

**Secular, Sacred, and Revisited:
The Ancient Desecration, Disturbance, and Reconsecration of Maya Burials**

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paper prepared for an SEEM conference in

Santiago de Compostela, Spain

October 28, 2002 – November 1, 2002

For many years in the history of Maya archaeology there was an unspoken perception that the burial of an individual was a single discreet event, the Maya equivalent of a time capsule. This was supported by archaeological data that indicated that the majority of human remains found were of single articulated individuals. Extra bones discovered in a burial generally were viewed as heirlooms, battle trophies, or sacrifices. While there was early recognition that variation existed within the kinds of interments made by the ancient Maya, the recovery of multiple individuals in tombs (like those in the upper Motagua Valley of Guatemala) were believed to have resulted from a series of discreet, sequent events. Recently, however, we have come to understand the intricacies of Maya interments and to recognize that Maya burial practices often involved secondary interments, double funerals, and a host of other ritual permutations. Compound burial practices and chamber re-entries are, in fact, fairly common in the archaeological data recovered from Caracol, Belize. We believe that a greater understanding of the Maya burials can be achieved by considering compound burial processes, by undertaking detailed analysis of interments with disarticulated remains, and by making comparisons between single-event or single-entry interments and those with evidence for multiple events or repeated entries.

BACKGROUND

Maya burials traditionally have been categorized by means of their unit of deposition or “grave type” (see Welsh 1988 for a history). An interment was categorized as either directly in fill (simple), in a simply dug and refilled pit with or without capstones (cist), in a small stone-lined and stone-capped area with or without air (crypt), or in an open-air stone chamber (tomb). Efforts to identify grave type often were

correlated with assumptions that grave type could help suggest status. A further consideration was the number of individuals present (single, multiple, or mass) and the state of the articulation. Interments were generally categorized as primary or secondary. Primary deposits contained articulated human remains; secondary deposits contained disarticulated remains. Articulated skeletons were described as either flexed or extended; if extended, they were either prone or supine.

While completely disarticulated individuals have not been dealt with in great detail in Maya archaeology, it is evident that there were both individual bundled remains and mass burials included within the category of disarticulated individuals. And, somewhere in between were semi-articulated remains, often representing portions of one or more individuals. The presence of disarticulated skeletons indicates the existence of compound burial processes involving reduction of human remains followed by deposition (Sprague 1968). Elsewhere we have suggested that the Maya of Caracol practiced double funerals with the second funeral conjoined with the final secondary deposition of reduced human remains (D. Chase and A. Chase 1996). To accomplish this, the dead may have been previously buried (in tombs, crypts, cists, or simple burials), placed on scaffolding (as was done in certain North American Indian groups), left in perishable or more permanent containers (such as boxes, baskets, or ceramic jars), or bundled and kept in specialized locations or buildings. At some point after the death of the individual and once the human remains had been reduced and most, if not all, of the soft tissue had decayed, subsequent interment would have taken place, presumably in association with additional funerary ritual. Localized or spatially concentrated disarticulated individuals can represent the bundled human remains of a single person. However, in the

archaeological record not all remains are either localized or complete, and at Caracol, disarticulated remains often accompany articulated remains in the same burial.

The combined and varied states of articulation found in a single deposit at Caracol can be difficult to interpret. It is apparent that a single burial or tomb may contain relatively recently deceased and articulated individuals along with individuals who had been dead for a long enough period of time for at least some flesh to leave the bone and disarticulation to occur. Varied states of articulation in situations of clear multiple entry may suggest sequent events; however, single episode, single entry interments containing individuals in varied states of articulation, must represent either periodic interment of individuals who had died during a particular interval – such as took place during the Huron “Feast of the Dead” (Hickerson 1960) – or the combined interment of those who had previously died and been curated, following the death of a key individual. An analysis of burial deposition in residential groups at Caracol containing more than one interment indicates the possibility of periodic deposition every forty or fifty years, possibly roughly correlating with 2 katuns or one calendar round (D. Chase and A. Chase 2002).

Although an association between specific individuals and tombs is argued for sites like Palenque (Ruz Lhuiller 1973) and Tikal (Coe 1990), such a clear-cut correlation is generally not evident in the Caracol data. The formal model for tomb construction in the Maya area (M. Coe 1956, 1988) has the chamber being built for a specific individual, either at death or significantly before death (as indicated by an entryway). Hieroglyphic evidence from Caracol, however, indicates that the consecration of a chamber could take place independently of the actual interment of an individual. Thus, the chamber and its

construction may have been as important as the ultimate interment. Stratigraphic evidence suggests that many of these chambers would have been constructed well before their use and prior to the death of any potentially associated individual or individuals. And, it is not clear that these chambers were necessarily prepared for specific individuals or groups, although this may have been the case. The fact that many of Caracol's tombs have formal entryways indicates that easy, and in some cases, repeated access to these chambers was possible and desired. However, re-entry could be undertaken even if no formal entranceway was present.

At Caracol tombs with formal entryways are widely distributed at the site (Figure 1), occurring both in the epicenter and in many of the outlying residential groups. Sometimes these entryways could become deeply buried within the fill of later building efforts, but in other instances they remained accessible for an extended period of time. However, from what we can discern of burial patterns at Caracol, most tombs were utilized in single episodes. Thus, when multiple bodies were found in a chamber, they appear (with some exceptions) to have been deposited as a single event. The single-episode final use of tombs is also often physically mirrored in the archaeological record by the presence of only a single articulated individual in any given chamber at Caracol; remains of other individuals, when present, are usually disarticulated, presumably having been saved elsewhere until it was time for their appropriate deposition. Deposition of multiple individuals, all in varying states of articulation, also occurs in single-entry deposits - and in tombs without entranceways as well as in other grave types. While possibly similar to tombs containing multiple individuals at Nebaj, Guatemala (Smith and Kidder 1951), the emphasis on single episode interment of multiple remains at Caracol

differs from patterns recorded at Lubaantun, Belize (Hammond et al. 1975) and in Guatemala's upper Motagua Valley (Smith and Kidder 1943) where a sequence of articulated corpses appear to have been placed over an extended period of time within the same chamber.

CLASSIC PERIOD RITUAL AND RITUAL LOCATIONS AT CARACOL

By the Classic Period, if not earlier, the ancient Maya surely had developed a ritually proscribed way for dealing with death and burial. Thus, what we recover in the archaeological record must reflect these lost ritual acts and ceremonies. For Caracol, it is clear that most residential groups had their own shrines (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994). With the possible exception of epicentral groups, there was usually a single locus in most Caracol residential groups in which ritual acts were carried out. These rituals focused on the dead and on offerings and sacrifices. For the most part, these buildings were associated with the eastern sides of plazas and contained one or more tombs or burials. Surface finds sometimes associated with such structures have included incense burners placed on the stairs or summits of these buildings. Cave formations like stalactites and stalagmites are also sometimes found in the structure cores. More common, however, are ceramic cache containers usually placed to the front of these buildings; small lip-to-lip dishes sometime contained human fingers and larger lidded barrels, exteriorly modeled with human features and interiorly empty when found, probably once contained organic remains (D. Chase and A. Chase 1998).

The interments associated with the eastern buildings in each residential group contain only a small percentage of people who can be projected to have lived there (D. Chase 1997:25-26). The people placed in this specialized location must have been

selected for interment – whether based on their social status or propitious death and burial times - and must have had broader social meaning for the associated household group. Regardless, the shrines with their tombs, other interments, and caches served as focal points for residential group ritual. We – and others (Becker 1982, 1992; Becker et al. 1999; McAnany 1995) - have tended to view the eastern building in residential groups as related to “ancestor veneration” and as the locus of socially re-enforcing rituals (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994). Affiliation with the eastern shrine may have positioned the family unit within a broad site-wide context of status or rank or, perhaps, even land rights (Goldstein 1976; Pearson 1999:29-30; Saxe 1970).

Once the eastern locus tomb had been filled, subsequent interments and caches often were placed in association with the same building. Again, these cannot account for all the group’s dead individuals, but represent only pre-selected, presumably ritually or socially important, people. Confusing the situation even more, however, are the articulated sacrifices of both adults and children that also could be placed in association with these same buildings. Stable isotope analysis has indicated that sacrificial individuals had different diets from those found in encapsulated tombs (A. Chase et al. 2001) and, in some cases, associated artifacts like obsidian eccentrics, confirm a highly ritualized context that is distinct from other interments.

The archaeological contexts recovered at Caracol make it clear that compound burials and double funerals were commonly practiced by the ancient Maya of the site. Recognizing this fact helps explain why so many of the site’s burials (approximately 50%) are to some degree disarticulated; it also suggests that many of the dead could have been interred elsewhere before their final placement for archaeological recovery.

Previously, we (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994) suggested that the building associated with the eastern construction in each group served as a mausoleum. While the dead may have spent some time at or in this locus, they were not necessarily permanently buried in association with this building. Empty tomb chambers are generally either entered from or found positioned on the sides of Caracol's eastern buildings, perhaps indirectly indicating the transient nature of the site's dead.

Thus, the eastern building represents the locus of ritual for a household group. The combined individuals in a single tomb may suggest the unification of ancestors within the residential groups. Ritual acts, however may have been related to cyclical or periodic events as opposed to the strict veneration of ancestors (D. Chase and A. Chase 2002). One other aspect of the funerary customs at Caracol was chamber re-entry; however, more common than re-entry itself was the deposition and use of specific items as part of extended funerary ritual. In some cases, vessels are broken directly on top of burial capstones. In other cases, specially cached objects are placed either in direct association with the fill sealing a burial or in association with the building housing it. Burning and the use of pottery incense burners also form part of the ritual repertoire. Finally, human sacrifice, the signature of which is often difficult to recognize definitively in the archaeological record, probably formed a distinct part of the ritual proscriptions.

TOMBS AND COMPOUND BURIAL

Once characterized as strictly elite interments (M. Coe 1988:222; Loten and Pendergast 1984:9), tombs were clearly accessible to a wide range of ancient Maya society at Caracol and elsewhere (A. Chase 1992; D. Chase 1994, 1998). At Caracol, they are found in most residential groups and may have served to tie a given household to

a specific locale or piece of land. In essence the tomb and its contents served to “center” a given social unit. However, tombs are not the only grave type found at Caracol. Tombs, crypts, cists, and simple burials may all be found in the same residential plazuela group. At Caracol only tombs of the highest social status tended to contain single individuals and, generally, these were located in the site epicenter. Most tombs at Caracol contained multiple individuals and some degree of disarticulation.

At lowland Maya sites like Tikal (W. Coe 1990), Altun Ha (Pendergast 1979, 1982), and Calakmul (Carrasco et al. 1999; Folan et al. 1995) tombs have tended to be associated with single articulated individuals. The few “disturbed” tombs identified have tended to be attributed to Terminal Classic looting (Culbert 1973:77-78; 1988). Instances of this can be seen in North Acropolis Burials 8, 22, and 200 at Tikal. All had their capstones removed and were found largely devoid of contents; their chambers had been filled with earth and rock and were then sealed under thin plaster floors (W. Coe 1990:869-872, 930-931). The sealed plaster floors and bench constructions over both Tikal Burials 22 and 200, however, are likely incongruous with arguments of Terminal Classic depredation; similarly, it is unlikely the condition of Burial 8 can be simply attributed to looting. Based on the Caracol data discussed below, we would alternatively suggest that the events associated with these Tikal tombs may have been political actions associated with the Terminal Classic ritual termination of the existing Tikal dynastic structure.

Single-Event Multiple Individual Tombs (S.D.s C4C-2 and C14C-4)

While the assumption might be made that multiple individual interments or those with disarticulated bones are more likely to be found in re-entered chambers, single-entry

tombs may contain both single disarticulated individuals and combinations of articulated and disarticulated remains. Thus, the interred individuals were subjected to compound processing (with reduction followed by interment). These secondary burials and presumed second funerals were practiced by the majority of Caracol's population, including the acme of the site's society. An excellent example of a disarticulated individual in a sealed chamber is the presumed royal interment S.D. C4C-2 in Structure B19-2nd (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:26-29). The placement of multiple individuals, most disarticulated and some associated with partial ceramic vessels, can be documented from other sealed tomb contexts, such as that represented by S.D. C14C-4.

Sealed over 4 meters beneath the final plaza summit of Caana, S.D. C4C-2 was discovered and excavated in 1986. Entry to the chamber was gained through the rear wall of a deeply buried stairway niche. Upon removal of the rear stones of this niche, a 3 m long open-air passage was encountered that was blocked by vertical stone slabs at the point of entry to the chamber itself. The chamber was painted and had the long count date 9.10.1.12.11 (A.D. 634) recorded on its northern wall. The undisturbed contents of the chamber produced 8 ceramic vessels arranged about a disarticulated central skeleton that was also associated with jadeite earflares and beads (Figure 2). The skeleton itself was intermixed with a dark earth matrix that did not appear elsewhere on the chamber floor. The bone concentration appeared to be consistent with the remains of a single female between 35 and 45 years of age at death. However, the disarticulated and mixed condition of the bone, the dirt matrix, and the inclusion of several extra adult teeth suggested that these remains represented an *in situ* compound burial (Figure 3). While some (Grube 1994; Martin and Grube 2000:91-92) have suggested that these remains are

those of *Batz' Ek'*, the skeletal age doesn't match the presumed death date; nor is it even clear from the hieroglyphic record if *Batz' Ek'* was a female personage. What is significant here is that in S.D. C4C-1 we have archaeological confirmation of an undisturbed compound burial of one of Caracol's Late Classic elite personages.

Located over 3 kilometers distant from the epicenter, S.D. C14C-4 was accidentally revealed in the wall collapse of a looters' trench (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:45-46). Excavation revealed a small chamber lacking any entryway. The tomb had been set off axis to an eastern building into earlier constructed architectural remains. The stratigraphic evidence indicates a single event. The chamber produced the remains of minimally 7 individuals (5 adults and 2 subadults), 11 pottery vessels, shell jewelry, and jadeite and malachite beads (Figure 4). A single, badly decomposed adult female had been placed in the center of the chamber and what were probably individually bundled remains were then set around her at the edges of the chamber. That these bundled remains were the result of compound processes can be seen by the admixture of two distinct individuals (1 adult and 1 child) in recognized skeletal concentrations and in the inclusion of at least one partial vessel with one of the bone concentrations. Also part of the final funeral deposit was the inclusion of 5 small cache dishes (of the kind associated with human fingers elsewhere at Caracol) in the tomb. Thus, S.D. C14C-4 provides evidence for a single event tomb containing 1 articulated individual and the bundled remains of at least 6 other people in varying states of disarticulation.

RE-ENTERED TOMBS AT CARACOL

We once characterized some of Caracol's tombs as impermanent resting places (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994). While this can be inferred from both archaeologically

recovered empty chambers and from formally constructed tomb entryways with external building access, many of which are still open at the site, re-entry could be accomplished irrespective of the kind of chamber. Some tombs at Caracol did not have formal entryways, but re-entry of these chambers can be established archaeologically by cuts through floors and fills to reach tomb capstones, and the stratigraphy makes it clear that the re-entry occurred in antiquity. Sometimes the chamber contents bear out the re-entry. Why re-entry occurred can only be guessed. While some re-entry was undertaken to place the awaited tomb occupants with no disturbance of pre-existing remains, other re-entry led to changes in context and content. Perhaps heirlooms were necessary for some ritual or ceremony (Fitzsimmons 1998; Grube and Schele 1993). Perhaps it was necessary to inter other items, bodies, or body parts in the chamber for whatever reason. Or, the re-entry may have served to ritually desecrate an interment and, thus, remove its “power” or sanctity. Alternatively, the re-entry may have further combined the spirits or essences of the deceased ancestors, already united within the tomb.

Re-entered tombs have been extensively documented at Caracol. For this paper, we will not be considering re-entries of chambers for the initial placement of remains, but rather only re-entries that changed the contents or context of the deposit in some way. Thus, there appear to be three types of formal re-entry, each with different archaeological signatures. They are referred to as: (1) limited re-entry; (2) modified re-entry; and (3) obscured re-entry. Limited re-entries are characterized by chambers, capstones, and contents that are still largely intact, even if the contents may be disturbed. Modified re-entries are characterized by chambers whose contents were presumably dispossessed; these chambers were largely infilled with earth that either contains or covers partial

skeletal and artifactual remains that have often been burned. Obscured re-entries are characterized by almost intact contents on a chamber's floor, but completely sealed under construction fill in a roofless chamber; a later burial often is placed in the upper reaches of this structural fill.

Limited Re-Entry (S.D.s C1B-1, C19A-2, C86C-2, C87E-1)

In a limited re-entry something is either placed or extracted, but the open-air chamber is preserved. Excavations of tombs with open entryways have encountered chambers whose contents are empty, disturbed, and intact. Limited re-entry of chambers with and without entryways has also been encountered in the archaeological record of Caracol. When evidence of limited re-entry is found sealed beneath later constructions, the contents of the chamber may be either minimally or totally disturbed, but the original contents of the chamber generally can be discerned and most pottery vessels are largely reconstructible.

In Structure L3 a tomb with no entryway had been re-entered through its ceiling and its capstones had been replaced at a 90 degree angle from their original installation; the contents of S.D. C19A-2 were totally disrupted (Figure 5), but could be reconstructed as consisting of a single adult male, 4 ceramic vessels, and jadeite beads and mosaic pieces; this re-entry would have taken place after 9.9.0.16.17 (A.D. 613), the date painted on one of the tomb's capstones (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:41-43). In Structure A38 a plaster cap sealed a circular pit that had permitted re-entry of the chamber through its capstones; it is suspected that minimally a finger cache was placed in the chamber upon re-entry and that the contents of the tomb were moved about, for pottery vessels and bones were stacked along the northern wall and only 1 skeleton showed signs of any

articulation (Figure 6). In Structure A34 a circular cut permitted re-entry through the southernmost capstone. Although the original interment dated to after A.D. 572 based on a hieroglyphic capstone (and consistent with partial vessels recovered in the chamber), minimally 2 other individuals and 13 intact ceramic vessels, dating a century later than the original materials, were placed over the largely disturbed earlier interment (D. Chase and A. Chase 1996). A similar cut in a buried room floor in Structure B20-2nd indicated that the middle tomb in this building (later looted in modern times) was probably re-entered through its formal entryway prior to the construction of Structure B20-1st.

Modified Re-Entry (S.D.s C4H-1, C4I-1, C7B-1, C117B-4, C141B-1)

A second kind of re-entry largely preserves the tomb's roof, but does not preserve the context of the original contents of the chamber or its open-air nature. Rather, there appears to have been a ritual re-processing of artifactual and skeletal material so that both contents and context were altered. Material was then re-deposited within the tomb, often beneath or within the addition of an earthen matrix. In some instances, only the original contents of the chamber appear to have been re-processed, but in other instances it would appear that new skeletal remains and artifacts were added to these re-opened chambers.

This modified re-entry is evident in both lateral tombs excavated in Structure B19-1st during our 2001 field season. Both chambers contained pottery vessels and human bone that was broken and burnt in an earthen layer on and immediately above the floor of the chamber (Figure 7). The dispersed and partial remains of 1 adult, 1 subadult, and 7 vessels (only 1 complete) were recovered in eastern lateral chamber; the dispersed and partial remains of 2 adults, 3 subadults, and 8 vessels (4 complete) were recovered in the western lateral chamber. In the case of both of these Late Classic tombs, clear re-

entry holes were recovered (Figure 8). And, what is assumed to be the former contents of each chamber appear to have removed, broken, and put through a process that involved differential burning. After this ritual treatment, portions of what are assumed to be the original tomb materials were then redeposited in the chamber along with a layer of earth; more dirt, rubble, cut stone, and modeled stucco from demolished buildings was then used to largely fill each chamber, in one case almost to the roof of the tomb. In one of the B19 chambers an articulated hand was left in the earth matrix immediately covering the floor of the chamber prior to the deposition of the final rubble layer. Fits between the ceramics re-deposited on each chamber's floor with pieces atop the final tomb fill indicate that the re-filling of the chambers constituted a single purposeful event. The reconstructible pottery vessels were all temporally earlier than some of the small pottery sherds included in the overlying fill, indicating that these materials were not new items, but had rather been re-processed. Both of these chambers also included portions of specific kinds of birds that are only found within highest elite interments at Caracol; and, one of the chambers contained a reconstructible incensario of a kind only noted from special deposits associated with the summit of Caana. Thus, the suggestion is that the interment was appropriate for this location. The tomb re-entry and ritual re-deposition within the two chambers was later sealed by plaster floors. The rooms continued to be used, as is indicated by both ritual burning on the new floorings and by the addition (and, in one case, subsequent removal) of benches to the rear rooms over the disturbed chambers.

A similar situation involving the infilling of a tomb may be inferred in front of Caracol Structure B34. At this locus a tomb was constructed in the early part of the Late

Classic era and an interment was placed in the spacious chamber. Half a century later it was re-entered and the single adult and five vessels were moved about, but left on the floor of the chamber; then, more than a meter of earth and rubble were used to fill in the chamber and the disarticulated remains of 5 adults and 2 reconstructible ceramic vessels were included in the upper part of this matrix. The small airspace that remained was then covered with capstones and a new plaza floor sealed the re-entered chamber.

In Structure F2 a re-entered tomb was excavated in 1986 in which the floor of the chamber had been penetrated in antiquity and then the chamber had been systematically filled with the partially articulated (or, minimally, tightly bundled) remains of more than 24 individuals embedded in a dirt matrix and interlaced with evidence of burning that could be seen on the bone, jadeite beads, and broken ceramic vessels that comprised this deposit. The successive deposition and lensed burning of these semi-articulated bundled remains in this chamber constitutes a situation not recovered elsewhere archaeologically at Caracol.

Another dirt-filled chamber was excavated behind Structure A1 in 1997; in this case, the chamber contained the broken, burnt, dispersed, and partial remains of 6 individuals and 41 reconstructible whole and partial ceramic vessels rather randomly distributed throughout the earth fill. Clearly, this chamber – like the one in Structure F2 – is important for understanding Caracol mortuary ritual. The chamber was positioned directly behind Caracol Stela 1 and Altar 1; the ceramic contents of the chamber are consistent with the early Late Classic date (9.8.0.0.0 or A.D. 582) of Stela 1. Additionally, Satterthwaite (1954) found the remains of a great many reconstructible vessels associated with the stela and these also appear to be consistent with the dating of

the ceramic materials found within the chamber. Excavation in the fill behind the chamber revealed 2 elaborate caches and a twice-lifesize seated stucco figure immediately west of the chamber wall (similar to one noted from the site of Bonampak; see Tovalin Ahumada and Velazquez de Leon Collins 1997). Thus, this “tomb” and its contents formed part of a broader ritual pattern that at various points included special structural caches, a stela and altar, and a freestanding stucco statue.

Obscured Re-Entry (S.D.s C37C-1, C39E-4, C137B-2)

Obscured, or what appear to be accidentally re-entered, tombs have been recovered in both the epicenter and in the residential units of Caracol. These are chambers without their capstones that are completely filled with construction core, but which still have their presumably original contents on the chamber’s floor, largely untouched save for the damage created by the addition of fill. All of the known examples contain more than one individual. Anderson first recovered one of these “re-entered,” but preserved tombs, in the epicentral Structure D18 in 1958; it contained the skeletal remains of 2 adults, 14 ceramic vessels, and an extensive deposit of shell and jadeite beads. Another such chamber was recovered in Structure 4P46, some 2.5 kilometers distant from the epicenter, in 1989. It contained 5 individuals, 7 pottery vessels, and smaller artifacts. A third infilled chamber minus its capstones, located only 0.5 kilometers north of the epicenter, was excavated in Structure H10 in 1997; it contained 4 adults and 1 subadult as well as 6 pottery vessels, spondylus shell, and jadeite and shell beads (Figure 9). The two tombs excavated the UCF Caracol Archaeological Project both had other simple interments – perhaps the reason for the obscured re-entry - set within the upper fill of each chamber. Because the floor contents of these 3 chambers are

largely intact and include jadeite artifacts, it is suspected that in each of these three instances there may have been accidental re-entry, possibly through the collapse of one or more capstones. Interestingly, no capstones were recovered in the fill within any of the chambers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A consideration of the Caracol burial data highlights a number of important factors related to mortuary practices of the ancient Maya. It is evident that there is not a correlation between one individual and one tomb. Tombs could be re-used, multiple individuals could be placed in the same tomb, and tombs could be consecrated without human remains. Not all tombs with multiple individuals and/or multiple articulations are the result of re-entry, at least at Caracol. Some are single entry deposits incorporating compound burial processes and presumably double funeral rituals, each of which would have celebrated the death of more than one individual at a time.

The varied articulations of single-entry tomb occupants make it evident not only that compound burial processes were undertaken, but that funerary activity was also a group enterprise, re-enforcing the tomb as a central ritual place for the living and deceased occupants of the residential plazuela. That multiple individual interments generally are not indicative of sacrifice is indicated by stable isotope data suggesting that the occupants of a single tomb (regardless of their state of articulation) had the same or similar diet (A. Chase and D. Chase 2001) while presumed sacrificial victims (generally located in simple burials or cists and identified by variant artifactual offerings such as obsidian blades) had a different and more nutritionally deficient diet (A. Chase et al.

2001). However, some individuals interred within eastern shrines may have been sacrifices.

The Caracol re-entry sample can be subdivided into three categories (exclusive of re-entry for initial placement of human remains). The first is the re-entered chamber in which something is either placed or extracted, but with the open chamber being preserved and where the contents of the chamber can be reconstructed; these have been characterized as “limited re-entries.” The second kind of re-entry largely preserves the tomb’s roof, but does not preserve the content or context of the original contents of the chamber or even its entirely open-air nature; these have been characterized as “modified re-entries.” In the third kind of re-entry, chambers without their capstones are completely filled with construction core, but still have their presumably original contents on the chamber’s floor, largely untouched save for the damage that the added fill has done; these have been characterized as “obscured re-entries.”

It often is difficult to suggest the actual reasons for re-entry, although (as indicated) in some cases it appears that re-entry was accidental. Was there intentional robbery involved in re-entry activities in antiquity? Where chambers had formal entryways that are found open, it is often impossible to tell. However, in all three identified classes of re-entry defined for Caracol, jade and jadeite objects are present. This fact would tend to argue against the intentional “looting” of these chambers in antiquity. While the removal of relics is possible in any of these cases, in most instances of re-entry other activity clearly also was being undertaken. It is probably significant that the obscured and modified forms of re-entry involved infilling in with earth, even though the symbolism of this is not clear.

It is suspected that “limited” and “modified” re-entries served a variety of purposes. Given that the contents of a chamber were largely intact in limited re-entries, it is suspected that these re-entries involved various levels of activity that were viewed as important to a still extant and functional social group, be these the recovery of needed heirlooms or the modification of ancestral identities. It is unclear whether the mixing up of bones in re-entries could have symbolized the merging of ancestral identities (e.g. Bloch and Parry 1982:34-35) or, alternatively, the separation of ancestral spirits from their bodies, the tomb, and the building or group. A wide range of possible interpretations exists. However, the modified re-entries were so extreme in some cases that they may have served the purpose of establishing the rights of a different social group to an existing area. Thus, limited or obscured re-entries could have served to reconstitute the social meaning of tombs and to fix the jural rights of new usurpers in Caracol’s political scene. Given that these re-entries occur in some of Caracol’s most important loci, the significance of these carefully carried out acts cannot be underestimated. Yet, given the vagaries of the archaeological record, we can only speculate as to the true nature of their ancient meaning.

What is clear in the Caracol archaeological data is that tombs served as focal points for most residential groups at the site and that these chambers would have functioned in both the sacred and secular (or social) realms. In cases where it was accessible through an open entryway, the tomb may have originally functioned as a temporary processing area for the dead of a given residential group, who were subsequently re-interred elsewhere in a second funeral ceremony. However, tombs were sealed and entryways were blocked when certain social and ritual conditions were met.

But when this happened, another ritual cycle appears to have begun within a residential group with its own rules for the timing and placement of caches and burials (D. Chase and A. Chase 2002).

In some instances, after the passage of a significant amount of time (based on the accumulated archaeological data and recovered stratigraphy), re-visitations to the earlier tombs were made. Some of these re-entries preserved the contents of the chambers, modified them slightly, or added to them, but the overall context was unaltered. These re-entries, then, appear to have reinforced, or at least not changed, the secular and sacred aspects of the chambers and their relationships to a given social group. Other re-entries, however, appear to have completely transformed the contents and context of a given chamber. These modifications likely changed the context and meaning associated with a given chamber by altering its secular and sacred identities, perhaps changing dynastic ties and instituting new political and social processes and rights. It is the transformational re-entries at sites like Caracol and Tikal that perhaps hold the promise of elucidating social and political changes both within and at the end of the Classic Period.

Acknowledgements

The excavations at Caracol, Belize were funded by a wide variety of sources (see <http://www.caracol.org>). The excavations reported on here were funded: by private donations to the University of Central Florida; by grants from the Ahau Foundation, the Stans Foundation, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and the United States National Science Foundation (SBR-9311773); and, through funding provided by the Government of Belize.

Figure Captions:

- Figure 1. Map of Caracol, Belize showing location of known tombs and tombs with entryways.
- Figure 2. Plan of S.D. C4C-2 showing tomb outline, entryway, and contents.
- Figure 3. Photograph of the disarticulated skeletal remains in S.D. C4C-2.
- Figure 4. Plan of S.D. C14C-4 showing distribution of pottery, a disintegrated articulated individual in the center of the chamber, and disarticulated, probably bundled, skeletal remains along the walls of the chamber.
- Figure 5. Photograph of S.D. C19A-2 showing disturbed contents of the tomb.
- Figure 6. Plan of S.D. C86C-2 showing disturbed contents of the tomb.
- Figure 7. Photograph of the western lateral chamber, S.D. C4I-1, in Structure B19-1st.
- Figure 8. Section through the eastern lateral chamber, S.D. C4H-1, in Structure B19-1st.
- Figure 9. Photograph of the almost intact remains in S.D. C147B-2.