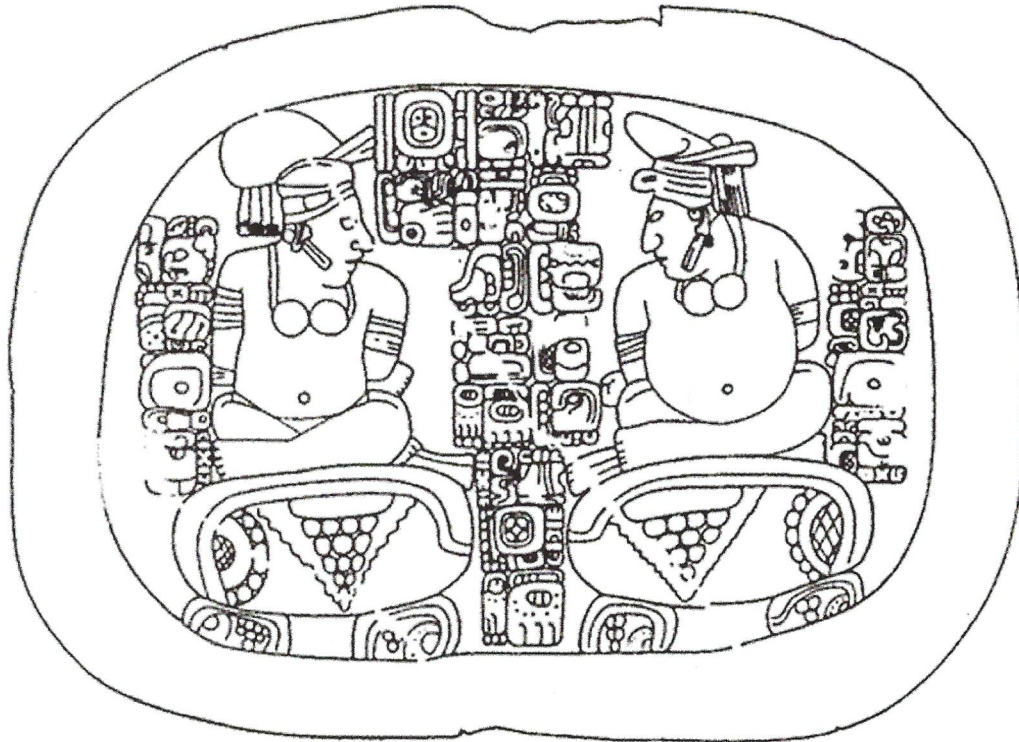


## CARACOL: THE THIRTEENTH TUN 1997 SEASON



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The 13th season of the Caracol Project ran from the end of January through the beginning of April 1997. Major support for the 1997 season came from the Foundation of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI) and from private donations to the University of Central Florida . In an attempt to better understand Caracol's internal settlement prior to continued destruction from looting, the 1997 investigations focused on excavating in 4 residential groups with 6 open/collapsed/looted tombs located in the southeast sector of Caracol.

In a group nicknamed "Saraguate", 2.5km distant from Caracol's epicenter, three tombs were fully recorded:

one tomb was open, but unexcavated; the other two chambers had been looted. The unexcavated tomb proved to be largely sterile, but human bone, artifacts, and vessels were recovered in association with the other two tombs. These vessels were of Preclassic, Early Classic, and Late Classic date. Two test-pits were also excavated to bedrock in this group; one produced an intact Late Classic burial with two vessels, and the other produced a Late Classic face cache.

Three other southwest sector tombs were excavated. These were all open and collapsed, but not looted. In a group called "Flatop", 2km from the epicenter, the capstones of a tomb had collapsed inward, forming a depression in the eastern building. Excavation of this small chamber showed that it sat directly upon a chaltun, making this a "double-decker" tomb. Human bone fragments, but no association in situ artifacts, were recovered from within the chaltun. A test-pit exposed the front steps of the east structure, but found no associated deposits.

A large chamber in the "Tres Gradadas" group, also 2 km distant from the epicenter, was entered through a 4m long entryway in the rear of the east building. The entrance terminated in a bee-hive-like chamber in the shape of a "D", the southern capstones of which had collapsed inward. Like Flatop, the Tres Gradadas tomb was also double-decker with a large chultun cut into bedrock immediately beneath it. Shell, jadeite, and ceramic vessels were recovered in association with the Tres Gradadas chamber; the use of this chamber dated to the Terminal Classic era (post A.D. 790), making this one of the latest known tombs from Caracol. A test-pit in front of the east building produced a cache vessel.

The capstones on the "Insectos de Amor" tomb, 1.5km from the epicenter, had collapsed, probably because of the extreme width of the chamber (relative to the vault height). Excavation revealed a double-bench tomb with a northern entryway. A test-pit to the front of the east building produced a multiple burial dating to the early part of the Late Classic Period.


Apart from the settlement investigations, one excavation was also carried out in the Caracol epicenter

behind Structure A1. A line of stone was noted washing out of the side of the pit left by Linton Satterthwaite during his removal of Caracol Stela 1 and Caracol Altar 1 in the early 50's. This feature turned into the eastern edge of a tomb that had been purposefully filled in and buried by the Maya. The cremated remains of several individuals were recovered from within this chamber as well as some 40 broken, but largely reconstructible, vessels and 150 obsidian lancets. Further excavation behind the tomb recovered two elaborate caches dating from the end of the Early Classic era. A lidded pottery barrel from the first cache contained spondylous shells, "charlie chaplins", a mirror, and a large carved jadeite figure — among other things. A second cache consisted of an intact ceramic box containing a jadeite hunchback figure, a large rectangular jadeite breast pendant, and two oversize obsidian points. Excavation beneath the two caches revealed the base of what had once been a freestanding stucco statue of an individual seated on a throne, some 2m deep by an estimated 1.2m wide by an estimated 2.8m in height. The ceramic box had been located in the chest area of this statue. Nothing was found beneath the statue itself.

Besides the excavations noted above, mapping was also carried out in the southern and western parts of Caracol. Almost 2 square km of settlement were added to the Caracol map during the 1997 field season. Over 16 square km of Caracol's core settlement has been recorded. This central 16 square km of Caracol settlement has over 4,000 mapped structures.

Thirteen tuns of continuous research at Caracol by the Caracol Archaeological Project have begun to significantly alter many of our older preconceptions about the Classic Maya.

[1990](#) - [1991](#) - [1993](#) - [1994](#) - [1995](#) - 1997

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