

Conclusions

What, then, do we know about Tikal's high and mighty? That they lived and acted the way members of a favored socioeconomic class usually do: they seem to have eaten better, lived longer, and wielded more power than the hoi polloi. Their housing was more substantial, permitted them to command more in the way of personal space for themselves (as their tombs did in death), and was arranged in such a way as to minimize their contact with people of lower standing in society. Consistent with this, marriage seems to have been with others of their own kind. Their needs were catered to by live-in servants, and they were able to afford more belongings, and of better quality, than less exalted members of society. Finally, they engaged in different activities than did people of lower standing.

Symbolic of their position in society were certain of their belongings, their housing, where they lived, their physical appearance, how they were treated in death as well as in life, and undoubtedly much more. This is where analysis of the entire corpus of Tikal art—nonelite as well as elite—will help us enormously to understand the full range of symbolic indicators (class differences in clothing, to cite just one example) and the meanings behind much of the symbolism. Here iconographic analysis of tomb contents, now being pursued by C. C. Coggins, shows promise of revealing much about elite worldviews. These sorts of analysis, however, have yet to be completed and we can all look forward to them.

5. Noblesse Oblige: The Elites of Altun Ha and Lamanai, Belize

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THE phrase that heads the title of this paper is an apposite one for ancient Maya society, as it is for any in which nobility or other elite rank or status separated a controlling group from the remainder of the populace. Such separation conferred upon the upper echelon a set of rights and privileges, but also established a reciprocal relationship of obligation to the nonelite community. The existence of that obligation renders any characterization of the elite incomplete unless it rests in part on an understanding of the people they controlled, from whom they drew their sustenance.

There is no question that the degree of separation from the masses can be assessed with reasonable accuracy in any Maya polity for the nobility, and with varying but lesser accuracy for other elements of the elite, on the basis of a variety of archaeological evidence. Information on aspects of the reciprocal relationship between elite and commoner may also be extracted from artifacts and from site plan, but the data base for commoners' material culture is never very likely to approach the solidity of that for the Maya upper crust itself. It is evident, however, that the most profitable approach to the elucidation of the obligations borne by the elite should rest equally on an examination of the richness of upper-class life and an attempt to discern the benefits that accrued to the community at large in return for services rendered.

The internal coherence that derives from extensive excavation may at least assist in setting the data in a solid framework. In this respect, both Altun Ha and Lamanai provide conspicuously fertile ground for examination of ancient Maya elites and their socioeconomic roles. Several significant questions can be addressed by close scrutiny of the archaeological record at the two sites. First, what criteria of elite status are discernible in the archaeological remains, and what is the degree of their reliability? Second, what can the evidence tell us about the histories of the elites within the historical frameworks of their two communities? Finally, can one proceed from the characterization of an elite to a real elucidation of the relationships between the group and the other segments of the society? In the following discussion, these matters are examined in as orderly a progression as possible for data from two comparatively proximate but often sharply different sites.

Architecture as an Identifier of Elite Status

At the highest level of size and complexity, the buildings of Altun Ha and Lamanai (and indeed of all Maya sites) leave no doubts as to their use by nobles and perhaps by other elements of the elite. By their very nature they reflect, in fact, the essentially reciprocal relationship between noble and commoner, the former in the role of guide and intercessor and the latter in the role of hewer of stone and drawer of water. In this respect, the principal structures of any site's central precinct tell us nothing that is not apparent in other sources of information. They also embody, however, a considerable quantity of secondary information regarding the composition of the upper class exclusive of the nobles themselves.

The complexity of Maya large-scale civic buildings is in itself evidence that extensive construction experience was requisite to the architectural work. Furthermore, thorough dissection of civic structures has shown that highly sophisticated construction staging was employed, with numerous widely separated units of a building in simultaneous independent production. This obviously required the application of a very high level of management skills if buildings were not to end up as nonfunctional, unstable jumbles. It follows from this that Maya civic buildings had to be brought into being with the aid of detailed plans and specifications. Such materials must have been created by a cadre of architects, who surely functioned both as designers and as supervisors. These functions are in themselves sufficient to have established the architect as a member of the elite; what is uncertain is whether such status was related to or separate from noble rank.

Monumental architecture may also provide us with a moderately specific measure of the breadth of the gulf that separated noble from commoner. The existence of the gulf is readily apparent in the form and scale of the structures, but the expression of its measure in mortar and stone is not a necessary element in Maya architecture. It is, in fact, far more often absent than present. At Altun Ha, however, there are two cases of what I see as architectural reification of social condition as well as process. To a limited extent in Structure A-1 (Pendergast 1979:40-91) and a far greater one in Structure B-4 (Pendergast 1982a:132-36), architectural development appears to mirror social development and to give us a normally intangible part of the community's history in truly concrete form.

It is not necessary to set forth the full construction histories of the two structures here, because it is the process they embody that is at issue. In both A-1 and B-4, what began in the Early Classic as moderate-size temples with comparatively open frontal plans evolved in Late Classic times into structures quite different from the originals. The change in A-1 created a side access route that was more tortuous, and in part more concealed, than the antecedent frontal one. The lower frontal stair was left open, but the development of the new side stair appears to have usurped its role as access.

Its condition indicates that it was not fully maintained and may have been allowed to fall completely into ruin while the upper part of the structure remained intact and in use.

The effect of the modifications of A-1 was to increase the claustal atmosphere of processions up the face of the structure, though the laity's line of sight from the plaza to the doorway of the building remained unobstructed. The link between the viewers and the performers in religious drama was therefore only partially altered, but the alteration may well have conveyed a message. The viewers could scarcely have avoided the impression that the gulf between themselves and the main participants in the drama, never narrow, had been widened.

In B-4, the erection of an increasingly formidable barrier between those assembled in the plaza and those engaged in ritual acts on the temple dominated most of the structure's Late Classic history. The earliest form of the structure offered onlookers an unrestricted view of ceremonies, presumably with a corresponding sense of direct linkage to such events. The first major reconstruction began the severing of that linkage through creation of a Lamanai building type structure with a building set athwart the stair; later alterations and additions sundered the linkage fully and ultimately created floor surfaces unusable for ceremonial or any other purpose. The conclusion is inescapable that B-4, always a monument to the power of a deity and his representatives, grew into an expression in stone of an ever widening gulf between rulers and ruled.

The second category of architectural evidence that bears on the elite is, of course, residential. At Altun Ha, far more than at Lamanai, evidence available in quantity allows identification of classes of elite domestic buildings as well as the tracing of the histories of a good many such structures. Residential structures offer the additional advantage of association with refuse, a link that embodies specific meaning in itself and also yields a variety of evidence that complements and amplifies the architectural information.

There are three architectural criteria on which identification of a structure as an elite residence can rest: location, form (and occasionally specific elements of plan), and construction type. A building may meet all three standards, but may quite easily omit the first of the three. It is self-evident that the criteria are applicable only in a context of reasonable social stability; in circumstances of sociopolitical disintegration it is entirely possible, as we shall see, that none of the three will serve to distinguish an elite residence. I have placed location at the head of the list simply because it is very often the first basis on which elite residences can be identified and the only one that can serve as a guide prior to excavation in conditions of major structural decay. It would be comforting to think that excavation thus guided yields confirmatory evidence in the form of the other two criteria, but it is intriguing that it sometimes does not.

It is axiomatic that residences within the central precinct will be identifiable as those of the elite—indeed, generally those of the nobility—throughout the period in which the central precinct retains its original function. Within this axiom it is a reasonable premise that structures closest to the main civic edifices were occupied by those of highest rank and that grading of rank and status is reflected in fairly direct fashion by distance from such edifices. It is obvious that this scheme will work only in areas immediately peripheral to the central precinct; no mechanical approach to linear distance can elicit information on social distance beyond a fairly restricted limit. Once outside that border, identification must rest on the remaining two criteria. Even inside it, the application of the principle of proximity to the community's nerve center as a measure of status produces some seeming anomalies that are interesting and possibly instructive.

Structure A-8 at Altun Ha (Pendergast 1979:100-42) exemplifies the palace class most clearly of the three central precinct residential buildings. It meets all three criteria for identification as the dwelling-place of nobility and is associated with a very large quantity of elaborately decorated pottery that underscores the identification. Yet there are twists in its history that distinguish it from its counterparts in the community's heart and also leave a good many questions regarding form and pattern of use unanswered. Most of these are relevant only to the structure or to Altun Ha, but one in particular bears on the relationship of noble to lower-elite echelons and to commoners as it is expressed in architecture.

In its earlier form, A-8 had a fairly standard plan in which four transverse rooms were ranged back from a single entrance on the east side, facing Plaza A. By virtue of its size and its separation in level from the three rear rooms, the outermost chamber appears likely to have served as a hall of audience, a function made quite appropriate by the relationship of structure to plaza. In a radical transformation, the later version of A-8 shifted to a southern orientation and an increased number of rooms that were smaller than those of the antecedent building, but perhaps still included a hall of audience as the front chamber. The shift in orientation was augmented by construction of a large platform between A-8 and the plaza, part of the set of events that brought the south access to A-1 into being. Here again the increase in the cloistered atmosphere of noble life may reflect a Late Classic widening of the social gap between ruler and ruled.

Across Plaza A from A-8, a glance beyond the eastern border of the plaza shows us the potential limitations in the use of proximity to major civic ceremonial structures as an accurate measure of elite status. The distance between Structure D-2 (Pendergast 1990a:4-14) and Structure A-5 is no greater than that between A-8 and A-3, the temple with which A-8 may have been linked in its early form. The small overall size and largely non-masonry construction of D-2 suggest, however, that the building's occupants were not members of the nobility, though they may well have enjoyed some

level of elite status. The difference between D-2 and the palaces as regards linear distance is not great; the critical element is the location of D-2 at the back of A-5, perhaps on a subsidiary unit of the Plaza A platform. In this circumstance it is tempting to see the location of D-2 as equivalent to "The Backs" in later communities: a statement of status by association with the community's heart, but encompassing a distance far greater than a simple measure of distance would suggest.

Within the neighborhoods that surround Altun Ha's two central plazas there are numerous structures, such as C-6 and C-10 (Pendergast 1982a:151-69), that exceed D-2 in architectural quality and permit at least a rough ordering of elite families within the central precinct periphery. Such an ordering obviously rests on the assumption that building size and masonry content are closely correlated with status, an assumption that is entirely logical but not entirely unassailable. Unfortunately, none of the structures yielded cultural material that might reinforce or allow refinement of this sort of house-pride ranking.

Of the several neighborhoods that border directly on the central precinct, none appears to exemplify an elite residential district more fully than Zone E (Pendergast 1990a:19-246). Virtually all structures investigated, as well as a very considerable number left unexcavated, are marked by elaborate masonry faced platforms and masonry or part masonry buildings. The percentage of such structures is so high that upper level elite presence appears to have characterized virtually all of the northern half of the zone, the area closer to the central precinct, and a considerable portion of the southern half as well. Location relative to the community's center presumably dictated choice of the area for elite residence, but neither the particulars of this factor nor the bases for choice of building site within the densely packed zone can be extracted from the archaeological evidence.

Once one moves farther from the site center, the location criterion obviously breaks down completely. This is not to say that site selection for elite residences was a random matter in outlying zones; it is simply that relationship to the central precinct did not direct selection, and intrazonal factors in such choices are absolutely unapparent. Structure H-1, a building of sufficient size and complexity to qualify as a palace were it situated on one of the central plazas (Pendergast 1990a:figs. 127, 131), seems to sit virtually isolated, facing a scattered lot of small structures of clearly greater simplicity and possibly nonelite quality. Its hall of audience, though very small, bespeaks the building's mixed public and residential function, but the public served cannot be identified on the basis of proximity to H-1 or any other grounds. H-1's features deny isolation in the operational sense; hence the reasons for choice of the building's location remain enigmatic.

At an even greater remove from the site center, the plazuela group K-29 through 35 (Pendergast 1990a:333-88) provides an example of an elite residential compound identifiable as such partly on the basis of structure form

and construction type and partly on nonarchitectural grounds. Such groups are widely dispersed at Altun Ha, and it is reasonable to assume that most, if not all, are extended family residential units that, like K-29 through 35, were of comparatively simple form and small scale initially and developed over time into moderately complex assemblages.

Although the status of the occupants cannot be assessed over the full span of development of plazuela assemblages, it is quite likely that most or all such groups represent the elite from beginning to end. A considerable amount of elite family history can be read from the Zone K group, as it can from H-1 and other more central residences; the most outstanding example is in Structures E-14 and E-54 (Pendergast 1990a:123-66), which appear to represent a family's step up from a modest home to a far more pretentious one erected in the backyard. The details of this sort of individual family history are not of consequence here; what is of importance is the time of many positive events in such histories, a matter to which we shall return shortly.

At Lamanai, divergence from the standard plaza plan makes identification of residential structures a very tricky matter in the absence of excavation data and sometimes almost equally perplexing when the data are available. The large courtyard complex (Plaza N10/3) at the north border of the plaza associated with Structure N10.0 (Pendergast 1986:231-33) is identifiable as a multifaceted, multipurpose assemblage in which all buildings had some domestic use. It appears to have served as a residential center for the community's rulers for an exceedingly long period, but surely cannot have been the only noble domestic architecture in the central precinct. On architectural grounds, however, no other excavated structures in the precinct are unequivocally identifiable as palaces.

Although the pinpointing of possible noble dwellings in much of Lamanai poses formidable problems, it is possible to identify a considerable number of residences within or very close to the central precinct. In most cases, it is location rather than any other criterion that raises the possibility that these were the homes of Lamanai's elite. Contemporaneity with neighboring ceremonial structures is clear-cut in many instances; hence it may be that the somewhat more diffuse community plan allowed for greater fluidity in elite residence location than at sites more formally laid out. It also appears quite likely that the degree of such fluidity increased in the ninth or early tenth century, especially in the more northerly portions of the central precinct, where abandonment of some ceremonial structures may have been underway.

The Lamanai data, fraught with difficulties though they are, suggest strongly that the criteria applicable to elite residence identification at Altun Ha are of limited utility at the more westerly site. Either some noble residences were meaner dwellings than those in the N10/3 complex or the complex was in fact the principal home of Lamanai's nobility for a very great

part of the site's long occupation span. There is no question that palaces, as they would be definable elsewhere, were not widely distributed at Lamanai. Though this fact is open to many interpretations, I am inclined to conclude from this that the community's rulers were fewer in number than their confreres at other centers, a matter to which we shall return when we consider the different fates of the ruling groups at Lamanai and Altun Ha.

Mortuary Evidence of Elite Status

Fortunately, none of the architectural evidence of elite status at Altun Ha and Lamanai exists in isolation. Both sites are replete with burial and refuse-heap data that augment the architectural record very substantially and shed light on aspects of elite life that are not illuminated by the buildings alone. Some of the identification of elite material culture, of course, proceeds from the categorization of the buildings themselves, but it is largely in the area of criteria independent of architecture that the more significant questions arise regarding the elite as a cultural stratum.

If one allows for the flawed perception that arises from loss of evidence on perishable materials, it is possible to rank burials on the basis of grave goods and to segment the ranking in a manner that at least has the potential of reflecting some ancient social realities. It is equally possible to apply this approach to grave type and, with considerably less success, to burial position. Because each of these variables presumably reflects, first, status differentiation within the elite and, second, distinction between elite and nonelite, there should be reasonable correspondence among the three rankings. In fact, there is not—and when the fourth and highly important variable of context is introduced, the waters are muddied even further.

Although the means of measuring quality of grave form and contents are inadequate to the task of sorting out gradations in status, at Altun Ha both burial locations and the amounts and kinds of accompanying artifacts generally indicate very strongly that individuals encountered in an elite structure were members of the elite. No great problem is posed by this identification when a single interment, or even a small group of burials, constitutes the entire sample from a residential structure. This is especially true when many of the burials are encased in secondary elements, generally benches, as in Structure E-14 (Pendergast 1990a:fig. 62). A very considerable problem does arise, however, when the number of burials in the core of a major residential modification greatly exceeds the possible total for deaths in a family immediately prior to and during construction. The matter is given a slight additional twist when the structure involved is civic rather than residential.

The general status of numerous individuals interred in a residential or civic construction unit is not subject to doubt; context surely provides the answer on this point. Nonetheless, the existence of marked disparities in grave goods and types among such immediately contemporaneous burials

raises serious questions regarding the bases for identifying elite status even at the most general level. Of equal importance, though presumably not in the area of rank or status classification, is the nature of the relationship between the individuals and their final resting-place.

Structure C-13 (Pendergast 1982a:170-204) provides an early example of multiple burials in a civic building, whereas Structure E-7 (Pendergast 1990a:72-122) is an even more striking example of numerous burials in various modifications of a structure that probably combined residential and administrative-ceremonial functions. The very large numbers of burials in various levels of modification indicate that the relationships of the individuals to the structures must have been essentially the same in both instances. Rather than being residents in or users of the buildings, the dead are very likely to have been those whose rank or status was high enough to assure them a place of honor at death. The choice of place could have rested on some sort of functional tie between the individual and the structure, such as residence in a specific administrative unit, but it may well have been dictated by nothing more than coincidence between the schedules of the builder and the grim reaper.

An additional factor that affects interment-based perception of the elite is sampling error induced by the very obvious fact that nonstructure-associated burial must have been a common practice among the elite, as it was in the remainder of the population. Both Altun Ha's and Lamanai's burial yields per elite structure are higher than those for many sites, but neither approaches a plausible total for deaths in a given period. The same is true of what are surely elite family burials in the family's residence, such as those in Structures E-14 and H-1 at Altun Ha (Pendergast 1990a:123-43, 279-308). The inescapable conclusion is that cemeteries or some other form of site-peripheral or off-site disposal of the dead characterized Maya communities from beginning to end. Hence there is no question that in treating an elite burial sample, no matter what its size, we are not dealing with a population in any sense.

Because no identifying features of nonstructural interment sites can be distinguished, we are not now able to go beyond the recognition that such places exist. As a result, we can only examine the effects of their use on the assessment of elite population physical characteristics in the most general terms. Furthermore, there is considerable likelihood that the sample is a structured one, given shape by the factors, probably numerous, that determined whether a deceased member of the elite was accorded structural or nonstructural burial.

Dietary and Midden Evidence of Elite Status

Just as ranking of burials offers the possibility of evaluating some aspects of elite life, comparison of structure-associated middens sheds considerable light on elite lifestyle. Altun Ha is virtually a textbook example of the

correlation between architectural complexity and midden richness, and as such it permits judgments regarding dietary distinctions within the community's elite. Lamanai provides less information on this facet of elite existence, but the reasons for the absence of data are, in a way, as instructive as the data themselves would be.

At Altun Ha the mass of refuse alongside the platform of the palace-type Structure A-8 (Pendergast 1979:127-38) gives us what is often lacking in the midden sample: the top end of the spectrum. From this top downward, the site's refuse deposits can be graded with regard to both cultural and faunal content, and the grading very closely parallels diminishing complexity in architecture. We can focus here only on the broad pattern that emerges: nobility brought with it in the Maya city-state more or less the same degree of culinary privilege recorded in other heavily stratified societies and such privilege diminished as status distance from the top stratum increased.

Privilege meant, as elsewhere, both quantity and quality. The preponderant portion of the bone that represents the legs and other major cuts of meat comes from the A-8 midden and from others associated with structures, such as H-1, that unquestionably housed upper-level elite families. The A-8 midden yielded, along with fair quantities of deer and other bone, the entire site sample of the largest and finest turtle, *Dermatemys mawii*; non-noble families seem not to have enjoyed a scrap of this excellent creature. I suspect that for the occupants of A-8 privilege extended to special preparation of food as well, which may have involved cooking away from the palace and bearing dishes to the dining area at mealtime. The absence of an identifiable kitchen in the intensively examined vicinity of A-8, the basis for the foregoing suggestion, is unfortunately characteristic of all other elite residences except for Structure E-14 (Pendergast 1990a:128-29). Hence we have only the food remains themselves—and only the meat, at that—as a mirror of the difference between an elite repast and a lower-class meal.

All of our attempts to wrest social stratification from data on dietary difference obviously can deal only with the two phenomena exemplified in Altun Ha's A-8 midden: differential distribution of cuts of meat from the larger species and wholly class-specific foodstuffs. Both of these necessarily involve resources available in limited supply; hence the particulars are quite likely to vary with significant environmental differences. For example, striking variation exists between comparatively turtle-poor Altun Ha and turtle-rich lakeside Lamanai, where *Dermatemys* made as frequent an appearance on the tables of the low as it did on those of the mighty.

Coupled with the impossibility of segmenting the faunal data along absolute social lines is a major problem regarding the nature of the association between middens and the structures they abut. We have long portrayed Maya residential areas as malodorous because of the great heaps of refuse that were allowed to accumulate around houses—and part of this portrait envisioned the middens as mirrors of life over very considerable periods.

The Altun Ha data made it reasonably clear, and those from Lamanai make it unquestionable, that the middens we encounter were in fact precursors of structure abandonment. This means that in virtually all sites what we investigate is the product of social breakdown and hence does not necessarily reflect patterns of life prior to the beginnings of disintegration. Of course, it does not follow that middens never accumulated until Terminal Classic times; there is ample evidence that they did, but equally ample evidence that they were periodically cleared away and very often incorporated in construction. We cannot know whether the clearing away was organized at the single-family, neighborhood, or citywide level, but we do know that only when the organizing force died, along with others in the community, did garbage round the doorstep become commonplace in Maya life.

The importance of assessing midden data as a reflection of Terminal Classic rather than earlier life, with the exception of such anomalies as the early Late Classic Altun Ha A-8 midden itself and the dumping of refuse in abandoned rooms of B-5 (Pendergast 1982a:27-30), lies in the fact that the road to collapse may have led to changes in dietary patterns. The possibility clearly exists as well that the supply was more limited in Terminal Classic times than it had been earlier. The limitation is less likely to have resulted from excessive exploitation of the environment than from less effective distribution of the hunting yield. There are two predictable results of distribution breakdown: the quantity, especially of larger game, will be less per household, and the cutoff point below which such game disappears from the menu will be higher than in times of plenty. The first may not alter our perception of the size of the elite community as defined by diet, but the second surely will. We should therefore recognize that the midden data on which we are forced to rely are very likely to show us an elite less well fed than in the Classic and smaller than it was even in Terminal Classic times.

The Lamanai data raise a final question in our assessment of elites on dietary grounds—the importance of nutritional difference as an issue in relations between upper and lower social strata. We are accustomed to depicting the lower classes of Maya society as impassive and willing to accept rule that offered many organizational advantages but exacted a heavy toll in labor tax in return. A further toll surely existed in the requirement that game, or major portions thereof, be provided for elite consumption. There is no evidence for the prehistoric period as to whether such a requirement was given legal codification buttressed by reverence for nobility and respect for others in power or was simply a matter of economics. It is highly probable, however, that in any form the need to pass high-protein foodstuffs up the social ladder would have added to other burdens in times of hardship.

It may follow from this that Terminal Classic distribution of elite victuals was reduced by retention of game lower down the ladder. If this was the case, it is clear that the elite of Lamanai would have enjoyed a singular

advantage in the availability of an abundance of protein foodstuffs in the form of lake-dwelling fish and turtles. The existence of high-quality nutritional resources may have heightened the burden-bearing ability of the lower echelon of Lamanai society and hence may have been one of many factors that contributed to the community's survival in the face of disintegration on all sides, including nearby Altun Ha.

The Fate of Elites at Altun Ha and Lamanai

Surely no sharper contrast exists in the Maya lowlands than that between Altun Ha and Lamanai from the ninth century onward. Separated by only 40 km, the two communities diverged so markedly in the Late Classic that the gulf between them seems to have been ten times as wide. In fact, physical evidence of communication between the two is not extensive. The existence of Lamanai-type Structure B-4 at Altun Ha (Pendergast 1982a:43-141) bespeaks exchange of architectural ideas, if not of architects, but the presence at Lamanai of only a minuscule amount of pottery probably manufactured at Altun Ha suggests that exchange of goods between the two centers was not of economic significance. Finally, there is the absolutely amazing occurrence of one shell ornament or clothing fastener at Lamanai and the remaining three from the set at Altun Ha (Pendergast 1982b:4, fig. 2); this could be combined with the architectural data as evidence of elite contact, but it scarcely documents elite links on a grand scale. Transmission of information from one site to the other nevertheless surely occurred on a larger scale than the evidence suggests; despite the unpleasant nature of some of the terrain, 40 km can hardly have been an effective barrier to interchange as long as Altun Ha continued as a functioning community. Yet when Altun Ha descended into the dust, Lamanai held fast.

The decline of Altun Ha has already been partly traced (Pendergast 1982a:134-36, 139; 1990a:302-07, 331-32, 388), though not examined in full site context. Among the many classes of data relevant to the phenomenon there are three salient features of central precinct and nearby neighborhood evidence that reveal part of the effect of the decline on the community's elite. The first of these (Pendergast 1982a:134-36) documents a protracted period of diminishing control over the labor force, with concomitant reduction in the quality and scale of architectural modification. The second (Pendergast 1979:183-84, 1982a:139) argues fairly persuasively in favor of a final stroke in the collapse that was at least tinged with violence. The third (Pendergast 1990a:246, 388) shows us that events in the central precinct were not an accurate gauge of life throughout the site in Terminal Classic times. Together with other lines of evidence, the three permit some fairly educated guesses regarding the fate of Altun Ha's elite.

The diminishing ability of Altun Ha's ninth-century rulers and their administrators to marshal labor forces for temple renewal was almost unquestionably mirrored in other areas of community life. It is possible that main-

tenance of water reservoirs and other similarly critical facilities declined in concert with work on central precinct structures, but evidence on this point is highly unlikely to be recoverable. Garbage removal, at whatever level it was managed, was clearly a casualty of social decay. As we have seen, it is probable that a declining standard of living as regards food consumption attended the dissolution of power in the community. If these and other forces persuaded some elite families to decamp in the ninth century, their departure is not documented in the archaeological record.

In most cases, if not in all, the histories of plazuela groups and individual upper-class structures mirror the rising fortunes of elite families through at least middle Late Classic times. In a good many, the rise may have peaked in the eighth century, but subsequent events do not necessarily indicate decline. In the following century, as the center of their world was fragmenting, a number of elite families gave concrete evidence of positive attitude by continuing to modify their homes, often in quite substantial ways. Examples of this activity are provided by Structures C-16 (Pendergast 1982a:217-20), C-22 (Pendergast 1982a:240-45), E-7, and E-50 (Pendergast 1990a:72-122, 216-28), among others. It is clear that at least part of Altun Ha's elite refused, as conservative elements of societies very often do, to admit that the handwriting was on the wall. Though imprecision in dating does not permit certainty on the matter, it is quite likely that a kind of determined optimism in the face of incontrovertible evidence of societal failure continued in some households for half a century or more after all higher government functions had come to an end. What kept the spark alive is something that we cannot hope to know on the basis of the archaeological data.

Because Altun Ha rulers whose tombs were accessible appear to have suffered a Cromwellian fate, it is quite likely that the community's living leader, and perhaps his immediate retinue, fared rather badly in the last stages of the collapse. The most interesting question regarding this period and the years that followed is: what became of the remainder of the elite? What use was there now for architects, jade carvers, feather workers, and the like? The answer to the second question is self-evident; without noble and near-noble consumers, the market for the talents of such specialists was gone. This answer provides a response of a sort to the first query. Most of the elite who remained in the community—and the evidence suggests that many did so—must have undergone painfully quick job retraining.

The image of the soft hand forcibly hardened by manual labor is, I think, a very fitting one. We know from the amount of Terminal Classic material remains that depopulation is not likely to have been either sudden or massive; we know that no slaughter of the elite attended the collapse, unless we wish to posit careful interment of the dead following the carnage; we know from the cessation of communal construction that sustenance of the family rather than the community must have become life's main motive force; hence we must also know that many a craft specialist's, and perhaps even a

great merchant's, hand was turned by the collapse to agriculture and other homely pursuits.

How does the foregoing suggestion relate to new construction in elite residences, especially in Structure E-7, where the architecture bespeaks combined administrative and residential use? Beyond simple refusal to admit that the apocalypse was upon them, some elite families may have genuinely attempted to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat by keeping up appearances—by continuing, in fact, leadership roles their ancestors had enjoyed for centuries. This suggestion holds particularly in the neighborhoods around the central precinct, where the atmosphere of decay must soon have become oppressive and the hopelessness of resurrecting the old way of life absolutely apparent. In outlying zones, death at the heart may have left a fair amount of blood flowing in peripheral veins and rebuilding may, for a time at least, have been less bravado than a reflection of the fact that removal of the head does not necessarily destroy the body.

At Lamanai, the collapse never came. Somehow, as organization raveled at centers nearby and distant, the people of this lakeside community made the positive attitude of some Altun Ha families into workable reality. I have elsewhere suggested a number of causes for Lamanai's strength, among them its location, which not only provided the protein advantage to which I have already alluded but also gave the inhabitants a major river avenue to the outside world. Furthermore, the labor tax imposed on Lamanai's working class may have been less than at some other centers, owing to a focus on limited frontal modification rather than complete transformation of major civic structures. Hence the burden borne may have been lighter while at the same time the strength to bear it was greater. The concept of a sort of adaptive advantage is attractive as at least a partial explanation, but it is weakened by the fact that neither at Altun Ha and Lamanai nor anywhere else do we have the kind of data required for real quantification of differential loading imposed on communities.

Together with the other factors, qualities of leadership may well have been a force in Lamanai's survival (Pendergast 1986b:247-48). This is not because there is evidence of particularly forceful leaders—what evidence could there be?—but rather because all of the socially and environmentally based explanations are too pat and monochromatic to serve in circumstances that must have been of the utmost complexity and difficulty. In making this suggestion I am not simply subscribing to the so-called Great Man view of history; rather, I think it self-evident that a special strength had to lie in the elite as a whole if survival was to be made possible.

Guided by the elite, Lamanai began in the ninth century a program that, on the one hand, had the appearance of retrenchment, but, on the other, involved major restatements of the community's continued well-being. Despite abandonment of the northern part of the central precinct in the ninth century and afterward, that same time saw the beginning of what was prob-

ably the largest single construction effort in the site's history, in an elite residential and administrative complex near the precinct's south end (Pendergast 1986b:231-33). This was clearly far more than failure to recognize defeat; such major public works seem an almost proud refusal to admit the possibility of defeat. The aura of pride stems not from the nature of the works themselves, but rather from the fact that the efforts were commenced at a time when Lamanai's people cannot have failed to be acutely aware that the vital force was being sapped from their neighbors, who were barely able to keep up the pretense of public architectural renewal.

The Fortunes of the Postclassic Elite at Lamanai

As the full enormity and scale of collapse events in the Southern lowlands became apparent to the rulers and the elite of Lamanai, a vast range of serious problems must surely have come to the fore. Primary among them was the fact that, although theirs was not the only center operating in the area in the Postclassic years, Lamanai's inhabitants were very largely cast in the role of the lone bulwark against chaos in their immediate region. By about A.D. 1100-1150, Lamanai may in fact have been the sole large community still functioning in Belize, but even before that time the site was effectively an island of calm in a very rough sea. As individuals and perhaps as a group under noble leadership, Lamanai's elite must have had to labor mightily to develop constructive strategies to deal both with the external world and with the pressures that world exerted on the community's internal stability.

An intriguing aspect of external pressure, but one on which no evidence is forthcoming, is the relationship between Lamanai's elite and whatever remained of an elite in neighboring communities. Surely, where close ties had earlier existed there must have been feelings of compassion, and perhaps of responsibility, that could have been translated into action. Lamanai was no soup kitchen for the unemployed specialists from Altun Ha or elsewhere, but knowledge of the community's survival must have fueled hungers of various kinds in former members of those elites. Were Lamanai's elite families pressured to accept refugees from among their compeers at other sites? We shall never know, but the nature of human interaction suggests that they were and raises the question of how the community held out against these and other pressures from what were now depressed areas in every sense.

That Lamanai itself escaped depression may have been due in large part to the "Dzuluinicob," that great water avenue that had served the city for all of its years. With its economic ties in the Southern lowlands severed, Lamanai must have begun to turn its eyes to the north more than it had ever done before the Postclassic, and the river made that turning feasible. The evidence indicates that reorientation of the community's economy northward involved production as well as consumption; the flow of goods in both

directions was surely essential to the maintenance of status, as well as a truly viable way of life, throughout the Postclassic.

Meanwhile, although the formal management of trade networks within the Southern lowlands and beyond to the highlands had been sheared away by the collapse, there is ample evidence that materials formerly transmitted via such networks still made their way to Lamanai. The most solid element in the evidence is obsidian, which was used in the area well into the sixteenth century (Graham and Pendergast 1988). What we cannot determine from the evidence is how much of the on-ground structure of the Classic system survived despite loss of the organizing bureaucracy. This is because many of the same individuals very probably made their way over the same trading trails, carrying obsidian and other materials from the same sources, as in precollapse days; what better example could we have of the failure of material remains to reflect momentous sociopolitical events?

The flow of goods into and out of Lamanai occurred within a framework of maintenance of religious practice (Pendergast 1986b:234-35), and surely social organization as well, that must have given the elite essentially the same intrasite role as in Classic times, and very largely the same extrasite role as well. At the head of the elite remained a nobility whose graves, though somewhat less elaborate than those of Classic times, were still marked by the concentration of wealth that proclaims the concentration of power.

Structures that formed the heart of the Middle Postclassic community have the same aura as Structure E-7 at Altun Ha; they are packed with burials that on grounds of location and associated goods clearly represent Lamanai's twelfth- and thirteenth-century elite. Chief among the burials in Structure N10-2 is that of an unquestioned noble, Burial N10-2/9 (Pendergast 1981b:44, figs. 19, 20), whose gold-adorned wooden staff and other objects combine with a copper bell and elaborate censers to declare his rank quite unmistakably. A similar level of wealth is discernible in the multiple fifteenth-century Burial N10-4/46 (Pendergast 1981a, 1981b:47, figs. 21, 22), intruded among elite interments of earlier times in Structure N10-4. It is impossible, however, to be sure that the young person who was the grave's principal occupant was in fact the community's ruler. As in the case of his twelfth/early-thirteenth-century predecessor, the N10-4 individual bore with him to the grave both imported and locally made items of wealth, so that both power and the economic strength over which it held sway are in evidence.

At the end of Lamanai's prehistoric period, a few years at most before the Spanish put in their appearance at the site, the last identifiable ruler of Lamanai was laid in his grave (Pendergast 1984). His gravesite, though beside a Classic residence rather than in a major civic structure, was presumably no less honorific than those chosen in preceding centuries and his wealth, as documented by grave goods, was approximately the same as that

of earlier Postclassic rulers. Yet the community that was his domain was architecturally not even a shadow of its Classic forebear and had shifted away in both location and form from its middle Postclassic antecedents. Whether the shift involved a population diminished from the levels of mid-Postclassic times unfortunately remains unclear. Nevertheless, a body of elite continued to form part of the social structure, and wealth was still there to be controlled. The tomb itself gives evidence of Lamanai's overall continuing strength and richness, as do ceramics from refuse pits. Sadly, no other burial of an elite individual of the period was recovered in excavation; architecture and other material culture remains tell us all we know about the community's upper stratum after 1500.

With the arrival of Spaniards at Lamanai, which probably occurred in 1544 (G. Jones 1984:31-32), came the end of noble rule as it had existed for three millennia or more. European presence also brought about the destruction, or at least the submersion, of the precontact criteria for definition of elite status. Community leaders were obviously identifiable throughout the period of Spanish presence, but the validation of their power was, on the surface at least, provided by Europeans rather than by ancient considerations. They went to their graves unaccompanied by the wealth that surrounded their predecessors and probably having professed no ties to those individuals. When circumstances permitted, however, their interments may well have been attended by as much Maya ritual as Christian, for when Spanish influence evaporated the old practices and their material manifestations quickly emerged once more (Pendergast 1985a:101-2, 1986b:5-6, 1990b).

As for the remainder of the elite, they, too, drew much of their status from Spanish-dominated economic pursuits and from their adherence to Christian doctrine; many of the same families may have occupied positions of dominance, but behind them now stood, however distantly, European power.

Unlike the early Postclassic, the opening century of the historic era is a time in which elite status seems very likely to be reflected by material culture items that we can identify without difficulty, because they are of European origin. Such objects, especially glass beads, form one of the principal bases for identification of Structure N11-18 (Pendergast 1985b:3-4, 1990b) as an elite residence. The truth is, however, that we have no specific knowledge of the significance of European goods in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Maya material culture inventory. We likewise know painfully little about the mechanisms of introduction and distribution of such goods, apart from the ethnohistorical identification of priests as principal importers of certain classes of objects.

It is reasonable to assume that the foreign products were highly valued because of their novelty and, in some cases, their utility. Such valuation would, of course, have made the objects very suitable markers of status, but

they might equally well have been dispensed for religious reasons largely or wholly unrelated to rank or status within the community. In circumstances in which the precontact criteria for definition of elite status were blended with, altered by, and perhaps extensively supplanted by criteria introduced by the Spaniards, we can be reasonably sure that possession of European goods was some sort of mark of distinction, but far from certain as to how such distinction fit into Lamanai's social hierarchy.

The Spanish hold on Lamanai was never tight, and in 1641 it was permanently shaken by Maya rebellion (López de Cogolludo 1971:bk. 11, ch. 13). Whatever remained of an elite at the community in the seventeenth century appeared to the Spaniards to have decamped together with the rest of the populace, but in fact a number of families probably left only for the brief time of the Spanish stop at the site and then returned to reestablish some of the patterns of precontact life. The old religion, probably never really suppressed, came to the fore again in a combination of precontact and new material manifestations, and it is very likely that something of the life of the period before 1544 was revived as well. Evidence of the presence of people at Lamanai after 1641 exists (Pendergast 1985a:101-2, 1986a:5-6, 1986b:243-44), but nowhere is it plentiful and nowhere does it give us more than an indirect glimpse of the existence of an elite within a community of unspecified size and equally unspecified lifespan. By 1700, Lamanai had very probably ended its existence as a settlement; a few families may have continued to inhabit the site after that date, but there was surely no longer a basis for application of the term "elite" to any portion of the remnant population.

Reciprocity between Classes: The Nature of the Evidence

If we accept that reciprocal relationships in Maya communities extended beyond the link between noble and commoner to encompass the entire elite as a body with both privileges and concomitant obligations, it should follow that archaeology will yield evidence of such reciprocity. It is my view that, whereas direct archaeological evidence is rarely if ever forthcoming on this matter, a considerable range of indirect evidence exists that allows us to perceive part of the bond between the elite and those on lower rungs of the social ladder.

It is self-evident that the rulers of both Altun Ha and Lamanai, and their respective cadres of nobles, had several very specific things to offer to the rest of the population, including the remainder of the elite. Effective rule provides stability through long-term and short-term direction and organization. It also offers intercession with the gods and with any other external forces in defense of the community and a principal channel for communication of a wide range of information that, at least in its applied form, is vital to the community's continued existence. None of these things leaves behind concrete evidence, but every one is reified in the architecture and the other components of the material culture inventory. Much of what I have dis-

cussed above is, in fact, as close as we can come to direct evidence of the essentials provided for the commoners by the leaders of the two Belize communities, as they were provided by the rulers of all Maya centers.

In return for their essential services, leaders and their retainers received the material and philosophical support necessary both to their daily existence and to their ability to provide continuity in such services. Such support obviously came not only from commoners but also from all elements of the elite below the nobles themselves. Much of this is manifested physically in the nature of noble residences, the wealth items that were the trappings of nobility, and the massive efforts dedicated to providing suitable settings for religious activities directed by nobles. At the level of the bidirectional flow of services, and the accompanying monodirectional flow of goods, between rulers and ruled, the data from Altun Ha and Lamanai are as clear and as extensive as those at any center. They do not reveal attitudes, but they do give us the translation of those attitudes into action.

It is in the area of relationships between the non-noble elite and the lower echelons of the population that the picture becomes, predictably, quite a bit cloudier. We cannot know, for example, whether craft specialists whose products were destined for noble use derived from that upward link sufficient power to marshal peasant labor for the construction and maintenance of their homes. We can be fairly sure that jewellers did not extend their abilities with stone to the level of cutting masonry; but who can say whether the mason worked on command or for payment? Throughout the range of elite residences, the mason's skills are consistently evident; but because we cannot know how widely such skills were developed in the community, we cannot separate tradesman from handyman. Hence we cannot know whether a mandated or an economic relationship linked an elite homeowner to the builder or in how many cases the two roles were embodied in a single individual.

If we cannot specify the nature, or even the existence, of a relationship between merchant or artisan and mason or peasant laborer, surely we cannot hope to express in concrete terms the type of reciprocity that linked upper and lower segments of the society. One such link, the economic arrangement between purchaser and purveyor of service, is indisputably reciprocal and would need no discussion if we could confirm its existence. It involves, however, none of the sense of mutual obligation that I have suggested is very likely to have been of central importance in Maya life.

Reciprocity surely existed in any arrangement that was state-established, even though the apparent obligation flowed only from the lower element of the community to the upper. The sense of obligation in such circumstances is in fact as imposed on the elite individual as on the commoner by definition of role through prescription and proscription. An example arises if we assume state control over import and export and see it, as we surely must, as effected equally through administrators' decision making and merchant-

traders' huckstering. In this context we can understand the entrepreneurial skills of the merchant as offered within the framework of state dictates, in return for state-established rewards provided ultimately by the masses. The difficulty here is that the degree, and indeed even the existence, of state control remains entirely within the realm of assumption.

It is the scale of exchange and the distances involved that conjure up the picture of major government intervention in the economy; we have no import control documents or excise stamps to verify our suspicions in the matter. There are, to date, not even very many emblem glyphs on communities' portable products, whether found at home or far from their source. Where they exist, no one can be sure what kind of political relationship or what amount, if any, of state economic control they document.

The contribution of the elite to the shape and richness—the quality—of life can be seen as having involved a type of reciprocity that lay beyond the reach of diktat and may never have been given verbal or tangible expression. Though impossible to resurrect from the archaeological record in any specific sense, elite-generated quality pervades all site centers in countless forms. It is this aspect that one would most like to grasp: community pride based on artisans' special skills, on architects' superior design abilities, on merchants' outstanding successes on the trading trail, or even on such mundane but important things as neighborhood atmosphere.

As in many other societies, the elite of Maya communities such as Altun Ha and Lamanai surely perceived their obligation to maintain a certain level of quality in their existence, to keep up appearances both individually and for the community as a whole. In return, they received both material and psychological support from those below them; the relationship enriched each group and sustained the polity in a viable setting. In the ninth century it may have been this, as much as any other relationship or force, that kept Lamanai on a level road while Altun Ha toppled off the cliff of Classic collapse.