

MAYA MULTIPLES: INDIVIDUALS, ENTRIES, AND TOMBS IN STRUCTURE A34 OF CARACOL, BELIZE

Diane Z. Chase and Arlen F. Chase

It is commonly assumed in both the public and professional perceptions of Maya archaeology that tombs serve as time capsules, each representing a single event, and that burials of single individuals were the normal interment type, at least during the Late Classic period (A.D. 550–800). The investigation of Caracol Structure A34 provides excellent examples of tomb re-entry as well as of multiple-individual interment in sealed contexts, both of which contradict current assumptions. Analyses of the excavations also embody a true conjunctive approach by utilizing stratigraphy, osteology, artifacts, and epigraphy. When the archaeological data from Structure A34 are placed within a broader context, single-event single-individual tombs are shown to be but one manner of interment at Caracol. Although the large number of multiple-individual burials and the possibility of widespread tomb re-entry at Caracol may appear aberrant when compared with general interment practices at other Maya sites, the inferred funerary rites are well within the bounds of worldwide cultural practices relating to death and burial.

En la percepción tanto pública como profesional de la arqueología Maya, se supone por lo general que las tumbas funcionaron como cápsulas de tiempo, de las cuales cada una representa un evento único, y que el enterramiento de individuos sólo fue el tipo normal de sepultura, al menos durante el período Clásico Tardío (550–800 d.C.). Investigaciones realizadas en la estructura A34 de Caracol proporcionan excelentes ejemplos de tumbas de re-enterramiento, como también del entierro de múltiples individuos en contextos sellados y esto contradice las suposiciones de la actualidad. El análisis de las excavaciones involucra una verdadera aproximación de conjunto al emplear estratigrafía, osteología, artefactos, y epigrafía. Cuando consideramos los datos arqueológicos procedentes de la estructura A34 en un contexto más amplio, observamos que las tumbas de un solo individuo que representan un solo evento constan de un solo un tipo de enterramiento en Caracol. Aunque la gran cantidad de entierros de múltiples individuos y la posibilidad de tumbas de re-enterramiento en Caracol pudieran parecer aberrantes cuando se comparan con las prácticas de enterramiento reportadas en otros sitios Mayas, los ritos funerarios inferidos están dentro de los límites de las prácticas culturales a nivel mundial relacionadas con la muerte y el enterramiento.

Human mortuary remains are extremely important in reconstructions of prehistoric culture because their analysis can reveal information on everything from population history to status differentiation to belief systems. Maya mortuary practices have been the subject of intense study (Coe 1988; Ricketson 1925; Ruz 1967; Welsh 1988), which has revealed substantial variation in interment locations and practices for the ancient Maya of Central America. Although multiple-individual interments have been documented in the Maya lowlands (Hammond et al. 1975; Healy et al. 1983; Leventhal and Dunham 1989; Moholy-Nagy 1987; Smith and Kidder 1943; Welsh 1988), the

most common Maya burial pattern appears to have been single-individual interment. Archaeological evidence for the re-entry of tombs is likewise sparse, but has been occasionally documented (Becquelin and Baudez 1979:Plates 79, 80; Coe 1959:133; Miller 1986:50).

The lowland Maya site of Caracol, Belize (Figure 1), provides a substantial skeletal ($n = 392$) and burial ($n = 213$) sample (D. Chase 1994, 1997).¹ Interments at Caracol are found in various locations at the site both in the ritual and residential areas of the epicenter and in the core settlement at some distance from presumed ceremonial and administrative architecture (see Chase 1992:Figure 3.3). Human skeletal remains occur

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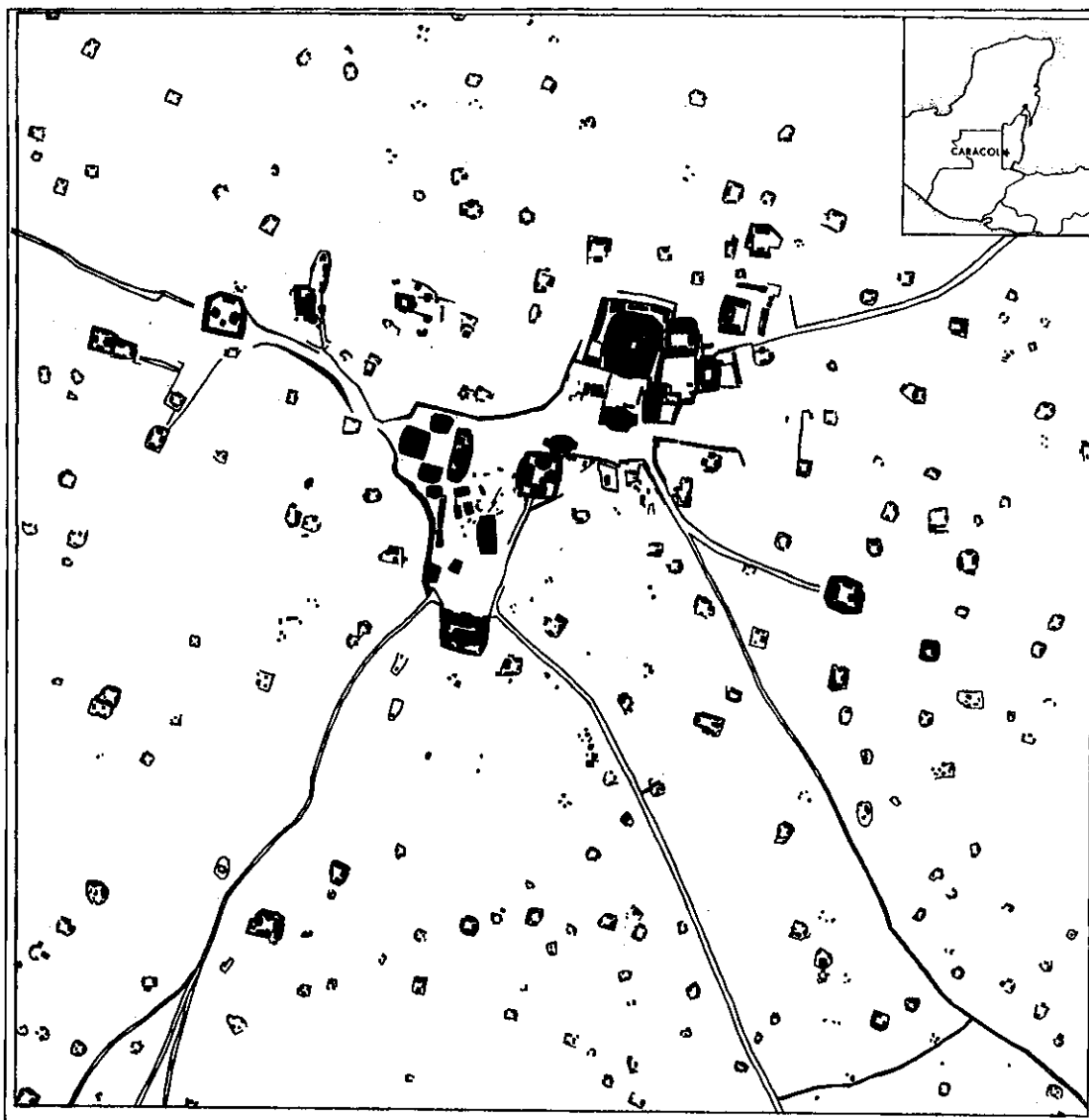


Figure 1. Location of Caracol relative to Central America (inset) and a 4 km² plan of the site; north is to the top of the page. The Central Acropolis is located immediately north of the figure's midpoint.

in a full range of contexts, from simple burials to tombs to inclusion in refuse (see Chase and Chase 1987, 1995, and D. Chase and A. Chase 1994 for general information on Caracol Archaeological Project investigations).

Eastern buildings have been identified as favored locations for burials at various locations in the southern Maya lowlands (Becker 1982; Chase 1985; Welsh 1988:215; but see Leventhal 1983 for a contradictory perspective from Copán). However, the association between death-related ritual and eastern constructions is particu-

larly well developed at Caracol (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994), where such eastern buildings frequently contain more than one formal interment.

More unusual at Caracol is the high proportion of tombs relative to other recovered interment types in the total sample (40.4 percent; $n = 86$). Although 86 tombs with associated human bone have been encountered at Caracol (D. Chase 1994:Table 10.1 and Footnote 1), we use data from only 58 in this paper because the other 28 were either incompletely described by previous projects ($n = 2$) or the chambers had been looted

or disturbed ($n = 26$), and hence body counts are impossible to ascertain without extensive reinvestigation. An additional seven tombs that have been excavated are not included in the burial or tomb totals because no bone was found in these chambers. Although the majority of interments at Caracol are of single individuals, at the conclusion of the 1996 field season multiple burials constitute 45.6 percent ($n = 83$) of the 182 Caracol interments for which body counts can be ascertained. Table 1 indicates securely identified cases of single and multiple burials in relation to known tomb and non-tomb contexts relative to epicentral and core/settlement groups investigated at Caracol. The data indicate that for well-controlled contexts with a representative sample of bone, 65.5 percent ($n = 38$) of the excavated tombs contain multiple individuals, whereas 36.3 percent of non-tomb burials ($n = 45$) contain multiple individuals. Multiple-individual burials include complete articulated bodies as well as partially articulated and incomplete nonarticulated skeletal material, and hence reflect primary and secondary burial as well as re-entry into burial locations for placement of additional individuals or removal of relics (and occasionally the entire contents of a given chamber).

Certain interments show clear evidence of re-entry; this is particularly evident in tombs. Approximately 60 percent of Caracol tombs have formal entranceways that would have facilitated repeated entry, but re-entry is also in evidence in tombs with no formal entranceways, such as that in Structure A38. Virtually all the known interments from Caracol are also associated with artifactual offerings. Like the skeletal remains, the artifacts are found in both whole and partial condition and may sometimes be correlated with distinct interment episodes. Analysis of human bone in combination with artifacts, stratigraphy, and hieroglyphic texts reveals a complex pattern of mortuary activity at Caracol that consists of both primary and secondary interment. Although we have cited only isolated examples of multiple burials and purposeful re-entry of chambers, the data suggest that both were elements of the predominant Classic Maya practice at Caracol.

Investigations in Caracol Structure A34

revealed two tombs that not only provide excellent examples of episodic burial and re-entry, but also clearly demonstrate the necessity of conjoined analysis of stratigraphy, epigraphy, human osteology, and artifacts in order to provide a full interpretation of interment events. We suggest that the Structure A34 investigations and the work at Caracol in general not only provide information on the variability in Lowland Maya burial practices, but also offer insights into wider interpretations concerning ancient Maya beliefs surrounding death and burial.

Caracol Central Acropolis Investigations

The Caracol Central Acropolis is, as the name implies, centrally located within the epicenter of the site. It is but one of many areas of Caracol investigated by the current archaeological project (Chase and Chase 1987, 1996; D. Chase and A. Chase 1994). The complex measures some 65 m by 80 m and is equidistant from Caracol's South Acropolis, A Plaza, and B Plaza. The basal platform on which the acropolis rests rises almost 5 m above the surrounding terrain.

As mapped by Satterthwaite in the early 1950s (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981), the complex consisted of seven structures, but excavation has revealed the existence of two additional buildings (Figure 2). The group is dominated by northern and eastern pyramids, Structures A34 and A37, that rise just over 7 m above the associated plaza. Three other buildings in the group, Structures A33, A38, and A39, rise some 3 m above the plaza. Structures A35 and A36, which remain unexcavated, appear to be building platforms less than .5 m in height. The foundations of Structures A40 and A41 were discovered through excavation; although both had been largely stone-robbled in their latest manifestations, the northern walls of Structure A40 still rise to almost a meter in height; the remnants of both buildings were, however, hidden from view by the later Structure A38.

When we first encountered the eastern building, Structure A37, in 1985, we found that it had been looted. An axial trench that extended into the pyramid above plaza level had struck a tomb in the core of the building (Chase and Chase 1987:34) that contained a bench and an entrance-

Table I. Caracol Burials.

Opera- tion No.	Structure	Total Burials	Tomb		Non-Tomb		Opera- tion No.	Structure	Total Burials	Tomb		Non-Tomb	
			Mult.	Single	Mult.	Single				Mult.	Single	Mult.	Single
C1	B20: Caana	4	0	2	1	1	C63	Nowhere	1	0	0	0	1
C3	A37: C. Acropolis	2	1	0	1	0	C65	Zero	1	0	0	0	1
C4	B19: Caana	3	0	1	0	2	C66	Dwarf	2	1	0	1	0
C5	A63: Zoom	1	1	0	0	0	C67	Chunta	3	0	0	1	2
C6	B108: Rag	3	1	0	0	2	C71	A2	1	0	0	0	1
C7	F2: Frog	4	1	0	0	3	C72	D4: S. Acropolis	1	0	0	0	1?
C8	A6: Wooden Lintel	2	1	0	0	1	C73	A7	1	1	0	0	0
C9	F17: Canela	1	0	1	0	0	C74	C69: Chib	1	1	0	0	0
C10	A4	2	2	0	0	0	C75	B64: C Group	2	0	0	1	1
C12	A3	1	0	1	0	0	C76	B26: Barrio	1	0	0	0	1
C14	4L6: Conchita	3	1	2	0	0	C79	F4: Frog	4	0	0	1	3
C14	4P10: Pajaro	1	0	0	1	0	C85	Bayal	7	1	1	1	4
C14	6F7	1	1	0	0	0	C86	A38: C. Acropolis	2	1	0	1	0
C14	8F8: Tulakatuhebe	1	1	0	0	0	C87	A34: C. Acropolis	2	1	1?	0	0
C14	8F9: Tulakatuhebe	1	0	1	0	0	C88	D16: S. Acropolis	1	1	0	0	0
C15	K4: Castle	1	0	1	0	0	C92	N.W. Cave	1	0	0	1	0
C18	B5	2	0	0	0	2	C95	B118: Walled	4	1	0	3	0
C19	L3: Machete	6	0	1	1	4	C98	Sam	1	0	1?	0	0
C22	C11: Tabanos	2	0	0	1	1	C99	Cedro	1	0	0	0	1
C22	C13: Tabanos	1	0	0	1	0	C101	Alta	1	0	0	0	1
C24	O4: Monstera	1	1	0	0	0	C102	Wind	1	0	0	1	0
C24	P14: South	1	1	0	0	0	C103	Earth	1	0	0	0	1
C28	6G4: Mujer	1	1	0	0	0	C104	Fire	2	1	0	1	0
C29	C97: Tres Estrellas	2	1	1	0	0	C105	Cuchara	1	1	0	0	0
C31	2E20: Hilltop	2	1	0	1	0	C107	Midget	4	1	0	0	3?
C32	M11: Mosquito	1	0	1	0	0	C108	Blood	1	0	0	1	0
C32	M12: Mosquito	3	1	0	0	2	C109	Sweat	1	0	0	0	1?
C33	(O27): Muertos	1	0	1	0	0	C111	Tenedor	2	0	0	1	1
C34	Talking Trees	1	0	0	0	1	C116	Centro	1	1	0	0	0
C35	C63: J's	1	0	0	0	1	C117	B34: E. Acropolis	11	1	1	1	8
C36	Arana	2	1	0	0	1	C118	Monterey	4	0	0	2	2
C37	D17: S. Acropolis	1	0	1	0	0	C119	Veracruz	3	0	0	2	1
C37	D18: S. Acropolis	1	1	0	0	0	C120	Capstone	1	1	0	0	0
C39	Rooster	9	1	0	3	5	C121	Gerard	1	1	0	0	0
C39	Chick	2	0	0	1	1	C123	London	1	0	1	0	0
C39	Hen	1	0	0	1	0	C124	Madrid	1	0	0	1	0
C40	Chachalaca	2	1	0	0	1	C125	Berlin	1	0	0	0	1
C41	M7: Midway	1	0	0	0	1	C127	Rome	1	0	0	1	0
C42	M81: Lost	2	0	0	1	1	C132	Lima	1	0	0	0	1
C48	Dove	1	0	0	1	0							
C49	B88: Ultimo	6	0	0	1	5							
C50	N43: Tiger	3	0	1	0	2							
C50	N46: Tiger	1	0	0	0	1							
C51	M42: Pech	1	0	0	0	1							
C52	Blanca	3	0	0	3	0							
C53	Rita	2	1	0	0	1							
C54	Toucan	2	1	0	1	0							
C56	Cerrita	2	0	0	2	0							
C58	Escoba	1	0	0	0	1							
C59	2E28: Highrise	2	1	0	0	1							
C59	2E30: Highrise	1	0	0	0	1							
C60	Pato	3	0	0	3	0							

Note: Includes only formal Caracol burials with secure individual counts through the 1996 field season; interments with limited and isolated bone fragments largely have been excluded from the current table. A complete listing of interments through the 1994 field season may be found in D. Chase 1994:Table 10.1.

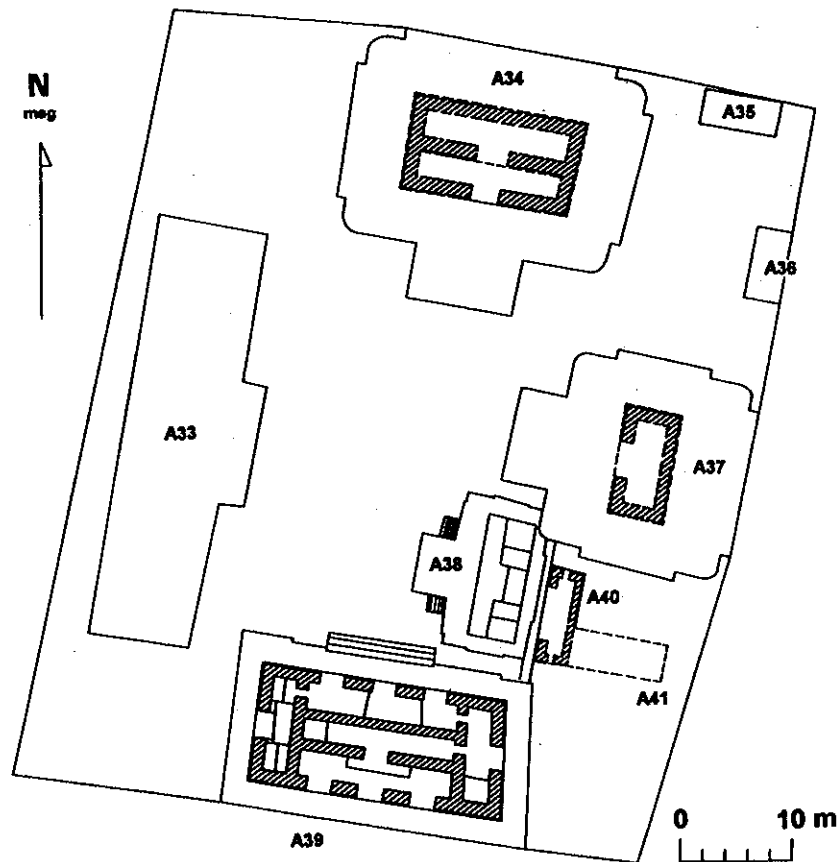


Figure 2. Detailed plan of the Caracol Central Acropolis illustrating excavated buildings and their reconstructed plans; on the buildings themselves dashed lines indicate reconstructed features while diagonal lines indicate excavated features.

way. Despite the looting, we excavated the tomb during the 1985 season and recovered the disturbed bodies of three individuals as well as four vessels and some attendant jewelry. Testing of the basal portion of the Structure A37 stairway during the 1992 field season revealed a cache of two large lip-to-lip vessels that contained a single large jadeite bead and numerous unshaped rocks secreted within the stair. In front of (west of) the steps we encountered two additional deposits that included face cache vessels (A. Chase 1994:Figure 13.7a, e), one of which held the pyrite remnants of a mirror. Along with two pottery vessels, the remains of three adults in varied states of articulation were placed in a single interment in front of the same steps; intermixed with the bones of one of the adults were almost a dozen obsidian lancets, perhaps an indication of sacrifice.

Excavation of Structure A38 during the 1992 field season uncovered the entire building as well as hidden constructions behind it, but south of the Structure A37 substructure. Once Structure A38 was built, access to the earlier Structure A40 was limited to a small passage between Structures A38 and A39. Structure A38 had a raised substructure with a central stairbalk flanked by side stairways (Figure 2) surmounted by a bilevel building that had perishable walls. There was a lower frontal portico and a raised rear room that had benched areas along its entire length. An axial trench revealed that Structure A38 was built in a single construction effort. The stairbalk was the only part of the construction that showed any modification; it was originally lower with a bank of steps behind the balk connecting the two side stairways.



Figure 3. Initial investigations into Structure A34 showing the test excavation at the base of the substructure in which the lower tomb was found.

A tomb measuring 2 m long by 1.10 m wide by 1.46 m high was built into the hearting of the initial Structure A38 stairbalk. Although the tomb lacked a formal entryway, it had been re-entered in antiquity. The Classic Maya had dug a roughly oval hole through the top of the original stairbalk down to the southern capstones of the hidden chamber to gain access; they then refilled the hole and repaired the floor with a plaster patch. All evidence of this re-entry was subsequently hidden beneath the construction of the final raised stairbalk for Structure A38. Inside this tomb were three adult individuals (two males and one female), 12 pottery vessels, and a large amount of shell jewelry; one of the individuals was found in primary, articulated condition. In a pattern similar to that in Structure A37, two other special deposits were found on axis to the building in the plaza in front of the stairbalk; they comprised a cache, consisting of a single pottery vessel, and a burial of two children, both four years old, accompanied by obsidian eccentrics and one pottery vessel.

We investigated Structure A39 during the

1992, 1993, and 1995 field seasons through both areal exposure and axial probing. In plan, Structure A39 consisted of three tandem rooms bounded by transverse rooms at either end (Figure 2). Archaeological data demonstrate that Structure A39 was constructed in a single effort, but then saw repeated modifications that involved the addition and removal of benches as well as alteration of traffic patterns through the building by blocking doorways. Although no caches or burials were associated with Structure A39, we encountered complete vessels on the floor of its northern room as well as an extensive Terminal Classic trash dump in the alley separating Structures A38 and A39.

Apart from the buildings already discussed, the only other edifice in the Central Acropolis that has been excavated is Structure A34.

Caracol Structure A34 Investigations

Structure A34 dominates the northern end of the Central Acropolis. During 1992 we undertook two separate excavations related to the building (Figure 3). We placed a 2-m-x-2-m test on axis to

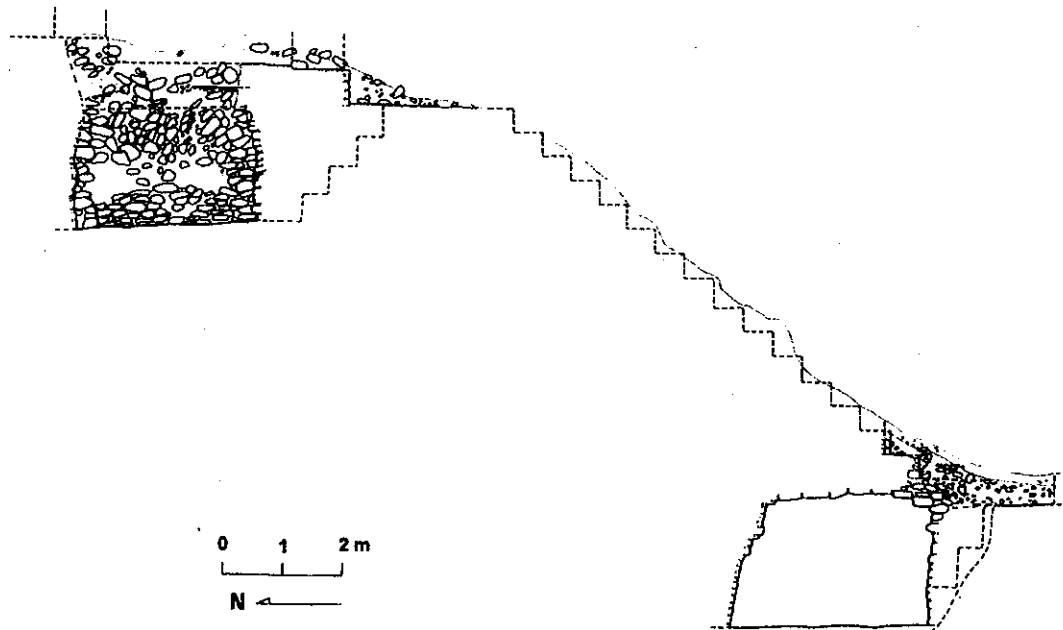


Figure 4. Section of Structure A34 showing the location and relationship of the upper and lower tombs.

the structure at the junction of the pyramid base with the central plaza; it revealed both the lower steps of the structure and a tomb situated beneath them (Figure 4). Areal clearing of the structure's summit in an attempt to determine the building plan revealed the remnants of a two-room building with single central interior and exterior doorways. Owing to the steepness of the rear angle of the basal pyramid, the entire back room of Structure A34 had slid off the substructure. Excavations on the summit also focused on an axial depression that proved to be a collapsed tomb.

Structure A34 Upper Tomb

As in many other cases at Caracol, the depression visible in the summit of Structure A34 proved to be the result of the collapse of a tomb vault that was, however, still intact at its southern end (Figure 4). The depression contained a mixture of large uncut rocks from construction core as well as cut stone from the middle wall and step-up for the collapsed building. The tomb (S.D. C87B-1) was 3.1 m long by 1.6 m wide by 1.91 m high, with an overall volume of 7.49 m³ (see Chase 1992:Figure 3.2 for comparative volumes).² The walls of the chamber from the floor to the vault

spring were composed of shaped limestone blocks; the vault, however, had been constructed of unfinished "firestone" (marbleized limestone). The crude construction of the upper vault may have been a factor in the chamber's collapse. A southern entranceway to the tomb had been blocked in antiquity. cursory investigation of the blocked entrance revealed a lip-to-lip set of pottery cache vessels that had been placed in the stone fill, presumably as an offering during the final exit from the chamber. Apart from the cache, we encountered only one fragment of a human femur on the tomb floor. The presence of the single bone indicates that a body had once been placed in the chamber but had been almost entirely removed, together with any grave offerings, by the Classic Maya prior to the abandonment of the building.

Structure A34 Lower Tomb

The lower tomb in Structure A34 (S.D. C87E-1) was discovered in the test excavation at the base of the building (Figures 4, 5, 6, 7). There was evidence of a poorly preserved, use-related floor abutting the lower step of the construction; the steps rested on a lower floor. The lower floor had been cut through by the Maya; unusually large

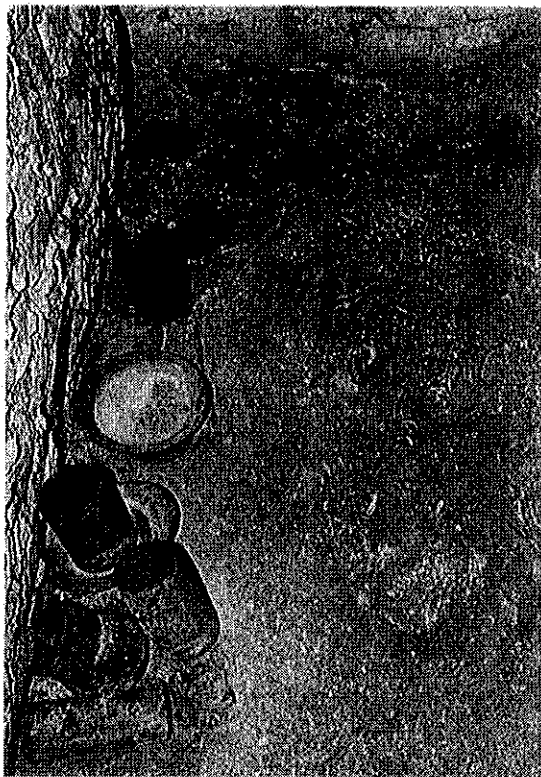


Figure 5. Structure A34's lower tomb floor.

quantities of obsidian blades and debitage found in the vicinity of the cut, eventually totaling 4,946 pieces, suggested that a tomb entrance might be nearby, and investigation of the area did, in fact, reveal an intact chamber.

Stratigraphic data indicate that the tomb was constructed at the same time as the latest stairs of the structure. The greater part of the chamber rested underneath the stairs, but the entranceway was located in front (south) of the steps; the cut in the floor encompassed the entranceway stairs. The entranceway was blocked by a masonry wall constructed from inside the tomb at some point following completion of the chamber. Final entry to and exit from the chamber were accomplished by stepping on large stones left at the southern end of the tomb and by raising the southernmost capstone.

The tomb was constructed of well-dressed stone covered by white plaster. The chamber was oriented 13° east of north; its dimensions were 3.05 m long by 1.52 m wide by 2.25 m high, and its total volume 8.30 m³ (cf. Chase 1992:Figure

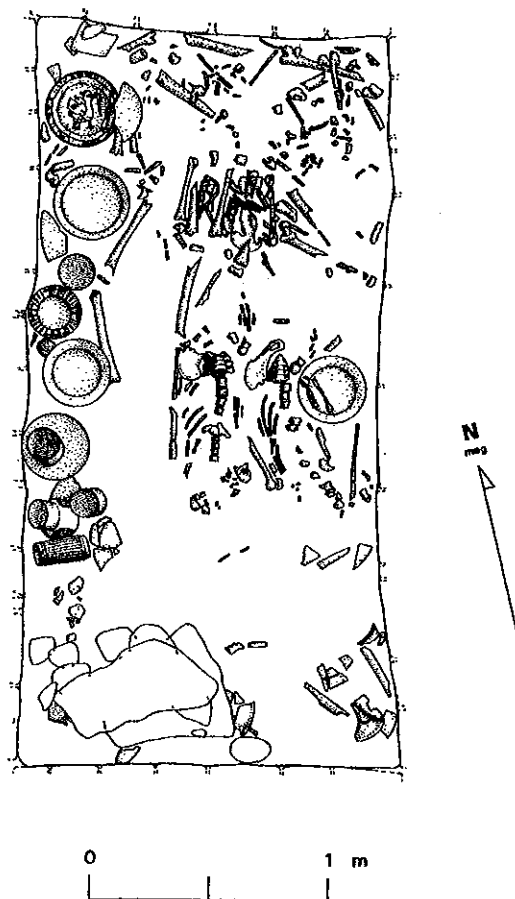


Figure 6. Plan of the Structure A34 lower tomb illustrating the upper level of bone (with no reconstruction of bone outlines shown).

3.2). A red panel on the north wall contained the remains of a hieroglyphic text, as did a single centrally located red-painted capstone. There are only five other known tombs at Caracol that contain readable, painted tomb texts (A. Chase 1994:163); the presence of the texts suggests that one or more occupants of the tomb were of royal, although not necessarily ruling, status.

The scattering of small waferlike jadeite pieces ($n = 403$) on the floor of the chamber preceded the interment of any individuals. A substantial quantity of human bone and pottery, shell, and bone artifacts lay in the tomb. The pottery was placed primarily along the west wall of the tomb (Figures 5, 6, 7), whereas skeletal remains were located predominantly in central, western, and northern areas of the chamber. Combined archae-

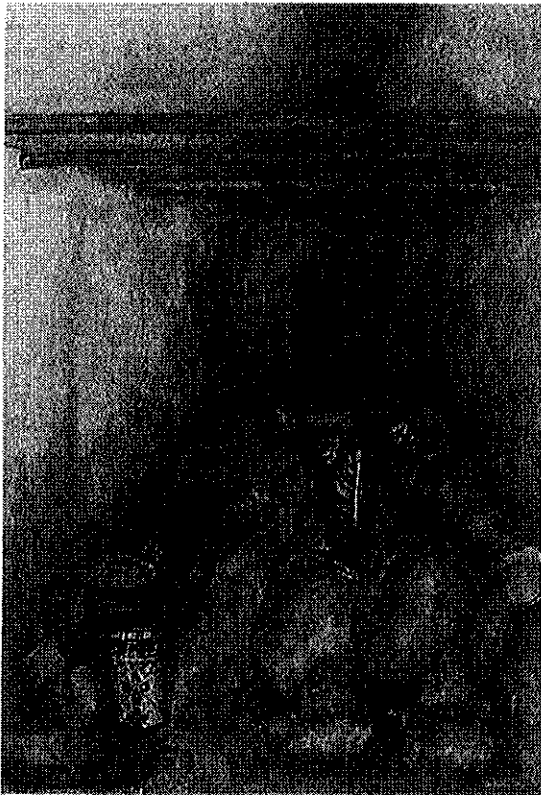


Figure 7. Artist's conception of the latest burial event in the Structure A34 lower tomb. Painting by Barbara Stahl.

ological evidence indicates a minimum of two entries, each associated with specific deposits of human bone and certain artifacts.

Osteology. Skeletal remains of more than one person were found in the chamber. Three individuals appear to have been placed in the tomb in primary articulated condition, a fourth individual was not articulated, but was relatively complete. The extremely partial and nonarticulated remains of other individuals were also present, primarily at the northern and southern ends of the chamber. The location and completeness of the skeletal remains permit establishment of a history of chamber use based on osteological analysis that clearly implies at least two formal interment episodes.

Individual 1 was a male, approximately 35 to 45 years of age at death. He was buried in extended position on his back in close proximity to the east wall of the tomb; his head was oriented to the south. His body was completely articulated

with the exception of his right leg, which was absent. His right femur, tibia, and fibula may have been among the two sets of right leg bones located in the northeastern area of the chamber. The position of his left tibia in situ above Individual 3's torso indicates his placement in the chamber subsequent to Individual 3's initial deposition and lower-body displacement. Individual 1's skull and mandible were not well preserved. Only 18 teeth were present in the area of the skull. Teeth found in the area of the head, predominantly molars and premolars, include an upper left canine with pyrite inlay, a lower molar with an enamel extension, and several teeth with calculus build-up. Degenerative changes in the bone include slight arthritic lipping of the cervical vertebrae. Only one item, a shell pendant, was located in the individual's upper body area, but his right arm lay on top of a single Belize Red plate (Figure 10r) located at the eastern side of the chamber.

Individual 2 was also a male and was also probably 35 to 45 years of age at death. He was interred in the tomb immediately next to (west of) Individual 1, in extended position on his back with his head located to the south in a central position. He was completely articulated with the exception of his right leg, which was missing. Osteological remains indicate a muscular individual, and distinctive muscle attachment areas made it possible to identify the missing, but articulated, leg, which was located next to pottery vessels along the eastern wall of the chamber. Because it was separated from the body, but articulated, the right leg was very probably set in its location at the time of the individual's interment. The location of Individual 2's left leg directly above the articulated remains of Individual 3's torso shows that placement of Individual 2 followed both the initial interment and any subsequent movement of Individual 3. Degenerative changes in the vertebrae of Individual 2 indicate slightly more advanced arthritis than that found in Individual 1. Again, only 18 teeth, predominantly molars and premolars, were located in the area of the skull; they exhibit hypoplasia and slight shovelings, and include an upper right central incisor with an empty inlay hole and filing. A series of adult human teeth, each with a single hole drilled in the

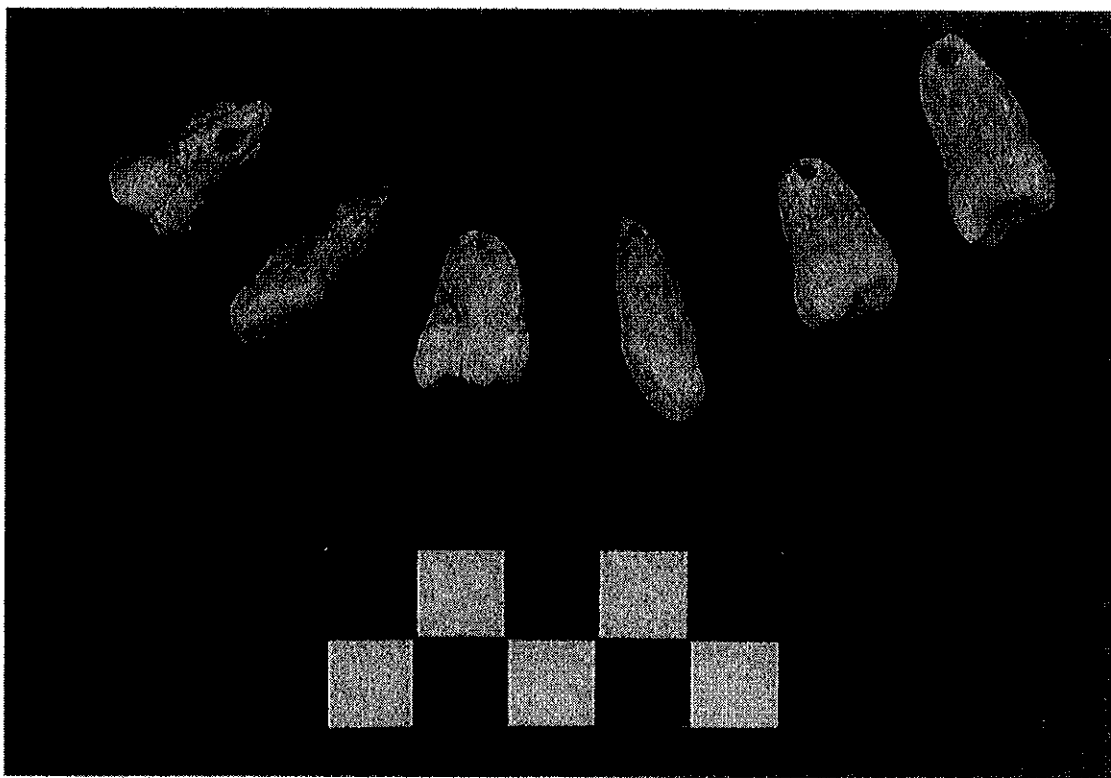


Figure 8. Drilled human teeth associated with Individual 2 in the Structure A34 lower tomb. Photograph by Richard Spencer.

root for suspension (Figure 8) were located in the chest area and were very probably worn as a necklace by Individual 2.

Individual 3, probably the first occupant of the tomb, was a female and was located in the north-central area of the chamber below the articulated lower legs and feet of Individuals 1 and 2. She was approximately 35 years of age at death. Caries and hypoplasia were visible in her teeth, but she exhibited no other pathologies. She appears to have been placed in the chamber in an extended position with her head to the north. The only part of her body that remained in situ, however, was her upper torso. The only artifact in the immediate area of her skeleton was a single molar (LM₂) with a drilled suspension hole, presumably from the necklace associated with Individual 2. Her upper body was completely articulated; her lower body was apparently moved at a later date to accommodate the placement of Individuals 1 and 2.

Individual 4 was located in the northeastern area of the tomb among what was either a pile or

a bundle of disarticulated bones. Teeth indicate an adult about 25 years of age; no sex identification was possible. The origin of the bones is difficult to assess. It seems quite likely that the ultimate deposition of the material was coeval with the interment of Individuals 1 and 2, but it is not clear whether the bones were collected from this tomb location or from somewhere else. Artifacts in the area of the bone group, but west of Individual 3, include shell beads, shell ornaments, and shell earflare assemblages as well as a jadeite pendant (Figure 9), obsidian blades/lancets, and several carved bone implements. The concentrated location of the artifacts may support identification of the skeletal remains as bundled, rather than piled, ancestor bones.

Disarticulated osteological remains not easily identifiable as belonging to Individuals 1, 2, 3, or 4 also existed in the tomb. A partial female skull lay just south of a linear vessel concentration along the west wall; several long bones were situated south of Individual 1 (in an area with broken

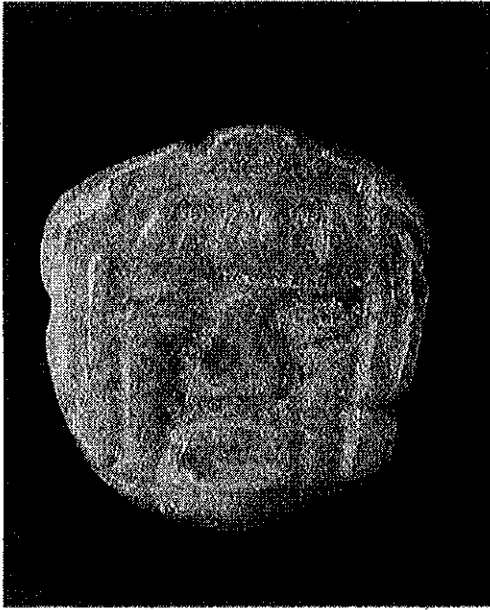


Figure 9. Jadeite pendant, 2.1 cm high, associated with Individual 4 of the Structure A34 lower tomb. The image contains a crownlike element in its forehead that has been associated with Maya royal authority (Freidlow 1990). Photograph by Richard Spencer.

incensario pieces); and additional long bones, vertebrae, and teeth occurred along the north wall of the chamber. Some of the bones very likely derive from the partial Individual 3 or the bundled or piled Individual 4, but there are some remains, specifically extra teeth, from nonisolated or non-identified individuals.

The sequence of events in the chamber's history, judged solely on the basis of osteological remains, embodies a minimum of two interment episodes. In this scenario, Individual 3, the first known occupant of the tomb, lay undisturbed until the tomb was re-entered and her lower torso was moved. Disarticulated bones located throughout the chamber may have been dispersed at this same time. Interment of Individuals 1 and 2 clearly followed that of Individual 3, and may have coincided with the re-entry that resulted in partial disinterment of her remains as well as placement of a bundle (or other grouping) of ancestor bones that largely, but not necessarily wholly, represents Individual 4.

Ceramics and Obsidian. Two classes of artifacts from the tomb, ceramics and obsidian, are also indicative of episodic re-entry or disturbance

of the occupants. The chamber contents included 13 complete and seven incomplete pottery vessels (Figure 10) and 379 pieces of obsidian.

The seven incomplete and broken vessels consist of large sherds that were scattered throughout the chamber and, in some instances, were located beneath other materials. Specifically, an incense burner (Figure 10f) was smashed and scattered beneath the stones used to facilitate entry and exit once the chamber's formal entryway had been sealed. Pieces of each of three partial polychrome bowls (Figure 10a, b, e) lay in the northwestern and southern parts of the chamber, and fragments of a large polychrome dish (Figure 10c) and a water jar (not illustrated) were situated under whole vessels along the west wall. The base of a dish or jar (Figure 10d) lay in the northeastern portion of the chamber adjacent to and partly above a complete polychrome dish (Figure 10h). The distribution of partial vessels throughout the chamber and below other tomb contents is indicative of disturbance. More important, all seven date to an earlier Late Classic horizon than the 13 whole vessels (Figure 10g-s) in the tomb, which date to the middle of Caracol's Late Classic era. The partial vessels (Figure 10a-f) may therefore have formed all or part of the original vessel assemblage presumably associated with Individual 3. The complete vessels are very probably related to the second interment episode indicated by the skeletal remains and suggest that re-entry took place some 100 years later.

The obsidian found in the tomb is also strongly suggestive of re-entry. Obsidian layers occur in the fills over tombs at both Caracol (Chase and Chase 1987:15, 43) and elsewhere (see Coggins 1975:373 for Tikal). At least the entrance area of the tomb, if not the unexcavated area above the chamber's vault, was laced with obsidian. The large amount of obsidian and its concentration in the southern part of the chamber suggest that re-entry involved removal of the southernmost capstone.

Whereas obsidian blades and lancets are quite common in Caracol tombs, and at least a dozen complete blades or lancets were noted in the vicinity of Individual 4, non-blade obsidian is infrequent, if not extremely rare, in both tombs and burials at the site. Of the 379 pieces of obsid-

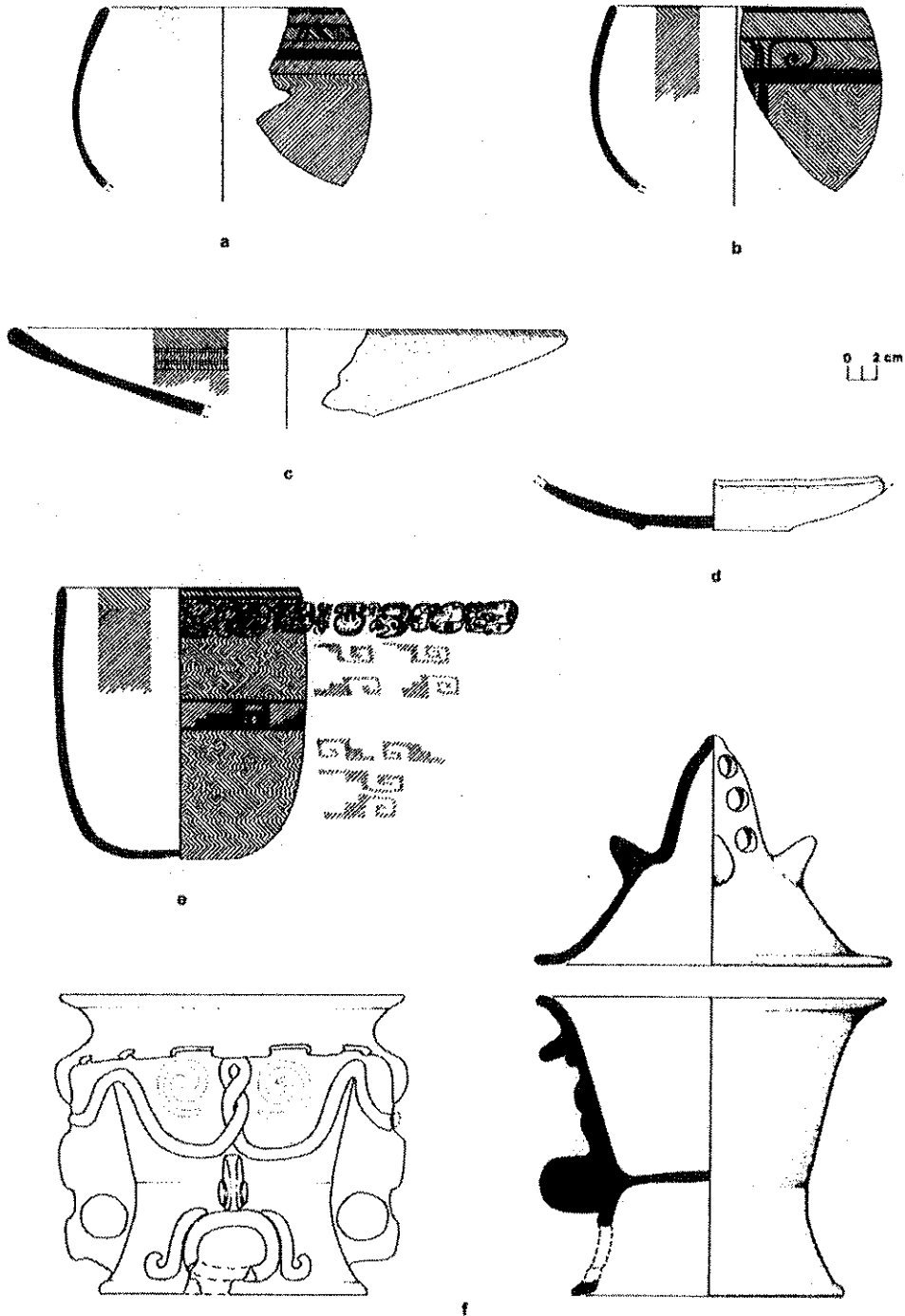
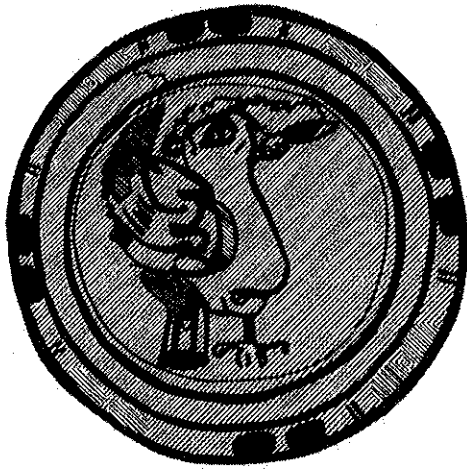


Figure 10. Ceramics associated with the Structure A34 lower tomb: Saxche Orange Polychrome (a and b); Pajarito Orange Polychrome (c); Valentin Unslipped (d); Saxche Orange Polychrome (e); Candelario Applique (f); possibly



g



h

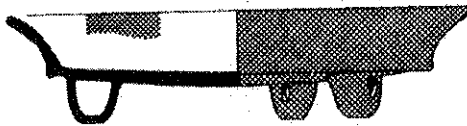


i

0 2 cm



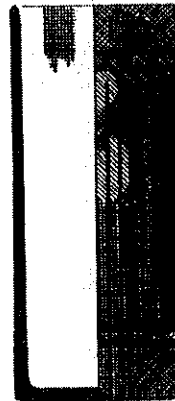
j



k

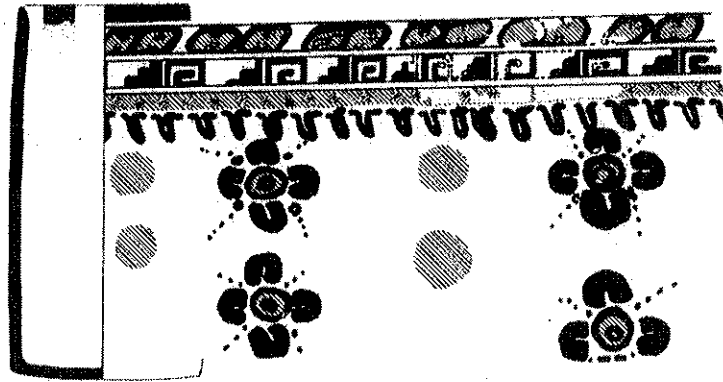


l



m

Tenaja Fluted (g); Machete Orange Polychrome (h); possibly Tialipa Brown (i and l); unnamed Orange Polychrome (j); Infierno Black (k); possibly Canoa Incised (m); Zacatel Cream Polychrome (n); Platon Punctated-Incised (o); pos-

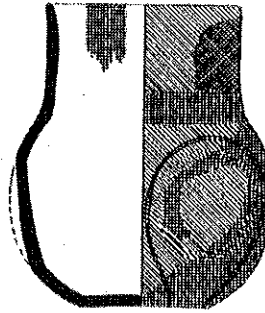


n

0 2 cm



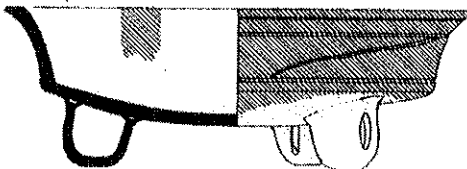
o



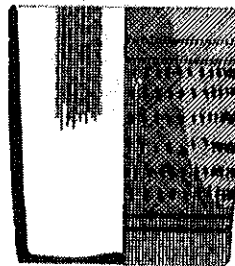
p



q



r



s

sibly Tialpa Group Composite (p); unnamed Red (q); Belize Red (r); possibly Calabaso Gouged-Incised (s); one large jar body sherd not shown.

ian recovered from within the tomb, 185 are blades or blade fragments, 175 are classified as "flakes" or larger "fragments," and 19 are classified as "cores." The obsidian from the tomb exterior consists of 1,469 blades or blade fragments, 3,273 flakes or fragments, 156 cores or core fragments, and 48 prepared platforms, and hence is extremely similar to the material from within the tomb.³ The resemblance and the concentration of the obsidian in the tomb's southern end near its entranceway suggest that the initial tomb closure was accompanied by placement of an obsidian layer that was disturbed upon re-entry, with the result that a great many pieces of obsidian fell into the re-opened chamber.

Hieroglyphic Texts and Dating. The hieroglyphic text painted on the north wall was extremely poorly preserved and provided no dating or other information relating to the tomb. The wall text presumably once contained an individual's death date, whereas the painted text on the vault capstone (Figure 11) presumably refers to the consecration of the chamber (A. Chase 1994:160). Because both the red paint and the hieroglyphic text are partially obscured by stones in the roof vault, the capstone must have been painted prior to its placement in the tomb's roof during the completion of the chamber, and hence the text can only refer to initial interment activities.

The capstone text has been read by N. Grube (1994:101–102). It opens with a calendar round date of 6 Eb 10 Xul or 6 Eb 15 Xul (A1-B1), for which Grube (1994:101) has suggested the following potential dates: "6 Eb 10 Xul at 9.7.8.12.12, 9.10.1.7.12, or 9.12.14.2.12; or, alternatively, 6 Eb 15 Xul 9.7.3.11.12, 9.9.16.6.12, or 9.12.9.1.12." It is apparent that no single date can be suggested by hieroglyphic analysis alone. A host of other alternatives also exist for the calendar-round dates; however, the dates given are the only ones that coincide with the range of time indicated by the ceramics. Assuming that the hieroglyphic readings are correct, a consideration of the contextual and ceramic parameters permits assignment of the consecration date of the chamber to a five-year period. If, as we have suggested, the earlier ceramics (Figure 10a–f) are associated with the initial tomb assemblage of Individual 3,

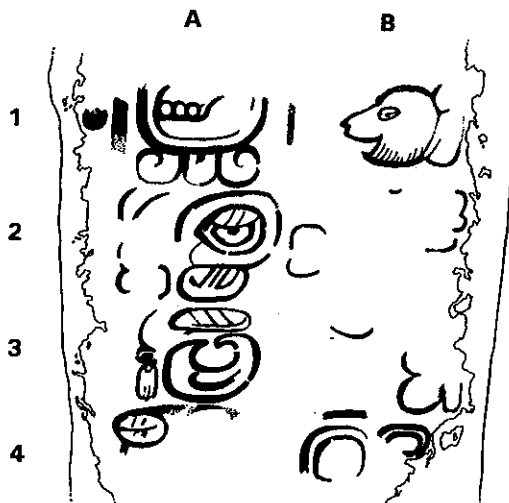


Figure 11. Hieroglyphic text from capstone, averaging 36 cm in width, in the Structure A34 lower tomb. Drawing by Nikolai Grube.

only the 6 Eb 10 Xul 9.7.8.12.12 or the 6 Eb 15 Xul 9.7.3.11.12 dates are possibilities for the text. Hence, the tomb was formally covered (*mak-ah*, A3) either in A.D. 582 or A.D. 577. The event may have been undertaken in the presence (*y-il*, A2) of a Caracol ruler (Grube 1994:101–102). Elsewhere in the Maya area epigraphy has been used to postulate tomb re-entry (Grube and Schele 1993). Unfortunately, the Structure A34 text only records information concerning the consecration of the chamber and not subsequent events that can be archaeologically documented.

Discussion and Summary

The investigation of Structure A34 revealed the existence of two tombs that help to illustrate the complex nature of Caracol burial practices. Both tombs are similar in size and configuration, both contain formal entranceways on their southern sides, and both have evidence of at least two ancient entries to place and remove bodies; however, the two differ substantially in their contents.

At some time after the initial entombment, the upper tomb was re-entered, presumably through its formal entryway, and the burial and any offerings that may have accompanied it were removed with the exception of one piece of human long bone; a single cache vessel and lid were left in the tomb entranceway. For reasons unknown, no other body or accompanying goods were ever

placed inside the chamber. Long after the final use of the upper chamber the vault of the tomb collapsed, probably in conjunction with the subsidence of the rear room of the building.

The lower tomb, in contrast, contained the remains of more than four individuals along with substantial grave offerings and two painted hieroglyphic texts. From this evidence it is possible to identify a series of interment episodes spanning a period of approximately 100 years. The investigations suggest the existence of both primary and secondary burials as well as the disturbance of pre-existing interments. The first occupant of the lower tomb was a female (Individual 3). Her lower body was apparently moved in order to permit placement of the bodies of subsequent occupants of the chamber (Individuals 1 and 2). The two men were placed in the tomb in full articulation with the exception that each had one leg removed and placed elsewhere in the chamber. There are no clear cut marks related to the removal of the legs, but this may be the result of poor preservation of the bone. That the separation of Individual 2's leg took place not long after death (i.e., before complete decay of the flesh) is suggested by the articulated condition of the displaced leg bones and the rest of the skeleton. Intentional removal of the legs of Individuals 1 and 2 as well as the probability that the corpses did not merely lie in another location long enough to begin to decay is also indicated by the fact that the same leg—the right one—was moved in both cases.

The substantial number of disarticulated bones located in the northern and eastern parts of the chamber may have been either bundled or piled. Although they all may have come from the same source, either within the tomb or elsewhere, the location of the source is difficult to ascertain. The nonarticulated bones that are present represent primarily the remains of a single individual, although fragmentary and incomplete remains of several other people may also be present.

Apart from the stratigraphy and the skeletal remains themselves, other evidence for re-entry is found in two specific artifact classes—ceramics and obsidian. Hieroglyphic texts reveal nothing about the episodic use of the chamber, but in combination with other archaeological evidence the

capstone text can be used to date the completion of the chamber and presumably the initial interment episode to either 9.7.3.11.12 6 Eb 15 Xul or 9.7.8.12.12 6 Eb 10 Xul. The seven partial ceramic vessels, scattered throughout the chamber and located beneath other tomb contents, are separated from the 13 whole ceramic vessels by almost 100 years, and hence the ceramics, like the human bone, suggest at least two interment episodes. The broken vessels very probably formed all or part of the original vessel assemblage associated with the initial interment episode. The whole vessels appear to correlate with the second interment episode approximately a century later. The distribution of obsidian both within and outside of the tomb is also indicative of re-entry after the formal closing of the chamber; a similar distribution of obsidian inside and outside of a chamber existed in the re-entered Structure L3 tomb, which was initially consecrated in 9.9.0.16.17 2 Caban 15 Uo (Chase and Chase 1987:43).

Conclusion

Tombs at Caracol were not always intended to house a single deceased individual's corpse or designed for eternal occupancy. Use and re-use of a tomb could span a considerable period of time. Some corpses placed in tombs were clearly disturbed after interment; bones and grave offerings were also moved within chambers or removed partially or entirely from their original settings and placed elsewhere (not within the chamber) at a later date. Interments at Caracol very clearly show that entombment was not always immediate, but could follow the disintegration of flesh. Other interments document re-entry of tombs, even those without entranceways, that resulted in disturbance of the individual and the removal of relics of bone and pottery without the addition of new occupants or offerings.

As we have previously noted, multiple-individual interments make up a large portion of the Caracol burial sample. The majority include both complete articulated and incomplete disarticulated remains. It is evident, as indicated in comparative works on the Maya (Welsh 1988:216) that, at Caracol, immediate primary interment was not the overwhelmingly prominent burial

practice. The Caracol burial practices are within the realm of discussions of secondary interment by Landa (Tozzer 1941:130–131) and certain contemporary activities (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994:62, Note 2). Although the purposeful removal of bone from a tomb has been postulated (Miller 1986:50), it has been termed “a rare lowland feature” (Coe 1959:133). In fact, bone removal has not been indicated as a significant aspect of multiple interments elsewhere in the Maya area (Hammond et al. 1975; Miller 1986:50; Smith and Kidder 1943). However, this practice may have some support in hieroglyphic texts describing entry into previously sealed tombs in search of relics (Grube and Schele 1993).

This study not only provides an example of the use of a Caracol tomb for more than one individual and entry on more than one occasion, but also demonstrates the variation that exists among interments in terms of body treatment and preparation at Caracol. Some individuals were buried by themselves and some with other people. Some were buried immediately following death; others were buried and completely moved (as was the case in the upper Structure A34 tomb); some were only partially disturbed—perhaps in search of relics. Multiple-individual interments with evidence for multiple entries are found throughout Caracol, as are constructions with more than one formal interment. Multiple-interment episodes were facilitated in tombs with entranceways, but are also encountered in tombs with no formal entranceways as well as in non-tomb interments.

The presence of multiple individuals inside a tomb, the evidence for multiple entries, and the fact that individuals might be wholly or partly moved following death reveals a pattern not typical in the Maya lowlands, but one that may offer insights into Maya beliefs with regard to death. Secondary burial and/or the staging of burials is not an uncommon pattern outside the Maya area. It has been described at length for a variety of New and Old World groups (see Bloch 1982; Bloch and Parry 1982:3, 24, 34; Harris 1982:46; Metcalf and Huntington 1991:35; Ubelaker 1974:8–14; Watson 1982). Double funerals are the focus of a work by Hertz (1960) in which he demonstrates their widespread distribution.

Interpretations of this kind of burial process have focused on a series of factors such as the length of the death and burial process as well as family burial areas; these considerations may in fact prove to have significance for the Maya.

Ethnographic and ethnohistoric studies of societies practicing double funeral ceremonies for the same individual indicate the existence of a two-part process that may span a considerable period, sometimes a decade or more (Ubelaker 1974:8–14; Watson 1982:155). Each funeral in a two-funeral process has very distinctive functions (see Bloch and Parry 1982:4). In the first funeral the corpse is initially disposed of, and the event is usually concerned predominantly with expressions of death and sorrow. The second funeral is generally, but not always, characterized by secondary burial, usually of remains devoid of flesh. This final ceremony for the deceased individual reflects several things: the end of mourning, continuity, and a reaffirmation of the social order. The timing of the second ceremony may be related to a variety of social and practical factors that include the time necessary for flesh to decay from the body (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:4, 120) and economic considerations (Watson 1982:155); secondary burial may also be related to periodic activities of the group at large (Ubelaker 1974:8–14). Even in those situations where no actual double burial occurs, two aspects of the funeral process may still exist (see Harris 1982:54); an important aspect of the process with regard to the data presented here is that double funerals may take place either without the physical remains of the deceased or with only selected body parts, such as the skull (Bloch and Parry 1982:5). Double funerals (and double burials) are practiced both in societies that utilize tombs and in those that do not; in cases of collective burial in tombs, the physical context of the tomb itself may serve to reunite the dead and reaffirm the continuity of the group (Bloch 1981:139; Bloch and Parry 1982:34; Humphreys 1981:6).

We have previously proposed that the combined burial and caching activities associated with special mortuary structures at Caracol indicate practices related to the veneration of the dead that have a widespread occurrence among the Maya beyond Caracol alone (A. Chase and D. Chase

1994). As we have also shown, the seemingly aberrant ancient Maya of Caracol (and perhaps other sites/regions) can be placed squarely within broader world cultural views concerning death and interment. These interpretations would not be possible without a conjunctive approach that considers stratigraphy, osteology, artifacts, and epigraphy, and they offer a strong cautionary note against the interpretation of archaeological remains on the basis of a single line of evidence.

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Notes

1. Only 182 burials are used in this analysis. Of the 213 burials formally identified at Caracol, 31 largely derive from looted and disturbed contexts that make individual body counts suspect and, more often, impossible. Other human material not discussed here includes four individuals encountered on the floors of three different buildings and the many archaeologically known cases of isolated human bone. The seven empty tombs thus far excavated at Caracol are not classified as formal burials.

2. Tomb volume at Caracol is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Tomb Volume} = [L \times W \times S] + [(H-S) \times L \times C] + \left[\frac{(W-C) \times L}{2} \right]$$

where: L = length of tomb; W = width of tomb; S = spring height (above tomb floor); H = vault height (above tomb floor); and C = width of capstone exposure in tomb vault.

3. The original assessment made in 1992 was based on 1,931 pieces of obsidian found exterior to the lower tomb. In 1995 the remainder of the cut for the tomb entranceway was excavated, and an additional 3,015 pieces of obsidian were recovered. All of this obsidian underwent more detailed analysis by Richard Meadows and Maureen Carpenter during the 1996 field season, especially with regard to patterned edge damage.

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