

**Copyright**  
**by**  
**Gretel Rodríguez**

**2012**

The Thesis committee for Gretel Rodríguez

Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

**Dancing in the Watery Past: Mythical History and Performative Architecture in the  
Palace of Palenque**

**APPROVED BY**

**SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:** \_\_\_\_\_

David Stuart

\_\_\_\_\_

Julia Guernsey

**Dancing in the Watery Past: Mythical History and Performative Architecture in the**

**Palace of Palenque**

by

Gretel Rodríguez, B.A.

**Thesis**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2012

## **Acknowledgments**

I am deeply grateful to my advisor, David Stuart, for suggesting the topic of this thesis and for providing invaluable support and inspiration throughout the process. I thank Julia Guernsey, my second reader, for pushing me to ask the right questions and for being a wonderful mentor during my years as a master's student at UT Austin. I would like to thank the members of my colloquium committee, Nassos Papalexandrou, George Flaherty, and most especially Penelope J. E. Davies. I have been greatly inspired by her vast knowledge of Roman art and architecture and I will always be grateful for her guidance during the conception and writing of this thesis. Professor John R. Clarke offered constant advice and suggested essential sources for my research. I thank my friends and fellow graduate students of Mesoamerican art, Caitlin Earley, Michael Long, and Meghan Rubenstein, who have helped in every step of the way with intelligent suggestions, emotional support, and authentic camaraderie.

This thesis was in part made possible thanks to the funding provided by the 2011 Tinker Summer Research Grant awarded by the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies, which allowed me to conduct fieldwork in Palenque. It was also supported by the 2010 Diversity Recruitment Fellowship awarded by the Graduate School and the Department of Art and Art History of the University of Texas at Austin.

I thank my parents Mabel Rosa Matamoros Tuma and Alberto Rodríguez González for guiding me with their example, and for offering unconditional support in

every one of my life's adventures. My brother Bruno Rodríguez has always inspired me with his unique artistic talent, and I owe him more than one photoshop favor. I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my maternal grandmother, Sofia Cesarina Tuma Acevedo for being the strongest woman on the planet, and to my husband and friend Oriel Almeida, who traveled with me to Palenque for the first time and fell in love with the city even before I did. I thank him for his eternal good spirits and for following me in every one of my dreams without ever thinking twice.

**Dancing in the Watery Past: Mythical History and Performative Architecture in the  
Palace of Palenque**

by

Gretel Rodríguez, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

SUPERVISOR: David Stuart

This thesis analyzes a series of stucco reliefs that decorate the piers of House D of the Palace of Palenque, a Classic Maya city in modern Chiapas, Mexico. Each of the five extant piers of House D depict pairs of individuals facing each other and engaged in what appears to be ritual performances associated with dance and sacrifice. I rely on an iconographic analysis of the reliefs of House D and on a reading of the architecture in relation to the surrounding built environment in order to reconstruct ancient patterns of viewership. I argue that the reliefs of House D of the Palace present a royal narrative where myth and history are fused, and that this combination is validated through ritual performance. The integration of mythical and historical narratives is transmitted through the ruler's enactment of past events that take place in a watery environment signifying the mythical origins of the city of Palenque. This performative narrative at the same time reproduces and perpetuates the actual ceremonies that took place in and around the

building, specifically in the monumental stairway and in the ceremonial plaza that flank the building on its western margin. The dynastic messages embedded in the narrative of the piers, and its incorporation into the performances associated with the building, serve to promote the military accomplishments and the political legitimacy of a new ruling dynasty, initiated by the king of Palenque K'inich Janab Pakal, who is the main figure portrayed on the reliefs.

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| List of Figures.....  | x  |
| Introduction and Methods.....                                   | 1  |
| Chapter 1: Introduction to the Palace of Palenque.....          | 13 |
| 1.1 The Palace: design and chronology.....                      | 13 |
| 1.2 Chronology of the northern sector.....                      | 15 |
| 1.3 Brief dynastic history of Palenque.....                     | 19 |
| 1.4 Introduction to the mythology of Palenque.....              | 22 |
| 1.5 Conclusions.....  | 23 |
| Chapter 2: The Palace of Palenque: History of Research.....     | 25 |
| 2.1 Early explorations and first attempts at documentation..... | 25 |
| 2.2 Archaeological investigations.....                          | 28 |
| 2.3 Architectural and art historical interpretations.....       | 32 |
| 2.4 Conclusions.....  | 36 |
| Chapter 3: Iconographic analysis.....                           | 37 |
| 3.1 Iconography of the piers.....                               | 42 |
| 3.2 Structural principles: symmetry, image, and text.....       | 53 |
| 3.3 Stylistic parallels in the Palace: House A.....             | 59 |
| 3.4 Water symbolism.....  | 61 |
| 3.5 Theme of dance.....   | 65 |
| 3.6 Conclusions.....  | 67 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Chapter 4: Viewership.....                                 | 71  |
| 4.1 Architecture of the Palace: design and function.....   | 72  |
| 4.2 The architectural dynamics of House D.....             | 79  |
| 4.3 Patronage and political legitimation through myth..... | 90  |
| 4.4 Conclusions.....                                       | 94  |
| Conclusions and directions for future research.....        | 96  |
| Figures.....   | 101 |
| Bibliography.....  | 125 |

## List of Figures

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Fig. 1: Map of the Palace of Palenque.....  | 101 |
| Fig. 2: House D of the Palace of Palenque.....                                      | 101 |
| Fig. 3: House D Piers, schematic reconstruction.....                                | 102 |
| Fig. 4: House D, Pier F. Digital reconstruction.....                                | 102 |
| Fig. 5: Palace of Palenque, <i>Ik'</i> window.....                                  | 103 |
| Fig. 6: House A of the Palace, detail of central doorways.....                      | 103 |
| Fig. 7: Palenque, emblem glyph.....   | 104 |
| Fig. 8: Detail of the inscription on Pier G.....                                    | 104 |
| Fig. 9: Map of the Palace by Architect Antonio Bernasconi.....                      | 105 |
| Fig. 10: House D Piers. Drawings by Ricardo Almendáriz.....                         | 106 |
| Fig. 11: Waldeck. Ariadne and Theseus inside the Temple of the Sun at Palenque..... | 107 |
| Fig. 12: House AD of the Palace, reconstruction.....                                | 108 |
| Fig. 13: Detail of secondary text on Pier F.....                                    | 108 |
| Fig. 14a: Pier B.....   | 109 |
| Fig. 14b: Pier B.....   | 110 |
| Fig. 15: Ground line detail of Pier B.....  | 111 |
| Fig. 16a: Pier C.....   | 112 |
| Fig. 16b: Pier C.....   | 113 |
| Fig. 17a: Pier D.....   | 114 |
| Fig. 17b: Pier D.....   | 115 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Fig. 18: Pier D detail.....                                     | 116 |
| Fig. 19: Detail of Pier E, frame and ground line.....           | 116 |
| Fig. 20a: Pier F.....   | 117 |
| Fig. 20b: Pier F.....   | 118 |
| Fig. 21: House A, Pier E.....                                   | 119 |
| Fig. 22: Tablet of Temple XIV.....                              | 120 |
| Fig. 23: Dumbarton Oaks Panel.....                              | 120 |
| Fig. 24: Map of the Palace with Main Plaza and North Group..... | 121 |
| Fig. 25: House D, Piers B and C.....                            | 122 |
| Fig. 26: House D, monumental stairway and Main Plaza.....       | 122 |
| Fig. 27: Structure I Xpuhil.....                                | 123 |
| Fig. 28: House C of the Palace, Hieroglyphic Stairs.....        | 123 |
| Fig. 29: Tableritos.....  | 124 |
| Fig. 30: Tower stairs.....                                      | 124 |

## **Introduction and Methods**

The art of the ancient Maya has fascinated modern scholars for a long time perhaps due to the delicate balance between its beauty, as understood by the Western mentality, and the bizarre aspect of the humans, gods, and creatures portrayed. The Maya continue to amaze contemporary viewers who visit the sites, today shrouded in the green jungle canopy, but also from the distance through texts, photographs, drawings, and film. This tradition of documentation of the art and architecture of ancient ruins in Central America has a history of more than two hundred years. The early explorations promoted a view of the Maya as a mysterious past civilization, sophisticated in their art and astronomy but savage in their beliefs, a vision that still today is pervasive in popular imagination.

Students of Mesoamerican civilizations have approached Maya art through diverse academic disciplines, with an ample spectrum of results. Archaeologists are concerned with unveiling social and political structures, and patterns of trade and settlement. Art historians and iconographers concentrate on the intricacies of visual representation and attempt to situate the imagery in its original cultural context. Epigraphers have worked intensely in recent years in deciphering the complex nature of the hieroglyphic script, a process that has aided enormously in our understanding of Maya art and culture. While building on all of these disciplines combined, this thesis

proposes an art historical interpretation of a particular sculptural program in the Classic Maya city of Palenque: the stucco reliefs that adorn the piers of House D of the Palace.

Palenque, in modern Chiapas, Mexico, is one of the most easily identifiable of all Maya sites. Its ample corpus of hieroglyphic inscriptions and the impressive buildings that remain at the site are often used to epitomize Maya art in general. Part of the celebrity of the city stems from the fact that, together with Copán in Honduras, Palenque was the first Maya site to attract attention from westerners. Colonial authorities and foreign explorers began a long history of official visits and amateur explorations of the ruins as early as 1784. Palenque was also the scenario of the greatest archaeological discovery of the New World, the magnificent tomb of K'inich Janab Pakal, found in 1952 by Mexican archaeologist Alberto Ruz Lhuillier inside the Temple of the Inscriptions. It is then not surprising that considerable research has been published on the site's history, artistic production, and hieroglyphic inscriptions. However, despite almost three hundred years of explorations and research, many works of art at the site still elude precise interpretation and are in need of comprehensive art historical analysis.

This thesis analyzes a series of stucco reliefs that decorate the piers of House D of the Palace, one of the most iconic architectural complexes in the Maya world. The Palace is a conglomerate of double vaulted buildings arranged around several interior courtyards and elevated on a trapezoidal platform, and at least during the Late Classic Period (c. AD 600-900), it functioned as the civic-ceremonial heart of the site (Fig. 1). Judging by the remains of painted stucco still attached to the buildings, most of the facades and piers of

this complex were profusely decorated. The building known as House D constitutes the western edge of the complex, and its stucco facing is one of the best preserved at the site (Fig. 2).

Each of the five extant piers of House D depict pairs of individuals facing each other and engaged in what appears to be ritual performances associated with dance and sacrifice. While most of the figures and allegorical motifs that adorn these piers are still in situ, the hieroglyphic fragments that originally accompanied the reliefs are almost completely destroyed. By looking at these reliefs in their original location my thesis begins by asking, what is the nature of the narrative being represented here? Who are the individuals portrayed? What is the relationship between these piers and the rest of the facade reliefs of the Palace? How is the imagery in dialogue with the surrounding architecture? And, what is the connection between the architectural decoration of House D and the ritual performances that took place in the building and in the plaza below?

In attempting to address these questions, I rely on an iconographic analysis of the reliefs of House D and on a reading of the architecture in relation to the surrounding built environment in order to reconstruct ancient patterns of viewership. I argue that the reliefs of House D of the Palace present a royal narrative where myth and history are fused, and that this combination is validated through ritual performance. The integration of mythical and historical narratives is transmitted through the ruler's enactment of past events that take place in a watery environment signifying the mythical origins of the city of Palenque. This performative narrative at the same time reproduces and perpetuates the

actual ceremonies that took place in and around the building, specifically in the monumental stairway and in the ceremonial plaza that flank the building on its western margin. The dynastic messages embedded in the narrative of the piers, and its incorporation into the performances associated with the building, serve to promote the military accomplishments and the political legitimacy of a new ruling lineage, initiated by K'inich Janab Pakal, who is the main figure portrayed on the reliefs.

While most scholarly research at Palenque has concentrated on the iconographic and epigraphic details of the art, attempting to create a catalogue of individual motifs and hieroglyphs, my study offers a synoptic view of the sculptural program of House D and attempts to explain the process of production, reception, and perpetuation of ideology in monumental art. The merging of mythological narrative and political discourse is one of the themes that appears most frequently in the art of Palenque, always in connection with cyclical rituals that enable the creation and continuation of collective memory. In the piers of House D the ruler of Palenque engages in a ritual dance of sacrifice and conquest that helps create a continuity between the historical present and the legendary origins of his dynasty. This narrative is presented in five piers, each one conveying one episode, and framed by a single hieroglyphic inscription distributed among the first (now lost) and the last piers (Fig. 3).

The presence of the same formal and thematic elements in the decoration of other buildings at the site demonstrates that the formula was effectively employed by Pakal and his successors, and was adopted as a preferred visual language that constitutes a defining

characteristic of the art of Palenque. Some of these recurring formal devices, appearing across diverse media, are the strong emphasis on bilateral symmetry, the depiction of royal characters in the guise of deities and mythical ancestors, and the dynamic combination of text and image in the decoration of architectural spaces. The piers of House D offer an ideal case study to explore this visual language typical of Late Classic Palenque, where monumental art reflected a close interconnection of myth, history, and performance. An analysis that attempts to bridge these different manifestations of elite discourse will provide a new model to study the process of transmission of ideology in monumental art in the larger context of Classic Maya society.

The selection of the piers of House D is significant for several reasons. First, the imagery of these piers has preserved much better than most stucco reliefs in Palenque, providing a more accurate idea of their original appearance. After the abandonment of the city this building was covered by thick vegetation but a layer of calcification from water filtering through the collapsed roof covered the stucco surface, aiding in its preservation. Second, the quality of the stucco modeling in these reliefs is especially superb, denoting a high level of workmanship and a careful design process. The reliefs possess unique characteristics when compared to other similar programs, such as the dynamic movement of the figures and the elaborate ground lines where they stand. They also show a great care in portraying physiognomic traits, allowing to identify the figure of K'inich Janab Pakal as the main protagonist of the action. According to the constructive chronology of the Palace, the decorative program of House D represents one of the earliest examples of

the utilization of rectangular stuccoed piers in building facades to communicate messages to the general public, allowing to trace the development and spreading of this art form in later structures. This medium is a trait unique of Palenque and substitutes the carved stelae tradition present in other Maya sites as main recorders of elite discourse.

This study is composed of four chapters. The first two offer a general background of the history of the Palace of Palenque and a review of previous research done at the site. In Chapter 1 I provide a general description of the Palace and address the chronology of the main structures of the complex. I make special emphasis on House D, attempting to reveal the historical context for the creation of its decoration and the stylistic connections with other similar sculptural programs in the Palace and in other buildings of the site. In this chapter I also provide a brief dynastic history of Palenque as well as an introduction to the site's mythology. Both sets of information originate in epigraphic and archaeological studies and permit a better understanding of the mythological and historical content of the reliefs of House D.

Chapter 2 offers a panorama of the history of research of the art of the Palace, specifically that which deals with the piers of House D. I divide the long documentation tradition in three phases: early explorations, archaeological investigations, and art historical interpretations. An analysis of previous research of the piers of House D is relevant in several ways. Because of the incomplete state of the piers at present one essential aspect of my study consists in a careful revision of all previous documentation including field notes, drawings, and photographs, produced by early explorers and

modern scholars. While at times crude and inaccurate, the earliest accounts permit to reconstruct an image of the reliefs, rendering them closer to their original appearance. As will become evident, many of the sculptural details that are no longer extant can be better understood by careful cross-comparison of these early drawings and photographs. Finally I provide a summary of recent scholarly interpretations of the iconography of these piers.

In Chapter 3 I analyze the iconography of each pier in detail in order to identify clusters of motifs and to extract all possible meaning from each one. Through this process I explore the narrative devices on each relief such as framing elements, ground lines, portraiture, costumes, and ritual actions. I also reference briefly the contents of the fragmentary hieroglyphic inscriptions, and offer a commentary on the relationship between text and image in monumental Maya art. In this chapter I will also analyze the visual interplay of the program of House D with that of House A of the Palace, two buildings that seem to have been commissioned around the same time and which share important stylistic and thematic characteristics. Finally, I address the two major themes of the reliefs: water symbolism and ritual dance. These two elements are key to understanding the overall narrative of the reliefs and their connection with the surrounding architecture.

In Chapter 4 I explore the role of the piers as architectural decoration and the connection with the surrounding built environment. I explain how the images function in association with the architecture of House D, with the monumental stairway that ascends to the Palace platform, and with the Main Plaza, a public gathering space at the base of

the complex. The connection between the building and the surrounding architecture strongly suggests that the space served as stage for public performances which were closely related in theme and form with the ceremonials portrayed on the stucco reliefs. I also explore issues of viewership such as the visibility of the piers from the Main Plaza, the role of the monumental staircase in the experiencing and perception of the reliefs, and the connection between the theme of House D and that of the Temple of the Inscriptions.

The final chapter offers a summary of the main points explored in this thesis and proposes unresolved questions and future directions for research.

## **Methodology**

To begin to understand the imagery on the piers of House D, I first engage in a thorough review of all previous documentations of the reliefs in chronological order. The earliest visitors to the site were responsible in part for the removal of many fragments of the reliefs with the objective of sending them as collectible artifacts to the Spanish royal court. Ironically, these visitors also documented the reliefs before defacing them, and thus their renderings and field notes are invaluable. As a test, I present a reconstruction of one of the piers using Adobe Photoshop, based on the early drawings of Ricardo Almendáriz (1787) and on contemporary photographs taken by Merle Green Robertson (1985) (Fig. 4).

In the iconographic analysis of the piers, I describe each of the figural reliefs (B to F) in detail in order to identify all the elements in the composition. It is important to note

that House D had originally five piers composed of imagery, but of these, Pier E is in terrible state of preservation and only the silhouettes of two figures standing in front of each other can be discerned (Fig. 3). For this reason, I comment only briefly about one of the components of the ground line that still remains in place. For the other four extant piers, Piers B, C, D, and F, I divide the imagery in four sections: 1) frames, 2) ground lines, 3) human figures, and 4) glyphic elements.

For the identification of the motifs I rely on those authors who have established models for the study of iconography in Maya art. The work of George Kubler (1969) remains one of the fundamental texts for the study of Mesoamerican iconography and I support my analysis with many of the categories that he proposed to explain individual motifs, thematic content, and narrative structures. When addressing the inclusion of water symbolism I follow the impressive catalogue of water iconography compiled by Nicholas Helmuth, *Monster und Menschen in der Maya-Kunst: eine Ikonographie der alten Religionen Mexikos und Guatemalas* (1987). The comparison with this corpus of water motifs allows to identify the different elements in the iconography that signify different types of watery environments and the mythological symbolism of water, such as the surface of the “Underwaterworld”. For the discussion of the theme of dance I establish comparisons with other works at Palenque which represent rulers in dancing ceremonies, such as the Tablet of Temple XIV and the Dumbarton Oaks Panel (Figs. 22 and 23). The presence of readable texts in these similar works allows for a contextualization of the dancing scenes of the piers of House D in the larger visual and ideological record of

Palenque. Furthermore, I look at the way in which Matthew Looper (2009) studies dance in architectural contexts in Mesoamerica, and more specifically his analysis of this phenomenon in House D of the Palace.

After the detailed description of the iconography of each pier, I address the relationship between image and text on the Piers of House D. For this, I establish a correspondence between stucco piers attached to architecture and carved panels found throughout Palenque, suggesting a similar correlation in composition, theme, and reading of the iconography. For the analysis of this relationship between text and image in Maya art I explore the ideas proposed by Kubler (1969) and W. J. T. Mitchell (2003).

In the last section of this thesis I conduct a spatial analysis of House D and its surroundings in order to explore how the architecture of the building choreographs movement through space and to describe the process of viewership of the iconography. For this, I rely primarily on architectural theory, especially that which explains the agency of architectural bodies and the way in which buildings interact with viewers (Arnheim 1977, Bloomer and Moore 1977, Lynch 1960, Templer 1992). I begin by analyzing the general design and possible function of the Palace of Palenque. I then identify parts of the architecture that actively interact with the art on the piers, making emphasis on the monumental stairway as a potential stage for performances (Templer 1992). I also explore the plazas that surround the complex and attempt to define the types of ceremonials that took place in these spaces. For this I rely primarily on archaeological evidence provided by excavations at the site (Acosta 1968, García Moll 1985 and 2007,

Nieto Calleja and De la Cruz Paillés 1993, Tovalín Ahumada and López Bravo 2001), and by definitions provided by students of Mesoamerican architecture such as George F. Andrews (1975, 1978), and Mary Miller (1998, 1999). I finalize by suggesting the models of production and reception of the imagery, in order to understand how they functioned in their original cultural milieu.

While the commissioning of these reliefs is exclusively of elite origin, I address also the potential audience for the imagery by creating viewer scenarios that reproduce the visual experience in ancient times. While this methodology is speculative by nature, it provides a working interpretative model for understanding Maya monumental art by taking into consideration the original topographical and cultural context of the artwork, and the class and identity of patrons and viewers.

The study of elite art is important in several ways. For one, elite art is universally of better quality since those in control of the means of production can more easily dispose of economic and human resources and are in a better position for commissioning higher quality, more durable art, better equipped to communicate specific ideological concerns. Writing is also an elite prerogative, and among the Maya there is evidence to suggest that scribes were part of the royal families (Coe and Kerr 1998, Houston and Stuart 1992). In the case of Palenque, elite art makes emphasis on the ruler as an enactor of myth and history, and this narrative is always combined with hieroglyphic texts. Especially in public monuments, writing production was carefully controlled by the elite, and these are almost exclusively the only types of texts that have come to us. The combined study of

texts and imagery in monumental art is a rich source of information for the understanding of ancient Maya culture and history. This methodology is particularly useful at Palenque, where archaeological investigations of the domestic sector have been very scarce.

The reliefs on the piers of House D portray the body of ruler in a public manner to communicate directly with the general population. I argue that the imagery depicted on these piers has a fundamentally public character, since visibility is one of the most important aspects of this sculptural program as a whole. This is further supported by the minimal use of text and the primacy of figural content, indicating that they were meant to be read and understood by all members of society.

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Palace of Palenque

### 1.1 The Palace: design and chronology

The city of Palenque is located in an advantageous geographic position at the intersection of the southern Chiapas highlands with the plains of Tabasco, and bordered by the Usumacinta river towards the east. The exuberant tropical jungle covers most of this natural environment, where water is a primordial element. Many small rivers, streams, and cascades surround the site center, a phenomenon that probably inspired the name of the city in ancient times which was referred to as *Lakamha'* or “Wide Waters” (Stuart 2010). The buildings of this central part of the city perch on a promontory that offers breathtaking views of the landscape. Mary Miller has pointed out that this type of strategic siting, placing buildings on hillsides to command impressive vistas, fueled important innovations in Maya architecture during the Late Classic period, especially on western sites such as Palenque, Toniná, Yaxchilán, and Piedras Negras (1999: 35-36).

The situation of Palenque at the western frontier of the Maya world helps explain some of the unique characteristics of the city’s art and architecture. Among these unique characteristics are the absence of artifacts typically encountered in other Maya sites, such as carved stelae, eccentric flints, and obsidian caches (Rands 1974). The ceramic corpus of Palenque is also atypical with weak presence of figural representations and painted glyph bands in polychrome vessels (Rands 2007). The architecture is characterized by

double vaulted buildings with stone “thatch” roofs, and T-shaped windows which represent the glyphic sign *Ik'* meaning “wind” or “breath” (Fig. 5).

Located in what is usually nicknamed “downtown” Palenque, the Palace consists of a series of double vaulted buildings arranged around several interior courtyards. The Tower constitutes a distinctive visual element of the Palace, and its vertical dimension establishes the building as a visual landmark in the cityscape. Flanking the complex on its western and northern sides are two large open plazas which served for the staging of public ceremonies (Fig. 24).

According to the many inscriptions found in the Palace and in other buildings at the site, this complex constitutes the centerpiece of the architectural and artistic renovation of Palenque carried out by the great ruler K'inich Janab' Pakal in the second half of the seventh century AD. The Temple of the Inscriptions, containing Pakal's funerary chamber, was also a part of this monumental enterprise. After his death in 683, Pakal's two sons continued to build and renovate the Palace and the Temple of the Inscriptions, but the majority of the structures of the Palace, at least as they appear today, seem to have been initiated during Pakal's lifetime. This big architectural renewal was only possible after Pakal's engineers canalized the Otolum river, which runs to the east of the Palace, thus avoiding the flooding of the Main Plaza and bringing running water into the complex (French 2007, Miller 1999).

Since the days of the early explorations this building complex has been labeled as a Palace assuming that it served as the residence of the ruling elite of the site. However,

most scholars today agree that it most likely functioned as an administrative center intricately connected with public and private ceremonials (Andrews 1975, Nieto Calleja and De la Cruz Paillés 1993). Because of its elaborate architectural design, its relative rapid development, and the prominent location it occupies within the city, it is possible to assert that the Palace constitutes the ultimate monument of Pakal's solidification as a ruler of Palenque (Stuart and Stuart 2008). This is evident in the art of House D where Pakal is portrayed as enactor of mythic performances that mirror the types of ceremonials associated with the building and its surrounding built space. This active ritual exchange between architecture, iconography, and performance constitutes the core of my study and I will explore these issues in detail in the following chapters.

## **1.2 Chronology of the northern sector**

The excavations carried out at the Palace have been, for the most part, insufficient and fragmentary and for this, it is difficult to establish an accurate chronology of the buildings within the complex. While attempting to propose a precise building history is outside the scope of this study, I here provide a general review of the available data for the building chronology of the Palace, concentrating primarily on the northern sector of the complex. My goal is to help understand the physical and stylistic connections between Houses A, D, and AD.

Based on archaeological and epigraphic data, the best estimates indicate that the earliest buildings in the Palace are the subterranean galleries, and Houses E, J, and H

(Berlin 1970, Nieto Calleja and De la Cruz Paillés 1993, Ruz in García Moll 2007).

These were followed by House C and by some of the southern edge constructions (Fig. 1). House D and the rest of the structures of the northern sector of the Palace seem to have been built in a single stage of construction, after the addition of the platform that supports the Palace today (Nieto Calleja and De la Cruz Paillés 1993). Though spanning a relatively short period of time, it is possible to observe a development that moves from building at the center of the complex toward a disposition of structures in the perimeter around small interior courtyards. This building pattern was accompanied by an increasing restriction in access and circulation throughout the different spaces. The tower seems to have been one of the last structures added to the complex.

#### *House A.*

House A flanks the Palace on the east. The platform does not provide a direct access to the building on this side, presenting instead a vertical wall. This is an intriguing feature, since the building has a clearly defined entrance with a central doorway aligned with the opening in the median wall, and with another doorway in the inner gallery (Fig. 6). According to an inscription on its southernmost exterior pier, this building was dedicated in 668, when Pakal was already a well established ruler. The piers on the facade of House A, like those on its western counterpart on House D, are faced with elegant stucco sculpture that depicts royal personages dressed in ceremonial regalia (Fig. 21). These reliefs still retain their elegant imagery and parts of the pigments that covered their surface originally. Though not thoroughly understood, the iconography of the piers of

House A conveys a message of divine royal power and are commemorative in essence. The theme seems to participate in the militaristic narrative that is prevalent in the northeast courtyard (Baudez and Mathews 1978). In Chapter 3 I will address in more detail the iconographic and stylistic connections between the piers of Houses A and D.

#### *House D*

An accurate date for House D is harder to establish, since the few fragments that remain of the hieroglyphic inscription are almost illegible today. Archaeology has also been poor in this building, concentrating only on restoration and consolidation of the walls, roof, and sculpture, as well as on the reconstruction of the monumental staircase that borders it on the western side (Acosta 1968, Ruz in García Moll 2007). Several scholars have attempted to explain the chronologic relationship between Houses A, D, and AD. Archaeologist Miguel Angel Fernández was the first to address this issue and he proposed that Houses A and D were contemporaneous and that House AD had only been added at a later date (Fernandez in García Moll 1985: 33). This interpretation was later confirmed by Ruz (García Moll 2007) and Merle Green Robertson (1985). In his architectural survey of the city, George Andrews suggested that House D had been built at the same time as House AD, and that both buildings had been connected from their conception (Andrews 1978). This interpretation poses a problem for the reading of the iconography of the piers, since it would imply that House D had originally eight piers instead of seven, containing one central doorway instead of a central pier. Based on my own observations of the architecture and in stylistic considerations regarding the stucco

reliefs of Houses A and D, I follow Fernández and the rest of the scholars who state that House D is contemporaneous or only slightly later than House A, and that House AD belongs to a later phase of construction.

*House AD.*

House AD links houses A and D and it serves to close the Palace complex on its northern side. An earlier substructure is buried beneath the current building. This later stage seems to have been commissioned by K'inich K'an Joy Chitam, the second son of Pakal, who rededicated the building in 720. The monumental stairway that faces this building on the north connects the Palace complex with the North Group Plaza, an important ceremonial space within the city. The Palace Tablet, one of the Palace's lengthiest inscriptions, was located on the central wall of the northern gallery. The text deals primarily with K'inich K'an Joy Chitam's life and ancestry, and closes with the dedication of House AD. As seen in the last section of the text, the name of this building was the "Headband Binding House", which indicates a possible function as a place for the "installation of subordinate political offices overseen by K'inich K'an Joy Chitam." (Stuart and Stuart 2008: 219).

As previously noted, the Palace was initially commissioned by Pakal during the second half of the seventh century, and most of the structures were built or at least initiated during his reign. In the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs he receives the epithet "He of the Five Platform Houses", indicating the enormous prestige he attained by commissioning this complex. The monumentality of the Palace, and the recurring references to his

achievements in the inscriptions, reveals Pakal's intention of creating a perdurable record of his administrative and military skills. In these visual representations, he portrays himself as the main actor of a narrative that conflates myth and history, conveying a powerful statement about his divinely sanctioned rule. Judging by the continuous use of this form in the art and inscriptions of subsequent years, this visual rhetoric was imitated by Pakal's successors becoming a defining aspect of the political ideology and of the art of the city. In order to understand the role of Pakal as a lineage founder, as well as a continuator of mythic tradition, I follow with a brief description of the dynastic and mythical histories of the city.

### **1.3 Brief dynastic history of Palenque**

The earliest hieroglyphic inscriptions refer to the kingdom of Palenque as *Baakal* or "Bone" (fig. 7), and throughout the years the members of the various ruling lineages attached this place name to their titles, becoming the "Holy Lords of Baakal". The kingdom maintained relations with many of the most powerful Maya polities, such as Tikal, with whom they kept friendly alliances, and with Calakmul, Tonina, and Piedras Negras, with whom they remained enemies (Martin and Grube 2000).

According to the inscriptions of the seventh and eighth centuries, the first ruler and founder of the Palenque dynasty was K'uk' Bahlam, who was born in 397 and became ruler in 431. During these early years several place names were used to refer to the city, such as Toktan, which appears to be the place dynastic origin, and Lakamha'

which refers to the city proper. In the sixth century a woman, Ix Yohl Ik'nal, reigned as queen, remaining in power for twenty years. During her rule, in 599, Palenque suffered a bitter defeat by Calakmul, an event that is recorded in the hieroglyphic stairway of House C of the Palace (Grube 1996,Looper and Schele 1991). A second and more devastating defeat by forces of Calakmul took place in 611, under the rule of Ajen Yohl Mat. A period of political instability followed this event, including the short-lived rule of an individual called Muwaan Mat.

The introduction of this character as king of Palenque provides an interesting scenario for understanding the way in which myth and history were intertwined in the minds of the ancient Palencanos. During this time of political upheaval a new dynasty was installed in the throne and this new leader took the name of one of the most important mythological characters associated with the city. Muwaan Mat, also known as the Palenque Triad's Progenitor, is the mythical figure who gave birth to the Palenque Triad, the three patron deities whose effigies inhabited several temples in the city (Stuart 2005: 180-183). This parallel between the mythical past and the establishment of a new ruling elite demonstrates the close correspondence between myth and history that existed in Palencano ideology, a parallel that they constantly portrayed in their visual and textual record (Berlin 1963, Kubler 1969).

Following this period of uncertainty, the city experienced a bright resurgence with the accession to the throne of K'inich Janab Pakal, the ruler who has left the most visible imprint in the history and cityscape of Palenque. Pakal came to the throne as a young boy

in the year 615. Having experienced the period of political and military turmoil following the conquest of Palenque by Calakmul, Pakal made great efforts for asserting his political authority over Palenque and its neighboring sites, and for projecting an image of restoration of the political order. The defeat of the city known today as Santa Elena in 659, an ally of Palenque's archenemy Calakmul, resulted in a pivotal moment for Pakal's solidification as a ruler. This event appears prominently in the imagery and texts of the northeast courtyard, in the stairs of House C of the Palace (Fig. 28), and in the chronicle of the Temple of the Inscriptions (Schele 1991: 82). Pakal expressed this process of rulership solidification primarily in architectural form, by commissioning impressive monuments that constitute the civic-ceremonial center of the city. This message of conquest and political reassertion is skillfully inserted into the piers of House D, but elevated to mythology and made public through ritual performances.

After the dedication of the subterranean galleries in 654, Pakal embarked on an active period of urban renovation, concentrating efforts on the platform west of the Otolum river. The two centerpieces of this monumental program are the expansion and renovation of the Palace complex and the construction of the Temple of the Inscriptions. He did not live to see his funerary chamber completed, and this was finally executed by his son and successor K'inich Kan Bahlam. The decorative programs on the facades of Houses A, D, and the Temple of the Inscriptions date to this intense period of construction; the stylistic similarities between the three programs support this proposition. Several others of Pakal's successors carried out modifications and

renovations in the Palace, such as the ending phase of House AD, which seems to have been completed by K'inich K'an Joy Chitam (Martin and Grube 2000: 170). The last known ruler of Palenque was K'inich K'uk' Bahlalm, who became king in 764.

#### **1.4 Introduction to the mythology of Palenque**

The principal deities associated with the mythology of Palenque are the so called Triadic Gods, simply named GI, GII, and GIII (Berlin 1963). These deities are primarily associated with the Cross Group Temples, located in an elevated platform east of the Palace that offers commanding views of the city and the surrounding landscape. Each temple in this group was dedicated to one of the deities of the Triad, and their design and position correspond to the gods' hierarchy of importance. The Cross Group Temples were commissioned by K'inich Kan Bahlam in his early years as a ruler as an attempt to establish his legitimacy as heir to the remarkable legacy of his father Pakal (Martin and Grube 2000).

Caring for and venerating periodically the images of the gods housed in temples throughout the city was one of the responsibilities of the rulers of Palenque. Several texts record instances of these actions, indicating their significance for the political authority of the kings and their intersection with the ritual life of the city. The discourse of the texts reveals a parallel juxtaposition of individual kings with particular deities. The recurrent use in the texts of the phrase "the cherished one", indicates this personal connection between ruler and god.

The births of the patron deities of Palenque occurred in mythic time, thousands of years before the foundation of the city. This took place in a mythical locale named *Matwiil*, translated as “Place of Cormorants” or “Place of Water Birds” (Stuart 2006). This mythical origin place must be associated with the geographic location of Palenque and as I will address later on, this symbolic association is prominently represented in the art of the site, particularly on the piers of House D.

Another deity that appears frequently in the inscriptions of Palenque is the aforementioned Triad Progenitor. As we saw previously, the rulers of Palenque utilized the name of this founding figure to create a continuity between mythical past and historical present as a means of legitimizing their dynastic lineage. Part of the name of this deity appears on Pier G of House D, on the second half of the hieroglyphic text that frames the sculptural program (Fig. 8). The inclusion of this deity in the text, closely followed by a “capture” statement indicates that, while the characters portrayed on the reliefs correspond to contemporary historical figures, the narrative has close connections with mythical history. More on this in the following chapters.

## **1.5 Conclusions**

In the art and inscriptions of Palenque, history and myth appear conflated into a single narrative. This is not an accidental occurrence, but is rather a deliberate choice that reflects a vision of the past that is Maya in essence. While contemporary thought tends to see history as “truth”, fundamentally different from myth, according to the rhetoric of the

texts encountered in Palenque and elsewhere in the Maya world, myth and history are one single aspect of ideology and were incorporated into political discourse as a natural conclusion of a system of beliefs which was manifested in all aspects of daily life. Furthermore myth/history was validated through performance, a process that is clearly exemplified on the reliefs of the piers of House D of the Palace. A detailed analysis of these issues as they appear in this sculptural program will offer new insights into our understanding of the construction of myth and political discourse in Palenque and in other Maya sites.

## **Chapter 2. The Palace of Palenque: History of Research**

In this chapter I address the historiography of Palenque making emphasis on previous research and interpretations of the art and architecture of House D of the Palace. An analysis of the ways in which the Palace has been investigated in the past is significant for two main reasons. On the one hand, the sculpture of the piers of House D has received ample attention from scholars due to their exceptional artistic quality and to their preservation, so there is an extensive body of documentation in the form of drawings, notes, and photographs that can aid in a reconstruction of those elements in the piers that have fallen off or were removed. On the other hand, the study of archaeological investigations of this building complex will help in understanding its original form and its construction chronology, two aspects that are often obscured in discussions of the accompanying decoration. I begin with the earliest attempts at documentation, moving then to the period of archaeological investigations to finalize by exploring more recent interpretative studies of the art and architecture of the piers.

### **2.1 Early explorations and first attempts at documentation**

The first official exploration of the ruins of Palenque occurred in 1784 when Don José de Estachería, governor of the Capitanía General of Guatemala entrusted lieutenant José Antonio Calderón the mission of investigating some ruins near the town of Santo Domingo de Palenque. Estachería responded to the encouragements of Ramón Ordóñez y

Aguiar, a local cleric whose great grandfather had visited the ruins around the year 1730. Calderón cleared and explored the ruins for three days, producing the first known written and graphic accounts of the Palace and other structures. He is the first to use the term Palace to refer to the largest and most prominent building at the site (Navarrete 2000).

The second official expedition, also organized by Estachería, was led by Antonio Bernasconi, royal architect of Guatemala who was assisted also by Calderón. Estachería provided Bernasconi with a detailed set of instructions for the clearing and excavation of the ruins, including a detailed description of the architecture, and the removal of art objects from the buildings. Bernasconi's work was hindered by the harsh climate during the rainy season and he could not comply with all of Estachería's instructions. However, in his report he describes more than twenty buildings, and produced plans and cross-sections of several structures, the first description of the aqueduct, and the first map of the Palace (Fig. 9).

Bernasconi's report was well received by the Spanish monarch Charles III, who then prompted Estachería to organize a third expedition in 1787. This was led by captain Antonio del Río who was accompanied by Guatemalan draftsman Ricardo Almendáriz. Almendáriz' drawings are the first to contain important details that were later eroded or purposefully destroyed from the artwork of the Palace, including several fragments of stucco from the piers of House D (Fig. 10). Many of these fragments, thirty-two in total, found their way to Spain and are now part of the Museo de Américas in Madrid,

constituting the first documented museum collection of Maya art in the world (Cabello Carro in Navarrete 2000: 28).

In the nineteenth century, Palenque received even more attention from explorers and adventurers. In 1808 Guillaume Dupaix visited the site accompanied by artist Luciano Castañeda, who produced renderings of many artworks at the site. Jean-Frédéric Waldeck lived in Palenque for more than one year between 1832 and 1833 and illustrated many of the buildings populating them with local men and women who posed as his models (Fig. 11). Waldeck's renderings of the architecture and contemporary inhabitants of Palenque were inaccurate and highly romanticized; he saw the city through the lens of a typically eighteenth century ideal of beauty. However, he was genuinely captivated by the elegance of the architecture, its decoration, and the harmonious intersection of buildings and the landscape. He was the first to recognize the aesthetic value of the art of Palenque, departing from the alienating gaze of previous explorers (Pasztory 2010).

Renowned travelers John L. Stephens and Frederick Catherwood visited the site in May of 1840, and the best-selling account of their journey *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, describes some details of the piers on House D. The book reproduces unfinished drawings of Piers C and D made by Catherwood under harsh weather conditions (Stephens 1949). Around the same time, and inspired by Stephens' expedition, Patrick Walker and John Herbert Caddy visited the ruins and commented on the Palace's sculptural program (Pendergast 1967). Walker's report and

Caddy's descriptions and illustrations of House D, though rudimentary and incomplete also help reconstruct many of the lost details of the reliefs.

The work of Alfred P. Maudslay still constitutes the best attempt at graphic documentation of Maya art. During his visit to Palenque in 1891, Maudslay cleared and photographed numerous monuments, including the stucco piers of Houses A and D. His careful notes on the process of cleaning and documenting the reliefs are invaluable for a reconstruction of their imagery. Maudslay's work constitutes a shift from the anecdotal character of the early explorations to the systematic study of Mesoamerican art and architecture.

## **2.2 Archaeological investigations**

In 1911, with the creation of the Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnografía, a new chapter opened in the history of investigations at Palenque. Scientific excavation and documentation methods replaced the autodidactic character of the previous explorations. The first major work at the site fueled by this institutional response was led by Eduardo Noguera Azua in 1921. In his lengthy report Noguera comments briefly on the Palace and House D (García Moll 1985). His description of the aqueduct is more productive, emphasizing its function as a management device to control the current of the Otolum river in order to avoid flooding of the Main Plaza. Noguera's interpretation of the reliefs echoes the contemporary belief that all monumental architecture at Palenque

had an exclusively religious function. He is however right in noticing that Palenque constituted the center of a regional system of power with subsidiary satellite centers.

Archaeologist Miguel Angel Fernández directed excavations at Palenque starting in 1934 until the time of his death in 1945. One of Fernandez's most dedicated labor concentrated on the northern sector of the Palace, where he excavated the substructure that predates House AD, and uncovered the magnificent stucco masks that decorated the *taludes* and *alfardas* of the monumental stairway (Fig. 12). Fernández offered an explanation for the collapse of the final phase of House AD, indicating that while the adjacent structures, Houses A and D, had been built on top of platforms specifically designed for this purpose, House AD had been built on top of the previous substructure, and thus the foundation lacked in stability. With this, he provides archaeological evidence to support his claim that the construction of House AD is posterior to that of both Houses A and D, an idea that as I will address later on, has significant implications for the reading of the iconography on the piers of House D. In the Palace Fernández also uncovered the entrance to the subterranean galleries and completed excavations in the tower and the adjacent courtyard. During the season of 1935 Fernández's workers found the Tablets of the Orator and the Scribe and the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs at the base of the Tower.

Miguel Angel Fernandez made important contributions to our understanding of the chronology and building techniques employed in the Palace and in many other buildings of Palenque. His interpretations of the art and iconography, on the other hand,

are greatly influenced by the ideas current in his time that identified Palenque with a religious center, ruled by a pacific theocracy of modest priests who cared only for their gods and the preservation of their arcane rituals. He overlooked the traits of the iconography that clearly denote ideas of kingship and conquest, ritual sacrifice and death. Fernandez also worked extensively in the consolidation of many monuments at the site and helped improve the infrastructure for making the site accessible to visitors, believing that this would aid in the preservation of the artistic treasures of the city. He was responsible for the construction of the first museum of the site in 1939 (García Moll 1985).

Alberto Ruz Lhuillier was the first professional archaeologist to work in the Maya area. His contributions to our understanding of Palenque, thanks to his ten seasons of excavations between 1947 ad 1958 remain a landmark in Mesoamerican archaeology, and he has the credit of leading the team that uncovered the tomb of K'inich Janab Pakal. Ruz and his team carried out excavations and reconstructions in the Palace in every season during this period. In Ruz's first field report dating of April 28 1947, he describes the condition of House D of the Palace noting that,

“The Western Gallery is well preserved but with plenty of filtrations which darken and corrode the vaults and walls. The reliefs on the piers, except some that have disappeared completely or are eaten away by humidity, are in good state of conservation. However, small fragments of stucco fallen at the base,

demonstrate that their destruction continues to be slow and relentless.” (Ruz in García Moll 2007: 41).

This continuous process of destruction was somewhat slowed down in the subsequent years thanks to Ruz’s efforts for consolidating the buildings. This is however a still unresolved problem at Palenque, a site that receives hundreds of visitors per day.

During the second season in 1949, the works at the Palace concentrated in the exploration of House AD and included the discovery of the Palace Tablet. In his report, Ruz mentions the fragments of stucco fallen among the rubble indicating that the piers of the facade of House AD had also been adorned with colorful reliefs. In the following year Ruz worked in the consolidation of the piers of Houses A and D, and added a horizontal cornice to protect the stuccoes from filtering water. Also during that season, Mexican artist Agustín Villagra Caletí, who had previously worked at Bonampak, produced watercolors of several works of art of the site.

During the season of 1959 Ruz worked in the aqueduct that runs through the eastern side of the Palace and canalizes the water of the Otolulm river. This hydraulic feature was collapsed at the time of excavations and Ruz notes how during the rainy season the area between the Palace and the Temple of the Sun flooded rapidly, a phenomenon that Alfred P. Maudslay had also observed during his visit in 1891.

In 1953, Ruz himself supervised the completion of the works in House D. His team filled the openings above the concrete lintels, reconstructed the vaults, and repaired the entablature and the roof. House D, together with the tower, were among the first

structures of the Palace to be thoroughly reconstructed. The significance of the sculpture adorning the piers and an interest in arresting the deterioration process, no doubt played a role in these efforts for conservation.

More recently archaeological works at the Palace have been directed by Mexican archaeologists Jorge Acosta (1967), Rosalba Nieto Calleja (1993), Rodrigo Liendo Stuardo (1999-2004), Alejandro Tovalín Ahumada and Roberto López Bravo (2001), among others. The most important documentation work during the twentieth century was carried out by Merle Greene Robertson, who worked at the site for more than twenty years and published her numerous photographs and drawings in impressive four volumes, *The Sculpture of Palenque* of 1985. Robertson also played an important role in the development and publication of the Mesas Redondas, a yearly meeting dedicated exclusively to the art and writing of Palenque.

### **2.3 Architectural and art historical interpretations**

Throughout the years, various scholars have attempted to interpret the intricate iconography of the reliefs of House D. Most of the early explorers instinctively identified the main figures as elite individuals and rightfully noted the significance of the undeciphered accompanying hieroglyphs. In the twentieth century, the assessment of the iconography became the main focus of research. Eduard Seler's 1915 *Observations and Studies in the Ruins of Palenque* provides an examination of the ruins that includes a long and detailed description of Houses A and D. He recognized the similarities between the

two sculptural programs, and provided detailed commentary on their iconography. His analysis of the figures of House D establishes parallels with Mexica and Northern Yucatek iconography (now known to be much later in date), and while assigning creative interpretations to the imagery, he discards some of their visual elements as “strictly ornamental”.

Mexican scholar Beatriz de la Fuente studied extensively the art of Palenque from an art historical perspective. In her impressive volume *La Escultura de Palenque* published in 1965, De la Fuente sees the sculpture of this city as “the most significant and representative manifestation of Classic Maya art.” (1965: 14). Hers is the first comprehensive art historical analysis of the art of Palenque and she studies in detail the decorative stucco reliefs of the Palace. Building on previous archaeological and epigraphical investigations in order to create a historical and cultural context for the exquisite sculptural corpus of Palenque, De la Fuente offers detailed descriptions of materials, techniques, and modes of representation.

Describing the reliefs of House D in particular, De la Fuente highlights their refinement, and compares them with those of House A of the Palace. De la Fuente’s analysis of the iconography of the piers of House D concentrates on the figures’ postures, costumes, and facial features, while downplaying their actions, especially those that demonstrate violence such as the decapitation and submission scenes. In her interpretation she adheres to the prevalent view of the Maya as a peaceful star-gazing people, ruled over by a erudite theocracy. Despite these anachronisms, her work stands

out as one of the earliest art historical monographs on Maya art and provides a comprehensive record of the sculptural corpus of Palenque.

George Kubler's groundbreaking contributions to the study of iconography are still an important reference for Mesoamerican scholars attempting to decode the intricate visual language of the ancient Maya. In his book *Studies in Classic Maya Iconography*, Kubler uses Palenque as a case study to exemplify his category of "dynastic ceremonies" (1969). Kubler's brief analysis of the piers of House D highlights the ceremonial character of the imagery, exemplified by the dancing and decapitation scenes. Kubler rightfully notes the visual interplay of the decoration of the facade of House D with the similar program in the Temple of the Inscriptions. Since both buildings shared also the ceremonial Grand Plaza, he suggests that the iconography mirrors the performance of dances with funerary connotation that took place in between both buildings.

In the 1970s George F. Andrews conducted architectural survey at Palenque providing detailed descriptions of the Palace's chronology, construction methods, and decoration. Andrews proposes a development of the Palace that includes House A, and Houses D and AD as a unit, rejecting the idea that House AD had been added at a later date as proposed earlier by Maudslay and Fernández (Andrews 1978). More interested in the technical and constructive aspects of the architectural ensemble, Andrews does not address the meaning of the art of the Palace or its role in the cultural history of the city.

However, his work is invaluable to understand the architectural uniqueness of Palenque, and its relationship with other Maya sites.

In her study of Classic Maya gestures *Pose and Gesture in Classic Maya Monumental Sculpture*, Virginia E. Miller (1981) examines the reliefs of House D proposing a narrative sequence for their imagery. Miller's analysis stresses a diachronic, pan-Maya standardization of gestures such as the raised foot as representation of dance, and the kneeling position as an indication of captivity. Claude Baudez also proposes a left to right continuous reading for the reliefs in his article "The Maya Snake Dance: Ritual and Cosmology" (1992), where he divides the images in *acts*, establishing a theatrical sequence for the scenes. Baudez interprets these scenes as a dancing ceremony, with fertility rain production associations. For this, he draws parallels with colonial Yucatek dances, Mexica mythology, and the K'iche' Maya creation myth known as the Popol Vuh.

More recently Matthew Looper (2009) analyzes the architectural contexts for the representations of dance in Maya art. In his comprehensive study he traces the history of representations of dance through different periods and media, and adduces iconographic, archaeological and ethnographic data to support his propositions. When describing the piers of House D, Looper establishes a parallel between the dance ceremony portrayed on the reliefs and a type of modern K'iche' Maya fertility dance called Patzkar. More significant for this thesis is Looper's discussion of the connections between the imagery on the piers, their architectural context, and the type of ceremonials that occurred in the monumental stairway and in the plaza below. Looper proposes a reading order for the

piers where viewers would begin to “read” the imagery at the central pier (Pier D) and then move through the rest in pairs, beginning from the outmost piers and moving toward the center. While such a strict reading order of the iconography appears slightly simplistic, Looper’s discussion of the relationship between the imagery and its physical and performative context is an important departing point for understanding the clear ideological message of this sculptural program.

## **2.4 Conclusions**

The early explorers brought to light the impressive art of Palenque as the product of an exotic, lost civilization, covered by the mysterious veil of the tropical jungle. Many of the visitors who helped in the destruction of the monuments were ironically the same who recorded their original appearance and location. During the phase of archaeological investigations, still in process today, the Palace was not always the center of attention; the work concentrated primarily on reconstruction and consolidation at the expense of excavations that attempted to uncover the chronology and function of the complex. More recently scholars have made efforts for interpreting the art of Palenque with a focus on reconstructing its dynastic history. Most studies on House D of the Palace have concentrated on iconographic analysis, while excluding discussions of context and viewership. My thesis aims at filling this gap by situating the iconography of the reliefs in its original architectural and cultural context, and by addressing issues of patronage and reception of the art.

### Chapter 3: Iconographic analysis

A detailed study of the iconography is the first necessary step for understanding the complex imagery of the sculptural piers of House D of the Palace. In this chapter I address the overall iconographic scheme of the five extant piers beginning with a detailed description of each relief. I identify common motifs that can help understand their main thematic content, then comparing them with the extensive corpus of imagery available for the study of Maya art. I then discuss the overall narrative depicted on the reliefs, including a discussion on the relationship between text and image, and their possible reading order. Finally, I refer to the themes of water and dance as main elements connected with the performative aspects of the building.

The study of Mesoamerican iconography has greatly benefited from the early work of George Kubler, who building on Erwin Panofsky's hermeneutic models, applied a systematic study of the figural content of Maya art in his book *Studies in Classic Maya Iconography* (1968). There he concentrated on what he called commemorative and ritual scenes of Maya art, and defined a set of principles that can be applied in the comparative study of the whole inventory of Maya iconography (Kubler 1969: 5). Some of the categories proposed by Kubler are the relationship between text and image, the isolation and clustering of motifs, the creation of figural allographs, as well as notions of age and change, invariance and disjunction, and commemoration and ritual. Using these categories proposed by Kubler, complemented by the knowledge of inscriptions present

elsewhere in the Palace and in Palenque in general, I attempt to analyze in detail the iconographic and thematic content of the five extant reliefs of the piers of House D.

When analyzing the relationship between text and image in Maya art, Kubler places more importance in the figural content than the hieroglyphic content. This approach is the result of the state of the decipherment process during the time of his writing, when the majority of the hieroglyphic texts could not be read. After the new advances in decipherment, the role of texts have come to occupy a more prominent role in the scholarly literature and in the interpretative process of Classic Maya art. However, Kubler's propositions still apply to the rich corpus of imagery created by the Classic Maya. Because of the lack of accompanying glyphs in the piers of House D of the Palace, a methodology that stresses the role of figural elements is an important tool to extract all possible meaning from the reliefs. Further support for the iconographic analysis will come from the extensive corpus of Maya water iconography compiled by Nicholas Hellmuth (1987).

Before addressing the iconography of each pier in detail, I begin with some general considerations of the piers as a whole, since they obviously form a stylistic and thematic unit. House D was originally composed of two parallel vaulted galleries with seven stuccoed piers supporting the western facade (Figs. 1-3). Of these piers, the first (A) and the last (G), contained a single hieroglyphic inscription. This inscription can no longer be read since Pier A is collapsed and Pier G preserves only two fragments of glyphs, including part of a name, a fragment of the name of the Palenque Triad

Progenitor, and a “capture” glyph (Fig. 8). Since the text on Pier G begins in the middle of a sentence, it is logical to assume that Pier A contained the first half of the same inscription.

The five remaining piers contained primarily imagery but smaller secondary texts labeled some of the individuals and actions depicted. On these five piers, pairs of individuals face each other and are engaged in what appears to be ceremonial acts. Their position and body language indicate a hierarchical relationship between them. Each pair is enclosed in a frame composed of alternating “jade beads” and other glyphic signs. These circular jade bead elements traditionally signify water in Maya art. The figures stand on elaborate ground lines, which seem to have a double purpose. On the one hand, they indicate the type of environment or setting for the actions depicted; in this case a mythological watery environment. On the other hand, these ground lines, measuring approximately fifty centimeters, serve to elevate the figures in order to ensure their visibility from the base of the monumental stairway (Robertson 1985 Vol. III: 33). Above the piers, and covering parts of the now absent wooden lintels, a band of hieroglyphs runs through all seven piers. This text originally provided an inscription, probably a building dedication, that began with a long count date. A similar pattern was observed by Peter Mathews in the Temple of the Inscriptions (1993).<sup>1</sup>

The style of these reliefs is characterized by the elegance and stylization of both human figures and allegorical motifs. The quality of the modeled stucco and the figures’

---

<sup>1</sup> For more details on this inscription see Mathews’ reconstruction of the text above the piers of House D on Robertson 1985: Fig. 241.

poses and demeanor, has captivated the imagination of scholars and visitors since the early explorations. The stucco is modeled in a high relief that projects the figures to the foreground, emphasizing their dynamic and lively quality. Though the figures move energetically, their expressions are stern and distant; they engage in their rituals completely ignoring the viewer. In their original context, the piers were covered in bright colors as is usual in Maya monumental art. Traces of blue, black and red can still be observed in some areas despite the advanced state of decay of the stucco (Robertson 1985: 32-49).

On these piers there is a unique correspondence between the framing elements, the imagery on the ground lines, and the human figures. The frames seem to indicate a specific spacial-temporal setting for the actions depicted. Each frame is composed of the symbol for “jade bead” which alternates with a different glyphic element on each pier. These glyphic symbols serve to locate the scenes in a sacred landscape. Reading from left to right, the elements are shells, “crossed-hatched flowers”, *yax* (green) signs, *k’an* crosses (yellow), and “ajaw bones” (Seler 1915: 17-18). In the writing system, all of these elements substitute to represent the concept of *k’uh*, divine or godly essence, and they also appear with the same function in other artworks at Palenque such as the Cross Group panels and Pakal’s sarcophagus’ lid (David Stuart, personal communication, 2012). In other words, the framing elements help to establish that the narrative depicted on the reliefs is mythical or sacred in nature. To add more specificity to this mythical narrative, the complex imagery in the ground lines indicate that each scene takes place in

a different type of watery environment. On each scene the figures stand on water bands that bear water motifs such as personified seeds and water lilies, a typical Maya symbol of earth's fertility associated also with notions of kingship (Hellmuth 1987).

The human figures depicted in the five piers appear to correspond to specific elite individuals of Palenque's history. The secondary texts that accompany the figures surely provided some indication of their identity. However, since most of the stucco that forms these texts has fallen off, or was purposefully removed, it is difficult to read any specific names. A reconstruction based on the early drawings by Ricardo Almendáriz and the photographs and drawings by Alfred Maudslay, allows for a reading of the name of K'inich Janab Pakal on the secondary text that labels the figure on the left on Pier F (David Stuart, personal communication, 2011) (Fig. 13). Moreover, comparing the facial features of the individual who possesses the most prominent role in all four piers (except for Pier E whose figures are completely destroyed), it is possible to suggest that this important individual is K'inich Janab Pakal himself, who according to several other inscriptions found throughout the site, is the one responsible for the construction and dedication of the majority of the buildings in the Palace.<sup>2</sup> An identification of Pakal with the figures on these reliefs is also reinforced through comparison with other instances of representation that are accompanied by texts in the art of Palenque, such as his portrait on

---

<sup>2</sup> See the texts on the Tableritos, the Palace Tablet, and the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs for examples of this.

the Oval Tablet of House E of the Palace, and the sarcophagus' lid in the Temple of the Inscriptions.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.1 Iconography of the piers

The first step for understanding the narrative and meaning of these sculptural reliefs is to identify the main motifs that compose their iconography. In Classic Maya art, there is a large corpus of standardized motifs that have been identified and which permit an identification of the themes and characters, whether mythological or historical, which populate the rich imagery of the reliefs of House D. In the following section I provide a detailed description of each pier, identifying recognizable motifs and their significance for the overall narrative of the sculptural program of House D.

#### Pier B

Pier B is the first of the series that contains primarily imagery (Fig. 14a/b). The frame that encloses the scene, now almost completely destroyed, was composed of alternating jade beads and shell signs. The ground line consists of three rectilinear water bands, folded in “U” shape to form three superimposed watery bodies. They are marked with groups of three dots and *na* signs, elements usually employed to indicate the surface of the watery underworld (Hellmuth 1987). On the left edge there is a personified *Ik'* head, and to the right vestiges of foliation can still be seen, although this element has

---

<sup>3</sup> Merle Greene Robertson identifies two of the figures on the reliefs with Pakal. On Pier B she correlates Pakal with the individual on the left. Based on facial features, I believe that Pakal is instead the figure on the right who wields the axe (Fig. 16a/b). Robertson rightly identifies Pakal with the dancing figure on Pier D (Robertson 1985, Vol. III: 32-49).

been completely eroded at present and can only be appreciated in Almendáriz's drawings and in Maudslay's photograph (Fig. 15).<sup>4</sup>

Both figures in this scene are dressed in elaborate regalia. The figure on the left sits on top of what appears to be a personified head. He raises his left arm in a protective gesture while his right hand rests on his lap. His legs cross in a manneristic fashion. The figure wears a jade pectoral, a simple loincloth, and jaguar pelt sandals. His head is now gone, possibly removed by the early explorers, but fragments of his headdress reveal an elaborate arrangement, with upper foliated elements and his hair tied at the back. The overall body language of this figure suggests a dignified request for clemency in view of the menacing gesture of the figure on the right. This second individual is standing with his right leg in treading position. His right arm is raised and he holds an ax pointed at his companion's head. On his left hand, he holds a piece of cloth, now almost completely destroyed. The figure's lips are parted, possibly indicating speech. His head, still observable in Maudslay's photograph, shows the cranial modification typical of Maya elites, and his facial features remind the youthful portraits of K'inich Janab Pakal. His dress is more elaborate than the figure on the left, with a large jade beads necklace, a pectoral mask, girdle and loincloth. He wears neatly tied sandals and large armbands on his wrists. The headdress of this character is more elaborate than the first figure and it contains feathers, a bird motif and carefully tied hair. Everything in the body language of this individual, from his treading position, his raising

---

<sup>4</sup> The drawing of this pier produced by John Caddy includes also a face at the right edge of the ground line. See Plate 27 in Pendregast 1967.

armed hand, and his attempt at speech, indicate that he is in the act of declaring his vanquishing or capture of the individual on the left. The figures' relatively static postures, indicate that rather than representing an actual act of violence, the scene recreates a symbolic statement of conquest, in which the personage on the right obviously represents the victorious part.

In addition to the human figures and symbolic motifs this pier contains two glyph bands. One "L" shaped is located above the figures' heads. The other consists of only three glyphs and divides the two figures on their lower sections. These texts served to label the actions that take place and the participants involved.

### **Pier C**

Pier C is framed by a combination of the jade bead motif and "hatched" flowers, the Maya symbol for zero or completion (Fig. 16a/b). The two figures stand directly on the ground line and they interact more closely with its contours. This ground line is composed of two parallel lines where water lilies curl and intertwine. In the upper line, four stacked elements (schematic shell ends) indicate that this is the surface of the Underwaterworld, as identified by Hellmuth (1987: 85, Figs. 189, 190, 196). The overall aspect of this surface contrasts sharply with the one depicted on Pier B. While Pier B is primarily geometric, here the water lilies and the personified seed elements curl in sinuous movement, suggesting the lush vegetation that covers water pools in the tropical forest. There is without a doubt a different "type" of water being represented in this case.

The figures stand gracefully on the surface of this watery environment, attempting to maintain the balance.

The figures in this case are presented in reversed hierarchy in relation to the preceding scene. The character on the left stands in a position of power and dominance. With his left hand he presents an object to the figure on the right. His body posture is flexed and he leans to the front reaching his companion. The slight separation of his legs, as if attempting to maintain the balance over the watery stacks, suggests the subtle movements of a dance or at least a carefully choreographed performance. His facial expression transmits dignity and impassiveness. He wears an elaborate netted skirt with mask belt and a heavy chest pendant. His bird headdress exhibits a long curled nose with a sky motif and exuberant feathers. Again he wears elegant jaguar skin sandals. This figure resembles the standing individual on Pier B, and his facial features suggest that he is the same character. Perhaps the most prominent element in this composition is the object this figure holds with his left hand. Kubler refers to this figure as an individual performing a dance while holding a corn scepter (1969: 25), Claude Baudez, who assigns a sequential narrative structure to the piers, suggests that this object is a simplified cosmogram, which the figure will be wearing during the dance on the following scene on Pier D (Baudez 1992: 39).<sup>5</sup>

The figure on the right is kneeled directly on the ground line; his knees and ankles softly resting on the watery surface. Once more the defeated individual shows signs of

---

<sup>5</sup> Baudez follows Jeffrey Miller's interpretation (1974) for this and he cites possible comparanda in the Temple of the Cross Tablet and the sarcophagus' lid of the Temple of the Inscriptions.

submission, but violence is absent from this scene. He rests his right hand over his chest, in what has been called the “hand-before-chest” gesture, traditionally associated with scenes of accession or presentation of offerings (Miller 1981: 188). His body is almost deprived of clothing, wearing only a loincloth and simple head and wrists ornaments. His facial expression reflects tension and anxiety; he looks up to his companion parting his lips as if to speak. The overall narrative of this scene is about the investiture of a power symbol from one individual to the other. While less explicit than the previous scene, the message is clear in the depiction of a power imbalance between the two characters, which is emphasized through their body language and through the differences in costume and ornamentation.

This scene includes also two groups of secondary texts. The longer “L” shaped text on the upper right corner is completely fallen and thus impossible to read. Another short text, composed of three glyph blocks, separates the two individuals.

### **Pier D**

Pier D depicts a scene of ceremonial dance, and has been recognized by several scholars as the central event in the narrative of the decoration of House D (Baudez 1992, De la Fuente 1965, Kubler 1969,Looper 2009, Miller 1981) (Fig. 17a/b). Again if we can ascertain that this building was originally composed of seven piers in total, Pier D would have been situated at the center of the composition, and thus would have constituted the focus of the decorative program of the facade (Fig. 3). In this sense the building constitutes an atypical case compared to the general architecture of Palenque where

monumental buildings tend to have central doorways instead of central piers.<sup>6</sup> The framing element on this relief is composed of *yax* (green) signs alternating with the jade beads. The ground line in this case is significantly different from the rest of the piers. Two parallel lines are crossed by short lines and dots and crossed by a rectilinear element that zigzags between them curling at each turn. This type of water band is rare but it is well established as a watery element, more specifically associated with a type of marshy water (Hellmuth 1987 Figs. 218-223; David Stuart, personal communication, 2012). Two semicircular elements flank both extremes of the ground line. Though extremely eroded at present to provide an accurate interpretation, both Almendáriz and John Caddy rendered heads at both ends, presumably the same type of personified vegetation that appears on the ground lines of Piers C and F. One of the most intriguing elements in this watery band is the inclusion of a *k'in* or sun motif at the center. The incorporation of this solar motif has been emphasized as an indication of the centrality of this pier in the overall composition (Looper 2002: 213). Rather than breaking with the overall emphasis on water, this solar motif stands as a metaphor for the setting or rising of the sun in the marshy waters. Given the orientation of the piers of House D facing west, and the importance of the afternoon light for the experiencing of its imagery, it is logical to assume that this is a reference to sunset. I will address this shaping effect of the sunlight in the following chapter.

---

<sup>6</sup> See for example the Temple of the Inscriptions, and at the Palace, Houses A and C. Not so House AD, which seems to also have had a central pier.

The figures on this pier stand apart for their elegance and refinement. The hierarchical relationship between the two characters is of a different nature here; rather than presenting a victor and his vanquished opponent, the division of status between the two figures is less dramatic than in the rest of the scenes. The figure on the left, no doubt the protagonist of this pier, stands in the traditional dancing position with his left foot slightly raised and the right resting sideways on the ground line. His torso is in frontal position, and his head turns to his companion, showing the elegant profile of the individual that we can identify with Pakal. This figure's costume is even more elaborate than the ones seen so far, with a netted bead skirt, ornate apron, sandals, knee ruffs, and wrist bands. He wears a long bead pectoral and large ear ornaments. His hairdo is again elaborate and elegantly decorated with long feathers and plant foliage. To assist in his dance, the character holds an axe in his left hand and he joins his companion holding with his right hand an undulating snake or centipede motif. Everything in this figure, his costume, body language, and the actions he engages in, denote his role as the focus of the narrative. Whether he is depicting mythological personage or Pakal as an enactor of a mythical character, he is without a doubt the main actor of the whole sculptural program, as evidenced in both the iconography and in the positioning of this scene at the center of the whole composition.

The figure on the right is a woman, the only one appearing in the piers of House D. Her head was already missing by the time of Maudslay's visit, as can be seen in his photographs and drawings. She is shorter in stature than her counterpart but her dress and

posture suggest the same status and dignity. The figure stands with both hands holding the serpentine element. Almendáriz portrayed her with visible breasts under the netted blouse, but all subsequent representations lack this anatomical detail (Fig. 18). Baudez (1992) refers to this figure as a male transvestite dancer, but according to Almendáriz's depiction, and in relation to representations of women in ceremonial scenes at Palenque and elsewhere, she is obviously a woman. Her costume includes elaborate skirt and blouse, pectoral with jade mask, wrist bands and a complex belt with dangling shell elements. Her feathered headdress culminates in a pointed element very similar to the object held by the left figure on Pier C. By the traces of stucco on the pier, it is possible to determine that this figure held an elaborate costume piece tied at the back.

The introduction of an elite female figure in this image allows to establish a parallel with other representations of Classic Maya art. High ranking females were usually portrayed in coronation or ascension scenes, becoming a vehicle for the transmission of lineage and rulership. This type of imagery where mothers or wives of rulers appear side by side the male character can be seen in Palenque on the Palace Tablet, the Oval Tablet of House E, and on the tablet of Temple XIV. A woman is also the main character depicted on Pier C of the Temple of the Inscriptions (see Kubler 1969, Fig. 38). This abundance of representations indicates that females played an important role in the discourse of political power, lineage, and ceremonial in Palenque and in other Maya sites.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Another site of the Usumacinta that is renowned by its representations of elite females is Yaxchilan, where female rulers are presented as active participants in the ceremonial life of the court.

The centipede element that the two figures hold link them both physically and symbolically. The creature's segmented body twists in a contorted position as if suggesting life and movement. This motif has received extensive attention from scholars. Seler refers to it as a "lightning serpent" (1915: 24). Baudez suggests that it is a supernatural being related to dance ceremonial, a manifestation of God K as a deity of lighting and thunder, what he labels the *thunderer*, and thus pertinent to a ritual fertility dance (Baudez 1992). Looper sees it as a centipede representation of the celestial axis, in relation to the rising sun as depicted in the ground line below (Looper 2009: 215).

There is no doubt that the imagery on this pier plays a fundamental role in the narrative of the reliefs. Located at the center of the composition, the theme of ritual dance is the most significant event being narrated. Looper has seen the dancing theme of this pier as a "performance in which deity impersonators perform a centipede dance associated with the rebirth of the sun from the underworld." (2009: 215). Comparanda for this type of snake-holding dance appears on Lintel 4 of Site R, near Yaxchilan, where a pair of figures, male and female, dance while holding serpents in their hands (Looper 2009, Fig. 1.2).<sup>8</sup> Beatriz de la Fuente interprets the scene on Pier D as a representation of a rain bringing dance, where the axe in the figure's right hand, a symbol of Chahk, correlates with his holding of the serpent, symbolizing rain (1965: 114).

A line of seven glyphs in "L" arrangement is again inserted between the two figures, but their reading is impossible given their eroded state.

---

<sup>8</sup> See also the Dumbarton Oaks Panel, Fig. 23.

### **Pier E**

Pier E is almost completely destroyed at present and it probably was already in that state by the time of the earliest explorations, since none of the early visitors made any efforts for documenting it. Only a fragment remains of the lower basal register where we see the alternation of jade beads this time with *k'an* crosses (Fig. 19). A small fragment of the ground line indicates that the figures were equally raised to increase their visibility. From the traces of stucco left in the stone surface, it is possible to discern a pair of figures, both of them standing on a watery environment. Fragments of an elaborate headdress belonging to the figure on the left, and a hand, from the figure on the right, can still be seen. The two-figure composition of this pier, which obviously participates in the overall narrative of the facade, has gone so far unmentioned by the scholars who have documented the piers.

### **Pier F**

The frame of Pier F, the last of the series bearing only imagery, contains the usual jade beads combined with “ajaw bone” elements (Fig. 20a/b). The ground line here is one of the most elaborate and elegant of the group. In terms of composition it is closely related to the ground line on Pier C in its sinuous presentation of aquatic plants and flowers, recreating a pond or still water environment. At the center there is a personified water lily plant, a common motif in representations of watery scenes (See Finamore and Houston 2010, Cat. 21). On this pier the motifs cover the space more densely, and the plants’ stems and leaves create an orderly pattern around the central figure. The surface of

this watery environment is indicated by the stacked shell elements, on top of which once again, one of the figures balances his body in graceful posture.

The figures in this scene return to a subjugation relationship like in the cases of Piers B and C. The figure on the left sits atop a large *Ik* (“wind” or “breath”) head, possibly a representation of an altar or censer base. His body is deprived of elaborate costume or ornaments. He takes his right arm to the chest in submissive position while with the left he holds an unidentified object.<sup>9</sup> He is definitely a captive and he bends his head almost willingly, submitting to the menacing movement of the figure on the right. This second individual holds his companion’s head by the hair and his axe this time descends dangerously to his neck. The dominant figure in this case stands again in treading position and he seems to concentrate on the sacrifice he is about to perform. He wears only a loincloth and a belt with head mask, jaguar sandals, a long and heavy pectoral, and his hair is adorned with flowers and feathers.<sup>10</sup>

This scene is without a doubt the one that more clearly depicts a scene of sacrifice, and it seems to constitute a thematic pair with Pier B, the first of the series. However, given the dignified and calm posture of both figures, rather than a depiction of an actual decapitation, this scene recreates a symbolic sacrifice or stands as a abstract and stylized representation of the act. This points to a possible enactment scene where the

---

<sup>9</sup> This gesture can only be appreciated in Almendariz’s and Caddy’s renderings. See Fig. 10.

<sup>10</sup> In Annie Hunter’s rendering of Maudslay’s photograph she incorporates a netted skirt, John Caddy does include the same attire; but this is not evident in any of the other representations including Almendáriz’s drawings.

ruler, Pakal, would have been represented in a reenactment of events related to the mythical origins of his lineage and of Palenque.

The decorative program of House D is characterized by the elegance and refinement of the figures, as well as by its variety in the representation of narrative events and mythical locales. Contrasting sharply with other decorated pier programs, such as that of House A, where repetition of figures and postures seems to be the main aesthetic and thematic concern, here the action deploys in several episodes that include scenes of capture and submission, ritual dancing, and sacrifice. The manufacture of these reliefs also highlights their dynamic effect, since the stucco here is more volumetric and detached from the background than in other similar works from the Palace. This heightened effect emphasizes the light and gracile silhouettes and the fluid mobility of figures through space, underscoring their participation in performative acts. The imagery on the ground lines is particularly telling, since it provides variety and specificity to the scenes, indicating that each one takes place in a different place, and perhaps at a different mythical/historical time.

### **3.2 Structural principles: symmetry, image, and text**

One defining aspect of the piers of House D is their semantic and stylistic coherence and the presence of a visual interplay of words and images. The use of rectangular piers to display imagery and text was prevalent in Palenque during the Late Classic Period and is one of the unique characteristics that define the art of this Maya

center. The composition and structure of the piers of House D can be linked with another common medium typical of Palenque, the carved or modeled tablets containing a combination of image and text and displayed on interior walls and facades of buildings. Though variations occurred through time, this art form was characterized by large segments of text disposed around sections of figural content. Some important examples are the Palace Tablet, the Tablet of Temple XIV (Fig. 22), and the tablets of the Cross Group.

The piers of House D, and those of House A and the Temple of the Inscriptions, all contain the same compositional scheme as the carved tablets. In them, lines of text frame sections of imagery that represent court ceremonial and lineage. The main organizing principle in the composition of both media is a strict bilateral symmetry that organizes image and text at both sides of a central plane. The facade of House D emphasizes this strong symmetry through a central pier, Pier D, which portrays the most important action in the narrative, the image of the ruler dancing in the surface of the Underwaterworld. While the rest of the figures in the ensemble are in profile, the body of Pakal is the only one that faces the viewer (Fig. 17). The piers containing the hieroglyphic inscription, Piers A and G, frame the figures and anchor the narrative in mythical and historical time (Fig. 3).

In architectural terms, all buildings in Palenque present this bilateral symmetry as a feature that helps unify the urban landscape. While most structures incorporate a central doorway (House A and Temple of the Inscriptions), House D of the Palace is atypical in

its employment of a central pier. Since the narrative here is also unique, emphasizing movement and action instead of static commemoration, this central pier helps to identify the main action portrayed, and links the imagery with the performances that took place in the surrounding spaces. The translation of the same visual devices from one medium to another, from sculpture to architecture or vice versa, reinforces the idea of a visual language that existed in Palenque and which was employed by the elite in monumental art and understood by the general population as an important means of communication.

Kubler treats the relationship between text and image as one of the principles for his systematic study of Maya iconography. He recognized the constantly changing interplay between text and image in Maya art but his analysis is limited by the state of the decipherment at the time of his writing. He deemed the content of the texts as formulaic and reduced to a few ceremonial contexts. Kubler saw the primacy of the imagery in Classic Maya art as a result of a deficiency of the writing system, which according to him, had only a limited amount of words (1969: 5). We now know that the writing system is fully phonetic and could be used to represent not just historical events and mythological narratives, but to express a whole range of ideological concerns and symbolic concepts. However, Kubler was right in noticing that the images, while connected and complementary to the text, possessed an intrinsic meaning of their own, and were readable by contemporary viewers who could lack the skill to read the complicated script, but who would have been knowledgeable of the symbol system encoded in the art.

The active exchange between image and text is usually downplayed in Western art, where one form tends to overshadow the other. W.J.T. Mitchell refers to the relationship between text and image in art as one of constant shifting between contraposition and unity. Images and words are at a constant play where “the word/image difference . . . is not merely the name of a boundary between disciplines or media or kinds of art: it is a borderline that is internal to both language and visual representation . . . and must be understood as a dialectical trope rather than a binary opposition.” (Mitchell 2003: 59).

Perhaps like no other culture, the ancient Maya employed the relationship between text and image in visual representation to complicate in symbolic and cognitive terms the act of experiencing works of art. This changeability of image and text is especially evident in the monumental art of Palenque, where there is a double interplay between text and image. On the one hand the inscriptions and imagery coexist in almost all examples of the art, whether carved, painted, or sculpted. On the other hand, there is a correspondence between the tablet as a permanent, but smaller in size medium, concerned primarily with text, and the architectural sculpture, more monumental in size and primarily concerned with figuration.

In the piers of House D, this dialectic between word and image is not only expressed by the insertion of imagery within text (pier order), and text within the imagery (secondary texts), but also through the flexible translation from one medium to another; from small scale tablet to monumental architecture, or vice versa. The exact direction of

this translation is hard to establish, since it is difficult to identify chronologically if the architecture is referencing the tablets, or the latter are smaller versions of the form seen in the architecture. In any case, both media express an ideological trope that emphasizes the dialogue that existed between text and image as one of the defining characteristics of Classic Maya monumental art. This fluidity of media is not a rare occurrence in Mesoamerican art. Early examples are the translations in form and design between small scale jade celts and monumental stelae (Porter 1992, Stuart 2010b), and the relationship between painted codices and hieroglyphic stairways (Julia Guernsey, personal communication, February 2012).

Besides the main inscription that frames the reliefs, distributed between Piers A and G, there are other glyphic elements that are inserted among the figures on Piers B to F and which play an important role in the reading of the narrative changing their role from textual to iconographic devices. The water bands are marked by *na* signs and personified wind heads (*Ik*). Moreover, the glyphic elements in the frames of each scene serve to visually situate the narrative in a sacred mythological time and place, by referencing the term for holy or sacred, *k'uh*. The text that appears on the exterior piers (A and G) serves to anchor, both visually and historically, the figural narrative on the piers. The figures are historical and represent real elite individuals from Palenque, engaged in what contemporary viewers would recognize as common rituals performed at the site. However, names of deities also appear in the text, both in the main inscription that covers piers A and G, and in the secondary labeling texts. Pier G is particularly

significant since it contains the name of the Palenque Triad Progenitor, Muwaan Mat, followed closely by a “capture” glyph (Fig. 8). This juxtaposition of a mythological character in a specific historical event typifies the overall message of the reliefs where myth and history are always presented in synthesis. Other elements, such as the water bands filled with aquatic creatures and allegorical figures and the glyphic frames, also serve to localize the actions in a remote time and place, elevating the narrative to mythology.

This mythological dimension of the narrative of House D, where the ruler of Palenque was represented as enactor of myth, served to legitimize his leadership as divinely sanctioned. The combination of historical characters with myth imbues the reliefs with a sense of authenticity which together with the high visibility of the reliefs, constitutes their main expressive and communicative value. On these reliefs, the harmonious combination of text and image, and of iconography and architecture, is part of a deliberate aesthetic choice that allows the facade of the building to be “read” as a text.

The reading order of the imagery has been discussed by several scholars (Baudez 1992, Miller 1981,Looper 2009). Baudez and Miller propose a left to right continuous reading while Looper emphasizes a reading that begins with the external piers (F and B) and moves toward the center to Pier D. In general, the reading order of these reliefs seems to correspond with the reading order of most Maya texts, especially those that accompany architecture in Classic Maya sites. The five piers containing the figural

narrative are enclosed and complemented by the two piers on the extremes bearing a single inscription. Since the inscription was read from left to right, it is logical to assume that the associated images would have been arranged to follow the same pattern.

This reading however, would have been limited by the viewer's level of familiarity with the script.<sup>11</sup> But even from a structural perspective, the hieroglyphic text could have encouraged a reading that followed the text. The combination of text and image in the architectural decoration of House D presents substantial iconographic parallels with the general pattern of the carved tablets included in buildings all across Palenque, and thus their visual and semantic structure must have also been similar.

More productive than venturing in establishing a specific reading order for these piers, is attempting to understand the close relationship between the iconography of the reliefs and the general design and topography of the building. Both text and image combine with the architectural setting to transmit the message more effectively. As its form and central siting suggests, House D was intricately connected with the civic-ceremonial life of the Palace and the city. The correspondence between the iconography, the architectural design, and the ritual performances that took place in and around the building, offers an insight into the relationship between politics, art, and courtly life at Palenque. These issues will be further explored in the following chapter.

### **3.3 Stylistic parallels in the Palace: House A**

---

<sup>11</sup> For a full discussion of literacy among the Classic Maya see Houston and Stuart "On Maya Hieroglyphic Literacy," in *Current Anthropology*, 33(1992): 589-593

An analysis of the relationship between House D and House A of the Palace in terms of style can help clarify some of the uniqueness of these reliefs. A possible precedent and/or parallel for the design of the decoration of House D is the similar program that appears on the eastern facade of House A (Fig. 21). Several formal elements link both decorative programs in terms of their interaction with the architecture and the landscape. However they differ significantly in their subject matter and style. House A contained originally eight piers, including the first and last with only glyphs. The building presented a centralized entrance, a doorway perfectly aligned with another doorway in the dividing wall, leading to the inner gallery, and into the northeast courtyard (Fig. 6). The six piers bearing imagery depict individuals in groups of three, with always one figure standing and two kneeling or sitting at the sides. The overall aspect of the imagery here is static and grave, and though their theme seems to contain a dynastic message, they transmit a sense of hieratic awe to the viewer. The composition is different from House D, with no ground lines and the figures positioned directly on the frames, which bear celestial symbols. The modeling of the stucco is also strikingly different, characterized by low relief that highlights the immobility and atemporality of the figures. Compared to the sobriety of the reliefs of House A, those of House D are lively and manneristic, and they seem to emphasize narrative in contraposition to the commemorative quality of House A (De la Fuente 1965). Most scholars believe that House A, and by extension its decoration, was built previous to House D (Andrews 1975, García Moll 1985, 2007, Tovalín Ahumada and López Bravo 2001). Despite these

differences in style and subject matter, both decorative programs are similar in their structure, medium, and visibility, and they form, together with House AD, a unified facade to the northern sector of the Palace complex.

### **3.4 Water symbolism**

One of the most prominent thematic elements in the reliefs of House D is that of water. Water iconography, represented in the ground lines of all piers, provides the scenario where the actions occur, thus becoming a signifier of place and time. The sculptors of the piers made special efforts to represent a different kind of watery environment on each pier. The theme of water is very common in the art of Palenque, perhaps due to its geographic location on an escarpment surrounded by a multitude of rivers, streams, and waterfalls. The epigraphic record demonstrates that in ancient times the city center was called *Lakamha'*, meaning "Wide Waters" (Stuart 2010). Moreover, water is a significant element in the Palace where the iconography of water is particularly conspicuous. A stucco relief that adorns the vaulted corridor over one of the access stairs that ascend from the subterranean galleries to the upper floors shows a beautiful image of the Maize God emerging from the primal waters (Baudez 1996: 175, Schele and Villela 1996, Stuart and Stuart 2008: Fig. 48). This image has been interpreted as self-referential, indicating that the subterraneans were probably understood as a symbolic representation of the primordial watery underworld and would have been connected with the ceremonials performed by the ruler at the Palace.

The hydraulic works carried out at the site can also be related to the theme of water in the iconography. During the renovations of the Palace made by Pakal in the seventh century, the aqueduct that runs east of the Palace platform was enlarged, thus allowing the canalization of the Otolum river which flooded this area of the city during the rainy season. Flood and erosion control were the main functions of the aqueduct, and this act of water management allowed for the creation of a civic and ceremonial space at the heart of the city (French 2007). Water manipulation was one of the main achievements of the builders of Palenque, and many other water features served also to control the innumerable bodies of water that run throughout the site. This constant interaction with water and the rulers' attempts at controlling its course, do doubt influenced the numerous instances of water representations in the iconography of the Palace and in other structures at the site.

Recent geoarchaeological investigations at Palenque have yielded a considerable body of fossilized marine life remains found primarily in deposits under the Cross Group temples, but also in the bench that occupies the upper level of the Tower. More marine fossils have been found at Palenque than at any other Maya site, which is the result of this area being submerged in the ocean during the Eocene and Miocene periods (Cuevas García and Alvarado Ortega 2012). The finding of these marine fossils, in an area today far removed from the seashore, could help explain the origin of the fascination of the inhabitants of Palenque with a mythological history of the city in connection with water. The idea of the primordial sea, predating thousands of years the founding of Palenque,

was embedded in the mythological imagination of the city's inhabitants, and was constantly reflected in the writing and in the art.

Several epigraphic sources of the site refer to a mythical original place called Matwiil, which was the birth place of the Palenque Triad. Matwiil is translated as "Place of Cormorants", of "Place of Water-Birds", referencing an exuberant watery environment where Muwan Mat, the Palenque Triad Progenitor "created" or brought to life the gods of the Palenque Triad, GI, GII, and GIII. This mythical locale seems to have been particularly important for the rulers of Palenque, who as evidenced in many of the inscriptions found at the site, often adopted the title "Holy Lord of Matwiil" in addition to the more common "Holy Lord of Baakal" (Stuart 2006: 94). Though not directly named, the ground lines on the piers of House D signal an association between the historical narrative portrayed and this mythological watery place of origin for the Palenque dynasty.

One example of this fascination with water mythology comes from a tablet found in Temple XIV. This image shows the ruler K'inich Kan Bahlam as a young man receiving the K'awiil scepter from his mother while he dances on the surface of the Underwaterworld (Fig. 22). The watery world is represented by parallel bands crossed by three place names and lined on the upper part with stacked shell elements, and in the bottom with *na* and *ha'* (water) signs. Kan Bahlam's mother is kneeling in front of her son, dressed with the attributes of the Moon goddess. Kan Bahlam is attired as a personification of the Jaguar God of the Underworld, as seen in the ornament that hangs on his belt. The text here references the dancing and the taking of the Kawill scepter,

taking place both in historical time and in a remote past, almost one million years before the dedication date on the tablet (Wald and Carrasco 2004). We see here a conflation of historical and mythical time as a means of connecting the past and the present in a cyclical way. The message is that these characters were transported after death into a past time where water (described as the primordial sea) covered the earth.

The theme of correlating water imagery with dynastic history is a common occurrence across Mesoamerica since the Preclassic Period (Fash 2005, Guernsey 2010b, Lucero 2006, Scarborough 1998). For example in the Late Preclassic site of Izapa, in the Guatemalan highlands the theme of water management, depicted in stelae, was integrated into the architecture of the site, mirroring the types of royal performances orchestrated by the rulers in public spaces. This way the use of water iconography in the art became a discursive tool employed by the rulers to celebrate their own political and cosmological authority (Guernsey 2010a: 216). At the Early Classic site of Aguacatal, in western Campeche, a circular altar is profusely adorned with stucco water imagery. The stuccoed basin altar is located in front of a raised platform that functioned as a ceremonial center for a triadic building complex (Houston et al 2005, Fig. 5). The shape of the altar is a quatrefoil and is decorated with aquatic creatures and glyphic inscriptions. The lower part of the altar contains bird tail feathers, a representation of an avian deity known as *Aj K'ahk' 'O Chahk*, a messenger of the god Chahk (Houston et al. 2005: 24). The presence of the water symbolism in this altar, and the fact that it is located in front of a platform in

an open public space, suggests that it functioned as a place for the performance of rituals associated with water management.

In Palenque, like at Izapa and Aguacatal, the emphasis on water iconography and its association with mythical history and performance comes as no surprise. Water was an essential part of the surrounding natural environment and it became an important component of the city's mythology and history, as well as a part of the identity of the ruling dynasty. From the perspective of the rulers, the inclusion of water iconography in mythical enactment scenes, reinforced their divine origin and their role as continuators of cyclical ancestral tradition.

### **3.5 Theme of dance**

A second important theme portrayed on these reliefs is that of ceremonial dancing. The episode depicted on Pier D, being the central element in the overall composition, emphasizes dance as the main narrative event of the whole group. Other representations of dance at Palenque are usually intricately related to accession ceremonies or to depictions of rulers in the guise of deities or mythological characters. There are also instances of dance in association with sacrificial scenes, as appears to be the case with the reliefs of House D (Miller 1981: 143). One close parallel though later in time, is again the scene depicted in the Tablet of Temple XIV, where K'an Bahlam performs a dance while standing on the surface of the waters. The taking of the royal insignia from the hands of

his mother, while he dances in a watery underworld, closely resembles the scene depicted on Pier D of House D.

Another representation of dance from Palenque comes from the Dumbarton Oaks Panel 2, which shows ruler K'inich K'an Joy Chitam performing a dance as impersonator of the god Chahk in front of his parents (Fig. 23). The young ruler lifts his left heel in the typical dance pose, while his body is in frontal position and his face in profile, similarly to Pakal on Pier D of House D. He holds an incense bag marked with an *ak'bal* glyph, and holds a small snake with the same hand. The image of this ruler as a deity impersonator mirrors the conflation of myth and history that appears in many examples of the art of Palenque, and of which House D is an early example.

The significance of depictions of dance in monumental public art is associated to the mythical history of Palenque, but most significantly with ritual and performance. There are numerous examples of dance scenes represented in monumental art created specifically for places of public access and assembly. For instance,Looper cites a series of stelae erected in front of the stairway between the Great Plaza and the North Acropolis of Tikal (Looper 2009, Figs. 5.1 and 5.2). Other examples of architectural decoration depicting dancing events can be found at Copán Structure 10L-22 and at the House of the Bacabs, at the Temple of the Warriors in Chichén Itza, and in sites of the Puuc region such as Itzimte, Uxmal, and Xcorralché (Looper 2009).

The iconography of the architectural decoration of the piers of House D is intricately related to the performative function of the building and acts as a vehicle for the

communication of mythical history and for the legitimation of dynastic discourse. By perpetuating in architectural and sculptural form, in a highly visible location, the figure of the ruler as enactor of myth, Pakal situated himself at the center of the process of place making and of the creation of social identity of the city.<sup>12</sup> This process has been described byLooper as a “sophisticated spacial narrative, designed both to awaken memories of familiar performances as well as to perpetuate the ritual action by drawing the viewer into the pictorial universe.” (Looper 2009: 155). The implications for this relationship for the specific case of House D will be further discussed in the following chapter.

### **3.6 Conclusions.**

The content and location of the reliefs of the piers of House D make them a typical example of elite visual representation commissioned for the consumption of both elite and non-elite. The reliefs were purposely situated in a highly visible location, where their iconography was in constant visual and physical association with the performative spaces that surround the building. Contrary to other representations at the site, which tend to be more static and commemorative, the iconography here is dynamic and possesses a clear narrative character. The figures engage in a sequence of events whose main theme is a ritual dance of conquest and sacrifice that takes place in a watery environment. This aquatic place is signaled through the employment of different types of water for each

---

<sup>12</sup> For a full discussion of rulers as deity impersonators see Houston and Stuart, “Of Gods, Glyphs, and Kings: Divinity and Rulership among the Classic Maya.” *Antiquity*. 70 (1996): 289-312.

scene, indicating that the actions took place at different locations, and perhaps at different times.

The conflation of mythical and historical time is an ubiquitous theme that defines the art of Palenque and its presence in House D indicates an early occurrence linked to the establishment of a new ruling dynasty. In many works of art and inscriptions at the Palace, pairs of mythical/historical figures appear in the performance of parallel events. For example, a band of glyphs running above the Oval Tablet in House E of the Palace records an unidentified mythological event in the deep past that is then paralleled by the accession of the Triad Progenitor, which is followed by the accession to the throne of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb (Stuart 2006). Another example is the Panel of Temple XIV, where the Moon Goddess oversees the initial taking of K'awiil, only to be reenacted by K'inich Kan Bahlam and his mother in historical time, thousands of years later.

In terms of style and composition the reliefs participate in a visual language that is typical of Palenque, and which probably originated at the Palace. The use of rectangular piers covered in stucco sculpture that depicts rulers and other elite individuals engaged in ceremonial scenes is seen in other buildings of Palenque, especially in Houses A, C, and AD of the Palace, and in the facade of the Temple of the Inscriptions. All of these sculptural programs share common pictorial elements such as a marked bilateral symmetry, a carefully designed balance of image and text, and the amalgamation of mythical and historical narratives. The combination of rectangular piers as medium for the depiction of imagery and the facade as an architectural element was widely developed

at Palenque, becoming a defining characteristic of its art, and substituting the stelae tradition of other Maya sites as main vehicles for elite discourse.

Besides the depiction of mythical narrative and ritual ceremonial, the reliefs reveal an underlying political message that correlates with the overall artistic program of the Palace. In several examples of the architectural decoration of the complex, Pakal and his successors utilized the art and the architecture to promote their military achievements and to highlight their dynastic history. More specifically, the capturing and submission of enemies from the enemy site of Santa Elena constitutes the main theme of the northeast courtyard in the form of figural sculpture and hieroglyphic texts. This event, which appears prominently in the stairs of House C (Fig. 28), is particularly important for understanding the development of Pakal's political career, since it appears that only after that important victory over Santa Elena, and the ritual exhibition and sacrifice of its leaders, it was possible for Pakal to become a powerful regional ruler. The representation on Piers B, C, and F of capture and decapitation episodes, enacted by Pakal, evokes this historical event, but located inside a mythological and sacred framework. This process of mythification of history on a building facade acted as effective propaganda which was constantly activated and perpetuated through its connection with the surrounding performative landscape.

What better characterizes the sculptural program of House D is its dynamism and elegance. The sophistication and refinement of the iconography combines with the monumental architectural setting to transmit a sense of reverence and awe in the viewers.

The lively movement of the figures evoke the rituals performed in and around the building, and serves to perpetuate in the collective memory the notion of sacred history attached to the city and rulers of Palenque.

## Chapter 4: Viewership

Studies of Mesoamerican architecture generally concentrate either on architectural form and style or address in detail the specificities of the iconography of the accompanying decoration. My study in contrast attempts to combine these two approaches, including also a discussion of the socio cultural context of the production and reception of architectural sculpture. The decorative program of House D must be seen in relation to the architecture of the Palace and the surrounding built environment. In this chapter I analyze the relationship between the iconography, the architectural design of House D, and the ceremonial plaza and monumental stairway that flanks the building on its western side. The intersection between architectural decoration and built space indicates a connection with the types of ceremonials that took place in and around the building during the Late Classic period. On these reliefs, the ruler of Palenque, Pakal, portrayed himself as enactor of mythical and historical narratives represented through scenes of ritual dancing in a watery environment. These instances of elite self-representation offer a valuable tool for better understanding the interconnection between myth, ceremonial, and rulership legitimation at Palenque. Employing a phenomenological reading of the architecture and its decoration I attempt to reconstruct ancient patterns of viewership in order to reveal how both architecture and iconography encode messages of dynastic lineage, religious beliefs, and political power. Furthermore, I highlight the relationship between sculptural decoration, architectural space, and public ceremonial in

order to explore the process of production and reception of the art by individuals of different class in Palenquano society.

Because of its fair state of preservation in both architecture and decoration, House D presents an excellent case study for understanding the dynamic relationships between space, imagery, and performance at Palenque. First, the building is located at the western edge of the Palace, representing one of the outside faces of the complex. This way it is physically and visually connected with the Main Plaza and both building and plaza are linked through the mediation of the monumental stairway. Second, the conception of the imagery on the reliefs has a clear public connotation, in other words, these images were meant to be seen from the outside and from below the platform. This is clearly indicated by the large size of the figures, the use of light and shadow as a shaping element, and the use of high ground lines that serve to raise the images making them visible from the lower levels of the stairway. Thirdly, the building and its decoration are intricately connected with the plaza below through the narrative theme depicted on the reliefs. As previously discussed the main themes are those of dance and sacrifice, and they no doubt reflected the types of public ceremonials that took place on the plaza and on the stairway landings (Looper 2009).

#### **4.1 Architecture of the Palace: design and function**

The Palace of Palenque is a conglomerate of double vaulted buildings arranged around several interior courtyards and elevated on a trapezoidal platform, approximately

80 by 100 meters (Fig. 1). After the construction of the earliest buildings in the complex, the Subterráneos and House E, the Palace group grew outward becoming more labyrinthine and restrictive in access (García Moll 1985; 2007, Nieto Calleja and De la Cruz Paillés 1993). House D belongs to the later stages of construction that helped close the complex, together with Houses A and AD. While the interior buildings and courtyards became more private through this process, the facades of these three houses A, D, and AD, maintained a public face and continued to play an important role in the communication exchange between the elite and the general audience, who not necessarily had access to the interior spaces of the Palace. All buildings within the Palace had decorated facades, wether stuccoed, painted, or carved, and studies suggest that the form and meaning of the decoration corresponded in more or less degree with the levels of accessibility of each individual structure (Parmington 2011).

George F. Andrews defines a Palace Group as a conglomerate of buildings and courtyards with a outside perimeter usually elevated on a low platform (Andrews 1975). These platforms separate the complexes from the exterior spaces and this separation is usually mediated by stairs. The buildings on the periphery of Palace Groups maintain a dual correspondence with the exterior spaces, usually plazas, and the inner spaces of the complex. This duality of spacial relations is especially highlighted at the Palace of Palenque, where Houses A, D, and AD act as liminal borders which at the same time link visually and separate physically the interior structures of the Palace with the outside plazas. The platform where the whole complex is located, approximately 9 meters high,

also contributes to this process constituting a visual link and a physical barrier for the whole complex. Andrews noted that in Palace Groups there is no intrinsic hierarchy of importance among the different buildings that form the complex. This is true of the Palace of Palenque, but exceptions are perhaps House E, which served as the throne seat and which had a unique style of decoration, and the Tower which acts as a vertical axis for the complex.<sup>13</sup>

House D is located at the western edge of the complex, and at some point it was connected with House AD. The two vaulted galleries are divided by a solid median wall with only one opening communicating the two at the southern end. This organization of the space, that clearly divides the exterior from the inner gallery, suggests that their function also differed. The inner gallery is more parceled and the resulting spaces could have served as individual rooms with specific function. In contrast, the exterior gallery is a continuous space only broken on one side by the alternation of piers and doorways that form the western facade. This form indicates that this part of the building had no clearly defined function attached to it, although it could have functioned as a corridor connecting access through the exterior galleries of Houses A and AD. In general the Palace of Palenque is characterized by the lack of a defined circulation pattern, which can be the result of a spontaneous accumulation of structures over time, rather than a carefully programmed planing of the complex in one single phase (Andrews 1975).

---

<sup>13</sup> According to Andrews this lack of hierarchy among the different buildings allows to separate this category from the Acropolis Groups, which possess a clear hierarchical demarcation (1975: 59-60).

Although this building compound has been known as a Palace since the early explorations, the implication of its function as the residence of the ruling elites is not supported by the archaeological evidence (Andrews 1975, Nieto Calleja and De la Cruz Paillés 1993, Stuart and Stuart 2008). More likely, this building complex served as a ceremonial and administrative center, where the rulers of Palenque carried out public and private rituals associated with royal accessions, captive display, and ceremonial dancing. From an architectural perspective, Palace type buildings do not differ greatly from temples in their design and decoration (Andrews 1975). This is especially true of the decoration of facades at Palenque, where most temples at the city center shared with the Palace the scheme of rectangular piers adorned with stucco reliefs.

A better understanding of the function of this building complex can be attained when analyzing its design and its relationship with the surrounding built environment. The building is flanked by ceremonial spaces on at least two of its sides. On its northern side House AD is flanked by a large plaza with a ball court, the only one found at Palenque (Fig. 24). This plaza is delimited on its northern side by the Temple of the Count and the buildings of the North Group. The North Group plaza was in constant circulation with the Main Plaza, located at the western side of House D. The Main Plaza is delimited by the Palace, the Temple of the Inscriptions, the Temple of the Red Queen, and Temple XI. These two plazas combined form the largest ceremonial space found in Palenque, and they are linked by a low stairway that articulates the circulation between

the two (López Jiménez 2002). The Palace functions as an architectonic axis that links both spaces visually and physically.

In Mesoamerican architecture plazas are defined as open spaces delimited by buildings and connected through paths and steps (Miller 1999: 23). They conform broadly to four categories: central multifunctional courtyards, ceremonial sunken courtyards, ball courts, and ceremonial plazas with articulated circulation (López Jimenez 2002). Plazas are an essential part of Maya cities and they epitomize the active transformation of nature by humans for social activity. They are usually rectangular in form, and while they can be self-contained, they are often defined by the buildings that surround them. In Maya architecture plazas are public by nature and functioned as focus of community life (Andrews 1975, Miller 1999).

The interconnection of the Palace complex with the plazas constituted an active ceremonial zone within the city, and thus it was the focus of a series of artistic programs and architectural renovations over time. The exterior decoration of the buildings in this area clearly reflect the type of ceremonials that were carried out in the plazas below. A reading of the space in terms of ritual helps understand some of the aspects of the relationship between architecture and decoration of House D. The direct connection of this building with the stairway indicates that both served as a backdrop for performances. The exterior gallery of the building is open but the interior one is more fragmented. It is then possible to assume that the ruler, or other officiants in the ceremonies, could emerge through the doorways from the interior, more restrictive spaces of House D, becoming

visible to the attending population standing in the plaza below. The narrative portrayed on the reliefs served the double purpose of evoking the specific types of ceremonial that took place repeatedly on this space, while at the same time commemorating the rituals and mythical events as they had occurred in the past.

In Mesoamerica historical events were intricately connected to the landscape and past events were constantly being reenacted in the present as a means of perpetuating collective memory (Joyce 2008, Mills and Walker 2008, Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). Byron Hamann describes this process as a cohabitation of people in the present with materials from the past, where the animate nature of ancient things is incorporated into the daily life of Mesoamerican communities (Hamann 2002: 353). In other words, the people from the present, primarily elites, created a continuity between present and past, in the form of revered objects, reenactments of mythical narratives, and in visual representation, in order to demonstrate their divine descent and to legitimize their right to rule. Furthermore, in Classic Maya state ceremonial, an “invocation of divinity consists of stories that liken royal lives to the immutable patterns set by gods . . . not only the notion of remote events and beings, but the continual repetition of such patterns in later times.” (Houston and Stuart 1996). The iconography depicted on the reliefs of House D of the Palace reflects this continual repetition of the ruler as impersonator of exemplary mythological characters associated with the origins of Palenque and of Pakal’s dynasty. By inserting this performative narrative into the architecture, and by making it permanent

in sculptural form, the elite of Palenque attempted to perpetuate their role as heirs and continuators of cyclical history and as overseers of ancestral tradition.

Numerous examples of this correspondence between architectural space, decoration, and ritual can be seen at other Classic Maya sites. For example at the palace complex of Xcalumkín, a Late Classic site in Campeche, dance imagery is situated on doorways, jambs, and columns. The accompanying hieroglyphic texts indicate that the figures portrayed were rulers in the guise of deity impersonators. The position of these dance scenes on the inner jambs follows the outward movement of the rulers/dancers, who would come out from inside the building, passing through the decorated doorways and emerging into the exterior ceremonial plaza (Looper 2009: 173-176). In contrast to Xcalumkín, in House D of the Palace of Palenque the dance imagery is located on the external faces of the piers, not on the inner sides. The implication is that the visibility of the imagery from the plaza is the main purpose of the placement of the reliefs. Rather than just an indication of the way in which rituals were performed, they act as a permanent memorial of the individuals who enacted these rituals and of the ruler's role in the mythical origins of the city.

While the association with public, state orchestrated rituals enacted by the ruler demonstrates one significant aspect of the design and function of this building, another way of looking at it is to consider the kinds of daily rituals in which the building could have been involved. Plazas in Mesoamerica had uses other than large scale performances on special occasions. They were also used as gathering places, markets, and as circulation

paths to move around the city. In this context, even if not directly related to large scale public ceremonial, the building would have still provided a constant reminder to passersby of the kinds of rituals associated with this space and of the divine power of the ruler who commissioned its sculptural program. Architecture alone is a form of commemoration and perpetuation of memory, and with the insertion of iconographical narrative, the facade of House D became an even more effective vehicle in the process of collective remembrance.

#### **4.2 The architectural dynamics of House D**

In order to understand the relationship between the imagery on the reliefs and the performative function of the building, it is relevant to analyze how the form of the building interacts with the viewer choreographing movement through space. During the Late Classic period the Palace of Palenque was no doubt a landmark in the city due to its size, intricate design, and to the splendid decorative program that covered its facade and roof. The centrality of this complex as a reference point in the cityscape of Palenque was later reinforced with the construction of the Tower, a unique occurrence in Maya architecture, and an element that served to highlight the vertical dimension and the visibility of the complex from the distance, helping to establish a clear and perdurable image of the city in the minds of the viewers.<sup>14</sup> Though primarily horizontal in its overall volumetric aspect when compared to other buildings of the site, the Palace also expressed

---

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of landmark buildings as organizing principles in the urban layout and perception of cities see Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*. 1960.

a marked vertical axis through the combination of platform, stairways, and elaborate roof combs. The form and decoration of the Palace then must have communicated to viewers the significance and function of the complex, differentiating it from other buildings of the site such as temples and dwellings.

Successful buildings usually communicate their function through their architectural form, especially to those individuals who participate in the same visual and symbolic language of those who created them. Architectural historians have analyzed how buildings control movement through space and generate emotional responses in the viewers (Arnheim 1977, Bloomer and Moore 1977, Templer, 1992). The peripheral structures of the Palace of Palenque encourage observation from below the platform rather than direct interaction with the building. The imagery on the piers is conceived to be observed from below and their message, encoded in the iconography, transmits primarily the power and divinely sanctioned rule of the elite of Palenque. The stairway acts as a visual link between viewer and building, but at the same time it acts as a physical and psychological barrier that prevents direct access to the upper levels. The interior galleries remain in the shadow while the exterior surfaces, covered in stucco and painted in bright colors, absorb all the attention. This effect reinforces the restricted access of the inner spaces of the Palace, allowing the viewer to concentrate on the messages embedded in the narrative reliefs.

Therefore, in terms of viewership, the architecture and decoration of House D present at the same time an accessible and restrictive experience to the viewer. While the

exterior elements such as the facade, stairway, and plaza were accessible, at least visually, to the majority of the population, the elevation of the complex helped restrict the level of accessibility by physically marginalizing the viewer and encouraging him or her to remain at the ground level. Furthermore, while the external piers were clearly visible, the interior galleries of the building remained in obscurity augmenting the secretive, restrictive quality of the interior spaces of the Palace. The presence of holes around the doorways indicates that the building could be covered with curtains, which would be drawn to limit access both visually and physically into the interior cubicles.

### *Reading the iconography*

The narrative scenes portrayed on the reliefs are for the most part clearly legible from the base of the stairway. The peak of this visual experience is reached in the late afternoon when the sun light hits the western facade directly, creating a powerful contrast between light and shadow and bringing the imagery to the fore with particular expressive force (Fig. 25) A viewer approaching from the distance would have seen the whole complex established as a landmark in the landscape. When approaching closer, the direct interaction with the building would have been obstructed by the elevated platform and the monumental stairway. This however, would have encouraged a closer examination of the piers' iconography, painted in bright colors and highlighted against the shadowy hollows of the doorways that punctuated the facade.

This position of the viewer at the base of the stairway allows for a reading of the iconography that goes beyond a strict left to right reading order. While analyzed in isolation the scenes portrayed might suggest a particular reading order, whether left to right (Baudez 1992, Miller 1981), or from the outside to the center (Looper 2009). However, when seen in the architectural context, the visualization of the piers from the base of the platform encourages the contemplation of all scenes simultaneously and allows the viewer to selectively concentrate on one or several piers in no particular order. This experience would have been slightly different for the literate viewer, who would have followed the left to right reading order of the hieroglyphic text inscribed on the first and last piers, and thus would have read the iconography following the same direction (see Chapter 3). This way, the sculptural program of the building, where image and text combined, encouraged multiple readings of the iconography depending on the viewer's social standing and his or her level of familiarity with the script and with the visual language that governed the art. The same pattern would have applied to the rest of the decorated piers at the Palace and elsewhere in Palenque, especially on those that adorned buildings' facades.

This combination of stuccoed piers and doorways on building facades is one of the main elements employed in architectural decoration, and forms a genre of architectural iconography that is unique of Palenque. On House D the shaping effect of light and shadow combine with the geometry of the building and with the ideology expressed in the iconography. The piers become then the only truly visible aspect of the

building, and the viewer has no choice but to concentrate on the iconographic scheme. In the fashion of ancient Greco-Roman theater *scanae frons*, this building effectively employed a combination of architectural and sculptural elements that together with the monumental stairway, provided an architectural setting for the performance of the mythical history of Palenque. Through this process, Pakal and his successors reinforced their royal divinity through the visual representation of myth, and through an effective articulation of architecture and ritual.

*Three aspects of stairs: visual, dynamic, and symbolic*

I will now analyze in some detail the monumental stairway that links House D with the Main Plaza, since this constitutes the principal connective element in the interaction between imagery and performance at the Palace (Fig 26). The stairway provides access to the Palace and was built in three sections of nine steps each with two landings in between, for a total of twenty seven steps. Eighty percent of the original steps were found in situ, allowing a reconstruction of the staircase during archaeological works in 1967 (Acosta 1968).

In general, stairs are an important architectural element in pre-Columbian America, as evidenced in the architectural corpus of sites such as Monte Alban, Teotihuacan, and Machu Pichu, where a multitude of stairs constitute the fundamental building blocks of the overall built landscape (Templer 1992). They are also a dynamic element that serves to choreograph movement through space and are thus intricately

connected to ritual and performance (Bloomer and Moore 1977, Templer 1992). From a more functional perspective, steps were also an important architectonic element that physically linked different spaces such as plazas, building complexes, and platforms (Miller 1999: 23). This is evident in the Palace and the surrounding plazas at Palenque, where small steps separate the Main and the North Group Plazas (Fig. 24).

As in many examples of Mesoamerican architecture, the monumental stairway that flanks House D on its western side plays an active role in the experience of the building as a whole. Templer notes that “stairs engage the user’s motions and their senses . . . perhaps more than any other architectural element.” (1992: 23). At times the design of stairs define their use, and this is seen in the proportional relationship between treads and risers. In Mesoamerican architecture this relationship is often disproportionate, especially in monumental and temple architecture where treads tend to be short and risers high. The stairs serve to both mediate and to limit access to buildings, especially those which have a sacred connotation such as temples. This is true of House D, where ascent requires considerable effort due to the high riser/short tread ratio.

In some cases, stairs become symbolic and lose their functional quality. For example the non-functional stairs that decorate building facades in sites such as Rio Bec and Xpuhil in the central Yucatán peninsula become pure decorative elements that evoke the vertical dimension and the architectural symbolism of temples (Fig. 27). They become a *pars pro toto* representation of monumental sacred architecture and, as these

examples demonstrate, their role as essential elements in a typically Mesoamerican architectural iconography was already recognized and articulated in ancient times.

Furthermore, stairs play a role in the transmission of ideological concerns and aesthetic ideals. For example in Maya architecture, stairs are often more than formal elements and become literal canvases to transmit information about dynastic lineage, conquest, and war. The most prominent example of this is the Hieroglyphic Stairway at Copán, a monumental stairway that serves as the backdrop for a lengthy inscription that references historical events and important characters of the Copán dynasty (Fash et al. 1992).

In Palenque, stairs are also often direct message bearers. In House C of the Palace the hieroglyphic stair contains a short but detailed inscription that announces the capture of prisoners from the neighboring enemy city of Santa Elena (Fig. 28). This short text covers both treads and risers of the small stairway reading almost like a codex book (Julia Guernsey, personal communication, February 2012), and its message is intricately connected to the overall theme of military prowess that characterizes the decoration of the northeast court of the Palace.

Another example in the Palace are the six small panels known as the *Tableritos* (Fig. 29). These were originally arranged in pairs on the inner walls of the three access stairways that connect the Subterráneos with Houses E, H, and K (Fig. 1). The six panels form a single inscription that describes the construction and dedication of the Subterráneos (Berlin 1970). The association of this dedicatory text with the three access

stairwells that ascend from the subterranean galleries to the upper levels of the Palace, highlights their connection with the performative aspects of this section of the Palace. As previously noted, the subterraneans were seen as a symbolic manifestation of the primordial watery underworld, and these stairs probably offered an opportunity for a dramatic appearance of the ruler from this mythical realm into the upper levels of the Palace during performances (Baudez 1996). While here the text is not inscribed directly on the steps, the association of the text with this architectonic element indicates that the reading was in some way connected with the direction of the movement encouraged by the stairs, and that both shared a functional and ideological purpose.

Also in the Palace, but at a later date, the steps that lead to the Tower contained a small inscription, the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs, flanked by two panels that depict human figures, the Tablet of the Orator and the Tablet of the Scribe (Fig. 30). The two human figures are portrayed addressing the individual who presumably stood in the space in between, either standing on the small steps or sitting on a throne (Houston and Stuart 1998: 88). Besides the fact that the text is incorporated into the steps, there is also a compositional correspondence with the facade of House D, in that we see a section of text flanked by two figural planes. Here, the symmetry is reversed when compared to House D, with the text occupying the central position and the figures serving as a frame. But again, the combination of text and image in a symmetrical composition demonstrates that this form was established as an important visual tradition that probably originated under the rule of Pakal but which was continued by his successors until the demise of the city.

At a more symbolic level, stairs acted also as cosmological maps connected with myth and calendrics. In the Temple of the Inscriptions, the nine levels of the platform that supports the stairway and the upper temple structure correspond to the nine levels of the underworld as described in the Maya creation myth the Popol Vuh (Aveni 2004, Miller 1999). Stairs bear cosmological and calendric connotations also at Chichén Itza, where the monument known as El Castillo is a quadrilateral stepped pyramid, raised on a nine-level platform and accessed by four stairways whose total number of steps is 365, a clear reference to the solar year used by the Maya (Aveni 2004: 129).

As aesthetic elements, stairs also participated in the decorative programs of buildings. In the Palace of Palenque, excavations of the the earlier phases of House AD revealed large stucco masks, glyphic motifs, and other figural elements in the *taludes* and *alfardas* than flanked the monumental stairway (Fig. 12) (Fernandez in García Moll 1985, Tovalín Ahumada and López Bravo 2001). Using these examples as reference it is possible to assert that the monumental stairway that faces House D had originally some sort of sculptural decoration in its body or runners, participating in this way in the overall external appearance of the complex. In the later phases of construction, the middle sections of the stairways of both Houses D and AD, contained rectangular niches aligned with round altars located on the plazas below, further indicating their participation in religious rituals that involved both spaces (Tovalín Ahumada and López Bravo 2001).

Thanks to this incorporation of the building and plaza into the ceremonial life of the city, the monumental stairway also acquires a theatrical dimension. During official

performances orchestrated by the rulers, part of the spectacle was to see the priests and/or rulers ascend the stairs. In this context, and as suggested by the form and the dynamic qualities of the stairs, the stairway became a stage, and “the act of climbing becomes ritually significant” (Templer 1992: 38). On House D of the Palace, this theatrical aspect is further reinforced by the iconography of the stucco piers, where the depiction of dancing and ritual decapitation, seems to reproduce the actual performances that regularly took place in this particular location.<sup>15</sup>

From a more pragmatic point of view, the monumental stairway is one of the utmost symbols of political power and authority expressed in architectural form. The ruler’s capacity to mobilize great amounts of resources and personnel is evidenced in the magnificent architectural and engineering programs exhibited by cities during the Classic period. In Templer’s words, “. . . wherever autocratic power is exerted over large building complexes, there flourishes the monumental stair as an immediate exhibition of the puissance of the king, the empire, the state, and latterly the corporation and institution.” (1992: 47). In House D of the Palace, the stairs and the imagery on the piers are part of the overall display of political power and dynastic legitimacy promoted by Pakal and his successors as part of their program of self-representation as active renovators of the city.

### *Piers as decoration*

---

<sup>15</sup> For a full discussion of architecture as a backdrop for dance and ritual see Looper 2009: 151-188.

The use of rectangular piers decorated with stucco sculpture is one of the defining aspects of the art of Palenque. The tradition of stucco modeling at this site, more widely used and more artistically accomplished than at any other Maya center, reveals an interest in highlighting the decoration of small but well designed buildings, rather than an emphasis in grander monumental architecture. In Andrews' words, the stucco represented a “. . . most flexible and expressive means available for adding a further touch of refinement to the small-scale buildings which depend on gracefulness rather than monumentality for their impact.” (1975: 173). This form was widely used in various buildings at Palenque, and it is especially noticeable at the Palace and at nearby buildings such as the Temple of the Inscriptions and the temples of the Cross Group.

Therefore, these rectangular piers served a purpose that went beyond their role as structural architectural elements. Their form allowed them to become a sort of flat canvas, an ideal medium for the communication of ideology. Like murals and stelae, two of the most widely spread artistic media in Maya art, the piers communicated historical, mythological, and dynastic narratives. Unlike wall painting, also frequently used at Palenque, the stucco allowed for the incorporation of three dimensional forms, increasing the dynamic quality of the reliefs. In contrast to stelae, the piers were not freestanding, but were instead attached to the buildings, and thus intricately related to the architectural form. In the buildings of Palenque, the rectangular pier substitutes the tradition of erecting stela and altar pairs in front of buildings that is prevalent in other Maya sites, becoming the principal medium of visual communication of religious and political

discourse. In the case of House D of the Palace, this dynamic interplay between architecture and decoration allows for a dual experience that involves static contemplation of the reliefs and active participation in the architectural space, enabling a constant commemoration of performances linked to the Palace and the plazas.

The architectural form of House D is part of the overall system of visual representation that characterizes the art of Palenque, and which was guided by ideologic and aesthetic principles similar to those that belonged to other art forms. While in this thesis I concentrate on the sculptural program that covers the piers of House D, it is important to note that most buildings of the Palace were covered with some sort of decoration, including paint, stucco, or carving. The roof was decorated with elaborate roof combs, the sloping eaves were covered with large stucco masks, and the *taludes* and *alfardas* of stairways were also richly adorned. As a whole, the Palace offered a complex visual experience that helped situate it as a powerful landmark in the cityscape of Palenque.

#### **4.3 Patronage and political legitimation through myth**

Another productive way of analyzing the relationship between architectural decoration and ritual space is by exploring issues of patronage and audience for the monument. As seen previously, according to the epigraphic evidence the patron of this building and the accompanying reliefs was K'inich Janab Pakal. Starting in the 650s, Pakal initiated a period of renovations and new constructions in Palenque, and the Palace,

together with the Temple of the Inscriptions, was the centerpiece of this program. These renovations, which were later continued and expanded by his successors, are the ultimate expression of Pakal's political and dynastic propaganda in architectural form. The representations of Pakal as an enactor of mythical narrative of dance and sacrifice in the piers of House D situates him in a continuum with the mythical origins of the city and of the Palenque dynasty, and reinforces his role as a powerful conqueror and as a legitimate ruler.

These two aspects of Pakal's political discourse, military might and dynastic legitimacy, were highlighted in the decorative program of the Palace during this process of architectural renovation. On the one hand, he celebrated his military exploits that led him to solidify his rule over several nearby polities of the area (Baudez and Mathews 1978). This is especially evident in the northeast section of the Palace, where the art references primarily the theme of conquest and the taking of war captives. The iconography and texts of House C, including the aforementioned hieroglyphic stairway, deal primarily with this military subject. On the piers of House D, the theme of military capture and sacrifice is depicted conspicuously on Piers B and F, which portray the ruler in the act of submitting and decapitating a captive.

In general, the piers of House D seem to emphasize the rhetoric of dynastic legitimation through mythical narrative. These process of viewing the present as a repetition of past history is a principal trope in Mesoamerican thought and more generally is a frequent form of expression of political power by ruling elites in complex societies.

For example, in Postclassic Central Mexico the Aztec rulers claimed direct descent from the Toltecs, a northern group seen as culturally superior, in order to legitimize their recent rise to power. The Aztec also revered as sacred the ruins of the great Early Classic city of Teotihuacan, which they used as an important pilgrimage site connected to their creation myths (López Luján 2002). This preoccupation with the cyclical repetition of the past is seen in several inscriptions throughout Palenque. Later rulers such as K'inich Kan Bahlam and K'inich K'an Joy Chitam emphasized their identity as direct descendants of Pakal, who shortly after his death was seen as a divine ruler of mythical proportions. This is particularly evident in texts from the Palace, such as the Palace Tablet and the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs.

A different side of this process of communication through visual representation is revealed when analyzed from the point of view of the intended recipients of these images. While the patronage for the reliefs is easy to establish thanks to the abundance of epigraphic evidence and artistic comparanda, the identity of the intended audience for these reliefs, and for monumental art at Palenque in general, is harder to identify. One way of addressing this issue is by asking who had access to these plazas and in what circumstances? As previously discussed, the Palace is connected physically and visually to the Main Plaza and to the North Group Plaza. The form and layout of these plazas seems to justify their characterization as open, public spaces, dedicated to both carefully orchestrated state rituals, as well as daily activities such as markets and circulation paths (Miller 1999). Due to the public nature of these spaces, it is possible to assert that the

decoration of the facade of the peripheral buildings of the Palace was intended for communicating messages to the general population who would gather in these plazas during appointed occasions, or who would simply circulate through the space.

A viewer approaching the plaza from the southern or northern edges would first notice the size and elegance of the building identifying it as a landmark because of its elevated position, bright colored decoration, and elaborate roof combs. The staircase, occupying half of the total volume of the space, would have indicated the status of the building as a monumental structure associated with a ceremonial function, whether religious, political, or a combination of the two. Coming closer the viewer would have then perceived the piers' imagery inviting closer examination of their iconography. As previously noted, the effect of light and shadow would have been especially dramatic during the late afternoon, which suggests that the most important public spectacles took place during these hours. During ceremonial performances the imagery provided a backdrop for the actors, allowing the common viewer to compare the attire and choreography of the ritual with those depicted on the reliefs.

Even if the viewer was a member of the lower classes and had no precise knowledge of mythical history, he or she could still engage with the imagery by concentrating on the intricate designs and recognizing some of the animal and plant motifs depicted. The human figures represented on the reliefs would also cause an impression on the viewer thanks to their elaborate vestments and headgear, their imposing stature (larger than life size), and their gracile dance moves. The dignified body

language and the themes of dominance and sacrifice would have resonated with the common viewer instigating a sense of reverence, and even perhaps a hint of disdain or resistance for this excessive display of royal pomp.

A member of the court or the royal family, on the other hand, would have most likely recognized the portraits of his ancestor or relative, and would have surely been able to identify the episodes of the mythical narrative aided by the hieroglyphic inscriptions. He would have felt pride and rejoice in the accomplishments of his kinsmen as military leaders and statesmen, and, most especially, would have participated in the shared prestige attained by the creation of the magnificent reliefs, which served to perpetuate the family's name for posterity.

#### **4.4 Conclusions.**

The reliefs on the piers of House D are intricately connected with the design of the building and they must be analyzed in this architectural context. In combination, architecture and decoration functioned as a vehicle for the perpetuation of memory through their incorporation into ritual performances. The building's dynamic qualities encourage the observation and interaction with the reliefs in a sophisticated way that at the same time celebrates the divine nature of the ruler, while ensuring the maintenance of the social order. The idea of perpetuation of memory is persistent in the art of Palenque where texts and imagery constantly remind the viewer of the earthly achievements and divine nature of the rulers. The Palace, as the seat of the throne and the heart of the civic-

ceremonial life of the city, is perhaps the most dramatic case of this phenomenon.

However, in later times, the use of decorated piers in building's facades was replicated in other parts of the city, as seen in the Temple of the Inscriptions, Pakal's funerary chamber completed by his son K'inich Kan Bahlam. This format seemed appropriate for the communication of the permanence and divinity of the ruler, and was thus maintained and elaborated by successive generations of builders.

## **Conclusions and directions for future research**

In this thesis I have demonstrated how the stucco piers of House D of the Palace of Palenque acted as repositories and activators of collective memory and performance. I began by exploring the architectural and artistic characteristics of Palenque, which make this city unique when compared to other Maya sites. Using archaeological data, I indicated a possible construction chronology for the buildings in the Palace. I also established the basic notions of the Palenque history and mythology, reconstructed primarily through the abundant corpus of hieroglyphic inscriptions available at the site. I then addressed the history of research on the piers of House D to examine some of the previous interpretations of its imagery.

My exploration of the imagery on these piers was based primarily on an iconographic analysis combined with a phenomenological reading of the architecture and the surrounding space. Using the format of rectangular piers covered in stucco decoration, the facade of House D portrays the ruler K'inich Janab Pakal as enactor of a ritual dance in a watery environment. The narrative on the reliefs presents elements of myth and history in combination, expressed through a sequence of events that include statements of capture, investment of power attributes, ceremonial dance in the surface of the Underwaterworld, and ritual decapitation. The imagery suggests a reading order that varies according to the viewer's level of familiarity with the mythological events depicted and with the hieroglyphic system; the events can be "read" in sequential manner

following the script, or in a simultaneous fashion following no particular order. The episodes narrated take place in five distinct watery locations, indicated clearly in the ground lines and in a fundamentally sacred dimension, as suggested by the glyphic frames. These scenes perhaps also occurred at five different times periods.

By addressing the imagery on the reliefs in close interaction with its original physical context, I demonstrated how the building itself, through its architectural design exerts a powerful dynamic influence over the viewer, choreographing movement through space. The principal architectonic elements that facilitate this process are the monumental stairway, the alternation of solids and hollows in the facade, and the stucco decoration of the piers with highly visible, large scale imagery. Moreover, the location of the reliefs, in a constant physical and visual dialogue with the Main Plaza, indicates that the elements on the facade of the building were an active scenario for the public performances that took place in the plaza and in the monumental stairway. The role of the imagery in these instances was to reflect, as well as to perpetuate, the form and the content of those rituals, which most likely incorporated the body of the ruler as enactor of mythology linked to the origins of the city.

This synoptic analysis of the iconography of House D that considers iconographic, topographical, and spatial considerations, serves as a model for the study of decorative programs in later buildings of Palenque, which obviously mimic the format of rectangular stuccoed piers employed at the Palace. The reliefs of House D present many of the defining characteristics of the art of Palenque in general, most notably the use of

bilateral symmetry, the dynamic interplay of image and text, and the amalgamation of myth and history as part of dynastic discourse. The early appearance of this visual language in House D of the Palace suggests a connection with the establishment of Pakal as initiator of a new ruling dynasty. The prevailing use of these characteristics across different media, such as stuccoed piers and carved panels, turns these formal elements into much more than an aesthetic choice, becoming a fundamental aspect of Palenque ideology. Understanding the role of these elements in the architectural decoration of the site that can add significant depth to our understanding of ancient Maya thought.

While explored only briefly in this study, one aspect of the art of Palenque that requires further investigation is the relationship between the stuccoed piers and the smaller size carved panels that ornate buildings at the site. There are several elements that suggest a clear visual correspondence between these media: 1) the strong bilateral symmetry that governs their composition, 2) the active dialogue between image and text, and 3) the ratio and disposition of text and image in relation to their placement in alternating public and private spaces. These questions should be answered from an art historical perspective that considers the pictorial quality of the hieroglyphic texts, the connection with the iconography, and the architectural setting for these works.

Another issue that warrants further research is the precise identification of the different kinds of water portrayed on each relief and the connection of these with the surrounding environment. This can be done through a comparative study that incorporates instances of water iconography in architectural decoration at other structures

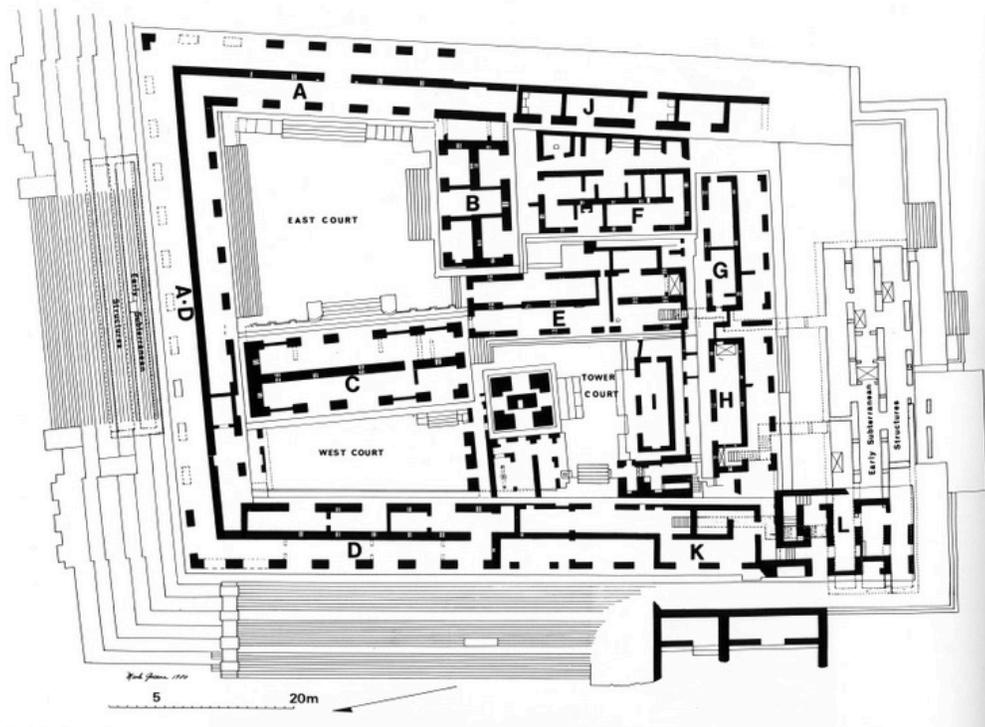
of Palenque, including the various hydraulic features of the site such as the aqueducts. Furthermore, an epigraphic analysis of references to water-related places in the hieroglyphic record could help clarify the cryptic but hardly coincidental sophistication of the watery environments represented on the ground lines of the piers of House D.

The Palace of Palenque, together with the Temple of the Inscriptions, is the ultimate monument to the life and achievements of Pakal. It is not a coincidence that both buildings are in close proximity and together they form the Main Plaza, the most important ceremonial space within the city, at least during the time of his reign. The imagery on the facade of House D, and the rest of the Palace's peripheral buildings, serves to commemorate the deeds of Pakal in life: his military victories, his role as administrator, and his participation in the ritual life of the city. In contrast, the Temple of the Inscriptions celebrates his death and resurrection. The imagery on the piers of House D participate also in this rhetoric of resurrection, though in a more subtle manner. Their incorporation into the performances of the Plaza perpetuates the memory of Pakal through the cyclical repetition of the rituals portrayed. While his image as legitimate, powerful ruler ensures the preservation of his memory for posterity, his mythical persona extends his legacy backwards in time, fusing his family history with that of the city itself.

For more than two hundred years the art of Palenque has marveled casual visitors and scholars thanks to the harmonious marriage of the architecture with the exuberant ecosystem, and to the close proximity of the figures to our Western conceptions of beauty and refinement. However when understood as part of the historical and ideological

system that produced the reliefs, the piers of House D reveal much more than an exotic past culture, or a aesthetic canon that we can equal to our own. They express the mentality of the ancient inhabitants of Palenque, and the rich communication that existed between the elite and the common people through the mediation of monumental art. The reliefs of House D stubbornly resist the passage of time and proudly exhibit their ancestral figures to the fascinated visitors who, in their attempts at deciphering their mysterious messages, still after many centuries participate in the perpetuation of their eternal legacy.

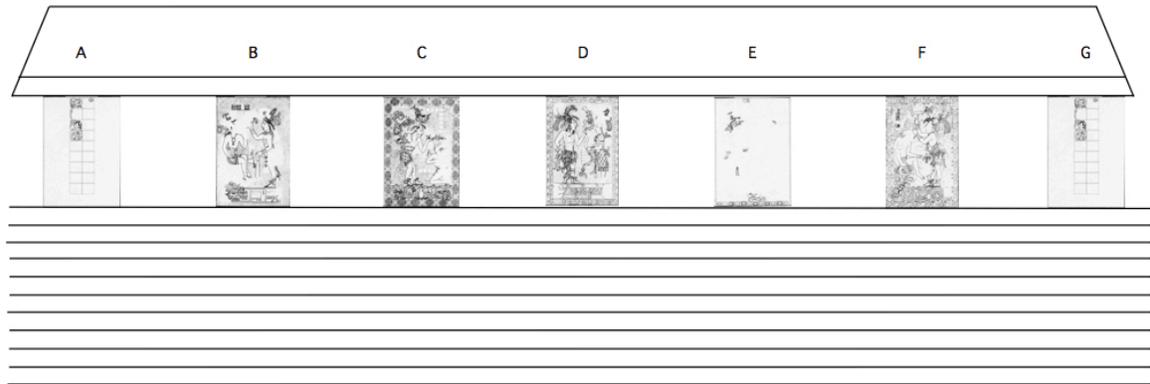
## Figures



**Fig. 1** Map of the Palace of Palenque. After Robertson (1985: Fig. 9)



**Fig. 2** House D of the Palace of Palenque. Photo by the author.



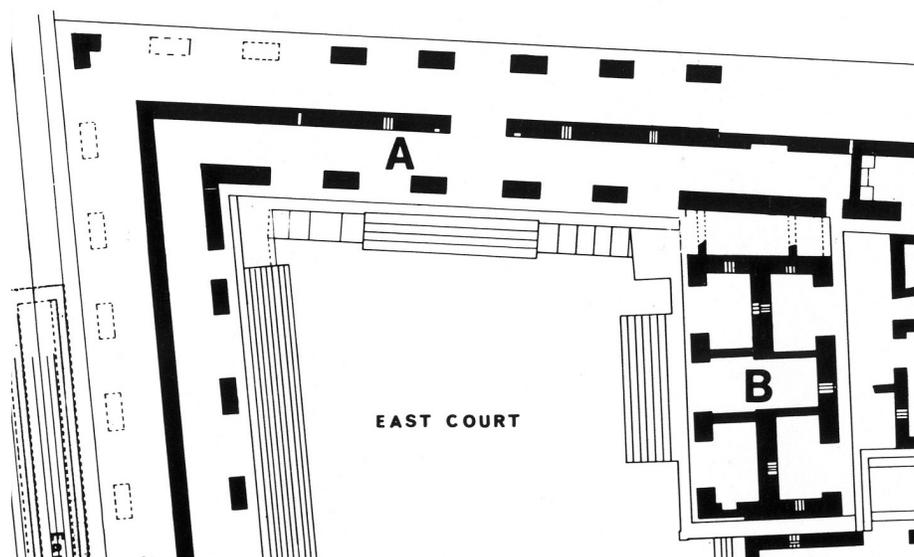
**Fig. 3** Hose D Piers, schematic reconstruction.



**Fig. 4** House D, Pier F. Digital reconstruction by Bruno Rodríguez. Photograph by Merle Greene Robertson.



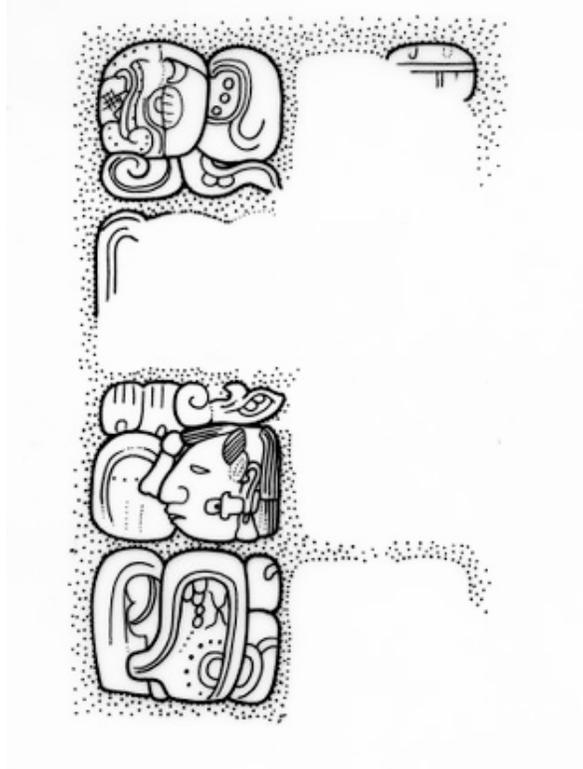
**Fig. 5** Palace of Palenque, *Ik'* window. Photo by the author.



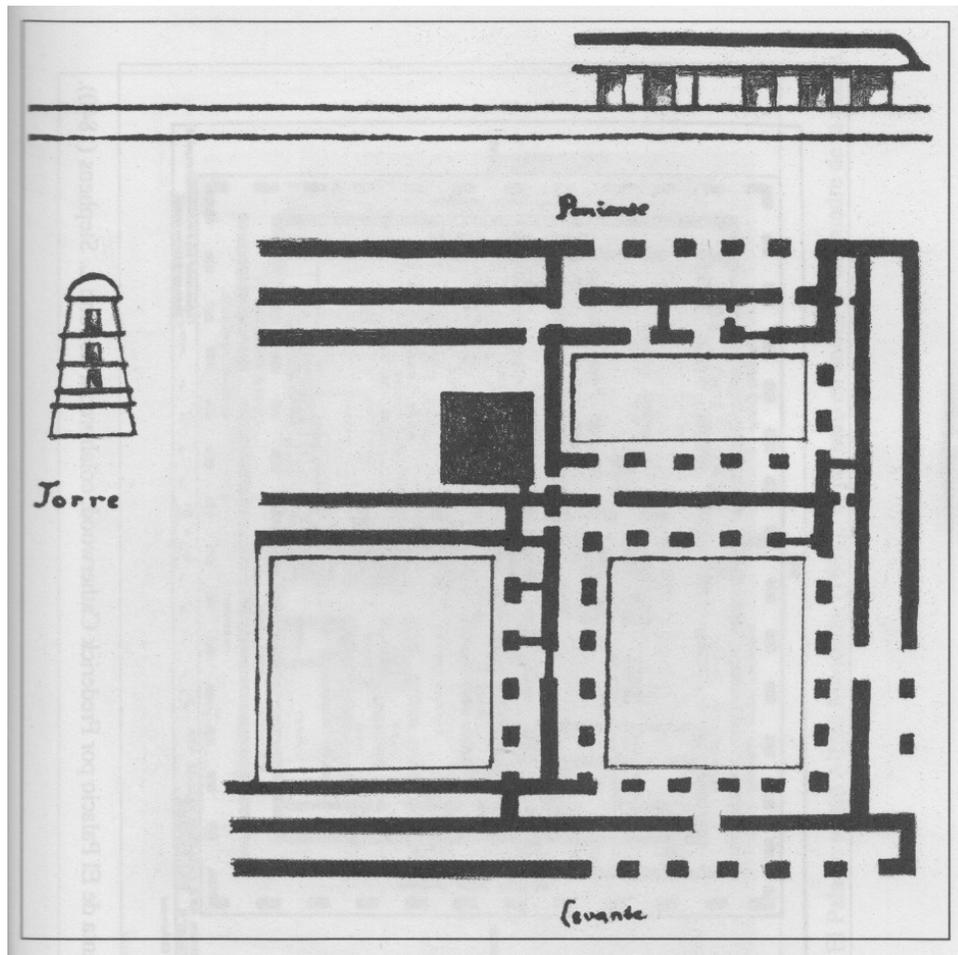
**Fig. 6** House A of the Palace, detail of central doorways. After Robertson (1985: Fig. 9)



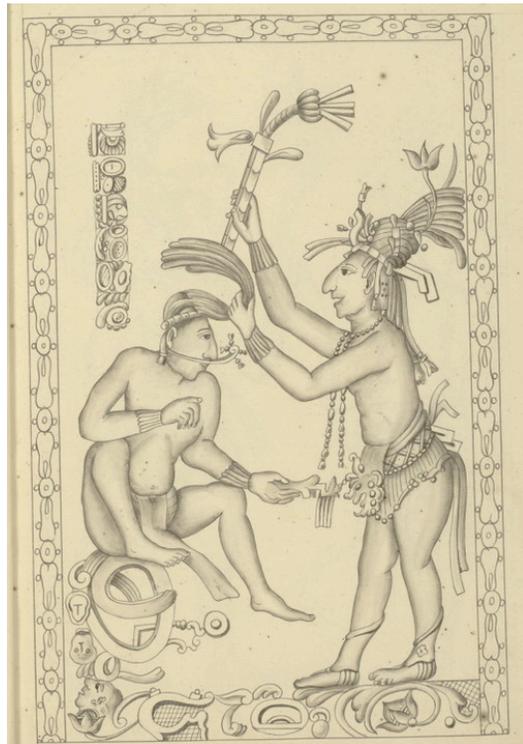
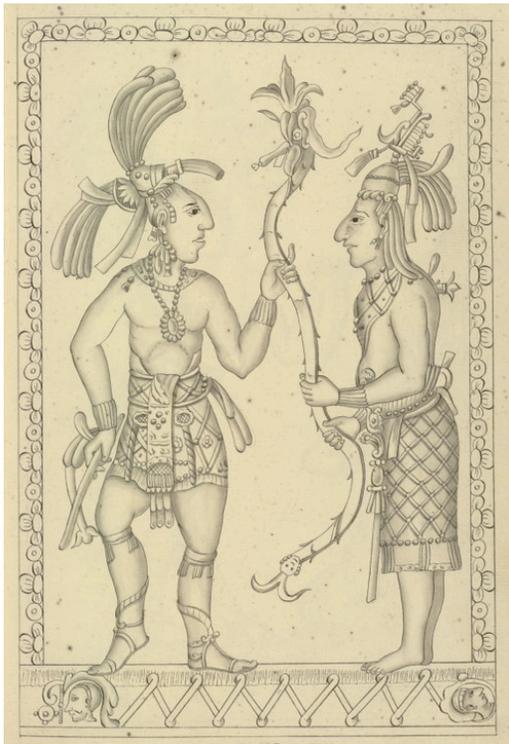
**Fig. 7** Palenque, emblem glyph. After Coe (2001: 70)



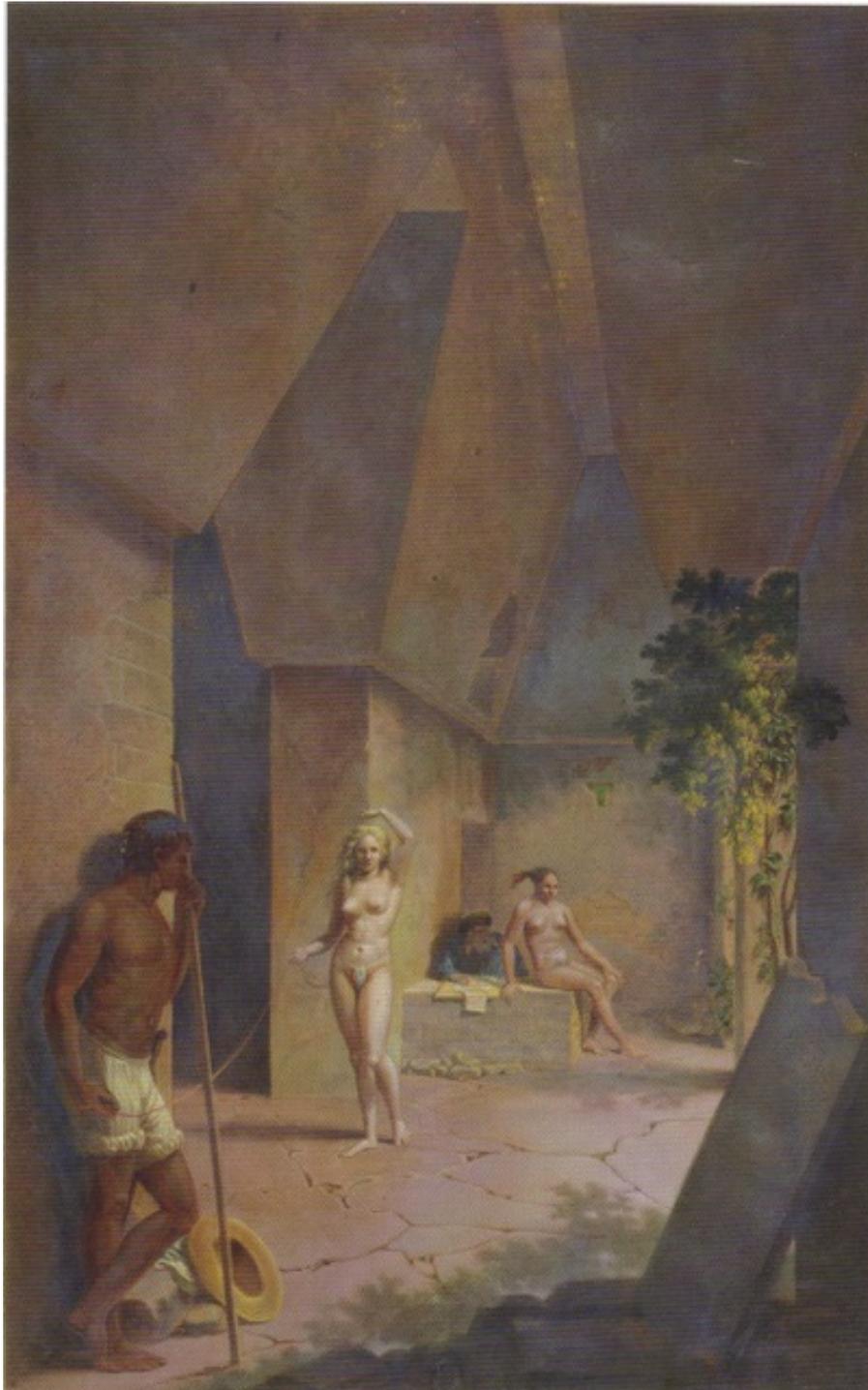
**Fig. 8** Detail of the inscription on Pier G. Drawing courtesy of David Stuart.



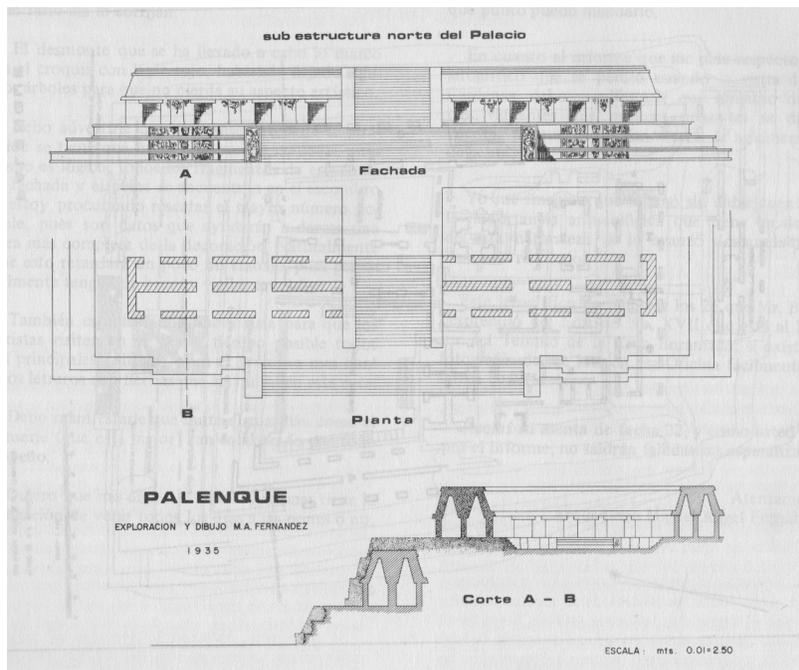
**Fig. 9** Map of the Palace by Architect Antonio Bernasconi. After Navarrete (2000: Fig. 5).



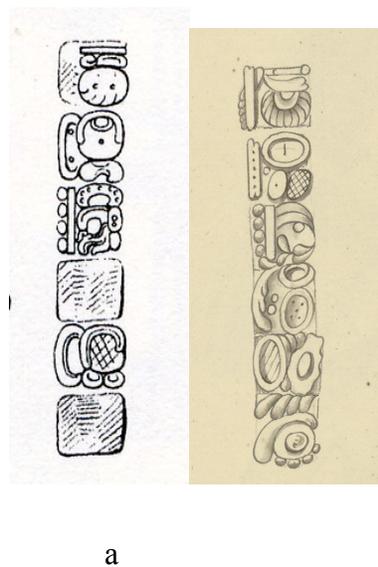
**Fig. 10.** House D Piers. Drawings by Ricardo Almendáriz. After Library of Congress Digital Collections



**Fig. 11** Jean-Frédéric Waldeck, *Ariadne and Theseus inside the Temple of the Sun at Palenque*. After Pasztory (2010: Plate 51)



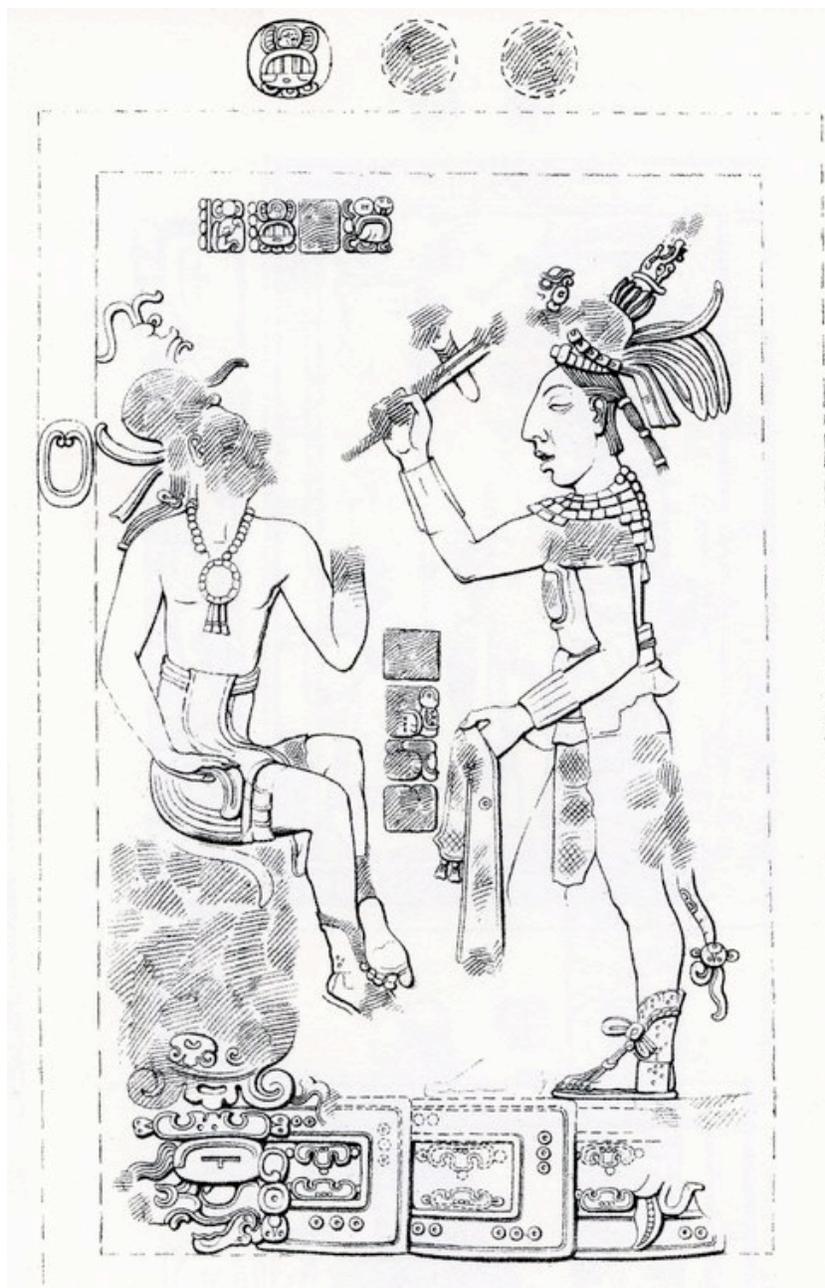
**Fig. 12** House AD of the Palace, reconstruction by Miguel Angel Fernández. After García Moll (1985: 101)



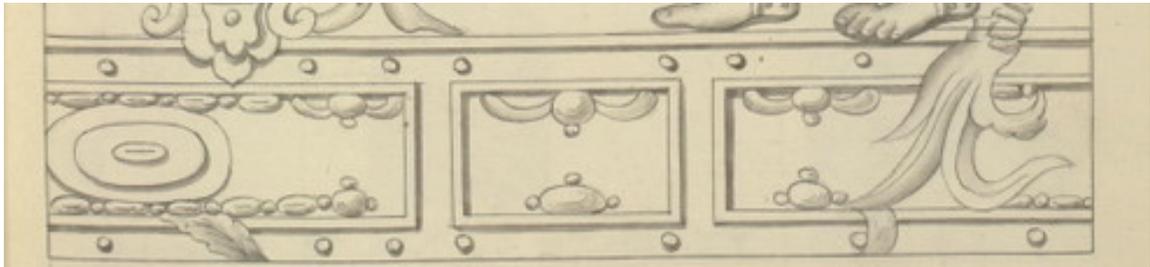
**Fig. 13** Detail of secondary text on Pier F. a) Drawing by Almendáriz. b) Drawing by Annie Hunter based on Alfred P. Maudslay's photograph.



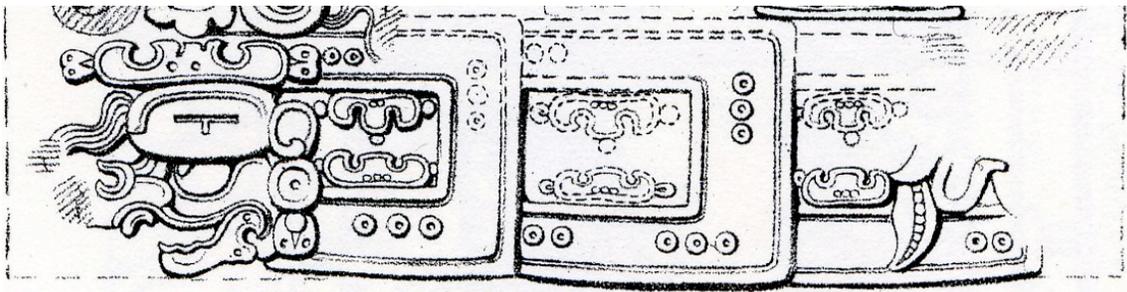
**Fig. 14a** Pier B. Photo by the author



**Fig. 14b** Pier B. Drawing by Annie Hunter based on Alfred P. Maudslays's photograph.  
After Kubler (1969: Fig. 33)



a



b

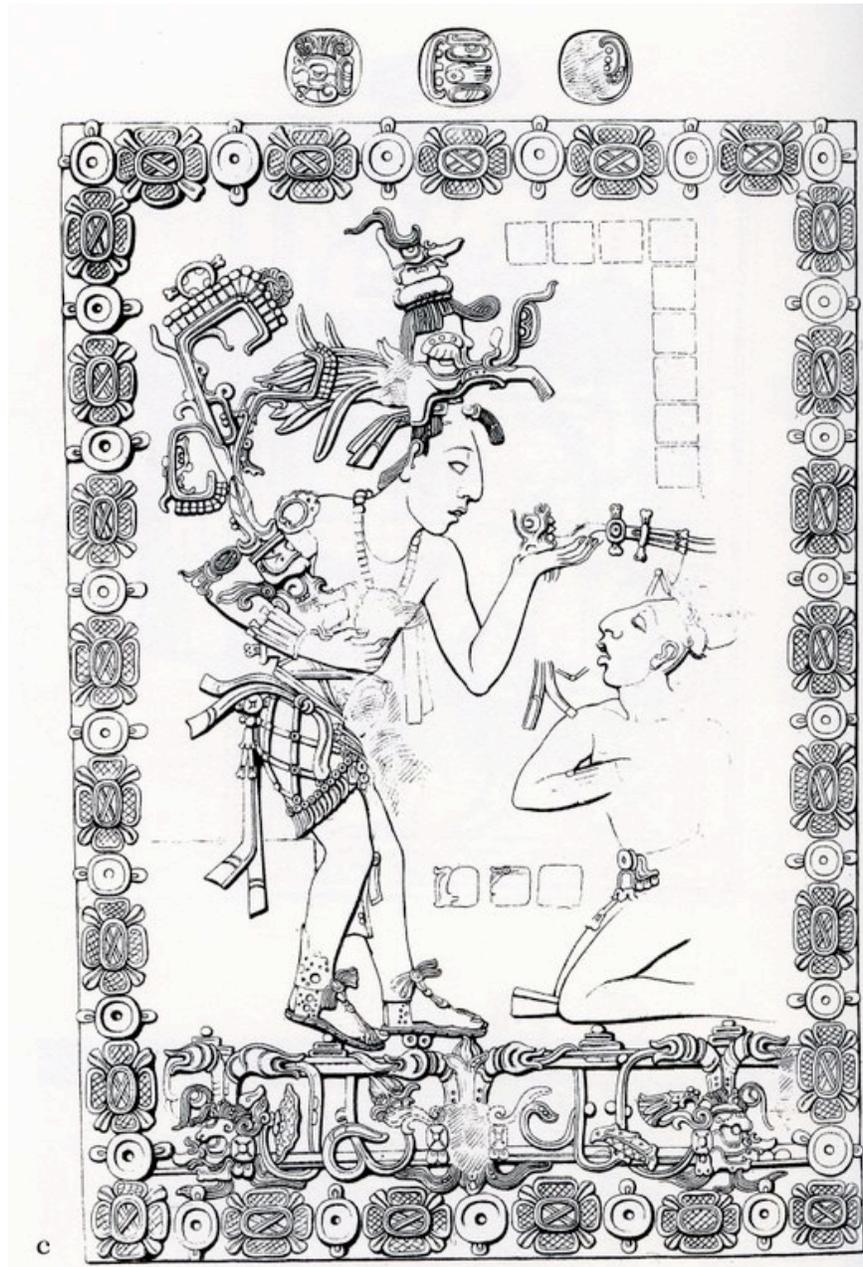


c

**Fig. 15** a) Ground line detail of Pier B. a) Drawing by Almendáriz. b) Drawing by Annie Hunter. c) Detail as it appears today. Photo by the author



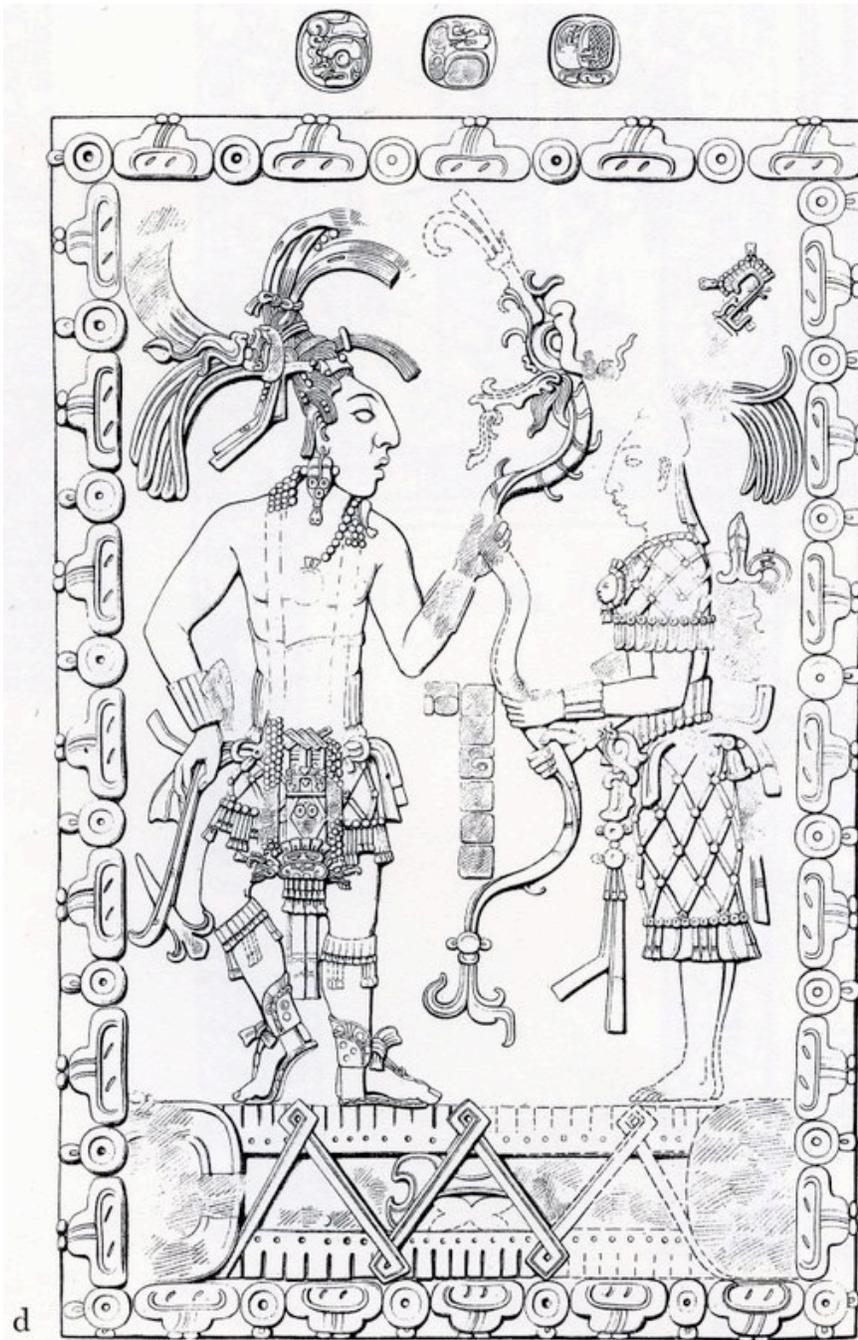
**Fig. 16a** Pier C. Photo by the author



**Fig. 16b** Pier C. Drawing by Annie Hunter based on Alfred P. Maudslays's photograph.  
After Kubler (1969: Fig. 33)



**Fig. 17a** Pier D. Photo by the author



**Fig. 17b** Pier D. Drawing by Annie Hunter based on Alfred P. Maudslays's photograph.  
After Kubler (1969: Fig. 33)



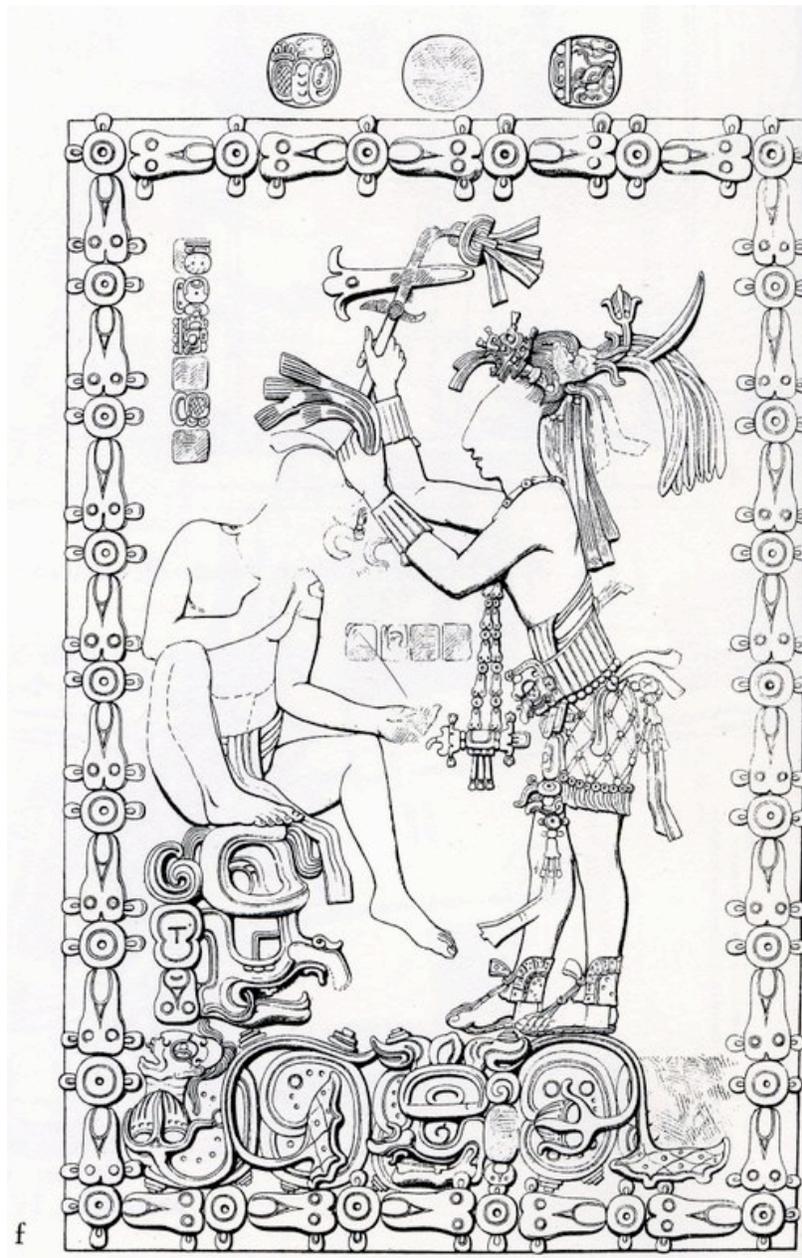
**Fig. 18** Pier D detail. Drawing by Ricardo Almendáriz. After Library of Congress Digital Collections



**Fig. 19** Detail of Pier E, frame and ground line. Photo by the author



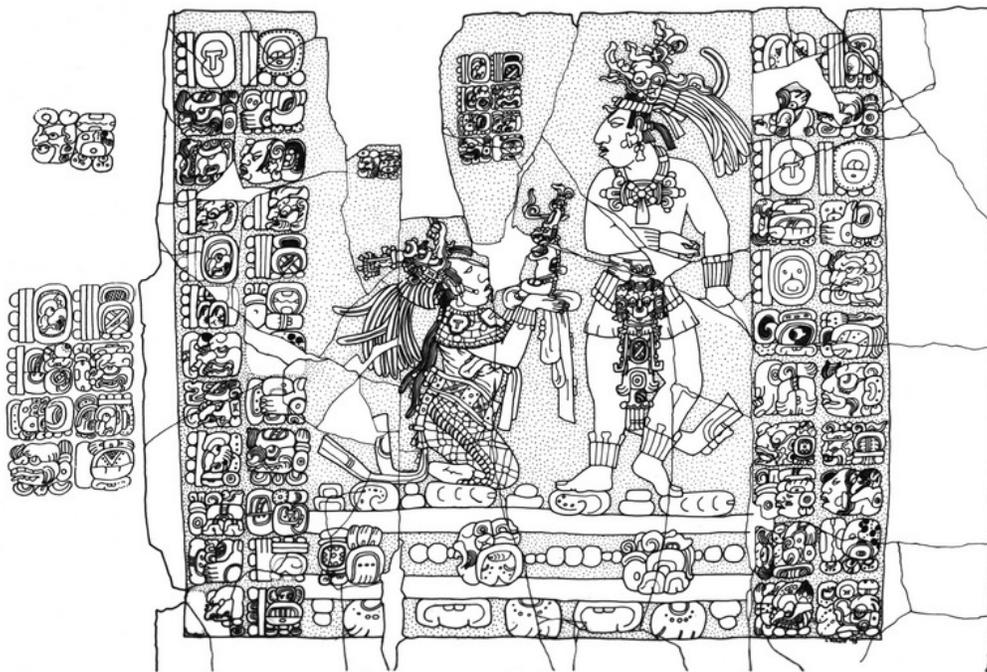
**Fig. 20a** Pier F. Photo by the author



**Fig. 20b** Pier F. Drawing by Annie Hunter based on Alfred P. Maudslays's photograph.  
After Kubler (1969: Fig. 33)



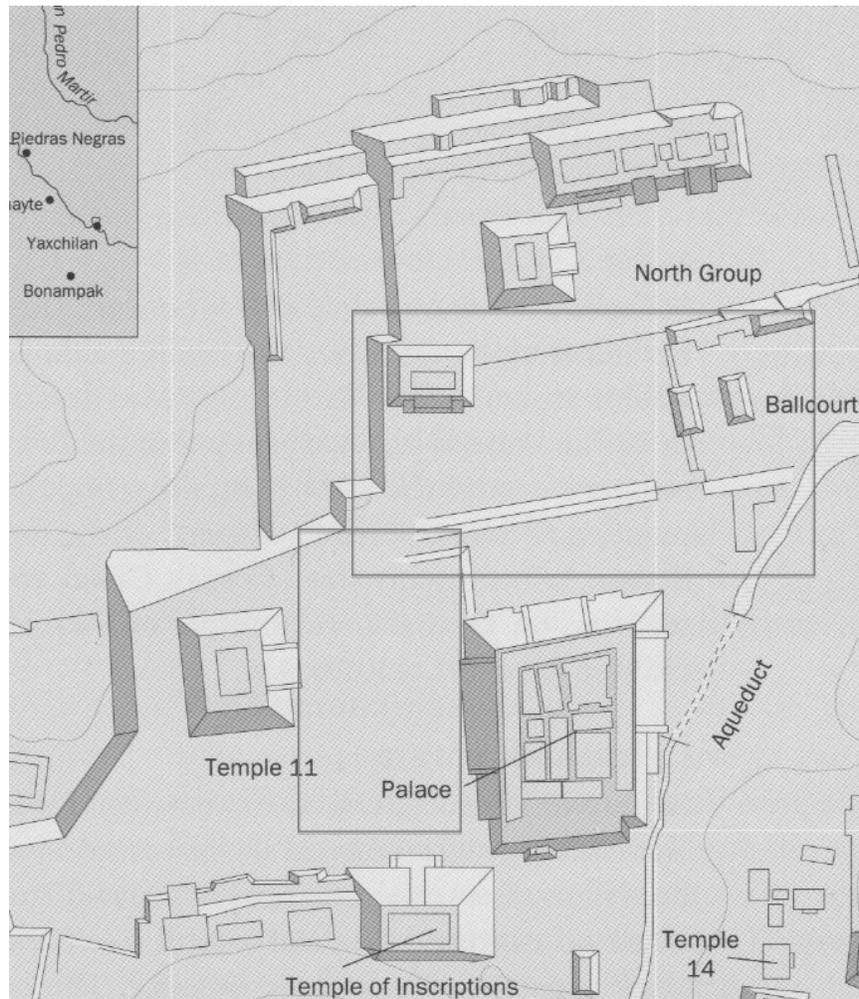
**Fig. 21** House A, Pier E. Photo by the author



**Fig. 22** Tablet of Temple XIV. Drawing by Linda Schele. After [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org)



**Fig. 23** Dumbarton Oaks Panel. Drawing by Linda Schele. After [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org)



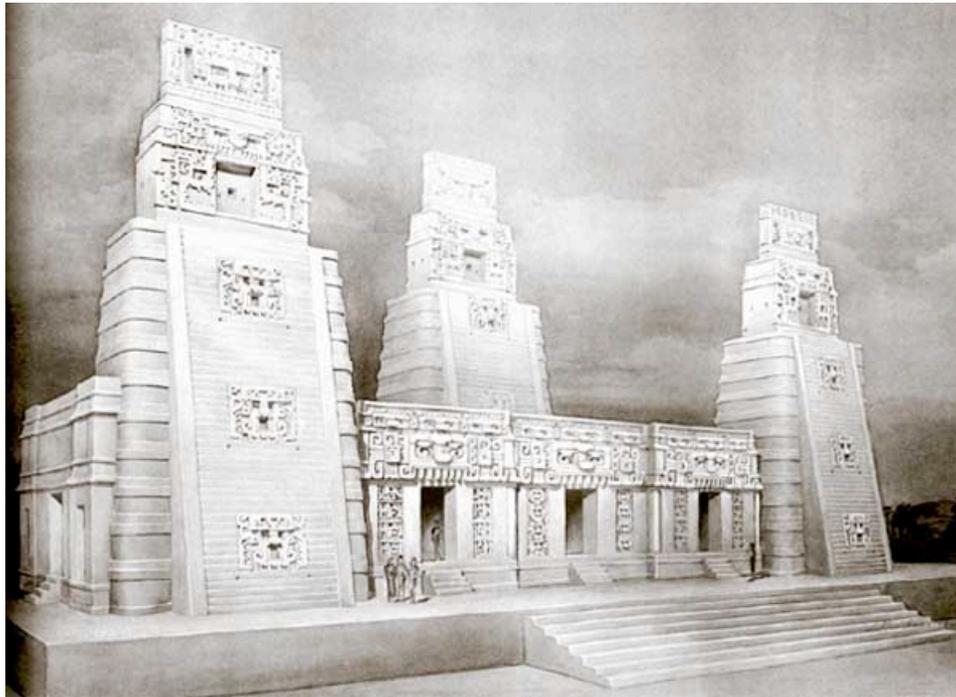
**Fig. 24** Map of the Palace with Main Plaza and North Group. Photo after Martin and Grube (2000: 154)



**Fig. 25** House D, Piers B and C in the afternoon light. Photo by Merle Green Robertson (1985: Fig. 145)



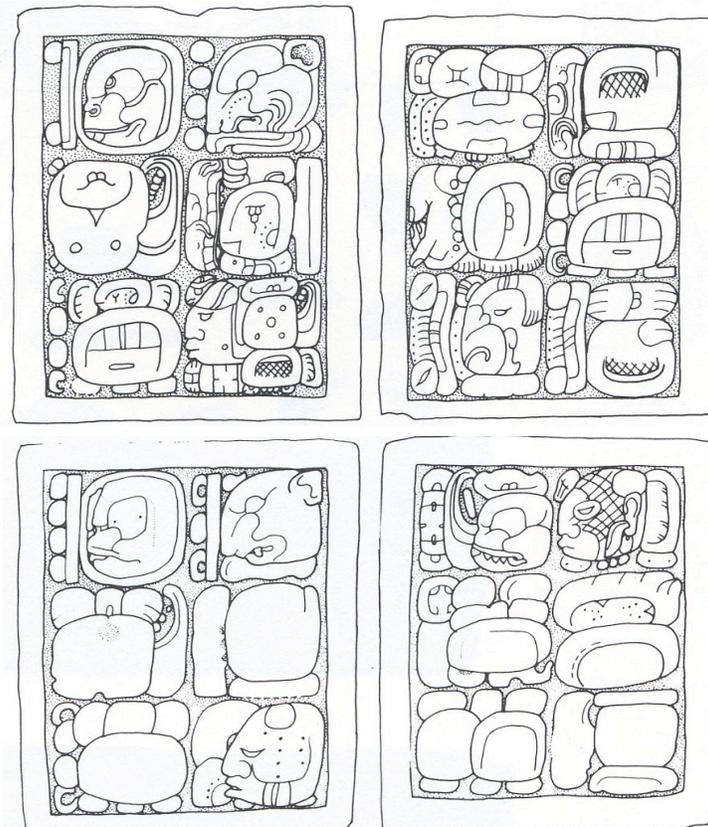
**Fig. 26** House D, monumental stairway and Main Plaza. Photo by the author



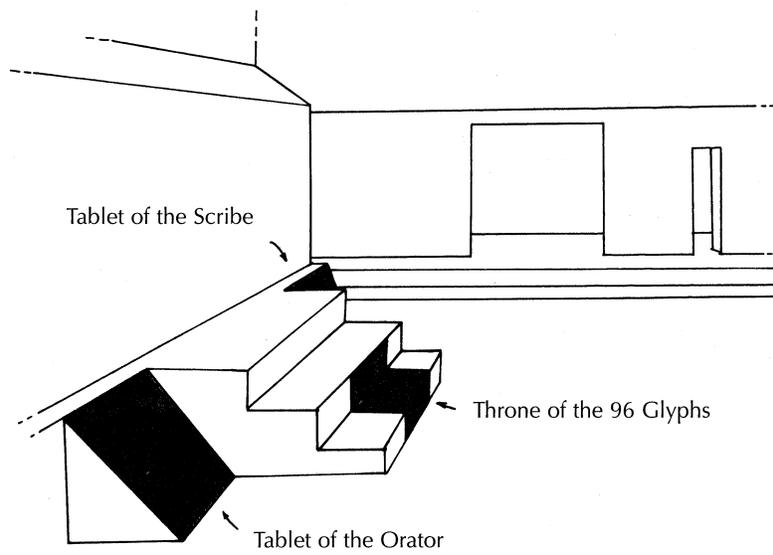
**Fig. 27** Structure I Xpuhil. Reconstruction by Tatiana Proskouriakoff



**Fig. 28** House C of the Palace, Hieroglyphic Stairs. Photo by the author



**Fig. 29** Tableritos (fragments). Drawing by Linda Schele



**Fig. 30** Tower stairs. After Houston and Stuart (1998: fig. 13a)

## Bibliography

- Acosta, Jorge R. 1968. *Exploraciones en Palenque 1967*. Mexico DF: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.
- Andrews, George F. 1975. *Maya Cities: Placemaking and Urbanization*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- — — . 1978. “Architectural Survey. Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. The Palace”. George F. and Geraldine D. Andrews papers, Alexander Architectural Archive, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.
- Aramoni Calderón, Dolores. 1991. “Los indios constructores de Palenque y Toniná en un documento del siglo XVIII.” *Estudios De Cultura Maya XVIII*: 417.
- Arnheim, Rudolf. 1977. *The Dynamics of Architectural Form: Based on the 1975 Mary Duke Biddle Lectures at the Cooper Union*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Aveni, Anthony F., Susan Milbrath, and Carlos Peraza Lope. 2004. “Chichén Itzá’s Legacy in the Astronomically Oriented Architecture of Mayapán.” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 45: 123–143.
- Baudez, Claude-Francois. 1992. “The Maya Snake Dance: Ritual and Cosmology.” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 21 (Spring): 37–52.
- — — . 1996. “Arquitectura y escenografía En Palenque: un ritual de entronización.” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 29/30: 172–179.

- Baudez, Claude-Francois, and Peter Mathews. "Capture and Sacrifice at Palenque." In *Tercera Mesa Redonda De Palenque*, ed. Merle Greene Robertson and Donnan Call Jeffers. 1978.
- Berlin, Heinrich. 1963. "The Palenque Triad." *Journal De La Société Des Américanistes* 52: 91–99.
- — —. 1968. "The Tablet of the 96 Glyphs at Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico." *Tulane University, Middle American Research Institute*. 26: 135–150.
- — —. 1970. "Miscelánea Palencana." *Journal De La Société Des Américanistes* 59: 107–128.
- Bloomer, Kent C., Charles W. Moore, and Robert J. Yudell. 1977. *Body, Memory, and Architecture*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Castañeda Paganini, Ricardo. 1946. *Las ruinas de Palenque: su descubrimiento y primeras exploraciones en el siglo XVIII*. Guatemala.
- Charnay, Désire, and M. Viollet-le-Duc. 1863. *Cités Et Ruines Américaines: Mitla, Palenqué, Izamal, Chichen Itza, Uxmal*. Paris: A. Morel.
- Coe, Michael D. and Justin Kerr. 1998. *The Art of the Maya Scribe*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams.
- Coe, Michael D. and Mark Van Stone. 2001. *Reading the Maya Glyphs*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Cuevas García, Martha and Jesús Alvarado Ortega. 2012. "El mar de la creación primordial: un escenario mítico y geológico en Palenque." *Arqueología Mexicana* 113: 32–38.

- Fash, Barbara. 2005. "Iconographic Evidence for Water Management and Social Organization at Copán." In *Copán: The History of an Ancient Maya Kingdom*, ed. Wyllys E. Andrews and William L. Fash, 103–138. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research.
- Fash, William L., Richard V. Williamson, Carlos Rudy Larios, and Joel Palka. 1992. "The Hieroglyphic Stairway and Its Ancestors: Investigations of Copán Structure 10L-26." *Ancient Mesoamerica* 3 (1): 105–115.
- Fernández, Miguel Angel. 1985. "Informe de los trabajos realizados en la zona arqueológica de Palenque, Chiapas, durante las temporadas de 1934-1945." In *Palenque 1926-1945*, ed. Roberto García Moll, 87–247. Mexico: INAH.
- Finamore, Daniel; Houston, Stephen, ed. 2010. *Fiery Pool: The Maya and the Mythic Sea*. Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum; Yale University Press.
- French, Kirk D. 2007. "Creating Space Through Water Management at the Classic Maya Site of Palenque, Chiapas." In *Palenque: Recent Investigations at the Classic Maya Center*. Marken, Damien B., Ed. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.
- De la Fuente, Beatriz. 1965. *La escultura de Palenque*. Mexico: Imprenta Universitaria.
- De la Garza, Mercedes. 1981. "Palenque ante los siglos XVIII y XIX." *Estudios de Cultura Maya* XIII: 45–65.
- García Moll, Roberto. 1985. *Palenque 1926-1945*. Mexico: INAH.
- . 2007. *Palenque 1947-1958: Alberto Ruz Lhuillier*. Mexico DF: INAH.
- Graham, Ian. 2002. *Alfred Maudslay and the Maya: A Biography*. London: The British Museum Press.

- Grube, Nikolai. 1996. "Palenque in the Maya World." In *Eighth Palenque Round Table, 1993*, ed. Martha Macri and Jan McHargue, 1–14. San Francisco, CA: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute.
- Guernsey, Julia. 2010a. "Rulers, Gods, and Potbellies: A Consideration of Sculptural Forms and Themes from the Preclassic Pacific Coast and Piedmont of Mesoamerica." In *The Place of Stone Monuments: Context, Use, and Meaning in Mesoamerica's Preclassic Transition*, ed. Julia Guernsey, John E. Clark, and Barbara Arroyo, 207–232. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.
- . 2010b. "A Consideration of the Quatrefoil Motif in Preclassic Mesoamerica." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 57/58: 75–96.
- Hamann, Byron. 2002. "The Social Life of Pre-Sunrise Things: Indigenous Mesoamerican Archaeology." *Current Anthropology* 43 (3): 351–382.
- Hellmuth, Nicholas M. 1987. *Monster Und Menschen in Der Maya-Kunst: Eine Ikonographie Der Alten Religionen Mexikos Und Guatemalas*. Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt.
- Houston, Stephen et al. 2005. "The Pool of the Rain God: An Early Stuccoed Altar at Aguacatal, Campeche, Mexico." *Mesoamerican Voices* 2: 37–62.
- Houston, Stephen D. and David Stuart. 1992. "On Maya Hieroglyphic Literacy." *Current Anthropology* 33 (5): 589–593.
- . 1996. "Of Gods, Glyphs, and Kings: Divinity and Rulership Among the Classic Maya." *Antiquity* 70: 289–312.

- — —. 1998. "The Ancient Maya Self: Personhood and Portraiture in the Classic Period." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 33: 73–101.
- Houston, Stephen D., ed. 1998. *Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture: a Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks*. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.
- Joyce, Rosemary. 2008. "Practice in and as Deposition." In *Memory Work: Archaeologies of Material Practice*, ed. Barbara J. Mills and William H. Walker, 25–39. SAR Press, Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Advanced Seminar Series.
- Kowalski, Jeff Karl (editor). 1999. *Mesoamerican Architecture as a Cultural Symbol*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kubler, George. 1969. *Studies in Classic Maya Iconography*. New Haven, CT: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences.
- Liendo Stuardo, Rodrigo. 2001. "El Paisaje urbano de Palenque: una perspectiva regional." *Anales De Antropología* 35: 213–231.
- — —. 2003. *The Organization of Agricultural Production at a Maya Center. Settlement Patterns in the Palenque Region, Chiapas, Mexico*. Serie Arqueología De México. University of Pittsburgh Latin American Archaeological Publications/INAH.
- Looper, Matthew and Linda Schele. 1991. "A War at Palenque During the Reign of Ah-K'an'." *Texas Notes on Precolumbian Art, Writing, and Culture* 25.
- Looper, Matthew G. 2009. *To Be Like Gods: Dance in Ancient Maya Civilization*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- López Jiménez, Fanny. 2002. "El diseño de las plazas de tipo ceremonial en Palenque." *Pueblos y Fronteras* 4: 125–132.
- López Luján, Leonardo. 2002. "Los aztecas y su visión del pasado." In *Aztecas*, ed. Eduardo Matos Moctezuma and Felipe Solís Olguín, 22–29. Madrid: Turner Publicaciones.
- Lucero, Lisa J. 2006. *Water and Ritual: The Rise and Fall of Classic Maya Rulers*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Lynch, Kevin. 1960. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Marken, Damien B., ed. 2007. *Palenque: Recent Investigations at the Classic Maya Center*. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.
- Martin, Simon and Nikolai Grube. 2000. *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens: Deciphering the Dynasties of the Ancient Maya*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Mathews, Peter. 1993. "The Stucco Text Above the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque." *Texas Notes on Precolumbian Art, Writing, and Culture* 49: 1–5.
- Maudslay, Alfred P. 1889. *Archaeology: Appendix to Biologia Centrali-Americana*, Eds Osbert Salvin and F. Ducane Godman. five vols. London: R.H.Porter and Dulau.
- Miller, Mary Ellen. 1998. "A Design for Meaning in Maya Architecture." In *Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture*, 187–222. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.
- — — . 1999. *Maya Art and Architecture*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Miller, Virginia. 1981. "Pose and Gesture in Classic Maya Monumental Sculpture. PhD Dissertation." Austin: University of Texas at Austin.

- Mills, Barbara J. and William H. Walker, eds. 2008. *Memory Work: Archaeologies of Material Practice*. SAR Press, Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Advanced Seminar Series.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. 2003. "Word and Image." In *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, 51–61. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Navarrete, Carlos. 2000. *Palenque 1784: el inicio de la aventura arqueológica maya*. Mexico: UNAM.
- Nieto Calleja, Rosalba and Maria De la Cruz Paillés. 1993. "Estudio del palacio de Palenque, su desarrollo arquitectónico, resultado de las recientes exploraciones arqueológicas realizadas entre 1982 y 1989." *Perspectivas Antropológicas En El Mundo Maya. Actas De La IIIª Mesa Redonda De La S.E.E.M.* 151–161.
- Parmington, Alexander. 2011. *Space and Sculpture in the Classic Maya City*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Pasztory, Esther. 2010. *Jean-Frédéric Waldeck: Artist of Exotic Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Pendergast, David. 1967. *Palenque: The Walker-Caddy Expedition to the Ancient Maya City, 1839-1840*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Porter, James B. 1992. "Estelas celtiformes: un nuevo tipo de escultura olmeca y sus implicaciones para los epigrafistas." *Arqueología 2nd Series* 8: 3–13.
- Rands, Robert L. 1955. "Some Manifestations of Water in Mesoamerican Art." *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 157 No. 48: 265–393.

- — —. 1974. "A Chronological Framework for Palenque." *Primera Mesa Redonda De Palenque, Parte I*: 35–39.
- — —. 2007. "Palenque and Selected Survey Sites in Chiapas and Tabasco: The Preclassic." In *Palenque: Recent Investigations at the Classic Maya Center*, ed. Damien B. Marken, 25–56. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.
- Robertson, Merle Greene. 1985. *The Sculpture of Palenque. Four Volumes*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Ruz, Alberto. 1962. "Exploraciones arqueológicas en Palenque: 1957 y 1958." *Anales Del Instituto Nacional De Antropología e Historia* 14 (43): 35–112.
- Scarborough, Vernon L. 1998. "Ecology and Ritual: Water Management and the Maya." *Latin American Antiquity* 9 (2): 135–159.
- Schele, Linda. 1976. "Accession Iconography of Chan Bahlum in the Group of the Cross." In *The Art, Iconography, and Dynastic History of Palenque, Part III*, ed. Merle Greene Robertson, 9–34. Pebble Beach, CA: Robert Louis Stevenson School.
- — —. 1991. "A New Look at the Dynastic History of Palenque." In *Supplement to the Handbook of Middle American Indians, Vol. 5, Epigraphy*, ed. Victoria R. Bricker, 82–109. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Schele, Linda and Elizabeth P. Benson. 1986. "Architectural Development and Political History at Palenque." In *City-states of the Maya: Art and Architecture: A Conference*. Denver, CO: Rocky Mountain Institute for Precolumbian Studies.

- Schele, Linda and Peter Mathews. 1979. *The Bodega of Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico*.  
Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks.
- Schele, Linda and Khristaan D. Vilella. 1996. "Creation, Cosmos, and the Imagery of Palenque and Copan." In *Eighth Palenque Round Table, 1993*, ed. Martha Macri and Jan McHargue, 1–18. San Francisco, CA: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute.
- Seler, Eduard. 1915. *Observations and Studies in the Ruins of Palenque*. Pebble Beach, CA: Robert Louis Stevenson School.
- Stephens, John L. 1949. *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*. 2 vols. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Stuart, David. 2005. *The Inscriptions from Temple XIX at Palenque*. San Francisco, CA: The Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute.
- . 2006. *Sourcebook for the 30th Maya Meetings: March 14-19, 2006*. Austin, TX: The Mesoamerica Center, University of Texas at Austin.
- . 2010a. "The Wide Waters of Palenque." In *Fiery Pool: The Maya and the Mythic Sea*, 41–43. Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum; Yale University Press.
- . 2010b. "Shining Stones: Observations on the Ritual Meaning of Early Maya Stelae." In *Rulers, Gods, and Potbellies: A Consideration of Sculptural Forms and Themes from the Preclassic Pacific Coast and Piedmont of Mesoamerica.*, ed. Julia Guernsey, John E. Clark, and Barbara Arroyo, 283–298. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.

- Stuart, David and George Stuart. 2008. *Palenque: Eternal City*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Templer, John. 1992. *The Staircase: History and Theories*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Tovalín Ahumada, Alejandro and Roberto López Bravo. 2001. “Excavaciones en el norte del palacio, Palenque.” *Pueblos y Fronteras* 1: 131–46.
- Van Dyke, Ruth M. and Susan E. Alcock, eds. 2003. *Archaeologies of Memory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.