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BETWEEN DEATH AND DIVINITY

**Rethinking the Significance of Triadic Groups
in Ancient Maya Culture**

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Introduction

As much as the archaeologists try to reconstruct past cultures using material remains to reconstruct social interactions, religion, behaviour, and even thoughts, in many cases the reconstruction is more of an educated guess than scientific proof. However, a considerable amount of data exists that allows researchers to build theories and hypotheses that constitute functioning models of long gone civilisations. As long as the constant stream of new facts and data fits the model and makes it work even smoother, the model can be considered a paradigm. If a number of pieces of evidence do not fit in the current model it means that the model needs to be changed, refined, or sometimes even completely dismissed.

Such changes in established perception of an ancient civilisation have been quite recurrent in Maya archaeology due to the fact that it is a relatively young field of research. In the first decades of the 20th century researchers saw the Maya as peaceful stargazers, when, in fact, current data points towards a civilisation accustomed to violence and war. J. Eric Thompson thought that the Maya texts were mere calendrical notations. His strong personality and great authority made many scholars cease to pursue other contents in hieroglyphic inscriptions. It had to be an outsider like Yuri Knorozov that proved the otherwise. Even today, new readings of certain glyphs, new contexts, new murals, and new architecture discovered each season make archaeologists constantly change their ideas about the ancient Maya. However, some subfields of the Maya archaeology seem to have settled and hardened, while others still remain quite fluid, such as the areas of epigraphy and architectural studies.

The former depends on a corpus of inscriptions that provide hieroglyphs and constitutes a base for cross-checking and referencing of past readings. The hieroglyphic corpus expands constantly as new discoveries are

being made. Apart from that, a certain trend can be observed recently in the Maya studies: a great number of scholars and students seem to be shifting their interests towards epigraphy, as it becomes more accessible through workshops, handbooks, and extensive Internet databases. With such an amount of intellectual effort directed towards the ancient Maya system of writing, new discoveries have been published broadly in journals, epigraphy blogs, conferences, and even the Internet social media, on a daily basis. This comes as no surprise, since the Maya culture is unique in New World archaeology in terms of possessing such an extensive writing system.

Studies of architecture, the latter of the previously mentioned progressive subfields, seems to be thrown off a certain balance between the gathered data and intellectual effort invested in analysing it. Since there is hardly an archaeological project that does not unearth at least a few buildings each season, the corpus of data grows perhaps even faster than that of inscriptions. However, the analysis of architecture and its context, its function and meaning, often follows the algorithms developed for entirely different sites, or even regions, and thus not well applicable elsewhere, which causes architectural data under-analysed. Hence, certain discrepancies arise between how Maya architecture is being described, classified, and contextualised, and its appearance when seen *in situ* or studied in the field reports and raw drawings. This is not to say that these discrepancies result from negligence, but rather that the perception of architectural context used for cross-referencing and comparison needs to be reevaluated.

A great example of the above that only recently saw some refinement, was the case of so called E-Groups. Named after first such a complex discovered in Uaxactun, Guatemala, an E-Group consists of a pyramid, usually radial, and a long platform extended along the N-S line to the east of that pyramid, topped with three small buildings on its ends and in the centre. As early as in 1920s, Frans Blom recognised the complex to be aligned in the

way that allowed observations of sunrise on equinoxes and solstices (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937). The course of years following that discovery brought an array of reports of E-Groups from the Peten and other regions within the Maya world. However, none of them could have been designed to watch and predict exact moments of solstices and equinoxes due to their alignment aberrations, no visible horizon line, etc. (Aveni *et al.* 2003). Nevertheless, in the literature they had been routinely described as solstice-and-equinox observatories - sometimes just with a brief note on their misalignment - as similar to the one in Uaxactun. Laporte and Fialko (1990) argued that they could have been mere symbolic copies of the original Uaxactun E-Group that departed from their basic function in exchange for other, transcendent qualities. A recent study by Estrada-Belli (2011:77-82) has shown, though, that a number of E-Groups predates that at Uaxactun by centuries. According to Aveni and colleagues (2003) most probably the original idea behind their design, at least in some stages of development, was to mark passages of the Sun through zenith instead of recording the solstices and equinoxes, which proved to be more useful for agricultural calendar. Another comprehensive analysis of the significance of E-Group assemblages by Aimers and Rice (2006) concludes that such a formalised type of architecture was designed as a large-scale architectural stage for solar rituals rather than a precise astronomic observatory or a calendric calibration device.

Other examples of under-analysed architectural structures tend to be described in very broad categories, as "ritual", "administrative", or "domestic", rarely specifying the nature of their use, meaning, context, etc. The lack of data allowing comparison of truly similar examples gathered in a single monographic work results in repetitive referring to cases that are most "popular" rather than representative.

Subject Matter and Methodology

The main goal of this dissertation is to fill the gap in understanding of another kind of such elusive architectural complexes that suffer from lack of scientific attention, namely the Triadic Groups, attempting to establish their meaning and function for the urban Maya societies.

The beginning of this work appears to be a suitable moment to state that despite conducting a research as thorough as the resources and intellectual abilities available to the author allowed it to be, no pretence is made of exhausting the matter completely. Perhaps, however, it will be found useful for future work both on the topic of Triadic Groups specifically, and other specialised architectural complexes in general.

Triadic Groups occur widely throughout the whole Maya region - from the northeastern Yucatan to the Guatemalan highlands - and from the Middle or Late Preclassic until the Postclassic times (roughly 350 BC - AD 1500). This kind of architecture has been reported since the beginnings of the 20th century (see Tozzer 1913:171-175, among others), but the term "Triadic" was coined at the end of the 1980s (Matheny 1987:87; Valdes 1989; Hansen 1990:171-172). In the 1990s and 2000s, a few attempts were undertaken to gather and analyse data in terms of a formal and functional pattern of the Triadics, most notably the papers by Hansen (1998) and Taube (1998) in a canonical study of architecture titled *The Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture* (Houston 1998). Some remarks on the subject can be found in Freidel, Schele, and Parker's classic work *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path* (1993). A recent book by Estrada-Belli (2011) extends the list of Triadics included in the Hansen's work, adding data obtained from the Holmul region projects in Guatemala, along with a discussion on their chronological occurrence and ritual importance at the dawn of the Maya civilisation. The corpus of Triadic Groups compiled for the purpose of this work

has expanded further on and consists of slightly over 80 complexes, but their number may be far greater. For example, the Catalogue lists 10 Triadics from El Mirador, while Hansen mentions as many as 34, though without further specification of the topic (Morales Aguilar *et al.* 2008:201). That being said, many of Triadic Groups listed in this dissertation still await a proper archaeological investigation, and the scarcity of appropriate data prevents them from being useful for the discussion.

Unlike E-Groups, Triadics do not present uniform, practically identical, formal pattern. It is not to say that any group of three buildings forming a triangle will be considered as a Triadic Group. A working definition of the Triadic Group used in this work has been adapted from Estrada-Belli (2011:67-69) and modified by the author. It is based on two criteria that must be fulfilled together:

- a Triadic Group is formed by a main temple set at the back of the platform or pyramid and facing the entrance of the platform flanked by two other temples, usually smaller than the main one, that face each other, set at opposing lateral edges of the platform (Fig. 1a).
- Triadic Groups, or Triadics, are situated on elevated platforms or pyramids.

A number of secondary features, however not always present, can be observed in many cases:

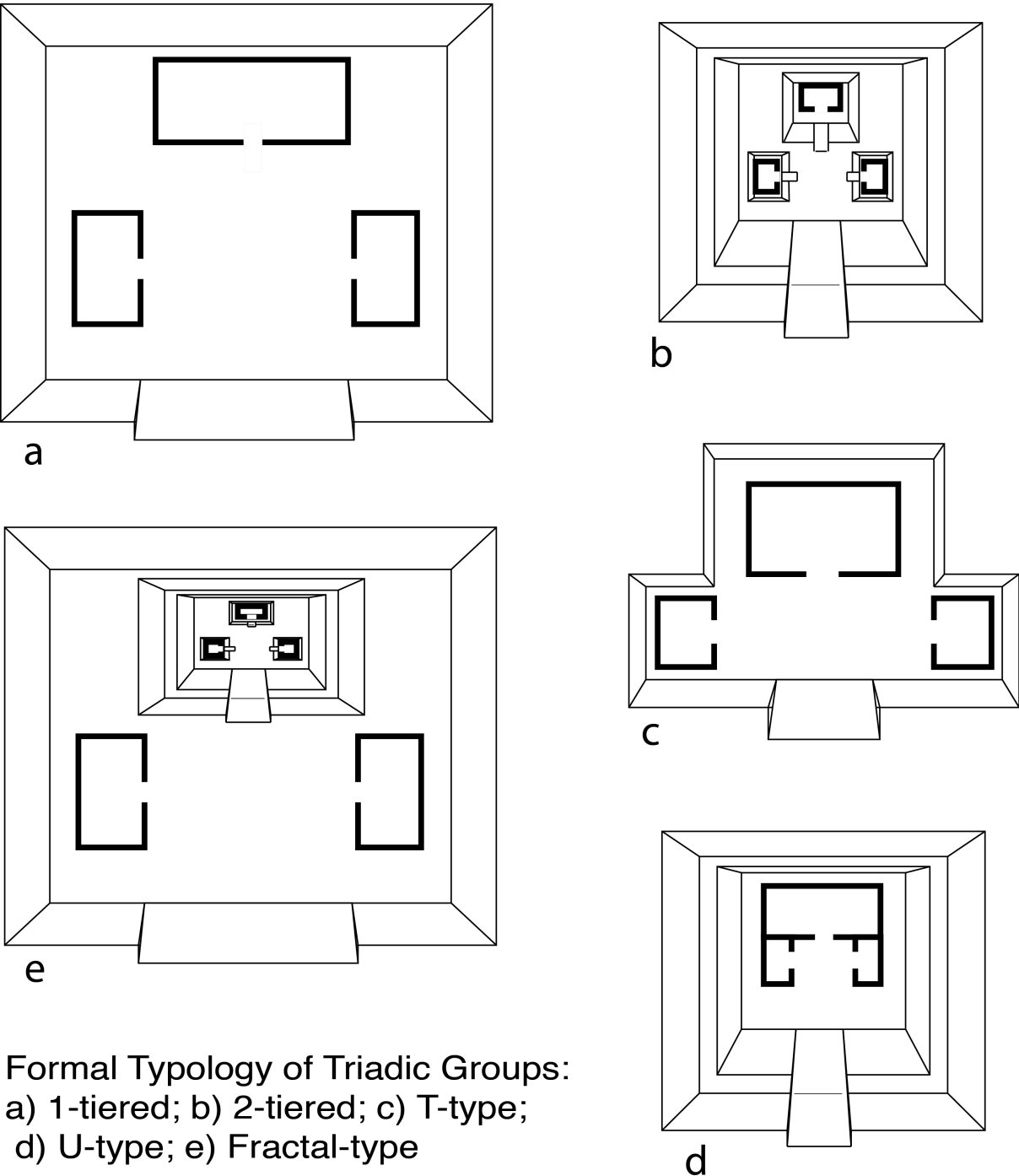
- the main (central) temple of a Triadic, or all three, may be further elevated above the platform by means of pyramidal substructures („2-tiered”, Fig. 1b);
- the entrance to the platform usually takes the form of a broad monumental stairway, frequently flanked by stucco masks;
- the triad of temples may be accompanied by several other buildings on the top of a platform or pyramid;

- the two lateral superstructures may be adjoining the central one („U-type”, Fig. 1d);
- the platform may take form of an inverted letter T, leaving just enough space for the three main superstructures to be constructed on top without additional space on the sides and behind the main structure („T-type”, Fig. 1c);
- one site may feature more than one Triadic Group;
- each of the superstructures constituting the triad may further feature the triadic pattern on top of its own substructures („Fractal-type”, Fig. 1e);

The type names postulated above have been introduced for the sake of discussion that follows, to avoid frequent type descriptions that might confuse the reader. The use of capital letters marks either the nominal phrase (Triadic Group), or its short version understood as a noun (Triadic), when referring to the complexes constituting main focus of this dissertation. Otherwise the word „triadic” will be used as an adjective.

In attempt to answer the primary question of this work - what the Triadic Groups were built for and what they meant for their creators - several secondary questions were asked. They tackle the issues of chronological and spatial distribution of the Triadics, their architectural forms, development stages, urban contexts, iconographic and epigraphic programmes, and archaeological content (burials, caches, etc.). Subsequently, a broad spectrum of cultural traits constituting the Maya civilisation as a whole, such as religion, iconography, astronomy, ethnography, aesthetics, mythology, etc., was scanned in search for topoi of triads and threefold themes, preferably ones with a central, prominent element. Current theories on the Triadic Groups were re-thought, and a cross-cultural comparison of all the above had been performed. The array that emerged was then confronted with the architectural data obtained during the first stage. All topoi that proved to be compatible in

every detail with the generic form of a Triadic Group were subsequently approached from the cognitive perspective, including observations of a built environment and cultural perception of space. The resulting pattern is what most probably once constituted the semantic value of that architectural complex for the Precolumbian Maya people.



Formal Typology of Triadic Groups:
a) 1-tiered; b) 2-tiered; c) T-type;
d) U-type; e) Fractal-type

Fig. 1. Types of Triadics.

Classification and Semiotics of Maya Architecture

Before proceeding towards the data description, the architecture of the Maya will be defined and described, with its variety of forms and symbolic levels. In general, current knowledge about ancient Maya architecture concentrates mostly on monumental constructions, however the bulk of Maya architecture is constituted of a proportionally unknown class of domestic constructions. Part of this disproportion is due to the fact that materials used for the majority of domestic architecture of the common Maya people used to be made of perishable canvass of poles and sticks, sometimes plastered over. As such, a domestic construction's durability is limited in the tropical climate and rarely exceeds one human generation, hence the archaeological traces of perishable buildings are most commonly limited to low basal platforms that have frequently been overlooked by mapping and excavation teams (see Wauchope 1977:232). Exceptions, like the Ceren village in El Salvador that was covered with a thick layer of ashes from the eruption of Loma Caldera, a nearby volcano, around AD 590, therefore preserving everything beneath it, are scarce (Sheets *et al.* 1990; Sheets 2006).

Recently the situation has seemingly improved with the introduction of Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) technology that allows for elaborate Digital Terrain Models to be constructed based on aerial spatial data obtained through laser scanning that penetrates the rainforest canopy (see Chase *et al.* 2011). Studies of Maya domestic architecture show a great variety of shapes and sizes in those constructions, but at the same time underline some basic similarities, like the almost universal presence of basal platforms. Such foundations were used to elevate plaster floors as well as the actual domestic constructions, being the simplest way to keep water from flooding the premises during rainy seasons (Szymański 2010:38-39).

The much better understood monumental architecture stems out conceptually from domestic architecture. Most of the civic and religious buildings resemble the Maya houses to a degree, or at least present the same basic formal principles. The difference lies in the materials used, and the size and height of those structures. Hence practically all the Maya monumental constructions rest on basal platforms that can range from low elevated spaces less than 1 meter tall, to lofty steep pyramids reaching 40 or 50 m in height. The exception are ballcourts that lack associated platforms. The basal platforms of monumental buildings might have been stacked one on top of the other, either in form of terraced pyramids or acropoleis bearing other monumental substructures that in turn bore the actual buildings on their summits. The material used for civic and religious architecture was mostly stone and plaster, with some structures being made of wood and thatch socketed in low basal walls and platforms (Totten 1973; Loten and Pendergast 1984).

Further division of monumental architecture can be made by dividing superstructure bases on their form and the size of their substructures. Hence the multi-chambered, long buildings set on relatively low platforms have been called 'palaces', or more neutrally, 'range' or 'gallery' buildings, whereas narrow, single-, or double-chambered structures elevated on top of high pyramidal substructures have been labelled as 'temples'. The former usually tend to be clustered into patio- or plaza groups, meanwhile the latter can either be parts of the plaza groups or acropoleis, or constitute stand-alone landmarks (Loten and Pendergast 1984; Christie 2003).

Apart from temples and palaces there are a number of free-standing, public constructions that take various forms. The most common are open platforms that served as stages for either ritual activity or displays of artistic and religious media, or as foundations for perishable buildings. Ballcourts, another frequent element of ancient Maya cities, take the form of two long

parallel platforms with sloping inner walls that once formed the playing alley. They are usually found within the cores of the Maya sites. Equally frequent are causeways, usually elevated above the surrounding terrain, and having widths between 5 and 40 m. They served to connect various architectural groups within a given city, or multiple cities together (Cohodas 1985).

A combination of all these types of construction constituted the Maya site core. The architecture in the core was scattered around plazas and patios, platforms bore pyramids and other buildings, and causeways wound between them forming the fabric of the city. Some of the structures mentioned above tended to be clustered together forming fixed architectural groups.

Archaeologists have distinguished a number of such monumental architectural complexes, of which the most frequent and universal are E-Groups as well as Triadic Groups, with Twin Pyramid Groups limited both in spatial and temporal occurrence to the Early Classic Peten region (Cohodas 1985; Hansen 1998; Aveni *et al.* 2003).

Constructing a building, be it a house, a palace, or a temple, is a great effort, especially in cultures lacking modern industry and technology. In such cultures the resulting product was not only a shelter, but also a symbol that could have been read on different levels. First and the most obvious was a symbolic proof of strength and unity within the family or community that built it. The other symbolic levels depended on the structure type, the receiver of its message, and his abilities to decode it.

The semiotics of ancient architecture are perhaps the most wanted elements of architectural studies, and surely the most difficult to obtain. It is not only due to the risk of falling into a loop of circular logic, reconstructing the culture through its architecture and the meaning of architecture through its builders' culture, but also because the symbolic messages are intertwined across so many levels, and often seemingly opposed to one another. As Amos Rapoport has put it,

„ Buildings, as all human endeavors, obey varied and often contradictory and conflicting impulses which interfere with the simple and orderly diagrams, models, and classifications we love to construct” (Rapoport 1969:11).

What can be safely assumed, though, is the builders’ desire to accommodate the particular function of a building under construction as perfectly as possible. According to Paul Oliver, in the modern, developed cultures,

„[t]he architect determines the forms that seem appropriate to the needs of a particular building or building complex within a society” (Oliver 1975:13).

However, it has not been proved that the Maya had professional architects. In fact, some evidence suggests that there had been a group of ‚master builders’ rather than architects. This group of people were experienced masons and builders who copied building methodology and layouts, learned through and used at previous construction sites (Wernecke 2006). Therefore the shapes and layouts of buildings were a result of an accumulated tradition. Such a tradition was then very powerfully charged with symbolic meaning, since the effort invested in its construction required years of tradition and investment, and not just the labor required to erect a building (Oliver 1975; Kubler 1958).

It can be expected, then, that the form and layout of Triadic Groups accommodated not only the physical need for a cluster of three shrines, either for three stages of a single god’s veneration or for three separate deities, but also the spatial three-dimensional settings of a particular ritual concept. In other words, the selection of that particular design was not an accidental nor aesthetic issue, but rather a result of a thorough specialisation as a

monumental symbolic stage for a mental template, enacting a constructed myth. The following chapters will elaborate more on the nature of that template.

Catalogue

This compilation of known Triadics has been structured alphabetically, taking the site name as the primary keyword, then using the name or number of a particular structure as the secondary one. Orientation has been marked from the observer's point of view, i.e. a direction that one would face when looking along the main axis towards the central building. It is an approximation rounded up towards the nearest cardinal direction.

Period abbreviations expand as follows: MPC - Middle Preclassic (1000 - 400 BC), LPC - Late Preclassic (400 BC - AD 100), PC - Protoclassic (AD 100 - 250), EC - Early Classic (AD 250 - 600), LC - Late Classic (AD 600 - 800), TC - Terminal Classic (AD 800 - 900), EPsC - Early Postclassic (AD 900 - 1250), LPsC - Late Postclassic (AD 1250 - 1500). The chronology used henceforth is a standard one and, except of some minor differences, widely accepted throughout the Mesoamerican academic community (*cf.* Sharer 2006:153-155). Question marks within the catalogue stand for a missing, unpublished, or uncertain data.

Although this catalogue is the most complete list of Triadic Groups elaborated up to date of its writing, it most certainly is not complete, as many of the Triadic Groups have not been properly published, or the author has not yet stumbled upon them in his research.

More information and ground plans of the particular entries can be found in the annex attached at the end of this work. Also the urban context, dimensions, and maps are included where available.

Site	Structure	Orien - tation	Date	References
Altar de los Reyes	SE Group, Str. 1	S	LPC	Šprajc 2008:25-32, plans 1-2
Becan	?	?	LPC	Estrada-Belli 2011:158
Bejucal	?	W	?	Quintana and Wurster 2001:41
Calakmul	Str. II	S	LPC - LC	Folan <i>et al.</i> 2001; Rodriguez Campero 2009
Calakmul	Str. VII	N	LPC - LC	Folan <i>et al.</i> 1995; 2001; Carrasco Vargas <i>et al.</i> 2006
Caracol	Caana	N	LPC (?) - TC	Chase and Chase 1987a; 1987b; 1988; 2001; Miller 1986; Martin and Grube 2008:93
Cerros	Str. 3	N	PC	Freidel 1986; Walker 2005
Cerros	Str. 4	W	LPC (AD 1-100)	Robertson and Freidel 1986; Freidel 1986; Walker 2005
Cerros	Str. 6	N	LPC (50 BC - AD 1)	Freidel 1986; Walker 2005; Schele and Freidel 1990:20-22; Freidel <i>et al.</i> 2002:64-65
Cerros	Str. 29	E	LPC	Schele and Freidel 1990:125
Ch'el	?	N	LC - TC	Robles and Andrews 2003:53-56
Chochkitam	XV	W	?	Quintana and Wurster 2001:68-69
Cival	Triadic Group	E	LPC	Estrada-Belli 2006
Dzibanché	Kinichna Level C	N	EC - LC	Nalda <i>et al.</i> 1994; Nalda and Balanzario 2005
Dzibilchaltun	Str. 605	S	LPC (100-1 BC)	Andrews IV and Andrews V 1980:25-36

Site	Structure	Orien - tation	Date	References
Edzna	Grand Acropolis	E	LC - TC	Benavides 1997:41-58
Edzna	Small Acropolis	E	LC - TC	Benavides 1997:41-58
Ek Balam	X-Huyub	?	LPC	Ringle 1999:195; Bey <i>et al.</i> 1998:111
El Mirador	Structure 34	S	LPC	Hansen <i>et al.</i> 2005
El Mirador	Chicharras	E	LPC	Suyuc Ley and Hansen 2005:15-18
El Mirador	Cutz	E	LPC	Šprajc <i>et al.</i> 2009:85; Suyuc Ley and Hansen 2005:15
El Mirador	Danta	E	LPC - PC	Howell and Evans Copeland 1989; Suyuc Ley <i>et al.</i> 2008:527-529
El Mirador	Kolomte	E	LPC	Šprajc <i>et al.</i> 2009:85
El Mirador	Monos	S	LPC	Copeland 1989
El Mirador	Pava	S	LPC - PC	Howell and Evans Copeland 1989; Suyuc Ley <i>et al.</i> 2008:526-527
El Mirador	Tigre	W	LPC - PC	Hansen 1990
El Mirador	Tres Hermanos (South Acropolis)	S	LPC	Suyuc Ley and Hansen 2006:228
El Mirador	Tres Micos	E	LPC - PC	Estrada-Belli 2011:50; Suyuc Ley and Hansen 2006:228
El Palmar	Triadic Group	W	LPC	Doyle 2013
El Perú (Waka)	Str. O14 (1-3)	E	PC - LC	Rich <i>et al.</i> 2007
El Socotzal	Triadic Acropolis	?	LPC (?)	Fialko 2005a

Site	Structure	Orien - tation	Date	References
El Tigre (Itzamkanac)	Str. 1 (?)	S	LPC	Vargas Pacheco and Delgado Salgado 2003
Hahakab	Triadic Group	N	?	Estrada-Belli 2003:11-12
Holtun	Group A (1-7)	N	LPC - EC	Ponciano 1995
La Honradez	VII	E	?	Quintana and Wurster 2001:73
Lamanai	Str. N9-56	E	LPC - EC	Pendergast 1981; Grube 2006:59, 446
Lamanai	Str. N10-43	N	LPC - EC	Pendergast 1981; Grube 2006:59, 446
Lamanai	Str. P9-12	E	LPC - EC	Pendergast 1981; Grube 2006:59, 446
Las Delicias	Str. 2	E	EC	Šprajc 2008:95
Las Ruinas de Arenal	Group C	E	?	Taschek and Ball 1999
Mucaancah	North Acropolis, Str. 1	N	PC	Šprajc 2008:45, fig. 4.47
Nakbe	Str. 1	W	LPC	Martinez Hidalgo and Hansen 1992
Nakbe	Str. 13	E	LPC	Hansen 1991
Nakbe	Str. 27	N	LPC	Forsyth and Acevedo 1994
Nakbe	Str. 59	E	LPC	Martinez Hidalgo 1994
Nakbe	Str. 66	E	LPC	Martinez Hidalgo 1994
Nakbe	Str. 78	S	LPC	Monterroso Tun 1999:368
Nakum	Str. 99	N	TC	Koszkul <i>et al.</i> 2008:3-6
Nakum	Interior Acropolis	S	LPC - TC (?)	Žračka 2008:83-89
Nakum	Str. E	W	TC	Žračka 2008:50-55

Site	Structure	Orien - tation	Date	References
Nakum	Str. N	W	LC - TC	Żrałka 2008:70
Naranjo	Str. A-15	N	TC	Aquino 2007:594
Naranjo	Str. B-5	N	EC - LC	Fialko 2004; Żrałka 2008:138-141
Naranjo	Str. C-3	E	EC - LC	Fialko 2005b
Naranjo	Str. C-9	E	LPC - TC	Fialko 2005b; Żrałka 2008:145
Naranjo	Str. C-10	E	EC - LC	Fialko 2005b
Naranjo	Str. D-1	N	LPC - TC	Fialko 2005b; Aquino 2007
Palenque	Cross Group	N	LC	Cohodas 1985:61-62; Sharer and Traxler 2006:467-470
San Bartolo	Pinturas	E	LPC - PC	Saturno 2002
San Bartolo	Ventanas	N	LPC - PC	Saturno 2002
Sacnab	?	E	MPC / LPC	Rice 1976:437-439
Sacul	Plaza C (1-3)	N	LC - TC	Ramos 1999
Seibal	Group D Triad	E	LC - TC	Smith 1982:210-213
Tikal	Str. 5D-22 Triad	N	LPC - EC	Loten 2007:43-66
Tintal	Triadic Complex	E	LPC - PC	Hansen <i>et al.</i> 2006
Tintal	?	?	LPC - PC	Hansen 1998:80
T'ot	?	?	LPC	Estrada-Belli 2006:58; 2001:11-12
Tzicul	?	S	EC - LC	Robles and Andrews 2001:23-25; 2003:34
Uaxactun	Str. A-V	N	EC	Valdes 1989; 1993

Site	Structure	Orien - tation	Date	References
Uaxactun	Group E Triad (Str. E4-E6)	S	LPC-EC	Ricketson and Ricketson 1937; Kovač <i>et al.</i> 2010:798
Uaxactun	Group H North (Str. H-I, H-III, H-V)	E	LPC - PC	Kovač <i>et al.</i> 2010:271, 442
Uaxactun	Str. H-I	E	LPC - PC	Kovač <i>et al.</i> 2010:271, 442
Uaxactun	Group H South (Str. H-VII - H-X)	E	LPC - PC	Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:139-143)
Uaxactun	Str. H-X	E	LPC	Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:139-143)
Utatlan (Qumarkaaaj)	Str. RC 60	E	EPsC	Carmack and Weeks 1981
Wakna	Str. 3	N	LPC	Hansen 1992:15-18
Yaxha	North Acropolis (Str. 137, 142, 144)	N	LPC - LC	Garcia 2001
Yaxnohcah	Str. A-1	N	LPC - EC	Šprajc 2008:67-71
Yaxuna	Str. 5E-19 Group	S	LPC	Freidel 1988; Freidel <i>et al.</i> 1989; Stanton and Ardren 2005
Yaxuna	5E-30	S	LPC	Freidel 1988; Freidel <i>et al.</i> 1989; Stanton and Ardren 2005
Yaxuna	East Acropolis	E	LPC	Freidel 1988; Freidel <i>et al.</i> 1989; Stanton and Ardren 2005
Yaxuna	North Acropolis	N	LPC	Freidel 1988; Freidel <i>et al.</i> 1989; Stanton and Ardren 2005
Xtobó	Group B	S	MPC (?) - LPC	Robles and Andrews 2003:49-52; Anderson 2005

Site	Structure	Orien - tation	Date	References
Xtobó	?	S	?	Robles and Andrews 2003:49-52; Anderson 2005
Xualcanil	Tetunna Group	N (?)	?	Taschek and Ball 1999:215
Xulnal	?	E	LPC (?)	Mejía 2008:654
Xunantunich	A11	N	LC - TC	LeCount <i>et al.</i> 2002

Comments on the Catalogue

A scholar attempting to analyse such an array of data such as the one listed in the Catalogue faces several methodological problems. One of the most notable ones is the heterogeneity of sources and their details. The information presented in the catalogue comes from a spectrum of reports, papers, books, and plans, each of which focuses on different aspects of an ancient Maya city, inevitably omitting others. Some structures listed above have been only briefly mentioned, still awaiting a proper archaeological excavation, meanwhile others had been subject to multiple seasons of research. In a handful of cases, the Triadics have been merely spotted on the published maps, but not described within the respective references at all.

The same problem occurs when establishing dates of particular constructions. If a structure was excavated, and pottery or radiocarbon samples obtained from it, the date given in the Catalogue has been rounded up either to the specific period, or a range of periods spanning the beginning and end of the Triadic's use. If a previous, or later, architectonic phase presented a set of non-Triadic features, it was not taken into account, hence listing only the „triadic period” of building's existence. However, if a Triadic Group has not been excavated, the dates listed are those of the next greater architectural level that has been dated, for instance a sector or an architectonic group, or even an entire site.

Due to a variable accuracy of the published maps, and an arbitrary usage of true or magnetic north, an astronomic orientation analysis could not be performed. Instead, an orientation of particular buildings has been rounded up to the nearest right angle, either 0, 90, 180, or 270 grades, corresponding to the north, east, south, or west, respectively.

Having this in mind, one has to be aware of certain limitations of the analyses, especially those involving statistics. For the sake of scientific

accuracy of this dissertation, on most occasions the data taken into account will be limited to the structures that have been properly excavated. Other times the incoherence of data will be stated when needed, and the outcomes of such a research will be treated with an appropriate caution.

The catalogue entries that feature more than one question mark, and therefore their value for the discussion is minute, are nevertheless included for two reasons: to attempt to compile the most complete list of known Triadic Groups, and to point out future ways to corroborate or dismiss the models presented below. It is every archaeologist's wish for his or her work results to be included in the process of forming new hypotheses and asking research questions when preparing new archaeological projects or seasons, and establishing its goals. Perhaps, then, some of the ideas presented here will prove useful for those who plan to dig out a Triadic Group, or to discuss further our understanding of the Maya ways of looking at the space and its modifications.

Spatial and Temporal Distribution of Triadic Groups

Placing the total of 87 Triadic complexes discovered in 46 archaeological sites, the uncertain ones also included, on a map, results in receiving a visible cluster of occurrence in the centre of the Maya land, especially in the central and eastern portions of the Guatemalan Peten, and southeastern Campeche in Mexico. Another cluster, comparatively small but visible due to its isolation, populates the northwestern tip of the Yucatan peninsula. Besides these, only a few sites do not fit either cluster, being rather randomly scattered on the map (Fig. 2).

Such a distribution, however peculiar, does not permit to draw any definite conclusions; it merely points towards the origin of Triadics somewhere within the eastern Peten. In fact, some of the earliest Triadic Groups have been discovered in that area, for example early Early Preclassic Cival (Estrada-Belli 2006), or perhaps even earlier late Middle Preclassic Sacnab (Rice 1976). The latter, reported during the survey and brief sampling excavation, yielded a mixed Mamom and Chicanel ceramic samples, possibly being the earliest such a construction known today, therefore contradicting a belief that the Triadics had been a Late Preclassic architectonic innovation within the administrative or ceremonial cores, following the Middle Preclassic E-Group type of structures. The inconclusive nature of the test-pit data, though, makes such an early dating only a tentative hypothesis.

In opposition to the Peten-genesis theory, but, arguably, corroborating the Middle Preclassic origin, stand the data from Xtobó, a minor early site located west from Dzibilchaltun on the northwest of Yucatan. Again, excavations conducted within the site had more of a sampling character than an extensive study; nevertheless the sherds obtained from both the Triadic platform, and the *sac bih*, or ritual causeway leading to it, point towards their Middle Preclassic origin (Robles and Andrews 2003; Anderson 2005).

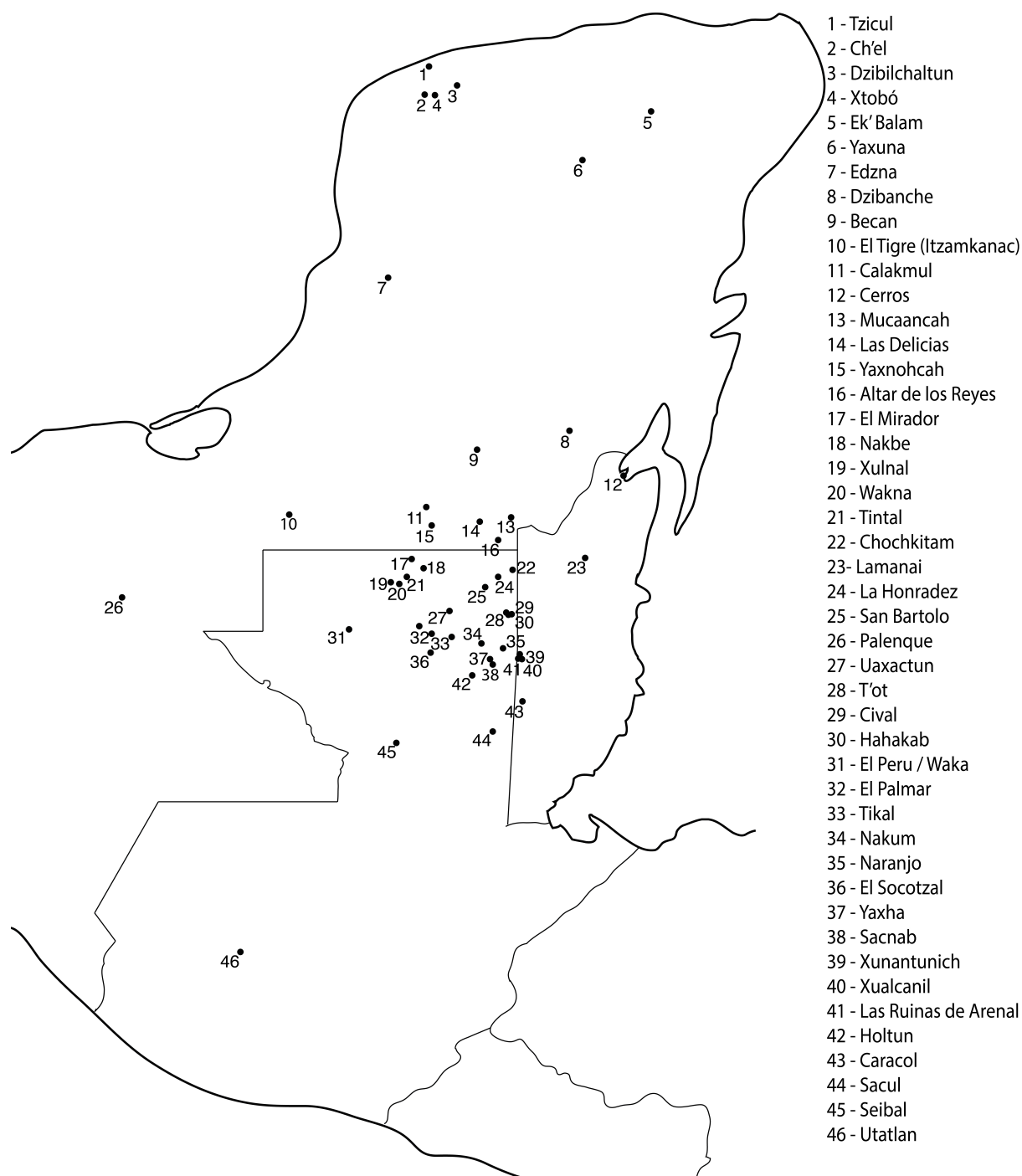


Fig. 2. Spatial distribution of the sites featuring Triadic Groups.

Having a look at the the orientation of particular Triadics within their respective sites, an interesting information can be obtained: the northern and eastern ones are favoured, meanwhile the western one occurs sporadically, in most cases as a complimentary orientation at those sites that feature more

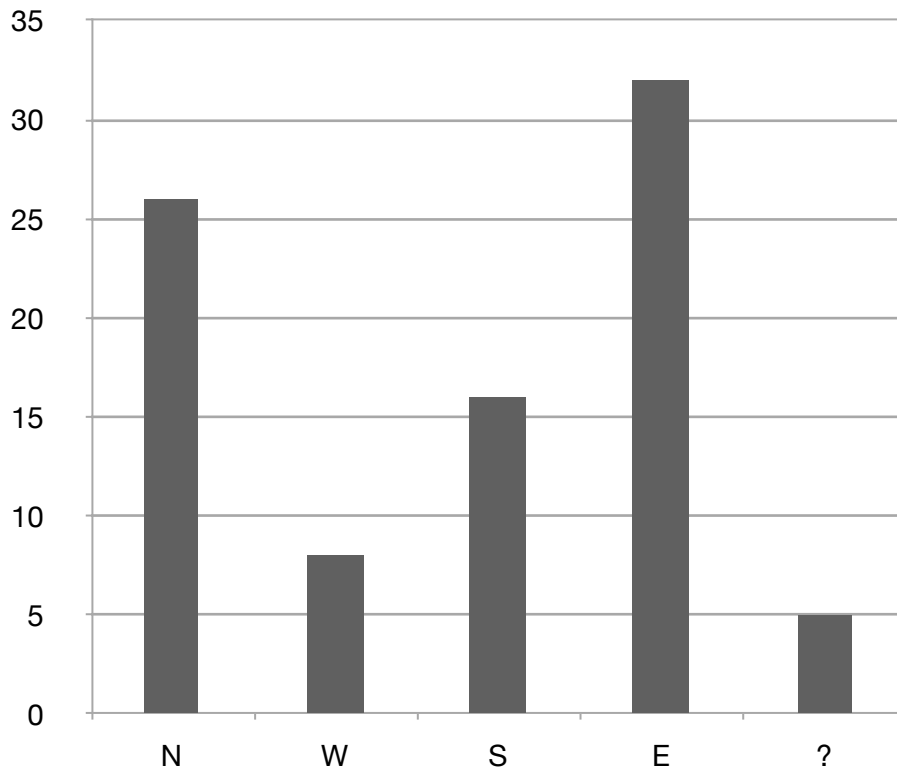


Fig. 3. Cardinal orientation distribution of Triadic Groups.

than one Triadic Group with different orientation, as seen in El Mirador, Cerros, or Nakum (Hansen 1990; Freidel 1986; Żrałka 2008). However, one of the earliest Triadics that have been excavated, and possibly the first such a complex at the site, is Structure 1 from Nakbe, and it is oriented due West. Also the El Palmar Triadic Group, the only Triadic at the site, displays western orientation. Southern orientation prevails on the northern Yucatan, being rather randomly scattered elsewhere (Fig. 3).

It has to be underlined, however, that as signalled before, the orientation of particular Triadic Groups presented in this work is a mere approximation of their actual Azimuth, rounded up to the nearest cardinal direction. It is due to the variable quality and exactitude of published plans and maps, and lack of differentiation between the true and magnetic north. Hence any detailed astronomical or geographical analysis could not have been conducted.

The chronological analysis bases on the count of Triadic Groups present within each period, that is the ones that had not been abandoned, destroyed, buried within other types of structures, or otherwise morphologically modified. It does not specify, though, the difference between the amount of abandoned structures and those that had been newly constructed. In other words, the graph below (Fig. 4) merely shows the amount of Triadic Groups actively used at the certain timespan.

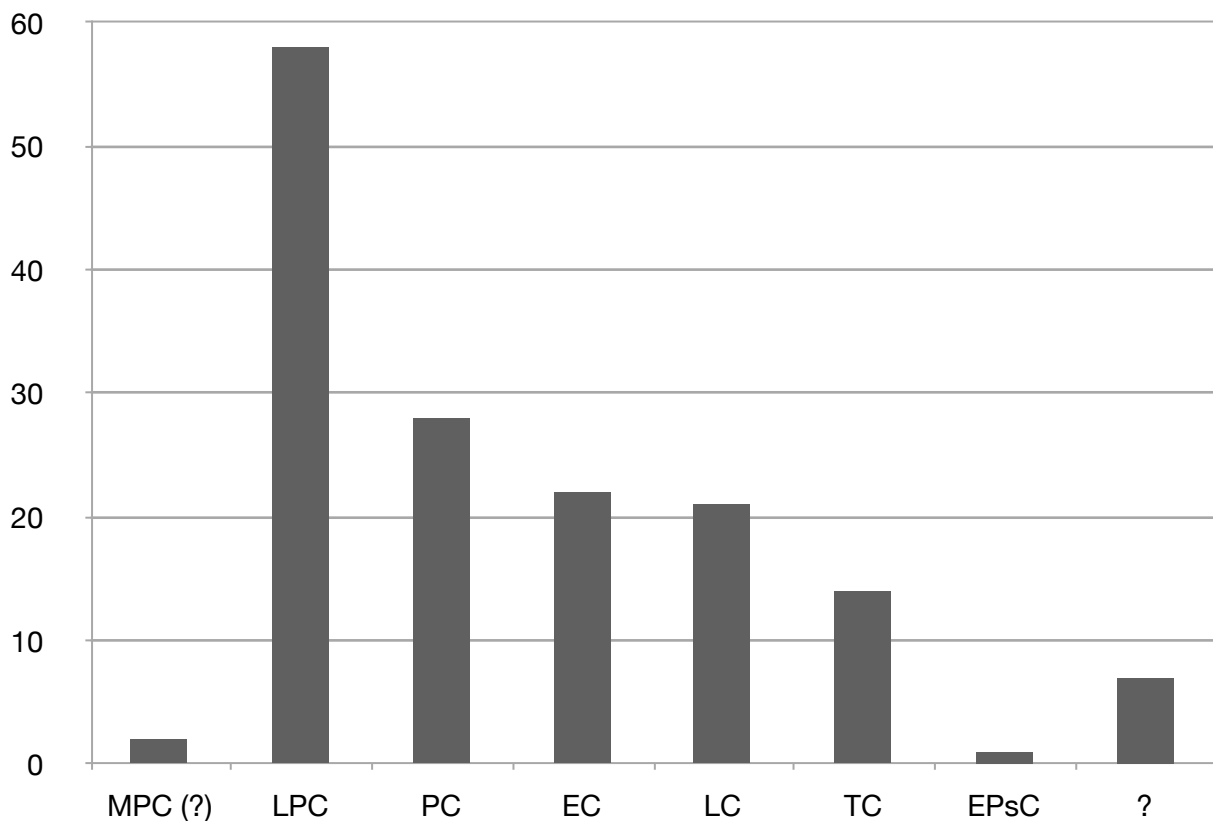


Fig. 4. Chronological distribution of the Triadics.

Temporal occurrence of Triadics does follow a coherent pattern. A few issues have to be underlined, however, for this data not to be overused. As mentioned earlier, both Middle Preclassic examples have to be treated carefully, since their dating is not entirely convincing. The eastern Peten site of Sacnab features mixed Mamom and Chicanel pottery samples that put the Triadic Group somewhere at the end of Middle Preclassic or the beginnings of

the Late Classic period. Similar problem occurs in the northwestern Yucatan centre of Xtobó, where a double Triadic Group was tested for pottery samples and yielded a collection of Middle and Late Preclassic sherds. In the collection, Middle Preclassic ones are significantly more abundant; nevertheless no definite connection between the Triadic Group's final form and the early ceramics has been established. However, even if the Xtobó Triadics are in fact rather Late than Middle Preclassic, one valuable observation was made by Anderson in connection with them:

„The presence of this architectural form implies some form of architectural communication. Pottery vessels, and other portable objects ripe with symbols can be easily traded without the knowledge of what those symbols mean, but an architectural form has to be carried as a mental template. The act of specifically recreating the form suggests a knowledge of the form's significance” (Andrews 2005:4-6).

The look at the chronological occurrence of the Triadics makes the Late Preclassic period more plausible for that kind of architectural complex to be invented. A relatively sudden boom in the Triadics' appearance throughout the Maya land points towards their first appearance in one of the major Preclassic centres that have been securely dated, perhaps Nakbe or Cival. Only a major political player with wide network of interregional connections would be able to broadcast such a template so rapidly over an area so vast. However, the quick appearance of Triadic architecture in remote Xtobó proves two important assumptions. First, an exchange of ideas among the Maya elites that formed a crucial component of the Classic Period had been most probably well established at the beginning of the Late Preclassic. Second, the Anderson's notion of the conscious implementation of the triadic form in Xtobó and its neighbours, along with an apparent suddenness of its distribution

among other sites, leads to the assumption of a great ideological importance of its function and meaning. It is worth mentioning that the Preclassic Triadics' appearance is limited exclusively to the Lowland area, and does not occur south of the latitude of Caracol.

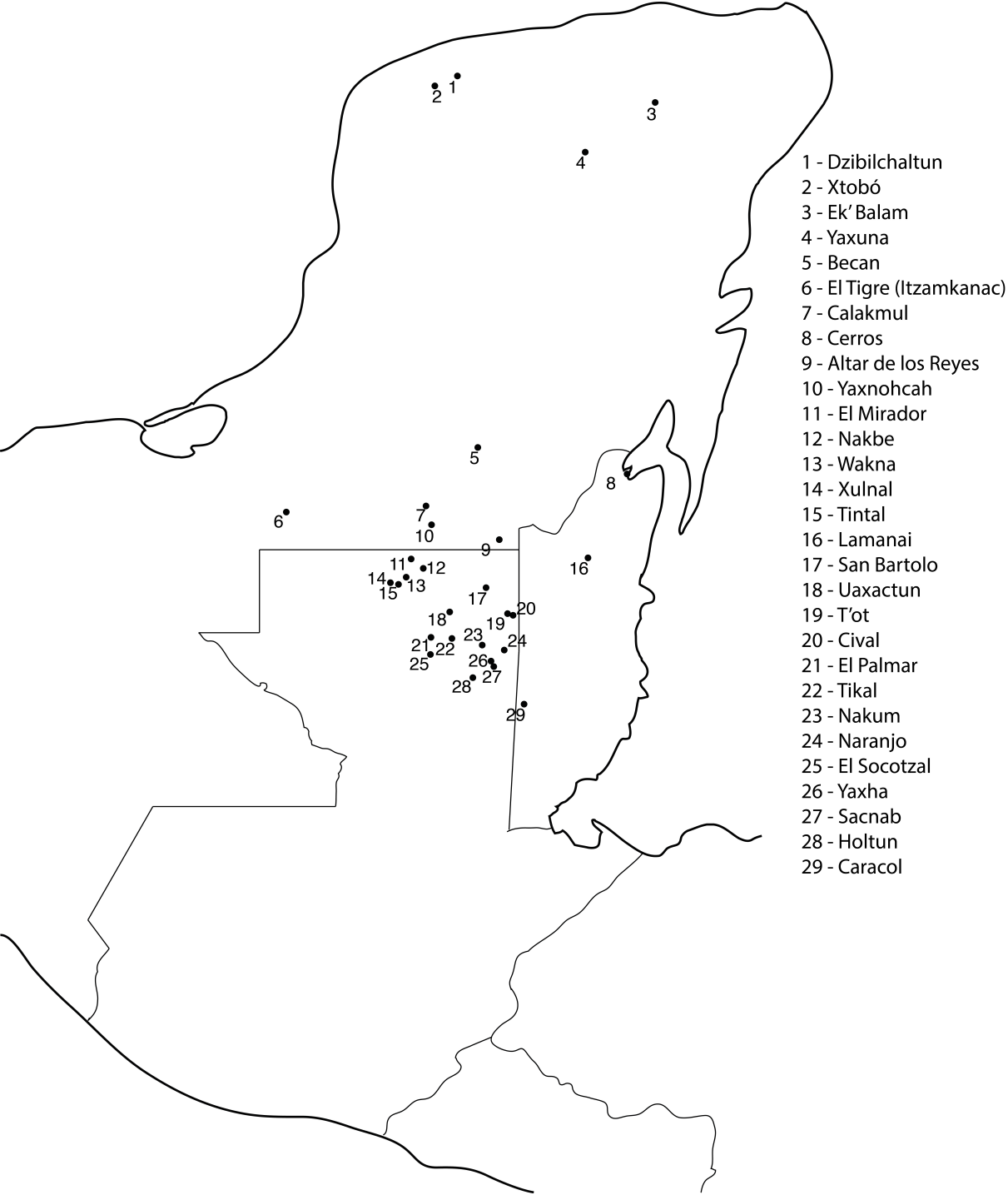


Fig. 5. Late Preclassic distribution of Triadic Groups.

Overall, at least 55 Triadic Groups are being constructed at approximately 26 sites during the timespan of 500 years that constitute the Late Preclassic period (Fig. 5). Some sites, most notably those within the Mirador basin, feature more than one Triadic. In cases of Cerros, Nakbe, and El Mirador, these complexes „embrace” the city core, facing it from three or four cardinal directions (Hansen 1990; 1991; Freidel 1986). The Late Preclassic Triadics always occupy prominent locations, either on an elevated terrain, on a side of the main plaza, or as a principal component of a separate architectural group. Their size, when compared with the rest of a site’s architecture, is monumental.

At that time the eastern orientation prevails, reaching approximately 40% of all such constructions existing in the Late Preclassic, while the northern one constitutes just over one-fourth of the total number (Fig. 6). The southern orientation dominates on the northern Yucatan, and otherwise randomly occurs at sites such as Uaxactun, El Mirador, Calakmul, Altar de los Reyes, and Nakum. Three out of five west-orientated Triadics had been constructed at Nakbe, El Mirador, and Cerros. The other two come from Late or Terminal Classic Nakum; their shape, however, puts them in the problematic U-type category (see Fig. 1d), that will be discussed later on.

Moving on from Late Preclassic to Protoclassic period a sudden drop in the number of Triadics in use can be observed. This fact has to be treated with caution, because in many sources referring to the Late Preclassic architecture, only the foundation date or period can be safely established, meanwhile the abandonment of a structure cannot be properly pinpointed. Moreover, the Protoclassic Period has been particularly elusive, giving its transitional nature. Hence the actual number of existing Triadics after the Late Preclassic times may have been significantly higher than the one presented here. Despite the uncertainty of data, however, it can be safely stated that some sites with Triadics had been partially or completely abandoned before the onset of

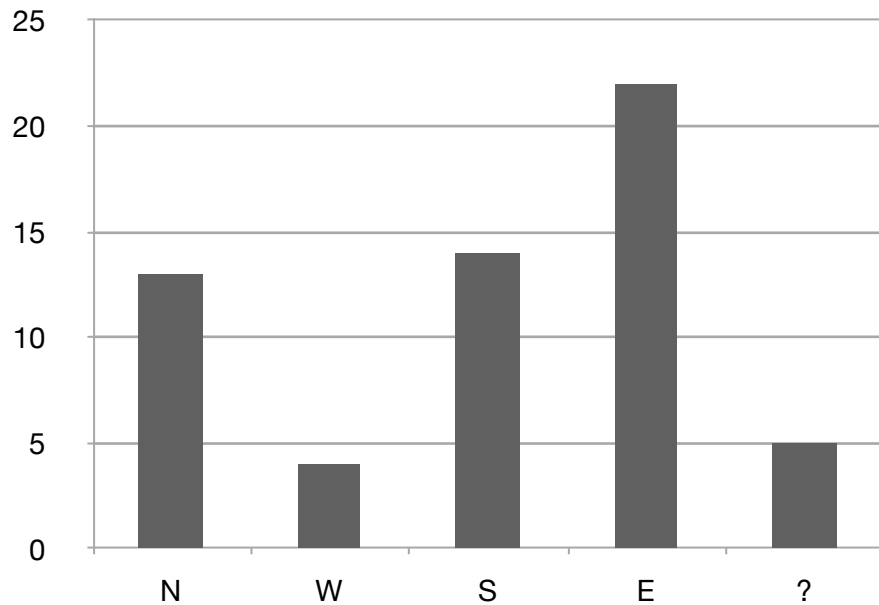


Fig. 6. Late Preclassic cardinal orientation of Triadic Groups.

Protoclassic period, i.e. Nakbe. On the other hand, new Triadic Groups are being constructed at sites like El Peru and Cerros (Structure 3); the latter, though, had never been finished (Freidel 1986).

A much more important shift in Triadics' distribution accompanies a general decline and renewal of the Maya civilisation at the beginning of the Classic Period. The Mirador basin ceased to be the cultural hub, meanwhile Tikal rised to its greatest importance. In the Holmul region a seat of power seemed to be drifting gradually from Cival to Holmul, leaving the abandoned Triadic Groups behind (Fig. 7).

The cluster of sites featuring Triadics that appears in the eastern Peten during the Early Classic spatially overlaps with this period's political influence of Tikal. No new sites in that sphere begin to display the triadic architecture, but in Uaxactun and Naranjo some new ones are being built. The other polities preserve the Triadics already in existence, maintaining the Preclassic traditions. In the K'an sphere of influence, three new kingdoms feature Triadics, i.e. Dzibanche, Las Delicias, and distant El Peru / Waka. All four northern Yucatan sites cease to use their Triadic Groups; however, two Early

Classic Triadic Groups are being raised in northeastern Yucatan - one at Tzicul and one at Ch'el. Altogether the number of sites displaying the Triadics decreased to around fifteen, and the Triadics themselves to nineteen. A virtual lack of western orientation, along with the shift from eastern to northern one as the most favoured can be observed (Fig. 8).



Fig. 7. Early Classic spatial distribution of Triadic Groups.

The onset of Late Classic period marks the golden era for the Maya lowland civilisation. Density of settlement reaches its highest during that time. Nearly all the lowland Late Classic polities are involved, one way or another, in the Calakmul-Tikal conflict. The network of exchange between elites, and, consequently, the uniformity of culture, is archaeologically attested across the Lowlands and beyond, with participants so distant to each other as Palenque in Chiapas, Mexico, and Copan in Honduras, or Rio Bec in the Mexican state of Campeche, and, towards the end of Classic times, developing Puuc region on the northwestern tip of the peninsula.

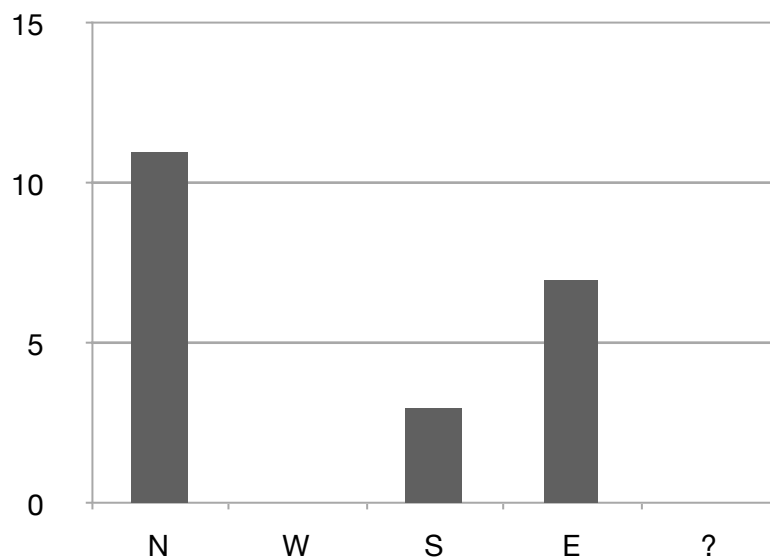


Fig. 8. Early Classic cardinal orientation of Triadic Groups.

The number of Triadics further decreases during the Late Classic. At Tikal, the North Acropolis complex no longer maintains the triadic pattern, neither does Structure A-V in neighbouring Uaxactun. But by no means it proves that the Triadics became obsolete, for there are new Triadic Groups constructed during that period as well, i.e. Palenque's Cross Group, and Nakum Structure N, among others. It is no longer possible to establish any clusters, though, as the Late Classic Triadics seem to be quite randomly



Fig. 9. Late Classic distribution of Triadic Groups.

dispersed over the map (Fig. 9). The specific case of Triangulo Park's main sites, namely Yaxha, Nakum, and Naranjo, that not only carefully maintain the Triadics along with their surroundings, but also elevate new ones, has to be

treated locally. At the end of Classic times Nakum enters its heyday, exercising the gap of power left after the demise of neighbouring superpowers (Żrałka 2008; Żrałka and Hermes 2012). It is even more clearly perceivable during the Terminal Classic period (Fig. 11).

The northern orientation of Late Classic Triadics, similarly to the Early Classic, exceeds 50%. The eastern one further decreases, reaching 25% (Fig. 10).

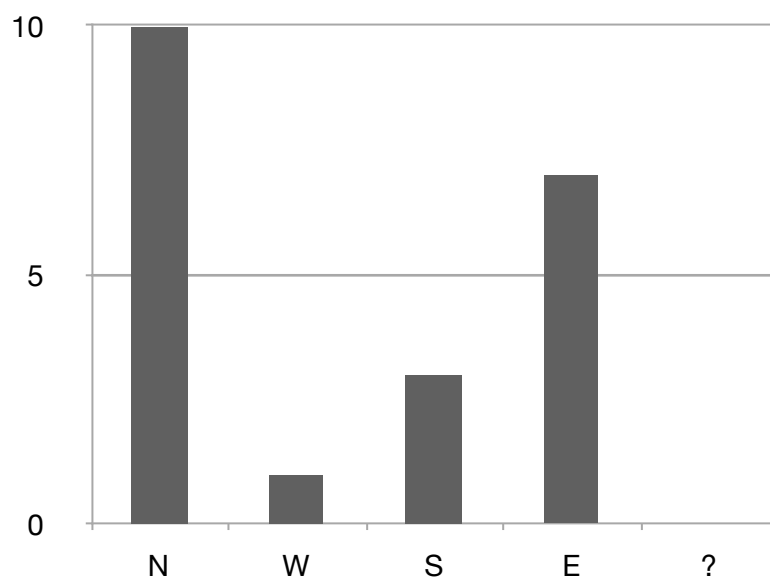


Fig. 10. Late Classic cardinal orientation of Triadic Groups.

Terminal Classic period that follows marks an important, but not fully understood, moment for the Maya culture. A great majority of thriving Classic polities fall into a demise - some gradually, and others suddenly. Some smaller sites disappear along with their larger patrons, while others exploit the opportunity to grow. A plethora of theories explaining why the Maya civilisation collapsed has been published, leading to the conclusion that most probably it was a variety of factors that caused the catastrophe (see Webster 2002 for a good review of the discussion).

As mentioned earlier, some polities were able to delay their collapse, in fact rapidly growing during the time of a pan-regional crisis. Others, like Xunantunich, seemed to be not affected by it at all. The westernmost Maya polity of Palenque entered the Terminal Classic already seriously weakened, and fell depopulated and abandoned in the first years of the 9th century (Martin and Grube 2008:175).

Distribution of Triadics during the Terminal Classic illustrates well the times of abandonment. Only a handful of sites that survived existed at that time, of which eight still maintained the triadic architecture (Fig. 11). Only three new triadic arrangements had appeared at that time, i.e. those in Nakum (Str. 99 and Str. E) and Naranjo (Str. A-15). The remaining 9 Triadic Groups are those that outlived the collapse as a remainder of the Classic Period. Again, their cardinal orientation is most frequently due north, with only two due east, two due west, and one due south (Fig. 12).

Eventually, virtually all Classic sites mentioned above ceased to exist, or at least underwent modifications so extensive, that the Triadic patterns had disappeared from urban landscapes. The Postclassic times saw the shift in population density from the Central Lowlands towards the northern and southern extremities of the Maya realm. Curiously, only one Postclassic city had built a Triadic Group, that is the K'iche' capital of Utatlan (Q'umarkaj) in the eastern Highlands of Guatemala (Fig. 2). The archaeological reports do not mention it per se, but it can be quite easily spotted on the published plans of the site (Carmack and Weeks 1981:328). It is somewhat removed to the east from the centre, and featuring an eastern orientation. Not much can be said about it otherwise.

Summing up the facts, it can be said that the Triadics are most probably a Late Preclassic invention, although some evidence suggests their possible late Middle Preclassic origin. The first boom reaches from the central



Fig. 11. Terminal Classic distribution of Triadic Groups.

and eastern Peten to the tip of Yucatan peninsula, with a visible cluster in the heartland. During those times the eastern orientation is slightly favoured over the northern one, although the remaining two are not entirely absent either. The Classic period is not as abundant in Triadics as the Preclassic, but despite the depopulation and abandonment of some sites, new ones take over and

keep constructing and maintaining Triadic Groups until the end of the Classic times. A shift in orientation pattern can be observed - the northern one seems to prevail, accompanied by constant decrease of the eastern one. The western orientation is displayed only at these sites that feature other Triadics, oriented towards the east and north, and sometimes south as well. The importance of such a specific architectural compound must have been great for it to outlive nearly fifteen centuries of cultural and political turmoils and civilisation development in different parts of the Maya world, from the northernmost tip of Yucatan to the Southern Highlands of Guatemala, and from belizean Caracol through Palenque in Chiapas.

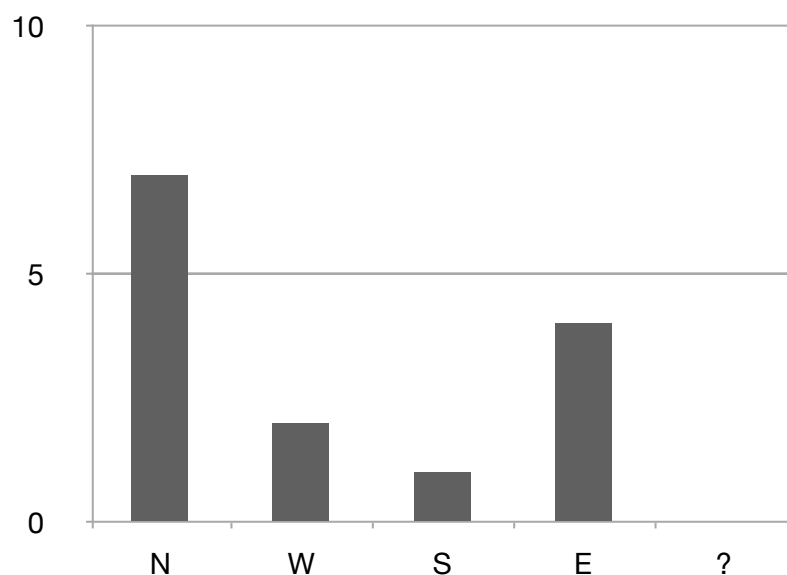


Fig. 12. Terminal Classic cardinal orientation of Triadic Groups.

Triadic Form and Its Urban Context

Leaving the issue of cultural perception of space for further chapters of this work, a formal analysis of the triadic architecture needs to be conducted. For that purpose, an entirely „etic” perspective has to be assumed to avoid possible equivocation of the facts and their interpretation. This chapter will then attempt to focus on the Triadic Groups as seen by a unbiased eye of modern observer.

Even at the first glance the Triadic Complexes listed in the Catalogue present certain differences when compared to each other. A subjective set of rules adopted as a definition of triadic architecture results in such a variety of shapes and features displayed within the Triadics that needs to be further divided into comprehensive arrays of similar forms. The typology proposed below and elsewhere in this work (cf. Fig. 1) has been designed to be disjunctive, i.e. to assign single category to each structure; in some cases, however, particular Triadic Groups fall into more than one of them. Five of such types can be established basing exclusively on the Triadics’ appearance:

1-Tiered

This type is the least complicated one. It consists of a substructure, in form of either an elevated platform or a pyramid, and three structures set immediately on its summit, of which the central one faces the entrance to the substructure, and the two lateral ones face each other from opposing edges of the substructure. The entrance usually takes a monumental form (Fig. 1a). The substructure may be part of a greater architectural unit, for example crowning an imposing set of platforms, but essentially the triad of buildings forms the only set of superstructures on its top. 1-Tiered type is rather rare, occurring mostly in later times of the Triadics’ existence. Good example of such a group

comes from the Terminal Classic Nakum Str. 99 (Koszkul *et al.* 2008:5, Żrałka *et al.* 2011:118; Fig. 12).

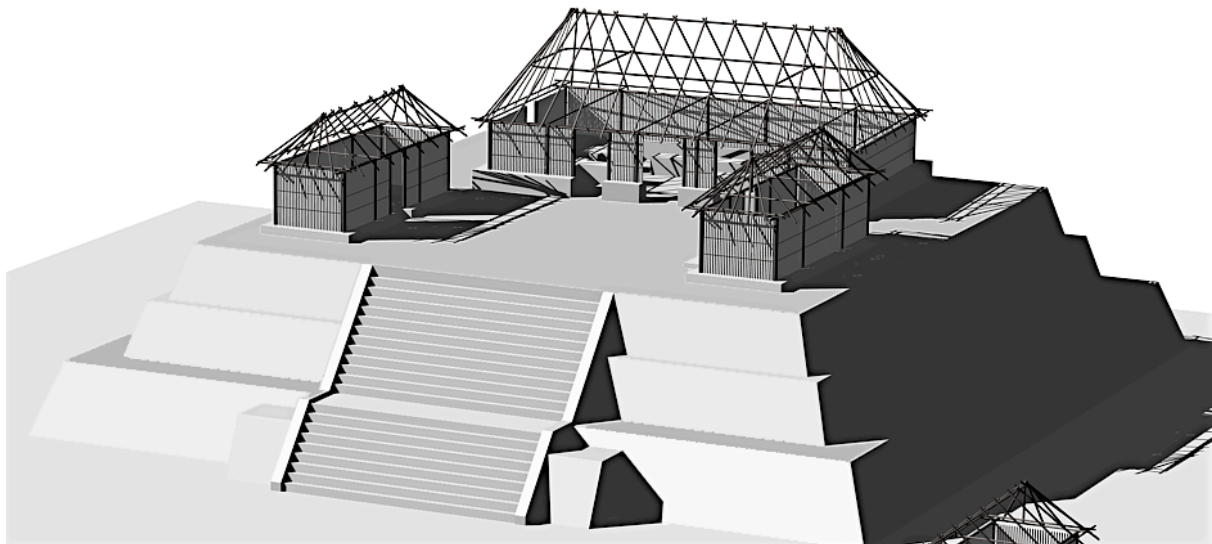


Fig. 12. Structure 99, Nakum, Guatemala (reconstruction by Anna Kaseja and Anna Kozińska, Nakum Archaeological Project; courtesy of Dr. Jarosław Żrałka).

2-Tiered

This type in its essence is similar to the 1-Tiered one. However, particular buildings constituting the triad possess their own separate substructures located on the top of a basal platform or pyramid (Fig. 1b). There might be more than three structures on top, particularly in form of a pair of low auxiliary platforms removed behind the central building on its sides, or ranged structures flanking the platform entrance on the frontal edge of the platform, as for example in both Group H Triadics at Uaxactun or in North Acropolis at Yaxha (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993; Kovač *et al.* 2010; Garcia 2001). In some cases only the central building is elevated on a substructure, meanwhile the lateral structures assume the form of an open-air platform, not crowned by any building *per se*, as seen particularly in the Triadics of Cerros (Freidel 1986,

Walker 2005), and both Triadic Groups at Calakmul (Folan *et al.* 1995; 2001). These examples are problematic in a sense, since in the former case there might have been perishable structures on each substructure, meanwhile the latter is subject to a discussion whether the lateral platforms had really been there. The latest excavations put their existence in question, arguing instead that the main structure was flanked by a pair of masonry altars (Robertson and Freidel 1986; Carrasco Vargas *et al.* 2006; Rodriguez Campero 2009).

Otherwise a 2-Tiered type constitutes the major percentage of all Triadic Groups, appearing throughout the timeline. In fact the early Triadics from Cival (Estrada-Belli 2006) and El Mirador Basin (Hansen 1990) are typically 2-tiered (Fig. 13). Also the Late Classic examples from Palenque, Dzibanche, Seibal, and Xunantunich prove to be of that type (Cohodas 1985; Nalda Hernández and Balanzario 2005; Smith 1982; LeCount *et al.* 2002).

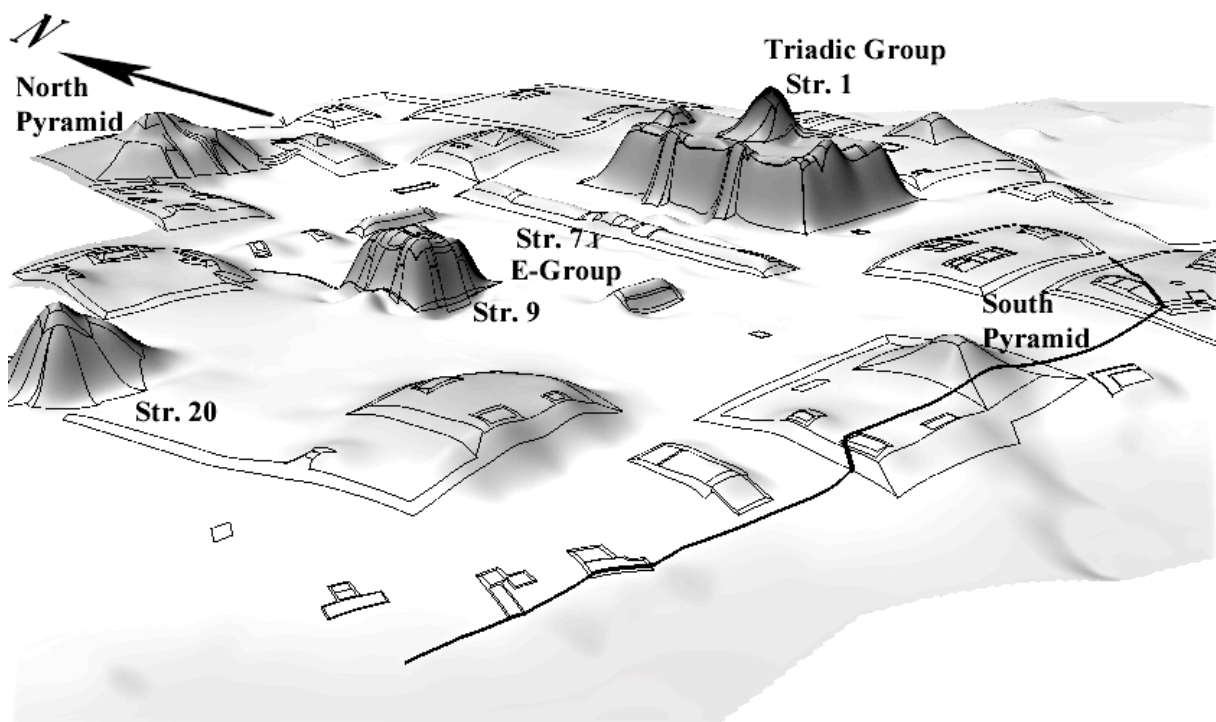


Fig. 13. A 2-Tiered type of Triadic at Cival (from Estrada-Belli 2006:59).

T-Type

The T-Type Triadics in fact may be further divided in two categories. First one consists of an „inverted T-shape” basal platform, with a building constructed on each extremity and the entrance in the middle of the lateral axis, opposing the point where the vertical one adjoins it (Fig. 1c). In such a way the necessary spatial configuration is preserved with a vast amount of a constructive effort saved. This kind of T-Type Triadics is fairly rare. An example is provided by the Preclassic structure from Sacnab (Rice 1976; Fig. 14a).

The second category applies the same principle to pyramidal substructures. The front sloping facade is broad at its bottom portion that leads to a wide, shallow terrace. On both ends of that terrace two buildings are set, meanwhile the main body of the pyramid, at least slightly narrower than the facade, continues some meters upward, where it is crowned by the main building. Such pattern is more frequent than the former, yielding a number of examples, as Str. H-I from Uaxactun among others (Kovač *et al.* 2010, Fig. 14b).

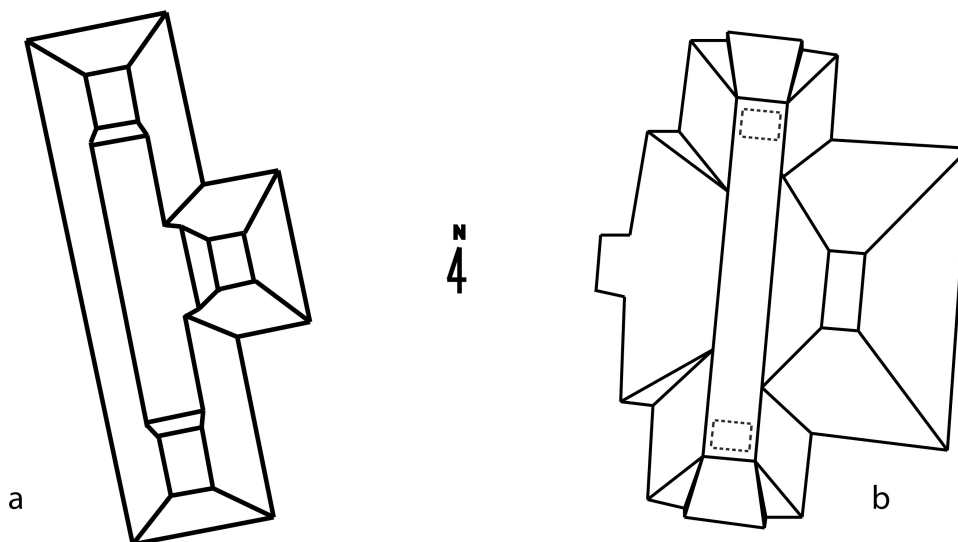


Fig. 14. T-Type Triadic Groups (not to scale); a - Sacnab (after Rice 1976:438); b - Uaxactun (based on Kovač *et al.* 2010:272, fig. VII-1, drawing by M. Riecan and M. Hanus).

It has to be mentioned, however, that according to Morales López *et al.* (2008) structures of that shape resemble the „lk” glyph, and are not triadic. From the vantage point of this work the classification of T-Type, or „lk”-shaped structures as triadic or non-triadic depends on the position of lateral stairways. If they lead from the middle platform towards the lateral temples, the structure is definitely triadic. If, however, the lateral buildings had entrances from the frontal side, they are not Triadics (*cf.* the case of Caana, below).

U-Type

A handful of structures featuring the triadic pattern do not fit the definition to the letter, nevertheless being considered as Triadics. The lateral buildings constituting the triad adjoin facade of the central one with their short internal walls, effectively assuming shape of an inverted letter U, and therefore forming a single structure. However, particular elements of that structure are not connected internally and have separate entrances sharing a common *plazuela* on top of the substructure (Fig. 1d). The U-Type structures appear exclusively as modifications of previous forms, perhaps as a result of a need for constructing a Triadic and a limited space on the top of a platform. Two such structures were discovered in the Late Classic Southern Sector of Nakum (Żrałka 2008; 2012; Fig. 15).

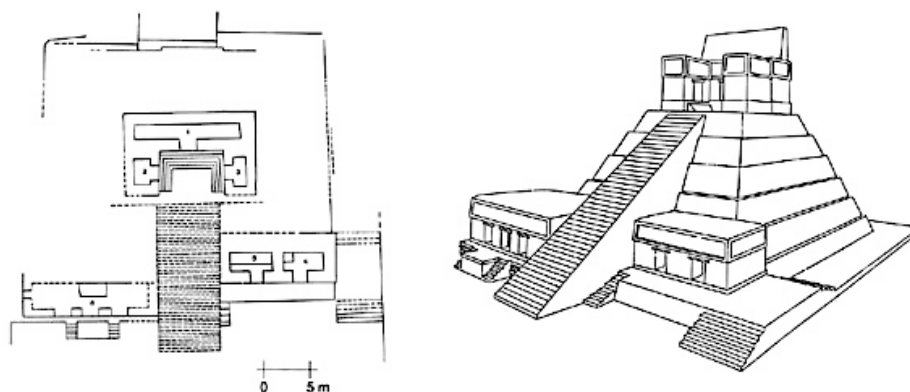


Fig. 15. U-Type Triadic structure. Plan and reconstruction of Str. E, Nakum (after Żrałka 2012, cropping by the author).

Fractal-Type

Describing the Triadics in Uaxactun, Freidel, Schele and Parker (1993:140) observed that Southern Group H Triadic had featured „triads upon triads”: there were three structures on the basal platform maintaining the triadic pattern, of which the central one was further crowned by a Triadic Group. Recent excavations on the Northern H Group platform, conducted by the Slovak project (SAHI-Uaxactun, see Kovač *et al.* 2010), revealed a possibly similar pattern at Structure H-I (Kovač *et al.* 2010). The Northern H Triad consists of structures H-I to H-VII, with H-I being the principal structure. It is tentatively assumed that on lateral edges of the middle terrace once stood two perishable buildings (Martin Hanus, personal communication, April 2011; Fig. 16).

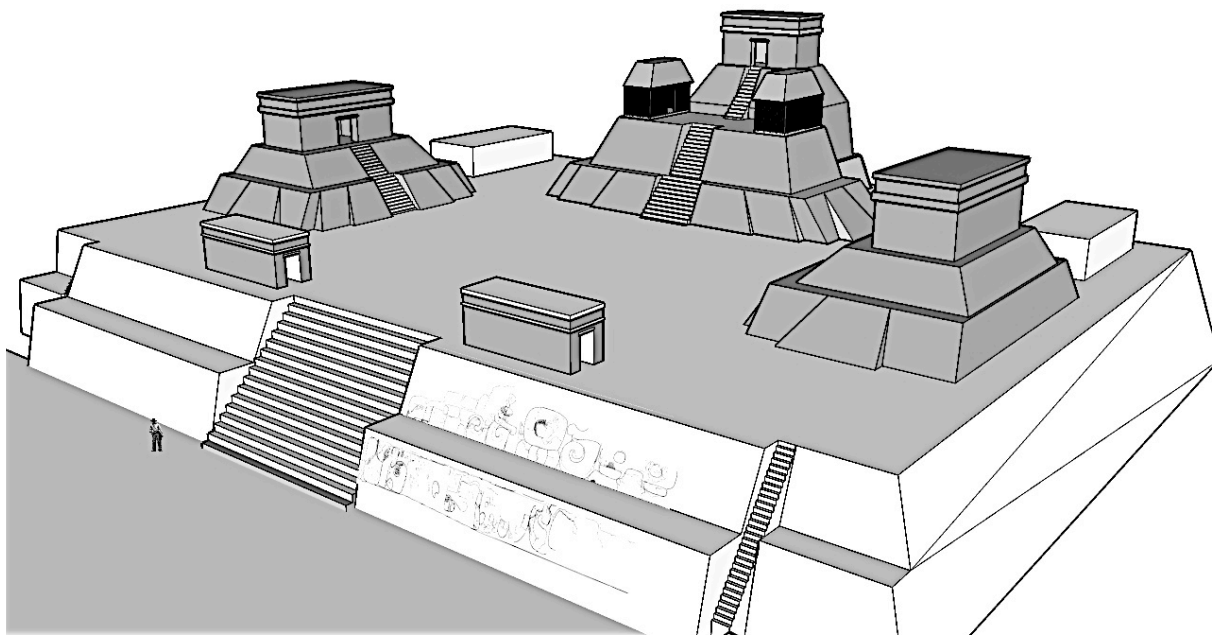


Fig. 16. A Fractal-Type Triadic Group. Group H North, Uaxactun (reconstruction by the author).

Such a pattern occurs elsewhere as well, particularly in El Mirador, where the Danta Triadic shares the same platform with the Pava Triad on the southern edge and another structure on the northern one, forming yet another triad of a greater level (Howell and Evans Copeland 1989; Suyuc Ley *et al.*

2008). Also the Terminal Classic Nakum Structure 99, which is a Triadic Group, along with two perishable structures that once flanked the pyramid, might have formed another triad (Dr. Jarosław Żrałka, personal communication, November 2012). Since the simplified definition of a fractal states that it is a set with self-similar geometry and fractional dimension (Brown *et al.* 2005:40), the Triadic-upon-Triadic pattern comply well with it.

As many other monumental constructions created by the Maya people, Triadic Groups were prone to frequent, sometimes profound modifications, remodellings, constructive stages, etc. In a number of cases the triadic pattern was not the first structure built on a given locality, rather emerging as a result of additions and alterations of a previous one designed differently. It is interesting to analyse such processes, especially when assuming broader perspective that includes an overall development of particular architectural sectors or entire site plans. The same holds true for the processes of Triadic disappearance. In most such cases they just loose their triadic pattern due to elevation of other buildings around, or covering with larger structures of a different layout. Those changes leave some hints about their builders' motives that may contribute to modern understanding of the ancient perception of Triadic Groups.

Two of the earliest Triadics in the Maya Lowlands, Structure 1 at Nakbe and Triadic Group at Cival, follow quite similar patterns of development. Both cities have been long established before the onset of the Late Preclassic period, having their first vestiges of architecture traced back to the Middle Preclassic (Estrada-Belli 2011:168-172; Hansen 2002). At Cival, the first monumental structure in the city core was the late Middle Preclassic E-Group, with its immanent sightlines due east. Sometime around the turn of the 5th and 4th centuries, a massive Triadic platform was raised just east of the E-Group, therefore making the latter obsolete (*cf.* Fig. 13). Recent excavations at the

platform have shown that the whole mass had been built as a single-episode effort, designed to be triadic in layout from the beginning. Several later phases of remodelling made the structure grow until it had reached the height of 33 m, and the triadic pattern had been preserved throughout that time (Estrada-Belli 2006:64). At least since the penultimate (4th) constructive stage, two huge stucco masks had been adorning both sides of the stairway leading to the top of the platform (*idem*). No evidence could be recovered that proved the existence of such masks in either earlier nor later periods.

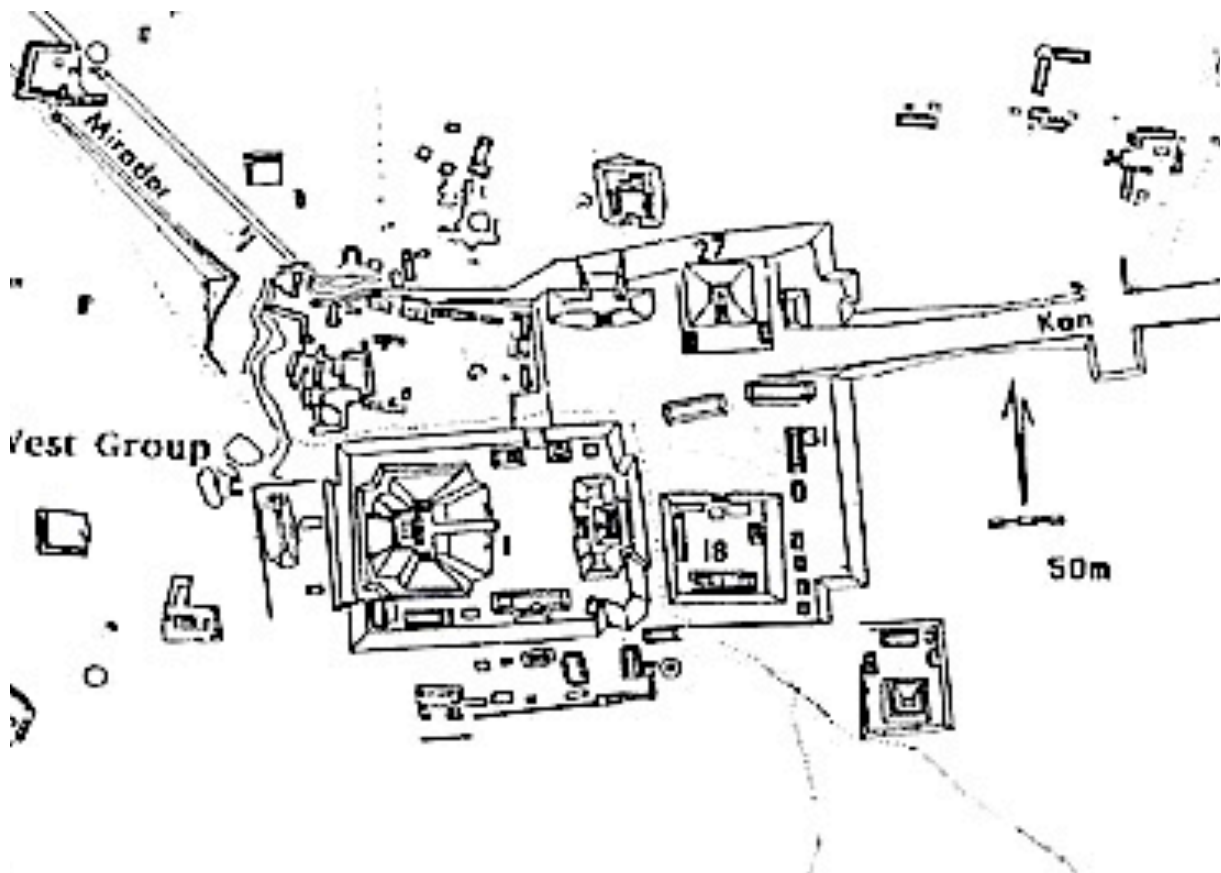


Fig. 17. Plan of Nakbe with Structure 1 located in the centre (after Hansen 2002, cropping by the author).

Nakbe Structure 1 had been built over an earlier Middle Preclassic platform around 350 BC. It emerges as a double-stage episode, but the fully developed triadic pattern of superstructures on its top appears to be a single episode. Altogether at least seven stucco masks were adorning the entire

complex. During the subsequent constructive phases the triadic form had been preserved. Just as in the case of Cival, Structure 1 eventually assumed the central position within the city core and maintained it until the abandonment of the site just before the end of Late Preclassic (Hansen 2002). Curiously, it presents a rare western orientation, that appears elsewhere only as complimentary to other Triadic Groups within the city centres. It is quite possible, though, that at Nakbe western orientation was the earliest one (Fig. 17).

Both Hansen and Estrada-Belli underline one peculiarity: the earliest Triadic Groups appear suddenly in fully developed form and effectively replace the former focal buildings within the city centres (Hansen 2002; Estrada-Belli 2006:64). In the case of Nakbe there are other Triadics that flank the site core on all the remaining sides (*idem*, *cf.* Fig. 17). Other early Triadic Groups also appear as single-episode constructions. However, at Cerros a sequence of construction episodes of various structures points towards a certain evolution of the triadic pattern. While the first Triadic raised at that site, Structure 6, also appears as a whole sometime during the 1st century BC with stucco masks resembling those at Cival and Nakbe, slightly earlier non-triadic Structure 5 bears similar artistic programme, that will be discussed in later chapters. Subsequent constructive episodes bring an array of three more Triadic Groups oriented towards different cardinal directions. All of them most probably had been adorned with stucco and stone masks following the pattern of Structures 5 and 6. An apparently unfinished Structure 3 is an exception, though. Curious layout of Structure 29, however, clearly reveals a supremacy of spatial configuration over its utility and accessibility. On an elevated platform oriented towards the east (or facing west) a central superstructure is flanked by two long lateral ones that face each other along the north-south axis that passes almost through the middle of the main building. All three are set so close to each other that reaching each stairway of the lateral structures turns out to be

nearly impossible, especially with the long-snouted decorations emerging from their facades (Fig. 18). Freidel (1986:11-12) underlines the importance of such a spatial template, perhaps due to its ritual meaning. Again, the artistic programme of Structure 29, along with another three Triadics from Cerros and other sites, that point to some clues of what the function and meaning the Triadics might have had for their builders, will be the part of later discussion. It is worth to mention, though, that the recurring set of motifs that is ascribed to masks adorning the Triadics at many sites might have been conceptually earlier than the triadic architecture that had served as its canvas, as seen on Cerros Structures 5 and 6 (Freidel 1986). Schele and Freidel also note (1990:119-125) that the Triadic Groups at Cerros constitute anchor points for the city layout axes, encompassing the entire site. Such a urban plan had been perhaps conceived at once, but its realisation took at least two centuries (*idem*). It stays in concordance with an apparent urban planing in the Mirador Basin sites, where the Triadics mark focal points of the centre layout (Hansen 2002; Šprajc et al. 2009).

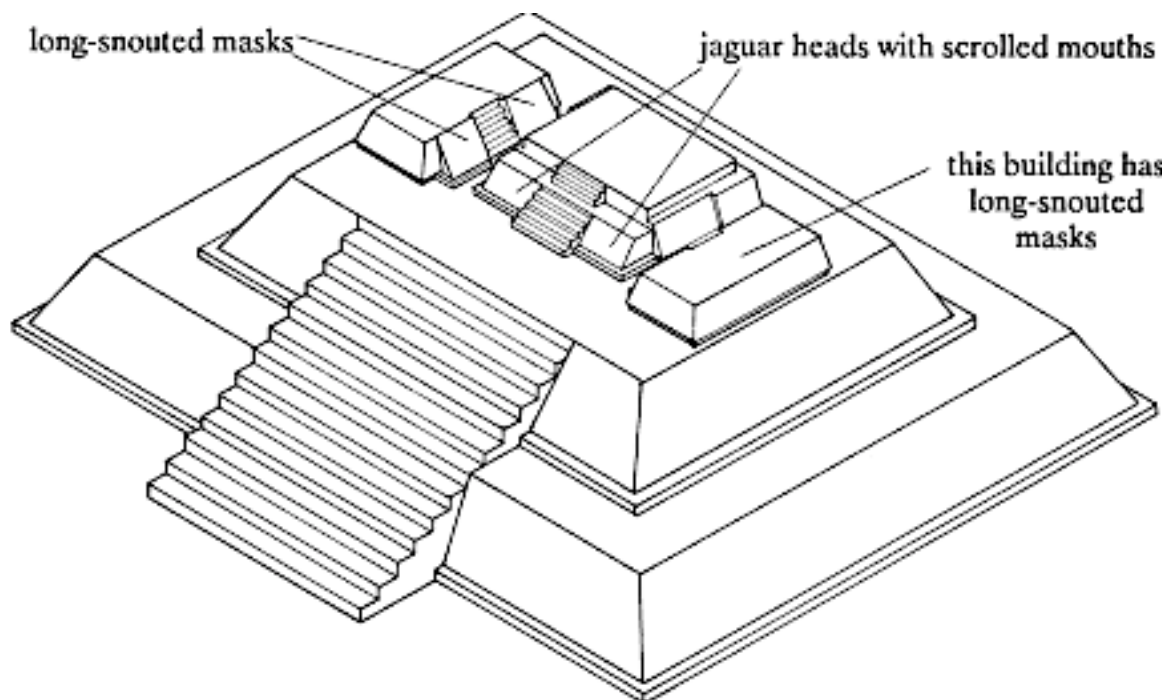


Fig. 18. Structure 29C from Cerros (from Schele and Freidel 1990:125).

At Late Preclassic sites of Altar de los Reyes and Xtobó, Late Classic Palenque, and also, to some extent, Terminal Classic Nakum, the Triadic Groups are set apart of the centres. So called Cross Group at Palenque rises on a semi-manmade low platform beyond the edge of main plaza, with access provided from the north, that is from outside of the centre (Cohodas 1985:61-62). The Maya planners of Altar de los Reyes actually constructed a separate group with its dominant Triadic structure nearly 1 km away of the city core. The Triadic towers over the plaza formed by other structures around, and faces the direction from which one must have been approaching it coming from the centre (Šprajc 2008:25-32). Xtobó Triadic Groups dominate the architectural cluster at the end of a causeway leading south from the core (Anderson 2005). In Nakum, the so called Northern Sector eventually became triadic in the Terminal Classic period (Koszkul *et al.* 2008:3-6; Żrałka 2007:6-14; *cf.* Fig. 12).

In all four cases the very centres of those cities had not been changed so the Triadics would have fitted in them, but at the same time their isolation made them stand out as prominent locations. The gigantic Danta structure from El Mirador can also be included in that list, but its mass is so overwhelming that a vast space that separates it from the rest of the city seems only natural in terms of maintaining a rhythm of interwoven built and empty space intervals. Danta Triadic had been perhaps the largest single architectural complex ever built by the Maya, rising some 72 m above the ground level. Its basal platform (Platform 1) measures 500x300 m. It bears several structures as well as entire complexes (Pava Triadic Group among others). On the eastern side, another platform set on top of Platform 1, labelled Platform 2, elevates the actual Danta Acropolis and its accompanying structures. It faces the Tigre Triadic Group that borders the main plaza on its western edge, both being oriented 5° to the south from the east-west cardinal axis (Fig. 19). In front of Platform 2 a round basin, some 50 metres in diameter

and 5 metres deep, was set into the surface of the Platform 1. It is uncertain, however, whether its origin is natural or man-made (Howell and Evans Copeland 1989; Suyuc Ley *et al.* 2008:527-529).

One of the best-known Triadics from the Classic period is no doubt the Caana Acropolis from Caracol. This massive structure, nowadays over 43 m high and 100x120 m at the base, is located in the heart of Group B, in the northern portion of the monumental core of the city. The name 'Caana' translates as 'The Sky Place', and was assigned to the Triadic by archaeologists as the tallest Maya building known from Belize (Chase and Chase 1987b:18; Chase and Chase 1987a:9; Martin and Grube 2008:93).

The ultimate stage of development left the top of the pyramid crowded with buildings. The western lateral temple, labelled B-18, is a tandem-plan building set on top of a pyramidal platform, with a broad monumental stairway leading to it. Both sides of that stairway were once adorned with stucco masks.

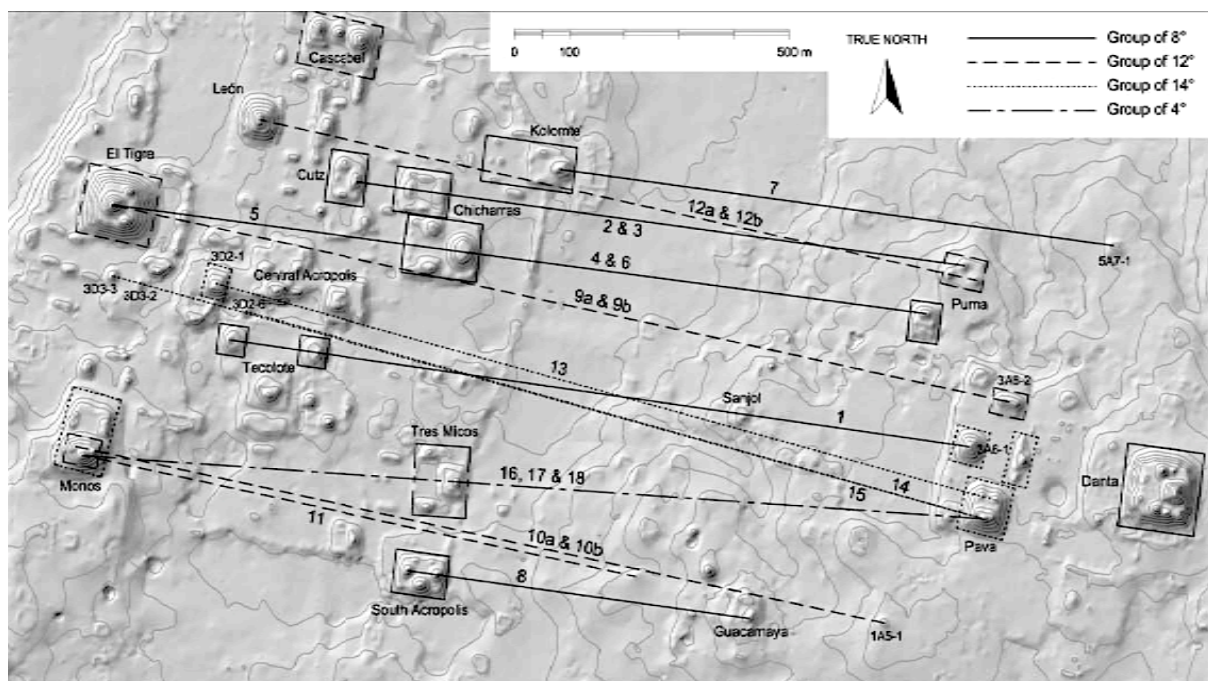


Fig. 19. Urban arrangement of the Danta and Tigre complexes, El Mirador (Šprajc *et al.* 2009:81).

Main temple on the northern side of the platform summit, B-19, presides over the entire area from the top of a substructure considerably higher than the B-18 one. The ultimate phase of the building rises some 43,5 m above the floor of Plaza B, but the only earlier stage discovered within the B-19, dating to the Late Preclassic, proved to be just 4 m smaller. Due to looters activity, the eastern temple, labelled B-20, has been heavily devastated. At the same time the looters' trenches and tunnels aided the archaeologist in establishing a long history of earlier constructive activities and burials encapsulated within the ruined building. As many as 4 subsequent stages of development have been recorded, dating from the Late Preclassic, through Early and Late Classic times. However, archaeological trenching of the base of B-18 platform revealed remains of a previous construction, 4 m below the latest floor of B-18-1st, with the entrance doorjambes on its southern side. The late building has been dated to Late and Terminal Classic, basing on pottery assemblages recovered both from the fill and the rooms (Chase and Chase 2001). It is quite possible, then, that the triadic pattern on the top of Caana had emerged no earlier than Late Classic times. Before it might have been an asymmetrical acropolis with two structures facing south (B-18 and B-19) and one facing west (B-20). Apparently then Late and Terminal Classic Caana, the central point of Caracol, and perhaps also of other minor sites in the vicinity, assumed the ancient form for the first time (*idem*; Fig. 20).

Three out of four Triadics at Nakum emerged as the ultimate stages of development in their respective loci. Structure 99 that proved to be an essentially Late Preclassic massive platform that received a triadic set of buildings during the Terminal Classic heyday. All three constructions were most probably made of perishable materials, possibly in wattle-and-daub technique, canvassed over low stone foundations (Koszkul *et al.* 2008; Żrałka *et al.* 2011; Fig. 12).

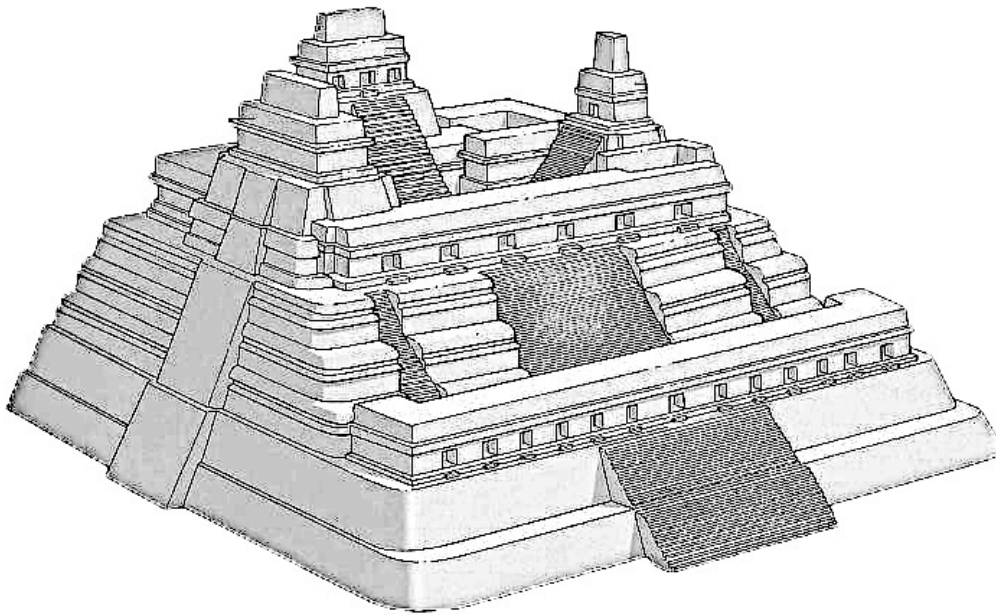


Fig. 20. Reconstruction view of Caana, Caracol (from Ballay 1994:43).

Both U-Type Triadics in the Southern Sector assumed their peculiar layout after a long sequence of constructive episodes that had been radically changing the architectural pattern over several decades. The central building of Structure N was flanked by two single-chambered structures (labeled Str. 60 and 61) since its first stages during the Late Classic; however, at the beginning all three had been facing the same eastern direction. The 6th and 7th architectural episodes dating to the end of Late Classic and Terminal Classic, respectively, converted the plan into a Triadic that can be classified both as a T-Type and a U-Type (Żrałka 2008:70, Żrałka and Hermes 2012; Fig.).

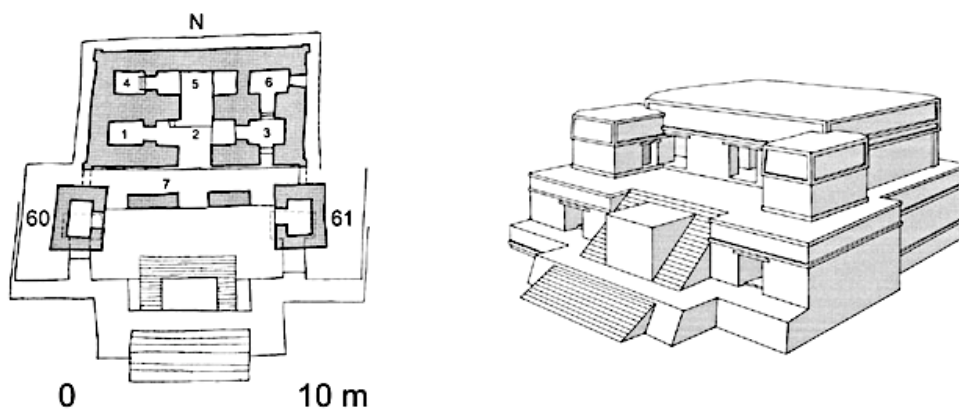


Fig. 21. Ultimate form of Structure N/60/61 at Nakum (from Żrałka and Hermes 2012).

The Terminal Classic version of Structure E (Fig. 15) had also concluded a sequence of Late Classic architectural stages. Before, the summit of Structure E was crowned by a single building, meanwhile its bottommost facade featured two semi-inset buildings, all three facing east. The Terminal Classic attempt to convert the structure into a Triadic had to utilise the little space that was left on the summit without a costly and time-consuming process of enlarging the entire pyramid. Due to such inevitable condensation a U-Type structure had turned out to be apparently the only option (*idem*).

Quite the opposite situation occurs in Late Preclassic Tikal and Early Classic Uaxactun, where the North Acropolis and A-V group, respectively, first assume and then gradually lose their triadic patterns.

Tikal Structure 5D had been an important locus prone to frequent modifications for over a millennium. At least from the Middle Preclassic period it bore one kind of construction or another, beginning with a simple round building on a modified bedrock knoll (Loten 2007:1-2). Subsequent Middle Preclassic and early Late Preclassic stages saw it changing both in size and layout until it reached a pattern that might have been an immediate conceptual predecessor of the Triadic. It consisted of an elevated basal platform (by now quite extensive in size) with two low superstructures symmetrically located in the middle of its length, and another large square platform behind them bearing yet another platform crowned with a masonry vaulted superstructure (*ibid.*:6-9; Fig. 22).

Loten (*idem*) remarks that that structural pattern, although modified, had been essentially preserved through most of the remaining stages. Although it is not triadic according to the definition, i.e. the front/lateral platforms do not face each other, a triad of structures is already there. Subsequent phases convert it into a proper Triadic Group when the second terrace swallows both low platforms and two perishable structures begin to face each other on its enlarged top (*ibid.*:11-13). The only aberration takes

place during the Protoclassic times when the entire location gets completely encapsulated within a large, elevated, two-tiered platform (*ibid.*:30). At the onset of the Classic period the triadic layout returns in its fully developed glory and scale that points to it as a primary location within Tikal. As in many other cases, the main entrance to the platform is then adorned with stucco masks, and so are both terraces of the substructure of main temple, Structure 5D-22-3rd (Fig. 23).

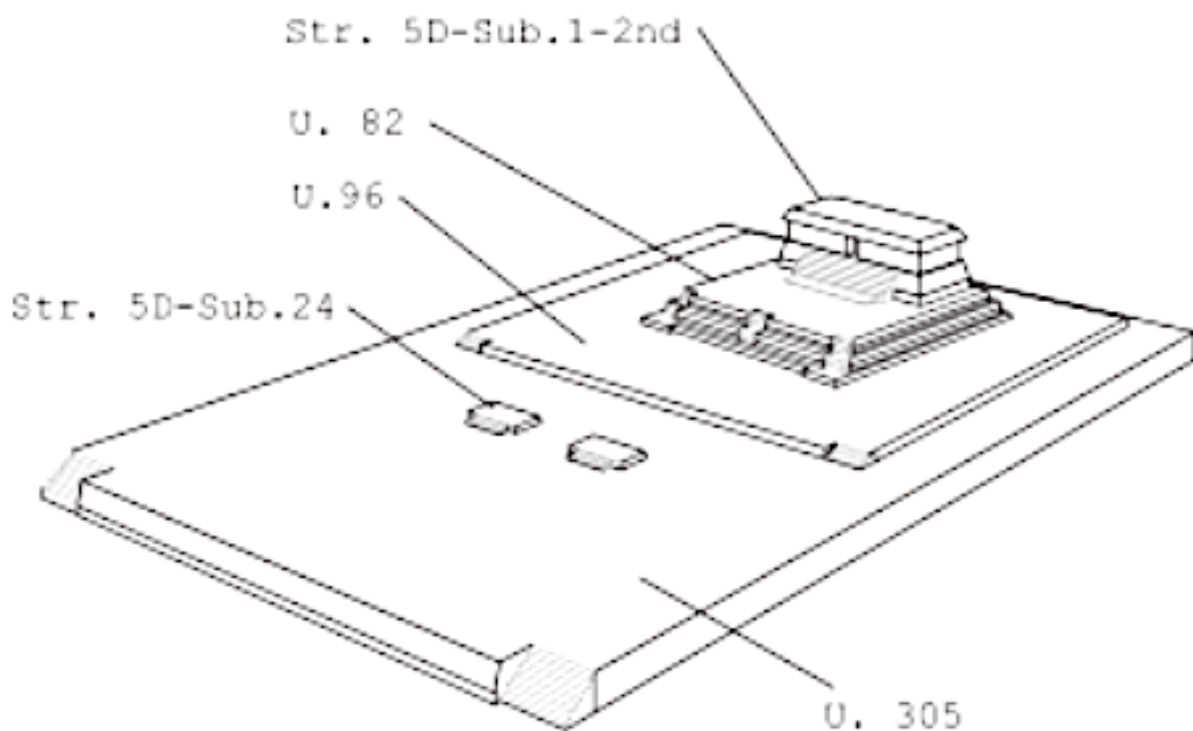


Fig. 22. Late Preclassic predecessor of the Tikal Triadic Group 5D-22 (from Loten 2007:6).

At the front edge of the platform a gate-like structure is located, that might have served both as an architectural division of space and an access-controlling device, as probably in other Triadic cases as well, i.e. Uaxactun A-V and Group H, and Yaxha (Valdes 1989; García 2001).

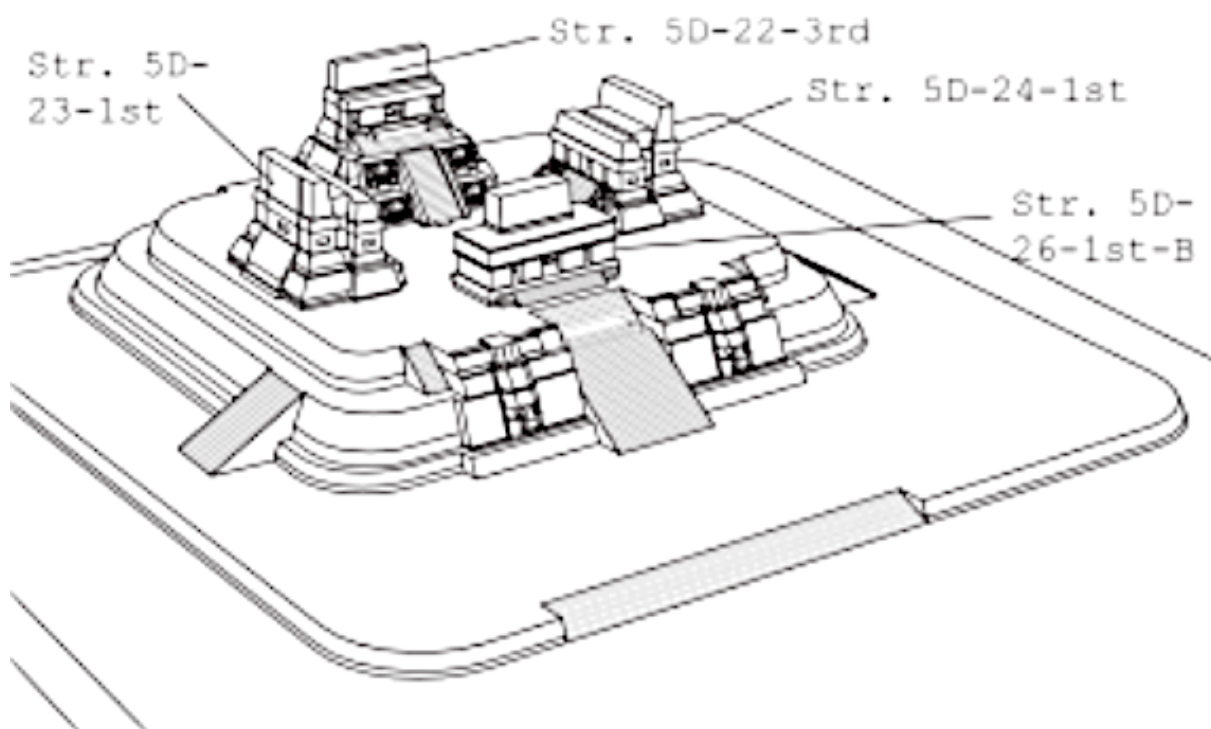


Fig. 23. Early Classic stage of 5D-22 at Tikal (from Loten 2007:45).

The whole triad reaches its peak development sometime before the beginning of 5th century AD, by then functioning as a monumental necropolis of the city royal lineages. From around 400 AD onward the actual Triadic Group gradually gets blocked by another row of temples growing in front of it, and most probably loses all its ritual importance by the beginning of the Late Classic (Martin and Grube 2008:43; Loten 2007:64-66; Fig. 24).

Structure A-V at Uaxactun had comparatively short history and fewer stages than its Tikal counterpart, although Valdes (1989:37) underlines both structural and developmental similarities between these complexes. In place of a Preclassic pair of small buildings, a fully developed Triadic appears at the beginning of the Classic period Tzakol 1 phase (*ibid.*:32; Fig. 25a). Further development stages add more structures and elevate the platform surface but leave the triad essentially intact (Fig. 25b; Fig 26 a-d).

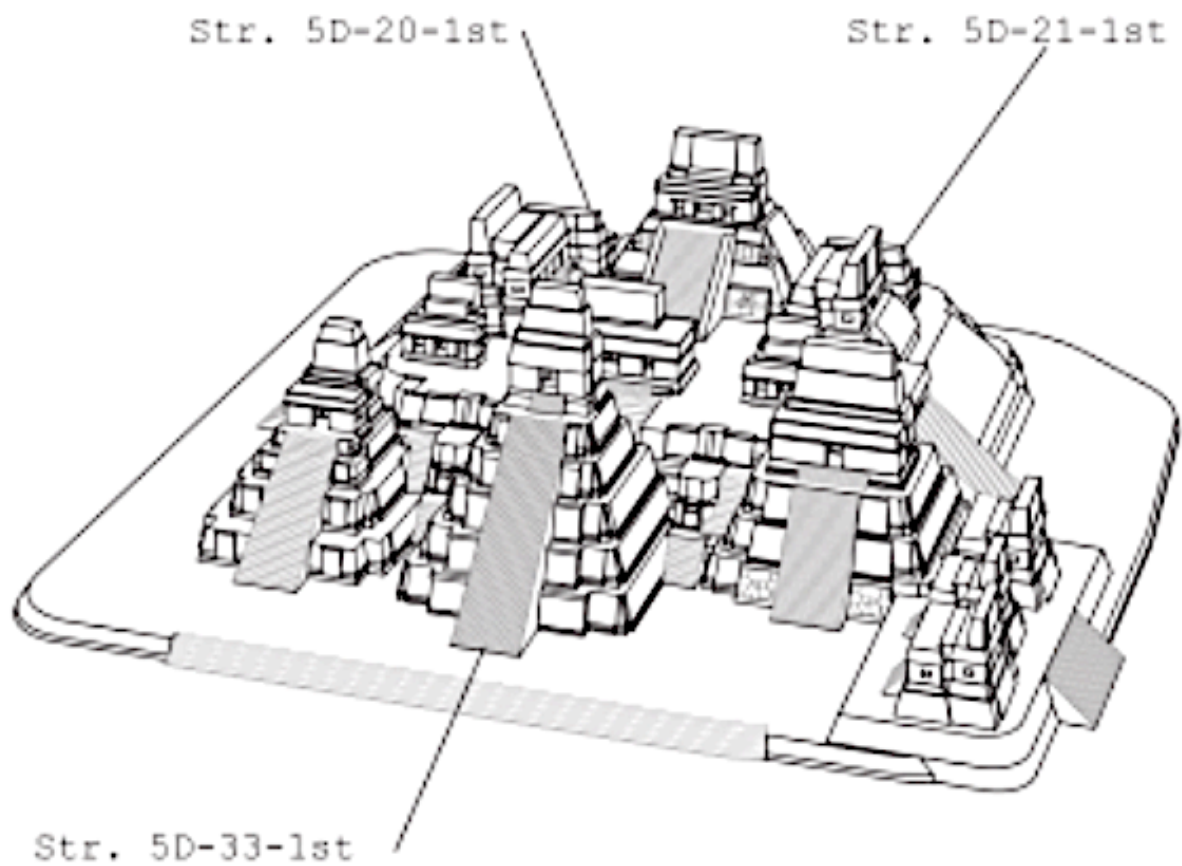


Fig. 24. Ultimate stage of the North Acropolis development during the Late Classic period at Tikal (from Loten 2007:66).

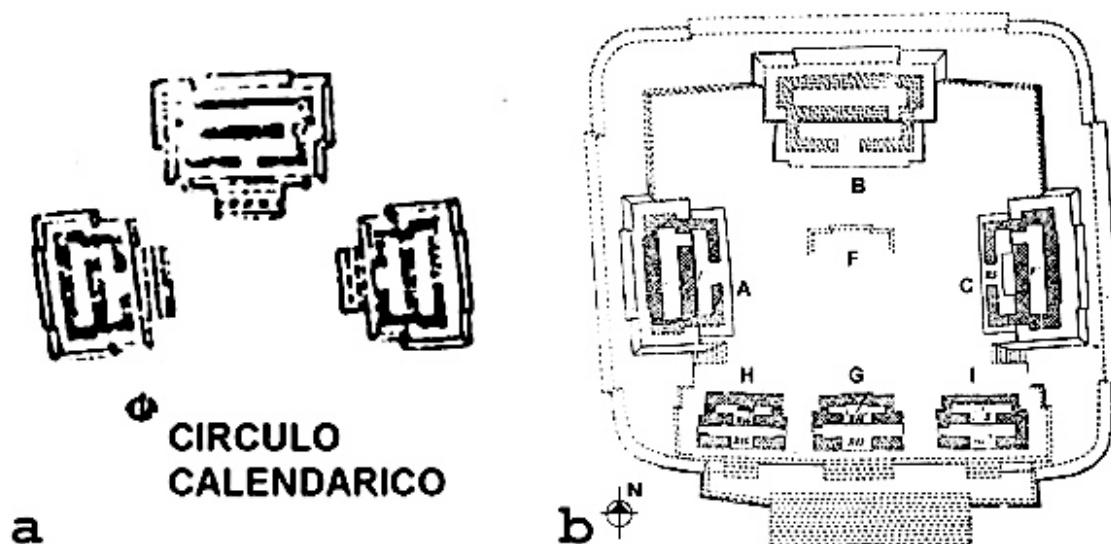


Fig. 25. Structure A-V at Uaxactun during the Early Classic: a - Tzakol 1 phase, b - Tzakol 3 phase (after Valdes 1989, modifications by the author).

A notion by Valdes (*idem*) that at that point the A-V might have turned from a purely ritual function into more funerary-commemorative one, just as the Tikal North Acropolis, can be justified by the number of Early Classic royal burials. However, in the author's opinion these two functions do not stand in opposition being rather complimentary to each other, especially in the Triadic context. Later chapters will focus specifically on the ritual aspects of Triadic Groups.

At the turn of the Early and Late Classic periods the A-V Triadic underwent another series of profound modifications that at first left it as a U-Type triad (Fig. 26e), and then completely drowned the triadic pattern in a maze of interconnected patios and ranged buildings (Fig. 26 f and g).

The ultimate destiny of both 5D-22 from Tikal and A-V from Uaxactun, then, turned out to be the same from the conceptual vantage point. They gradually lost their value as prominent, visually exposed loci with the triadic arrangement on their summits, either turning into other functions or falling out of the perceptual grid.

Great majority of Triadic Groups, however, shared less complicated fate. Once they had emerged, they usually stayed more or less intact for the rest of their lifespan within urban landscapes. If modified at all, they had usually been enlarged or new embellishments had been applied to them, meanwhile the basic conceptual plan behind their function and meaning was constantly manifested in the triadic layout. It was rather the city that kept evolving around, more often than not respecting the existence of monumental Triadic Groups.

The question of architectural context of the Triadics within the city canvass seems now appropriate. No obvious array of rules considering placement of the Triadic loci appears from mere studying the site plans.

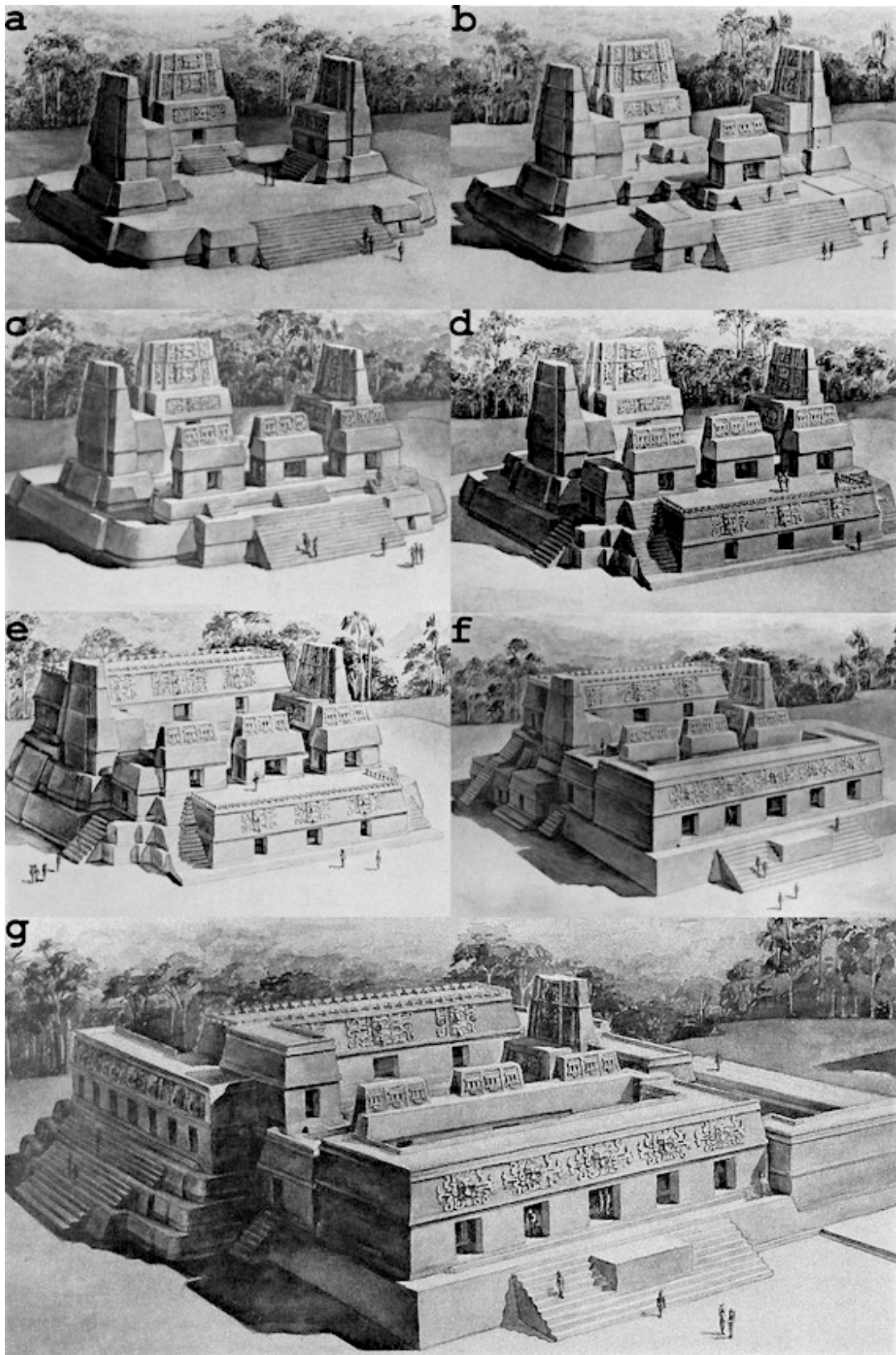


Fig. 26. Reconstructed development sequence of the A-V Triadic Group at Uaxactun; a-e - Early Classic phases (Tzakol), d-e - Late Classic phases (Tepeu); (from Proskouriakoff 1946:111-125, not to scale; arrangement by the author).

However, some details prove to be recurring quite frequently, especially those that associate Triadic Groups with neighbouring structures and natural features.

As mentioned before, the most frequent location of Triadics lies within the strict centre of a site. Many such complexes assume the principal position among other buildings, becoming focal points that tower over entire cities. Their outstanding monumentality immanently turns them into landmarks in the local skylines, as for example in Preclassic Nakbe (Structure 1), Cival, El Mirador (Tigre), Cerros (Structure 4), and Classic examples from Caracol (Caana), and both Triadics from Calakmul (Hansen 2002; Estrada-Belli 2006; Hansen 1990; Freidel 1986; Martin and Grube 2008; Folan *et al.* 1995; 2001). As a rule the Triadics border extensive plazas that balance the vertical mass with horizontal emptiness, as they had been doing with other kinds of massive architecture that demanded equally monumental void (Miller 1999:23). Quite possibly such a plaza was a requirement, if the importance of triadic pattern in fact stemmed from its ritual function. Many scholars agree upon such a view of the Maya architecture as a grand religious and political stage that reinforced, restored, and recreated order, power, and the entire cosmos (*cf.* Inomata 2006). Few exceptions to that rule exist, where the Triadic Groups are squeezed in between other structures. This can be observed in Cival, where the Triadic Acropolis had been fitted just at the back of the E-Group, having no immediate gathering space in front of it. However, the E-Group that ceased to fulfil its astronomical functions due to the lack of horizon observation points blocked by the Triadic, was never demolished (Estrada-Belli 2006; Fig 13). Nevertheless the difference in height between the E-Group eastern platform and the Triadic Acropolis was so great that it could have easily served as a stage even when looked at from a distance.

The spatial co-occurrence of Triadics and E-Groups can be further attested by urban plans of several early sites. The E-Group plaza at Uaxactun

is flanked by a Triadic Group on its southern side (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937). In the Mirador Basin, centrally located E-Groups are surrounded by Triadics, as seen in El Mirador Leon complex, with the Tigre and Cutz Triadic Groups immediately to the west and east, respectively (Hansen 1998:80; Šprajc et al. 2009:85). Late Classic Calakmul features a similar pattern, where the E-Group located in the middle of the main plaza is flanked by both Triadics from the north and south sides (Folan *et al.* 1995; 2001). The Preclassic platform under the Structure 99 in Nakum encapsulates an earlier platform with a building set far on its northern edge; such a layout evokes a possibility of two other building once existing on the vast space on front of it. If it had indeed had a triadic plan in the Preclassic times, it might have corresponded with an early version of Structure X that is thought to be originally an E-Group (Dr. Jarosław Żrałka, personal communication, November 2012). A recent article by Flores (2010) proposed the Western E-Group - Eastern Triadic Acropolis tandem to be the standardised layout; such a notion, however, seems to be an oversimplification, applying only to the east-oriented Triadics, mostly in the Preclassic times.

Another recurring urban layout concerning the Triadic Groups features a separate architectural group removed from the centre, and usually connected with it via a *sac bih*, or the Maya causeway. Such is the case in Middle or Late Preclassic Xtobó, Late Preclassic El Mirador (Danta and Pava groups) and Altar de los Reyes (Southeast Group), Late Preclassic and Late Classic Northern Acropolis at Yaxha, and Late Classic Kinichna Group of Dzibanche, among others (Anderson 2005; Howell and Evans Copeland 1989; Šprajc 2008:25-32; Garcia 2001; Nalda Hernandez *et al.* 1994). To a certain degree, also both H Group Triadics in Uaxatcun, and the Cross Group in Palenque, follow the same pattern (Kovač *et al.* 2010; Cohodas 1985). The reason behind such a design might have been different for each site, nevertheless it is plausible that the main factor was the requirement for the

appropriate amount of space for a Triadic to be properly accentuated and to accommodate its ritual needs.

A peculiar observation has been made by Fialko (2004) in connection with the Triadic Groups at Naranjo. At least four such complexes had been located in the immediate vicinity of caves (*ibid.*:574). In case of Structure B-5 the cave entrance lies in front of the Triadic Group's monumental stairway. This notion evokes another, similarly interesting feature from El Mirador. On the summit of first basal platform that bears both Danta and Pava acropoleis a large circular depression had been discovered, measuring roughly 50-60 m in diameter. It was never definitely determined whether the basin was man-made or natural, but its regular shape points toward the former (Howell and Evans Copeland 1989:8). The identical pattern of such a Triadic-and-cave / basin pairing occurring at both sites can hardly be a coincidence. Cavities of any kind had a strong supernatural significance in Mesoamerica at least since the times of Olmec culture that flourished in Veracruz and Tabasco states in Mexico during the Early and Middle Preclassic periods (Brady and Prufer 2010; Grove 1970). Findings at Chalcatzingo (Aviles 2000), and under the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan (Taube 1986) revealed that caves had been perceived as places of origin, power sources, and loci of passage to the supernatural realms. The Maya were no different from the other Mesoamerican people, and their ritual cave use had been quite extensively interpreted as the important in rituals and power propaganda as well (Vogt and Stuart 2010). In such a context the presence of caves in proximity of the Triadic Groups would point to their linked meaning and similar perception of the Triadics by the Maya people.

Iconographic and Epigraphic Programmes of Triadic Groups

Analysing a mere form of a building, it is possible to determine its function only to a certain extent. The meaning can be even more elusive, making it virtually impossible to guess the perception of particular spaces by their ancient creators solely focusing on the architectural morphology. The ancient Maya, however, left great amounts of clues about their intentions and perception of architecture painted, sculpted, engraved, and moulded all over their cities. Triadic Groups quite often appear to be such architectonic canvasses for artistic media, especially during the Preclassic times. Moreover, the artistic programmes displayed on them present a rather uniform set of features that shed some light upon our understanding of their designers' purposes and intentions.

The Maya artists that had been creating artistic decorations and embellishments that once adorned the monumental architecture used a variety of media for that purpose. The choice of materials depended on the ultimate receiver of messages carried by such works. Painted scenes and texts placed on objects belonging to the inner spaces within the palaces and temples, like thrones, wall panels, and lintels, were meant for the few privileged who could enter the controlled private space, and so would be able to admire them from a short distance. Wooden lintels from giant temples of Tikal, for example, are intricately carved to feature detailed propaganda scenes (Martin and Grube 2008:45; Fig 27a). The stone Panel 3 from Piedras Negras depicts a very dynamic scene, with bodies in motion carved with steady strokes of a chisel (Martin and Grube 2008:149; Fig. 27b).

However, when the decoration was meant for the common dwellers to cause an awe and also mark the building function, it had to be clearly visible and large enough to be spotted without climbing to the confined space of the summit. It is also understood that such artistic displays might have been



a)



b)

Fig. 27. Summit decorations of monumental structures: a - Temple 1 Lintel, Tikal (from Latin American Studies, <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/maya/lintel-temple1-tikal.jpg>); b - Panel 3, Piedras Negras (from Mesoweb, <http://www.mesoweb.com/monuments/media/PNG-Panel3.jpg>).

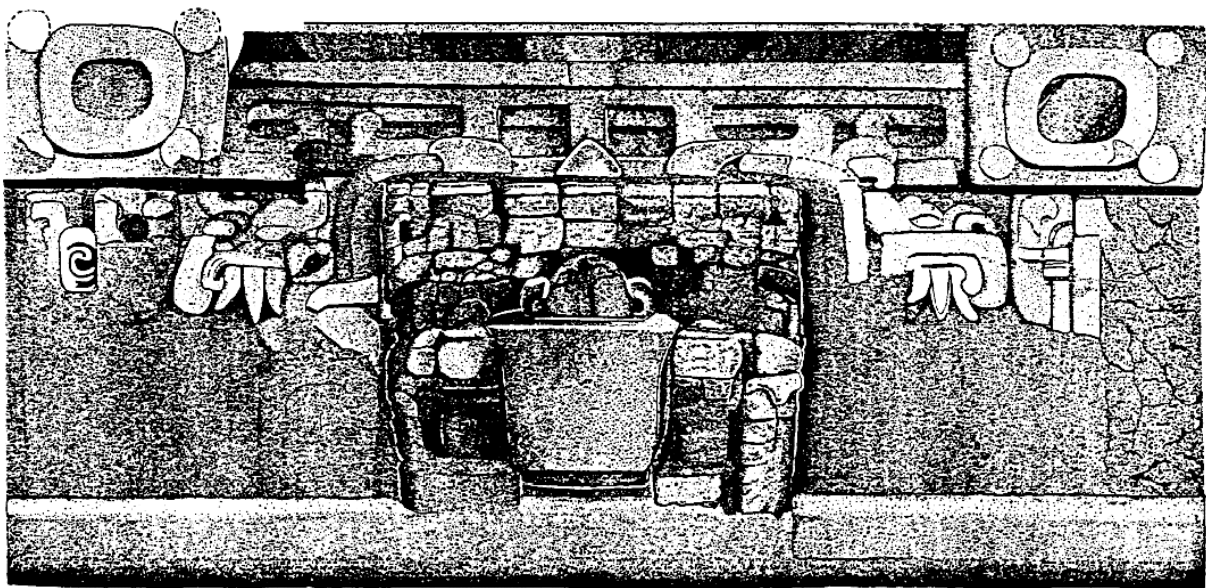
necessary in the process of evoking supernatural beings during the course of a religious event. The medium of choice for that purpose was lime stucco, at least during the Preclassic times. It is highly plastic and easily applicable over large areas, and was available all over the Maya land. The process of lime manufacturing, however, required large amounts of limestone and wood, and was a rather labour-consuming enterprise (Werneck 2006:23-30, 168-175). The firewood necessary for the lime production inevitably had to be gathered farther and farther away from the city cores, and perhaps that is why the amount of stucco applications decreases in archaeological record from the Preclassic to Classic Period (*idem*, Hansen 1998).

Nevertheless, the majority of Preclassic Triadic Groups that have been excavated feature large stucco masks on their facades, sometimes over a metre in height, and several meters in length. Most frequently they occur on frontal sloping facades, or *taluds*, of basal platforms bearing the triadic arrangement, flanking their monumental stairways. In case of 2-Tiered Triadics another favoured location seems to be on the facades of particular substructures of the triad.

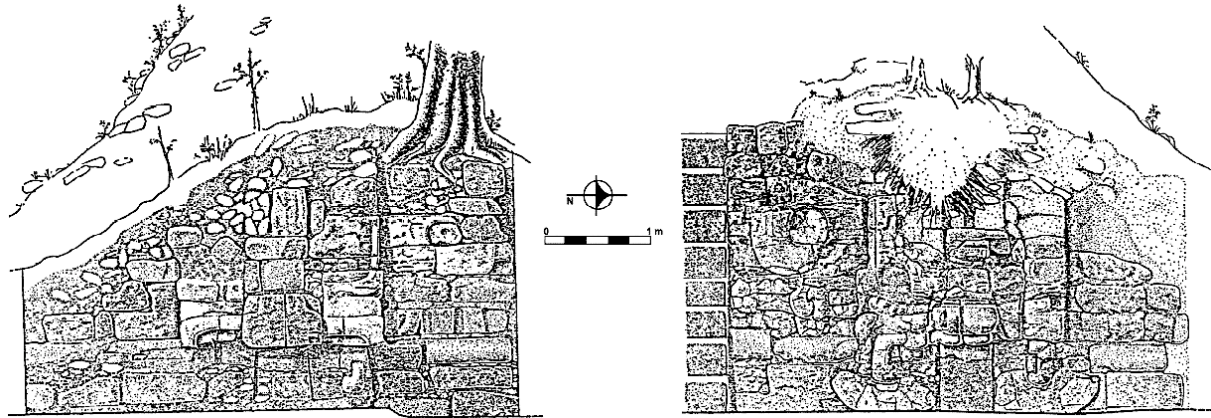
All stucco friezes discovered within the Triadic Groups bear striking resemblance to one another, to the point that they might be plausibly treated as a standard decoration linked to the function and meaning of the Triadics as a genre (*cf.* Freidel 1986; Freidel *et al.* 2002; Estrada-Belli 2006; Kovač *et al.* 2010). The analysis that follows will focus on their iconographic qualities and interpretations proposed by several researchers. Some non-triadic structures from a handful of Lowland sites also feature similar decorations, as for example Structure 5 at Cerros (Freidel 1986). Although their architectural pattern is different, they will be included as well, as they reveal clues about the evolution of Triadic function and meaning through time.

Chronologically first monumental stucco masks discovered within Triadic Groups come from two regions within the Maya heartland of the Guatemalan Peten department - the Mirador Basin, and the Holmul region.

The site of Nakbe features several Triadic Complexes, of which of particular interest are Structure 1 and Structure 27. The first is the largest construction at the site, meanwhile the other is the tallest. Both display multiple large stucco masks that depict huge anthropomorphic faces. Structure 1 features four such friezes: two pairs flanking the stairway from the platform to the summit of the central structure, and one additional mask on the northern building (Hansen 2002; Fig. 28a). Structure 27 was decorated with a pair of masks on its main building (Forsyth and Acevedo 1994; Fig. 28b). In both cases the preservation of stucco was poor. Forsyth (1993:115) notes that the stone armatures that originally held the friezes in place differ from site to site. At Nakbe they resemble the major facial features of the masks, so only a minimal layer of stucco needs to be applied to shape the actual masks. At El Mirador, on the other hand, the armatures take form of crude stones emerging from the walls.



a)



b)

Fig. 28. Stucco masks from Nakbe; a - Structure 1 (from Martinez Hidalgo and Hansen 1992); b - Structure 27 (from Forsyth and Acevedo 1994).

Not much has been said about the masks' iconography otherwise. However, a couple of common elements are clearly visible. Each mask features a stylised face with a pair of large circular earplugs or earflares flanking the squarish rounded eyes, and pronounced zygomatic bones. Upper parts of an open maw are still preserved. Hansen (2002) notes the long snouts or trunks emerging from the central portions of each face. Despite their poor preservation, masks from both structures at Nakbe bear resemblance to other such findings from Cival, El Mirador, Cerros, Uaxactun, Yaxha, and Lamanai.

At the grand site of El Mirador a few dozens of Triadics have been reported (Hansen 1998). Of great interest for this dissertation are particularly structures known as Structure 34, Danta, and Pava complexes. On these, the stucco masks had survived until modern times, and have been mostly restored, analysed, and interpreted.

Pava Triadic Group presents vestiges of stucco masks on its central and eastern structure. Whether the western structure once featured friezes has yet to be determined, but it appears that it underwent at least one major remodelling episode during the Late Classic, during which earlier decorations might have been removed. The eastern structure (Str. 2A6-6) displays two

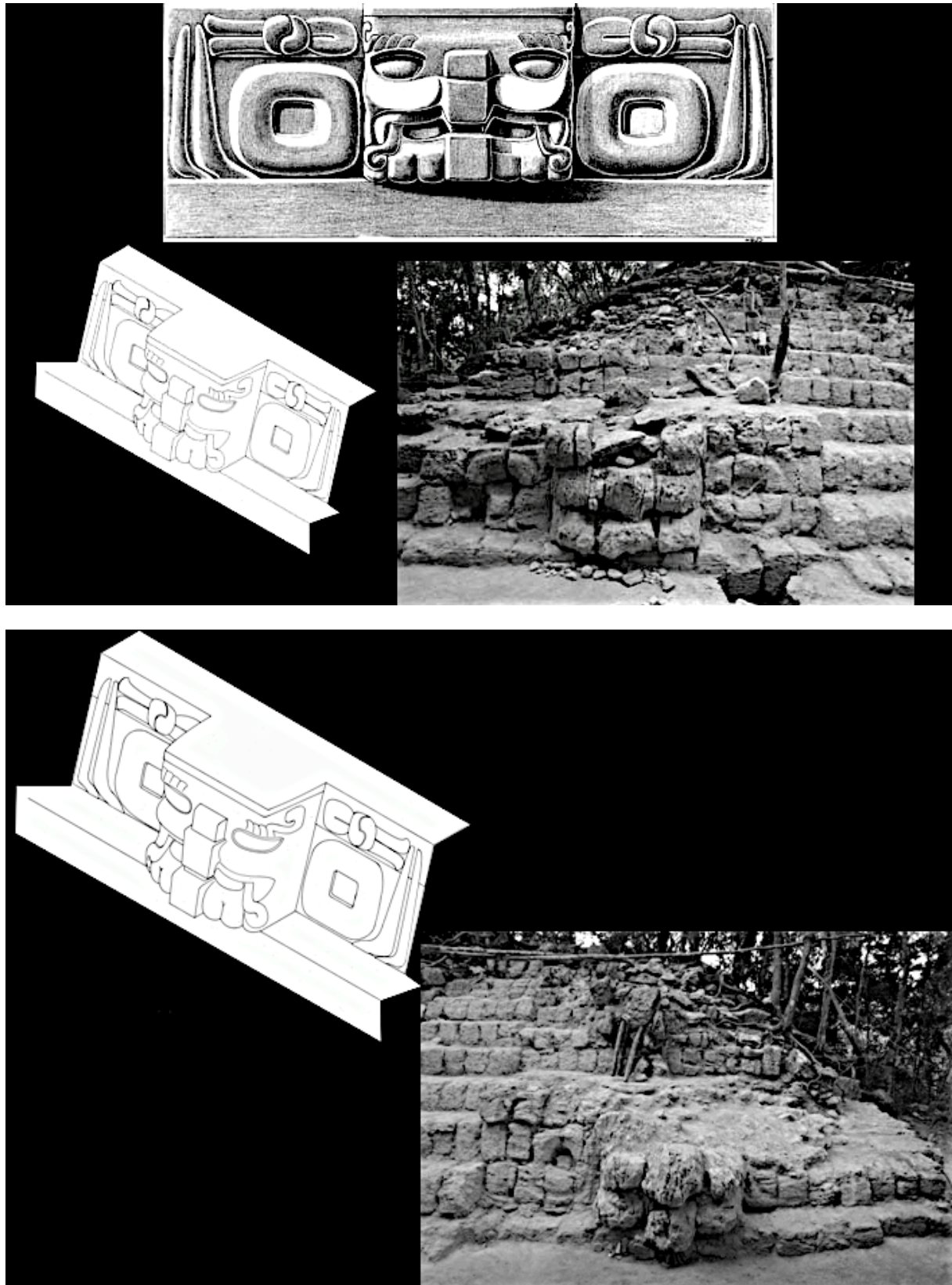


Fig. 29. Stucco masks from the eastern structure (2A6-6) of La Pava Acropolis, El Mirador (from Suyuc Ley *et al.* 2008:539-540).

pairs of masks adorning both sides of the stairway, sitting on each level facades of the substructure. The upper ones were probably chronologically later than the bottom ones, probably overlapping them during the final Preclassic stage of development. Today they are virtually nonexistent, nevertheless the lower pair of masks survived underneath. They are essentially identical, and feature an anthropomorphic face with a prolonged flat nose or beak, oval eyes, and large round earplugs with knots over their upper rims (Suyuc Ley *et al.* 2008; Fig. 29). According to Suyuc Ley and his colleagues (*ibid.*:527) they may represent either a stylised form of the Principal Bird Deity (PBD), Itzamnaaj, or the Maize God.

Poor preservation of the central Pava structure (2A6-3) does not allow to plausibly reconstruct the masks; however, the retrieved elements feature some zoomorphic and anthropomorphic details (*idem*).

Quite similar pattern of mask preservation occurs on the Danta Triadic. The northern (to the left from the centre) structure, labelled 3A8-1, features large stucco masks in fairly good shape that feature similar knots and earflares. The central Danta structure, or 3A8-2, also possessed stucco masks on its bottommost platform. However, due to some Late Classic construction activity at the bottom of the substructure they have been mostly destroyed (Suyuc Ley *et al.* 2008:528). The retrieved elements feature emerging upper jawbones, zygomatic bones, long snouts or beaks, and other anthropomorphic and zoomorphic details (*idem*).

Structure 34 from El Mirador, along with two small buildings labelled 33 and 35, forms a Triadic Group that flanks the gigantic Tigre pyramid from the south. The central building (Structure 34 itself) bears a pair of friezes that feature the same set of iconographic details as the ones from the Danta and Pava acropolises, accompanied by enormous jaguar paws. Also the eastern (leftmost) building of the triad has recently proved to be flanked by similar masks (Hansen *et al.* 2005). Other Triadic groups at the site also appear to

feature stucco masks, however their poor state of preservation and lack of data does not allow the iconographic analysis (*cf.* Suyuc Ley and Hansen 2006; Fig. 30).

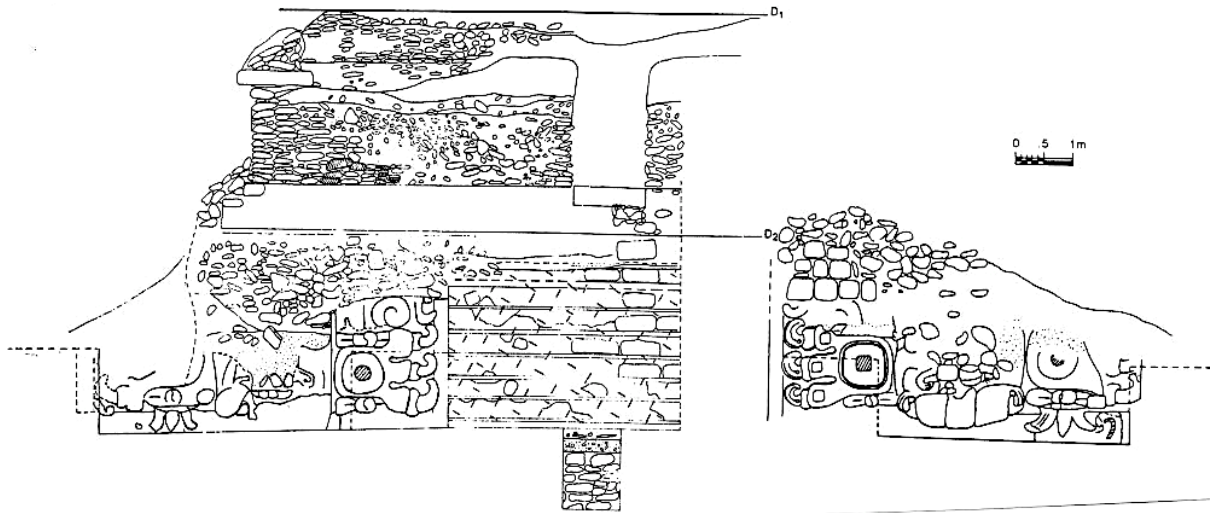


Fig. 30. Stucco friezes adorning Structure 34, El Mirador (from Hansen *et al.* 2004:34).

The Late Preclassic stucco masks that adorn both Triadic Groups at Uaxactun Group H have been excavated first during the 1980s (Valdes 1986; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:139-143) and recently by the ongoing Slovak SAHI archaeological project since 2009 (Kovač *et al.* 2010). In each case they flank the broad monumental stairways that lead to the summit of the Triadic platforms.

The southern H Group Triadic Group is a model example of Fractal-Type triads. A large platform oriented to the east bears three substructures that form a triadic pattern; the central substructure, labelled H-X, further displays a triadic layout formed by structures Sub-3 (main), Sub-4 (north), and Sub-5 (south). Other buildings stand at the summit as well, of which a gate-like Structure Sub-10 that guards the frontal edge of H-X is worth mentioning (Fig. 30).

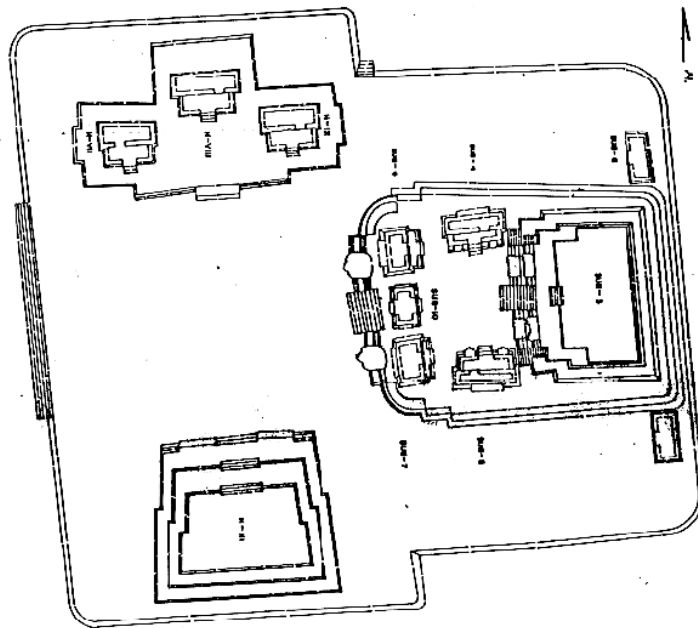


Fig. 30. Group H South, Uaxactun (from Valdes 1986).

The total of at least 14 large stucco masks have been recovered during the excavations of the H-X Triadic. A pair of gigantic anthropomorphic masks flank the main entrance to the platform, measuring approximately 4 m in height, and over 7 m in length. They feature two faces with long noses and square, crossed eyes. Pairs of earplugs flank the faces, having knots attached below and on top of them. The figures also wear headbands, most likely with depictions of the Jester God (Valdes 1986; Fig. 31).

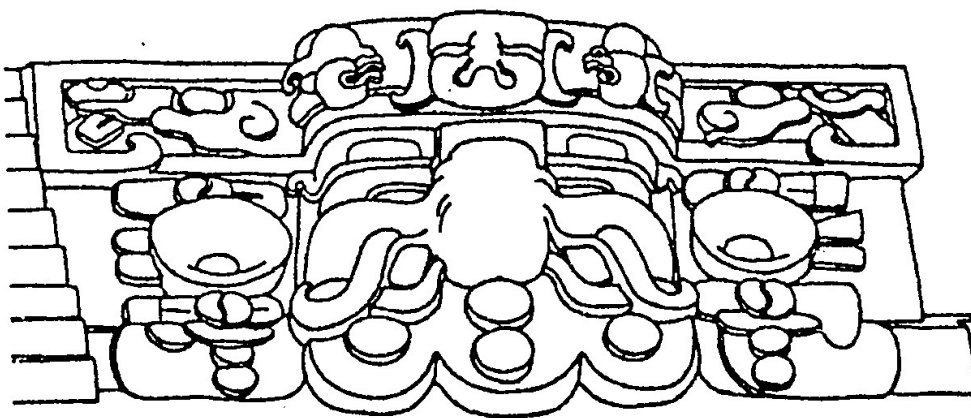


Fig. 31. Masks flanking the stairway to the summit of Structure H-X, Uaxactun (from Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:142).

The gate structure, or Sub-10, was originally richly decorated with stucco heads at the bottom, and full figures on the walls. Freidel, Schele, and Parker (1993:140-142) identify it a *popol nah*, or a council house, due to its wall decoration in form of a mat - symbol of power and rulership among the Maya. The bottom friezes depict the blunt-nosed jaguars wearing earflares, with pairs of trilobed, downward facing elements hanging from them (Valdes 1986; Fig. 32).

The lateral structures of the triad, named Sub-4 and Sub-5, featured symmetrical pairs of masks on each side of their stairways. The masks were nearly identical, differing in a few crucial details, though. Both represented long-snouted, jaguar-like creatures with round earplugs. The pair to the south (Sub-5), however, has rounded eyes with concentric circles for pupils, and does not feature lower jaws, therefore most probably depicting a Underworld deity (Fig. 33a). The northern pair (Sub-4), on the other hand, features square eyes associated with the Sun god (Valdes 1986; Fig. 33b).

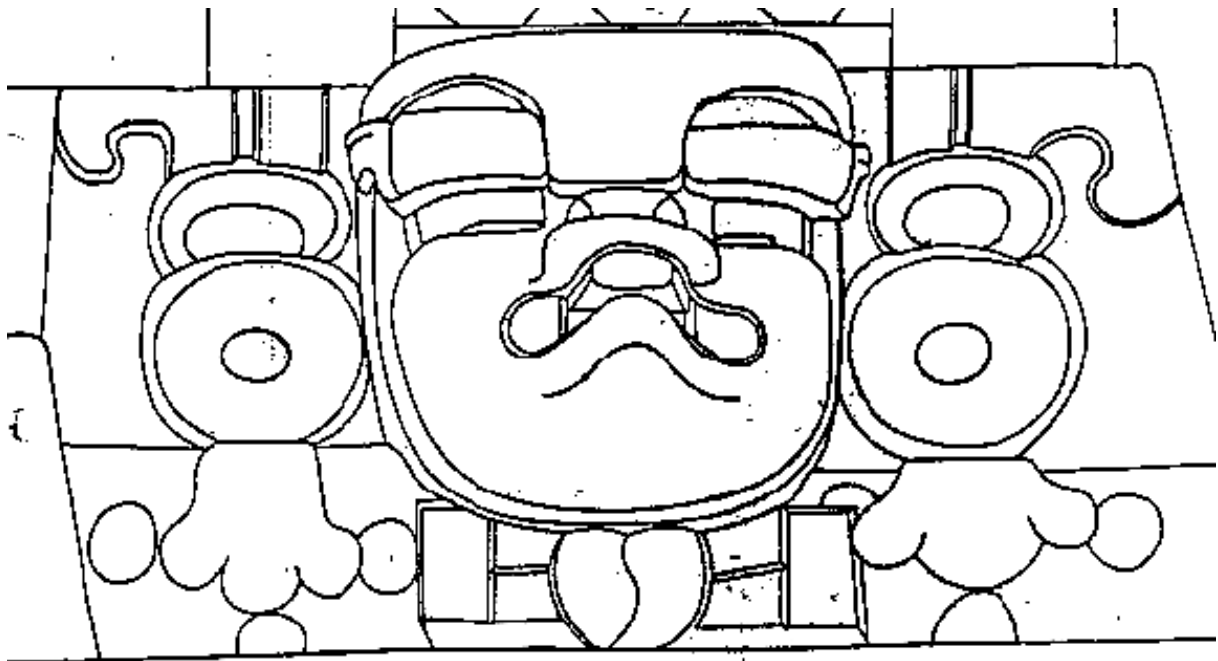


Fig. 32. Jaguar masks at the bottom of Structure H-Sub-10, Uaxactun (from Valdes 1986).

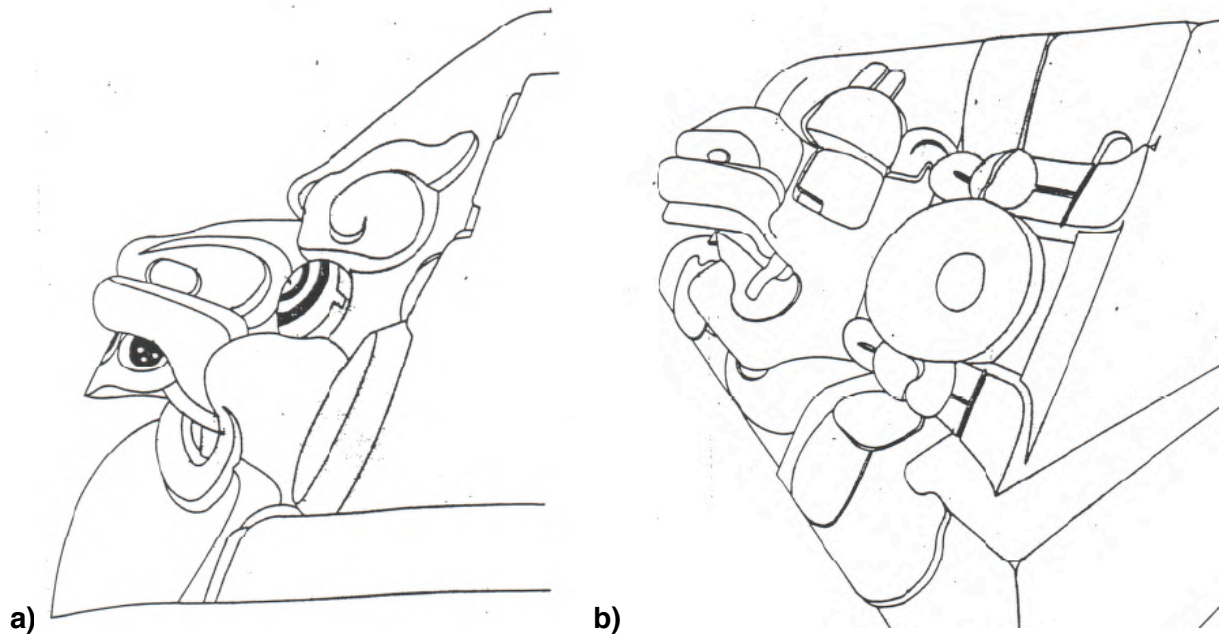


Fig. 33. Masks from the Lateral H South Triadic Structures, at Uaxactun: a - Sub-5, b - Sub-4 (from Valdes 1986).

The central structure of the Triadic Group, H-Sub-3, featured four masks, two on each level of the two-tiered platform, on both sides of the stairway. They feature stylised *Witz*-monsters, depicting the Earth or Primordial Mountain. Lower pair displays some aquatic motifs in form of fish and water swirls, meanwhile the upper masks are embraced by double-headed Vision Serpents, that symbolically connect the natural and supernatural realms (Schele and Freidel 1990:137-139; Fig. 34).

The Northern Group H Triadic has just recently been excavated by the SAHI Archaeological Project from Bratislava, Slovakia. One of the first discoveries made upon commencing was a pair of enormous stucco masks decorating the front of the Triadic platform. They measure as much as 20 m in length, and originally were probably extending to the upper edge of the platform 4 m above the plaza level; present height, though, barely exceeds 3 m. Nevertheless, they are most probably the largest and longest stucco friezes ever discovered in Mesoamerica (Kovač *et al.* 2010:419). The masks are shaped in form of the *Witz*-monster with some Jester god implementations,

again flanked by large earflares with knots; hence the tentative reading of the whole as „The Mountain of Jester God” was proposed (*ibid.*:438; Fig. 35). Some traces of red and black pigment applied over white stucco had been recovered from the friezes and other remains of stucco from the entire group (*idem*).

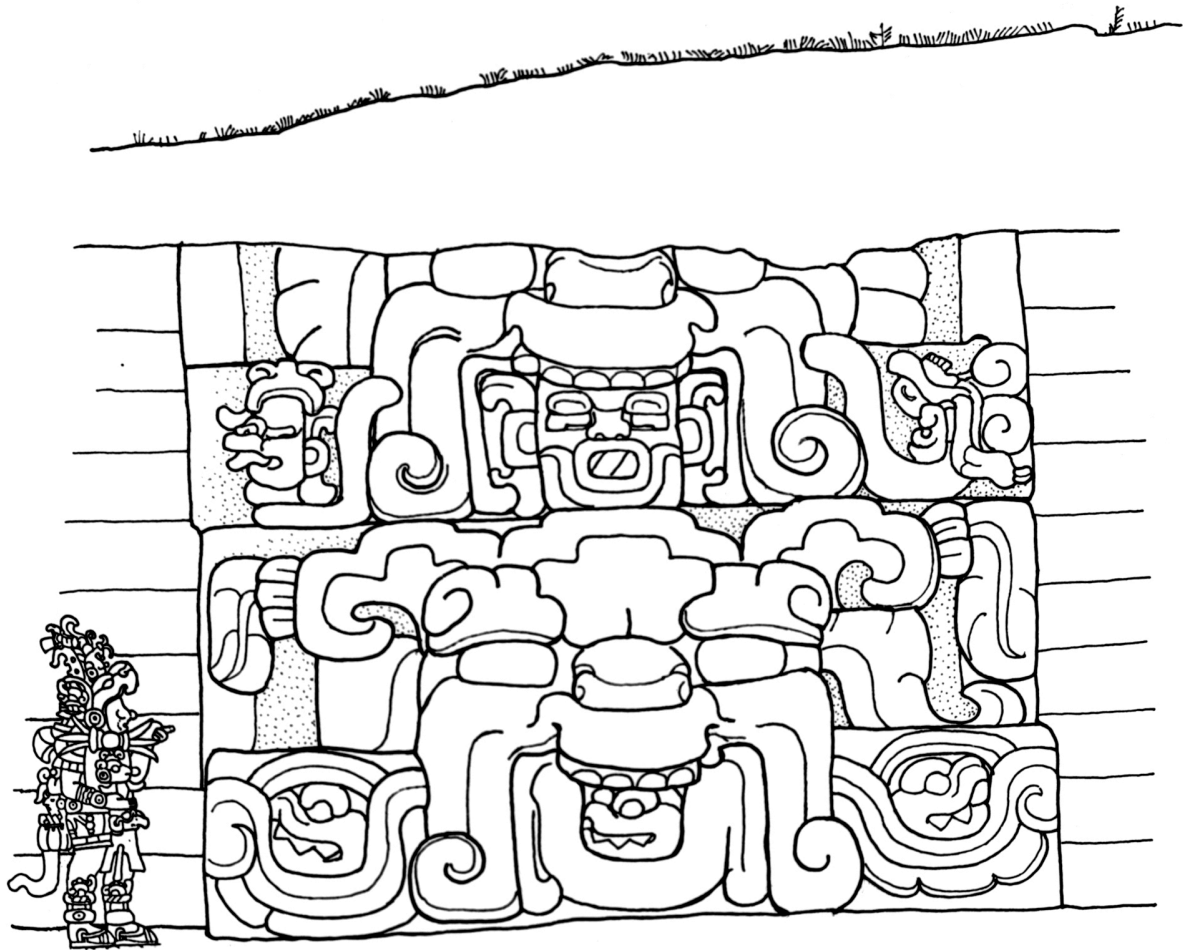


Fig. 34. Witz-monsters adorning central building of the H South Triadic, Uaxactun (after Schele and Freidel 1990).

Some remains of other stucco friezes had been found on upper terraces of the central building of the Triadic Group (Martin Hanuš, personal communication, April 2011). Their state of preservation does not permit any iconographic analysis, though. It has to be mentioned that the excavations on the Group H North Triadic are still in process at the time of writing this

dissertation (2011-2012), so it is possible that some of the above will be prone to corrections and changes when new data comes to light.



Fig. 35. Southern Stucco Mask in Group H North, Uaxactun (copyright by SAHI; from International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works web page, <http://www.iiconservation.org/node/3214#>).

Among the best-known triadic structures with monumental art are those from Cerros, Belize. Two of them had been once adorned with artistic programmes that can still be read nowadays, i.e. Structures 6 and 29; peculiarly, chronologically the first structure bearing stucco masks that had been later copied on Structure 6, is a non-triadic complex named Structure 5. It was most probably the first monumental building raised at Cerros, and its decoration resembles the worse preserved one on Structure 6 to the point that Freidel (1986) analysed the latter using mostly the data obtained from the former.

Both structures have been oriented to the north, sitting almost on the summit of a natural hill overlooking the Corozal Bay (Fig. 36).

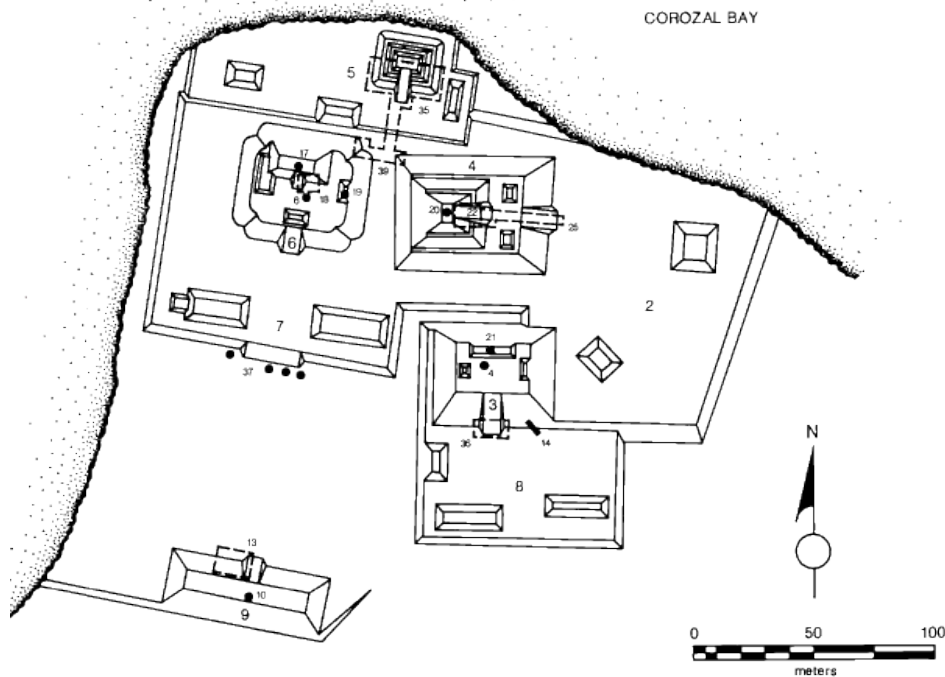


Fig. 36. Location of Triadic Structure 6 and non-triadic Structure 5 at Cerros (from Freidel 1986:13).

Radiocarbon samples place Structure 6 construction sometime between 50 BC and the turn of eras (Walker 2005:25). A focal point of that group is a two-tiered pyramidal platform, 6B, that probably bore a perishable superstructure. The facades of these terraces were decorated with large stucco masks featuring polymorph heads interpreted by Schele and Freidel (1990:20-22) as double incarnations of the sun (lower facade) and Venus (upper facade), in their morning and evening aspects, on the right (eastern) and left (western) sides, respectively.

A peculiar offering was cached on top of 6B: four carved jade heads, possibly effigies from a royal headband, surround a central, larger jade mask. The whole lot deliberately replicates a quincunx design, often being interpreted as a visual representation of the Maya worldview (Stross 1986). The basal platform of the entire complex, 6A, was crowned by additional structures, among them two asymmetrical side platforms, 6D and 6C. Three

other mounds were set on the southern edge of the platform, perhaps as architectural means of access control (Walker 2005:21, fig. 15). The same pattern may be observed in other Triadic Groups from the Late Preclassic, (*cf.* Uaxactun Group H Triadics above, Fig. 30, and Yaxha Triadic Acropolis and Cival Structure 1 below).

As said before, the interpretation of Structure friezes 6 bases on the similar programme found on Structure 5. It is earlier and smaller, and does not feature the triadic pattern. However, its stucco decoration survived in good condition until modern times. Scholars believe that it holds the key to understanding the function of Triadics not only from Cerros, but from other sites as well. The interpretation of that set of masks have been changing through time. At first, Freidel proposed a two-level understanding, according to which the four masks had reflected a daily path of the Sun and appearances of Venus as Morning and Evening star, at the same time representing Hunahpu and Xbalanque, the second generation of Hero Twins known from Popol Vuh, and elsewhere (Schele and Freidel 1990:104-116; Christenson 2007; Figs. 37 and 38).

However, over a decade later, a more thorough identification of particular elements composing the frieze led Freidel and colleagues to different conclusions. They made an observation that the upper tier masks display some avian features, meanwhile the lower tier features the feline ones:

„The upper masks can be identified as sacred birds on the basis of their long, curved beaks and other diagnostic features (...). While both of these masks bear connections to the Principal Bird Deity, named Itzam-Ye or Mut Itzamna (...) during the Classic Period, we suggest that these masks represent in fact two connected divinities, the Principal Bird Deity, on the eastern side, and the Water Fowl on the western upper panel. (...) In similar

fashion, we think an argument can be made to identify the lower jaguarian masks with specific supernaturals, Yax Balam, younger of the Classic period Maya hero twin sons of the Maize god, and the Waterlily Jaguar. We propose that these supernaturals have celestial referents in the constellations in the area of Capricorn/ Aquarius and Leo, respectively, on the ecliptic (...). The white stairway between the mask panels, in this interpretation, symbolised the Milky Way in its two north-south orientations, the Wak Chan Ahaw (Six or Stood-up Sky Lord) and the Na Te' K'an" (Freidel *et al.* 2002:48-49, 64-65).

A peculiar argument has been made according to the earflare depiction. First of all, the shape of its oval element strongly resembles the Maya glyph for *beh* or *b'ih*, a word that means „road” or „path” (*cf.* Mathews and Biró 2006: [road]). Secondly, the volutes surmounting each earflare, formerly identified with K'awiil, now have been thought to represent a stingray perforator and a swirl of blood (Freidel *et al.* 2002:63).

Yet again three years after the second interpretation Freidel (2005) announces another explanation of the whole 5C-2nd decoration:

„Today I think the lower masks represent funerary masks of the bundled bones of the Maize God and his twin brother. The upper masks represent Itzamnaaj and Chahk, the axe-wielding sacrificer god; these creator gods caused the death and resurrection of the Maize God. These were the gods impersonated by the king when he performed here as a lord of creation.” (*ibid.*:53).

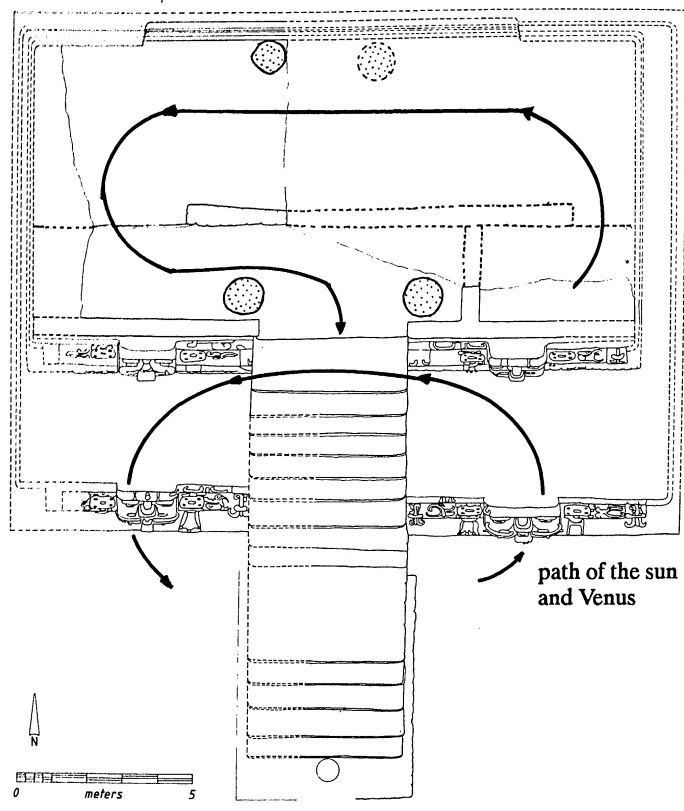
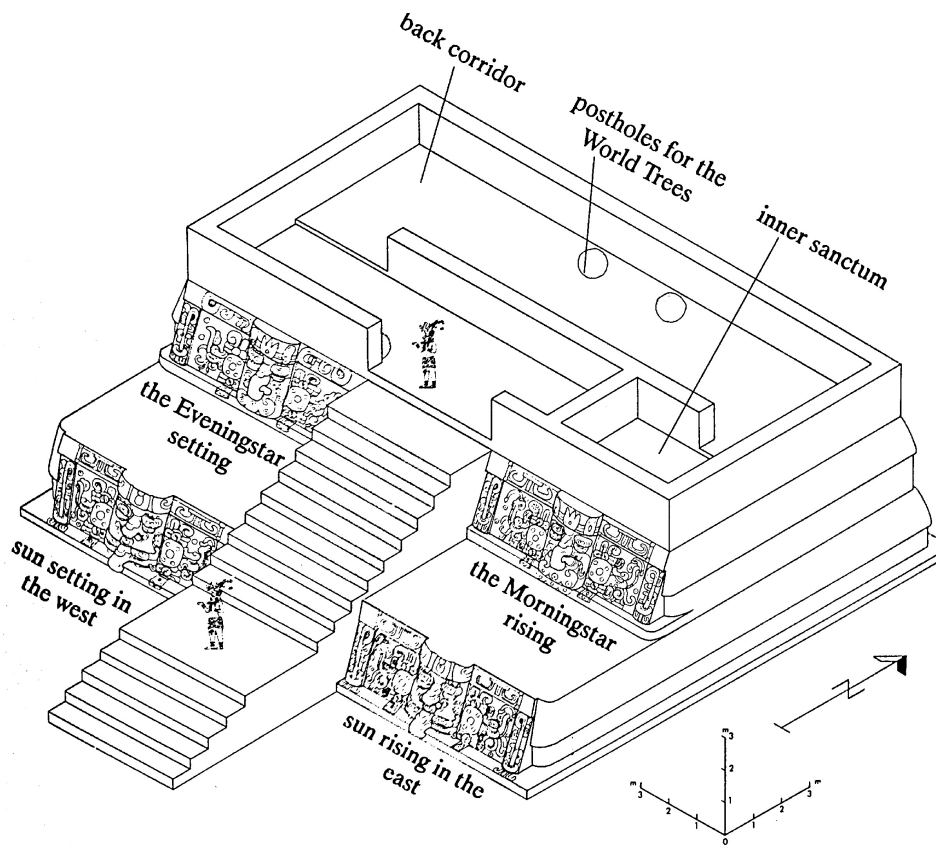


Fig. 37. Artistic programme on Structure 5D-2nd at Cerros (from Schele and Freidel 1990:105, 110).

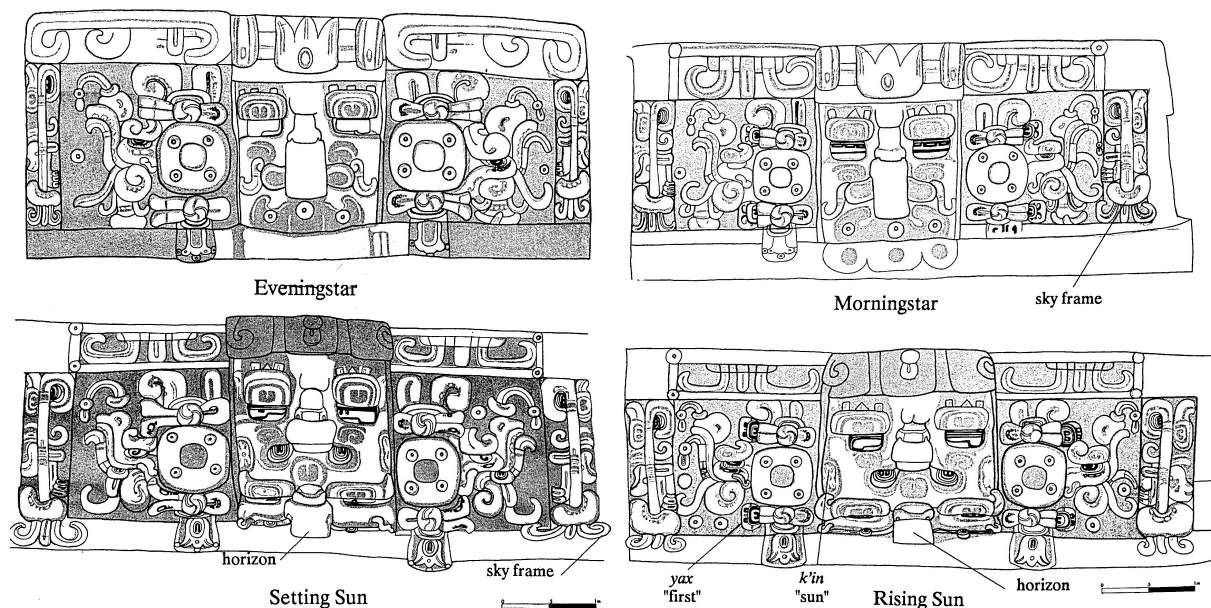


Fig. 38. Stucco masks adorning Structure 5C-2nd at Cerros (from Schele and Freidel 1990:112-113, cropping by the author).

One way or another, each of these interpretations tackle the same ritual theme, that is creation of the world. The metaphors proposed by scholars differ from one another, though, and so do the actors, at least at the first glance. Of particular interest is the fact that the iconographic motifs such as earflares, knots, and trilobate pendants occur on the majority of presented examples from all over the Lowlands.

Contributing to the collection is one of the most recently discovered stucco friezes that adorned the Triadics. It comes from Cival Triadic Group Structure 1 (Fig. 13), where it once flanked the stairway to the main building. The Cival frieze consists of two masks located on the highest (third) terrace of the central substructure; the northern mask has been labelled Mask 1, and the southern one - Mask 2 (Estrada-Belli 2006:68; Fig. 39).

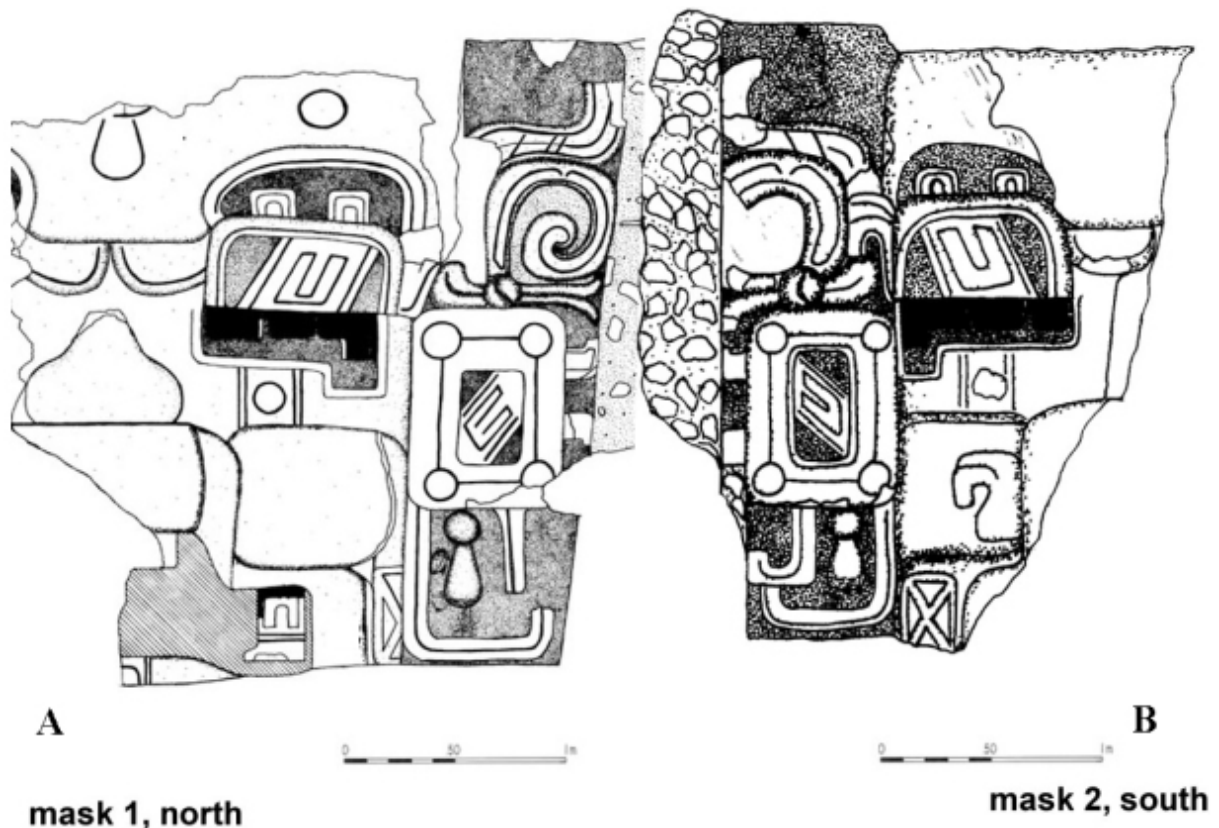


Fig. 39. Stucco frieze from Triadic Group 1 at Cival, stairway cropped away (from Estrada-Belli 2006:68, modifications by the author).

A group of diagnostic details has been selected by Estrada-Belli that helped to identify both depicted personages, and also hinted the function and meaning of the whole structure. This array consists of L-shaped eyes, flame eyebrows, pug noses, crossed bands, earflares with swirls and knots, J-shaped fangs, U-shaped molars, upturned exclamation marks, wrinkles, lack of lower jaws, and the paw-wing motif, among other things (*ibid.*:65). The same set of details, more or less complete, can be observed in most of the Triadics' stucco decoration. The Cival masks, however, most accurately resemble the lower tier of 5C-2nd decoration at Cerros, albeit the former is at least two centuries older than the latter, with charcoal pieces obtained from the stucco yielding calibrated dates around 200 BC (1-sigma: 260-160 BC; Estrada-Belli 2006:65).

Upon analysis, each of the motifs distinguished by Estrada-Belli pointed towards a Middle Preclassic pan-Mesoamerican iconographic tradition, stemming mostly from the Olmec art. Especially appealing is the masks identification with *Tzuc*, a word that denominates a metaphysical concept and a divine being at the same time. Using a simplified definition, *Tzuc* is a trinity of gods acting as one, that reside (or impersonate) the centre of the Sky, its navel, or the primordial Heart of Creation. This location, known from Popol Vuh, became a birthplace of various gods, and directly led to creation of the Universe, and indirectly to the appearance of Maize God, and, in consequence, the human race (*ibid.*:71, Christenson 2007). The overlapping identifications of different beings led Estrada-Belli to a conclusion that the friezes at Cival depict a conflation of the rain god Chahk, Maize God, Palenque Triad God I, Sun God/*Tzuc*, and the Olmec Avian Serpent and God I. The whole group represents the beginning of the world with all its beings, glorifying its true creators (Estrada-Belli 2006:71-73).

Structure 1 at El Tigre/Itzamkanac, although not a Triadic in its ultimate stage of development, might have once been one. The remains of one lateral platform located on the summit terrace of Structure 1 summit just west of the main building, along with a vast unoccupied space on the opposite edge, allow to assume a triadic pattern in earlier Late Preclassic stages of development. A rich decoration programme of Structure 1 survived mostly in terms of the frieze that adorned the stairway in the Late Preclassic period. The central face of the mask has been identified as a reptile, perhaps an iguana (Vargas Pacheco and Delgado Salgado 2003:991). The ornaments and details, however, bear striking resemblance to stucco friezes from Uaxactun, Cerros, and Cival. The presence of earflares with knots and swirls, paw-wing, and perhaps flame brows, is apparent even on a highly stylised reconstruction drawing, and therefore places the mask at the same interpretation level with Cival Masks 1 and 2 (Fig. 40).

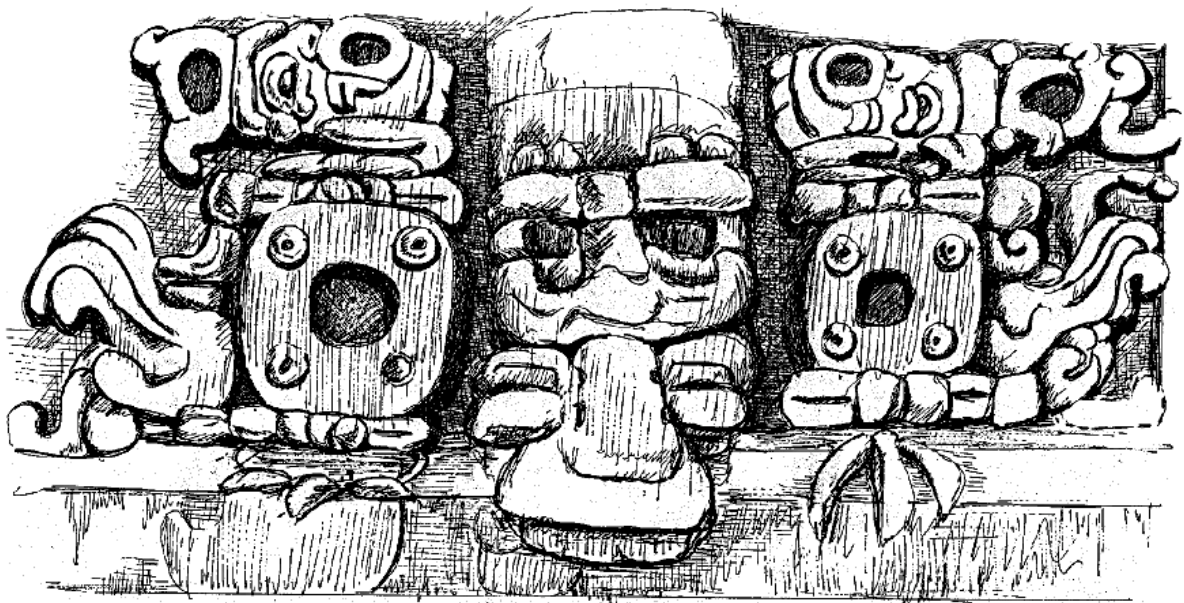


Fig. 40. *Mascaron 1* from Structure 1, El Tigre/Itzamkanac (photo by the author, 2008; drawing from Vargas Pacheco and Delgado Salgado 2003).

Another stucco mask that bears some reptilian features comes from the Early Classic Lamanai. Here the Triadic Structure N9-56 yielded two pairs of masks, again flanking the stairway. The upper masks did not survive the Late Classic remodelling episodes, meanwhile the lower ones have been

thoroughly buried within the rubble. The southern mask represents a young male with a upturned upper lip and two enormous earflares. The whole scene is surrounded by swirls, perhaps depicting smoke. The headdress adorning the forehead of the figure has been partially destroyed, but it features strong reptilian nuances that led scholars to believe that perhaps a crocodile or other large reptile used to be worshipped in Lamanai. The name itself, being reconstructed as Lama'anayin, would attest to such a theory (Pendergast 1981:37-38; Fig. 41). The reptilian features over the headdress are practically unnoticeable nowadays. The discussion on a reptilian entity, sometimes called the Starry Deer Crocodile, Zipacna, or Itzam Cab Ain, as a hostile creature that had to be destroyed prior to the world creation, will be presented in further parts of this work.



Fig. 41. Lower southern mask from Triadic Structure N9-56 at Lamanai (photo by the author, 2008).

According to Estrada-Belli (2006:68) the reptilian features denote the Olmec God I, as seen on the Olmec examples found on various portable objects from coastal Mexico. God I constitutes an Olmec counterpart of the Maya Earth Monster, that is a supernatural that personifies both the surface of the Earth and the entrance to the Underworld (Pool 2007:117).

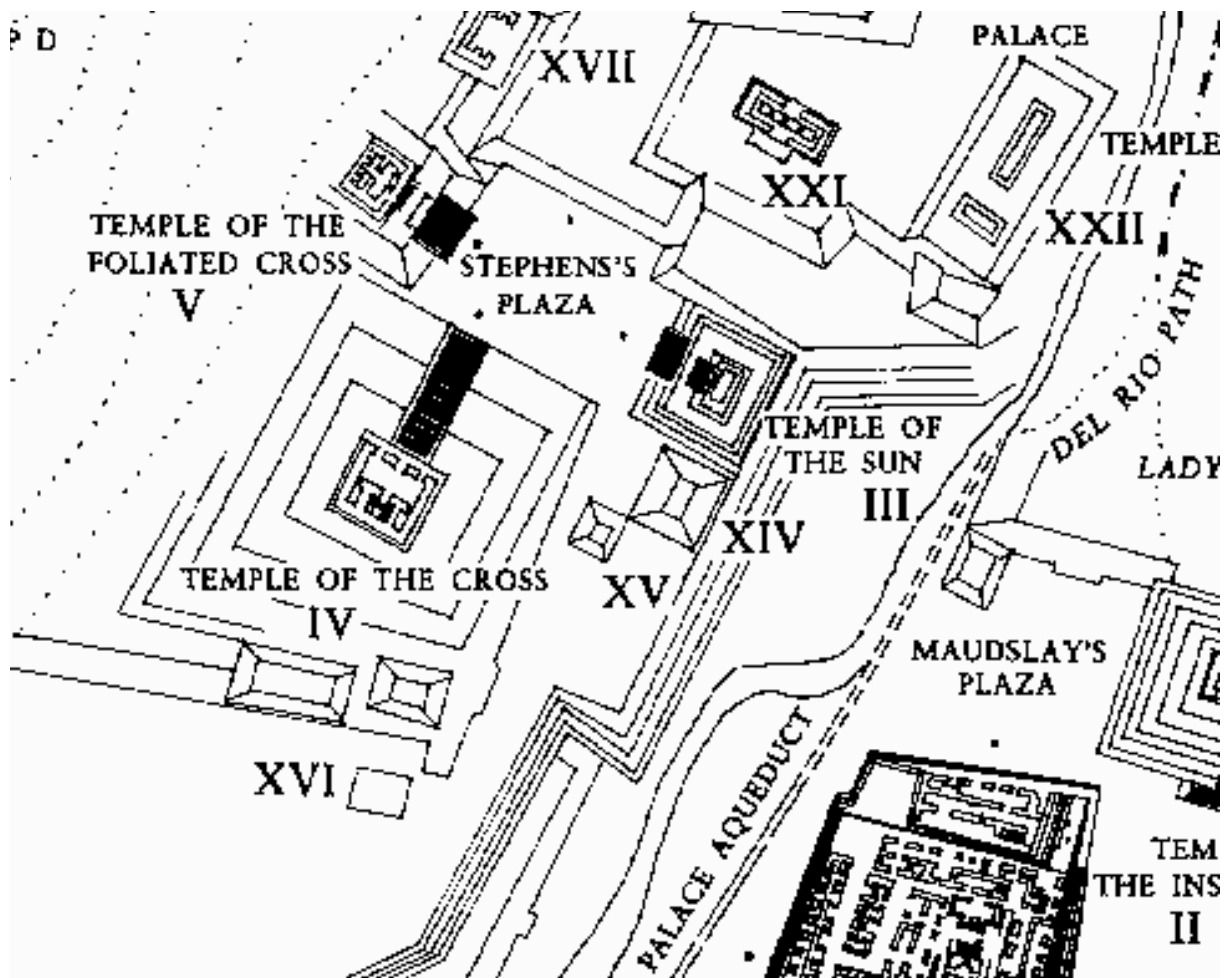


Fig. 42. Fragment of Palenque's centre showing the Cross Group (from MESOWEB electronic resources, http://www.mesoweb.com/palenque/resources/maps/media/palenque_map_orig.gif, north on the bottom, modifications by the author).

Many other Preclassic and Early Classic Triadic Groups appear to have been adorned with stucco friezes, albeit some of them perceptible only in vestiges of stone armatures, or just in the lime mortar pieces found in the rubble. However, one Late Classic Triadic Group yields a complete and fully

intelligible artistic programme that has also been interpreted as a key to understanding the Triadic function and meaning. It was dubbed the Cross Group and is located in the corner of the centre at the site of Palenque, Mexico. Although it adjoins the main plaza with its western edge, the access is provided from the southern side, making it stand out as an isolate architectural complex. It consists of a low, semi-natural platform oriented to the north, on which three pyramids bear buildings dubbed Temple of the Cross (TC, central), Temple of the Sun (TS, western), and Temple of the Foliated Cross (TFC, eastern; Fig. 42). The most important artistic programme has been found inside the actual buildings, within inner sanctuaries called *pibnaahob*. Names of particular temples come from prominent features of carved panels found on the rearmost and side walls of the sanctuaries (Fig. 43 a-c). The Cross Group was commissioned by the Palenque ruler known as K'inich K'an Bahlam II in AD 692 (Martin and Grube 2008:169).

A sequence of scenes depicted on the panels operates on two intertwined levels. On the literal level it reports a series of actual, historic events connected with Kan Bahlam's accession to the throne, that included dedicatory activities (Cross), ritual bloodletting (Sun), heir designation (Sun), and again bloodletting and accession rituals (Foliated Cross; Hansen 1998:80). At the same time the panels can be read as profound metaphors concerning the important succession of stages leading to the Creation (*idem*).

The artistic decoration of the Cross Group at Palenque is worth a closer look for one more reason: this site has been an eponymic home of the Palenque Triad, a group of gods known from other sites as well, but only here worshipped together (Miller and Taube 1993:129-130). They have been labelled as GI, GII, and GIII by Heinrich Berlin in 1963, and until today their proper Mayan names still remain obscure. Some remarks can be found on the Cross Group panels that concern the Triad's birth dates. The oldest of the three is GI, born in 3122 BC, that is just prior to the current world creation

(3114 BC). However, he has been named both the father and son, and TC yields just one more birth date of GI placed in 2360 BC, so already during the current era. It led some scholars to believe that under the label of GI there are two related deities, father and son, sharing the same name (Loundsbury 1980). Hence the identification of both generations of GI with Hun Hunahpu and Hunahpu, both first-born twins of pairs constituting the main actors in Popol Vuh. Another frequently proposed identification of GI mixed him with *Chahk*, or the Maya Rain God; Taube, however, remarks that such conflating is wrong in light of the epigraphic spelling of each name (*idem*; Lounsbury 1980). He frequently displays attributes connecting him with another supernatural being, the Bicephalic Monster, that has been interpreted as a metaphor for Venus and Sun on their way beyond the western horizon (Miller and Taube 1993:45). The newest study of the Palenque Triad, however, proposes an entirely different interpretation of GI's identity. Stuart (2005:170-174) reads the sequence of important dates from GI life stages as concerning the same deity. His second „birth” might have been only a descent from heavenly realms onto earth as a metaphor of transformation from a universal god of creation to a more localised Palenque form of the same entity.

GII, the youngest of the Triad, was born 18 days after GI, of the same mother, as stated on the TFC panel. This deity is well known from the Maya religion under a variety of names: God K, Tohil, K'awiil, or Manikin Sceptre. Judging by his iconographic depictions, he is very small, and often figures as an effigy carried in the crook of the ruler's arm. He has been interpreted as a patron god of the ruling families as well as a god of lightning, again being connected to Chahk (Miller and Taube 1993:130).

The middle brother, GIII is the main subject of TS decorations. Born 14 days before GII and 4 days after GI, he can be clearly linked with *K'inich Ajaw*, or the Maya Sun God. On TS panels, however, he takes form of the Jaguar God of the Underworld, which my represent path of the Sun during the night.

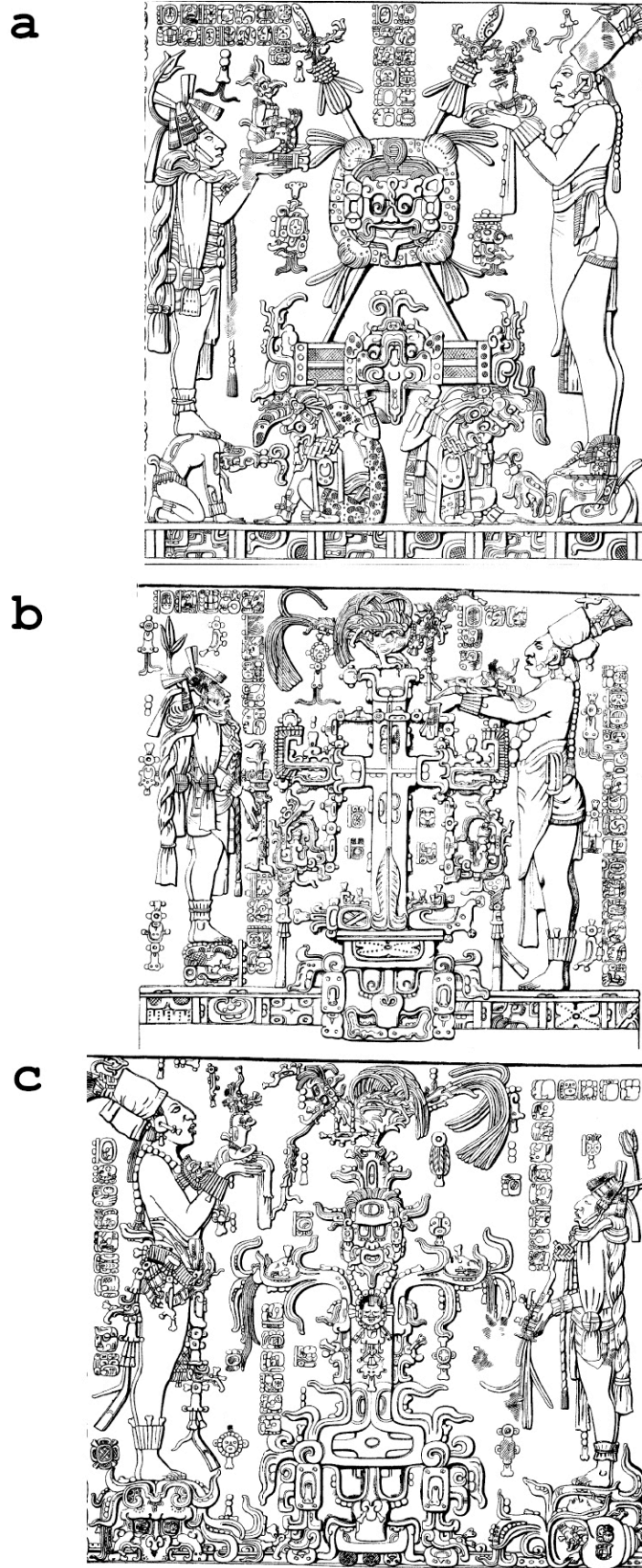


Fig. 43. Carved panels from the Cross Group at Palenque: a - TS; b - TC; c - TFC (after Schele 1974, not to scale, modifications and arrangement by the author).

Taube proposes the interpretation of GIII as both diurnal and nocturnal aspects of the Sun (Lounsbury 1980; Miller and Taube 1993:130).

Further remarks on the Palenque Triad as proposed by Stuart (2005) will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters.

The array of themes featured on various Triadic Groups decorations does not reveal one definite function and meaning of this kind of architecture. However, the frequency and recurrence of some motifs allows to narrow down the spectrum of cultural traits that may be linked to the Triadics. Generally, the stucco masks tend to occur on the front sloping facades of basal platforms, flanking a central, monumental stairway. Some 2-Tiered Triadics display vestiges of stucco friezes on frontal facades of particular substructures forming the triad. The friezes within each Triadic Group are symmetrical in size and overall shape, albeit differ from one another in crucial details.

Virtually all the preserved friezes depict supernatural beings, mostly with mixed anthropomorphic and zoomorphic features. Most notably, each deity wears a pair of oversized earflares with knots attached to their tops and bottoms. In some cases the earflares possess four dots on their rounded corners that possibly convert them into glyphic signs reading as *bih*, or „road”. The most common facial features of the masks are long noses, that sometimes have been described as beaks or snouts, and flame eyebrows, that link the personages to the Olmec iconography. L-shaped or crossed eyes are also quite frequent, along with trilobed embellishments on headbands or below the faces. Great portion of depictions lack lower jaws and display pronounced zygomatic bones. Generally, the stucco friezes fall in one of three categories: avian (El Mirador, Cerros, Uaxactun), feline (Uaxactun, Palenque El Mirador), or abstract/monstrous (Cival, El Tigre/Itzamkanac), with rare exceptions of exclusively anthropomorphic ones (Lamanai). A scholarly consensus favours their theoretical reconstructions as forming complimentary semantic pairs,

usually depicting opposite aspects of the same entities or phenomena, e.g. diurnal/nocturnal, celestial/infernal, etc. However, in almost all cases the decoration of a Triadic Group is far from completely preserved, revealing mere fragmentary glimpses of the original programme. A temptation to mirror the preserved friezes and transpose them to the other side with an opposite meaning is great, and might be perceived plausible, but cannot be treated as basis for further analysis.

Nevertheless, from all interpretations presented above emerges a ritual pattern that, however far from being uniform, tells the same story. It is perhaps the most clearly extracted by Estrada-Belli (2006) and his linking the friezes to the *Tzuc* entity that expresses itself in three avatars, and still remains a unity. Before him, Valdes and Freidel noted the presence of *tzuc* glyph within upper mask of Uaxactun Southern H Group (Valdes 1986; Freidel, Schele and Parker 1993:139-142; Fig. 34). The differences in appearance and mythological identity of particular deities may be stemming from regional differences in religious cult, but each group of these personages played an important role in the very Creation of the World, either as actors, or personification of divine loci, as described in Popol Vuh and other sources (Christenson 2007). The exact linking and fitting of particular beings and moments of Creation with the Triadic pattern will be the matter of a separate chapter of this work.

Archaeological Content of Triadic Groups

Many Maya monumental buildings, although they look solid from the outside, in fact hide numerous empty spaces within their stone bodies. Triadics are no different, and thus archaeologists have been finding special offerings left in such cavities, either secondarily excavated some time after completion of a building, or deliberately planned during the construction process. They can take form of anything from a small offering of pottery vessels or flint points placed under a stone stair, to elaborate burials carefully deposited in vaulted chambers with painted stucco over the walls, and multiple funerary goods surrounding the deceased. Since the usage of a term 'content', understood as presented in the study by Diane and Arlen Chase (1998:299-332), seems adequate, being able to comprise such a variety of deposits.

Due to extensive looting that plagued virtually all the Maya lowland sites during the past 50 years, especially in the 80s and 90s of the past century, most of these offerings are either completely gone or at least significantly incomplete. Hence their usefulness in the process of analysis of the Triadic Groups is very limited. Nevertheless, a handful of observations has been made. Hansen, for instance, observed that in the Mirador Basin Triadics offerings and burials are scarce. Despite a great amount of effort invested in tunnelling and shafting of such great structures as Danta and Tigre, among others, researchers have failed to discover burials within their massive stone platforms (Hansen 1991; 1992; 2002).

At the opposite end of this spectrum, the Caracol's Caana has yielded numerous burials and cached offerings within the substructures of the central (B-19) and eastern (B-20) temples. The B-19 tunnelling has revealed two tombs were within the substructure's core, below a two-room suite set into the basal portion of the platform. Both had been reentered, perhaps during the Terminal Classic times. The total of 7 individuals had been buried in the

chambers, and subsequently burned. A human hand was apparently deposited in one of the tombs upon the Terminal Classic reentrance. Another tomb was discovered behind the central stairway of the B-19-2nd, with a seated female adult recovered inside. The most elaborate burial known from the entire Caracol area, it was securely dated to AD 634 by the hieroglyphic text painted on the wall. A sequence of three parallel tombs were discovered within the B-20 substructure. The earliest tomb produced some Long Count dates that placed it either in AD 576 or 615. A peculiar stone and stucco mask was found on the front facade of the substructure. It was shaped as an open maw of the Earth Monster, or a "skeletal face of the Sun in the Underworld" (A. Miller 1986:41,43; after Chase and Chase 1987b:23). The interior of that maw had a form of a vaulted shallow room or a deep niche. When a fire was lit inside, the mouth and the eyes of the mask were producing smoke (Chase and Chase 1987a:12). As mentioned before, however, the Caana might have been a non-triadic acropolis until its very late, if not ultimate, stage of development sometime between the Late Classic and Terminal classic periods (*idem*; Chase and Chase 2001).

In the Structure 4 at Cerros, a chamber was encapsulated within its core; lack of a visible entrance points to it being a sub-surface room from the beginning, perhaps a never utilised royal tomb. Thick, layered deposits of copal, smashed vessels, and charcoal attest to some repetitive burning ritual prior to its sealing (Freidel 1986:9-10).

A peculiar offering was cached on top of another Triadic at Cerros, namely the Structure 6 summit platform, 6B: four carved jade heads, possibly effigies from a royal headband, surround a central, larger jade mask. The whole lot deliberately replicates a quincunx design, often being interpreted as a visual representation of the Maya worldview (*idem*).

Structure VII at Calakmul has yielded a couple of interesting features. In the passageway connecting three rooms of the central temple, a rich burial

was discovered. Along with a funerary bundle consisting of an adult male, several remains of a jaguar were recovered, including a skull and a pelt with claws still attached to it. Accompanying the burial were 10 Tepeu 2 vessels and numerous jade adornments. Apart from the burial, another peculiar feature was discovered within the temple: a *patolli* board was pecked on the floor of the first room to the west of the entrance (Folan et al. 1995:319-320).

North Acropolis at Tikal had been serving as a royal burial ground for several centuries until the Late Classic period. The Triadic Group itself might have been such a locus until the end of the Preclassic Period (Loten 2007:43-48).

The data concerning archaeological content of the Triadics, although rather accidental and far less complete than the architectural one, seems to be pointing towards the funerary use of this kind of structures generally in the Preclassic times, being rather scarce during the later periods. Burials revealed in excavations have been interpreted as royal or strictly limited to the king's family. It comes as no surprise in light of the overall importance and central nature of the Triadic Groups within their urban surroundings. The Late Classic example of the Triadic featuring overt ties to the ruler, the Cross Group at Palenque, stands in accordance with the above. However, neither the deposits nor burials present data that could be used straightforwardly in the interpretation of the Triadic function and meaning. Moreover, lack of deposits apparent in case of the majority of such complexes might be explained by the random character of archaeological findings as well as by their irrelevance to the main idea represented by the triadic form.

Threefold Topoi in the Maya Culture

Although the term *topos* comes from both the literary and mathematical studies, and is generally defined as a standardised phrase, place, scene, category, or set (*cf.* McLarty 1992), for the purpose of this work it will be adapted in a slightly narrower meaning, defined as an established cultural motif of any kind, be it a recurrent mythological event, a frequent iconographic pattern, a common literary phrase, a three-stage ritual activity, etc.

The pre-conquest Maya civilisation had developed a deep, multi-dimensional culture that has been laboriously reconstructed by modern scholars from bits and pieces encountered in archaeological material and epigraphic and iconographic remains of its former glory. Far from being complete, and farther still from being completely comprehended, it nevertheless reveals some clues and keys to understanding certain fragments of the ancient worldview. From that fragmentary cultural map an array of motifs has been selected, each of which consists of three elements. The selection presented below does not, perhaps, stand for the complete set of triple Maya topoi, but rather reflects the most logical avenues of thinking when pursuing the topic of function and meaning of such a specific architectural design as the Triadic one. Later parts of this work will entertain the „fitting” of motifs and Triadics, mirroring logical processes of the author’s workflow.

Three Stone Hearth

The first of these motifs, or topoi, appears quite frequently in the scholarly literature concerning the Maya cultural perception, being a pivotal point of both the mythological genesis of humans and the house plan. The former focuses on the lower half of modern day constellation of Orion, the latter - on the traditional Maya hearth. In fact, the southern portion of Orion (south of the celestial Equator), that is anchored by stars named Alnitak

(northern), Rigel (western), and Saiph (eastern), for the Maya people is the Celestial Hearth, or Heart of Sky, as attested by the Popol Vuh (Christenson 2007:60; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:79; Fig. 44). The triangle formed by these stars marks the astronomic West and East where it sets and rises, with the tip pointing towards North, and hence constitutes a reference point for astronomical orientation. The mythological value of this constellation has been established by various scholars as the place where the actual Creation took place (Hansen 1998:80; Taube 1998:432). Freidel, Schele, and Parker (1993:65-70) go further on in their account of the Hearth's significance, basing on two sources. One is Tedlock's edition of the Popol Vuh (Tedlock 1996:236), the other - Quirigua Stela C inscription. According to the latter text the three stones were elevated by specific beings: one by Itzamnaaj, one by Na Ho Chan, and one by a pair of gods named the Jaguar and Stingray Paddlers. There has been a discussion between Tedlock and Schele as to the exact timing of that event (*idem*), but the overall idea seems to have been established well. Tedlock also mentions that the Great Nebula M42 in the centre of the Celestial Hearth are being interpreted as the first fire of creation (*idem*).

An excellent study of the meaning of Maya hearths by Taube (1998) brings a vast amount of evidence together concerning the similarity between the house plan and cosmic vision in the Maya culture. Not only did the Maya deliberately establish four corner posts and the hearth acting as *axis mundi* during the erection of a house, but also that model had been constantly multiplied in forms of masonry temples. A number of glyphic examples found on numerous buildings helps to identify them as local versions of *axis mundi*, with the doorways often surrounded by images of three stones accompanied by the Earth Monster's maw (*ibid.*:436). None of these buildings exhibits a triadic pattern, however.

A similar motif of three stones can be found among the Mixtecs. In the Nuttall and Selden codices they appear in the context of new fire or world

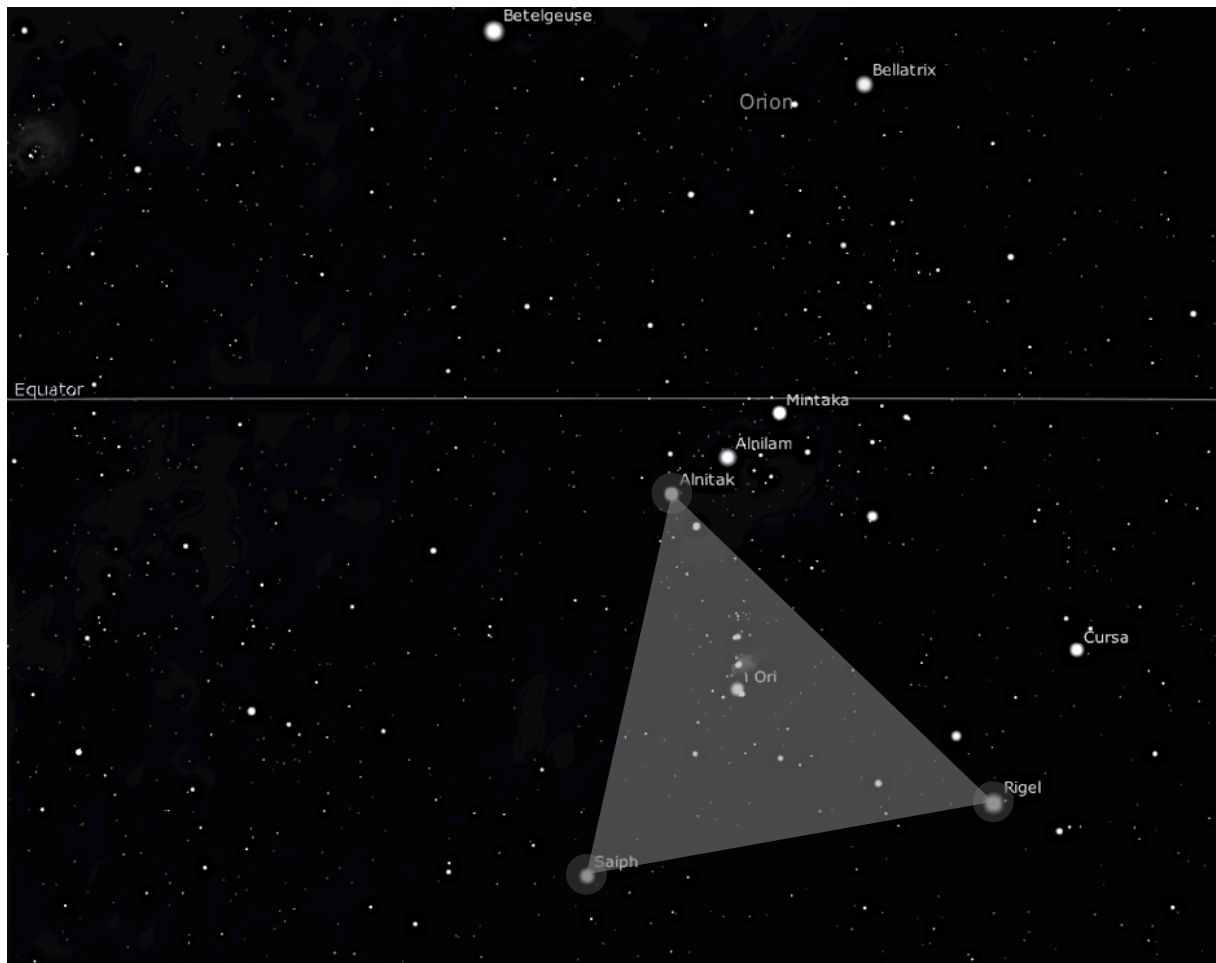


Fig. 44. Southern portion of the Orion constellation (sky map from *Stellarium for Mac* computer software, ver. 0.11.0.4, 2012, modifications by the author).

creation. Aztec interpretation of the same event took place in Teotihuacan, with two gods residing on the summits of two gigantic pyramids of the Sun and the Moon (Taube 1998:433).

Palenque Triad

As mentioned earlier, according to David Stuart (2005) the Palenque Triad interpretation presented by Loundsbury (1976) and Freidel, Schele, and Parker (1993), needs to be dramatically reevaluated in light of the new evidence coming both from the Temple XIX at Palenque and epigraphic

breakthroughs made after the 1990s. This new interpretation sees GI as a single personage, member of the pre-creation pantheon, that was the main actor of somewhat enigmatic „axing” event involving the Starry Deer Crocodile that immediately contributed to the Earth’s creation. His subsequent „birth” date, previously interpreted as a birth of his next generation namesake, may have rather been his descent and assuming the role of principal god of the local Palenque trinity of patron-deities. The mythic ritual of sacrificing a reptile by GI can be further tracked back to the common Mesoamerican tradition, for different versions of the same event are present in many neighbouring cultures, as well as in the variety of Maya sources from different times. The being monikered by Stuart as Starry Deer Crocodile might have been conceptually identical with Aztec Cipactli, earlier Central Mexican Earth Monster (an aspect of later Tlaltecuhli), or Postclassic and Colonial beings such as Itzam Kab Ahyiin from Chilam Balam of Tizimin, and Zipacna from Popol Vuh (Stuart 2005:176-180; Christenson 2007:82-83). Each version of this myth had taken place before the „era” event on 13.0.0.0.0, causing either the dry land to emerge from the primordial ocean as the crocodile emerges from murky water (Stone and Zender 2011:183), blood sacrifice from the decapitated cadaver (Stuart 2005:178-179), or the preparation of the earth for receiving humans (Christenson 2007:96). As shall be described later on, this event can also occur as a part of a triple „defeating” or „sacrificing” myth.

GII, the youngest of the siblings, continues to be related to K’awil, perhaps as the young aspect of that god. However, Stuart also finds evidence that ties GII to the Infant Jaguar God of the Underworld, the god of fire and, perhaps, the moon (Stuart 2005:174-175). An interesting remark (*idem*) names the GII’s birthplace as *Naahho Chan*, resembling name of Na Ho Chan, one of the gods that had set the Three Stones, according to Freidel, Schele, and Parker (1993:65-70). The concept of *Naahho Chan* tie GII to the Paddler Gods, beings that, similar to the Hero Twins, made it possible to create the

world. Connection between these two pairs of personages will be explored with greater detail later on.

The middle brother of the Palenque Triad, GIII, can be clearly associated with K'inich Ajaw, the Maya Sun God; there is some doubt, however, whether he can be treated as Sun God *per se*, or rather one of his juxtapositional counterparts. Nevertheless, his iconographic features along with the epigraphic evidence, relate this being Jaguar God of the Underworld, again, this time to the mature aspect, though. An extended link between GIII and various jaguar gods can be established, both categories being clearly solar deities, and Temple of the Sun sheltering the solar *pibnaah* (Stuart 2005:175-177; Miller and Taube 1993:130).

The Palenque Triad occurs together exclusively at that site, however its particular members are universal Maya deities found across the time and space within their Civilisation. Lavish textual and graphic evidence found and deciphered by scholars make the Triad to stand out, but in fact it is possible that many Maya communities had possessed such patron trinities (Stuart 2005:183). Some very late Postclassic sources, Popol Vuh among them, attest to that concept, *i.e.* the K'iche Triad (discussed below).

K'iche Triad

Another trinity of patron gods come from the Postclassic Highland Guatemala. According to Popol Vuh, first fathers received patron gods to look after the lineages, and in return to be looked after them. The names of these gods, read as Tohil, Auilix, and Hacavitz, reveal bits of their possible identities. The Mixe-Zoquean origin of Tohil, as proposed by Christenson (2007:198, after Campbell 1983:83), links him semantically with thunder, and, by extension, with fire. Miller and Taube (1993:170) translate this name as „obsidian”, though. Nevertheless, Tohil can be quite securely identified as the Postclassic version of K'awiil (*idem*), the deity of fire. As the principal actor of

the second part of Popol Vuh, he donates fire to his people, demanding blood in return. In fact, K'ichean word *tojil* means „tribute” or „debt”.

Auilix, or Awilix, may derive from K'ichean for „to care”, as well as from Nahuatl toponym *Awilizapan*, a mountain from the area of Pico de Orizaba, or the actual volcano itself, in the modern-day Puebla and Veracruz states (Christenson 2007:198).

The Hacavitz name has been partially deciphered as a mountain toponym, from the lowland Mayan languages, where *witz* invariably stands for „mountain”, and, by extension, „pyramid”. Highland *q'aq* may be the counterpart of *k'ahk*, or „fire”. Hence Hacavitz was translated as the Fire Mountain, and thus that god was linked to fire as well (*ibid.*:198-199).

As the Popol Vuh has it, the K'iche people built a three-temple complex to worship their gods in Q'umark'aj. It is very plausible, then, the only Postclassic Triadic Group found in Utatlan/Q'umark'aj is exactly that complex.

Each of the K'iche patron gods was given to particular lineages to take care of. The fourth deity, Nik'akaj Taq'aj, was placed in hands of the fourth K'iche First Father Iqui Balam, that had never started a lineage; hence Popol Vuh mentions him only once, and subsequently refers to the patron gods as a triad. The division of societies into three separate groups can be further attested by the recent study of Teotihuacan social order by Annabeth Headrick (2007). She argues that the elite strata of Teotihuacan society formed three separate groups of interest, kept in balance by their eternal struggle and friction, and reciprocally neutralising each other. These three groups were the ruler (or rulers), kin-based lineages, and militaristic orders.

Triple Pre-era „Victory”

When discussing the „axing” of reptilian being, Stuart (2007:177) quotes the Yaxchilan texts concerning a triple sacrifice of unknown beings, of which one is a reptilian. These events, although quite distant in time from each

other, nevertheless occur before the beginning of Long Count known from the Classic times. They in a way prepare the earth for coming of the true people, perhaps by creating the world itself, or wiping hostile beings from it. Such a mythological concept evokes a parallel story from Popol Vuh, where the Hero Twins undertake the quest of defeating Vucub Kaquix, and his sons Zipacna and Cabracan (Christenson 2007:80-99). Vucub Kaquix, also known as Seven Macaw or Chan Mo' Nal, impersonated the Sun before it was created, and bragged about his usurped powers. Zipacna was a crocodile responsible for creating mountains and carrying them, but his brutal deeds towards „four hundred boys” (perhaps the penultimate creations of gods before the „era” event) had placed him on the evil side. His brother Cabracan was a dangerous creature, perhaps a giant, responsible for destroying the mountains and causing earthquakes. The Hero Twins, Hun Ajaw and Yax Bahlam (or Hunahpu and Xbalanque) defeated all three of them using various tricks, cunning, and hunting skills (Stone and Zender 2011:45).

Although not known otherwise, such a mythological topos could have been universal, judging by other motifs from Popol Vuh corroborated archaeologically as known during the Classic and Preclassic times at various Maya sites. To mention only one early example - the frieze depicting two personages interpreted as Hero Twins crossing the River of Pus had been discovered recently in El Mirador (Hansen *et al.* 2005).

Bone Thrones

The thrones made of human long bones have been found on numerous iconographic depictions of supernatural and historic events. The most frequent ones concern the Death God and his seat in Xibalba. However, on a few occasions the bone thrones are depicted in triplets. Stela C from Quirigua features depictions of three such thrones as seats for three gods setting the Stone Hearth; the main actor is Itzamnaaj, seated on the central throne. Other

triple bone thrones are additionally marked with certain attributes linking them with jaguars (usually the one to the left), serpents (right), and sharks (central). Stone and Zender (2011:95) interpret them as sacred mountains and heavenly Hearthstones at the same time (Fig. 45).

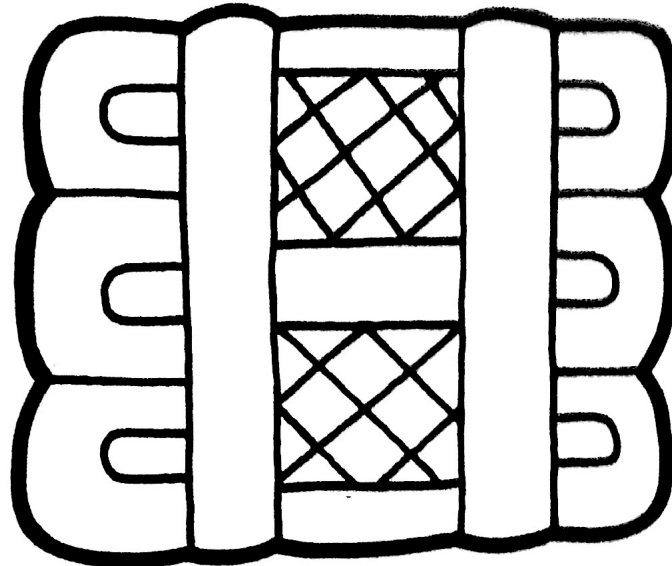


Fig. 45. Iconographic motif of Bone Throne (from Stone and Zender 2011:95).

„K'in” Bowls

Often referred to as „Quadripartite Badge”, the „K'in” Bowl name may perhaps better reflect the purpose of including it in the array of threefold motifs (Stuart 2005:164). It is an iconographic motif consisting of a vessel that bears the K'in („Sun”) glyph. Within the vessel, three ritual devices are held: a *Spondylus* shell (usually to the right), a stingray spine (centre), and a cloth with floral traits (left), (Stone and Zender 2011:155). The whole complex can be worn as part of a headdress, and is frequently featured in connection with GI, and Quadripartite Monster. The interpretation of the „K'in” bowls is not secure, but perhaps relates to the concept of sacrifice as the sustaining force of the universe (*idem*). Frequently it also marks the point of emergence of the World Tree, thus being the centre point of the universe itself (Stuart 2005:164).

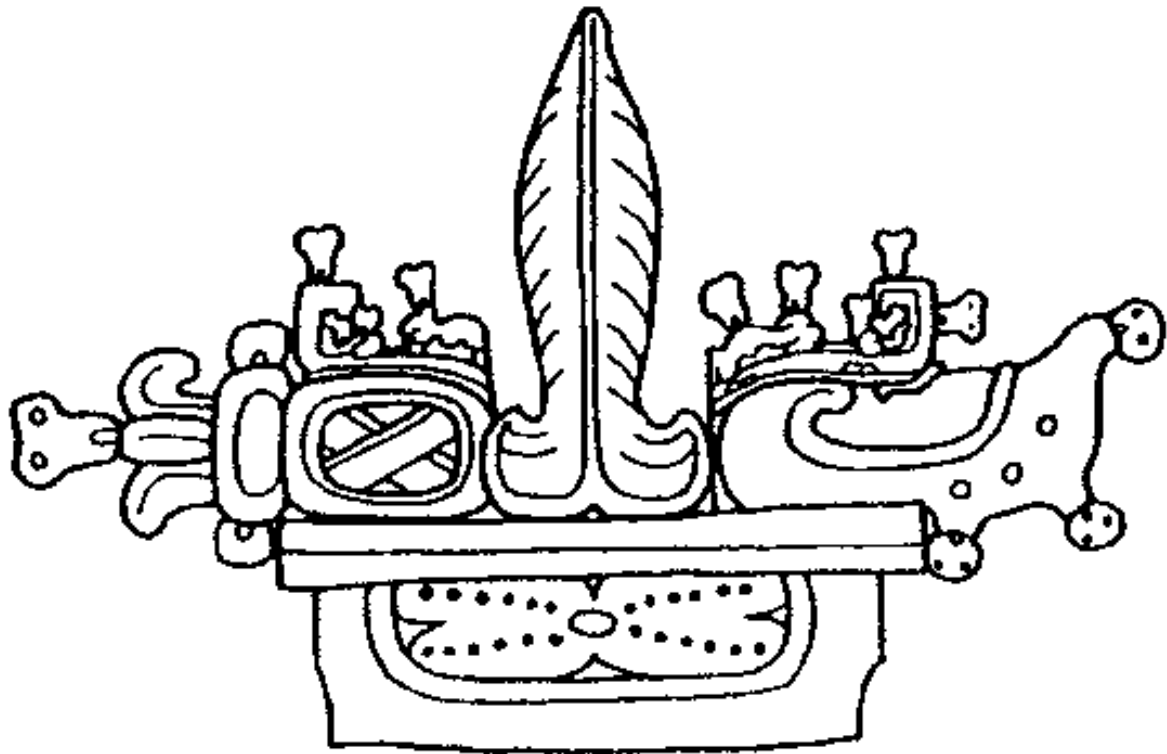


Fig. 46. „K'in” Bowl (from Stuart 2005:164).

Maize God and His Acolytes

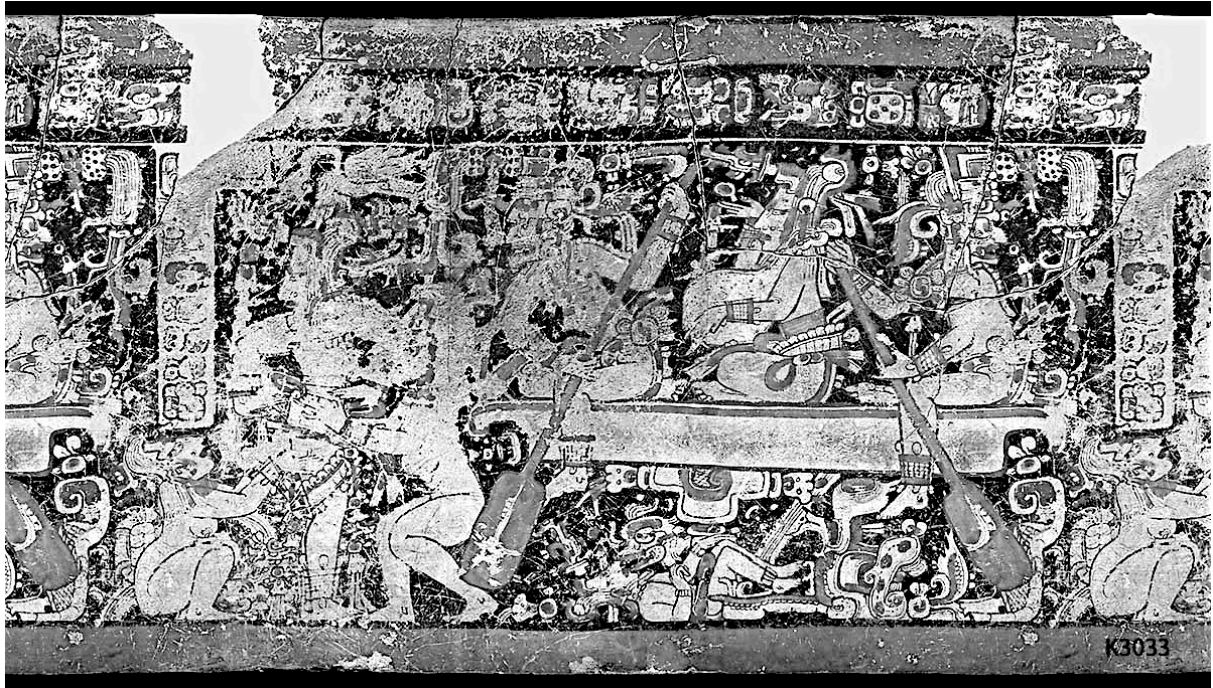
Quite understandably, the Maya Maize God was one of the most prominent supernatural beings in the pantheon. For the Maya people, with their subsistence based on maize, the agricultural activities concerning that plant had been both the pivotal point of their daily life and the profound metaphor of life, death, and resurrection cycle (Taube 1985; Saturno *et al.* 2005:21).

One of the most persisting motifs in the Maize God iconography depicts his cyclical journey through the Underworld. After a period of absence he then reemerges on the face of the earth in the act of resurrection. On the literal level that story represents the agricultural cycle of maize being harvested („decapitated”), planted („buried”), and grown again („resurrected”). The mythological disguise of the cycle appears throughout the Maya culture,

from the earliest known textual and iconographic evidence on the San Bartolo murals from the Guatemalan Lowlands to the Late Postclassic K'iche book of Popol Vuh from the Southern Highlands. Despite some variable details, the overall consistency of the Maize God story known from different periods attests to its great antiquity, perhaps as old as the Maya religion itself. Moreover, the Maize God from San Bartolo bears striking resemblance to his earlier Olmec counterpart, pushing the origin of that topos further back in time (Saturno *et al.* 2005:25-28).

A number of painted Classic vases and carved funerary bones from the Lowlands capture the scene of Maize God's journey through the watery Underworld (Fig. 47 a-c). His means of transportation takes form of a dugout canoe propelled forward by two supernatural beings called the Paddler Gods. These two old deities are otherwise known from Popol Vuh as important actors of the creation episode, having set one of the three Hearthstones (Tedlock 1996:236). Their Classic appearance features characteristic wrinkled faces as a sign of their ancient wisdom, a requirement in a difficult task of navigating a canoe through murky waters of Xibalba (Miller and Taube 1993:128-129). They can also be recognised by their particular attributes that differentiate them from each other. The one operating at the stern of canoe, regularly placed on the right of entire scene, features several feline marks, like jaguarian dots, Ak'ab signs, jaguar paws, and patches of jaguar skin around the mouth and ears; hence he is being called the „Jaguar Paddler“. His counterpart on the bow, depicted on the left side, bears a characteristic stingray spine bloodletter piercing his septum, and thus is called the „Stingray Paddler“. His headdress routinely features the K'in sign (Stone and Zender 2011:51). Some examples depict the canoe oriented reversely (stern on the left and bow on the right), though the Paddlers remain on their usual sides (Fig. 47 c). Designed to be the opposing forces of Day and Night unified in the common effort of

a)



b)



c)



Fig. 47. Paddler Gods transporting the Maize God through the Watery Underworld; a) Kerr Vase no. 3033 (from FAMSI, <http://research.mayavase.com>); b) Kerr Vase no. 8009 (from FAMSI, <http://research.mayavase.com>); c) Tikal Burial 116 inscribed bone (from Martin and Grube 2008:46).

transporting the Maize God, they represent the past and the future of that deity's destiny (Vasco Foster 2005:170-171). Linda Schele interpreted the canoe scenes as metaphors of the actual astronomical phenomena, with the Milky Way being a canoe that brings Maize God to the Hearth of Creation (Orion) to provide corn for the creation of humans (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:91-94).

The second triadic episode from the Maize God life takes place after the canoe journey. Numerous depictions of his resurrection present him stepping out of a crack in the turtle carapace, or growing out of the open maw of *Witz* monster. The reappearance of Maize God is also assisted by two supernatural individuals, but not necessarily the Paddlers. One painted Classic vessel substitutes the Stingray Paddler with the Rain God Chahk (Fig. 48). The Popol Vuh puts the Hero Twins as witnesses and actors in this event. They are also seen in the Classic imagery assisting their father in his coming back to earth (Fig. 49). Certain links can be established connecting the Hero



Fig. 48. Chahk and Jaguar Paddler watch Maize God stepping out of a crack in the turtle carapace (from FAMSI, Kerr no. 731, <http://research.mayavase.com>).

Twins with the Paddler Gods. Yax Bahlam, or Xbalanque, is a feline personage, always depicted with jaguarian skin and other implements around his face. There was a discussion concerning his astronomical identity going on during the 1990s, now apparently being settled on his identification with the Moon, and perhaps with certain aspects of the Jaguar God of the Underworld. The other Twin can be clearly associated with the Sun as a „shiny” personage (Miller and Taube 1993:134-136; Stone and Zender 2011:45, Houston *et al.* 2006:17).



Fig. 49. Maize God resurrection assisted by Hun Ajaw (left) and Yax Bahlam (right) (from FAMSI, Kerr no. 1892, <http://research.mayavase.com>).

Interestingly, one of the first resurrection scenes depicted on the West Wall of the San Bartolo murals, features yet another pair of witnesses. The stylised, quatrefoil turtle carapace surrounds the dancing Maize God, an early version of Chahk to the left, and the Maya Water God to the right (Fig. 50) (Taube *et al.* 2010).



Fig. 50. Detail from the West Wall of the San Bartolo murals: quatrefoil turtle carapace with Maize God, Chahk, and God of Water (from Houston *et al.* 2006:250, drawing by H. Hurst).

Basing on certain iconographic traits, Taube (2004; Saturno *et al.* 2005) argues that the place of resurrection, sometimes metaphorically depicted as the turtle shell that represents the Earth, might have taken place at the mouth of a cave within a mountain. This mythological locale bears clear resemblance to the Flowery Mountain concept that has been a pan-Mesoamerican idea of paradise (*idem*). That mountain had been the first dry land that emerged from the primordial ocean. The Earth Monster's maw (cave entrance) within the Flower Mountain was the place of receiving maize after its creation. Conflation of other important mythological events places that locus in the centre of the Mesoamerican religious beliefs. Moreover, frequent depictions of the Maize God resurrection give explicit hints as to the location of this event, and often link the Maize deity with K'inich Ajaw, or the Maya Sun God (Taube 2004).

The triplets and triads may be a template of great antiquity, attested by their abundance in the Maya culture, and beyond it. They appear in written record as figures of speech (Popol Vuh), in religious beliefs as triads of patron gods (Palenque, Tikal, Calakmul, Copan, Caracol), in the iconography, ethnographic record, cosmic order, and architecture (Christenson 2007; Taube 2006; Stone and Zender 2011; Schele and Freidel 1990; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993; Hansen 1998). The examples of threefold topoi presented above were the ones that bore possibilities of contributing to the modern understanding of the Triadic architecture. Mentioning every triple and trinity ever recorded by the Maya would be impossible, and perhaps even counter-productive. The selection made in this work, thus, had formed the array of possible functional traits and semantic attributes of the Triadics. Confronting the architectural, iconographic, and other evidence concerning the Triadic architecture with the selection of topoi allows to further eliminate some, and merge the other. It will be the matter of next chapter, along with revision of currently existing theories on the subject.

What Does, and What Does Not Fit the Triadic Layout?

Some two decades ago, Linda Schele and David Freidel proposed an explanation of the Triadics as monumental reflections of the Cosmic Hearth. The Cosmic Hearth is an allusion to the Creation event, and Schele and Friedel's interpretation of Triadics as such was further enforced by identifying stucco friezes from Group H-South at Uaxactun as *Tzuc*, which is understood literally as the "partitioning of the universe, and emergence of the first land" (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:140). This interpretation however, was later somewhat flattened, repeatedly stressing the Cosmic Hearth portion while ignoring the other half regarding the partitioning of the universe (*cf.* Taube 1998:468; Hansen 1998:80).

The idea of replicating an important celestial constellation in architectural pattern is indeed very tempting, but two formal features of the Triadic layout contradict such an interpretation to a certain degree. First, the southern portion of the Orion constellation, known to the Maya as the Celestial Hearth, moves through the nightly sky, but never rotates, that is, never changes its orientation in relation to the cardinal directions and thus always points towards north and opening due south (Aveni 2001:44, 58). When necessary, the Maya builders could, and have, oriented the important structures very nearly towards the desired directions, as for example the E-Group complexes (Aveni *et al.* 2003). As was shown at the beginning of this work (*cf.* Fig. 3), the Maya Triadic Groups were oriented towards all cardinal directions, with the east being most favoured in general. It is hard to imagine that a monumental building thought to be mirroring certain celestial figures would have been constructed with a disregard to the original feature. It has to be noted, however, that in the course of centuries a shift in favoured orientation from the east to the north can be observed. That being said, no

period of development of Maya culture saw Triadics oriented exclusively towards any single direction.

The second, and perhaps less compelling feature that contradicts the Triadics' identification with the Celestial Hearth is the inequality of height within the Triadic arrangement. The Hearth on the sky, mythologically one of the first loci that ever existed, which was subsequently reproduced within each household, is in fact conceptually secondary to the domestic fireplace. Quite obviously, all the cultures in the past were explaining natural phenomena by means of parallels to objects and activities from their daily lives.

The invention or introduction of pottery to Maya culture in the Early Preclassic times resulted in changes in cooking technology from putting hot stones within a vessel full of liquid to the more efficient and versatile way of placing the vessel directly over fire. This was not previously possible with preceramic gourd vessels, and now required a device to hold the vessel in the desired position while allowing the individual using the vessel to stand at a distance from open flame. Three stones of approximately equal size placed around the bonfire served this purpose just right. Four stones would be an unnecessary effort plus they would have to be exactly similar to prevent pots from rocking, and two would not hold a vessel in place. Three allowed for easy balancing of the vessel, with minimal effort at locating stones of the same size and shape. The condition of more or less equal size, however, must have been fulfilled with three stones as well in order to provide a stable cooking base. Until today three-stone hearths mark the centre of contemporary Maya kitchens (Fig. 51).

With such an object close at hand in every Maya house, immanently present in both daily life and the cultural conscience, the three distinctive, equally bright stars on the sky had been associated with the hearth. Thus if the ancient Maya ever intended to re-reproduce the hearth in the form of monumental architecture, they would have most probably used a layout of



Fig. 51. Kitchen fireplace in contemporary Campeche (photo by the author, 2009).

three equally high structures arranged at the corners of a triangle. Most Triadic Groups feature a central substructure significantly higher than the lateral ones, and in many cases this disproportion exceeds mere aesthetic or constructive concerns. It will be argued, then, that such a form was designed to reflect a cultural motif of three elements, in which two are equal, and the third one is more prominent or important.

In his discussion about the Triadic arrangement at Palenque Cross Group, Hansen (1998:80) notes that the inscriptions found within each structure attests to the structure's function as housing the gods of creation. As a matter of fact the Cross Group is unique in terms of the modern understanding of its ritual function, the exact date of its dedication, and its commissioner (Dr. Marc Zender, personal communication, December 2012). Hansen extends that identification, as the representative example, over the whole genre of Triadic architecture:

„The specialized events that occurred during the accession of Kan Balam included dedication and ritual activities (Cross), bloodletting (Sun), heir designation ceremonies (Sun), and bloodletting and accession rituals (Foliated Cross). The peculiar order and placement of the events recorded at Palenque suggest the possibility that the triad may have been a standardized format for important religious and ideological rituals (...). The continuity of the triadic arrangement may indicate the antiquity of accession rituals and bloodletting rituals in the lowlands.” (Hansen 1998:80).

This statement, although not improbable, may be a long shot that cannot be easily corroborated. The Cross Group, one of the latest Triadic Groups constructed by the ancient Maya, had certainly been designed to accommodate ancient traditions and ritual concepts recurring in the Maya culture already for more than a millennium. However, the entire site of Palenque is widely recognised as having its local version of myths and pantheon of gods, and a specific way of conducting the rituals. Despite their presence across the Maya world, these local deities and rituals presented a fusion of pan-Maya and local motifs with the importance of particular personages structured differently. A number of other lowland Maya sites provide information about such localised groups of patron gods, and region-specific ritual activities attested in the archaeological material (Taube 2006:265-266). The unique set of inscriptions recovered from the Cross Group may be explained by the randomness of archaeological discoveries as well as by its localised nature.

Moreover, one of the most accentuated cultural features of the Late Classic Lowland Maya was the artistic and ritual focus on the ruler and his personal aggrandisement. It is thus plausible that it was Kan Bahlam's

intention to merge the monuments commemorating his accession to the rulership with a broader, central topos of a great cultural importance, further enforcing his divine right to preside over his kingdom. Extending that function of the Cross Group over the Preclassic Triadic Groups faces a basic difficulty of knowing frustratingly little about the Preclassic rulership. Far from being firmly grasped, the modern understanding of social structure before the Classic period is based on a continuously growing data set. Nevertheless, the perception of the king and his place among his subjects in the Preclassic remains elusive. No evidence of accession rituals have been recovered from Preclassic Triadic Groups.

An array of cultural traits concerning the Triadics has led multiple scholars to link these architectural compounds to the Creation event. Although analysing different kinds of data and using different perspectives and lines of reasoning, they all eventually arrived at various aspects of the Maya Genesis as underlying the construction of Triadic Groups (*cf.* Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993; Schele and Freidel 1990; Taube 1998; Hansen 1998; Estrada-Belli 2006). Indeed, the ubiquity of triadic arrangements, and their cultural endurance, must have been a reflection of some central and basic ideological idea that had never fundamentally changed despite the civilisational evolution. However, the Maya had never formed a unified political institution, nor did they possessed a single canonical „gospel”, or uniform standardised religion. Instead, the Maya pantheon consisted of multiple beings with variable sets of attributes and fields of operation that frequently overlapped and conflated into each other (Vail 2000:123). Despite a general sense of coherence, the myths describing the emergence of gods, their interactions and activities that led to the creation of the world, present the same variety. The Creation myth itself was regularly described as a multi-stage process featuring a number of actors (Wagner 2006). The only way of selecting the topoi that had been possibly

represented by the Triadic Groups is by elimination of those that do not seamlessly fit this specific layout.

Two threefold topoi described before, namely the Palenque Triad and the triple Pre-Era „Victory”, tackle the same motif of the preparation of the Earth preparation before the arrival of humans. Multiple textual sources tell the story of slaying or sacrificing the semi-divine monsters that threaten the very existence of life. Thus, from the human perspective, might be perceived as fundamental. According to Popol Vuh, the Hero Twins defeated a great avian usurper and his two sons, and Yaxchilan inscriptions describe a triple pre-era sacrifice. However, despite the insightful set of Palenque inscriptions, no other iconographic programme connected with the Triadics deals with such an event. Although Freidel (*et al.* 2002) has interpreted the Cerros friezes as depicting the Hero Twins, among other beings, the iconographic features of the masks are ambiguous at best. The mere presence of Hun Ajaw and Yax Bahlam does not necessarily resolve the issue either, for they had been participating in multiple important events of the mythic times.

A peculiar set of disguises of the Bone Thrones, showing traits of jaguarian, aquatic, and snake features only partially corresponds with the Triadic form and iconography. A sporadic representation of sharks, apparently very important in the Bone Throne representations, makes that triplet a less likely candidate. Although firmly connected with the Creation event, the thrones, when depicted in triples, are of equal size. An average Triadic arrangement clearly stresses its central element, as was already discussed before.

The K'in Bowl concept has been interpreted as the *axis mundi* representation, often worn by the kings as a part of the headdress. The distribution of ritual paraphernalia seen within the bowl had initially presented a promising lead towards better understanding of the triadic arrangement in general. The central stingray element that also occur in Palenque's Temple of

the Cross connects the bloodletting ritual with the world's sustenance. The floral motif on the left cannot be securely identified, and the *Spondylus* shell has proven to be an ubiquitous element in ritual activities. However, despite its apparent ritual and mythic connotations, the K'in Bowl cannot be linked with the Triadic Groups in any plausible way.

A very powerful topos of three elements that no doubt belonged to the very core of the Maya beliefs can be actually divided into two events from the Maize God's life. Most of the versions of the Creation story hinge on the Maize god's sacrifice, journey through the Underworld, and resurrection. Scenes of the Maize god's journey through the Underworld and his resurrection have been routinely captured by Maya artists in the threefold layouts of the Maize God himself, and two other personages that witnessed or facilitated his endeavours.

In the journey scenes the Maize God is most frequently depicted in a dugout canoe floating among the watery Underworld. Paddler Gods navigate the vessel helping the Maize God to get to the surface world. They are the opposing beings of day and night, or light and darkness, with feline and solar features. In the Postclassic Popol Vuh version of this event, the Hero Twins bring their father's head back from Xibalba to revive it. They also feature feline and solar elements, and have been identified with the sun and the moon. No clear connection between the Paddlers and Hero Twins has been established, though. Nevertheless, this pairing of motifs stands in accordance with elements of the stucco friezes found on many Triadic facades, that also feature jaguar and solar symbols, as in Cerros, Uaxactun Group H, Nakbe, El Mirador, and Cival, among others (Freidel *et al.* 2002; Valdes 1986; Hansen 2002; Hansen *et al.* 2004; 2008; Estrada-Belli 2006). As some scholars have pointed out, the Uaxactun H Group stucco masks bear some aquatic symbols (Saturno *et al.* 2005).

The overall template of the journey scene, with the Maize God in the centre, flanked with two minor personages, is similar to visual design of the triadic architecture. However, the artistic programmes of Triadic Groups frequently present witz iconography that cannot be easily fitted in the journey story (Kovač *et al.* 2010; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993). Additionally, there are other, emic concerns that present some difficulties in linking that event with the Triadics. They will be analysed in the next chapter.

The ultimate mythological scene concerning the Maize God is his resurrection. This joyful and glorious moment is loaded with positive emotions and profound, multi-layered metaphors from earthly life and royal ethos. After being planted and hidden from sight for a time being, the maize grows out of the ground, at the same time causing the relief and marking the beginning of another cycle of hard work with harvesting and processing the corn cobs. A number of Classic Maya kings had commissioned their post-mortem depictions in disguise of Maize God returning from the dead. Such messages are easy to read and understand: although already divine, the Maya kings had been assuring their resurrection and heavenly immortality by the unification, or impersonation of Maize God. On the mythological level the maize plant is especially important, for it is the very substance of creation. After two imperfect attempts to build human beings that would worship the gods, they succeeded in this enterprise when using the maize dough for the human flesh (Christenson 2007:182-183). But before it could happen, Maize God had to return back to the surface of Earth. He did so with help of the Paddlers at first, but then two other personages witnessed the moment of his resurrection. As shown above, the most frequent pair of witnesses are the Hero Twins, sometimes bearing gourds full of water and bags of maize seeds that will be used in germination of life (Fig. 49). Other versions of the story place aquatic gods, Chahk and Terrestrial Water God, on both sides of dancing Maize God, perhaps to provide him with water essential in his further existence (Fig. 50).

According to some scholars, the pair of attendants may also be identified as the Sun and Rain Gods that stand for two necessary elements for the growth of Maize (*cf.* Estrada-Belli 2006:62). Usually the act of resurrection and reappearance happens through a crack on a turtle shell. This turtle has been identified as the world, and the crack as a cave that links the Underworld with the surface.

When analysing details of the resurrection scenes, Taube and colleagues (Saturno *et al.* 2005; Taube 2004) arrived to a conclusion that it had happened in a certain mythic place called the Flower Mountain. According to an extensive corpus of examples gathered by Taube, the ancient Maya believed in a paradisiacal locus of abundance, filled with fragrant air emitted by flowers and edible fruits, and inhabited by wild creatures. Most frequently, the animals depicted in association with Flower Mountain are a jaguar and a serpent, sometimes also a bird, a fish, and a deer (Fig. 52). In *Popol Vuh*, the discovery of that place by the animal scouts happened just before the creation of humans. In fact, the discovery of maize was made there, in the place of „Paxil” and „Kayala”. That dual name might be understood as a description, for *paxil* refers to „splitting” or „cleft”, and *k’ayala’* stands for „bitter water” that by extension is associated with the salty sea water (Christenson 2007:180-181). Broken, split, or cleft mountain has been long linked with the birthplace of maize and the Maize God himself across Mesoamerica at least from the Olmec times. The early Maize God depictions from La Venta and elsewhere show the distinctive cleft feature, interpreted by Taube as the split earth out of which the plan emerges (Fig. 53)(Taube 1996:41). The split is also associated with a cave within the mountain, as a passage between the Underworld and the human world.



Fig. 52. Early Classic Flower Mountain with birds and serpents, Balamk'u (from Baudez 1996:38).

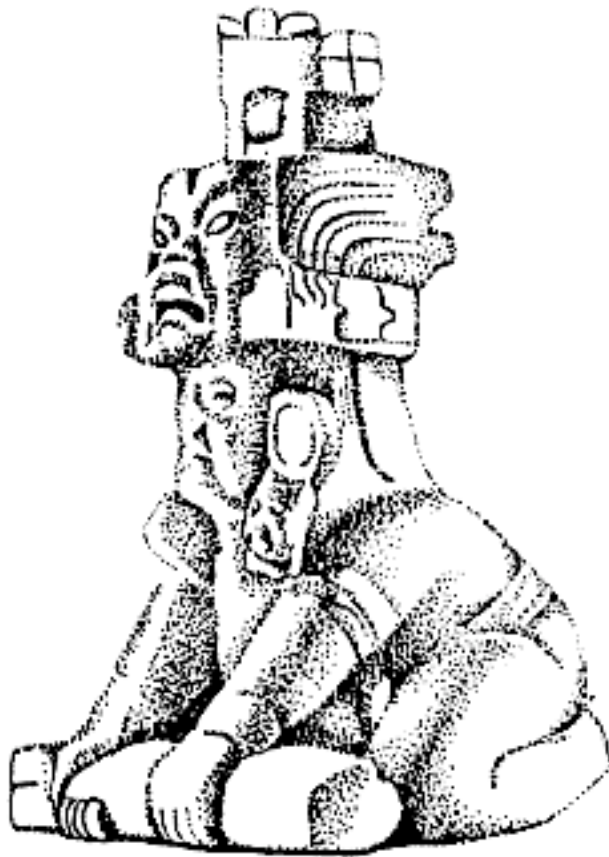


Fig. 53. The Olmec Maize God with cleft head, San Martín Papajan (after Taube 1996:49).

The *kayala* part of the name associates the Flower Mountain with the primordial ocean that had existed before the world appeared. The first dry land emerging from it was exactly that mountain, laded with pleasant and useful objects (Taube 2004:80-84). The importance and ancient origin of that ideological complex is attested by its ubiquity in Mesoamerica, for traces of it might be found in Teotihuacan, Tlaxcala, Toltec imagery, American Southwest, and the Late Postclassic Aztec and Chichen Itza visual and textual data (*idem*). Its cultural provenience cannot be securely asserted, but its earliest explicit appearance on the Late Preclassic San Bartolo murals, Kaminaljuyu vessel, and perhaps on the Southern H-Group Triadic at Uaxactun, might place the Maya as the inventors and distributors of that myth among other Mesoamerican cultures (Taube 2004:88; Saturno *et al.* 2005). Contrary to this opinion, some scholars opt for the Teotihuacan as the place of origin of the Flower Mountain concept. It is perhaps no coincidence that in Teotihuacan tradition a tripartite worldview and trinities of all sorts are at least as prominent as they are within the Maya culture. Moreover, the only Mesoamerican examples of architectural triadic layout from outside of the Maya area, albeit very few, come from the Teotihuacano culture, but have been tentatively interpreted as reflections of a threefold partition of society rather than religious concepts (Fig. 54; Headrick 2007:103-105).

The Flower Mountain in the Maya thought was not only the place of heavenly abundance, but also home to many wild creatures, the birthplace of maize, and the locus of ascend of gods to the celestial realms, linking the earth and the heaven. The cave piercing its base further extended that passage towards the Underworld, thus connecting all three dimensions together. As such, the Mountain became yet another representation of *axis mundi*, the navel of the world (*idem*).

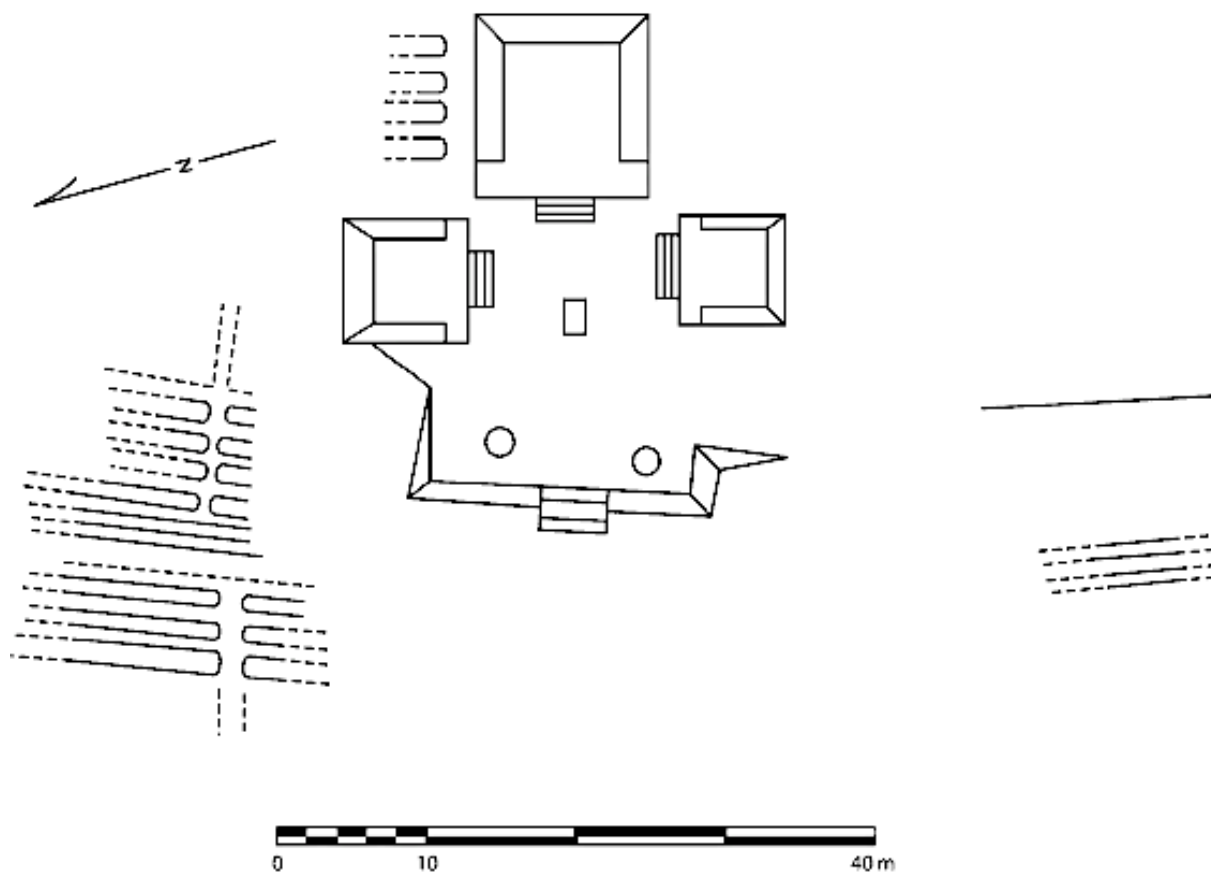


Fig. 34. Triadic compound from Tetimpa, Teotihuacano culture (from Headrick 2007:104).

The iconographic set of motifs constituting the Flower Mountain perfectly overlaps the one of the Triadic artistic decorations, presented in the previous chapters. First of all, stucco friezes adorning the facades of basal platforms frequently feature the *witz* monsters, as seen in Uaxactun Group H (Valdes 1986, Kovač *et al.* 2010). Thus the basal platforms are perceived as representations of mountains, a universal connection among the Maya. But other symbols and features further specify the qualities of that mountain. It seems to be strongly connected with water, perhaps even emerging from it, as some friezes present aquatic symbols and creatures, as fish and reptilians. Perhaps the most obvious aquatic iconography has been discovered on the Southern Group H at Uaxactun, where the *Witz* monsters rest on the shark

heads (Fig. 34). The Lamanai Triadic Group N9-56 stucco mask bears a badly destroyed depiction of a reptilian.

The circular basin in front of the Danta Triadic at El Mirador, and the Naranjo association of Triadics with Caves stands in accordance with the Flower Mountain imagery as having the cave at its base (Suyuc Ley *et al.* 2008:527-529; Fialko 2004; Saturno *et al.* 2005:16).

The personages inhabiting the Triadic *Witz* can be identified by their more or less explicit attributes constituting parts of the stucco decorations. One of the most recurring elements of the masks is a trilobed motif, either dangling down from the earpools, as for example at El Tigre/Itzamkanac, Uaxactun, and Nakbe, or forming part of the masks' headbands, for example at Cerros and Uaxactun (Schele and Freidel 1990:112-113; Valdes 1986; Forsyth and Acevedo 1994; Vargas Pacheco and Delgado Salgado 2003). This element has been widely accepted as a *pars pro toto* depiction of Jester God, which, in turn, is one of the Maize God impersonations deriving from the Olmec tradition (Skidmore 2011; Fields 1991). Hence the Christophe Helmke's reading of the Northern H Group Triadic name at Uaxactun as „The Mountain of Jester God” can be further extended as „The Mountain of Maize God” (Kovač *et al.* 2010:438).

As to the other personages involved in the Triadic Group symbolic representation, they cannot be identified so acutely. The resurrection scenes known in the Maya imagery feature various pairs of deities, and so do the artistic programmes of the Triadics. This ambiguity may derive from different versions of that myth prevailing in particular regions and times. However, on the basic level, all of them display a coherent system of cultural symbols that might be semantically correlated. And so most of the stucco masks feature abundant jaguarian traits that relate to the Jaguar Gods. This group of deities has been identified with opposing, but complimentary forces of the universe, representing solar and lunar aspects of the sky, diurnal and nocturnal sun, light

and darkness, and also certain aspects of both Hero Twins (Miller and Taube 1993:103-104). The swirling or wavy elements protruding from the stucco heads' maws are the breath scrolls, and it was shown by Taube (2004) that the Wind God was a prominent personage connected with the Flower Mountain, along with his companion god of rain, Chahk. These two, often depicted in struggle, symbolically denote the frequent natural phenomenon of strong wind followed by pouring rain, so desired by the maize farmers. In fact some of the earliest representations of the resurrection scenes depict Chahk as one of Maize God assistants during his revival. It is no coincidence, that the San Bartolo murals that vividly tell the story of Maize God's resurrection and accession to the heavenly throne adorn walls of a temple that was subsequently converted into a Triadic Group. The West Wall mural features the dancing figure of Maize God flanked by Chahk and Terrestrial Water God, both pointing their index fingers at him (Fig. 50). Houston and colleagues interpret this gesture as denoting the speech of importance and authority (Houston *et al.* 250). On the other hand, the Cross Group at Palenque features GII and GIII as flanking the central GI deity that is a local version of Maize God. According to Stuart and other scholars, GII is a fusion of the lightning god K'awiil and an aspect of the Jaguar God (Stuart 2005:174-175). GIII bears both solar and feline symbols, thus fitting within the general picture of the resurrection event. Several motifs distinguished by Estrada-Belli from the Cival Triadic masks point towards a triple set of beings associated with GI / Maize God, Chahk, and Sun God (K'inich Ajaw), with some traces of serpent and avian symbolisation, which constitutes the Flower Mountain complex as well (Estrada-Belli 2006; Taube 2004).

The oversized earspools that are most prominent features of virtually all the stucco masks discovered in connection with the Triadic Groups have been sometimes interpreted as denoting the *b'ih*, or „road” glyphs, especially when bearing four dots around the central opening. Taube (2004) argues that

they might be standing for two separate symbols. One would be a well known expression *och' b'ih*, „entering the road”, regularly describing someone’s death, but in this sense more probably standing for the Maize God’s entering the path of resurrection and accession to heaven through the Flower Mountain. The other meaning comes from association of earflares with flowers (*idem*). Thus the stucco earspools bore the clear designation of the Flower Mountain toponym and the action of Maize God’s accession to heaven through a metaphorical portal.

The triadic architectural layout also stands in accordance with the resurrection scene. On the top of the Flower Mountain, a central personage (Maize God) is further elevated towards the sky in his shrine, meanwhile two other beings, opposing but symmetrical and complimentary to each other, flank him, and perhaps also protect, guarding and controlling the access to the newly reborn deity.

Out of a number of cultural topoi that initially bore resemblance to the Triadic Group architectural layout, emerged the only one that appears to fit perfectly with all its details and variations. However, some other motifs appear to be at least partially accommodating that scheme, especially those that tackle the common pivotal moment of the Maya mythology - the Creation event. On the deepest, most universal level, the Maize God resurrection and accession to heaven through the Flower Mountain, appears to be the principal theme of the Triadic architecture. Nevertheless, due to a particular characteristic of the Maya religious system that merges, conflates, and fuses several deities, and places the same stories in different settings, accompanied by different actors, it might as well point towards a multiple meaning of Triadics, depending on their spatial and chronological occurrence. The next chapter will provide some remarks on the Maya perception of monumental architecture in general, and the Triadic Groups specifically.

Cultural Perception of Triadic Architecture - An Emic Perspective

In a way, both function and meaning are products of the mind. When in need a human being searches for tools and devices that would facilitate desired actions, and if he or she finds none, then he or she designs new ones for that purpose. In most cases the process of designing and creating an object is conducted with a specific function in mind. It holds true for material and ethereal human products, be they using a stick for planting, a pot for cooking, creating an instrument to play a song, or building a structure to fulfil a ceremonial purpose – these activities only differ in scale and complexity.

Meaning usually comes second to function and consists of the sum of emotions evoked by an existing object. Meaning may be much more variable than function, because the perception of any given object is subjective and therefore the emotions evoked by the object are specific to an individual and are prone to changes as an individual changes. The way that one regards an object is a fusion of one's personal cognitive map and a learned or imposed set of cultural traits. However, some human products may have possessed fixed meanings as a preconceived quality, especially when designed as essentially symbolic representations of other products or ideas. A logical problem arises, though, upon the realisation that a cultural relation between an original object and its symbolic representation may be reciprocal with both ends interacting and influencing each other in a somewhat circular fashion. Ancient Maya architecture provides an excellent example of such a reciprocity of meaning, as was shown earlier in the discussion of the significance of the three-stone hearth.

To undertake the task of reconstructing function and meaning from ancient Maya architecture, is to simultaneously work backward from the final product into the minds of its long-gone creators, while simultaneously working forward in pursuit of its cultural reception. Considering the usually incomplete

nature of the product itself, and the elusive and distorted contemporary perception of both its creators and receptors, one can hardly hope to go beyond a speculative and theoretical exercise. Moreover, as remarked by David Webster in his epistemological essay (1998:16), using a common sense explanations can be, and in fact frequently is, misleading. He also states that the overall task of interpreting meaning is by no means futile or counter-productive (*ibid.*:17). If approached carefully and with an awareness of the limitations in an etic interpretation, it may yield an important and insightful contribution to modern understanding of the ancient Maya in general.

The greater part of this work has been carried out by approaching Triadic Groups from an „etic”, or external, vantage point. It has focussed on the form, context, and decoration of architecture, and then juxtaposed these elements with cultural motifs that appeared to be likely symbolic prototypes of the whole design. Having grasped the probable interpretation, an essential refinement has to be made. I will attempt to look at the triadic architecture with the eyes of the ancient Maya, bearing in mind that such an „emic” endeavour is necessarily infected and distorted by the my own cognitive filters.

Recent studies have resulted in a great deal of publications concerning the Maya use of space and urban design. A tool especially well suiting that purpose was provided by the development of built environment studies (*cf.* Lawrence and Low 1990). General consensus among scholars regarding ancient Maya cities as local representations of the Maya cosmos has been further scrutinised with focus on particular elements comprising the artificially constructed landscapes charged with meaning. Great paved plazas spreading within cores of monumental centres, apart from their function for holding masses of subjects during ceremonial activities performed on lofty pyramids, have been proven to fulfil yet another important task, that of water catchment areas during the rainy season. Expertly designed water channels were directing rainfall towards *aguadas*, (artificial or semi-artificial reservoirs) for

storage during the dry period (Nicolaus Seefeld, personal communication, January 2013; French *et al.* 2006). Thus some scholars propose an interpretation of the plazas as *nahb*, the symbolic ocean, out of which the buildings emerge as the mountains emerged during the creation of the world (Wagner 2006:290). Recent epigraphic studies have shown that the ocean glyph possessed a phonetic value in addition to the *nahb* pronunciation, reading as *polaw* (Stone and Zender 2011:141). Additionally, the semantic extension of *witz*, or the mountain glyph to denote a pyramid has been completed by another sign of unknown reading that explicitly depicts an architectural substructure (Fig. 55). Perhaps, then, the *witz* glyph stood for the whole conceptual entity of the pyramid with its temples, deities, and rituals, meanwhile the pyramid glyph operated on a more literal level, describing the architectural structure itself (*ibid.*:105).

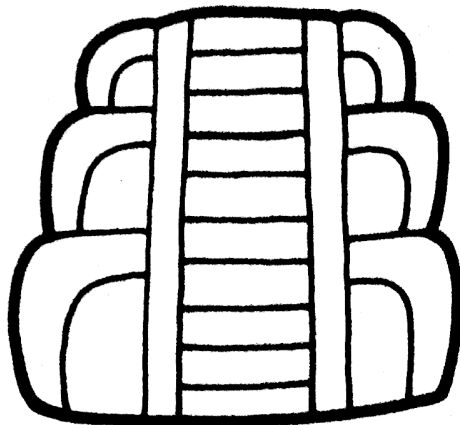


Fig. 55. Hieroglyph depicting a pyramid (from Stone and Zender 2011:105).

Such an ambiguity of representations stands in accordance with an apparent inclination of the Maya towards constructing subtle interplays of different meanings and attributing multiple functionality to particular objects. This, in turn, evokes two important questions: did all the architectural complexes classified as Triadic Groups originally represent the same cultural concept? In other words, is the Maize God's resurrection, as proposed above,

a universal meaning for Triadics? And what was the function of Triadic Groups, which is to say what kind of ritual activities were performed within the three structures on the summits of Triadic Groups?

Before answering these question it must be realised that modern understanding of ancient Maya usage of temples is a mere assumption. Miller and Taube (1993:161) note that

„[a]mong Mesoamerican cities known only archaeologically, the word temple has often been applied without specific knowledge of any religious practices that may have taken place there.

What have been termed Maya „temples” and „palaces”, for example, seem to grade into one another, and in recent years, archaeologists have preferred to give structures neutral numbers rather than nicknames like „Temple of the Giant Jaguar”. Nevertheless, Maya temples can generally be identified: a temple has a high platform topped by small chambers; access is limited and is usually by a single staircase, although a few examples have other arrangements. (...)

Although clearly associated with specific deities, these Maya temples primarily commemorated royal ancestors and the gods with whom the kings were united in death”.

That is precisely what seems to have happened in Palenque. The Cross Group seems to have been designed to serve the specific purpose of complex accession rituals for K’an Bahlam, but the selection of the very particular triadic layout was a premeditated allusion to the Maize God’s accession to heavenly rulership. Thus, in the common perception of his subjects the king was equated with one of the most important divine personages of ancient Maya religion. Even if an average maize farmer who’s knowledge of other

urban centres had been very limited and he did not immediately understand the depth of this metaphor, he must have been familiar with the divine concepts of the life, death, and resurrection of the Maize God, whom he himself symbolically tended, sacrificed, and witnessed resurrecting, year after year. An elite member, in turn, exercised a more profound grasp of mythology, and was perhaps aware of other Triadic Groups existing in neighbouring centres since at least a few centuries before.

In the similar fashion the Flower Mountain concept might have endured until the times of Postclassic Qumarkaj. The Popol Vuh mentions a triad of temples featuring the triadic layout, constructed for the K'iche Triad (Christenson 2007:267). Although their principal function is overtly stated as to house particular gods, the Flower Mountain appearance in the same account suggests the underlying, perhaps not even entirely consciously perceived ancient significance of that architectural complex.

Considering the relatively rapid appearance of the triadic architecture during the Preclassic period, it may be safely assumed that this then-innovative way of representing the myth of the death and rebirth of the Maize god, that may have perhaps already existed for a long time, was initially adopted with its basic meaning. It subsequently evolved adding other dimensions that served to enforce the local purposes. The concept of Flower Mountain as the Maize God's entrance to heaven was so powerfully charged with important religious messages that it probably would not have been overlooked by the agents with the means to enforce the legitimacy of their elevated social status by building these Triadic Groups.

As previously mentioned, the emic perspective further enforces the plausibility of the resurrection story as the basic meaning of the Triadics, at the expense of the episode of the Underworld journey. Intuitively, the former is the moment of glory and relief, meanwhile the latter evokes the entirely opposite connotations. Although it is not entirely improbable that some ritual activities

existed that metaphorically pleaded certain gods for the positive conclusion of Maize God's misfortune, the mere size and grandeur of Triadic Groups suggests some glorious and monumental cultural associations rather than those of insecurity and anticipation. Another minor but possibly relevant argument can be made when looking on the canoe scenes. Both Paddler gods that accompany the Maize god look outward in their difficult task of manoeuvring through the water, meanwhile the resurrection witnesses invariably face the principal deity. The triadic layout features exactly the same pattern, to the point where Cerros Triadic Group 29 manages to squeeze two inward looking lateral platforms leaving little space for actual access to either. This disregard as to the access issues caused by the extremely limited space shows the intention of using the platforms to mimic the witnesses to the Maize god's resurrection (Schele and Freidel 1990:125).

As to the variable orientation of Triadic Groups, two observations can be made. Unlike the astronomical representations, the Flower Mountain concept does not seem to have any specific, universally accepted geographic location within the universe. Moreover, the specific distribution of scenes concerning the Maize God's resurrection has not ever been cardinally oriented. Perhaps, then, Triadics were constructed on localities and orientations that fitted well in the urban canvass at the moment, without losing the most important metaphorical connotations. However, at the first stage of Triadic Groups appearance the eastern orientation seems to be favoured, perhaps due to its general connotation with life and resurrection evoked by the rising sun (Miller and Taube 1993:77-78; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:128). The Classic shift towards the north as a more preferred direction might have been dictated by two separate factors. In general, the Classic worldview attached specific qualities to different cardinal directions, with the north associated with fortune, new life, and the rainy season, during which the maize plant grows (Christenson 2007:181). The second factor

regards only a limited array of north-oriented Triadics with all three superstructures of approximately similar size, as for example North Acropolis at Yaxha. During the development of Triadic symbolism, resulting in stacking and overlapping different functions and meanings, a group of Triadics may have indeed represented the Celestial Hearth constellation, among other things, as originally proposed by Freidel, Schele and Parker (1993).

Although Miller and Taube argue that the principal function of ancient Maya temples was to commemorate rulers (*op. cit.*), in the case of Triadic Groups this function might have in fact been secondary, with the original actors of the resurrection scene being the likely candidates for the patrons of each temple. The nature of rituals performed within particular sanctuaries is best left for the imagination rather than scientific investigations. However, according to Hansen (*op. cit.*), the peculiar order of activities in regard of the kin's accession recorded on the walls of the Cross Group at Palenque may reflect a more general pattern. Thus, the lateral shrines, perhaps devoted to the Hero Twins, or Chahk and K'awiil, would house the bloodletting rituals performed by the king to please and enforce the divine attendants, meanwhile the central, Maize God temple would witness his formal enthronement and offering of the ruler's headband, as seen on the San Bartolo west wall mural (Saturno *et al.* 2005; Taube *et al.* 2010). Considering the vast amount of iconographic depictions of Maize God in the act of dancing after his rebirth, a ritual dance performed by the king may have also been part of activities conducted in front of the central shrine (*cf.* Grube 1992).

Such a reconstruction, however, leaves more questions than it provides answers, not least of which would be the issue of existence and nature of a ritual performed at the centre of the Triadic platform, and hierarchical order of participation in the rituals of each tier. If ever to be resolved at all, though, those issues require much more evidence than has been recovered so far,

and, frankly, such data seem not very likely to come to light in the foreseeable future.

Conclusions

No great endeavour can be brought to a conclusion without planning, and at least a vague vision of the final result. And since construction of monumental architecture was no doubt a very laborious and costly enterprise, ancient Maya builders must have had specific purposes for each structure before commencing the process of building them. As was indicated at the beginning of this work, a rather particular layout of Triadic Groups recurred for nearly fifteen centuries in the Maya area, implicating some very persistent and important ideas as a motive driving the whole societies to elevate those huge platforms and pyramids time and time again.

Out of a spectrum of topoi selected as probable candidates for that motive, one has proven to concur particularly well with the archaeological and other data regarding Triadics. This model interprets Triadic Groups as symbolic monuments commemorating the Maize God and the act of his resurrection upon Flower Mountain. According to a variety of sources, mainly iconographic and epigraphic, the Flower Mountain was a paradise of creation, life, and abundance, and connected the three realms of the Maya universe. The resurrection of the Maize God took place on the top of that mountain and was attended by a pair of complimentary deities representing forces allowing and assuring the growth of maize plants, most likely the Hero Twins, Gods of Rain and Wind, the Sun and the Moon, or perhaps a fusion of these entities.

The mythical story about the Maize God was pivotal for ancient Maya people, who were maize farmers and agriculturalists. It must have evoked self-identification across all levels of ancient Maya societies from the humblest farmers attending maize on their *milpas*, or cornfields, on a daily basis, to the kings themselves. All of them routinely identified with Maize God and his *post-mortem* destiny through their acts of production and consumption of maize. The Triadic Groups then were so powerfully loaded with important religious

messages that they eventually grew in value and became cultural symbols of their own, perhaps with the original concept of the death and rebirth of the Maize God slightly diminished under the layers of secondary functions and meanings.

This conclusion, however, evokes a number of secondary questions. Not the least important of them is: if the Maize God myth is indeed so essential and the Triadic Groups are indeed the stages of its reenactment, why do many of the Preclassic and Classic sites lack this kind of architecture? Was there another type of specialised space that could replace a Triadic layout in the veneration of the Maize God? Perhaps the presence of Triadics was linked to a specific type of political organisation within a given site, such as one with a centralised ruler and a strong social hierarchy, whereas the sites without Triadics exercised more egalitarian political systems. This question cannot be answered presently, but perhaps the constant stream of new data will bring more clues concerning that topic in the future and verify the ideas comprised within this dissertation.

As already stated above, no endeavour can be brought to a conclusion without a plan and a vision. The endeavour of committing this work has been planned since 2009 and concluded in early 2013, which hopefully is reflected by the selection and adoption of the latest references and ideas available at that time. The initial vision, loosely oscillating around the Maize God and Creation themes, was growing more and more solid with each new Triadic structure brought to the author's attention, and with the elimination of other likely 'cultural suspects'. However, every effort has been made to preserve the scientific integrity of this work and to avoid twisting the facts to suit the preconceived theories of the author. That being said, the scientific models live only so long as there is lack of evidence proving them wrong. It is the author's humble wish to inspire critical discussions that would prove him right or wrong

but all the same dragging us all towards better understanding of the ancient Maya.

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Annex

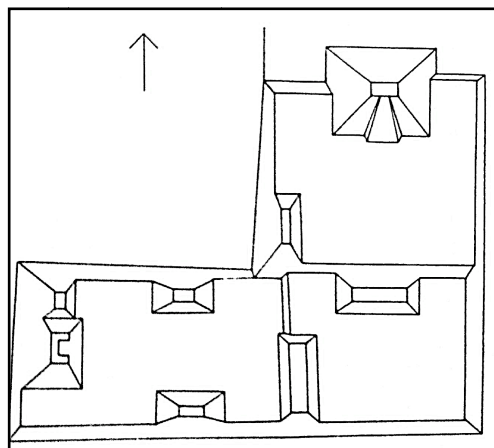
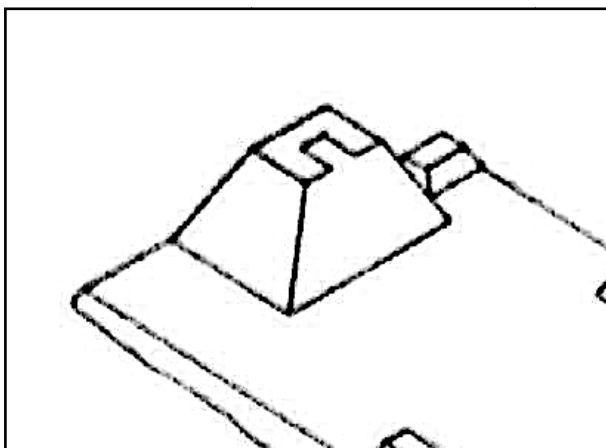
Extended Catalogue

This extension of the Catalogue included within the main body of this dissertation contains a textual and visual data concerning the shape, dimensions, and urban context of the particular entries. The orientation is an approximation, rounded up towards the nearest cardinal direction. Unless indicated otherwise, the plans and maps are oriented towards the north.

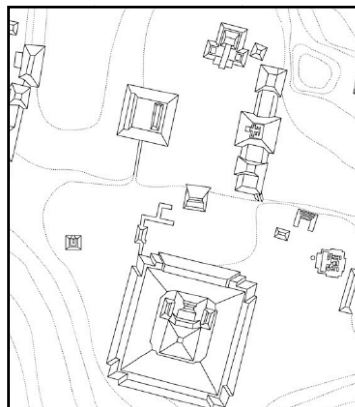
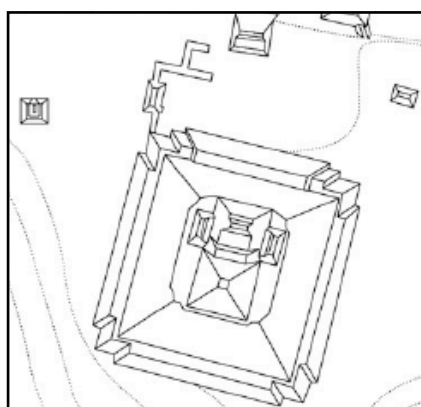
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Altar de los Reyes / Mexico	Southeast Group Structure 1	S	LPC (?)	Šprajc 2008:25-32, plans 1 and 2
Description	Small site in SE Campeche, recently mapped; not excavated. Structure 1 - the most prominent construction of the SE Group. Ca. 40x40 m., 20 m high. 2-Tiered type. Dated pottery - Tzakol; stylistic features of an associated stela - Terminal Classic; formal resemblance to Nakbe Structure 59, and Dzibanche Kinichna Structure - Late Classic / Protoclassic.			

Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Becan / Mexico	?	?	LPC (?)	Estrada-Belli 2011:158
Description	Not confirmed, data missing.			
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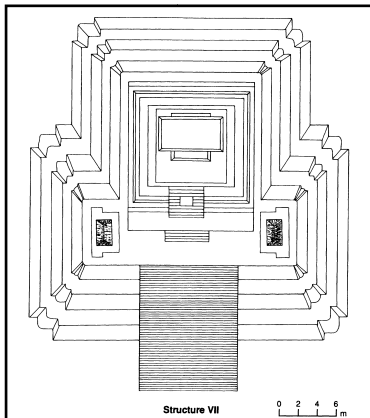
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Bejucal / Guatemala	?	W	?	Quintana and Wurster 2001:41
Description	A small U-Type Triadic on the western edge of an elevated plaza. The site has never been excavated. Not dated, data missing.			



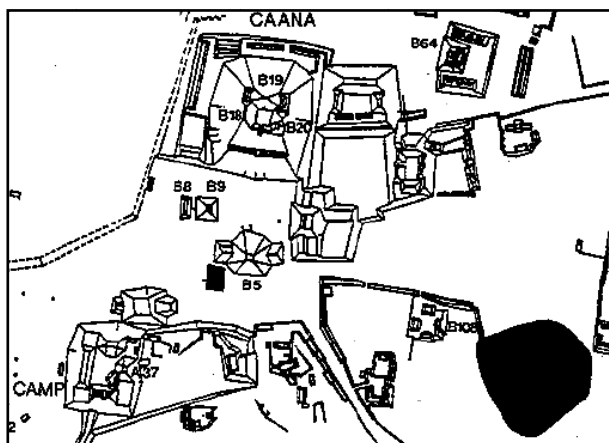
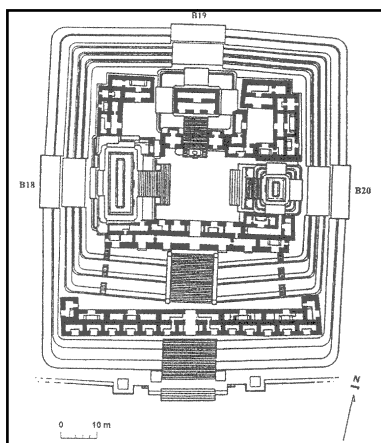
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Calakmul / Mexico	II	S	LPC - LC	Folan et al. 2001; Rodriguez Campero 2009
Description	A giant (55 m high) pyramid with the triadic layout present at the summit between the Late Preclassic and Late Classic times; later redesigned into a different form. It is the tallest construction within the site, bordering the central great plaza from the south side. A discussion whether the lateral constructions were platforms or altars arose after re-excavating the structure in the late 2000s.			



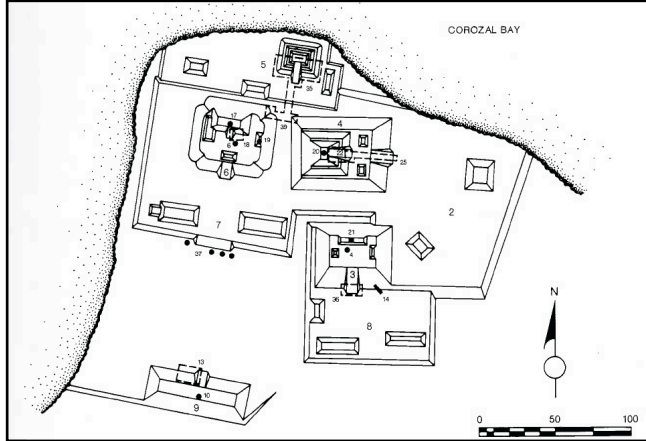
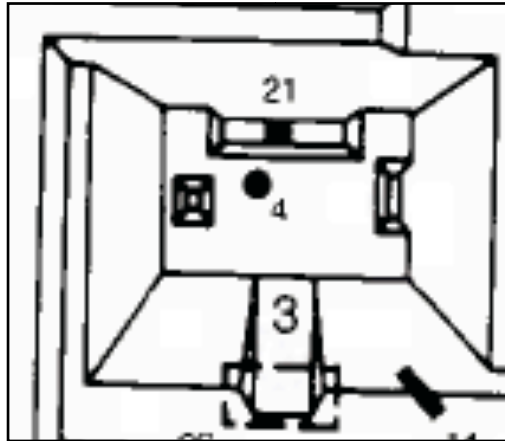
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Calakmul / Mexico	VII	N	LPC - LC	Folan et al. 1995; 2001; Carrasco Vargas et al. 2006
Description	A medium-sized, T-shaped platform. First three (out of four) phases are triadic, either with lateral platforms or masonry altars. The first two date to the Late Preclassic and Protoclassic, while the last Triadic phase is Late Classic. Structure VII faces Structure II, closing the plaza from the north.			



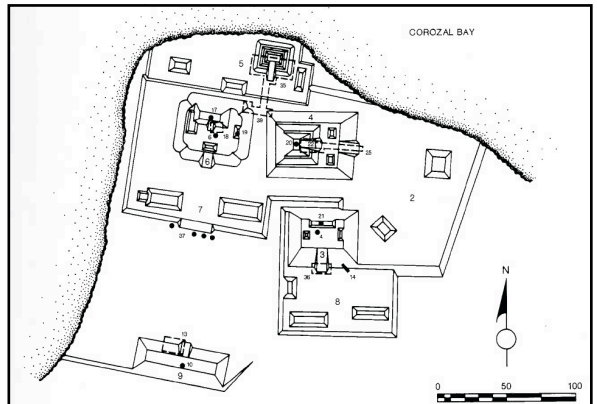
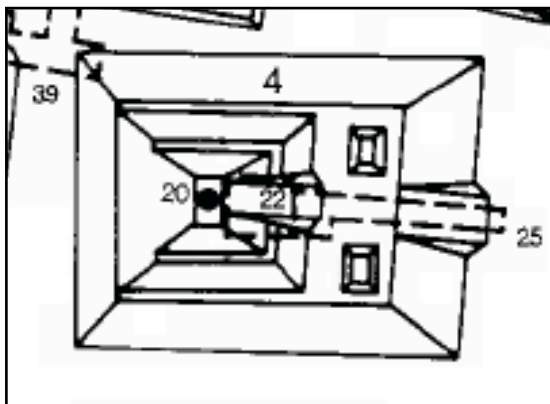
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Caracol / Belize	Caana	N	LPC (?) - TC	Chase and Chase 1987a; 1987b; 1988; 2001; Miller 1986; Martin and Grube 2008:93
Description	Possibly the tallest Maya structure in Belize (43 m). It marks the centre of Group B, flanking a great plaza from the north. Only the ultimate architectural stage (LC-TC) was no doubt triadic; some data indicates that formerly B18 was facing south towards the plaza. Possible residential / administrative function during the Classic times.			



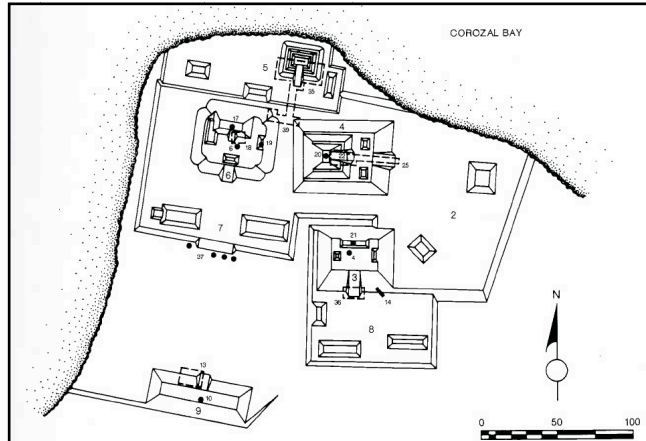
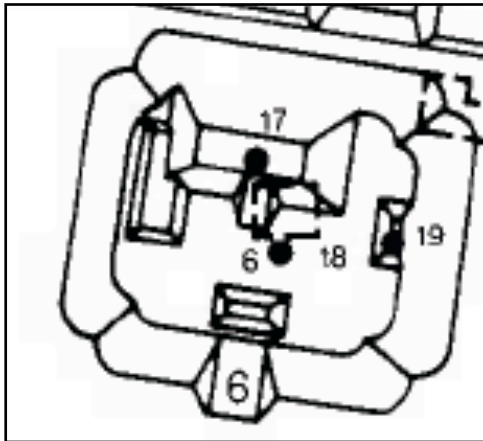
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Cerros / Belize	3	N	PC	Freidel 1986; Walker 2005
Description	The latest Triadic on site, dated to the 2nd century AD., most probably unfinished. The substructure measures ca. 50x40 m. Possibly perishable superstructures on summit platforms. It is located in the very core of the city centre, just south of the Structure 4			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Cerros / Belize	4	W	LPC (AD 1-50)	Robertson and Freidel 1986; Freidel 1986; Walker 2005
Description	The most prominent landmark in the area, marking the centre of the site. 2-tiered structure with a unused burial chamber built in the main superstructure. Dated with Radiocarbon analysis yielding calibrated dates between AD 55 and 115, with 1-sigma ranges between AD 5 and 140 (68% probability).			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Cerros / Belize	6	N	LPC (50 BC - AD 50)	Freidel 1986; Walker 2005; Schele and Freidel 1990:20-22; Freidel et al. 2002:64-65
Description	The earliest Triadic in Cerros; stucco friezes upon the central superstructure resemble artistic programme on a non-triadic str. 5. Dated to the turn of eras (50 BC - AD 50, 1-sigma, 68% probability).			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Cerros / Belize	29	E	LPC (50 BC - AD 80)	Schele and Freidel 1990:125
Description	Outside the city core, close to the southern edge of the moated centre. Peculiar layout that stresses the importance of the triadic arrangement over the usability. Long-snouted stone and stucco masks adorn the facades of lateral superstructures. Calibrated date of AD 50, 1-sigma AD 30-100, 68% probability.			

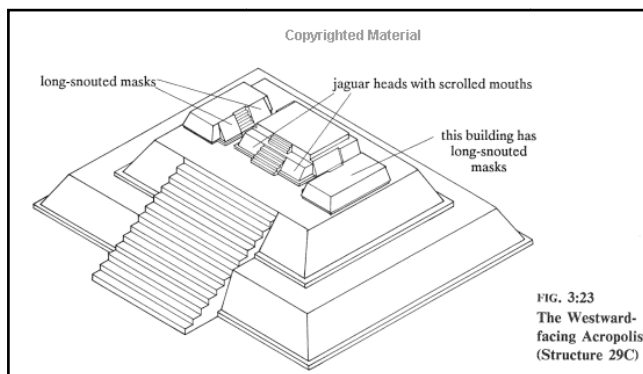
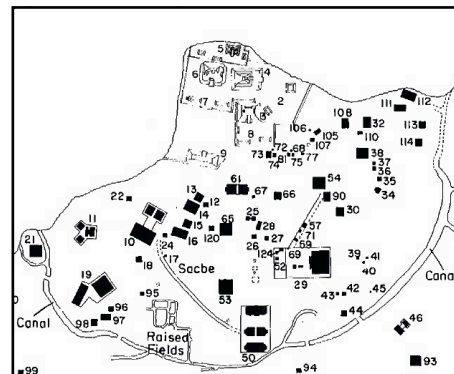
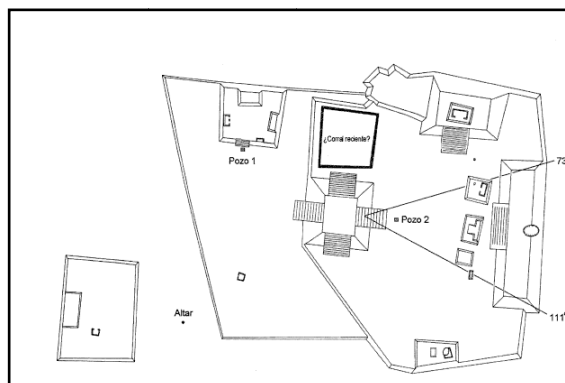
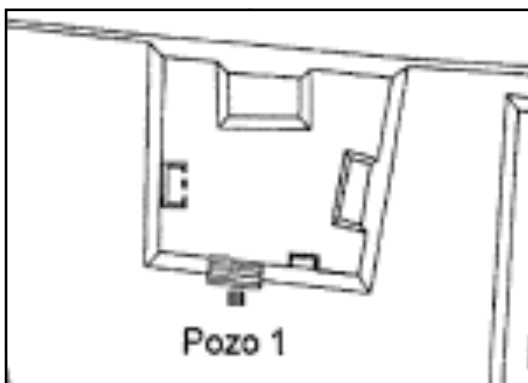


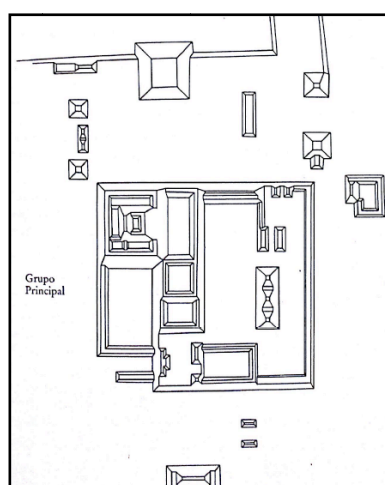
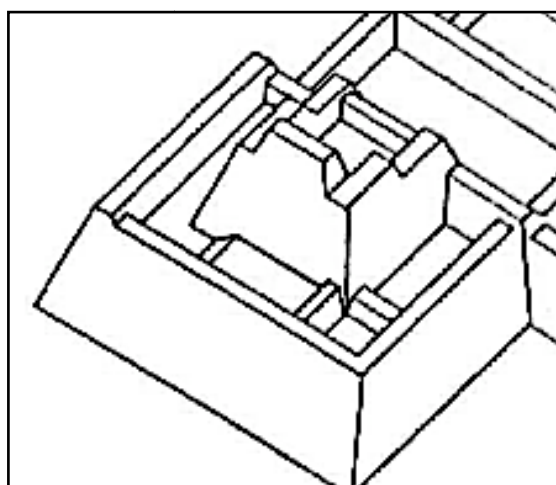
FIG. 3:23
The Westward-facing Acropolis (Structure 29C)



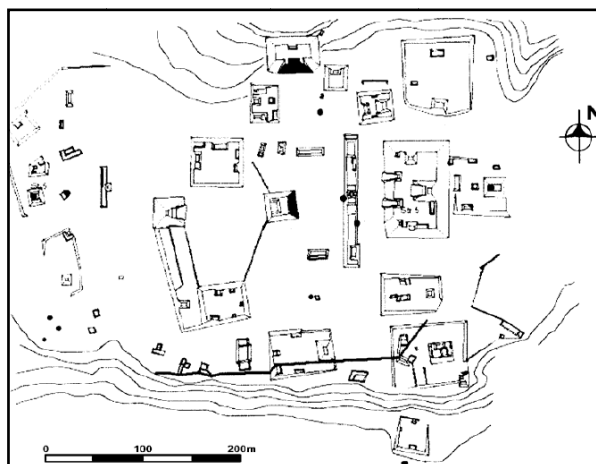
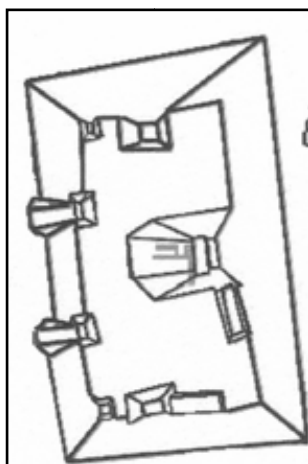
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Ch'el / Mexico	?	N	LC - TC	Robles and Andrews 2003:53-56
Description	Ch'el is a relatively small Late or Terminal Classic site on the northwestern tip of the Yucatan peninsula. The Triadic Group (no number/name published) is a small, 1-Tiered structure to the north of the E-Group that marks the centre of the site's main platform. Pottery sherds point to the Middle or Late Preclassic origin of the city, but the Triadic platform most probably dates to the Late Classic times, with the abandonment at the end of the Classic Period.			



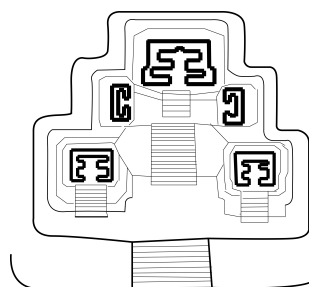
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Chochkitam / Guatemala	XV	W	?	Quintana and Wurster 2001:68-69
Description	An elevated, closed acropolis with the Triadic layout on the summit, set in the northwestern corner of the city centre. The access controlled by a sequence of closed patios gradually rising from the basal platform to the acropolis. Not dated, not excavated.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Cival / Guatemala	1	E	LPC - PC	Estrada-Belli 2006
Description	Massive (70x39 m, 33 m tall) monumental construction flanks the central plaza on its eastern side. The Triadic Group, dated to the timespan of four centuries between 300 BC and 100 AD, was constructed east of an earlier E-Group, blocking its horizon line. The structure underwent at least 5 major remodelling stages. The penultimate stage of Structure 1, later encapsulated entirely within the ultimate construction, manifested itself in a pair of large stucco masks featured on the uppermost terrace of the pyramid.			

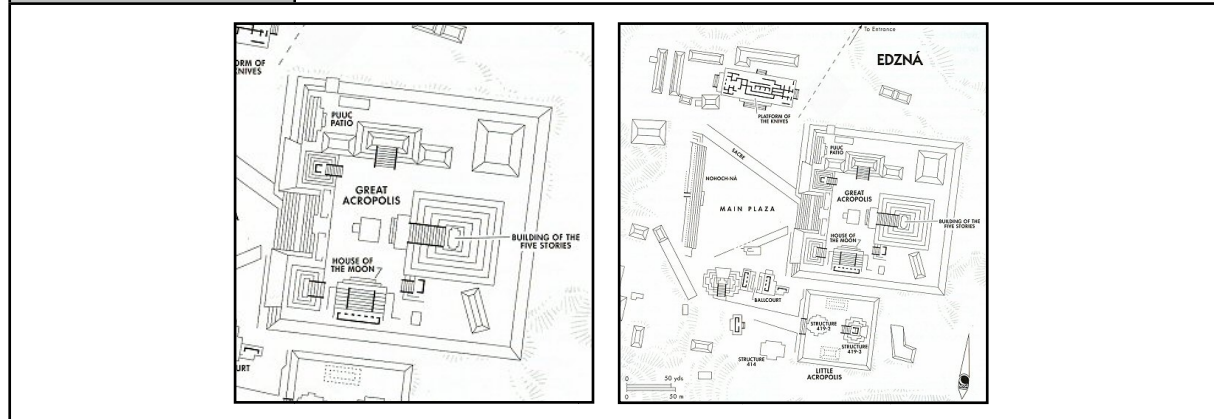


Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Dzibanché / Mexico	Kinichna Acropolis Level C	N	EC - LC	Nalda et al. 1994; Nalda and Balanzario 2005
Description	According to different classifications Kinichna is perceived either as a periphery group of Dzibanche, or a separate site. It consists of just one massive Acropolis, that comprises three levels dating to different periods. Level A is an elevated platform from the Late or Terminal Preclassic times. On its top, the Early Classic Level B consists of a pyramidal platform, crowned by two temples facing the plaza to the south. The actual Triadic Group resides on top of the Acropolis, at the Level C, dated to around AD 600. The main temple was a tandem-plan vaulted building. Its flanking companions are small one-chambered masonry buildings that limit the platform to the west and east.			

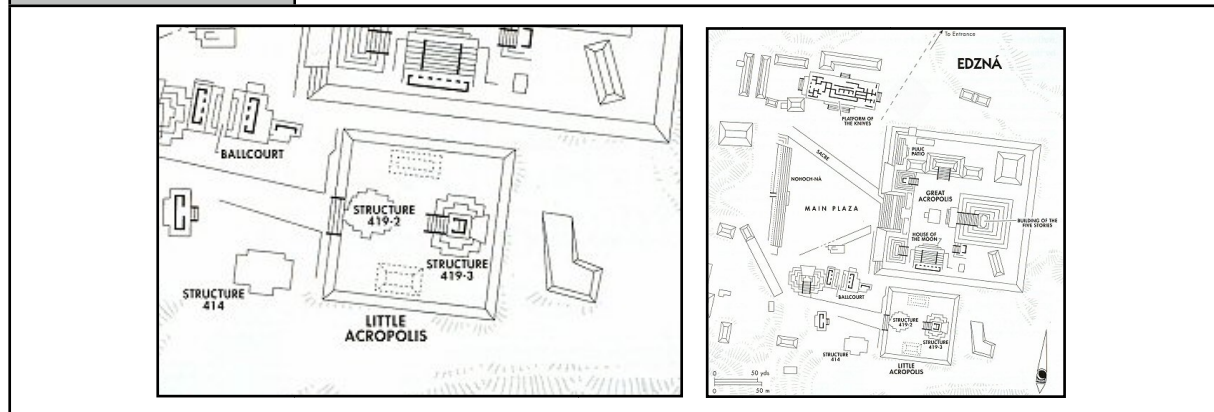


Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Dzibilchaltun / Mexico	605	S	LPC	Andrews IV and Andrews V 1980:25-36
Description	A small domestic platform with remains of 3 superstructures arranged in triadic layout. Dated to the 1st century BC.			
?				

Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Edzna / Mexico	Grand Acropolis	E	LC - TC	Benavides 1997:41-58
Description	The Triadic Acropolis reaches a total of nearly 40 m in height, hence becoming the tallest structure in Edzna. It is located within the strict centre of the city, flanking the eastern side of the main plaza. There are various buildings on the elevated platform that measures ca. 160x160 m.			

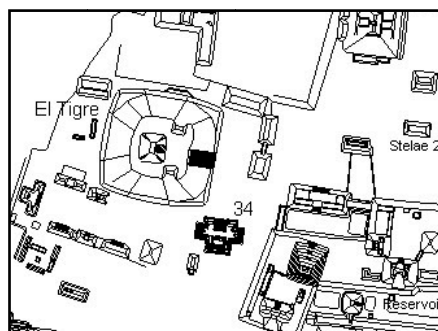
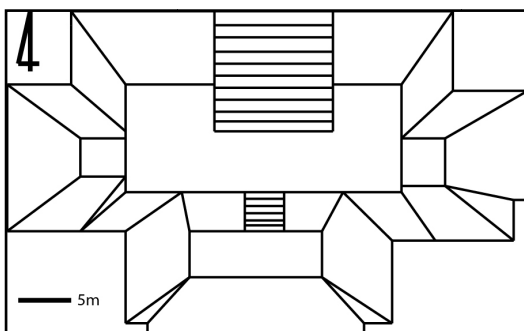


Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Edzna / Mexico	Small Acropolis	E	LC - TC	Benavides 1997
Description	A much smaller acropolis to the south of the main plaza, with its own causeway connecting it with the city core.			

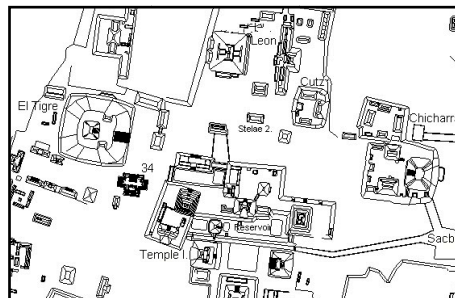
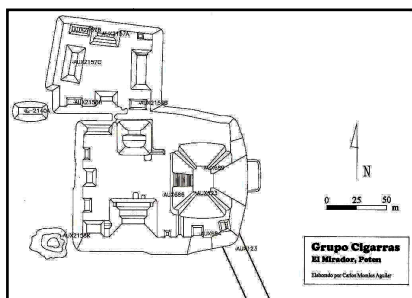


Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Ek Balam / Mexico	X-Huyub	?	LPC	Ringle 1999:195; Bey et al. 1998:111
Description	A peripheral group of Ek Balam, not published (?). Data missing.			
?				

Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
El Mirador / Guatemala	34	S	LPC	Hansen <i>et al.</i> 2005; Hansen <i>et al.</i> 2008
Description	A medium-sized T-Shaped structure just north from the giant El Tigre platform, actually consisting of Structures 33 (west), 34 (south) and 35 (east). Central superstructure (perhaps vaulted) 17 m tall. Large stucco masks adorn all three superstructures and the front facade of the basal platform.			



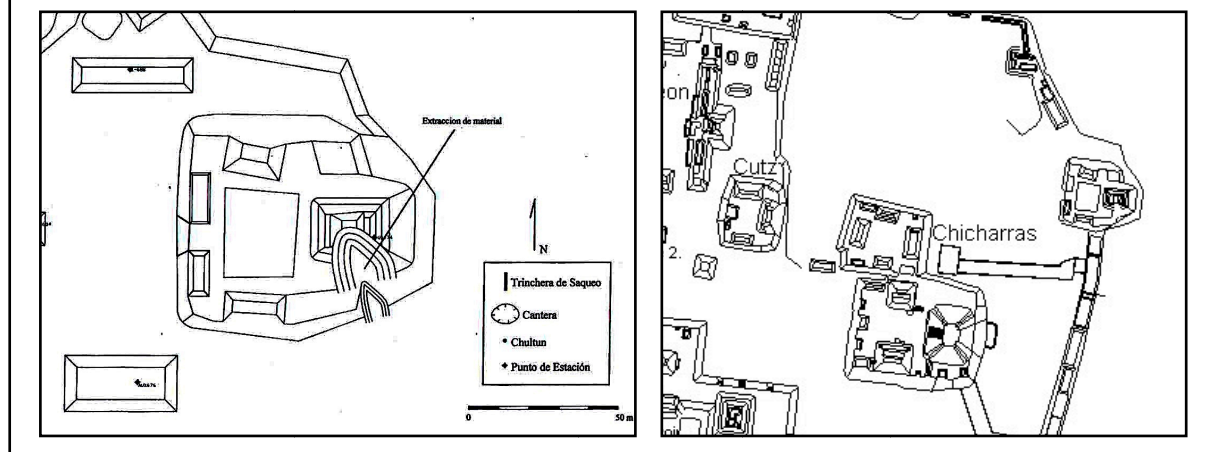
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
El Mirador / Guatemala	Chicharras	E	LPC	Šprajc et al. 2009:85; Suyuc Ley and Hansen 2005:15-17
Description	This group consists of a Triadic Group and a habitational unit immediately to the north. The whole complex borders the core of the city to the east, opposite the gigantic El Tigre Triadic. The platform of entire group is 8 m high, with the central Triadic superstructure elevated further 25 m.			



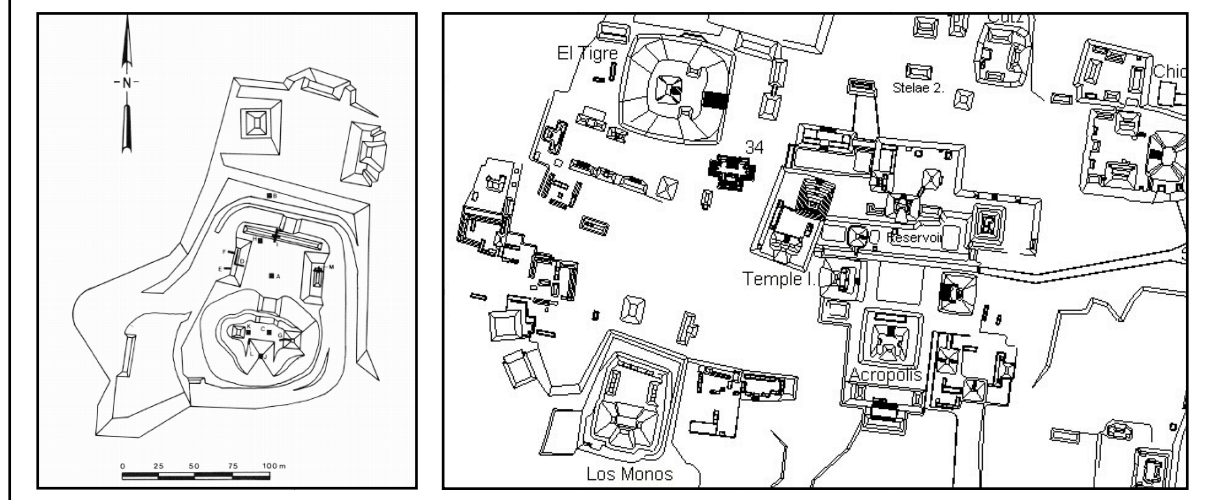
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
El Mirador / Guatemala	Cutz	E	LPC	Šprajc et al. 2009:85; Suyuc Ley and Hansen 2005:15
Description	Midway between the Tigre and Chicharras groups, immediately southwest of the E-Group. Basal platform 58x68 m, 15 m high, with 5 superstructures maintaining the Triadic layout.			

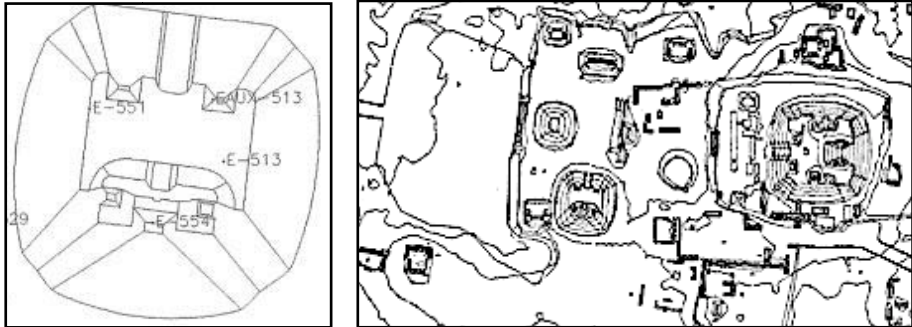
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
El Mirador / Guatemala	Danta	E	LPC	Howell and Evans Copeland 1989; Suyuc Ley et al. 2008:527-529
Description	<p>The largest single architectural complex ever built by the Maya (72 m high, its basal Platform 1 measures 500x300 m). On the eastern side, another platform set on top of Platform 1, (Platform 2), bearing actual Danta Acropolis. The entire construction is removed ca. 1 km from the city core, marking the eastern edges of the site. It is oriented due east, with ca. 5° east of north aberration. In front of the Platform 2 a round basin, some 50 m in diameter and 5 m deep, was set into the surface of the Platform 1. It is uncertain whether its origin is natural or man-made. The central building of the Triadic, 2A8-2, is a five storey pyramidal structure with pairs of stucco and stone masks on each side of the stairway; poor state of preservation of the entire building does not permit a reconstruction of the masks' features. The northern lateral structure, 3A8-1, consists of two tiers. Similarly to 2A8-2, its front facade was adorned with two pairs of masks. These can be partially reconstructed; bases of each of the three pyramids were adorned with additional masks. None of the superstructures had been vaulted, although some traces point to masonry walls at least on the central structure.</p>			

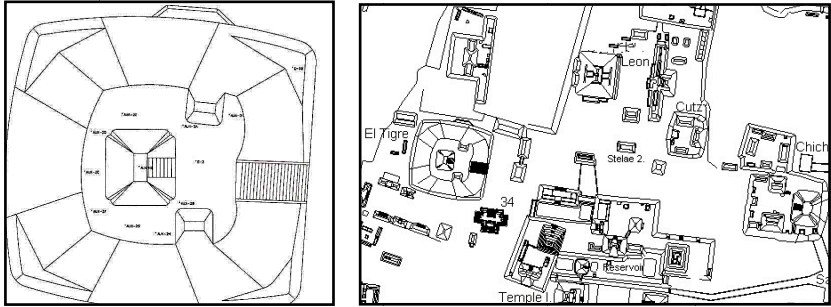
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
El Mirador / Guatemala	Kolomte	E	LPC	Suyuc Ley and Hansen 2005:228
Description	North of the Chicharras, a relatively small complex (66x80 m), with the central pyramid just over 20 m tall. In the middle of the elevated plaza a sunken, closed court. It marks the eastern edge of the city core.			



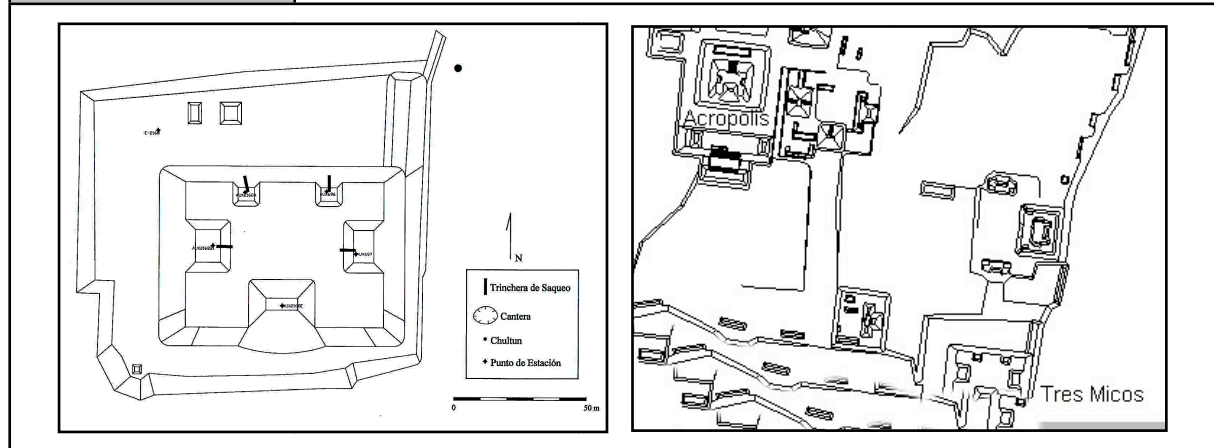
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
El Mirador / Guatemala	Monos	S	LPC	Copeland 1989
Description	Third largest construction at El Mirador, the Monos complex is a Fractal-Type Triadic Group. It marks the southern margins of the centre, being located behind the Central Acropolis. It consists of three levels, two bottommost are oriented ca. 13 degrees east from north, and the top level - 8 degrees. The whole structure measures 127x160 m and rises 42 m above the plaza.			



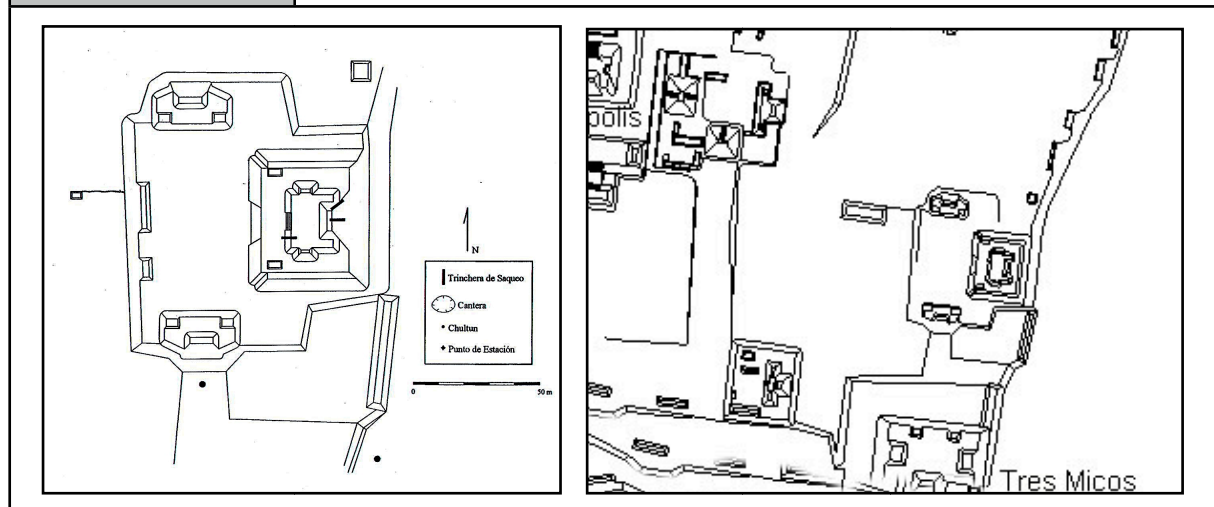
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
El Mirador / Guatemala	Pava	S	LPC	Howell and Evans Copeland 1989; Suyuc Ley et al. 2008:526-527
Description	<p>The Pava Acropolis shares the same basal platform with Danta complex, situated on the Platform 1 southern edge. The acropolis consists of several tiers, connected with two megalithic stairways. It has been dated to Late Preclassic period, with some later occupation. The Building 2A6-6 located to the left (east) from the entrance, features four stucco masks, set on each terrace flanking the central stairway, resembling the Maize God. The structure was probably crowned by a perishable building. Building 2A6-3, or the central temple, also features such pattern of stucco masks, however the poor state of preservation hampers further analysis. The rightmost, or western building, 2A6-5, apparently underwent at least one later constructive stage, perhaps during final years of the Classic Period.</p>			
				

Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
El Mirador / Guatemala	Tigre	W	LPC	Hansen 1990
Description	<p>Second largest construction at El Mirador, and one of the largest pre-conquest structures in the New World. Its main superstructure rises ca. 53 m above the ground level, and 25 m. above the platform. Lateral structures are 11 m high. It faces the Danta complex located some 2 km to the east and Chicharras at the opposite edge of the city centre. It is oriented ca. 5 degrees east from magnetic north, towards west. The Tigre complex was flanking the city core to the west, being the most prominent structure of the centre.</p>			
				

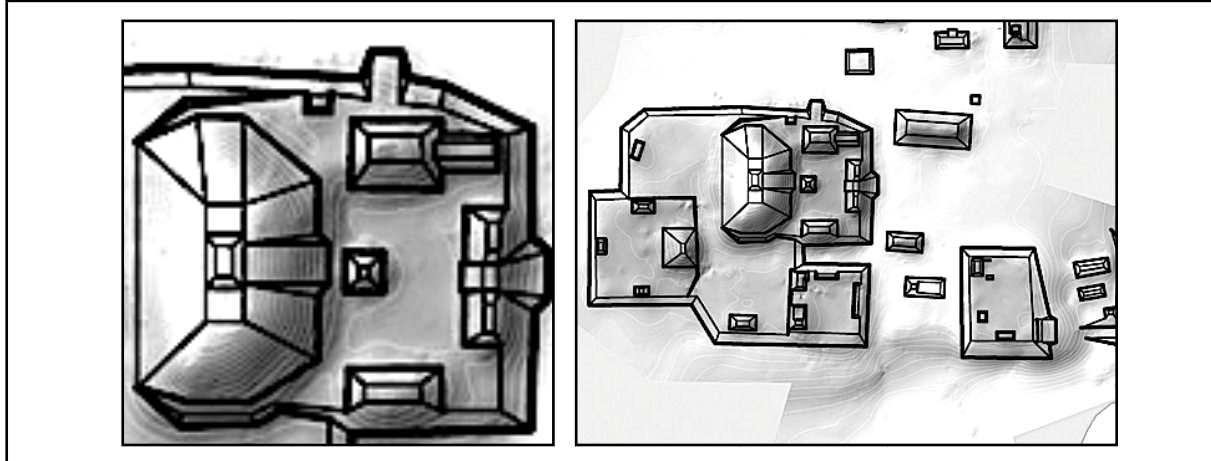
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
El Mirador / Guatemala	Tres Hermanos (South Acropolis)	S	LPC	Suyuc Ley and Hansen 2005:228
Description	A relatively large complex (90x65 m), with the basal platform 8 to 10 m high. On top, the principal pyramid elevates further some 16 m, while the flanking structures are 6 m tall. The complex marks the southwestern corner of the city centre.			



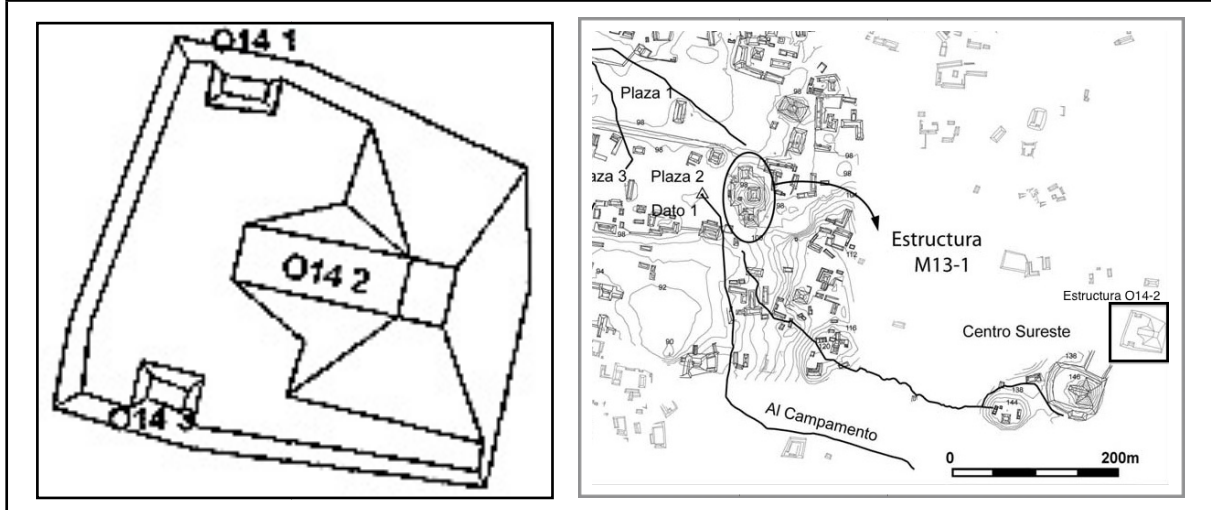
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
El Mirador / Guatemala	Tres Micos	E	LPC	Suyuc Ley and Hansen 2005:228
Description	Adjoining the Tres Hermanos complex from the north, the Micos group measures 105x97 m. It is an example of Fractal-Type Triadics. The main superstructure, measuring 40x68 m, further bears a Triadic, of which the main superstructure is yet another Triadic. Both lateral structures of the bottom level possibly bear triadic layouts as well.			



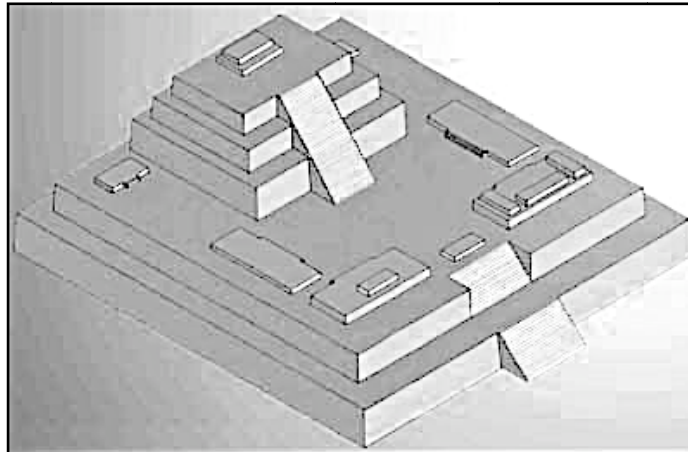
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
El Palmar / Guatemala	Triadic Group	W	LPC	Doyle 2013
Description	A large complex (100x160 m) that constitutes the focal point of the entire site. It is located a short distance to southwest from the earlier E-Group. It consists of a pair of entrance controlling structures, a triad of superstructures, and a small construction in front of the monumental stairway leading to the summit of the central pyramid. Vestiges of a masonry structure were found on the summit of the main superstructure. This is the only case of a site-unique Triadic oriented to the west.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
El Peru (Waka) / Guatemala	O14 (1-3)	E	PC - LC	Rich et al. 2007
Description	Triadic Structure O14-2 (consisting of Str. 14-1 and 14-3 as well) is a part of the Group of Three Structures, or the Mirador Group, constructed on a natural hilltop 45 m high, overlooking the centre some 350 m away. The platform measures ca. 60x50 m. The complex is somewhat dwarfed by the neighbouring non-Triadic Structure O14-4.			

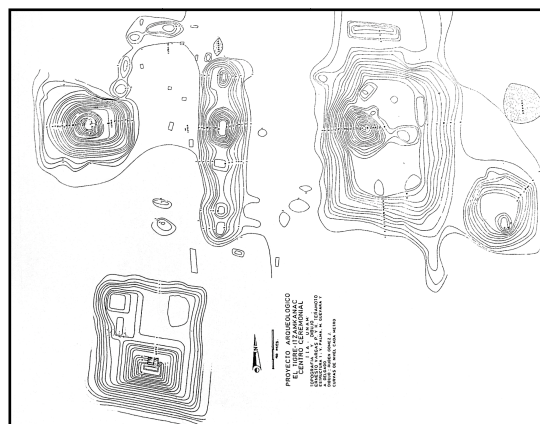
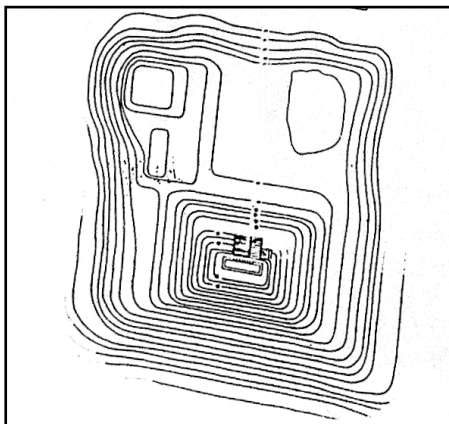


Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
El Socotzal / Guatemala	Triadic Acropolis	?	LPC (?)	Fialko 2005a
Description	A two-tiered Triadic, constituting the most of a small peripheral site of Tikal on its southern edge. Data missing.			

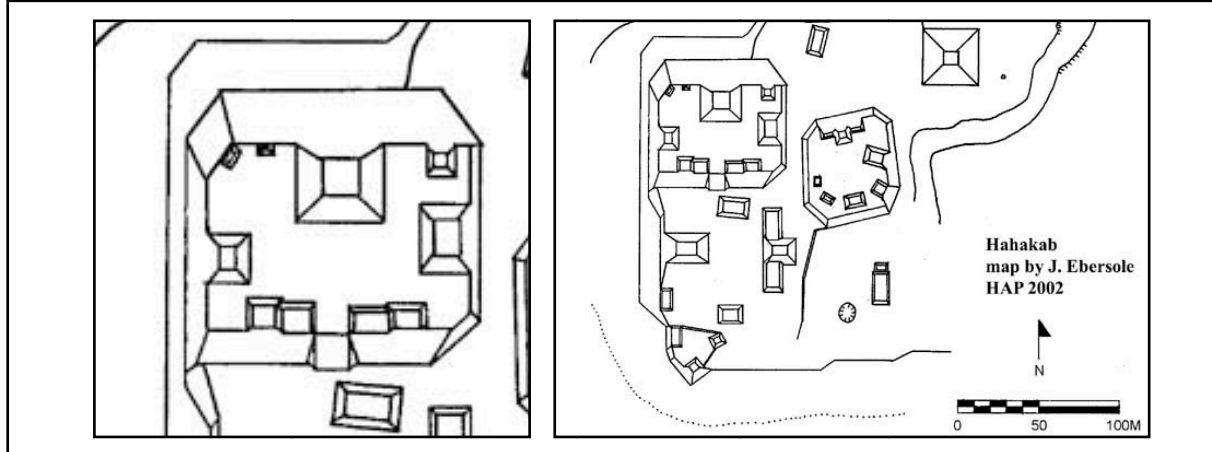


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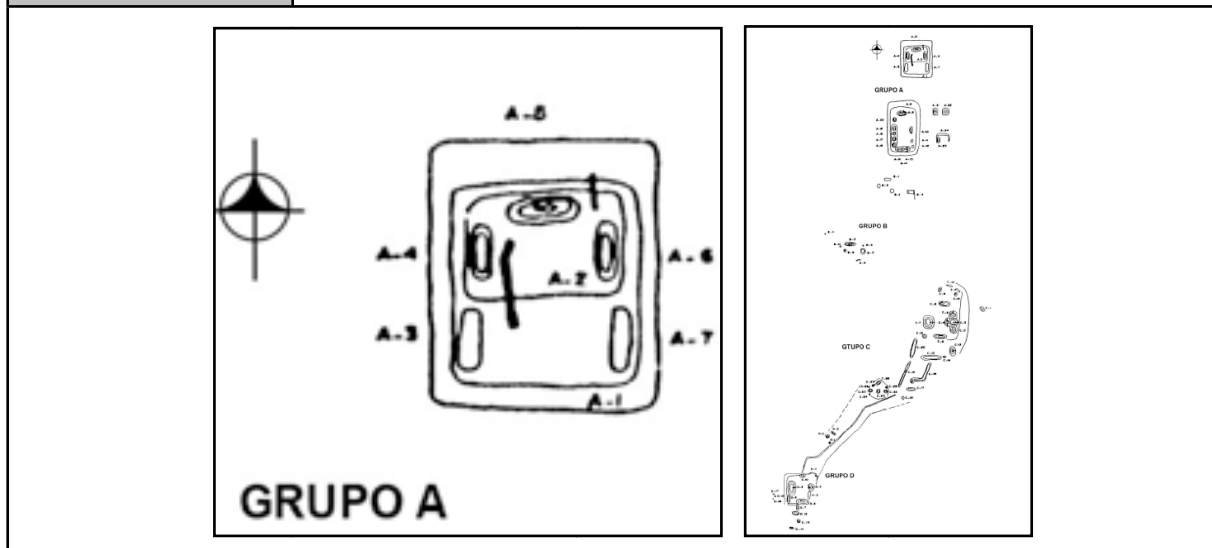
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
El Tigre (Itzamkanac) / Mexico	1 (?)	S	LPC	Vargas Pacheco and Delgado Salgado 2003
Description	Although the ultimate phase of Structure 1 has not been listed as Triadic, being dated to the LAte and Terminal Classic, its earlier version, dating to the Late Preclassic, might have been Triadic in arrangement. The presence of stucco friezes at the bottom tier of the facade further points to the triadic character of the building. It is a relatively large structure, 149x132 m, some 25 m tall, that borders the central plaza to the south. At the same time it is one of the most prominent loci of the city.			



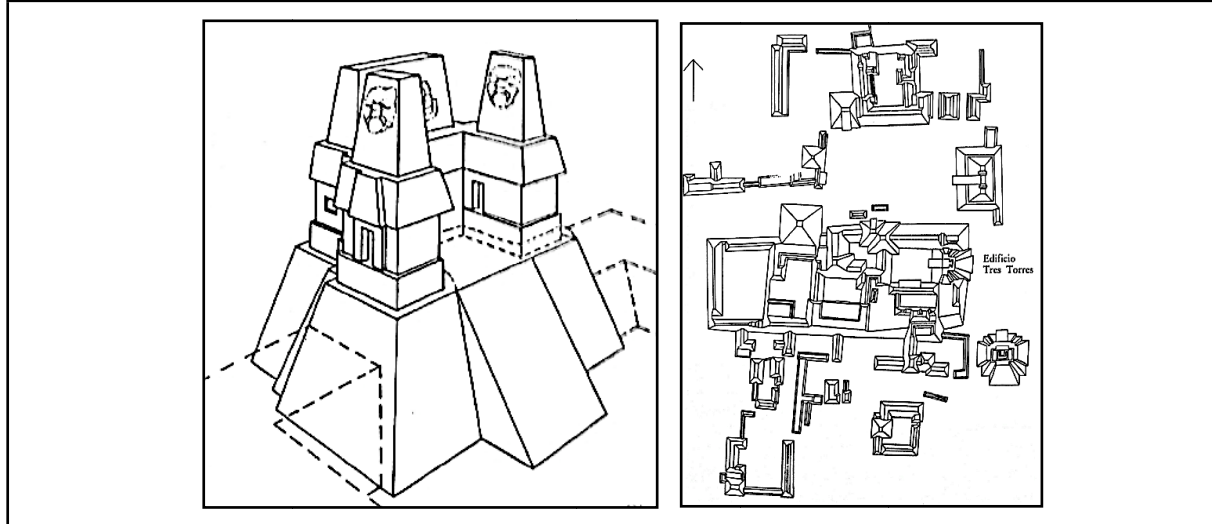
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
Hahakab / Guatemala	Triadic Group	N	?	Estrada-Belli 2003:11-12
Description	The most prominent construction of the small site, measuring some 18 m in height. The layout on the summit resembles the H-Group at Uaxactun. It is adjoined by an E-Group immediately to the south. No secure dating has been established.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
Holtun / Guatemala	Group A (1-7)	N	LPC - EC	Ponciano 1995
Description	The whole site follows the natural karstic crest stretching from the southwest towards northeast. Group A constitutes the northernmost, and the highest, point of the site. The most prominent building is the Triadic Platform that actually forms a Fractal-Type, 2-Tiered Triad. The basal platform measures 50x70 m, and bears vestiges of stucco friezes along its frontal facade; the most preserved masks adorn the facade of Structure A-2, or the main pyramid of the Triadic.			



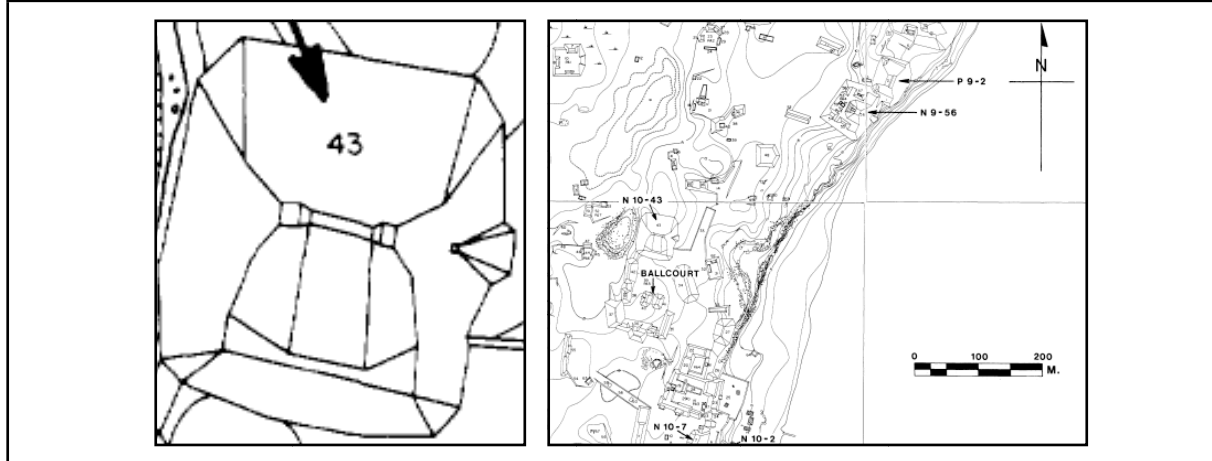
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
La Honradez / Guatemala	VII	E	?	Quintana and Wurster 2001:73
Description	A U-Type Triadic Group set on top of a steep pyramid that flanks the central acropolis of this middle size site. Not excavated, not dated. The site has been prone to a heavy looting activity.			



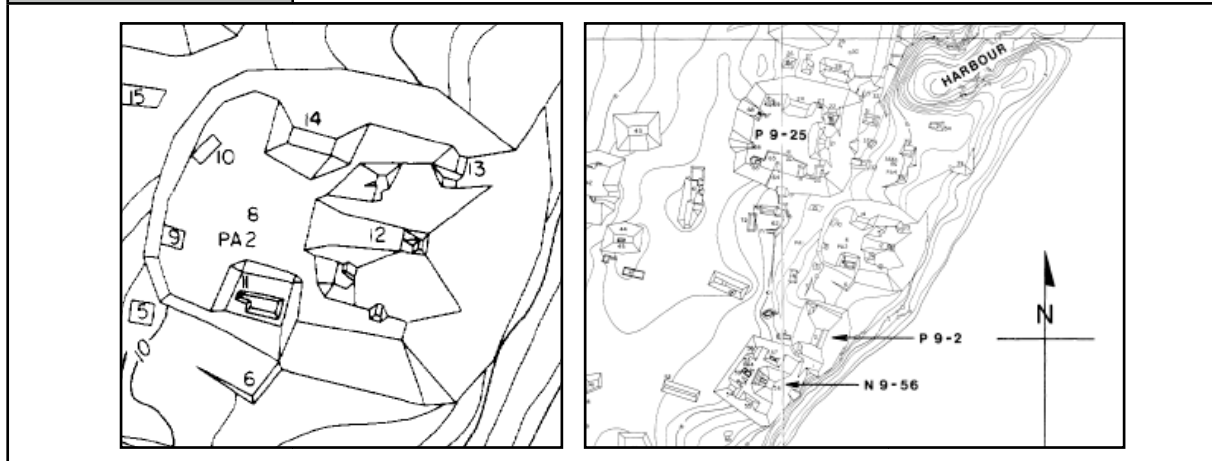
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Lamanai / Belize	N9-56	E	LPC - EC	Pendergast 1981; Grube 2006:59, 446
Description	Built in the middle of the shoreline of entire site, it faces the centre, having its back to the river. It consists of several structures, with the central pyramid 17 m tall. 4 m tall stucco masks on both sides of the stairway. Several stages of development, in use at least until Early Classic times.			



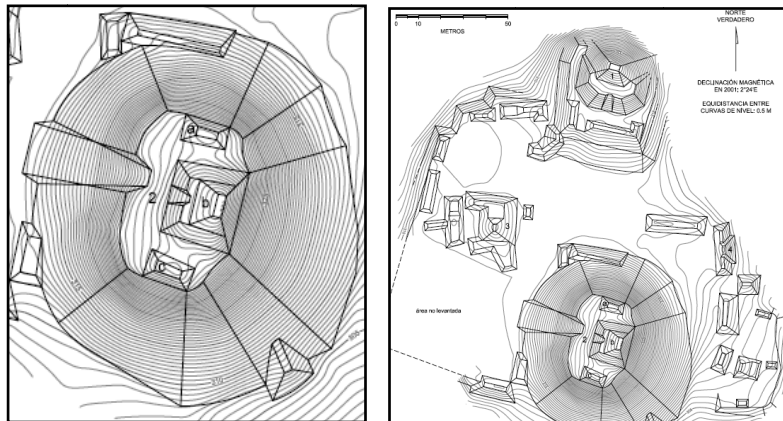
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Lamanai / Belize	N10-43	N	LPC - EC	Pendergast 1981; Grube 2006:59, 446
Description	The tallest (33 m) structure at the site, marks the most important, central locus. During the first phases of development, until the end of Early Classic, triadic layout visible on the summit of the main pyramid. The base once adorned with large stucco friezes.			



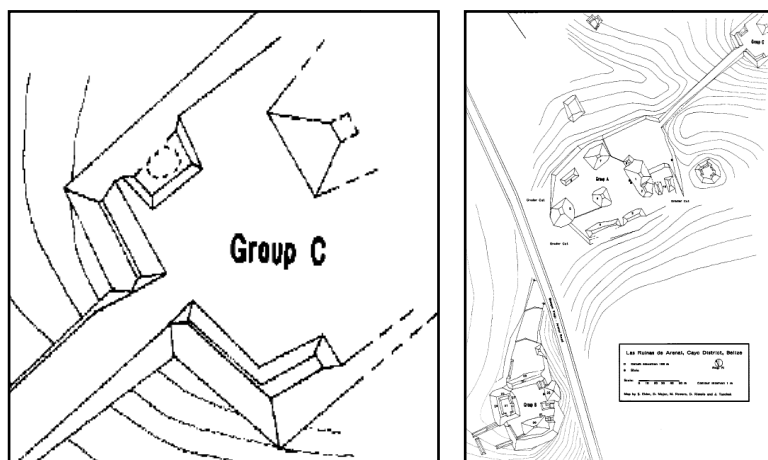
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Lamanai / Belize	P9-12	E	LPC - EC	Pendergast 1981; Grube 2006:59, 446
Description	One of the largest structures at Lamanai, it is oriented towards the lagoon and the river. Its construction has been dated to the same boom period of the Late Preclassic as the N10-43.			



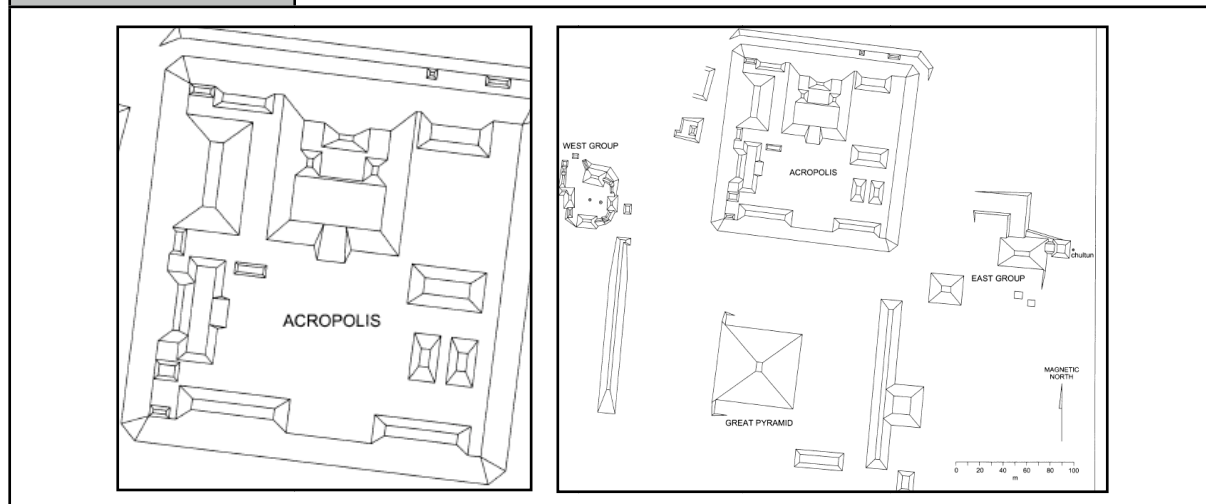
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Las Delicias / Mexico	2	E	EC	Šprajc 2008:95
Description	The Triadic, labelled Str. 2, dominates the area with its height of 33 m. Although the sherds found within the looters' trench represent the early Tzakol phase, the structural and morphological similarities between this building and Structure 59 from Nakbe point towards the former's Late Preclassic origin.			



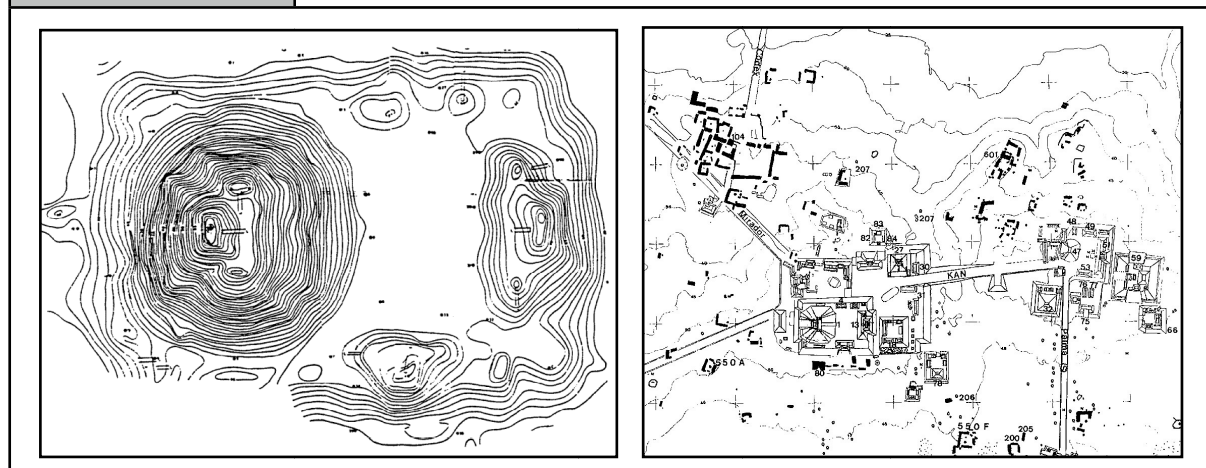
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Las Ruinas de Arenal / Belize	Group C	E	?	Taschek and Ball 1999
Description	A group removed from the centre of that small site, consisting of just one basal platform that bears a triadic layout of superstructures. Instead of having a monumental stairway leading to the platform summit, apparently it was connected with a ramp with the causeway running from the core groups to its terminus in the C Group. No excavations have been conducted; no secure dating can be established.			



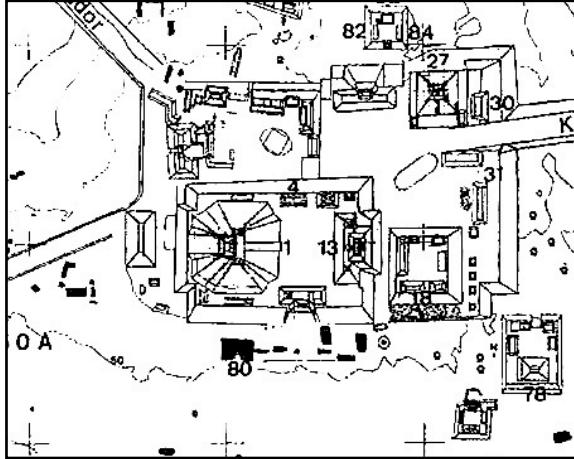
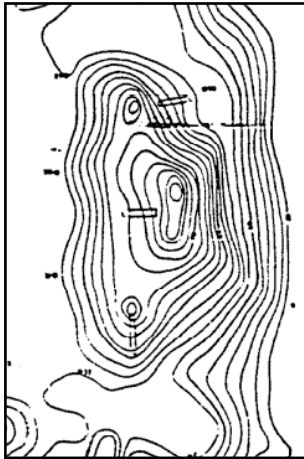
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Mucaancah / Mexico	Northern Sector Acropolis Str. 1	N	PC	Šprajc 2008:45, fig. 4.47
Description	A large (150x150 m) basal platform, some 7 m high, with a 10 m tall pyramid on its northern edge. That pyramid bears three superstructures arranged in a triadic layout. Pottery sample features sherds from Chicanel, Tzakol, and Tepeu periods alike, but the size and architectural features of the Acropolis point to its Late Preclassic date. Immediately to the south a probable E-Group is located.			



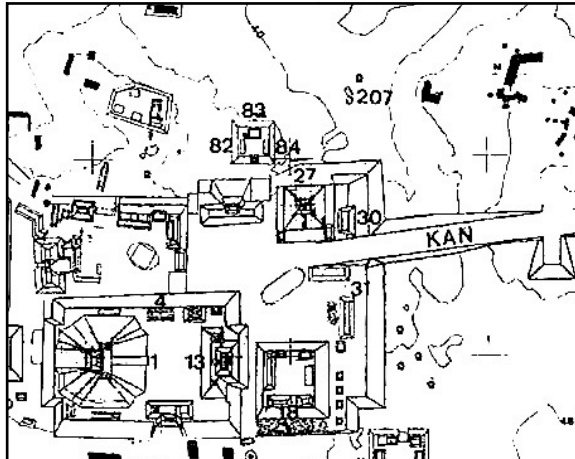
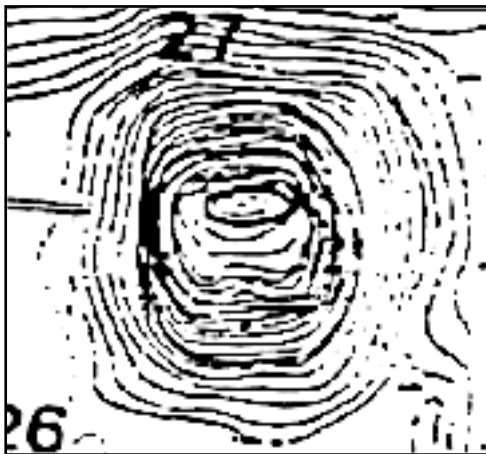
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Nakbe / Guatemala	1	W	LPC	Martinez Hidalgo and Hansen 1992
Description	The largest structure in Nakbe; basal platform measures ca. 200x150 m, and bears four Triadic complexes. Structure no. 1 is the tallest pyramid, measuring 45 m in height. Both sides of its monumental stairway are adorned with massive stucco masks. The summit is crowned with a triad of structures that might have been roofed. It constitutes a principal point within the city core; the platform further bears other Triadic Groups.			



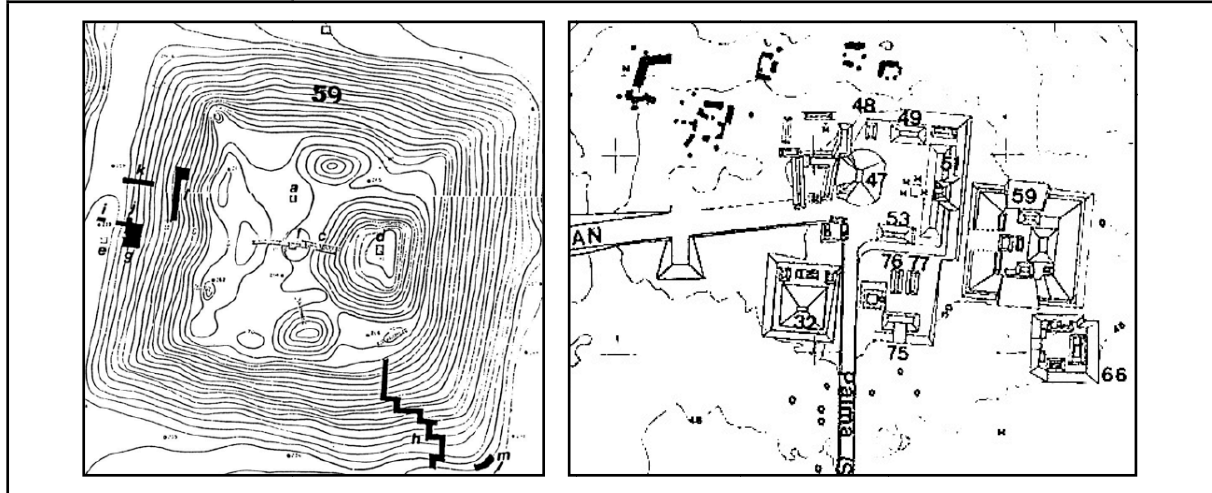
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Nakbe / Guatemala	13	E	LPC	Hansen 1991
Description	T-Type Triadic Group that faces the Structure 1 pyramid, sharing the same basal platform. It flanks the elevated plaza from its eastern side, and measures 19 m in height. Due to its location the access to the basal platform was blocked along its longer axis, leaving most probably the northern side as an access route.			



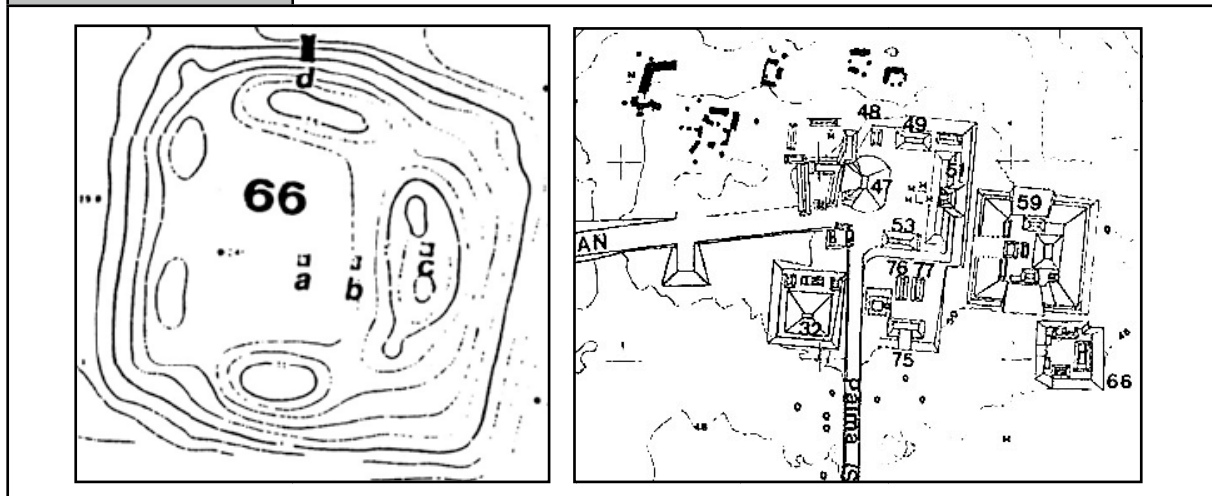
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Nakbe / Guatemala	27	N	LPC	Forsyth and Acevedo 1994
Description	One of the most prominent structures of the Western Group, Structure 27 rises 24 m high on the northeastern corner of a grand elevated platform that constitutes the Western Group. The lateral buildings are much smaller than the northern pyramid. The stairway leading to the summit of the main pyramid was flanked by large stucco friezes, now almost completely destroyed. The whole complex guards the beginning of the <i>Kan</i> causeway that connects the Western and Eastern Groups.			



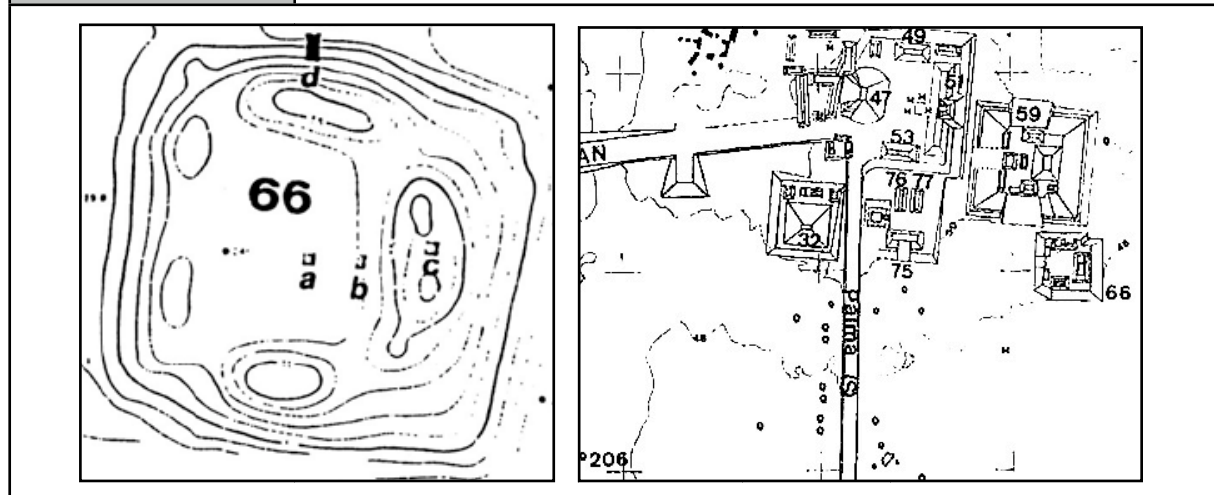
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Nakbe / Guatemala	59	E	LPC	Martinez Hidalgo 1994
Description	The largest acropolis in the Eastern Group, str. 59 borders the centre from the east. It's massive basal platform is in a very bad state of preservation, and hence does not permit any detailed analyses of the architectural and artistic features. The group was reoccupied during the Late Classic, and the Triadic pattern disappeared in a number of subsequent construction activities.			



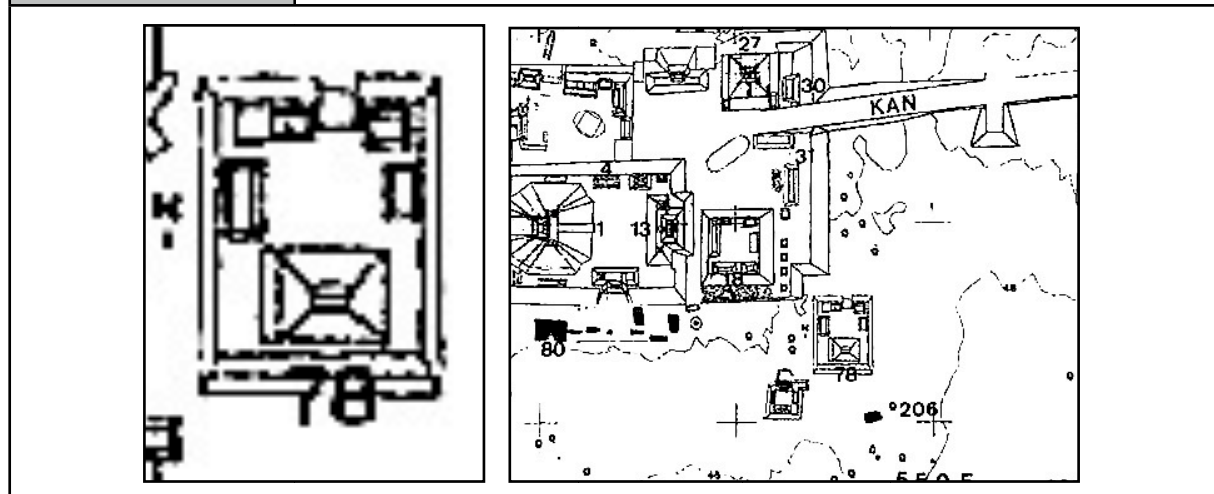
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Nakbe / Guatemala	66	E	LPC	Martinez Hidalgo 1994
Description	The largest acropolis in the Eastern Group, str. 59 borders the centre from the east. It's massive basal platform is in a very bad state of preservation, and hence does not permit any detailed analyses of the architectural and artistic features. The group was reoccupied during the Late Classic, and the Triadic pattern disappeared in a number of subsequent construction activities.			



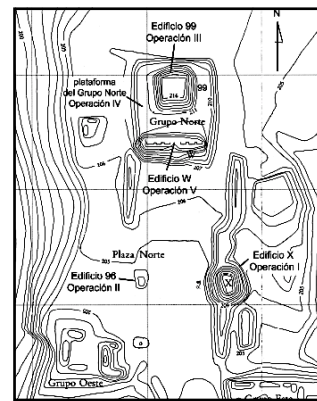
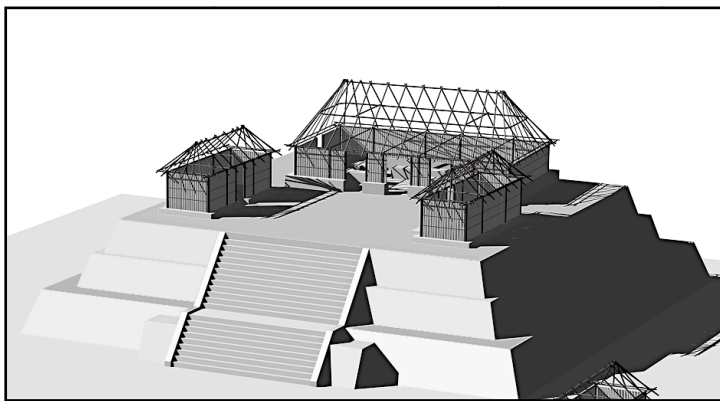
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Nakbe / Guatemala	66	E	LPC	Martinez Hidalgo 1994
Description	A medium-sized acropolis dwarfed by Str. 59 immediately to the north. It was separated from it by a paved passage. It is removed farther east from the core than Str. 59. Not fully excavated.			



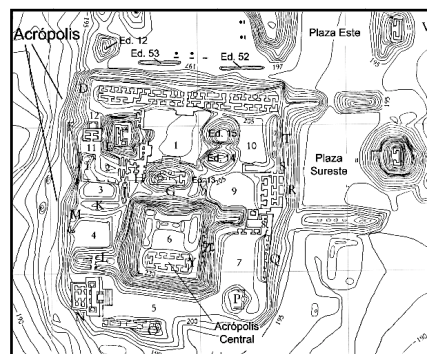
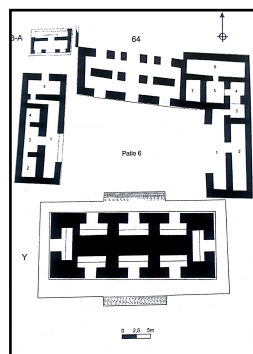
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Nakbe / Guatemala	78	S	LPC	Monterroso Tun 1999
Description	A small, heavily looted Triadic Group southeast from Structure 1, just off the great basal platform of the Western Group. Not excavated.			



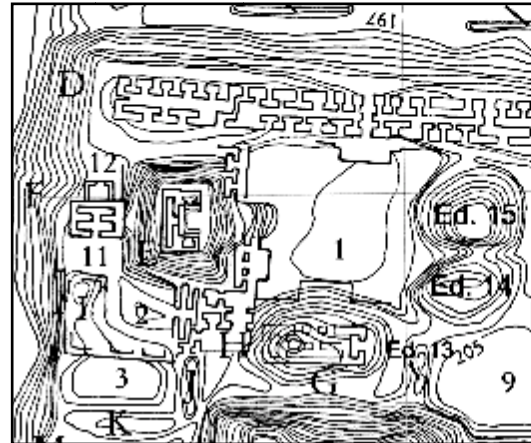
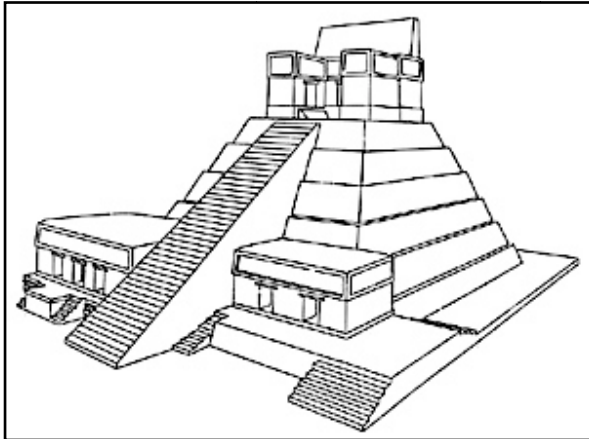
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
Nakum / Guatemala	99	N	TC	Koszkul <i>et al.</i> 2008
Description	The most prominent building of the Northern Group, structure 99 is a Fractal-Type Triadic Group. It's basal platform measures 42x39 m, and is 8 m high. It bore a triad of semi-perishable buildings, with two more flanking the plaza in front of the platform. It dates to the Terminal Classic, although the Northern Group in general is a Late Preclassic construction. The access was provided through a set of range buildings on the southern edge of the platform, with Northern Plaza spreading further south, and Perigny Causeway running towards the Southern Sector.			



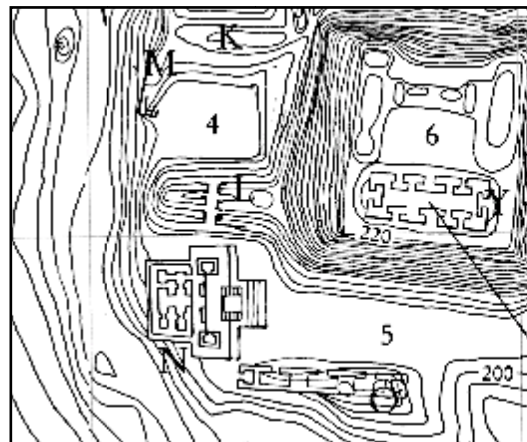
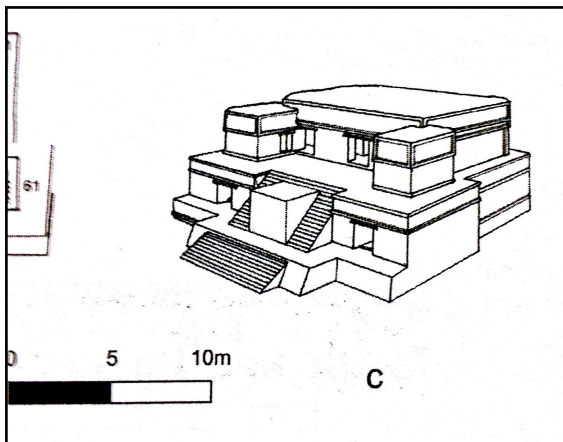
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
Nakum / Guatemala	Interior Acropolis	S	LPC - TC (?)	Žračka 2008:83-89
Description	The Inner Acropolis is the highest point of the city, being constructed in the heart of the Southern Acropolis. Its second stage of development, dating to the Late Preclassic, manifested in a terraced platform, ca. 13 m high and measuring roughly 20x20 m at the base. It was crowned with a triad of buildings that were erased at the end of Preclassic times. The Terminal Classic, ultimate stage of development restored the triad of buildings with a range building to the north guarding the access. The function of the Terminal Classic Interior Acropolis might have shifted from ritual to residential or administrative.			



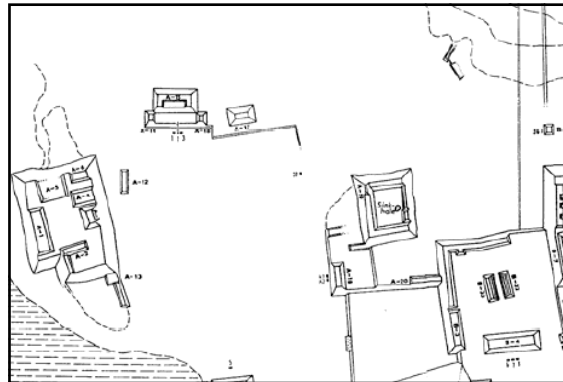
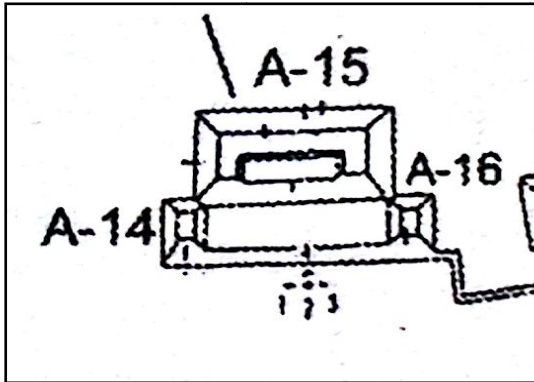
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Nakum / Guatemala	E	W	TC	Žraška 2008:50-55
Description	An example of the U-Type Triadic, it became one only during its three ultimate, Terminal Classic stages of development. Before it was a singular superstructure elevated on a pyramid measuring ca. 30 m at its base. The ultimate building is a unusually formed temple, with two buildings inset at the bottom part of the substructure, and an inverted <i>talud</i> decoration at the top. It marks the western edge of the Southern Acropolis.			



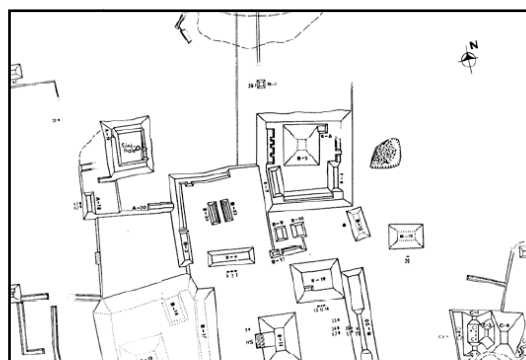
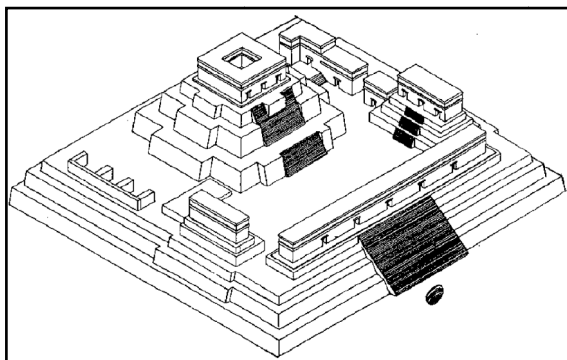
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Nakum / Guatemala	N	W	LC - TC	Žraška 2008:70
Description	Structure N/60/61 is hidden behind the south-western corner of the Southern Acropolis. It also features the U-Type Triadic that emerged during a multi-staged evolution of that building. Two tiers of chambers are connected by a stairway, that at first led to three separate temples on the top. During the Terminal Classic western structure (N) grew larger and partially embraced both lateral shrines.			



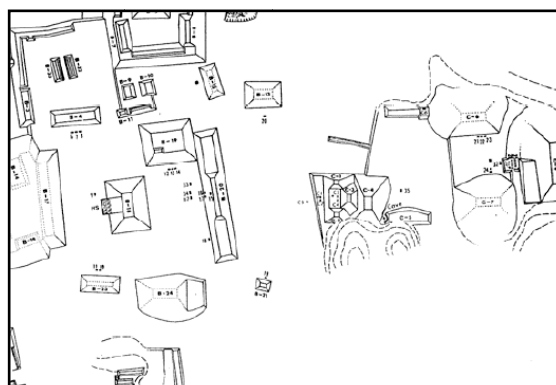
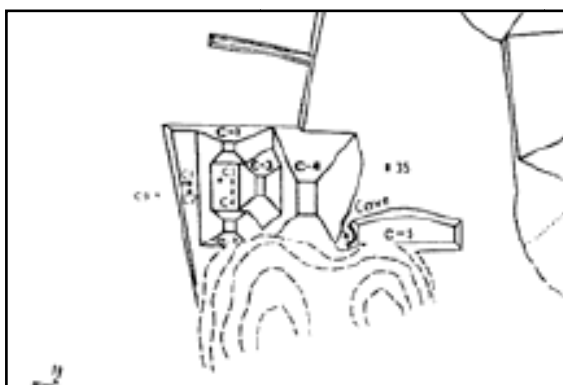
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Naranjo / Guatemala	A-15	N	TC	Aquino 2007:594; Žračka 2008:137
Description	A T-Type Triadic Group at the far northwestern corner of the city centre. An entrance to a cave is located in the vicinity of the basal platform.			



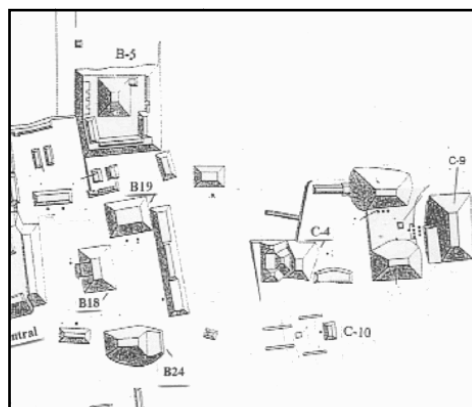
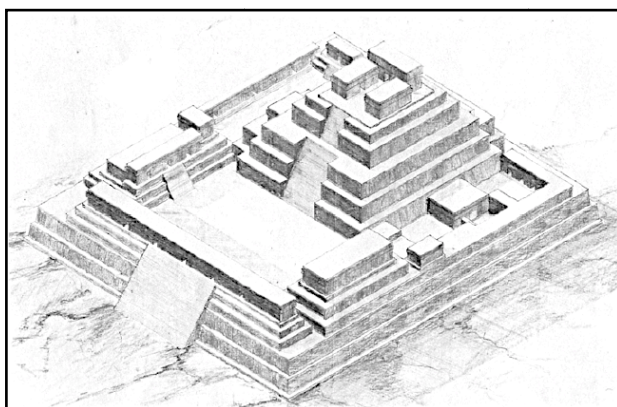
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Naranjo / Guatemala	B-5	N	EC - LC	Fialko 2004; Žračka 2008:138-141
Description	Built in the heart of the ceremonial core of Naranjo, with the main plaza and the E-Group immediately south of it, and a ball court to the west.. It evolved from a simple platform during the Preclassic times into a simple Triadic during the Early Classic, and subsequently into an elaborate Triadic Acropolis during the Tepeu phases of Late Classic. It measures 115x150 m at the base and 32 m in height. In front of the monumental stairway an entrance to a cave is located.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Naranjo / Guatemala	C-3	E	EC - LC	Fialko 2005b
Description	The Triadic crowns a natural hilltop immediately in front of a giant C-9 Triadic Group. It is relatively small, with basal platform measuring roughly 50x60 m. It closes the eastern side of the main plaza, sharing the axis with the E-Group. Although the traces of architecture date back to Chicanel phase, its triadic form appeared during the Tzakol times and lasted until Tepeu 2.			



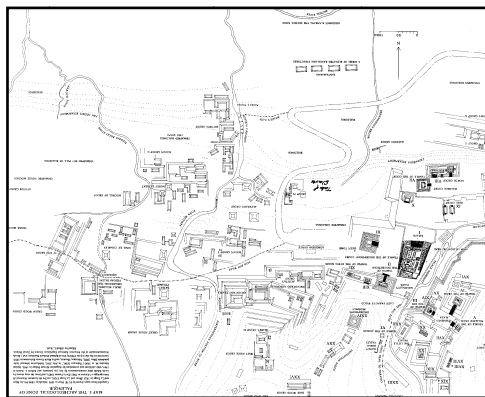
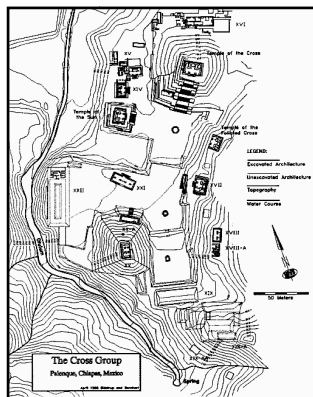
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Naranjo / Guatemala	C-9	E	LPC - TC	Fialko 2005b; Žračka 2008:145
Description	A very large architectural group, measuring ca. 120x100 m. It is located on a large natural rock outcrop that delimits the city core to the east. The earliest architecture dated within C-9 dates back as far as Mamom ceramic complex of Middle Preclassic period. Triadic layout appears during Chicanel and lasts until the end of the Classic period, making C-9 one of the longest-present Triadics within Naranjo. At least during the later phases of development it might have been a Fractal-Type. A cave entrance is located underneath the main pyramid.			



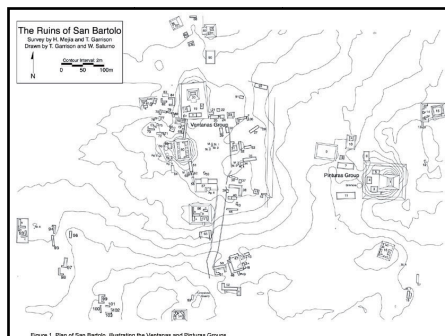
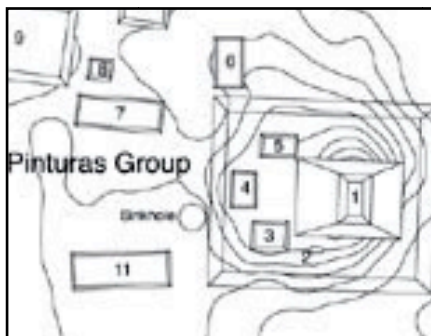
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Naranjo / Guatemala	C-10	E	EC - LC	Fialko 2005b
Description	Another hilltop group to the east, just south of C-3. A small group of structures, of which the main pyramid measures some 40 m at the base. It is flanked by two low elongated platforms. In the middle of an enclosed plaza an altar or a ritual platform is located. Its major period of architectural development has been dated to the Late Classic, although it is possibly a modification of an earlier, Early Classic locus.			

Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Naranjo / Guatemala	D-1	N	LPC - TC	Fialko 2005b
Description	Removed far north of the core, D-1 is connected with the centre by an elevated causeway. It crowns a hill that has been architecturally modified at least until the Middle Preclassic times. The triadic layout appeared during the Late Classic times and was present until the Terminal Classic. During that time the access to this group was closed by a wall blocking the causeway.			

Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Palenque / Mexico	Cross Group	N	LC	Cohodas 1985:61-62; Sharer and Traxler 2006:467-470
Description	Probably the only Triadic Group with known dedication date and the founder's name - it was inaugurated in AD 692 by Kan Bahlam, the son of Pakal the Great. Its artistic programme focuses mainly on various stages of Kan Bahlam's enthronement intertwined with the Palenque Triad veneration. The group, although adjoining the main plaza to the west, is somewhat separated from the core due to the location of its monumental entrance from the south. It consists of the central Temple of the Cross (TC), Temple of the Sun (TS) to the west, and Temple of the Foliated Cross (TFC) to the east. The basal platform merges with the natural plateau, and the TC and TFC substructures are partially natural knolls. Large decoration panels are displayed within the inner sanctuaries set inside each temple.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
San Bartolo / Guatemala	Pinturas	E	LPC - PC	Saturno 2002
Description	Removed 500 m from the core, the Pinturas group is a very large complex, with its main pyramid reaching 26 m in height. At the back of the ultimate stage of this building, within its fill, the earlier temple with elaborate mural paintings have been found. The triadic layout seems to be a later redesign of space within the group. Together with structures 7 and 11 on the plaza level, the Pinturas Group might be classified as a Fractal-Type.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
San Bartolo / Guatemala	Ventanas	N	LPC - PC	Saturno 2002
Description	This complex delimits the core from the north, marking the edge of the main plaza. The western edge is occupied by a grand palace structure, and the eastern one by a ball court. At the opposite end of the plaza from Ventanas, a causeway runs several hundred meters south and then disappears among the <i>bajos</i> . The main pyramid of the Ventanas Triadic encapsulates a number of earlier construction episodes dating as far back as the Mamom ceramic phase. The first triadic arrangement, though, can be securely dated to the Late Preclassic period.			

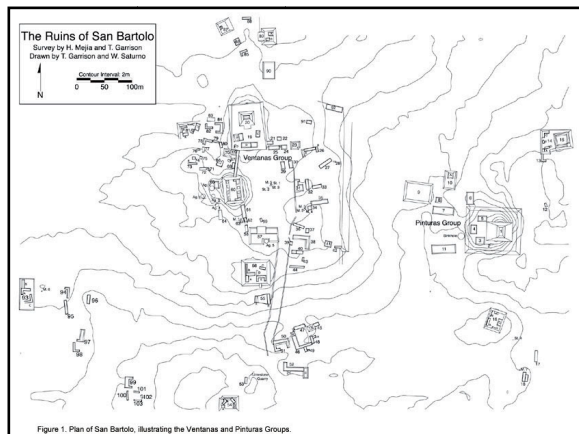
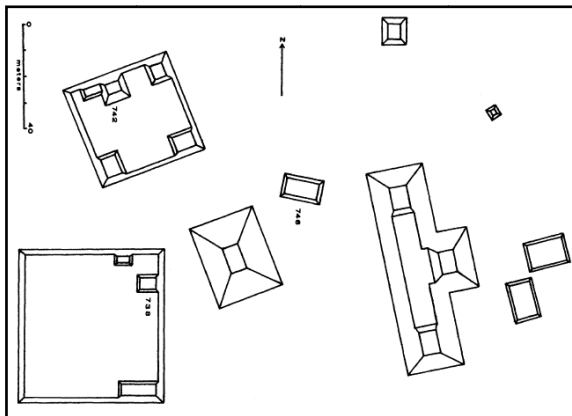
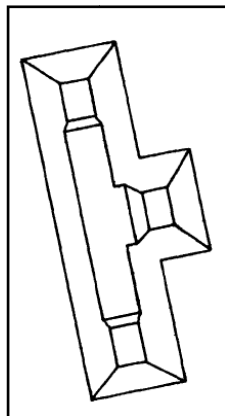
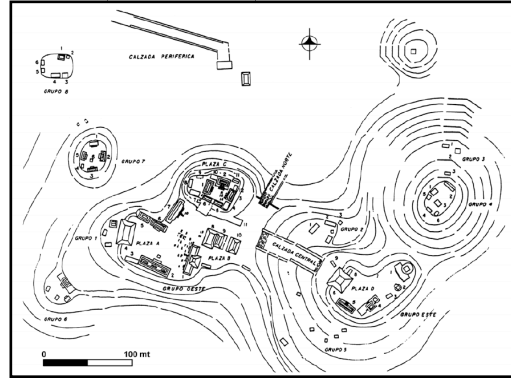
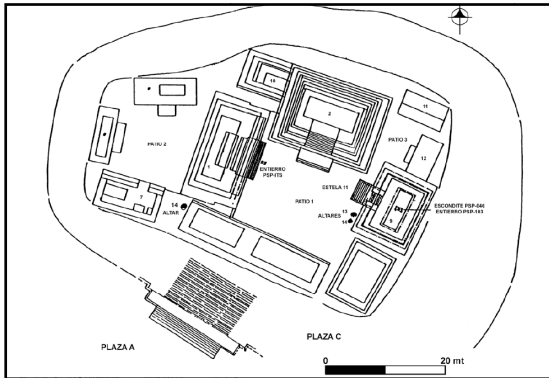


Figure 1. Plan of San Bartolo, illustrating the Ventanas and Piruras Groups.

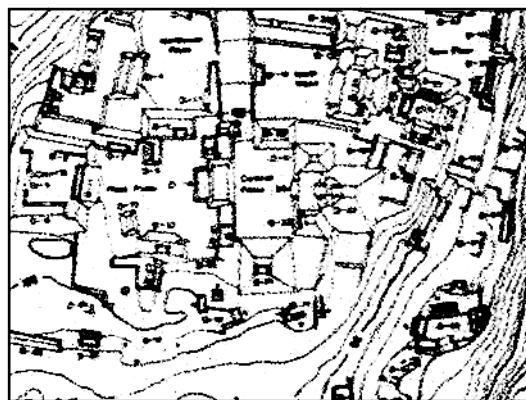
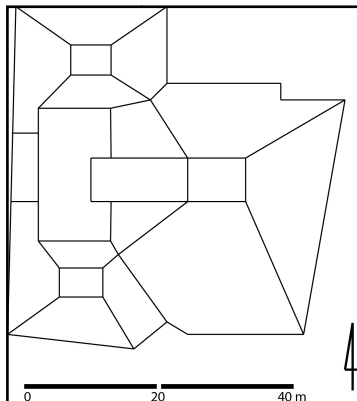
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Sacnab / Guatemala	?	E	LPC - PC	Rice 1976:437-439.
Description	A possible example of the T-Type of Triadics (depending of the front side locations of the lateral structures). This small site, never thoroughly investigated, has yielded a sequence of pottery dating back to the Middle Preclassic period. It is not certain whether the Triadic was built at the end of the Middle Preclassic, or at the beginning of the Late Preclassic period; the overall data set points to the latter as a more plausible scenario.			

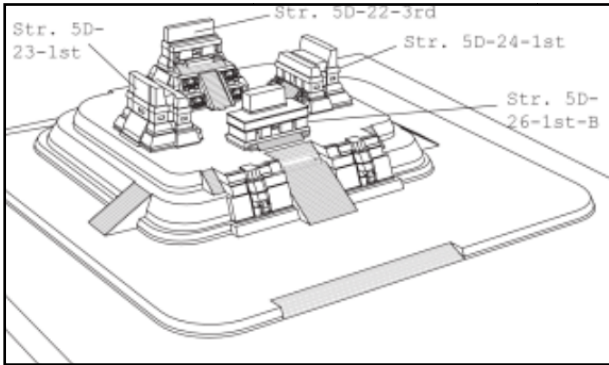
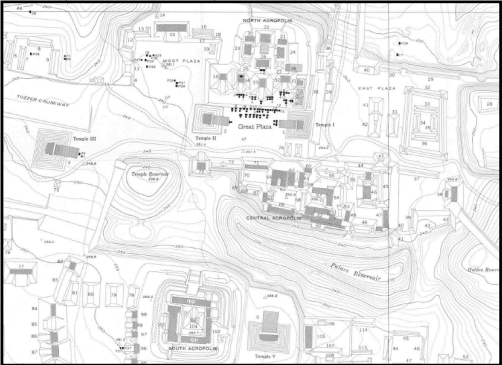



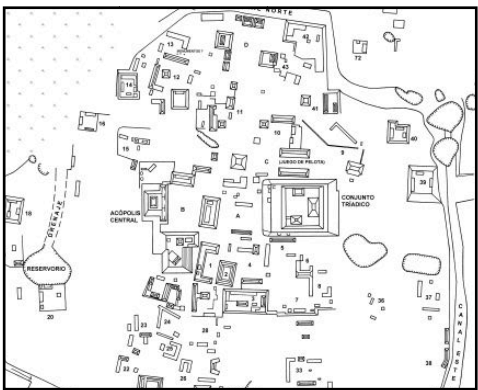
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Sacul / Guatemala	Plaza C (1-3)	N	LC - TC	Ramos 1999
Description	A relatively small site, with several architectural groups scattered on tops of natural knolls. The Triadic Group constitutes the main construction of the Plaza C, on the northwestern part of the city. To the south of the Triadic Patio 1 extends a plaza with a ball court and a possible E-Group. The Triadic itself is a middle-sized group of substructures with single-chambered masonry superstructures. There are burials and caches found within particular Triadic buildings.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Seibal / Guatemala	Group D Triad	E	LC - TC	Smith 1982:210-213
Description	A medium sized (roughly 40x50 m at the base) platform with a triadic layout, that forms the core of Group D, flanking its eastern edge. The plaza is set on the top of a hill overlooking the area and the nearby river. Groups A and C are in the vicinity, and all three are connected by a system of causeways. The Triadic was first constructed during the Late Classic times, together with the whole group.			



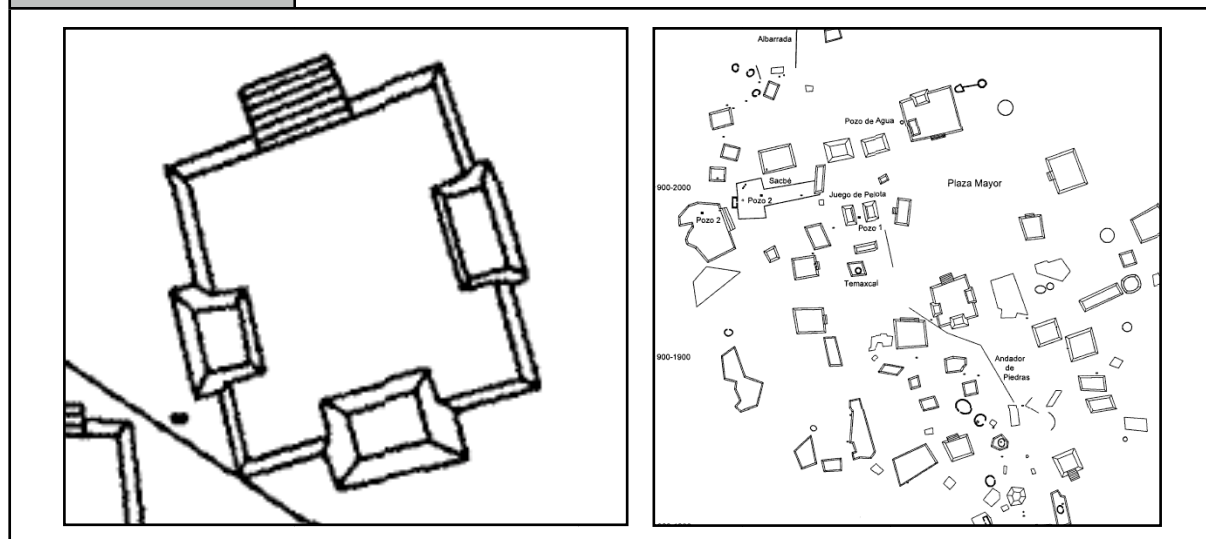
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Tikal / Guatemala	5D-22 Triad	N	LPC - EC	Loten 2007:43-66
Description	One of the earliest monumental groups in Tikal, it forms the core of Northern Acropolis. During its first stages of development it was an elevated platform, partially natural, with an array of structures. During the Chicanel phase it became a Triadic, and at the end of Early Classic the acropolis bore a number of structures facing south, effectively blocking the access and losing the triadic layout.			
				

Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Tintal / Guatemala	Triadic Complex	E	LPC - PC	Hansen <i>et al.</i> 2006
Description	Large platform (105x78 m) bearing a Triadic group, of which the central building reaches 44 m in height. It forms the central part of the whole site, being set at the core of the principal group, called Mano de Leon, which was circumscribed by a moat or a canal.			
				

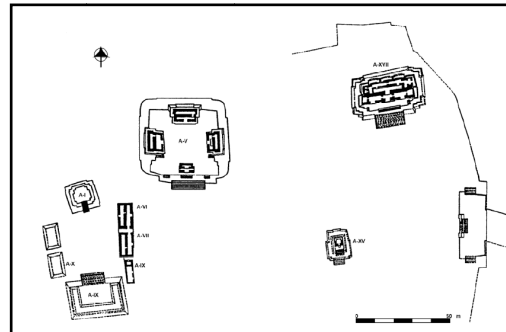
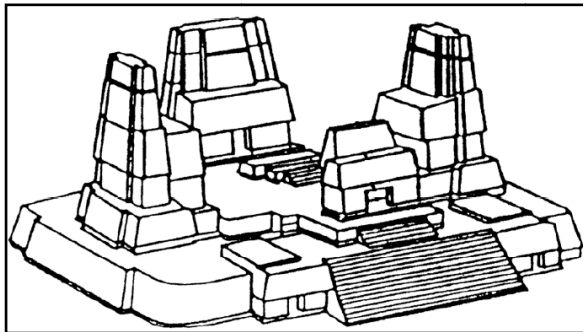
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
Tintal / Guatemala	?	?	LPC - PC (?)	Hansen 1998:80
Description	Briefly mentioned, no description, no plan. Data missing.			
?				

Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
T'ot / Guatemala	?	?	LPC	Estrada-Belli 2006:58; 2001:11-12
Description	Briefly mentioned, no description, no plan. Data missing.			
?				

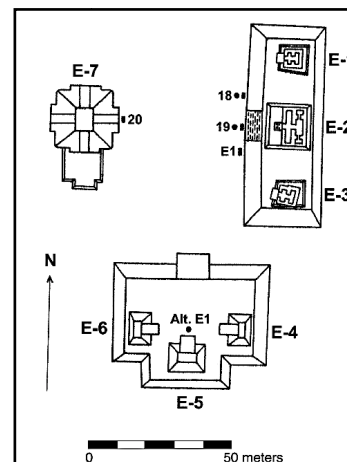
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
Tzicul / Mexico	?	S	EC - LC	Robles and Andrews 2001:23-25; 2003:34
Description	The Triadic platform occupies the central space of the middle-sized site of Tzicul.			



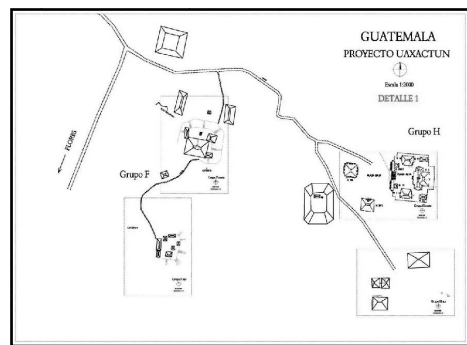
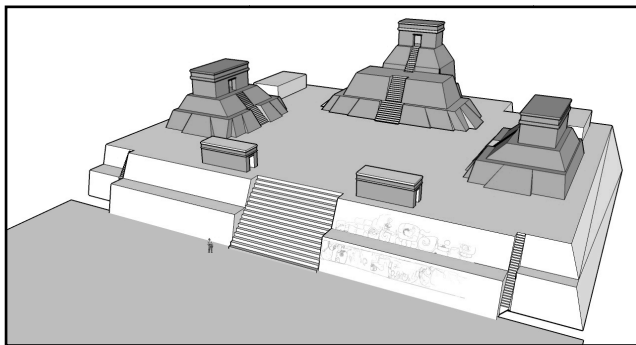
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Uaxactun / Guatemala	A-V	N	EC	Valdes 1989; 1993
Description	During the Tzakol phases of Uaxactun development, the A-V complex was located within the core of the A group. It was designed to be triadic, and that layout had been carefully preserved during the whole Early Classic period. At the end of the Tzakol ceramic phase the A-V triadic arrangement disappeared in a mass of walls and vaults, effectively turning into a multi-chambered palace-like building with a courtyard at the centre.			



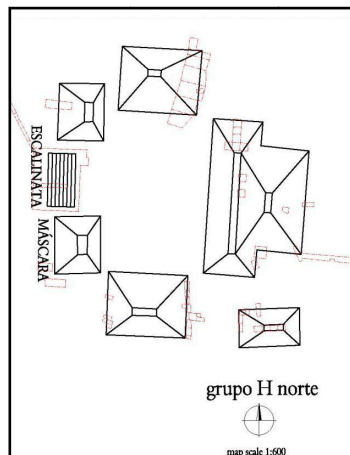
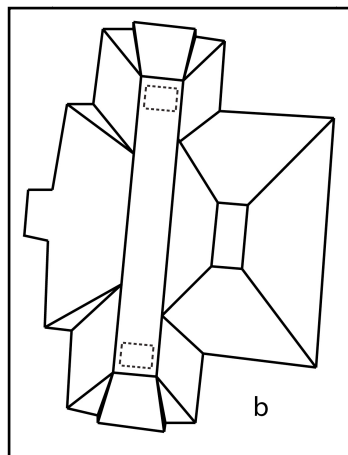
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Uaxactun / Guatemala	Group E Triadic	S	LPC - EC	Ricketson and Ricketson 1937; Kovač et al. 2010:798
Description	A medium-sized platform on the southern edge of the plaza flanked from east and west by the actual E-Group complex. It originally bore three platforms, perhaps bases for perishable structures, aligned in a triadic fashion. Its beginnings date back to the establishment of the monumental architecture within Group E somewhere during the Late Preclassic times. It most probably fell into disuse during the Early Classic.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Uaxactun / Guatemala	Group H North (Str. H-I, H-III, H-V)	E	LPC - PC	Kovač et al. 2010:271:442
Description	A large Triadic acropolis in the southern portion of the site. It consisted of several buildings, of which the main ones maintain the Triadic pattern. The central building in turn is a Triadic structure itself, hence becoming a Fractal-Type Triad (see below). The whole group has once been adorned by huge stucco masks on the frontal facade of the basal platform. The masks feature anthropo-, and zoomorphic elements.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Uaxactun / Guatemala	H-I	E	LPC - PC	Kovač et al. 2010:271, 442
Description	The main structure of the Group H North Triadic Acropolis. The terrace in the mid-height of the frontal facade might have borne two perishable structures on its southern and northern edges. Therefore it was classified as a Fractal-Type Triadic. Along the central stairway, traces of stucco masks have been found; however, their poor state of preservation does not permit any further iconographic analysis.			



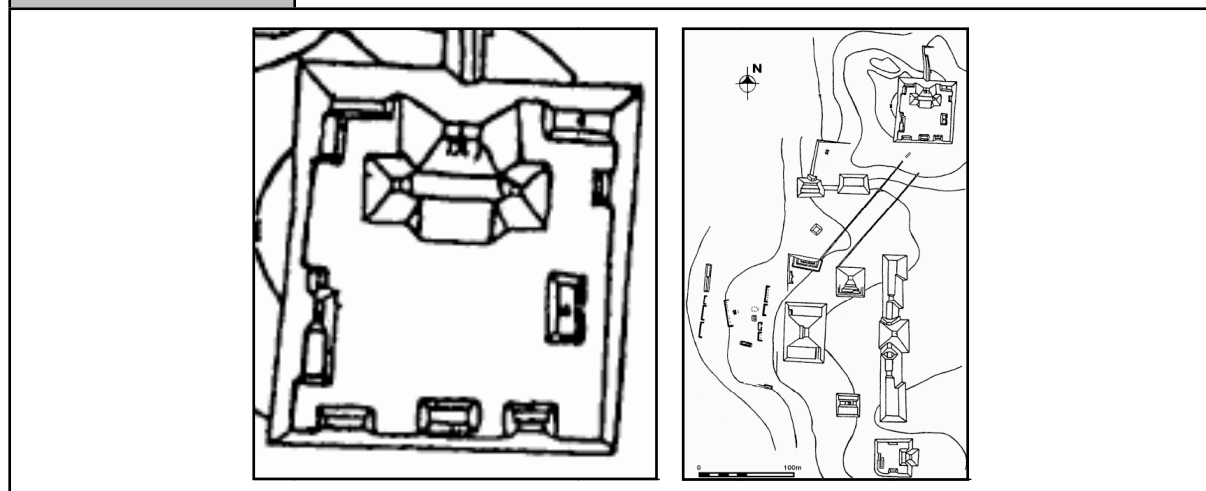
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Uaxactun / Guatemala	Group H South (Str. H-VII - H-X)	E	LPC - PC	Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:139-143)
Description	An extensive acropolis bearing three basal platforms arranged in a Triadic fashion. The frontal facade bears stucco decorations in form of large masks featuring anthropomorphic and zoomorphic faces. The central platform further bears a Triadic arrangement of buildings (see below).			

Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Uaxactun / Guatemala	H-X	E	LPC	Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:139-143)
Description	A Fractal-Type Triadic bearing stucco decorations on both sides of its monumental stairway. The distribution of buildings on top of the platform resembles that of the Group H North Triadic. Each of Triadic constructions bore an elaborated artistic programme in form of stucco masks and panels.			

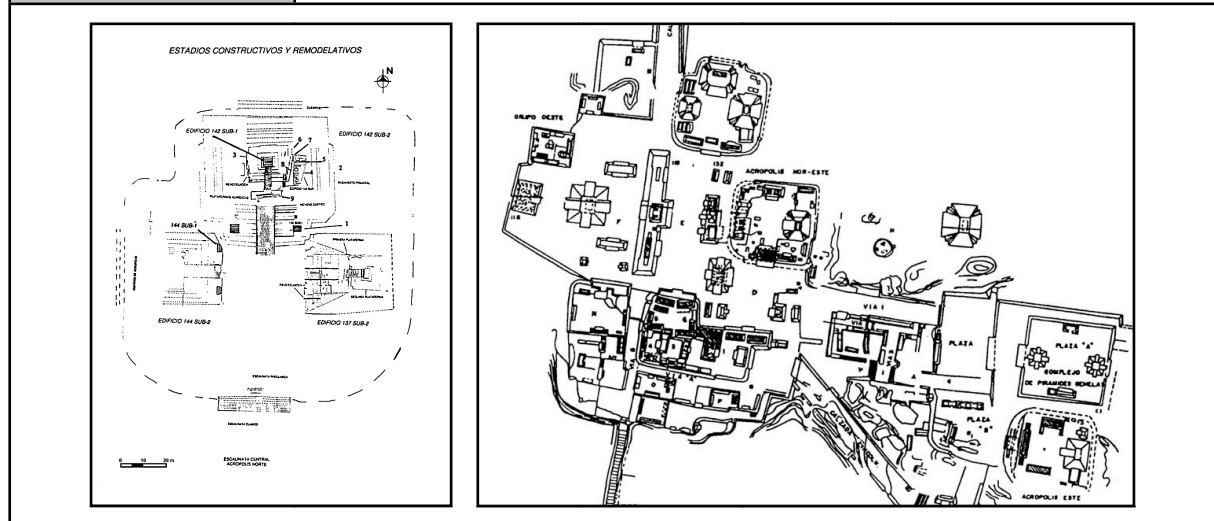
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Utatlan (Qumarkaaaj) / Guatemala	RC 60	E	EPsC	Carmack and Weeks 1981
Description	Removed to the east from the centre, Str. RC 60 was most probably arranged in a triadic fashion. Apparently it has not been fully excavated, and there is no mention about it in the publications. It was included due to its appearance on the published maps.			



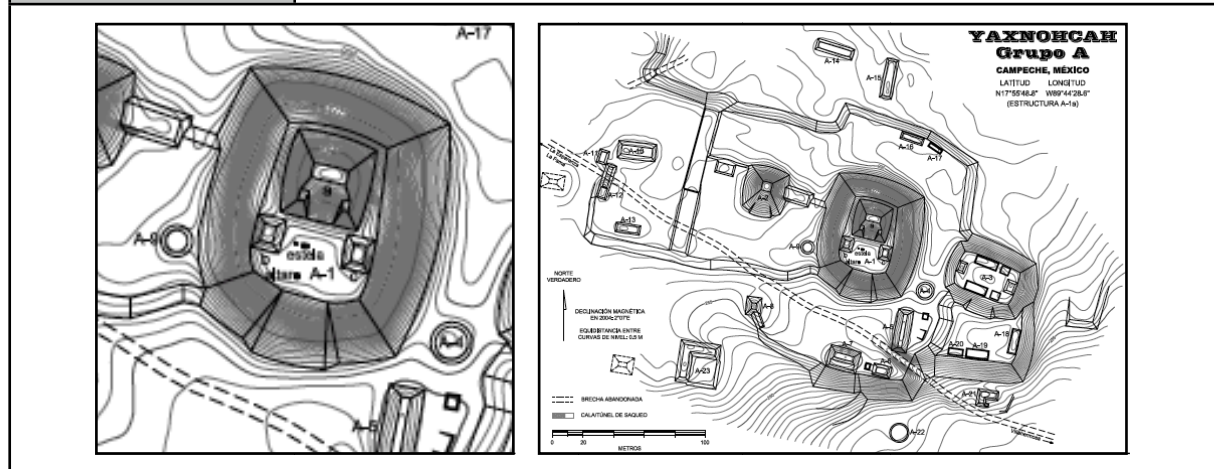
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Wakna / Guatemala	(?)	N	LPC	Hansen 1992:15-18
Description	It is not certain whether the T-Type building found within the core of Wakna was indeed Triadic or not. Data missing.			



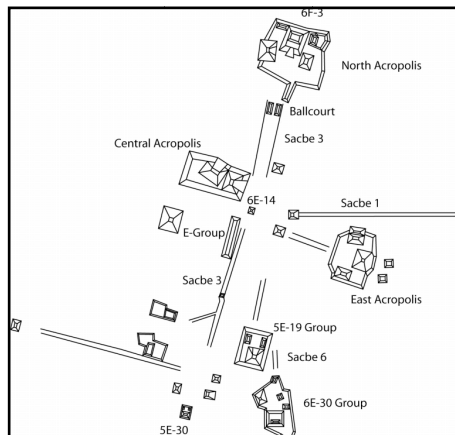
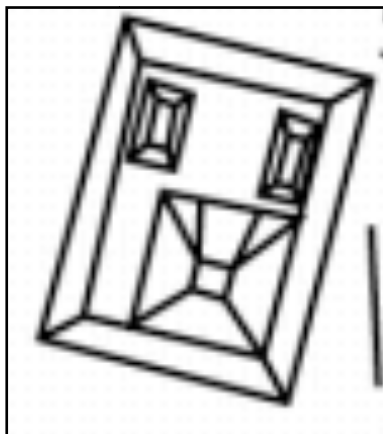
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
Yaxha / Guatemala	North Acropolis (Str. 137, 142, 144)	N	LPC - LC	Garcia 2001
Description	A large complex of three tall pyramids set on a relatively low basal platform. The main pyramid, Str. 142, reaches 26 m in height. The facade of the basal platform was adorned with large stucco masks. The overall pattern, except the orientation, is somewhat similar to the Uaxactun Group H Triadics.			



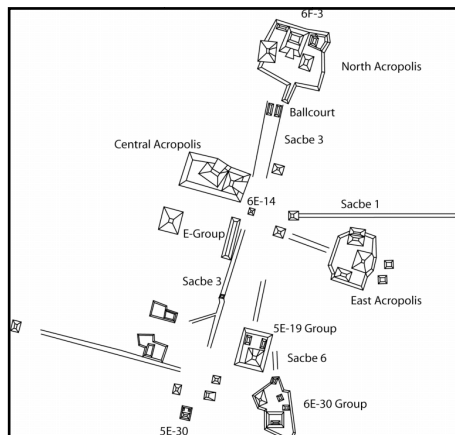
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientatio n	Dating	References
Yaxnohcah / Mexico	A-1	N	LPC - EC	Šprajc 2008:67-71
Description	A large basal platform (approx. 80x65 m) sustaining a Fractal-Type Triadic. Its main pyramid, being itself a Triadic, reaches the height of 24 m. Apart from the analysis of various looters' trenches, the structure has not been excavated so far. It constitutes the main, focal point of the whole site.			



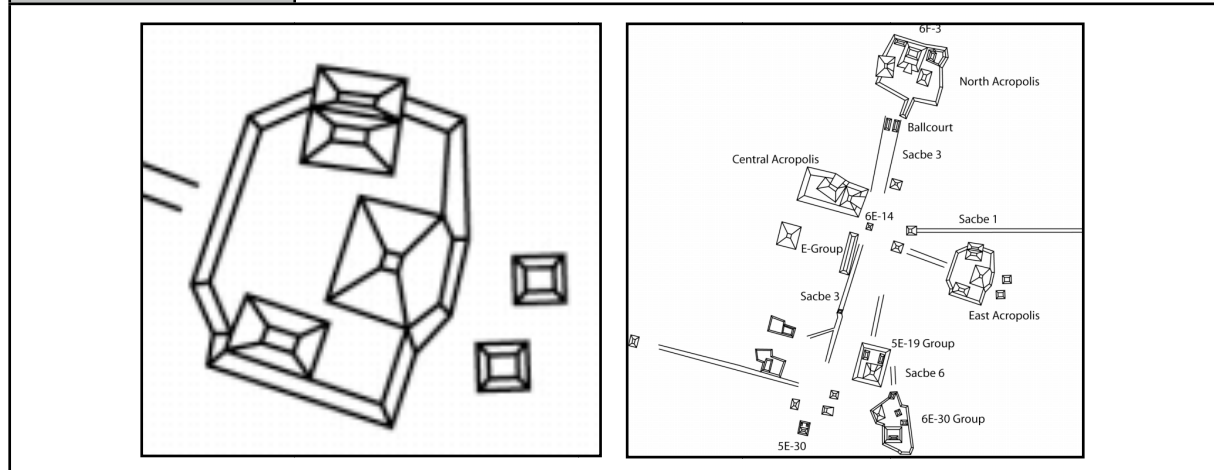
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Yaxuna / Mexico	5E-19	S	LPC	Freidel 1988; Freidel et al. 1989; Stanton and Ardren 2005
Description	A 6 m high basal platform supporting a triad of structures located to the south of the city core. The main pyramidal one rises further 6 m above the platform floor. Out of a total of four construction episodes, the first is a non-Triadic structure dated to the Middle Preclassic. The remaining three are Triadics and are dated to the Late Preclassic period. The traces of a causeway have been discovered leading 5E-19 it from the city core.			



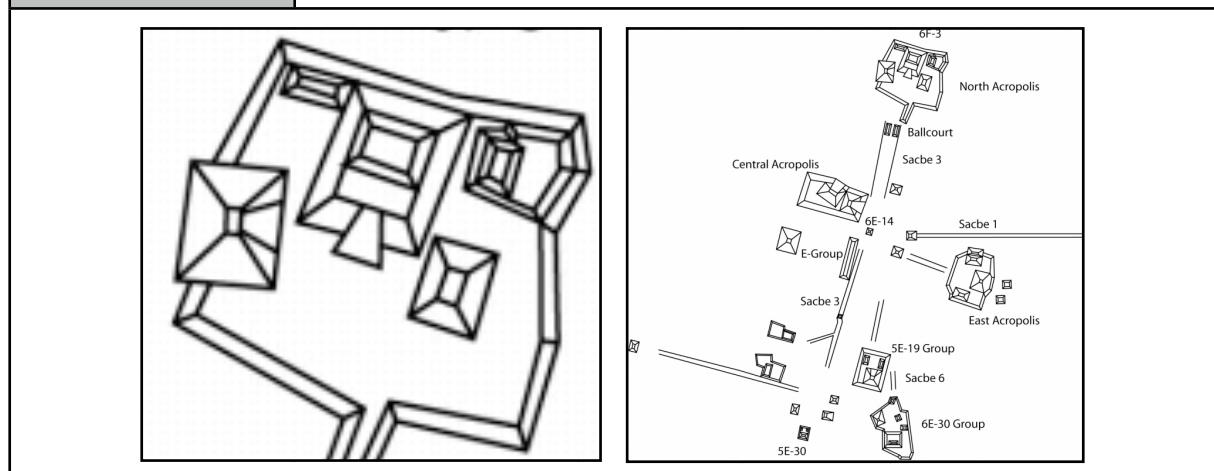
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Yaxuna / Mexico	5E-30	S	LPC	Freidel 1988; Freidel et al. 1989; Stanton and Ardren 2005
Description	A very small platform sustaining a triad of structures built at the southern extremity of the site. All of its development phases have been dated to the Late Preclassic times.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Yaxuna / Mexico	East Acropolis	E	LPC	Freidel 1988; Freidel et al. 1989; Stanton and Ardren 2005
Description	The Eastern Acropolis was connected with the core by a short causeway. The Triadic extends over an irregular platform. The two lateral buildings lack symmetry, with the northern one being slightly larger than the southern one.			



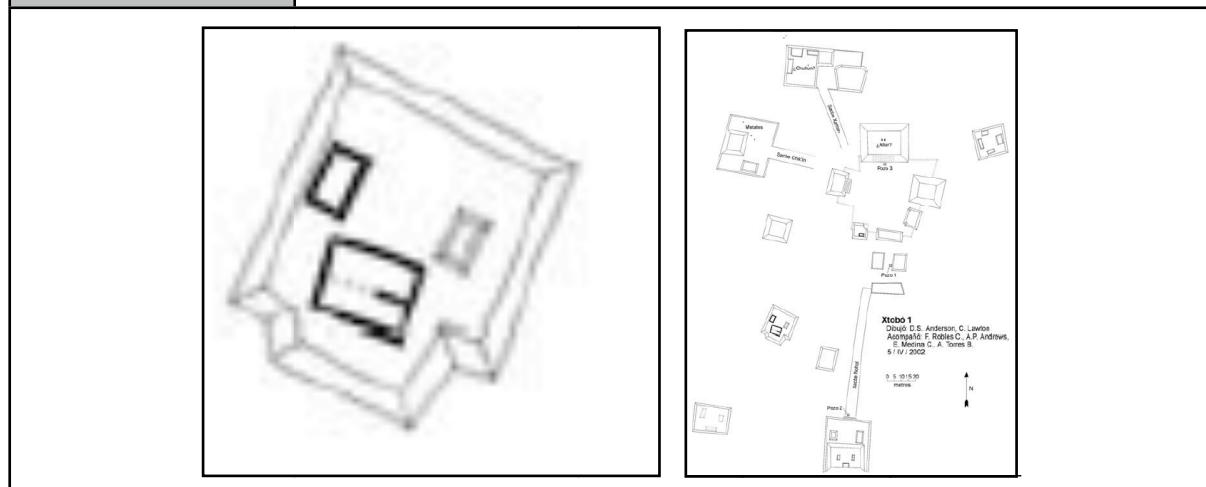
Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Yaxuna / Mexico	North Acropolis	N	LPC	Freidel 1988; Freidel et al. 1989; Stanton and Ardren 2005
Description	The largest architectural group of the entire site, the Triadic formed on top of the North Acropolis spreads over an irregular basal platform. The diagonal causeway that traverses the site terminates at the foot of the platform, with the ballcourt constructed alongside.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Xtobó / Mexico	Group B	S	MPC (?) - LPC	Robles and Andrews 2003:49-52; Anderson 2005
Description	A Fractal-Type Triadic set on top of a medium-sized basal platform at the southern end of the causeway. Some pottery sherds attest to a unusually early date of that structure (Middle Preclassic), but it cannot be securely connected with the triadic distribution of superstructures.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Xtobó / Mexico	?	S	?	Robles and Andrews 2003:49-52; Anderson 2005
Description	An apparently Triadic structure visible on the map published in Anderson 2005 west of the causeway in its mid-length. However, no mention whatsoever can be found about it within the text.			

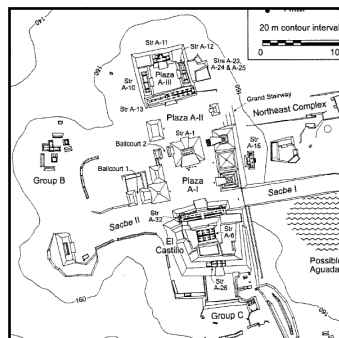
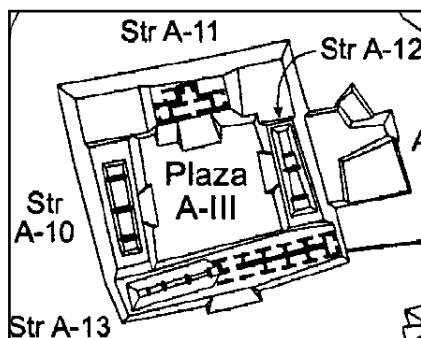


Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Xualcanil / Belize	Tetunna Group	N (?)	?	Taschek and Ball 1999:215
Description	A brief mention in the text, comparing the Triadic from Las Ruinas de Arenal with that of Xualcanil. Otherwise data missing.			
?				

Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Xulnal / Guatemala	?	E	LPC (?)	Mejía 2008:654
Description	A medium-sized platform on the eastern edge of the main plaza, within the strict core of the site. Its placement directly behind the E-Group blocking its sight lines resembles the one found in Cival.			



Site / Country	Str. Name or Number	Orientation	Dating	References
Xunantunich / Belize	A11	N	LC - TC	LeCount <i>et al.</i> 2002
Description	A restricted patio group that can be classified as a Triadic. It constitutes the northern edge of the city core. It dates to the Late and Terminal Classic times.			



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