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E Groups and the Rise of Complexity in the Southeastern Maya Lowlands

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Too often our view of the ancient Maya has been formed by accidents of research history and by our modern predilection to focus on impressive architecture, art, and origins. The investigation of the Group E complex at Uaxactún, Guatemala, was undertaken precisely for these reasons. Perhaps more than any other set of monumental architecture, however, the E Group serves as a proxy for early ceremonialism and its association with the rise of Maya civilization. It provides a framework for interpreting the ancient Maya fascination with time and the cosmos.

At the time of their "discovery" by S. G. Morley (1925) in the first part of the twentieth century, the earliest known dated Maya stelae were located in association with this architectural complex. The site of Uaxactún (Eight Stone) had been named in honor of these stelae. Excavation there was expected to shed light on the development of Maya civilization because of its co-location with an 8th cycle monument. The excavations at Group E in Uaxactún did precisely that: the earliest remains then known from the Maya area were uncovered and defined. In concert with assumptions about the need for the elite to monitor times for planting crops, this architectural complex was related to the Maya observance of solstices and equinoxes (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937), an assumption later ridiculed by cultural ecologists like William Sanders (1979), who, countering arguments for intensive agriculture (Harrison and Turner 1978), argued that any good Maya farmer practicing milpa agriculture knew when to plant without elite oversight. Although the Group E complex was initially dated entirely to the early part of the Early Classic period (278–593 CE or ca. 250–550 CE; Smith 1950:67)—largely based on the associated stelae—the discovery of a radial building arrayed with an impressive series of stucco masks under the western pyramid hinted at an even earlier dating, something implicitly

expressed (but not stated) in the architectural plans for this group (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:Figure 98). Thus, while the temporal dimensions of Uaxactún Group E were never fully fleshed out, this architectural complex came to be correlated with the early crystallization of Maya culture in the Southern Lowlands.

That E Groups are among the earliest Maya architectural assemblages is not in doubt. Deep excavations at Ceibal, Guatemala, have demonstrated the existence of one of these complexes at least as early as 1000 BCE (Inomata et al. 2013). The fully excavated examples of E Groups have one commonality. None of the earliest eastern platforms are associated with central buildings; rather, the extended eastern platform itself is the first hallmark of an E Group. At least at Ceibal and at Tikal, this early platform is also associated with a western pyramidal structure.

Almost fifty years ago, Gareth Lowe (1977:224, Figure 9.4) noted a similar group pattern in the Middle Preclassic settlement of the upper Grijalva River area of Chiapas, where he identified a dozen early sites as having a large western pyramid and a rectangular eastern platform approximately 100 m long. Lowe (1977:226) believed that the pattern was Olmec-derived and indicative of "the steady but more obscure expansion of other and perhaps related peoples into the lowland Maya riverine and water-hole forest regions at about this same time" and that most of these regions "may have had similar advanced organization." Inomata and his colleagues (2013:470) have since shown that the process was far more complex, involving interregional interactions, local Maya innovations, and "shared notions of new social order." The emergence of a standard architectural complex in the form of an E Group has great significance, however, in that the appearance of this architectural complex represents the coalescence of formal Maya communities that shared a unified belief system (Chase and Chase 1995, 2006b; Inomata et al. 2013).

Excavations at the sites of Cenote (Chase 1983; Chase and Chase 1995) and Tikal (Fialko 1988; Laporte and Fialko 1995) in Guatemala have substantially changed our understanding of these architectural complexes. Research at both of these sites demonstrated an early temporal placement for this plaza plan—back to the Middle Preclassic period (1000–350 BCE). Both Cenote and Tikal also evinced a plan different from the Uaxactún Style E Group that has been labeled "the Cenote-style E Group" (Chase 1985:39; Chase and Chase 1995). The majority of the differences between these two styles are found in the eastern platform of the architectural assemblage (Figure 2.1a, b). In the Uaxactún Style, three buildings are located

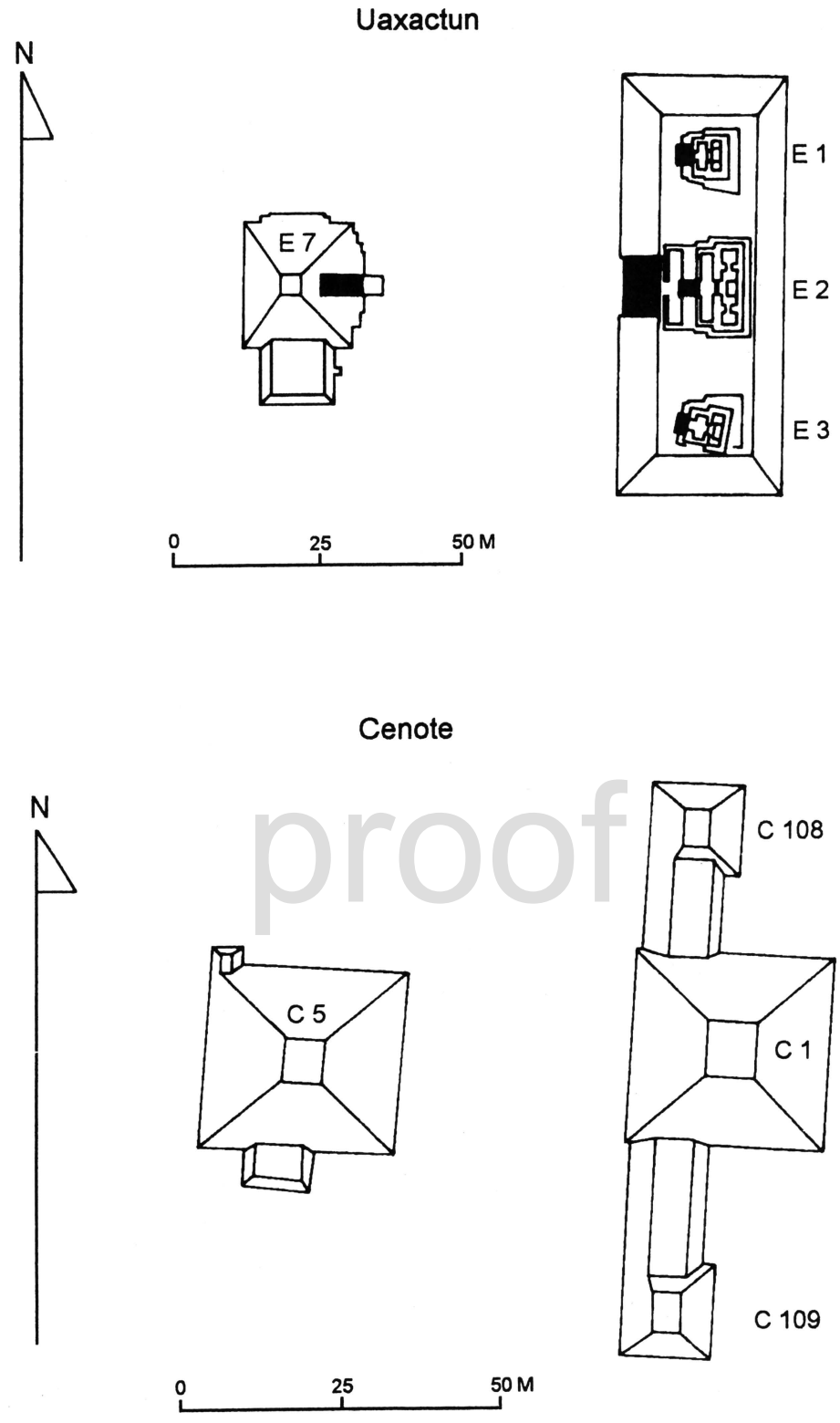


Figure 2.1. The two variants of the E Group plan: (a) Uaxactún, Guatemala; (b) Cenote, Belize (after Chase 1983:1302; Chase and Chase 1995:90) The Cenote variant is always earlier and usually dates to the Middle to Late Preclassic period. The Uaxactún variant is later and dates to the Early Classic period. Excavations have shown the transformation of some Cenote Style E Groups into Uaxactún Style E Groups over time.

upon a single platform that is usually around 70 m in length. In the Cenote Style, the eastern platform usually exhibits a large central pyramid that is offset from the platform to the east and two smaller buildings that may be situated toward the ends of the platform.[1] In the Cenote Style complex, the eastern platform varies in length but can be quite long; the eastern platform of the Cenote Style E Group at Yaxhá, Guatemala, is 172 m in length (Chase 1983:Table 44). Mapping and excavations in the southeast Petén as part of the *Atlas arqueológico de Guatemala* (Escobedo 2008; Laporte and Mejía 2000, 2005b; Laporte et al. 1988) have shown that E Groups are concentrated within the southeastern portion of the Maya Lowlands and that eastern platforms can be as small as 20 m in length. As shown below, there are temporal distinctions between the two styles, with the Cenote Style E Group dating to the Late Preclassic and the Uaxactún Style E Group dating to the Early Classic periods.

Karl Ruppert (1940) noted that almost all known E Groups were within a 110 km radius of Uaxactún and that there appeared to be minimal spacing of approximately 21 km between the occurrences of this architectural complex. Because of this stated spacing, E Groups have been utilized as a size-rank indicator of site status (Rathje 1973; Hammond 1974:326, 1975; Rathje et al. 1978). In the Southeastern Lowlands, however, both the site status and the spacing of these groupings are called into question. Many of the occurrences of this public architecture are much closer, often only 4 to 5 km apart in the southeast Petén—and the plan appears with such frequency as to denote the formal founding architecture of a given Maya community. As shown in this chapter, changes in form and proximity of E Groups over time may be correlated with broader transformations in Maya sociopolitical organization. Thus, while the closely located E Groups of the Lake Petén–Itzá area (Cenote and Paxcamán; Chase 1983:1244) and Mountain Cow region of Belize (Cahal Pichik and Hazcap Ceel; Thompson 1931) were originally thought to be anomalous, the research undertaken for the *Atlas* in the southeast Petén demonstrated a dense clustering of minimally 170 groups evincing the E Group pattern (Table 2.1) and providing archaeological evidence of use during the Late Preclassic era (and some even earlier).[2] This clustering has significance on a number of levels: (1) it permits an analysis of the great variability that is evident in this architectural form, thus allowing for a firmer understanding of its developmental sequence and potential relationships; (2) the location of these groups in association with watersheds that extend from the Usumacinta River to the Belize River is consistent with the existence of one of the most important

Table 2.1. E Groups of the Southeastern Lowlands

Site number & name	E height	E length	#E structures	W height	Other
Río Mopán: Bajo					
157 Buenos Aires Gr 9	?	81 m	none	9 m	E is platform
156 El Camalote	14 m	87 m	none	9 m	central shrine
155 Yok'ol Witz Gr 7	?	37 m	3	?	3 structures platform
154 La Providencia 1	?	113 m	3	?	
163 Dos Hermanos N	9.5 m	56 m	Central	14.5 m	
163 Dos Hermanos S	11 m	70 m	Central	8.5 m	
151 La Guajira	10 m	43 m	Central	5 m	
173 El Cruzadero 1	?	48 m	Central	?	
174 El Cruzadero 2	drawing from Yok'ol Wits Gr 7 reused				
Río Mopán: Medio					
94 Ucanal Plaza A	?	ca.160 m	3	?	modified
94 Ucanal Plaza B	4.3 m	55 m	central+S	4 m	
198 Yaltutu/Melchor	3 m	59 m	3	2.5 m	
64 El Calabazal	7.7 m	50 m	central	6.6 m	
65 El Calabazal 2	2.05 m	28 m	central	0.75 m	
142 La Vertiente	3 m	23 m	central	0.40 m	
56 Calzada Mopán	3 m	41 m	3	5 m	
57 Agua Blanca	3.4 m	28 m	central	4 m	
58 La Trinidad Plaza A	2.4 m	30 m	3	3 m	shrine/rect. W
58 La Trinidad Gr 8	3 m	48 m	none	4 m	E is platform
59 La Gloria 1	4 m	34 m	3	2.85 m	
61 Miguelon	5.6 m	66 m	3	3.30 m	
62 Las Delicias	4.2 m	28 m	central	5 m	
197 La Gloria 3	4 m	30 m	central	2 m	
63 El Cabro	no information other than it exists				
52 El Rosario 1a	8 m	64 m	3	10 m	
52 El Rosario 1b	5 m	36 m	central	3 m	
132 El Rosario 5a	6 m	35 m	3	?	W platform
132 El Rosario 5b	2.5 m	34 m	central	2 m	
53 El Rosario 4	5 m	63 m	3	3 m	rectangular W
54 El Rosario 2	4 m	23 m	3	?	rectangular W

(*continued*)

Table 2.1—*Continued*

Site number & name	E height	E length	#E structures	W height	Other
Río Mopán: Alta					
7 Ixtontón	12 m	108 m	3	10.5 m	
8 Moquena	5.3 m	32 m	central	5.3 m	
9 Ix Ak	7 m	49 m	central	3 m	
10 Mopan 2–Oeste	4 m	24 m	central	6.2 m	
19 Ix Kol	6.75 m	28 m	central	5.3 m	
20 Suk Che'	6 m	54 m	3	?	
11 Ixkun	11 m	76 m	central	15.5 m	
12 Mopán 3–Este	11.4 m	77 m	3	11.3 m	
14 Mopán 3–Sureste	5 m	36 m	3	4.4 m	
15 Mopán 3–Oeste	5 m	44 m	3	3 m	rectangular W
17 La Jutera	2.5 m	38 m	3	3 m	
129 El Pedregal 3	?	24 m	central	?	unclear W
128 El Pedregal 2	2 m	22 m	3	1 m	rectangular W
127 El Pedregal 1	2.5 m	23 m	3	2 m	large W platform
29 Sacul Plaza A	5.2 m	35 m	central	4.85 m	Monuments
29 Sacul E of Plaza A	6 m	39 m	3	?	
161 La Gloria/Sacul	?	47 m	3	?	
30 Sacul 4	?	66 m	3	6 m	
31 Sacul 3	5.65 m	74 m	3	8.2 m	
33 Limones	?	37 m	central	5.5 m	
34 El Jutalito	4.5 m	47 m	3	5 m	rectangular W
35 K'ax Ba	4.5 m	62 m	3	6 m	
36 Xa'an Arriba	3 m	70 m	3	9 m	W w/side platforms
37 Canajui	4 m	52 m	3	2.45	pub scale incor
Chiquibul: Bajo y Alto					
144 La Cebada	6.8 m	38 m	central	6.8 m	
170 El Ceibo	9 m	55 m	3	12 m	E rebuilding
149 El Mamay	?	63 m	central	16 m	
148 Palestina	>8 m	54 m	central	>8 m	
143 La Rejoya	?	44 m	3	?	
180 Piedra Quebrada	?	39 m	central	?	platform at rear W
146 El Naranjal	?	92 m	3	16 m	shrine front E
241 El Ronron	5 m	30 m	central	?	

Site number & name	E height	E length	#E structures	W height	Other
150 Jinaya	2 m	32 m	central	1.5	E projects W
140 Maringa 1	?	48 m	3	?	
135 El Triunfo	?	45 m	central	?	
139 Las Flores Chiquibul	6.5 m	40 m	central	?	
177 San José	8 m	47 m	central	9 m	
134 El Muerto	3 m	30 m	central	1.2 m	rectangular W
121 El Mozote A	?	38 m	central	?	(north)
121 El Mozote B	?	38 m	central	?	(south)
Salsipuedes					
200 Salsipuedes	6 m	65 m	central	15 m	
93 Los Lagartos	?	57 m	2 (C&N)	?	
91 La Amapola	?	50 m	-	?	E&W platforms
69 El Camalote/Delores	11 m	99 m	central	16 m	
70 La Esperanza	3.10 m	25 m	2 (C&S)	3.5 m	rectangular W
71 La Gloria 2	2 m	28 m	central	3.3 m	shrine?
72 Canija	3.88 m	41 m	3	7.85 m	(north wrong)
Pusilhá–none					
Parte Aguas Oriente-Occidente					
38 Ix Ek'	6 m	37 m	3	6.6 m	(scale? 56 m?)
40 Yaltutu	6 m	32 m	3	5.4 m	
25 Tesik	6 m	33 m	central	1.7 m	(scale? 66 m?)
116 La Pimienta	5 m	39 m	central	?	(scale? 78 m?)
Río Subín					
278 Rayo de Luz 1	8 m	45 m	3	7 m	
279 Rayo de Luz 2	4 m	39 m	3	2 m	
312 Rayo de Luz 4	2 m	41 m	central	5 m	
205 Subín Arriba	9 m	50 m	3	?	W in acropolis
308 El Tinto	3 m	25 m	central	3 m	
263 Nueva Libertad 1	?	42 m	single range	?	Not identified before
Río San Martín					
208 San Valintín	10 m	70 m	central	8 m	shrine
191 La Guadelupe	3.5 m	47 m	central	5 m	
193 Casas Negras	10 m	52 m	central	5 m	

(*continued*)

Table 2.1—*Continued*

Site number & name	E height	E length	#E structures	W height	Other
Río San Juan: Bajo					
259 N. Democracia 1	?	38 m	3	1 m	
261 San Juan	?	29 m	central	?	
Río San Juan: Media					
192 Santa Rosa	4.5 m	45 m	central	5 m	late remodeling
189 La Ginebra	9 m	95 m	central	8 m	
103 El Tigrillo	4 m	50 m	3 on plat	3.5 m	shrine
115 Las Flores A	2 m	72 m	3	?	
115 Las Flores B	1 m	?	?	1 m	(not on map)
96 El Edén 1 A	4.8 m	63 m	central	7.6 m	
96 El Edén 1 B	3.4 m	?	?	1.2 m	(not on map)
266 El Edén 3	3 m	35 m	central	4 m	
Río San Juan: Alta					
87 El Chal	7 m	72 m	?	6 m	
88 El Quetzal	4 m	26 m	central	4 m	
89-A Colpetén	6 m	36 m	3	0.3 m	
81 El Ocote 1	2.5 m	30 m	central	2 m	
82 El Ocote 4	?	23 m	central	?	
79 Copoja 1	3.75 m	41 m	3	2.8 m	rebuilt
80 Copoja 2	3.75 m	34 m	2 (C&N)	3.0 m	
76 Santa Cruz 2	4 m	20 m	central	1.9 m	
41 Ix On	7.4	51 m	3	7.8 m	
89 Santa Rosita 1	6.05 m	47 m	3	8.8 m	
47 El Nagual	8 m	46 m	3	7.00 m	scale = 50%?
42 La Unión 1 Cent 1	?	40 m	central	?	
42 La Unión 1 Cent 2	?	40 m	3	?	
43 Ixjuju	4.9 m	34 m	2 (N&C)	?	
77 Santo Torbio 2	4.3 m	3	2 m	3	4.35 m
16 Nacim. Moquena	1.5 m	26 m	central	0.60 m	
45 La Unión 2	4.0 m	20 m	3	3.00 m	
44 Sabaneta	4.5 m	26 m	3	0.60 m	
48 Santa Rosita 4	8 m	53 m	3	8.4 m	shrine
49 San Valentín Norte	6 m	30 m	central	6.3 m	
40 Santa Rosita 3	6.05 m	30 m	3	8.8 m	

Site number & name	E height	E length	#E structures	W height	Other
Río Poxte					
97 Nuevas Delicias	2 m	23 m	?	?	(not on map)
5 Pueblito	5 m	50 m	central	5 m	
113 La Lucha	5 m	45 m	central	?	
6 Machaca 2	?	23 m	platform only	?	
51 Santa Rosita 2	4.45 m	43 m	3	?	
4 Poxté 1	6.4 m	42 m	3	?	
39 El Chapayal	4.2 m	29 m	central	2.4 m	
24 Poxté 2	4 m	23 m	3	?	
185 El Tintal 2	3.5 m	18 m	central	3.0 m	
171 El Tintal 1	4 m	24 m	central	0.75 m	
23 Curucuitz	?	58 m	3	?	
26 Ixcoxol 2	5 m	33 m	3	?	
27 Ixcoxol 1	5 m	36 m	2 (C&S)	?	
195 Chaquiux	6 m	50 m	central	5 m	
28-A Nocsos	3.25 m	34 m	central	2.70 m	
Río Machaquilá y Santa Amelia					
209 Esquipulas 1	8 m	80 m	3	6 m	
1 El Achiotl	5.2 m	43 m	central	?	
2 Puente Machaquilá	6.25 m	48 m	3	?	
Central and West Petén					
158 La Pacayera	4.5 m	51 m	central	?	
159 El Bucute	4.0 m	36 m	central		Destroyed
160 El Juleque	3.5 m	36 m	3	0.5 m	
123 Sajalal	3.0 m	24 m	central	2.3 m	shrine
131 Santa Ana–Zamir A	5.0 m	51 m	3	4.3 m	
131 Santa Ana–Zamir B	4.0 m	?	?	2.0 m	no plan of E
202 La Instancia A	9.0 m	60 m	central	7.0 m	
202 La Instancia B	4.0 m	32 m	?	3.0 m	
280 San Francisco 1	2.0 m	31 m	central	1.0 m	
274 Los Pavos	4.5 m	40 m	central	3.0 m	
288 El Guarumo	2.0 m	29 m	central	?	Long west str
237 Ch'ich'a A	12.0 m	91 m	central	?	W remodeled
237 Ch'ich'a B	7.0 m	41 m	central	?	shrine

(*continued*)

Site number & name	E height	E length	#E structures	W height	Other
Los Lagos					
299 Ts' Unun Witz	1.0 m	41 m	central	3 m	map 90° off
325 K'u Jux 2	5.0 m	52 m	central	7 m	
223 El Sos	2.0 m	22 m	central	?	
221 El Xux	4.0 m	39 m	?	2 m	plan unclear
Eastern Platform, But No West Structure					
167 Casa de Piedra	?	28 m	3	-	no west
155 Yok'ol Wits Gr 1	?	40 m	3	-	no west
153 Los Encuentros	7 m	26 m	none	-	no west
199 Linares 1	6 m	63 m	central	-	no west
138 Sacul 5	?	23 m	central	?	no west
99 El Chilonché	3.5 m	45 m	central	-	no W structure
260 N. Democracia 2	6 m	60 m	central	-	no west
265 El Frijolar	?	40 m	central	-	no west
190 La Pajarera	?	43 m	central	-	no W/rebuilt?
83 El Ocote 3	2.8 m	18 m	central	-	no W/stela
74 Santo Domingo	4.8 m	25 m	3	-	no W
75 Santo Torbio 1	5.5 m	30 m	3	-	no W
291 Chan K'ix	2.0 m	35 m	central	-	no W/Odd Angle
291 Chan K'ix	2.0 m	3	5 m	central	-
277 El Cosuco	3.5 m	21 m	central	-	no W str
Identified, But Probably not E Groups					
157 Buenos Aires Gr 1	15 m	?	3	?	separate E strs
172 La Providencia 2	?	34 m	odd	?	juts forward
125 Grano de Oro	?	26 m	central	?	shrine
66 El Bombillo Central	?	23 m	central	-	no west
66 El Bombillo Gr 17	3	10 m	23 m	?	3.30 m
67 El Calabazal 3	7 m	-	3separate	10 m	
60 El Limón	?	47 m	3	?	W is platform
55 El Rosario	2.40 m	22 m	central	1.90 m	
21 Uizil 'Ox	?	19 m	central	?	
22 Ixchen	?	20 m	3	?	W not defined
13 Ek Tzic	7 m	13 m	none	?	W platform
18 Xa'an Abajo	3.7 m	29 m	central	3.2 m	E&W rectangles

Site number & name	E height	E length	#E structures	W height	Other
147 Chiquibul 2	?	35 m	2 (C&S)	?	rectangular W
168 Los Laureles 1	3 m	14 m	none	-	no W/E on platform
169 Los Laureles 2	2.6 m	15 m	central	0.6 m	E on low platform
162 La Ponderosa	3.6 m	22 m	central	0.3 m	rec W/platform E
179 Nueva Armenia	?	26 m	central	6.5 m	no alignment
133 El Llanto	4 m	27 m	2 (C&N)	6 m	rectangular W
234 Camixtun	15 m	32 m	central	4 m	W range/2 E
258 La Reinta	6 m	37 m	3	-	no W/shrine
262 El Botan	6 m	26 m	3	?	rectangular W
119 Buen Retiro	?	29 m	3	?	Triadic?
119 Buen Retiro B	?	29 m	?	?	
124 El Cartucho	3.8 m	23 m	3	?	Triadic?
73 La Puente	10 m	?	?	?	plan unclear
85 San Miguel/Dolores	7.0 m	44 m	platform only	?	W is ballcourt
78 Santa Cruz 1	3.1 m	16 m	central	-	W is quadrangular platform
3 Ixtutz	7 m	23 m	3	?	Triadic?
28 Ixcoxol 3	2.5 m	?	?	?	plan backward
102 Xutilha	4.5 m	-	none	?	3 separate E
285 La Lechuza	?	?	?	?	plan unclear
217 La Benedición 1	3.0 m	21 m	?	3 m	plan unclear
Other E Groups Used in Chapter					
Caracol epicenter	10 m	95 m	3 (+2)	25 m	remodeling
Caracol Hatzcap Ceel	10 m	96 m	3	10.4 m	
Caracol Cahal Pichik	9.5 m	87 m	3	13 m	
Caracol Ceiba	ca. 7 m	70 m	2 (C&S)	ca. 9 m	
Caracol Cohune	ca. 7 m	54 m	central	ca. 9 m	
Tayasal	ca. 5m	65 m	3 (+1)	rebuilt	
Paxcamán	8 m	96 m	central	7.4 m	
Cenote	8 m	92 m	3 (+1)	9 m	
Yaxhá Cenote Style	?	172 m	3	?	
Yaxhá Uaxactún Style	e	?	65 m	3	?

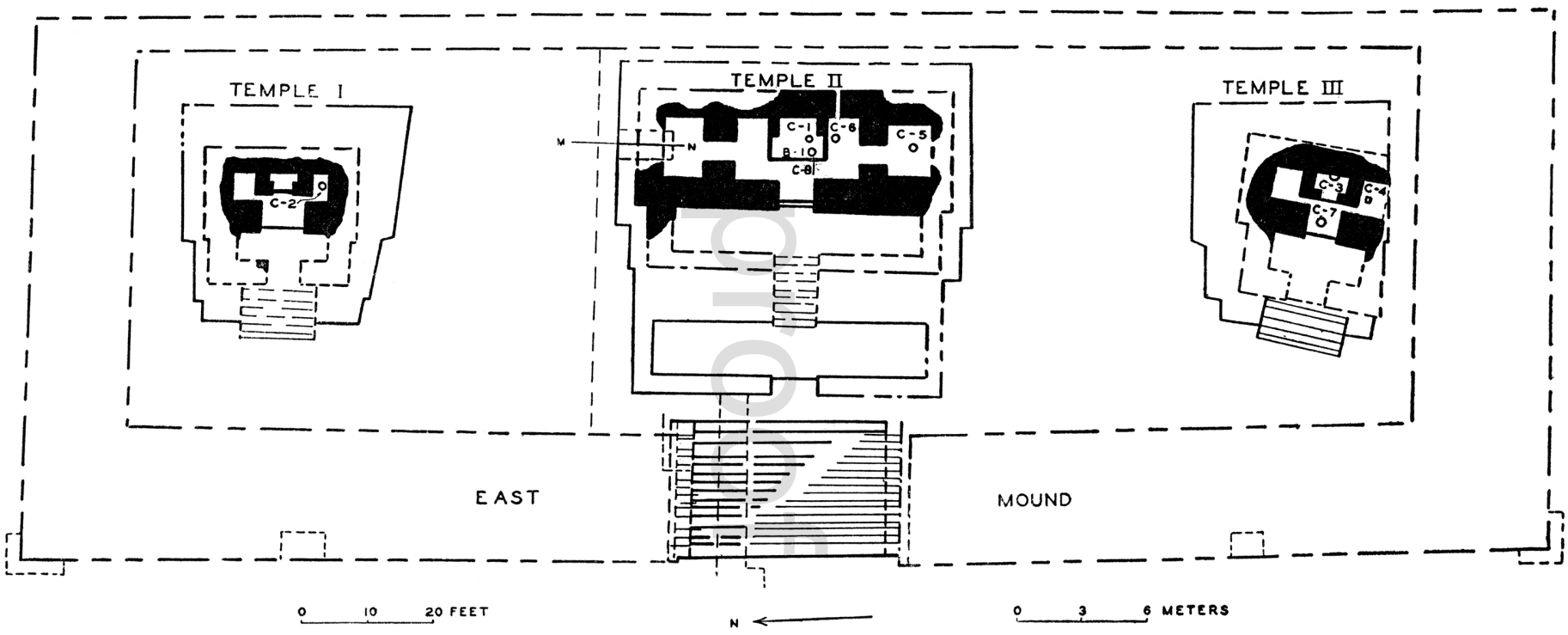


Figure 2.2. The eastern platform at Uaxactún, Guatemala, showing the location of various caches associated with the three buildings, Structures EI-EIII (after Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:48, Figure 8). All three buildings contain a skull cache on the north–south axes.

cross-peninsular Maya trade routes (Chase and Chase 2012); and (3) these E Groups may be used as a partial proxy for understanding the peopling of the Maya Southern Lowlands.

The Archaeology of E Groups

Uaxactún

The Uaxactún Group E (Figure 2.1a and Figure 2.2), from whence the term "E Group" derives, was one of the first major architectural complexes investigated by the archaeologists from the Carnegie Institution program who worked there from 1926 through 1931. These investigations formed the baseline for all other E Group research but were not actually extensive enough to fully document the developmental pattern for this architectural complex. A. V. Smith (1950:63) noted that the latest pottery within all four of the E Group buildings that were investigated by Oliver Ricketson and Edith Ricketson (1937) at Uaxactún dated to Tzakol—or Early Classic (250–550 CE)—times. This dating does not take into account, however, that neither the deeply buried E-VII-Sub (western pyramid) nor the platform supporting the three eastern structures was penetrated. Thus, for the better part of half a century E Groups were dated to the early part of the Early Classic period (for example, Smith 1950:63). The earlier aspects of these archaeological complexes were subsequently documented by research at Cenote (Chase 1983, 1985), Tikal (Laporte and Fialko 1995), Caracol (Chase and Chase 1995), and Mirador and Nakbé (Hansen 1992).

All three of the masonry structures at Uaxactún, which were set astride the summit of the eastern platform, were excavated axially. While the Ricketsons (1937:52) noted that earlier constructions were present in the platform, they did not investigate them: "the additions and refloorings here are very complicated and indicate that the East Mound itself was probably not originally built to its present dimensions." There were minimally three and possibly up to five earlier constructions at this locus (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:52, Figure 14). Excavations at the base of the eastern platform revealed the presence of several different facings and an inset side panel (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:Figures 94, 95).

Structure E-I, the northern building, yielded two deposits. Feature 1, dated to Tepeu 1 or 2 times (based on Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:Plate 86, Figure 10), was an intrusive pottery dump placed within the altar of the building. Cist 2 was located south of this altar and consisted of a skull

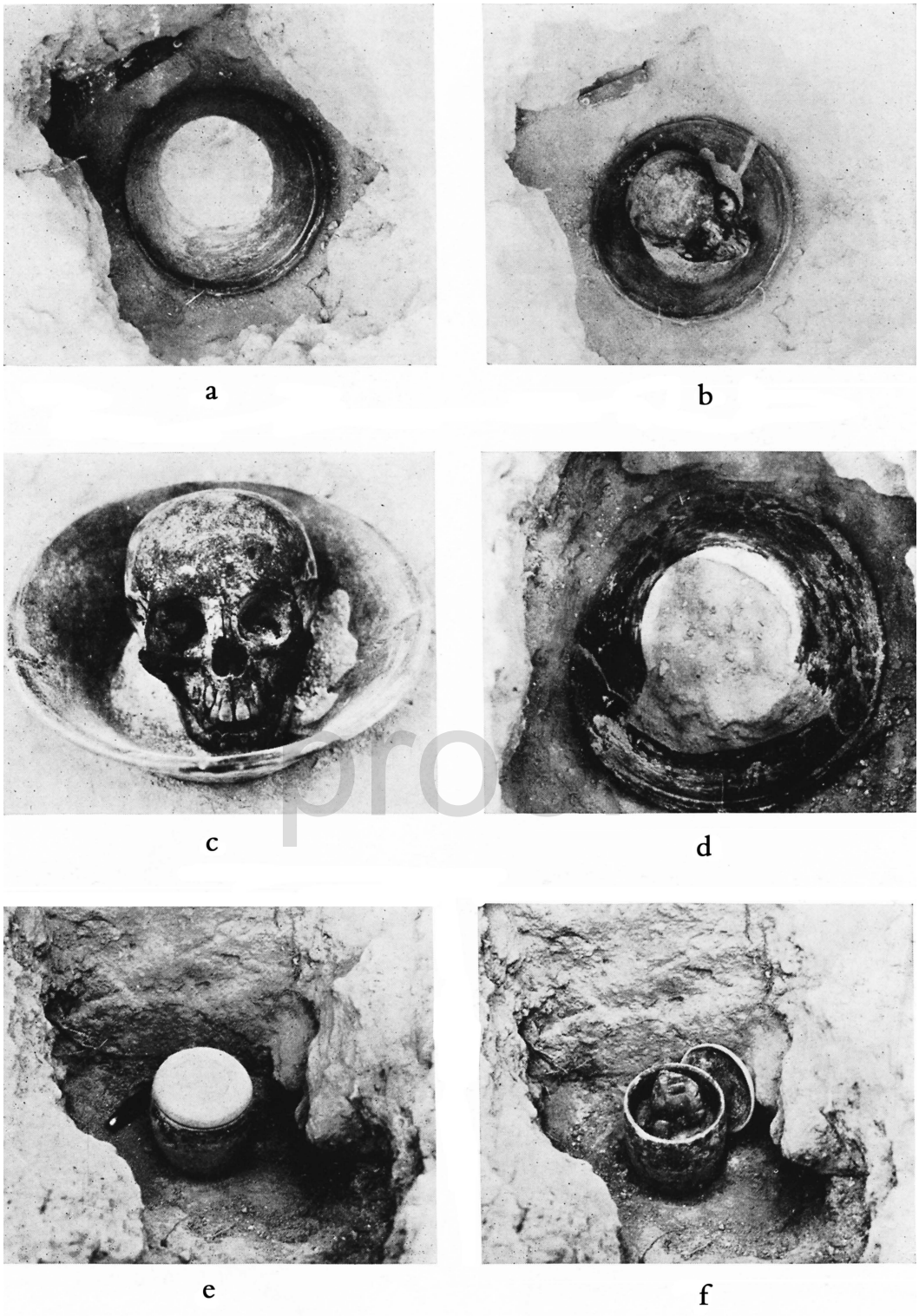


Figure 2.3. Caches from the core of Structure EII at Uaxactún: (a–c) Cist 4; (d) Cist 7; (e<n<f) Cist 3 (after Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:Plate 23).

set between two Águila Orange bowls (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:Plate 81a, b) along with twelve jadeite objects; it would appear that Cist 2 was intrusive, based on "a faint line of demarcation in the floor" (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:49).

Three deposits were uncovered in association with the southern building, Structure E-III. Cist 3, containing an Águila Orange barrel (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:Plate 81e, f), had been located on the within the building's altar set against the buried back wall. Cists 4 and 7 each contained a set of Águila Orange dishes that each housed a human skull. Cist 4 was located south of the masonry altar, while Cist 7 was "found in the floor in the doorway between the two galleries" (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:58).

Three deposits were also recovered from the central eastern building, Structure EII (Figure 2.3a–f), all again on axis and all again associated with Águila Orange dishes (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:Plate 81d, h, i, l, m). Cist 1 contained one vessel and the bones of a child. The two vessels in Cist 8 encased two obsidian lancets. The two vessels in Cist 6 contained a human skull. Cists 1 and 8 were sealed within the fill of the building and were considered to be nonintrusive (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:55–56). Yet another deposit, consisting of two very early Early Classic vessels (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:56, Plate 79j–l), that was not formally recognized by the excavators appears to have been sealed in the fill beneath Cists 1 and 6.

The large western pyramid, Structure E-VII, was also investigated. The later substructure formed a 24.3 m by 24.7 m square that was flanked by stucco masks and had no structure on its summit. Radial stairways were confirmed on its eastern and northern sides and suspected on its southern and western sides (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:67–68). Three sealed caches (Cists 9, 11, and 12) and one burial (Cist 10) were recovered. The caches contained fifteen Early Classic ceramic vessels—Águila Orange dishes and Balanza Black cylinders (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:Plates 81n–o, 82a–e, 84a–h). An additional Early Classic polychrome basal-flanged bowl was recovered from the core of Structure E-VII. One other cache (Cist 13) was recovered from the core of the E-VII southern platform and contained sixteen Early Classic vessels (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:Plates 82g–i, 83a–e, h, i, 85a–g, Figure 190e) and four eccentric flints. Whereas the Ricketsons (1937:93, Fig. 57) argued that Structure E-VII-sub was followed by E-VII-secondary and then by the E-VII-platform, this sequence of construction is inverted, as can be seen in their Figure 57,

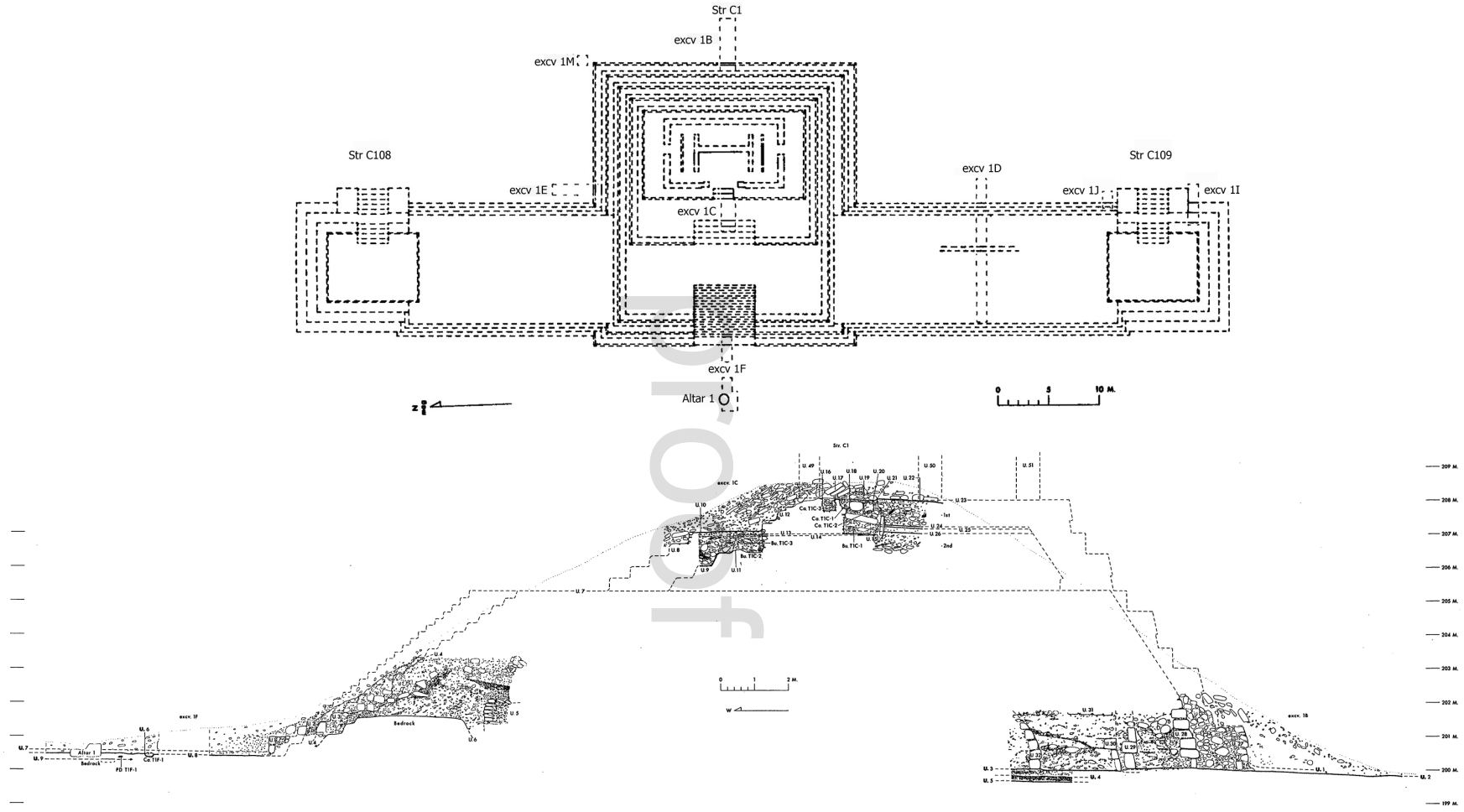


Figure 2.4. The (a) plan and (b) section of the eastern platform of the Cenote E Group, Structures C1, C108, and C109, showing the locations of excavations undertaken in 1971 and the locations of caches and burials associated with the central building. Also shown in the section is the earliest modified bedrock version of the eastern platform (after Chase 1983:298–301).

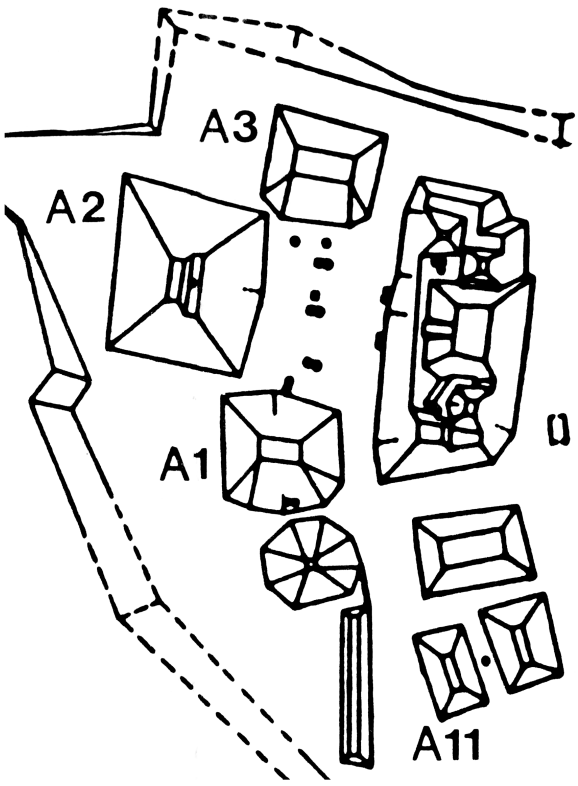
which correctly shows E-VII-sub followed by E-VII-platform and then by E-VII-secondary.

The reexamination of the Uaxactún E Group investigations reveals three important points. First, the cultural material recovered in association with the western Structure E-VII appears to be of a later Early Classic date than the caches recovered in association with the three buildings atop the eastern platform. Second, the final form of the Uaxactún E Group dates to Early Classic period but clearly had antecedents in the Late Preclassic period, as the Ricketsons (1937:Figure 98) themselves noted (in spite of no excavations into the earlier version). Finally, the Uaxactún E Group declined in importance in inverse relationship to the development of the Uaxactún Group A acropolis, beginning in the last part of the Early Classic period (Andrews 1975:123; see also Kovic 2011).

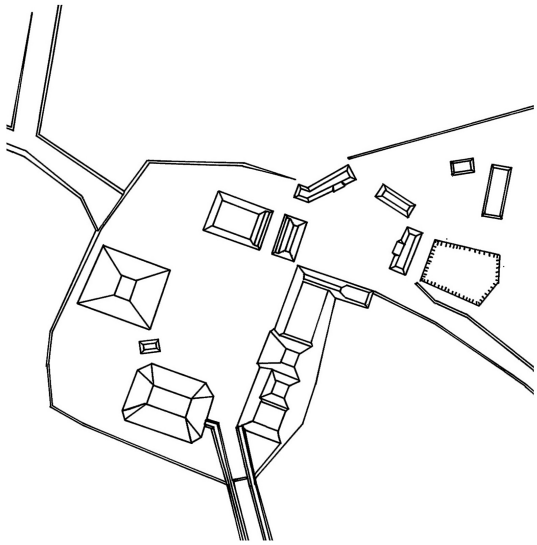
Cenote

Three E Groups are noted for the Tayasal-Paxcamán Zone of the central Petén lakes district. A Uaxactún Style E Group of Early Classic date has been documented for the site center of Tayasal, replete with stone stelae; its western pyramid was presumably leveled by subsequent Postclassic period (900–1519 CE) occupation (Chase 1983; see also Pugh et al. 2012:7, Figure 4). Two Cenote Style E Groups are noted, one at the site of Paxcamán and the other at Cenote (Chase 1983:1155). The Paxcamán E Group was mapped in 1977; its eastern platform is 96 m in length, with no lateral structures in evidence; its central east building is 7.4 m in height; its western building is 8 m in height (Chase 1983:1155). The Cenote E Group (Figure 2.1b and Figure 2.4a, b) was excavated in May and June 1971 by the University of Pennsylvania Tayasal Project and formed the type-site for this style variant (Chase 1985). The core of its eastern platform contains materials dating to the Middle Preclassic, and the earliest form of this E Group was constructed of carved bedrock. Under the eastern platform, bedrock was shaped as a stepped platform complete with lower side wings. Under the western platform, bedrock was carved into a small platform. The western pyramid, Structure C5, eventually came to be 8 m in height; it was not, however, a radial pyramid like Uaxactún and did not face to the east in its final form, but rather to the south.

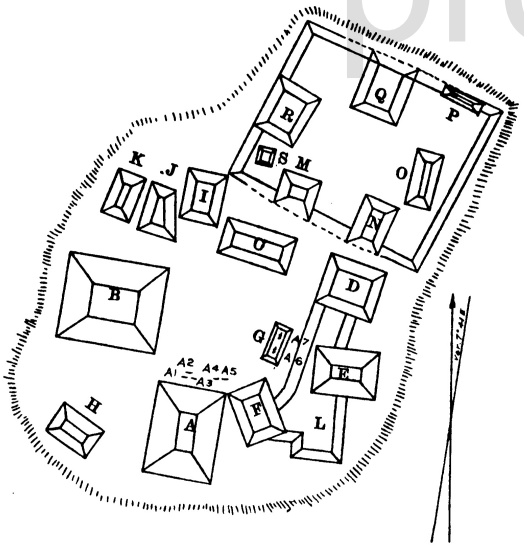
The eastern platform at Cenote was 92 m in length; its central construction, Structure C1, was some 6 m in height by the beginning of the Early Classic period. The two constructions on the end of the platform evinced eastern access. A stone altar was placed on axis to the west of the central



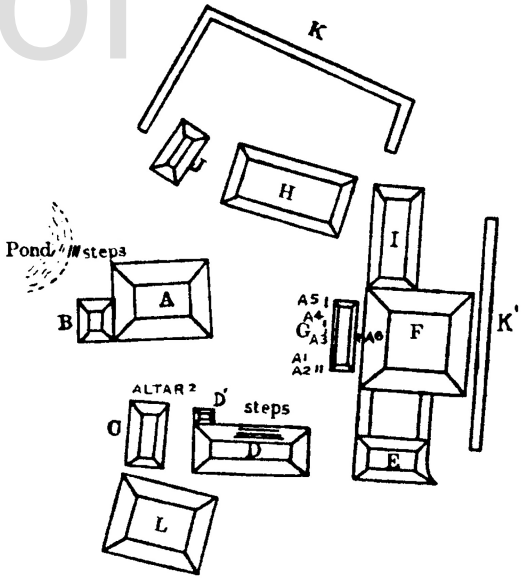
Caracol epicenter



Ceiba



Cahal Pichik



Hatzcap Ceel

Figure 2.5. E Groups from Caracol, Belize: (a) epicenter (after Chase and Chase 1987:65), (b) Ceiba, (c) Cahal Pichik (after Thompson 1931:240); and (d) Hatzcap Ceel (after Thompson 1931:250).

building and a lip-to-lip cache of black tetrapod vessels was set on bedrock in between the altar and building. What is presumed to have been a corner cache, also consisting of partial tetrapod vessels, was recovered northeast of the latest central building. The latest version of the central construction also was associated with two burials and a series of caches. Sealed within the frontal step was a single supine burial accompanied by two lip-to-lip red cache bowls. Set in the fill above this burial before it was sealed in the construction was another set of lip-to-lip red cache bowls containing a human skull. A second burial was intruded into the floor of the latest building during the transition into the early Early Classic and contained eleven ceramic vessels and two censers. This burial had been disturbed in the early part of the Late Classic, however, but appears to have been reconsecrated with the deposition of four other vessels that likely came from this deposit as a cache through the summit floor and by two other small caches placed in the fill immediately above the redeposited interment. At a much later date, a ritual concentration of broken Terminal Classic vessels appears to have been placed in a shrine on the summit of this building, reminiscent of a similar deposit placed in the northern altar of the Uaxactún E Group (see above) and in a shrine.

Uncovered immediately north of the eastern platform was a small construction, Structure C2, which also faced west. This construction housed an eroded plain stela, and a carved stone was recovered from the platform fill. Two Early Classic burials had been intruded into the building in front of the stela, both sealed by the latest platform floor. A series of three early Early Classic caches had been placed immediately east of this platform. All contained redware bowls. Two caches consisted of single bowls, and the third consisted of a set of these bowls that encased a human skull. These caches are stratigraphically much earlier than the burials. The conjunction of this stela platform with an E Group at Cenote is significant, as it is indicative of the subsequent role of such carved monuments in public ritual.

Caracol

As noted elsewhere (A. Chase and D. Chase 1994, 1996, 1998; Chases et al. 2011), the site of Caracol encompassed almost 200 sq km in the Late Classic period (550–800 CE). Located within this settlement area are the remains of five E Groups (Figure 2.5a–d)—presumably architectural concentrations representing early independent communities within the Caracol landscape. All of the known E Groups in Caracol can be dated to at least as early as the Late Preclassic period. Four of these groups (Hatzcap Ceel, Cahal Pichik,

Caracol, and Ceibal) are linked together by causeways, while one (Cohune) was not formally incorporated into the Late Classic city by roads. Cohune was extensively looted by means of tunnels, but actual excavation data exist for three of the groups (Caracol, Hatzcap Ceel, and Cahal Pichik). All three of the formally excavated groups contain cached deposits that permit both dating and some insight into the broader cosmological functions of these complexes.

Ignored in the early E Group literature (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937; Ruppert 1940; Ruppert and Dennison 1943) were the excavations undertaken by Thompson (1931) at the Belizean sites of Hatzcap Ceel and Cahal Pichik in the 1920s. Both the Cahal Pichik and the Hatzcap Ceel E Groups are Cenote Style architectural complexes. The eastern platform at both sites support three buildings, with two plain stelae set on a smaller platform immediately in front of the eastern platform at Cahal Pichik. The western pyramid at Cahal Pichik, Structure B, is 13 m in height and supported a stone building. A bench was attached to the rear wall of this building, and an earlier bench was found directly below. Thompson (1931:Plate 36) recovered "Votive Cache 4" beneath the back wall of the structure on axis to the bench; this cache consisted of a single large flaring walled dish that contained a single jadeite bead and a shell that had a Maya portrait painted on it. Reconnaissance at the site in 1989 found that Cahal Pichik had been extensively looted, with both the eastern and western pyramids being savagely trenched. Three early barrel caches, stylistically dating to the Late Preclassic, were recovered from the looters' excavations at the summit of the western structure.

On the 3 m high eastern platform of Cahal Pichik, Thompson (1931:243) investigated the 9.5 m high central building, Structure E, which had a western stairway and no formal construction atop the substructure. He also investigated another building, Structure F, associated with the southern extant of the eastern platform, finding a masonry structure that rose 1.5 m above the platform. A refuse dump that produced whole vessels was located under the floor of the rear room of this building; these materials are transitional between the Late Preclassic and the early Early Classic periods (Thompson 1931:Figure 10d).

The plan of the Hatzcap Ceel E Group resembles that at Cahal Pichik, but the eastern platform is actually longer; as at Cahal Pichik, a stela platform is located immediately in front of the eastern platform at Hatzcap Ceel. The western pyramid, Structure A, rose to a height of 10.4 m and supported a formal building; although a stratigraphic sequence of three

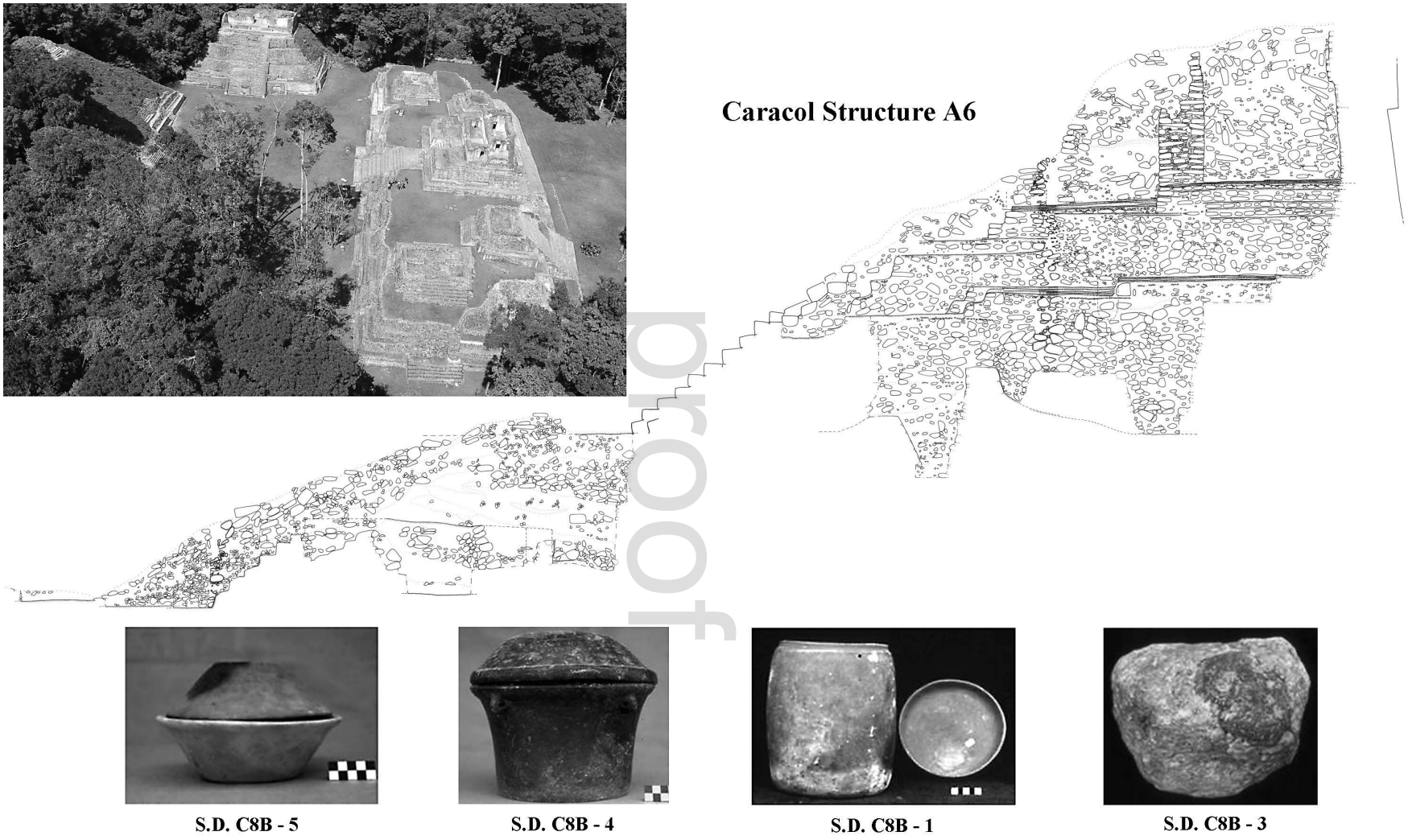


Figure 2.6. The Caracol epicentral E Group east platform, Structure A6, showing (a) an aerial photo of the E Group looking north, (b) the section through the central building of Caracol's east platform, and (c–f) caches associated with the refurbishing of Caracol Structure A6-2nd (SDs 4 and 5) and with the construction of Structure A6-1st (SDs 1 and 3).

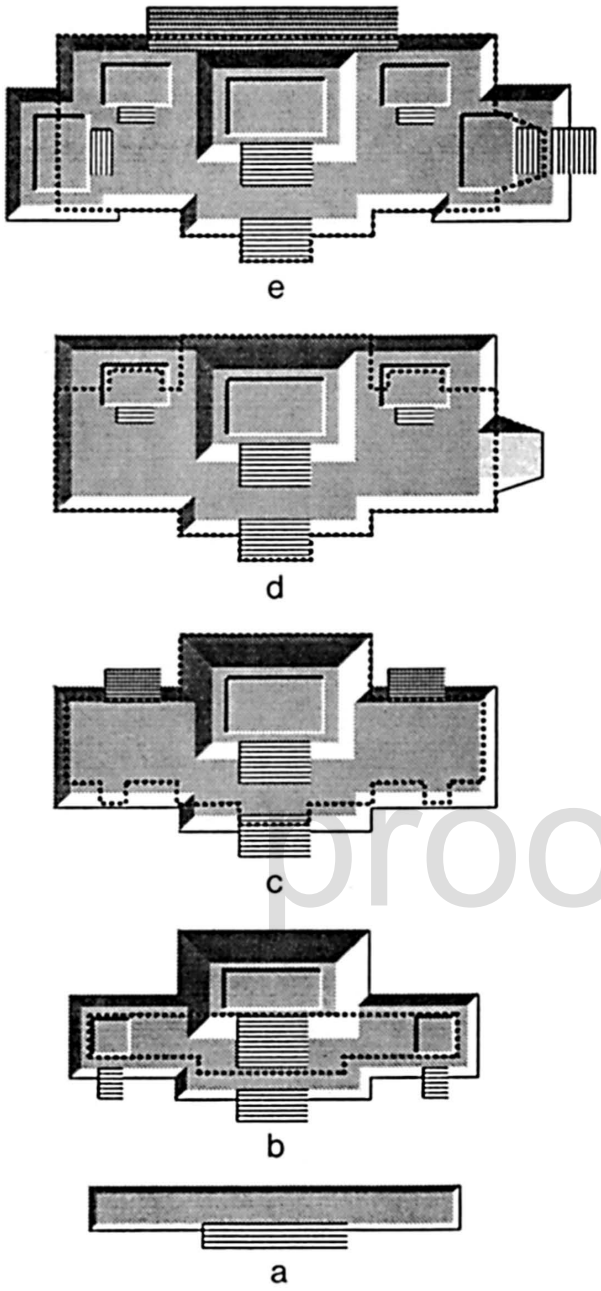


Figure 2.7. The architectural development of the eastern platform of the Caracol E Group based on excavation data: (a) estimated time of construction 360 BCE; (b) estimated time of construction 160 BCE; (c) estimated time of construction CE 41; (d) estimated time of construction CE 440; and (e) estimated time of construction CE 640 (after Chase and Chase 1995:98).

floors was found, no deposits were located (Thompson 1931:260). As at Cahal Pichik, excavation focused on the central and southern buildings of the eastern platform. Investigation of the southern building, Structure E, encountered the remains of two sequent masonry buildings but no associated deposits. The central building on the eastern platform, Structure F, rose to a height of 10 m and supported a single room building at its summit. An earlier red-painted building was located 1.2 m directly beneath the later

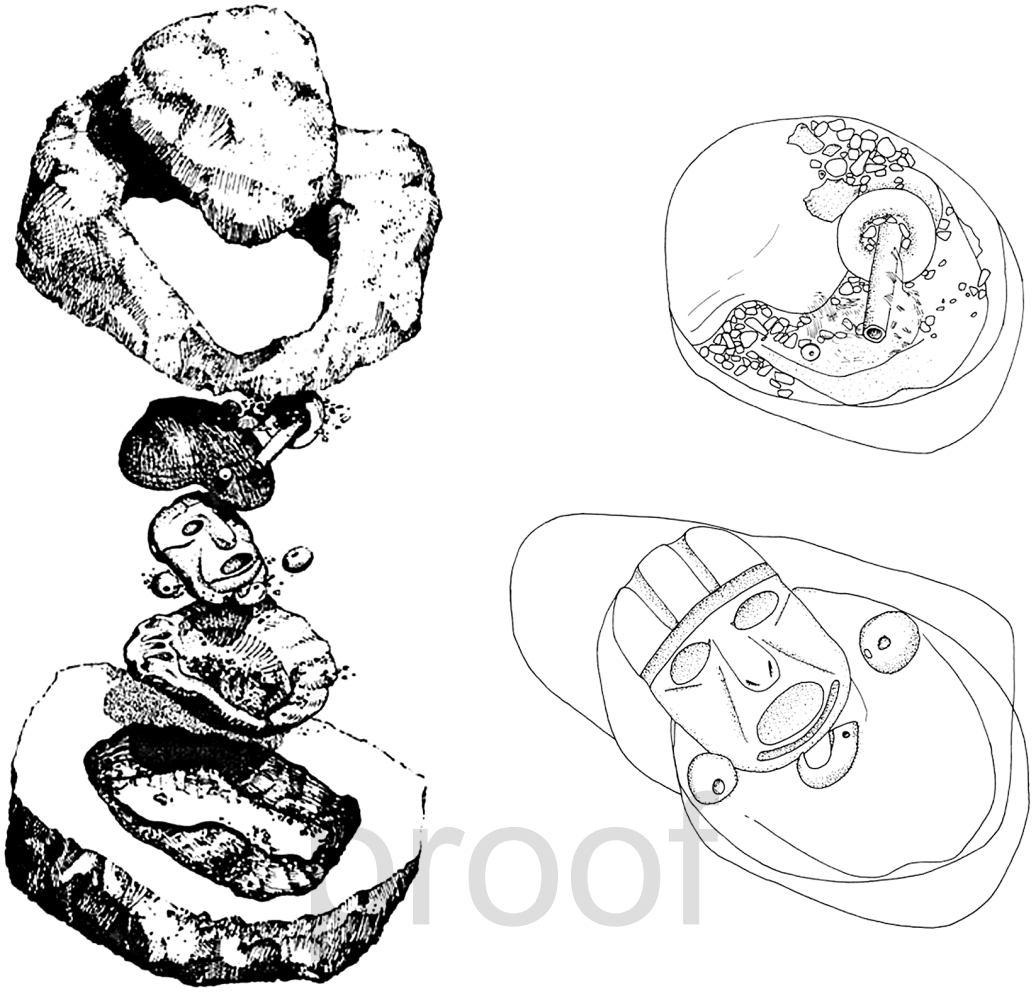


Figure 2.8. Expanded view (after Chase and Chase 1995:96) and upper and lower plans of SD C8B-3. Some 664.7 grams of mercury were found in the bottom of a stone geode. The carved limestone lid was attached to the geode with red bedrock clay. Paired *Spondylus* shells were set above the mercury. Within the *Spondylus* shells was a large jadeite face with a jadeite claw pendent and a jadeite bead and a *Strombus* bead on either side; the items were bedded in malachite chips. A single jadeite earflare assemblage with pearl end was set atop the shells. There were indications that the shells had been wrapped in cloth.

building. Below the floor of this earlier building and centered on its doorway, Thompson (1931:275, Plate 34 left) recovered "Votive Cache 3," which consisted of a red barrel and an unslipped vessel dating to the transition between the Late Preclassic and Early Classic periods. A final plaster floor was found 1.25 m below the earlier building.

The epicentral Caracol E Group has also been investigated extensively. The western pyramid, Structure A1, rises some 25 m above the associated plaza and does not support a formal building. Instead, a 2 m raised platform

with side stairways crowns the summit of this building. A carved stela dating to 9.10.10.0.0 is set into the facing of the summit platform between the two stairs and is associated with a Giant Ahau altar that had been placed over the fragments of a partial 8th cycle stela. Three caches were recovered in the summit trench. Within the core of the summit platform was a deposit of obsidian eccentrics, stingray spines, and white calcite balls. East of the summit monuments, set into an upper platform, was a lip-to-lip cache of two large flaring rimmed, redware bowls that contained a host of marine items in the form of shells and coral. A third barrel cache was found deep within the summit core buried within the core of an even earlier construction. This lidded barrel was associated with a number of smaller objects that included stingray spines, coral, jadeite and shell beads, shell "Charlie Chaplin" figures (Lomitola 2012:110), a large jadeite pendent, and a single large jadeite earflare. It is likely that this deposit dates to the Late Preclassic era. Basal excavations were unable to find earlier buried constructions at plaza level.

The eastern platform of the Caracol E Group has also been extensively investigated (Figure 2.6a–f). All of the formal buildings have been excavated and a detailed plan of the development of the eastern platform has been presented (Chase and Chase 1995:98, Figure 60) that extends back to the early part of the Late Preclassic period. As presently understood, the initial construction was a long platform with central steps that did not support structures (Figure 2.7a–e). This platform was eventually engulfed in a Cenote Style E group consisting of an earlier version of the central Structure A6 and at least one deeply buried end-platform structures, the back of one being recovered deep beneath Structure A8. Two caches were recovered sealed in the core of the earlier masonry version of Structure A6. Around CE 41, the final masonry version of Structure A6 was built and the platform was next expanded to its present length and height. This platform evinced rear stairs running east directly beneath where the later Structures A5 and A7 were later located.

Two of the most impressive caches recovered at Caracol were included in the construction of the final masonry version of Structure A6, one in a stone geode (Figure 2.8) and one in a large ceramic barrel (Chase and Chase 1995, 2005, 2006a). A tomb was intruded into the platform beneath the locus that was to become Structure A4 between 350 and 400 CE. Another tomb was placed in the plaza to the southern axis of Structure A6 at about the same time; this double-decker chamber had its upper room filled around CE 480. Structures A5 and A7 were constructed around CE 450;

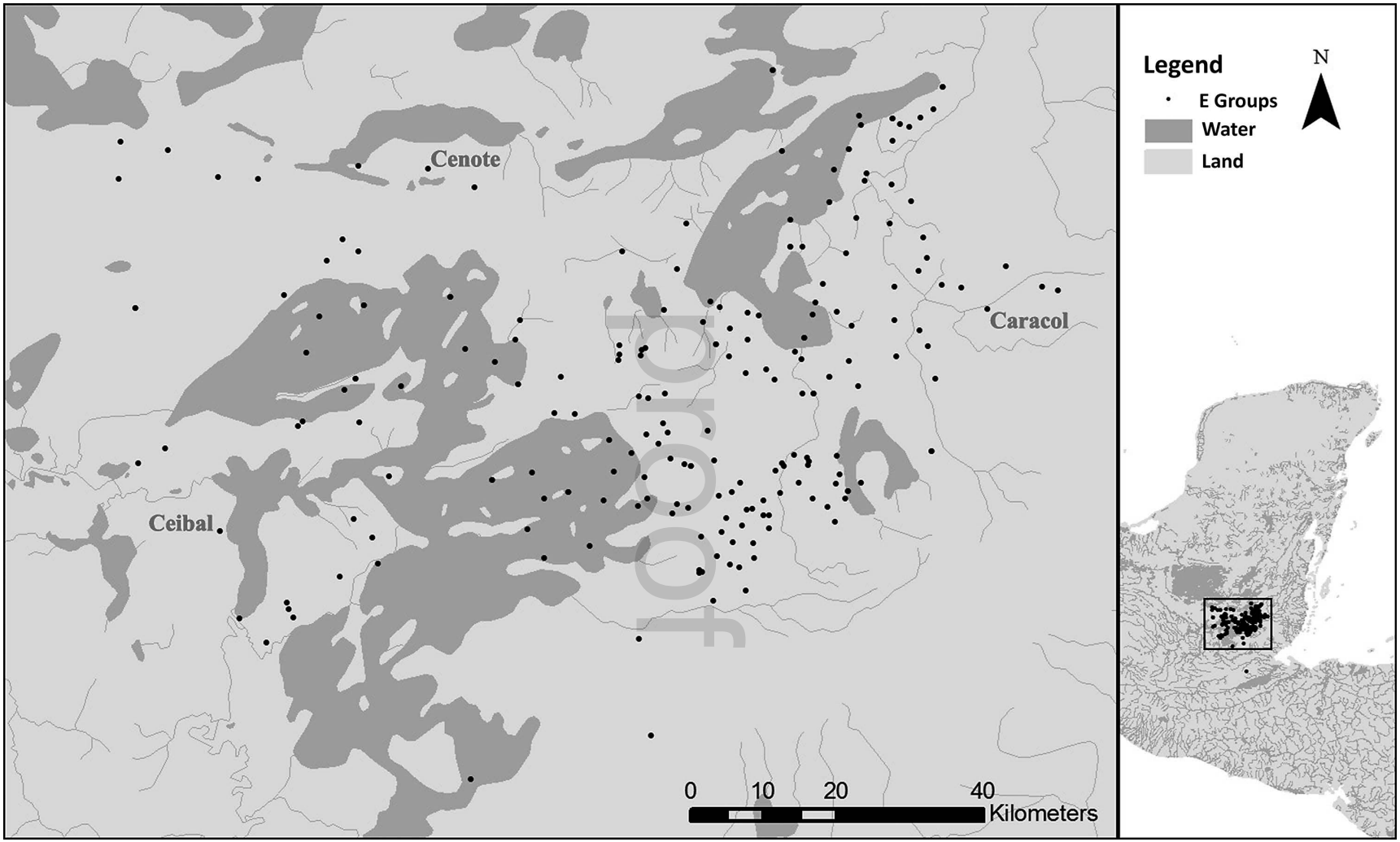


Figure 2.9. Distribution of 170 known E Groups (see Table 2.1) recorded by the Guatemalan *Atlas* project (Escobedo 2008). These E Groups accord well with a major transpeninsular trade route from the Río Pasión to the Caribbean Sea (Chase and Chase 2012; Laporte et al. 2008).

it is suspected that an early version of Structure A8 containing a Charlie Chaplin cache (Lomitola 2012:112) was also constructed about this time. Structure A7 contained a formal tomb with a northern entry that was filled and sealed by 500 CE. Finally, between 550 and 600 CE, Structure A4 was constructed and encased a large tomb. Monuments were erected in front of Structure A4 and eventually were buried in a stelae dump in front of this building in association with a cache. Thus, the eastern platform of Caracol's E Group served as the locus for long-standing concentrated ritual activities that continued throughout Caracol's history, first associated with caching practices in the Preclassic period (1000 BCE–250 CE), then associated with high-status interments in the Early Classic period, and, finally, terminated with burning and trash in the Terminal Classic period (800–1000 CE) (Chase and Chase 2000).

Southeast Petén

Juan Pedro Laporte orchestrated a long-term effort to accomplish a total survey of the sites in the southeast Petén of Guatemala in order to understand the political organization of this region (Figure 2.9). This effort ran from 1987 through 2008 (Laporte et al. 1988; Laporte and Mejia 2005a; Escobedo 2008). Among its more important results was the documentation of at least 170 architectural complexes that can be classified as E Groups (Table 2.1). This represents a concentration of E Groups that is not found elsewhere in the Maya area and places the five known E Groups at Caracol within a context where these features are often located only 3 to 5 km apart. While all of the known sites in the southeast Petén were recorded and plotted as to longitude and latitude by the Guatemalans working on the *Atlas* project (Escobedo 2008), most of these sites witnessed only limited excavation, often in the form of test-pits to establish some idea of dating. Significantly, many of these test pits yielded Middle and Early Preclassic sherd materials. Initially, the dating of many of the E Group complexes was not fully understood, much like the situation elsewhere in the Petén. Thus, some were assigned a Late Classic date without being excavated. As the early date of E Groups became better understood (for example, Chase and Chase 1995; Aimers and Rice 2006), however, the *Atlas* project also recognized that many, if not all, of these groups dated to the Late Preclassic period or earlier. By 2008 some forty of the architectural groups in the southeast Petén referred to as E Groups were dated with certainty to minimally the Late Preclassic period based on the associated test excavations (Escobedo 2008).

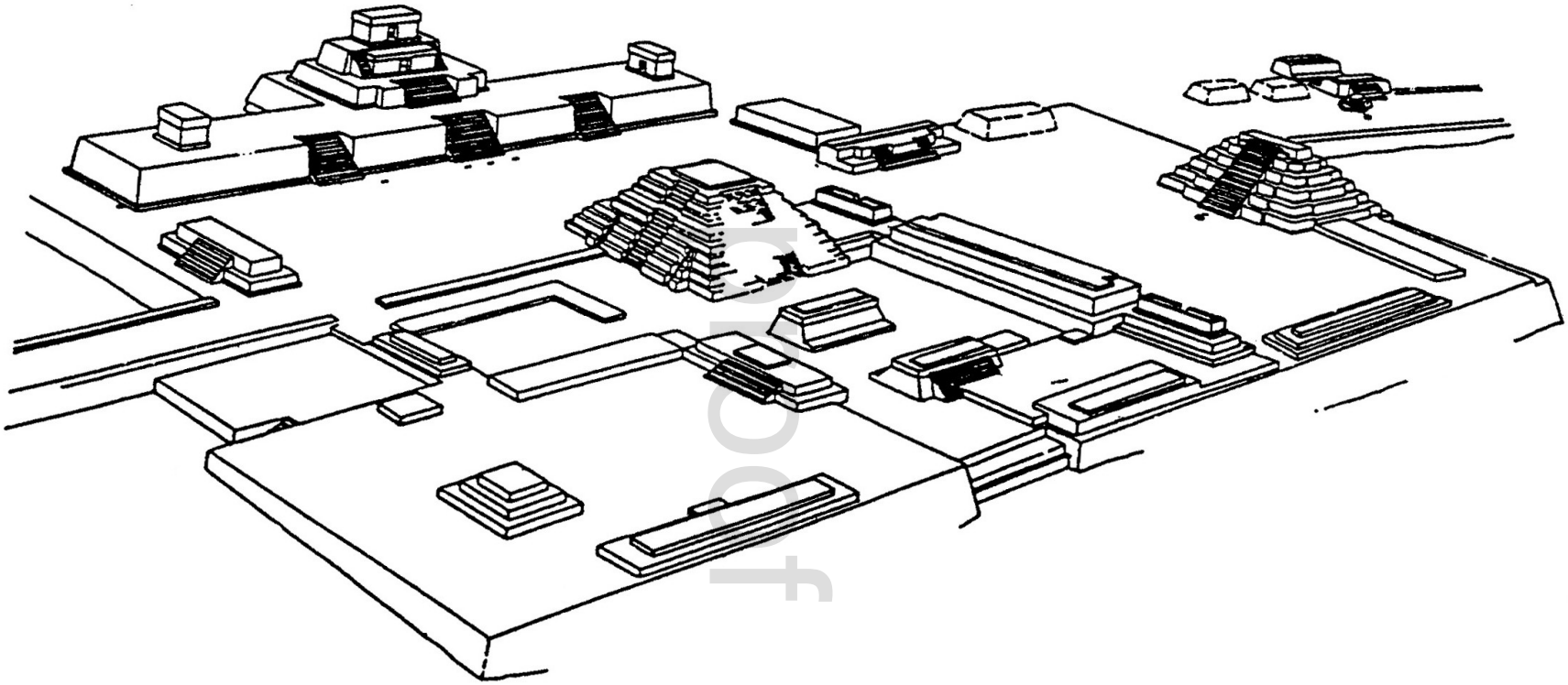


Figure 2.10. Perspective of the center of Ixtontón (*north to the left*) showing a Cenote Style E Group dating to the Late Preclassic period (after Laporte 1994).

Several of the E Groups in the southeast Petén have been investigated in greater detail than a single test excavation, but none have been deeply penetrated and explored. Ixtontón (Figure 2.10) was investigated in the mid-1990s and dated to the Late Preclassic period (Laporte 1994). Other archaeological investigations were undertaken at Ixkún (Laporte and Mejía 2005a) and Ix Ek' (Laporte and Mejía 2007) that confirmed the Late Preclassic dating of these E Groups as well. Cache vessels and burials dating to the Late Preclassic period are reported from a series of sites throughout the southeast Petén (Laporte and Fialko 2007). It is suspected that further work in this region will yield even earlier deposits. Juan Pedro Laporte and Vilma Fialko (2007:60–61) noted that in spite of relatively limited excavation strategies Middle Preclassic occupation could be confirmed at 21 sites and that Late Preclassic occupation was found at minimally 105 sites in the southeast Petén.

In a final publication, Laporte and colleagues (2008) laid out a transpeninsular trade route that ran from the Río Pasión up the Río San Juan and used a portage area to connect to the Río Salsipuedes and Río Mopán and thence to the Belize River and the sea. This was also clearly a route used to settle this part of the Maya area, as is indicated by the ceramic distributions and the E Group distribution. It was also in use during the Late Classic period based on the distribution of Belize Red ceramics (Chase and Chase 2012).

Discussion

Oliver Ricketson (1928) published an early article identifying the Uaxactún E Group as a solar observatory, although the Ricketsons (1937:108–109) felt that the construction of such groups was "more closely associated with geomancy than with observational astronomy." The full publication of the Uaxactún E Group excavations provided great detail and support for the argument for the use of the architectural complex to observe solstices and equinoxes (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937), and the observatory function was applied to all other known E Groups. Given structural variations in the complex across sites, Uaxactún was (and still is) viewed as the earliest and "purest" version of this architectural complex. The Carnegie Project archaeologists' views both on the Early Classic and on Uaxactún as the earliest example of an E Group (Kidder 1950:1) were also later reassessed (Chase and Chase 2005, 2006a).

Ruppert (1940) initially addressed the distribution of E Groups. Ruppert and Dennison (1943) mapped a series of these groupings in the northern Petén of Guatemala and in southern Campeche and Quintana Roo, Mexico. Their interpretations went largely unchallenged for more than forty years. Because Uaxactún was considered to be the original E Group, the unclear solar alignments seen in other E Groups were explained as their having become "provincially and decadently . . . merely ritualistic" even through "the obvious similarity in orientation and arrangement suggest [*sic*] their use for a common function" (Ruppert and Dennison 1943:5). Anthony Aveni and Horst Hartung (1989) further demonstrated the variable orientations of these various complexes but argued that they all shared a common function in observing and anchoring 20-day Winal intervals around the solar zeniths (Aveni et al. 2003).

The investigation of the Cenote E Group changed our perspectives on both the expected form and date of this complex, resulting in the definition of two distinct variants based on the shape of their eastern platforms: "in the Uaxactun E Group variant, the platform comprises a separate rectangular unit, usually about 70 m in length, supporting three buildings; in the Cenote E Group variant, the platform is much longer and narrower and the three buildings appear to be appended to it" (Chase 1983:191). The investigation of both the Caracol (Chase and Chase 1995) and Tikal (Laporte and Fialko 1995) E Groups established that the Cenote variant was earlier than the Uaxactún variant and that later construction efforts could transform a Cenote variant into a Uaxactún variant (as took place at Caracol). Richard Hansen (1992) recognized the early dating of E Groups in his doctoral dissertation based on archaeological work at Nakbé and elsewhere in the northern Petén and confirmed by excavations at Ceibal (Inomata et al. 2013).

The E Group may therefore be seen as being one of the first hallmarks of Maya public architecture. Its appearance at sites is taken to be indicative of the coagulation of a formal ritual community in which there was broad participation (Chapter 7 in this volume). If the Cenote stratigraphy can be extended to other examples, the earliest complexes were actually carved out of bedrock, with the eastern platform being the most important component of this grouping. In fact, in several cases in the southeast Petén, no western pyramid is in evidence; it either was removed in urban renewal projects or was never in existence (see chapter 13 in this volume on Belize). Thus, although the western pyramid was a prominent construction

in many E Groups (as can be seen in the elaborately decorated E-VII-Sub at Uaxactún), the search for the meaning of such a complex must focus on the eastern platform.

The eastern platforms are usually marked by the presence of three platforms or formal buildings. Often these buildings occur in association with caches and, in later times, burials. At Caracol, four caches line the axis of the central eastern building. The timing and stratigraphy of these caches indicate that they were used to "center" the building during the transition to the 8th cycle (Chase and Chase 2006a), thus ascribing an aspect of temporal ritual to this complex. Prudence Rice (2004; Aimers and Rice 2006) also saw time as being an important element in E Groups both for the celebration of 20-year K'atuns and for the *may* or 256-year cycles. Based on Caracol's archaeology, we would instead see them as important markers for Bak'tuns (400 years) and half-Bak'tun celebrations. Caracol's E Group was presumably founded around 360 BCE (7th cycle); it was remodeled around 40 CE, coincident with the onset of the 8th cycle. Datable burials and remodeling of the central Caracol E Group began around 440 CE with the onset of the 9th cycle. At this time, the Caracol E Group was transformed from a Cenote Style E Group to a Uaxactún Style E Group; the other E Groups within the Caracol metropolitan area did not see similar modification, indicating that 9th-cycle Bak'tun ritual was appropriately centered on the complex in the Caracol epicenter. The west pyramid in Caracol's epicentral E Group was completed in its final form around CE 640, midway between the two cycles, and commemorated with a summit stela that recorded deep mythological history (Grube 1994). While the central building remained relatively unchanged through the 10th cycle, the 10th cycle saw the Caracol epicentral E Group buildings used for caching and for late ceremonies on the west and as a ritual dump on the east. The establishment of Caracol's political presence at Naranjo is memorialized in a hieroglyphic stairway set in that site's E Group around CE 640, also midway between the 9th and 10th cycles. The use of Naranjo's E Group for this act must have been charged with symbolism. Thus, in these archaeologically established examples, the importance of long-term cyclical time is emphasized.

The general development of the more varied-sized Cenote Style E Group into the more regularly shaped Uaxactún Style E Group over time has implications for interpretations based on survey without excavation. Adding the temporal component shows that the Cenote Style E Groups co-occur with greater frequency, particularly in the southeastern Maya Lowlands, where they are often spaced only 3 to 5 km apart. This coagulation of E

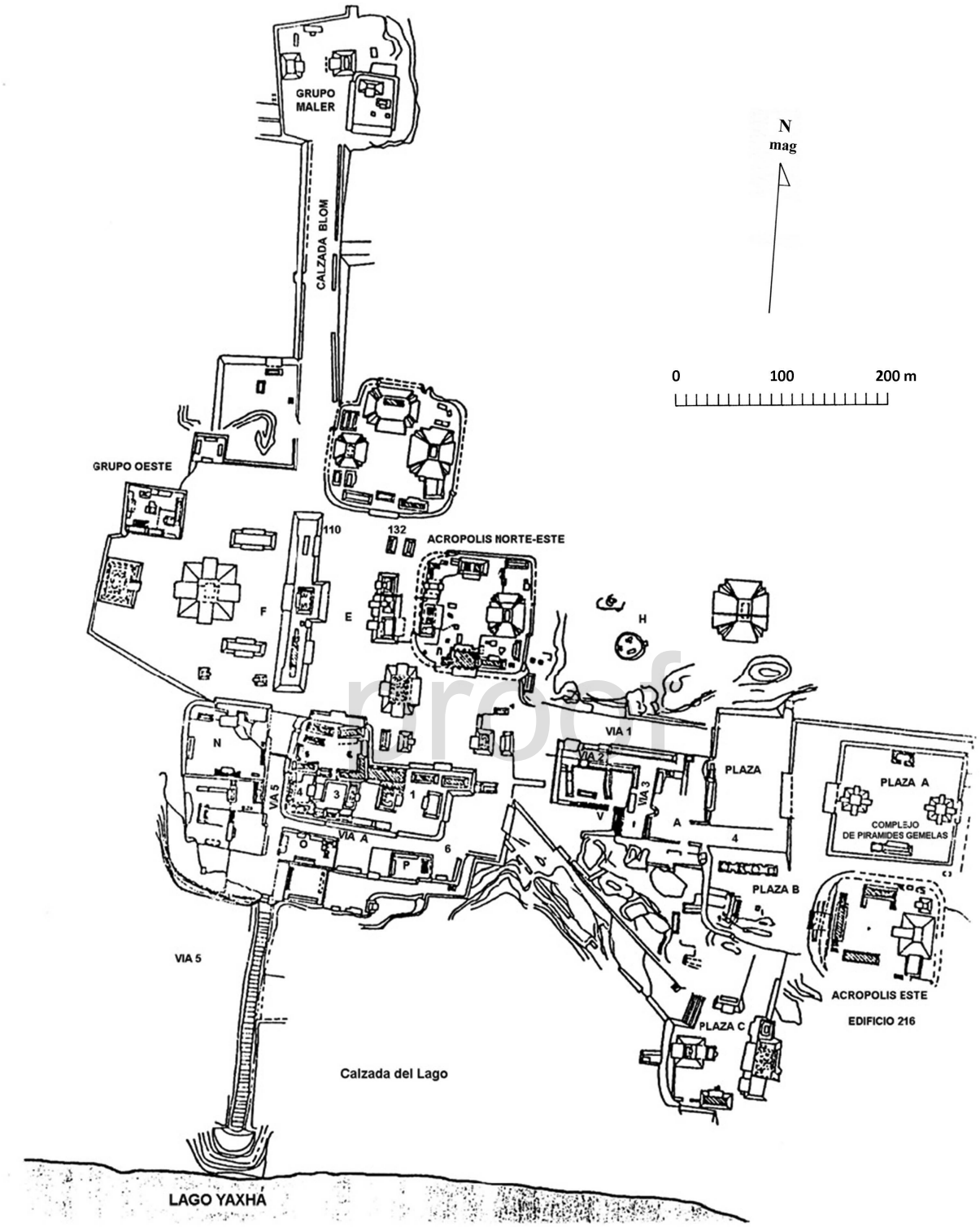


Figure 2.11. Map of Yaxhá, Guatemala, showing a Cenote Style E Group (Plaza F) and a Uaxactún Style E Group (Plaza E). The radial temple in Plaza F is suspected to be a late addition to this E Group complex (map originally published by Hellmuth 1972:149).

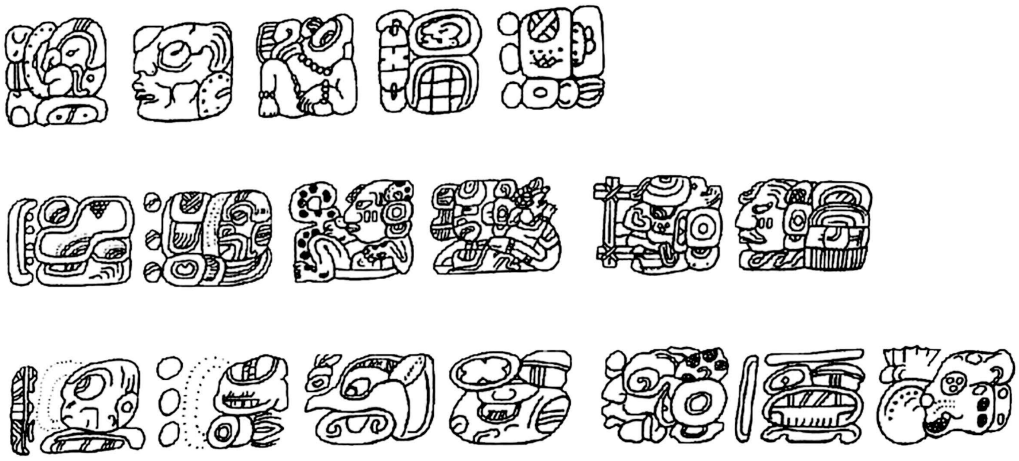


Figure 2.12. The founder deities or "triad gods": (*upper*) Palenque; (*middle*) Tikal; (*lower*) Caracol (after Kelley 1976).

Groups suggests a local as opposed to foreign derivation for this form in this part of the Maya world. The Uaxactún Style E Group is far less frequent and more broadly spaced than the Cenote Style E Group (being more consistent with Ruppert's [1940] original spacing of 21 km for these complexes) and is presumably associated to some extent with the differences in Maya polity size and growth between the Late Preclassic and Early Classic periods—and perhaps also with the changing size and composition of the community directly participating in the temporal rituals associated with these buildings.

The emphasis on temporal ritual for the ancient Maya can be seen in several ways within the archaeological record. Stone stelae often mark the ceremonies carried out on 20-year K'atun periods and the caches associated with them reflect Maya cosmological principles related to the Nine Lords of the Night (for example, Coe in Moholy Nagy and Coe 2008). At Caracol, there was an emphasis on erecting Giant Ahau altars every Katun (Maya 20-year period) (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981) and "face" caches were also used to mark Katun rituals that were carried out in that site's residential groups (Chase and Chase 2013). At Tikal during the Late Classic period, complete architectural assemblages known as Twin Temple complexes were erected to accompany the stelae erected for the K'atun (Jones 1969). Two of these Twin Temple complexes are known from outside Tikal at the sites of Yaxhá and Ixlú (Rice 2004). Yaxhá presents multiple examples of E Groups (Figure 2.11) and has the longest known eastern platform at 172 m in length

(Chase 1983:1301). Its constructions likely represent three sequent Bak'tun cycles: a Cenote Style E Group constructed for the 8th cycle; a Uaxactún Style E Group immediately east of the early one constructed for the 9th cycle; and a radial pyramid intruded into the original E Group plaza, probably with the onset of the 10th cycle. Other E Groups were modified for the 10th cycle, including the one at Ucanal that had a circular structure placed atop the central building of the eastern platform (Escobedo 2008; Laporte and Mejia 2002). As more extensive archaeological research is undertaken on these complexes, the full temporal complexities of ritual associated with E Groups will be better defined.

Whatever the outcome of the continued debate about their cosmological significance, it is clear that E Groups were key elements in the development of early Maya sites. We have previously proposed that E Groups represented the founding public architecture for sites—something confirmed in the archaeology at sites like Ceibal (Inomata et al. 2013; Chapter 7 in this volume)—and that the three eastern structures may have been associated with the founding deities that are known in the epigraphy of a series of sites (Figure 2.12; see also Chase and Chase 2006b). Palenque, Tikal, Naranjo, Toniná, and Caracol all have records in their hieroglyphic texts of three deities that were important in the mythic foundings of their respective sites (Kelley 1976; Stuart 2005). Because of the detail contained in the texts, the best-known founder deities are those of Palenque (Lounsbury 1985; Schele and Miller 1986; Stuart 2005). Although these founder deities varied by site, they were clearly key in the establishment of any Maya cosmological order and were in our view most likely present at all major centers. The E Groups were also of primary importance in the establishment of a Maya worldview at their respective sites, and ritual deposits associated with these complexes must have represented this cosmological order (see Chapters 6 and 10 in this volume for discussions of architectural decoration and cosmology). At Caracol, the cosmological representation of world order is seen in the placement of objects within the caches associated with the central building of the eastern platform that emphasize layering and directionality (D. Chase and A. Chase 1998). The deposition of three skull caches in each of the eastern buildings in the Uaxactún E Group, possibly in association with the ninth Bak'tun, may have been similarly charged and represented the personalization of the three deity founders in their respective abodes. This is quite possible, as we know that the Maya prepared some of their dead to represent deities. At Caracol, a Protoclassic burial dating to 150 CE was dressed as Ix Chel (Rich Brown 2003) and two Late Classic individuals

placed in a Central Acropolis tomb may have represented God K (Chase and Chase 2011). Thus, among any other meanings ascribed to E Group complexes, we would see them as being the physical representation of deep mythical history for any given community.

Finally, the distribution of these E Groups is also reflective of communication and trade. They represent the crystallization of Maya civilization in the Southern Lowlands. While aspects of the architectural form may have antecedents elsewhere in Mesoamerica, it was translated into something that was characteristically Maya; the distribution of E Groups coincides with the core developmental area for Maya civilization. These groups are indicative of a shared culture and shared trade networks. These trade networks minimally go back into the Middle Preclassic period, and it is probably not a coincidence that some of the earliest-known Maya architectural and ceramic expressions occur along the southeastern transpeninsular trade route that extended from Ceibal on the Río Pasión (Inomata et al. 2013) to Cahal Pech and Blackman Eddy on the Belize River (Awe 1992; Garber et al. 2004; Sullivan and Awe 2013). With further excavation, it is likely that similar early occupation will be found throughout the southeastern Petén. The concentration of E Groups in this area likely represents the remnant markers of some of the earliest known Maya. These Maya first occupied the riverine areas of the southeastern Petén and then spread into the drier Southern Lowlands and Vaca Plateau.

Conclusion

The establishment of E Group architectural complexes was clearly foundational and fundamental for the ancient Maya. The distribution of these architectural complexes occurs within the same area that we currently recognize as housing the heartland of Classic Maya civilization in the Southern Lowlands. Thus, E Groups represent the first recognized public architecture of lowland Maya civilization. As such, a consideration of E Groups directly raises questions about the identification and causes of complexity (see Chapters 7 and 8 in this volume). In the example of the Southern Lowland Maya, it would appear that the existence of complex social organization may be recognized through their public architecture and that this architecture was oriented to serve community ritual. The streamlined distribution of E Groups during the Early Classic period correlates with polity growth and increased sociopolitical complexity. Thus, Maya belief systems and religion would have formed the driver for the initial coagulation of Maya

societies (see Chapter 16 in this volume). Based on the regularities in form that occurred among early E Group complexes, the underlying belief system was widely shared, deeply held, and persisted for almost 1,400 years.

The development of a subsequent secular order, represented in Maya dynasties as portrayed on their stone monuments, was purposefully located in and conflated with the E Groups. The secular orders, however, neither fully replaced nor destroyed the E Group architectural complexes. Rather, even though the dynastic orders focused on building acropolises and palace compounds, they continued to use the E Groups as ritual locales associated with important long-term Maya temporal cycles and shifts to legitimate their rule. In many instances, as at Caracol and Cenote, the central buildings of E Groups were constructed and then placed in continuous use for 600 to 800 years with only minor changes (that themselves were correlated with broader temporal cycles), indicating that such constructions were presumably imbued with deep religious meaning.

While E Groups have a long history of recognition within Maya studies, it is only comparatively recently that we have recognized the full role that they played in the rise of Maya civilization. These architectural complexes formed the core of early Maya communities, and many continued to be ritually utilized for well over a thousand years. While Belize and the southeastern Petén have always been seen as largely overshadowed by events in the northern Petén, it is clear that early Maya civilization was centered in this region and that many of the central tenets of Maya religion were fully developed here. E Groups serve as a proxy for understanding the spread and nature of the religious foundations that underlay Classic period (CE 250–900) Maya societies of the Southern Lowlands and the long-term changes that took place.

Acknowledgments

This work builds on a long-standing interest in Maya E Groups that started with archaeological work at the site of Cenote, Guatemala, and was later expanded through extensive archaeological work in the E Group at Caracol, Belize. Some of the detailed archaeological discussions related to E Groups are directly derived from the unpublished Ph.D. dissertation of Arlen F. Chase (1983). Sincere appreciation is extended to the Santa Fe Institute for providing funding and support for two sequent sessions that involved over a dozen individuals and permitted an intensive exploration of the meanings of that the E Group architectural complexes held for the ancient Maya.

Notes

1. The Uaxactún Style variant has been confused with a triadic eastern building that occurs in western Belize. The triadic eastern buildings in western Belize, such as those that occur at Cahal Pech (Awe 2013:34) and Pacbitún (Healy et al. 2007:19), differ from eastern E Group platforms in that they are agglomerations of three pyramidal structures and not three separate structures set on a platform. They also usually contain a long sequence of important interments that extend into the Late Classic period. Thus, while they may be derivative from E Groups, they are actually quite distinct in both form and archaeological content.

2. The measurements in Table 2.1 are primarily derived from the scaled maps in *Registro de sitios arqueológicos del sureste y centro-oeste de Petén* (Escobedo 2008). In some instances, however, it is clear that the scales are not correct. Where possible, measurements derived from other project publications associated with the *Atlas* project have been used. If anything, the *Atlas* measurements are smaller than they should be. For instance, measuring the map for Ixkún in the *Atlas* (Escobedo 2008:188) yields a measurement of 32 m for the eastern platform. The detailed publications on Ixkún, however, make it clear that this platform is actually 76 m in length (Laporte and Mejía 2005a:42).

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