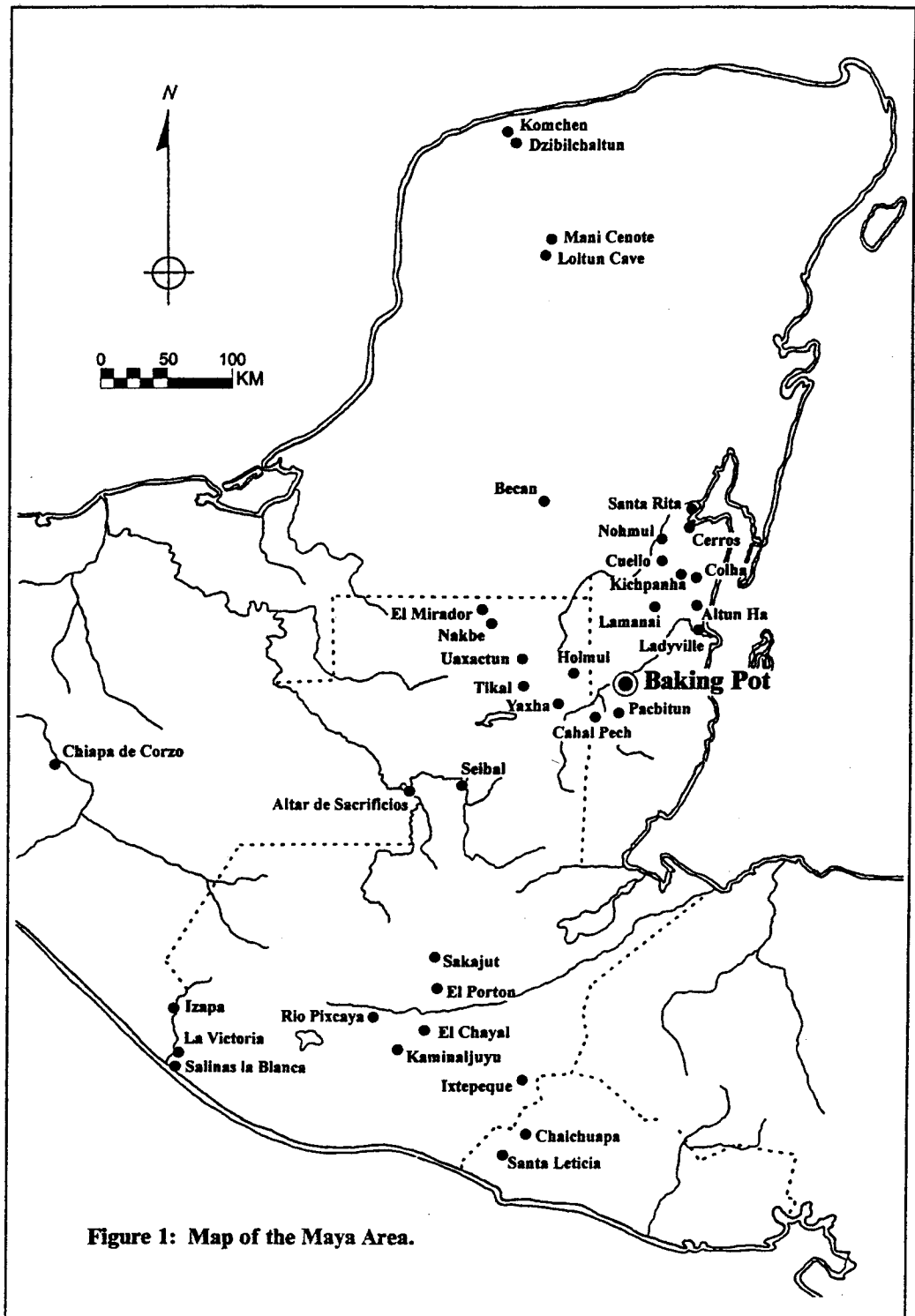


## **INTRODUCTION:**

### **THE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE BELIZE VALLEY: EVIDENCE FROM BAKING POT, XUNANTUNICH, AND CAHAL PECH**

*The Political Organization of the Belize Valley: New Evidence from Baking Pot, Xunantunich, and Cahal Pech* engages in an assessment of the political organization of a large river valley located just east of the Petén region of Guatemala during the Late and Terminal Classic period (580-950 A.D.). Theories attempting to explain the nature of political and economic interactions are tested with data recently recovered from the region, culminating in new hypotheses explaining the relationships that existed both internally and with distant powerful centers. Issues such as the monumentality of the site center, population size, the discovery of hieroglyphic writing on stela or portable art, the hierarchy noted in the inscriptions themselves, the degree of status and wealth items discovered both within elite tombs and as caches deposited within the site, and the inclusion of particular centers into ceramic spheres are studied in an attempt to reassess the political landscape of the Belize River Valley during the Late Classic to Terminal Classic.

The Maya civilization flourished in the northern half of Central America (Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) and southern Mexico from 1000 B.C. to 900 A.D. before suffering a collapse that left many of the large sites in ruin (Figure 1). The height of the civilization occurred during the Late Classic period, at which point populations were at their highest, portable art was crafted



**Figure 1: Map of the Maya Area.**

*Figure 1: Map of the Maya Area (after Awe 1992)*

by skilled artisans and traded throughout the region, and written records are found at more centers than ever before. While archaeological data has been primarily used to determine political organization, models based primarily on ethnographic, ethnohistoric and epigraphic data also tend to illuminate different threads of the culture that both influenced and were influenced by the political system, and therefore these field of knowledge will be addressed alongside archaeological models in Chapter 1. Primarily however, archaeological data, including information regarding settlement patterns, burial and caching practices, and monumental architecture, are employed in connection with newly read epigraphic texts to determine the nature of the political hierarchy within the Maya lowlands.

This dissertation will focus primarily on political models derived from data from the Maya lowlands, particularly the southern Maya lowlands, including Belize, the Petén province of Guatemala, Honduras, and southeastern Chiapas. In this region, monumental site cores of varying sizes were constructed in part as palace residences and temple complexes where rulers conducted both private and public rituals. Administrative buildings were also located within the site cores, usually characterized by long, low, range structures complete with benches and often a throne room for the ruler. These cores were surrounded by a scattering of household platforms of various sizes and varying distances from the core. While some centers may have upwards of 100,000 people supporting the center (e.g. Tikal, Caracol), other centers had less than 2,000 (e.g. Seibal, Baking Pot, Xunantunich). There were no urban centers in the Maya lowlands like there were in Central Mexico, suggesting that Maya families grew at least some of the staple

food for their own survival in the immediate vicinity of their homes (e.g. corn, beans, tomatoes, and squash) (Wilk and Ashmore 1988). Many of these homes are clustered in what archaeologists call *plazuelas*; domestic groups that contain 3 or 4 platforms surrounding a single plaza (Ashmore and Wilk 1988). These groups, miniature and less complex versions of royal palaces, probably housed an extended family that was controlled by the eldest male (probably the father and grandfather to the younger blood-related members). Other homes were simpler; a single platform that housed the immediate family members. Regardless of the size of the domestic structure, non-elites (those living in the periphery of the center) were likely required to contribute tribute to the elites. They may have aided in the construction or maintenance of the core area or provided other domestic services to the elites living there (e.g. cooking, cleaning, sewing, etc.).

Between two centers, tribute requirements may be the clearest reflection of the power relationships but unfortunately no written tribute lists survived. An elite perspective regarding the power hierarchy comes from carved stela, however many regions lack these monuments or they are so badly eroded that they can not be read. Archaeologists then turn to other types of information (population, size of monumental architecture, number of stela, etc) to inform them about the nature of the political hierarchy (Adams and Jones 1981; Adams and Smith 1981; Ball 1993; Hammond 1974; Marcus 1993).

My research focused on three centers, Xunantunich, Baking Pot and Cahal Pech, in the Belize River Valley (Figure 2). Archaeologists working in other regions, particularly the Petén, rarely mention these centers in their political



hierarchies. When sites in the Belize Valley are noted, they are believed to be subsumed under the political hierarchy of powerful Petén centers. In Martin and Grube's short assessment of Xunantunich in their *Chronicles of the Maya Kings and Queens* they argue that Xunantunich was under the control of Naranjo (Martin and Grube 2000). Archaeologists working within the valley have written a great deal about the importance of Xunantunich and Buenavista del Cayo (and to a lesser degree Cahal Pech) however Baking Pot has failed to find recognition even within the local political landscape (Ashmore in press; Ball and Taschek 2004; Garber 2004; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004; Taschek and Ball 2004). New evidence presented here should provide a new perspective on the importance of these centers within the political landscape.

In an effort to illuminate the political positions of these medium sized sites, a review of the political theories and their positioning of the Belize Valley sites within the larger hierarchy will be undertaken in Chapter 1. These theories target the political and often economic importance of various centers and the underlying principles guiding their roles in the system. Unfortunately, the lack of glyphic data from the Belize Valley has led many researchers to ignore the role of it in the overall political hierarchy. Newly discovered evidence from Baking Pot, however, indicates that these centers may have played an important role in the ever fluctuating political system in the Petén.

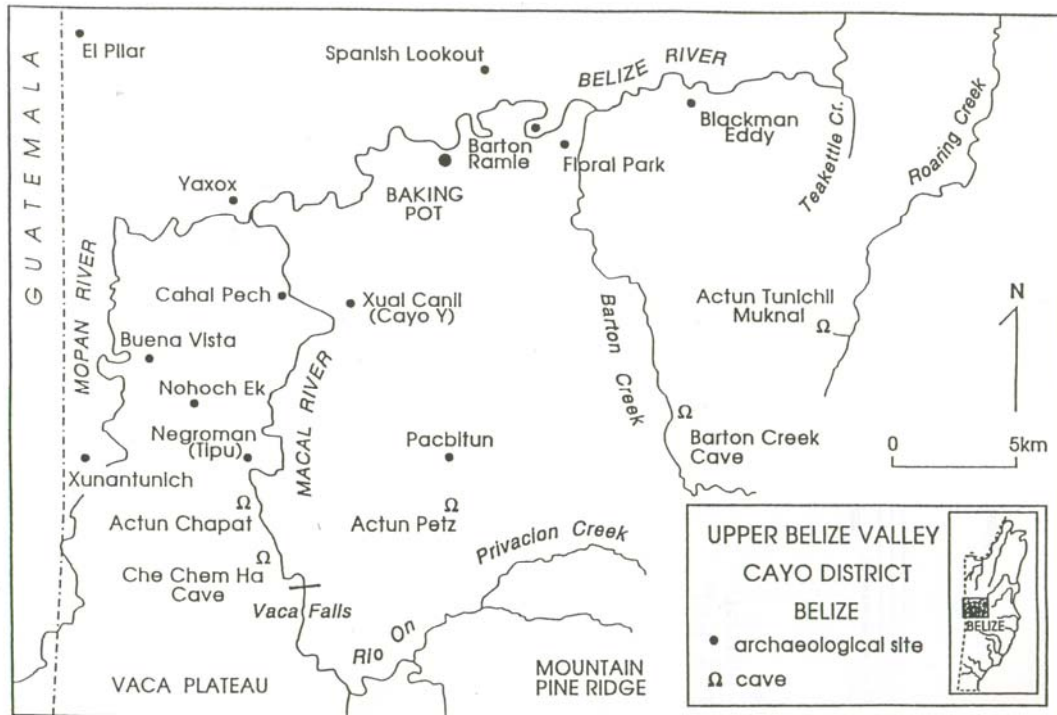


Figure 2: Map of the Belize Valley (C. Helmke 2003)

To determine the role that these smaller centers may have played within the greater political landscape I will attempt to fit Baking Pot, Cahal Pech, and Xunantunich into previously proposed models of the political hierarchy during the Late and Terminal Classic periods. These include ranking models, socio-religious models, as well as centralized and decentralized models of political organization. Not surprisingly, none of the proposed models fit the data in the Belize Valley exactly, but some, including the dynamic model coupled with models of economic core-periphery interactions have proven useful in understanding the relationships between the centers in the Belize Valley and those in the Petén. Using newly discovered data, I will show that while more politically and economically powerful centers in the Petén did have influence over the valley

during the Late Classic period, there were also times of political independence during which rulers at Baking Pot, Cahal Pech, and Buenavista del Cayo thrived both economically and politically.

It is often difficult to determine the political relationships between powerful core regions and areas in the immediate periphery. Interactions among centers tells us a great deal about fluctuating economic and political power dynamics. In the Belize Valley, the constant power struggles between Naranjo, Caracol, Tikal and Calakmul during the Late Classic strongly affected the political and subsequently the economic prosperity of Baking Pot, Cahal Pech, and Xunantunich.

Within the Belize Valley there appears to have been a three tiered site size hierarchy and a two tiered political hierarchy throughout the entire Late Classic period. This two tiered system is hypothesized based on site size, site location, elite wealth, hieroglyphic texts, and artifact assemblages, of which there appear to be two categories: small centers with few expressions of material wealth and medium sized centers with elaborate tombs, temples, and palace complexes.

One source of wealth for these medium sized centers may have been control of the riverine trade route leading into the Petén via the Belize River. The elites at centers located along the river, particularly Baking Pot and Buenavista, display an unusually large number of high status items in their tombs. These grave goods include highly prized polychrome ceramics, worked jade adornments, chert and obsidian eccentrics, and marine shells. While these centers were politically independent, the elites profited from control over this important trade route. The

Belize River was the main riverine route into the Petén, and likely carried goods into the region from as far south as Honduras as well as from the Yucatan Peninsula. This wealth may have enabled elites to buy their power from the politically authoritative centers in the Petén.

A second possibility explaining the success of the Belize Valley centers is their ability grow large quantities of cacao in the lush soils surrounding the river. Cacao was a very important cash crop during the Late and Terminal Classic periods because of its highly valued status to the elite members of society. Evidence of this is found on hundreds of painted vessels adorned with Primary Standard Sequence texts and often accompanying images of chocolate preparation (McAnany et al. 2003). Soils in the Belize Valley were noted as excellent for cacao growth during the early Colonial Period (Jones 1989). If riverine centers like Baking Pot were able to grow and export cacao during the Late Classic period the profits from this trade could also explain the concentration of wealth within the hands of their elites.

The following two chapters will detail the political models that have developed based on archaeological evidence as well as assess the assumptions upon which they are based. The effects of large versus small populations, the importance of wealthy and prestigious elites, and the political ramifications of the construction of a small versus large site core are discussed in detail in Chapter 2 in efforts to better understand the conflicting political evidence gathered in these peripheral centers. Chapter 3 provides an overview of previous research in the Belize Valley, while Chapters 4 and 5 detail new evidence, particularly from

Baking Pot, Cahal Pech, and Xunantunich. Chapter 6 provides a detailed analysis of the ceramic material from Baking Pot and the relation of these remains to the political landscape. Chapter 7 integrates the new data in with the old to postulate the role these centers had in the Belize Valley and within the greater political arena during the Late to Terminal Classic periods.

# CHAPTER I

## POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE ANCIENT MAYA

### **Introduction**

Determining the nature of political relationships among Maya sites during the Classic Period has proven to be a difficult endeavor. The ever changing nature of political ties, the effects of economic relationships, and the importance of site location all need to be recognized before a clear understanding of these complex hierarchies can be garnered. All are linked through inter and intra site elite relationships and demands for prestige goods, tribute obligations, and ability to successfully defend ones territory and sovereignty. This challenge is even greater in regions where glyphic texts are limited, variations in site size are not as prominent as those found in the central Petén, and gradations in wealth between the elite and commoners are minimal. Areas where these challenges prove most difficult are those in regions labeled “peripheral” to the central Petén, Chiapas, and the area around Copan. The Belize Valley, located in west central Belize, is situated within this peripheral zone. Its political and economic systems have been understudied, their importance under appreciated, and the idea that the larger centers to the west exerted political dominance over the valley often assumed.

The problem typically encountered by scholars working in the Belize Valley is the lack of clear answers regarding political ties. Unlike sites only a few kilometers to the west, there are few carved monuments describing raiding, warfare, or feuds between polities. Political and economic ties among centers

within the valley and between the valley and areas around the region are implied from archaeological remains, artifact assemblages that are open to various interpretations by the numerous archaeologists working within this small valley.

The application of political models constructed on data from central regions of the Maya area is difficult in the Belize River Valley. The region was not closed to external influences or control, but how can we determine the nature of interactions and how they changed over time? It is possible to gain insights into the political, economic, and social interactions among the sites located within the Belize Valley through a close analysis of the archaeological remains. I plan to show that strategic economic management coupled with a fortuitous location along side the Belize River allowed the elites at Baking Pot to prosper more than they would had they been living closer to the Petén. The elites at Xunantunich did not enjoy similar benefits. Despite the greater size of the monumental architecture, these individuals appear to have been unable to import significant quantities of worked jade, pyrite, or other precious portable objects. Cahal Pech and Baking Pot appear to have been able to thrive both economically and politically during the Late Classic period by growing and exporting cash crops such as cacao. Baking Pot appears to have also benefited by its location alongside the well traveled Belize River. The number and unique nature of some trade items discovered at the site indicate that the elites may have been extracting some form of tribute or at least preferential trade arrangements from canoes traveling into the Petén laden with exotic items. Many archaeological traits can provide insight into a center's political position; however all of these traits, in conjunction with

characteristics unique to the region, have to be taken into account to accurately understand shifting political alliances.

It is difficult to determine if the Belize Valley is an isolated case for the Maya or if similar interactions between peripheral centers in close proximity to core regions could also have maintained a similar relationships to more powerful centers they tried to hold at a political arms length away. It is likely that peripheral regions rich in natural resources would have been a natural location for more powerful centers to conquer, as eventually occurred in the Belize Valley, however if left independent, these regions can thrive more successfully than small centers within the political and economic grip of the core powers.

### **History of Research**

Over the past one hundred years, scholars have been fascinated about the elite members of Maya society that ruled over large cities now hidden in the jungles of Central America. Numerous theories have been proposed to explain how rulers came into power, how they controlled their populations, and whether rulers vied for hegemonic control over vast areas. While scholars have not come to an agreement as to the nature of political organization in the Maya realm, an increasing wealth of information from excavations has allowed archaeologists to develop theories that more accurately reflect on-the-ground evidence.

No single model that can account for the variation that we see across the entire Maya region. Variations existed along ethnic lines, between geographic regions, between linguistic groups, and across time. Evidence collected by



archaeologists, ethnographers, ethnohistorians, iconographers, and epigraphers must all be combined to assemble models aimed at elucidating the sociopolitical history of the Maya. Despite this partnership within the subdisciplines, Robert Sharer (1994:465) suggests that understanding the complex processes and cultural meanings that are the foundation for the political organization falls primarily on the archaeologist. Archaeologists are the only ones who have access to the remains of all classes of people, including burials, caches, inscriptions, settlements, temples, and roadways. While other classes of information are important, they must be supplemental to the archaeological data left by the ancient Maya themselves.

In the recent past, most of the archaeological information we had regarding Maya sociopolitical organization derived from tombs, palaces, and temples constructed for the elites. The rest of the population, (e.g. at least the other 90%) was mostly left unstudied due to the unspectacular nature of their remains. Since the 1960's, household archaeology has become a more common and sometimes even the preferred method of site investigation as the costs of excavating in the periphery are significantly lower than that of reconstructing large temples or palaces. Recently, a balance between both site core and settlement analysis is expected both from scholars and the government agencies issuing excavation permits. Current research, coupled with investigations from the past, has created a vast database of information about both the Maya elites and those of lesser status.

Ethnohistoric and ethnographic accounts are ripe with information regarding both the elites and the common people; however, these accounts are primarily useful when analyzing the Postclassic Maya and become increasingly difficult to apply to the Classic Period. Given the clear archaeological evidence of a political collapse sometime from 800-900 A.D. throughout much of the Maya Lowlands, it is likely that the political system, as well as local social organizations would have been disrupted significantly at the end of the Classic Period. No longer were temples and tombs being dedicated to divine rulers, stela were no longer commissioned, and cities became less populated. One might question, however, whether applying models based on Postclassic and Contact period Maya society would still be more useful than applying models imported from other world regions. Prudence Rice (2004) believes that the direct historical approach is more relevant and paints a more accurate picture of the ancient Maya than trying to understand Maya political organization by means of the galactic polities in southeast Asia (Demarest 1992), theater states of Bali (Geertz 1980) or feudal models of Europe (Adams and Smith 1981). These models, and their implications and use in understanding the Maya are discussed later in this chapter.

Glyphic texts and iconography produced by Maya elite also aid in our understanding of the sociopolitical organization. These remains constitute the elite perspective; the elites only referred to themselves in their inscriptions. Elite texts on stela typically refer to few events: warfare; the births, marriages, or deaths of those in the ruling family; and the inauguration or seating of a ruler, either independently or under the auspices of a more powerful state. Books written by

scribes often detailed creation stories, the Maya calendar, and astronomical observations. The perspective of the sociopolitical system from the non-elites is much more difficult to determine. Non elites probably could not read or write and often their written remains are limited to pseudo glyphs painted or carved onto pottery. In effect, they were trying to mimic elite imagery when they did not understand how to write because they understood the importance of the written word. An example of this can be found on Martin's incised pottery in the Belize Valley (Gifford et al. 1976). The vases are covered with pseudo-glyphs intended to mimic the real glyphs carved and painted on the ceramics of the elites.

A second interpretative problem lies in the difficulty of separating the political, religious, social, and economic characteristics of this early complex society (Smith 2003). This challenge is in no way unique to the Maya; all early complex societies have weak divisions between these categories. Researchers have tried to understand the political systems by employing their knowledge of the importance of lineages and religious beliefs in Maya culture. These scholars (Demarest 1992; Marcus 1992; Rice 2004) note the importance of religious cycles, familial relations, as well as the dual role of the ruler as the high priest. In Demarest's socio-religious model, the ruler obtains his power over the populace through this ability to conduct impressive and effective rituals, demonstrating his special connection with the deities, and thus solidifying his special position within the community.

Some of the political models presented below are based strictly on observable archaeological evidence, which gives archaeologists a snap shot of the

political landscape at any given time. These models support middle and higher level theories that explain why the sociopolitical system was organized in a particular way, how it changed over time, as well as the all important question as to why Classic Maya rulers ultimately failed to lead their supporters through the Terminal Classic collapse. Unfortunately these models do little to explain the political situations in areas lacking glyphic texts and tend to focus entirely on the core region without understanding interactions between large and small centers.

Conflicting opinions concerning the political organization of the Maya are continuously debated because of the variability in the archaeological record across time and space. Numerous models have been proposed to explain the confusing patterns of site distributions, sites of various sizes, and people with greatly varying levels of political and social power. This plethora of academic theories is understandable and useful: different aspects of these models can be applied to centers at various times and locations. The variability also presents scholars with the notion that no single political model can explain the extreme variability found throughout the Maya lowlands. This realization can allow scholars to focus on interactions between specific regions, instead of trying to force one model on the entire Maya Lowlands.

Most models tend to focus on the Petén region of Guatemala, southern Campeche, and Chiapas during the Late-Terminal Classic periods, but a limited few look to areas that are located in Belize or the Yucatan, far outside of the core regions. Sites located outside these central zones are viewed as regions with limited political hierarchies (McAnany 1995). The focus of my research, the

densely populated Belize River Valley located in west-central Belize, is no exception. Although it has been extensively studied, few postulates have been made for its political organization in the Late to Terminal Classic periods (580-900 A.D.). I hope that data presented in subsequent chapters will help provide the necessary links to establishing the nature of the political organization of the region and how these relationships changed over time.

This chapter details the perspectives that various sub-disciplines contribute to our understanding of the relationships between various centers, describes the previously discarded theories of the political organization in the Maya lowlands, details the currently employed models of political interaction and hierarchy, and provides information about how these theories have been applied to the Belize River Valley in western Belize.

### *Archaeology*

Archaeological evidence has provided much of the data and support for our understanding of the ancient Maya. Archaeology alone does not provide all the answers, but it is the key to understanding some of the basic interactions between centers. Site location and settlement analysis is key to understanding relationships and interactions among centers. Intersite relationships, including political ties, can be hypothesized through studies of site distribution, location, site size, and distance between centers. This type of analysis can be conducted at an intra and inter site level, providing new ideas about interactions between community members and between various communities. Distance between

centers, the spacial arrangements between large, medium, and small communities, as well as a sites proximity to important geological resources can potentially reveal intersite hierarchies and relationships.

There is no single line of evidence that can fully explain the political relationships and the complex nature of hierarchies that existed during the Late and Terminal Classic periods in the Maya Lowlands. This limitation, coupled with the limited nature of archaeological remains, has forced scholars to look at other avenues of scholarship in an attempt to increase our understanding of these processes. These other avenues include ethnohistory, which offers archaeologists rich and vibrant descriptions of sacred rituals, fierce political rivalries, and interesting characters, something altogether lacking in the excavation records. The study of the iconography from the Classic Period art can provide information about the culture from the perspective of the ancient artist, while the epigraphy can illuminate the elite perspective of political activities. When pieced together, these unique perspectives can be applied to theories and models that seek to explain the political organization of the Classic Period Maya. Each anthropological sub discipline, taken separately, can begin to address the nature of political relationships, social ties between communities, as well as the intrasite ranking of elite individuals within this system.

Within the Belize Valley, various archaeological projects and researchers have aided in determining the political organization. Detailed in Chapter 3, these projects include Richard Leventhal and Wendy Ashmore's work at Xunantunich, James Garber's research at Blackman Eddy, Joseph Ball and Jennifer Taschek's

excavations at Buenavista del Cayo and Cahal Pech, as well as Jaime Awe's work at Cahal Pech and Baking Pot. These projects have often been long-running programs with significant and impressive research agendas. Unfortunately, they have also generally been low-budget endeavors with few large-scale excavations (with the exception of recent work at Xunantunich and consolidation work at Cahal Pech in the early 1990's) and much of the information has yet to be published as many of these projects are currently ongoing. The data recovered from these and other smaller programs can now be understood more fully when put in the context of previous studies. A synthesis of all pertinent material, in conjunction with new excavations, can provide a unique perspective of the political history of the Belize Valley region.

### ***Ethnohistory***

Christopher Columbus was the first European to have contact with the Maya. On his forth voyage, in the Bay of Honduras near the Bay Islands, he met with a group of Maya sailing in a large canoe up towards the Yucatan. Their canoe was laden with metal goods, ceramic vessels, food, cotton and other precious cargo (Henderson 1997). Due to language as well as cultural barriers, the Spanish did not understand where the Maya were coming from or the direction they were heading. However they did note that the canoe was without a sail, it was big enough to hold 20 men, and it could withstand deep sea ocean waves. It is interesting to note that the Spanish took little interest in these people. While they clearly had access to merchandise, it was not the riches that the Spanish were

looking for, thus the Spanish did little more than record the incident and continue on their way (ibid.).

Early explorers did little to detail their encounters with native peoples, but Spanish friars arriving in the New World who were attempting to convert the masses to Christianity and destroy the native religion, noted many aspects relevant to the political system. One of the most important texts from the years immediately following the conquest was written by Bishop de Landa, the infamous individual who tortured and killed many Maya people during the inquisition. In addition to his bonfires of Maya codices and religious idols, he also documented many aspects of daily life among the Maya of the Yucatán (Landa 1991). Through Landa, we know that the Maya of the Yucatan had an elite class of individuals who ruled over the communities. These people were better educated, had access to more precious trade items, sponsored rituals, and were highly regarded within the community. In particular, Landa noted the hereditary nature of rulership and within the priesthood (Landa 1566 translated by Gates 1978). Chiefs would confer their positions to the eldest male if he was worthy while the second son would be trained as a priest. The male children of priests would be trained as their fathers were, and promoted according to their abilities.

Maya culture underwent significant changes between the Classic and the end of the Postclassic periods, but the significant degree of centralization and lack of social mobility between the two classes even during the Postclassic period may be indicative of the social and political organization of the Classic. Epigraphic and archaeological evidence both point to a fairly small number of elite who



isolated themselves physically from the rest of the population through large architectural complexes and socially through the use of glyphic texts that only the elite could read. The lack of social mobility may have been even greater in the Classic period; however the mechanism of maintaining power within a single group through patrilineal descent was likely the key to limiting the number of elites throughout Maya prehistory. This information, gleaned from ethnohistoric documents, is also supported by the epigraphic data from monuments found at important Classic period centers.

Ethnohistoric documents regarding the Belize River Valley are extremely limited and refer to most communities only in passing. Only Tipu, a Postclassic and Contact Period center along the Macal River, is discussed in detail by Spanish missionaries (Jones 1989). Information recorded about the Belize Valley refers to the importance of cacao plantations and the trade route in local economies. While there is no certainty of cultural continuity, archaeological evidence in the Belize Valley is used to further support ethnohistoric evidence, presenting a new line of evidence in our understanding of the political organization.

In addition, political models are often based on ethnographic analogy. Royes geographical study looked at the political organization of contact period communities in the Yucatan to extrapolate possible patterns in Classic period settlement and site hierarchy (Royes 1965, 1957). Rice's *May Cycle* model is also based on ethnographic evidence, including reports that leaders voluntarily gave up political power every twenty years in the Yucatan. Combining this information

with archaeological data, Rice was able to present a new model of political organization during the Classic period.

### ***Epigraphy***

The study of Classic Maya glyphic texts has been limited to a few scholars who have dedicated themselves to understanding glyphs that 40 years ago were completely illegible. While archaeological information provides broad brush strokes of information about the political organization, Rice notes that “such data are static and descriptive. They fail to illuminate “the political” itself, the arenas in which power is negotiated, which whom and by whom, and on what basis decision making takes place” (Rice 2004:36). Glyphic texts found on stela often provide just this information, but are limited in scope, number, and location.

It was Tatiana Proskouriakoff who first realized that the glyphs located on Classic period stela were recoding life events of rulers (1960). She was able to decode the birth, marriage, and death glyph based primarily on date spread of years between each event listed based on the lifespan of the average human. At the same time, Heinrich Berlin noted the appearance of what he termed “emblems” that represented specific places and “emblems” that were linked with particular people (Figure 1.1) (1958; 1959).

Many theories regarding sociopolitical organization of the Maya find support from glyphic texts. While we cannot read all the glyphs, epigraphers understand the vast number of commonly encountered phrases. One of the most important elements of these texts relating to political organization are emblem

glyphs (Berlin 1958). Emblem glyphs contain the titles of Maya rulers, wherein they refer to themselves as the *k'ul ahaw* or divine lord of a particular polity represented by the main sign in the glyph (Martin and Grube 1995).



*Figure 1.1 Some of the Emblem Glyphs Mentioned in the Text (After Rice 2004: Fig 2.5)*

Mathews (1985) used emblem glyph data to argue that each polity with an emblem glyph was independent, igniting a firestorm of controversy from archaeologists who were determined to find evidence for hierarchical relationships between the sites. Recent theories, including those by Martin and Grube (1995), have analyzed one particular element found in some Maya texts.

They argue that prefix *y*, added to *ahau* (*y-ahau*), changes the meaning of *ahau* from “lord or ruler” to “his vassal” (1995:42). They have found further evidence of hierarchies in a secondary phrase found in the texts of some accessions. These secondary phrases give the name and title of a foreign lord, and was long translated as “under the auspices of”(ibid: 42). Martin and Grube now believe that *u-kahiy* should be read “it was done by him,” indicating that the accession of a new lord was overseen and perhaps even orchestrated by a more powerful polity. The relationship between these two communities may have been one of political and/or economic control, however the nature of this hierarchy not yet clearly understood.

The titles that the Maya elites used to refer to themselves can illuminate our understanding of the sociopolitical organization during the Classic period. Marcus was the first to apply ethnohistoric political organization titles to ancient Maya (Marcus 1993). More recently, Rice outlines the major titles used by political elites, noting the differences in frequency of the highest ranking titles at Tikal in comparison with other sites in the Petén (Rice 2004:36). She divides these titles into three categories: the highest level, second-ranking, and local-level political titles and units. Rice notes that the highest political rank at a Classic Maya site was *kalomte'* (translated as overlord). This person would have controlled a vast number of communities, including those ruled by other *ajaws* (lords) or *k'ul ajaws* (holy lords) (Rice 2004:36). The *kalomte'* title has been found at some of the more powerful centers, including Tikal, indicating that the site likely controlled an empire of weaker polities (Harrison 1999). Second-

ranking titles include *sahal* (or *sajal*) meaning governor or war leader, *aj k'uhun* translated as “he of the holy books,” and *b'atab'* a town governor with control over the military, the daily administration of the community, and judicial powers (Rice 2004:38). Local-level political titles include *aj kuchkab'*, a political appointment usually filled a wealthy male who heads one of the four subdivisions within a town for a year and *aj k'ul*, their assistants (Rice 2004).

The number of glyphic texts on portable objects and Classic period stelae from Xunantunich, while limited, help to situate the Belize Valley inhabitants within the wider context of the Maya Lowlands. Inscriptions from ceramic vessels found in mortuary contexts indicate political ties to Naranjo, while others provide information about place and individual names (Helmke et al. 2004). The studies of these few resources are vital to understanding the emic view of ancient Maya elites about their positions within the political structure.

### **Early Views of Maya Political Organization**

The earliest models of Maya political organization were based primarily on erroneous data and the unfounded belief that Maya civilization was created by the coming of a few Asiatic people on boats who intermarried with local people and taught them civilized ways (Mitchell 1934). According to Mitchell, Maya cultural achievements should be attributed to this small group of travelers who were able to impress their ways on the Maya.

“In other words, the founding of the Maya Old Empire was not the work of the ancestors of the present-day Maya, either of the old triangle or of Yucatan. It was an alien importation from that ferment of cultural activity

which reared the palaces and temples of the Chams and Khmers in Cambodia...” (Mitchell 1934:119)

His evidence rests almost entirely on the stylistic similarities and misinterpretations between Maya art and the art of Indian and Cambodia. He believes that Chac-priests and those he refers to as “Real Men” controlled the populace through ideology and fear of the reprisals from the gods if they were not given what they want. He even describes possible scenarios of typical days for different members of Maya society. Inter-site competition is not noted, although he mentions capital as the destination for tribute payments in passing. Mitchell believes that the greatest fear and strain on people were the almost daily sacrifices ordered by the priests and gods (Mitchell 1934).

By the 1950’s, archaeologists had changed their opinions of the Maya significantly. Sir J. Eric Thompson did not see Maya cities as places where people lived and worked as Mitchel describes, but rather as vacant ceremonial centers. He believed that a Maya city was “not a city at all in our sense of the word, because it was ceremonial, not an urban, center, to which the people repaired for religious ceremonies, civic functions, and markets. The stone buildings are quite unsuited for permanent habitation...” (Thompson 1954:57-58). Those who performed rituals and congregated at these religious centers were peaceful stargazers. During this time, scholars argued that the Maya were ruled by priests who worshiped a series of gods, studied the movement of the stars and planets, and who peacefully guided vast populations living harmoniously in the tropical jungles of Central America. While he acquiesces that the Maya of the Postclassic period may have been involved in battles, he believed that Classic period centers

were undefended, indicating the peaceful nature of those nearby inhabitants. Thompson wrote “I highly doubt that the Maya of the Classic Period used wooden fortifications (long since perished) in view of their long tradition of masonry construction, which, after all, is fire resistant” (1954:79). In conclusion, Thompson concludes that he

is inclined to think of the Maya lowlands during the Late Classic Period as a loose federation of autonomous city states, the government of which was largely in the hands of a small caste of priests and nobles, related by blood and dominated by religious motifs ... for instance, one imagines ... that a raid by Tikal on some outlying settlement would have been endured without thought of retaliation, but the Maya motto was “live and let live,” and somehow I don’t see too much bullying of a small city state by a big one... (ibid:81).

In the 1940’s and 1950’s, Sylvanus Morley argued that some dominant ruling cities in the Maya lowlands controlled all others (Morley 1946; Morley and Brainerd 1956). While he admitted that this was difficult to prove archaeologically, he held to this belief when describing the political organization for the Classic Period Maya (or Old Empire). Morley and Brainerd also suggested that there may have been four regions in the Maya lowlands that were “sub-provinces” of some political nature (ibid:144). Using a ranking system similar to one that Adams later employed in the 1980’s, Morley ranked sites according to size, number of stela, and aesthetic value. The four provinces they propose include the central Peten and Belize (led by Tikal), the southeastern region (led by Copán), the Usumacinta region (ruled by Palenque, Piedras Negras, or Yaxchilán) and the northwestern zone ruled by Tonina.

In the 1960’s and 1970’s, archaeologists began to analyze the political organization of the Classic period using ethnographic data collected from modern

Maya populations, ethnohistoric data, and in particular Bishop de Landa's *Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan*. Evan Vogt, a prominent ethnographer who has worked in Chiapas beginning 1960, promoted the use of ethnography to better understand the ancient Maya. He wrote:

The question I am most frequently asked about Zinacantan concerns the extent to which the contemporary culture contains or reflects Pre-Columbian patterns; or, phrased somewhat differently, what proportion or part of the culture is Ancient Mayan and what proportion is post-Conquest Spanish or Ladino fashioned during the Colonial Period, then transformed in the last century by the forces of the modern world? (Vogt 1990:103)

Vogt maintained that one of the areas of life that had changed the least was family and social life, as well as ritual activities. Social life includes lineage structure, kin-based relationships, and more abstractly, the political organization of the community. Vogt's study was just one of many that were used to reconstruct the social and political organization of the Classic Maya.

In the past 25 years, new models have been presented that attempt to understand and explain both the external manifestations and the internal motivations that generated the political landscape. These theories can be divided into three main categories: centralized models, decentralized models, and socio-religious models. The dichotomy between the centralized and decentralized models may be a bit misleading, as even those who argue for a particular decentralized model often believe that hierarchical relationships existed between polities, however to them these relationships are not absolute: lower order centers still maintain elements of autonomy.



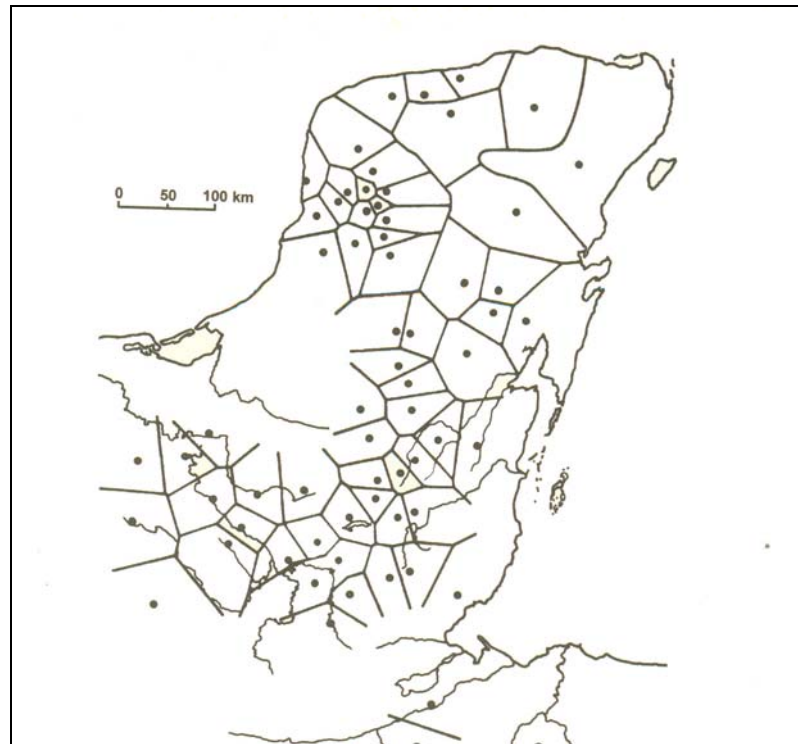
Some of the models presented below have been fallen into disuse; however many of them are still vying for acceptance within the academic community. Each one of these models emphasizes the importance of one particular aspect of Maya culture- from familial relations and genealogy to the impact of religion in the political arena. While all of these characteristics are integral to Maya culture, a compelling political theory relies on our ability to correctly interconnect these elements into one cohesive model. Unfortunately, many models are based on information from primarily one site, or one type of data source, leading those working at Tikal, Caracol, or Calakmul to support theories of centralization and those working in sparsely populated regions to support more decentralized or socio-religious models.

### **Decentralized Models of Maya Political Organization**

Decentralized models indicate that the political organization of the Maya lowlands was characterized by independent polities vying for power and prestige through warfare, ideological, and/or political means. Scholars who support these models do not subscribe to the notion of a 3 or 4-tiered political hierarchy wherein all sites can be placed on a political “power scale,” but believe in an ever-fluctuating system of short-lived hierarchies and subjugations followed by periods of independence (Hammond 1975; Rice 2004; Willey et al 1965). Not surprisingly, the majority of these supporters work at smaller sites, often communities located in the shadows of the large cities such as Tikal, Calakmul, or Caracol or at sites located in regions with relatively low-population densities

(Hammond 1975; Rice 2004; Willey et al 1965). Those working in peripheral regions often see few material remnants of connections between large sites in the Petén (or Copán, Caracol, or Calakmul) and therefore believe that these large centers had little to do with the day to day life of the inhabitants they are studying. Those studying the remains of sites close to prominent cities may believe that consistent domination of the small by the large is an oversimplification of a rather turbulent and unstable system of political control.

One of the first decentralized models to be proposed was Norman Hammond's Thiessen Polygons, which marks the boundaries between sites at the midpoints between them (Hammond 1974). The problems implicit in this theory



*Figure 1.2: Map of Decentralized Maya Polities (after Mathews 1991: Fig 2.6)*

became clear immediately after these polygons were drawn on a map (Figure 1.2). Due to the large number of sites clustering in the Petén region of Guatemala, Tikal, Naranjo, and other large sites were credited with controlling less territory than some small centers in less populated regions. It did not explain the differences in site size, number of stelae or elaborateness of tombs. In addition, it did not explain how political maneuvering or human agency impacted the political organization of the Late Classic Maya. In 1985, Peter Mathews tried to breathe new life into Hammond's theory by arguing that those sites with identified emblem glyphs (corresponding to Hammond's capitals) were independent, at least at one point in time, and these capital cities likely controlled the territory and smaller sites in their immediate vicinity (1985), creating a two-tiered political hierarchy. This unusual political structure was abandoned almost as soon as it was written; with Mathews own comment regarding the likelihood that all sites with emblem glyphs were of equal status. He wrote, "archaeologically, it is clear that this assumption is not a valid one" (Mathews 1985:54).

Norman Hammond attempted to illuminate these internal processes of his original theory in his article "Inside the black box: defining the Maya polity" (Hammond 1991). He suggests that the only way to determine the political organization of the Maya is to employ our knowledge of the Maya social and economic organization as well as their population size to understand the "black box" that is the political system in place during the Classic period. Using evidence from the two-tiered social hierarchy (with three levels of elites and two

types of commoners) and the economic interactions on both the intra-site and intersite levels, he argues that while there are some exceptions, most regional capitals with emblem glyphs were independent. Most scholars no longer believe that emblem glyphs indicate a claim for independence, creating less support for Hammond and Mathew's theories in recent years.

Colin Renfrew and John Cherry (1986) suggest that to understand processes leading to the political organization of a nation state, one must look to the histories and practices of its peers, those independent or previously independent polities that once surrounded it. In this model, these polities are always in uneasy relations with each other, and it is these relationships that determine the form any developing centralized state may take. Warfare and raiding are often commonplace and economic competition could be stringent among these polities; however none of them were completely dominant. This model does not ignore the evidence for political alliances and hierarchies; instead it attempts to describe how they develop (Hammond 1991). However, it does not explain the internal processes of the political system that are creating differences in size, wealth, and status that archaeologists have recorded among the Maya during the Classic period, and we are therefore left with what Hammond describes as the "black box" (Hammond 1991). We can see the input and the output, but do not understand the motivations of the political system or the actors within the structure.

In an attempt to better understand the relationships between these important actors, the segmentary state model, derived from the political

organization of the African pastoralists the Alur, has been applied to the Classic Period Maya (Southall 1956). Southall noted that groups of Alur pastoralists, while fiercely independent most of the time, would band together to fend off a foreign and common enemy, even if it attacked only one particular city. Rice has recently commented that the Alur were nothing more than low-level chiefdoms (a problematic ranking system within itself), not complex states; therefore the analogy has little merit (Rice 2004). In an effort to apply this model to the Maya, Joyce Marcus has argued that the key element of this theory is that all leaders at the sites in a given region are related to the same lineage. While these sites operate primarily independently and even fight amongst themselves, if there is ever an external threat they will band together to expel the foreigners.

During the Early Contact Period this model does not hold up. When the Spanish arrived, some rulers sided with the foreigners, contributing troops in efforts to destroy their own relatives, while others remained loyal to their family. This division within the domestic unit indicates that there was likely a significant amount of strife occurring around this time (Marcus 1993). Marcus suggests that the segmentary states model, as outlined by Southall, likely can not be applied generally to the Late Classic period Maya. The only region where Marcus identifies such a possibility is the Petexbatun region of Guatemala, where it appears that the majority of rulers were blood related and shared strong political and social bonds. This is evidenced by the sharing of a single emblem glyph (at least at various points in time) between Dos Pilas, Aguateca, Tamarindito, La Amelia, and Seibal (Marcus 1993:147). In 1993, when Marcus published her

article, she predicted that Arthur Demarest, who had recently begun conducting research in the region, would find evidence of extensive warfare. Her prediction was confirmed with the discovery of palisades, masonry walls encircling Dos Pilas, and human remains rife with battle scars at the site of Cancuen (Berryman personal communication 2005).

### **Socio-Religious Models**

Socio-religious models have primarily been based on ethnographic analogies to Thai and Bali kingdoms in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Theater State, developed by Clifford Geertz (1980), as well as the Galactic Polity model (Tambiah 1977) both suggest that the ruler, who also doubled as the ritual specialist within a polity, was the determining factor in the success of his community. The more convincing and flamboyant the rulers' visible ritual activities, the more power he would acquire from his populace. His power rested in his ability to communicate with the gods, and convince them to grant the rulers requests due to his skill as a ritual specialist. According to Arthur Demarest (1996, 1992), who applied these models to the Classic Period Maya, the same belief that allowed a leader to rise to power also contained the seeds of his demise. If the rains did not arrive on time, or if the rituals he performed did not restore the fertility to the soil, his credibility would be lost and a new specialist with appropriate charisma and skills would be sought. Since excessive bloodletting really did not control the weather or other people, the actions of rulers were based on predictions of normal events (i.e. the rains usually came

around the same time each year), so the rulers' lack of power would not be revealed until a situation of unusual magnitude arose. These types of events include, but are not limited to endemic warfare, drought, soil erosion, or flooding. The inevitable downfall of this system begs the question of why it lasted as long as it did, since there were *ahau* rulers from at least 400 A.D., if not two hundred years earlier (Demarest personal communication 2003; Rice 2004).

This model can be applied with some degree of success to sites in the Belize Valley. Some rulers or important elites appear to have gained spectacular levels of support from their populace and wealth from trade goods while others were less successful. It is possible that the ruler's ability to conduct successful rituals both at home and at distant communities could have aided his financial success. The artifacts located within the tombs of rulers at Baking Pot also point to their important role within the religious realm of life, further supporting the use of this model in understanding the political organization of centers within the Maya lowlands and the Belize Valley in particular.

Stephen Houston has developed a similar model (2004). He argues that Maya rulers were the highest moral order within Maya society, and that they, along with other members of the community, monitored the actions of others. The ruler dispenses judgment because he is of the highest moral order and is respected by the community. This ruler is similar to the charismatic individual described in Demarest's model (1992) yet Houston distanced his model from Geertz's theater state in that rulers are not consciously manipulating their followers; they believe in the rules and regulations as much or more than the poorest farmer. This theory

explains the small number of Maya inhabitants at most sites (2000-5000) because the upper end of this range would have been the most people such a system could have kept under control. With this in mind, Houston notes that larger cities, like Tikal and Caracol, may have been organized under diverse principles: centralized control of the populace by rulers through political alliances and physical threat.

The size of the communities Houston discusses are in range with the centers in the Belize River Valley which tend to contain around 2,000 people in the immediate periphery of the site core and perhaps an additional 2,000 in the region under the control of this main center. Unfortunately, the idea of a moral order that is enforced from the top down is difficult to prove archaeologically and not well supported by ethnographic studies, ethnohistoric documents or ancient glyphic texts.

### *The Dynamic Model*

One of the first scholars to argue that Maya civilization was neither entirely centralized nor decentralized was Gordon Willey (1986). He noted that politically, Maya civilization was characterized by a series of peaks and valleys (Lucero 2006). Promoted in large part by Joyce Marcus (1992, 1993a, 1998) to explain the constant shifting of alliances and power dynamics between Classic period Maya polities, the dynamic model details the accordion-like fluctuations between periods of decentralization and more centralized authority. Recently, other scholars have also supported the notion of variability of integration in the political record across time and space (Henderson and Sabloff (1993:456), Fash



(1994:191), Sabloff (1996), Demarest (1996), Haviland (1997), and Marcus and Feinman and Marcus (1998). The dynamic model, while noting that these fluctuations occur, does not adequately explain what pressures within Maya society might cause these variations (Iannone 2002; Marcus 1995). Marcus and Feinman (1998) note that Maya rulers had difficulty controlling their subjects and would consequently lose control periodically when states became too large, while Marcus (1998) also note that it was likely difficult to maintain the clear inequalities between the elites and the commoners within Maya society. Zagarell (1986) argues that the contradictory roles of kinship and kingship within Maya society may also have led to periods of centralized kingship (which places power in the hands of a few individuals) only to have kinship ties (which attempt to limit the authority one person or state could possess) destabilize the authority of the court. In early states, this contradiction destabilizes the polity, leading to the peaks and valleys of centralization found within Maya political history of the Classic and Terminal Classic Periods.

Within the Belize Valley, the dynamic model appears to be a viable approach to understanding the constant peaks and valleys of political affiliations and independence. While the struggle between kinship and kingship likely figured into these fluctuations, there were other issues, namely tribute demands and the control of elite trade items (like cacao) that increased the value of co-opting the Belize Valley centers under the umbrella of a more powerful polity. Tribute demands led to economic strain on the dominated polities, leading to increasing levels of friction between the core and periphery. These frictions created an

unbalanced and often unwelcome political alliance, one that weaker members may have sought to escape.

### **Centralized Theories of Political Organization**

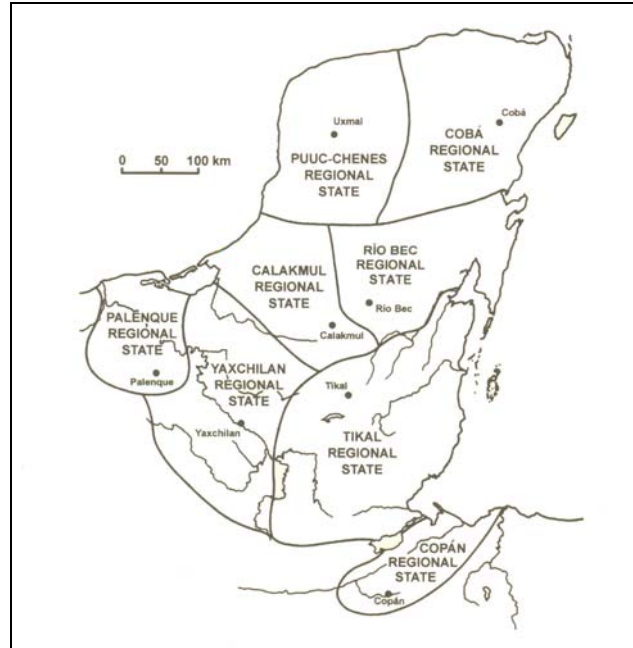
Decentralized and socio-religions models have enjoyed some degree of support from those working in the Petexbatun and more peripheral regions of the lowlands, but the majority of scholars support more centralized models of political organization. Ceramics, site size, the discovery of elite tombs, and glyphic texts, are cited by researchers who argue that there was strong degree of hierarchy amongst Classic Period Maya centers. The agreement generally ends here. How to determine the fluctuations in power dynamics, as well as the nature and degree of control exercised over one polity by another are complicated issues over which few find common ground. Centralized political organization supporters, tend to be excavating the large sites of Tikal, Calakmul, Caracol and Naranjo (Chase and Chase 2001, 1998, 1996; Fash 1991; Folan et al. 2001; Folan et al. 1995; Harrison 1999). However, there are exceptions to this trend, and more scholars working at smaller sites are looking for external connections that link their community with the greater Maya political sphere (LeCount et al. 2002; McAnany 2004).

### *Ranking Models*

In 1981 Adams and Jones developed a political ranking model based on the number of formal courtyards constructed in the central precincts of Maya

sites. Four sub-regions were determined, based on architectural styles, distance between communities (the smaller centers had to be 35km or one-day walking distance from a large center), and what they saw as natural geographic boundaries. The regions included the Tikal Region, the Calakmul Region, the Rio Bec Region, and the Chenes Region (Figure 1.3) (Adams 1990; Adams and Jones 1981). Other areas, including much of Belize were left out for two reasons. They felt that these sites has not been adequately studied or mapped, and because there were no large centers around that likely established control over these peripheral regions. Adams and Jones proceeded to rank sites from most to least powerful (on a scale of a site ranking of 1 (most powerful) to 4 (least powerful)) based on the number of formal courtyards constructed in the central precincts. The outcomes were predictable. Tikal was the highest ranked site in the Tikal Region, Calakmul was the most powerful in its region, Rio Bec was the largest in its region, and Sta. Rosa X was ranked first in its region (although only by a single courtyard over Dzibilchaltun).

This model was systematic, but the difficulties arose when the divisions between the different tiers were being created. Adams and Jones note that they made this decision based on a visual, not statistical, inspection of the data (1981). However, it is difficult to determine if Sta. Rosa X really should be a first tier site while Dzibilchaltun, with only one less courtyard, should be ranked as a second tier. What does that tell us about their political power? In addition, there is little explanatory value in this ranking system. While Adams and Jones make further arguments for spatial organization based on a smaller 10km from a largest site



*Figure 1.3: Centralized Model of Political Organization in the Classic Period (after Adams 1990)*

radius, the larger ranking regions appear to be of little use in understanding the political organization of the Late Classic Maya.

Turner et al. (1981) provided support for Adams and Jones's ranking system through the use of architectural volumetric studies, in which they determined the amount of construction material necessary to build the courtyard groups and temples at sites in the Maya Lowlands. This model is more precise than a courtyard count, because it takes in to account the workforce necessary to create these huge earthworks, but unfortunately this model does little to differentiate those places where building materials were much more distant versus those who are building on limestone outcrops and have quarries surrounding the main centers. The further away building materials are found, the more manpower

and time that is necessary to create a similar sized site core. It also does not take into account the length of time a site has been occupied, thus underestimating the importance of a site only constructed during the Late Classic period and potentially over valuing one that has been continuously occupied since the Middle Preclassic.

This ranking system, coupled with courtyard counts does tend to mimic the data derived from epigraphic sources regarding the most powerful centers in particular regions. The model does not account for the internal processes that create inequalities in the size of sites, which is the vital element of any sociopolitical model, rendering these models of minimal use for understanding Maya political organization.

### *Central Place Theory*

The majority of Maya archaeologists now believe that there was some form of site and/or regional hierarchies among the Classic Period Maya. Central Place theory was developed by Christaller, a German geographer, in 1933. The original theory was developed to describe an economic situation he saw in Germany, which involved an analysis of the size, location, and opportunities offered by various communities across the landscape. He believed that there were economic reasons why particular goods were made available to all markets while others were centralized in larger towns and cities. He was concerned with the profitability of these goods and the motivations behind consumer willingness to travel to obtain particular items not locally available.

The original model was based on a number of assumptions about the landscape and political structure within which this economic system operated. These assumptions include an isotropic (flat) surface, an even distribution of both resources and people, and the relatively equal purchasing power of all people within the system (Baskin 1967 trans. of Christaller 1933). In addition, all of the cities within this model are assumed to be under a single political power (for example Christaller was studying cities in Germany). Scholars have taken the pieces of the theory, the notion of higher and lower order settlements at varying distances from each other that providing different levels of goods and services, and applied it to the Maya.

Two of the most vocal proponents of Central Place theory in the Maya lowlands are Diane and Arlen Chase. They see Maya political organization not just as a loosely tied lineage based alliance but rather a series of centers that identified with, and were organically dependent on, particular central places (Fox et al. 1996, Chase and Chase 1996). Such highly centralized governments, located in these central places, regulated everything from trade to ritual activities, and forced those living in the periphery to abide by the rules they set into place.

The physical expression of Central Place theory can be seen in inter-site settlement patterns, as discussed briefly above, and through the discovery of a select number of large centers surrounded by a series of sites (Marcus 1976, 1973). In addition, the large centers that served as central places would have infrastructure in place to provide services not available at smaller locales; this was one of the benefits drawing people into the capital city. The infrastructure should

manifest itself in the form of architecture unique to these central places, not simply larger versions of constructions ubiquitously found throughout the region. Governmental investments may include road works linking the communities (as is seen in the Yucatan), urban development (as seen in Central Mexico), and the centralization of administrative functions (often difficult to determine archaeologically).

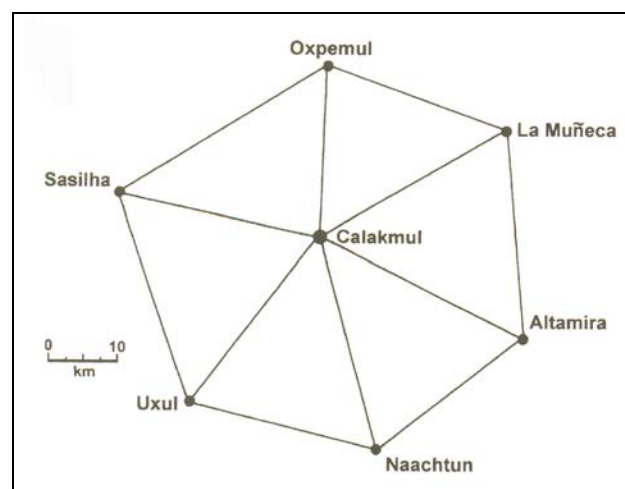
The Chase's have suggested that Caracol is a central place given its large population, its vast networks of roadways and terraces, and glyphic texts referring to battles waged against Tikal in alliance with Calakmul (Chase and Chase 1996). In their model, the cities of Tikal, Calakmul, Palenque, and Copan would all be places where activities and resources that could not be found at second order cities could be acquired. In an enclosed system, there would then be a greater number (3 times that of first order cities) of second order (or B level) cities, which would offer some of the services found at the higher order cities, but not all of them (such cities include Naranjo and others). In turn, third order cities would exist, again at three times the rate of second order cities, offering even fewer services to the surrounding population.

While clearly this is an idealized model, it does appear to have useful application in highly populated regions. If, for example, we were to apply Central Place theory to the centers connected with those in the Belize Valley in 750 A.D. we would see Calakmul as a first order site, Naranjo as a second order site, Xunantunich as a third order site (in the view of Leventhal and Ashmore 2004) and Baking Pot and/or Buenavista as a fourth order site (or all three as third order

centers and the surrounding hamlets as forth order sites). The difficulty here is the lack of centrality of these polities in location to one another and the difficulty in determining the degree of difference between Xunantunich and Baking Pot. This model, however, does present possibilities for the study of the political system with the Belize Valley.

#### *Glyphic Support for Centralized Authority*

Joyce Marcus (1993) is also a strong supporter of Central Place Theory, and uses glyphic material, as well as ethnohistoric information, to make a strong case for a dynamic and hierarchical political hierarchy (Figure 1.4). Marcus assessed the distribution of the references to foreign emblem glyphs carved into the stone monuments at each site. It is Marcus' belief that elites only refer to those of greater or equal political power than themselves on these monuments, thus leaving a written record of the most powerful centers by those who viewed them

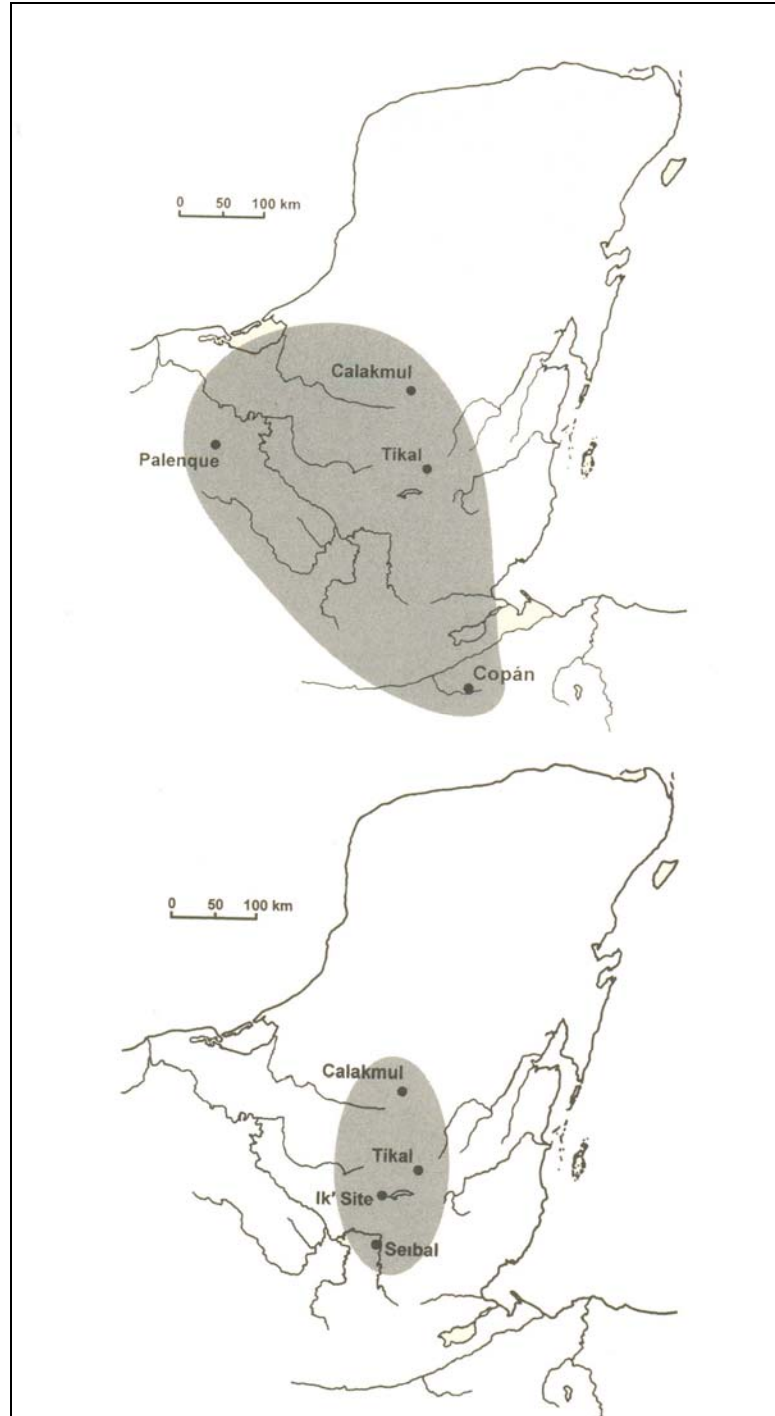


*Figure 1.4: Central Place Theory Focusing on Calakmul  
(After Marcus 1976: fig 1.15)*



as such. Thus, Tikal does not refer to Naranjo on their stela, but Naranjo does refer to Tikal as their patron site. This discovery has allowed Marcus to recreate the complex web of political rankings that existed during the Classic period. Marcus also argues that Maya themselves viewed their political landscape as containing four “capitals”, based on the texts found on two stelae; Stela A at Copan and Stela 10 at Seibal (Figure 1.5). Stela A at Copan dates to 731 AD and records the names of four cities: Tikal, Palenque, Calakmul, and naturally Copan. These sites are referred to as the “four on high” by the Copan ruler (Marcus 1993, 1976). Marcus believes that 18 Jog viewed these cities, “or the *four royal houses ruling them*” as the capitals of the “four quadrants of the Maya world at A.D. 731” (Marcus 1993:150 emphasis from original). In 849 AD Stela 10 from Seibal notes four emblem glyphs: Tikal and Calakmul appear again, but Motul de San Jose (?) and Seibal are now in the place of Copan and Palenque (Marcus 1993). Marcus argues that as Maya social and political alliances splintered, each of the four capitals shrunk into a smaller region that was easier to control.

Adams and Jones have difficulty believing that the small site of Motul de San Jose, less than .5km<sup>2</sup> in area could replace the huge site of Calakmul that encompasses 5km<sup>2</sup> of controlled territory (Adams and Jones 1981). Marcus argues that this is not the case; Calakmul is still listed as one of the capitals, and in addition she is not even sure Motul de San Jose is the site being referred to (as the glyph occurs only once at the site and could be referring to a larger patron city a5



*Figure 1.5: Centralized Model of Political Organization (as identified by Marcus) (1976: fig 1.10) Based on Glyphic Inscriptions. Figure a: the Capitals in A.D. 731 and Figure b: the Capitals in A.D. 849.*

yet undiscovered) which is why she notes Motul de San Jose with a question mark. In addition, she argues that during Calendar Cycle 10 there were five political regions, lead by the capitals of Seibal, Calakmul, Tikal, Motul de San Jose, and Chinkultic (Marcus 1993). The 4-Capital Model coupled with Marcus' belief that sites refer only to those of greater or equal status in glyphic texts, combine to create a strong argument for the political organization of the Classic period, at least as seen from the perspective of the elites at Seibal and Copan.

### *Maya Superstates*

Based entirely on the glyphic texts, Martin and Grube (1995; 2000) have traced how the balance of power shifts between the large sites of Tikal and Calakmul, suggesting an even more centralized landscape during the Late Classic period than Marcus proposes. They suggest that there were two superstates that dominated the landscape: Tikal and Calakmul. While their evidence for some degree of centralized authority are quite convincing, the degree to which other centers may have played important roles in shaping the history of the region is unclear.

Evidence for intersite hierarchies is found on monuments recording the accession of kings. On some monuments, the name and emblem glyph of a foreign ruler is found in a secondary phrase, located after the name and emblem glyph of the new ruler. "This phrase is introduced by a verb clause that epigraphers have long glossed as "under the auspices of," though we now believe that it should be translated as *u-kahiy*, literally "it was done by him"" (ibid:42).

The discovery of this phrase on a monument indicates the hierarchy between centers, with the ruler from the more powerful center overseeing (and perhaps controlling) accession rites of rulers and the ceremonies that accompanied these events.

Martin and Grube believe that these two phrases, when combined with additional evidence of intersite exchange, murals and texts commemorating visiting dignitaries, the gifting of ceramic vessels, variation in site sizes and populations, and the marriages of elites from different cities, all point to a series of hierarchical relationships between elite individuals and individual cities (ibid). Unfortunately, the Belize Valley lacks the epigraphic evidence necessary to determine its position within this system. We can speculate as to the relationships these Superstates had with smaller centers in the periphery, but the lack of hard evidence leaves us with only spacial patterns of sites and buildings to determine political affiliations (Ashmore and Sabloff 2002). We are left to ponder the meaning associated with sites that lack carved monuments. The lack of carved monuments could indicate the lower status of a given region or center (as scholars have been assuming), or that rulers of these sites found some other method of expressing lineage relations and kingship accessions (e.g. paint and stuccoed stelae).

### *The May Cycle*

Prudence Rice points out that there are two vital elements which most models ignore; the importance of cyclical events and the process by which

political change and action actually “worked” (Rice 2004). Prudence Rice has developed a model based on Maya cosmology, wherein the seat of power changed voluntarily every 256 years. Based on ethnographic and ethnohistoric accounts, Rice claims that the seat of power rotated between major communities throughout the Classic Period. She proposes:

that the political organization and political geography of the Maya lowlands during the Classic period was structured by the same principles as the Postclassic calendrical celebrations of the k’atun cycle or *may*, as Edmonson prophetically suggested in 1979. Modeling political rotations on cosmic cycles allowed power to be shared predictably, minimizing the potential chaos of political succession and disruption of the social order (Rice 2004:83).

In the contact period the *jalach winiks* or *ajaws* from prominent communities under the authority of the capital “took turns seating the thirteen constituent *k’atuns*” which rotated every 20 years” (Rice 2004:75-76). The strength of Rice’s theory is its basis in Maya social organization and religious beliefs, however the weakness is revealed in its disregard for an important element of human nature: power is rarely given up voluntarily; there has to be some benefit to the individual or group for doing so. The idea that they would purposely sabotage their own efforts to provide another site the opportunity to take charge is weakly supported in the archaeological record, and the fact that only a few select sites are included in this rotation raises more questions than it answers.

Clearly the May Cycle was an important event in ancient Maya culture. Entire temple complexes were built to commemorate these events and ritual deposits were probably timed to correspond with these cycles (Harrison 1997).

Their use in the shifting nature of political power between sites is undocumented, unusual considering the number of texts recored, however, and would have required a substantial penalty or reward levied towards centers required to give up power at these intervals.

Despite the vastly different natures of these political theories, they do provide archaeologists with a framework for organizing the copious quantities of data that often appear unmanageable and overwhelming. It is unfortunate, but understandable, that the models focus primarily on large sites with epigraphic information detailing political interactions. Taking these models and applying them to regions and centers that are more peripheral may provide new insights into the inner “workings” of the decision making process rulers from both dominating sites and those being dominated.

## **Discussion**

These theories offer new and interesting ways of viewing Maya political organization, but the impact of political domination on both the more powerful center and those falling under their control have yet to be elucidated. In central Mexico, where ethnohistoric evidence is extensive, historians and archaeologists can determine lists of tribute payments, changes in the power dynamics, replacement of local lords with those associated with the dominant power, and most importantly, the motivations behind these actions. While this information may give us some possible insights into the case of the ancient Maya, the differences in these two cultures make it impossible to import wholesale. In the

Maya lowlands we have less information on which to build political hypotheses and conjectures, but still desire to find a model (or more likely models) that will provide us with the same level of detail regarding sociopolitical processes. This is a tall challenge for archaeologists, and in some cases it may be better to simply focus attention on better understanding interactions between specific areas, instead of trying to “fit” data into one model.

Incorporating the evidence we have from ethnography, ethnohistory, epigraphy, iconography, as well as archaeology into variations of the models presented above should enable us to gain new insights into the motivations behind political maneuvers, social restrictions and expectations of the rulers and the ruled, as well as the relationships between polities, both those of equal political might and those in hierarchical relationships.

The ever-fluctuating power dynamics that we have uncovered in the region lend support to the dynamic model as espoused by Joyce Marcus and others (Iannone 1992; Marcus 1998, 1993, 1992). Information about the economic, social, and political fluctuations throughout time and space suggest new contributing factors leading to the constant centralization of polities followed by their eventual break up into their original contingent parts years later. Freedom from heavy tribute demands would have encouraged smaller polities to remain independent as long as possible, and to break free of oppressive political alliances when possible. Like the independent cultural groups in Central Mexico, communities within the Belize Valley likely resisted domination as long as possible, in efforts to reap the rewards of their own economic fortunes. Thus,

forced political ties would have been weak, leading to their quick dissolution should the more powerful center experience periods of political or militaristic weakness. However the processes by which power fluctuated needs to be illuminated by recently discovered data.

This dissertation will focus on answering several questions. How did smaller sites in the Belize River Valley relate to more powerful centers in the core region? How was power negotiated between these two regions and what degree of independence did rulers in these peripheral areas have throughout time? Does the dynamic model adequately explain these fluctuations and what new information does the data from the Belize Valley lend to further strengthening this model? Does location along important trade routes and construction in rich soils greatly benefit a smaller center or do these characteristics make it a prime target for control by larger centers? Belize River Valley in western Belize, have yielded new evidence pertaining to the political organization of the region. Recent excavations have revealed an extremely wealthy group of elites living at the relatively small center of Baking Pot. This riverside community, home to approximately 2,000 inhabitants, prospered from the Late Preclassic through the Terminal Classic periods. Rulers were interred in jade-filled tombs and other elites were found with fabulous ceramic vessels and musical instruments. Similar interments were also been found at Cahal Pech during excavations in the 1990's. Cahal Pech was a hilltop community located at the confluence of the Mopan and Macal Rivers that contained an estimated population also around 2,000 during the Late Classic period. In contrast, the site of Xunantunich, located atop a ridge



approximately one kilometer from the Mopan River, has yielded significantly muted expressions of wealth despite its greater size, a stela indicating its affiliation to Naranjo, its slightly closer proximity to the Petén, and its previously assumed dominance over the other sites in the Belize Valley.

The following chapter will address what I see to be the problematic assumptions and biases inherent in the political models currently in use. In addition, I will show how my recent research in the Belize Valley will enable me to adequately address these biases, and why the evidence in this region is useful in challenging and overcoming the limitations of the political models described above.

## CHAPTER II

### HOW DOES POLITICAL ORGANIZATION MANIFEST ITSELF IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD? PROBLEMS UNDERSTANDING ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

#### Introduction

Archaeologists have long assumed the bigger the site and its monumental components, the more political power it possesses (Adams and Smith 1981; Adams 1985; Morley 1956). This underlying tenant of Maya political organization has traditionally been supported in large part by hieroglyphic texts (Martin and Grube 2000; Rice 2004), burial data, and population density in the central lowlands (A. Chase 2004; Welsh 1988). This picture, however, is incomplete in part because research has primarily focused on larger settlements and a lack of carved stelae in peripheral regions leaves researchers with holes in the cultural history of a region. The lack of carved stela, compounded with the smaller size of sites, leaves us with an incomplete understanding of the place peripheral regions have within the political sphere (McAnany et al. 2002). This chapter will explore the following: Does bigger equal better? What sources of power are represented by large temples, increasing populations, or elaborate tombs? Can we define the nature of political hierarchy based on these archaeological criteria?

New research in peripheral regions is providing data that can potentially challenge underlying assumptions about expressions of political wealth and power. Elaborate tombs have been found at sites comprised of small monumental

centers, lacking carved monuments with only small supporting populations. These tombs often contain elaborate long distance exchange items; similar to those found in the ruler's tombs at Tikal, Palenque or Copan, yet we have no idea who these small site rulers were. Are these elaborate tombs a reflection of a ruler's political authority and success? Or are they reflective of his economic status? Can politically unimportant individuals "buy" elaborate goods for their tombs?

Large temples are found in the Petén and adjoining areas, while temples are generally constructed on a smaller scale the further away from this core region one travels (Adams and Turner 1981). Does the lack of *large* monumental temples necessarily indicate an absence of political power? Does a volumetric analysis, like that conducted by Adams and Turner (1981) really reflect the political status of a center? Which political models are able to take these discrepancies into account and provide an accurate picture of the political organization? Understanding the meaning behind the artifacts and architecture we find enables an accurate analysis of the culture-history of the region, which in turn allows the development of finer tuned political models. This analysis facilitates the study of the political relationships between the core region of the Petén and the Belize Valley.

### **Elite Burials and their Importance**

Scholars have long been fascinated with the tombs of Maya rulers. Elaborate grave goods were held as symbols of successful and important rulers, and bragging rights were held by archaeologists who discovered them (Gann

1928; Rathje 1970; Willard 1926). The relationship between royal tombs and a center's political position is debatable, but the trend of finding elaborate tombs in grand temples at large centers, often accompanied by hieroglyphic texts suggests that there may be some connection (Welsh 1988).

The elaborate Late Classic tombs of Pakal from Palenque, TA 1/1 from Altun Ha, and Burial 116 from Tikal are the three most impressive interments yet found in the Maya lowlands (Audet n.d.; Fitzsimmons 2005; Pendergast 1970; Welsh 1988). These burials were filled with copious quantities of jade, worked mother of pearl shells, ceramic vessels, carved wooden objects, and bloodletters. They were located in large temples at their respective sites, further indication of their important status within the community. But, were their positions and status comparable? Surprisingly few papers have been written focusing on these interments and their relationship to their centers political position.

The first substantial analysis of the socio-political implication of lowland Maya burials was published in 1970 by William Rathje. In his paper, Rathje (1970) noted elaborate tombs were not distributed at random and burials found in temples tended to have the most elaborate set of grave goods. This knowledge was fairly widespread by the seventies; even at the turn of the century Thomas Gann and Edward Thompson were looking for the tombs of rulers and priests in large temple structures (Gann 1928; Willard 1926). While Rathje believed that elite family lines did not emerge until the Late Classic period (a theory that has been put to rest in light of overwhelming research; see Welsh 1988:154-155) he believed that individuals buried within temples spent their lives acquiring goods

that could be placed within their tombs (Rathje 1970). An *a priori* requirement for rulership was the ability to acquire a large number of status enhancing goods, something that likely only the children of elite individuals could accomplish. He argued that children gained wealth and status from parents who in turn had gained similar things from their parents, creating an almost unbreakable chain that restricted access to those from lower classes. While Rathje was able to pinpoint the most likely location of elite burials and the items most commonly found within them, he did not adequately explain the wider range of burial contents or try to distinguish who these individuals were and what role they played within Maya society.

W. B. M. Welsh's 1988 "An Analysis of Classic Lowland Maya Burials" contains detailed descriptions about the contents of published elite interments found in the Maya lowlands. Welsh discusses the notion of ranking sites based on burial data but discounts the idea because he feels that there is a lack of data, both from sites where we have some (but likely not all) of the elite burials and from sites where the main temples have yet to be probed. He does use some artifacts as elite markers (including jade and pyrite), however does not adequately deal with what the differences in grave goods from different sites can tell us either about the person buried with a set of elaborate items or about the site from which he/she is from. He does, however, note the problem of an incomplete dataset, based primarily on a lack of excavation in some centers and looters getting to the elite burials in others.

An article by Krejci and Culbert (1992) regarding the ranking of burials attempts to address this gap in previous research across the Maya Lowlands. Although they primarily focused on the differences between Late Preclassic and Early Classic period burials and caches, their method for approaching burial data can be applied to later interments. Krejci and Culbert devised a checklist of six to eight items that a *Super Elite* individual will contain in their tombs, indicating that only a few individuals would stand out enough to be classified as royal. These individuals would have been important rulers from politically powerful centers. Krejci and Culbert also separate a second class they called *Intermediate Elites*, who generally contain between four and five of these items. Unfortunately, they do not make an effort to determine who these people were within Maya society or what roles they played within the political system. However, it does raise the question of what titles and status markers these people had and what the natural breaks in their burial artifacts say about Maya society during the Late Preclassic and Early Classic period.

In 2002, my study of Late Classic Maya burials yielded different results (Audet n.d). The discovery of numerous elite interments at Baking Pot stimulated my interest in understanding what elaborate graves indicate about both the primary person interred as well as the site in which they are found. In an effort to determine where the burials I found “fit” within the Maya area, I reviewed reports and publications from almost every major center that has been investigated (Adams and Jones 1981; Audet and Awe 2003a, 2003b; Coe 1990, 1967; Fash 2001; Fitzsimmons 2002; Pendergast 1990, 1970; Ricketson 1925; Welsh 1988).

Surprisingly, very few centers had burials with elaborate grave goods. The benchmarks of “royalty” were, not surprisingly, usually found at Tikal, Palenque and Copan, corresponding well with both some of the most intensively excavated centers, but also with sites noted as important in glyphic texts (Marcus 1992). A significant number of extremely wealthy tombs, however, were also found in peripheral regions at small, otherwise unassuming centers. Only fourteen out of one hundred sites in the sample contain interments with elaborate offerings. While there are likely to be sites less intensively excavated and those tombs that have yet to be published, the trends so far discovered are still important to note.

I reviewed seventy-eight elite burials (designated as such by the principle investigators of each site) from fourteen sites in the Maya lowlands in an effort to illuminate possible links between the monumental site size, hierarchies determined by glyphic texts, the size of the supporting population, and the elaborate nature of elite tombs. Methodologically, I used many of the same traits designated by Krejci and Culbert (1992) to determine which tombs were of higher rank. The presence or absence of jade, chert or obsidian eccentrics, worked marine shell, polychrome ceramic vessels, codices, and cinnabar were taken as important indicators of that individual’s status within his or her community. While some centers that archaeologists consider important may be omitted because important tombs have been looted, this analysis is important because it highlights polities otherwise ignored in the political reconstruction of the Maya lowlands.

Altun Ha and Baking Pot both yielded evidence of elites with more status enhancing goods in their tombs far and above what would have been predicted based on site size or epigraphic evidence. At Altun Ha, Pendergast found one of the three most elaborate tombs ever discovered in the Maya area. The grave goods of TA 1/1 included thousands of jade objects, 19 ceramic vessels, chert eccentrics, worked shell, worked bone, a decomposing stuccoed material that may have been a codex, and the body was sprinkled with cinnabar after death (Pendergast 1970). Three additional tombs from Altun Ha rival the richest graves from Tikal, Copan, and Palenque. A single tomb from Baking Pot, Burial 1 from Structure E (see chapter 5), is also one of the richest tombs in the lowlands (Audet n.d.; Audet and Awe 2003, 2004, 2005).

Both of these sites are relatively small when compared with the major centers in the Petén. They have 5-7 monumental plazas and temples rarely exceed 17 meters. Baking Pot and Altun Ha both lack carved monuments, both have small supporting populations of around 2,000 people, and their site cores are relatively unimpressive when compared to like Tikal. Altun Ha, located near the Belizean coast just north of modern day Belize City, is far removed from the highly populated regions to the north and west. There is no evidence Altun Ha was a political capital nor does Pendergast understand how this large amount of wealth was generated (Pendergast 1990, 1970). Baking Pot, located alongside the Belize River, is an equally unimpressive center with small temple and palace complexes and no carved stela.



Traditional Maya archaeology would suggest the wealth of these centers resulted from political power. These sites, however, were not important political centers and therefore had to acquire their wealth from other sources. In this context, wealth (the ability to purchase desired goods or services) may not be equal or consistent with political authority or prestige. Hieroglyphic texts, large quantities of jade, and high quality polychrome vases appear to link rulers to the larger Lowland Maya political authority (LeCount 1996; Lucero 2006) whereas musical instruments, local ceramics, and smaller quantities of jade and shell suggest a high ranking locally. For example, the carved ahaw glyph on the front of the jadite mosaic mask from Burial 1, Structure E, Group 1 at Baking Pot suggests the high political status of the individual interred. Not only did he have access to hieroglyphic texts and vast quantities of jade, but also his mask contains evidence of his rank. In contrast, while the fragile and well crafted flutes from Burial 2 in Structure 209 may reflect that individuals political position, they more likely indicative of his economic and social status within the community.

### **Population Size**

Understanding the relationship between population size and monumentality of architecture is crucial to understanding a possible correlation with political status. This approach is demonstrated by scholars at Caracol and Tikal, who have addressed this question from different perspectives. Chase and Chase have proposed that although Caracol has a smaller monumental core than Tikal, its supporting population, as a result of military success, is greater (Chase

and Chase 1987). Therefore, while the monumental core at Caracol is smaller than Tikal's, they are both super powers during the Late Classic period. A larger supporting population would allow for greater site core construction, a larger pool of individuals who could join in military campaigns, and support for a larger number of elites and specialists who did not have to grow their own food.

A connection between military power and population size is easily established. The size of the army would be partly dependent on the size of the supporting population. If control over distant polities were maintained through force (the size and competence of the standing army would have been extremely important). This is best illustrated through an analysis of the Aztec army during the centuries leading up to the Spanish conquest (Hassig 1988). The Aztecs also employed the use of allied troops, but maintained a strong local army whose members enjoyed special privileges, including housing, education, and the right to wear high status objects and clothing within the empire (*ibid.*). While Maya cities were clearly not organized with an equally high degree of centralized urban planning, the importance of an army in maintaining intersite politics appears to have been significant from the glyphic record found at the core centers such as Tikal, Calakmul, Naranjo, and Caracol (Marcus 1993, 1992; Martin and Grube 2000). Glyphic texts suggest a certain level of intersite conflict to maintain political independence, therefore the greater number of eligible combatants, the better chance of success in battle.

At times, Maya warfare may have been a small scale affair (*i.e.* used to gain captives for sacrifice) and as such would have had a strong ritual component

(Webster 2000). However, our lack of information about the size and formations of armies, as well as the reasons for initiating conflicts makes it impossible to speculate with any certainty that only small numbers of militia were necessary for warfare during the Late Classic Maya period. If conflicts were fought over territory, particularly control over important trade resources, larger numbers of soldiers would have been desirable. Such large armies were found in the Postclassic/Early Contact period and were documented by Bernal Diaz during periodic landfalls along the Yucatan coast (Diaz 1963). During these battles, he noted that thousands of men fought against the Spanish, and while the numbers may have been exaggerated, Webster believes that large numbers were likely recruited for war during the Classic and Postclassic periods (Webster 2000).

Population size may also have implications for the size of the monumental core, as rulers would have had a larger base contributing to the construction of temple and palaces. This is largely the assumption behind Adams and Turner's ranking of centers based on their overall volume (1981). The monumental size of these structures may be a reflection of the ruler's ability to harness the potential workforce living around the site core, which could be indicative of his charismatic personality, his leadership and management skills, and/or his power over the common people. Ford (1990) argues that labor investment is indicative of overall wealth at a particular center. In the Belize Valley, investment in construction is less than 50% of what is found around Tikal (ibid). Were residents of the Belize Valley only half as wealthy? Are there other factors in this equation? Abrams (1994) argues that large construction is not necessarily a reflection of population

size. Based on a study of labor cost analysis at Copan, he concluded that a large population base was not necessary for the construction of large temples, given that they were built over long periods of time. But what about massive earthworks, like El Castillo or Structure A-1 at Xunantunich that were built in short periods of time? Would these have not required more laborers in a short span?

One element of construction often overlooked is the nearest distance to the limestone quarry. At the site of Xunantunich, for example, the ancient quarry is located just outside the monumental site core, significantly reducing the workload for masons and stonecutters. At Baking Pot, the nearest quarry was over 1.5 km from the site core (over land), making transportation of these cut blocks a time consuming and labor-intensive undertaking (Hayes personal communication 2005). Buenavista del Cayo would also have faced a similar challenge as would have many centers built along riverbanks in thick alluvial soils. This distance certainly would not entirely account for the discrepancy between the core region and the Belize Valley, but play a factor in our understanding of the importance of site size.

While sites tend to display a positive correlation in site core monumentality and population size, there are examples of centers comprised of medium sized monumental cores yet displaying evidence of very small supporting populations. These centers challenge the notion that a greater population base equals a more powerful polity. Xunantunich, the largest site in the Belize Valley, is comprised of a large monumental core (consisting of at least 20 structures,

including the 137 foot tall El Castillo) but is surrounded by less than 40 residential mounds (MacKie 1985). Far from the norm in this region, other sites with decidedly smaller temple/palace structures have significantly larger populations, including the sites of Buenavista del Cayo, Cahal Pech, and Baking Pot, which boasted populations of roughly 2,000 people. LeCount argues that the mounds may in fact be present at Xunantunich, but due to the short occupation history of the site they are too small to be detected (LeCount 1998). Another possibility is that the site was supported by the smaller ‘clusters’ of housemounds designated as San Lorenzo (Yeager 2000) and the Chan site (Robin 2003, 2004), which are located across the river, although this would still be an unusual configuration for the region.

The possibility that Xunantunich did not have a significant supporting population has led Joe Ball and Jennifer Taschek to argue that the site was a “planted” capital of sorts, an empty ceremonial center to which elites from nearby centers made pilgrimages for religious or political purposes (Ball and Taschek 2004). The parallels with early models arguing that Maya cities were merely empty ritual centers surrounded by Maya living amongst the trees is strong and few researchers working in the Belize Valley are accepting this interpretation (Audet and Awe 2005). But an acceptable reason for the lack of visible settlement around the site remains a significant point of contention and may be related to a short occupation and some specific function Xunantunich served within the Belize Valley (discussed in Chapter 3).

The small size of supporting populations within the Belize Valley must have limited their military and construction resources, making it difficult to compete with the larger centers in the Petén. Despite this obvious drawback to maintaining a small population, none of the centers in the study area ever exceeded more than 2,000 inhabitants. Was this limit imposed for economic, agricultural, or political reasons? Did it benefit those living in the community by reducing the strain on agricultural resources? Can it be used as a marker for political prosperity? Most politically important centers have a large supporting population, but the possibility for upward mobility within this framework does not appear to be completely linked.

### **Site Size**

Two of the political models outlined in Chapter 1 implicitly or explicitly link political hierarchy with the size of the monumental centers (Adams and Jones 1981; Turner et al.1981). The size of the center reflects a ruler's ability to harness a large workforce to procure raw materials (wood, limestone, smaller rocks) to construct public buildings and platforms. This workforce may be local, but also could come from tribute given by surrounding communities.

In the central Petén, overwhelming evidence indicates that large city-centers controlled the political arena (Martin and Grube 2000; Marcus 1992). In peripheral areas, the construction of large temples and palaces either does not hold the same importance and/or elites do not have the authority to command a large enough workforce for its construction. The cultural importance placed on

the construction of large monumental architecture may be reflective of the social and political role elites, and in particular rulers, were playing. It is possible that the rulers' claim to power in these peripheral regions was not as closely tied to claims of elite-deity connections as in the core. If centers in the periphery were contributing labor to the core region, the discrepancy in site size would be a reflection, at least in part, of a centers political position.

In an effort to address these discrepancies in the archaeological record and present new explanations for core-periphery interactions across the Maya lowlands, two models of interaction between these centers are presented below. Neither is exclusive; it is likely both were in action throughout the Late and Terminal Classic periods in the study region. These economic and political based interaction models are supported by data recently discovered in the Belize Valley and from other small, peripheral centers in Belize. The first model details the relationship between centers with access to desirable elite goods and those polities who demand them. The second details the relationship among elites at centers with differing degrees of political power.

Multiple lines of evidence support the assertion that cacao production was an important crop grown in the Belize Valley. Intensive agricultural analysis in the region by Scott Fedick and Sue Hayes has revealed high quality soils ideal for growing cacao, highly prized by elites throughout the Maya lowlands (Fedick 1995; Hayes 2004). The Belize Valley is comprised primarily of Class 1 and 2 soils would have been an ideal location for the growth of cacao (Hayes 2004). Soil analysis is supported by historic documents. When Spanish missionaries first

traveled into the region they noted the large number of cacao groves flanking the Belize River (Jones 1989, 1982), perhaps indicative of a specialized economy centered on cacao production during the Classic Period. Jones (1989) also notes that the soils in the Petén are not well suited for cacao production, and given the significant demand for cacao during the Late Classic period, the control of a large production area would have given the residents of communities along the Belize River (e.g. Baking Pot) an envied position. This possibility is discussed further in Chapter 7.

McAnany, excavating in the nearby Sibun River valley, argues that surplus cacao production from this area was traded for goods and services with centers in the Petén region. In good times, centers controlling cacao production flourished from this trade, as elites coveted the chocolate drink for ritual feasts and hosting important political allies. The demand for this drink, coupled with its short supply, may have translated into profits for those centers near fertile soils.

Soils in the Petén are not of sufficient quality and drainage for cacao growth. The lack of home grown cacao supplies would have made these powerful centers dependent on peripheral sites for cacao. Was cacao traded in an open market system or was it delivered as tribute to these powerful centers? Was cacao production and distribution a bargaining chip these peripheral centers could use to ensure peace and/or a degree of political independence? Investigations in the Belize Valley provide convincing evidence that this production impacted the economic and political position of polities, providing increased prestige and access to exotics for elites in major centers.



A second model applicable to the relationships between core and peripheral centers is a patron-client relationship LeCount details in her analysis of Xunantunich (LeCount 1996). In this model, rulers of peripheral centers benefited from a relationship with an important neighbor who bestowed gifts upon them for their alliance and loyalty. A patron-client relationship is defined as a mutually obligatory relationship that binds a powerful individual and community (the patron) with a weaker partner who benefits from their relationship. Hegemonic strategies of control include “co-opting peripheral elite through exchange and intermarriage, military threat, frontier garrisons, [and] occasional campaigns” (Feinman 1998:109). In the Maya lowlands, these political gifts have been identified in the form of ceramic vessels (Ball 1994; Helmke 2000; LeCount 1998; Reents-Budet et al. 1994). In the most elaborate burials found at both Baking Pot and Altun Ha, non-locally produced vessels did not comprise a major component of the interred offerings, and were often completely absent from the assemblage, suggesting that political gifts exchanged between rulers were either not commonplace or were not interred with the recipient upon his or her death. If such a relationship did exist, gifts bestowed upon rulers for their loyalty likely paled in comparison to the required tribute.

## **Discussion**

Patterns of political power express themselves in the architecture, burials, and art of a polity, but these clues present conflicting messages. Some polities have all the trappings of power and prestige: large monumental architecture,

elaborate tombs filled with exotic goods, portable art in the form of painted vessels, musical instruments, and figurines, and sophisticated permanent art such as complicated stucco and stone work as well as carved stelae. Others have only some of these elements. How do we interpret these absences? Is the lack of one or more elements evidence of political weakness? What does having carved stela really reflect about the nature of their political power? What about population size or having a large monumental core?

The cultural historical evidence from the centers within the Belize Valley, detailed in the following three chapters, underlines the need to constantly reassess our assumptions about what archaeological evidence constitutes political power. Comparing excavation results with better known regions (such as the area around Tikal) provides new insights into the political status and organization of peripheral centers. In an effort to better understand the importance of characteristics in these regions, new evidence from the Belize Valley can provide models of political interaction. Population, site size, elite burials, ceramic material, and soil analyses aids in the reconstruction of political interactions, accounting for changes in communities over time and space.

### **Excavations at Baking Pot, Xunantunich, and Cahal Pech: Objectives and Methodology**

Intensive excavation in the Belize Valley has generated a wealth of data about settlements dotting the riverbank and surrounding foothills. In the past 20 years, research has been conducted by Richard Leventhal and Wendy Ashmore at Xunantunich (Xunantunich Archaeological Project; 1992-1997), Jaime Awe at

Baking Pot, Cahal Pech, and Xunantunich (Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance Project; 1988-2005), Joseph Ball and Jennifer Taschek at Cahal Pech and Buenavista (1988-1993), James Garber at Blackman Eddy and surrounding smaller settlements (Belize Valley Archaeology Project; 1996-2005), Jason Yeager at Xunantunich (2001-2002), Cynthia Robin at the Chan Site (2003-2005), and Lisa LeCount at Actuncan (2003-2004). Combined, these data sets allow the development of a detailed picture of life within the region and present a solid foundation for testing models of political organization.

My excavations at Baking Pot, Cahal Pech, and Xunantunich were carried out in areas of elite activity to gain information about political activity during the Late and Terminal Classic periods. To achieve this goal, excavations were undertaken in palace groups, temples, and administrative buildings. In addition, ceramic analysis was conducted on the material from Baking Pot, skeletal elements were examined, and all material in special deposits was researched.

The often conflicting nature of the archaeological evidence, coupled with the limited number of glyphic texts, encourages comparisons with better understood regions to aid in the meaning behind particular deposits. In the case of burials, site and population sizes, this was best accomplished with centers containing complete glyphic histories and extensive excavation histories. This comparative data, coupled with new information from centers in the Belize Valley, allows for a more complete understanding of the history in the region.

Excavations at Baking Pot were conducted over four summer field seasons from 2001-2004 under the auspices of the Belize Valley Archaeological

Reconnaissance Project. Our goals were to 1) determine the periods of construction and occupation at the site; 2) excavate sections of the site core, in an effort to balance recent seasons of investigation of domestic structures; 3) determine the place Baking Pot held within the political framework of the Belize Valley; 4) determine the nature of the relationships Baking Pot held with more distant polities in the Yucatan, the Petén, and the Maya Mountains.

Excavations were undertaken by 8-10 local excavation assistants, several graduate students, and numerous undergraduate field school students. During each season we typically were able to investigate two or three structures, with a focus on excavating the entire terminal phase construction and then placing a number of penetrating excavations into the fill of the platform. Structures were chosen based on their perceived potential to contain evidence of elite-controlled and/or public activities, including caches, burials, sacrificial offerings, sacred architecture and middens. Five temples, two palace structures, and five residential platforms were excavated. Three of the temples, one palace structure, and one of the residential structures were completely cleared of collapse; those remaining were cleared to varying degrees as time permitted. The results of these investigations, as well as a detailed analysis of the ceramics recovered, are presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

Research at Xunantunich took place between December 2000 and May 2001. My goal was to explain evidence of elite activity at the center, including burials and cached deposits, as little such activity had been documented in the past. Excavations were undertaken by 50-60 excavation assistants from the communities of San Jose Soccotz, Benque Viejo, and San Ignacio and were

supervised by Juan Luis Bonor and myself. These excavations were part of the Tourism Development Project, a Government of Belize initiative aimed at increasing tourism in the country. This project was directed and coordinated by Drs. Allan Moore (Project Director) and Jaime Awe (Excavation Director). Excavations were geared towards clearing the terminal phase architecture of large structures to consolidate the platforms for tourism purposes, but we were encouraged to probe within previously uninvestigated structures in an attempt to learn more about the construction sequence, ritual activities, and political affiliations of the site. Four structures, including two temples, an administrative building, and the large palatial complex known as El Castillo were excavated and consolidated. While these structures were chosen for restoration purposes, the discoveries found during our and previous investigations make them excellent resources for a study on political organization.

Research at the site of Cahal Pech was conducted from May 2000 to December 2000 and again from January 2002 to May 2002. Excavations at Cahal Pech were less comprehensive; funding by the Tourism Development Project was limited. Despite this, new information pertaining to inter-site relationships with nearby centers was recovered. Previously, Cahal Pech had been posited as the summer home for the elites at Buenavista del Cayo (see Chapter 3; Ball and Taschek 2004; Taschek and Ball 2004). My goal was to determine if the site was in fact tied as closely to Buenavista as previously suggested or if Cahal Pech was an independent political entity. The investigations were supervised by Juan Luis Bonor as well as myself and conducted by a group of 30 to 40 local workmen and

women from the surrounding communities. Like the work conducted at Xunantunich, these excavations were carried out under the auspices of the Tourism Development Project, although a number of field school students from the Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance Project also participated in the research during the summer of 2000. Structures were chosen on the basis of increasing the tourism potential of the site, particularly in efforts to create new plazas with conserved structures to disperse large groups of visitors. In addition, Group A needed conservation work to fix previous reconstruction activities that were done during the early 1990's (Ball 1992). The nature of these investigations were limited in scope, but extensive termination rituals discovered in Plaza A as well as the newly exposed terminal phase architecture dating to the Late Classic provide new insights into activities conducted at Cahal Pech.

New research, coupled with previous discoveries in the study area, provides the necessary data to identify local political relationships and those with the core region. Shifts in these alliances, brought about by changes in relationships between "superpowers," wars in the Petén, and shifting trade routes, affected the prosperity of the Belize Valley (Ball and Taschek 2004; Ford 2004; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004; Taschek and Ball 2004). These shifts, evident in the archaeological record, can enable the reconstruction of the political organization during the Late and Terminal Classic period.

## CHAPTER III

### PREVIOUS RESEARCH IN THE BELIZE RIVER VALLEY

#### **Introduction: A Regional Perspective**

During the Late to Terminal Classic period (A.D. 580-900), the Belize River Valley was home to over 24,000 people (Willey et al. 1965). The average structure density in the region was 118 mounds per km<sup>2</sup>, compared with 200 around Tikal and 105 encircling Yaxha (Ford 1990). While the number of mounds is comparable to the core area, the “size and composition of the Belize River area residences are not at all equivalent...” (Ford 1990: 170). Medium-sized centers dot the landscape roughly every 10 kilometers with smaller centers nestled in between (Driver and Garber 2004). The major centers include (from west to east); Xunantunich, Buenavista del Cayo, Cahal Pech, Baking Pot, Blackman Eddy, and Camelote. Minor centers in the Belize Valley (from west to east) include Nohoch Ek, Esperanza, Floral Park, Ontario, Warrie Head, Barton Ramie, and Saturday Creek (ibid 2004). While it is postulated that none of the major sites in the valley had Late or Terminal Classic populations exceeding 2,000 people, there was an almost continuous ribbon of settlement lining the Belize River (Willey et al. 1965).

Surrounding valleys also contain the ruins of Maya communities occupied during the Late to Terminal Classic periods. These centers, with the exception of Caracol and Pacbitun generally consist of small centers located along riverways. These communities would have interacted with the study area, both politically and

economically. They include the Valley of Peace (Lucero 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000, 1999) located to the north; the Roaring Creek (Awe 1998; Helmke 2005; Moyes 1998), Barton Creek (Ishihara, Griffith and Awe 2000), and Sibun River Valleys (McAnany 2004, 2002, 2000) which are located to the south and east; the Macal River Valley (Ishihara 2000, Moyse 2003) located to the west; the site of El Pilar located northwest of the valley (Ford 2004); and the large center of Caracol located in the Maya Mountains to the south (Chase and Chase 2004, 1992, 1987).

Maya centers located in Guatemala also had political and economic relationships with the major centers in the Belize Valley, as evidenced by the discovery of foreign-produced ceramics in the palaces and tombs of valley elites (Audet and Awe 2004; Ball 1992; Reents-Budet et al. 2004) and by the discovery of an emblem glyph on local stela (Martin and Grube 2000). The site most often cited as having political ties to the Belize Valley is Naranjo, although it is likely that political relationships changed over time. This will be explored in more detail in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

The greatest difficulty in understanding the political organization in this region is the minimal number of glyphic texts referring to warfare, political accession rites, or familial ties within a ruling dynasty. The few texts from the Belize Valley have been deciphered and summarized by Christophe Helmke in a paper presented at the Texas Meetings in 2004 (Helmke et al. 2004). Monuments from Xunantunich have been analyzed by Martin and Grube (2000) and contain the remains of what may be Naranjo emblem glyph. The majority of textual evidence is comprised of Primary Standard Sequences from ceramic vessels and



inscriptions from monuments at Xunantunich, Pacbitun, and Blackman Eddy. The implications of these texts are discussed in the site descriptions below.

### **Political Organization in the Belize Valley**

Research addressing the Late Classic (A.D. 580-780) to Terminal Classic (A.D. 780-900) political organization in the Belize Valley has usually focused on three main loci of power: Xunantunich, Buenavista del Cayo, and Cahal Pech. Many scholars have embraced a centralized model of political organization, wherein the Belize Valley was subjugated by a powerful center in the Petén (Ashmore and Sabloff 2002; Ball and Taschek 2004; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004; Taschek and Ball 2004). The nature of this relationship, its effects on local populations, and changes in political authority over time, are limited in nature.

In the past 50 years, every major ancient Maya community in the study area has been investigated. The results of these excavations have only recently been published, creating an excellent opportunity to address issues of political stability, organization, and hierarchy. Scholars have usually addressed political hierarchy from the perspective of their own centers, with only D. Chase (2004) and A. Chase and Garber (2004) commenting on the valley as a whole, making efforts to incorporate newly reported data into their analyses. D. Chase notes,

Thus, a key question is how the different parts of the Belize Valley are related to each other and to neighboring areas. It would be a mistake to consider the Belize Valley settlement in isolation...Undoubtable all these sites and areas [Caracol, Pacbitun, and Moho Cay] interacted with and both conditioned and were conditioned by the ancient inhabitants of the Belize Valley. However, the exact nature of these interactions is still not well known. (D. Chase 2004:345)

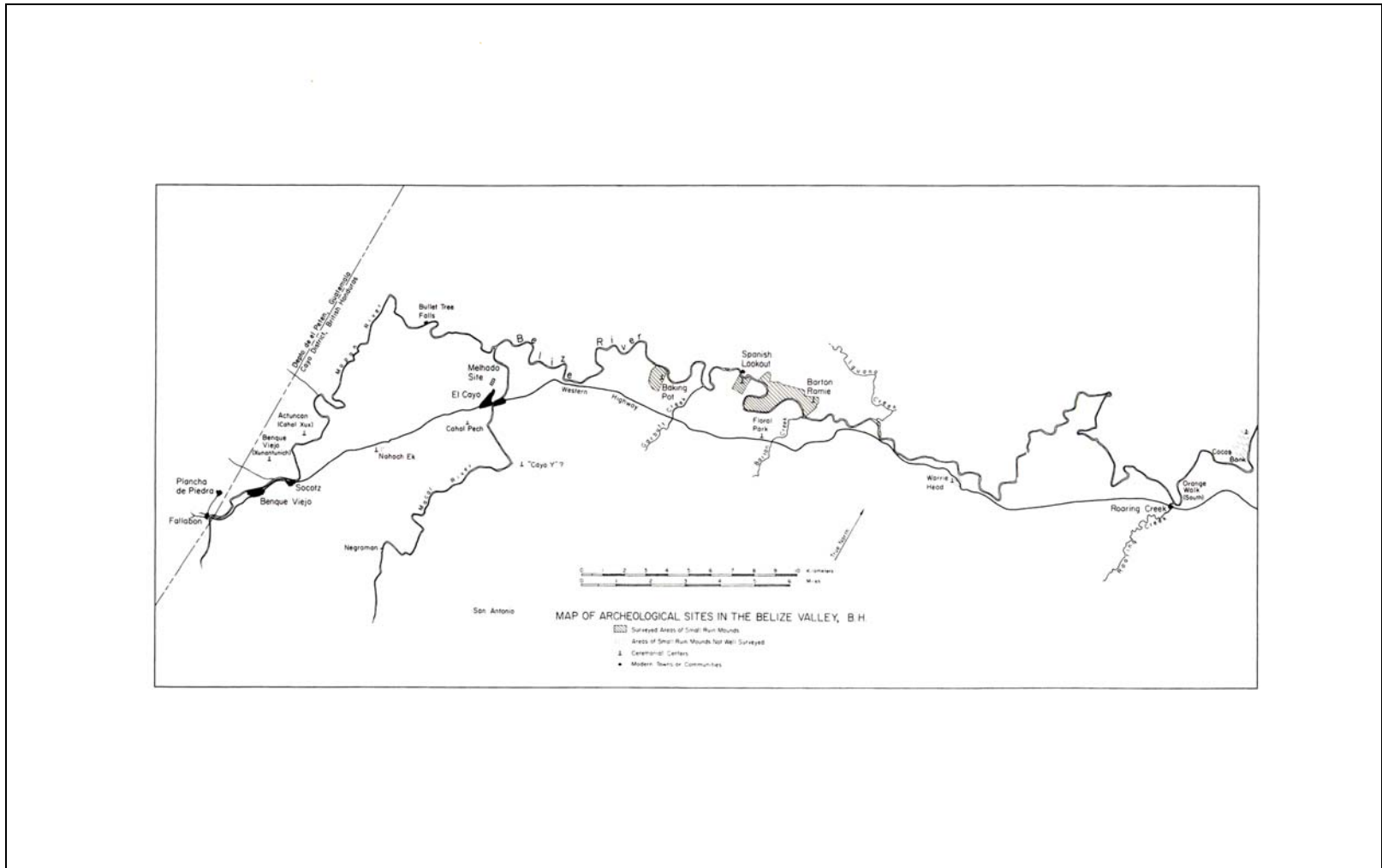


Figure 3.1: Map of Belize Valley with Willey's Proposed Districts (After Willey et al. 1965:22)

Thus while research has been ongoing for decades, “different models and researcher perceptions color interpretations” perhaps even more so than the data may explicitly warrant (D. Chase 2004:345).

Most discussions regarding the political organization of this region ignore the role of Baking Pot due in large part to a dearth of published material (with the exceptions of research conducted by Bullard and Bullard 1960, Ricketson 1927, and Willey et al. 1965). The research conducted at the site prior to 2002 was limited to small scale excavation in the site core, or was focused entirely in the periphery (Aimers 1998; Bullard and Bullard 1960; Conlon 1995; Piehl 1999, 1997; Ricketson 1931). Thus, little could be said with certainty about the political affiliations of the elites living at the site center. Elites tend to have relationships with other elites, often across the landscape. By investigating activity among elites, both within the valley and with sites in the Petén, we can illuminate the role elites played in political ties, something previously under investigated in this area.

Political reconstructions of the valley range from two tiered decentralized hierarchies to centralized models of political control. One of the earliest sociopolitical reconstructions of the Belize Valley was proposed by Gordon Willey (Willey et al. 1965). He believed there were four districts in the Belize Valley, the Benque Viejo (now known as Xunantunich) district, the Cahal Pech district, the Baking Pot district, and the Cocos Bank district (Figure 3.1). In his analysis, in each of these four districts was a “capital” of sorts that controlled the smaller centers around them, in a two-tiered political hierarchy. The Cocos Bank district is somewhat of an anomaly, as no major center has been found in the

region, but the other districts are so-named from the sites that likely served as capitals. Willey argued that each of these regions controlled a population of approximately 6,000 people during their height in the Late Classic period (based on mound counts), suggesting an overall population of around 24,000 (Willey et al. 1965: 576-577).

Willey's description of the political organization in the Belize Valley is similar in design to studies pointing to site size (courtyard counts and volumetric analysis) as well overall population counts (Adams and Smith 1981; Turner et al 1981). While these theories suggest a certain degree of centralization, Willey and his colleagues do not argue for one overarching polity that controlled the entire region, possibly given the similar size of these major centers.

Driver and Garber (2004) believe the larger sites in the Belize Valley were peer polities, who controlled or had influence over smaller centers located within their boundaries. They noted the major sites were located 9.9 km from each other, and at the midpoint between them were the locations for smaller, perhaps allied or buffer zone communities. This updated version of Willey's proposal includes Buenavista del Cayo and Pacbitun, in addition to those centers identified by Willey as the capitals of independent polities. Driver and Garber do not comment on possible status/power differences between the major sites nor do they focus on possible external influences exerting control over the region, leaving the question of possible domination from the central Petén unaddressed.

This two-tiered political hierarchy as described above conflicts with more recent proposals by Joseph Ball and Jennifer Taschek. They believe Naranjo was

the powerful center controlling the Belize Valley, much like other researchers: however in their view, Naranjo administered this control by establishing a seat of power at Buenavista del Cayo. Evidence for the Buenavista – Naranjo relationship is represented in the archaeological record primarily by the discovery of ceramic vessels found in palace middens and royal tombs that originated in the eastern Peten region of Guatemala (Ball and Taschek 2004, Houston, Stuart, and Taube 1992; Reents-Budet et al. 2000: 117; Taschek and Ball 2004). In particular, the “Juancy” vase is thought to be an affirmation of that alliance. This famous vessel was discovered in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century tomb of a young man. Ball and Taschek believe that the vase was used to cement a political relationship between Naranjo’s ruler K’ak’ Tiwil Chan Chaak and the ruler of Buenavista, likely the father of the entombed individual. Based on the location and association of these ceramic remains with the main palace complex, Ball and Taschek argue that Naranjo controlled Buenavista during the Late Classic period, who in turn controlled the smaller, tertiary and quaternary sites in the valley (2004).

Ball and Taschek worked at Cahal Pech and Buenavista during the 1980’s and 1990’s, and have developed a unique perspective on the connection between these two centers. Taschek and Ball suggest Cahal Pech was the summer home for those ruling at Buenavista from the mid-seventh century onwards (Ball and Taschek 2001, 2004; Taschek and Ball 2004). In a recent article they write:

in our reconstruction, we identify the hilltop Cahal Pech citadel as serving primarily a high elite if not regal residential and private ritual function throughout much of the year, with Buenavista providing both a theater for many important communal, administrative, economic, and public ceremonial services and activities as well as a warm and cozy rainy season residential alternative (Taschek and Ball 2004: 198).

Evidence used to support this hypothesis includes: 1) the stylistic similarity of the ceramic assemblages found in the palaces of Buenavista and Cahal Pech; 2) elite ceramics show greater parallels between the two centers than with their own immediate supporting populations; 3) the discovery of a ceramic workshop at Buenavista (compared with the lack of data for a similar specialization at Cahal Pech); 4) the lack of feasting remains around the palace at Cahal Pech when compared with the copious quantities found at Buenavista; 5) the dominant size of the palace at Cahal Pech; 6) the differences in weather conditions between these centers and 6) the lack of overlapping elite interments from the same time periods (Ball and Taschek 2001). Common sense dictates that negative evidence does not create a strong argument. Specific critiques are noted below.

Taschek and Ball (2004) argue that during the Late Classic period Xunantunich was an empty ceremonial center that functioned as a pilgrimage destination. The site eventually superseded Buenavista del Cayo when it began to function as an administrative and public ceremonial locus for the valley around A.D. 700. They believe that these functions were moved to Xunantunich due to the unsettled and violent political climate that existed during the Terminal Classic period throughout much of the Maya lowlands: the hilltop location of Xunantunich was more easily defended than the valley bottom site of Buenavista del Cayo. They do not address the why Xunantunich was created, nor why if a hilltop location was so important the capital was not simply moved to Cahal Pech.

Archaeologists working at Xunantunich are attempting to clarify the relationship between local centers and the core area (Leventhal and Ashmore 2004). They originally believed that Naranjo refocused its domination from Buenavista to Xunantunich around A.D. 780, leading to increased construction and activity (Ashmore and Leventhal 2004). Leventhal, Ashmore, and LeCount originally saw Naranjo as the impetus for the growth and development of the site. They have noted that the site layout (with two causeways crisscrossing the site core), a partially legible Naranjo emblem glyph located on Stela 8, and the stylistic similarities between the three Xunantunich stela with those found at Naranjo, provide convincing evidence of subservience between Xunantunich to its Petén neighbor and suggest that this relationship provided the authority for Xunantunich to dominate the rest of the region (Ashmore in press, 2004; LeCount 2002; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004).

According to Ashmore, other Xunantunich Archaeological Project (XAP) members now believe that the quick expansion of Xunantunich resulted from their efforts to break free from Naranjo's grip after that center was defeated by Caracol and Calakmul in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century (Ashmore in press, Yeager and Lecount in press). Ashmore, however, is not convinced, suggesting that the emulation of site core layout of Calakmul by Naranjo as well as the massive workforce necessary to construct the large temples at Xunantunich indicates an external intervention by a revitalized Naranjo in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century (Ashmore in press, 1998, 1986; Ashmore and Sabloff 2002).

Regardless of the impetus for growth of Xunantunich during the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, Naranjo was soundly defeated in A.D. 744 by Tikal. This defeat likely created a power vacuum in the region, perhaps leading to the independence of Xunantunich and change in the political hierarchy of the Belize Valley (Martin and Grube 2000:78-79). For the next 70 years, Xunantunich and Baking Pot thrived, as evidenced by increased construction and caching activity in the site cores. Cahal Pech and Buenavista, however, faltered, and were abandoned by the end of the Late Classic period.

Investigations at Cahal Pech have produced new data aiding in the reconstruction of the political organization in the valley. Excavations have revealed that Cahal Pech was a center with its own elite inhabitants, supporting population (despite our lack of knowledge about the exact numbers given modern development), and a site core with administrative, ritual, and palace buildings. Ball argues that Cahal Pech was composed of primarily a large palace; however this notion is largely a result of excavation and reconstruction work directed only on one section of the city (Awe 1992; Ball 1992; Cheetham 2004, Lee 1994, 1995). The architectural evidence provides little support for the argument that Cahal Pech was merely a summer home for Buenavista elites. In addition, aside from the cool breeze people living on the hilltop at Cahal Pech would enjoy, there are no measurable differences in weather conditions between the two sites, creating no need for a “cozy rainy season alternative.”



## **Major Centers in the Valley**

There are four medium sized centers in the Belize Valley. These sites, from west to east, are Xunantunich, Buenavista del Cayo, Cahal Pech, and Baking Pot. In addition, there are two additional smaller sites, further to the east, that have monumental cores with a supporting population of several hundred. These centers are Blackman Eddy and Camelote (Figure 3.1).

Xunantunich, Buenavista del Cayo and Cahal Pech have all been postulated to have ruled over the Belize Valley at some point in prehistory (Ball 1992; Ball and Taschek 2004; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004; LeCount 2002). In addition, Ford has argued El Pilar, a large center located just outside the valley, may have held political supremacy over the region (Ford 2004). Two slightly more distant centers, Caracol and Naranjo, may also have dominated the landscape at various points in the Classic period, perhaps setting up a seat of administrative power at one of the aforementioned centers (Ball and Taschek 2004; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004; Taschek and Ball 2004). Lastly, it is possible that the major centers in the Belize Valley experienced periods of independence at various points in history, with centers coexisting in a hierarchal system.

Evidence of political control is difficult to determine without glyphic texts specifically detailing tribute demands or the outcome of battles. Without these texts, researchers can look to archaeological evidence to elucidate a community's position within their region (Ashmore in press). When elites and their communities thrive, it likely reflects the position of their polity within the greater landscape. Therefore, if elites are acquiring valuable portable art and constructing

large ceremonial structures, they are likely experiencing success both within the community and region. When construction ceases, or elites no longer have access to exotics, it can be assumed that this success has been thwarted. It is difficult to know how much political success actually affects the lives of every day people. In some cases, large tribute demands could place a strain on production and local resources. There are times, however, when politics do not strongly affect the lives of the majority: the evidence at Tikal suggests “that political upsets between A.D. 562 and 682 has little affect on most people” (Haviland 2003:140).

Political links among centers in the Belize Valley and distant polities have been made on the basis of site size, elite level ceramic trade, and site layout patterns (Ashmore in press, 1998, 1986; Ashmore and Sabloff 2002; Ball 1992; Ball and Taschek 2004; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004; Taschek and Ball 2004). The archaeological evidence is often contradictory; making it necessary to clearly understand the meaning behind archaeological evidence.

Excavations at Naranjo have only recently begun (Fialko 2004, 1997; Fialko et al. 2004, 2003). Evidence of Naranjo’s political position is based primarily on glyphic texts and neutron activation analysis evidence from ceramic vessels (Martin and Grube 2000). Researchers at Naranjo have not commented in papers about the relationship between Naranjo and the Belize Valley (Fialko 2005, 2004) but given the volatile nature of its intersite relationships during the Late Classic period, and its close proximity to the Belize Valley, a relationship with centers in the valley is likely.

### *Xunantunich*

The site center of Xunantunich was built atop a ridge, approximately 1.6 km northwest of the Mopan River (Figure 3.2). A causeway, running east-west, leads into the site core through a break between Structure A6 (El Castillo) and Structure A4. Three main interconnected groups within a north-south orientation comprise the majority of the monumental architecture at the site. The largest structure at the site is A6, better known as El Castillo, stands over 46 meters tall and is a complex structure composed primarily of two stacked platforms that support numerous vaulted rooms at the summit. To the east and west are two flanking platforms, Structures A5 and A20. These platforms contain the remains of several rooms constructed with non-vaulted masonry walls. Structure A-6 likely functioned as both the palace as well as a center for administrative functions. This structure also provides a 360 degree view of the surrounding region, a view that may have aided the inhabitants in defending the center during times of warfare and allowed commoners to see any rituals or events taking place. Structure A-6 was originally the southernmost structure of a long plaza bordered by A-14 on the north. Towards the end of the Late Classic period Structure A-1 was constructed in the center, dividing it into Plazas A-I and A-II. Originally, however, Structures A2, A3, and A4 lined the eastern edge, likely in a late version of an E-Group complex that no longer functioned as an astronomical observatory but was still

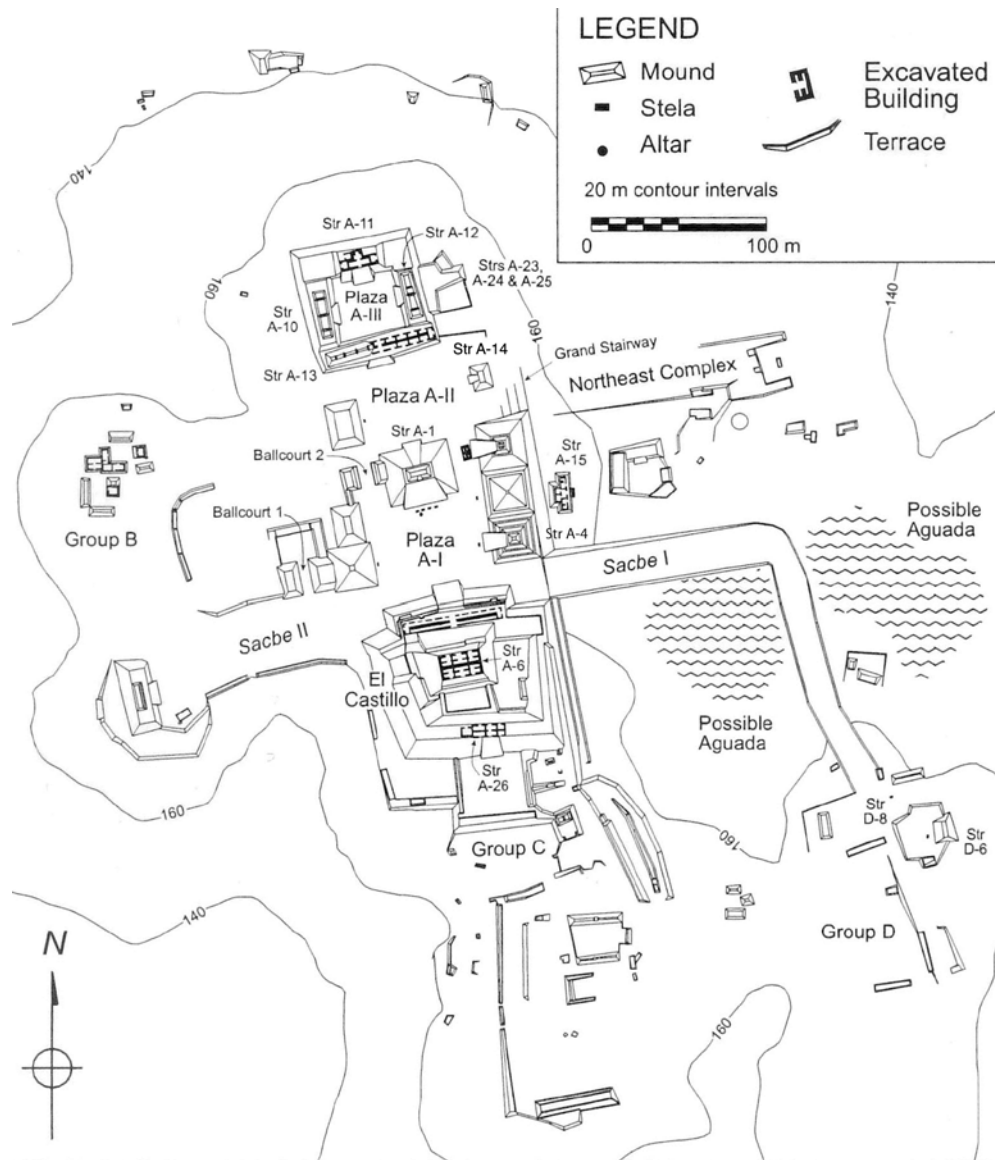


Figure 3.2: Map of Xunantunich (after LeCount et al. 2002:fig 2)

regarded as an eastern shrine: a location for the burial of important individuals (Aimers and Rice in press). Lining the west side of the plaza is a series of temples and to the north is a long range structure. North of the main plaza is a smaller courtyard (Plaza III). Plaza III was identified by the (XAP) as the royal residence

based on the restricted nature of access into the courtyard and the multi-room vaulted structures that line the courtyard (Keller 1995). Awe recently has postulated that the Castillo was the main royal residence and structures lining Plaza A-III were the residences of lesser elites (Awe personal communication 2003). Two ballcourts have been discovered within this central precinct: one just to the west of Plaza A-I and a second on the western side of Structure A-1.

Three outlying groups, B, C, and D also contain the remains of masonry architecture, including the platforms and superstructure walls of residential structures, temple platforms, and a single ballcourt. These groups likely comprise centrally located residences of the sub-elites, as the constructions are more elaborate than the typical housemounds of the region. Ball and Taschek (2004) and LeCount (1996) have noted that there are few housemounds surrounding the site; less than typical found at other centers in the region. LeCount postulates that this could be due in part to the rapid rise and fall of the site between A.D. 700 and 850 while Ashmore, suggests instead that this may be due to the direct annexation of the center by Naranjo. It also could be a problem of invisible settlement, where houses were not built on large platforms, however this would not be in keeping with the other settlement in the region. According to Ashmore, the more politically dominant center may have provided the “incentive” to locals to construct the large temples at the site. There are several areas of settlement off the ridge and around the river valley that were likely areas of supporting population for the large center. Newly investigated areas include Chan Noòhol (Robin 2002,

2003) and San Lorenzo (Yeager 2000) which are located just across the Mopan River.

Xunantunich was first occupied in by A.D. 650 and was continuously inhabited until the end of the Terminal Classic period (LeCount 1996). While a small Middle Preclassic center is located under the massive Late Classic site core, it was abandoned for hundreds of years before the area was resettled. Less than one kilometer away, the Early Classic center of Actuncan was settled for a short time, but no evidence for occupation from this period at Xunantunich. There is evidence of continued occupation in Group B during the Postclassic Period (Pendergast and Graham 1981) as well as scattered Postclassic ceramic remains in the site core (ibid).

Over the past one hundred years, Thomas Gann (1925), Linton Satterthwaite (1951), Euan Mackie (1985, 1961), David Pendergast and Elizabeth Graham (1981), Richard Leventhal (1993, 1992), Wendy Ashmore (1994, 1993), Jason Yeager (2003), and Jaime Awe (Audet 2002) have led investigations into the site's history. In addition to this, numerous graduate students have conducted their research at the center, many of whom are still working in Belize today (Robin et al 2003; LeCount 2004; Yeager 2000). This extensive history of archaeological research has increased our knowledge of the site and the interactions Xunantunich had with their neighbors.

Gann conducted excavations at Xunantunich three times over the course of his career, focusing on Structures A-1, A-2, A-6, A-7, and A-9 (Gann 1895, 1925, 1927). His investigations revealed several caches of chert eccentrics, jadeite beads

and other precious stone jewelry, several burials, and architecture from each structure. Unfortunately he did little with non-valuable artifacts (e.g. pot sherds, lithics, shells) and only recorded obvious items of ritual or political significance. Even back in the 1920's, Gann noted the possibility that Xunantunich was subservient to the larger nearby center of Naranjo. He wrote, "It [Xunantunich] was originally, no doubt, a colony from the great city of Naranjo, situated only a few miles to the north-west..."(Gann 1925:64). His evidence for this relationship lies in part due to the similarity between one of the carved stela at Xunantunich with one from Naranjo (ibid).

Gann was the first to record the origin of the name "Xunantunich." The name translates to "stone maiden" or "maiden of the rock" and originates from a vision a local man had in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of a

"beautiful statuesque Maya maiden... clad in *huipil* and *pik*, standing motionless by the side of the mouth of the passage which runs beneath the temple. She appeared of a dazzling and supernatural whiteness, as she stood full in the rays of the rising sun, and looked with fixed and stony stare ... across the intervening bush to the valley, where later the Indians built the village of Succots" (Gann 1925:68).

While no one else ever saw this woman, and the tunnel can no longer be found (Gann could also not find it in his travels over 80 years ago), the name remains in use to this day.

In 1908 Sylvanias Morley visited the site to draw the inscriptions from Stela 1 and its altar (Morley 1908: 77-91). His trip prompted the visits of Rutherford, who photographed the stela Morley drew, and A Ledyard Smith, who made a sketch map of the site in 1930. In 1938, J.E.S. Thompson arrived at the

site to create a ceramic typology for the region and conducted his own series of excavations in Group B.

Linton Satterthwaite conducted limited excavations of the eastern frieze on Structure A-6/2<sup>nd</sup>, revealing a stuccoed eastern-roof facade with astronomical images, including the image of the Sun God (Satterthwaite 1950). The second half of the frieze was excavated by then archaeological Commissioner A.H. Anderson in 1959 and left exposed for view by the public. In 1952 Michael Stewart exposed the Stela House (Structure A-17), the junction between A-3 and A-4 (revealing rounded interconnected platforms) and upon his return in 1958 he exposed the central staircase on Structure A-14 and the northern staircase of A-1. A year later, Euan MacKie spent four months excavating at Xunantunich, focusing on the terminal phase architecture of Structures A-6, A-11 and A-15. MacKie found the remains of several cracks in the architecture leading him to speculate that the site was destroyed by a local earthquake and that the premature destruction and abandonment of Xunantunich was one of the factors leading to the widespread collapse of the Maya (MacKie 1985). He also noted the lack of settlement in the immediate vicinity of the site, although he did not look across the river. He believed Xunantunich was the capital of the Belize Valley and that other sites with large settlements would have supported elites living in the core. This centralized view of the Belize Valley was challenged and discarded by Willey and his colleagues a few years later (Willey et al. 1965) and soon forgotten, although the recent work by Ashmore, Leventhal, LeCount, and Yeager



is once again challenging the two-tiered political organization (Ashmore in press; LeCount et al. 2002; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004).

David Pendergast and Elizabeth Graham worked in Group B in response to looting in the 1970's. Luckily, the damage to the site was minimal, as looters managed to dig into the back corner of the platform instead of trenching through the center as they were intending (Pendergast and Graham 1981). Pendergast and Graham extended the trench started by the looters in effort to determine the construction chronology of the structure and in hopes of finding undisturbed burials. They determined Thompson's initial ceramic chronology of a Late to Terminal Classic occupation at Group B was accurate, but also discovered new Postclassic activity in Structure B-5. These remains included the burial of an adult female with jade inlays, a flute, and a unique censor with numerous slits that likely functioned to release smoke from burning incense. Pendergast and Graham determined that while the site center of Xunantunich may have been abandoned by the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, people were still living or at least being buried around the site into Postclassic times.

In the early 1990's Richard Leventhal from the University of California, Los Angeles, in conjunction with the Department of Archaeology, collaborated on a new development and research program at Xunantunich. Wendy Ashmore of the University of Pennsylvania joined the project a year later to supervise the settlement survey and excavation research conducted by several of her graduate students. The work supervised by these two scholars far out shadowed the work of previous investigators both in its scope and interpretative depth.

Leventhal supervised the excavation of Structures A-1, A-6, as well as the royal residence in Plaza A-III. In addition, work was undertaken in Group D, one of the largest complexes located outside of the site core (Leventhal and Ashmore 2004). Excavations revealed that the site was occupied for only a short time: they suggest that the site core was first constructed around A.D. 700 and abandoned by A.D. 850 (LeCount 1996).

The site layout has been cause for extensive speculation by Wendy Ashmore who argues that Xunantunich was constructed to mimic the site layout of Calakmul and Naranjo (Ashmore in press, 1998; Ashmore and Sabloff 2002). The cross-formed layout of the causeways, she argues, is evidence of political domination of the later over Xunantunich. In addition, a partially legible emblem glyph of Naranjo was found on a Xunantunich stela and ceramic fragments from Naranjo-produced workshops has supported the notion that Xunantunich was under the political control of the larger center to the northwest (LeCount 1996, 1998, 2001; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004; Martin and Grube 2000).

New research has been conducted at the site under the auspices of the Tourism Development Project from 2001-2004. Work at the site was directed by Jaime Awe, and supervised by various archaeologists including Jason Yeager, Juan Luis Bonor, and myself. Excavations by Yeager focused primarily on Structure A-11, where he stripped the majority of the terminal phase architecture before conserving it. Excavations supervised by Audet and Bonor include penetrating units as well as a complete stripping of the terminal phase architecture

of Structures A-4, A-6, A14, and A-15 and will be summarized in the following chapter.

Ashmore, Leventhal, and LeCount believe that Xunantunich was the dominant polity in the Belize River Valley during the later half of the Late Classic period. The history of occupation at the site is relatively short (it appears to have been built initially in the Tiger Run Phase (or Late Classic 1; 580-680 A.D.) according to work conducted by Audet (2003b). The impetus behind the initial settlement of the center at such a late date remains unclear, but several centers nearby, including Actuncan, were occupied during earlier periods (LeCount 2003).

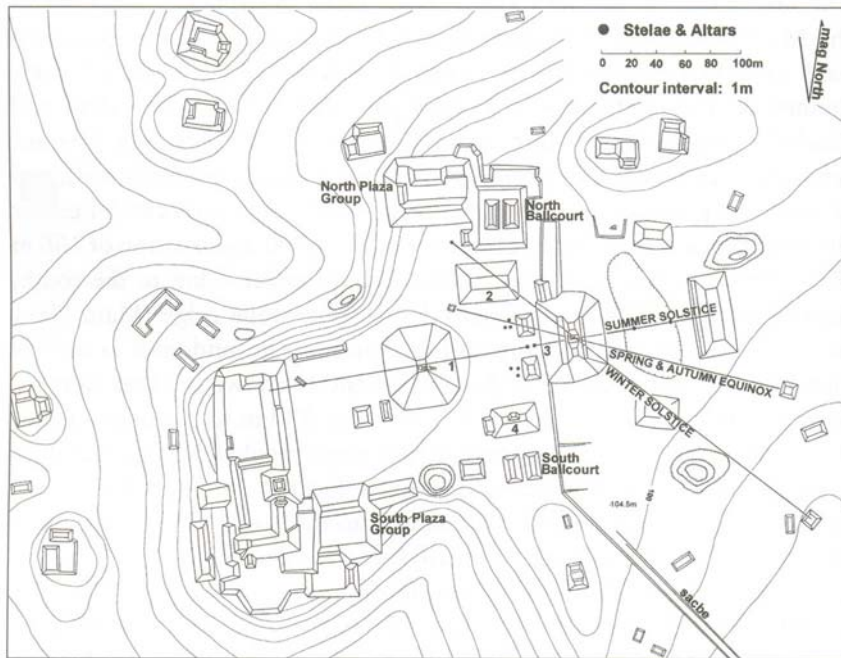
LeCount and others originally believed that it was Naranjo's rise in the Late Classic period that prompted the construction of Xunantunich as an outpost of that prospering center (LeCount 1996; LeCount et al 2002). Further consideration, coupled with recent excavations, have led them to suggest that it was actually a hiatus in Naranjo's power in the Late Classic that allowed for Xunantunich's to rise to prominence. The destabilization of political authority in the Petén both enabled their rise and ultimately caused the decline of the center. By the end of the ninth century, Xunantunich was abandoned. Some squatters remained living in the site core and in Group B, but the elite had long-since fled from their palaces.

### ***Buenavista del Cayo***

The site of Buenavista del Cayo lies along the southeastern bank of the Macal River, relatively equidistant (roughly 6km) from both Cahal Pech and Xunantunich (Driver and Garber 2004). The site has slightly larger and more numerous ceremonial structures than Cahal Pech or Baking Pot (Figure 3.3). At its height during the Late Classic period Buenavista del Cayo was comprised of three main groups, including two ballcourts, that were surrounded by hundreds of small domestic platforms.

Buenavista del Cayo contains three main plaza areas; the North Group (containing a plaza group and ballcourt), a central group with two large temples, and the South Plaza Group containing the palace. A viable E-Group complex located in the central group would have marked the summer, spring and autumn, as well as winter solstices. The site center is fairly open, and unlike Xunantunich was located along the alluvial soils of the riverbank. This accessible layout is similar to Baking Pot, also located along the Belize River floodplain, suggesting raiding and warfare were not prevalent in the region during its height.

Buenavista was first constructed in the Middle Preclassic Period; only slightly after the nearby site of Cahal Pech was first settled. The site was occupied continuously until it reached its apex during the early part of the Late Classic. Much of the construction at the center occurred during the Late Classic period, suggesting a thriving economy during this time. Like the nearby center of Cahal Pech, it appears that Buenavista was abandoned before the end of the Late Classic



*Figure 3.3: Map of Buenavista del Cayo (after Ball and Taschek 2004:fig 9.1)*

period, as few Terminal Classic ceramics found at the site (Taschek and Ball 2004).

Buenavista del Cayo was investigated by Joseph Ball and Jennifer Taschek during the 1980's. While they did not file reports of their research with the Department of Archaeology; however they have published several articles regarding Buenavista's relations with other centers in the valley. Their articles focus primarily on the unusual ties between Buenavista and Cahal Pech, the political relationship between Buenavista and Naranjo, as well as issues of ceramic production and exchange. Their insights are particularly useful to studies of political organization and relationships within the area.

Ceramic production and specialization at Buenavista del Cayo and Cahal Pech has been one focus of Ball's study. He identified a ceramic palace school, like those of Naranjo and Homul identified by Dorie Reents-Budet (Reents-Budet et al. 2000), likely centered at Buenavista. Broken ceramics were clustered behind the palace, many of high quality elite ware. He notes that smaller sites like Barton Ramie lack similar well made ceramics, possibly indicating a lack of political ties to the more powerful centers in the Petén and to Buenavista (Ball 1993). He also noted the similarity of ceramic styles between the elites at both Cahal Pech and Buenavista, which he believes were made by a single workshop near the palace, one line of evidence he believes supports their unique relationship.

Ball and Taschek argue Buenavista was a major center within the Belize Valley subsumed under the powerful authority of Naranjo. They suggest Buenavista's sphere of influence extended over the Belize Valley throughout the Late Classic I. Ball supports this claim by citing the degree of social complexity at Buenavista was greater than that found at the other sites in the region (based primarily on the discovery of palace-sponsored [i.e. attached] ceramic specialists in the site core) as well as Buenavista's proposed patron-client relationship with the site of Naranjo.

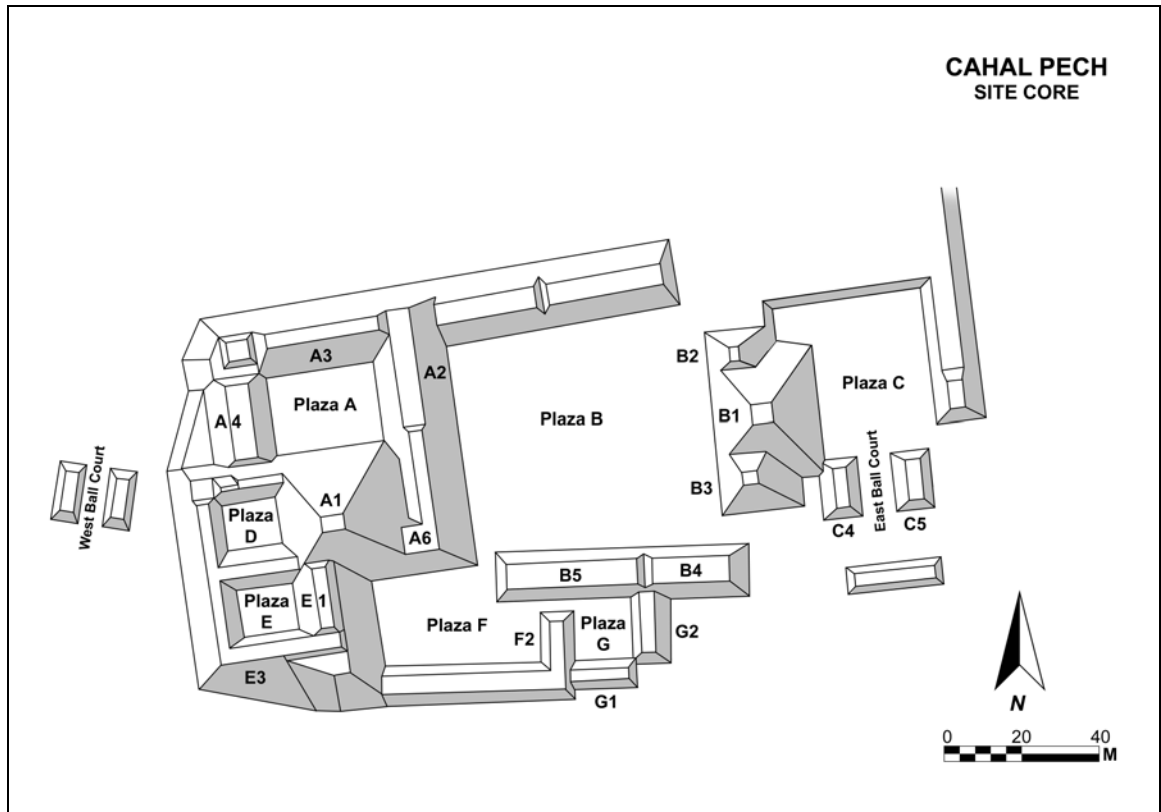
Such a centralized political vision of the Belize Valley is similar in many respects to that proposed by those working at Xunantunich (Ashmore in press, 1998; Ashmore and Sabloff 2002; LeCount 1996, 1998, 2001; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004; Martin and Grube 2000). In both cases Naranjo is the primary link to the larger centers in the Petén, through either a mutually beneficial political

relationship or though a dominant relationship where tribute is extracted. The difficulty is determining a) whether or not Buenavista freely entered into an alliance with Naranjo; b) whether that alliance precluded centers in the Belize Valley from forging their own relationships with Naranjo or other centers in the Petén, and c) the impact that such an alliance would have on the daily lives of average people living in this peripheral center.

Whatever the nature of this relationship, it apparently ended, likely during a period of disorder and chaos at Naranjo after its defeat by Caracol in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century (Ball and Taschek 2004; Martin and Grube 2000). Whether Buenavista was ultimately dependent on this connection is unknown, but Ball and Taschek argue that once the tie was severed Buenavista del Cayo faltered and never recovered to its previous position. It was abandoned at the end of the Late Classic period (Ball and Taschek 2004). Their data provides an interesting comparison with recent finds at Baking Pot, and provides further support for a centralized political organization within the Belize Valley.

### ***Cahal Pech***

The site of Cahal Pech was first recorded in the 1930's; although it was not until the 1950's that archaeological investigations were begun (Awe 1992). Cahal Pech, meaning Place of the Ticks, was so named because the site core was used as a cow pasture during the 1950's, and ticks were plentiful. Thankfully, the site is now controlled by the Institute of Archaeology, and the cows and associated ticks have left the area.



*Figure 3.4: Map of Cahal Pech (D. Lee)*

The site center is comprised of numerous temples, residential and administrative structures, as well as two ballcourts (Figure 3.4). It is located at the crest of a hill overlooking the junction of the Macal and Mopan rivers, surrounded by the modern day town of San Ignacio.

There appears to have been only one entrance into this ancient community; a causeway leading into the eastern side of the site would have directed traffic through the ballcourt or directly into the large and public Plaza B from the north. Three long range structures flank the northern, western and southern edges of the plaza, while an E-Group structure (likely not functional) is located on the eastern edge. There are two entryways into the administrative and



residential sections of the site; one through the range structure on the western side of Plaza B, and one through a small passageway located on the western side of Plaza F. Two of these private plaza groups (Plaza's D and E) functioned primarily as residences for the ruler's family. The third group, Group A, contains the remains of the throne room of the ruler (located part way up Structure A-1) as well as numerous administrative range structures. Two ballcourts have been found at the site, including the previously mentioned eastern ballcourt and a western court that is located just off the main acropolis, about 100 meters below Plaza A.

Cahal Pech may have been one of the first occupied centers in the Belize Valley, with radiocarbon dates from the lowest levels of stratigraphy ranging from 1200-1000 B.C. (Awe 1992). A significant amount of construction in the site core took place in the Preclassic period, with substantial evidence of Early and Late Classic construction phases. The site was likely abandoned at the end of the Late Classic period, as ritual deposits dating to the end of the Late Classic period litter Plaza A. This termination deposit includes smashed polychrome, bichrome, and monochrome vessels, complete chert points, worked jade, as well as broken figurine fragments.

Linton Satterthwaite from the University of Pennsylvania's University Museum conducted small scale testing throughout the site. Unfortunately he did not publish the results of his excavations with the exception of short two paragraphs about the site in a 1951 university bulletin (Awe 1992). In the 1950's Gordon Willey visited Cahal Pech while conducting his settlement survey of the

Belize River Valley (Willey et al. 1965) but did not conduct his own investigations.

Peter Schmidt excavated the Eastern Group during the 1960's in response to looting at the site and discovered an elaborate tomb, the details of which he never published. From notes obtained at the Institute of Archaeology in Belize, in addition to the artifacts stored in the vault, we know that Schmidt found the remains of an elite tomb complete with polychrome vessels, a mosaic jade and shell mask, jade pectorals, and carved shell objects (Awe 1992). Unfortunately, the majority of the artifacts recovered from this interment were stolen from the on-site museum during the summer of 2000; many of the elaborate items were never recovered.

During the 1970's and 1980's the site was heavily looted, due in part to its close proximity to the town of San Ignacio. In the late 1980's, in an effort to stop the looting, Awe began a series of investigations in the site core and periphery along with a campaign to educate the community about the importance and value of the ruins. Concurrently USAID provided funds to Joseph Ball and Jennifer Taschek to excavate and consolidate a number of the structures in the site core and funds to create a museum in efforts to financially benefit the nearby community.

Both Awe and Ball continued their respective research for several years. Ball concluded his research in 1991 thereafter focusing his attention on laboratory analysis and writing. In 1992, Awe published his dissertation on the Preclassic occupation of the site and went on to lead several more field schools at Cahal

Pech. After a brief hiatus during which he focused his attention on caves in the region, Awe once again returned to conduct research at the site of Cahal Pech under the auspices of the Tourism Development Project in 2000 (Audet 2001). Excavation and consolidation of Structure F-2, Structures A-1, A-3, and A-4, as well as the eastern ballcourt were undertaken by the project from 2000-2002 (Audet 2001; Bonor 2002).

The political and social history of Cahal Pech during the Late Classic remains clouded. Joseph Ball and Jennifer Taschek argue that the sites trajectory is tethered to that of Buenavista del Cayo (2004), while Jaime Awe suggests the center is independent (Awe, personal communication 2004). While political affiliations are not equal to marching potsherds across the landscape, ceramics found at Cahal Pech may indicate trade, social, and political affiliations. During the Late Classic, the ceramic assemblage at Cahal Pech is similar to both Baking Pot and Buenavista, not surprising considering these are the two closest large centers in the region. It is interesting to note, however, the ceramic assemblage at Xunantunich is slightly different. There, the ceramic traditions are heavily influenced by Mount Maloney Black bowls and are tied more closely with sites to the west. These bowls are first seen in the Late Classic 2 (LeCount 1996), and while they continue to be produced in the Terminal Classic period, the Late Classic examples are almost never found at Cahal Pech. Awe (personal communication, 2004) suggests that Cahal Pech may be affiliated with the large city of Caracol, located south of the Belize Valley, on the basis of similar ceramic styles and caching practices. He believes that the demise of Caracol early in the

9<sup>th</sup> century also affected Cahal Pech, forcing the elites to abandon the site center before the Terminal Classic period.

While Awe and his colleagues believe that Cahal Pech was an independent center within the Belize Valley, Ball argues that the history of Cahal Pech was inextricably tied to Buenavista. Unfortunately, the growth of the modern town around the site core has led to widespread looting of the site core in the 1980's. Valuable details were most certainly lost, including information that may have been gleaned from the many elite burials. Potential information about political ties, including gifted ceramic vessels or other items that may have been interred with important rulers may be no longer available. Regardless, both Ball and Awe agree that Cahal Pech was not politically dominant over any major center within the Belize Valley.

### ***Baking Pot***

The site of Baking Pot is located on the alluvial banks of the Belize River, relatively equidistant (9.9 km) between Cahal Pech to the west and Blackman Eddy to the east. Named for the large chicle cooking pots abandoned around Group II, the area around the site used to be a location for processing chicle in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. The site is comprised by two distinct groups that are connected by a 200 meter long *sacbe* (Figure 3.5). Group 1, located closest to the river, contains three plazas, including two large temples, two ballcourts, and several long range structures. Group II, located on the southern end of the causeway, likely had a primarily residential function, containing the remains of

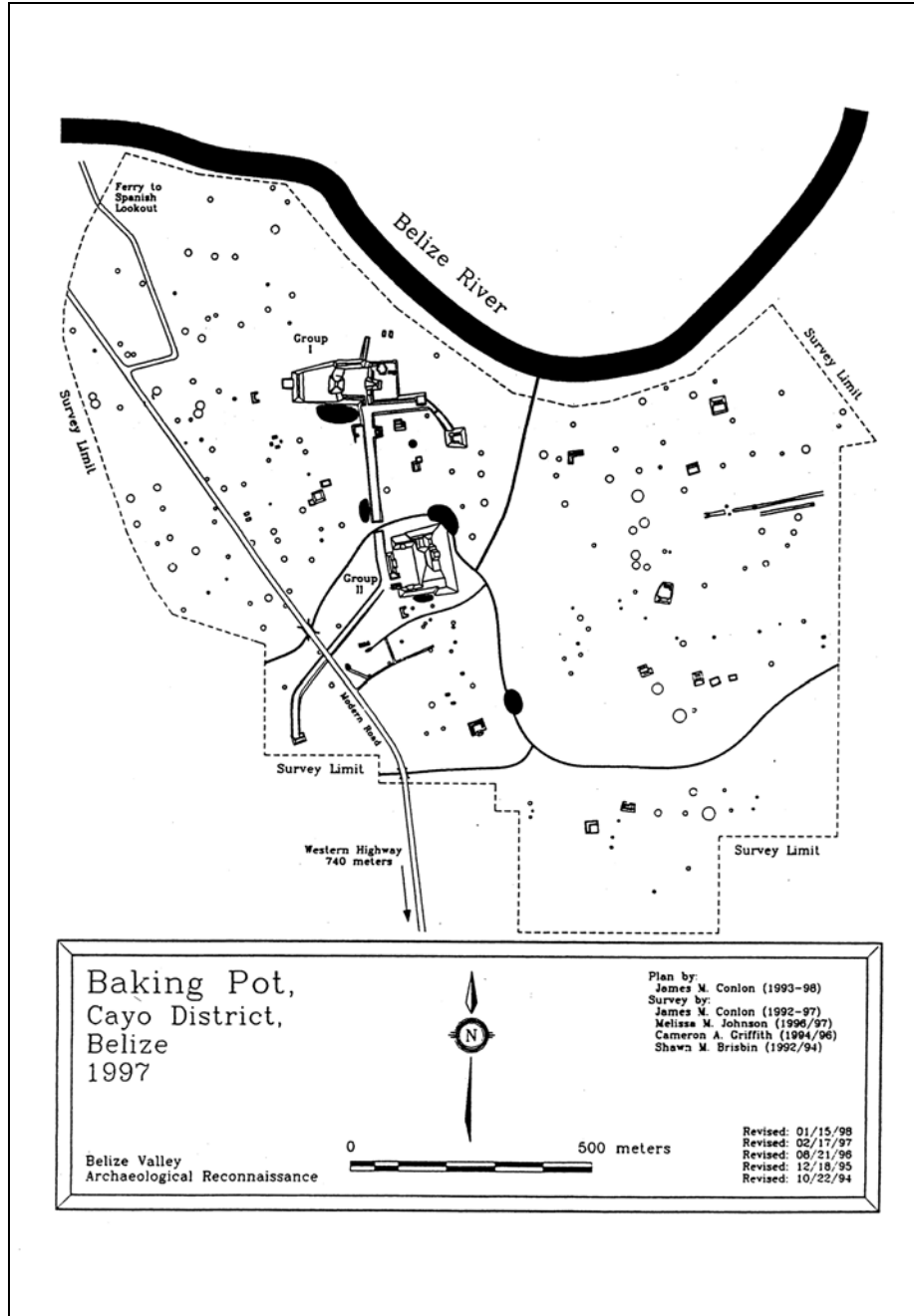


Figure 3.5: Map of Baking Pot (after Conlon 1992)

the royal palace as well as a large temple, numerous range structures, and a single ballcourt. Small housemounds dot the landscape surrounding the site, primarily to the east of the monumental core.

Baking Pot was occupied from the Late Middle Preclassic to the Middle-Late Postclassic period (600 B.C. – A.D. 1300), probably continuously, although it is difficult to determine the nature of the transition between the Terminal Classic inhabitants and those that occupied the site during the Postclassic (Audet 2000, 2002, 2005). This initial period of occupation is significantly later than found at the sites of Cahal Pech or Blackman Eddy, where occupation began around 1100 B.C. (Awe 1992; Garber et al. 2004).

The first significant archaeological investigations at Baking Pot were led by Oliver Ricketson of the Carnegie Institution in 1924. Focusing entirely on Group 1, Ricketson trenched Structure G in an attempt to find cut stone architecture, ceramics to date the site, and grave goods fit for display in an American museum (Ricketson 1931). He also cleared the adjoining structures, M and J, and placed a few small units in Structure B and Structure E. Structure J proved to be a treasure trove for Ricketson, as he uncovered the remains of seven individuals from the platform fill. None were buried with valuable grave goods, but they established Group 1 as a location for numerous interments.

Gordon Willey of Harvard University conducted limited research at Baking Pot during the spring of 1956. Willey's investigations were part of a larger regional (Belize Valley) settlement study with primary interest in the small settlement of Barton Ramie. His research at Baking Pot consisted of four test

excavations for the purpose of “obtaining stratigraphic pottery samples and examining the vertical structure of some of the small, house-type mounds which in outward appearance are identical with those at Barton Ramie” (Willey et al. 1965:305). In contrast to Ricketson’s efforts, Willey was able to propose a chronology for prehistoric Maya occupation of the site. He noted that ceramic remains suggested that the site was occupied from the Late Preclassic Period through the Early Postclassic (300 B.C. – A.D. 1200), with most of the monumental construction occurring during the Late Classic (A.D. 600-800) period (Willey et al. 1965; Gifford 1976). He also postulated that Baking Pot was one of the major centers in the valley, controlling a population of around 2,000 inhabitants that lived in the surrounding alluvial valley bottom (Willey et al. 1965).

Following Willey’s limited excavations at the site, William and Mary Bullard of the Royal Ontario Museum conducted a single season of investigation at Baking Pot in 1961. At this time the Bullard’s focused specific attention on Group II of the site core, excavating on Structure II-A, Structure II-D, and the Group II ballcourt (Bullard and Bullard 1965). They uncovered seven burials and caches from Structure II-A, most dating to the Late Classic period, leading them to suggest that the site reached its apogee during this time. Some of these burials contained polychrome vessels, numerous shell beads, or even a pyrite mirror, indicting the high status of these elite individuals in addition to marking the site as one of the wealthier communities in the region.

Almost thirty years after the Royal Ontario Museum's research, the Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance Project (BVAR) began investigations at Baking Pot in 1992. The project initially focused attention on a small peripheral plazuela group known as Bedran, located about two kilometers west of the site core (Conlon 1993). The primary goals of this operation were to acquire data that could be used for studying the development of the plazuela group and secondly, "provide a basis for intragroup comparison" (Conlon 1993:188). During these investigations, Conlon found evidence for occupation spanning from the Early Classic to the Late Classic period, after which the group was abandoned (Conlon 1993).

Work at Bedran continued during the 1993 field season, and in 1994 the causeway connecting Group I and Group II of the site core was tested in an effort to determine its date of construction. Excavations by Cheetham (1995) suggested that the causeway was built during the Spanish Lookout phase of the Late Classic. In 1995, Conlon tested two mounds flanking the southern entrance of Plaza 2 in Group I to ascertain whether the two structures (Mounds E and F) formed a ballcourt (Conlon 1996).

During the 1996 field season, research focused on the monumental architecture in Plaza 2 of Group 1 (Awe 1997; Aimers 1997) and on another formal patio cluster known as the Atalaya Group (Moore 1997). Since that time, work at Baking Pot has continued, with the focus of excavations shifting from monumental architecture to the study of household archaeology. In 1997 Moore conducted a second season of study at Atalaya (Moore 1999), and during the 1997



-1999 field seasons, Piehl focused on two separate housemounds at the site (Piehl 1998, 1999, 2000). Approximately 300 household platforms have been mapped in the region surrounding Baking Pot, leading researchers to speculate that the Late Classic population was approximately 1680 inhabitants (Poe personal communication).

The majority of BVAR's research was conducted in residential zones located in the sites periphery prior to 2002. Recent research in several temples and the royal palace complex will provide the basis for discussion in the following chapters (Audet and Awe 2003a, b, 2004a, b; Audet 2005). This new research, described in Chapters 5 and 6, will enable us to propose several possible political implications for the position of Baking Pot within the greater sphere of the Belize Valley and within the Maya Lowlands as a whole.

### ***Blackman Eddy***

Located 9.9 kilometers downstream from Baking Pot, in the foothills of the Maya mountains, the site of Blackman Eddy was one of the preeminent centers in the valley during from the Middle Preclassic to the Early Classic periods (Garber, personal communication, 2005). The Classic Period construction covers an area of approximately 1.9 hectares and includes two monumental core areas. While the site core is small in comparison to Xunantunich, Baking Pot and Cahal Pech, it does contain the remains of a single ballcourt, several temples, and four stone monuments (Figure 3.6) (Garber et al. 2004b).

Excavations at Blackman Eddy have been conducted at the site since 1990 by James Garber, who initially was looking to determine the political role of the site relative to the larger centers to the west. His research interests shifted when he discovered the remains of early Middle Formative construction under the Classic period phases of Structure B1 to a study of the earliest occupants in the valley (Garber et al. 2004a and b).

Blackman Eddy is one of the earliest occupied centers in the Belize Valley, with occupation and ritual activity continuing back to the Middle Preclassic period. Continuously occupied until the Terminal Classic period, much of the Classic period occupation was bulldozed during the construction of a water tower in 1999. This modern destruction had two major impacts on archaeological investigations: it limited the ability to learn about Classic period activities and increased access to the earliest levels of occupation by clearing several meters of construction.

A single Classic period elite individual was found at the summit of Structure B1. The contents of his burial, coupled with the elaborate crypt construction suggest that he may have been a Late Classic ruler (Garber et al. 2004b, Garber, personal communication, 2005). This individual was interred within the crypt along with three secondary individuals. Several grave goods, including an Anonal Buff-Polychrome slab-footed cylinder vase, a slate mirror back, carved bone and shell, and a single jade bead were placed with him (Garber et al. 2004b). While two of the shell adornos are intricately carved the bone tube is rather crude and the paucity of these types of artifacts found within the burial

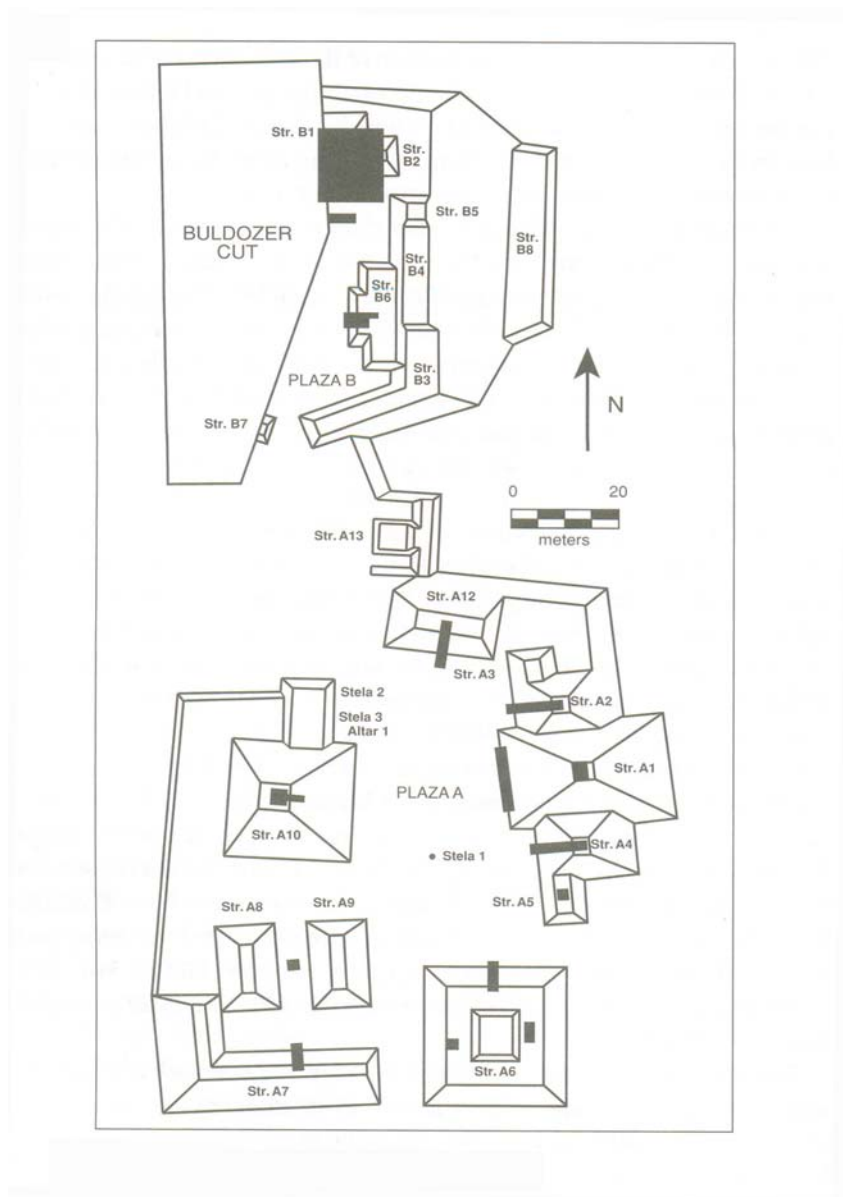


Figure 3.6: Map of Blackman Eddy (After Garber et al. 2004b:fig 4.1)

indicate that this ruler likely had less access to exotics than his neighbors living to the west.

Nevertheless, the complexity of the architecture and the remains of three stela and an altar from Plaza A both indicate that Blackman Eddy was the administrative center for a significant population. Garber suggests that the settlement known as Barton Ramie, located 2 km away on the valley floor, may have been allied with Blackman Eddy. This arrangement is reminiscent of the settlement patterns around Xunantunich, where the nearest cluster of household mounds to the site center is on the valley floor several kilometers away.

James Garber argues that Blackman Eddy's political power was minimal during the Late Classic period. In comparison to other centers in the valley, Blackman Eddy's ceremonial core is small, and with the exception of an Early Classic stela, monuments are plain. Classic period caches are also unimpressive (Garber et al. 2004b). Garber believes that either Baking Pot or Buenavista was the powerhouse within the Belize Valley, and further excavations at these two centers will illuminate the political landscape.

### ***Summary***

As is clear from the summaries above, centers have not been researched equally and investigations have been reported to varying degrees. Despite this, the sheer quantity of information available about the cultural history of these centers is impressive, and does allow for the comparison of material remains with distant polities. It is difficult to firmly establish one of the above-mentioned centers as a clear-cut dominant polity over the others. All are relatively similar in size and population, with variations in burial wealth indicating that some rulers at

Buenavista, Baking Pot, and Cahal Pech enjoyed significant wealth and status during their tenure. It seems unlikely, however, that any one center of 2000 people could completely dominate the valley.

The relationship between this wealth and their center's political position is more difficult to illuminate. Did rulers benefit from affiliation with powerful centers in the Petén? Were these centers just peripheral enough to avoid the wars fought in the core region? Did affiliation with a strong polity ensure peace with neighbors? Alternatively, were tribute demands so arduous that they would drain any surplus wealth away from the dominated polity? The proximity of the Belize Valley to large and powerful centers like Naranjo and Caracol would suggest that an isolationist policy may have been difficult to enact, as often smaller polities had no choice but to associate with those more powerful: but at what cost and benefit? This will be addressed in greater detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

Smaller centers in the valley would also have been affected by political relationships negotiated by the dominant communities in the valley. These minor villages often have no portable wealth or status indicators, lack palace, ballcourt or temple structures, and maintain minimal supporting populations. Their presence between major centers, however, does indicate an important role in the region which can not be ignored.

### **Minor Centers in the Valley**

Minor centers in the Belize Valley include Nohock Ek, Esperanza, Floral Park, Ontario, and Warrie Head. Driver and Garber have noted that these

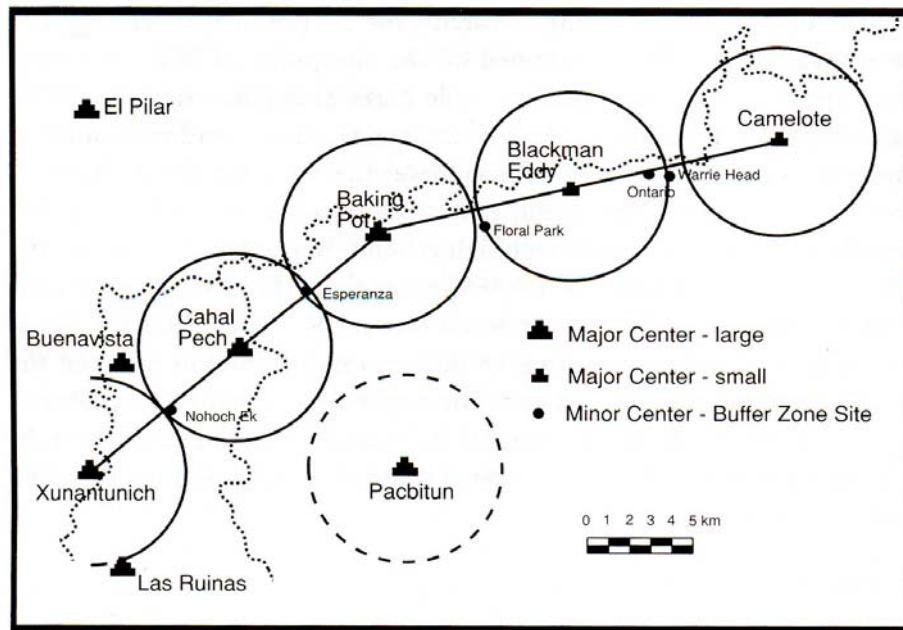


Figure 3.7: The Belize Valley highlighting center locations (after Driver and Garber 2004:fig 4)

communities tend to be located mid-way between two major sites, possibly in areas where territory was contested (Figure 3.7) (Driver and Garber 2004). The predictability of their locations indicates a relationship between major and minor centers; possibly that the larger centers struggled for political and economic control over them (ibid.). If these sites are areas of political contestation, we may be able to determine the extent of territory larger polities (Baking Pot, Xunantunich, Cahal Pech, Buenavista) held, their influence over these minor centers, and how these centers integrated into a larger political landscape.

The identification of small boundary marker centers indicates a degree of centralized political control. Site and population size, access to portable wealth and status objects, and the discovery of monuments, suggests that major centers

were central places: they contained palaces, the remains of important individuals, received tribute for services (ritual performances, protection, etc) from the surrounding population.

While neither comprehensive settlement surveys nor extensive excavation projects have been completed at any of these centers, Driver and Garber believe that these sites exhibit at least small local populations (a few hundred at most) based on both formal and informal surveys (2004). Most of these sites were settled during the Late Classic period, at a time when the population estimates are highest for the Belize Valley (ibid). Driver and Garber suggest the need for boundary makers did not occur until there was significant population pressure, perhaps at a time when conflict between major centers necessitated “lookouts”. Another possibility they suggest, is that lesser elites, who grew in numbers during the Classic period, found they could avoid taxation and/or tribute demands, or who wanted increased status by creating their own centers, fissioned off just outside the political sphere of a major center.

#### *General Characteristics of Minor Centers*

There are at five minor centers dating to the Late Classic period in the Belize Valley: Nohock Ek, Esperanza, Floral Park, Ontario, and Warrie Head, each located at the mid-point between two major sites. Most are located along hilltops; only the site of Ontario is located along the valley floor. Construction in defensible locations could suggest tension and conflict in the region, a common theme throughout the Maya lowlands during the Late and Terminal Classic

periods or that all the good agricultural land was already occupied. These sites have significantly smaller monumental structures than the major centers and the surrounding populations are usually limited to less than a dozen families. The sites of Esperanza, Floral Park, Ontario, and Warrie Head all contain the remains of range-type residential/administrative structures and at least a single temple. Only Nohoch Ek, a cluster of primarily range-type structures, seems to have lacked a temple structure.

Driver and Garber (2004) argue minor centers were buffers between the major centers in the Belize Valley. If they were able to stay outside of a dominant polity's borders, these small communities may have been able to avoid taxation or other tribute responsibilities. These placements may also indicate the extent of the control larger centers during the Late Classic period, given the similarity in size and population between the larger centers.

Driver and Garber present one hypothesis: these small communities were outposts, placed strategically to delimitate border zones. If this were the case, the lack of fortification is surprising. In addition, the number of individuals living at these outposts could hardly have slowed an advancing army. A second hypothesis proposed by Driver and Garber is that these communities were settled by a group of lesser elites who wanted some degree of autonomy from the major centers in the region. If this were the case, I would have expected to see portable trade objects indicating their wealth and status. Surprisingly, there is a lack of status enhancing goods found at these communities, no tombs, and few caches suggesting that they were still tied to larger centers. The construction of a



ballcourt at Ontario is the only clear indication of an elite presence at one of these boundary sites, as ballcourts are believed to have been used primarily by elites. The discovery of one at Ontario, could indicate its use by nearby sites (as suggested by Driver and Garber) or by its own elite inhabitants who were making a statement with the ballcourts construction.

### **Influential Centers outside the Belize Valley**

The majority of archaeologists working in the Belize Valley believe there was some degree of influence and/or control from powerful centers located outside of the study area. Below are details about some of the more prominent centers attributed to this powerful position (and some centers that may have played a role but have not previously been discussed). The fluctuating nature of political hierarchies, particularly in the Maya area, point to ever shifting power dynamics that are difficult to document without written records, however it is clear that some degree of influence was felt by these larger centers.

#### ***Pacbitun***

Located along the southern edge of the Belize Valley, Pacbitun is a large Maya center that was occupied from the Middle Preclassic through Terminal Classic times (Figure 3.8). Meaning, Stones set in the Earth, this center was first recorded by the Department of Archaeology in the 1970s. Positioned between the fertile soils of the Belize Valley to the north and the less fertile pine covered

Maya Mountains to the south, Pacbitun is a relatively large center, comprised of eight monumental courtyards including three palace groups, a large E-Group

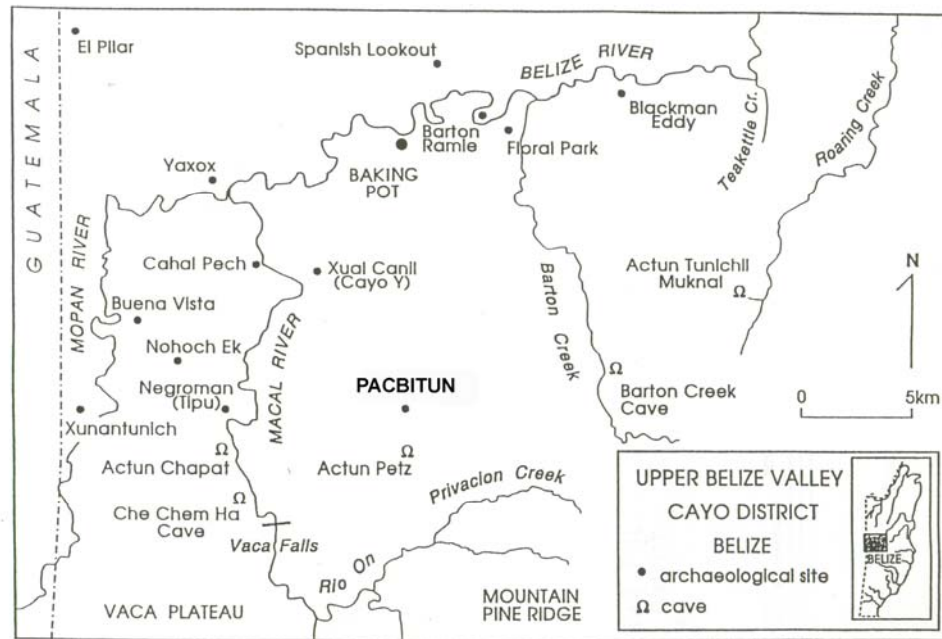


Figure 3.8: Map of the Belize Valley and Surrounding region (Helmke 2004)

complex, and a single ballcourt (Figure 3.9). Twenty monuments have already been discovered, including 13 stela and 7 altars. Two of the altar fragments still retained evidence of carving, while a single stela (Stela 6) displays part of a long count date dating to the Early Classic period (Healy 1990).

Pacbitun was first occupied in the Middle Preclassic period (900-300 B.C) and was eventually abandoned in the Terminal Classic period (around 900 A.D.). Healy argues that at its peak (the Terminal Classic), the site supported a population of between 4,000 and 8,000 inhabitants, at least twice the size of the largest center in the Belize Valley (Healy et al. 2004a). They also believe that the site played a major role in the sociopolitical landscape of the region, either linked

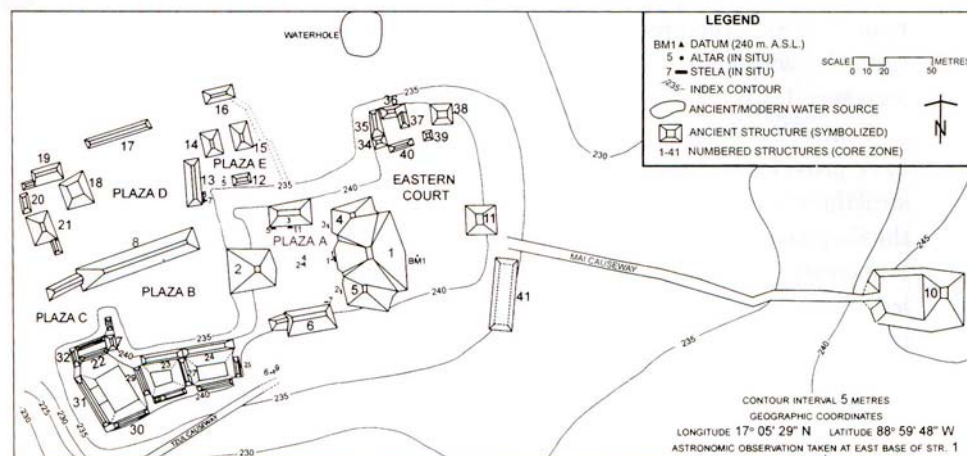


Figure 3.9: Pacbitun Site Map (after Healy et al. 2004:fig 13.1)

with the valley site of Xunantunich or with the large center of Caracol to the south. The ceramic styles found at Pacbitun resemble those from the Belize Valley; however other artifact classes, including slate working and some caches appear more strongly related to Caracol (ibid).

The tomb of a Late Classic elite male was found in the large E-Group temple located in the center of the site. The tomb dates to about A.D. 550-700 and contains numerous exotic and elaborate high status goods including 19 ceramic vessels, 3 jade beads, one pyrite tube, circular shell earflares, a slate disk (possibly a mirror back) and worked bone tubes (possibly panpipes?) (Healy et al. 2004b). This is the most elaborate tomb from the site, suggesting that the person interred was a Late Classic ruler of Pacbitun.

First investigated by Paul Healy in the 1980's, extensive excavations have revealed the periods of occupation, population size, and potential political relationships with nearby communities (Healy et al 2004a). Further studies were

conducted by Jaime Awe, Bobbi Hohman, and Terry Powis during the late 1980's and early 1990's. With the upgrade of the road to Caracol in 2004, access to the center has become easier in the rainy season, potentially creating new interest in working at this large and important center.

An alliance with Caracol during the Late Classic period has been postulated for Pacbitun (Healy et al 2004). The relationship this center had with the Belize Valley is unknown. The large population base, coupled by clear ties to Caracol, suggest that Pacbitun could potentially have been administering control over the valley at particular times (via power derived from Caracol).

### ***El Pilar***

Located 10 kilometers north of the Belize Valley, the site of El Pilar straddles the Belize/Guatemala boarder. It is two to three times larger than the major sites found within the Belize Valley. El Pilar is comprised of three main groups: Xaman Pilar, Nohol Pilar, and Pilar Poniente (Ford 2004a). Ford claims it is equal in size to the large Petén cities of Uaxcatun and Yaxha, however a cursory analysis of site maps and brief visits to these centers would suggest otherwise. The site core contains numerous 10 plazas, at least 10 temples, palace structures, as well as attached obsidian and chert workshops and residential groups (Figure 3.10) (Ford 2004b; 2003). Based on the size and complexity of the site, Anabel Ford claims that El Pilar was the administrative center of the Belize River Valley, controlling the major nearby centers of Xunantunich, Baking Pot, and Cahal Pech.

Excavations have revealed that the site was first occupied in the Middle Preclassic and that construction continued through the Terminal Classic period (900-1000 A.D.) (Ford 2004a). Preservation of the Late and Terminal Classic architecture is amazing, with many of the corbelled arches still standing. Massive construction events began in the Middle Preclassic period, specifically in the Plaza Copal. Large temples were constructed in this plaza in the Late Preclassic, and these temples were only increased in size through the Terminal Classic period. Final construction efforts dating to this late period, however, were incomplete, suggesting a fairly rapid decline and abandonment of the site core.

Investigations at the site begin in 1983 by the BRASS/El Pilar Project directed by Anabel Ford (Ford 2004a). Research has been limited however, by the geographical spread of the site across the boarder into Guatemala. Permits to excavate this section of the site have been difficult to obtain so the majority of research has focused on the larger section of the site located in Belize. A lack of funds to ensure stabilization has hindered Ford's interest in working in the site core. For the past several years she has collaborated with scholars from Grinnell University in areas outside the site core, including domestic and workshop platforms (Ford 2003).

Unfortunately, a large number of the structures at El Pilar have been looted, and this, coupled with the limited nature of the excavations conducted in the site core, makes it difficult to determine the nature of its political interaction with the sites in the Belize Valley. The large size of the monumental core and surrounding population does support the hypothesis that El Pilar was an important

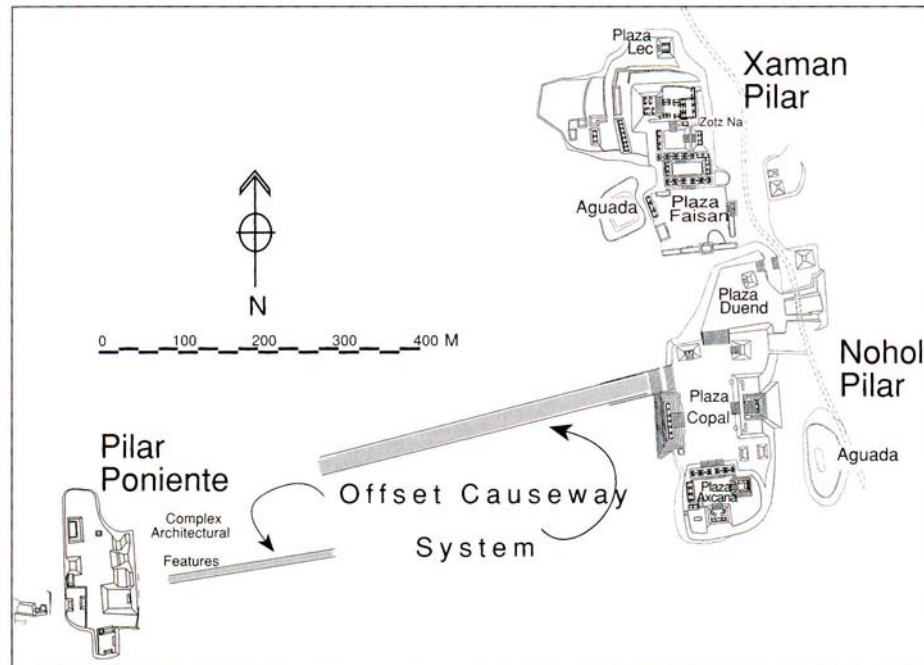


Figure 3.10: Map of El Pilar (after Ford 2004a:fig 15.2)

polity in the region. Naranjo is about the same distance from El Pilar as Buenavista or Xunantunich (the latter two being slightly closer), and contains larger temples, extensive glyphic material, and more elaborate architecture than these centers. Their proximity would suggest close ties were maintained by the elites of these communities, and that political relationships would have been negotiated among all centers.

### *Caracol*

Located on the Vaca plateau adjacent to the Maya Mountains, the site of Caracol is one of the largest and most politically dominant Classic Period Maya centers (Figure 3.11). Well known from epigraphic information detailing its

conflicts with Tikal, Calakmul, Naranjo, Ukanal and others, the archaeological data recovered from more than 19 seasons of excavation are equally intriguing. The site core is extensive; containing over 667 structures arranged around 128 plazas in an area just over 2.26km<sup>2</sup>. Population estimates compiled by Chase and Chase for this large center are high: they argue that at least 100,000 people inhabited Caracol during the Late Classic period, which is well above the 40,000-60,000 people estimated for the site of Tikal (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004, 2002, 2001, 1992, 1987; D. Chase and A. Chase 1997). While the Tikal numbers may be underestimated, and those at Caracol slightly inflated, it is clear that Caracol was an important political player during the Late Classic period in the Maya lowlands.

The ceremonial core region is dominated by 4 main groups: the South Acropolis, Group A, the Central Acropolis, and Group B. The largest structure, Caana, raises 140 feet from the plaza floor and supports three small temples at the summit. Directly across the plaza is a large triadic structure. Other large temples are found in Group A, while the South Acropolis and plaza located east of the B-Group are primarily residential in nature. Two ballcourts can be found in the site center, one located near Caana and one adjacent to Group A.

Caracol was first settled between the years 600 – 900 B.C. Major construction, however, appears to have begun around A.D. 70, when Structure A-6-1<sup>st</sup> was consecrated. The Caracol Royal dynasty was officially founded in A.D. 331 and a building boom commenced throughout the site center. The Middle and Late Classic periods were times of expansion and conflict for the Caracol polity,

with considerable growth following the wars with Naranjo from A.D. 626-636. The last recorded date at Caracol is found on Stela 10 (A.D. 859) and by A.D. 1050 the site core was completely abandoned.

Extensive excavations have been conducted at the site of Caracol. In 1951 Linton Satterthwaite of the University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania spent two seasons searching for monuments and their associated tombs as well as mapping the site center. In 1956 and 1957, A.H. Anderson also conducted limited excavations of the site, discovering the remains of numerous tombs as well as previously undiscovered stela. The first long term research at the site began in 1985 when Arlen and Diane Chase decided to begin their investigations (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987). Their research has revealed Caracol was a densely populated and vibrant city, which actively waged war on surrounding communities to increase the polity's size and strength. These conflicts provided them with vast number of conquered cities in when successful but also led to destructive effects during periods of defeat (*ibid.*). Caracol was long under the control of Tikal, until, in A.D. 562, Calakmul is suspected to have defeated Tikal in battle. This victory freed Caracol from the Tikal's grip and led to a period of political independence during which Caracol thrived (Martin and Grube 2000). The same battle has been interpreted somewhat differently by Arlen and Diane Chase who argue instead that Caracol initiated this battle, not Calakmul, freeing themselves from Tikal's authority (Chase 1992).



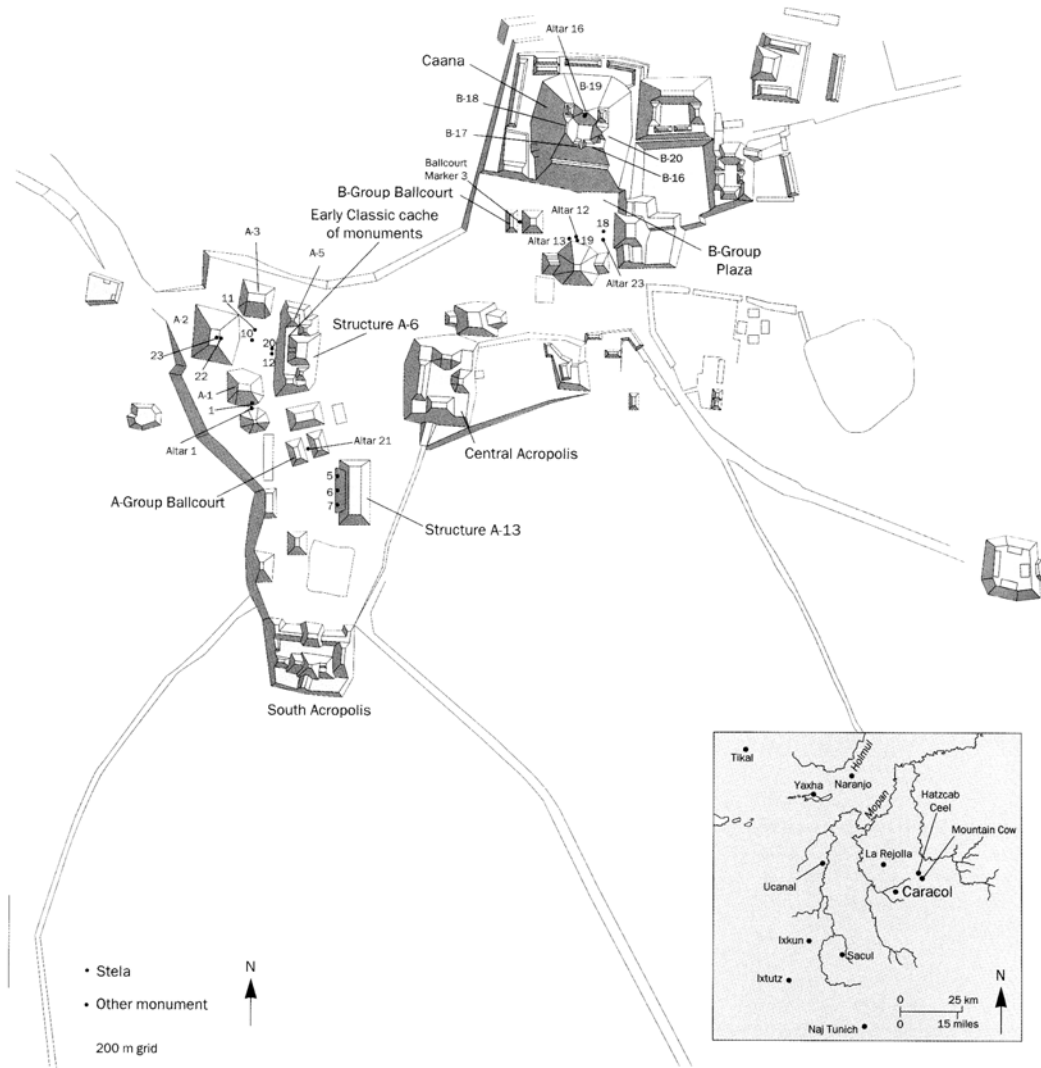


Figure 3.11: Map of Caracol (after Martin and Grube 2000: 84)

Opinions on Caracol's involvement in the defeat of Naranjo in 631 differ. Arlen Chase believes Caracol was the dominant proponent who subsequently controlled Naranjo, while Martin and Grube believe that Naranjo was subjugated under Calakmul (2000:92). Throughout the early part of the Late Classic period, Lord K'an II refers to Calakmul and the battles, rituals, and accessions performed

by numerous rulers. The longest and most elaborate record of these events is found in the remains of a hieroglyphic stairway, originally made at Caracol, and found in disarray at Naranjo. Arlen Chase interprets this discovery as evidence for Caracol conquest and control; however Martin and Grube believe that instead it reflects a Naranjo pillaging event at Caracol and the removal of this staircase back to Naranjo as a statement of defiance.

Regardless, the richness of material wealth and growth of the city does not seem significantly affected by this apparent loss of political stature. Arlen Chase notes that a significant number of middle class individuals begin to appear in the archaeological record at Caracol during the Late Classic period, and that items that previously were limited to discovery in tombs of elite rulers were now much more wide-spread (1992). He also notes the appearance of tomb interments in a large percentage of households, coupled with the appearance of specially made ceramic cache vessels something that is not found throughout the Maya region.

An intricate series of causeways link the center of Caracol to more peripheral locals, including sites that were once independent during the Preclassic and Early Classic periods. This consolidation of power within the region is something that Arlen Chase believes is happening throughout the Maya lowlands in the Late Classic period (2004). He sees many of the smaller, once independent centers as falling under the political sway of larger and more powerful cities. Chase argues that when Caracol defeated Naranjo in 631 they also gained control over the Belize Valley, although he does not go so far as to speculate how this control was manifested or the effects it would have had over the region in

question. In any event, control over Naranjo, and the Belize Valley, would have ended within 50 years, when Naranjo fought back and regained their independence.

From A.D. 680- 798 the hieroglyphic records at Caracol are extremely limited. Only a single monument was erected (in A.D. 702) and none of the rulers' names are known until A.D. 798 when K'inich Joy K'awiil comes to power. It is thought that Caracol experiences a renaissance until around 830 A.D. when the changing nature of political and social customs of the Maya began to affect the prosperity of the elite. Chase and Chase believe that the site was abandoned violently, arguing that the body of an unburied infant and evidence of burning on structures indicates warfare and pillaging. In contrast, Jaime Awe, who worked at the site from 2001-2004 directing consolidation of the largest structures, believes that there is no evidence for warfare or any kind of violent end for the city, citing a lack of evidence for burning on *Ca'ana* and all the structures in Group A (Awe personal communication 2003). Regardless of the nature of its demise, the last written record from Caracol dates to 859 A.D. and the "crudity of carving and abbreviated chronology distinguish it from true Classic traditions" (Martin and Grube 2000:99).

### ***Naranjo***

The site of Naranjo is most widely attributed by archaeologists as playing a politically dominating role over the smaller centers in the Belize River Valley

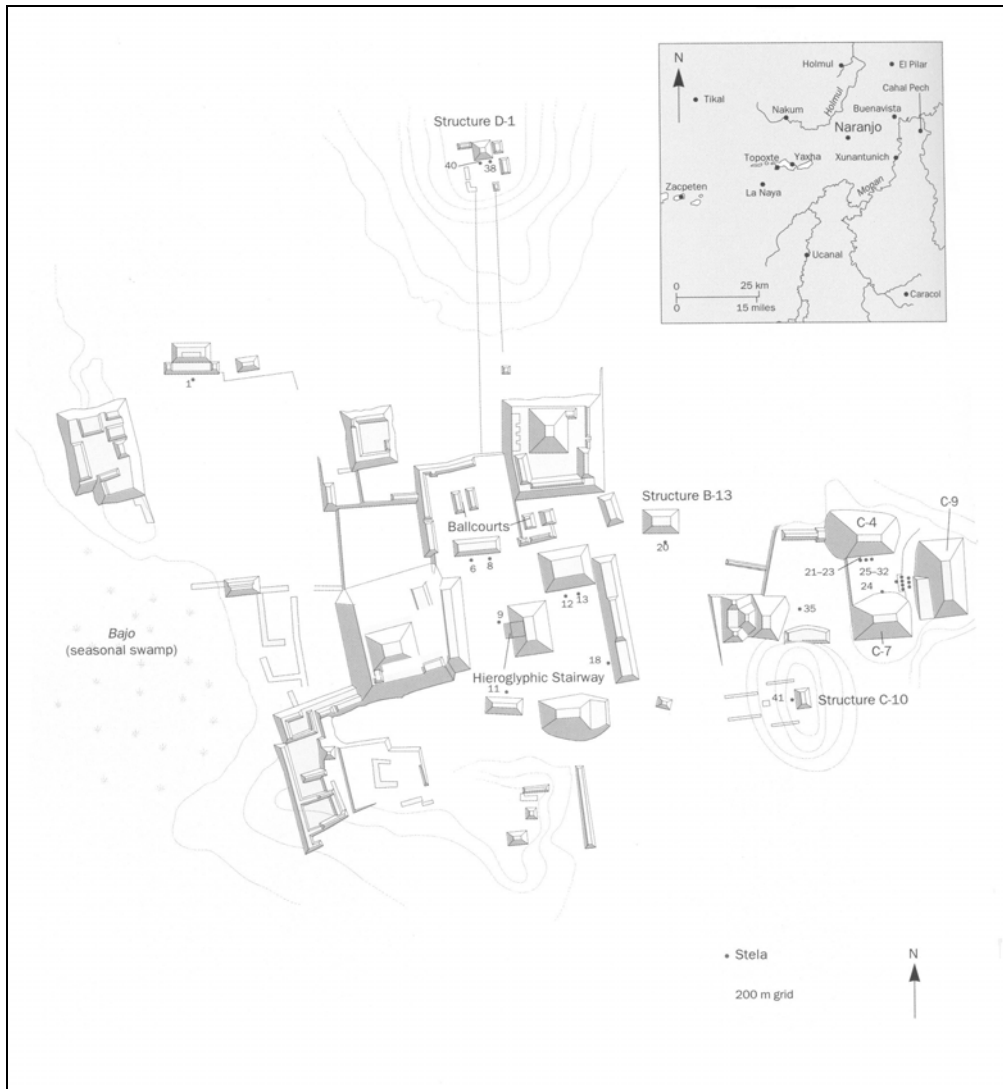


Figure 3.12: Map of Naranjo (After Martin and Grube 2000:68)

for the majority of the Late Classic period. The evidence for this is largely based on epigraphy, size and location, and ceramic vessels. Despite the lack of epigraphic evidence specifically detailing political relationships with this region, Naranjo's propensity for warfare and domination during the Late Classic period supports the possibility.

Naranjo is located only 13 km from Xunantunich and Buenavista, just across the boarder into Guatemala (Figure 3.12). The site is large, significantly larger than those found in the Belize Valley. At least 15 monumental plazas are located within the core, including two ballcourts, several temples and a causeway terminus group. Forty-two monuments have been found in the monumental core area, in addition to a hieroglyphic staircase, located on a temple in the main courtyard. Excavations at the site center have revealed a long occupation at the center. The earliest occupation dates to the Middle Preclassic and continues until the Terminal Classic period. Early occupation has been detected below the West, Central and Triadic palaces. In addition, superficial evidence of cave and chultun use from this period has also been encountered (Fialko 2004). Much of the Early Classic occupation at Naranjo was destroyed prior to Late Classic activity at the site, but can still be found below Late Classic modifications of Structures C-9 and B-8.

In the Late Classic period, after resolution of the Naranjo-Caracol conflict, construction of the Central Acropolis continued in earnest. Construction also continued in the palace B-19, and a new version of B-18 was created. Temples were increased in height (some more than 13 meters in a single effort) and new platforms were constructed. By the Terminal Classic period, most of the occupation was reduced to west and southeast sections of the city before the center was eventually abandoned (Fialko 2004, 2003).

Epigraphic evidence allows for a nuanced insight into the political history of Naranjo. The site was embroiled in the politics of the Late Classic period, and

was at war with almost every major player at one time or another. From at least A.D. 546 to 615 the site existed peacefully subordinate to Calakmul during the reign of Aj Wosal. With his death, however, came a change in the political climate and the new ruler of Naranjo decided to take on their powerful overseer as well as Caracol. After their defeat at the hands of both polities (according to A. Chase [2004] Caracol won the battle, according to Martin and Grube [2000] Calakmul was the likely perpetrator with help from Caracol), the site was battered and fell into disarray. From this point (A.D. 631) A. Chase believes that Naranjo fell under the authority of Caracol while Martin and Grube argue for subservience to Calakmul once again (A. Chase 2004).

In 680 A.D. Naranjo attacked Caracol and at least wins the first attack (as noted on a monument at Caracol) (Martin and Grube 2000). Martin and Grube note however, that stela of these type found at the defeated site usually go on to refer to retribution of some kind, and perhaps that section of the monument has yet to be found (ibid). In 688 A.D. K'ak Tiliw Cha Chack was born to Lady Six Sky (daughter of a Dos Pilas ruler sent to Naranjo). He eventually would take the throne in 693 (at the age of 5), his accession under the auspices of Calakmul. At this time, Naranjo begins its wide scale attacks on many cities throughout the Petén, including Tikal, Bital, and Ucanal. The location of Bital is unknown, but it is possible it was one of the Belize Valley communities. If attacks were not undertaken towards Belize Valley centers, it is possible that they were either a) content to not rebel against such a powerful overlord, b) rebelled but there is not record of the events, or c) that the sites of the Belize Valley were not under the

authority of the valley until Xunantunich feels their assertion at the end of the Late Classic period. As larger centers tend to not mention weaker ones in their records, it is not unusual that Naranjo did not record interactions among them.

In 744 A.D. Naranjo was defeated once again by the powerful city of Tikal. By 780 A.D. Naranjo may have regained their independence but by 830 A.D. the site core was all but abandoned, and evidence for construction and monument making ceased (Fialko 2004). Centers in the Belize Valley remain occupied for a few more years, without the influence of these abandoned centers.

### **Summary**

The Belize Valley is constituted of four similarly sized centers, all of which contain the remains of elites who had access to status enhancing objects and the labor of their constituents. Relationships must have existed with powerful centers to the west and south: the differences in size, political clout, military control, and populations among these lowland centers were enormous. Evidence of political gifting, in the form of ceramic vessels from Naranjo can be documented at Buenavista and Baking Pot (as described in Chapters 5 and 6). Other elite wares come from the area around Caracol or other sites in the Petén. Despite our lack of glyphic material, the archaeological record provides significant clues of ancient interactions.

The following two chapters provide new details about the cultural history of the study area. Chapter 4 details new findings at the site of Xunantunich and Cahal Pech while Chapter 5 provides new information about excavations at

Baking Pot. All of this new data helps to illuminate the importance and ever changing relationships between these ancient cities. These two chapters include details of recent excavations of several temples, palace structures, and household platforms. This discovery of several elite interments at both sites, in addition to dozens of ritual deposits will allow the social and political trajectory of each site to be reinterpreted and better integrated into our understanding of events that occurred in this region during the Late and Terminal Classic periods of ancient Maya history.



## CHAPTER IV

### A SUMMARY OF EXCAVATIONS AT XUNANTUNICH AND CAHAL PECH

#### **Introduction**

Data discovered at Cahal Pech and Xunantunich is directly pertinent to understanding the political organization in the study area. Burials, caches, ceramic material, and architecture all reflect the social and political networks created and maintained by elites. These ties, expressed by the material remains, include temples at Xunantunich mimicking distant architectural styles at Narnajo and Caracol, ceramics at Cahal Pech similar to elite ware at Buenavista del Cayo and Baking Pot, and limited burial wealth at Xunantunich contrasting with ornate tombs throughout the study area. Excavation results have also yielded information about intense construction efforts in the site centers, periods of limited construction and/or caching, and ritual activity after elite abandonment. This information is valuable when reconstructing the history of the region and allows for the creation of a framework from which to compare to other centers in the Maya lowlands (see chronological chart- Table 4.1).

Data from this and the following two chapters are interpreted using models presented in Chapters 1 and 2. The information recovered from the study area is viewed from the perspective of its political importance in a region peripheral to the core polities of the Petén. The framework of these models permits a clearer image of interactions between among communities and regions.

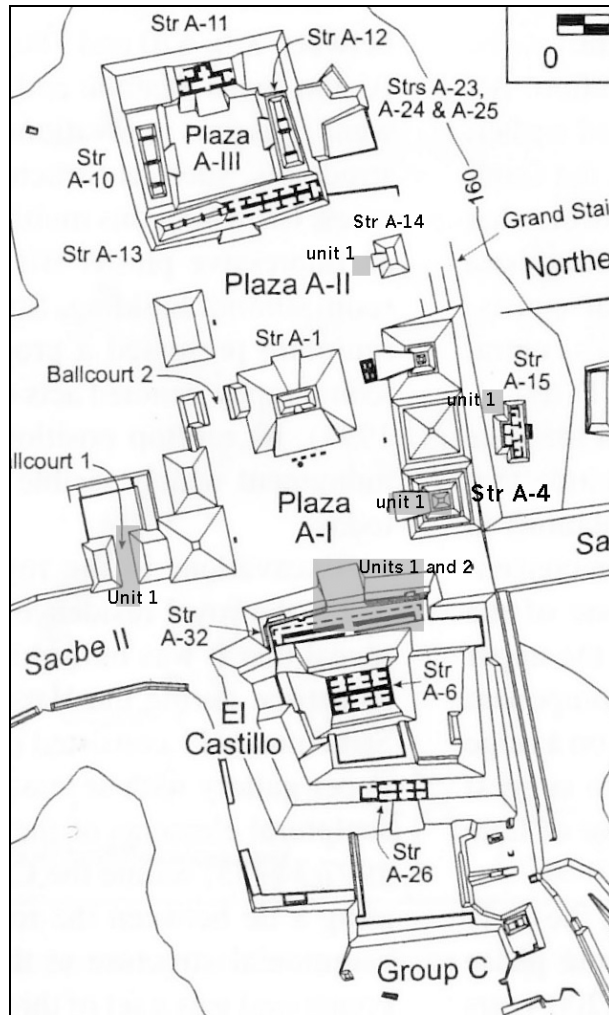
Date A.D.	Time Period	Belize Valley Ceramic Complex	Xunantunich Ceramic Complex
580-680	Late Classic 1	Tiger Run	Benque Viejo IIIa
680-800	Late Classic 2	Spanish Lookout	Benque Viejo IIIb
800-900	Terminal Classic	Spanish Lookout	Benque Viejo IV

*Table 4.1: Time periods and Associated Ceramic Complexes*

This chapter is divided into two main sections: a detailing of data discovered at Xunantunich followed by Cahal Pech. Excavations are discussed structure by structure followed by a discussion of their importance.

### **Xunantunich**

In the fall of 2000 the Tourism Development Project (TDP), under the auspicious of the Ministry of Tourism, Belize, began the excavation and consolidation of a number of structures at Xunantunich (Figure 4.1). The most prominent structures were chosen for restoration, including the main temple/palace building (El Castillo or A-6), an elite residential or palatial structure (A-11), Ballcourt 1, and two temples (A-4 and A-14). The work at Xunantunich was supervised by Juan Luis Bonor, a Spanish archaeologist living in Belize, and myself. Together we oversaw excavations, production of plans and profiles (along with help from Jorge Can), and made decisions regarding the consolidation of these monumental structures. Excavations were conducted from November 2000-May 2001 with a crew of 50-70 excavation assistants from San Jose Succotz, San



*Figure 4.1: Map of Xunantunich (after Leventhal and Ashmore 2004: 10.1)*

Ignacio, and Benque Viejo. Excavation units were placed along the central axis of structures, and all fill material was sorted by a ¼ “ wire screen.



*Figure 4.2: Structure A-4 (photo by Author)*

#### *Excavations of Structure A-4*

Investigation of Structure A-4 focused on both the base and top of the platform (Figure 4.2). Excavations at the base of the structure yielded a series of small platforms attached to Structure A-4 while excavations at the summit uncovered a series of terminal phase modifications, exposed the penultimate superstructure, and probed within the fill of this earlier construction phase.

#### *Excavations at the base of A-4*

Excavations at the base of A-4 yielded evidence of two low platforms abutting the front of A-4 (Figure 4.2). These platforms were previously excavated, in part, by the Xunantunich Archaeological Project (Leventhal 1994). Two units

were placed into the platforms. Unit 1 revealed three levels of construction in the plaza area, all dating to the Late Classic period. Unit 2 yielded a series of three broken floors followed by the discovery Burial 1 (Figure 4.3). No distinct pit was discernable surrounding this male individual. He was found just above bedrock, head to the north, facing west, with his legs bent back so his feet rested around his pelvis. The position of the skeleton suggests that this person may have been bound when placed in the grave or simply that he was awkwardly placed in a small pit. The discovery of a miniature black vessel on the left ulna, however, suggests that this individual was not unceremoniously dumped, but rather was a person of some status within the community. Little more can be said about him, as no other artifacts were interred within the grave. Directly under the skeleton we discovered bedrock, 1.5 meters from the surface.



*Figure 4.3: Burial 1 at the base of Structure A-4 (photo by author)*

#### *Excavations at the Summit of A-4*

Unit 1 was placed in the center of the building, aligned with the stela below and Structure A-7 across the plaza. The unit was 4x4 meters, extending from the back wall on the east to the last bit of preserved plaster on the terminal phase floor on the west. Excavations were conducted at the summit of A-4 to expose the platform and to investigate previous phases of construction. The terminal phase floor continued across the entire length of the excavation unit. When the collapse was cleared off the terminal phase floor seven whole vessels were found sitting directly on top of it. Five were small bowls and two were “frying pan” type vessels. The frying pans were found face down, while the bowls were placed face up (Figure 4.4).





*Figure 4.4: Frying Pan style vessels found on Structure A-4 (photo by author)*

These vessels were just slightly south of the midline of the building near the back wall. Located in association with these vessels was a large stucco fragment, perhaps the part of an old stucco frieze, which had been plastered into the floor. Directly in front of this stucco object we discovered a large hole (60cm wide x 70 cm long) in the plaster floor.

Inside the hole located in the bench we discovered four skulls, one complete pelvis, one set of vertebrae, four ulnas (from at least three different people), two radii (both right), 3 humerii (two left, one right), four femurs (two right, two left), three patellas (one right, two left), four tibias (two right, two left), three fibulas (two right, one left), one right scapula, and three clavicles (Figure 4.5. No grave goods were discovered in association with these remains.



*Figure 4.5 Pit of Human Remains at the summit of Structure A-4 at Xunantunich (photo by author)*

At least one juvenile individual was represented and elements from five adults. Only one individual was complete when interred. This cache was never sealed with a plaster floor, suggesting its coeval date with the whole vessels and stucco object placed on top of the terminal phase floor.

Excavations along the western half of the unit, in front of the bench, continued through four closely spaced plaster floors before discovering a series of caches clustered throughout the fill surrounded by the remains of burnt organic material. These four deposits were located approximately 30-70cm below the sixth floor, primarily on the southern side of the unit. Cache 1 was located on the southern edge of the unit. It contained five red chert eccentrics chipped into the form of C's and two spiny oyster shells (Figure 4.6). Cache 2 was located close to the bench and also contained five red chert eccentrics in the form of C's. Cache 3, located 20cm west of Cache 2, and contained eleven chert eccentrics in various shapes and one jade bead (Figure 4.7). Cache 4 was comprised primarily of ceramic vessels, including at least 5 ceramic incensarios (Figure 4.8), two partially complete Benque Viejo polychrome vases, and a number of Mount Maloney Black bowls.

Excavations continued in the area below the bench as well as below the floor that lay in front of it. The tops of two vaulted rooms from the penultimate structure were discovered only 1.2 meters below the terminal phase surface (Figure 4.9).





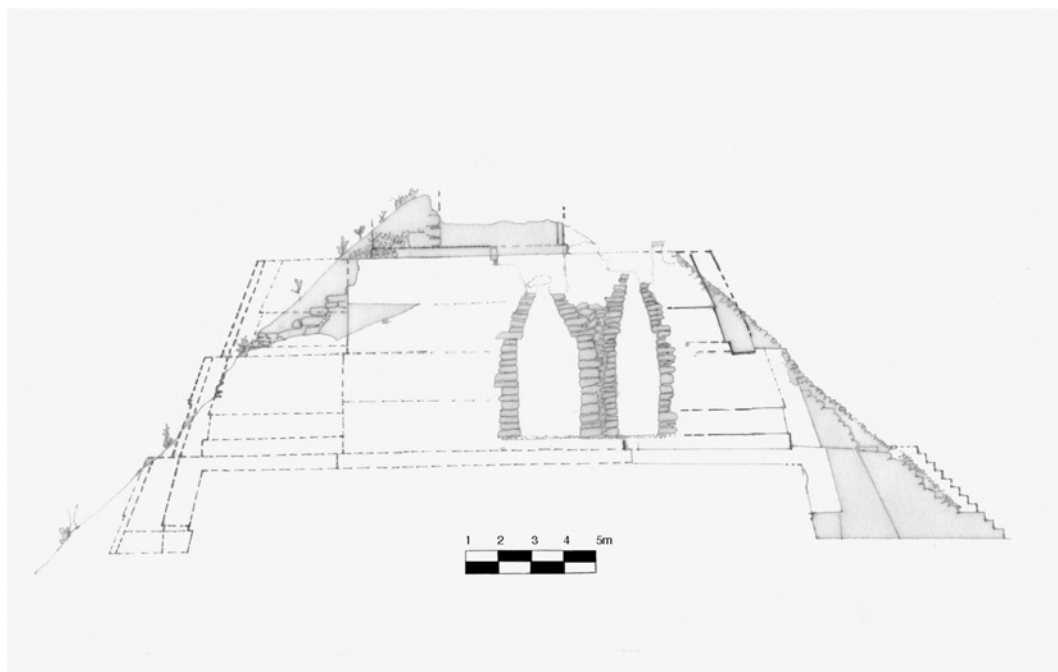
*Figure 4.6: Cache with Shells and Chert Eccentrics (photo by author)*



*Figure 4.7: Cache with Chert Eccentrics and Jade Bead (photo by author)*



*Figure 4.8: Incensario from Structure A-4 (height 38 cm) (photo by author)*



*Figure 4.9: Profile of Structure A-4 (Facing South)(Jorge Can -courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology)*

The preservation of the front room (to the west) was poor. Many of the vault stones in the front room were removed while the vault in the back room remained intact. Both rooms were filled with large limestone blocks and white marl. We were able to clear the debris from Room 1 (the eastern room) enough to expose the doorway to Room 2, and a 3 meter area on the floor for another excavation unit. Unfortunately, Room 2 was not stable because the vault stones were removed in antiquity and we were forced to abandon our excavations.

We placed our last excavation unit into the penultimate structure into the floor of Room 1. The unit was 1.2 meters wide by 2.4 meters long, limited primarily by the width of the room and the length of area we were able to clear. Approximately 30 cm below the floor of the penultimate structure (5.4 meters

below floor one) we uncovered a burnt layer that covered a cache and ultimately a burial. This cache contained numerous artifact clusters that were given letters for

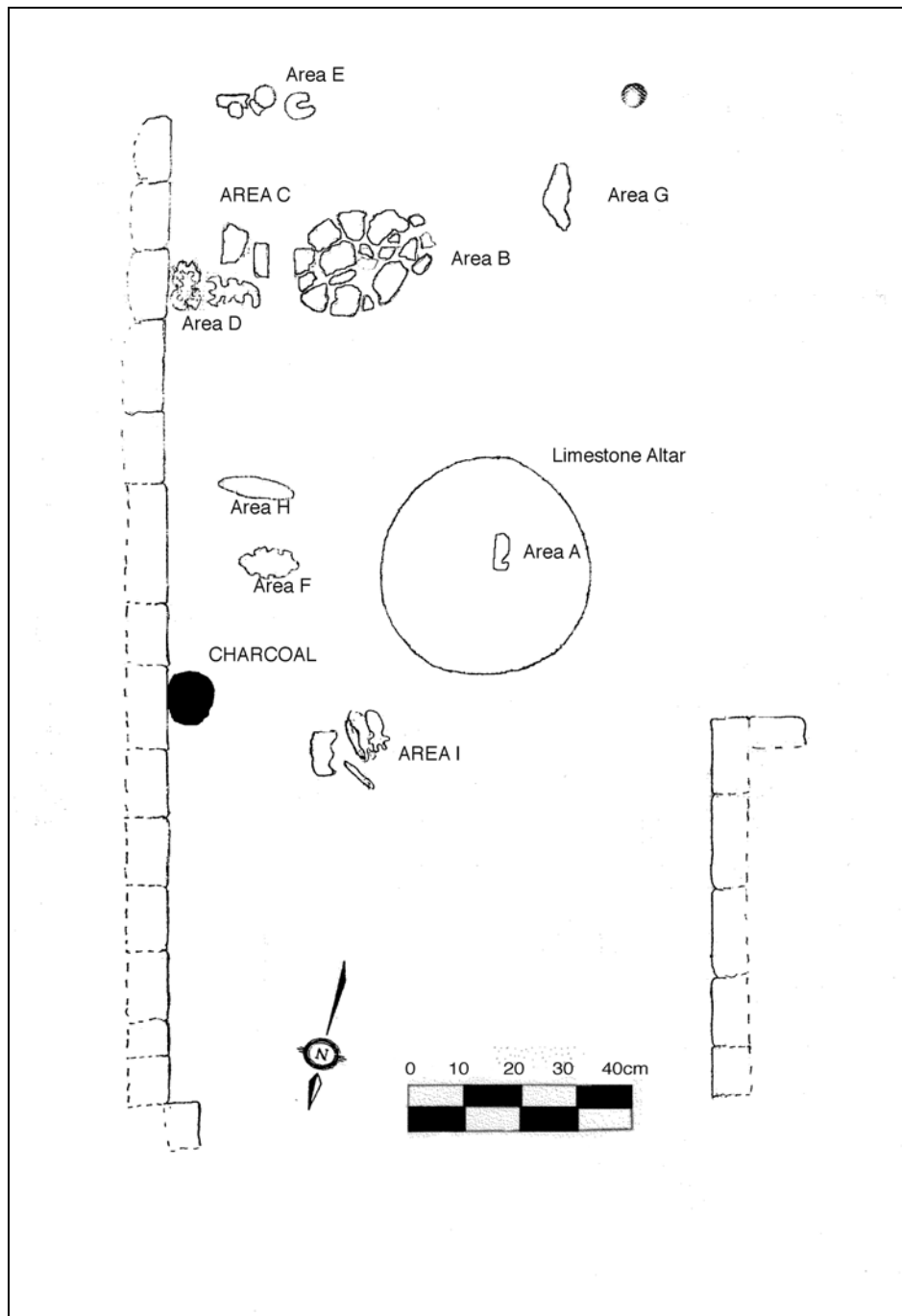
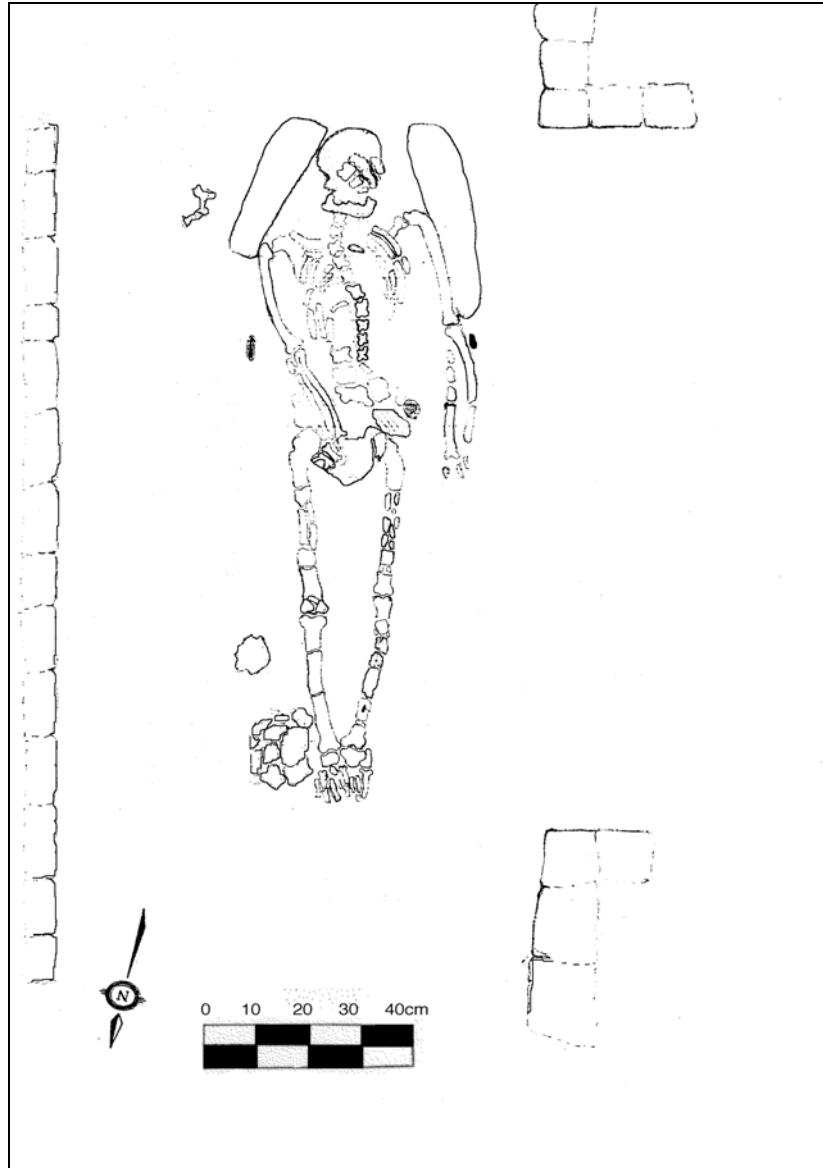


Figure 4.10: Artifacts found above Burial 1 (Drawn by author)



*Figure 4.11: Plan of Burial 1(Drawn by author)*

easy reference (Figure 4.10). Area A is located on a round limestone altar-type stone and contained one obsidian eccentric (scorpion). Area B contained the remains of two Saturday Creek Polychrome dishes; Area C contained three clear chert eccentrics; Area D contained one obsidian eccentric, one chert eccentric, and one chert blade; Area E contained one obsidian core, one obsidian eccentric, and one chert eccentric; Area F contained one chert eccentric; Area G contained one chert eccentric; Area H contained a limestone biface; and Area I contained two obsidian eccentrics, one quartz eccentric, and one chert blade; Finally, Area J contained six chert eccentrics sprinkled with cinnabar.

As we dug under the round limestone altar stone we discovered the feet of a human skeleton. We removed the stones on top of the burial to discover a single adult individual lying extended on his back, head to the south, facing up (Figure 4.11). Numerous grave goods adorned the body including more fragments of the same two polychrome vessels that were found above the cyst. Also in the grave were six chert eccentrics located over the individuals' pelvis, a red chert eccentric 20 cm west of the right knee, three obsidian blades, two jade beads near the skull, and one obsidian core. The bones and a number of the eccentrics were found sprinkled with cinnabar.

The location of this burial within one of the primary temples on the eastern side of the main plaza, coupled with the grave goods indicates his high status. At other sites in the Belize Valley, axial interments located in main temples often include the remains of deceased rulers (Audet and Awe 2004; Awe 1992; Garber 2004). This individual represents the most elaborate burial yet found



at Xunantunich, and the limited nature of elite grave goods contrasts strongly with the monumental nature of the site-core architecture. Burials from similar locations at Baking Pot and Cahal Pech are much more ornate. Jade objects, complete polychrome vessels, and elaborately carved spondylus shells characterize these interments. The stark contrast between this elite interment from Xunantunich and those from other sites in the region does leave many questions unanswered. It is possible that rich tombs from Xunantunich have simply yet to be found, given the large size of the structures. However, if these tombs are not located at Xunantunich, the most obvious question is why?



*Figure 4.12: Structure A-6 (El Castillo) from Structure A-3 (Photo by author)*

*Structure A-6 (El Castillo)*

Structure A-6 is the focal point of the site for most tourists (Figure 4.12). It is the biggest structure at Xunantunich, standing over 130 feet tall. The TDP set out to excavate and consolidate the central staircase and 4 meters of the terraces on each side. We also excavated and conserved the rooms located on the first platform. Richard Leventhal supervised previous excavations of the western half of the staircase and several of the rooms at the summit, but *in situ* artifacts were located on the upper terraces, on the eastern half of the staircase, and within the rooms on the lower platform.

The ceramic sherds primarily included dozens of stacked Mount Maloney Black bowl fragments, dating from the Late to Terminal Classic period, concentrated on the upper western terraces. None of the vessels were found intact, but most were at least ¼- ½ complete. Mount Maloney vessels were extremely common at Xunantunich, contrasting with their relative scarcity at centers within the eastern parts of the Belize Valley, including Cahal Pech and Baking Pot.

Two limestone carved faces were found among the flat wall stones. The faces were placed on their side, although they would not have been visible when the structure was occupied. Both blocks were covered with a layer of stucco, which eroded when we exposed it to the elements. The first carved block is representative of the Sun God or Kinich Ahau (Figure 4.13). It was found on the third western terrace, with the head lying on its right side. It was covered in stucco when first excavated and not until a heavy rain halted excavations did we





*Figure 4.13: Face found on Western Terrace of Structure A-6  
(approx length 34 cm) (photo by author)*

discover the carving. The second carved stone is a human face. The second carved block was located along the back wall of the lower platform. Both stones were removed from their respective locations, and plaster replicas were put in their places.

The massive central staircase that rose to the first platform contained at least two modifications. The terminal phase staircase consisted of a number of small limestone blocks plastered together to create each large step. The penultimate staircase was made of large limestone blocks of 26-30 cm tall and 40-60 cm wide. Twenty-six stairs lead to the lowest platform where 13 doorways lead into a series of transverse rooms. Surprisingly, despite the fact that the walls

rose over 7 feet tall in some places, these rooms were not vaulted. There were also few benches found within these hallways, suggesting this area was not used as residential quarters or for meeting areas. A staircase leading up to the second platform was discovered on the eastern side of the platform against the back wall. The staircase ascends to the east, leading to another series of unvaulted rooms excavated by the Xunantunich Archaeology Project in the 1990's. While we did no further excavation on El Castillo, it is worth noting the spectacular view found from the highest platform. Comprised of two stories of vaulted rooms, the top platform consists of small rooms complete with benches.

This structure likely functioned as an administrative and residential compound during the Late and Terminal Classic period. The number of rooms, benches, and hallways would have yielded space for a variety of activities that could have included administrative, ritual, and residential. Rituals could have been conducted near the summit of the structure, allowing those from far away to witness these activities. Lower rooms with benches could have been used as residential structures (perhaps in conjunction with those buildings in Plaza III) as well as meeting rooms for important elites.

The architectural style of this structure is similar to Ca'ana at Caracol and Structure 2 at Calakmul. These large acropolises contained living quarters, ritual platforms, and administrative sections. The discovery of a similar structure at Xunantunich has been used by the XAP members to suggest political ties with Calakmul (and subsequently Naranja as it was under the control of Calakmul). If elites were mimicking the architectural styles of distant and powerful polities, the

message to surrounding communities in the Belize Valley would have been clear: Xunantunich is associated with powerful allies.

#### *Structure A-14*

During the 1920's Dr. Gann blew the top of the building apart with dynamite in a successful search of artifacts worthy of display in the British Museum (Awe, personal communication, 2002). Excavations by the TDP include one unit placed in the stairs, and a second was placed in the plaza directly in front of the lowest step. The unit in the staircase yielded nothing aside from stone fill, but the unit in front of the staircase yielded two caches. The caches were located approximately 65 cm from the modern plaza surface and they are approximately 30 cm apart. Both caches contain 9 objects; Cache 1 is comprised of nine finely chipped chert eccentrics, while Cache 2 is comprised of eight finely chipped chert eccentrics and one jadeite bead (Figure 4:14).

#### **Discussion**

Excavations at Xunantunich during the 2000-2001 seasons yielded numerous important discoveries relevant to the political organization of the area. The discovery of an elite burial, caches of jade and chert eccentrics, ceramic deposits, and the exposure of large scale architecture, while limited in scope, indicates an interesting mix of political prestige, economic hardship, and control of local labor and other resources. These characteristics provide an interesting



*Figure 4.14: Caches from the front of Structure A-14 (photo by author)*

contrast with the small architecture, rich tombs, and elaborate discoveries at Baking Pot and Cahal Pech.

The first elite individual discovered at the site was uncovered in Structure A-4. While the cyst was littered with chert and obsidian eccentrics, the only two jade artifacts were crude and of poor quality. In addition, no complete ceramic vessels were discovered, unusual in the grave of important Maya elite individuals. There are several possible ways in which this can be interpreted. It is possible that Xunantunich did not possess the resources to prepare an opulent tomb. If this was the case, the location of the burial in an eastern shrine structure and the discovery of eccentric flints point to the high status of this individual but also of his limited

ability (economic, social, and political) to acquire the typical burial goods associated with the elite. It is also possible, that despite the location in a large temple, this individual was not a person of high status within the Xunantunich community.

In either case, the number and quality of interments found at the site, both by the Tourism Development Project as well as other projects throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, provides an interesting quandary. Several elaborate tombs have been discovered at other centers in the region, including Baking Pot, Buenavista del Cayo and Cahal Pech. These centers, with smaller monumental cores than Xunantunich, appear to have an element of economic prosperity lacking at that site. This will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

The large quantity of cached material, coupled with the remains of ritual feasting suggests the center was a vibrant community during the Late and Terminal Classic period. The common use of chert and obsidian eccentrics as cache and burial offerings at Xunantunich is reflective of a common cultural tradition found throughout the Belize Valley, the Petén, and northern Belize (Iannone 1992; Pendergast 1970). The introduction of new ceramic types not common at other centers to the east during the Late Classic and Terminal Classic periods (i.e. Mount Maloney Black types) coupled with their use of carved stelae and altars (not found elsewhere in the Belize Valley during this time), and the previously deciphered emblem glyph of Naranjo on Stela 8, suggests that political affiliations and social networks extended to the west, more so than found at other centers in the Belize Valley.

## **Cahal Pech**

In May of 2000, the Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance Project initiated excavations at the site of Cahal Pech, specifically focusing on Structure F-2. In July, when the BVAR project ended, the Tourism Development Project took over operations, expanding the number of excavation assistants excavating at the site and the number of structures being worked on. Work continued at Cahal Pech, with a small 8-month hiatus, between the years 2000-2002. Juan Luis Bonor and the author supervised the excavations, while the workers were primarily recruited from the nearby communities of San Jose Succotz, Benque Viejo, and San Ignacio. Excavations of six structures and a large plaza were conducted; however, information relating to the political organization of the Belize Valley was limited to Plaza A, including deposits found above the terminal phase plaza floor, as well as discoveries in Structure A-3 and A-4 (Figure 4.15).

Excavation of Plaza A and the surrounding structures began in January and continued until August of 2002. A-2 had been almost completely excavated and reconstructed by Joseph Ball during the early 1990's, while the summit of A-1 had been intensively probed and the northern side partly cleared and reconstructed (Ball 1992). The TDP primarily focused on removing the refuse and collapse above the terminal phase architecture on Structures A-3 and A-4, however the staircase leading to the throne room on A-1 was also excavated and reconstructed. The plaza was almost completely excavated down to the terminal floor, exposing numerous deposits made near the end of the occupation at Cahal Pech as well as post abandonment.

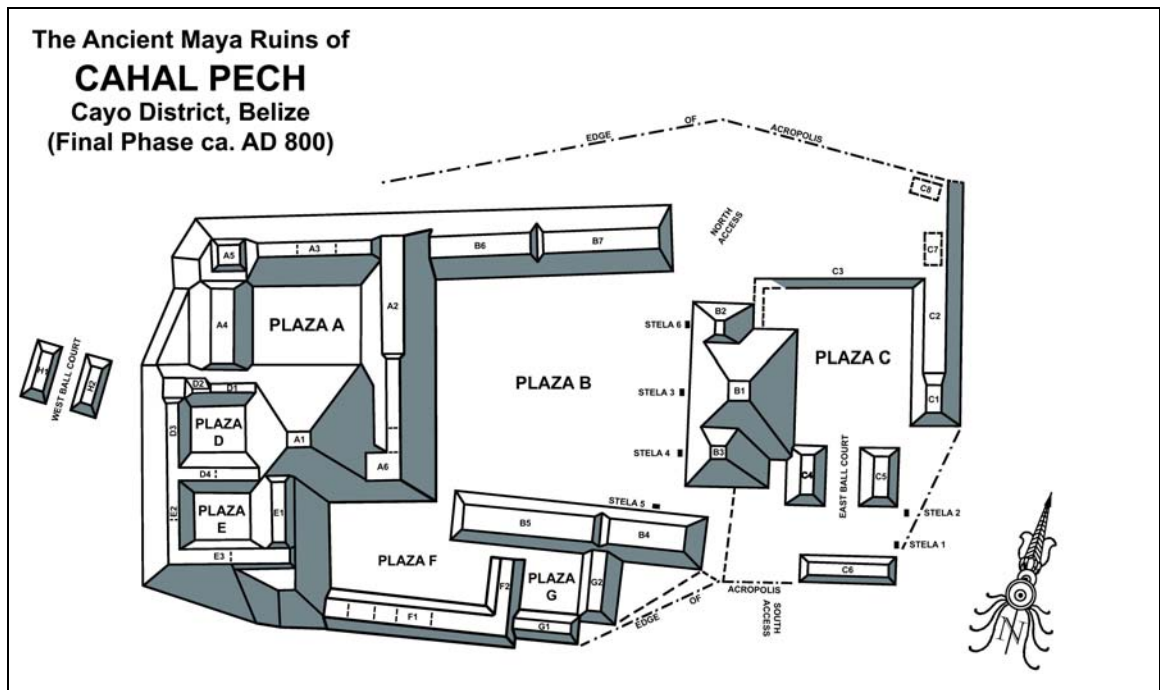


Figure 4.15: Map of Cahal Pech (D. Lee – courtesy of the BVAR project)

This plaza was chosen for excavation because of its proposed administrative function as suggested by Joseph Ball (1992). The throne on the north side of Structure A-1, excavated by Ball in the early nineties, had been consolidated, but Structures A-3 and A-4 had been left untouched. Much work had been done in the palace, and we hoped that excavations in none-residential areas would provide new information about the political activities taking place at the center at the end of the Classic Period.

The most important discoveries were made above the terminal plaza floor, particularly surrounding the base of Structures A-2 and A-3. Littered above the

plaza floor were hundreds of broken ceramic vessels, complete chert points, partially complete figurines and ocarinas, a single complete ocarina, obsidian blades, ceramic spindle whorls, animal bones and two carved jade fragments. The deposit ranged anywhere between 10 to 24 cm thick, with the thickest parts concentrated around the sides of the central staircases and in the corners where the platforms joined (Figure 4.16).

Despite almost 100% clearance of the plaza, no intact ceramic vessels were found *in situ* nor was it possible to reconstruct any complete vessels. Ceramic analysis was based solely on a cursory examination of the sherds as they were discovered *in situ*. Polychrome vase fragments (Zacatal Cream Polychrome, Benque Viejo Polychrome, and Xunantunich Black on Orange) and partially complete Belize Red bowls were extremely common, particularly on the northern and eastern sides of the plaza (Gifford et al. 1976). These Late Classic types date to the early part of the Spanish Lookout complex (A.D. 680-800). The deposits were markedly thicker in these areas, and the number of artifact types was high.

Like the ceramic vessels, the figurines and ocarinas were broken (with one exception), and were usually decapitated (Figures 4.17 and 4.18). The figurines included solid heads decorated with long thick hair (one nicknamed the “Rasta Maya” given his apparent dreadlocks) and several other zoomorphic creatures. The ocarinas were sometimes zoomorphic in nature but many were anthropomorphic images of gods, women and children, or old men. A single section of a flute with the image of a human head at the tip was also discovered.



All of the figurines and ocarinas were local in style. The ritual killing of the figurines and ocarinas appears to be similar to the treatment of the ceramic



*Figure 4.16: Deposit in Plaza A (photo by author)*



*Figure 4.17: Decapitated Figurine Heads (Height of far left 7 cm) (photo by author)*



*Figure 4.18: Only Unbroken Ocarina (height 12 cm) (photo by author)*



*Figure 4.19: Chert Arrow Points (lengths 11-15 cm) (photo by author)*

vessels. In contrast, the 23 chert bifacially worked points were all found complete. These points were thin, approximately 3 mm thick, and fairly short (only 11-15 cm long). Their function is undetermined (Figure 4.19).

Five complete ceramic and two stone spindle whorls were also found. Six were carved with various line and dot motifs, while one was a simple whorl carved from an old sherd. The discovery of these items can be interpreted as domestic refuse, perhaps items used by the women in the royal family.

Two carved jade fragments were also recovered. One had a circle carved in the center of a piece that likely was originally part of a mosaic mask, mirror, or other decorative object. The second was carved into a face, with a large nose, two closed eyes, and a top knot. The mouth had broken off, as had much of the hair and sides; however none of these sections were recovered during our excavations.

The ceramic vessel fragments and sherds recovered from this deposit belong to the first half of the Spanish Lookout ceramic complex (A.D. 700-800) (Gifford et al. 1976). During this time, most of the centers in the region were still occupied (Audet 2005; Audet and Awe 2004; Awe 1992; Ball and Taschek 2004; Driver and Garber 2004; LeCount 1998). The deposit in Plaza A has interesting implications for the sociopolitical organization of the Belize Valley.

The ceramics from this deposit show strong connections to decorated pottery at the nearby centers of Baking Pot and Buenavista del Cayo. Found primarily in elite contexts, ceramics from all three centers are stylistically identical, and possibly made by the same artist. Benque Viejo Polychrome and Xunantunich Black on Orange wares (Late Classic types) from Cahal Pech are the same type and style as those discovered by Joe Ball at Buenavista del Cayo during the late 1980's and early 1990's (Ball 1996 FAMSI website). Ball has postulated that the ceramics he discovered at these two centers were made by the same artists, which he believes indicates an extremely close political and social relationship between these two centers. While I indicated my disagreement with Ball about the exact nature of the relationship in Chapter 3, it is interesting to note that more examples of this ceramic type, with the same images and painting styles, has also been discovered at Baking Pot (Audet and Awe 2004; see Chapter 5). Potsherds do not march across the landscape denoting political alliances; instead they can be indicative of trade, social alliances, or economic spheres in addition to elite political relationships.



This discovery can be interpreted in a number of ways. If, as Ball suggests, the distribution of stylistically similar ceramics is indicative of the closeness of the royal court, Baking Pot, Cahal Pech, and Buenavista were strongly allied centers during the Late Classic period. The proximity of these three centers, however, could have naturally led to a distribution of similarly styled ceramics at each center. Their discovery within ritual and elite contexts indicate that these status symbols were important markers for local elites and the distribution of these vessels was restricted. Politically, their discovery at all three centers indicates a close tie between rulers. The nature of these relationships cannot be established conclusively from the presence of ceramic vessels, but they suggest close bonds between elites of these centers.



*Figure 4.20: Ocarina from Burial 1 (Height 16 cm) (photo by author)*



*Figure 4.21: Broken Ocarina Fragment (Height 14 cm) (photo by author)*



*Figure 4.22: Flute from Burial 1 (Length 14 cm) (photo by author)*

## **Discussion**

It is unfortunate so many of the important tombs placed at Cahal Pech had been looted in the years before the start of archaeological research in the 1980's (Awe 1992). It is important to note that these tombs did exist. The single most important tomb was found in the E-Group temple by Peter Schmidt in the 1960's. While he did not publish his results of, the Institute of Archaeology retained the artifacts until recently when they were stolen from a museum in San Ignacio. A jade mask and three carved pectorals adorned the skeleton, along with numerous polychrome vessels (Awe 1992). The contents of this tomb were similar to Tomb 1 and 2 from Structure E at Baking Pot and contrasts with the lack of such interments at Xunantunich (see Chapter 5).

The only burial found at Cahal Pech during our research was placed around the time of abandonment. Placed intrusively within a bench on Structure A-3, a juvenile individual was found extended with their head to the south. Four ceramic vessels, a flute, a complete anthropomorphic ocarina, and the head of an ocarina (human head with a headdress) were discovered with the skeleton (Figures 4.20-4.23). Interestingly, the bench was never repaired indicating that this child was interred either at the time of abandonment or some time after. The quality of the grave goods suggests that he or she enjoyed a good quality of life during their childhood, but likely does not reflect the status of the elites during the Terminal Classic period at Cahal Pech.

The similarity of ceramics uncovered in Plaza A with those at Buenavista and Baking Pot may suggest strong particularly strong ties among the elites at these centers. Trade relationships, closeness of elite culture, network of social ties, or familial relationships are all possible but the evidence is unequivocal. The Benque Viejo Polychrome vessels found in Plaza 1 at Cahal Pech are almost indistinguishable from those previously found at Cahal Pech and Buenavista by Ball and Taschek. They are also identical in their painted design to those found at Baking Pot, particularly those from Structure 190 (see Chapter 6).

### **Conclusion**

The medium sized centers within the Belize Valley coexisted peacefully with significant intersite trade in goods and ideas. No evidence of warfare has been found within the valley, despite numerous projects conducting excavations in the area. Ceramic typological evidence closely links Cahal Pech with Baking Pot and Buenavista del Cayo leaving Xunantunich linked to Petén centers. Xunantunich is located less than two kilometers from the modern border with Guatemala and only eight kilometers from the ancient city of Naranjo, the closest of these centers to the Petén. Evidence suggests that politically Xunantunich was linked to these western polities, likely as a weaker allied community within the Calakmul hierarchy.

Connections with distant communities, such as Caracol, Calakmul or Naranjo, affected the political and economic organization. Naranjo is only a few kilometers from the western edge of the Belize Valley and could easily have



waged war on the region should it have chosen. It is possible that the threat of battle alone was enough to subdue ambitious elites, given the lack of warfare in the region. Xunantunich has considerably more evidence for western connection than does Cahal Pech, where signs of foreign intervention have yet to be discovered. Like the evidence from Baking Pot discussed in Chapter 5, foreign involvement at the site was likely intermittent, with periods of growth coming during times of political freedom (Ashmore in press). It is possible that Xunantunich enjoyed political freedom and success during the Terminal Classic during which time Buenavista and Cahal Pech had been reduced to less powerful polities. While the excavations conducted by the Tourism Development Project found no additional supporting evidence of Naranjo influence at either center, the previously discovered stela with a Naranjo emblem glyph as well as some ceramic evidence noted by LeCount (1998) at Xunantunich leaves little doubt that there was a dominating political relationship for some period of time during the early part of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Whether this political control extended to Cahal Pech at the same time is unknown.

The Terminal Classic deposit location within the administrative plaza at Cahal Pech are similar to post-abandonment deposits, identified as *de facto* refuse by Arlen and Diane Chase at Caracol (A. Chase and D. Chase 2001; D. Chase and A. Chase 2000). The ceramics and lithics found are of high quality, suggesting that those conducting rituals or activities within the group had access to exotics and therefore were of some status within the community. The discovery of ritual paraphernalia is also indicative of activities that likely took place during the Late

and Terminal Classic occupation. Rituals, including feasting ceremonies would have been held in this courtyard, which would have held several dozen important individuals, likely including those from surrounding centers. Unfortunately, the deposits do not point to specific political partners shared by the elites at Cahal Pech. Ceramics are locally made and there are no glyphic texts indicating alliances with distant royal families.

Fortunately, additional research at Baking Pot uncovered evidence that links it with Naranjo during the Late Classic 2 period. The lack of differentiation between Cahal Pech, Baking Pot, and Xunantunich during the Late Classic 1 and 2 suggest minimal hierarchical variation among these centers. During the Terminal Classic, the increase in architecture at Xunantunich likely reflects a surge in prosperity and an attempt to assert independence from Naranjo as well as authority over the remaining communities in the Belize Valley. The continued occupation and success of activities at Baking Pot however may have made it difficult to control the valley without diplomatic concessions. Evidence presented in Chapter 5 shows the continued occupation and elite activity at this center when many others were abandoned. Their struggle with powerful core centers, like Naranjo, had an intense affect on the elite's prosperity and success.

Understanding the position of Baking Pot within the valley relies primarily on Theater State models in which religion is the main driving force of economic exchange of shell, jade, polychrome ceramics, and eccentrics while the nature of their interaction with distant centers in the core area is best explained by core-periphery models of interaction. The Belize River trade route was only

valuable to these centers because of the transportation of goods desired by elites to create social distance and to use in ritual activities. These goods were more easily obtainable by elites along the river, giving them a level of prestige among their people and within the region. These goods may have increased their status but it did not increase their ability to demand unreasonable amounts of labor from a fairly small pool of inhabitants, at least in the case of Cahal Pech and Baking, capping the size of temples, administrative structures and palaces in the region. While the success of these centers was dependent on their ability to perform ritual activities in a charismatic and public fashion, as expressed by the copious cached deposits around the site core at Xunantunich and Cahal Pech, the growth of these centers was inhibited by larger and more powerful core regions who exploited the natural resources of the region. Baking Pot, detailed in Chapter 5, was no exception to this trend.

## CHAPTER V

### A SUMMARY OF EXCAVATIONS AT BAKING POT

#### **Introduction**

The site of Baking Pot is located along the banks of the Belize River, about 10 km downstream from Cahal Pech, and 10 km upstream from Blackman Eddy and Barton Ramie (Figure 5.1). The site is comprised of 24 monumental structures surrounding five main courtyards. Group 1, located 100 m south of the Belize River, contains three courtyards surrounded by two large temples, two ballcourts, and several administrative platforms. Group II, located 200 meters to the south, contains a large temple, a single ballcourt and the royal palace complex. The site is located on the flat and rich alluvial soils of the Belize River Valley, an ideal location for agricultural production.

The original name of the site may have been four- waters. A vessel with this emblem glyph was discovered in the Bedran Group, less than 1 mile from the site core (Helmke et al. 2004). Unfortunately, no additional evidence to support this conclusion has been found. The discovery of this name on a portable ceramic object means that while it may have been from Baking Pot, it also could have been traded from a nearby community of that name.

My research at Baking Pot was carried out under the auspices of the Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance Project, directed by Dr. Jaime Awe and Dr. William Poe. The excavations were conducted under my direction, with assistance from 3-5 field supervisors, 6-10 local excavation assistants, and a large

number of field school students. Since little work had previously been done at the site, my goals consisted of: 1) determining the chronology of occupation and construction; 2) ascertaining the function of particular sections of the monumental core; and 3) determining the political and economic role of Baking Pot within the Belize Valley.

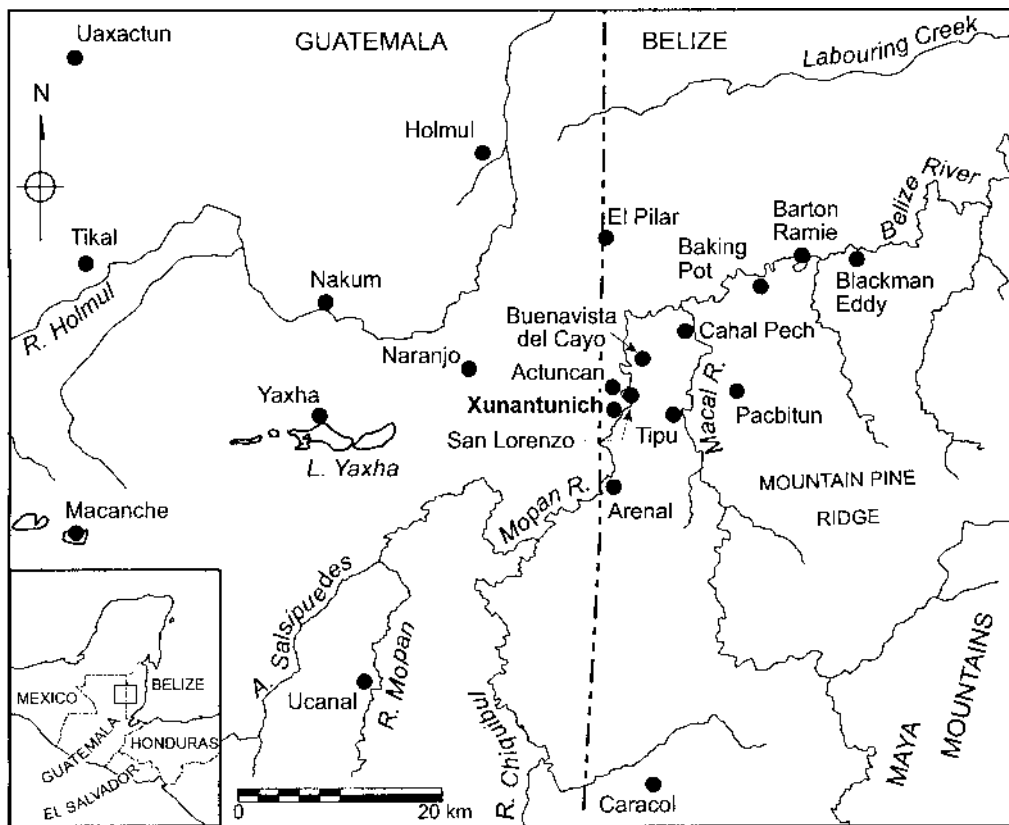
In efforts to achieve these goals, excavations at Baking Pot were conducted in both of the monumental groups (Groups I and II), two causeway termini structures, and several non-elite residential platforms (Figure 5.2). In Particular, we were looking for evidence of elite sponsored ritual activity (including cache deposits, burials, erected stela, and large-scale temple construction), evidence of political relationships with distant and nearby centers (foreign status symbols including ceramic vessels, musical instruments, glyphic texts), and evidence of economic activity (agricultural potential, trade routes, local resources).

Excavations were conducted in and around structures throughout the site center and periphery. Units were placed along the central axes and most structures were cleared to their terminal phase architecture. All excavated material was screened with a 1/4' mesh with the exception of the area around burials and caches, which were screened with a 1/8<sup>th</sup> mesh.

The results of these investigations are detailed below, organized by the location and perceived function of the structure. Excavations conducted in the periphery provide an overview of the site history and construction chronology. Discoveries within Structures B and E in Group 1 provide valuable data relating

to Baking Pot's political and economic position within the Belize Valley and these descriptions are followed by a discussion of excavations at two causeway-related structures (Structures 190 and 209). Two of the palace structures, important political and social symbols, were also investigated.

Efforts to understand how the political and economic conditions leading up to the Late Classic florescence influenced site development and how these conditions continued to affect the lives of those in the Belize Valley during the



*Figure 5.1: Map of the Belize Valley and Surrounding Centers (after LeCount et al. 2002:fig 1)*

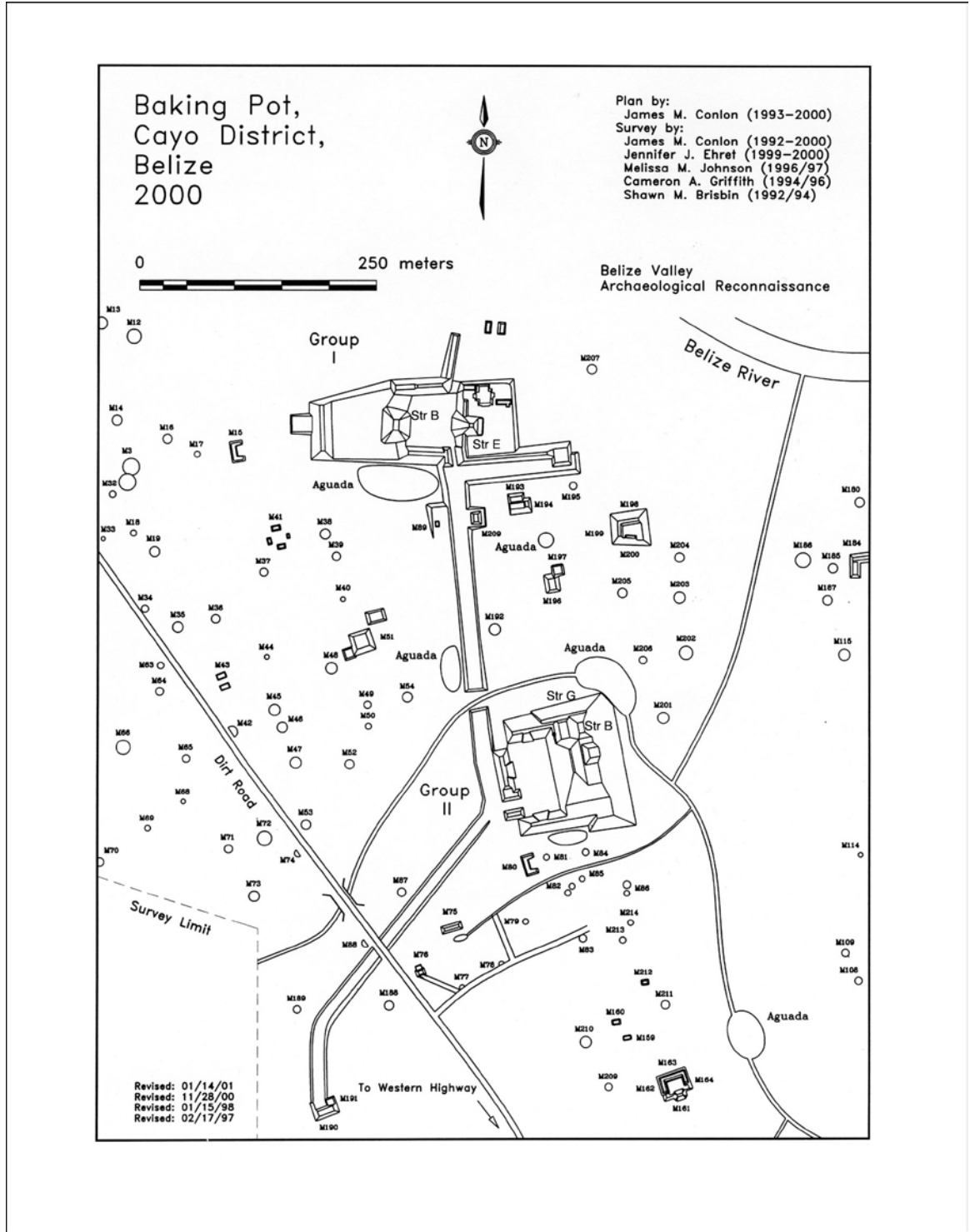


Figure 5.2: Map of Baking Pot (after Conlon 1996)

Late to Terminal Classic period were undertaken through a study of the architecture, burial goods, and caches. This information, coupled with the data collected from Xunantunich and Cahal Pech, permits a re-assessment of the political organization within the Belize Valley. Using models of political interaction detailed in Chapter 1, it is possible to reconstruct the political history of the Belize Valley during the Late and Terminal Classic periods.

### **Excavations of Domestic Structures Located in the Periphery**

Excavations of several domestic structures were undertaken by the BVAR project from 2001-2004. Structures 51 (Dixon 2005), 188 (Dixon and Hoggarth 2004), 198 (Audet 2002), 203 (Weller 2002 and 2003), and 215 (McRae 2004) were excavated in efforts to gain a better understanding of the chronology of the sites construction, learn about domestic caching practices, gain an understanding about the lifestyles of people living in both large and small residences, and to determine functional differences, if any, between these structures. The results of these excavations directly relate to the question of Baking Pot's political position within the Belize Valley as these were the individuals who were supporting elites, providing tribute, and constructing the monumental architecture. The largest additions on these platforms were constructed during the Barton Creek/ Mount Hope phases (300 B.C. – A.D. 200) and the Spanish Lookout phase (A.D. 680-900) (Figure 5.3). This mirrors the construction activity documented in the plazas of both Groups I and II, perhaps indicating the times when Baking Pot's



inhabitants were most prosperous or a time when the elites enjoyed their greatest influence over the region. In addition, many of the domestic structures were inhabited by wealthy families throughout their occupation, particularly those living at the plazuela groups around the center (Audet 2000, 2002, Audet and Awe 1999; Cheetham 1996, 2004; Conlon 1995; Moore 1999). The majority of the populace had only limited ties with foreign polities, but they provided the manual labor for construction and agricultural projects in support of

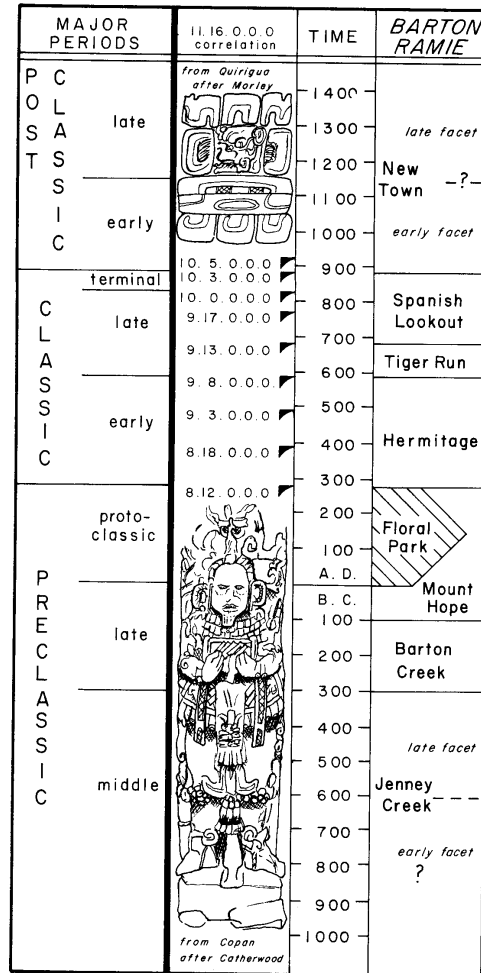


Figure 5.3: Maya Time Periods (after Gifford et al. 1976)

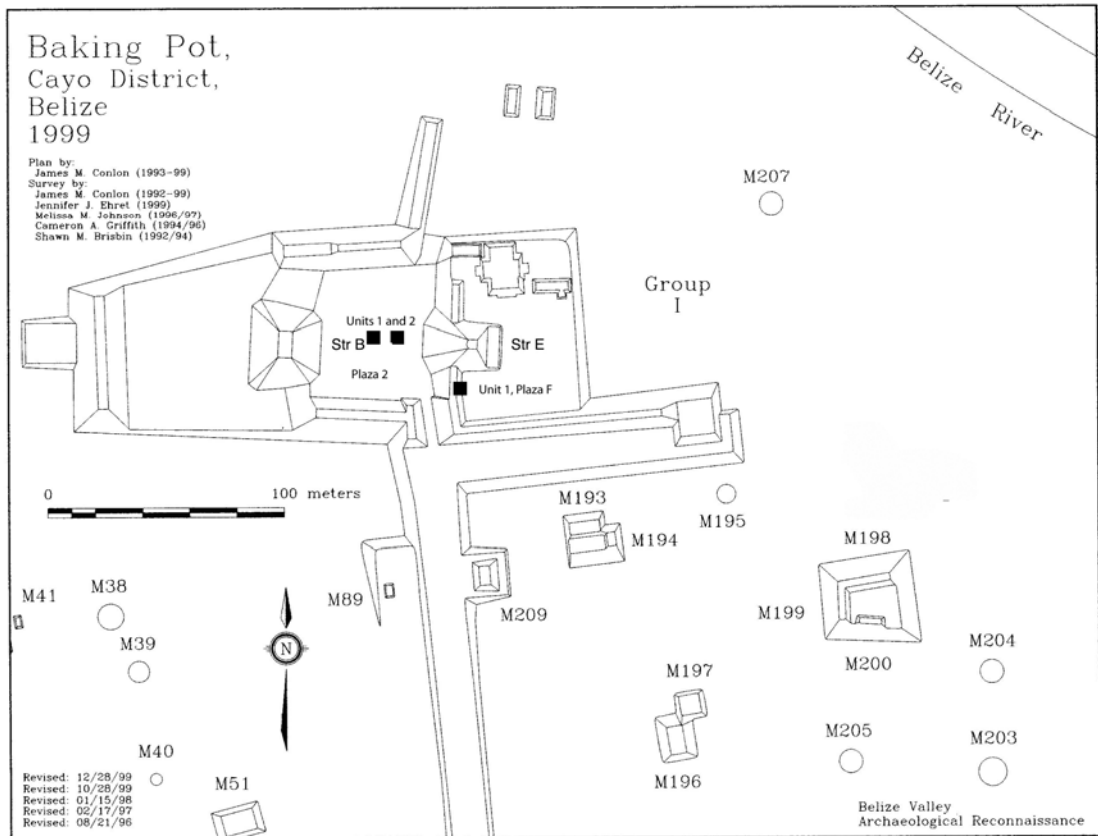


Figure 5.4: Map of Group I at Baking Pot (courtesy of the BVAR project)

the elite. Their success reflected the overall degree of elite achievement within the political and economic realm of the Maya lowlands.

### Group I

The temples, ballcourts, and long, low range (administrative and residential) structures in Group 1 provided the backdrop for rituals conducted by the elites, rituals that were likely witnessed by the majority of the population, in part due to the open nature of these plazas (Figure 5.4). Plaza 1 consists of only

two structures, A and B. Structure A is a range structure while Structure B is a tall conical temple. Structures B and E surround plaza 2 on the east and western edges, and Structures C and D on the northern and southern ends. Plaza 3, located to the east, contains Structures F, G, and H.

Four excavations were conducted within Group 1. One in the center of Plaza 2, one in the plaza just south of Structure E, and two larger units at the summits of Structures E and B. The excavation of the Plaza 2 and areas south of Structure E were conducted by Julie Hoggarth and Leslie Swain, who have generously allowed me to use the data they recovered in this dissertation.

### ***Structure E***

Work commenced on Structure E in Group 1 in June of 2002 (Figure 5.5). This Eastern Group temple is located along side the eastern edge of Plaza 2. The first excavation was axially located at the summit of the mound, and measured 2 x 3 m. This unit was later extended 1.5 meters to the west, 1 meter to the east, and 2 meters to the south. The excavation revealed traces of a poorly preserved plaster surface, but no evidence of a masonry super structure. In its final form the summit of Structure E had a small building platform that may have supported a perishable superstructure. Due to erosion, bioturbation and structural collapse, it was impossible to determine the actual size of the building platform.

Previous excavations by Jim Aimers in 1996 and 1998 (Aimers 1997, 1999) focused on exposing the terminal phase architecture of Structure E. He

discovered the central staircase at the base of the temple, but unfortunately found that little was preserved as he excavated further up the platform. Some of the



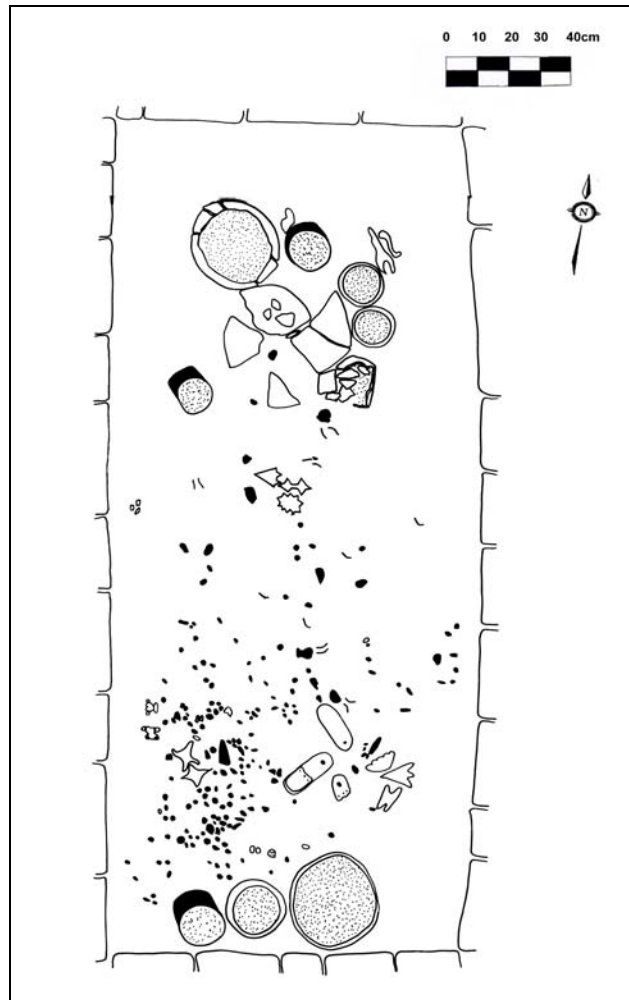
*Figure 5.5: Structure E during Excavations (photo by author)*

limestone blocks may have been removed during the Postclassic Period and used for the construction of new residential platforms located to the northeast of the Baking Pot site core. Pillaging of cut limestone might also account for the small amount of collapse we found around other poorly preserved structures in Group II (Audet 2005, 2002).

Excavation below the floor of the terminal phase platform penetrated several 4-6 cm thick layers of chert flakes that had been deposited above the capstones of two tombs. Both tombs were oriented north to south and were constructed of limestone blocks that were cemented together with stucco.

*Burial 1 (Late Classic 1; A.D. 580-680)*

The capstones of Burial 1 were discovered 36 cm below the natural surface of the mound. We recovered approximately 5000 chert flakes above the capstones in 5 distinct layers. The majority of the flakes were thin (2-6 mm thick) and between 4-9 cm long. All colors of stone were used to create these flakes. Beneath the flakes were 9 limestone capstones measuring between 50-60 cm long and 25-30 cm wide. They enclosed a hollow chamber measuring 120 cm wide, 120 cm high, and 273 cm long. The walls were constructed with rough limestone blocks that ranged between 18-43 cm long. The floor of the chamber was constructed of packed dirt that was covered by a thick layer of chert flakes and obsidian flakes and blades (Figure 5.6).



*Figure 5.6: Plan View of Burial 1 (drawn by N. Puc)*

The tomb contained a large number of artifacts, including 10 ceramic vessels, 240 pieces of jade, 9 eccentric flints, 3 carved mother of pearl shells, 8 carved Spondylus shells, 240 obsidian blades, 1 circular obsidian piece, and roughly 2000 chert flakes. Most of the human skeletal remains were absent. The only skeletal material recovered in the burial were two molars and a hand phalange that were located on the southern side of the grave, and three left metatarsals that were located under vessel #7 on the north side. These bones were very well preserved,

suggesting that most of the skeletal remains may have been purposely removed some time in antiquity.

The removal of skeletal remains from burials is well documented at Maya and Mesoamerican sites (Chase and Chase 1989, Headrick 1999). This practice was associated with the tradition of ancestor worship and the removal of an individual's skeletal remains generally reflected a high status, both political and social, within the community.

The distribution of the artifacts, the location of the two teeth on the southern side of the grave, and the discovery of left metatarsals on the northern side, suggest that the body was originally placed in an extended fashion along the center of the chamber with head to the south. Examination of the few remaining teeth and bones indicated that the individual was an adult, but little more can be ascertained. The north-south orientation of the skeletal remains (with head to the south) reflects the typical burial pattern at Baking Pot and at many central lowland Maya sites in the Late Classic period (Ricketson 1931; Bullard and Bullard 1965; Willey et al. 1965; Piehl 1997).

The floor of the burial was covered with several thousand chert flakes and 240 obsidian blades. As indicated above, this practice has been noted at several sites in the Belize Valley, but rarely, if ever, in association with non-elite burials (c.f. Awe 1992; Song 1996, Piehl 1997). The placement of the burial between layers of chert and obsidian flakes on the floor and above the capstones is strongly imbued with symbolism. The *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* states that at each cardinal point the gods placed a sacred Ceiba tree to define the limits of the earth

(Roys 1933:171). Each tree was associated with its respective color and each location contained flintstones produced by the Chaacs. These rain gods, as we know, reside in caves that served as entrances to the Maya underworld. Schele and Friedel (1990:201: 463) report that flint and obsidian flakes were considered “the fingernails of the lightning bolt” or Chaac the rain god. Schele and Miller (1986:286) further note that flint (and obsidian) objects often served as “sacred power objects used in rituals, especially in the dedication and termination rites for Maya architecture and stelae, and as funerary objects to accompany the dead into the afterlife”. The placement of the burial between layers of chert flakes and obsidian blades may have therefore symbolized that the deceased was laid to rest in the watery underworld domain of the rain god. This symbolic combination of water and human flesh that was considered made from maize, were the essence of life, fertility and rebirth.

Ten complete vessels were found in the Burial. Seven (number 1-7) were located on the northern side of the room, and 3 (number 8-10) were lined against the southern wall. All of the vessels were monochrome and date to the Late





*Figure 5.7: Photo of Southern end of Burial 1 (photo by author)*

Classic period (Tiger Run period- 580-680 A.D). Of the seven vessels on the northern side of the tomb, six were orientated in a semi-circle and one sat in the middle of the circle. From west to east, these vessels included a Sotero Red-brown vase, a Mountain Pine Red dish, an orange bowl (variety unknown), and three additional Sotero Red-brown vases (Gifford et al. 1976). The single vessel in the middle is a broken Mountain Pine Red dish (ibid). Dirt was collected from all vessels but no preserved artifacts were discovered.

Three vessels lay against the masonry wall on the southern side of the burial. From west to east, these vessels included a Mountain Pine Red dish, a Sotero Red-brown bowl, and a Sotero Red-brown vase with fire clouding. All

three vessels were filled with dirt, which was collected, but like those on the northern side, no artifacts were uncovered from inside them.

Two hundred and forty pieces of green jade were located in Burial 1. These pieces included 54 beads of various shapes and sizes, 182 fragments from a mosaic mask, three large pectorals (one that was broken into two pieces and then mended) and a single earflare. The jade beads were not composed of high quality jadeite like those found at Tikal or Altun Ha (Pendergast 1992). The beads were brown in places, not highly polished, and made into irregular shapes. This contrasts with the jade used in the mosaic mask, earflare, and the pectorals, which was highly polished and clear. Only a single piece was carved, unlike similar jade items from Altun Ha (Pendergast 1992).

The fifty-four jade beads were located on the southern side of the Burial and were probably part of a single necklace. The larger beads were highly polished, but the majority had areas that contained imperfections and rough patches. The circular beads varied from 0.8 cm long to 3 cm long. A single long tubular bead, measuring 5 cm long, was highly polished and may have been part of the earflare or the central piece in the necklace. Two of the beads were flatter than the others and these were also highly polished.

The single jade earflare was located near the center of the burial but no match for this flare was discovered with the tomb. In fact, it was not until we excavated Burial 2 (located just to the east of Burial 1) that we discovered the matching piece. I believe that the earflares originally were placed with Burial 2 and for an unknown reason only one was transferred into the later interment.

The three jade pectorals were located in close proximity to each other in the southern half of the tomb. They are each 17 cm long, 0.4 cm thick and 6 cm wide. One of the pectorals was broken into two pieces and three mend holes had been carved into each side in an apparent effort to rejoin the pieces with string. The other two pectorals were unbroken. Pectorals are commonly portrayed adorning the chests or waists of rulers depicted on stela, painted ceramics, and on carved images on jade (Coe and Kerr 1997).

The one hundred and eighty-two jade plaques, once pieces of an elaborate mosaic mask, were found scattered throughout the southern side of the tomb. Each piece is polished on only one side making it relatively easy to determine which side is “face up”. Some fragments are less than 1 cm wide and long, making it almost impossible to put the mask back together. One of the pieces had an *ajaw* glyph carved on it, suggesting that the original inhabitant of the tomb was likely an elite ruler. This piece probably was located in the center of the mask, but due to the scattering of the objects we are not completely certain of this. The jade pieces appear to have been glued to a perishable object, probably a wooden base that provided the backing for the jade pieces. We found no traces of the wooden back for the mask during excavations.

All the jade was discovered on the southern side of the tomb. The scattered distribution of the mask fragments suggests that they were disturbed when most of the skeletal remains were removed from the chamber. This would suggest that some period of time had elapsed between the death of the individual and the removal of skeletal elements from the tomb.

Nine chert eccentrics were scattered across the floor. Their forms included an X, two tridents, an H, a four-pointed star, a six-pointed star, a Y, an S, and a semi-circular form with wave-like shape on the flat side (Figure 5.8). All of the eccentrics were less than 15 cm long, and they were made of blue-gray colored chert. The total number of eccentrics is likely indicative of the nine levels of the underworld that this individual needed to pass through after his or her death. According to Schele and Miller (1986) these levels of the underworld contained trials and tribulations that could prevent the spirit of the individual from completing its journey to the heavens.

Eight small fragments of orange and pink spondylus shell were located across the southern half of the tomb. It is likely that these pieces represent sections of the jade mask, including the area around the pupil (which was most likely a rounded piece of obsidian or pearl shell), the teeth, and possibly other sections. These pieces are smooth on either one or both sides but were not carved into any recognizable shape.

The three carved mother of pearl shells were discovered in the southern section of the burial. One is a small circle, which may have been used as one of the eyes in the jade mosaic mask. A second carved shell is in the form of a jaguar and measures approximately 2.7 cm long by 2.3 cm wide. Jaguars were animals worshiped by the Maya for their strength and are often associated with elite rulers (Awe, personal communication, 2004). One side of the jaguar shell effigy is shiny and carved, while the other appears to have been glued to an object. The third



*Figure 5.8: Chert Eccentrics from Burial 1(photo by author)*

shell is the same size as the jaguar effigy and is carved in the form of the glyph for *sac*, or white. Like the jaguar, the shell has one shiny side with a rougher side that appears to have been glued to another object.

Lastly, a single, small, rounded piece of obsidian was discovered on the southwestern side of the Burial. This piece was initially believed to be one of the eyes of the jade mask, however a second “eye” of obsidian was not located. It is possible that this second eye was either lost, or that the actual eyes of the mask were made from the mother of pearl shell noted above.

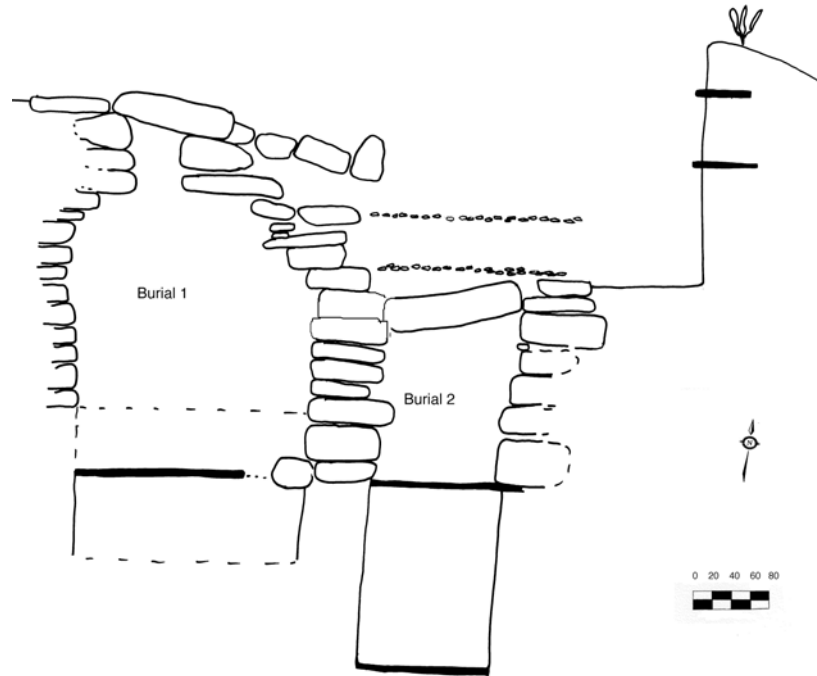
Based on the ceramic data, Burial 1 dates to the Tiger Run phase of the Late Classic period (between A.D. 550-690). The jade objects from Burial 1 at Baking Pot are surprisingly similar to the jade artifacts that were discovered in Burial 1 in the eastern shrine at Cahal Pech. Jade objects from the tomb at the latter site included a similar jade mosaic mask, and three pectorals (Awe and

Campbell 1988; Reents-Budget 1994). This suggests that these individuals likely rose to a similar status within their communities and indicates that the both Cahal Pech and Baking Pot were thriving communities during the early part of the Late Classic Period.

Who was the individual interred within the Baking Pot Burial? Our evidence strongly suggests that he or she was unquestionably of high status, and likely one of the most important Late Classic rulers of the site. The large vaulted burial chamber, the location of the burial within the eastern shrine, the sumptuous grave goods, the exotic origin of many of the cultural remains, and the ahaw glyph adorning the death mask strongly support this conclusion. Individuals with similar burial treatments throughout the Maya lowlands (and even those with less well-adorned tombs) have been identified as rulers (see Chapter 2 for a summary).

#### *Burial 2 (A.D. 550-650)*

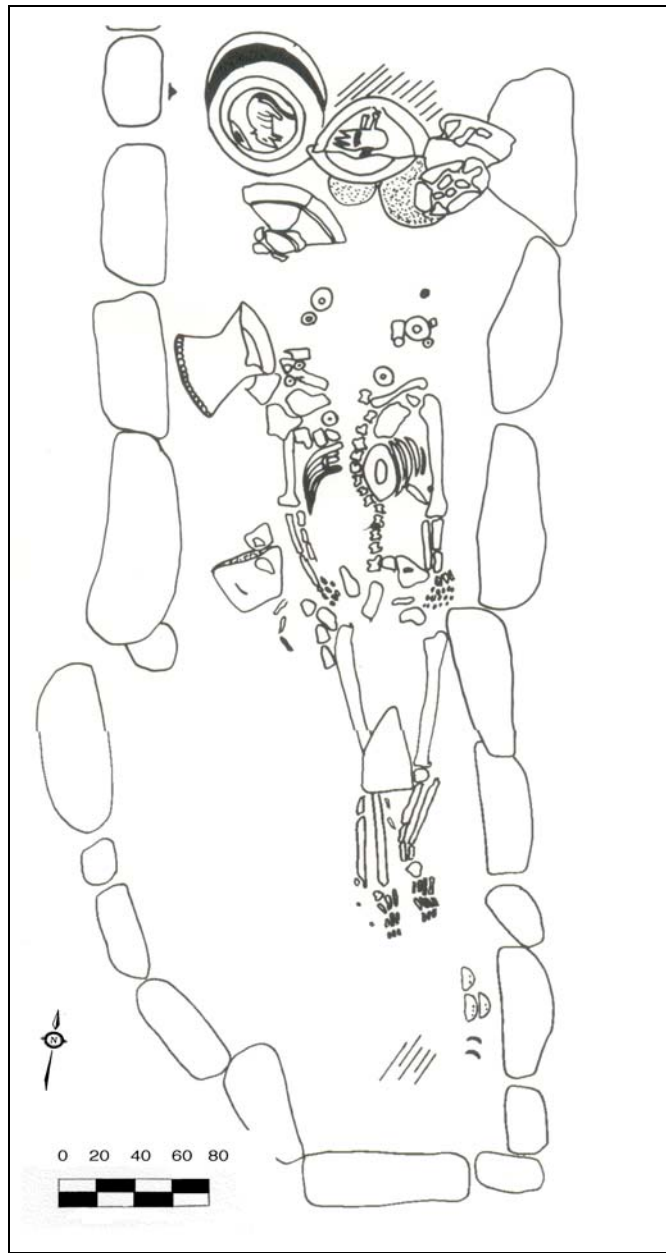
Burial 2 was located adjacent to the eastern wall of Burial 1 (Figure 5.9). The capstones were 96 cm below the natural ground surface and four layers of chert flakes, scattered in 2 - 4 cm thick layers, were recovered between the top of the tomb and the surface of the platform. A rough count of the chert suggests that between 4000 to 5000 flakes were deposited above the capstones. Unlike Burial 1, Burial 2 was filled with dirt. This feature probably saved the artifacts from being taken by looters who attempted to vandalize the structure on a Saturday evening when we were absent from the site. The burial chamber was constructed with crudely cut limestone blocks and capped by several larger



*Figure 5.9: Profile of Tombs in Structure E (Burial 1 to the left) (drawing by author)*

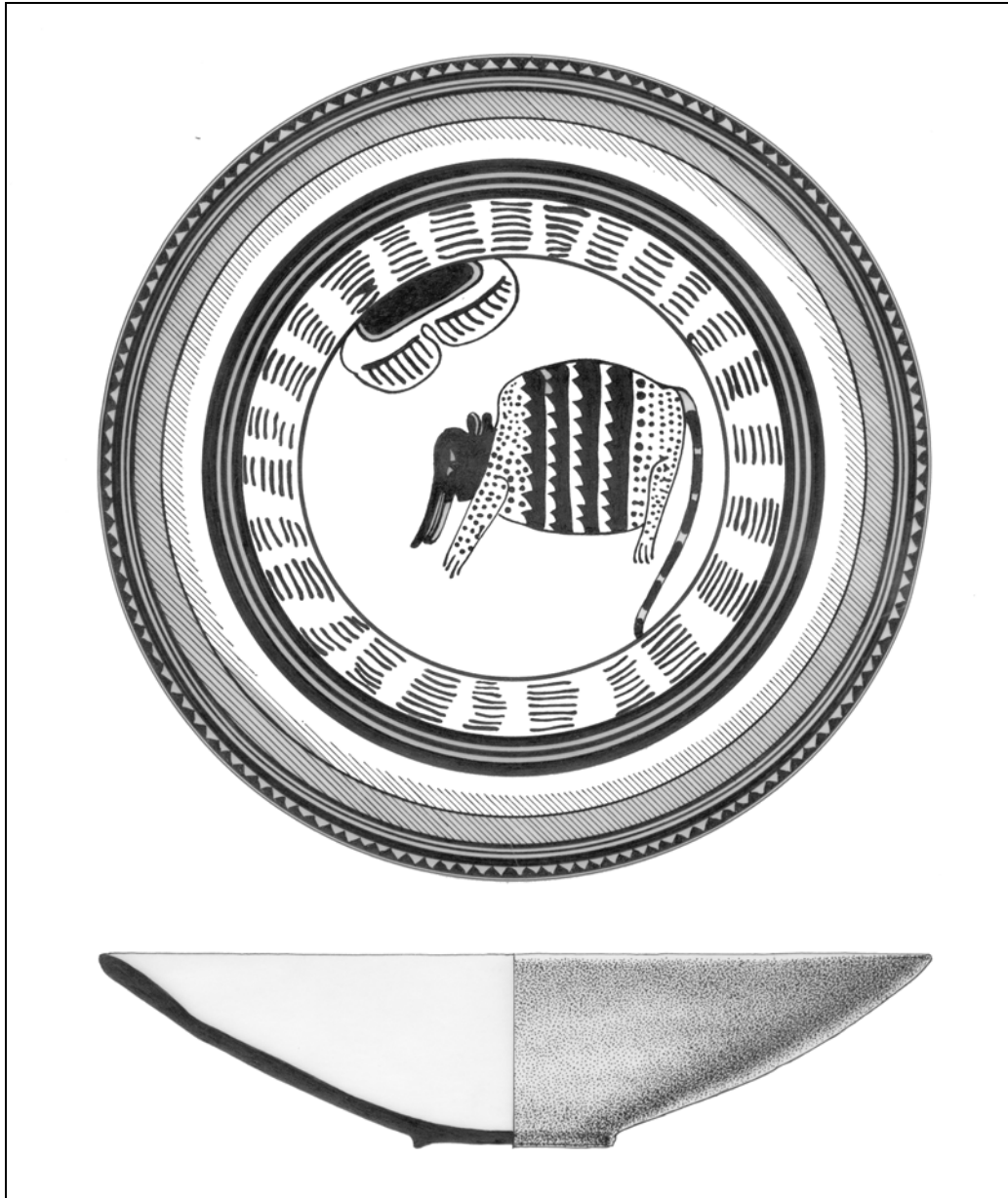
limestone slabs. The chamber measured 2.4 meters long, 0.9 meters wide, and 1.2 meters in height.

The skeletal remains in Burial 2 were not very well preserved. Despite their poor condition our osteologist determined that the individual was probably female and between 40 and 45 years old at death (Kokkalis 2005). Age was determined on the basis of dental ware and some degenerative changes in the lower thoracic vertebrae. Sex was determined on the basis of a large mastoid and general robustness of the bones (Kokkalis 2005). The individual also had a number of abscesses and carries on 8 of her 13 remaining teeth. The position of the bones indicated that the burial had a north-south orientation with head to the south (Figure 5.10).

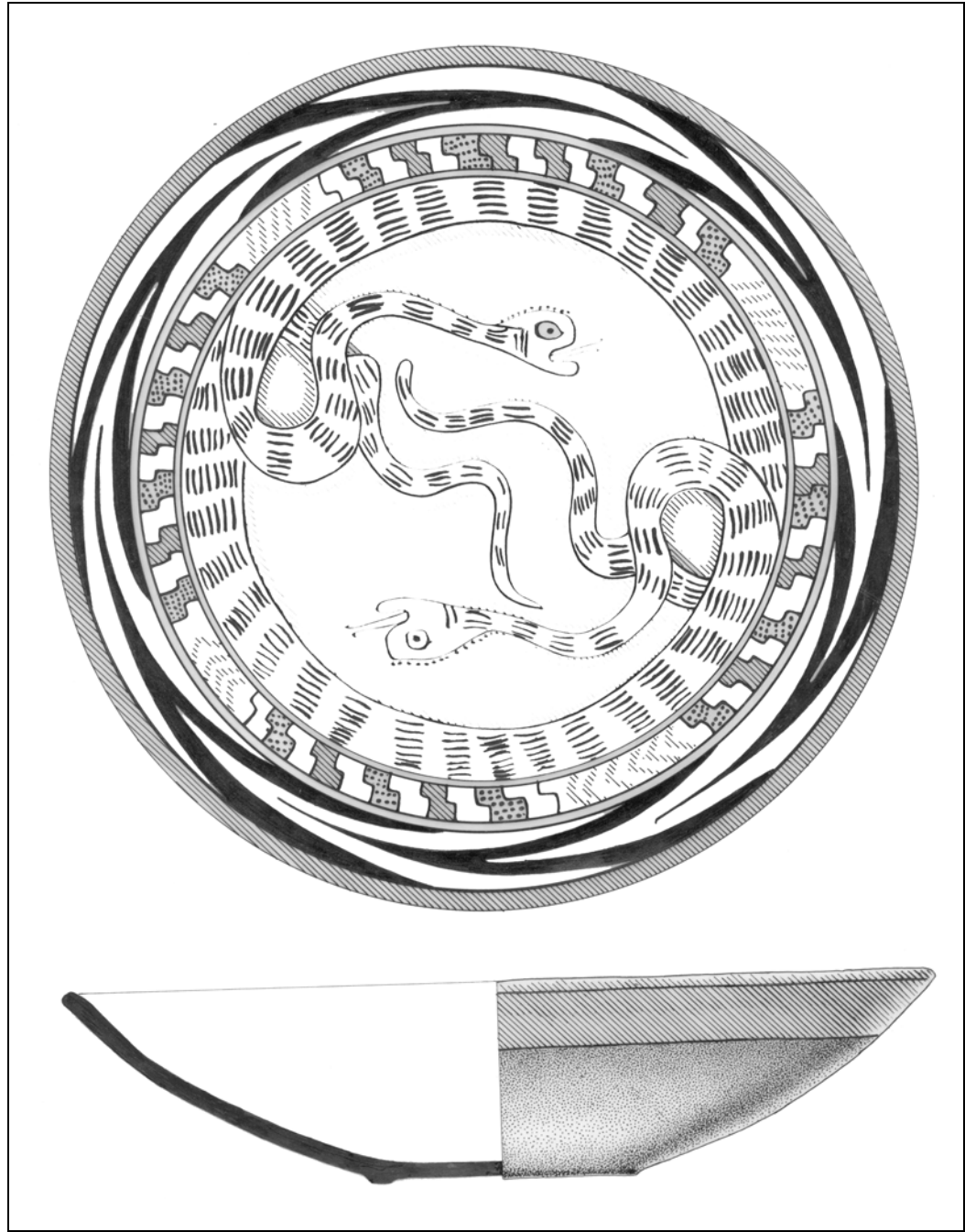


*Figure 5.10: Plan View of Burial 2 (drawing by author)*

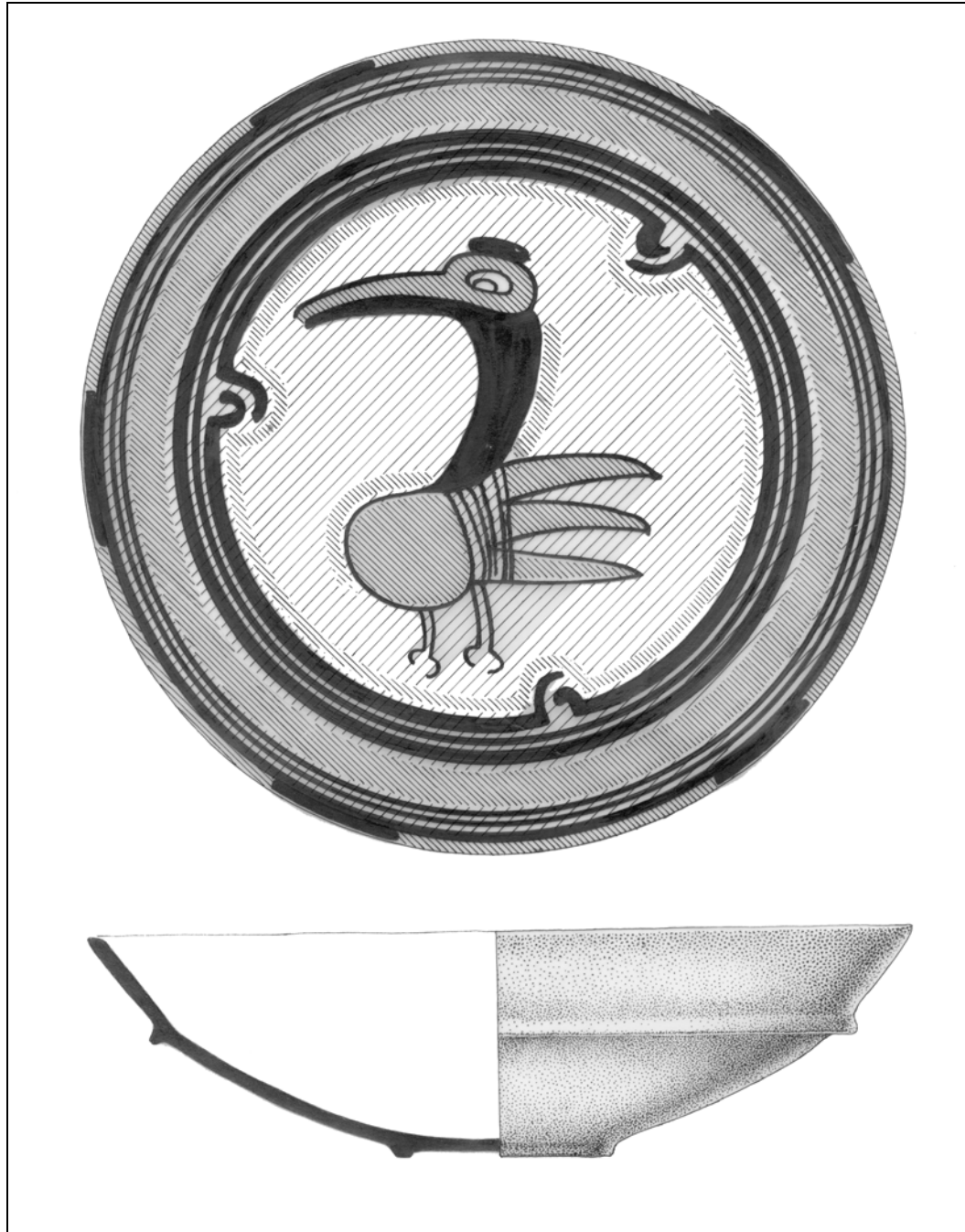




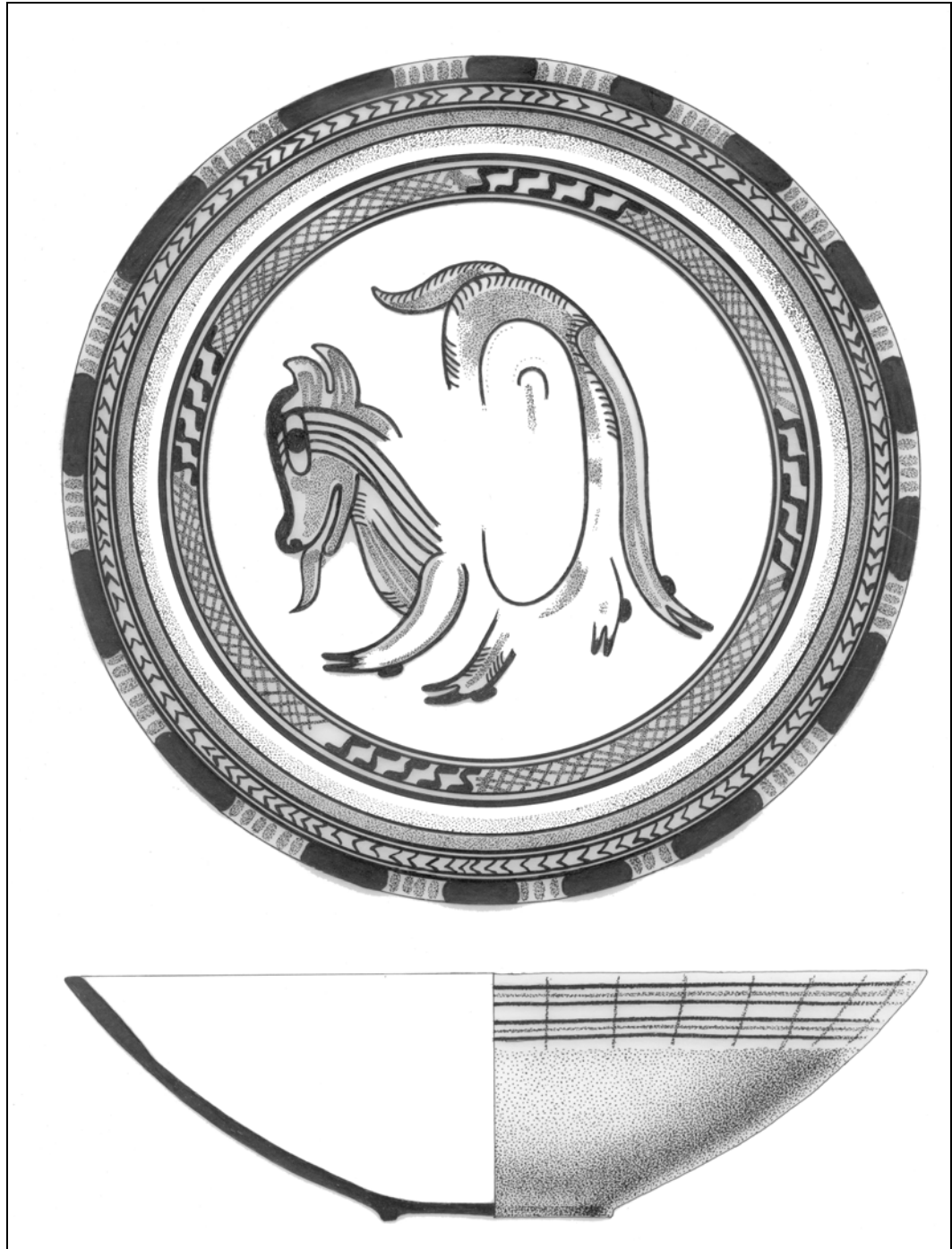
*Figure 5.11: Saturday Creek Polychrome with Armadillo (dia 31 cm) (Gustavo Valenzuela)*



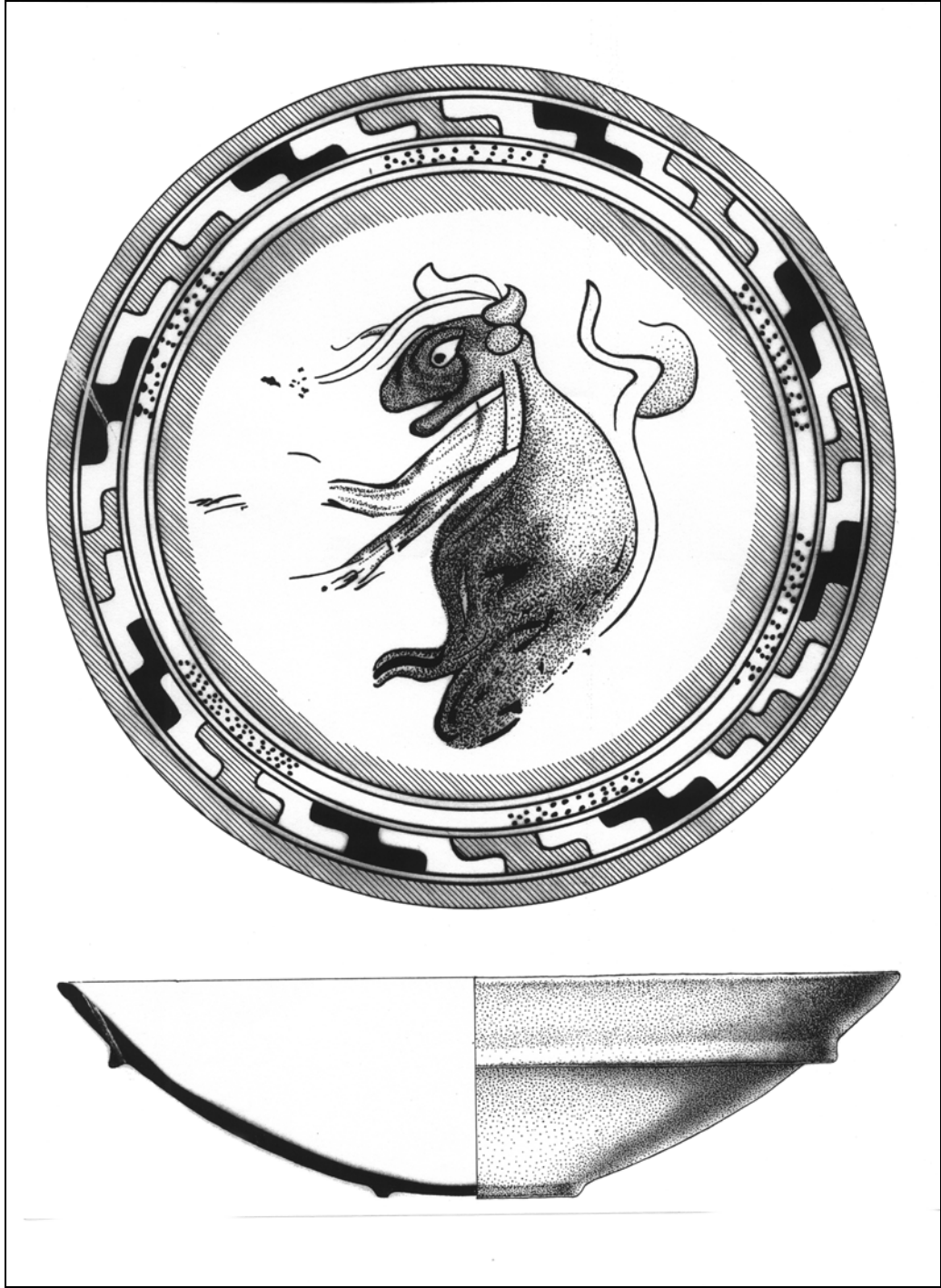
*Figure 5.12: Saturday Creek Polychrome with two serpents (dia 34 cm) (Gustavo Valenzuela)*



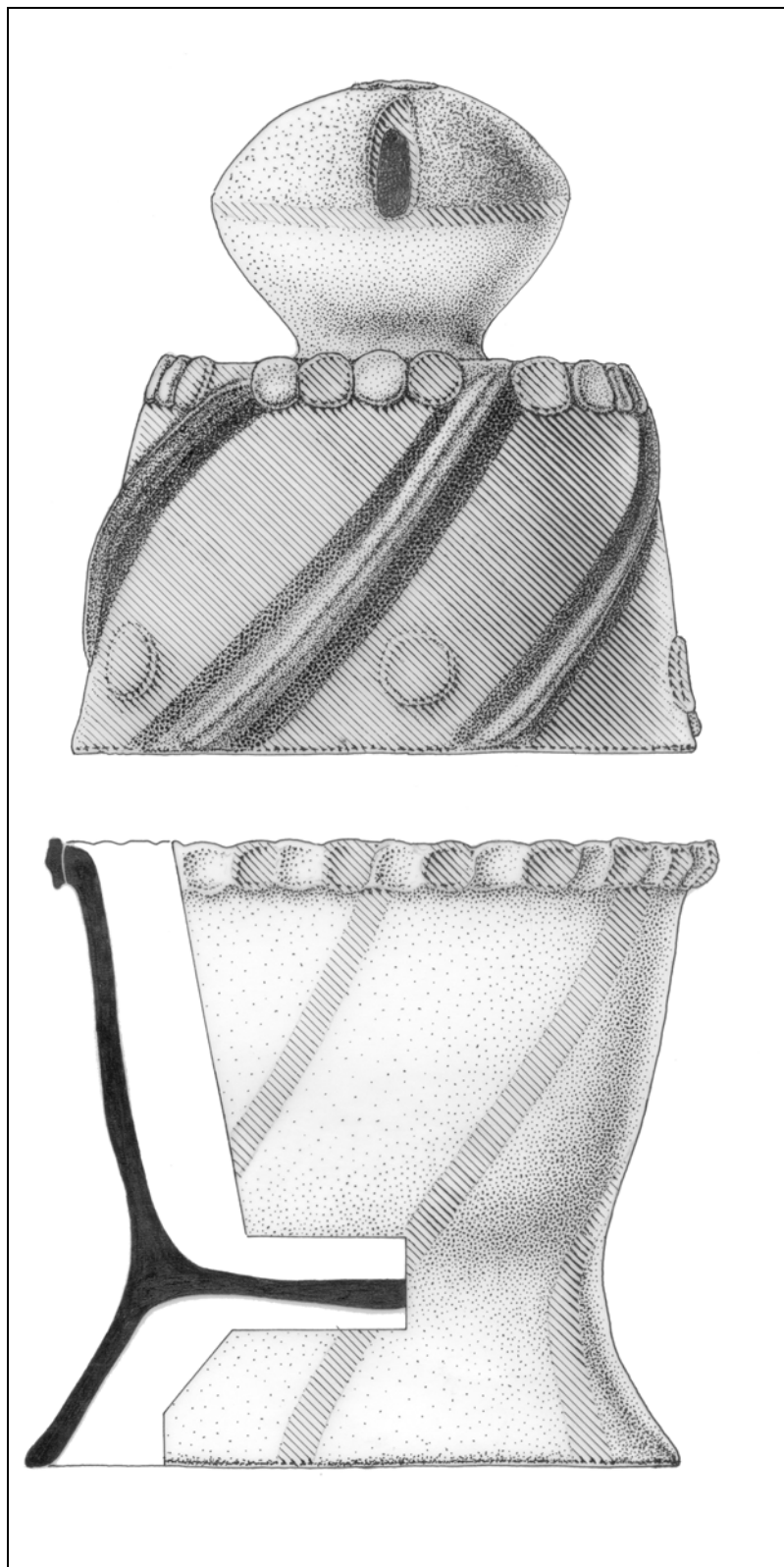
*Figure 5.13: Saturday Creek Polychrome with Bird image (dia 34 cm) (Gustavo Valenzuela)*



*Figure 5.14: Saturday Creek Polychrome with Dead Deer Image (dia 34 cm)  
(Gustavo Valzuela)*



*Figure 5.15: Saturday Creek Polychrome with Water Lilly Jaguar Image (dia 34 cm) (Gustavo Valenzuela)*



*Figure 5.16: Incensario from top of Burial 2 (height 56 cm) (Gustavo Valzuela)*

Although Burial 2 contained fewer large jade beads than Burial 1, the burial had a large number of interesting and unique grave goods. Inside the chamber there were 8 ceramic vessels, a single, painted, mother of pearl shell, two plain mother of pearl shells, 12 carved spondylus shells, two canine pendants, two jade beads and several hundred small jade fragments that were glued onto the carved shell objects and a single jade ear flare, a fragment of hematite, a small perishable object covered with stucco and painted designs, and a larger perishable object also covered in painted stucco.

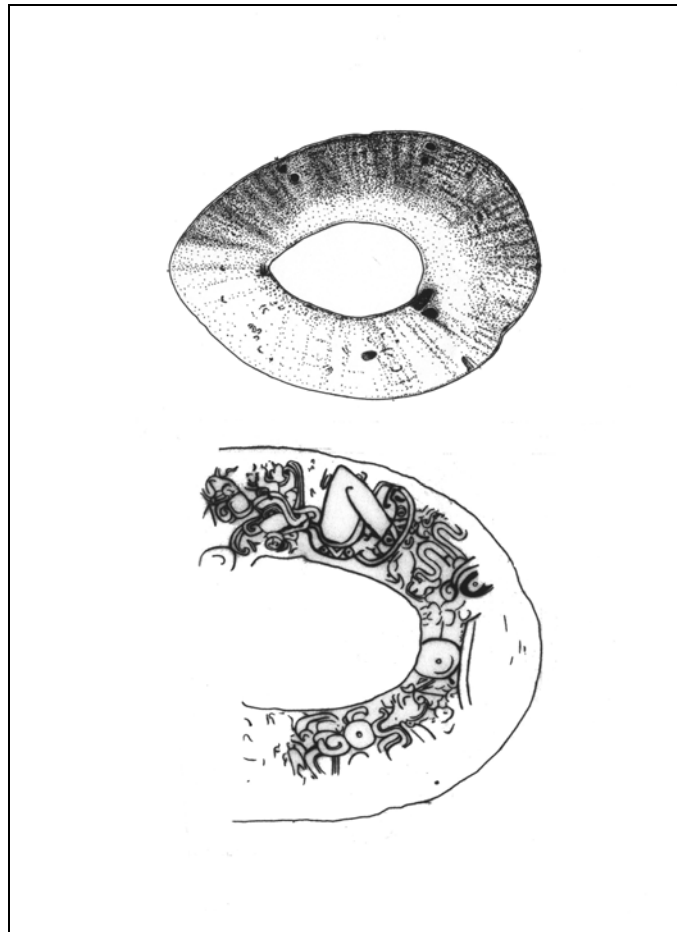
The eight ceramic vessels included five Saturday Creek Polychrome dishes (Figures 5.11-5.15), two Sotero Red-brown vessels, and a bichrome incensario (Figure 5.16). The latter appears to have been interred within the chamber sometime after the original placement of the burial, perhaps when dirt was used to fill up the chamber. The Sotero Red-brown vessels were discovered on the southern side of the tomb. All of the polychromes had animal figures painted on the inside of the vessels. Three of these vessels were stacked one on top of the other on the southeastern corner of the tomb, and the other two were stacked above the a monochrome vase and bowl in the southwestern corner. The uppermost Saturday Creek Polychrome dish was broken into several sections, and parts of it were scattered throughout the chamber. Most interestingly, pieces of this dish were found in association with the censer, suggesting that it may have been moved during the intrusion into the Burial. The image on this dish is a so-called waterlilly jaguar (Reents-Budet 2004). This vessel appears to have been placed above a second Saturday Creek Polychrome vessel with a bird figure. The

third, fourth, and fifth polychromes were located east of the latter dish, and were stacked on top of one another. The uppermost vessel had the image of an armadillo painted on it, the second vessel had a painting of a dead deer (with the tongue hanging out), and the third vessel contained the image of two snakes rapped around the inner perimeter of the vessel with their heads and tails appearing in the center of the dish.

Directly underneath the vessels with the bird figure and waterlily jaguar were two Sotero Red-brown vessels. The vessel closest to the skull was a bowl, while the one farthest south was a vase. Inside the vase were the remains of a stuccoed object of unknown design. The stucco was painted red, green, black, and white and several curled designs were noted on the crumbled remains. A second, larger, area with stuccoed remains was uncovered underneath the two Sotero vessels. The second stuccoed material measured approximately 30 by 40 cm. It consisted of several layers of stucco painted in green, white, red, black and yellow paint. Several flakes had images of possible glyphs and other presently undetermined designs. In an effort to preserve these remains the layers of stucco were collected in a single large segment held together with matrix from the Burial. A grant from the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI) was obtained to curate this stucco material at the Smithsonian Institute. Rae Beaubien and a graduate intern worked on the piece for almost a year, determining eventually that it was several gourds or wooden objects stacked on top of each other (Audet and Beaubien 2005; Beaubien 2004).



One half of a 17 cm long mother of pearl shell was located above the left humerus. The shell had been carved into a large 0 shape (with a hollowed out center), and the inner portion of the shell (or glossy section) had been painted (Figure 5.17). The image is difficult to determine given the faintness of the lines, but one half of the shell clearly details a reclined human figure with one knee propped up, and a snake (probably a boa) weaving through the figure's legs and the mid-section of his body.



*Figure 5.17: Painted Shell from Burial2 (dia 17cm)*

The face may be looking away from the rest of his body, but poor preservation in this area makes it difficult to confirm this. The opposite side of the 0-shaped shell also contains an image, but this area is even more poorly preserved than the other side and thus making it impossible to determine its design.

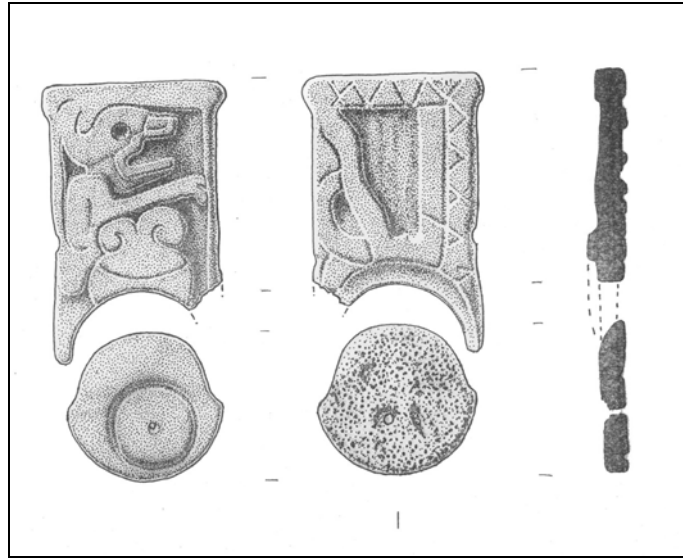
Twelve, pink, spondylus shells were discovered under the skeletal remains. Many of these were elaborately carved while some were simple beads and earflares. The two large spondylus earflares, approximately 8 cm in diameter, were found on either side of the skeleton, one close to the skull and the second closer to the pelvis. These flares had separate plugs (3 cm in diameter) that likely extended through the ear lobes. Numerous thin jade fragments were discovered near the flares, suggesting that the jades were probably once glued to the shell to give the effect of solid jade earrings.

Two shells, carved in a form that resembles the “Mundo Maya” logo, were discovered on the eastern section of the grave, near the pelvic area of the skeleton. These shells were less than 2 cm long and less than 0.1 cm thick. The function of these objects is unknown, but it is possible that they served as pendants. It is also possible they were sewn or glued onto the individual’s attire.

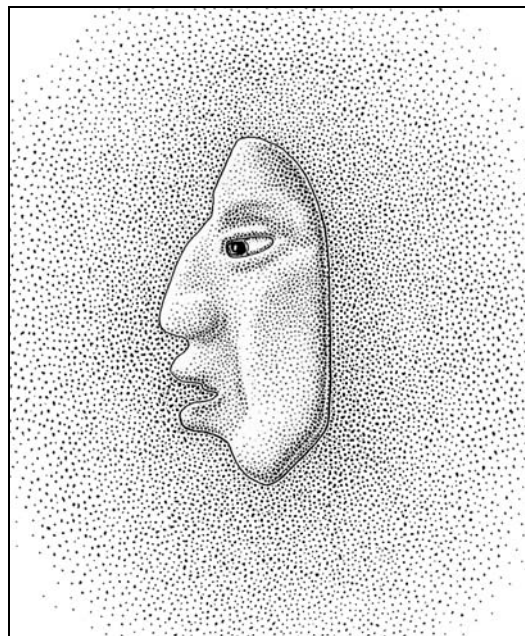
Two large earflares with separate shell plugs were discovered, one near the skull and the second near the pelvis. Both were covered with thin jade flakes that were likely glued onto the shell to create the appearance of jade earflares. Two carved shell objects of unknown function were also discovered. Each object is composed of two sections, and while the relationship between these two pieces can not be functionally determined, the image suggests the orientation. The upper

piece is an unusual shape, with a square top and a concave lower section that allowed for easy fitting with a flat, circular piece (Figure 5.18). One side has a stylized mollusk, depicted somewhat like a coyote, crawling out of its shell (Taube, personal communication, 2005). The shell iconography is similar to expressions of bivalve shells in Teotihuacán murals, and is usually depicted in the watery border sections of these murals. They are rare in the Maya area and may indicate some late contact between these two regions or more likely a pan-Mesoamerican use of Teotihuacáno iconography highlighting the underworld. The creature is depicted in profile with outstretched arms, similar in style to animals depicted at Teotihuacán and Cacaxtla (Taube and Headrick, personal communication, 2005). Its eye is made from a small jade chip that was still in place when the shells were uncovered. On the opposite side, the carved image is a serpent, with an open jaw and large eye orbit. Taube and Headrick believe that the serpent image and associated chevron border look strongly Teotihuacáno, although there are similarities with Cacaxtla as well. Both images are associated with the watery underworld. In addition, the placement of these images on a *Spondylus* shell, an object found at the bottom of the ocean, further strengthens their connection to the underworld.

Another shell object was finely carved in the form of a “typical” Maya face (Figure 5.19). This object was discovered literally “face up” in the west central section of the Burial. The profiled face has a small mother of pearl shell fragment flanking a small circular piece of pyrite that forms the eye. The face on



*Figure 5.18: Carved Spondylus Shell from Burial 2 (height 8.5 cm) (Gustavo Valenzuela)*



*Figure 5.19: Shell Face from Burial 2 (height 5.6 cm) (Gustavo Valenzuela)*

the shell is looking to the left, mouth slightly open, recessed chin, but no hair detailed. The function of this shell object is unknown, although it may have been used as decoration for clothing.

Three circular shell pieces, 5-6 cm in diameter, were located on the eastern side of the chamber. Fragments of very thinly carved jade were found in association with these artifacts but none remained on the shell. These pieces could have been either sewed onto clothing or used as pendants.

Several other pink *Spondylus* shell items of various sizes and shapes, and a single, orange colored, shell spindle whorl, were also found with the carved shells. The former objects had no recognizable forms thus it is difficult to determine their function. Along the north end of the chamber were two complete, 8 cm long, mother of pearl shells. One of these shells had two holes carved through it, while the second had three holes. North of these shells were two canine teeth which also had suspension holes carved through them. It is possible that all these objects were used on one necklace or that they were attached to a perishable item, like clothing, that decomposed in the tomb. Beneath these items we discovered more fragments of painted stucco, but unlike the stucco on the southern side of the chamber, only traces remained of this material. We removed some fragments of green and red paint for future study.

Two jade beads and a single jade earflare were discovered with the skeleton. The jade earflare is 2.6 cm in diameter and was located on the southeastern corner of the chamber, away from the location of the skull. As noted above, however, the skull appeared to have been moved from its original location.

It is therefore quite possible that this earflare was also moved from its original position sometime in the past. The two jade beads were located near the left humerus and were likely worn as part of a necklace. One of the beads had two holes drilled through it, while the other had three.

The distribution of artifacts in Burial 2 makes us relatively certain that the chamber was reopened and pillaged at some point during the Late - Terminal Classic period. The latter is suggested by the discovery of a Late-Terminal Classic censer that was placed in the dirt well above the upper body of the skeleton, and the apparent movement of the skull and the earflare in Burial 2. The censer is composed of two parts: a lower section that has a form of a bowl with a pedestal base and a lid with a semi-circular, fist-sized, handle. The latter is decorated with four long, narrow holes and one circular central hole with alternating bands of red and cream colored paint decorating the exterior. The lower section of the vessel has similar painted decoration and small circular appliqués along the upper rim of the vessel. The censer is approximately 36 cm high, and ranges from 6 – 12 cm wide. Stylistically this vessel dates between 800-900 A.D. This date is much later than that of the other pottery discovered in the tomb, which have been placed between 550-680 A.D. We hope that future radiometric dating of charcoal that was recovered within the censer will provide us with a more absolute date for this vessel.

Another piece of compelling evidence supporting our argument that Burial 2 was reopened in antiquity, however, comes from the discovery of a single, jade earflare in Burial 1 identical in every regard to the one found in Burial 2. We

know from the construction sequence that Burial 2 predates Burial 1; therefore it is reasonable to suggest that the earflare in Burial 1 was pillaged from the earlier Burial 2 and subsequently deposited in Burial 1. It is also possible that other objects were removed from Burial 2, but we can not begin to postulate which ones.

Less conclusive evidence for intrusion into Burial 2 comes from the apparent displacement of the skull. As we noted above, the skull was discovered 30 cm south and 12 cm west of its anatomical position on the endoskeleton. Although rodent activity could have disturbed the bones, this could only have occurred if the tomb had been hollow for some period of time. However, we found the grave filled with dirt from the floor to the capstones. This fact makes us confident that Burial 2 was originally a hollow chamber that was later filled with dirt after it was reopened at least once, if not twice, in antiquity. This would certainly account for the distribution of objects within the burial, the discovery of the earflare in the adjacent tomb, for the location of the censer above the rest of the cultural remains, and for the censer's substantially later date.

The individual interred within the tomb was clearly a person of high status within the Baking Pot community. She may have been a ruler (a queen), the mother of a ruler (perhaps of the individual in the tomb next to hers) or the wife of a ruler, or some combination thereof. The relationship between the two people interred is interesting considering the “sharing” of the set of earflares. This may indicate a close relationship between the two occupants during life as well as death.

These two tombs are ornate and certainly reflect the wealth and/or status that these individuals were able to accrue during their lives. However, it is interesting to note that all of the ceramics within them were locally produced, with the exception of two dishes. Vessel # from Burial 2 was an import from either western Belize or the eastern Peten, while the Vessel # , also from Burial 2, was from Buenavista del Cayo (Reents-Budet et al. 2004). The lack of foreign ceramics included in these tombs contrasts strongly with the grave goods discovered in Burial 1 from Structure B, a cyst containing the remains of a later ruler, suggesting either that these individuals did not desire or require status-enhancing items from one particularly powerful community, perhaps indicating autonomy or that they were not powerful enough to acquire them. The discrepancy between both the form of the burial, the types of objects interred, and the placement of these items suggests a break in tradition between the burials of these earlier rulers/elites and Burial 1 from Structure B.

Excavations ceased after the tombs were investigated for fear of destabilizing the temple, with the exception of a small test below the floor of Burial 1. This excavation yielded a partially complete Mountain Pine Red dish but few other artifacts. Time constraints, coupled with constant rain during the first few weeks of August, forced us to terminate our excavations before earlier construction material could be located.



*Burial 1, Structure B, Group 1 (Terminal Classic; (A.D. 780-900)*

Structure B is located along the western edge of Plaza 2 of Group 1 directly across from the Eastern Group where two elite burials were discovered. Structure B is slightly taller than the 17 meter high E Group, and a large platform likely once covered the top of this temple. Due to the heightened concern about looting after word of our discoveries in Structure E reached the general public in San Ignacio, we decided to dig a shallow trench into the top of Structure B to determine if any tombs were in immediate risk of discovery.

Burial one was actually discovered just under two meters below the surface, in a plaster covered cyst (Figure 5.20). Two partially destroyed plaster floors were uncovered near the surface of the mound and an intact floor was discovered 30 cm above the grave. Few diagnostic artifacts were uncovered in the fill, and the chert flakes that covered the two tombs located in Structure E were conspicuously absent.

While this individual was only interred within a cyst, the quality and quantity of his grave goods, along with the location of the burial, suggest he was an individual of high status within the community. More specifically, a single elaborately carved jade pendant of K'awil, the patron-protector of ruling families, was worn as a pendant around his neck (Figure 5.21). The pendant indicates that this individual was likely a Terminal Classic ruler of Baking Pot (Headrick, personal communication, 2005). Ten ceramic vessels were located in the

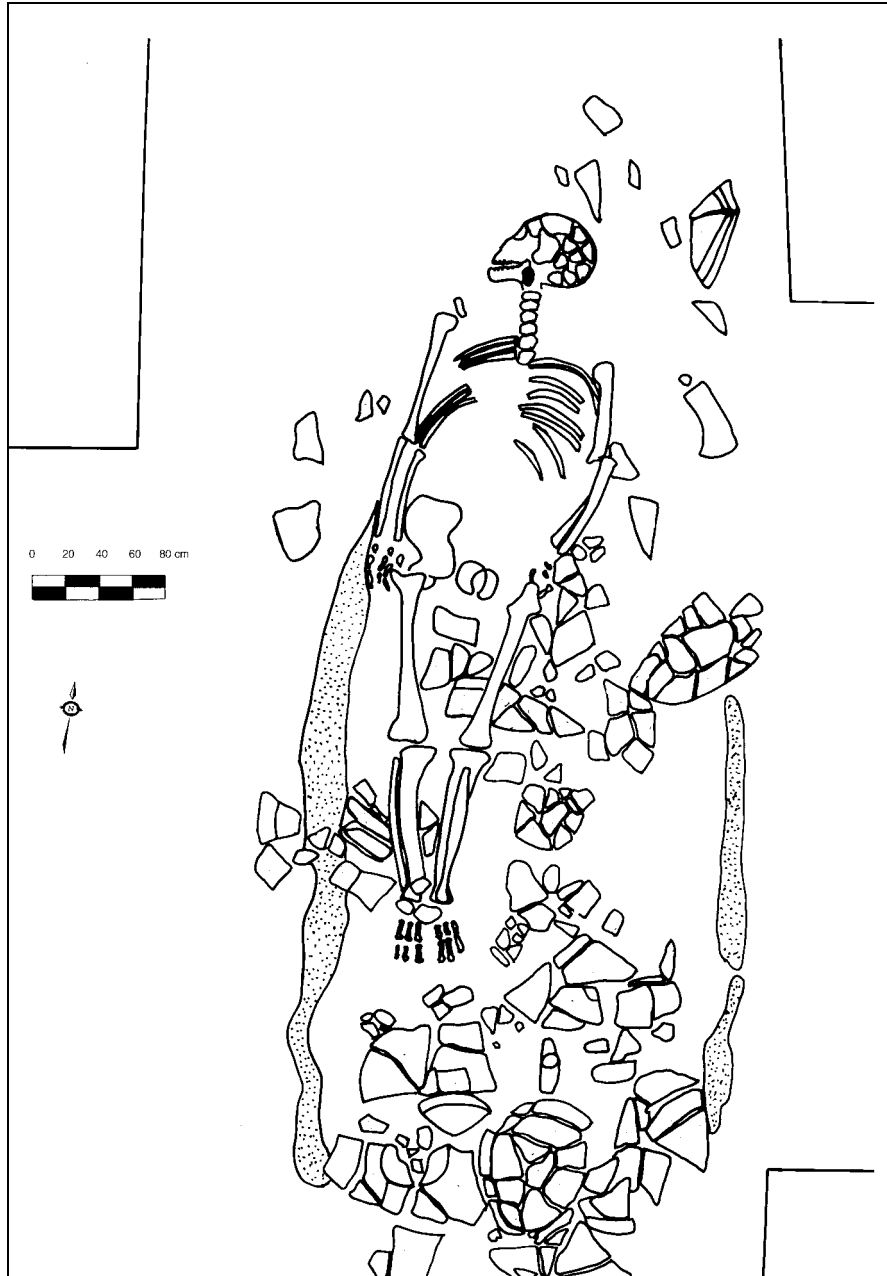
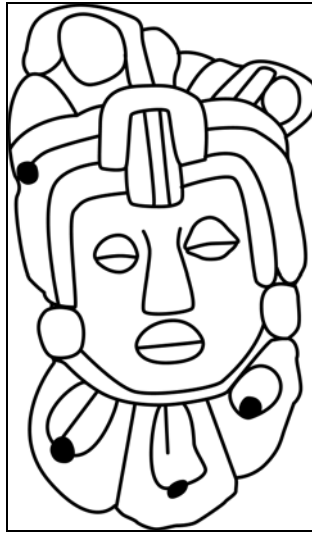


Figure 5.20: Plan of Burial 1, Structure B (drawn by author)

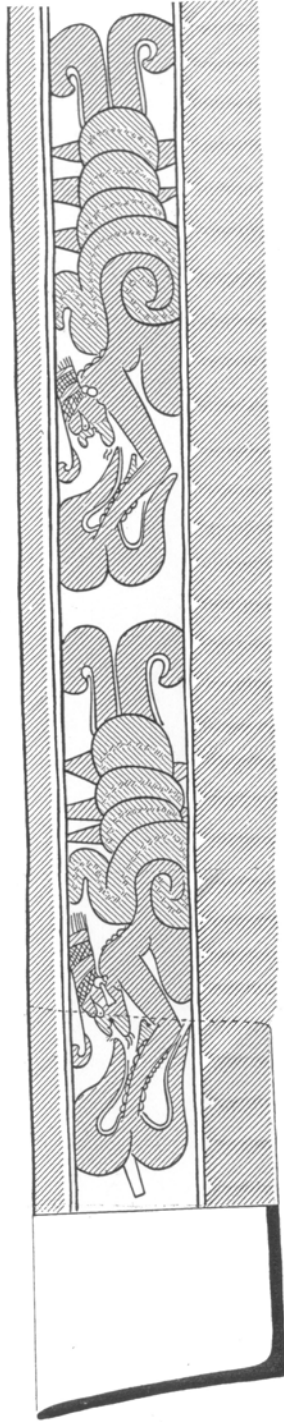


*Figure 5.21: Jade Pendant (150%) (Jenny Bongard)*

burial. Almost all of the vessels were broken, and with the exception of a miniature polychrome vase, these ceramics were separated and placed in various locations around the body. We have no similarly-styled burials from Baking Pot.

Seven of the ceramic vessels are of foreign origin, with particularly strong ties to Buenavista del Cayo, Homul, and Naranjo (Reents-Budet et al. 2004). Four are Cabrito Cream polychrome vessels (Gifford et al. 1976), including one with the image of the Holmul dancer, which dates to between 660 and 800 A.D. (Reents-Budet 2004) (Figures 5.22-5.24). A second Cabrito Cream polychrome vessel is a small drinking vessel, with a unique whistle feature built into one of the sides (Figure 5.25). This vase has a primary standard sequence horizontally written around the rim of the vessel as well as a single vertical glyph band

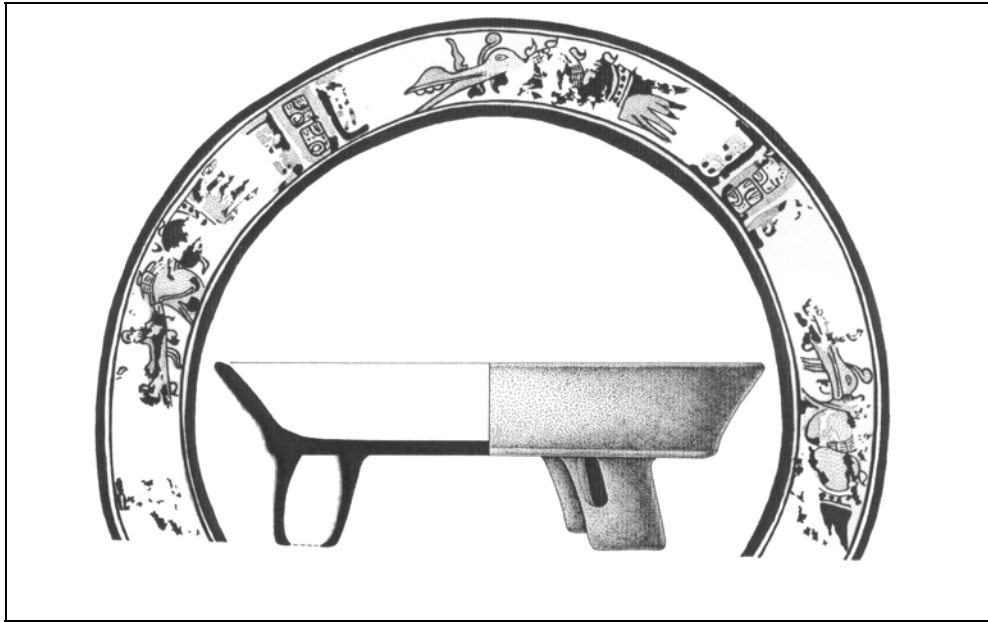
comprised of three glyphs. An image of an unidentified bird adorns one side of the vase, while the other image is too corrupted to discern.



*Figure 5.22: Polychrome Vase with God N emerging from Shell (height 7 cm) (G. Valenzuela)*



*Figure 5.23: Polychrome Vase with Bird image (height 7 cm) (G. Valenzuela)*

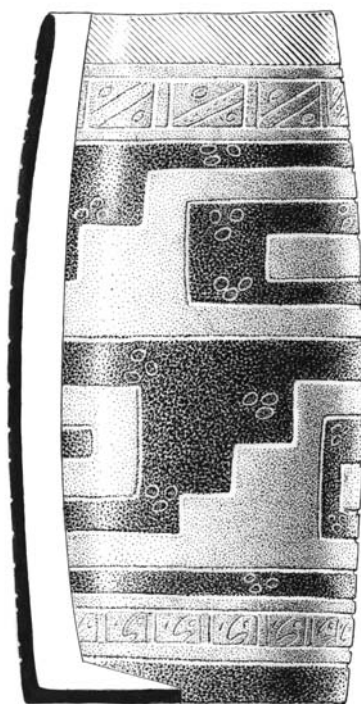


*Figure 5.24: Tripod Dish from Burial 1, Structure B (dia 36cm) (G. Valenzuela)*



*Figure 5.25: Drinking Vessel from Burial 1, Structure B (height 12 cm) (Photo by J. Awe)*

The epigraphic information deciphered from the vase suggests that it was manufactured at Naranjo, although the chemical analysis suggests its source elsewhere in the Petén (Reents-Budet et al. 2004). The patron of the vessel may have been K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk, a Naranjo Lord that ruled from 693-728 A.D. (Grube and Martin 2004; Helmke et al. 2004; Martin and Grube 2000). This vase has prompted others to argue that Naranjo had exerted its strongest influence over the valley during the reign of this ruler (Helmke et al. 2004), since Naranjo appears to experience a slight hiatus both before and after his reign. This date, however, does not entirely correspond with the dating for Naranjo's influence at



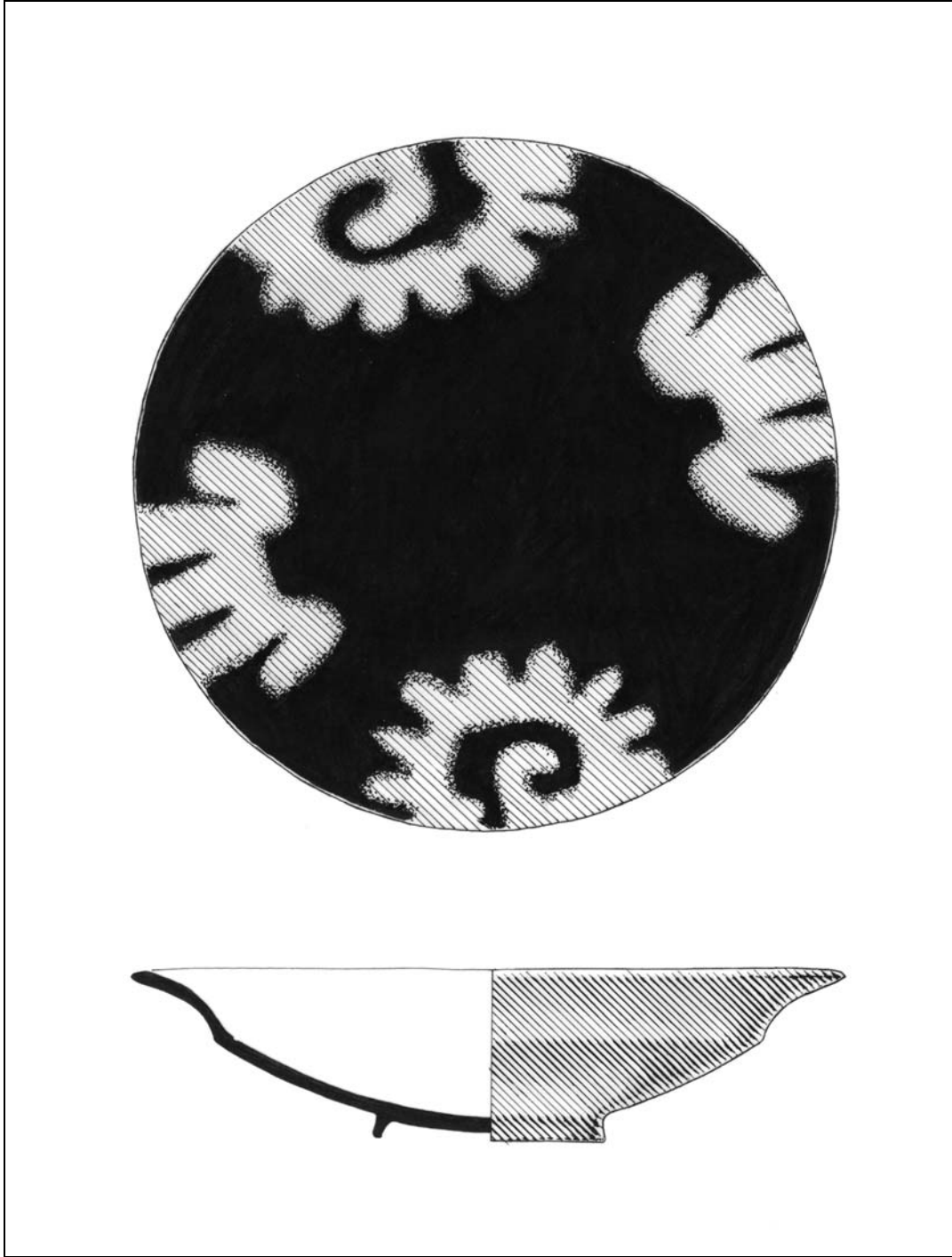
*Figure 5.26: Puhil-zibal Composite Vase (height 26 cm) (G. Valenzuela)*



Buenavista del Cayo, nor with perceived Naranjo domination at Xunantunich.

Other well-known varieties from this burial include three Belize Red dishes, a Puhui-zibal Composite vase (Figure 5.26), a partially complete Balanza Black vase with stuccoed and painted decoration, and a single large Daylight Orange: Darknight Variety dish (Figure 5.27) (Gifford et al. 1976). The discovery of the Daylight Orange type was surprising, considering its Terminal Classic date, suggesting a later date for this burial than previously believed, perhaps even as late as the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This dish is decorated with two hand prints and two stylized shell images similar in form to shells found in Burial 2 in Structure E. The Puhui-zibal Composite vase is decorated with geometric shapes as well as a line of faces in profile carved into band at the bottom of the vase.

Unfortunately, the bones did not preserve well and have not been thoroughly analyzed by an osteologist, but we were able to determine this individual to be an adult male. The location of the interment in conjunction with the artifacts placed with the body suggest this individual held an important place within the Baking Pot community and also was well connected throughout the region with other elites. The jade pendant, coupled with the valuable ceramic offerings strongly suggest that he was a ruler of the site during the Spanish Lookout phase, probably during the latter half (780-850 A.D.).



*Figure 5.27: Daylight Orange: Darknight Variety (dia 44cm) (G. Valenzuela)*

### *Plaza 2: Units 1 and 2*

Excavations in the plaza consisted of two 1.5 x 1.5 meter test units located near the center of the plaza. Excavation of these units was overseen primarily by Leslie Swain (Swain 2005) until her departure in early August, at which point excavations in Unit 2 continued for approximately two weeks under my direction. These excavations were placed to better determine the chronology of site construction, which is relevant to our understanding of Baking Pot's place in the cultural history of the Belize Valley.

#### *Unit 1*

Unit 1 was located just east of Unit 2, in line with the central staircase of Structure E (see Figure 5.4). Excavations revealed three plaster floors (Floors 1, 2a and 2b) within 10 cm of the modern surface level, all with ceramic artifacts dating to the Spanish Lookout phase. The third floor was discovered 56 cm below Floor 2b or 66 cm below the surface. Intrusive into the fill in this level we discovered a burial of a single adult individual (Figure 5.28). This individual was laid north-south, with the head to the south facing west, prone, and in a semi-flexed position (Swain 2005). While no grave goods were found associated with this individual he or she appears to have been a person of high status during life based primarily on the discovery of jade inlays in the 6 upper incisors and canines. Ceramic sherds from this level include Spanish Lookout phase types,

however given the intrusive nature of the deposit this does not necessarily date the fill of Floor 3. The last floor discovered, Floor 4, was located 105 cm below the



*Figure 5.28: Burial 1, Plaza 2, Group 1 (photo by author)*

surface level but due to time constraints we could not complete excavating until we hit sterile soil. Instead we excavated 62 cm below the 4<sup>th</sup> floor before terminating our investigations. The ceramics from this level suggest a Late Preclassic date for the construction phase, like that found in the adjoining Unit 2.

Excavations in Unit 2 yielded a clearer image for dating the construction of the plaza because we a) were able to continue the unit until we hit sterile soil, and b) we discovered no intrusive caches or burials. The first three floors in Unit 2 are identical to those found in Unit 1. Three floors were found close to the surface (Floor 1, 2a and 2b), all dating to the Spanish Lookout ceramic complex. Approximately 38 cm below the surface, Floor 3 was discovered. This floor was not found in Unit 1 (it had probably been destroyed when placing the body into the ground) however no new periods of construction were detected as the fill

within Floor 3 dates to the Spanish Lookout phase. Floors 4a and 4b were discovered 17 cm below Floor 3 (58cm below the surface) and again date to the Spanish Lookout phase of construction.

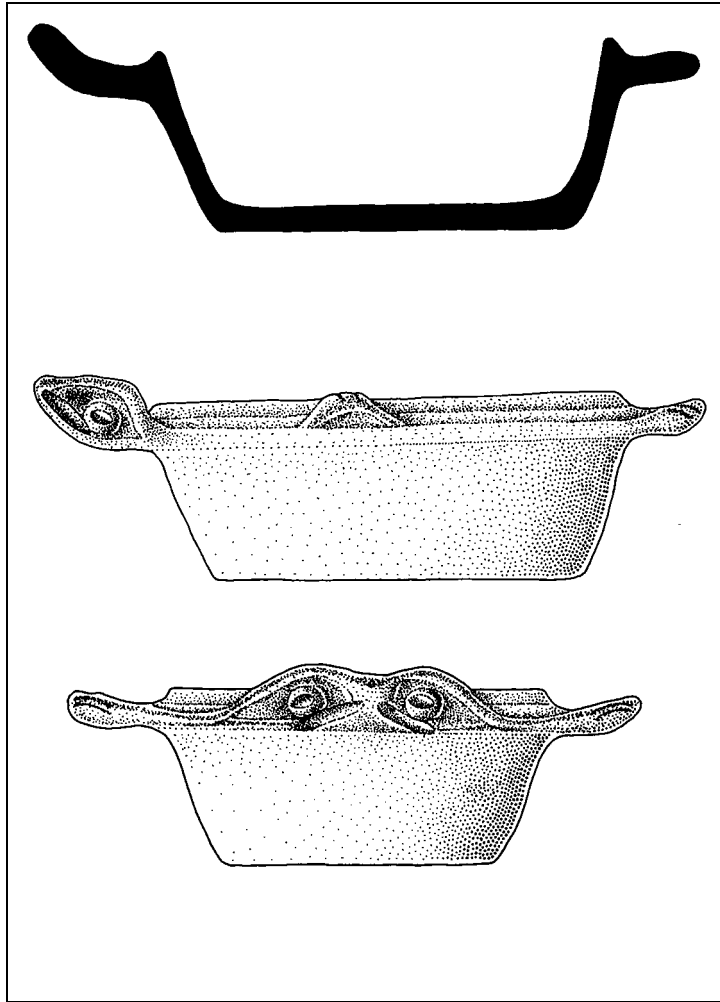
The Late to Terminal Classic construction phases were followed directly by the discovery of a Late Preclassic construction phase. Floor 5 was discovered 100 cm below the surface and about 40 cm below Floor 4b. The ceramic artifacts found within the fill include Sierra Red, Polvero Black, Lechugal Incised, and Paila Unslipped sherds (Gifford et al. 1976). Around 250 cm below the surface the concentration of artifacts began to wane and we suspected we were about to hit sterile soil. However by 300 cm below the surface we once again began to hit large numbers of artifacts. Because of this break in artifact concentrations we divided this lower section into its own level. Level 6 included Feature 1, a Late Preclassic deposit measuring over 2 meters high and 1.5 meters wide. The deposit was comprised of burnt organic material, thousands of broken ceramic vessels (however only four complete vessels), obsidian blades, chert bifacially worked tools, animal bones, and thousands of marine and freshwater shells (*jute*, bivalves, and *pomacea*). Sierra Red, Polvero Black, Savanna Orange, Paila Unslipped, and Reforma Incised sherds were found by the hundreds in this deposit (Figure 5.29). Such deposits are typically characterized as the remains of feasting ceremonies (Garber personal communication 2004) and perhaps Feature 1 was been placed at the founding of the construction of Group 1. While most of the ceramics were of the typical forms found in Gifford et al (1976), a single, complete, toad effigy Sierra Red vessel (Figure 5.30) was uncovered and two of the Sierra Red rims



*Figure 5.29: Middle-Late Preclassic Deposit*

from large bowls have the profile of a human face impressed into the clay. In addition, several censor fragments and modeled figures were uncovered.

While the majority of the ceramics from this deposit date to the Late Preclassic period (300B.C. to 300 A.D.), a single radiocarbon date from the cache dates to between 700 B.C. - 400 B.C. While the radiocarbon date is indicative of a Middle Preclassic deposit, only a small percentage of the sherds were actually from that early time period. These included Savanna Orange, Reforma Incised, Jocote Orange-Brown, and Pital Cream types (119 out of 7578 sherds or 1.5%). The significantly larger number and presence of Late Preclassic sherds suggests that this early date may be slightly too early and that this C14 sample had been contaminated. Unfortunately only a single sample was tested from this deposit, however future researchers may choose to retest other carbon recovered from this feature.



*Figure 5.30: Sierra Red Toad Effigy Bowl (height 5.6 cm) (N. Puc)*

Irregardless of the exact date, the large size of this deposit indicates that the early elites at Baking Pot were interested in establishing their presence in the area. If this deposit was the remains of ritual feasting, this could be early evidence of contact and formal relationships between Baking Pot and other political powers in the region.

*Patio Group H Unit 1*

Located to the south of Structure E, a small plaza encircled by two low range structures was chosen for investigation during the 2004 field season. These investigations were conducted by Julie Hoggarth (2005) with the goal of determining the chronological sequence of construction of this area. Unit 1 measured 1.5 by 1.5 meters, and was oriented to magnetic north. The terminal phase occupation shows signs of both a Terminal Classic and Early Postclassic phase, as a large number of Belize Red sherds were discovered along with smaller numbers of Augustine Red and Paxcaman Red sherds. A partially preserved floor was found about 20 centimeters below the surface level. The ceramics characterizing the terminal phase of construction date to the Spanish Lookout phase of occupation. Floor 2, also partially preserved, was located 32 centimeters below the surface. The ceramics from this level include Mountain Pine Red and Minanha Red sherds, indicating a Late Classic 1 or Tiger Run ceramic complex date of 580-680 A.D. A third floor was located approximately 47 centimeters below the surface level. Unfortunately, no diagnostic sherds were discovered in this level making it impossible to date. Approximately 15 centimeters below Floor 3, Floor 4 was discovered. The ceramics from this level are Late Preclassic in date, including Sierra Red, Polvero Black, and Paila Unslipped. Floor 5, a poorly preserved floor, was located approximately one meter below the surface. The only diagnostic ceramic type found within this level was an isolated Polvero Black sherd. Floor 6 was located 140cm below the surface level and the ceramics from



this level include Sierra Red and Polvero Black. Due to time constraints, excavation stopped at 145 centimeters below the surface level.

### ***Summary***

The construction within Group 1 clusters into distinct time periods. The Late Preclassic, during which Maya occupying the site center directed a huge surge in construction of the monumental plazas. The Early Classic hiatus that LeCount and others have noted (LeCount 2004), while not seen everywhere at Baking Pot, is clearly noted in Group 1. Extensive construction again is witnessed during the Late Classic period, particularly during the Spanish Lookout phase (680-900 A.D.). This is interesting to note, given that the richest tombs date to the Tiger Run Phase, a hundred years before the majority of the construction in the plazas was conducted. It is also important to note that no construction dating to the Postclassic Period was discovered in Group 1, something that Jim Aimers also noted, with one possible exception (what may be a small platform), during the 1999 season (Aimers 2000).

### **Causeway Termini Structures**

Causeway associated structures are relatively common throughout western Belize and the Petén province of Guatemala (Cheetham 2004). There appear to be two common types of these structures. Both are located at the ends of causeways; however one is found in the site periphery away from the site core, while the other is located at the entrance to the monumental center (Cheetham 2004). Cheetham

has noted that in the Belize River Valley there does not appear to be any trends in the orientation or location of these structures within the site.

Several causeway termini structures have been documented in the Belize Valley. At the site of Cahal Pech a large terminus group was located and excavated by David Cheetham (Cheetham 2004). At Caracol, numerous terminus groups have been documented and excavated by the Chases and Sonja Schwake focused on the terminus structure at Xualcanil (ibid.; Schwake 1999). While the Xualcanil and Cahal Pech examples strongly suggest a ritual function for these structures, several of the termini groups at Caracol appear to have a more domestic or economic role in the community (Chase and Chase 2001). Cheetham notes that when these architectural features are located within one kilometer of the site core they tend to be ritual in nature, and only after this distance do these groups display signs of residential function. Both causeway termini structures at Baking Pot are located within this one kilometer range, suggesting that the Baking Pot examples likely served a ritual function within the community.

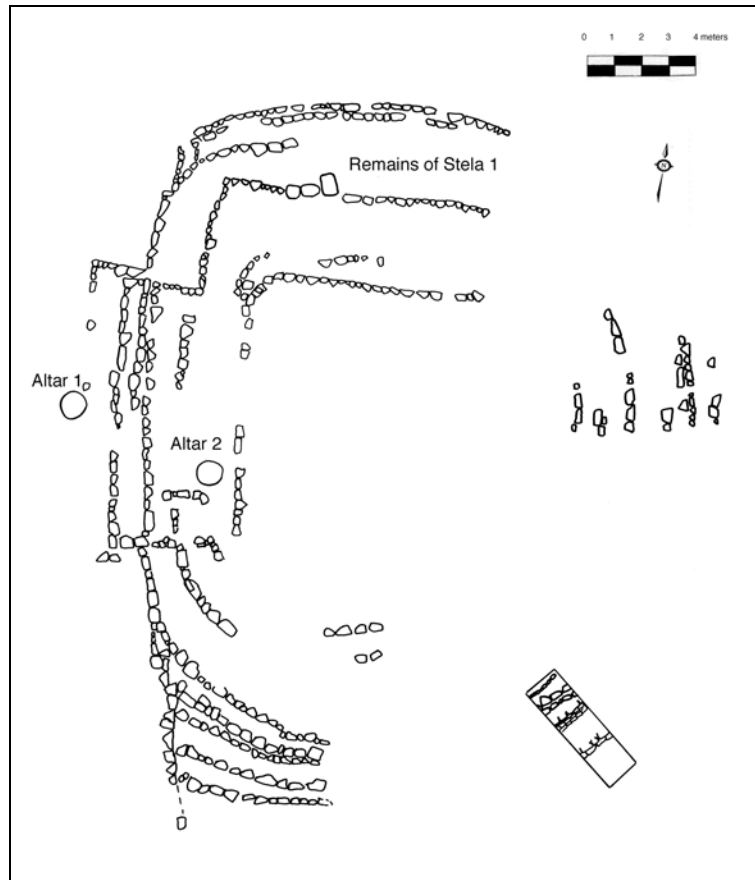
***Structure 209 (Late Preclassic to Late Classic; 100 B.C. – A.D. 800)***

Located along the eastern side of the causeway leading into Group I, Structure 209 is known as the “Ticketbooth” (see Figure 5.5). In the Belize Valley, Awe (personal communication, 2003) notes that “Ticketbooth” structures that are constructed near the entrances to important architectural complexes, and adjacent to (or abutting) major causeways, are present at Cahal Pech (see Structure A2 of the Zopilote Group in map by Awe, Grube and Cheetham in

Press), Buena Vista (see Fig. 43) in Ball 1993), Xualcanil (see Structure 14C, Fig. 10, in Schawke 2000), Pacbitun (see Healy 1990:250) and possibly at Xunantunich (see Fig 2 in LeCount et al. 2002). Elsewhere, similar structures may be present at Caracol where the Conchita causeway connects with Group B (see Fig 47, Chase and Chase 1987), and at Naranjo (see p. 68) in Martin and Grube 2000). Because of its rather unique location, I hypothesized that Structure 209 may have served ritual rather than domestic function, and that possible ceremonial activities may have been associated with elite uses of the causeway to restrict access to Group 1. In an effort to test this hypothesis I decided to investigate Structure 209 in the summer of 2002. The investigations included both penetrating excavations and the horizontal clearing of the terminal phase architecture.

#### *Terminal Phase Architecture*

In its final, Terminal Classic, form, Structure 209 was comprised of a series of elliptical terraces crowned by a distinct upper platform that included both elliptical and straight walls (Figure 5.31). A short flight of stairs provided access from the causeway to the summit of the platform. The walls of the structure were made from cut limestone blocks ranging between 20-30 cm long, with slightly larger blocks used on the stairs and the lower terraces. The terminal phase floors were made from a 4-6 cm layer of plaster placed directly on top of alluvial clay fill with a few rock and artifact inclusions.



*Figure 5.31: Plan View of Structure 209 (N. Puc and A. Itza)*

The three lowest terraces intersect with the causeway on both the northern and southern side of the building. The maximum height of the terrace on the southern side of the structure is over 2 meters in height. On the eastern side of the structure, however, the terraces stand only 1 meter high. These terraces decrease in size on the northern side of the building, where they are less than 50 cm high. The differences in height appear to conform to differences in the height of the natural ground level.

Three stairs are located on the western side of the building and lead to the second terrace. The third terrace is relatively low and may have also served as the

final step leading to the summit of the platform. The stairs were constructed with large limestone blocks that were well preserved on the northern side of the staircase but absent to the south. The latter appear to have either been purposely removed to facilitate the placement of Burial 1 below the western half of the stairway, or may have been scavenged by Postclassic inhabitants of the site.

The upper platform is comprised of a lower apsidal terrace and two rectangular upper terraces. The lowest terrace was approximately four to five courses high (50 cm), although much of the wall appears to have been removed in antiquity (possibly during Postclassic times). The upper terraces were better preserved; with the second terrace four to six courses high (50-60cm) and the third terrace only two to three courses high (20-25 cm). The second and third terraces were only preserved on the western and northern sides of the platform and no collapse was encountered on the eastern and southern sides, suggesting that the stones here were also removed in antiquity. Further supporting this possibility is the discovery of several Middle to Late Postclassic arrowpoints on and around the building and the presence of a Middle Postclassic household roughly 200 meters east of the Ticketbooth (Audet 2002, Audet and Awe 1999).

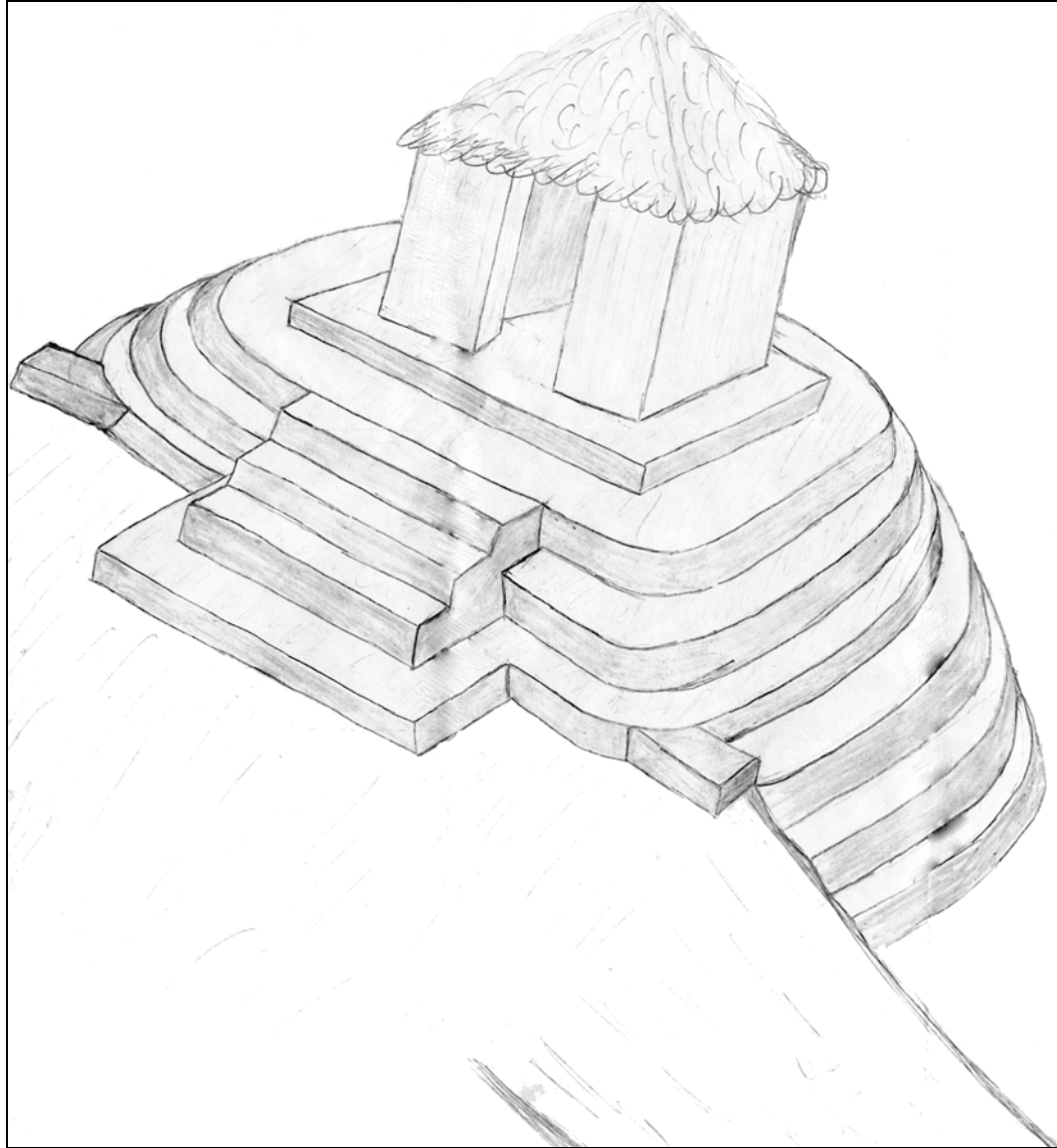
The terminal phase form architecture of Structure 209 is unusual and, until now, has never been recorded in the Belize Valley. Similar building forms (with round lower terraces and rectangular upper platforms), however, have been noted at several Postclassic sites in the Yucatan Calera, Chichen Itza, and Quiengola (Andrews and Andrews 1975; Pollock 1936). Importantly, the unique

architectural style of the structure supports the argument that the Ticketbooth served as a special function structure at Baking Pot.

### *Construction Sequence*

Excavations in the Ticketbooth suggest that the structure underwent five major phases of construction and one minor modification. The two latest construction phases were faced with limestone blocks cemented together with lime plaster. The core fill of these platforms consisted predominantly of alluvial clays with a scattering of pebbles and cobbles. The floors of the platforms were made from thick layers of lime plaster, and there is evidence to suggest that these floors were re-plastered several times.

The earliest phase (Structure 209/1<sup>st</sup>) of architecture was recorded by three excavation units (Units 26, 27 and 36). Two of the excavations (Units 26 and 27, measuring 1.5x1.5m) penetrated the mound from the surface of the upper platform and the third excavation (Unit 36, measuring 1.5x1.5m) was placed in front of the staircase. Data produced by these operations indicate that the Structure 209/1<sup>st</sup> platform stood between 100- 140 cm above sterile soil. This difference in height simply reflects changes in the natural contour of the terrain, particularly between the western side or front of the building and the southeastern section of the structure. Despite the fact that our excavations exposed a limited area of the earliest construction, it appears that 209/1<sup>st</sup> was a relatively low platform that may, or may not, have supported a perishable superstructure. No



*Figure 5.32: Reconstruction of the Terminal Phase Construction (N. Puc)*

burials or caches were associated with this construction phase but associated ceramic remains suggest that it was constructed between 300-100 B.C.

Three smaller modifications were made to Structure 209 during the Early Classic period (300 – 580 A.D.). Unfortunately our limited test sample gives us

few indications as to the nature of the final form the construction took. We only were able to determine that the structure was increased in height by 75 cm.

The fifth construction phase (209/5<sup>th</sup>) substantially altered Structure 209 (Figure 5.32). New retaining terrace walls were added to the southern side of the structure and the summit of the platform was increased by 153 cm. The width of the platform was also extended by at least 3 meters and a wider central stairway was constructed on the west side of the structure.

### *Monuments*

Excavations in the Ticketbooth uncovered two uncarved altars and a single broken stela. The stela was produced from dolomitic limestone and was broken into at least three pieces. Two fragments of the possible monument were located on the northern side of the platform and a third fragment, which appears to be the top of the stela, was discovered on the second terrace along the western side of the platform. Measurements of the fragments suggest that the monument may have been at least 2 meters in length. No evidence of carving was found on any of the fragments suggesting that, like other stela in the Belize Valley, the monument was originally plain or decorated with stucco and paint.

The two altars were found in the front, or western side, of the structure. Altar 1 was located along the central axis of the platform, one meter below the base of the stairway, and on top of the 1<sup>st</sup> plaza or causeway floor. This position suggests that it could have been originally associated with the first construction phase but kept in place following the construction of 209/2<sup>nd</sup>. Altar 1 is 18 cm



thick, 72 cm in diameter, and was made from soft limestone. No evidence of carving, stucco, or paint was found on the monument and neither did it have associated caches or offerings.

Altar 2 was also found on the western side of the structure; however, it was located 60 cm under the second terrace floor and approximately 3 meters south of the central axis. It was slightly smaller than Altar 1, measuring 18 cm thick and 70 cm in diameter. Altar 2 was found resting on alluvial fill and its placement beneath the terrace suggests that this was not the original location of the monument. Like Altar 1, no associated caches or special deposits were discovered with Altar 2.

### *Burials*

Four individuals were located in Structure 209, all placed along the central axis of the platform. Three were primary interments, while the fourth was a secondary burial placed within the tomb of Burial 3.

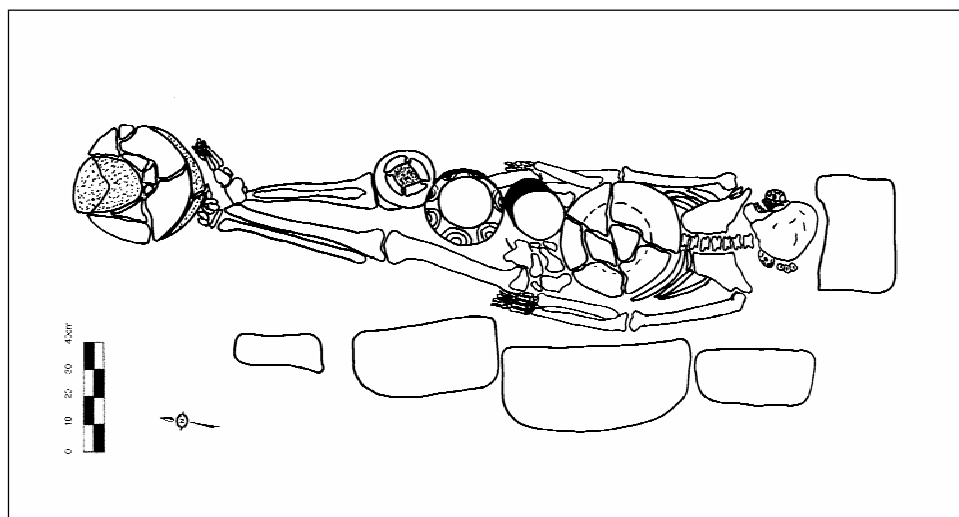
#### Burial 1

Burial 1 was located one meter under the terminal phase stairs on the western side of the platform (Figure 5.33). The grave consisted of a cist that was placed slightly off the central axis of the structure. Because the limestone blocks of the stairway were missing in the area over the burial, it is possible that stones were either removed by later (Postclassic inhabitants) or that the stairs were never reconstructed following the placement of the burial. The burial was capped by a series of large limestone slabs that were placed over the body. These stones were

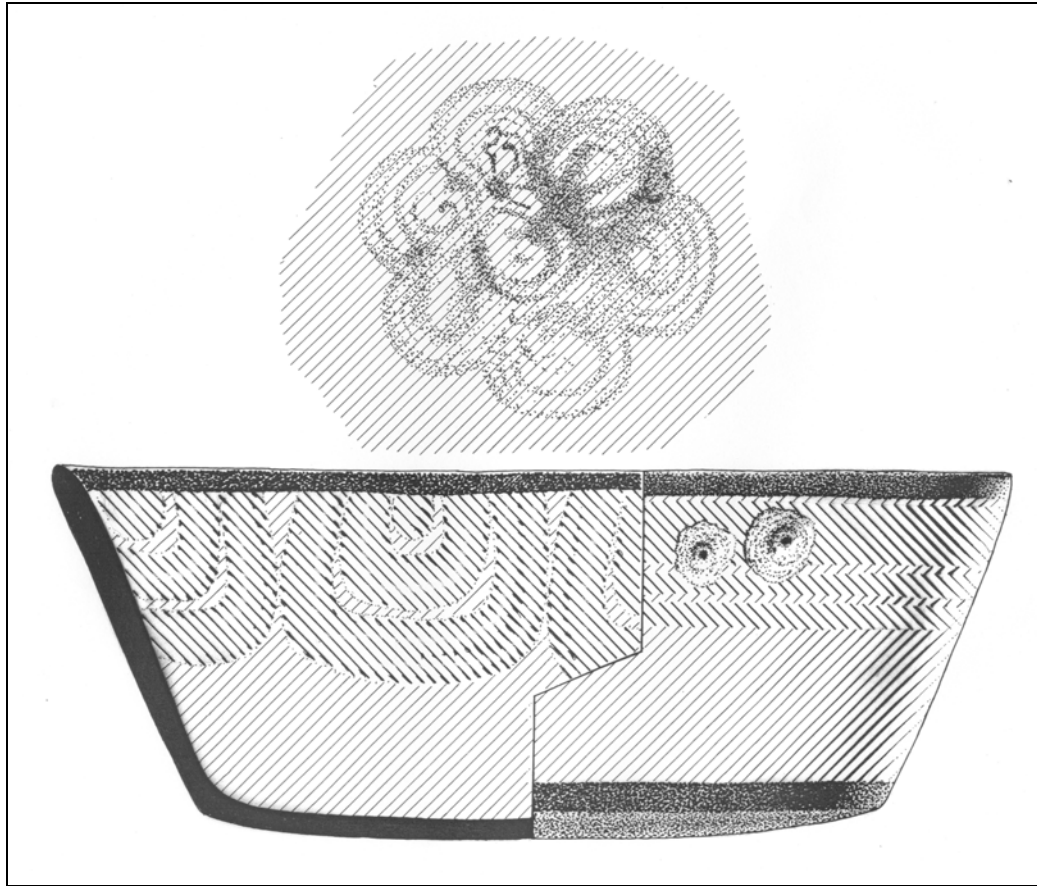
60-70 cm long, 25-34 cm wide, and 10-15 cm thick. One end of the stones rested against clay fill above the eastern side of the individual (the stones were on a 45 degree angle) and the other side rested on the floor west of the burial.

The grave contained a single individual. The skeleton was extended, supine, head to the south, and looking east. The skeleton is that of an adult male individual of undetermined age (Kokkalis 2005). This individual suffered from numerous pathologies, including porotic hyperostosis, ankylosing spondylitis in his vertebrae, osteoarthritis (which led to his left acetabulum fusing to his femoral head), and the fusion of many bones in his left foot (Kokkalis 2005).

The burial contained a number of grave goods. Seven whole vessels, including three Belize Red dishes, one Vinaceous Tawny Ware polychrome vase, one red on orange bichrome bowl, and two small ollas were placed with the body (Gifford et al 1976). One of the Belize Red dishes was placed on the back of the individual, the polychrome vase was located on the pelvis, and an olla and the



*Figure 5.33: Burial 1, Structure 209 (N. Puc)*



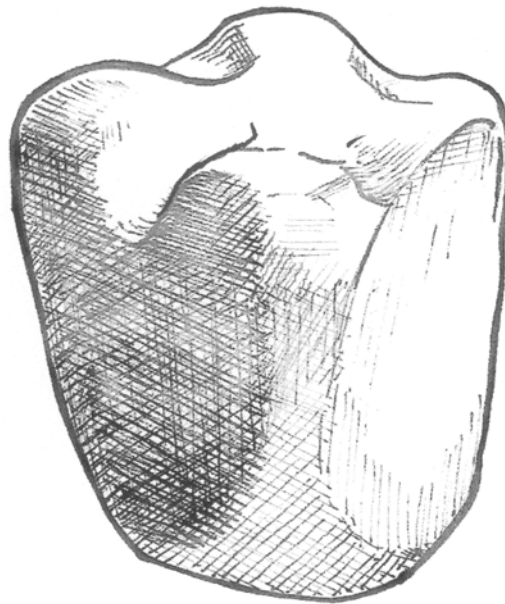
*Figure 5.34: Red on Orange Bowl from Burial 1, Structure 209 (height 14cm) (G. Valenzuela)*

bichrome bowl were resting on the femurs. The other two Belize Red dishes and one of the ollas were located north of the feet. The Vinaceous Tawny Ware polychrome vase had alternating bands of red and black paint that were broken in the central third of the vase, where large red glyphs or pseudo glyphs were painted. All of the decoration was limited to the outside of the vase. The red on orange bichrome bowl had 12 large, red, semicircular designs painted on the inner rim of the bowl. Each of these designs was created with three strokes of the paintbrush, creating a small semi-circle, an intermediate semi-circle, and a larger

semi-circle all nestled together (Figure 5.34). In the center of the bowl a red unidentified object/animal was painted. A large claw-like form can be seen, but the rest of the painting is unclear. It is possible that the painting is representative of a bird or the headdress of a human individual. The typology of this vessel has yet to be ascertained.

Three jade objects were discovered in Burial 1. Two fragmented greenstone ear flares, 7 cm in diameter, were uncovered on either side of the skull. Six semi-circles were carved into the flares, giving them a flower-like appearance. The location of the ear flares suggests that the deceased may have been interred with the flares on his ears. A third jade object was uncovered in the individual's mouth. This small jade object appears to have been carved into the shape of a molar and may have been in the position of the third molar on the right side of the mandible (Figure 5.35). Only the top and one of the sides of the jade exhibited polish but unfortunately it fell out of the mouth while cleaning the mandible, and we are uncertain which side this faced when in the mouth. It is possible that this "tooth" was glued into the mouth and used as an expensive denture, but further tests are necessary to confirm this.

A single obsidian blade (possibly a bloodletter) was discovered in the cyst. It was located on the left side of the pelvis and appears to have been either directly on the individual, or leaning against the pelvis when the person was interred. The inclusion of such an artifact may be indicative of the individual's status (only elites let blood) and/or position within the community (perhaps this person was a ritual specialist).



*Figure 5.35: Jade Tooth from Burial 1 (height 0.9cm) (Drawing by Joel Zovar)*

Both the location of the grave, and its ceramic contents, argue for a Terminal Classic (800-900 A.D.) date for Burial 1. This late date makes Burial 1 the most recent of all the burials discovered in the Ticketbooth. The fact that the stairway was destroyed above the burial is also intriguing. Two possibilities may account for this. First, the burial could postdate the platform. If this was the case, then the stairs were destroyed during the construction of the grave and never reconstructed. The second possibility may be that the burial is associated with the terminal construction phase of the Ticketbooth, and that the stairs were destroyed sometime after the structure was no longer in use. Given that the date of the

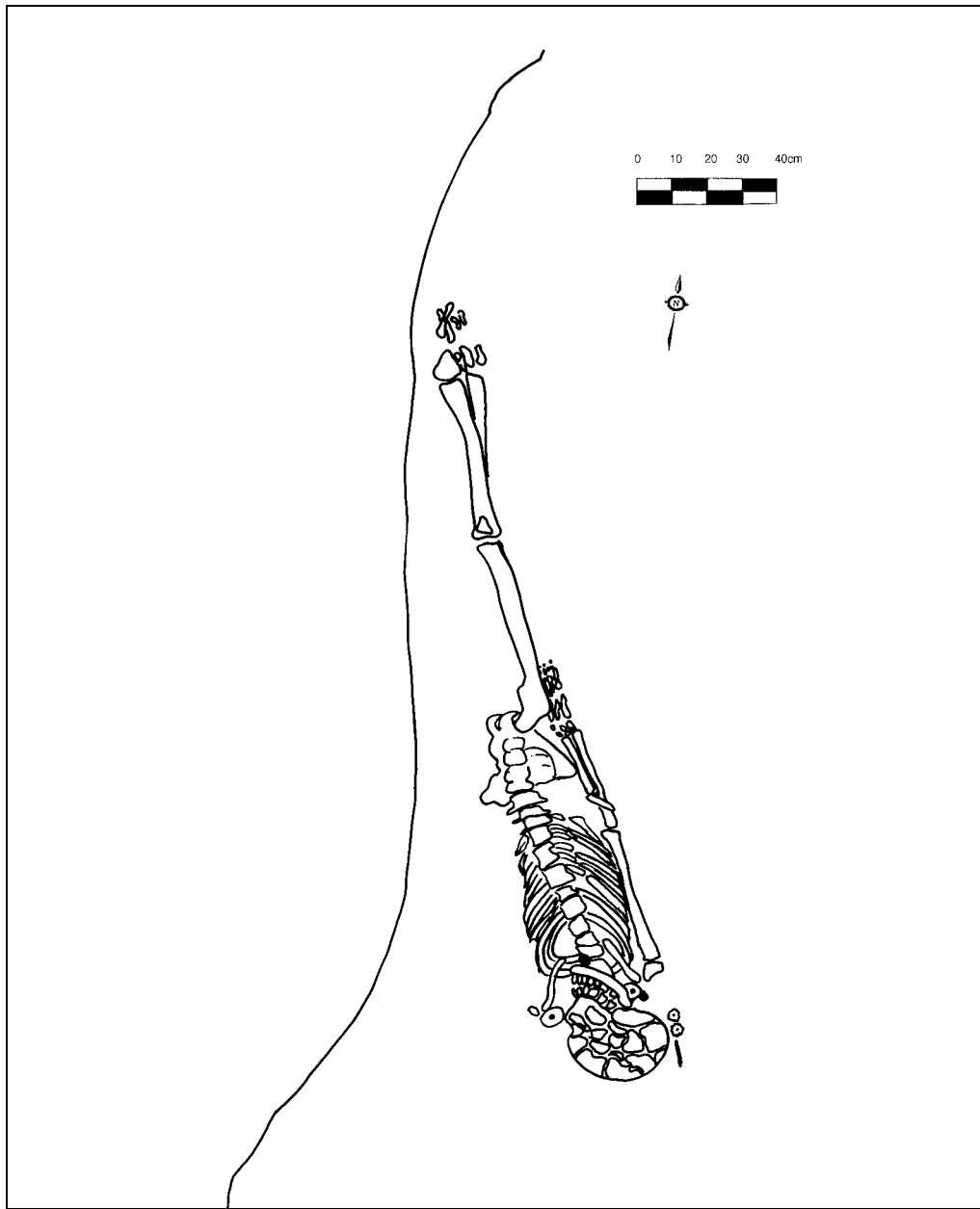
grave goods is relatively coeval with the date of the terminal form of Structure 209/2<sup>nd</sup>, the latter possibility appears more likely.

## Burial 2

Burial 2 was located on the surface of Floor 2, along the central axis of the Ticket booth (Figure 5.37). The burial was placed approximately 2 meters from the upper platform wall on the eastern side of the structure, and 153 cm below the terminal floor. The grave was a simple cist that contained the remains of a single individual. The grave was partly encircled and capped by large (60-80 cm long, 15-20 cm thick, and 30-40 cm wide) limestone blocks. The large stones were predominantly found on the southern and western side of the grave, and in several cases were placed directly on top of the individual causing some damage to the skeleton when they were removed.

Burial 2 was extended, prone, with head to the south. Individual 2 was male and was between the ages of 19-23 (Piehl personal communication 2002). The left arm, (including the humerus, ulna, radius and hand bones), as well as the left leg (including the femur, patella, tibia, fibula, and all feet bones) were missing (Figure 65). No sign of disease or trauma was noted, and it is likely that the bones were removed when two later graves (Burials 3 and 4) were placed just west of the burial.

Three ceramic vessels, two large ceramic flutes (Figure 5.37), two jade beads, a mother of pearl shell, 2 conch shell “buttons,” a large stuccoed perishable object, and two pyrite inlayed ceramic disks were located with the burial. Of the



*Figure 5.36: Plan View of Burial 2 (N. Puc)*

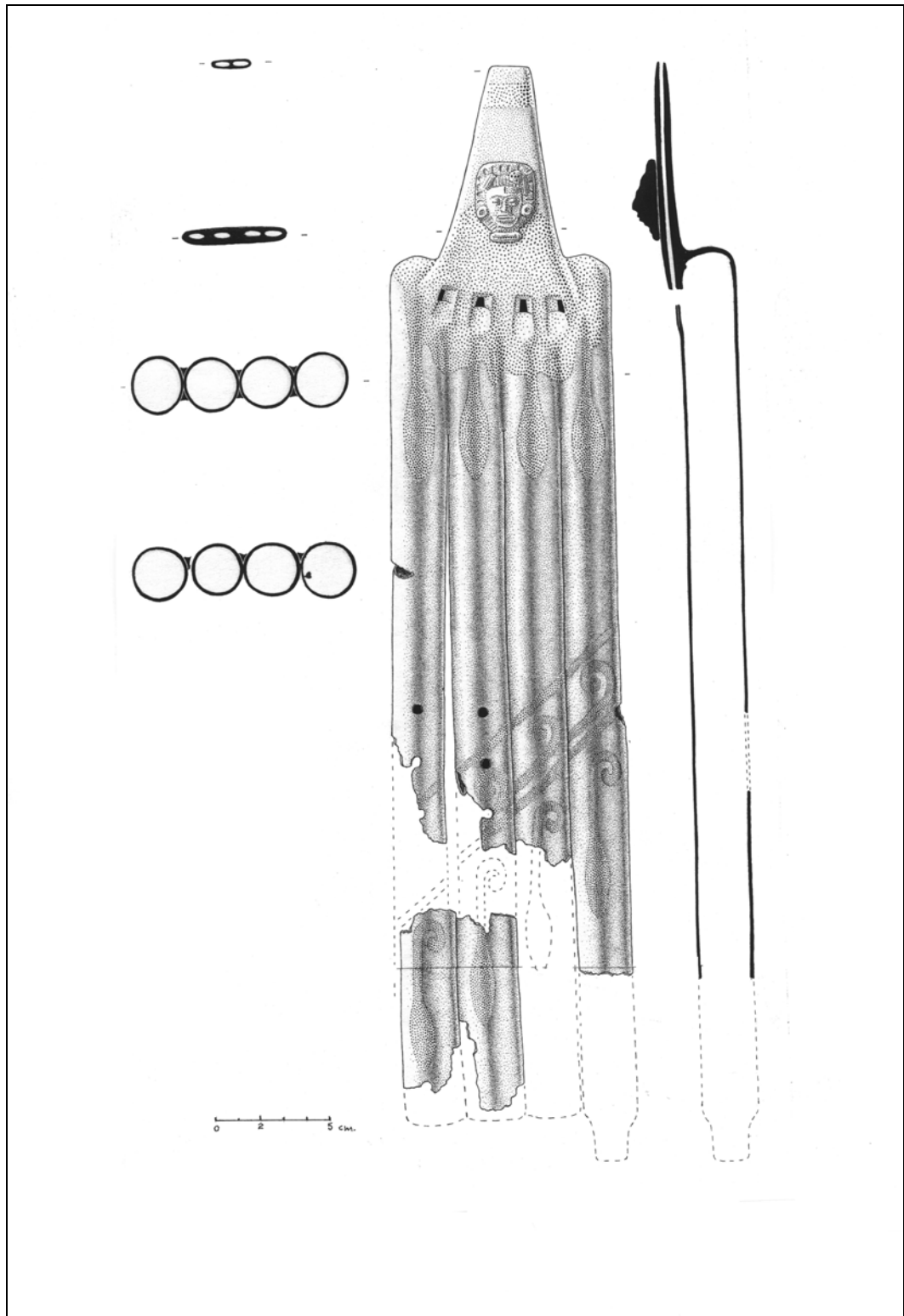


Figure 5.37: Ceramic Flute (40cm long) (G. Valenzuela)





*Figure 5.38: Balanza Black Vessel with Appliqué Spout (vessel 22cm high) (G. Valenzuela)*

three vessels, a Saturday Creek polychrome dish and a partially complete olla with two appliquéd figures were located near the feet. The third vessel, with an appliquéd modeled neck and bird head was located on the southern end of the burial (Figure 5.38).

The Saturday Creek Polychrome vessel was poorly preserved and split into three pieces in antiquity. It lay broken on top of the partially complete olla, approximately 20 cm above the level of the skeleton. Although the preservation of the dish was poor, it was possible to note the similarities between this vessel and the ceramic dishes found in Tomb 2 from Structure E. An image of an

unidentified animal was painted in the center of the dish, while the outer rim was decorated with geometric designs. The olla was only partially complete, including the rim and part of the neck of the jar. A small animal, possibly a monkey, was modeled onto the neck of the jar on opposite sides. Similar designs on ollas have been found previously at Baking Pot and in Tunichil Muknal and Che Chem Ha Caves in western Belize (Awe 1999).

The zoomorphic vessel (Vessel 3) is of unusual design, and was decorated with a compliment of carving, modeling, and painting. The neck, head, and feet represent a bird that was modeled, carved and painted, while the rest of the vessel was slipped brown. The beak and feet were painted yellow, while parts of the face appear to have been painted white. The appearance/form of the bird and the colors used to decorate its features, strongly suggest that it depicts a curassow. The diameter of the vessel is approximately 10 cm, and it is approximately 16 cm high. The neck of this zoomorphic creature was hollow and an opening in the vase appeared initially to have allowed liquid to be poured from the vessel, into the neck of the bird, and out through the beak. In practice, however, this would have been hampered by the fact that liquid would have escaped through the top of the vessel before it would have been poured through the spout, thus giving this spout a merely decorative function.

Two ceramic flutes measuring 43 cm long and 9 cm wide were found along the western side of the burial, one above the pelvis and one above the right femur. These flutes were made of very thin pottery (measuring approximately 1 mm thick) and were painted with a red design in several places. Each flute had

four barrels measuring over 30 cm long and four holes located near a thicker mouthpiece. A very detailed modeled/carved ceramic face was appliquéd on the front/top of each mouthpiece and faced down towards the end of the flute. The faces on both flutes are identical, and given the tremendous detail, may have been a portrait of the individual who used them. The hairstyle can be ascertained, earflares are clear, a headdress is present, the person had a large nose, and the eyes are closed. A flute of similar style was recently discovered in a tomb at Copan (Reents-Budet, personal communication, 2004) and flutes of this style are common in the Vera Cruz region of Mexico (Mary Miller, personal communication, 2003).

Two jade objects were located near the neck of the individual, a small bead and a fragment of an unknown object. The fragment was approximately 5 cm long and had a circle carved into it. It was located on the right side of the skull and was leaning against the pyrite covered ceramic disk. The bead was found just under the mandible and may have been placed within the mouth of the individual or worn as part of a necklace.

A mother of pearl shell was located to the east of the burial. This shell was approximately 12 cm long and had 4 holes bored through it (two on either side). Nothing was carved or painted on it. Two small shell objects (2.4cm in diameter) were located on the eastern side of the head. They were carved from conch, and look like circles with piecrust edges that have small prongs sticking out from the center. Their actual function is difficult to ascertain, but it is possible they served as some kind of earflares.

A layer of red, green, blue, and white stucco was found in a semi-circular pattern east and slightly above the burial. No glyphs or other decoration was visible, possibly due to the extremely poor preservation of the material. The stucco was removed in large clumps with the underlying dirt to aid in preserving the material. It is likely that the stucco was part of a large wooden bowl or dish (90cm-1 meter in diameter), given the shape of the remains.

Two ceramic disks adorned with pyrite were discovered with the skeleton. These disks were 6-7 cm in diameter and were located on either side of the skull. Given their location, it is likely that they served as part of the earflares. Pyrite mirrors, perceived as containing magical powers, were often used as decoration on the costumes of elites.

The ceramics discovered in the burial dates to the early part of the Late Classic period (550-650 A.D.) and is contemporary with cultural remains recovered in Burials 3 and 4 at Structure 209 (see below) and with Burial 2 from the E-Group in Group 1 (see Audet and Awe this volume).

#### Burials 3 and 4

Located in the center of the upper platform, Burials 3 and 4 were placed next to each other in a small tomb (Figure 5.39). The tomb was placed 3.2 meters below the terminal phase floor. The chamber was .8 m high, 2.4 m long, and .47 m wide and had been filled in with dirt before the burial was sealed with a series of large capstones. The capstones consisted of large limestone blocks piled 2-3 courses high. The blocks ranged from 20 – 60 cm long by 20-30 cm wide by 10-

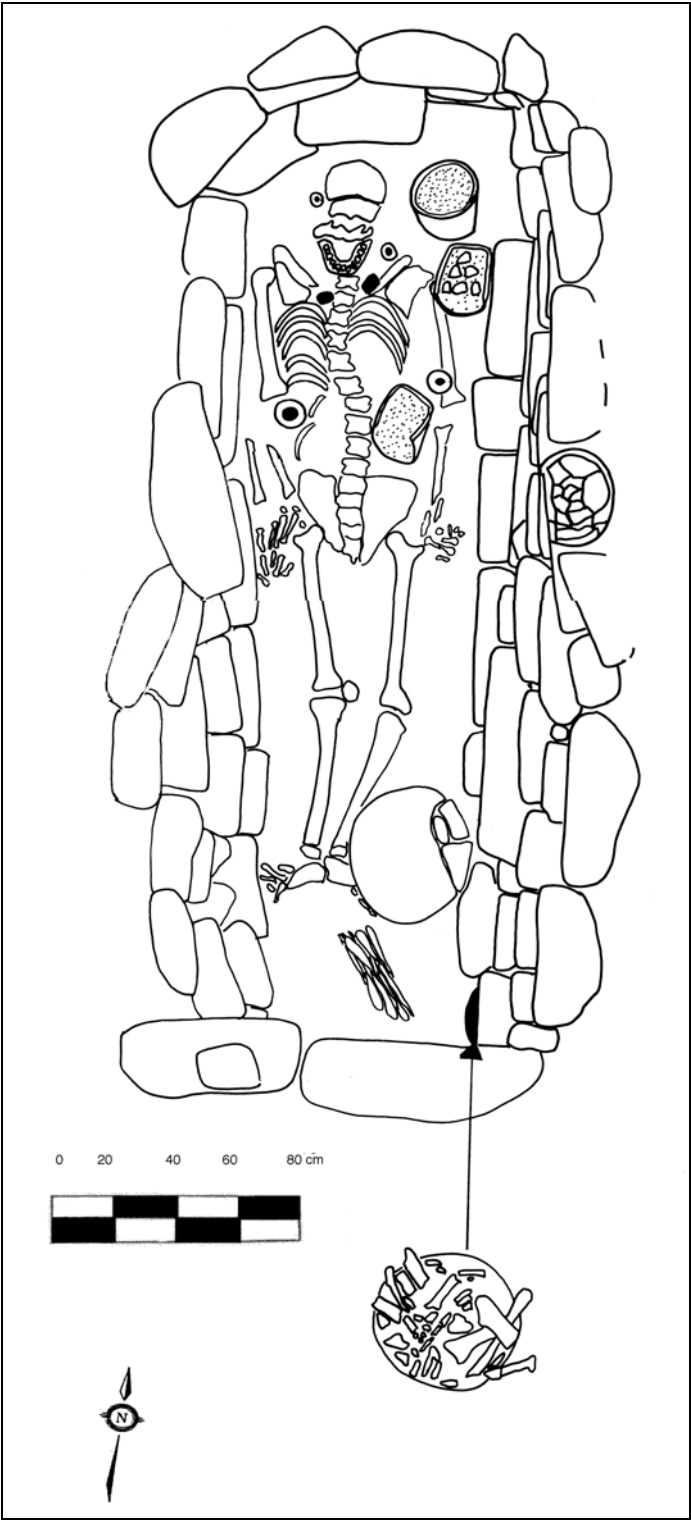


Figure 5.39: Plan View of Burials 3 and 4 (N. Puc)

15 cm thick. The tomb also intruded below the level of floor #2 and was placed just a few centimeters west and 140 cm below Burial 2.

### Burial 3

Burial 3 was a female at least 55 years old (Kokkalis 2005). The skeleton was laying in an extended, prone position, with head to the south. Prior to her death the individual had broken a rib, which healed, but the shaft had expanded in the process. The teeth were very worn and there were degenerative changes in her vertebrae. This individual was the primary individual in the tomb, and it is likely that Burial 4 (to be discussed below) was an offering to individual 3.

Numerous grave goods accompanied the skeleton (Burial 3), including 7 vessels, 16 bone hairpins, 6 jade objects, three obsidian blades, and the partially complete remains of individual that we have designated as Burial 4. Of the seven vessels, two were polychrome dishes, one was a stuccoed and painted vase, 2 were monochrome vases, and 2 were monochrome bowls. Vessel 1 was a polychrome dish and was located west of the left tibia and fibula (Figure 5.40). A seated human figure, with his arms held out in front of him and tassels dangling from his wrists, is painted in the center of the dish. An unidentified object rests on the lap of the seated figure, who also wears a small headdress, and a larger cummerbund. Eight spider monkeys appear to be running around the outer 10 cm of the dish. The vessel has been identified as a Saturday Creek Polychrome, similar to the dish located with Burial 2 (located east of Burial 3) and similar to



*Figure 5.40: Polychrome Dish in Burial 3 (dia 33 cm) (G. Valenzuela)*



*Figure 5.41: Polychrome Dish that held Burial 4 (G. Valenzuela)*



the five polychromes discovered in Tomb 2 in the Eastern Shrine building in Group I. Vessel 2 is a polychrome dish that was located west of the individual's feet, under the western wall of the tomb (Figure 71). It contains the remains of burial 4 and has the image of a peccary painted on it. It is a Saturday Creek Polychrome dish, like Vessel #1, and dates to between 550-650 A.D. Vessel 3 is a stuccoed black-slipped vase, probably a Balanza Black vase, that was placed between the trunk of the skeleton and the left radius and ulna (Gifford et al. 1976). This vessel was in extremely poor condition, and most of the stucco was deteriorated beyond restoration. Vessels 4 and 5 were located on a wall stone, approximately 54 cm above the body. Vessel #5 was a red/orange bowl nested inside a brown bowl (Vessel 4). These vessels were placed in the grave after the tomb had been filled in, but before the capstones were placed above the tomb. Vessels 6 and 7 were located west of the individual's skull and were plain brown vases. On the basis of ceramics analogy the tomb was dated to the early part of the Late Classic period (550-650 A.D.).

A possible bone hairpin, or weaving implement, was found east and slightly north of the skull, and a cluster of similar objects (approximately 15) was found just north of the feet (Figure 5.42). These bone artifacts are 2-3 cm wide at one end and taper to a point. They are 23 cm long. Although we are not entirely sure of their function, it is possible that they are hairpins or weaving implements.

Six green jade artifacts were interred with the individual. Two were large beads or pendants and four were ear flares. The larger of the two beads (Bead 1)



*Figure 5.42: Bone Implements (length 23cm) (photo by author)*

was located above the left clavicle and measures 6.4 cm long, by 5 cm wide, by 4 cm thick. It has a hole 1.2 cm in diameter that perforates it lengthwise. The smaller of the two beads was located just east of Bead 1 and measures 4.9 cm in length, by 3.8 cm in width, by 2.4- 2cm in thickness. Bead 2 has two small conical “plugs” that were found stuck into both the holes that perforate the bead. These plugs are only .8 cm long by .6 cm wide at the top. There is an extension of the hole (.2 cm high by .6 cm wide) next to the blocked hole that a string could still be fit through but the plugs would have greatly restricted the movement of the bead (Figure 5.43).

Two small flares were discovered next to the skull and two larger flares were located at the junctions of the radius/ulna and the humerus. The small flares are 2.9 cm in diameter, 0.9 cm thick, and are shaped in the form of flower. The larger earflares are circular and are 5.4 cm in diameter and 2 cm thick. Three prismatic obsidian blades measuring 7-9 cm long were located around the skull.



*Figure 5.43: Four Jade Artifacts from Burial 3 (Earflares are 5.4 cm in diameter)  
(photo by author)*

All three taper to a point, and appear more like blood letters than typical knife blades.

#### Burial 4

Burial 4 is a partially complete skeleton that was found in the polychrome dish (Vessel 2) in the western wall of the tomb. The burial was west of the feet of Burial 3 and was probably left as an offering to the principal occupant of the tomb. Initially we believed that the bones in the dish may have been the left arm and leg bones of Burial 2, which were removed postmortem, however this turned out to be incorrect. Burial 4 consists of the complete lower skeleton of an

individual, plus two humeri and a few hand bones, and a few ribs (Piehl personal communication 2002). Further analysis by Voula Kokkalis during the 2004 season revealed that there were at least two partially individuals represented, and that their bones were mixed that those of a deer or peccary (Kokkalis 2005). These remains were likely scavenged from other decomposed individuals and placed as an offering to the recently deceased. It is difficult to know, however, why these skeletal elements were chosen or why elements from two individuals were placed with this interment.

### *Caches*

A single deposit was located above the terminal phase architecture of Structure 209. Cache 1 was located on the third terrace of the lower platform on the southern side of the structure. It consisted of a partially complete Benque Viejo Polychrome vase and 36 Cayo Unslipped olla sherds from various vessels. The sherds were placed on top of the plaster surface, possibly after the abandonment of the structure and/or the site.

A second deposit, this one placed inside the platform, was found along the central axis. Cache 2 was an axial lip-to-lip cache consisting of three vessels. It was discovered 20 cm under the terminal phase floor of the upper platform, 160 cm directly above Burial 2. The vessels were plain monochrome ware, and include a large orange slipped bowl as the bottom upturned vessel, a smaller orange dish upside down above it, and a brown bowl set inside the lower vessel. The vessels were filled with dirt, and inside the brown bowl a chert arrow point

measuring 8 cm long was discovered. The dirt from inside the vessels was collected for sampling.

### *Discussion*

The goals of our excavations on Mound 209 were to ascertain the function of the structure, and to determine whether these “Ticketbooth” structures, that abutted major causeways, were of specific ritual significance. The results of our investigations appear to confirm our assumptions for, as I note below, there is no evidence that Structure 209 served any domestic purpose. The quality and form of the architecture, the presence of three plain monuments, several burials with sumptuary grave goods, and the lack of residential refuse or building materials are evidence for its special function.

The architectural style of Structure 209 is relatively unique in the Belize Valley. Most round, or rounded, structures in the Valley date between the Middle and Late Preclassic period and possibly served as low dance platforms (Awe 1992; Aimers et al. 2000). Structure 209 differs in form (it has one flat side with stairs) from the more circular Preclassic platforms, but its dimensions, form and location suggest that it too could have served as a place where ritual dancing could have been performed. Unfortunately, such a function is difficult to prove, but there are other lines of evidence that reinforces the argument for non-domestic activity. For example, none of the residential units excavated at Baking Pot, Cahal Pech, Xunantunich, Blackman Eddy, and other regional sites display the characteristic features of Structure 209. Furthermore, the location of the structure,

at a point a few meters away from where the causeway connects with Group 1 via Ballcourt 2, does not make it a likely place for domestic activity. Like causeway termini groups (see Schwake 2000) it is therefore possible that these structures may have been related with special activities that incorporated access into particular areas of the sites via causeways.

Ritual function is also indicated by the presence of the two altars and the fragmented stela that were found in front and on the side of the platform. Several altars have been found at Baking Pot in Groups I and II, and all were discovered in front of large monumental architecture (Ricketson 1931; Bullard and Bullard 1965). At most Maya sites, altars are typically found associated with elite contexts and with tombs of elites, and the Stela/Altar combination is a typical feature of the Classic period Maya ceremonial complex.

The three elaborate burials discovered along the central axis of the structure are also indicative of special function. The quality and nature of the sumptuous grave goods in the burials strongly suggest that the three individuals interred in Structure 209 were of high status. Elite individuals are typically interred in temple structures, within cists, or tombs. In contrast, commoners are predominantly buried in simple graves beneath the floors of their homes (McAnany 1993). The inclusion of obsidian bloodletters with two of the individuals further suggests high status. Among the Classic Maya, the act of bloodletting was an activity predominantly conducted, privately and publicly, by elite individuals on special function structures.

Several other objects and features provide secondary evidence which suggest a special function for the Ticketbooth. One unit yielded sherds from a spiked ceramic censer, while burnt plaster on the floor at the top of the building, suggest that either incense or other organic materials were burnt at the summit of the platform. At the center of this burnt area there was also a large hole that descended deep within the floor of the platform. Poor preservation, however, produced no trace of the type of materials that may have been burnt in this location.

Finally, a lack of household goods (i.e. broken obsidian blades, broken utilitarian pottery, chert flakes, animal bones, and the remains of edible shell fish) suggests that the building was not used for residential purposes. In addition, the lack of daub in the archaeological record suggests that a perishable superstructure did not cover this platform. With no enclosed area to live, it is logical to suggest this structure was no domestic in nature.

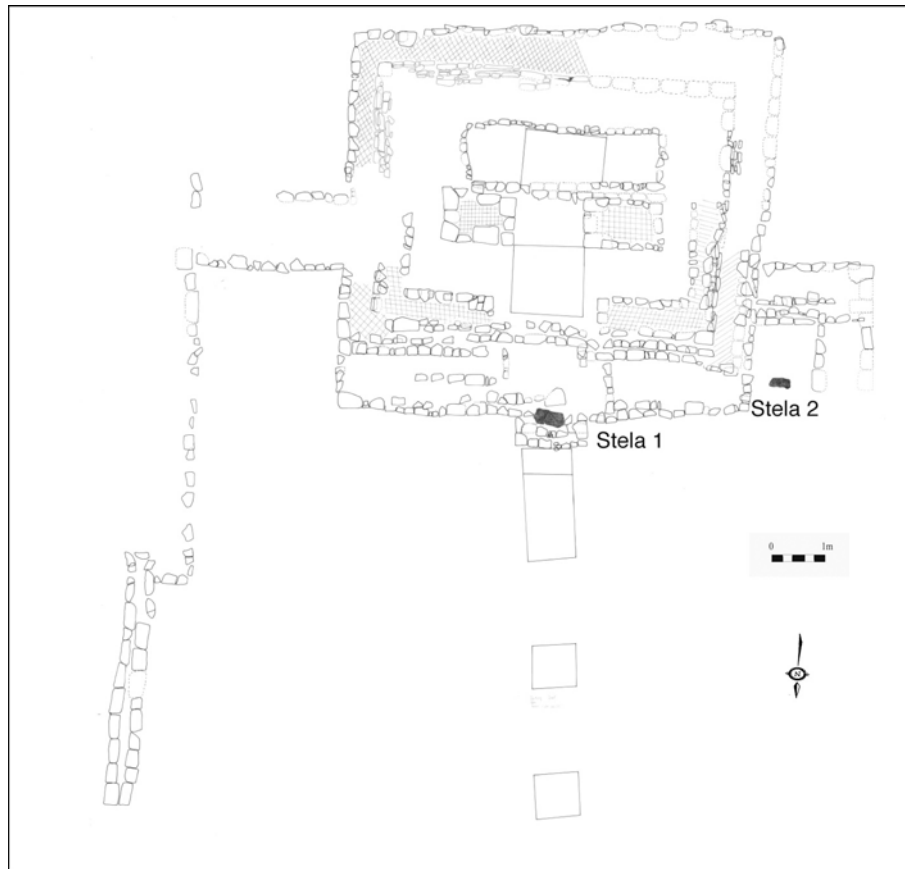
The form, quality and size of the architecture of Structure 209, plus the monuments, artifacts and burials discovered in and on the platform strongly suggest that the Ticket booth may have served a ritual function within the Baking Pot community. It is likely that the ancient rituals were conducted on the altar in front of the building, around the stela (wherever it once stood), and at the summit of the platforms. The individuals who were interred within this temple were clearly elites of importance. Two were of advanced age, and one of these individuals had a crippling disease that may have given him special status within the court. The artifacts interred with these individuals indicate their position as

specialists within Baking Pot. Very specialized musical instruments, bone objects, obsidian bloodletters, and jade dentition all suggest that these individuals were ritual specialists. I would suggest that these individuals were the specialists performing rituals on Structure 209.

### ***Structure 190***

Excavations of Structure 190 exposed the entire terminal phase architecture, including much of the plaza area in front (to the north) (Figure 5.44). The last two major construction phases dates to the Spanish Lookout Ceramic phase (Late Classic Period), with an earlier Hermitage Phase, (Early Classic Period) and a single construction dating to the Barton Creek Ceramic Phase (Late Preclassic period). Structure 190/1<sup>st</sup> was likely only a low platform with the large altar (70 cm high and 130 cm wide) at the center (Figure 5.45). Structure 190/2<sup>nd</sup> included several modifications of the first construction. The platform floor was raised by 30 cm and high masonry spine walls for the creation of at least one room were constructed around the altar. While we only exposed a small section of this earlier phase of construction, it appears that we cleared part of a small room. The height of the southern wall was over 160cm, while the spine walls to the north were slightly shorter, measuring only 140cm in height. The walls do not appear to be vaulted. This room was oriented in the same direction as the terminal phase architecture, with the altar located in the doorway leading into this room. It is interesting, however, that this doorway would have been partially blocked by the altar. The altar rose 40 cm above the stucco floor in the center of the doorway.





*Figure 5.44: Plan View of Structure 190 (A. Itza)*

There are at least two possible explanations for its location. Perhaps this opening was not used as a doorway and there were other entrances into this room, or people were allowed to walk over this alter as necessary. No further information about this phase of construction was encountered in our test excavation.

The Early Classic modification was only found on the western side of the building, under the small room containing Stela 2. The earliest construction of this addition dates to the Early Classic period. A large deposit under the stela consists of primarily Late Preclassic ceramic types (Barton Creek ceramic complex) with

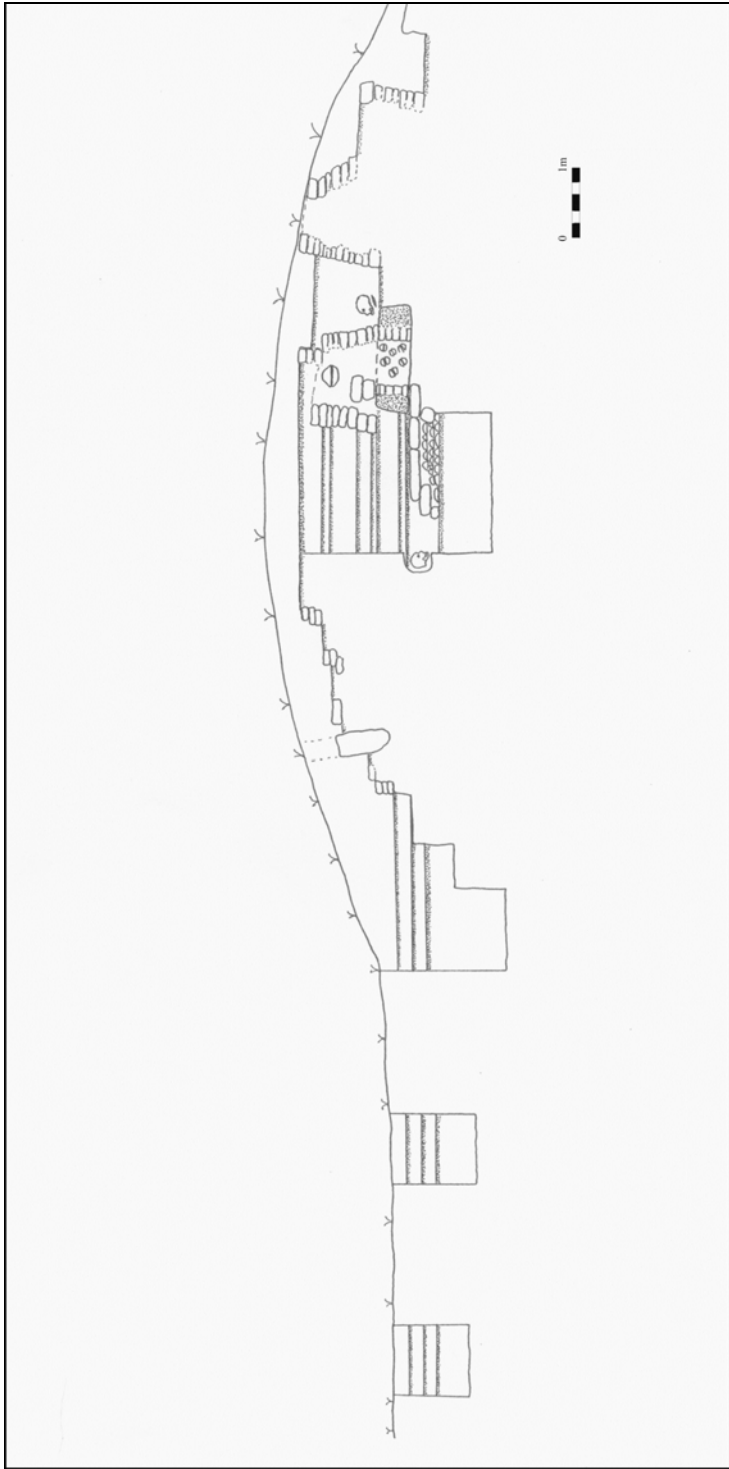


Figure 5.45: Profile of Structure 190 (A. Itza)

12 Dos Arroyos Orange Polychrome sherds intermixed with the cache. These 12 sherds suggest an Early Classic date for the deposit but also illustrate the use of Late Preclassic ceramic types well into the Early Classic period. This continuity of ceramic types from one period to another is something that we believe is very common at Baking Pot and may be skewing the data: making it look like there is little construction during the Early Classic period at the site, perhaps even a hiatus in occupation. Unfortunately while I believe that this is likely not the case, only extensive radiocarbon dating and thin section analysis of ceramics (like analysis currently being conducted by Lauren Sullivan at sites in Northern Belize) can address this issue.

During our two month field season, the terminal phase architecture was completely exposed. Several penetrating excavations were placed along the central axis and a single unit was placed in the floor of a small room appended onto the western side of the structure. Our excavations exposed a 3 meter high platform topped with a two room masonry superstructure. All of the platform and superstructure walls were constructed of small cut limestone blocks that were likely mortared together and covered with lime plaster. None of the rooms were vaulted, and based on the amount of collapse uncovered, the walls were likely no more than 70 cm (or 7-8 courses) high when the structure was occupied.

A small two step outset staircase with an uncarved stela placed in its center was appended to the northern of the structure. Four terraces were discovered on the northern side of the structure while two higher terrace walls were located on the southern side.

Entry into the front room was limited to a central doorway 238.5 cm wide. This doorway led into a room 665 cm long (east to west) and 115 cm wide (north to south). On the southern side of this room were three doorways leading into a second room. The central doorway connecting the two rooms was narrower than the main entrance, measuring only 150 cm wide. It led into a smaller, narrower room that was situated 30 cm (two steps) lower than the larger room to the north. This chamber was only 440 cm long and 90 cm wide. Two additional doors leading into this back room were located on the eastern and western ends. These doorways were small, measuring only 70 cm wide. There was no exit leading out the southern (or back side) of the structure.

The southern side of the structure was constructed of two large terraces, each measuring 120 cm and 90 cm high respectively. The upper terrace was built on a 130 degree angle, in contrast to the 90 degree angle which the rest of the terrace and superstructure walls were constructed. No additional architectural features were uncovered on this side of the building.

Appended to the western edge of the building was a small room, measuring 160 by 120 cm wide. The walls enclosing this small addition were low, only 1-3 courses high, and it is probable that the rest of the wall height was once constructed of wattle and daub. Inside this room, excavators discovered the butt of a stela (Stela 2). Only 30 cm of this stela could be seen above the terminal phase floor, however, its butt extended almost a meter below the plaster surface.

While Structure 190 was not composed of a vaulted superstructure, the quality and height of the superstructure and platform walls is equivalent to the

construction of the elite palace complex and site core temples at Baking Pot. This would have allowed occupants to privately conduct activities without being seen by onlookers in the periphery of Baking Pot.

### *Monuments and Associated Deposits*

Along the primary axis of the structure, facing the causeway to the north, we discovered the butt of a stela (Stela 1). The stela was placed in an outset stair block, directly in front of the first terrace. The top section of the stela was broken into several pieces that were located at the base of the structure. Around the base of the outset staircase we encountered a large deposit of broken ceramic dishes, vases, bowls and censers (Figures 5.46 and 5.47). Dozens of partially complete vessels and thousands of sherds were encountered. The pottery dates to the Spanish Lookout phase and predominantly includes types affiliated to the Belize Ceramic Group. Many of the polychrome vases are similar to styles found at Cahal Pech and Buenavista del Cayo. Very few jar fragments or black slipped vessels were discovered, and there were no animal remains, chert flakes or manos and metates. One dozen partially complete or complete obsidian blades were also located in the deposit.

We believe that this feature was ritual in nature due to its location around the base of the stela, the uniformity of the ceramic types within the deposit, and the lack of domestic debris. While all the ceramic date to a single ceramic phase, it is clear from our excavations that these ceramics were placed at the front of this temple over a short period of time. There were no thick layers of dirt between

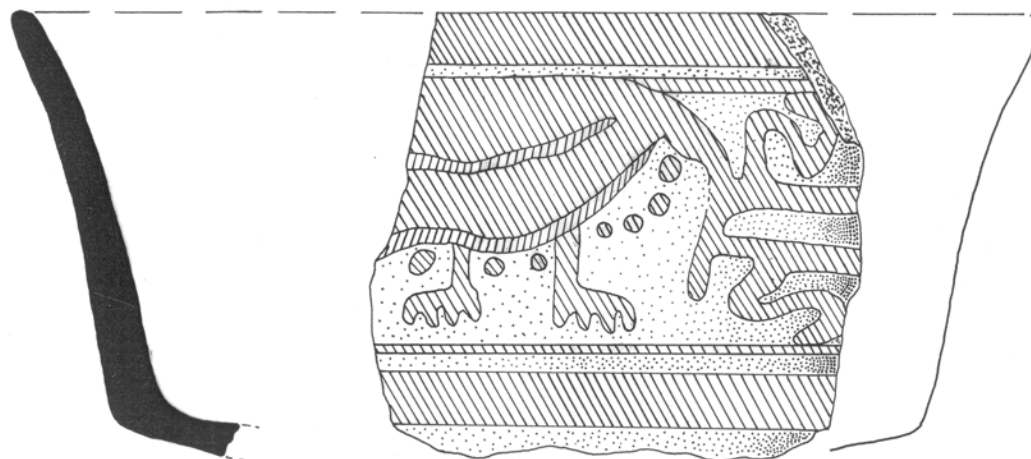


Figure 5.46: Benque Viejo Polychrome Vase (height 9 cm) (N. Puc)



Figure 5.47: Benque Viejo Polychrome Vase (height 8.8 cm) (N. Puc)

different ceramic deposits; however its thickness and the number of vessels suggest that this even did extend for some period of time. The fact that the deposit was never cleared from the front of the structure suggests that this temple ceased to be used some time during the Terminal Classic Period, around the time of this “termination” event.

Excavations under the stela yielded a hole in the plaster floor directly under the monument. While we expected to find something in this perforation, whatever was put into the gap was either removed or was perishable. Soil samples were taken, however no tests have yet been performed.

A second stela was discovered in a small room on the western side of the structure. Buried under the base of the stela were the remains of at least 26 modeled censers that date to the Late Preclassic period. These incensarios have out-flaring rims and a flat base (Figures 5.48 and 5.49). All have a single face, including eyes, nose, and teeth. Flanges are located on the sides of the vessels and typically have two modeled circles impressed into them. Fifteen fragmented pieces of polished jade beads were recovered just above the ceramics in a similar fashion to the Feature 11, found in the center of the platform. In addition, large fragments from 12 dishes were also discovered. These include five Aguacate Orange, two Sierra Red, two Sierra Red with a interior black slip, one Savannah Bank Usulután, and one Vaquero Creek Red dish (Gifford et al 1976). An unslipped miniature olla was also uncovered. Twelve Early Classic sherds (all Dos Arroyos Orange) were found in association with this deposit, suggesting at

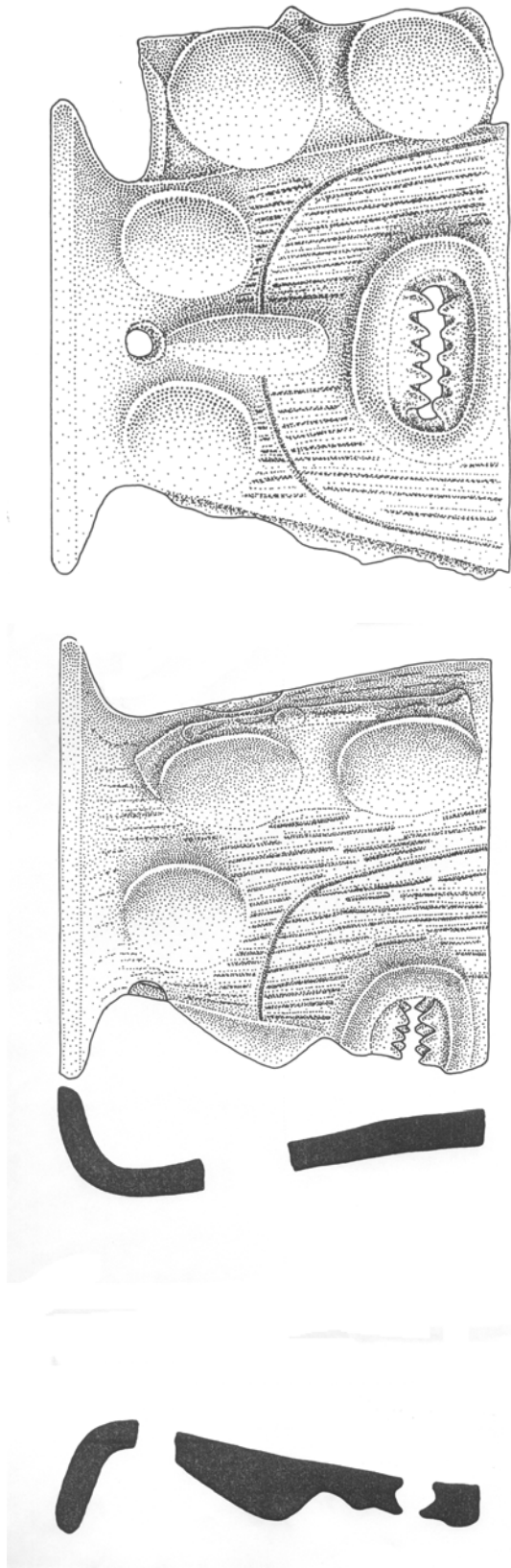


Figure 5.48: Incensarios from Stela Cache (N. Puc)



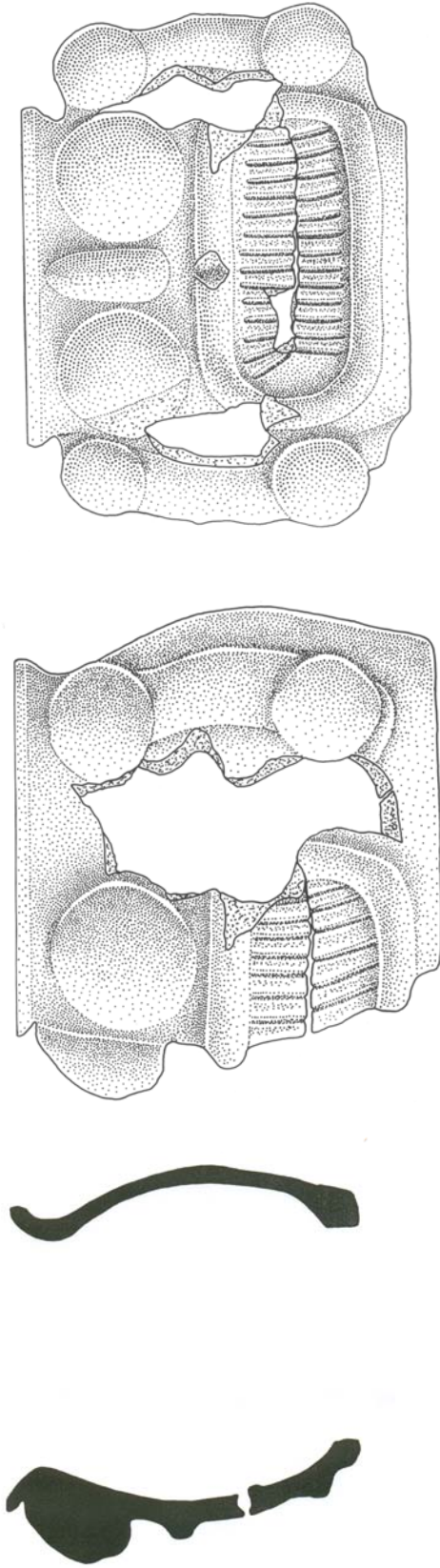


Figure 5.49: *Incensarios* from Stele Cache (N. Puc)

least a date that teetered on the edge of the Late Preclassic to Early Classic transition.

A large altar, 134 cm in diameter and over 70 cm high was discovered in association with Structure 190/1<sup>st</sup>. This altar was constructed with cut limestone blocks that lined both the outer face of the monument and an inner circle within it. Excavations inside the altar yielded the remains of 26 miniature unslipped bowls, including nine placed in a lip-to-lip orientation. The rest were found throughout the fill, at the same level as the ceramic finger bowls. Unfortunately not a single diagnostic sherd was found within the fill of the altar, making it impossible to date this deposit, however its association with Feature 11 discussed below (i.e. the altar that was resting on the floor under which Feature 11 was discovered), suggests a Late Preclassic date.

At least one dozen complete sets of finger bones were found in the matrix of the altar, the majority inside the lip-to-lip pairs. Only one of the finger bones showed evidence of cut marks, while many showed signs of being burned (with the flesh still attached to the bone) before interment. The burning of the fingers indicates that they were “donated” to the ritual specialist right before they were prepared for the offering. However the lack of cut marks may suggest that the entire hand was removed from the person (and the rest of the bones used elsewhere) or that the cutmarks would be found on the metacarpals of the “donating” individual. Whether these fingers were taken from slaves, captives, or were truly donated by devote individuals is unknown, however their “freshness” indicates that they were not scavenged from primary interments. This deposit

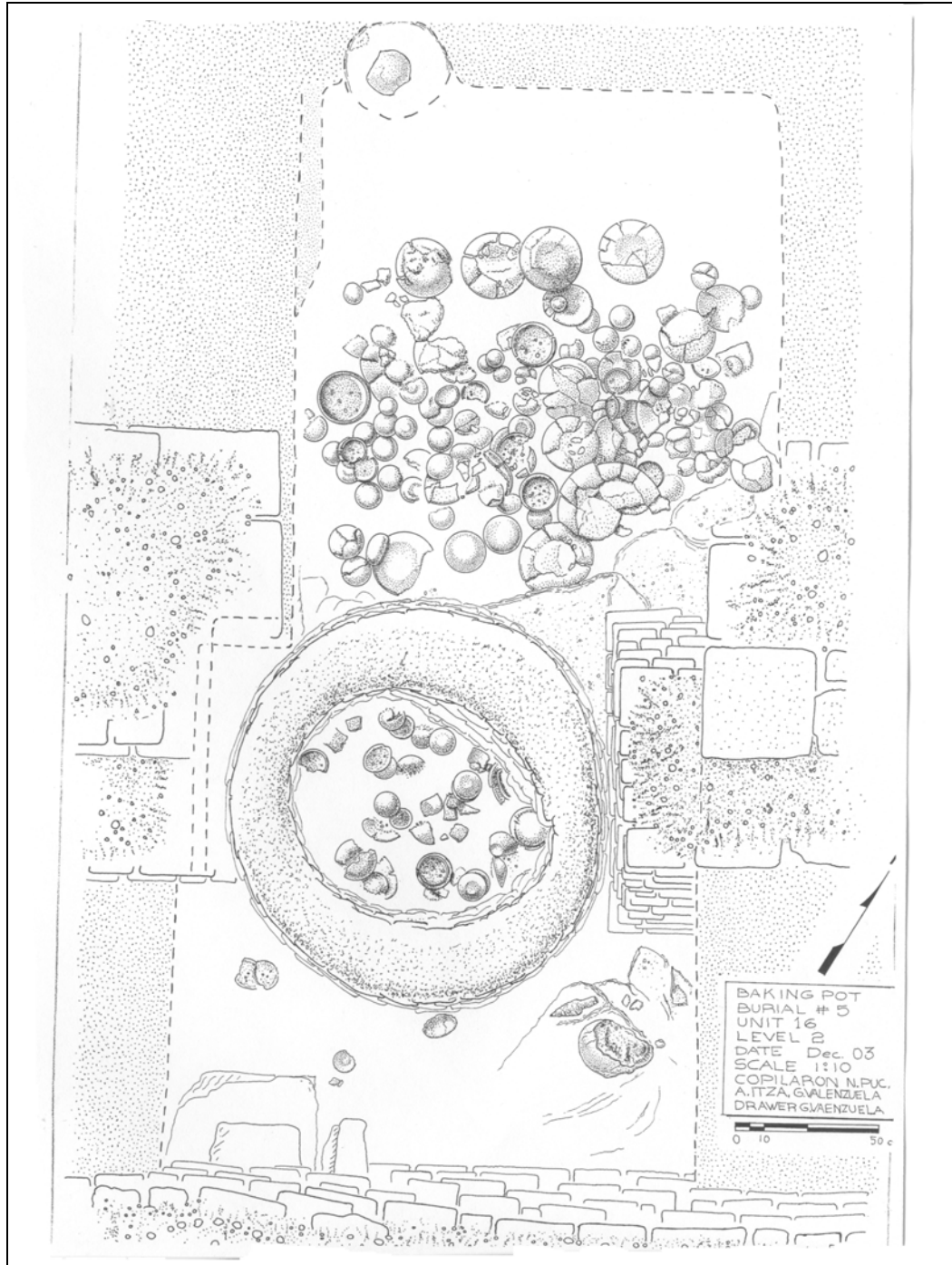


Figure 5.50: Altar and Ceramic Cache from Structure 190 (G. Valenzuela)

appears to be associated, at least temporally, to Feature 11, discovered under the floor of the altar, extending almost two meters to the north.

Feature 11 included the remains of 186 ceramic vessels, over fifteen hundred broken fragments of jade, and several jade beads (Figure 5.50). The majority of these ceramic vessels were unslipped miniature bowls and ollas that were placed upside down. Unfortunately these vessels were not made in identifiable types, making it difficult to date the deposit. However, a few identifiable types of bowls and dishes were recovered from the northern section of the deposit. Preliminary assessment of these ceramics suggests that they date to the end of the Late Preclassic period or early transition into the Protoclassic (Culbert 1993; Gifford et al. 1976) while a single radiocarbon date of 400 B.C. - 220 B.C. (2-sigma calibration), supports a slightly earlier date. The ceramic vessels include five complete Happy Home Orange bowls, four complete Sierra Red dishes, 177 undiagnostic unslipped miniature bowls, and dozens of Sierra Red, Polvero Black, and Sapote Striated sherds. In addition, 109 incensario fragments were recovered from the deposit.

This early deposit suggests that when this structure was built it was initially constructed as a sacred location where important offerings were placed. It also testifies to the strength of these early elites and the power they were displaying through these ritual deposits. The later caches, discussed below, indicate that this power continued and intensified throughout the Late Classic period. The deposition of human remains, some that were covered in flesh at the time of ritual burning, indicates that they maintained a strong degree of control,

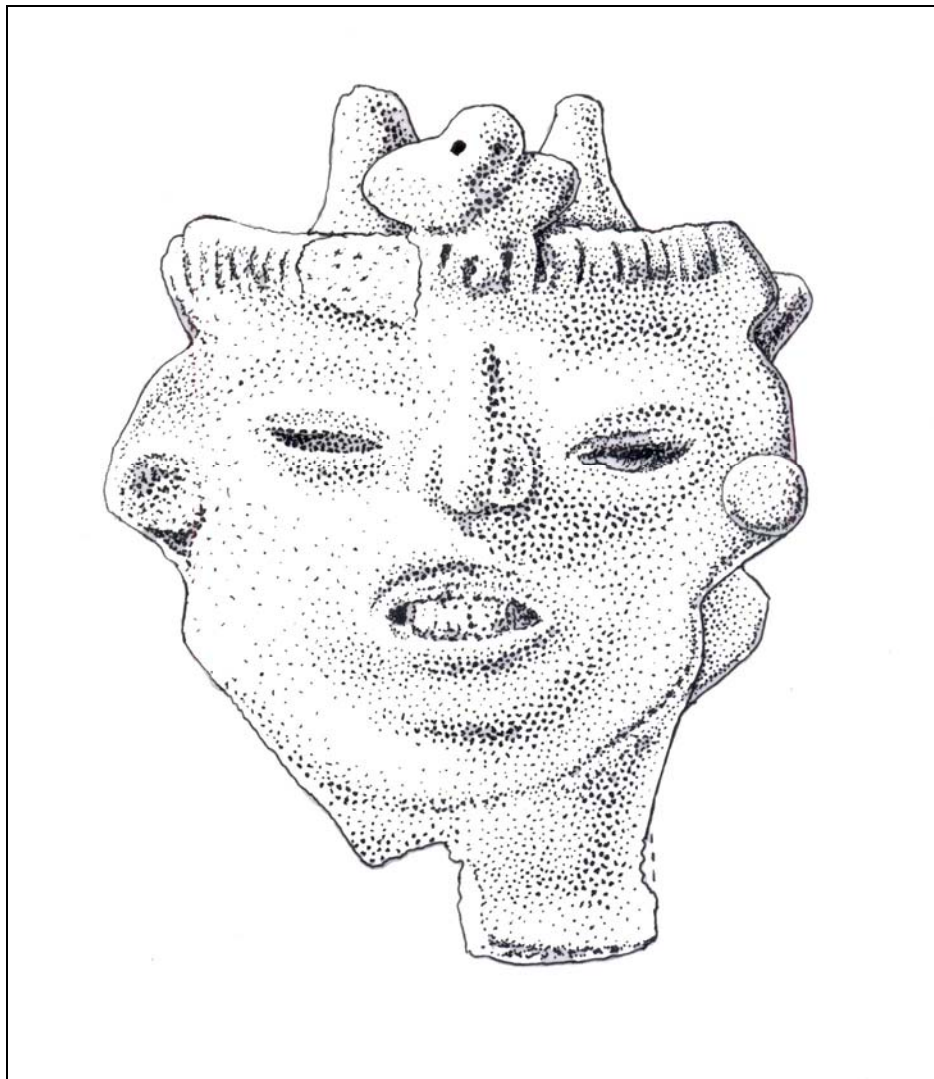
whether through coercion or religion (or both) over those living at the site. Such deposits could be reflective of the increasing political power these elites enjoyed within the Belize Valley and how they were able to leverage this authority over people for religious purposes.

### *Burials*

Four individuals were discovered within the structure, including the remains of two adult skulls, a neonatal baby, and a headless adult individual. All are likely offerings deposited inside the structure during ritual activities or during periods of construction.

All of the human remains were deposited during the Tiger Run Phase / Late Classic One and these remains were located along the central axis of the structure. Burial 1 was located in the center of the structure, under the terminal phase plaster floor of room 2. It contains a very young infant or premature baby located in association with several partially complete Mountain Pine Red dishes and a fragment of large hollow figurine head. This figurine has a bird located in the middle of its forehead, nose and ear plugs, and six horns extending from below the ears on each side to the top of the head (Figure 5.51). Further analysis needs to be conducted to determine if this figurine was representing a specific deity or individual.

Burial 2 was located just north of Stela 1 in a north-south orientation (Figure 5.52). This individual was an elderly (over 65) female, placed in a supine position with her feet slightly elevated (Kokkalis, personal communication, 2004).



*Figure 5.51: Figurine Head Fragment (height 11cm) (G. Valenzuela)*

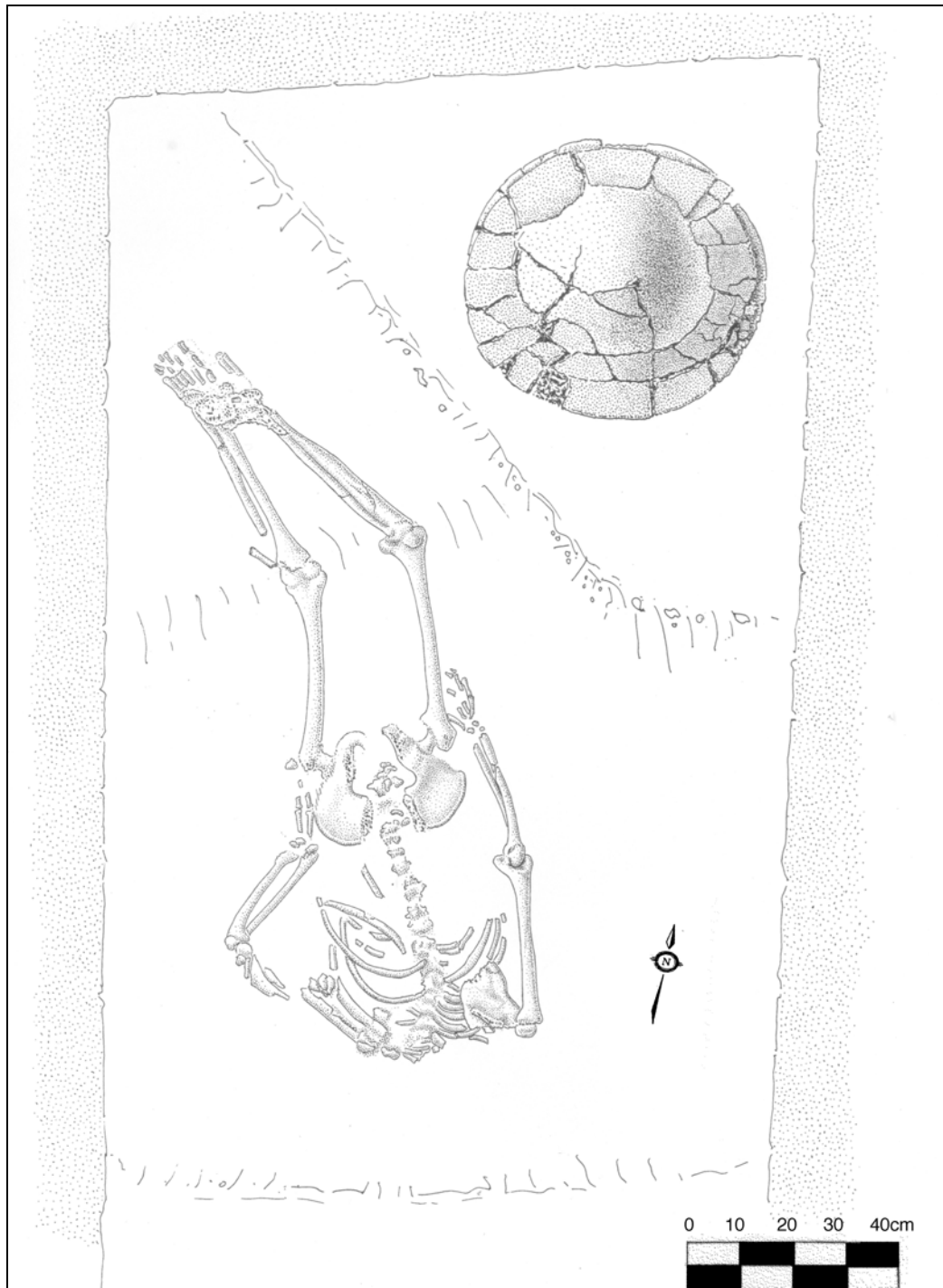


Figure 5.52: Headless Individual found in front of Structure 190 (G. Valenzuela)

Her skull was missing, suggesting that she was either decapitated or her head was removed after interment. She was interred with two unslipped bowls that were placed in a lip-to-lip formation. These ceramics were discovered just east of the individual's feet. Inside the lip-to-lip we discovered evidence of burning as well as two bones which were cut sphenoid skull bones from a neonate. These bones have a unique feature that is not found on adult bones: simple faces that look a little bit like ducks (Figure 5.53). They appear to have been purposely removed from their original "owner" and placed in the vessel for some ritual purpose. Further supporting this interpretation is the discovery of the same bone types stuffed inside another skull found within the fill of Structure 190 (Burial 4). The importance of these specific faces or the bones themselves is unknown, however the young age of the individuals may have been important, perhaps for a specific ritual or offering.

Burials 3 and 4 consisted only of skulls. Burial 3 was a partially complete skull, missing much of its occipital. It was located in a hole carved into a plaster floor of Structure 190/1<sup>st</sup> on the northern side of the structure. Inside the skull, we discovered the second set of neonatal skull bones that naturally make simple faces. These bones were cut, leaving just the "faces" from the sphenoid bones, unlike the first set which still contained some of the surrounding occipital bone. The discovery of these bones deep inside the skull suggests that the brain had decomposed or had been removed before they were placed inside the skull. It is possible that this skull represents a secondary burial or that when the person died



their brain was immediately removed and these bones placed inside before interment.



*Figure 5.53: Neonatal Skull Bones (photo by author)*

Burial 4 was located on the southern side of our excavation, directly under Burial 1. It consisted of a complete skull and the two top cervical vertebrae. A chert stemmed biface was located next to it, however no other artifacts were discovered nearby. Like the previous three individuals, Burial 4 is more an offering than a burial. Osteological evidence does not suggest that the skull was decapitated; it indicates instead that like Burial 3 this individual was a secondary interment (Kokkalis, personal communication, 2004).

### *Discussion*

Structure 190 likely functioned as a ritual shrine for the following reasons. First, the structure is physically connected via the causeway to Ballcourt 3, and to one of only two access points into Group II. Second, the presence of two stelae at the base of the structure, and the relative quality of the architecture (compared with other platforms at the site) indicate a higher level of investment in its construction. Third, the discovery of two skulls, the skull-less individual, the infant, and the human finger bones in the fill of the building suggests that there may have been some dedicatory caching of human remains in the fill, something that we do not often find in residential platforms, and forth, the large quantity of ceramics around the stela and base of the structure reflects a practice commonly associated with ritual termination of, or ritual pilgrimage to, special function buildings, even after the abandonment of the site center.

The artifacts discovered in association with this structure suggest that it was a sacred location for the ancient Maya living at Baking Pot throughout its history. In contrast to Structure 209, this temple was not a shrine associated with the burial of ritual practitioners and elites; the deposits within the platforms were more indicative to creating a sacred space to perform rituals than creating a place to bury individuals of importance. In addition, the cached offerings as well as architectural features are indicative of elite controlled construction and use from its inception. The increasing degree of violence, or at least use of already deceased individuals, in ritual activities suggests an increase in the intensity of

ritual activity. This increase could be reflective of the improving political position of Baking Pot's elites, or an increasing degree of violence in the valley as the Classic period wore on.

## **Group II**

Group II contains the only palace group at the site of Baking Pot (Structures B and G) (Figure 5.54). Palace groups have been excavated at most major Maya sites, and range in size from a single 4-structure grouping to dozens of vaulted structures surrounding numerous connected plazas. At Baking Pot, we initially believed that our palace was a small grouping of four structures (some vaulted and some not) that surrounded a single plaza. Our clearing of the vegetation and subsequent remapping of the area however has led us to understand the palace to be a complex of at least three plazas surrounded (Poe 2005). Excavations in the 2004 season focused on the structures associated with the largest plaza that had been previously mapped by Bullard and Bullard (1962).

### ***Structure B***

Structure B is a 15 meter tall structure located on the eastern side of the palace complex (contained in Plaza 2) in Group II. Initially, I believed that it might have functioned as a temple, given its conical appearance and location on the eastern side of the main palace group. Its wide platform at the summit, coupled with the topography before excavation, suggested that there were several rooms with masonry superstructure walls and likely several benches. In an effort

to expose these features, a 12 by 5 m unit (broken into two sub units) was placed on the top of the structure (Unit 3a and b). In addition, a 2 x 8 m trench was placed on the front of the structure along the central axis in efforts to discover

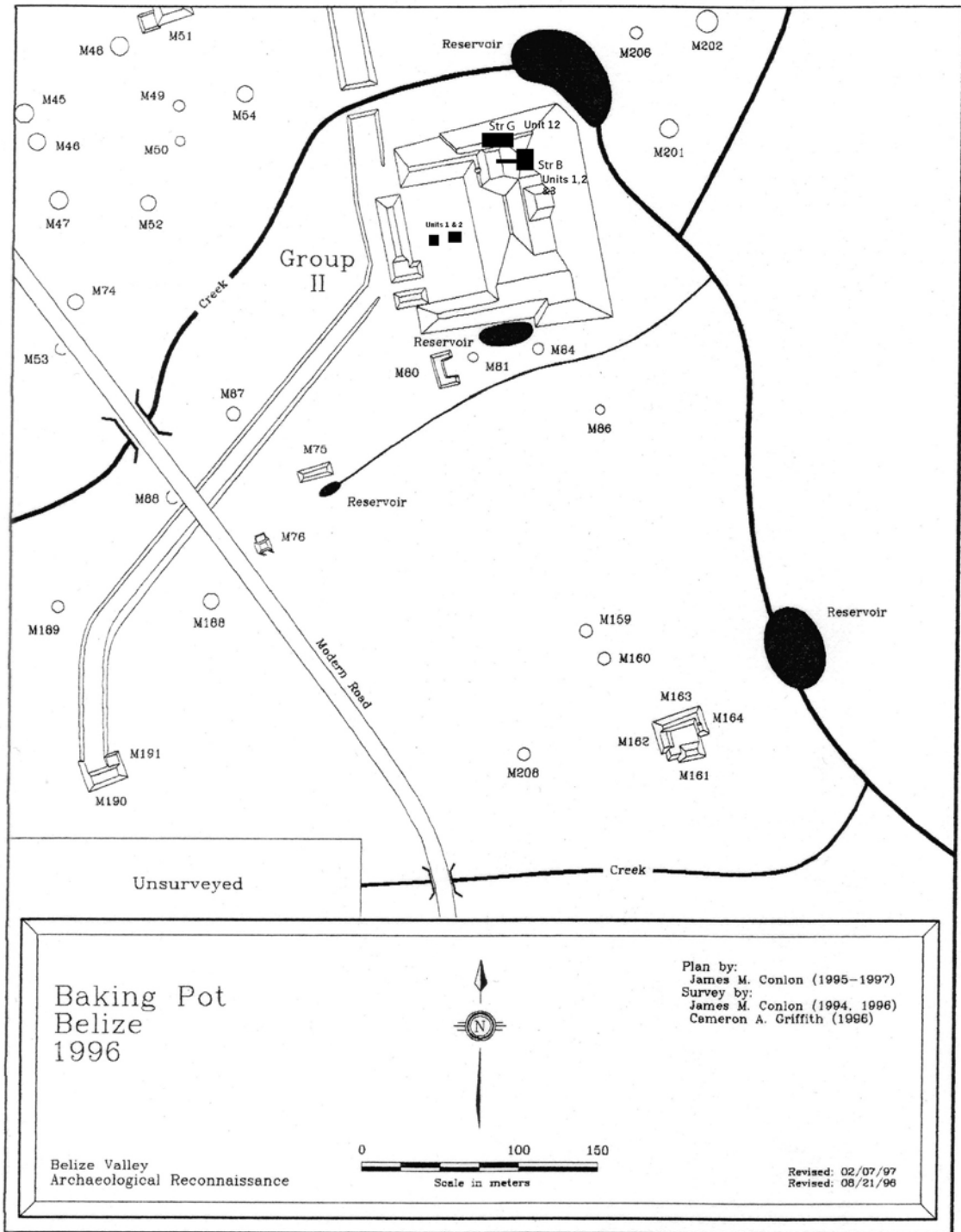
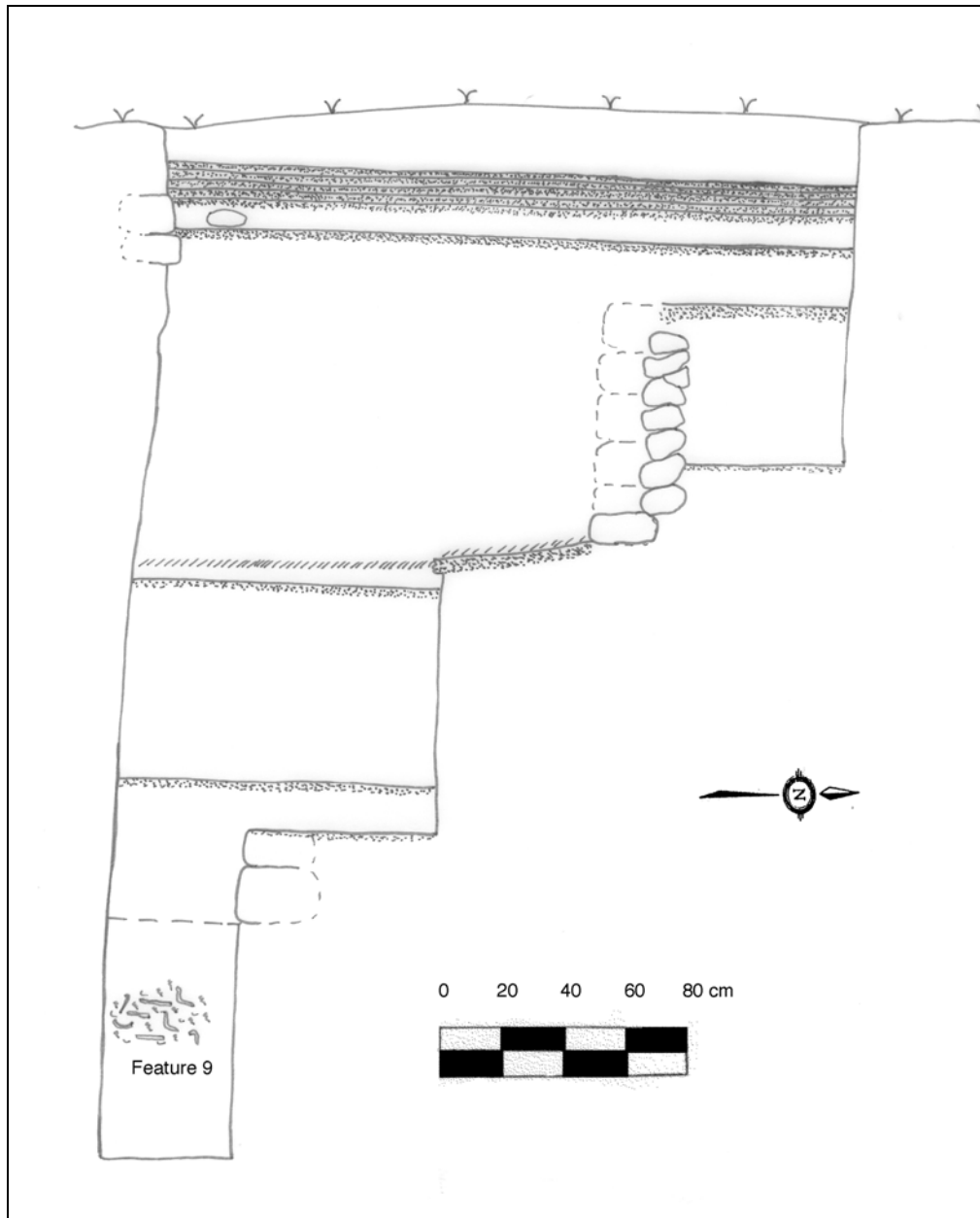


Figure 5.54: Map of Group II, Baking Pot

the central staircase (Unit 2), and a 2 x 2 meter penetrating unit was placed on the plaza floor directly in front of the trench (Unit 1). Additional penetrating units were placed in the fill of Structure B in efforts to determine the construction sequence of the platform.

Unit 1, 2 x 2 m, was placed in the center (as close as we could determine) of the plaza (Figure 5.55). We were hoping to discover a series of plaza floors that would provide a better idea of the construction sequence of this section of the site. Floors 1-5 (located 20-28 cm below the surface) were all extremely well preserved. The ceramics from the fill below the first four floors (Plaza 2/7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup>) indicate a Late Classic 2 or Spanish Lookout date, as does the material from Level 1. These floors were simple replasterings of the original floor surface (Floor 5) that was constructed on a level of large river rocks measuring between 15-25 cm in length and 10-17 cm in width. Within this rocky fill, we encountered Cache 1, two Mountain Pine Red dishes stacked, upside down, lying above Floor 5. This cache, coupled with the fill ceramics from this level both point to a Late Classic 1 or Tiger Run date for the construction of Plaza 2/6<sup>th</sup>.

Directly below this cache, we encountered Floor 6 (Plaza 2/5<sup>th</sup>), a well-preserved stucco floor that abutted a two-course high limestone platform on the northern side of the unit. Unfortunately, we did not have the time to investigate the nature of the platform, however future researchers may find its location an interesting feature to investigate. The fill under Floor 6 (level 7) consisted



*Figure 5.55: Profile of Unit 1, Plaza 2, Group II (J. Puc)*

primarily of Late Classic 1 or Tiger Run ceramics, including Mountain Pine Red dishes, Saturday Creek Polychrome sherds, and Zibal Unslipped jar rims.

The fourth phase of construction was encountered 1.3 meters below Floor 6. This phase of construction consisted of a second platform, which was

encountered on the southern edge of the unit. The single platform wall we discovered faced north (running east-west) and was constructed with 6 courses of cut limestone blocks. Since this platform stood over 1.3 m high, we decided to extend our excavations south an additional meter in efforts to place a small penetrating unit inside this earlier construction phase. The platform, unfortunately, was not in a good state of repair. It seems that the Maya, before covering the structure to create the subsequent construction, ripped the majority of the good facing stones from the platform, likely using them in the walls of nearby buildings. The likelihood of this occurring is further supported by the distance of Baking Pot from the nearest limestone quarry; over one kilometer. With a limited population, it appears reasonable that cut blocks would be reused at times.

At the base of this wall a 6<sup>th</sup> plaster floor extended from the platform almost 60 cm before evidence of it being dug through in antiquity was discovered. Above this floor, and extending over the region that the floor should have been, was a thick (7-14 cm) layer of burnt material, including ceramics, organic material, and lithics. Due to time constraints, we left the area of unbroken floor intact and continued our excavations through the region where the floor had been broken. Fill from within the platform suggested a Tiger Run or Late Classic 1 date. While some earlier material was encountered, the bulk of the ceramics date to this time period.

The earliest three phases of construction dated from the Middle Preclassic to the Early Classic. The only remarkable feature was encountered below the first phase of construction: below the base of the platform, we encountered a Middle



Preclassic cache consisting of partially complete ceramic vessels, individual sherds, and hundreds of freshwater and saltwater shells. The partially complete vessels include Reforma Incised, Savanna Orange, and Jocote Orange Brown sherds. The shells included hundreds of jute shells, bivalves, and conch shells. Almost all showed signs of being broken for eating purposes, possibly indicating feasting. Its location below the first construction phase of the site (and it being the earliest sealed deposit at Baking Pot), certainly point to the possibility that the deposit is the remains of ceremonial activities associated with the first construction at the site.

Unit 2 was initially set up as a 2 x 8 m trench intended to locate the central axis and staircase on Structure B. Unfortunately, preservation of the front of this tall structure was not as good as we hoped, or even as good as the structures around it. This difference in preservation, in addition to the lack of massive quantities of collapsed material, led investigators to believe that much of the western face of the terminal phase construction had been removed in antiquity or recently. It is possible that the rather robust population of people living at Baking Pot during both the Early and Late Postclassic periods, both around the site core and to the northeast of the site used these stones in the construction of their own homes. Structure 209, a causeway terminus structure located only 200 m from Group II, also had the majority of its facing stones removed in antiquity, further supporting this position.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that we found only a single row of stones from the terminal phase of construction. This line was located directly on

the plaza floor: everything located above this had been removed, with the notable exception of the superstructure on the summit of the mound. We persevered onwards, and deep within the trench discovered the penultimate phase staircase. These huge stone slabs were covered in a very thick layer of stucco that was so well preserved we could not determine where one stone began and the next ended without breaking through it. After uncovering 4 large stairs that clearly were leading several meters below the terminal phase superstructure we were currently excavating we terminated the excavation for fear of undermining the stability of the mound.

Unit 3 was a located on the summit of Structure B. The terminal phase architecture was surprising well preserved, particularly when compared with the front of the structure (Figure 5.56). It does not appear that any of the walls were removed in antiquity, and even the platform retaining walls at the top of the structure were still standing. Just above the floors and along the tops of the benches within the structure, particularly within the central room, we encountered a large number of ceramic vessels, chert debitage, and shell refuse. All of the ceramics date to the Late/Terminal Classic period, or to the Spanish Lookout phase. Many of the Cayo Unslipped sherds contained the “Pie Crust” impressions,

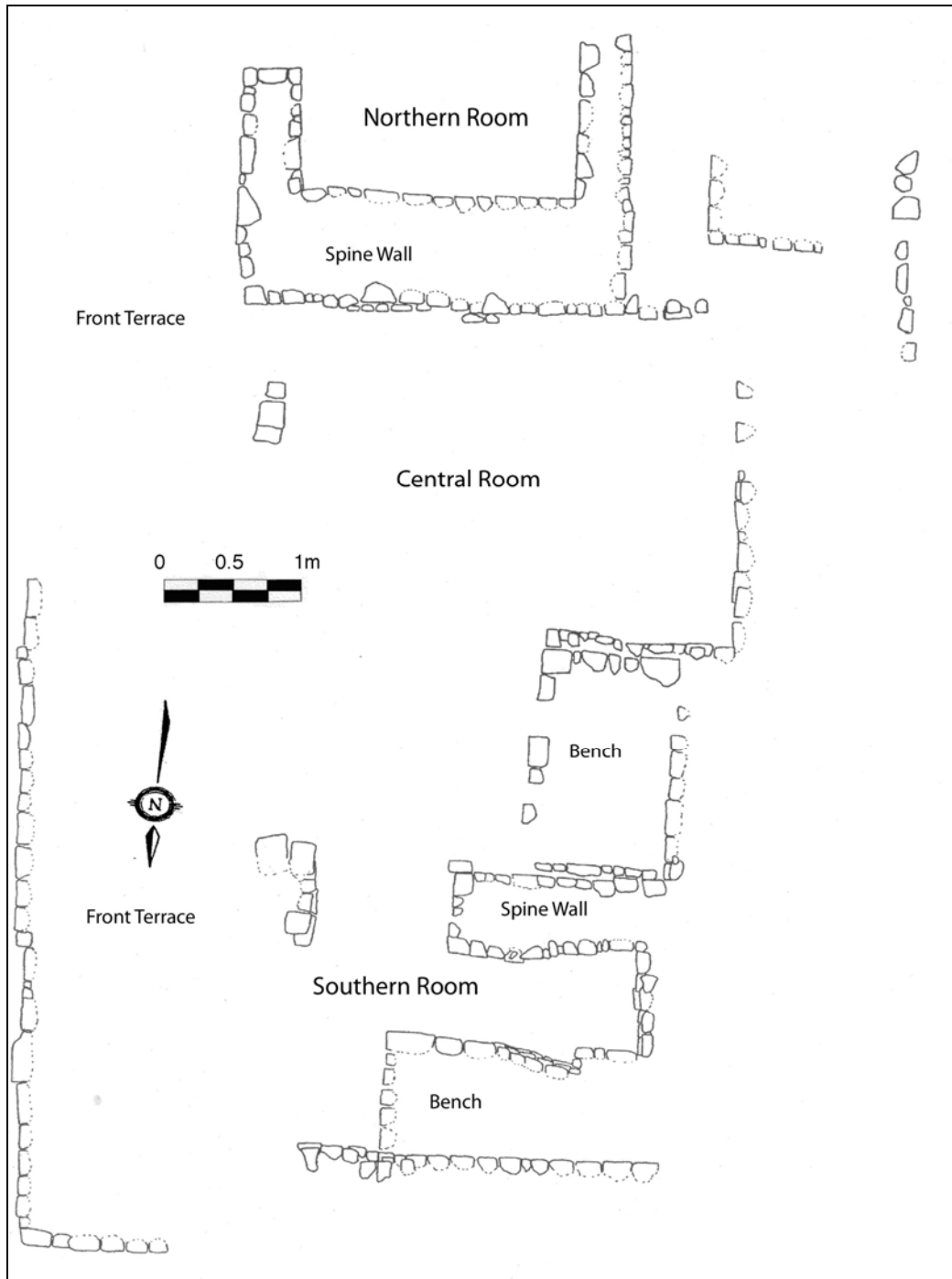


Figure 5.56: Plan of Structure B (A. Itza)

and several Daylight Orange: Darknight Variety sherds were also uncovered, suggesting that the last occupation of these structures occurred quite late. However it is difficult to determine if this cluster was left by squatters or by the original occupants themselves. Some elite quality shell and jade ornaments were encountered with the ceramics, perhaps suggesting the later; however either way the site core in Group II was abandoned by the end of the Terminal Classic period.

The architectural features located at the terminal phase summit of Structure B were numerous. Two benches and three separate rooms were uncovered. The central room is the largest, measuring 4.15 m wide and 5.81 m long. On the southeastern edge of the room is a large bench, measuring 1.53 m wide and 2.46 m long. The bench abuts two spine walls; one separates the central room from the southern room, and the eastern or back wall that divides the internal space from the back terraces. The western edge of the room is open, likely once leading out to the pillaged staircase. There would have been little privacy in this room; even though it was likely covered in thatch. It is possible, however, that the front walls were constructed with wooden poles, or that this room was intended to be visible to the rest of the palace and to those in the main courtyard of Group II. Perhaps certain ceremonies were conducted in this space, ceremonies that were more private than those that were carried out on the tops of the three main temples at the site.

The southern room did offer its occupants more privacy, however the space was significantly more cramped than the central room. The southern room

as 4.2 m long by 2.4 m wide. A single bench stood in the southeastern corner of the room and measured 192cm long by 140 cm wide. This bench took up much of the floor space. There were two entrances into this room: one from the north leading into the central area and one to the west, leading out to the front terrace of the structure.

The northern room was only accessible from the top of the structure via a hallway that began at the back of central room, led to the edge of the structure and then turned to the west and opened into the small northern space. There was also a doorway to the north, likely with steps leading down into the smaller northern palace group. Time constraints, however, limited our ability to test this hypothesis. There was no bench in this room, possibly suggesting that many of the inhabitants used this room as the entryway, which then led into the two rooms that were more commonly used for sleeping, meetings, and/or ritual ceremonies.

The eastern face of the structure remains unexcavated but the tops of the terraces could clearly be seen with just a cursory inspection, suggesting that a series of small terraces extend down to the base of the mound. Future excavations at the base of this structure, if time allowed investigators to get through the monumental layer of collapse, would likely yield evidence of feasting and the remains of rituals performed at the top of the structure. Unfortunately, time did not permit testing during the 2004 season.

### *Test Excavations*

Several test units were placed at the top of Structure B. Only one of these units, Unit 5 (located in the northern room) yielded ceramics artifacts. Unfortunately, the ceramics from this unit were undiagnostic. The others only contained the remains of roughly cut limestone blocks that formed construction pens directly below the terminal phase plaster floor. Unit 7 was completed to a depth of 2.3 meters, however only construction pens and plaster were uncovered. Due to the difficulty in excavating in solid stucco material, excavations were eventually halted.

### ***Structure G***

Then northern palace structure lining Plaza 2 in Group II is a 2.3 meter high residential platform that supported a masonry two-room superstructure (Figure 5.57). Only the eastern half of this structure was excavated, with the assumption that the western half mirrored the layout of the eastern section to some degree. Time and financial constraints made excavation of the entire platform impossible.

A single 14x7 meter unit was placed across the eastern half of Structure B. We hoped that Unit 12 contained the remains of the superstructure as well as the topmost terrace, with Unit 19 placed adjacent to it in an effort to uncover the stairs and sections of the plaza. Unit 12 yielded evidence of two rooms; a southern or front room that was accessible from both the central staircase and through a

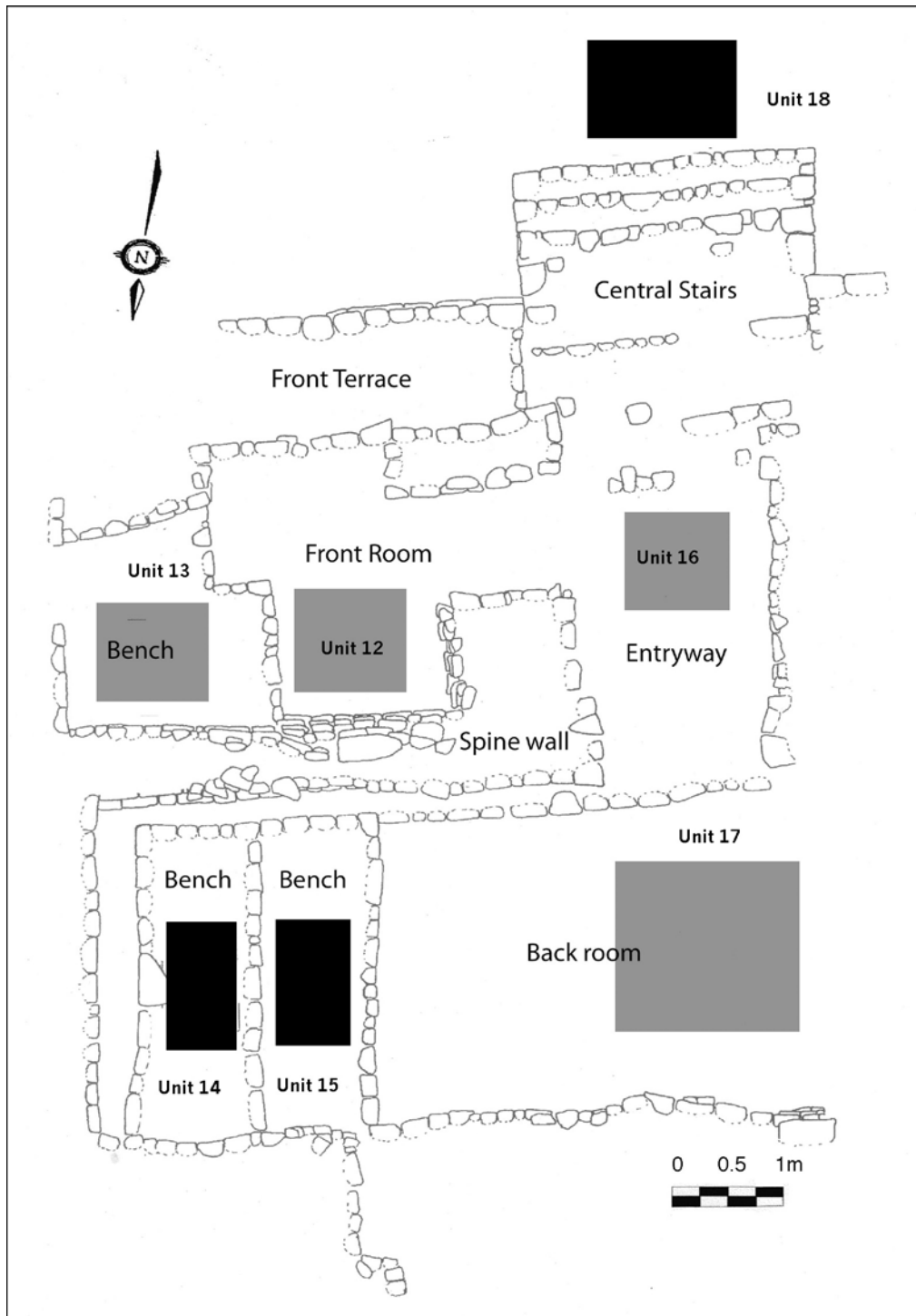


Figure 5.57: Plan of Structure G

second doorway on the eastern side of the front platform as well as a northern or private room only accessible via the central doorway. The front room was smaller than the back, measuring 7.2 m by 2.2 m and contained a single bench on the eastern end. The back room was significantly larger and contained the remains of two benches, both located on the eastern edge of the room. The back room appears to be a single large room. Half of the room was excavated and measured 7.4 m long (but likely would be roughly double this) and 3.1 m wide.

Two features within this room were unique. The benches are unlike anything found in the Belize Valley. These two level benches were placed parallel to each other, the easternmost one 30 cm higher than the other. Perhaps there were two benches for a large family to sleep or for meetings with lots of people? Unfortunately that is something we will never know.

A second, and more confusing element in this room is a “drain”-like feature that encircles the benches. While it does not appear as though it would have actually functioned as a drain, (the slop actually angles down into the center of the room) there had to be some function for this long and narrow passage. Unfortunately, we have not been able to ascertain its purpose nor have similar features been documented in the region to my knowledge.

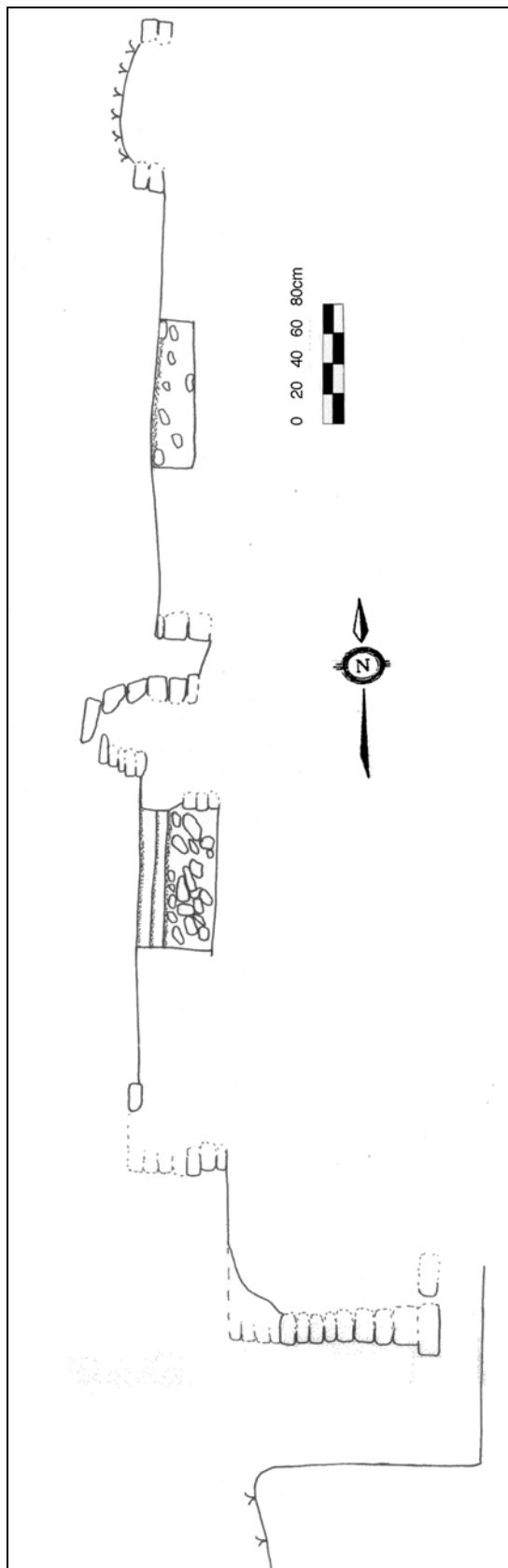
Thankfully, the test units in Structure G yielded more ceramic information than those placed into Structure B. The ceramics found above the first floor indicate a Terminal Classic date. These include Cayo Unslipped “pie crust” ollas, several Belize Red dishes and vases, a partially complete Montego Polychrome vase, and two Daylight Orange: Darknight variety sherds (Gifford et al. 1976).



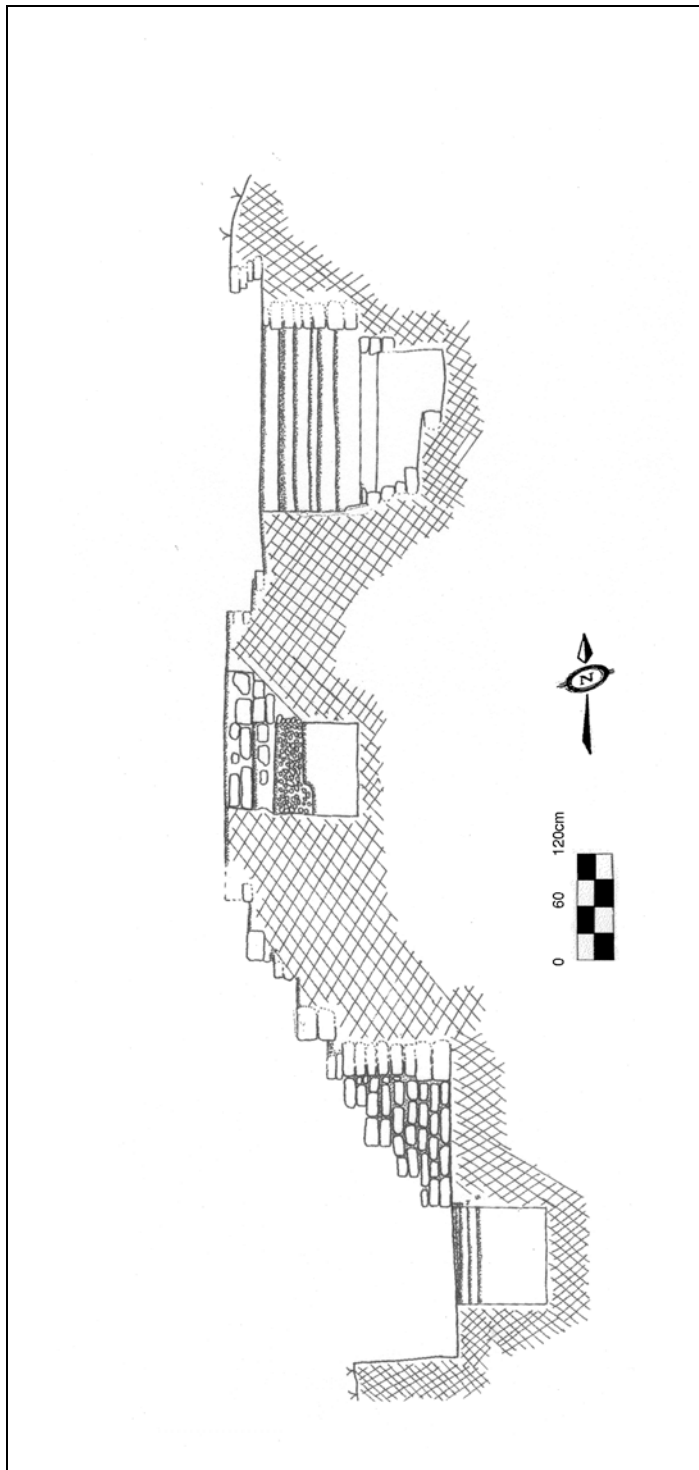
Several penetrating units were placed within the platform and the benches. A single unit was placed at the base of the stairs. No cached material was found in any of the units, however some ceramic material useful for dating was uncovered. Unfortunately, like our excavations in Structure B, we did not have time to complete the excavation to sterile.

Unit 19 revealed the front terraces and the nine steps leading up to the summit of the platform (Figures 5.58 and 5.59). These steps were usually two courses high and constructed with large cut limestone blocks. The platform was 2.2 m above the plaza floor, with 3 terraces flanking each side of the staircase. At the base of the eastern side of the 1<sup>st</sup> terrace we uncovered a drain that led from the plaza, through the platform, and presumably out the back of the monumental core. This drainage system was common throughout the lowlands, but it was an interesting discovery nonetheless. Below the monumental core was a stream that bisected the causeway leading from Group 1 to Group II (there was likely a wooden bridge of some sort connecting the two sides) that this run off would have flowed into.

A single test excavation, Unit 13, extended to at least the level of the plaza and was placed in the center of the back room in Structure G. This unit measured 1.5 x 1.5 m and we hoped to find evidence of the construction sequence of the platform. While some of the levels yielded numerous datable ceramics, many of



*Figure 5.58: Profile of Structure G, Group II (drawn by author)*



*Figure 5.59: Profile of Structure G, Group II (Drawn by author)*

the levels were without ceramic artifacts entirely. Level 2 was a simple replastering over the floor covering the construction fill of Level 3 and contained no artifacts. However, a ceramic feature (#6) was found in the fill of Level 3, at least giving us an idea of the late date of construction. The ceramics found within this feature include Belize Red dish sherds, several Benque Viejo Polychrome fragments, and numerous Cayo Unslipped rim sherds with “pie crust” impressions. This last type in particular, along with material found in the collapse, suggests a Terminal Classic date for the last two construction phases. Levels 4 and 5 contained ceramics dating to the Late Classic 2 phase, while Levels 6-8 did not contain any ceramics at all. Ceramics from Levels 9 and 10 date to the Late Classic 1, or Tiger Run phase. Unfortunately, we did not have time to continue below level 10 and had to terminate our excavations approximately 2 meters below the level of the terminal phase floor.

Additional test units were placed in the benches and in the floor of the southern room. No caches or artifacts were uncovered, just lots of thick plaster and roughly cut limestone blocks, similar to the construction techniques found in Structure B.

### *Artifacts*

Unlike Structure B, few artifacts were found in situ above the terminal floors of the platform. However, a miniature unslipped olla and a partially complete Benque Viejo Polychrome vase were found at the base of the western side of the double-decker bench. Few artifacts indicating activity areas were

discovered, specifically no evidence of cooking in or around the structures or courtyard was uncovered. A few broken manos and metates were found in humus layers, and three spindlewhorls were found scattered throughout the area, but this is very sparse artifact density when compared with other households that we have excavated at the site. This may indicate the lack of domestic chores that were being completed in the palace complex. Perhaps cloth was woven and food was prepared in areas outside of the site core and brought in at appropriate times. This would be consistent with hypotheses proposed at other sites in the Maya region.

### *Discussion*

The construction and artifacts uncovered from the palace at Baking Pot were comparable with those found at other sites in the region (Ball 1992; Leventhal and Ashmore 1996). The only element lacking was the corbelled arch. However when the distance to the nearest limestone quarry is taken in account (over 1.5 km), the quantity of stone construction is impressive. The lack of domestic refuse is expected, given the assumption that the elites were not cooking food nor weaving their own clothes. Those who were taking care of this probably lived in the smaller homes in close proximity to the palace.

The dating of the first phase of construction in the plaza was also slightly earlier than I expected. The late Middle Preclassic date for the first platform indicates that Baking Pot, while settled later than Cahal Pech or Blackman Eddy, did have some significant activity occurring during this early period. Of additional note, was the limited construction that occurred during the Terminal Classic

period. While it is impossible to know how much of Structure B was built during this late phase, at least minor modifications were still being added to the plaza and to Structure G. Many of the ceramics previously thought to have a Postclassic date, including Daylight Orange: Darknight Variety are present, however it is interesting to note that Plumbate, found in other parts of the site in early and middle Postclassic assemblages, was absent from site core.

The lack of dedicatory caches in both platforms was a surprise. At other temples and residences throughout the site there has been a consistent pattern of axial caches extending from the Late Preclassic through to the end of the Classic period. Despite the numerous axial, doorway, and bench units placed in both platforms, not a single cache was discovered. It is possible that these caches were located in earlier phases of construction (thus on different alignments) however why there were no terminal phase caches, with the exception of the Tiger Run period deposit in the center of the plaza, is a mystery.

### ***Plaza 1 Group II***

Two excavation units measuring 2 by 2 m were placed at the center of Plaza 1, Group II. The goal of these excavations was to determine the chronological phases of construction within this group. In addition, Bullard and Bullard discovered numerous burials along the central axis of Structure A, to which our units were aligned, and we hoped to encounter the remains of elite ritual activity. Unfortunately, excavations in Unit 2 were of little value as two excavation assistants did not notice the series of floors they were digging through,

however Unit 1 yielded information about the construction sequence in Group II, Plaza 1.

Unit 1 was placed slightly west of Unit 2, aligned with the central stela in front of Structure A. A series of 5 floors were uncovered before sterile soil was discovered 4.4 meters below the surface. Floor 1 was located 27 cm below the surface. Above Floor 1 a number of Spanish Lookout phase ceramics were collected, including Belize Red types, Roaring Creek Red and Dolphin Head Red. Within the fill of Floor 1 (Level 2) all of the ceramic types belonged to the Tiger Run complex, significantly earlier than I expected and much earlier than found in the elite palace group to the northeast. Floor 2 was found 21 cm below Floor 1 and contained the remains of ceramics dating to the Late Preclassic period. Much like in Group 1, Late Classic construction is placed directly above the Late Preclassic platforms. This might be due to our misunderstanding of Early Classic ceramic types, or they may be a hiatus in site core construction during this time. Earlier phases of occupation include Late and Middle Preclassic phases of occupation.

### *Summary*

The construction sequence found in Group II suggests that this area was occupied hundreds of years earlier than the rest of the site. As in Group I, the majority of the construction took place during the Late Preclassic and Late Classic periods, with limited evidence of an Early Classic occupation. Ceramic evidence

found in Plaza 2 suggests that areas of the palace were still being constructed well into the Terminal Classic period, unlike most of the site core structures.

Ritual activity in the palace was limited, which is surprising considering the amount of dedicatory caches located throughout the center. Ceremonies on larger and more public temples may have been emphasized in an effort to capture the support of the populace. In addition, the lack of burials within this complex was surprising. It is possible that this is reflective of foundation changes across time, however, this would indicate that Group II has undertaken more changes than other areas of the center as caches and tombs were in found in typical axial locales. As at most other centers in the Maya lowlands the number of skeletons recovered from Baking Pot is not reflective of the population that once lived there. Perhaps we simply placed our excavations units in unlucky places; perhaps the elites were not always buried within the site cores. Future research at the site should focus more on this palace complex and understanding the relationships that the elites had with the rest of the people living at Baking Pot.

### **Summary of Occupation at Baking Pot from the Late to Terminal Classic**

#### *Late Classic I Occupation (A.D. 580—680)*

Two clear trends emerge by the Late Classic period. The first is a clear division between the burial treatment of rulers and other elites in comparison to those buried in domestic platforms located in the periphery. The second is the massive nature of the construction phases within the site core of a few structures contrasted with the relative lack of construction found in the palace, monumental



plazas, and temples in Group II. Group I excavations conducted by the BVAR project have revealed a similar trend: significant Late Preclassic construction followed immediately by several Spanish Lookout phases. This is contrasted however, with the construction of much of Structures E and G within Group 1, which appear to have been primarily conducted within this Late Classic 1 period (Audet and Awe 2003; Ricketson 1927).

Conversely, the elite burials dating to this period are clearly the most elaborate and ornate at the site. Construction in and immediately around Group I may well have reached its peak during this time, indicating a focus on temple platforms and other ritual structures, instead of residential construction by the elites. It is clear that those of high status were being honored after their death, but it is unclear why the general population or the elites were not constructing residential platforms with the same fury as we see later in the Late Classic 2 period.

#### *Late Classic 2 –3 Occupation (A.D. 680-900)*

During the Late Classic 2 or Spanish Lookout Ceramic Complex, the population of Baking Pot reached its height (approximately 2,000 people), followed swiftly by the abandonment of the site core by the elites and the majority of residential platforms in the periphery by the rest of the population. While the reason for this collapse is unclear and debated by numerous scholars (see Demarest et al. 2004; Lucero 2002) the abandonment of Baking Pot occurred towards the latter part of this period (between A.D. 830-900) based primarily on

ceramics found in the construction fill of the royal palace group (Audet 2005). The beginning and middle parts of this period were times of intense construction and growth at Baking Pot. Structures and Plazas in both Groups 1 and 2 were significantly increased in height and width, and all of the residential platforms tested by the BVAR project were significantly modified during this time.

The elite inhabitants at Baking Pot also appear to have access to important status markers in the Spanish Lookout phase. While the burial of only a single high status elite individual has been discovered, his cist contained the remains of numerous polychrome and bichrome vessels, many of them imported from powerful centers in the Petén (Reents-Budet et al. 2004). A number of the imported vessels date to the Late Classic 1, but those locally produced date to the second half of the Spanish Lookout phase, perhaps indicating that these earlier pieces were heirlooms. If this were the case, and the heirlooms resided at Baking Pot for several hundred years, they could be indicative of an earlier political hierarchy in which Naranjo had a significant relationship with the Belize Valley. Alternatively, these vessels may have belonged to many rulers over the years, perhaps traded from one elite individual to another in a form of social currency.

The other elite interment dating to this period likely dates to the latter half of the Spanish Lookout phase, circa the time of abandonment. He also was interred with significant wealth, including two jadeite earflares, a jadeite tooth (denture), and nine ceramic vessels. After this individual was interred within the central staircase of Structure 209 no repairs were made to the structure to enable

access to the summit. His death, sometime in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, signaled the beginning of the end for the elites at the site.

## **Conclusions**

Research conducted at Baking Pot over the past 12 years provides us insight into its history. The cultural history of the site, found in archaeological and epigraphic remains, paints a picture of a vibrant, global, and wealthy community. The patterns of occupation and construction, as well as the caches and burials, present snapshots of life at Baking Pot, from the Middle Preclassic to Terminal Classic periods.

The discovery of wealth and high status individuals at the site during the Late and Terminal Classic period, coupled with the large construction efforts at this time, impressive caches and burials, and an impressive palace complex suggest considerable political and/or economic power within the valley. Several models presented in Chapter 1 can be successfully applied to the interactions between the Eastern Periphery (particularly the Belize Valley) and the core region of the Petén. In particular, models of core-periphery interaction and the relationship between economic activity and political success are pertinent for understanding the economic organization of the study area. Trade objects, including ceramic vessels and musical instruments, jade jewelry, marine shells, and stone eccentrics highlight a pattern of interaction, one facilitated by the sites location alongside the Belize River. Some of these objects are politically imbued with importance, and their discovery presents inferences about intersite

relationships. A ceramic vessel from a Naranjo ruler, a unique flute from Honduras, and a jade mask with an Ajaw glyph, are all items that suggest long distance connections.

Core-periphery models and a discussion of economic activity within the region are pertinent to the political organization. Discussed further in Chapter 7, these models illuminate motivations both for and against entering into long distance political alliances. Fertile soils ideal for the growth of cacao orchards and other valuable crops, as well as the benefit from its location along a major trade route led to economic prosperity for local elites. This prosperity is illustrated in tombs, architecture, and caches associated with elite sponsored structures.

Control over agricultural production and the Belize River trade route would have been enticing to near-by superpowers. Relationships between the study region and centers in the Petén fluctuated with the political ups and downs among powerful centers. These fluctuations can be traced to outcomes in battles and political alliances between Caracol, Naranjo, Calakmul, and Tikal (among others), indicating how truly interconnected the system was. The distance from the core region would have had benefits for the region, however, as sites of far distance may have been willing to pay for goods and services to avoid distant and expensive wars.

With all this information, the political organization in the Belize Valley is becoming clear. The two tiered political system described by Willey and his colleagues (Wiley et al. 1965) and Driver and Garber (2004) is an accurate snapshot of the situation within the valley during periods of relative independence

(with major and minor centers controlling small hamlets). During periods of political domination, the valley was subsumed by stronger political players. The elites ruling at Baking Pot during the Late Classic 1 phase were thriving. The Late Classic 2 elites began large construction efforts, while those in the Terminal Classic struggled to maintain their position within the region. Interactions among the valley centers and throughout the Maya lowlands played a significant role in the fluctuating political and economic prosperity of the valley inhabitants. Models of core-periphery interaction are particularly valuable in understanding relationships with Naranjo and other distant centers, while as previously mentioned, the Theater State model provides an understanding for why trade of cacao and other ritual goods was so valuable to elite consumers. Ceramic evidence, as discussed in Chapter 6, provides a unique snapshot of these interactions and how they affected the inhabitants of Baking Pot.

## CHAPTER VI

### CERAMIC ANALYSIS OF MATERIAL FROM BAKING POT

#### **Introduction**

Ceramics are the most ubiquitous and arguably most valuable class of artifacts uncovered at Maya sites. They are used to date construction phases, assess social status and political ties, and detect migrations of people and ideas. James Gifford initiated the most comprehensive ceramic analysis in the Belize Valley, a volume still used by archaeologists today (Gifford et al. 1976). Gifford's analysis was largely reliant on data from Barton Ramie, a small settlement located between Baking Pot and Blackman Eddy. Gifford was able to construct well-developed ceramic sequences from the Middle Preclassic through the Late Classic period, noting connections between ceramics produced locally and those from distant regions. Recently, Lisa LeCount analyzed ceramics from Xunantunich in an effort to understand the social, political, and economic relationships among Naranjo, Calakmul, and Xunantunich during the Terminal Classic (1996), a period not well understood at Barton Ramie. LeCount's study, coupled with work by Gifford, provides a solid understanding of the temporal sequence in the valley, one that can be employed in the analysis of ceramics from Baking Pot.

A well-defined ceramic complex for the Late to Terminal Classic periods in the Belize Valley is invaluable. LeCount's study has provided this information. Deposits have been more finely dated, influences from distant regions noted, and local complexes identified. An analysis of ceramic material provides unique information about Baking Pot within the context of the Belize Valley and more

distant polities. Ceramic analysis was limited to material from Baking Pot for several reasons: 1) the sample was more controlled and excavations were conducted in a variety of locales; 2) an analysis of ceramic material has just been completed by Lisa LeCount at Xunantunich; and 3) the ceramic sample from Cahal Pech was extremely limited both temporally and numerically, making it less valuable than the Baking Pot material.

### **Previous Ceramic Analysis in the Belize Valley**

#### ***Xunantunich Chronology***

In an effort to provide a fine-grained distinction between Late Classic and Terminal Classic pottery, Lisa LeCount undertook the analysis of pottery excavated in the site core and periphery by the Xunantunich Archaeological Project directed by Richard Leventhal and Wendy Ashmore (LeCount 1996). Her analysis was an extension of the work conducted by J. E. S. Thompson (1940). Thompson excavated a residential group located just west of the site core, Group B, and revealed distinct Late and Terminal Classic construction phases. Thompson's chronology, although not currently used by archaeologists in the Belize Valley, noted continuity in the ceramic assemblage during the Late Classic period at Xunantunich followed by an abrupt change in ceramic construction, paste, and form during the Terminal Classic.

Thompson detailed a Late Classic ceramic phase (Benque Viejo III) that was further subdivided into BV IIIa and the slightly later BV IIIb (Figure 6.1). He characterized this period as one of ceramic stability and continuity (Thompson

Type	Temper	Phase
<b>Unslipped Plain Ware</b>		
Simple silhouette dishes	Calcite	BV III
Incense burners (flanged)	Calcite	BV III
Scutate lids	Calcite	BV III
<b>Red Ware</b>		
Lateral ridged dishes	Calcite/Ash	BV IIIa
Simple silhouette dishes	Calcite	BV IIIb
Shouldered dishes	Calcite	BV III
Tau-footed tripod dishes	Ash	BV IIIb
Tau-footed tripod pans	Ash	BV IIIb
Simple silhouette bowls	Ash	BV IIIb
Tall cylindrical vases	Ash	BV III
Barrel-shaped vases	Ash	BV IIIb
Fluted tripod bowls	Ash	BV IIIb
Small drum	Opaque carbonate	BV IIIb
<b>Black Ware</b>		
Cylinder vases	Ash	BV III
<b>Fugitive black ware</b>		
Incurving bowls (beveled)	Calcite	BV III
Barrel-shaped jars	Calcite	BV III
Early storage jars	Calcite	BV III
<b>Vinaceous Tawny Ware</b>		
Tawny ware tripod bowls	Ash	BV IIIb
Red/black on tawny bowls	Ash	BV IIIb
Red/black on tawny barrel-shaped vases	Ash	BV IIIb
<b>Other Bichromes and Polychromes</b>		
Black on red dishes	Ash	BV IIIb
Red/black on orange dishes	Calcite	BV IIIa
Glyph & figure painted vases	Ash	BV IIIb
Orange ground polychrome dishes	Ash	BV IIIb
Whitish ground polychrome dishes	Ash	BV IIIb
Whitish ground polychrome bowls	Ash/calcite	BV IIIb

Figure 6.1: Thompson's Benque Viejo III Types (after LeCount 1996)

1940). Attributes common throughout the BV III phase include ash-tempered pottery, polychrome painted vases, black slip and plain wear styles and forms, and tau-shaped supports. During the BV IIIb subphase Thompson noted an increase in the frequency of ash tempered red-ware (called Belize Red by Gifford) and ash tempered polychrome forms.

The Terminal Classic pottery (BV IV) shares many characteristics similar to pottery at Barton Ramie, in part because Gifford used Thompson's typology to aid in the creation of his own (Figure 6.2). Thompson, however, saw a clear break



Table 5.2: Thompson's Benque Viejo IV diagnostic types		
Type	Temper	Date
Unslipped Plain Ware		
Storage jars with pie crust lips	Calcite	BV IV
Storage jar with flaring lips	Calcite	BV IV
Basin lids	Calcite	BV IV
Spiked vessels	Calcite	BV IV
Red Ware		
Oven-footed tripod dishes	Ash	BV IV
Oven-footed tripod pans	Ash	BV IV
Incised vases	Ash	BV IV
Fugitive Black Ware		
Incurving bowls with flat lips	Calcite	BV IV
Bowls with recurved rims	Calcite	BV IV
Storage jars with flared necks	Calcite	BV IV
Large jars with outcurving rims	Calcite	BV IV
Vinaceous Tawny Ware		
Small bowls with recurved rims	Ash	BV IV

Figure 6.2: Thompson's Benque Viejo IV Types (after LeCount 1996)

between the Late and Terminal Classic ceramics at Xunantunich, a much clearer break than noted by Gifford at Barton Ramie. The diagnostic forms from the Terminal Classic period Thompson notes include black incurving bowls (Mount Maloney Black type), pie crust rims on large ollas (Cayo Unslipped with Pie Crust impressions), and red-slipped ash ware dishes with large "foot" supports. He also noted the absence of polychrome vessels and the increase in carving on red wares, much like Gifford found at Barton Ramie.

### ***Barton Ramie Chronology***

During the 1960's and 1970's, James Gifford created a systematic and descriptive type-variety system from the ceramics excavated at Barton Ramie

(Gifford et al 1976). His creation of a temporally sensitive type variety system has allowed scholars working in the area to anchor their construction phases and special deposits to particular dates and compare their data with centers throughout the Maya region. Gifford's system is well accepted for the Middle and early part of the Late Preclassic as well as the Late Classic Period (LeCount 1996). During these periods the ceramics found at Barton Ramie are strongly related to material found throughout the Maya lowlands, making this small sample representative of a larger ceramic sphere. The Early Classic, Terminal Classic and Postclassic were characterized by periods of regional balkanization, and this, coupled with the small sample of construction at Barton Ramie during these periods, reduces the usefulness of Gifford's analysis. In particular, ceramics dating to the Terminal Classic were not always separated from their Late Classic predecessors, making it difficult to determine events that occurred before and during the collapse.

Gifford subdivided the Late Classic period into two groups: the Tiger Run Ceramic Complex (580-680 A.D.) and the Spanish Lookout Ceramic Complex (680-900 A.D.). The Spanish Lookout phase is partly subdivided into earlier and later forms, although only within certain ceramic groups. Polychrome dishes, highly polished black and red-wares (often with a medial ridge), and vessels with a carbonate temper characterize the Tiger Run ceramic complex. These vessels are highly durable and preserved well in the archaeological record. During the Spanish Lookout complex, ash-wares predominate, particularly red-slipped dishes and bowls (Belize Red types). Gifford (Gifford et al. 1976) suggests that this ash tempering was the prelude to mass production of ceramic vessels within the

Belize Valley, and their predominance within the archaeological record indicates their popularity despite their greater propensity for breakage. Vessels become larger, particularly jars and dishes, and jar mouths become much thicker and wider. The Terminal Classic period is difficult to characterize using Gifford's typology, however vessels continue to expand in size, polychrome painting decrease significantly, and Belize Red forms begin to receive gouging and incised decoration on basal flanges.

*The Tiger Run Ceramic Complex (A.D. 580-680)*

Gifford describes the Tiger Run ceramic complex as a "lull in ceramic development" (Gifford et al. 1976:191). A period of slow transition between the Early and Late Classic periods, the Tiger Run ceramics do "not extensively reflect the attributes ... of what is entirely new in Tepeu 1 at Uaxactun" (Gifford et al. 1976:192). While the ceramics at Tikal and Uaxactun were characterized by beautiful polychromes such as Saxche Orange Polychrome, pottery at Barton Ramie was of relatively poor quality and reflects a decreased flow of ceramic technology to the east.

Two ceramic types found in the Belize Valley at this time are representative of ceramic units from Copan and Palenque; Sotero red-brown and Macal Orange-red. Gifford proposed that perhaps links between communities at this time "may form a great arc or almost a ring of occurrences around the central Petén without penetrating this geographic (and cultural?) island" (Gifford et al. 1976:192). The lack of similar pottery styles to the Petén may indicate a political

or social barrier limiting trade of ceramic goods between the central area and the eastern periphery.

*Spanish Lookout Ceramic Complex (A.D. 680-900)*

The most important characteristic separating the Tiger Run and Spanish Lookout ceramic complexes is the introduction of ash tempering during the latter (Gifford et al. 1976). In earlier ceramic complexes, calcite was the temper of choice for potters at Barton Ramie. Calcite helped to create hard and durable ceramic vessels. The introduction of ash tempering corresponds with a boom in ceramic production. Gifford suggests that an increase in the number of valley inhabitants led to the near mass-production of pottery, resulting in reduced ceramic quality and durability.

The Spanish Lookout ceramic complex is divided into two facets – early and late. The early half (Late Classic II) predominated the archaeological record at Barton Ramie, while ceramics dating to the latter half (Terminal Classic) were sparse. This made it difficult to adequately separate these two facets. Gifford was able to only designate three Terminal Classic types: Vaca Falls Red, Roaring Creek Red, and Mount Maloney Black (ibid: 226). At Xunantunich however, LeCount was able to better distinguish between these two periods because of increased activity in the site during this late phase. These deposits present new evidence for political interactions in the region.

The Late Classic II ceramics in the Belize Valley are similar in form and style to those in the Petén, the Maya Mountains, as well as the entire Maya lowlands (ibid: 225). This abrupt change from the regional spheres of the Late Classic I to pan-Maya styles in the Late Classic II, indicates increased communication, ceramic trade, and ceramic gifting between centers. During the Terminal Classic period, there is shift again to more regional styles. This shift is due in part to the collapse of elite lineages and centers throughout the Maya lowlands (LeCount 1996). The collapse of elite society likely terminated the demand for high-quality polychrome ceramics, leading to the domination of utilitarian ware with few diagnostic features. Utilitarian ceramics tend to change more slowly than elite types, leading to the identification of few Terminal Classic types within the Barton Creek deposits “even through the levels involved produced good sherd material” (Gifford et al. 1976:226).

#### *New Town Ceramic Complex*

Monumental core areas within the Belize Valley were largely abandoned by the end of the Terminal Classic period, with small pockets of people living in the peripheries of Xunantunich (Pendergast and Graham 1981) and Baking Pot (Audet 2002). Often these late deposits are mixed with Postclassic refuse, making the isolation of this phase extremely difficult. The transition between these two late periods probably took place slowly, with many of the Terminal Classic forms continuing into the Early Postclassic period.

A study of the political organization spanning the Late and Terminal Classic periods in the Belize Valley necessitates a close understanding of the ceramic evidence. The chronology of ceramics in the region is solid, but the ceramic activity at Baking Pot is less well understood. In this chapter, I have determined the profile of types found at Baking Pot, identified patterns of interregional influence and exchange, and related these patterns to political organization.

### **Baking Pot Ceramic Assemblage**

Ceramic analysis of the Baking Pot assemblage began in June 2002 and continued intermittently until October 2004. All of the ceramics I excavated at Baking Pot from 2002-2004 were studied, regardless of their spatial or temporal locale. Ceramics from special deposits (burials, caches, middens) were documented intensively. Modal attributes, decorative technique, decorative motifs, and vessel rim/base sizes were all identified and recorded. Gifford's standard system of paste identification, temper, and surface treatments were employed, resulting in a type-variety analysis of the material from Baking Pot. Ceramics from less important contexts – usually from architectural fall or fill material from structures – were typed for dating purposes, but little additional information was garnered from them.

Ceramics from the Jenny Creek (600-300 B.C.) to New Town Ceramic (950-1500 A.D.) complexes were uncovered, with the largest numbers belonging to Barton Creek (300 -100 B.C) and Spanish Lookout (580-900 A.D.) Ceramic

Complexes. While the data is skewed towards the Late Classic II and Terminal Classic, this is only in part due to excavation choices. Many of the structures not included in the ceramic analysis dated entirely to the Late Classic period (Audet 1999, 2000; Piehl 1998, 1999) indicating an increase in construction during this last period. Still, the discrepancy in the number of sherds dating to each period is enormous and will be discussed below. Given the focus on the Late Classic political organization, only ceramics from the Early Classic through Terminal Classic periods are discussed.

*Table 6.1: Time Periods and Ceramic Types at Baking Pot*

Ceramic complex (Barton Ramie)	Ceramic Complex Uaxactun	Dates	Number of Sherds Recovered at Baking Pot
New Town		900-1500 A.D.	10
Spanish Lookout	Tepeu 2 and 3	680-900 A.D.	17,227 (15 complete vessels)
Tiger Run	Tepeu 1	580-680 A.D.	645 (33 complete vessels)
Hermatige	Tzakol 1-3	260-580 A.D.	1,244 (6 complete vessels)
Floral Park	Chicanel	1- 260 A.D.	106
Mount Hope	Chicanel	100B.C.-260 A.D.	48
Barton Creek	Chicanel	300-100 B.C.	2,704 (212 complete vessels)
Jenny Creek (Late Facet)	Mamom	600-300 B.C.	609
<b>Total diagnostic</b>			<b>22,443</b>
<b>Total recovered</b>			<b>46,558</b>

The alluvial soils of the Belize Valley degraded the ceramic material, leaving 52% of the ceramic material unidentifiable. A total of 46,558 sherds and 266 whole vessels were recovered from the monumental core and three peripheral structures. Both residential and ceremonial structures were excavated, providing a mix of domestic and ceremonial deposits.

#### *Hermitage Ceramic Complex at Baking Pot*

The Early Classic period is not well represented at Baking Pot. While the overall numbers are higher than the Tiger Run complex, the numbers are deceiving. Of 1244 sherds, 1183 are from a single deposit. Incensario fragments account for 1139 of these sherds. This one deposit, from Structure 190, was a stela cache, and despite extensive testing in the structure few other Early Classic sherds were recovered.

The limited nature of Early Classic material in the Belize Valley and from Baking Pot specifically makes it difficult to determine patterns of trade or exchange. None of the vessels are of high quality or were found in elite contexts, in part due to excavation choices and in part due to construction trends in the site core. Although the Early Classic material is not the focus of this analysis, the shift in construction efforts from this early period to the Late Classic is immense.

#### *Incensarios*

The most common Early Classic sherd came from the untyped incensario fragments. Described in Chapter 5 (see Figs 5. And 5.1) these incensarios had



modeled faces with holes carved into the clay for the mouth. Open at both the base and top, only the front side was decorated (with the exception of some scraping lines on the back of some vessels). Unslipped and unpainted, the rough

Table 6.2: Hermitage Ceramic Complex Sherds at Baking Pot

Minanha Red	10
Fowler Orange-red	1
Dos Hermanos Red	21
Balanza Black	42
Pucte Brown	4
Dos Arroyos Orange Polychrome	16
White Cliff Striated	8
Hewlett Bank Unslipped	2
Untyped Incensario Fragments	1139
<b>Total</b>	<b>1244</b>

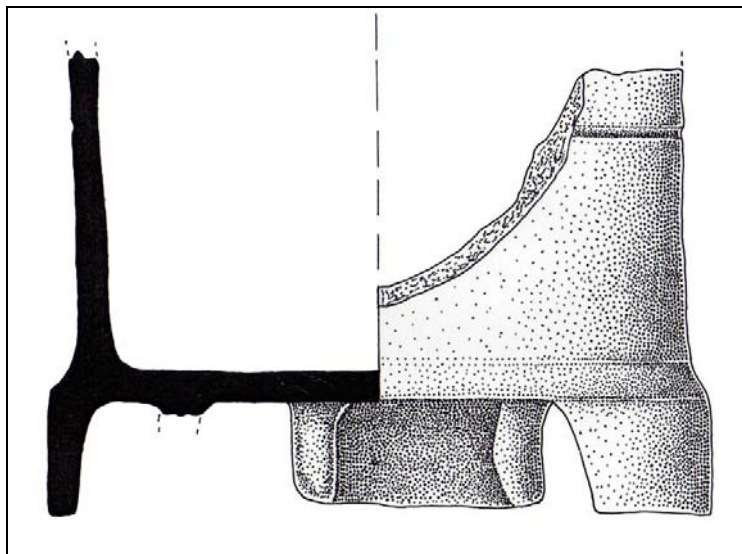
finishing suggested quick manufacture or desire for an “unfinished look.” Despite this, some of these faces show great attention to detail, including sharp teeth, lips, earflares, and noseplugs (Figure 6.3). These vessels were 16 cm to 21 cm tall with rim diameters 9cm to 13 cm wide.



Figure 6.3: Incensarios (height of front vessel 16 cm) (photo by author)

*Balanza Black Ceramic Group*

The second most prevalent sherd type is Balanza Black (Figure 6.4). Generally found in poor preservation, a single large sherd (the base of a vase) was found cached in Structure 190. This vase was a tripod vessel in Teotihuacan style, likely a local copy of Petén style copies. No complete specimens were found at Baking Pot; however vessel types include vases and bowls. Shiny, highly polished, and waxy feeling, Balanza Black types are found throughout the Maya Lowlands, indicating a pan- Maya style that the Belize Valley was incorporated.



*Figure 6.4: Balanza Black base (height 12 cm) (N. Puc)*

*Dos Arroyos Ceramic Group*

Dos Arroyos Orange Polychrome sherds comprise 16 of the Early Classic sherds. Like Balanza Black, this type is strongly linked to Petén ceramic ware suggesting strong ties between these two regions. While likely local copies of Petén styles (given their poor quality), the small number of sherds indicates their limited production in the area. Dos Arroyos Orange Polychrome dishes have a medial basal flange on the exterior portion of the vessel. Painted designs are located above and on the flange, as well as on the interior of the vessel. Only a single sherd contained both the rim and basal flange, but unfortunately the preservation was so poor the painted design could not be ascertained. Similar bowls from Barton Ramie had rim diameters of 27cm to 43 cm (Gifford et al 1976), while the lone Baking Pot sherd had a rim diameter of 31 cm.

#### *Dos Hermanos Ceramic Group*

Twenty-One Dos Hermanos Red sherds were discovered at Baking Pot, all from the same partially complete vessel. This thin-walled bowl was slipped with a streaky but glossy red-orange slip. The vessel was well preserved, due in part to its location almost two meters below the modern surface. The Baking Pot specimen is 7 cm high and has a rim diameter of 24 cm.

#### *Minanha Red Ceramic Group*

Ten Minanha Red sherds were found scattered throughout the site. These red slipped dishes are characterized by their basal flange or ridge around the exterior of the vessel with the exteriors only slipped above the ridge. The

predecessor to Mountain Pine Red ceramics, the basal flanges slowly recede to ridges over time. The red slip is hard and often fireclouding or crazing is visible. No complete vessels were found in the Baking Pot sample, but rim diameters from two sherds suggest sizes of 39 cm and 41 cm.

### *Discussion*

The small number of Early Classic ceramic sherds combined with limited construction activity in the site core, contrast strongly with material and activity during the early part of the Late Classic period. In contrast to the Tiger Run ceramic complex, the pan-lowland style and forms found in the region indicate a degree of social and political integration between the Petén, Caracol, and the Belize Valley that we do not see again until the Late Classic II.

### *Tiger Run Ceramic Complex at Baking Pot*

Only 645 Tiger Run phase sherds were encountered in our excavations at Baking Pot. In addition, 29 whole vessels were recovered from burials and cached

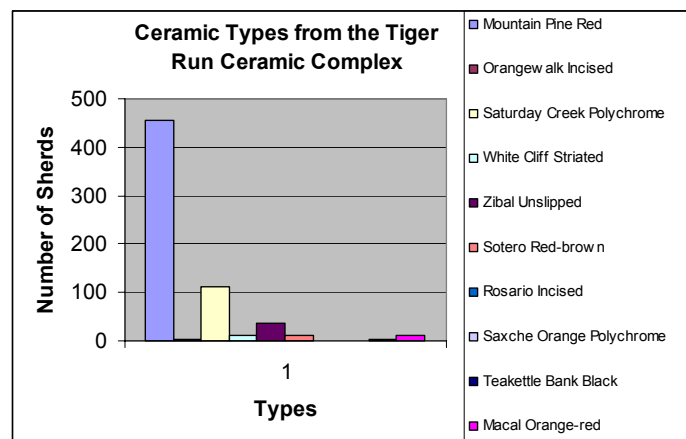
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Table 6.3: Tiger Run Ceramic Complex Sherds at Baking Pot

Mountain Pine Red	454
Orangewalk Incised	4
Saturday Creek Polychrome	113
White Cliff Striated	12
Zibal Unslipped	35
Sotero Red-brown	12
Rosario Incised	1
Saxche Orange Polychrome	1
Teakettle Bank Black	3
Macal Orange-red	10

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deposits throughout the site. This low frequency of Late Classic I material in the archaeological record mirrors the situation at Barton Ramie (Gifford et al. 1976). It is possible that some of the Spanish Lookout complex types may have begun during this earlier phase, as there are often mixed deposits containing both, however this alone cannot account for the discrepancy. The limited number of diagnostic sherds recovered from the fill indicates we are missing a large group of ceramic markers, a significantly smaller population lived at the site than during the Late Classic II, and/or a reduced consumption and production of diagnostic

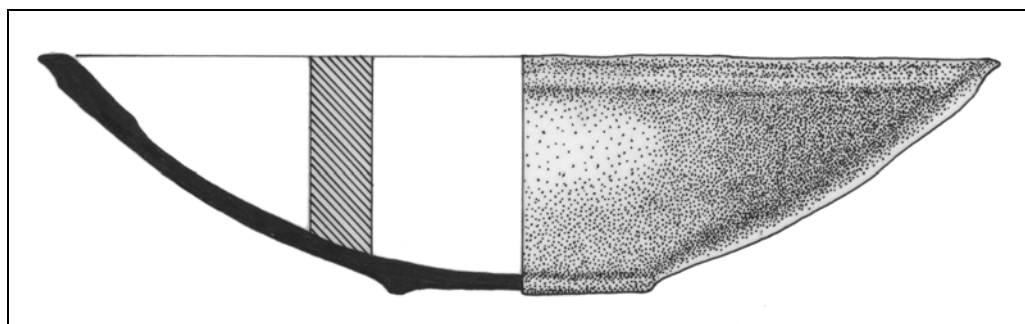


pottery during this time. The parallels with the Barton Ramie materials indicate a similar process at work at both centers, perhaps affecting the valley as a whole.

The possibility of ceramicists missing diagnostic material from this phase, while possible, is unlikely given the large number of projects and specialists working within the valley. Thus we are left with two other possibilities: a population boom in the Late Classic II and/or reduced pottery consumption and production during the Late Classic I.

### *Mountain Pine Ceramic Complex*

The most commonly encountered ceramic type was Mountain Pine Red sherds (Figure 6.5). These vessels, a precursor to Belize Red types of the Spanish Lookout complex, are characterized by their hard calcite temper, medial ridge, and red slip (on interior and above ridge on exterior) primarily found in dish form. The inner slip was a hard and deep red, while slip found on the external perimeter



*Figure 6.5: Mountain Pine Red (height 9 cm) (G. Valenzuela)*

was often lighter and less carefully applied. None of our specimen had slip applied below the medial ridge. These vessels were found cached in the Palace and below Burial 1 in Structure E, and were common in fill contexts throughout the site.

### *Saturday Creek Ceramic Complex*

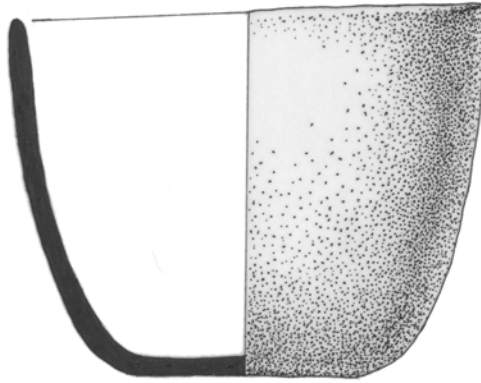
The second most commonly encountered ceramic type was Saturday Creek Polychrome (see Figures 5.11 – 5.15). Similar in form to Mountain Pine

Red dishes, these vessels were primarily found in elite contexts, and were often imports from Buenavista or the Eastern Petén (Reents-Budet 2004). The vessels at Baking Pot were all dishes (although Gifford notes bowls as well in his sample from Barton Ramie) and given their location in tombs and crypts, these sherds and whole vessels were well preserved.

The interior of the vessels was well smoothed and polished before decoration. Exterior surfaces were often left slightly rough, and decoration usually extended less than 3 cm below the rim. Exterior decoration was limited to lines and other geometric designs. Interior decoration was more elaborate: geometric designs, animal motifs, and human figures were all found on the central section of the plates. Vessel diameters ranged from 34 cm to 38 cm, at the upper range of vessels found by Gifford (Gifford et al. 1976:199).

#### *Sotero Ceramic Complex*

Sotero Red-brown bowls and vases were the third largest group in the Tiger Run ceramic complex (Figure 6.6). These highly polished and thin-walled vessels are described by Gifford as “velvety,” an apt depiction of the interior and exterior surfaces. Unlike the Saturday Creek Polychrome dishes, these bowls and vases were locally produced (Reents-Budet 2004). About half of the sample was discovered in elite contexts (including tombs, cysts or crypts) and of these vessels, all were complete. One vessel contained a unique spout modeled onto the side and painted (see Figure 5.38) while the remainder were simple vessels covered in a highly polished reddish-brown slip.



*Figure 6.6: Sotero Red-brown vase (height 18cm) (G. Valenzuela)*

### *Discussion*

Six structures and three plazas showed evidence of construction during the Tiger Run Phase. Structure G in Group II and Structures E, B, and G in Group I were modified significantly during the Late Classic I period. Structures 51, 209 as well as plazas in both Group I and Group II all increased in height. Occupation throughout the periphery was also wide-spread (the Bedran Group, Atalaya and the Yaxtun Group were all occupied during this time). Construction during this phase is significantly higher than during the Early Classic period, during which only two structures and one plaza in the site center and one large plazuela group were modified, but the number of diagnostic sherds is lower (1244 vs. 645). Site construction trends suggest that populations were increasing from the Early Classic to the Late Classic I period, and that this increase continued (perhaps even spiked) in the Late Classic II. If populations were increasing, why do we see a decrease in ceramic diagnostics?



Gifford notes the lack of foreign diagnostics at Barton Ramie and suggests that there was likely a decrease in trade between the Petén and the Belize Valley during this time. This lack of trade may have been a result of a political or economic situation that reduced the flow of ideas as well, thus creating a barrier between the ceramic styles found in Belize and those in the Petén. This was the period of Caracol’s height, and even the Ik ceramics at Tikal show signs of Caracol influence (Culbert 2001). Perhaps the strength of Caracol’s political sway limited the Belize Valley’s ability to interact freely with centers in the eastern Petén (Chase 2004). Ceramics from throughout the lowlands exhibit regional characteristics at this point in time, and Ball notes that ceramics reflect the “equally growing regionalism in other aspects of lowlands Maya life” (Ball 1976:328).

Table 6.4: Tiger Run Ceramic Complex Whole Vessels from Baking Pot

Saturday Creek Polychrome	8
Zibal Unslipped	1
Balanza Black	2
Mountain Pine Red	5
Sotero Red-brown	11
Unidentified Red/orange bowl	1
Unidentified Orange Bowl	1

Ceramic vessels interred in elite burials included Saturday Creek Polychrome dishes and Sotero Red-brown vases and bowls. One of the Saturday Creek Polychromes was sourced to the Caracol region using NAA at the Smithsonian Institute, and several others to an unknown location in western

Belize (Reents-Budet et al. 2004). Two ceramic flutes, found in Burial 2 in Structure 209, were also sourced to Honduras (ibid). This contrasts with the Sotero and Mountain Pine varieties, also predominantly found in elite contexts, which were produced locally. As Gifford noted, this was a period of ceramic isolation within the Belize Valley. Baking Pot, while generally adhering to this trend in regards to ceramic styles, also appears to have access to other exotics from long distance trade networks. This network, however, was accessible primarily to elite individuals.

While elites maintained access to high quality ceramics for caches and burials, the rest of the population lacked access to ceramics made in a pan-Maya style. This regional isolation did not last long. During the Late Classic II, or early part of the Spanish Lookout ceramic complex, ceramics once again were strongly influenced by the Petén centers and pan-Maya ceramic forms once again dominate the assemblage.

#### *Spanish Lookout Ceramic Complex at Baking Pot*

Ceramics dating to the Spanish Lookout complex dominate the assemblage discovered at Baking Pot. The terminal phase architecture of four structures was completely cleared, understandably skewing the data towards this occupation phase, but it is questionable if this entirely accounts for its domination of 75% of the diagnostic material. The large quantity of diagnostic markers is evident, but less obvious (unless sitting in the ceramics lab in San Ignacio) is the noticeable increase in serving vessels and painted ceramics over Tiger Run

ceramics. Polychrome vases are more common during the Late Classic II than previous times, as are carved, punctuated, and incised vessels.

Belize Red	13,629
Platon Punctated Incised	176
Martins Incised	15
Gallinero Fluted	20
Puhui Zibal Composite	45
Dolphin Head Red	257
Garbutt Creek Red	299
Vaca Falls Red	4
McRae Impressed	131
Duck Run Incised	9
Cayo Unslipped	214
Cayo Unslipped (red)	15
Cayo Unslipped (black)	10
Cayo Unslipped (pie crust rim)	65
Alexanders Unslipped	186
Humes Bank Unslipped	2
Tu-Tu Camp Striated	14
Rubber Camp Brown	8
Mount Maloney Black	482
Achote Black	6
Daylight Orange	17
Xunantunich Black on Orange	28
Benque Viejo Polychrome	1534
Zacatal Cream Polychrome	24
Montego Polychrome	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17,227</b>

The Terminal Classic once again is characterized by a decrease in these diagnostic forms; less than 4% of the Spanish Lookout sherds at Baking Pot can be conclusively identified as Terminal Classic. This is likely representative, at least in part, of the decrease in population at Baking Pot. Occupation and construction was limited during this period, particularly in the site core.

### *Spanish Lookout Ceramic Complex at Baking Pot (Late Classic II)*

The ceramics from Baking Pot dating to the Late Classic II are similar in form to pottery from throughout the Maya area. Unlike the regionalization seen in the Late Classic I, this period is characterized by an increase in the trade of ideas and goods throughout the lowlands. Gifford notes that the ceramics at Baking Pot are immediately identifiable pan-Maya Late Classic forms (Gifford et al. 1976). The majority of sherds discovered are of the Belize Red type. Plain ware red bowls and outflaring dishes are ubiquitous in the archaeological record. Students immediately learn what ash tempering is as they wash “the annoying ceramics that lose their slip and break apart easily” in late afternoons. The vast number of these sherds tends to overshadow the discovery of other types, skewing the data towards an almost completely Belize Red Late Classic deposit.

Ash tempered pottery of all types comprises 15,575 of the 17,227 Spanish Lookout sherds (90%). A few sherds are well preserved, but many are small fragments with heavily eroded slips. I decided not to weigh the sample in part because of the large amount of erosion on these ash tempered sherds. There is a fairly balanced split between red-slipped bowl and dish sherds within the assemblage while a lesser number of polychrome vases are partially complete.

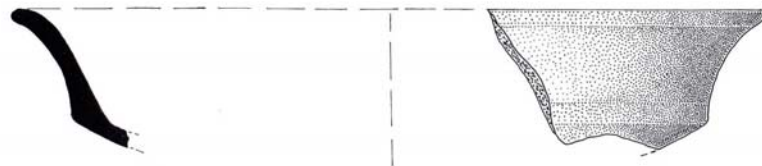
### *Belize Red Ceramic Group*

Belize Red ceramic group is composed of many different types and varieties. The most common is the Belize Red: Belize Red variety, composed of ash tempered, red-slipped, dishes, vases, jars and bowls (Figure 6.7). These

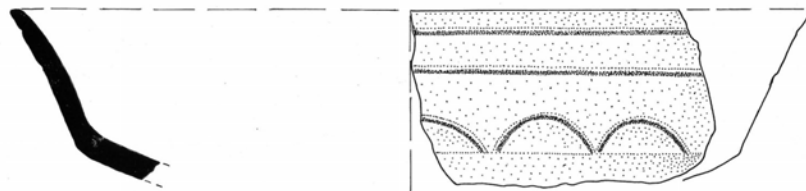
vessels have no impressions, incisions, punctations, or painted design and likely were the standard serving vessel of the day.

Platon-Punctated Incised and Martins Incised are also common Belize Red types, composed of incised, punctated, or impressed decoration primarily on bowls and dishes. Platon-Punctated incised are similar in form to Belize Red variety with the exception to the inclusion of incised lines on the exterior of the dish or bowl (6.8). Martin's Incised are commonly vases with incised decoration, including pseudo-glyphs, on the exterior of the vessel (6.9).

Forty-Five Puhui-zibal Composite vase fragments were recovered from two ritual deposits at the site (Figure 6.10). This type is comprised of ash-tempered bichrome bowls and vases with incised and punctated decoration on exterior surfaces. The vessels were black and red slipped on the exterior, with a



*Figure 6.7: Belize Red Dish (diameter 31cm) (N. Puc)*



*Figure 6.8: Platon-Punctated Incised (diameter 33cm)(N. Puc)*

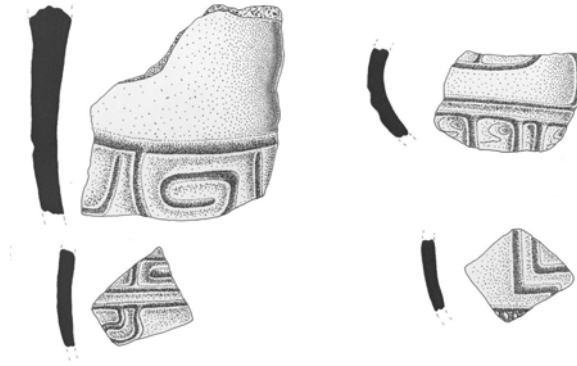


Figure 6.9: Martins Incised Sherds (top left sherd is 2 cm high)(N. Puc)

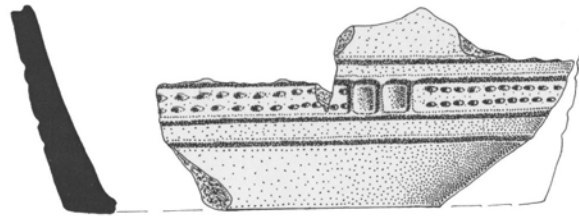


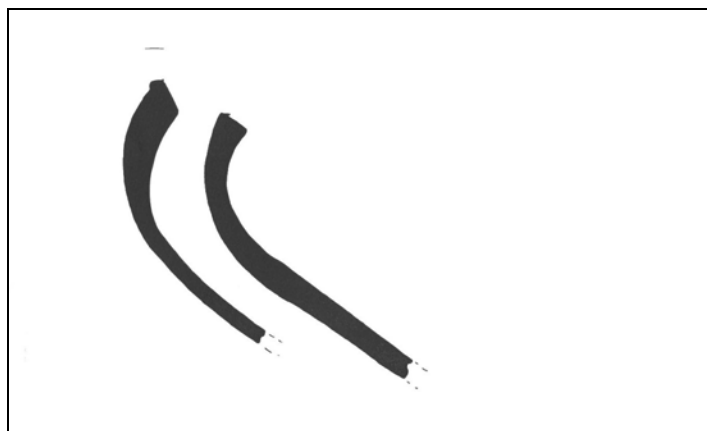
Figure 6.10: Puhui-zibal Composite vase (height 8 cm) (N. Puc)

narrow band of slip on the interior rim. Decoration, size, and styles are similar to Gifford's findings at Barton Ramie, although our sample contained a more complete and well-preserved sample. Decorative elements include profile faces, geometric designs and pseudo-glyphic elements. A single complete vase was found in the burial of a late ruler, while pieces of others were found in a deposit surrounding the base of Stela 1, Structure 190.

Fragments of Gallinero Fluted vases were scattered throughout the deposit. These thin-walled, ash-tempered vases have wide shallow fluting extending from just below the rim to slightly above the base. The rim and base are

encircled by one or two incised lines. The slip is deep, vibrant red on well preserved specimens and the vessels are well smoothed. The Baking Pot specimens were typically vases, with rim diameters of 12 cm to 20 cm. No complete vessels were encountered, making it impossible to determine height, as were the sherds in the Barton Ramie sample (Gifford et al. 1976).

Although Belize Red was the most prevalent ceramic group at the site, several other groups were also represented, albeit in significantly smaller quantities. The Mount Maloney Ceramic group was well represented in fill and midden deposits, both within the site core and in the periphery (Figure 6.11). Mount Maloney vessels are characterized by incurving black slipped bowls with squared rims. A shallow ridge extends around the lip of the vessel. The black slip is matt and dull, in stark contrast to Balanza Black sherds from the Tiger Run complex. While over 400 Mount Maloney Black sherds were recovered from our



*Figure 6.11: Mount Maloney Black Rims (height 8 cm) (N. Puc)*

excavations at Baking Pot, the number and percentage of the assemblage pails in comparison to that found at Xunantunich (LeCount 1996). The divergent ceramic spheres likely represent a difference of local production and distribution, wherein Xunantunich appears to be tied to a Petén sphere and Baking Pot to the local Belize Valley ceramic complex.

### *Palmar Ceramic Group*

The Palmar Ceramic Group was not well represented in our Baking Pot sample. Found only in elite contexts, these sherds and four whole vessels fall into two types: Zacatel Cream-polychrome: Variety Unspecified and Zacatel Cream-polychrome: Cabrito Cream Polychrome (also called Cabrito Cream Polychrome: Cabrito Variety) (Kosakowsky 2000). The sherds uncovered in the palace were Zacatel Cream-polychrome: Variety Unspecified. These sherds were all vase forms with red, black, and purple slip on a cream slip below it. No complete vessels were discovered. The four complete Cabrito Cream Polychrome vessels were all imports, as described in Chapter 5 and below, and no broken pieces of this type were uncovered at the site. These complete vessels ranged from a large dish, a small vase with whistle at the rim, a large barrel-shaped Holmul dancer vase, and a short vase with an image of God N coming out of his shell. Cabrito Cream Polychrome types were originally discovered at Holmul by Merwin and Vailland (1932) creating the impression of their local production in this area, but more recently Kosakowsky has suggested instead that they may not have been locally made (Kosakowsky 2000). Wherever their production source, rulers from



throughout the Belize River Valley region were acquiring these vessels for funerary purposes.

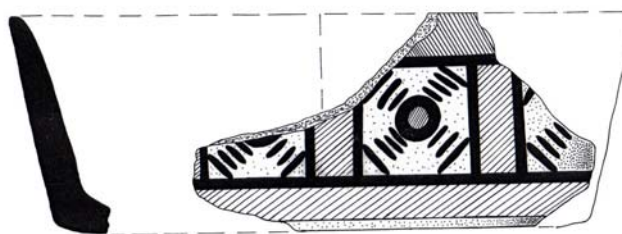
#### *Cayo Ceramic Group*

The Cayo Ceramic Group and contains two of the most common jar forms from the Spanish Lookout complex. Cayo Unslipped and Alexander's Unslipped types were common in midden and fill contexts throughout the site, particularly in domestic refuse. The numbers for these types are deceiving; while rim sherds are often easy to type, body sherds are all extremely difficult. Both types have rough, usually unslipped body sherds with numerous calcite inclusions in the paste and a large range of variability in paste color. Therefore the number of sherds identified to either type is significantly lower than the actual sample would suggest. Cayo Unslipped jars are medium sized (with rim diameters ranging between 25cm to 38 cm), while Alexander's Unslipped are typically larger (with rim diameters ranging between 21cm to 51cm) and have thicker body and rim sherds than Cayo forms. Both types continue to be made in the Terminal Classic period with few variations, although some Cayo forms are easily diagnostic of this later date.

#### *Vinaceous Tawny Ware Group*

Two-dozen Xunantunich Black-on-orange sherds were discovered at Baking Pot, primarily in a ritual deposit at the base of Stela 1 on Structure 190 (Figure 6.12-6.13). These vessels, part of the Vinaceous Tawny Ware Group, are ash tempered, well-polished, and are typically incurving or flaring sides bowls

with painted decoration on the exterior surface. Decoration includes a band of black around the rim and one or two additional black bands 1 to 2 cm below. Curvilinear elements are combined with dots to create repeating patterns on the exterior and sometimes interior rims. Outflaring bowls often have three nubbin feet whereas incurving forms are flat bottomed. Vessel heights range from 6 cm to 9 cm and rim diameters are typically 13cm to 15 cm.



*Figure 6.12: Xunantunich Black-on-orange Polychrome (height 8 cm) (N. Puc)*

One thousand five hundred thirty four Benque Viejo Polychrome sherds were recovered from the site. This type weathered poorly given its proximity to the surface and the ash tempering, but painted designs often remained intact. Zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, and geometric designs were all discovered frequently (Figures 6.13 – 6.15). The polychrome vases were primarily limited to elite and ritual locales, including stela caches and elite trash deposits.

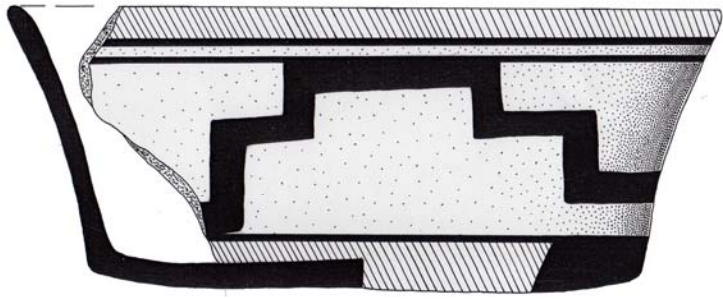


Figure 6.13: Benque Viejo Polychrome (height 8 cm) (N. Puc)

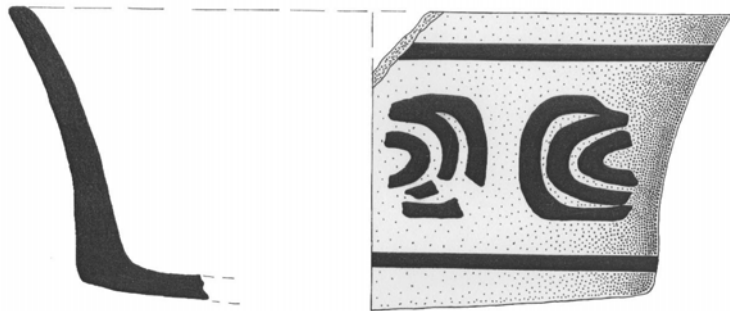


Figure 6.14: Benque Viejo Polychrome (height 8 cm) (N. Puc)

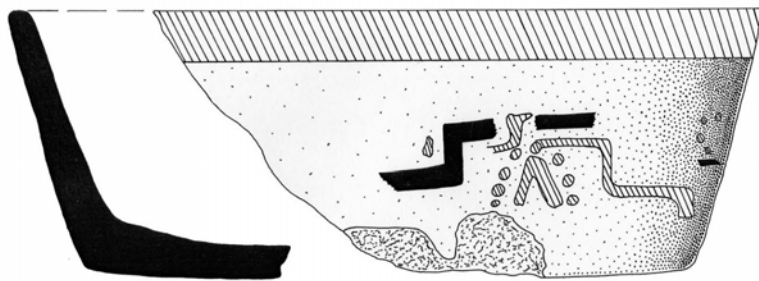


Figure 6.15: Benque Viejo Polychrome (height 9 cm) (N. Puc)

### *Garbutt Creek Ceramic Group*

Garbutt Creek Red contains a common red-slipped (predominately) bowl forms found throughout the site. Garbutt Creek are primarily medium-thick bowls with square or beveled- in lips, slipped primarily on the interior (occasionally on the upper section of the exterior as well). Exterior surfaces are only lightly smoothed, while the interiors are highly polished. Bowl diameters ranged from 20 cm to 35 cm and height from 6 cm to 8 cm.

### *Dolphin Head Ceramic Group*

Dolphin Head Red bowls and dishes are thinner than Garbutt Creek types at Baking Pot, are shallower, and have a deeper red slip on vessel interiors. The sample included several partially complete bowls 4.5 and 5.4 cm high and body thickness of 0.4 and 0.5 cm. These bowls were placed upside-down at the base of Stela 1 on Structure 190. The slip color and paste composition is reminiscent of Mountain Pine Red and Rosario Incised of the Tiger Run complex, local types with few external influences.

## **Discussion**

Baking Pot experienced a construction boom during the Late Classic II period: every structure and plaza was modified at least once. Structures increased in size frequently; some were modified only once while Structure 190 was modified 7 times during this period. Many domestic structures were occupied only during this time (Moore 1999; Piehl 1999). The re-inclusion of the Belize

Valley into a pan-Maya ceramic sphere appears to correspond with a peak in population (Willey et al. 1965). Gifford suggests that “rather than an influx of new people bringing new pottery traditions, the changes in the Tiger Run and Spanish Lookout phases probably reflect internal changes in Classic Maya culture and society” (Gifford et al. 1976:192). Ball (1976) however argues the regionalism that began in the Tiger Run complex continued and grew in the early Spanish Lookout. He cites the number of distinct ceramic spheres that become viable by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. This fragmentation is parallel to the political decentralization that began towards the middle of the Late Classic period and reflects the decrease in social and political integration across the lowlands.

Elite tombs were less ornate during this period than during the preceding Tiger Run complex. Smaller quantities of elaborately carved jade and marine shell were discovered and ceramic vessels, with the exception of those from a single cist, were predominantly local (Reents-Budet et al. 2004). Seventeen whole vessels dating to the Late Classic II period were discovered at Baking Pot.

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Table 6.6: Ceramic Vessels from the Spanish Lookout Ceramic Phase (early) at Baking Pot

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Belize Red	6
Puhui-zibal Composite	1
Humes Bank Unslipped	1
Benque Viejo Polychrome	1
Red-on-orange bichrome bowl (untyped)	1
Cayo Unslipped	2
Cabrigo Cream polychrome	4

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Four Cabrito Cream polychrome vessels from a late rulers burial were imported: two from Holmul, one from the eastern Petén (not Holmul), and one from Buenavista del Cayo (Figure 6.16). A Puhui-zibal Composite and Benque Viejo polychrome vases were also made at Buenavista del Cayo. All of these vessels were located in a Terminal Classic interment in Structure B (based on the presence of later types), Group 1, suggesting their importance as heirlooms. A single Belize Red dish, located with Burial 1 in Structure 209 was also imported from Buenavista del Cayo, while the balance were produced locally.



*Figure 6.16: Cabrito Cream Polychrome Vase (C. Helmke)*

The epigraphic information deciphered from the miniature vase suggests that it was manufactured at Naranjo, although the chemical analysis suggests its source elsewhere in the Petén (Reents-Budet et al. 2004). The patron of the vessel may have been K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk, a Naranjo Lord that ruled from 693-728 A.D. (Helmke et al. 2004; Grube and Martin 2004; Martin and Grube 2000). This vase has prompted others to argue that Naranjo had exerted its strongest influence over the valley during the reign of this ruler (Helmke et al.

2004), since Naranjo appears to experience a slight hiatus both before and after his reign.

It is interesting that the elaborate foreign ceramics from this period were primarily found in a tomb dating to the Terminal Classic period (based on the presence of Terminal Classic ceramic vessels). Why would they not have been interred with a ruler from this period? In fact, despite finding six elite burials in Group 1, only one dated to the end of the Late Classic II, and this interment lacked the quality and quantity of goods from other burials.

The discovery of ceramics from the Petén region has been used to postulate political alliances between polities. Ceramics were gifted between elites, often from someone in a powerful political position to a foreign ruler with lower status in efforts to cement alliances and encourage loyalty (LeCount 1996). These ceramics were high status items; objects that could not be bought or sold through the accrument of wealth. They would have identified and differentiated the rulers from lesser elites and from non-elite but wealthy inhabitants.

These high status markers, impressive site construction, and numerous ceramic diagnostic markers from the Late Classic II are in stark contrast to the characteristics in the Terminal Classic period. Construction all but ceases in the site core, ceramic markers are difficult to identify, and elite burial characteristics change radically. The political organization appears to change radically.

*Spanish Lookout Ceramic Complex at Baking Pot (late phase)*

In an almost sad proclamation about the state of affairs during the Terminal Classic period, Gifford wrote, “here comes to rest the end of the protracted and once powerfully spirited Maya Classic ceramic continuum” (Gifford et al. 1976: 227). At Baking Pot, this statement accurately assesses the state of affairs during the latter half of the Spanish Lookout ceramic complex.

Only 720 of 17,227 Spanish Lookout complex sherds found at Baking Pot are clearly identifiable as Terminal Classic. Roaring Creek Red, Daylight Orange, Vaca Falls Red, and particular forms of Cayo Unslipped (with pie crust impressions around rim), Mount Maloney Black, and McRae Impressed form the bulk of the Terminal Classic sherds.

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Table 6.7: Spanish Lookout Ceramic Complex (late phase) sherds from Baking Pot

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Roaring Creek Red	25
McRae Impressed	131
Cayo Unslipped	65
Mount Maloney Black	482
Daylight Orange	17
Vaca Falls Red	4

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*Roaring Creek Ceramic Complex*

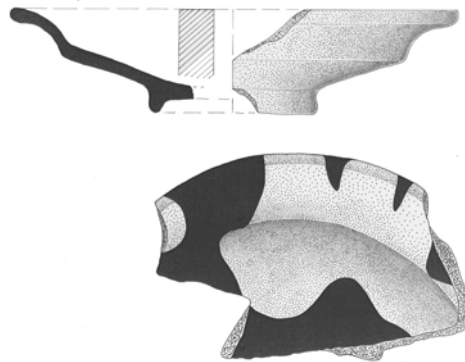
Large red-slipped dishes with outcurving rims, a basal break, and often a ring or pedestal base characterize the sample from Baking Pot. Color ranges from a dark red to maroon, and crazing occurs on a small number of sherds. Rim diameters are fairly large, the smallest 29 cm and the largest 38 cm. Continuing



into the Terminal Classic, this large dish went from having small ring bases to large pedestal bases as time passed.

#### *Daylight Orange Ceramic Complex*

Originally placed by Gifford (Gifford et al. 1976) in the New Town Ceramic Complex (Early Postclassic), discoveries in the valley since then indicate it began during the Terminal Classic period (Aimers 2004; Audet 2000; Reents-Budet personal communication 2004). Two partially complete and one whole Daylight Orange: Darknight Variety dishes were discovered at Baking Pot (Figure 6.17). A shiny orange slip was applied to the entire vessel and black “firecloud-like decorative pattern on bowl interior surface” was added (Gifford et al.



*Figure 6.17: Daylight Orange: Darknight Variety (partially complete vessel (diameter 26cm) (N. Puc)*

1976:301). These blackened areas can be nebulous or have definite shapes, as in the case of shell and handprint motifs seen on one Baking Pot specimen (see

Figure 5.27). One of the dishes had a rim diameter of 27 cm, while the other was significantly larger with a diameter of 46 cm.

#### *Cayo Unslipped Ceramic Complex*

Described above, Cayo sherds from later periods often have “pie-crust” impressions around the rim. With a rim shape described as an “everted concave rim” with a pie crust “impressed lip” (Gifford et al. 1976:279), these vessels have diameters ranging between 23 cm and 28 cm. This design, fairly common in terminal deposits at Baking Pot, is almost never found in construction fill, attesting to its late date. Only in a few residential structures in the periphery and the palace have these sherds been discovered.

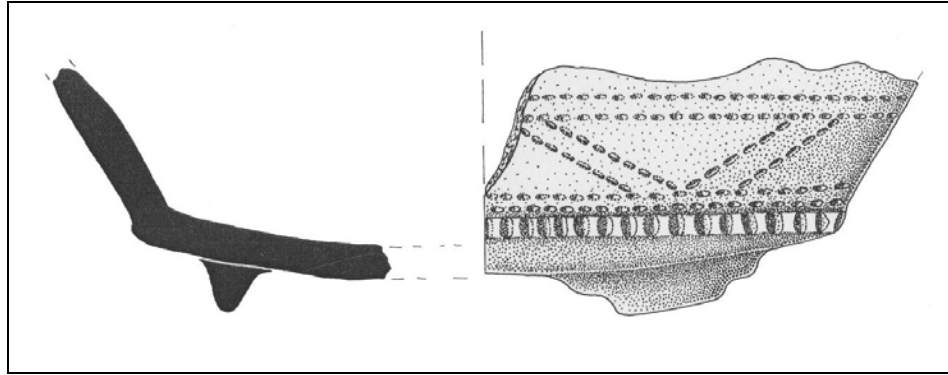
#### *Vaca Falls Ceramic Group*

Identified by Gifford as a late phase Spanish Lookout ceramic type, Vaca Falls Red vessels were very uncommon at Baking Pot. Only four were recovered from midden and collapse deposits and none were well preserved. All were incurving bowl forms with rim diameters from 21 cm to 32 cm.

#### *Belize Red Ceramic Complex*

McRae Impressed are the one Belize Red type consistently found in later contexts at Baking Pot (figure 6.18). Dishes with appliqué and incised decoration along the basal breaks and (sometimes) short pedestal bases, these vessels influence forms produced in the Postclassic period (Graham personal

communication 2004). Terminal Classic forms of this type have large appliqués situated at the basal break of the dish, often carved into geometric designs with incised decoration.



*Figure 6.18: McRae Impressed vessel (height 9 cm) (N. Puc)*

#### *Mount Maloney Ceramic Complex*

Described by Gifford as primarily a Terminal Classic form, LeCount has more finely seriated the Mount Maloney Black types. Based on rim form, she was able to use sherds discovered in excavations at Xunantunich to identify changes in the form from the Late and Terminal Classic period (LeCount 1996). She noted that Mount Maloney bowls with a greater rim overhang tended to be produced during the Terminal Classic, while Late Classic forms had straighter, less incurving rims. Mount Maloney sherds from Baking Pot showed a larger array of forms, from earlier to later versions of this bowl.

A single elite burial dating to this period was discovered in Structure B, Group I. Many of the ceramics interred with this individual were Late Classic II (including four Cabrito Cream polychromes, one Benque Viejo polychrome vase, three large Belize Red dishes, and one Puhui Zubal Composite vase), but the

inclusion of a Daylight Orange: Darknight Variety dish indicates a Terminal Classic date for the interment. All of these vessels were broken and distributed around and above the skeleton, a practice previously unknown at Baking Pot.

Preservation of terminal phase floors makes dating construction to this period difficult, but evidence of modification to the palace in Group II was evident. Other structures, including 209 and 190 were abandoned by this time. The abandonment of the site core during the Terminal Classic period ended the elite occupation at Baking Pot. Construction continued to the northeast, and small numbers of Early and Middle Postclassic remains were discovered closer to the center (Audet 2002, 2000). This once vibrant center never again achieved the status and success of its Late Classic hayday.

## **Conclusions**

Ceramic material reflects the economic, social and political relationships in the Maya lowlands. The most ubiquitous artifact, painted and carved ceramic vessels from distant centers can be indicative of political alliances, while the style and paste of locally produced material mirror social and political boundaries. The discovery of local ceramic types that extend as far west as Buenavista del Cayo and a shift in ceramic spheres near the modern day Guatemalan border at the ancient center of Xunantunich. And the discovery of pan-Maya ceramic styles and foreign vessels in the tombs of elites at Baking Pot, indicating their participation in the larger social and political system. The analysis of ceramic material from

Baking Pot provides a new insight into that centers position both within the valley and on an interregional scale.

## CHAPTER VII

### DETERMINING POLITICAL HIERARCHY

#### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Recent excavations have discovered important new details of the cultural and political history of the Belize River Valley. Construction in the site core and periphery, the discovery of wealthy tombs, hieroglyphic texts, and the distribution of ceramic types present insights into the political system of the Belize Valley. The distinction among wealth, status and political power in the Maya area is perhaps best illustrated within the context of the vibrant Belize Valley riverine trade route, where individuals at sites with little political power within the context of the larger Maya lowlands were able to acquire long distance exchange goods usually limited in distribution to powerful rulers.

The Belize Valley is unique in that it contains centers of relatively similar size: all of which have their own palace groups, temple complexes, and administrative buildings. This region was bordered by two powerful polities (Naranjo and Caracol), which had an impact on the regional political hierarchy (Chase 2004). These centers were politically swayed by powerful centers throughout the Late and Terminal Classic period, with fluctuations in the degree and source of control depending on the greater political climate in the lowlands.

The benefits of controlling the Belize River Valley were significant. Two local resources were particularly valuable: the riverine trade route (a major navigable route from the Caribbean into the Petén) and trade of cacao. The Belize

Valley contains prime agricultural soil, soils ideal for cacao, highly desired by the elites in the Petén where cacao did not grow as readily (Jones 1989:102). Jones notes that “cacao did not grow well in the central Petén, however, and the Itzas and their neighbors had to depend on importation of the product or control over subject populations who could supply them with it” (Jones 1989:102). The primary reasons that cacao flourished in the Belizean peripheries and not in the Petén included a lack of well shaded areas devoid of people and cacao’s preference for growth in well drained alluvial soils with a low pH (McAnany et al. 2002; Muhs et al. 1985). During the Late Postclassic and into the Early Colonial periods, Jones notes that the centers in the Belize River Valley (particularly Tipu) were often independent trading centers. In addition to cacao, they also grew wild vanilla (as flavoring for the chocolate drink) and achiote (flavoring for a variety of foods).

McAnany credits increased production of cacao for the exponential growth in the Xibun River Valley during the Late Classic period (McAnany et al. 2004). Like the Belize River, the Xibun River spills over its banks for short periods during the rainy season, enriching the soil around the river. Nutrient rich soil, coupled with large shade trees needed to protect ancient cacao trees, provided the ideal environment for cacao orchards. The value of cacao within the politically powerful centers of the Petén encouraged the growth of the Xibun Valley communities, who prospered primarily due to their export of cacao (ibid.: 296). McAnany plans on testing for theobromine (left from cacao trees) at the Hershey site in the Sibun River Valley. Soil samples from Baking Pot were taken

in efforts to determine what crops were being grown during the Late Classic Period, but Hayes does not believe evidence remains: cacao does not leave a strong signature in the soil for longer than 50 years (personal communication, 2004).

Location along a valuable trade route benefited Buenavista del Cayo, Cahal Pech, and Baking Pot. The Belize River was the primary waterway into the Petén, carrying goods from the Yucatan, the Belizean coast, and from as far south as Honduras. Economic benefits from such a fortuitous location resulted in significant accumulation of wealth in the Belize Valley.

A number of unique trade items were encountered during our excavations at Baking Pot, including ceramic flutes and jadeite jewelry from Honduras, carved shells from the Caribbean, and ceramic vessels from throughout the Maya lowlands. While much of this trade wealth is concentrated in the hands of elites, there has also been significant “distribution” to non-elite individuals indicating that they too were benefiting from the source of wealth (Audet 2000, 2002; Audet and Awe 1999). Cahal Pech also contains the remains of long distance trade items in association with rulers dating to the Late Classic period. Buenavista del Cayo also appears to have housed numerous wealthy elites and their constituents. Ball and Taschek have mentioned reports of wealthy tombs in published materials (1992, 2004). Anecdotal information from published material suggests that the elites at that site also had access to high quality long distance exchange items, including highly valued ceramic vessels (Ball 1992; Ball and Taschek 2004; Taschek and Ball 2004). While Ball suggests that Buenavista was able to acquire



these objects due to their fortuitous relationship with Naranjo, this center likely benefited from their location along the river and the rich soils on which the site was constructed.

Similar economic benefits and success can be found at commercial centers in the valley of Oaxaca. The site of Lambityeco, occupied during the Monte Alban IV phase, was a commercial center with exchange relationships throughout the Oaxaca and central Mexico. This small successful center was controlled not by political rulers, but instead by wealthy elites with powerful trade relationships (Blanton et al. 1993). Could this same type of political organization parallel the situation in the Belize Valley? Were these high elite individuals from Baking Pot and Cahal Pech true rulers or successful merchants able to buy political authority? Was this one method for achieving political success?

Xunantunich is an exception to this: although the architecture and monuments suggest important political standing, few elite-quality portable objects in burials, caches, or fill suggest a less prosperous economic situation for elites at the center. They lack the riches found at other valley sites. The massive nature of temple and palace construction however, coupled with the numerous carved stela and altars at the center differentiate Xunantunich from Cahal Pech and Baking Pot. This difference appears to be indicative of closer political and cultural ties with centers in the Petén (LeCount et al 2002) than centers in the valley further to the east maintained. Whether these political and social alliances were beneficial or detrimental to the center is debatable, but their strong effect is indisputable. These relationships appear to get weaker the further east a center is located.

Objects such as fine ceramic vessels, jade, worked shell, and musical instruments, were usually concentrated at large, politically powerful cities (Chase and Chase 1992; Coggins and Shane 1984; Culbert 1993; Fitzsimmons 2004; Kidder 1947; Welsh 1988). Their discovery at small sites dotting the Belize Valley suggests that during the Late Classic period, economic prosperity aided local elites in acquiring objects that traditionally were limited to important rulers (McAnany et al. 2002). There is little evidence that Baking Pot, Cahal Pech, or Buenavista were politically important centers; small site cores, a lack of carved monuments, and small supporting populations suggest otherwise. Economically, however, rulers and their families thrived during parts of the Late and Terminal Classic, resulting in the acquisition of jade, high quality polychromes, and carved marine shells in quantity and quality beyond what is expected in sites of this size. Did economic prosperity lead to greater acceptance within the wider political community and/or from their own populations? Or did these centers become a target for political conquest?

Naranjo is the closest large, politically powerful center, and their willingness to loot, pillage, and conquer is well documented within the epigraphic record (Martin and Grube 2000). Did this or another more powerful center force tribute demands on the Belize Valley? Elsewhere in Mesoamerica this type of relationships was common. The Mexica in Central Mexico, a powerful empire, rarely fully occupied any of their conquered territory. Instead they forced tribute on these regions, tribute that would be difficult to identify in the archaeological record without written records (Berdan and Anawalt 1992). Xoconochco, under

the authority of this great empire, was one of the most highly taxed regions. Most of the material, however, would have been undetectable archaeologically and was not detected at Xoconochco but was noted by the Mexica on tribute lists. Every 6 months or year, they were required to bring 800 rich blue, red, yellow, green, and quetzal feathers, 160 bird skins, 200 loads of cacao, 40 jaguar skins and 800 bowls for cacao drinking. Only three demands, two large strings of *chalchihuitl* stones (green stone), 2 lip plus of clear amber, and 2 large pieces of amber would have been detectable archaeology (ibid.). If centers in the Belize Valley were giving or sending tribute the lack of glyphic information in this region would make this economic exchange invisible, but it is important to note that this relationship did exist (Gasco and Voorhies 1989; Smith 2003).

Were they the political authority in the region? How did intersite relationships shift over time? How did they affect the economic climate in the region? Information gleaned from excavations can assist in answering these questions.

### **Political Organization in the Belize Valley**

The political organization within the Belize Valley during the Late and Terminal Classic is characterized by periods of foreign control followed by independence, before a new alliance with a distant community was solidified. This is particularly evident at Xunantunich Economic and political exchange among centers in the lowlands was present throughout history: but it appears that during periods of independent rule Baking Pot and Cahal Pech were able to

accrue great quantities of wealth. The reasons for this are debatable. While under the control of foreign rulers, tribute payments may have been demanded, limiting financial gain. In addition, rulers in the Belize Valley may have lost the ability to directly negotiate prices for goods and services while under the control of a foreign leader. This may have affected tribute demands from surrounding communities or fees charged to travelers on the Belize River. There is no direct evidence of tribute demands between Naranjo and Baking Pot, but ceramic vessels from the Classic period often portray weaker centers bringing tribute bundles of cacao, cotton or other objects to foreign rulers but these vessels are found in the Petén (Reents-Budet 1994). Numerous benefits of incorporation into political spheres for the weaker party can be argued: enhanced status of rulers through the procurement of polychrome vessels from powerful elites, or increased integration politically into the core region (LeCount 1996). However, when elites at Baking Pot were not under the strong political influence of a distant community, they flourished economically, rising some question as to the nature of these core-periphery relationships.

### **The Political Organization in the early Late Classic Period (A.D. 580-680)**

During the early part of the Late Classic Period (Late Classic One/Tiger Run Ceramic Complex) Baking Pot and Cahal Pech flourished both economically and politically. Tombs dating to this period are filled with jade, polychrome vessels, and carved marine shells, indicating the high economic and often the political status of the inhabitant (see Chapters 3 and 5). Caches were elaborate,

and construction was ongoing throughout this early period. At Xunantunich, this is a period of great construction and growth in the site core (Chapter 4). Much of A-4, A-15 and Plaza 1 were constructed during this time (Audet 2001).

There is no evidence of conflict between the region and large polities, or among centers within the region. While this does not negate the possibility of warfare, the political rank of local communities may not have been of significant importance to warrant a threat to the ranking of superpowers. It is possible that during the Late Classic 1, communities were out of the reach of these powerful centers to the west and south. Despite their lack of renown within the wider lowlands, rulers in the study area maintained power and prestige among their people. They relied upon ritual performances, religious beliefs, control of water during the dry season, and economic prosperity to secure support (Demarest 1992; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993; Lucero 2006; Schele and Freidel 1990). Evidence of ritual activity within the site core and temple structures was commonplace, including the deposition of human remains, valuable ceramic and jade objects, and utilitarian obsidian and stone tools.

Ceramic material from this period supports the notion that centers within the Belize Valley were not strongly linked with their Petén neighbors. Local ceramic types predominate the assemblages, with little influence from external modes or pastes. In addition, few imports were discovered, even in elite contexts. This period corresponds with the boom period at Caracol, and some of the ceramic material between the two regions is similar. Most of the ceramic similarities between these two regions however are found in the Late Classic

Two, when Belize Red ceramics are common in both Caracol and the Belize Valley.

Medium-sized independent polities characterize the political organization in the valley during the Late Classic 1. These polities were centered at Xunantunich, Baking Pot, Buenavista, Cahal Pech and possibly Blackman Eddy (Driver and Garber 2004). Elites from these communities, while not necessarily highly regarded in the core region of the Petén given the limited size of their communities, were important individuals within the valley. Cahal Pech, Buenavista del Cayo, and Baking Pot were able to reap the economic rewards of their valley location on prime agricultural land. Smaller centers located within a few miles away were likely under their control or attempting to avoid the political system entirely, as evidenced by their lack of elite occupants and/or evidence of economic success (ibid).

Centers within the valley tend to fall into one of three categories: those with access to exotics, populations of 1500-2000, and palace groups, smaller centers with some monumental architecture, and extremely small hamlets with few exotics, and populations of only a few hundred. This three-tiered hierarchy appears to remain intact throughout the entire Classic period (A. Chase 2004; Driver and Garber 2004). My excavations at Xunantunich, Cahal Pech, and Baking Pot further support this distinction. A three-tiered, relatively decentralized political system is further indicated by the spatial layout of the centers within the study area. As Garber and Driver note, the medium sized centers with monumental architecture (Tier 1 and 2) Belize Valley centers are equally spaced

across the landscape with smaller hamlets spaced at borderland junctions. The discovery of small centers in these borderland locations suggests territorial divisions of relatively equal size.

Why would this system of apparent political heterarchy survive in the Belize Valley when other areas had 4-tiered political hierarchies clearly reflected in the size, populations, and architecture of their centers? Arlen Chase argues that the unique location of the valley between Caracol to the south and Naranjo and Calakmul to the east and north played an important role (A. Chase 2004). The political struggles between these centers, as well as Tikal, may have created a borderland that constantly changed alliances, depending on the victor in the wars between “superstates”. These more powerful centers would have played the role of the politically dominant center, controlling lower level individual centers. In some cases, as it appears in the early part of the Late Classic, these superpowers were so enveloped in rebuilding their own centers after crushing defeats or engaging in war with other superstates (see the histories of warfare in Martin and Grube 2000) that their influence and affect on the Belize Valley was minimal.

This minimal interference allowed the larger centers within the valley to flourish economically and politically. In particular, elites from the major centers prospered and benefited economically from their relative independent position during this time. Unfortunately for them, it was not to last; during the second half of the Late Classic period foreign influence became more apparent in the archaeological record in the Belize Valley and elites lost their prized independent economic and political positions.

### **The Political Organization of the Late Classic period (A.D. 680-800)**

The second half of the Late Classic period (A.D. 680-800) is marked by decreased wealth within the hands of the elites, despite continued construction throughout the valley and ever-increasing population densities. The number and quality of elite tombs dating to the second half of the Late Classic dropped dramatically throughout the valley suggesting a shift in political alliance and economic growth (Audet 2002a; Audet and Awe 2004; Garber personal communication 2005). During this period, the center of Naranjo, located less than 20 km to the northwest of Xunantunich, once again flourished (LeCount 2001; Martin and Grube 2000). After reeling from several defeats during the 100 years previous, Naranjo is resurrected by Lady Six Sky from Dos Pilas who arrives in Naranjo to reestablish the sanctity of the ruling family (Martin and Grube 2000). Under the auspices of Calakmul, and with ties to the Tikal dynasty, Naranjo once again reasserts itself as a powerful player in the eastern Petén. No known Belize Valley centers are named as defeated centers on Naranjo monuments, however many larger and more powerful centers are, as well as centers of unknown location. Given our lack of knowledge of the ancient city names in the Belize Valley, it is possible that some are listed at Naranjo, as many of the centers named are unidentifiable (Martin and Grube 2000). In any case, the resurgence of Naranjo into the political landscape of the eastern Petén extended to Belize River Valley neighboring centers.

The influence and political sway of Naranjo extended into the Belize Valley. Buenavista del Cayo and Baking Pot both contain numerous ceramic



vessels manufactured at Naranjo and Homul. Three vessels that Helmke et al. (2004) identify as types from Naranjo were manufactured at Homul (Reents-Budet et al. 2004) and discovered in association with a Baking Pot ruler. One vessel refers to *K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk* a Naranjo ruler who lived from A.D. 693-728 (Helmke et al. 2004). This inscription suggests that he had the vessel produced as his chocolate drinking cup. The discovery of such a vessel at Baking Pot suggests it may have been gifted to the local ruler. But what implications would this have politically?

According to Bishop de Landa, during the early Colonial period Maya elites commonly held feasts during which they gave visiting guests ceramic cups (Tozzer 1941:92). These cups were used to cement political alliances but were not only distributed to those under the control of a dominating power (LeCount 1996). Centers with equal political footing would also gift these ceramics to each other to cement good relations. Thus while the discovery of such vessels in the Belize Valley indicates a relationship of some nature *if* the cup was directly gifted to a Baking Pot ruler, it cannot alone measure the nature of the political alliance between these two centers. These ceramics, however, in addition to known glyphic texts from Naranjo detailing their political conquests, the difference in sheer size of the site cores, and the lack of any Baking Pot material at Naranjo point to a power differential that placed Baking Pot at a distinct disadvantage in political or economic negotiations. Thus, such a discovery likely reflects the political climate wherein Naranjo politically controlled much of the Belize Valley during this time.

The “Jauncy Vase,” a vessel produced at Naranjo (Helmke et al. 2004), was discovered at Buenavista. This vase names its patron, *K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk*, who ruled during the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century at the end of the Primary Standard Sequence (Helmke et al. 2004; Martin and Grube 2000). Found in the tomb of a young ruler, this vessel was also likely used to cement a political relationship between the two polities (Ball and Taschek 1993) during this time.

The remains of ceramic types from the Belize Valley suggest a much closer relationship between the Petén and the study area than during the Late Classic 1. Ceramic types in the Belize Valley were similar in form to those from the Petén, and imports of foreign vessels were commonplace (Reents-Budet et al 2004). The influx of Petén style ceramics likely did not reflect a movement of people, and ideas, into the valley but emulation and interaction among politically integrated centers. Population peaked at Baking Pot, Buenavista del Cayo, and Cahal Pech during this time, with many new residential structures constructed (Poe 2004; Willey et al 1965). In either case, ties with the Petén were renewed and fostered during the Late Classic 2, with significant effects to the local elites.

Burials of elite individuals are significantly less opulent during this period than the early part of the Late Classic. Tribute demands would have been a natural part of such a political hierarchy as is evidenced on Classic period vessels and in post-contact documents (Landa 1941). Providing tribute to Naranjo impacted the wealth and status of Belize Valley elites. Tombs were fewer and less opulent, caches contained less jade, and locally made polychrome ceramics were less

elaborate. Surplus wealth generated from cacao growth and proximity to the trade routes was greatly diminished, likely exported as tribute.

Incorporation into the Naranjo political sphere would have also had its benefits and was likely achieved with little or no force. As no direct evidence of warfare in the Belize Valley exists, elites from these small communities may not have even attempted to resist. While the elites may not have greatly increased their wealth through this relationship, it may have increased the social capital of rulers associated with powerful individuals to the west. This relationship between the eastern Petén and the Belize Valley lasted until the Terminal Classic period, when Naranjo, Calakmul, and other superstates began to decline.

### **Political Organization in the Terminal Classic (A.D. 800-900)**

The Terminal Classic period is characterized by political and social change throughout the Maya lowlands (Demarest et al. 2004). The Belize Valley was not immune to this instability. Cahal Pech and Buenavista are abandoned in the early part of the Terminal Classic, while other centers, including Baking Pot and Xunantunich, both experience a resurgence (LeCount 2002). The abandonment of Naranjo, Calakmul, Caracol, and Tikal led to a reorganization of the political hierarchy, which in turn led to a large number of communities claiming independence (Braswell et al. 2004; Martin and Grube 2000; Mathews 1991). The collapse of powerful royal dynasties left a void lesser elites in peripheral regions tried unsuccessfully to fill. The collapse of the entire system

soon destroyed the majority of centers, leaving only pockets of small settlements near once vibrant cities.

For much of the Terminal Classic period, however, Baking Pot and Xunantunich managed to survive, and for a short time, flourish. Construction within the site core at Xunantunich increased during the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and monuments continued to be made until A.D. 830 (LeCount et al. 2002; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004). At Baking Pot, construction in the palace and other structures in Group II continued, but on a lesser scale than seen in earlier times. Once Naranjo, Caracol and Calakmuls royal dynasties collapsed smaller centers in their political spheres, including Xunantunich and Baking Pot, became independent polities.

Unlike the Late Classic 1, however, elites were unable to amass large quantities of wealth or status objects. At Baking Pot, a cyst burial containing a single elaborately carved jade pendant of K'awil, the patron-protector of lineage ruling families, and 10 ceramic vessels were found. The quality of the ceramics and the jade within this interment indicates increasing prosperity of elites from the Late Classic 2, but the offerings are not of the quality nor as plentiful as found in Late Classic 1 tombs. In addition, many of the ceramic vessels were heirlooms, suggesting that elites were consciously harkening back to a brighter past.

The site of Xunantunich bears clear evidence of a political relationship with Naranjo during the early part of the Terminal Classic period. Stela 8, dated to 830 A.D. contains the Naranjo emblem glyph, suggesting that the ruler at Xunantunich was “seated” by the ruler at Naranjo (Ashmore in Press, LeCount et

al. 2002; Martin and Grube 2000). This glyph is the only direct evidence of political control over any site in the Belize Valley by an outsider and comes at the end of Naranjo's florescence. The length of time Xunantunich was politically controlled by Naranjo is unclear, but may have begun much earlier.

Not long after Stela 8 was erected, the city of Naranjo was abandoned (Martin and Grube 2000). Xunantunich became independent after Naranjo's demise, as did any other dominated center in the region. Throughout the lowlands powerful polities began declining, losing control communities in their political spheres. It is during this period of political fragmentation that centers in the Belize Valley became independent once again.

The renaissance period of the Late Classic 1 was not to be repeated in the Terminal Classic. Centers throughout the central Maya lowlands were abandoned during the Terminal Classic period and with the elite trade network collapsing around them, profits from trade would have been limited. Elites living in the Belize Valley survived for a time, but soon site centers fell into disrepair and were deserted.

### **Political Models in the Belize Valley**

As noted in Chapter 1, no one model detailing political interactions can be applied to the Belize River Valley Maya. Three of the models have important explicatory value in understanding the political organization. Core-periphery models are useful in understanding the economic interactions between centers. This model is particularly useful in our attempts to understand the Belize Valley

and its relationship with more powerful centers to the south and west. Tribute requirements, ideological and political hierarchies, and social dynamics are explored through site proximity, site size, and assigned political importance. The dynamic model accurately describes the accordion like oscillation between centralized authority and decentralized political relationships. Unfortunately, while it does describe the political climate, it does not effectively explain it. Galactic Polity and Theater State models are the most useful in understanding the motivations behind the actions of rulers and their followers. The role of ideology and religion is clearly reflected in political and economic systems, affecting the actions and goals of local inhabitants. Its explanatory value expands into the economic realm as well, providing a context for the elite quest for prestige goods, large monumental architecture and elaborate caches. The elaborate stages are created for grandiose rituals performed by charismatic rulers in ornate costumes. These important individuals communicate with powerful ancestors in efforts to ensure agricultural, economic, and military success. While this model was derived from groups in Southeast Asia, its application to the political organization to the Maya is useful in understanding the context of the situation during the Late and Terminal Classic periods. It does not, however, attempt to explain the political authority exercised among regions over time and space, for which the detailed data from the Belize Valley is necessary.

These models allow for different angles from which to view the political activities within the Belize Valley allows for a deeper understanding of the meaning behind elite relationships, hierarchies, and conflicts. Without the need

for ritual activity and elaborate rituals for religious purposes and to maintain support of the population, the drive for elite goods such as quetzal feathers, cacao, jade, spondulys shells and polychrome vessels would be diminished. This lively trade precipitated the need for transportation along the Belize River (into the Petén) and the growth of cacao for the prized chocolate drink and for the beans themselves. These two demands benefited centers in the valley, as they were built on Class 1 soils, which allowed for the growth of cacao, and were located along a natural trade route. However, they also spawned competition among elites, unequal

The political organization of the Belize Valley shifted throughout the Late and Terminal Classic period, from times of relatively decentralized control to moments when power and control was organized within greater polities. The valley inhabitants benefited from the rich soils and location along one of the most traveled trade routes in the Maya lowlands. Political shifts greatly impacted economic conditions, however, particularly the prosperity of elites. When flourishing politically, elites gained immense disposable wealth, but during times of domination the economic riches of the elites were limited. Eventually the collapse of the political system throughout the central Maya lowlands led to the demise of centers in the study area and a shift to small communities and independent traders living throughout the region.

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