What the Hieroglyphs Don't Tell You:

Archaeology and History at Caracol, Belize

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Caracol, Belize is an excellent site from which to view the relationship between ancient Maya recorded history and archaeology because there are substantial bodies of coeval archaeological and hieroglyphic material available and because current interpretations based on these two bodies of data are both complementary and divergent.

The site of Caracol has been the subject of epigraphic and archaeological interest since its discovery in 1937. Our own Caracol Archaeological Project (CAP) investigations have been ongoing every year since 1985. This research builds on earlier work done by: A. Hamilton Anderson, the first Belizean Archaeological Commissioner, in the South Acropolis; Linton Satterthwaite, an epigrapher and archaeologist from the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, in the site epicenter during the 1950s; on investigations of Caracol's settlement and agricultural terraces undertaken by Paul Healey of Trent University in 1980; and, to some degree, on more recent Tourism Development Project (TDP) stabilization work undertaken from 2000 through 2004 and directed by Jaime Awe, Director of the Belize Institute of Archaeology.

Each of these investigations has amplified the Caracol database. As a combined result of this work, Caracol currently has the largest hieroglyphic corpus in Belize consisting of 53 carved stone monuments along with numerous texts on stucco, as well as texts on portable artifacts. Initial drawings and readings of these texts have been undertaken by Nikolai Grube (1994; A. Chase et al. 1991; Martin and Grube 2000) and

Stephen Houston (1987, 1991), and have also been reconsidered by other epigraphers (e.g., Gutierrez 1993 and Martin 2005). The Caracol texts, with dates ranging from A.D. 331 to A.D. 859, name key individuals and denote relationships among people and sites.

Archaeological investigations also have provided a sizeable body of data documenting occupation from no earlier than 650 BC to no later than AD 950. Twenty-three square kilometers have been mapped by transit; over 108 residential groups in the core settlement area have been sampled, as has much of the epicentral architecture. Excavations also have uncovered numerous burials, caches, whole vessels or reconstructable vessels, and other artifacts. Investigations have provided data relevant to ancient Maya social, political, economic, and ritual organization that can be compared and contrasted with other parts of the Southern Maya lowlands and with the recorded hieroglyphic history of the site.

However, at Caracol - as in other parts of the Southern Maya Lowlands - hieroglyphic and archaeological data and interpretations are not always in synch. Generally only the epicentral portions of Caracol, representing a very small portion of the estimated 177 square kilometers of site area, are associated with hieroglyphic texts. Texts also clearly refer only to a small segment of Caracol's elite society rather than to the population at large – or to the day-to-day activities of life, for which there is abundant archaeological evidence. Texts incorporate activities and relationships; however, these also are limited to items of presumed significance to Caracol's elite, such as birth, parentage, accession, and warfare. Some of these hieroglyphic events may be matched with archaeological signatures, especially Caracol's 6th and 7th century wars with Tikal and Naranjo, Guatemala (A. Chase and D. Chase 1989; D. Chase and A. Chase 2002).

There are, however, substantial periods of time when no contemporary texts are recorded, such as prior to AD 300, post AD 859, as well as during much of the 8th century. Hieroglyphs and archaeology, when combined, illustrate that a lack of texts should not be assumed to correlate with population decrease or economic decline (A. Chase and D. Chase 1996b); Caracol evidences greatest prosperity, population, and extent precisely during a period when hieroglyphic texts are remarkable in their absence (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003b). The Caracol data demonstrate that the juxtaposition of history and archaeology is possible and extremely productive, producing a far more vibrant and realistic reconstruction of the ancient past. This paper will review Caracol chronologically and conjunctively in relation to history and archaeology in order to better delineate these complex relationships.

Caracol Archaeology

The archaeological record at Caracol derives from 22 seasons of excavation by the Caracol Archaeological Project (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987a, 1996a, 2004a; D. Chase and A. Chase 1994, 2004a) and incorporates data gained through five years of Tourism Development Project excavation (Bawaya 2004), as well as earlier investigations by Anderson (1958, 1959), Satterthwaitte (1951, 1954), and Healey and his colleagues (1983). These combined investigations have uncovered various archaeological remains and mapped 23 kilometers of the site proper (Figure 1).

Epicentral architecture at Caracol consists of several formal public architectural spaces. The major spaces are called the A and B Groups. The Caracol A Group was among the earliest at the site; it has massive temples, all of an early date, on three sides of its plaza and a long platform, supporting 6 structures, on its western side. The western

pyramid and eastern platform in this group were built over earlier remains and took the form of an "E Group" or astronomical observatory complex, having been constructed by AD 70 (A. Chase and D. Chase 1995, 2006a). The B Group, perhaps the most important plaza at Caracol, was just as early, rising to 35 meters of its total 41.5 meters height by the Late Preclassic Period (A. Chase and D. Chase 2005a); Caana was modified and lived in throughout the Classic and Terminal Classic Periods. Many of the other epicentral constructions, such as the Central Acropolis and South Acropolis, were occupied throughout the Classic Period. While the bulk of Caracol's central constructions were modified and used during the Late Classic Period, Terminal Classic remains, dating to after AD 790, are abundant in the western portion of the epicenter, particularly deriving from excavations in the Barrio Palace, the C Group, and Caana.

Causeways define relationships among the different areas of Caracol and conjoin architectural nodes with the epicenter; they also provide access into and out of the site epicenter, providing access to site markets at causeway termini (A. Chase and D. Chase 2001, 2004b). Households are almost equidistantly distributed throughout the 177 square kilometer core area and are interspersed within purposefully constructed agricultural fields (A. Chase and D. Chase 1998b). It is estimated that there were over 9,000 plazuela groups at the site; only 1.2% of these have been sampled. Households not only were located within the agricultural fields, but also in close proximity to constructed water storage systems. Approximately 5 reservoirs are located in each square kilometer of the site, usually in raised areas where there was little likelihood of pollution from run-off. Classic Period Caracol was clearly a planned community.

Investigations not only have recovered the ancient constructions, but also the remains of burials, caches, and in situ debris. During the course of CAP investigations, more than 250 burials and at least 200 caches have been recovered. De facto refuse has been excavated in the majority of areally cleared structures and provides substantial functional and temporal information, particularly as related to the Terminal Classic Period (post AD 800) occupation at the site (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004c, 2005b, in press).

Excavations have produced evidence of occupation at the site dating from the transition between the Middle to Late Preclassic Periods or to approximately 600 BC (A. Chase and D. Chase 2006a). The number of loci with Preclassic remains is relatively small. Discovery of additional early remains is complicated as these are generally buried under later constructions. They are difficult to access without substantial effort due to the later Classic Period proclivity for covering earlier remains with difficult-to-penetrate dry core fill. Nevertheless, Preclassic Period population likely was not great, reaching no more than 10,000 people by AD 250.

The bulk of Caracol investigations have produced material from the Classic Period (AD 250-800). Early Classic Period (AD 250-550) Caracol was well tied into trade networks and shared in pan-lowland ideological systems (A. Chase and D. Chase 2005a). Population was highly stratified. The Late Classic occupation at this site provides the largest number of remains. Between AD 650 and 700, Caracol maintained its largest occupation, estimated at well over 115,000 people (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994) based on standard methods for reconstructing population numbers used throughout the Maya area (Culbert and Rice 1990). During this same temporal span, the site also

demonstrates its greatest prosperity (as indicated by consideration of burials and artifact distribution); it is characterized by a shared identity that is particularly well expressed in mortuary and caching practices, but that is also evident in the distribution of artifacts (D. Chase and A. Chase 1998, 2004a, 2004b). This shared identity masked some of the differentiation among peoples at the site; evidence suggests the existence of symbolic (as opposed to actual) egalitarianism (D. Chase and A. Chase 2006); however stratification clearly existed as indicated by the use of differential diets by various population segments (A. Chase et al. 2001). Terminal Classic occupation suggests that Caracol's elite remained in place and successfully continued external trade and communication networks (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004c; 2005b); the shared identity, however, was minimized at this time and there were clear haves and have nots – as well as a resurgence of dynasty (A. Chase and D. Chase in press). During all time periods, there are materials that can be successfully compared with hieroglyphic texts and with investigated remains from other sites in the Southern Maya Lowlands.

Caracol Hieroglyphic Record

Prior to the Caracol Archaeological Project investigations, the hieroglyphic record for the site consisted of 21 stelae, 19 altars, and a few fragmentary texts. These were uncovered by A. Hamilton Anderson and Linton Satterthwaitte and subsequently commented on by a number of epigraphers (Riese 1972; Sosa and Reents 1980; Stone et al. 1985) and finally published by Beetz and Satterthwaitte (1981). CAP and TDP investigations have added substantially to this corpus with 4 new carved stelae, the top of Stela 20, 4 new carved altars, 5 new ballcourt markers, 4 painted capstone texts, 4 other tomb texts, stucco texts associated with 3 range buildings, and texts on portable artifacts.

Currently there are 25 known carved stelae and 28 carved altars (including ballcourt markers); painted texts are also associated with a limited number of presumably royal tombs from the A Group (Structure A3), the Central Acropolis (Structure A34), Caana (Structures B19 and B20), and the Machete Terminus (Structure L3). A single carved stone capstone with texts also was found 4 kilometers from the site epicenter associated with a looted tomb in Structure 6A2 (Grube 2000:17). Portable artifacts with writing include ceramic and stone bowls as well as carved bone; these secondary texts have a somewhat wider distribution at the site, being found outside the epicenter and in relatively humble as well as in elite contexts.

The hieroglyphic record is presently interpreted as indicating that the Caracol dynasty was founded in AD 331 (A. Chase et al. 1991). The last monument at the site dates to AD 859 (Houston 1987). However, the majority of the hieroglyphic dates are recorded during the 6th and 7th century on stone monuments and stucco texts (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981; Grube 1994; Houston 1987, 1991). There are gaps in the known hieroglyphic record – and stucco building texts and stone monuments sometimes refer to different people and different kinds of information. Caracol's projected dynastic sequence is also broken and/or unknown during some periods. Not all dates are contemporary; some are historical and others are mythological. A good number of dates and events, however, are repeated – and not only at Caracol – potentially reaffirming their validity. These dates include a series of events specifically related to the defeat of Naranjo, Guatemala over the course of a ten year period of war (AD 626-636). Key dates in Caracol's history also include AD 562, which is recorded on Altar 21 as a successful star-war against Tikal (A. Chase 1991; Houston 1991).

Reconstruction of History and Archaeology at Caracol Belize

The earliest evidence for the occupation of Caracol comes solely from the archaeological record. Although parts of Caracol were occupied by 600 BC, abundant population is not evident until the Late Preclassic Period (300 BC – AD 250), when construction and occupation is associated both with monumental architecture and housemounds. Late Preclassic settlement in the Caracol area included a series of separate sites. There were several minor centers located within 8 kilometers of what we now refer to as epicentral Caracol (A. Chase and D. Chase 2005a), including the site of Cahal Pichik (Thompson 1931). Investigations indicate that the site's early population saw substantial consumption of elite items and trade in exotics and long-distance food items (salt water fish), as well as precocious development of what would later become become pan-lowland Maya ritual (A. Chase and D. Chase 2006a; D. Chase and A. Chase 1998). Occupation may have been more extensive than is currently estimated (ca. 5-10,000 people) and the occupants of Caracol were clearly more than simple farmers.

There are no hieroglyphs to guide and inform us about dynasty or about internal or external politics for this early time period, but the special deposits encountered suggest that Caracol was at the heart of Lowland Maya innovation for the time and was well tied in with other sites and "world systems." Caches from the A Group appear to have been placed to celebrate the advent of the 8th Cycle in A.D. 41, possibly in synch with the dedication of the group as a Uaxactun-style E Group (A. Chase and D. Chase 2006a). The caching practices seen at this early date foreshadow caching practices seen at Caracol's later rival Tikal, Guatemala more than 300 years later.

An interment located in the Northeast Acropolis has perhaps the most exotic artifacts for this time, even though it was placed within a simple cist and not a tomb (A. Chase and D. Chase 2006a). The woman in this cist was buried in a prone position with her head to the east. She was accompanied by over 7,000 jadeite and shell beads forming a mantle (probably attached to a cloth backing), 32 ceramic vessels, an ocarina, and a small animal figurine. Dog teeth (from over 80 individual animals) were incorporated into the mantle fringe as well as anklets. An even larger number of burial offerings had been present in the initial interment, but a portion of the burial was removed in antiquity by an intrusive cut (including the woman's left arm and half of one vessel). An iconographic study of her costume suggests that she was meant to represent Ix Chel, the moon goddess, in death (Brown 2003).

In terms of the monument record, Early Classic Classic Caracol is represented by three 8th cycle dates; two of these are associated with early monuments (8.>15.3.?.?; 8.18.4.4.2) and one is a backdating to the possible dynastic founding of Caracol in A.D. 331 (8.14.13.10.4). In fact, Caracol is somewhat unusual in that at least two of these dates appear to be contemporary rather than historical. However, hieroglyphs provide no other detail, beyond the reference to the apparent founding of the site in the 4th century AD. That Caracol had already been settled a millennia prior to the appearance of its inital hieroglyphic history is evident from archaeological evidence for earlier Preclassic Period occupation going back to 600 BC (A. Chase and D. Chase 2006a). The hieroglyphically recorded founding, rather than reflecting the initial site settlement, instead appears to be related to the establishment of the Caracol dynasty (A. Chase and D. Chase 2006b). There are burials that could conceivably represent the ruling elite of

the site, such as a tomb in South Acropolis Structure D16 that contained two individuals and is dated to just before AD 500 (Figure 2; see also http://www.caracol.org [2003 season report]). Offerings included 13 complete ceramic vessels, composite obsidian earflares, jadeite, stingray spines, mirrors, bone figurines, and complete spondylus shells; the burial was covered in cinnabar. Taken collectively, these items may be interpreted as symbols of rulership. Significantly, however, no historic individuals from the site can be securely identified with these remains. In a similar vein, a double-decker Early Classic tomb placed at plaza level in front of Structure A6 (Anderson 1958) – again with significant offerings included – cannot be associated with any historic personages.

In contrast to the nearly silent hieroglyphic texts, archaeological remains dating from the Early Classic provide substantial information about the site, suggesting that the Preclassic extensive trade networks continued and that the site's population grew to some 25,000 people (D. Chase and A. Chase 2004a). The earliest known hieroglyphic text associated with a tomb (presumably a death date) dates to A.D. 537, presaging an explosion of subsequent Late Classic recorded history; the written date is associated with an important individual interred on the summit of Caana beneath an earlier version of Structure B20.

During the Late Classic Period, Caracol maintained its largest population and achieved is greatest areal extent. Early Late Classic Period Caracol contains an abundant hieroglyphic record (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981; Grube 1994; Martin and Grube 2000). Eroded hieroglyphic texts can be used to reference three Caracol rulers in the late 5th and early 6th centuries. In AD 553, Lord Water acceded to rule and was in power for at least 40 years. The practice of caching lidded urns modeled with faces was started during his

tenure. Also during his reign, Caana was rebuilt and important tombs were placed at the summit of Caana in Structure B20 (AD 577) and in the northern building of the Central Acropolis (AD 582). Lord Water's accession was presumably under the auspices of Tikal, but texts indicate two aggressive actions with Tikal. Tikal seemingly got the upper hand in an axe event in AD 556, but was on the receiving end of a star war in AD 562. Importantly, the hieroglyphic information concerning this event, all contained on Caracol's Altar 21 (Figure 3), does not specify that Site Q (the Snake Head Emblem popularly identified as Calakmul) participated in this event, contrary to epigraphic assertions (Martin 2005; Martin and Grube 2000).

Three other individuals are found in the texts that are relevant to Lord Water and played a role after his death. Batz Ek was born in AD 566; Knot Ahau was born in AD 575; and K'an II was born in AD 588. However, none of these named individuals can be placed in any of the 108 tombs have been investigated at Caracol. Even though all of the major epicentral structures have been dug, none of the recovered burials can be equated with any of the named rulers from the site. This is particularly intriguing since a half dozen epicentral tombs contain painted texts that should accompany the highest elite (A. Chase and D. Chase 1996a). Thus, it remains unknown where the people recorded in the hieroglyphs on the epicentral monuments were buried – and the known texts themselves do not provide any clues.

Knot Ahau acceded to rule in AD 599 and was followed by K'an II in AD 618. There was likely tension between these two individuals. Houston (1987) suggests that they were brothers, but no texts clearly confirm this. Caracol Stela 1 (Figure 4) may be a posthumous monument erected by K'an II to solidify his rule, especially as the

monument contains a variant name for Lord Water and ends with a reference to K'an II's first penis perforation (another interpretation has this name being a reference to Lord Water's father). The importance of K'an II's initial penis perforation is also referenced on Stela 3. Altar 21, opening with the long count date of K'an II's birth, similarly references early history related to Lord Water and nowhere mentions his predecessor Knot Ahau.

From Stela 3 we learn of K'an II's accession to rule in AD 618, even though the monument probably portrays Batz Ek, who likely served as a surrogate parent and regent for K'an II. Batz Ek has usually been cast in a female role (Grube 1994; Martin and Grube 2000), presumably because of the jade skirt dress and other costume elements found on Stelae 1 and 3. However, this costume is indicative of the reborn Maize God and transformational situations, - and was often used by males (see Joyce 2000 and Looper 2002). From the Naranjo texts we note that K'an II was the "cherished one" of Batz Ek, but this text does not establish the gender of this individual. Batz Ek has also been identified as coming to Caracol from Calakmul (Martin and Grube 2000), but again this is not indicated in the texts. Instead, the arrival events (one dating to AD 584 and the other to AD 623) appear to involve two different deities and are "witnessed" by Batz Ek (Figure 5). The identification by epigraphers (Grube 1994; Martin and Grube 2000) of Batz Ek as the person interred in a tomb in Caracol Structure B19 dating to AD 634 is also suspect.

That the transition between Lord Water, Knot Ahau, and K'an II is a troubled one can also be seen in reference to Caracol Stela 1. This monument is located behind Structure A1, set at a right angle to the pyramid in front of a projecting rear construction.

When excavated by Satterthwaite, a host of smashed and reconstructable vessels were located about the base of the monument. Stela 1 was also set directly in front of a small tomb that had undergone a transformational event (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003a) and that contained the cremated remains of three individuals (1 adult and 2 subadults), approximately 150 obsidian lancets, and 41 reconstructable vessels. All of the vessels date to the early part of the Late Classic Period. The tomb itself was placed over the feet and lower torso of a free-standing twice-lifesize stucco figure (measuring 2 m deep by 1.2 m wide, by at least 2.8 m in height and similar to a later one at Bonampok; Tovalin and Velazques de Leon 1997). Two caches were associated with the stucco figure and the tomb construction. These date to the Early Classic – Late Classic transition (A. Chase and D. Chase 2005a). Thus, this important locus (Figure 6) surely played a role in the Lord Water, Knot Ahau, and K'an II transition. Within this same era, another tomb from Structure L3, with a text dating its original sealing to AD 614, also underwent a transformational event (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003a) in which the contents of the chamber were broken and scattered, ending with the chamber's painted capstone being placed askew when it was engulfed in a new construction.

When K'an II acceded as ruler in AD 618, he stayed in power until a month before his death in AD 658, when he was succeeded by Smoke Skull, whose only known monuments appear at the Guatemalan site of La Rejolla 11 kilometers northwest of Caracol (and likely connected by causeways to the Ceiba terminus). K'an II presided over Caracol's golden years. The inner causeway termini, all located 3 to 3.5 kilometers from the site epicenter, were completed. Naranjo (41 km distant) was brought under the sway of Caracol between AD 626 and 631, presumably to control Tikal (76 km distant)

territorially (A. Chase and D. Chase 1998a). And, a common identity involving tombs, caches, and dental inlays spread through most residential groups at the site (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003b). Prosperity was widespread based on artifact distributions. The site's population grew to well over 115,000 people.

From an epigraphic standpoint, the direct involvement of Site Q, usually now identified as Calakmul, in the Naranjo war of AD 636 (Martin and Grube 2000) must be questioned. Epigraphers have tended to meld the structure of the Naranjo text into a single statement, in spite of the fact that several clauses are clear and the warfare references Caracol (Figure 7). In a similar vein, a suggestion that the Naranjo hieroglyphic stairway originally came from Caracol (Martin and Grube 2000:92) is extremely unlikely. No texts of this sort currently occur at Caracol and the stone chip upon which Martin and Grube (2000:92) base their supposition could come from any number of possible carvings.

The epigraphic insistence on Site Q / Calakmul manipulation at Caracol and Naranjo needs further comment. At Naranjo, the earliest occurrence credited to Site Q on Stela 25 does not resemble a Site Q emblem. On Naranjo Step 6, the Site Q emblem is in a referential situation of unclear meaning. On Caracol Stela 3, the Site Q emblems always occur with passages of secondary importance; a non-Site Q 4 katun lord is noted in relation to the first penis perforation of K'an II and K'an II's accession occurs in relation to Caracol's Diety Triad (e.g., Kelley 1976). Elsewhere in this same text, K'an II is named as a companion (*yitah*) to an individual known to be a Site Q lord. Clearly, there are problems with the current epigraphic model that incorporates Site Q as a hegemonic empire based at Calakmul (Martin and Grube 1995, 2000). Even more telling

is the fact that all of the early Site Q references and "rulers" occur in the Peten of Guatemala, many at Caracol, Belize; for this same time frame, none are currently known from the site of Calakmul itself.

Following Smoke Skull's accession in AD 658 and Naranjo's war of independence from Caracol in AD 680, few hieroglyphic texts are preserved. Texts on Stela 21 record the capture of a possible Ixkun lord in AD 702 by an unknown Caracol lord. Textual dates on Caana's stucco once filled in some of this gap, but most are now gone. Some of the eroded A Group monuments may have been erected late in this timeframe, but for the most part the texts at Caracol are silent until nearly AD 800. However, archaeological remains from this time period are substantial and clearly indicate the prosperity of the site at that time. Nearly all of Caracol's residential groups are occupied during the late Late Classic Period. One painted capstone from a tomb in Caracol Structure A3 indicates that this building was renovated in AD 696. The stratigraphy from Caana also indicates extensive major constructions that date from this time period. In spite of a dearth of monumental records, this is not a period of decline and chaos at the site, but rather one of sustained population levels and, seemingly, stability.

At the inception of the Terminal Classic Period at Caracol, there is a resuscitation of monument erection. Texts indicate that there were a series of rulers at the site between A.D. 798 and A.D. 859 (the most notable being Makina Hok K'awil); all were involved in warfare and alliances with neighboring sites. Dissimilar to the preceding Late Classic Period, archaeological remains from the Terminal Classic Period indicate a clear split between the elite and the rest of Caracol society in terms of access to trade items (A.

Chase and D. Chase 2004c, 2005b). In fact, the difference in material culture is so great that it was originally thought that there was no Terminal Classic Period occupation in the outlying settlement, something that is now archaeologically established as not being the case. The Terminal Classic focus on rulership on Caracol's late monuments is a marked shift from 8th century practices. We have previously suggested that divine kingship disappeared from Caracol sometime after AD 680 (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003b). The use of a full vision serpent as the main iconographic theme on Caracol's Stela 18 (Figure 8) suggests that the latest elite were trying to recapture dynastic control. While the Terminal Classic monuments could be interpreted to represent the re-imposition of a strong dynasty at Caracol, the archaeological record informs us that it ultimately failed. Following the erection of the last monument at the site in A.D. 859, no more texts were carved – even though the elite continued to occupy, modify, and rebuild the downtown palaces for at least another 40 years. At the same time, Caana' Late Classic elite tombs were desecrated and then resealed, perhaps indicative of changed social and political relationships in Caracol's final years (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003a). Thus, again, the combined use of history and archaeology together provide for a clearer and richer view of the past.

Conclusions

The conjunction of history and archaeology at Caracol, Belize, is not a simple correlation. There are numerous places where either archaeology or hieroglyphs provide information and the other database does not. Archaeological investigations often encounter materials that contradict assumptions based solely on the presence or absence of glyphs. There are two primary periods of time when hieroglyphs and archaeology co-

occur at Caracol – the first during the 6th and 7th centuries and the second during the beginning of the 9th century. During each of these times, texts and archaeological data largely appear to be in agreement. However, there are times when the conjunction is not immediately apparent, but none the less fruitful.

The limited textual material in the early part of Caracol's history is not unusual among lowland sites and likely reflects both the date of onset of dynastic history and, at least to some degree, a lack of preservation of these remains. Those early texts that have been recovered are fragmentary and reference historic events rather than contemporary ones. That Caracol was founded in AD 331 is contradicted by earlier archaeological remains, suggesting that this was a subsequent dynastic founding (A. Chase and D. Chase 2006b). Archaeology is the driving force behind any Preclassic and Early Classic Period reconstructions for the site.

Late Classic Caracol provides two very different sets of evidence for the conjunction of history and archaeology. The 6th and 7th century texts delineate the actions of Caracol's Lord Water (Yajaw Te' K'inich) , Knot Ahau, K'an II, and Smoke Skull (K'ak' Ujol K'inich). In addition to accession, they also outline aggression first between Caracol and Tikal, and later between Caracol, Naranjo, and Ixkun. While the defeat of Tikal is noted only on Caracol Altar 21, the defeat of Naranjo is recorded in texts both at Naranjo and at Caracol, thus potentially confirming the reality of this event. While archaeological investigations are not able to identifiy the specific constructions of individual rulers, archaeological data clearly demonstrate that Caracol prosperity grew following each of these warfare successes (A. Chase and D. Chase 1989, 1996a; D. Chase

and A. Chase 2002, 2003b), just as would be expected theoretically (Otterbein 1973). Thus, history and archaeology are in agreement.

Perhaps most interesting, however, is the dearth of monuments during the 8th century. Interpretation based on hieroglyphs alone has been used to suggest that Caracol was not thriving at this point in time. Martin and Grube (2000:95) refer to this time as "Caracol's hiatus" and comment that "such hiatus periods are invariably a sign of political crisis" and that at Caracol "the trauma was clearly profound and prolonged." In contrast, however, archaeological data clearly indicate that the 7th and 8th centuries saw major construction efforts in the epicenter and that the outlying population enjoyed a time of great prosperity. Combined archaeological data, in fact, suggest the existence of a political system that was potentially more democratic and bureaucratic than preceding or subsequent times; archaeological data indicate not only prosperity, but also the existence of shared identity throughout the site. The lack of monument erection would appear to correlate with a decreased emphasis on dynastic rule, rather than on an economic or political decline. Thus, while the presence of textual history provides enlightenment concerning our understanding of the past, the lack of such texts cannot be axiomatically used to make the inference that some crisis occurred.

Both archaeology and epigraphy provide rich test-beds for a conjunctive approach. While Maya epigraphy, if well translated, provides an outline of history that some past elite wanted conveyed for any number of reasons, archaeological data cover areas not treated in the hieroglyphic record and can be used to rectify epigraphic interpretation. Hieroglyphs do describe relationships among sites and people; they can even provide explanatory tools for archaeological data. However, hieroglyphs do not

directly inform us about: ancient Maya trade and political economy; site organization, planning, and structure; the subsistence base; settlement and occupation; the day-to-day life of the vast proportion of Maya society; social structure and stratification; ritual organization and mortuary practices. Instead, hieroglyphic texts are restricted in time and space, applying only to a small segment of society. Using hieroglyphic data as the primary tool to interpret the past provides a very warped view of the ancient Maya, one that is often cloaked in Western ethnocentric terminology ("kings" and "queens"). Hieroglyphs constitute but one database, albeit a very appealing one filled with projections of intrigue and people; however, their use can be substantially augmented by contextual, iconographic, and linguistic considerations.

We cannot understand Caracol from history alone, as the texts sometimes provide a false sense of occupation and accomplishments. Assumptions or reconstructions from history need to be tested with archaeological data. Obviously, sites and time periods that are devoid of hieroglyphic texts clearly must rely on archaeology. While historic information may be appealing because of its focus on people and events, clearly the conjunction of archaeology and history provides the richest picture of the ancient Maya and must drive the future of Maya research.

Figures

Figure 1.   Map of Caracol, Belize, showing the settlement and causeways.

Figure 2.   Special Deposit C88C-1 from within Caracol Structure D16, showing excavation section, tomb plan, and a photograph of the tomb.

Figure 3.   Caracol Altar 21 (after A. Chase and D. Chase 1987a: fig. 27).

Figure 4.   Caracol Stela 1 (after Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981: fig. 1).

Figure 5.   Texts from Caracol Stela 3, showing the structure of the "arrival" statements and the fact that Batz Ek was only the observer.

Figure 6.   The Caracol Stela 1 locus from behind Caracol Structure A1, showing stratigraphic relationships between the stela, tomb, caches, and stucco statue; reconstruction, plan, and photograph of statue also shown.

Figure 7.   Text from Naranjo Hieroglyphic Stairway Step VI, showing the relationship between the star-war and the Caracol agent, followed by a second clause involving Site Q (Naranjo text block is after Graham 1978 and stairway photo is after Maler 1908).

Figure 8.   Caracol Stela 18 (after A. Chase and D. Chase 1987b).

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