the Maize God's rebirth. Drawing an analogy to the life cycle of the maize plant, the swallowing of the man would correspond to the sowing of the maize kernel into the ground. Classic imagery only depicts the liberation, or the rebirth of the Maize God from the body of the fish monster. On some vessels we find the scene to involve Chaak (Fig. 5.1d; K595, see Coe, 1978) and/or a protagonist that appears to be the wind god (Fig. 5.1e; K1742, see Robicsek and Hales, 1981) who are engaged in spearing the fish monster and seizing the young god by his hair, as if pulling him out of the

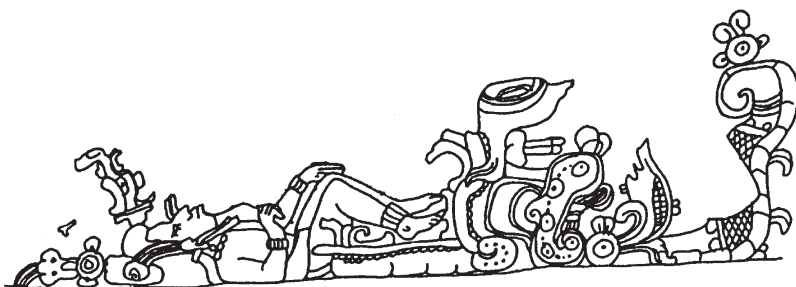


Fig. 5.1 Maize God emerging from a fish monster (a) Detail from polychrome vessel K3033 (after drawing by Linda Schele) (b) Chocholá vase K3115 (drawing by Carolyn Tate) (c) Lid of an Early Classic vessel after Gallery Mermoz Catalogue (drawing Michel Quenon) (d) Detail from polychrome vessel K595 (drawing Michel Quenon) (e) Detail from polychrome vessel K1742 (drawing Michel Quenon) (f) Carved shell from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (drawing Michel Quenon)

⁵ There has been some discussion whether all these images refer to the same narrative and whether it is indeed the Maize God who is the protagonist of this episode. A more recent suggestion is that the seized god in the scene is the Wind God who is captured by Chaak, an event that might be related to rain-making (Taube, 2004:74–78; Quenon 2005: pers. comm.). Taube's main argument for this identification focuses on the floral elements on the god's forehead and before his nose and mouth which are characteristic for the Wind God, as well as the circumstance that on all vessels the event happens on a date involving the day sign Ik'. However, floral elements are frequently found with otherwise undisputed images of the Maize God (see also Taube 1996). A similar spearing scene on the vessel K1391 clearly involves the Maize God—as does the birth scene on K3033 (Fig. 5.1a). Although neither image depicts the Maize God emerging from a fish-monster, the similar, if not identical, context of place and event in both cases suggests it to be rather likely that all these scenes are part of the same narrative.

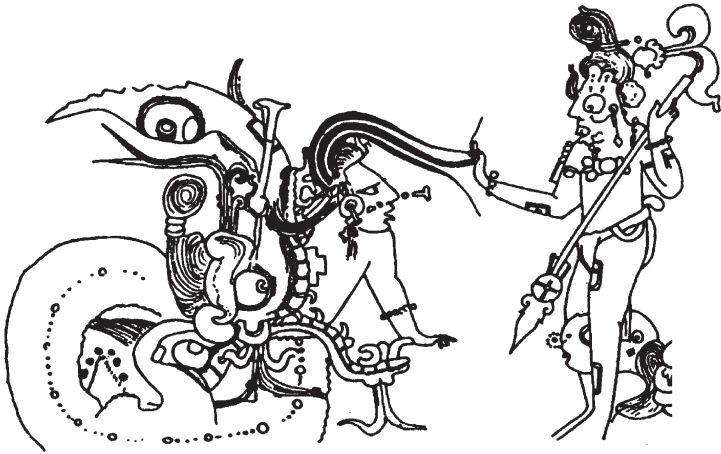
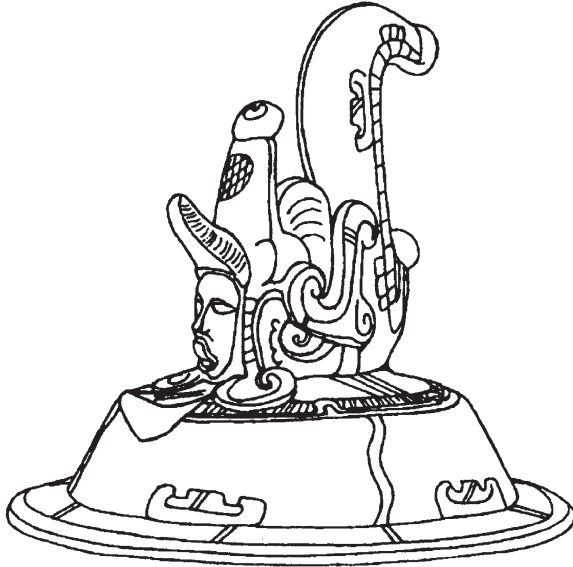
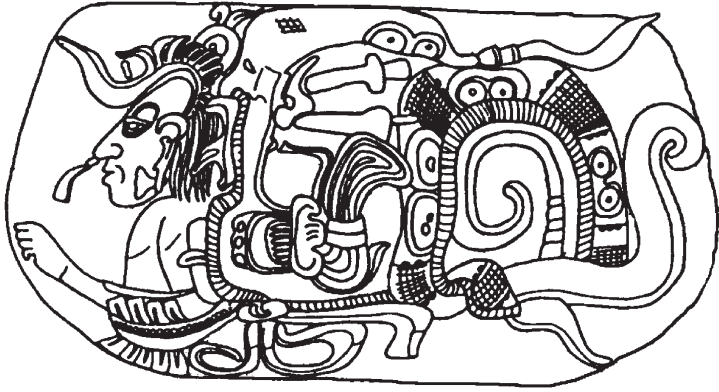


Fig. 5.1 (continued)

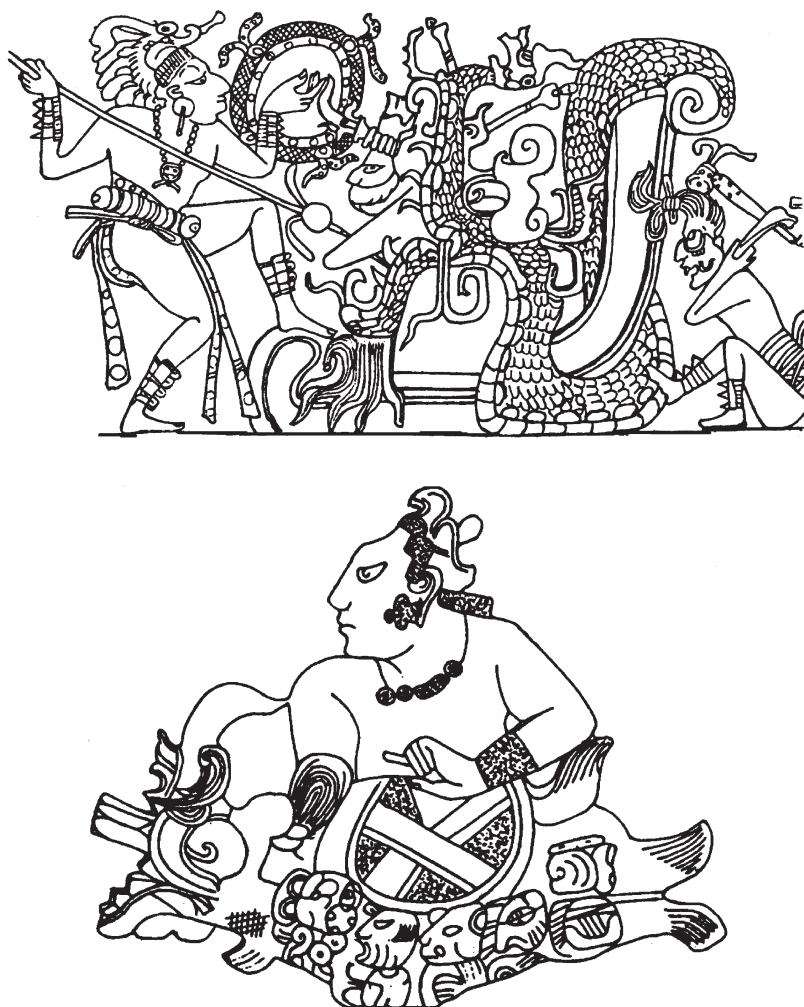


Fig. 5.1 (continued)

fish's mouth (cf. Quenon and Le Fort, 1997:888). Interpreted in the context of the life cycle of maize, the rebirth of the Maize God could be understood as an iconographic metaphor for the germination of the seed, which can only come about after the first rainfalls, iconographically represented by Chaak and the Wind God.

The location where the Maize God is reborn is identified as the "watery underworld" (cf. Freidel et al., 1993:92ff.; Quenon and Le Fort, 1997:886; 891; see e.g., K2723). It has been demonstrated that the rebirth of the Maize God takes place at *Yax Hal Witznal* "the first true mountain place," a place that can be linked with the Mountain of Sustenance and place of creation *Paxil* "Split Place" mentioned in the *Popol Vuh* (Taube, 1985; Freidel et al., 1993:138; Bassie-Sweet, 2001).

The man in the tale and the Maize God in Classic imagery are both swallowed by a fish-like creature. This may indicate that the place of rebirth is, either under water, or a place that can be reached via water. If we accept this analogy, the fish-monster functions in both cases as a “medium of transport” from this world into an under-, or otherworld, and is thus a metaphor for an otherworld portal. The most typical otherworld portal in the Maya system of thought is a cave, and abundant ethnographic evidence supports the assertion that caves are perceived as entrances to the underworld (Thompson, 1970; Bassie-Sweet, 1991; Christenson, 2001). Quite significantly, these cave portals are usually associated with water (see e.g., MacLeod and Puleston, 1979:72). Employing again the agricultural analogy, in the widest sense we can see this as alluding to the planting stick that splits up the ground and leaves a little cave where the maize kernels are sown. In fact, the Tz’utujil of Santiago Atitlán, see maize as emerging out of clefts in the earth. They build up little “hills” of earth around the growing maize stock to support it, and to keep it from falling down with the wind. This little hill is considered a “sacred mountain” and the maize plant is emerging out of its cleft, which is therefore a cave, or portal to the otherworld. During planting, the farmers often pour offerings to the ancestors into such portals at the center of their fields, which are referred to as *r’muxux* “navel” (Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991:27; Christenson, 2001:118).

On the Other Side of the Sea

Having arrived “on the other side of the sea,” the man—hungry from his journey—enters a rich maize field and breaks an ear of corn to eat it. In contrast, the lords, who are the owners of the maize field, do not exploit its plenty and simply smell the corn. Feeding on smell is a known *topos* in oral traditions from all over the Maya area and is generally connected with supernatural abilities and ancestors; according to contemporary belief in Yucatán, the ancient ancestors fed on the aroma of flowers (see Taube, 2004:73). Feeding ancestors and gods with the smoke of incense and other burned offerings is a recognized religious concept in Maya culture throughout time (Mendelson, 1967; Freidel et al., 1993:205–206; Houston and Taube, 2000; Christenson, 2003:213).

The contrasting opposition of “eating maize” and “smelling maize aroma” leaves the lords on the other side of the sea without the most basic trait of humanness. In contemporary highland Maya culture, the eating of maize, in particular of locally produced maize, is one of the central defining features of human identity (Christenson, 2006:212). The man’s “necessity” for sustenance is contrasted by the lords’ likewise non-human “inability” to digest or defecate. These attributes characterize these lords as belonging to a non-human sphere.

The opposition between eating and smelling, humanness and non-humanness, suggests that the lords of the maize field are analogous to the lords of Xib’alb’a of the *Popol Vuh*. Like the lords in the tale, the lords of Xib’alb’a are keepers of riches, which they do not exploit themselves. They merely smell the smoke of incense, feed

on the light, and partake of the essence of maize. The most striking parallel is the fruit tree where Jun Junajpu's decapitated head is hung, turns into a calabash and causes the tree to bear rich fruit. Despite the fruit of this tree being sweet and rich, the lords Jun Kame and Wuqub' Kame do not eat it as they cannot tell the difference between Jun Junajpu's head and the calabashes anymore, which may imply that they care to avoid eating the remains of the Maize God, and thus maize in general. The calabash tree from the *Popol Vuh* might be an acceptable analogy to the maize field in the oral tradition—the lords avoid eating the corn, the life- and humanness-defining fruit. This analogy is further supported by the well-known image of a Late Classic Maya vase (Fig. 5.2; K5615, see Reents-Budet, 1994:277) that depicts what is most likely Jun Junajpu's head in a cacao tree (see Miller and Taube, 1993:135; Miller and Martin, 2004:63). This image of the cacao tree has been convincingly identified by Simon Martin as a symbol for the *Iximte'*, the Maize Tree, symbol of sustenance and *axis mundi* (Martin, 2006:164–168). The concept of a primeval, deified, life-giving tree at the center of the world, engendering all life on earth, is a vivid belief in contemporary Atiteco myth (Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991:27).

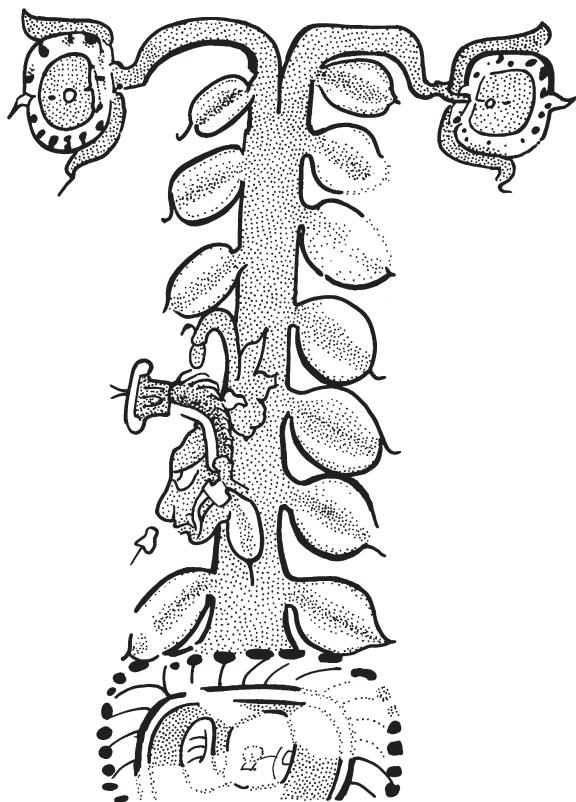


Fig. 5.2 The Maize God's face in a cacao tree; detail from K5615 (drawing Simon Martin)

Various lines of evidence support this analogy and further indicate the location of the maize field “on the other side of the sea” is indeed an otherworldly place. One of the most striking elements of the narrative states: the very moment the man tries to break an ear to eat it, the maize field screams: *Pero are taq xujek'o, xuraqaqeej uchi' ri ab'iix*. “But when he broke it, the maize field cried out.” The screaming maize field is reminiscent of the calabash tree, or *Iximte'*, from the *Popol Vuh*. and of Jun Junajpu's skull speaking to the maiden Xkik', spitting into her hand, impregnating her with his saliva, and thus engendering his sons Junajpu and Xb'alanke. His sons are born on the surface of the earth after the flight of Xkik' from Xib'alb'a. Just as Jun Junajpu revives himself by means of procreation with an underworld lord's daughter, the eating of maize from the “*iximte'*-like” maize field recreates the man from the story as a human being, or catalyzes his human resurrection.

The concept of eating primordial maize is known from ethnographic research. At the time of sowing in Santiago Atitlán, a ceremony is held which involves the drinking of *maat'z'*, a maize gruel that is prepared from flour of toasted maize which is mixed with ash and water (Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991:31–32; Christenson, 2001:123). *Maatz'* is thought to symbolize mother's milk or semen and the drinking of *maat'z'* is connected to the idea of life-renewal, rebirth and regeneration from death (Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991:31; Freidel et al., 1993:180; Christenson, 2001:123). The preparation of *maat'z'* resembles the episode in the *Popol Vuh* when the Hero Twins are burned, their bones ground and strewn into the river, where they later come back to life as fish (Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991:32; Tedlock, 1996:130; Carlsen, 1997:57–59; Christenson, 2001:123). Thus, *maat'z'* represents sacrificed maize (Christenson, 2001:159) and the drinking of *maat'z'* equates eating the fruit from the calabash tree/*Iximte'* in order to become impregnated, or engendered, by primordial maize semen.

It is of particular significance that *maat'z'* is consumed at a ceremony connected with the sowing of maize, to the time of burying seeds into the ground, or cave, which again corresponds to the journey of the man in the fish to the “place of germination.” In Aitéco culture, maize seeds are often referred to as *muq* “interred ones,” or *jolooma* “skulls” (Tarn and Prechtel, 1981; cf. Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991), clearly reminiscent of Jun Junajpu's skull being placed in the tree. Like the engendering of the Hero Twins in the episode from the *Popol Vuh*, the drinking of *maat'z'* regenerates human flesh. It was the maize from the so-called Mountain of Sustenance at *Paxil Cayala*—filled with yellow and white ears of corn, with pataxte and cacao, zapotes and anonas, jocotes and honey—that according to the creation story from the *Popol Vuh* was used by the gods as the main ingredient for the design of humankind. In modern Maya thought, the eating of maize is understood as a means of incorporating divine/ancestral flesh into their bodies, thus accessing ancestral speech, knowledge etc. Young children are fed maize so that they will be able to speak Maya and become Maya with ancestral flesh and blood. (Christenson, 2006:210)

However, human rebirth requires escape from the underworld—like Xkik' finding shelter with the grandmother's house, like the Classic Maya Maize God breaking out of the turtle carapaces, or like the maize sprout shooting out of the ground to grow. In the story, the man escapes the otherworld by deceiving the lords

seducing them to eat corn and allowing him to slit them open without the promised curative. This part of the story is clearly reminiscent of the Hero Twins Junajpu and Xb'alanke playing a trick on the Lords Jun Kame and Wuqub' Kame by misleading them into submitting themselves to sacrifice and not reviving them as promised—it is decisive that revival is held out as a prospect that is never accomplished. The killing of all Xib'alb'ans is the prelude to restoring Jun Junajpu's head and rising to the sky as sun and moon (cf. Christenson, 2003:185–186). Like the Hero Twins (and Xkik'), finding a way out of the otherworld requires wit and knowledge presumably obtained from eating corn.

It may not be accidental that the verb expressing this act of cruelty in Mondloch's version of the oral tradition is *pusu* “slice, cut open,” which is the same etymological concept that is applied in the colonial sources to refer to the heart sacrifice.⁶ In Classic Maya iconography, a parallel to this sacrifice might be seen in the Hero Twins stripping God L of his clothes and sacrificing one of his companions. Henceforward, God L has to pay tribute to the sun (Stuart and Stuart, 1993:170–171; Miller and Martin, 2004:59–60). The concept of tribute payment by God L may likewise find its parallel in the story: After tricking—or better sacrificing—the lords, the ultimate escape of the man from the otherworld is only achieved by the help of a deer which he demands from the lords “for their own benefit,” i.e., to bring them a saving curative.

Escape and Resurrection

The escape from the otherworld by help of a deer seems to have no overt parallel in the *Popol Vuh* or Classic Maya Maize God iconography.

However, the deer is a substitute for the human sacrifice and is seen as the quintessential sacrificial animal by the K'iche' and other Maya groups. It is related to the K'iche' creator god Tojil who brings rain, fire, and sustenance. Tojil, who is addressed in the *Popol Vuh* as *Qajawal Keej* “Our Lord Deer,” orders the K'iche' to sacrifice deer and prepare the deer bundles which they should show to the other nations as a substitute representation for the deity (Christenson, 2003:234–235; 254).

In Maya culture, the deer is a metaphor for bearing life-generating power and is thus connected to the life cycle of maize. In Santiago Atitlan, the bundle of Martín, the most powerful object associated with life-renewal, was first brought from the sacred place of creation, Paq'alib'al (see below), to town on the backs of deer. There is a deer dance in which elders wear the skins and deer heads prior to the “recreation of the world” on the Day of Martin on the 11th of November, a time

⁶Example from the *Popol Vuh*: *Ta xtiker k'ut pusunik, xepus ri Ilokab' chuwach k'ab'awil* “Then began therefore sacrificing, they sacrificed the Ilocab before the face of the god” (Christenson, 2004:231).

that marks the end of harvest season and beginning of the dry season. The deity Martín is the principal patron of maize, rain and life itself. The Martín bundle is kept in a wooden chest that bears the carved image of a massive ear of split-cob maize, which is one of the principal images associated with the deity as a patron god of maize. The confraternity house of the *Cofradía San Juan*, where the bundle is kept, is the place where seed maize is blessed, and rows of split-cob maize hang from its rafters (see Christenson, this volume). The deity invoked as Martín is represented by a large cloth bundle, called the *ruk'ux way*, *ruk'ux ya'* “heart of maize food, heart of water.” The annually performed ritual Dance of Martín is an act of creation during which “the ancient *nuwals* (revered ancestors, including Precolumbian Tz'utujil kings) give birth to the world” (Christenson, 2001:24).

The man's return to Guatemala, crossing the sea on the back of the deer, is analogous to the resurrection of the Maize God, and thus to the renewal of life as such. Classic imagery depicts the resurrection of the Maize God from a split turtle carapace (see e.g., K1892)—an image, which alludes to a sprouting maize plant shooting from the ground. Being the substitute representation of Tojil, the creator of rain, fire and sustenance himself, the deer represents the medium by which such resurrection is feasible. It may be added that among contemporary highland Maya, the day *Keej* or *Kiej* “Deer” is understood to be one of the strongest day signs that is related to the commemoration of the dead (Bunzel, 1981:338–339, B. Tedlock, 1992:113). Furthermore, all over Mesoamerica the deer is the year bearer that is associated with the cardinal direction of east, that is, *Mam Keej* among the K'iche', *Mazatl* in Nahuatl, and *Manik* in Yukatek (see B. Tedlock, 1992:99–100; Akkeren, 2000:402).

From these analogies and symbolic associations, we can conclude that “the other side of the sea” in the oral tradition corresponds to the underworld as it is depicted in Classic imagery or described in the *Popol Vuh*. It is the place where the lords of Xib'alb'a reign, where one can be revived only by means of the first sustenance (the first maize), and from where one can only escape by means of trickery and deceit. In modern Maya thought, human life is seen as equivalent to the life of maize and perceived as cyclical. The idea of “ancestral regeneration” being based on the concept of *k'ex* “exchange”—the most central aspect in Maya theology that describes the generation of new life out of death (Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991:26; 34). The story may therefore be interpreted as a contemporary account of death and resurrection.

Access to the Otherworld

The analysis of the concept “on the other side of the sea” in the modern⁷ and Classic narrative provides us with the necessary keys to understanding the description of origin places in the colonial sources.

⁷The crossing of the sea functioning as a passageway to a Xib'alb'a-like place is a topos that is also found in other oral traditions from the Maya area (see e.g., *The Adventures of Xun Beyond the Sea*, Gossen, 2002:539–597).

The dichotomy of the contrastive concepts of “eating” and “smelling” finds its parallel in the colonial account of origin. The *Popol Vuh* and the *Título de Totonicapán* tell us that the forefathers when they arrived from across the sea, from Tulan, did not eat and just sustained themselves by smelling the tips or bottoms of their staffs.

maja b'i wa	They did not have food
maja b'i echa'	or sustenance.
xa uxe'	Only the bottoms
kich'ami'y chikisiqo	of their staffs they would sniff,
keje' ri' kewa'ik chikina'o.	to feel as if they were eating.
xma kewa wi ta xepetik	But they did not eat when they came.
ma k'u q'alaj	It was not clear
ki ik'owik uloq pa palo	how they passed over the sea to come here.
keje' ri' maja b'i palo	It was as if there were no sea
xe'ik'ow wi uloq	that they had to pass over.
xa chuwi' taq ab'aj	They merely passed over
xe'ik'ow wi uloq	on the tops of stones
k'oleje' ula ri ab'aj	for there were stones
pa sanayeb'	on the sand.
ta xkib'i'natisaj k'ut	Thus they named it
Cholochik Ab'aj	“Lined Up Stones”
B'oqotajinaq Sanayeb' ub'i'	and “Piled up Sand” also was its name.
kumal ri' xe'ik'ow wi uloq	Over these they made their passage here
chupan palo	from within the sea.
ujachon rib' ja'	The water divided itself and
xe'ik'ow wi uloq	through it they made their passage here.

(*Popol Vuh*, fol. 38v)

ta kiq'axik k'u uloq	When they crossed over hereto,
waral uloq ch'aca palo	to here across the sea,
ta xkik'am uloq'	when they brought
uxe' che uxe' k'am	the roots of trees and bejuco,
chi mawi wa	they did not have food,
chi mawi ja	they did not have water.
xa ki uwi kich'amiy	Just the heads of their staffs
chikisiqo	they should smell,
chikub'e k'u kik'ux	should console their heart
xepetik	(when) they arrived.

(*Título de Totonicapán*, fol. 9r)

Ximénez linked the passage to the biblical exodus from Egypt and interpreted the passage as a literal statement that the forefathers were hungry and did not have anything to eat when they arrived in Guatemala (*Historia de la provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala*, Libro I, cap. xix, p. 43). The wider context,

however, suggests that the account of the forefathers nourishing on smell may refer to a characteristic of the arriviers and the circumstances of their arrival. It has been argued above that smelling instead of eating is connected with the realm of the divine and supernatural. In both sources, the attribute of “not-eating” is linked with the act of crossing over, or passing through, the sea. “Not-eating” is fasting. Until the present day, fasting is a common shamanic practice in the Guatemalan highlands (see e.g., Thompson, 1970:173). Religious specialists often may not eat for several days prior to an important ceremony; in Santiago Atitlan, past *nab’eyסים* are said to have been able to fast for weeks only smelling maize rather than eating it while engaged in ceremonies (Christenson, personal communication). If the statement that the forefathers did not eat when they came across the sea is to be understood as an indication that they were fasting (instead of suffering from hunger), the metaphor of “crossing the sea” might refer to the shamanic practice of accessing the otherworld.

The colonial sources provide further evidence for this view as they describe the forefathers as *nawal winaq*:

maja b’i kech	There was nothing theirs.
xa e nawal winaq	They were merely <i>nawal</i> people
chi ki k’oje’ik	in their essence,
ta xepe chila’	when they came there
Tulan Suywa	(from) Tulan Suywa,
Wuqub’ Pek Wuqub’ Siwan	Seven Caves, Seven Canyons,
cha’ chupan ojer tzij	as said in ancient word.

(*Popol Vuh*, fol. 36r)

The term *nawal* has found several translations in the sources.⁸ Traditionally, *nawal winaq* has been interpreted as “sorcerer” or “magic people” (cf. Schultze Jena, 1944; Recinos, 1950; Edmonson, 1971). Tedlock translates it as “people of genius” (Tedlock, 1996:152), while Christenson prefers the term “enchanted people” as referring to “unusual power of knowledge” as well as having the “extraordinary abilities or talents” of the forefathers (Christenson, 2003:213; see also 141). The modern K’iche’ understanding of the term *nawal* differs slightly from the well-described concept among Tzotzil or Yukatek Maya who refer to animal companion spirits of human beings as *nawales* (see Köhler, 1977:128–138). Among the K’iche’, the term

⁸The term is derived from Nahuatl *nahualli* “sorcerer, one who uses spells an incantations” (Karttunen, 1983:157). Edmonson in his colonial K’iche’ dictionary notates it as “linked spirit, power, evil spirits, knower, mystery” (Edmonson, 1965:78). In Nahuatl, the root of the word *nahualli* is **nahua-*, the basic sense of this root seems to be ‘audible, intellegible, clear’. From this root several meanings from “speaking” to “sorcery” and “language” are derived (Karttunen, 1983:157). However, the K’iche’ form *nawal* can also be morphologically analyzed as deriving from the root transitive verb *na’o* “think, feel,” -w- would be the antipassive suffix and the suffix *-al* is a still productive agentive nominalizer. The form would thus translate as “know-er or feel-er.” There are several other derivations from the verb *na’o* that are connected with the concept of *nawal*, such as *na’wikil* which can translate as “enchanted abilities” (see Christenson, 2003:141).

may moreover refer to a spirit essence of an animal and sacred object as much as of the day on which a person is born (Bunzel, 1981:330–331). A “*brujo-que-se - transforma*” is understood to be a *nawal* (Saler, 1969:9). Furthermore, the souls of deceased ancestors are referred to as *nawal* (cf. Freidel et al., 1993:184–185). Yet K'iche' and Tz'utujil people also talk about ancestors as powerful living priests. In Santiago Atitlan, the powerful *nab'eyails* are said to have been able to visit ancestors at will in the places they live and that they themselves never really died but just moved to the place of the ancestors (Christenson, 2001:210).

The idea of an ancestral abode that spiritual leaders may access by crossing some kind of water survives in Guatemala until the present day. In the Xinka area in southeastern Guatemala, traditional religious specialists—so-called *brujos* “witches,” *voladores* “flyers” or *hacedores de lluvia* “rainmakers”—are said to be able to leave their bodies at night, access the otherworld, and have the power to direct the rain clouds (Schumann Galvez, 1967; see also Freidel et al., 1993: ch. 1). During my fieldwork in Guazacapán in 2001, Sebastián Hernández, one of the few last Xinka speakers, explained to me that across the sea is the place where the dead people live. Duncan Earle describes that among the K'iche', “those who claim to come from across the sea (like many tourists do), are considered to be from another world in a previous creation” (Earle, 1986:168).

More evidence for this interpretation of an abode of deceased ancestors on the other side of the sea is provided by the *Popol Vuh*: when the sons of the forefathers decide to go back to the east, “where the sun emerges,” to receive their insignia of lordship, they cross again over the sea:

“kojb'e chila' releb'al q'ij chila' xepe wi qaqajaw”	“We go to Where the sun emerges (east) from where our fathers came”.
...	...
are' k'u kib'i' ri' xeb'e chila' ch'aqa palo e oxib' ta xeb'ek. xawi k'o ki na'oj k'o pu keta'mab'al ma na xa e ta winaq kik'oje'ik xkipixab'aj kanoq ronojel katz kich'aq keki'kotik xeb'ek “mawi kojkamik kojulik” xecha' ta xeb'ek e oxib'	These, then, were the names of those who went across the sea They were three When they went. They had wisdom and knowledge. They were more than ordinary people in their existence. They left behind their counsel to all their older brothers. and their younger brothers. They rejoiced when they left: “We will not die. We will return,” they said When the three of them left.

xawi xere xe'ik'owik	Thus they passed
chuwi' palo	over the sea,
ta xe'opon k'ut chila'	arriving there
releb'al q'ij	where the sun emerges (east).
ta xb'e	They went there
kik'ama' ri ajawarem	to receive their lordship.

(*Popol Vuh*, fol. 48v)

The statement that the sons “had wisdom and knowledge” and were *ma na xe a ta winaq ki-k'oje'ik* “more than ordinary people in their existence” identifies them again as *nawales* who have the capacity to access the ancestor’s abode. Interpreted in this way, the phrase *mawi kojkamik kojulik* “we will not die, we will return” may suggest that they go on a journey to an otherworld that can otherwise be accessed only by the dead and from where there is usually no means of return. As such, the *Popol Vuh* would justify their legitimacy to rule as having been bestowed by the place of the creation of humanity itself. This interpretation finds further support in the ethnographic analogy from Santiago Atitlan, where the powerful *nuwals* Francisco Sojuel and Marco Rohuch are simply said to have disappeared “for they did not die, they said that they would leave a sign in front of their home at the cave of Paq'alib'al to show that they still live.” (Christenson, 2001:87)

The interpretation of the phrase *ch' aqa palow* “across the sea” as a metaphor for the shamanic practice of transcending into the abode of the ancestors, requires us to focus our attention to water as an element of transcendence. Among the Tz'utujil, the places where deceased ancestors live are either associated with Lake Atitlan or with caves. The *nab' eysils* are able to access spiritual pathways that make it possible to travel great distances in a very short period of time—and in nearly all cases these involve watery pathways (Christenson, 2001:79). Shamans are generally associated with water, as water is seen as an element that contains knowledge and through which one can envision the world beyond (cf. B. Tedlock, 1992:54; see Bassie-Sweet, 2001).

The *Popol Vuh* provides us with more indications that the sea is a metaphor for water as a spiritual pathway. Describing the arrival of the forefathers from Tulan, the text states that they made their passage *chupan palo* “from within the sea”:

kumal ri'	Over these [stones]
xe'ik'ow wi uloq	they made their passage here
chupan palo	(from) within the sea.
ujachon rib' ja'	The water divided itself (and through it)
xe'ik'ow wi uloq	they made their passage here.

(*Popol Vuh*, fol. 38v)

As mentioned above, the *Historia de los Xpantzay de Tecpan Guatemala* describes the place of origin, Tulan, to be *niqaaj palo* “the center/midst of the sea,” which may be understood as additional evidence that the place of creation cannot be marked on any map. It is likely that the use of the complex preposition *chupan*

[chi u-paam] “in its stomach,” that is, “within,” in the *Popol Vuh* alludes to amniotic fluid, the water through which everyone who is born passes—given that the context is the forefathers/first human’s passage from their place of origin into the world they now reside in.

Conceptions of Creation Places

Having identified the concept of *ch’aqá palow* “on the other side of the sea” as an ancestral abode and place of human recreation, the chief question is how this concept can be defined with respect to the other places of origin mentioned in the colonial sources, and how these places of origin and creation may be tied into the landscape of Maya cosmology.

The *Popol Vuh* describes the place of creation, from where the forefathers crossed over the sea, as a mountain full of yellow and white ears of corn and all sorts of fruit, named *Paxil Cayala* “Split Place, Bitter Water Place.” *Paxil*, an abstractive of the verb *pax* “to split, to break open” has been identified as alluding to the myth that is known throughout Mesoamerica about the origin of maize from a mountain or rock that was broken open by the force of lightning (Tedlock, 1996:288; Bassie-Sweet, 2001:10; Christenson, 2003:193). The connection between lightning and the so-called Eastern Mountain of Sustenance is mirrored in Classic iconographic depictions of the Maize God’s resurrection being accompanied by Chaak and K’awiil (see above). In the *Popol Vuh*, this Mountain of Sustenance is not only the place of the discovery of maize, it is foremost the place where the creator gods form humankind from the first maize and water—that is possibly alluded to in the name *Cayala* which means “bitter water” and might refer to amniotic fluid (Christenson, 2003:193–194).⁹

The other name for the place of human creation in the sources is *Wuqub’ Pek Wuqub’ Siwan* “Seven Caves, Seven Canyons.” Caves have been seen as places of creation and passageways, or entrances, to the underworld ever since the Olmec times (cf. Miller and Taube, 1993:28; Bassie-Sweet, 1991, 1996). In Santiago Atitlan it is believed that there is a series of seven ‘cave’ openings into the underworld, all of which branch outward from beneath the floor of the church. The most powerful of these openings is the *r’muxux ruchilew* “the navel of the world,” a hole in the floor of the church that is uncovered once a year and gives access to the realm “where all the creative and destructive elements inherent in nature gather together” (Christenson, 2001:76–77). The most sacred among the caves is called *Paq’alib’al*. It is described by Atitecos today as a place where the spirits of the great saints and

⁹In Central Mexican oral traditions and in the text of the *Leyenda de los soles* the Mountain of Sustenance is the place where Quetzalcoatl finds the food that will sustain humankind that has just been newly created by the gods from their own blood and the ground bones of the humans of the former creation that were turned into fish by the flood (cf. Bierhorst, 1992:8–9).

nuwal ancestors live, and where wind and rain clouds are born. The cave is guarded by jaguars and a giant snake, the entrance is adorned with abundant fruit, and beside the cave grows a giant *po'j* tree “where angels rest when it rains, and inside the branches are clouds...” (Christenson, 2001:79 and 84).

The tree at Paq'alib'al is strongly reminiscent of the concept of the World Tree as the center of creation—a concept that we find throughout Mesoamerica (Miller and Taube, 1993:57; Freidel et al., 1993:55; cited after Christenson, 2001:85; see also López Austin, 1993:62). The association of caves with fruit-trees and abundance is also known from other areas. Barbara MacLeod describes a similar myth about a river running into a cave where it leads to a land of abundance and fruit-trees among the Tojolab'al in Chiapas (MacLeod and Puleston, 1979:73). As pointed out above, the eating of primordial maize, or of fruit from the primordial *Iximte'*, is associated with recreation and procreation, and thus, the connection of fruit-trees with caves defines these places as spaces of human renewal and rebirth.

Among contemporary Maya communities, caves of abundance are widely believed to be the abode of the most powerful deceased ancestors (Vogt, 1969:298, cited after MacLeod and Puleston, 1979:73; Christenson, 2001:84–87). These ancestors are not perceived as dead; Atitecos explain that the *nuwals* just went to Paq'alib'al and that the fruit-trees were a sign of their presence (Christenson, 2001:87). There seems to be a distinction between the death of ordinary people, who are simply buried in the cemetery, and powerful ancestors “going to Paq'alib'al.” It has been suggested that in Classic Maya thought, resurrection and ascent to the celestial paradise was restricted to the nobility, or even to the rulers alone who appeared as representatives of the sun and Maize God (see Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991:35; Taube, 2004:93). Just as the maize kernel, that is planted in the ground to sprout, is not dead but simply covered by earth, powerful ancestors are believed to control the “regenerative nature” centered in caves (cf. Christenson, 2001:78; Fischer, 1999:483).

All over Mesoamerica, caves are considered sacred places that form an interface between the world of the living and the world of the dead. According to Atiteco belief the *r'muxux ruchilew* and Paq'alib'al are both guarded by serpents. These serpents may be seen as symbolic representations of the passageway to the underworld, comparable to vision serpents in Classic Maya imagery, which function as portals through which deceased ancestors could re-enter the world of the living (Stuart, 1988:183–185; Freidel et al., 1993:207–210; Miller and Taube, 1993:150; see Christenson, 2001:79, 88). Snakes are widely associated with water in Mesoamerica. In the Maya highlands, they are understood as the guardians of wells and rivers; killing them would cause a well to fall dry (see several oral traditions in Weisshaar 1995b). The connection of serpents and caves as access portals to the otherworld seems to be consistent with this belief.

Caves are thought of as places where rain clouds and winds are created (MacLeod and Puleston, 1979:72; Christenson, 2001:84). Among the Yukatek Maya, it is believed that caves are inhabited by the Chaaks (Villa Rojas, 1945:103); the Tzotzil of San Pedro Chenalho “see a Chauc as the rain god, god of water, owner of the thunderbolt, lord and owner of the mountains, protector of *milpas*, giver of maize.

He is lightning; he lives in the interior of a mountain, the doorway to his home being a cave guarded by a frog” (Thompson, 1970:268; cited after MacLeod and Puleston, 1979:72). It is also in Yucatán, where the Chaaks as deities of rain and lightning are associated with the cardinal direction of east and it is believed that the “highest ranking Chaak resides at the eastern horizon” from where the first rains of the season set in (Villa Rojas, 1945; see Bassie-Sweet, 2001:8).

The east as the direction from where the rains of the season come links up with the agricultural year and the concept of the rebirth of maize and the renewal of the world. In Highland Maya languages the east is called the place “where the sun emerges,” connecting the cardinal direction with the concept of the resurrection of the sun. The conceptual connection of the east and the sea seems plausible. Traveling straight eastward from the Guatemalan highlands one reaches the coast of the Gulf of Honduras; when the sun rises in the morning, it thus emerges from the sea, out of the underworld and out of the darkness.

The attribute of darkness and obscurity seems to be important in this respect. Most of the colonial sources relate that the forefathers came from a place of darkness¹⁰:

wae r(i) utestamento	This is the testament of
qat(a)ta qamama	our fathers and mothers,
oj ak'a-nimaqi(b')	of us, the children-elders
Xpantzay	of Xpantzay,
chire qak'ojlem, q'alaxik	for engendering, our birth (was)
k'a qapetik	when we arrived
chi q'equm chi ak'a	in the darkness in the night
chila Tulan Suywa	from Tulan Suywa

(*Testamento de los Xpantzay*; Recinos, 1957:153)

The narrative in the *Título de Totonicapán* and the *Popol Vuh* likewise recounts that they left Tulan in the darkness:

ju su chi Tulan xpe wi	Straightaway at Tulan came
kiq'aq'al	their glory.
nima eta'mab'al k'o kuk'	Great knowledge was theirs.
chi q'equ'mal k'ut	In darkness therefore,
chi aq'ab'al puch	In night as well
xkib'ano	they accomplished it.
xepe chi k'ut	Already they came,
xeb'orotaj chi	Already they were pulled up
ula chila'	from there.
xkikanaj chik	Already they left it behind,
releb'al q'ij	the place where the sun emerges (east).

(*Popol Vuh*, fol. 37v)

¹⁰ We find this concept again in the Central Mexican sources where the arrival of the Aztecs is also stated as occurring at a time when there was still obscurity (see e.g., *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*).

An analogy for Tulan Suywa and the east as a place of darkness may be found in Classic representations of the Mountain of Sustenance that is typically marked not only with maize kernels but also with glyphs for *ak'ab* "darkness" (T504) which may be understood as a reference to an underworld place as much as to the rainwaters which are created inside the mountain (Martin, 2006:180). This interpretation finds its ethnographic analogy in the widespread idea of rain being created in caves, and thus in dark places.

This argument might even be driven further, interpreting the *ak'ab* signs marking the Mountain of Sustenance as an allusion to the fact that creation takes place before "the dawn." On plate K1609, the primordial waters of the underworld are referred to as *ik'naab nal* "black/dark ocean place" (see Wagner, 2000:287). Drawing again an analogy to the life cycle of maize and the process of natural human conception, we may say that sprouting and pre-natal growth take place in the dark—in the earthen ground, in the womb. Water is in both cases involved.

Thus, "leaving Tulan" may be understood as a metaphor for "sprouting/being born," that is, emerging from the place of creation/underworld/cave/womb through the sea/primordial water/ amniotic fluids into life. It has been noted before that in K'iche'an languages human birth is also described as "sprouting" or "dawning" (Tedlock, 1985:251; Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991:28, 30–31). The couplet of the "sowing" and the "dawning" is thought to have "human connotations" with the sowing being a metaphor for human death, while the dawning refers to human birth (Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991:30). The interpretation of the term *suywa* as "bloody water" (see above), which also alludes to amniotic fluids, certainly supports the idea of Tulan as a metaphor for a place of birth and creation.

This birth metaphor is consistent with the aforementioned association of water with knowledge. In the Postclassic sources, *Tollan* generally being referred to as a place of knowledge, wisdom, creativity, arts, and writing, and *Toltec* is the central concept for civilization. In view of that, The *Popol Vuh* account of the forefathers' sons bringing back insignia and writing from Tulan by crossing over the sea to the place where their fathers came from seems to confirm the interpretation of the water-passage as a metaphor for entering a spiritual pathway of knowledge that is only open to the powerful *nawals*.

The concepts of "Tulan," "the east," and "the other side of the sea" in the K'iche'an sources are metaphors for a place of origin in the sense of creation and not departure, and thus do not necessarily refer to an actual location that could be found on any map. Instead, the references to places of origin need to be understood within the framework of Maya cosmology.

Mesoamerican religious traditions distinguish between different otherworld places. In Maya cosmology, which is based on the daily journey of the sun, the west ("where the sun enters the water") is associated with death and the dreadful places named Xib'alb'a (K'iche'), Metnal (Yukatek), or Mictlan (Aztec) according to the various traditions. The east, in contrast, is the place of abundance and creation, where the sun is reborn from the waters, and where the souls of those who succeeded in overcoming the lords of the underworld ascend to the "celestial paradise" (Landa, 1986:60; Taube 2004:70). Both places are connected: from the place of

human defeat and death one proceeds through the waters of the underworld to the east where life is created from death.¹¹

The belief in an otherworld place where food is abundant is found among the Yukatek, Tzotzil, and Tz'utujil who call this place the “Flowery Mountain Earth” where recreation and renewal take place (Carlsen and Prechtel, 1991; Taube, 2004:81). The descriptions of Paq'alib'al in Santiago Atitlan (see above) clearly corresponds to the idea of what Taube labels “flower mountain”—a “paradise” and abode of the ancestors connected with the *axis mundi* (Taube, 2004:81). Rebirth, i.e., the ascent to the upper world, comes about in the east. The Ch'orti believe that “the soul of the child derives from the east” (Wisdom, 1940:427–428; see Taube, 2004). K'iche' daykeepers in Momostenango associate the east with the present and the future as well as birth—as opposed to the deceased ancestors who are associated with the west (see B. Tedlock, 1992:140–141).

The idea of the east as a place of glory and splendor where gods and ancestors reside is ancient in Mesoamerica and can be identified already in Olmec and Late Preclassic Maya culture (Taube, 2004:69). Studies in Classic Maya architecture and iconography have shown that there is a predominant pattern that ancestor shrines are located on the eastern side of residential groups (Chase and Chase, 1994; Becker, 1999). For instance, the facades of buildings on the east side of the Copan acropolis show iconography associated with rebirth and renewal (Wagner, 2006).

These Maya descriptions of a paradise of abundance find their Central Mexican equivalent in the concept of Tamoanchan, the place of creation where the world tree rises, where gods (e.g., the maize deity Centeotl) and humans alike were created as well as time and the calendar itself (Miller and Taube, 1993:160; López Austin, 2001:184–185). And as the east is the location where the sun rises, Tamoanchan is associated with the sun god Tonatiuh (López Austin, 1997:270). But the descriptions also remind one of Central Mexican Tlalocan, the realm of Tlaloc, on the fourth level of heaven—likewise a place of abundance of food, a watery, primordial land of warriors and the glorious dead that can be entered by religious specialists through caves and water in dreams (Miller and Taube, 1993:167; Knab 2001:227–228). This connection of warriors with the sun and the eastern paradise is also attested in Classic Maya iconography (Taube, 2004:86–87). López Austin (1997:267–269) suggests that Tamoanchan and Tlalocan form a mythical unit, which is embodied in the *axis mundi* with Tlalocan located at the root of the World Tree, while Tamoanchan is represented by its trunk and crown. The analogy lies again in the maize cycle with planting and seed germination taking place in Tlalocan and the sprouting of the plant being connected with the concept of Tamoanchan.

In Mesoamerican cosmography, the cardinal directions were marked by four world trees that were also associated with the four yearbearers (see Roys, 1933:64;

¹¹Taube links the two otherworld locations with the Maya concept of two human souls and that awaited different fates in the afterlife, with the way soul being associated with the underworld and the breath soul corresponding to the celestial paradise (Taube, 2004:91–92).

Codex Borgia, 1976:49–52; *Codex Dresden*, 1975:25–28; *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer*, 1971:1; Miller and Taube, 1993:186; see also Saturno et al., 2005). López Austin (1997:116, 270) interprets the Tamoanchan tree as the synthesis of the five trees that hold up the sky—the one in the center and four in the corners of the cosmos. This concept of synthesis explains why in modern Maya cultures “east” and the “center” are not conceived of as mutually exclusive ideas. The Yukatek Maya, for instance, understand the *axis mundi* and the east as identical concepts labeling the eastern horizon as the trunk of the sky (Villa Rojas, 1945; cited after Bassie-Sweet, 2001:8). In Santiago Atitlán the concept of the “navel of the world” is not tied to one single place but several actual places which are still seen as “one” center of the world. Santiago Atitlán itself is today considered a dawning, or Eastern place, irrespective of its actual location with respect to other places (Christenson, 2004: personal communication). The phrase *relib'al q'ij* may therefore be best translated literally as “where the sun emerges,” and not as “east,” to conserve its original meaning (see also Yamase, 2002:112).

This concept helps to unravel the mention of the four Tulans in the *Memorial de Sololá*, which seems to refer to this very idea of four World Trees in the east, west, north and south—each being a place of creation in itself. According to the text, two of these Tulans were related with the otherworldly locations of “Xib'alb'ay” and the place of the “Kab'owil.” The reference to the Tulan *chi Kab'owil* corresponds to the description in the *Popol Vuh* about the forefathers leaving the east to go to Tulan to receive their gods. Thus, the Kaqchikel-account reflects the four-partite cosmological system that is expressed in the text of the *Popol Vuh* by a single concept of Tulan.

The Ideology of Origin as a Source of History

While it seems that the places of origin in the K'iche'an sources need to be understood within a mythological context, we still have to account for the fact that *Tollan* and *Tamoanchan* functioned as reverential epithets that were given to a number of major religious-political centers (e.g., Cholula, Teotihuacan, Tenochtitlan) which were perceived as “places of creation” and were known pilgrimage sites (cf. Boone, 2000:375–378; López Austin, 2001:185; Christenson, 2003:94, 209). Other Postclassic place names allude to the concept of Tollan; e.g., the K'iche' named their capital Q'umarkaj, the “Place of Ancient Reeds” to indicate its political-religious centrality as a place of creation and of “Toltec” legitimacy (see Fox, 2001:295). Thus, it is likely that the concept may have had its physical manifestations in actual Postclassic cities, such as Chichen Itza or Tenochtitlan.

Some of the sources mention a second journey back to the east, to where the sun emerges, when the forefathers' sons cross the sea again to receive the insignia of power from a lord who was called Nacxit. The *topos* of a pilgrimage to Tollan, or the east, to obtain the emblems of rulership is known to us from other traditions within Mesoamerica. According to Mixtec sources, the ruler 8 Deer Jaguar Claw

legitimized his political authority by way of pilgrimage to a sanctuary that is believed to be Tula, Cholula, or Tulancingo, where he received the insignia of lordship from a Toltec king who shows traits of Quetzalcoatl (Byland and Pohl, 1994; Jansen, 1996; cited after López Austin and López Luján, 2000:65). These mythological accounts are believed to be indicative of an ancient practice to legitimize political authority at the supreme center of hegemonic control. Classic Maya hieroglyphic texts report of royal accessions as being supervised by foreign kings of dominant polities (Martin and Grube, 2000:19–20). These contexts and accounts are generally understood as being historical.

However, the topic of pilgrimage to sanction political power is also consistent if interpreted solely within the cosmological pattern in that authority to rule is bestowed by the ancestors at the eastern place of abundance, and thus, by the sun. Pilgrimage is a known concept in Mesoamerica, which is connected with centers that are understood as “eastern places.” With regard to this, Taube (2007) pointed out the practice among the Huichol who go on pilgrimages eastward to where the sun was first born.

The supreme lord mentioned in the K'iche'an sources is Nacxit, which was one of the names of the legendary and likewise mythological Toltec ruler Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl who according to written tradition at his death went eastward across the sea (Roys, 1967:83; Nicholson, 2001:283). The mention of Nacxit in the K'iche'an sources may reflect Central Mexican influence, but the whole concept might also function as a metaphor for declaring divine descent. The *Título de Totonicapán* recounts that Nacxit gave them the *Pisom Q'aq'al* (Carmack and Mondloch, 1983:175–176; fol. 8v, 9r), the “bundle of glory” that according to the *Popol Vuh* was left to the K'iche' by their forefather Balam Quitze. The K'iche' term *q'aq'-al* means literally “fire-ness” or “hot-ness” which has been demonstrated to be a characteristic trait associated with Classic Maya kingship (Houston and Cummins, 2004:365; Wichmann, 2004:80–81). The aspect of “fire/heat” again alludes to the sun, which is born in the east, and may thus indicate that the rulers claimed descent and legitimacy of office directly from the ancestors and divinity.

The concept of migration and descent from Tulan, the place of creation, is a wide-spread tradition in Postclassic Mesoamerica by means of which ruling lineages claimed political legitimacy. The statement in the *Memorial de Sololá* that the Kaqchikel forefathers came from the Tulan in the west, and the *Título de Totonicapán* recounting that one of the sons of Balam Quitze went westward, to Mexico (Carmack and Mondloch, 1983:181; fol. 14r-1v) may be interpreted as evident attempts in Late Postclassic highland Maya society to establish a connection with the politically influential culture of the time in Tenochtitlan. López Austin and López Luján have argued that this striving for cultural association with Central Mexico was an expression of political and ideological strategies by which a new system of political organization and power which may be called Toltec, or “Zuyuan,” spread over Postclassic Mesoamerica (2000:27). The similarities of written sources in Mesoamerica may be attributed to these strategies. However, it can be demonstrated that the Postclassic migration stories show continuity with an earlier system of thought.

The value attributed to purportedly foreign descent from a remote supreme center over local origin seems to be a defining concept of rulership and political power in Mesoamerica throughout time. The Early Classic interactions between Tikal and Teotihuacan that can be reconstructed from the early Tikal monuments are strikingly similar to dynastic patterns and events related by Central Mexican sources. Stuart reconstructs that in AD 378 a foreigner named Siyah K'ak' arrives at Tikal on the same day the previous Tikal ruler Jaguar Paw died. This arrival was apparently sanctioned by the alleged king of Teotihuacan Spear-Thrower-Owl. A year later, Siyah K'ak' oversees the accession of Spear-Thrower-Owl's son Nun Yax Ayin (Stuart, 2000:479–489). The concept of a new dynasty founder from foreign descent who arrives at a place, takes a local wife, and installs his offspring into office is clearly reminiscent of Central Mexican sources (see Motolinia's account of the dynasty found Acamapichtli at Acolhuacan).

Whereas Andrea Stone has interpreted these similarities in the Classic and Postclassic sources as a form of “ideological manipulation” that served to enhance elite status (cf. Stuart, 2000:501). David Stuart argues that the “claims of foreign descent were based on historical realities of the late fourth and fifth century” (Stuart, 2000:501). He sees evidence for this in the reconstruction of events that occurred at Tikal, Copán, and Piedras Negras, and in his identification that the Classic Maya name for Teotihuacan (references in Tikal and Copan) was *Pu* or *Puh* which means “Place of Reeds” (Stuart, 2000:502). He concludes that the “Tollan-paradigm” had its roots in the Classic and that Teotihuacan was the archetype of the “first ideal city” of Tulan which Classic Maya kings claimed as a “place and an idea of political origin” (Stuart, 2000:466, 506).

The historical connections do not need to be disputed. However, the thrust of this paper is to suggest that the original concept underlying historical events of dynasty founding and pilgrimage in Classic and Postclassic sources might be even older and deeply embedded in Maya culture and Mesoamerican ideology throughout time. Taube points out that the idea of the celestial sun paradise and flower mountain is rather ancient and that *Tonatiuh* is in fact the Aztec version of the Maya sun god. These data imply that Postclassic Central Mexican religious ideology was founded on ancient Maya ideas which were re-borrowed in form of Toltec traditions (Taube, 2004:69ff., 2007). In the colonial K'iche'an sources, “Tulan” thus functions as an *en vogue* Postclassic label for an older Maya, or even pan-Mesoamerican, concept of a place of creation where sustenance originates. References to the Tepew Oliman and the Gulf Coast area as they are found in the *Popol Vuh* might have to be understood as indications for vivid cultural memory and historical awareness in Postclassic Maya society of the Gulf Coast region as the cradle of Mesoamerican civilization.

Analysis of text sources from Mesoamerica involved a concerted attempt to neatly separating real historical events from mythological narratives. However, history and mythology may overlap as the following account about the quest for the Aztec homeland illustrates: Fray Diego Durán (cap. XXVII; 1984(II):215–224) reported that Motecuhzoma I sent out an expedition to search for the lost homeland where the ancestors had lived. After having transformed themselves into animals,

the emissaries arrived at a lake in the midst of it the mountain Colhuacan. After re-transforming themselves into humans they crossed the water in canoes in order to find Huitzilopochtli's mother Coatlicue and their ancestors still alive on the mountain. As a sign, they bring back all sorts of fruit from this place of abundance on their return to Mexico. Duran's account suggests that in the Late Postclassic cultural memory of Aztec society, Aztlan may indeed have been preserved as an actual place, which is not unlikely, given that the Nahuatl speakers were indeed immigrants to the area. The elements in the narrative describing that place are however reminiscent of the descriptions of Tulan, Wuqub' Pek Wuqub' Siwan in the Guatemalan sources.

It is generally understood that historical events form the basis of cultural memory and mythology. However, the reverse is equally true in that *weltanschauung* and religious belief shape the perception and recollection of history and, even more importantly, the course of action. Like this, cultural practice may be the actual expression of deeper conceptualizations, and claiming foreign descent, or traveling to a supreme center in order to derive political legitimacy may have to be understood as a sign of belief in the connection of divine ancestral renewal and actual, secular authority. If in Mesoamerican perception the east, where the sun emerges, is the place of wealth and ancestral power, then political dominance, pilgrimages to supreme centers, and the arrival of foreign dynasty founders will be understood as inherently logical and appropriate action within that ideological scheme. Ideology and cultural practice are interconnected and it may not be the question whether certain narratives are historical or religious, but whether they have become historical because they were part of an earlier ideology.

Thus, irrespective of whether there have been actual migrations of people into the Guatemalan highlands, the concepts Tulan, "on the other side of the sea," "where the sun emerges" in the K'iche'an sources are primarily references to an idea of a place of creation, rebirth, and human origin, which is meaningful within the context of Mesoamerican cosmology, political rhetoric, and cultural practice alike.

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Chapter 6

Fox Walker on the Parapeti River, Bolivia: The Origins of How We Guarani Live in Íví

Elio Ortiz, Antonio Mendez, Alejo Zarzycki O., and Janis Bristol Alcorn

Isoso Background: The People, the Land, and the River

The Guarani people currently occupy a large area of the Bolivian Gran Chaco (Fig. 6.1). They speak a language which belongs to the Tupí-Guaraní linguistic family which historically covered a wide territory in the greater Amazon basin. According to tradition, Guarani groups moved west into the region that is today Bolivia seeking the “Íví Maraëi”—“Land Without Trouble” prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. When the Spanish entered the Chaco, the “Chiriguanos”¹ Guarani of Isoso were established and well-organized, having earlier defeated the “Chanés”² and other groups in the area.³ Guarani were defeated by the Bolivian state in 1896, at the massacre at Kuruyuki.⁴

The Ioseño Guarani (current population 12,000), however, were never defeated by the Spanish Crown and in recent years have talked of signing a peace accord officially to close Spain’s declaration of war against them. From 1932 to 35, Isoso suffered during the Chaco War with Paraguay, a war stirred by competing oil companies who wanted to secure their access to resources in the contested region, a war in which a quarter of the population of Bolivia reportedly died.⁵ Until the 1980s,

¹Early Spanish documents use this name for Guarani.

²An indigenous people of the Arawak linguistic family, some of whom live in Argentina today.

³c.f., Combes, I. (2005). Etno-historias del Isoso. Chané y chiriguanos en el Chaco boliviano (siglos XVI a XX). IFEA/PIEB, La Paz.

⁴Kuruyuki in the foothills region west of Isoso has become a significant landscape element where Guarani from Argentina, Paraguay and Bolivia converge in late January each year to commemorate the sad anniversary of the battle and renew their identity as a people.

⁵c.f., Querejazu Calvo, R., *Historia de la Guerra del Chaco*, published in 1998 by Librería Editorial Juventud, La Paz, Bolivia, as a synthesis of his longer classic work, *Masamaclay*. Isoso was at the center of the Chaco war, and Guarani refugees fled from Isoso into Paraguay and Argentina. A brave Guarani leader (Caiano Barrientos) was executed in Isoso during this international confrontation. The refugees who returned had to drive out the White settlers who had moved into their homes and lands. The landscape is full of painful memories of these times. A recent review of research on this aspect has been published online as Riester, J. (2006). *Iyambae-Ser Libre: La guerra del Chaco en la*

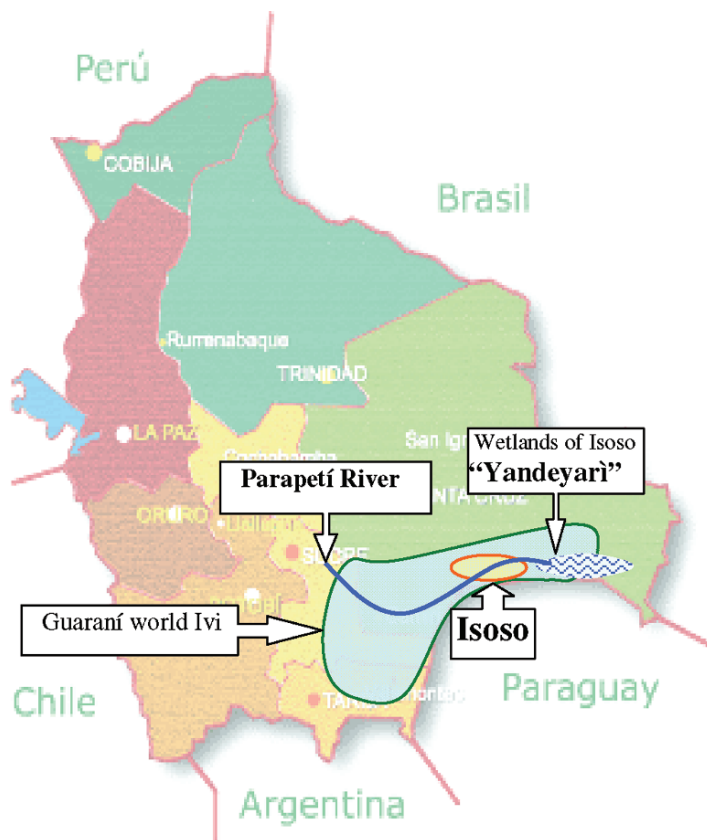


Fig. 6.1 Illustrative map locating Isoso in Guarani territory along the Parapetí River in the Bolivian Chaco region

the Isoleño Guarani maintained enemy relations with Ayoreode people to the east of Isoso.⁶ In 1995, at the request of Isoso's self-government, Capitanía de Alto y Bajo Isoso (CABI), the Bolivian government created *Kaa Iya* (forest spirits) National Park in Isoso Guarani territory just to the east of Isoso—the largest protected area in South America. Isoleños thus govern approximately 5.4 million hectares—their 2 million hectare Isoso TCO⁷ territory and the co-managed *Kaa Iya*

memoria indígena isoleña. *Nuevo Mundo Nuevos Mundos* Numero 6. <http://nuevomundo.revues.org/document1635.html> Many analysts have argued the Chaco War was caused by British Shell urging Paraguay to fight Bolivia, while the US company Standard Oil urged Bolivia to go to war against Paraguay to establish sovereignty over the frontier lands and their resources; c.f., <http://www.foros.gob.mx/read.php?3,77608> also Rush, C.R., 2005, Chaco War, Anglo-Dutch resource grab, Executive Intelligence Review, http://www.larouchepub.com/other/2005/3235chaco_war.html

⁶ Uncontacted bands of Ayoreode continue to live inside the limits of *Kaa Iya* National Park.

⁷ Under Bolivian law, indigenous territories have been titled as *Tierras Comunitarias de Origin* (TCOs). The TCOs contain pockets of ranchers and private lands that are supposed to negotiate co-existence or sell to their indigenous neighbors.

del Gran Chaco National Park of 3.4 million hectares—a considerable area that comprises the largest intact tract of dry forest remaining on Earth.

The world (*Ívî*) now occupied by the Guarani people in Bolivia⁸ (total population ca. 60,000) covers some 5,000 km². Internally, Bolivian Guarani are subdivided into three groups with different dialects: *Simba*, *Ava*, and *Isoseño*. The first two groups live in the Andean foothills, where the spring-fed affluent streams create a rockstrewn Parapeti River which contains water year-round. The Parapeti River's character changes further along its course, however, and the Isoseños live with a different kind of river. After the Parapeti River rushes down from the foothills and reaches the lowland plains in Isoso, the river is forced to flow against a slight upward incline into deep sands, and it transforms into a widening, winding river that eventually disappears (Plate 6.1).

During the season when abundant water flows down from the Andes to Isoso (November–April), the Parapeti's waters flow into the flooded *Yandeyari* wetlands northeast of Isoso, changing as the season progresses. In November, small ankle-deep streams begin to flow among the dunes in the wide, dry river bed in Isoso and slowly spread into the Chaco thorn forest beyond Isoso. By January, the waters flood up to 4 m deep in *Yandeyari* but only run chest deep in Isoso. This apparent anomaly occurs because the Parapeti River's waters flow through deep sands below



Plate 6.1 The Parapeti River snakes through the forested plains of Isoso in the Gran Chaco Sudamericano ecoregion—the largest remaining dry forest in the world, and the second largest ecosystem in South America after the Amazon

⁸Guarani populations are also found in Paraguay, Argentina and Brasil.

the river bed up to edge of the Guiana Shield subsurface rock where they are stopped at the far edge of *Yandeyari*, where the water rises to the surface when it can no longer move belowground, creating the wetlands. During the height of the season, waters surfacing in *Yandeyari* are so deep that they rise to form a small, seasonal stream that flows north into Concepción Lake in Chiquitano indigenous territory. The Parapeti is the only major river entering Kaa Iya, and as such the pulses of the Parapeti waters into Isono are essential for the park and its wildlife, as well as for the continued existence of the disjunct Concepción Lake.

The river has a completely different face from May to October. In April, the river's multiple streams begin to dry into receding pools as fish migrate upstream from the drying wetlands. Eventually, by June, the expansive river bed converts itself into a vast sea of sand dunes buffeted by the southern winter winds, until the waters once again flow into Isono after the rainy season begins upriver in the Andean foothills.

Parapetí (literally place of massacre) is the Guarani name given to this river at the national level, but for Isonoños it is simply: *ñane ìaka Isono* (our river Isono). The word *Isono* (*ì + oso + oso* = water + letting itself loose + letting itself loose) roughly translates as "water that lets itself loose in repetition." And this describes exactly what happens annually in the sector of Isono, but not in the upper parts of the river where water flows permanently. Traditionally the river changed its name in different Guarani regions, according to the particular influence the river had on the environment and its inhabitants. Local names of the Parapeti River in other places include: *Piratini* (place where sábalo, a type of salmon, abound); *Pikìrì* (waters of the sardines); *Pirapo renda* (place where the fish jump); and *Ìtòro* (place of rapids). These are names that might be applied to any river. No one but Isonoños imagine a Parapeti River without water, and this is what makes Isono unique.

This unusual river has extraordinary influence over the landscape, the ecosystem, and the society. The influence is so strong that Isono is disconnected from the rest of the world, with its own life. Because of this influence, Isonoño Guarani culture is distinct from *Simba* and *Ava* Guarani culture in many ways.⁹ The Isonoño is the only one in the arid Chaco¹⁰ who does not worry much about rain. For him, the most

⁹Isonoño cultural manifestations of Guarani cosmology are markedly different from the other two groups of Guarani who do not live in this extremely bipolar world created by the Parapeti River's behavior in Isono. This difference may stem from influence from the *Chané* culture which adapted to the Parapeti River's behavior prior to their conquest by *Isono* Guarani. *Ave* and *Simba* Guarani are shifting agriculturalists; *Chané* irrigation systems were adopted by Isonoño Guarani after conquering the *Chané* territory in what is today Isono. The sexual and cultural relations between Isonoños and their *Chané* male and female slaves (enslaved after their defeat in pre-hispanic times) possibly reinforced the strong bipolarity-unity and Fox-Jaguar themes in modern Isonoño culture (Isonoños being the Jaguar invaders into *Chané* territory), but these are beyond the scope of this chapter and require extensive investigation to be more than speculation.

¹⁰Mennonite colonies have, however, established themselves just upriver from Isono and are increasingly withdrawing water for irrigation from the river before it reaches Isono, a growing problem for Isono.

important thing is that the river arrives so he can use its waters for irrigating his fields. The very low and erratic rainfall in the Isono area is inadequate for sustaining agriculture. Without water in the river, Isonoños cannot harvest maize, and the entire people will suffer.

Isonoños feel as if the river were a giant heart beating rhythmically to give life to the Isonoño world. For Isonoños, water is an essential and fundamental life force,¹¹ not just a physical liquid. The generating source of Isono’s vitality and cultural continuity is this river. The most fundamental *raison de etre* for Isono culture and life is this combination of perfect dichotomy—“with water, without water.” This makes Isono a world of permanent contrasts and contradictions. Today it can offer a captivating and attractive landscape, but tomorrow nothing of this will remain, not even a shadow. On the contrary, the landscape will change and be adorned as horribly as the day of its death—sufficiently ugly that outsiders, not accustomed to this, leave Isono hurriedly. And all of this absolutely depends on whether or not there is water in the river.

The River: Source of the Origins and Ends of Time and Space

Parapeti River as Source of the Cyclical Origins and Ends of Time

The presence/absence of waters in the Parapeti or *Isono* River, in the Isonoño landscape is itself a microcosm of the bipolar world of opposites and its cyclical behavior (Fig. 6.2). When there is water (*ì iara yave*), the landscape offers a captivating panorama, the green of its vegetation forming a giant carpet across which snakes the solitary river whose waters “interrupt themselves, flow and then flow” (*ì-oso-oso*). When the waters cut back from flowing (*ì oso yave*), the landscape changes completely and becomes sad and dark, the sun beats down hard, animals die, food becomes scarce, children cry with hunger, and families disperse. This happens and has happened forever, and, for this reason, this event is nothing more than “the cyclical reiteration of the original time—*arakaë*, this has always been its custom” (*jukurääñomaiko arakaë guieima, jekoñomaiko jukurääi*).

The explanation that the Isonoño gives for the intermittent flow of the Parapeti (*Isono*) River follows:

They say there was a child who was a Tumpa (god), who aside from being a very beautiful child was also very capable of doing things, as if he were an adult, for his ways of thinking and acting,

¹¹The word *ì* (water) is the essential root of the Guarani words for wind, earth, semen and blood; hence the Guarani metaphorical relation between the river and life’s pulses of essential liquids is implicit in this feeling that the river is a heart. Isono, as *ìvì*, possesses all these essential elements and Isonoños have the task to learn to combine them and maintain them in equilibrium, so that the world will continue to exist. The Guarani word for heart is *pia*, and all beings have *pia*, which is also the interior center of emotions. The earth has *pia*, and its *pia* is sad when it suffers painful pulsations. *Pia* is intangible and only perceptible by the way it influences external existence.

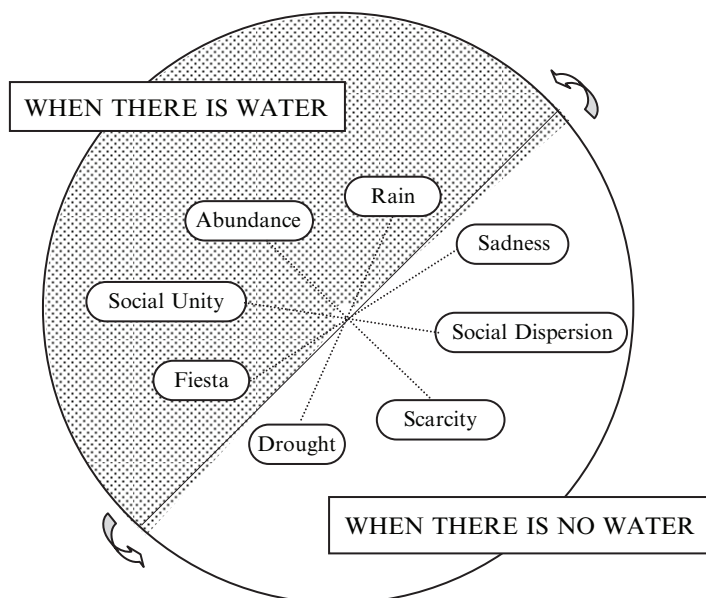


Fig. 6.2 Isoso—A bipolar temporal world shaped by the Parapeti River

but the thing he liked best was to hunt and fish. His mother was very proud of herself because he always arrived in the house with plenty of fish. “How can it be that this child so small captures so many fish and in such a short time?” the Fox asked himself spying on him from afar, until one day, out of pure curiosity, the Fox followed him from afar and discovered what he did. Well, it turns out that the child God had an enchanted Toborochi tree, whose swollen trunk was full of water; so full that it looked like the trunk was ready to burst. After arriving in that place, the child opened the swollen trunk and allowed the water to pour out, and then after a bit closed it. Then he went about happily picking up the fish that had fallen with the water. But when this was discovered by the Fox, the Fox began to do the same thing, except that he was very irresponsible, and sometimes he forgot to close the trunk back up, and the water was wasted. Sometimes he allowed a lot of fish to come out and then he only carried off a few, allowing the rest to rot, that’s what the Fox did. Because of this, we don’t have water all the time. Ever since the Fox learned how to do this, we depend on him to have or not have water. Not only for this, but also for the presence of fish. Sometimes the Fox kills fish just for fun and not because he really needs them to eat, and this means that the following year the fish will be scarce in our river.¹²

¹² All quotes and stories used in this chapter draw on Elio Ortiz and Antonio Mendez’s extensive knowledge and experience gained during their lives as Guarani. Translations from Guarani to Spanish were done by Elio Ortiz. Elio Ortiz directed the research and analysis, and drafted the Spanish language draft manuscript which was interpreted into its English language form by Janis Alcorn and Alejo Zarzycki.

Parapeti River as Source of the Spatial Organization of the Ioseño World and Landscape

The Ioseño landscape is, in part, uniform and monotonous, but at the same time changable and dynamic, thanks to the presence of the river that is with or without water for extended periods. The vegetation is not exuberant, and one does not see a single hill or mountain, with the exception of small hills of sandy soil; the Ioseño feels sure of himself and proud of being a man of the plains, and has various social and cultural practices that differentiate him from the Guarani of the higher lands. For the Guarani, the world begins and ends in the extensive flat plains that stretch out under the great dome of the sky. When a child climbs to the top of tall sand dunes in the Isoso riverbed (Plate 6.2A), he learns to orient his flat home to the distant mountain ranges of Cerro Colorado and Aguarañie to the south and west.

This apparent geographic and topographic uniformity of the extensive plains is interrupted by the passage of the Parapeti (*Isoso*) River, which crosses from the Southwest to the Northeast, provoking contrasts in the landscape that contradict the initial impression of conformity.

The Parapeti River divides Isoso into two equal parts (Fig. 6.3) that are diametrically opposed, creating an Isoso with high geographic, topographic and ecological contrasts that project themselves directly into the life of the inhabitants and affect the ways in which the inhabitants interpret and organize their space.

The width of the river bed averages 3 km (ca. 2 miles), but the actual spaces where the waters run are seldom wider than 100 m, and the remaining spaces in the river bed between the running waters include flat areas as well as immense sand dunes that move. At the height of flow, water is rarely more than chest-deep, as the river's waters sink and run below the sands (Plate 6.3).

The principle line that cuts Isoso into two halves is that which crosses transversally from the Northwest to the Southeast (ab-ab) (in relation to the direction taken by the river, A-B), crossing the river at a point near a boundary marker placed by Ioseños at the Center of Isoso. Both "Upper Isoso" and "Lower Isoso" are made up of two equal quarters that oppose each other, which at the same time subdivide the area into equal parts. The directions of Left and Right bank are oriented as if a person is standing in the exact center of Isoso and looking upriver or downriver from that point. The significance of these Right and Left relations is described later.

The first half of Upper Isoso (Fig. 6.4) occupies the Southwest sector (A) and thus has a bit of South and a bit of West, where the southern half (a1) is higher than the other (a2). The second half of Upper Isoso is divided in two opposing quarters of Northwest and Southeast, where the part of the Northwest is Right (dr) while the Southeast part is Left (iz). Exactly the same occurs in Lower Isoso (B), with the difference that the sides are reversed. In this case, the quarter part in the North (b1) is Left and is higher than the Eastern quarter (b2). This geographic-topographic configuration is clearly appreciated in the behavior of the river when water runs in it (its behavior being a language), and in the form in which the Ioseño decodifies this language and establishes relationships with his environment, as we describe below.

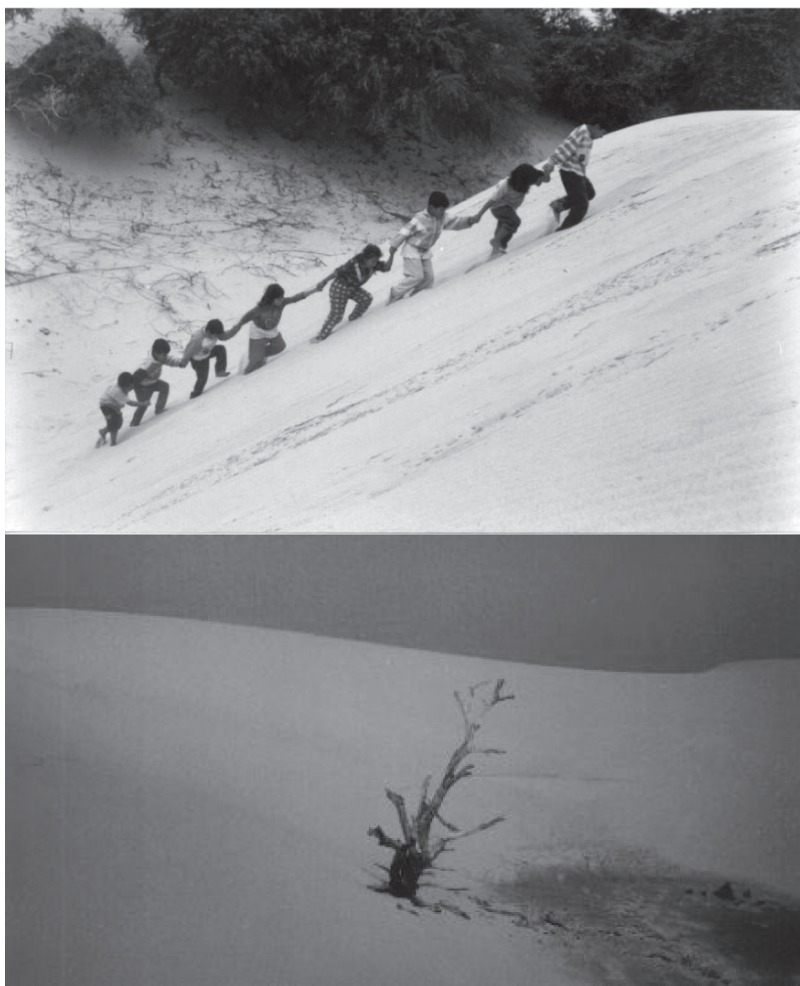


Plate 6.2 **A.** Isoseño children climbing dunes of the Parapeti River, helping each other upward, reflecting the Isoseño way of uniting to overcome challenges in the world that also constantly changes beneath their feet (photo courtesy of CPI Chaco, Santa Cruz, Bolivia). **B.** Trees are consumed by the moving Parapeti dunes, and the dead treetops show the past location of forested banks (photo courtesy of Fundación Yeporaka, Camiri, Bolivia)

A River That Truly Changes...

The Isoso River is a river that truly changes, not only in the periods of having and not having water, but also in the form in which it moves its waters. For example, in the Upper Isoso it leans (*ñapia*) to the left and then, crossing the imaginary center,

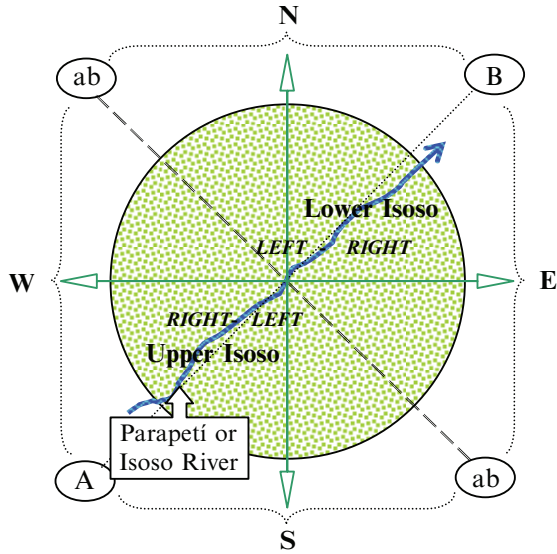


Fig. 6.3 Upper and Lower Isoso



Plate 6.3 People cross from one side to the other of the Parapeti River when the water is just beginning to arrive, flowing in ankle-deep rivulets above the sand. In the time of water, people continue walk across the river, because it rises no more than chest-deep. The invisible waters running under the sands make the riverbed dangerous for vehicles which sink and disappear. In the distant flat horizon, dense forest is visible on the banks of the river where Ioseñios have their communities (photo courtesy of CPI-Chaco, Santa Cruz, Bolivia)

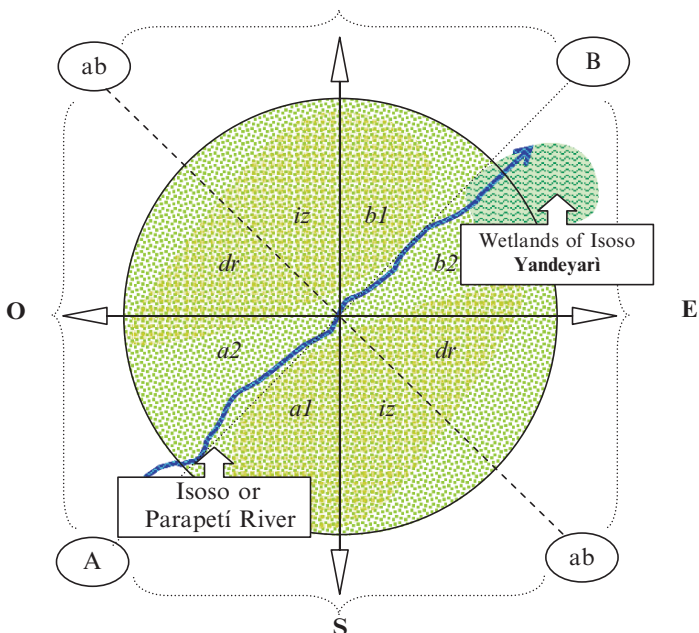


Fig. 6.4 The many opposing halves created by the river of Isoso

it inverts its inclination to the opposite side. In this way, in the upper sector, the main channel of the current runs on the left edge, but after crossing the Center, the current runs on the right edge (an elongated reverse S curve of flowing waters within the broad, relatively straight channel). This behavior, that according to the locals has always occurred, affects the spatial configuration of Isoso. For the simple reason that both the left upper sector (a2, Fig. 6.4) and the right lower sector (b2, Fig. 6.4) are the lowest, the areas that most frequently flood when the water runs high, and possess the richest ecosystem of Upper and Lower Isoso. This also explains why these two riversides that are diametrically opposite have the densest human population. The darker patches, that appear on the northwest and southeast sides of Fig. 6.4, are small hills of sandy soil that border the river and the populated areas of Isoso, and are the highest parts of the area. On the left border of the river these small elevations do not have much influence on the ecosystem in Upper Isoso, but they do influence Lower Isoso. Exactly the opposite occurs on the right border of the river where it transitions more sharply from higher to lower. All this means that the waters of the river easily move outside the banks toward the lower areas, to the left in Upper Isoso and to the right in Lower Isoso (Fig. 6.5).

The Isoseños take good advantage of this topographic inclination to irrigate their crops that are located between a few meters to a few kilometers from the banks of the river. Both a2 and b2 (Fig. 6.4) have as their opposites a1 and b1 on the other

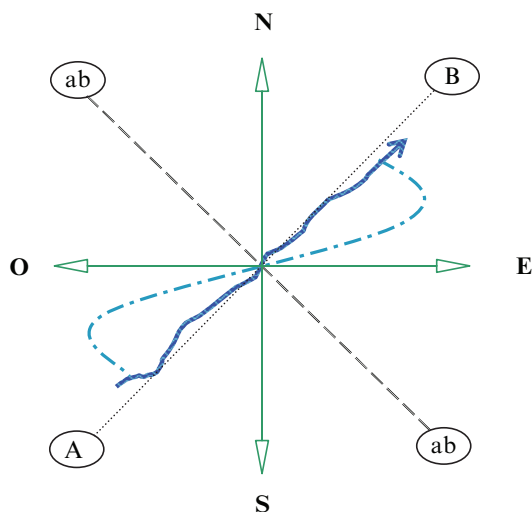


Fig. 6.5 The direction of flooding outside the banks of the river

shore of the river, for which in Guarani they describe these as *Jovaicho*, which means the contrary, the opposite, and most concretely, the enemy. The latter pair of places (a1 and b1) are much drier and not appropriate for agriculture, not only for the quality of the soil but also because the river never runs close to these places. The inhabitants of these arid sectors are not Guarani but are ranching settlers who arrived in earlier centuries.

The remaining segments labeled “iz” (left) and “dr” (right), in Fig. 6.4, together form another half in opposition to the half occupied by human activities. These are the wilder areas that are used by hunters, *paye* (shamans) and *mbaekuas* (witches). They are the areas dominated by the *Iya* (see below).

The Spatial Distribution of Communities in Isoso

The toponyms in the community names below reference the habitats created by the river’s waters and their behavior, as well as history:

Guarani Communities of Upper Isoso (presented south to north; Fig. 6.6)

- Isiporenda: place of wild lianas (*Ìsipò*) that grow in humid places and have diverse local uses.
- Kopere: partial destruction (*pere-pere*) and continuation of gardens (*koo*) for the repeated floodings, also refers to the constant interruption of the natural vegetation by the practice of agriculture.
- Kapeatindi: place with abundant *abrojos*, a plant which has thorny burrs (*Eragrotis orthoclada*) and grows in humid areas.

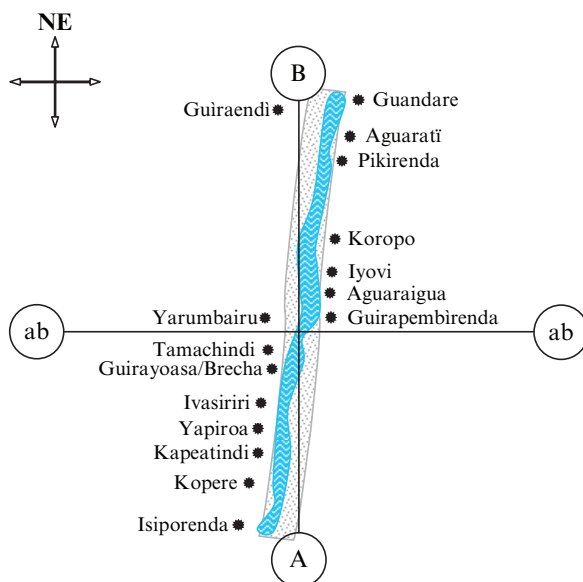


Fig. 6.6. Locations and geographic distribution of present day Guarani communities in Isoso

- Yapiroa: Original full name is *Yapirúa renda* = place of the sickness of the skin (small pox or measles). This community has been the most invaded by outside settlers over the years and is a fusion of Guarani and Whites (Karaí).
- Ivasiriri: place where the river leaves its banks (*siriri* is onomatopoeia of the sound of the water running over its banks).
- Guirayoasa: There are two local interpretations of this name, *Guira oyoasa* = flock of birds that fly over; or *Ìvira oyoasa* = inter-twined trees or dense vegetation.
- Tamachindi—name of a leader of the *Chane* (a group of indigenous people now extinct in Bolivia)
- Yarumbairu: Old word meaning muddy ground.

Guarani Communities of Lower Isoso¹³:

- Guirapembirenda: no known translation
- Aguaraiqua: “Drinking Place of the Fox” in honor of an extensive lake that is located here.
- Iyovi: “Green Waters,” another lake that links with the forementioned lake.
- Koropo: name of an old and highly respected leader who was executed during Chaco war.

¹³These are the oldest Guarani Isoso communities, on this side of the river, because the communities on the other side have had to move as the river moved over time.

- Pikìrenda: place of “*piki*” fish, a type of sardine.
- Aguaratí: “White Fox.”
- Guìraendì: place with abundant Guìraë, a local tree that grows in wetlands
- Guandare: no known translation

Non-Guarani Population

The non-Guarani population points have names that appear in the boxes (Fig. 6.7) in the areas known as “enemy side” (*Jovaicho*) in relation to the Guarani occupied side. These are the small places occupied by the Whites¹⁴ (*karai*). Some Whites have opted to maintain the original Guarani names (some of which are so old that no one knows their meaning today), and others created new names. For the most part, they are simply the centers of small, free-range ranching operations.

The River Takes the Decisions

The river is everything; on the river depends the present and the future spatial configuration—a situation which Ioseño describe as the river “taking decisions.” “He can throw us out immediately, if that is what he (the river) wants to do” (*Ipia jei oĩ yave, ipuereko aramoete pegua opa ñanemoe yande mbosii*). As far back as memory

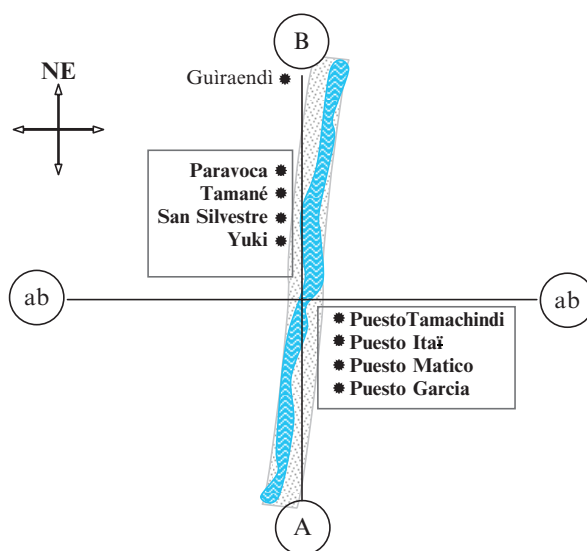


Fig. 6.7 Location and geographic distribution of present day population centers of “karai” (Whites), living opposite the communities of Guarani in Isoso

¹⁴*Karai* strictly means foreigner but is usually translated into Spanish as “Whites.”

goes, they tell stories of how some communities have been moved three or four times, within the past hundred years, because of flooding. The most recent major flood occurred in the 1950s, and the old people prefer not to recall those disastrous times, so bad that absolutely nothing remains of the communities erased by the river, which also erased history of old Isoeso from the landscape with them.

To know his history, the Isoeseño needs the support of physical, tangible things in the landscape, “there, behind that algarrobo tree, such and such happened; on that little hill, in that quebracho zone, in that sandy area, etc.” These elements of the landscape hold fragments of Isoeseño history. And so, to be able to hold onto history, one needs these fragments to give a logical order and project the historical image of this reality. And if/when these disappear or shift,¹⁵ it is as though a history book has had whole chapters torn out of it. The role of the river in the end of time is explored below.

The Dual World and Time Through Which the River Flows

World of Above, World of Below

There are few myths that reflect in detail this perception of dual space and few elders recall them with clarity. Nonetheless, the visible practices demonstrate that this archaic vision of the world still persists in Isoeseño thinking.

The grandmothers tell us that the earth is a great surface, flat and round, a sort of disc, sustained on four supports¹⁶ at its extremes (in the four cardinal points). It possesses a superior, upper face (*iarambo*) and an inferior, lower face (*igui*). In the upper part live human beings in current time, while in the lower part live spirits/the dead.

They say when the earth trembles at times, those are the evil spirits that move the supports of the earth (*Ìvi kana yave, aña reta ndayeko omomii ìvi iyokoka*).

“*Ara*” means “the superior or upper part of something,” “that which is on top,” the tangible; while “*gui*” is its opposite side—“the inferior or lower part of something,” the intangible, that which is not solid/unstable, e.g., blood.

The world of above is the space of the concrete that is visible to humans. At a time in the past, humans occupied the inferior world and, thanks to the kindness of the good spirits, they were authorized the honor of occupying the superior plane.¹⁷

¹⁵Communities not infrequently must move the locations of houses, soccer fields, etc., in response to the river’s (water and dunes) movements. Elders say the river used to run farther to the east, where evidence of old dunes and oral memory of old settlements indicate the river’s ancient prior locations and its northwestward shift over time.

¹⁶The four supports are said by some to be the arrows of the gods.

¹⁷Isoeseños have no single history that explains clearly this theme, but rather have a mixture of stories that, according to their purpose, highlight dichotomous facets of the world. The elders assure us that there is an Upper and Lower world, and some of them give precise descriptions, but no one knows the history of the origin of the world’s existence.

Nonetheless, in spite of the dominion that humans exercise over the upper world, the human needs to learn and be capable of sharing his habitat with the spiritual beings of the opposite world. This is the reason for day and night coexisting in the same plane. During the day, the man is the protagonist and exercises control over the earth; while, during the nights, it is the spirits who go into action and humans submit themselves to them.

!Do not walk at night, the spirits are in plain day at these hours! (*Aguiye eguata piare rupi, aña reta iaramako kuräi yave!*), advise the elders to the youth.

A story which represents in part this living together of humans and spirits on the face of the earth in current time:

They talk of a man that was taken to fish in the river, tricked by an aña spirit, where the poor man had to spend long disagreeable hours in the company of this spirit, but when daybreak was just beginning, the aña pressured him to take his leave of him, saying that he had to go because pïtu oyearoma, the night was starting to fall,¹⁸ but the man, gathering up his courage, grabbed him tightly in his arms and would not let go.—!Epoimo sëi, ajatama, pïtu oyearoma... let me go, my friend, I have to go because night is coming...!—the poor aña pleaded in vain and offered him thousands of things in exchange for liberating him, but the man did not give up for anything in the world. His intention was firm: to know the aña in person in the full light of day. But the result was, as the day became clear, the aña was converted into a bat, and then a rat and later into other dirty, ugly, small animals.¹⁹ That's when the man had no other option than to kill him and return to his house.

They say that, if today the human being enjoys being “above,” it is because there has been a time when humanity occupied the inferior sphere. The elders believe that some day humanity will return to occupy this position, and this will occur when the earth “flips over” (*ïvi oyere yave*) and, with this, will be produced the end of the world. We will return to this theme further ahead.

The Ioseño Re-Creation of This Contrasting Vision in Daily Space

Ïvate kotì/Ïvì kotì = Upper sector/Lower sector. Upper sector and Lower sector are not precisely extreme positions of opposition above/below but rather describe an intermediate state between “absolute above” (*ara*) and “absolute below” (*ïvì*). The Ioseño says: “toward above,” “toward below” (*ïvate kotì, Ïvì kotì*), giving one to understand that further along one encounters the location's more extreme point, the most high and the most low. This is true because the river passes dividing the landscape exactly by the intermediate line of the totality of space (from southwest to northeast), which means that the Upper is not completely Upper (because it has a lower side), just as it is not absolutely Right and Left, but both.

¹⁸Daybreak in the man's world is nightfall to the spirit.

¹⁹Impure animals associated with the dark.

The Most Lower Sector. In the very most Lower sector live the ancestral spirits. Guarani believe that when they die, their souls go to the place of the dead, a place located toward the rising sun, in the direction toward which all rivers flow. From there come their ancestors to visit during fiesta days. This explains why they throw their masks into the river when the big fiesta ends.

Within Isoso, the most Lower sector is occupied by *Yandeyari* (our grandmother), a seasonal wetland place²⁰ where the waters of the river disperse forming giant lakes and swamps in the flooding season. For Guarani, *Yandeyari* possesses the best fish in the world, because she is the *Iya* of the fish (see below). When the water level in the river has dropped almost to the point of drying up (and the *Yandeyari* wetlands are also drying), the fish begin to swim upriver from *Yandeyari*. During this time, Isoseños fish by night and by day. There, on the edges of the streams flowing within the great river bed, they speak with *Yandeyari* and thank her for her generosity (see below). The Isoseño doesn't fish just anytime, but only in the "true time" (*iárape*), which is when the waters are dropping and the fish are coming back upriver. The fish that come downriver, arriving from Upper reaches of the river are ugly and undesirable for Isoseños.

Our World, Others' World

Right/Left (Akatu/Asu). For Guarani, the left hand and the left foot belong to the malignant spirits of the unknown (*aña*). Children who sometimes either naively or purposefully offer their left hand at the moment of meeting are immediately scolded by their elders. The left is stupid, slow, and useless for doing normal activities. It is qualitatively bad, and all that is bad is thought to come from the bad spirits.

The landscape of Isoso projects clearly these opposing sides (Fig. 6.3). From Guarani perspective (which is always located in the center), the Right side of Upper Isoso is located to the west on the left side of the river which is opposed to the South (right side of the river) which is Left for Isoseños—and the bad side of the region. The inverse is true for Lower Isoso. In Lower Isoso, the Left is North and Right is East. The importance of this is shown by the degree that the area most populated of Upper Isoso is known as the "Rights," which is the same as saying that they are the ideal areas for the subsistence of social life. Exactly the opposite occurs in the Left sectors; they are inhospitable areas for the Isoseño (Fig. 6.8). They say, "one should not live there" (*mbaeti mbaere yaiko vaerä jokope*); the land is dry, arid and one cannot do agriculture there because the waters of the river never reach there. Nonetheless, there are many rancher settlers and haciendas that have lived

²⁰ A biodiversity conservation NGO, Wildlife Conservation Society, published a booklet about the spiritual significance of *Yandeyari* seasonal wetlands to reinforce cultural respect for the wetlands. Until recently, Isoseños did not pay much attention to the area, which is at the frontiers of Isoso. A dairy farm occupied much of *Yandeyari* in the last century. The wetland area is only sacred during the flooding season; during the period when it dries up, it is no longer sacred.

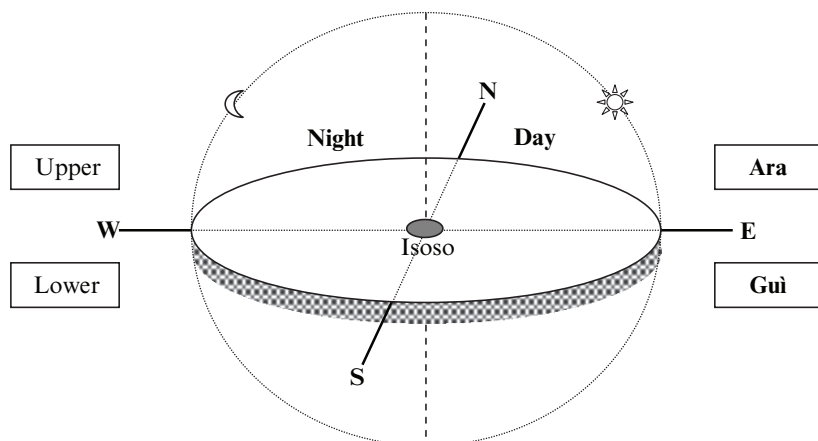


Fig. 6.8 The Isoso Guarani World

there for decades. But for the Guarani, those people are “the others” (*ambuae vae reta*), different from them and opposite by nature, so it is appropriate that they should occupy those places.

Yande ìvì (our world) (Fig. 6.9) is populated by “us, who have always lived here” (*yande, kúa ìgua ñomai yaiko va reta*). Guarani say, “*Tüpa ñane ñono pìpe yaiko vaera*” (God put us here). The most populated area of Upper Isoso lies on the bank opposite to the ranchers’ haciendas and small private properties (the Right edge of the river, and Left for them); while in Lower Isoso, the inverse is the case. There the settlements of the *karai* (Whites) are located on the Left side of the river. “Our world” and “the world of the others” differ not only by nature and origin of their inhabitants, but also in the conditions that both spaces give in one or the other place. “Our world” is more humid, fertile and apt for agriculture, while “the world of the Others” is more dry and poor for agriculture, but not for cattle ranching (an activity foreign to Guarani culture).²¹ In the 1950s, the old leaders mobilized to demand titles²² for their lands, walking on foot all the way to the capital, La Paz (more than 1,000 km²), two times. These actions reflect the high value they gave to these two places that are “our world.”

²¹For the Guarani, to be “*guaka iya*”—“caretaker of cows” or rancher is practically to be “Other.” In Isoso, many community members have cattle, but only in small numbers (3, 5, 10, and, in a few cases, up to 30), but when their animals start to enter the fields, when fields are in production, these cattle-raisers are obliged to leave the area.

²²Over the years, the Bolivian state has had changing laws and administrative procedures for granting indigenous land rights. The same lands have had to be titled over and over as the laws changed. The TCO, mentioned in a previous footnote, is the current manifestation of title to indigenous land, but Ioseños have taken advantage of every administrative opportunity over the years to maintain their land rights, as in the 1950s.

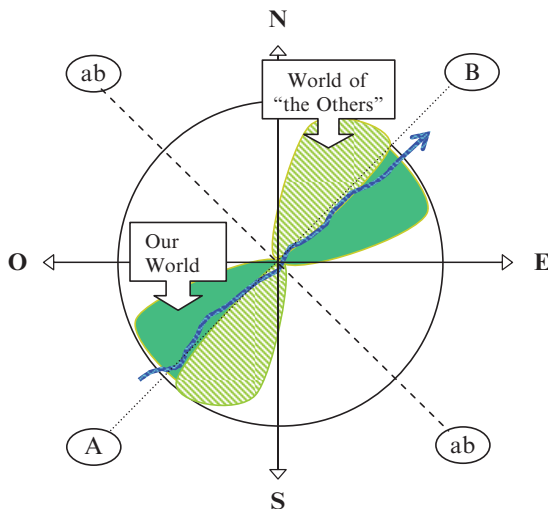


Fig. 6.9 Our World–Others’ World

Green Landscape–Grey Landscape

Jovì (green) represents happiness and well-being, and this is what is reflected in the landscape when there is water in Isoso. Children run and play in the puddles. The banks of the river convert into ideal locations for youth to meet. Maize abounds and fiestas are frequent. The greenness of the landscape reminds Ioseños of the paradisaical world of the time of origins, the place where their ancestors rest and the place where they themselves will return when they abandon this life. There are many stories that tell of this mystical place.

There was a time when a young woman lost her husband, and while she cried for his death, she saw that his soul detached itself from his body, and she began to follow the soul. ... The woman encountered many difficulties in her path but she overcame them all until, suddenly, she arrived at a beautiful meadow. A crystalline stream divided the green landscape into two parts, and in the background, she heard the sound of tambores. It was the sound of the dead giving a grand welcome to the soul that had just arrived....

In the green landscape are heard the barking of dogs, the shouts of children, the crowing of the rooster. On the other hand, on the opposite side absolute silence reigns. One rarely sees the footprints of men here. Everything seems without life, with a gray aspect leading people to say, “we would be very unhappy living there” (*yavía rapea ndipo jokotì*).

To this should be added that, among the inhabitants of the green world, are trees, plants, and animals that also share this place. One of these is the algarrobo (native carob tree). The biggest algarrobo groves that are given life by the Ioseño landscape are on this side, while the algarrobo groves on the opposite side are sparse,

small, and produce poor quality fruits. The Ioseño says, “*iguope jaeko yande ivira, yande ndie oiko va*” (the algarrobo is our tree, with whom we share life).

There is a story that tells of the day that the Fox robbed the original seed of the algarrobo, which says in part:

... having drunk the exquisite liquor of Mee²³ (algarrobo), to which the Grandmother Takumbo-kumbo had invited him, the Fox decided to rob the seed by putting it inside a dental cavity, and he did it. The Fox arrived and deposited the seed, and it immediately germinated and grew. And from there it began to multiply itself across the land.

Similarly there are other stories in which appear the animals, plants and birds who share the land and are contemporaries of the Ioseños.

When the river is high and the land is green (around February), and there are too many *ñeti* mosquitos, Ioseños say, “the Fox is giving birth²⁴.” This is the same time that the stinky *ivaguasu* plant bears its fruits that also attract the *ñeti*. At this time there are also many *kumbaru* fruits, a principal food of the Fox.

Contrasting Social Activities in the Time with and Without Water

In the time with water: Motirö—When the algarrobo begins to show fresh leaves and flower (September to October), men no longer just speak about preparing the land. Women make *chicha* beer while their husbands give out invitations to their friends and relatives to come and help with the work, and then share the liquor prepared by their wives. In the *Motirö* cooperative parties, the men help the host for one day, and then they drink *chicha* for 2 or 3 days straight. The good times have arrived and every one should be prepared.

Communal labor—As soon as there starts to be water in the river, the leaders of the communities have their meetings to program the cleaning of the principle irrigation canals. This work can last three consecutive days, depending on the length of the canal. This is a collective activity that, more than work, is an important time and space for recreation taken advantage of by the men. There they have the liberty to joke, talk about women, tell stories of the astute Fox, and laugh at others.

The harvest—This is the time and space where the women are in charge. The women harvest and invite their women friends to whom they want to give a gift of maize (after they have helped with the harvest for a few days). She decides who to invite, what to do with the harvest, etc. She is, at this time, the lord and mistress of these products, while the husband is in perfect submission and insignificant (Plate 6.4).

²³The mythical name of the first algarrobo.

²⁴The timing of the fox’s parturition is unknown. This simple statement about the time of many *ñeti* being the time when the fox gives birth may in fact refer to the fact that these *ñeti* mosquitos are attracted to, and follow, the stinky fox who often has smelly mange in addition to a generally strong odor, and hence the fox “gives birth” to the *ñeti* because a high number of *ñeti* appear when a fox is nearby.



Plate 6.4 Isoseño women in the patio pounding maize, the basic element of Isoseño food and culture, the production of which depends on irrigation from the waters that flow intermittently in the Parapeti River (photo courtesy of CPI-Chaco, Santa Cruz, Bolivia)

Group fishing parties—There are many forms and techniques for fishing but the most important is group fishing, which is when the families of Isoseño come together to fish as a group (see below).

The “*Arete*”—*Arete* is the “Time of the Fiestas,” when the fiestas are in abundance, the special moment when the objective of the multitude is to dance and drink chicha²⁵ until they are satiated. *Arete* is the noise of the tamboures and shouting, it is drunken melees between friends, is luxury and pleasure, is nuptials and separation.²⁶

²⁵For more detail, see Ortiz, E. (2002). *Invitación—Mbarea*. Cuadernos de Investigación de la Cultura Guaraní No.1, Ed. Kipus, Camiri, Bolivia.

²⁶During the “*arete*” there is no moral censure for the men who fight each other over women; nor against the married woman who escapes with another man abandoned by his wife. Because the *arete* will have served its purpose if rivals/competitors release their hate and feel more tranquil, like the woman who finds happiness in the arms of another man. These are normal consequences of a fiesta. More than that, some say that a fiesta without fights loses its Grace.

But above all, it is the time and space of the integrity of the human and the spiritual. This is what makes the *Arete* “the true day,” an “extra-ordinary time,” whose “arrival” is awaited with much patience and celebrated with great fervor.

The arrival of the *Arete* is not tied to a fixed calendar nor tied to predetermined programming. Rather it is subject to the material conditions and the spiritual conditions that the group experiences, and this happens when there is water in Isoso and when maize abounds.

The phrase “*ñande areteä añave*” (roughly “we have not had a fiesta today or this year”) literally means “this isn’t our true day, today—this year.” This gives one to understand that this “special day” (as a time) simply hasn’t happened this year, because the physical and material conditions haven’t been favorable, or because the entire group didn’t feel spiritually well for the lack of material things (bad harvest for example). In other words, the spatial environment was not favorable.

As the waters dry up and the landscape changes from green to grey, the hunters²⁷ become active. As the leaves dry, they can better see their prey, fattened from eating the wild fruits borne by the trees at the end of the green time.

It is at this transition time that the *Iya* are most important to the Ioseños (see below).

In the time when there is no water

Wind, Sun and Sand

When there is no longer water in the river, things become sad and dark in Isoso, beginning with the water and ending with depression of the mental energy of the people. The decision of the river to stay without water coincides with the strong winds that begin to blow from the North. The Ioseño says, “*oyombobarandu retako*” (they—the winds and river—put themselves in agreement to act). Giant clouds of dust cover the sky and darken the sun. The river appears a giant channel of windstorms, capable of disorienting anyone who isn’t familiar with the space and tries to cross the river. In less than one month, the immense dunes of sand begin to form themselves. The earlier face of the river when it had water disappears completely. In some places, the dunes grow in a way that they end up burying trees on the riverbanks (Plate 6.2B). Dirt is in the sky, dirt in the houses, dirt in soup at mid-day, dirt in the nasal passages and even in the smiles of suitors. No one but the Ioseño is able to accept this as absolutely natural. Moreover, when they are far from their land and feeling nostalgic, they say, “*Tätama ìvitu aeka!*” (!How much I miss the wind!). The grandmothers are sure to feel as if they are drowning when they are in the city, but this windy time is natural to them.

²⁷Hunters, night-bird hunters, and fishers are specialists who reciprocate with others, sharing their catch in exchange for maize. There are only a few of these persons per community.

Living on the Opposite Side

Without river, without water, without life. There is no choice but to abandon the region. The noisy howler monkeys, the songbirds of the riverbanks, the fishing herons, all abandon the place. And those that decide to stay or do not have the means to leave, have to adopt another mode of living. The cattle invade the driest sectors to seek cactus to eat. The fox sneaks into yards to rob chickens. Even the bird that announces the fish now changes his song and melody. Earlier he said: “*itiguipe jeta jevae!*” (!How many fish abound there!), today say: “*Guuuuuu... guuuuu!*” imitating the winter wind, cold and dry that penetrates to the bone blowing from the South. And then hellish heat finishes off the scarce remaining green that survived the frosty cold. Then the buzzards make themselves owners of the sky and have their fiesta eating the carrion of dead animals. These birds are filthy beings from the other side of life. Their presence is associated with death. Death invades Isono at this time.

And so, to be able to continue living, the Isonoño has to submit himself to the forces contrary to his existence and combat, from there, the generalized scarcity/hardship of his world. For this reason, he should leave his land and head for the ranching haciendas, where the “*karais*” (Whites) live to sell his labor and dignity in exchange for a piece of meat, cheese, and a few cents. Symbolically he dies to be able to continue dreaming of the life in the coming times. In this way he passes to become part of the hostile world, dark and frightening, that is spoken of in the myths of origin, in whose interior the human being feels absolutely insignificant given his inability to be valued for himself. He has no choice but to submit himself to the rules of the game—obedience and submission. The more obedient and submissive is the peon, the better are his possibilities of subsistence.

However, if the nearby haciendas take life at these times with the presence of Guarani daily laborers and Guarani cowboys, even more Isonoños prefer to go to the most hostile extremes of the world, i.e., beyond the edges and borders of Isono to the big cities. To the extreme northwest is located the city of Santa Cruz, to which each year immigrate large numbers of Isonoños. So many go that only four or five families remain in some communities. The preferred work of the migrants is cutting sugarcane.²⁸ On the other hand, in the opposite direction from Santa Cruz, to the Southeast, lies Argentina, which is known to Guarani as *Mbaaporenda* (Place of Work), the name with which the country was baptised in the 1940s and 1950s, when it was the corner of industrial revolution in this corner of South America.

With these changes, there are also major changes in the social sphere, but for Isonoños, this is normal. They say, “*jukuraiño maiko roiko koropi*” (that’s how life is), and “*yaiporarataiko yaiko*” (it is necessary for us to suffer in this life). They know and recognize how difficult it is to do this, but they have no alternative, and the manner least painful to face this is to abandon the place (just as the water has abandoned the place). If the spirits do this, why not men? They say, “*Mombiri ñai*

²⁸The Guarani migrant labor in sugarcane fields from Santa Cruz down to Argentina was more prevalent in the past. Now the migrant jobs are becoming more diversified.

yave ramo yande mbaendúatei ñane rëta koti” (When we are far from our land, then we learn to value it). Among the social crises that Ioseño experience in this time are:

- Community and family fragmentation—Children are abandoned, mothers constantly worrying, separation of spouses, etc.
- The collective labor disappears and the mutual assistance and survival are individualized. “*Yande-ndeíma yaiko jayave*” (everyone is worried to take care of himself).
- From work “for us,” it becomes work “for others.” Ioseño work so that others can live and enjoy life.
- From being free they pass to being slaves; the dependence and submission to the other is the lowest point to which one can pass.
- The individualization of the family fiestas takes away their sacred character and convert into fiestas of sadness (the famous *Tairaris*, Easter, San Juan, and others) that are sad and melancholy interpretations that end in tears.

The Sacred Geography and Transactions of Daily Life in the Land of the Iya

The Iya: Tutelary Spirits of the Things that Exist

The Ioseño, like all Guarani of the region, firmly believe in the existence of the “*Iya*,” tutelary spirits of the animals, hills, vegetation, etc. There is nothing in the world that does not have their *Iya*, in the same way that nothing belongs to human beings. Although in Spanish, it is often translated as “owner,” *Iya* means Caretaker or *Iyangarekoa*, a sort of administrator or custodian of something that is not theirs. “*Mbae mbuaereko má yayangareko kavi*,” (that which is not ours we care for more), says the Ioseño. In sum, these tutelary spirits are administrators of the divine creation.

Who are the Iya? *Iya* are the ancestral spirits of the Guarani, although they don’t explain it directly in that way. The form in which Guarani relate to the *Iya* leaves no room for doubt however. For example, the *Iya* of fish is called Grandmother or Little/Beloved Grandmother, and people use very kind and respectful language in their conversation with *Iya*, just as they talk and behave in front of a living elder.

An excerpt from a fisherman, for example:

Koo ayu paravete aguapì nde rokape che yari, eiparareko emae nde membìre, che mbopota paravete... (Here I am, seated again in your sacred patio, my Grandmother, to ask you to gift me some of your little animals....).

These are deities/spirits, which can be male or female, who are distributed the length and breadth of the extensive territory. Each place, each space, each wood, and each hill are governed/administered by the *Iya*. There is no single *Iya* for each

species of animals and plants; for example, the *Iya* of the peccaries of the northern sector is not the same as the *Iya* of peccaries in another sector. The *Iya* live like a big community in which each one has their particular domestic space and animals that they care for. Some are more good than others. Other *Iya* can be passive and generous with some people and sadistic with others. In other words, they are spirits whose personalities are similar to personalities of humans. This is the main reason for which not all hunters hunt in the same area. If one hunter prefers to cross the river to hunt, it is because he does not get along well with the *Iya* of the deer in the other sector.

The specific function of the *Iya* is to preserve the totality of existence with elemental and sacred rules that make possible the integral coexistence and equilibrium among the beings in the world. It is the obligation of humans to know these rules and apply them in their relation to nature and the spirits.

The Language of the Iya

The *Iya* constantly speak to humans. Although their system of codifying their communications is different from that of the ordinary world, it is certainly not outside the capacity of humans to understand. For the Guarani, the world and the landscape that he reads is a great text through which he interprets the language²⁹ of the gods and spirits, and takes an attitude toward them. For example, the low productive quality of the algarrobo groves in the last three years should be interpreted and analyzed as a language that communicates something. The most probable interpretation is that the *Iya* of this place has abandoned it because they feel profaned by the interventions³⁰ that have been strange and damaging to their mutual coexistence. If the river changes its channel, certainly the people will say, “*oime mbae yayavi*” (we have failed in something), and for this reason a profound reflection must be taken so that the wise people rechannel anew the movement of the group.³¹

The Elders and the Iya

If the *Iya* are ancestral spirits that are responsible for the following of the elemental rules of the coexistence of humans and nature, the elders are the physical representation

²⁹The *Iya* also communicate to individuals through dreams and by talking directly to a person at night.

³⁰Projects introduced by development agencies have promoted commercialization of fish and algarrobo resulting in intra-community and intra-family fights, and apparently reduced yields.

³¹c.f. the shaman's smoking ritual investigation, as partially described in Riester, J. (1998). *Yemboingaró guasu—El Gran Fumar. Textos sagrados y profanas de los Guarani*, Ministerio de Desarrollo Sostenible y Planificación, La Paz.

of the ancestors. While the *Iya* speak to their children from outside, the grandparents do it from inside. The *Iya* communicate with a language that is strange to the new generation, but the elders interpret and translate this code in a more comprehensible language. There is no one except the elder who possesses so much knowledge about the world and its existence, and for this they are so respected and treated as they are. A Guarani will say, “to not have a grandparent is like being an orphan.” When something is going wrong in the community, what is needed is that the grandparent speak to them about fundamental values. When there are problems with new things, what is needed is for the grandparent to explain how the ancestors acted in the face of similar situations, and thereby reinterpret the new reality and take a position in relation to it. The elders speak in the daytime, just as the *Iya* speak at night. Hence, as it is, the elders never leave, even when they die; so people have absolute confidence in the elders. They are socially connected to the dead. They focus on an ideal world when they speak, so that their knowledge of the ancestral past can be a guide into the future.

The Fox Walking the Parapeti River

Who is the Fox? The *Aguara* or Fox is one of the most famous protagonists in both modern Guarani stories and in myths. The Fox incarnates the ideal of a person who is an astute, intelligent, audacious liar who lives walking through the world, constantly followed by the *Yagua* or Jaguar³² but is never conquered. On the contrary, he is an invisible hero in every story. His principal scene of action is the present world, in the historic present, and as such he is capable of reading and writing, riding horses, and using modern tools.

The Fox³³ is the rule-breaker, the breaker of frontiers. He is half crazy and as such is in a state of transformation. He bridges time and space in ways that break the norms and patterns described earlier, while at the same time re-enforcing norms. The landscape evokes stories of the Fox and the messages/morals embedded in those stories.

“They say that when we die we are converted into foxes” (*Ñamano yave ndaye yaja aguararä*). This is something that up to the present time Guarani confirm. Every day are heard stories and personal testimonies related to the Fox that confirm this metamorphosis after physical death. This means that living Guarani continue

³²Herein we focus on the fox in relation to origins in the landscape. It is far beyond the scope of this short chapter to provide the extensive detail about the two-headed jaguar figure in Isoso cosmology. Even by cutting off one of the heads of the jaguar, it was impossible to eliminate the evil within him; the moon is eaten by the jaguar after the moon offers to hide the jaguar from the twins after they cut off one of his heads.

³³The fox and jaguar are important in Andean cosmologies as well. There are said to be many kinds of foxes in the area, with different colors and specific behaviors, but the fox stories concern the fox in the generic sense and do not refer to a particular species or variety.

sharing space with the dead who have been converted into foxes. For this reason, the figure of the fox in present-day stories personifies those Guaraní who recently died and have not yet stopped sharing the scene with the living, in order to show the living how to face new challenges.

Ambiguous and Contradictory

The Fox has been responsible for many good things for humanity, but the inventory of his negative accomplishments is greater than the good accomplishments and has negative outcomes that cannot be corrected. In sum, he is responsible for the current condition of Guaraní, and is too human not to make a mistake. The challenge now is to learn from his actions and errors by means of the stories.

The Good Things that the Fox Did

The Fox got maize so that Guaraní can live on it, and it was also the Fox that showed them how to plant and cultivate maize.³⁴ Isoso Guaraní have the most tasty algarrobo groves today, because the Fox sneakily robbed the first seed from the Grandmother *Takumbo-kumbo*.³⁵

The Fox is and will always be a famous hero loved by children, because, in spite of being small and physically weak, he has a brilliant intelligence. For example:

One day the Fox tricked the Karai (White) with a small pot that bubbled and boiled in the middle of the road without any fire. Fox had pulled it off the fire and put it in the road just before the Karai arrived. The Karai fell in love with the little magical pot and wanted to have it. The Fox offered to exchange it for the Karai's horses. And so, thanks to the Fox, the Guaraní also have horses.

On one occasion, the Fox tricked a priest who came full of fervor to do his work in Isoso. Upon seeing him, the Fox slipped up under an overhanging rock and acted as if he was supporting it. He asked the priest to help him because if he did not the ledge would fall and create a landslide burying the town where the priest was headed. The priest believed him, and the Fox left him there, on the pretext of going to seek more help. The poor priest stayed there for days holding up the rock in vain until he was about to fall dead from fatigue and hunger, and then he discovered that he had been tricked.

Isoseños say that if the Fox hadn't tricked the priest, he would have arrived earlier in Isoso and had more time to convert them. Isoso is one of the few places where Catholic missionary priests never arrived.

³⁴Ortiz, E. (2002). *Invitación—Mbarea Cuadernos de Investigación de la Cultura Guaraní* No. 1. Ed. Kipus, Camiri, Bolivia.

³⁵A small mole that lives in underground tunnels.

The usual foil to the Fox's actions is the poor Jaguar—a naive, stupid and lazy subject in the Fox stories. Sometimes the Fox rides the Jaguar, as if the Jaguar were a horse (to make himself seem more agreeable), sleeps with his daughters, and steals his tools.

On other occasions, the Fox and the Jaguar have declared war on each other. The army of the Jaguar was made up of the strongest animals in the region, while the Fox faced him with an army of insects (ants, wasps, bees, etc.). The Fox won the battle, despite the small physical size of this army, because small things can be terrible when they unite.

The Bad Things that the Fox Did

The Fox seduced and slept with the Sun's sweetheart, daughter of one the Guarani leaders; and from then on the sun became angry and hot. Because of the Fox's behavior, the fish and water do not flow freely in Isoso (see above). He mistreated the little daughter of the goddess *Nanui* (the original Grandmother of Agriculture); and from then on the Guarani have had to work the land in order to feed themselves. The Fox has broken many rules, for example:

There was a time when the dead constantly visited the living. There was no difficulty in passing from one place to the other. The humans only had to prepare chicha and play their tambors for the dead, at the sounds, to come to share the fiesta with the living. But on one occasion, when a young widow and her child anxiously awaited the arrival of her beloved (dead) spouse, the Fox tricked her, by dressing in the way that the dead man usually dressed, and slept with her. When the true spouse arrived, he became very angry with her and all the living people; and that was when the souls decided to never return to the world of the living, except during the days of the True Time or Arete. This is the only ritual when Guarani share happiness with their ancestors. If the Fox had not committed this crazy act, today people would be living happily communicating with their dead.

The Settings and Personalities of Those Who Interact with the Fox

The Fox is here, there, and everywhere, the most globetrotting character known in adventure stories. Here we try to classify the most important scenes where the Fox has arrived. He is the only four-legged creature that managed to arrive in the sky to participate in a great bird fiesta, and he did that by riding on the back of a buzzard.³⁶

³⁶After arriving in the sky at the birds' fiesta, the Fox got drunk and insulted them. He then fell asleep, and the birds left him in the sky. He convinced a spider to help him down with vines, but half way down a bird saw him and cut the vine, so the Fox fell to Earth and died, his body transforming itself into something else (possibly a mountain range near Villamontes, the name of which translates as "that which was a fox").

He is capable of using any means to cross to the other side of the river, generally by means of using other animals. He likes to cross the places of Whites (Karai) and enjoy their foods, especially cheese. He rides a horse like Whites do, and he uses spurs, knives, and all the tools of the cowboy.

His preferred place is on the road (Plate 6.5), the river, or places close to small towns, places where he can meet the White, the priest, and others who wander like him. The stories that tell of fights between the Fox and Jaguar have multiple settings, for example in the forest (*Kaa*), rivers, lakes, and fiestas. He invades the territories of other animals like himself. For example, one day, when he was dying of hunger, he turned himself into a woman, dropping his testicles and changing sex in order to seduce *Këse-këse*.³⁷ The Fox lived with him for some time, eating and sucking life from his child to fatten himself, and then abandoned *Këse-këse*.

The characters with whom he relates are by nature, animal or human. The first set can be subdivided into two categories: the inoffensive and the dangerous. With the inoffensive, he is sweet, generous and careful in manner, because they know him very well. With the second group—the dangerous, he is a picaresque liar.



Plate 6.5 Places like the roadway, shown here, or the borders of the river where people pass are the types of landscapes that typically serve as scenes for the Fox stories. The Toboroche, a common tree with a swollen trunk, stands in mid-road here. This is the type of tree that figures in the Fox story about the origin of the Parapeti River (photo courtesy of CPI-Chaco, Santa Cruz, Bolivia)

³⁷A small, fast eagle/hawk.

Sometimes the animals trick the Fox, as when the rat pretended to be a woman and seduced him.

The human beings can also be classed into two kinds: the Whites (*karai*) and the Guarani. With the first group he behaves just as he does with the Jaguar, and with Guarani he behaves just as he does with the animals who know him. Attempts at being clever with these animals often do not turn out well, because they know him well.

Culturally accepted and socially disapproved—The Guarani laughs and enjoys the adventures of the Fox, and children cannot hide their admiration of him, because they feel represented by this figure and proud of being “the Fox” of these lands. Although the Fox is the wandering spirit of the dead, there is no doubt that his origin is Guarani; and hence Guarani accept him as one of their own and love him dearly.

At the same time, in the stories, social disapproval is just as strong as the acceptance. No one wants to have the Fox as a son-in-law or brother-in-law, and he is always rejected when he tries to be part of a family. He dreams of having the most beautiful daughters of the caciques (leaders), but he is always rejected. He is too crazy and alien to honor with this confidence. And hence it is best that he continue as he is, as this is his role. His position as an intermediary (not very much human, not very much a spirit, not very much White, not very much Guarani) permits him to protect the group from the evil beings that accompany the White invaders.

In mid-road—The Fox is always encountering other travelers like himself, be they animals or human beings. He moves constantly from one place to another, but he never gets too far from small towns and never goes to play his jokes in Whites’ (*Karai*) towns. In the real life, the real fox is exactly like this in Isoso. The fox animal lives not very far from human environments, but he also does not come too close. When he is scarce of food, he invades the fields and robs young ears of maize, or dedicates himself to robbing chickens. At the river, he steals fish from herons who have pulled the fish from the waters. This behavior typifies the animal—half wild, half domesticated. When local people seeing him crossing the road or seated on the roadside, they ask, “¿What is the Fox announcing to us?,” and then give an endless set of interpretations to describe each behavior of the animal, especially those that meet the Fox in the road.

The Cosmic Landscape in the Daily Landscape

Pîte/Mbite: the Cosmic Center

Mbite o *pîte* (the true center/origin) (mbì [pi] + té /eté = *origin* + *true*) is the point of union between above and below, left and right, north and south, east and west. It is the point of origins. *Ara mbite* (center of the day), what we call midday, is the center point of the day which coincides exactly with the *piare mbite* (center of the night), what we call midnight, of the opposite side or lower face of the earth. When this alignment of midnight with midday occurs, it forms a sort of imaginary channel/

line (one vertical and the other horizontal) that act as axes/centers that connect the world above with the world below and the left with the right. There are various stories that talk of this reality where men and spirits can be seen ascending or descending these lines. This explains why the grandparents prohibit the children to walk around at midday. According to them, “the spirits walk at this hour.” Midnight (*piare mbite*) can be taken advantage of by witches to do their bad, or by the shamans to acquire knowledge. The person who comes to occupy the *mbite* or *pìte* space is himself converted into the origin to project from there the true essence of “being Guarani.” Among the persons most able to do this are the *mbirae iya* (possessor of the primordial songs), the *ñane ramù retà* (the elders who are most knowledgeable in the sacred histories), and the *mimbi regua* flute musicians who possess the gift of taking the flute (*mbo*) to the origin (*mbi*) by means of its sound (*pu*) (*mimbi mbopu*). The rest of the participants, for their part, must *o-ya-pì-sa-ka* (listen, make themselves into ears).³⁸

The Geographic Centers of Isoso

Across the Isoso territory exist many symbolic centers that are important according to the time and the place, but the most important is located at the center of Isoso where the river switches from the left to the right and converts Isoso into Upper and Lower. At this place has been placed a marker that today coincidentally coincides with the crossing of an old roadway constructed by the petroleum exploration teams in the early 1900s. Of the group of communities that belong to Upper Isoso, there is one that is outside the dividing line (*Yarumbairu*), for which reason it is classed more as a community of Lower more than Upper.³⁹ The community members of this community have to double their efforts to capture water from the river or to irrigate their crops. The shift of the waters at the point of this community have left it abandoned, which means they have to seek permission from neighboring communities to capture water or to create a field.

But more than the social and political utility given to this marker placed by their ancestors, is the great mysticism with which it is viewed. For example, few people will walk near there at night because they will be immediately accused of being devils or evil spirits. There are numerous stories and testimonials that describe in rich detail the different apparitions seen or met there. For Ioseños, without doubt, this geographic center point is an enchanted place.

³⁸The literal meaning of *apisa* (ear) is “he who sees the origin.” During the night (*pitiü*), the human being is capable of perceiving, with the ear, the true essences of the origins.

³⁹Members of this community which has its outpost on the opposite side of the river, play the politics of being part of Lower or Upper Isoso as they choose.

Mbìte: The Ritual Center

The ritual space is a small circular area (real or imagined) in a large area, symbolically located in the center. For example, *kaa* is the forest where hunting is done, and *kaa mbìte* is the “center of the forest” where the hunter connects with the *Iya* (tutelary spirits). All of these spirits have, in these centers, their *oka* (patios) of their “houses,” which are divided into two halves: patio in front—patio in back. In the front patio, the hosts are charged with receiving strangers that arrive to visit. The hunter and the fisher are visitors that enjoy the honor of sharing the patio with the spirits, the *Iya* of the animals, during the ritual.

A fragment of a prayer by a hunter in the *kaa mbìte* (ritual center of the forest) states,

...koo nde rokape aĩ paravete yeema che Ru, ayu apou nde piri.. (...here you have me once again, my Father, seated in your patio, to share with you this humble offering...)

The Ioseño world is similar to a great human-spiritual world whose inhabitants live in families and where each one possesses a domestic space.⁴⁰

These ritual spaces, nonetheless, only have life and importance when “their time” (*ara*) arrives. Hence, the ritual space for fishing has its importance when there is water in the river, and loses its sacred value when there is no water in the river.

Okavite: The Community Center

The community center is called “*okavite*” (the center of the grand patio or central plaza). All the communities, without exception, are divided into two halves by a central road that crosses in the middle. If a new road passes within a few kilometers of a community, in no time the people will move there to make a new settlement and separate themselves into two equal parts across the road, because this is the way it is meant to be. There are many examples of community activities in which the people from one side or the other of the road (opposites/enemies—*jovaicho*), lead separate actions, just as happened with Isoso dividing itself into two parts across the river. This geographic division is necessary, not just for practical reasons, but also from the symbolic perspective. This division is reflected in social, political and economic practices of Isoso.

In one point of this large community center space is located the symbolic space—usually a space where there is a spreading algarrobo tree, a bit beyond the soccer field, and close to the main road that divides the community in two. There, below the algarrobo, the community meets in times of peace and crisis to discuss their problems, plan

⁴⁰Traditionally Ioseño houses are said to have had one central post. Half the house, to one side of the centerpost, was for close family, and the other half was for in-laws, in a repetition of the pattern of oppositions.

future activities (Plate 6.6), have fiestas, etc, but principally to listen to the sacred histories of the ancestors and the profound counsel of the knowledgeable ones.⁴¹

One says, “*Ñee iya ome arakuaa mbiteape*” (the orator/owner of the words is giving advice in the center), when in the community assembly meeting, the orator stands in the center of the circular meeting. The respected orator who puts himself in the middle of the group to speak about the *ñande ipi reta* (ancestors or mythical origins) makes from this point the unique center of attention for all present that are seated in a circular arrangement. *Mbite* is the privileged place which cannot be accessed by just anyone but only by those who have reached the profound knowledge of “the truth.” The shaman uses this space in moments of social crisis, to smoke and connect himself to the spirits, because only he knows the secret path that conducts the truth. The words that pour forth in this center are true, while the *kupe rupigua* (what they say to the back, outside of the center, rumors) are not to be believed as truth.



Plate 6.6 Ioseños are seated in a typical circle, discussing a project around a tree in the patio. Also visible are a satellite TV antennae, a solar panel, and a cistern for drinking water constructed by development projects administered through the Capitanía de Alto y Bajo Isoso (CABI) Guaraní local government (photo courtesy of CPI-Chaco, Santa Cruz, Bolivia)

⁴¹Different individuals hold different types of knowledge, including: the *arakuaa iya* who are the traditional elder specialists “owners of knowledge/words” that guide Guaraní society in times of crisis; and the other specialists who have particular realms of relevant knowledge—the shaman curers, the hunters, the fishermen, the women who gather medicinal plants, etc.

One says, “*Tamoe jeko chupe mbiteape*” (he told the truths in the very center, i.e., in front of everyone) when a *paye* (shamán) points to a person accusing him/her of witchcraft. No one will risk contradicting him, because he is saying the truth, using the unique center where only the truth is spoken. A person will have no doubt or any fear to incriminate the other person, when he is in the center, because he is very sure of what he will say, and he knows well that in the *mbite* (center) lies are not told, only the truth.

Oka: The Domestic Center

In the middle of every family *oka* (patio) is a leafy tree (usually a algarrobo), below whose shade the group shares daily life. But this space from time to time can convert itself into a living representation of the cosmic center. This happens on the day of the *arete*, the moment when is produced the meeting of the time and space between the social group of the living with their ancestors, between the man and the spiritual beings, between the dead and the living. During the *arete*, the central point will be occupied by the most elderly and by the men that have a divine gift, who interpret the *mbirae iya* (sacred song of the origins), which is a position currently occupied by the most talented musicians of the region. Also in the center is the convoker of the *Arete Guasu* fiesta in whose patio the event occurs. The people of the community are seated in a circle around the central tree and the musicians. When the flute player begins, the drum players immediately join with the rhythm and harmony that the group needs in order to get up and dance. The men break the space to go to the opposite side of the circle, to the semicircle of women and invite them to be their partner for the dance. The pairs of dancers form a smaller circle inside the larger circle where they dance to the drums, creating a dynamic with their constant combination of movements that circle from left to right and then switch to right to left. The ritual center is converted by cause of their movement (Plate 6.7). Those present feel the magic that emerges from the ritual center radiating into them, and it spreads until it envelopes them completely with a mystical elixir of sacred origin.

Mbirae (dance) literally means “projecting origins,” or “reviving the primordial time.” The flutist, located in the center of the circle, interprets the sacred origins (*oyemimbi*) and the dancers, men and women, dance to the rhythm of the drums. First they dance in one direction, and then when the flutist suddenly raises the melody (with faster and higher notes), the dancers shout and change directions. The word *omboivate* means “make it go up,” or to make “up/above” that which was, until that moment, “below/lower.” The sign of this change comes when the flutist suddenly interrupts his monotonous melody with sharply raised tones that “make it go up,” accompanied by sharp drum beats, so that the dancers know to stop, turn around, and continue dancing in the opposite direction.⁴² When the dancers move

⁴²This style of two circles dancing in opposite directions, one within the other, and changing directions, as described, is not typical of other Guarani.



Plate 6.7 Isoso dancers wear masks representing the *Iya* and the ancestors during fiestas. After the dance concludes, the masks are thrown into the Parapeti river to be carried back to the east from whence the ancestors came (photo courtesy of Fundación Yeporaka, Camiri, Bolivia)

in one direction, the masked dancers (*Samii*, the ancestors, grandfathers) dance in the opposite direction; and when the dancers change direction, so do the *Samii*.

The Waters: The Interplay of Centers in the Ritual Space of Communal Fishing

The leader of the ritual is found standing in front of one of the immense lakes of *Yandeyari*, and a few meters behind him are gathered a multitude that attentively observe in absolute silence the actions of the *İupaya* (man of the lakes, the name with which these highly-respected persons are honored). The *Iupaya*, without saying a single word, moves slowly looking at the place, at times lowering his head and appearing to mutter some ancient song of sacred origins. What he is trying to do is locate the exact Center of the patio (*oka*) and the doorway (*okë*) of the original Grandmother (*Yari*), the keeper of the fish, the same that during a dream has made him participate in a sacred revelation. Having done the inspection, the *İupaya* introduces himself slowly into the water. The slight incline of the lakebed makes the water slowly rise up his body as he advances into the water, until it reaches his *kúa* (waist, the middle of the body), and he stops because he considers that he has arrived at the doors of the *Yandeyari* (*mbitepe* = at the middle/center of the origin). The upper half

of the sacred space has been invaded without problem and this is a good sign.⁴³ Once there he calls the group to accompany the ritual that consists of a formal and very respectful conversation with the *Iya*, full of promises and vows of loyalty to the sacred norms. After they complete the ritual (Plate 6.8), those present invade the domestic space (*Okupe*) of the *Yandeyari*.⁴⁴

The *Yandeyari*, just like a Guarani would do, receives the visitors in the front patio (*oka*) but never allows a guest to enter the back patio (*okupe*) when he does not trust the person. *Okupe* is the space reserved for family privacy, physically it is the part least-cleared in the domestic environment that until now the Guarani conserve. There is where the children run to hide themselves when a stranger arrives. There is where women move their activities (Plate 6.4) when there are guests in the house. In the *okupe* are raised the domestic animals, and this is where corrals are constructed. Likewise *Yandeyari* has her animals kept in the deepest part of the



Plate 6.8 Isoleños are fishing according to their customs and rules although to the outsider it may appear to be a free-for-all. The river fills with fish returning from the Yandayeri wetlands, swimming back upriver at the time when the waters begin to disappear (photo courtesy of CPI-Chaco, Santa Cruz, Bolivia)

⁴³They say that sometimes, when they are not welcome, they can be bitten by pirañas and caiman in the water, the faithful guardians of the Grandmother's house. Some *lupaya* show, with pride, the scars that they have earned in their fragile position.

⁴⁴The young adults move into the deeper parts of the water body (located symbolically in the *Okupe*), and drive the fish back into the shallow areas (*Oka*) where the children and old people of Upper and Lower Isono wait to catch the fish.

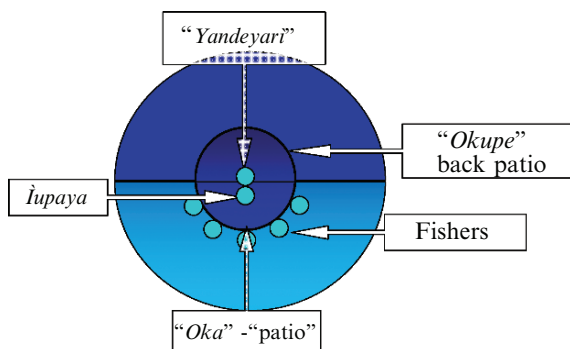


Fig. 6.10 Yandeyari ritual circle and center in the waters

lake/pool (which represents the back patio), the same which will be invaded by the fishers when she allows them to enter. This ritual is particularly important for Isoso, because it involves families of Upper and Lower Isoso, and thereby celebrates community enjoying life together, also reminding all of the rules, the oppositions, and thereby the origins of Isoso (Fig. 6.10).

The Fox Walking Today

In this Guaraní world's sacred and profane landscape defined by the Parapetí River, the Fox stories narrate histories of an inverted world, where the Fox makes the ancestral spirits materialize. And in that way he shows the world of men to be as it actually is. But at the moment of practical understanding, the roles switch and the Guaraní becomes the Fox, and the ancestral spirits (*Iya*) become "the true men" in their original state. "*Taja rãri taseaguara-guara kotì rupi*" (I go like a Fox here), the Ioseño says when he goes out to walk around in the streets of the city. But before going out, he has dressed himself well—with new shoes, jeans, new watch, a stylish cell phone, dark glasses, etc.—converted into the White (*Karai*). This is the modern Ioseño, the same Fox of the stories that this time is constantly disapproved by the *Iya* ("*ñande ipi reta*"—"our origins," as he himself calls them) for his imperfect condition and being of reduced essence, definitely not appearing like his ancestors. And he knows full well that the *Iya* are reproaching him constantly. Nonetheless, despite this, they keep caring for him and the admiration that they feel for him is as great as that of a grandfather for his favorite grandson (*jimimino*). The *Iya* are happy to have a son with these qualities to fight against the malignant forces that attack the integrity of "the original community," and for this, the Fox of today is fulfilling his role of trying to maintain the equilibrium. The sign of thanks he receives is that the *Iya* give him the gift of the animals he finds when he goes hunting in the forest.

As the Fox stories tell of an inverted world, to understand his role in the world of Isoso today, we need to do the same—flip the stories into the Upper World, and see that the roles are also switched. The Guarani is the Fox and the “original men” with whom he interacts become the *Iya* or ancestral spirits. In the current sphere, it is the man who is constantly being disapproved by the *Iya*, because he has lost much of his original ways (he dresses like a White, uses the tools of the White, thinks like a White) but not so much as to stop being Guarani. In sum, the Fox is still loved and admired by the ancestral spirits, because he is an expert and very capable in his fight against evil. His intermediary position does not permit that the strange spirits stop being essential in Isoso. Without this, the *Iya* would have disappeared by now. So things are very good as they are.

Guarani: Between Life and Death

If the intermediary position of the Fox as a dead-being living trapped between two worlds projects the current state of Guarani (a subject that has lost a “half life” since the colonial invasion), at the same time, his principle enemy the Jaguar has also stopped being the *karai* (White) devouring monster of earlier myths, but rather a character who is stupid and lazy, despite his physical strength. With the passage of time, the Guarani has killed him a little, showing the White how to live like a Guarani in the Guarani world. The current haciendo owners are weakened, because they have learned to speak the language of the natives, believe in the witches and *Iya* of the forest, practice his rituals, farm the land, and plant maize like Guarani, using the same methods and tools. This is the same as saying that the Isoso Guarani continues living on the intermediate edge that he himself represents in the stories and further demonstrates in present space. The Guarani and the *karai* have produced between them a reciprocal contagion and a reciprocal death-life exchange, as it should be and has always been since primordial times. The challenge now is to maintain this equilibrium.

Territory of the Iya: Territory of the Fox

The Fox stories are very clear in showing a separation between the scenes of action of the human and the other, the Fox—separation between the human and the spiritual sphere. Any Isoleño and all Guarani in general conceive his world with this unity of separation, a territorial space (*ivi*) integrated by humans and spirits, but each one living in his corresponding space. The human space begins in the small towns and ends a little bit beyond the agricultural fields and pastures, at whose edge begins the territory of the *Iya*.⁴⁵ Both are permitted to pass the frontier, but respecting the rules

⁴⁵As noted in the earlier discussion about the summed half of areas marked as *iz* and *dr* in Fig. 6.4.

that are established in each one. During the day, the human invades the sacred spaces of the *Iya* in the search for fruits and wild animals, but before entering, he should ask permission and offer gifts to the *Iya*. If not, he risks death. In the Fox stories, sometimes the Fox is punished with severe cruelty when he has transgressed the rules of the world of the living. During the night, it is the spirits who invade the space of the living and communicate with them through dreams and music (Plate 6.9).

When the space occupied by the living expands, the *Iya* retreat going farther away in search of less populated places, and when the population exceeds the geographic and cultural limits, the spirits definitely abandon the place. And the subsequent effect is felt immediately in the community. Families fight; youth crime, robberies, and aggressions increase. And the elders will say, with good reason, “*Jaema teko reta oyepoepi yandeve*” (definitely the times have changed, or have been substituted by others that are different). Even more correctly they say, “the Fox has died,” devoured by the Jaguar of the myths.

This need for spatial balance is one of the principle reasons for which the Guarani has never been understood when he speaks of his territory and his ancestral rights to a very large territory. Instead, outsiders ask, “For what do you need so much land if you do not even work it?”



Plate 6.9 The huge Parapeti River dunes, created and moved by fierce winter winds, are shown below a typical summer sky. Those who fish at night hear the flute music of the *Iya* accompanying them reaching their ears from the dunes of the Parapeti (photo courtesy of CPI-Chaco, Santa Cruz, Bolivia)

The End of the World: A River Landscape in the Shadow of Death

The Ioseño, like all Guarani, believes that the world will end regardless. Sooner or later there will be a grand cataclysm (*kañütei guasu*) that which puts an end to the current existence and gives beginning to a new one. This will come to pass when “the earth turns over” (*ivì oyere yave*). The world is a great living being in constant degradation, and all the stories in which the Fox is protagonist demonstrate that human beings will be the principal cause of its aging and premature death, or of its prolonged life.

Today’s human lives devouring nature; he is a great consumer who feeds on nature. But a day will come when the roles will be inverted, and the man changes from “devourer” to “devoured.” Below is part of a story that reveals this idea. The story begins with a woman who invades the space of the dead, a place that is the inversion of the space of the living, where day is night and night is day:

...they say, suddenly, as soon as they were subjected to the day, the souls were converted into all kinds of vegetables and inanimate objects

- ¿You, in what are you going to be converted?, they asked each other. I will become a sweet potato, me a squash, me a watermelon, they said. Having said this, they took a small jump and were converted into vegetables.

As the day passed, the woman (the widow who braved many obstacles to follow her dead husband’s spirit to this other side) become hungry and began to build a fire but did not know what she was going to cook. “Well, I will grill some squash,” she said, and she began to poke the squash one by one. “This one is still too young, this one is almost ripe, and this one is ripe,” she said, talking to herself, and then she put her attention to the sweet potatoes and grabbed a few, and put them to roast under the embers.

As night fell, the plants and objects began to convert themselves back into people, and saying to each other... “listen, did you feel that you feel that someone was poking you last night?”

It is foreseen that there are two possible elements that will destroy humanity, by water or fire; both options depend on the decision taken by the Parapeti River. Both happened in the past, according to historical myths. Which was the first and the second? How often do they happen? No one knows. Nonetheless it seems that the most recent was by water. In Guarani language, there is a name for the flood and destruction by water—“*i porou*” (water that devours). It is probable that one day Ioso will end below water, and there is no small fear of floods. There was a bad flood in the 1950s, and the distress that it caused cannot be erased from the memories of the elders. There were hundreds of dead, victims of malaria and typhoid fever, and landscapes were completely disfigured, erasing a great part of this history of Ioso. It should be mentioned that the current topography gives evidence of a monstrous river that once flowed across the Ioso plains, in other epochs. The elders believe that the chains of sand hills to the south and east are small islands left from when this great river covered Ioso.

But at the same time, one cannot discard the possibility of annihilation by fire, taking into account the phenomena which play between opposites. The gradual shrinking of the river flow, the permanent delay in its arrival, and the early end to

flow in recent years warn of future water scarcity in Isoso and destruction by fire. The aridity which characterizes the soil is increasing, and with an average high temperature of 40°C, Isoso has the potential to become a small inferno. Everything depends on the amount of water that is, or is not, in the Isoso river, who itself controls the way and timing in which the “waters cut back.”

In addition, the overlapping of superior space and inferior space bring with them the destruction by fire, because the Ioseños are thinking and acting more and more like Whites, and not attending to the elemental rules of their relation to space. And thus the river’s waters will stop arriving. This behavior explains why certain development projects, such as the commercialization of algarrobo and fish-farming have failed, for example. The explanation that they give is that, from during the implementation of the commercialization projects, the algarrobos have lost their good quality and the fish have disappeared, because their tutelary spirits (*Iya*) have abandoned the place. This is a bad sign.

At the same time, it is not a good idea for the Guarani to “Guaranize” too much the White-outsider, because otherwise to whom would he turn in times of hardship? There are mestizos and criollos who have crossed to the Guarani bank (side) and now live like Guarani, but this is not beneficial for Guarani. Guarani need to have the White on the opposite bank/side.

The migrant workers who abandon their lands every year to work among the Whites are said to do so because they are dying of hunger. But that is not the case. On the contrary, they leave their granaries full for future consumption on return. Despite the brutal conditions of work to which they must submit themselves, the exploitation and unjust pay, they enjoy narrating the adventures of the invincible Fox while there. And, once again when they are back to their lands, they re-initiate life, because they have passed the shadow of death and maintained the equilibrium.

Conclusions

Origins arise from oppositions. The cyclically-intermittent Parapeti River (*Isoso* River) is the landscape element central to Isoso Guarani culture. The river creates and shapes the bimodal physical landscape in which Guarani culture prospers and renews its origins. The Parapeti River thereby is the source of origins and ends. The river’s particular behavior gives temporal and spatial orientation to Isoso Guarani culture and governance.⁴⁶ The mutual reinforcement created in the play between the oppositions

⁴⁶Isoso has self-government—the Capitanía of Upper and Lower Isoso (CABI). The unifying strength originating from oppositions is reflected in the strength of CABI. At the community level, the capitan (leader) has two assistants, one from each opposite side of the community. The current grand capitan has successfully used Fox strategies to maintain the strength of Isoso while allying himself with the White elites of Santa Cruz in order to protect Isoso. He is currently an elected, national Senador Suplente, a “second” who “acts” as Senator when the Senator of the region is unable to, or chooses not to, perform his official duties.

in the symbolic and real landscape shapes people's occupation and interpretation of that landscape. The Fox's presence is recalled by the landscape elements, because he walks this landscape in clever stories that are re-created and repeated with laughter. He is the moving fulcrum point for balancing the Guarani way between the living and the dead, between day and night, between indigenous and colonizing White, and between the Upper and Lower worlds through which flows the Parepeti. The Fox is the essence of origins. He teaches Guarani to walk on the edge in order to maintain the center, and thereby renew themselves rooted in an ancient, ever-changing landscape.

ANNEX

Examples of the many names that make reference to the Fox in Guarani territory.

Place names⁴⁷:

- Aguaragüa: Drinking Place of the Fox (a lake).
- Aguaratí: White Fox (whose presence presages death).
- Aguarai: Waters of the Fox.
- Aguaraimí: Little Fox.
- Aguaragüe: That Which Was a Fox (a mountain range near Villamontes).

People's names:

- Aguará pire: Fox Skin.
- Aguará juku: Fox in a Hurry.
- Aguará yu: Yellow Fox.
- Aguará ruguai: Fox Tail.
- Aguará nambi: Fox Ear.
- Aguará ití: Fox Muzzle.
- Aguará raì: Little Fox.

Plants' names:

- Aguaraguai: Fox Tail (a type of straw)
- Aguará kîi: Fox Chili
- Aguará kîgua: Fox Comb (a rough-edged plant where the fox always leaves his hair)
- Aguará rapia: Fox Testicles (small round fruits that remind us of the stories, one mentioned in the text, of the Fox dropping his testicles, leaving them hanging on the plant, in order to change his sex)
- Aguará jandia: Fox Watermelon.
- Aguará mburukuya: Fox Easter/Passion.

Other animals' names:

- Aguará-guara: A type of wasp.
- Pira Aguará: Fox fish.

⁴⁷There are at least thirty-one Guarani place names that refer to the Fox. See Ortiz, Elio (2004). *Toponimia Guarani del Chaco y Cordillera, Ensayo lingüístico y etnográfico. Cuadernos de Investigación* Numero 2, Ed. Kipus, Camiri, Bolivia.

- Agwara imburika: Fox bird (a brown bird that flies low or walks the road, like the fox).
- Agwara rembiu: Fox food (a plant).
- Agwara yaimba: Dog who is like a fox.

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Chapter 7

Where the Land and the Ocean Meet: The Engoroy Phase Ceremonial Site at Salango, Ecuador, 600–100BC

Richard Lunniss

Introduction

A series of rocky headlands and small islands reach into the sea along the southern coastline of the province of Manabí, Ecuador, outlying sentinels to the mainland and its forest-covered cordillera. This tropical oceanic landscape inspired and shaped religious practices from the time of earliest documented human presence there in the 4th millennium BC up to the arrival of the Spanish in the early fifteenth century. Yet the area, removed from those of denser population to north, east and south, has been largely considered peripheral also to the main streams of social and ideological development during the Formative period of Ecuador's pre-Colombian history. Similarly, little attention has been paid to the meaning of the landscape and its components, which include a number of major ceremonial and sacred sites.

The relative invisibility of the constructed sites (as opposed to the natural landforms with which they were associated) has played a large part in the general failure to recognize their value. There can be no comparison between the size of the small scale wooden structures and clay platforms of even the largest Formative settlements and ceremonial centers in Ecuador with the massive stone built *huacas* of neighboring Perú and the great complexes of more distant Mesoamerica. Furthermore, Ecuadorian Formative sites are mostly long buried by alluvial soils or the anthropogenic deposits of subsequent occupation. Another factor has been the shortage of careful field work and full final reports.

Salango, however, one of the principal Late Formative period ceremonial sites of south Manabí, has been subject to long and detailed excavation, and the results make it possible both to reconstruct the history of development of this particular center and to extrapolate from it something of the significance of other ceremonial sites in the region. It is evident that the symbolic structure represented by the design of these centers of ritual activity, and by the offerings incorporated in them, was both sophisticated and constantly evolving.

Specifically, Salango was a Middle and Late Engoroy phase ceremonial center, represented archaeologically by a sequence of successively superimposed floors, platforms and wooden structures. These served, over the period ~600–100BC, as settings for a wide range of ritual practices. The position, orientation and internal

structure of the site indicate that it was designed in conscious relation to the cycle of the year, to the cosmos as a whole, and to the immediate landforms. Reference to some larger temporal cycle is perhaps made by the pattern of successive rebuilding. Material offerings suggest that the terrestrial and marine environments were symbolically embodied in the substance of the buildings. The presence of buried human individuals and carefully deposited anthropomorphic figurines point to an overriding concern with ancestors and ancestral origins. Salango was, in short, the scene of a dynamic and complex sequence of events. Initially constructed as a focus for local shamanic ritual, the site was ultimately transformed into a center of ancestor worship of regional importance, this process in turn reflecting ideological and social changes across the Ecuadorian lowlands as a whole (Stothert, 2003).

Helms (1988, 1993, 1998) has given ample treatment to the principle themes relating to the acquisition and expression of chiefly power, and there is no need to dwell here on the general significance of a ceremonial center such as Salango as an indicator of pre or incipient chiefdom social development. Nor is it necessary to emphasize that the vision of the world enshrined at Salango is essentially shamanic. Numerous studies of coastal Ecuadorian formative cultures have already demonstrated the value and applicability of analogy with South American tropical forest cosmology (e.g., Damp, 1979; Lathrap et al., 1975; Marcos, 1978; Stahl, 1984, 1986; Staller, 2001b; Stothert, 2003; Weinstein, 1999, 2001; Zeidler, 1983, 1984, 1998; Zeidler et al., 1998).

Rather, using archaeological and ethnographic analogy to support the interpretations, the emphasis will be on concepts and symbols of cosmic structure and power and how they were incorporated in the design of this ceremonial site. The list of buried offerings, including fauna and metal objects, stone, bone, shell, and pottery is long, and the symbolic connotations of the complete set, through all the different permutations of contextual association, are even more extensive.¹ The discussion, then, focuses on those elements that are most closely integrated with the ceremonial structures.

The Environmental Setting

The south-western corner of the province of Manabí, which forms part of the Tumbesian ecological zone, transitional between the Chilean-Peruvian desert and the tropical forests of Colombia and Panama, is notable for the close proximity of the hills of the Cordillera Chongón Colonche to the waters of the Pacific Ocean. Peaks of over 800m lie only a few kilometers from the shore. The climate is governed by alternating ocean currents, which create a general pattern of two longer wet seasons separated by two shorter dry seasons, though there can be marked variability with respect both to their intensity and duration. The Humboldt Current that drives up from the

¹ There is no surviving direct evidence of textiles, basketry or other organic remains, though some carbonized plant materials, so far not analyzed, were recovered.

Antarctic brings with it notably cool weather, with low cloud and drizzle or *garúa* that precipitates over the hills for the months from June to November; while in the hot *invierno* months from December onwards the southward moving warm Panama Current provokes heavier rain until April. Longer cycles see the sporadic intervention both of El Niño (Philander, 1990), whose effect is that of a long *invierno*, and of extended drought, which can result in almost total desiccation of the landscape.

The type of vegetation (Becker, 1999; Cañadas, 1983; Dodson and Gentry, 1991; Josse, 1996, 2000; Parker and Carr, 1992; Svenson, 1946) varies abruptly according to altitude, aspect and distance from the sea (Parker and Carr, 1992:36). Dry cactus savannah dominates from the shoreline, where annual rainfall may be as little as 300mm, up to 150m above sea level. Deciduous tropical dry forest then follows, while wet forest is found from 400m upwards, though it may occur at lower altitudes. Up to 1500mm of rain falls in the higher parts of the region (Josse, 1996:11f). Seasonal weather patterns also affect plant growth dramatically. Thus, the *garúa* months reduce the savannah to a monotonous grey, sere and leafless, while the first rains of the *invierno* stimulate the sudden outburst of leaf buds and the countless seeds that had lain dormant in the soil, and within days the bushes and surrounding forest are alive with color.

The region, ~40km long by 20km wide, is bordered to the south by the Cinco Cerros, a particularly rugged westward outcropping of the coastal cordillera. The cloud and rainfall that these hills attract permit the growth of wet forest almost to the cliff edges. The shoreline is characterized by sandy bays that initially face southwest, but then, from Salango onwards, are oriented west to north-west, thus affording protection at their southern ends from the prevailing southwesterly winds. To the north, the mass of hills reaches as far as the Río Jipi Japa, beyond which there opens a wide coastal plain stretching inland from an unprotected southwest facing shore and reaching up to Cabo San Lorenzo, 60km away.

Salango, then, lying at 1°35'30''S, 80°50'30''W (Fig. 7.1), marks the southern limit of a series of bays that are further characterized by the presence of small islands, themselves just off their southern ends. Salango Island, at 1300m across, and 135 m high, is the largest of these, while the most northerly, just off Salaite, is Islote Cayo. Further out into the ocean, however, 44km northwest from Salango, there is the much larger La Plata Island, 4km long and 160m high.

The pre-Colombian settlement at Salango was situated at the south end of the bay (Plate 7.1). As one stands on the beach near this site, almost driven into the sea by the pressure of the surrounding hills, the view to the west is dominated by Salango Island.² Beyond that, La Plata Island and the cliffs leading to Cabo San Lorenzo, when visible, mark the more distant horizon to the north-west and north. The north end of the bay, however, cuts off the view of much of the intervening coastline.

Between Salango Island and the headland, Punta Piedra Verde, the narrow channel is quite shallow, and reefs project at low tide. The waters here are rich in fish of

²The area of the ceremonial center itself now lies under the cement floor of a fishmeal factory warehouse.

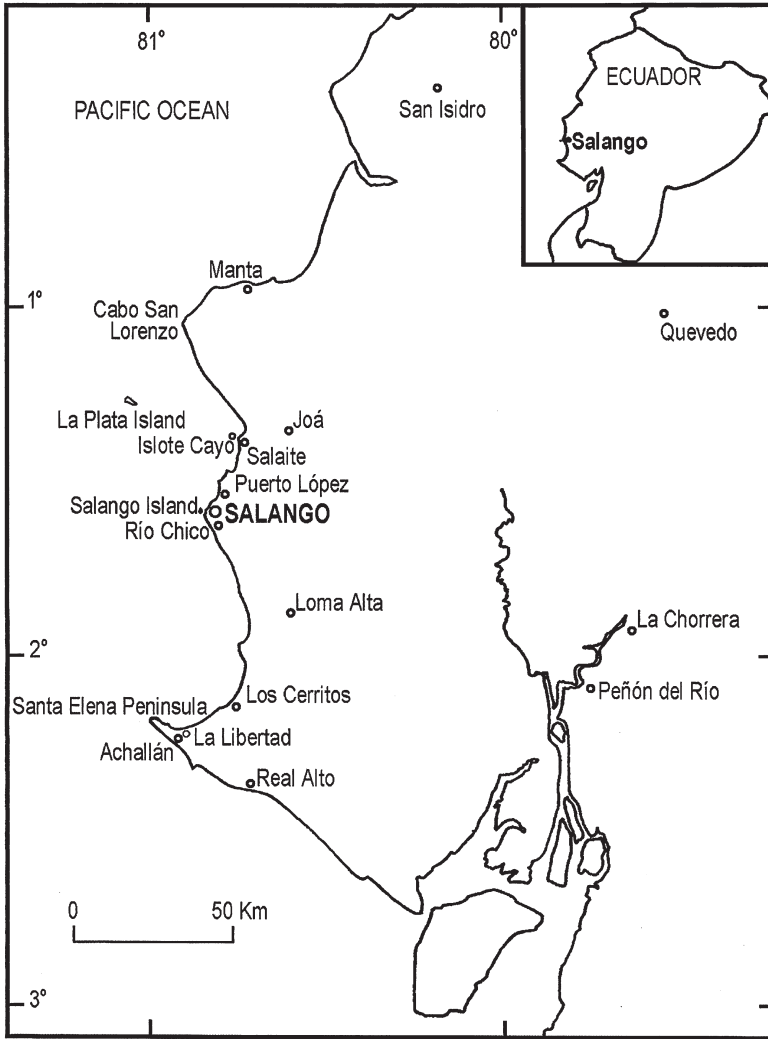


Fig. 7.1 Map of central coastal Ecuador showing sites mentioned in the text

different species (Béarez, 1996a), while the rock and coral reefs are home to an immense variety of bivalves, gastropods and other marine invertebrates. The island serves as an important coastal migration point for schools of black skipjack (*Euthynnus linneatus*) (Béarez and Lunniss, 2003). Green (*Chelonia mydas*) and other species of sea turtles lay their eggs on the mainland shores. Humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) may also pass through the straits on their migratory journeys from the Antarctic to the waters between La Plata Island and the mainland,



Plate 7.1 Salango: Punta Piedra Verde, the bay and Salango Island seen from the north. The Engoroy ceremonial site was located at the foot of the headland to the left of the picture, where the fish factory now stands (From Lunniss, 2007: Photo 1)

where each year they come to breed. The spectacular wealth, diversity, and seasonal variation of marine fauna reflect the interplay of the two ocean currents.

It was the sea, then, that provided the great majority of protein for local inhabitants, principally in the form of fish (Béarez, 1996b), though shell fish were also important (Béarez, 1996b:137). It was also the source of materials for personal adornments and tools, in particular mother-of-pearl (*Pinctada mazatlanica*) and two species of *Spondylus* shell (*S. princeps* and *S. calcifer*) (Keen, 1971).

The diversity of avian species, terrestrial mammals, reptiles and amphibians in the region is also notable (Albuja and Muñoz, 2000), and the forests support even today the iconic jaguar (*Panthera onca*). But although non-marine vertebrate remains are found at pre-Colombian Salango, their quantities are relatively insignificant, and as we shall see for the Late Formative in particular, their depositional context and condition argue more for symbolic than dietary importance.

Engoroy and Chorrera Phase Occupations

The Ecuadorian Late Formative is principally famous for and associated with the Chorrera culture. Chorrera is the name ascribed, in the first place, to a ceramic assemblage identified at the type site, La Chorrera, on the bank of the Río Babahoyo

(Evans and Meggers, 1954, 1957, 1982; Estrada, 1958). Certain attributes of this assemblage, in particular its iridescent painted fine ware, were subsequently identified amongst other collections, and as time went by, Chorrera was seen to extend over much, if not all, of the Ecuadorian lowlands, and even to extend into the southern highlands (Estrada, 1958).

Parallel to this process, however, excavations at La Libertad (Bushnell, 1951) had led to the identification there of Engoroy, a Late Formative ceramic set with similar iridescent painted fine wares. More field work and analysis (Bischof, 1982; Lanning, 1967; Marcos, 1982; Paulsen and McDougle, 1974, 1981; Simmons, 1970; Zevallos, 1965, 1995) led to the proposition that Engoroy itself extended along the Guayas coast up into southern Manabí (Bischof, 1982), representing one of several regional manifestations of a Chorreroid series. Subsequently, analysis (Beckwith, 1996; Lunniss, 2001) of Late Formative pottery assemblages from the Achallán albarrada (Stothert, 1995) and settlements at Loma Alta (Raymond, 1980, 1982) and Salango (Kurc, 1984), has reinforced the view that, while Engoroy and Chorrera ceramics are closely related, there is sufficient difference between them to warrant the use of separate names.³ In addition, it is clear that while Engoroy ceramics dominate the coastal strip from the Santa Elena Peninsula up to the area of Salaite and Joá in southern Manabí, Chorrera is limited to the agriculturally rich valleys of the interior lowlands to the east of the coastal cordillera.⁴

One particular problem has been the paucity of provenienced material available with which to define Chorrera. Only a very small part of the pottery from the Chorrera type site has been published, and other than a small sample of sherds from Peñon del Río (Zedeño, 1985), some material from the upper basin of the River Guayas around Quevedo (Graber, 2002; Guillaume-Gentil et al., 2001, 2002) and the Jama Valley Tabuchila ceramics outlined by Zeidler and Sutliff (1994), the evidence for Chorrera consists primarily of a vast number of looted vessels probably deriving from cemeteries of central and northern Manabí, including the major ceremonial center at San Isidro (Stothert, 2003: 366; Zeidler and Sutliff, 1994:115). These vessels, including bowls, jars, bottles and figurines, are of spectacular quality and thematic range (Cummins, 2003; Lathrap et al., 1975). But no complete, classic Chorrera vessel has ever been recovered by controlled excavation, though a few examples of elaborate Late Formative pottery have been documented *in situ* at Engoroy cemeteries at Los Cerritos, on the Guayas coast (Zevallos, 1965, 1995:138–189), and at Salango (Lunniss, 2001), while a whistling bottle representing the howler monkey (*Alouatta palliata*), native to the mainland forests of south Manabí, was excavated on La Plata Island (Marcos and Norton, 1981:146).

³ See Staller (2001a:234–240) for an alternative interpretation.

⁴ Zeidler's (2003:494–508) regional perspective on Late Formative chronology, however, suggests that Engoroy both began and ended later than Chorrera.

First Occupations at Salango

The first settlers came to Salango some time in the latter half of the fourth millennium BC, and there appears to have been more or less continuous occupation of the area at the base of the southern headland right through to the arrival of the Spanish and the fall of the Manteño señorío of Salangome (McEwan, 2004; Norton, 1990), more than four and a half thousand years later (Lunniss, 2001; Norton et al., 1983). Valdivia people exploited the sea there, and made offerings of shells and pottery into the water of a lagoon. Later, around 1500 BC, when the lagoon filled in, Machalilla fishers built a village that prospered up to the end of the second millennium BC. Some time around 900 BC, ceramic and funerary data point to a transition into Early Engoroy phase occupation (Beckwith, 1996; Kurc, 1984), though there does not appear yet to have been any significant change in subsistence or settlement pattern.⁵ With the beginning, however, of Middle Engoroy occupation there were profound alterations to the structure and management of the site.

Excavation of different parts of the Late Formative Middle and Late Engoroy phase ceremonial site at OMJPLP-141, Salango (Fig. 7.2), was carried out at different times between 1979 and 1989, with principal efforts at sectors 141B-T3, which included the rear, west corners of the structures, in 1985–6 (Lunniss, 2001; Lunniss and Mudd, 1987), and 141B-T4, which included the front, facing halves and entrance ways, in 1988–9 (Lunniss, 2006) (Fig. 7.3). The rear south corners of the structures were not excavated. Further information came from sectors 141A, 20 m to the east (Norton et al., 1983), and 141C (Kurc, 1984), 50 m to the northeast. In the years 2000, 2004 and 2005, community projects involving the digging of latrine pits and trenches for water pipes permitted less formal observation of stratigraphic profiles and associated artifacts that assisted in estimating the original size and configuration of the Engoroy settlement.

The following account, then, discusses the sequence of eight episodes of construction and use of ceremonial spaces and buildings created over the ~500 year period of Middle and Late Engoroy occupation of Salango. Table 7.1 presents calibrated radiocarbon dates for samples taken from sector T3 of site OMJPLP-141B⁶. For Middle Engoroy, the material sampled was in each case wood charcoal. The first two samples came from contexts associated with Episode 2: GX-13028 was from a post-hole cut into the clay floor, while GX-13027 was from a layer of ash that overlay the floor and also post-dated the post hole of the first sample. GX-13025 came from an ash layer on the platform summit, and may be associated with Episode 3 or 4. For Late Engoroy, samples OxA-5836, GX-13670 and GX-13671 derive from human bone taken from articulated skeletons associated with Episodes 7 and 8 or with the transitional phase that followed Episode 8. GX-13023, however,

⁵Detailed stratigraphic and contextual analysis of the Valdivia, Machalilla and Early Engoroy levels remains to be undertaken.

⁶Three dates with very large standard deviations are omitted.

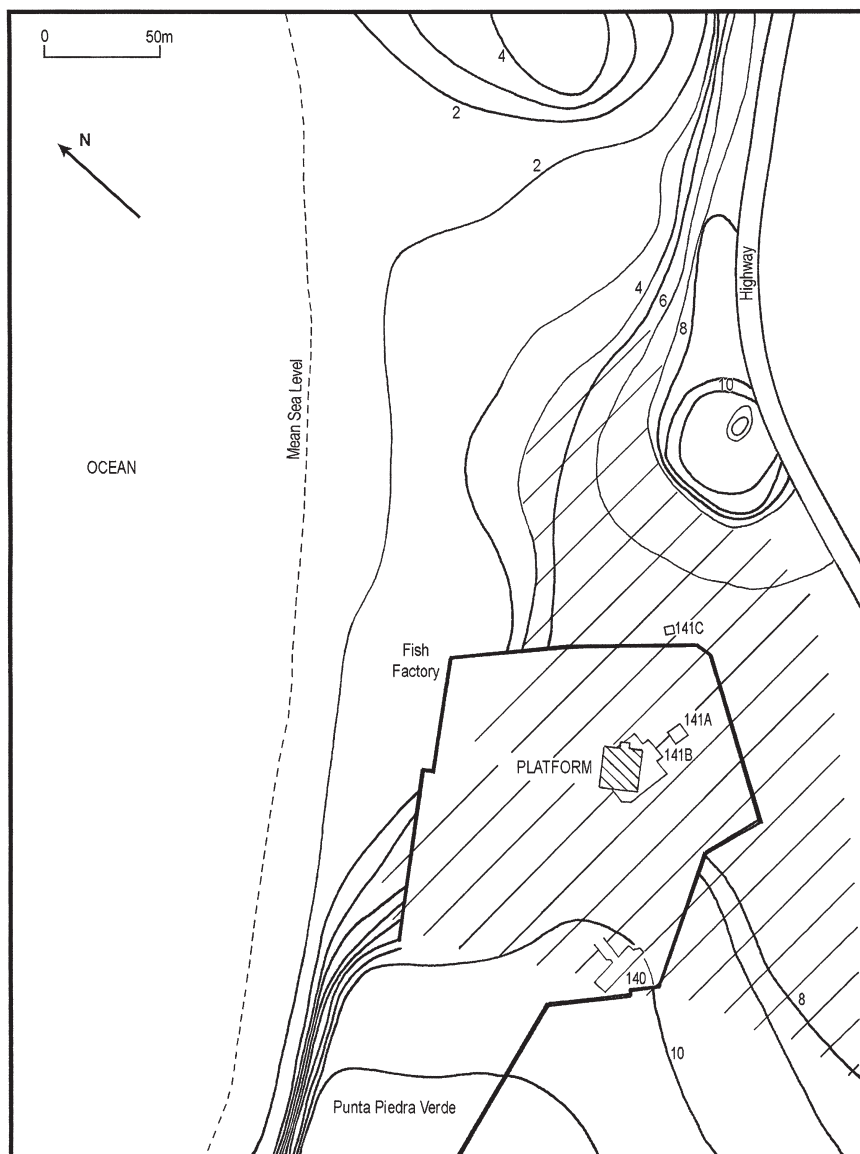


Fig. 7.2 Plan of the south end of Salango, showing sites OMJPLP-141A, B and C, the extent of the Engoroy settlement (broader shading), and the location of the Episode 8 platform (narrower shading).

was a sample of wood charcoal found in burnt soil next to a funerary fire pit just to the SW of the Episode 7/8 platform. And GX-13024 was a sample of wood charcoal taken from the fill of the same grave, 3776, as contained the skeleton that provided the bone sample for OxA-5836.

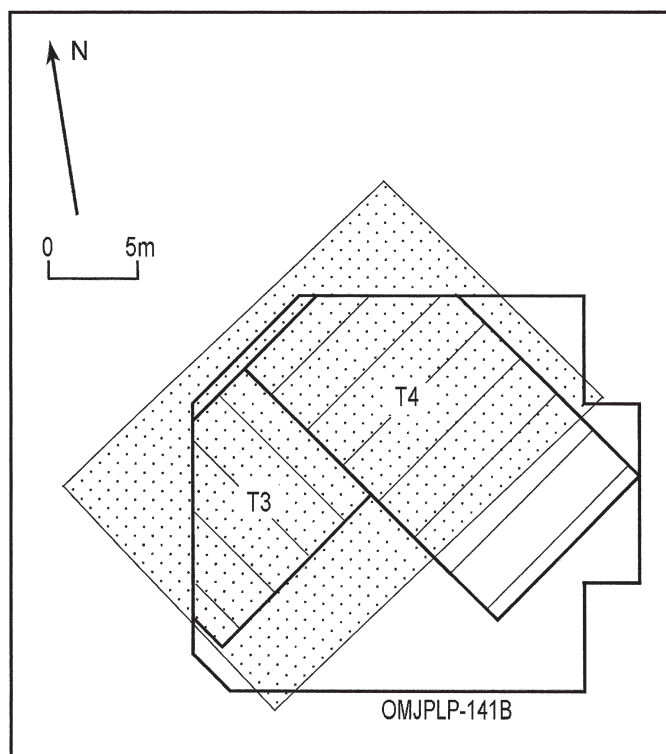


Fig. 7.3 Site OMJPLP-141B, Salango, showing the relation of the area (stippled) of the reconstructed plan drawings of Episodes 1–8 (Figs. 7.4–7.11) to the excavated sectors T3 and T4

Table 7.1 Radiocarbon Dates from the Engoroy Phase Ceremonial Center at Salango OMJPLP-141B-T3

Catalogue no.	Sample	Material	Conventional ¹⁴ C years BP	Calibrated age range (1 σ) at 68.2% probability	Calibrated age range (2 σ) at 95.4% probability
Middle Engoroy					
7277	GX-13028	CHAR	2540 \pm 85	810–520BC	820–400BC
6653	GX-13027	CHAR	3045 \pm 150	1440–1050BC	1700–850BC
5684	GX-13025	CHAR	2655 \pm 85	970–660BC	1010–510BC
Late Engoroy					
3776	OxA-5836	BONE	3180 \pm 60	1520–1400BC	1610–1310BC
3301	GX-13670	BONE	2475 \pm 165	790–400BC	1000–150BC
3201	GX-13023	CHAR	2220 \pm 285	800BC–AD100	1000BC–AD500
3776	GX-13024	CHAR	1820 \pm 195	40BC–AD430	350BC–AD650
3305	GX-13671	BONE	1725 \pm 170	AD120–540	100BC–AD700

Note: Calibration was carried out using the OxCal program v3.9 (Bronk Ramsey, 1995, 2001).

The results are frankly hard to work with. They suggest a much earlier start to Middle Engoroy than would be expected on the basis of the Early Engoroy date range obtained for OMJPLP-141C Salango (Beckwith, 1996: Table 2.1; Kurc, 1984; Zeidler, 2003:501), a range that roughly concurs with the estimate of 900–600 BC suggested by Bischof (1982). Likewise, for Late Engoroy, the results extend well to either side of the estimate of 300–100 BC also suggested by Bischof (1982). For the moment, it is probably best to consider that the Middle and Late Engoroy stages at Salango date to roughly 600–300 BC and 300–100 BC respectively, bearing in mind, however, that both stages are in need of a good new sequence of dates before we can be sure of their correct ranges.

It has been possible to reconstruct the overall plan outlines (Figs. 7.4–7.11) and profiles (Figs. 7.12 and 7.13) of seven of the eight episodes (Episodes 1–4, 6–8), though one (Episode 5) remains uncertain. This sequence is unique as the only documented example of ceremonial.

Construction Episodes 1–8: The Engoroy Ceremonial Site at Salango

The eight episodes of construction and use of the Late Formative ceremonial floors and platforms at site OMJPLP-141B Salango correspond to the two later stages of the Engoroy phase. Thus Episodes 1–6 are associated with Middle Engoroy ceramics,

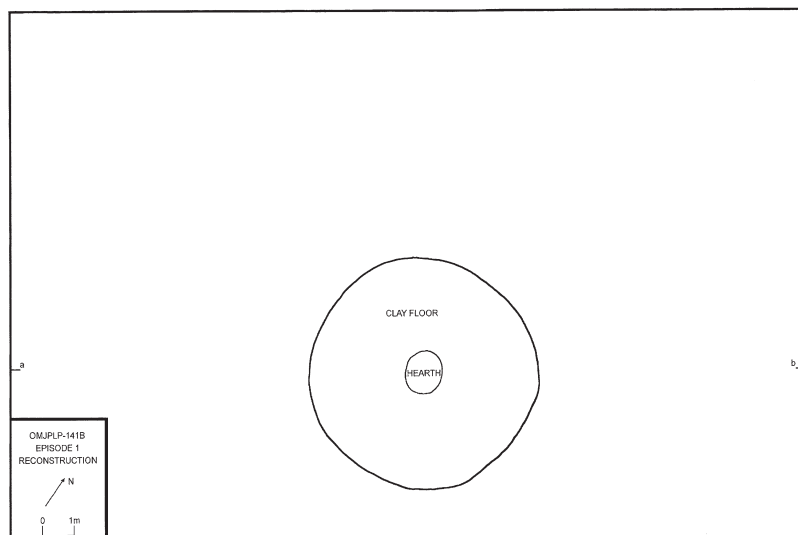


Fig. 7.4 Reconstructed plan of the ceremonial floor of Episode 1. The circular outline is conjectural. (From Lunniss, 2007: Fig. 7.3)

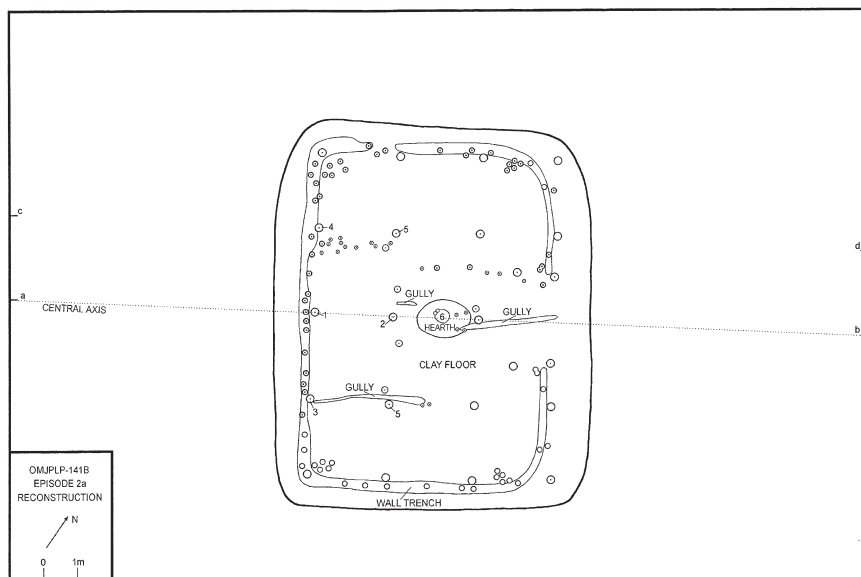


Fig. 7.5 Reconstructed plan of the first phase of the ceremonial house of Episode 2, showing the main elements. The entrance faces northeast. Secondary hearths are omitted, along with many postholes. Circles with central dots represent post holes for which evidence was recovered. Circles without dots represent post-holes whose presence is postulated. Buried offerings were associated with the roof supports of the center rear section: (1) two tuff discs at the base, and a juvenile *S. princeps* in the packing; (2) one tuff disc at the base and a *V. caestus* in the packing; (3) one shale disc at the base, and three copper flakes in the packing; (4) probably as (3), but the hole was mostly destroyed and no offerings were recovered; (5) one shale disc. (6) was a small ash pit

while Episodes 7 and 8 are associated with Late Engoroy material. It will be seen that the transition from Middle to Late Engoroy ceramics corresponds also to important ideological change as expressed particularly by site configuration, funerary practice and the use of stone figurines.⁷ Throughout, the central structures are associated with extensive layers of discard over the surrounding floors, including pottery fragments, shell, fish bone, lithic material, and tools and ornaments of shell.

Late Engoroy Salango extended ~300m along the beach from the base of Punta Piedra Verde. Roughly 200m wide at the southwest end beneath the headland, the settlement tapered to a point at its far end, expansion beyond which was blocked by a shallow river channel and a low spur of the inland hills. The total area occupied, then, was about three hectares. Middle Engoroy Salango may have been even

⁷It should be noted, though, that the ceramic transition from Middle to Late Engoroy at Salango was not a sudden event, but staggered, as changes in different forms occurred one after the other (Lunniss, 2001:267–270).

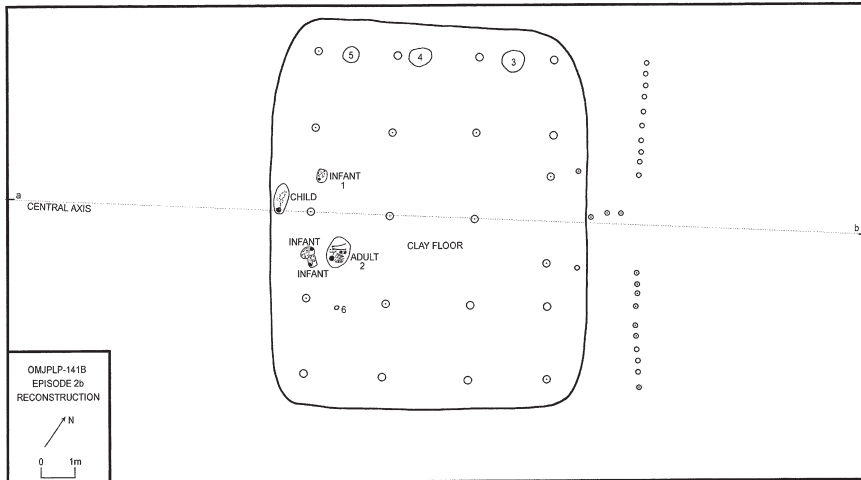


Fig. 7.6 Reconstructed plan of the second phase of the ceremonial house of Episode 2b, showing the main elements, i.e., the roof supports, the five human burials and other offerings. Hearths are omitted, as are many postholes. Circles with central dots represent post holes for which evidence was recovered. Circles without dots represent post-holes whose presence is postulated. One infant burial (1) was accompanied by a string of shell beads, and the adult burial (2) had a string of shell beads and a tripod bowl. On the northwest side, pits contained offerings of stones (3), and ash (4 and 5). A tuff disc and a green stone bead were also buried in the floor (6)

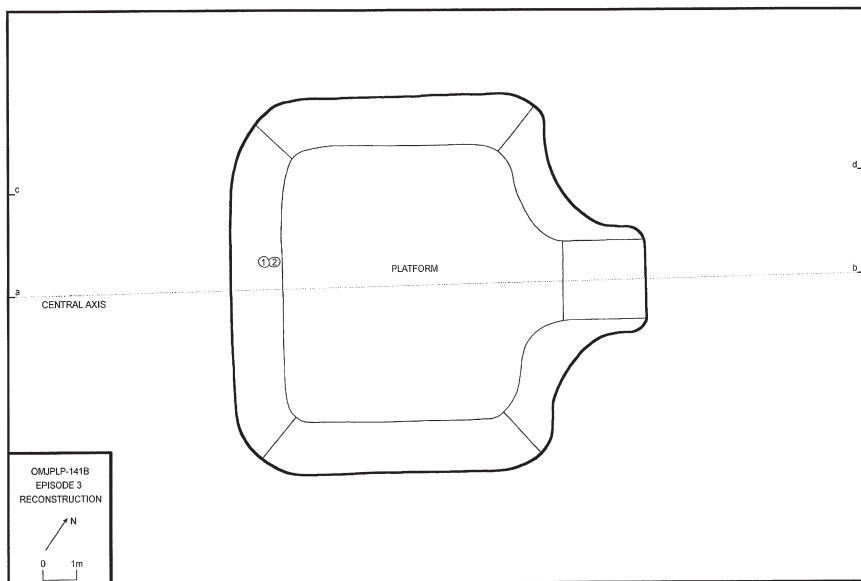


Fig. 7.7 Reconstructed plan of the ceremonial platform of Episode 3. The entrance faces northeast. Evidence for the rearward superstructure is omitted, as are other post holes and the hearths. The orientation is uncertain. Buried offerings included: (1) armadillo scutes, a red *S. princeps* bead and three greenstone beads; (2) a tuff disc, a fragment of a tuff disc, a white shell bead and six greenstone beads

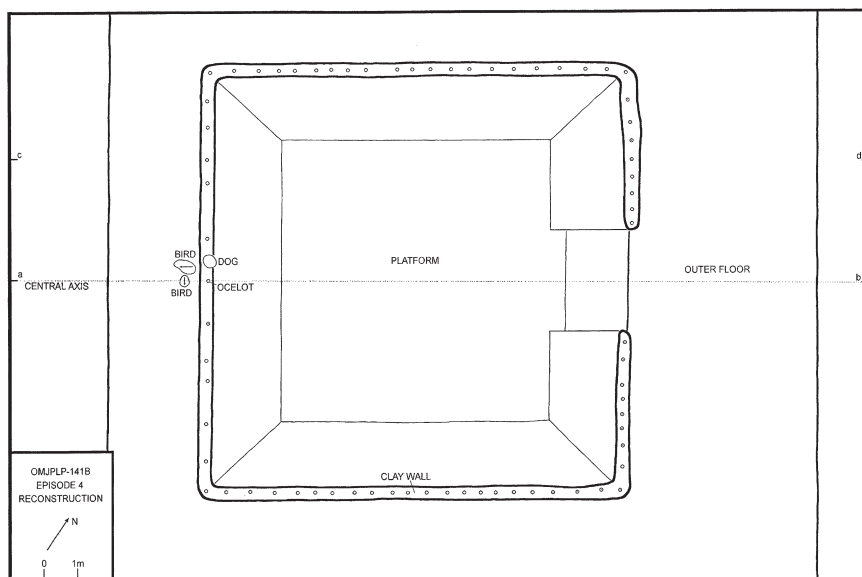


Fig. 7.8 Reconstructed plan of the ceremonial platform of Episode 4. The entrance faces north-east. Evidence for rearward secondary structures is omitted, as are other postholes on the platform and the hearths. A fence was set into the clay wall around the platform. Excavated post holes are represented by small circles with central dots. Circles without dots represent postulated postholes. The ocelot skeleton was buried incomplete. The birds were probably herons. That to the southwest of the ocelot was accompanied by a green stone bead and a shell bead. The other was associated with thirty five polished chert flakes and a greenstone bead

smaller. It appears that the zone to the southwest, at the base of the headland, was that chosen for public ceremony, while any habitational structures probably lay to the northeast. No contemporary domestic structures, however, have been identified for either Middle or Late Engoroy.

The first evidence, then, for public ceremony at Salango is a floor of yellow clay that was laid on very gently sloping ground at the base of the headland, about 3.50m above sea level and 100m from the high tide line. Possibly circular, with a diameter of ~7m, the floor of Episode 1 (Fig. 7.4) was the setting for a central open hearth, about a meter wide, itself represented by red scorched clay and a covering of grey ash.⁸

This simple arrangement was succeeded by the most elaborate and complex structure of the entire sequence, the ceremonial house of Episode 2. The house's foundation layer was an extensive layer of yellow clay, 10cm to 15cm thick, measuring 11.20m by 9.60m. Embedded in the clay were a tusk-shaped pendant of

⁸The floor was much truncated, with only the north half recovered. It may indeed have been not circular but some other shape.

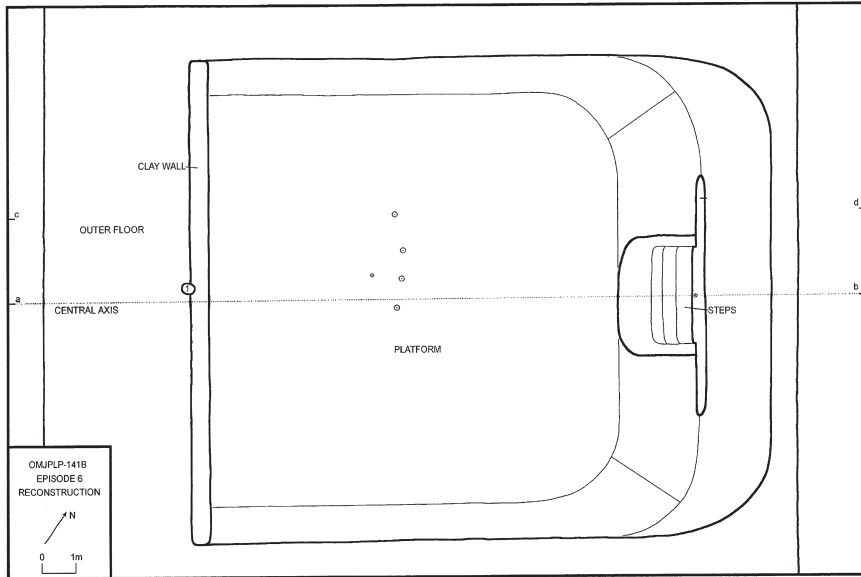


Fig. 7.9 Reconstructed plan of the ceremonial platform of Episode 6. The entrance faces northeast. Features suggesting small secondary structures along the back are omitted, as are shallow, clay-filled trenches that suggest internal divisions of the platform top, and one human burial. A shell figurine was incorporated within the top step, and five greenstone beads within the bottom step. Later, a tuff figurine was buried upright in the bottom step, with thirty four greenstone beads round its waist. (1) was a buried offering of stone hammers, flaked stone tools, rough chert cores, a fragment of tuff disc and a disc of *P. mazatlanica*. An arc of four post holes, with a smaller fifth hole inside the arc, marks off the rear of the platform. A small hole at the center of the bottom step may have held an offering or supported a post

white *S. calcifer* (Plate 7.2) and a small greenstone disc (Plate 7.3, left). Rectangular in outline, with its long axis running northwest to southeast, and measuring 10.10 m by 7.40 m, the house had its entrance at the center of the long side, with an approximate orientation of 60°E (Fig. 7.5).⁹

The principal elements were four rows, running northwest to southeast, of large wooden posts set in holes up to 70 cm deep, these supporting a roof probably covered with the leaves of the *tagua* palm (*Phytelephas aequatorialis*). The rows were roughly 2.50 m apart. In the rear three, there were five posts, again about 2.50 m apart. The front row, however, accommodating the 2.50 m wide entrance, consisted of a corner post at each end, a post either side of the entranceway, and perhaps a post each at the ends of the center-northwest and center-southeast files.

⁹ While the south corner was not excavated, the east corner was largely destroyed, and other areas, including the north corner, were also impacted by later features. But, while some details of the front may be uncertain, the reconstructed plan seems likely to be mostly correct.

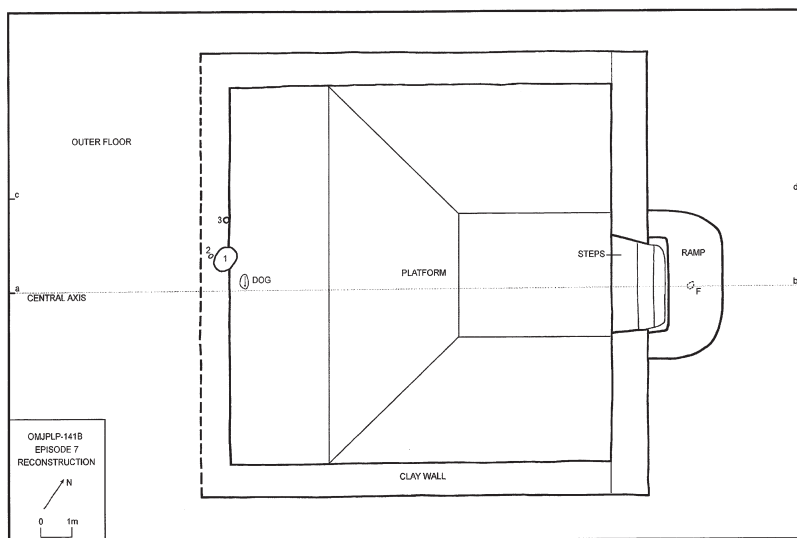


Fig. 7.10 Reconstructed plan of the ceremonial platform of Episode 7. The entrance faces northeast. Human graves and associated features are omitted, as are features suggestive of secondary structures. The rear wall merged directly into the outer floor, and the dotted line marks the edge of the buried wall trench. In the ramp, a figurine (F) was buried upright and facing northeast on the central axis, with a broken tuff disc lying flat over its head. On the rear wall, one pit (1) had a malachite disc at the base. Filling a small hole (2) was a *Muricanthus* sp. conch set upright over four hundred and seventy two chert flakes. Another small pit (3) was filled by pottery sherds, a broken net weight, two lumps of chert and two pebbles that may have been hammer stone

The rear two posts of the central three files were each accompanied by offerings in carefully deposited clay packing. In the central file, the rear hole contained two flat discs of volcanic tuff (Plate 7.3, center) at the base, and a juvenile *S. princeps* (Plate 7.4, left) part way up the fill, while the second hole had a single tuff disc at the base, and a *Vasum caestus* conch (Plate 7.4, right). The holes of the files to either side each contained a single small disc of grey shale (Plate 7.3, right) at the base, while packing of the rear hole of the center-southeast file also contained three small flakes of copper.¹⁰

The space covered by the roof was then enclosed by a series of smaller posts, spaced at up to 50 cm apart and set into a shallow trench that ran outside the main posts to the rear and to either side, but inside the main posts of the front row. The corners were marked by denser clusters of post holes.

The interior of the house was subdivided by a number of partitions, represented by narrow gullies and rows of small post holes. One gully bisected the front sector, running back from the middle of the doorway to the edge of an oval hearth, with a central

¹⁰The rear hole of the center-northwest file was mainly lost.

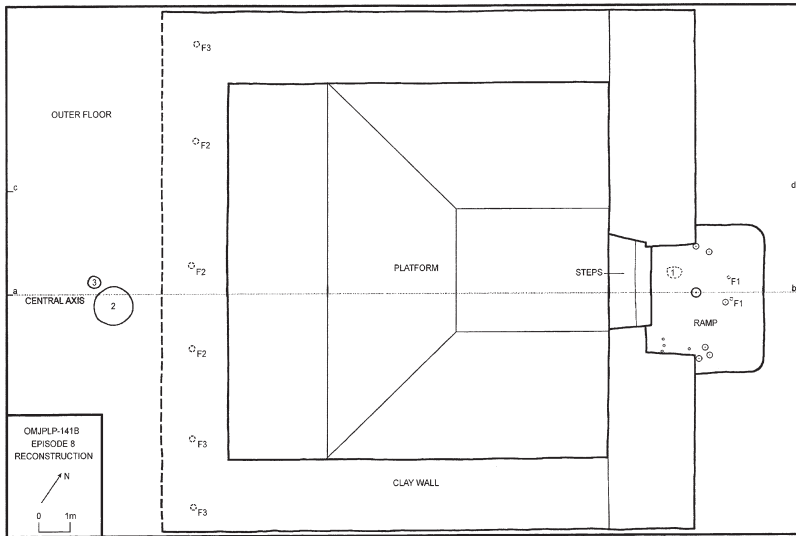


Fig. 7.11 Reconstructed plan of the ceremonial platform of Episode 8. The entrance faces north-east. Human graves and associated features, and dedicated figurine depositions around the platform, are all omitted, as are features suggestive of secondary structures. Two upright tuff figurines (F1) were buried prior to construction of the ramp, one either side of the central axis, facing north-east. A bird (1) was buried near the top of the ramp. The ramp supported a gateway, indicated by various postholes, the largest of these marking the central axis. Beneath the rear wall, three upright figurines (F2) were buried, and another three (F3) are postulated. Other buried offerings to the southwest include: a wide shallow pit with colored clay linings (2); and a ceramic jar neck, with a *Muricanthus* sp. conch set upright in its mouth, and to either side, a *P. mazatlanica* valve (3)

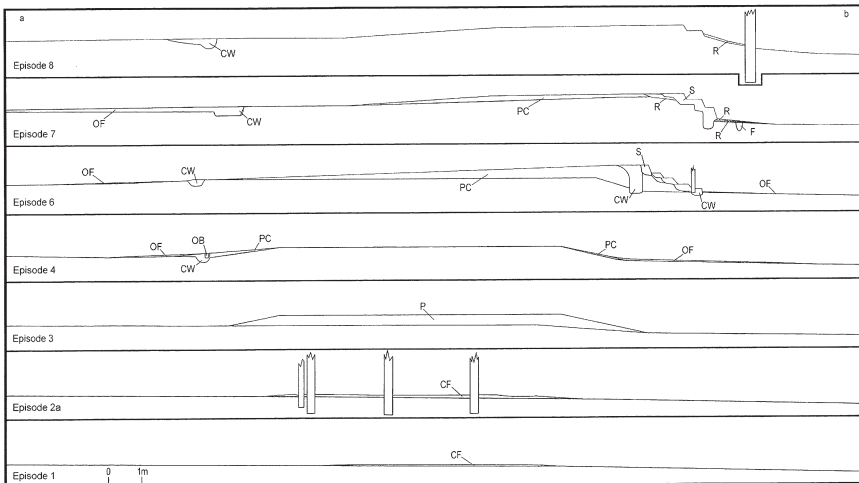


Fig. 7.12 Reconstructed southwest to northeast profiles of the ceremonial structures along the central axis (a-b on the plan drawings), showing the main elements added with each episode, and including posts of the main structures. CW: clay wall; CF: clay floor; F: figurine deposition; OB: ocelot burial; OF: outer clay floor; P: clay platform; PC: clay platform cap; R: ramp; S: clay steps.

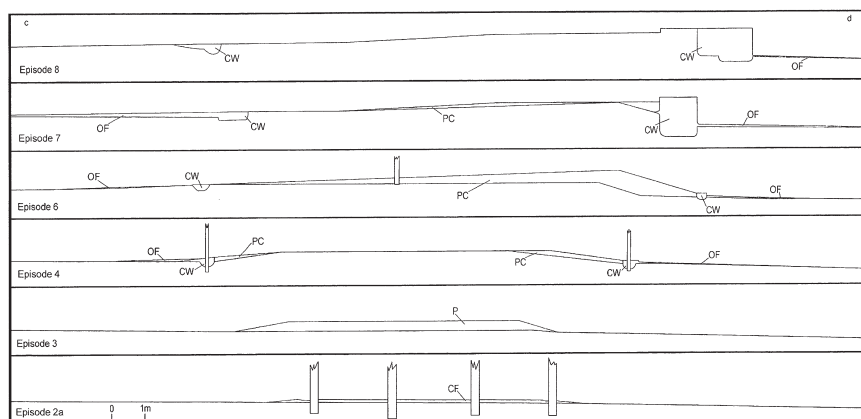


Fig. 7.13 Reconstructed southwest to northeast profiles of the ceremonial structures to the northwest of the central axis (c-d on the plan drawings), showing the main elements added with each episode, and including posts of the main structures. CW: clay wall; CF: clay floor; OF: outer clay floor; P: clay platform; PC: clay platform cap. (2007: Fig. 7.12)



Plate 7.2 Tusk shaped pendant of white *Spondylus calcifer* from the Episode 2 house floor



Plate 7.3 Stone discs of Episode 2: (left) green stone disc from the house floor; (center) tuff and (right) shale discs from posthole packing of the central and flanking files respectively



Plate 7.4 Shells buried in post holes of the central axis of the Episode 2 house: (left) juvenile *Spondylus princeps* and (right) *Vasum caestus*

ash pit, that lay just forward of the center of the house. Two other partitions running northeast to southwest and an arc of four other posts running northwest to southeast marked off the 5.00m by 2.50m central rear section of the house. Other holes suggest furniture and other fixtures. As in Episode 1, the focus of activity was the central hearth. Repeated burning of the floor, however, and ash scatters, with subsequent clay repairs in other areas of the house, indicate that secondary hearths also existed, principally to the rear, but with one important hearth also in the central northwest section.

At some point, the outer wall and the interior partitions were dismantled. A screen of posts was set up just off the floor, about a meter away from the original outer wall, while a line of three other posts bisected the approach from that screen to the doorway. Hearths continued in use inside, but the house now became a repository for a number of offerings, and, more importantly, for the human dead (Fig. 7.6).

There were five individuals buried, including one adult, a child and three infants. The adult was accompanied by a tripod bowl (Plate 7.5) and a string of seventy-one white shell beads (Plate 7.6, left). One infant had a string of sixty-eight white shell beads (Plate 7.6, right). Four graves lay within the rear center section previously demarcated by interior partitions, one of the infants' tombs cutting directly into the line of the earlier wall trench, the other two close to it. The child, however, lay further to the southwest, just outside that line, but still on the floor. Four of the individuals were buried on a northwest to southeast axis, heads to the southeast, while one infant was oriented to the north.



Plate 7.5 Tripod bowl buried with adult beneath the floor of the Episode 2 house



Plate 7.6 Strings of shell beads buried with (left) the adult and (right) an infant beneath the floor of the Episode 2 house

We have seen how the central axis of the house was marked in at surface level by the central file of roof posts, the central hearth and its ash pit, the forward internal partition of the early stage, and the row of posts bisecting the entranceway in the later stage. However, in the underground, this axis was also defined by the offerings in the post holes, and by the difference between those and the offerings made into the holes to either side. Now, the child was laid outside with the head directly on the line of that axis also, the rest of the body extending to the northwest.

Meanwhile, the earlier trench line of the northwest side was chosen to accommodate a pit containing a set of stones (including twenty seven small polished pebbles, two larger flat, unpolished pebbles, and two chert flakes) (Plate 7.7), and two ash pits, each being set between a separate pair of main posts.¹¹ A flat tuff disc and a greenstone bead were also placed in a small hole to the southeast of the graves.

For Episode 3, the superstructure of the Episode 2 house was carefully dismantled (a *Strombus peruvianus* conch, and various elements of two tripod bowls and a bottle spout were left in or close to the emptied holes of three roof posts), and a new layer of yellow clay, up to 35 cm thick, was laid on top of the old floor, creating a platform about 11.00 m wide and 9.40 m from front to back (Fig. 7.7).¹² Access

¹¹ Offerings may also have been made along the southeast side.

¹² The northwest half of the platform, including the ramp, was mostly preserved, so that the overall design as reconstructed is probably correct. The orientation, however, of the platform is not certain.



Plate 7.7 Stones offered in a pit cut into the wall trench of the Episode 2 house

was now via a 2.40 m long ramp that projected from the center of the long northeast side. The top, however, of the platform was smaller, on account of the slope of the edges, and covered about 8.00 m by 7.00 m. Embedded in the platform were greenstone beads, shell beads, tuff discs, a stylized tuff human figurine, and a small pottery vessel, that perhaps served as a lime container, in the form of a tree snail (*Strophocheilus popelairianus*) (Plate 7.8).

Some sort of wooden structure was erected, though post holes were generally found in the rear half only, with only a very few towards the front. While some post holes may have been lost through later intrusion, the evidence suggests that any new building would have been significantly different from that of Episode 2.

Again, there were open hearths across the floor. A small gold ring was buried southeast of the center. On the southwest slope, just to the northwest of the central axis, were two small pits containing ritual offerings: one had armadillo scutes, a red bead of *S. princeps* and three greenstone beads, while the other had a tuff disc and disc fragment, a white shell bead, and six greenstone beads.

In Episode 4, the platform was expanded (Fig. 7.8). Clay walling was constructed to retain the yellow clay of the platform itself and to define more clearly the difference between the platform and the area around it. In this case, a wall of yellow brown clay, 10–15 cm in height, set in a U-shaped trench 30–40 cm wide and 40 cm deep, was laid around the earlier platform, extending outwards as a shallow layer for up to 80 cm away from the trench edge. The wall thus created a square enclosure of about 12.80 m along each side, with a 3 m wide gap to accommodate the earlier ramp. Yellow clay was then used to extend the existing platform to



Plate 7.8 Pottery vessel in form of a tree snail (*Strophocheilus popelairianus*) from the Episode 3 platform

the limits set by the new wall, creating a top surface about 8 m square, with a slight forward projection of the top to meet the newly resurfaced ramp. Narrow posts were set into the top of the wall, at least along the front and sides, at intervals of 40 cm to 70 cm. Soon after, a new clay floor was laid around the wall, reaching to 6 m or more away from the platform.¹³

By this stage, the center of the platform was over 40 cm higher than the ground in front. No obvious signs, however, of a main superstructure were found, though clusters of holes along the rear suggest that several smaller fixtures may have been sited there. The center of the platform continued, as before, to be a site for open hearths.

Four ritual offerings were made of animals and birds. The partial remains of an ocelot (*Felis pardalis*) were buried vertically in a small hole cut into the rear wall on the exact line of the central axis, this now oriented approximately to 57°E. Just to the northwest, cutting the inside edge of the rear wall, was a pit containing a dog burial (*Canis familiaris*).¹⁴ Just outside the wall, on the central axis, another pit contained a bird, probably a heron (Ardeidae), lying on its left side on an overall northwest to southeast axis, and accompanied by one bead of greenstone and another of white shell. Immediately to the northwest was another bird burial, again

¹³ The northwest side and south corner were not excavated, but the entrance and north corner, part of the southeast side, and much of the rear wall were all preserved.

¹⁴ The much disturbed remains suggest that the animal was laid on a northwest to southeast axis, with its back to the northeast, though it is not clear at which end the head may have laid.

probably that of a heron. This time, the bird lay on its back, head to the southwest, tail to the northeast. Within the area of the body there were thirty five polished and rounded chert flakes, while a broken greenstone bead lay elsewhere in the fill.

Episode 5 is less well defined than the others, though it appears that the front and sides of the platform were extended, there was a clay wall of sorts along the front, and at some stage a low clay wall in a U-shaped trench along the rear. The platform surface continued to be used as a setting for hearths, but there is no evidence for a superstructure.

The most interesting feature is a buried ritual offering that was made into a pit that cut the rear edge of the structure, just to the northwest of the central axis. A bar of cut and polished malachite lay on the center of the pit floor. A large block of fossil wood that acted as a figurine stood to the southwest, facing northeast. Just in front was an anthropomorphic figurine pendant (perhaps made of a sea mammal canine), facing the same direction but set part way up the fill, as if being worn by the larger figure. Finally, two greenstone beads were laid flat and side-by-side, 2 cm above the top of the pendant's head (Plate 7.9).



Plate 7.9 Stylized fossil wood anthropomorphic figurine, anthropomorphic figurine pendant of carved tusk, green stone beads, and a malachite bar. All from a single offering made into rear of the Episode 5 platform, to the northwest of the central axis

Cutting immediately into the top of that pit, a second feature contained three white and two red shell beads, a greenstone bead, and a broken tuff disc. There were also two unfinished colored shell beads and a fragment of a *Conus* sp. rattle.

During Episode 6, the old platform was completely covered by a new layer of yellow clay, extending the overall length of the structure to around 14.30 m, with a width of between 12 m and 14 m (Fig. 7.9).¹⁵ From its ground level rear edge, the platform surface rose gradually towards the northeast, such that the forward edge of the top, 12 m away, was about 35 cm higher than the back. From that point, the yellow clay then, over a distance of perhaps 2.20 m, sloped around 70 cm down to the forward base of the platform, from which point in turn the clay then extended, as a shallow, slightly sloping layer, a further 2.00 m or more out to the northeast.

A narrow low wall (no more than 15 cm high) of distinctive reddish brown clay was then set along the central 7 m of the front base, marking off the edge of the platform from the outer floor. The wall also served as the bottom of five steps belonging to an elaborate 3.50 m wide stairway, of the same clay, that was next built up the center of the platform front. The steps were laid between the arms of a U-shaped clay wall (opening to the northeast) set in a trench cut back from the base wall. While five greenstone beads were incorporated in the bottom step, a tusk-shaped shell figurine pendant was buried at the top of the stairway. Subsequently, a plain tusk-shaped tuff figurine was buried in a small hole cut into the bottom step, with thirty-four greenstone beads around its waist.¹⁶ Other features cut into the stairway include a small, well-defined hole set in the very center of the bottom step, perhaps to hold a post, else for a long-since perished offering.

Meanwhile, at the back of the platform, cut into the outer edge of the low rear wall, just northwest of the central axis, was a small pit that contained two stone hammers, flaked stone tools, rough chert cores, the fragment of a tuff disc, and a disc of *P. mazatlanica*.

On top, the platform was bare of any major superstructure. However, just into the rear half, slightly northwest from the central axis, there was a 2.5 m wide arc of four post holes running northwest to southeast, with a fifth 90 cm inside and to the southwest of the arc. Whether these holes represent the original entire set of posts is not clear. However, they suggest that a small fence separated the center rear section of the platform from the forward half. They seem, then, to replicate the arc of post holes associated with the Episode 2 structure.

With Episode 6, use of the platform as a site for the burning of fires in open hearths came to an end. Instead, the platform was redesigned as a focus for human funerary rites, and in Episodes 7 and 8 human interments and their associated features became more common.

¹⁵The edges were not preserved.

¹⁶Precise locations for these depositions were not recorded.

During Episode 7, a relatively much larger red-brown clay wall was laid around the earlier platform, creating an enclosure roughly 14 m square (Fig. 7.10).¹⁷ Along the front, the wall was 1.20 m wide, and rose 80 cm above the ground outside. A gap in the wall (slightly narrower on the outside than the inside) more or less matched the position of the Episode 6 stairway, but resulted in an entrance that was now no longer exactly central to the front. Along the sides, the wall was narrower, and around 30 cm lower. However, as the sides approached the rear, the difference between the top of the wall and the outer floor diminished, such that along the rear, the top was actually horizontal with the newly created outer floor (see below). This was due to the fact that, despite the back and sides of the wall being horizontal, the ground surrounding the platform sloped gently down to the northeast.

Along the rear side of the enclosure, the clay of the wall was spread thickly also over the area to the southwest. The new clay was not simply laid over the old floor, but set in a specially made extension cut out from the side of the wall trench, so that the wall and floor comprised a single unit, indistinguishable at the surface. It is likely that this surface would have continued all around the enclosure, but it was only at the rear that it was level with the wall.

Secondly, more yellow clay was laid over the front and sides of the old platform, bringing the top to the level of the top of the front wall. However, it seems that the high part of the platform was limited to a level proscenium, measuring around 4.80 m long by 4 m wide, immediately behind the entrance, and that the platform surface sloped down from this area both to the two sides and towards the back. Furthermore, the rear of the space enclosed by the clay walling was left more or less level with the wall and floor to the southwest.

The new platform in place, the entrance was rebuilt. First, a ramp was laid out from the steps of the earlier stairway to about 2.30 m from the wall. Various artifacts probably intended as offerings were incorporated in the ramp layers, amongst them greenstone and shell beads, the latter including a unique set of sixty-eight square beads of a markedly ribbed white bivalve, *Protothaca beili*. Two pits towards the top of the ramp contained broken tuff figurines, while a third pit, set at the very center, just outside the entrance through the walls, contained a plain tusk-shaped figurine of *S. calcifer*, upright and facing northeast, with a broken tuff disc laid flat over its head. Finally, three red-brown clay steps were set into the top of the ramp, reaching to the forward edge of the proscenium.

As in all previous episodes, the rear of the platform was the site for ritual offerings. Just northwest of the central axis, the wall was cut by two pits. One, larger, had a malachite disc at its base, while in another small hole, four hundred and seventy-two chert flakes all lay under a vertically set (and modified) *Muricanthus* sp. conch. A little to the northwest again, a third pit, cut into the inside edge of the wall, contained pottery sherds, a broken net weight, two lumps of chert and two pebbles that

¹⁷ The front wall and east corner, parts of the two sides, and the rear wall (save the corners), were all recovered.

might have served as hammers. Meanwhile, inside the wall, lying immediately to the northwest of the main axis, there was a dog burial, with the animal on its left side, back to the northeast, head to the southeast and tail to the northwest.

Several post holes along the back wall suggest that there were also some small, secondary structures set up there. No post holes, however, were found along the front or side walls. While, likewise, there was no evidence for any superstructure on top of the platform, clay set in shallow trenches perpendicular to the walls may have served as markers of internal divisions.

Just outside the front entrance, and to the southeast, there was a plain tusk-shaped figurine of marble buried upright in a pit with three greenstone beads around its waist. A tuff disc, a miniature pottery jar, seventy-eight *Cerithium* sp. shells and other material may also have been associated.

The main construction event during Episode 8 was the addition of a new wall, of identical red-brown clay, around the wall of Episode 7, so creating a structure that measured 17.10m by 16.40m (Fig. 7.11).¹⁸ In combination with the old wall, this resulted in a single massive boundary to the platform, almost 3 m thick along the front and perhaps 2.30m thick along the sides. Along the front, from the base of the wall there stretched a floor of the same clay.

Along the back, the top of the new wall lay flush with that of the wall and outer floor of Episode 7, not disturbing the gentle slope away to the southwest. This time, however, the underground of the enclosure was further marked by the deposition of a series of large anthropomorphic tuff figurines set upright in holes cut down through the base of the rear wall's foundation trench.¹⁹ One of the figures, painted green, stood over a likewise green-painted tuff disc. Another was accompanied by a purple *Spondylus* bead.

While the entrance through the new wall roughly matched that of the previous episode, it was not centered in line with the old opening, but slightly to the southeast. Its sides narrowed rather than widened as one moved inside, and it was also slightly wider than the old one. Thus, on the southeast side the approach ran into an 80cm wide block of clay presented by the outer face of the old wall.

The approach was further altered with the creation of a series of superimposed ramps of yellow clay that ultimately led down from the base of the second step of the old stairway to roughly 2.50m beyond the wall. The final ramp, extending beyond each side of the opening, was about 3.50m long and 4.70m wide. First, however, two matching tusk shaped anthropomorphic tuff figurines (Plate 7.10), each facing northeast, were set in a pair of holes 2.20m out from the entrance and

¹⁸Much of the front wall, including the entrance and east corner, part of the southeast side, and much of the rear wall (though neither the west nor the south corner) was all recovered.

¹⁹Three such figures were found. A total of either four or six may have lain along the rear wall, that is to say two or three figurines either side of the central axis. The ground beneath the trenches along the front and to either side was never excavated, and it is not known whether any figurines may have lain in those areas also.



Plate 7.10 Matching pair of anthropomorphic tuff figurines buried to either side of the central axis beneath the ramped approach to the Episode 8 platform

to either side of the entrance's central axis, this now being oriented $\sim 56^\circ\text{E}$, as had been those of Episodes 6 and 7. Next, the various layers of soil that formed the ramps included a number of complete and broken shell beads, broken shell rattles, and fish hooks, as well as ash, fish bones and bird bones, all of which may have been intended as offerings. One layer was cut by a pit containing a bird skeleton.

Additionally, there was a gateway built at the entrance. A large post (perhaps 30cm wide and set over a meter into the ground) marked the centerline near the top of the ramp, with smaller posts next to the two outer corners of the opening through the wall.

To the rear, just northwest of the central axis and off the platform, there was a circular pit filled with thin layers of different colored clays, and also a smaller pit with a ritual offering that consisted of a modified *Muricanthus* sp. Conch, upright inside the mouth of a jar neck, with a *P. mazatlanica* valve flat on the pit base to either side.

Stone Figurine Depositions of Episode 8

The most common features associated with Episode 8 were dedicated anthropomorphic stone figurine depositions. Until now, individual stone figures had been generally buried underground, whether as integral elements of a structure or as parts of associated features post-dating construction of a house or platform. Now, individual figurines, and groups of up to thirteen, were set upright in small holes cut into the floor surrounding the platform. Importantly, their heads protruded and the figurines were probably left entirely uncovered.

Thirty-seven such depositions were recovered from the relatively small areas excavated immediately around the Episode 8 platform. These included seventy-two figurines or figurine equivalents, in a wide variety of forms and materials. They tend towards one or other of two broad types, though the categories are far from watertight, such that several pieces stand somewhere between them. On one hand, the majority comprises tusk-shaped figures that evolved out of earlier pendants designed to be worn around the neck. Those of this type are generally characterized by not only their form, but also their inability to stand without support, their smaller size (mostly 100 mm to 200 mm tall) their lightness (140 g to 500 g) and their consequent portability. On the other hand, there is a smaller group of larger (195 mm to 250 mm), heavier (1400 g to 5050 g), flat-based sculptures, not so readily carried, which can often stand unaided (Plate 7.11).

Both the tusk-shaped and flat-based forms are explicitly or implicitly anthropomorphic. In addition, there are carved anthropomorphic figures of other general shapes, carved ichthyomorphs (Plate 7.12), a carved disc with a “geometric” design, and carefully selected but unmodified flat river stones. The range of carved material includes white or light colored volcanic tuff (most commonly), creamy brown marble (one example), and coral (one example).

Figures within multiple depositions tended in each case to share a slightly distinct style of crafting and raw material, suggesting that they were made as separate lots. Four tuff figures were painted green all over, while a single plain figure had a red top to its head. Four figurines were each associated with a greenstone bead or pendant, while one of these was also associated with two obsidian flakes and a red *Spondylus* bead, and stood over a *P. mazatlanica* valve, while the disc was also associated with a greenstone bead.

None of these primary figurine depositions were located inside the perimeter line as defined by the Episode 8 wall.²⁰ In terms of alignment of the figurines, the most favored orientation was to the northeast, followed by the southwest. It is also likely that the primary depositions were first placed close to the wall, and as time went by, they were placed further and further away.

²⁰Two mutilated figurines, however, lacking lower halves, were buried at the head of a grave sited on the platform. In addition, there were six secondary depositions of individual pieces, and three of these also lay within the area of the platform itself.



Plate 7.11 Large anthropomorphic tuff figurine set upright and emerging from a hole cut into the clay floor to the northeast of the Episode 8 platform

A further nineteen figures, however, were found 60 m to the northeast of the platform, more of them 20 m to the east, while a small group turned up 80 m to the south. In other words, not only was the platform surrounded by these depositions, but they may have extended over an area at least 150 m long and perhaps 60 m wide.

Human Burials of Episodes 6, 7 and 8

Meanwhile, through Episodes 7 and 8, the platform itself was primarily the setting for human interments. A total of twenty eight primary, articulated burials were recovered. Others probably lay in the area of the unexcavated south corner. Associated directly with these graves were a similar number of fire pits and rubbish pits, the latter containing many faunal and artifact remains, in particular unusually



Plate 7.12 Ichthyomorphic tuff figurines set emerging from holes cut into the clay floor to the southwest of the Episode 8 platform

large fragments of pottery vessels, many of which had been imported. Graves were focused towards the center rear of the platform, but also lay over the exterior clay floor to the southwest. Rubbish pits and fire pits extended slightly further to the southwest and the northwest than the main concentration of burials, with the overall effect of ringing those graves. All three feature types, furthermore, were found interspersed with the dedicated figurine depositions of the rear floor.

Twenty five graves lay in the southwest, outside and over the rear of the platform. All burials were of single individuals, save one double burial that involved an adult female and an infant. All the burials were oriented on a northwest—southeast axis, with thirteen burials headed to the northwest, and twelve to the southeast. The infant of the double burial lay perpendicular to this axis, across the abdomen of the woman. Most burials were extended (or probably extended) and supine, though one extended skeleton was onto the left side. Three, perhaps four, were semi-flexed on the back, i.e., with the knees raised, while just one was fully flexed on the back. The population included three infants, one sub-adult and twenty-two adults. Of the adults, eight each were identifiable as male and female. There was no correlation between orientation and sex.

It is probably no coincidence that these graves all lay behind, i.e., southwest from, the position of the arc of posts associated earlier with the Episode 6 platform cap. For, in Episode 2, all the graves were also sited at the rear of the house, southwest of a similar arc of posts earlier set across the central axis. It can be suggested then not only that the location of the later graves was determined in accordance

with some strict conceptualization of the space of the platform, i.e., that they should be limited to the rear, southwest side, but also that the arc of posts made an explicit statement as to the forward boundary of that appropriate rearward space, even though the posts would have been dismantled before the majority of burials occurred.

The spatial distribution of these northwest–southeast oriented graves is all the more striking when compared with the three burials found in the forward half of the platform. Though these match the general characteristics (i.e., posture and grave goods) of the main set, a child on the central axis and two sub-adults on the northwest side all lay well ahead of the other group. Furthermore, while the child lay southeast to northwest, the two adolescents were both aligned according to a different, north/northeast–south/southwest orientation. While, then, these three do not form an entirely coherent set or subset, they indicate that the concepts of space and death were linked in a more complex relationship than would be suggested by the main group alone.

Such complexity is further suggested by a bone-free but grave-like feature, containing typical grave goods, which lay just to the northeast of the infant, northwest from the main axis and aligned parallel to that axis.

Only some of the graves were completely preserved, but some patterns regarding grave goods could be discerned. Adults were usually accompanied by at least one durable artifact out of a wide range of possible materials and forms. Emphasis was on pottery vessels, greenstone beads and obsidian blades. Objects of the latter two classes were all imported. Pottery included local fine ware bottles (Plate 7.13),



Plate 7.13 Iridescent painted whistling bottle from a grave of Episode 8

jars and bowls, and local cooking ware jars. Other goods included antler points, a large point or baton possibly made from whale bone, a perforated pearl, a string of almost one thousand ceramic beads, and many shell artifacts. Worked bivalve species included *S. princeps* and *S. calcifer* (both used for making beads), while worked gastropod shells included a *Fasciolaria princeps* baton and a *Latirus* sp. (?) head ornament (Plate 7.14). Also present were complete or incomplete unworked shells, including examples of *S. calcifer*, *Lyropectens subnudosus*, *Trivia* sp., and *Neoprana muricata*. One grave included a unique and elaborate container made out of a modified deer skull (*Odocoileus virginianus*) with a *P. mazatlanica* lid. Another contained two mutilated stone figurines. Yet another contained lower leg and foot bones and teeth of a two-toed sloth (*Choloepus hoffmannii*), while bones of a rear left leg of the sloth lay in a small pit a meter to the west of the foot of the grave. Small stones and burnt stone fragments also appear to have been given as offerings. Goods were sited next to, over or under different parts of the body, but with a preference for the area of the head. Associated rubbish pits were characterized by large pottery sherds, including fragments of imported vessels.



Plate 7.14 Shell artifacts associated with Episode 8 burials: (left) a *Fasciolaria princeps* baton and (right) a *Latirus* sp. (?) head ornament

Meaning and Use of the Engoroy Site

We have seen how the physical configuration of the site underwent constant alteration and growth throughout its history. Within this process, however, even as the site expanded, successive buildings depended on those of previous episodes as literal and symbolic foundations and cores, and new buildings did not so much replace the old as recreate them in new form.²¹

The first floor may have served initially as a sacred space in its own right, the setting for rites associated with its central hearth, or it may have been designed to prepare the site for the creation of the house that was later built over it. Whatever, it can be argued that the layer of yellow clay was conceived as a very simple but profound representation of the sacred center (Eliade and Sullivan, 1987), while the hearth fire, purifying and transforming that space (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:108), both permitted access there to the spirit world and served to connect, through the vertical axis (*axis mundi*) embodied in the rising smoke, the terrestrial world with the sky. With the site thus sacralized, it was a fitting place for the construction of the ceremonial house of Episode 2.

Although there are no documented examples of Engoroy or Chorrera domestic structures, it seems likely that in its general form and size the Episode 2 building would have been similar to contemporary habitations.²² However, it expressed a complex set of structural principles that were to be followed through the following centuries; and although these principles may also have been applied to and even to have evolved out of domestic architecture, their application in this case will have been of a different order.²³

The aligned central axis was fundamental to the design of the house. Ethnographic and archaeological analogy makes it certain that the chosen direction would have been established on the basis of observation of a key solar, lunar or stellar rising (Zeidler, 1998). The approximate orientation of 60°E perhaps corresponded to the June solstice rising of the sun, whether as observed from the site of the house itself, or from some point on the headland behind it. By marking this axis, the house would have both expressed a correspondence between its own structure and the celestial dimension of the cosmos, and specifically have identified the sun as a direct source of power.

²¹ And since a large part of the rebuilding consisted of expansion of the earlier structures, rather than their burial and replacement with complete new foundation layers, the total depth of added soil represented by the sequence described here was only 95 cm.

²² It is slightly smaller than the dimensions of an oval, Valdivia III house at the coastal Real Alto site (Marcos, 1988:138), which would date to the period 2500–1950 BC (Raymond, 1993: Fig. 7.2). Rectangular domestic structures at highland Cotacollao (1500–1100 BC) were slightly smaller (Villalba, 1988:65).

²³ See Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971) and Hugh-Jones (1979) for tropical forest longhouses with explicit sacred charge and structure, and Descola (1988:118–125) for a house whose spiritual connotations are less rigorously conceived.

In addition, the position of the house at the base of the headland would have established a direct association between the building and the natural landform. The axis of the house, aligning it with the headland behind it, would have then identified it more specifically as an extension or symbol of the landform.

The orientation and position of the central axis once determined, this line was then marked by the central file of main posts and the respective offerings of the rear two holes. *S. princeps*, placed in the rearmost center hole, is understood as a symbol of, among other things, the feminine principle, particularly when used in conjunction with a *Strombus* conch, symbolic of the masculine (Paulsen, 1974; Stothert, 2003:362–364). Here it was another conch, *V. caestus* that was set against the thorny oyster, but almost certainly with the same intention, that is, to act as its complementary opposite.²⁴ In this case, these unmodified shells acted in several ways. First they distinguished, by their presence, the central axis from the spaces to either side. Secondly, they associated the house with the sea. Third, they added to the complex set of values attributed to the central axis, once again asserting the notion of complementary opposition, this time with the female principle (*S. princeps*) to the southwest rear, and the male (*V. caestus*) to the northeast.

Additionally, discs of different shapes and different local stone types were used to distinguish the central from the flanking files. And the presence of two tuff discs in the center rear hole and only one in the next, yet again reflects the differential value accorded to different points according to their relative position along the main axis. The specific meanings of the different discs are not clear, but their form was perhaps that of the earth, while their position at the base of the posts suggests that they were understood to support the vertical axis as represented by the roof supports.

Finally, the three copper flakes of the rear hole of the flanking file are the products of the metallurgical craft, small sections of beaten sheet metal, similar to those used to decorate textiles (Dorothy Hosler, personal communication, 2000). Their source is not known, but could be the southern Ecuadorian sierra or northern Peru. As such, they added to the house the power of shining substances acquired from far distant lands (Helms, 1988:118–129).

The wooden superstructure itself was probably, like many other ceremonial houses, conceived of as a model of the universe (Eliade and Sullivan, 1987), distinguishing and connecting, at the same time, the layers of the cosmos. In such a case, the post holes root the structure in the underworld, the floor symbolizes the earth, and the roof is the sky, supported by the main posts. In the middle of the house/cosmos, the smoke rising from the central hearth would have acted as

²⁴ While one complete *S. peruvianus* was offered at the dismantling and burial of the Episode 2 house by the Episode 3 platform, the sequence includes two instances of *V. caestus* burial, and two also of *Muricanthus* sp. conches, all in elaborately structured contexts. Similarly, *S. princeps* was not the only red bivalve incorporated in ritual depositions. Complete specimens of *Chama buddiana* and *L. subnudus* were also used. The symbolism of shells at the local level, close to their source, was clearly more subtle and more flexible than the Andean macro-perspective tends to allow.

another pillar to connect the earth with the sky, and the ash buried in the central pit was yet another offering to the underworld.²⁵

The house was further structured at ground level by the interior partitions: the front was divided into two halves, while the front and rear were also differentiated from each other, the central hearth occupying a mediating position between these various opposed domains of horizontal space also. The central and other hearths then formed the focuses for what was probably a wide range of ritual events conducted within the house.

Attention to the underground was of importance from the start, when the offerings were placed in the post holes. In the second stage of use of the house, this dimension was the object of increased concern, but again according to firm principles of spatial organization. Now, the offerings of stones and ash indicated the importance of the line of the original wall trench as a sacred boundary within the area of the floor, giving further protection to the house interior.²⁶ And the two infant graves cut into the old trench line reinforced even more the importance of the perimeter.

If we assume that the five buried individuals were all members of the local population (the presence of the locally manufactured tripod bowl with the adult might support this assessment), they also embodied a direct link between the house and the community that created and used it. The composition of the group, and the fact that the adult and one child were each entitled to a similar string of white shell beads, might then further suggest that they were all part of a single family, perhaps that of the leading religious actor of the community. As such they would have been chosen as worthy ancestors who could represent the community in its dealings with the spirits who dwelt beneath this sacred place.²⁷

The center rear of the house, then, had earlier been mapped out as a zone of special importance in the underground by the offerings made into the post holes, and at surface level by the three internal partitions. The burials now identified this as an area associated with death and the ancestor underworld, a correspondence further emphasized by the location of the child's head on the central axis to the southwest of the old wall line.²⁸ Beyond the headland, the southwest is also the direction

²⁵ Though it is not known what substances produced the ash.

²⁶ It is notable that the larger and smaller stones, collected locally, correspond very closely in size and shape to the tuff and shale discs, respectively, that were placed in the post holes. The ephemeral Valdivia ceremonial house on La Plata Island (Damp and Norton, 1987) offers another local example of the use of sacred stones, collected but not worked, in defining such a perimeter.

²⁷ Helms (1998:37, 38) makes an important distinction between two types of ancestor, and identifies such agents as have just been described as "emergent ancestor", former members of the larger group that celebrated its rites at the house, but individuals who, through death, had "grown out of living membership of that house". However, in light of the behavior at Salango (to be discussed below) of what are probably examples of the other type of ancestor she defines, and so as to avoid confusion, this term is not used here.

²⁸ Effectively, the offerings and posts marked what was to be a small underground house for the dead.

towards the setting of the sun at the time of the December solstice. With these interments, then, an explicit larger correspondence was most likely recognized between the underworld, accessed by the dead through the floor of the house, the headland, into which effectively the dead were buried, and the setting sun. Contrariwise, the opposed rising sun and would have been associated with birth and life of the community.

In short, by the end of Episode 2, the principal terms of symbolic reference as structured along the central axis were most likely as follows. To the northeast, the entrance to the house was associated with the rising sun, birth, and the male principle, while to the southwest, the rear of the house and the headland was associated with the setting sun, death and the female principle. And these two opposed sets were symbolized most succinctly by the *V. caestus* and the *S. princeps* buried in their respective holes at the moment of foundation of the house.

At the same time, the path through the house from northeast to southwest, when seen in the terms just described, matched that which connected the risen sun above, through the earth of the yellow clay floor, down into the underworld. The horizontal central axis was, then a direct equivalent to and transformation of the central vertical axis (Helms, 1988:44, 45).

While the central axis was probably linked to the annual cycle as defined by the solstices, there was also perhaps a much larger cycle expressed by the successive renovation of the site over the following episodes. It is not yet clear however, what principles may have governed the temporal sequence of rebuilding of the center. But as a very rough guide, if we take it that the eight episodes occupied a period of ~500 years, the average life of each structure would have been a little over sixty years.²⁹

Along with the process of growth, new devices were employed as means to heighten the power of the sacred center. In Episode 3, the low platform elevated the floor above its surrounds. In Episode 4 the clay wall and fence redefined the immediate perimeter, while the exterior floor extended the range of controlled ground around the platform. Later episodes saw the platform rise and the perimeter wall grow taller and thicker, especially along the front, and the outer floor become thicker and wider. Indeed, by Episode 8, while the platform itself covered 280 m², and the platform and outer floor together covered over 700 m², the total area apparently dedicated to ceremonial activities extended over more than half a hectare.³⁰

²⁹The absence of wholly dependable absolute dating limits argument. Marcos (1988:44–46) estimates that rebuilding of the Valdivia ceremonial platforms known as the Fiesta House Mound, at Real Alto, occurred on average every 120–140 years, with rebuilding of the ceremonial house on top every 60 or 70 years.

³⁰Late Engoroy clay floors were the setting of stone figurines found 20 m to the east of the Episode 7/8 platform. The structures described here, then, were associated with at least one sequence of secondary, constructed ceremonial spaces.

In the latter stages in particular, the use of different colored clays further emphasized the different values of the different spaces. Specifically, yellow clay was reserved for the central floor, while red (or red brown) clay was the material chosen, and perhaps created (Lunniss, 2001:105, 106), for the perimeter wall and outer floor. Given the respective gender associations of the yellow power of the sun and the conch on one hand, and the red *S. princeps* on the other, it is not difficult to see that the sacred center was considered to be a fundamentally male domain, and the immediate perimeter female.³¹ And taking this argument of gender symbolism further, the center was probably understood to activate the space around it.

Meanwhile, there was continued addition of cosmic substances and symbols, and at the front, the increasingly elaborate entrance was also increasingly charged. In particular, shell and stone figurines, alone or in conjunction with greenstone beads were deposited with careful reference to the central axis, variously lying on it or to either side of it. The Episode 8 gateway with its main post was a visible marker of the central axis at the point of entry.

The point of intersection, however, of the main horizontal axis with the perpendicular line of the rear of the platform, and the area immediately to the northwest of that point, was perhaps the zone of highest spiritual energy, the setting for a more diverse group of buried offerings that included several non-human faunal species. The upright position of the ocelot buried on the center point of the rear wall of Episode 4 was a particularly evocative placing of feline power at the intersection of the vertical and two horizontal axes. In this instance the animal perhaps stands as a substitute for the larger jaguar, so widely associated with shamanic transformation.³² The two birds on and to the northwest of the central axis perhaps made reference both to water and to aerial flight, thus again symbolizing the shamanic trance journey.³³ The dogs of Episode 4 and Episode 7 or 8 were both domestic animals, and two zoomorphic whistling bottles buried in the Late Engoroy cemetery also figured dogs, or else dog-like creatures (Plate 7.15). These dogs may symbolize intermediaries between the wild and inhuman world of the forest or the uninitiated, and the fully socialized world of initiated adult human beings. The association of the group as a whole, however, with a place dedicated to the reception of the human dead, indicates that these birds and animals were all linked conceptually with venerated ancestors (Helms, 1998:52).

³¹ Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971:107) describes a similar correspondence between male space and the color yellow, and female space and the color red, as observed by the Barasana within their long-houses, though in that case the spaces are aligned rather than concentric. However, an identical linear structuring of space also existed at the Salango site, within the sacred center itself, where the forward domain was identified as male (through the conch), and the rearward as female (through the *S. princeps*).

³² See, for example, Hugh-Jones, 1979:125. Ocelot bones, interpreted as the remains of a skin worn by the deceased female in her role as shaman, were found in a Late Valdivia burial in north Manabí (Zeidler et al., 1998).

³³ Another Engoroy heron burial was found at the nearby Río Chico site (Weintz et al., 1991).



Plate 7.15 Zoomorphic whistling bottle from a grave of Episode 8, mainly covered with a polished gray brown slip. The feet are painted red, while the neck and back of the head are yellow. The rest of the head is unpainted and without polish. Overall length is 184 mm

Perhaps the most important artifacts were the anthropomorphic shell and stone figurines. These had a long, close and ultimately dramatic association with the ceremonial spaces, and were apparently images of mythical original or first principal ancestors, who arrived in this place “from a cosmological setting that was originally somewhere outside it” (Helms, 1998:38).

First, however, the white shell pendant buried in the floor of the Episode 2 house is comparable in size and color to quartz crystal and jaguar teeth pendants symbolic of shamanic power and abilities to access spiritual realms (Hugh-Jones, 1979b:121; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:49). It is also a precursor to the larger tusk shaped pendants found at Salango and to those depicted on Bahía phase ceramic figurines (Meggers, 1966: Fig. 31). This simple and elegant object was itself, then, a symbol of the authority of the shaman, here conjoining the force of the jaguar (as primary predator) with the substance of the ocean.

In Episode 5, the anthropomorphic figurine pendant buried near the intersection of the central axis and the rear line of the platform demonstrates an explicit equivalence between the tusk shape and the human form. The deposition was also the first explicit expression of the conjunction of shamanic power, as embodied in the pendant “worn” by the fossil wood, with green stone, in this case two beads and a malachite bar. The fact that later figurines were sometimes painted green, that the artifacts most commonly associated with shell and stone figurines were green stone

beads, and that green stone beads were closely associated also with the recent human dead here and elsewhere in the Late Formative (Stothert, 2003:358, 359), suggests strongly that the color green symbolized the ancestors and the underworld.³⁴

It is noteworthy, however, that in the enacted scene of Episode 5, the figures, although in the underworld, were not positioned as the human dead, that is, horizontally, but rather vertically, such that they appear to be alive. Dedicatory burial of figurines in direct association with the central axis of later episodes maintained this posture. In other words, there was not a direct equivalence between the figurines and the recently buried human dead, though they occupied the same underworld domain.

This difference was most clearly expressed in Episode 8. While tutelary figures were buried beneath the perimeter wall and to either side of the central axis outside the front entrance, the main set of figurines were placed as if emerging from the ground around the platform. Although, then, some Episode 8 human burials were indeed situated outside the platform perimeter also, the overall differential distribution, posture and position, with respect to ground level, of the figurines and human dead suggest a powerful dynamic: in short, the site was the scene of a local flow of energy involving the downward passage of the dead at the center, and the reciprocal, upward movement of the figurines through the outer clay floor.

If the venerated ancestors represented by the figurines were not the recent dead, then, who were they? Western Amazonian groups such as the Barasana trace their origins to the journey of ancestral anacondas up a mythical river. The anacondas stopped at a string of sites where they then “emerged from the water, became groups of ancestral people, and danced” (Hugh-Hones, 1979a:33–34). It seems possible, then, that the literal emergence of the figurines from the ground at Salango was an enactment of a similar mythical emergence of the human ancestors of the Engoroy phase population after an underworld journey from their source.³⁵ This being the case, the stone fish would further imply that fish emerged with the first people and that they might actually also have been first people.

The Late Engoroy human burials include the most varied set of buried objects and substances of any feature type. They also display an important relationship to the spatial organization of the platform. In particular, the main group to the rear southwest area confirms the previous association of this region with death. Thus, in the burial rites, we can imagine that the dead were brought up the slope through the

³⁴ It is interesting that the Desana of Colombia also considered green to be the color of their underworld Paradise, *Ahpikondiá*, on account of its association with coca, itself symbolized by that same color (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:123). There is no direct evidence for Late Formative coca chewing at Salango, but two miniature vessels, including the pottery snail shell from the Episode 3 platform, could have been lime containers, and various bone points (Lunniss, 2001:Fig. 81a,b, Fig. 82c,d,e) could have been lime dippers associated with coca-chewing.

³⁵ Though, if the underground journey was made inside a creature, then it would probably not have been made inside an anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*), as this species does not inhabit the western lowlands of Ecuador.

field of deposition of the ancestor figurines, up the ramp and stairway, through the imposing façade and gateway, and onto the proscenium. Music was no doubt part of the ceremony: whistling bottles were amongst the grave goods and seem to have had a particular association with funerary ritual. Likewise, shell rattles are evidence of dance. To the rear, fires were lit in pits, and other holes were dug to hold the remains of feasting conducted around the outside of the platform. Then, with their burial towards the rear of the platform, accompanied by so many natural and crafted symbols of cosmic power, the dead were sent on their way to the underworld that lay beneath and beyond the headland.

By this time, however, what had once been a ceremonial house dedicated to the general rites of a local community had evolved into an ancestor site of much wider social significance. The burial population was a select group, predominantly adult, and still rather small. But there is evidence, in the form of imported pottery vessels associated with the funerary rites (Lunniss, 2001:270–272), that Salango was linked through kinship ties to families of larger, distant communities not only within the Engoroy zone, but also including Manta, a major Bahía I phase center (Estrada, 1957, 1962) to the north.

Manta itself cannot be seen from Salango, because it lies on the far side of Cabo San Lorenzo, on the far north horizon. It would, then, have been recognized as a community lying over the edge of the world as perceived from Salango. As such, the burial of individuals embodying kinship ties with it would have brought to Salango the spiritual power of yet another set of cosmological Others, the affines, essential “to the social and ideological reproduction” of the local group (Helms, 1998:55–72).

In sum, the spiritual range of Salango’s ceremonial center had grown no less impressively than its physical configuration and social extension. Symbols of the cosmic power of the local and far off natural world underlay the first ceremonial house according to strict principles of design which both reflected the spatial and temporal order of the universe and linked that order to the immediate landscape. The burial of the recent dead of that house confirmed the relation of the local community with the site. This, in turn, was followed in later episodes by the addition of representatives both of the animal world and of the original ancestors, the latter in the form of figurines. These original ancestors were initially identified as denizens of the underworld who protected the sacred center. In the final episode, their role was recast, so that Salango was given explicit identity as a site of original appearance on earth of the first people.

Engoroy phase Salango was linked through affines to at least one large community beyond the horizon to the north. There is evidence that Salango was also just one of a number of more closely situated local sacred centers that were linked through a common cult of mythical original ancestors. Salaite, like Salango, and 25 km to the north, lies opposite an island, Islote Cayo, just south of the bay into which flows the Río Jipi Japa. This site, though never scientifically investigated or documented, has been the source of a wide range of pottery artifacts, obtained from looted graves, which suggest it was the most important funerary center in south Manabí at this time. Rituals also involved very large numbers of stone figurines

similar to those found at Salango. Salaite and Salango, then, were perhaps both designed in terminal Late Engoroy to “represent serial stages of differentiation in the course of the journey” (Hugh-Jones, 1979a:34) made from their shared site of origin by the first people who emerged there and became first principal ancestors to the dwellers of this region.

Meanwhile, La Plata Island lies in a straight line beyond Islote Cayo when observed from the Salaite site. It dominates the western horizon from all sites of the southern Manabí coast, and was surely fundamental to local cosmology, but it served as the setting for a set of rites distinct from those of the mainland. Though the excavated artifacts are of similar types (Carlucci, 1966; Dorsey, 1901; Marcos and Norton, 1981) to those found at Salango, Salaite and Islote Cayo, their relative frequencies are quite different. Importantly also, there have been no contemporary human interments found on La Plata Island. And though stone figurines have been recovered, their depositional context does not suggest identification of the place as an emergence site.

Salango was, then, part of a landscape in which oceanic islands or sites close to islands were the major settings for public ritual. Ritual varied according to specific locale: sites were carefully chosen for their individual character or spirit, and need to be understood on their particular terms. But they all had in common the immediate presence of the sea. The two mainland sites, lying at the edge of the continent, almost straddle the boundary with the ocean, while on La Plata Island, ritual depositions were made into floors created right at the foot of the sea cliffs.

Two marine shells buried underground defined the values of the central horizontal axis as it was first conceptualized at Salango during Episode 2. At one end of this axis, the sun rose out of the land, at the other, it fell into the sea. The dead, on their long journey’s start, went down through the earth’s entrance, the sacred center at the base of the headland, down underground and out under the sea, so rich in life, and so essential for life.³⁶ The immediate visible expression of return from the underworld spirits took the form of anthropomorphic ancestor figurines emerging from the ground. But the presence of fish among the ancestor figurines also points to a direct link between human origins and the sea, and the general direction taken by the dead suggests that the return sought for their offering was, along with social regeneration, the great abundance of the ocean. Indeed, the regeneration of human society and that of marine resources were most likely considered aspects of a single process.

Salango, unlike La Plata Island, was not a purely ceremonial place, but one where humans had lived and died for over two and a half thousand years before the first Middle Engoroy ceremonial floor was laid. So it was already a site populated by ancestors, the ultimate source of wealth (Helms, 1998:168). But this aspect had

³⁶It is not clear what is signified by the alignment of the majority of graves, perpendicular of that of the central axis. One possibility is that these burials offer an alternative or complementary statement of the relation between the marine and terrestrial domains that lie to the northwest and southeast respectively.

remained tacit until then. What, then, the structure and history of the Late Formative sacred center at Salango finally suggest, is that the ancestors there were now specifically and overtly identified as providers of the wealth embodied and symbolized by the sea. And it was in order to gain and guarantee access to the resources they guarded, that an ancestor shrine was created that was both ever more explicitly dedicated to that purpose and ever more charged with its own spiritual power.

Conclusion

The development of the Late Formative ceremonial centers on the Ecuadorian lowlands suggests conscious ideological reconstruction of the landscape. On one hand, much ritual practice was removed from the settlement and associated instead with spaces outside the immediate sphere of mundane dwelling and activity. Thus cemeteries were now commonly located adjacent to rather than within the villages (Stothert, 2003:355). At the same time, Salango shows that such liminal spaces, dedicated to the recent dead and to the original ancestors, were nevertheless closely integrated with the social domain through a variety of structural and symbolic devices

Clearly, great importance had always attached to the relation between society and the natural world around it. But it was only with the Late Formative that we find, in the fine ware Chorrera pottery in particular, evidence for a concerted attempt to classify nature and align it with that of human society within an explicit, integrated system of visible images (Cummins, 2003:439–444). Likewise, it was at that time that an increasingly large and wide ranging sample, as it were, of the natural world was deliberately incorporated within architectural structures, burials and other depositional contexts.

Thus there was a two-way process whereby religious leaders now managed relations with the spirits. On one hand, the recent dead were sent through specially constructed entranceways to the spirit world set on the outer boundaries of the settlement. On the other, collected examples and crafted images of wild creatures were used to bring nature within the socialized sphere of ceremonial architecture, and to endow ritual settings with its power. And in the precision with which offerings were placed at Salango, we see a reflection of the fine sense with which artifacts were crafted at this time. Perhaps we also see something of the delicate and respectful balance that society then sought to achieve in its relations with the natural and spirit worlds on which it was so dependent.

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Chapter 8

The Astronomical Significance of Ritual Movements in the Calendar of Cuzco

R. Tom Zuidema

Introduction

In 1979, Anthony F. Aveni and I gave papers on horizon astronomy in Cuzco the capital of the Inca Empire until 1534, and its surrounding valley. Our research was based upon Spanish accounts of Inca astronomy that began to appear at c. 1550.

Aveni's analysis (1981) was primarily dedicated to a set of four pillars on the western horizon, 2 km. from the main plaza Haucaypata in the city of Cuzco. From the accounts of a well-informed chronicler (Anonymous, 1906 [1570–1584]) on the pillars located on the northern slope of a mountain called *Sucanca* and their observation of the sun relative to the known location of the *Ushnu*, a construction in the main plaza, Aveni suggested a date of 18th of August (18/8), for sunset between the inner pillars.¹ The chronicler also specified the distance between the outer pillars and thus I estimated that the sun would have passed all pillars in about a month (Fig. 8.1).²

My analysis was concerned with a related problem; how a point in the horizon, Mt. Quispicancha, located at the far eastern end of the Cuzco valley, some 25 km. from town, was used for astronomical observation (Zuidema, 1981a) (Fig. 8.2). Sunrise behind Mt. Quispicancha as observed from Mt. Sucanca (103.5° azimuth) would have coincided with, or been close to, a sunrise on the days when, at the latitude of Cuzco (-13.5°), the sun goes through zenith (October 30th and February 13th). A sunset in the reverse direction (283.5°), towards the pillar mountain, Mt. Sucanca, would indicate dates close to half a year apart from the first ones (April 26th and August 18th). Both dates would have been appropriate also for

¹The anonymous chronicler mentions only the period of August for the astronomical use of the pillars. I will keep to this date, contrary to the suggestion of Bauer and Dearborn (1995:73–74) that the pillars might have been used for various dates as observed from different locations.

²Here I correct an erroneous calculation of Bauer and Dearborn (1995:Figure 4). They arrived at a period of 35 days for the passage of the sun through the outer pillars, adding the time of passage through the inner pillars to that of the outer pillars. But, of course, the first was part of the second! Bauer and Dearborn (1995:71) do not make this error in the third diagram. Here they accept the periods as initially proposed by me.

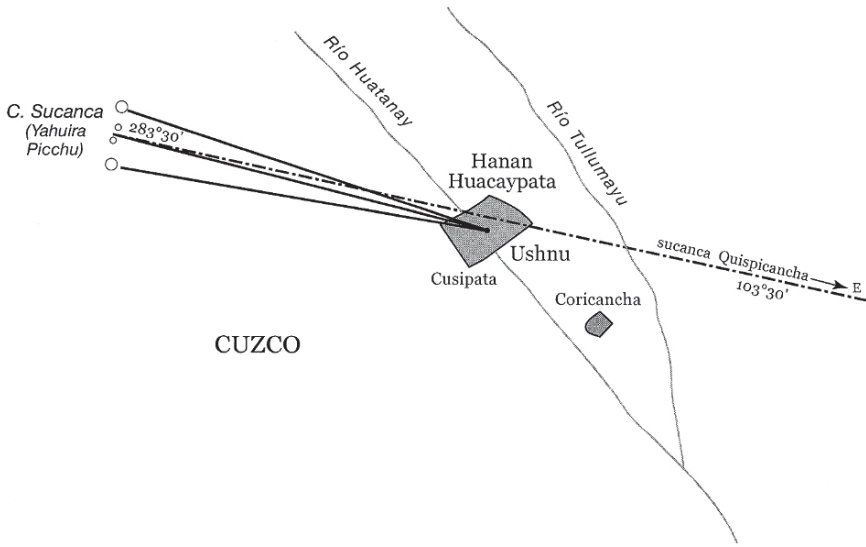


Fig. 8.1 The two uses of Mt *Sucanca* for observing sunset (after Zuidema, 1981a)

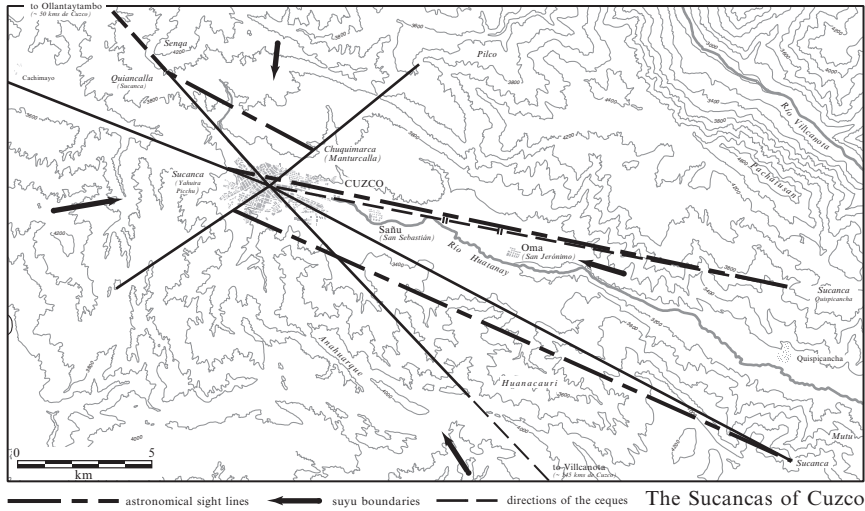


Fig. 8.2 The valley of Cuzco and the suggested use for observation of the four sucancas

sunset between the inner pillars on Mt. *Sucanca* as observed from the *Ushnu* on the nearby plaza (see Fig. 8.1). Moreover, both dates would have referred to an “anti-zenith” sunset, it being immaterial, whether or not the Incas actually knew that this was when the sun went through nadir.

In a series of later articles data was presented, based on information about a ritual procession repeated by the Incas during eight days ending harvest in April, that, in fact, even a third observation of sunset was made in the antizenith direction as focused on Mt. Sucasca (Zuidema, 1993, 1996, 1997). This observation was made from a third point just outside Cuzco, in its valley and between the *Ushnu* and Mt. Quispicancha (Fig. 8.2). The procession would have followed a central part of the direction from Mt. Quispicancha to Mt. *Sucasca* and moved towards sunset on those days. Thus, we remain in doubt regarding the astronomical purposes that the Incas assigned to Mt. Quispicancha. In this study, I will not return to the problem as initially proposed by Aveni and me in 1981, but accept the astronomical conclusions that we arrived at then as essentially correct. Instead, the focus of this analysis is on the calendrical use of three ritual movements with visits that each began and/or ended at one or two of a set of four horizon points, including the two mentioned previously, said to be used for astronomical observation. Remarkably, these movements and visits were carried out, not in periods of days as reconstructed for the astronomical observation of those horizon points, but rather on quite different rationales. Analysis of these movements and their dates will clarify our understanding of their connection to the astronomical use of the horizon points, and thus, support and confirm the Incaic dates in their use for astronomical observation.

The Sources of Information

The four places were all described by Molina (1989) [ca. 1574] for their use in a system of ritual movements. Although other places were also used as horizon points for observing a sunrise or sunset, they were not included in the same system and I do not need to discuss them here. Molina also knew about the system of *ceques* — 41 directions organizing the distribution of 328 *huacas*, sacred places, in or close to the Cuzco valley — which included the four places as *huacas* (Bauer, 1998; Zuidema, 1990, see also Zuidema, 2002:238). The *Ceque* system was originally reported by Polo de Ondegardo (1981, 1990 [1559]) and its description was also included in the chronicle of Fr. Bernabé Cobo (1956 [1653]:169–186). My concern in this analysis is a more general remark made by Polo concerning astronomical markers. Almost a century later, Cobo elaborated on this remark, possibly based on more extensive written information of Polo from 1559 that is now lost. Their remarks were not made, however, in the context of their descriptions of the *ceques*, but elsewhere. Polo (1981 [1559]:463–464) and Cobo (1956 [1653]:141–144) both refer in their general descriptions of Inca astronomy to a calendrical use of the *Ceque* system. Sacrifices were brought to *huacas*, following the *ceques* from their single point of origin at the Temple of the Sun in the city out towards the valley limits. The remains of those sacrifices or offerings were then brought to the places used for astronomical purposes; Polo and Cobo specify two of these places, the principal ones, by name. The first, *Pucuy sucanca*, was the *sucanca* indicating a sunrise or sunset for the beginning of the wet season (*pucuy*). The second, *Chirao*

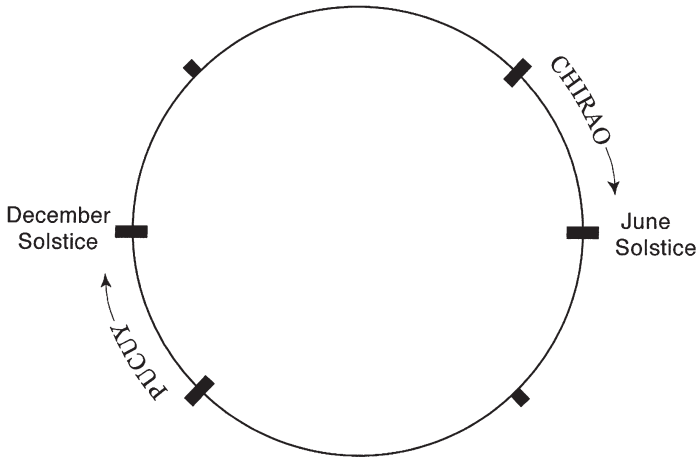


Fig. 8.3 The six suggested dates of observation

sucanca, indicated a sunrise or sunset for the beginning of the dry season (*chirao*) (Fig. 8.3). The *sucancas* were not, however, as Polo's account implies, outside the *Ceque* system, but rather, were integrated into it as *huacas*. In other words, a *sucanca* could be a *huaca* because of its use for astronomical observation while the *ceque* on which it was located had a quite different calendrical significance. Polo and Cobo's descriptions lead to the conclusion that the *Ceque* system, next to its role in organizing space, also had one in the regulation of astronomical and calendrical time. Both chroniclers evoke an integration of space and time while only being vaguely aware of how that system worked. Nevertheless, their idea is fundamental for reconstructing the Inca calendar.³

The Four *Sucancas*

First I discuss the four places, three identified as *sucanca* either by Molina or by being specifically described as such within the *Ceque* system. The fourth, Quiancalla, was not labeled a *sucanca*; nevertheless its ritual and astronomical use was completely integrated with that of the other three. I will deal with it as such

³The information from these chronicles make it clear that the Incas dealt with a system of fixed periods in the tropical year that Polo and Cobo recognized as "months." Another issue is how the Incas made ritual use of certain synodic lunar periods in this context. While I do not need to deal with the whole problem here, this study will seek to identify two lunar periods in the context of the solar calendar.

and add the “sucanca” label to its name in brackets (see Fig. 8.2).⁴ After a review of the *sucancas* and their use for astronomical observation, I turn to the visits.

Two *sucancas* were located on the far eastern side of the valley (Molina, 1989 [1574]:68–69). The first was near another *huaca*, Mt. Mutu. Modern maps identify various places as Mutu in a small area at a distance of ± 25 km from Cuzco. Mutu *sucanca* should have been located in, or near to, this area and possibly closer to Cuzco, but Molina’s information does not allow a more precise location. We know, however, the approximate direction from Cuzco. The second *sucanca* was near Mt. Quispicancha, the *huaca* of an Incaic town of the same name. Together these still represent an impressive archaeological site. The modern village of Quispicancha is a colonial resettlement further down and close to the valley floor. We can locate Mt. Quispicancha precisely; Quispicancha *sucanca* may have been identified with it.

The other two *sucancas* were much closer to Cuzco at the western end of the valley. The *Ceque* system knew the first as Mt. Sucasca, applying the name (here used with capital) to the mountain itself and not to the four pillars there. Molina (1989 [1574]:106–107) calls the mountain “Yahaira” — one of Cuzco’s six sacred mountains (Sarmiento, 1943 [1572]:Chap. 31) — and mentions that it was visited some time before the December solstice. Molina (1989 [1574]:74) does not refer to the August observation of the four pillars, although he records the concurrent calendrical importance of the *Ushnu* in the main plaza, Haucaypata, from where they were observed. Near Mt. Yahaira was a place called Picchu, which today has replaced the old name for the mountain. The Anonymous chronicler (1906 [1580–1621]:151, 158) does not mention the mountain. But since he specifies the distance from the *Ushnu* to the pillars and the date of their observation, we can conclude that Mt. Yahaira was the location.

The last place was called Quiancalla and formed part of another sacred mountain (of the six mentioned by Sarmiento), Senqa, at a distance of seven kilometers as the crow flies northwest of Cuzco.⁵ While it was not called *sucanca*, it had two “markers (*mojones*)” or pillars” probably similar to the ones on Mt. Sucasca. Irrespective of

⁴All four places can be located with confidence, irrespective of the fact that three are included as *huacas* in the *Ceque* system. Molina (1989 [c.1547]:126–127) refers to the use of the *ceques* as straight directions. In the map, I have assumed that the *sucanca* locations also helped define their *ceque* directions. There is no need to enter here into the important question of how closely other *huacas* were located to the direction of their common *ceque* (Bauer, 1998). For two reasons, the *sucanca* near Mt. Quispicancha presents a special problem. Its name, as given by Molina, does not occur in the *Ceque* system. Probably, the *sucanca* can be identified with the last *huaca* of one particular group of three *ceques*. I have indicated the common general direction to which they are related by a dotted line. Only in this case, the second *ceque* began beyond the space represented by the first and the third beyond that of the second. The use of straight long distance directions elsewhere in the Andes is also mentioned by Caillavet (2006) and Del Río (2005).

⁵We can locate Quiancalla more precisely than Bauer and Dearborn (1995 pp. 80–89) realize (Zuidema, 1981b). Nearby were said to be: a spring of water of the still existing village of Huarhuaylla; a road still in use entering the valley from the northwest; and a structure, identified as a “fortress,” later replaced by a Spanish aqueduct but still called “fortress” by local people.

their use for astronomical observation, the pillars would have identified Quiancalla (*sucanca*) for use in ritual visits.

Comparing the four *sucancas* to each other, the distant ones had no pillars; they were both called *sucanca* by Molina. The nearby ones had pillars and the Anonymous chronicler comments that the group of four pillars on Mt. Sucasca was used for viewing in August at a distance of ± 2 km. But in addition he makes the intriguing statement that they also could be seen from a distance of about 12–18 km. No pillars can be distinguished from that far and we may wonder if the author really meant what is claimed. I will later suggest that only the mountain itself was called *Sucasca* because of the distant view. It served three purposes of observation: as a *sucanca* from two distant places (from a location in the valley and from Mt. Quispicancha) and for its pillars from the *Ushnu* in the plaza nearby.

The Astronomical Observations

Coming now to the observations, we have good documentation for two *sucancas*. Easiest to solve is the problem of Quiancalla (*sucanca*) mentioned in the *Ceque* system for sunset during the June solstice (Cobo, 1956 [1653]:172). Around this time of the year the king went to a Temple of the Sun three kilometers northeast of Cuzco, called *Chuquimarca*, built on the hill of Manturcalla (Molina, 1989 [1574]:69–70; Cobo, 1956 [1653]:176, 215), both of these places can be accurately located. Chuquimarca is the only possible candidate for making a precise observation of the June solstice sunset behind Quiancalla (*sucanca*) (Zuidema, 1981b).

The Incas applied an identical method for observing the December solstice sunrise at the end of the month of *Capac raymi*, the “royal feast” that included the initiation of noble boys. People then brought a statue of the Sun to the temple of Puquincancha south of Cuzco, together with solar paraphernalia like also taken to Chuquimarca. Only *Mutu sucanca* near Mt. Mutu could have served for an observation from the temple at that time of the year. This, then, was an observation of sunrise.⁶

While we have reasonably good empirical evidence on the astronomical use of Quiancalla (*sucanca*) and *Mutu sucanca*, such information seems to be missing for the other two *sucancas*.⁷ Our only documented evidence on Mt. Sucasca is for the

⁶Aveni and I identified Puquincancha in 1979 and Bauer and Dearborn (1995:90–91) confirm the location. They do not mention the *sucanca* and do not put on their map the area of Mt. Mutu. Contrary to their judgment, the observation of the December solstice sunrise from Puquincancha to the *sucanca* near Mutu is well supported. I should emphasize one significant difference between the two solstice observations. The June one was made in the middle of its solar month but the December solstice one at its end.

⁷I will call the eastern *sucancas* after their nearby mountains, although these did not necessarily define the exact directions from Cuzco of the *sucancas*.

observation of its pillars. In addition, Cobo (1956 [1653]:142) mentions that an observation was made from there but as he does not specify a date, I will suggest this later. We also have no direct information on the astronomical use of Quispicancha *sucanca*. The ritual data will be particularly helpful in reconstructing that use of these two *sucancas*.

Before turning now to the ritual movements honoring the four *sucancas*, let me make a methodological remark concerning the observation of the last two. As viewed from opposite sides of the valley, Quispicancha *sucanca* and Mt. Sucasca are below their more distant horizons although they surely could have helped to identify features of interest there (Fig. 8.3). Thus, Bauer and Dearborn (1995:92–98) declare them to be of no interest in studying Incaic techniques of astronomical observation. Such a judgment is of course putting the cart before the horse. The Incas called these places *sucanca*; it is up to us to find out the reasons why. The former splendor of Mt. Sucasca (*Yahuira*) as a sacred mountain within the limits of Cuzco, and the similar significance of Mt. Quispicancha to the town of Quispicancha, demonstrate that both mountains were of paramount political importance in their respective sectors of the valley. A sightline between them and extended in both directions to the distant horizons could well have served legitimate purposes including astronomical ends.⁸

I will support the claim that one of the four *sucancas* was used as a *sucanca* for the beginning of the wet season (*Pucuy*) and another for the dry season (*Chirao*). Polo does not suggest any specific dates, and Molina and the *Ceque* system fail to mention the terms *Pucuy* and *Chirao*. At first I thought that the two seasons could have started, respectively, in February, when two Inca months occurred with the name *Pucuy*, and in August.⁹ In a more recent article (Zuidema, 1992), I studied extensive documentation from the XVIIth century in Central Peru indicating that the *Pucuy* season started at the beginning of November with the coming of rains, and the one of *Carhua* (a synonym for *Chirao*) near the end of April, after harvest, when the dry season started (Fig. 8.3). Ethnographic information supports similar dates from all over southern Peru and even from Ecuador (Weismantel, 1997). In line with these dates, Betanzos (1987 [1551]:71), our first chronicler to report on the Incaic solar months, adds *Pucuy* to the name of the month preceding the December solstice.

⁸The early Spaniards admired Mt. Yahuira because of its beautiful terraces but dismantled these after the earthquake of 1650, using the stones for the reconstruction of the city. Mt. Quispicancha is surrounded by a huge pre-Inca wall. On top of it are petroglyphs and an old police report mentions graves that had contained golden objects. No other *huaca* in the valley was the subject of such lavish attention thus underlining its ceremonial importance.

⁹I based this suggestion on observed similarities between Incaic and modern customs in these two months (Lira [1946] 1985, pp. 2–3, 121–126; Urton, 1981 p. 11; Zuidema, 1981a, pp. 328–329).

The Ritual Movements

The *sucancas* were visited, as part of the ritual movements, in three periods of the Incaic calendar: A procession and a pilgrimage by priests of the Sun in the month around the June solstice; a commemoration of those two movements in the second month before the December solstice; and a race by young men ending in the second month after the December solstice.

Both June rituals, one marking space within the Cuzco valley as delimited by the horizon and the other outside the valley, occurred on the same days when the king stayed in Chuquimarca. His activities included the (probably daily) observation of sunset determining the exact day of the June solstice. In the procession, priests went, before dawn and on each day of the month, to Mt. Huanacauri, on the southeastern horizon of Cuzco and foremost among its six sacred mountains (see Fig. 8.2). Here they sacrificed a llama at sunrise. Back in Cuzco at noon, they sacrificed a llama in the *Coricancha*, the central Temple of the Sun. A third llama was sacrificed at sunset on a “Mt. Alpitan” because “the sun sets behind it” (Molina, 1989 [1574]:67–68).¹⁰ This name does not allow any interpretation or identification. But as the mountain was visited at the same time when Quiancalla served a sunset observation from Chuquimarca, I suggest that Alpitan was another name for Quiancalla. Mt. Alpitan and Mt. Huanacauri lie in exactly opposite directions from Cuzco and at comparable distances. On the same days when the king saw sunset approach, reach and leave Quiancalla (*sucanca*), the priests would have arrived there.

During the time that the king was in Chuquimarca and the procession was repeated, other priests went to a distant temple of the Sun, located in exactly the same southeastern direction as Mt. Huanacauri from *Coricancha* in town (Molina, 1989 [1574]:68–69). Their goal was the temple of *Villcanota*, said to be dedicated to the December solstice (Fig. 8.4).¹¹ The priests left *Mutu sucanca* some ten days before the day of the June solstice, and returned to Quispicanha *sucanca* some ten

¹⁰Urbano, in his edition of Molina’s (1989 [c.1547]) text, reads the name of this mountain as “*Aepiran*,” whereas earlier editions read it as “*Alpitan*.” I agree with the earlier editions.

¹¹This conclusion can be drawn combining four definitions given in the Aymara dictionary of Ludovico Bertonio (1984) [1612] using the word *villca*. *Villca*: The sun as they said in ancient times, and now they say *Inti*. *Villca cuti*: The solstice when (the sun) begins to return from the tropic of Capricorn to (that of) Cancer. *Villca*: Place of worship (“*adoratorio*”) dedicated to the sun or other idols. *Villcanuta*: Very famous place of worship between *Sicuana* and *Chungara*. It means house of the sun, according to the barbaric Indians. The place of *Villcanota* constitutes the continental divide, today called La Raya, between the *Villcanota* river (later called *Urubamba* and then *Ucayali*) flowing NW into the Amazon and the river that from there flows into Lake Titicaca. Ruins of an actual temple have been found there (Reinhard, 1995). Pachacuti Yamqui (1993 f. 27v.) [c. 1630] mentions that there stood two pillars, of silver and gold, that together thus would have served like a *sucanca*. *Villcanota* (La Raya) had high mythological significance in Inca times (Pachacuti Yamqui ff. 17v, 18) and it still has today (Valencia Espinoza, 1973; Flores Ochoa, 1973).

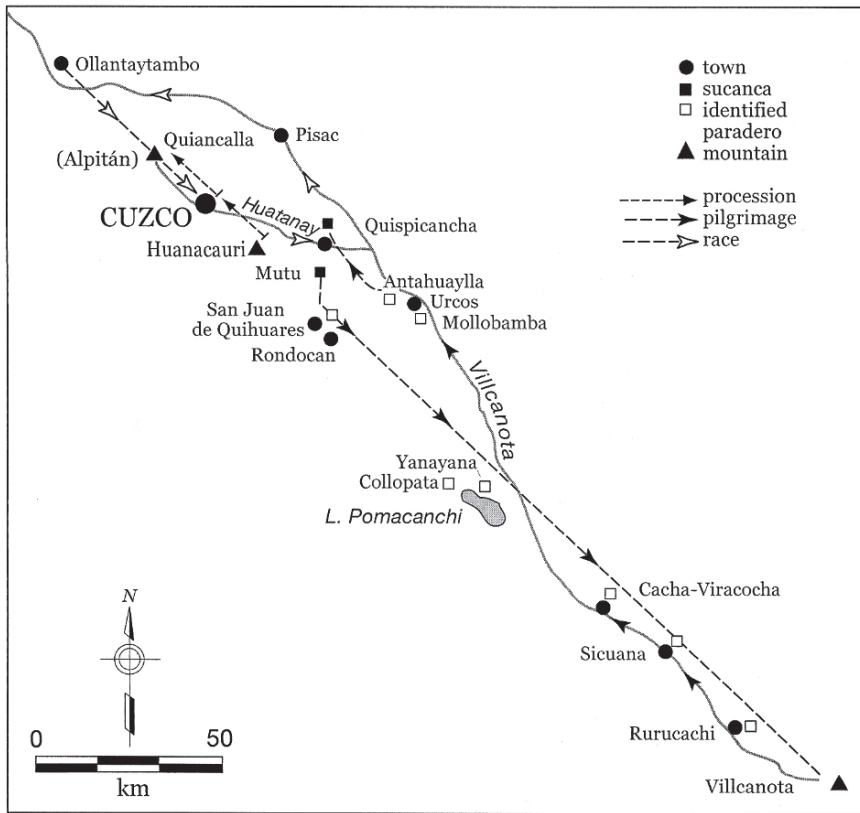


Fig. 8.4 The routes of the procession, the pilgrimage and the race

days after the event.¹² *Villcanota* was clearly visited for a purpose in conjunction with the processions from Mt Huanacauri near Cuzco to Quiancalla. But why did the priests include the eastern *sucancas* in the pilgrimage? These *sucancas* were not located on the same direction. The visits in the other two periods of the year will contribute to an answer. Some observations can be made now.

Comparison to the procession during harvest in April analyzed elsewhere (see e.g., Zuidema, 1993, 1996, 1997), shows that the Incas considered the procession from Huanacauri to Quiancalla to be a reflection of the path of the Sun through the sky from dawn to dusk. Moreover, it probably was meant to replicate the sun’s path from the December solstice sunrise to the June solstice sunset. Both intentions were, however, primarily symbolic as the direction from Huanacauri to Quiancalla,

¹²For an analysis of the names and locations of the 21 huacas as other “temples of the Sun” that the priests daily passed on their pilgrimage to Villcanota and back (see Zuidema, 1982, Figure 16.5:441–442).

to be called the “solstitial axis,” deviates some 20° clockwise from the axis that could have made it useful for practical purposes of Inca astronomy. By starting the pilgrimage from Mutu *sucanca*, then turning to the direction from Cuzco over Huanacauri to Villcanota, the Incas tied a place of astronomical observation to rituals, primarily the pilgrimage, and also, indirectly, the procession of calendrical intent. The pilgrimage to Villcanota and back projected the royal observation and the priestly procession from Huanacauri to Quiancalla (*sucanca*) onto a wider landscape and cosmological scale.

The procession and pilgrimage are referred to again, in the second month before the December solstice, for a daily succession of sacrifices to all the same *huacas* and *sucancas* (Molina, 1989 [1574]:98). We may question whether the sacrifices were actually brought to all those places or rather addressed to them from Cuzco, as a close reading of the text also might indicate. Still, we have to ask why again.¹³ The answer helps solve the problem why the June pilgrimage ended in Quispicancha *sucanca*.

In June, the rituals were governed by the idea of a “solstitial axis.” Why was this not also done in December (instead of November) motivated by similar solstitial concerns? The answer may lie in the importance that the two different routes had in the pilgrimage from and to the Cuzco valley and the two different *sucancas* that were visited. In June, the pilgrimage had departed through the mountains and returned by the river coming from the temple of *Villcanota*, leaving the river only when approaching Mt. Quispicancha. Then, in the dry season, the waters of the river are low, but in November, when the rains are heavy, they are swelling. Urton (1981:69, 71, 172) has demonstrated how much native cosmology still takes into account seasonal changes of the Villcanota River. The commemoration of the pilgrimage in November could well have reversed the two directions. The first sacrifice would have been addressed to Quispicancha *sucanca* and the last to Mutu *sucanca*. Then, as the time of the December solstice approached, Mutu *sucanca* was going to be observed from Puquincancha. Such use of the pilgrimage would imply that Quispicancha *sucanca* was observed at the beginning of the second month before that solstice. Commemoration would have stressed the astronomical use of observing both *sucancas* and worship helped to “carry back” the rising waters to their source against the current of the river.

The involvement of the river waters becomes even more explicit, and useful for solving the calendrical problem, if now we look at the “race” in the third period of the year, the one after the December solstice (Fig. 8.4). It was known under two names: *Mayucati* “following (the waters of) the river” and Pura upiay “drinking (the waters of the river?) (during) full and waning moon.”¹⁴ According to Cobo (1956 [1653]:212–213) — his description is one of the few (see also note 18) to make explicit the differential use of solar and lunar periods as applied in general

¹³Molina, in using Spanish month names for Incaic months, normally is one month ahead of all other chroniclers. Thus his Incaic month corresponding to “October” has to be understood as “November.”

¹⁴For the term *pura*, see Urton, 1981, pp. 82–85.

throughout the Inca calendar —, the *Mayucati* ritual followed a soli-lunar schedule. With a first new moon following the beginning of its solar month, it began six days after the next full moon.¹⁵ Molina (pp. 146–147) discusses the feast, also as a lunar occurrence, for the first month after the December solstice, *Camay quilla*. Other chroniclers assign the other name, *Pura upiay*, either to the feast in relation to this month (Cabello Valboa, 1951 [1586]:350), or, as a month name by itself, to the next month (Fernández, 1963 [1571]:Vol. 2:86; Gutiérrez de Santa Clara, 1963 [c. 1600] Vol. 3:256). We realize that the lunar ritual would have fallen more frequently in this second, less important month, and when late, it even could have reached the end of the second month itself.

The sequence of intended movements to and from *Villcanota* before the December solstice may have reversed the sequence of these during the pilgrimage in June. The *Mayucati* or *Pura upiay* ritual executed after the December solstice clearly meant to express complementary movements to the latter. Its professed intention was to accompany the ashes of the year's sacrifices cast into the river Huatanay. First, runners followed the ashes down this river from Cuzco to the Villcanota River. The confluence is between Quispicancha *sucanca* and the place where the pilgrims had returned in June from the Villcanota river. The runners then followed the ashes in this river down to the Inca town of Ollantaytambo. Here the river was considered strong enough to carry on the ashes down to the Ocean without help. Two days later, the men returned to Cuzco in a competitive race (Zuidema, 1998). The river did not play a role anymore and we can assume that the runners followed a road through the mountains as short and straight as possible. No places names en route are mentioned, and it is unknown if the men would have visited Quiancalla. It was customary to worship Cuzco upon first sight of the city when entering from the surrounding landscape.¹⁶ Quiancalla and Ollantaytambo are located in approximately the same direction from Cuzco. Most likely, then, Quiancalla was also passed by.

The direct line distance from Ollantaytambo over Quiancalla to Cuzco and the direct line distance from Cuzco over Huanacauri to Villcanota constitute almost precise prolongations (see Fig. 8.4). There emerges for this analysis a year-long ritual in which the combined use of the W -E direction from Ollantaytambo to Villcanota is counteracted by an equally combined E-W use of the river from Villcanota to Ollantaytambo. We can consider the W-E direction from Ollantaytambo to Villcanota also as a reversal and extension of the E- W use of the “solstitial axis” between Huanacauri and Alpitan (*Ouiancalla*). Its principal significance (given the inclusion of the Temple of the Sun in Villcanota) would equally have been solstitial.

¹⁵Cobo explains the detail about the New Moon after describing the initiation rituals of the noble boys. Although their last ritual had occurred on the day of the December solstice, they maintained their fast till the next new moon. Only if the new moon arrived early in the next solar month would they sacrifice a llama in her honor but not if it was late.

¹⁶Chroniclers refer to this custom and I observed a survival of it in 1954 when entering Cuzco by bus. At the moment when the city appeared in view, all the men took off their hats.

Then, why did the timing of the commemoration of the pilgrimage and the race fall so far outside any solstitial use? We can suggest an answer by comparing the movements in the three periods to each other.

Comparing the Ritual Visits

The timing of the *Mayucati* with the race back to Cuzco is perhaps the clearest. It was part of the lunar rituals that began after the December solstice and ended within 53 (30 + 15 + 8) days later. The second limit is the fixed date of 12 February in the Gregorian calendar. Only from this particular day in the Inca calendar on were tributes, arriving from all over the empire, allowed to enter Cuzco (Polo, 1981 [1559], 1990:45–6, 56, 80, 83, 84).¹⁷ The day was meant to coincide with that of the sun's second passage through zenith. The race from Ollantaytambo, with its use of the solstitial axis and the visit to Quiancalla *sucanca* “dragged” the influence of the December solstice (December 21st) toward the day of this event (February 13th).

Bearing in mind the calendrical importance of the *Mayucati*, we can consider in a similar way the commemoration in November of the previous rituals in June. Molina refers to them in the context of other rituals in the two months before the December solstice. As his description can be combined with that of other chroniclers, let me address the problem briefly. The commemoration coincided with the first initiation rituals of the noble boys –when they were subjected to tests of endurance outside Cuzco– and with the *Itu* rituals inside town —whose execution were the prerogative of king and high nobility. While Polo (1981 [1559]:461) and Cobo (1956 [1653]:220) discuss the *Itu* for the month of November, Ramos Gavilán (1988 [1621]:157) claims (again, probably based on Polo's lost description) that they followed a lunar schedule including a combined gathering in the plaza of older men and *initiandi*. The early Anonymous chronicler (1908:158–159) agrees with Ramos Gavilán on the lunar timing of the rituals. Clearly, this gathering is the same act as described by Molina (1989 [c. 1574]) for the 15th to 20th days of *Capac raymi* suggesting that this part of the ritual celebration occurred immediately after

¹⁷Returning to the same issue at various times, Polo (1981 [1571]:56, 83, says that in “February” entered into Cuzco: textiles woven for the state *acllas* (*ibid.*:80) and “cattle”(llamas) used for sacrifices (*ibid.*:84). Then returned to Cuzco also the functionaries who had registered: all what had happened in a province or district, all men and animals that had died and been born there and all that had been harvested (*ibid.*:45–46). The month of February in the Julian calendar began on February 11 in the Gregorian one, thus a date close to that of the second passage of the sun through zenith (13/2).

the appearance of the full moon.¹⁸ Some time after these lunar days came two days around the December solstice, the first being used to pierce the ears of the boys as a rite of passage. We can apply to the lunar rituals before this solstice the same type of calculation as to those after. Each sequence fitted within a 53 (30+15+8) day period. The first of the two began with a new moon after the sun's first zenith passage and it ended, at the very latest, just before the December solstice.

Before, I suggested that the commemoration of the pilgrimage began with attention being paid to Quispicancha *sucanca* and ended with similar attention to Mutu *sucanca*. Most likely, prior to this lunar version of the pilgrimage, observation was made of sunrise behind Quispicancha *sucanca*. Some time after, sunrise behind Mutu *sucanca* was observed. The same observations also delimited the lunar celebrations after the December solstice but then in reverse order.

With these remarks I return to the June rituals and suggest why the pilgrimage ended at Quispicancha *sucanca*. By carrying out ritual processions to and from the temple of *Villcanota*, the priests helped the sun "turn around" at the solstice, strengthening it with prayers, offers and sacrifices (Guamán Poma, 1980 [1583–1615]: ff. 246(248), 248(250)). Beginning their pilgrimage at Mutu *sucanca* underlined the fact that this place had been observed for the December solstice sunrise half a year apart. The beginning occurred ten days before the June solstice, not merely because of the logistical necessity to allow time to travel to Villcanota. A period of twenty days, with ten days before and ten after the solstice, was also needed in order to observe how the sun slowly moved along the horizon, coming to a standstill in its the middle. But the pilgrimage did more: By visiting the *sucanca*, the priests made explicit the importance of defining the period around the June solstice opposite, and equal to, that from first to second observation of Quispicancha *sucanca* around the December solstice. The priests could have stayed until the 18th of August (18/8), seeing sunset as the exact reversal of the second zenith sunrise (13/2) half a year apart. Even if the priests had not done so, in August, the ruler or Sapa Inca made an observation of sunset from the *Ushnu* in the plaza of Cuzco

¹⁸Molina does not give a hint that the *Capac raymi* rituals might have been lunar, although he outlines the lunar character of the rituals in the next month, *Camay quilla*, and in *Coya raymi* (September). The relation of lunar rituals to *Capac raymi* becomes clear, however, from the following data. Some chroniclers, instead of the name *Capac raymi* use that of *Quilla raymi* "month of the Moon." Guamán Poma knows the two names, although he does not combine them, like he does for the next month calling it *Capac raymi Camac quilla*. He explains for *Quilla raymi* certain rituals carried out by the queen in the lunar month tied to the solar month of *Capac raymi*, when the king carried out his rituals (Guamán Poma, 1980 [1583–1615]:f. 263(265); Zuidema, 1998b:214–216). Before, the Anonymous chronicler (1908 [1580–1621]:159) had explained of the month "*Raymi quilla*" (= *Quilla raymi*) and the previous month "*Cantaray*" (= *Ayarmaca raymi*), that "they celebrated these two months in one way... because during the full moon of these two lunar months the *Yngas* were accustomed to knight (the *iniciandi*), and to pierce their ears, ..." From the context in which he discusses this full moon, we can only conclude that the months themselves were not lunar but solar. Coming to a more precise calendrical definition of the *Itu* and initiation rituals, we understand that they belonged to the single lunar month *Quilla raymi* as related to the two solar months of *Capac raymi* and *Ayarmaca raymi*.

towards the central pillars on Mt. Sucasca. The direction of both observations was the same (taking into account the small discrepancy due to the fact that the Inca himself looked towards a nearby, much higher horizon).

The Role of Mt. Sucasca (Yahuira, Picchu) in Observing Zenith Sunrise

So far, I was reluctant to make the claim that Mt. Sucasca should have been the location from where zenith sunrise behind Quispicancha *sucasca* was observed, because no chronicler mentions such a role. The next discussion will conclude, however, that two important pieces of information can, in fact, support such a claim for Mt. Sucasca.

First is a statement by Cobo, which may be derived from Polo's lost account. But writing almost a hundred years later, he includes his own interpretation, in order to bring his data more in line with the Christian calendar. Reintegrating them into the Incaic system of *sucasca*s, I outline the changes that Cobo (1956 [1653]:142) applied, as done in his chapter on astronomy and the calendar. He claims that there were two "markers" ("*padrones*") or pillars east of Cuzco, for the December solstice sunrise, and two west, for the June solstice sunset. He calls the eastern ones *Pucuy sucasca*, "for the beginning of winter where the year was divided in half ...," and the western ones *Chirao sucasca*, "... for the beginning of summer," adding for clarification, that these names belonged to the horizon features and not to the places from where they were observed. Polo (1981 [1559]) only had said that *Pucuy sucasca* was for the beginning of winter and *Chirao sucasca* of summer). Cobo (1956 [1653]) confuses, however, the beginning of the wet season (*pucuy*) with the western concept of the beginning of winter (December solstice) and of the dry season with that of summer (June solstice). He reveals his error when he claims that the first month of the Incaic year, *Capac raymi*, the "Royal month," fell after the December solstice. (He adds that the second month began on January 20). Polo (1981 [1559]:464) had explicitly made clear that this month fell before the December solstice. Betanzos (1987 [1551]) made the same claim, adding *Pucuy* to the month's name. From their descriptions, we can be sure that the wet season (*pucuy*) also began ahead of this solstice. Even so, they did not claim that this season began with *Capac raymi*. From the argument developed here, we discover that the *Pucuy* season began two months before the December solstice.

Cobo (1956 [1653]:142) also made a highly intriguing statement when he noted that *Pucuy sucasca* "was observed from the city itself," for the beginning of the wet season. Only Quispicancha *sucasca* could possibly have been identified with *Pucuy sucasca*. One would not have been able to see this *sucasca* from the main plaza in Cuzco because of landscape features that obstruct the view. As the direction of observation from Mt. Sucasca (Yahuira), at the border of the Incaic city, is the same as from its plaza, we can now safely suggest that Mt. Sucasca was used for making

the Pucuy observation “from the city” towards Quispicancha *sucanca*.¹⁹ But its name *Sucanca* was not derived from this use, but rather because Mt. Sucanca itself was observed from the other end of the valley when the *Chirao* (dry) season opened. This is around the time of first anti zenith sunset April 26th. This implies that the *sucanca* and the mountain of Quispicancha were one and the same, as were Sucanca and Yahaira as the mountain of Cuzco. Both mountains, Quispicancha and Yahaira, received their identities as *sucanca* being viewed from each other within the system of four *sucancas*. Molina’s description of Mt. Yahaira can now be fully appreciated in the context of the ritual visits. He mentions how its top was visited by the noble initiates during a rite of passage, when they received there from the king their golden ear spoils and new loincloths of grown-up men. This act initiated their six days of participating jointly with the older men in the plaza. The ear spoils were to be worn with a thread of wool from their ears until the day of the December solstice, when their ears were actually pierced. Following the lunar schedule, Mt. Yahaira could have been visited by them as early as 15 days after the first observation of zenith sunrise from here and as late as six days before the December solstice. Similar to the use of Quiancalla (*sucanca*), the importance of Mt. Yahaira (Sucanca), making from here the zenith sunrise observation, was “dragged” towards the December solstice. We can imagine that the Inca king, in a position of “*Axis Mundi*,” was compared to his father the Sun, first of all when the latter passed the zenith position in the sky. Being united with the *initiandi* on top of Mt. Yahaira, the king imbued them with the afterglow of his solar connection. It seems as if the visits to the western *sucancas* allowed the moon to carry the sun from his first to his second zenith passage. The sun was most needed then for sending his rains.²⁰

The Double Function of the *Sucancas*

This analysis only considered the highly integrated system of four *sucancas*, combining Molina’s discussion of ritual movements visiting *sucancas*, data from the *Ceque* system and Polo and Cobo’s descriptions of observing Pucuy and Chirao *sucancas*. Molina paid a great deal of attention to Mt. Yahaira (Mt. Sucanca) but did not seem to integrate its role into that of the other *sucancas*. However, the observation for the beginning of the Pucuy season was made from here and the mountain came to the fore as the actual linchpin of the system. Located at the city limits, it shared a central role with *Coricancha* in Cuzco and with the *Ushnu* in the main plaza from where the

¹⁹Mt. Yahaira was the only one of the six sacred mountains as mentioned by Sarmiento that was close to the city and that could have been considered part of it.

²⁰This suggestion reminds of a finding made by Urton (pp. 71–77) in the modern village of Misminay, some 50km from Cuzco. People observe how the sun, coming from the north, passes through the “center” of the sky but consider as uninteresting when the sun is south of zenith. Thus “when the crops are inside the female earth, they are in the domain of the moon ...” and “... during the period of the sun’s movement from the zenith to the south and back, the principal celestial body is to be the moon, not the sun.”

pillars were attentively observed. In contrast, the other three *sucancas* served concerns with places on Cuzco's distant horizon and beyond (Zuidema, 1997).

It is now possible to provide a succinct account of the system of astronomical observation in Cuzco including its organization of ritual movements (Fig. 8.4). Three *sucancas* together with Mt. Huanacauri were organized in pairs according to two "axes." Quipicancha *sucanca* and Mt. Sucasca could be observed from each other for calculating a sunrise when the sun went through zenith and an antizenith sunset. The "solstitial" axis imitated the ritual role of the zenith antizenith axis though not its astronomical role. Quiancalla (*sucanca*) was observed during the June solstice, but from Chuquimarca as observatory and not from Mutu *sucanca* or Huanacauri. The actual observation of the December solstice was made from Puquincancha to Mutu *sucanca* and not from Quiancalla (*sucanca*). However, Huanacauri replaced Mutu *sucanca* for part of the latter's ritual roles and Quiancalla (*sucanca*) was used for observation as well as endpoint of the solstitial axis. Keeping in mind these complications, the two axes functioned ritually in similar ways. The three *sucancas* (Sucasca, Quispicancha and Quiancalla) and Huanacauri each served for two dates: one for being observed and the other as an observatory, either actually or in a symbolic way (Fig. 8.4).

There were five ritual movements, two within the Cuzco valley and three without (consult outer space there). Of the first two movements, the procession during harvest served, as an astronomical tool, to actually observe sunset in its direction of movement on eight days when the sun approached its antizenith sunset point on Mt. Sucasca (*Yahuirá*). The procession was carried out along the central part of the zenith-anti zenith axis. It projected onto the landscape the observation as made from Quispicancha *sucanca* to Mt. Sucasca. The daily processions around the June solstice from Huanacauri to Quiancalla (*sucanca*) accompanied the actual observation of sunset made during that time. These solstitial movements went from horizon to horizon, but only to the horizons as seen from Cuzco; much further horizons can be detected from the beginning and end points of the axis. In fact, the solstitial axis was the central part of an axis that went far beyond the Cuzco valley: beyond Quiancalla to Ollantaytambo and beyond Huanacauri to Villcanota.

The three other ritual movements all defined their general directions according to the extended solstitial axis but each also included a loop into its execution. Probably in conformity with this pattern, each was concerned, not with just one observation (either for a solstice, a zenith sunrise or an antizenith sunset), but with a period between two succeeding observations. The June pilgrimage first visited Mutu *sucanca* and the Villcanota temple. At this time of the year, both acted in a symbolic way as "observatories" for viewing the June solstice sunset. The pilgrimage "dragged" the observation to Quispicancha *sucanca* by actually visiting this place. From here, two months later in August, the second antizenith sunset could actually be observed (at the same time when this observation was also made from the *Ushnu*). The race to Ollantaytambo and back to Quiancalla "dragged," now in a lunar way, the symbolic role of the latter as an observatory of the December solstice sunrise towards the day when the second zenith sunrise was observed.

The commemoration of the pilgrimage distinguished itself in two respects from the other two movements. Sacrifices were offered to the same places as during the June pilgrimage but in reverse order. The calendrical execution of the sacrifices occurred within the period from first zenith sunrise to December solstice. Now they were offered to the two *sucancas* (of Quispicancha and Mutu), not as observatories, like in the other two ritual movements, but as *sucancas* to be observed. The only well documented ritual use of Mt. Sucasca or Yahuira for a visit is on a day within this period, when the Inca king went there together with the *initianti*.

Conclusions

I suggest that our chroniclers missed the information that actual observations of zenith sunrise were made from Mt. Sucasca to Quispicancha *sucasca* on the 30th of October for the beginning of the *Pucuy* season, and on the 13th of February. In addition, I suggest that actual observations of antizenith sunsets were made from Quispicancha *sucasca* to Mt. Sucasca on the 26th of April, for the beginning of the *Chirao* season when the final harvest procession towards sunset behind Mt. Sucasca was held. Antizenith sunsets were also made on the 18th of August, when the king observed sunset behind Mt. Sucasca from the *Ushnu* in the main plaza. The two ritual movements and the commemoration of one made use of *sucancas* near dates when these *sucancas* were actually and/or symbolically used as observatories, half a year apart from when they were observed.

The chroniclers only fully reported on one astronomical observation, that of the passage of sunset through the pillars on Mt. Sucasca. Perhaps this was the only occasion on which they actually witnessed such an observation. But even here they could not record information on the astronomical purpose or the precise date. All conclusions about the astronomical system in Cuzco had to be reached with the help of ritual data. These data provide us, however, with sufficient information; they enable us to arrive at the precise dates of interest to the Inca calendar. One of the most difficult problems in the study of the pre-Hispanic calendar as a register of Cuzco's socio-political, economic and ritual practices, is to decide which of the available pieces of evidence can be verified best as trustworthy. At the moment, I consider Molina's exact description integrating a procession, a pilgrimage and a race into one yearlong ceremony as lending itself best to such a goal. The combination of two solstice dates, two dates of zenith sunrise and two dates of antizenith sunset formed the fundamental core around which the Inca calendar was constructed.

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Chapter 9

Dimensions of Place: The Significance of Centers to the Development of Andean Civilization: An Exploration of the *Ushnu* Concept

John E. Staller

Introduction

Andean scholars have long known about indigenous cultural and religious beliefs about the natural geography or what is referred to as sacred landscape. Some Spanish chroniclers in fact speculated that Native Andeans were descendants of the ancient Chaldeans who once lived on the Plain of Sennaar in the Persian Gulf because they worshiped natural features such as mountains, lakes and springs, as well as celestial bodies in the night sky (Valera, 1968 [1594]:153–154; Vega, 1966 [1609]:67–68, 76–78; cf. Hyland, 2003:96). Despite a large body of ethnohistoric and ethnographic literature on the topic of Native religious beliefs, archaeologists have rarely dealt with the Andean significance of “place” to the origin and creation of Sacred Places or *huacas* or their role in social inequality and cultural complexity. Native Andeans in fact have a distinct sense of place. When being introduced, it is commonplace for natives to mention where they are from even before giving their name (Condori Mamani and Quispe Huamán, 1996:21). This strongly infers that place, where a person is from, is very important to who a person is and how others perceive them. Many Native Andeans still traverse a sacred landscape under the watchful eye of the Sun Father (*Inti Tyata*) and Mother Moon (*Mama Killa*). They walk through the high mountain passes (*apachitas*), beside lakes (*quchas*) and cross the plains or *pampas*, down warm valleys (*qhiswa*), and on the eastern side of the cordillera, into the jungle valleys (*yunka*) in a mythic geography imbued with cultural meanings (Gelles, 1996:10).

The sacred nature of place and the importance it still holds is evident when noting that “centers,” both ancient cultural and ceremonial, and even certain places in the landscape, are still referred to in the vernacular as “*huaca*” a term meaning, extraordinary and sacred. More generally, anything that was given special attention through veneration could be referred to as a *huaca* (Salomon, 1991:14–19). The chronicler Garcilaso de la Vega conveyed the sense of this important term in 1609 when he said that *huaca* means:

... “a sacred place”... “a sacred thing” such as... idols, rocks, great stones, or trees which the enemy [Devil] entered to make the people believe he was a god. They also gave the name *huaca* to things they offered to the Sun, such as figures of men [figurines and statues], birds, and animals made of silver, gold or wood... *Huaca* is applied to any temple,

large or small, to the sepulchers set up in fields and to the corners in their houses where the Devil spoke to their priests... They use the same word *huaca*... to very high hills that stand above the rest as high towers stand above ordinary houses, to steep mountain slopes... All these things and others like them were called *huaca*, not because they were considered gods and therefore worthy of adoration, but because of their special superiority over other common run of things... they were regarded and treated with veneration and respect. (1966:73, 76–77)

Huacas can therefore be represented by a number of things, including places in the natural environment. *Huacas* are differentiated by some special quality, and refer to the crack (split) or mediation space where “communication” occur between the natural and supernatural (Classen, 1993:2, 14). The origins of *huacas* in the landscape are related to their symbolic association with Andean communities and to the belief that their extraordinary qualities embody spiritual essence and power.

During the Contact Period, the Inca in Cuzco recognized 328 *huacas* stretched out along 41 imaginary sight lines called *ceques*, which radiated out from the *Coricancha* in the Temple of the Sun (Zuidema, 2002:238). In addition to being objects of veneration, *huacas* in the surrounding valley (hills, mountains) were also used as visual markers for astronomical observations as a way of marking religious and agricultural cycles (see Zuidema, this volume). *Huaca* Sacred places, material manifestations of the sacred, and even departed ancestors, were in some instances called *huacas* (Zuidema, 1973, 1989:182; Salomon, 1991:16–17).

Stone sculptures, such as the Lanzón in the Old Temple at Chavín de Huántar, is one of the most dramatic *huacas* preserved from prehistory (Rowe, 1962:8; Burger, 1992a:Illustrations 126, 127, 1992b:Figures 6–7, 1992b, 265–266). *Huacas* such as the Lanzón and the oracle at Pachacamac were highly venerated and served as a communicative link to the spiritual realms. Garcilaso de la Vega (1966 [1609]:75–76) mentions that the oracle at Pachacamac, which he called the “unknown god” was worshiped inwardly even more than the Sun or “visible god” by the Inca.

The concept of *huaca* is so fluid as to become almost meaningless as an analytical tool unless it is defined specifically with reference to the topic at hand, that is, centers (Fig. 9.1). *Huaca* is also used here to refer to Sacred Places in the landscape, and how material objects, living things, including people, attain the status of *huaca* and have distinct symbolic meanings with reference to such places. Particular emphasis is given to how such Sacred Places are differentiated from secular space and the role(s) *ushnus* may play in status differentiation and sociocultural development.

Huaca shrines (*huacacuna*) were powerful social and political places, and as they gained legitimacy worshipers would build temples or platforms and make offerings. The oracle at Pachacamac, located near present day Lima in southern coastal Peru, was in fact so powerful and highly venerated throughout the coast and highlands that even the Inca built a temple to the Sun (*Inti*) and to the Virgins of the Sun (*mamaconas*) at that locality and made offerings of textiles, gold and silver (Salomon and Urioste, 1991 [c. 1598–1608]:Chap. 22, Sect. 277).

These cultural and behavioral patterns emphasize a close personal relationship between the spiritual and corporal world, between people, places and spiritual entities.

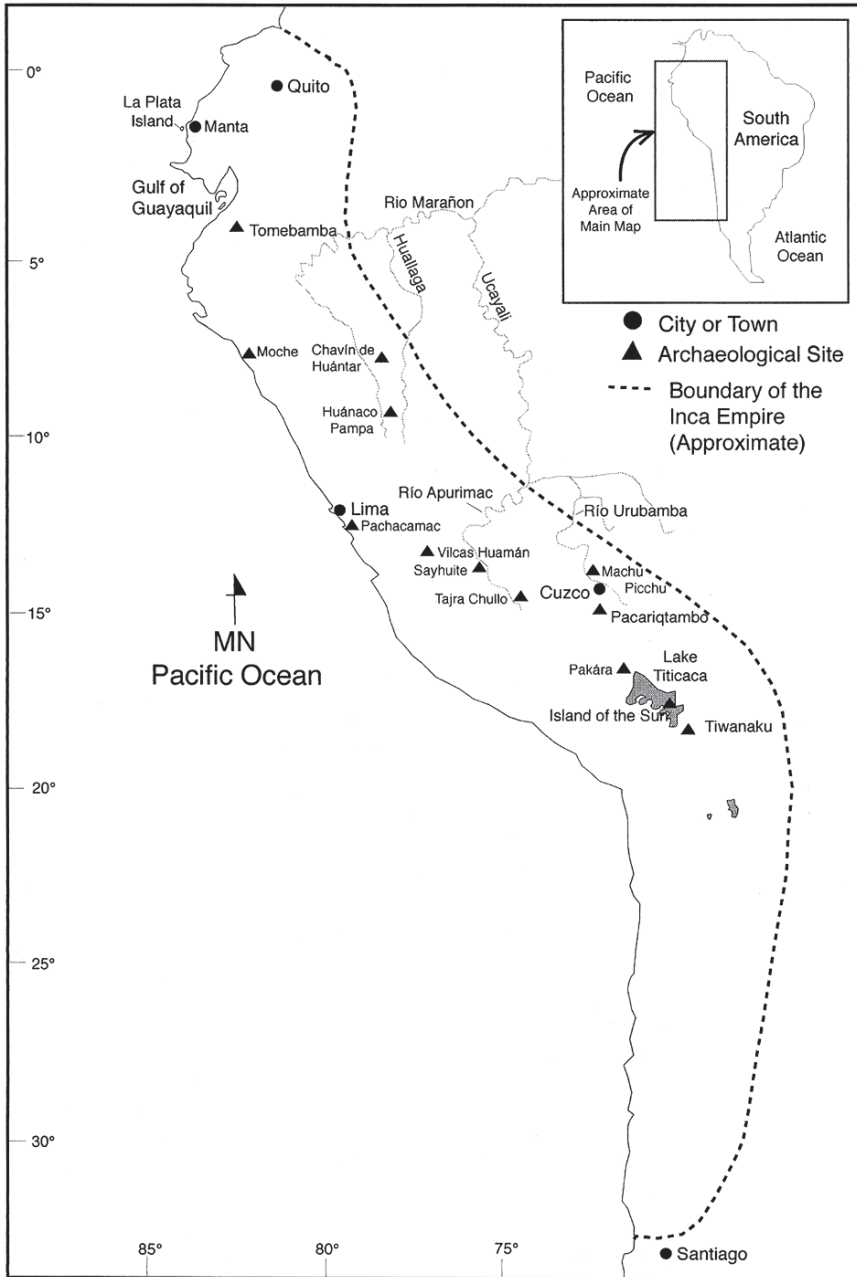


Fig. 9.1 Map showing the approximate boundary of the Inca Empire and some of the cities, towns, *huacas* and sanctuaries mentioned in the text

I begin with a consideration of Andean concepts of place and their significance and role to status differentiation, ethnic identity, and sociopolitical entities. A primary goal is to determine how Andean concepts of time and space may have affected or be expressed in the archaeological patterning. The analysis concludes with an exploration of the concept of *ushnu* and introduces comparative data on Inca and non-Inca *ushnu* centers. The significance of the *ushnu* concept is then considered through examples of sacred centers in earlier Andean civilizations. The evidence indicates the Inca were recreating an idea of place that had considerable chronological depth. The most apparent ideological shift in emphasis with regard to *ushnu* was the perpetuation of the solar cult and ancestor veneration as a basis for divine kingship. Archaeological evidence indicates that the *ushnu* concept was ideally suited to such sociopolitical and religious rationales and that this is indirectly apparent at major centers dated to well before the Late Horizon Period.

Andean Concepts of Place

Another fluid concept comes from the term "*Llacta*." Narratives indicate *llacta* refers to a nucleated rather than dispersed settlement (Allen, 1988:260). It can also refer to a hamlet, village, city, a people, or country (*ibid.*). In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the term still had reference to earth spirits associated with a particular place, what Salomon (1991:23–24) calls "place deity" or "deity-locale," the area or territory controlled by the local *huaca*. In other words, "cultural centers" (referring here to nucleated settlements) were intrinsically associated with and in most cases actually represented *huacas*. They had a spiritual identity that was directly related with that specific place or location and to the associated communities.

By the late seventeenth century colonial oppression and religious persecution had all but wiped out the traditional and symbolic relationships between communities, *ayllus*, and territory. Before this time however the relationships between nucleated settlements and the surrounding landscape was very different (Salomon, 1991:23). During the early 1600s the people saw the *pueblos viejos* (old villages) and stone houses of the dead of their parents generation all around them. While the colonial masters sought to reassert their religious beliefs every Sunday in the confined space of a church, the people lived and worked in a sacred landscape, which constantly harkened them back to the time of their ancestors (*ibid.*).

Llacta or nuclear settlements were entities that consisted of three distinct dimensions: (1) they were linked to a *huaca*, often a deceased and venerated ancestor, (2) who oversaw a territory, and at the same time, (3) the community or *ayllu* of that nucleated settlement (Salomon, 1991:23). *Llacta* in the seventeenth century therefore signified or was synonymous with the local *huaca* (Fig. 9.2). The *huaca* was the possessor of the *llacta* and at the same time possessed by the spiritual powers residing at that place. In the present day, *llacta* is essentially the name of a relationship, not of a type of settlement (Salomon, 1991:23). The concept of *llacta* as it once existed



Fig. 9.2 Felipe Guaman Puma depicts Ayamara of highland Bolivia venerating a *huaca*, in this case an *apu* or mountain spirit. The mountain has a mummy bundle, presumably a venerated ancestor, placed in a cave near the summit. Above the image he writes the “Idols and *huacas* of Collasuyu.” He shows a man and woman venerating the *huaca*, the man holding up his offerings while the woman holds a llama, upon which he wrote “*carnero negro*” that will be sacrificed to the *huaca*. At the bottom of the page, Guaman Poma wrote “*en el Callao*” in reference to a particular place. This image provides an example of how *llactas* were linked to their *huacas* and ancestors (Guamán Poma, 1980 [1583–1615]:244 fol. 106)

with respect to Checa societies is clearly brought out by Salomon in his introduction to the Huarochirí Manuscript:

The chain of human movements and transformations by which the Checa people explained their social organization emphasizes at every stage a pattern of *huacas* among whose territories human groups move and fight. *Huacas* might travel on the way to establishing their dwellings but once victorious they had — they were — their locales, and it was the deity-locale that gave wealth and identity to human groups. The Checa explained all changes both prehispanic and recent, with reference to the geography and the relative fortunes of *huacas*. (Salomon, 1991:24)

Traditional indigenous beliefs surrounding *llacta* and Iberian religious orthodoxy involve a syncretism regarding the association of certain places with Roman Catholic saints (Gelles, 1996:80). It is presently common to have certain towns, villages, communities etc., represented by a patron saint and other “lesser” saints, who play a critical role in communal identity (Fuenzalida, 1970). The pre-Hispanic association of certain places with *huacas* and earth spirits suggests that they were

sacred. The sense of kinship, belonging, and participating *in terms of place itself* infers a spiritual connection that bonds people together with their community (Gelles, 1996:9 [original italics]). The communal bond extends to the surrounding landscape and the spiritual powers that reside there including venerated ancestors, mountain lords and the earth. These spiritual powers have benevolent and malevolent qualities. Communication with the spiritual realm as it occurs in the *llacta* is related to the sacred center, a ceremonial center or temple (see e.g., Salomon and Urioste, 1991 [ca. 1598–1608]; Guamán Poma, 1980 [1583–1615]:236, 239, 357, 413).

Social Dimensions of Place

Priests and diviners (*hanpiq*) or sorcerers (*paquas*) were ritual specialists who communicated with oracles and *huacas* on behalf of their constituents, villages, communities, towns, and individuals, etc. (Valderrama and Escalante, 1977). In return for their advice on various matters the *paquas* and the *huacas* were given gifts and offerings veneration and if they were particularly powerful, developed a cult following (Allen, 1988; Topic et al., 2002). Thus, communication with the spiritual realm occurs between ritual specialists and their associated communities or *ayllus*. However, the Andean concept of *ayllu* is neither straightforward nor simplistic with regard to community or place. Salomon (1991:21–22) defines *ayllu* of the seventeenth century as a “named landholding collectivity, self-defined in kinship terms, including lineages but not globally defined as unilineal, and frequently forming part of a multi-*ayllu* settlement.” He goes on to say that the concept is one of relatedness and not an entity of any specific dimensions or limits of scale (Urton, 1990:22–23). Allen (1988:107, 257) adds that *ayllu* mates derive their well being from the “same locality” or place and through this shared relationship they are set apart as a distinct social unit. In this sense, *ayllus* shared a common focus. Thus, *ayllu* denotes a relationship between people that can be expressed through a place or locality, descent, or political affiliation (Gelles, 1996:8). Modern community members or *comuneros* also emphasize an identification with and membership in a particular community (Condori Mamani and Quispe Huamán, 1996:80, f. 17). Members of an *ayllu*, like *comuneros*, had claims on the *ayllu* resources — lands, camelid herds and on human energy in the form of labor services (*mit'a*). Agricultural tasks, the construction, maintenance and feeding of *huacas* etc., were carried out by *ayllus* but provisions of food and maize beer (*chicha*) were expected in return as a form of reciprocity (Murra, 1975[1972], 1980, 1982; Morris, 1979, 1993; Morris and Thompson, 1985). Reciprocity linked households, communities (*comuneros*), and their corporate kin groups to their leaders (*curaca*) and to the larger polity. Reciprocity and redistribution formed traditional ties that bound people into a social and economic unit (Rostworowski, 1977, 1999; Murra, 1980, 1985a,b; Zuidema, 1983). Communities and the larger polity were tied to *huacas* in some cases by “fictive” bonds. *Curacas*, ritual specialists and nobles of larger polities were considered to have access to these spiritual and supernatural domains

associated with a particular place in the geography (Zuidema, 1983:53; Urton, 1985:253, 255–257, 1990:24).

Spiritual and Temporal Dimensions of Place

The untranslatable Quechua word “*Pacha*” is a critical concept associated with place. *Pacha* generally refers to a moment or interval in time and a locus or extension in space (Salomon, 1991:14; Allen, 1988:64–66). It can also denote the world or earth. The earth is a personified female being or *Pachamama* (Earth Mother) that has metaphorical reference to fertility and fecundity. The oracle at Pachacamac includes this word and “*camac*,” which Salomon and Urioste (1991 [c. 1598–1608]:57) translate as the one “who charges the world with being.” Pachacamac is therefore the place or extension in space where the world (*Pacha*) is charged with being. *Camac* is the agentive form of the key verb “*camay*,” and may mean in certain contexts, to be “powerful” (Cummins, 2002:28; Taylor, 1974/76). Among Aymara speaking agro-pastoral societies, the term *camac* refers to a “vital generating principle,” an “animating essence,” or a “life force or essence” (Rostworowski, 1986:10; see also Staller, 2006:453). This life force presumably exists and permeates certain places in the natural landscape (Taylor, 1974/76; Carpenter, 1992; Kolata, 1996).

The term *Pacha* is also conceptually linked to another term, “*Enqa*,” which refers to the “source and origin of felicity, well-being, and abundance” (Flores Ochoa, 1977:218; Paternosto, 1996:177). Flores Ochoa (1977:84) suggests *enqa* is a deformation of the word *Inca*, which may be defined as, “the creative and ordering principle or power of the universe, the primordial moment of all being and becoming”. When Inca rulers or *Sapa Inca* assumed this appellative, they were attempting to center in themselves the metaphysical principle underlying this concept (Zuidema, 1983:54–56; Paternosto, 1996:177; Classen, 1993:36, 40). This essence or force is presumably embodied in *huacas*, at ceremonial centers, and at cultural centers. Such spiritual essences are both beneficial and malevolent and therefore must be venerated and propitiated through offerings, rituals, and ceremonial activities as a form of reciprocity.

Thus, Sacred Places, cultural centers and the ceremonial centers sometimes found within them embody or contain a “place deity” or “local deity” closely identified with the local population and the surrounding geography. *Huacas* and their associated cults were possessed by them and at the same time possessed them indicating an intrinsic link between the spiritual and corporal (Staller, 2006:453). *Huacas* were involved in containing supernatural power in the form of a life force or animating essence closely tied to the identity of the place in which they are situated. *Huacas* oversaw the surrounding territory and were closely identified with the communities, corporate ethnic groups or *ayllus* within such settlements. Communication and propitiation of such spiritual powers were essential to the survival and well being of the cultural center.

Sami or “*wasisami*” [Quechua] is another term for an “abstract vitalizing force” or “animating essence” that unites terms such as *Enqa* and *Pacha* [Aymara]. *Samay* (*sami*) is the life force, a kind of “soul breath” that animates and forms a bond between humans and animating forces in the environment (Custred, 1979:288–289). *Sami* and *enqa* are therefore a kind of “spiritual energy or power.” The exchange or circulation of *pacha*, *enqa* or *sami* occurs among dead ancestors, *huacas*, and *Pachamama* the Earth Mother (Tschopik, 1951:115; Zuidema, 1973, 1982a:151–153; Allen, 1988:207–208; Rösing, 1995:80; Dillehay, 1995:298, 303, Figure 4; Kuznar, 2001:42). One of the primary goals in the circulation of life force in the Andes is to control and “channel” it for the common good and for the fulfillment of some particular goal or desire. Movement of *enqa* or *sami* is most eloquently expressed by Catherine Allen,

The circulation of *sami*, or life force, underlies all cultural activities from religious ritual to economics to politics. In this worldview all existing things — people, llamas, mountains, potato fields, houses, whatever — are imbued with life. The life force can be transmitted from one living thing to another. The flow of *sami* depends upon a material medium; there are no disembodied essences in the Andean universe. In this, *sami* resembles the Polynesian *mana* and our own concept of energy. The flow is neutral in itself and must be controlled and directed so that all things attain their proper mode and degree of liveliness. All activity revolves around this central problem: controlling and directing the flow of life (1988:207–208)

Since Andean worldview assumes a mutual interdependence and an intrinsic interrelationship between culture and nature, the well being of *huacas* depends upon a constant flow of offerings from the living to deceased ancestors, and the spiritual domain as a form of reciprocity. Since life force is an essence that animates the world, brings wellbeing, abundance and thus can take on a variety of forms.

Spiritual energy or animating essence can be both hostile and friendly to humans (Allen, 1988:37, 44–54, 65–66, 207). Classes of spiritual energy are contained in cultural and ceremonial centers and also reside in the landscape, on mountain peaks, in ancient ruins, natural springs, caves, rivers, lakes etc., and are in some cases hierarchically ranked according to their presumed power (Bandelier, 1910:103, 155; Flores Ochoa, 1977:229–230; Isbell, 1978a:46, 1985:258–259; Urton, 1981:39–48; Reinhard, 1985b:414, 1995:340–342; Rostworowski, 1986:10–13, 31, 62). Ritual and sacrificial offerings are essential to maintaining cosmological equilibrium and facilitating the exchange or circulation of animating essence among these spiritual entities in cultural and geographic spaces (Buechler and Buechler, 1971:9; Allen, 1988:49–50, 207–208; Carpenter, 1992:122; Classen, 1993:14; Rösing, 1995:74–76, 80; Kuznar, 1999:84; Ceruti, 2004:104).

Between A.D. 1438 and the Spanish conquest in A.D. 1532 the Inca constructed over 100 ceremonial platforms and shrines (*villcas*) on the summits of the highest mountains in the empire (Ceruti, 2004:104). Spiritual forms and their symbolic connotations are therefore conditioned in part by the geography, and may also be extended to their associated biota (Isbell, 1985).

Natural features and the species (plants, animals, birds etc) adapted to such places may be seen as manifestations of the sacred and would in association with

huacas be temporally couched with reference to sacred rather than secular time (Turner, 1985). Natural places therefore are also the places of ritual performance, human sacrifices and their burials, and given offerings of precious material objects and natural species (Ceruti, 2004). The spiritual realm is sanctified and propitiated through ritual feasting and sacrificial offerings (Cobo, 1990:115–119 [1653]; Bandelier, 1910:94; Rostworowski, 1986:31, 62; Allen, 1988:44, 49–54).

Ethnographic and ethnohistoric accounts indicate that sacrificial offerings left at *huacas* are a form of reciprocity between humans and earth mother or *Pachamama*. Obsidian used in blood sacrifice, powerful shamanic tobacco, feathers from exotic birds, translucent quartz crystals, distinctively shaped or pebbles covered with ocher, ground marine shell, coca leaves, maize kernels or beer, animals (especially camelids), more rarely humans, and in some cases even mummy bundles were offered as sacrifice (Cieza de León, 1977:106–107 [1551]; Guamán Poma, 1980:244 [1583–1615]; Tschopik, 1951:207; Nuñez del Prado, 1974:243; Isbell, 1978a:154; Ceruti, 2004:103–104). Since all animate or inanimate objects with unusual properties are seen as an aspect of a single overriding unity, they are appropriate as sacrificial or ritual offerings.

The natural world exists in multiple temporal cycles, some tied to an annual subsistence round and others to the periodicity of sacred and mythological (epochs or world) cycles (Eliade, 1959:72, 92, 112, 1969; Leone, 1978:315–316; Zuidema, 1982a:159–161; Rostworowski, 1986:31; Classen, 1993:143, 194–195; Urton, 1999:40–44; Sullivan, 1996:27). Thus, multiple modes of a historical and mythological past are both “real” in the sense of conditioning behavior — they coexist and continually contribute to the ongoing process of life (Kramer, 1978; Zuidema, 1982a; Allen, 1988; Sullivan, 1987b, 1988; Rösing, 1995). Andean periodicities have particular references to *huacas* (rivers, caves, hills, mountains etc.) on the horizon and to celestial bodies associated with them particularly with the coming of climatic or seasonal events (Zuidema this volume).

Time among various Andean cultures is cyclical, and social relations and the meanings of temporal cycles are closely tied to the sacred rhythms and periodicity of the cosmos (Roe, 1982; Fabian, 1983; Turner, 1985; Sullivan, 1984a; Zuidema, 1997). Temporal and cosmological cycles are marked through ritual dancing, music, that generally involved feasting and sacrificial offerings (Sullivan, 1984a,b, 1987b, 1988; Harrison, 1989; Cummins, 2002). Feasts and feasting are ritual acts of reciprocity that reaffirm the social order and provide a communal means of venerating and propitiating animating essence and/or venerated ancestors (Cummins, 2002:41). The previously defined terminology particularly with reference to *Pacha* would further suggest that such spiritual communication takes place in sacred or mythological time as opposed to secular time (Sullivan, 1984a, 1987a; Turner, 1985). The propitiation of the spiritual realm through ritual sacrifice is closely embodied in Andean customs surrounding reciprocity (McEwan and Van de Guchte, 1992; see also Levi Strauss, 1963).

The concepts of *Llacta* and *Pacha* as well as earth deities are consistent with the origin and creation of *huacas* and beliefs surrounding a sacred landscape (Bandelier, 1910; Reinhard, 1983a,b; Urton, 1985). Andean concepts of an animating

essence however make terms like deity imprecise. Significantly, the chronicler Fr. Bernabe Cobo (1990 [1653]:22) observed that there was no proper noun for “God” in the Quechua language. All such words were metaphorical references. Animating essences and earth spirits are not particular beings or deities (gods) but rather are a combination and recombination of anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and naturalistic forms that presumably have a special quality or “essence.” These forms have specific reference to particular *huacas*, and to ceremonial centers within nucleated communities (*llactas*). Previous descriptions regarding the pantheistic nature of Andean religion are based upon the mistaken impression that, like Indo-European pantheons, the symbolic correlates to supernatural power are references to beings.

An overriding concept that unites Andean religious belief is that of *Pachamama* or Earth Mother. This is of pre-Columbian origin and closely associated with the fecundity and fertility that resides in the earth (Valderrama and Escalante, 1988:129–130). *Pacha* also refers a moment or interval of “time”—not secular time, but sacred and mythological time. Since *Pacha* can refer to both time and a specific place simultaneously, Allen (1988:45) has suggested that “world mother” or even “life mother” may be more appropriate terms. However, spirit with reference to *Pachamama* is conceptualized as dwelling in the earth. Therefore, it may take on different manifestations, for example, mountains, uncultivated earth, earthen habitations etc. (Allen, 1988:37–67; Valderrama and Escalante, 1988:210–211).

Cosmological and Ideological Dimensions of Place: The Inca Example

The Inca Empire was called *Tawantinsuyu*, or the land of the four corners (Fig. 9.3). The Inca universe was referred to as *ayni*, a word meaning balance and reciprocity (Classen, 1993:11). The primary function of religion and ritual in Inca culture was to keep the universe in a state of balance and harmony. The idea of balance and harmony is closely tied to customs surrounding reciprocity and redistribution, concepts intrinsic to the relationship of the ruling polity to its subject populations. Inca cosmology perpetuated the idea that the underlying duality of all life was based upon the dialectic of structure and fluidity (Staller, 2006:454). Divinity was transferred through the senses within a certain prescribed sequence that ordered rather than obliterated the boundaries of the senses as a mirror of the duality embodied in the cosmos. The inherent duality and dialectic complementarities of structure/fluidity, male/female, were separate and not interchangeable (Classen, 1993:79–80; see also Isbell, 1985:305; Staller, 2006:454, 464–465). The conjugal pair metaphorically embodies potential fertility and reproductive capacity of Andean dualism. The symbolic referents of this dialectic complementarity extends beyond a structural logic for organizing the cosmos, or an ideology for social hierarchy and control, but also serves as a medium through which the fertility of the natural world is conveyed to the human realm (Sallnow, 1987:145).

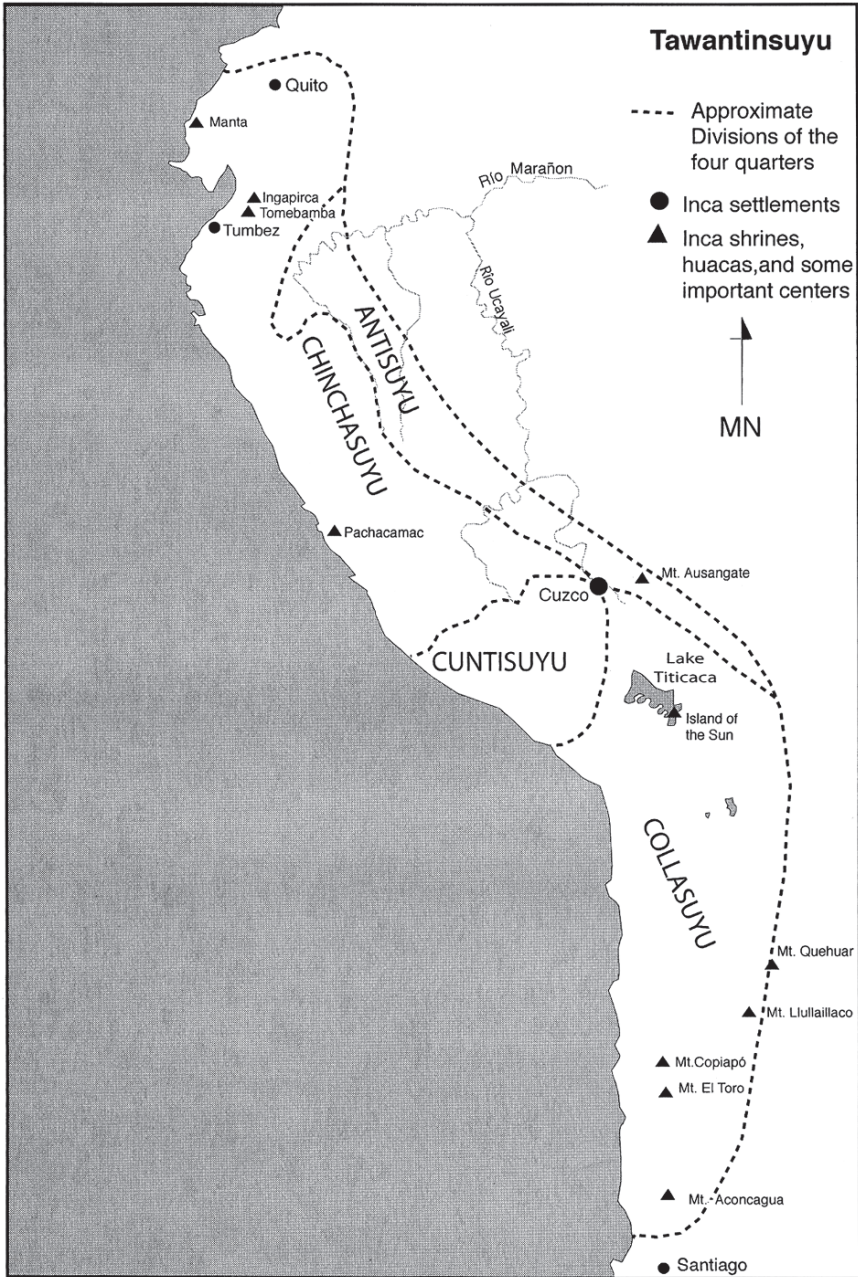


Fig. 9.3 Map of Tawantinsuyu, the land of the four comers showing the approximate boundaries of the *suyus* of the Inca Empire. The approximate locations of Inca settlements, *ushnus*, mountain sanctuaries (*apu* or *wamani*) important to *Capac Hucha* as well as important regional centers mentioned in the text

The primary object of veneration in the Inca Empire, the Sun (*Inti*), is conceptually opposed but at the same time complementary to Mother Moon (*Mama Killa*). The metaphorical importance of the sun and moon and their relationship to gender related ideology and sexual symbolism is well documented (Isbell, 1978a; Urton, 1981; Zuidema, 1977). Mother Moon was considered a supreme deity during Inca times. Its symbolic significance continued into the Colonial Period and to the present day, where it is closely tied to sexual symbolism and gender ideologies in the highlands (Condori Mamani and Quispe Huamán, 1996:28, 150, *f.* 22).

The underlying duality of all life was structured ideologically upon a hierarchy based primarily upon political status and ethnic affiliation. The ruler or *Sapa Inca* was at the top of this hierarchy followed by the nobility in descending rank by non-Inca elite related through marriage to Inca wives and called Incas by privilege, and the lowest level consisted of all others (Zuidema, 1964). The state imposed status hierarchy was maintained by military force or conquest, and it was sanctified and perpetuated by veneration to the Cult to the Sun and Dead. Sanctification of rule was rationalized by ritual, religious, ethic and moral codes of conduct readily comprehensible to Inca and non-Inca populations alike. The emphasis upon the solar cult and ancestor veneration constituted an appeal to mythological rather than merely political rationales.

Before the arrival of the Spaniards, status was also afforded to individuals or groups who possessed some particular skill or form of esoteric knowledge (Staller, 2000/02). This is evident linguistically by terms such as *camac* (Taylor, 1974/76). *Camay* is the key verb of the agentive form “*camac*” and it refers to the supernatural vitalization of all material things for which there is a supernatural prototype (Salomon and Urioste, 1991 [1598–1608]:57; Cummins, 2002:28).¹ Master craft specialists, weavers, woodworkers, and record keepers were given titles such as *cumbicamayuc*, *querocamayuc*, and *quipucamayuc* respectively. These titles include the term “*camayuc*” and therefore indicate a linguistic relationship between artisans and the material products they create. In the case of record keepers, a relationship to power from the esoteric knowledge and memory they possess (Fig. 9.4). Such skills and forms of knowledge therefore have an ontological component rather than merely a utilitarian function (Harrison, 1989).

The knowledge or capacity to physically produce an object of symbolic or social import also imbues a craftsman with a certain status or rank by occupation (Staller, 2000/02). Lechtman (1984) has related the concept of *camac* to metallurgy and weaving in terms of a crafter “revealing its inner structure” — each object substantiates *camay* in a visual form and reveals its substance or essence. The technology and construction of material objects have in common the fact that, like *Pacha*,

¹Sancho, Zaraté and others make reference to the Incas and their allies burning supplies to keep them from the Spaniards. Murra (1980:76) states that in preference to anything else, they will burn textiles and clothes to prevent these from falling into Spanish hands, also the native allies of the Spaniards attempt to take clothing off defeated enemies, and even to “kill” clothes of defeated enemies by hanging. These are very evocative references to the spiritual quality of textiles and their animating essence (Meddens, personal communication, 2005).



Fig. 9.4 *Quipucamayus*. in this drawing Guaman Poma depicts Condor Chagua the person in charge of the *quipus* of Tawantinsuyu. Below he states that Condor Chagua is the “*contador y tezorero*” the counter and treasurer. His headdress is emblematic of his status and rank (Guamán Poma, 1980:262 fol. 287 [1583–1615])

“they join *space* or the material (real) aspect of the world, with time, both historical and future events, in that they differentiate essences from interior states or conditions” (Lechtman, 1999:227). Indigenous beliefs regarding an animating essence may therefore be extended to finely crafted manufactured objects in various mediums

and forms of esoteric knowledge, particularly, since there was no form of writing, those that involved record keeping. Sacred places, ceremonial and cultural centers and the spiritual powers that reside there also imbue objects and things from that place, with cultural and religious significance.

Natural, Cultural, and Ceremonial Centers

A sacred center is critical to an ordered and meaningful universe because all cultural and natural elements in the heavens and on earth have their “proper” place (Levi Strauss, 1966:10, 1978:188; Sullivan, 1988:130). A “center” can be a fixed geographic place that orients a community with respect to *huacas* and the passage of temporal cycles, the organization of celestial bodies and channeling fluidity. It is through the center where cultural existence and interrelated symbolic realities are given meaning, but ironically, their relevance to the meaning of geographic and symbolic space depends upon their sacred quality (Eliade, 1959:20). A sacred center is where the qualities of being made manifest in space encounter one another, and therefore appear most fully, it is where all modes of being (primordial and temporal) converge, and where communication and passage among the cosmic layers occurs (Eliade, 1959:20–29; Sullivan, 1987a, 1988:130). Among cultures where the universe consists of multiple planes or cosmic layers of being, the center is where the various layers are penetrated (Zuidema, 1986; Sullivan, 1987a,b, 1988; Eliade and Sullivan, 1987). The sacred quality of the “center of the world” or *axis mundi* creates the possibility of viewing the universe as a coherent ordered system of symbolic, literal, and logical interrelationships. The *heterogeneity of space* is what permits an understanding of the landscape in terms of different modalities (Moore, 1984:129; see also Eliade, 1969; Levi Strauss, 1963, 1966; Eliade and Sullivan, 1987).

Andean Meanings of “Center”

Cuzco was the cultural and religious center of the Empire of *Tawantinsuyu* or the land of the four quarters. The Temple of the Sun or *Coricancha* (Golden Enclosure) was the most important religious and sacred center within the Imperial capital (Rowe, 1944:Figure 9). There were many distinct languages and ethnic groups before, during and after the Inca Empire, but of these languages Quechua became the *lingua franca* after the European conquest (Gelles, 1996:1, *f.* 3; Cobo, 1979 [1653]:39–42). Quechua served as the administrative language of the empire and served as a medium of communication for societies within the Inca state. The state promoted Quechua as a vehicle of linguistic homogeneity (Mannheim, 1991:64). It was the promotion of Quechua as the predominant language over most of the Andes that has played such a large role in making Andean worldview more comprehensive to social scientists. Despite the linguistic diversity of the Andean region

before the rise of the Inca state, many of the terms used by Quechua speakers relating to religion have concepts that are closely related to more ancient Andean customs and worldview as a whole.

The Inca cosmos consisted of three layers or tiers that represent permutations of the “internal” or underworld (*uchu pacha*), terrestrial (*cay pacha*), and celestial (*janan pacha*) realms (Roe, 1982:128; Urton, 1981:38, 40, 42, 63, 68; Zuidema, 1972:39, 1983, 1989, 1997). Andean concepts of center are complex and multidimensional. Quechua terms that give meaning to “center” include *ucumu* (straight down) or *cusca* (straight up) and particularly *allpa*, in this case, the dividing point of straight up and down (Sullivan, 1988:132). However, the meaning of the term *allpa* changes depending upon its context. Sullivan (*f.* 89, p.732) indicates that *allpa* in this sense designates; “the productive soil and clay used for pottery.” Transformation is implied by this definition, that is, the use of earth (clay), water, and fire, is used to be manufactured into something completely different. Therefore, center, in the Andean mind, has a horizontal geographic significance and a vertical dimension, and may infer transformation. Thus, the word *allpa* as the “dividing point” of straight up and down could have a metaphorical reference to verticality, penetration of the layers through a cosmic axis. This may be particularly relevant to *huaca* in that it can also refer to a crack (split, dividing point) or mediation space where spiritual communication (transcendence or transformation) occurs between the natural and supernatural, and where temporal cycles were reckoned (Classen, 1993:2, 14; Levi Strauss, 1963). The stone thrones or “seats of power” associated with *ushnu* centers, were places where ritual festivals and economic activities were overseen, where the Inca mediated the channeling of water to agricultural fields, and read the stars in the heavens.

Cuzco society embodied verticality and horizontality of center in a geographic sense by the terms “*hanan*” which means up, and the term “*hurin*” which means down, and horizontality by the terms *saya* and *suyu* (Zuidema, 1982a,b, 1997). The term *suyu* is in fact the suffix for the names of the four quarters (Urton, 1999:11). The name given the Inca Empire, *Tawantinsuyu* therefore embodies both a horizontal and vertical dimension (see Figure 3). The horizontal dimension of center is further reflected by the Quechua term *chaupo* and by *taypi* in Aymara (Gelles, 1995:715). Harris (1985) states that center is in this sense defined by what is on either side, which suggests it may be seen as a dividing or bisecting line — the place where two sides meet. These terms are particularly relevant to ritual combat (*Tinku*) or warfare, which has the general connotation of an “encounter” the confrontation of two forces or a commingling of energy whose ultimate goal is to bring balance order and equilibrium in the social realm (Harrison, 1989:30; Gelles, 1995:715). Ideas surrounding encounters and alternation, that is, alternate succession, performance or occurrence, are related to this aspect of center (Gelles, 1995:715). Center in this sense is particularly appropriate to consideration of the division of Andean societies into moieties and for ritual performance during certain rites of festivals (Harrison, 1989; Gelles, 1995).

Verticality and transformation are further implied by the term *allpa*. Zuidema (personal communication, 2004) has mentioned that *allpa* can also mean “white

and black.” Ethnohistoric sources infer an association of black with rituals during the month of *Camay Quilla*² (Cobo, 1990 [1653]). The color black has a clear hierarchical function and very specific role (Zuidema, 1992:23). It has metaphorical references to the ocean (*Ticcicocha*), where the water, ashes, pollution and disease went during the *Citua* ritual, and to the name given to two springs in the center of Cuzco (*ibid.*). Zuidema (1992:23) states that the ocean was seen as surrounding and supporting the earth and the since “*there are no clear cosmological ideas from Cuzco regarding the underworld,*” that black and llamas of this color were related to the night, to death, the ancestors and to the world outside Cuzco [emphasis mine]. The color black, therefore, has reference to the night, lunar aspects, possibly the underworld, while white may symbolically refer to daylight, the sun and celestial realm (*ibid.*). Significantly, special varieties of white maize were cultivated in the “Garden of the Incas” (Staller, 2006). The garden consisted of a series of cultivated terraces in the Urubamba Valley, and was renown for the white maize grown there. White maize used in purification rituals came from this sacred valley (Fig. 9.5).

The term *allpa* when used with reference to agriculture or farming means “productive terrain,” presumably in contrast to *puka-allpa* unproductive earth or terrain (Ballón-Aquirre et al., 1992:227). The term *ushñu-allpa* is defined as *tierra superficial* or “superficial earth” (*ibid.*:228). Thus, when *allpa* is preceded by the word *ushñu*, it refers to the soil near the surface, and implies something beneath or below it. Moreover, the Spanish term “*tierra*” may in this context have indirect reference to the all-encompassing concept of *Pacha* — and therefore by extension to “place” and “time.” The vertical and horizontal dimensions of the *ushnu* concept as it relates to center make it critical to an analysis of place and centers. The concept of *ushnu* also has reference to the “throne of the Inca” and to the channeling of fluids suggesting an important religious and political dimension.

The Concept of Ushnu: The Cuzco Model

Ushnus have been identified from Ecuador through Peru and into Bolivia, Chile and Argentina (Meddens, 1997:Figure 4, this volume; Hyslop, 1990:72–90). The origins of the concept remain enigmatic, but there are some reasons to suspect that the Inca

²Cobo (1990:166, Vol. I, Chap. 35) mentions that in purification rituals during the *Citua* festivals maize was used to purify living space and in healing rituals. The Inca would make a flour made first from black kernels and then white kernels. The walls and floors are then scrubbed with this maize flour while burning said flour at the same time. Curing rituals also involve maize flour made from white and black kernels that was mixed with crushed seashells of various colors. The flour mix would be put in a sick person’s hand, and then chanting certain words, they would blow it as an offering to the *huaca*. The transfer of divinity was through distinctly colored varieties of maize within a certain prescribed ordered sequence, by sight (color), touch and fluidity (smoke) mirroring a complementary duality in the cosmos (structure/fluidity) that maintains the boundaries of the senses. These data suggest that the conjunction of black/white possibly inferred divinity or access to different cosmic layers through a transference of divinity (see also Staller, 2006).

Fig. 9.5 Examples of the white kernel maize from the sacred valley of Urubamba northwest of Cuzco. White kernel and black kernel varieties were particularly important to Inca rituals because they had metaphorical reference to the celestial and underworld realms and therefore to concepts surrounding sacred center (Photo courtesy of the University of Illinois-Chicago)



were recreating an idea of considerable antiquity as a means of justifying and sanctifying their right to rule. *Ushnu* is closely associated with veneration rituals to the Sun and central to *Capac Hucha* or child sacrifice, and symbolically connected the sacred landscape to the Inca dynasty (McEwan and Van de Guchte, 1992:360). Archaeologists have maintained that the platforms, administrative and ceremonial centers associated with various *ushnus* are prevalent outside of the Valley of Cuzco and may be connected to an ancient coastal tradition (Agurto, 1987:70; Hyslop, 1990:72–73). Zuidema (1980:352–357) also emphasizes a close association with *ushnus* and conquered regions of the Inca realm (see Meddens, this volume).

Ushnus have generally been identified archaeologically as multi-tiered or truncated platforms with a staircase leading up one side (Hyslop, 1990; Meddens, 1997). The emphasis has generally been their function as viewing platforms and places where elites and nobility conducted important rituals (Bauer, 2004:115). Zuidema (1980) has a more multidimensional emphasis involving astronomy, the veneration of ancestors, and the channeling of fluids to both sacred places (*huacas*) and surrounding agricultural fields. Although the Inca did not emphasize solid earthen architectural constructions, they are common throughout the Andes and of great antiquity extending back to the Preceramic Periods (Conklin, 1986; Williams, 1985; Moseley, 1985). The general association of *ushnus* with ceremonial platforms and administrative centers is complicated by Inca forms of architecture and the fact they appear to have been recreating the concept in their own terms, while at the same time making it mythologically, politically, and symbolically meaningful to their subject populations (see Meddens, this volume).

Cuzco was the political and religious center of *Tawantinsuyu* (see Fig. 9.3). A number of sacred sanctuaries and centers whose cultural role and religious significance varied widely were included within the capital. They were symbols of the sacredness of Cuzco and its religious and political importance to the balance and harmony of the empire. Everything had its place and functioned at some level at making the landscape around it more meaningful. The *Coricancha* or as it was called by the Spaniards, *Templo del Sol* (Temple of the Sun), was the most sacred center in the capital and connected to the plaza called *Huacaypata* of Hurin-Cuzco (hereafter the main plaza) and accessible by three roads that ran north/south (Vega, 1966 [1609]:185; Bauer, 2004:139). Another street to the east of these also led to the *Coricancha*, thus, one could reach the temple by four roads. The largest and straightest road to the temple, called the Street of the Sun, ran to that sacred center from the middle of the main plaza (Vega, 1966 [1609]:185; Bauer, 2004:130, Photo 10.14). The temple had five fountains or wells that were fed from five different sources by solid gold subterranean canals (Vega, 1966:186 [1609]). Such fountains or wells were often associated with stone pillars at times covered in gold and silver. Sacrifices were washed in these fountains and one of them channeled water to the “Garden of the Sun” in the *Coricancha* (Vega, 1966:185–186 [1609]; Rowe, 1944:26–41, Figure 9; Urton, 1999:12; Bauer, 2004:Figure 11.2, Photos 11.4, 11.5).

The Garden of the Sun was composed of objects made entirely of gold and silver and included all kinds of plants, herbs, flowers, large trees, birds, animals small and large, wild and tame, and three times a year they [the Inca] filled the garden with realistically looking gold cornstalks (Pizarro, 1921 [1571]:255; Vega, 1966 [1609]:187–188). All the *huacas* and shrines within the Valley of Cuzco were either visually or symbolically linked to the *Coricancha* and within it were idols dedicated to the Creator *Viracocha*, Thunder (*Sallallaya*) and Lightning (*Illyap'a*), the Moon, and of course the most sacred of all, the *Punchao* which symbolized the Sun (Cobo, 1990:48–49 [1653]; Zuidema, 1964, 1983:54, 1986:180–182). The mythic geography in the different quadrants of the Valley of Cuzco was given meaning by their location with respect to the *Coricancha*.

The Inca Empire was governed from Cuzco and its solar cult perpetuated from the *Coricancha* (Zuidema, 1986, 1989). The *ushnu* in the main plaza was located some 500 meters northwest of the *Coricancha* and beside a tall circular tower made of finely hewn stones called the *Sunturhuasi* (Zuidema, 1982a:161–162, 1986:187, 1989:402–408, Gráfico 48). This stone tower stood more than 18m high and was the tallest building in Cuzco (Vega, 1966 [1609]:701; Guamán Poma, 1980 [1583–1615]:262, 263). The roof was of the finest timber and above it was a very tall and thick pole that enhanced its beauty and height. In the walls were a number of windows used for observing solar cycles and therefore functioned as a kind of observatory (Vega, 1966 [1609]:701; Zuidema, 1982a:162). The *Sunturhuasi* was linked with the *ushnu* in the main plaza and another one to the northeast (Zuidema, 1980:326, 1982b, 1989, 1997). These architectural features functioned together to link the cosmic layers and mark the passages of temporal cycles (Zuidema, 1997). The way in which the cosmic layers were linked was when the sun was at zenith, its celestial aspect was reflected on the surface of the water from the well of the

ushnu in the main plaza (*ibid.*:266–267). This metaphorical connection between the world above (outside) and that below (inside) is in consort with an ancient and prevailing cosmology that perceives this world as a mirror that alternately reflects the celestial and underworld order across and through itself (Urton, 1981:63; Lechtman, 1999:227). According to Zuidema (1997:266), the *Suntuurhuasi* also represented an *axis mundi* or center of the world.

Wooden or stone pillars and fountains or wells demarcated the presence of *ushnus* within Cuzco (Anonymous, 1906:158 [1580–1621]; Albornoz, 1989 [c. 1582]:205; Zuidema, 1986:188). The basin or well was located near the base of the gold pillar in the main plaza (Pizarro, 1921 [1571]:251–252; Betanzos, 1987 [1557]:48–49; Molina, 1989 [1575]:74, 79). The Inca would carry out acts of ritual pouring of *chicha* and water into this basin and these fluids were channeled through an underground system of canals to *huacas* in the surrounding valley (Zuidema, 1986:187–188). Stone and wooden pillars such as those associated with the *ushnu* in the main plaza appear to be of religious as well as astronomical significance.

On civic/religious ceremonies such as *Citua Raymi*, the pillars were adorned with flowers and powerfully scented herbs (Vega, 1966 [1609]:117–118). Columns or pillars approaching Quito near the equator had diminished shadow, and were for this reason said to be more revered (Vega, 1966 [1609]:117–118). Garcilaso de la Vega goes on to say that the pillars and columns around Quito and to the north in Cayambe and Ibarra, were so highly venerated that the Governor Sabastián de Benalcázar tore them all down and they were “broken to pieces” because the Andeans worshiped them idolatrously (p. 118). The pillars functioned as gnomons, and Inca astronomers would make records of changes in the shadow cast by the sun on them (Zuidema, 1980:317–318). The anonymous chronicler (1906 [1580–1621]:151) is more explicit, stating that the Inca would observe the sunrise from the *ushnu* in the main plaza and if the sun rose in the horizon at mid point between sets of pillars on the horizon, they knew it was time to plant. The *ushnu* at Tajra Chullu in the Viriniyoc Canyon also has a large pillar that could have served in both horizon and zenith observations (Meddens, 1997:Fig. 9.3). In 1560, an Augustinian friar recorded a ceremony similar to a ceremony still practiced around the month of August in which a large wooden pole more the 40m high was erected in the plaza of *Huamachuco*. This pole was taken to the plaza along the straightest possible route and much *chicha* was consumed (Topic, 1992:45–59).

Beside the *ushnu* in the main plaza was a throne for the idol of the Sun to come and sit on, as they said, “in all its light” as well as fountains or wells to which offerings of *chicha* were made (Betanzos, 1996 [1557]:48; Vega, 1966 [1609]:117). The sacred quality of the *ushnu* in the main plaza was also represented by a stone in the shape of a sugarloaf pointed and inlaid with a strip of gold that represented the sun (Betanzos, 1996 [1557]:47–48). The social integration of elites and commoners to the solar cult involved veneration of two distinct symbolic representations of *Inti*. Commoners worshiped the sugarloaf stone, the elite a golden idol (*ibid.*:47–49).

The sugarloaf stone was also part of the *ushnu* and beside it a large hole was dug and all the people of Cuzco made offerings of gold and silver (Betanzos, 1996 [1557]:48). Once this hole was filled they built a stone font and all around it they

buried many small gold figurines or statues. It was on this platform that the Inca would be seated on the throne during certain rituals (Rostworowski, 1999). Excavations at the main plaza in Cuzco exposed the foundations of what may have been the *ushnu*. Large amounts of Inca ceramics were found and an offering of four camelid figurines, one made of gold two of silver and a fourth made of Thorny Oyster (*Spondylus* spp.) shell placed in a line oriented south-east (Meddens, 1997:6).

The ethnohistoric accounts suggest that *ushnus* were also central to participating in ritual ceremonies that were for the most part associated with the Inca nobility and the sanctification of divine kingship. Molina (1989 [ca. 1575]:79) describes the *ushnu* in the main plaza as the geographic center of the four quarters or *suyus* of the empire. The place where ritual celebrations involved animal sacrifices (mainly camelids) and mass consumption of *chicha* (Zuidema, 1980:326). These descriptions also imply that it was essential that the concept of *ushnu* be integrated into the religious beliefs of commoner populations.

The three primary material elements associated with the Inca concept of *ushnu* are; multi-tiered or truncated platforms, wooden or stone pillars, and basins or wells where water and *chicha* was deposited (Zuidema, 1980, 1989). Albornoz (1967:24 [1570–1584]) describes the *ushnu* as “a pillar of gold in the plaza from where the sun drank” and that a variety of ceremonial centers such as Tiwanaku, Huánuco Viejo, and Pucára also had *ushnus* and that they provided drink for the Sun (cf. Zuidema, 1980:327). The *ushnu* is also said to have provided a throne or “seat” for *Inti* (Fig. 9.6). *Ushnu* also has reference to the throne of the *Sapa Inca* (Guamán



Fig. 9.6 Guaman Poma’s depiction of the ascension of the young Inca Manco as *Sapa Inca* to the throne. His ascension in 1536 marked a period of resistance against Spanish colonial rule. The only text in this image is at the base of the truncated platform, Guaman Poma writes, “throne and seat of the Inca, called *ushnu* in Cuzco.” The ruler is surrounded by indigenous nobility who represented various states and communities throughout the empire (Guamán Poma, 1980 [1583–1615]:370 fol. 160)

Poma, 1980 [1583–1615]:239, 356). The sugarloaf stone associated with the *ushnu* in Cuzco is a reference to the original mythological Inca who turned into stone (see Urton, 1990, 1999). This stone has a symbolic relationship to Inca dynasty and their mythological basis of their right to rule.³ Zuidema (1980:331) suggests that the Cult of the Dead was a primary motivation for the astronomical use of *ushnus*, offerings of *chicha* into a basin or well, the burnt offerings of llamas, and probably the fountains as well. The locations of the *Sunturhuasi*, *ushnus* and the *Coricancha* suggest that they functioned to mark subsistence and cosmic cycles were also essential for channeling water and *chicha* (Zuidema, 1980:317–318, 320, 1989:412; Aveni, 1981). *Ushnus* integrated astronomical and meteorological information, and linked them to subsistence, ritual, and religious cycles as well as surrounding *huacas*.

Political Dimensions of Cultural and Ceremonial Centers Regarding the Concept of Ushnu

There is considerable ambiguity in the ethnohistoric literature and the archaeological record as to precisely what an *ushnu* was or how it should be defined and understood. Rostworowski (1999:230) describes *ushnu* as a “small stone structure in the main plaza, which served as a throne for the Inca during certain ceremonies.” Zuidema (1980:344–351) suggests that in Cuzco a building called the *Cuyusmanco* once existed on one side of the main plaza and that it formed an integral part of the *ushnu* (Fig. 9.7). The archaeological evidence appears to support the assertion that this concept is very ancient in the Andes, and took on various roles before its manifestation in the Late Horizon Period (see e.g., Hyslop, 1990). The antiquity of the concept is related to the association of truncated platforms at *ushnus* outside of the imperial capital, and their presence at centers from earlier time-periods, extending

³ According to the Inca origin myth, when the mythological ancestors were approaching the valley of Cuzco for the first time, Ayar Uchu was transformed into stone and became one of the principal Inca *huacas* (Urton, 1990). When they arrived at the place that would become the main plaza and the geographic center of the empire, another ancestor Ayar Awka was transformed into a stone pillar. Sarmiento (1942:69–70 [1572]) states this stone pillar stood near the Monastery of Santo Domingo, which was later built over the *Corichancha* (Bauer, 2004:140–142). Urton (1990:38–39) locates the same pillar on the central plaza. These ethnohistoric and anthropological lines of evidence suggest that the stone pillar associated with the *ushnu* in the main plaza represented an original mythological Inca. This perhaps explains why it was covered in gold and why the sugarloaf stone had gold inlaid into it, as well as, why these *huacas* (both pillar and sugarloaf) were so highly venerated. The transformation of two of the mythological ancestors, Ayar Uchu and Ayar Awaka into stone speaks to religious imperatives. Stone, sometimes living rock, were perceived of as petrified ancestors of humankind (Niles, 1992:347, Fig. 9.1). Carved and modified rocks are generally characteristic of Inca *huacas* throughout the realm and represent metaphors to ancestor veneration and at the same time speak to the mythological origins of the Inca dynasty. In the version of the origin myth by Cobo (1979 [1653]:104) one of the Inca ancestors was transformed into the sacred hill of Huancauri located near Cuzco.

Fig. 9.7 This is the first in a series of drawings by Guaman Poma dedicated to the conquest of Tawantinsuyu. He shows the Inca Emperor in a plaza in Cuzco holding a plate of gold nuggets as he asks the Spanish conquistador Candia, “is this the gold that you eat?” he responds, “this is the gold we eat.” In the background in a building beside the storehouses is a truncated platform. It is possible that this building is Cuyusmanco and that the platform inside was, during certain ceremonial rituals, probably moved into the main plaza beside the *ushnu* stone and pillar. Below the image he writes, “in Cuzco” (Guamán Poma, 1980 [1583–1615]:343 fol. 147)



back to the preceramic in Peru (*ibid.*). The Inca appear to have focused this concept upon serving their own political interests, and make it readily comprehensible to their non-Inca subjects. This is one possible reason for the lack of consensus.

Zuidema (1986, 1989) has emphasized the importance of the *ceque* lines with regard to dividing water for irrigation in the Valley of Cuzco. The *ceques* also played a major role in water rights that regulated cooperation (reciprocity) in the building and cleaning of such canals and subsequent use of water. Underground canals channeled *chicha* and water from the well in the central plaza, but may also have directed the flow of water in and out of the capital (Zuidema, 1980:324–331, 1986:182, 1989:414; Classen, 1993:68).

The channeling of both water and *chicha* as separate categories suggests a dual function that may explain why *ceque* means both “borderline” and “watery *chicha*” (Classen, 1993:68). This dual function continues to play a major role in indigenous ideas regarding water rights, hence, the linguistic association between *ceque* and borderline (Zuidema, 1986:182). Moreover, the geographic subdivisions of Hanan Cuzco were related to problems of water rights. Therefore, *panacas* and *ayllus* can be seen as geographic subdivisions of *suyus* and not only political subdivisions as has been generally supposed (*ibid.*:198). Thus, *panacas* and *ayllus* may have initially been defined as divisions of water rights within their *suyu*.

The channeling of fluids throughout the capital and surrounding landscape through the *ushnu* has a political dimension that has fundamental implications for social organization, group affiliation as well as the political geography. Molina’s (1989:74, 79 [ca. 1575]) description of the *ushnus* in Cuzco indicate that the *ushnu*

in the Huacaypata or main plaza served as the geographic center of the Inca Empire — the precise point the empire was divided into halves (upper/lower or *sayas*) and quadrants (*suyus*). As the geographic center, *ushnu* also had an important political significance to rites and festivals associated with the Solar Cult (Zuidema, 1989:414, 1980, 1992).

Albornoz (1967:24 [1570–1584]) related that *ushnus* were “Sacred Places” found throughout the empire, and were made of different kinds of stones and precious metal, and had buildings associated with them, as well as towers “made of beautiful masonry.” He provides sites such Vilcas Haumán, Huánuco Pampa, Pucára and more ancient ceremonial centers such as Tiwanaku as examples (see e.g., Hyslop, 1990; Morris and Thompson, 1985).

Despite these observations, the Spanish chroniclers overall rarely mentioned *ushnus* in their descriptions. However, those that do are rather explicit in their discussion of the concept. These various descriptions suggest *ushnu* had a variety of roles as well as sociopolitical and religious significance to Andean peoples (see Table 9.1). The association of *ushnu* with truncated platforms outside of Cuzco and the suggestion they were spread throughout the empire at centers that predate the Inca Empire indicates that their origins and meanings may be identified through an

Table 9.1 Functional and Material Correlates of the Ushnu Concept

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- (a) Astronomical observations: Two *Ushnus* in Cuzco, both demarcated by pillars and fountains or wells and their relationship to the *Coricancha* and a large tower called the *Suntar Huasi* were used in the systematic observation of the solar cycle as it related to the agricultural round. These features were used precisely in August and April, to mark the beginning and end of the growing season in the Valley of Cuzco and may have been used for reckoning cycles of various kinds, e.g., agricultural, ritual, political, mythological etc., (Zuidema, 1980:317, 319). Material correlates include pillars made of various materials, columns, gnomes, which are also used reckon astronomical cycles through esoteric knowledge surrounding shadow casting.
 - (b) Sociopolitical as thrones and channeling fluids on the surface of the earth and below the surface of the earth. Ushnu has also been used to refer to a throne of the Inca (Guamán Poma, 1980 [1583–1615]:239, 357); as stones arranged as a platform or throne (Pachacuti Yamqui, 1950 [ca. 1613]:200). A fountain, basin or well and a pillar of gold from which the sun drank and where Inca nobility drank to the sun (Albornoz, 1967:24 [1570–1584]). Material correlates included stepped platforms or truncated pyramid, carved stones, stone altars, fountains, or basins to channel fluidity (water and fermented intoxicants such as *aqha* or *chicha*). These accounts suggest *ushnu* functioned as a seat of power for the Inca during certain festivals or rites. In toasting the Sun and venerated ancestors the concept was related to the Cult of the Sun and the Dead during the Late Horizon Period.
 - (c) Another sociopolitical dimension of *ushnu* is related to the integration of subject populations through human sacrifice. One chronicler mentions a stone altar called *Osno* that was used for sacrifice (Anonymous, 1906 [1580–1621]:157); the *Ushnu* in the main plaza of Huacaypata was usually the site for the initial ritual ceremonies surrounding *Capac Hucha* or human sacrifice, primarily children (Guamán Poma, 1980 [1583–1615]:236). The sociopolitical function is again related to solar veneration and to the Cult of the Dead, but in this case relates to transforming the unblemished children of non-Inca societies into *huacas*, which become venerated ancestors and play a major role in rank and hierarchy within moieties of those
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(continued)

Table 9.1 (continued)

populations. In sacrificing such children to the sun they become *huacas*, that is, sacred and extraordinary. They are usually buried alive and kept alive with chicha fed through a tube until they die. The *villcas* or shrines, which hold their remains, are found in association with ceremonial centers within *llactas* or with Sacred Places, usually mountain tops, in the surrounding landscape (McEwan and Van de Guchte, 1992; Ceruti, 2004).

(d) *Ushnu* also refers to towers built around a shaft or axis (Albornoz, 1967 [1570–1584]:24); as a “sitting stone” or boundary marker (González Holguín, 1952 [1608]).

(e) *Ushnu* was also with reference to ordering the landscape in the Valley of Cuzco with reference to natural centers or *huacas* that radiated along imaginary lines called *ceques*. *Ushnu* is used with reference to a stone called *Osno* for the first line of the fifth *ceque* in the sector of Antisuyu and a fountain called Chilquichaca on the thirteenth *ceque* line of the sector of Cuntisuyu (Cobo, 1990 [1653]:63, 83). Material correlates are in this case stones, both modified and unmodified that may be distinguished by their shape and/or associated modification(s). It is possible that they, like the sugarloaf stone in the main plaza may have reference to the transformation of mythological Inca into living rock.

examination of the archaeological record. What is particularly telling about the *ushnu* concept beyond an important political component is that like all true centers, such places primarily function to bring order and meaning to the natural and mythic geography.

The political dimensions of *ushnu* are evident from a description by Guamán Poma (1980:413 [1583–1615]) of the Spaniard Viceroy Don Francisco de Toledo, who upon visiting the administrative center at Vilcas Huamán climbed upon the truncated platform to speak to the populace was received by the local nobles as an Inca noble (see Fig. 9.1). Locals related that when he stood upon this platform the viceroy assumed the “power” of the Inca. The assumption of power may imply that his physical presence upon the platform led to the perception by the populace that in that place, he represented the Inca (Isbell, 1978b:286). This sociopolitical dimension compliments its significance as the geographic center and speaks directly to mythological and dynastic imperatives.

The political importance of the *ushnu* as a throne, the geographic center of the empire, reckoning of subsistence and calendric cycles, and through the channeling of fluids to the boundaries of the political geography was another reflection of its organic complexity. The evidence also suggest some Inca and non-Inca *ushnus* served as centers of the world or *axis mundi*, implying a religious dimension that may predate the material, symbolic and political associations of the Late Horizon (Zuidema, 1980:322, 1989, 1997).

The political dimensions of *ushnu* have strong reference to Inca rule and therefore to ancestor veneration and the Cult of the Dead and particularly to the rite of *Capac Hucha*, as child sacrifice was central to providing a spiritual relationship between the Inca and their subjects. When being sacrificed to the sun, the most beautiful children of the empire became *huacas*, and the places they are buried became *huacas* and sanctuaries (McEwan and van de Guchte, 1992). The term *villca* (Aymara) can mean both “sun” and “shrine” (Bertonio, 1956 [1612]:386). In the seventeenth century it meant someone that entered into the society of *huacas* by

achievement or marriage — a very important cacique or chief (cf. Salomon and Urioste, 1991:46; Zuidema, 1973:19). *Villca* was also referred to an individual who partakes of the status of a *huaca*, a superhuman person (Salomon and Urioste, 1991 [c. 1598–1608]:Chap. 2 Sect. 10 f. 44). *Huaca* cults involved veneration of apical ancestors, of their patrilineages, their *ayllus*, and large clan like groups identified with major founder *huacas*⁴ (Salomon, 1991:17).

Most South American peoples do not describe creation from nothing. In fact, most show little interest in absolute beginnings but rather tend to emphasize transformation of primordial creatures and the first attainment of “creations” by a shifting succession of ancestral heroes (Maybury-Lewis, 1967:285–286; Sullivan, 1988:32). In linking the concept of *ushnu* to ancestral heroes in mythological time, to the very origins of Inca culture, there are strong reasons to suspect that the *ushnu* concept would have been used or have allegorical as well as metaphorical references to attaining vertical access and communication among spatial planes. The ideology and material manifestations associated with *ushnu*, as redefined by the Inca, are complicated by symbolic and sociopolitical concerns in the Late Horizon (Zuidema, 1980, 1992). The Inca not only tied the origins of their culture and polity to mythological heroes, but also to the origin of the sun on the Island of the Sun in Lake Titicaca (Urton, 1999:34–37). These mythological associations have reference to cosmic origins and world cycles that were manipulated through the *ushnu* in veneration of the solar cult. It was the association of the Inca to the sun through fictive kinship, they called themselves children of the sun, that provided another basis for their right to rule their vast empire, and to place themselves above all other regional cults as the supreme lords of their domain (Fig. 9.8).

In contemporary indigenous culture, the concept of *ushnu* is referred to as “the grand transcendence” (Zuidema, 1980:325–326). Adelaar (1977:371) states that “Our grandfathers and grandmothers say: “The stone (*câcû*) has drank of me (*tuxabaraman*) and the earth or the soil (*pampa*) is ‘*ushnu*,’ he has drank of me.” They are referring to the stone or *câcû* drinking and the stone symbolizes the Sun (Zuidema, 1980:332). Adelaar (1977) goes on to define *câcû* as an emanation associated with the dead ancestors, with buried gold, and also with stones and fountains.⁵ *Ushnu* refers to the spirit of the bones of the ancestors in Ayacucho, Peru and are commonly associated with a sacred mountain and are considered the equivalent of mountain spirits or *Wamani* (Ansión, 1987:129, 138). Body/mountain metaphors equate that circulation of water with that of blood and have reference to the fertility and fecundity of both the earth and humankind (Meddens, 1997:7).

⁴This association extends into the modern period; an ethnic group in highland Bolivia called the Uru was referred to as *haqe huaca* by their Aymara-speaking neighbors because they were believed to have survived from primordial times (Manelis de Klein, 1973:143).

⁵It can also mean to make one sick through emanations. The prefix “*tuxa*” means to “drink” while “*tuxaba*” means to emanate, or to exhale. The reference here to stones, fountains dead ancestors, and buried gold make metaphorical references to the Inca origin myth. When the term *ushnu* is followed by “*ulxu*” or *ushnu ulxu* it can refer to a person (usually male) who drinks excessively without getting intoxicated (Zuidema, 1989:421).

Fig. 9.8 This image is titled “the idols of the Incas, *Inti* (the sun), Huanacuari (the hill near Cuzco), Tambo Toco.” Beneath the symbol of the sun and moon the Sapa Inca and Coya (Queen) venerating at Tambo Toco near Pacariqtambo the site of the mythological origins of the Inca. The text in the *huaca* says Tambo Toco and below the windows or caves Pacariqtambo. The mythological Inca ancestors were said to have emerged from the central cave or window (Guamán Poma, 1980 [1583–1615]:238 fol. 264)



The Inca perpetuated the Cult of the Sun and the Dead as a means of legitimizing and sanctifying divine kingship. The inherent duality and dialectic complementary oppositions of structure/fluidity, was separate and not interchangeable (Classen, 1993:79–80; Staller, 2006). It is perhaps for this reason that they cloaked their religious imperatives, particularly the transference of divinity, through mythology and history, kinship, Inca ethnic identity and the recreation of a mythic geography that reasserted and reaffirmed their spiritual and political control over the natural and cultural world (Zuidema, 1982c, 1992:17; Niles, 1992). These religious cults were first and foremost political and represented a sanctification of sociopolitical domination within their realm and a primacy over all other religious cults (Niles, 1992:348).

Landscape Dimensions: “Civilized” Versus “Wild” Ushnu

The ceremonial and political dimension of *ushnu* as a throne or seat of power may be of great antiquity. Stepped or truncated platform mounds and subterranean plazas are very ancient in coastal and highland Peru. Cultural and ceremonial centers were sometimes depicted in effigy pots and in pottery motifs going back to the Initial Period and Early Horizon Period in Peru and Late Formative Period in Ecuador.

The evidence presented herein suggest the *ushnus* in Cuzco were distinctly Incaic and stand in contrast to those in other regions of the empire. When the *ushnus* in the civilized heartland of the Valley of Cuzco are contrasted and compared with *ushnu* in the countryside, some differences appear to reflect an inherent dualistic opposition that still permeates many aspects of Andean culture. The dualistic opposition relates to human/environmental interaction is centered upon a civilized/wild dichotomy. This dualistic opposition is particularly apparent in how the landscape is conceptualized. The Inca used architecture and engineering in the construction of roads, administrative centers, stone faced agricultural terraces, to symbolically dominate the landscape and visually reassert their authority over their subjects (Niles, 1992:348–349). In symbolically imposing themselves upon the land of the four corners, they were also expressing the sacred power of the civilized world of Cuzco, to the most remote reaches of the empire.

The civilizing influence of the Inca is particularly evident in remote *ushnus*, such as the monolith at Sayhuite. It is located on a hill called Concacha near the town of Abancay in the Curahuasi valley at 3550 masl (Meddens, 1997:5). It consists of a platform situated on Concacha measuring four meters wide and two meters high (Squier, 1877:555; Paternosto, 1996:123; Meddens, 1997:5, Figure 2). Sayhuite comes from the Quechua term *saywayta*, which means “place of orientation” (Paternosto, 1996). The nearby ruins of Rumihuasi and the *ushnu* at Sayhuite are distinct parts of a single site made up of a number of carved rocks and two or more raised platforms (Meddens, 1997:5).

The raised platform at Sayhuite is oriented along a NW-SE axis referred to as *Chingana*. It measures 28 × 13 m and stands 2.2 m high and a 5.5-m wide stairway that leads to the summit is on the north side of the structure (Meddens, 1997:5). On the summit is a one-meter square rectangular depression that may represent a well for channeling fluids. The plaza below and to the east is called *ushnu pampa*, by the local population and measures 128 × 59 m. Within the plaza, on the eastern side, is a finely carved stone fountain connected to a subterranean canal 35 cm wide. The canal is connected to two other platforms, one on the south and another the north side of the plaza (*ibid.*). Many nearby natural springs suggest the rituals associated with this place may be related to channeling fluids and to bringing on fertilizing rains (Fig. 9.9).

Hemming and Ranney (1982:165) maintain that Sayhuite is really the sanctuary oracle of Apurimac. Chroniclers state the oracle at Pachacamac “told” the *Sapa* Inca Tupac Yupanqui that this was one of its four sanctuary-oracle “sons.” Chroniclers describe a painted room with a thick post or pillar of gold dressed in delicate women’s clothing, as well as other idols (*ibid.*). This room has not yet been identified archaeologically, making the identity of the *ushnu* as the sanctuary oracle of Apurimac problematic at best (Paternosto, 1996:124). However, César Paternosto (1996:123, 127) mentions that during the sixteenth or seventeenth century the Spaniards vandalized *Sayhuite*, during one of their campaigns to eradicate idolatry.

The *Sayhuite* monolith is one of several carved rocks at this locality. It is ovoid measuring ~3.3 × 3 m and stands about 2.7 m in height (Paternosto, 1996:127).



Fig. 9.9 Concacha the terraced hilltop on which stands the remains of a once enclosed sanctuary and the carved Sayhuite Monolith. This site was said to be one of the oracles of Apurimac, one of four oracles, called the “sons” of Pachacamac (from Paternosto, 1996:Plate 70)

It may have been transported to *Sayhuite* as a boulder as it is not a natural outcrop. The original location of the monument on the platform cannot be determined as it appears to have been moved, perhaps by looters. The foundations and entrance spaces that remain suggest the platform was enclosed. Stepped terraces held in place by retaining walls made up of irregular rocks surround the platform. The retaining walls are symbolic rather than functional, demarcating sacred space, a common practice throughout the Andes (*ibid.*:127, Plate 70).

A miniature landscape with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery, primarily felines, reptiles, frogs, and shellfish is carved upon the upper surface of the monolith (Paternosto, 1996:Figures 15–16, Plates 70–71; Meddens, 1997:Figure 2). The metaphor expressed by the carvings refers primarily to the channeling of fluids, the male generating principle. Once the hollowed out receptacle at the apex filled, it channeled water throughout the carved landscape (Fig. 9.10). The predominance of feline imagery reflects a possible symbolic reference to Cuzco and the Inca nobility especially with Inca Pachacuti (Paternosto, 1996:128). The entire monolith is in fact in the shape of a head of a feline (see Fig. 9.10). A feline head is also carved below the upper surface (Paternosto, 1996:Plate 71; Meddens, 1997:Figure 2). The symbolic significance of channeling fluids is further evoked by the fact that all other sculpted rocks at the site have steps and canals.

Below in the valley, and visible from the Sayhuite mound, are a series of carved boulders called the Rumihuasi, a Quechua term meaning “stone house.” The

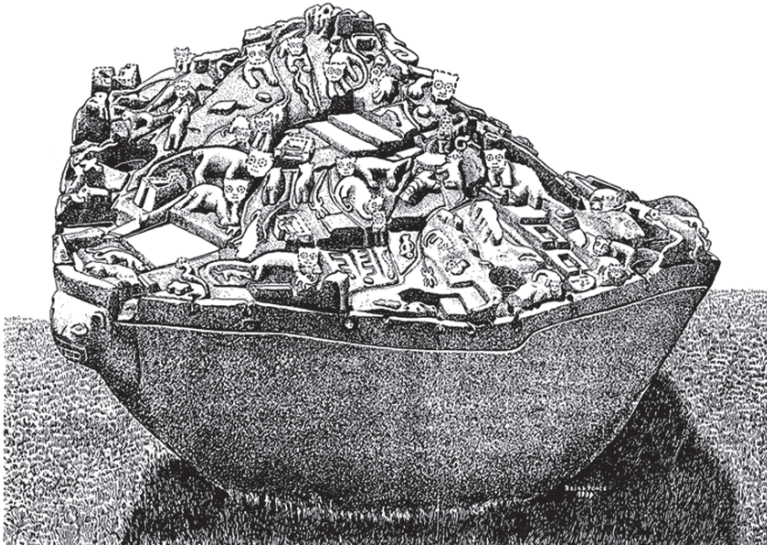


Fig. 9.10 Carved boulder showing its configuration, and the sacred landscape carved on its upper surface. It is said to be in the shape of the head of a feline. Note the three-dimensional feline head carved into the outer, lower surface to the left of the drawing (Photo by Paternosto, 1996: Figure 15). Drawing and reconstruction was originally done by Rojas Ponce, 1955.

Fig. 9.11 The geometric rock at Rumihuasi. The carvings on the left give the impression of being steps while those on the right of terraces. When E. G. Squier visited the site in the late 1800s the rock was only slightly fractured. Rumihuasi was subsequently damaged even further by either lightning or an earthquake (Photo courtesy of Jessica J. Christie)



Sayhuite monolith is the only modified rock in the area with such imagery all other carved rocks at nearby Rumihuasi have geometric modifications consisting of either steps and/or canals (Fig. 9.11).

The carved rocks at the Rumihuasi include one sculpted rock carved into a natural outcrop consisting of a double stairway, of “alternating” type, with three slightly ascending platforms surfaces above the stepped carvings (Paternosto, 1996:Plate 73). They are alternating in the sense that one has the appearance of a stairway while the other gives the impression of terraces. On the eastern part of the upper surface of the rock are cup shaped depressions, presumably receptacles for collecting rain-water or other fluids poured into them. Some of these depressions have channels

that extend to the side of the rock and terminate in rectangular and bell shaped concave depressions (Fig. 9.12).

Paternosto, citing Hébert-Stevens (1972:115) mentions that marriage ceremonies are still held there. *Illacta camayos* (foremen or town officials) pour fluids, presumably water or *chicha*, into the depressions as the bride and groom kneel before the two small channels and drink the fluids (Betanzos, 1996 [1557]:109). These practices may testify to a more ancient symbolic ritual.

Kauffmann Doig (1978:688–689) has suggested that the *huaca* at Sayhuite-Chingana was associated with a water cult. Neither Squier (1877:555–556) nor Middendorf (1895:541) saw the carved rock, though it was reported to them (Meddens, 1997:10). Felines in the highlands are associated with hail and Venus, and embody both malevolent and beneficial aspects. Feline are therefore linked to water and venerated ancestors (Meddens, 1997:10). The importance of channeling water is suggested by the irrigation canals, which originate to the southwest and west of the terraced hill and provide water to the Valley of Curahuasi (*ibid.*).

When Squier (1877:555) first described and illustrated the carved rock at Rumihuasi it was deeply cracked, but not as fragmented as it is now, perhaps the result of either a direct lightning strike or an earthquake (see Fig. 9.11). The carved rock measures 3.7 × 4.3 m and is just below 2 m high. A few feet to the south is another smaller rock with seats carved into its sides and rounded edges. It contrasts sharply with the geometrically carved alternating “stairways” of the Rumihuasi rock. These sculptures have two of the three elements associated with *ushnu*, seats or thrones, and platforms that involve the channeling of fluids. One must go down the valley ~600 m east of Rumihuasi to the so-called “Third Stone” to find the third element, carved boulders, pillars or gnomons (Paternosto, 1996:Plates 76–77, Figure 19). This rock stands alone with no architectonic reference to underscore its placement. Hébert-Stevens (1972:115) first suggested it was a solar stone, and in an earlier site survey of the region Carrión Cachot (1955:16) refers to it as an *intiwatana* or hitching post of the sun (Fig. 9.13).

The Third Stone is carved so that when shadow cast by the sun’s movement across the sky changes, its reflection may be used to record the passing of the annual cycle. Thus, it performs the same function as *intiwatana*, a pillar or gnomon.



Fig. 9.12 On the sides of the Rumihuasi rock are rectangular and cup shaped depressions that channel fluids and rainwater to the upper surface and sides of the monument (Photo courtesy of Jessica J. Christie)



Fig. 9.13 The carved boulder referred to by César Paternosto (1996) as the Third Stone, is a hitching post of the sun or *intiwatana* used for astronomical observation and the reckoning of temporal cycles. It is located to the east and below the *Ushnu Pampa*, a large plaza with platforms on the northern and southern edges (Photo by César Paternosto, 1996:Cover).

This sculpture is distinguished by the fact it incorporates both naturalistic with geometric modifications. It is aligned on a north to south axis 15° west of magnetic north and carved *in-situ*. Moreover, there is a total absence of shadow when the sun is at zenith during the passing of the equinoxes (Paternosto, 1996:135).

The site of Chingana /Sayhuite/Rumihuasi has all of the primary elements associated with the *ushnu* of the Late Horizon Period (see e.g., Molina, 1989 [ca. 1575]; Vega, 1966 [1609]; Betanzos, 1996 [1557]). A platform with a seat or throne upon which the “sun sits,” a fountain or well for channeling fluids, and a gnomon for reckoning solar cycles. However, it is distinguished by an inversion from the various elements found in the main plaza in Cuzco. The *Sunturhuasi* tower functioned to record the sun’s movement and shadow cast by the pillars or gnomes, fountains channeled water through subterranean canals to the surrounding *huacas* and streams. The fountain in this case is in the highest part of the site, while the *intiwatana* or Third Stone is topographically at the lowest point (Fig. 9.14). Situated vertically between these parts of the site is the Rumihuasi, a makeshift platform with carved seats. Rather than channeling water below the surface of the earth, the fountain collects rainwater and other fluids and channels them through a landscape carved on its surface that ultimately feed into the irrigation canals to the southwest and west of the terraced hill.

The inversion of the various components may reflect Andean concepts of dualistic opposition that contrast the civilized with the wild. Chingana/Sayhuite/Rumihuasi is set in a stark landscape and the upper and lower components, the fountain and *intiwatana* respectively, are inverted the opposite of the way they are vertically

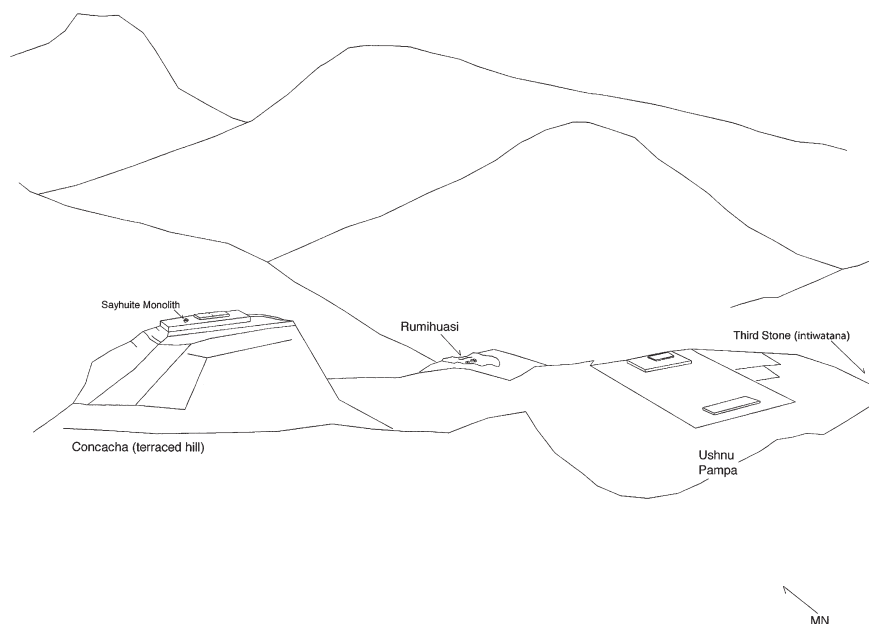


Fig. 9.14 Panoramic depiction of the various parts of the Chingana/Sayhuite/Rumhuasi *ushnu* showing their approximate topographic relationship and elevation of the various parts of the site to one another. (redrawn by author from Van der Guchte, 1990:Illustration 107)

organized in the civilized heartland of Cuzco. The underworld embodies a strong symbolic association with the dead and past and future events, and its ambiguous pull is related to the idea that everything that happens there is the opposite or the reverse of the way it happens on earth (Sullivan, 1988:123; Maybury-Lewis, 1989). The platform and thrones or seats of power are situated between them, mediating, the inverted upper and lower realms.

If the stone house or *Rumihuasi* really was the oracle sanctuary of Apurimac, then “communication” with the oracle would have been seen as mediating the civilized/wild duality and, promote access to the dead or venerated ancestors. The golden pillar wrapped in finery represents the final, albeit missing element for this site to be properly defined as an Inca *ushnu*.

The intrinsic relationship between the cultural and natural world is both a duality and an opposition. The community or heartland is closed and bounded—the civilized world of social solidarity (Classen, 1993:26, 34). The heartland stands in opposition to open space of the wild or savage natural world (Isbell, 1978:163–164). As one of the four sanctuary-oracle “sons” of the oracle at Pachacamac, that sanctuary-oracle of Apurimac would have symbolized a civilized center contained within a wild setting, a transcendence of the duality inherent in civilized/wild opposition. The inverted site components may be a metaphor for *otra nación*, where everything is the opposite of what it is in the world of the living (Urton, 1981).

Ushnus as Regional Centers

Ushnu centers in distant places within the empire contrast with what was reported from within and near the Inca capital. The architectural emphasis appears to be focused upon truncated platforms and large plazas, features of great antiquity in ceremonial centers throughout the Andes (Williams, 1985). The *ushnu* at Vilcas Huamán was one of the most important centers of the Late Horizon Period (Meddens, 1997:5, Figure 1). The truncated platform there has five levels, and access to a stone seat on the summit was through a double jammed doorway. The stairway and seat are oriented east to west and the structure is in a large plaza just north of a major building interpreted as a royal palace. Cut stone features found near the platform were thought to represent the remnants of a throne (Wiener, 1880:266–267). Chroniclers indicate the throne was part of a shrine associated with another large rock carved in the manner of a fountain or basin, where the nobility or lord would give public addresses, and where offerings and sacrifices were made (Cieza de León, 1947[1553]:435).

Anecdotal accounts indicate that an underground channel connected the *ushnu* at Vilcas Huamán to the modern church, which is built on top of a house of the *Mamaconas*. A 50 m long elaborate terrace still survives east of the plaza (Meddens, 1997:5). Albornoz states that the Inca considered the *ushnu* at Vilcas Huamán, as the “true” center of the empire. Molina and Albornoz mention a messianic cult of the *Taqui Onqoy* as related to the idols there and it is for this reason that the colonial government extirpated the idols from this destroyed capital center. Chroniclers of the seventeenth century, such as Guaman Poma and Santacruz Pachacuti also emphasize a relationship between the *ushnu* in the main plaza of Cuzco and the one at Vilcas Huamán (Zuidema, 1980:325–326).

The low three tier stone platform located at the Inca administrative center of Huánuco Pampa is an *ushnu* in the center of a large 550×350 m plaza with a staircase on the south side (Morris and Thompson, 1985:Figures 5 and 11). Access to the summit is provided by a low balustrade and located on the lowest platform are two small structures that face east. Felines, probably pumas, are carved in relief on the facade by the two access points. A well or hole that connected the interior of the structure near its eastern wall is said to have been located on the summit, but looters’ pits obscure the connecting channel (Morris and Thompson, 1985:59; see also Meddens, 1997:5). Earlier excavations mention the existence of a drainage system evident by a canal that was used for this purpose (Squier, 1877:218). The *ushnu* at Huánuco Pampa is connected to the most elaborate compound by gateways lined up at 88° east of north — closely approximating the point where the sun rises during the equinoxes. A canal follows the same line slightly off center of the gateways (Morris and Thompson, 1985:58–60; cf. Meddens, 1997:5).

The figuratively carved feline images on platform at Huánuco Pampa and the carved monolith at *Sayhuite* may be reflecting the importance of *ushnu* with respect to the male generating principle of the channeling of fluids (Zuidema, 1989:306). The symbolic association of feline imagery with channeling fluids may also be

related to the tail of the feline, which is thought to control the force of water and fertility in the lower parts of the Apurimac Valley (van de Guchte, 1990:227; cf. Meddens, 1997:10). Cuzco is in the approximate shape of a feline and regarded as a puma (Zuidema, 1989:360–383).

Felines such as the puma and jaguar are often conceptualized as intermediaries between this world, the celestial realm and underworld respectively (Meddens, 1997:10; Anders, 1986:916; Dillehay, 1998). The beach sand brought up steep Andean slopes to the main plaza (*Huacaypata*) in Cuzco emphasizes the symbolic importance of water (Sherbondy, 1992:61–62). Chroniclers stated that this was done in reverence to *Viracocha* whose temple was located beside the main plaza (Polo de Ondegardo, 1916 [1561]:109). The presence of sea sand at the very center of the imperial capital was both a political as well as a religious statement about Inca right to rule, one that evoked primordial origins and absolute beginnings (Sherbondy, 1992:62). Condors were also associated with *ushnu*, and both felines and condors with stars (Rosworowski, 1983:45). Condors were intermediaries with mountain spirits or *apu* (Isbell, 1978a:211; Reinhard, 1996:42). Mountain worship has a long and ancient tradition in the Andes (Kolata, 1993:109–143; Sharon, 2001; Reinhard, 1983a,b, 1985a). The evidence further indicates that mountain veneration is related to the fertility of *allyus* as well as agriculture (Meddens, 1994:141–142, 145; Reinhard, 1985a:306–307).

Mountain summits linked the celestial and lower realms in that such places mark to the passing of the sun and the basis for the circulation of water across the landscape. Circulation of water on and below the earth is crucial for rejuvenation and fertility and maintaining the structure and balance (Meddens, 1997:7–8). Iconographic evidence on Moche pottery suggests mountain worship and a symbolic link between elites and surrounding *apu* and *wamani* has ancient origins (Meddens, 1997:11; Sharon, 2001:Figures 1–4; Donnan, 1978:146–147, 150, 184, 1996:Figure 45; Donnan and MacClelland, 1999:102, 121). The complex irrigation technology associated with various highland and coastal civilizations emphasize the importance of the circulation of water to the political and religious sanctification of elite status.

Ancient Dimensions of Ushnu Centers: Tiwanaku and Chavín de Huántar

The archaeological evidence suggests that there is a variety of *ushnus* in different regions of the Andean landscape (see e.g., Hyslop, 1990; Meddens, this volume) and well beyond the scope of this analysis. The discussion is therefore restricted to two important highland centers; the Late Intermediate/Middle Horizon Period center of Tiwanaku, and Chavín de Huántar a Initial/Early Horizon Period center. Tiwanaku has features that may represent direct developmental antecedents to what occurs later in the Inca context. Chavín de Huántar shows a clear emphasis upon feline and aviary imagery in its sculpted monoliths and architectural facades, and the temple complexes have features which suggest this site may be an early expression

of the *ushnu* concept, as well as a metaphorical reference to mountain spirits and *axis mundi*.

Meddens (1997:10–11) suggests the Akapana and Puma Punka platforms at Tiwanaku represent an ancient example of *ushnu*. Both of these ceremonial complexes have elaborate drainage systems that predate such features in the later truncated platforms of the Late Horizon Period (Kolata, 1993), and may as well have served as an ideological basis for such drainage systems in later ceremonial centers.

Twenty-one human burials were uncovered at the base of the Akapana suggesting ideological continuity with ancestor veneration and sacrifice. Some are sub-adult and juveniles in association with large quantities of broken pots including drinking vessels or *keros* with motifs consisting of feline and condor imagery (Meddens, 1997:11). A feline mask on an anthropomorphic basalt sculpture was also found with these burials (*ibid.*). Canine burials were also recovered in one of the drainage canals and in Andean mythology were believed to accompany the dead into the afterlife (Kolata, 1993). Burials involving the ritual interment of canines and *keros* in association with humans later appear at the royal Inca estate of Machu Picchu (Salazar-Burger, 2001:Figure 5).

Under the Akapana platform is a layer of green gravel brought in from the Quimsachata and Chila mountains, which infers ideological continuity and symbolic identification to mountain spirits (Kolata, 1993:109–110), as the beach sand from the Peruvian coast brought to the main plaza in Cuzco, emphasized a symbolic association with the ocean and by extension Viracocha (Sherbondy, 1992:61–62). Other features suggesting a developmental relationship to later *ushnu* include, vertically elongated sculpted monoliths and tenoned heads on the wall of a subterranean or Sunken Temple, the stone pillars on both sides of the staircase in the Kalasasaya complex, and subterranean canals to channel water to surrounding raised fields. Evidence of human sacrifice, juvenile and sub-adult interments, feline and condor imagery, symbolic association to sacred mountains or *apu* and *wamani* and subterranean canals that channel water also suggest Tiwanaku may be an earlier expression of the *ushnu* concept.

The Initial Period/Early Horizon Period (900–300 B.C.) ceremonial center at Chavín de Huántar represents even more compelling evidence to suggest an earlier origin for the *ushnu* concept. Located along the banks of the Mosna River in the Cordillera Blanca of northern Peru at 3150 masl, Chavín may get its name from the Caribbean term *chavi*, which denotes tiger or feline (Burger, 1992a:128). Luis Lumbreras (1970:22) maintains the term comes from the Quechua word *chawpin*, which means “in the center.” Chavín de Huántar is situated along a river that forms a confluence with a tributary, the Huachasca River — an area of important mountain passes that link the western coast and eastern tropical lowlands.

The Old Temple at Chavín is incorporated architecturally to the New Temple and together they form a “U” shaped platform surrounding a sunken circular courtyard (Burger, 1992a:130, Figure 120). In front of the New Temple is a U-shaped plaza with a sunken rectangular court (Burger, 1992a:Figure 120, 1992b:Figure 2). The source of the architectural innovation involving the incorporation of the New

Temple is believed to come from the North Coast and adjacent highlands of Pacopampa (Burger, 1992b:267).

The principal icon is a carved monolith called the Great Image, Smiling Deity or Lanzón located in a subterranean gallery in the Old Temple (Rowe, 1962:9, 1967; Burger, 1992a:Figures 126–127). The subterranean gallery faces east in the center of the Old Temple, and is at right angles to the horizontal plane (Burger, 1992a:136). It represents an anthropomorphic being that incorporates reptilian and feline elements and is posed with its right hand raised and open palm exposed and the left palm lowered with the palm facing inward (Burger, 1992a:Figure 140). The imagery may be a metaphorical reference to *axis mundi* as mediator of oppositional duality—the personification of balance and order in the cosmos (*ibid.*:136). Moreover, a guilloche, or in this case a sky rope, emanating from its open palm is a clear symbolic reference to *axis mundi* (Rowe, 1962:Figures 7a–c, 8; Burger, 1992a:Figure 140). Another runs vertically from floor to ceiling up the back of the monolith and three additional guilloches extend below the feet (Burger, 1992a:137). The monolith is set into the roof of a cruciform chamber that extends into the ceiling and a vertical channel leads down the top of the sculpture into a cruciform design with a central depression carved on the top of the head (Rowe, 1962: Illustrations 6–8; Burger, 1992b:Figure 6; Roe, 1995:Figures 2.9–2.10).

A drainage canal extends from under the eastern staircase in front of the Old Temple and extends beneath the paved floor of the circular courtyard or plaza (Burger, 1992a:Illustrations 120, 122). Such a canal would have channeled water from inside the temple and drained it into the circular courtyard or plaza, essentially forming a basin (Meddens, 1997:11).

The circular courtyard or plaza includes feline imagery a pair of matching jaguars on the lower register of each side of the western staircase, arranged as if on a procession towards the main staircase (Burger, 1992a:Illustration 124). The upper register has pairs of anthropomorphic figures with feline and reptilian features on the head and extremities respectively, holding a “staff” of the psychotropic San Pedro Cactus (*Echinopsis pachanoi*) in their right hand (Burger, 1992a:Illustrations 123, 125; Sharon, 2000). The hair of this mythical being is made up of serpents and reptiles that also dangle from its waist reinforcing the water related symbolism, as do the curled tail of the felines in the lower register. The mythical beings in the upper register are blowing *Strombus* shell trumpets (*pututu*). *Pututu* traditionally used in ceremonies or rites in the Andes to initiate and terminate ritual festivities (Burger, 1992a:135).

The Great Image or Lanzón gives the distinct impression of vertically connecting the cosmic layers as an *axis mundi*. This is particularly apparent from the upper portion of the idol, its position and central location within the Old Temple, as well as the fore-mentioned sky ropes. *Chicha* or some other fermented intoxicant could have been poured down on the idol from above into the vertical channel, which would have settled in the central depression on the top of its head. Once filled, the *chicha* would have trickled down the top of the sculpture, reinforcing the cosmic connections of the layers through the channeling of fluid.

These various features, and the location and imagery suggest that Chavín de Huántar may represent an early variant of the *ushnu* concept. The reptilian, aviary

and feline imagery found on various idols and sculptures, and predominantly depicted in the ceramic art reinforce a symbolic association to mountain spirits and its location is a subterranean chamber, a clear connection to the underworld and the channeling of fluids. Underground passages and chambers are present on three sides of the circular plaza, beneath the floor of the rectangular court of the New Temple, and the numerous hidden stone lined canals that run beneath the court and plaza all eventually drain into the Mosna River (Burger, 1992a:135). Moreover, the site combines the two primary forms of plazas or courts, characteristic of the Initial Period and later periods of the highlands, circular and rectangular respectively.

Although circular sunken courts are relatively late at Chavín de Huántar, they are present at many earlier Late Preceramic and Initial Period sites on the coast of Peru (see e.g., Moseley, 1985; Williams, 1985; Shady-Solís, 1997, 2003). Ruth Shady (1997:39–41, 49–51) has identified an *ushnu* on the summit of a platform mound at the Late Preceramic Period ceremonial complex at Caral-Supe in the Supe River valley of coastal Peru. Significantly, irrigation canals are also found at this very early agricultural ceremonial complex. The repeated association of stepped and/or truncated platforms in association with circular depressions designated as plazas may reflect the great antiquity of *ushnus* and religious beliefs surrounding cosmic layers and access to and penetration through them via *axis mundi* within sacred centers. Later rectangular courts often have either platforms and/or monoliths in the center or to one side (see e.g., Morris and Thompson, 1985; Kolata, 1993). It is possible therefore that the Tello Obelisk at Chavín may have served as a gnomon in association with the rectangular plaza since Julio Tello found it outside of the New Temple near that plaza (Lumbreras, 1970:82, 1989:63). The imagery on this sculpture is highly detailed and includes zoomorphic and naturalistic representations that symbolically incorporate all of the various cosmic layers and elements derived from all of the various cardinal directions (Burger, 1992a Figure 141). Anthropomorphic images associated with the sculpture are also said to include solar symbolism (Lumbreras, 1989:63).

The various subterranean passageway-chamber complexes, underground channels, ventilation ducts and galleries, colossal stone idols and their location with respect to the most sacred mountains in each region are just some parallels exhibited by important ceremonial centers such as Chavín de Huántar and Tiwanaku (Reinhard, 1985b). These architectural features and the presence of stone obelisks, monoliths, and subterranean canals suggest that the concept of *ushnu* may have ancient origins in the Andes.

Concluding Remarks

These various lines of evidence suggest Andean centers were critical to cultures past and present. They provided a means by which the heavens were accessed to obtain meteorological and astronomical information and create order and meaning to the surrounding landscape. The sacredness of certain places is embodied in the concept of *Llacta*, which suggests an intrinsic relationship between a “place deity”

or “deity-locale” or local *huaca* and the surrounding landscape. The term *Pacha* conceptualizes the centrality of place and movement through time as occurring simultaneously at a moment or interval in time and a location and extension in space regardless of its scale (Salomon, 1991:14; Salomon and Urioste, 1991:14, 23–24 [c. 1598–1608]). Thus, the temporal dimensions of cosmic centers have reference to secular concerns such as agricultural cycles, as well as cosmological and mythological time. Vertical movement through the cosmic layers may be seen as approximating the concept of “*camac*” that is that penetration involves, revealing its inner structure, substance or essence or differentiating animating essences from interior states or conditions, that is, modes of being. Native Andean worldview still perceives the earth as a mirror that alternately reflects the celestial and underworld order across and through itself, and this is clearly embodied in the architecture and symbolism surrounding *ushnu* centers throughout Andean prehistory.

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Chapter 10

High Altitude *Ushnu* Platforms in the Department of Ayacucho Peru, Structure, Ancestors and Animating Essence

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Introduction

This study is based on a pilot project that was launched to test the validity of a series of hypothesis about the nature, structure, function and role of *ushnu* platforms in the Late Horizon Inka landscape of the Peruvian Andes. The theories to be tested were firstly whether *ushnu* platforms were constructed to a precise form that closely resembled the geological, geomorphological and hydrological characteristics of nearby mountains and the surrounding landscape. Secondly, whether the structures adhered to a system of interconnected 'sight lines' linking landscape features in remote and widely dispersed parts of the Inka Empire. Thirdly, whether children (*Capac Hucha*), were selected to be brought to the *ushnu*, and to be sacrificed there, and placed in, under, or in close proximity to the structure. A collaborative research project was organized involving the Universidad Nacional de San Cristobal de Huamanga and Royal Holloway of the University of London with British Academy funding. The project involved the exploratory excavation of two high altitude *ushnus* in the department of Ayacucho. In addition, the sampling of lake sequences in close proximity to these structures was to be completed in order to facilitate the contemporary landscape reconstruction of areas around the *ushnus*. Aspects of mutual visibility between *ushnus* and other landscape features were to be investigated using GIS facilities available at Royal Holloway.

The Inkas in the Andean Landscape

The economic organization of the Inka state was based on the recognition of the importance of vertical as well as horizontal distance and by applying to these principals of ecological complementarity (Murra, 1975, 1980). In a mountainous landscape with very pronounced topography, microenvironments vary dramatically with altitude. Potential catastrophic variations in climate as a result of the unpredictability and the effects of El Niño-Southern Oscillation events as well as the

prevalence of tectonic instability means that the area constitutes a high risk setting for any social group foolish enough to link its survival to a single ecological niche and restricted resource base. As a result, successful social groups aim to achieve economic stability by seeking to maximize their access and rights to multiple micro environmental and supply niches. This was achieved in the Andes by settling related kin groups in the maximum number of resource areas and maintaining a balanced set of reciprocal kinship obligations to supply each other with the total package of resources available in all of the resource islands under control of the group as a whole. This resulted in communities, which linked central areas with distant peripheries in a single economic, political, social and religious system (Murra, 1980; Rostworowski, 1977, 1981). The ideological basis of the Andean societies provided them with a conceptual model, which allowed them to understand their world as made up of a patchwork of interdependent communities with interlinked responsibilities and obligations. This ideological structure was maintained by a system of pilgrimages and exchange mechanisms of sacred essence, which served to stabilize and maintain the structure of society in balance (Staller, this volume).

The religious elements of this system were rooted in the role the nobility and rulers played in maintaining stability and fertility by their perceived interaction with Sacred Places (*huacas*), mountain deities (*apus* and *wamanis*) and ancestors (*mallqui*).

Rulers (*kurakas*) successful management of the state and ethnic groups within it, derived from a system of public generosity. Redistribution of goods resulting from labour tax and tribute to the subjects of the state ensured their loyalty and in executing the rules of reciprocity it meant that the ruled had a duty to respond to the leader's calls upon them as a direct result of his generosity to them. By his temporary ownership of the items he redistributed he increased the value of the goods by imbuing them with aspects of his sacredness and power. The 'values' of gifts depended not just on the inherent value of the item but also on the status; social political as well as religious, of the giver (Staller, 2000–2002:76–78, 2006:462; Morris, 1978:320–321, 1979:25). In the Andean area the *kuraka*/ruler managed the redistribution of goods within a structure of multiple environmental niches and resource sources. The entitlement of the *kuraka*/ruler in the Andes was to labour tribute, not to goods but to services. For example, a *kuraka*/ruler could ask a weaver to weave to obtain textile but he would also have to provide him with the wool or cotton to end up with a finished product (Murra, 1980).

The Inka World and the Ceque System

The Inka Empire was named Tawantinsuyu, the land of the four quarters, Chinchasuyu, Cuntisuyu, Collasuyu and Antisuyu. It was seen as being divided into four parts along conceptual lines, which came together in Cuzco. Each quarter was

divided by 9 lines known as *ceques*, except Cuntisuyu, which held 14 *ceques*, making a total of 41 (Zuidema, 2002:238). These were in each of the four quarters hierarchically ranked in three sub-groups (Zuidema, 1964). At the centre of the Inka empire at Cuzco this *ceque* system was defined by a series of 328 *huacas* or shrines, places which held sacred essence.¹ These *huacas* were physical aspects of the landscape such as stones, springs, mountains and buildings, etc., representing shrines and deities. They and their individual significance and meaning were explained in a detailed mythology, such as for example some of the *huacas* being stones which had turned into warriors to help the Inkas defend Cuzco against the Chankas (an ethnic group located in Chinchasuyu (northwest of the Inka core territory)). An individual *ayllu* or *panaka* (a Royal *ayllu*) was responsible for each set of *huacas* along the line of its designated *ceque*. These *ceques* and their associated *huacas* performed multiple functions. They defined irrigation districts and the social groups responsible for these as well as their ranking. They constituted a calendrical system central to the demarcation of Inka social and ritual culture as well as its agricultural cycles. Its details were first noted by a Spanish administrator (Polo de Ondegardo) and recorded in detail by a 17th century Jesuit scholar Bernabé Cobo and other chroniclers confirmed its existence (Albornoz, 1989 [1581–1585]; Cobo, 1895 [1653]; Molina, 1989). It has been comprehensively analysed by Tom Zuidema (1964), John Rowe (1979) and more recently by others such as Bauer (1998), and Sherbondy (1986).

The Cuzco system is the only one of which we have detailed knowledge. The Inkas sought to extend the *ceque* lines beyond the horizon to the limits of their empire (Zuidema, 1982a:421). Cobo reported that each local region and community had a similar system in place to define the sacred landscape on a local level and scale (Albornoz, 1989 [1581–1585]; Cobo, 1895 [1653]). This conceptual framework therefore served as an interactive sacred network of shrines and lines along which sacred essence maintained coherence of the centre with its periphery.

These *ceques* or sightlines formulated a conceptual network extending throughout the Inka Empire, which served to co-ordinate planting, irrigation and state ritual with calendrics and astronomy (Zuidema, 1982a:419–458). We know that in Cuzco the *ceque* system centred on the Temple of the Sun (*Coricancha*) and on the *ushnu* and *Sunturhuasi* in the main plaza, Huacaypata.² These served as points from which astronomical observations could be made of the central sectors of both the eastern and western horizons. These observations allowed the Inkas to determine the most

¹ There were 41 *ceques*, an eight day Inka week means that $41 \times 8 = 328$; $365 - 328 = 37$, Pleiades could not be seen for 37 days at Cusco around the time of the conquest, it disappeared at the time harvesting finished and reappeared at the time planting commenced; in addition it should be noted that 12 sidereal lunar months of 27.3 day, $12 \times 27.3 = 328$.

² Huacaypata or the terrace of festivals (Vega, 1723:235) comprises the centrally placed principal plaza of Cuzco where some of the most important yearly celebrations would be acted out such as the solstice rituals, the harvest and planting celebrations, aspects of the young adults initiation rites, and the cleansing (*citua*) festival. At such times the mummified remains of former Inka rulers would gather in the plaza to participate and be part of the religious events unfolding.

important dates for their agricultural activities (Zuidema, 1989a:404, 406–407, 413). According to Pizarro (1978:91), the *ushnu* in the principal plaza of Cuzco functioned as a seat of the sun. Particular images and idols of the sun, which are likely to have constituted small gnomons were placed on these seats at certain times (Zuidema, 1989a).

There were three types of *ceques*, the first was local to the *huacas* being worshipped, the second concerns the sightlines, which cover a valley, the third was the *Capac Hucha* and the sightline connecting two distant points. Mountain passes connect horizon points to the centre and link the deeper valleys into the system (Zuidema, 1982a:431).

Capac Hucha Sacrifice

Cuzco was at the centre of Tawantinsuyu and the Inka universe. The fact that items came from Cuzco increased their value and the status for the recipient many times, certain sacrificial foods were distributed from Cuzco to all the major shrines in the land (Murra, 1980:122). This can also be seen in the manner that *Capac Hucha* sacrifices were distributed. Firstly, chosen ‘perfect’ children were sent to Cuzco where the *Capac Hucha* would be chosen from among them. Following elaborate rituals, they would return to where they came from (in an as straight a line as possible) where they were sacrificed, and their parents would gain greatly in status (Zuidema, 1989b:144–190).

The link of the *ushnu* with human, particularly child sacrifice, is made explicitly by Guaman Poma de Ayala (1980:236), Cieza de León (1947 [1553]:435) and Carabajal (1965 [1586]:218–219). *Capac* specifically *Capac Hucha* sacrifice is of crucial importance. Following this chronicler evidence child sacrifice was associated with the structure of the *ushnu*; and from the *ushnu*, in the case of Cuzco itself sacrificial victims were redistributed to the outlying quarters of the Inka state. These sacrificial children carried, along straight routes, with them the self-sacrifice of the Inka back to their communities of origin (Urbano and Duvoils, 1989), where the actual sacrifice was completed. They provided some of the most important links to maintain the stability and health of the state (Zuidema, 1989b:144–190; Hyslop, 1990:72).

An interesting element to note is that the *Capac Hucha* sacrifice as an expression of the Inka himself, when travelling could only be accompanied by the people whose territory he or she passed through. If this was not the case then the people travelling with the *Capac Hucha* could claim title to the land (Zuidema, 1982a:429). This indicates that even prior to being sacrificed the *Capac Hucha* was already perceived as being at one with the world of the ancestors, as it is the ancestral link with resources, which legitimizes a group’s rights to them.

Capac Hucha has been translated as ‘great sin’ or ‘sin of the Inka’ (Rostworowski, 1977; Zuidema, 1964). Urbano and Duvoil argue that the meaning of *hucha* as sin is a colonial change to its original pre-conquest meaning. Molina equates the term

with *cachagues*, *cachaguaco* which has a meaning of messenger and confidant (Urbano and Duvoils, 1989:120–121, note 134). This translation of the *Capac Hucha* sacrifice would come close to the delegated self-sacrifice of the Inka as a ruler and deity in which the *Capac Hucha* represents the Inka himself moving from Cuzco to the location of sacrifice, clearly dressed and covered in special textiles demonstrating the embodiment of the Inka in a regional sacrificial context. Albornoiz remarks on a further use of the term *capaccocha* he notes that all *huacas* have clothes made of the finest textiles which the population used to re-instate and re-dedicate *huacas* following their destruction by Spanish extirpators (Albornoiz, 1989 [1581–1585]:196).³

‘The practice of linking points of ancestral and cosmological importance with the capital of Tawantinsuyu through lines, conceptual or materialized in pilgrimages, was compelling in Inka society’ (Van de Guchte, 1990:59). These pilgrimages included the journeys of *Capac Hucha* sacrifices from their home communities to the centre at Cuzco where they would be dived up and the ones selected for *Capac Hucha* would return to their home communities in as straight a line as possible to be sacrificed and become native ancestor deities including at *ushnu* platforms.

***Ushnu* Definitions**

The term *ushnu* had a variety of complementary definitions: as throne of the Inka (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980 [1583–1615]:239, 357), as a site of ‘*capac hucha*’ or human sacrifice (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980 [1583–1615]:236), as basin/post of stone or gold in the plaza’s of towns, all with structures like towers built in beautiful stonework (such as at Vilcas, Pucára, Huanuco Viejo and Tiahuanaco)⁴ where the Inka lords sat and drank to, and made many sacrifices to the sun (Albornoiz, 1989 [1570–1584]:176) as a ‘sitting’ stone, or a boundary marker when it is a large ‘sitting’ stone ([1608]); walling an *ushnu* is mentioned in the Huarochirí manuscript (Salomon and Urioste, 1991:102); as a stone and first *huaca*, on the fifth *ceque* line in the Antisuyu sector (Cobo, 1897 [1653]:27) and on the thirteenth *ceque* line in the Cuntisuyu sector (Cobo, 1897 [1653]:45); a stone altar, which they called *Osno*, for their sacrifices (Anónima, 1968 [1580–1621]:157); there is also the reference by Anónima to its use as a pillar for solar observations (see below), and the observation of it representing stones arranged in the manner of a throne or platform, by Joan de Santa cruz Pachacuti Yamqui (1993 [1613]:200).

³The terms *capaccocha/capac hucha* according to Molina equates with *cachaguaes/cachaguaco* (Molina, 1989:120–121, note 134; Albornoiz equates *ceque* with *cachauis*. Considering that Quechua was not a written language and the overlap and running on of words from one to the other as frequently occurred in 16th & 17th century Spanish (Rowe, 1979) the terms *cachaguaes* and *cachauis* are likely to be the same. On some level therefore *capac hucha* and *ceque* have a common strand (Zuidema, 1982a:431).

⁴Clearly, Albornoiz is referring here to the platform type *ushnu* structure.

Cabello de Valboa when discussing Guayna Capac's construction activity in Tumibamba (sic) notes the construction of an *ushnu* in its plaza. He describes it as a seat of Huayna Capac where *chicha* was offered to the sun, and that it is also known by another name, namely Chuqui pillaca (Cabello Balboa, 1951 [1586]:365). This, following Diego Conzalez Holguin translates as '*llaca chuqui*' = *lança de Guerra emplumada* and '*pi*' = *en mi mano esta*. The wording *llaca chuquies* is used by Carabajal when he describes the Inka on the *ushnu* at Vilcas Huaman. He describes them as being large lances made of palm wood, which below the copper point had a tassel of bristles of peccary hair (1965 [1586], 218). The phrase could therefore be translated as a feathered war lance in my hand, or perhaps more accurately in the hand of a person involved in ritual activities.

The Inka in one of the illustrations by Guaman Poma de Ayala, showing him on his *ushnu* (Fig. 10.1) (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980:370), and when he (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980:305, 313, 355), his '*segunda persona*', or his mummy (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980:350) are carried about on a litter are depicted under a canopy which is portrayed in a manner which appears to mimic feathers or leaves (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980:313, 355). The illustrations almost certainly are meant to represent feathers, as they look identical to representations of feathers elsewhere in this manuscript (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980:301), and appear to constitute a drawing convention for 'feathers'. There is also a parasol depicted with



Fig. 10.1 Inka on *ushnu* under feather canopy (from Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980 [1583–1615]:370 fol. 160)

Fig. 10.2 Manco Capac with feather parasol (from Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980 [1583–1615]:67 fol. 25)



the image of Manco Capac, the first Inka (Fig. 10.2) (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980:67). Parasols are further illustrated as being held over the heads of elite royal queens (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980:98, 112, 116, 118, 120), interestingly enough in all but one case they appear to be shown indoors (Fig. 10.3). The parasol too appears to represent an item where the canopy is made of feathers. There is a clear distinction being made between the ones associated with Inka elite and the illustration of a Christian principal and his wife where the parasols used appear to be made of a textile type of material (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980:710). Carabajal when describing the use the Inka makes of the *ushnu* at Vilcas notes that the Inka is under a large canopy called *achigua* (parasol according to Gonzalez Holguin, 1989 [1608]:13) made of bird feathers of ‘a thousand colors’, held up on poles made of gold. It was carried by 12 captains of ancient lineage (Carabajal, 1965 [1586]:218).

The covering with a textile or a piece of textile covered in feathers owned by a *huaca* may be seen as a metaphorical reference to the concept of movement of *huacas* and their associated sacred essence from one place to another. *Mitimae* communities are known to have put textiles over their principal *huacas*, particularly their *pacarinas*, in their home territory. This textile they then took to the new area where they were to be resettled. These textiles would there, in the new territory, be put over objects in the landscape which would by this action be transformed into the equivalent *huaca* as existed in the home territory (Albornoz, 1989 [1581–1585]:171, 180).

Fig. 10.3 Coya under feather parasol depicted indoors (from Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980 [1583–1615]:118 fol. 49)



Thérèse Bouysse-Cassagne in her study of use made of feathers by the Inkas has demonstrated that they were conceptually linked to concepts of transformation and sacred essence (Bouysse-Cassagne, 1997:545–565). What would therefore be the symbolic meaning of shading the Inka from the sun when he is the son of the sun? or indeed the daughter of the moon (in the case of the Inka *coya*) from the moon. Is it perhaps more a reflection of what is under the parasol, as in containing the sacred essence, perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the fact the Inka queens are shown indoors with parasols being held over their heads (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980:98, 112, 116, 118, 120).

No feather constructed parasols or canopies are known from any archaeological context. This is not surprising if their association is strictly with the Inka and his *coya*, particularly as all known Inka and *coya* mummies (and their associated ‘grave goods’) are thought to have been destroyed by the Spaniards. *Capac hucha* sacrifices, where these have organic remains surviving do include a feather type helmet (Reinhard and Ceruti, 2000:Figure 46) not known from other Inka burial associations, which is almost exclusively coupled with the Inka and his captains in Guaman Poma’s illustrations (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980:passim).

In a description which dates to 1551, Betanzos outlines the use the Inkas made of the *ushnu* platform or seat (Betanzos, 1987 [1551]:185–186).

The Inka, Guayna Capac, travelled through Tawantinsuyu visiting all the *Curazgos*, pueblos and provinces, and before entering the principal towns or villages he dressed in their ethnic dress and had his hair arranged as theirs. “He entered their principal town where he came to the main plaza where they had a platform (*castillejo*)

with a small rock filled basin, which he climbed and where he sat down on his seat and reviewed all the people and they saw him. They brought him many llamas, which they sacrificed and they brought him much *chicha* (maize beer), which they put as a libation in the basin. He drank with them and they with him. Later he descended, danced, ate and sang with them and granted them many blessings. He got them to bring him all the poor, widows and orphans and he got them to tell him what they possessed and nobody would not tell the truth and he provided for them from the store houses which there are for this purpose in each village” [translation by the author].⁵

In 1552, Cristobal de Molina, as quoted by Morris and Thompson (1985:59), mentioned of these platforms, that ‘in each town there was a large royal plaza, and in the middle of it was a square high platform with a very high staircase; the Inka and three of his lords ascended it to speak to the people, and see the army when they made their reviews and assemblies’.

Christobal de Molina (c.1570) describes the *Citua* ritual held in the main plaza of Huacaypata in Cuzco, during the month of August. *Citua* as presented by Molina is one of the most important celebrations in the Inka calendar as he devotes (in the edition used here) 24 pages to this month. April and November, which represent the next most detailed descriptions, get 16 and 12 pages respectively and four months merit less than a page each (June and January to March). Although he states that the *Capac Raymi* celebration (in November) constitutes the most important festival of the year. August was the month in which the rains started and diseases came to the land and served to appeal to the creator that during this year there would not be any. Molina states that this festival took place at the time of the conjunction of the moon (probably signifying the astronomical new moon in this context). For the duration of this celebration all foreigners and people with disabilities were made to leave Cuzco to a distance of two leagues. Four groups of one hundred warriors gathered at Huacaypata around the *ushnu*, here comprising a stone basin made of gold for libations of *chicha*. Each of these groups took to the four main roads leading out of Cuzco to one of the four quarters or *suyus* shouting to banish all evil, bad and polluted things. These cries were handed over to *ayllus* of *mitimaes* at regular intervals (around every two leagues) who carried the cries banishing the dirt and

⁵ *ansi entraba en el pueblo principal della donde llegado que era a la plaza del le tenían hecho cierto asiento a manera de un castillejo alto y en do medio del castillejo una pileta llena de piedras y como llegase el Ynga al pueblo subíase en aquel castillejo y allí se sentaba en su silla y de allí veía a todos los de la plaza y ellos le veían a él y siendo allí traían delante de el muchos corderos y allí se lo degallaban delante y se lo ofrecían y luego le vaciaban delante mucha chicha en aquella pileta que allí estaba en sacrificio y él bebía con ellos y ellos con él y luego descendía de allí y bailaba y cantaba con ellos asidos de las manos a manera de quien anda en corro y comía con ellos y esto hecho dábales de lo que llevaba y hacíales mercedes y des que esto era hecho mandaba que le trajesen la quenta de las viudas que había y de los huérfanos que todos se lo trujesen delante y ansi mismo de los pobres y luego se informaba de lo que cada uno destes poseía y decíanle la verdad porque nadie le osaba decir mentira y del que era informado que era pobre dábase hacienda de los depósitos que en cada pueblo había para este beneficio.... (Betanzos, 1987 [1551]:185–186)*

evil to the main rivers, where they washed their weapons and clothes in the waters which drained it away to the sea, thus purifying the state (Molina, 1989:73–75). The next day the *ayllus* and *panacas* constituting the Cuzco Inkas gathered in Huacaypata around the *ushnu* together with the ancestral mummies and mummies of former Inkas and their attendants, they were placed following their genealogical order, status and moiety divisions. They danced, sang, ate and drank, and the ancestral mummies were also fed and provided drink. They gave thanks to the creator (*Viracocha*) the sun and thunder gods. The Inka drank with them, and the sun had a large golden drinking vessel placed in front of him into which the Inka served him *chicha*. The principal priest took this vessel and poured the drink in the *ushnu* from where it ran via a tube to the houses of the sun, creator and thunder gods (*Coricancha*). The priest consumed and drank the sacrificed foods and drink. At the end of this day, the deities and people returned to their temples and houses (75–79). The celebration took four days, the second day was for the creator, Sun and Thunder gods, the third day for the moon and earth (mother) and on the final day all the subject nations of the Inka came with their *huacas* in their national dress, and they and their priests came to do homage to the creator, Huanacauri, sun and thunder (*ibid.*:94). This ritual acted to unite all the Inka groups *ayllus* and subject nations, and in a rigid and synchronised manner this ritual yearly pilgrimage manifested and defined the social political space of the Inka state (Urbano and Duviols, 1989:74, note 48), and indeed confirmed it in its purified unity.

Like the *Citua* runs *Capac Hucha* routes (as distinct from the location where the sacrifice was completed) were required to reach their limit at rivers or the sea (Duviols, 1976:21; Heffernan, 1996:27).

That the *ushnu* played a role in observations of sky phenomena and horizon observations for the purpose of the time keeping of the calendar is clear from a reference to this practice by the anonymous chronicler. He states:

The place taking the sun to enter the central two pillars was another pillar in the middle of the plaza, a pillar of well dressed stone, one estado high, in the middle of the plaza, in a place for that purpose was singled out, that they called *Osno*, and they measured the sun between the two pillars, and when it was exactly there, it was the time for sowing in the valleys of Cuzco and around. (translation by Zuidema, 1982b, with revision by Patricia J. Lyon) (Anonymous Chronicler, 1906 [1581–1585]:151; as quoted by Dearborn and Schreiber, 1989:61)

The Huarochiri manuscript refers to an *ushnu*. When Llocllay Huancupa (a *huaca*) disappeared the people grieved and searched for him. They went to the place where Lanti Chumpi (a local woman) had first discovered him and built him a step-pyramid (Salomon and Urioste, 1991:102). In the explanatory footnote (Salomon and Urioste, 1991:102, note 479) '*husnocta pircaspa*' is translated as literally meaning 'walling an *ushnu*'.

Cieza de León links the *ushnu* of Vilcashuaman with child sacrifice (1947 [1553]:435) and Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala says of *ushnus*, that the Inkas had in their dominion lands reserved for sacrifices named '*usno*' (ceremonial structure) which was always for *Capac Hucha* (human sacrifice) to the sun and to feed the *huacas* (using libations) (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980 [1583–1615]:236).

Carabajal notes that at the *ushnu* in Vilcas Huaman unblemished and flawless children, selected for their beauty were sacrificed in pairs, well prepared and adorned in beautiful clothes. They were offered to *Ticsi Viracocha*, the creator god, to the sun, the earth mother and a white llama was sacrificed to the thunder deity (Carabajal, 1965 [1586]:219). Pachacuti Inka arranged the sacrifices to the *huacas*, temples of the sun and Coricancha and the throne and seat of the Inka, named '*usno*', in every '*uamani*' (Inka administrative district) (idem 239). He refers to the *ushnu* as the throne of the Inka (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980 [1583–1615]:357). He also infers a level of political power inherent in the *ushnu* in a description of Don Francisco de Toledo, the Spanish Viceroy, on a visit to Vilcas Huamán. Toledo climbed the *ushnu*, and is said to have thus been received as the Inka himself by all the local nobility (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980 [1583–1615]:413). Francisco de Toledo in this gesture can be said to have assumed the Inka's power from his position on the structure.

The power that the seat or *ushnu*, engendered is illustrated in this description. In position on the *ushnu* the Inka became the conduit through which the three levels of *hanan pacha*, *kay pacha* and *uku pacha* were linked. In this position he in some sense embodied the link itself, and became one with the conduit, sharing in its spiritual power (Isbell, 1978:286).

The *ushnu* as an administrative tool enabled the Inka or his representative when in position on the *ushnu* to formulate the will of the state, sanctioned by the deities of the cosmos and the ancestors of the world below to mobilize the people. Through the ruler or his representative the sacred essence flowed as the maize beer flowed through the basin down into the world of the ancestors.

There are two interpretations current of what constituted an *ushnu*, the first is that it consisted of a masonry construction in the shape of a platform or truncated pyramid (Morris and Thompson, 1985:58–59). The *ushnu* itself would have been regarded as a *huaca* of considerable importance, which conceptually was linked to mountain worship (Kolata, 1993:109–111; Meddens, 1997). The second view sees the *ushnu* essentially as a basin or fountain associated with a gnomon, which acts as an axis mundi linking earthly ancestors and *huacas* with the deities of the cosmos (Zuidema, 1989a). Zuidema (1989a, 1989c) interprets the *ushnu* concept as signifying any *axis-mundi*-like vertical conduit, symbolically linking the heavens with the earth and underworld, earthly ancestors and *huacas* with the deities of the cosmos.

In the chronicle sources, essentially Betanzos's and Molina's versions agree with each other on the role of the *ushnu* as serving as a place for libations, although Betanzos links the platform with a basin. Betanzos, Albornoz, Cabello Valboa, Guaman Poma de Ayala, Carabajal and Santacruz Pachacuti Yamqui all include the presence of a stone platform in the definition of what constitutes an *ushnu*. It should be noted that none of the descriptions of the concept are contradictory. Importantly, Betanzos' is not describing the *ushnu* in Huacaypata in his description. He describes what happens in the provinces when the Inka, the son of the sun travels. The Inka embodies the sacred essence coming from the centre and coming from the *apu*. On the *ushnu* he *metaphorically and symbolically* replicates the libations acted out at Huacaypata on the *ushnu* located there. He completes the link between ancestors

apus and subjects. The people are linked into these connections by their sacrifices and the Inka generates obligations to him personally and his state by his public generosity to the people as expressed in his gifts to the ‘poor widows and orphans’ (Betanzos, 1987 [1551]:185–186).

Excavated *Ushnu* Examples

A small number of *ushnus* has been excavated or sampled and of these fewer still have been published. These include Pumpu which is situated in the central highlands on the Pampa de Junin at an altitude of c. 4,080 masl. The *ushnu* at Pumpu is located a little off-center in the principal plaza of the site. It measures 25.50 m × 20.50 m at the base and has an average height of 2.10 m. Its longitudinal axis is on a near north - south orientation, and it has a single staircase, which is 9 m wide and faces east (Matos, 1994:214–217). In its construction fill was used which was not local to the site (Matos, 1994:217). This fill includes river pebbles measuring between 0.10 and 0.15 m in diameter and weighing between 150 and 350 gr. (Matos, 1994:219). This provided the structure with good drainage characteristics.

The Inka city of Huanuco Pampa is situated some 150 km NE of the modern city of Huanuco in the department of the same name on a high plain at c. 3,800 masl. The *ushnu* at Huanuco Pampa, is also located centrally in the principal plaza and like the one at Pumpu is surrounded by open space. It measures 48 × 32 m at the base, and its height is c. 3.5 m. This platform is on a near east – west alignment, and its staircase faces south. The structure appears to have an earth and rock fill (Morris and Thompson, 1985:59).

The *ushnu* at Abancay, with the name of Usno-Moq’o measures 20.60 × 19.95 at the base and has a height of 7.5 m. It appears to have been built in isolation from other Inka structural remains, although this perception may be due to a lack of archaeological work in its vicinity rather than being a true reflection of reality. Its longitudinal axis is on a north-west by south-east orientation. Earlier unpublished excavations here apparently uncovered pottery and human remains, copper and gold pendants, a *conopa*, *spondylus* shell and stone agricultural tools. The follow up excavations by Oberti did not expose any artifactual material (Oberti, 1997:19).

The *ushnu* of el Shinkal de Quimivil is situated in the Hualfín valley in north-west Argentina. It measures c. 16 × 16 m and comprises a single platform approximately 2 m in height. On its north side it has a seat, and a staircase ascends it from its western side. Its longitudinal axis is on a north – south orientation. Its fill comprises soil and rubble, which alternately came from the Shinkal Mountain and the nearby river Simbolar. The Inkas constructed a pebble stone floor or *cocha*, some 80 cm below the current surface of the structure. Other concentrations of rubble, difficult to interpret were present. Possible evidence for *Capac Hucha* sacrifice was represented by human vertebrae and two molars, a bronze *tumi* and other fragmentary adornments, and Thorny Oyster or *Spondylus* shell. The structure had been reused

in colonial times for localised ritual activity or possibly a *pachamanca* (Raffino et al., 1997:22–37).

Fieldwork and Results

Ushnu Pata

The fieldwork completed as part of the work for this paper comprised test excavations in two separate *ushnus* in the department of Ayacucho in Southern Peru.

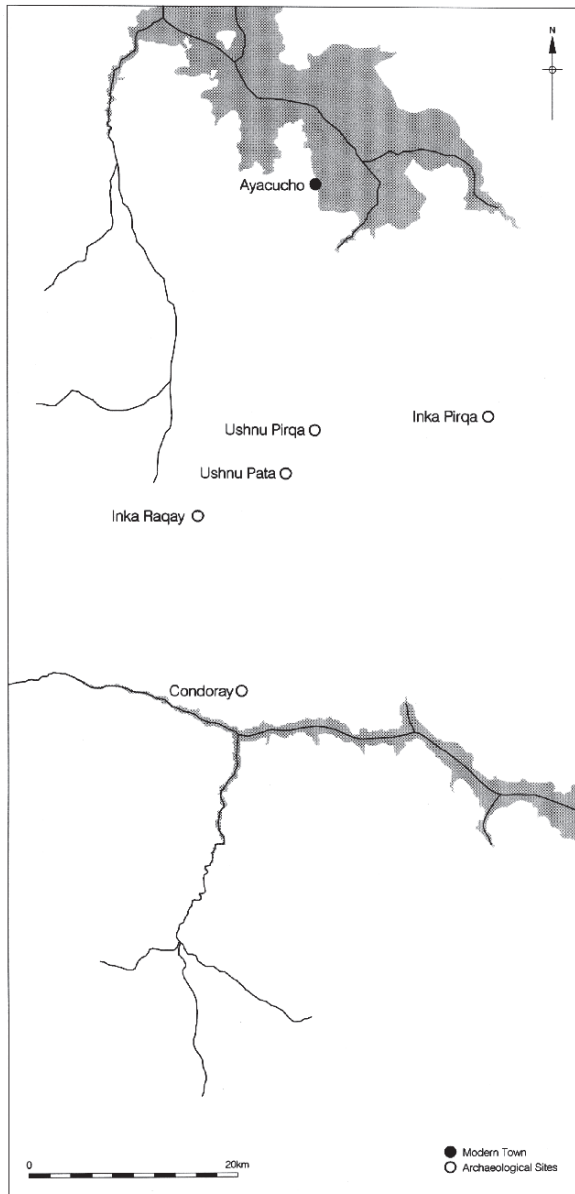
The first, *Ushnu Pata* is located on a low saddle forming the western margin of an ancient lakebed, at 13°23'57.3 S by 74°14'53.0" W and at an altitude of 3,664 masl (Fig. 10.4). To the west, the valley drops away and continues. Some 300m to the north is the Inka site of Inka Pirqa Pata at 13°23'46.04 South by 74°14'43.7" West and at an altitude of 3,700 masl. *Ushnu Pata* comprises a single platform measuring 15.30m in length by 12.80m in width. The platform is c. 1.4m high and the walls are c. 0.65 m wide and constructed out of finely fitting polygonal ashlar stonework (Fig. 10.5). The stones average about 0.30m across. The principal axis of the platform is on a NNE orientation of 44° off north. Along the south wall is a single step abutting the platform, providing access to the top (Fig. 10.6). It is located on a low rise or hill, separating two parts of the valley. A lower lying flat area comprising an extensive former lake-bed is located to the east of the platform. The valley gradually falls away to the west and opens up to lower lying agricultural fields and terrace systems.

Two test pits were excavated here. The first (trench 1 measuring 2 × 2 m) was located in front of the access step on the south side of the platform. The second (Trench 2) measuring 4 × 1 m was in the north-west corner, exposing both the interior of the structure and the area on the outside and in front of the platform wall. The central sector of the platform showed evidence of looting activity in the form of a rounded depression and what looked like an old spoil heap surrounding it. A large feature comprising a depression was located which appeared to constitute a quarry site for parts of the interior fill is located to the southwest side of the *ushnu*. This cut was oval in shape and measured c. 16 × 10 m by 1 m in depth (Fig. 10.6).

Much of the surrounding horizon profile comprised relatively near and rounded mountain topography. To the NNW however a distant denticulated horizon providing a markedly punctuated profile along which multiple mountain peaks are visible is present (Fig. 10.7) similar in aspect to that surrounding the whole of the site of Inka Pirqa.

The sequences in both test trenches below the level of the topsoil comprise repeated layers of mid grey dense soft rocky material followed by dark brown and black layers. This basic group of fills was repeated various times in the same order constituting the fill of the platform, and overlay the natural subsoil under the monument (Fig. 10.8).

Fig. 10.4 Site location map



The single access step to the top of the platform is located off center, on the south side of the short southeast wall of the platform. This access step abuts the ashlar wall rather than being keyed into it. Even though it facilitates access, it being only a single step it still leaves a significant rise of 0.8 m to reach the top level of the platform. The only find from the excavations here comprised a single small and un-diagnostic pottery body sherd.



Fig. 10.5 Polygonal ashlar wall of the Ushnu Pata platform

The platform was constructed by levelling the summit of the hill, followed by construction of the cut stone wall. This wall was built on top of the ground surface, without first cutting foundation trenches. The fills were subsequently placed inside the walled platform structure in relatively level horizontal layers as observed across the full extent of the test trenches, and by implication across the full extent of the platform. The layers comprised dark, predominantly sandy silts, interspaced with light compacted pebbly material, possibly crushed diatomite⁶ probably quarried from the cut situated to the south-west of the platform.

The alignment of the *Ushnu Pata* platform is north-east by south-west along its length axis. Its north-east corner is orientated approximately halfway between the summer or winter solstice events though this is unlikely to be related to these as the horizon, particularly in the direction of the summer solstice is obscured by a significant rise in the topography.

Inka Pirqa Pata

Circa 300m northeast (43°) of the *ushnu* platform at Ushnu Pata an occupation site called Inka Pirqa Pata is located, at 13°23'46.4" South and 74°14'43.7" West, at approximately 3,700masl. It is separated from Ushnu Pata by a flat plain named Ñuñuwayqo. The remains are located on the south-west slope of a low terraced rise. Mounds of rubble are visible and a modern irrigation canal cuts through the site.

⁶Diatomite or diatomaceous earth is a fine-grained sedimentary rock of friable chalky appearance made up in large parts of the skeletons of diatoms.

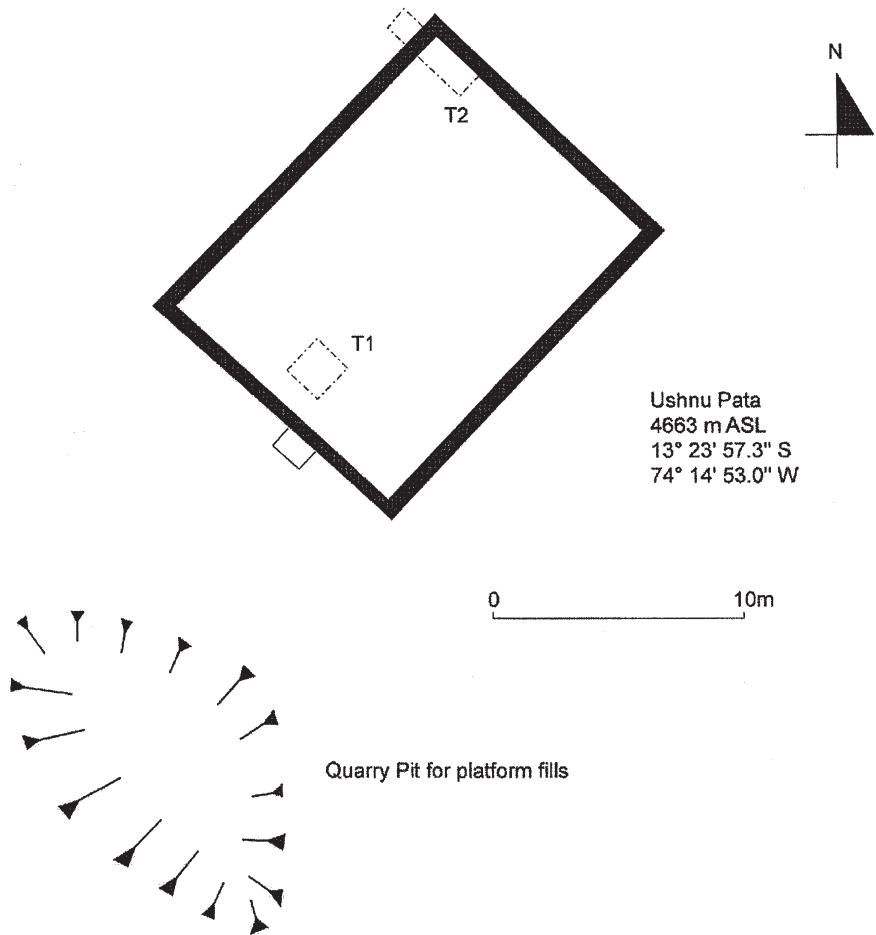


Fig. 10.6 Plan of Ushnu Pata platform

In the exposed section cut through by the construction of the canal, wall remains and stratified deposits are visible. A platform cut into the slope is present here, which is rectangular and measures approximately 15.7 × 12.2 m. Its length orientation is 225° and the wall widths is approximately 0.68 m. Half way across this platform a wall runs its entire width. The foundation of this wall appears to go the full height of the platform as could be observed in a hole, which appears to have been excavated centrally and up against it. The walls of the platform are of quarried fieldstone, moderate to large size, randomly coursed and set in clay mortar. The function of this platform is unclear and it appears to represent a different type of structure from the *ushnu* platforms



Fig. 10.7 North-northwest horizon profile at Ushnu Pata

Ushnu Pata - Trench 1

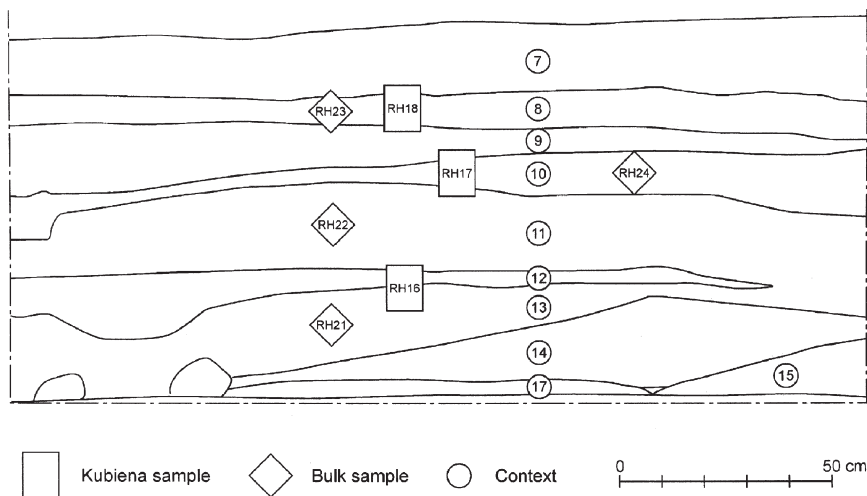


Fig. 10.8 Southeast section trench 1 showing layered profile

observed at the other sites. Finds present on the surface included stone agricultural tools such as part of a stone spade tip or *Chaquitactla* and pottery comprising provincial Inka and Late Intermediate Period style material.

Inka Raqay

Circa 13.4 km to the south west (313°) of Ushnu Pata is the site of Inka Raqay. It is located at $13^\circ 26' 37.5''$ South and $74^\circ 19' 26.0''$ West at an altitude of 3,768 masl. The site is on the edge of a modern reservoir. It has suffered extensive damage in the construction of the basin and subsequent stone robbing and looting. The foundations of large rectangular structures built in field stone and rough ashlar are visible on the surface, as are a number of carefully constructed drains and at least one elaborate rectangular bath with trapezoidal niches in three of its walls. Floor levels built of consolidated reddish clays can be observed. The site has been partially excavated by the Instituto Nacional de Cultura (Ayacucho) in advance of the construction of the reservoir, although it has not been published and falls outside the areas previously surveyed by Benavides (1976), MacNeish (MacNeish et al., 1981) and Lumbreras (1974). The settlement measures at least 300 meters across and appears to represent an elite Inka site. Part of it is below the water level of the adjoining basin and a second sizeable Inka settlement is reported to have disappeared in the building of the reservoir.

Condoray

The site of Condoray is located on a mountaintop overlooking the confluence of the Río Qaracha with the Río Pampas $13^\circ 35' 27.1''$ South by $74^\circ 17' 34.7''$ West, at an altitude of 4,119 masl. This represents a LIP fortified settlement site with relatively few surviving circular fieldstone built structures (<30). These tend to be less than 5 m in diameter. The site has segments of up to three walls encircling it. There is a LH re-use of the site with a definable Inka presence. A single rectangular building made of moderate quality polygonal ashlar measuring 10.05 m by 7.6 m with double faced 0.85 m wide walls is located on the southwest margin of the settlement looking directly up the Río Qaracha.

Two relatively small Inka type rectangular *ushnu* platforms are known to be located several hundred meters north of the site as is a third non-*ushnu* platform. These are planned to be included in future investigations.

Inka Pirqa

Inka Pirqa is located on a rounded mountaintop on the altiplano c. 27 km southeast of the city of Ayacucho, at $13^\circ 21' 40.2''$ South by $74^\circ 04' 38.2''$ West, and at an altitude of 4,340 masl (Fig. 10.4). The *ushnu* platform present here is situated on the summit of the mountain. It comprises three superimposed platforms. The basal one is little more than a rectangular outline of rocks, or very low double-faced fieldstone wall, barely a single rock in height, constructed directly on top of the ground surface.

The wall width here is 0.65 m. This lowest platform measures c. 32.7 m by 18.5 m. The second platform consists of a single faced wall, c. 1.07 m in height and measuring c. 24.5 by 11.4 m. The third and final platform is contained within a double-faced wall, c. 1.35 in height and 0.65 m wide. This stage measures 22.8 m in length by 9.6 m in width (Figs. 10.9 and 10.10). The walls of the *ushnu* are built out of selected and minimally modified fieldstone, which appears to have been quarried from rock outcrops in the immediate vicinity of the monument. The rocks used measure from c. 0.3 × 0.3 m to c. 0.4 × 0.7 m.

The structure is aligned on a north-east by south-west orientation of 73° off north. There are no steps or stair constructions facilitating access to the top (Fig. 10.9). On the long south-eastern side there were two sections of wall collapse which suggested tumbled down stairs. Excavation of one of these indicated however that steps had never existed here. Considering the wall heights of the second and third platforms (1.07 m and 1.35 m respectively) climbing to the top, though clearly, not impossible, would involve considerable agility. The absence of stairs suggests a number of possibilities. Firstly, the nature of the activities carried out here could have been at variance from the activities associated with stepped platforms with stairs, and did not involve regular accessing of the top platform. Alternatively, steps or a ramp would be added and removed at the times that the structure was in use (No obvious stock of materials reserved for this process was present in the vicinity of the structure). Thirdly, the structure was not finished at the time that it was abandoned

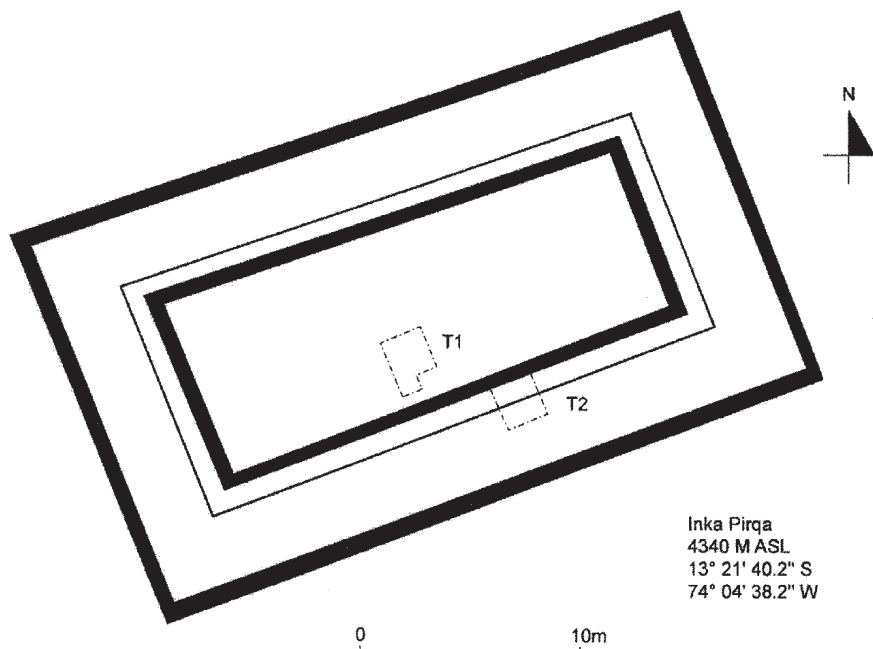


Fig. 10.9 Plan of Inka Pirqa platform



Fig. 10.10 The east face of the Inka Pirqa ushnu

and there had not been time to construct the steps. The latter possibility would mean that the construction of stairs was the last part of the building process involving steps not keyed into the *ushnu* walls. The presence of the single step access, not keyed into the structure's wall at Ushnu Pata perhaps favours the last of these possible interpretations.

Information on the placement of stairs at other *ushnu* platforms is limited, although published images of ones at Huanuco Pampa (Morris and Thompson, 1985) and el Shinkal de Quimivil (Raffino et al., 1997) suggest that stairs here too may be abutting these platforms rather than being keyed into their walls.

The location of the site of Inka Pirqa offers a remarkable view of the major mountain peaks and ranges present in the departments of Ayacucho, Huancavelica and Apurimac. Ampay, Uripe, Condoray, Qarawarasu, Apacheta and Rasuwilca can all be seen from this platform, as can many lesser peaks. The panorama is uninterrupted except by these major features which rise slightly above the far off, ragged horizon profile. The distances over which these features are visible are considerable, Qarawarasu for example is approximately 110km away as the crow flies to the SSE, on an orientation of 168° (Fig. 10.11).

The alignment of the platform appears not to be related to that of the summer and winter solstices which are at 114° and 66° respectively. Any possible observable near horizon solar positions related to particular parts or sections of the horizon profile and to solstice or other Inka seasonal festivals remain to be further investigated. Similarly, no obvious alignment characteristics relevant to the lunar cycle have been identified, though a link between the observable horizon profile and particular lunar settings or rising events remains a possibility.

Similar to the archaeological sequence at Ushnu Pata the Inka Pirqa platform fills below the topsoil comprise a layer of pale brown grit and gravel and pebble



Fig. 10.11 The south-southeast horizon profile from Inka Pirqa with Qarawarasu visible

sized angular stone followed by a layer of black to dark brown sandy silts in turn overlying a repeated sequence of similar materials (Fig. 10.12). There was some evidence of looting of the platform comprising a large shallow angled cut.

Evidence for three further steep sided narrow and deep cut features was uncovered. The first measured 0.75 m in diameter at the top, 0.10 m in diameter at the base and it had a depth of 0.92 m [13] (Fig. 10.12). The second had a top diameter of 0.65 m, and was excavated to a depth of 1.65 m, at which point it was approximately 0.35 m in diameter. It remained unfinished as it became impossible to finish this excavation for health and safety considerations with the available resources. The top of the third steep sided cut [38] was observed near the base of the west facing section in Trench 1. The only finds recovered from the excavations comprised a few ‘odd’ shaped rocks of stone types not local in origin, which came from the steep sided deep cuts.

The two excavated and partially excavated steep sided cuts appear to have been fashioned fairly soon following the completion of the construction of the platform. They were positioned side by side and the shallower one [13] cut the deeper one [19]. These features do not appear to represent looting pits as they were carefully constructed and steep sided. One interpretation favoured by the excavators is that the platform was built by first constructing the walls, perhaps followed by placement of offerings in specific locations around the base of the structure. This would then have been followed by carefully putting the platform fills into place — these being put in a pre-selected sequence of structured layers. Following completion of the construction, steep sided cuts were inserted over the locations of the original offerings in order to be able to ‘feed’ these same with libations and offerings at appropriate times.

Inka Pirqa - Trench 1

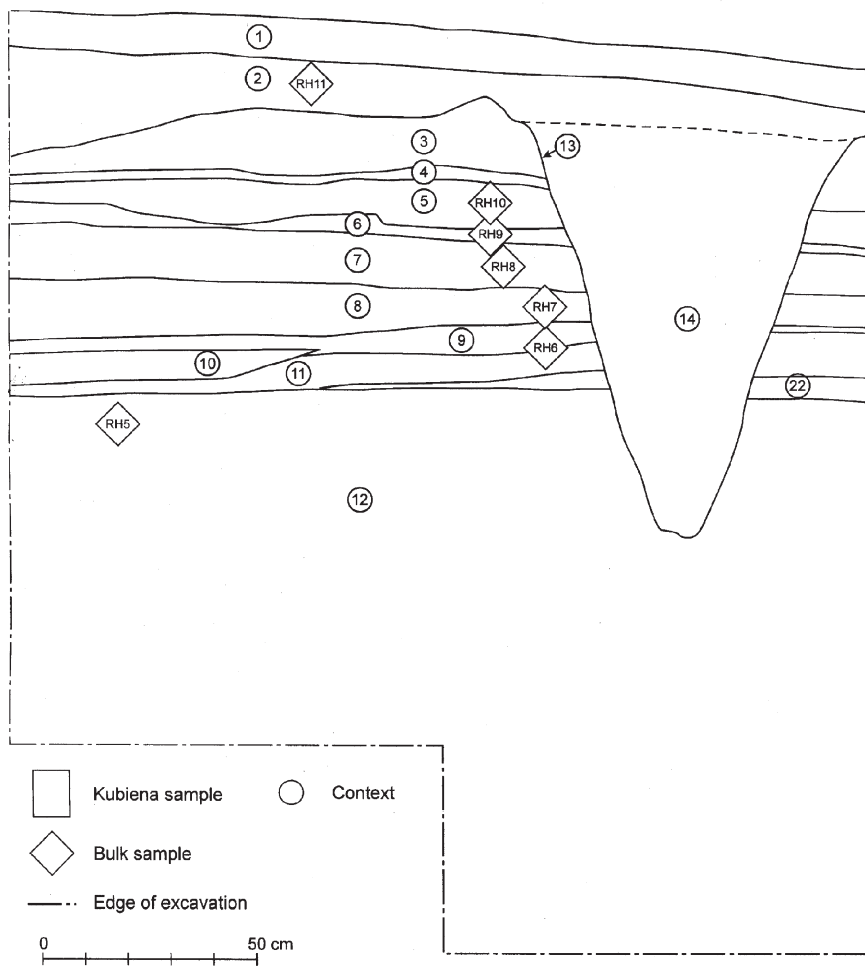


Fig. 10.12 The south section of trench 1 at Inka Pirqa showing steep sided cut [13] and layering of fills

Clearly with the data currently available the interpretation of the role of the steep sided cuts has to remain a hypothesis. It would however make sense in the light of what is known of Andean offering traditions. Both in terms of earlier cultures such as the cut stone chambers at the Middle Horizon site of Huari just to the North of Ayacucho, which had well constructed feeding channels. Isbell has identified a series of Middle Horizon tomb types at Conchopata and Huari some of which have access holes such as Cist interments (Type 3), Bedrock cavity interments (type 4), and Mortuary Room Interments (Type 5). These holes served to make repeated offerings long after burial of the dead (Isbell, 2004:8–20). The provision of libations

at Huacaypata in Cuzco to both dead ancestors and structured sacred places within this public space can be seen in a similar light. The circulation of sacred essence or *Sami*, *Samay*, *wasisami* or *enqa* is fundamental to the Andean cultural model (Allen, 1988:207–208; Bolin, 1998:xiii, 9, 36 passim; Flores Ochoa, 1977:211–237; Staller, this volume). The circulation of this animating essence constructs the bond between people and the animating forces of their environment. The bond between descendants and their ancestors comprises a fundamental link in maintaining the stability and fertility of this relationship. It also re-enforces the legitimacy of claim the people can make to the resources in their landscape. Many further examples of feeding of ancestors and sacred *huacas* are known from the various Late Horizon Inka and indeed non-Inka traditions. With respect to one of the *ushnu*'s focal aspects being on the ancestors in *uku pacha*, their feeding through shafts fits with Andean tradition.

The analysis performed on the samples taken from the Inca Pirca platform comprised organic matter content (loss on ignition); calcium carbonate analysis; particle size analysis; soil geochemistry, and thin section analysis.

The results of this work indicate that the sequence of horizontally laid down layers represent sets of soil profiles, which mimic 'local' agricultural soil packages. What cannot be confirmed or negated on the existing data resolution is whether this stratigraphic sequence of repeated soil packages comprises inverted soil profiles or ones, which have been placed right side up. An aspect of inversion of the soil profile is apparent in the groundbreaking activities associated with the use of the foot-plough (*taquitaccla*), where the sods are overturned and the turf is inverted to the base of the profile. This inversion of sods of earth has been interpreted in contemporary Andean culture in the Department of Apurimac, as an inversion of the seasons and finishing the rainy season, 'a reversal of the worlds of the living and the dead', and a setting in motion of the next year's agricultural cycle (Gose, 1994:184; Staller, this volume). If further analysis confirms the hypothesis of inverted agricultural soil packages constituting the fill of high altitude *ushnu* platforms than a focus on the ancestors or Mallqui appears justified in its interpretation.

The analysis of the micromorphology of a thin section sample through a stratigraphic sequence of a dark, a light, followed by a further dark layer was analysed. The dark layers comprise humic stained fine material in the form of loose or partially welded faunal excrements that are interspersed with angular clasts of quartz-rich rocks (quartzite and possibly also granitic) – only weakly weathered.

The light layers comprise non-humic orange silty clay irregularly dispersed between angular to subangular clasts of a wide range of rocks including basalt, silty mudstone and a granitic rock – the first two are extremely weathered.

There is no doubt that we are dealing with topsoil material (dark) and subsoil material (light) that has been transported from elsewhere. There is an outside chance that they come from the same soil – in which case, the basalt and silty mudstone must have been completely removed by weathering prior to movement and the rock components in the topsoil would be residual, a possibility which is considered to be highly unlikely. Most likely, the topsoil was removed from a site where the soil developed in a parent material containing quartzite/granitic rocks, whereas the

subsoil was removed from a different site where the soil developed in a parent material dominated by basalt rocks.

The results from soil geochemistry indicates a ‘local’ origin for the repeated soil and subsoil packages present in the *ushnu* fill. ‘Local’ in this sense does not necessarily mean the immediate vicinity of the platform, as the thin section results are consistent with an origin of these deposits from the soils derived from the general geomorphological structure characteristic of the region, but not a match for the soils around and under the platform. A hypothesis where the fills were brought to the platform by the *ayllus* under the administrative aegis of the platform from their local ancestral agricultural fields, therefore is a possibility. Separate agricultural soil sequences being placed inverted in the Inca Pirqa platform, form a physical link with the ancestors of the *ayllus* who were being drawn in to a relationship with the Inka administrative center at Cuzco. This link is both symbolic and metaphorical through mediations, rituals and sacrifices being completed at the platform, as these would present an elegant Andean construct to the building of the platform in first place.

Each *ayllu* responsible for a contribution to the construction of the platform in this model would contribute ‘ancestral’ soil from their agricultural lands. Each contribution would form a physical and metaphorical link between the *ushnu* structure and the various contributing *ayllus* homelands.

Ushnu Pirqa

Ushnu Pirqa is situated on a rounded mountaintop on the altiplano at 13°21′42.0″ South by 74°14′11.0″ West, at an altitude of 4,175 masl (Fig. 10.4). The structure present at this location comprises a rectangular walled feature. It measures 9.9 by 6.6 m (exterior measurements). The walls average 0.75 m in width. Its long walls are on an orientation of 333: off North. The height of the walls averages 1.05 m and there is no evidence for doorways, niches or windows (Fig. 10.5).

The stones used in its construction consist of faced fieldstones, which vary in size from approximately 0.35 m × 0.35 m to 0.70 m × 0.56 m (Figs. 10.13 and 10.14). They have been fitted into the wall taking account of their individual shapes, on average the stones on the interior face are smaller than those on the exterior, and both exterior and interior faces are flat.

Circular configurations of stones at floor level on the inside of the structure lead one to suspect that these may be positions of offerings, *pagos* or sacrifice. As this site was not included in the excavation permit, no exploration test pits were completed here.

Since the toponym for the site is Ushnu Pirqa and that the structure does not appear to represent a building for habitation, the possibility has to be considered that it represents uncompleted *ushnu* platform still under construction.

Its location would be consistent with the other examples of high altitude *ushnu* platforms recorded in the vicinity of Ayacucho. Compared with the stepped construction

Ushnu Pirqa
4175 m ASL
13° 21' 42.0" S
74° 14' 1.10" W

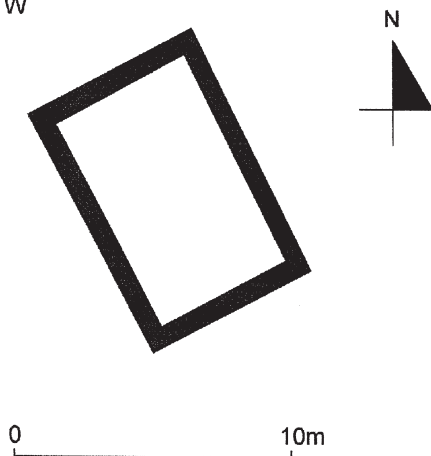


Fig. 10.13 Plan of the Ushnu Pirqa structure



Fig. 10.14 South face of the Ushnu Pirqa structure

of Inka Pirqa this rectangular walled feature could represent the central platform of a stepped platform. The top platform at Inka Pirqa is also double faced as is the wall of the single platform at Ushnu Pata. The interior fills at both these platforms were deposited subsequent to the construction of the walls. Therefore, a construction

such as at Ushnu Pirqa lacking features consistent with those of a domestic building could be an unfinished platform where the interior fills were never put in place.

GIS Analysis, Visibility and Intervisibility

As part of the current investigation, preliminary analysis was completed to test the hypothesis that the location of high altitude *ushnus* in the Peruvian Andes was determined on the basis of intervisibility between these structures and other landscape features. This work was carried out by Naomi Riddiford using ArcView GIS facilities at Royal Holloway. The basis for the analysis was formed by the 1:100,000 scale contour map, two known and one possible *ushnu* in the area, an elite Inka occupation site, a second Inka habitation site and a Chanka/Inka mountaintop settlement. Clearly, at this stage of the current project, the results are limited both by the extent of the total area digitised and the small number of Inka sites in the sample. Despite this fact a number of interesting preliminary conclusions can be reached. Ushnu Pirqa is only visible to the occupation site at Inka Raqay, and *vice versa*. Ushnu Pata and the settlement site of Inka Pirqa Pata are visible to one another. Inka Pirqa is effectively invisible, as it can neither see nor be seen from the *ushnus* or the occupation sites. It is interesting to note that the orientation of Ushnu Pata (44°) is almost identical to the angle between Inka Raqay and Ushnu Pirqa (43°) when connected by a straight line. The areas from which a site can be seen and those that can be seen from it as defined for Inka Raqay, Ushnu Pata and Inka Pirqa Pata are also close to this orientation⁷ Thus it may be suggested that these structures were deliberately positioned to maximise visibility from them (Riddiford, 2004).

The concept that Inkas aimed to link *hanan pacha*, through *kay pacha* with *uku pacha* via *ushnu* construction may be reflected in the Ayachucho *ushnu* locations: The areas which can be seen from them and which they can be seen from extend from immediately adjacent to agricultural land and settlement up the mountainside and then to the *ushnus* themselves. This may provide an ideological linkage between the Inkas, their ancestors and their gods. The evidence suggests that visibility exerted an important influence on the choice of the location of these *ushnu* sites. Thus *ushnu* intervisibility with landscape features such as *huacas* and mountains is reflected in the corresponding areas from which they can be seen, and which can be observed from them throughout the landscape, rather than in the possibility of identifying other *ushnu* locations from any particular one (Riddiford, 2004). The latter may however also be a consequence of the sample size.

Inka Pirqa differs from the other *ushnus* in a number of ways. These differences suggest it may have performed a distinct role. Its orientation (73°) varies greatly from that of the other sites. Taking the view that *ushnu* orientation reflects the focus of the area that is meant to be seen from it and vice-versa it is possible to infer that

⁷The view shed orientation discussed here relates to the short axis, i.e. 90° to the line of sight.

Inka Pirqa principally focuses on the north and south horizons. This may reflect the location of an Inkan settlement at Ayacucho, or possibly one beyond at Huamanguilla. However, the visible landscape clearly also extends to the west and southwest. Although Inka Pirqa is invisible from the remaining *ushnu*, it clearly has the most extensive view. This is due to its location on a mountain summit. Distant mountain peaks constituting key Inkan *wamanis* are visible from Inka Pirqa. Qarawarasu for example is c. 110km away as the crow flies to the SSE, on an orientation of 168°, and features up to 130km away can be seen from this site.

Other distinguishing features of Inka Pirqa are that it is the only tiered platform, which mimics the mountain upon which it is situated. Its location was chosen due to the visibility of distant key Inkan sites and landscape features, thereby providing a visual linkage with the wider kingdom. This is further supported by the inclusion of rocks and stones, which are not of local origin in cut features in the *ushnu*, which may provide a tangible link with some of these distant sites. Thus, the other *ushnus* and occupation sites relate to the local scale, whereas the nearby Inka Pirqa *ushnu* provides a regional focus. This suggests a hierarchical approach to *ushnu* location. There are therefore at least two levels of *ushnu*. The first has a local focus, tying sites within a valley or site complex into a system of ritual locations and sacred sites visible from the *ushnu* within the local landscape. The second has a regional or interregional focus, where it serves to visually tie in interregional landscape features such as mountaintops or *wamanis* into the state's ritual landscape from the top of this type of *ushnu*.

The effectively isolated location of the high altitude *ushnus*, makes their low structural height surprising. In order to ensure that these features were visible in the landscape, their structural height would need to have been considerably increased. The area, which can be seen from them, extends over vast ranges of the landscape (distances of over 130km are projected for Inka Pirqa).⁸ They themselves are however not obvious and it is therefore what can be seen from them rather than where they can be seen from which is the operative notion in the planning of their positions.

The distance between Inka Raqay and Ushnu Pirqa is c.12 km. Thus although these two sites are in theory intervisible, the height of Ushnu Pirqa (1.35 m) is not enough to make it visible at this distance. However the unfinished state of Ushnu Pirqa means that its final height is unknown. The location of Ushnu Pata does not favour visibility in the landscape: Unlike Inka Pirqa and Ushnu Pirqa, it does not have a mountain top location. The natural horizon profile is therefore not disrupted. This substantially reduces Ushnu Pata's potential visibility (Riddiford, 2004). There is a tendency for the structures to blend in with their surroundings. High altitude *ushnus* are deliberately positioned to maximise visibility.

The GIS analysis therefore leads us to the preliminary conclusions that the location of Inkan settlement and agriculture exerted an influence on the choice of *ushnu* sites. *Ushnu* visibility aspects provided an ideological linkage between the Inkas,

⁸Further work must include the plotting of *ushnus*, their locations, orientations, heights, stairs, steps, associations, etc.

their ancestors and their deities. There was a hierarchical approach to *ushnu* function and geographic location. *Ushnu* location was determined by the view observed from these sites, and they were built to blend into the landscape, with their construction deliberately mimicking the natural surroundings (Riddiford, 2004).

Discussion

The Ushnus Investigated

Two *ushnu* platforms located at high altitude and in isolation from occupation sites were tested by excavation of two exploratory pits in each. These sites are Inka Pirqa, which translates as Inka wall, and Ushnu Pata, which could translate as steps or tapering slope (González Holguín, 1989:280) or high point, edge or top (Soto Ruiz, 1976:85) of the *ushnu*. A further isolated potential *ushnu* platform was visited and surveyed although no excavations were done here. This site is known by the name of Ushnu Pirqa, which means 'Ushnu wall'. Two Inka sites in the vicinity of the tested sites were visited and linked into the study, these comprised the settlement and administrative site of Inka Raqay and a small settlement site called Inka Pirqa Pata and the more distant mountaintop Late Intermediate Period Chanka and Late Horizon Inka settlement of Condoray. The platforms of Inka Pirqa and Ushnu Pata, other than their walling, their structured fills, certain cut features at Inka Pirqa and a single potsherd from Ushnu Pata, lacked cultural material.

The structured fills uncovered in these platform structures comprised a sequence of topsoil and subsoil followed by a repeated set of similarly configured layers. These comprised angular blocky gravel, representing weathered bedrock material, followed by layers of dark brown and black soil overlying a further layer of broken up bedrock. This series of layers was repeated a number of times down to the underlying natural.

The structured fills have been interpreted as sequences of possibly inverted natural soil profiles with 'natural bedrock' at the top followed by a dark soil horizons overlying the next set starting again with 'natural subsoil'. These fills though likely to come from the general region do not originate in the immediate vicinity of the *ushnu*.

The stone used in the construction of the walls of Inka Pirqa appeared to have been quarried from nearby bedrock outcrops. The bedrock here comprised igneous granite-like material associated in places with large veins of white quartz. The origin of the stones used in the construction of the walls at Ushnu Pata remains to be identified (it may be a form of andesite), but is thought unlikely to have come from any great distance away. Although as is indicated in recent work by Ogburn a distant source is not impossible, and certainly in the light of this study is worth further investigation (Ogburn, 2004).

Most of the few other excavated *ushnus* known, such as at Pumpu (Matos, 1994), Huanuco Pampa (Morris and Thompson, 1985) and El Shinkal de Quimivil (Raffino

et al., 1997) are associated with occupation sites. In the cases of Pumpu and Huanuco Pampa with substantial administrative centres of urban proportions.

Ushnu Location

Valderrama and Escalante note a structure of opposition and complementarity, namely that between culture and nature. Culture (village) → Nature (mountain) in their study of the community of Yanque Urinsaya and Yanque Hanansaya in the Colca valley (Valderrama and Escalante, 1988:210). Similarly, Billie Jean Isbell observed in her work on the village of Chuschi, Ayacucho that the people here view the valley as civilised and the *puna* as wild or savage (Isbell, 1978:164). That these beliefs are deeply rooted in Andean thinking and go back at least to the early colonial period, and almost certainly well into the Late Horizon, becomes clear in the Huarochirí Manuscript. Here green irrigable valley lands are viewed as female, whereas snow-capped mountaintops where river waters originate are viewed as male. Water is seen as male and violent in association with *wamani* and *apu* (Salomon and Urioste, 1991:15, 115). Water embodies the transcendence of the pairs of opposites in that it also has female connotations when associated with *pachamama* and life giving rain.

Verticality following an *axis mundi* concept appears to reflect aspects of linking *kay pacha*, *uku pacha* and *hanaq pacha* by means of the *ushnu* platform structure (Staller, this volume). The fills of the platforms in themselves may well be structured to demonstrate these aspects of vertical linkages. The isolated high altitude *ushnus* sampled in Ayacucho (in particular the Inka Pirqa site) were located in a part of their environment that the Inkas would have characterised as 'wild'. This would have constituted locations at, or above the limit of cultivation. In order to create this aspect of verticality, a structured deposit of materials within their fills reflected cultivated cultural soils associated with lower altitudes. It would also demonstrate the 'cultural' cultivated versus 'wild, untamed' uncivilized dichotomy. It would conceptually link the 'wild' high altitude *Apu* world with the lower cultivated, domesticated valley environment.

This dichotomy of wild versus domesticated and cultural is one which has been recognized in early colonial and late Inka thinking, with respect both to an opposition between valley and *altiplano* human populations, domesticated and wild untamed animals and cultivated and wild soils (Staller, this volume). This model could be used to explain the deposition of structured fill sequences as observed at Inka Pirqa and Ushnu Pata, particularly if the inverted depositional sequence is seen as providing an agricultural soil for the ancestors.

The *quechua* term for guano or fertilizer is *wanu*, which comes from the word *wañuy*, which means death or die and refers to decaying organic material (Gose, 1994:113). The fact that the dark layers of fill in the Inka Pirqa *ushnu* comprise in part loose or partially welded faunal excrements, though the evidence does not confirm a purposeful addition of fertilizer, is suggestive in this context of a direct

link with the world of the dead and the ancestors. The link between the dead and agriculture in the Andes is of great antiquity, with many modern Andean peoples metaphorically equating burial with sowing (Gose, 1994:114; Harris, 1982:52). The dead or *malqui* were in prehispanic times interpreted as seed or plants, with roots in the underworld and with their stone *huanca* or metaphorical double, having its principal face turned or inverted to the side where the sun rises in the world above (Duvoils, 1973:164). The interleaving dark and light layers with black relating to the ancestors and the underworld and white to the sun and the world above (Staller, this volume), further emphasizes the verticality and link with the underworld and the ancestors in the construction of the *ushnu*. The inversion and colour oppositions reflecting the Andean concept of dualistic oppositions (Staller, this volume).

This same dichotomy may also be reflected in the structured fills of the *ushnus* located in lower lying cultivated lands and habitation sites. These would, in this model, reflect a link with wild undomesticated nature and the *apus* (mountain deities). Their fills should therefore comprise rubble fills or rock, mimicking natural bedrock/mountain locations.

As a working hypothesis concerning some of the differences observed between the high altitude *ushnus*, sampled at Inka Pirqa and Ushnu Pata in Ayacucho, remote from areas of habitation and forming the subject of this report, and the other excavated ones, which to a greater or lesser extent have been published may lie in the location of the latter, in close proximity to, or forming part of habitation sites. Other aspects of relevance relate to whether the *ushnu(s)* is or are part of a local network of shrines and deities. These associations can for example be postulated for the *ushnu* at Laymi in the Chicha valley (Meddens and Schreiber, 2008) or the one at Sayhuite (Van de Guchte, 1990), or whether they are part of a larger long distance of extended interregional ceque/shrine network, such as identified by Zuidema (1982a) and Heffernan (1996). Certainly some *ushnu* sites are closely linked to these, such as Vilcashuaman and Tambo Colorado.

Soil Classifications

Currently Andean communities employ complex soil classification schemes. These are in some elements at variance from occidental schemes of classification. These types of categorization are likely to be of considerable antiquity as unlike religious schemes there was little reason for the colonial, church or republican authorities to attempt to modify them. These types of classification would have been taught from a very early age and form some of the basic elements relevant to agricultural productivity. They would therefore have been included in the basic repertoire of elements needed for the population to survive.

The Yanque community from the Colca valley defines the key characteristics of soils on the basis of temperature, humidity, texture, colour, topography and fertility. All these variables are used together in order to define any specific soil type (Valderrama and Escalante, 1988:82–85).

That these systems of classification are widespread in Andean thinking is reflected in the Cuzco quechua agricultural terminology which similarly uses a wide range of terms distinguishing ranges of moisture, fertility, compaction, composition, topography, crop suitability and extent to which a soil has been lying fallow (Beyersdorf, 1984). In addition, there is a ritual and religious vocabulary including terms such as *harawi*; a ritual song dedicated to the soil (Beyersdorf, 1984:34), *haywarikuy*; a ritual sacrifice to the earth at the start of the agricultural year (*ibid.*:38), *t'inkasqa*; a toast to the earth and seed prior to the harvest (*ibid.*:114); and *wanka*; a loud and festive cry to the earth when harvesting maize (*ibid.*:121). These have survived centuries of Hispanic influence and continue to form part of the Quechua agricultural technology serving to ensure productive arable processes.

Use and Movement of Soil and Stone in the Construction of Temples and Shrines

The *mitmaq* for the Island of the Sun in lake Titicaca were based at Copacabana. Special agricultural terraces had been constructed on the island for the shrine, with good and fertile soil brought in from a great distance. This was so that maize could be grown there, because of it being very cold (high altitude) and maize could not normally be grown there. With much tending they managed to grow small numbers of maize plants. (Vega, 1723:105).

While constructing the cathedral of Cuzco Polo de Ondegardo established that the original soil from the plaza of Huacaypata had been taken away to other places as 'it was greatly esteemed'. The plaza was covered in a thick layer (c. 0.5 m and more in places) of coastal sea sand littered with offerings (gold and silver vessels and tiny gold and silver figurines and camelids are mentioned). This sand had been brought up to Huacaypata 'out of reverence to *Tizibriacocha* (Titi *Viracocha*) to whom they mainly offer their sacrifices' (Polo de Ondegardo, 1965 [1571]:118–119).

The stone with which the Inka palaces and the Temple of the Sun in Tumibamba in the province of the Cañaris (present day Cuenca, Ecuador) were constructed was brought from Cuzco, (a distance of 400 leagues, c. 1,700 km) on order of the king Huayna Capac and his father Tupac Inka. This was done to favour and honour the inhabitants of this province, as these stones were sacred. Not only did the Temple of the Sun (in Tomebamba) look like the one in Cuzco, *it was the one in Cuzco* (Vega, 1723:270–271), for having been made of the same materials.

The claim for building stone having been transported from Cuzco to Ecuador and in particular to Tomebamba is also made by a number of other 16th and early 17th century chroniclers. These include Cabello de Balboa (1951 [1586]:376–377), Cieza de León (1984 [1553]:145, 1985:190) Guaman Poma de Ayala (1980 [1615]), Murua 1946 [1590]:103 and Polo de Ondegardo (1916 [1571]:111–112). Cieza de León makes mention of Inka operations which involved moving hills or

mountains (1985 [1553]:190), a statement supported by Murua (1946 [1590]:111).

Dennis Ogburn has confirmed in his research that stone originating in the Rumicolqa quarry in Cuzco was moved c. 1,700km from Cuzco to Ecuador to be used in Inka buildings there. The Andesite stones were geochemically characterized using wavelength dispersive X-ray Fluorescence (XRF spectrometry) (Ogburn, 2004:419–439). The stones in this transport ranged in size from 41 × 42 × 43 cm to 143 × 47 × 40cm and are estimated to weigh from 200 to 700kg (Ogburn, 2004:422).

Archaeologically the tradition of moving quantities of stone, aggregate and soil to provide a tangible and material link between separate and distinct spatial entities is of considerable antiquity and has been confirmed in the excavation of the Akapana temple pyramid at the site of Tiwanaku (c. AD 300–1000) (Staller, this volume). Carefully placed layers of green gravel had been used in its construction. This gravel came from the Quimsachata and Chila mountain range to the south. These mountain ranges represented important mountain deities in the Tiwanaku pantheon. Alan Kolata (1993:109–143) interpreted the temple structure and that of the adjoining Puma Punku complex as mimicking mountains present in the Quimsachata range.

The issue with respect to the equating of a sacred shrine or body with another by incorporating physical elements of one in the other does not mean that the whole structure of one had to be built of parts of the other. Small fragments of named *huacas* are known to have been used to recreate these same *huacas* elsewhere following their destruction during the Colonial extirpation campaigns, much to the disgust of the Spanish priest in charge of putting an end to native religious beliefs (Molina, 1989:131–132). Examples can be seen in Cristobal de Albornoz's campaign against Taqui Onqoy. Doubles of Inka rulers are known to have existed, comprising of idols, which held a small piece of the Inka concerned (such as a few strands of hair or nail clippings). Symbolic transference of the sacred identity of *pacarinas* is known to have been achieved by pouring a sample of water from the original source into the newly appropriated spring or lake or by placing a textile which had previously been draped over the original source *huaca* over the newly selected stone, in the case of *mitimac* emigrants (Albornoz in Duvoils, 1967:21). The use of limited or even symbolic contributions of soil or stone to link and equate one structure with another does of course not help in creating a testable model to establish the physical existence of such a link. The fact is that we know that some physical part of the structure with which a shrine is linked will be incorporated within it but that this physical element could be very small indeed and need not be present in sufficient quantities to show up in test results which we can obtain with current techniques.

Ushnu Construction

The site of Ushnu Pirqa with its potentially unfinished *ushnu* should be considered in the light of the terminology used to describe the building of an *ushnu* in the

Huaro-chiri manuscript. When Llocllay Huancupa (a *huaca*) disappeared the people grieved and searched for him. They went to the place where Lanti Chumpi (a local woman) had first discovered him and built him a step-pyramid (Salomon and Urioste, 1991:102). In the explanatory footnote (*ibid.*:102, note 479). '*husnocta pircaspa*' is translated as literally meaning 'walling an *ushnu*'. Duviols (1984:202) describes *ushnu*-like shrines as 'towers' built around an axis or shaft at which worship was celebrated. Firstly, the reference in the Huaro-chiri manuscript could be taken to refer to the method of construction of the *ushnu* platform. The immuring being completed first followed by the deposition of the fills inside the walling, a construction method now confirmed in excavation. Duviols' concept to the *ushnu* as being built around a shaft would make sense with respect to the placement of *Capac Hucha* sacrifices as part of the foundation offerings in the construction of the *ushnu* structure.

Steps and Liquids

Steps as a form are part of a widely distributed Andean land / mountain concept (de Bock, 2002:14). Steps in structures, in a stairs configuration, are in Inka thinking linked with liquids. This idea is obvious from the stairs and cascade combination associated with the sun temple at Machu Picchu and the stairs and cascade structure which is part of the temple building at the site of Sayhuite (located between Abancay and Curahuasi). In both instances, cascades serve to link separate temple precincts by the use of sacred liquid and essence. In the case of Machu Picchu, the Temple of the Sun with the temple of the Condor, and at Sayhuite the Upper temple with the lower *ushnu*. In the case of Machu Picchu, the aspect of the condor as a messenger of the mountain deities (*wamanis* or *apus*) should be mentioned, and the fact that the temple of the Condor here is positioned below the cascade in the lower sector of the site, in the opposite of the location where a real condor might be expected. Stepped platforms or steps leading up to the top of a platform include a visual and visible expressions of and reference to running water.

The number of steps forming the *ushnu* platform can clearly vary. Why this should be is at present unclear. Three levels such as at Inka Pirca are relatively common with other examples being the Huanuco Pampa platform (Morris and Thompson, 1985), Usno Moq'o in Abancay (Oberti, 1997) and the Pumpu *ushnu* (Matos, 1994). Three steps could be an expression of a *kay pacha*, *hurnin pacha* and *uku pacha* symbolism. Vilcashuaman even has four steps. Single levels such as at Ushnu Pata also have a wide distribution, with el Shinkal in Northeast Argentina (Raffino et al., 1997) constituting another example.

Similarly, the stairs mounting the platforms vary both in orientation and in the number of steps they have. They can be completely absent such as is the case with Inka Pirqa. They can have a very limited number of steps as with Ushnu Pata, which has only one, or significant sequences, such as el Shinkal de Quimivil, which has nine, Pumpu thirteen and Ushnu Moq'o which has fifty-three.

The lack of obvious drainage structures within or in the immediate vicinity of the Ayacucho *ushnu* platforms requires explanation. It may be that the steep sided shaft-like cuts in the Inka Pirqa platform can be viewed as fulfilling this role. The lack of more obvious drainage structures could be seen as being at variance to the perceived link of *ushnus* with libation offerings and fountains (Meddens, 1997; Zuidema, 1989a). It may be that the explanation for this characteristic of these *ushnus* derives from the isolated location of these particular platforms, it may be the result of the limitations of the excavation sampling strategy used. They draw in the world of the ancestors, *apus* and *wamanis* into the network of Inka social, economic and political exchange and structure. The use of shaft features may be more appropriate in this context.

Circulation of Life Force, Fluid, Blood Chicha and Water

The flow of life force or *sami* underlies all cultural activities in Andean belief systems (Allen, 1988:207–208). The continued vitality of sacred places, shrines and *huacas* is dependent on the feeding of these *huacas* and through them the nourishing of the ancestors and the supernatural. The ritualized exchange of offerings in a reciprocal relationship, in return for well-being, stability and fertility of the community forms the basis of Andean existence (Murra, 1975; Staller, 2000–2002). This circulation of animating essence is fundamental to the maintaining of entropy of the universe, or maintaining balance and stability of the world (*ayni*) (Classen, 1993:11; Staller, this volume).

The sequences of material present in the two sampled *ushnus*, Inka Pirqa and Ushnu Pata comprise black to brown coloured soils mainly made up of sandy silts. These are interspersed with pebbly and gravelly layers made up of what appears to be the natural geological ‘bedrock’. The soils may derive from a range of different altitudinal and ecozones. They appear to have been laid down in a series of repeated possibly inverted sequences, i.e. with the ‘cultural’ soils at the base of each sequence and the ‘natural’ stone and gravel at the top. The soil structure superimposed with the gravel and stone on top of a further soil deposit.

The perceived inversion of the natural sedimentary sequence reflected in the platform fills represents an intentional arrangement. There is no structural reason why the inner fills of these platforms should be ordered in this manner. This manner of construction therefore elucidates Inka concepts related to the role and function of these platforms. The definition of the *ushnu* platform as an axis mundi, linking the world above (*hanan pacha*) with the contemporary world and society (*kay pacha*) to the world below and the ancestors (*uku pacha*), (Meddens, 1997:11; Zuidema, 1989a:402–454) permits the development of an interpretative model for the internal organization of the fills of these high altitude structures. Each set of soil profiles present would conceptually derive from a different part of the area, which the individual platform was meant to draw or tie into the greater Inka world. Each soil profile would stand for a distinct defined eco-zone and for a circumscribed

social unit or *ayllu* tied to this specific area. Each set in turn would be focussed on a matching group of ancestors in the world below (*uku pacha*). This would explain the inversion of the soil package, and in this way the world of the ancestors would be linked into the cycle of life force or *sami* of the living (Allen, 1988:207–208). This spiritual energy was, and indeed is, viewed as being key to maintaining the entropy of the cosmos (Allen, 1988:49–50, 207–208; Classen, 1993:14; Staller, 2006).

Ushnus, Sky, Sun and Lunar Observations

The orientations of the principal axis of the various known *ushnu* platforms clearly varies significantly from site to site. In the Ayacucho case, the platforms in the landscape appear to have a link with distant denticulate horizon profiles, and an association with distant *wamanis* is indicated. A direct relationship with sky phenomena such as solstices and equinoxes, or less obvious lunar events is not easily identified at either Inka Pirqa or Ushnu Pata. Work by (Pino Matos, 2004:303–311) suggested at least for some *ushnu* platforms a link between principal alignment of the structures and summer and winter solstice events.

Capac Hucha Sacrifice and Ushnus

The ancestors legitimise the present for their descendants and are therefore a demonstration of both the rights to resources for the living and duties of the living to the ancestors and *huacas*. This would link in well with the potential presence of *Capac Hucha* burials under the *ushnus*, being both a highly charged and most valued form of offering, they would also in turn become part of the world of the ancestors.

The use of *Capac Hucha* sacrifice in association with *ushnus* is confirmed in chronicle evidence, Pedro de Cieza de León mentions a stone seat as part of a shrine in Vilcas, ‘where the lord would give his public addresses’, as well as another large cut stone, ‘in the manner of a fountain or basin’, where they would sacrifice animals and children, in the center of the principal plaza of Vilcas itself (Cieza de León, 1947 [1553]:435). Guaman Poma de Ayala says of *ushnus*, that the Inkas had in their dominion lands reserved for sacrifices named *usno* (ceremonial structure) which was always for *capac hucha* to the sun and to feed the *huacas* (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980 [1583–1615]:236). Pachacuti Inka Yupanqui arranged the sacrifices to the *huacas*, Temples of the Sun and Coricancha and the throne and seat of the Inka, named *usno*, in every *uamani* (Inka administrative district) (Guaman Poma de Ayala, 1980 [1583–1615]:239).

Human remains, which may represent *capac hucha* sacrifice, have been found at the Usno-Moq’o site in Abancay, although unfortunately no age or sex information was obtained from the bone (Oberti, 1997:19). Similarly, human vertebrae were uncovered in the excavation of the *ushnu* at El Shinkal de Quimivil in Argentina.

As in the case of the Usno-Moq'ō *ushnu* again no age or sex data are available (Raffino et al., 1997).

The issue of child sacrifice associated with the structure of the *ushnu* also demonstrates the existence of a network of conceptual links existing among *ushnus* and between them and other sacred places such as *huacas* in the landscape as noted above, from Cuzco itself sacrificial victims were redistributed to the outlying quarters of the Inka state. The sacrificial children travelled along straight routes and carried with them in essence the Inka himself and his self-sacrifice (Urbano and Duvoils, 1989) from the Inka in Cuzco back to their own communities of origin, where the actual sacrifice was completed. They provided some of the most important links to maintain the stability and health of the state (Zuidema, 1989b:144–190; Hyslop, 1990:72).

In essence, the *ushnu's* link with *capac hucha* sacrifice can be seen as exemplifying this role of the structure in linking linking the periphery to the center. The analysis of the account of Hernández Príncipe of 1622 by Zuidema relating to the *Capac Hucha* sacrifice described in this document is particularly relevant (Zuidema, 1989b:144–190). A chosen girl or accla, by the name of Tanta Carhua, aged 10, from the village of Ocros (or Orcon) had been send by her father (Caque Poma), the local curaca to Cuzco, to take part in the solstice rituals there. She was subsequently returned to her home community to serve as a *capac hucha* offering to the sun. The site of her sacrifice back in Ocros was that of an earlier ancestral tomb (or *huaca*) of the Llachuas (people who had come from outside into Ocros). Her sacrifice served to confirm the rank of her father to that of *kuraca* of the first *allyu* of Chillcas and Ocros. Tanta Carhua was as a sacrifice to the sun and by her participation in the solstice rituals in Cuzco tied into the Inka center and the Inka state. This served to tie the *ayllu*, community and geographical area of Ocros to the Inka personally and to the administrative center of Cuzco in particular (Zuidema, 1989b:147–190).

Cuzco as the conceptual center of the Inka Empire united in its core the Coricancha temple, the deities and *huacas* of the groups incorporated in the kingdom and tied by this their sacred essence to the Inka dynasty and the Inka state. The *capac hucha* by its contact with the sacred center and the Inka gained sacred essence and was elevated to the level of a *huaca* in its own right. By gathering *huacas* and chosen ones at the center Royal power was continuously replenished.

Conclusions

The *ushnu* platforms distributed throughout the empire were linked through their association with child sacrifice (*capac hucha*) and the movement of sacred essence along the *ceque* sightlines incorporating the margins of the Inka dominion to its center at Cuzco. Indeed its link with *capac hucha* renders this link even more compelling. In *capac hucha* (*hucha* or *cachahui*, messenger) sacrifice the travelling in a straight line maintained the long distance visibility aspect of the *ceque* and the

sacrifice. By not avoiding mountains in this journey it emphasizes the links between adjoining valleys and the periphery with the center (Zuidema, 1982a:431). In the links between the center and the periphery for at least some of the long distance *ceques* the observation point used was not at Coricancha (the Temple of the Sun) but a point in Huacaypata plaza where as we know an important *ushnu* was located (Zuidema, 1982a:435). In addition the *ushnu's* role in functioning as a conduit for sacred essence is further expressed in its function in the *Citua* ceremonies in purifying Tawantinsuyu and the in the creation of links and obligations of remote communities to the center at the time of the Inkas travels to the provinces.

As noted above Betanzos's and Molina's definitions agree with each other on the role of the *ushnu* as serving as a place for libations. Betanzos, Albornoz, Cabello Valboa, Guaman Poma de Ayala, and Santacruz Pachacuti Yamqui identify a stone platform in their descriptions of *ushnus*, none of which are contradictory. Betanzos' describes what happens in the provinces when the Inka, the son of the sun travels. The Inka embodies the sacred essence coming from the center. On the *ushnu* he replicates the libations acted out at Huacaypata on the principal *ushnu* located in Cuzco. He completes the link between ancestors *apus* and subjects, a link now known to be metaphorically replicated in the structured fills of the *ushnu* itself. The Inka generates obligations to him personally and his state by his public generosity to the people by his giving of gifts, which by the fact that they come from him are infused with his sacred essence. These gifts therefore acquire an additional dimension and importance.

One of the principal purposes of the network of *ushnus* over the landscape was therefore to tie the periphery to the center and to enable the Inka state to appropriate distant lands by reciprocal exchanges of offerings and animating essence for local stability within the distant sacred landscape.

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Chapter 11

Representation, Memory, and Power: Pre-Columbian Landscapes of Creation and Origin

Brian Stross

Introduction

It is likely that all people define themselves in part through their physical environment. We feel an attachment to our surroundings. We tell and listen to stories about them. We use them to remember the past, justify the present, and shape the future. Native peoples of the Americas likewise felt—as do their descendants of today—the importance of place, maintaining narratives of origin that linked themselves, their ancestors, and their deities to the natural as well as to the built landscape. The Mexica, of central Mexico, for example, specified a place to the northwest named Chicomoztoc (“Seven Caves”) from which their original ancestors emerged to begin the southward journey to their eventual destination at Tenochtitlán. The location of Chicomoztoc remains a subject of speculation to this day. It likely was unknown to the Mexica by the time they entered the valley of Mexico despite their ability to describe it, recall it, and anchor events in that place. Similarly, we saw in this volume that “on the other side of the sea” represents a place, constructed through metaphor, that can be viewed as a place of origin for the K’iche’ Maya of Guatemala; a place that can be recalled in narrative, and that can be utilized symbolically for various purposes.

Such creation narratives make reference to entities of a geographic nature that can be called pre-Columbian landscapes of creation and origin. Vital conceptual elements related to such landscapes of creation and origin in the Americas include specific mountains, caves, springs, lakes, rivers, buttes, boulders, and valleys of the earth. They include certain planets, stars, and constellations in the night sky. These elements articulate with notions of center, periphery, boundary, top, bottom, and side; they are situated in space, but not anchored in time as is generally perceived. We can see these conceptual elements in turn relating to the human body and its functions, to the house and its components, and to astronomical bodies and the calendric cycles often related to their movements.

The chapters in this volume represent temporary destinations in a journey, rather long and winding, from north to south in cartographic terms, but also back and forth in time as well as space. It could be viewed, if we choose to see it thus, as our

pilgrimage to the past from the present, and back, touching on a number of different worldviews or models of reality by means of which we have been able to experience concepts through the words of others, and thereby witness, features of the cognized landscapes, while learning of their meanings. Along the way we heard stories in various voices, about peoples of different eras, interpreted from distinctly diverse perspectives. It has been a vaguely familiar exploration, charting cartographies of the mind, and visualizing mountains, caves, and springs while synthesizing origin tales of belonging, memory, and power. The whole journey we were exploring the nature of the sacred in landform, image, and word.

If a pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place for a particular purpose, then surely this journey toward understanding a sampling of the many qualities and variations on landscapes of origin in the Americas qualifies as a reader's pilgrimage. This volume started fittingly on the Mexican Gulf Coast, a bit south of Tampico, exploring images and interpreting thoughts of a people who lived more than a thousand years ago. The next stop was at the upper end of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec where Mexico's waist narrows greatly, and where the Olmecs lived more than 2,000 years ago. Following an interpretation of Olmec origin narrative through images, we pressed on to highland Guatemala where three chapters deal first with sacred K'iche' caves through time and space. The volume continues with landscape features surrounding a Tzutujil community and their counterparts in town, and after that with a Colonial K'iche' document, the *Popol Vuh* in which the K'iche' place of origins is said to be "over distant waters." Now we know what that means.

From Guatemala, we journeyed south and east, to the Gran Chaco region of Bolivia, east of the Andean range, where origins were explored through narratives of Guaraní speakers whose lives, thoughts, and activities revolve around the Parapeti river, as we learned about what a contemporary people view as their past. Following this absorbing account of the present that presents tantalizing hints about Pre-Columbian times, we crossed the Andes, winding sinuously up that great range of mountain peaks to stop in western Ecuador at Salango, where the land abruptly meets the Pacific Ocean. While the lowland Olmecs flourished in Mexico's Isthmus, early Ecuadorians were building their own ceremonial centers in the coastal tropics at Salango, and we were led through an exploration of power and ritual action as expressed through the built environment and its manifestation of the sacred landscape at the edge of the sea.

Continuing southwards to Peru, we were presented with three final chapters dealing with the Inca of Peru from the perspectives of astronomy and calendars, ethnohistory, and archaeology, putting flesh on the bones of the Inca concept of *ushnu* from different vantage points with respect to data and its interpretation.

In addition to providing other salient information, these chapters just as clearly as the preceding ones, can be said to explore three important thematic foci; representation, memory, and power. Before elaborating on contributions of the chapters, and isolating some patterns suggested in them, these three themes can be identified more fully in the following way.

Themes

Theme one, representation, addresses the physical characteristics of a people's conceptualized places of origin and creation, including, but not limited to places where humans first appeared. Often focusing on mountains, stones, caves, and water sources, these features of the natural landscape are commonly given gender by indigenous societies. They often have counterparts in the built landscape, and they are usually believed to possess some sort of inherent power. They appear to make manifest the circumstances of creation as they occurred and recur in the minds and cultural creations of social groups for which they retain a reality.

While attention to the physical features of landscape can be reprised through oral narratives and visual images, it might be noted that other communicative media are normally also put into play through the performance of ritual action, such as dance, instrumental music, and song. In such performances, sometimes accompanied by prayer, chanting, and sacrificial offerings, elements of the sacred landscape, always consecrated, whether natural or built, serve as context, as text, or as both.

Theme two, memory, deals with the natural world and its social counterpart as encoded in the sacred landscape, and as cognized or understood by the local inhabitants. Just as relevant are the means by which the cognized sacred landscape is shared, memorialized, and rearticulated through cyclically repeated ritual action. While many features and aspects of the natural environment of a people figure into the daily life of a people, their economy, and their pleasures, the sacred landscape, so called because of its relation to origins and creation, is made even more salient by the fact that it plays a very important part in their cultural memory. As these chapters show, it is often represented also in narrative, image, song, dance, and geographic forms. These symbolic media embed memories, fixing them for future recollection, but it is important to note that such media of representation are continually subject to interpretation, modification and reinterpretation, being the generally tangible loci of adaptive and other kinds of transformative change.

Memory is one of the bases for continuity and change in the meanings of origin places (landscapes), representations, and rituals for the descendants of those who earlier "formulated" or at least passed on these representations of existence, creation, and belonging. Clearly they evolved over time, and likely were continually changing, if sometimes relatively slowly, and at other times more rapidly and radically. There may be mechanisms within change that could be considered "self-correcting," that in fact were conducive to those elements of apparent continuity that can be perceived over time. Such mechanisms, primed by and beholden to observational logic for example, might result not only in self-correcting tendencies in meaning change, but also in conceptual features that are regionally widespread or even found wherever there are similar natural environments, regardless of whether the shared features are products of independent construction or of diffusion.

Theme three, power, involves a concept that can be variously categorized; for example in terms of natural, cosmic, spiritual, ancestral, mundane, political, and martial power; or perhaps alternatively in terms of coercion, strength, authority, and persuasion; or power could be classified in terms of qualitative oppositions, such as

diffuse versus directed, social versus spiritual, delegated versus allocated, political versus ethical, and adaptive versus maladaptive. In terms of relating power to the sacred landscape, all the categories above and more are potentially useful in discovery and interpretation.

The meaning of a landscape of creation or origin concerning the nature of power and its uses, of access to the “otherworld,” or of the relationship between humans and the rest of the cosmos in terms of power as well as of other depends to a large extent upon a culture’s worldview. Those expressions of power, be it through architecture or iconography, include specifiable ideas and dimensions that constitute the social order. It also includes the potent process of ritual re-enactment of the forms and process of creation, which multiple leaders have found useful for organizing their agendas and more importantly for controlling their followers. Beyond this there is an apolitical sort of power in origins, and power so characterized seems to be at least partly due to the fact that places of origin are places of communication between worlds, and partly based on the empowerment created through participation and identity processes. It can be politicized, but it does not have to be. The political uses, in particular, to which a landscape of origin can be put are legion, and are discussed in invigorating detail in this volume.

To amplify, the multiple dimensions of power are continually applicable to the sacred landscape, which creates a sense of order to the world, gives pleasure to the people, and power through symbolic associations to their leaders. Sometimes the sacred landscape gives a sense of empowerment to the subalterns as well, as they engage in life’s activities according to tradition and the knowledge that they are doing what needs to be done. The sense of empowerment is often given by their participation in commemorative activities, and while commemoration can be stretched to fit representation for either memorializing or for participatory purposes, a distinction made between remembering and participation is nonetheless useful. The notion of representation (re-presentation) and the means by which it is achieved is also key in this discussion.

Chapters

In Chapter 1, Rex Koontz deals with images carved in relief on ballcourt panels at the urban archaeological site of El Tajín in Veracruz on the Gulf Coast of Mexico, interpreting the meanings of decapitation sacrifice activity depicted in images created during the second half of the first millennium AD. The author points out that several critical origin activities (such as the first fire drilling, the first sunrise, and the first sacrifice) are very important in sacred narratives, noting that in various regions of Mesoamerica during Classic times the first humans were created, according to tradition, by means of a blood sacrifice.

The critical origin narrative then can be found represented by images on a panel depicting human creation by a deity who is clearly performing an auto-sacrificial ritual, squatting over what must represent the first human, in a constructed

container. The ritual is performed in a visual setting that contains a mountain (representing the earth, with flowering maguey plants functioning toponymically to qualify the mountain), a star band (representing the sky), and a pool of water (in the container in which the human stands, wearing a fish headdress). These elements of the landscape represented suggest a primordial timeframe, when the sky came to be separated from the earth. It is possible that the sun and the moon are also represented on this panel as overseeing deities. The visual representation facilitates perception of the origin narrative without requiring literacy, and even if augmented by oral narrative the fixed nature of the images provides a consistency of narrative that is less likely to be preserved by oral narration alone. Thus memories are given a framework for interpretation that in some ways can be considered self-correcting.

Theme three is addressed as well by the nature of the medium examined, as the constructed images not only refresh memory in specific ways; they also serve as relatively permanent repositories for the power generated by whatever ritual action they participate in as well as by their very existence. It is power that is also addressed when Koontz suggests that origin narratives may be “myths” of validation that, as part of their meaning and function, validate the right to govern. Furthermore repeated linking of a ballcourt sacrifice to the creation of humans also promotes the notion of political legitimacy. This linkage occurs in the context of the “built landscape,” a ballcourt, where the display of status objects (baton, cape) and ritual activity (decapitation) in a constructed creation setting is represented. The iconography and imagery in the ballcourt panels are perceived as parallel to the creation because the scene is across the actual ballcourt from where the original creation scene is located on another panel in which a deity is seen to perform an auto-sacrificial act. Repetition of this theme of sacrifice and creation with respect to governance is strategically useful, as few things have more power to persuade than repetition. Repetition is of course a symbolic precursor to intensification, whether that is for the purpose of power accumulation or for the production of cognitive salience when measured by ease of retrieval from memory.

Manipulation of origin narratives can be seen as having a political legitimizing function at El Tajín, and most certainly also in many other places that like El Tajín could be considered a form of the “state.” In societies of less social complexity “shamans” still acquire spiritual “power” from encounters with places in landscapes of origin, and this can be amplified by repeated visits to such places, as with the pilgrimages that the Huichol of Jalisco and Nayarit, Mexico undertake to “find our life” in Wirikuta; one pilgrimage gives power to the shaman, five such pilgrimages confers exponentially more power. Surely there is a political dimension to the power of “shamans,” even if that dimension remains rudimentary for them in contrast with its importance for the rulers at El Tajín.

Using Mexica (Aztec) and other Mesoamerican sources, Koontz takes us through an exploration of continuity and change in meaning by seeking specification of the mountain toponym’s meaning as represented by the flowering maguey plant of the decapitation and auto sacrifice scenes. Noting that earlier Mesoamerican cultures depicted a “flower mountain” concept to represent a vital part of paradise or of the sacred landscape, he suggests that the flowering maguey at El Tajín

similarly referred to the fecundity of paradise, the original landscape. Nevertheless, while flowering plants represented fecundity at Mesoamerican sites depicting sacrificial decapitation imagery in ballgame contexts, different plants symbolized that fertility at the different sites. Moreover El Tajín is located below the altitude where the maguey is a significant source of the primary liquid from which the intoxicant *pulque* derives. However, just west of El Tajín the maguey is commercially viable. Koontz concludes that while mountains, both built and natural, serve as reference points for most Mesoamerican urban spaces, it is their boundary function that is referenced in the ballcourt panels, marking the mountain of creation as distant and exotic.

In Chapter 2, Carolyn Tate finds in monumental sculptures excavated at the Olmec site of La Venta on the northern end of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, material representing perhaps the earliest version of a creation narrative, visually presented for processional viewing. It is a narrative dealing with the creation of earth, time, and humans as well as with protagonists in the local ballgame, an institution already established in Mesoamerica. Reconstructing the positioning of sculpted monuments with respect to a central axis running along the length of the site, she develops the hypothesis that their placement contributed to their meanings. She further suggests that their meanings were embedded in a processional route that constituted at least the context for a performed narrative of creation and origins, and quite possibly functioned as some of the characters in the story. The processional route or narrative path constituted almost two miles going from south to north or vice versa. Author Tate cautiously chooses not to specify which direction is more likely, but for the sake of exposition, she assumes a processional beginning on the southern end with sculpted fetuses wearing ball-player helmets and grasping their heads, set on a U-shaped mound perhaps symbolizing a womb. This could mark the sacrificial initiation of the creation story.

As the procession and the narrative continues, there is evidence by way of sculpted thrones, of a dismembered crocodilian, representing earth's creation and the establishment of the four directions, in accord with later Aztec creation narratives. Going north, stelae next to the Great Mound sculpted as human embryos with maize regalia (i.e., "human-maize" seeds as identified first by Tate) indicate the Great Mound to be an early version of what came to be called Sustenance Mountain in Aztec times. A bit further north, huge buried greenstone mosaic pavements and offerings straddle the central axis, and these are interpreted as representative of Earth and Water goddesses.

Three colossal heads with ballgame helmets, facing north, are interpreted as possible rulers and/or possible decapitated ballgame players. They gaze toward the final monumental characters in the Olmec creation narrative, a tall green column, perhaps a phallic symbol. Together these elements constitute both setting and agents in a narrative constructed to operate with more movable narrative agents, perhaps people and their ritual paraphernalia re-enacting origin and foundation rituals. The human built settings represent primordial sacred places of the natural landscape, charged with power and agency, and through such re-presentation are able to revive and memorialize the creation events that were significant for local

historical narrative. The author points out that repeated elements, constituting “sets,” intend to strengthen whatever statement they might make individually. Again, the notion of intensification by repetition is highlighted.

Tate interprets the central crocodilian narrative element as representative of the first creation, with the colossal fetuses on the southern end of the north-south axis representing another previous attempt to create humans. Time as we conceive it in this narrative seems to be subordinated to space. One indicator of a temporal dimension is in a cache of twenty jade celts arranged as crosses suggested to represent trees, each celt, it is suggested, standing for one of the twenty named days iterated 13 times in the sacred almanac. Another aspect of time considered by the author is that the processional creation narrative was certainly not constructed all at once, and may well have been done piecemeal over a long period of time. That this makes interpretation somewhat problematic, as narratives as all else transform themselves through time is carefully considered by Tate, who looks for creation elements that have largely retained their integrity through large swaths of space and time in Mesoamerica.

Examining Mesoamerican creation narratives for nuclear meanings that might be tied to the La Venta visual materials, even piecemeal, Tate notes the following meaning elements that can be easily coordinated with themes suggested by the sculptural and monumental “actors” and “settings” on the La Venta stage: a sexual union of sky and earth took place; there were male and female creator pairs; humans were created from maize or bones; and blood sacrifice was necessary to ensure continuity of life.

Tate concludes by considering some social implications of the monumental architecture and sculpture at La Venta, and by suggesting that La Venta’s visual narrative was important to the development of writing on the Gulf Coast and that it prefigured both content of later written narrative and the concept of narrative itself as a means for establishing group identity.

Whereas in the previous chapters, Koontz and Tate focus on elements of the built environment as they supply the origin and creation narrative as interpreted with reference to the natural environment, in Chapter 3, Duncan Earle begins with a focus on the natural environment, exploring the meaning of caves, citing them as places of transformation, emergence, and entry. He then integrates the built and natural environments by linking them through cultural processes of appropriation and representation. The cultural focus of the built environment in the center is seen as an appropriation of the power residing in the natural environment on the periphery through constructed miniaturization re-presenting salient elements of sacred natural places at the edge of the unfamiliar.

He initiates this discussion with the plausible suggestion that when one of the “hero twins” loses his head to a “death bat” in the *Popol Vuh*, sacred book of the K’iche’ Maya, the literal must give way in importance to a metaphorical interpretation. Thus “losing one’s head” is seen to refer to hallucinations and other symptoms caused by a common disease found in caves where bats live, attributable to breathing fungal spores borne by bat guano. The cave is also a dark and mysterious doorway linking worlds and requiring prayers and sacrificial ritual. Soon we discover that

caves are central to completing the process of shamanic initiation, a process the author went through over the course of a 260-day “gestation” through a complete cycle of the named days of the sacred Maya almanac. The beginning and ending points of the initiation cycle are in caves, and there are other caves along the way. The two most significant caves are in the east at the “place of dawning” in a cave on the side of a high peak on the periphery, facing the rising sun, and in the west at the archaeological site of Utatlan, the center of the old K’iche’ empire. The last day of the 260-day training cycle sees the daykeeper (“shaman”) and his apprentice (initiate) leaving the house and arriving at the Dawning place, edge of the natural sacred landscape, in order to witness the next day’s dawn. The pair has made a ritual circuit, performing appropriate oral and behavioral activities at various pairs of shrines, suggesting a parallel to the activities of the *Popol Vuh*’s “hero twins,” exiting and entering the underworld. The final day of the initiation proper requires a journey from the house to Utatlan, rituals among the ruined temples, and then entry into the cave complex constructed beneath the temple ruins, where additional rituals are conducted. The initiate emerges as a completed daykeeper. He has traversed the natural and the cultural representatives of the sacred landscape and by doing so along with appropriate ritual action he has become another link in the long chain of memory that binds the present to the past and that will help shape the future. Tradition, while changing inexorably, clings always to the familiar and to the past.

Agreeing with others who have studied indigenous cultures in Mesoamerica, the cave, says Earle, is the supreme place of emergence in Mesoamerican thought. From the cave comes the rain, the clouds, and the winds, as well as the sun, moon and planets; all emerging from caves. Moreover, what comes up and out of caves must go down and into them; from dawn to sunset, from birth to death. The mother of the “hero twins,” daughter of an underworld lord, emerged into this world from the underworld to give birth to the twins, having been impregnated by their father from this world. Earle suggests cogently that the powers of the “hero twins” derived from the mixing of lineage from this world and the underworld.

He suggests too that theocratic societies often appear to, “replicate the sacred in nature so as to gain political and theological control over the shared religious system”, referring to this replication as “an architecture of intensification, taking the sacred landscape of the rural and re-mapping it into an urban center, smaller in scale...” a process that he later more succinctly refers to as the “cultural capturing of sacred geography”(p. 71), a phenomenon to be found seemingly from the very dawn of civilization throughout Mesoamerica. Related to this notion of replication is the pattern found in many parts of the Americas of a metaphorical linkage between home and landscape reflected most clearly in the naming of house parts after named parts of the landscape, or perhaps it is the other way around. After all, the metaphorical linkage of microcosm to macrocosm in many ways begins with the named parts of the human body.

Chapter 4 sees Allen Christenson also locating caves in the meaningful context of sacred mountains housing powerful nature deities, and also in the context of highland Guatemala, but the focus of this chapter is on a contemporary Tz’utujil Maya community located at the edge of Lake Atitlán. Like Earle, Christenson was initiated

into the ways of a Maya “shaman” and like Earle he sees birth and rebirth as a major theme of Maya ceremonial activity. Additionally he too speaks of the symbolic relationship between the natural landscape—particularly the sacred peaks, caves, and trees—and its replicated “man-made” counterparts in town, but in this case the counterparts are not caves under an ancient urban ruin, but rather contemporary *cofradía* houses. These one-room structures were built and maintained by voluntary associations, each dedicated to worship of a specific saint or deity.

Christenson introduces the reader to the caves of nature around Santiago Atitlan, and to the most important of them, Paq'alibal, primarily through the words of members of the Tz'utujil community, a very effective means of avoiding accidental misinterpretation as well as for transmitting some of the flavor of local thoughts about what English speakers would see as the natural world interacting with the supernatural. We hear from the Tz'utujil speaker of the ritual offerings, incense burning, and prayers dedicated in the cave, of the amazing tree growing nearby that cannot be cut down, and of the animals guarding the entrance, especially the jaguar. The voice of the native speaker also informs of the navel of the world to be found near the cave entrance, of the king and serpents living within the cave, and of the fruits of many kinds that decorate the area about the cave entrance. We hear more than once that a short time within the cave corresponds to a long time on the outside, a temporal relationship that is almost ubiquitous in Mesoamerica.

Christenson then invites the reader into a *cofradía* house in town, describing in some detail the way in which it replicates its rural counterpart. The single room's interior is conceptualized as a “cave” within a man-made “mountain” that houses items immediately recalling Tz'utujil descriptions of Paq'alibal cave. In the rafters are lodged a variety of stuffed animals, like the cave guardians. There are also mountain plants and fruits like cacao, gourds, and pataxte hanging from the ceiling, including twinned maize ears. From the ceiling center to the four walls and the four corners of the room run eight garlands of artificial pine boughs, pine being a sacred tree whose needles and sap are ceremonially used in the Maya region. The garlands represent the cardinal and intercardinal directions, and present a view of the ceiling from the room's center that strongly suggests the viewer to be inside the center of a cone shaped volcanic peak, such as those surrounding the Tz'utujil community on Lake Atitlán. The author says the garlands show that power generated in the *cofradía* activities extends to the edges of the world.

The constructed devices of the *cofradía* house, by bringing what could be seen as memories of the less frequently visited local caves and other aspects of the rural sacred landscape into more general view, shows how tradition can be and is being preserved in one arena even as it is less actively pursued in the other. While symbolic representation abounds in worship practices and worldview both in the town and around it, one might still conclude that in town there is more abstract representation of symbols while around it the symbolism is more directly concerned with the natural sacred landscape. The amount and kind of power generated in both the natural and the built landscapes of origin appears to be comparable however.

We are told that ritual performance generates power that it is absorbed by the landscape where the rituals occur, whether built or natural, and that rituals and

more encompassing ceremonies are most frequently performed as re-enactments of various origin events related to places of emergence in ritual action. Christenson's description of performance during *cofradía* ceremonies is particularly vivid as he introduces the reader to a green velvet wrapped bundle containing clothing of a patron deity of life, maize and mountains. Ubiquitous in the Maya region, such bundles are treated with great respect and are believed to possess great power. At midnight on the appropriate day, the traditional religious functionary takes garments from the bundle and wears them as he dances to each of the four cardinal directions "to re-establish the limits of the world" (p. 2). Clouds of incense obscure the scene, the dancer seems to disappear, and Christenson witnesses how the "shaman" has renewed the world by retracing the steps of the earliest ancestors of the community.

It is difficult to talk about Mayans in highland Guatemala without mentioning the *Popol Vuh*. Both Earle and Christenson refer to it on several occasions. Frauke Sachse uses Chapter 5 to return us to a deeper consideration of origins as presented in that document, along with other colonial K'iche'an sources, in order to better interpret the meaning of migration and origin in Maya cosmology. In the process she brings us back in time to Classic lowland Maya imagery and writing and to the ultimate source material for much in Maya lifeways and worldview, the life cycle of maize.

Many highland Maya sources indicate that the K'iche' migrated to their current territory from a distant place, "on the other side of the sea," usually specifying that they came from the east. Concentrating on locating that distant place of origin for the K'iche' people, Sachse decides to interpret it metaphorically instead of as a more traditional historical reference. The approach bears sweet fruit, having important implications for interpreting other Mesoamerican migration narratives.

After having closely examined multiple ethnohistoric accounts specifying a place across the sea, known as "seven caves, seven canyons" as the origin place of the K'iche' nation, she takes a folktale from Guatemala's highlands as a point of departure for her analysis through metaphor. In it a man is swallowed by a large aquatic animal that brings him to the other side of the sea, at which point the man escapes by cutting his way free. He finds himself in a cornfield and, being hungry, begins to eat an ear of maize. The owners of the field arrive and marvel that he can eat the maize. Having no anuses, they merely sniff the maize. The man tricks the owners into letting him slit them open supposedly to create an anus so they can eat. As they are dying, he tricks them again into giving him a deer, with which he then returns to Guatemala.

Sachse then finds crucial elements of the story illustrated in Classic Maya images, interprets the aquatic animal and the deer as psychopomps (like the Aztec dog, the Huastec sea turtle, or the Greek dolphin) delivering the man to and then from Sustenance Mountain through a world connecting portal in the landscape, which for Mesoamericans is usually a cave. Caves being associated with water, the metaphor is almost complete. She makes an analogy then between the metaphor of the discovery of maize in the underworld from which it is then brought to people, and both the agricultural origins of maize and the origins of people from their

“caves.” The mound in which the maize is planted, through a “cave” made by the digging stick and out of which it emerges after germination is seen to correspond to the womb with its birth canal within the person. So ultimately, the K’iche’ nation emerged from a dark place filled with water, rather like the underworld, where food is not taken through the mouth. The “seven caves” of Tulan Suyva, K’iche’ place of origin, is a metaphor, perhaps most directly seen as the Otherworld, or the Underworld, but also the womb. Leaving Tulan is thus a metaphor for being born, or sprouting.

Sachse mentions as ripe for reinterpretation the cave systems found in known pilgrimage sites, such as Teotihuacán and Utatlán and a few others. A cave system, which could be added to such consideration, is in the pyramid known as the High Priest’s Grave at Chichen Itzá, which has seven burials in the shaft from top to bottom of pyramid. Fifty-two feet below the base of the pyramid is a natural cave that has been made into seven different compartments.

One might add also that the whole person would appear to correspond to the mountain (built or natural) with its seven caves (built or natural), and if one counts carefully one can find seven “caves” or holes in a woman; two ears, two nostrils, a mouth, an anus and a vagina. The seven caves of Aztec origins can be reinterpreted also by means of this metaphor, which might see the Mexica who promulgate the narrative, as departing from the womb at Chicomoztoc, having come from Aztlan, the “place of water,” while the other six Nahua speaking tribes could be thought to have emerged from the other six caves (or body orifices), thus remaining inferior.

The chapter concludes significantly with the observation, made more pregnant with meaning by its detailed support, that history and ideology are so interconnected that investigating the one without the other misses the consequences of their interconnection.

It is quite clear now that the caves in Mesoamerican landscapes of origin might all have a significant metaphorical component based in ideology dressed up as history, suggesting that we need not continue to be so obsessed with locating Tulan, Tula, Aztlan, Chicomoztoc, or Tamoanchan in physical space as specific individual places.

Chapter 6 is an ethnographic study of the Gran Chaco of Bolivia. The analysis was written on site by an American ethnobotanist and three Guaraní speakers. The study uses local narratives placed in descriptive cultural and ecological context to convey some of the Guaraní worldview with respect to landscape and origins, a worldview that is in many ways quite unfamiliar to Mesoamericanists and Andeanists.

Tradition holds that the Ioseño Guaraní came to their present flat Chaco lands before Spaniards entered South America. They came from the east, and all 12,000 of them live in a region where the Parapetí river is little more than sand dunes for several months of the year. Because of that river Ioseños live in a landscape and ecosystem quite distinct from those of their neighboring Guaraní speakers. Unlike the others, Ioseños rely more on the river than on the rain for irrigating their maize fields, and depend absolutely on the contrast between times when the river has water and when it has not. When there is water the landscape is green and beautiful;

when there is no water, the landscape is barren and there is hunger. The intermittent flow of the river is attributed to wasteful behavior of the Fox.

Distant mountain ranges to the south and west serve to orient one visually, but play no larger part in the Ioseño world. The river, the sand dunes, local plants and animals, and the generally flat land are natural world that they know, and the river is everything. History is contained in such elements of the landscape as a particular tree, a hillock, a sandy area, and so on; but sometimes the river floods and wipes out history. It is a seemingly capricious river. Tradition tells the Ioseño that the world is a large flat disc, supported at the cardinal points by columns variously conceived. Humans live on the upper surface and spirits of the dead inhabit the lower surface of the disc. Humans originally were on the lower surface, but were allowed by good spirits to emerge onto the upper surface. Day is when humans are active, while night is the time of the spirits. People learn to coexist with the spirits. Midnight and noon, as in much of Mesoamerica, are times when the world above is connected with the world below, and when left joins right through another central axis.

The center is always an important part of the sacred landscape of origin and creation, generally being a place of communication between worlds, a portal as it were. The authors describe the “center” first in terms of a cosmic center, the name of which in Guaraní is literally “true origin.” Then there are multiple geographic centers of Iroso, the most important of which is seen as a mystical and enchanted location. There is also the ritual center, the small circular central part of a domain such as the forest or the river, viewed as the combined front and back patios of tutelary spirits. The community center, a plaza near the road that bisects each community, has an algarroba tree under which narratives of the ancestors are told, along with other activities; the central position of this plaza is a place of privilege, respect, and of truth. An algarroba tree shades the domestic center as well, located in the middle of the family patio, where stories are told and where dead relatives are communicated with once a year. It is through tales told of other times and places, related in one type of center or another, that memories are preserved, and creation gives way to tradition.

The river has a center of ideological importance, but its water is of greatest importance. The river determines green and happy times by its liquid presence, but grey depressing times when the water dries up. Ioseños enjoy the good and endure the difficult times caused by the changing river with fatalistic acceptance, leaving the area during the worst of times to work for others. At such times the caretaker spirit of the river can be seen as not having communicated clearly enough to those in Iroso.

All things, and prominently animals, hills, vegetation, have caretaker spirits called *Iya*, who are interacted with as ancestral spirits of the Guaraní. The *Iya* speak to Ioseños at night, and though the communication is in form that we would not call language, they can be understood, especially by the elders. The sacred landscape of origins and change is continually walked by the trickster Fox, who is the main protagonist of a major cycle of narratives, some mythic in scope and subject.

Fox brought the Guaraní maize and showed them how to cultivate it (recalling the fact that in the *Popol Vuh* of the K'iche', the fox helped to procure maize for

humans); and he brought them the algarroba with its tasty fruit, having stolen a seed from the underground dwelling mole “grandmother.” Thus, Fox and the stories about him concerning origins can be seen as most relevant to the theme of power. It is not directly a political sort of power allowing some individuals to control others, but rather it is better understood as a form of empowerment, first of the elders who are closer to the ancestors and who can understand them better. It is also an empowerment of all who call themselves *Isoseños* in terms of a social identity. This social and ethnic identity facilitates both pride and the ability to resist the continual onslaught of the natural and social environment.

Chapter 7, by Richard Lunnis, identifies periodic construction episodes of a Late Formative Period ceremonial center in coastal Ecuador. The construction episodes from over 2,000 years ago cast light on the nature of power as inferred from the built landscape and elements of its natural counterparts. The scene begins at Salango at around 600 BC with an approximately circular beachfront ceremonial house built, expanded, and altered in eight stages until ~100 BC. People had lived in that area for more than 2,000 years already before the Late Formative ceremonial house was excavated but apparently it was only then that the ancestors there were explicitly identified through material manifestations as the ultimate suppliers of the bounty of the sea.

As carefully as a detective describing a crime scene, Lunnis describes the material changes at the ceremonial site over the course of some 500 years; the artifacts, burials, and construction materials, and their positioning and orientation in space along with their location in time. Shells, beads, figurines, pottery, copper, post-holes, colored clay, birds, mammals, and human burials; all such excavated materials were identified and placed in their respective archaeological contexts.

The interpretation of the Salango materials by Lunnis suggests that the Late Formative period saw the development of a previously less overtly recognized need to place humans and society within the context of the natural world by means of a system of visible symbols. The Engoroy Phase platform mound at Salango is on the edge of the sea to the west, with mountains almost immediately to the east, as part of a landscape in which the sea played a prominent part, was clearly an important location for public ritual. In the absence of oral or written narratives, archaeological materials and ethnographic analogy form the core of data informing interpretation.

There were no caves, mountains, nor trees unambiguously represented at the site, but there were ramps, platforms, walls, and floors of colored clay that might have represented elements of the cosmic or sacred landscape, and that beg further interpretation in terms of major features of the cosmos. Cached or buried objects, most of which came from the sea, indicate the overwhelming importance of the sea, suggesting also that people may have arisen on shore after an underworld journey through the sea. Other elements are interpreted within a framework of increasing size and complexity of representational elements, culminating by the first century before this era in an explicit recognition that the site was where the first people appeared on earth.

A layer of yellow clay and a central hearth seem to have served as a sacred center, purifying and connecting different worlds. The yellow clay, later surrounded

by red clay might, based on ethnographic analogy, have represented the male principle; the red being female. Gender of place and of offerings is also indicated by the caching of *Spondylus* shells (female) and *Strombus* conch shells (male) in appropriate parts of a ceremonial building that was oriented to 60 degrees east of north, identifying the sun as a source of power. The platform also had a central axis running from northwest to southeast. The front part of the building facing the rising sun seems to have represented birth and the male principle while the back is interpreted as having associations with the setting sun, the female principle, and death. Small copper flakes suggest that such shining substances acquired from afar were seen as a source of power to be added to the already accumulated ritual power of the building, which surely was intended as a microcosmic model of the universe.

As the phases of occupation and rebuilding progressed toward the present, various animals came to be buried at the platform; an ocelot and two birds in phase four perhaps indicating shamanic transformation and flight. A dog in phase four and later in seven or eight are interpreted as possible intermediaries between the natural and cultural world, though had they been found in Mesoamerica, they would surely have been viewed as symbolic psychopomps, accompanying the soul to the land of the dead. The human burials and the figurines, earlier positioned like the human dead, by the fifth phase came to be positioned vertically, and by the final phase were positioned as emerging from the ground. There is a growing elaboration of the means by which ancestors were venerated and placed in a well-specified framework of a cosmic model constituting the sacred landscape.

Lunnis sums up the significance of his excavations and interpretations for notions of landscape and origins by stressing the linkage of the cosmic order to the local landscape in the early ceremonial house by means of both construction design and artifacts of distant as well as local provenience. Earlier burials recognized the local connection to the spatial and temporal order, and later additions of cached animal remains and figurines representing the original ancestors indicate a growing complexity of representation in worldview of the role of underworld ancestral protectors of the local population. The last episode reflects a revision of the role of the ancestors in that Salango has come to be seen as the origin place of the first people on earth.

Chapter 8 by Tom Zuidema rounds out a consideration of the sacred landscape by focusing directly on calendrics and astronomy, whereas earlier and later chapters in this volume only lightly touch on these two topics. Planets, stars, and constellations are parts of the sacred landscape of the upper world, and at least some aboriginal groups in the Americas recognized particular parts of the heavens as places of the original creation related to counterparts on earth, as did for example the Classic Maya, and equally, speakers of some of the nearly 30 Mayan languages surviving today (c.f. e.g., Tedlock, 1992). Others recognized particular directions as related to origin. The Huastec Maya, like the K'iche', saw their origins in the east, the Aztecs originated in the north and migrated south. The Inca of highland Peru related the north to origins and to the ancestors (Urton, 1981:51).

Zuidema is concerned with four specific sacred places around Cuzco, in Peru, that were used by the Incas as sightlines for astronomical observation. Two of these

points on the horizon with respect to Cuzco were used to indicate sunrise of the December solstice and sunset of the June solstice, but astronomical information concerning the other two is not well documented in the historical record. However, using a well documented system of ritual visits according to dates not in accord with astronomical uses, and contrasting it with the astronomical one, Zuidema is able to reconstruct the astronomical uses for the other two sacred sites. One referenced sunrise at the beginning of the wet season, and the other sunset at the beginning of the wet season, coinciding with dates for the sun's first zenith sunrise and its first antizenith sunset. Based on the reconstructed dates, he concludes that the Inca calendar was constructed upon a foundation that combined the two solstice dates with two zenith sunrise dates and two antizenith sunrise dates. Significantly, then, we can now see how for the Incas, space and time were thus integrated by a yearly cycle of ritual visits to important spots on the sacred landscape. We could call them temporally mediated pilgrimages.

In Chapter 9, John Staller discusses the meaning of the sacred landscape to the Inca (Inca) and their predecessors, and to their descendants. In discussing the significance of place and the importance of centers in the development of Andean civilization, he examines a few crucial concepts labeled in the Inca language. Noting that it is common for native Andeans, when being introduced, to register where they are from even before giving their name, he infers the importance of place to identity. Special places are important for the inherent sanctity and power they possess, especially places such as "centers" that are labeled *huaca* "shrine, sacred or extraordinary place or entity" including elevated truncated platforms with multiple ceremonial uses (including sun worship and ancestor veneration, astronomical observation, child sacrifice, and channeling of fluids) known by the term *ushnu*.

Sacred places, material manifestations of the sacred, and even venerated ancestors, could all be named with the term *huaca*, and of particular interest is the function of a *huaca* as a shrine or portal for communication between the natural and supernatural realms. Even as such things as tombs, altars, temples, offerings to the Sun, fountains, canals and corners in houses were termed *huacas*, and *huacas* as natural features of the landscape included mountain peaks, caves, springs, large stone outcroppings, and rivers. The importance of such sacred places or *huacas* to the Inca is made clear from the fact that during the Contact Period 328 *huacas* were recognized in and around Cuzco. As sacred places in the natural and built landscape, *huacas* as sacred places no doubt attracted not only reverence, but important ones also attracted settlements and a symbolic association to those settlements.

Nucleated settlements, referred to as *llactas* in colonial narratives, are associated with and early on even represented *huacas* until the late seventeenth century, by which time much native tradition was obliterated. Today *llacta* names a relationship rather than a place, but clearly the relationship of today used to be a more clearly localized relationship, as too with the *ayllu*, whose members are related ultimately in terms of place and the kinds of connections shared by being members of a localized community. Thus, usage of *llacta* illustrates meaning change as social nomenclature has adapted to changing conditions. Today, and presumably also in the past, cultural centers, sacred places, and ceremonial centers embody a "local earth spirit"

identified with the population, the community, and the surrounding geography (recalling similar embodiments in many regions of native Mesoamerica), adding another sort of localized social connection among community members.

Balance and reciprocity are suggested to be vital concepts in both the social and natural order and that the concept of center is necessary in a meaningful and ordered universe. Cuzco was ordered within it and involved in relationships with the surrounding geography, the heavens, and other elements of the Inca realm in such a way as to preserve balance and reciprocity. Cuzco was the political and religious center of *Tawantinsuyu* the land of the four quarters or Inca Empire.

The author then explores the meaning of “center” in Andean culture, and how centers provide meaning to the surrounding landscape, to the celestial world and even at times indirectly refer to the underworld as well. The analysis continues with a consideration of the vertical dimension or *axis mundi* within a center was the locus of communication with these otherworld realms of the cosmos. Narratives concerning landscapes of origin tied these realms together cognitively and in memory, and the sacred landscape organized social and political as well as religious relationships.

One center of considerable importance in the Andes is the *ushnu* or “seat of the sun.” The author analyzes the *ushnu* concept and assesses its antiquity. Beginning with the archaeological identification of an *ushnu* as a raised truncated platform with stairs leading up one side, to which viewing and ancestor veneration functions are attributed, he notes an additional function, the channeling of fluids. Staller further proposes that the Inca were deliberately recreating the *ushnu* concept, adapting it to suit their political and economic interests and using non-Inca architectural forms, in order to make it more meaningful to their subject populations. For contemporary native Andeans, *ushnu* refers to transcendence and spiritual power associated with venerated ancestors. In considering the ancient Peruvian sites of Chavín de Huántar and Tiahuanaco, Staller concludes that among other features, stone monoliths and subterranean canals at these earlier major centers imply ancient origins for the concept of *ushnu*, which is one of several concepts crucial to an understanding of the sacred landscape and its relationship to the people living in it.

The authors of Chapter 10, Frank Meddens et al., use archaeological materials to test a series of related hypotheses concerning high altitude *ushnu* platforms in Ayacucho (west of Cuzco). The first hypothesis was that *ushnu* platforms were made to resemble characteristics of nearby mountains. The second was that the *ushnu* platforms were part of a system of sight lines connecting distant parts of the Inca Empire. The third was that children bore a significant relationship to the *ushnu* platforms under consideration, namely in terms of a sacrificial role.

The results of sampling excavations, informed by ethnohistoric observations, led to the conclusions that child sacrifice in Inca times helped to link *ushnu* platforms throughout the empire, providing some of systemic circulation of the sacred essence connecting the center to the periphery along “sightlines” (called *ceques*) radiating out from the Cuzco center to all parts of the empire. Composition of the platforms revealed apparent inversions of packets and layers of geological material (rocks and soils) that by its analysis in comparison with material sampled from

different locales suggests contributions from regionally dispersed *ayllu* representatives during construction, and possible mimicking of the inverted underworld presumably connected by means of the *ushnu* to this one.

This center to periphery (and back) circulation metaphor makes an analogy between the empire and the (human) body, which is seen in the travels of the Inca in visiting the *ushnus*, and even more clearly in the travel of sacrificial children from outlying quarters to the empire's center along straight routes followed by later redistribution to the outlying areas for sacrifice at the *ushnus*.

Circulation of vital essence—much as the heart pumps blood to all parts of the body and back—shows the empire and the sacred landscape (like the body) to have been viewed by the Inca as an organic whole. This chapter also mentions the notion of gender with respect to the sacred landscape, noting that snow-capped mountains where rivers originate were seen as male, whereas green irrigable valleys were seen as female, recalling Mesoamerican and North American native conceptions of gender relative to the sacred landscape. Water, another form of linking essence, like blood and *chicha*, is said to be viewed as male and violent in rapidly flowing contexts associated with mountains, and female when associated with the “earth mother” and rain, encouraging recognition of a wild/domesticated dichotomy. Circulation, of blood, water, and *chicha* throughout the sacred landscape has been seen in this chapter and earlier ones to be temporally and spatially cyclical, repeating processes that can be seen as nourishment during the growth of empire. The landscape of origins can thus be seen as providing a template map for successive repetitions of origin, changing in adaptation to the ever changing environment, yet providing stability through continuity of traditions that maintain and sustain the organic whole.

Conclusion

The landscapes of creation and origin, and the narratives that underlie and define them, have been discussed in this volume by a variety of scholars, bringing together different perspectives and different topical concentrations as well as different peoples and places and even different time periods. From these contributions, one can synthesize a number of characteristics of creation and origin narratives and of beliefs and rituals surrounding a sacred landscape.

Regarding the former, it is clear that origin narratives can be promulgated, negotiated, interpreted, and altered, in several ways, corresponding in part to different sensory modalities. Among other things origin narratives can be represented as traditional folktales or myths, as vocal discussions, as prayers, and as verbally manifested calendrical elements. They can also be represented through visual media; as in writing, sculpted renderings, maps, or pictographs, to be interpreted iconically, schematically, indexically, or symbolically.

These narratives of presentation and representation of a sacred landscape, and of ritual activities associated with it, also find metaphorical and allegorical expression

in ritual action that is located “objectively” in both space and time and yet that curiously is quite subjective in both respects. They find expression where centers are more important than peripheries, where boundary markers trump borders, and where repetition and circulation are vital elements. It is in ritual action that we are most easily led to the physical components of the sacred landscape, and to the notion of repeated creation events (Eliade, 1958:367). It is here that we can most easily discern the push, pull of continuity, and change in adaptation, although it is also here that meaning is most subject to the work of interpretation.

Having noted that origin narratives can take several different forms, I would like to enumerate some of the notions, concepts, and ideas associated with sacred geography that have emerged from the chapters in this volume.

1. Features of the sacred landscape, both natural and built, can involve sacred or ritual numbers, sacred directions, sacred times, sacred colors, and gender specification. For the Inca, Seris and Aztecs four is the ritual number. The number five is sacred for the Huichol of Mexico, and the Tarahumara ritual numbers are three for male and four for female.
2. Sacred geography is categorizable, usually conjunctively (i.e., having additive rather than alternative attributes), in terms of local, regional, and “tribal” levels of recognition. It can also be classified by means of such criteria as central and peripheral, high and low, domesticated and wild, and male and female among other conceptual distinctions.
3. The origin narrative and sacred landscape can include the celestial landscape (including sun, moon, planets, and constellations), and commonly monsters are slain by human precursors or culture heroes, making the world safe for people. When ancestors appear or are created, it is often in groups of four, making a sort of pun of the word “forefathers.” The K’iche’ origin narrative specifies four ancestral pairs (four males and four females), as does that of the Inca people. This is not exclusive to Latin America, and we may note that each of several Navajo clans came about as Changing Woman rubbed her body parts to create four individuals (two men and two women).
4. Features of the sacred landscape are generally, but not always, related to the three basic cosmic realms, which can be succinctly named as the upper world, the middle world and the lower world, and each might be subdivided. The sacred landscape can be represented in microcosm as well as in macrocosm, and its features can be related to metaphors of the body and of the house. Features in the landscape are given religious and cultural meaning from a particular urban center, be they ancient platforms and ceremonial centers or modern indigenous villages.
5. Communication and movement between cosmic levels utilizing sacred places and ritual actions suggests the places may be perceived of as conduits or portals, and that the ritual action opens the mind to their presence. Ritual action, which is essentially timeless and occurs in sacred space, often employs music, song, dance, sacrifice, oratory, and sometimes hallucinogens. Despite its timelessness in one sense, timing is vital in another. Particular deities have particular times of the year dedicated to them, and ritual action concerning them is often

accomplished only at particular times of the day or night as we saw in the chapter on Tz'utujil *cofradía* activities, though the same could be said about almost every indigenous group in Mesoamerica. One reason for the crucial aspect of timing is that the passage between this world and the other is only, or most easily, accomplished at certain times.

Preparation is important to successful ritual action. In rituals, the part can stand for the whole. Pilgrimage, ceremonial circuits, ballgames, processions, and sometimes races are ceremonial constructs of ritual action. It is possible to see all of these as having a "pilgrimage" component. Equally, offerings of blood, food, vegetation, smoke, and prayers constitute ritual actions, as do the activities cited above that are so much a part of opening the portal; dance, song, oratory.

6. Origin narrative and its ritual/ceremonial accompaniment or representations, often depending upon features of the built and natural landscape, function to restore harmony, to establish dominion, to remember, and/or to participate.
7. High places in the natural landscape (as well as the built landscape), such as mountain peaks, are especially likely to be powerful, sacred, and referenced in origin or creation narratives. When gendered, they are likely to be male, and lakes and oceans are likely to be female.
8. Memory is highly dependant on place. Easily pointed out landmarks are likely to have high salience in memory and likely to be relatable to what can be called sacred geography if not necessarily to "origin" features of the landscape. Moreover, such memorable features of the landscape are particularly likely to be named, to be imbued with meaning of importance and with power derivative of the meaning, as well as to be foci for narratives concerning those features. Naming, power, and the repetition of significant narrative events constitute the triad of supports upon which memory is based and upon which memorials depend. We have seen that high peaks, deep caves, tall trees, long rivers, and large lakes are particularly significant features of the natural sacred landscape and appear likely to figure into the built landscape of the sacred, which emulates and transforms the natural landscape.
9. In most societies certain plants (e.g., peyote for the Huichol) animals (e.g., the jaguar for the Yucatec Maya) and human constructed symbolic items (e.g., the staff of office for a Tzeltal speaker, a flywhisk for an ancient Egyptian, a drum for a Kaluli native of New Guinea, a mask in Bali, a consecrated wheat wafer in a Catholic society) are seen to represent, possess, embody, or delegate power. Sometimes but not always, these things need to be apprehended in an appropriate context in space and time in order to generate recognition of their power. Through ritual, some specific tokens of these items can accumulate power.
10. While power, authority, and control are wielded by people and can be both allocated (transfer from many to one) and delegated (transfer from one to many) by people (Adams, 1975:43), power can also be attributed to non-human cosmic, natural, supernatural, spiritual, and/or otherworldly elements. Power is usually also seen as inherent in particular geographic configurations, elements and directions, in certain numbers, in certain names and verbal formulae, and

expressible or more effective at certain times (of the day, month, year). Power is also generated by ritual re-enactments, circuits and processions, and ritual performance appears to generate power that is absorbed by the landscape where the rituals occur, whether the landscape is natural or constructed. Thus, more ancient sacred places are more powerful. However, in the end power, whether generated through ritual activity or inherent in actual or symbolic elements of the sacred landscape is not just for anyone to generate or utilize. It can be employed to the benefit of those who know how to use it, and it is thought to be dangerous to those who **don't**. Such power has a political dimension, and validation of authority can be accomplished by manipulation of the origin narrative and one's positioning with respect to it.

Places of creation and origin are of signal importance in landscapes and in particular, representations of what can be called the sacred landscape, and natural or symbolic caves are of particular importance as places of origin and creation. Such places and the associated creation and origin narratives serve to reiterate vital and germane historical portions of a cosmology or metaphysics, and they also serve to retrieve some of the power of creation from locally specific manifestations and symbolically represented locations for use in legitimating authority of those who are skilled in "packaging" and "selling" these representations. Ceremonial circuits, so important in recreating origins, are repeated and repetitive representations that through performance are perceived to accomplish certain goals. For example, exposing a neophyte to a place of importance, calling into being or presence elements of the "supernatural" (i.e., the "natural" elements from another place), and/or opening the conduit between this world and the otherworld. In so doing they make manifest the powers of place that figuratively lie dormant until so aroused.

In many communities balancing powers is a desired end; a means of establishing the harmony of relationships between this world and others and among things of this world. Establishment of a harmonious balance of powers among the integral parts of a system ensures continued food, housing and survival. This can be partly accomplished by identifying the "sacred landscape" that "defines" the world and its important components, and that is miniaturized in the construction of a pueblo, or within a pueblo the construction of a "sacred garden" (a plaza), or the construction of a house, and within the house, of an altar. Sometimes within the tomb of an especially important person—which can be seen as the house for the person, in that it shelters their remains after death, just as a womb full of amniotic fluid shelters the person before birth—there will be deposited a cosmogram in the form of symbolic representations from various realms of the cosmos (e.g., shells symbolizing ocean, jades symbolizing maize, and birds symbolizing the sky); or a shell, a deer bone, and a bird feather, or an engraved image on stone, bone, shell, or wood). A similar deposit, a cache, may attend the construction of a temple or place of worship, perhaps to animate it, giving it a heart and the spark of life, though the latter often requires sacrifice of a life.

In addition to identifying the components of the sacred landscape, they must be manipulated in such a way as to constitute or represent the physiology of the system

that they represent. There must be the means for channeling or transporting liquids and other materials from one place to the other, much as blood is transported by the blood vessels from one organ to another in the human body. There must also be a means for entrance and exit of sustaining life forces (food, blood, breath, semen, spirit, waste), orifices like the mouth and anus, that might be represented as caves in the earth or bowls on an altar, as might the womb so important for birth.

Certain mountains (peaks, hills), caves, *cenotes*, trees (ceiba, gourd tree, algarroba, *po'j* tree, cacao, cottonwood), springs, and bodies of water (oceans, lakes, rivers) are or mark places in nature's sacred landscape, and certain animals (fox, jaguar, puma, coyote, shark, eagle, heron, *Spondylus* and *Strombus* conch) are sacred elements in that landscape. People, in attempting to manipulate these, get pieces or parts of them, or make images of them, or symbols, manufacturing "artificial" correspondences to these places and animals, often attributing gender to the animal, plant, or place. They make a temple, pyramid, or earthmound that corresponds to the natural mountain, and we know from the Maya, the Aztecs, and the Inca that these often were named. The constructed elements are treated as if they stand for the power entities, deities, or other attributes of the elements of the landscape, being exhorted, prayed to, sacrificed to, ordered, or begged, among other things, or they may just be carried around for luck.

Some peoples construct standing stelae of stone, or wood, perhaps corresponding to the natural tree. And they also make cisterns, artificial lakes, bowls, and/or other items that hold water which correspond to the natural bodies of water. It is likely that in most societies the lake is distinguished from the ocean (which is salty) and from the river (which circulates water), the latter corresponding to the sometimes elaborate water channels or drains found in Olmec and Teotihuacan sites in Mesoamerica and found in the Andean region as well.

Arrangements of the most important elements of the sacred landscape or landscape of origin and creation, can be constructed iconically and in miniature, and even on a two dimensional space. As such they could be termed cosmograms. Cosmograms apparently help to maintain the balance and harmony of the world, essentially by restating it in schematic form thus allowing its recognition, memory, and manipulation by people. They also appear to represent places constructed by humans where communication between the different worlds can be established. Metaphorical cosmograms (non-iconographic manifestations of the same cosmological principles can be found in ritual activities, some of which may consist in recounting stories, as well as in the arrangements and the named components of ones hunting grounds, cornfield, and house.

In all cases, the pre-Columbian landscapes of creation and origin are given constructed representation, not infrequently on several different levels of organization (e.g., altar, house, cornfield, hamlet, village, city). The representation reproduces multiple times the sacred landscape, keying one to the significant elements of it, intensifying the memory by repetition, and allowing a representation to stand in for the real thing in memorializing activities. The representation of the landscape and the reproduction of origins and creation from its significant components, the memory and the identity of individuals and groups with respect

to the sacred landscape, and the differential privilege of usage for various representations of it constitute the major means by which the landscape of origin represents power and authority. It embodies power, legitimates power, and it empowers those who use it.

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Index

A

- Action, in Olmec ceremonial center, La Venta, 42–54, 56
- Agency, Olmec concepts of, 55
- Allegory, 6
- Allpa*, 283, 284
- Amniotic fluid, 147
- Ancestral anacondas, 241
- Ancient cultures, landscape approaches to, 2
- Ancient Eurasian landscapes, 1
- Ancient K'iche' kingdom, 75–79
- Ancient landscapes, 1
- Ancient Latin American religions, 2
- Andean
- civilization development of, 269
 - concepts of place, 272–274
 - cosmological and ideological dimensions, 278–282
 - social dimensions, 274–275
 - spiritual and temporal dimensions, 275–278
 - cultures
 - creation and origin myths among, 6
 - sacred places and, 5
- Inkas in
- El Niño-Southern oscillation events, 315
 - ideological structure of, 316
 - management of rulers in, 316
 - tectonic instability in, 316
- landscape, rulers in, 316
- literature, 1
- sacred center and, 282–284
- soil classification in, 344–345
- Andes, 3
- Andesite stones, 346
- Animal sacrifices, 118
- Anthropomorphic figurine pendant, 225
- Anthropomorphic tuff figurines, 228
- Antigua, cave near, 107
- Antisuyu. *See* Inka empire
- Antizenith sunset, 250
- Aparicio, 11
- Apus*. *See* Mountain deities
- Archaeological sites, ceremonial use of, 80
- Artificial caves, archaeological evidence of, 132
- Ashlar wall. *See* Ushnu Pata platform
- Associations narrators, 5
- Astronomical observations, 254–255
- Atiteco myths, 100, 105, 115
- Atzlan caves, 72, 89
- Autosacrificial ritual, 14–15, 17
- Awilix, 77, 91
- Awuilix, 75
- Axis mundi*, 7, 139, 151, 152, 235, 304, 305, 343
- Ayllu*, concept of, 274
- Aztec
- calendar stone, 55
 - creation stories, 33, 44, 47–50, 56–57
 - creator couple within celestial, 58
 - culture
 - Aztlan*, legendary place of, 133
 - mythological concept borrowed from, 133
 - origin of humanity or mankind, 132
 - Great Temple of, 31
 - myths, 48, 72
- Aztlan*, 133

B

- Babylon, biblical concept of, 126
- Bahía phase ceramic figurines, 240

- Ballcourt sacrifice, 11–18, 21–23, 25–26, 361
 carved stone objects associated with, 11
 in Classic Veracruz iconography, 12
 depictions in public art, 11
 at El Tajín, 13–15
 baton ceremony with cape, 14, 16
 offering and donation of sash and baton, 13, 15
 participants, 13–14, 16
 and fecundity, 4, 21–23, 25–26
 human origin and political power at El Tajín, 12–17
 human sacrifice in, 12, 17–18
 logic of sacrifice, 18
- Bilbao, ballgame imagery of, 23
- Black River, 78
- Blood sacrifice, 20
- Book of Council*, 67
- Brujo-que-se-transforma*, 145
- C**
- CABI. *See* Capitanía de Alto y Bajo Isoso
- Cacaxtla, mural from, 59
- Camac*, concept of, 275
- Camay quilla*, 259
- Capac Hucha* sacrifice, 322, 324
 evidence for, 326
 Inka expression, 318
 Molina on, 318–319
 translation of, 318–319
 and *ushnu*, 349–350
- Capac raymi*, 254, 323
- Capitanía de Alto y Bajo Isoso, 162
- Carved ichthyomorphs, 230
- Carving Mountains in a Blue-Green Bowl*, 33
- Caverns, 7
- Caves, 3, 7, 55–56, 98
 ceremonial use of, 80
 practice of worship, 108
 sacred in Santiago Atitlán, 99–100, 103–111, 119
 as sacred space, 81–82
- Celestial and terrestrial world, 3
- Celestial phenomena, movements of, 12
- Centers of the world, 7
- Central Mexican descriptions, of Tamoanchan, 20
- Central Mexican tales, 15
- Central Mexico, colonial sources of, 130
- Central Quiche Basin region, 80
- Queque* system
 in Inka empire, 317, 318
 Polo de Ondegardo works on, 251, 252
- Ceremonial architecture, 244
- Ceremonial centers, 2, 7
- Ceremonial platform, reconstructed plan of, 216
- Ceremonial rituals, 2
- Chalchiutlicue (Water goddess), 25
- Chamula ceremony, in Chiapas, 73
- Ch'aaq choo ch'aaq palow*, 124
- Chelonia mydas*, 206
- Chiapas, sacred landscape of, 89
- Chiche, 74
- Chichen Itza
 ballgame imagery of, 23
 physical manifestations in postclassic cities, 152
 postclassic center of, 131
- Chichicasteñango, 74, 91
- Chicomoztoc*. *See* Seven caves
- Children (*Capac Hucha*) sacrifice, in *ushnu* platforms, 315
- Chinchasuyu. *See* Inka empire
- Chipixab, 76–77
- Chirao sucanca*, 251–252
- Chitimamit, 77, 87
- Chixoy river, 78
- Chorrera domestic structures, 234
- Chorrera pottery, 244
- Christian ideology related to Maya culture, 131
- Chuacus Mountains ranges, 77, 89
- Chujuyup region, 74–75, 79, 90–91
- Chupan palo*, 146
- Chuquimarca, 254
- Chutinamit, cave shrine on, 106–107
- Cipactli-cave-throne plaza, 56
- Citua* ritual performance, in Cuzco, 323
- Classic Maya, 21
 courts, 12
 decapitation sacrifice in, 22
 iconography, 133, 134
 rituals, 73
 site, 70–71, 78
 writing, 22
- Classic Teotihuacan, 20–21
- Classic Veracruz
 ballcourt decapitation sacrifice, 13
 ballcourt sacrifice
 depictions in public art, 11
 in iconography, 12
 culture, 18
 imagery and politics
 associations of maguey in, 12
 ballcourt decapitation sacrifice, 13
 origins of power in, 11–26

- Clay walling, 223
 Coatepec, 31
Codex Borgia, 152
Codex Dresden, 152
Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, 152
Codex Vindobonensis, 33, 57–58
 Cofradía ceremonies, and sacred mountains, 95–120
Cofradía house, 96, 102, 108–110, 112, 116, 119, 365
 Colca valley, Yanque community in, 344
 Collasuyu. *See* Inka empire
 Communal fishing, ritual space of, 194
 Condoray, 332
 Contact-era K'iche Maya epic, 12
 Contact-era writings, 12
 Contemporary Mesoamerican ballgame imagery, 23
 Copan
 iconography of, 70–71
 stone mountain in, 72
 structure, 117
 Corn, discovery at Food Mountain, 50
 Cosmic layers, 7
 Cosmic orders, 4
 Cosmologies, 2, 4, 72, 81
Costumbre ritual, 74
 Creation and origin
 characteristics of narratives on, 6
 landscape and visual narrative of, 31–62
 La Venta narratives, 57–60
 flexibility to fixity, 60–62
 stations, 42–54
 temporality, 55–56
 Middle Formative story, 61
 mythological origins and, 4, 6
 myths among Andean cultures, 6
 narratives transformations, 6
 Pre-Columbian landscapes of, 1–7
 symbols of, 7
 Creation narratives, in Mesoamerica, 32–33
 Creatrix deity, 100
 Cross Group Temples, at Palenque, 33
 Cruz Che, 79
 Cuachus mountains, 92
 Culture
 and ethnic identity, 6
 memory, 2
 and nature, 1–2
 Cuntisuyu. *See* Inka empire
 Cuzco, 317
 Citua ritual performance, 323
 contact period and, 270
 Cuyusmanco in, 289
 feline imagery and, 296
 Guaman Poma works on, 290
 and *hanan*, 283
 model, 284–289
 Tawantinsuyu, 318
 Tawantinsuyu empire and, 282
 Ushnus astronomical observations, 291
 Ushnus in, 295, 299, 301
 valley, 249
 Cuzco Polo de Ondegardo, cathedral of, 345
- D**
 Dance of the Conquest, 85
 Dawning of day-keeper, at Maya Caves, 70, 80
 Dawning Place, 80, 85–87, 91
 Day-keeper, at Maya Caves, 70, 80
 Debt payment, conception of sacrifice as, 17–18
 Decapitation, 44
 ceremony, 11–12
 rite in Mesoamerica, 13
 sacrifice in Classic Maya, 22
 Deciduous tropical dry forest, 205
 Deities, setting of sky by, 15, 17
 Descent passage, at Maya Caves, 82–88
 Diego Kiju, 103
 Drunkenness ritual, among pulque cult, 19
- E**
 Early Colonial Central Mexican descriptions, of human creation, 14
 Earth
 goddesses, 53, 60
 and sky sexual union, 57
 Easter Celebrations, 109
 Eastern Mountain of Sustenance, 147
Echinopsis pachanoi. *See* San Pedro Cactus
 Ecuador
 ceremonial centers in, 203
 lowlands of, 208
 Olmec and Late Formative cultures of, 6
 social development, 204
 Effigy caves, 107, 117
 Ehecatl, 19–20
 El Manatí, 51
 El Niño-Southern oscillation, 315
 El Tajín, 6, 11
 ballcourt decapitation sacrifice
 offering and donation of sash and baton, 13, 15
 participants, 13–14, 16
 ballgame imagery of, 23–25

- El Tajín (*cont.*)
 baton ceremony with cape, 14, 16
 ceramic tradition of, 19
 Flowering Maguey
 mountain, 18–21
 as plant of paradise, 23–25
 Gulf Coast societies of, 5
 human origin and political power at,
 12–17
 narratives, 19
 place of skull at, 21–23
 rulers, 361
 stone architecture, 12–13
 Embryo-maize stelae sprout, 55–56
 Emergence
 passage at Maya Caves, 82–88
 places of, 95–120
 Engoroy settlement, original size and
 configuration estimation of, 209
 Epiclassic El Tajín, 22
 Epiclassic Xochicalco, 20
 Epi-Toltec warlords, 129
 Eschatological imperatives, 4
 Escuintla, ballgame imagery of, 23
 Esoteric knowledge, 2, 6
 Esquipulas, cave near, 107
 Ethnic identity, 6
 Ethnohistoric records, 2
Euthynnus linneatus, 206
 Existential orders, 4
- F**
Fasciolaria princeps, 234
 Feasting, 2
 Fecundity
 and ballcourt sacrifice, 21–23, 25–26
 creation through, 4
Felis pardalis. *See* Ocelot
 Fetus sculpture, 41, 44, 56
 Figurines, burial of, 241
 Flora, symbolic significance of, 1
 Flowering Maguey
 mountain, 18–21, 25–26
 and penis rite, 23–24
 as plant of paradise, 23–25
 as Pre-Columbian paradise, 20–21
 Flower Mountain, concept of, 21
 Flowery paradise, Nahuatl conceptualizations
 of, 21
 Foliated, temple of, 81
 Food Mountain, 50
 Foreshadowing, at Olmec ceremonial center,
 La Venta, 42–54, 56
- Fossil wood anthropomorphic figurine, 225
 Francisco Sojuel, 103–104, 107, 116
- G**
 Garden of the Sun, 286
 Geomancy regularities, in Mesoamerican,
 72–74
 Glyphic documents, 12
 Grand cataclysm, 199
 Great sin. *See* Capac Hucha sacrifice
 Great Temple of the Aztec, 31
 Guaraní
 in Bolivia, 163
 and fox related myths, 185–189
 and *Iya*, 183–185
 between life and death, 197
 lower and upper Isoso communities, 171–173
 migration of, 161
 and Parapeti river, 164–168
 Guatemala
 colonial sources of, 127
 destination for pilgrims from, 131
 Gulf Coast Olmec sites, 34, 38
 Gulf Coast societies, 5
- H**
 Hacautiz, 77–78
Hacedores de lluvia, 145
Hanan pacha, 340
 Harvest Mountain Lord, 61
 Haucaypata, 253
 Head ornament, 234
 Hieroglyphic writing, 2
 Highland Guatemala, 123
 Himalayas, 3
Historia de Don Juan de Torres, 126
Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas,
 15, 33
*Historia de los Xpantay de Tecpan
 Guatemala*, 126, 146
Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca, 56
 Histories and local landscape, in memory of
 associations narrators, 5
Histoyre du Mechique, 15, 19–20, 47
 Honduran Classic Maya site, 70
 Honduran Mayas, 70–71
Huacas, 269, 270. *See also* Sacred Places
ayllus role, 274
Coricancha and, 286
 map of, 271
 origin of, 270
 pre-Hispanic association of, 273

priests and diviners role, 274
 representation of, 270
 sacrificial offerings of, 277
 succession of sacrifices, 258
 supernatural power, 275
Huacaypata, 286, 302, 317, 323
 Huanuco Pampa, *ushnu* at, 326, 342, 347
 Huarochirí manuscript, 273, 319
 on *ushnu*, 324, 346–347
 Huastec ethnicity, 19
 Huastec traditions, 19
 Human
 accession to power and creation, 12–17
 behavior, 1, 3, 7
 burials of Episodes 6, 7 and 8, 231–234
 creation of, 11–12
 maize plants, 56
 maize seeds, 59–60
 origin and political power at El Tajín, 12–17
 race
 birth of, 48
 origins from maize, 59–60
 sacrifice as payment to gods, 18
 Hun Hunahpu, 116–117
Husnocta pircaspa (ushnu), 324

I

Ichthyomorphic tuff figurines, 232
 Iconography, 2, 3, 5, 11, 360, 361
 Inca (Inka) Empire. *See also* Tawantinsuyu
 boundary of, 271
 calendar, 256, 323
 Carabajal works on, 320, 321
 ceque system and, 316–318
 construction in, 276
 Coricancha in, 286
 cosmos, 283
 culture of, 278
 cuzco and, 318
 economic organization of, 315
 ideological structure of, 278, 280
 Inca Manco, 288
 Inca Tupac Yupanqui, 295
 mummies of, 322
 pirqa pata, 329–331
 veneration of, 280
 Incense offerings, 82, 91, 96, 98, 100, 102–104,
 106–107, 110–113, 116–118, 120
 Infant sacrifice, 48–49
 Initiation rights, 69
 Inka Pirqa platform
 analysis of sample from, 337
 ayllus responsibility, 338

 east face of, 334
 features of, 341
 focus of, 341
 Isbell identification, Middle horizon tombs,
 336
 levels, 347
 location of, 334
 measurement of, 333
 plan of, 333
 stairs absence in, 333
 top platform at, 339
 and *ushnu*, 340–341
 ushnu platform existence, 332
 Inka Raqay, of *ushnu* pata
 location of, 332
 and Ushnu Pirqa
 distance between, 341
 visibility, 340
 Inkas
 in Andean landscape, 315–316
 Betanzos on, 322
 Capac Hucha sacrifice association with, 318
 Carabajal on, 321
 and Ceque system, 316–318
 Citua ritual celebration, 323
 hanan pacha, linking of, 340
 Huanuco Pampa city, 326
 Manco Capac, 321
 Pachacuti, 325
 queens, 322
 use of feathers by, 322
 on *ushnu*, 320
 as administrative tool, 325
 Insemination, 57
 Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 332
 Islote Cayo, 205
 Isoleño
 believes about river, 174–179
 end of the world, 199
 and *Iya*, 183–185
 landscape organization, Parapeti river in,
 167–168
 social crisis of, 183
 water related social activities of, 179–182
 Isoleño Guarani, in Chaco lands, 367
 Isoso
 community center, 191–193
 cosmic center, 189–190
 domestic center, 193–194
 geographic centers of, 190
 ritual space, 191
 spatial distribution of communities,
 171–173
 and water, 191

- Isoso river. *See* Parapeti river
Īupaya (Man of the lakes), 194
Iximte, symbol for, 139
Iya
 and elders, 184–185
 functions and definition of, 183–184
 languages of, 184
 territory of, 197–198
 Izapa, 62
- J**
 Jakavitz, 77–79, 91
 Jama Valley Tabuchila ceramics, 208
 Joyabaj, 74
 Juan Kiju, 103
 Jun Junajpu, 139
- K**
Kañitei guasu. *See* Grand cataclysm
 Kaqchikel, 79
 K'iche'
 calendar diviners, 69
 empire, 364
 Maya calendar, 90
 Maya mythic history of, 5
 metaphor for birth and death, 88
 reading-related landscapes in, 67–92
 shamans initiation of, 70
K'iche' laj forests, 74
Kurakas, in Andean landscape, 316
- L**
 Laguna de Terminos region, 76
 Lake Atitlán, 107
 La Lagunilla, 78, 87, 89
 La Mojarra, Harvest Mountain Lord of, 61
 Landscape
 approaches to ancient cultures, 2
 and religion, 3
 and visual narrative
 of creation and origin, 31–62
 in Mesoamerica, 31–33
 Lanzón, 304
 La Plata Island, excavation at, 208
 Las Higueras, 11
 Late Postclassic era, 129
 Aztec, 12
 Central Mexico, 22
 narratives place of pulque's origin, 18
 polity in, 19
 La Venta
 landscape and visual narratives, 31–62
 Massive Offerings of, 34, 52–53, 59
 monuments distribution at, 37–40
 narratives
 of creation, 57–60
 flexibility to fixity, 60–62
 stations, 42–54
 temporality, 55–56
 visual, 40–42
 Olmec ceremonial center
 landscape and visual narratives, 31–62
 setting, characters, action and
 foreshadowing at, 42–54, 56
 plan of, 36
 processional visual narrative, 40–42, 62
 sculptures of, 61–62, 363
 sex in, 42
 sources of stones transported to, 34–35
 La Ventilla, 25
 Legends and history, transformation of, 4, 5
Leyenda de los Soles, 15, 20, 33, 44, 49
 Life, power of, 88
Llaca chuquies, 320
Llacta, concept of, 272
 Lower Isoso, 167–170
 Lyle Campbell's linguistic analysis, 129
Lyropectens subnudus, 234
- M**
 Machalilla fishers, 209
 Maize God, 12, 42
 emerging from fish monster, 135
 face in cacao tree, 139
 rebirth of, 137
 Male and Female Creators forms, 57–58
Ma na xe a ta winaq ki-k' oje' ik, 146
 Manco Capac (Inka), 321
 Manteño señorío of Salangome, 209
 Marco Rohuch, 102–103, 110, 116
 María Batz' b'al, 100
 María Castelyan deity, 100, 103
 Massive Offerings, of La Venta, 34, 52–53, 59
Mawi kojkamik kojulik, 146
 Maya
 ancient traditions of storytelling and sacred
 rituals, 95–96
 archaeological evidence for early post-
 classical occupation of, 131
 archaeological site of Palenque, 81
 art, 59
 calendar, 117
 and calendar calculations, 80
 caves

- across time and space, 67–92
- Ancient K'iche' kingdom tale, 75–79
- dawning of day-keeper, 80
- descent, transformation and emergence
 - passage, 82–88
- edges in center, 70–72
- imagery, 103
- initiation rite of passage, 82–88
- ritual and history, 88–92, 119–120
- sacred landscapes, 72–74
- sacred space, 81–82
- Utatlan axis, 88–92
- caves, transformation passage at, 82–88
- ceremonialism, 108
- cosmology, 108, 123, 147
- cultures, 21
- hieroglyphic
 - decipherment, 33
 - texts report of royal accessions, 153
- highlands, 6
- iconographic concept of Maize God's
 - rebirth, 135
- immigration, 132
- Maize God, 12
- monument, 44
- pattern of ancestor shrines, 151
- religious concept of, 132
- sacred landscapes of, 72–74
- source for *emic* explanations of, 133
- story, 33, 57, 59
- temples, 117–118
- text, ritual and history, 67–92
- theology of, 98, 108
- traditional worship practices, 116–117, 119
- versions of Roman Catholic saints, 95
- Yukatek Maya, 131
- Mayahuel (the Goddess of pulque), 19, 25
- Megaptera novaeangliae*, 206
- Memorial de Sololá*, 124, 127, 129, 131, 152, 153
- Mesoamerica, 3, 11–12, 32
 - archetypal metaphor for, 133
 - art, 38
 - artists and architects, 31
 - ballgame narratives, 1, 22, 25–26
 - ceremonial practices, 72
 - characters in creation narratives, 55
 - civilization, 60
 - concept of World Tree, 148
 - cosmography, 151
 - cosmos, 88
 - creation narratives, 32, 44, 55, 57, 59–60
 - culture, 76, 130, 364
 - decapitation rite in, 13
 - feature of political legitimacy in, 130
 - geomancy regularities in, 72–74
 - history, 71
 - iconography, 23
 - landscape and narrative in, 31–33
 - Mountain of Sustenance, 50
 - myths of, 123
 - pilgrimage, 153
 - spatio-temporal concepts in, 38
 - stories solid nucleus, 57
- pan-Mesoamerican tradition, 132
- Mexicanized Chontal Maya speakers, invasion of, 129
- Mexico, immigration of Uto-Aztecan speakers into, 133
- Middle horizon tombs, Isbell identification, 336
- Migration, concept of, 123
- Miraculous tree, tales of, 116
- Mitimae* community, 321
- Mixe Nashwini (Mother Earth Surface), 52
- Mixe-Zoquean language, 34
- Mixtec creation tale, 33, 57–58, 60
- Mixtec sacrifice, 18
- Mixtequilla, 18
- Momostenango, 73
- Monuments
 - distribution at La Venta, 37–40
 - and monumental architecture, 1
- Mosaic Pavements, 52–53, 59
- Mountain deities, 316
- Mountain of Sustenance, 31, 56, 59, 137, 150.
 - See also* Food Mountain
- Mountains, 3, 7, 31, 56, 59
- Mount Chichinauhia, 19
- Mount Pozonaltepetl (Mountain of Foam), 19
- Mt. Quispicancha, 249
- Mt. Sucasca
 - Ceque* system, 253
 - group of four pillars, 254
 - Mt. Quispicancha and, 251
 - observation of sunrise from, 249
 - observation of sunset from, 250, 251
 - quispicancha *sucasca*, 255
 - role in observing zenith sunrise, 262–263
 - role in zenith sunrise, 262–263
- Mutu *sucasca*, 253, 258
- Mythic Maya tale, 68
- Mythological origins and creations, 4
- Myths
 - and local landscape in memory of
 - associations narrators, 5
 - of *Popol Vuh*, 4
 - solid nucleus of, 57–60
 - of transformation, 4

N

- Nab'eysil* priest (Traditionalist priest), 96–97
- Nahuatl narratives
 - of origin, 15
 - place of skull in, 21–23
 - of Tamoanchan, 19–21
- Narratives
 - of creation and origin, 57–60
 - flexibility to fixity, 60–62
 - La Venta stations, 42–54
 - temporality, 55–56
- Native oral accounts, 4
- Natural environment, fertility of, 4
- Natural world, power of, 7
- Nawal* people, 124
- Nawal winaq*, 144
- Neotropics, 4
- Nextlahualtin*, 18
- Night sky, 7
- Niqaj palo*, 126
- Non-Guarani population, 173

O

- Ocelot, 224
- Odocoileus virginianus*, 234
- Oliman*, 129
- Olmec and Engoroy ceremonial centers, 6
- Olmec and Late Formative cultures, of Ecuador, 6
- Olmec art, 59
- Olmeca-Xicalanca, 129
- Olmec Ceremonial Center, La Venta
 - characters of, 42–54, 56
 - landscape and visual narrative of creation and origin at, 31–62
- Olmec quincunxes, characteristic of, 46
- Olmec sculptures, 32, 44
- Oquin, 79
- Origin places, reenactment in ritual performance, 5

P

- Pacha*, concept of, 275
- Pachamanca*. *See* *Capac Hucha*, evidence for
- Palenque Cross Group, 57
- Panthera onca*, 207
- Paq'alib'al cave, 98–111, 147, 365
 - jaguars and pumas associated with, 103
 - myths about, 105
 - story about fruit in front of, 104–105
- Paradise
 - Mesoamerican ideas of, 12, 26
 - plant as flowering maguey, 23–25

- Parapeti river, 358
 - change of flow, 168–171
 - cyclical behavior, 165–166
 - flow, 163
 - importance of, 164–165, 173–174
 - Isoseño believes of, 174–179
 - Isoseño landscape organization, 167–168
 - spatial distribution of communities, 171–173
- Pascual Abaj, 90–91
- Passage, initiation rite at Maya Caves, 82–88
- Patojil, 75, 77, 79, 90
- Pawilix, 75, 77, 79, 91
- Paxil Cayala*, 124, 147
- Penis
 - rite and flowering maguey, 23–24
 - sculpture of, 58–59
- Pero are taq xujek' o*, 140
- Phallic image, 53–54, 59
- Phytelephas aequetorialis*, 216
- Pictorial creation narratives, 33
- Pinctada mazatlanica*, 207
- Pisom Q'aq'al*, 153
- Pixlaq* plant, 112
- Place of Ancient Reeds, 152. *See also* Q'umarkaj
- Places of emergence, 95–120
- Plant of paradise, as flowering maguey, 23–25
- Po'j* tree, 99
- Political power, at El Tajín and human origin, 12–17
- Popol Vuh*, 4, 12, 33, 44, 49, 58–60, 67, 71, 75–76, 80, 82, 89–92, 116, 125, 129, 132, 363, 364, 366
- Post Classic Maya creation myth, 44, 58
- Power
 - of all life, 88
 - categorization of, 359
 - concepts of, 6
 - dimensions of, 360
 - expression of, 360
 - of natural world, 7
 - political at El Tajín and human origin, 12–17
- Pre-Columbian landscapes
 - creation and origin, 1–7
 - symbolic significance of, 1
- Pre-Columbian shaman initiation rights, 69
- Primordial maize, concept of eating, 140
- Processional creation narrative, 60
- Protothaca beili*, 227
- Pucuy sucanca*, 251
- Pueblos viejos*, 272
- Pulque cult, 18–20
- Pulque drinking tradition, 19

Pulque symbolism, 19
 Pumpu (*ushnu*), 326, 342
Pura upiay, 259

Q

Qajawal Keej, 141
 Quechua language, 282–283
 Quezaltenango, 90
 Quiancalla, 253–254
 Quiche'. See K'iche'
Quim Tulan Ahzib Tulan, 126
 Quispicancha *sucanca*, 253, 255
Q'umarcaj, 90
 Q'umarkaj, 132, 152

R

Reading-related landscapes, in K'iche', 67–92
 Religious ideology, 1
 Resurrection, 44
 Right to rule, 6
Rite-de-passage, concept of, 134
 Ritual

- artifacts and sculpture, 6
- and history in Maya text, 67–92
- human sacrifice, 4
- movements and processions, 5
- offerings, 223
- and oral accounts, 4
- origin places reenactment performance
 - in, 5
- performance, 3–4, 6
- sacrifice, 2–3

R'muxux ruchilew (The navel of the world), 147
 Roman Catholic saints, Maya versions

- of, 95

 Royal Holloway, research on *ushnu* platforms, 315
 R'tie Chie deity, 100
 Rumihuasi, carved rocks of, 297, 298, 300

S

Sacred caves, in Santiago Atitlán, 99–100, 103–111, 119
 Sacred landscape, 3, 269, 376

- of Chiapas, 89
- of Maya, 72
- night sky as, 7

 Sacred life-giving trees, 60
 Sacred mountains, and *cofradía* ceremonies, 95–120
 Sacred narratives, events in, 11

Sacred places

Albornoz works on, 291
 in Andean landscape, 316
 origin and creation of, 269
 vitality of, 348
 Zuidema works on, 370
 Sacrifice, conception as debt payment, 17–18, 60
 Salango

- ceremonial center, 242
- Engoroy ceremonial site at, 212
- evidence for public ceremony at, 215
- late formative sacred center at, 244
- occupation of, 209
- pre-Columbian settlement at, 205

Sami, concept of, 276
 San Andres Sajcabaja, 76
 San Bartolo murals, 60
 San Martin Mundo mountain, 87
 San Pascual Abaj shrine, 87
 San Pedro Volcano, 111
 Santa Elena Peninsula, 208
 Santa Maria volcano, 90
 Santa Rosa Chujuyup, 74, 77
 Santiago Atitlán, 97–100

- mythology of, 103
- sacred caves in, 99–100, 103–111, 119

Sapa Inca, 275
Saq'iq' cave, 102
 Saqiribal, 76, 79, 81–82, 86–87, 90–92
 Saqiribal Mountain, 78
 Sayhuite monolith, 295–297
 Scared mountains, cultural version of, 71
 Scenic displays, 37, 39
 Self-destruction, 44
 Serpent Mountain, 31
 Setting, at Olmec ceremonial center, La Venta, 42–54, 56
 Seven caves, 81, 89, 132
 Sexual union, of sky and earth, 57
 Shamanic initiation practice, 69, 72–73, 89
 Shell artifacts, associated with Episode 8 burials, 234
 el Shinkal de Quimivil (*ushnu*), 326, 342
 Skulls, place at El Tajín and in Nahuatl narratives, 21–23, 26
 Sky

- and earth sexual union, 57
- setting by deities, 15, 17

 Snake Mountain

- in Nahuatl narratives, 21
- narratives, 21–23

 Social activities of Ioseño and water availability, 179–183
 Sociopolitical orders, 4

- Soil classifications, by Andean community, 344–345
- Solid nucleus, of mythic motifs, 57–60
- Solstitial axis, 258
- Space-time, in La Venta narrative, 55–56
- Spaniards, 286
- Spondylus* bead, 228
- Spondylus* shell, 207
- Spondylus* spp., 288
- Stone mountains, in Copan, 70, 72
- Street of the Sun, 286
- Strombus* conch, 236
- Strophocheilus popelairianus*. *See* Tree snail
- Sucanca, 249
- comparison of ritual movements in, 260–262
 - double function of, 263–265
 - Incas and, 255
 - ritual movements, 256–260
- Sun Pyramid, in Teotihuacan, 132
- Sunturhuasi*, 286, 287
- Sustenance Mountain, in Aztec period, 362
- T**
- Tabasco-Veracruz area, 129
- Tamoanchan, 19–23
- Postclassic Nahuatl visions of, 21
- Tawantinsuyu, 278, 279, 283. *See also* Inka empire
- Temple of Foliated, 81
- Temporal eras myth, 55
- Temporal succession, 40
- Teotihuacan, 81, 89
- imagery, 23–24
 - La Ventilla area of, 25
 - pyramids of, 19
- Tepew Oliman*, 129
- Tepoztlan, 19
- Terrace of festivals. *See* Huacaypata
- Theocratic society, 364
- Tiered platform. *See* Inkas
- Time
- concepts of, 7
 - and space across Maya Caves, 67–92
 - understood and charted by indigenous cultures, 5
- Título de Tonicapán*, 117, 124–126, 143, 149, 153
- Tojil, 75, 77, 84, 89–91
- Tollan*, 3, 130
- Toltec-influenced sites, 131
- Toltecs, 89
- Tonacatepetl, 31
- Tonacaxochincuahuitl* (Flowerly tree of our sustenance), 21
- Totonicapan valley, 90
- Tree snail, 223
- Tulan, geographical location of, 132
- Tulan Siwan*, 130
- Tulan Suywa*, 124, 130
- Tulan Zuyva*, 76
- Tutelary figures, burial of, 241
- Tzitzimime, 19
- Tzitzimit, 91–92
- Tzotzil Mayas, 89
- Tz'um tz'um* fruits, 112
- Tzutujil community, 358
- Tz'utujil Maya community, 364, 365
- U**
- Universidad Nacional de San Cristobal de Huamanga, research on *ushnu* platforms, 315
- Upper Isoso, 167–170
- Ushnu*, 249, 272, 284–289
- ancient dimensions of, 302–305
 - ceremonial and political dimension of, 294–300
 - ceremonial platforms and administrative centers, 285
 - concept of, 284–289
 - concurrent calendrical importance of, 253
 - cultural and ceremonial centers of, 289–294
 - landscape dimensions, 294–300
 - Mt. Sucanca observation, 250
 - observation of sunset from, 261
 - political dimensions of cultural and ceremonial centers, 289–294
 - a regional centers, 301–302
 - ritual ceremonies in, 288
 - role in status differentiation and sociocultural development, 270
 - significance of, 272
 - sucancas* function and, 263
 - sugarloaf stone in, 287
 - vertical and horizontal dimensions of, 284
- Ushnu* Pata platform
- assessment steps towards, 328
 - alignment of, 329
 - ashlar wall of, 329
 - central sector of, 327
 - Inka Pirqa, 332
 - location of, 327
 - North-northwest horizon profile, 331
 - orientation of, 340

- plan of, 330
 - separation from Inka Pirqa Pata, 329
 - visibility of, 340
 - Ushnu Pirqa*
 - location of, 338
 - site of, 346–347
 - South face of, 339
 - structure plan of, 339
 - Ushnu platform*
 - at Abancay, 326
 - as administrative tool, 325
 - and *Capac Huca* sacrifice, 349–350
 - Carabajal on Vilcas Huaman, 325
 - children sacrifice in, 315, 318
 - construction, 346–347
 - definition of, 319
 - Duvoils concept of, 347
 - huaca* importance, 325
 - at Huanuco Pampa, 326
 - Huarochiri manuscript on, 324, 346–347
 - Inka on, 320
 - Betanzos views, 322
 - Carabajal views, 321
 - location of, 341
 - observatory role of, 324
 - orientations of, 349
 - in Peruvian Andes, altitude determination, 340
 - at Pumpu, 326
 - purpose, 351
 - role of, 351
 - soil geochemistry indication, 338
 - testing of theories, 315
 - of Vilcashuaman, 324
 - Zuidema interpretation, 325
 - Ushnu wall. *See* Ushnu Pirqa
 - Usumacinta River drainages, 128
 - Utatlan axis, in Maya Caves, 88–92
 - Utatlan caves, 72, 75–77, 80–81, 83–86, 88–89, 91–92
 - Uto-Aztecanspeakers, immigration into Mexico, 133
- V**
- Vasum caestus* conch, 217
 - Veracruz cult activity, 19
 - Veracruz lowlands, 5
 - Viejo, 89
 - Vilcas Huaman, *ushnu* in, 324, 325
- Visual narratives, 4
 - and landscape in La Venta, 31–62
 - at La Venta, 40–42
 - processional, 40–42
 - Vvcub Pec Vvcub Zivan*. *See* Wuqub' Pek Wuqub' Siwan
- W**
- Wamanis*. *See* Mountain deities
 - Wasisami*, concept of. *See* *Sami*, concept of
 - Water
 - bodies, 3
 - goddesses, 53, 56, 60
 - in Nahuatl narratives, 21–22
 - Weltanschauung*, 155
 - Western stories, temporal aspect in, 55
 - Window of the World, 85, 87, 92
 - Wombs, 55–56
 - World cycles, concepts of, 7
 - Wuqub' Pek Wuqub' Siwan, 124, 126, 132, 144, 147, 155
- X**
- Xeabaj mountain, 76, 78
 - Xibalba, 116–117
 - Xibalbaj, 68, 88
 - Xochincuahuitl* (Flowering Tree), 21
 - Xochitl Icacán* (Where the Flowers Arise), 21
 - Xuk'uxuel* cave, 102
 - Xuraqaquej uchii' ri ab'iix*, 140
- Y**
- Yahaira, 253
 - Yandeyari*, 194
 - Yanque community, in Colca valley, 344
 - Yaxchilan structure, 44
 - Yax Hal Witznal*, 137
 - Yukatek Maya, 131, 375. *See also* Maya
- Z**
- Zacualpa, 74
 - Zaculeu, 89
 - Zenith sunrise, role of Mt. Sucasca, 262–263
 - Zinacantán, 111
 - ceremonial circuits, 73
 - Zinacantecos, 103