

13 THE TOMB OF TE' KAB CHAAK AT CARACOL, BELIZE: CONTEXT, CONTENTS, DATING, AND IMPLICATIONS

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During the 2025 field season of the Caracol Archaeological Project, an important tomb was located in the Northeast Acropolis, an elite residential unit located immediately east of Caracol's central architectural complex, Caana. During construction, the tomb was placed within the fill beneath the front stair of an Early Classic version of Caracol Structure B34. It contained the remains of a single individual accompanied by eleven ceramic vessels and three sets of jadeite earflares; a mosaic death mask comprised of jadeite and shell plaques also accompanied the interment. The contents of the chamber were coated with red cinnabar. Based on its siting, its contents, and relationships to other deposits in the Northeast Acropolis, the tomb can be dated to the timeframe of Caracol's earliest epigraphically recorded ruler. The dating and items in the chamber indicate that it housed Te' Kab Chaak, the founder of Caracol's dynasty. In conjunction with data previously recovered in the Northeast Acropolis that post-dates this burial, this deposit also sheds light on Caracol's relationship with Teotihuacan, Mexico, in the early fourth century.

Introduction

It is exceedingly rare in Maya archaeology to be able to associate a name with an ancient individual in a tomb. However, during the 2025 field season at Caracol, Belize, an early chamber was excavated and recovered that, based on archaeological context and cross-dating, matches the hieroglyphically-known founder of the city's dynasty, Te' Kab Chaak. Other instances of named individuals in Maya tomb chambers that can be confirmed with archaeological evidence include Pakal at Palenque, Mexico; Jasaw Chan K'awiil I at Tikal, Guatemala; and, Yax K'uk' Mo' at Copan, Honduras. The conjunction of hieroglyphic texts and named individuals with archaeologically recovered materials has generally proved to be difficult. Hieroglyphic names, when they co-occur with tomb contents, are often on portable objects, making identification problematic because of the possibility of trade and gifting. Most identified rulers have had some kind of controversy over the exact correspondence between the name and the tomb – for a variety of different reasons. Generally, however, archaeology has been the source of confirming data. Of the named rulers, only two individuals in Maya tombs archaeologically recovered can be designated as dynastic founders – both were responsible for the Classic era (250-900 CE) dynasties that sequentially numbered the sovereigns governing their polities (see Schele 1992) – originally Yax K'uk' Mo' at Copan and now Te' Kab Chaak at Caracol. This does not mean that there were not earlier governance

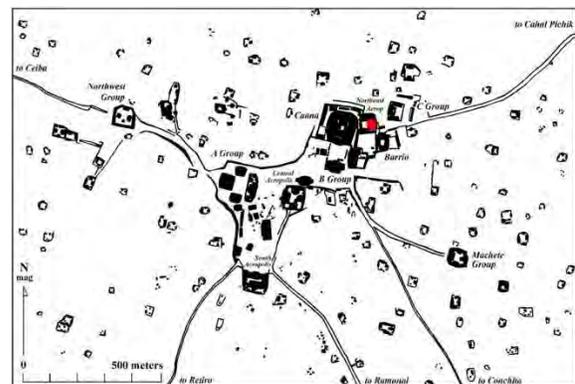


Figure 1. Epicentral map showing the location of the 2025 tomb.



Figure 2. View of Structure B34, looking east across the plaza of the Northeast Acropolis. The 2015 excavation was placed where the individual is standing. Inset in the lower right is the Mayan hieroglyphic name for Te' Kab Chaak.

systems in place, but it does imply that both individuals were important enough to be remembered in later texts as the initial ruler in a numbered sequence that persisted long past their deaths. There are no hieroglyphic texts that

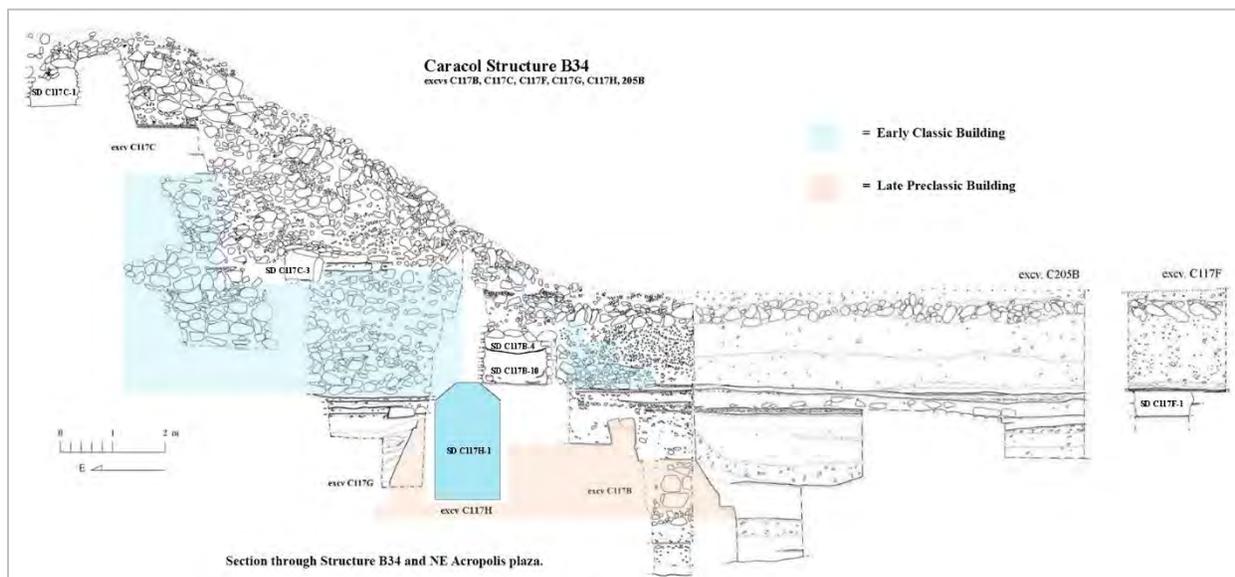


Figure 3. Section through Structure B34 and associated axial plaza, showing location of the 2025 tomb relative to other archaeological features.

directly name these individuals in their tombs at either Copan or at Caracol; their identification is based on documented archaeological stratigraphy, on contextual data, and on both radiocarbon dating and stylistic cross-dating. Yet, their identifications are important because of the details that they can shed on Maya society and its political development. This is certainly the case with Te' Kab Chaak.

2025 Excavation at Caracol, Belize

During the 2025 field season of the Caracol Archaeological Project, a small excavation was placed in front of Structure B34, the eastern building of Caracol's Northeast Acropolis (Figures 1 and 2). The 2 m by 2 m excavation was designed to reopen a small portion of the previously excavated axial trench. In 1993, this investigation had found a Late Classic tomb set into an earlier front stairway for Structure B34; the tomb (S.D. C117B-10) was covered over by a later front stairway for a substantially elevated eastern building. The tomb had been previously revealed when the Northeast Acropolis plaza was raised 2 m by the Maya at the end of the Classic Period and these steps were partially dismantled. As a result of this Late Classic activity, the tomb was partially infilled, pushing and covering the existing interment (S.D. C117B-10) to the south side of the chamber, and

another burial (SD C117B-3) was placed in the upper part of the infilled chamber. The new crypt had the capstones replaced and was subsequently covered by the final plaza floor in front of Structure B34 (see Figure 3).

Following the re-exposure of the 1993 tomb in the 2025 season, the flooring in that chamber was removed, revealing large, packed rocks on the eastern side of the excavation and the remains of a floor on the western side. Only 20 cm below the tomb floor, an open hole was discovered in the northeast corner of the 1993 tomb. Further investigation proved this cavity to be the 2025 tomb (S.D. C117H-1). The new tomb was roughly parallel to the 1993 tomb, both running north-south. The offset between the eastern wall of the 1993 tomb and the western wall of the 2025 tomb proved to be 40 cm. The eastern wall of the 1993 tomb had been bedded on vault stones for this earlier chamber. The original discovery point of the tomb was enlarged and used as the point of access and egress for excavation (Figure 4).

The 2025 tomb itself was placed into an earlier plaza floor directly below the front steps of the Early Classic building that covered the chamber. These steps were associated with the final surface for the earlier plaza, some 2 m below the current ground (and later plaza) surface. Excavations in 2016 recovered a Pacific



Figure 4. The C117H excavation, showing tomb uncovered in 1993 and point of entry into the 2025 chamber. Maureen Carpenter is to the left and Edwin Chan is to the right.

spondylus shell set in the fill for this early building on axis to and east of the 2025 chamber. This 2016 excavation missed the eastern side of the tomb by only 0.5 m.

The Tomb and Its Contents

The tomb itself measured 1.25 m in width by 2.7 m in length (3.75 m with the niches discussed below) and was 2.15 m in height (floor to capstone); the chamber enclosed 7.26 m³ of open air space. The north wall of the chamber contained a square niche measuring 50 cm in width, height, and depth. The vault area of the northern side of the chamber was covered by horizontally placed slabs of black slate that were anchored to the soffit of the north wall (Figure 5). The capstone and vault for the chamber continued directly into this slate facing. It is likely that the slate slabs were placed to close the chamber after the contents had been placed. The south wall of the chamber was constructed with a t-shaped niche that was inset into the wall some 30 cm, the upper part of which directly articulated with the vault and capstones.

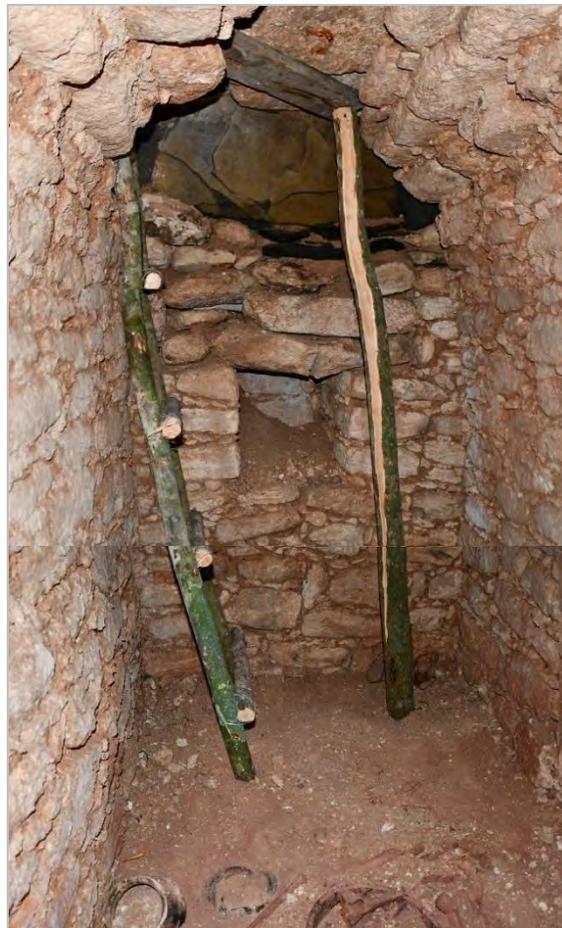


Figure 5. Interior view of tomb, looking north with entry ladder in place; three ceramic vessels had been removed at the time of this picture.

The area below the southern niche was coated with red cinnabar. Cinnabar covered the basal portion of the walls in the southern part of the tomb, the contents of the tomb, and the body within the chamber. The cinnabar was concentrated in the southern part of the chamber and decreased as one moved north.

The chamber itself contained the body of a single individual (Figure 6). The individual was likely a male, based on height and cranial morphology (particularly robust mastoid processes), and in a supine position with head to the south. This person was an elderly individual; no teeth were present and none were in evidence in his maxilla. His jaw was complete and the area where the teeth should have been was completely resorbed (Figure 7). A complete femur in the northern portion of the tomb permitted a rough initial height estimation, and the individual would

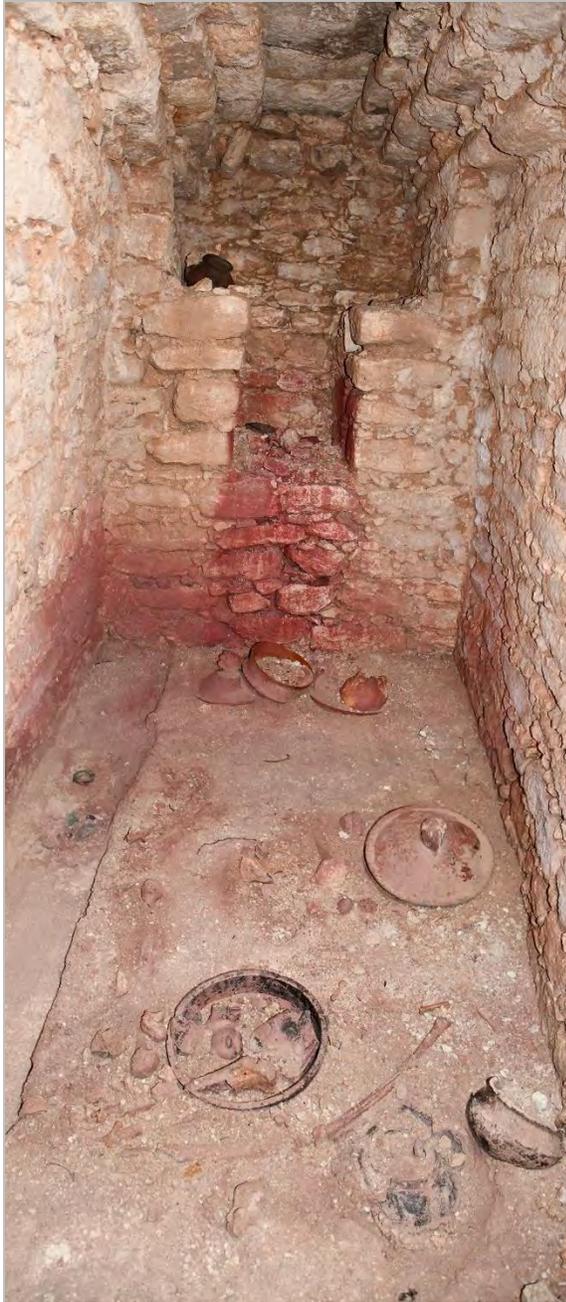


Figure 6. Interior view of tomb, looking south.

have been approximately 5'7" tall. He had likely been placed on a raised pallet as the bones, while articulated, had shifted slightly along with other tomb contents. His lower leg bones were angled northwest (from knee) to southeast (feet) and one fibula was west of where it should have been anatomically (possibly caused by the disintegration of the pallet). His skull was also separated from the body and upside down in a ceramic vessel at the northern end of the chamber



Figure 7. The resorbed mandible of the individual in the chamber; spondylus shell is above it.



Figure 8. Carved bone handles from the southeast corner of the chamber.

along with two vertebrae, his atlas and axis; there were no signs of any cut marks, meaning he had not been decapitated. A large Pacific spondylus shell was in the same vessel with the cranium.

This mandible was located beneath the second spondylus shell which was under a central basal-flange vessel that rested on two other basal flange vessels along the northern wall. Also along the northern wall were the lower parts of two turtle plastrons.

In the southeast corner of the chamber were two carved bone handles (Figure 8). The iconography on each handle is almost identical and likely represents images of the Principal Bird Deity (identification thanks to David Freidel, personal communication, 2025). In the upper chest area of the body, a concentration of earflares, tubular jadeite beads, and other jadeite beads were found. There were three sets of jadeite earflares with two of the sets having four very small perforations on the front of the flare, indicating that something could have been attached to these points (Figure 9). Four large tubular beads were also recovered that were carved in the round; two of these depict living monkey faces and two of them show skeletal monkey faces (Figure 10). Also recovered were 7 jadeite beads that were likely parts of earring assemblages and also 1 spondylus bead. Along the eastern wall of the chamber south of its midpoint was an area of small jadeite pieces, jadeite blocks, and worked shell; these proved to be the remains of an upside-down, broken mosaic jadeite mask (Figure 11). There were 86 pieces of jadeite in total, all finely worked on one side and rough on the other; one prominent nose and two smaller jadeite earflares are among these pieces. The mask also has 29 worked pieces of worked shell, some with incised design. The mask is yet to be fully reconstructed.

There were eleven ceramic vessels in the chamber, including both quotidian and fineware pottery (Figure 12). While no artifactual materials were recovered from the northern niche, a small plainware olla rested on the surface of the eastern part of the “T” in the t-shaped niche on the south side of the chamber (Figure 13); its lid, made out of a re-shaped circular ceramic sherd rested on the accumulated dirt surface in the lower central part of the “T.” Other quotidian vessels were recovered in the northern part of the chamber. Tangent to and centered on the north wall was a flared-wall plainware plate (Figure 14). An incised collared bowl rested in the interior of this plate. This collared bowl was very



Figure 9. Three sets of jadeite earflares from the chamber.



Figure 10. Four jadeite tubular beads, two carved to represent live monkeys and two representing dead monkeys.

finely made and was slipped black with incised decoration forming two different motifs separated by an incised icon for lightening (Figure 15). Along the eastern wall just south of the corner area was a large overturned plainware olla with four small handles applied between the vessel shoulder and the neck (Figure 16). A re-shaped circular ceramic sherd rested near this olla and was probably a lid for this vessel. Tangent to the western wall approximately 1 m from the



Figure 11. The jadeite and shell mosaic mask upside down and in situ along the eastern wall of the chamber.

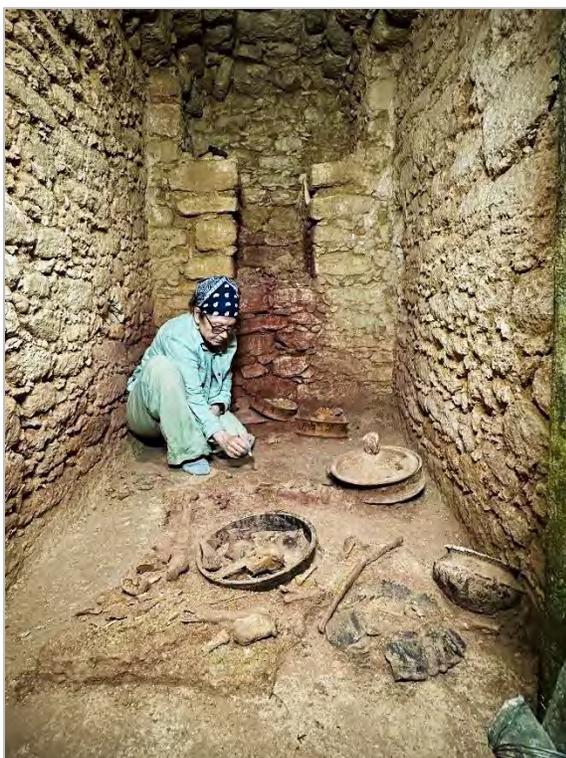


Figure 12. Interior south view of chamber after excavation by Diane Chase (portrayed).

northwest corner was also a plainware olla with exterior applique decoration and a rim that had an interior groove (more typical of earlier time periods; Figure 17). Northeast of this vessel and almost touching the western olla, was a collared bowl, slipped black and modeled and incised in the form of an owl (Figure 18). This vessel was broken and completely buried by overlying dirt so that it was not initially visible in the chamber (see Figure 12).



Figure 13. Plainware olla from south side of chamber in niche.



Figure 14. Plainware plate from north side of chamber adjacent to wall.



Figure 15. Incised black-slipped collared bowl from inside the plainware plate.

Also in the chamber were five basal flanged bowls, three of them with lids. A fourth smaller lid was found in the northern part of the chamber. This lid was elaborately decorated with an incised coatimundi body and modeled head that served as the handle (Figure 19). It fits the incised collared bowl along the north wall of the tomb and the triangular pendent incised in front of the coatimundi also aligns with one of the triangular incised decorative elements on the northern blackware collared bowl. The location



Figure 16. Large plainware olla with handles adjacent to the northeastern wall.



Figure 17. Olla with interiorly grooved rim and exterior applique decoration adjacent to the northern part of the west wall.

of these vessels likely shifted from their original placement on the raised pallet (on which the body rested) during its disintegration.

Four of the basal flange vessels in the chamber display exterior decorations consisting of the “stretch-captive” motif (Figure 20; see A. Chase and D. Chase 2018: 17-18). Two of these motifs occur on each vessel. This motif features a horizontal individual with feet upturned and bound to the left, a central belt in evidence and the hands tied in front of the face and head with a headdress usually connecting to the belt. In some cases, drops of blood are shown dripping from the hands. The face often has a vertical red line associated with the inner edge of the eye. In some cases, there is a nose ornament and in others there may be indications of a mask in front of the face. There were additional stretch-captive vessels in



Figure 18. Black-slipped and modeled collared olla in the shape of an owl.



Figure 19. Coatimundi lid that likely goes with collared bowl in Figure 15.

other Northeast Acropolis excavations. Besides the four stretch-captive vessels in this tomb, there are four stretch-captive vessels in the 2010 cremation found in the Northeast Acropolis (A. Chase and D. Chase 2010, 2011) and one stretch-captive vessel in the summit tomb in Structure B33 that was recovered in 2009 (A. Chase and D. Chase 2009). Intriguingly one basal-flange vessel in the north tomb and one in the east tomb share the same interior design of what may be a “hummingbird” (see Figure 26). Single examples of basal-flange bowls with this decorative motif have been recovered from several sites in the eastern Maya lowlands (Uaxactun and Holmul in Guatemala; Dos Hombres, Bats’ub Cave, and Cahal Pech in Belize; see A. Chase and D. Chase



Figure 20. Example of a “stretch captive” motif from the basal-flange bowl in Figure 23.



Figure 21. Polychrome basal-flange bowl with a coatimundi-handled lid; easternmost basal-flange bowl along south wall.



Figure 23. Polychrome basal-flange bowl with a macaw-handled lid; in west-central portion of chamber.



Figure 22. Ek Chuah figure portrayed on rear portion of the Coatimundi polychrome lid.

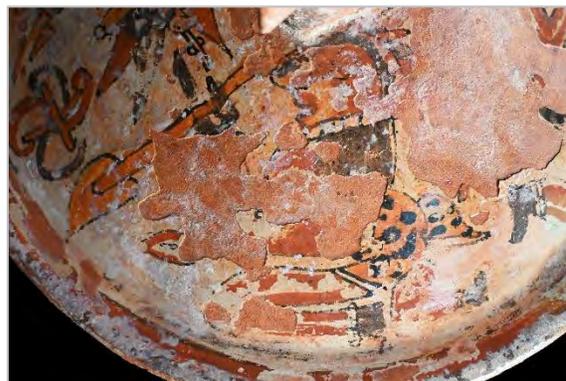


Figure 24. Figure kneeling and holding spear on lid of Figure 23 beneath the macaw's beak.

2018:9); at Tikal, sherds with this design were found in the late Manik 2 phase (350-378 CE) deposits (Laporte 1989:227, fig. 97).

Two of the stretch-captive basal-flange vessels in the 2025 tomb are associated with lids. On the northeast end of the chamber a coatimundi lid caps one of the basal flanges (Figure 21); although heavily eroded, decoration on its lid portrays the Maya merchant god Ek Chuah with feet splayed in odd positions, while making offerings of specific icons (Figure 22;

identification made in conjunction with David Freidel). His portraiture is unusual in being so early as he is usually seen in the Postclassic Period. In the west-center of the chamber, one of the basal-flange bowls was capped by a macaw head lid (Figure 23). It too is eroded, but contains important imagery showing a kneeling individual holding a spear and wearing a jaguar pelt around his middle, indicating high-status (Figure 24); he is faced by a set of supplicants. The supplicants appear to be deity figures with elaborate headdress gear; all kneel with their hands



Figure 25. Suppliant figure on macaw lid, making an offering to the individual in Figure 24.



Figure 26. Comparisons of “hummingbird” motif from interior of 2025 macaw basal-flange (left) and from the interior of the 2009 basal-flange in the northern tomb (right).



Figure 27. Westernmost basal-flange vessel along the south wall of the chamber.

extended in front of them making offerings (Figure 25). Remnants of painted design on the lid and spacing suggest that there were three of these supplicants. These could be symbolic of the three triad deities for Caracol (see A. Chase and D. Chase 2017:62). The interior of this basal-flange also vessel contained the “hummingbird” icon (Figure 26).



Figure 28. One of two Pacific spondylus shells from the chamber.



Figure 29. Central basal-flange vessel along the south wall of the chamber.

The coatimundi-lidded vessel appeared in a line of three basal-flanges adjacent to the south wall of the chamber. It was the easternmost vessel (Figure 12). The westernmost vessel (Figure 27) contained the skull of the individual and a large Pacific spondylus shell (Figure 28). Another basal-flange vessel (Figure 29) lay between and on top of the other two vessels. Beneath it lay a second Pacific spondylus shell and the mandible of the individual (Figure 7).

The final basal-flange vessel in the 2025 tomb is a blackware vessel with abstract incised designs around its body, but with a blackware modeled-and-incised lid with a monkey head handle (Figure 30). The lid handle clearly represents a spider monkey based on the prominent, almost Tlaloc-like, eyes. The monkey’s tail is modeled on his lid and his body has extensive cross-hatched or weaved designs on its interior reminiscent of a turtle carapace. In front of the head is an incised version of the back



Figure 30. Black-ware basal-flange vessel with lid from north-central portion of chamber; handle of lid is the head of a spider monkey.



Figure 31. Overview of the modeled monkey body and incised designs on the lid for Figure 30.

icons presented as if it were a turtle (head to the right and tail to the left). Two icons resembling mats (symbols of royalty) are incised on either side of the vessel (Figure 31).

The iconography of vessels in this chamber significantly adds to our repertoire of early Early Classic materials. Some related scenes have been found on unprovenanced materials (e.g., Hellmuth 2024), but much of the iconography has not previously been recovered in documented archaeological contexts.

Discussion

Royal and high-status chambers of Early Classic date have been excavated in Mundo Perdido (the Lost World Complex), Tikal, Guatemala; one of the Tikal burials (PNT-019) also contained a jadeite mosaic mask, indicative of his probable position as a ruler (Laporte and Fialko 1995: 58, note 30). A high-status chamber of even earlier date is also known from Chan Chich, Belize (Houk 2004). Other chambers dating to the Early Classic and Late Classic Periods are well known from a variety of sites. Caracol itself has produced a series of royal chambers associated with black-on-red texts (D. Chase and A. Chase 2012), but none could be identified as rulers (D. Chase and A. Chase 2017). Other royal chambers are known from Altun Ha (Pendergast 1979, 1982); Tayasal, Guatemala (A. Chase 1985); Santa Rita Corozal, Belize (D. Chase and A. Chase 1988, 2005); Tikal, Guatemala (Coe 1990); and El Diablo, Guatemala (Houston et al. 2015).

Named rulers with glyphic texts are even rarer than high-status tombs. While we now recognize that Pakal was in the Late Classic tomb at Palenque excavated by Alberto Ruz in 1953 (Ruz Luillier and Mason 1953), his name – which is actually on the sarcophagus lid in the chamber – and his dynastic ties were not deciphered until over a decade later (Schele and Mathews 1998). There has been extended discussion over whether the individual in the tomb was actually Pakal because of a dispute over the age of his skeletal remains. The original age estimation did not match the epigraphic age, and only subsequent skeletal analysis has brought the two bodies of data into conjunction (see Tiesler and Cucina 2006). Burial 116 at Tikal has been identified as the Late Classic ruler Jasaw Chan K'awiil I (Coe 1990:690; Jones 1977), but the hieroglyphs in the chamber on artifacts contain a variant name for this individual (e.g., Moholy-Nagy 2008: fig. 97) that differs from the one found on texts on stone monuments and on a wooden lintel (e.g., Jones and Satterthwaite 1982) demonstrating some of the difficulties in directly equating names to people.

A chamber containing the single body of a ruler accompanied by a jadeite mask along with a stone bowl, and a variety of other items indicative of his status, was also discovered at

Santa Rita Corozal, Belize (A. Chase 1992; D. Chase and A. Chase 1988, 2005); his name, “Great Scrolled Skull,” can be deduced not from items in his tomb, which contain texts naming other individuals (possibly his parents), but from post-fire painted cache vessels set above his tomb. A Late Classic tomb at Dzibanche, also containing a jadeite mosaic mask, names a known Kanuul ruler, “Sky Witness,” on a stingray spine located in the burial (Estrada-Belli 2024: fig. 17), but has not been used to identify this burial securely as that individual because of the portability of the glyphic artifact in question.

Portable artifacts with rulers’ names have been found in other contexts that are clearly not their royal burial chambers, probably a result of gifting or trade (A. Chase et al. 2025:4). A small residential tomb found during the 2025 field season at Caracol names the ruler “Double Comb” of Naranjo in the hieroglyphic text on one of its pottery vessels, but he is not buried in this chamber. A text on a stone bowl from a royal tomb in Caracol Structure B20 names Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987: fig. 15a; Praeger and Wagner 2013), again an impossibility, given his identified burial at Copan (in addition to the later dating of the chamber). Thus, the presence of or lack of hieroglyphic texts does not necessarily identify the individual in a chamber, as pointed out by David Stuart (1998).

Archaeologically excavated remains of the resting places of dynastic founders are incredibly rare (e.g., Houston et al. 2015:12-14). Perhaps best known is Yax K’uk’ Mo’ from Copan. His dynastic origins lie at Caracol (Stuart 2007) and he is credited with founding the Classic dynasty at Copan in 426 CE. His tomb was located beneath the Temple of the Hieroglyphic Stairway (Bell et al. 2004) but contains no naming texts. He was identified through stratigraphic dating and archaeological contexts (Sharer 1999). The same kind of careful archaeological analysis has led to the identification of the tomb of the founder at Caracol, Te’ Kab Chaak (Figure 12), discovered during the 2025 field season.

Te’ Kab Chaak’s tomb (C117H-1) is the earliest in a sequence of three sequential burials in the Northeast Acropolis, all deposited within a very short time span. The volume of the 2025 chamber (just over 7 cubic meters), the number of

vessels (n=11), the amount of jadeite (especially 3 sets of earflares, which is highly unusual at Caracol), the two large Pacific spondylus shells found in association with his skull and jaw, the carved bone handles, and the red cinnabar covering his body indicates that he is an important elite individual and likely a member of the royal family; the mosaic jadeite death mask (the only one known from Caracol) further establishes his status as a ruler. Despite later connections to Teotihuacan in the Northeast Acropolis described below, everything about his tomb suggests that he is Maya - the placement of his tomb follows Maya patterns at Caracol and the vessels and artifacts in the tomb are all of Maya manufacture and style.

The next deposit in the sequence is a pit excavated in 2010 in the middle of the Northeast Acropolis plaza and is a Teotihuacan-style high-status cremation containing fragmentary and badly burnt human remains, as well as twenty broken and burnt pottery vessels (SD C117F-1; A. Chase and D. Chase 2011)). The pit also contained a large amount of Pachuca green obsidian artifacts from central Mexico and an atlatl tip, but its pottery vessels are both Maya and central Mexican. Its radiocarbon has been dated to between cal AD 220-345 and cal AD 370-375 at a 95% probability (Beta-4822497), but the accompanying ceramic vessels narrow the dating range down to between CE 330 to 350. Four vessels in this chamber contain exactly the same iconography (stretch captives) and forms as four of the vessels in the 2025 tomb (see A. Chase and D. Chase 2011).

The third burial in the sequence is the tomb of a woman (SD C181B-1) found in the summit of the north building in the Northeast Acropolis in 2009. She, too, was covered with cinnabar and had two large Pacific spondylus shells near her skull; some of her teeth were inlaid with hematite; she was accompanied by four pottery vessels (all Maya; see A. Chase and D. Chase 2018: fig. 4), and possibly a hematite mirror. One of her vessels shared both its form and iconography (stretch-captive) with the cremation and 2025 tomb. The interior decoration of this vessel matches almost exactly the interior decoration from a similar vessel in the 2025 tomb (Figure 26). Thus, it is highly likely

that all of these deposits are closely interlinked in time.

Te' Kab Chaak acceded to the throne in CE 331 based on retrospective hieroglyphic texts from the Late Classic era (specifically Caracol Ballcourt Marker 3 [A. Chase et al. 1991; Helmke et al. 2006] and Caracol Stela 22 [Helmke et al. 2022]). Both later texts emphasize the importance of this dynastic founder by the desire of then current rulers (K'an II and Hok K'auil) to link their actions with Te' Kab Chaak's legacy during pivotal events in their lives. Thus far, all indications from archaeological materials (dating, size of chamber, use of cinnabar, elaborate pottery vessels, associated iconography, jadeite earflares, and jadeite mask), the stratigraphic sequence in the Northeastern Acropolis, and existing epigraphic parameters point to Te' Kab Chaak as the identity of the occupant of the tomb found in 2025.

Conclusion

On a broader level, the archaeological data from the Northeast Acropolis sheds light on the complicated relationship between Teotihuacan and the lowland Maya (e.g., Braswell 2003). The Caracol data indicates that the Maya elite maintained long-distance bidirectional relationships with a variety of locations in Mesoamerica, including ties to central Mexico by CE 350 (earlier than commonly ascribed by epigraphic interpretation; e.g., Stuart 2001, 2024). However, there is no direct evidence of Teotihuacan influence in this Maya tomb, matching data from elite tombs at Tikal of similar date (Laporte and Fialko 1995:60).

Archaeological data collected from Tikal, Guatemala in the 1980s and 1990s (Iglesias 1987; Laporte 1989; Laporte and Fialko 1995) suggested that Teotihuacanos or Teotihuacan-affiliated Maya were present at Tikal around CE 378. Recent archaeological data from Tikal are amplifying this picture (Houston et al. 2021; Roman Ramirez et al. 2025), pointing to earlier temporal interaction between the Maya and central Mexico, similar to what has been documented at Caracol. Excavations at Teotihuacan, Mexico, have also documented significant Maya presence at that city by CE 350

(N. Sugiyama et al. 2020; S. Sugiyama and Cabrera Castro 2007).

That Caracol had some kind of direct interaction with central Mexico prior to the CE 378 entrada (see Martin 2020: 80, 241-242 for description of the entrada) is clear based on the recovered 2010 cremation, which contained central Mexican artifactual material and matched elite burial patterns found at Teotihuacan (A. Chase and D. Chase 2011). The archaeological record in the Caracol's Northeast Acropolis stratigraphically places the 2025 tomb as slightly earlier than this deposit. Thus, bi-directional interaction occurred on the elite level, but did not supplant or condition royal Maya identity. Only after A.D. 378 do we see the widespread use of Teotihuacan iconography and shared vessel forms like cylinder tripods, indicative of increased contact and trade and possibly to the usurpation of Maya governance systems (e.g., Marcus 2020).

The tomb recovered in the Northeast Acropolis during the 2025 field season of the Caracol Archaeological Project represents the beginning of the Maya dynasty at Caracol and the establishment of a count of sequential rulers. Te' Kab Chaak acceded to rule in CE 331 and likely died before CE 350. The individual in the Northeast Acropolis chamber was someone that later rulers in the city called back upon as the foundation of their ruling lineage and in relation to important changes in their own lives. While the name of and information about Te' Kab Chaak derives from retrospective hieroglyphic texts from the Late and Terminal Classic Period, his identification in the 2025 Caracol tomb is based on solid archaeological context and cross-dating as well as upon a body of archaeological data gathered over forty years of excavation.

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undertaken in February and March of 2025 by: Maureen Carpenter, Edwin Chan, Jorge Itza, and Diane Chase. The chamber was digitally scanned by Adrian Chase. Artifacts were processed during the last two weeks of the field season and turned over to the Institute of Archaeology on March 21, 2025. The chamber was guarded around the clock by the Caracol staff from the time it was entered in early February so that it was not disturbed by any intruders; individuals involved in this effort included most of the Caracol Archaeological Project staff: Egor Anorov, Ryaan Ansari, Cameron Castillo, Maureen Carpenter, Edwin Chan, Saul Galeano, Jaime Iglesias, Joel Iglesias, Jorge Itza, Mehran Jalali, Rumari Ku, Abner Mendez, Carlos Mendez, Ruth Palla, Flavio Pirir, Hannah Roark, Gabriela Saldana, and Nathan Womack. Members of the Institute of Archaeology who inspected the excavations and the tomb during the 2025 field season included: Melissa Badillo, David Griffith, Rumari Ku, Andres Novelo, Katherine Coye, Paul Smith, Josue Ramos, and Joyce Tun. Our sincere thanks to all who helped make the 2025 season of the Caracol Archaeological Project a success. The authors also thank David Freidel for help with iconography. Testing of the skeletal material is being carried out by Rick Smith for aDNA and Angelina Locker for stable isotopes. More about the season is on the 2025 Caracol blog at www.caracol.org.

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