

The Transformation of Maya Rulership at Caracol, Belize

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Classic period Maya rulers are distinctly tied to epigraphic statements of warfare and to hostile actions with neighboring and distant sites and polities. Long-term research at Caracol, Belize, provides substantial historic and archaeological information from which to view the changing nature of Classic Maya rulership. Based on both history and archaeology, we know that the results of these hostilities were impactful in both the physical and ritual realms. Research further indicates the dynamic nature of Maya polities; the size of Maya states varied over time, as did the nature of economic stratification. Caracol provides an excellent case example of rulers who practiced successful star wars against both Tikal and Naranjo in Guatemala, resulting in the incorporation of these two cities into the broader Caracol polity during the sixth and seventh centuries. Cementing these actions, two of Caracol's rulers, who we argue were divine kings, were buried in the sacred central precinct at Tikal. However, Caracol's further expansion was disrupted when Naranjo defeated Caracol in a star war in 680 CE. Even though Caracol's current ruler was able to return to the site after a 168-day hiatus, this act likely removed him from divine status, and the area controlled by Caracol appears to have been severely reduced. However, while there may not have been a divine king during the later part of the Late Classic period, this does not appear to have affected the general prosperity of Caracol's population, thus posing other questions about the infrastructure existing below the divine king. In contrast, the general prosperity of the site's inhabitants did decline during the Terminal Classic period at Caracol (post 798 CE), when there appears to have been an attempt to return to a form of divine kingship by a new power elite.

The attempted reassertion of divine kingship in the Terminal Classic period can be seen both in the iconography of the initial stone monuments for this era at the site and in the archaeological record. Iconography presents a stela-sized vision serpent with the initial Terminal Classic ruler, and the initial texts for this ruler are set in a ballcourt—a locus associated with the installment of kings—and refer back to Caracol's founder. The archaeology also indicates change. Late Classic tombs on the summit of Caana were ritually desecrated and then resealed, with the rooms above them being reused, suggesting that there was discontinuity in the ruling line. The material record associated with Terminal Classic elite palaces also indicates the restricted use by the ruling elite of ceramics, foreign finewares, and other artifactual materials that were not readily available to the general public. This represents a rupture from previous Late Classic period economic practice. It is also likely that the mode of rulership for the Terminal Classic period at Caracol differed from earlier forms. Terminal Classic reigns appear to span no more than a katun, and the associated monuments often portray scenes involving more than one individual, one of whom may be foreign to the site. We suspect that this is indicative of a new form of governance at the site. Thus, the conjunction of archaeological, iconographic, and hieroglyphic data from Caracol provide not only information on broader issues of Maya rulership during the Late Classic period but also on the transformation of Maya rulership in the Terminal Classic period, a transformation potentially related to political events elsewhere in the Maya Lowlands.

CLASSIC PERIOD RULERSHIP AT CARACOL

Maya rulership at Caracol was dynamic rather than static, changing throughout the course of the site's history. Our understanding of these transformations is tied to an ever-growing body of archaeological data and may be illustrated by our changing view of the site itself regarding its scale, extent, and influence (e.g., D. Chase and A. Chase 2017). The epigraphic texts associated with stone monuments permit us to reconstruct a dynastic line for Caracol that involved some 31 rulers (based on K'inich Joy K'awiil being named on Ballcourt Marker 3 as the twenty-seventh ruler in line after the founder) and to gain insight into the names and deeds of many of these individuals. Archaeological data that have been recovered from Caracol and other Maya sites suggest that significant changes occurred in Caracol rulership during the early part of the Late Classic period and again toward the end of the Late

Classic period. Part of this change can be seen in Yajaw Te' K'inich II's adoption of a formal emblem glyph (K'uhul K'antu Maak) over the earlier use of only the Uxwitza' toponym and Uxwitza' Ajaw title (Helmke et al. 2006:16). While the K'uhul K'antu Maak emblem continued in use through the Late and Terminal Classic periods, iconography associated with the site's latest stone monuments reflects another shifting governing strategy and presumably differences in the role of the ruler.

It is generally assumed that Late Classic period Maya rulership is based in “divine kingship” (e.g., Freidel 2008; Freidel and Schele 1988; Freidel et al. 1993; Houston and Stuart 1996; Schele and Freidel 1990; Schele and Miller 1986; Thompson 1973; Webster 2002; see also Arnould, Chapter 1; and Andrieu, Chapter 2, both this volume), but absolutely establishing divinity in the archaeological, iconographic, and epigraphic records of the ancient Maya is difficult. Potentially complicating the issue is broader debate over the differences between “divine kings” and “sacred kings” (e.g., Brisch 2008a) and the implications that these distinctions have for ruling strategies of the ancient Maya (see Baron 2016; Kurnick 2016:15–16). Divine kings generally are associated with the gods and place themselves in a central role in the cosmos; this is different than kingship based on power or birthright alone, which does not necessarily place the ruler on a religious apex. As noted above, it also is likely that rulership and governance varied across space and time within the broader Maya area. Considering these factors and through combining epigraphic, archaeological, and iconographic data, we argue that these modifications were not limited to major transitions in Maya culture and that ancient Maya rulership at Caracol was continually transformed.

Like elsewhere in the Maya area, our understanding of Caracol's rulers is based largely upon carved stone monuments bearing iconography and texts. The two known references to the Caracol founder, an individual named Te' K'ab Chak, are both retrospective; they occur on Caracol Stela 22 and on Caracol Ballcourt Market 3, where this individual is positioned within the Early Classic period at 8.14.13.12.9 (331 CE; see A. Chase et al. 1991; Helmke et al. 2006). Archaeologically, the entire span of the Early Classic period (200–550 CE) is well represented at Caracol (A. Chase and D. Chase 2005a, 2006b, 2018). Burial deposits within Caracol's epicentral Northeast Acropolis span the time associated with Te' K'ab Chak. An interment in front of Caracol Structure B34 dates to approximately 150 CE and contained the prone body of a woman dressed in an Ixchel (“moon goddess”) costume, with a mantle composed of over 7,000 shell and jadeite beads and associated with 32 ceramic vessels, several of which are related to Kaminajuyu whiteware (A.

Chase and D. Chase 2005a:Figure 1e; Rich 2003). A tomb from the summit of Structure B33, dating to approximately 400 CE, contained a woman with a shell bead necklace and four pottery vessels of standard Maya Early Classic form (A. Chase and D. Chase 2018:Figure 4). Intriguingly, a cremation (unusual for the Maya of Caracol) was placed in a small squarish sealed pit within the center of the plaza of the Northeast Acropolis; it may be contemporaneous with Te' K'ab Chak, based on a radiocarbon date (Beta-482497; Cal 220–345 or 370–375 CE) and certainly predates the epigraphically noted 378 CE incursion into the central Peten of Guatemala of Sihyaj K'ahk', who was related to “the ruling house of Teotihuacan” (Martin and Grube 2008:29). The Caracol cremation contained the burnt and fragmented remains of three individuals, 20 ceramic vessels, a partial metate, at least one mirror, a host of shell and jadeite beads, broken carved shell and bone, the shell tip for an atlatl, and a significant amount of Pachuca green obsidian; overall, the items and patterning in this interment can be related to Teotihuacan and suggests contact between these two centers at this time (A. Chase and D. Chase 2011).

Rulers following Te' K'ab Chak are not well established; their monuments are either unknown or were broken, buried, and sometimes re-erected. Two eighth-cycle monuments are known from Caracol's A Group. The upper part of an eighth-cycle stela with epigraphic texts was cached beneath a Late Classic altar on the summit of Structure A2 (Grube 1994b:Figure 9.5). The top of a second stela dating to 8.18.4.4.12 (400 CE) was recovered beneath a constructed terrace associated with the eastern platform in Caracol's A Group; it could be fitted to the top of Caracol Stela 20 (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004b:Figure 52). Unfortunately, apart from the Long Count date, the lower texts incised into circular cartouches are too eroded to read (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981:Figure 18b); however, the Long Count date from Stela 20 is situated within a bordered box like early texts from the Guatemala highlands (see Sharer and Sedat 1987). Later Early Classic rulers have been established from a series of stela, two buried and two re-erected, in front of Structure A4 (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981:Figures 13, 14, 15). An early Copán ruler is also mentioned on one of these monuments (see Helmke et al. 2019). While not well known because of the eroded and partial nature of the associated texts, these individuals were likely quite important, especially as it is thought that Caracol supplied Copán with its initial ruler in 426 CE (Stuart 2007), something also supported by stable isotope analysis from the Copán tomb identified as being Yax K'uk Mo (Price et al. 2010).

Several important tombs dating to the later part of the Early Classic period have been recovered in epicentral Caracol, and it may be that these housed

the remains of early rulers at the site. While the upper version of Caracol Structure A4 was associated with a looted early Late Classic tomb, a buried version of Structure A4 contained another looted tomb of Early Classic date that yielded a cylinder tripod, a bowl, and jadeite mosaic fragments (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:11). A “double-decker” Early Classic tomb was also situated in the A Group plaza in front of Structure A6; the lower chamber held two basal-flanged bowls, one pair of shell earrings, 109 shell and jadeite beads, a set of jadeite earrings with associated pearls, a mirror, and a carved monkey head with inlaid shell and obsidian teeth (Clancy et al. 1985:Figure 146) thought to be associated with the ballgame; the upper chamber held one jadeite bead and 26 ceramic vessels, many of them lidded cylinder tripods (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:5). A third potential royal tomb from this time period was dusted with cinnabar and contained a pair of obsidian earrings on ceramic backings, two carved bone figurines, jadeite, mirrors, stingray spines, and spondylus shells, and 13 whole vessels (as well as three partial ones) were also excavated within Structure D15 (A. Chase 1994:Figure 13.4; D. Chase and A. Chase 2008b).

The early part of the Late Classic period has references to two of Caracol’s greatest rulers. These were Yajaw Te’ K’inich II, who acceded as ruler on 9.5.19.1.2 (553 CE), and K’an II (born 9.7.14.10.8 in 588 CE), who acceded as ruler on 9.9.4.16.2 (618 CE) and died on 9.11.5.15.9 (658 CE). The transition between these two rulers is not fully understood, but it appears that K’an II’s brother, “Knot Ajaw,” carried out some ritual duties for their dead father, Yajaw Te’ K’inich II; Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube (2000, 2008) include this individual in the Caracol king list, but the texts from Caracol Stela 6 make it clear that he acceded only to a specific office and that he carried out his duties in “direct” association with “dead” Yajaw Te’ K’inich II (D. Chase and A. Chase 2008b). Tombs with painted death dates on their walls or capstones bracket the reigns of these two rulers and are known from Caana (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:Figures 14 and 23, 2017; D. Chase and A. Chase 2017), the Central Acropolis (D. Chase and A. Chase 1996), and the Machete Terminus (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:Figure 37). However, we believe that the two Caracol rulers themselves occupy Burials 195 and 24 in the Tikal North Acropolis (A. Chase and D. Chase 2020b).

Initially beholden to Tikal (according to the epigraphy), a shell-star event in 562 CE carried out on behalf of Caracol ruler Yajaw Te’ K’inich II served to catapult the city into a prominent political role in the southern lowlands. With Yajaw Te’s death around 600 CE, it appears that there was some competition for the role of ruler at Caracol. Eventually, K’an II was enthroned

in 618 CE (although his first bloodletting event is placed at 593 CE when he was five years old). Many of K'an II's monuments were presumably placed at Naranjo after the conquest of that site in 631 CE, and it appears that he used Naranjo as a second capital (A. Chase and D. Chase 1998a; D. Chase and A. Chase 2003). If there were true divine kings, both Yajaw Te' K'inich II and K'an II would fall into this category. Both ultimately had themselves interred in Tikal's North Acropolis, presumably as part of an attempt to assert their extended family rights at that site (A. Chase and D. Chase 2020b; D. Chase and A. Chase 2017:213). In accord with other early state strategies (e.g., Feinman 2016), ideology and religious ritual were utilized as political tools by minimally K'an II to advance his political agenda. He erected several carved stone monuments at Naranjo. Just as ideology and religious ritual were important in establishing the right to govern, the effacing of monuments that had been placed at Naranjo by K'an II signaled the end of Caracol's political and ritual control of that city.

After the death of K'an II in 658 CE, we know little about the succeeding ruler at Caracol, K'ahk' Ujol K'inich II (Smoke Skull); he accedes to the throne in 658 CE and the last record that we have of him is his return to Caracol 168 days after a star war in 680 CE by Naranjo against Caracol's "three stone place." He had a relatively lengthy reign, but his minimally 24 years of rule are almost completely unrecorded. It is unknown what happened to him after his return to the site in 680 CE. Following Naranjo's successful star war against Caracol in 680 CE, at least four carved stone compositions relating to Caracol's K'an II were ritually destroyed. Pieces of these carved monuments were dispersed to Xunantunich (Helmke and Awe 2016a, 2016b), to Ucanal (Graham 1978), and possibly to other sites. Caracol-related monuments were placed out of order as the lower step of a hieroglyphic stairway at Naranjo (Graham 1978) and buried in building fill at that site (e.g., Tokovinine 2007:Figure 5). Interestingly, the star war in 680 CE would have been waged against Caracol's current ruler, K'ahk' Ujol K'inich II, and we have no known carved stone monuments for him at Caracol proper. He only appears in two stela texts, one of which dates to 672 CE (9.12.0.0.0 [prior to the Naranjo star war]), at the Caracol terminus of La Rejolla. Thus, if there were monuments relating to him in downtown Caracol, they likely also bore the brunt of Naranjo's wrath.

In spite of a stela erected in 702 CE for an unknown individual, few monumental or epigraphic records exist at Caracol for the 120-year period after the Naranjo star-war event. This is consistent with what occurs at both Tikal and Naranjo after they suffered star-war events (A. Chase 1991; Houston 1987,

1991). Even though stone monuments and hieroglyphic texts marking rulership were largely absent at Caracol during the eighth century, the archaeological record from the site indicates that this was a time of great prosperity (D. Chase and A. Chase 2003, 2004b, 2017), suggesting that the shared Caracol identity and market economy that was in place at the beginning of the Late Classic period continued largely unabated (D. Chase and A. Chase 2004b, 2014) without the presence of divine kingship.

TERMINAL CLASSIC RULERSHIP AT CARACOL

There was a concerted effort to re-establish the visible record of rulership on monuments at Caracol at the start of the Terminal Classic period (or ca. 798 CE). However, the form that Terminal Classic leadership took appears to have differed from what had been in place earlier at the site (see Table 13.1). This conclusion can be deduced from archaeological, iconographic, and epigraphic data. The epigraphic record contains only very limited detail about the lives of individual rulers and instead seemingly focuses on events that may have been participated in by several sites. It also contains written records of individuals who were not rulers but who could still use the Caracol emblem (A. Chase et al. 1991). The iconographic imagery suggests that, while warfare was still carried out and prisoners were taken, there was a strong focus on alliances and engagement with former enemies (A. Chase and D. Chase 2015a). The archaeological record indicates a major disjunction with the site's previous patterns of integration (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004a); there were clearly changes to the market economy and a potential decrease in the number of middle status level individuals. The elites living in palaces enjoyed the use of a foreign ceramic sub-assembly that was not shared with the rest of the population. Stable isotope analysis indicates that the high-status palace diet (high in both maize and protein) continued within these complexes. Architectural modifications to Terminal Classic palace buildings, in which central access was blocked with buildings or walls, also suggests that the elite were isolating themselves from the rest of the population.

Looking at the various databases from Caracol in greater detail also provides grist for understanding the evolution of kingship at the site. During the Terminal Classic period, there was substantial construction activity at Caana and a number of the site's other palaces (A. Chase and D. Chase 2007). Excavations throughout Caana indicate that the summit plaza for this complex was raised 4 m sometime after 700 CE (A. Chase and D. Chase 2017). Raising this summit meant that the latest versions of both Structures

Table 13.1. Caracol, Belize: Terminal Classic dates, monuments, and iconography

Long Count	Short Count	CE Monument	Iconography	Event	Ruler
9.18.9.5.9	6 Muluk 2 Kayab	799 BCM 4	text only	Accession	K'inich Joy K'awil
9.18.10.0.0	10 Ahaw 8 Sak	800 St.11	standing ruler ceremonial <i>bar witz</i> ; 8 captives	10-year	K'inich Joy K'awil
		800 Alt. 23	two prisoners on "thrones"	10-year	
(9.18.12.10.14)	8 Ix 7 Sip	800 BCM 4	text only	10-year	K'inich Joy K'awil
9.18.13.5.14	8 Ix 7 Pax	803 BCM # 803 BCM 3	(missing) (implied)	same event as first ruler of Caracol	K'inich Joy K'awil K'inich Joy K'awil K'inich Joy K'awil K'inich Joy K'awil
9.19.0.0.0	9 Ahaw 18 Mol	810 St. 18	rearing snake over prisoner	katun	Ruler XI?
		810 Alt. 22	two prisoners on "thrones"	katun	unknown (CRC emblem)
		810 MCW 2	text	katun	unknown
		810 St. 8	standing ruler ceremonial bar	katun	unknown
9.19.9.9.15	12 Men 8 Pax	819 Alt. 12	two figures on "thrones" "alliance"	"chi-ta-ha" event (also NAR32, TIKL.3T, CLK89)	Ruler XI
9.19.9.15.0		Naranjo St.32		"palanquin" with Ucanal's Papamali	(Papamali)
?	12 ? 11 Mol	Alt. 12		"ch'ak kul mutul"	Ruler XI

(continued)

Table 13.1—Continued

Long Count	Short Count	CE Monument	Iconography	Event	Ruler
9.19.9.17.0	1 Ahaw 8 Sek	820 Alt. 12 St. 19	(A6-B6 ??)	“ku-ba-ha”	Ruler XI
9.19.10.0.0	8 Ahaw 8 Xul	820 St. 19 820 Alt. 12		katun katun (future event)	Ruler XI (Ruler XI)
9.19.12.4.19	8 Kawak 17 Yax	820 Alt. 13	3 figures (2 standing; 1 kneeling) “alliance”	katun	Ruler XI
10.0.0.0.0	7 Ahaw 18 Sip	830 Alt. 13		“chia’k” vs. “makalte” katun (future event)	(Papamtilil) ?
10.0.2.13.11	10 Chuwen 19 Pax	833 MCW 1	indiv. with fan prisoner	“huli-wa”	Ruler XII
10.0.5.0.0	13 Ahaw 13 Wo	835 MCW 1		5-year	Ruler XII
10.0.19.6.14	13 Ix 17 Sek	849 St. 17 849 Alt. 10	2 seated indivs “alliance” 3 standing indivs “alliance”	“u patwa kab”	Ruler XII Ruler XII
10.1.0.0.0	5 Ahaw 3 Kayab	849 St. 17		katun	(MCW1 indiv) Ruler XII
10.1.10.0.0	4 Ahaw 13 Kankin	859 St. 10	text only	10-year	?
10.2.15.0.0	8 Ahaw 8 Mol	884 Alt. 26	2 seated indivs “alliance”	15-year	?

Source: Table compiled from Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981; A. Chase and D. Chase 2015; A. Chase et al. 1991; Grube 1994b, 1998; Helmke et al. 2006; Houston 1987.

B19 and B20, temples that arose from the earlier summit plaza surface, also underwent architectural modifications to articulate with the latest summit plaza surface. For Structure B20, this involved recreating its front (or western side) with a new frontal terrace and stairway. Structure B19 also received a foreshortened stairway with a central balk; on either side of this new stairway tandem-room vaulted structures were built, the roofs of which articulated with Structure B19's substructure pyramid. Each of the tandem-room shrines at the base of the latest version of Structure B19 was constructed over a Late Classic tomb; each of these tombs had been built as the summit was being raised. Because each was associated with an entry stairway, they were presumably filled sometime after 700 CE (the time of the summit raising). During the Terminal Classic period, starting around 800 CE at Caracol, both of these tombs were re-entered and the contents of the chambers were ritually broken and burned with the chambers themselves being partially infilled with construction materials. An articulated hand was tossed into the fill of the western chamber. After this activity, the floors above these tombs were sealed and the rooms continued to be used.

It should additionally be noted that the western Structure B18 was built atop earlier palace buildings that were also associated with the latest summit floor on Caana (an even earlier palace building located directly beneath Structure B18 was associated with the earlier summit floor 4 m below the latest plaza level). This massive western structure was the latest construction built on the summit of Caana, and the giant mat symbol on its northern substructure may reflect the building's use in governance, perhaps representing the late adoption of a council house at Caracol like those seen in the northern lowlands (Arnauld 2001; Bey and May Ciau 2014). However, if that were the case, situating this kind of structure on the Caana summit signals that the governing strategy was different from that in the northern lowlands, where such a structure would have been both "available and visible to the larger community" (Bey and May Ciau 2014:315), as opposed to separate from the populace in a restricted location at the summit of Caana.

Rebuilding efforts were taking place throughout the site epicenter immediately prior to the ultimate abandonment of the site. Final use of Caana occurred in the later part of the Terminal Classic period. The doors to the eastern palace rooms directly abutting the base of Structure B19 were blocked, and these rooms were infilled with dirt and rock; this was done before final abandonment, and a series of complete plates and vases were left upon the floors in both rooms of this building. Other rooms in the northeast quadrangle were still used until the final abandonment and had the remains of

storage vessels on their floors; a burner base with a modeled body of an individual in cotton armor was recovered from this northeast courtyard (Figure 13.1a); and an unburied six-year-old child was recovered from the inner doorway of the south building in the northeast plaza. The western building in the northwestern courtyard (west of Structure B19) produced a complete pedestaled barrel censer (Figure 13.2d) similar to earlier one recovered in both the B19 lower tomb (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987:Figure 22d) and in the core of Structure B20. Another larger flanged and lidded barrel censer (Figure 13.2e) and an unburied lidded cache vessel were recovered from the interior of the summit building immediately south of Structure B20. An adult human femur was recovered in the southwest summit plaza corner. While two flanged censers (Figure 13.2a) were set at the base of the northern Structure B19, the floors associated with the summit building also produced a series of vessels and the human remains of two children as well as an unsealed cache of five ceramic vessels (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004a:Figure. 16.2).

More reconstructable ceramic material was recovered broken on the floor in the eastern midrange alleyway, and one of the eastern front rooms produced two complete large jars and one complete large serving bowl still resting on the associated bench (A. Chase and D. Chase 2019:Figure 2). The remains of two modeled-carved vessels (Belizean-style vessels; see Helmke and Reents-Budet 2008) were recovered from the central entryway through the midrange building. The presence of this in situ on-floor debris suggests the rather sudden abandonment of Caana. Radiocarbon dating of burning on the floors of epicentral buildings indicates that abandonment took place at approximately 895 CE (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004a:349, Table 13.1). The ritual destruction of the tombs at the base of Structure B19, along with other evidence both for a shift in governance to shorter katun-based reigns involving multiple individuals and for economic change that led to greater disparity at the site, may indicate inter-elite competition between families for the right to rule the site during the Terminal Classic era, as has been argued for interfamily politics at Tikal (Haviland 1981, 2015; Laporte and Fialko 1990). This situation may also have resulted from internal squabbles among second tier administrators, who had maintained Caracol following the Late Classic Naranjo star war. Alternatively, it may represent the imposition of foreign rule at the site. That the site's emblem glyph was still used on carved monuments, however, would likely indicate that there was some kind of continuity.

Architectural modifications undertaken to most palace groups at Caracol during the Terminal Classic included making their access more restricted.

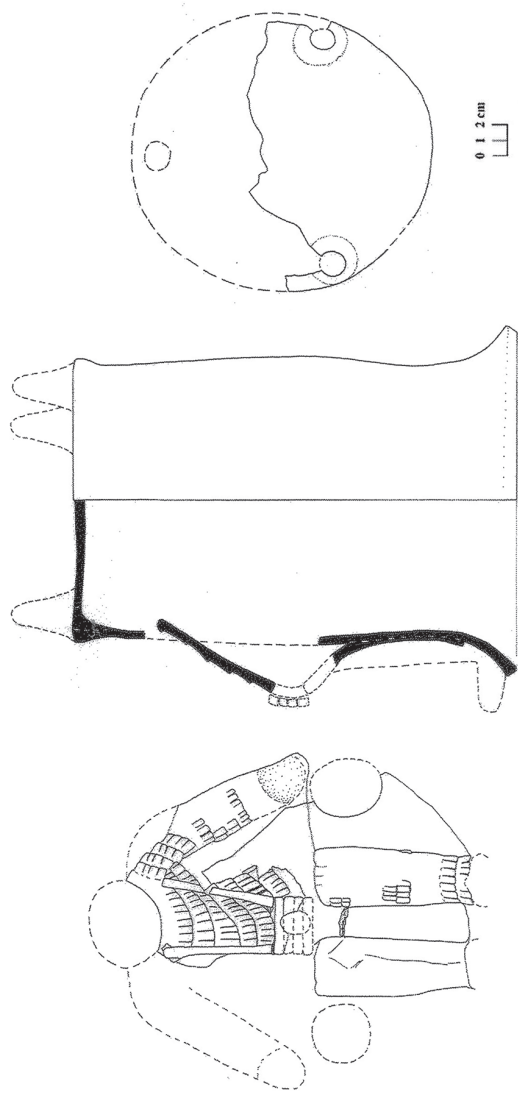


Figure 13.1. Terminal Classic ceramics from Caracol: (a) Warrior burner or stove from the northeast courtyard floor on the summit of Caana; (b) Modeled-carved tripod cylinder associated with the front of Structure C142.

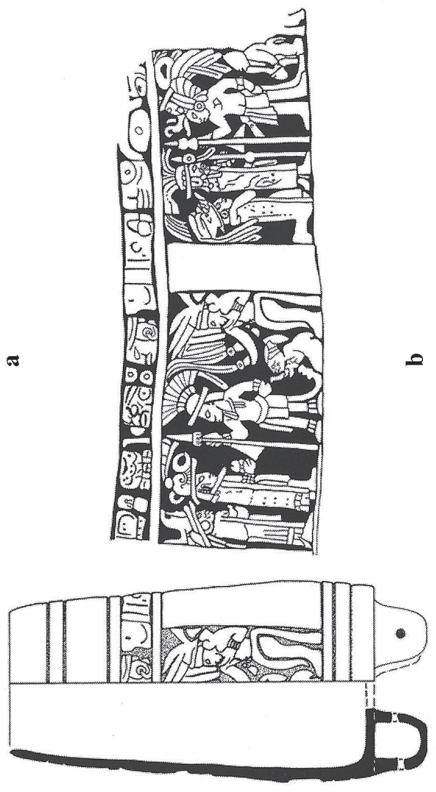


Figure 13.2. Terminal Classic ceramics from Caracol: (a) Modeled-carved tripod cylinder associated with the front of Structure C142; (b) Modeled-carved tripod cylinder associated with the front of Structure C142.

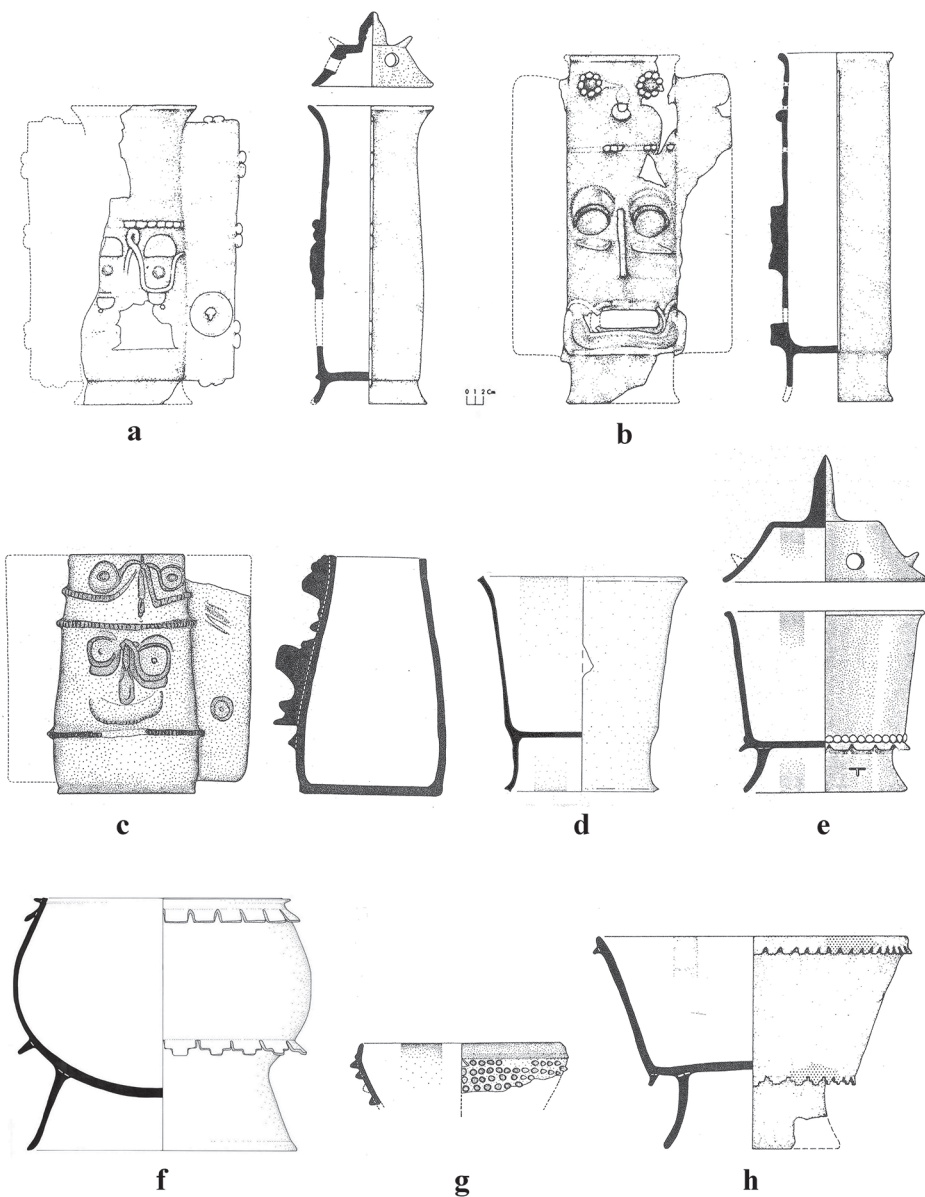


Figure 13.2. Terminal Classic *incensarios* from Caracol: (a) Flanged and modeled cylinder censer with associated lid from the base of Structure B19; (b) Flanged and modeled cylinder censer from the interior summit floor of Structure A3; (c) Flanged and modeled cylinder censer from the floor of the front room of Structure A6; (d) Pedestal-base barrel censer from inside the western building in the northwest courtyard on Caana; (e) Pedestal-based flanged barrel censer with lid from interior room of building directly south of Structure B20 on Caana; (f) Pedestal-base and flanged cauldron associated with front step of Structure A31; (g) Incurved bowl censer with appliques from the interior of Structure A6; (h) Pedestal-base brazier from the interior summit floor of Structure A3.

This can be seen in the residential patterns on the top of Caana (A. Chase and D. Chase 2001, 2017) as well as in other epicentral residential groups. The central access doorway to the Barrio suite of palace buildings (west of Caana and the B Plaza) was walled up, forcing individuals to gain admission to the inner plaza area through narrow passages from the sides. Rebuilding efforts in the Northeast Acropolis (directly to the west of Caana and Structure B20) blocked both southern access and the view of the summit plaza; two newly constructed range buildings on the south side of the summit plaza offered no direct entry and forced restricted access only from the sides of this acropolis. However, it is also clear that architectural modifications beyond access restriction were ongoing at the time of abandonment for stockpiles of building materials were recovered in three different locations and unfinished construction efforts were also in evidence in three other locations (A. Chase and D. Chase 2007:Figure 6).

The Terminal Classic period also saw a split between the ceramics used by those in the elite residential groups and those used by the bulk of the population. The ceramics used in elite contexts only had a very limited distribution among the rest of the site's population (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004a, 2005b, 2007), suggesting both a breakdown in the market system with a corresponding increased disparity in status groupings and the participation of the site's elite in broader social and political spheres that lay outside of the site itself. Whatever the case, internal exchange systems were likely disrupted. However, external exchange continued to be reflected in the archaeological record, especially in artifactual assemblages associated with the elite palaces, which included prestige items (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004a) and even sea fish (see Teeter and Chase 2004). Some of the ritual censers that were used at the time of abandonment (Figure 13.2) indicate widespread Mesoamerican ties; specifically, larger pedestaled vessels that can be linked to northern Belize and to northern Yucatan (figure 13.2f) are in association with Caracol Structure A31, as is a fine-orange Mixtec-style hand censer (A. Chase and D. Chase 2013a:Figure. 4.6a,b,d). Additionally, design elements found on fine-orange and modeled-carved pottery (e.g., Figure 13.1b) are similar to those found at other sites both in eastern Belize (Helmke and Reents-Budet 2008) and farther afield (e.g., Smith 1958).

The final abandonment of Caracol appears to have taken place abruptly. Besides complete vessels and other artifacts on the floors of buildings, uncollected sheet refuse also accompanies many of the epicentral buildings (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004a, 2019). Structures A6 and B6, both public buildings, were heavily burned (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987). Artifactual

materials from the two buildings on the south side of the B Plaza—specifically, in Structure B4, which contained in situ ceramic vessels within the building and sheet refuse to its front, and in Structure B6, which contained in situ vessels, stone points, and a significant lens of burning—also point to a sudden and probably violent end. As noted above, three unburied children were recovered on the floors of Caana's final buildings. Two of these children were recovered inside Structure B19 in what is assumed to be a final ritual offering. A third was recovered on the interior floor of one of the palace complexes in a decidedly nonritual context. Besides the unburied child in the summit palace room of Caana, at least two unburied bodies were recovered at the base of Structure B28 at the eastern extant of the epicentral B Plaza near Caracol Stela 25 (Figure 13.3b); also with these bodies were a dozen extra mandibles, possibly representing a warriors necklace; in our estimation, that these bodies were left in situ and unburied points to a final violent confrontation. The relocation of Altar 23 (Figure 13.3e) from the same locus by the stabilization project in 2001 CE also resulted in the recovery of two additional bodies in this general area; strontium analysis of one of these individuals (value equals .70724) indicated a non-local origin of this person from somewhere south of Caracol (Freiwald 2011:341–344). This would suggest that at least one of the unburied individuals in Caracol's B Plaza was not originally from the site. However, it cannot be determined whether the unburied individual was from a foreign military force who attacked the site and was killed by its defenders or if the individual was simply a foreign migrant living at Caracol who met an untimely end. Whatever the case, the archaeological data indicate that the epicentral final abandonment was fairly rapid and likely associated with warfare.

Besides the archaeological data that reflect Terminal Classic period turbulence at Caracol, the known epigraphic record also establishes the relatively short tenure of the Caracol rulers during the Terminal Classic era, usually on the order of 20 years, possibly suggestive of a katun rotation (A. Chase et al. 2009:181). There is also a change in the political content of the inscriptions during the Terminal Classic period in that they do not record the biographies of rulers (birth, accession, parentage) (Grube 1996; Chapter 3, this volume). Finally, there also appears to be the use of the Caracol emblem glyph by individuals other than the ruler (e.g., Altar 22 [Figure 13.4c]; A. Chase et al. 1991). The epigraphic changes are further reflected in the iconography of the latest monuments at Caracol, which shift from a focus on single individuals to one emphasizing multiple people. The earliest Terminal Classic monuments focus on either a half-katun ceremony or the accession

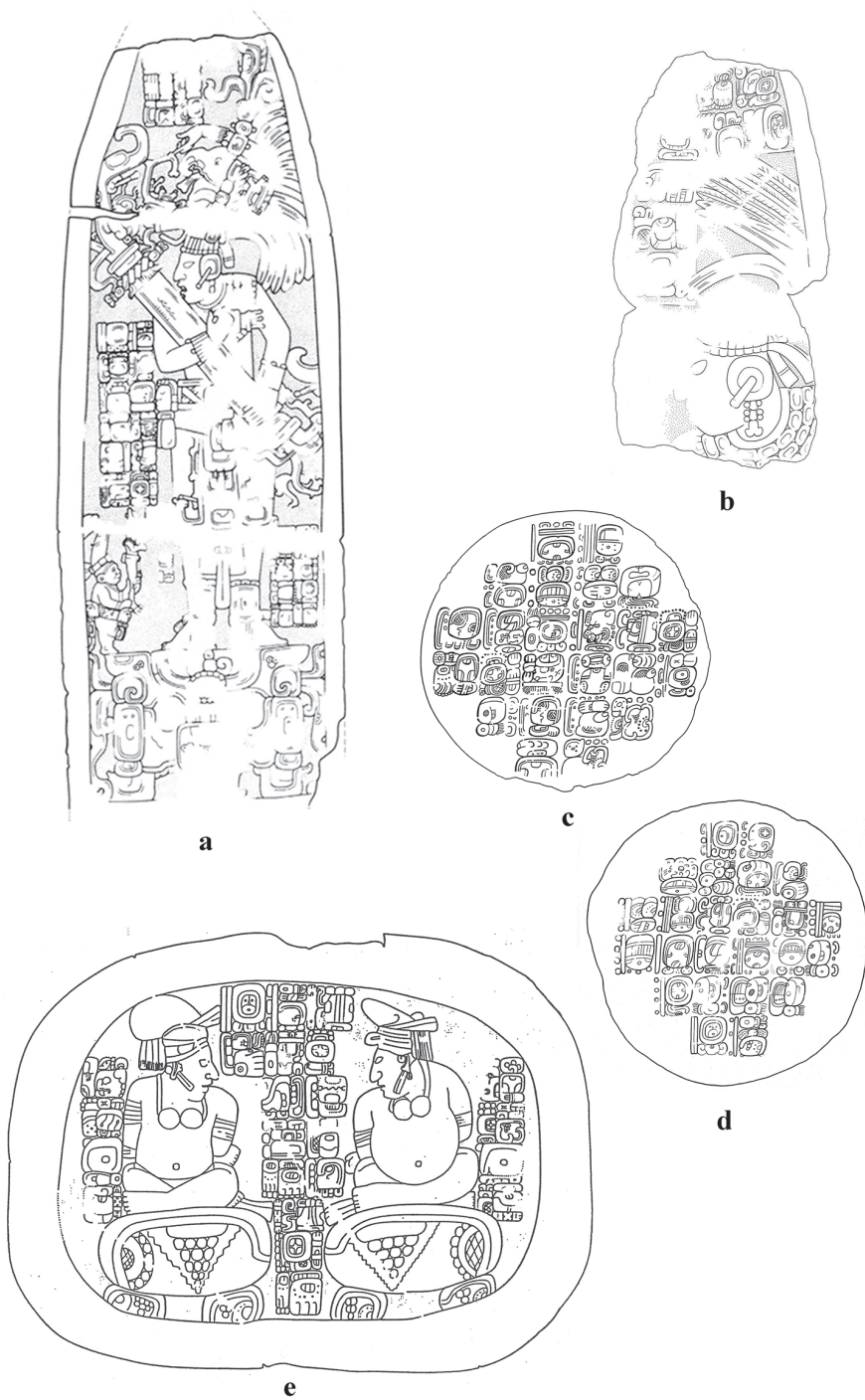
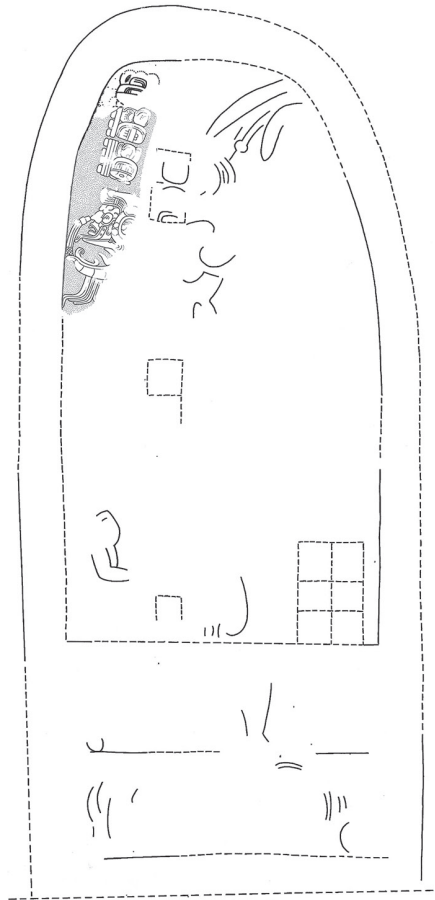


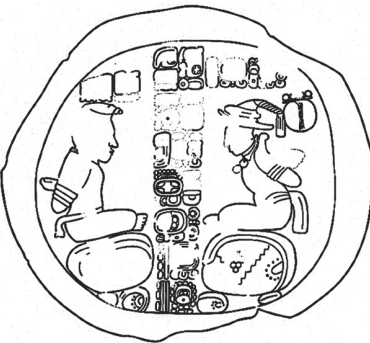
Figure 13.3. Caracol carved and incised monuments dating to 9.18.10.0.0 (800 CE): (a) Stela 11; (b) Stela 25; (c) Ball Court Marker 3; (d) Ball Court Marker 4; (e) Altar 23.



a



b



c

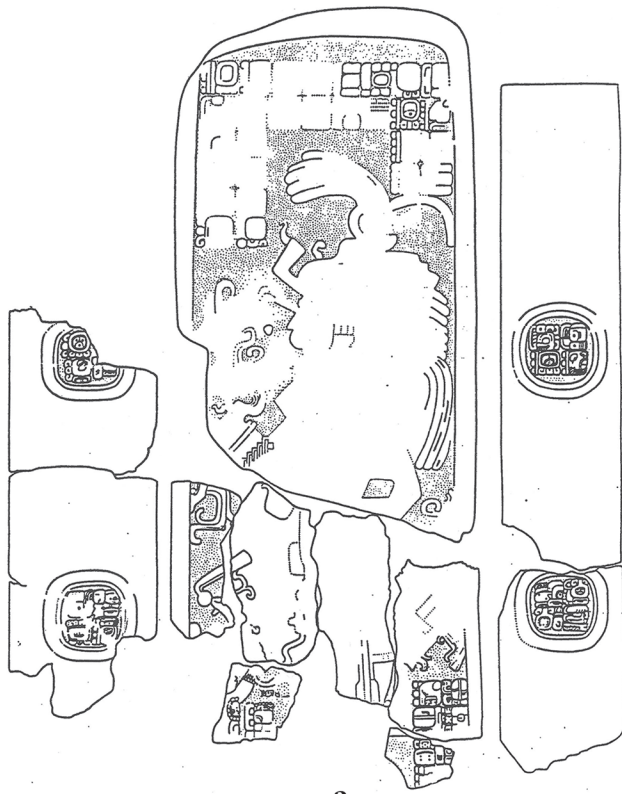


d

Figure 13.4. Caracol carved monuments dating to 9.19.0.0.0 (810 CE): (a) Stela 18; (b) Stela 8; (c) Altar 22; (d) Hatzcap Ceel Altar 2.

of K'inich Joy K'awil (Figure 13.3); his monuments in the B Group ballcourt contain only text and make reference to Caracol's first ruler (e.g., A. Chase et al. 1991; Helmke et al. 2006), something appropriate for the re-establishment of divine right to govern.

Accession stelae showing rulers holding ceremonial bars are in evidence through 820 CE (Figures 13.3a, 13.4b, and 13.5a), but none are known from Caracol's Tenth Cycle (Figure 13.6) monuments. Ceremonial bars have been interpreted as the accession icons that position incoming rulers within the center of Maya cosmology (Clancy 1994). The lack of a ceremonial bar on later Terminal Classic monuments may be interpreted as representative of a significant change in the cosmology related to rulership; this is consistent with much of the other Terminal Classic iconography found at Caracol. Caracol Stela 18, dating to 810 CE, portrays a rearing serpent (a vision serpent or possibly a centipede; see Taube 2003) positioned above a captive (Figure 13.4a); if a serpent, one might also wonder if Caracol is not making reference to its position in a reborn "snake kingdom." Paired bound prisoners are in evidence on monuments dating to 800 CE (Figure 13.3e) and in 810 CE (Figure 13.4c); a single bound prisoner occurs on Hatzcap Ceel Altar 1 dating to 835 CE (Figure 13.6a). After 820, however, most Caracol monuments portray scenes of alliance, usually between two or more figures. In the scenes that are carved on these stones, figures are sometimes seated on "thrones" (e.g., Caracol Altar 12; Figure 13.5b) in scenes very reminiscent to those found on Sahcaba and Pabellon Modeled-Carved pottery (e.g., Adams 1973:Figure 16d and 16e; Smith 1958:Figure 44m). One of the paired figures portrayed and named on Caracol Altar 12 dating to 820 CE (Figure 13.5b) has also been identified as an individual known as Papamalili of Ucanal, who also occurs in texts at Naranjo (Grube 1994b:95). In the last pairing of individuals on a Caracol monument, Altar 26 dating to 884 CE, the Caracol lord is gesturing in alliance or submission to the other individual (Figure 13.6e; see also A. Chase and D. Chase 2015a) Thus, we would see the iconographic pairings as representative of alliances and relationships often with nearby foreign individuals, reflecting the probable participation of Caracol's elite in broader political interaction before the site's final abandonment (something also confirmed in the latest elite ceramics).



a



b



c

Figure 13.5. Caracol carved monuments dating to 9.19.10.0.0 (820 CE): (a) Stela 19; (b) Altar 12; (c) Altar 13.

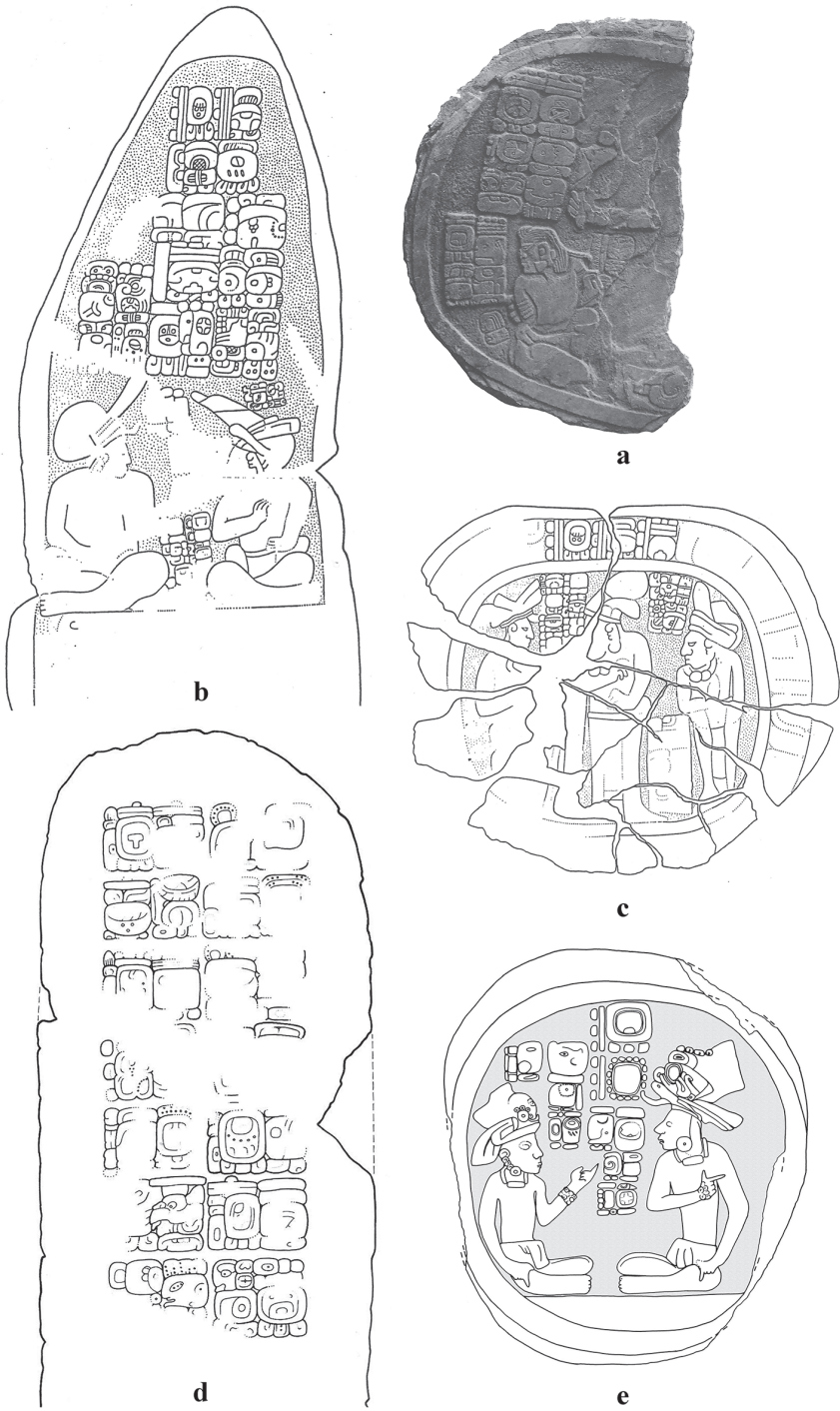


Figure 13.6. Caracol carved monuments dating to the Tenth Cycle: (a) Hatzcap Ceel Altar 1 (10.0.5.0.0; 835 CE); (b) Stela 17 (10.1.0.0.0; 849 CE); (c) Altar 10 (10.1.0.0.0; 849 CE); (d) Stela 10 (10.1.10.0.0; 859 CE); (e) Altar 26 (10.2.15.0.0; 884 CE).

CONCLUSION

We argue that Maya kingship at Caracol was constantly changing. Whether kingship was always divine or sacred is not clear. However, certain of Caracol's rulers were more powerful than others, specifically those at the beginning of the Late Classic period in 550 CE. When the site was defeated in a star war in 680 CE by Naranjo, it is likely that any existing divine kingship came to an end, for at least a time, given that the epigraphic records across sites suggests that star wars had severe consequences on minimally the elite of the affected sites. Yet the archaeology at Caracol also makes it clear that the loss of the ruler did not negatively impact the overall prosperity of the site. But Caracol kingship surely changed after 680 CE. Only 100 years later do we see evidence of a concerted attempt at Caracol to reintroduce the memorialization of rulers on stone monuments. And an argument can be made that the rearing snake on Caracol Stela 18 is representative of the deification of the ruler. Yet the epigraphic texts, the subsequent iconography, and the archaeological record all suggest that these later Caracol elite were disconnected from the rest of the site's population and more focused on exterior political relationships, leading to a breakdown in internal site economy (D. Chase and A. Chase 2020). We have earlier suggested that Caracol was part of a broader hegemony at the time of the Maya collapse (A. Chase and D. Chase 2004a:366), and our review of the current data indicate that this earlier suggestion has merit. It is also evident that Caracol's kingship in the Terminal Classic era differed in significant ways from its early Late Classic period manifestation.

Perhaps most interesting is the correlation of the material well-being of the population at large with powerful dynastic rulers. Even though Caracol's greatest period of prosperity began under the authority of powerful and potentially divine early Late Classic rulers, this prosperity continued in their absence (or at least during a period of hieroglyphic silence) following Caracol's 680 CE defeat by Naranjo. And while it is possible that this continued prosperity was possible because of the short time—only 168 days—before Caracol's ruler re-established his legitimacy (and took back his “three stone place”), the lack of corresponding dynastic monuments during the following century is striking, as is the change in iconography when stone monuments were re-introduced to the site. Caracol's overarching prosperity declines and economic disparity ensues only with the later Terminal Classic rulers' attempts to restore dynasty after 798 CE. No matter the issues of governance, if Caracol's Terminal Classic rulers were indeed attempting to assert

themselves as divine kings, then divine kingship did not always offer positive benefits for the population at large. An ancient reminder of the fragility of even the most resilient cities, Caracol demonstrates the dynamic nature of governance within one polity and the impact that changes in rulership can have on human lifeways.