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Interpreting Form and Context

Ceramic Subcomplexes at Caracol, Nohmul, and Santa Rita Corozal, Belize

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> Archaeology is in mortal danger of losing itself on the bypaths of abracadabra. There is precious little difference between the Maya medicine man mystifying his patients with muttered incantations and the ceramicist awing his scant congregation with still more esoteric names.
>
> Thompson 1970: xvii

The vast majority of artifactual materials recovered at Maya sites are broken sherds recovered from the fills of stratigraphic excavations. While whole vessels are incorporated into ceramic analysis, they are generally less plentiful than pottery sherds and, thus, are less likely to be the primary unit of ceramic analysis. Jeremy Sabloff (1975: 4) distinguished between the type-variety study of sherds and the modal analysis of form, noting that in most Maya ceramic analyses "the study of individual modes is either forgotten or relegated to a minor role." James Gifford (1976: 6) pointed out that ceramic analyses were "obliged to cope with large quantities of sherds and adapt the type: variety-mode approach to the *limitations* of the sherd collections" (our emphasis) even though "our conceptual scheme is based on whole vessels and culturally meaningful segments of vessels." For half a century, it has been primarily broken sherds that have been the focus of Maya ceramic analysis. Many site chronologies are based on type: variety-mode analyses of sherds, and many cultural reconstructions of ancient Maya society are also premised on these fragmented materials. But are there other ways of approaching ancient Maya pottery? As both Sabloff (1975: 4) and Gifford (1976: 6, 8) have noted, the answer is "yes."

The goals of type: variety-mode analysis are to categorize and label Maya ceramics to promote intersite comparisons (Sabloff 1975: 4)—and the use of a common system of nomenclature and illustration does permit this. But much

current research in Maya archaeology seeks to look at intrasite variability and to deal with questions involving social, economic, political, or ideological organization that are not easily studied using the type: variety-mode analysis, referred to hereafter as "t-v-m." Some analysts (for example, Gifford 1976: 5–6) have argued that emic units are discovered through t-v-m. In this view, the standards and practices of producers and consumers are manifest in the attributes of ceramic products, so the point of t-v-m analysis is not merely the creation of analytically useful classes (such as types) but also the discovery of patterned associations of attributes that inherently identify cultural ideas, practices, and even individuals or groups (see also Gifford 1960). In contrast, most ceramic analysts appear to agree that t-v-m does not discover actual cultural units (Adams 1971: 14) and that the analytic system was not designed to directly engage in social considerations (see Rice this volume). We also question the ability of t-v-m to identify emic stylistic units. The analyst's classifications of ancient pottery may or may not mirror ancient cultural considerations. While modern researchers may think that a major difference occurs between red-slipped and black-slipped pottery (even distinguishing this material at a higher-order "group" level), this may not have been of primary cultural importance to the ancient Maya consumer. While an analyst in the t-v-m system focuses on surface treatment and lumps together various forms based on surface characterization, creating separate types for incision, grooving, modeling, and other decorative techniques, the ancient Maya likely categorized these materials differently. We have no way of knowing what the ancient Maya considered to be important and should not assume that t-v-m automatically conveys any sort of ancient reality. Differences in categorization and inconsistencies in the use of t-v-m by analysts also mean that it may not always be "an efficient and effective medium for establishing spatiotemporal frameworks" (Ball 1979b: 830) and dealing with questions of chronology, one of its presumed strengths (as will be seen below).

In this chapter, we attempt to demonstrate the benefits of expanding Maya ceramic analysis to include alternatives to t-v-m analysis. We are specifically focused on the concept of ceramic subcomplexes—a culturally meaningful component of ceramic complexes (Willey et al. 1967)—as originally suggested by Joseph Ball (1977a) and subsequently modified by ourselves (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987a), particularly within the framework of the contextual review of ceramics as articulated by David Pendergast (1979). To better delineate the utility of ceramic subcomplexes within the study of Maya ceramics, we briefly review the advantages and constraints of t-v-m and then explore the utility of contextual ceramic analysis with materials from three sites in Belize—Nohmul, Santa Rita Corozal, and Caracol.

Stratigraphy and Ceramic Analysis

Not all stratigraphic sequences are equal; stated another way, multiple sequential floors do not necessarily a good ceramic sequence make. Sampling would be simple if archaeological remains were always evenly distributed throughout a site, but this, of course, is virtually never the case. Type: variety-mode analysis, like all analyses, is only as good as the archaeological data from which it was ultimately derived. If the sampling scheme was initially skewed or misinterpreted, so too may be any interpretations based on t-v-m. Complicated stratigraphic records may show evidence of continuous development but not necessarily what this development was or how and why it occurred. Detailed, constructed analytic sequences may not have much relevance to theoretical questions having to do with social process, change, or organization. While not the defined unit of t-v-m analysis, a complex stratigraphic sequence that contains multiple primary deposits in association with abundant ceramics is more easily ordered, analyzed, and seriated than a complex stratigraphic sequence consisting only of broken sherd material. Such primary deposits form the basis of our ceramic methodology.

The long-term excavations undertaken at Tikal, Guatemala, may be used to illustrate some of the problems involved in conjoining ceramic analysis and the archaeological record—particularly the impact of sampling, even at well-excavated sites. The University of Pennsylvania Tikal Project ran from 1956 through 1969 and constituted one of the longest-running projects in the Maya area (Coe and Haviland 1982; Sabloff 2003). However, in spite of the project's length and size—and even though complex architectural sequences relating to this era were excavated in the site epicenter (Coe 1990; Jones 1991)—the transition between the Late Preclassic and Early Classic period proved difficult to define in terms of ceramic subcomplexes (Culbert 1977, 1993; Culbert et al. 1990: 120; Fry 1990: 290, 297). The recovered sample included a series of Late Preclassic (Cauac) primary deposits, dating prior to A.D. 75, and a series of late Early Classic (Manik 3) primary deposits, dating to after A.D. 380 (Culbert 1993). In spite of 14 years of extensive excavation, no primary deposits were recovered with associated ceramics that could be dated to between A.D. 75 and A.D. 380. While sherds recovered from the secondary contexts could be used to flesh out a t-v-m analysis for this 300-year period (Culbert n.d.), the archaeological record had not provided a full ceramic inventory—making cultural interpretations relating to this transition difficult (Culbert 1977; Jones 1991).

A second Tikal Project carried out excavations at the site from 1980 through 1984 under the auspices of the Guatemalan government. This Proyecto Nacio-

nal Tikal concentrated both on Tikal's "Lost World" section of the site and on a series of residential groups immediately south of this imposing complex. The result was the recovery of a ceramic sample that largely filled the gap in ceramic data recovered by the earlier Tikal Project (Laporte and Fialko 1987, 1990, 1995; Laporte et al. 1992). These materials, mostly from primary deposits, fleshed out Tikal's prehistory between the years A.D. 200 and A.D. 380 and hinted at some even earlier transitional materials. But in spite of the intensive excavation programs carried out by these two projects over two decades, there are still no known primary deposits with associated ceramics from Tikal for the period of time between A.D. 75 and A.D. 200. It is evident from the many stratigraphic excavations that multiple construction episodes occurred during this time period, but the recovered ceramic sample (while defined in terms of t-v-m) does not contain ceramic materials from mortuary or cache subcomplexes and still remains incomplete. Thus, even after substantial excavation by multiple projects, the transition from the end of the Late Preclassic through the beginning of the Early Classic at Tikal—a time that witnessed major changes in ceramic content—is still not fully understood.

Subcomplexes

Ceramic analysis that is focused on material recovered from stratigraphic sequences by necessity most often uses sherd material from structure fills in mixed debris building cores rather than de facto use-related debris (Schiffer 1987). The analyst must sort and seriate materials that may be culturally mixed into categories with temporal and cultural meaning. A single fill context can include mixed ceramics of Preclassic to Late Classic date as well as a wide variety of fine wares and plain wares. Some archaeologists assume that a t-v-m sorting of sherd material from mixed contexts automatically gives you useful information about chronology and past Maya ideas, behaviors, and organization; this is emphatically not the case. David Pendergast (1979: 33) has noted that such practices "may in fact widen the gulf that separates us from the people whose culture we are studying"; he chose not to use t-v-m analysis but rather to focus on groupings of ceramics and artifacts left in the archaeological record by the Maya themselves. Our practice has been to use contextual analysis to identify archaeological situations from which meaningful artifactual associations may be derived (A. Chase 1994; A. Chase et al. 2007). Contexts suitable for such consideration include both purposefully placed and accidentally discarded materials. Unlike fill items, which are usually from secondary contexts divorced from their original cultural milieu, de facto vessel groups, which are recoverable archaeologically (and can be placed into the context of associated

formation processes [Schiffer 1987: 286]), often permit insight into issues of both contemporaneity and function. From an analytical standpoint, these culturally significant groupings of vessels have been called "ceramic subcomplexes," following their original definition in t-v-m (Willey et al. 1967: 304).

Ideally, many ceramic subcomplexes exist. The most common ones recognized by archaeologists are mortuary subcomplexes consisting of vessel sets that are found buried with the dead (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987b). Cache and *incensario* subcomplexes are also ritual in nature (D. Chase 1988) but often show minimal overlap with mortuary subcomplexes. Still other ritual subcomplexes have been recovered in association with caves (Brady 1992). These various subcomplexes exhibit a wide variety of forms, groups, and types, ranging from entirely fine ware pottery to entirely plain ware vessels to entirely ritual containers. Ideally, domestic subcomplexes should also be common in the archaeological record; in practice, however, such materials are often not found in primary use-related contexts, either due to sampling problems or because they were more usually recycled into fills and other areas of mixed trash disposal. When ceramics do occur as de facto refuse on floors, however, they can provide important clues for interpreting the use of associated rooms and buildings (D. Chase and A. Chase 2000; Inomata 1997; Inomata and Triadan 2000; Pendergast 1979). The subcomplexes formed by these materials are quite variable from locus to locus, presumably because of the range of activities that were undertaken and because of differences in ancient status and role. Although some researchers feel that on-floor in situ materials are rare in the Maya archaeological record, they are in fact quite common and even occur in stratigraphically buried contexts.

The overlap of vessel types and forms between ceramic subcomplexes that can be defined at a given site is often not great (being dependent on the vagaries of archaeological sampling and research). When overlap does occur, it is not always common (even in sites that have seen intensive, long-term archaeological research). Compounding this overlap issue is the fact that mortuary vessels may often be different from sherds recovered in fill materials. This is due both to temporal factors, in which earlier ceramic materials constitute the fills that surround in situ deposits, and to curate behavior, in which certain vessels are purposefully removed from the archaeological record to accompany these deposits (meaning that their probability of occurrence as fill material is significantly lessened).

While mortuary subcomplexes are sometimes discussed in the archaeological literature (Haviland et al. 1985), other subcomplexes are rarely defined, for a variety of reasons. They are often hard to find contextually in the archaeological record, as they usually require broader areal excavations in contrast to the

test pits so useful to t-v-m. When such deposits are located, they also involve more time and effort to reassemble sherds into complete vessels. Finally, earlier subcomplexes are especially hard to locate because subsequent rebuilding at any given site usually disturbs any in situ materials. However, in our estimation, such subcomplexes provide the primary way of gaining specific behavioral insights from the archaeological record relating to ceramics.

A broader question for the analyst is how to assemble the pottery contained within diverse archaeological contexts not only into a ceramic sequence but also into behaviorally meaningful units. While sherds can be temporally ordered with much work in a t-v-m analysis, this ordering does not reveal how they were used, what they were used with, what the relative frequency of an item really was, or if certain items were in fact restricted to certain levels or parts of a given society. Within a t-v-m analysis, sherds, and even reconstructable vessels, do not reveal what was behaviorally meaningful (Lyman et al. 1997: 117, 157); only the archaeological contexts—correctly interpolated—can do that. While inferences about production behavior may be made from a physical inspection of sherd materials and gross patterns of ceramic interaction may be made from a simple inspection of ceramics, t-v-m analysis by itself only organizes ceramics typologically. While conducive to facilitating interanalyst communication, the typological units that are produced are clearly divorced from any past behavioral contexts and considerations. The ceramic "complex" is difficult to relate to any functioning subcomplex or subassemblage of behaviorally meaningful vessels.

A case in point is the Floral Park complex of Barton Ramie (Gifford 1976: 51). While a "complex" by definition includes all of the existing ceramic materials during a given phase (Willey et al. 1965), the Floral Park ceramic complex includes only three groups (striated, unslipped, and orange-slipped); this combination seems rather unlikely given the group variety evident in the preceding Mount Hope ceramic complex and in the succeeding Hermitage ceramic complex. Thus, while defined as an analytical unit, the Floral Park ceramic complex is probably lacking both content and context. To a large extent, the interpretation of meaning is not only context dependent but also dependent on the analytical questions that are being asked and the kinds of archaeological samples that exist. Fill sherds can provide an idea of what is present in a sample and what the temporal parameters are but—in and of themselves—can only rarely be used to address other issues. Thus, while researchers have used fill materials to argue for various interpretations, from feasting (following arguments made by Hayden and Gargett 1990) to population numbers (following Millon 1973 for Teotihuacan) to status (following Ford 1991: 39–40), such interpretations are always problematic.

Schiffer (1987: 285–86, 359–60) has noted the "vast potential that ceramic reassembly holds for illuminating formation processes" while at the same time noting that "considerable caution" must be exercised when "using restored vessels as evidence of formation processes and past behaviors of interest," in case "other restorable pots were missed." In the cases presented below for the Belizean sites of Nohmul, Santa Rita Corozal, and Caracol, great care was taken in looking at and analyzing the total potential ceramic sample, both vertically (fill and humus overburden) and horizontally (entire sample for building and area excavated). Much time was spent looking for fits and reconstructable vessels through cross-mending and refitting to minimize the exact problems to which Schiffer refers. Related to these analyses was also a consideration of curate behavior (Binford 1979) to see what may have been missing from the given ceramic deposits. In light of the detailed refitting and cross-mending that was done, consideration of what was *not* present in a given deposit proved to be particularly informative.

Nohmul Structure 20

Investigations in Nohmul Structure 20 (figure 4.1) undertaken in 1978 provide an excellent example of the utility of conjoining contextual analysis with traditional t-v-m analysis. They also demonstrate the importance of analyzing nonsealed contexts within a broad spatial setting. Nohmul, Belize, is one of the largest sites known in northern Belize (Pyburn 1990: 183). Nohmul Structure 20 is located in the site's epicenter and is a "patio-quad" construction, a type of building most closely associated with Chichén Itzá, Mexico (D. Chase and A. Chase 1982), where it is thought to have functioned either as an elite residence (Freidel 1981) or as a men's house (Arnauld 2001). The structure measured approximately 15.6 meters square and was demarcated by base walls that defined a sunken interior court, which measured 3.2 by 4.2 meters. A single door exited the building to the west. Excavations demonstrated that the building was a late addition inserted into Nohmul's east-central plaza (D. Chase 1982b).

Investigations uncovered substantial ceramic remains (D. Chase 1982a, 1982b). Had the ceramics from this excavation been viewed solely from a t-v-m perspective, it is possible that the pottery—which included what were previously viewed as temporally distinct ceramics (southern lowland Late Classic and Terminal Classic types as well as northern lowland Early Postclassic types)—could have been segregated into more than one phase. Had this been the case, the resultant interpretations might well have suggested that the Structure 20 locus was in use for a substantial period of time. However, areal excavation, ceramic reconstruction, and subsequent contextual analysis indicated

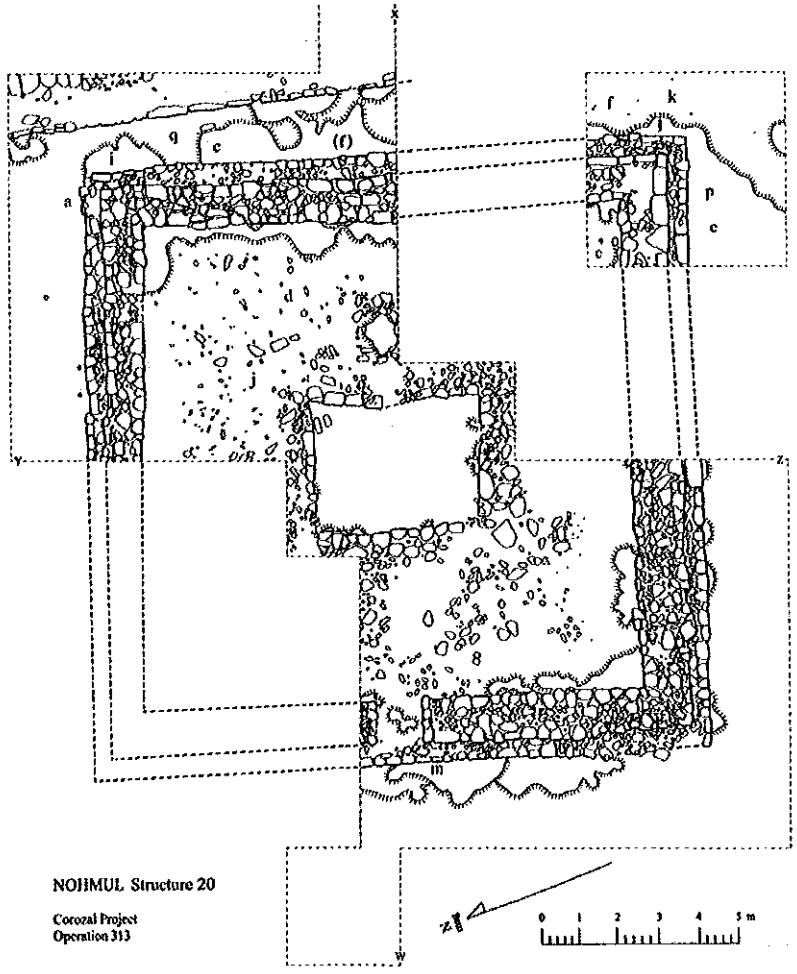


Figure 4.1. Plan of Nohmul Structure 20 showing location of recovered vessels. Letters on plan correlate with letters associated with vessels in figure 4.2. (Courtesy of D. Z. Chase and A. F. Chase, Corozal Postclassic Project.)

not only that all of the ceramics were contemporaneous but also that much of the garbage behind the structure was originally broken in the building's central courtyard. Analysis made it clear that artifacts were used within the building and, after breakage, were swept up and carried as refuse to the rear of the structure. There were sherd fits from a variety of locales about the building (on the floor within the structure, in the central patio, in front of and on the side of the structure) to the refuse at its rear, which appears to have accumulated relatively rapidly.

As a result of analyzing the refuse that was gathered from the floors both within and outside Nohmul Structure 20, it is possible to say something about the nature of an elite ceramic subcomplex of Terminal Classic date—or at least about the materials that were last broken and not removed from the building. The assemblage of pottery recovered in association with Nohmul Structure 20 included a wide range of slipped wares but also included some plain wares (figure 4.2). The majority of the pottery appears to have been oriented to the preparation, cooking, and serving of food and/or drink; however, the excavations also uncovered a ceramic musical instrument. Large vessels (Chambel Striated), presumably used for cooking, were recovered both inside the building and in the rear refuse deposit. A large striated serving vessel (Red-Neck Mother Striated), which probably held liquid, was recovered in the rear trash deposit, as were a variety of serving basins (Ohel Red; Campbells Red) and a large pedestaled dish or chalice (Kik Red). At least two large water jars (Sansomal Black-on-cream) were present. A smaller jar (Chacil Black-on-red) was also recovered. Three different kinds of small bowls (Kik Red, Savinal Cream, Metzabok Slate) came from the front and rear of the building; pieces of footed plates (Achote Black) were in evidence as well. A footed grater bowl (Xixilic Incised), or *molcajete*, also was part of this assemblage. Small double-mouthed striated jars (Buyuk Striated), which are quite common in northern Belize in the Terminal Classic (Sidrys and Krowne 1983), were present as well. Finally, over half of a very large drum (Chembeku Modeled) was recovered from the interior of the building.

The contextual analysis of the Nohmul ceramics not only permitted insight into the functional use of Structure 20 but also effectively showed the relationship between northern and southern lowland ceramic sequences (D. Chase and A. Chase 1982); this relationship was subsequently verified through reinterpretations of northern lowland ceramic sequences (Lincoln 1986). The Nohmul data supported a variant dating scheme for the alignment of these two sequences that was at one point controversial (Ball 1979a) but is now strongly supported by data from most northern lowland sites (Anderson 1998; Cobos 1999, 2004). The Nohmul data can be used to argue for total overlap in the Terminal Classic period (circa A.D. 800–900) with ceramic materials that were at one point placed substantially later in the Postclassic period in the northern lowlands. Again, these interpretive breakthroughs in aligning intersite chronologies come not so much from t-v-m but rather from a detailed contextual analysis of associated ceramics—and a focus on vessel reconstruction. As defined and championed by Gifford (1976: 21; see also 34–36) for Maya ceramic analysis, t-v-m methodology was not contextual but rather analytical: "[T]he chronology at Barton Ramie was derived

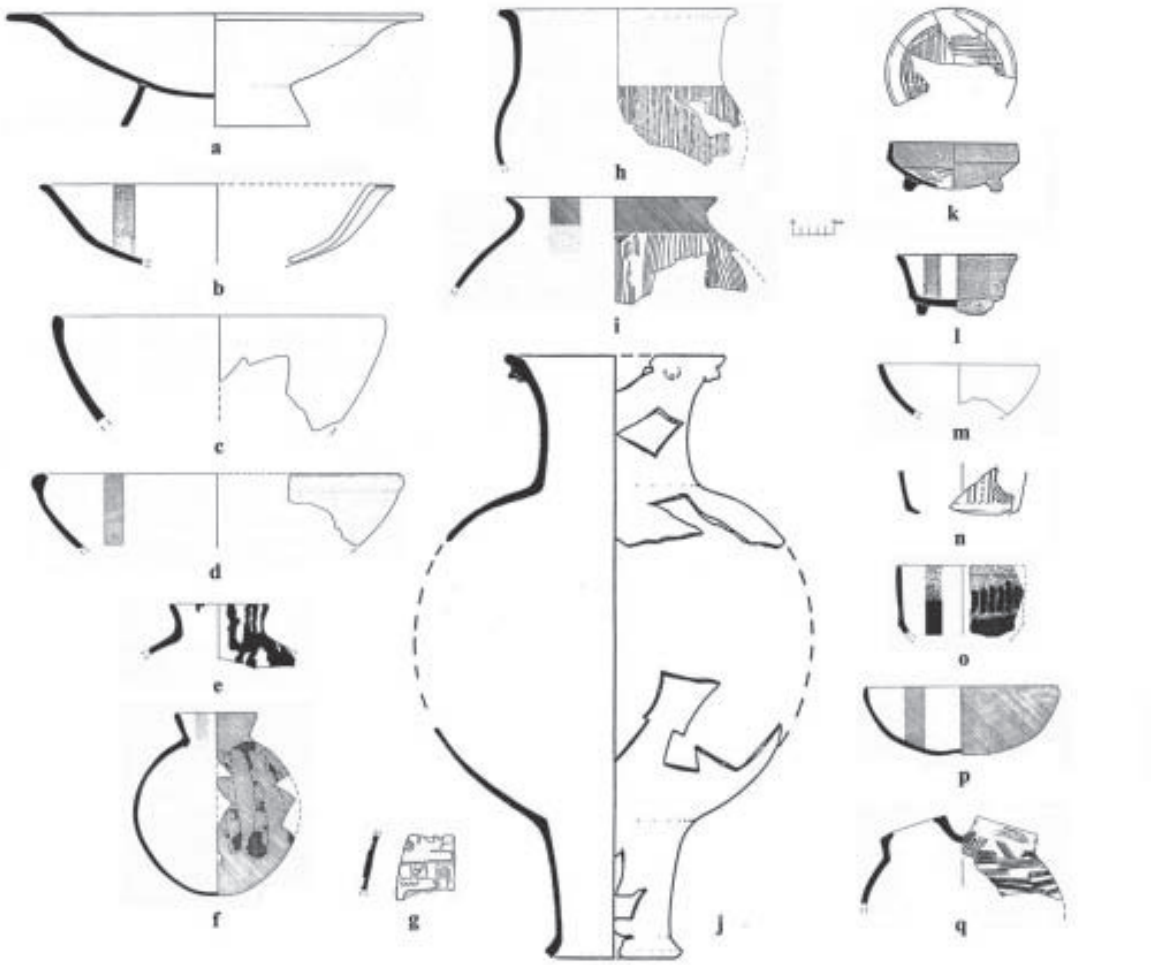


Figure 4.2. Vessels associated with Nohmul Structure 20: *a*, Kik Red; *b*, Taak Orange-red; *c*, Ohel Red; *d*, Campbells Red; *e*, Sansomal Black-on-cream; *f*, Chacil Black-on-red; *g*, Tzibana Gouged-incised; *h*, Chambel Striated; *i*, Red-Neck Mother Striated; *j*, Chembeku Modeled; *k*, Xixilic Incised; *l*, Metzabok Slate; *m*, Savinal Cream; *n*, Usukum Gouged-incised; *o*, Achote Black; *p*, Kik Red; *q,* Buyuk Striated. (Courtesy of D. Z. Chase and A. F. Chase, Corozal Postclassic Project.)

from ceramic analysis alone rather than from a consideration of 'constructional phases.'" Because t-v-m was explicitly operationalized as a taxonomic method for sequencing out-of-context fill materials at Barton Ramie, consideration of formation process (Schiffer 1987) has sometimes been neglected in the creation of ceramic complexes, meaning that temporal associations can be inappropriately established and inaccurate chronologies can be perpetuated.

Santa Rita Corozal Structure 81

The site of Santa Rita Corozal is located primarily on the bluff that overlooks Corozal Bay outside modern Corozal Town in northern Belize. It attracted early attention because of its extraordinary Postclassic remains (Gann 1900). The site is most likely the location of the Late Postclassic Maya capital of the Chetumal region (D. Chase 1986; D. Chase and A. Chase 1988: 65–68). Santa Rita Corozal Structure 81 was located in the northeastern limit of the site. It was the northern building of a formally arranged plaza group that was integrated with a raised acropolis area to its southwest (Platform 2; D. Chase and A. Chase 1988: 25–31).

Investigations were undertaken in Santa Rita Corozal Structure 81 during the summer of 1980. Excavations consisted of both areal clearing and axial penetration. Areal clearing revealed a multiroomed Late Postclassic construction that measured some 36 meters wide by 8.5 meters deep and was fronted by a formal terrace that extended for an additional 7.7 meters to the south of the building. Within Structure 81 were several interior rooms that were arranged around a central shrine room (figure 4.3). The shrine room contained a single

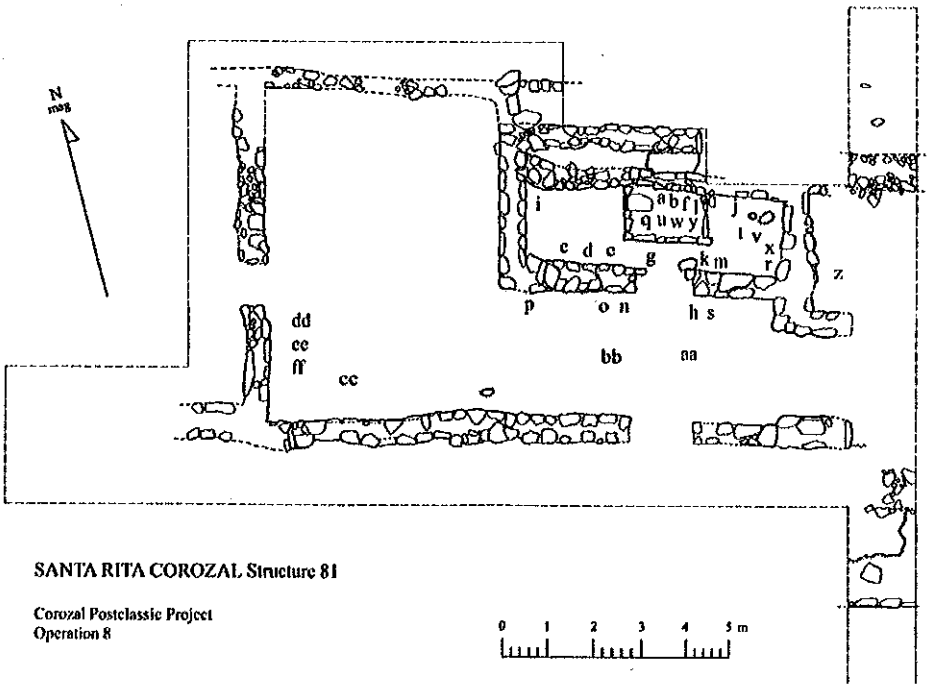


Figure 4.3. Plan of Santa Rita Corozal Structure 81 showing location of recovered vessels. Letters on plan correlate with letters associated with vessels in figure 4.4. (Courtesy of D. Z. Chase and A. F. Chase, Corozal Postclassic Project.)

formal door and had a constructed stone bench centered on its rear (north) wall. Contextual analysis of ceramics demonstrated that Structure 81 probably housed an oracle and that the narrow chamber or "alley" paralleling the northern wall of the shrine room was likely employed to provide cover for a hidden orator (D. Chase 1982b: 302–3); the form of the structure is, thus, similar to that of oracles noted ethnohistorically for Cozumel Island (Freidel 1975).

Substantial ceramic debris was located on the building's floors and within the construction core of the building. Although widely scattered, many of the ceramic materials located on the structure's floors could be reconstructed into almost whole pottery vessels (table 4.1; for distribution of the associated ceramics, see D. Chase 1982b: 259–88). It is only when t-v-m analysis is combined

Table 4.1. Sherds and vessels recovered from latest use of Santa Rita Corozal Structure 81

Ceramic group/type	No. of sherds	% of total	Non-vessel sherds	% of total	Vessel sherds	% of total	Total vessels	% of total	Sherds / vessel
Rita Group	1,418	36.54%	961	51.50%	457	22.68%	13	39.39%	35
Rita Red	1,262	32.52%	961	51.50%	301	14.94%	10	30.30%	30
Zanga Modeled	124	3.20%	0	0.00%	124	6.15%	1	3.03%	124
Kulel Modeled	32	0.82%	0	0.00%	32	1.59%	2	6.06%	16
Nucil Group	482	12.42%	0	0.00%	482	23.92%	3	9.09%	161
Nucil Modeled	93	2.40%	0	0.00%	93	4.61%	1	3.03%	93
Chontalli Red	247	6.36%	0	0.00%	247	12.26%	1	3.03%	247
Arroba Modeled	142	3.66%	0	0.00%	142	7.05%	1	3.03%	142
Cimatl Group	47	1.21%	18	0.97%	29	1.44%	1	3.03%	29
Cimatl Buff	47	1.21%	18	0.97%	29	1.44%	1	3.03%	29
Manta Group	37	0.95%	0	0.00%	37	1.84%	1	3.03%	37
Manta Buff	37	0.95%	0	0.00%	37	1.84%	1	3.03%	37
Cohokum Group	1,573	40.53%	683	36.60%	890	44.17%	14	42.43%	64
Kol Modeled	440	11.34%	307	16.45%	133	6.60%	2	6.06%	67
Santa Unslipped	1,078	27.77%	376	20.15%	702	34.84%	11	33.34%	64
Ayal Unslipped	55	1.42%	0	0.00%	55	2.73%	1	3.03%	55
Specials	120	3.09%	0	0.00%	120	5.95%	1	3.03%	120
Palmul Incised	120	3.09%	0	0.00	120	5.95%	1	3.03%	120
Other	204	5.26%	204	10.93%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Total	3,881	100.00%	1,866	100.00%	2,015	100.00%	33	100%	61

with the contextual analysis of the associated pottery that the activities in the Structure 81 locus may be reconstructed.

Type: variety-mode analysis of the pottery from the Structure 81 investigations appropriately reveals two different ceramic complexes. The fill materials sealed below the floor level of the Structure 81 supporting platform are mostly Terminal Classic–Early Postclassic in date (D. Chase 1982b: 252) and contain characteristic northern Belize types such as Buyuk Striated, Campbells Red, and Kik Red (D. Chase 1982a; Graham 1987); however, two caches purposefully placed in the building fill during construction establish the Postclassic dating for the building. The materials above the floor and intruded into the shrine room altar are Late Postclassic in date and include a majority of the Late Postclassic types identified for the Xabalxab ceramic complex (D. Chase 1982b, 1984).

If one were to make interpretations from t-v-m alone, the logical assumption would be the existence of two robust phases of activity, one dating to the Terminal Classic–Early Postclassic and the other to the Late Postclassic period. However, a contextual review of the ceramic deposition indicates a somewhat variant and far more detailed picture. First, contextual analysis makes it clear that the Terminal Classic–Early Postclassic materials—in spite of their abundance and the large size of the sherd pieces—were redeposited fill items in a Late Postclassic platform. They are not directly related to any earlier activity, as there was no earlier construction at the Structure 81 locus. In addition, while there is a dense concentration of large pottery sherds, few of these fit together as would be expected if the refuse was primary and use-related rather than redeposited. Second, contextual analysis makes it evident that the 33 reconstructable Late Postclassic vessels found in association with the use of Structure 81 do not represent a single abandonment event, but rather a protracted series of ritual activities (D. Chase 1982b; D. Chase and A. Chase 2000). In fact, ceramics were apparently left on the floor of the building even after initial breakage.

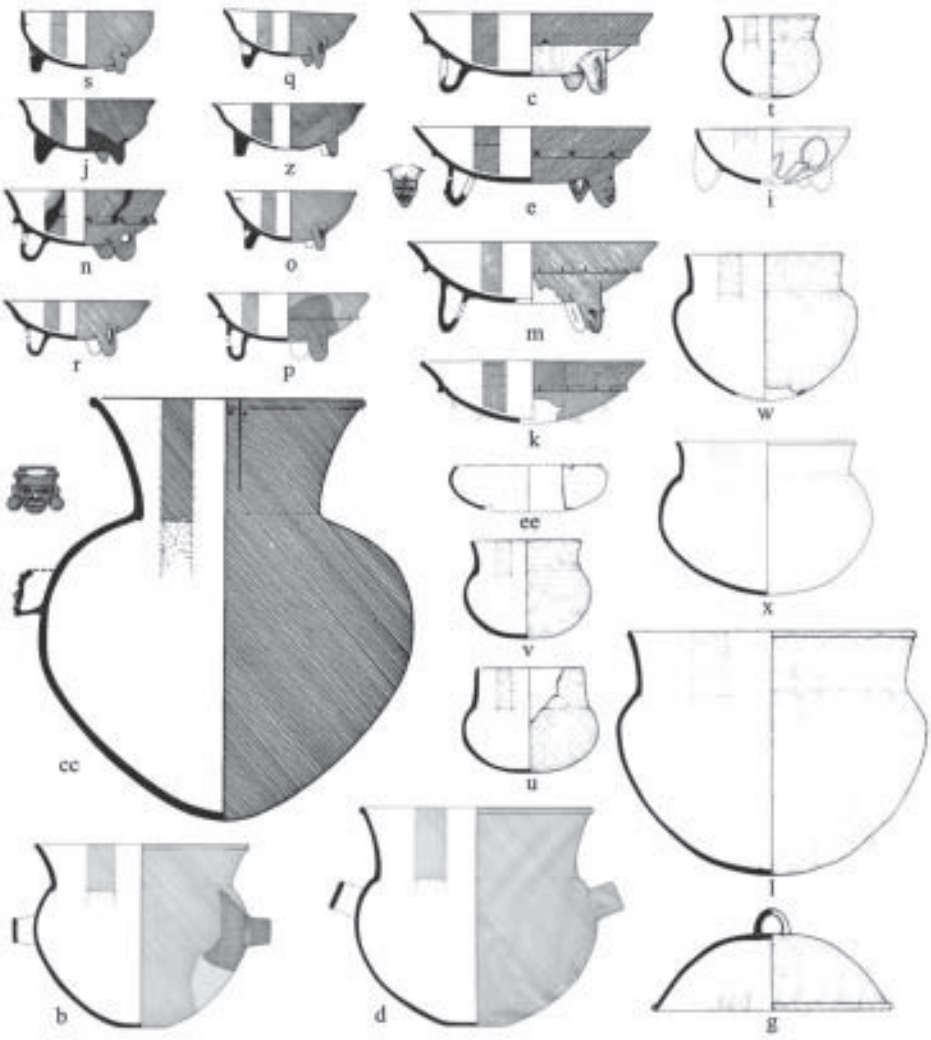
All of the sherd material that was excavated in the overlying humus, in the building collapse, on the floors of Structure 81, in between refurbished Late Postclassic building floors, and in pits cut through these floors—some 3,862 sherds—was processed according to t-v-m analysis. Analysis also considered the number of sherds in each reconstructable vessel. Thus, it is possible to examine the relationship between sherds and vessels (table 4.1; extrapolated from D. Chase 1982b: 624–39). These data reveal that almost half of the total sample of sherds recovered from Structure 81 could be refitted as vessels; other sherds recovered in excavation may have derived from some of these vessels but could not be securely fitted to them and thus were classified as "extraneous." An average of 61 sherds went into each of the 33 vessels that were cross-mended. As

expected (P. Chase 1985: 217), the number of sherds per vessel was partially dependent on the size, thickness, and complexity of the resultant vessel. Smaller red ware bowls (Rita Group) averaged 30 sherds per vessel. The larger and thinner red wares (Nucil Group) broke into the most vessel pieces, averaging 161 sherds per vessel. Unslipped vessels, which included effigy incense burners and various-sized ollas, averaged a fairly standard 64 sherds per vessel. However, there were "outlier" ceramics as well; Kulel Modeled vessels had an average of 16 sherds per vessel, while a single Chontalli Red vessel was reconstructed from 247 pieces. One hundred and twenty sherds of a partial Palmul Incised vessel were also distributed throughout the excavations; at least twice this number of sherds would have been necessary to reconstruct the ceramic piece; they probably exist in the unexcavated eastern portion of Structure 81. Rita Red Group ceramics made up 36.54 percent of the sample by sherd count and 39.39 percent of the sample by vessel count. Nucil Group ceramics made up 12.42 percent of the sherd count and 9.09 percent of the vessel count. Cimatl Group ceramics made up 1.21 percent of the sherd count and 3.03 percent of the vessel count. Manta Group ceramics made up 0.95 percent of the sherd count and 3.03 percent of the vessel count. Cohukum Group ceramics made up 40.53 percent of the sample by sherd count and 42.43 percent of the sample by vessel count.

These data demonstrate that while overall ceramic group sherd frequency can be correlated broadly (within 2–3 percent) with the actual number of recovered reconstructable vessels, certain types are more prevalent as complete vessels than their relative sherd frequency would indicate (D. Chase 1982b: 617–19). The differences between sherd and vessel frequency become more striking when types are considered. For Structure 81, the most extreme case of this can be seen in Kulel Modeled, which makes up 0.82 percent of the sample by sherd count but 6.06 percent of the sample by vessel count. However, none of the relative sherd or gross vessel counts by type reflect the functional forms of the vessels that are present or are lacking in the sample. Most significantly, when the partial assemblage is reviewed in detail, it becomes evident that no water jars or sherds from water jars occur within this building (figure 4.4cc is a specialized vessel; see below), thus confirming the nondomestic ritual use of Structure 81. Thus, while attempts to quantify ceramics by simple counts or weights are better than nothing, such quantification may not be fully representative of the composition of the actual assemblage or subassemblage.

Detailed analysis and reassembly of the vessels in association within Structure 81 (figure 4.4) resulted in the definition of four distinct groupings of vessels and additional reconstruction of the behavioral events associated with these vessels (D. Chase 1982b). These four vessel groups were, to some extent,

spatially segregated. The first vessel group (*n*=4) was located in the southwest corner of the main room. A set of three plain ware vessels that included two ollas and one shallow platter (thought to have functioned as a "roaster"; figure 4.4ee and 4.4ff [one not illustrated]) were stacked atop each other and had clearly been left in situ. In addition, most of a special-use large *tinajera* (Arroba Modeled; figure 4.4cc)—a tinajera is "a very large version of a *tinaja*, although the neck may be lower and wider" (Reina and Hill 1978: 26)—was located here; sherds from this vessel were also found in the shrine room. Together, these four vessels presumably formed an activity set, perhaps related to the preparation of an alcoholic drink (given the ritual function of this structure [as determined by the location of the interior shrine]). A second group of more elaborately decorated and larger vessels (*n*=9) appeared to have been part of a funerary ritual.



Some of these vessels (3 large red-slipped ollas [figure 4.4a, b, y], 1 red tripod bowl [figure 4.4q], and 1 unslipped olla [figure 4.4l]) were found only within a burial pit that had been intruded through the rear bench of the shrine room. However, other vessels that were included within this grave (1 red-slipped tripod jar [figure 4.4f], 2 unslipped ollas [figure 4.4u and 4.4w], and 1 red tripod bowl [figure 4.4j]) could also be refitted with sherd fragments from the floor of the shrine room; thus, they had been broken either intentionally or accidentally prior to their deposition in the grave.

By far the greatest number of vessels (*n*=18) made up a third grouping: these were found smashed, but scattered, within or immediately outside the shrine room and its doorway. While a large red-slipped olla (figure 4.4d) and a large unslipped lid (figure 4.4g) are included in this grouping, most were smaller

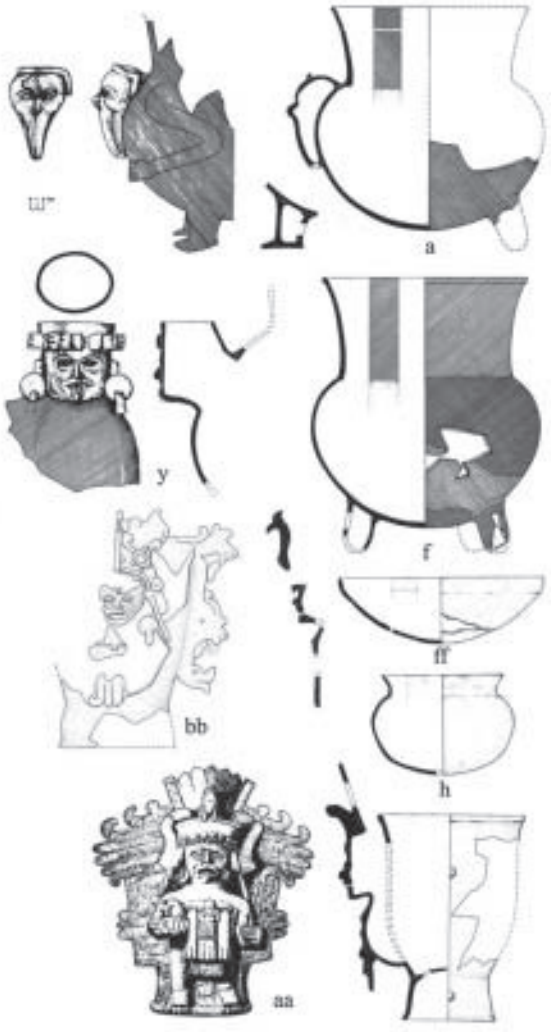


Figure 4.4. Vessels associated with Santa Rita Corozal Structure 81: *a*, Nucil Modeled; *b*, Rita Red; *c*, Manta Buff; *d*, Rita Red; *e*, Cimatl Buff; *f*, Chontalli Red; *g*, Ayal Unslipped; *h–i*, Santa Unslipped; *j*, Rita Red; *k*, Kulel Modeled; *l*, Santa Unslipped; *m*, Kulel Modeled; *n–s*, Rita Red; *t–x*, Santa Unslipped; *y*, Zanga Modeled; *z*, Rita Red; *aa–bb*, Kol Modeled; *cc*, Arroba Modeled; *dd*, Santa Unslipped (not shown); *ee–ff*, Santa Unslipped. (Courtesy of D. Z. Chase and A. F. Chase, Corozal Postclassic Project.)

vessels; six were tripod bowls (5 red-slipped [figure 4.4n, o, p, r, s] and 1 unslipped [figure 4.4i]), four were unslipped ollas [figure 4.4h, t, v, x], and four were red-slipped or buff-slipped tripod plates (figure 4.4c, e, k, m)—all presumably serving vessels suitable for holding offerings. One bowl (figure 4.4z) was located east of the shrine room. Virtually all of these ceramics were wholly or partially reconstructable, but again pieces of several nearly complete vessels in this group were found distributed in multiple locations and in more than one building room. Pieces of three of these vessels had been left smashed on the floor of the central shrine long enough to have been brushed, knocked, or otherwise located in the back "alley" of Structure 81 sealed below a plaster floor (*n*=2; figure 4.4j and 4.4p) and in the fill around a plaster-sealed cache pit (*n*=2; figure 4.4n and 4.4p). The fourth and final vessel grouping (*n*=2) consisted of a pair of effigy incense burners (figure 4.4aa and 4.4bb) that appear to have been placed in the main room in front of the rear shrine, possibly representing the latest activity at the Structure 81 locus. Elsewhere, similar *incensarios* have been related to calendric ritual and community organization thought to be correlated with *katun* ceremonies (D. Chase 1985b, 1985b; D. Chase and A. Chase 1988: 72, 2008). The effigy incense burners may also represent the physical idols that would have been associated with the postulated oracle that occupied the center of Structure 81.

The vessels and their pattern of archaeological occurrence are suggestive of accumulative ritual deposition rather than a single short-term abandonment event. The reassembly of this ritual subcomplex is also telling in what is present and in what is missing. Two effigy incensarios are present. Three large slipped collared ollas or jars, all with feet or handles, are present, and part of a fourth was also recovered. Nine tripod bowls (8 slipped red), four slipped and footed plates, and one large slipped tinajera are also present. Unslipped vessels include eight ollas of various sizes, one unslipped lid, and one roaster. Within this set of 33 vessels, however, several forms are lacking that would typically be expected in an elite domestic subcomplex. There were no water jars from Structure 81; there were no small jars; there were no grater bowls; and there were no drums or other musical instruments. These items were all included in the elite subcomplex from Terminal Classic Nohmul (see above), and all of these Postclassic forms are present in the ceramic materials recovered south of the adjoining Santa Rita Corozal Platform 2 (D. Chase 1982b: 318–50). From these data it is clear that the plentiful Structure 81 ceramic forms are quite specialized. Thus, contextual analysis provides functional information for the Structure 81 ceramics on long-term building use that could not have been determined through t-v-m analysis alone.

Caracol Epicentral Palaces and Structure A31

Caracol is one of the largest sites in the Maya lowlands. Located in western Belize high in the Maya Mountains, the city of Caracol integrated a settlement system that covered some 177 square kilometers (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994b, 1996). The site has been excavated by the Caracol Archaeological Project annually since 1985. These investigations have recovered detailed archaeological data from most of the epicentral temples and palaces as well as from over 120 outlying residential groups (A. Chase 1998; D. Chase 1998; field reports at www.caracol.org). A large amount of ceramic materials has been recovered from these investigations, and the outlines of the site's ceramic sequence have been presented (A. Chase 1994). Based on a consideration of these ceramic data, it is possible to tentatively identify palace and mortuary subcomplexes at Caracol as well as to examine spatial variation in the use of censer ware at the site (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004, 2005, 2007).

During the Caracol Archaeological Project excavations, on-floor debris has been recovered from many buildings at the site. At least for Caracol's palaces, these ceramics are remarkably consistent among the various contexts (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004, 2007), indicating that these materials were clearly coeval use-related assemblages and not a hodgepodge of various occupations (A. Chase and D. Chase 2008). That they are all Terminal Classic in date is clear both from the presence of recognized markers such as Tinaja Red tripod bowls and Sahcaba and Pabellon Molded-carved forms and from a consistent set of associated radiocarbon dates, all centering on approximately A.D. 895.

While both traditional and local Terminal Classic ceramic markers are easily recognized within t-v-m and are omnipresent in Caracol's epicentral palaces, they are relatively rare in outlying core area excavations. Although individual vessels, like those found in the epicentral palace ceramic subcomplex, have been found in many of Caracol's outlying residential groups, such vessels do not occur as part of a complete palace subcomplex in the outlying settlement (A. Chase and D. Chase 2005). While the relative absence of Terminal Classic markers in Caracol's residential settlement could be interpreted as a lack of Terminal Classic occupation in Caracol's core area, this would be incorrect. Areal clearing and substantial vessel reconstruction undertaken at the site make it evident that there are plain wares and censer wares that cross-tie the epicentral and core ceramic inventories but that the fine ware inventories are divergent. In fact, contextual analysis of Caracol's late ceramics suggests that traditional Terminal Classic ceramic markers form a status-linked ceramic subcomplex. This ceramic subcomplex, consisting of Terminal Classic fine wares (such as Sahcaba and Pabellon Molded-carved vases and Tinaja Red tripod bowls) that

are recognizable throughout a broad region of the Maya lowlands, is strongly associated with the final elite occupants of the site's epicentral palaces (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004, 2005, 2007; D. Chase and A. Chase 2000). Again, this interpretation would not be apparent from simply undertaking traditional t-v-m analysis alone, as such an analysis would have minimized the Terminal Classic Period occupation at the site.

An interesting variant of the Terminal Classic period palace subcomplex was found in an epicentral building excavated during the 2006 field season at Caracol. Structure A31 is located in the middle of the Caracol epicenter between the A Plaza and the Central Acropolis. Situated immediately northeast of the A Group ballcourt, Structure A31 formed a western focus for what was apparently a late epicentral group placed in what had previously been an open epicentral space. The companion buildings for Structure A31 were both low-lying platforms placed to the north and east of Structure A31 to form an irregular plaza.

Structure A31 was raised approximately 1.5 meters above the surrounding plaza level. No traces of a formal structure were found atop the raised substructure. However, the stonework associated with the substructure was very high in quality, and the stone step on the eastern side of Structure A31 was in relatively good shape (see figure 4.5). A trench dug through the center of Structure A31 found the building to rest directly on an underlying plaza floor and to have been constructed as a single event. The four corner areas of the building substructure were all excavated. No artifactual materials were found to the rear of the building or on its sides, but some 21 reconstructable pottery vessels were recovered to either side and in front of Structure A31's stairway (figure 4.6).

The recovered ceramic materials from the Structure A31 stairway area provide some clues as to the building's use. The location of one larger and one smaller brazier to either side of the stairway hints that a symmetrical relationship was necessary for the rituals that were carried out at this locus. The braziers themselves are unusual. The taller brazier (figure 4.6d) may have been imported from northern Belize; similar vessels are common at Lamanai (Graham 1985: fig. 4.5a), where they are most common in the Buk phase, currently dated from A.D. 962 to 1200/1250 based on a preliminary assessment of a suite of radiocarbon dates (Graham 2008); this Lamanai dating is later than the dating assigned at Caracol (A. Chase and D. Chase 2007: 21, 2008) and elsewhere in central Belize (Awe and Helmke 2007: 37). The paste of this Buk-related Caracol brazier was analyzed in 2010; Aimers (personal communication 2012 and this volume) suggests that it can be placed in the Zalal Gouged-incised ceramic system based on its stylistic similarity to vessels from Cerros and Lama-

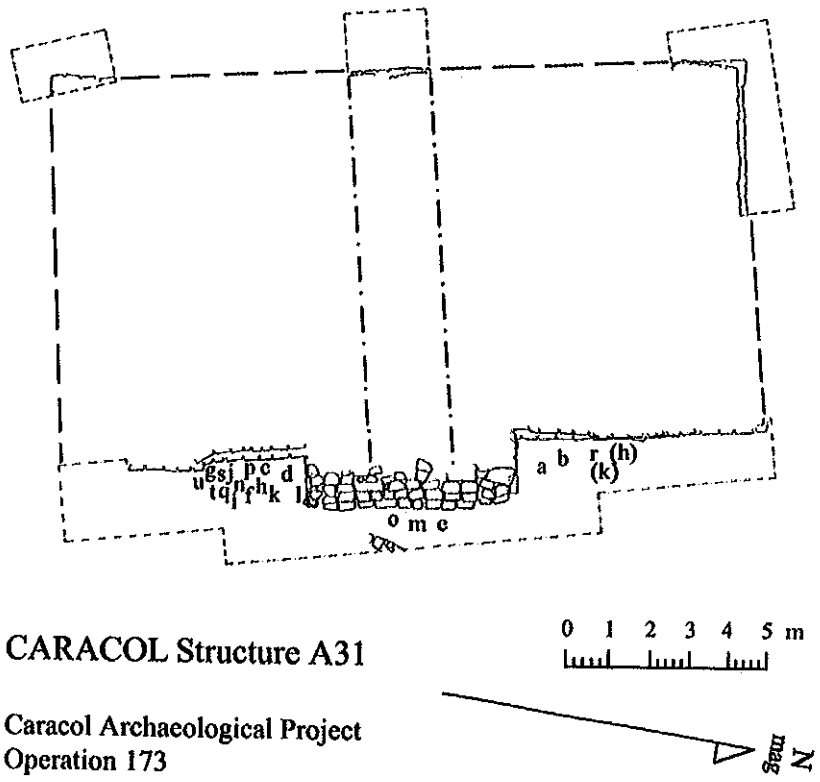


Figure 4.5. Plan of Caracol Structure A31. Letters on plan correlate with letters associated with vessels in figure 4.6. (Courtesy of A. F. Chase and D. Z. Chase, Caracol Archaeological Project.)

nai. However, the Terminal Classic context (with a late dating of approximately A.D. 900) of the Structure A31 vessel is clear (A. Chase and D. Chase 2007, 2008). The other globular brazier (figure 4.6a) is unique for Caracol but is related in size and concept to one recovered from the interior room of Structure A3 in 1985 (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987a: 14); similar braziers are reported as occurring at Isla Cerritos in the Yucatán (R. Cobos, personal communication, 2007). The smaller censers are also distinctive; one is a "fry-pan" type censer (figure 4.6c) of a kind found at Terminal Classic sites in the Petén region (Sabloff 1975), and at Chichén Itzá (Brainerd 1958); the other is a nonlocally made, fine-orange Mixtec incensario (figure 4.6b) that is widely dated to circa A.D. 900 throughout Mesoamerica (A. Chase and D. Chase 2007: 23). Thus, all four censers represent ritual items potentially manufactured outside the Caracol region.

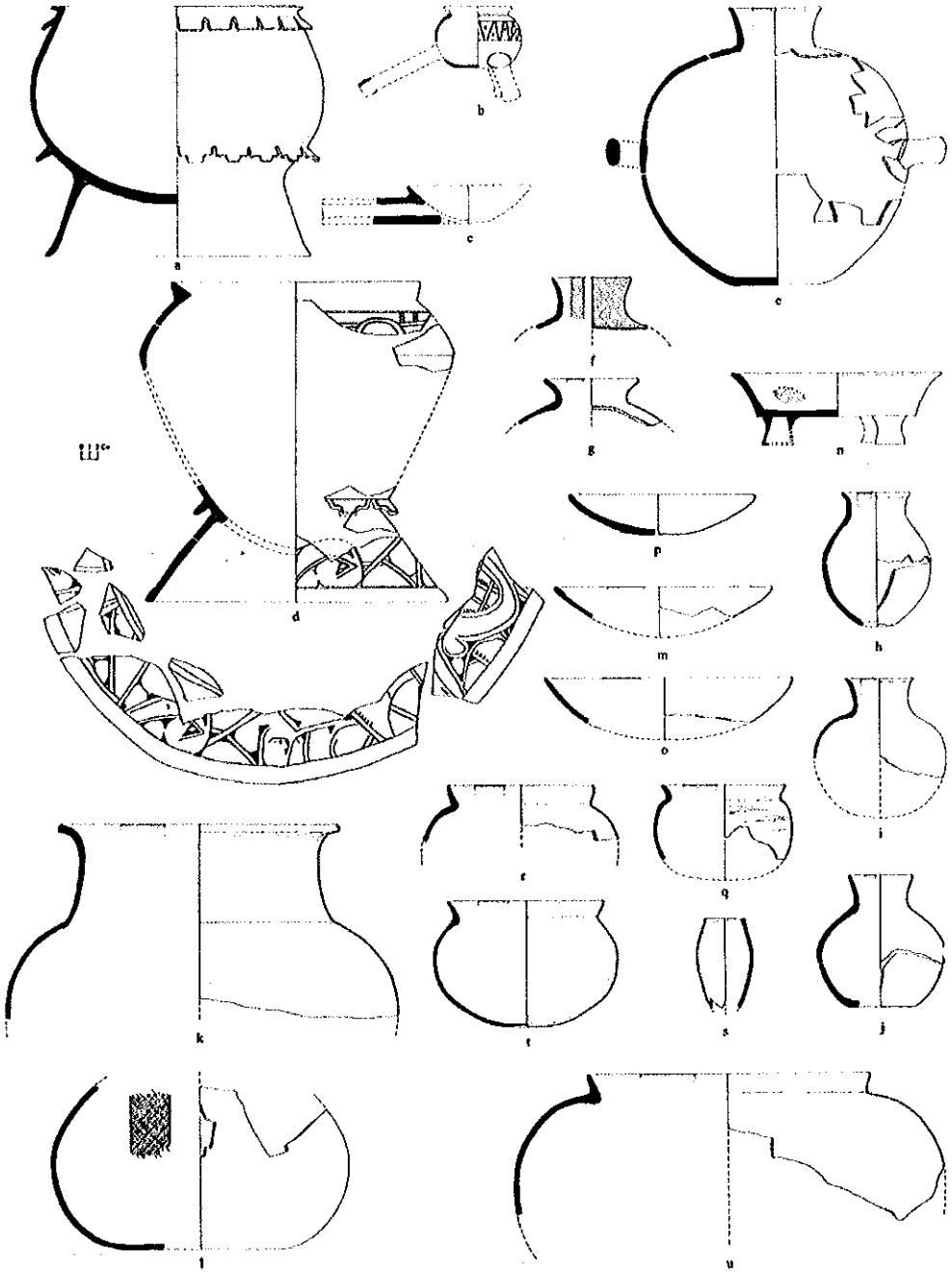


Figure 4.6. Vessels associated with Caracol Structure A31: *a*, undesignated; *b*, related to Altar Orange; *c*, possibly Miseria Appliqued; *d*, type possibly in the Zalal Gouged-incised ceramic system; *e*, undesignated; *f*, Tinaja Red; *g*, probably Valentin Unslipped; *h–j*, undesignated; *k*, Valentin Unslipped; *l*, possibly Infierno Black; *m*, undesignated; *n*, possibly copy of Altar Orange; *o–p*, undesignated; *q–u*, Valentin Unslipped. (Courtesy of A. F. Chase and D. Z. Chase, Caracol Archaeological Project.)

The other vessels from Structure A31 are also useful for interpreting function. Three larger water jars, one of which has handles on its sides, are represented in the collection, as are three smaller jars (possibly mugs). These six vessels indicate the use of a liquid in this vicinity. Four plain ware ollas, or cooking pots, are also included in the collections; these resemble later Postclassic ollas in form and rim treatment but are again of clear Terminal Classic period date (A. Chase and D. Chase 2007). One unslipped vessel may represent a small cup. Three round-bottomed dishes and one small plate with trumpet feet constitute the "serving" vessels. The tripod plate was once polychrome. Its diminutive size is appropriate for its Terminal Classic date. Its foot form and rim/lip treatment resemble examples from Chichén Itzá (Brainerd 1958: fig. 81). A rimless olla that was possibly burnt on its interior was also collected, as was a large storage jar that is modally similar to other Terminal Classic vessels recovered from excavations in the Northwest Acropolis (2006 field report at www.caracol.org).

Taken as a whole, the ceramics suggest that activities in the Structure A31 locus included both the preparation of food (that is, cooking) and the serving or offering of liquids. While some of these forms may derive from standard household goods, they are few in number and presumably represent containers used for ritual offerings in a nondomestic arena. The distinct assemblage suggests that this was a locus for specialized rituals that were not carried out elsewhere at the site.

The mix of ceramics found in sheet refuse associated with Structure A31 also points to the need to consider entire vessel units and not individual sherds in terms of dating (A. Chase and D. Chase 2008). Had the analysis been noncontextual and only analytically integrated (Gifford 1976: 21), these ceramics possibly could have been interpreted as indicative of a much longer use of the building. When combined with the problematic overlap among latest-use materials from palace floors in the site's epicenter and residential groups in the site's settlement that point to the existence of distinct but coeval ceramic subcomplexes, the importance of contextual analysis for determining contemporaneity of ceramics and estimating occupations during different timespans is abundantly evident.

Further Issues in Mortuary and Censer Ware Subcomplexes

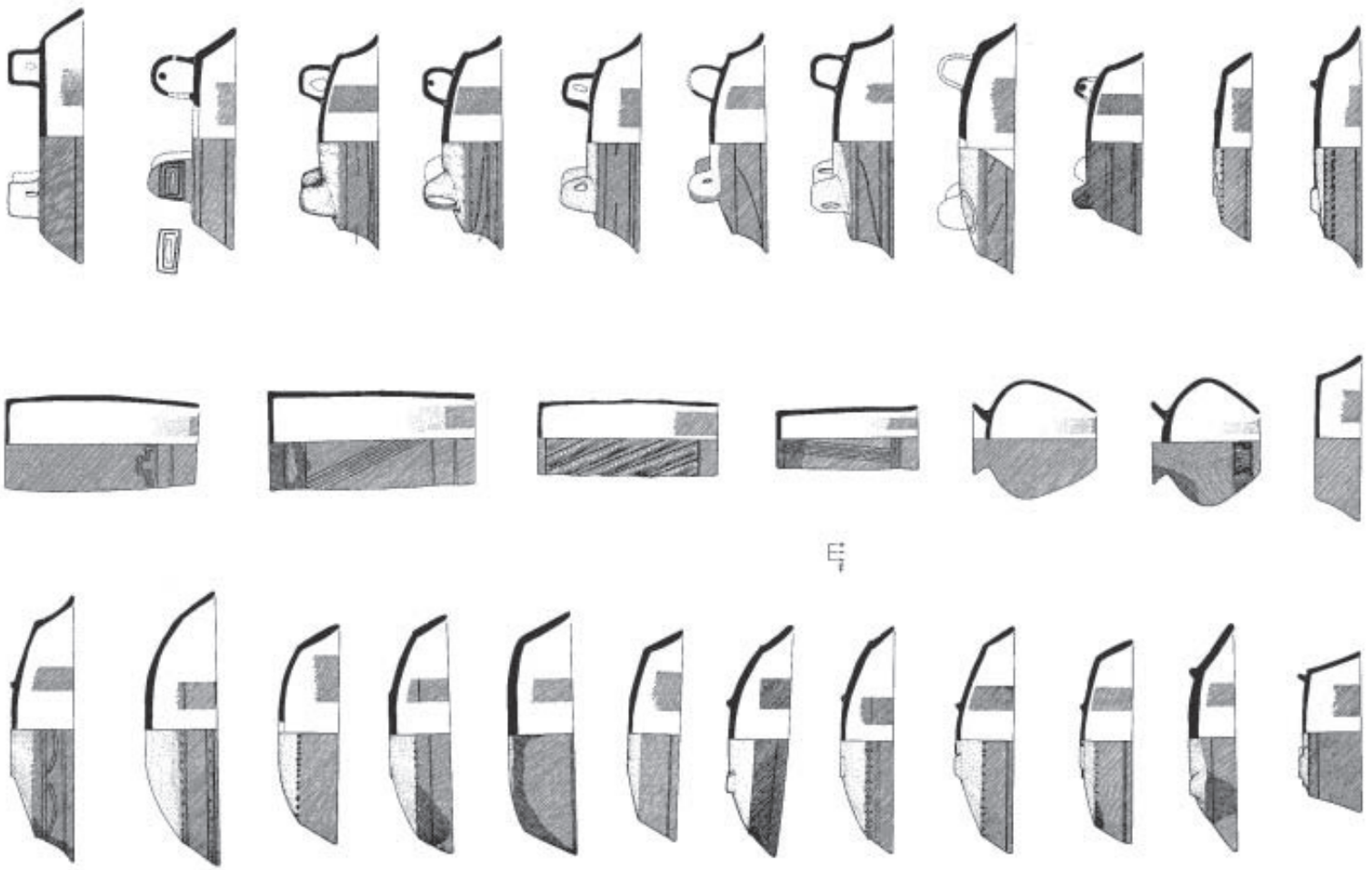
Caracol Archaeological Project investigations have uncovered more than three hundred interments; almost 70 percent of these burials have ceramics associated with them. As with the Tikal, Guatemala, sample (Culbert 1993), it is possible to use these contextual ceramic groupings to seriate other pottery that has been gathered from fills. Because eight tombs at Caracol are associated both

with ceramic offerings and with painted hieroglyphic dates, it is also possible to more securely date the internal Caracol seriation of the burial subcomplexes (A. Chase 1994). Such a seriation may be accomplished independently of any t-v-m analysis and helps to provide alternative datings for ceramic types as well as to suggest developmental origins for certain kinds of pottery. For instance, the ceramics grouped together as "Belize Red" (figure 4.7)—and first defined by Gifford (1976; Willey et al. 1965) for the Belize Valley—have a long history at Caracol.

Belize Red ceramics constitute an important part of burial offerings throughout the Late Classic era and may even have originated within the extended Caracol polity. Mend holes, or "crack-lacing," is a common occurrence within Belize Red vessels and sherds at Barton Ramie—"noticeably more in evidence than in connection with any other type ever represented at Barton Ramie" (Willey et al. 1965: 380). This could indicate that once these vessels were broken, it was difficult to replace them in the Belize Valley. The lack of mend holes in the Caracol ceramic sample (of both vessels and sherds) may indicate that the Belize Red vessels were more easily accessed in the Vaca Plateau than in parts of the Belize Valley. Even if not local in origin (A. Chase and D. Chase 2012), Belize Red vessels were available to most, if not all, households at Caracol throughout the Late Classic period, indicating easy access to, if not actual control over, at least one group of producers of this kind of pottery. While Belize Red sherds and partial vessels do appear regularly in construction fills at Caracol, the widespread occurrence of whole vessels of this type in burials and on floors of buildings also permits temporal faceting of its various form changes, something that would not be possible without contextual analysis. Thus, within the Caracol sample it is possible to demonstrate that the highly formalized concave-rim, sag-bottom plate is late Late Classic in date and that shallow vessels with thicker rims and nubbin feet are generally earlier in the sequence (A. Chase and D. Chase 2012).

Another example of the utility of contextual analysis can be found in the dating of vases as a form class at Caracol. Traditionally, polychrome cylinder vases were used as late Late Classic markers in the Petén (for example, Coggins 1975), but this form spans the entire Late Classic period at Caracol and can be faceted into earlier and later versions (like the Belize Red vessels). Earlier versions are consistently much shorter in height, broader in diameter,

Figure 4.7. (*facing page*) Sample of Belize Red vessels recovered from Caracol, Belize, illustrating possible standardization within different forms. (Courtesy of A. F. Chase and D. Z. Chase, Caracol Archaeological Project.)



and more cuplike than the later vases. Thus, contextual analysis not only may provide functional information but also can be used to refine existing ceramic chronology.

Other classes of ceramics also may provide useful interpretations when considered contextually. Censer ware is sometimes included in t-v-m analysis (Adams 1971; Sabloff 1975; Smith 1971), and sometimes it is excluded (Gifford 1976; Culbert 1993 [but see Ferree 1967]). Regardless, censer ware can be difficult to analyze. Most of it is encountered in very fragmented form and is notoriously hard to piece together, which makes identifying variations in form and decoration difficult. In spite of presumed ideological connotations, we do not know exactly how incensarios were used within Classic period Maya society. In general, incensarios are thought to correlate predominantly with site centers, large architecture, and the elite (P. Rice 1999). At Caracol, incensario pieces are present in many non-epicentral excavations, and entire effigy censers are sometimes found on the stairs of buildings in "less-than-elite" residential housemound groups (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994b). However, multiple kinds of censers also existed at any one time at Caracol (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987a: fig. 9; 2004: figs. 16.4a, 16.5, 16.7c, 16.8), and there is great variability in the censer form, even though some imagery is repeated among forms. Contextual analysis suggests that Caracol's censers served several distinct functions. The majority of the censers that are reconstructable appear to have been associated with the latest use of buildings, having been left either singularly or in pairs either at the base of stairways for shrines or temples or within the summit buildings prior to abandonment. Other reconstructable censers were included within burials as offerings, again either singularly or in pairs. There are also some archaeological indications that censers were used in association with some household or domestic subcomplexes. And because of the contextual focus and the emphasis on vessel reconstruction, the Caracol data also suggests that some of the materials that are traditionally called "incensarios" within t-v-m or other analyses may actually be more mundane decorated "burners" that were used for general cooking purposes within residential groups (see also Ball and Taschek 2007b).

A similar contextual consideration of censer ware at Santa Rita Corozal (D. Chase 1988; D. Chase and A. Chase 1998, 2008) also demonstrates that multiple kinds of censers were used simultaneously (figure 4.8) and, as at Caracol, sometimes preserved in situ as remnants of the latest preabandonment activity at a given locus. Additionally, Late Postclassic effigy hourglass incensarios found at Santa Rita Corozal (for example, figure 4.4aa and 4.4bb) did not merely represent the willy-nilly deposition of a plethora of Maya deities but rather were idols that were purposely created and purposefully deposited in

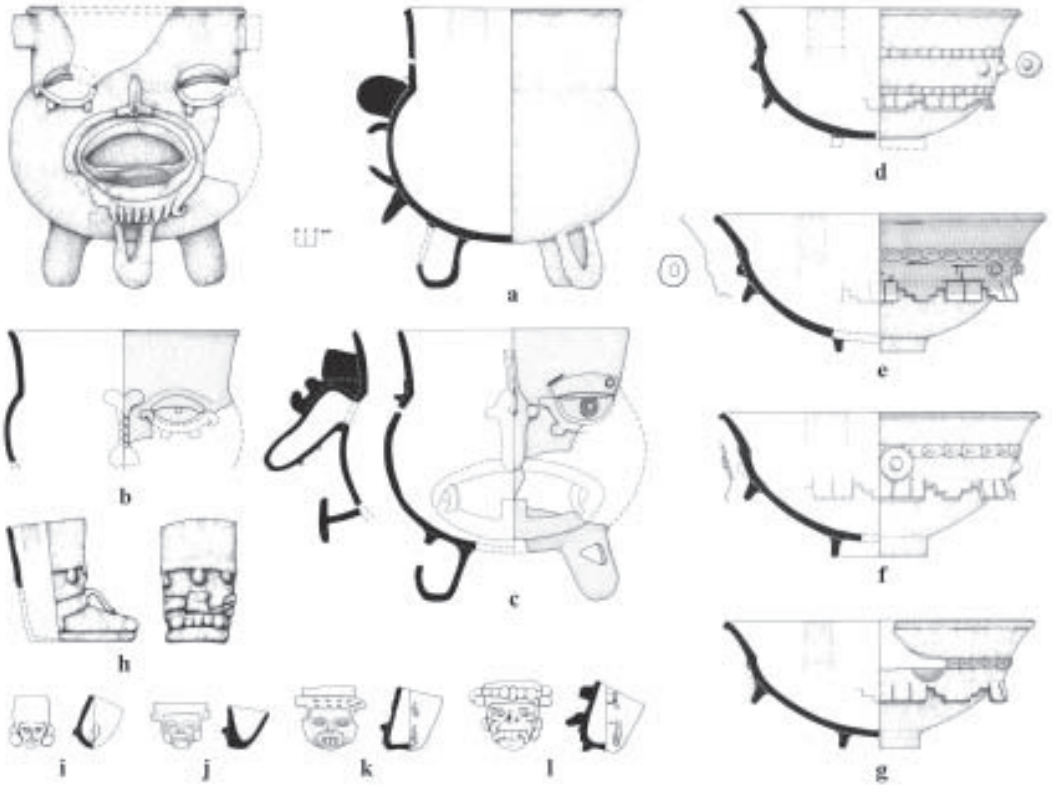


Figure 4.8. Pottery classified as "censer ware" from Santa Rita Corozal (see also figure 4.4aa and 4.4bb). Even though this is a single analytical category, the great variability of vessel forms is suggestive of specific multiple ritual functions. (Courtesy of D. Z. Chase and A. F. Chase, Corozal Postclassic Project.)

the archaeological record—most likely as part of calendric ritual (D. Chase 1985a, 1985b, 1986; D. Chase and A. Chase 1988, 2008). Traditional t-v-m analysis was not designed to draw these kinds of functional distinctions.

Conclusion

For better or worse, the current implementation of the type: variety-mode system of ceramic analysis in the Maya area is ready to be revamped. Rather than suggesting a completely new analytic framework, however, we would suggest the integration of t-v-m analysis with contextual analysis focused on reconstructable vessels, whenever possible. The process of ceramic analysis in the Maya area has become somewhat formulaic with many analysts assigning types and making counts with little attention paid to contextual and functional

meaning. Without knowing exactly what vessel forms are present in a given context and what grouping of vessels constitute that context, analysts have difficulty placing the ceramics into a cultural milieu, which complicates the delineation of ceramic exchange and the interpretation of stylistic interaction. The focus on sherds, rather than on whole vessels or contexts, means that we have minimized the possibility of cultural interpretation, sometimes limiting expectations to the identification of types and varieties. Part of this focus is due to the need to process bulk ceramic material that has been excavated and is sometimes driven by permit requirements to analyze materials quickly and to develop type collections for viewing in national or regional collections (as in Mexico). But, as noted by Gifford (1976) in his influential conceptualization of t-v-m analysis, there is an abundance of sherd material in the archaeological record in comparison to whole vessels. And while detailing the multitude of sherd materials from an analytical standpoint was difficult enough, there also existed a not-always-correct assumption that a focus on reconstructable vessels encountered in specific subcomplexes would provide an incomplete ceramic picture or inhibit intersite comparisons. However, most collections of sherds, even those gathered by long-term large-scale projects and subjected to many years of analysis (such as those from Barton Ramie), represent only partial samples of the actual past. Thus, contextual analysis of recovered ceramics and a focus on recovering subcomplexes can substantially bolster traditional t-v-m analysis and potentially provide substantial alternative information relative to dating and cultural interpretations. Issues of mixed contexts, uneven breakage of sherds among forms and/or types, the probable existence of distinct and contemporaneous ceramic subcomplexes, and the functional analysis of ceramic materials are all easily masked when using t-v-m alone.

This chapter is not suggesting the abandonment of t-v-m analysis, which is still useful and necessary, especially in considerations of sherd-only collections and in comparisons among sites. Rather, we argue that Maya ceramic study can greatly benefit from additional modes of analysis that are specifically designed to develop and augment cultural interpretations. The examples selected here highlight the utility of combining contextual analyses and subcomplexes with more traditional t-v-m analysis as a means of making detailed functional and chronological interpretations that would not be possible through the use of t-v-m analysis alone.

Acknowledgments

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