

CULTURE OF MEMORY AND MAYA ARCHITECTURE: ARCHITECTURAL DOCUMENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF STRUCTURE 1 OF CHUNCHIMAI 3

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ABSTRACT

The building of Chunchimai 3 is a good example of a culture of memory within the Maya culture. It shows building decorations with typical elements of the Classic Maya period in the Puuc region. In addition, there are rectangular scroll elements at the back and the 'sun stone' within the building. The stone carries a relief that consists of two presumably different production phases. Both the sun stone and the scroll elements seem to originate from earlier buildings and apparently served as a reminiscence of them and the people connected to them. In this case, as in other ones, the positioning of decorative architectural elements clearly shows they were reused.

Key words: Maya architecture, Late Classic, Puuc region.

The architecture left behind by the Maya is the most impressive remnant of their culture. Structure 1 of Chunchimai, Group 3, documented in this article is a small building, not the most impressive one and not well known, however it has interesting details and façades.

The site of Chunchimai is situated approximately 1.5 km south of Chunhuaymil, a very small modern village in the Mexican state of Campeche, about 25 km north of Hopelchén and close to the border between the states of Campeche and Yucatán. The region surrounding this village is covered with Maya ruins. Several of them were documented by the Austrian architect and photographer Teobert Maler at the end of the 19th century. The region is dominated by the Puuc style Maya architecture dating back to approximately A.D. 800-

In 2001 the author was guided to a relatively well-preserved building within Group 3 of Chunchimai. This is one of the buildings that was described but not documented by Teobert Maler. The geographical position was recorded by the author using GPS: its latitude is 20°05.988' north, its longitude 89°39.491' west (Hohmann 2001: 136). On 20th

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February 2004, the author revisited the building together with Stephan Merk and Adele Drexler. The orientation of the building as seen in the ground plan was recorded by Merk using a compass. This measurement is therefore not very accurate and defines an uncorrected magnetic north. The remains of at least two different buildings can be found in Group 3 of the ruins of Chunchimai; the documented building will be called Structure 1. Teobert Maler visited the structure in 1889. Maler called the small site “Chunchimai, 3. Ruinengrund” (3rd group of ruins); he described the site, but did not take photographs or measurements of the structure. Only the “Sonnenstein”, the Sun Stone, a recycled relief stone from a former structure found inside Structure 1 was measured and roughly sketched by Maler. In 1989, almost exactly 100 years later, Hanns Prem, George F. Andrews and Ursula Dyckerhoff revisited the site (Maler 1997: 201, 276).

The building originally consisted of at least two rooms. Only one of them – with a partially collapsed vault – survived. The mound of rubble to the south contains the remains of the second room. It is interesting that the structure has two completely different façades at the front and at the back, and the northern façade differs yet again from the other two; the decoration of Maya façades is usually more consistent.

Eastern Façade

The eastern façade with the entrance is divided into two horizontal sections by a moulding positioned between the wall and the vault zone and consisting of three members. It is formed by a line of small vertical colonnettes between two horizontal rows of corbels. Only two of the colonnettes are still in place, however the negative forms of a number of



Figure 1. Chunchimai, Group 3, Structure 1, eastern façade with the entrance.

other colonnettes are still visible on the core material of the wall. The lower cornice of the moulding has a sloping surface. The upper moulding, close to the roof level, currently consists of the remains of a cornice with a sloping surface just like the lower member of the medial moulding. The stone elements of the cornice are large. Like the medial moulding, the complete upper moulding quite certainly also consisted of three members including a long row of colonnettes (Figs. 1 and 2).

It is almost certain that there was a fourth member above the upper moulding, as in numerous other structures within this area and this building period. The roof level on top of the vault is almost half a meter higher than the added third member of the upper moulding would reach on the façade. Therefore there must have been a fourth member between the moulding and the roof level, as one can see in both sections.

Above the entrance and between the two mouldings there are two larger col-

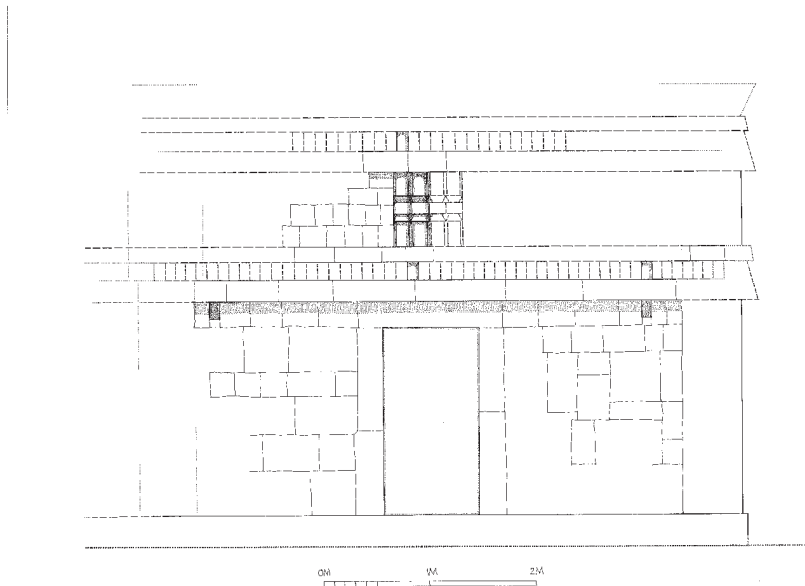


Figure 2. Chunchimai, Group 3, Structure 1, front view of the eastern façade. Broken lines represent the reconstructed portions, dotted lines hypothetically added ones.

umns with a typical elaborated element standing in the remains of a small flat niche. Due to symmetrical reasons four such columns must have existed originally. There were no indications that more niches like this existed within the façades of the structure. However, there is a possibility that one existed above the destroyed entrance to the destroyed room on the south of the building.

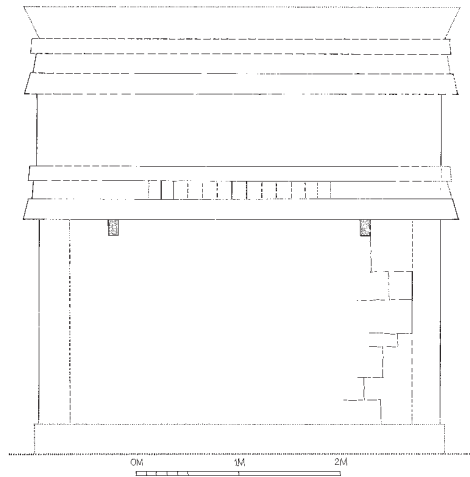


Figure 3. Chunchimai, Group 3, Structure 1, front view of the northern façade.

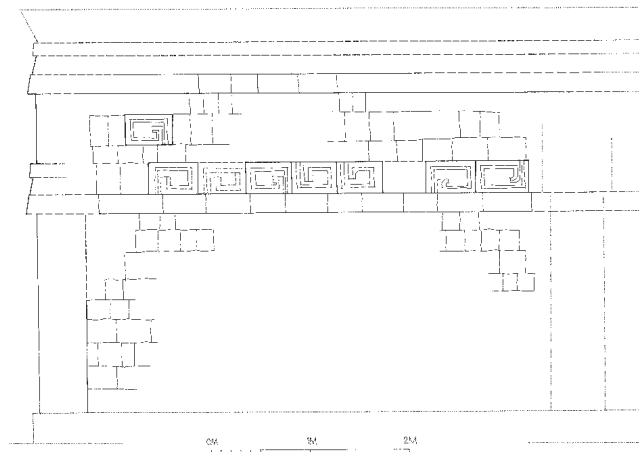


Figure 4. Chunchimai, Group 3, Structure 1, front view of the western façade, with remains of decoration.

Northern Façade

The remains of the north side of the structure show a similar medial moulding to that on the main façade. Thus colonnettes seem to have existed only in the central section of this façade (Fig. 3).

Western Façade

The medial moulding on the back, i.e. western façade, consists mainly of a row of relief stones and a lower cornice with long sloping stone corbels below; the relief stones are approximately as high as the two upper members of the medial moulding on the opposite sides. The row of relief stones does not reach the corners of the western side and there is at least another stone like this positioned higher up on the same wall. The relief stones represent a part of a meander. The relief stones must be those Maler (1997: 201) mentioned in his report as decorative stones with “Vereckungsgezier” (Maiandrataineia) rectangular scrolls. He suggested they were recycled architectural elements originating from an older building, which had already been destroyed (Fig. 4).

Most of these reused relief stones were more or less broken at the edges before they were used for this building. The design of the scrolls varies, the orientation differs, and the positioning within the back façade looks accidental. Therefore they cannot have been new. They were recycled architectural elements placed in the new façade of this structure.

The scroll motifs are very common in Puuc architecture and are nearly always associated with a step motif and several of these combinations placed together form a meander, as for example at the ruins of Sacbe, Structure 1, South Façade (Kelly 1993: 102, 103). This façade even shows such meanders in two different sizes. Therefore, the relief stones of Chunchimai originally belonged to a meander. Within this façade they look incomplete. This aspect is another piece of evidence suggesting that the relief stones were reused, as Maler has already stated.

There was some kind of a tradition of reusing relief stones from earlier ruins, as is the case, for example, at the Chenes site of Santa Rosa Xtampak, less than 25 km away from Chunchimai. They are positioned in two different flat niches on the first floor in the two largest rooms within the large palace on this site. A number of relief stones were put together incorrectly (Maler 1997: Tafeln 172, 173) and there is no doubt that this was intentional. The planners of this palace possibly wanted to show that these relief stones belonged to another building and should only remind the inhabitants of their past, of an earlier building or of a person related with the earlier building.

The rectangular scroll motifs are usually composed from a number of different stones – like a mosaic. In a very rare example of the Puuc ruins of Sabacche in the state of Yucatán, the medial moulding of Structure 5, Room 2, East Façade (Pollock 1980: 75, 76, Figs. 142, 144 b) shows these motifs carved into single stones as a whole, however in this example the motifs are of a very small size. The reliefs at Chunchimai are larger than the small ones at Sabacche, but smaller than most of the large motifs. Nevertheless, the

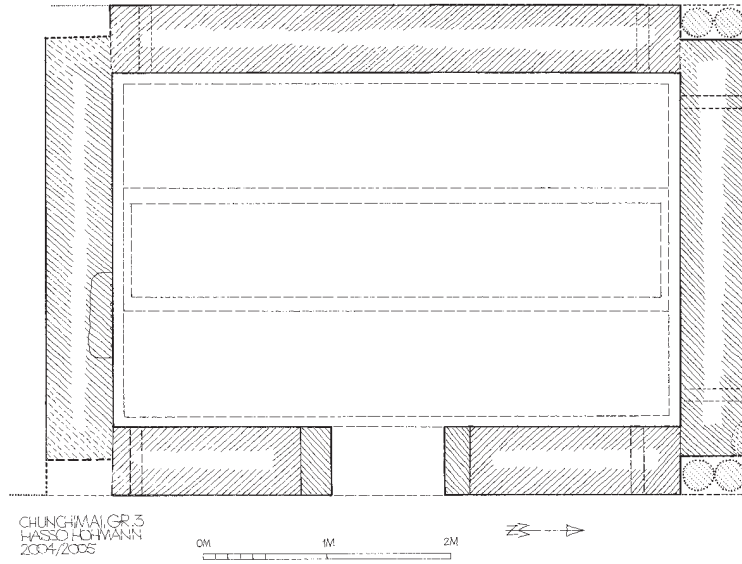


Figure 5. Chunchimai, Group 3, Structure 1, ground plan.

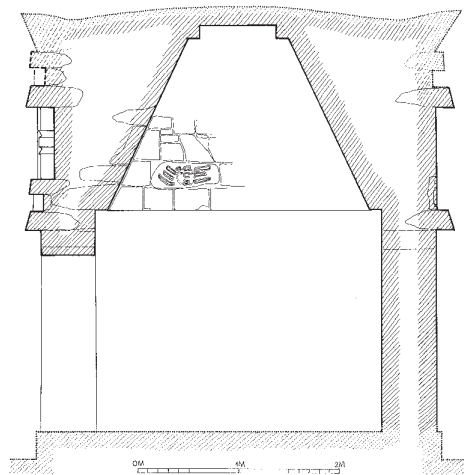


Figure 6. Chunchimai, Group 3, Structure 1, east-west cross section showing the 'Sun Stone'.

scroll reliefs at Chunchimai seem to be unique in Maya architecture, as no other scrolls of this size carved as a whole into single stones were known before.

Southern Wall

The southern 'façade' shows a large projecting section above a row of corbels. At 9 cm these corbels are less corbelling than the cornices on the outside, which measure 15 cm and the position of this line is higher than the lower member of the medial mouldings on the façades. The corbels on the southern exterior wall correspond to the vault spring on the interior side. Therefore the wall must have been a dividing inner wall between two rooms. A second room follows to the south, however it has collapsed completely. The slight slope of the wall above the corbels might be caused by the poor condition of the structure.

Base mouldings

There are no indications for a base moulding at Structure 1. A few meters east of Structure 1 lay the remains of another building (Structure 2), which has a base moulding that consists of three members on its eastern façade. The medial member of the base moulding on Structure 2 is a row of small colonnettes. Therefore, such a base moulding might have also existed around Structure 1, however it is currently covered by debris.

Building Edges

All flat undecorated walls of the façades below the medial moulding do not reach the edges of the building. All existing walls end more or less in a straight vertical line leaving an open space for a special corner construction. It could be an indication for an elaborated edge, such as the one at the Castillo of Chacbolay, with three-quarter-elaborated columns (Pollock 1980: 349), one on the level of the wall and three on the level of the vault, or at the Palace of Four Rooms at Huntichmul, with three in-line half-columns on the wall level (Pollock 1980: 344); both of which are typical Puuc buildings. There could have been two profiled half- or three-quarter-columns at each corner and in the centre of the western and eastern walls (Fig. 5).

The rubble around the Chunchimai building contains cylindrical column elements, which could originate from the edges. The edges could also have been undecorated simple corners built from very high flat vertical stone elements, such as were used for the entrance as doorjambs. In any case, larger stone elements must have been used for the edges of this structure. The joint material is usually softer than the stone material and therefore edges with less joint material make the edges stronger. This phenomenon can even be recognised at numerous historic structures in the Old World architecture.

The Construction

The ceiling of the room looks like a 'corbelled vault' with two gables to the north and the south. Corbelled vaults are also called 'false vaults'. They are formed by horizontal layers of stones corbelling from the two long walls of a room step by step. The top of

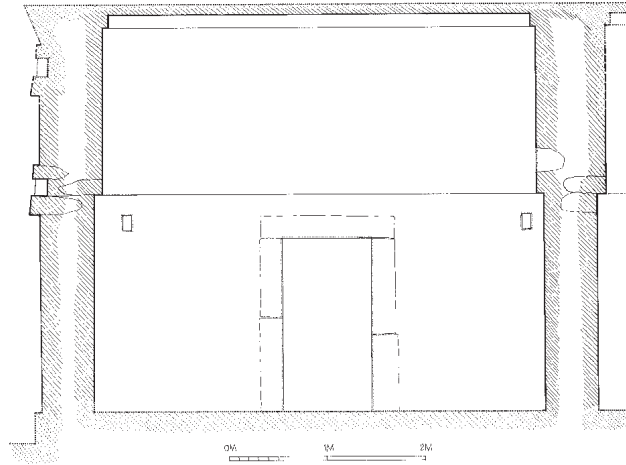


Figure 7. Chunchimai, Group 3, Structure 1, north-south section showing the interior wall with the 'Sun Stone' and the profiles of the outside decoration. The drawing also shows the entrance with the large stone elements viewed from inside.

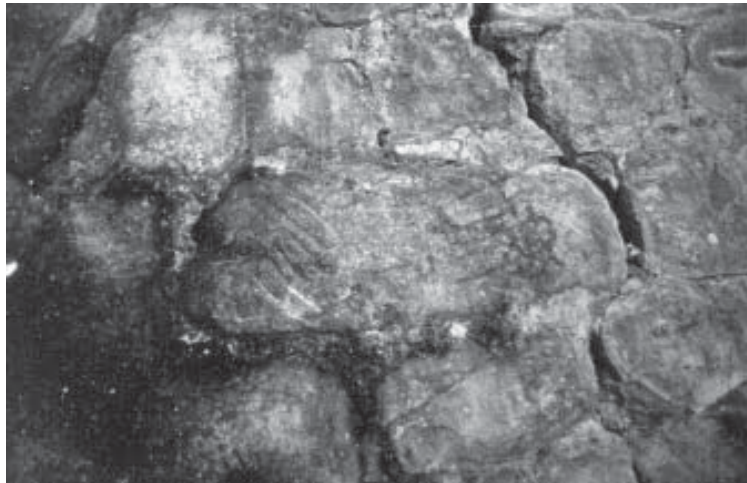


Figure 8. Chunchimai, Group 3, Structure 1, the 'Sun Stone'.

such vaults is formed by a row of capstones that bridge from one side to the other. As in so many other Puuc buildings, Chunchimai 3 also has a row of corbels on top of the walls, which go around the room and mark the spring of the vault. A row of capstones rests on a frame of corbels marking the upper end of the vault. The 'V'-shape vault is typical for the Classic Maya period (Figs. 6 and 7).

The fragile vault of Chunchimai holds the four walls of the structure together. This shows it is not truly a corbelled vault. The core of the vault behind the vault stones and the upper façade consists of a huge monolith made of rubble and hydraulic lime. This is called a cast vault (Hohmann 1979: 36). The façade and vault stones function as veneer stones with almost no static function whatsoever.

Tests performed on the core material at Xkipché, Yucatán, and other sites revealed there is usually no evidence for hydraulic material composing such vaults (Hohmann 1999: 110). Since the lime of the Yucatán Peninsula is very soluble, all the lime used for the vault and wall cores may have already been dissolved at least once by rainwater during the course of twelve centuries, and later sintered within the material. This must be the reason for the lack of hydraulic components, while the sinter reinforces the structure's stability.

The Interior

The most interesting stone inside the structure is the so-called 'sun stone'. Its position in the south gable is not at its centre and is rather accidental. The stone is 68 cm long and 24 cm high. The relief is quite flat and seems to have been produced in two different phases. Within a softly delineated circle there are three small depressions that are reminiscent of the face of the sun. On the other hand, relatively clear lines define the



Figure 9. Chunchimai, Group 3, Structure 1, the 'Sun Stone'; drawing by the author.



Figure 10. Chunchimai, Group 3, Structure 1, the 'Sun Stone'; drawing by Teobert Maler (1997: Fig. 11-3).

three small fields with rounded corners, vertically aligned in the centre of the stone and running across the face of the sun, which is flanked by larger fields looking like wings. On top of the left wing is a smaller additional field. These ten, clearly delineated fields must have been produced in the second phase (Figs. 8 and 9). Maler's drawing is a combination of both reliefs, the face in the centre and the seven fields on the sides that form the wings (Fig. 10). The style of both reliefs on the sun stone is different from the rectangular scrolls on the western façade, suggesting that the sun stone is from a different period.

The problem of ventilation was solved by several small rectangular openings in the walls. Not all have been measured.

Building Period and Value of the Structure

The decorative elements above the entrance and the medial moulding are very similar to the decoration found elsewhere in the Late Classic Puuc architecture, indicating that Structure 1 of Group 3 at Chunchimai belongs to the same period. The characteristics of the wall and vault construction are in accordance with this conclusion. The structure is thus a very typical Puuc Maya building, and one of those that are connected with the past by reusing decoration elements of older buildings, which no longer existed when this structure was erected. The scroll stones and the sun stone are secondarily reused, and refer to different Maya periods. This interesting structure, suggesting that history played an important role in the Maya culture, is in great danger of collapsing if no consolidation works are carried out as soon as possible.

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Povzetek

Kultura spomina in arhitektura Majev: arhitektonska dokumentacija in interpretacija Strukture 1 na najdišču Chunchimai 3

Stavba na najdišču Chunchimai 3 je dober primer kulture spomina v okviru majevske kulture. Ima arhitektonsko okrasje s tipičnimi elementi klasične majevske dobe na območju Puuc. Razen tega najdemo na zadnji steni meandraste ornamente,

znotraj stavbe pa 'sončni kamen'. Ta ima relief, ki je bil domnevno izdelan v dveh fazah. Kaže, da tako 'sončni kamen' kot meandrasti elementi izvirajo iz zgodnejših stavb; najbrž so služili v spomin nanje in na z njimi povezane ljudi. Položaj teh dekorativnih arhitektonskih elementov jasno kaže, tako kot v drugih podobnih primerih, da so bili v novejši stavbi uporabljeni sekundarno.

Ključne besede: arhitektura Majev, pozna klasična doba, območje Puuc.