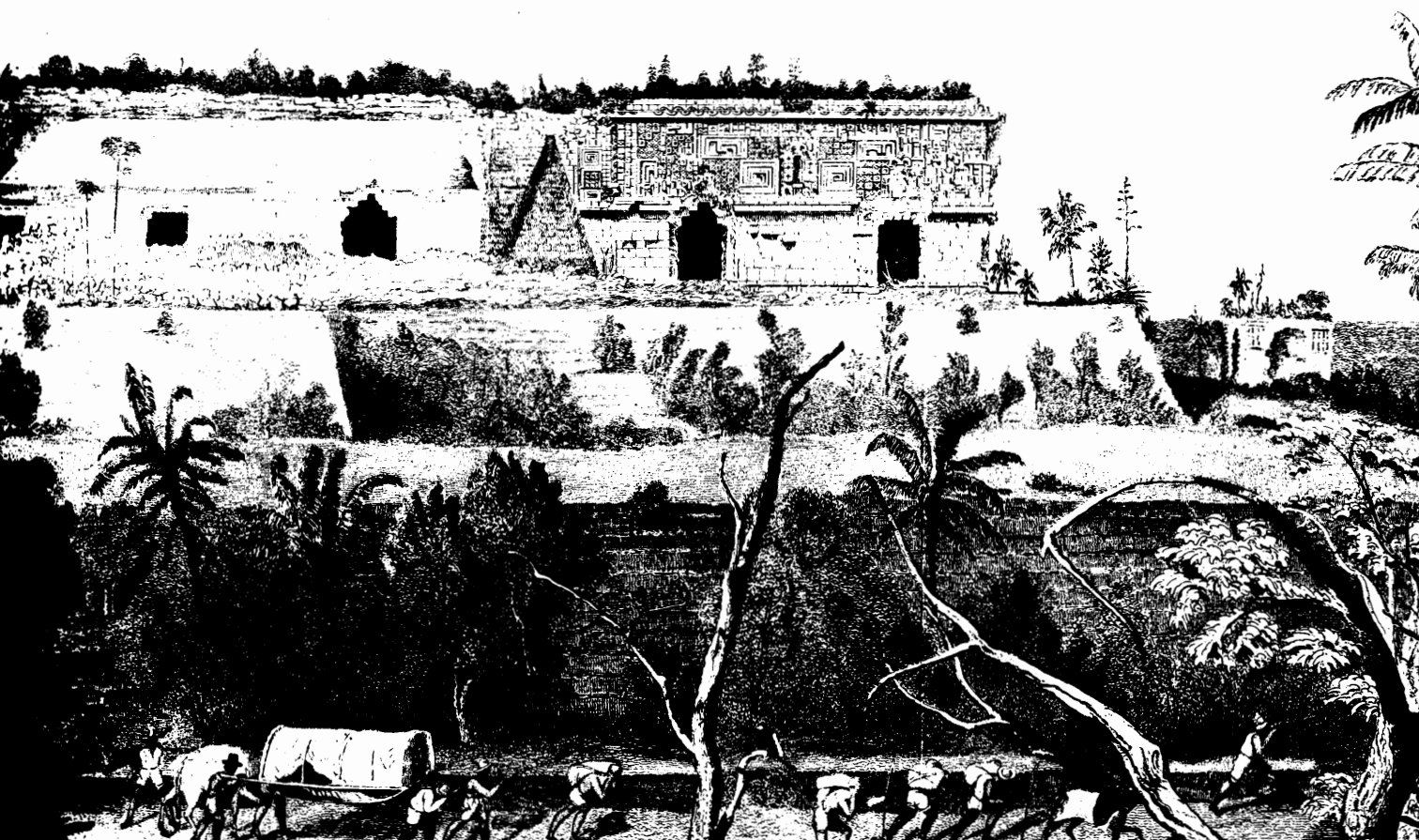


# THE HOUSE OF THE GOVERNOR



# Contents

Preface	Page xix
Introduction	3
PART ONE. HISTORY AND FUNCTION	
Chapter 1. Location and General Description	7
Chapter 2. Historiography of Uxmal and the House of the Governor	17
Chapter 3. Puuc Chronology and the Dating of the House of the Governor	25
Puuc Ceramics	31
Puuc Epigraphy	33
Uxmal Sculpture	37
Puuc Radiocarbon Dating	38
Early- and Late-Puuc Architectural Style	40
Synthesis	48
Chapter 4. Uxmal and the Xiu	52
Chapter 5. A Historical Interpretation of the Inscriptions of Uxmal	68
Chapter 6. Function of the House of the Governor	75
PART TWO. ARCHITECTURE	
Chapter 7. Construction	89
Building Tools and Instruments	89
Sources of Building Stone	90
Plaster and Stucco Preparation	91
Mosaic Elements	92
Architects	92
Construction Time	93
Site and Platform System	93
Siting	93
Platform 1	94
Platform 2	94
Platform 3	95
Monumental Stairway	97
Platform 4	99
House of the Governor	101
Base	101
Lower Walls	102

	Doorways	104
	Bench	104
	Wall Depressions and Openings	105
	Cordholders	105
	Partition Walls	105
	Vaults	106
	Vault Beams	108
	Outer Faces of the Vaults	109
	Transverse Vaults	109
	Cleavage Plane and Upper Façade	109
	Roof	111
	Plaster Facing	112
Chapter 8.	Plan and Massing	113
	Plan	113
	Massing	116
	Freestanding Block Design	117
	Three-Part Division	120
	Transverse Vaults	125
Chapter 9.	Visual and Proportional Effects	132
	Mosaic Façades	132
	Negative Batter	135
	Moldings	137
	Recessed Doorways	139
	Proportion and Measurement	140
	Doorways	140
	Rope Measure	140
	Base	141
	Modular Planning and Numerological Considerations	142
	Curvature of the Transverse Vaults	145
PART THREE. ARCHITECTURAL SCULPTURE		
Chapter 10.	Human Figural Sculpture	149
	South Wing Figures	149
	North Wing Figures	151
	Central Building Figures	153
	Human Figural Traditions in Maya Architectural Sculpture	158
	Iconography of Human Figural Sculpture	167
	Central Motif	167
	Portraiture in Maya Art	174
	Patronage and Portraiture of the House of the Governor	180
Chapter 11.	Mask Panels	182
	Origins	183
	Iconography	187
Chapter 12.	Step-Frets	203
	Origins	207
	Distribution in Mesoamerica	208
	Antecedents	209
	Iconography	215
Chapter 13.	Latticework	219
	Origins	219
	Iconography	222

CONTENTS

xi

Chapter 14.	Bicephalic Jaguar Throne	229
	Jaguar and the Olmec	230
	Jaguar and the Maya	230
Chapter 15.	Epilogue	237
Appendix.	Summary of Mexican Archaeological Activities and Reconstruction at Uxmal and the House of the Governor	243
Notes		247
Bibliography		275
Index		293

## Preface

THIS BOOK is a revised and updated version of a doctoral dissertation submitted to Yale University in 1981. It includes discussions of the historiography, chronology, native history, epigraphy, function, plan and massing, visual and proportional effects, and architectural sculpture of the magnificent palace building known as the House of the Governor at the northern Maya site of Uxmal, Yucatan, Mexico.

I owe thanks to many persons for helping me complete this project. I am particularly grateful to George Kubler and Esther Pasztory, who instructed me in the critical appreciation of pre-Columbian art. During my undergraduate years at Columbia University, Esther Pasztory awakened me to the richness, beauty, and meaning of this art tradition and stimulated me to make it my area of concentration. It has been a rare privilege to work with George Kubler, who was my doctoral adviser at Yale University. His deep and wide-ranging knowledge of pre-Columbian art has served as an inspiration and a challenge. During the preparation of the dissertation he read drafts of all chapters and patiently and enthusiastically counseled me on how to improve both structure and content, enabling me to shape my research into a work of scholarship. Throughout the process of revision he has continued to be helpful in countless ways.

I also owe a special debt to Michael D. Coe and Floyd Lounsbury, also of Yale University. Michael Coe's exuberant and infectious interest in Maya iconography and Floyd Lounsbury's profound knowledge of Maya hieroglyphic writing are responsible for much of the new information I am able to provide. Floyd Lounsbury provided me with extensive comments and criticisms on chapter 5, on the hieroglyphic inscriptions at Uxmal.

Others to whom I wish to give special thanks include David H. Kelley and E. Wyllys Andrews V. David Kelley commented on my hieroglyphic interpretations, and his studies of northern Maya inscriptions have deepened my own knowledge of writing and history in this area. I have had many discussions by letter or telephone with Will Andrews regarding Puuc archaeology and chronology, and he gave me free access to relevant records at the Middle American Research Institute at Tulane University.

I would also like to thank Anthony Andrews and Joann Andrews, who graciously allowed me to use the archaeological library in their home and research center, Quinta Mari, in Mérida. During the early phases of my research H. E. D. Pollock was helpful, providing information on Puuc chronology and then-unpublished maps of Puuc ruins. Anthony Aveni and John Carlson have helped me understand the astronomical significance of the House of the Governor, and George Andrews has shared his knowledge of specific Puuc ruins and construction techniques. Rosemary Sharp and I had valuable discussions on the significance of cut-stone façades, while Donald Roberston encouraged my studies of architectural design and proportion. Information on Frans Blom's research at Uxmal was provided by Mr. Edward Hinderliter, of Media, Pennsylvania, while Ian Graham sent me preliminary drawings of several hieroglyphic monuments from the northern Maya area. I have also profited from many discussions with Joseph W. Ball regarding the archaeological ceramics of Yucatan and the native historical tradition contained in the Books of Chilam Balam.

During 1976-77 I was able to travel to Mexico thanks to funds provided by the Josef Albers Traveling Fellowship administered by Yale University. I

would like to thank Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, then director of the Archivo Técnico of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, for permitting me to review unedited reports of archaeological excavations and reconstructions undertaken at Uxmal. Dr. Alberto Ruz Lhuillier, then director of the Center for Maya Studies at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, kindly answered questions concerning his work at Uxmal, and Marta Foncerrada de Molina discussed her studies of the architectural sculpture of Uxmal. For my work in Yucatan I owe a particular debt to Norberto González Crespo, then director of the Centro Regional del Sureste of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, in Mérida, who provided me with permits to use ladders on the House of the Governor and to survey the platform system. He also introduced my wife and me to two guides, Mario Magaña and Pedro Gongura, of Oxkutzcab, who conducted us to many smaller Puuc ruins. Alfredo Barrera Rubio, also of the Centro Regional del Sureste, provided me with air photos of Uxmal and informed me about settlement pattern studies. I also wish to thank all other members of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia who helped me obtain the permits necessary to complete my work at the House of the Governor.

During 1977–78 I was the recipient of a Robert Woods Bliss Fellowship and was privileged to work on sections of this book as a junior fellow of the Center for Pre-Columbian Studies, Dumbarton Oaks,

Washington, D.C. I would like to thank Elizabeth P. Benson, then director of the center, for her help locating resources and for general discussions of my topic. I returned to Uxmal in March, 1978. I am grateful to Roy Whitehead, of Hingham, Massachusetts, for acting as my field assistant on that trip. We surveyed the platform system of the House of the Governor and thoroughly measured the building at that time.

I would also like to thank my mother, Mrs. Tid Kowalski, and my grandfather, Floyd Gates, of Tulsa, Oklahoma, who made many of the inked drawings and maps for this book. Thanks also go to Barbara Fash for providing several of the final drawings. An expert job of obtaining the best possible photographic images from my negatives or from books was done by Herb Nelson, of Northern Illinois University.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my wife, Mary Fleming Kowalski, and my children, Sarah and David. My children have had to tolerate my absences while I was typing or visiting libraries. Mary accompanied me to Mexico several times, most importantly during the extended visit of 1976–77. Among other things she has been a field assistant, photographer, artist, editor, and typist. Without her help and encouragement this book would not exist.

*DeKalb, Illinois*

JEFF KARL KOWALSKI

## Introduction

IN his important study of the Maya, the *Relación de las cosas de Yucatan*, Bishop Diego de Landa averred that "If Yucatan were to gain a name and reputation from the multitude, the grandeur and the beauty of its buildings, as other regions of the Indies have obtained these by gold, silver and riches, its glory would have spread like that of Peru and New Spain."<sup>1</sup>

This book is concerned with the building traditionally known as the House of the Governor at Uxmal (figs. 1–4, 199). This edifice so perfectly exemplifies the "grandeur and beauty" of which Landa speaks that it has consistently been acknowledged as the masterpiece of Maya architecture in the New World. Typical of this adulation is the homage paid to the House of the Governor by John Lloyd Stephens in 1841:

There is no rudeness or barbarity in the design or proportions; on the contrary, the whole wears an air of architectural symmetry and grandeur; and as the stranger ascends the steps and casts a bewildered eye along its open and desolate doors, it is hard to believe that he sees before him the work of a race in whose epitaph, as written by historians, they are called ignorant of art and said to have perished in the rudeness of savage life. If it stood this day on its artificial terrace in Hyde Park or the Garden of the Tuileries, it would form a new order, . . . not unworthy to stand side by side with the remains of Egyptian, Grecian and Roman art.<sup>2</sup>

Impressive masonry structures such as the House of the Governor are the tangible remains of a great civilization which flourished in northern Yucatan centuries before the arrival of the Spaniards. By the time Landa encountered the Maya and compiled his important record of their customs and beliefs, they had already entered into a cultural de-

cline, reflected by a lessening of quality in art and architecture. It was during the Classic period (ca. A.D. 250–900) that the ancient Maya created one of the New World's most intellectually advanced and artistically rich civilizations, centered in the lowland jungles of northern Guatemala and extending into Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, and adjacent parts of Mexico, including the Yucatan Peninsula. The Classic period witnessed the zenith of social complexity in these areas, with a host of thriving cities and carved monuments attesting the Maya's cultural achievements.

A recognizable cluster of traits distinguished the Maya from other peoples at this time. These include architecture employing the corbeled vault; the Long Count and Initial Series dating system; a hieroglyphic writing system with a mixed pictographic, logographic, and phonetic script; and a specialized stela and altar cult.<sup>3</sup> Although they possessed a certain cultural cohesion and individuality, the Maya were also firmly included in the wider cultural entity known as Mesoamerica, which embraced much of central and southeastern Mexico and at times reached as far south as Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The Maya were making contact, trading, and interchanging ideas with other Mesoamerican peoples throughout their history. Although Maya civilization in the south experienced an irreversible decline and collapse between about A.D. 800 to 900, there was a rapid cultural and architectural florescence during this same period in the northern Yucatan peninsula. It was at the end of this time, sometimes referred to as the Terminal Classic period, that the House of the Governor was constructed. The succeeding centuries from A.D. 900 to 1200 saw the rise to power of Chichen Itza, a vi-

tal new capital in Yucatan, where the culture and art style incorporated both traditional Maya and central Mexican "Toltec" elements. The House of the Governor, created at a critical developmental juncture, thus may be discussed not only as an exceptional aesthetic object but also as an important monument for the reconstruction of northern Maya culture history.

The concurrent rise of the northern centers and fall of the southern Maya was accompanied, and caused in part, by the growing influence of the Chontal or Putun Itza Maya. These were militarily powerful groups of Chontal-speaking peoples who occupied a gulf coast homeland from Tabasco to Champoton in Campeche, and who served as middlemen for trade between Central America and highland Mexico. Uxmal and other Puuc centers apparently participated in an important circum-peninsular trade route, supplying the Chontal with commodities (e.g., cotton, cloth, slaves) for transport to central Mexico or Veracruz, and obtaining from them elite goods along with new artistic and architectural forms and cultural and religious concepts.

Increasing wealth and trade help account for the construction of buildings as grandiose and technically superior as the House of the Governor and the Nunnery Quadrangle at Uxmal. Trading contacts also help explain the distinctive blend of innovative local stylistic features, Classic Maya forms, and foreign or "non-Classic" elements visible in Puuc architecture. Features such as the elongated range plan, tripartite architectural arrangement, mat-weave lattice, long-snouted mask panels, and dynastic human figural sculptures of the House of the Governor are based on earlier southern lowland or central Yucatan traditions. Other Uxmal edifices, such as the West Structure of the Nunnery, adorned with prominent feathered serpent sculptures, display syncretistic combinations of Maya and Mexican forms and symbols. Simultaneously, the House of the Governor and other Late Puuc structures possess characteristic local features, such

as the use of lime concrete cores covered by expertly finished masonry, and an architectonic harmony between the geometric stone mosaic sculptures and the sharply rectilinear buildings they adorn.<sup>4</sup>

Despite general agreement concerning the aesthetic merit of the House of the Governor, and although there exists documentary knowledge of both the building and the site dating from the sixteenth century, the edifice has almost never been treated in more than a chapter or section in general descriptions of Maya archaeology, art, or architecture.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, until this time the student of Precolumbian art history has had to consult a wide range of studies to form a more comprehensive view of this building. The lapse this presented in studies of Maya architecture would be comparable to a similar lack of sustained discussion of a European monument of the caliber of the Parthenon or Chartres Cathedral.

This book is an art historical monograph that supplies a more complete examination of the House of the Governor. Gaining a deeper understanding of this edifice requires recognition that it is a complex phenomenon. While it is clear that the House of the Governor is a material object (composed of stone, mortar, wood, and plaster) with a tangible existence, it is also an aesthetic object whose forms have been arranged consciously to evoke a strong visual-emotional response from the viewer. In addition it is a cultural expression, or what has rightly been termed a "persisting event,"<sup>6</sup> made in a particular time and place by people with a specialized world-view.

In this book I portray the House of the Governor in its richness and complexity of meaning—as a monument in which material, cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic aspects are inextricably interrelated. Such a holistic approach is as productive as it is challenging, for by examining and tying together these separate strands of meaning we will ultimately be able to form a more coherent image of the House of the Governor.