MAYA GRAFFITI
and the Classic Maya Elite

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ARCHITECTURAL GRAFFITI AND THE MAYA ELITE

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fig. 1
Map of Maya Area Showing Sites with Graffiti
Architectural graffiti, defined as ancient drawings or writings scratched on a wall or other surface, are found on walls, floors, and masonry "benches" in numerous buildings in certain parts of the Lowland Maya area. By their nature, graffiti cannot be viewed as integral parts of the decoration of the rooms in which they appear; they are always "secondary" additions with no formal organization. Unlike wall paintings or murals which are conceptually integrated with wall spaces, the graffiti are scattered at random over the plaster surfaces of walls, floors, vaults, and benches, and many are found in dark corners and narrow passageways, seemingly "hidden" from view. They rarely form larger "scenes"; most are isolated "units" with no obvious relationship to adjacent drawings.

Teobert Maler, the indefatigable German archaeologist and explorer, was the first person to compile any substantial record of the graffiti, principally from buildings at Tikal, Santa Rosa Xtampak, and Hochob (Maler, 1889, 1891, 1918). Somewhat later, a smaller number of graffiti were recorded from Nakum (Tozzer, 1913), Holmul (Merwin, 1932) and Uaxactun (Smith, 1937, 1950). Most of the other early references to graffiti are fortuitous, since the authors tended to view them as curiosities, rather than significant manifestations of Classic Maya culture. More recently, Webster (1963) and Kampen (1979) have described and analyzed many of the graffiti from Tikal but to date no corpus of Maya graffiti has been published nor has any comparative analysis of graffiti from different sites been attempted. Both Webster (ibid) and Kampen (ibid) raised numerous questions regarding the dating, meaning, and authorship of the graffiti at Tikal and most of these questions still remain open to further investigation.

For the most part, the graffiti have been ignored in the literature of Classic Maya art and architecture, sometimes on the grounds that they are merely childish scribbles or cartoons, or else that they are the products of Post Classic "Kilroys", who temporarily occupied the
buildings after they had been abandoned by their original builders. I believe that neither of these interpretations is correct, and this paper will attempt to demonstrate that the architectural graffiti are authentic examples of a kind of "popular" art which was executed by members of the Classic Maya elite class during the time when they lived and worked in these buildings.

**DISTRIBUTION**

To date, architectural graffiti have been reported from 23 different centers in the Lowland Maya area as shown in Chart I. Admittedly, this chart is bound to be incomplete since a more careful search would probably turn up additional graffiti at sites not included in this list as well as others from buildings in centers already known to include graffiti. In spite of this, several important facts can be gleaned from this chart:

1. The geographic distribution of graffiti is very uneven with regard to the entire lowland Maya area. Nearly all of the known graffiti are concentrated at a small number of sites in four contiguous regions which form a narrow band running north and south in the center of the Yucatan Peninsula (fig. 1).

2. The total number of graffiti reported from sites outside the narrow band noted above represents less than 5 per cent of all graffiti so far recorded, not including those from Comalcalco.

3. With the exception of Comalcalco, which is a special case, the largest number of reported graffiti are found at Tikal, where they have been reported from 37 different buildings.

4. Many of the lowland regions, which include numerous large and important sites, are conspicuous by their absence from Chart I.

It might be argued that the distribution of graffiti as shown in Chart I and figure 1 is excessively biased, due to uneven recording, but I do not believe this is actually the case. For example, the Puuc region is represented by a single graffito found by Maler in the Governor's Palace at Uxmal together with several graffiti found in a cave below a pyramidal structure at X-Kukican, in spite of the fact that there are more well preserved buildings in the Puuc region than in any other part of the entire lowland area. John Lloyd Stephens
### CHART I. MAYA SITES WITH REPORTED GRAFFITI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chichen Itza</td>
<td>4 examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Comalcalco</td>
<td>10,000+ examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dzibilchaltun</td>
<td>1 example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palenque</td>
<td>3 examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uxmal</td>
<td>1 example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-Kukican</td>
<td>4+ examples</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### CHENES REGION

- Hochob: 10+ examples
- Santa Rosa: 10+ examples
- Xtampak: 10+ examples
- Xkichmook: 10+ examples

#### RIO BEC REGION

- Becan: numerous examples
- Chicanna: numerous examples
- Payan: numerous examples
- Rio Bec B: numerous examples
- Rio Bec V: 4+ examples

#### NORTH AND CENTRAL PETEN REGIONS

- Benque Viejo: 3 examples
- Calakmul: 3 examples
- Holmul: numerous examples
- Kinal: 2 examples
- Nakum: numerous examples
- San Clemente: numerous examples
- Tikal: hundreds of examples
- Uaxactun: numerous examples
- Xunantunich: 5 examples

*Comalcalco is a special case which is included for comparative purposes.*
and Teobert Maler both examined literally hundreds of buildings in the Puuc region without turning up a single graffito except the one in the Governor's Palace at Uxmal. Pollock (1980) makes no reference to graffiti in the Puuc region in his recently published monumental study of Puuc architecture, and my own examination of several hundred buildings in the Puuc region has also failed to locate a single graffito. I would suspect that the same condition holds true for many other regions where graffiti appear to be lacking, since a sufficient number of buildings in all regions have been examined by enough different individuals, including the writer, to reveal the existence of graffiti if they were present even in small numbers. Thus, while I would expect to find additional graffiti at many sites in the Chenes, Rio Bec, and North and Central Peten regions, we are likely to encounter only scattered examples in most of the other regions.

At this point some further mention must be made of the graffiti at Comalcalco, even though by definition they fall outside the scope of the present study. As early as 1923, Franz Blom reported the presence of numerous graffiti inscribed on the surfaces of the fired bricks used in the construction of buildings and sub-structure facings at Comalcalco. These drawings were scratched into the non-exposed faces of the bricks prior to firing and the bricks were then laid up in mortar into walls and vaults. Since the drawings were never exposed to view once they were incorporated into buildings, they cannot properly be included in the present study which is limited to exposed architectural graffiti on plastered surfaces. This is extremely unfortunate since by now over 10,000 graffiti have been reported from Comalcalco. Many of these were described and recorded by Blom (1923), Eckholm (1954) and Navarrete (1967) but the vast majority (over 8,000) were discovered by Ponciano Salazar in the late 1970's during his excavation and restoration of Temple I at Comalcalco. (Salazar, personal communication.) Each graffito found by Salazar was carefully recorded in drawing form but to date these have not been published. I will return to this enormous collection of graffiti a little later since I believe they have important implications for the graffiti in other regions with regard to dating, meaning and authorship.
The subject matter included in the graffiti varies widely. Many of the drawings are representational although there are a large number of geometric and abstract designs that defy easy categorization. Noteworthy among the graffiti included in the present study are human figures, human heads, anthropomorphic figures, dieties, buildings, hieroglyphs, ceremonial paraphernalia, human sacrifices, serpents, animals, insects, birds, planetary symbols, mat symbols, religious symbols, grotesques, fanciful designs, litters, ballcourts, patolli boards, and a number of unidentifiable symbols and designs as well as ordinary scribbles. Most of the graffiti appear as isolated elements even though individual graffito may be surrounded by numerous other unrelated drawings. Occasionally, several drawings form a larger scene such as the famous "execution" scene in Temple II at Tikal (fig. 3), the "processions" in the Temple of the Inscriptions and Five Storied Palace at Tikal (figs. 1 and 2) and the multi-figure scenes in Structure IV at Rio Bec V (figs. 4 and 5). Chart 2 shows the general distribution of the graffiti used in this study on the basis of subject matter. (Graffiti from Comalcalco are not included.)

Obviously, human figures and human heads were the most popular subjects followed by buildings, "symbols", glyphs, animals and dieties. In spite of their scarcity, the litters (palanquins) and patolli boards are of special interest which I will return to later.

The quality of execution of the graffiti varies as much as the subject matter. At one end of the scale are illegible "scribbles" (figs. 6 and 7) and very crudely executed representational drawings which seem "childish" or cartoon-like (figs. 8-16). At the other end are carefully drawn human figures (figs. 17, 82a), human heads (figs. 17, 95a, 90a, 85b) and animals (fig. 19), which rival some of the best Classic Maya sculptures and paintings in terms of line quality and form. Many of the drawings are strangely reminiscent of that segment of modern art which depends on the reduction of complex forms to bare essentials. In particular, some of the graffiti in Structure I at Rio Bec B and Structure IV at Rio Bec V bring to mind the drawings of
A. CHART 2. SUBJECT MATTER OF THE GRAFFITI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Figures</td>
<td>-118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Heads</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buildings</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentifiable 'symbols'</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentifiable</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hieroglyphs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dieties</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribbles</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceremonial Items</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometric Symbols</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropomorphic Figures</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mat Symbols</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serpents</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canoes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patolli Boards</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litters</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grotesques</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifices</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insects</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballcourt</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-294 Total
Saul Steinberg (figs. 22, 23, 24, 25). Both the Maya drawings and Steinberg’s drawings combine an elegant simplicity of line with a humorous undertone.

The majority of the graffiti fall somewhere between the two extremes in terms of quality or "artistic merit." This should hardly come as a surprise since by nature graffiti are spontaneous "sketches", executed for the most part by individuals with no training in drawing who would not be likely to have any real understanding of the formal principles of composition and organization which served as the foundations of Classic Maya art. What is surprising are the large number of fairly well executed curvilinear drawings which are extremely difficult to execute since they must be scratched into a very hard surface with a sharp pointed tool. (figs. 17 and 18) Maller (1911) mentioned that the stucco on walls of Tikal is so hard that he was unable to peel off the outer layer in order to get at drawings underneath. Straight lines or simple curves are easy to come by when they are incised in this fashion but complex curves and delicate lines are another matter. Anyone who has ever tried to scratch a drawing into a hard plaster wall or to scratch in the design on an etching or engraving plate knows that this process presents many technical difficulties. In contrast to the techniques employed in stone carving and painting, both of which allow for the correction of mistakes and continuous adjustment of shapes and forms over a long period of time, a graffito is a non-correctable, almost instantaneous drawing which has to be "right" the first time; there is no way to change it other than to add more lines. Given this inherent technical difficulty, I would argue that many of the graffiti are extraordinarily well executed, and that their spontaneous quality adds an important dimension to the otherwise rigid canons of Classic Maya art.

**DATING THE GRAFFITI**

The question as to when the graffiti were executed presents many problems, particularly in view of the fact that most of them (excluding Comalcalco) have been found in unsealed contexts. While they cannot be earlier than the construction dates for the buildings in which they
appear, they could have been done almost any time afterward. Fortunately, there is some data pertaining to these questions and these consistently support the premise that the graffiti are contemporary with the major occupation of the buildings in question.

The practice of inscribing drawings on the walls of buildings has a long history in the lowland Maya area. Kampen (1979) reported that five Preclassic buildings at Tikal contained graffiti as well as three from the Early Classic and two from the Middle Classic Periods. These ten buildings had been completely sealed by later superimpositions so there is no question regarding their chronological placement. Other graffiti which might be dated earlier than the Late Classic are found at Rio Bec V (Ruppert, 1943) and at Uaxactun (Smith, 1950). Most of the graffiti from Tikal and elsewhere are found in buildings which can be dated to the Late Classic, and in a few cases to the Terminal Classic Period (Chart 3).

Given that the majority of the buildings containing graffiti were constructed during the Late Classic Period, we are still confronted with the question as to whether the graffiti are contemporary with the major occupation of these structures or whether, as Kampen (ibid) has proposed, they are Post Classic additions, affixed to the walls and floors of these buildings after they had been abandoned by their original occupants. What little data is available which bears on this question supports my belief that the graffiti were executed by the original occupants of the buildings, both at Tikal and elsewhere.

In his analysis of the buildings in the Central Acropolis at Tikal, Harrison (1970, p. 170) points out that in Structures 5D-49 and 5D-65 "benches" partially or wholly covered graffiti. Harrison (ibid) also believes that the benches were "secondary" constructions, added to these buildings sometime between A.D. 650-750 (late Ik or early Imix). There is no data whatever to support the idea that the benches were added during the Eznab Period (A.D. 850-925). Clearly then, the graffiti behind the benches were executed not much later than A.D. 700. Obviously, this does not prove that the "exposed" graffiti were executed at the same time as those behind the benches but their
### CHART 3. Dates of buildings with graffiti

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITE</th>
<th>BUILDING</th>
<th>CONST. DATE</th>
<th>REFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chichen Itza</td>
<td>Temple of the Warriors- Terminal Classic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Morris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chichen Itza</td>
<td>Nunnery - East Wing Late Classic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bolles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comalcalco</td>
<td>Bricks Late Classic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blom, Navarrete, G.F. Andrews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dzibilchaltun</td>
<td>Structure 1 - Sub Late Early Period II</td>
<td>Andrews V</td>
<td>Ruz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palenque</td>
<td>Temp. of Inscriptions Late Classic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Maler, Gann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uxmal</td>
<td>Governor's Palace Terminal Classic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Maler, Pollock, G.F. Andrews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-Kukican</td>
<td>Cave Early Classic?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Maler, Pollock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hochob</td>
<td>Structure 2 Late Classic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Maler, Pollock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Rosa</td>
<td>Palace Late or Terminal Classic</td>
<td></td>
<td>E.H. Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xtampak</td>
<td>Palace Late Classic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xkichmook</td>
<td>Palace Late or Terminal Classic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becan</td>
<td>Structure I Late Classic</td>
<td>Potter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becan</td>
<td>Structure IV Late Classic</td>
<td>Potter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicanna</td>
<td>Structure II Late Classic</td>
<td>Potter, Eaton, G.F. Andrews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payan</td>
<td>Structure I Late Classic</td>
<td>Ruppert, G.F. Andrews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Bec B</td>
<td>Structure I Late Classic</td>
<td>G.F. Andrews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Bec V</td>
<td>Structure IV Late Classic</td>
<td>Ruppert-Denison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benque Viejo</td>
<td>Structure ? Late Classic?</td>
<td>Gann (1918)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calakmul</td>
<td>Structure III Late Classic</td>
<td>Ruppert-Denison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holmul</td>
<td>Structure A Early Late Classic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinal</td>
<td>Structure 39 Late Classic?</td>
<td>Tozzer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nakum</td>
<td>Structure D, Temple A Late Classic?</td>
<td>Tozzer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nakum</td>
<td>Temple E, Temple N Late Classic?</td>
<td>Tozzer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Clemente</td>
<td>Structure 3 Late Classic?</td>
<td>Mason</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uaxactun</td>
<td>Structure XVIII Middle Classic?</td>
<td>Smith, Gann</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xunantunich</td>
<td>Structure A-11 Late Classic</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For dates of buildings with graffiti at Tikal, see Kampen, Chart 3, page 164
content and style of execution, which is the same as those behind the benches, does suggest that this is the case. A similar situation prevailed at Rio Bec V where Ruppert (1943) located several graffiti on the walls of a recess in room 2 of Structure IV which were partially sealed by later constructions. (figs. 4 and 5).

Ruppert (ibid) stated:

"Of interest are a series of graffiti in the plaster of the east and west walls of the recess. Because they extend under the masonry blocking the original entrance they must be ancient."

At Uaxactun, Dr. Thomas Gann (1923) who examined Structure A-XVIII stated:

"On the northern wall (room 9) were a number of graffiti; some of them still bearing traces of having been covered by the topmost coat of red paint, a sure indication that they were scratched in during the occupancy of the structure by the original builders, and not by wandering indians at a later date. The graffiti show crude human heads, a scorpion-like creature, and what are probably intended to be phallic symbols."

In his recent paper on the patolli boards at Seibal, A.B. Smith (1978) reported that five graffiti, all in the form of patolli boards, were found in Structure A-ll at Xunantunich during excavations carried out in this building in 1959-1960 by Dr. E.W. MacKie. MacKie (Smith, ibid) believed that the graffiti should be dated to Benque Viejo IIIb (Tepeu 2 at Uaxactun or Imix at Tikal). MacKie also reported that Structure A-ll was destroyed (probably by earthquake) at the end of Benque Viejo IIIb and was not reconstructed, thereby authenticating the dating of the graffiti to Benque Viejo IIIb.

The dating of the patolli boards elsewhere is problematical. Smith (ibid) points out that the patolli design found at Teotihuacan by Sejourne (fig. 37) is probably the earliest known example of a patolli board in an architectural context, and the patolli design from Structure I-sub at Dzibilchaltun (fig. 38) is similar to this. Andrews (1973) dates the Dzibilchaltun graffito in the late Early Period II (ca. 700-750 A.D.) The geometric designs found by Maler at El Cayo, La Mar, San Lorenzo and Piedras Negras (figs. 33 to 36) are similar
to the *patolli* designs from Teotihuacan and Dzibilchaltun but I am not sure if they are intended to represent the same thing.\(^2\) The *patolli* boards at Palenque (fig. 27), Xunantunich, Nakum (figs. 29 and 30) and Seibal (fig. 26) are similar to those found at Tula (fig. 28), which corresponds to Acosta's type A *patolli* boards in the Maya area, derived from those at Tula or vice-versa. In any event, the *patolli* boards at Palenque, Nakum, Seibal, and Tikal must be later than those at Teotihuacan and Dzibilchaltun and could date to either the Late Classic or Terminal Classic periods.

Elsewhere, the evidence regarding the dating of the graffiti is equivocal since the contexts are unsealed but there is no positive evidence from any site which favors a Post Classic dating for graffiti in Late Classic buildings. In this connection, it seems reasonable to examine the situation at Comalcalco, even though the graffiti found there have to be considered as belonging to a different category than those found elsewhere on exposed plaster walls and floors. As noted earlier, the graffiti at Comalcalco are inscribed on the flat faces of bricks which were then laid up in the walls, vaults, and substructure facings of the Late Classic buildings at that site. In this case it is patently clear that the graffiti actually predate the construction of the buildings, by a few weeks or months at least, and came from irrefutably sealed contexts. What is most interesting, however, for purposes of the present discussion, is the fact that the graffiti at Comalcalco deal with precisely the same subject matter as the graffiti from our core area (Chenes, Rio Bec, North and Central Peten regions). Navarrete's (1967) inventory of the graffiti found at Comalcalco prior to Salzar's recent excavations of Temple I includes scenes of ritual character, geometric designs, glyphs and numbers, human figures, zoomorphs, religious symbols, and architecture, which we have already shown are the most popular subjects for all the known graffiti at all sites. (Chart 2) My own brief examination (in 1978) of Salazar's collection of more than 8,000 graffiti from bricks used in the construction of Temple I revealed a broader spectrum of subject matter but the emphasis was still on the same subjects noted by Navarrete. The similarity of the graffiti at Comalcalco to those elsewhere may be pure coincidence, but those at Comalcalco are clear-
ly a Late Classic manifestation, and as such embody ideas and concerns which are rooted in this time period. Since the graffiti in the "core" area appear to stem from the same ideas and concerns, they should also be of Late Classic manufacture.

At this point it becomes necessary to examine three pairs of graffiti which come from Rio Bec B and Holmul respectively, since these bear heavily on the general questions of the dating of the graffiti as well as their authorship. The three graffiti from Rio Bec B are shown in figures 30a, 30b, and 30c and those from Holmul are shown directly below in figures 31a, 31b and 31c. Figures 30a and 31a show a canopied litter being carried by two "slaves", both bent over from the weight of their load. The litter, which has a serpent head and tail, holds a seated personage who is covered with what appears to be a thatched canopy. The two bearers are wearing loin cloths and sandals but there is no indication of special clothing for the person seated on the litter, although he is obviously a member of the elite class. Figures 30b and 31b show a geometric symbol consisting of three concentric rings, more oval than circular. The central ring is elaborated with seven crudely drawn step-frets while the inner ring has seven cog-like elements in the same general positions as the stepped frets. A gouged figure was superimposed over part of this symbol at Rio Bec B. Figures 30c and 31c both show a seated figure blowing some kind of trumpet; a horizontal line indicates that both figures are seated on a step or bench. In all three cases the representations are nearly identical, down to the smallest details.

The striking similarity of the three pairs of graffiti from these two sites naturally raises questions as to who did them and when. Three basic possibilities can be suggested:

1) They were made by different individuals at different times who had no contact with one another. Obviously, both must have seen models of identical design.

2) They were executed by different individuals, one of whom had seen the three drawings during a visit to either Rio Bec or Holmul. This latter person then recreated the same drawings
from memory upon his return home.

3) They were executed by the same person, who traveled from one site to the other and left his "mark" in both places. The first possibility does not seem tenable. The three drawings at both sites are so nearly identical that it is inconceivable that two different individuals would independently come up with precisely the same graphic interpretation, even though they started with similar models. The second possibility is also suspect on similar grounds. Even though person "A" had actually seen the drawings done by person "B", it is unlikely that they could be so precisely duplicated from memory, allowing for the necessary time lapse in between. (It is over 130 km on a straight line from Rio Bec B to Holmul). This leaves us with only the last possibility as being plausible and I believe that a close examination of the two sets of drawings shows clearly that not only is the subject matter identical, down to the last detail, but the line quality, general character, and execution of the drawings is also identical and must have come from the same hand. The fact that this individual was not a trained "artist" seems self-evident.

If our assumption that the three pairs of graffiti at Rio Bec B and Holmul were executed by the same person is correct, they are obviously contemporary in date. This still leaves us with the specific questions as to exactly when they were done. Structure 1 at Rio Bec B can be dated to ca. A.D. 650-700 on the grounds that it is contemporary with Structure 1 at Chicanna which has been dated to the Bejuco ceramic phase (A.D. 600-750) (Potter, 1977). Structure A, Group II at Holmul has been assigned to the Holmul III period although this building continued to be occupied up through Holmul V (Valliant, 1933). To date, the Holmul ceramic and architectural sequences have not been correlated with those from nearby sites such as Uaxactun and Tikal but the Holmul III period should fall somewhere in the early part of the Late Classic period. Thus, the drawings at both sites could date to the Late Classic but there is no proof of this since the contexts in both buildings were unsealed. This circumstance leaves us with only the subject matter of the graffiti as a basis for estimating their dates and I believe these point to the Late Classic rather than the
Post Classic period. The argument in favor of this position will be presented in detail in the concluding section.

**MEANING OF THE GRAFFITI**

Several theories can be advanced regarding the meaning of the graffiti. Here we are aided in part by the long history of the "art" of graffito, which goes back as far as Neolithic times when the early cave dwellers left a permanent record of their existence in the form of wall paintings and petroglyphs. Most writers seem to agree that these early graffiti were used in the promulgation of magic to increase the chances of success in hunting or in currying favor with the forces controlling nature. Through the ages, graffiti have derived from diverse motives such as unconscious doodling, establishing personal identity (initials, names, dates, self-portraits), efforts to be instructive (representational diagrams, "advice"), attempts to produce "art", popular or otherwise, and an interest in just plain pornography. In our own culture, the more "public" graffiti have focused on political slogans and protests addressed to the "establishment". The modern graffiti in Classic Maya buildings are generally easily distinguishable from those that are ancient since the former consist mostly of names and dates, including those of early explorers such as Charnay, Merwin, and Maler, as well as those of countless chicleros and tourists. My own guess is that the majority of all graffiti from all ages stem from that fundamental human urge to tell others that "Kilroy was here".

Webster (1963) suggested that the varied subject matter of the graffiti at Tikal could be interpreted to indicate an interest in instruction, personal records, and magic. Kampen (1979) on the other hand, suggests that the Tikal graffiti are essentially acts of desecration, regardless of their age, content or context. My own view corresponds more closely to Webster's since the content of most of the legible graffiti in all regions seems to indicate an overwhelming desire to record personages, events, objects, and places that were important in the lives of members of the elite class. The emphasis on human figures and human heads attests to the degree of personal involvement
with the graffiti. A few of the graffiti, such as the patolli boards, must have developed from practical considerations since they are invariably found on floors or horizontal surfaces of benches where they could actually be used by both children and adults. I would also not rule out magic as a reason for inscribing some of the graffiti, and those at Comalcalco are a good case in point. The sheer number of graffiti at Comalcalco, including over 8,000 from the bricks used in a single structure, suggests that the inscribing of drawings on the bricks was not a casual pastime of the workers employed in making the bricks; if so, they would scarcely have had time to do their job. A more viable alternative would be that the bricks were inscribed as part of an organized ritual process, wherein the "signs" or "messages" they contained were deliberately incorporated into buildings in a position where they would not be seen by mortals. Thus hidden from view, they could continue to work their magic for all time. This theory does nothing to explain the "exposed" graffiti in other parts of the Maya area but it does suggest a basic Maya belief in the efficacy of personalized graphic symbols in furthering human desires and needs.

CONCLUSIONS
I believe that the data and discussion presented in the preceding pages leads to three closely related conclusions:

1. That the practice of inscribing graffiti in the plastered surfaces of Maya buildings developed along regional lines, as evident from the limited geographical distribution of all graffiti so far recorded.

2. That the graffiti were executed by members of the elite class and their families, most of whom were not "artists" by occupation.

3. That the majority of the graffiti were inscribed during the Late Classic period, when the buildings in which they appear were occupied by, or under the control of, members of the elite.

These conclusions differ considerably from those offered by Kampen (1979) who proposed that the graffiti in the Late Classic buildings
at Tikal were executed after the buildings in which they appear had been abandoned and no longer functioned in their traditional capacity under Classic rulership. Kampen (ibid) also proposed that the graffiti on structures predating the Late Classic period were also produced after they had been abandoned, as an act of desecration marking the onset of new construction. Kampen's interpretation seems to be based primarily on the grounds that the Tikal graffiti fail to meet the standards of Tikal art in general and could not have been done by Tikal artists. In effect, this is a way of saying that graffiti should be "art" instead of graffiti. I concur with Kampen's assessment that most of the graffiti at Tikal and elsewhere were not produced by trained artists but this does not mean they were done by Post Classic "squatters" who were bent on desecrating the buildings produced by the Classic Maya. All of the positive evidence so far available points to a Late Classic provenience for some, if not all of the graffiti.

At the outset, it was pointed out that the vast majority of the graffiti so far reported come from four contiguous regions; Chenes, Rio Bec, Northern Peten, and Central Peten. We also noted that the enormous number of graffiti from Comalcalco does not change this distribution since they represent a special case falling outside our definition of architectural graffiti. I believe that the few scattered examples of graffiti outside of the central "core area" can be taken as a demonstration that the impulse to leave one's "mark" is a basic human urge which is not confined to time or place. The fact that these latter graffiti appear as random events in scattered locations is ample evidence that they do not derive from an area-wide Late Classic practice which had peer group sanction. As a corollary to this, the fact that the majority of the graffiti are confined to a very restricted geographical area suggests that the practice of inscribing drawings on the walls and floors of temples and elite class residences developed along regional lines as a kind of "fad" which was probably transmitted from one region to another by elite class groups who maintained contact with one another on a regular basis.
Since this practice did not spread to other regions east and west of the "core area", we can assume this indicates a level of cultural isolation between these particular regions while those in the "core area" must have maintained close contact through trade, marriages, or alliances. All of these later activities are associated with the elite class.

Positive evidence of inter-regional communication has been shown in the duplication of several graffiti at Rio Bec B and Holmul, which appear to have been inscribed by the same person at both sites. This phenomenon could be attributed to a member of a roving band of Post Classic "wanderers" who made their way from Rio Bec to Holmul, or vice-versa, and temporarily occupied abandoned buildings at both sites. But if this were so, why would this individual focus his attention on the canopied litters, which are so clearly a reference to the lifestyle of members of the elite class during the Late Classic Period? Aside from the duplicate graffiti, it must be admitted that there is only indirect evidence of communication between elite groups in the Central Peten Region and those in the Rio Bec Region during the Late Classic Period. Here I am referring to the fact that there is a very high incidence of buildings furnished with large, stone masonry "benches" at numerous sites in both the Rio Bec and Central Peten regions. Harrison (1970), identified 13 bench types which are found in numerous buildings in the Central Acropolis at Tikal, including many of those with graffiti. Several of these bench types are also prominent features in buildings at those sites in the Rio Bec region where graffiti are found. This may be coincidence but it is noteworthy that benches of the kind found at Tikal have roughly the same geographical distribution as the graffiti. It is also worth noting that the vast majority of all buildings with graffiti, both at Tikal and elsewhere, can be classified as elite residences.

The subject matter of the graffiti, which can be characterized as ceremonial or esoteric in content, also leads to the conclusion that they were executed by members of the elite class who were concerned with recording ideas, events, hopes or fears that were important in
their daily lives. Had the graffiti been executed by Post Classic squatters, or by Post Classic remnants of local populations, we would expect to find graffiti which ridicule the "old order" or that pertain more directly to the lives of individuals who were probably peasants. This is not the case, however, as the majority of the legible graffiti deal with themes and representations that are associated with Classic Maya art, which was surely the province of the elite class. Most of the representations of human figures and human heads have elite class associations and the majority of the buildings are pyramid-temples, not thatched-roof huts. Furthermore, the hieroglyphic inscriptions, ceremonial paraphernalia, serpents, jaguars, litters, patolli boards and scenes of sacrifice reflect an understanding of ideas and a lifestyle associated with the elite class during the Late Classic Period. The fact that the majority of the graffiti are not executed with the same skill evident in the sculpture and painting produced by skilled Late Classic artists does not indicate they are not contemporary with the buildings in which they appear. Graffiti are produced by amateurs, who do not automatically acquire any drawing skill simply by virtue of their status in a hierarchical society. Clearly the elite class had the power to draw on the skills of trained artists to decorate the walls of temples and their own residences if this was what was wanted but they also had the option of personalizing their spaces with their own hands.

In our review of the dating of the graffiti we noted that there is convincing evidence that some of the graffiti were executed prior to, or during, the Late Classic period. This is true not only in the "core area" but at Comalcalco as well where graffiti were inscribed by the thousands. Since there is no substantial difference in terms of style, content or technique between the graffiti which are known to have been executed during the Late Classic period and those for which there are no secure dates, it seems logical to assume that all are roughly contemporary. In this connection, it should be pointed out that many of the original graffiti have been partially
obscured or defaced by later superimpositions and I would assume that these later efforts may well be the work of Post Classic visitors or squatters. It is also possible that some of the more legible graffiti are also the work of Post Classic occupants who were merely emulating the drawings already in place but there is no positive evidence that this is actually the case.

The conclusions presented here are obviously subject to revision as a larger corpus of Maya graffiti is recorded and published. The question of who did the graffiti, and when, is important in terms of our overall understanding of Maya life and times since they represent a very direct and spontaneous expression of thoughts and ideas which transcend the limits imposed by formal art forms. The graffiti provide us with the same kind of cultural data that generally finds its way into diaries and personal sketchbooks which reflect highly personal concerns. Their value as "art" may be suspect but they serve to remind us that even the most graphically inarticulate amateur has the capability of telling us something that even a Picasso might well overlook.
NOTES:

1. In a recent study of the graffiti of Tikal, Guatemala, Kampen (1979) identified ten technical varieties of graffiti which he divided into four major groups. The present study is limited to cut graffiti, incised or gouged, and painted graffiti in the form of line drawings. I have omitted red hand prints and punctate "astronomical signs" on the grounds that they have special meaning outside the scope of the present paper. Also omitted are petroglyphs and graffiti on portable objects since they do not qualify as architectural graffiti.

2. I have not included the "patolli" designs from El Cayo, La Mar, San Lorenzo and Piedras Negras in my tabulation of specific design motifs found in graffiti on the grounds that they are carved in stone (three of lintels and one on a rock) and therefore do not qualify as graffiti. By the same token, the patolli boards found on altars at Seibal have also been omitted since they are not in an architectural context.

3. The graffiti showing patolli boards in Structure 5D-46 reported at Tikal by Harrison (ibid) have not been published so I do not know if they correspond to Acosta's type A or type B designs.

4. In two unpublished manuscripts presenting detailed surveys of architecture in the Rio Bec and Chenes regions, I have identified all of the buildings with graffiti in both regions as elite class residences. Harrison (ibid) identified many of the Late Classic buildings with graffiti in the Central Acropolis at Tikal as permanent or temporary residences and most of the other Late Classic buildings at Tikal containing graffiti (other than temples) also appear to be residences of the same type found in the Central Acropolis. The same thing can be said for buildings with graffiti at Uaxactun, Holmul and Nakum.

5. In his review of the Maya downfall at Tikal, Culbert (1977) points out that the collapse of Tikal at the end of the Imix period must have resulted from internal rather than external forces. The internal collapse theory assumes the overthrow of the elite class by commoners, and the subsequent rapid disintegration of Classic Maya culture. The sparse populace occupying some of the buildings with graffiti at Tikal during Eznab times would probably not represent remnants of the Classic elite group, and may well have included outsiders who would have little interest in identifying themselves with the "old order".
APPENDIX I

CORPUS OF MAYA GRAFFITI RECORDED BY VARIOUS AUTHORS

CHICHEN ITZA - figs. 57, 58
COMALCALCO - fig. 59
PALENQUE - fig. 60
UXMAL - figs. 61, 62
XKICHMOOK - figs. 63, 64, 65
X-KUKICAN - figs. 66, 67
HOCHOB - figs. 68, 69, 70
SANTA ROSA XTAMPAC - fig. 71
PAYAN - fig. 72
UXACTUN - figs. 73, 74, 75, 76
BENQUE VIEJO - fig. 77
HOLMUL - fig. 78
CALAKMUL - fig. 79
KINAL - fig. 80
NAKUM - fig. 81
TIKAL - figs. 82-103
APPENDIX II

DRAWINGS OF SELECTED GRAFFITI
fig. 1
TIKAL - Str. 6F-27
(after Webster, 1963
fig. 29)

fig. 2
TIKAL - Str. 5D-52
(after Webster, 1963
fig. 38)

fig. 3
TIKAL - Str 5D-2 (after Webster, 1963: fig. 23)
fig. 4
RIO BEC, GROUP V, STR. IV
(after Ruppert and Denison, 1943: fig. 37)
fig. 5
RIO BEC, GROUP V, STR. IV
(after Ruppert and Denison, 1943: fig. 38)
fig. 8
PAYAN - Str. 1

fig. 9
RIO BEC B
Str. 1
fig. 10
TIKAL — Str. 5D — 52
(after Webster, 1963
fig. 39)

fig. 11
Payan — Str. 1
(after Ruppert and
Denison, 1943:
fig. 98)

fig. 12
Payan — Str 1

32
fig. 15
RIO BEC B - Str. 1

fig. 16
RIO BEC B - Str. 1
fig. 22
RIO BEC B
Str. 1

fig. 23
Drawing by
Note similarity
to no. 22 above
fig. 24
RIO BEC B - Str. 1

fig. 25
Drawing by
fig. 26
SEIBAL - Patolli board on altar in front of Stela 10 (After Smith, 1977: fig. 5)

fig. 28
TULA - Patolli board (after Acosta, 1960: pl. 23)

fig. 29
NAKUM - Patolli Board, Temple N (after Tozzer, 1913: fig. 49, f.)

fig. 27
PALENQUE - Patolli board in Temple of the Inscriptions. (after Ruz Lhuillier, 1951: fig. 2)

fig. 30
NAKUM - Patolli Board, Temple A. (after Tozzer, 1913: fig. 49, e.)
fig. 31
Graffiti at Rio Bec B - Str. 1

fig. 32
Graffiti at Holmul, Bldg. A, Group II
(after Merwin and Vaillant, 1932: fig. 31)
fig. 33
EL CAYO - Geometric design on stone lintel. (after Maler, 1903: fig. 27)

fig. 34
PIEDRAS NEGRAS - Geometric design on stone lintel. (after Maler, 1903: fig. )

fig. 35
LA MAR - Geometric design on stone lintel. (after Maler, 1903: fig. 34a.)

fig. 36
LA MAR - Geometric design on rock. (after Maler, 1903: fig. 34b.)

fig. 37
TEOTIHUACAN - Geometric design. (after Sejourne, 1959: fig. 37)

fig. 38
DZIBILCHALTUN - Str 1-sub (after Andrews, V, 1973: fig. 7)
fig. 39

TIKAL - a - e,
Temp II, f - h,
Str. 5D-65
fig. 40
HOCHOBO - a and b.
Graffiti from Str. 2
fig. 41
CHICANNA - Str. II
Serpent

fig. 42
CHICANNA - Str. II
Serpent tail
fig. 43
CHICANNA - Str. II

fig. 44
CHICANNA - Str. II
Twin-tower structure overlaid by serpent.
(see fig. 41)

fig. 45
CHICANNA - Str. II
Stepped "pyramid"
fig. 48
TIKAL - Str. 5D-6

fig. 49
RIO BEC B, a & b
Str. 1
fig. 50
RIO BEC B
Str. 1

fig. 51
TIKAL - Str. 5D-65
fig. 52
TIKAL - Str. 5E-58
Cluster of graffiti including sacrificial victim.

fig. 53
TIKAL - Str. 5E-58
Detail of sacrificial victim.
fig. 54
TIKAL - Str. 5D-65

fig. 55
TIKAL - Str. 5D-65
Important person in litter. Compare with fig. 56 to right.

fig. 56
PIO BEC B - Str. 1
Important person in canopied litter.
fig. 57

CHICHEN ITZA - Monjas, East Wing. (after Bolles, 1977)

Fig. 58

CHICHEN ITZA
Monjas - East Wing
(after Bolles, 1977)
fig. 59
COMALCALCO
Graffiti on bricks
(after Navarrete, 197
fig. 60
PALENQUE - Temple of the Inscriptions. (After Ruz Lhuillier, 1951: fig. 1)

fig. 61
PALENQUE - Temple of the Inscriptions. (after Ruz Lhuillier, 1951, fig. 3)
fig. 61
UXMAL - Governor's Palace
(after Maler, 1971: fig. 6)

fig. 62
UXMAL - Governor's Palace
(after Gann, 1951)
fig. 63
XKICHMOCK - Palace
(after Thompson, 1898: fig. 35)

fig. 64
XKICHMOCK - Palace
(after Thompson, 1898, fig. 32)

fig. 65
XKICHMOOK - Palace
(after Thompson, 1898, fig. 33)
fig. 66
X-KUKICAN - Cave
(after Valentine, 1965: fig. 19)

fig. 67
X-KUKICAN - Cave
(after Valentine, 1965: fig. 19)
fig. 68
HOCHOB - Str. 2
(after Maler, 1887)

fig. 69
HOCHOB - Str. 2
(after Maler, 1887)

Fig. 70
HOCHOB - Str. 2
(after Maler, 1887)
fig. 71

SANTA ROSA XTAMPAX - Palace
(after Maler, 1891)
fig. 72
PAYAN - Str. 1
(after Ruppert and Denison, 1943: fig. 98)
fig. 73
UAXACTUN - Str. A-V
(after Smith, 1950, figs. 113, 114, 115)
fig. 74
UAXACTUN - Str. B-XIII
(after Smith, 1950, fig. 115)

fig. 75
UAXACTUN - Str. A-XVIII
(after Smith, 1937: fig. 3)

fig. 76
UAXACTUN - Str. A-V
(after Smith, 1950, fig. 115)

fig. 77
Benque Viejo
(after Gann, 1918: fig. 39)
fig. 78

HOLMUL - Str. A, Group II
(after Merwin and Vaillant: 1932: fig. 31)
fig. 79
CALAKMUL - Str. III
(after Ruppert and Denison, 1943, fig. 8)

fig. 60
KINAL - Str. 39
(after Graham, 1967, fig. 26)
fig. SI
NAKUM - Graffiti from various structures.
(after Tozzer, 1913: figs. 46, 49)
Fig. 83
TIKAL - Str. 5E-58

Fig. 84
TIKAL - Str. 5D-33
(after Webster, 1963: figs. 19-22)
fig. 85
TIKAL - Str. 5C-13
(after Webster, 1963
figs. 32, 33, 34)

fig. 86
TIKAL - Str. 6F-27
(after Webster, 1963:
figs. 30, 31)
fig. 87
TIKAL - Str. 5D-65
(after Webster, 1963: figs. 15, 17, 18)

fig. 88.
TIKAL - Str. 5D-52
(after Webster, 1963: fig. 40)
fig. 89
TIKAL - Str. 5D-65
(after Webster, 1963: fig. 16)

Fig. 90
TIKAL - Str. 5C-13
(after Webster, 1963: figs. 35, 36, 37)
fig. 91

TIKAL - Str. 5D-2
(after Maler, 1911: fig. 8)

fig. 92

TIKAL - Str. 5D-2
(after Maler, 1911: fig. 11)
Fig. 93
TIKAL - Str. 5D-2
(after Maler, 1911: fig. 16)

Fig. 94
TIKAL - Str. 5D-2
(after Maler, 1911: fig. 10)
fig. 95

TIKAL - Str. 5D-65
(after Maler, 1911: fig. 14)
fig. 96

TIKAL - Str. 5D-65
(after Maler, 1911: fig. 12)

fig. 97

TIKAL - Str. 5D-65
(after Maler, 1911: fig. 16)
fig. 98

TIKAL - Str. 5D-91
(after Maler, 1911: fig. 17)

fig. 99

TIKAL - Str. 5D-C5
(after Maler, 1911: fig. 11)
fig. 100
TIKAL - Str. 5D-65
(after Maler, 1911: fig. 13)

fig. 101
TIKAL - Str. 5D-2. (after Maler, 1911: fig. 9)
fig. 102
TIKAL - Str. 5D-65
(after Maler, 1911: fig. 11)

fig. 103
TIKAL - Str. 5D-65 After Maler, 1911: fig. 15)
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