

## The Americas

GEORGE F. ANDREWS, *Maya Cities: Placemaking and Urbanization* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, Civilization of the American Indian Series, 1975. Pp. 468. \$20.00)

This lavishly illustrated and handsomely produced work is essentially a pictorial record of seventeen sites selected by the architect-author as being representative of lowland Maya cities of the Classic Period (A.D. 300-900), and of two post-Classic lowland sites and one highland site which have been included for comparative purposes. The resultant survey is summarized in approximately 154 pages of text, 323 photographs, and 28 maps and site-plans of the cities examined. The author contends that these last "form the most important documentation presented in support of the present study" because his primary concern "is with the structure of the city as a whole" rather than with "details of building construction and architectural style". Yet, the photographs, which constitute the bulk of the book, deal overwhelmingly with architectural and artistic "details" whereas the site-plans are uniformly lacking in any form of labeling which would allow the reader to key the individual structures depicted to the "arrangements of groups or complexes of buildings" whose "spatial relationships" the author purports to be demonstrating. Indeed, six of the site-maps lack compass orientation as well, leaving the reader to assume that north is "up"; this may not necessarily be a valid assumption, however, for most of the other site-maps are oriented simply for the publisher's convenience so that they will fit the shape of the page.

"Problems of orientation" also plague the text, for one does not have to read very far before statements such as the following are encountered (the italics are mine): "the majority of all the sites shown fall within a very narrow north-south band between the *latitudes* of 89° 30' and 90°; "the site of Yaxchilán lies about thirty miles *downstream* from Piedras Negras" (it is upstream!); Comalcalco "marks the *easternmost* point in the spread of Maya culture along the Gulf of Mexico"; (it is the westernmost Mayan settlement); "Mayapan is located about thirty miles *southwest* of the present city of Mérida" (it is southeast of Mérida), etc. I would argue that the geographer has every reason to be sensitive to such inaccuracies.

Although this volume may be useful to architects and laymen who wish to gain some insight into the monumental magnificence of the Mayan civilization, it is likely to be a disappointment to the professional geographer, whether he be an historical, urban or regional specialist. Little or no attempt is made to enlist factors of site or situation in explanation of why Maya cities are located where they are, or, for that matter, of how individual aspects of their architecture may be related to local environmental conditions. For example, it seems almost inconceivable that the author can discuss the spatial organization of Tulum without any mention whatsoever being made of the city's protected natural harbor and its seaport function; or that in his examination of the structures at Palenque, he completely ignores their unique door-hinges, most probably a reflection of the fact that this "city" receives more than 125 inches of precipitation a year, making it the wettest major site in Mesoamerica.

But again, a harbor at Tulum and temples with doors at Palenque are merely isolated details. The text's most serious deficiency is its almost total lack of spatial perspective in a geographic, rather than an architectural, sense. Although the author includes a map of the Maya area and remarks on the striking pattern of "urban" concentration that it reveals, he fails to discern any "obvious explanation" for it by pointing out that "it does not correspond to the natural phytogeographical divisions of the Yucatán Peninsula or to any other known ecological divisions". He therefore concludes that, "it may well be nothing more than an accident due to uneven exploration". The fact that the cities are clustered near the drainage divide between the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico goes completely unnoticed. Yet Andrews continues his discussion by suggesting that the larger Mayan cities must represent strategic locations on ancient communications routes, although he concedes that little is known about where these routes were; they merely "had to exist". No mention is made of the role which religion may have played in siting some of these cities, nor is the author sensitive to the environmental "symbolism" reflected in the "meaningless repetition" (his words) of the Chac masks on the Codz Pop (a building whose name he consistently mis-spells everywhere it appears in the text) at Kabah. In sub-humid northwestern Yucatan, the Maya's desperate cry for rain resounds in the very stones of their fallen cities!

In conclusion, it should be noted that the author is at his best in his photographs, in his second chapter where he describes the architect's conception of a city, and in an eloquent three-page epilogue summarizing the Maya's achievements.

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