

Postclassic Stage

DEFINITIONS

The Postclassic stage in Middle America and Peru is marked by the breakdown of the old regional styles of the Classic stage, by a continuing or increased emphasis upon urban living, and, inferentially, by tendencies toward militarism and secularism. Concerning the leveling of stylistic regionalism, we have observed that diffusion between regions in the Classic stage both in the central Andes and in Middle America was either the not easily detectable movement of technological ideas and isolated elements or the trade in actual objects and manufactures. In the Postclassic we see the wide, interregional transferences of total art and architectural styles. The mechanisms behind these transferences are debatable, but it is reasonable to interpret many of them as actual movements of large groups of people often accompanied by military force. These trends toward militarism and large-scale warfare are reflected in the archaeological record by late Postclassic stage increases in fortifications and fortified communities in many Middle American and Peruvian regions. The implications for a gradually increasing secularization of culture and society in the Postclassic are less direct. We would, however, argue that a decrease in the number, size, and elaboration of pyramid mounds and other kinds of religious structures is one clue to the waning of religious authority. Another is the aesthetic decline from Classic standards which characterizes much of Postclassic art in Peru and Middle America. In some regions this tendency is seen in standardization and mass production

of objects. In citing such definitions, we are attempting, it must be remembered, to weigh and give classificatory value to trends. Warfare and non-religious authority were certainly not absent from either the Peruvian or the Middle American scene in the Classic or even the Formative stages; but, in so far as we can measure such things from the archaeological evidence, both militarism and secularism were in the ascendancy during the Postclassic stage.

We have discussed and defined urbanism in some of its aspects in our treatment of the Classic stage, but it is from the Postclassic level that we know most, from both archaeological and ethnohistorical sources, about the native American city. These cities were formed around politico-religious nuclei—pyramids, temples, palaces—and the urban zones contained not only the rulers, priests, and their entourages but various craftsmen and handlers of produce. In the Inca system all these city dwellers were governmental employees; under the Aztec many of them were independent artisans and merchants. In brief, the native city of the New World had large population aggregates either within residence or within reach, was the seat of politico-religious power, served as an economic and social center, and maintained complex and diverse divisions of labor among its citizens.

SOUTH AMERICA

Peruvian Postclassic cultures include all those of the Tiahuanaco horizon and of later times. Their time span is approximately from A.D. 1000 to A.D. 1532.¹ In the final years Inca sovereignty spread over all Peru and into adjacent Andean territories,² but just prior to this there were important regional kingdoms such as the Chimú,³ Cuzimancu, and Chíncha⁴ of the coast and numerous smaller states in the highlands.

We know that in ancient Peru, cities so defined came into being on the Classic stage, at least in some regions, such as the north and

1. Rowe, 1945. As observed in the discussions of the Peruvian Classic, this beginning date may have to be moved back two or three centuries.

2. Means, 1931; Rowe, 1946. 3. Rowe, 1948. 4. Rowe, 1946.

south coasts. There is an important difference, however, between the Peruvian Postclassic city and its presumed Classic stage prototype. The north coast Classic population aggregate appears to have grown by accretion, somewhat haphazardly, around a temple center, while the Postclassic city follows a planned or partially planned layout.⁵ It is as though the necessity for, and idea of, city life had been accepted in Postclassic times whereas, in the earlier stage, the problem had not yet been dealt with consciously. We are not certain of the time of the first appearance of the "planned city" in Peru, but there are several indications that it may have marked the beginnings of the Postclassic on the Tiahuanaco style horizon.⁶ By the latter part of the Postclassic the symmetrically arranged urban center was characteristic of north coast sites such as Chan Chan, Pacatnamu, and El Purgatorio.⁷

Coexistent with the Peruvian cities are the tendencies toward secularism and militarism mentioned above as defining the Postclassic stage. The big religious centers and shrines dominated prehistoric Peru during the Formative and, particularly, the Classic. Beginning with the *castillo* at Chavín de Huantar and the other Chavín horizon temples in the Nepeña and Casma valleys,⁸ the temple pyramid reached gigantic proportions in Classic stage constructions such as the Huaca Cortada in the Chicama Valley, the Pyramid of the Sun in the Moche Valley,⁹ the Gallinazo and Huanaco mounds in the Virú Valley,¹⁰ and the Maranga pyramids in the Rimac Valley.¹¹ In the Postclassic, pyramids continued to be built, but these were usually placed within the inclosures of large architectural complexes.¹² Like the pyramids within the walls of Chan Chan, they tended to be smaller in absolute size than those of the Classic, and they lost still more in impressiveness by the size

5. Willey, 1953c, pp. 396-99.

6. Willey, 1953c, pp. 412 ff.; Stumer, 1954.

7. Schaedel, 1951. 8. Tello, 1943. 9. Kroeber, 1925.

10. W. C. Bennett, 1950; Willey, 1953c.

11. Jijón y Caamaño, 1949.

12. Schaedel, 1951; Willey, 1953c; Stumer, 1954.

and numbers of the palaces and city buildings which surrounded them. There are other trends which support these inferences drawn from architecture. During the Postclassic, Peruvian art, as a whole, moved away from representational or what could be interpreted as god-themes. Following the Tiahuanaco horizon, the drift was toward stultification and geometric decorative art. Also, we know from ethnohistoric sources that the Inca state was highly secularized. The Inca sun-god was imposed upon conquered peoples, but there was no concerted effort made to obliterate local religions.¹³ Power was conceived of as military and bureaucratic might.

Militarism seems to have been a force in old Peruvian society from an early time. In this, as in many other of its trends and emphases, Peru differs from Middle America. Large fortifications of a refuge nature have been identified as far back as the late Formative White-on-red horizon,¹⁴ and fortified strongholds, or *castillos*, are a common feature of north coast Classic. There seems little doubt, however, that organized warfare was stepped up at the close of the Classic and throughout the Postclassic. The Tiahuanaco stylistic horizon was probably propelled by military force,¹⁵ and long-distance roads date from this time.¹⁶ Essentially, the difference between Classic and Postclassic warfare in Peru was probably one of scope. Fighting was, undoubtedly, intense on an intravalley or small intervalley scale in the Classic, but wide-scale geographical strategy and maneuvers belong to the later stage. This is indicated by a change in the nature of fortifications as well as by ethnohistoric accounts of Inca activities.

MIDDLE AMERICA

The Postclassic centers of Middle America are those well known in the literature of the ethnohistoric period. Aztec Tenochtitlán in the Valley of Mexico is the most famous example.¹⁷ Mitla in Oaxa-

13. Means, 1931; Rowe, 1946.

15. Willey, 1948a.

14. Willey, 1953c, pp. 358-59.

16. Willey, 1953c, p. 370.

17. Prescott, 1843; Vaillant, 1941; Sanders, 1956.

ca,¹⁸ Tzintzuntzan in the Tarascan country,¹⁹ Totonacan Cempoala in Veracruz, and Mayapan²⁰ in Yucatán are others. Most of these cities were seats of power in the late centuries just antedating, or coming up to, the Spanish conquest. Somewhat earlier, in the centuries between A.D. 800 and A.D. 1200, there was another set of centers such as Tula, in Hidalgo,²¹ and Mexicanized Chichén Itzá.²² The Middle American Postclassic varies regionally in total time range, as did the Classic. In the central Mexican highlands its beginnings may be considered coincident with the fall of the Teotihuacán IV culture and the concomitant rise of Tula (ca. A.D. 800). Elsewhere, it may be a century or two later. The terminus of the Postclassic is marked by the early sixteenth-century arrival of the Spanish, who found Tenochtitlán full of vigor and Mayapan abandoned.

The history of Middle American urbanism cannot be followed in the same detail as that of northern Peru, but, as we have remarked, the Teotihuacán IV phase in the Valley of Mexico was a foreshadowing of the city life seen later in sixteenth-century Tenochtitlán. The Aztec city, with an estimated population of sixty thousand persons,²³ was supported by a thick fringe of chinampa (floating garden) farmers on its margins and around the shores of Lake Texcoco. Water transportation—a mobility factor—was almost certainly of importance in the maintenance of a community of such size, and this same factor may well have been important in Teotihuacán times. Temple pyramids were dwarfed by the large and elaborate cities surrounding them in much the same fashion as in Postclassic Peru. There is not much question that religion was always a stronger force in the life of prehistoric Middle America than in Peru, but there are indications that secular and military powers were in the ascendancy during the Aztec regime. The Tenochcas rose to dominance in central Mexico during several

18. Parsons, 1936.

20. Roys, 1950.

19. Foster, 1948.

21. Acosta, 1940, 1944, 1945.

22. Morris, Charlot, and Morris, 1931; Tozzer, n.d.

23. Sanders, 1956.

centuries of bitter intercity fighting following the collapse of Teotihuacán, and in this period the war-god rose to a commanding position in Aztec society.²⁴

Militarism, secularism, and urbanism in Postclassic²⁵ Mexico and Central America have been discussed at length by others;²⁶ but, apparently, these trends do not march evenly in all quarters of the Middle American area. There are some indications that the highland basin environments were more favorable for urban growth than the lowlands;²⁷ thus, the urban classification seems to fit better in western Mexico, Oaxaca, and the Guatemalan highlands than on the east coast or in the Maya lowlands. Yet there are significant variations among the highland regions. In the Guatemalan highlands some of the largest site zones date from the Formative. The Miraflores phase at Kaminaljuyu offers evidence of a great occupation zone and politico-religious center outstripping in size anything that came later.²⁸ Guatemalan highland late Postclassic sites are well fortified, however, and attest to a period of widespread warfare and strife linked to the disruptions in central Mexico. In the Maya lowlands at Chichén Itzá, the Tula-Toltec art and the new constructions at an old Classic ceremonial center suggest that long-distance conquest was a feature of the early Postclassic in that region. Just how much of an urban center Chichén Itzá ever became is not clear. There are numerous house mounds around the center, but it is unlikely that the dwelling pattern here was comparable to that of compact Tenochtitlán. Later, however, the Yucatecan Maya attempted an urban center at the walled site of Mayapan. Within the inclosing wall some four thousand household units have been mapped over an area about two to three kilometers in extent.²⁹ It is the most urbanized of any known lowland Maya site, but whether the greater part of its inhabitants lived within the walls most of the year following non-farming occupations is still a matter for con-

24. Vaillant, 1941.

25. The term "Militaristic" has been used for this stage (Armillas, 1951).

26. *Ibid.*

28. Shook and Proskouriakoff, 1956.

27. Sanders, 1953.

29. Ruppert and Smith, 1952.

jecture. In any case, we can conclude that urbanization was decidedly less successful in the Maya lowlands than in the Valley of Mexico.

There is an important phenomenon connected with the Postclassic stage of development that has not been significant in earlier stages. This is, in effect, the large-scale exportation and implantation of the Postclassic features of militarism, secularism, and urbanism into and upon other cultural traditions where they had been lacking. Mayapan may have been modified by such an implantation, deriving its Postclassic patterns from central Mexico. In Peru this was certainly the case with the Inca empire. Roads, fortifications, and administrative quarters were constructed by the Inca from Ecuador to central Chile. These traits and much of the Inca system must have had profound effects upon the local inhabitants, although we do not know to what extent these conquered cultures were modified. Possibly, too, Postclassic phenomena exerted equally great, but less direct, influences in ways other than conquest and incorporation. It has been suggested that real cities may have grown up on the Ecuadorian coast in response to the rich trade with the Postclassic Chimu kingdom of the Peruvian north coast. If this is true, the process which gave rise to some of the ancient Mediterranean trading cities of the Old World would have its counterpart in the New. Such a development is an excellent example of the interlocking effects of diffusion and internal culture development.