between Capacha and Machalilla, but it is also important
to point out certain similarities between Capacha iconogra-
phy and that of the Olmec—similarities that Kelly did
not recognize or accept. One of these is the "sunburst"
design common on the funerary pottery. This design may
be a variant of the "Saint Andrew's Cross" motif common
in Olmec iconography, and very possibly used by the
Olmecs to represent the sun. There are also significant
similarities between Olmec and Capacha pottery fig-
urines, especially the probable representations of forehead
deformation and lip excision to expose the front teeth.

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SEE ALSO
West Mexico

Caracol (Cayo District, Belize)
A large Classic period Maya center situated away from
natural water sources in extremely hilly terrain within the
Vaca Plateau of Belize, Caracol was first occupied during the
Late Formative period (c. 300 B.C.). Caches and epis-
central building efforts dating to A.D. 1 indicate that
Caracol was a participant in wider lowland Maya cultural
and ritual practices at this time, and was also well con-
ected to long-distance trade routes. Caracol achieved
prominence during the Late Classic period (A.D. 550–
900). At its peak of political power in A.D. 650, the city
covered an area greater than 177 square kilometers, with a
population of at least 115,000. Some 60 km of internal
causeways radiate out from the center and connect vari-
ous parts of the city. Agricultural terraces were intermixed
with settlement within the site core.

Hieroglyphic texts from stone monuments, stucco
buildings, and tomb walls provide substantial historic
information. Caracol's ruling dynasty traced its history
back to A.D. 331. Caracol was extremely warlike during
several periods in its history. During the sixth and seventh
centuries A.D., it records conquest in war of two Petén
(Guatemala) sites—Tikal in 562, and Naranjo during a
ten-year period of war from 626 to 636.

Caracol's population increased dramatically during the
Late Classic period following this initial period of war.
General prosperity is visible throughout the site. It is dur-
ing and after the period of greatest epigraphic claims that
public works such as causeways and agricultural fields
were developed. Various cultural patterns indicate that
the people of Caracol also developed a distinctive cultural
identity during this time. Dental decoration (inlays) is far
more common in the Caracol area than in neighboring
sites such as Tikal, and ancestor veneration seems to have
become more intense. The eastern building in each living
group contains human burials and caches rather than
standard household remains. There are many caches
consisting of pottery vessels with human fingerbones
inside them, or with modeled human faces applied to
them. Tombs were increasingly used to inter the dead,
and often one or more tombs occur in a single living
group. Perhaps as a result of increased population, tombs
frequently house the remains of more than one person.
Skeletal remains in tombs and burials are often incom-
plete and disarticulated, suggesting that secondary burial
was common.

Caracol's historic record indicates further military
activity against neighboring cities during the ninth cen-
tury; indications of increased warfare are found in scenes
on model-carved pottery and in weapons encountered on
palace floors. Nevertheless, Caracol continued to prosper
in the Late to Terminal Classic period. Caana, the most
massive architectural complex, was rebuilt during the
ninth century, and excavations indicate that a substantial
population continued to live and build in the Caracol
core. Artifacts and burnings encountered on building
floors suggest that site abandonment, when it finally
occurred, was abrupt and may be dated to just before A.D.
900 for the center. Limited occupation in the surround-
ing region and sporadic reoccupation of the center may
have continued for an additional 200 years.

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