Ghosts Amid the Ruins

Analyzing Relationships between the Living and the Dead among the Ancient Maya at Caracol, Belize

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MAYA BURIALS ARE A COMMON part of the archaeological record and a major resource for the interpretation of ancient Maya beliefs about death and afterlife. Human interments are encountered with relative frequency at archaeological sites (Welsh 1988) and are increasingly subjected to ever more detailed analyses (Wright 2004). While the bulk of evidence for the consideration of ancient Maya mortuary activity is found in excavations, additional information is available in iconography, epigraphy, ethnohistory, and contemporary ethnography (Ciudad Ruiz et al. 2003; Cobos 2004; Tiesler and Cucina 2007). In addition, however, ancient Maya mortuary activity may be compared with descriptions and theoretical discussions of death ritual worldwide (Metcalf and Huntington 1991) and expands our understanding of these materials.

Archaeological investigations at Caracol, Belize, have generated substantial information on ancient Maya burial practices; some 282 formal burials have been recovered during our excavations at Caracol from 1985 through 2008. The ancient Caracol Maya interred their dead in simple burials, cists, crypts, and tombs (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:56–57); human remains also were interred within ritual caches (D. Chase and A. Chase 1998) or incorporated in residential refuse (D. Chase and A. Chase 2000). Interments included both single and multiple individuals, and human remains were recovered articulated, disarticulated, and semi-articulated (D. Chase 1994, 1998). Once thought to have represented a single event or "time capsule" from the past, we now know that this often is not the case with Maya interments; simple burials and tombs both show indications of compound burial processes and reentry events

(D. Chase and A. Chase 1996, 2003a). It is the analysis of these burial contexts that provides detailed evidence for a consideration of ancient Maya mortuary systems.

Ancient Maya mortuary and ritual patterns outlined within this chapter indicate the potential of cyclic, as opposed to individual-oriented, mortuary activity and the existence of burial reentry as a means to alter the contract between the living and the dead. These patterns are consistent both with theoretical discussions of the significance of contemporary and historic mortuary activity and with discussions of double funerals and the liminal aspects of death ritual (Hertz 1960; Metcalf and Huntington 1991). The Caracol data confirm the symbolic importance of ancient mortuary ritual in codifying the liminal aspects of death, connecting the living and the dead, and maintaining linkages among members of the living and ancestral community. This analysis suggests that variations in mortuary ritual reflect the dynamics of ancient sociopolitical relationships as well as altered relationships between the living and the dead.

Caracol, Belize

The archaeological site of Caracol, located in the Vaca Plateau of western Belize, has been the focus of annual investigations by the Caracol Archaeological Project since January 1985 (www.caracol.org). Caracol Archaeological Project excavations have focused both on the site epicenter and on the settlement in the surrounding core. The focus of research has varied over the course of the project. While there has always been a consideration of the relationship between Maya hieroglyphic history and archaeology, research also has focused extensively on warfare, status differences, settlement boundaries, field systems, urban development, and, in some cases, simply salvage excavation. Over the course of 24 years, most epicentral structures have been investigated, and approximately 115 residential groups have been sampled.

Archaeological remains indicate that Caracol was first occupied at approximately 600 BC and continued to be occupied through AD 950. However, the majority of the site's occupation dates to the Late Classic period (AD 550–780). Caracol also has a hieroglyphic history, with named rulers and key dynastic events occurring on its carved stone monuments and stucco-adorned buildings. Texts indicate that the site's dynasty was

founded in AD 331 and that its latest recorded date is AD 859 (A. Chase et al. 1991). These texts describe Caracol's prowess in war through defeats of neighboring sites, such as Tikal, Naranjo, and Ucanal (D. Chase and A. Chase 2002, 2003b). Caracol reached its maximum size by AD 650, covering an area of approximately 177 square kilometers that contained a population of more than 115,000 people (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994a:5). The site administrative and residential areas were conjoined by a series of causeways that radiated from the epicenter to outlying areas (A. Chase 1988; A. Chase and D. Chase 2001a), presumably connecting markets within a centrally administered economic system (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004). Agricultural terraces were located throughout the core area between residential plazuelas (A. Chase and D. Chase 1998, 2007).

The prosperity of the site's occupants is indicated by the widespread use of tombs (fig. 4.1; see A. Chase 1992; D. Chase 1994) and in the distribution of artifacts ranging from obsidian to marine shell to polychrome pottery throughout the site (D. Chase 1998). Status differentiation among the members of the population is apparent in stable isotope assessment of diet using ancient bone. These studies suggest that the elite living in Caracol's palaces consumed high-maize and high-protein diets and that a support population living immediately adjacent to the site epicenter consumed the least amount of maize and protein; intermediate diets were consumed by the inhabitants of the surrounding settlement core (A. Chase and D. Chase 2001b; A. Chase et al. 2001).

Late Classic Caracol is also characterized by a shared identity (A. Chase and D. Chase 1996; D. Chase and A. Chase 2004a). A key aspect of this identity was Caracol mortuary ritual that centered on symbolic, as opposed to actual, egalitarianism (e.g., A. Chase and D. Chase 2009;). Basic mortuary practices were the same throughout greater Caracol (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994b; D. Chase and A. Chase 2004b). Mortuary activity in elite as well as in nonelite contexts throughout Late Classic Caracol centered on the placement of caches and burials in association with the eastern structure of residential plazas (fig. 4.2). The caches generally consisted of specially made ceramic containers (A. Chase 1994), sometimes accompanied by obsidian eccentrics or human finger bones (D. Chase and A. Chase 1998). Burials in eastern buildings also usually included at least one tomb as well as multiple individual interments. These interments also contained a large number of individuals with

Caracol, Belize

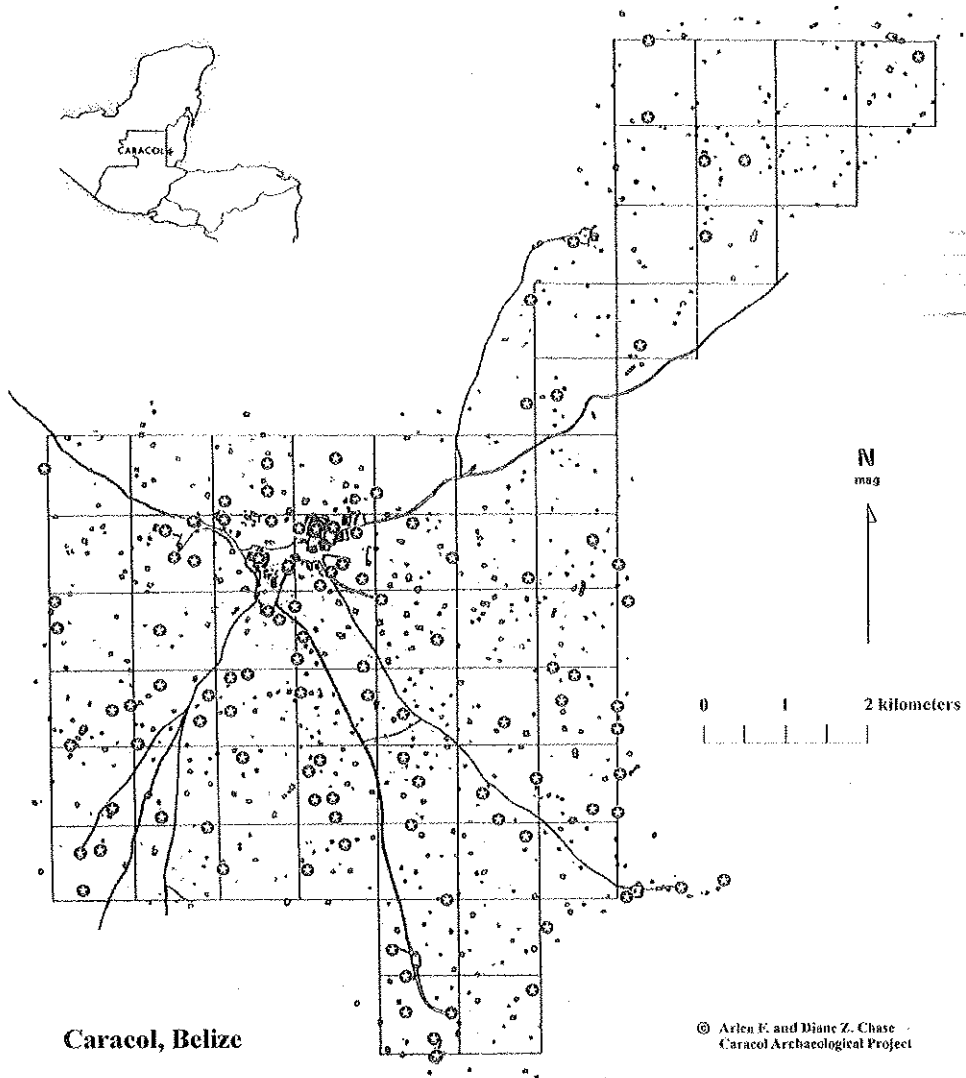© Arlen F. and Diane Z. Chase
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FIGURE 4.1. Map of Caracol, Belize, showing the distribution of known tombs relative to mapped residential groups. Each square measures 500 m on each side; north is to the top of the page.

Indicators of a Caracol Identity

Face caches

East-focused residential groups

Tombs

Structure 2F15:

plan

section ———— 498 m

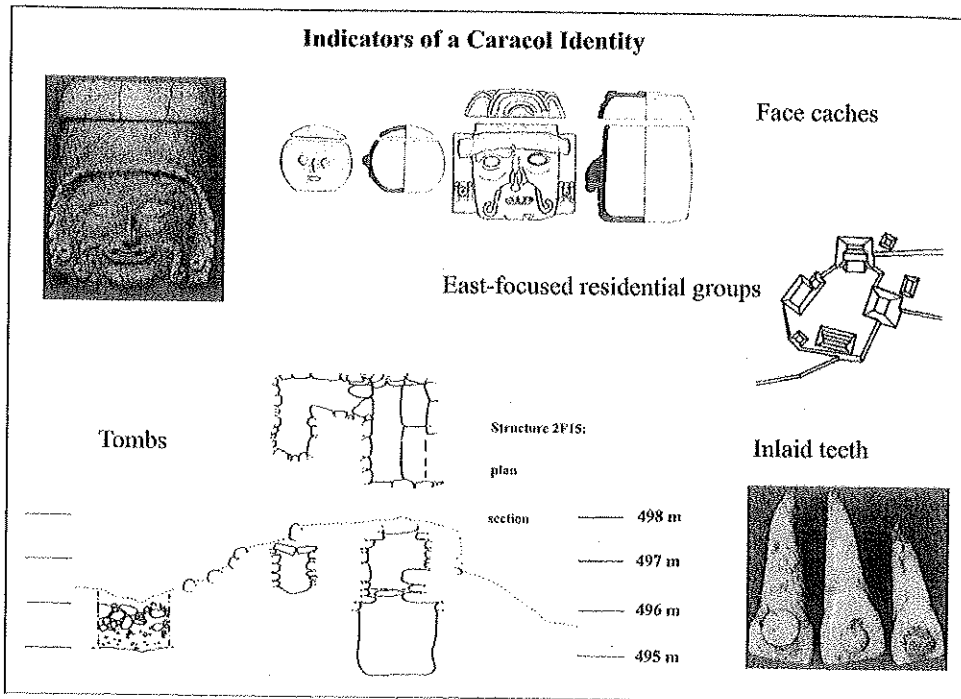———— 497 m

———— 496 m

———— 495 m

Inlaid teeth

FIGURE 4.2. The establishment of a "Caracol identity" is based largely on common ritual and mortuary activities at Caracol, Belize, that focused on eastern buildings in residential groups, interments with multiple individuals, the use of formal tombs, offerings in special-function cache vessels, and a high percentage of individuals with inlaid teeth.

modified teeth; some 33 percent of Caracol's burials exhibit teeth that are either filed or inlaid with jadeite and hematite (D. Chase 1998).

Investigations at Caracol have uncovered 282 formal interments from the site epicenter and core areas. While Caracol's inhabitants were frequently interred within formal tombs (109 chambers have been investigated), over 60 percent of Caracol's interments were simple burials placed directly in the fill of structures or plazas, in cists that had a formal grave outline but no stone lining, or in small stone-lined crypts. However, in the majority (ca. 80%) of investigated residential groups, at least one tomb was located. Nearly half of the interments at Caracol (46%) contain more than one individual (D. Chase 1998). Many of these burials

are indicative of secondary or compound burial events (D. Chase 1994; D. Chase and A. Chase 2003a). Most of these multiple individual interments were the result of a single deposition event, with an articulated individual being placed at the same time as additional bundled and/or partial individuals. However, other interments represent multiple entries, with new placements, disruptions, and removals of human material over time. The fact that interments are often not immediate or primary has been interpreted to suggest the likely existence of double funerals—a two-stage process that entailed a final burial event occurring a considerable period of time after an individual's death (D. Chase and A. Chase 1996:76–77). This research builds upon earlier work by Hertz (1960) and Metcalf and Huntington (1991). However, at least some of these events may also have been episodic—occurring at specific temporal intervals—rather than timed relative to the death of specific individuals. An archaeological consideration of interment history in several of Caracol's mortuary constructions reveals that the sequential burials in many of the site's residential groups were separated by temporal intervals on the order of 40 to 50 years (D. Chase and A. Chase 2004b). These archaeologically dated intervals are consistent with the other data pertaining to the ancient Maya that indicate their timing of events correlates with temporal cycles (e.g., A. Chase 1991; A. Chase and D. Chase 2006). The tightly sequenced archaeological data from Caracol strongly suggest that residential burials in eastern buildings may have been timed to occur with temporal cycles relating to the passage of two *k'atuns* (40 years) or of one calendar round (52 years).

Linking the Dead and the Living: The "Social Compact"

The tie between the living and ancestral Maya is most clearly seen in the colocation of ancient Maya mortuary and household activity within residential plazuela groups (see also McAnany 1995, 1998). Despite statements made by Bishop Landa (Tozzer 1941:130) that Maya residences might have been abandoned once interments were made, this does not appear to have been actual practice. Archaeological evidence demonstrates the consistent conjunction of household and mortuary activity within the same residential plaza, often over an extended period of time.

However, distinct spaces appear to have been reserved for specific residential and mortuary activities.

Interments at Late Classic Caracol were generally located within and in front of identifiable mortuary buildings located on the eastern sides of residential plazuela groups. This correlation between burials and the eastern buildings was recognized early in the research undertaken by the Caracol Archaeological Project (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:54–57) and built on earlier work by Marshall Becker (1971, 1982, 1992, 2003; Becker and Jones 1999) at Tikal, Guatemala, that dealt with spatial patterning in Maya residential groups. Becker (1971, 1982:120, 2003:259) had demonstrated that the eastern buildings in 14–15 percent of Tikal's residential groups were special-function mortuary structures. At Caracol, our research has shown that this pattern is even more widespread than at Tikal; some 85 percent of eastern constructions tested appropriately at Caracol contained burials or caches (D. Chase 1998:17). It is further apparent that human remains at Caracol were interred in a specific sequence relative to a single edifice: first placed would be a tomb in the core of the building; next, a burial, cist, or crypt would be deposited at the front of the stair; then, a tomb, crypt, or cist was secreted within the stair itself (D. Chase and A. Chase 2004b). Even later burials could then be placed far into the plaza to the front of the building. While the majority of Caracol's interments have been found in or associated with eastern mortuary structures, some burials in residential groups also were located in northern structures (one of the traditional locations for ancestors; see Ashmore 1991).

Caches, consisting either of lidded urns with modeled ceramic faces or of small dishes placed lip-to-lip, were commonly located in association with the same eastern constructions, either above and/or to the sides of interments during the Late Classic period. While the face caches were generally devoid of contents, indicating that they probably had held perishable items, they were sometimes associated with obsidian eccentrics. The smaller lip-to-lip caches were found either empty or containing the remains of human fingers. These fingers were primarily from adults but also included children. As few as a single disarticulated phalange to over 30 articulated fingers have been recovered in a single cache—presumably as a sacrifice to the dead within the building (D. Chase and A. Chase 1998). Other evidence of ritual activity within residential groups includes the placement of complete incense burners both within tombs and on

(or under) the steps of eastern buildings (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994b) —
and of broken *incensarios* within the fill of cist burials. The conjunction
of interments and caches in living spaces indicates the strong ritual con-
nection between the living and the dead. It has also been interpreted as an
indication of ancestor veneration by the ancient Maya (McAnany 1995).

During the full temporal occupation of Caracol, plazuela groups
continued to be built, lived in, used, and rebuilt as human remains
were deposited. A clear and conspicuous proximity existed between the
dead and the living that must have reinforced the relationship between
the dead ancestors and their living descendants. The continuing nature
of this relationship is symbolized by the existence of entranceways (for
reentry) into chambers (to place additional dead and/or to remove bone
relics). It is further reinforced by the presence of multiple individuals
within a chamber (placed contemporaneously and over time).

The Social Bond: Accidental and Purposeful Reentries of Interments

Caracol's interments are directly reflective of the society that inhabited
the ancient city. The placement of multiple individuals within a cham-
ber reduced the focus on the individual, reinforced the unity of the resi-
dential group, and confirmed the social compact between the living and
the dead (see also Bloch 1981:139; Bloch and Parry 1982:34; Gillespie 2001;
and Humphreys 1981:6). The ultimate disarticulation of human remains
through both double funerals and reentry activities further served to
commingle the individualities of the dead. However, there were different
types of reentry, and it is argued that these varied reentry activities served
social purposes (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003a). Tomb reentry has been
identified by researchers such as Bloch (1971), who studied the Merina
of Madagascar. Thus, the concept of tomb reentry is not new or unique.
However, patterns of ancient Maya tomb reentry at Caracol suggest that
the significance of any given tomb was multifaceted, going beyond ances-
tor veneration, beyond the final placement of an important ancestor, and
beyond the establishment and reinforcement of social identity.

Many of Caracol's tombs had formal entryways, meaning that they
could be easily accessed and reopened. In some cases chambers were
reentered and bodies were removed after the passage of a certain amount

of time. In other cases, chambers may have been constructed and initially left empty in anticipation of housing a specific individual but ultimately were occupied and formally sealed. For the purpose of this chapter, the term *reentry* is reserved for situations in which an already occupied and sealed tomb was reopened and new activity ensued.

Two distinct types of burial reentry can be identified in the archaeological record at Caracol. Initially identified only for tomb chambers, these reentries have been subdivided into the categories "accidental" and "purposeful"; purposeful reentries can be further subdivided into the categories "traditional" and "transformational" (fig. 4.3). Archaeological signatures exist for each of these reentry types, and each also has different potential cultural implications. While reentry types may be most easily distinguishable in tombs, similar reentries may be defined and identified for other kinds of interments.

The archaeological signature for accidental reentry is a chamber whose contents are largely intact but is filled entirely with earth and rubble (and whose roof is often difficult to distinguish from the material comprising the engulfing fill). The implication is either that these chambers had their roofing stones collapse unexpectedly (exposing the open-air chamber) or that they were found during the modification of an existing construction (meaning that these interments were outside of any social memory). These tombs were then infilled and hidden during rebuilding efforts. Often, what is presumed to be a sacrificial victim (perhaps representing reconsecration) was placed within the overlying fill. The overall disruption to the original interment is relatively minimal, the burial contents being disturbed only by the laying down of the new fill. Several examples of this kind of reentry have been found in residential groups at Caracol (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003a:271–72); all consist of what were once open-air chambers that have had their roofs largely removed and the chambers completely infilled with dirt and rubble that rests directly on the original interment (in some cases clearly smashing ceramic vessels and upending in situ bone); in at least two cases, this infilling was accompanied by the placement of flexed bodies that were centered in the fill at roof level prior to a structural addition being constructed on the eastern building. A similar kind of reentry may occur in other interment types but is more difficult to detect archaeologically because of even less disruption of the original interment. The clear
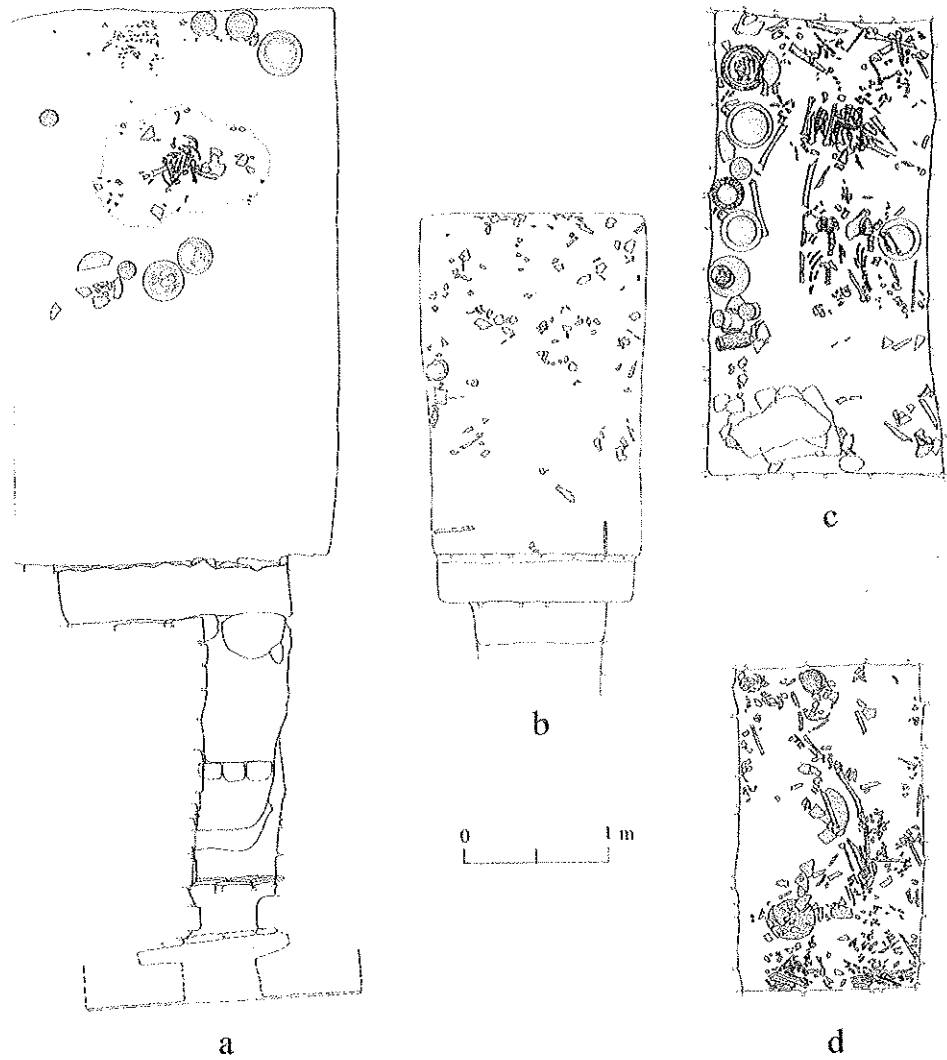
a

b

0   1 m

c

d

FIGURE 4.3. Floor plans of chambers that have been reentered: (*a*) "reentry" of preconstructed chamber to place bundled burial and associated items; (*b*) purposeful and transformational reentry, showing the patchwork of materials left on the chamber's floor; (*c*) purposeful and traditional reentry, showing largely intact vessels and some articulation; (*d*) accidental reentry, showing the disturbance of an intact burial due to infilling of the chamber.

attempt at not overly disrupting the previously placed burials and their contents, but rather simply reobscuring them, suggests that this kind of reentry likely did not indicate any changes in the sociopolitical order or in the social compact between the dead and the living.

The archaeological signature for a purposeful, but traditional, reentry is an open-air chamber (or other interment) whose human remains and artifacts show signs of some disturbance and suggest the addition and/ or removal of contents. Often, covering capstones are replaced askew, or sealed floors are pierced by circular entry holes. Rationales for these reentries likely varied substantially. Some incorporated additional individuals and artifacts, usually many years or cycles past the initial interment date (see D. Chase and A. Chase 1996). Other chambers may have been entered to remove relics (see Fitzsimmons 1998 and Grube and Schele 1993 for comparative statements). These kinds of reentries are particularly recognizable in the archaeological record through floor patches that permitted chamber reentry (assuming the lack of a formal entryway) or through contextual analysis that indicates either sequent events separated by a substantial period of time or the addition of ritual objects like cache vessels or *incensarios* into a chamber. While primary individuals in interments may have changed and/or some ritual items may have been removed and others added, the chamber remained open-air without added debris, and the interment is largely intact and without major disruption. Thus, it is argued that the social compact between the dead and the living likely remained intact.

The archaeological signature for a transformational reentry (which is also "purposeful") is an interment whose contents are completely disturbed, often having been broken and burnt and then redeposited. If the interment is in a chamber, the chamber is often partially infilled with earth and rubble, and the subsequent roof closure may be fairly crude in its construction standards; however, the chamber roofs are still present, and there is usually some open-air quality preserved in the chamber. Skeletal remains and offerings alike are generally fragmentary. Burning is fairly ubiquitous. Even in the rare instances in which bodies are partially articulated, they are still burnt; jadeite beads are usually shattered and burnt; ceramic vessels are often partial, with heavy burning on some sherds but not others. A fairly wide range of behaviors entered into these transformational deposits, and they are also usually located in architecturally

prominent locations and places. The implication is that these transformational reentries are intentional disturbances of both the interment and the social compact between the dead and the living. At Caracol, transformational reentries are known from two time horizons. The first occurs in elite tombs dating to the beginning of the Late Classic era, precisely when Caracol announced its independence from Tikal. The second occurrence of transformational reentries can be dated to the Terminal Classic period, another time of dynastic change at the site. Thus, transformational reentries also potentially served political purposes and may be indicative of sociopolitical transition. Bodies and chambers were treated symbolically to effect change. A similar use of human remains for political purposes has been documented for the royal houses of Europe (Weiss-Krejci 2001).

The Timing and Placement of Maya Interments

We have argued previously that the east-focused mortuary activity within residential plazuela groups represented a strong focus on ancestor veneration (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994b, 1996) and was thus the basis for a social compact between the living and the dead. However, we also have shown that the timing of placement of these household interments was periodic and may have been undertaken in accord with ritual cycles rather than with the death events of specific individuals (D. Chase and A. Chase 2004b). Two specific lines of evidence support this interpretation. First, a dramatically smaller number of burials were made within residential groups than can be expected when based on the projected number of household occupants that would have existed in these groups; only some 10 percent of the total household population that once resided in a residential group can be archaeologically documented as having been buried there (D. Chase 1997). Second, the materials included within many of the burials recovered in a residential group permit the fairly precise dating of these interments (e.g., A. Chase 1994) and suggest that a sizeable temporal span existed between inhumations. Detailed stratigraphic and contextual review of interments recovered from eastern buildings in a series of Caracol's residential groups (and tightly dated by associated ceramic assemblages) suggested that this interval may have been approximately 40 to 50 years, perhaps even having been timed to coincide with a calendar round or 52-year cycle (D. Chase and A. Chase

2004b:table 1). Pru Rice (2004) has argued recently that the entire Classic period Maya sociopolitical order was timed to coincide with the *may*, or 256-year, ritual cycle. Archaeologically, it can also be argued that certain building assemblages, ranging from E Groups (A. Chase and D. Chase 2006) to radial structures (Schele and Mathews 1998:175–196), were erected or rebuilt to commemorate *b'ak'tun* (or 400-year) cycles. Jones (1996:91) has demonstrated that plaza plans of a very specific form were erected to celebrate 20-year *k'atun* intervals at Tikal, Guatemala, in the Late Classic era. We have previously argued that certain Maya caching patterns were reflective of calendric ritual and that some incense burners may have served as *k'atun* idols, further marking the passage of time (D. Chase 1985a, 1985b, 1988; D. Chase and A. Chase 1988, 2008). We would argue that such overriding concerns with temporal cycles also were manifest in Caracol residential plazas in the episodic placement of burials relative to the site's eastern buildings. Thus, household interment events appear to have been conjoined with community-wide ritual activities that not only bolstered ties between direct ancestors and their living descendants but also emphasized the wider connection between the dead and the living in the broader sociopolitical environment of "greater Caracol."

Liminality in Death Ritual and Maya Concepts of Death

Life and death were not absolute opposites for the ancient Maya. Just as the Maya did not abandon their living areas after placing the dead within them, the archaeological record also suggests that Landa's (Tozzer 1941:129) statement that the Maya had "a great and excessive fear of death" does not mirror the Classic period situation. Much theoretical discussion has focused on the transition of the corpse (and essence or soul of the deceased) in death ritual and on the use of symbols to represent both transition and regeneration (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:32–33; Turner 1969; Van Gennep 1960). We would argue not only that there were liminal phases and symbolism in mortuary ritual, but that the ancient Maya dead during the Classic period were conceived of as being liminal or transitional beings, only partially separated from the living. The dead could reappear in the present world; the living (at least dwarfs [A. Chase and D. Chase 1994b]) could access the places of the dead by reentering

their tombs. Interactions between the dead and the living were possible and necessary in that the living were obliged to venerate their ancestors. At Caracol, the interactions took several forms. Some dead may have been literally housed in the superstructures of the eastern buildings in the residential groups, which likely functioned as mausoleums. Offerings associated with these eastern buildings are fairly common in the archaeological record and consist of ceramic cache vessels as well as vestiges of other perishable objects, indicating a potentially proactive form of intercession on the part of the living. These offerings can be taken as evidence that ancestors also could intercede (positively and negatively) in the affairs of their descendants. The continued relationship among the living and the dead was facilitated at Caracol by the colocation of mortuary activity with household occupation. Veneration was therefore possible on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, mortuary ritual was not a single, one-time event correlated with the death of an individual. Compound burial processes suggest the existence of double funerals that took place over an extended period of time. Each household may also have engaged in episodic mortuary activities conducted at key intervals, probably associated with calendric cycles. Formal entranceways into chambers encouraged reentries; however, interments without entranceways were also reaccessed. Reentries into interments added or removed remains and offerings over time, implying the continuous nature of the social contract between the dead and the living.

While the living could visit the resting places of their dead ancestors with relative ease due to their proximity to day-to-day activities within the household, the dead and the living were predominantly situated in different places — the living were above ground, and the dead (for the most part) were underground in the underworld. Separating the worlds of the living and the dead was a surface that could be penetrated, often depicted iconographically as the surface of water with fantastic underworld creatures below and more mundane contemporary worldly creatures above (Coe 1978; Schele and Miller 1986). Beings that could penetrate this surface and exist simultaneously in both worlds were liminal, like the ancestors themselves (D. Chase and A. Chase 2009). Such creatures included dwarfs as well as sharks, turtles, alligators, snakes, and water lilies. Viewing one world from the other was possible with the aid of reflective devices such as mirrors or mercury (D. Chase and A. Chase 1998).
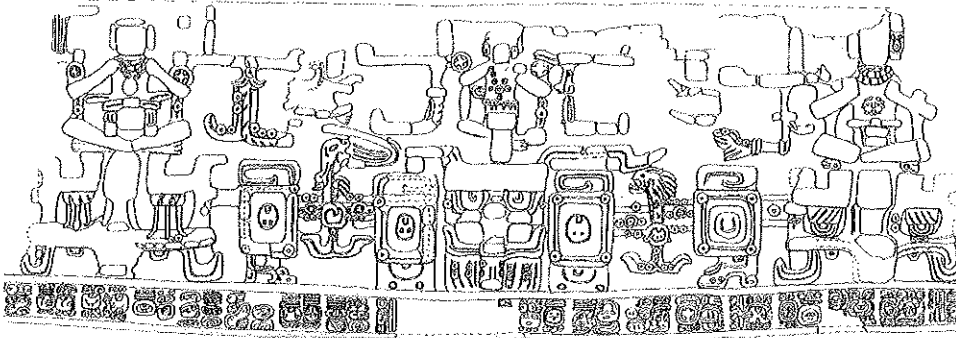
FIGURE 4.4. Examples of ancestral portraits on a Late Classic building facade from Caracol, Belize.

Transition to the underworld for the dead was also a process, the journey likely comparable to the timing of the second funeral. Even artwork suggests that this transition was not instantaneous. Incised bone from a Tikal tomb shows a boat with the dead individual surrounded by personified animals about to sink into the depths of the watery underworld, implying a journey that ends in submersion. Hieroglyphic texts also hint that a substantial period of time was involved (see the discussion in McAnany 1998:289 of *muknal* activities extending to 24 years, and in Fitzsimmons 1998 of mortuary anniversaries). Ancestors continued to exist even after being transferred into the underworld and often were iconographically portrayed in the world of the living in locations such as building facades; at Caracol these ancestral portraits on monumental architecture (fig. 4.4) depicted them in association with underworld creatures (such as fish eating transitional water lilies). The liminal aspects of death and mortuary ritual, in conjunction with the ongoing relationships among the dead and the living, led to reentries into interments and necessitated rectifying the relationships among the dead and the living through transformational reentries.

Conclusions

The dead were clearly important to the ancient Maya. Yet Maya interments were not simply placed to coincide with the death of an individual or with

the commemoration of such an event. Some researchers have argued that interments placed in monumental architecture were dedicatory to building construction (see W. Coe 1990 and discussion in D. Chase 1988), essentially serving as elaborated offerings or caches (Becker 1992). Others have suggested that these buildings instead served as funerary monuments for great rulers (see M. Coe 1956, 1988). Most interments, however, are not located within monumental site architecture, but rather within residential plazuelas (as indicated above). While abundant, there are not nearly as many individuals recovered from residential burials as there were proposed inhabitants of specific residential groups. Even in the largest samples of well-excavated residential compounds, there are far too few interments to indicate the existence of a sustained population over time. This is evident in residential groups not only at Caracol (D. Chase 1997) but also in the neighboring and well-excavated central Petén site of Tikal (A. Chase et al. 2002; Haviland 1988; Haviland et al. 1985). Analysis of interment placement and sequence at Caracol has been facilitated by the existence of hieroglyphically dated tomb contexts, substantial contextually recovered ceramic inventories, and radiocarbon dates. While it is possible that the deceased were cremated or were placed elsewhere, a review of the interments at Caracol suggests yet a different situation — that tombs were sometimes a temporary, as opposed to a final, resting place (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994b; D. Chase and A. Chase 1996) and that the timing and placement of interments was more likely related to larger community-wide cycles than to specific life and death events of particular individuals (D. Chase and A. Chase 2004b). The recent proposal by Pru Rice (2004) to relate regional sociopolitical events to the adherence of a *may*, or 256-year cycle, may be viewed as the logical extension of cyclically timed household interment ceremonies and calendric caching rituals (D. Chase 1985a, 1988). The existence of periodic or episodic community-wide mortuary ritual, while not generally proffered or referenced for the ancient Maya, was a key component of such patterns among a number of native North American groups (Hickerson 1960; Ubelaker 1989:40) and thus makes sense in the Maya archaeological context.

The conjunction of mortuary ritual with contemporary household activity, the temporal sequence of burial events within households, and the iconographic portrayals of ancestors all demonstrate the strong ties

between the dead and the living among the ancient Maya. Eastern mortuary constructions constituted mausoleums and ritual loci that were used both for ancestor veneration and to establish a broader social identity for the group's inhabitants through the placement of multiple individuals in a single grave. The eastern buildings not only contained burials but also had cached offerings. Burials could be reaccessed over time to add or remove bones and offerings. Tombs with multiple individuals and disarticulated and bundled bones served to commingle remains, thus symbolizing the unity of the group as opposed to the veneration of individual ancestors. However, the relationship between the dead and the living was not limited to a single family. The episodic patterning of burial deposits suggests regular cycles of interment that were community-wide. Thus, while ancestors of a family might be more likely to intervene in the affairs of their living descendants, death ritual formed a unifying factor for the entire community. Reentries into chambers generally occurred within these larger interment cycles; however, some reentries were distinctive in disturbing and destroying remains. These reentry contexts are called "transformational"; they disrupted and/or destroyed the individuality of interred individuals as well as of any burial offerings associated with them, ritually and symbolically cleansing the locale of past social and political meaning. These transformational reentries were limited in number and coincide with political transitions at the site. Thus, the transformational reentries that are associated with the interments at the base of Structure B19 on the summit of Caracol's tallest building complex, Caana, are coeval with the shift from a known dynastic line with identified rulers to a period with unclear historic and dynastic connections (see D. Chase and A. Chase 2003a). Transformational reentries not only destroyed the individuality of tomb occupants but also signaled the end of a particular dynastic tradition, representing either the end of a cycle or a political change—or both.

Archaeological investigations at Caracol have demonstrated the importance of mortuary remains in maintaining family continuity and in unifying the wider community. These data further suggest that the Maya viewed the dead as conjoined with the living. While liminal aspects of death ritual symbolism often are noted as a key phase in the transition of the corpse, the continued connection between the dead and the living and the possibility that liminality may be a state of being associated with

deceased individuals have not been as thoroughly explored. The Caracol Maya (and probably other groups) practiced episodic interment events on a community-wide basis. Most initial mortuary contexts and reentries into interments were consistent with the continuation of a social contract between the dead and the living; however, burial contexts could also redefine the relationships between the dead and the living and reflect changes in the social and political order. In sum, ancient Maya mortuary remains from Late Classic Caracol, Belize, give insight into the larger Maya worldview. These data confirm the intimate and continuing relationship between deceased ancestors and their living descendants and underscore the value of analyzing mortuary contexts to analyze broader cultural and sociopolitical change.

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