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Rehabilitating Becan

by **Joseph W. Ball** of San Diego State University
and **David Webster** of The Pennsylvania State University

Research in 1970 vaulted Becan to prominence on the landscape of great Maya centers. Mapping, excavation, and ceramic stratigraphy revealed that its enigmatic earthwork, first recorded archaeologically in 1934, was a fortification built at the end of the Preclassic period. Large-scale warfare thus unexpectedly turned out to have very deep roots in the Maya lowlands. The site's wider implications remained obscure, however, in the absence of dates and other inscriptions. The ever-increasing dependence on historical and iconographic information in our narratives, along with the invisibility of its Preclassic buildings and plazas, unfortunately marginalized Becan.

Some colleagues even claimed that we have misinterpreted both the nature of the earthwork (not fortifications) and their dating (not Preclassic). We rehabilitate Becan by dispelling these claims and by showing that standard archaeological evidence, contextualized in what we know today, has much to say about Becan's role in lowland culture history. We identify intervals of crisis when the earthwork remained useful long after it was originally built,



Becan can be interpreted as "The Way of the Serpent" ("Be" means camino or roadway; "Kan" means serpent) because of the ravine that twists in irregular size and shape around the site. Note: This image courtesy of mexicoarchaeology.com was not a part of Ball & Webster's original paper.

especially during the great hegemonic struggles of the Snake and Tikal dynasties, and introduce new ceramic and lithic data about Becan's settlement history and political entanglements. Our most important message is that inscriptions and iconography, for all their dramatic chronological detail and historical agency, must always be complemented by standard fieldwork.

Becan is one of those big Maya centers that lacks

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Jim Reed,
Editor

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Rehabilitating Becan

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by **Joseph W. Ball** of San Diego State University
and **David Webster** of The Pennsylvania State University



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inscriptions, dates, and elaborate iconography. Today such places are frustrating and inconvenient. We call them narrative orphans because they do not neatly dovetail with the historical data, especially from the text-rich, south-central Maya lowlands so central to our current perspectives.

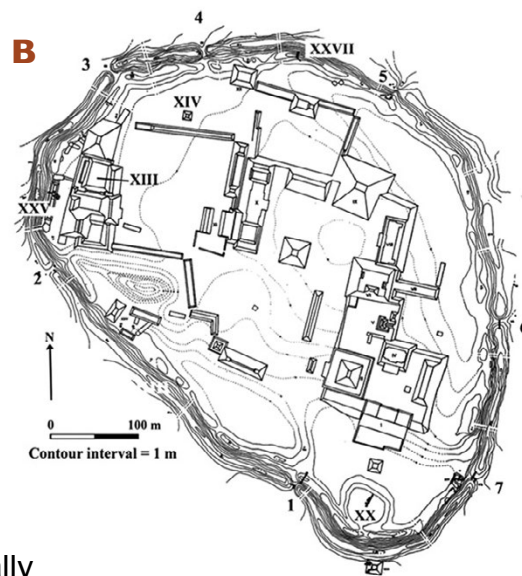
Because Becan's early architectural and other features (the earthwork excepted) remain deeply buried, the site does not figure much in the Preclassic literature either. Archaeologists often accordingly ignore such places, or they become ink-blot tests for unidentified sites referred to in the epigraphic record elsewhere (e.g., maybe it is Site X). Here we show that traditional archaeological data can complement dates, inscriptions, and iconography. As a case study we propose new interpretations of central and southern Maya lowlands political history linked to the Tikal/Kaanu'l hegemonic conflicts.

Fifty years ago research at Becan, Campeche (**Fig. 1**) jumpstarted both our careers as members of the Tulane University/ National Geographic Project.¹ Our 1970 field season elevated Becan to prominence on the Maya landscape, and justifiably so.² Long before Maya archaeologists became heavily reliant on inscriptions (dates apart), it revealed that Becan was an impressive center in a region seemingly devoid of sites



A

Fig. 1: A) Location of Becan in the south-central Maya lowlands. Drawing by Webster. B) Webster's 1970 map of the site. Perimeter numbers show positions of causeways.



B

of comparable scale, and one with a deep occupation going back at least to Late Preclassic times, as documented by Ball's (1973) ceramic sequence (**Table 1**, see next page). Equally revealing was Webster's (1972, 1976) investigation of the great earthwork first detected by Ruppert and Denison in 1943.³

The fiftieth anniversary of our work presents a timely opportunity to dispel some stubborn misconceptions about

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¹ The Tulane/National Geographic effort ran from 1969–1972 under the direction of E. Wyllys Andrews IV, with Richard E.W. Adams as field director. Research extended through 1973 under the continuing direction of Adams, and the aegis of three separate National Geographic and National Science Foundation funded University of Wisconsin and University of Tennessee projects. Principal efforts during that final year included the hillside terracing survey by Turner (1974, 1983) and the settlement survey of Thomas (1981).

² Earlier surveys before World War I by de Périgny (1909), Merwin, and Hay (Merwin 1913) recorded sites in the region, but somehow missed Becan.

³ Ruppert and Denison first mapped the site in 1943. They accurately depicted the architecture, but only schematically sketched in the earthwork. Webster added his contours of the earthwork to the architecture shown on Ruppert's and Denison's map (**Fig. 1**). Mexican archaeologists (Campaña 2005) made the most recent and detailed map in 1999–2000 using a total station, but we have no high-resolution image of it.

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the date and function of the earthwork. More important, we reassess Becan in the context of Ball's (2014) revised ceramic sequence (**Fig. 2**), current data about regional settlement, fortifications, warfare patterns, climate change, and the wider culture history of the central and southern Maya lowlands. We discuss new ceramic data that extends the time depth of Becan's occupation, and some implications drawn from Becan's ceramic sequence and its obsidian assemblage about its wider political and military interactions.

Despite its obvious importance, Becan pretty much fell out of view during the interlude between its discovery and the inception of the Tulane/National Geographic Project. Most archaeologists remembered it, if at all, as the biggest center in a region notable for its distinctive Río Bec architecture and for its impressive, if puzzling, earthwork. Unfortunately, they also remembered Ruppert's and Denison's (1943) misnomer for the site – Becan – a Yucatec Mayan word signifying “*barranca o cañon formada por agua*,” that was anglicized into “moat.”

As we shall see below, this determinative nomenclature, still used today (e.g., Martin 2020:201), has caused decades of confusion.⁴ Morley (1946:319), the most prominent Mayanist of the time, dismissed Becan in his opus *The Ancient Maya* as a third-rank center. One suspects that the lack

⁴ Military engineers call defensive ditches that were never filled with water “dry moats.” but this nicety often escapes the average reader (as we well know), who assumes that moats are water barriers.

Christian Calendar	Major Periods	Tikal (2003)	Uaxactun (1955)	Becan (2014 revision)	Río Bec (2013)	Calakmul (1994)
1500	PROTO HISTORIC					
1400	LATE POSTCLASSIC					
1300						
1200				?		
1100	EARLY POSTCLASSIC	Caban		Xcocom b	?	?
1000				Xcocom a	Xpuhuk ³ / ₂	
900	TERMINAL CLASSIC	Eznab	Tepeu 3	Chintok	¹ / ₁	Halibe
800				gap	² / ₂	
700	LATE CLASSIC	Imix	Tepeu 2	Bejuco	¹ / ₁	
600		Ik	Tepeu 1		Kanlol ² / ₁	Ku
500				Sabucan		
400	EARLY CLASSIC	Manik	Tzakol	Chacsik	Iximche	Kaynikte
300					Guayacan	
200		Cimi				
100	PROTO-CLASSIC	Cauac				
0			Chicanel	Pakluum	Bohom	Takan
100						
200	LATE PRECLASSIC	Chuen				
300						
400		Tzek	Mamon	Acachen		Zinal
500						
600	MIDDLE PRECLASSIC				undefined	
700		Eb		?		
800					?	?

Table 1: Ball's (2014) Becan ceramic sequence juxtaposed with others from the central and southern lowlands, including the Río Bec region.

of carved and dated monuments explains Morley's neglect because earthwork-enclosed Becan is comparable in scale to the main civic precincts of his beloved Copan (**Fig. 2**, see next page).

Before examining some revisionist and recent data about Becan (in the April 2022 *IMS Explorer*), here is what we knew and did not know in 1970:

- (1) We knew almost nothing about Maya fortifications of any date in the central and southern lowlands; the just-discovered Tikal ditch was the only model we had for such features.
- (2) We knew a little about a few small but impressive sites around Becan from explorations prior to World War II, but nothing about wider settlement patterns. Archaeologists

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had even somehow “lost” the famous site of Río Bec B, discovered more than 50 years earlier.

- (3) We had no inscribed monuments from Becan, and had they been found, the non-calendrical glyphs could have been read only in the most minimal sense.
- (4) There were no monuments from anywhere else nearby with readable dates, emblem glyphs, or other texts.
- (5) There was no local or regional ceramic sequence.
- (6) There was only a sparse literature on agricultural intensification; the Río Bec region terracing was first published in 1974 and 1983 by Turner.
- (7) We knew very little about the Preclassic Maya, apart from finds at Tikal and Uaxactun, and almost nothing about the widespread Middle and Late Preclassic

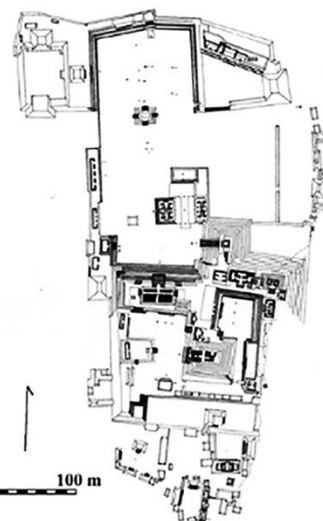
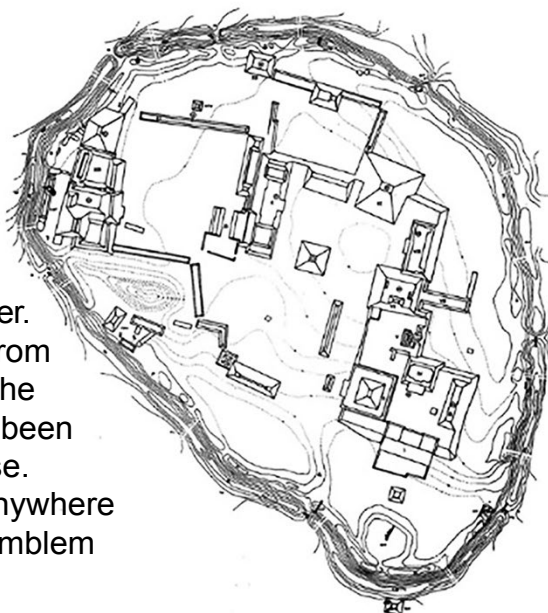


Fig. 2: A) Becan (drawing by Webster), and B) Copan shown to the same scale (image by Hasso Hohmann and used with his permission).

florescence and collapse now so well-documented for the central and southern lowlands.

- (8) Classic Maya warfare was still a controversial issue, and the time depth of warfare of any kind was unknown.

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A personal communication from Joe Ball:

Editor's note: When I reached out to Joe Ball to mention that I would be publishing excerpts and images from Rehabilitating Becan, he responded with this message in early February:

“Dave Webster and I first met as afterwork evening’s hours Hearts card game partners after dinner on the open veranda of the Pension Asturias in Guatemala City, where we were both working on our Master’s degrees as graduate students. Dave at the University of Minnesota and me at Wisconsin – Madison. This was in the summer of 1969, just before the United States landed the first humans on the moon. We became steadfast friends and have remained so for 53 years, something of a rarity in what is often and has often proved to be a more than slightly ‘contentious’ profession! In late August of ‘69, Dr. Richard E.W. Adams of the University of Minnesota and Director of the U.S. Ford Foundation Graduate Fellowships Program in Anthropology recruited both of us to participate as field/lab staff and graduate trainees on the new Middle American Research Institute – Tulane University Río Bec Regional Project at Becan, Campeche, Mexico, under the general directorship of Dr. E. Wyllis ‘Bill’ Andrews IV, also of Tulane University and the MARI. We both readily accepted.

“Dave has always been the ‘brains’ and backbone of the team, (which we both cheerfully acknowledge, and which, Jim, you are completely free to “cite” using me). At my honorary Festschrift Symposium at the SAAs in D.C. in 2018, Dave commented that, ‘I go out and find the stuff and dig it up. Then I pass it along to Joe in his lab, and he tells me when it dates to. Been doing this for nearly fifty years, and everyone’s as happy today as we were back in the early 1970s.’

“I am presently working on what I expect to be a major final type-variety ceramics paper that blends some very much today-needed 1970s-style retrospective discussion of typological systematics, dating, and ‘naming,’ with an intensive examination of one very distinctive and elaborate Eastern Peten-Upper Belize Valley red and orange red on cream polychrome ‘type’ of ceramics known informally for far too long as ‘Cabrito Cream-polychrome.’ Should be ready sometime later this year.”

Su amigo, Joe



Joseph W. Ball

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- (9) We had only the slightest inkling of Teotihuacan's intrusions or influence in the lowlands, and incorrectly believed that Teotihuacan had declined as a great Mesoamerican power as late as 750 CE.
- (10) We knew nothing about the great hegemonic struggles between Tikal and Dzibanche/Calakmul, or that Becán was located in the homeland of the Snake Dynasty.
- (11) There was practically no information about lowland climate change or how it might have affected agrarian adaptations, population dynamics, or conflict.
- (12) We knew little about lowland Maya lithic industries and obsidian exchange, and nothing about these in the central part of the peninsula.

This is an impressive list of ignorance, some, but not all of which has been dispelled by subsequent research.⁵

Anyone reading accounts of the great Early to Late Classic hegemonic struggles that so dominate much of the literature will find that few mention Becán even in perfunctory ways (as Coe did), much less consider in detail its potential political and military significance. In our experience, the answer is none. That a great fortified center on the scale of Copan smack in the center of Snakeland should be an orphan in all these narratives is very strange. If a single monument were found at Becán with a readable sixth- or seventh-century date, a reference to a warfare event, or the name of a warrior-king, the site would suddenly leap to prominence in our discourse.

Our rehabilitation, and especially our case study, show that even without elaborate art, dates, and inscriptions, good excavation strategy and complementary artifact analyses can suggest important cultural-historical models and hypotheses that can be tested in the future, and that ignoring

Becán as a significant agent potentially creates strange gaps and distortions in our historical narratives.

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⁵ For the Río Bec region and southern Campeche in general see the impressive French fieldwork as reported in the Special Section of *Ancient Mesoamerica* 24, 2013, and the publications by Šprajc summarizing the Slovenian surveys listed.

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Ancient Maya Settlement

*Investigating how the ancient Maya disposed themselves
over the landscape*

Dear friends & colleagues,

We would like to announce that we have started a new blog – Ancient Maya Settlement, at: <http://ancientmayasettlement.com>

Ancient Maya Settlement is meant to serve as a forum for short research notes and data-sharing related to ancient Maya settlement, from household archaeology to remote sensing. We really hope that it is seen as a venue for researchers to share information and ideas at a faster and more informal pace than what journal articles allow.

Ancient Maya Settlement is not a “Tulane” blog” nor a “MARI blog”. Moreover, it should not be considered a “lidar blog” and

definitely not a “Marcello blog”! So, if you are keen to share ideas about ancient Maya settlement or the methods we use to study it, or if you have data you would like to share with colleagues, we’d like to publish it.

For the moment, we are happy to provide three inaugural posts to begin this blog. Please feel free to leave comments about the posts; or, via email, you are welcome to write me your thoughts and suggestions. Please also feel free to forward this email to anyone else you might think would be interested.

Please enjoy!

Marcello Canuto
mcanuto@tulane.edu



The new MARI-GISLAB portal goes live

We are proud to be inaugurating our map portal hosted by the MARI-GISLAB and ESRI. Please visit us at:

<https://marigislab.maps.arcgis.com/>

Our first shared map is a collection of outlines of Lidar coverages from 35 different projects from 2009 to 2019 compiled by Marcello Canuto. It shows how fast lidar coverage has progressed in the Maya Lowlands but also how much more there is to be done.

<https://arcg.is/1bCfju>

Its data layers can be downloaded here:

<https://marigislab.maps.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=a325e153eba943fa80ba82cb-bc611615>

A second map application we are sharing is the Holmul Tour map. It is a simple (virtual) way of getting to know what and where the site attractions are, while following the trail from our camp to the plazas.

<https://arcg.is/1inmWG0>

A third map that might be fun and useful is a time-series map app of landsat imagery from 1972, when the first landsat multi-spectral sensor went into space to the present. You can try it at different scales to get different imagery.

<https://arcg.is/1z1DP8>

Francisco Estrada-Belli
festrad1@tulane.edu



March 16 • 8 pm ET • IMS Live Streaming

A Pot for all Seasons: An Introduction to Maya Pottery Studies

with Dr. Michael Callaghan, University of Central Florida

Image: John Tomasic

Access and bookmark this active hyperlink to join the event:

[A Pot for All Seasons with Michael Callaghan](#)

**Pottery is the most abundant artifact
at archaeological sites in the Maya area.**

Through pottery analysis, ceramicists inform research related to chronology, production and exchange, sociopolitical and economic organization, religion and ideology, and everyday practices. In this talk, I'll introduce the fundamentals of Maya pottery studies by presenting terminology used in Maya pottery classification and analysis, and synthesizing recent research on production and exchange.

Dr. Callaghan is Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Central Florida. He specializes in the study of ceramic technology and its relationship to social complexity. Dr. Callaghan's research informs the study of how technology and production contribute to changes in social structure.

His current research elaborates on the articulation of ritual, economy, and politics at the site of Holtun, Guatemala. Holtun is a civic-ceremonial center located in the Peten lakes region of Guatemala occupied from the Middle Preclassic through Late Classic periods.



Ceramic vessels are prominent in this Maya polychrome vase preserved within the Kerr Maya Vase Database on Research.mayavase.com. Justin Kerr's comments on the artifact: "Palace drunken party. Honey is fermenting in the narrow necked ollas. Ruler watches as a dwarf drinks from a gourd." Access it all here: [Kerr K1453](#)

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Pottery studies have been pillars of research programs in the Maya lowlands since the early 20th century. Pottery is arguably the most significant class of artifact available to Mayanists informing research related to chronology, production and exchange, politics, foodways, and religion and ideology. Because of the analytical power of pottery, its study is a critical component of any Mayanist's toolkit. Unfortunately, despite advances in methodology, pedagogy for educating students remains little changed since the early 20th century. Lone specialists, often working on projects with little input in research design, are tasked with educating graduate students for a few weeks in field settings each year. In an effort to balance project goals with mentoring, specialists often rely on students to teach themselves fundamental skills and supplemental methods.

Over decades this pedagogy has resulted in an impoverished number of Maya ceramicists, a dearth of research programs with integrated goals of pottery analysis, a lack of student interest (and often dread!) of pottery studies, and an increased workload for existing ceramicists (I can't even count the amount of projects I've had to turn down!). Currently there are not enough specialists to fulfill the research needs of archaeological projects, prepare existing graduate and undergraduate students for archaeological research, or educate a future generation of pottery specialists in the U.S. and host-countries.

I'm intimately aware of this issue, as I've spent the majority of my career analyzing and teaching Maya pottery. In this article, I'd like to identify and address the challenges of teaching pottery analysis in the Maya area. I'll begin by describing the current state of the field, then I'll offer some reasons why there are so few ceramicists practicing today. Finally, I'll make some suggestions about what we can do to improve the situation.

Fig. 1: Undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Central Florida (UCF) learning to code for ceramic attributes using a mock type-collection, laptops, and cell phones.



So, how bad is it?

In order to assess the effectiveness of our current pedagogy, I consulted a range of open-access academic, professional, and social media resources. The first step was to determine the number of lowland Maya pottery specialists that received PhDs since the advent of processual archaeological archaeology in the early 1960s. Lowland Maya ceramicists were classified through a combination of identifiers including title of PhD dissertation and history of academic work in Maya pottery studies as seen through publications, papers, and projects.

Resources included searches in the Proquest Thesis and Dissertation Database for the Social Sciences, Web of Science, anthropology department websites, cultural resource management websites, third party research websites (i.e., *academia.edu* and *researchgate.org*), social media websites (i.e., Facebook and Linked-in), Society for American Archaeology annual meeting programs, *scholar.google*, and news organizations. After determining the number of Maya pottery specialists who had graduated since the early 1960s, data were created to assess demographic information, the number of active specialists, rank/position of specialists, and access to pottery studies programs in U.S. colleges and universities

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“Where Have All the Ceramicists Gone?” by Dr. Michael Callaghan

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with Mayanists on faculty in social science departments.

The data show that between 1960 and 2020 only 68 scholars received PhD's concentrating on Maya pottery studies (**Table 1**). This total includes scholars who became Maya pottery specialists but focused on pottery from other areas in Mesoamerica in their dissertations, or did not focus on pottery studies in their dissertation, but are now specialists. Only 33 (48%) are still active (i.e., publishing on Maya pottery). This means in the past 68 years conventional education has produced less than one active specialist every two years.

The current number of specialists is less than the number of active archaeological projects in the Maya lowlands of Guatemala and Belize (at least 34 named projects by my count). Many of these projects hold permits for regional investigations that include multiple sites. In addition, most of these specialists are pursuing individual research programs and not working for one of the 34 projects. The data show a lack of Maya pottery specialists as well as an imbalance in rank, gender, and ethnicity of scholars. The majority of scholars do not hold university positions (i.e., “Independent Researchers” or “Research Associates”), or they hold teaching-heavy positions with little opportunity for advancement and where Maya pottery studies are not taught.

These data show a bimodal distribution with scholars in senior positions requiring administrative commitments, and scholars in non-tenure earning positions, leaving few in Assistant or Associate positions able to educate new specialists. There are also unequal distributions of positions according to gender. While women form the majority of pottery specialists, they hold fewer tenure-earning positions as a percent of their gender (28% compared to 39% in men), and have a higher rate of attrition (22% compared to 10% in men). Finally, only 3 of these scholars are Latin American, demonstrating that scholars from home countries are not receiving PhDs.

Status	Total	Women	Men	Researching	Teaching
Deceased	4	2	2	0	0
Unknown	12	9	3	0	0
Researcher	21	13	8	13	0
Instructor/researcher	14	8	6	7	1
Assistant Professor	1	1	0	1	0
Associate Professor	6	3	3	5	1
Professor	10	4	6	7	2
Totals	68	40	28	33	4

Table 1: Table showing status, gender, research, and teaching activity of PhDs with Maya-related ceramic dissertations between 1960 and 2020.



Fig. 2: Undergraduates at the University of Central Florida learning to sort, mark, and classify ceramics using a mock type-collection.

Taken together, these data show the current pedagogy creates few active specialists, leads to high attrition, is unsustainable, and is inequitable in terms of gender and nationality.

Why are we here?

I'd argue the current situation is the result of three things: namely, 1) the nature of pottery analysis, 2) cultural patrimony regulations, and, 3) requirements of academic institutions. To begin, the amount of pottery from Maya excavations is staggering. As a rough estimate, we see at least 10 sherds for every other artifact. This puts pottery analysts at an immediate disadvantage compared to other materials analysts. Next, it takes a long time to learn how to classify and analyze pottery. This is compounded by the fact that projects don't work year round. They are limited by funding and seasonal weather patterns. This means analysts and students only work for a few weeks during the year. If you're a graduate student with limited funding

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“Where Have All the Ceramicists Gone?” by Dr. Michael Callaghan

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(or self-funding!), why the heck would you choose pottery analysis over some other method that could get you finished faster!

The next issue is that while cultural patrimony regulations are an excellent means to stop cultural resources from leaving home countries, they inadvertently inhibit pottery analysis. Because pottery type-collections can't be exported, they can't be studied or used as teaching collections year-round at international institutions. Aside from a few schools that imported collections prior to the UNESCO convention of 1970, teaching Maya pottery analysis with an actual collection of Maya pottery is all but impossible outside of a home country.

Finally, the requirements of academic institutions are not exactly working in our favor. Recently minted PhDs with a specialization in pottery analysis who are trying to break into an academic job have it incredibly rough. If they're fortunate enough to land a tenure-track position, they'll be so busy prepping classes, publishing research, and writing proposals for future research, they'll be lucky to take a bathroom break. Seriously, I sometimes felt like that! Added to this, tenure-earning faculty at many programs are expected to generate large dollars and create projects with opportunities for many students. Maya pottery projects do not fit these criteria. But none of this really matters; because the majority of new PhDs are being channeled into Visiting Assistant, Instructor, or Adjunct positions where they're teaching so many classes they have absolutely no time for training others (much less research or writing!). While some may be fortunate enough to land a postdoctoral position, they will likely be focused on a specific project and have no time to analyze or teach pottery analysis. For all of these reasons, many PhDs that started out as ceramicists eventually move away from pottery studies.

So, what are we supposed to do?

The simple answer is “what we can”. As a ceramicist, it's easy for me to become overwhelmed at the state of things right now. But what I try to do is use the resources I have, act locally, and reach out to others for opportunities to collaborate or engage. The first thing I'm doing is using my university resources. I'm extremely fortunate to be in a department that values pottery analysis as an archaeological method. I've built a wet lab and share multiple dry labs with other faculty where I teach undergraduates and graduates about pottery production, classification, analysis, and interpretation (**Fig. 1**, pg. 8).

Whenever I get the chance, I try to apply for small teaching grants that can help with equipment

Fig. 3: MA candidate, Carrie Tucker, reconstructing a Sierra Red plate from the University of Central Florida's Maya type-collection from Nohmul, Belize.



costs like digital microscopes, petrographic scopes, and pottery making supplies. Outside of my methodological classes, I try to plug pottery whenever I can. Whether I'm teaching General Anthropology, a regional topics course, or advanced graduate classes, I try to share something about pottery and my passion for analysis. One of my longterm goals at UCF is to produce pottery analysts who will work with other projects. Pottery classification and analysis are incredibly valuable transferable skills. Because there are so few analysts out there, an MA or PhD with ceramic skills can be quite valuable to projects or institutions.

I'm also always looking to collaborate – especially with international students and institutions. In order to alleviate current inequities in the demography of pottery analysts, we need to be accepting students from home countries and engaging with local institutions. Not only will this practice help produce more analysts in home countries, but it will help to decolonize Maya archaeology as a discipline.

Lastly, there are some ways we can address the three types of problems I mentioned in the previous section.

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“Where Have All the Ceramicists Gone?” by Dr. Michael Callaghan

continued from page 10

While it's difficult to overcome the quantity of material and how long it takes to learn analysis, we can give students a head start by teaching them basic methods before they arrive in the field. If students are familiar with the principles of classification and attribute studies, and have just a little practice at home, they can hit the ground running when they arrive in the field. They may not know specific Maya pottery types, but they will know how to analyze them (**Fig. 2**, page 9). Building pottery analysis modules into existing courses is a great way to start. Overcoming cultural patrimony regulations that prohibit export of material may seem daunting at first, but there are ways to work with them.

Many home countries have exhausted storage space for artifacts or they may want to cull older material. At this time, it may be possible to negotiate with some archaeological institutions to have specific-type collections cataloged and sent overseas on long term loans. It can't hurt to ask! Additionally, many archaeologists and schools in the U.S. are in the possession of Maya pottery that was imported before the UNESCO convention. We should start coordinating with one another to move those collections around to analysts and institutions that can use them for teaching. This is how UCF got its collection! (**Fig. 3**, pg. 10)

Finally, regarding the requirements of academic jobs, those of us within the university

system need to begin changing the rules when we can. This means creating a culture where lab projects, community engagement, and pedagogy are given the same amount of value as traditional research programs. This will allow pottery analysts the opportunity to expend effort and time on creating teaching programs.

So, where have all the ceramicists gone?

Well, that question is kind of moot. The data show us that ceramicists were never really here! But, our current training program isn't helping. The title of this article is a reference to a famous song by Peter, Paul, and Mary called “Where have all the flowers gone?” It's not a very current reference, but I think it works. Pete Seeger wrote the lyrics and says he was inspired by a Russian folk song about Cossacks going off to join the Czar's army in the 19th century. The song is about how war and suffering are cyclical: girls pick flowers, men pick girls, men go to war and fill graves which get covered with flowers. While no pottery analysts are being killed here, our traditional pedagogy is killing the discipline. In sum, we've got to recognize that we have a problem then start trying to change it for the better. I'm doing my part as best I can, and I thank IMS for giving me the opportunity in this newsletter to inspire others to do the same.

Editor's note: Change those rules, Michael! 🏰



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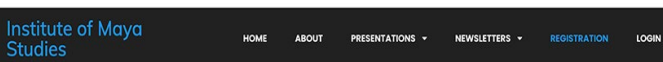
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March 23 • 8 pm ET • IMS Live Streaming

Buried Power, Dzibilchaltun Seven Dolls with Georges Fery

Spring Equinox, 2021

Access and bookmark this active hyperlink to join the event:

[Dzibilchaltun with Georges Fery](#)

Unlike other Precolumbian sites on the Yucatan peninsula such as Chichen Itza, Mayapan, Uxmal, and others, the lesser-known Dzibilchaltun still retains unanswered questions about Structure I-sub and its “dolls.”

E. Wyllys Andrews IV, along with George W. Brainerd had reported the site in 1941, after its discovery by Alfredo Barrera Vásquez. The site was thoroughly mapped, researched, and partially restored over 40 years, thanks to the remarkable work of talented archaeologists and dedicated scholars, among whom was one of IMS’s own, the late Edward Kurjack, who helped the author understand the ancient city’s past.

Teams from the Middle American Research Institute (MARI) and the National Geographic Society, “Tulane University-Dzibilchaltun Field Program,” worked field seasons from 1951 to 1965, when George E. Stuart joined the team together with other talented archaeologists from the Instituto Nacional de Arqueología e Historia (INAH), Mexico. We focus here on the site’s best-known structure, the Temple of the Seven Dolls (Str. I-sub), which attracts visitors from afar, drawn by the temple’s enigmatic name.

Dzibilchaltun is among one of the oldest human settlements on the Yucatan peninsula. Earlier dates of occupation range from the Middle Formative to the Early Formative pre-Nabanché phase. 1,900>250. The settlement was continually occupied, with high and low periods up to the arrival of the Europeans. In 1941, Dzibilchaltun’s only structure still standing was Str. 57; all others had completely collapsed. The northern Maya lowland was densely settled throughout much of its prehistory, witness the large and small sites that dot the countryside. So much so that, as Kurjack wrote, “it is often difficult to decide where



Temple of the Seven Doll. Image: Georges Fery.

one site starts and another stops to fix the boundaries of large sites” (1974). The problem is especially acute at Dzibilchaltun for its urban core is spread over eight square miles with more than 8,000 ruined structures, most of which are house platforms that supported pole-and-thatch dwellings.

During the 1942 survey of Dzibilchaltun, Andrews and Brainerd noticed several bits of intact masonry, underneath a collapsed pyramidal platform. Excavations revealed extensive use and alteration of this edifice, designated Structure I (Str. I) and Structure I-sub (Str. I-sub), built during the Decadent period. Andrews reports that “the time at which Str. I was built over Str. I-sub is not known (1980). Str. I was found to have completely collapsed and was unsalvageable; archaeologists had no option but to remove over 7,000 tons of rubble to uncover Str. I-sub below it.

Str. I-sub is the earliest vaulted building at the site. Its square footprint is built over

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Buried Power, Dzibilchatun Seven Dolls

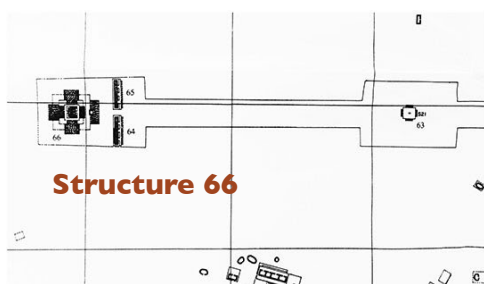
by Georges Fery

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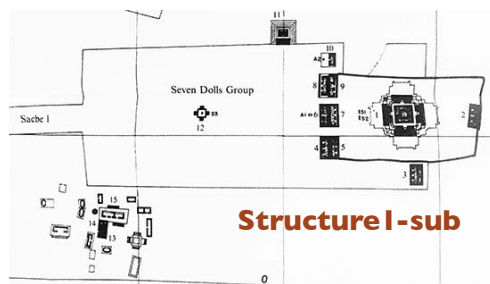
a platform with four stairways. Four wide doorways lead into a continuous vaulted corridor that surrounds a central room covered by a high, four-sided vault that forms a low tower above the roof. Rectangular windows flank the eastern and western doorways, and the upper exterior façades were decorated with elaborate stucco masks. By the Decadent period, Str. I was destroyed beyond possible reuse. Str. I-sub, however, remained intact under it, and late inhabitants of Dzibilchaltun exposed the west façade as far down as the old windows on either side of the doorway and cleared a passageway through the west corridor to the central chamber and out in the east corridor. An altar of uncut and roughly cut stones set in mortar sealed the east doorway to the central chamber. There was found a small hole that was dug twenty-five inches below the altar's floor to a small cache where seven crudely made and poorly-fired clay figurines were buried, identified in Andrews' report as Cache 3. The mouth of the hole, cut in the shape of a funnel, remained open and capped with a small unworked loose flat stone, that was found in place. Archaeologists named Str. I-sub, the "Temple of the Seven Dolls".

Andrews' report notes in the "Content" section of Cache 3 that the "seven very crude, unslipped and poorly fired clay figurines were dropped into the duct," and further, that "six of the figurines look human, the other has an almost animal-like face...all seven appear to have some form of bodily deformity." He also notes that "one individual supports an erect member of truly monumental proportions...no figurines have breasts..." In his "Remarks," Andrews concludes that "the Seven Dolls were probably made specifically to be cached and not to be used as toys. Since some of the dolls show the effects of diseases, the ceremony attending their internment perhaps dealt in part with ritual to ward off human illness" (1980).

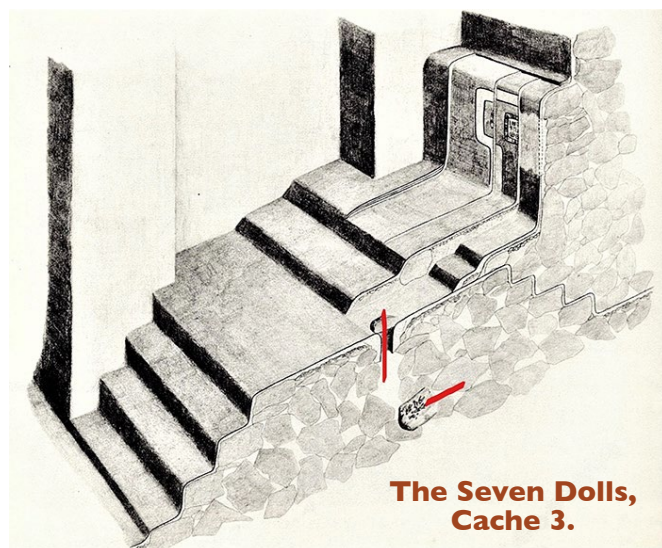
The first part of Andrews' remark is undoubtedly correct, while the second is incomplete at best and begs for an answer as to the reason for such a ritual. The description of the excavation by Andrews merely



Structure 66



Structure I-sub



The Seven Dolls, Cache 3.



The Seven Dolls

underlines the extent of efforts by priest-shamans to secure the "seven dolls" in an inaccessible place within the holiest location of the temple.

Str. I-sub is the easternmost structure of Dzibilchaltun, where the sun rises, while Str. 66, its westernmost counterpart, is where the sun sinks into the underworld.

Sacbe'ob 1 and 2, are built in a straight line between the two structures, and meet at the east and west entrances of the central plaza. Str. 66 is strikingly like the Seven Dolls complex. It has a four-stairway/six-step quadrangular platform known as Str. 63, and an

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Buried Power, Dzibilchatun Seven Dolls

by **Georges Fery**

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eleven-foot-high limestone monolith known as Stela 21. The monument is located 145 feet east of Str. 66's plaza, straddling Sacbe 2, like Stela 3 to the east with Stela 21 straddling Sacbe 1 that was covered with stucco and painted with figures of the Maya pantheon, now lost to time. Andrews refers to the Str. 66 complex as "a mirror image of the Seven Dolls group" (1961). Coggins notes that, from Str. 66 looking toward the Seven Dolls, 1.4 miles away in a straight line to the east, one can see through all four of its aligned doorways and windows to the eastern horizon beyond" (1983). In an agrarian-based economy, a structure like Str. I-sub would function to observe and thereby confirm the cyclical seasonal rising and setting of the sun and the moon, timeclocks of agriculture. Observation of their cycles in their predictable order ritually correlates with Str. I-sub as "sun-fire-male-sunrise" and Str. 66 as "moon-water-female-sunset".

The third, or perhaps central anchor of the ancient city's sacred geography, is cenote Xlakah, and rituals on its shores that were associated with the eastern and western temples. This large sinkhole and its abundant water were still in use recently. The cenote and its deities were perceived to complement and balance each temple's predominance, respectively that of the sun and the moon. Xlakah was Cháak's home (Shellhas God B), the powerful god of storms, lightning, and the life-giving rain, located at the very heart of Dzibilchaltun. For the Maya, the moon was the wife of the sun, and in the Yucatan, the moon goddess ruled the water world, as noted in the "Ritual of the Bacabs" where she is referred to as "she in the middle of the cenote" (Thompson, 1970, Milbrath, 1999).

Myths and ancestor worship in ancient Maya societies permeated all aspects of their lives from individual and family activities to communal interactions. Deified lords were no exception, for their actions and policies were likewise subject to supernatural forces, especially those personified by ancestral deities and spirits. Maya society was defined by a complex cosmological system, as it still is today in traditional communities. For centuries, benevolent deities were

the heartbeat of this great city and helped people cope with environmental stresses such as drought, locusts, hurricanes, and



You're allowed to swim in Cenote Xlakah. Image: Georges Fery.

other natural events associated with malevolent deities. We will undertake to answer the "riddle of the dolls" for, we know about the ancient city's "when" and "how" but are short on the purpose of the figurines that were buried below Str. I-sub altar's floor. What drove people to dig through Str. I, at great efforts in manpower, to reach Str. I-sub below and bury the seven clay figurines? And for what purpose were they planted? Andrews' remarks may have some bearing on understanding Cache 3's content, but his analysis comes short on the significance of the doll's burial... the "why."

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Opinion:

¿La Guerra de Qué?

by Zach Lindsey

In the mid-1800s, a group of Maya in present-day Quintana Roo got fed up with the poor treatment by the Mexican federal government and rose up to start an army, one that almost split the young Mexico into pieces. You might already know about it. You might even know that it was a complicated affair – federalists and anti-federalists working together; people who believed in ethnic cleansing and theocracy side-by-side with people who just wanted living wages; overzealous Mexican soldiers massacring families; U.S. mercenaries; guns falling to pieces in the humid jungle; the infamous stalled Merida attack; autonomous cities, semi-autonomous cities, federal cities and cities that seemed to switch allegiance daily.

But what is it called?

It's typically known as the Guerra de Castas, or the Caste War, but it sometimes goes by other names, such as Guerra Social Maya. Some indigenous folks, such as the Tihosuco-born David Chan and Nestor Cituk Tuz or Merida-based historian Jose Koyoc Ku, say it's time to retire the name Caste War.

The idea of a name change isn't a new one; in 2008 and 2009, Carlos Chablé Mendoza, co-founder of the Academia de la Lengua y Cultura Maya, suggested the term *Levantamiento Maya* (Maya Uprising) and called the Caste War a poor name imposed by the government after-the-fact, according to his book *X Báalam Naj 500 Años Después*.

Luis Barjau wrote about it in 2016 for UNAM's *Investigaciones Jurídicas*. But in 2021, Koyoc Ku brought the debate to the general public with his article for the mainstream anthropology magazine *Relatos e Historias en Mexico*.

You can find Koyoc Ku and others in favor of the name change arguing about this theme with their neighbors on social media, so the change is by no means universally beloved by the Maya community. But I think their argument has a point that is worth respecting, even if you disagree.

The caste system codified by the Spanish colonial government was a form of proto-racism,



Maya leaders commemorated in the Caste War museum in Tihosuco. Submitted by Zach Lindsey.

but it was not racism. It was different from the way we think of race today in important ways, especially its complex staircase-like hierarchy from indigenous American or African to European, with every possible combination of parentage from these three groups occupying a step.

After the breakdown of colonialism, the nascent Mexican government tried to eliminate the complexity of the caste system, and the Constitution of 1824 codified Mexico's distaste for the colonial institution, according to Federico Navarrete in the *Revista de la Universidad de México*. Years later, José Vasconcelos called Mexicans a fifth race, implying *mestizaje* had united all Mexicans. In practice, lighter-skinned people with connections to European wealth continued to maintain the bulk of political power, but the caste system itself was dismantled before the beginning of the war in 1847.

I've noticed a tendency for those who only have a passing familiarity with Mexican history, including some Mexicans, to think that the Caste War was between the Spanish and the Maya, and I think that's partly because of the name. The official narrative positions the war as a battle against the last vestiges of colonial oppression. But

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“La Guerra de Que?”

by **Zach Lindsey** *continued from page 15*

indigenous scholars like Chablé Mendoza and Koyoc Ku argue that it was the start of a different style of occupation that is still occurring. This is the disruption of Maya society and lifestyle so outsiders, including other non-Maya Mexicans, can benefit from local Yucatecan resources while the locals do not.

In this sense, it was not a war between castes for a few reasons: 1) More than 20 years before the war, the Mexican government began moving to eliminate the caste system as racist ideas became the norm 2) Even if the loose ramework of the caste system still existed, the Maya themselves didn't see themselves as sitting on the lowest step of a hierarchical system and 3) There were Maya on both sides, as some ethnic Maya folks, especially in Campeche and northwestern Yucatan, owned land and benefited from the current political climate.

In that sense, the war was more about ethnoracial category and class than caste. But besides being an imprecise descriptor, it's a term an increasing number of indigenous voices are moving away from. That's probably a good enough reason to consider a new name.



Recently constructed, this chapel building enshrouds the Maya's "Talking Cross". It is situated directly above the cenote where the cross originated.

Courtesy of: bicycleucatan.wordpress.com

And, after all, it couldn't be a war between castes since the federal government had already gotten rid of the caste system. The war was a complex manifestation of a number of social and political ills of the time, but at its heart, it was an attempt by Maya people to ensure the survival of Maya society in the face of what they perceived as a draconian central government. In that sense, the Maya Social War is more accurate than Caste War. 🏰

Unbundling the Past: Events in Ancient and Contemporary Maya History for March

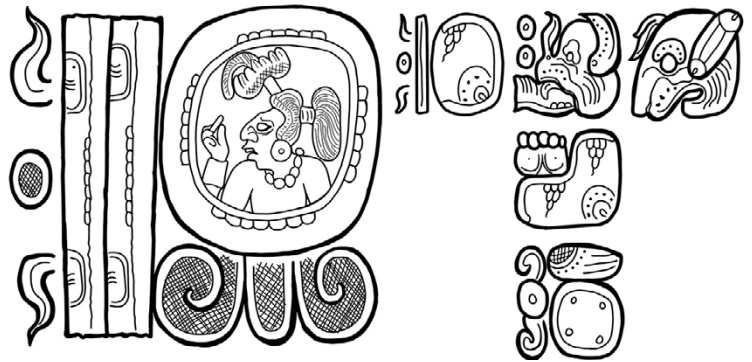
by **Zach Lindsey**

24 March 603 CE: On 9.8.9.13.0 8 Ajaw 13 Pop G8, K'inich Janaab' Pakal was born. Even in contemporary times, archaeologist Alberto Ruz Lhuillier confused the birthday of Pakal the Great with his name. While all kings certainly do bad things, Pakal's legacy in retrospect seems like one of the greatest in world history: His reign was long and stable, and he oversaw a renaissance of architectural, artistic, and religious accomplishments which wow tourists even today.

31 March 773 CE: On 9.17.2.3.19 6 Kawak 2 Sots' G7, a young man received a cup as a gift. The cup is today archived in the Kerr Gallery as K508. It's a beautiful piece, with one of my



favorite Ajaw signs, and I hope its owner was proud, even if the fellow in the portrait does look a bit goofy.



Glyphs on "the cup of the youth". Artwork by Zach Lindsey.

It's nicknamed "the cup of the youth," (above) and it does, in fact, talk about a *ch'ok* – literally "sprout," but used metaphorically as "young person." That he chose to identify not by his name, not by any titles of nobility, but simply as "the youth" may reflect broader cultural changes going on during the passage from the Early to the Late Classic periods. According to Steven Houston, early Classic literature and iconography focused on ancestors and the elderly, but by the Late Classic, it was all *ch'ok* culture – young people and heirs were the focus of texts and art. 🏰

An Artistic Eye for the Maya with artist Steve Radzi

Dzibanche is an important archaeological zone located north of the ruins of Kohunlich. It has been tentatively established that this was the original location of the mighty Kaan Kingdom of Calakmul. The site dates from the Late Pre Classic (300 BCE–250 CE) through the Late Post Classic (1100–1450 CE). Dzibanche/Calakmul and Tikal were the two great “Superpowers” of their day. They were in constant rivalry with each other resulting in numerous victories and defeats between themselves and their respective allies. A ruler known as Yuhkno’m Uht Chan, aka Sky Witness; reigned c.561–572. It was during his reign in 562 CE that Tikal was thoroughly defeated resulting in its 150-year-long hiatus. His elaborately furnished tomb is located within the Temple of the Cormorants (as illustrated above).



Steve Radzi has been illustrating Maya sites for many years. In 1995, his original black & white illustrations were exhibited at the IMS Conference at the Miami Museum of Science. In recent times, Steve has colored them, bringing them to life. These illustrations have not been published before. We shall feature his work in this and upcoming issues. Enjoy. You may visit Steve’s site for more of his work. www.mayavision.com



Volume II of the Sylvanus Morley Diary Project is now available on Mesoweb

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD DIARIES OF
SYLVANUS GRISWOLD MORLEY:
THE SPY YEARS, 1917–1918

The Morley Diary Project, Volume II

Edited, annotated, and with introductions by

Christopher Ward
Prudence M. Rice

Illustration assistance by

Don S. Rice

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“The Spy Years, 1917–1918”

Edited by Christopher Ward
and Prudence M. Rice

Excerpt from Chapter 29: **Tabi**

Leaving Chichen Itza on March 17, Morley and his companions stayed overnight in Dzitas before taking the train the next day to Ticul, the beginning of their exploration of the Puuc hill country. The Puuc Hills, also known as the Sierrita de Ticul, is a wedge-shaped range of low, karstic hills in the southern part of the otherwise flat peninsular states of Yucatan and Campeche. The first stop was the Loltun cave, where they



Fig. 29.3: The uniquely shaped Tabi Stela I. Photo by Geiser Martín Medina, sourced from Pinterest.

found countless artifacts strewn about the floor: “pottery, beads, potsherds, fragments of idols, charcoal, pieces of bone, bone needles and borers, malacates or spindle whorls, broken grindstones...” (Gann 1924: 234). Exploration of the cave lasted until late afternoon, when they left for the hacienda of Tabi, where they stayed overnight. Previously a sugar plantation, by the time of Morley’s visit the refining operation was in ruins and the estate was now exclusively devoted to cattle ranching. In the hacienda courtyard stood a curious stela (Tabi Stela I; Fig. 29.3, above) in the form of a true arch, with two hunters carrying a deer (Voss and Kremer 1998). Partly because of the arch, Morley and Gann speculated that the monument dated post-conquest. At the time of the visit, the stela was garishly painted – as is shown in the photograph Gann included in his book – which probably further confused its dating. Indeed, the archaeologists were so confounded by this monument that they speculated the inscription was evidence that the Puuc Maya were using hieroglyphs in the decades after the conquest. It is now understood that Tabi Stela I dates from the Postclassic.

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