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THE BONAMPAK MURALS

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Robert Burton Tonkin
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ABSTRACT

THE BONAMPAK MURALS

by ROBERT BURTON TONKIN

The study of Mayan art and Mayan painting in particular was advanced more significantly by the discovery of the three rooms of frescoes at Bonampak than by any other single find of the twentieth century. At first these unique paintings were valued mostly as sources for historical and ethnological insights into the Mayan culture. In other words, the unprecedented quantity of the murals' subject matter overshadowed the unparalleled quality of their aesthetic accomplishments. But today, less than a score of years later, the murals are recognized as the highest manifestation of Mayan aesthetics in the painting medium. However, their historical and sociological implications ironically still overshadow their aesthetic dimension.

Although the aesthetic merit of the murals is not denied by contemporary scholars, it is not emphasized by them. As somewhat of a personal reaction against this denial of emphasis, the writer, after advancing the appropriate preliminary studies into the murals' site and discovery (Part II), their reproductions (Part III), and their subject matter (Part IV), concentrates on their most important aspects -- their aesthetics (Part V).

Since the basic nature of any problem in aesthetics is visual, it is only logical that the primary sources for the

writer's major concentration (Part V) also be visual -- namely, the superb close-up photographs in Mexico: Pre-Hispanic Painting of the UNESCO World Art Series and the watercolor studies of the original frescoes by Villagra in Supplementary III of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia and by Tejeda in Publication #602 and its Supplementary #46 of the Carnegie Institute of Washington.

With copies of the Tejeda studies supplied by the Carnegie Institute, the writer constructed a scale model one-sixteenth the actual size of Structure 1, the temple of the magnificent murals. He was then empathically able to experience the aesthetic qualities of the murals and subsequently able to analyze their most important aesthetic feature -- their projection into the awareness of the observer and their consequent domination of his attention.

Such effects by the Bonampak murals are essentially products of their immediate presentation to the observer. This major concept of immediacy is advanced and analyzed by the way of the secondary concepts of the murals' senses of potential activity, their counterbalancing stabilities, and their organic transitions of movement, all three of which, in turn, complement their immediateness. The key to analyzing and consequently understanding the complexities of the immediate presentation of the murals is simply the senses of movement embodied in the murals.

The results of these analyses of the murals' immediacy demonstrate how the mind of the observer is engulfed by the activity of the murals and is subordinated to them. And as a

tangent to these analyses of the tyrannical powers of the Bonampak frescoes, it will be pointed out how they, by dominating their observer, reflect the sociopolitical philosophy of the culture that created them.

THE BONAMPAK MURALS

By

Robert Burton Tonkin

A THESIS

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This thesis would have been impossible without the help of the Carnegie Institute of Washington, a help which was twofold: first, by furnishing the writer with microfilm of Publication #602 as well as a back copy of Supplementary #46, and secondly, by supplying the writer with six scale sets of the Tejada watercolor studies as well as reproductions of the original (1946) photographs by Healey.

A special thanks is in order to Sr. Salvador Toscano, Executive Secretary of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, for selling the writer his personal copy of the Villagra monograph which, having been out-of-print for slightly over ten years, is now extremely difficult to obtain.

It should be noted that for the factual material in Parts II and IV the writer relied heavily upon the writings of Karl Ruppert and J. Eric S. Thompson in Carnegie Publication #602.

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

Although various cultures had waxed and waned in Middle America for almost three millennia, the centers of the old world civilization were not even aware of their existence until the Spanish Conquest in the early sixteenth century. As the invading conquistadors were naturally preoccupied in the Valley of Mexico with the militaristic Aztecs, the "Romans of the New World", cultural studies of the other indigenous societies were not undertaken until Spanish colonialism had secured a firm foothold in the western hemisphere. Then a few historically-minded padres compiled chronicles, known as codices, of aboriginal lore. However, these efforts to learn about the Indians were soon replaced by efforts to establish the Spanish Empire.

It was not until the American, John L. Stephens, published his Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán in the mid-nineteenth century that a pre-Columbian renaissance was launched with an unprecedented emphasis upon the artistic Mayas, the "Greeks of the New World". During the next hundred years archaeological expeditions gleaned from the ancient ruins miscellaneous facts concerning the Mayas and other pre-Hispanic peoples. Painstakingly these assorted bits of information were assessed and then formulated into the overall cultural picture of ancient Indian life in Middle America. It was to this ever-growing body of information that modern scholars were continually

referring in their organization and evaluation of newly acquired facts. Such was the normal pattern of pre-Columbian studies which was significantly advanced almost two decades ago by an extraordinary find -- the three rooms of frescoes at Bonampak. Defying classification by their comprehensiveness and their uniqueness, the Bonampak murals were initially regarded as " . . . a storehouse of information that may be drawn upon for years to come".¹ This overall appraisal owes its validity not only to the narrative quality of the frescoes but also to their unusual manner of presentation, i.e., their exceptional use of realism, which renders the subject matter of the murals more readily intelligible to the present-day observer.

Even though these paintings are presented with a novel objective realism and not obscured by the traditional subjective symbolism, they were undoubtedly even more immediately meaningful to the ancient Maya than to the modern observer, for the former would have had actual experiences to associate with these artistic experiences.

The common Maya of the late Classic Period was not only subjected to celebrations similar to those depicted on the walls of Structure 1 but also subordinated to their performers, usually the high-priests, for they were the ones who, through such religious rites, interceded between the Maya and his gods.

¹Karl Ruppert, J. Eric S. Thomson, and Tatiana Proskouriakoff, Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1955), p. V.

And since all Mayas lived in continual fear of these deities, a large share of the sociopolitical power of their society was invested in those who practiced the mystical rites through which the ever-demanding gods were appeased. As is true with any form of mysticism, the effectiveness of the Mayan religion, as well as the sociopolitical status quo of the Mayan civilization, depended upon secrecy concerning the nature of these religious ceremonies.

With these facts in mind it would seem to be a safe presumption that the Bonampak murals, by realistically depicting the preparation for and the celebration of religious ceremonies, afforded an opportunity for the Maya to study objectively the interworkings of these ceremonies and thereby offered by this manner of education a chance for partial liberation from the communal system of the Mayan civilization. However, as will be demonstrated by analyzing the visual impressions that the modern-day observer receives from the murals, this emphatically is NOT the case!

On the contrary, the Bonampak murals through impressions conveyed to any observer, Mayan or modern, do not even permit his complete freedom of thought; instead, the frescoes, by their handling of subject matter and by their subtle illusionary devices, masterfully thrust themselves into the observer's attention. So subtly forceful is this assertion into the awareness of the viewer that he is consciously and often subconsciously dominated by the Bonampak murals.

However, prior to analyzing the sensory perceptions of the

present-day viewer as he confronts the murals and prior to glimpsing insights into the basic structure of the Mayan civilization, it is necessary, for background material, to discuss the recent discovery of the murals, their location, and their unprecedented subject matter, as well as the probable interpretation of that subject matter. Even though this thesis will be critical of the emphasis upon subject matter in the major publications on the Bonampak murals, such interpretations, as an outgrowth of the early research at the site, would have been impossible without the respective efforts of the various specialists at Bonampak, the authorities in the various fields of Mayan studies.

PART II

SITE AND DISCOVERY

The most praiseworthy accomplishments of the Mayas of the Central Highlands and of Bonampak in particular include not only the unparalleled excellence of their art but also their thriving prosperity under extremely adverse climatic conditions, the latter of which was a prerequisite of the former. Situated in the equatorial jungles of eastern Chiapas midway between the Jatate and Usumacinta Valleys (Figure #1), Bonampak is at an elevation 990 feet on the north bank of the treacherous Lacanha River. With the exception of an occasional chewing-gum gatherer, mahogany cutter, or archaeological researcher wandering into the city, these remote ruins are frequented today only by a few Lacandons who, with their camp a short distance away at El Cedro, are the only permanent inhabitants of the area as well as the only surviving pure-blooded descendants of the ancient Maya.

As a typical, small mountain settlement of the late Classic period, Bonampak is not an exceptionally beautiful religious center (Figure #2). However, the city does have one architectural distinction -- its enormous plaza, which measures approximately 295 X 365 feet with a perimeter formed by Structures 12 and 13, Structures 17 and 18, and Structures 14, 15, and 16 on its west, east, and north sides, respectively. On the south front a 141-foot acropolis constructed on a tripartitely terraced hill towers above the entire city. Overlooking the plaza from a prominent

position on the second terrace, the temple of the magnificent murals is 55 feet long and contains three rooms, each of which is about 15 feet long and $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide with a mean height of 17 feet from floor to capstone. Thus Structure 1 with its panoramic view and dramatic setting dominates the city of Bonampak just as its contents dominate the study of Mayan painting.

It was into this general geographic region and into this specific site that the two North Americans, John H. Bourne and H. Carl Frey, were guided by a few friendly Lacandóns. While at Bonampak in early February of 1946, Bourne diligently recorded most of the buildings with the notable exception of Structure 1. In March their findings were reported to Sr. Juan Palacios of the Instituto Nacional, and in May photographic reproductions of Bourne's plans were forwarded to Dr. A.V. Kidder of Harvard. In this manner the discovery of Bonampak was reported to the modern world.

Also in May the photographer, Giles G. Healey, stumbled upon the ruins while filming the documentary study, "The Maya through the Ages", for the United Fruit Company and discovered the frescoes in Structure 1. Having learned from Healey at El Cedro of his find, Frey returned to Bonampak and subsequently credited Healey with the uncovering of the murals, while he and Bourne claimed the honor of finding the site.

The compulsion to acquire more exacting information about these extraordinary paintings immediately gave impetus to five major expeditions to Bonampak: the three Carnegie Expeditions,

the Novedades Film Expedition, and the Bellas Artes Expedition.

Conceived by Healey and co-financed by Carnegie and himself, the First Carnegie Expedition reached Bonampak in mid-August of 1946. Upon Healey's suggestion, Kidder, acting on behalf of Carnegie, had secured the consent of the Instituto Nacional to contract Sr. Antonio Tejeda Fonseca to copy the frescoes in Structure 1. Tejeda's preliminary studies of the murals plus his commentary on their subject matter, preservation, and aesthetic excellence motivated further study of the murals in situ.

The Second Carnegie Expedition, subsidized by the United Fruit Company and directed by the Carnegie Institute in co-operation with the Instituto Nacional, was made up of the following Carnegie members: Karl Ruppert, head; Gustav Strömsvik, engineer; J. Eric S. Thompson, epigrapher; and Sr. Antonio

Tejeda Fonseca, artist. Sr. Agustín Villagra Caletí, a staff artist for the Instituto Nacional, collaborated with Tejeda on studies for Rooms 2 and 3, producing a second set of water-colors. With the exception of Thompson and Healey, the members remained at the site from March 17 to April 21, 1947.

Exactly one year later the Third Carnegie Expedition, financed by the United Fruit Company and participated in by the Instituto Nacional, encamped at Bonampak. With the possible exclusion of the director, Strömsvik, the most important members of this party were its artists, Sr. Antonio Tejeda F., Sr. A. Villagra Caletí, and Sr. Hipolito Sanchez Vera of the Carnegie Institute of Washington, Instituto

Nacional de Antropología e Historia of Mexico City and Museo Arqueológico, Etnográfico e Historia of Campeche, respectively. To facilitate the artists in their task of reproducing accurate copies of the murals, a small lighting plant was established at the site.

Unfortunately photography could not successfully be used to record the frescoes, because they were obscured by calcareous incrustations. But by using kerosene to render these heavy layers of lime temporarily transparent, the artists were able to capture with watercolors the artistic refinements of the murals.

Disregarding the Frans Blom party, which was at the site for a two-day period in mid-March, the fourth campaign to Bonampak was the Novedades Film Company Expedition. Under the leadership of Amador Coutiño, the director of the sponsoring firm, this group included Jorge Olvera of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, and Carlos Prieto F., photographer, and Eduardo Coutiño, explorer-guide.

This small expedition in the mid-summer of 1948 prepared the way for the Bellas Artes Expedition which was at Bonampak from April 29 to May 3, 1949. Personnel for this largest expedition to the site, organized by the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, included Jorge Olvera, Raul Anguino and Franco L. Gómez, painters; Julio Prieto, sculptor; Alberto R. Arai, architect; and Manuel Alvaréz Bravo and Luis Morales Ramirez, photographers. Other members, more versed in Mayan research in general than in Bonampak art in particular, were Carlos

Margain, archaeologist commissioned by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, and Carl Frey, guide and camp manager. The research was abruptly halted by the untimely drowning of Frey and Gómez in the Lacanja River.

Although there have been several other prominent, scientific expeditions to Bonampak, such as the New York Graphic and UNESCO Campaign in the late 1950's, these earlier expeditions were the most significant since their findings on the Bonampak frescoes by their expertly trained and highly experienced personnel, now the recognized authorities on Bonampak studies, prepared the way for the emergence in Middle American art of a new field per se -- Mayan painting.

PART III

REPRODUCTIONS

With the possible exception of Mexico: Pre-Hispanic Painting, a joint undertaking by UNESCO and the New York Graphic Society, only two official publications resulted from all the previously discussed exploratory expeditions to Bonampak for the purpose of studying the magnificent murals in Structure 1. These two monographs of great, but not equal, merit are

Villagra Caletí, Agustín. Bonampak: La Ciudad de los Muros Pintados. Mexico City: Anales del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1949. Suplemento, Vol. III.

Ruppert, Karl, Thompson, J. Eric S., and Tàtiana Proskouriakoff. Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1955. Publication #602 and Supplementary Publication #46.

Of particular significance in the first are the reproductions in scale of the watercolor studies by Villagra. Of greater importance in the second monograph, the definitive work, are the reproductions one-fourth the size of the Tejeda watercolors and one-sixteenth the scale of the frescoes at Bonampak. The original studies by Villagra are on exhibition in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, and those by Tejeda are in the possession of the Carnegie Institute in Washington.

Naturally both copyists were motivated by the same objective -- the documentation of the murals. Nevertheless, their studies differ considerably in the attainment of that goal. In

other words, the artistic qualities of the two sets of reproductions vary. The Tejeda watercolors are for the most part far superior in color and sensitivity to the Villagra works, judging from the superb photographic details from Rooms 1 and 2 in Mexico: Pre-Hispanic Painting.

Apparently by the late 1950's the New York Graphic Society in co-operation with UNESCO had solved the technical problem of photographing through the formerly noted calcareous incrustations. In fact their solution was so successful that the resulting photographs paradoxically show the sensitively delineated and lushly colored paintings as well as their relatively transparent veil of lime formations. However, it should be clearly understood that although these layers of lime obscured some of the refinements of the frescoes, they did not appreciably reduce their overall impact upon the observer.

Without a doubt the greatest accomplishment of these photographic studies is their accuracy in recording for posterity the sensitivity of the modulating line in the figures and the richness of the blue in the skies. As a matter of fact, such Mayan blue is so lush that in all the history of coloring it is comparable only to the reds of Pompeii or, perhaps, the blues of Chartres.

Both Tejeda and Villagra undoubtedly chose watercolors with which to work not only because of their obvious advantages of convenience on scientific expeditions but also because of their technical similarities to fresco. Even though these likenesses of technique afforded opportunities for capturing

the true colors of the Bonampak murals, it is in this aspect of color that the two resulting studies differ the most.

Without exception the color in the Tejada set is far superior to that in the Villagra copies. For example, in comparison to the photographs by the New York Graphic Society, the color of the middle zone of Room 1 is much too dark in the Villagra studies and slightly overemphasizes the ochre in the Tejada copies. Incidentally, the color in the latter set is remarkably close to that in the original photographs by Healey. In rendering the basic colors of Rooms 2 and 3, Villagra's tones lack the intensity and vitality of Tejada's colors and suggest a dullness and flatness similar to paper cut-outs. In short, the value of the Villagra watercolors is not in their coloring.

Even though the modulating line is one of the greatest aesthetic triumphs in the Bonampak murals, there is for the most part no indication of it in the Villagra reproductions. Their value is in their sensitive feeling for the action, their expressiveness of the scene. This appraisal is, however, not applicable to the entire set of reproductions, but just to the close-up studies of which there are five in the Supplementary Volume III: in Room 1, the central underchief on the north wall and the six deity-impersonators in the lowest zone and, in Room 2, the fighting headchief in the upper southwest corner, the battling warriors in the lower northeast corner, and the judgement scene over the doorway. In the details from the second room, more so than those from the first one and even more so than the corresponding passages in the Tejada studies, the

Villagra copies catch the essential feeling of the action which agrees with that in the photographs by the New York Graphic Society. For example, the close-up^{study} of the upper southeast section, with the possible exclusion of the spearman wearing the crocodile-headpiece and hurling the plumed lance, expresses the determination and brutality of the Maya in his never-ending quest to appease his ever-demanding gods, whereas, the entire battle scene with its pictorial indefiniteness in rendering the areas of flaked-off plaster suffers a vagueness and confusion of activity that suggest, by their general softening effect to the scene, more of a primitive ballet in a duststorm than a barbaric forey in a tropical jungle.

On the whole the Villagra copies, lacking accuracy of color and sensitivity of line, are more like illustrations than like works of art in their own right, as is the case with the Tejeda watercolors. In essence, these differences in aesthetic excellence between the Villagra and Tejeda studies are attributable to the individualities of the two men. In other words, to the extent they differ, their works differ.

PART IV

SUBJECT MATTER

Even though the sensitivity of execution varies between the two sets of studies, the objectivity of their subject remains the same, for the common purpose of the artists was to document, not to interpret, the Bonampak murals. Clearly attesting to this importance of subject matter, both monographs devote more text to its discussion than to any other facet of the murals.

However, this concentration upon subject matter is to a certain extent justifiable for without it no study of the murals could be considered complete. As one first confronts these ancient works of art, one's thoughts surely attend to their narrative quality, the meaning of the provocative scenes. And only after pondering these initial questions of subject matter would the mind of the confronter be free to focus upon other facets of the murals, perhaps delving into matters of technique, date, discovery, etc. But, more importantly, by attending to these matters of theme and by analyzing the sensations which emanate from the murals during the concentration on subject matter, the observer can attain a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of the murals and indirectly of the society that created them than would otherwise be possible by simply treating the study of the subject matter as an end in itself. This less thorough approach is evidenced in the Villagra

monograph for it concentrates on factual descriptions of the subject matter rather than emphasizes the aesthetic quality of the works.

It is in approaching the latter through the former, the content through the theme, that attention is now directed toward the study of the murals' subject matter. The following is for the most part an abridged account of Thompson's definitive study in the Carnegie Publication #602, which divides the subject matter of the three rooms into four acts: preparation for a dance, capture of prisoners, arraignment of captives, and performance of a ceremony.

Upon the walls of Room 1 are depicted the primary and secondary scenes of Act One, the act of preparing for a ceremonial dance (Plate #1). The opening scene on the east and south walls depicts fourteen aristocrats, clad in white floor-length capes which are generally ornamented with three shells, symbols of the earth, placed triangularly on their chests. Forming the nucleus of this activity, the two conversationalists slightly off-center on the south wall hold the attention of the other twelve; in all probability, the topic under discussion concerns their respective roles in the forthcoming ritual.

On the west wall another incidental scene is staged on a plinth, which supports a dais and measures approximately 18 X $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet. Seated cross-legged upon the raised bench are the high-chief, the so-called halach uinic, his wife, and his daughter or mistress to his left and right, respectively. The female servant squatting before the throne eavesdrops on the

commands emphatically issued by the halach uinic to the male servant who attends the child on the south wall -- probably the chief's son. Staunchly standing in the northwest corner, the obese manservant patiently awaits orders from his master. (Incidentally, this mass along with that of the wife stabilizes by counterbalancing the activity to the southeast.) In all probability the royal family will be spectators and not participants in the coming ceremony.

Just as the child-bearer with his torso, legs and feet, and hands and arms extending forward and with his head turning backward serves, along with the projected platform on which he stands, as a transitional passage relating the west to the south wall, so does the servant who carries the quetzal-frame form a link between the north and south walls.

A third secondary scene leading up to the climax of Act One is presented on the north wall. It shows the three under-chiefs or high-priests, the so-called batabs, depicted in various stages of dress and aided by their valets. The most completely attired batab, right of center, wears a loin-cloth of jaguar skin and an inverted U-shaped frame of quetzal feathers as well as bracelets, earplugs, anklets, and a collar, the latter four of which are colored green to simulate precious jades and quetzal feathers. While one attendant adjusts this official's right wrist-band, another daubs him with ochre paint. To their far right stand five servants-in-waiting, some of whom are engaged in conversation. They are above the rank of serfs, judging from their costumes -- the jaguar skins which in

Middle America denote nobility.

Immediately in front of the high platform on which the batabs are being dressed, eight slaves are sedulously altering costumes, mending fans, and drying or cleaning green costume jewelry. While clasping the anklet of the shortest batab, the third servant from the left represents another transitional element, helping unify the north wall scene by projecting himself into the upper part of that scene. By the placement of this figure the entire scene successfully evades a dichotomy of composition. Incidentally, such devices for compositional unity will be instrumental in stressing the aesthetic nature of the murals (in Part V).

The major scene of Act One, the presentation of performers and musicians on stage, covers the entire lower register of all walls. On the south wall the three batabs, now fully attired, occupy the limelight of center stage. They are flanked on the left by twelve music-makers, two parasol-bearers, and six impersonators of the gods and on the right by two more parasol-carriers and eleven male attendants. All of them, including the three batabs, are apparently awaiting the cue to begin their performance.

Reading from left to right, from the north to the south by way of the east wall, the twelve-man orchestra is composed of one whistler, two trumpeters, one drummer, three tortoise-shell-beaters, and five rattle-shakers. Grouped on the north wall before these men of music are the six impersonators of terrestrial deities, identifiable as such by the water lilies

in their headgear or on their earplugs. Since the water lily is emblematic of the copious earth, it is an attribute of the earth gods. A plausible derivation for such a conceit is the Middle America myth that the surface of the earth is similar to the back of an enormous crocodile which floats on an interminable lagoon. This reptile prefers the tranquility of still waters which, in Middle America, are often carpeted with water lilies. By association, these flowers may have become symbols of the earth-crocodile and, by extension, of mother-earth herself.¹

Reading from right to left, from the north to the south via the west wall, the thirteen males, flanking the three underchiefs on the right and counterbalancing the opposing twenty men to the left, consist of three serfs, two parasol-porters, and eight miscellaneous servants. The attendants nearer to the three batabs are obviously of higher social and political rank than those farther from center stage, judging by their more prominent position and by their more elaborate costumes -- in particular, their jaguar aprons. Thus the concluding scene of Act One occupies the entire bottom register of Room 1, where all who were preparing for the ceremony are now awaiting its start.

Upon the walls of Room 2 are presented two more acts of the Bonampak drama -- the waging of a raid and the judgement of its captives (Plate #2). On the east, south, and west wall the Mayan warriors, armed with wooden axes and stone-pointed

¹J. Eric S. Thompson, "The Subject Matter of the Murals," Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico, by Karl Ruppert, J. Eric S. Thompson, and Tatiana Proskouriakoff (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1955), Pp. 21-22 in Publication #602 and Pp. 49-50 in Supplementary Publication #46.

spears and spirited into a fighting frenzy by trumpets and rattles, are triumphantly led into battle -- in accordance with Mayan strategy, probably, a surprise attack -- by their courageous halach uinic against their non-Mayan inferiors, as is indicated by their distortions of physique, by their lack of weapons, and by their consequent deficiency of military skill. The purpose of such a merciless raid was usually to procure captives for ritualistic sacrifices. Since no opponent is actually slain in the campaign and since capture is simply indicated by grasping the enemy's hair, it is a safe presumption that the need for sacrificial victims motivated this ruthless assault. The depiction of such a foray on the walls of Room 2 was in all probability a visual glorification of Mayan military supremacy.

In the arraignment of prisoners on the north wall, the halach uinic, flanked by his war-lords, the so-called nacoms, on the top of the pyramid, assumes the roles of judge, juror, and even executioner, as his family watches from the right. Armed guards are stationed at the bottom of the pyramid to prevent the prisoners from escaping and to witness tribal, ceremonial justice. Sandwiched between these two forces at the summit and base of the pyramid, the nine defendants are, with one obvious exception, either pleading for clemency from the halach uinic, as are the one immediately before him and the three to his left, or submitting to the ritualistic practice of blood-letting, as are the four to his right. Even though the exact meaning can not be given to the diagonally prone figure on

1

the steps or to the severed head on the wild figus leaves at his feet, the overall theme of this scene is an enactment of ceremonial and tribal justice through which the Maya attempted to appease his gods.

As an introductory scene to the fourth and final act (Plate #3), which occupies all of Room 3, the frescoes on the north wall portray ten men of high sociopolitical rank on the top of the pyramid, some of whom are presumably the fourteen conversationalists seen in Room 1, judging by their similar apparel and action, and some of whom are the ten dancers in Room 3, judging from their similar number. The conversers, like those in Room 1, are apparently settling last-minute details concerning the forthcoming ceremony. Seated cross-legged before them, nine men of relatively high rank, indicated by their jade pectorals, gossip among themselves as they await the start of the ceremony.

In the upper section of the east wall the ceremonial rite of venesection is being practiced by the royal family. The halach unic, firmly seated on the free-standing dais and ceremoniously attired in female fashion, collects his blood on bark paper, strips of which can be seen in the spiked pot before him. The self-inflicted wound from which his blood is drawn was made by pricking his tongue with the sharply pointed bone or thorn that is now in the possession of the kneeling manservant. The First Lady, crouched behind her husband, is aided by the buxom maid, while the daughter or mistress issues orders to the child's nurse. Apparently this type of phlebo-

tomy was a preparatory rite for religious ceremonies that were climaxed by festive dances of worship.

In the corresponding zone of the opposing wall, approximately a dozen litter-bearers, preceded by attendants with two upraised clubs, carry an extremely old chieftain of the city, judging from his facial distortions and his jaguar apron or, more probably, an impersonator of the god Nam, judging from his physical distortion, which is an attribute of Nam, and from the nature of the impending ceremony. In other words, the god Nam, via a representative, is making a spectacular entrance to witness the approaching ceremony in honor of himself and the other terrestrial deities that were represented in Room 1.

Staged on the various terraces of a typical Mayan pyramid, the finale of Act Four is presented on all four walls of Room 3 and, therefore, occupies more wall space than any other scene in Structure 1. Clearly in the center of all the activity, the largest batab, majestically standing on the summit of the pyramid on the south wall, is accompanied by an aide and is flanked on the lower step by the other two batabs. All three of these secondary chiefs, like the seven dancers at the base of the pyramid, are magnificently costumed with enormous headdresses of quetzal feathers and with highly decorative, windmill-like wings projecting from their waists, the latter of which are unique in the depiction of Mayan costumes. These lavishly attired performers feverishly dance to the music provided by the four trumpeters and the two rattle-shakers in the lower northwest corner. Other miscellaneous servants, including the four

umbrella-porters, play unknown minor roles, while the major role, possible apart from that of the batabs, is enacted at ground level in the center of the south wall. Here two semi-nude Mayas are offering up to the gods the bound naked body of a sacrificial victim -- presumably, one that was captured and judged in the scenes of Room 2. This sacrifice amid all its pagan splendor climaxes, as well as concludes, the activities of the four-act drama depicted in Rooms 1, 2, and 3 of Structure 1 at Bonampak.

As the modern observer, like his ancient counterpart, ponders the meaning of these exotic and provocative scenes, he becomes increasingly conscious of their projection into his awareness, their possession of, and control over, him and his investigative act.

PART V

AESTHETICS

Ironically, both the Carnegie and the Instituto Nacional monographs on Bonampak in general and on the murals of Structure 1 in particular reflect a preoccupation with the discovery and subject matter of the murals, rather than a preoccupation with their most important feature -- the aesthetic excellence of the frescoes per se. Perhaps this is because the former more academic engrossment directly afforded historical and ethnological insights into the Mayan civilization, whereas, the latter less objective concentration indirectly offered aesthetic insights into the Mayan culture. Naturally no study of any aspect of that culture would be complete without appropriate preliminary studies into the historical and social structure of the civilization for many facets of that civilization were instrumental, as well as reflected, in the creation of its culture -- in particular, the murals at Bonampak.

However, these studies for background material should be clearly subordinated to the major concern -- the art. In other words, it would seem most logical that the appropriate historical and sociological inquiries should be regarded as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. And, by extension, the most direct and significant approach to a full understanding of the Bonampak art would logically be through the painting themselves. Therefore, the major concern of this thesis is a compre-

hension of the Bonampak art, approached through studying the frescoes. In particular, this approach will be to analyze the sensory perceptions of the viewer, as he is subjected to the visual sensations emanating from the murals.

While confronting these masterpieces of Mayan art in Structure 1 and attending to their most immediate and imperative questions -- questions of subject matter -- one becomes increasingly aware of the murals' tyrannical powers over one's investigative act. To the discerning eye the murals are thrust into inescapable prominence. They are so masterfully and forcefully asserted into the observer's attention that they subordinate and subjugate his thoughts. This despotic character of the murals is, in essence, a product of their immediateness, the rapidity and potency with which they are presented to the beholder.

It is precisely this dimension that Tatiana Proskouriakoff, the Carnegie authority who noted the aesthetic aspects of the murals, inadvertently overlooked in discussing their universal features. In comparing the frescoes of Structure 1 at Bonampak with those of Structure B-XIII at Uaxactun, she concluded that with the former

Each figure is an individual, and characterization is so vivid as to have at times almost the quality of caricature. The artist does not hesitate to introduce small episodes incidental to the main theme as personal commentary on social types or personalities. The scenes painted are not merely illustrations of myths as are those of Teotihuacán, Monte Albán, Mitla, and Tulum, or of history as are those of Chichén Itzá. They are scenes which recount an event the artist himself may have witnessed and are compiled of his own personal observations on the life

of his day. By this rejection of higher abstractions and by an interest focused on particulars within the scope of individual experience, they achieve a catholic appeal, and as works of art are more meaningful to us today and less obscured by the cultural idiom of their time.¹

Unquestionably, this lack of esoteric symbolism and use of realism both in the choice and treatment of subject matter enhance the universal aspects of the murals, but the concept of their immediacy far transcends simple appeal.

As proposed on the following pages, this concept of immediacy is advanced by way of its subservient concepts of the murals' potential actions, their counterbalancing stabilities, and their organic transitions, all three of which, in turn, complement their immediateness.

An empathic analysis of the viewing locus, the conditions under which the frescoes are viewed, gives rise to the development of the first subservient concept -- the concept of potential actions. .As one surmounts the artificially terraced substructures of Structure 1, after meandering through a labyrinth of smaller ruins, he is most surely confronted by the air of drama that issues from this imposing edifice which occupies a dominant spot on the Bonampak acropolis. Upon entering this temple his sensation of impending drama is partially substantiated by the unusual painting technique and subject matter -- warriors -- of the incised and polychromed lintels and

¹Tatiana Proskouriakoff, "Artistic Aspect of the Bonampak Paintings," Bonampak, Chianas, Mexico, by Karl Ruppert, J. Eric S. Thompson (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1955), p. 42.

jambes of all three doors which, by adding color and representing a general loosening up or freer handling of conventional Mayan sculpture, serve as a transition from the tightly executed stelae and altar sculptures in the plaza to the more freely conceived paintings within the temple. Thus the dramatic placement of the temple and the unusual treatment of its entrance ways not only confirm one's earlier anticipation of drama but also set the mood for one's later artistic experiences.

Precisely who entered this temple and confronted these frescoes eleven and a half centuries ago is a matter for the social or cultural historian, not the art historian; however, the sensory perceptions of that person are of concern to the latter and are relevant to the contents of the murals' actions and subsequent immediacy.

As the prospective Mayan viewer entered these rooms, the acute transition from the brilliancy of the tropic sun to the tenebrity of the unlit chambers rendered him nearly blind until his eyes had made the necessary adjustments to see in semi-darkness, at which time the almost life-sized figures seemingly danced across the wall and dazzled the beholder. At first the flickering flame of his torch permitted him to focus randomly and momentarily on various characters. Because the anonymity of these figures, arrested in various states of activity, produced a somewhat jerky but, nevertheless, continuous movement, an animation of figures was mentally perceived by the observer upon initial confrontation with the frescoes. Although he may not have physically participated in similar ceremonies, he,

regardless of his social status, mentally participated -- an experience participation. Even though these first sensations of the present-day observer are somewhat impeded by the constant ray of his more modern lighting mechanism and by his deficiency of knowledge concerning Mayan mores, an animation of the murals still creates an experience participation to the sensitive eye.

This sense of animation is enhanced by another facet of the anonymity concept, the anonymity of the backgrounds which are composed of only the essentials -- sky, jungle, and architecture -- without reference to any specific locality. By not confining the action to any specific site, such as Bonampak, the settings are typical of all small Mayan centers of the late Classic Period. Also the actors are not obscured in a nebula of local color; instead, they are instantaneously presented to the beholder against monotone backdrops which, by their sameness and by their lack of other elements, lend coherency to the scenes as well as present an unobstructed animation of the figures.

Since these backgrounds, with the possible exception of the architectural stage in Room 3, are of a single hue of uniform value and intensity on one plane, they acquire suggestions of solidity which, by association, render them nearly impregnable, thus making it extremely difficult to achieve an illusory recession into a great depth, the most widely diffused Western method of depicting perspective. However, perspective is attained in the other direction, emergence out of depth --

more precisely, emergence from the shallow depth that is achievable. To illustrate, the fourteen conversationalists in Room 1 are, in terms of visual sensations, brought forward on white shields by the projecting and receding nature of warm and cool colors, an effect intensified by the dramatic juxtaposition of strong contrasting colors -- namely, a flat white of a vibrant ochre. By thrusting these figures toward their observer, they are more immediately presented to him, thereby exemplifying a facet of the immediacy concept.

Without a doubt the key to analyzing and consequently understanding the full nature of this whole complex concept of immediacy is simply the senses of movement that are embodied in the murals. There are three specific, and often overlapping, types of movement: those contained within one figure, those shared among the figures, and those projected toward the beholder. With the exception of the first type, which relates primarily to the subservient concepts of the murals' potential actions and their counterbalancing stabilities, these categories of movement, especially those involving several figures, will be instrumental in advancing the subservient concept of organic transitions.

The first type of movement, pertaining specifically to the individual figure, can best be developed by exploiting the popular fallacies concerning the similarities between the "conventions" governing the Mayan and Egyptian frescoes. Apparently it was John L. Stephens in his widely read Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán who set the precedent

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for comparing Mayan and Egyptian painting.

But the Bonampak murals are not constrained by convention, nor do they warrant the idea that they are based on convention, since the term convention implies standardization and the Bonampak frescoes are unique in the field of Mayan painting. Nevertheless, there are stylistic grounds for a comparison and contrast between the Bonampak and Egyptian murals in general. For instance, both emphasize a narrative quality and manifest a sense of permanency and strength; the former frescoes, however, lack the monumentality of the latter. In each case the hieroglyphics are incorporated into the design, orientated to the pictorial composition; yet, the Egyptian works evidence a horro vacui that the other avoids. Contrary to the new world example with its concern for realism, the old world artist painted what he knew, not what he saw, for his was an art for the Ka, the Spirit of the Dead, with the figures depicted from several views simultaneously. The Egyptian muralist, unlike his Mayan counterpart, implied the sex of his figures by color -- various shades of red for men and of yellow to white for women -- and depicted these figures in the traditional way with their shoulders, torso, and eye viewed frontally and with their two left hands and feet in profile. Also characters performing identical tasks are simply indicated by repeating part of the outline of the front performer. Herein lies the crux of the difference between the Bonampak and Egyptian murals (and muralists).

Although the Bonampak artist, like the Egyptian, often ar-

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ranged his figures in tiers and depicted their heads in profile and their torsos frontally, he portrayed many performing the same activity, whereas, the Egyptian pictured few performing the same activity. For example, in Room 1 there are two trumpeters, two parasol-porters, five rattle-shakers, fourteen conversationalists, etc. In short, as individuals, not stock types, the Mayan figures are not frozen for eternity by fixed repetition as are their Egyptian counterparts.

On the contrary, each figure attains individualism by his height and distribution of weight and, more importantly, by his facial characteristics and his hand gestures, through which he communicates to his companions, as well as to his beholder. Even though the figure, because of these various individualistic traits, is apparently portrayed in the caught moment, he has the capacity for movement, but lacks the compulsion for immediate movement which, in effect, would produce the transitory quality of the momentary.

Enhancing this aspect of the potential motion concept, which pertains to the individual figure, is the overall compositional design, which escapes the rigidity of absolute symmetry by being slightly off-center. Since this compositional design with its plasticity is in keeping with the movement in the individual figure, it accentuates these movement possibilities within that figure as well as the other types of movement. With the sensation of movement each figure is, in essence, a thematic variation on movement, rather than an exercise in repetition, as is the case with his Egyptian counter-

part which incidentally would produce a sense of visual monotony.

This sensation of movement in one figure, however slight, is evidence of his capacity for movement; it is basically potential movement or energy with kinetic inclinations which declare its potency, rather than kinetic motion in the main. If this sensation of energy were to overcome its dormant character and become dynamic energy, as is almost the case in the frantically danced ceremonies of Room 3 (Plate #3), it would become too explosive and compositional disintegration would ensue. A similar idea has been traditionally credited to the Flemish master, Peter Paul Rubens, that in order to have chaos, you must have order.

The manner by which the Bonampak muralist integrated an elaborate system of subtle checks and balances to preserve the latency of this figural energy and to avoid the compositional dangers of unharnessed movement reflects his native genius. The sense of subdued activity is held in check by physical, as well as pictorial, stabilities which when combined with the sense of movement are conducive to a sense of continual motion, as will be seen later.

The following three examples illustrate some varying degrees of these stabilizing devices. In the middle zone of the east and south walls of Room 1 (Plate #1), the plinth on which the fourteen conversationalists stand is solidified by glyphs and is buttressed by parasols, a combined effect of giving the platform the visual sturdiness necessary to support

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the figures.

And by a similar token the lower wooden braces, indicated by the black dots in the Tejeda and Villágra studies, not only support the walls of the temple but also by their placement relative to the frescoes constitute a three-dimensional platform upon which visually rest the figures in the truncated triangular scenes of the east and west walls of all three rooms.

Also taking an architectural element into the composition, the north wall scene of Room 2^(Plate #2) incorporates the negative void of the doorway without weakening the composition or producing a sense of impending collapse. This is accomplished basically by the grouping of the figures and by the distribution of their implied weight. For example, the central weight over the door, i.e., the halach uinic, is diagonally reflected through the two prisoners immediately before him into the guards posted at the base of the pyramid. These guards flanking the entrance way produce, by their massing, a sense of strength visually capable of supporting the more open and consequently less weighty top figures. In addition, the stronger color contrasts in the lower passages convey a sense of strength capable of supporting the lighter contrasts in the upper sections. Thus the heavinesses of the upper figures are visually sustained by the lower masses without creating a stress on the negative space of the doorway. (Incidentally, since this particular illustration demonstrates an interaction of the figures, it, as movement involving more than one figure, is an example of the second phase of movement.)

Additional insights into such reciprocities between the

slightly active figures and their supporting counterbalances can best be gained by an analogy with a kite. The kite will remain in flight only as long as it is held in bounds. Release the cord, thus giving it unreined freedom, and it crashes chaotically to the earth. Likewise remove the checking stabilities, thus creating a sense of unrestrained figural activity, and the composition of the Bonampak murals becomes too dynamic to retain its composure and consequently flies apart due to the loss of its internal order. These stabilizing elements solidify the passages of the painting that support the active figures, thereby counterbalancing, as well as by contrast accentuating, their movement with mass. In short, it is the old idea of mass balancing activity with the new twist of the former visually supporting the latter.

Thus the first phase of the movement concept, the key to the whole complex concept of the murals' immediacy, pertains basically to the sense of movement within the individual figure, the potential state of which, like the flying kite, is preserved by stabilizing forces. Since each of these stabilizing masses relates to several figures, the next logical development for movement would also be to relate to other figures. This transfer from individual to group movement is phase two of movement.

However, prior to analyzing this second phase, it will be necessary briefly to introduce phase three and to define the orbit in which it occurs because there are many complex overlappings between these phases. And in order to understand one, insights into the other must be first attained. Also for back-

ground, as well as introductory, material to the second and third phases, it will be necessary to discuss in general terms the line and mass in the frescoes before concentrating on them as they relate specifically to the various phases of movement.

With the sensation, in phase two, of group activity within the fresco, the observer senses, in the third phase, the projection of this group movement from its pictorial sphere into the observer's world, thereby involving the so-called "psychical realm" of the murals.

The concept of "psychical distance" was formulated by the Englishman, Edward Bullough, in his article "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Esthetic Principle", which was published in Volume V of The British Journal of Psychology in 1913. Simply stated, psychical distance is a metaphorical reference to the physical distance between the mind of the observer and the art object observed. For example, in the theater there are two distinct worlds -- the stage of the players and the area of the spectators. The proscenium arch and surrounding area form a third sphere -- the psychical sphere, for in relation to the spaces of the actors and the audience, it is common to both, yet peculiar to neither. In other words, the psychical distance is, in simplified form, that indefinite zone that exists between the pictorial realm of a work of art and the physical world of its beholder that paradoxically both separates and merges the two. The primary value of Bullough's concept is an analytical one for prior to its advancement there was no verbal approach to this dimension of art.

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One of the highest attainments in a work of art is the reduction of the psychical distance to a minimum without breaking it. If it were broken, the art would then be made continuous with the world of the observer. Hence the peculiarities of that art would be destroyed, and it would simply become another part of the physical world. This reduction of the psychical distance is one of the basic factors responsible for the immediate presentation of the Bonampak murals.

As seen in these murals, the psychical sphere usually relates more specifically to either the world of the observer or the realm of the frescoes proper. This sphere, the psychical distance, is bridged, not broken, by subtle lead-ins -- transitional agents existing partially in both worlds -- the pictorial realm of the paintings and the physical domain of the beholder. The activation of the psychical sphere, accomplished by anchoring an element in one world and then asserting it into the other, is without question the most abstract employment of the breathing concept in the murals, as evidenced by the following examples.

As previously noted, the lower sets of black dots, paired at each end of the north and south walls of the three rooms, mark the spots where supporting beams brace Structure 1. As tangible elements actually existing in the physical world, these beams penetrate through the psychical sphere into the pictorial realm where they form a platform that visually supports the figures. In such a manner, these beams activate the psychical space.

Although the doorway of Room 2, like the proscenium arch, is basically an element in the psychical sphere, it can be experienced by the observer in all realms. The beholder actually enters into the negative space of the painting as he passes through this opening. This illustration, like the preceding and following ones, constitute subtle tours de force with the the reduction of the psychical sphere and, as a result, promote the immediateness of the frescoes by more directly and dynamically linking them to the observer.

Just as the background pyramids in certain scenes restate the palpable architecture in the Bonampak plaza, so do the daises depicted in Rooms 1 and 3 pictorially reassert tangibilities of the physical world. The bench encircling each room at a height of approximately 16 inches, including a cornice of 7 inches, is painted with a fret design, repeating in variation the fresco motif of the daises. By its physical construction it is the property of the world of reality, not the world of imagery, but by its painted surface, its superficial aspects, it is related to the latter world. By relating to both the physical and pictorial spaces, the bench, like the hitherto discussed doorway and beams, plays with, and thereby activates, the psychical sphere.

These three illustrations are not simply lead-ins demonstrating how well the subject matter is orientated to the exterior surroundings and the interior surfaces of Structure 1. Instead, they, by activating the interstices between the realms of imagery and reality, illustrate the breathing concept. As expressed in the Bonampak murals, this concept is essentially

the enlivenment of the negative, as well as the positive, passages by the sense of expansion and contraction of the psychological distance as well as the line and mass.

However, prior to concentrating on line as illustrations of the breathing concept and of the various phases of movement, it will be most helpful to consider some of the general aspects of line. Indisputably the most superb single aspect of the Bonampak murals is their use of line, as inferred in Proskouriakoff's statement. "How much they could express in simple outlines is really admirable; for example, the intensity of the drama in the scene on the walls of Room 3 is adequately conveyed by nothing more than the swirling lines of the plumed headdresses of the dancers."² However, not acknowledging the fact that a work of art is a whole composed of organically interrelated parts and consequently not perceiving the function performed by line in relation to that whole, Proskouriakoff's evaluations on the significance of line are somewhat incomplete. "In any case, . . . the primary aesthetic value of the Bonampak paintings lies not in their coloring, but in their lines, and . . . they are best regarded as colored drawings."³

In reaching her conclusion she evidently neglected the fact that this emphasis upon line was in part dependent upon the

²Ibid., p. 43.

³Ibid. For some unexplainable reason Proskouriakoff chose to play down the aesthetic and historical significance of Mayan blue. (See Part III)

execution of the work. This dependency can best be seen by comparing the technique of fresco with that of oil. Stressing luminosity and gradation of hue, the oil is intrinsically inclined toward three-dimensionality, whereas, beginning with outlines and then quickly filling in color, the fresco emphasizes line and flat color areas contained within these lines, thus fulfilling a natural inclination toward two-dimensionality. With all brush strokes applied while the surface is wet, the fresco reflects a sense of stability and simplicity of technique in comparison to oil. However, the line in the Bonampak murals far surpasses these elementary norms established by the medium -- especially in the arraignment scene on the north wall of Room 2 (Plate #2), the supreme linear accomplishment in pre-Hispanic painting!

Substantiating Proskouriakoff's observations concerning the economy of line, the prisoner, who crouches at the immediate right of the halach uinic and pleads for his life, is delineated only by outline. These modulating lines of varying widths strongly suggest the anatomical structure of the figure. The thinner segments of line are indicative of the hardness of the clearly definable bony areas, whereas, the thicker segments are indicative of the softness of the less definable adipose tissue. Although there are exceptions within this figure, the overall effect of delineation extraordinarily complements and accentuates the anatomy of the figure by externally imaging its internal components.

Since this figure, not unlike the others, is so naturalis-

tically described, he easily assumes suggestions of movement -- especially a slight restlessness within himself, i.e., the first phase of movement. Further developing the anatomical structure of this captive and thereby giving a stronger suggestion of life to him and, in turn, increasing his possibilities for movement, the black modulating outline delimits the reddish brown body by sensitively circumscribing it and clearly marking its borders. This dark line of indefinite widths also suggests the shadow for, as well as cast by, the lighter colored body, thus conveying corporeal volume without the traditional modelling of the figure in chiaroscuro. By delimiting and, more importantly, defining the fullness of this figure in such a manner, the overall effect of this prisoner and, to a lesser degree, of all the figures at Bonampak is paradoxically a three-dimensionality, ^{more so than a two-dimensionality,} ~~the usual~~ linear complement of the fresco technique.

Other elements contributing to a sense of realism in the figure are found in the counterpart of line -- mass or area. In essence, suggestions of life are given to the figures by the activation of mass, as exemplified in the three seated figures to the right of the tortured captive. Even though the tautness and tenseness of their outlines and the soul-searching depth in their eyes visually image their horror-stricken attitude toward their forthcoming punishment, their hands are their individual expressive agents since their terror-smitten attitude is somewhat of a group reaction. It is the hands of the central figure in this group of three that most clearly demonstrate the concept of breathing as it is expressed with the mass

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of one figure. The space surrounding him is activated by the opposing gesticulation of ^{his} hands. With his right hand and extended, stiffened arm he gestures rejection of the impending horror, while with his left hand and retracted, relaxed arm he gestures submission to his fate. This sense of concurrent negation and affirmation runs the gamut of human emotions and thereby intensifies the psychological stress of the character. In the same way, but to a lesser degree, this manifestation of the breathing concept, the simultaneous vitalization of opposing poles, is applicable to both flanking figures as well as to the counterbalancing group of three to their left. As a reaction common to these six prisoners, the implied movement of the hands activated the positive area of the figures as well as their surrounding negative space, thereby exemplifying phase one with secondary inclinations of phase two of the movement concept.

As a general rule, line describes the naturalistic form which is capable of movement, whereas, mass describes the movement which is produced by that naturalistic form. Not only are the effects of mass similar to those of line, but also their functions are similar. With the notable exception of the implied lines extending to, and consequently linking together, the central characters in this arraignment scene, the function of line is confined to intrafigural unity, phase one of movement, whereas, the function of mass is also relevant to movement within and between scenes, phases two and three of the movement concept.

Mass, as it promotes unity within one scene and as it re-

the first of these is the fact that the system is not a simple one, but a complex one, in which the various parts are interrelated and interdependent. The second is that the system is not a static one, but a dynamic one, in which the various parts are constantly changing and evolving. The third is that the system is not a closed one, but an open one, in which the various parts are constantly interacting with the environment. The fourth is that the system is not a linear one, but a non-linear one, in which the various parts are constantly interacting with each other in a non-linear fashion. The fifth is that the system is not a deterministic one, but a probabilistic one, in which the various parts are constantly interacting with each other in a probabilistic fashion. The sixth is that the system is not a simple one, but a complex one, in which the various parts are interrelated and interdependent. The seventh is that the system is not a static one, but a dynamic one, in which the various parts are constantly changing and evolving. The eighth is that the system is not a closed one, but an open one, in which the various parts are constantly interacting with the environment. The ninth is that the system is not a linear one, but a non-linear one, in which the various parts are constantly interacting with each other in a non-linear fashion. The tenth is that the system is not a deterministic one, but a probabilistic one, in which the various parts are constantly interacting with each other in a probabilistic fashion.

lates to the observer, plays not only upon the positive area of the figures but also upon the negative space among them. And in so doing, mass -- more precisely, figural mass -- is extended into a slight pictorial depth, a depth that is attained by means other than the obvious overlapping of elements displayed in the groups on the lower steps of the judgement scene of Room 2 (Plate #2).

Perspective is rendered by the relative placement of figures, not by their diminution in size or color, as in occidental art, or by their mere elevation in the picture plane, as in oriental art. For example, the prostrate body in the judgement scene stretches from its firmly fixed right foot before the severed head to its own languidly placed head before the halach uinic. It is through such passages that the observer can visually penetrate into the illusionary depth of the fresco as his eye follows the expertly foreshortened anatomy. Thus this scene not only displays a depth but also invites the observer's entrance into that depth by providing a guiding element, a direct lead-in. In essence, such figural movement into a pictorial depth illustrates the second phase of movement. There are, however, slight overtones of phase three -- namely, the invitational lead-ins linking the second phase of movement to the observer.

Further extending these invitational features into the psychical sphere of phase three by employing line as well as mass, the forms encircling this prostrate aborigine constitute an inwardly swinging arc, which is, in effect, a line guiding the eye movement of the observer. Starting on step one, it

quickly ascends the first four steps through the standing warrior to the west of the entrance way, then recedes through the severed head on step five, the front captive on step six, and the imploring prisoner on step seven. After culminating its regression in the halach uinic, the line of vision swings forward through the central native in the right trio on step six and rapidly advances frontward by descending four steps in the standing warrior to the east of the doorway.

With any circular movement, such as the elliptical one in this case, there is always a strong but natural tendency to complete itself since the circle is the most complete, as well as the most perfect and permanent, shape in nature. Therefore, the complementary counterpart of this pictorial incurvature is a psychical-physical excurvature, which by encircling the observer locks him to the activity of the scene. Thus through this psychical-pictorial involvement the observer can visually experience the positive space of the scene by visually penetrating into the painting, just as he physically experienced the negative space of the scene by entering through the doorway. Without a doubt this psychical extension of the interfigural transition of movement within one scene is the most abstract variation of all the overlapping complexities of the concepts of organic transitions and immediacy.

The next development of the overlapping second and third phases of movement is the extension of a part of a given scene to another wall, thus in effect unifying and uniting an inter-wall scene through related figural movement. Such an extension

can be most clearly demonstrated in the three ceremonial participants in the bottom northwest corner of Room 1 (Plate #1). As the native with the claw emerging from his chest pivots to communicate a matter of apparent significance to his follower, he momentarily strikes a three-quarter pose which not only suggests his three-dimensional anatomy but also promotes compositional unity within the scene. The roundness of his strategically placed body softens the otherwise squareness of the corner. In effect, the observer's line of vision gracefully flows from the communicator's left arm on the north through his turning torso to his right hand on the west without the angular hardness of the corner. Thus as a common element of two walls, he, like the squatting native in the northwest corner of Room 1 (Plate #1), the struggling warriors in the southeast corner of Room 2 (Plate #2), and the waving plumes of the ceremonial headdress in the southwest corner of Room 3 (Plate #3), helps to unify the intermural scene by bridging the walls.

But it is in the manner by which this clawed speaker relates to the other figures that the concept of breathing and the second phase of movement are applicable to interwall unity. Like the attendant in the same scene on the west wall, who turns to the parasol-porter seemingly to remind him of some last-minute detail concerning the coming ceremony, the native with the claw turns to his follower and issues relatively complex instructions. Confirming the ponderous nature of this communication are the amazed response of the eavesdropper, the

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deep concentration of the receiver, and the latter's visual reception of the information as he recounts the enumerated points. In essence, here in terms of mass is illustrated the key to the second phase of movement as well as to the concept of breathing -- a juxtaposition of responsive masses activated by the physical and psychological gestures of the figures.

The communicator with the claw also illustrates a variation on the preciously discussed lead-in agents and depiction of space. With his weight on his right leg his body rotates on its axis, activating the pictorial and psychical space that surrounds him. It is to the extent that he projects toward the viewer and recedes into the fresco that he is a lead-in element aiding in the demonstration of a shallow space and involving the third phase of movement through the previously demonstrated invitational features.

This compositional unity within one scene, achieved by the psychological and physical interaction of figures, is not limited to small passages in corners; more often, it is relevant to the whole scene and often extends to scenes on other walls. To illustrate, in the scene on the west end of Room 1 (Plate #1), the objection of the somewhat astonished maid to the reprimand issued by the halach uinic is substantially overridden as the two women on the table and the manservant to their left take the part of their chieftain. The object of the halach uinic's invective reproof is the child-bearer at the west end of the south wall who, by the direction of his psychological response, is a member of the west scene and, by his pictorial

placement as well as by the forward stare of the baby, is a member of the south scene. And, in a similar manner, by retreating from the north and advancing to the west, the valet carrying the headgear on the north wall shares not only the plinth with the slave who holds the child but also the transitional qualities of intermural agent, thus linking the scenes of the south and north walls through that of the west wall. Here is demonstrated the second phase of movement at its highest and most complex development, that is figural movement involving several scenes on more than one wall and thereby relating those walls.

Just as the west wall in Room 1 is correlated to those of the north and south by the employment of pictorial elements, so it is affiliated with the east end by the subtle management of the psychical-physical spaces -- more precisely, the nature of the two ends and the spacial void between them. Although the construction of these walls was not the responsibility of the Mayan muralist, the orientation of the subject matter to these walls was perhaps an intuitive but, nevertheless, an intrinsic part of creating the work of art as an organically interrelated whole. In the east scene the combined effect of the slight visual projection of the four conversationalists and of the inward tilt of the wall creates the sensation that the figures are falling into the room and are hence forcing themselves upon the observer. However, the construction of, and the monumental dais scene painted on, the opposing west wall with their impressions of solidity and stability buttress and firm up

the interposed psychical and physical spaces, consequently securing and reaffirming the pictorial placement of the four conversationalists on the east wall without countermanding their immediateness upon the observer. In short, the suggestions of mobility associated with the east wall are stabilized by the suggestions of immobility affiliated ^{with the} west wall, thus making the east end dependent upon the west one and, in so doing, relating both to the observer, as well as demanding his attention by using and activating the physical space surrounding him.

In a similar manner, the reverse sensation of thrust and counterbalance by the end walls is illustrated in Room 3 (Plate #3), where the placement of half a dozen blood-letters on the leaning wall are sustained by the massing of a dozen litter-bearers on the confronting vertical wall. In effect, in Rooms 1 and 3 the architectural and pictorial solidity and rigidity of the interior ends hold in check the inward stress of the outer ones. However, the subject matter on these outer walls still asserts itself upon the observer, and accordingly illustrates phase three of the movement concept.

With the above study of the reciprocities between the east and west walls of Rooms 1 and 3, the concept of movement has been advanced in its development from its incipient beginnings within one figure to its ultimate extension involving entire walls. Within this range of movement, which for purposes of analyses has been categorized into three phases, are embodied and employed the secondary concepts of potential motions, their

subtle stabilizers, and their life-giving transitions. These secondary concepts are unified by the more comprehensive concept of breathing which, in turn, is subordinated to, as well as essentially responsible for, the immediate presentation of the Bonampak murals to the observer.

However, prior to analyzing the effect of this immediate presentation upon the observer, it will be necessary to review briefly the various phases of movement in order to better understand the murals' full impact upon their observer.

The first phase, initially sensed as a form of animation, is basically confined to movement within the individual figures. Giving stronger suggestions of movement to these figures is their depiction in various individualistic states of arrested motion, which when constrained by subtle pictorial and physical stabilizers produces an additional sense of potential movement within the figure. The invincibility and unrelentingness of either of these opposing forces produces a sense of continual, as well as potential, activity.

In phase two this slight figural restlessness is transmitted into all the scenes in the temple by various combinations of figural, scenic, and wall transitions. In short, sensations of varying degrees of activity emanate throughout the entire pictorial realm of Structure 1.

The third phase of movement cannot be as clearly defined or as clearly abstracted from the total concept as the first

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two phases. It does, however, pertain essentially to the extension of the active figures, which in phase two were unified into moving forces within the pictorial realm, into the psychological sphere and thereby into the more immediate awareness of the observer. For example, the sensation of projecting figures -- such as the ejection of the fourteen conversationalists in Room 1 (Plate #1), previously noted in relation to the animation facet of movement -- is essentially an aspect of the third phase by virtue of their relation to the psychological sphere and their direct presentation to the observer. Also various lead-ins into the pictorial depth not only pull the eye of the observer into the illusionary depth of the painting but more importantly permit the active figures to make advances along these implied guide-lines toward the observer. And, in a similar manner, such elements as the previously discussed bridges in the psychological distance -- the beams, daises, and doorway of Room 2 -- not only provide visual entrances into the pictorial realms for the observer but also, more importantly in terms of understanding the immediacy of the murals, provide visual links with, or by extension exits into, the psychological and physical spheres for the active figures, thereby making the frescoes more immediate to the beholder.

Therefore, in effect, as the observer -- Mayan or modern -- confronts these magnificent murals and contemplates their provocative subject matter, he suddenly senses that he is surrounded on all four sides by the pulsating activity which permeates throughout the pictorial-psychical sphere of the painting and

even into the psυχical-physical space of the beholder. In effect, the observer, encircled by throbbing movement which is subtly but, nevertheless, dynamically thrust upon him is subordinated to these omnipotent and omnipresent sensations of activity emanating from the painting.

Thus today, as a millennium ago, the visual impact of the three rooms of frescoes in Structure 1 at Bonampak upon the indefensible observer is so vigorous and inescapable that he is completely dominated by the murals.

But it is not surprising that the frescoes suppress and subjugate the individualism of their observer, for as the ultimate refinement in the painting medium of Mayan philosophy, which is essentially the suppression of the individual to the group for collective propitiation to the ever-demanding gods, the Bonampak murals are in alignment with Mayan philosophy, which in its most complete manifestation is the Mayan civilization.

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FIGURES

PLATES

Plate #1 -- Room 1

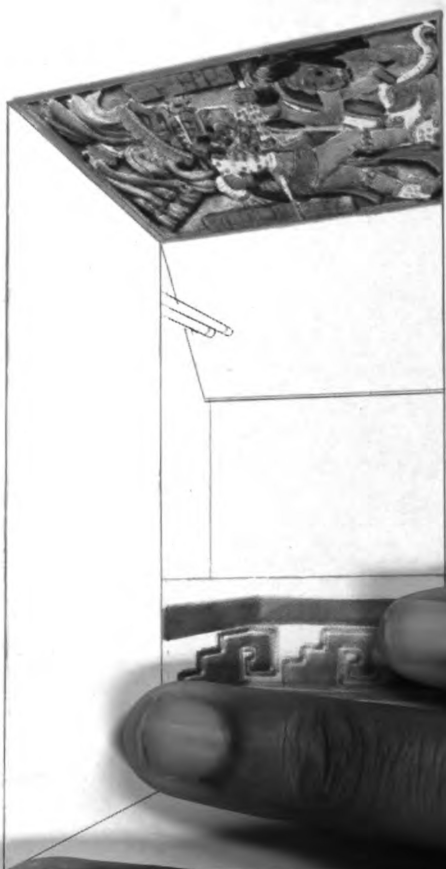




Plate #2 -- Room 2

FIGURE 28

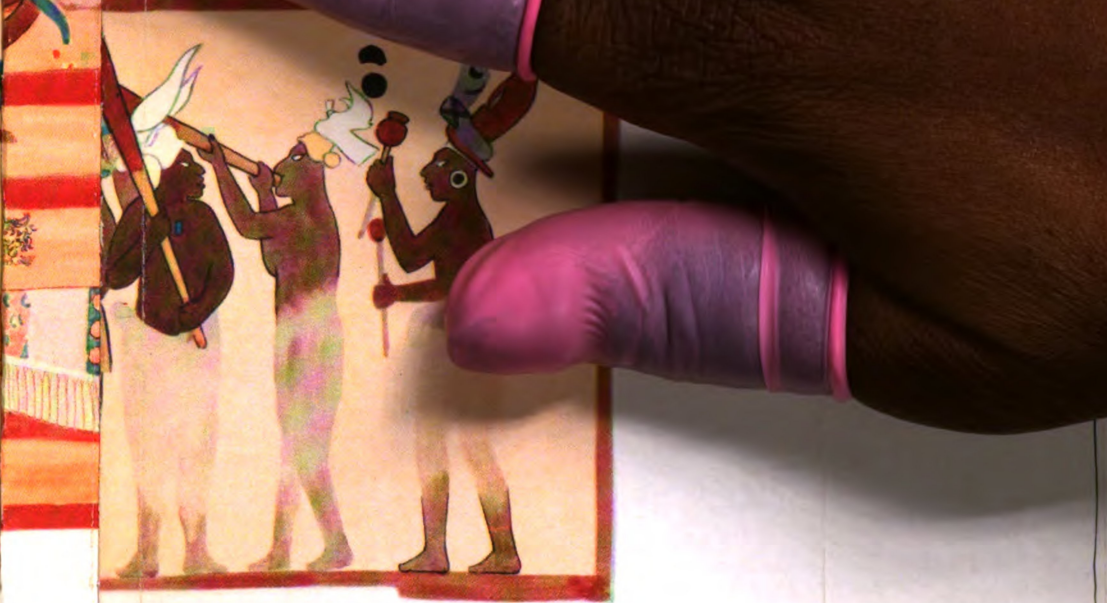
Painting by
Antonio Tejada
of the mural in
Room 2, Structure
1, Bonampak.

Carnegie Institution
of Washington





Plate #3 -- Room 3





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