1 Introduction

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Archaeological efforts to explain the dissolution of early state formations have always been rooted—at least to some degree—in contemporary circumstances. In the case of the ancient Maya, this was clearly illustrated three decades ago by Richard Wilk (1985), who demonstrated how shifting concerns in American society influenced what were considered to be valid interpretations for the collapse of a large number of southern lowland kingdoms during the ninth century AD. Prevailing concerns with climate change and the propensity to see droughts as the primary causal factor in the demise of these same Maya kingdoms (e.g., Gill 2000; Kennett et al. 2012) continue to illustrate how current issues can bias our interpretations of the past (Iannone, Yaeger, and Hodell 2014; Yaeger and Hodell 2009). That is not to say that droughts did not play a significant role in the downfall of the various Maya kingdoms, only that we need to be more critical with respect to the implicit (and often untested) aspects of our interpretive frameworks (Iannone 2014).

One such implied (and often unverified) component of many models for the collapse of early state formations—including those of the Maya—is the concept of the "scapegoat king," first promoted by James Frazer (1993 [1922]) in his still-influential volume, *The Golden Bough*, subsequently elaborated on by many others (see Chapter 2). In its original formulation, this model emphasized two different yet complementary themes, both of which continue to pervade many models of societal collapse (Hansen and Stepputat 2006, 298–299; see also Abercrombie and Turner 1978, 154–155; Plant 1980, 345; Quigley 2000, 239). The first theme suggests that kings are intrinsic to their kingdoms and that as the embodiment of these kingdoms, they reflect the shared, collective will and well-being of the people who inhabit their realms. The second theme implies that kings are extrinsic to

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their kingdoms because they have special characteristics, unique origins, and unusual powers and that this allows them to assume the dangerous task of carrying the moral transgressions and impurities of their kingdoms and to assume the role of guarantor of prosperity for their followers because of the special relationship they have with the supernatural forces that are responsible for fertility. The latter qualities relate to the notion of the "divine" king who is different, powerful, vital, and potentially dangerous (Trigger 2003, 79–87). Both the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of kings are usually highlighted in unison in efforts to illustrate the unique roles these individuals play within society (Hansen and Stepputat 2006, 299), and to explain why kings are often perceived to be at fault when kingdoms begin to show signs of declining prosperity, and ultimately collapse[1] and thus are treated as scapegoats, resulting in their removal from power using prescribed ritual practices and sometimes even violent acts (as is documented in the various cross-cultural examples presented in chapter 2).

At least since the initial formulation of J. Eric S. Thompson's (1954) "peasant revolt" model, Mayanists have frequently used the scapegoat king trope in their explanations for the ninth-century collapse, sometimes explicitly (e.g., Freidel and Shaw 2000; Iannone, Chase, et al. 2014; Lucero 2002, 2006; Moyes et al. 2009; Webster 2000, 2002a, 2002b) but far more often implicitly. Although this model seems to draw the various environmental and sociocultural data sets into a coherent whole that accounts for how and why the various Maya kingdoms met their demise, as an explanatory device it has rarely been vigorously tested (but see Moyes et al. 2009). As Takeshi Inomata underscored in his commentary on the first draft of this volume, while the divine king model may be quite useful for understanding the ancient Maya, whether the scapegoat king trope is useful for conceptualizing the ninth-century Maya collapse remains to be demonstrated.

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Returning to the idea that our contemporary circumstances often influence what we consider to be valid interpretations of past events, one wonders whether our attraction to and uncritical application of the scapegoat king model relates, on some level, to our perception that contemporary governments are mismanaging resources and are generally unresponsive to issues that are of concern to the general public. That such sentiments are not unique to our own sociopolitical milieu may explain why the scapegoat king model has had such a long and often uncritical explanatory reign within the social sciences. Nevertheless, the persistence of such views does not, in and of itself, confirm the efficacy of the explanatory framework. From an archaeological standpoint, the tenets of the scapegoat king model

need to be critically evaluated using the range of data sets available to us. In doing so, particular emphasis must be placed on the material correlates that support the idea that ancient rulers—including the Maya kings who are the focus of this volume—symbolized the well-being of their communities, assumed the role of guarantor of prosperity and fertility for their kingdoms, and were therefore treated as scapegoats when it was perceived that they were no longer effective in these roles.

This, then, is the explicit goal of this volume: to assess the explanatory power of the scapegoat king model using detailed data sets from a number of Maya centers, all of which show evidence for ritual and/or violence that correlates in space and time with the fall of kings and the demise of the traditional institution of kingship in the early ninth century AD.

Critique of the Scapegoat King Model

Although many believe that the scapegoat king model has substantial explanatory power with respect to understanding societal collapse—as is amply demonstrated by the many cross-cultural analyses discussed in chapter 2—some significant issues lurk beneath the surface of this interpretive framework. Criticisms center on a series of interrelated issues, many of which are rooted in Weberian approaches to power and legitimacy (e.g., Abercrombie and Turner 1978; Brenner 1994; Hansen and Stepputat 2006; Heath 2010; Rudolph 2006). To reiterate, several of these concerns were raised by Takeshi Inomata as we worked our way through the first iteration of this volume, and his insights were integral to framing the final version of the monograph. In broad terms, the main issue concerns the fact that most of the models that employ the concept of the scapegoat king are based on questionable notions of how legitimacy would have been cultivated and maintained in past societies.

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To begin, it is clear that the scapegoat king model is overtly *functional*; it is often based on the notion of a sacred covenant that binds the supernatural powers, elite managers, and mass of producers under a social contract that promotes solidarity by assigning each component of this tripartite relationship specific yet complementary roles (e.g., Joyce 2000, 75; Monaghan 2000, 39; cf. Houston and Inomata 2009, 28, 36–42). In the scapegoat king models, solidarity diminishes when: 1) the gods decide not to provide the sun, rain, and fertile soils that are vital to the productivity of the producers and overall health of the kingdom (which initiates the crisis); 2) elite managers fail in their tasks of properly sustaining and eventually placating

the gods through their ritual practices (which initially stimulates and in the end perpetuates the crisis); and 3) the mass of producers eventually decide to withhold and redeploy for their own direct benefit the natural and human resources they would have normally provided to an effective ruler so the latter could properly nourish and pacify the supernatural forces (which exacerbates the crisis). In other words, loss of solidarity results when ineffective kings fail in their chief roles, as defined by the principals of the sacred covenant. According to the scapegoat king model, when this occurs, kings can suffer from a legitimacy crisis (Habermas 1975), which, if it cannot be dealt with through an effective strategy of containment (Jameson 1981), ultimately leads to their removal from power. The latter may be achieved through a variety of means and may involve ritual termination events and even violent acts (see chapter 2).

Whether the ability to do so is framed in ideological terms or in more tangible expressions, it is true that good rulers keep their supporters' well-being in mind when governing. However, the idea that kings lose power simply because they are perceived to be poor managers is an obvious oversimplification (Brumfiel 1992, 556–557). Models that emphasize external causes for declining prosperity and hence the removal of a scapegoat king and the concomitant fall of their kingdom—whether this is the result of shifting trade networks, defeats in warfare, or various environmental causes (i.e., drought, resource degradation)—also underestimate the role internal factors play in a collapse and generally undervalue the dynamic character of social change (Middleton 2012, 257). In reality, societies—especially those that are highly differentiated and pluralistic—are not systems that exhibit long-term equilibrium punctuated by periodic, externally stimulated, legitimation crises but are rather social formations that perpetually lurch from crisis to crisis (Abercrombie and Turner 1978, 152; Brumfiel 1992, 558). The fluid, conflictive, negotiated, and multivocal nature of societies and communities is ignored in the more functional applications of the scapegoat king model.

Most interpretations that employ the idea of the scapegoat king can also be characterized as *normative* because they imply significant levels of collective adherence to and belief in a dominant ideology imposed from above (Heath 1999, 2; Rudolph 2006, 3). We use the term ideology here in a very strict manner, one that adheres to how it is employed in the various applications of the scapegoat king model, as opposed to the broader way it has been applied in other discussions of legitimacy, where it encompasses "*any* aspect of symbolic systems, ritual, religion, or belief, and . . . associated

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