

## **TERMINI, TEST-PITS, AND ASSOCIATED "GREENERY:" REPORT OF THE 1998 FIELD SEASON AT CARACOL, BELIZE**

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The 1998 field season of the Caracol Archaeological Project took place from late January through the end of March. Staff consisted of a total of 27 individuals during the field season. Three basic programs of research were carried out during 1998:

- epicentral investigations in the A plaza;
- investigation of collapsed tombs in the Caracol core; and
- survey in the Caracol core area.

Funding for the field season derived from the Ahau Foundation, the Stans Foundation, the University of Central Florida Trevor Colborn Endowment, and private donations to the University of Central Florida; additional monies towards the purchase of a new butane freezer were also forthcoming from the J.I. Kislak Foundation.

### **Epicentral Investigations in the A Plaza.**

Epicentral investigations were conducted in the A Plaza preliminary to Department of Archaeology (DOA) research in this Caracol epicenter plaza area that was scheduled to take place during the summer of 1998 in conjunction with their field school. The Caracol Project 1998 research in the A Plaza was specifically funded by a grant from the Ahau Foundation. Excavations were placed at the bases of Structures A1, A3, and A8 ([Figure 1](#)) in order to search for evidence of: preserved architecture suitable for stabilization, latest use refuse, and/or indications of "special deposits." These investigations were extremely productive and suggest the need for - and promise of - additional research in these locations.

#### **Structure A1**

During the 1997 field season of the Caracol Archaeological Project, excavations were undertaken at the rear base of Structure A1 adjacent to and, in one case, within the area excavated by Linton Satterthwaite to remove Stela 1 and Altar 1 (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981:8). These investigations encountered a tomb at the edge of and tangent to Satterthwaite's excavation unit, as well as a buried free-standing stucco statue (Chase and Chase 1997:figs. 16 & 17). However, these investigations failed to reveal the exact relationship of the architectural units containing these cultural remains to Structure A1 itself. The 1998 field season investigations sought to place both the Satterthwaite and the 1997 research in better context as well as to locate and evaluate basal architecture elsewhere in the A Plaza area. Investigations undertaken in relation to Structure A1 during 1998 consisted of a series of 6 excavations positioned around the base of the structure ([Figure 2](#)). All excavations were included within the analytic unit previously established for investigations in the vicinity of Structure A1 - Operation C141. Each excavation revealed remains of one or more plaster floors. All but C141H - which was placed in an area of substantial collapse on the west side of the structure - revealed basal architecture. C141F included the remains of stairs, an inset stair balk, and a "stela butt." C141D demonstrated that the Structure A1 substructure had rounded corners, a feature often associated with temples at Caracol (Chase and Chase 1994:7). In general the artifactual materials recovered in association with Structure A1 indicate that it was minimally decorated and utilized in the Late to Terminal Classic Period.

**Suboperation C141D** was located at the southeastern extent of the mound. The excavation was placed so as to locate one of the rear corners of the substructure. Originally measuring 4.4 m in length by 1.0 m in width, the portion of the excavation exterior to the building platform was ultimately widened an additional 1.0 m to the west to expose more basal architecture. A curved architectural facing was exposed, but not penetrated ([Figure 3](#)). The basal facing of the substructure was encountered approximately 2.2 m north of the southern excavation limit. It was preserved to a height of approximately 70 cm with the blocks used for its construction being from 10 to 15 cm in height. The facing was abutted by a plaster floor that covered a lower plaster floor upon which the facing was set. When the excavation was extended to the west along the front of the facing, the rounded corner became quite evident in the area of the original western section line. Five lots were established to provide horizontal and vertical location and to differentiate the excavated matrices. Artifacts recovered in association with this part of Structure A1 included stucco fragments from what was presumably an elaborately modelled building facade as well as Late to Terminal Classic incensario fragments. At the request of the Belize Department of Archaeology, this area was not backfilled, but was completely covered with zinc roofing material so that it could be used in the future to aid in uncovering the eastern side of the substructure.

**Suboperation C141E** was located on northeast side of Structure A1. It was placed so as to find the front facing of the substructure. The excavation measured 3.8 m north-south by 1.5 m east-west. Architecture was exposed, but not penetrated ([Figure 4](#)). The basal wall of the substructure was encountered 3.77 m from the plaza excavation limit below substantial collapse. The maximum preserved height of the basal facing was 50 cm. Masonry blocks varied in height from 6 to 14 cm in height. In this part of the A Plaza only a lens of small bedding stones remained to indicate the former existence of plaster floors. Four lots were established to provide horizontal and vertical location and to differentiate the excavated matrices. Similar to materials associated with the southeastern corner of Structure A1, an incensario fragment and pieces of modelled stucco were recovered from the building collapse; a partial stalactite was also found. The entire excavation was backfilled at the end of the field season.

**Suboperation C141F** measured 4.8 m by 2.0 m and was located on axis to Structure A1 in an area that had previously been excavated by Satterthwaite. This excavation was placed so as to locate the frontal stair of Structure A1 and in an attempt to find other pieces of a stela that may have been associated with the remains of a stela butt noted by Satterthwaite (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981:24,80). Again, architecture was exposed, but not penetrated ([Figure 5](#)). The stela butt was evident as soon as the area was cleared of surface rubble and was used to define the eastern extent of the excavation. The butt only measured 36 cm in height by 10-16 cm in width. It may represent a partial monument fragment that was re-erected in this location. Although Satterthwaite had indicated that this potential monument was slate, the "butt" appears to be burnt and weathered limestone. The frontal stair of the construction was located 2.55 m south of the western side of the putative stela butt. A central inset stair balk was located immediately behind the initial step and extended 1.7 m south from this step. Facing stones varied from 4 to 14 cm in height. Overall, the central architecture was very poorly preserved. No floors were found in direct association with this stair or with the latest use of Structure A1. However, two earlier plaster floors were located beneath the front stair at depths of 12 and 28 cm below the bottom of the step. The eastern half of this excavation - including the area over which the stair for Structure A1 was built - was dominated by a deep sump in the underlying clay matrix. This sump had been filled in by the Maya in antiquity; upon excavation, water flowed into this area. Ten lots were established to provide horizontal and vertical location and to differentiate the excavated matrices. Artifacts found with Suboperation C141F included modelled stucco, a stalactite fragment, incensario fragments, and chert cores. The excavation was backfilled at the end of the field season.

**Suboperation C141G** was located in the northwestern corner area of Structure A1. It was placed in the hope of locating the frontal platform of the substructure. The excavation measured 3.8 m north-south by 1.6 m east-west. As in the other excavations, architecture was exposed but not penetrated ([Figure 6](#)). The basal facing of the substructure was encountered tangent to the southern limit of this excavation. It was preserved to a height of approximately 40 cm. Blocks within this facing included both smaller rectangular blocks measuring 6 to 16 cm in thickness and more massive rectangular blocks that were up to 34 cm thick. Two plaster floors were encountered. One was located at the base of the facing; the other was located approximately 13 cm below this facing. Bedrock was exposed in the northern part of this excavation. Seven lots were established to provide horizontal and vertical location and to differentiate the excavated matrices. A large amount of modelled stucco was recovered in this excavation as well as a small fragment of a carved slate monument (an earlier carved slate fragment had been recovered here by Satterthwaite [Houston 1987:fig. 70c]). The excavation was backfilled at the end of the field season.

**Suboperation C141H** was located on the western portion of Structure A1's talus slope so as to hopefully locate the western facing of the substructure ([Figure 7](#)). The excavation measured 4.8 m east-west by 1.5 m north-south. A well preserved plaster floor was located throughout nearly the full extent of the excavation and was used to define the bottom of the unit. However, no facings were encountered. Based on the extent and depth of penetration into non-structural fills, it is quite evident that there had been substantially more collapse of the western side and summit of Structure A1. Locating a basal facing would have required at least 2 more meters of penetration into already unstable collapse fills. As the plan of the building was already evident based on the other investigations, this excavation was aborted without reaching the facing. Four lots were established to provide horizontal and vertical location and to differentiate the excavated matrices. Modelled stucco and obsidian blade fragments were found in the collapsed fill. At the conclusion of the field season, this excavation was completely backfilled.

**Suboperation C141I** consisted of an investigation which first re-cleaned (and re-squared) the Satterthwaite eastern excavation limit associated with his removal of Stela 1 and Altar 1 and then involved the extension of this eastern section via a tunnel to reach the southern rear facing of Structure A1. This investigation was particularly designed to better define Satterthwaite's work and the 1997 Caracol Archaeological Project research as well as to locate the rear facing of the substructure. Caracol Archaeological Project investigations in this vicinity in 1997 had revealed a tomb, a series of caches, and a free-standing stucco statue (see Chase and Chase 1997:figs. 8-17); however, the southern facing of the A1 substructure was never located during the 1997 field season and it was unclear as to whether it even existed. Satterthwaite (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981:8) reported finding a "plastered step of Structure A1" in this vicinity and it is

shown on his Caracol map. The materials recovered in 1997 made this interpretation impossible, but did little to resolve the actual situation. Thus, the C141I excavation hoped to prove that there was a rear facing to Structure A1 and that some architectural construction associated with Stela 1 and Altar 1 was buried in the collapse of the rear of this building. The excavation labeled C141I eventually measured just under 5 m north-south by 0.5 to 1 m east-west. Outside of a 1 m wide area within the old Satterthwaite excavation, a tunnel was dug into the compacted collapse to reach the building substructure. This tunnel was only 0.5 m wide. A well-preserved facing was finally encountered 4.96 m from the southern excavation limit and was exposed to a height of 50 cm. It was entirely covered with plaster and was abutted by a plaster floor. This floor was encountered for nearly the full extent of the excavation (ca. 4.1 m). One small penetrating excavation, measuring 1.0 m by 1.0 m and located 0.80 m from the southern excavation limit, located an earlier plaster floor at a depth of 16 cm below the uppermost floor. Four lots, containing a few pieces of modeled stucco and some chert pieces, were established to provide horizontal and vertical location and to differentiate the excavated matrices. At the end of the 1998 field season, the tunnel and deeper probe within the Satterthwaite excavation were backfilled. Overall, the data recovered from this probe indicate the existence of some sort of small structure behind Structure A1 with which Stela 1 and Altar 1 were associated.

### **Structure A8**

During the 1990 field season, the western part of the summit building that comprised Structure A8 was exposed and the building was axially trenched on its north-south axis. These investigations encountered the basal walls of a tandem-room superstructure oriented and facing to the south away from the A Plaza. Terminal Classic debris was found on the floor of this building. The deep axial trench revealed an earlier Classic Period cache, the sloping plastered face of the platform on which Structure A8 was set, and a deeply buried, earlier architectural platform that faced west. In an attempt to see if the deeply buried architectural platform could be easily accessed from the eastern side of the A Plaza, during the 1998 field season, two excavations were placed along the basal eastern side of the platform on which the Structure A8 substructure rests. Based on previous work done in the area during 1985 and 1986 in association with the central stair for Structure A6, it was expected that the latest basal architecture would be badly preserved, meaning that earlier constructions could be easily approached without removing extant architectural features. This proved not to be the case. Investigations in this vicinity encountered the relatively well preserved remains of an outset from the basal platform. Given the architectural preservation, investigations were not continued into the earlier fills. While the exteriorly recovered materials were primarily of a Late to Terminal Classic date, the earlier fills that exist behind the platform facings date primarily from the Late Preclassic and Early Classic.

**Suboperation C70D** was located at the base of the platform below Structure A8, on its western side, and roughly on the transverse axis to the superstructure. The excavation measured 4.6 m east-west by 2.0 m north-south ([Figure 8](#)). Excavation encountered the remains of 3 stepped levels and facings associated with the basal platform supporting Structure A8 as well as the northern side of a basal terrace projection. From 1 to 3 courses of stone were preserved in each of the platform facings; however, one section contained 10 courses of stone, measuring to just over 1 m in actual preserved height. Each facing recovered in the excavation was abutted by a small section of an associated plaster floor; earlier floors from rebuilding efforts were also evident. The individual masonry stones were generally between 4 and 12 cm in height. No architecture was penetrated; however a deeper probe through the plaza floor revealed a posthole located 86 cm in front of the terrace projection. It is unclear whether this posthole (diameter = 20 cm) could be in association with the excavated platform or was the remnant of an earlier construction. Ten lots were established to provide horizontal and vertical location and to differentiate the excavated matrices. Besides the usual stucco decorative elements and chert fragments, a small carved slate fragment, presumably from a monument, as well as isolated human bones were recovered in this excavation. In consultation with the Belize Department of Archaeology, the excavation was backfilled only to the level of the upper plaza floor and then the entire excavation was covered with zinc roofing.

**Suboperation C70E** was located 2.15 m south of Suboperation C70D. The excavation was undertaken to explore and better define the basal terrace projection encountered in C70D. The excavation measured 2 m by 2 m in area ([Figure 9](#)). Remnants of 2 facings were encountered. While their articulation was not evident, these may have either been the remains of steps or, alternatively, of even more elaborate or decorative terrace projections. The exterior basal facing was 5 courses high and was abutted by a plaster floor (nearly 60 cm high). Four lots were established to provide horizontal and vertical location and to differentiate the excavated matrices. Several fragments of obsidian blades were recovered. At the conclusion of the field season, the excavation was backfilled.

### **Structure A3**

Investigations were undertaken at the summit of Structure A3 during the 1986 field season (Chase and Chase 1987a:13-17). These excavations encountered the well preserved internal superstructure walls of a tandem room edifice, as well as in-situ ceramics on the building floor. The building itself was eventually stabilized ([Figure 10](#)). Deeper penetration of this building revealed a sealed tomb with a capstone date of A.D. 696 as well as a cache of chert bifaces; these same investigations showed the upper stair of the building to have collapsed. The 1998 investigations were

undertaken at the base of the substructure in the hope of finding preserved basal steps and possibly associated special deposits or on-floor debris. Investigations focused on a single excavation located at the base of the substructure, but on axis to the superstructure. This research uncovered a well preserved stair and the basal portion of a central stair mask ([Figure 11](#)) like that encountered in the front of Structure B20-2nd at the summit of Caana (Chase and Chase 1987b:12; [Figure 12](#)) but with earflare stone construction more similar to the structure frieze buried beneath Structure B17 on Caana (Chase and Chase 1999; [Figure 13](#)). Excavation revealed a series of floors in front of the Structure A3 stair and its central mask as well as two special deposits - a skull cache and a partial burial. Neither special deposit included artifactual offerings. Given the reasonable preservation, future investigations will more fully excavate and stabilize the Structure A3 stairs and search for both earlier stairs, construction efforts, and/or associated special deposits within the core of the building platform. Twenty-three lots were established to provide horizontal and vertical location, to differentiate the excavated matrices, and to isolated special deposits. The most common material remains in this excavation where pieces of stucco ornamentation that had broken off of the mask in antiquity. In consultation with the Belize Department of Archaeology, the excavation was covered by zinc roofing.

**Suboperation C12E** investigations were conducted at the base of Structure A3 on axis with the superstructure. It was hoped that investigations would uncover the basal remains of the stair and this was, in fact, the case. The excavation measured 2 m east-west by 3.4 m north- south. Five steps were encountered in the western portion of the investigation. Each of these was partially covered by a plaster floor and approximately 25 cm high and 30 cm deep. The basal step was abutted by two floors; 2 other earlier floors ran below this stair. The recovered stairs were well preserved probably by the extensive collapse of a central mask that had once formed a central stair balk. The mask that made up this stair balk was preserved to a height of approximately 70 cm ([Figure 11](#)). Based upon other Caracol examples (Figures 12 and 13), this architectural mask would have reached a total height of at least 2 m. The portion of the mask that was exposed in the 1998 excavation consisted of a doorway/mouth and the stone facade- work that would have formed the base of one of the earflares. The interior "room" forming the mouth of the mask measured some 35 to 40 cm from front to back and would have measured some 65 cm from east to west. There was evidence of substantial burning inside the doorway/mouth. A carbon sample was collected, but has not yet been run. Although the Structure A3 basal architecture was not penetrated, two special deposits were found intruded through the plaza floors in front of (south of) the central mask.

**Special Deposit C12E-1 (C12E/14):** This deposit was located in an oblong pit cut into the uppermost floor encountered in the excavation. The pit measured approximately 34 by 48 cm at its upper extent and was set in the plaza to the front of the mask's mouth ([Figure 14](#)). The sole contents of the pit was a flattened and elongated human skull and mandible along with several extraneous human teeth ([Figure 15](#)). The skull was located within the wet clay fill of the plaza and was exceedingly poorly preserved; however, it was possible to discern that the individual was a young adult who was perhaps 25 years of age at death. Only one upper central incisor was present. It was filed - a lateral notch was removed. It would appear that this deposit represents a skull "cache" made during the Terminal Classic Period.

**Special Deposit C12E-2 (C12E/22):** This deposit was located in a pit that was essentially half-sectioned by the eastern excavation limit. The pit was placed in the plaza approximately 2 m in front of the mask and was deeply cut into bedrock. Because the plaster floors were not intact at this distance from the Structure A3 steps, it is not possible to know its exact stratigraphic position. Even though it was not found below sealed floors, the overlying soil coloration and stratigraphy would suggest that this deposit had been sealed by one or more floors. Because of its position on the section line, the upper portion of the pit was not completely excavated on its east side; however the upper dimensions of the pit measured 67 cm north-south by approximately 50 to 55 cm east-west. Within the pit were very poorly preserved human skeletal remains belonging to a young adult who was perhaps 25 years of age at death. This individual had two upper central incisors, both of which had lateral notches; these teeth were also shovel shaped and showed evidence of hypoplasia. It is suspected that this deposit was placed during the Late Classic Period at Caracol.

### **Core Investigations: El Vez**

The only core investigations undertaken during the 1998 field season were sponsored by the Stans Foundation and examined a group located approximately 250 meters north of the Caracol epicenter. This group, nicknamed "El Vez," contained a series of low mounds on the north, west, and east sides of a plaza ([Figure 16](#)). The summit of the low eastern construction contained an extensive sump, suggestive of a collapsed tomb. Excavations were undertaken as Caracol Operation C147 and consisted of a test excavation in front of the east structure (C147C), the clearing of the collapsed tomb itself (C147B), and the collection of miscellaneous surface finds associated with the group (C147A). Artifactual materials recovered above the group's plaza floor, as well as in construction debris, indicate that the inhabitants of El Vez produced chert tools. The chert was local and of inferior quality. Special Deposits recovered in these excavations consisted of 5 burials and 1 cache. The cache consisted of a carved jadeite Figure set within a jadeite



earflare, with both objects encased between two lip-to-lip vessels ([Figure 19](#)). The tomb from within the eastern structure contained the remains of several individuals, including one articulated adult male with his head to the north. The walls of the chamber were constructed of large, well-finished blocks. The El Vez investigations were surprising in that it was unexpected that excavations into such a small residential group would result in such substantial offerings.

**Suboperation C147B** consisted of excavations in the vicinity of the open and collapsed tomb. This tomb was located approximately 2.6 m behind (east of) the front step of the substructure. Eight lots were established to provide horizontal and vertical location and to differentiate the excavated matrices. This excavation resulted in both the definition of the intact, but collapsed tomb (Figures 17 and 18) and the discovery of a later burial that had been placed in the fill over the chamber (but that now was in the collapsed material that filled the chamber). The excavation was backfilled at the end of the field season.

**Special Deposit C147B-1:** This deposit included the contents of the tomb below the level of the completely collapsed vault for the chamber. It is estimated that the original tomb height would have been in excess of 1.8 m. The chamber measured 2.15 m north-south by 1.15 m east-west. The remains of minimally 5 individuals were recovered from the floor of the chamber. The primary remains were of a single, articulated, adult male buried in extended position with his head to the north. This individual was at least 35-45 years of age at the time of death; he had caries, tartar, hypoplasia, antemortem tooth loss, reabsorption, and enamel extensions. Only one central incisor was present; it was not decorated or filed. Additional unarticulated and potentially bundled human bone was also recovered from within the chamber, particularly in its southeast and western portions. This bone represented the partial remains of an additional 2 to 3 adults as well as the remains of a subadult approximately 18 months of age. Objects within the tomb included 6 pottery vessels: 1 Belize Red tripod plate, 1 Molino Black rounded bowl, 1 Veracal Orange rounded bowl, 1 Saxche Orange rounded bowl, and 2 eroded Machete Orange Polychrome plates. Also present were worked and unworked shell, a spindle whorl, two pieces of jadeite (1 bead and 1 inlay piece), a bone needle, obsidian (1 blade and 1 core), and a small rounded stone ball. The contents of the tomb indicate that the tomb was utilized during the early to middle part of the Late Classic Period.

**Special Deposit C147B-2:** This burial was located within the tomb collapse, but above Special Deposit C147B/7-1. It consisted of the fragmentary remains of an adult. Spondylous shell was also located in the fill above the tomb and was likely associated with this interred individual.

**Suboperation C147C** was defined for a test excavation placed in the El Vez plaza on axis to the eastern building and tangent to its front steps. This test pit measured 1.5 m by 1.5 m. The excavation was dug to bedrock. The lower step of the eastern building was located, but was very disturbed. Three plaza floors were also encountered and a series of special deposits were excavated. Ten lots were established to provide horizontal and vertical location and to differentiate the matrices and deposits. The excavation was backfilled at the conclusion of the field season.

**Special Deposit C147C-1 (C147C/5):** This deposit consisted of the interment of a subadult human in the northwest corner of the test excavation. The bone was very poorly preserved, but the extent of the burial suggests the individual was either bundled or a secondary interment (or perhaps both).

**Special Deposit C147C-2 (C147C/6):** This burial consisted of a poorly preserved subadult human remains of an individual who was approximately 8 years of age at the time of death.

**Special Deposit C147C-3 (C147C/7):** This cache consisted of two lip-to-lip ceramic vessels set to the west of the front building step and sealed beneath a plaster floor. The two unslipped cache vessels were fairly large for this kind of vessel and contained a carved jadeite human Figure ([Figure 20](#)) set upright within a circular jadeite earflare ([Figure 19](#)).  
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**Special Deposit C147C-4 (C147C/10):** This interment was set within a stone cist in the northwest corner of the excavation, immediately above bedrock. Only a small portion of the burial was sampled by the test excavation and it was decided not to extend the excavation to recover the entire interment. The recovered skeletal remains indicate that an adult (most likely a male) was in this burial. A single pottery straight-sided bowl of late Late Classic date was also recovered in association with this interment.

## Survey

Survey undertaken in the Caracol core area during the 1998 field season focused on recording causeway termini and their connecting causeways. Initially, a transect was cut as an extension of the northern settlement survey baseline due

east from Puchituk Hill to Cahal Pichik, thus establishing Cahal Pichik's position relative to the overall Caracol map. Because other work was slated in the Mountain Cow region by John Morris (who is pursuing his Ph.D. at UCLA on Hatzcap Ceel and Cahal Pichik) during the Summer of 1998, the research focus for the Caracol Archaeological Project shifted to recording the Retiro and Ceiba termini and causeways. Both sets of causeways and termini were fully mapped. Finally, Tim Murtha (Pennsylvania State) cut and staked (every 50 meters) a 6 km long transect from the Cohune terminus due west to the Guatemalan border; this transect, approximately 6 km north of the epicenter, forms the baseline for his Ph.D. thesis work on Caracol's agriculture and settlement at the northern margins of the city. The mapping and surveying that was undertaken in 1998 resulted in the physical joining of all known Caracol termini to the epicentral map ([Figure 21](#)). As a result of this work, it is now finally possible to demonstrate the overall size of the site as well as its solar organization. In the process of undertaking reconnaissance and mapping, information was also collected from a series of looted tombs found at the Retiro and Ceiba termini. The 1998 survey program was supported by funds from the UCF Trevor Colborn Endowment.

### **Retiro**

The Retiro terminus had been discovered during the 1991 field season, at which time a large number of looted tombs were salvaged by the project. Before 1998, mapping of the Retiro Causeway had been undertaken to a distance of approximately 3 kilometers from the epicenter. During 1998, mapping finished the recording of this causeway as well as the major groups that formed the termini. The Retiro Causeway terminates in an large "administrative plaza" surrounded by low range structures. This administrative plaza is in turn connected to another plaza by a broad 30 m wide causeway. This second plaza contains large pyramids as well as plain stelae and altars; it is set at the foot of a very high hill. Yet another causeway climbs this hill, literally becoming a broad stairway to a large summit range building. Entry through this range building permitted access to a series of elite plaza groups that are situated tangent to each other on the top of this ridge. A "via" (or smaller road, sometimes not as formally defined as a causeway [Hellmuth 1971]) at the foot of the hill connects the stelae plaza with yet another suite of large structures. The amount of construction at Retiro is impressive and dates from the Early and Late Classic Periods based on recovered artifactual materials. Many of the buildings at the terminus are looted.

**Suboperation C80A/11** consisted of a collection of materials from looting associated with a building in the third plaza group south of the central ridgetop unit. Materials were also collected from this same building in 1991 in association with a looted tomb in the core of the building. This tomb had at one time been decorated with red-line painting. The more recent looting had uncovered what appears to have been a crypt interment north of the tomb and exterior to the building. Skeletal remains were fragmentary, but suggested the presence of at least 3 individuals - 1 young adult, 1 other adult, and 1 subadult. Ceramics collected included 2 extremely partial and fragmentary bowls (1 large red-slipped, 1 polychrome) dating to the Late Classic Period.

### **Ceiba**

Following the recording of the Retiro Causeway, mapping efforts moved to a focus on the Ceiba terminus and its causeway. The Ceiba terminus had also been located during the 1991 field season. The causeway to this terminus crosses the Valentine Camp road and, thus, was very badly destroyed in this area, making it difficult to locate (even though it had been successfully followed in 1991). Secondary growth in large milpa fields also compounded the problem. Several days of reconnaissance eventually relocated the terminus and the causeway (as well as several large fields of variously-sized marijuana plants). With the Belize Defense Force "weeding" the area, mapping of both the sacbe and terminus followed. The Ceiba terminus is situated on a high hill. The causeway runs past a functional reservoir (still holding water) on its way into a small group of range structures which probably functioned as an "administrative plaza." Immediately south of this range group was a large plaza with several sizeable pyramids. An acropolis group was situated to the northeast of the central range plaza. Three other elite residential groups were connected to the central Ceiba architecture by means of a series of short causeways. Yet another causeway runs due west from Ceiba towards the Guatemalan border; surveying of this sacbe was halted at a distance of approximately 700 m from the Guatemalan border.

**Suboperation C148A** was established for recovery of looted materials from groups associated with the Ceiba terminus.

**Lot C148A/1** was established for the surface collection for the northernmost eastern structure of the Ceiba southern acropolis group. This elite residential group is located south of Ceiba's main architecture and is connected by a ballustrated causeway with Ceiba's pyramid plaza. The building has an east-west looters' trench running through it; backdirt was located to the north and south of this trench. Artifacts were collected from the backdirt and from inside the trench. Human skeletal material includes the partial remains of 2 adults (1 was an older individual; both were probably male) and 1 subadult (ca. 5 years of age). Recovered ceramics included 2 cache vessels (both of the lip-to-lip type), 1 eroded and broken red-slipped cylinder, and a partial polychrome plate. These materials are all Late Classic in date.

**Lot C148A/2** was established for a surface collection of the southernmost eastern building in the Ceiba southern acropolis group. Like its companion to the north, this building also contains an east-west looters' trench through it; backdirt was piled to the north, south, and west of this trench. Artifacts were recovered from inside the looters' trench and in association with the north and south backdirt piles. Capstones from a looted tomb were found stacked inside the trench. Human skeletal remains indicate the presence of at least 3 individuals - 2 adults (both probably male and one an older individual based on antemortem tooth loss and reabsorption) and 1 subadult (ca. 7 years of age). Recovered artifactual materials included worked bone and the remains of 6 ceramic vessels - 2 cylinders (1 very partial), 2 dishes (1 very partial), 1 very partial plate, and 1 broken face cache. All of this material is Late Classic in date.

**Lot C148A/3** was established for a surface collection from the southernmost eastern structure of the Ceiba southern acropolis group. This building also displays an east-west looters' trench with backdirt piles to the north, south, and west. Artifacts (primarily sherds) were collected from the western backdirt pile. Recovered human skeletal material included the partial remains of one older adult.

**Lot C148A/4** was established for surface collection from the eastern structure of the northeastern acropolis group at Ceiba. Artifactual material (again primarily sherds) was strewn both within the looters' trench and on the backdirt piles. A sea shell was also recovered. Human skeletal material included the extremely partial remains of 1 individual (probably an adult).

**Suboperation C149** was established for materials collected in association with a looted group discovered immediately north of the causeway running toward Guatemala, some 424 meters northwest of the main plaza at Ceiba. The group was given the nickname "Pescador."

**Lot C149A/1** was established for surface collection from the eastern structure in Pescador. A looters' trench was cut on an east-west axis through this building. Materials were recovered from within the trench as well as from the backdirt piled in front of the structure. The recovered human skeletal material was so partial that no age or sex identifications were possible. Recovered artifacts include part of a shell earflare and a broken chert point. Beside the usual Late Classic material, collected sherds include both Preclassic (Sierra Red) and Protoclassic (mammiform tetrapods) ceramics, indicating that this locus (or somewhere close by) was occupied at a very early date.

## Summary

The 1998 field season at Caracol was extremely productive. Epicentral investigations in the A plaza focused on three structures and were additive to previous work that had been undertaken. Investigations in the vicinity of Structure A1 revealed its basal configuration, confirmed the existence of rounded corners, located its front step and a central inset stair balk, and provided the position of various plaza floor levels associated with this building. Investigations in the area of the supporting platform below Structure A8 encountered unexpected architectural detail. Excavations in the vicinity of Structure A3 encountered well preserved basal steps, the remains of a stair-balk in the shape of a stone mask, 4 plaster floors, and 2 special deposits. These investigations strongly suggest the need (and value) for further work in relation to the Structures A1 and A3. Excavation in the residential group called "El Vez" produced both a surprisingly well constructed tomb and an extremely well "endowed" cache (especially given the small structure sizes). These same data suggest that substantial Early Classic residential occupation will be found in this portion of the site. The survey work that was undertaken during 1998 helps to better frame the Caracol site map. The mapping of the Ceiba and Retiro termini and causeways aids in successfully conveying both the integrative plan and the large scale of the site. Perhaps more than any other season, the 1998 field work has helped to both tie up loose ends and crystalize our broader archaeological understanding of Caracol, Belize.

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## FIGURES

[Figure 1](#). Plan of the locations of the 1998 excavations relative to A Group architecture; north is to the top of the page.

[Figure 2](#). Photograph of Structure A1 looking south from Structure A3.

[Figure 3](#). Photograph of Suboperation C141D, Structure A1.

[Figure 4](#). Photograph of typical Structure A1 basal platform stone-work, Suboperation C141E.

[Figure 5](#). Photograph of Suboperation C141F, Structure A1.

[Figure 6](#). Photograph of Suboperation C141G, Structure A1.

[Figure 7](#). Photograph of cut stone rubble in the collapse of Structure A1 after the removal of humus in Suboperation C141H.

[Figure 8](#). Photograph of Suboperation C70D below Structure A8.

[Figure 9](#). Photograph of Suboperation C70E below Structure A8.

[Figure 10](#). Photograph of the summit of Structure A3.

[Figure 11a](#); [Figure 11b](#). Photograph of Suboperation C12E at the base of Structure A3.

[Figure 12](#). Structure B20-2nd stairway mask.

[Figure 13](#). Portion of Structure B16-2nd upper facade mask.

[Figure 14](#). Location of Special Deposit C12E-1 in front of Structure A3.

[Figure 15](#). Detail of Special Deposit C12E-1, Structure A3.

[Figure 16](#). Photograph of artifact screening in the "El Vez" residential group.

[Figure 17a](#); [Figure 17b](#). Photograph of El Vez tomb, Special Deposit C147B-1.

[Figure 18](#). Plan of El Vez tomb, Special Deposit C147B-1; northern side of tomb is to the top of the

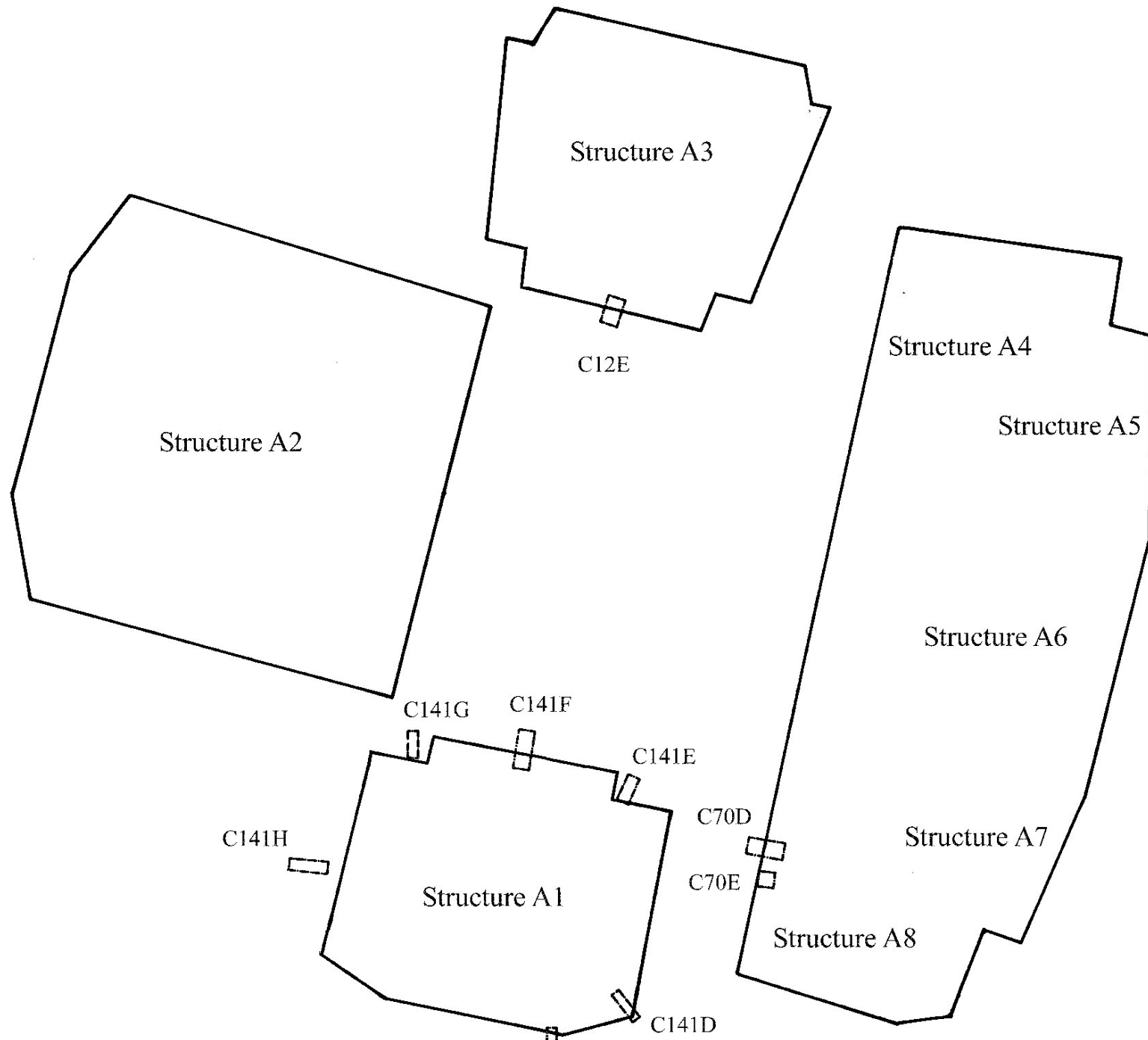


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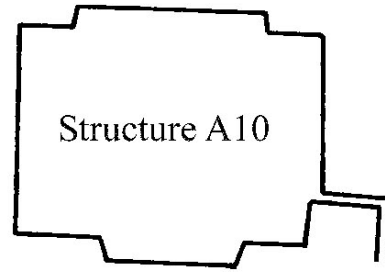
[Figure 19](#). In situ cache, Special Deposit C147C-3, El Vez.

[Figure 20](#). El Vez central carved jadeite Figure from Special Deposit C147C-3.

[Figure 21](#). Caracol map at the conclusion of the 1998 field season.



C141I<sup>u</sup>



Structure A10



































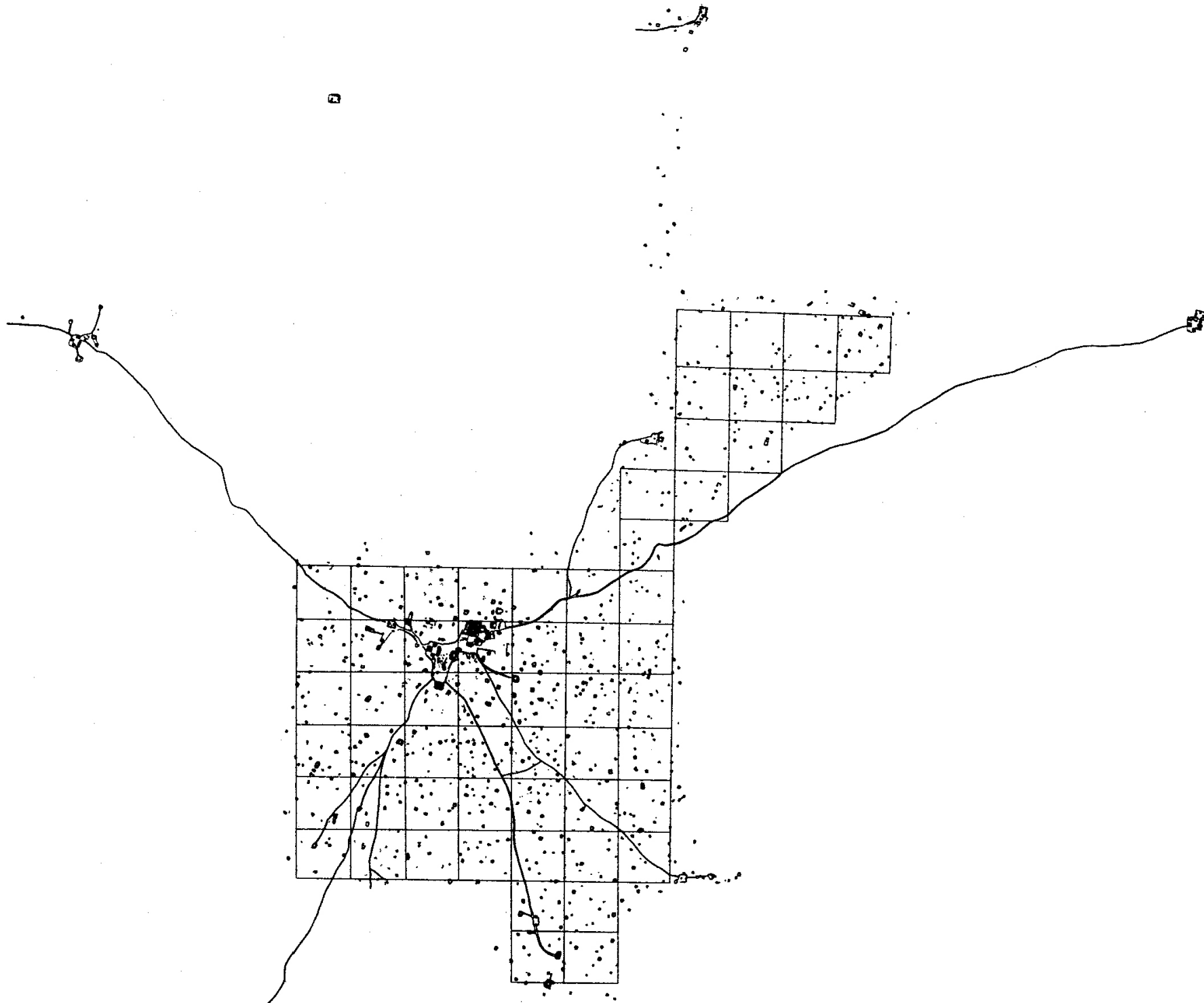


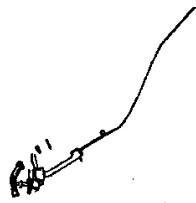












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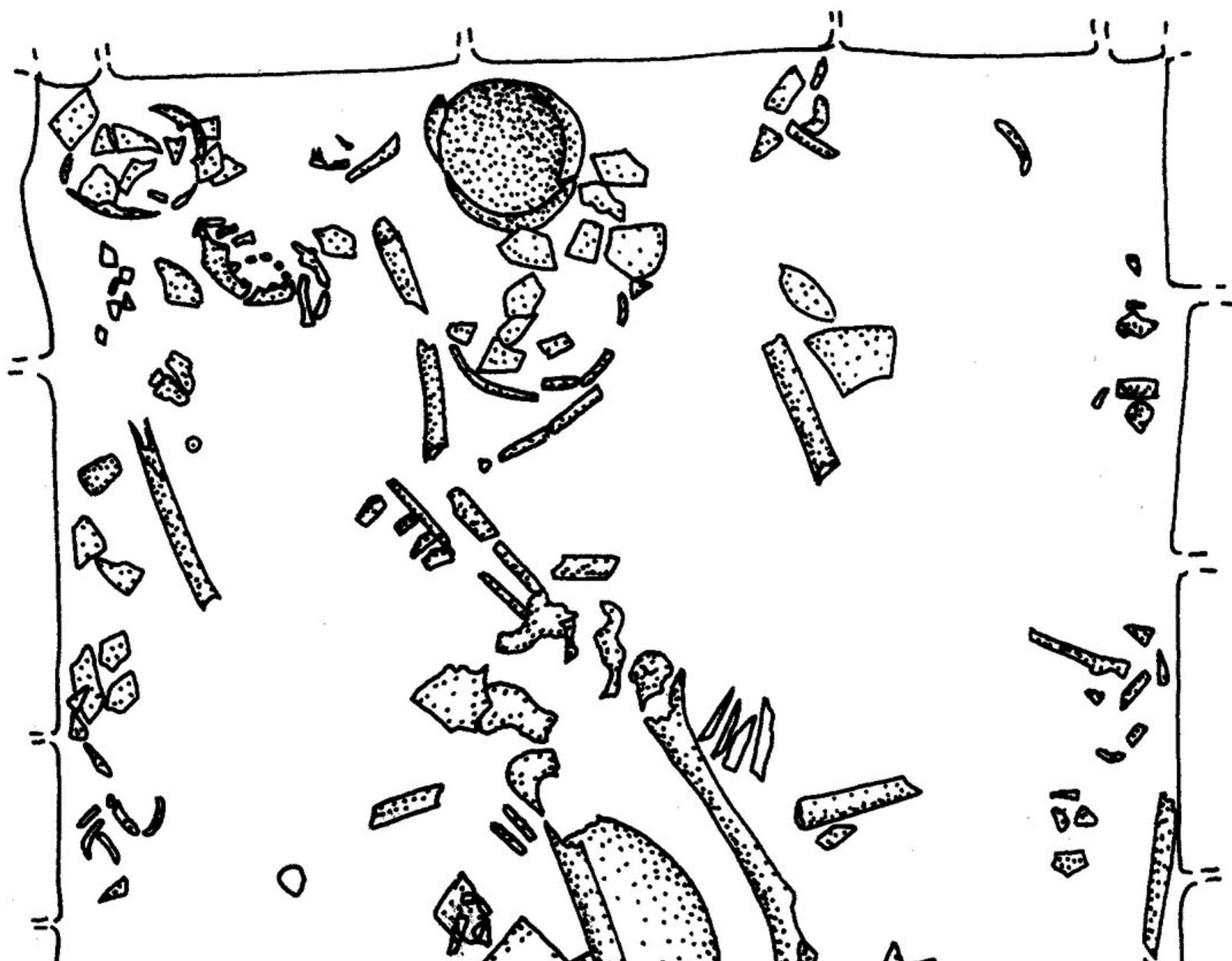




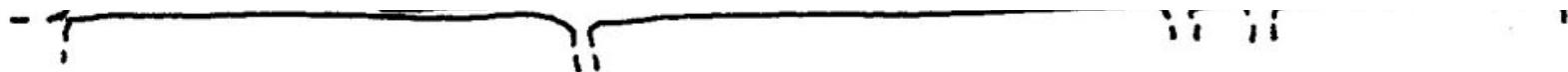












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