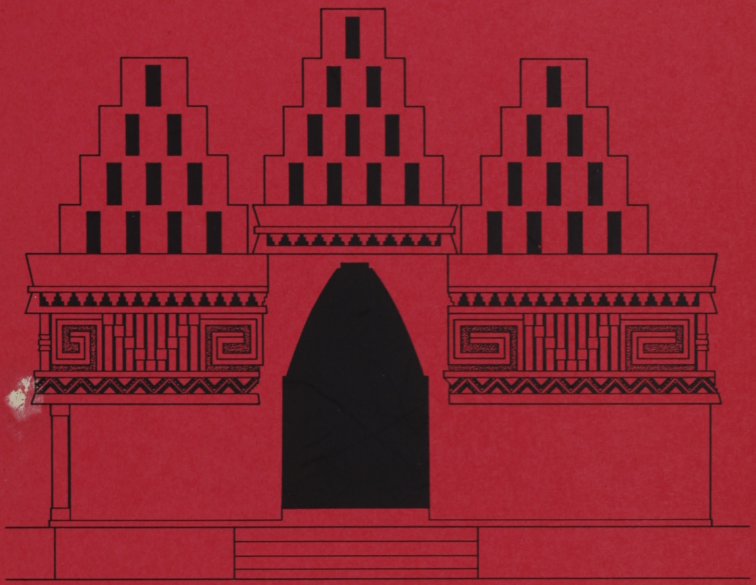

CLASSIC PUUC MOSAIC STYLE ARCHITECTURE:

GEOMETRIC MASKS

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CLASSIC PUUC MOSAIC STYLE ARCHITECTURE AND GEOMETRIC MASKS

In 1982 I presented a paper at a symposium on the Northern Maya Lowlands entitled: Puuc Architectural Styles: A reassessment. In this paper the basic diagnostic features of six different Puuc architectural styles were described which form two major groups. The first group includes the Early Oxkintok, Proto-Puuc, and Early Puuc styles while the second group includes the classic Puuc Colonnette, Mosaic, and Late Uxmal styles. The first group, which has tentatively been dated from 550 to 770 A.D. consists of the 'early' styles, and the second group, which has been tentatively dated from 770 to 1050 A.D., is made up of the 'late' or classic styles.

While the largest number of Puuc buildings were executed in the classic Puuc Colonnette style, it is the classic Puuc Mosaic style buildings which have generally received most of the attention from tourists and professionals alike, partly because of a concentration of monumental Mosaic style buildings at well-known sites such as Uxmal, Kabah, Labna, Sayil, and Xlapak. The term Mosaic style refers to those classic Puuc buildings whose facades are decorated with geometric sculptural motifs wherein a series of small, individually carved stone components are carefully fitted together to form larger designs and patterns. The stonework was later smoothed over with a thin layer of stucco which obscured the joints between the individual stones, emphasizing the larger sculptural forms.

The inventory of decorative motifs employed in the Mosaic style was strictly limited and consisted of colonnettes, both plain and banded, frets and stepped-frets, latticework, long-nosed masks (Chaac masks), mat symbols, and a zig-zag dentate (Fig. 1). These motifs were then

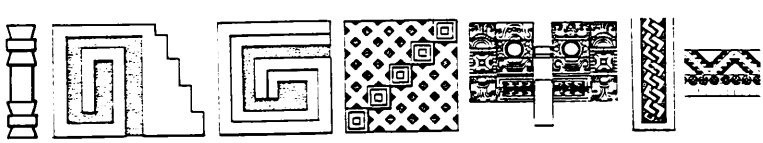


Figure 1. a, colonnette b, stepped-fret c, fret d, lattice-work e, long-nosed mask f, mat symbol g, zig-zag dentate

combined in a number of different configurations, producing an almost endless variety of specific facade treatments. In spite of this, certain designs were repeated with only minor variations and one of these, which can best be described as a 'geometric mask', is worthy of special attention. I believe it can be shown that these forms are greatly simplified versions of the long-nosed (Chac) masks which enliven the facades on numerous classic Puuc Mosaic style buildings.

In order to test the validity of this premise, it is necessary to examine the typical long-nosed mask form in some detail. Herbert J. Spinden (1913) was one of the first persons to describe and analyze Maya masks in terms of their basic components. He pointed out that a typical mask is a highly conventionalized face shown in front view. Figure 2 shows a somewhat simplified mask which consists of: 1) head band, 2) eyes, including lower and upper lids and the eyeball, 3) nose, with superior nose ornament, 4) mouth, with teeth and lateral ornaments, 5) ears, with ornaments above and below, and 6) lateral ear ornaments, which generally consist of large frets. Spinden believed that such a mask represented the feathered serpent but others have suggested that the Puuc examples represent Chac, the God of Rain. In recent years, Paul Gendrop (1983) has greatly extended the study of Maya masks, particularly those found in the Rio Bec, Chenes, and Puuc archaeological regions, and has shown how the masks found on Puuc Mosaic style buildings were derived from earlier models as found on Chenes and Rio Bec style buildings to the south.

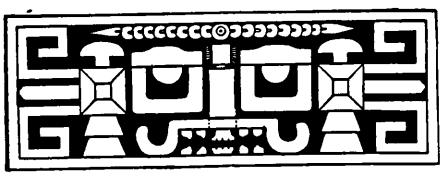


Figure 2. Simplified long-nosed mask panel

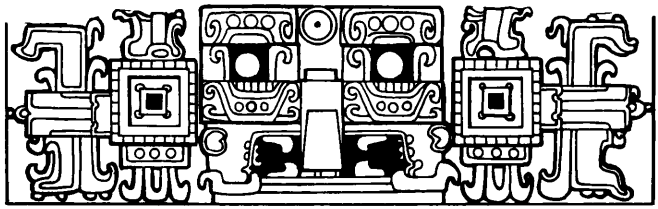


Figure 3. Typical long-nosed mask. Nunnery, Uxmal

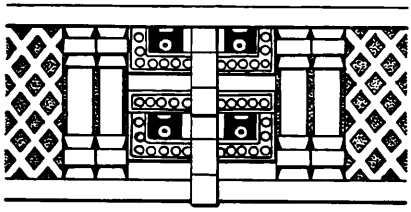


Figure 4. Simplified long-nosed mask

Both Spinden and Gendrop argue that conventionalized motifs in Maya art, such as masks, tend to change over time through the processes of simplification, elaboration, elimination, and substitution. Several of these processes may be acting simultaneously wherein a typical long-nosed mask as found on numerous Puuc Mosaic style buildings (Fig. 3), could be altered to the point where only the eyes and nose remain (Fig. 4). I believe that the geometric masks, which are the subject of this paper, were derived from the typical long-nosed mask panel through the processes of simplification, elimination, and substitution. As shown in figure 5, the basic long-nosed mask form has been altered to the point where only a suggestion of the face remains; the eyes are now represented by large frets and the nose by a diagonal arrangement of squares, combined with colonnettes. This arrangement is essentially a mirror-image pair of stepped frets, which are generally used in non-mask configurations.

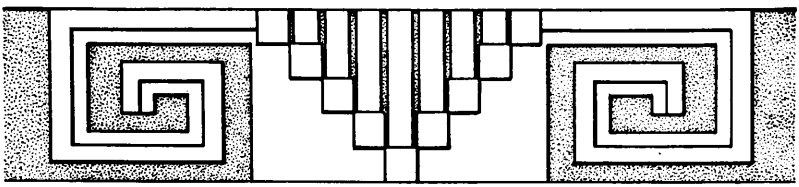


Figure 5. Typical geometric mask.

To date, nineteen examples of these unusual mask configurations have been identified, which are found at fifteen different sites. These are listed below and their geographical distribution is shown in figure 6.

Chunhuhub - Structure 2 (Adjacent Palace)
Dzibiltun - Temple
Dzibiltun - Palace
Kabah - Structure 1A2
Kupaloma West Building
Labna - Structure 1, East wing
Labna - Structure 11, Southeast wing (Portal vault)
Rancho Perez - Structure 1
Sabacche - Structure 5, North wing
Sacbe - Structure 1
Uxmal - Governor's Palace, South facade
Xcalupococh - Group A, Structure 1
Xcavil de Yaxche - Structure 1, second level
Xcavil de Yaxche - Structure 5
Xkakochna - Group C, Structure 1
Xlapak - South Group, Structure 1
Xlabpak - South Group, Structure 1
Yakaxiu - Structure 1, Main facade
Yakaxiu - Structure 1, End facade

For purposes of discussion, the nineteen buildings noted above have been divided into two groups. The first group includes those buildings with 'typical' geometric masks, and the second group includes buildings with 'variants' of these masks.

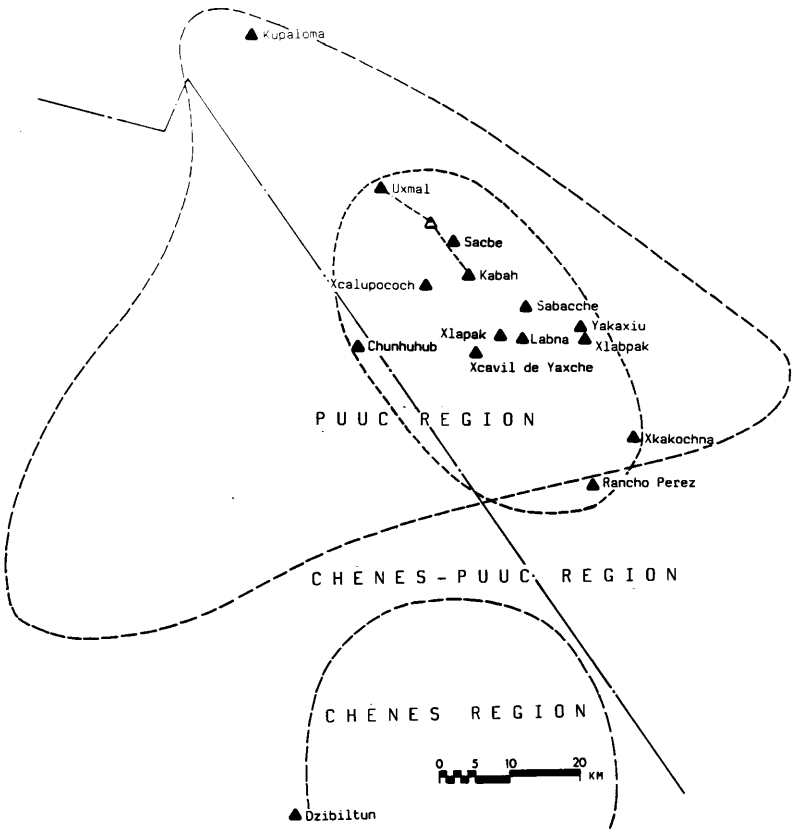


Figure 6. MAP SHOWING SITES CONSIDERED IN THIS STUDY

Typical masks. As defined here, a typical geometric mask is composed of a mirror-image pair of stepped frets, in which the stepped portion is formed by a series of squares, arranged in a 45 degree diagonal line. The squares are combined with colonnettes, which generally fill the space both above and below the square forms. As noted earlier, the squares and colonnettes represent the nose while the eyes are represented by large frets (Fig. 5). Buildings with typical geometric masks include Structure 1A2 at Kabah, the West Building at Kupaloma, Structure 1 at Labna, Structure 11 at Labna, Structure 1, Group A at Xcalupococh, Structure 1 at Xcavil de Yaxche, Structure 6 at Xcavil de Yaxche, Structure 1, Group C at Xkakochna, Structure 1 at Xlapak, Structure 1, South Group at Xlabpak, and Structure 1 at Yakaxiu.

Variant geometric masks. The term "variant" is used here to describe those geometric mask forms which show significant deviations from the typical masks. In virtually every case, the nose portion of the variant masks have been altered appreciably and in two cases (Sabacche and Sacbe) conventional long-nosed masks have been inserted between the two halves of the typical geometric mask. The treatment of the stepped portion of the stepped-frets also deviates from the norm in the variant masks and, in some cases, the diagonal rows of squares are replaced by a simpler stepped form. In spite of these changes, I believe that the examples which follow will show that the basic concept of the very stylized geometric mask form can be maintained as long as the underlying order and arrangement of parts remains intact. Buildings with variant geometric masks include Structure 2 at Chunhuhub, the Palace at Dzibiltun, the Temple at Dzibiltun, Structure 1 at Rancho Perez, Structure 5 at Sabacche, Structure 1 at Sacbe, the Governor's Palace at Uxmal, and Structure 1 at Yakaxiu.

Kabah. Structure 1A2 at Kabah, which has also been called the Edificio de las Grecas, is a very large building with 18 rooms (Pollock, 1980). Figure 7 shows a restored view of the geometric mask above the doorway to Room 10, and it can be noted that in this example there are no colonnettes below the two diagonal rows of squares forming the nose. It can also be noted that there are rows of very short colonnettes just below the large frets representing the eyes, which may represent the lower lids. The treatment here is particularly effective, since the plain surfaces below the diagonal rows of squares emphasize the triangular shape of the nose element.

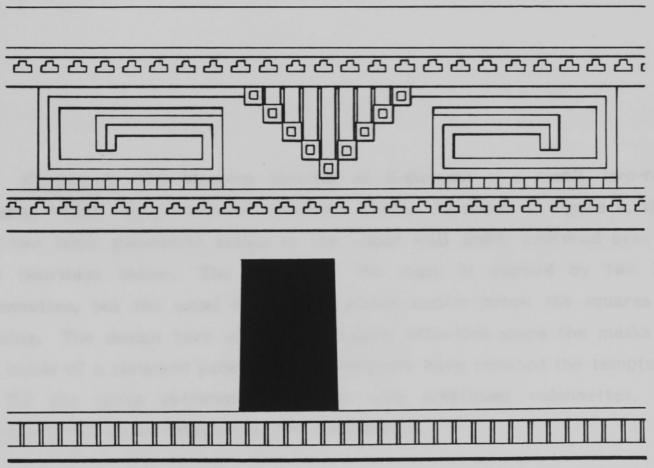
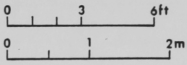


Figure 7. Kabah, Structure 1A2. West facade, Room 10.



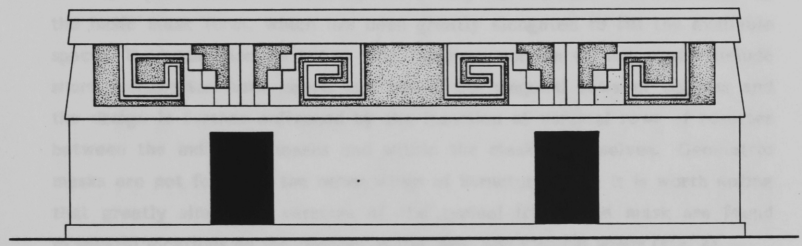


Figure 8. Kupaloma, Western Building.
West facade (restored)

Kupaloma. The Western Building at Kupaloma is a small, two-room building which faces northwest (Pollock, 1980). As shown in figure 8, there are two large geometric masks in the upper wall zone, centered over the two doorways below. The center of the mask is marked by two long colonnettes, but the usual colonnettes above and/or below the squares are missing. The design here seems particularly effective since the masks are set inside of a recessed panel and the designers have resisted the temptation to fill the space between the masks with additional colonnettes, thus preserving the visual integrity of the mask forms.

Labna. The East Wing of Structure 1 at Labna shows a somewhat unusual interpretation of the geometric mask motif, since there are six masks in all, each of which is centered over a doorway below (Fig. 9). The masks here are particularly noteworthy since they demonstrate the flexibility of the basic mask form, which has been greatly elongated to fill the available space. It should also be noted that the nose portion of the masks include short colonnettes both above and below the diagonal rows of squares and the design is further enlivened by the insertion of vertical rows of rosettes between the individual masks and within the masks themselves. Geometric masks are not found on the other wings of Structure 1 but it is worth noting that greatly simplified versions of the typical long-nosed mask are found in several locations on the facades of the West and Central wings (Fig. 4).

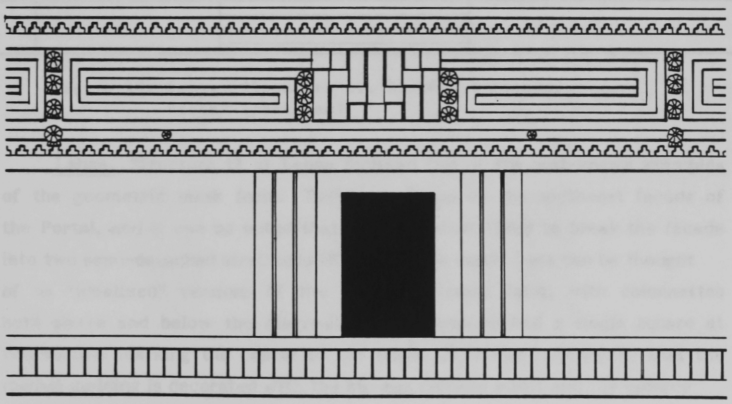


Figure 9. Labna, Structure 1, East Wing. Portion of south facade.

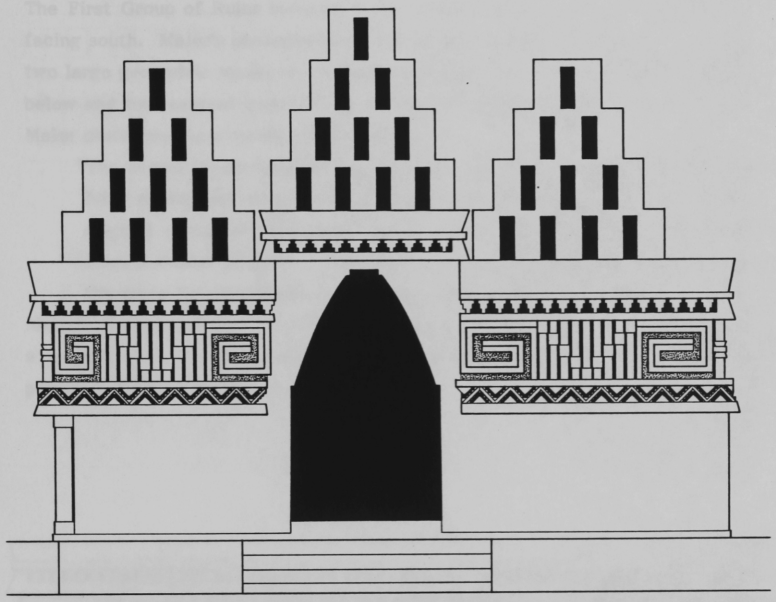


Figure 10. Labna, Structure 11. Southwest facade, Portal (restored)

Labna. Structure 11 at Labna includes two of the best-known examples of the geometric mask form. These are found on the southeast facade of the Portal, and it can be noted that the high vault tends to break the facade into two semi-detached structures (Fig. 10). The masks here can be thought of as "idealized" versions of the geometric mask form, with colonnettes both above and below the diagonal rows of squares and a single square at the bottom marking the center of the mask. It is also noteworthy that the medial molding is decorated with the zig-zag dentate motif and the cornice includes small T-frets, both of which are typical decorative features in the classic Puuc Mosaic style.

Xkalupococh. Teobert Maler (1902) visited three different groups of ruins at Xkalupococh, the first two in 1889 and the third group in 1895. The First Group of Ruins included a two-room building with the main facade facing south. Maler's photograph of this building (1902, p.215, Fig. 13) shows two large geometric masks in the upper wall zone, centered over the doorways below and the restored south facade shown in figure 11 is based on this photo. Maler described these masks as follows:

> "The actual frieze field has over the two entrances, two pairs of beautifully developed rectangular scrolls (ornamental simplification of the original serpent's-head), each rectangular scroll, as usual, proceeding from a course of little square stones rising at an angle of 45 degrees, the space between filled up with engaged columns."

Maler's suggestion that the large stepped-frets are simplified versions of a serpent head is particularly interesting since he may have been the first person to recognize the origins of this form.

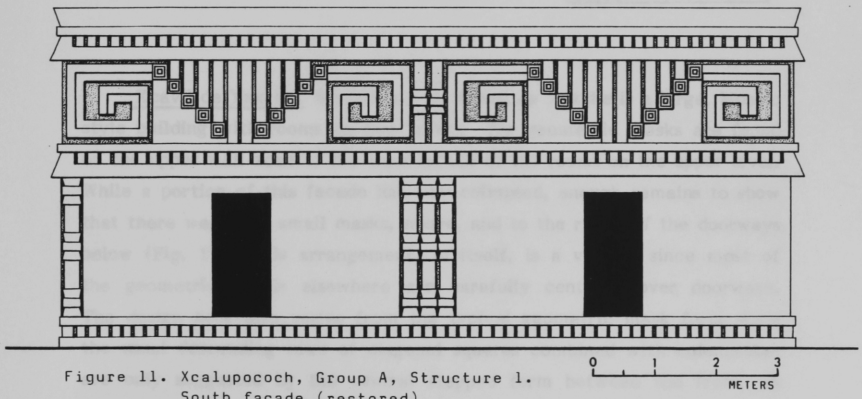


Figure 11. Xcalupococh, Group A, Structure 1. South facade (restored)

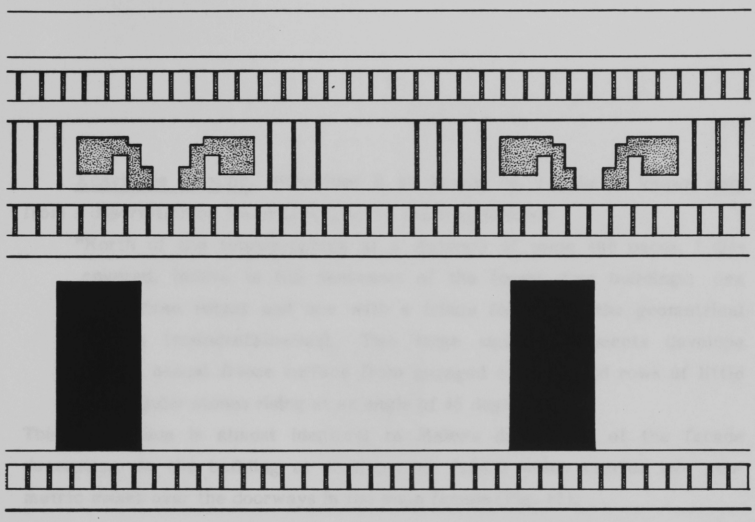


Figure 12. Xcavil de Yaxche, Structure 1. West facade, second level.

0 1 2 3 6FT

0 .5 1 2M

Xcavil de Yaxche. Structure 1 at Xcavil de Yaxche is a large, Mosaic style building with rooms on two levels. The geometric masks are found on the upper wall zone of the west facade of the rooms on the upper level. While a portion of this facade has now collapsed, enough remains to show that there were two small masks, above, and to the right, of the doorways below (Fig. 12). This arrangement, in itself, is a variant since most of the geometric masks elsewhere are carefully centered over doorways. The design here also varies from the typical geometric mask form since the usual descending rows of diagonal squares combined with colonnettes are only suggested by the central stepped form between the frets. In spite of this, the design "reads" the same as the typical form and the resulting mask loses none of its effectiveness.

Xcavil de Yaxche. Structure 6 at Xcavil de Yaxche is known only from a description by Maler (1902) which reads as follows:

> "North of the temple-palace at a distance of some 400 paces, I discovered, hidden in the denseness of the forest, two buildings; one with three rooms and one with a frieze formed of the geometrical designs (maindrataineisas). Two large square ornaments develope on the actual frieze surface from engaged columns and rows of little rectangular stones rising at an angle of 45 degrees."

This description is almost identical to Maler's description of the facade decoration on the building at Xcalupococh (1902) which carries two geometric masks over the doorways in the main facade (Fig. 11).

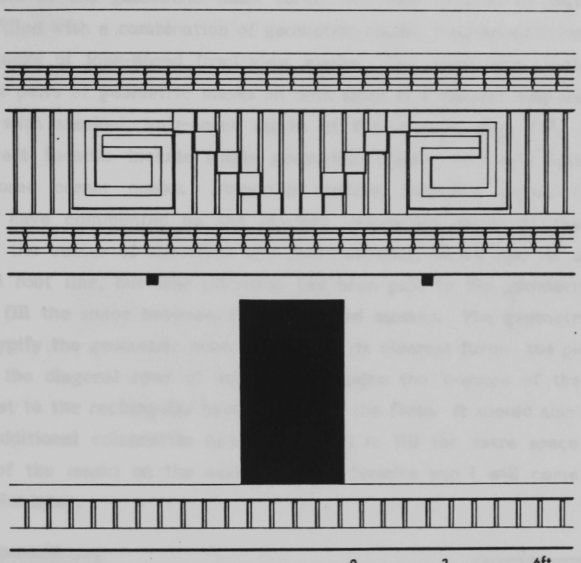


Figure 14. Xcakochna, Group C, Structure 1. North facade, Room 3

Xcakochna. Structure 1, Group C at Xcakochna is a long, L-shaped building which faces north (Andrews, 1985). Only Room 3 of this building is still standing and the facade above the doorway includes a very well preserved example of the typical geometric mask. Here, the center of the mask is marked by a long colonnette and there are additional colonnettes both above and below the diagonal rows of squares forming the nose (Fig. 14). As in several other examples, the space on both sides of the mask is filled with additional colonnettes, a practice which tends to obscure the outline of the mask itself.

Xlapak. Structure 1 at Xlapak includes several of the best-known examples of the geometric mask form. All four facades of this building were filled with a combination of geometric masks, long-nosed corner masks, and stacks of long-nosed front-view masks. The north and south facades feature pairs of geometric masks on both sides of a central long-nosed mask panel with stacked, long-nosed masks at the corners (Fig. 15). The east and west facades include single geometric masks, centered between the long-nosed corner masks. Numerous writers, including myself (Andrews, 1975), have commented on the stacked long-nosed masks at the corners and in the center of the north and south facades, which rise up above the normal roof line, but less attention has been paid to the geometric masks which fill the space between the long-nosed maskks. The geometric masks here typify the geometric mask concept in its clearest form: the plain areas below the diagonal rows of squares emphasize the V-shape of the nose in contrast to the rectangular eyes formed by the frets. It should also be noted that additional colonnettes have been used to fill the extra space on both sides of the masks on the east and west facades and I will come back to this point later.

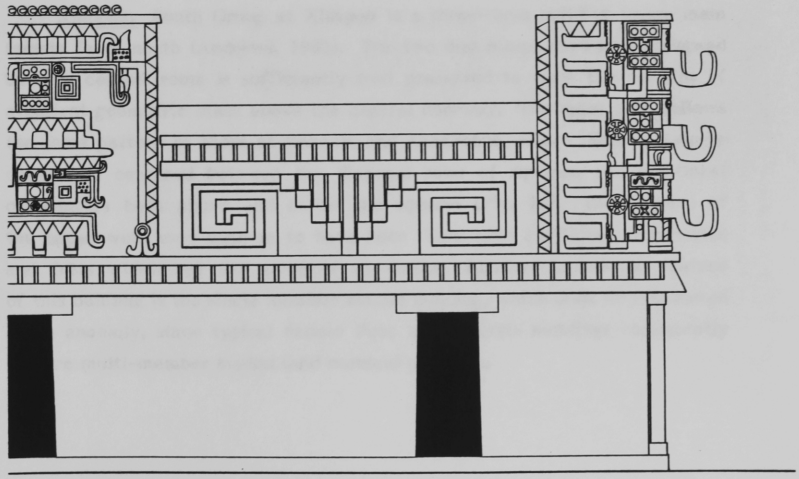


Figure 15. Xlapak, Structure 1. Portion of south facade (restored)

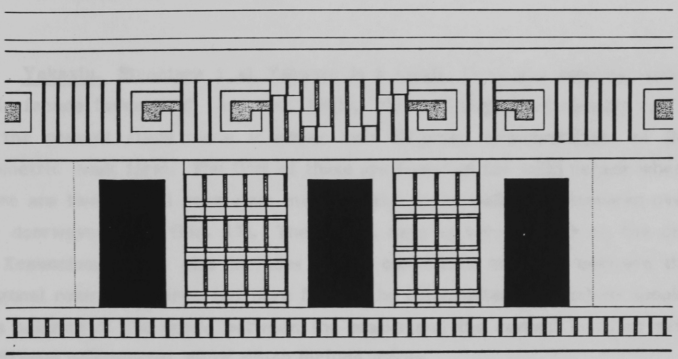


Figure 16. South Group, Structure 1. Restored facade, central room.

Xlabpak. South Group at Xlabpak is a three-room building whose main facade faces north (Andrews, 1985). The two end rooms have now collapsed but the central room is sufficiently well preserved to show the remains of a typical geometric mask above the central doorway. The mask here follows the same pattern as those at Yakaxiu and Xcakochna, where there is a single colonnette centered between the diagonal rows of squares, and additional colonnettes both above and below the squares (Fig. 16). The balance of the upper wall zone appears to have been filled with additional colonnettes and frets which are not arranged as masks. Another interesting feature of this building is the single member medial molding, which must be considered as an anomoly, since typical classic Puuc mosaic style buildings consistently feature multi-member medial (and cornice) moldings.

Yakaxiu. Structure 1 at Yakaxiu is a small, two-room building whose main facade faces north (Andrews, 1985). This building is particularly useful to the present study since it shows two different interpretations of the geometric mask form. The first of these are found on the main facade where there are two typical geometric masks in the upper wall zone centered over the doorways below (Fig. 17). The design here is very similar to the one at Xcakochna, which also includes a long colonnette centered between the diagonal rows of squares, but here five of the colonnettes also include spools. The balance of the space between the masks and the corners is filled with additional colonnettes, all of which include spools.

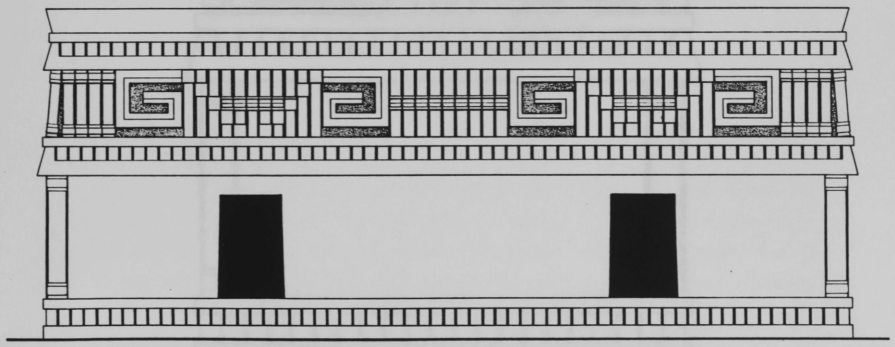


Figure 17. Yakaxiu, Structure 1. North facade (restored)

Yakaxiu. The second version of the geometric mask forms at Yakaxiu are found on the end walls. The west facade, shown in figure 18, includes a variant of the basic geometric mask where the arrangement of both the diagonal rows of squares and colonnettes have been altered. In this example, there are three colonnettes with spools centered between the squares, and the squares do not rise to the top of the adjacent frets as they do in all other examples. In spite of this, enough of the basic order remains to retain the essential elements of the mask form.

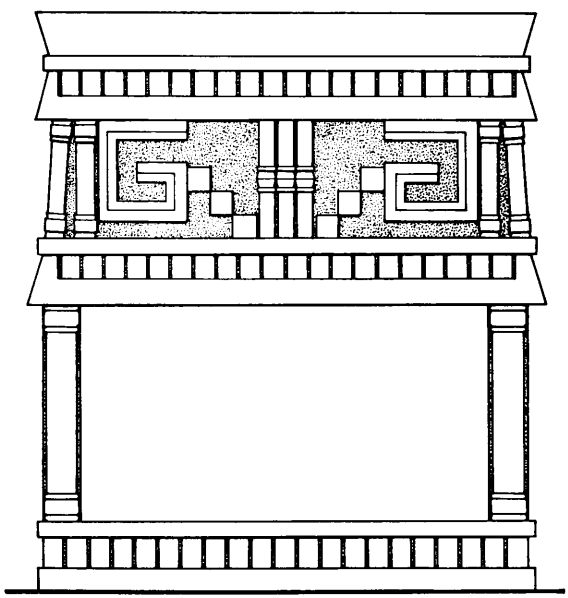
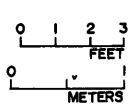


Figure 18. Yakaxiu, Structure 1.
West facade (restored)



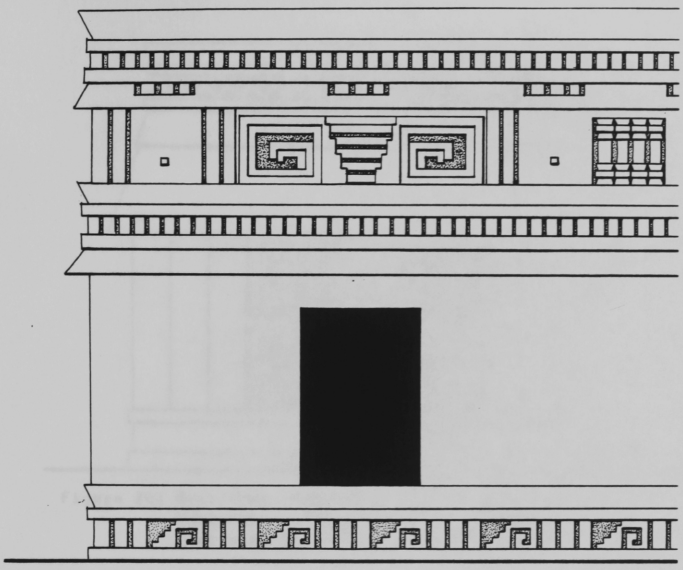


Figure 19. Chunhuhub, Structure 2. West facade, Room 1.

Chunhuhub. Structure 2 at Chunhuhub, which is also called the Adjacent Palace, is a good sized three-room building which faces west. The treatment of the upper portion of the west facade differs from typical classic Puuc facades in two different ways. First, the overall design of the upper facade is not symetrical since the designs over the central and southern doorways differ from the design over the northern doorway. Secondly, the latter design takes the form of a variant of the geometric mask in which the normal vertical colonnettes above the rows of diagonal squares are now horizontal (Fig. 19). It should also be noted that the stepped portions of the stepped-frets are not formed with squares as in typical geometric masks. Here again, it is the basic order and arrangement that produces the mask character rather than the specific details of the individual parts.

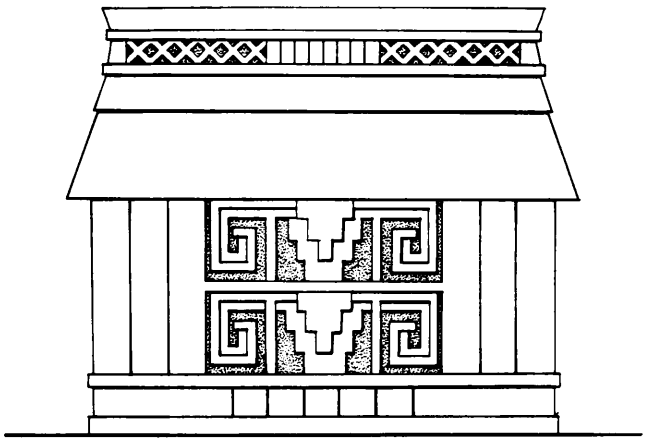


Figure 20. Dzibiltun, Palace. East facade, Northeast Wing (restored)

Dzibiltun. The building at Dzibiltun that Maler (1895) called the Palace, included one of the variants of the basic geometric mask on the lower wall zone of the northeast wing. Unfortunately, most of the room with this design has now collapsed and no trace of these masks were visible when I visited the site in March of 1985. The restored east facade (Fig. 20) is based mostly on Maler's photo, supplemented by vertical dimensions taken near the interior corner where the northeast wing meets the main mass. The design here consists of a pair of geometric masks, one over the other, which are flanked on both sides by large colonnettes. In this example, there are no colonnettes either above or below the diagonal rows of squares, showing that the process of elimination can be carried one step further in simplifying the nose portion of the masks. Elsewhere (Andrews, 1984) I have classified Dzibiltun as a Chenes-Puuc site and it is quite possible that the geometric masks here are earlier than those found in the Puuc heartland.

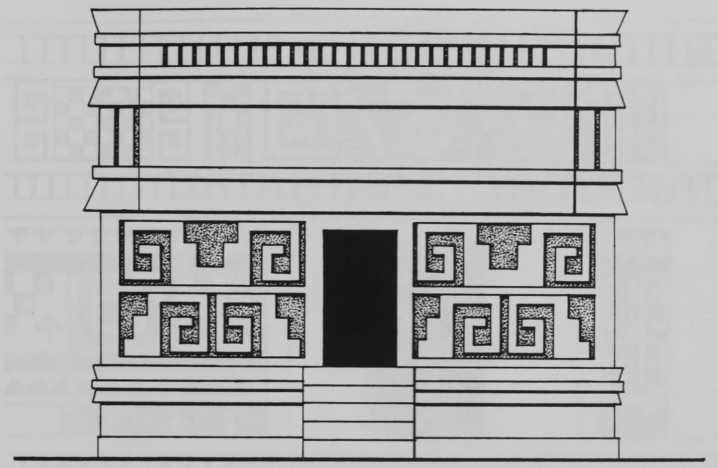


Figure 21. Dzibiltun, Temple. South facade (restored)

Dzibiltun. The Temple at Dzibiltun was first reported by Maler who included a photograph of the main facade (Maler, 1902, Fig. 22) H.E. Pollock (1970) also described this building and included a photo of the southwest corner, showing the variant geometric mask in the upper portion of the decorated panel adjacent to the doorway. I visited the site in March of 1985 and found the Temple to be in roughly the same state of preservation as when seen by Pollock some fifty years earlier. As in the Palace at the same site, the mask here is in the lower wall zone and it is worth noting that while both the lower and upper sections of the decorated panels adjacent to the doorway feature stepped frets, only the upper section takes the form of a geometric mask since the frets in the lower panel are reversed (Fig. 21). This makes for a curious juxtaposition but does demonstrate clearly that the geometric mask form is dependent on maintaining the characteristic order and assemblage of the original mask form.

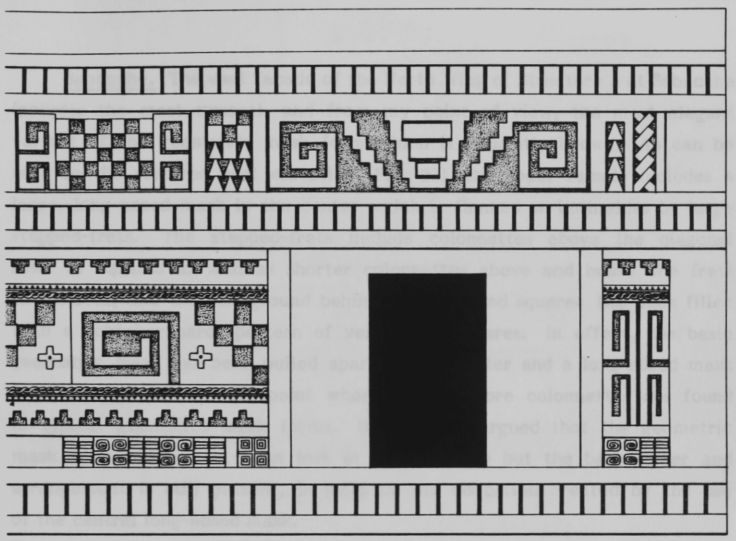


Figure 22. Rancho Perez, Structure 1. Room 3, restored facade

Rancho Perez. Structure 1 at Rancho Perez is an eight-room building with a stairway in the center leading to an upper level (Andrews, 1984). Most of the rooms have now collapsed and only a portion of the main facade in front of Room 3 is still preserved. The decorated panel above the doorway includes yet another variation on the typical geometric mask, and the design here is similar in some respects to that found on Structure 2 at Chunhuhub (Fig. 19). The restored facade of Room 3 shows that the nose of the geometric mask is formed with diagonal rows of squares, with horizontal colonnettes between, an arrangement we have already seen at Chunhuhub, but the large stepped-frets on both sides include an additional row of squares on the diagonal, making two sets of squares (Fig. 22). This somewhat unusual example of the geometric mask demonstrates once more the inherent flexibility of the basic form, which is capable of innumerable permutations.

Sabacche. The east facade of the North Wing of Structure 5 at Sabacche includes the most unusual, and from my point of view, the most elegant variant of the geometric mask form which is presently known. As can be seen in the restored east elevation (Fig. 23), the upper facade includes a large, long-nosed mask in the center which is flanked on both sides by large stepped-frets. The stepped-frets include colonnettes above the diagonal rows of squares as well as shorter colonnettes above and below the frets themselves, and the background behind the frets and squares has been filled with a "checkerboard" pattern of very small squares. In effect, the basic geometric mask has been pulled apart at the center and a long-nosed mask has been inserted at the point where one or more colonnettes are found in typical geometric mask forms. It might be argued that the geometric mask form has almost been lost in this example but the basic order and arrangement is still present, in spite of the distortion created by the use of the central long-nosed mask.

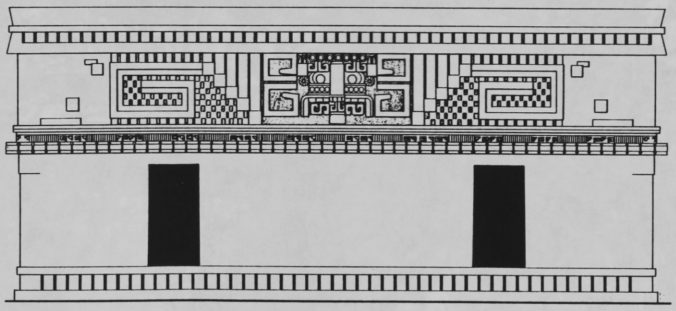


Figure 23. Sabacche, Structure 5. North Wing, east facade (restored)

Figure 24. Sacbe, Structure 1. Drawing by F. Catherwood

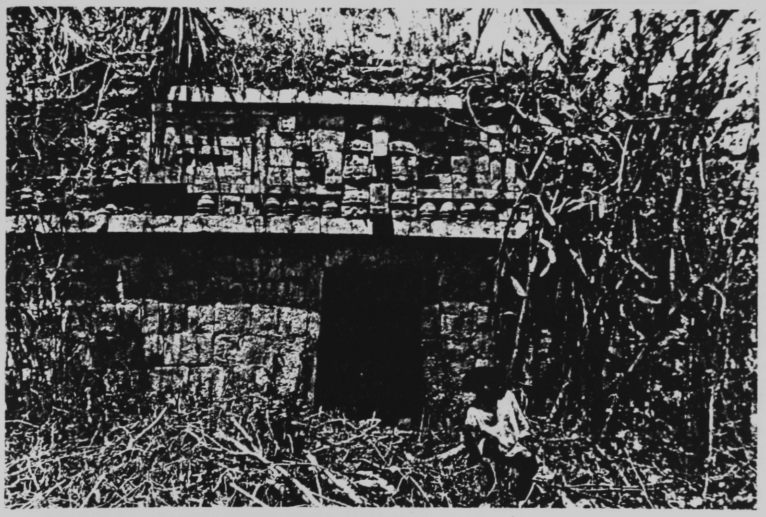


Figure 25. Sacbe, Structure 1. Maler photo

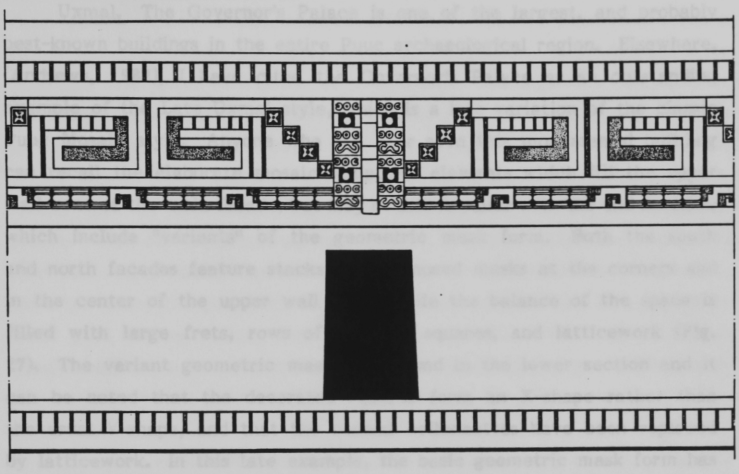
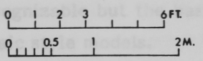


Figure 26. Sacbe, Structure 1. Restored facade, central room.



Sacbe. The building I have called Structure 1 at Sacbe is known only from a description by John Lloyd Stephens (1843) accompanied by a drawing by Frederick Catherwood (Fig. 24), and a photograph taken by Teobert Maler in 1887 (Fig. 25). Maler's notes on this site have yet to be published and its exact location remains unknown, despite repeated efforts on the part of numerous Mayanistas, including the author, to relocate it. In spite of this, Catherwood's drawing and Maler's photo show clearly that the main facade carried three variant geometric masks above the doorways to the rooms below. These masks are very reminiscent of the large mask on the east facade of Structure 5 at Sabacche since they also feature long-nosed masks at the center of the geometric mask forms (Fig. 26). The design here might well be interpreted as a very sophisticated version of the basic long-nosed Puuc mask which succeeds in combining two different versions of the same motif in a single coherent design.

Uxmal. The Governor's Palace is one of the largest, and probably best-known buildings in the entire Puuc archaeological region. Elsewhere, (Andrews, 1982), I have cited the Governor's Palace as an outstanding example of the Late Uxmal style, which is a late variation of the classic Puuc Mosaic style. Anyone who has ever seen this monumental building can recall the elaborate mosaic sculptural elements which fill the upper wall zone of the main facade, but may be less familiar with the end facades, which include "variants" of the geometric mask form. Both the south and north facades feature stacks of long-nosed masks at the corners and in the center of the upper wall zone, while the balance of the space is filled with large frets, rows of diagonal squares, and latticework (Fig. 27). The variant geometric masks are found in the lower section and it can be noted that the decorated squares form an X-shape rather than the usual V-shape, and that the normal collonnettes have been replaced by latticework. In this late example, the basic geometric mask form has been modified to the point where it is almost unrecognizable but the basic design is clearly derived from the earlier classic Mosaic style models.

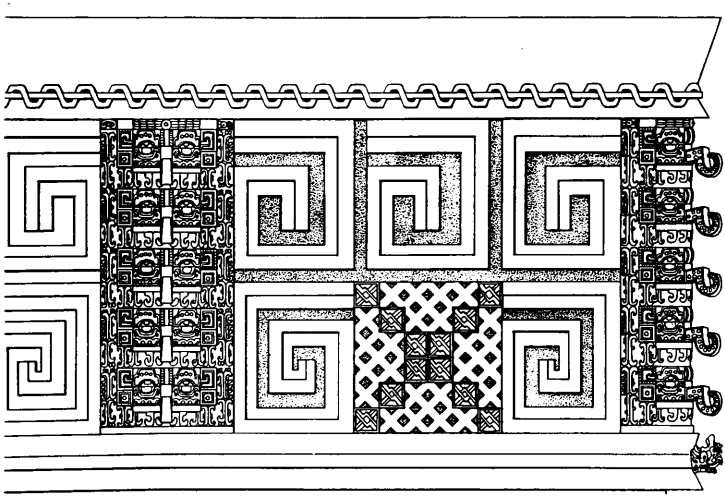


Figure 27. Uxmal, Governor's Palace.
South end, portion of upper facade.

Summary and discussion. The eighteen buildings carrying geometric mask panels described and illustrated in the foregoing pages represent a significant portion of the total inventory of classic Puuc Mosaic style buildings. The most recent list of Mosaic style buildings from all parts of the Puuc archaeological region shows seventy different buildings from forty-five sites (Andrews, 1985). This means that some twenty-five percent of all Mosaic style buildings presently known include these special mask forms. By way of comparison, about forty different buildings have been located which carry typical long-nosed masks, including those used at corners. It is also worth noting that with two exceptions (Dzibiltun and Kupaloma), the sites where the geometric masks are found are restricted to a relatively small part of the eastern Puuc heartland (Fig. 6). While this is still a considerable area, the limited geographical distribution of geometric masks does suggest special political or family ties among the elite groups controlling these sites.

As noted earlier, Spinden believed that the long-nosed mask represented the feathered serpent and this view still seems valid today. Moreover, numerous writers, beginning with Maler, have postulated that the stepped-fret is also derived from a serpent model, indicating that the symbolism underlying both mask forms is the same. It would simplify matters greatly if it could be shown that there was a clear progression over time wherein the typical long-nosed mask, with its six basic parts, was gradually altered and various parts eliminated until only the geometric mask with its very stylized nose and eyes remained. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case since we have already seen that there are at least eight instances where both long-nosed and geometric masks appear on the same building, demonstrating that both forms are contemporary. This still leaves a large number of buildings where only geometric masks were employed, but these must be considered as roughly contemporary with those buildings including both mask forms.

In regard to those buildings where both mask forms are found side by side, I am inclined to view the presence of the geometric masks as an outgrowth of the general tendency on the part of classic Puuc artists and builders to treat the problem of the decoration of the facades of buildings as an exercise in filling all of the available space with some form of ornamentation, regardless of its symbolic content. With one or two

exceptions, all of the buildings included in this study share this predilection to avoid leaving any blank space in the upper wall zone leading to some level of redundancy. This tendency can also be seen in the facades of a large number of Colonnette style buildings, where row upon row of colonnettes can be found in a seemingly endless succession. The most extreme example of the desire to avoid blank space can be found in the main facade of the Codz-Poop at Kabah, where the entire surface has been covered with hundreds of long-nosed masks. At this point, the facade has merely been covered with a kind of wallpaper; the repetive pattern may be decorative but the message is lost.

In those buildings where the geometric masks were used alone, I believe they might well have been substituted for the more conventional long-nosed mask, and were intended to carry the same meaning. While this choice may seem arbitrary, the geometric masks do have the advantage that they can easily be elongated or shortened to fill the available space and could also be used to restrict the symbolic content to those who understood the kind of "shorthand" being employed. Certainly members of the elite class, who may well have used many of the buildings carrying geometric masks as residences, could be expected to understand their meaning while others might respond to the same design as purely abstract decoration. If this is true, the classic Puuc builders have shown us that it actually is possible to have your cake and eat it too.

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