# VIII. COMMENTARY ON: THE EMERGENCE OF CIVILIZATION IN THE MAYA LOWLANDS

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## Introduction

In his introduction Andrews (1970 Ms.) quite rightly sets down his beliefs and biases on the nature of "civilization." He eschews what he calls a "rigid" definition of that condition, meaning by this a listing of cultural traits or criteria which would mark such a developmental threshold. He prefers, instead, to conceive of civilization as an inextricable part of the whole process of human cultural development, a process of natural and socio-cultural ecological adaptation. He also feels that "'civilization' knows no rules of its own and develops in varying ways from area to area", ways that are unpredictable. He admits to an aversion to "Spenglerian and Neo-Spenglerian theorists" with their constructs of "chrono-cultural typologies" which plot an inevitability in cultural growth. Such typologies are, to him, "rarely valid in more than limited geographical context." This position is a conservative position, but it is adhered to by a majority of historians and, probably, by a majority of archaeologists. In brief, it is a position that is skeptical of ever arriving at valid positive generalizations as to the uniformity of culture developmental processes. As such, it is a point of view that must necessarily hold serious reservations as to the underlying theme of this symposium.

Let me now outline my own biases on these matters. In the first place, I will reject a Korzybskian or semantic approach to the concept of civilization and will argue that there is a specific segment of the continuum of human social and cultural development that can be marked off and labeled as civilization and that it is a profitable and legitimate exercise for the archaeologist to do this. I would claim this for the Maya lowlands, for Mesoamerica as a whole, and, still more broadly, for the history of human culture at large. This brings me to another area of disagreement with Andrews: I do not think that the search for universal regularities in the processes of cultural development is a hopeless task. Admittedly, much that has been written on this subject -- and written with great erudition -- has fallen far short of the goal of the discovery of meaningful explanatory process. To tell us, as Spengler does, that a culture, like a plant or a biological organism, has a youth, maturity, old age, and death, is to tell us nothing of cause. Toynbee, less fatally deterministic, provides hypotheses on the mechanisms of culture change, such as "challenge-and-response", but most of us, at least in anthropologically-oriented archaeology, find such "explanations" too all-embracingly simplistic. That hardy perennial, Marxist evolutionism, tends to find more favor -- consciously or subconsciously --

in archaeological eyes. It has the advantage of focusing on the tangible, upon the relationships of culture to natural environment, upon subsistence, and the production and distribution of goods. It has a piece of the truth, but its doctrinaire insistence that prime cause resides always in the technico-economic sphere is not convincing. One must concur with Andrews that the schemes that have attempted to tell us just how and why man has marched toward civilization have so far failed; but I think the reason for their failure is that they have not been grounded in a close-up understanding of how and why change has come about in specific historical situations. It is from these situations, and their comparative analyses, that we will make progress in the formulation of "regularities" in culture change.

This preamble, is, of course, an endorsement of the aims of this symposium, but how does this leave me in a discourse with Andrews, assuming our views to be so hopelessly at odds? I will answer this by saying that I don't think that our outlooks are all that far apart. Actually, we have some very basic agreements. As all archaeologists should, we see the investigation of regional particulars as a *sine qua non*. Further, I am in accord with his view of culture as essentially systemic, as a phenomenon that develops through natural environmental-socio-cultural adaptations. Finally, in spite of Andrews' disclaimers, he leaves the door open when he says that although he "will not attempt to define when 'civilization' began (or ended) in the Maya lowlands", he "will attempt to outline briefly what now seem the critical developmental stages of human culture in the area and how they have been or may be dated." The phrase "critical developmental stages" is the operative one here. He obviously sees important differences in the Maya continuum. Perhaps he is willing to be convinced if others can demonstrate to his satisfaction that these specific, differentiable Maya lowland "stages" conform to larger patterns of human cultural development.

## Questions of Chronology

In pursuing my comments, let us first turn to some factual ground where I don't think Andrews and I see things very differently. His observations on chronology, especially as these pertain to radiocarbon dating and the correlation of the Maya calendar, are similar to mine. Given the uncertainties of the radiocarbon method, the pertinent dates from the southern lowlands support an 11.16 correlation while the majority of those from the north are more easily reconciled with a 12.9 correlation. So, lamentably, radiocarbon determinations have not, as yet, resolved the correlation question. My own appraisal of the archaeological dating for all of the Maya lowlands and, beyond this, for Mesoamerica as a whole, leads me to favor an 11.16 correlation. As Andrews has often pointed out, this correlation allows relatively little time to accommodate the northern lowland Pure Florescent, Modified Florescent, and Mayapan periods if we date the inception of the Pure Florescent as late as A.D. 800-900 Such a dating is based on an equation with the end of the Tepeu period in the

south, the interpretation which Andrews prefers. On the other hand, if we allow for chronological overlap between Tepeu and Pure Florescent then there is more time for the development of the latter. A full contemporaneity between Tepeu and Pure Florescent may be going too far in this direction, and I think now that I would favor the kind of alignment proposed by Parsons (1969) in a recent monograph where the beginning of the Pure Florescent is made coeval with the beginning of Tepeu 2 at about A.D. 700.

Although the Maya correlation problem is important to our understanding of events in the lowlands, and particularly the coordination of these events between north and south, it does not pertain very critically to the questions surrounding the emergence of Maya civilization. Almost certainly, the correlation falls somewhere in the range discussed, with a slippage of only two or three centuries in either direction at most. More crucial to our concerns here are radiocarbon dates relating to the Formative or Pre-Classic cultures. We have a number of these, both from the Maya lowlands and from elsewhere in Mesoamerica; and, taken in conjunction with stratigraphic excavations, they offer a generally agreed upon chronological framework for the long Formative Period and its major events. Briefly, and viewing Mesoamerica as a whole, it would appear that an effective agricultural subsistence came into being at somewhere around 2000 to 1500 B.C., in what is usually called the Early Formative. At 1200 B.C., we have the first great ceremonial centers of the Olmec, and the spread of Olmec influences after this mark the Middle Formative. The Late Formative, after about 400 B.C., was the time of the various successor cultures to the Olmec. The subsequent Classic Period developments of Teotihuacan, Monte Alban, the Maya lowlands, and elsewhere arose from these Late Formative and Proto-Classic cultures in the first two or three centuries of the Christian Era.

## Diachronic Configurations of Development in the Maya Lowlands

We need many more radiocarbon dates on the Maya lowland Formative Period cultures and other kinds of information as well; however, from what we know now, it looks as though there was no settlement of any kind in these lowland regions until at least 1000 B.C., or until the Middle Formative Period. These earliest cultures of the Maya lowlands appear as developed farming, pottery-making phases, and it is assumed that they result from migrant societies who entered the jungle lowlands from elsewhere. In this connection, it is to be remembered that such societies were already extant in a number of places in southern Mesoamerica at this time -- in the old Olmec heartland of the Veracruz-Tabascan lowlands, in the Guatemala-Chiapas uplands, and in Oaxaca, but it is not clear, as yet, just which one of these Mesoamerican subareas played the parental role with regard to the Peten-Yucatecan cultures.

In the southern lowlands these earliest settlements of the Middle Formative were small villages. Perhaps the very earliest of these, dating at ca. 800-600 B.C., are the Xe phase components at Altar de Sacrificios

(Willey and Smith, 1969) and Seibal (Smith and Willey, 1969), on the Pasión River. Most of our information on Xe comes from small excavation exposures beneath later refuse and architecture, and this is also true for the succeeding Mamom phases (ca. 600-400 B.C.). In her current symposium paper, Proskouriakoff (1970, Ms.) has called attention to a small San Felix Mamom plaza with surrounding platforms at Altar de Sacrificios, and it may be that these relatively modest little buildings were temple substructures. Certainly, in the later Chicanel-like phase at Altar de Sacrificios these small structures were built over and enlarged, and the plaza in question very definitely became a ceremonial precinct. This follows developments in other southern lowland sites in the Chicanel-related,[1] or Late Formative, phases. In the Late Formative Period population increased greatly; new centers sprang up; and impressive ceremonial architecture marked these centers. Toward the end of the Late Formative, or in the Proto-Classic, distinctive stylistic features of Maya culture appear and assemble rapidly -- vaulted architecture, sculpture, hieroglyphics and calendrics, polychrome pottery -- to form the Early Classic Mayan culture of the third century A.D.

Now there are some contrasts between this southern lowland developmental picture and that which Andrews sketches for the north -- or, at least there seem to be, and we need further comment from him about these. His earliest phase at Dzibilchaltun, the Zacnicte, has a median radiocarbon date of 975 B.C., which would place it as somewhat earlier than Xe and Mamom in the south. Depending on just how one would draw the line between Early and Middle Formative, Zacnicte would be either at the end of the Early Formative or the beginning of the Middle. The architecture which Andrews describes, while not impressive, seems more advanced than anything we have yet been able to associate with Xe and Mamom in the south. The pottery, as he describes it, is definitely more sophisticated than that of Xe-Mamom; and the appearance of polychrome painting at this early time is most surprising. Thus, although both the earliest cultures of the southern and northern lowlands give the impression of pioneer communities that moved into these jungles from elsewhere, the status of development of the northern immigrants appears higher than that of the southerners. This suggests that the original homeland of the peoples who pioneered northern Yucatan may not have been the same as that of the early immigrants into the south.

Following Zacnicte, Andrews refers to the "Second Formative stage in Yucatan" as "one of tremendous development in human culture", featuring terraced and stone-faced pyramids at Dzibilchaltun. He notes widespread modal similarities in pottery over long distances, stating that "sherds from as far apart as Dzibilchaltun and Chiapa de Corzo are quite indistinguishable." He

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(1) Following the terminology for phase designations agreed upon at the Guatemala City Conference of 1965, these Late Formative or Late Pre-Classic phases of the southern Maya lowlands would be linked together in a "Chicanel Ceramic Sphere" (Willey, Culbert, and Adams, eds., 1967).

qualifies this last to make clear that he is speaking of similarities of form and finish; in paste and temper they are quite different. In other words, the manufacture is local; what is being transmitted are stylistic features. This participation in widespread ceramic similarities suggests the Chicanel horizon or sphere in the south, and, if so, this would correlate with the comparable Late Formative configuration of southern architectural development; however, this correlation seems in doubt as Andrews refers to a "terminal Formative in Yucatan" which witnessed the beginning of a long process of decline", with the discontinuation of monumental architecture and a population drop-off. This does not correspond at all to the rhythm of development in the south where, contrariwise the Late Formative followed by the Proto-Classic were periods of steady expansion of population and ceremonial center build-up.

As to the emergence of Classic Maya civilization from the antecedent Formative Period cultures, Andrews and I have basic agreements in that we both see the rise of the Classic Maya as a lowland phenomenon; that is, it was not developed _en toto_ elsewhere and then transferred to the Peten and Yucatecan plains. At the same time we also admit that the "seeds" of many features of the Classic Maya development were derived from a widespread and early southern Mesoamerican heritage. This is certainly true of the general forms of ceremonial architecture -- although not of such specialized things as the corbelled vault. It is true of hieroglyphics, mathematics, and calendrics although, as Andrews emphasizes, the unique Mayan evolution of these traits is matched nowhere else in Mesoamerica at any time. I see this development arising steadily, gradually, and then with accelerated speed all through the Late Formative and Proto-Classic. New ideas appear from time to time in the course of development until, taken cumulatively at a more or less arbitrary point, they can be said to mark a Classic Period threshold. This is seen very clearly at Tikal (W. R. Coe, 1965) and also at Uaxactun (A. L. Smith, 1950). In contrast to this, Andrews says of his northern Formative Period cultures that they "seem to have none of that remarkable entity we would call Maya _civilization_. The modalities which later made the Maya different are simply not foreshadowed." Andrews points up this difference between north and south by suggesting that, while the north may have been in advance of the south in the development of Formative Period monumental architecture and complex societies, the crystallizing elements of Maya civilization of the Classic -- writing, art forms, and the corbelled vault -- were earlier in the south. From there, presumably, they diffused to the north.

## Comments Concerning the Condition of Civilization

At the outset of my discussion I said that I thought civilization could be defined as a social and cultural condition and that its evidences could be identified archaeologically. Leaving aside for the moment the lowland Maya and the Andrews paper, I shall attempt such a definition. I

conceive of civilization as having three essential dimensions: (1) large population size and density; (2) marked social complexity; and (3) a complex network of intercommunication among its social components. More specifically, I submit that a civilization integrates the lives of more than 5000 persons. This integration may be achieved in either a concentrated, or urban, settlement or in a dispersed, or non-urban, settlement. The crucial factor is that the energies and abilities of a population of this size are drawn upon and integrated to a common purpose. As to social complexity, a civilization is characterized by marked divisions of labor, by a complex ranking system or by social classes, and by an hierarchial governmental structure. These circumstances and institutions may be reflected in various ways in the archaeological record: in differentiation in the size and elegance of living quarters; in the presence of constructions dedicated to public purposes or personages -- temples and palaces; in evidences for the specialized manufacture of various goods; in evidences for the differential distribution and use of these goods as seen in dwellings or in burials. As to the nature of the governmental structure, I would say that this could be either that of a chiefdom or a state, as these terms have been used recently by anthropologists (Service, 1962). That is, I would not restrict the condition of civilization to the political form of the state. I accept the chiefdom-state distinction and the evolutionary implications of this distinction, however; and I would see the sanctions of a large scale force, as these can be manipulated by the state, as the essential differentiation between the two.

As to the network of intercommunications, the key points in such a network are either cities or ceremonial centers. It is from these that government, religion, and trade are controlled. Media of communication are obviously of great importance. Language is the foremost of these in any human communication, but in the context of a civilization it is important that the word be recorded, and so writing has become, deservedly, a classic hallmark of the status of civilization. But this is not the only way, in a broader sense, that the "word" is recorded. Art is another communicative form. As Proskouriakoff (1970, Ms.) notes, "Monumental ... arts provided validation for hierarchial society and maintained communication between administration and the populace." The communication network of a civilization binds not only the present with the traditions of the past, but it ties hamlet to village and village to city or major center. The construction and enlargement of such a network may be effected through political or military power, but it may also be effected through trade.

I make no claim here to great originality in the formulation of these criteria of civilization. Gordon Childe (1950) and others have offered similar ones. My attempt here has been to place them in systemic context; but they can be summarized as traits as follows:

(1) Communities of more than 5000 people or the clear evidence of the integration of such numbers in a close-knit cultural system.

(2) Marked divisions of labor.

(3) A complex ranking system or social classes.

(4) An hierarchial governmental structure.

(5) Monumentality in architecture.

(6) A codified symbolic system (such as writing or a pervasive art style.)

(7) Interregional trade.

Before turning to the status of civilization in the Maya lowlands, we should consider one other matter: the different kinds of civilizations. In their symposium paper Parsons and Price (1970, Ms.) define two basic kinds of civilization for Mesoamerica. In referring to what they have said, I beg indulgence for anticipating the formal discussion of their paper, but their thoughts on the matter are very pertinent both to the symposium theme as a whole and to the Maya lowlands in particular. They refer to "urban" and "non-urban" civilizations. These have, respectively, the diagnostic feature of the presence or the absence of the trait of true urban settlement. They also have other associated traits. The urban civilization is associated with a market economy and a merchandising middle class, with a greater social class complexity than the non-urban civilization, with a landed aristocracy, and with a militaristic leadership. It is the setting for the state. The non-urban civilization is linked to a redistributive economy in the hands of an aristocracy, to a social ranking system, to corporate or kin ownership of land, and to a theocratically oriented leadership. It is the setting of the chiefdom.

The extent to which these two trait clusters are functionally associated with their respective urban and non-urban settlement types is yet to be fully demonstrated. Sanders and Price (1968), and again, Parsons and Price (1970, Ms.), have argued for functional interrelationships. They see the urban type civilization as developing in regions of diversified natural resources. In Mesoamerica, these are the upland valleys, with deep soils suitable for intensive cultivation techniques and a variety of items for exchange -- obsidian, jadeite, basalt. This micro-environmental diversity was best served by a local market economy, and such an economy, and the positive feedback from it, flourished best in a true urban setting. The lowlands, on the other hand, lacked environmental differentiation of resources and the symbiosis between micro-environmental niches. For them, the most important trade was long-distance trade which was mediated by the nobility or by the lineage heads whose ceremonial centers were the redistributive points for a dispersed peasantry. These are instructive models; I am inclined to agree with them;

whether they are correct or not in all details will be revealed, we hope, by further archaeological testing. The two models carry with them an implication of evolutionary sequence, with the stage of non-urban civilization preceding the urban. Parsons and Price (1970, Ms.) caution, however, that this need not be the case and cite Morton Fried's (1960) model of the "secondary state." The Mesoamerican non-urban civilization of the lowlands could be such a "secondary state" -- that is, one which developed in response to, and from contact with, the primary state of an urban civilization, in this case one from the Mesoamerican highlands. Although this point is not pressed in the Parsons-Price paper, it is favored in the earlier Sanders-Price argument where Maya Classic Tikal is seen in such a "secondary state" relationship to Teotihuacan. In this particular instance, I am inclined to doubt the "secondary state" model as being fully applicable to what happened in the Maya lowlands; but, as a way of going into that, let us get back now to my specific theme, the rise of civilization in the Maya lowlands.

## The Status of Civilization in the Maya Lowlands

The greater part of our Maya lowland evidence for population size, settlement distribution, clues to social classes, and trade comes from the Late Classic Period, and, especially in the south for what is designated as the Tepeu 2 sub-phase (ca. A.D. 700-800). We will take a look at these Late Classic data first -- in the light of our foregoing criteria of the condition of civilization -- and then consider how far back in time we may project these patterns.

That there were Late Classic Maya lowland communities that integrated the lives and efforts of more than 5000 people is now fully demonstrated. Earlier versions of Tikal population estimates give figures of 10,000 to 11,000 persons for the 16 square kilometer mapped central zone, and this was supplemented by another 10,000 persons in a surrounding peripheral belt (Carr and Hazard, 1961; Haviland, 1965). Now more recent estimates following strip-sample surveys radiating out from the center of the site have increased these figures to a total of 49,000 people within a zone of 163 square kilometers (Haviland, 1969). As far as we know, this was the largest Classic Maya community of the south, and it seems to be unique in its great size; however, other ceremonial centers, although smaller than Tikal, are estimated to have controlled sustaining areas of more than 5000 people. Seibal is one example (Gair Tourtellot, personal communication 1970); Benque Viejo, in the Belize Valley, another (Willey and others, 1965); and in the north, Dzibilchaltan was the major center in a very large population zone (Andrews, 1961). It has been argued, indeed, that some of these Maya lowland centers were true urban communities, not just ceremonial centers with dispersed sustaining populations. Haviland (1969), especially, has made this point with regard to Tikal. To settle such an argument requires a more exact definition of what we mean by urban than I have given so far in this discussion. To me, there is a significant difference between Tikal's 49,000 persons scattered

over an area of 163 square kilometers and the 100,000 persons that are estimated as having been grouped within the 19 square kilometers of Teotihuacan (Sanders and Price, 1968; Millon, 1967, 1968). Still, I admit there is room for discussion and further examination of this urban question. For our immediate consideration, though, whether urban or non-urban, we can affirm without doubt that the Maya Classic Period culture of the lowlands had integrated communities of over 5000 people.

Marked division of labor seems well attested for the Maya Classic. It is unlikely that the fine craft goods, the monumental sculptures, Maya writing, and calendrics were made or manipulated by part-time farmers. Maya society must have had certain persons whose lives were devoted to such tasks and activities. Certainly there was an aristocratic leadership. We see this depicted in Maya art; we see it in Maya tombs and burials; we see it in the esoteric knowledge that was part of Maya religion. As to the size and composition of what might have been a "middle class", we are more in the dark. As mentioned, professional artisanry is implied by the nature of some of the luxury products that we find in graves and caches. Other proofs of full-time craft specialists are more equivocal. Culbert (1958, Ms.) stated that he saw no evidence at Tikal for craft barrios, such as are identified for Tenochtitlan and Teotihuacan; Haviland (Haviland and others, 1968) contrariwise, insists that there are indications that certain sections of the site had been the residences of flint or obsidian workers. Coe's (W. R. Coe, 1967) tentative identification of a Tikal marketplace is another datum that can be taken to support both economic differentiation and social differentiation within Classic Maya society.

An hierarchial governmental structure, monumentality in architecture, and a codified symbolic system (or systems) are all so heavily and obviously documented from Maya archaeology that they need no further discussion. The same now is true for interregional trade.

The Maya Late Classic, then, meets all of the traits or criteria that I have set down as diagnostics of the condition of civilization. How far back in time can we push this civilizational threshold for the lowland Maya? I do not think there can be any question about extending it back to the Early Classic. Although settlement data are less secure for this earlier period, we know that Tikal had a very large population by this time (W. R. Coe, 1965; Haviland, 1969). Social class differentiation was probably less marked than later (Rathje, 1970); nevertheless, it was in the Early Classic that Tikal enjoyed a trade in luxury goods with Teotihuacan, and the nature of this trade implies that a non-egalitarian society had already taken form in the Maya lowlands. Other traits -- great architecture, sculpture, and hieroglyphic writing -- are all present at the beginning of the Early Classic.

The Teotihuacan relations with Tikal, and the southern Maya lowlands as a whole, raise the question of the role of that highland site in the

development of Maya civilization. Can the Maya achievement be explained as a response to these contacts? Or, as we have asked earlier, was Maya lowland civilization a "secondary" formation made possible by Teotihuacan trade and political influence? I would answer this in the negative. We know that those unusually sophisticated Maya forms -- its architecture, its art, its hieroglyphics, and its calendar -- were all present before Teotihuacan influence is registered in the Maya lowland sequences; and I think it is highly probable that those other traits which I have listed here as marking the threshold of civilization were present then as well. Without question, Teotihuacan had a very important effect on Maya culture, but I do not see these Teotihuacan influences as the levers which raised Maya society and culture from the level of simple village agriculture to the status of civilization. Rather, the impact of Teotihuacan had the effect of moving a non-urban Maya civilization in the direction of full urbanism and the state; but, as I have said in a previous paper (Willey, 1968, Ms.), I do not believe that this transformation to the developed state was ever complete.

If we hold to the above arguments, and see Maya lowland culture as being on the level of a civilization at the beginning of the Early Classic, can we push this back to the Pre-Classic? Quite probably we can, although here we are handicapped by our relatively slight knowledge of the lowland Maya Proto-Classic and Late Preclassic Periods. For the moment, I think the best that we can do is to say that the Maya cultural continuum of the lowlands attained the status of civilization -- as I have defined it here -- in the span of the Late Preclassic-to-Proto-Classic or between about 400 B.C. and A.D. 200.

## Comments on Process and Cause

Of all of the symposium papers, the one most concerned with process and cause is that of Parsons and Price on "Mesoamerican Trade." They see this trade as an important factor, perhaps the key factor, in the systemic relationships that led to civilization. It is their position that the generation of a non-egalitarian society is the first important step-up to the threshold of civilization; and they ask the question: under what circumstances will a society produce a surplus of goods and voluntarily cede it to others? The answer to the first part of the question is essentially an ecological one; in Mesoamerica it was man as an agricultural exploiter of his natural environment. Their answer to the second part of the question is that a society will voluntarily cede a surplus to others if there is some advantage to everyone in doing so. Such advantages accrue from trade, from the opportunity to obtain items that are not immediately at hand. These items may be either basic necessities or exotic luxuries. With the increase of Early Formative Period populations egalitarian mechanisms for inter-regional trade would be inadequate to supply the increasing demands for non-local products. Trade would come to be administrated by an elite who would, thereby, become an aristocratic leadership through their control of the distribution of wealth.

This hypothesis deserves very serious consideration and should prompt further archaeological testing. At the moment, I am inclined to accept it and to go even further and add another "twist" to it, one developed by William Rathje (1970, Ms.) in a recent but still unpublished paper. This additional aspect of the interpretation impresses me as the first fully satisfactory explanation for the primacy of Olmec civilization in Mesoamerica. The early rise of the great lowland Tabasco-Veracruz ceremonial centers at La Venta and San Lorenzo, dating back before the first millennium B.C. (see Bernal, 1970, Ms.) has always been a puzzle, especially if one followed the Sanders-Price (1968) reasoning that Mesoamerican civilization must necessarily have arisen first in a subarea of diversified natural resources and with a potentiality for irrigation farming. In their present symposium paper Parsons and Price seem to shift away from this view, at least to the extent of explaining early Olmec leadership in the march toward civilization to the advantages in river levee soils for high crop yields. Undoubtedly, these local riverine conditions gave the early Olmec an initial boost and provided them with a surplus that they could invest in trade for needed items; but, to apply Rathje's hypothesis,[2] the crucial transformation of an egalitarian to a non-egalitarian society resulted from this trade in the desired upland products -- stone for corn-grinding implements and obsidian for cutting tools. This trade was mediated by early entrepeneurs who eventuated into a class of aristocratic priest-chiefs, and with this change Olmec society was on its way toward the civilization whose monuments and evidences we see not only at San Lorenzo and La Venta but elsewhere in the Mesoamerican Middle Formative world.

Once trade was established by the lowland Olmec leadership with the highland regions the peoples of the latter, in a rapid accomodative adaptation, converted to non-egalitarian social modes. With their basic advantages in resources and demographic potential, they outstripped the Olmec by the end of the Middle Formative. Quite probably, they passed rapidly through the stage of non-urban civilization; certainly, by Teotihuacan II times they had become fully urbanized. The lowlands, on the other hand, never really accomplished this final step-up to full urban civilization although the Late Classic Maya, in places such as Tikal, were moving toward it.

As a final word, I'd like to enter one caution about these hypotheses concerning the rise to civilization. Parsons and Price (1970, Ms.) state:

> "Archaeologically, the distribution of elite goods is merely the indication that we are dealing with a ranked society based economically on a system of redistributive exchanges. Such an indication cannot be analytically regarded as in any sense the cause of that system."

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(2) Rathje's (1970, Ms.) hypothesis was applied to the lowland Maya; however, as he acknowledges (personal communication), it also seems to apply to the rise of the earlier Olmec.

I would accept that the goods, *per se*, are not the cause of the system - if this is what the statement is intended to mean. In fact, I would insist that they are not. A few years ago I published a paper (Willey, 1962) about the Olmec art style and its horizonal pervasiveness in Mesoamerica. I postulated that this style was the symbolic system of an ideology that had an important part in synthesizing the first Mesoamerican co-tradition, the first areal oikoumene of shared beliefs. I did not state that I believed the distribution of this style to have been carried by proselytizing force, nor do I think so now. In the light of the ideas which Sanders, Parsons, Price, Flanery (1968), Rathje, and others have advanced, I think it very likely that trade was the mechanism which carried the style. At the same time, I think that more was carried than the elite goods or the physical properties of the style. There was also transmission of ideas, of a religious ideology; and this ideology was an important force in the formation of all Mesoamerican civilizations -- or, if you like, of Mesoamerican civilization. It helped make and perpetuate it. The continuity of this ideology - undoubtedly modified - is seen persisting down to the Aztec empire -- as Bernal has pointed out to us in his present paper. In fact, I think we have here a fourth dimension of civilization to add to our other three - the dimension of ideology. Intercommunication among discrete social segments is a necessity for the rise of civilization, as I have argued at the beginning of this commentary, and, undoubtedly, McLuhan's concept that the medium is the message has much to recommend it; nevertheless, I would argue that the idea content of the message is the most important of all. For if we do not accept this then we are saying that there are no differences in ideas whatsoever, that ideology can be held as a constant as we seek for the causes of civilizational growth only among the variables of ecology, demography, and technology. With what I know of the world around me and what I know of the past through history and archaeology, this seems highly unlikely, and I cannot accept this view. I offer this as no cry of reaction, no retreat from the attack on the ecological-demographic-technological front. Archaeology has made great advances along this line in the last two decades, and there is still much ground to be won; but this approach will not tell us everything worth knowing about past human affairs. What I am saying is that I am certain that some ideas, some ideologies were "better" than others or were more successful adaptations that prepared the road to civilization. Whether we will ever be able to reveal the nature of these Precolumbian Mesoamerican ideologies in any meaningful way, to appreciate them as adaptive mechanisms of greater or lesser social and political success, remains to be seen. Obviously, it is archaeology's most difficult task, but I don't think we should pretend that such a task, such a challenge, does not exist.[3]

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(3) This commentary is published essentially as it was written in June of 1970, prior to the symposium sessions at Burg Wartenstein in early July. Some minor changes have been made in the body of the text, and the final paragraph has been expanded somewhat over the original version.

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