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Reviews Shannon E. Plank, *Maya Dwellings in Hieroglyphs and Archaeology: An Integrative Approach to Ancient Architecture and Spatial Cognition* (Oxford: BAR International Series 1324, 2004), pp. vii+259, pb.

ELIZABETH GRAHAM

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Shannon E. Plank, *Maya Dwellings in Hieroglyphs and Archaeology: An Integrative Approach to Ancient Architecture and Spatial Cognition* (Oxford: BAR International Series 1324, 2004), pp. vii + 259, pb.

Plank's treatise focuses on buildings which Maya-area archaeologists have called 'palaces', 'range-type structures' or 'elite residences'. In fact, the functions and significance of these buildings have long eluded us, and Plank addresses the problem by exploring how the Maya have classed such buildings in their inscriptions. She takes as her starting point that such buildings in the Maya lowlands are often defined in associated hieroglyphic texts as *otoot* or 'dwelling'. Her research therefore embodies study of hieroglyphic texts which contain relevant architectural terms on the buildings' lintels, doorjambs, stairways, columns, benches, wall panels and balustrades.

Evaluation of textual and archaeological information from all Maya sites would not have been practicable; therefore Plank selected four sites for study that represent three zones of the Maya area: the Usumacinta zone of lowland forests, the northern lowlands, and the southern frontier. The sites – Oxkintok, Yaxchilan, Copan and Chichen Itza – also represent the full range from Early to Terminal Classic. The chapters dealing with the sites' architectural texts do not incorporate discoveries beyond 2002, but this does not diminish the value of Plank's efforts or her interpretations, not least because she has been so clear about how she constructs her arguments.

This well organised and well written work presents theory and method at the start, follows with a treatment of texts at the four sites, and closes with themes and conclusions. The material itself – at least for readers who are not epigraphers – is dense and can be very hard going; it requires some knowledge of Maya glyphs and how they are read. But in the hands of such a careful and capable writer as Plank, the treatment is well worth a place on all archaeologists' shelves. Epigraphers will of course be familiar with the texts Plank uses and will find no new glyphic discoveries (although the author does put forward some new interpretations), but they will certainly benefit from such a detailed integration of archaeological and textual records on the *otoot* 'problem'.

One of Plank's broad goals is to use emic categories from Maya texts to shed light on the etic classificatory terms archaeologists use. Her other goal is to understand the way the ancient Maya elite thought about what they categorised as dwelling space. It seems to me that the relevant comparison is actually between how the Maya thought about space and how the space was used. The latter remains as elusive as ever, owing to lack of material evidence, but if a room with hearths and storage jars or filled with scribal equipment were to be found, comparison of Maya statements about the space with the evidence of use would clearly be far more relevant than an archaeological designation.

Plank comes close to apologising that her study does not produce a straightforward typology that would allow archaeologists to classify buildings. But we archaeologists 'classify' because we do not know the buildings' significance to the Maya, and classification enables discussion of the possibilities. Plank actually moves us closer to an understanding of the significance of this particular set of buildings; as knowledge increases, classification will take care of itself.

Maya *otoots* embrace a wide variety of what we would call building types. For example, the textual name of an *otoot* can be shared by dwellings of completely

different plan, and similarities in plan can cross-cut differences in emic dimension. Some *otoots* appear to have served as residences, and one interesting group marks out space used by women, but the inference that individuals slept or resided in such spaces rests on plans and such features as frequent additions and changes to rooms, rather than recovered artefacts. This is because the Maya kept their buildings swept clean and were not in the habit, until cities fell into decay, of throwing refuse near living space.

Why, then, did the Maya label such structures as *otoot* or ‘dwelling’? At Yaxchilan it appears that *otoots* were noble dwellings in the sense that they were places for the nobilities’ actions, but were not necessarily residential. Was the primary ethos of an *otoot* to designate, in Plank’s terms, interior spaces as places for the care and feeding of gods or deified ancestors? Even when living individuals are associated with a building in the texts, as in the case of the elite women of Yaxchilan, the concept of ‘dwelling’ seems to apply to something other than a residence. Plank offers the phrase ‘god dwelling’ for some of the cases. If I understand her argument, the theme common to *otoots* seems to be that they embody space delineated or marked through the act of construction and the placing of inscriptions on what is built. Rulers and other elites who entered such spaces did not experience daily activities as they would in unmarked space, but rather in a charged dimension with ‘otherworld’ overlap. This did not mean that people carried out rituals incessantly but, as in a monastery, it established that certain kinds of actions or communications or thoughts were possible here as part of daily life that were not possible – or not as effective – in other sorts of spaces, perhaps even including what we call ‘temples’, which may have been the sacred space of specialists.

Other issues covered by Plank include the idea that glyphs embody ritual speech, the differences between *otoot* and *naab*, and the involvement of women with *otoot* architecture, to name but a few. As I have noted, the volume is most likely to be attractive to archaeologists, historians or anthropologists who are interested in the relationship between excavated structures and Maya emic classifications, but epigraphers should appreciate the compilation and discussion of the range of texts on the *otoots* and their interpretation, as well as the integration with archaeological correlates. For archaeologists, interpretations of the *otoot*-related inscriptions assembled in this work can inform further excavation and interpretation of features. For epigraphers, the variety of structures subsumed by the term *otoot* will surely contribute to an understanding of the meaning and significance of the concept.

*Institute of Archaeology,
University College London*

ELIZABETH GRAHAM