

RECONSTRUCTING SOCIAL SHIFTS THROUGH MONUMENTAL ARCHITECTURE: A MAYA  
PALACE-TEMPLE CASE FROM KIUIC, YUCATAN, MEXICO

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## **ABSTRACT**

Tomás Gallareta Cervera: *Reconstructing Social Shifts through Monumental Architecture: a Maya Palace-Temple Case from Kiuic, Yucatan, Mexico*  
(Under the direction of Drs. Patricia McAnany, Silvia Tomaskova and Margaret Scarry)

Due to their hybrid nature, people and objects cannot be analyzed as separated entities; the changes in one entity are necessarily reflected in the other. Monumental architecture, an object constructed to last a long time in a defined space, becomes a receptacle of accumulated meaning, memory and the social identity of communities interacting with it in their daily life. By reconstructing the social biography of a Maya palace-temple, through the building's recovered architectonic sequence and its general characteristics, I explore the possible social implications in the life of ancient Maya dwellers through this structure's 1800 years construction history.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
List of Tables.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Chapter	
I. Introduction .....	1
II. Previous Investigations of Monumental Architecture in Maya Archaeology .....	4
III. Materiality of Social Change: Object-Subject Relationship.....	7
Monumental Architecture, Longevity and Memory.....	10
Maya Monumental Buildings.....	11
Maya Chronological Periods and the Socio-Political Implications of Architecture....	18
IV. Case Study: The Kiuic Archaeological Site in the Puuc Region of Yucatán.....	22
V. Architectural Sequence of the Palace Temple (N1065E1025) and Council House (N1015E1015).....	31
VI. Biography of Monumental Architecture at Kiuic, Yucatan .....	48
Stability and Transformation of Architecture.....	50
Changes in Access Patterns and the Use of Exclusionary Space.....	57
Temples and Termination Rituals.....	57
Linking of Sacred Places through Processions.....	58
VII. Final Comments.....	62
Bibliography.....	5

List of Tables

1.	Phase 1, structures dated to the Middle Pre-Classic (Floor 4) and relevant features.....	34
2.	Phase 2, structures dated to Early Classic (Floor 3 and 4) and relevant features.....	37
3.	Phase 3, structures dated to the late Early Classic (Floor 3) and relevant features.....	40
4.	Phase 4, structures dated to the Late Classic (Floor 2) and relevant features.....	42
5.	Phase 5, structures dated to the Terminal Classic (Floor 2) and relevant features.....	44
6.	Phase 6, structures dated to the late Terminal Classic (Floor 1) and relevant features.....	47

## List of Figures

1.	Archaeological Sites located at the northern Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico (Gallareta N, et al. 2002).....	23
2.	Map of Archaeological Map of Kiuic.....	25
3.	Yaxché Group, Kuic (Gallereta N. et al. 2004).....	26
4.	Obsidian (in circle) and pottery jar located in square 0-24 (Gallareta N. et al. 2004).....	27
5.	Detail of structure N1065E1025 showing the megalithic and palace construction phases.....	28
6.	Detail of floor 3 renovation in Structure N1065E1025 (Bey et al. 2007).....	29
7.	SW corner of Structure N1065E1025 (Temple-Pyramid) after excavation (2008).....	32
8.	Hypothetical extent of Late Pre-Classic Platform.....	34
9.	Detail of pavement in floor level (Gallereta N. et al. 2008).....	36
10.	Burned human remains found in pit (Gallareta C. 2008).....	38
11.	West view of the long rectangular structure or council house/Str. N1015E1015 (Gallareta N. et al. 2006).....	39
12.	Plan of Megalithic platform and vaulted room (Bey et al. 2006).....	41
13.	Reconstruction of Yaxché group in the Late Classic Period, by David Rivera Arjona.....	43
14.	Profile of Temple-Pyramid (N1065E1025) at its final construction stage (Gallereta N. et al. 2009).....	45
15.	East Temple (Str. N1050E1065). Location of fragments of burned floors (Bey et al. 2006).....	46
16.	Cross section and photograph of six floor levels and Dzunun Plaza. Test pit located at the north of Structure N1015E1015.....	50
17.	Map of Kiuic's archaeological groups in relation to the road that unites them (Sacbe).....	60

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

Due to their interaction, people and objects cannot be analyzed as separated entities; changes in one are inevitably reflected in the other and vice versa. Hence, qualitative changes in the characteristics of material culture can suggest different relationships between objects and subjects at any given time and space. Here I suggest that such changes are manifestations of shifts in the social, political and ideological systems of ancient societies. Monumental objects, such as buildings, are constructed to last for a long time and occupy a defined space. As a consequence, they become receptacles of accumulated meaning and memory that conform to the social identities of communities and persons interacting with the monuments in their daily lives. The questions that I explore are related to monumental archaeology, its associated contexts and artifacts, and the social inferences we make about them.

Monumental architecture has been a topic of interest to archaeologists since the foundation of the discipline more than a century ago. Massive monuments bring both fascination and intrigue to contemporary audiences, stimulating the mind to reflect on what these objects were like when they were still in use. However, it is important to remember that what we usually see is the corroded shell or peel of what a monument used to be. Paint, ornaments, decorative facades, and even parts of ancient structures are usually gone by the time archaeologists investigate a monument. Hence, the ruins that contemporary spectators see embody changed meaning in two ways: first, at a material level and due to long periods of

abandonment, monuments are partially destroyed and stripped of their formal characteristics; secondly, meanings are transformed through the passage of time. We, as audience, cannot interact with these objects the same way that past dwellers did, because we do not share cultural values with those who lived with the monuments in the past. As we will later see, their substantial mass and immobility “anchors” monumental architecture in time and space, and creates a canvas in which physical features and cultural meanings are added by individuals.

The purpose of this study is to identify material indicators that can tell us about social changes in society. To accomplish this task, I study a monumental building, construction sequence, cultural artifacts, and its relationship with other structures at the Maya site of Kiuic, Yucatán. Monumental characteristics and construction techniques can help us understand social, the relationships between social forms and material culture, as well as the construction of power. This study is by no means final; although the construction materials, techniques and even architectural styles may be similar to other structures within the Maya area, every building has a different story based on social, political and ideological circumstances.

In this paper the archaeological relationship among time, space, objects and subjects is analyzed through monumental architecture. In a general sense, this study is about place making and its implications for the daily life of ancient Maya dwellers. Through eight archaeological seasons, the Kiuic archaeological team recovered and reconstructed parts of the 1800 year construction history of the core of the site. Due to its size, physical characteristics and style, Structure N1065E1025 at the site of Kiuic in Yucatán, Mexico, can be characterized as a monumental palace-temple complex. Although N1065E1025 has only

been studied for three seasons, excavations have revealed the SW corner and the façade of the room located in the upper part of the structure. The architectural and chronological sequence of this complex can help us to understand social practice, elite identity and the projection of power among those who resided and built the architectural plaza complex today called Yaxché. Here, I explore an architectural sequence within a built environment through the social biography of this monumental object. In order to investigate the structure's quantitative (i.e., number of renovations) and qualitative (i.e., form or function) changes, I also discuss the role of ancient Maya temples, palaces, and their relation to the political and social milieu that characterized each of the main chronological phases of Maya culture.

In sum, questions I address include the following: (1) what can the construction sequence of an architectural complex and its associated artifacts tell us about the individuals who lived there and (2) to what extent can we reconstruct the social life of a place by looking through the small window that archaeological evidence provides? The goal of this study is to evaluate the relationship between structure N1065E1025 (a palace-temple) and N1015E1015 (a so-called council house, discussed in detail later), and to understand the social implications of reiterative architectural renovations, function changes and ceremonial contexts in the Yaxché group, at the center of the Kiuic archaeological site.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Previous Investigations of Monumental Architecture in Maya Archaeology**

The Maya region consists of what are now the southeastern Mexican states of Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatán, Quintana Roo and the east of Tabasco, as well as the nations of Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. The region can be divided into three cultural areas: the northern lowlands of the Yucatán peninsula, the southern lowlands of Belize, Guatemala, and the state of Chiapas in Mexico, and finally the southern highlands in the mountainous region of southern Guatemala.

Since the beginning of archaeology as a discipline, monumental architecture has captured the attention of antiquarians. Due to massive volume, integration with landscape, and powerful and suggestive nature, monuments have been co-opted as national symbols in most parts of the world (i.e., Giza Pyramid, Machu Picchu, the Roman Coliseum, and Teotihuacan, to name a few). In the Maya region, studies of monumentality closely paralleled theoretical paradigms of the moment. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century archaeologists focused on describing and registering exterior characteristics of monumental architecture. It was not until the 1940's that archaeologists started to go beyond the descriptive and analyze regional patterns and architectural styles (Wauchope 1938, 1949; Pollock 1940). In the 1970's regional assessments of monumental architecture in the Maya area emerged and ideas relating to behavior, urbanization, place making, and the creation of landscape were

investigated (Andrews 1975). However, the complete transition from descriptive to analytical approaches to monumental architecture in the Maya area took place only in the 1980's and 1990's. These new approaches explored the monumental as an indicator of social relationships among individuals. Hierarchy, for example, was analyzed through different analytical models such as the energetic cost per individual structures in relation to their construction material, form and decoration (most notably Adams 1998). Other social phenomena, such as mortuary customs, were no longer observed as isolated data, but incorporated into the social whole, as an important part of ideology, claims to place, and power (McAnany 1995, 1998).

Additionally, due to its large mass and impact on a built environment, monumental architecture -especially palaces and temples- are generally used as material indicators of socio-political complexity. In the Maya area, the appearance of monumental architecture in the Pre-Classic period, at sites like Nakbe and El Mirador in Guatemala, has been taken as a bench mark for the beginning of social complexity and urbanization (Hansen 2001; Stanton 2000). The enormous public architecture dated to 600BC at the site of Nakbe, for example, is argued to indicate a growing economic and social differentiation in society in which the elite were able to manipulate the masses to built significant public works and to otherwise support and sustain the elite (Hansen 1991, 2001). In the case of the west side of the Yucatán, our region of interest, sites have been traditionally considered to have been most populated periods during the Late (A.D. 600-900) and Terminal Classic (A.D. 900-1000) periods, due to the lack of permanent water sources (Dunning 1992). However, current investigations have observed that major civic-ceremonial architecture constructed in the Puuc area from the

Late Pre-Classic at sites such as Yaxuna, Komchen, Dzibichaltun, Xocnaceh, Kiuic, among others (Bey 2006:27).

The archaeology of monumental buildings has supported nationalistic ideas in Mexico since beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is especially true in the state of Yucatán, where most monumental structures are not excavated in any invasive manner. In fact, most monumental structures are only “liberated” from the large quantity of stone rubble, which is the result of collapsed walls, and of overgrown vegetation. The goal of this approach is to preserve the buildings’ final stage of construction, without risking the integrity and beauty of pre-Hispanic buildings (after all, archaeology *is* a destructive process). These consolidated buildings have been integrated as national symbols in to Mexican ideology and tourism (i.e. the Chichén Itzá “Castillo” and Observatory, the Uxmal Palace of the Governor, and the “Adivino” Pyramid, among others). The problem with this approach is that most of the architectonic construction phases of a building are not recorded or analyzed; hence, there are large gaps in the reconstruction of the urban development of large Yucatec Maya sites and their relationship to the southern Maya area. This situation, among other factors, has led Maya archaeologists to focus more on the southern lowlands when researching the origins of social complexity. As a result, virtually no stratigraphic sequences are known for the Maya Puuc region, which has led to an incomplete understanding of the time depth of the northern Maya lowlands, and the notion that this area was only densely occupied in the Late Classic Period and that there was little socio-political development before this time. This idea is challenged by new investigations which show that communities of the northern lowlands were constructing monumental architecture during the late Pre-Classic period (Gallareta Negron 2005).

### **Chapter 3:**

#### **Materiality of Social Change: Object-Subject Relationship**

Every object, small or monumental, has a social life of its own, and hence, a social biography (Kopytoff 1986); its story depends on the social value that subjects place on their objects. However, the relationship between individuals and objects changes from generation to generation, leaving visible traces or prints on an object. In other words, there is a constant reinterpretation of the relationship between objects and subjects which may occupy the same space but at different times.

Pels (1998:94) and Latour (2005:73) critique the traditional way that anthropology and sociology see materiality and classify it as fetishism due to inattention to object-subject relationship. Numerous social investigators such as Pels (1998), Meskell (2005:4) Keane (2003), Latour (2005), and Appadurai (1986, 2006) propose that studies of materiality must not only focus on the characteristics of objects, but must engage in the dialect of people. Objects have a set of cultural relations (Pels 2002) and they exist with individuals in a specific relationship which depends on temporality, spatiality and sociality (Meskell 2005a:6). These sets of relationships represent the power of realizing things in the world, crafting things from nothing, subjects from non-subjects (*ibid*). Meskell (2005b:58), for

example, makes an interesting parallel by arguing that the divine statues in ancient Egypt had an active role in society; statues mediated power relationships between the elite and commoners by embodying the materialization of the gods themselves. This mediation was done through daily routines that impose human agency in this particular social setting, time and space. Another example can be read in Latour's (1999) analysis of the slogan "Guns don't kill people; people kill people" in which he argues that objects have a dramatic influence on subjects and vice versa. "You are different with a gun in your hand; the gun is different with you holding it. You are another subject because you hold the gun; the gun is another object because it has entered into a relationship with you" (1999:179). In this example, Latour emphasizes the powerful hybrid entity that results from the relationship between humans and non-humans.

This hybridity connection between becomes more evident when observing changes in the relationship between humans and non-humans through time. Following Appadurai (1986, 2006) and Kopytoff (1986), we can ponder what factors influenced studied objects to have a successful or unsuccessful life trajectory (or successful career, as Kopytoff calls it). Moreover, Kopytoff (1986) points out that as persons have different kinds of biographies – psychological, political, professional, familiar– objects too have different types of biographies, and it is precisely this perspective that makes a biography cultural (*ibid*). Appadurai (2006:15), on the other hand, argues that all things are congealed moments in a longer social trajectory. History corrodes things; it changes their meaning and values through time (Appadurai 2006).

So far I have made two main points: (1) Individuals (subjects) and their materiality (objects) cannot be analyzed as different entities; objects are not only external artifacts, they are a

material culture within a larger conceptualization of culture and habitus (Miller 2005:4). Moreover, both need to be observed to understand their social implications and meanings within a given time. And secondly, the relationship between objects and subjects is constantly changing. The observation of these changes in a “social biography” can be useful to understand their trajectories through the series of events that took place in their history. Some of the social theorists quoted on the theoretical framework of this paper are focusing on modern sociological theory; their investigation questions range from what drives objects to become commodities in simple and complex societies (Appadurai 1986, 2006; Kopytoff 1986) to the role of actor network theory in science (Latour 1999, 2005). Nevertheless, I believe that their core argument – that subjects and objects are related and that this relationship changes through time – can be applied beyond the focus of commodities and the modern western world. This theoretical framework based on materiality (Meskell 2005; Miller 2005), hybrid objects-subjects (Latour 1999, 2005; Pels 1998) and the cultural biographical approach (Kopytoff 1986) can also be used to analyze the life of monumental objects. What is monumental architecture if not large unmovable objects (McAnany 2010)?

Due to the range of time it encompasses and its object of study (material remains), archaeology has a great advantage in this kind of analysis. Moreover, it can recover details that indicate the specific relations between objects and subjects within a specific time range. As we will see in the next section, monumental objects occupy a privileged position in the object-subject relationship. They are built to last for a very long time in a marked space, hence, traces of ideology can be tracked through archaeological manifestations.

### *Monumental Architecture, Longevity and Memory*

So far, I have suggested that: (1) objects and subjects are connected and cannot be studied as separate entities; (2) objects and subjects collectively have a social life that changes through time; and (3) changes in object-subject relationships can be observed through archaeological manifestations. In this respect, monumental architecture plays a significant role in the study of change in object-subject relationships; its significance is based on two factors. First, built a large mass and durable, they are resistant to damage from abandonment and weathering. In ancient Maya structures, for example, cut stone platforms and buildings preserve much better than rough-cut stone and mud houses. Carved stones are generally made from dense limestone and covered with a plaster coating that is more resistant to weathering than clay (which can wash away faster and easier). Second, the durable and massive nature of monumental structures provides a large canvas on which social groups can attach meaning and re-interpretation through generations. Through a constant reinterpretation of the function and meaning of buildings we can infer the object-subject relationships of the building and its surrounding social sphere. In this sense, monumental structures interact with different social spheres through time. Because one influences the other, when there is qualitative change in the interaction between these two, both of them are affected. Archaeologically, the subjects we study are gone, we cannot observe social change directly; however, we can infer social changes through the observation of a group's materiality.

In order to identify qualitative change we must search for key features that instantiate the function and meaning of monumental buildings. By finding these features in a building construction sequence, we can glimpse the hybrid relationship between monumental building and its agents. We can understand this relationship through the materiality of architecture by

observing quantitative and qualitative changes in the physicality of a structure. Here I suggest that quantitative changes, such as the number of renovations or episodes of maintenance, are designed to reinforce an ideological message. I suggest that qualitative changes, on the other hand, indicate that the fundamental values of place and space have been reinterpreted.

When monumental architecture is constructed, new spaces are created in a physical and social sense (Rowlands 1993). One effective way in which social groups integrate these monumental objects into landscapes is through the creation and recreation of memory and place; these are produced through rituals and ceremonies that preserve or change the social meaning of an object or place. Connerton (1989: 25) reminds us that the relationship between acting out and remembering is central to the study of memory; acting out replaces the capacity to remember by formalizing certain events and integrating them into a narrative. Thus, to remember is not to recall isolated events, but to become capable of forming meaningful narrative sequences (*ibid*). It is through this process that memories (individual and social) are created and transformed, which in turn, affect the perception of place (Stanton and Magnoni 2002:5). Hence, through monumentality, longevity and social changes through time, we as social scientists can infer the different meanings of objects at different points in time. Monumental architecture is used to legitimize or reinforce the status of individuals associated with their construction or use.

### *Maya Monumental Buildings*

Monumental buildings were integrated into the social, political and ideological life of Maya dwellers as early as the Middle Pre-Classic period (1000 BC – 300 AC). Miller (1998: 108, 1999:22) describes the general forms of elite architecture and characterizes its elements as

dependents upon principles of domestic architecture. In this sense, the different kinds of stone buildings located in the cores of sites are linked to non-elite structures made of perishable materials by four central construction elements. Miller (1998) describes these elements as the platform, the hut, the path and steps. Moreover, the physical spaces created by the distribution of these buildings (i.e., the plazas and open courts), serve as venues for public rituals where large numbers of individuals could participate. Additionally, these massive buildings were constantly re-modeled by adding additional architectonic features which sometimes were marked by caches, burials or sealed rooms (*ibid*).

Maya structures literally were built by layers of meanings. As Abrams (1998:124) mentions, early archaeologists made three observations that stand out and are still relevant to Maya architecture: (1) buildings often (but not always) were constructed in multiple and distinct episodes with a later buildings built over an earlier one; (2) existing buildings were partially demolished for re-use in a later construction; and (3) both elites and commoners shared many engineering practices. Maya architecture represents the physical embodiment of articulated materials and behaviors involving costs, construction decisions, human labor organization and buildings that are integrated into the sites and that can only be created within one social setting (Abrams 1998:123). Hence, different episodes of construction create historic layers of meanings that are consolidated by the daily praxis of dwellers, and preserved by social memory and historical reconstruction (Connerton 1989; Webster 1998).

Memory and place are produced through ritual and ceremonies that can preserve or change the social meaning of an object, what Rowlands (1993) defines as inscribed memory<sup>1</sup>. In this

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<sup>1</sup> Rowlands (1993) distinguished between inscribed memory (characterized by repetition, public access and materialized in visible ceremonial activities such as the construction of monuments) and incorporated memory (characterized by opaque symbolism and secrecy that leave little, if any, archaeological remains).

regard Maya monumental architecture was a fundamental element in the pre-Hispanic landscape due to its central role in the political and ideological organization of some Maya cities. Specifically, the creation and recreation of rituals here is undertaken by agents who control the recreation of inscribed memories by engaging or promoting rituals that take place in large stone buildings. The Maya built environment created containers for the performance of human and divine dramas, some of which were highly formulated and structured by tightly controlled conventions (Webster 1998; Houston 1998). In this sense, architecture functions as a very visual legitimization of power in space and time; through ideology it constantly reminds the audience “who” is in charge and “why” it is that way; the construction of monumental buildings, specifically Maya temples, together with a previously established system of beliefs legitimize the power positions of certain elite individuals or groups (Ringle 1998). In fact, the very act of building colossal structures appears to have accelerated and amplified social distinctions (McAnany 2010:162).

Moreover, as part of an engineered landscape, colossal constructions generally provide space, above and beyond all else, for performance and ritual practice (Inomata and Cobean 2006). Monumental buildings like temples, palaces and council houses, for example, had a social and political involvement with everyday life. Architecture, in this sense, functioned as a mnemonic backdrop, with public iconography framing repeated public ritual. Miller (1998:192) suggests that architecture confirms ritual and makes it present and living even when it is not being performed. This notion can be observed in many archaeological sites (like Naranjo, Bonampak, Caracol, Chichen Itza, Uxmal, and others) where iconographic elements display different kinds of messages (for example, stone stelae claim a victory, stairways show captives and building facades project kingly images).

The simplest definition of a Maya temple would be a small building used for ritual and ceremonial purposes. However, this same definition can also be applied to several other kinds of buildings. For this reason, a temple-pyramid is an appropriate expression, as this eliminates buildings that are temple like in size or form but lack a required substructure (Andrews 1975). Many temple-pyramids start as structures made of wood and other perishable materials. They may pass through an intermediate stage in which the lower walls are built of stone, while upper walls and the roof continue to be made of poles and thatch. During the next stage, the wooden roof may be replaced by masonry corbelled vaults (Andrews 1975). Temples usually, but not always, consist of one room which can be entered through a single doorway. At this final stage, pyramid-temples viewed from the ground are imposing monumental structures. Maya temples served Maya royalty in life and death. During their lives, Maya royalty performed rituals and ceremonies in temples on public and private occasions. In this sense, Miller (1998:194) argues that temples function as receptacles of meaning and memory at Maya sites. The monumental Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque, for example, embodies the ruler Pakal as the building itself is dedicated to him with his body buried at its base; the grouping of monumental architecture and powerful individuals, in this case Pakal the ruler of Palenque, creates a authoritative entity that displays the absolute power of an individual in his time and afterwards. Additionally, iconography on the exterior of buildings, elite ceramics, carved historical narratives and designs of elite clothing's also play an influential role in transmitting memory and meaning. In this sense, one of the objectives of Maya temples was the creation of memoir, to promote a specific set of memories and anchor them in time and space through visual imagery and written texts (*ibid*).

The term palace is used to describe a series of buildings that are different from the rest on the basis of size, ground plan, and relationship with other structures. As Andrews (1975) comments, there is really no single archetypal form which can be associated with the term palace. Within Puuc monumental architecture, they generally are stone buildings with vaulted roofs, and multiple rooms that can be entered by means of a series of doorways centered on the rooms along one of the long transverse walls. In contrast, buildings that are classified as Puuc palaces tend to be long, multi-room range structures that are constructed on low basal platforms (Ambrosino 2003). Andrews (1975) suggests that these kinds of buildings came into being after or evolved directly from a large version of the temple; Ambrosino (2003) for example, mentions that the palace at the site of Sayil, Yucatán, combines the typical form of a palace with a temple-pyramid form (the palace final construction phase was a three story structure essentially consisting of three separate range-style constructions, one on top of and recessed back from the other). For Ambrosino, there are two ways to understand the functions of particular Maya palaces: one is through the examination of formal characteristics of a given structure (i.e., layout of space within interiors, decorative and iconographic elements, and spatial positioning within the surrounding site) and the other is through the examination of cultural deposits associated with Maya palaces.

The term palace has been considerate problematic among Mayanists, due to the European bias inherent in the use of this term (Inomata and Triadan 2003; Ambrosino 2003); this bias can lead to the assumption that all palaces had certain intrinsic functions without firm contextualization of the building within its surrounding built environment; moreover, this assumption leads archaeologists to classify these kinds of buildings by form and not to

investigate the meaning behind the form (Ambrosino 2003:253). Currently, it is commonly accepted that palace-type structures were residential in function (Liendo Stuardo 2003). However, there is still no consensus about the specific functions of these buildings. In a review of northern Maya palaces, Kowalski (2003) discusses the spatial distribution, and surrounding buildings and associated hieroglyphic texts and concludes that northern Maya palaces conform to three patterns which correspond to different functions. The first pattern consists of a somewhat isolated distribution of vaulted-masonry residential courtyard groups with none standing out as a royal palace. The second pattern consists of centralized palaces of impressive size coupled with the focus on powerful, elaborately costumed individuals on the stele of sites (such as Dzibichaltun, Uxmal and Sayil), which suggests that the cities had a more centralized form of rulership in which the political system was dominated by a paramount ruler. The final pattern consists of large, multi-room palaces (like the three story palace at Sayil and the main palace at Labna) which were probably residences for extended elite families and their retainers, while other multi-room vaulted buildings (the southern palace of Sayil, the courtyard west of the portal arch at Labna) may have served public administrative purposes or been meeting places for local councils. The pattern observed at the site of Kiuic corresponds with Kowalski's third pattern.

In addition to temple pyramids and palaces, Maya archaeologists have interpreted other structures as council houses or *Popol Na* where Maya rulers met with elite council members for the administration of public affairs. Council houses are characterized structurally as long vaulted structures with a central room, multiple entrances, and an open, large and accessible interior space. Often they feature ramps and a frontal staircase that permit easy access. It is argued that these buildings served as places of civic reunions and ceremonies. Due to this

function, archaeological materials should indicate non-residential activities. Kowalski (2003) discusses several examples of structures that have been interpreted as council houses in the Maya area (at Dzibichaltun, Chichen Itza and Uxmal). For example, Structure 44 at the northern Maya site of Dzibichaltun, is one of the longest range structures in the Maya area. The building surmounts a terrace platform with a broad monumental staircase that leads from the plaza to the building. The front of the building contains at least 35 doorways that lead to three long, single vaulted corridor-like rooms. Its placement within the overall site and its form has led Kowalski to assent that this structure had a significant public administrative function (but see Kurjack 2003 for an alternative interpretation).

Although the buildings included in the categories of temple, palaces and council houses are the most monumental of their kind, the specific forms and functions of these are not completely understood. Some general functions have been argued in relation to artefactual and spatial contexts. Incorporating ancestors in the built environment, for example, played an important role for defining domestic structures and was practiced by both elite and non-elite parts of the populations (McAnany 1995:272-274). Ancestor incorporation in the monumental built environment served express social hierarchy and the power of elite groups. In other words, important individuals (e.g., heads of households, big man, chiefs, etc) might be buried in temples. The combination of monumental architecture and individual status of the burial created a powerful hybrid (Latour 2005) that reinforced the political, ideological and social importance of dominant groups.

*Maya Chronological Periods and the Socio-Political Implications of Architecture*

Maya civilization can be divided into three major chronological periods: Pre-Classic (1800B.C.-A.D. 300), Classic (A.D. 300-1000) and Post-Classic (A.D. 1000-1492). Each of these phases is characterized by different social, political and ideological structures (although there is a tremendous overlap in architecture forms). These changes are reflected in a material record that generates contexts that are the direct result of interaction between objects and individuals. I briefly describe the main characteristics of these chronological periods with special emphasis on the role of monumental architecture in regards to social and political organization.

*The Pre-Classic period* is divided in three sub-periods: early (1800-1000 B.C.), middle (1000-300 B.C.) and late (300 B.C.-A.D. 300). Monumental architecture is not prominent in the early and middle periods (although the site of Nakbe has a monumental pyramid dated to 600 BC), which were characterized by farmers living in small villages with houses made of perishable materials like pole and thatch. The Late Pre-Classic period has been argued to have been a period when hierarchy rose, as seen in numerous monumental structures, decorated stucco facades and large scale trade throughout the region. Nevertheless, Ringle (1998) argues that the first construction of monumental architecture, in the middle to late Pre-Classic, is associated with a largely egalitarian society with limited differences in rank. Ritual practices in this period (like human sacrifice, deities such as the Jester God, costumes and office) exhibit a significant continuity in later periods, suggesting that early in their history the Maya developed certain organizational principles which were materially manifested in the societies of the Classic and Post-Classic periods (Ringle 1998:185).

Several lines of evidence indicate that elite groups were materially and socially different from commoners by this period. These differences were linked to the eventual emergence of divine kingship and sacred bloodlines during the Early Classic Period. Maya temples, as monumental buildings, were built actively between 200-0 BCE throughout the lowlands; the construction of these massive pyramids that housed deities is argued to be a strong characteristic of archaic states, and is evident in several places in Mesoamerica (McAnany 2010); their function was related to the creation of group identity through ritual ceremonies, and the concentration of authority embodied large amount of human labor entailed in their labor.

*The Classic period*, often considered the pinnacle of the ancient Maya civilization, it is divided into three phases: early (A.D. 300-600), late (A.D. 600-900) and terminal (A.D. 900-1000). During this period, monumental architecture, stone carving, and façade decoration are highly elaborated. Political leadership is institutionalized, and characterized by divine kinship in which individual rulers affirmed their position through bloodlines of power and reference to material objects (architecture, inherited heirlooms, etc.); Major cities with populations that ranged from 8000-75,000 existed throughout the Maya region. By the beginning of this period, monumental architecture was an instituted part of the landscape. As mentioned earlier, the cultural traditions that originated in the Pre-classic period were appropriated by the elite groups who shifted away from the veneration of gods to particular individual rulers who conceived themselves as “divine rulers”. The architectural accomplishments of the Late Classic embody a great amount of collective human experience; they reflect economic prosperity, worldview, manipulated opinion and political relationships (Abrams 1998).

*The Puuc Region*, despite its fertile soils, has been perceived as a marginal settlement area because of its lack of permanent surface water. Dunning's (1992) investigations of the climate of the Puuc in pre-Hispanic times suggest that the early Classic period (250-600 AD) was significantly drier than present day. The Late Classic-Terminal Classic may have been slightly wetter than the present, and the early post-Classic may have been somewhat drier. He concludes that, the buildup of Maya occupation in the Puuc may have been in response to a wetter pulse in the region's climate and that the Puuc may have been a breadbasket of northern Yucatán. Control of this region's resources may have been an essential aspect of the political geography of the northern lowlands. The evidence: population of the northern coastal plains appears to have been much higher than their relatively poor soils could maintain during the Late-Terminal Classic period (Vlcek, Kurjack, and Garza, 1978).

The Puuc was, hence, the most probable surplus producing area that could have supplied food to the northern yucatec population. The occupation of the Puuc soils may have led rulers to expand their political influence across much of the northern Yucatán peninsula as is shown in the many sites exhibiting Puuc architecture that lie outside the Puuc zone during the Late and Terminal Classic periods. Permanent occupation in the Puuc region was accomplished by constructing thousands of cisterns for capturing water (*chultunes*).

*The Post-Classic period* can be characterized as a transformation of political and social organization across the Maya region. This period is most notoriously known by a demographic re-arrangement caused by the gradual depopulation of the main Maya cities of the Classic period. After their abandonment, evidence indicates that ancient sites were re-occupied by small populations that reused the buildings for different purposes. Evidence of this can be observed at sites in the form of partial dismantling (recycling carved stones of

abandoned buildings to create new structure), or commemoration rites (evidence of ceremonial objects have been found in post-abandoned contexts). After a period of rapid population increase, the Puuc area also experienced a demographic re-arrangement which is reflected by the gradual abandonment of Classic Period sites in several parts of the Maya area (specially in the southern lowlands).

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Case Study: The Kiuic Archaeological Site in the Puuc Region of Yucatán**

The Proyecto Arqueológico Regional de Bolonchén is a multidisciplinary project that since 2000 has carried out excavations in different archaeological sites of the Puuc region of western Yucatán. Its main objective is to understand the relationship between urban and rural landscapes and their social and political development in pre-Hispanic times. The project has carried out archaeological survey, excavation and restoration of numerous ancient structures. Since the beginning, the archaeological site of Kiuic has been central to this project (figure 1). Its urban features, such as public buildings, patios, plazas, pathways, temples, and architectural characteristics epitomize the Puuc area in pre-Hispanic times. During eight years of exploration in the center and periphery of the site, the project has generated a vast amount of architectural and chronological information. In particular, excavations have focused on the Yaxché group, the main civic center. There, investigations revealed an architectural complex that includes three plazas (Dunum, Icim and Ulum), several structures which we interpret as a council house or *popol nah* (Structure N1015E1015), the east temple (N1050E1065), and a monumental temple-pyramid (N1065E1025) (figure 2).

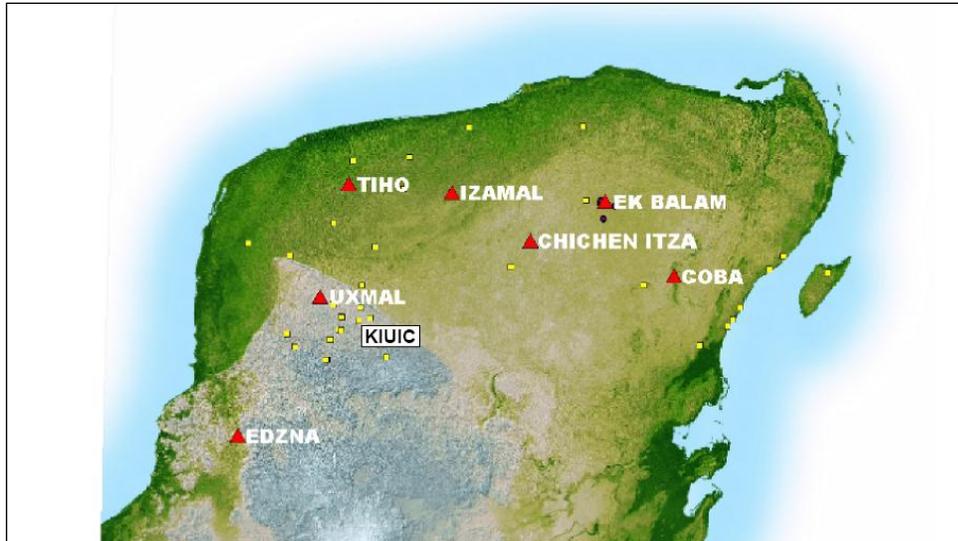


Figure 1. Archaeological Sites located at the northern Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico (Gallareta N, et al. 2002)

For most of the pre-Hispanic monumental architecture in the north of Yucatán, a complete stratigraphic record does not exist. This is especially true for the major buildings of the Puuc region. This lack of knowledge of construction history is related in large part, to a history of excavation and reconstruction that served the interests of tourism and nationalism. Bey (2006:17) provides four reasons why there are misconceptions about the northern lowlands (for example, lack of dense occupation, lack of sophisticated art, and literacy):

- Lack of coverage; some parts of the north were black holes until the 1980's and 1990's;
- No documentation of activities during the Classic period (opposite to the south, where dynastic histories were studied since the 1970's);
- Lack of a polychrome ceramic tradition;
- Low level of publications by researchers working on the area.

Hence, what is unique about the Yaxché group and its main architectural components is the high level of detailed knowledge about construction phases (figure 3). Archaeological

excavations have focused on documentation and interpretation of the construction sequences of the plaza and associated buildings. This process includes the generation of a long and detailed list of construction phases and other features that constitute the urban development of the site. Moreover, the site's long construction sequence (over 1800 years) materializes the process of placemaking in which ancient builders engaged at Kiuic.



Figure 2. Map of the archaeological site of Kiuc, Yucatan.

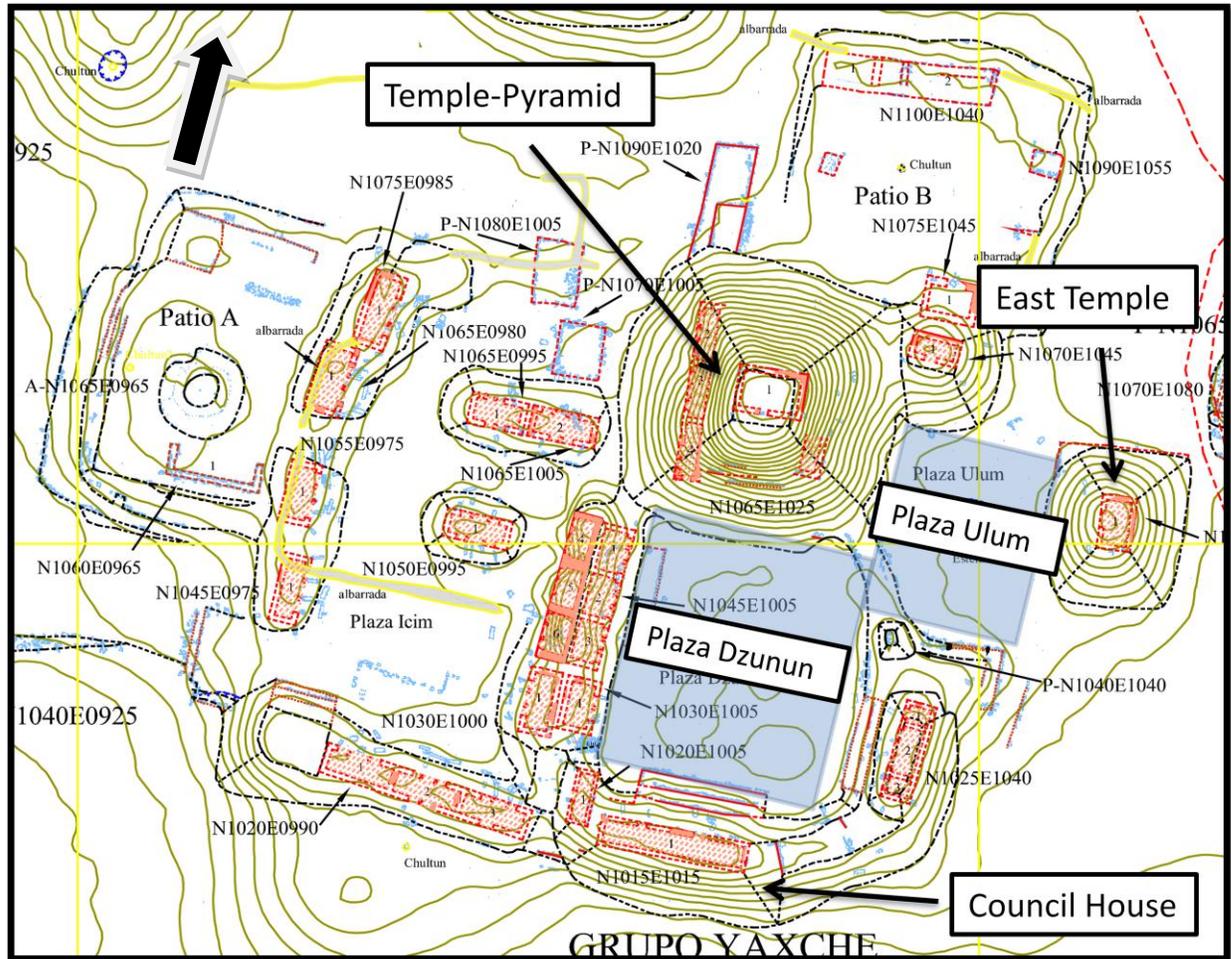


Figure 3. Yaxché Group, Kuic (Gallareta N. et al 2004).

### *Descriptions*

To infer the role of monumental architecture at Kiuic, I evaluate several material indicators that inform us about the nature of the relationships among the people constructing and residing near the Yaxché group. Additionally, I distinguish changes in a defined architectural phase from the overall development of the architectural complex. The archaeologically visible activities that reflect the biography and political identity of a building include the following: ritual deposits (such as cache offerings and burials), new construction phases, renovations, the partial dismantling (i.e., recycling of stones and other building materials for

use in another structure), and partial or total destruction. Below I discuss their material indicators in a general definitional sense.

### *Ritual Deposits*

These can be defined as ceremonial intrusions<sup>2</sup> to a building. This kind of deposit generally is placed as part of dedication or termination rituals (see figure 4). Dedicatory caches, for example, can mark the beginning of a new construction; they work to ritually animate a space; on the other hand, termination caches indicate the de-animation of a space; smashed and/or burned vessels, for example, can indicate a termination event. The function of these rituals is to activate and deactivate the animus of a building, which is believed to be housed in both objects and architecture (Harrison-Buck 2004). In other words, these rituals have the purpose of maintaining and terminating the social identity of a building.



Figure 4. Obsidian (in circle) and Pottery jar located in Square 0-24 (Gallareta N. et al 2004)

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<sup>2</sup>Ritual deposits can be defined archaeologically as one or more objects found together, but apart from burials, whose grouping and situation point to intentional interment as an offering (Chase and Chase 1998).

### *Construction Phases*

Many Maya buildings manifest a series of substructures and renovation phases beneath their final skin. As mentioned before, the stone buildings at Kiuic underwent constant renovations throughout their histories (figure 5). To build new buildings, structures were partially dismantled, leaving intact the parts that could be used as construction fill. These partially dismantled buildings discovered under later construction phases are called substructures. One of the main reasons for building one structure over another was economy of material; once the decision to renovate a structure was made, the new construction would be placed on top of a previous structure, converting the earlier building into the construction fill of the newer one. This was a common practice in Classic Maya construction.

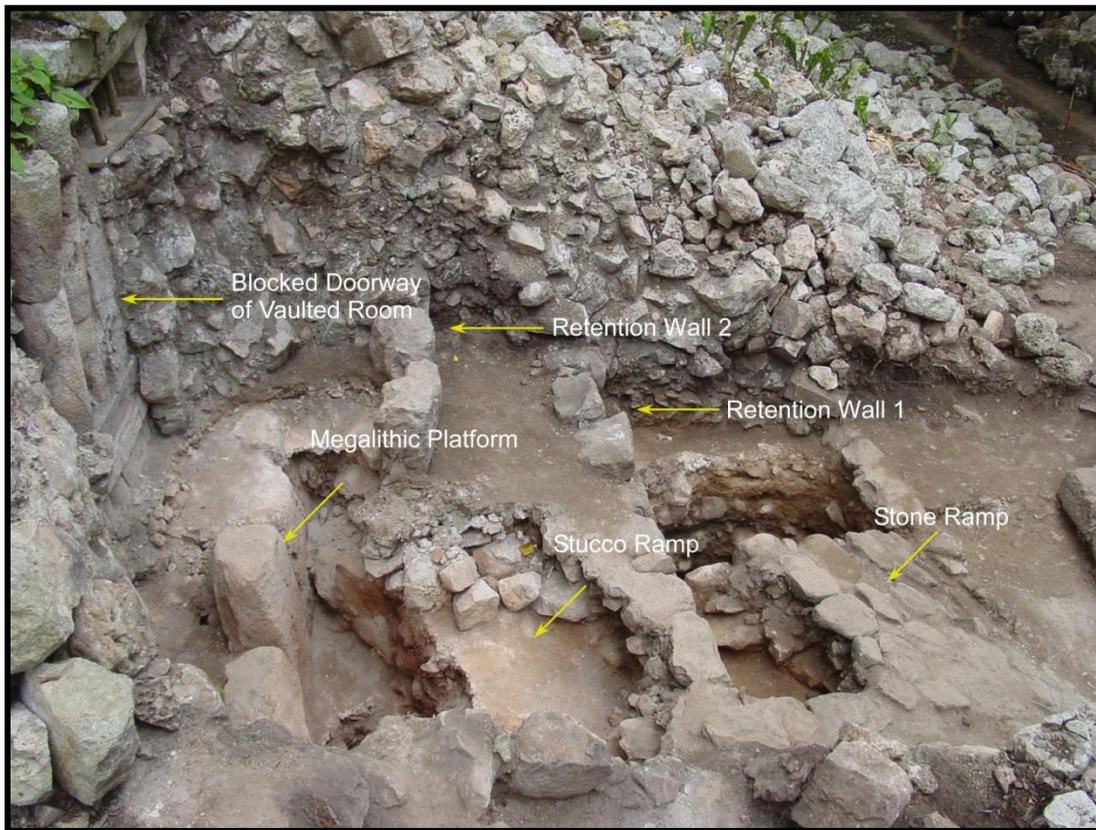


Figure 5. Detail of Structure N1065E1025 showing the megalithic and palace construction phases.

### *Renovations*

A renovation is identified by material remains that indicate a maintenance operation; stucco floors for example needed to be constantly maintained (figure 6). Expansion of architectural features are included within the category of renovation, especially contexts that indicate vertical or horizontal expansion of walls and platforms, but not entirely new constructions.

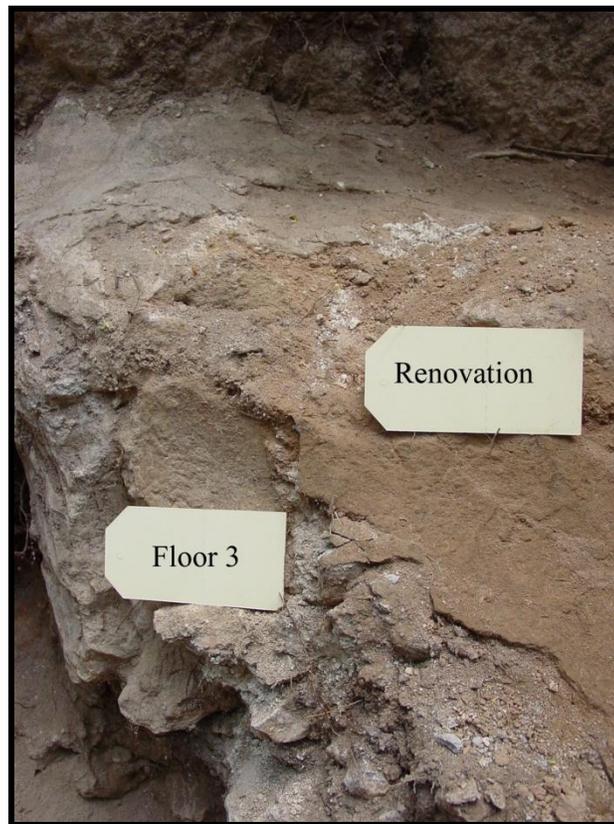


Figure 6. Detail of Floor 3 Renovation in Structure N1065E1025 (Bey et al. 2007)

### *Ceramic Chronology*

As in most archaeological studies, construction sequences are dated with the aid of associated ceramics. Using the principal of stylistic change over time, the Kiuic team analyzed the ceramics recovered from construction fill in order to establish a chronological framework for

the site. The ceramic typology and chronological framework used here were proposed by Gunn (2006).

Gathering together these lines of evidence, I correlate architectural changes with chronological sequences and reconstruct the decision-making processes by which a group of individuals shaped the topography of power at the Late Classic Maya site of Kiuic.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Architectural Sequence of the Temple-Pyramid (N1065E1025) and Council House (N1015E1015)**

There are at least seven construction phases in Kiuic's Yaxché group. The engineering techniques used by ancient builders were typical of the Puuc region. There was a progression and transformation from a series of stone platforms supporting buildings made of perishable materials to massive architecture made of masonry. This sequence extends over 1800 years, from the Middle Pre-Classic to the Terminal Classic period. During the seasons of excavation, several theories about the construction sequence of the plaza have been proposed. Stratigraphic excavations on the Temple-Pyramid (structure N1065E1025), in conjunction with excavated information from structure N1015E1015 (a range structure, and as we will discuss later, a possible council house) at the south end of the plaza, provided new insights on the chronology of events that led to the development of the Yaxché group in particular and the site in general. Information collected from the 2006-2008 excavations at the Palace-Temple, indicate that this structure witnessed at least three major construction events: the building of (1) an Early Classic megalithic platform, (2) a group of elite residential structures, possibly a palace, made of carved stone topped with vaulted roofs, and (3) a 17 m high pyramid temple with a large staircase from the plaza to the upper room of the structure (figure 7). Additionally, each construction phase showed evidence of numerous activities related to renovations (wall extension, ramp and floor constructions) and ceremonies (which

include a buried and burned individual during the Early-Late Classic and the use of Chen Mul incensories after the site was abandoned) that took place over different chronological periods.

I describe this sequence (with special emphasis on the Temple-Pyramid [N1065E1025] at the north and the long rectangular structure [N1015E1015] at the south end of the plaza) and discuss the social implications of its architectural and chronological contexts. This discussion is by no means exhaustive; it is a narrative of what we can infer from the material evidence recovered so far. As excavations move forward, interpretation of some details may change. With the information recovered so far, an accurate chronology for the plaza and some of its most relevant structures can be established.



Figure 7. SW corner of Structure N1065E1025 (Temple- Pyramid) after excavation (2008)

### *Group Phase 1*

The evidence for this phase indicates that the first stone building on the Dzunun plaza was a long rectangular stone platform (highlighted square in figure 8). This platform was built of small stones and measured approximately 0.75 m high and 14.5m x 14 m EW (Gallareta N. et al. 2004; Bey et al. 2006). The walls and roof of the platform were probably made of perishable materials. Ceramic, stratigraphic and radiocarbon<sup>3</sup> evidence indicates that this long rectangular structure was built sometime in the Middle Pre-Classic period, corresponding to the earliest stone buildings of the site. The dwellers of this building renovated the floor associated with this platform once before any other construction was built. Nothing was constructed at the north end of the plaza at this time (see Table 1). By the end of this phase, at least three structures were built on the west, east and south sides of the Dzunun Plaza. There is little evidence upon which to base an interpretation of the function of this plaza as ceremonial or residential during this phase.

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<sup>3</sup> A calibrated radiocarbon date from these contexts dates the plaza between 810 and 760 B.C.

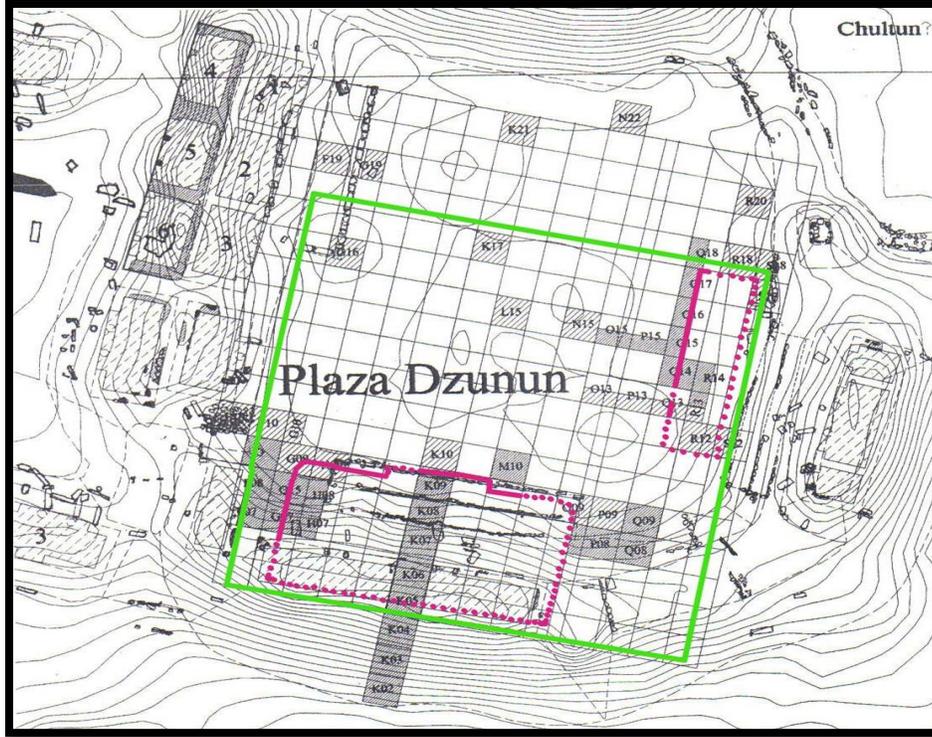


Figure 8. Hypothetical extent of Late Preclassic platform.

Table 1. Phase 1 structures dated to the Middle Pre-Classic (Floor 4) and relevant features.

Phase 1 Middle Pre-Classic	Ritual Deposit	Form	Function	Renovations
<b>Palace-Temple</b>				
<b>N1065E1025</b>	None	Not Built	None	None
<b>Long Rectangular Structure</b>				
<b>N1015E1015</b>	None	Pre-Classic Stone Platform	Unknown	Floor 4

### *Yaxché Group Phase 2*

This phase was characterized by two significant changes in the built environment of the plaza. The first change was a leveling and enlargement of the Dzunun plaza. The second was marked by the construction of a megalithic platform on the north side of the plaza (see Table 2).

The layer of pavement leveled and amplified the early Dzunun plaza as evidenced by the layer of compressed rough stones found in at least two test pits. I believe that this layer is a benchmark in the construction sequence of this plaza for three reasons: first the ceramic materials located below this stratum clearly correspond to earlier constructions (Middle and Late Pre-Classic) while ceramic materials above it are related to later occupations, thus marking a break in the chronological sequence. Second, the pavement stratum corresponds to the same level of the long rectangular structure (N1015E1015) Floor 3, just above the Pre-Classic platform. Third, before reaching bedrock and mixed with the ceramics, remains of white powder and large rough rocks were found in scattered locations of the strata. A test pit located just north of the long rectangular structure (N1015E1015), in the south end of the plaza, revealed similar white powder and large rocks just above bedrock (test pit L-10). Moreover, this test pit also provided ceramic materials dated to the Middle to Late Pre-Classic period<sup>4</sup>, therefore indicating a chronological relationship between ceramic and fill contexts. Although there did not exist a clear floor marker on the north side of the plaza, unlike the south side where Pre-Classic contexts are located beneath a thick plaster floor level (Floor 5), this layer of compressed rough stones was a benchmark that separated Pre-Classic from Classic ceramic materials<sup>5</sup> (figure 9). Additionally, evidence suggests that the long rectangular structure (N1015E1015) could have been used as a *council house* (Bey

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<sup>4</sup> Test pit L-10 contained a concentration of Guitarra Incised, Juventud Red and Chancenote Striated ceramic materials. These were located in the construction fills of the fifth and sixth floor levels (Gunn 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, this level of pavement was not found at the NW side of the plaza, although we located stucco fragments in square H-24, which could indicate a floor level similar to N1015E1015 floor 4 or 5. Additionally, these stucco fragments were recorded just above the burned individual and vessel located in the 2008 season.

2003; Bey et al. 2006); this is argued on the basis of the construction of Staircase C, the first of three staircases associated with the long rectangular structure (N1015E1015).



Figure 9. Detail of pavement in floor level (Gallareta N. et al. 2008)

At this point in time, a megalithic platform (sub-N1065E1025) was built on the northern edge of the plaza. This new arrangement of space can also be detected in the construction of Staircase C of the council house (N1015E1015), which had a slight shift of orientation from its sub structural base. It is likely that this change was coordinated with the construction of a megalithic stone platform; this would indicate that they were built at the same time as part of the same architectural plan. Bey (2006) believes that from this time on, the megalithic structure could have been the main residence of Kiuic's early Classic ruling family. Additionally, small stone house platforms, common in the Pre-Classic period, are very rare in the Early Classic period (Bey et al. 2006), indicating a new arrangement of space, not only in the Yaxché plaza but also in its surroundings. Staircase C of the long rectangular structure (N1015E1015) was located above the pavement floor. Evidence of its function is still not clear, although it might have functioned as a council house with this point. However, the

constructions of ramps associated at the megalithic platform and the new arrangement of the plaza space could indicate a ceremonial function.

Table 2. Phase 2, structures dated to the Early Classic (Floors 3 and 4) and relevant features.

<b>Phase 2 Early Classic</b>	<b>Ritual Deposit</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Renovations</b>
<b>Palace-Temple N1065E1025</b>	None	Megalithic Platform	Residential	Dzunun Pavement Floor Plaza Stucco Floor 3 Sub-Ramp
<b>Long Rectangular Structure N1015E1015</b>	None	Ceremonial Platform? (Staircase C)	Ceremonial ?	Floor 4

### *Yaxché Group Phase 3*

By the early Late Classic period the Dzunun plaza was amplified and converted into an Early Puuc Civic Complex (EPCC)<sup>6</sup>. These complexes are characterized by a modest pyramid, a long structure at the opposite side of the pyramid or by its side, ramps, a rectangular plaza arrangement and vaulted stone roofs (see Table 3). At Kiuic much of the constructions actively took place during this period, including renovation of floors, construction of ramps for plaza access, and construction of containment walls. A line of tilted squared carved rocks were added to the megalithic platform (str. N1065E1025). Stratigraphically, this new addition was located at the same floor level as one of the long rectangular structure sub-staircases. Architectural changes, aesthetic style, stucco cover and associated ceramics were very similar in both southern and northern structures at the Dzunun

<sup>6</sup> Other examples of EPCC can be observed in Sayil, Labna, Chac and Xcanacruz.

plaza. This would not only suggest that they are contemporaneous, but perhaps that they were conceived as part of the same architectural plan. These large-scale modifications suggest that the Yaxché group was a major focus of political and religious activity in the early part of the Late Classic. Evidence of ceremonial activities was uncovered in the SW corner of the megalithic platform, where an adult individual was cremated within a deep pit (Medina 2008). The context suggest that this pit was excavated through several plaza floors. After the individual was burned, the pit was sealed (figure 10).



Figure 10. Burned Human Remains Found in Pit. (Gallareta C. 2008)

In addition to the extensive alterations described above, two new plazas were constructed on each side of the Dzunun plaza, a feature that gave a new monumental dimension to the Yaxché group, consolidated its status as a palace group and reinforced its character as a center of social, political and religious activity at Kiuic. Big open plazas, such as the one observed in the Yaxché group, could have been developed as hospitality and feasting centers. Other buildings similar to the long rectangular structure (N1015E1015) located at the south end of Kiuic's Dzunun plaza have been identified in other sites (e.g., Str. 44 in Dzibichaltun,

Str. 7 in Labna, GT-20 in Ek Balam and Str. 10L-22A in Copan). All of them are defined as vaulted stone buildings with a long central room with multiple entrances, creating a large and accessible interior space (figure 11). Their front facades are characterized by long staircases with extended steps. These buildings have been interpreted as *council houses*; their function is argued to that of meeting rooms for civic or ceremonial events. Its presence on the south side of the plaza could have been assigned as venues for social events.



Figure 11. West view of the long rectangular structure or council house (Str. N1015E1015) (Gallareta N. et al. 2006).

Table 3. Phase 3, Structures dated to the late Early Classic (Floor 3) and relevant features.

<b>Phase 3 early Late Classic</b>	<b>Ritual Deposit</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Renovations</b>
<b>Temple-Pyramid N1065E1025</b>	Burned individual and ceramics	Megalithic platform	Residential	Plaza Floor
<b>Long Rectangular Structure N1015E1015</b>	None	Council House (Staircase B)	Civic-Ceremonial	Plaza Floor Stone Ramps
<b>Icim Plaza</b>	None	Open Plaza	Civic-Ceremonial	Plaza Built
<b>Ulum Plaza</b>	None	Open Plaza	Ceremonial	Plaza Built

#### *Yaxché Group Phase 4*

During the Late Classic there was yet another dramatic transformation of the Yaxché group (see Table 4). The space marked by the Dzunun plaza was completely enclosed. A vaulted structure of only one room and a column-fronted building were constructed on the west side of the plaza. Str.N1065E1025 at the north end of the Dzunun plaza was transformed from a megalithic platform to a series of vaulted buildings facing east and west (figure 12). It is possible that a third building, facing south and also part of this palace complex, was built in this plaza during the last construction phase. By this point, Icim and Dzunun plazas were connected by ramps, a feature common to civic and ceremonial plazas and to council houses as seen in other northern Maya sites like Labna, Chac II and Ek Balam (Bey et al. 2006). The platform that sustains the long rectangular structure (from now on referred as the council house) was expanded to the east, where a superstructure of perishable materials was built. On the west side of the Dzunun Plaza a small quadrangular structure (almost tower like) was constructed.

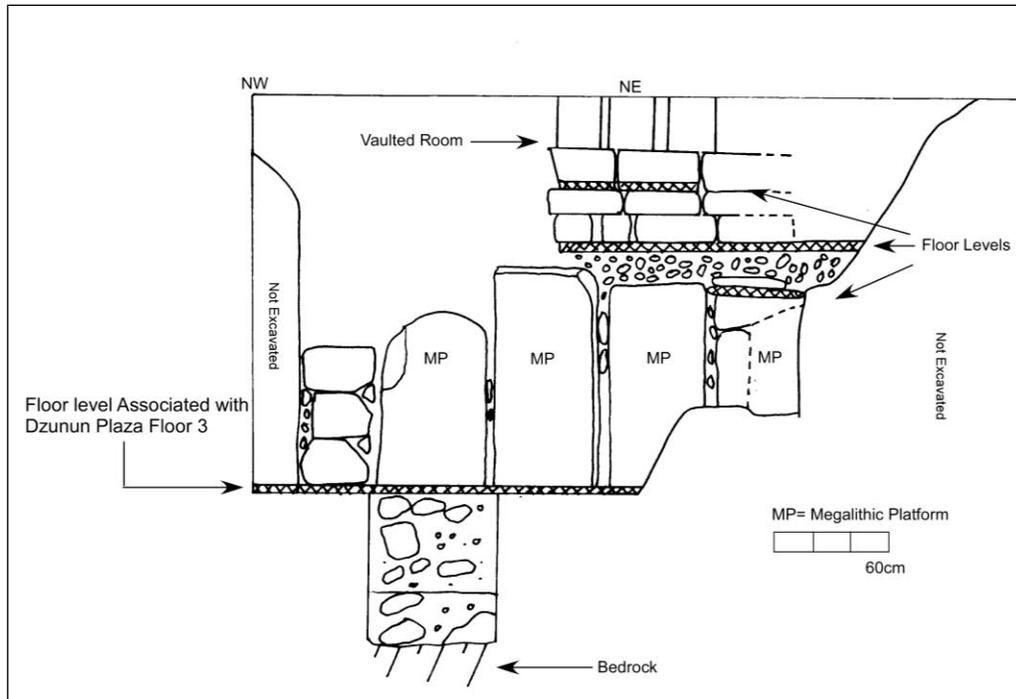


Figure 12. Plan of Megalithic Platform and Vaulted Room (Bey et al. 2006).

During this phase, Plaza Ulum, on the east side of the Yaxché group, was renovated. Moreover, the first of the two construction phases of the east temple (Str. N1050E1065) was completed. Ceremonial offerings deposited at this moment in time at Ulum include ceramic vessels containing jade and obsidian. Other contemporary constructions at Ulum included a small platform with steps and a vaulted structure on top at the north of the plaza, a platform to the south and an altar and flat stelae at the center. Ulum plaza was connected by a low staircase to the Dzunun plaza. A skull placed under the second floor of the second phase of the temple was the only evidence of human remains.

Table 4. Phase 4, structures dated the Late Classic (Floor 2) and relevant features.

<b>Phase #4 Late Classic</b>	<b>Ritual Deposit</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Renovations</b>
<b>Temple-Pyramid</b> <b>N1065E1025</b>	None	Vaulted Rooms (Palace)	Residential	Construction of Vault Buildings, Plaza Floor 2, SW stucco cover, Construction of Stone Ramp 1, Retention walls
<b>Long Rectangular Structure</b> <b>N1015E1015</b>	None	Council House (Staircase B)	Civic-Ceremonial	Expansion to the East, SW ramp constructed
<b>Icim Plaza</b>	None	Enclosed Plaza	Civic-Ceremonial	
<b>Ulum Plaza</b>	Ceramic Offering  (with Obsidian/Jade)	Enclosed Plaza	Ceremonial	Construction of sub-Temple
<b>Dzunun Plaza</b>	None	Enclosed Plaza	Civic-Ceremonial	Plaza Enclosed/West Building
<b>East Temple</b> <b>N1050E1065</b>	Skull/human remains	Temple Sub-structure	Ceremonial	Temple Construction

*Yaxché Group Phase 5*

During the Terminal Classic, the Dzunun plaza was remodeled for the last time and the ramps from Icim to Dzunun were renovated (see Table 5). Two retention walls in the palace (Str.N1065E1025) sub-platform were renovated. Whatever this building transitional from a palace to a temple at this time is unclear. What is clear is that (1) the retention walls were renovated with more rough large stones and (2) one wall eventually covered the vaulted

rooms of the palace. This phase probably represents a transition point for this structure and the rest of the Yaxché group (figure 13). The ramp that connected Dzunun and Icim plazas was renovated. The structure itself remained without any major changes or renovation. A one room building associated with a ramp was constructed. In Icim Plaza, the floor was raised slightly to accommodate new building renovations. The modeled stucco that covered the sub-temple of Ulum plaza was dismantled, and a new building was constructed. The stucco decoration was found in a midden deposit outside the plaza.

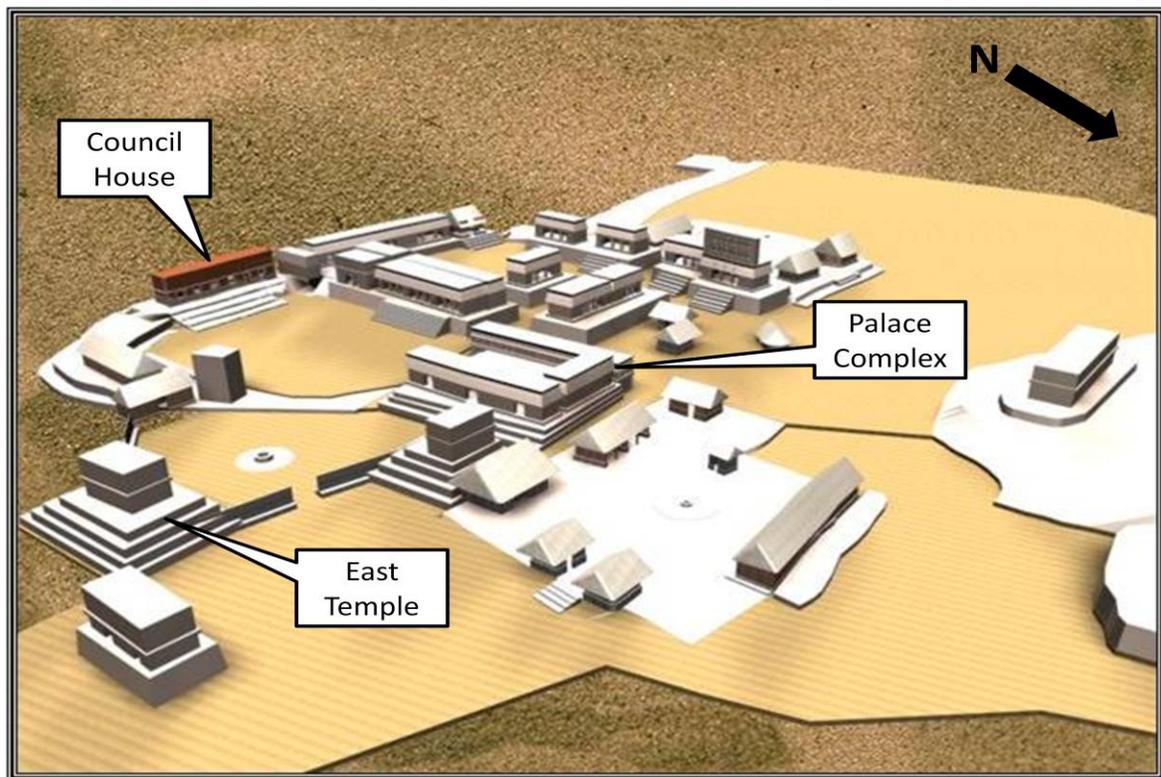


Figure 13. Reconstruction of the Yaxche Group in the Late Classic Period, by David Rivera Arjona.

Table 5. Phase 5, structures dated the Terminal Classic (Floor 2) and relevant features.

<b>Phase #5</b> <b>Terminal Classic</b>	<b>Ritual Deposit</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Renovations</b>
<b>Temple-Pyramid</b> <b>N1065E1025</b>	None	Palace/Temple ?	Residential/Ceremonial?	Retention Wall 2 and 3 renovations
<b>Long Rectangular Structure</b> <b>N1015E1015</b>	None	Council House (Staircase A)	Civic-Ceremonial	None
<b>Icim Plaza</b>	None	Enclosed Plaza	Civic-Ceremonial	Ramp connections to Dzunuz Floor renovation
<b>Ulum Plaza</b>	None	Enclosed Plaza	Ceremonial	None
<b>Dzunuz Plaza</b>	None	Enclosed Plaza	Civic-Ceremonial	Ramp connections to Icim
<b>East Temple</b> <b>N1050E1065</b>	None	Temple	Ceremonial	New Temple built on top of the old one Dismantling of Stucco façade (sub-temple)

### *Yaxché Group Phase 6*

The final part of the Terminal Classic was characterized by a major qualitative transformation in the architecture of the Dzunuz plaza (see Table 6). Before this transformation, there were a series of floor and architectural renovations to the palace (Str. N1065E1025), suggesting that a qualitative shift took place within a very short period of time. The Yaxché group was replaced by the much bigger Kuche and Chulul palace complexes, located at the east of the Kiuic site. The palace was transformed into a 17m tall pyramid with a vaulted temple on top (figure 14). Evidence suggests that this construction

was never finished. Bey (2006) believes that the transformation of the royal residence into a temple commemorated an ancient Kiuic founder (or founders). In other words, the building changed form and function; it now memorialized (or valorized) the history of the royal family who by this time resided in the Kuche/Chulul groups<sup>7</sup>. Several remains of Chen Mul incensories (associated with the Post-Classic period) were found in the rubble of the latest construction phase of the structure. This suggests that the Temple may still retained ritual significance after the Yaxché group was abandoned.

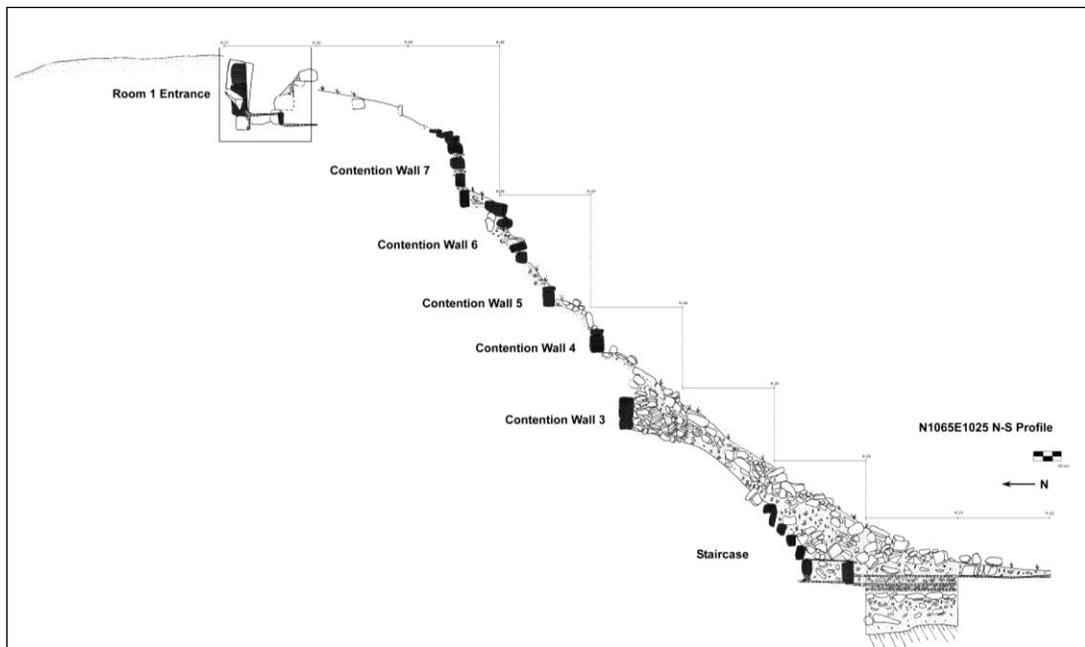


Figure 14. Profile of the temple pyramid (N1065E1025) at its final construction stage (Gallareta N. et al. 2009)

After this time, the council house (Str. N1015E1015) was drastically transformed: most of its entrances, except two, were blocked. The building changed from a long gallery building to a long room, which probably was no longer used as a council room.

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<sup>7</sup> Three other Classic Maya sites with similar construction history include Labna, Uxmal and El Mirador.

The Icim plaza was no longer maintained. Accumulated trash deposits were found across the plaza. It is possible that the removal of offerings and burials of the Ulum plaza date to this period too, indicating evidence of termination rituals, either reverential or desecrating behavior (see Navarro et al. 2008). The last floor of the rooms of the east temple (N1050E1065) was heavily burned (figure 15). When this activity took place is unclear.

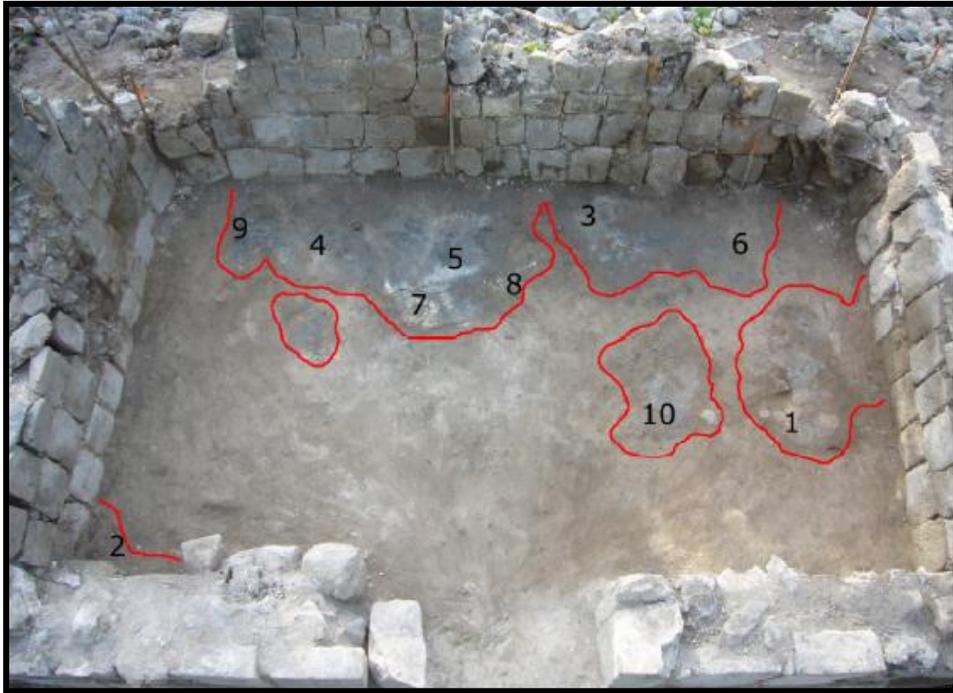


Figure 15. East temple (Str. N1050E1065). Location of fragments of burned floors (Bey et al. 2006)

Table 6. Phase 6, structures dated the late Terminal Classic (Floor 1) and relevant features.

<b>Phase # 6</b> <b>late Terminal Classic</b>	<b>Ritual Deposit</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Renovations</b>
<b>Temple-Pyramid</b> <b>N1065E1025</b>	Chen Mul Incensories (much later then the Terminal Classic period)	Temple	Ceremonial?	Stucco cover of ramp and Wall 1  Staircase renovation  Large south staircase addition  Annex Platform
<b>Rectangular Structure</b> <b>N1015E1015</b>	None	Enclosed Building  (Staircase A)	Unknown	None
<b>Icim Plaza</b>	None	Abandoned?	Unknown	None
<b>Ulum Plaza</b>	Burial and ceremonial offerings looted/removed	Abandoned?	Ceremonial?	None
<b>Dzunun Plaza</b>	None	Partially abandoned?	Ceremonial?	None
<b>East Temple</b> <b>N1050E1065</b>	Burned floor	Abandoned temple	Unknown	None

## **Chapter 6:**

### **Interpretation of the Biography of Monumental Architecture at Kiuic, Yucatan**

Having described the construction phases of the Temple-Pyramid (N1065E1025), the council house (N1015E1015), and their surrounding buildings, what can we say about the relationship of these objects with their subjects? What are the social implications of recursive architectural renovations, function changes, and ceremonial contexts in the Yaxché plaza? What are the social implications of the transformations of the Temple-Pyramid (N1065E1025) from the archaeological evidence? What about the life trajectory of this monumental object and its relation to individuals interacting with it? How much of its physical changes are materializations of social shifts?

In order to answer these questions, I now discuss and interpret the social biography and social implications of Kiuic's architectural sequence through four perspectives: (1) stability and transformation of architecture, (2) changes in access patterns and exclusionary space, (3) tempo of termination rituals, and (4) linking of sacred places through processions. Each of these represents different shifts in the relationship between monumental objects and subjects. Moreover, by placing these perspectives in a biographical perspective, we have a better perspective of the interaction between buildings and humans. In this essay, I propose three significant construction moments in the history of Kiuic which show major changes between the relationship between people and their buildings. These marked transformations expose a shift in power relations and their expression through monumental architecture, space and

place. I base these moments in the construction sequence of the Temple-Pyramid (N1065E1025), which reflect overall qualitative and quantitative changes in the Yaxché group. They represent three different moments in the history of the plaza during which the interaction between stone buildings and people changed. These moments in time were seen through the plaza floors (figure 16). The construction phases that define qualitative changes in the relationship between buildings (objects) and people (subjects) are defined in the following way:

- *Megalithic complex* (Phase 2): dated to the Early Classic, this complex is characterized by a complete remodeling of the Dzunun plaza, including the construction of a pavement floor, a megalithic platform at the north end of the plaza, and the first stage of the council house to the south.
- *Palace complex* (Phase 4): dated to the Late Classic, this complex is characterized by several renovations and constructions, including the replacement of the megalithic platform in the north for a palace complex, the construction of an east temple and the inclosing of the Dzunun and Ulum plazas.
- *Temple complex* (Phase 6): dated to the Late Terminal Classic, this complex was characterized by the last renovations in the Yaxché group, which was shortly abandoned and replaced by the Kuche and Chulul palace complexes.

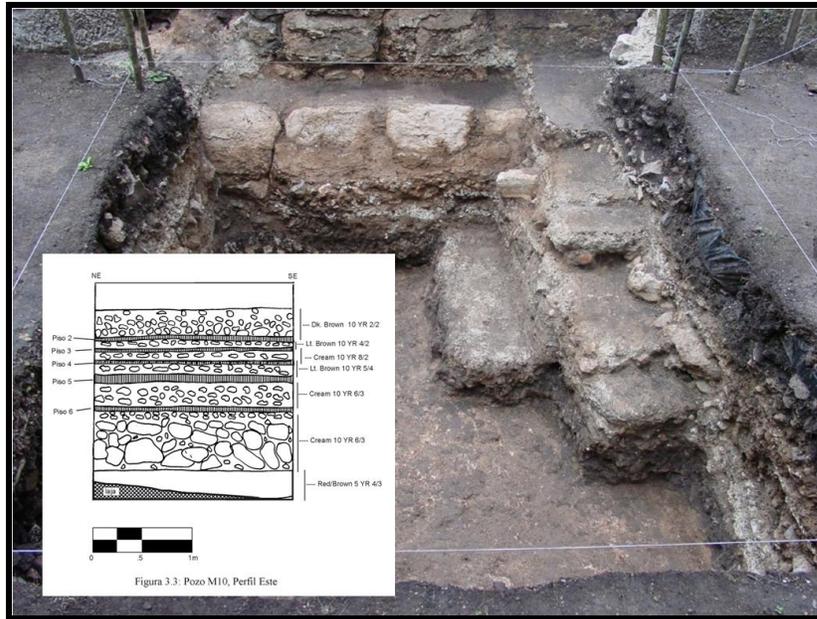


Figure 16. Cross section and photo of the six floor levels of Dzunun Plaza; test pit located at the north of Structure N1015E1015.

The implications of the three major construction events in relation to their connection with the social groups dwelling in and around these spaces can be examined with the perspective introduced here. Through the proposed lines of evidence, I hope to illustrate how the relationship between objects and subjects evolved and shifted throughout the 1800 years of Yaxché's continuous occupation during which monumental architecture, space use and rituals played an important role in place making at Kiuic.

### 1. *Stability and Transformation of Architecture*

The construction sequence of the Yaxché group is characterized by a recursive transformation and renovation of architecture. From the beginning of the Megalithic complex (Early Classic) to the Temple complex (Terminal Classic), stone buildings were constructed, transformed or renovated in one way or another. This pattern accelerated during the Palace complex (Late Classic) when evidence suggests a rapid increase of construction activity.

However, Str. N1015E1015, which Bey identifies as a council house, does not significantly change in form and, probably, function until the very last stage of its construction sequence. As our evidence has indicated, Dzunun plaza was first settled by the Middle Pre-Classic period and initially lacked monumental architecture. However, at this period Str. N1015E1015 was already a raised platform built of cut-stone whereas evidence suggests that surrounding areas were characterized by houses made of perishable materials. In a time period in which regional and local evidence indicates that social stratification was not heavily marked, a fine cut stone platform could indicate differences between the residents of this area and others on the rest of the site.

What I suggest here is that place making at the Dzunun plaza was initiated by the construction of this Pre-Classic platform in Phase 1. The plaza's stucco floor was renovated at least once before the platform was transformed into a council house. Moreover, evidence indicates that there is still one additional plaza level (Floor 6) below this platform, indicating that this space was in use long before this structure was constructed. The long rectangular buildings (N1015E1015) to the south of the Dzunun plaza occupied a central place in the Yaxché group and conserved a stable and constant form, and probably function, through approximately 1000 years. It became a key building in the place making process and a powerful landmark recognizable by several individuals throughout many generations. In sum, this building has the longest construction history and is the most stable in its form and function. Its interaction with the everyday lives of Kiuic's dwellers went on for generations and activities related to it, especially during the Late Classic, were probably experienced, in one way or another, by Yaxché's dwellers until the building was transformed during the Terminal Classic period.

On the other hand, most buildings in the Yaxché group were constantly under construction or renovation after the megalithic complex (Phase 2). The megalithic platform (Str. N1025E1025) was built in this phase to the north of Str. N1015E1015 (probably a council house at the time). Its construction marked the beginning of a relationship between this building and the council house, which was manifest not only in their spatial proximity, but also by their different, but “coordinated”, renovations. Opposite to the council house, the Pyramid-Temple (N1025E1025) had a series of physical transformations along its construction history that go from its size and form to its function. When major transformations occur, the council house is only superficially remodeled, with no substantial structural changes. The questions are then: why is there such contrast between the construction agendas of the two main structures in the Yaxché group? What is the nature of the construction stability of the council house (N1015E1015) and why is the Temple-Palace locale (N1025E1025) transformed so drastically?

I believe that the diverse construction histories of these two structures are due to their different functions and relationships with the individuals interacting with these buildings. While the Yaxché plaza was a megalithic complex, Str. N1015E1015 played an important role as a council house, a place where a group of people gathered and reached decisions related to the lives of Kiuic’s dwellers. The long and stable construction sequence of this building indicates that there was a constant process of decision making throughout the settlement’s history. Additionally, evidence suggests that this building was not the main focus of power display. The Temple-Pyramid (N1065E1025), on the other hand was characterized by a display of power through its architecture, especially when it was transformed into a Palace complex (Phase 4). If the Temple-Palace (N1065E1025) was, as

Bey suggests, the residence of Kiuic's noble family, then the display of power associated with the architectural evidence suggests that the emerging authority of the elite group was materialized in their buildings.

Although monumental architecture is a hallmark of power, it does not necessarily indicate hierarchy. Ringle (1999) argues that construction of monumental architecture in the middle Late Pre-Classic period occurs within a largely egalitarian society with limited inequality of rank; regionally, it is not until the last two centuries BC that temples with large stucco masks, ball courts, roads and imagery associated with rulership indicate that hereditary status differentiation existed. Stanton (2000), on the other hand, observes that the site of Yaxuna, Yucatán, monumental architecture could indicate the rise of hierarchy. Both Ringle and Stanton agree that the final part of the Late Pre-Classic was an important period during which the relation between people and monumental architecture changes.

In the Early Classic, when a megalithic complex is present in the Yaxché group, architecture evidences the inequality of power displayed by local elites. The construction of very important architectural features, such as the Dzunun plaza pavement, the megalithic structure (N1065E1025) at the northern of the plaza, and the renovations of the council house (N1015E1015) staircase indicate a re-organization of residential and ceremonial constructions around these structures. Bey (2006:29) suggests that this kind of reorganization could be due to the necessity of dealing with issues related to increasing population and availability of land. In other words, there is a need for some concentration of authority (*ibid*). In this sense, we can see that subjects directly related to the structures located in the Dzunun plaza, especially to the council house and the megalithic platform, are making decisions that ultimately results in the construction and remodeling of the plaza.

It is clear that by the Early Classic, the elite groups living in the Yaxché group had successfully appropriated the monumental architecture and were using it as a means to justify their power. Ringle (1999) argues that when the first monuments were built, they are not constructed to praise individual rulers, rather their construction had to do with more communal reasons. McAnany (2010) adds that there was a practice of collective work which is a variant of work feasts in which a central authority possesses the moral authority to call in labor obligations (Dietler and Herbich 2001:244). The evidence observed at Kiuic seems to fit both arguments, since there seems to be no evidence of power concentrated in one individual ruler. Temples, for example, which are most commonly associated with buried Maya rulers at Classic-period southern sites (Tikal, Calakmul, Copan, and others), do not appear at Kiuic until the Late Classic. However, at this point of the investigation, I think it would be too much of a stretch to assume we have some kind of *multepal*<sup>8</sup> organization at the site of Kiuic. What is clear is that a particular group of individuals started to build the construction history of the site in the Late Pre-Classic. By the Early Classic, this group had managed to coordinate a large amount of collective work to pave the Dzunun plaza floor, build the megalithic household and remodel the council house. It is not exactly clear how a small group of people managed to collect the labor from other individuals; however, I suspect that the use of performance rituals, memory and the appropriated place played a fundamental roll in this process.

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<sup>8</sup>*Multepal* rulership is characterized by less centralized councilor forms of local governments (Rivera Dorado 2000; Kowalski 2003). Evidence for this is based on the somewhat isolated distribution of vaulted masonry residential courtyards -no one stands out as a royal palace- as well as several individuals bearing the title *sajal* (regional governor or subordinate lord).

## 2. *Changes in Access Patterns and the Establishment of Exclusionary Space*

The later part of the Megalithic complex (Phase 3) is characterized by the construction of two open plazas and the renovation of the council house. Here, I argue that these additions are related to the same social and architectural project: performance rituals, memory and appropriation of space. If the shifts in monumental architecture observed at the early part of the Megalithic Complex (Phase 2) indicate a concentration of power, this new addition could have been designed to further expand and legitimize it through time. The construction of two plazas at approximately the same time that the council house was renovated by the addition of (Staircase B) gives emphasis, materially and spatially, to the power of the elite social faction in the Yaxché group. Moreover, the open areas could have been used for visual access to public rituals or assemblies. The associated remains of at least one adult and ceramic shreds in the SW corner of the megalithic platform could be evidence of such public rituals. Additionally, evidence indicates that there were no major barriers separating the plazas from the rest of the area, suggesting that they were a semi-public space with relatively free access at this time.

The early part of the palace complex (Phase 4), of the Late Classic indicates the fusion of the elite group (subjects) with their buildings (objects), and a quantitative shift in the way power was displayed in the Yaxché group. I argue this on the basis of the construction of at least three significant structures: (1) a multi-room vaulted building that replaces the megalithic platform, (2) a temple in the east Ulum Plaza and, (3) enclosure of the plazas. It is very difficult to think about any community based authority when such clear spatial and material barriers were built at this time. The new east temple seems to be of a private nature, since the only access is through the Dzunun plaza, also a private space by this time. The ritual

offerings associated with this temple may also indicate a new modality of private rituals, in which only certain individuals had access. Restriction of access to a space can also indicate powerful social identities, especially signaling distance between ranked groups. Meskell (2005) for example, explains how for the general Egyptian populace, it was largely impossible to see the statues, who embodied the gods; this right was exclusive to the high elite. However, in great festivities the deity could leave the darkness of the sanctuary when a portable image was taken out to the world (Meskell 2005:56). There is clear distinction between use of space and social status, where public-space rites and private space rites both have different representations. Yaxché plaza could have gone from semi-public to private as the result of increasing authority of the ruler elite group. Private space could also have changed the nature of rituals, making them exclusively for the elite group; furthermore, the privatization of space (i.e., spatial alienation) could indicate a more powerful blending of the object (monumental architecture) and subject (elite groups) relationship. In other words, monumental architecture and elite groups hybridized; one does not exist without the other. By drawing upon 900 year old practices, which go from the Late Pre-Classic to the Late Classic, the elites living at this time followed traditions of the past and collected labor from others through the use of ritual, memory and the materiality<sup>9</sup>. Other cases in which space use changes from public to private (obstructed ramps, halls and doors of structures) have been reported elsewhere in the Puuc area (Prem 2000).

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<sup>9</sup> The materiality of power depended on more than just architecture; portable objects of power (special ceramics, stone tools, dress, etc) played an important role for legitimizing power in the Maya area and other places in world. However, evidence of these kinds of objects are not preserved or have not been found in the site of Kiuic.

### 3. *Temples and Termination Rituals*

The temple complex marks yet another qualitative change in the relationship between elite groups and the buildings of the Yaxché group. This last shift is marked by the construction of a 17-meter tall temple pyramid that covered the palace at the north end of Dzunun Plaza. The three main plazas (Dzunun, Ulum and Icim) were abandoned; the council house was transformed into a closed building and ceased to be a place where elites gathered to make decisions. At Kiuic, evidence suggests that the temples were not only landmarks, but that their presence could be interpreted as the final outcome of socio-political re-arrangements. That is, the east temple was constructed and renovated during the Late Classic Period. The temple was renovated fairly quickly into a new one (it stayed the same for about 100 years). The newly renovated temple was used for even a shorter period, little less than 100 years, before its façade was completely dismantled and the interior room burned, both probably indications of a termination rite. Sometime after that event, Gallareta N. et al. (2001, 2002) report evidence of pre-Hispanic looting of ceremonial offerings and burials, likely part of other termination rites. It seems that the east temple changed function dramatically, fell into disuse and was replaced by the much larger temple constructed on top of the palace. In sum, evidence suggests that the qualitative changes in the temple complex marked the end of the Yaxché group as a central civic-ceremonial place. Evidence of termination rituals indicates that all ceremonial buildings were de-animated, except for the former elite palace, which was still in use, although transformed into a pyramid-temple. This evidence suggests that this period was characterized by a shift of the place of power. The specific nature of this shift is not clear; however, the rapid change registered in such a small amount of time may indicate

that the royal residency changed location to the bigger Kuche and Chulul groups, and consequently terminated its relation with Yaxché.

A theoretical reason for this change of power could have been the creation of a new lineage of power; a new ruler may have wanted to disassociate him/herself from the place of ancestors and initiated the construction of another, much bigger, palace complex to revamp the lineage authority. The accumulated wealth could be related to the ability of a charismatic leader to bring abundant rains in a land, like the Puuc, that has highly variable rain patterns. After all, the Late and Terminal Classic periods in which major growth is observed at Kiuic, have been characterized as more wet than earlier periods (Dunning 1992). Lucero has argued that powerful governors emerged in areas of significant seasonal variability and plentiful fertile land, where kings demonstrated their success in propitiating gods through bringing prosperity (Lucero 1999, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c). The governors did this by making public ceremonies or rituals that demonstrated their ability to connect with the supernatural world (Freidel et al. 1993).

#### 4. *Linking of sacred places through processions*

Ringle (1999:213) suggests that monumental construction did not come from the expansion of the egos of local elites, but occurred within a framework of regional competition between neighboring regional cults. These cult centers were successful in increasing tribute and labor; they could afford additional investments in ritual displays and sacred architecture. If this was true for Kiuic, we can conclude that the dramatic increase in monumental construction at the end of the site's built history represented elite's final effort to be politically relevant in the Terminal Classic. In this sense, we must notice that the Yaxché group gathered its social

power from nearly 2000 years of place making, monumental constructions, renovations and rituals. When the Kuche and Chulul groups were constructed during the late Terminal Classic period they dramatically transformed the landscape, however, they lacked the sedimented social memory and meaning upon which the Yaxché group had been built. These could have influenced the builders of the Kuche and Chulul groups to go “over the top” in the size of their constructions. Current evidence suggests that both of these architectural groups were built in one quick and single construction phase.

Architectural and energy expense studies by Abrams (1998) suggest that large masonry structures that are built in one single construction episode are much more costly than those built in several episodes, especially when materials are reused. Moreover, he suggests that masonry and plaster can demand approximately 89% of the total cost (*ibid*). Therefore, according to Adams, faced masonry wall and an abundance of plaster mark a difference in status. Additionally, the Kuche and Chulul group plazas were oriented towards Yaxché (figure 17). This orientation and the road that leads to the Dzunun plaza could indicate that residents of the Kuche and Chulul groups were connected symbolically and materially to Yaxché. Relevant here is Ringle’s (1999) idea that ideology was not used to repress but to integrate, creating centers as places of pilgrimage and ritual procession. For him, these centers served as places where religious cults were supported and sponsored. Rulers and other temple builders became performers whose success was judge by audience members (Inomata and Coben 2006).

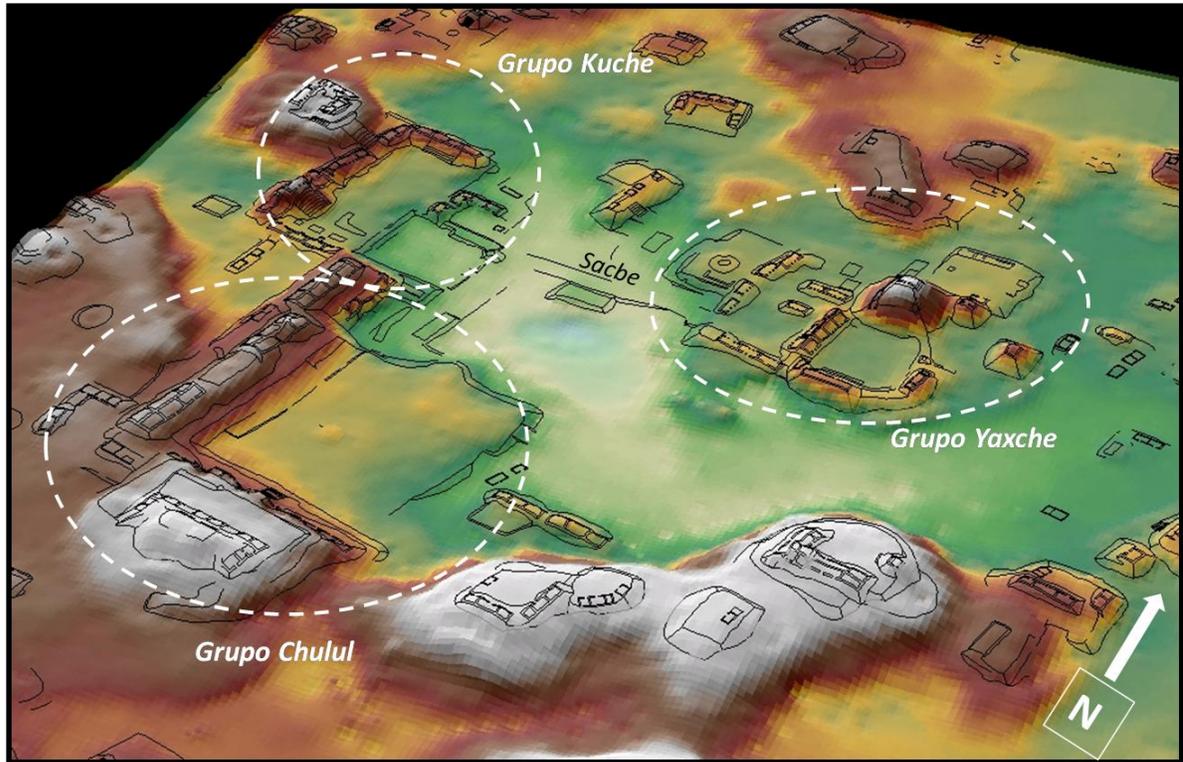


Figure 17. Map of Kiuic's archaeological groups in relation to the road that unites them (*Sache*).

Maya temples served as a symbol to attract and control the surrounding populations by the ruling class. As mentioned before, ceremonies and feasts are much more effective than any coercive action (Lucero 2007:409). For Lucero, building multiple temples signifies the internal competition of several groups. Temples linked towns to rural hinterlands and served as intermediaries between people and political leaders (e.g., Stein 1977).

Following this argument, I believe that the road that connects the old and new architectural groups was designed to preserve some of that powerful accumulated meaning that Yaxché had gathered for over the years. This implies that there was not a total break with the past. Elite groups identified themselves with the past to retain their authority and legitimacy. Whether the change of space to another location that lacked the more than 1500 years of place-making process was the reason for the overall abandonment of the site shortly after the Terminal Classic we don't know. However it might have been an influential factor; I concur

that monumental architecture can in fact guard against the defeat of hierarchy (see McAnany 2010), but maybe the placemaking process, in which elite groups and their buildings became one and the same through years of legitimizing space, also played an essential role in justifying and retaining authority.

## **Chapter 7:**

### **Final Comments**

Monumental architecture played an important role in the configuration of space, place and the establishment of elite social groups in the social landscape of Kiuic. The longevity and monumentality of these buildings has allowed us to study their construction sequence in terms of the individuals who dwelled in Yaxché's architectural group. What is more, we were able to reconstruct how ancient elite groups were able to create a place and how they changed their configuration from a residential to a ceremonial group. Moreover, through a biographical approach, I observed how different factors, such as longevity and monumentality, embodied memory, ritual, and the use of space and how this embodiment influenced the plaza's shift from a relatively communal and open place to an enclosed private one. This perspective helps us to understand more about the important relationship that monumental buildings and individuals share and how that relationship changed through time. In the Kiuic case, elite groups became increasingly associated with monumental architecture from the beginning of the Late Pre-Classic Period, creating a powerful hybrid relationship that expressed the hierarchy and political power of these social groups. As observed in excavations of the Yaxché plaza, Puuc sites contained a significant temporal dimension that previously has been underappreciated. Although it is true that the densest occupation dated to the Terminal Classic, arguments regarding the lack of permanent population in this zone are not sustained by evidence from Kiuic. As indicated by the stratigraphic sequence of the

Yaxché plaza, the development of Kiuic was continuous and complex. Only through stratigraphic excavations in Puuc palaces, temples and plazas we can learn more about the development of this area, the origins of its populations and the reasons behind their abandonment of monumental architecture in middle of the 10th century.

The changes in form and function of the ancient buildings can tell us by proxy of the constant re-interpretation of the meaning of buildings and its impact on dwellers; the constant re-interpretation of objects (monumental architecture) and subjects (elite groups) legitimizes the power relationship with site inhabitants through the memory and materiality of monumental buildings. The complex role of place making and memory is crucial to give ideological power to these objects. It is only through this long process that memories, landscape, and authority are negotiated through monumental architecture, and hence, the subjects related to it.

By observing key changes and their chronological contexts, we have glimpsed the relationship between objects and subjects. In the Yaxché group at Kiuic, we observed that there were at least three moments in the cultural biography of this monumental complex, in which we could infer qualitative social shifts in society through the several changes in monumental architecture. We also saw how memory can be a great source for ideological agendas; in the case of the Yaxche group, the longevity and importance of its occupations served as a means for crafting identity later times, when political power changed place. Remembering the ancient group and recognizing its importance and ancestry gave a sense of identity to the Kiuic dwellers.

After several years of research, the Kiuic team has been able to reconstruct a part of the construction history of the site. However, there are still many questions to be answered. The

elite group's display of power through place making, space arrangement, monumental architecture, and ceremonial contexts give us a glimpse of the complexity of the relationship between objects and subjects. Future investigations will surely shed more light, on its long construction sequence and the social implications of the people who lived at Kiuic.

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