
1 STATUS AND POWER: CARACOL, TEOTIHUACAN, AND THE EARLY CLASSIC MAYA WORLD

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The archaeological interpretation of status and power is fraught with a variety of issues. While it is sometimes possible to identify those individuals of highest status – and, presumably, power – in the archaeological record, for the most part issues of status and power can become a quagmire for archaeological interpretation. While the verticality of social relationships may sometimes be evident in the archaeological record, the horizontal aspects of socio-political relationships are more difficult to document. Status and power also need to be viewed comparatively as they may vary depending on the arena of interaction. Because agency is involved in determining status and power, what the archaeologist records may not clearly or directly reflect ancient reality. This paper examines the archaeological interpretation of status and power in the Maya area using examples derived from Caracol, Belize – with particular attention paid to an Early Classic cremation unearthed during the 2010 field season that has applicability to discussions of broader Mesoamerican interactions and relationships.

Introduction

What constitutes status and power in the archaeological record? The answer varies depending upon context and scale. Both status and power are relative terms that imply a hierarchical relationship between two or more individuals or parties; this hierarchical relationship can either entail proscriptive or consensual actions and can vary (to the point of being inverted) depending upon the situation. Higher status individuals evince more prestige and/or resources than other individuals or groups, but status also can vary depending upon the relational situation. One may be born with ascribed rights or status, but other also may be achieved through certain life accomplishments. Power usually implies control, either over people or resources; it also implies the ability to undertake certain actions. In life, such relationships were often in flux and could change over time, being dependent upon location and context.

This dynamic aspect of status and power relationships makes archaeological interpretation context-dependent. For instance, in central Mexico, green obsidian artifacts from Pachuca are quite common, as might be expected as Cerro de las Navajas source is only 50 km northeast of Teotihuacan; some 90% of the prismatic cores and blades at Teotihuacan are of green obsidian (Spence 1996:23). Thus, the use of green obsidian artifacts in central Mexico

does not necessarily imply a certain status or any unusual power. However, when green obsidian artifacts are found in the Maya area, they are often seen as being special – the products of long-distance relationships or exchange (e.g., Braswell 2003; Moholy-Nagy 1999). The presence of green obsidian artifacts in Maya contexts therefore may lead to a discussion of status and power because of the exotic nature and long-distance origin of these artifacts.

This paper seeks to briefly review the concepts of status and power and their implications with regards to archaeological interpretation. To accomplish this, the concepts first will be situated and defined relative to anthropological theory. Next, the terminology will be applied to current usage in Maya archaeology. Finally, an Early Classic archaeological deposit from Caracol, Belize will serve as an example of the issues involved in analyzing status and power in the archaeological record.

Status

Linton (1936: 113-114) noted that statuses are “the polar positions . . . in patterns of reciprocal behavior,” defining “polar position” as a “collection of rights and duties.” While the “rights and duties” define the boundaries for social relationships and behavior, “privilege” refers to options that exist within these prescribed boundaries and “role” constitutes the dynamic aspect of

status, where the actions of the individual or group put into effect the socially privileged rights and duties. Goodenough (1965:3) importantly noted that the analysis of status looks at boundaries and not at the range of available behaviors within a specific polar position:

“For status analysis, the boundaries (the rights and duties) command our attention and not the domain of idiosyncratic freedom (privileges). As for powers, they and their liability counterparts stem from privileges, while immunities result from rights and the observance of duties. None of them needs to be treated as a feature of status relationships that requires analysis independent of the analysis of rights and duties.”

Goodenough (1965:2) further noted that, while the concepts of statuses as “collections of rights and duties” and as “kinds and categories of persons” have become inextricably linked, that these two definitions should really be analytically separated.

In his important paper looking at the use of status and role in cultural anthropology, Goodenough (1965:3-4) demonstrated the use of these terms in modern Trukese society. He showed that each individual in any society has a number of different social identities and that each social identity has different rights, duties, and corresponding appropriate behaviors. Thus, because each individual has more than one status or social identity, it becomes imperative to analyze the situational nature of each social interaction in terms of status and role. Goodenough (1965:4-5) further noted that the parties in status relationships are not always individual human beings; the party that forms the “alter” in a status relationship may also be a group of individuals or may even be “animals, inanimate objects, and purely imaginary beings” that “may also possess rights and/or owe duties.”

Social identities – or statuses – are selected based on several factors (Goodenough 1965:7): (1) the ability to appropriately possess an identity; (2) the

occasion for the interaction or activity; (3) the setting; (4) the polar positions of an identity relationship and their arrangement with one another in identity relationships; (5) the number of identity relationships possible within a culture; and (6) the range of identities available to an individual simultaneously and their compatibility in constructing a coherent social persona. In any analysis of status, the two polar positions must be clearly understood. Goodenough (1965:6) pointed out that “... for any identity assumed by one party, there are only a limited number of matching identities available to the other party,” noting that “we take care to employ various signs by which to communicate the identities we wish to assume, so that others may assume matching ones and we can interact with mutual understanding.” Thus, there are any number of status relationships in a complex society and “the aggregate of its composite statuses may be said to constitute the identity’s *role*” (Goodenough 1965:16).

While status and role can be difficult to analyze among living populations, doing so in the archaeological record is even more challenging. We traditionally note the difference between “achieved” versus “ascribed” status as important indicators for social complexity, hoping to identify these statuses in mortuary remains by particularly focusing on status differentiation other than that associated with gender or increased age (Peebles and Kus 1977). We also write about “elites” (D. Chase and A. Chase 1992) and “commoners” (Lohse and Valdez 2004), but even our archaeological markers for these statuses are not completely secure – and status must be differentiated from wealth (e.g., Smith 1987). However, following Goodenough (1965:6), “various signs” can communicate assumed identities or “statuses” – and it is these signs or symbols that can be contextually located in the archaeological record to aid in the identification of status and identity.

Power

While archaeologists generally recognize different kinds of power – social, economic, political, and religious – seeing power in the archaeological record again requires the interpretation of ancient remains. Like status, power can be conceived of as a two-party relationship between actors and respondents. Similar to Goodenough's view of status, Talcott Parsons (1969:279) conceived of power "as a *generalized symbolic medium* operating in the process of social interaction." In this conception, the symbols should be archaeologically recognizable.

To analyze power in the archaeological record, one needs, first, to determine if power does in fact exist and then, second, to make comparisons of kinds of power. Dahl (1969:83) notes that an analysis of power requires a definition of differences: (1) in the basis of power; (2) in the means of employing the basis of power; (3) in the scope of power (and the response evoked); (4) in the number of comparable respondents; and, (5) in the change in probabilities. Importantly, the structure of power must also be understood (Kornhauser 1969:42): How is power distributed among major segments of society? How has the structure of power changed over time? What is the operation behind the structure of power (and the means by which it is exercised)? What are the factors that shape and support an existing distribution of power (and its bases)? And, finally, what are the consequences of a given power structure in terms of society?

For archaeology, considerations of power have had their greatest impact in discussions of ancient socio-political realms. State formation has become characterized as depending "primarily on the coercive power and absolute divinity of autocratic leaders whose highly centralized rule exploited commoners and largely precluded collective action or social contracts" (Blanton and Fargher 2008:5). Symbols of power and authority in the archaeological record are usually identified as representative of these leaders (Peebles and Kus 1977).

Complexity has often been cast in terms of centralization versus dispersion of resources in the archaeological remains. Authority and legitimacy have come to be viewed as being vested in the state and as being reflected in public art styles (Marcus 2007); however, both power and legitimacy are needed to constitute authority (Smith 2003:108). Less talked about in archaeological reconstructions are the differences between coercive and consensual power, which can also be referred to as "power over" versus "power to" (Smith 2003:108) or – more popularly – as "oppression theory" versus "collective action theory" (Blanton and Fargher 2008).

Potentially confounding deliberations, but in actuality overlapping in scope, are archaeological discussions over hierarchical versus heterarchical organization of past societies. Although applied only relatively recently in Maya archaeology (Scarborough et al. 2003), these alternative power structures have a long history in other fields, such as political science. For example, in a 1969 discussion of relational power structures, Brams (1969:347) outlined three types of decision-making systems, called "hierarchical," "mutual adjustment," and "mixed;" both the hierarchical system and the mutual adjustment, or heterarchical, system were characterized by Brams as being "extreme" heuristic models in terms of real situations – a characterization that is relevant, as well, for our current archaeological considerations.

The Archaeological Interpretation of Status and Power: General Considerations and Caracol

While difficult to translate from the archaeological record into a systemic context, status and power both are manifested in the archaeological record through the use of symbols – including those that are part of the built environment. These symbols can be massive or small. They can be large-scale public architectural constructions or, alternatively, attributes of personal dress. Access to foreign goods is also often used as an archaeological marker

for status and power (Braswell 2003:138; A. Chase and D. Chase 1992). However, as noted above, context and scale are very important variables in any analysis.

Both status and power can be conceptualized as existing on a series of levels during the Maya Classic Period (A.D. 250-900). At one end of the scale is the individual; at the other end of scale is cosmology. Interspersed between these two poles are families, residential groups, extended communities, inclusion in broader political units (or states), and interaction with exterior political units (or states). For each of these various levels and permutations of interactions, material remains in the archaeological record, especially those that may function as “symbols,” must be interpreted to convey meaning in terms of status and power.

Individual status and power may be conveyed by means of personal accoutrements and costume. While the decoration on clothing and cloth in the Maya area surely once denoted group membership (e.g., Morris and Foxx 1987; Hendrickson 1995) and, by extension, status, for the most part these items have not been preserved in the archaeological record. Often, they can be seen only in iconographic details that have been carved onto stone monuments or hard-fired onto painted ceramics – or in the items of personal adornment accompanying the dead. While pottery vessels often were interred with individuals in a recipe-like format (D. Chase 1997; D. Chase and A. Chase 2011) – one plate, one cylinder, and possibly one bowl per person – probably associated with a generalized death ritual, other artifacts may have functioned as status indicators. At Caracol, stone spindle whorls can be used to identify high status individuals who worked cloth (A. Chase et al. 2008a). Even more telling as personal status indicators at Caracol are the ear assemblages that accompanied the dead. The highest status individuals have jadeite or obsidian earrings; other high status individuals used shell earrings. The presence of the jadeite and obsidian earrings primarily in the site epicenter also stresses

the importance of location (and context) in status assignments. While other foreign or exotic goods may occur in high-status burials, such items are not restricted in their distribution – often occurring in non-epicentral contexts or even sometimes in lower-status interments.

Of additional interest in looking at status at Caracol are two other bodies of data. The first dataset is the isotope analysis that has been done at Caracol. Stable isotope analyses indicate the existence of a “palace diet” at Caracol that was generally restricted to the occupants of palaces and that appears to have been fairly consistent over time (A. Chase et al. 2001). The occasional presence of the palace diet in the bones of individuals interred in outlying residential groups demonstrates the use of lower status retainers in these palaces by the elite. Even more intriguing, the stable isotope analyses can be used to identify lower status retainers or support staff that lived and were buried in smaller groups adjacent to the epicentral palaces (A. Chase and D. Chase 2007); these individuals do not seem to have had great access to maize, probably because they did not have their own agricultural lands. Thus, at least for Caracol, diet can be related to socio-economic position typical in stratified societies where there is differential access to basic resources (Fried 1967). A second body of data that may have related to Maya status and role are inlaid teeth. Almost 22% of Caracol’s dead appear to have had one or more teeth inlaid with hematite or jadeite (D. Chase 1994). Yet, the patterning of the inlays on these teeth and the location of the dead with this kind of dental decoration has not yet been satisfactorily correlated with considerations of status and power. The use of dental inlays at Caracol can be seen in some of the most elite burials that have been recovered and in other interments that, by most measures, should be of lower status.

Maya residential groups have also been extensively analyzed for referents to status and power indicators in the archaeological record. At both Tikal (Becker 2003) and Copan (Fash 1983), residential groups have been categorized by generalized ground plan



Figure 1. Vaulted building from a Caracol residential group, indicative of high social status. Example shown is Caracol Structure F36, excavated during the 2010 field season.



Figure 2. Photograph of S.D. C117F-1, showing the extent of the sealed pit and the broken and burnt artifacts within the cremation.

in an attempt to understand their function. At Caracol, besides defining general categories of ground plans (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987), in an attempt to analyze function and status, we have also looked at building height, group platform height, group alignment, number of buildings per group, distance from the epicenter, distance from termini, distance from causeways, and farming area controlled (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994; Jaeger 1994; Murtha 2009). The majority of these variables were shown to have no direct correlation with status and, by extension, power. At Tikal, the use of a Plaza Plan 2 – characterized by an eastern shrine in a residential group – was correlated with higher status; however, this ground plan only occurs in 15% of that site's residential groups (Becker 2003). At Caracol, more than 60% of the residential groups are characterized by such an arrangement (A. Chase and D. Chase 1996). In conjunction with the use of formal tombs and specialized ceramic cache containers, this residential arrangement has been categorized as part of a broader Caracol identity (D. Chase and A. Chase 2004a) and, thus, not linked to status.

So, what does represent status and power in a residential group at Caracol? Craft production related to shell, lithics, and wood is evident in many of Caracol's residential groups and, while some of this production must have been done to gain capital for use within the broader site economy, there is no indication that it conveyed elevated power or status to the group's inhabitants. This interpretation is consistent with research that correlates craft production with lower status residential groups (Moholy-Nagy 2003). Building and platform size is similarly problematic. While the size of the residential unit may sometimes be telling, many of the larger groups at Caracol are the result of the extended use of those loci over time. However, what does appear to be an indicator of higher status is the presence of a stone building with a vaulted roof within a residential group (Figure 1). Many

residential groups do not have such a building, but vaulted buildings are found throughout the Caracol landscape. Because the eastern building at Caracol generally functions as a shrine structure that is not correlated with a stone construction, when they occur, vaulted stone buildings – often heavily stuccoed – are found on the southern, western, or northern sides of plazuela groups. The effort that went into their construction minimally reflects the wealth of a specific residential group and may well be reflective of a higher status within the overall Caracol community. Often, important vaulted buildings on the northern sides of plazas were used to both start and end interment cycles.

From an archaeological standpoint, most analyses of status and power occurs at the level of the residential group. At Caracol, interment in a tomb in and of itself is not an indicator of elite status (A. Chase 1992). Tombs are associated with the majority of the eastern shrines in residential groups and were part of what it meant to be a Caracoleño. Being buried within the eastern shrine of a given residential group was indicative of some social standing (even if relative). No more than 10% to 15% of the dead from any residential group were actually interred within their household (D. Chase 1997). And, those that were interred were apparently buried according to temporal or ritual cycles (D. Chase and A. Chase 2004b, 2011); some were dressed to represent specific deities in death (such as the moon goddess; Rich 2003). Thus, the interments in these groups were part of broader rituals and only indirectly reflected the statuses of the interred individual in life.

Considerations of status must also keep in mind broader political organization and inter-polity relationships. The size and kinds of public architecture have been used to assign status rankings and political assignments to sites in the Maya area (see Adams and Jones 1981; Turner et al. 1981). E-Groups appear to have been used as symbols for the founding of individual Maya cities in the Southern lowlands (A. Chase

and D. Chase 2006a). Ball-courts have been analyzed to see interactions between polities (Barrois and Tokovine 2005). Temples, palaces, and royal courts (Inomata and Houston 2001) have all been analyzed along a similar vein. Even more analyzed and debated has been the Maya hieroglyphic record. The very presence and number of such texts on stone monuments at a site is often taken to be a measure of that site's importance. While generally recognized as being largely restricted to use by the Maya elite (Marcus 1992; Stuart 1993), status relationships among Maya states are often interpreted through the use of emblem glyphs, parentage and sibling notations, and other "power glyphs" (Martin and Grube 1995, 2000). Like other archaeological considerations of status and power, however, these hieroglyphic models are still in flux (Houston and Lacadena 2004; Martin 2005; A. Chase et al. 2008b).

An important point in conceptualizing power and status in the archaeological record, then, is that such considerations should not be simplistic. The pertinent data for interpreting power and status are multifaceted, context-dependent, and dynamic. Even individual status and role may not be identifiable in death if individuals are interred within a standard ritual formula. Another deranging factor would be "wealth," which is not necessarily correlated with status (e.g. Smith 1987); wealthy commoners may have accumulated sufficient wealth to have access to at least some luxury goods and may have been able to harness sufficient human power to build substantial residential areas. This is all part of the dynamic with which archaeological interpretation needs to concern itself.

Having briefly looked at definitions of status and power, we now turn to a specific example of a single archaeological deposit that permits us to examine these concepts in detail.

Specific Consideration of Status and Power: Caracol Special Deposit C117F-1

Excavated during the 2010 field season of the Caracol Archaeological Project,

Special Deposit C117F-1 provides both a unique example of the concepts embodied in status and power and the difficulties involved in their interpretation (Figure 2). Placed deep beneath the courtyard of Caracol's Northeast Acropolis, the deposit dates to between A.D. 250 and 350. As the deposit contains the cremated remains of at least 3 individuals, it may technically be labeled a burial - but, it is an interment unlike any other at the site. The deposit is sealed by an Early Classic plaza floor level that lies approximately 2.2 m below the last Terminal Classic floor level for the Northeast Acropolis courtyard plaza. The deeply buried Early Classic floor rests immediately above another plaster floor that was heavily burned. The pit for burial S.D. C117F-1 was dug through this lower floor and then was sealed by a capping stucco surface that was in turn covered by the last Early Classic flooring. Because the cap over the pit was not burned, the disturbance was easy to spot.

Upon removing the cap, a square pit with rounded corners, measuring 1.6 m by 1.6 m, was exposed; the sides of the pit were calcined, indicating that intensive *in situ* burning had taken place. However, the upper part of the pit below the stucco cap was sealed to a depth of 30 cm with sterile marl. At a depth of 30 cm, however, a thick layer of ash appeared; removal of the upper part of the ash resulted in the exposure of burnt and broken artifacts and bone chips. Beneath the ash was a 2-3 cm thick layer of carbonized wood that completely filled the bottom of the pit and that represented the remains of the intense fire that had taken place at this locus and into which the bone and artifactual materials had been deposited. Based on an analysis of the burnt teeth, at least 3 individuals were present: one adult, one child between 10-15 years of age, and a subadult about 5 years old. Given the fragmentary nature of the burnt and broken bone, as compared to the artifactual materials, the bodies may have been cremated elsewhere and crushed into smaller pieces (perhaps using the partial metate that was included in the deposit). Alternatively,

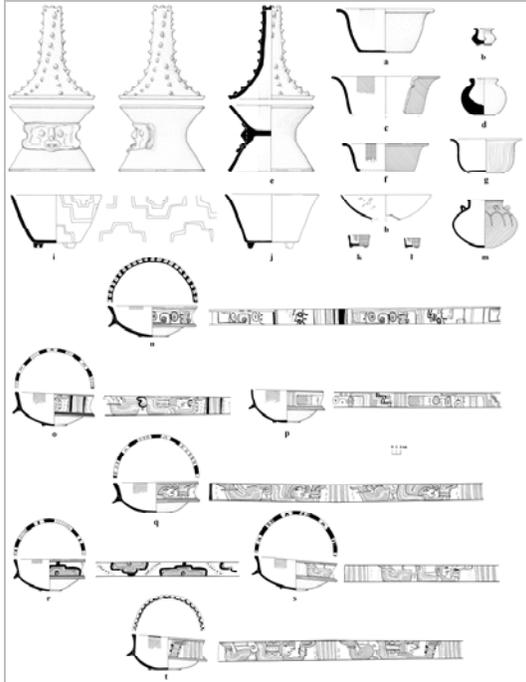


Figure 3. Re-assembled pottery vessels from within S.D. C117F-1.

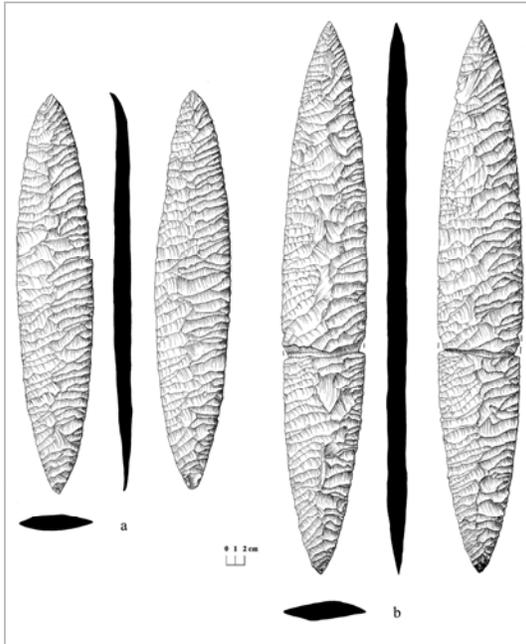


Figure 4. Re-assembled green obsidian knives from within S.D. C117F-1.

the cremations may have occurred within the pit, in which case the bone would have been burnt *in situ* in this pit first and then the artifactual materials would have been subsequently added.

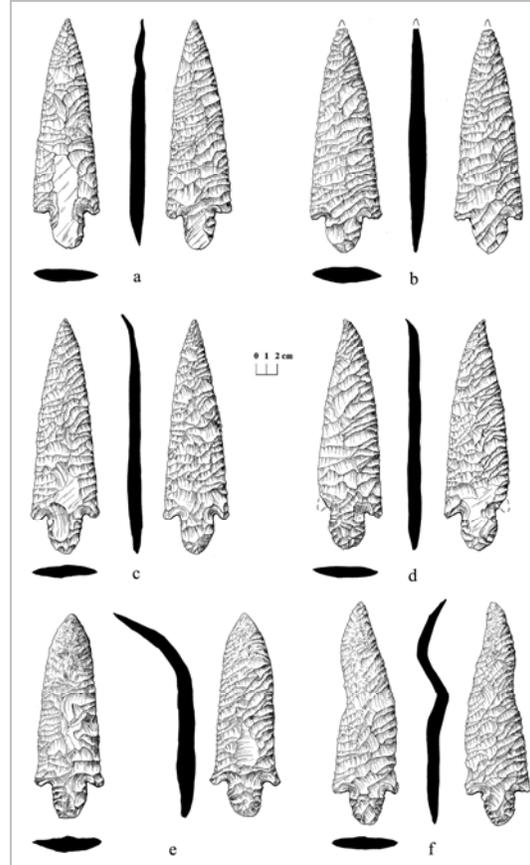


Figure 5. Green obsidian points from within S.D. C117F-1; warping (and discoloration) resulted from the points being used to poke or stir the fire used for the cremation.

Unlike the bone, most of the artifactual material was reconstructable, even though it was badly broken and exhibited differential burning. Besides the remains of three cremated individuals, artifactual materials added to the pit included 20 ceramic vessels (Figure 3): 7 polychrome basal flange vessels, 2 large footed tripod bowls, 1 constricted-necked bowl, 3 miniature vessels, 1 small jar, ½ of a possible thin orange dish (Figure 3h), 4 everted rim bowls (2 partial), and a 2-part effigy censer. Parts of some vessels are completely incinerated, while other parts of the same vessel are barely scorched – indicating that these items were broken before being added to the fire or that they may have been thrown into the pit with some force. As three of the vessels were not complete, it is thought likely that some destruction took place away from the

final resting place for the materials. Other artifactual materials in the deposit included: 2 probable hematite earrings, 1 oblong slate backing, 1 partial metate, 2 green obsidian knives (Figure 4), 6 green obsidian points (Figure 5), 15 green obsidian blades, partial blades of both green and gray obsidian, 4 large jadeite beads, 1 hematite mirror, more than 150 badly burnt shell beads, a possible atlatl tip (Figure 6), and a host of carved and uncarved shell and bone objects. It is suspected that the green obsidian spear-points from S.D. C117F-1 were still attached to their shafts and were used to poke or stir the still-burning fire, thus accounting for the deformed tips and warped bodies of many of the specimens. The intensity of the heat is evident. The hematite mirror had essentially melted because of the fire. In some cases, parts of pottery vessels had totally disintegrated due to the burning. In other cases, pieces of the pottery vessels had swelled in size and become distorted like the obsidian spear-points. The temperature for the fire was probably on the order of 1100 degrees centigrade (Cabrera Castro 1999:520); similar deformation of obsidian spear-points is recorded from Hohokam cremations in the U.S. Southwest (McGuire 1992).

The Northeast Acropolis has a long history of occupation. Refuse in the soil overlying bedrock in front of Structure B33 dates the initial use of this locus to approximately 100 B.C. The remains of two Late Preclassic buildings have also been found constructed above this refuse; both of these structures were completely engulfed within later fills. One of these buildings was cut through to place an interment dating to approximately A.D. 150 (A. Chase and D. Chase 2005:22, 2006b:46). This eastern interment was of a woman guised as the moon goddess (*Ix Chel*; Rich 2003) and accompanied by 32 vessels and 7,000 jadeite and shell beads. She, in turn, was sealed by the same floor through which S.D. C117F-1 was placed. During the 2009 field season, an Early Classic tomb was found interred on the summit axis of Structure B32. This east-west tomb contained a single supine

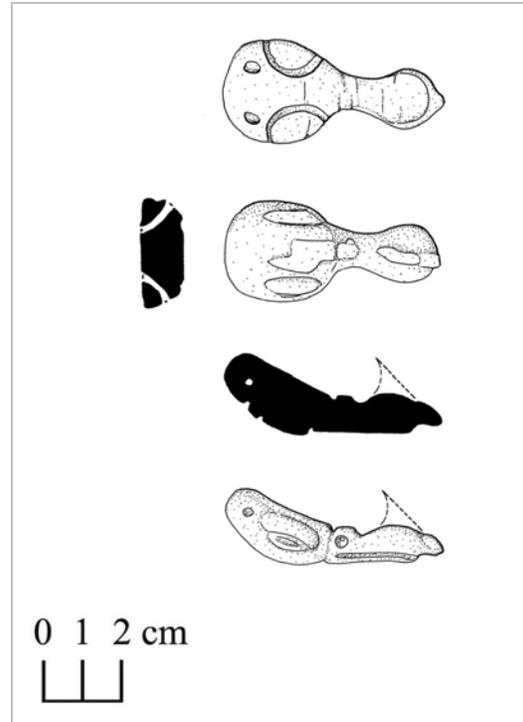


Figure 6. An incinerated, but elaborately carved, shell artifact was probably embedded in a wooden shaft and used as the throwing tip for an atlatl.

individual with hematite inlays in three teeth; the individual was accompanied by a single polychrome bowl with the same design as 4 of those found in S.D. C117F-1; also in the chamber were 3 other ceramic vessels, 2 large spondylus shells, a necklace composed of 54 shell beads, a shell disk, and 3 pieces of pyrite. The contents of this tomb indicate a close corresponding date with the deposit in the courtyard in front of Structure B32. Although the individual interred in the Structure B32 tomb surely was of high status based on location, the tomb contents were nowhere near as impressive as the contents of S.D. C117F-1 – nor do they raise as many questions.

So what does S.D. C117F-1 represent? And, how does it relate to discussions of status and power? Several of the artifacts from S.D. C117F-1 are the result of long-distance trade and should help to inform us as to Mesoamerican relationships in the Early Classic and perhaps past trade routes that skirted the central Peten. The two green obsidian knives in the Caracol deposit are

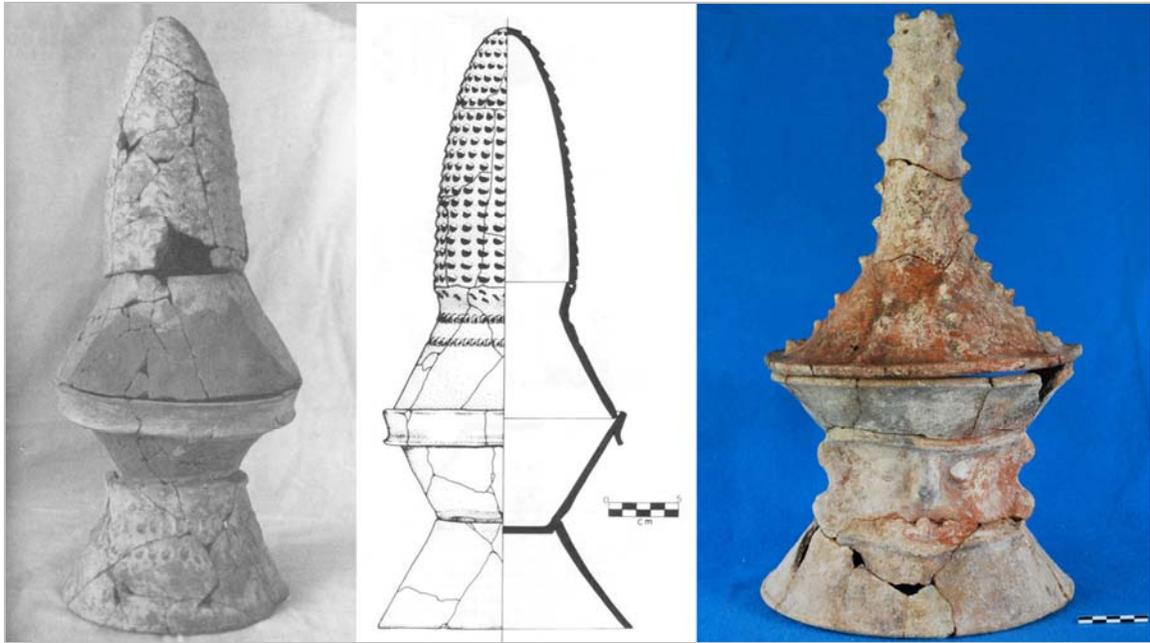


Figure 7. Comparison of the Caracol S.D. C117F-1 censer (right) with Early Xolalpan censers (left photograph and drawing) from the Oaxaca Barrio at Teotihuacan (after Rattray 2001:517).

only rarely noted from the Maya area – and, at 36 cm in length, one is the largest recovered. Similar knives derive from relatively few Maya sites: two are known from Uaxactun (Spence 1996:29); one from Pacbitun (Healy 1992); and, one from Kaminaljuyu (Kidder et al. 1946:138); none are known for Tikal (Moholy-Nagy 1999:303). The 6 green obsidian spear-points from the Caracol deposit are trade items from central Mexico; their shape is called “Stemmed B Type” there (Spence 1996:23). Seven Stemmed B points were recovered from Tomb A-7 at Kaminaljuyu (Spence 1996:26); only one other complete Stemmed B point is reported for the Southern lowlands – at Altun Ha. At Tikal, the only complete green obsidian points are classified as “Stemmed A Type” (Moholy-Nagy 1999:304). The three miniatures in this deposit also relate to central Mexico (Rattray2001); similar forms are noted as well from a deposit at Altun Ha, where green obsidian and ceramics with clear relationships to central Mexico were found above an Early Classic Maya tomb (Pendergast 1990; 2003). One of the partial Caracol vessels may also be a Thin Orange

tradeware from central Mexico. The 2-part censer is clearly Maya, but also resembles Early Xololapan composite censers from the Oaxaca barrio at Teotihuacan (Figure 7; see also Rattray 2001:517). Intriguingly, the burial pit itself is the same size as burial pits from Teotihuacan and is also constructed, as most burial pits at Teotihuacan were, by being dug into pre-existing layers “as a simple earthen pit” (e.g., Sempowski 1992:32, fig. 1).

Cremations are noted for Teotihuacan for high status individuals (Manzanilla 2002:61; Manzanilla and Serrano 1999), and S.D. C117F-1 would be considered a “Level 1” cremation (exceedingly burnt and reduced) in the Teotihuacan typology (Cabrera Castro 1999; Sempowski and Spence 1994). Many years ago, Linne (1942) demonstrated that broken pottery was burnt in association with cremations at Teotihuacan. Modern researchers have noted that “there is a positive correlation between incinerated burials and offering complexity” and status (Sugiyama 2005:207) at Teotihuacan. Other researchers at Teotihuacan have noted that higher status adults were more likely to be

buried in public areas, particularly principal courtyards (Manzanilla 2002; Sempowski and Spence 1994:251; Serrano 1993). Semposki (1992:33-34) recorded that 9 cremations recovered from Teotihuacan are associated with “luxury goods in complex offerings;” these cremations come from a variety of apartment compounds, including Xolalpan, Tetitla, Yoyahuala, and La Ventilla (Sugiyama 2005:207). Thus, while Caracol’s S.D. C117F-1 does not match known Maya burial practices, it is consistent with interment practices noted for Teotihuacan apartment compounds (“the use of tombs for high-level elite burials” is *completely unknown* from Xolalpan-phase Teotihuacan” [Braswell 2003:137]). Thus, if Teotihuacan burial practices (in terms of grave form, grave location, and complexity of contents) are applicable to the Caracol situation, at least one of the individuals within the Caracol cremation was of high status.

Special Deposit C117F-1 can be interpreted in many ways. Minimally, it shows knowledge of and emulation of foreign ritual practices. Whether this is simply status reinforcement or something more is an unanswered question. Caracol’s Northeast Acropolis housed an important elite family in the Early Classic Period. Whether it was the paramount family is unknown. What its linkages were with the rest of the Maya area and Mesoamerica are not fully established. However, S.D. C117F-1 has ramifications for the interpretation of “power,” external linkages, and events both at Caracol and in the Southern lowlands during the Early Classic Period. Significantly, this deposit is coeval with others that show little or no ties with central Mexico.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the perspective of archaeological interpretation, considerations of status and power relating to S.D. C117F-1 are intertwined with conceptualizing the meaning of the deposit and its symbols. A small, round-cornered square burial pit in a central courtyard is an appropriate location

for a high status interment at Teotihuacan, but not for a high status burial in the Maya area. Cremation is consistent with a high status interment at Teotihuacan, but again not in the Maya area – at least during this time. In fact, cremations are not at all well documented in the Classic Period Maya archaeological record (but, see Adams 1999:62 for Rio Azul for an Early Classic example). The Caracol tomb located in the summit of Structure B32 better accords with what is known about higher status Maya interments. Yet, the artifactual contents of the cremation are far richer. The use of green obsidian points, a mirror, pottery miniatures, a censer, and a Thin Orange bowl would be consistent with a high status Teotihuacan burial; but, miniatures and censers are not common components of Maya interments. Thus, S.D. C117F is not representative of Maya burial practice or placement; it does, however, strongly resemble the practices and placement of a high status Teotihuacan interment.

This deposit may be associated with the concept of power in several ways. First, the positioning of the deposit in the center of a courtyard may be seen as a form of personal power, although this is not normally where a high status individual would be buried at Caracol. The foreign aspects associated with this burial also bespeak of personal power. The mirror included in the deposit may have been directly reflective of such personal power, especially if it formed part of a warrior’s costume (e.g., Sugiyama 2005:229), something also suggested by the inclusion of a possible atlatl tip (Figure 6). Special Deposit C117F-1 also speaks of power in terms of access to resources, both local in the form of the polychrome bowls and exotic in the form of the green obsidian artifacts, seas shells, and the hematite mirror. Power is also specifically manifested in the symbolic incineration of exceedingly valuable resources that made later re-entry and recovery impossible.

The external connections displayed in S.D. C117F-1 are consistent with earlier evidence for external ties reflected in the earlier burial of a female disguised as Ix Chel a

short distance east of this deposit. The goods that accompanied this individual over 100 years earlier included ceramics that may have come from the Guatemala Highlands and a large number of jadeite and shell beads. Thus, residents of Caracol's Northeast Acropolis enjoyed a long and dynamic history of external connections, shedding some light on the importance of this site and its broader Mesoamerican connections. Realistically, S.D. C117F-1 evinces multiple aspects of this dynamic power: social power in the siting of the interment in an elite group; economic power in the availability and use of foreign goods; religious power in the incorporation of foreign burial practices into a Maya context; and political power in both the destruction of the goods that were placed in the interment (thereby removing them from circulation) and in the sanctification – even “Mayanization” – of high status exterior relationships.

In summary, while status and power are both abstract terms that vary depending upon relational situations and contexts, it is possible to view their inter-connectedness in the archaeological record. Conceptualizing and translating status and power into archaeological terms reveals both intriguing connections and potentially new structures for previously assumed developmental frames and relationships at Caracol. If one looks at the dating of S.D. C117F-1 in comparison to the hieroglyphic texts from the site, a possible correlation can be forged. Special Deposit C117F-1 dates to between A.D. 300 and A.D. 350 (impending radiocarbon dates may better position this). According to the hieroglyphic record contained on Caracol Ballcourt Marker 3, the dynastic sequence for the site was established in A.D. 331 (A. Chase et al. 1991; D. Chase and A. Chase 2008). Thus, it would appear that there could be overlap between the founding and the interment; minimally, the dating is close enough that each needs to be considered relative to the other. On one hand, then, the deposition of S.D. C117F-1 could simply have been a coincidence, having nothing to do with the

dynastic founding at Caracol. On the other hand, however, it could have been intimately related to the founding of the dynastic line. Given our knowledge of the archaeological record of the site and given the symbols associated with status and power reflected in S.D. C117F-1, we would be rather surprised if the placement of this interment in one of the more important Early Classic residential units did not have some direct bearing on epigraphic founding of Caracol.

Caracol became the largest known Maya site in the Southern lowlands. That it maintained connections with central Mexico at the start of its dynastic record is entirely appropriate. This early connection helps to explain and better contextualize Caracol's relationship with the dynastic founding of Copan, where Caracol is seen as being the donor of the ruling dynasty to its southern neighbor (Price et al. 2010). Even before the advent of the Early Classic Period, Caracol was intimately tied to trade and events that flowed through the Guatemala Highlands. The later connections seen in S.D. C117F-1 logically followed from these earlier relationships. Yet, the Caracol data raise other issues with the current interpretations of Teotihuacan relationships in the Southern lowlands, particularly with regard to trade-goods and inter-relationships. The distribution of items from central Mexico in the early part of the Early Classic Period thus far recovered from the Maya archaeological record may be suggestive of differences in early trade routes that may be related to status and power. The dating of the Caracol materials to the earlier part of the Early Classic Period, before A.D. 350, is also consistent with the Altun Ha situation. Thus, much contact with central Mexico archaeologically predated the epigraphic history generally attributed to Teotihuacanos (Clayton 2005; Stuart 2000), suggesting a much more complicated situation than the politicized story interpreted from the hieroglyphs.

But, these are topics for future considerations.

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