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### Article abstract

The more accessible archaeological sites of the ancient Maya have become cultural attractions for international mass tourism. Their development is a function of occupational and economic factors that construct an unrepresentative image of Maya civilization as a modern cultural production. While this image is part of the official heritage of modern nation states, the interaction of mass tourism and cultural resource management is creating a supranational structural framework conducive to the development of Maya ethnonationalism.

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# Maya Ruins, Cultural Tourism and the Contested Symbolism of Collective Identities

Adolf W. Ehrentraut \*

Les sites archéologiques les plus accessibles des Maya d'antiquité sont devenus des attractions culturelles du tourisme populaire international. Le développement de ces sites en tant qu'objets touristiques est relié à des facteurs de travail et d'économie qui contribuent à créer une image nonreprésentative de la civilisation maya comme produit culturel moderne. Bien que cette image fasse partie de l'héritage des États-nations modernes, l'interaction du tourisme populaire et du contrôle des ressources culturelles crée une structure supranationale qui facilite le développement d'un ethnonationalisme maya.

*The more accessible archaeological sites of the ancient Maya have become cultural attractions for international mass tourism. Their development is a function of occupational and economic factors that construct an unrepresentative image of Maya civilization as a modern cultural production. While this image is part of the official heritage of modern nation states, the interaction of mass tourism and cultural resource management is creating a supranational structural framework conducive to the development of Maya ethnonationalism.*

## INTRODUCTION

For nearly a thousand years, the ruined cities of the ancient Maya have lain abandoned under the shrouding canopy and tangled underbrush of the rainforests of Central America. Having reached their cultural zenith during the Classic Period (250-925 AD), many of the Maya's most imposing monuments were already forgotten by the time of the Conquest, and even nowadays significant sites are still being discovered.

Early scholarship on Maya civilization created an image of a unique people living in harmony with their environment and ruled by priestly stargazers concerned not with mundane ambition but with the mysteries of time unfolding over the celestial millennia. This halcyon vision has become replaced by a more credible image of dynastic struggles and endemic warfare enacted against a background of population growth, increasing stratification and environmental degradation, and culminating either in the destruction of cities through conquest or civil strife or in their slower descent into oblivion through malnutrition, disease and population collapse.

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The recent decades have also seen a nearly unparalleled popularization of Maya civilization through the mass media. Part of the general post-war development of international mass tourism, this popularization has elevated its ruined cities into the ranks of the premier archaeological attractions of the Americas. The visual image of Maya civilization created by these remains together with the symbolic significance placed upon them constitute the foci of this paper, which is primarily based on visits made over a period of twenty years to about fifty archaeological sites located throughout the Maya region.

The analysis is divided into six sections. The first provides a brief overview of mass tourism to Maya sites; the second discusses several background factors shaping their touristic development. The third section describes the professional parameters of archaeological heritage conservation and the visual image of Maya civilization created through the excavation, preservation, restoration and reconstruction of its ruined sites. The fourth section assesses the authenticity of this image and pursues this issue into the broader context of cultural globalization and commodification. The fifth section turns to the appropriation of archaeological heritage and discusses the symbolic significance of Maya sites for the contemporary Maya. The analysis concludes with some observations on the role of mass tourism and cultural resource management in the development of ethnonationalism.

## THE STRUCTURE OF MAYA TOURISM

Over the past years, Maya civilization has been increasingly popularized through various mass media, from newspaper accounts of new discoveries and television documentaries on site excavations to magazine articles and art books distinguished by their superb colour illustrations, all indicative of a widespread interest in the subject matter. The connection between this popular interest and mass tourism is already drawn by the newspaper travel sections, which regularly include advertisements of travel agencies offering tours to Maya sites and occasionally feature enthusiastic travelogues headlined "Riddles in Stone" (George, 1995) and "Mayan artistry reached for the stars at Copán" (Buhasz, 1995).

More detailed travel information is disseminated through the promotional literature published by the tourist ministries and associations of countries that have Maya sites within their borders. Distributed through their diplomatic missions to major travel agencies and, upon request, to the general public, this literature combines the hedonistic appeal of sun and beaches with the more cultured allure of mysterious ruins in exotic rain forests. Thus the Minister of Tourism and the Environment for Belize, for example, introduces his country's tourist attractions in these words:

Belize is blessed with the best of both worlds. You can visit the mainland cities, the towns and interior, meet friendly people, see historic sights and ancient Maya cities, or go to the caves and enjoy the sea, beaches and coral reef. The wonders of Belize are yours to enjoy (Young, 1994: 5).

The most comprehensive official promotion of Maya civilization occurs through the materials publicizing *La Ruta Maya*, the touristic itinerary formed by the major restored sites in Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. These countries divide the region once inhabited by the ancient Maya and are now cooperating in developing the touristic potential of Maya antiquities and contemporary Maya villages in their natural environment. This policy is being implemented through international treaties and the foundation of an umbrella organization named *Mundo Maya*, the Maya World (Del Carmen Solanes and Vela, 1993; Garrett, 1993). Its official magazine introduces this world in these terms:

Discover a land where ancient sages once charted the heavens, where the jaguar still reigns supreme, and where Indian weavers faithfully recreate designs first used centuries ago. This is the Maya World...The Maya World offers something for everyone: mystery, tradition, beauty, sun, sand, sea and just a little adventure.

(Comisión Empresarial MundoMaya, 1995: 4)

However, while the official map of *Mundo Maya* lists over 120 sites, the touristic map of Maya civilization remains predominantly defined by the tourist guidebooks published in various countries and languages. As will be reported elsewhere, this touristic map is far from identical to the archaeological map of Maya civilization: it identifies and ranks sites solely by their touristic importance,

already indicated by the length of the description devoted to an entry, but sometimes also expressed by a formal scale, as with Kelly's (1993) guide to the Yucatán, which awards one star to Balché, a small and inaccessible site, and four stars to Chichén Itzá, universally acclaimed as a premier sight on the entire route. The upper range of the ranking systems is internationally uniform, so that American, British, German and Japanese guidebooks all identify the same handful of sites as the primary attractions of *La Ruta Maya*.

The archaeological map is constructed by scholars concerned with the development of Maya civilization over the entire timespan of its existence (Culbert, 1991). Even a simple dichotomous classification of sites into major and minor Classic centres, for example, already yields numerous important sites, from Calakmul in Campeche to Tazumal in El Salvador, which the touristic map either marginalizes or excludes completely, while conversely Tulum, one of the latter's premier destinations in the Yucatán, is but a secondary Postclassic centre (Coe, Snow and Benson, 1989: 126, 141). It is thus the guidebooks, not Maya archaeologists, which predominantly set the touristic itinerary.

Although individual travel continues to grow in importance, observation indicates that the vast majority of visitors to the sites of *La Ruta Maya* arrive as members of some sort of group. This mass tourism can be classified into broad categories defined by the scope and exclusiveness of touristic activities. At one extreme are the vacation packages offered by the major tour operators and hotel chains of the international tourist industry, in which visits to a few highly developed sites form an integral part of the programmed activities characteristic of tourist regions. Among the variants of this category are the package tours of the smaller resorts offering more personalized excursions to sites within their vicinity, and the ship cruises that include day trips to sites within reach of their ports of call, like the Odessa Line's "7-Day Maya Adventure Cruise," which advertises visits to Tulum in Mexico, Lamanai in Belize, and Copán in Honduras.

Towards the other extreme are the permutations of the classical archaeological tour, which focus with increasing exclusiveness not only on touristically developed sites but also on less accessible but archaeologically equally significant sites, such as those on the major rivers of the Petén

region. The most elite variants are the study tours led by academic luminaries of Maya archaeology and the site visits made during the field season as guests of the archaeologists on site. Thus the travel agency Far Horizons, for example, advertised in its 1995 brochures both the "MayaQuest trail" with David Freidel to Calakmul, Chicanná and Cobá and to Yaxuna, where participants would "lunch with members of this traditional Maya community"; and a site visit to the "Royal Tombs of Copán," where Robert Sharer and David Sedat would show them their 1993 discovery, "a treasure-filled vaulted chamber that may prove to be the tomb of Yax K'uk Mo, the Copán dynasty's founder."

The touristic experience of Maya civilization is thus highly structured and differentiated by the tourism industry, which first identifies and ranks archaeological sites in order of their touristic importance and then organizes the itineraries for their visitation. Within this programmed framework, the most important sites are unquestionably Chichén Itzá, Uxmal and Tulum in the northern Yucatán, Palenque in Chiapas, Tikal in Guatemala and Copán in Honduras. While many site clusters are under touristic development, like Balamkú, Becán, Chicanná and Xpuhil in the southern Yucatán or Caracol, Xunantunich and Cahal Pech in the Cayo District of Belize, most visitors doubtlessly form their impression of Maya civilization on the basis of the handful of sites popularized through the tourist literature and made accessible through organized tours.

From a comparative perspective, this touristic promotion of Maya ruins is a facet of the accelerating boom in cultural tourism to the archaeological sites of antiquity. The globalization of this tourism nowadays embraces not only the classical destinations of mediterranean civilizations but, increasingly, also more exotic attractions, like Khajuraho (Ichaporia, 1983) or Borobudur (Errington, 1993), which rank prominently in both the international and domestic tourist itineraries of the respective countries, and which, as with the Maya sites, are differentially marketed to bracket the class fractions of the travelling public (Munt, 1994; Urry, 1990).

## BACKGROUND FACTORS OF SITE DEVELOPMENT

As may be observed even at highly developed Maya sites, an unexcavated structure is at best an unprepossessing mound where only the odd masonry section or the rubble underfoot indicate its artificial character; more frequently, it is simply a mass of vegetation indistinguishable from the natural features of the site's topography. All sites on the touristic map thus exhibit a measure of intervention designed to reverse some of the effects of centuries of decay and disintegration. The parameters of this intervention are shaped by several factors.

The first of these is inherent in the differential survival rates of site architecture. These rates are a function of regional variations in the development and the collapse of Maya civilization (cf. Pendergast, 1992) and of the interaction between climatic conditions and construction methods and materials, both of which vary substantially across the Maya area. Structures built of rubble cores covered with plaster and located on the wet southern lowlands of the Petén are thus more vulnerable than those protected by ashlar slabs and located in the drier Puuc hills of the northern Yucatán (De la Rosa and Velázquez Morlet, 1988; Kubler, 1984; Pendergast, 1993).

The second factor arises from the traditional conception of archaeology, which emphasized the discovery and conservation of antiquity's highest achievements as defined by the canons of western scholarship. This has meant that until the 1960s, Maya archaeologists concentrated their investigations on the elite structures found in the sites' central areas. In consequence, even "within the mapped zones, relatively small traces of human occupation were ignored, particularly where no stone architecture was visible" (Sabloff, 1990: 68). Thus, while the archaeological map nowadays reflects a more inclusive conception of Maya civilization, obtained through excavating the housemounds of the peasantry (cf. Webster and Gonlin, 1988), the touristic map continues to favour the temples, palaces, ballcourts and plazas that form a site's dominant features and hence constitute the focus of its touristic attraction.

The third factor expresses the logic of tourism development. While ruins have an intrinsic fascination for professional archaeologists, it is only their commodification as tourist attractions that

justifies the expenditure of the scarce resources required for their restoration and maintenance and for the development of the touristic infrastructure of roads and facilities that makes them reasonably accessible. The excavation of housemounds may thus satisfy the advocates of the "new" archaeology, but the results are of little interest to tourists whose conceptions of Maya civilization have been schooled by mass media representations of its elite architecture. Development has therefore focused on substantial sites where such monuments are numerous.

A related fourth factor is a direct function of touristic motivation. The very nature of mass tourism is predicated on the desire to maximize the gratification of leisure needs within the highly compressed time frame of a vacation. The most successful tourist destinations are consequently characterized by the sheer number and variety of things to do and see in that area (Lozato-Giotart, 1987). It is the recognition of this motivational factor that has made Cancún the developmental paradigm for the entire region (Bosselman, 1978). This means that archaeologically important sites like Toniná in Chiapas, which had rivalled Palenque as a regional power, cannot compete touristically with an archaeologically much less significant site like Tulum, which happens to anchor a highly multipolar and polyvalent area, the "Cancun-Tulum tourism corridor," where the site complements "fabulous beaches and turquoise waters ideal for diving" (Secretaria de Turismo, 1994: 126).

In addition to these factors, there are various others, like a country's political stability or the general level of its touristic development, which affect the nature of intervention at a site. But it is predominantly the general configuration of the former factors that determines the potential touristic significance of a given site and therefore the likelihood that the resources will be available not only for its excavation, which in principle remains fundable through standard academic sources, but also for the extensive work of consolidation and restoration, which offers comparatively few career payoffs. Such projects, however, are increasingly able to attract funding from international development agencies, as has been the case for the restoration of Cahal Pech in Belize, supported by USAID, and El Puente in Honduras, supported by the Japan International Development Agency (Henderson, 1992: 725-726).

## THE VISUAL IMAGE OF MAYA CIVILIZATION

The restoration of Maya ruins is not an isolated or particularly distinctive practice. On the contrary, it is a regional expression of a broad Western tradition concerned with the selective treatment of deteriorating or destroyed features of the built environment. Developed and refined over the past two centuries, the tradition defines the principles and practices that should govern the identification, valuation and treatment of ruined architecture. It is the outcome of intense debates that have raged over such issues as the romantic enhancement of ruins, the removal of incongruent stylistic features, and the resurrection of buildings destroyed in warfare or through the simple passage of time (Lowenthal, 1985: 125-182).

Once the decision has been made to value some architectural remnants of the past, the most conservative method used to ensure their continued existence is preservation. A senior archaeologist of Britain's Ancient Monuments Service has described this method as follows:

The objectives of the work in preservation are to arrest decay and freeze the masonry – as it were – in the condition in which it was found, and secondly to remove any accretions of structures or fallen debris or growing vegetation that conceals the stonework and is a deterrent to its preservation or the understanding of its original construction (Thompson, 1981: 24).

Implicit in this position is the principle of period selectivity, a fertile ground for continued dispute, where original construction is given preference over subsequent additions, and which, as discussed below, is of particular significance for Maya ruins. But this issue apart, preservation has traditionally meant consolidation of the extant fabric, be it freestanding or in need of excavation, and anastylosis, the replacement of fallen stones into their clearly identifiable original positions, as seen in much of the work at the Athenian acropolis, for example.

Beyond this minimalist intervention lies the area of bitter controversy: the restoration and reconstruction of damaged or ruined architecture. Historically, the most extreme position in this debate was assumed by those who utterly rejected the very notion, holding with Ruskin (1989 [1880]: 194) that restoration “means the most total

destruction which a building can suffer: a destruction out of which no remnants can be gathered: a destruction accompanied with false description of the thing destroyed.” This perspective fuelled the outrage that greeted, for example, Arthur Evans' partial reconstruction of the palace at Knossos, and the even more intense and widespread debates over the reconstruction of the architectural monuments destroyed wholesale during the two World Wars. In the case of the proposed reconstruction of the *halles-aux-draps*, the cloth hall of Ypres, opponents thus suggested that if the project were carried out, it should be commemorated by a plaque reading: “German vandalism had destroyed it, Belgian vandalism has reconstructed it” (De Naeyer, 1982: 174).

At the heart of this debate lies the issue of authenticity, which is not as simple as it might seem at first glance. Writing in the context of the rebuilding of Nürnberg, Mulzer (1972: 78-79), for instance, has raised a point of universal relevance: since in architecture the worth of a structure is primarily located in its original conception, which is “the creative, unrepeatable achievement,” there exists no compelling argument why its reconstruction, a mere repetition of the conception's initial execution, should be precluded in principle.

Over the postwar period, such considerations, and the experiences that gave them rise, have led to the professionalization of the entire field of architectural heritage conservation. As a result, the practice of conservation is nowadays restricted nearly everywhere to qualified professionals drawn from archaeology, architecture and art history (Dobby, 1978: 71-113), whose representatives have internationally codified the broad principles and practices governing the identification, preservation, restoration and reconstruction of architectural heritage. The seminal declaration, adopted in 1964 and known as the Venice Charter (reprinted in Keune, 1984: 34-41), created a significant measure of conceptual consensus which a number of subsequent declarations have elaborated and revised within the organizational framework of UNESCO and ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites. One of the more recent of these is the Burra Charter, formulated in 1980 by the Australian chapter of ICOMOS (reprinted in Flood, 1989: 92-101). It provides an overview of current principles.

Article 1.7 of this Charter thus defines restoration as the return of the “existing fabric of a place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing components without the introduction of new material”; Article 1.8 in turn defines reconstruction as the return of “a place as nearly as possible to a known earlier state” which is “distinguished by the introduction of materials (new and old) into the fabric.” The meaning of these terms is defined by further articles specifying, for example, that restoration “is based on respect for all the physical, documentary and other evidence and stops at the point where conjecture begins” (ibid.: 93-94).

Perhaps most significant for the present context are Articles 17, 18 and 19, which specify the premises for permissible reconstruction. The first article states that this form of conservation “is appropriate where a place is incomplete through damage or alteration and where it is necessary for its survival, or where it recovers the cultural significance of the place.” The other two specify that reconstruction is to be limited “to the completion of a depleted entity and should not constitute the majority of the fabric of a place,” and to “the reproduction of fabric the form of which is known from physical and/or documentary evidence” and which additionally “should be identifiable on close inspection as being new work” (ibid. : 95).

It is this evolving tradition that has provided the conceptual framework for Maya archaeologists in their approach to the preservation, restoration and reconstruction of specific sites. The international debates within the tradition are reflected in the differential treatment of sites since the early 1930s, when the first major projects were undertaken, and in the current arguments concerning the best approaches to site conservation, discussed further below (INAH, 1974: 51-54; Molina-Montes, 1975; Pendergast, 1993). Within this framework, however, conservation is shaped by the nature of Maya architecture itself.

Kubler (1984: 207) describes the Classic sites of the Petén as “island cities” or “archipelagic cities,” which consist “of many groups of platforms and buildings on knolls and hilly land rising above the surrounding swamps.” With due allowances for differences in local topography, this description applies reasonably well throughout the Maya area, from the sites in the northern lowlands of Yucatán to the those of the southern highlands in Chiapas and Guatemala.

Subsequent to excavation, further site intervention runs the gamut from preservation to restoration and reconstruction, and all three approaches are readily applied not only within the same site but even to the same structure. A touristically highly developed major site will thus display a central group of select elite structures partially preserved, partially restored and partially reconstructed. Complementing this core area may be several satellite monuments treated with a similar combination of methods and connected to the core and each other by pathways. The site’s other structures remain rubble mounds covered with tangled grasses and shrubbery or by a mantle of vegetation sometimes so dense that their very presence is completely obscured.

The basic appearance of highly developed sites is illustrated by Tikal, famed for the temple pyramids towering around the Great Plaza at the site centre. Its Pyramid II has been nearly completely restored and reconstructed on all sides, while Pyramid I has a reconstructed front, partially restored and reconstructed sides and a consolidated rear. The temple of Pyramid IV is partially restored with some reconstruction, but the body of the pyramid itself is not even consolidated: its ascent is a scramble over short ladders, tree roots and stones projecting from the rubble core. Scattered around the plaza periphery are other structures, variously consolidated, restored and reconstructed, and elsewhere throughout the densely forested site, mounds and assorted masonry elements hint at the hundreds of unexcavated ruins underneath (Coe, 1967).

At the other extreme are sites like Hormiguero in Campeche. Its main attraction is a consolidated and minimally restored palace which faces an overgrown plaza surrounded by tangled vegetation that covers several ruinous mounds and the collapsed remnants of some other elite residences. A second consolidated structure is easily missed among the trees, and no impression can otherwise be formed of the site’s extent and complexity: all lies hidden beneath the rainforest canopy. While the jungle is thus a common denominator for both sites, at Tikal it has become an exotic parkland; at Hormiguero it remains a raw and overwhelming wilderness.

In summation, the visual image of Maya civilization encountered by tourists along *La Ruta Maya* is constructed within the conceptual frame-

work of archaeological conservation principles codified by a narrow set of modern occupations and nowadays global in the scope of their professional applicability. Within this general framework, the selective excavation of sites and the selective restoration and reconstruction of their architecture have, however, produced an overall image of the ancient Maya that is extremely variable in a number of dimensions.

## THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE VISUAL IMAGE

The authenticity of this image has been severely questioned. Thus Molina-Montes (1982: 136), for example, considers the reconstructive facing of the Pyramid of the Magician at Uxmal, completed in 1971 (Sáenz, 1972), to have been "inexcusable from the point of view of good restoration practice" and "unjustified on economic, aesthetic or technical grounds"; he concludes that the "result is a cold caricature of the original" and elsewhere (1975: 74) condemns in general "the great backwardness which exists in the theoretical conceptions and practical executions of the restoration of prehispanic monuments in Mesoamerica," an opinion echoed by Flores Marini (1996: 33), who sees "excessive restoration" to have reduced many of these monuments to "the level of stage scenery." This sort of criticism illustrates the collision between professional principles and the touristic background factors which also influence the manner of site intervention. The fundamental issue has been well delineated by Cleere (1989):

Little effort is required to appreciate Chichén Itzá, Herculanaeum or the Great Wall of China, perhaps, but many visitors with high expectations must leave Troy, Carthage or the Roman Forum with a sense of disappointment coupled with bafflement and, even more serious, a loss of sympathy towards the archaeological heritage (ibid.: 14).

Not all Maya ruins are on the scale of Chichén Itzá, and considerable effort will have been required to appreciate the site prior to the first major phase of restoration and reconstruction in the 1930s. As noted above, current professional opinion accepts reconstruction where it "recovers the cultural significance of the place," and this means that the visual legibility of the result will also be shaped by touristic expectations, as Maya archaeologists like Leventhal (Nidever, 1993a: 9) and Pendergast (1993: 9) have explicitly recognized.

This said, however, the image of Maya civilization presented along *La Ruta Maya* remains problematic in several respects. One of the difficulties involves the issue of period selectivity, an inescapable aspect of consolidation that frequently entails the selective destruction of substantial amounts of architectural fabric. This difficulty arises from the nature of Maya architecture itself.

Contrary to the traditions governing monumental architecture in many other societies, where a structure was expected to endure unchanged over the centuries or was periodically restored to an approximation of its original condition, the Maya "viewed architecture as a transitory medium," with the consequence that "[f]rom pyramids and acropolises to housemounds and plaza space, architecture underwent numerous building events and frequent orientational changes" (Scarborough, 1991: 129). Since any major extant structure is therefore likely to entomb within its depths several earlier structures, there is no original structure to be recovered, unless one goes back to the earliest identifiable stratum and treats everything else as an accretion to be removed. Consolidation thus inescapably represents only a particular phase in a construction history which may have spanned centuries, while the restoration of a group of structures creates an architectural configuration without visual precedent in historical time itself.

The most notorious illustration of this problem is probably the case of Tikal's structure 5D-33-1st, a major temple pyramid which once faced the Great Plaza as the most prominent building in the northern acropolis, and which was dismantled during the restoration of the site because of its apparent structural instability (Coe, 1965: 43), a decision certainly not met with universal acclaim (Berlin, 1967). The resultant architectural configuration around the plaza today creates an image that, when compared both to Coe's (1965: 43) photograph of the cleared structure and to Gendrop's (1987: 95) reconstruction of its likely appearance, is, historically, simply inaccurate and visually far less impressive, since it left the northern acropolis, the backdrop to the plaza's stelae, a rather derelict jumble of secondary buildings not redeemed by the few mask elements exposed on the substructures of the demolished pyramid.

Although the problem of period selectivity is inherently unresolvable, efforts have been made to minimize its consequences through extensive excavations within the mantle of the consolidated ter-



minal construction phase, as exemplified by the recent work at Copán, where, within a late Classic structure, was discovered the "Rosalila" temple with its elaborately decorated facade and roof comb (Fash, 1991: 100-101). However, since this subterranean building is not visible from the outside and touristic access to the tunnels is, unavoidably, highly restricted, the problem remains: what visitors see never existed as such in the past.

Finally, there is the matter of image stability, the extent to which a site continues to present the same appearance over time. The most obvious factor effecting change is its upkeep. For example, in 1986 the structures of Kohunlich, a site in Quintana Roo initially excavated in 1967 (Segovia, 1969), appeared in pristine condition due to their recent consolidation and to the site rehabilitation which accentuated their neatness by smooth expanses of lawn covering the plazas. Two years later, a profusion of plants had rooted in the cracks of the masonry and tall grasses had overgrown the plazas as well as the lower flights of stairs leading to the structures themselves. The manicured image of an architectural museum had thus been replaced by a more "natural" image of ruins about to sink into the dank depths of the rainforest. The more popular the site, the more regular the maintenance, of course, but this does not ensure any greater stability in its image: the open spaces around Uxmal's ballcourt, for example, were recently planted with stands of trees, which certainly were never part of the site's original appearance.

Another source of instability is the ongoing deterioration of structures: consolidation does not ensure preservation, and even a few years can result in the loss of a substantial degree of architectural substance. An example is Hochob, a minor Classic centre built in the Central Yucatecan style (Potter, 1977). Photographs taken in the 1930s show the central structure to be flanked by two richly decorated wings (Ruppert and Denison, 1943), one of which had fallen but for a corner remnant. A decade later the extant wing was still standing (Robina, 1956), but by 1987, when the site was visited, it too had collapsed: all that now remains is a small corner segment surmounted by a few mask elements. Conservation may thus inhibit but cannot prevent structural deterioration and the loss of finer architectural detail.

The most significant source of image instability, however, is doubtlessly the continued excavation, restoration and reconstruction of both major

and minor sites (cf. García-Bárcena, 1994). The problem is nicely delineated in a guidebook commentary to Kabah, a major centre near Uxmal in the Yucatán:

Thanks to its newfound popularity, the site is undergoing extensive restoration. In fact, on our last visit it seemed as if entire buildings had suddenly sprung up where only grassy knolls strewn with stone rubble had been before. Workmen were scrambling everywhere in the ruins. Roof combs were appearing on buildings that hadn't even had roofs a few years ago. New stone is being quarried to rebuild undecorated walls, and the incongruity of fresh-cut masonry in a site more than a thousand years old makes for a somewhat artificial first impression (Harris and Ritz, 1993: 188).

The touristic development undertaken here clearly goes well beyond any anastylosic restoration into the realm of speculative reconstruction, inferentially defensible through the specialist's generic knowledge about the likely appearance of the reconstructed elements, and thus philosophically defensible as a recovery of the "cultural significance of the place," but in its sheer extent arguably a form of visual fakery nevertheless. Unaware of the site's initial condition and relying on the archaeologists' expertise, the majority of tourists will consequently have no idea what is authentic, i.e., original stone in original position, and what is artifice, i.e., new or reused stone in a theoretically plausible position, particularly since a few years of weathering will make it difficult to tell the one from the other in any case. Nor is this a recent phenomenon: a comparison of the current appearance of Uxmal or Palenque with photographs taken of these sites by Maudslay or Charnay between a hundred and a hundred and fifty years ago would doubtlessly prove disconcerting for many a tourist (cf. Baudez and Picasso, 1992: 5-6, 84-85).

Yet quite apart from such direct assaults on authenticity, even conservative excavation and restoration keeps changing the image of most sites. This applies not only to major sites like Tikal and Chichén Itzá, where substantial features continue to be added to its restored elements, or Caracol and Calakmul, where overall site restorations are in progress, but also to secondary sites like Chicanná in Campeche, for example, where Structure XX, in 1980 only an overgrown mound crowned with a partially collapsed structure, now stands resurrected as a building of two storeys,

each displaying the remains of a serpent monster facade. Much as these ongoing activities lend an air of discovery to subsequent visits, they prevent the crystallization of either a stable image of a particular site or a stable overview of the sites along *La Ruta Maya*. As a result, Maya civilization has a certain air of impermanence and hypotheticality.

In summation, the architectural image of Maya civilization is primarily the occupational product of professional archaeology, to whose licensed practitioners the work of site conservation has become legally restricted. As such, the image is shaped, on the one hand, by the profession's conceptual parameters which define research questions and the methods for their investigation, and on the other, by its career parameters which determine the salience of excavation and restoration for career progress and hence the career decisions to invest time and resources into a particular site. The second major force shaping the image is the value of sites and structures as professionally legitimized sights for international cultural tourism, which in turn is dependent on the touristic multipolarity and polyvalence of their location and on the state of their touristic infrastructure, especially in regard to accommodation and transportation. *La Ruta Maya* thus presents an image of Maya civilization that is ultimately constructed through the interaction of the occupational imperatives of professional career development and the economic imperatives of cultural resource management.

This interaction produces an elitist image of Maya architecture that is highly unrepresentative of the lives actually led by the vast majority of the population. In turn, its debatable architectural authenticity burdens the image with a considerable measure of what, in Ruskinian echoes, Eco (1986) has defined as "hyperreality" and Baudrillard (1983: 12) has decried as "simulacra" or "simulations" of antiquity, "a resurrection of the figurative when the object and substance have disappeared."

On the macrolevel of analysis, the historical evolution of architectural conservation expresses a globalized cultural form in Wallerstein's (1991) sense of the term, predicated on the professional criteria of an occupational subculture increasingly globalized through the international codification of its principles and practices, and driven by the economic imperatives of the equally global commodification of cultural resources. By selectively

identifying and defining the physical residue of the past as culturally meaningful and by specifying the parameters and methods of its conservation, the form also facilitates everywhere the commodification of such residue as meaningful attractions for touristic consumption. From the perspective of tourism, the form thus functions as a mechanism of what Munt (1994: 110-111) has called the "intellectualization of travel" in that the diversity in the global substance of archaeological sites is made fundamentally intelligible to the tourist masses by the similarity of their cultural mode of presentation; no matter where they are encountered, the authoritative designation of ruined structures as heritage automatically transforms them into appropriate tourist attractions. From this perspective, the sights of *La Ruta Maya* are, irrespective of their physical antiquity, a quintessential product of high modernity and its accelerating sociocultural globalization. The modernity of these cultural productions in turn raises basic questions of ownership and appropriation. In short, whose heritage are they?

## THE OWNERSHIP OF THE IMAGE OF MAYA CIVILIZATION

Perhaps no issue has become as controversial in archaeology as the ownership of the past and its monuments. As with anthropology in general (cf. Trigger, 1988; Valaskakis, 1993), central to the debate is the issue of appropriation, where diverse interest groups dispute their respective claims, not merely to ownership of artifacts and sites, but to ownership of the right to interpret their symbolic significance and to utilize them for diverse political purposes (Hodder, 1991; Shanks and Tilley, 1987; Watkins et al., 1995).

The debate is no idle academic matter among archaeologists discommoded by inconvenient local sensitivities. Historically, these sensitivities existed in most areas; they were dealt with by the simple expedient of sending in troops to guard site and archaeologist alike. More problematic were the intrigues between foreign offices, archaeological missions and local governments over the division of archaeological spoils, for which Egypt remains a paradigm case (Romer, 1981), but which also has had its parallels in Central America (Bernal, 1980). In the postcolonial world, however, the issue goes well beyond the continued competition for museum holdings or, as with Greece, the

posturing of politicians pandering to emotional electorates by demanding the return of antiquities looted, or salvaged, in the heyday of Empire. Instead, archaeology nowadays substantiates claims to disputed territory, a situation exemplified nowhere more clearly than in Israel but replicated, if for more modest stakes, in the ongoing negotiations over land claims in Australia, Canada and the United States (Flood, 1989; Silberman, 1989) – although archaeological justification of imperial aspirations and national identities as such is nothing new (Shennan, 1989; Trigger, 1984).

In the present context, the issue involves ownership of monuments created by a civilization admittedly long vanished but still echoed throughout its original area of distribution by the physical presence of its remote descendants. This physical continuity, no matter how intermittent and tenuous in some locations, suggests that the issue of appropriation needs to be addressed first within the framework of the historical relation between the Maya and their conquerors.

Among the indigenous peoples of Central America, the Maya have remained the least resigned to the realities of conquest and its consequences, proving themselves remarkably troublesome to their rulers to the present day (Farriss, 1984; C.A. Smith, 1990; Wright, 1992). In its initial phase, Spanish control was imposed only after some twenty years of bitter fighting punctuated by ignoble setbacks and a general revolt, with Tayasal, the last independent Maya principality, not capitulating until 1697, more than one hundred and seventy years after the fall of the Aztec's Tenochtitlan. The plantation society that evolved in the subsequent centuries was shaken fundamentally in the Caste War of 1847-1848, which nearly resulted in a Maya reconquest of the Yucatán Peninsula and left its southeastern region under rather nominal governmental control until the 1950s. More recent years have seen periodic guerilla warfare in the Petén, army massacres in the Guatemalan Highlands and the current Zapatista insurrection in Chiapas. This legacy of conflict makes the issue of appropriation of particular theoretical interest.

Legally, archaeological sites in all five nations are subject to restrictive legislation governing their excavation and restoration, the disposition of their artifacts, and the range of otherwise permissible activities within their precincts and environs, no

matter how ineffective the legislation proves in practice (Pendergast, 1991). From that perspective, sites are defined and conserved, like other archaeological artifacts (Blanchard, 1992), as symbols of nationhood that resolve the conflicts and differences of the past as the collective history of a multiracial society now united in the shared citizenship of a modern nation state (Bernal, 1980; De la Rosa and Velázquez Morlet, 1988). It is this conception of their symbolic significance that is expressed by the director of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History when he speaks of the "richness of our cultural patrimony" and then appeals to "all Mexicans to conserve the cultural patrimony of Mexico," (García Moll, 1991: [6]).

Apart from noting that such sonorous declarations nowhere resonate equally in the hearts of all citizens, it remains impossible to generalize about contemporary Maya orientations towards the monuments of their distant forebears, since these orientations are shaped and differentiated by factors ranging from the collective salience of historical events and the nature of community relations with respective governments to the particulars of family and individual life histories. However, some impressionistic evidence brackets the possible directions they can take.

The simplest of these is primarily an economic response to the appropriation of a resource. In one instance, for example, the Maya owner of a small, partially excavated site, which he would like to integrate into the local tourist itinerary, continues to object to the removal of the site's stelae to the regional capital, where they are now languishing unseen in storage since the museum, proposed several years ago, still has not been built. Conceptualizing the ruins as a resource to be developed, like the caves on his land and its suitability for camping and horseback riding, the owner argues that the return of the stelae would increase the touristic attractiveness of the site and consequently increase his income from admission fees and other services. Perfectly willing to respond to the expectations of international tourists with impeccable capitalist rationality, this Maya quarrels with the appropriation of his ancestral heritage not out of some sense of cultural loss but because it frustrates his entrepreneurial objectives. Such economic issues, centring on the division of the spoils of mass tourism, provide perhaps the most widespread bone of contention and can

become a source of conflict among the Maya themselves when touristic employment and petty entrepreneurship alter traditional gender relations (Rejón Patrón, 1992) and increase social stratification between and within their communities (Daltabuit and Pi-Sunyer, 1991).

Another type of response conveys a more complex sense of grievance. Thus a site keeper at Lamanai in Belize, for example, emphasizes the cultural and social continuities between the past and present Maya, the contribution the latter could make to a scientific understanding of the former, the questionable competence of archaeologists in general, and then complains:

We have archaeologists taking information and not sharing because they believe we are just labourers. This is not right. If you just want to work for money, fine. But if you have interest in what you are doing, why not share? And in the case of most archaeologists who have come to Belize, they have kept all the information to themselves (Nidever, 1993b: 11).

For such individuals, archaeological ruins are more than an economic asset: while readily coupled with a cynical awareness of the disproportionate benefits accruing to archaeological careers over indigenous communities, participation in their excavation and maintenance clearly involves the recovery of particularistic symbols of some sort of collective ethnic identity. Although these sentiments remain open to external input, and thus provide a basis for Hodder's (1991: 10) "critical engagement with the voicing of other interests," they do define ruins as a field of ideological tension and potential conflict probably not resolvable in purely economic terms.

This tendency culminates in the exclusive claim to the symbolic value of ruins and in their symbolic utilization in the political arena. A case in point is Iximché, the erstwhile capital of the Cakchiquel Maya in the Guatemalan Highlands, restored in the 1960s as a minor tourist attraction (Guillemin, 1980). It is here that Maya leaders chose to convene in 1980 to issue their Declaration of Iximché (reprinted in Mondragón, 1983: 11-22), which asserts that:

We the indigenous people of Guatemala declare and denounce before the world more than four centuries of discrimination, denial, repression, exploitation, and massacres committed by the foreign invaders and continued

by their even more savage and criminal descendants to the present day (ibid. : 12).

In this instance, the archaeological site symbolizes not merely a collective cultural identity but a previous political independence held to legitimize the contemporary demands of a conquered and dispossessed people. From this perspective, sites like Iximché and Tikal, which in 1984 had briefly been taken over by revolutionaries who lectured visitors on the evils of the national government, are not symbols of Guatemalan nationhood but, as discussed below, of Maya ethnonationalism. At the same time, of course, this ethnonationalism is not oblivious to the economic implications of cultural appropriation. The Declaration thus also denounces the Guatemalan tourist authorities who promote the "touristic propaganda in the outside world":

[t]hey paint a Guatemala which is very romantic and picturesque, with its Mayan ruins, fabrics, dances and traditions; the indigenous people have become a touristic object, a commercial object. The beneficiaries of this commerce are the hotel chains, the travel industry and those who control them, and all the middlemen of the indigenous arts and crafts industry. And we are those who profit least from tourism, which in the last years has represented the second mainstay of the national economy (ibid. : 19).

Yet as far as the archaeological sites are concerned, such claims, too, are but another form of appropriation, in this case the appropriation of an elite culture by the remote descendants of the peasant masses whose rebellions had contributed to the very collapse of the social system which had generated and sustained that culture. This is not to say that the contemporary Maya comprise an empty category, identified only by the superficial markers of symbolic ethnicity. As Farriss (1984: 390) has argued, "the culture need not be any less Maya for being humbler in style and simpler in conception, unless one assumes that folk culture is invariably an impoverished derivation of elite culture and, once cut off from this source, can have no independent existence." Yet the fact remains that it is indeed a peasant culture and not the bearer of ancient elite knowledge, skills and practices perpetuated as a living tradition. Quite on the contrary, for the modern Maya the ancestral ruins have been stone quarries for their villages and otherwise a source of illicit loot, while Maya involvement in their discovery, excavation and restoration

has been limited, but for rare exceptions, to the roles of guide, labourer and site keeper. The ruins are at best "relics" in Giddens' (1994: 102) sense of the term, devoid of the formulaic truths of tradition and signifying "a past which has no development, or at least whose causal connections to the present are not part of what gives them identity." Indeed, the very form in which these architectural relics are resurrected is itself a foreign modern intrusion alien to their builders' very conception of architecture.

At the same time, however, the organization of a supranational *Mundo Maya* may paradoxically legitimize this appropriation. Already the burgeoning mass tourism now further promoted under its aegis seems likely to reinforce international awareness that there exists some sort of relationship between archaeological past and ethnographic present. More critical, however, is the official recognition of this fact as embodied in both the concept and its organizational expression. By recognizing not only the distribution of Maya antiquities across national boundaries but the congruent persistence of an ethnic population explicitly linked to these antiquities, this formal political and economic framework for regional development may also prove structurally conducive to the rise of an overarching sense of ethnic distinctiveness.

At present, this sense is still in an embryonic stage of development. Despite the destructive impact of military repression and insurgencies on the communal social fabric, recent research shows that the indigenous population generally continues to define itself not as Maya, or even as Quiché, Mopan, Yucatec or any other of the more than twenty Mayan ethnolinguistic subgroups, but primarily as members of local communities which circumscribe highly particularistic collective identities. Thus Wilson (1995: 22), for example, argues that "an overt, conscious Q'eqchi' ethnic identity is a relatively new social concept," and C.A. Smith (1990: 18) asserts in a similar vein that "Indian identity is rooted in community rather than any general sense of 'Indian-ness'."

On the other hand, the civil war in Guatemala has created an indigenist revival movement (Wilson, 1995), and refugees from that war have "reinvigorated the Mexican Mayan sense of a distinct identity" (J. Nash, 1995: 32) and even contributed their labour to the recent reconstruction of Edzná, the premier tourist site in Campeche

(García Cruz, 1994). In Belize, the absence of both military repression and Ladino domination has allowed modernization to generate a sense of "Indianness," but in "terms of ethnic identification as opposed to cultural traditions" (Gregory, 1984: 148). Diverse sociocultural forces are thus undermining the foundations of particularistic community identities and stimulating the growth of inter-regional connections, but these forces cannot in themselves define the content of a more encompassing Maya identity.

However, as the Iximché declaration illustrates, there does exist an emerging Maya intelligentsia which endeavours to construct and promote a pan-Mayan identity based in part on the retrieval of prehispanic cultural elements. Yet as Watanabe (1995: 36) observes, aside from political oppression, "Pan-Mayanists" must face two other problems: "they must decide what being Maya actually means for them, then convince less cosmopolitan Maya still attached to local communities to accept this definition." Both problems pose severe difficulties.

The structuralist perspective prevalent in Maya ethnography sees indigenous cultural patterns essentially as forms of oppositional adaptation to the dominant hispanic culture. In the area of religion, for example, communal fissures run not between assimilated Christians on the one hand and traditionalists worshipping the ancient Maya pantheon on the other but between the proselytizers and adherents of competing permutations of Christianity itself, in which archaic cultural survivals are only of marginal significance (cf. Wilson, 1995; Gregory, 1984). From the essentialist perspective, however, these ostensibly marginal continuities form a fundamental conceptual substratum that shapes the very assimilation observable on the surface level of analysis. Thus Freidel, Schele and Parker (1993: 391) conclude their study of ancient and modern Maya religion, myth and rituals with the observation:

The Maya cosmos is still a place that is alive today. The Maya still play ballgames; still dance; still stand prepared to battle for their cultural autonomy; and still nurture their gods with holy objects, food, and the places they make. Their reenactment of Creation occurs in their fields, their homes, and their places of worship, as has been done from the beginning.

Extreme as the positions in this debate may become, they illustrate the ideological problem which the Maya intelligentsia faces in constructing an overarching identity that not only encompasses the present ethnic diversity but proves meaningful and acceptable to the majority of the people it seeks to subsume under the Maya rubric. The danger inherent in developing an essentialist conception of Maya identity through cultural retrieval, reappropriation and rearticulation lies in the potential irrelevance of the entire construct. As Watanabe (1995: 37) among others (C.A. Smith, 1991) has noted in this regard, "such 'strategic essentialism' also commits pan-Mayanists to cultural practices that are not only far removed from their own lives as Maya but also are on the wane in many rural Maya communities." Members of the Maya intelligentsia may thus challenge the verities of foreign anthropologists as neocolonial distortions (Warren, 1992: 207-210) or, conversely, enthusiastically participate in the hieroglyphic workshops offered by foreign epigraphers (Freidel et al., 1993: 337-339), but it remains theoretically far from clear why ordinary Maya should embrace the resultant esoteric visions of their social betters.

It is in this respect that *La Ruta Maya* may prove structurally conducive to a broader acceptance of such formulations. On the conceptual level, the ancient ruins are markers of an ethnically undifferentiated Mayan antiquity that symbolically undercuts the significance of contemporary ethnic diversity and the sociopolitical fragmentation this diversity entails. In touristic terms, Copán is not defined as Chorti nor Palenque as Chol: they are simply Maya sites, as such requiring no further specification of their attribution. That they form a highly unrepresentative image of Maya civilization, and that their very existence as tourist attractions is predicated on alien cultural forms of restoration and reconstruction, does not detract from their potential symbolic usefulness and strength: their touristic popularization disseminates both an external definition of Mayaness and an external legitimization of a time dimension stretching back to prehispanic centuries of independence and autochthonous development. From this perspective, the "modern Maya" can be presented, irrespective of their actual ethnic diversity, as "dignified and proud heirs of an ancient civilization that, at its peak, was one of the most advanced in the world" (Comisión Empresarial Mundo Maya, 1993: 49).

On the behavioural level, the ruins of *La Ruta Maya* provide a broad and complementary experiential basis for a general Maya identity precisely because of the commodification that the framers of the Iximché declaration have found so objectionable. It is the expanding touristic infrastructure which, on the microlevel of everyday individual existence, increasingly draws ordinary Maya villagers and townspeople into a web of transactions which have not only economic but symbolic significance. The nature and meaning of these transactions are not derived from the cultural nuances that distinguish, say, a Mopan community from its Kekchi neighbours, but from Maya participation in economic activities that range from touristic employment as guides and waiters to the petty entrepreneurship of roadside craft production, the operation of village guesthouses and the provision of "Maya family homestays" (Pariser, 1993: 240). Not only are such activities touristically conceptualized as valued dimensions of Maya ethno-tourism, they are also touristically contextualized by the archaeological sites of the modern Maya's generic ancestors. The Yaxuna hosts of Freidel's tour group, for example, arguably know that their guests define them as Maya, and only as Maya, and they will also know that these guests have come for lunch because of the Maya ruins nearby. Archaeological past and ethnographic present are thus subsumed under the same collective label.

For the indigenous population, it is these sorts of experiences with mass tourism that give the externally imposed definition of Mayaness an increasingly broad range of experiential referents which cut across national borders and ethnic boundaries, and which theoretically should thereby facilitate the conceptual shift from a particularistic communal identity to a more encompassing supranational Maya identity. Over time, this shift should also make the Maya increasingly receptive to the pan-Mayan cultural and political visions of their intelligentsia.

## CONCLUSION

International mass tourism has become recognized as a major force of social change throughout the world. In respect to preindustrial and developing societies, however, the analysis of its impact has been clouded by the value orientations of many anthropologists, whose "parochial" perspective, in D. Nash's (1981: 465) phrase, has highlighted only tourism's destructive consequences, wide-

ly held to include "environmental degradation, social disintegration, increasing dependence on touristic metropolises, increasing financial deficits, decreasing quality of life, and increasing social inequality." More recent theoretical models and research have balanced this analysis by acknowledging, for example, that tourism can also stimulate regional economic development and facilitate the preservation of minority traditions otherwise doomed by the modernization of wider society (Shaw and Williams, 1994: 41-87).

In the case of the Maya, the touristic impact also fuels the rise of the sort of ethnonationalism found in many other postcolonial societies. As distinct from the official territorial nationalism of various new states, whose governments seek to weld disparate ethnic groups into a "culturally homogeneous population, with a sense of unique ethnic ties," ethnonationalism "relies first and foremost on the existence of an identifiable community of culture" (A.D. Smith, 1981: 18). The ideological tasks of the latter's leadership include the retrieval and revitalization, and at times the outright invention, of traditions that can function as primordial symbols of an ethnic identity rooted in historical continuities. Elsewhere A.D. Smith (1984: 295) has conceptualized these ideologies as "renovation myths of ethnic descent," which "connect the community of the present with the remote ancestors through cultural affinity and ideology rather than genealogically, and shift the emphasis away from imputed blood ties to territorial association with a particular landscape and soil." As the histories of mature nation states already illustrate (cf. Trigger, 1984), there are no better symbols of such affinity and association than ancient ruins, nor is their symbolic significance necessarily undermined by various degrees of appropriation and inauthenticity: what matters is that they visibly link a fragmented present to a collective primordial past.

From this perspective, the more successful the touristic development of *La Ruta Maya*, the more complex, intense and widespread will become the ethnonationalism of the Maya themselves, and the more contested, conversely, the current symbolic claim to the route's archaeological sites by national governments intent on cultivating a sense of territorial nationalism among their respective populations. The case of the Maya thus illustrates how the increasingly global processes of cultural resource management and international mass tourism can structurally integrate marginal ethnic

groups into the global economy and thereby provide them with the means for a greater symbolic and practical representation of particularistic aspirations stimulated by that very integration.

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