

## **Patterns of Burial and Residential Cycles at Caracol, Belize**

Diane Z. Chase and Arlen F. Chase  
University of Central Florida

paper prepared for the Fourth Mesa Redonda de Palenque, June 2002

Maya interments encountered in the archaeological record most often are seen as having resulted from funeral rituals focused on the diseased individual, particularly as related to that individual's veneration and progression in the afterlife. An alternative view argues that many Maya interments must be viewed as dedicatory to the construction, completion, or termination of specific buildings, especially those structures that can be assigned a ritual or public function. Clearly, these different viewpoints concerning Maya interments have at their base very different functional interpretations. Within this paper, we propose yet a third possibility – that, at some sites and particularly in the Late Classic Period, interments may have been episodic events, not predominantly or solely contingent upon the life-spans of individuals or constructions, but rather intimately associated with the passage of time and/or the determination of auspicious times for interment.

One difficulty encountered in the interpretation of ancient Maya burials is the relative scarcity of individual human remains found in the archaeological record as compared to the total reconstruction of population numbers for both residential groups and sites (e.g., D. Chase 1990:207; 1997:25-26). A curious phenomenon exists in Maya mortuary archaeology. While many spectacular large Maya sites with extensive long-term settlement have been mapped and partially excavated and while huge populations are posited to have once existed at these centers and throughout the ancient Maya world (Santley 1990; Turner 1990), the number of formally buried skeletal remains that have

been archaeologically recovered is not all that impressive. Indeed, the total of 588 Historic burials recovered between 1982 and 1987 in association with the Spanish church at Tipu, Belize – a graveyard that was in use for between 71 to 163 years and that did not embrace all of the small Tipu community (Cohen et al. 1997:79-80) – exceeds the burial totals from the intensively excavated sites of Tikal, Guatemala (ca. 217 formally designated burials in 14 years of excavation by the University of Pennsylvania; Coe and Haviland 1982; Culbert 1993:29-30) and Caracol, Belize (ca. 255 burials after 18 years of excavation; see D. Chase 1994, 1998) – sites that were in existence for over 1500 years. This mismatch between archaeologically recovered interments of Late Classic date and population projections in the Maya area is a phenomenon that requires further investigation.

The magnitude of the discrepancy between the number of archaeologically recovered burials and the estimated population, however calculated (by structure or by group), is so great as to indicate that we do not have anything approaching a representative burial sample for any Late Classic era site (D. Chase 1997). Even if methods for the establishment of ancient population numbers are incorrect, the number of interments in well-excavated residential groups at sites like Caracol and Tikal only approach between 5 to 10 % of the individuals who once would have lived there (D. Chase 1997:25-26). The problem is even more complicated because the Late Classic Maya do not appear to have used cemeteries (Becker 1992:185). Thus, there is no simple way to recover a representative burial sample.

One possible interpretation for this disparity is that only the most revered ancestors were interred in a residential group. This interpretation often has been made

for individuals buried in ritual buildings and usually has been linked to the Maya practice of ancestor worship (M. Coe 1956, 1988; McAnany 1995). However, there is evidence that suggests that this may not always have been the case. There is remarkable variation in the kinds of interments and in the efforts expended in their creation; a single structure may house several interment types, ranging from a burial in an elaborate chamber to the simple inclusion of a person in a building's fill. There also may be substantial variability between interments in a structure with regard to associated offerings. In addition, interments not only include males, but may also contain females, subadults, and individuals that have been interpreted as sacrifices.

Another possible interpretation of Late Classic Maya burials is that interments were dedicatory to the construction of buildings or building stages (see W. Coe 1990:916, 1918; Haviland 1981); thus, very few were required to consecrate a building. "Many Maya burials may have been viewed by the makers as offerings to the temples covering them, rather than that the temples served as monuments to the people interred beneath them" (Becker 1992:191). While this may have been the case in some situations, it cannot be the explanation for the patterning of all or most interments. Some constructions contain no interments; others contain numerous interments. In addition, dietary and other evidence, at least for Caracol, suggests that there are status differences among interred individuals that may be significant in burial patterning (A. Chase et al. 2001:111-116) and in correlating many interments with the residents of plazuela groups.

A search through ethnohistoric references provides little help in explaining the disparity between the number of individuals in interments and the reconstruction of population estimates, but does suggest that interments are not dedicatory to buildings;

these data rather suggest that the process of building abandonment could be related to the interment of individuals. Landa notes that the Colonial Maya “had a great and excessive fear of death,” which caused them to carry out many rituals for their gods (Tozzer 1941:129). According to Landa (Tozzer 1941:130): the Maya tended to bury their dead inside or in the rear of their houses, usually with food offerings and professional objects; unless the house was occupied by a great number of people, it was usually abandoned after burials were made; the nobility were cremated and their ashes were placed within urns or pottery statues, above which were built temples; the highest sector of Maya society also cremated the dead, placing the ashes in wooden statues but sometimes separately preparing the skull as a keepsake, all of these items being placed within oratories with other idols. These ethnohistoric references to the interment of most of the population within or behind their houses is severely disconnected from the limited burial sample recovered archaeologically through the excavation of such locales in the Classic Maya lowlands.

Ethnographic studies among the Maya (e.g., Vogt 1969) provide information on beliefs about death, progression to the afterlife, and the need to revisit gravesites (especially as related to the Day of the Dead). However, these studies do not provide any direct insight into the patterning of the more limited burial episodes found in the archaeological record.

A detailed consideration of the some 255 interments of over 456 individuals from the site of Caracol, Belize suggests a strikingly different interpretation. For at least one part of the Maya lowlands, during at least one segment of time (the Late Classic Period), the majority of interments appear to have been placed at regular intervals rather than in

direct relation to the death of specific individuals, potentially during what were perceived by the Maya to have been auspicious periods of time. These auspicious times appear to have been at intervals that are roughly half a century apart. In subsequent parts of this paper, we will outline: first, the basic data from Caracol; second, the evidence for temporally patterned interments; and, finally, interpretations that derive from this patterning.

### **THE INTERMENTS OF CARACOL, BELIZE: BASIC DATA**

Excavations by the Caracol Archaeological Project began in 1985 and are ongoing. These investigations have led to a reconstruction of Late Classic Caracol as an extremely large Maya city that was spread over 177 sq km and contained approximately 115,000 people (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994a:5). The site was integrated by a series of causeways that linked outlying administrative nodes directly to the epicenter (A. Chase 1998; A. Chase and D. Chase 2001a).

Archaeological research at Caracol has recovered 255 interments from both the site epicenter and the site core; some excavated interments are located over 4 km from the site epicenter. Past investigations within the site's settlement have included salvage work on looted buildings, opportunistic sampling of collapsed tombs, and the purposeful excavation of structures and, occasionally, entire groups. Some archaeological data exist for a total of some 108 residential groups at Caracol, the majority of which date to the Late Classic Period. These residential groups vary in both group and structure size; some only consist of 2 or 3 low buildings on an agricultural terrace; others are raised acropoli containing more than a dozen structures. There is substantial variability within the

interments that have been recovered in these groups, although even the small groups often have tombs and other deposits (D. Chase 1998:fig. 3).

While Caracol may be best known for its many tombs, 60% of its burials are in non-tomb contexts and are classified as being “simple” (placed directly within structure or plaza fill), “cist” (with a formal grave being dug and refilled), or “crypt” (small formal stone lined and capped grave, usually open air). Some 46% of Caracol’s burials contain multiple individuals (D. Chase and A. Chase 1996:63). At Caracol, these multiple burials were often deposited in a single event and contain a central articulated individual accompanied by other bundled and partial individuals. However, the articulated and disarticulated or partially articulated human remains suggest that recovered interments were not always immediate or primary. Previously, this pattern has been suggested as being indicative of a double funeral process, whereby human remains were treated in a two-stage process with final burial often occurring a considerable period of time after the death of the individual (D. Chase and A. Chase 1996:77).

Stable isotope analysis has been undertaken on a sample of 85 individuals from various burials at Caracol. Such analysis indicates the relative amounts of protein and maize that comprised an ancient diet (White and Schwarcz 1989). When combined with the contextual placement of interments, it becomes evident that diet and status at Caracol were linked. Individuals who were buried in the temples associated with the site’s epicentral palaces had the best diets – those high in both protein and maize (A. Chase and D. Chase 2001b:129-131). These data may also be used to see status differences within the site. Individuals associated with the ends of causeways had diets similar to and, in some cases, better than those associated with the downtown palaces. Support

populations, apparently not producing food of their own, were located immediately outside of the site epicenter and had the worst diets (A. Chase et al. 2001). The people who lived in the midst of Caracol's agricultural fields had diets in between the two extremes (D. Chase et al. 1998). These patterns have been used to suggest that the urban occupation of ancient Caracol was in some ways similar to the concentric patterning of relatively modern cities as described by Burgess (1923). Stable isotope analysis also has aided in identifying human sacrifices at Caracol (A. Chase et al. 2001:113-114).

The strong relationship between burials and the eastern buildings of Caracol's residential groups was recognized almost from the onset of the Project (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:54-57). Excavation of collapsed tombs that occurred in these eastern buildings was initially combined with axial plaza tests in front of these structures. These plaza excavations invariably yielded burials and caches (Jaeger 1991). Tombs were also found to have entryways for ease of access and some were devoid of any contents. Thus, clear ritual patterns were recognized within the Caracol data (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994b). Further excavation undertaken over the years has again and again demonstrated that eastern buildings are more likely to contain caches and burials than any other construction within a residential group. Eighty-five per-cent of eastern constructions tested appropriately contained burials or caches and 60% yielded tombs (D. Chase 1998:17). We have previously suggested that this correlation was the result of a strong focus on ancestor veneration as part of Caracol's Late Classic identity (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994b, 1996); here, we argue that the identified rituals, while perhaps grounded in ancestor veneration, were more an expression of a shared ritual focus.

Among the distinctive features of the interment sample at Caracol is the presence of a limited number of tombs that contain dated hieroglyphic inscriptions. The association of these dated tombs with pottery vessels has led to a relatively fine-tuned ceramic sequence during the Late Classic Period (A. Chase 1994). Thus, stratigraphic relationships among interments and constructions, when combined with ceramics and other available dating evidence, allows for a relatively accurate sequence of interments for both the site and its residential groups.

While eastern buildings were not the only locations for burial, they were clearly the prominent location at Caracol during the Late Classic Period. Thus, eastern buildings located within residential groups are the focus of this paper. While the majority of eastern buildings are associated with interments, there are far fewer individuals within these interments than would be expected to have lived within any given residential group. Furthermore, a consideration of the chronological ordering of interments within individual groups provides substantial indication of episodic patterning beyond what would be expected if interments were placed predominantly in conjunction either with human lifespan termination or with the onset or completion of construction events.

#### **CARACOL BURIAL SEQUENCES IN RESIDENTIAL GROUPS: EXAMPLES**

Within a single eastern structure from any representative residential group at Caracol, numerous deposits of both burials and caches are often found when intensive excavation is undertaken. Within the beginning years of the Caracol Archaeological Project a correlation was established between the presence of a tomb within an eastern building and the presence of a burial at the base of the building's initial step. Although both were always Classic in date, associated ceramics demonstrated a substantial



temporal difference between the two interments with the tomb always being the earlier deposit. Trenching of eastern structures in Caracol's residential groups further refined this pattern by showing that burials intruded through stairways were substantially later than burials at the base of stairways. Another pattern involving the consistent re-entry (or minimally disturbance) of tombs was additionally noted, but was not well understood.

Using excavation data from several of Caracol's eastern structures, the following examples serve to establish general temporal patterns and permutations. The buildings have been selected because all have been at least minimally trenched and all have yielded at least 5 human interments that can be stratigraphically related. It is important to note that the patterns described below appear to be essentially the same no matter whether the residential group is in Caracol's core or epicenter.

### **Structure L3**

Located on the east side of a residential group linked by a 500 m long causeway to the site epicenter, Structure L3 was dug during the 1986 field season. Trenching the building yielded 6 burials and 2 caches in association with 2 sequent buildings and various modifications (Figure 1). The earliest interment (S.D. C19A-2) was that of a single adult male placed within a tomb constructed in the core of the earlier building; as found, he was disarticulated. Four ceramic vessels were recovered in the tomb and a text painted on one of the tomb's capstones that indicated a "covering" date of 9.9.0.16.17 or A.D. 613 (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:40-43). The capstone text had been reset in the tomb's vault during a later re-entry into the chamber, at which time the remains of the individual in the tomb may have been "scattered." The next burial event involved the placement of a single adult individual with inlaid and filed teeth at the base of the original

steps (S.D. C19A-5), approximately some 50 years later based on the 2 ceramic vessels that accompanied the burial (Figure 2); a cache was placed immediately above the capstones for this interment. Following two modifications to the stairway on the original building, the structure summit was raised and a new stairway was extended into the plaza. A disarticulated adult between 35 and 45 years of age with jadeite-inlaid teeth was deposited at the base of the new stairway (S.D. C19A-7). Subsequently, two formal interments were intruded into the final stair. The first interment consisted of a formally constructed crypt (S.D. C19A-3) that contained the remains of 3 disarticulated individuals (2 adults each older than 35 years of age [both with inlaid teeth and 1 whose teeth were also filed] and 1 child between 7 to 9 years of age at its death), 2 musical instruments, and 1 polychrome vase dating to the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:fig. 35). The second interment consisted of the remains of a single articulated adult female with filed teeth in a cist (S.D. C19A-4). At some point in time a single articulated adult male over 35 years of age was also placed directly into the fill of the structure (S.D. C19A-1). Based on recovered ceramic material, Structure L3 continued to be a ritual locus through the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Structure 4P46**

Some 2 kilometers southwest of the Caracol epicenter, Structure 4P46 dominates the eastern limit of its residential group. In 1988 a test excavation was dug in the plaza tangent to this building and in 1989 an axial trench was placed through the structure (Figure 3). These investigations produced 8 interments, 4 of which consisted of children (both articulated and disarticulated). The earliest formal burial in the building consisted of a tomb with a bench placed directly behind the landing for the stair at the summit of

the building (S.D. C39E-4). This tomb contained 7 pottery vessels and the remains of 5 individuals, only 1 of which appeared to be articulated; two of the tomb's individuals could be identified as male and female adults (Figures 4 and 5). At a later date, the capstones of the tomb were removed, the chamber was filled with dirt and rock with minimal disturbance of the tomb's contents below, and the articulated body of a 5-6 year old child was placed within the upper part of this new fill (S.D. 39E-3); another disarticulated child (S.D. C39E-1) was placed on the floor to the west. Between the first use of the tomb and its refilling, a burial cist was placed at the foot of the building's stairs (Figures 6 and 7). One articulated adult female and the disarticulated remains of 3 other individuals (1 female; 1 male; 1 unknown) were placed in (S.D. C39B-4) and on top (S.D. C39B-1) of this cist along with 9 vessels; 2 of these adults had inlaid teeth. At an even later date, a deep cut was made through the middle of the stairs and 2 disarticulated individuals, 1 with inlaid teeth, were placed into a crypt with 4 vessels (S.D. C39E-5); a cache vessel and the remains of another child were placed on top of the crypt's capstones (S.D. C39E-6). Based on an almost complete incensario found on the second stair landing, the structure continued to be used through the late 9<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Structure P64**

Settlement work was carried out in the southeastern portion of Caracol during the 1993 field season. One of the structures selected for investigation was Structure P64, an eastern building dominating a large residential group approximately 1.5 kilometers south of the epicenter. An open tomb with entranceway was found on the eastern side of the structure (S.D. C85B-1). Excavation produced the disarticulated remains of a single adult individual with 2 pottery plates. An axial trench was placed into this eastern

building (Figure 8) and yielded 6 burials, 2 of which were children and 1 of which consisted only of a hand. Sealed within the core of the latest building phase was a small tomb containing the disarticulated remains of 7 individuals, 2 with filed and inlaid teeth (S.D. C85C-4). Deposited just east of this tomb in the building fill was a human hand (S.D. C85C-6). Two different stairs were associated with the latest building phase. Each was associated with a formal interment. The earliest was in a crude crypt that contained the remains of 3 individuals, an articulated male over 50 years of age and the disarticulated remains of a 6 year old child and a child less than 2 years of age; 3 pottery vessels and part of a “face-cache” accompanied this burial (S.D. C85C-5). Beneath the latest step for the structure, a single adult female was interred with 2 pottery vessels (S.D. C85C-3; Figure 9). The burials of 2 children were also recovered, one sealed below a plaza floor east of the original stairway interment (S.D. C85C-7) and the second on the bedrock between the two stair burials (S.D. C8C-8).

#### **Structure B34**

Just east of Caana lies a large raised acropolis complex. The eastern pyramid in this complex was dug during 1995 and 1996 and resulted in a series of tombs, burials, and caches (Figure 10). The earliest constructions at this locus date to the Late Preclassic era. At approximately A.D. 150, the extended face-down burial of a female was placed in a cist with some 32 vessels (S.D. C117B-5). This interment predates the Late Classic construction at this locus and cannot be related to intermediate constructions. The original Late Classic plaza surface rested some 2 m below the present ground surface. The stair that articulated with this earlier plaza level contained several caches and joined with a structure that was later largely ripped-out. The earliest identifiable Classic Period

burial was an adult of 35-45 years of age that was intruded into an earlier stairway and sealed by steps that articulated with the earlier plaza surface (S.D. C117C-3). The first identifiable Late Classic deposit consisted of a tomb set into the lower landing of this stairway; it contained a least 1 adult with 5 vessels, but these materials were later disturbed and the tomb was largely re-filled, so the exact relationships are problematic (S.D. C117B-9). The next burial was a 15-year old articulated individual placed with 2 pottery vessels in a cist cut deep beneath the initial structure step (S.D. C117B-3). The summit of the building was then raised and a new tomb was constructed; it contained the remains of an articulated adult individual [with inlays] placed face-down with hands behind their back (S.D. C117C-1). The next event appears to be the re-entry of the lower tomb and the placement of 5 disarticulated adults [2 with inlays] with 2 pottery vessels (S.D. C117B-4). After this re-entry, the plaza to the front of the structure was then raised and a stair-balk was constructed to front the final building. A crypt was then constructed within this stair-balk (S.D. C117C-4); it contained an articulated adult female and 3 ceramic vessels (Figure 11). At an even later date an older adult female, probably disarticulated, was placed into the fill of the upper steps with a single pottery vessel (S.D. C117C-2).

#### **Summary of Structures L3, 4P46, P64, and B34**

The archaeological examples discussed above show construction sequences that are punctuated by the interments of one or more individuals at broadly spaced intervals. The sequences of formal burials appear to follow set patterns involving the placement of tombs in the construction core followed by the interment of burials at the stairway base. Later burials are then placed relative to new stairway extensions, within the steps of

buildings, or at the summit of structures (which usually restarted the burial pattern). The interments appear to be separated by a substantial period of time and do not occur in rapid-fire succession although more than one interment might be placed at the same time. Many burials consist of a single articulated individual either alone or accompanied by bundled or disarticulated remains; others consist only of disarticulated remains. Both females and males are present in these sequences, as well as children who may or may not represent sacrifices. The combination of multiple individuals and variable sexes makes it unlikely that the selected burials were only honoring lineage heads. There also appears to be regularity in the patterning that can, in fact, be fit to one or more temporal cycles. For the sake of heuristic illustration, Table 1 shows the burial examples discussed above broken out as if deposited in accord with a 52-year calendar round cycle. While all the examples can be fit to a ritual 52-year cycle stratigraphically and in term of ceramic associations, such a cycle is only used here for illustrative purposes.

#### **COMPARATIVE DATA: TIKAL**

Comparative data from Tikal's residential groups of Late Classic date may also suggest a model of ritual deposition rather than real-time burial. As at Caracol, very few dead were actually recovered from even the most extensively excavated residential areas at Tikal, and those who were recovered also appear to be correlated with eastern constructions (Becker 1982). While there was not a proclivity for the deposition of burials containing multiple individuals at Tikal, there were episodic burial events in the archaeological record. As at Caracol, this can be seen specifically in residential groups at Tikal that had eastern shrine buildings; one small shrine building (Str. 4H-4) evinces what appear to be several episodic deposition events, each involving the interment of

multiple individual burials, that spans the entire Late Classic era (Becker et al. 1999:38-39). Haviland (1988:125; Haviland et al. 1985:132,136-137) demonstrates similar patterns in non-shrine residential groups and minimally notes three different instances of episodic burial events in which multiple individuals were separately interred. Two of these cases appear to be spatially laid out in a quinquex pattern (Haviland et al. 1985:figs. 4,17). Not being able to readily account for so many dead from essentially single points in time (especially given how few were actually recovered per group), Haviland (1988:125-126; Haviland et al. 1985:132) posits either sudden death from disease or “sudden mass murder” related to human sacrifice to explain the high mortality rate. Thus, the patterns that were encountered in the residential groups at Tikal, could easily be subsumed in the model of purposeful ritual interment suggested here. This may well be in line with Becker’s (1992: 186) suggestion that the Tikal human interments should be called “earth offerings” in recognition of the “conceptual continuum that appears to exist between caches and burials among the Classic Maya.”

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The interpretations offered in this paper are a logical outgrowth of earlier papers that have focused on Caracol mortuary ritual. We have previously provided a rationale for the multiple individual interments at Caracol and the varying degrees of articulation of human skeletal remains by suggesting that the Classic Maya of Caracol may have practiced double-funeral ceremonies (D. Chase and A. Chase 1996:77). Comparable non-Maya data from cultures practicing double-funerals indicates that the interval between the first and second funerals may span a considerable period of time – sometimes more than a decade (Ubelaker 1989: 40; Watson 1982: 155, Hickerson 1960).

It has been suggested by others, that the elapsed time between the two episodes may be related to a variety of factors, ranging from the time necessary for flesh to decay so that bones become clean (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:4, 120) to economic considerations such as the time required to accumulate the resources necessary for a funeral ceremony (Watson 1982:155). However, and important to this discussion, there may also be periodic episodic activities related to the second funeral (Hickerson 1960). Funerals may even take place without the physical remains of the deceased or with only a portion of the remains of the deceased (Block and Parry 1982:35). Also potentially significant is the fact that double funerals may be undertaken for single individuals or as collective activities (Bloch and Parry 1982: 3-4; Ubelaker 1989:40). Interment of multiple individuals within a tomb has previously been suggested for other cultures as a symbolic reconfirmation of group identity (Bloch 1981:139; Bloch and Parry 1982:34; Humphreys 1981:6). Thus, the eastern structure caches and interments of Caracol that contain either multiple interments or multiple individuals in interments further suggests a focus on the unity of the associated social group.

Archaeological burials at Caracol consist of both sequential interments in the same chamber (however, usually separated by a substantial gap of time) and two-stage interments with partial articulation in the ultimate interment location. The remains of deceased individuals may also have been curated until the appropriate point in time for interment, thus accounting for the partially articulated or disarticulated nature of some human remains. There is variation in the types of interments found in a single eastern structure at Caracol. Combined dietary and contextual data suggest that some individuals may have been sacrificed. Apart from individuals in formally defined graves, individuals



placed within structural fill, particularly children, could include sacrificial victims; while sacrificed individuals could be buried with offerings such as ceramic vessels, they were probably not placed in tombs as the original occupants.

While there is a clear chronological pattern to interments in Caracol's eastern buildings in that they appear to have been placed at regular intervals of 40 to 50 years, the precise auspicious interval is not entirely clear. In the royal tombs contained in Structure B20 (D. Chase and A. Chase 1998:304-307), painted dates provide an interval of just over 40 years between the first two tombs. The placement of these and other burials at Caracol can perhaps be associated with auspicious temporal cycles possibly relating to the 20-year katun or to the 52-year calendar round, but other possibilities exist. As in other societies, certain factors, such as position and status, could have "modified" the auspicious times, cycles, and patterns (see Hassig 2001 for analogous ways in which Mesoamerican societies modified history). Episodically interring individuals in conjunction with actual katuns or even 2-katun anniversaries would correlate well with Caracol's Late Classic focus on erecting katun markers consisting of stela and Giant Ahau altars. Alternatively, a 52-year cycle would be appropriate as a time of renewal and could suggest a rationale for rebuilding as well as for the placement of interments. The ritual practice of such episodic events would also be consistent with the previously noted establishment of a Caracol identity (A. Chase and D. Chase 1996).

Although not common at Caracol, more than one interment may have been placed within the same auspicious period of time (perhaps extending as long as a year). Besides the initial placement of an interment, other interment events could include the re-entry of an existing tomb; at Caracol such re-entries appear to have taken place after ca.

100 years had passed (see D. Chase and A. Chase 1996 and Structure B34 above). If these re-entries could be associated with 2 calendar round cycles of 104 years, they would also have other meaning in terms of the completion of 13 Venus cycles of 8-years each. Such timed ritual re-entries of earlier tombs would be consistent with other ritual patterns derived from the hieroglyphic record relating to 20-year funeral celebrations (Fitzsimmons 1998) and the extraction of relics from earlier burials (Grube and Schele 1993).

The interment sequence associated with Caracol's eastern buildings many also have had intentional symbolic directional significance. Initial interments were often in tombs placed in the easternmost location used in a structure (or burial cycle), the immediately subsequent interments were generally placed to the west (either exterior to the building or at the base of the initial step). The east-west sequential placement of interments within these eastern constructions parallels the rising and setting sun and is symbolically consistent with the conception of rebirth. Other iconographic representations of rebirth are sometimes found on Classic era burial offerings (D. Chase and A. Chase 1986:cover).

There are other potential analogies for interments being made at set temporal intervals as opposed to following a time span related to the death of specific individuals – although these are not within the Maya Lowlands. The Huron conducted a Feast of the Dead every 10-12 years (Hickerson 1960). However, unlike the Caracol example, it is believed that all individuals who had died during the intervening time were buried (Ubelaker 1989:40). Whatever the case, our view of the Classic Maya as interring their dead almost immediately after they had expired needs to be rethought. Not only is there

substantial evidence for double-funerals, but we are also lacking burials for the vast majority of past Maya populations, and, we have no excavated Maya cemeteries. Instead, we generally have a correlation between a small sample of dead and ritual buildings in residential groups. The interments of the dead in these structures neither approximate lineage-head models nor dedicatory models related to construction. Temporally, they are also fairly widely spaced, at least for Caracol. Rather than simply seeing eastern buildings as being locales for the burial of the honored dead, perhaps we need to view the dead as simply part of the overall ritual complex that was associated with the use of this building. Thus, we would suggest that cycles and anniversaries are appropriate items to consider with regard to the placement of Classic Maya interments – particularly as they incorporate death into a cyclical ritual that may reinforce the conjoined ideas of community and rebirth.

TABLE 1: Burials from Structures L3, B34, P64 and 4P46 fit to a 52-year cycle and pegged to the Structure L3 capstone date. While sequences fit stratigraphic and dating requirements, each may actually follow slightly differently dated cycles.

	<b>Str. L3</b>	<b>Str. 4P46</b>	<b>Str. P64</b>	<b>Str. B34</b>
<b>A.D. 873</b>	SD C19A-1	-	-	SD C117C-2
<b>AD. 821</b>	SD C19A-4		SD C85C-3	SD C117C-4
<b>A.D. 769</b>	SD C19A-3	SD C39E-5 SD C39E-6	SD C85C-5 SD C85C-6	SD C117B-4
<b>A.D. 717</b>	SD C19A-7	SD C39E-1 SD C39E-3	SD C85B-1	SD C117C-1
<b>A.D. 665</b>	SD C19A-5	SD C39B-1 SD C39B-4	SD C85C-4	SD C117B-3
<b>A.D. 613</b>	SD C19A-2	SD C39E-4	SD C85C-7	SD C117B-9
<b>A.D. 561</b>			SD C85C-8	SD C117C-3
<b>earlier</b>				SD C117B-5