Pugh 2009 Maya Sacred Landscapes at Contact

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The Maya derived some of their most powerful and sacred symbols from the natural world. Plants, animals, and topographic features, such as caves, mountains, and water sources, found prominent roles in the sacred landscape. Many aspects of the built environment signified natural elements—for example, temple platforms represented hills and mountains. Furthermore, the Maya directed many rituals toward deities and ancestors who controlled elements of the natural landscape such as animal abundance, disease, land fertility, and rain. The world occupied by humans was not strongly distinguished from the realms of deities, as access points to these places were scattered across the land. Cosmogony and history occurred in the landscape and was likewise remembered through visiting sacred places. Hence, the Maya at conquest strongly wove their worldviews into the landscape. The landscape provided objectives for ritual action as well as natural metaphors, and human action and contemplation upon the landscape imbued the world with significance.

The landscape has long been a subject of interest to archaeologists but has generally been characterized as a “passive backdrop” (Knapp and Ashmore 1999:2). Static objective landscapes have been critiqued in favor of a processual landscape or landscape as praxis (Hirsh 1995:5; Jordan 2003:11–23). Peter Jordan (2003:279–283) defined the “enculturation of the landscape” as a process that produces the sacred landscape. Such meaning-producing practices occur as people create objects to place at sacred places and visit sites and make modifications to them. Hence, meaning is an unfinished project
that is always under construction. The meanings of sacred places change through time as they are replicated. The significance of a place can increase or diminish, if not disappear. It might also be revitalized, contested, appropriated, defaced, or even destroyed (Bender 1998:97–130; van de Guchte 1999:155).

Landscapes are frequently represented—maps being the most common form of representation in Western societies. Such representations are foundations of social identity as they encode “the memories, meanings, and sense of belonging as well as the process of social relations and interaction” (Smith 2003:71). Landscape images also occur in forms other than maps. They can be recorded in a variety of media and emphasize qualities other than horizontal relationships. They may represent dimensions other than the material world and the world may be depicted in an idealized manner. Ritual paraphernalia can signify the otherworlds through which the shaman travels (Jordan 2001:88; Pentikainen 1998:26–48). Some representations are small, but others are quite large and incorporate a number of buildings into a microcosm (Wheatley 1971:436–451).

Landscape studies integrate economic and symbolic approaches (Stewart and Strathern 2003:10). Given the focus of this volume, the present chapter will be skewed toward Maya ideational landscapes; however, one will note frequent references to the economic landscape. At the local level, the economic landscape included the residence, milpas, clay sources, stone sources, water sources, hunting and fishing areas, forests, and so on. These areas were not divorced from the sacred landscape as many ritual activities were directed toward ensuring good harvests, success in hunting/fishing, and offerings to animal or forest lords (Astor-Aguilera, this volume; L. Brown 2005). Furthermore, these spaces were encoded with gender and status values and, therefore, composed a significant portion of Maya worldviews (Clendinnen 1980:375–377). At the regional level, the economic landscape included long-distance trade networks, which brought in nonlocal (depending on the area) items such as obsidian, greenstone, serpentine, salt, bird feathers, copal, copper, coral, marine resources, pigments, honey, and cacao. Many of these items played critical roles in ritual activities (Brady 2005; Chuchiak, this volume). The larger economic landscape was also connected to the sacred landscape as some trading activities may have been combined with pilgrimages (Freidel and Sabloff 1984:179–192).

Maya Sacred Landscapes

Maya landscapes at contact included the earth, where people lived, as well as the heavens and the underworld (Chase and Chase, this volume). The specific form of the world—the imago mundi—varied immensely. From the Late Postclassic period until present, the Maya imagined the world in various shapes including circular, crocodilian, globular, house, rectangular, squash, and turtle forms (Hanks 1990:30). These forms centered on the salt earth and the otherworlds through which the shaman travels (Davis 1999).

The Maya sacred landscapes (Hanks ties) form a system of towns and cities (Hanks 1985:34; Santiago, this volume) that are maintained by the Santiag 1985:34; Santiago, this volume) paths and towns, and a metapath (Sandage, this volume) that connects groups. (Alexander, this volume; Chase and Chase, this volume). The Maya sacred landscapes also included altars and sacred spaces such as the centers of towns and cities (Hanks 1985:34; Santiago, this volume) and the salt earth (Davis 1999).
These forms are not mutually exclusive and one social group could utilize them all. In colonial documents, landscape representations are usually circular, often quartered. The modern Ch'orti' represent the world with five stones—four of which form a rectangle and the fifth, the center (Girard 1995:51). The Maya world is bounded. In Yucatán, the edges of the flat earth are considered a “great beach” and the salt water beyond this beach both bounds the human world and connects the earth and sky (Sosa 1985:319). The Lacandon world is also surrounded by water (Davis 1978:19–24).

The Maya world emerged from the primordial sea. Tzuk, “partition,” refers to the primordial division of the universe (Freidel et al. 1993:140). The term also designates markers, composed of five stones, defining the boundaries of milpas (Hanks 1990:357). Larger piles of stones mark the boundaries between communities (Hanks 1990:356). During the Colonial period, stone piles rested on the edges of towns at each of the cardinal directions. These mounds played a role in New Year rites (Landa 1941:139) and may have represented mountains (Taube 1988a:287).

In modern Yucatán, the edges of communities are marked by green crosses and altars also following this layout (Sosa 1985:429) and are, therefore, microcosms. Paths encircling rectangular milpas are boundaries and cleaning these paths helps maintain the boundaries and protect that which lies inside (Hanks 1990:356). Maya farmers measured the paths with cords. Similar cord paths mark ceremonial spaces as well as the edges of communities (Taube 1988a:159–160). Such enclosed spaces are known as ak, which include houses, temples, and villages as well as caves and cenotes (Clendinnen 1980:381). Cords were also used to create the world as a metaphorical milpa in the Popol Vuj (Tedlock 1985:72). The modern Maya of Santiago Atitlán imagine a rectangular road surrounding their world (Carlsen, this volume). It extends along the high mountain peaks surrounding the area and is the path around which the sun travels. Paths surrounding modern Yukatek communities are the locations of important rites protecting the town from evil winds (Sosa 1985:343). During the Colonial period, larger calendar-ending rites involved counterclockwise circuits around Yucatán (Edmonson 1986:27).

The ideal social space among the modern Yukatek is internally divided (Hanks 1990:306). Postclassic to Colonial period settlements had internal factions (Freidel and Sabloff 1984:182; Restall 1997:15–17). Space was also divided into residential groups, which at some sites were lumped together into recognizable social factions (Alexander 2005:170–173; Brown 1999:569). Although they frequently had more, the Maya often imagined their settlements and polities as having four parts, a form that also represented time (Coe 1965; Coggins 1980; Girard 1995:23–70; Pugh 2001b; Rice, this volume). Ritual events in Colonial period Yucatán suggest quadripartite divisions in settlements (Coe 1965:107–109). The cities of Mayapán and Utatlán also had four primary divisions (Edmonson 1986:81; Fox 1994:162–167).
Entire polities and larger regions were similarly partitioned (Edmonson 1986:16–58; Marcus 1993:128–153). The Ixä of Contact period Petén divided their polity into four parts (Jones 1998:94–96). Quadrupartite spaces also had a center forming a quincunx.

The centers of Postclassic communities included public ceremonial areas. These spaces generally incorporated plazas, temples, council houses, shrines, and “natural” features. Plazas were large flat areas, usually covered by a plaster surface representing the primordial sea (Freidel et al. 1993:139–140). They held large groups of people involved in religious, social, and economic activities. These areas also connected the buildings surrounding the plaza. Many activities in these buildings likely extended into the plazas. Temples were primarily points of interaction with deities. They were also monumental and, therefore, foundations of social identity, memory, and forgetting (Connerton 1989:43; Forty 2001:6–10; Lefebvre 1991:222–225). Council houses involved spousal exchange, marriage rites (Carmack 1981:192; Rice 1988:240–241), and divination (Pugh 2001a:549). Shrines varied in use, but many were used for ancestor veneration (Pugh 2003a:946).

Community centers frequently included natural features such as cenotes/caves and large trees. Caves played critical roles in Maya landscapes long before the Late Postclassic period and still continue to do so (Pugh 2005; Stone, this volume). Many modern Maya believe that deities and other supernatural beings occupy caves, cenotes, chultuns, and rock shelters (L. Brown 2005:137–139; Davis 1978:77; Hoffing 1991:136–192; Vogt and Stuart 2005). Water inside caves is pure/sacred (Brady and Ashmore 1999:127) and liminal (Chase and Chase, this volume). Caves are strongly linked to the underworld but also contain celestial elements and are, therefore, axis mundi. Since caves exist in material form, they engraved cosmology into the landscape (Halperin 2005:73) and are/were critical pilgrimage sites (Brady and Veni 1992:163; Patel, this volume; Roys 1943:82; Stone, this volume; Turner 1973:229). Stones were sometimes removed from caves and used in above-surface rituals (Brady et al. 1997; Davis 1978:77; McGee 1998:43–45; Peterson et al. 2005). On the other hand, at Chamula, stones and sherds are thrown “into a cave as tribute” to supernatural beings (Bricker 1973:114). Buildings were often aligned with subsurface features and their presence frequently designated the center of a community (Brady 1997; Pugh 2003b:251; 2003b:416–422). Prominent buildings might be linked to the features by causeways and other features (Halperin 2005:76–80). When absent, penetrations into the earth were frequently constructed and the Maya did not distinguish between the artificial and natural “caves” (Brady and Veni 1992; Pugh 2005:63). Similarly, large temple platforms represented hills or mountains, which were also powerful symbols (see Carlsen, this volume). Together, the mountain and cave are very sacred and represent the earth, as penetrations into mountains are close to the earth’s central cosmic force (Fischer 1999:482).
Like caves and mountains, trees were polyvalent symbols found throughout Mesoamerica. Large trees, especially ceibas, stand in the center of many Maya settlements and are often symbols of community (Schwartz 1990:131). Other trees such as cacao, copal, and mahogany were also important. The sacred tree that grew at the edge of Chan Santa Cruz helped unify people during the Caste War. The Mexican military discerned its efficacy and cut it down (Reed 1964:135–144). During some rites, the Maya cut trees and re-erected them in the plaza (Thompson 1930:111). Trees were frequently depicted with a reptilian head at their base representing a cave. Such “world-trees” separated and connected the earth, sky, and underworld (Taube 1988a:171). Trees also were represented by a cruciform pattern. As with caves and artificial tunnels, the Maya do not appear to have strongly differentiated between trees and crosses.

Although various Maya groups used similar buildings and natural features, they arranged them differently. Certain configurations coincide with ethnic boundaries (Pugh 2003b:410). The arrangement of buildings reflected and helped externalize communal worldviews. They were frequently arranged as microcosms (Ashmore 1991, 1992). For example, at Late Postclassic Zacpetén in Petén, Guatemala, a borrow pit and large amounts of human bone of the west side of the central plaza contrast with high temples and deity effigies on the east side; therefore, western death and eastern life associated with the solar cycle was written into the plaza (Pugh 2003b:423–426). Central architecture and natural features provided the community a foundation in time, space, and society. Residential architecture was frequently aligned with civic-ceremonial structures. For example, the Northern Lacandon oriented their residential architecture with the god house (McGee 2002:138). Domestic groups at many Late Postclassic sites in Petén were clustered around ceremonial areas (Rice 1988:236).

Like other ordered spaces, domestic groups have four corners, a center, and boundaries consecrated and cleansed with ritual performances (Hanks 1990:324–325). The four posts and hearth of the house were a commonly used imago mundi; hence, residential form was projected upon the world; Postclassic residential groups included ritual activity areas (Pugh 2002:313–319; 2004:361–365; Smith 1962:267), and residences are sometimes clustered around underground features (Brown 1999:569–570). The shape and habits of residential groups and villages also composed part of Maya worldviews at contact (Clendinnen 1980:377–378). Coresidence, production, consumption, transmission, and reproduction occur in residences (Ashmore and Wilk 1988:6). These activities are the impetus of many ritual activities in the community center. In addition to the consciously constructed perimeters, household and more inclusive identities emerge from “routine social practices” (Bourdieu 1977; Knapp and Ashmore 1999:20). Leslie Cecil (this volume) remarks that the production of material culture, from resource extraction to manufacture techniques (the technological style), is an important
aspect of worldviews that contributed to the social identity of the Kowoj. These practices occurred within and were, therefore, part of the Kowoj social landscape. During New Year rites, household goods were “terminated” and replaced. They also swept their houses and placed the debris and terminated objects in special deposits located outside the community. These deposits were considered contagion and strictly avoided (Hutson and Stanton 2007:137–138; Landa 1941 [1566]:151–152). Hence, everyday objects became sacred after their use-lives and their discard embedded this significance into the landscape.

Outside of human settlements were the undivided forest and its creatures. Similar to the Siberian Khanty (Jordan 2003:280–281), the Maya made offerings to obtain permission from forest lords and animal masters before using land or wild animals (Astor-Aguilera, this volume; L. Brown 2005:137–139; Hofling 1991:136–66). The forest could also be a dangerous place, especially when lost. As mentioned below, one might wander into another cosmic plane. The Maya term for being in the forest connotes that it is “dangerous and unpredictable” compared to bounded human spaces (Hanks 1990:306). Wandering lost in the forest was also a metaphor for displacement and migration and a frequent theme in ethnic origin myths (Edmonson 1986:59–61; Ringle, this volume).

The relationship between the human and divine worlds was reciprocal and involved travel to sacred places. Ritual movement outside the community occurred during ceremonial circuits and pilgrimages conducted during major calendrical rites. Cenotes, caves, wells, and other holes in the earth were the locations of rituals and pilgrimages (Brady and Veni 1992:163; Patel, this volume; Roys 1943:82) and appear to have been quite important during New Year and k'atun rites (Taube 1988a:307; Stone, this volume). Trees such as Chan Santa Cruz, ruins, and other shrines were also visited. These features were centers for the people living near them and “centers-out-there” for pilgrims (Turner 1973:229). Elites likely made ritual circuits to peripheral “centers” in order to maintain political boundaries (McAnany 1995:87–88) and reenact the primordial wanderings of mythical heroes. Pilgrims visited the shrines of Ix Chel on Cozumel to ensure fertility (Patel, this volume). Chich'en Itzá, Mayapán, and Tulum were also pilgrimage sites (Arnauld 1997; Freidel and Sabloff 1984:179–192; Landa 1941 [1566]:109). Ceremonial circuits and other pilgrimages incorporated landscape, time, and the social reality. They also connected the spaces of living humans to the underworld, while at the same time securing the boundaries between the two realms.

The Underworld

Penetrations into the earth—caves, cenotes, chultuns, tunnels, and tombs—connected the human world with the underworld. The Yukatek believe that the sun sets in a cave in the west and rises through a cave in the east—metaphorically repre-
resenting death and life—and in the process passed through the underworld (Sosa 1985:414–424). The Maya strongly related death and rebirth (Astor-Aguilera, this volume; Carlsen, this volume; Miller 1982:85–98). As the world of the newly dead, the underworld had a close relationship with the living. Tombs were often reentered and some were built with “psychoducts” linking the living with the dead (Chase and Chase, this volume). Miguel Astor-Aguilera (this volume) notes that modern Yukatek use bundles of human bones to communicate with and feed ancestors. The human remains are exhumed and placed in a cloth bundle, which is then stored in a shrine or altar. Apparently, these bundles were once reburied (Astor-Aguilera, this volume). Late Postclassic evidence for such practices was found adjacent to a shrine at Zacpetén (Pugh 2001a:377).

Some Maya imagined an underworld with nine levels (Thompson 1970:195); however, its appearance varied. Among some groups in Yucatán, it has two levels. One level includes “underground rivers” and below that is a layer of fire (Hanks 1990:305–306). The latter level suggests Christian influence. The belief in a watery underworld had a long history in Mesoamerica (Chase and Chase, this volume). Many Maya believe the chthonic landscape held various trials, obstacles, and punishment for the dead (Boremanse 1998a:91–96). Primordial heroes traveled to the underworld in the final acts of creation (Boremanse 1998a:91–96; Tedlock 1985:110–160). The underworld contains water and the winds that keep water in motion. The winds that propel water emerge from the sun and some are dangerous and can cause sickness (Hanks 1990:445–451). Healing rites generally involve immobilizing the “out-of-place” winds and sending them into the forest or “abandoned” chultuns—again subterranean features (Hanks 1990:339–349). The underworld is also not distinct from the sky. The water that runs underground is the same water that rains from the sky and is “freed” from the underground through rituals and the Chaak rain deities (Sosa 1985:396). Celestial winds drive the water between the earth and sky (Hanks 1990:305–306).

The Sky

Many Maya imagined the sky as a landscape. The Northern Lacandon imagined stars as tree roots. They named the visible stars of the Milky Way sak bel akyum, or “white road of our lords” (McGee 2002:129). The Yukatek believe that the Milky Way formed a road upon which the sun/Jesus walks with the souls of humans (Sosa 1985:430). The sky also holds temples that are replicated in modern rituals in Yucatán (Hanks 1990:373–374). The sky had multiple levels differing in their composition and occupants. Sometimes it had thirteen levels (Thompson 1970:195), although the modern Yukatek note five celestial levels (Hanks 1990:304–306). The Lacandon universe is usually described as having five circular layers (Davis 1978:18; McGee 1990:61), although Didier Boremanse (1982:84) suggests seven.
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In the Lacandon underworld, the newly dead were punished for sins. Above the underworld is the material world, which is surrounded by the ocean and occupied by living humans, less-righteous souls, and earth deities (Davis 1978:19–24). The celestial gods and the souls of righteous people occupy the third layer. Feathered serpent pillars separate the third layer and fourth layer, the domain of the god of the gods, K’akoch (Davis 1978:22–23). The fifth layer is the sunless and cold domain of minor deities and the first humans (McGee 1990:61) and will also be occupied by the last humans (Bruce 1979:8).

The Maya observed the movements of the sun, moon, and stars and aligned many buildings with astronomical bodies. Many constructions at Mayapán were oriented toward the solstices and equinoxes. These buildings were designed as replicas of structures at Chichén Itzá, yet Venus orientations present in the latter were not discerned at Mayapán (Aveni et al. 2004:139–141; Milbrath and Peraza Lope, this volume). However, the cycles of Venus do appear to have concerned the occupants of Late Postclassic Tulum (Miller 1982:85–91). Many sections in the Maya codices also describe astronomical events (Vail and Aveni 2004b:5–6). Until recently, the Northern Lacandon oriented their god houses toward both Polaris, the polar star, and Yaxchilán (McGee 2002:129–138). The sun’s movement defines the “sacred periphery” of Santiago Atitlán (Carlsen, this volume). The corners of the rectangular peripheral path are defined by the solstitial and equinocial positions; hence, the yearly cycle is written into the landscape. Furthermore, Tz’utujil Maya draw a line between points aligned with the sunrise at the spring equinox and sunset at the fall equinox to divide the year in half, thereby defining and spatializing the rainy and dry seasons. Critical rituals coincide with the four annual solar points (Carlsen, this volume).

The sky was attached to the earth but was not as accessible as the underworld since humans were “bound” within the limits of the earth (Sosa 1985:423). The cosmic sea connected the earth and sky. This boundary was also marked and bridged by a “sacred green cross” (Sosa 1985:429). At night the sun, moon, and some stars passed into the underworld—the sun metaphorically “entered its house” (Sosa 1985:425). Venus was also associated with the underworld (Miller 1982:88–91). The Southern Lacandon believed that the sun and moon, which were male and female, respectively, were married and lived together in a cave (Soustelle 1961:48). Hence, although modern astronomers consider the sun, moon, and stars celestial objects, they were both sky and earth beings for many Maya groups (Sosa 1985:424–429).

Interactions between Planes

Many Maya believed humans could travel to the heavens and underworld. Some powerful shamans visited deities, and people occasionally ventured into other cosmic planes by accident (Davis 1978:27). It was also possible to be summoned by deities, etc. such journeys Redfield (Davis 1962a:3) and the re-Reverse Freedom. Tiny Trav
landscapes or receive such travels by John Colonia, however, were usu-erat fered fro: Mayapán 1962b:1 just as the rites dur-rits were req. Through good ha-ter other de 2006). They re-
represents Hu caves/they
deities, especially if one broke a moral law. However, the usual conclusions of such journeys were not pleasant for the human participants (Hoffing 1991:136–166; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1962 [1934]:207–208); hence, most preferred to avoid such travels. Nevertheless, all people traveled to other realms of existence after death (Davis 1978:27). Some groups believed that a part of a person—their co-essence—existed in the heavens or underworld while the individual still lived (Chase and Chase, this volume; Vogt 1993 [1976]:19).

Travel to other cosmic planes involved transformations. Not everything on the landscape was always as it seemed—many things varied depending on who observed or received them. The Northern Lacandon believe that deities see the world in its reverse form. To them, caves and stone vaults in ruins appear as wood and thatch houses, big things are small, hot things are cold, and so on. Materials offered to deities are also transformed into their reverse forms. For example, burned copal becomes tortillas (Davis 1978:24–25).

One would assume that a human in the deities’ worlds would also see things differently from the deities. Hence, the Maya appreciated the subjective nature of the landscape.

Since the sky was largely off limits to the Maya and human access to the underworld was limited to torch-lit journeys into caves, they employed various devices to converse with the denizens of these supernatural planes. Socially and spiritually powerful individuals interacted with deities on behalf of other people (Boremanse 1998a:31, 66–67; Chase and Chase, this volume). The Postclassic and Contact period Maya also communicated with deities through deity images. As outlined by John Chuchiak (this volume), deity images in Late Postclassic, Contact, and Colonial period Yucatán were primarily composed of wood, stone, and ceramics; however, many were composed of special materials. For example, the wooden figures were usually made of cedar, and the clay for the ceramic effigies was sometimes gathered from caves and/or tempered by the pulverized remains of former censers. At Mayapan, some statues were composed of stucco and speleothems (Proskouriakoff 1962b:136). The Maya conducted rituals in a special house to activate the vessels just as they did sacred spaces. Some deity effigy censers were activated during wayeb' rites during which the new effigies were paired for a short time with the images they were replacing (Coe 1965; D. Chase 1985b:119; Landa 1941 [1566]:139–140). Through these objects the Maya communicated with their deities and requested good harvests and health. Postclassic period deity-image censers, and presumably other deity representations, were primarily within ceremonial buildings (Pugh et al. 2006). Lacandon effigy censers were connected to the “residence” of the deity that they represented. This “residence” was a known cave or ruin, often distant from the community. If Late Postclassic censers did likewise, then the temple full of censers represented the sacred landscape (Pugh 2005:53).

Humans could also communicate with deities through natural imagery such as caves/tunnels and trees/crosses, which bridge the earth, sky, and underworld. The
modern Maya of Santiago Atitlán imagine their community as a world tree standing at the center of the universe with the cofradía leader standing as the tree and the ancestors as the roots (Carlsen, this volume). Gabrielle Vail (this volume) notes that world trees represented in the Maya codices bridged the earth, sky, and underworld. She further notes that the trees represented "world destruction and renewal." Many crosses, which are related to trees, are believed to be occupied by divine spirits (Astor-Aguilera, this volume; Sosa 1985:241).

Ritual spaces also facilitated interactions between cosmic planes. The Maya built and/or consecrated religious settings as liminal spaces connecting the earth with other cosmic planes (Chase and Chase, this volume). For example, temples stood between the earth and sky, and caves and tombs opened into the underworld. These places often included symbolism tying them to other cosmic planes, such as water creatures and sky serpents. As noted, ceremonial architecture was frequently oriented with both caves and celestial bodies, thereby linking the buildings with the sky and underworld. Arthur Miller (1982:96–98) suggested that the murals of Tulum depicted the boundary between the underworld and the material plane. As Elizabeth Graham (this volume) argues, the various objects and places mentioned above were also metaphorical—they had significance in addition to their role in communication. For example, the Great Ballcourt of Chich'en Itzá may have been used as a liminal space where one could communicate with deities, but it also included imagery of creation events (Schele and Mathews 1998:206–255).

Consecration or dedication of spaces was human action intended to ensoul the landscape or objects and connect them with otherworlds. Such actions involved ritualized caching, construction, and renovation. Caching deposits special objects and/or materials into the earth or a construction. Activated spaces were "alive" and connected with the divine (Pendergast 1998:61–62; Stross 1998:35). Buildings and objects often were "terminated" at the end of a certain cycle of time. Termination "killed" the building or object through destruction or defacement and the removal of caches (Mock 1998:9–10). Terminated landscapes and objects might later be rededicated. Stratigraphy of ceremonial buildings represents generations of "death and rebirth" (Mock 1998:6–13). These generations of landscapes "lived and died" in tune with the flow of cyclical time.

Time

Human action constantly transformed the Maya landscape as settlement centers were reseated and sacred places were terminated and consecrated. These actions were generally attuned with calendrical and astronomical cycles. The sea at the world's edges was a potential danger as it could flood unless the proper rituals were performed at calendrical junctions (Taube 1988a:171–172; Vail, this volume). Many Maya objectified time as a road circumscribing the landscape (Bruce 1979:102)}
Late Postclassic spatial representations were frequently bordered by k’atun wheels. K’atun wheels were calendars of the may, a cycle of approximately 256 years (Rice, this volume). Modern Yukatek note that the spatial edge of the world is equivalent to the end of time (Sosa 1985:428–429); hence, earthly boundaries corresponded with temporal boundaries. Since the boundary is a beach, it is understandable that the end of the world is often imagined as a flood. The placement of calendrical junctions and the primordial sea along the borders of representations of time/space further supports Diane Chase and Arlen Chase’s (this volume) suggestion that the latter was liminal since calendrical completions are also in between states. The occupants of Santiago Atitlán imagined their community to be surrounded by a counterclockwise path traveled by the sun (Carlsen, this volume). This path pivoted the horizontal axis, placing the sky to the north and the underworld to the south (following Coggins 1980). The sun’s movement across the landscape is the most basic element of Maya time; hence, time and space are inseparable.

Time is also incorporated into the landscape through architectural construction. The primary temple of Chich’en Itzá, the Castillo, was covered with temporal markings including quadripartite time/space, 364 steps representing the “computing year,” and 52 niches signifying the Calendar Round. The building also casts its renowned (although contentious) serpent shadow at the spring equinox, and one of its axes faces toward sunset on the summer solstice (Aveni et al. 2004:129–130). The Castillo of Mayapán was likewise quadripartite and had 260 steps representing the tzolk’in cycle (Aveni et al. 2004:130).

Vail (this volume) investigates the calendrical, spatial, and ritual significance of the Madrid Codex. Like the k’atun turtles, a representation in this screenfold book depicts a landscape surrounded by time, but in this case the landscape is square with four parts and a center and the calendar is the 52-year Calendar Round. The Calendar Round combines the 260-day tzolk’in and the 365-day jāab’ cycles. Vail also argues that ritual actions associated with the Calendar Round, such as human sacrifice and ritual circuits, are depicted in this figure. She suggests that the use of the 52-year cycle differs from most other Postclassic Maya time/space representations, which use tun and k’atun cycles and that this variance may indicate influence from Central México.

Music was critical to the everyday life and the sacred landscape and was connected to cyclical time. Rodney Needham (1967:611–613) suggested that percussion in rituals signaled the transition from one state of being to another and associated transformations with the emotional effect of the music. Musical instruments are found in Late Postclassic Maya ritual contexts (Pugh 2001a:530–533) and images in the Maya codices and Santa Rita murals clearly indicate that Maya rituals incorporate music. In fact, Late Postclassic k’atun rituals were associated with the rattle and the drum (Roys 1967:77–78). Percussion instruments often become
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emblems of the transition they help mediate (Needham 1967:611). Mark Howell (this volume) investigates both modern highland Maya dance-plays and archaeological data in order to extrapolate elements of Precolumbian music. Although the dance-plays are now Spanish/Maya hybrids, they helped the Maya remember important elements in their historical consciousness.

The Past in the Past

Ruined settlements were scattered across the Postclassic Maya landscapes. Some recent Yukatek believed that dwarves and/or giants built the ruins as well as Colonial period churches (Sosa 1985:409–410). Others specified that it was the Itza who built the ruins and still lived in caves beneath the masonry structures (Villa Rojas 1945:153). Among the Northern Lacandon, caves and archaeological ruins were considered to be the homes of deities. The deities once occupied Yaxchilán and Palenque and the Lacandon faced their god houses toward the former (Davis 1978:18–24; McGee 2002:129–138). The Northern Lacandon also incorporated several rock-art sites into their sacred landscape. Some of these carvings and paintings were composed by earlier, perhaps Late Postclassic, occupants of the region (Palka, this volume; Pugh 2001a:117).

Past constructions were critical aspects of Postclassic and Contact period sacred landscapes. Similar to the Northern Lacandon, many Postclassic Maya made pilgrimages to Classic and Preclassic period sites. Both historical accounts and artifacts in the Sacred Cenote document that Chichén Itzá was an important pilgrimage site (Coggins and Shane 1984:111–155; Landa 1941 [1566]:180). Cerros, in northern Belize, was an important site of Late Postclassic pilgrimages from nearby Santa Rita (Walker 1990:472). The Maya did not just passively visit these places. A buried Late Classic temple at Dzibilchaltún was partially uncovered by the Late Postclassic occupants, who excavated a tunnel through the western doorway of the buried central chamber, built an altar in the inner chamber, placed a cache in front of the altar, and repainted the altar three times on k’atun- and half-k’atun-ending dates (Andrews IV and Andrews V 1980:112–116; Thompson 1980:116–117). In addition, they reconstructed the building’s western stairway. These Late Postclassic occupants also excavated tunnels into and renovated stairways on other buildings at Dzibilchaltún (Andrews IV and Andrews V 1980:25). Late Postclassic offerings, caches, and burials were found in some temples at Tikal (Adams and Trik 1958:134), and Classic period monuments were moved and sometimes reset and venerated by Postclassic period occupants of various sites (Graham 1994:113, 129; Hammond and Bobo 1994:26–32; Pugh 2001a:228, 256; Satterthwaite 1958:75–76).

The Late Postclassic Maya appropriated portions of earlier structures for use in their own constructions. The Kowoj of Zacpetén incorporated Terminal Classic monuments and cut limestone masonry blocks into ceremonial buildings and elite residential...
residential architecture (Pugh 2001a, 2002). Offerings near the carved monuments indicate that they played a role in ritual events. Classic period architectural features were also incorporated into buildings at Mayapán (Milbrath and Peraza Lope, this volume; Proskouriakoff 1962b:92) and Tipu (Cecil, this volume) as well as Colonial period churches including Telchaquillo (Proskouriakoff 1962b:92) and Izamal. In addition to using the stones and monuments of earlier peoples, both the Maya and Spaniards appropriated past places by building on top of them. Modern highland Maya believe that ancient artifacts, from statuary to potsherds, are powerful divinatory objects associated with the ancestors (Brown 2000:330; Carlsen, this volume). I observed the use of ancient objects in modern rites in Chamula, Chiapas, México, and San José, Petén, Guatemala. The inhabitants of San José argue that the artifacts demonstrate the antiquity of human skulls that they use in their modern celebrations.

The past was also mimicked by Postclassic constructions. The occupants of Mayapán built the Castillo and Caracol as replicas of buildings at Chichén Itzá (Aveni et al. 2004:130; Milbrath and Peraza Lope, this volume). The Late Postclassic Kowoj constructed replicas of Mayapán-style temple assemblages in Petén, Guatemala, in order to connect themselves with their homeland (Pugh 2003b:426). Although it is unlikely that all examples of mimicry share a common explanation, many were likely attempts to maintain continuity with the past as well as to create spiritual connections. Such architectural quotations are a form of power as they create precedence for the present in the past (Leone 1984:27–28).

Politics of Landscape

As with any form of knowledge, landscape is a contested form of power. Landscape can be considered a process that involves "controversy and conflict" (Strathern and Stewart 2003:229). Control over the landscape can be achieved in various ways—one can occupy it, walk across its surface, record it, or conduct critical rituals on it. Mapping records the landscape and social entities occupying it, but this practice is also a tool of social power (Smith 2003:84–85). Another strategy is to claim to have occupied the area first (Kopytoff 1987:52–62). Honoring the graves of ancestors buried within the landscape or the historical/sacred places upon the landscape is another manner of laying claim to a particular landscape. Even when history does not record the actions of ancestors, other strategies such as archaeology can embed the present in the past (Dietler 1994:597–599). Of course, any of these strategies might be countered by those of opposing groups.

As a critical dimension of worldviews, time was involved in politics. Many rulers used linear and cyclical time, especially the movement of the sun, to legitimate their power. Furthermore, some ethnic groups had their own calendars, and part of their political struggles was temporal (Milbrath and Peraza Lope, this volume; Rice,
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this volume). In Late Postclassic to Contact period Yucatán and perhaps before, the “capital” city of Maya polities shifted at the end of the may cycle of approximately 256 years. Towns within the polity also served as seats of the k’atun, which was likewise transferred cyclically according to that cycle (Rice, this volume). One can imagine the intense politics behind the selection of cycle seats.

Monuments are frequently destroyed or covered to undermine their social power (Forty 2001:10–12; Lefebvre 1991:221–225). Susan Milbrath and Carlos Peraza Lope (this volume) argue that the architecture of the ceremonial core of Mayapán became a symbolic battleground between the Xiw and Kokom during the Middle Postclassic period. When the Kokom dominated politics, they dismantled and covered Xiw constructions in the site’s ceremonial core. The Kokom copied constructions from Chich’en Itzá and remodeled the city’s architecture with an international style that reflected their connections with distant trading partners. After they successfully revolted, the Xiw revitalized the architecture of the city by dismantling and covering many Kokom constructions. Even buried buildings can be excavated and reinstated into the sacred landscape, as clearly seen at Dzibilchaltún, previously discussed.

Historical migration events played critical roles in the construction of Postclassic Maya landscapes. Places of origin and promised lands, whether real or imagined, help unify people and provide a basis for common identity (Malkki 1997:70–72; Smith 1992:438–452). They are often sacred, as the deeds of ancestors were considered heroic or pure. Their purity might arise from their liminality or perfection in character (Malkki 1997:67). As a symbol of social foundation, migration stories are myths that can play a part in ritual performance. A migration can be a stage of cosmogony because it is a crucial origin point that defines the composition and characteristics of the ethnic group. For example, the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, may have been built to resemble their mythical homeland, Aztlan (Boone 1991:122). Mayapán was likewise a powerful distant center for various Maya groups at contact. The Kowoj of Petén, Guatemala, created representations of the ceremonial spaces at Mayapán in order to advertise their connections with this city. Their most critical ritual events occurred—in a virtual sense—in the ethnic homeland. As noted, the Kowoj placed architectural elements from ruined Classic period structures, as well as carved monuments, into prominent places in their ceremonial and elite architecture to publicize that they also had historical ties in Petén. Hence, the Kowoj architecture symbolized a bifocal landscape projecting their identity as both legitimate locals and powerful foreigners.

Groups displaced by economically or militarily powerful migrant groups and denied the prestige of “first occupancy” can resist assimilation and social domination by constructing identities in their own terms. Indigenous groups throughout the Americas appropriated Spanish symbols and used them against the Spaniards as well as in internal conflicts between factions (Rappaport 1987:46–53; Silverblatt 1988:184 two lords quistador quasi-hist The May; ator Quet family like this volu conquest porated ii volume) c tices and The doub men were cave ritua role in Mi end their until press Ultimatel (Redfield regularly was explai The si differentia also did nc 39). In Su Spaniards volume). own tradit enous dei of cloth bu the object decorated land’s ferti mai dance-play Lands tions in cl how ceran and identit as temple a
MAYA SACRED LANDSCAPES AT CONTACT

1988:184; Whitehead 1993:297–298). William Ringle (this volume) notes that two lords of the Colonial period Pech family referred to themselves as first conquistadors. A myth common in Mesoamerica is that of the wandering creator—a quasi-historical figure responsible for making critical changes to the landscape. The Maya paralleled Spanish conquistadors with the indigenous wandering creator Quetzalcoatl. As the conquistadors reformatted the Maya landscape, the Pech family likewise paralleled their recent ancestral figures with the Spaniards (Ringle, this volume). Maya temporal systems and perceptions of history also resisted the conquest and colonialism, and elements of Spanish history and religion were incorporated into these alternative timescapes (Rice, this volume). Andrea Stone (this volume) observed that colonial symbols of power were hybridized into Maya practices and taken underground—literally—into cave rituals celebrating the k'atun. The double-headed Hapsburg eagle, “circular frontal faces,” and images of horsemen were Spanish symbols appropriated by the Maya and incorporated into Maya cave ritual. Since they were used in clandestine indigenous rites, they played a role in Maya resistance to the Spaniards. The Maya also resisted Spanish efforts to end their use of deity effigy censers until the nineteenth century in Yucatán and until present among the Lacandon (Chuchiak, this volume; Palka, this volume). Ultimately, many deities were syncretized with Catholic saints, Jesus, and the cross (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1962 [1934]:97–110). The Lacandon recently stopped regularly using their censers because television revealed a much larger world than was explained by their worldviews (McGee 2002:150–152).

The situation of contact varied from place to place. Ethnic diversity resulted in differential responses from indigenous groups (Gasco 2005:95–96). The Spaniards also did not follow a unified “ideology of domination” (Rodriguez-Alegría 2005:37–39). In Santiago Atitlán, the colonial situation was one of weak dominance by the Spaniards and appropriation and resistance on the part of the Maya (Carlsen, this volume). The Maya adopted the cofradía system but utilized it to preserve their own traditions as well as to “convert” the Catholic saints to fill the roles of indigenous deities. The cofradías directly maintained certain traditions, such as the use of cloth bundles containing various objects associated with ancestors. It was not just the objects held within the bundles that evoked the ancestors but also the textiles decorated with traditional designs. These bundles brought about the renewal of the land’s fertility and the ancestors’ reproduction as offspring. The highland Maya also maintained some traditional musical practices when they appropriated Spanish dance-plays (Howell, this volume).

Landscape politics are often subtle as humans create boundaries through variations in cultural practices (Wiessner 1983:257). Cecil (this volume) investigates how ceramic vessels used in ritual events help to communicate the social history and identity of the Kowoj. The use of this particular form of material culture as well as temple assemblages were critical aspects of the communal and regional landscape.
of the Kowoj. Although ritual is a powerful form of communication, even the raw materials and undecorated ceramic colors and textures differentiated the Kowoj from the Itza. Robert Carlsen (this volume) likewise discerned that the production and wearing of community-specific textiles helped the Maya of Santiago Atitlán to recreate themselves as the ancestors. Hence, they create a landscape of ancestors by transmitting communal styles to the next generation. Mobile material culture is often distinguished from the landscape, but the forms, colors, and textures of artifacts were cues just as critical to their living users as they are to archaeologists seeking to understand ancient cultural landscapes.

Summary

No pan-Maya worldview existed at contact and worldviews changed through time, but several themes emerge in the consideration of meaning in Maya sacred landscapes. Maya landscapes included significance that was built, “naturally” occurring, and appropriated from the colonial other and the past. Inherent in these themes is the construction of meaning through various practices. The Maya often externalized the shape of the universe. Representations of the world, or imago mundi, ranged from simple quincunx motifs to larger and more complex arrangements. The world could be represented by a particular construction or buildings and features combined into assemblages. Temples were also constructed adjacent to caves to recreate the mountain/cave, a representation of the center of the Maya universe. Some representations were less overt, such as the grouping of censers inside of temples, which likely represented sacred spaces in the landscape. Time was incorporated into the imago mundi through calendars, numerology, the quincunx, counterclockwise movements, cyclical seating of capitals, dedications/terminations, and other forms.

The imago mundi is not the only topic communicated by landscape symbolism—events were also memorialized. Perhaps the most common event was the creation of the earth represented by the mountain/temple rising out of the cosmic sea/plaza. The wanderings and actions of powerful figures were memorialized in the landscape and architectural constructions. Some buildings and assemblages were built as “quotations”; they represented past constructions in order to appropriate the power of the past and/or establish historical relationships with past peoples. The arrival of the Spaniards was also memorialized in the landscape through the incorporation of their symbols. The landscape also involved forgetting. Battles of construction, defacement, burial, reconstruction, and excavation constantly transformed the meaning of the landscape. The Spaniards participated in this process through their practices of tabula rasa, which involved the destruction of indigenous sacra and its replacement by Catholic symbols (Giffords 2007:71–72; Roys 1952:143–177). The Maya likewise destroyed Spanish sacra (Jones 1998:348).
Both the Maya and Spaniards built upon sacred places of the past and incorporated past objects in order to establish legitimacy in the present.

The Maya incorporated community organization into the symbolism of sacred spaces. Buildings in Late Postclassic temple assemblages integrated a number of social categories, including deities, politics/lineage, and ancestors. Some ceremonial groups represented factions within communities (Fox 1994:169-170; Freidel and Sabloff 1984:183-184; Pugh 2003b:426). However, architectural features such as plazas and sakbejo'ob symbolically (and metaphorically) tie factions together (Freidel and Sabloff 1984:84; Kurjack and Andrews V 1976:322-324; Shaw 2001:267-269). Central trees and cenotes were also associated with collective identity and possibly factions at large sites such as Mayapán.

"Naturally" occurring sacra include elements that the Maya strongly attached to divine beings or contained large amounts of spiritual energy. As mentioned, some caves were believed to be the homes of gods and animal masters. The sacred was not evenly distributed across the natural landscape as some things—such as caves in mountains or phenomena ascribed enormous power, such as Chan Santa Cruz or the Sacred Cenote of Chichén Itzá—possessed greater spiritual energy.

In the course of this chapter, I have described meaning as it "was" and I used modern ethnography and Classic period data as analogy for understanding landscape at conquest, perhaps giving the impression that meaning is static. However, meaning is neither static nor naturally embedded in constructions or the natural landscape—it is created, remembered, and contested through practices. Of course, praxis likewise occurs in a "world already defined" (Friedman 1992:837). Although Jordan (2001) described modern Khanty pastoralists in Siberia, I argue that his notion of landscape enculturation also works well with the Maya sacred landscape at contact. Most Maya lived in permanent settlements, but they constantly interacted with the natural world in their daily lives and ritual practices. Furthermore, many of their constructions were connected to elements of the natural landscape. Of course, most elements of the built environment differed from the nature landscape—the ritualized creation of bounded spaces would have distinguished them. Nevertheless, the built environment experienced re-enculturation through termination, dedication, and even excavation. This process emphasized human involvement in the construction of monumental spaces as well as the perpetuation of collective memories. As seen with mid-twentieth-century Maya perceptions of the builders of ancient ruins, people can become disassociated from their achievements. When construction is a celebrated ongoing process, people are less likely to be alienated from the work of their ancestors.

Sacred landscapes at conquest were varied and composed of numerous practices that facilitated interactions between humans and time, history, deities, and other-worlds. Such actions on the part of humans were often conducted to preserve or reconsecrate the landscape by repeating creation actions of deities. They coordinated
their ritual cycles and, therefore, social realities with the rhythms of their universe in the form of daily and yearly cycles, celestial patterns, larger units of time, and the spaces of cosmogony. Rituals might also be conducted to influence deities whose actions could have a direct impact on sunlight, water, plants, and animals. Maya deities were not absolutely distanced from humans; their actions also occurred in the landscape in the form of solar paths, their former and now-ruined settlements, and living avatars. The actions of deities might be invisible to humans or may have occurred before the creation of humans, but they were remembered through ritual events. Meaning is not a template in the mind or one that is permanently retained from childhood programming. The sacred landscape and its meaning are externalized and transmitting through action. Worldviews are perpetuated and celebrated as practices and experiences in the world.