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ARCHITECTURE AT SAN BARTOLO, EL PETEN, GUATEMALA: OBJECT AND SUBJECT

Abstract: Certain ancient Maya architectural patterns had multiple meanings and symbolic functions. They were designed not simply as static monuments to demonstrate the power of their patrons, but as places for the performance of transcendent events that linked those rulers to their constituencies – ancestors and gods likewise. Moreover, when ritually activated, they could acquire existential status, by providing the object with agency, meaning, and its own point of view, thus annulling the subject-object dichotomy, which is in accordance with the magical-mythic beliefs of their makers. At San Bartolo, located in the north-east of the Guatemalan state El Peten, around the year 100 BC there was an architectural complex that incarnated some Maya ideas regarding the universe, its cosmogony, and the role of the human beings.

Key words: San Bartolo, Maya architecture, existential status of images, mountain-cave complex, quatrefoil motif.

The objective of this paper² is to substantiate that the sixth architectural phase³ (of eight in total) of Las Pinturas Pyramid⁴ or Structure 1 (*ca.* 100 BC) at San Bartolo, located in Guatemalan state of El Peten, can be interpreted as a cosmogram which displays the ancient Maya conceptualization of space materialized in a particular architectural pattern. This cosmogram refers to the spatial ordering of the universe in three levels (as seen vertically), perceived as the underworld, the Earth's surface, and the upper or celestial world. It is a visual metaphor of the entire universe, namely macrocosm in form of microcosm.

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² A version of this subject matter formed a part of my doctoral dissertation (Savkic 2012).

³ Architectural phase refers to "structural entities that function by themselves and are integrated by the interplay of the construction phases, being its minimum unit a building designed from the beginning till the end" (Carrasco, Boucher & Álvarez 1985: 57).

⁴ The pyramid is called Las Pinturas (in Spanish), "Paintings", because of the mural paintings located in the interior of the edifice Sub-1A. So far it is the longest Late Preclassic pictorial discourse found in the Maya area.

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Moreover, as space and time are considered undivided entity in the Maya indigenous thought, this formal design also concerns re-actualization of the original act of creation, as gods did it primordially, by founding the first mountain or *witz*, symbolizing a territory and a history of each town. It is a collective *axis mundi* that unifies the three levels and permits the passage from the human world to the otherworld, functioning as a portal.

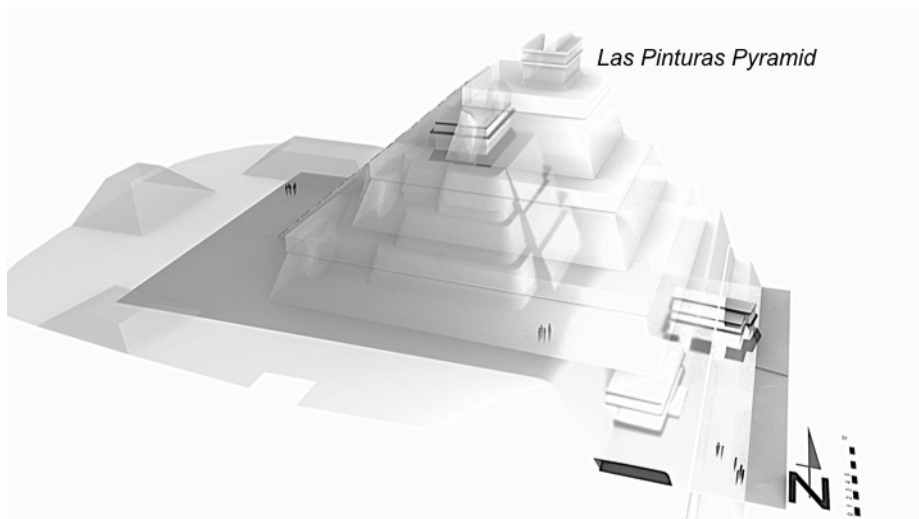
As the terrestrial world is unstable, it needs to be constantly renewed constantly through a set of ritual activities performed by powerful human beings –such as rulers, shamans, artists, warriors, etc.– in order to keep the world in motion. To do so, they have to access the interior of the mountain through a cave or *ch'e'n*, a passageway to the underworld. It is a place of time before time (time before human creation), where the past and the future are fused, and a locale of great riches where everything is possible.

As the horizontal segmentation of the Earth's surface consists of four directions –four quarters or cardinal points and the center–, the cosmogram can designate a directionality symbol and indicate the importance of the orientation of temples and their relation to some celestial bodies, especially to the Sun, where the direction of the east-west has a prominent role in indigenous thought and cosmogony.

There is a very enduring visual manifestation of cosmogram in form of architectural layouts expressed through a particular spatial arrangement of edifices. In addition, a formal design of an architectural pattern can indicate a path plan or journey design (Freidel & Suhler 1999), configured in accordance with the magical-mythic thought of its makers, those that call upon their memory, and refers to a privileged direction of movement in which, for instance, the rulers had to pass in order to perform a ritual effectively. Also, some other plastic-formal-constructive solutions can underline the same meaning, such as the edifices' floor designs, as well as the presence of some other visual manifestations, which will be discussed below.

Characteristics of the sixth architectural phase of Las Pinturas Pyramid

The architectural group of Las Pinturas at San Bartolo has five structures located in four cardinal points, rising on a rectangular platform of 75 m north-south and 90 m east-west, using a natural slope to the east, forming thus a closed plaza (Figure 1).

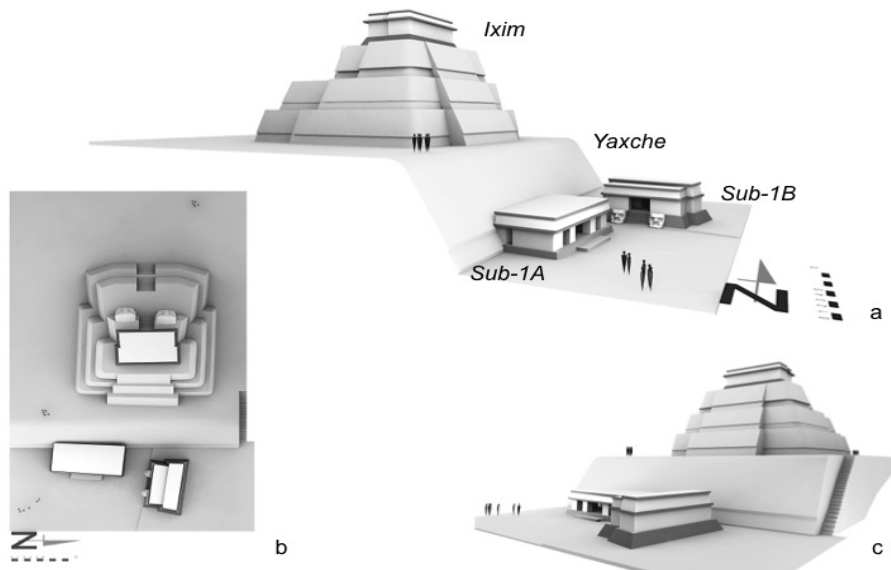


The structure located to the east of this plaza is called Las Pinturas Pyramid; it is a pyramid-shaped structure facing the west, the highest one at the site (approx. 27 m).

Unfortunately, before the organized archaeological exploration,⁵ this architectural complex was looted several times. Seven architectural phases were erected before the final one, which possibly had never been completed. The first phase dated to the late Middle Preclassic period, while the last one was set at the end of the Late Preclassic (*ca.* 500/400 BC – 100 AD).

The antepenultimate (or the sixth) version of the Las Pinturas Pyramid is a quite complex architectural group. It consists of four structures (Figure 2. a-c): platform Yaxche of a single apron-shaped body, building called Ixim above it and additionally installed on a base of three stepped bodies, and edifices called Sub-1A and Sub-1B. Their arrangement forms two spaces or plazas separated by Yaxche platform: one above it marked by Ixim (facing to the west) and the other one behind it and on the ground level (facing to the east), formed by the substructures 1A and 1B. The latter is understood as a sunken plaza (in comparison to the elevated one), quite common in urban and architectural designs throughout Mesoamerica from the early times. It is accentuated by general horizontal aspect of the two substructures and the verticality produced by superposing Ixim temple on additional platforms, thus expressing the opposition between up and down, mediated by a huge Yaxche platform.

⁵ Dr. William Saturno unexpectedly discovered this architectural group in March 2001; since then he has been the director of the San Bartolo Regional Archaeological Project.



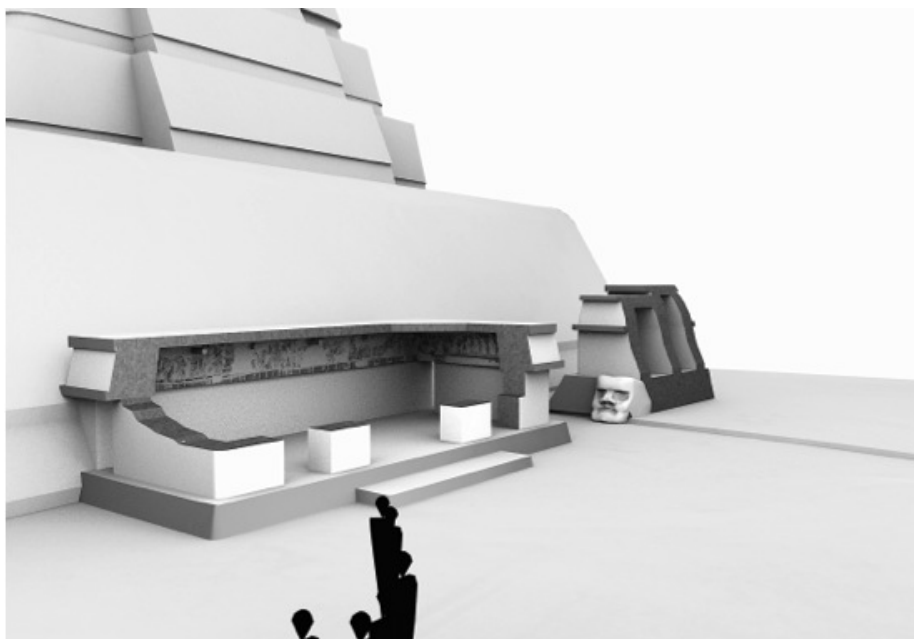
Consequently, this platform is not only the element that separates Ixim from the other two edifices, but also the one that unifies them; the union is articulated in two ways: a) there is a stairway in the northeast corner of the complex, allowing the passage between the two plazas, indicating a privileged direction of the movement through the passageway; b) the rear side (the west side) of Sub-1A is attached to the platform. This spatial organization of this architectural program alludes to the structure of the Maya cosmos, which is believed to have three levels, as mentioned before.

So, in spatial terms, the configuration of the edifices implied also the ancient Maya temporal categories, inseparable entity, such as the re-actualization of the original act of creation of the world underlining its three-layer structure and thus forming the first mountain or *witz* as a central axis, which enables the passage from the earth's level to the otherworld by acceding to its interior, i.e. the cave.

Moreover, as these two plazas formed part of the same complex indicating a totality, and were used at the same time, there was not only one privileged orientation but the two of them, as the sunken plaza faces the east and the elevated the west. I suppose this east-west orientation is associated with the apparent trajectory of the sun: it rises in the east and sets in the west. The Maya believed that the sun came out from the underworld by appearing or being reborn in the east, and finally went down, i.e. entered or died in it. One day cycle was the minimum time unit, which implied the continuous change and recreation of the day and night, life and death.

The floor design of Sub-1B and Ixim buildings is T-shaped. This configuration is a partial form of the so-called quatrefoil, when seen from bird eye's perspective. These edifices have two chambers – one frontal and the other posterior, which is longer than the former and situated on the lower level– and one entrance that can be reached by a stairway flanked by large architectural masks positioned in pairs. On the other hand, Sub-1A floor design is rectangular with a sole chamber. There is one entrance (because there is only one stairway) and four more openings on its three façades.

These three buildings have mural paintings outside and inside. The exceptions are the murals in the interior of Sub-1B, since they were not found *in situ*, but rather in form of painted stucco fragments; however, an anthropomorphic figure surrounded by undulating scrolls on one of its recessed corners, a band below the frieze, and some hieroglyphic texts written on the vertical walls on the front façade, survived the intentional dismantling in the remote past (Figure 3).



Ixim still has small portions of the mural paintings in its original place; however, most of them served as pieces of the filler before constructing the next architectural phase. At present, the longest pictorial discourse is located in the interior of Sub-1A; in its exterior there is a part of a frieze with a relief modeled in stucco and painted, as well as several painted anthropomorphic figures and volutes on the vertical walls. On the other hand, Sub-1B and Ixim have large architectural masks that flank the stair in pairs, unlike Sub-1A.

Vitality of images

In the pre-Columbian times Mesoamerican religion was imbued with magical elements, implying an active attitude towards the gods. As George Kubler (1986: 42) pointed out, the ancient peoples fused the sacred with the profane, myth with history, and it is virtually impossible to separate them, notions that for modern Westerners, in contrast, are difficult to perceive as a single entity. In many traditional societies across the world the ideology is based on religious notions which encompass politics, arts and many other aspects nowadays considered as separated, while for those peoples were inseparable and ritualized. In other words, art is closely related to the beliefs and religious ceremonies.

The plastic manifestations at San Bartolo had life cycles analogous to those of human beings, originating with their creation, and continuing through their display, dismantling (or termination), burial, and remembrance. Like people, they received ritual attention during the moments of transition between states of being and visibility (Brittenham 2009). In regard to that, several mayanists (Velásquez García 2011, 2009a; Houston & Stuart 1998; Houston, Stuart & Karl Taube 2006; Stuart 1996) have argued that certain Maya images were also vital beings, extensions of the personhood of the ruler or god that they represented, a concept denoted by the term *b'aah*.⁶

Velásquez García (2009a: 523-569) indicated that the notion of *b'aahis* in the Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions of the Classic period is an animate entity related to head, body and being. He noted that the morpheme *b'aah* when it is not possessed (indicated with the suffix *-is*), is a lexeme that refers to forehead, face or countenance and, by extension, to all frontal parts of the human head, area of the body which facilitates the individual recognition and the place where most of the senses are.

Velásquez García considers that the meaning of *b'aah* extended to the whole body, with the optional meaning of "being" or "person". This concept also relates to the phrases that refer to the ascent to power, decapitation, the meaning of the "first" linked with the idea of hierarchical authority. Likewise, it has to do with the notion of kinship, as children are a reflection or a corporal extension of the essence of their ancestors.

In addition, the portraits of the rulers (painted or carved) were among their more prized possessions. In relation to this is the term *b'aahaj*, "to become an image". Because of it *b'aahis* also refers to the portrait as a graphic extension of the body, while *ub'aah* designates "it is his body/being/image", and "it is the body/the being of the ancestor". Therefore, it is reasonable to think that –

⁶ There is a similar Nahuatl concept-practice (*teixiptla*) referring to the belief in the vitality of images.

by means of different visual manifestations– the personages were "captured" in time, establishing the lasting extension of the personal identity in spaces that transcend the biological limitations of the body. It also implies that for the Maya the images did not represent a model, but they were identified with it (Stuart 1996: 159-160; Houston & Stuart 1998: 87, 90-91, 95).

Depending on the level of the hierarchy taken into consideration, at San Bartolo the edifices of the sixth architectural phase can be perceived both as objects (as architectural constructs), and as settings or contexts for other objects and activities, as they incorporate other plastic manifestations. In relation to that, it is possible to make an assumption that the whole context, submerged in a ritual activity (created by the architecture with paintings and semidetached sculptures), becomes a single object with ontological characteristics, i.e. a subject. To know, the very context can be perceived like a totality, a single visual configuration, with animistic characteristics; at the same time, each of its smaller units can function in the same way.

I refer to different levels (or hierarchies) of meaning, which are, going from major to minor: the whole architectural group, its two plazas, four structures, and plastic-constructive elements of each one of them (in the exterior and in the interior). Thus, several visual configurations co-exist in multiple levels, where each one –through its individual form, physical and real–, becomes an animate entity, a subject, with certain salient anatomical parts that are in consonance with the beliefs of the ancient Maya.⁷ So, these particular spaces were conceived as life-experience places of the universe, as macrocosm made microcosm. Therefore, I understand the visual configurations as operating concepts manifested as ritual media and not as simple iconographic surfaces or media.

As objects, these images generate a surplus value when activated ritually, and within the ancient Maya magical-mythic thought they can be considered fantastic polymorphic being called the Earth Monster. During rituals, they were provided with agency and, as they gained living qualities and power, they wanted to interact with other living beings, commencing the life-death cycle of all organic beings. So, in order not to become too powerful, they had to die and be buried symbolically after certain time. That is one of the reasons why many edifices were demolished (usually partially), and afterwards covered with new architectural programs.

⁷ Alfred Gell (1998: 136) remarks that the whole setting –the extraordinary environment– could be animated, stating the ritual importance both of the exterior and of the interior space, and emphasizing the idea that the majority of the worshipers perhaps did not even enter the temple, which implies different spectators'/participants' roles and ranks during the rituals. Gell indicates the relevance of the context that also asserts my position regarding the double meaning established through the relation between a context and an object, which becomes a subject when activated ritually.

Moreover, in many cultures throughout the world, as in the ancient Maya, different objects get personified upon receiving "personal" names. For instance, the Maya give names to buildings and to many other objects. Considering this, in his article on architectural terms in the Maya and Nahuatl hieroglyphic texts, (2009b: 276) indicated some of the edifices with "personal" names.⁸ For instance, the so-called House E at Palenque, México was the only building in this city painted in white; so, in its dedication it can be clearly read that its name was *Sak Nuhk Naah*, "House of the White Skin".

In the same manner, some architectural terms implied a projection of the human body on the architecture (*Ibid.*: 269), as entrance openings called *ti'*, word that means "mouth or door". The *somatization* of the architectural elements can also be linked with the term *pakab'*, "lintel", whose etymology indicates that it derives from the verb *pak*, "to lie face down", plus the suffix *-ab'* that makes it a noun. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that the Maya believed the objects could take human-like physical positions and that the lintels possessed a face turned downward.

In relation to this theme, Stuart (1987) identified different ancient Maya structures as personified mountains, *witz*, being the Structure H-X-Sub 3 at Uaxactun, Guatemala one of them. Here the *witz* monster is presented through the architectural masks denoting the so-called Flower Mountain, the supernatural place associated with the communication with the celestial realm and the dwelling of ancestors (Taube 2004: 84). At the same time, this monster refers to the locale of contact between the (aquatic) underworld and the sky, which likewise is associated with the mountains, caves, water, and fertility. The recurrent form that alludes to those places and qualities is the quatrefoil, in its complete or partial version.

Quatrefoil motif as mountain-cave complex

There were many ways a quatrefoil could be expressed: through the architecture in form of T-shape floor designs (in San Bartolo), as radial pyramids (Structure 5C-54-4 at Tikal, Guatemala), in the arrangements of the objects placed in offerings (at Cival, Guatemala); on Stela 8 from Izapa, Mexico it has the form of a zoomorphic figure, while on Stela 67 has its partial (trefoil) form where an anthropomorphic figure emerges. In stela format the concept referring to the maw of the

⁸ Some of them are *B'olon Ajaw Naah*, "House of the Nine Lords" (at Copan and Tikal), *B'olon 'Eb'tej? Naah*, "House of the Nine Works" (at Palenque), *Wak Muyal Chanal*, "Place of the Six Clouds of the Sky" (at Río Azul), and *Ho' Janaab' Witz*, "Mountain of the Five Flowers of Corn" (at Cancun and Piedras Negras). There are many other edifices and funeral chambers with "personal" names.

Earth Monster was presented in two ways: a) the very shape of a monument was a complete or partial quatrefoil, and anthropomorphic figures were carved on its surface; b) figures were traced between the complex bands understood as celestial or terrestrial; what was expressed in ant format always happened in a delimited, precise space, within the open mouth of the monster-concept.

I consider that the presence of five openings on Sub-1A from San Bartolo mirrors the horizontal quadripartite division of the universe (manifested by four openings) and a center (the entrance). The (cosmic) center functions as a portal ("door") that connects all three levels of the world, so by entering this building one would actually enter a mountain through a cave, the latter being perceived as a mouth of the Earth Monster, when a ritual performance took place.⁹ It is an attempt to model the primordial landscape, by recalling

the mythical moment when the earth was created: an aquatic universe framed by four mountains with a fifth elevation protruding in the middle of the water. The mountain at the core had to be dotted with caves and springs, and sometimes surrounded by smaller hills. A setting like this duplicated, and forever would freeze, the primordial scene when the waters and the sky separated and the earth sprouted upwards (Ángel García-Zambrano 1994: 217–218, in Brady & Prufer 2005: 404).

I understand the T-shaped floor designs of the edifices Sub-1B and Ixim at San Bartolo as a partial quatrefoil (*pars pro toto*). They can thus be apprehended as the Earth Monster reduced to its open maw. These images, whether in the form of complete or partial quatrefoils, are part of the Mesoamerican imaginary present from the Middle Preclassic period that were expressed in various media until the end of the pre-Columbian history.

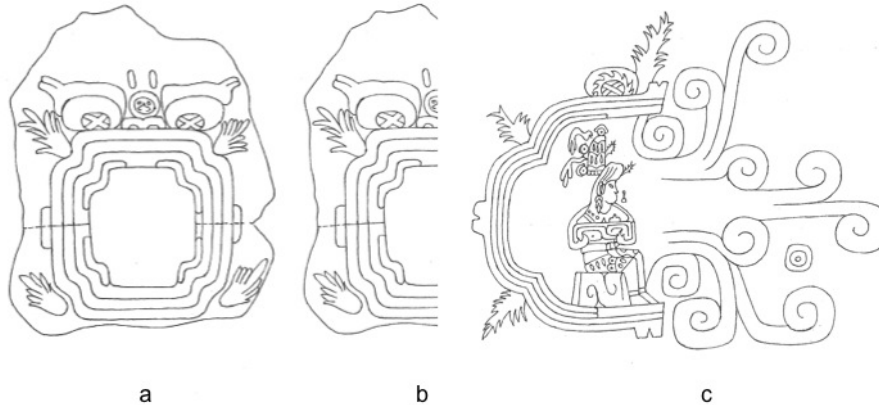
Some Olmec early monuments from Chalcatzingo, Mexico (Figure 4. a-c), such as freestanding Monument 9, show the face of the Earth Monster with eyes, eyebrows, huge open cruciform hollow mouth with phytomorphic elements (plants, flowers) that sprout from its exterior clefts, being it a quite iconic image of an animate cave. Undulating scrolls coming out the cave could emphasize its organic nature, as carved on Monument 1.¹⁰ In relation to these

⁹ Moreover, in Sub-1A this meaning is emphasized by mural paintings in its interior: two painted quatrefoils on West and East Murals, and a mountain-cave complex figure on North Mural. As this pictorial discourse nowadays is incomplete –because the walls on the south and east sides were intentionally dismantled almost completely and ritually buried by the ancient Maya, as part of their practice to construct new edifices over the existing ones, limiting in that way the visibility of some "artistic" programs through time–, it is not possible for us to know if there were some other iconographic signs referring to the same symbol.

¹⁰ These monuments testify the interchangeable nature of the full quatrefoil shape and its partial or trefoil (animate) version.

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volute is the Maya sign *ik'*, "wind, breath", referring to the living force of those places-monsters; on some monuments this hieroglyphic was substituted with a *exhaling mouth*, alluding to death expressions, as death was understood as the final exhalation.



If we understand the edifices at San Bartolo as fantastic zoomorphic figures reduced to their heads with open mouths, it is viable to believe that the volutes painted on the corners and close to the openings of the edifices also refer to the breath exhalations. In addition, as they surround the anthropomorphic figures perceived as ancestors, they may relate to their vitality or presence, irrespective of their existence in another space-time reality or universe (i.e. in the otherworld).

Patricia A. McAnany (1998: 271) indicated that the inclusion of the ancestors as painted and carved images on the edifices or by depositing their real remains within the tombs, suggests the repetitive cycles of ritual behavior and the construction activity. By being included, the ancestors facilitated the social definition of the residence and increased the political centrality of the selected locations.

In the case of the edifice Sub-1A at San Bartolo, the idea of a (living) mountain-cave complex in architectural terms was also expressed by the fact that it was attached to the Yaxche platform, since they shared one wall, accentuating their inseparability within the Maya cosmogony. In this manner, Yaxche is a mountain and Sub-1A a cave; the first one is exterior, encompassing and larger, while the second one is interior, encompassed and smaller place/space, so their physical proximity created a symbolic link between the two.

This notion is repeated inside Sub-1A by the salient upper part of the wall with (narrative) painted scene, inclined towards the spectator, as it protrudes from the surrounding painted surface and a band painted below it and on the straight part of the four walls. The band is the mixture of certain features of various

animals in stylized, abstract form: jaguar-saurian-avian fantastic creature, as a zoomorphic pattern that replicates the universe in its totality;¹¹ from its maw *comes out* the salient, being it a visual manifestation of the Mesoamerican emergence myth, according to which the human beings originated in the ancestral cave and came out of in the act of creation. Thus, the salient, together with mural paintings, literally and metaphorically *emerges* from the totality of the wall, this myth being one of the themes of these very murals presented in prolific iconography, as well as of copious monuments from the early Mesoamerican history until its end.

The open maw of a feline-saurian-snake is also present on the Classic (250-900/1000 AD) façades in the Chenes region (in Yucatan peninsula). Daniel Schávelzon (1978: 11) noted that the association maw-entryway and the cult of the caves was extremely popular in the Postclassic Yucatan:

In reliefs and stelae we can also see the union of the headdress-mask-maw and its association with the earth monster. Perhaps we could unite the serpent-earth monster-jaguar and the façade-mask-headdress. The sequence can be monster-temple in the first instance, façade-face (mask) in the second place, and mouth/maw-door in the third, being all of them expressions of the same thing.

It is a special way of *somatization* of different plastic manifestations. Consequently, it is reasonable to think that in this way they acquire existential status, and become fantastic creatures (with certain salient body parts), eliding the difference between the object *represented* and the subject *presented*, and become an entity provided with agency.

In regard to the relationship between the object-context and the body, the architectural façades of Chenes and Rio Bec styles perhaps are one of the most representative (in iconographical terms) ancient Maya manifestations of animate mountains (or mountain-cave complexes). These façades depict the commissures of the *witz* heads exhaling breath volutes, carved on the corners of their maw.¹² Therefore, these breath scrolls are not a simple ornamentation, but have a profound meaning, as they designate these edifices as places endowed with life and spiritual power (Taube 2004: 84-85).

I believe it is pertinent to suggest that San Bartolo edifices –besides entailing other meanings– are Preclassic examples of the type of the Classic edifices Schávelzon and Taube examined. They mark the intersection between the

¹¹ Mercedes de la Garza (2003) called this polymorphous creature *dragon*, which – among several meanings– indicates the totality of the universe. However, it is also possible that one of the meanings of each animal prevails, and in that way indicates some specific spaces, such as the interiors of the caves, the surface of the mountains and, possibly, the celestial realm or, in general, open spaces.

¹² In some cases the volutes also emerge from the earplugs.

underworld and the earthly realm, the latter being suggested by the shape of the buildings considered as mountains-caves made by humans. Their physical form refers to a complex of ideas related to the communication with the supernatural, time, thresholds, aquatic realms, as well as the calendric celebrations, dynasties rulers, cosmology and the four-divisional or quadripartite universe, in short with entire cosmos.

Architectural pattern as supernatural pathway or journey

In their study on the functional analysis of the ancient Maya architecture regarding constructive particularities of the Structure 6E-120 at Yaxuna, Mexico, Freidel and Suhler (1999: 250-273) drew attention to its design: as its corridors undulate around the sanctum chamber, they believe that its value is not of practical, but of a symbolic nature, as its overall horizontal design has much of the quatrefoil. They clarify that the hieroglyphic name of the quatrefoil among the Classic Maya was *ol*, "the heart of the place", and in modern Yucatec there is a related word *hol*, "portal, doorway".

Freidel and Suhler indicate that the form of quatrefoil relates to the turtle¹³ that is believed to be floating in the primeval ocean, out of which the Maya First Father, *Hun-Nal-Ye*, was reborn to reorder the world after his sacrifice. This was the reason that made these authors think that the platform could have functioned as the ritual place associated with the death and the rebirth. In my opinion, it is probable that Yaxche platform of the antepenultimate architectural phase of the Las Pinturas Pyramid at San Bartolo had the same function.

Another noteworthy feature of the building 6E-120 from Yaxuna is a stairway that leads out of one of the corridors to what could have been a horizontal trapdoor in the summit of the platform; instead of having an outer stairway, the usual means of ascending and descending, it was replaced by an internal stairway and the trapdoor on the summit. Clearly, the intention of the master builder of this edifice was to construe the place where certain persons/impersonators would move through the platform as they went up and down. Hence, what might be taken as an ordinary act (going up and down the stairway to get from the bottom to the top of a platform), here it was explicitly designed as an elaborate journey materialized in so-called path plan design.

Accordingly, it is important to recall that the antepenultimate architectural phase of the Las Pinturas Pyramid at San Bartolo possesses an outdoor stairway, located in the northeastern corner of Yaxche platform, enabling the communication between the two plazas, that is to say, it linked the sunken plaza

¹³ A quatrefoil with turtle features was painted on West Mural inside Sub-1A at San Bartolo.

(formed by Sub-1A and Sub-1B) with the raised one (marked by Ixim), indicating the movement from downstairs to upstairs by means of a stairway.

Moreover, Freidel and Suhler consider that there were a variety of formal designs that correspond to the category of *path or journey plans*; its physical expression can be assumed as a path in vertical sense, the one that departs from the underworld, or from the interior of the sanctuary, moving over the ground level, towards the area of the ceiling and, ideally, to a scaffold in the air – a path for a journey from the underworld to the sky. We should also remember the path where the Sun passes in its daily journey, as it comes out the underworld in the east, then rises in the horizon, and finally dies symbolically in the west. These authors think that all Maya structures could be called *witz*, regardless of the fact that many public buildings could have performed many functions at the same time.

Conclusions

Visual manifestations obtain animate status through ritual processes. In this perspective, objects-contexts acquire a point of view of their own through the very act of their creation and its formal specificities by imbuing them with agency and meaning, when they become subjects through ritual activation. Thus, all man-made *things* are *beings* and they all compete for power. There are different worlds and denizens that co-exist (i.e. three universe layers); they are in continuous flow and change, and all beings can interact and compete in search for power. In other words, there is a distinct relationship between object, subject and the act of viewing imposed by religious ideology, where an object acquires effectiveness and the quality of a being, thereby exchanging the position with the subject.

The sixth architectural phase at San Bartolo is a systematic organization of (social) spaces where the profane and the sacred are not separated, and where objects together with iconographic signs distributed in the specific places must be apprehended and used. It is a complex architectural pattern that materialized the structure of the ancient Maya universe constituted in three levels: the underworld, the earth's surface and the celestial realm. As they existed simultaneously, some (powerful) beings –rulers, shamans, artist, etc.– could move from one another as a part of ritual processes in order to re-actualize the world and ensure its stability and existence. These layers could be acceded through a passageway, frequently expressed in quatrefoil shape, which in the Maya magical-mythic thought was perceived as maw of an animate creature – earth monster; its mouth was an entrance to the interior of the mountain –cave– through which a ritual performer accessed. The mountain-cave complexes were replicated through (public) architecture and

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became the pulsating heart of the new town, providing the cosmogonic referents that legitimized the settlers' rights for occupying that space and for the ruler's authority over that site (Brady & Prufer 2005: 404).

Quatrefoils were present since the Middle Preclassic and adopted by the elite in order to provide a physical form to their ritual environments or settings. Practically, this motif was used in all media to denote a supernatural threshold for the rulers marking the specific places in the built environment. Moreover, it was conceived as the underworld (of the humid caves and aquatic thresholds), evoked by the rulers in specific historical moments to justify their political authority; it symbolized mythic space manifested by the architecture in a built environment (Guernsey 2010). Additionally, the quatrefoils were related to thresholds, mouths, flowers and places with supernatural energy, emanating breath, humidity, wind, aromas, as well as cosmograms, caves and, in general, powerful places.

These images/designs were created *to signify, to purport*, and not only *to be seen* in their optical sense, as we understand it today. Important are the ideas about things, and not the things in their mere materiality. In this manner, in Mesoamerican thought a concept became manifested plastically, and was related to a ritual activity linked to the precise images, made of different materials, and expressed in architecture, monuments, mural paintings, and other artifacts. The ancient artist animated different kind of objects and conceded them the willpower through the rituals of their very creation, which consisted of incantations, fasts, and prayers, understanding the ritual as a way to articulate the sacred with the profane. It is a unique way of animating different manifestations that, in addition, can acquire the name of the personage whom it portrays, belief that still persists among the modern Maya.

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Figure 1. Las Pinturas Pyramid (or Structure 1) of the seventh (or penultimate) architectural phase of Las Pinturas Group at San Bartolo, El Peten, Guatemala (1st century BC), "covering" the previous architectural phase completely. Hypothetical reconstructive illustration by Massimo Stefani.

Figure 2. a-c. Different views of the sixth (or antepenultimate) architectural phase of Las Pinturas Pyramid at San Bartolo, El Peten, Guatemala (*ca.* 100 BC). Hypothetical reconstructive illustrations by Massimo Stefani.

Figure 3. The sixth (or antepenultimate) architectural phase of Las Pinturas pyramid at San Bartolo, Peten, Guatemala, upon a partial dismantling of the edifices Sub-1A and Sub-1B. Hypothetical reconstructive illustration by Massimo Stefani.

Figure 4. a-c. Relief 9 (a-b) and the fragment of Relief 1 (c), Chalcatzingo, Mexico; Middle Preclassic period (*ca.* 1000-400 BC). Redrawn by Dragiša Bušić after John E. Clark, 1994, Figure 15.18.

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Сања Савкић

**АРХИТЕКТУРА У САН БАРТОЛУ, ЕЛ ПЕТЕН, ГВАТЕМАЛА:
ОБЈЕКАТ И СУБЈЕКАТ**

Одређени архитектонски обрасци античких Маја имали су више значења и симболичке функције. Они су дизајнирани не само као статични споменици како би показали моћ својих покровитеља, већ као места за обављање трансцендентних догађаја који су повезвали владаре са њиховим конституентима – прецима и боговима. Штавише, кад су ритуално активирани, они могу стећи егзистенцијални статус, опскрбљујући објекат агентивношћу, значењем и сопственим становиштем, укидајући на тај начин дихотомију субјекат-објекат, што је у складу са магично-митским веровањем њихових твораца. У Сан Бартолу, локалитету који се налази у североисточном делу гватемалске државе Ел Петен, око 100. године - п.н.е. постојао је архитектонски комплекс који је отелотворавао неке идеје које су Маје имале о свету, космогонији и улози људских бића.

Кључне речи: Сан Бартоло, мајанска архитектура, егзистенцијални статус слика, комплекс планина-пећина, *четворокраки* мотив.