Quiche Maya see the Pleiades as a handful of seeds. In the highlands during March, when corn is planted, the constellation sits on the horizon for a moment and then slips from sight. During lowland corn planting (May), the constellation remains completely invisible (Tedlock 1985).

In the *Books of Chilam Balam of Chumayel,* which came out of the Yucatan, *tzab* refers to the rattle on a **rattlesnake** and the Pleiades. Both were connected to the great god of Itzam Na, who, in some areas during the Late Classic, came to be revered as the most important and all-encompassing god (Thompson 1970).

Tracking the Planets

In order to make their calendars, to keep track of time and the passing of cycles, the Maya needed a method for tracking the gods as they crossed the sky. In some centers the Maya constructed buildings whose angles and heights could be used to calibrate time.

In the easternmost part of the Classic site Uaxactun is Group E (see Fig. 5). The group, its plaza bordered by structures on each side, is oriented almost exactly north-south and dates to Preclassic times. The Maya stood atop the building on the west side of the plaza, using it as a point of observation from which to record the passing of the winter and summer solstices, respectively the shortest and longest days of the year. They used the temples directly east, Temples I, II, and III, to measure the sun's movements. As the sun rises during its summer solstice, it passes just to the left of Temple I, the northernmost temple, and during the winter solstice just to the right of Temple III, the southernmost temple (Aveni and Hartung 1989).

WAR GAMES

For much of the Preclassic and Classic periods, war was a demonstration, not an act of acquisition. Maya ahaws not only needed to prove their connection with the spirit world, but they also had to have physical prowess and stealth. Ahaws and bands of warriors raided the neighboring centers, stealing people and goods, as opposed to acquiring land (a trend that caught on later). A successful raid displayed the prowess of a leader and his dynasty to the rest of the Maya world. The higher the official rank of the prisoner, the more prestigious the success. Ordinary captives, if brought to the victorious center at all, were often turned into servants. High officials, however, likely lost their lives, and ahaws almost always did.

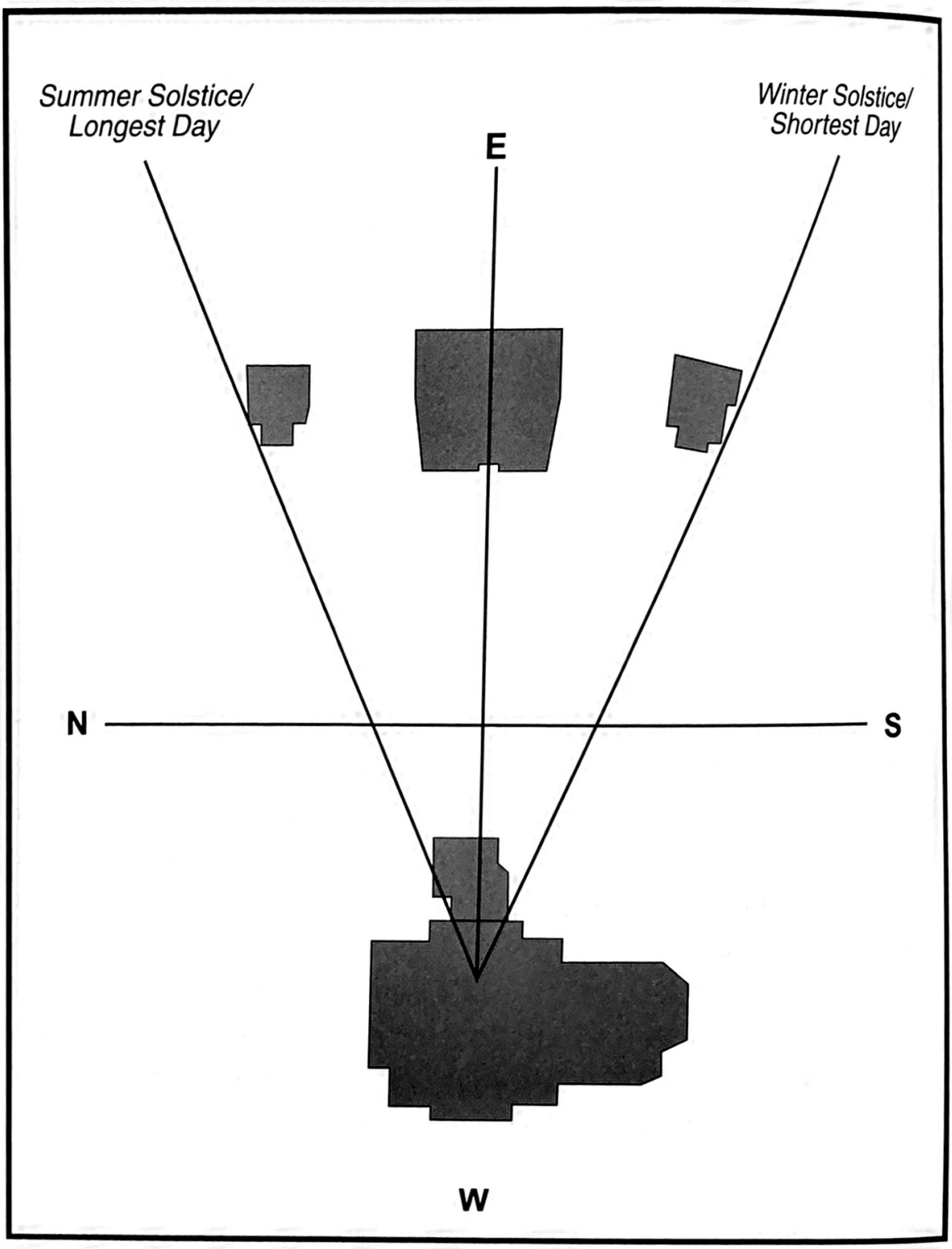

Fig. 5. Group E at Uaxactun in Guatemala, exemplifying how the Maya used architecture to calibrate the sun's yearly movements. Drawing by Tim Lohnes. Adapted from Aveni and Hartung 1989.

The capture of a ruler by another ruler was greatly glorified and worthy of being carved into stone. Stelae and other carved monuments recorded these triumphs. The stolen humans were sacrificed as offerings during special events, such as the blessing of a new temple or ahaw. Or if the ruler was not sacrificed, but merely held as a prisoner, a winning center could essentially paralyze the losing site, causing it to come to a standstill. Such was the case