

between Capacha and Machalilla, but it is also important to point out certain similarities between Capacha iconography 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 figurines, especially the probable representations of forehead deformation and lip excision to expose the front teeth.

FURTHER READINGS

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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 epical 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 connected 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 various 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 during 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 incomplete and disarticulated, suggesting that secondary burial was common.

Caracol’s historic record indicates further military activity against neighboring cities during the ninth century; 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 burning 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 surrounding region and sporadic reoccupation of the center may have continued for an additional 200 years.

FURTHER READINGS

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