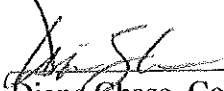
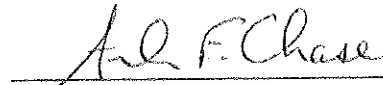
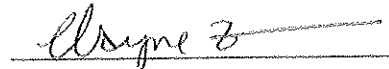


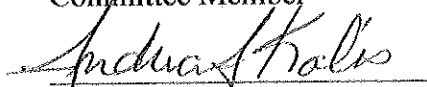
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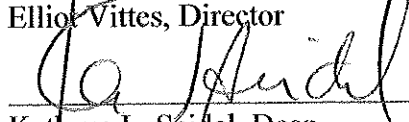
  
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**AN ANALYSIS OF A PROTOCLASSIC FEMALE COSTUME FROM THE SITE  
OF CARACOL, BELIZE**

by

**SHAYNA L. BROWN**  
B.A. University of Florida, 1998

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
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in the College of Arts and Sciences  
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## ABSTRACT

This research attempts to determine and understand the meaning of a costume recovered from a high status female burial of Protoclassic (A.D. 50-250) date excavated at the Southern Lowland Maya site of Caracol, Belize. The importance of this work lies not only in the addition of a major burial from the transitional Protoclassic time period to the current Maya corpus, but also in furthering our understanding about ancient Maya women of whom we know little about from this early period. Maya female costume has been thought of as relatively simple in form from the Preclassic and earlier due to the shortage of data relating to mode of dress in this era. The existing ideas on Preclassic Maya female dress are derived from barely clad broken figurines and, occasionally, from eroded stelae. The Caracol burial, labeled as "S.D. C117B-5," provides the opportunity to reconstruct an ancient Maya female's costume dating to the Protoclassic. In addition to discerning the form of the female's costume, this research also explores the possible social functions of her costume to the ancient Maya. It is proposed that the occupant of S.D. C117B-5 was clothed in the likeness of the goddess Ixchel or possibly an actor in a ritual, either in life or posthumously.

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## INTRODUCTION

“The social rank of any woman was obvious to the world at large from the particular quality of her garments and especially from her jewelry- her necklaces, bracelets and anklets, earplugs and nose-rings...” (Anton 1973:40).

Costume is the art of dressing the body with clothing, ornaments, and body paint as well as various other materials as dictated by one's culture. Costume has been utilized throughout the Mesoamerican region to set individuals off from one another and/ or to associate one with a group (Joyce 1993:19). “The main purpose of clothing has always been to serve as a visual indication of status and occupation, announcing to the world at a glance who someone is and what they are doing” (Hollander 1975:312 following) (Bruhns 1988:105). If clothing is a vehicle for cultural information, then it would seem a worthy endeavor to study it in the hopes of extrapolating this cultural information. “In Mesoamerica, costume was a medium for creation of specific social identity through cumulative layering of age-, gender-, and status- appropriate ornaments and items of clothing” (Joyce 2000:13).

The study of costume among the ancient Māya of Mesoamerica has largely targeted the Classic through contact periods. The carved stone monuments, finely painted vessels, and murals dating from the Classic and Postclassic periods have provided a compendium of dress examples. However, the majority of these clothing examples are found on male figures. Ironically, these same Classic period artifacts and monuments is precisely from where the greater part of the information that we have on women's dress and costuming derive. The native codices and the Spanish records also have been heavily utilized as resources of information about the Maya from the contact and colonial eras.



The Protoclassic and the Early Classic periods lack the amount of intact visual and legible textual records of the later periods and therefore rely upon these same resources for interpretations of archaeological data. Because of problems in preservation, it is rare that Maya archaeological contexts yield information relative to Maya dress. Yet, such is the case with Caracol S.D. C117B/5, a Protoclassic interment dating to ca A.D. 150 that was excavated by the Chases in 1995 (A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.). Because the clothing was decorated with a multitude of preserved organic and inorganic items, it is possible to reconstruct the costume that this woman wore when she was buried and, thereby, to hypothesize her past social status and role in early Caracol society.

As recovered archaeologically, her final costume is comprised of 6,718 recovered whole and fragmented pieces, as follows:

Table 1: Caracol S.D. C117B/5 Costume Pieces

<u>Catalogue #</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>No. of Pieces</u>
C117B/12-6	Jade Disk Beads	452
C117B/12-7	Jade Tube Beads	146
C117B/12-8	Bone Bars, Drilled	113
C117B/12-9	Bone Teeth, Drilled	392
C117B/12-10	Shell Beads, Seed	1377
C117B/12-11	Shell Beads, Olivella	124
C117B/12-12	Shell Beads, Pink Tubes	150
C117B/12-13	Shell Beads, Pink Round	322
C117B/12-14	Shell Beads, Disk	2993
C117B/12-15	Shell Beads, Beige Tube	224
C117B/12-16	Shell Circles	416+
C117B/12-20	Jade Circle, Shell Backing	1
C117B/12-21	Shell Medallions	4
C117B/12-22	Jade Bead	1
C117B/12-23	Amber Donut	1
C117B/12-24	Shell Bead, Pink Round	1
C117B/12-25	Jade Bead	1

Methodologically, a conjunctive approach has been employed in deciphering meaning from the data recovered from Caracol Burial S.D. C117B-5. This research reconstructs the costume of a Protoclassic Maya female and also interprets its possible meanings through an examination of the literature concerning Maya costume, other archaeological reports, and the internal relationships that exist within the Caracol Burial S.D. C117B-5 data.

### Women's Dress and Costuming Among the Maya

Maya costumes have been studied to varying degrees for well over 100 years. The research that has been conducted on Maya dress will be discussed chronologically in this section. However, it is necessary to open this discussion with a brief note concerning the problem of differing vocabulary in ancient Maya costume research. The words *quechquemilt*, cape, capelet, cape-like, beaded overlay, bead netting, and beaded collar, are used by different authors. A *quechquemilt* is a woven slip-on garment (Anawalt 1981:184) that is believed to be Mexican in origin (Sayer 1985:20) and occasionally referred to as beaded (Taylor 1983:72). The terms cape, capelet, cape-like, beaded overlay, bead netting, and beaded collar are all used to describe a beaded upper body garment (Bruhns 1988, Joyce 2000, Proskouriakoff 1961, Sayer 1985, and Taylor 1983). Their various definitions are comparable to the S.D. C117B-5 beaded garment, but the author feels that for the purposes of this study the term "shawl" (after Wolfgang Haberland [1953] 'umhange') offers the best description of the Caracol garment's form.

The pioneers of this early research, Alfred Maudsley (1889-1902), Teobert Maler (1901-1910) and Herbert Spinden (1913 1916), essentially served as archivists by documenting the variety of costumes depicted on Classic monuments (Taylor 1983:3).

Spinden (1913:23, 1916:443-444) first alluded to the possibility that variations in costume could essentially be regarded as identifiers of the wearer. Mary Butler (1931:177) concurred with Spinden, but also argued, through her studies of informal Maya dress on figurines and pottery, that the costumes Spinden discussed were formal in nature and that the differences in the costumes more likely represented activities than personal identities (Taylor 1983:4-5). Butler (1931) attempted to determine regional types of dress, but was unsuccessful due to the truncated time frame in which her data set fell (Taylor 1983:7). Almost 20 years later Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1950) was able to prevail where Butler had failed because Proskouriakoff had access to recently discovered monuments that provided a much wider time span in which to successfully conduct her study of dress elements geographically over time (Taylor 1983:7-9). All of these scholars' publications created interest in the study of ancient Maya costume, and of "...dress motifs that characterized simple and formal modes of dress, as well as particular articles for the ball game, for impersonation of the supernatural, for sacrifices, and for warfare" (Adams 1971:68-75; Benson 1976; Clarkson 1979; Quirarte 1979:137; Taylor 1983:5; Thompson 1970:68).

In the last 45 years, research on women's dress among the Maya has been conducted sporadically. Following on her earlier works, Proskouriakoff (1961) specifically focused on the insights that sculpture and epigraphy brought to the study of ancient Maya women's dress and costume. Proskouriakoff linked female name glyphs and costume elements to female figures carved on the monuments, and in doing so pointed out the fact that these female figures were occupying public (social and/or political) roles in the history of the ancient Maya (Proskouriakoff 1961:81 and Taylor

1983:7-10). Proskouriakoff further defined a complex of dress characteristics that identifies the Classic Maya woman's costume from the stelae. This costume consisted of a "narrow, ankle-length skirt, long robe or huipil, and a beaded skirt with a short cape" (Proskouriakoff 1961:96). Similar complexes like those described by Proskouriakoff (1961) have been identified as formal and/or ceremonial in later studies, due to the fact that the monuments were intended for a public viewing audience and the figures depicted were more than likely of the elite ruling class (Taylor 1983:14).

A few years later, Cordry and Cordry described the basic woman's costume as a *quechquemitl* and/or *huipil*, and a long skirt with "a straight piece of cloth wrapped about the hips, and held in place by a woven belt" (1968:9). In 1983, Dacey Taylor revitalized the initial work of Butler (1931) and Proskouriakoff (1950, 1961) and organized costume characteristics of the Classic period in order to determine regional types of dress. In her study, Taylor reported that the *quechquemitl* became a common article of Maya female dress during the Early Classic period (1983:72). "After El Zapote, women wearing long skirts and round *quexquemitl* appear at Tikal, Altar de Sacrificios (J. Graham 1972), Dos Pilas (Greene et al. 1972), Naranjo and Xultun" (Taylor 1983:72-73). She also pointed out that the *quechquemitl* of this time was typically constructed of a network of superimposed beads. Taylor went on to suggest that the impetus for creating this beadwork was due to the Maya's lack of fine weaving skill in the Early Classic and their desire to replicate Mexican motifs (1983:73).

The beaded *quechquemitl* (or "rounded capelet" as Bruhns [1988:106-107] suggests) and skirt are frequently the costumes found on female figures depicted on Classic period stelae and monuments. This costume was first associated with female

figures by Proskouriakoff (1961:98; Joyce 2000:60). However, we now know that many stelae picture men in a similar outfit (for example Pacal from the Palenque royal family), and it is agreed by most current scholars that this costume is the attire of the elite ruling class (Taylor 1983; Bruhns 1988:107). Bruhns contends that the majority of women shown on Classic monuments are wearing “extremely sumptuous versions of ordinary dress” in the form of a heavily patterned huipil and skirt, and that the *quechquemitl* is rarely depicted on Classic stelae because it is Mexican in origin (1988:108-109). Joyce states that the beaded skirt is often paired with a cape or bead collar and that this female outfit is “typical of monuments in more visible settings” (2000:60).

Bruhns (1988:106-108) studied the costumes of women in public art and determined that there were three sets of “royal” clothing for the Classic period: (1) a skirt and rounded capelet constructed of a bead netting seen in the most formal of occasions; (2) ceremonial full dress, typically with full blouse, petticoat, skirt, and beaded overlay; and, (3) the less formal, but lavish, everyday wear of, a huipil and wrapped skirt. We can infer from these studies on Classic period ancient Maya female dress that these costumes were representative of the upper class and were possibly ceremonial in nature.

The codices offer a variety of depictions of female dress and costume at the contact period. Patricia Anawalt (1981:184-191) compiled the costumes into charts and categories in order to create a manageable record of dress types by area with examples of Maya female attire from the Late Postclassic Lowland Maya area. The rounded *quechquemitl* “...is the only such costume in the Maya codices” (Anawalt, 1981:186) and was considered to be the typical everyday wear. The rounded *quechquemitl* was described at the contact period as a slip-on “small net” or “sack-like” garment that

extended the length of the torso (Anawalt, 1981:184-186). Anawalt (1981:186) includes the triangular quechquemilt in her synthesis even though it was not found in any of the sixteenth-century sources, such as the murals at Tulum, Quintana Roo, because she believes they are ritual costumes and/or are correlated to the supernatural. Sayer (1985:37) adds that most portrayals of women's costume in the codices consisted of a wrap-around skirt and a huipil.

The value and accuracy of the records in regards to female dress has been taken into account, and at times disputed, by the study of gender in archaeology. The fact that women have been represented in the art and history of the ancient Maya to a lesser degree than men has perpetuated the idea that women were relegated primarily to the domestic sphere (Sayer 1985:37). Whereas the study of ancient Maya women's costume initially was the domain of art historians and epigraphers, engendered archaeology has sought to interpret costume in order to elucidate "evidence of fleeting performances, and testify to the social importance of performance to larger social groups" (Joyce 2000:13). Joyce proposes that gender in Precolumbian Mesoamerica was fluid and negotiable, and that costume was the vehicle utilized for the individual to "negotiate their own standing within social groups of varying scale" (2000:18). For example, a man might adorn himself with dress elements that are culturally recognized as female in order to identify himself with the supernatural/ symbolic aspects of those items. Joyce suggests that costumes were "a less controlled media" (ibid.), which is contrary to the widely accepted idea that Maya costume was similar to Aztec with "laws restricting certain styles of dress to rigid social groupings" (Sayer 1985:30). It is undeniable that Maya dress had symbolic value (Sayer 1985:41); however, Joyce (2000:60-61) argues that the traditional

methods of determining the meaning of costumes through establishing an original owner is unproductive and it would be better to attempt to identify traits of performance.

### Costuming in Death

What we understand about funerary costume practices for ancient Maya females comes from a small number of archaeological findings that have documented costume elements recovered from burials, and of course the costume elements depicted on the stelae, murals, and vessels. There is a great need for the publication of costume recovered from ancient Maya female burials. Presently, there are few detailed archaeological reports dealing with female burials and their associated grave furniture. Typically, this information exists as almost an aside to the report or as a small “snippet” tucked within, possibly the result of a lack of necessary data. Engendered archaeology appears to be more concerned with deciphering subtle levels of social relations than in seeking out additional female burials to contribute to the archaeological record. Mortuary data from Yaxuna suggests females were buried with a “uniform set of burial objects” consisting of spondylus shell ornaments and ceramic vessels (Arden 2002:76-77). Arden (*ibid.*) argues that the women of Yaxuna were buried with artifacts that defined them as female; the spondylus shell was symbolic of the woman’s fertility and the vessels were believed to be portals between the living and the dead.

Burials of important women have been recovered from Santa Rita Corozal, Palenque, Copan, Rio Azul, and elsewhere at Caracol. They are briefly described below.

An elaborate female burial was excavated at the site of Santa Rita Corozal located in northern Belize (D. Chase and A. Chase 1986:11). Burial data from Santa Rita Corozal, Structure 7, provides that an important female was entombed with “...5 ceramic

vessels, some very impressive mosaic earflares, and a whole carved spondylus shell” (Chase and Chase 1986:11). The Structure 7 tomb dates to the end of the Early Classic period.

*La Reina Roja* (the Red Queen) was an apparently important female from the site of Palenque. The Red Queen was lavishly dressed upon her death and entombment. She was recovered in association with over 1,140 pieces that once comprised an ornate mask (Gonzales 2000). Flat circular jade beads were also found near her head and were thought to have made up a diadem. The skeleton’s chest area held four obsidian blades as well as a large amount of flat jade beads, and her wrists most likely had bracelets constructed of small jade beads. The presence of three limestone axes in the pelvis area indicate that she was quite possibly wearing a belt. “A large collection of jade and pearl objects, bone needles and shells both covered and surrounded the skeleton” (ibid.). The skeletal analysis of the Red Queen demonstrated that she was between 40 and 45 years old at the time of her death. The few ceramics found in the tomb were dated to between A.D.600 and 700 (ibid).

The lower chamber of the Margarita tomb of Copan, Honduras contained an elaborately adorned adult woman (Bell 2002:96-97). The woman wore an intricate costume made of shell, jadeite and organic objects. “Her upper body was adorned with seashells, an intricate jade belt, jade armbands and wristlets, and an elaborate jade, shell, and pearl necklace” (ibid.). The woman’s leg gear consisted of knee bands constructed of jade beads and anklets or sandals of shell plates (ibid.). Additional jade beads were located along both sides of the skeleton; strung tubular jade beads and round blue beads were on her right side, while small jade beads, numbering over 9,000 in quantity, were



placed atop cinnabar on her right. Funerary offerings located beneath the burial slab consisted of “two concentrations of bone needles” and 18 ceramic vessels (ibid.). Bell states that these funerary offerings “emphasize the identity of the buried individual as a woman, a mother, and a weaver” (ibid.). “Linda Schele has suggested that elements of the burial costume may indicate that the woman was dressed as an aspect of the Classic period Moon Goddess, and the needles, loom weights, and pick would have been an important part of her weaving tools” (Bell 2002:99). Skeletal analysis showed that the woman was in her 60s at death (Bell 2002:99).

An Early Classic tomb containing the skeleton of an ancient Maya female was recovered at the site of Rio Azul in Guatemala (Adams 1999; see also Ponciano 1989, and Saul and Saul 1989). Tomb 25 was excavated within Structure B-56 and is reported to be the only elite female burial in existence at Rio Azul (Adams 1999:95; Saul and Saul 1989). The tomb contained “seven pottery vessels, jade earplugs, obsidian blades,” and two cylinder jars (specified as caches) containing numerous incised shell and jade plaques (Adams 1999:61-63). Adams (1999:62-63) states that the incised shell and jade plaques are patterned with alligator, serpent, and bird motifs. The occupant of Tomb 25 was aligned on the north-south axis (Adams 1999:61). The tomb walls have four glyphs on each wall; Adams (1999:95-96) believes “three of the glyphs refer to the *witz*, or mountain glyph, which also has associations with the Chac rain god” and that the glyph on the east wall is her name, “Nine Darkness” (Adams 1999:96).

Caracol Special Deposit C4C-2 is a female tomb discovered in Structure B19-2<sup>nd</sup> and excavated in 1986 (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987a:9; A. Chase and D. Chase 1987b:24-29; D. Chase and A. Chase 2003:9). The undisturbed chamber contained “8

ceramic vessels arranged about a disarticulated central skeleton that was also associated with jadeite earflares and beads” (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003:9). Skeletal analysis has shown that the female was between 35 and 45 years of age at death (Ibid). “All of her maxillary teeth from first premolar to first premolar had inlay holes; the only recovered inlay was of jadeite” (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987b:26). Hieroglyphic texts painted on the north wall produced a date of A.D. 634 (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987a:10; A. Chase and D. Chase 1987b:27; D. Chase and A. Chase 2003:9). Caracol Special Deposit C4C-2 is suggested by Martin and Grube (2000) to be the royal tomb of Batz’ Ek’. Martin and Grube (ibid.) interpret the hieroglyphic text of Caracol stela 3 as referring to the person Batz’ Ek’ as a female, however, the Chases (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003:9-10) believe that the textual references to gender are unclear and that the skeletal age doesn’t correlate with the recorded death date.

The burials of Santa Rita Corozal, the Red Queen, the Margarita tomb, Rio Azul, and Caracol S.D. C4C-2 are all excellent examples of costume recovered archaeologically. Even though these burials are from four different areas, they share basic traits with one another as well as with Caracol S.D. C117B-5. All of the women in the above burials were interred with ceramic vessels. All of the women were also furnished with additional grave furniture. Caracol S.D. C4C-2 was the only tomb to not contain shell artifacts. The tombs of Santa Rita Corozal, Rio Azul, and Caracol S.D. C4C-2 all had costume assemblages comprised of ornate earflares or earplugs along with just a few other types of material associated with the skeletons. The costumes recovered from the tombs of the Red Queen and the Margarita female are more complex than those from the tombs listed above. The females were both elaborately dressed in costumes that

were constructed of similar materials- jade, shell, and pearls- and they even share some of the same elements: bracelets/ wristlets, belts, and necklaces. However, the majority of the Margarita tomb's costume construction remains unclear. Although the Margarita tomb had more offerings, both of the skeletons were found in association with bone needles, which offers the likelihood that the Red Queen could be identified as a weaver as well (functionally or symbolically). The burials of Santa Rita Corozal, Palenque, Copan, Rio Azul, and Caracol are all considered to be of high status due to their costumes and grave goods.

## **CARACOL S.D. C117B-5**

The site of Caracol, Belize, is part of the Southern Lowland Maya region and is located approximately 55 miles inland from the coast and about 3 miles from the present day Guatemalan border. Caracol is situated in the Maya mountains on the Vaca plateau (Chase and Chase 1987a). Dense jungle surrounds the site. The rainy season, due to the tropical climate, only allows passage in and out of the site's rustic road for a few short months. The ancient Maya of Caracol built reservoirs to store the rainwater for their needs (Chase and Chase, 1987a:6). The closest body of water to the site is 13 miles away from the epicenter. The soil is acidic and does not provide very good conditions for the preservation of cultural material. Two decades of archaeological work by Drs. Arlen and Diane Chase have brought Caracol, what once was thought to be a small site of little significance, back to its former glory as a major Maya political power.

### **Structure B-34**

Structure B-34 is one of three formally constructed buildings located on the summit of the Northeast Acropolis (A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.: 6). The Northeast Acropolis neighbors Caana (the "sky palace") is on its eastern side. Late Preclassic construction and mortuary activity suggest that this area was a major focus for epicentral Caracol prior to the Late Classic. However, the structure B34 locus was also the focus of much Late and Terminal Classic mortuary and cache activity (Chase and Chase 1995: [www.caracol.org](http://www.caracol.org) and A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.:6).

The burial known as "S.D. C117B-5" was excavated deep under the plaza floor of the "east-focused pyramid" B34 during the 1995 field season (Chase and Chase 2002: [www.caracol.org](http://www.caracol.org)). The Chases report on the investigation of Structure B34 as follows:

Structure B34 was excavated by an axial trench, measuring 2 meters by 12.75 meters, during the 1995 and 1996 field seasons. The front half of the pyramid was penetrated to a depth of 6 meters and excavations in the plaza in front of the structure were carried out to bedrock at a depth of 5.5 meters. The excavations at this locus uncovered architectural constructions spanning from the Late Preclassic to the Terminal Classic era. Six caches and seven interments- two in tombs- were encountered during the Structure B34 investigations. With the exception of one deposit, all of these burials and caches are of Late Classic and Terminal Classic date. The one exception is S.D. C117B-5, a Late Preclassic- Protoclassic interment (A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.:6).

#### **Burial S.D. C117B-5**

Special Deposit C117B-5 was a cist burial (A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.). Inside this burial, amidst 32 Preclassic vessels and a rich assortment of other grave goods, lay a female skeleton (Figure 1).

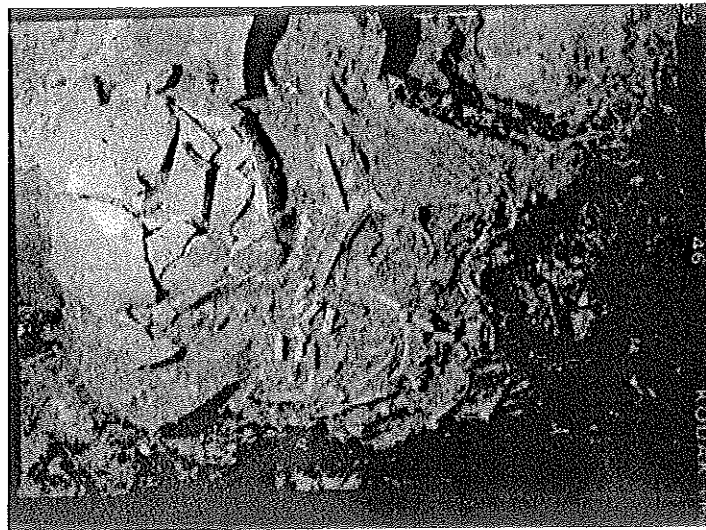


Figure 1. Burial C117B-5 (Photo by Diane Chase)

She was “placed on an east-west axis” as the primary interment and had not been disturbed until two cuts were made into the burial at the start of the Late Classic era (A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.:7). The cuts disturbed the burial and removed some of the burial goods and vessels. This skeleton was discovered without hieroglyphic texts accompanying her that could possibly provide information (as is found in some of Caracol’s epicentral tombs, see D. Chase 1994:123), so the task is left to the items that once adorned her body to provide clues as to who she was.

In death she wore a pair of dog-teeth anklets. Two bone spindle whorls were found just north of her legs. A small effigy whistle in the shape of a human with a distended belly was placed at her feet. Another badly eroded figurine, in the shape of an armadillo or turtle, was found in her chest area. Around her shoulders a very elaborate necklace had been placed. This necklace was decorated with a fringe made of dog-teeth, a collar of cowrie shells, and a central

design composed of larger jadeite and shell elements, all embedded in over 7,000 jadeite and shell beads that were both attached and separated by a large number of rectangular bone spacers. The presence of patterned shell circles, 7 to 8 centimeters in diameter, may also indicate a decomposed cloth mantle (A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.:8).

A reconstruction of the clothing that had once outfitted the female could possibly aid in determining who she was, or at least what position, status, or role she held (at the very least at the time of her interment) in Caracol society. It is clear that she must have been a person of some significance or held a role that was significant to the Maya, due to the richness of her accompanying grave furniture and to her position on axis to Caracol structure B34.

## SUMMARY OF MATERIALS

The discussion of the burial contents in this section will be limited to the items that are believed to have been included in the construction of the S.D. C117B-5 shawl and anklets. These contents will be grouped by material (i.e. jade).

### Jade

Jade has been described by many scholars (Digby 1964, Foshag 1957, Kidder 1951, and Rands 1965) as "highly prized" (Rands 1965:561) and a "most precious possession" (Digby 1964:10) of the ancient Maya. This may be because of its continuous association with priests or rulers proposed during the first three decades of Mesoamerican archaeology. Archaeological research at the site of Caracol has recovered jadeite from simple burials and cists, which demonstrates that one does not have to be of elite status to gain access to or use of this material (A. Chase and D. Chase 1992; Liepins 1994:47). However, this does not suggest that the elite did not have control over the import/ export, trade, sources of the material, or people skilled in working jade. A survey of archaeological reports will support the value of jade to the ancient Maya in that we do not find copious amounts of worked jade at all sites. Archaeologically, the presence and quantity of jade artifacts (as well as other items) in burials has been used as a chief indicator of wealth or status to the occupant, based on the reasoning that jade (1) only comes from a limited number of sources in the Maya region, therefore making it an exotic or luxury item; (2) crafting jade is extremely labor intensive; and (3) the assumption that only the "elite" had access or the rights (sumptuary law) to it. For an in



depth treatment on the topic of what comprises “elite,” see A. Chase and D. Chase 1992. Digby also attributes the value of jade to possible cosmological associations: jade is “green, the colour of water-the life giving fluid-green, the colour of the maize crop” (1964:10).

### Shell

Suarez Diez states that “beads were very common in all Precolumbian regions from very ancient times until today” (1997:19). Shell beads in the form of necklaces and bracelets are found in association with large tombs and the simplest of burials throughout the Mesoamerican area (D. Chase 1998; Pope 1994:149). This same distribution pattern is found at Caracol, where the three most popularly used species are *Strombus gigas*, *Prunum apicinum*, and *Spondylus americanus* (Cobos 1994:140). *Olivella dealbata* has not been found as often as the previously mentioned types of shell, but it is more common than other types of shell at the site (Cobos 1994:140). However, it is important to note that the manufacture of a shell into a bead makes it difficult to determine what species it is, unless a sliver of the bead is cut off and sent to a specialist to be analyzed (Suarez Diez 1997:19).

The majority of shell used at Caracol was from the coast of Belize, only 55 miles away (Cobos 1994:139-140). The shell was most likely transported from the coast in its natural form and then manufactured into ornaments at Caracol workshops (ibid.141-142; Pope 1994:149).

Shell is considered to be a material that was valued by the ancient Maya due to its frequent presence in archaeological contexts, Landa’s ethnohistoric account, and studies in iconography and cosmology. Archaeological data on shells recovered from burials and

caches suggests that they were of “great political, economic, and social importance to the Maya...” (Hohmann 2002:150). Archaeologically, the inclusion of shell in burials occurs frequently during the Preclassic and Early Classic, and does not necessarily accord the interred individual elite status (Krejci and Culbert 1995). Aizpurua and McAnany (1999:124) believe that a great quantity of beads that do not have many stylistic differences points to the status of the individual during the Preclassic period. Krejci and Culbert (1995:106) are in agreement with the above statement and add that “...jewelry, whole shells, and mosaics made partly from shell” are also attributes of an elite burial. Shell beads are considered to be the hardest to manufacture out of all types of shell ornaments and which again strongly suggests that they were highly valued (Suarez Diez 1997). Landa’s *Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan* (1566), states that shell was used in rituals and ceremonies (Tozzer 1941:102) and as “currency in market exchanges and as costume decoration or body adornment for priests and other high status individuals” (Hohmann 2002:149; Tozzer 1941: 95-96, 148, 231). Suarez Diez believes aside from being used as jewelry and other ornaments, shell grouped in strings could have “the function of money, or aided mnemonics, indicating ceremonies, pacts, names, or happenings” on the basis of cross-cultural analogies (1997:19).

The symbolic value of shell is realized through studies in iconography. Suarez Diez (ibid.) attributes the symbolic value of the shells to derive from their “aquatic origin and association with the sea [which] place[s] them in a mysterious and magical world.” Shell could represent the watery underworld of Xibalba from the *Popul Vuh* or shell could connote birth, life and growth from water in the form of rain (Aizpurua 1997:6-7; Hohmann 2002:150-151). The Maya deities God N and God GI are associated with shell

and water in representations of them from the codices and Early Classic cache vessels, respectively (Schele and Miller 1986:46-54).

### **Amber**

Book 11, "Earthly Things," of the Florentine Codex suggests that amber was prized by the people of olden times because of their belief that "it was the bubbles of sea water" (Sahagun 1963:225). Langan (2000:12) states that the amber of the Chiapas is unique to the area and that it is a "deep ruby red or wine color," which is the approximate color of the piece discovered in the Caracol burial.

### **Bone Bars**

The bone bars excavated from Caracol S.D. C117B-5 number approximately 113, including fragments. The bone bars associated with the upper body number 18 whole bars and 25 fragments. The bone bars that were located by the ankles total 23 fragments, of which 14 are large fragments (1/3 to 1/4 of a whole bone bar) and 9 are tiny fragments. The bone bars found in the Caracol burial have holes drilled through them that do not appear to have a pattern to the number of holes per bar. The holes are relatively evenly spaced down the center and there are two holes on the top and bottom of the ends, so that they could be connected together or to something else with string. The bone bars were probably crafted from animal bone, but it is difficult to determine the species when the bone has been altered from its original form (Hammond 1991:180; see also Teeter 2002).

Evidence for the manufacturing of bone artifacts has been recovered from the site of Caracol. Archaeological data recovered from the southeast and southwest walled areas of the epicentral ring groups indicate that a significant amount of bone-working took

place within the site (A. Chase and D. Chase, 2000: [www.caracol.org](http://www.caracol.org)). It is possible that the bone bars could have been manufactured at Caracol due to the fact that we now know that bone-working areas did exist (at least in the Terminal Classic era).

### **Dog Teeth**

It has been proposed that the dog (*Canis familiaris*) became an important part of the Precolumbian person's "religious life and diet" during the Formative period (Azua 1996:1). Clutton-Brock and Hammond (1994:820) cite evidence of domestic dog being used as a significant source of protein at Cuello. They also point out that dog was being consumed at the sites of Cerros, Colha, and Cozumel (ibid.). Wing (1978:29-41) finds in her study on the *Use of Dog for Food* that the Late Preclassic sites of Santa Luisa, Chalahuites, Patarata, and San Lorenzo in Veracruz, Mexico, all relied to some degree on dog as a food source. The writings of Sahagun (Florentine Codex) and Fray Diego Duran (1967) describe dogs being sold in markets during the contact period. They both emphasize the value placed upon dog meat; Sahagun (Book 5:19-20) wrote "...the price of dogs was so high, because they were eaten and needed by the people in days of old" and Wing extrapolates from Duran's account that "dog meat was highly esteemed, selling for higher prices than beef during Colonial times" (1978:39).

The Florentine Codex describes the use of dogs in rituals and ceremonies. For example, on the first day of Tlaxochimaco (the ninth month of the Aztec calendar), there was a feast for the god Huitzilopochtli where dogs were to be sacrificed and then eaten to pay homage to him (Azua 1996:5). Excavations in the Valley of Mexico at the sites of Cueva de Gallo, Cuicuilco, and Tlatilco provide evidence of dogs being used as offerings in burials (Azua 1996:3). Ceremonial and ritual importance of dogs appears to be further

supported by the numerous ceramic representations that have been found in excavations. The most famous of these figures are the dogs of Colima. Cosmological functions of the dog included using its "eye slime" to see the dead or evil spirits, its bones for medicinal purposes, and the dog itself as a guide for the dead to cross the river Chiconahuapan in the Underworld (Viesca 2000:25).

It is apparent from the archaeological data and ethnohistoric accounts that the Aztec used dogs in ritual contexts, but what about the Maya? The Codex Madrid shows the Maya goddess Ixchel, depicted as the "old crone," accompanied by four dogs (Anton 1973:76). The Maya myth the Popul Vuh mentions a dog owned by a Xibalban lord being sacrificed and resurrected by the Hero Twins (Tedlock 1985:134-137; see Plate 117 in Schele and Miller 1986:298). Post Classic Maya New Years' ceremonies involved dog sacrifices (D. Chase 1985). An incised bone found in the tomb of Hasaw Ka'an K'awil of Tikal pictures a dog along with other animals and the Paddler Twins accompanying the ruler into the underworld (Reents-Budet 1994:250, Figure 6.18; Schele and Miller 1986:270, Figure VII.1). Domestic dog faunal remains were discovered in a Protoclassic cache at the Belize site of Kichpanha, where there was also evidence of dog feasting (Shaw 1992). Miller and Taube (1993:80) posit that the dog was symbolic of the night sun and served to guide the deceased through the foreboding underworld. The importance of the dog to the Maya is implied by its inclusion in art and in the archaeological record from the Maya sites discussed above.

## PARTS OF SHAWL AND CROSS-COMPARISONS

Specific details of the archaeologically recovered materials in S.D. C117B-5 are now addressed.

### I. Tubular Jade Beads (C117B/12-7)

The tubular jade beads from the Caracol burial can be defined as elongated with a greater length than diameter and a longitudinal biconical perforation (Figure 2). There were a total of 140 whole and 6 fragments of tubular jade beads recovered from on and around the body in the burial.



Figure 2. Tubular Jade Beads (C117B/12-7)

Approximately 41 of the above jadeite tubes are dark green in color, which best correlates to the “dark ivy green” *Type II Jadeite* category created by Foshag (1959:21-22). The majority (99) of the jade tubes are sparkling or “prismatic” medium to dark green in color and could possibly be Foshag’s *Type V Diopside-Jadeite* (1956:22).

Tubular jadeite beads are most often referred to as parts of necklaces, bracelets (wristlets), and



Figure 3. Palenque Oval Palace Tablet  
(from Merle Greene Robertson Rubbings  
[www.mesoweb.com](http://www.mesoweb.com))

anklets (Digby 1964:12, Rands 1965:579, Guderjan 2000:1, Matillo Vila 1981:58,60, Barba de Pina Chan 1973:6-14, Schmidt, de la Garza, Nalda 1998:555, 557). They are believed to have been used in ceremonial clothing as depicted on stelae (Taylor 1983 and Bruhns 1988). For example, tubular beads of bone, shell, or possibly jade are shown (Figure 3) used in the capelet (after Bruhns 1988) and skirt of Lady Zac Kuk of Palenque on the Oval Palace Tablet (ibid.).

Rands notes that there is little known in regard to “Preclassic and Postclassic Maya styles of jadeworking...[however,] beads are normally undecorated and constitute the most common object of jade” during this time period (1965:577, 563). The jade tubes from the Caracol burial are not decorated and do not exhibit stylistic differentiation from each other.

## **II. Flat Circular Jade Beads (C117B/12-6)**

The flat circular jadeite beads (Figure 4) from the Caracol burial are approximately the same size in diameter and thickness as the flat circular shell beads, which also come from this burial. 445 flat circular jade beads were recovered; 438 of them were found in association with

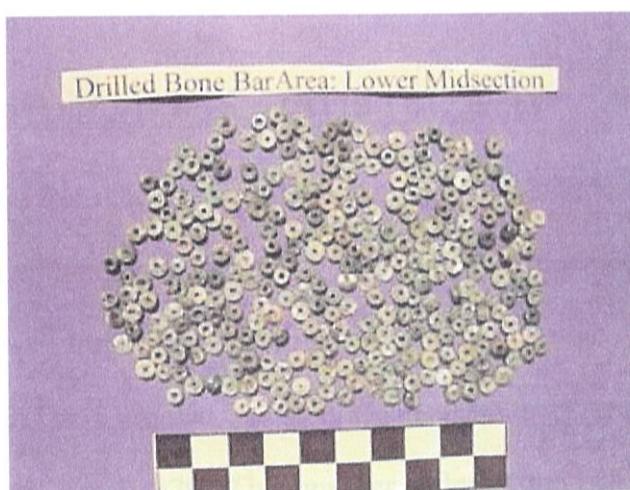


Figure 4. Flat Circular Jade Beads (C117B/12-6)

the female's body. The flat circular jade beads are medium to dark green in color and appear to have been crafted from the same *Type V Diopside-Jadite* as the 99 tubular beads previously discussed (Foshag 1959:21-22).



Flat circular jadeite beads of the same type as the ones from the Caracol burial were used in necklaces at Nebaj, Guatemala (Smith and Kidder 1951:53) and Uaxactun (Kidder 1947:50). The necklace from Nebaj had shell beads interspersed with the jade, its construction can be seen in Figure 5.

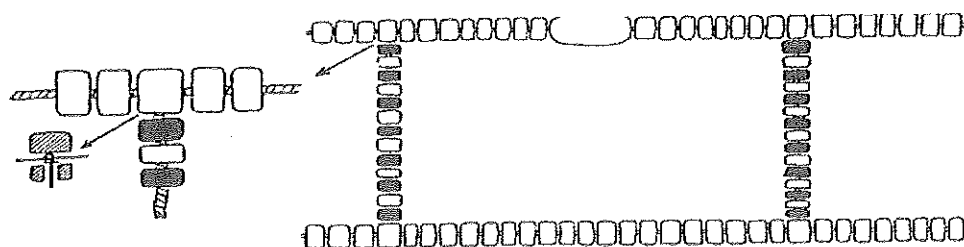


Figure 5. Shell and Jade Disk Bead Necklace from Nebaj, Guatemala (from Smith and Kidder 1951, Fig. 18)

This type of jade bead was used in conjunction with *olivella* shell beads (also found in the Caracol burial) to form a bracelet found in Burial 115 at Chiapa de Corzo (Agrinier 1964:25). It is probable that this type of bead was sewn onto a cloth backing or strung in rows between the bone bars, much like an upper armband from Tikal (Fig 20).

### III. Tubular Shell Beads (C117B/12-15 beige – C117B/12-12 pink)

The tubular shell beads recovered from the Caracol burial resemble the jadeite tubular beads in that they are elongated with a greater length than diameter and they are biconically drilled. These beads show very little differentiation from one another in length and diameter. They are not incised or decorated, but smooth on all surfaces. As a group, the tubular shell beads total approximately 329. This number includes two colors: beige (198 whole tubular beads; Figure 6) and pink (131 whole and 15 fragments of tubular beads; Figure 7).



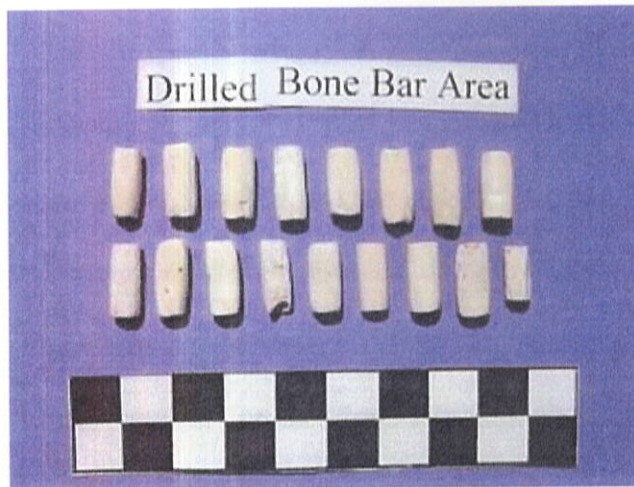


Figure 6. Tubular Shell Beads (C117B/12-15) beige



Figure 7. Tubular Shell Beads (C117B/12-12) pink

Smith and Kidder (1951:52) note the presence of “tubular, elongated cylindrical, square end” shell beads in their archaeological report on Nebaj. They suggested that they only found a few at Nebaj due to the decomposed state of the ones that they did find. Smith (1950:90) proposes that shell beads he found at Uaxactun were previously strung for necklaces. One tubular shell bead with a cylindrical bore was found in a cache, also at Uaxactun (Kidder 1947:62). The descriptions of the tubular shell beads from Nebaj and Uaxactun are comparable to the ones from the Caracol burial in form, but the function is most likely different. The small number of beads from Nebaj and Uaxactun most likely functioned as necklaces or bracelets, as Kidder and Shook proposed. A much larger sample of “cylindrical shell beads” comes from the site of K’axob (Aizpurua 1997:8, 72), where 746 cylindrical bifacially drilled beads were recovered from Burial 43, which is dated to the Early Chaakkax ceramic complex (800-400 B.C.) of K’axob. The date of Burial 43 is earlier than the Caracol burial, but the quantity of beads offers a better comparison. The problem of comparison lies in the fact there are no photographs of the cylindrical shell beads from Burial 43 published. Aizpurua and McAnany note,

“that there is a certain uniformity to these beads (referring to the total number recovered from Burial 43) with gross differences attributable to production stage as much as to stylistic variation” (1999:124). The distribution of the shell beads (in reference to all of the types recovered, not just cylindrical) in K’axob Burial 43 indicate that they were worn as bracelets, necklaces, and most likely sewn into headgear (Aizpurua 1997:17; Aizpurua and McAnany 1999:124). Another feasible usage of tubular shell beads is their incorporation into clothing. For example, Taylor (1983:71-73) posits that bead netting was used as an overlay on top of the *quechquemil* beginning in the Early Classic. Tubular beads, whether they are shell, jade, or bone, appear to have been used in this fashion in Figure 3.

#### IV. Flat Circular Shell Beads (C117B/12-14)

A total of 2,950 flat circular shell beads were recovered from the Caracol burial. 2,828 of these beads were recovered in association with the body. The flat circular shell beads (Figure 8) are beige in color and are similar in diameter and thickness to the flat circular jadeite beads also from this

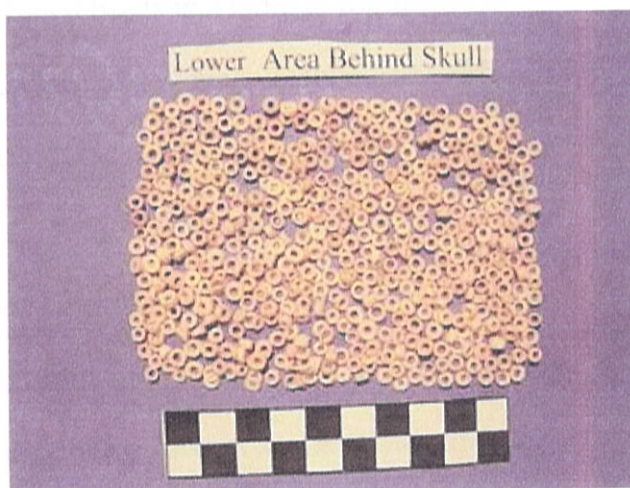


Figure 8. Flat Circular Shell Beads (C117B/12-14)

burial. Flat circular shell beads are referred to in the literature on Maya shell as “disk” beads. Anderson (1959:214-215) recovered “tiny flat beads made of shell” from a tomb in Structure D18 at Caracol in 1958 (Cobos 1994:139). Shell disk beads are thought to be a Middle Preclassic marker (Palma Buttles-Valdez, personal communication, 2002);

“...disk beads are commonly found in Middle Preclassic deposits at sites throughout the southern Maya Lowlands, including Colha (Buttles 1992; Dreiss 1994), Cuello (Hammond 1991), and K'axob (Isaza Aizpurua and McAnany 1999) in northern Belize and Nakbe and Tikal (Moholy-Nagy 1987, 1994) in Guatemala” (Hohmann 2002:147). Hohmann (ibid.) points out that at Pacbitun, as well as at the above sites, shell assemblages are dominated by shell disk beads. Shell disk beads are the most numerous by type out of the Caracol burial, but they only contribute roughly 1/3 of the total number of beads.

Smith and Kidder cited this type of bead in the previously mentioned necklace (Figure 4). They reported 817 of these shell beads and estimated that at least half of them were missing. Their necklace would have had approximately 1634 shell beads plus 411 jadeite beads of the same type (Smith and Kidder 1951:53). Shook and Kidder (1952:116-117) found 45 small biconically bored beads in a tomb at Kaminaljuyu. At Uaxactun, Kidder (1947:62) recovered a necklace of 457 biconically bored beads of shell and jadeite in Burial A-55. Over half of the 1,300 small beads from excavations at Cuello were disk beads (Hammond 1991:183-185). These disk beads were recovered from burials “either singly or in necklaces and bracelets” (Hammond 1991:185). All of the above are examples of flat circular shell beads used in necklaces or bracelets. Figure 20 is an example from Tikal of these shell disk beads used in conjunction with bone bars to form an upper armband. It should be noted here that these shell beads could have endless possible uses in the design of jewelry and clothing, but it is the author's belief that the same type of construction used for the Tikal armband was used to form a skeleton of a shawl initially before adding the other costume elements.



## V. Round Shell Beads (C117B/12-13)

The round shell beads (Figure 9) recovered from the Caracol burial are roughly subspherical in shape, with a majority of the group exhibiting flat sides where the hole was drilled through the center. The beads are pink in color, which compels the author to surmise that

the shell type is *spondylus*. A total of 322 of these beads were found in the burial. 311 round shell beads were in direct association with the upper body of the skeleton; 1 was discovered from the vertebra area; 1 came from the humerus area; and 9 were recovered from screening. For comparative purposes, we can note that the Early Classic Burial VIII-36 of Copan had a string of *spondylus* shell beads that numbered 110 (Fash 2001:91-93).

## VI. Olivella Complete Shell Beads (C117B/12-11)

*Olivella* shell beads (Figure 10) are commonly referred to as “tinklers” in the Maya region. *Olivella* shells that are drilled in this fashion can be used as

“tinklers.” A tinkler is given its name by

the sound it makes when it hits another tinkler. Whole tinkler shells are usually sewn on a garment at the edges or hems, so when the person moves they make a tinkling sound

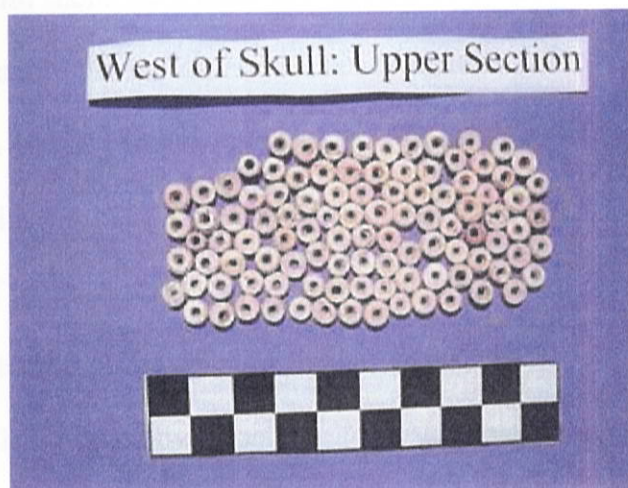


Figure 9. Round Shell Beads (C117B/12-13)

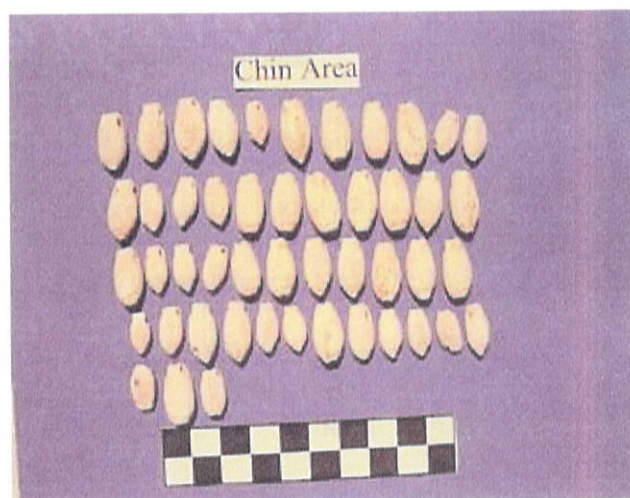


Figure 10. Olivella Shell Beads (C117B/12-11)

(Aizpurua and McAnany 1999:124). *Olivella* shells have been recovered from a variety of depositional contexts, occurring the most often in burials and caches (Aizpurua and McAnany 1999; Aizpurua 1997; Hohmann 2002). Anderson excavated 272 pendants of *Olivella dealbata* at the site of Caracol during his 1958 field season (Cobos 1994:139). Special Deposit C117B-5 contained 134 of these shells. They were drilled in a 4 hole pattern, with two at the top and two at the bottom. The *Olivella* shells were otherwise left intact; their spires had not been removed. It is argued by some scholars (Aizpurua 1997; Aizpurua and McAnany 1999; Hohmann 2002; Schele and Freidel 1990) that the inclusion of *olivella* shells in a burial is indicative of the higher status of the deceased. The reasoning behind this assumption is derived from shell tinklers being worn by Classic period rulers as ornaments "... suspended from belts or loincloths..." (Hohmann 2002:152, Figure 7.2, 153). The *pulque* gods in the Dresden Codex strung them "around the waist and ankles" (Aizpurua 1997:86). Hohmann (2002:152) has also noted that Schele and Freidel (1990) have suggested that *Olivella* tinklers appear to be associated with the Maya hieroglyphic symbols of kingship, "*pop*" and "*mat*."

Aizpurua and McAnany argue that tinklers "were not stand alone items of adornment, as shell beads were, but instead were part of specific ritual costumes" (1999:124). Smith and Kidder (1951:Fig.68) show some tinklers incorporated into necklaces from the site of Nebaj. A bracelet of *olivella* shell beads and 40 small *olivella* shells around the pelvic region were discovered in Burial 15 of Chiapa de Corzo (Agrinier 1964:25). *Olivella* shells are shown as fringe decoration on some Classic period huipils (Figure 11). However, the *Olivella* shells from Caracol were drilled in a four hole pattern; this indicates that they were to be connected to each other or a backing

(for an example of a backing see Figure 12 of a Peruvian mantle). As far as the author knows, no example of this type of construction has been recovered in the Maya area.



Figure 11. Yaxchilan Lintel 15 (from Merle Greene Robertson Rubbings [www.mesoweb.com](http://www.mesoweb.com))

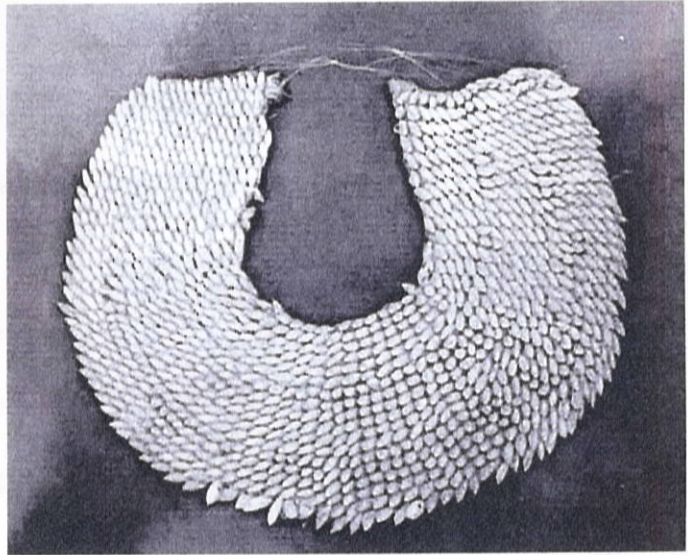


Figure 12. Peruvian Shell Mantle with Cloth Backing (from [exchanges.state.gov/culprop/peru](http://exchanges.state.gov/culprop/peru))

## **VII. Tiny Complete Seed Beads (C117B/12-10)**

The “seed” (named as such because their true name is unknown to the author) beads are very small and appear to be unmodified (Figure 13). The precise type of this shell is unknown to the author. The Caracol burial yielded 1,358 of these little shells; 1,281 of the 1,358 shells were recovered in direct association with the body, while the remaining 77 were collected through screening.

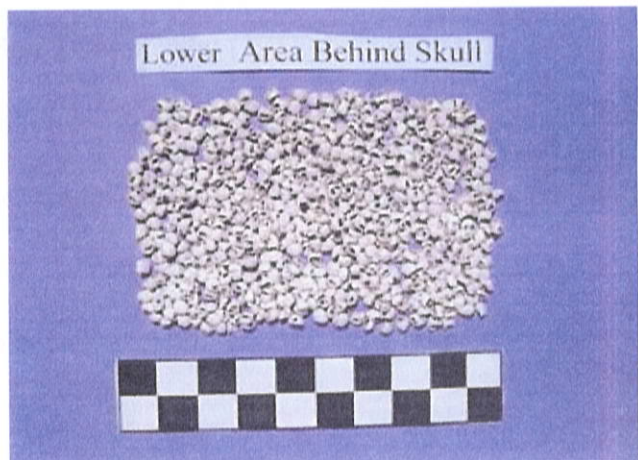


Figure 13. Complete Seed Beads (C117B/12-10)



Suarez Diez (1997:19) points out that this kind of shell could have been sewn or glued onto clothing, fabric, or other materials. It is possible that these small shells were glued onto a fabric backing in a design of some sort.

### VIII. Shell Medallions (C117B/12-21)

The four shell medallions recovered from the Caracol burial are rounded rectangles. Three of them have four small holes drilled into the corners and one of them has one large hole drilled in the center as shown in Figure 14. The specific type of shell that the medallions were manufactured from is unidentifiable, because none of the shell's natural characteristics are present.



Figure 14. Shell Medallions (C117B/12-21)

The drilled holes most likely allowed for the medallions to be sewn onto a backing or lashed together with twine. Smith and Kidder (1951) list an artifact of a similar form as a "spangle" from Nebaj in their Figure 69 (shown here as Figure 15). At Nebaj, the spangles were used to construct a shell and shark tooth ornament that was laid on the floor of the tomb. Another possible comparison is to a group of "*adornos*" from Uaxactun (Kidder 1947; Figure 16), particularly the one with the large hole.

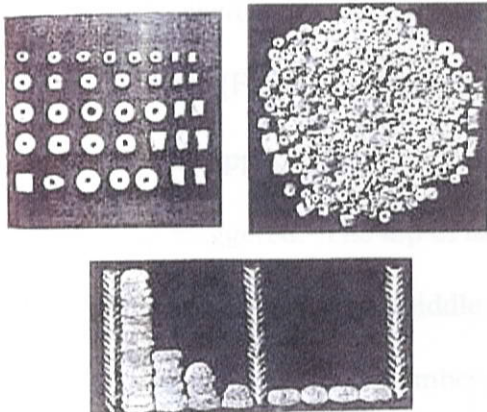


Figure 15. Flat Disks and Spangles. Nebaj, Guatemala (from Smith and Kidder 1951, Fig. 69)

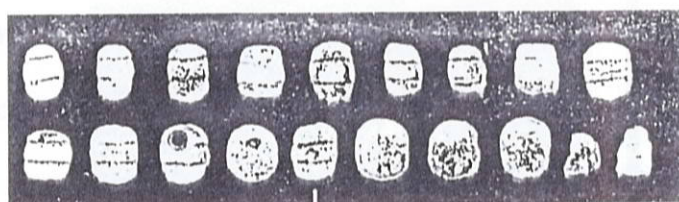


Figure 16. Shell Adornos. Uaxactun (from Kidder 1947, Fig. 85)

### IX. Shell Circles (C117B/12-16)

The shell circles from the Caracol burial are very thin. Shell circles that are very similar to the ones recovered from the Caracol burial were found with the Classic period Burial 130 of Cuello (albeit they are much smaller) (Hammond 1991:186). The Caracol shell circles (Figure 17) range in size from 7 to 8 centimeters in diameter.

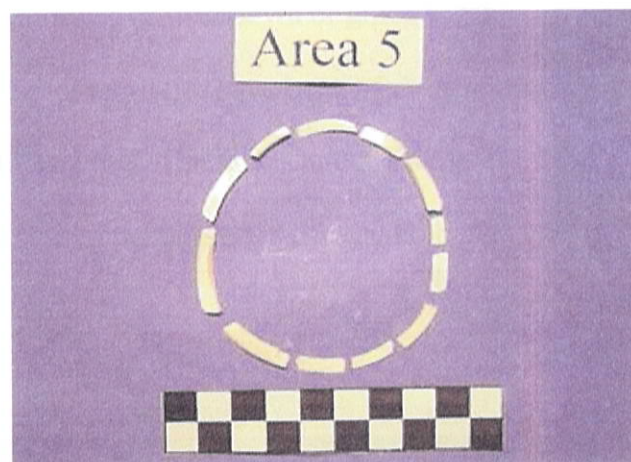


Figure 17. Shell Circle (C117B/12-16)

The possible five completed shell circles from the Caracol burial are crushed into fragments that total over 416 tiny pieces. Some of the pieces that were not crushed show that each circle was comprised of individually made pieces. The circles were manufactured from a nacreous shell and are iridescent.



The shell circles are pictured in the Caracol burial (Figure 1) in two overlapping circles on the upper back that appear diagonally staggered. The top of another circle is visible on the right middle section of the back. However, the number of fragments recovered suggests that there were more circles present at the time of her interment. They could have of originally had some kind of an organic backing.



Figure 18. Yaxchilan Lintel 6 (from Merle Greene Robertson Rubbings [www.mesoweb.com](http://www.mesoweb.com))

Suarez Diez suggests that inlays “usually form mosaics or were sewn or glued to fabric” (1997:20). The shell circles from the Caracol burial appear to have been made in sections and then put together to form a circle on a cloth backing. The lintels and monuments of Yaxchilan feature circles prominently in the design of the beaded collars on both men and women (Figure 18).

#### X. Amber (C117B/12-23)

One piece of amber was recovered from the Caracol burial. The amber has definitely been modified: it has the center cut out and it is coated with a thin cork-like substance that is flaking off (Figure 19).

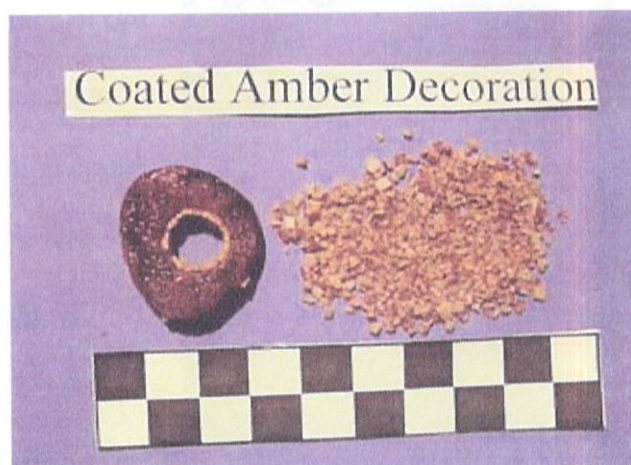


Figure 19. Amber (C117B/12-23)

Langan (2000:12) states that the amber of the Chiapas is unique to the area and that it is a “deep ruby red or wine color,” which is the approximate color of the piece discovered in the Caracol burial. The piece of amber from the Caracol burial functioned as an ornament, most likely the central element of the female’s beaded vestament. Similar to the Caracol item in form, the beaded capelets (following Bruhns 1988) of the Palenque royal family mostly feature rounded central elements, as do most beaded collars and necklaces (ibid.; and Haberland 1953).

#### **XI. Bone Bars (C117B/12-8)**

An example of one type of the bone bars’ function can be seen in Figure 20. The drilled holes down the center of the bone bar support strings of flat circular shell beads that together comprise an upper armband from Tikal. This type of construction could surely support a capelet, an entire collar, or a larger garment of shell and jade beads, such as a shawl. Piedras Negras Stela 13 (Figure 21) shows a possible collar with long rectangular pieces (which are similar



Figure 20. Tikal Upper Arm Band (photo by Andrea Kalis)



Figure 21. Piedras Negras Stela 136 (from Merle Greene Robertson Rubbings [www.mesoweb.com](http://www.mesoweb.com))



in shape to the bone bars) comprising the uppermost portion.

Deer mandibles formed a bone collar in Burial VIII-36 from Copan (Fash 2001:91-93). The bone collar appears to have been constructed of bone bars that look very similar to the ones recovered from Caracol S.D. C117B-5. Fash (2001:91) interprets the inclusion of the bone bars as the recognition of the deceased's animal spirit companion (2001:91). He (*ibid.*) also noted that a cayman tooth was found with the bone collar.

The majority of the bone bars recovered (Figure 22) from the Caracol burial were found massed in the chest

area. They probably acted as separators and supports for the entire assemblage of beads located from the female's midsection and higher (A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.:8).

The bone bars that were found around the ankles in the Caracol burial were in association with drilled animal teeth. The bone bars and teeth form elaborate anklets (see Figure 24) (A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.:8).

## **XII. Dog Teeth (C117B/12-9)**

A total of 392 whole and fragmented dog-teeth (Figure 23) were discovered in the Caracol burial; 124 of the dog-teeth were recovered whole and

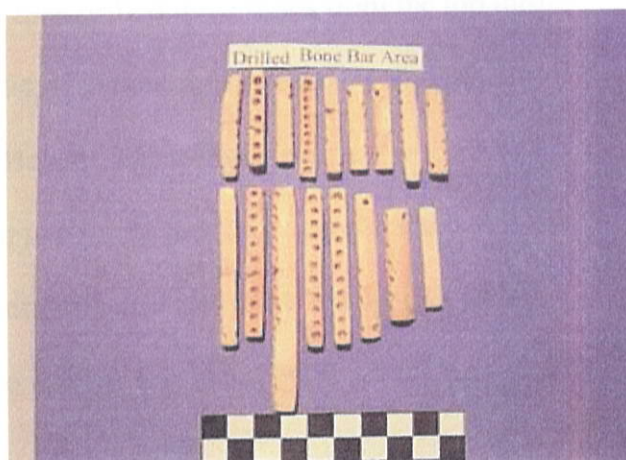


Figure 22. Bone Bars (C117B/12-8)

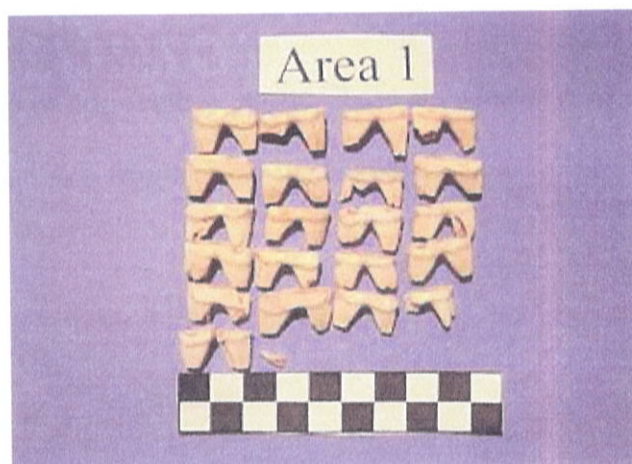


Figure 23. Worked Dog Teeth (C117B/12-9)

253 of the total number as fragments (approximately 3/4 of which were broken in half and 1/4 were in smaller pieces). The reconstructed group of dog-teeth numbers 198. Each dog tooth out of this group is the fourth premolar (Teeter 2001). This quantity of the same tooth would require that teeth were extracted from 99 dogs (Teeter 2001). The dog-teeth were filed off flat at the crown and then drilled three times from the top through the roots. Clutton-Brock and Hammond (1994:825) note three worked teeth in their report on the consumption of dog at Cuello, Belize. These three teeth are worked in a similar fashion as the teeth from Caracol, but two of the teeth are canines and one is the lower left carnassial. Clutton-Brock and Hammond also state that "burial 173, of late Bladen date, [was] where a perforated canine was the focal element in a necklace of shell disk beads" (ibid.). The dog-teeth of Caracol S.D. C117B-5 were found in association with the bone bars around the ankles in the form of anklets (Figure 24). It is possible that some of the dog-teeth that were located higher up on the skeleton form other elements of the jewelry or clothing.

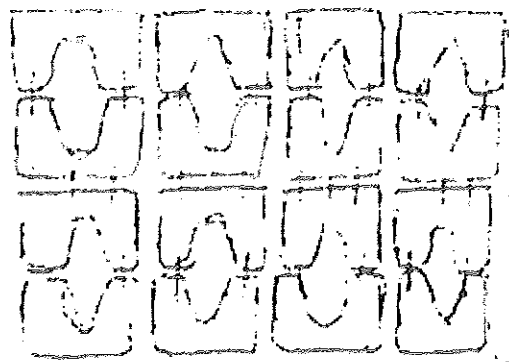


Figure 24. Field Drawing of Recovered Pattern (from Caracol Field Notebook)

The location and quantity of this second group of dog-teeth supports Chase and Chase (n.d.:8) in their assumption that they functioned as a fringe along the shawl.

## RECONSTRUCTED SHAWL

The artifacts of S.D. C117B-5, with the exception of the anklets, were discovered in such close proximity to one another- from the skull to the midsection of the torso- as to distinctly suggest that they were all used together to form an elaborate beaded garment. Chase and Chase (n.d.:8) previously stated that the vestament was an elaborate necklace, a statement with which the author concurs. The author suggests that the “necklace” is probably more accurately identified as a shawl. However, the shawl is preceded by a collar of *olivella* shells (Figure 25) followed by two strands of jade beads, before assuming its shawl-like form of alternating rows of tubular shell and jade beads with jade and shell disk beads interspersed between bone bar spacers from the base of the neck to approximately below the shoulders (see Figure 26). The beaded shawl was possibly placed over a mantle (A. Chase

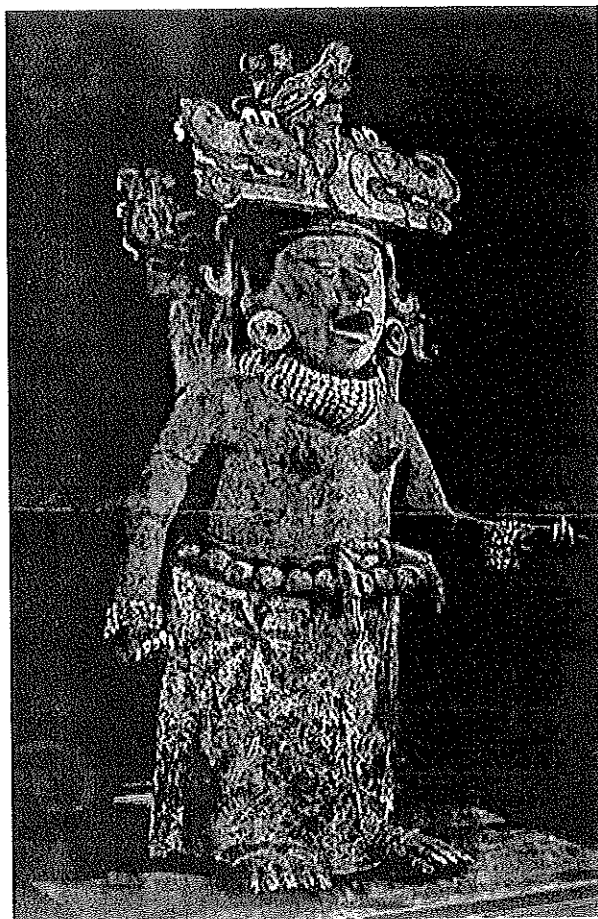


Figure 25. Ixchel (from Leon Portilla 1961)

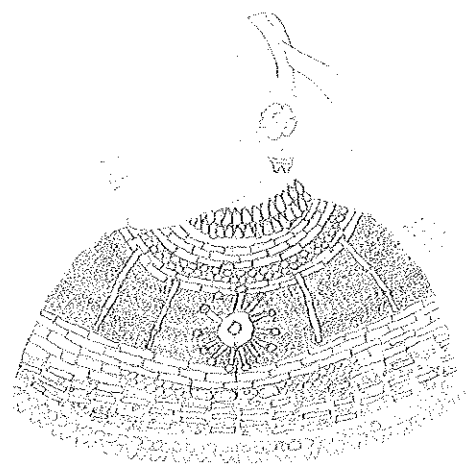


Figure 26. Reconstructed Shawl of S.D. C117B-5 (drawing by author)

and D. Chase n.d.:8). An example of this type of construction can be seen in Figure 12 of a Peruvian shell mantle, where small shells sewn onto a backing form a pectoral. Tiny shell seed beads were most likely glued to the backing, along with shell circles.

The shell circles that were recovered intact formed a checkerboard pattern on the back side of the garment. Figures 18 and 32 offer instances of circles being used in clothing. The large amber piece was most likely the central element of the necklace, much like a brooch (as seen on Yaxchilan Lintels 15, 24, and 25, in Altar de Sacraficios Stela 1, Dos Pilas Stela 16), encircled by jade tubes or beads. The dog-teeth created the fringe all along the bottom of the shawl (A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.:8). A possible representation of this type



Figure 27. Dos Pilas Stela 16 (from Merle Greene Robertson Rubbings [www.mesoweb.com](http://www.mesoweb.com))

of fringe can be seen on Stela 16 of Dos Pilas (Figure 27) along the collar, waist, and skirt hem. The distribution of the different types of beads along the body allows for an understanding of the organization of the shawl in terms of quantities of beads of the same material, and where they were recovered in relation to other groups of beads. It appears most probable that the different types of beads were grouped into like type and strung as such, creating a layered effect. (That is, two rows of jade tubular beads followed by three rows of shell tubular beads, because this pattern was recovered beginning at the top of the shawl, which compares to the representations of what appear to be similar beaded collars or *quechquemilt* on the stelae tend to be ordered in this fashion). It is difficult to

determine the exact pattern below the three strands of jadeite beads to the dog-teeth fringe.

### **Visual Comparisons**

The comparison of the Caracol assemblage of artifacts is only possible to make with photographs of reconstructed assemblages, figurines, and stelae at this time. The author has not found any other materials with a suitable likeness that can be compared with the archaeologically recovered shawl. In utilizing stelae as a source, it is difficult to identify what materials are used in an outfit or adornment because the medium is stone; there are no colors to indicate that an item may be constructed of jade or shell (Mahler 1956). It should also be noted that the stelae are “stylized,” i.e., they are bound to the artistic and political conventions of their day (Bruhns 1988:105-6). The stelae are public portraits and the women’s status is certainly obvious to the viewer by her attire. However, as Tatiana Proskouriakoff noted, “women do not appear on very early monuments” (1961:98). Thus, we must hope that Early Classic traits survived into the Late Classic.

Murals and vessels, for the most part, are confined to the Classic period and, like stelae, only portray a limited number of females. A recently discovered mural in San Bartolo, Guatemala is tentatively dated to A.D. 100 (O’Neill 2002:73). The early mural was conjectured to be only 10% exposed at the time of discovery (ibid.:75). Two females and two males are depicted in what appears to be a supernatural scene (ibid.:74). The jewelry and ornaments of the people were painted white, with no trace of green or gray-green. Reents-Budet (1995) points out that the green paint the ancient Maya used often appears as a grayish color due to aging and that many murals and vessels have this color

on them in jewelry; white was used if the painter chose to represent shell. In the absence of any surviving clothing, the only clues as to how the Caracol Protoclassic lady was adorned is the collection of non-perishable items of jade and shell beads, shell rings, olivella shell beads, seed beads, medallions, bone bars, dogs teeth, and a piece of amber.

### Comparisons in Garments

The following sources for comparison have been chosen based on two criteria: (1) what a probable female garment for this time could be; and, (2) the likelihood of a beaded garment, due to the quantity of items located from the midsection of the skeleton and up.

It is very likely that approximately half of the worked dogs teeth were joined along with some of the bone bars into anklets, because they were found in association with each other in the burial. The author has not found any anklets, decorated sandals, or other type of leg gear that resembles the constructed anklets (as recovered in Figure 24). The presence of the elaborate anklets causes the author to agree with Bruhns

(1988:110) that a shorter skirt or huipil

would be the most appropriate to reveal the decorated leg gear. Figures 28a and 28b offer examples of women in shorter skirts with exposed leg gear and sandals. In Figure 28a note the “tooth-like” items that are inserted at the top of the high sandals as well as

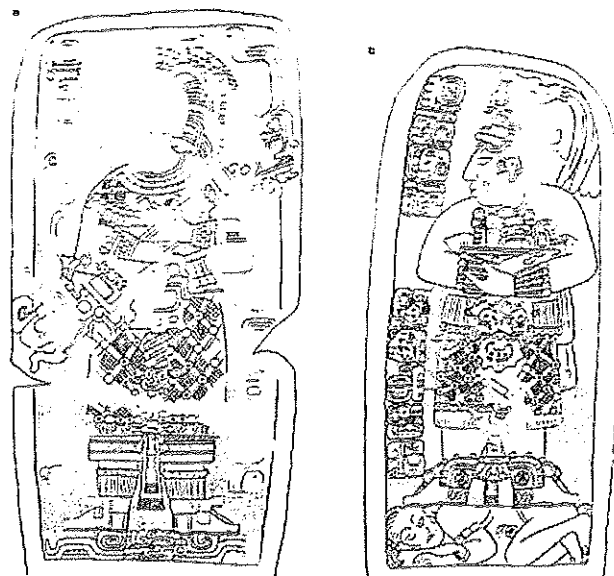


Figure 28. Lady Six Sky of Naranjo Stelae 31 and 24 (from Hewitt 1999, Fig. 9a and 9b)



small amounts throughout the skirt, belt, capelet, and wristlets of Lady Six Sky of Naranjo.

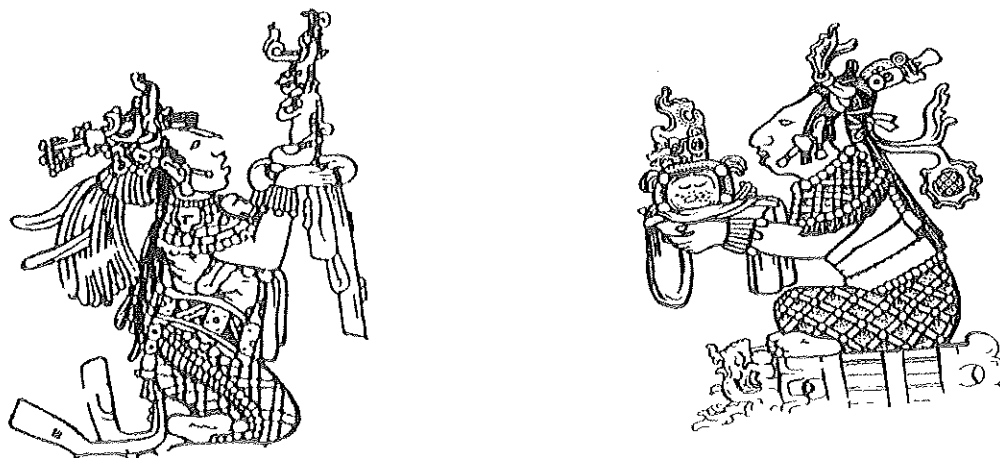


Figure 29 a. Lady Vulture and b. Lady Ahpo Hel (from Bruhns 1988:122)

The beadwork that was seen in Figures 28a and 28b was a prominent style of female ceremonial dress at Palenque as well, as pictured in Figures 29a, 29b, and Figure 3. The tubular and spherical beads shown in the Palenque figures are thought to be of jade, while the tubular beadwork of Lady Six Sky of Naranjo, in Figures 28a and 28b, are suggested to be of bone or shell by Bruhns (1988:124, Fig.4). Caracol Stela 3 (Figure 30) depicts what is interpreted to be a woman in the same capelet and skirt style as the women from Palenque and Naranjo; however, the Caracol woman has much more elaborate wrist gear and

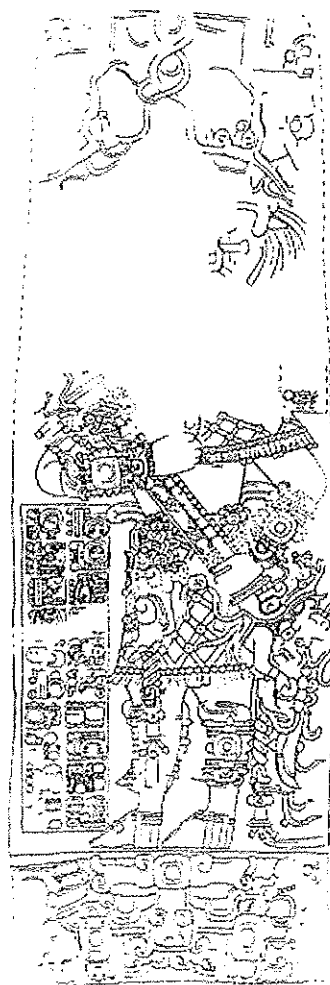


Figure 30. Caracol Stela 3 (from A. Chase and D. Chase)

leg gear and she is shown holding a ceremonial bar like Lady Six Sky in Figure 28a. It is impossible to tell if the beadwork has been sewn onto a fabric backing or if the beadwork is a net that lies over a cloth background. The total number of shell and jade tubular beads (minus approximately 40 jade beads used in a necklace) that would have been available to construct such an outfit is approximately 480. Jade beads were recovered in a pattern that formed a three-strand necklace or perhaps the top or middle of a collar, such as the one shown in Figure 28a. Approximately 103 *olivella* beads were found in the chin/ head area and could have formed the top few rows of the collar, like a choker, which is different than the styles we have reviewed here. Two examples of a Teotihuacan costume show the necklace collar beginning higher up the neck, as the Caracol shawl most likely did (see Figures 31a, b, and c). The Teotihuacan examples also picture rectangular pieces, which could have been tubular beads of shell and jade or even bone bars. The central circular element of the male shoulder pieces and the deity impersonator

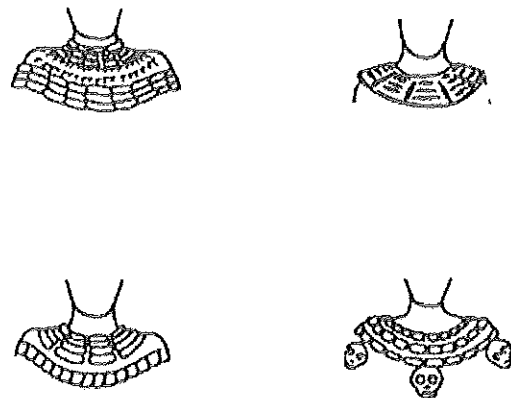


Figure 31a. Teotihuacan Bead Necklaces (from Taylor, 1983)

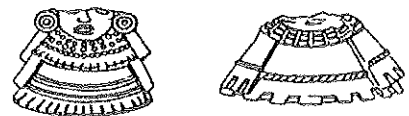
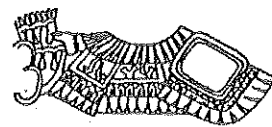


Figure 31b. . Teotihuacan Shoulder Pieces (from Taylor, 1983)

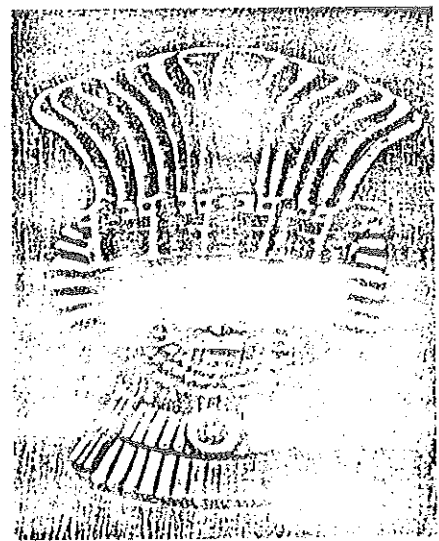


Figure 31c. Teotihuacan Deity Impersonator (from Taylor, 1983)

costume correlate well with the circular amber piece of Caracol S.D. C117B-5.

The woman pictured in Figure 32 from El Peru is wearing a highly decorated *huipil* with what appear to be sewn-on beads along with an elaborate collar the size of a *quechquemiltl*. Figure 33 offers a different example of a *huipil* with attached beadwork. Figure 33 of Lintel 25 at Yaxchilan shows what could be cut *olivella* tinklers along the hem of the woman's *huipil* as well as attached to the material along the sides and armholes. Round beads are evident in the first row of the collar closest to her neck as well as on a section of her bunched up dress. She also has flat bead or bone bar-like objects as the main design element of her collar and wristlets. The *huipil* is draped off of her shoulders and pushed up towards her elbows for these items to be seen.

The woman pictured in Figure 34 on the El Cayo Wall Panel (Bruhns 1988) is badly eroded, but appears to be wearing a capelet or collar of beads along with a pectoral that is very similar to a "v" shaped pectoral

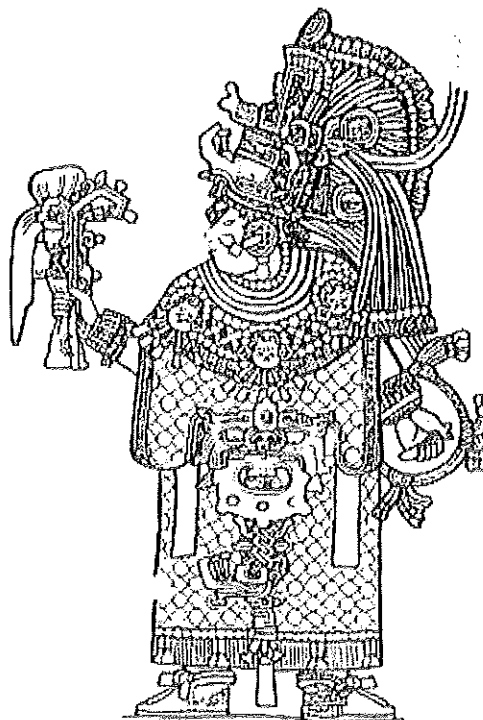


Figure 32. Stela 34 El Peru (from Bruhns 1988, Fig.5)



Figure 33. Yaxchilan Lintel 25 (from Merle Greene Robertson Rubbings  
[www.mesoweb.com](http://www.mesoweb.com))

from the attributed burial of Yuknom Yich'ak K'ak of Calakmul (see Figure 35). The beads in this pectoral are like the flat circular shell and jadeite beads that were found in the Caracol burial. Approximately 3,500 flat circular shell and jade beads were found with 1/3 of them being located around the midsection, chest area, and head, respectively.

### Interpretations

The contents of the Protoclassic Caracol burial could be reconstructed into a possible number of different upper body adornments. But, what do all of the pieces mean together? Iconographically, the shawl of the Caracol female, along with the associated grave goods, could possibly represent the goddess Ixchel in an earlier form. This goddess was the “grandmother /mother of the gods, the mistress of births, and patron of female handicraft” (Anton 1973:77). Ixchel was “the female member of the creator couple” (Read and Gonzalez 2000:198), believed to be the wife of Itzamna. An effigy whistle was



Figure 34. El Cayo Wall Panel (from Benson 1974, Fig.14)

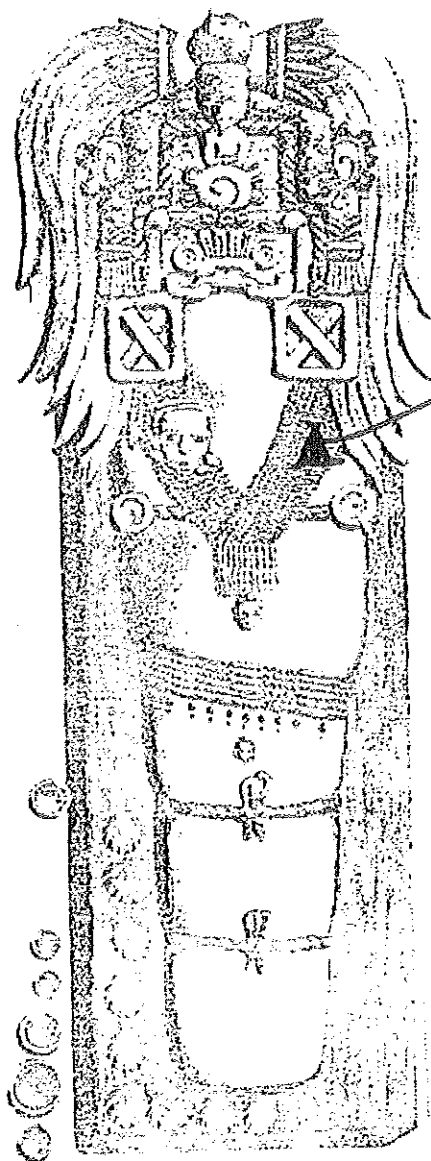


Figure 35. Yuknom Yich'ak K'ak of Calakmul (from Garcia-Moreno and Granados 2000:28)

recovered in association with the Caracol female. It has a distended belly and large breasts, which could be seen as a fertility figure. The jadeite that is incorporated into the shawl could represent the qualities that are often attributed to jade: it is "green, the colour of water-the life giving fluid-green, the colour of the maize crop" (Digby 1964:10). The jadeite, shell, and amber could all be tied into the cosmological characteristics of water and the Maya underworld. The negative traits of Ixchel include flooding and storms (Anton 1973:77), but those actions bring rain, which also brings new life in the form of food growth and sustenance of the population. Ixchel was also referred to as the patron of female handicraft, and the Caracol burial had two bone spindle whorls in direct association with the costumed female. Ixchel is pictured in Postclassic art with a combination of "symbols of death and destruction with those of water, life, and weaving" (Read and Gonzalez 2000:199). She is also depicted in the Madrid Codex as the "Old Crone" and, importantly, she is shown accompanied by dogs. The numerous dog-teeth from the Caracol vestament could correspond to her dual role in life and death. Thus, the recovered elements of the costume can all be related to traits associated with Ixchel.

It has been noted by Maya scholars that the Maya did indeed practice deity personification (e.g. Taylor 1983) through utilizing various costumes as the identifiers of the god/goddess being impersonated and thus represented. Taylor (1983) points out that costumes used for deity impersonation are classified as public formal wear. The large quantity, variety, and quality of beads used in the Caracol woman's vestament were certainly intended for public viewing. The wearing of such a costume would have been done in a public ceremony to mark an event. The elaborateness of the Caracol woman's garment would have befitted a ruler or someone of great importance. The question of the

costume wearer's status appears obvious;- large number of grave goods, ornate costume, filed teeth...but, who was she? Was the Caracol woman an important person in Caracol society, perhaps exemplifying her importance, her connection to the gods, or just displaying her wealth upon death? The Florentine Codex offers an example of deity personification in Book 1- The Gods (Sahagun 1963). The Goddess Chalchiuhtli was the water goddess and was represented as a woman. Chalchiuhtli is the Nahua counterpart of the Maya water goddess Ixchel (Nicholson 1967:115). On her feast day a woman slave (who was bought for the purpose) was dressed in the likeness of Chalchiutli and was sacrificed in a public ceremony to placate and honor the goddess. The sacrifice was intended to gain the favor of Chalchiuhtli in the form of much needed rain (No. 14, part II:21-22). Would it have been possible for this type of scenario to have taken place at Caracol?

## CONCLUSION: S.D. C117B-5 AND FEMALE ACCOUTREMENT

Caracol is now known to have been “well integrated into the Southern lowland Maya ritual system and had full access to exotic trade items such as jadeite and *spondylus* shell” in the Late Preclassic and Early Classic Periods (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994:2). Archaeological data from Caracol suggests that the site had a “heavy focus on the ‘cult of the dead’” and its association with the Maya underworld (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994:8). By A.D. 70 the “full Maya ritual complex was present at Caracol” (A. Chase and D. Chase 1995). The excavations of Structure B34, during which S.D. C117B-5 was recovered, support the importance of the role of ritual at the site of Caracol during the Protoclassic era in the Maya region. The excavation of stratified deposits from Structure B34 suggests that this area was being used as early as circa 100 B.C. (A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.:6).

Special Deposit C117B-5 is quite possibly one of the most important recent discoveries made for the Maya Protoclassic period. It is a primary context burial that contains the richest grave furniture as yet known for this time from the Southern Lowland Maya region (A. Chase and D. Chase n.d.:11, following Krejci and Culbert 1995). The fact that the burial occupant is a female and that she was associated with major epicentral architecture suggests that she was very important in some way, comprising part of the minority of Maya women that were buried in public space (Krejci and Culbert 1995:104-105). The elaborate costume suggests that this woman was a participant in a ritual or ceremony. It is unknown if she participated in this ceremony in life or if it was perhaps a treatment of the body reserved for death. This costumed female is important on many

levels, but specifically for demonstrating that females were active participants in ancient Maya culture. Females were portrayed on stelae in ornate costumes from the Classic period, and from this researchers have assumed that females were only at this late date becoming socially important. Archaeological data supporting the existence of important females that are portrayed on the stelae of the Classic period are scarce; scarcer yet are representations of costumed females from the Preclassic period. Special Deposit C117B-5 has given us evidence that there was a woman in Caracol's history who was socially or politically important enough to those who survived her to prepare her in a culturally relevant manner that befitted her station.

The interpretation of ancient Maya women's lives has relied heavily on Classic and colonial texts and images (Ashmore 2002:232-234). Two themes pervade the characterization of ancient Maya womanhood: the association of women with weaving and the role of women as complimentary to men in the domestic and public- political realms.

Codical, ethnohistoric, and ethnographical sources all provide information about women's roles from the Postclassic and Colonial periods. The codices appear to be handbooks that act as a guide as to how one should perform rituals and conduct oneself. In the codices women's roles are portrayed by female deities with Chac-chel and Ixchel being among the primary goddesses. Women's roles most often are portrayed as related to marriage or as sexual partners to men in addition to conducting activities such as spinning and weaving (Vail and Stone 2002:218). Vail and Stone (ibid.:216) note that both ethnohistoric and ethnographic sources suggest that "women's responsibilities included raising children and animals, preparing food, spinning and weaving" (see also



Clark and Houston, 1998:35, 37). According to Landa, women were not allowed to participate in rituals or ceremonies, except in terms of preparing the offerings of food and drink (Vail and Stone 2002:217). Caracol Special Deposit C117B-5 clearly contradicts this codical portrayal.

The stelae of the Classic period portray women in ceremonial attire engaged in ritual activity (Josserand 2002:128). These women were most often depicted as secondary figures to their husbands or sons, but some women were depicted as the primary actors. Information garnered from the stelae suggests that women held important roles through kinship, social status, ritual activity, and politics (Josserand 2002:114-151). “Two kinds of roles emerge as central: women as mothers and wives and women as the links between elite families in the arena of rulership and its military support” (ibid.:149). The women featured on the stelae of the Classic period are believed to have held significant roles in ancient Maya society. These women are dressed in costumes that likely were adopted from earlier Protoclassic precedents. At this time the earliest known intact female costume is that recovered in Caracol’s S.D. C117B-5. The collars and *quechquemits* were signifiers of status, lineage and political position. As such, they were laden with cosmological and other meanings that we have yet to understand fully. It is proposed that the occupant of S.D. C117B-5 was clothed in the likeness of the goddess Ixchel or possibly an actor in a ritual, either in life or posthumously.

We have learned from the archaeological example of this Caracol burial that elaborate costumes were utilized in the Protoclassic. This, in turn, offers us a new perspective for contrasting previous ideas that attire was relatively simple for this time frame. Women were most likely always involved in ancient Maya ritual and ceremony;

and, at least some ancient Maya women appear to have enjoyed elevated status and position.

Future research can examine other important factors raised by Caracol S.D.

C117B-5. Important questions for future consideration are:

What is a female with an extremely ornate costume doing in a cist burial? Why is this female extended along the east-west axis of the burial? Why was she placed in the prone position? What is this burial doing in the plaza floor at the base of a major public pyramid? Where does this burial fit in with other burials of the region and time frame? And perhaps most importantly, why are there so many Teotihuacan elements present in her costume at this early of a date- could it be that Juan Pedro Laporte (1989) was correct in positing that the Maya influenced the Mexican cultures and not the other way around?

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