

SOCIAL IDENTITY ACROSS LANDSCAPES: ANCIENT LIVES AND MODERN  
HERITAGE IN A Q'EQCHI' MAYA VILLAGE

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Maya Mountains region of southern Belize is crucial for examining social identity among ancient Maya settlements during the Classic period (AD 250-900) because of its cultural and geographic marginality. It is often the spaces and regions in-between perceived centers of power and influence that produce dynamic expressions of identity through their diverse social relationships. The first goal of the Aguacate Community Archaeology Project (ACAP) was to illuminate the ancient economic and social relationships between political centers and hinterland settlements in the Maya Mountains region and investigate the construction of a regional social identity during the Classic period. The second goal was to conduct a community-based archaeology project in which local Maya people were considered not only stakeholders in the creation of archaeological knowledge, but collaborators in the implementation of the research. Excavations were conducted at Kaq'ru' Ha', a residential and administrative site located on Aguacate land. In addition, excavations were conducted at Sites 9 and 10, two small residential sites also on Aguacate land. This dissertation includes my analysis of architecture, ceramic and lithic artifacts, and mortuary patterns in order to argue that Kaq'ru' Ha' was constructed during the Early Classic period (AD 250-600) and was most closely affiliated with Uxbenká and, later, the Lubaantun social and economic spheres. These data show that rural sites were participating in a region-wide social identity, while maintaining a strong connection to a local landscape. Also, I present the results of the community archaeology efforts – a heritage center and site conservation initiative. As such, Kaq'ru' Ha' is the fulcrum for a discussion of the creation and consumption of archaeological knowledge in southern Belize.

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## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO SOUTHERN BELIZE AND AGUACATE VILLAGE**

### **1.1 Introduction**

One of the first roads in the Toledo district of southern Belize was cut by the 1930 British Museum archaeological expedition to transport several carved stelae 50km from the ancient Maya site of Pusilhá to the coastal town of Punta Gorda, where the monuments were then shipped to England (Morley 1938: Vol. IV:15; cited in Wanyerka 2009). Though this is a footnote in the history of archaeology in the region, it is emblematic of the historical dynamic between the state, archaeologists, and local people. Until recently local Q'eqchi'<sup>1</sup> and Mopan Maya people were considered neither stakeholders in archaeological research nor consumers of archaeological knowledge; research was conducted primarily by British and American academics for a foreign audience. These initial projects conducted research at ancient Maya political centers – Lubaantun, Pusilhá, Nim Li Punit, and Uxbenká – in order to ascertain how the region was connected to other Maya sites such as Tikal and Copán (see Figure 1.1). Though foundational insights were made as to the chronology of occupation and idiosyncratic nature of the hieroglyphic inscriptions, little information was recovered about rural settlements.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the orthography endorsed by expert linguists through the Academy of Maya Languages of Guatemala (ALMG).



Figure 1.1 Map of Maya region showing sites mentioned in the text.

Spaces and regions in-between perceived centers of power and influence produce dynamic expressions of identity through their diverse social relationships. The Maya Mountains region is important for examining social identity among ancient Maya settlements during the Classic period because it includes various analytical scales: political centers with ties to other regions, settlement groups, and rural households. These locales contain information about how the region was integrated socially and economically. To that end, the first goal of the Aguacate

Community Archaeology Project (ACAP) was to illuminate the ancient economic and social relationships between political centers and hinterland settlements in the Maya Mountains region and to investigate the construction of a regional social identity during the Classic period.

Excavations were conducted at a complex multi-component site called Kaq'ru' Ha', located on Aguacate community land (Figure 1.2). A second goal was to conduct a community-based archaeology project in which local Maya people were considered not only stakeholders in the creation of archaeological knowledge, but collaborators in the implementation of the research.

By focusing on the “triadic relationship” (McAnany 2014:173) among archaeologists, contemporary communities, and the remains of past communities, this dissertation seeks to mitigate power inequalities exemplified by the exportation of Pusilhá monuments to Great Britain. In order to accomplish this goal, research was undertaken at the rural ancient Maya site of Kaq'ru' Ha', located on Aguacate community land in the western Toledo district (Figure 1.2).

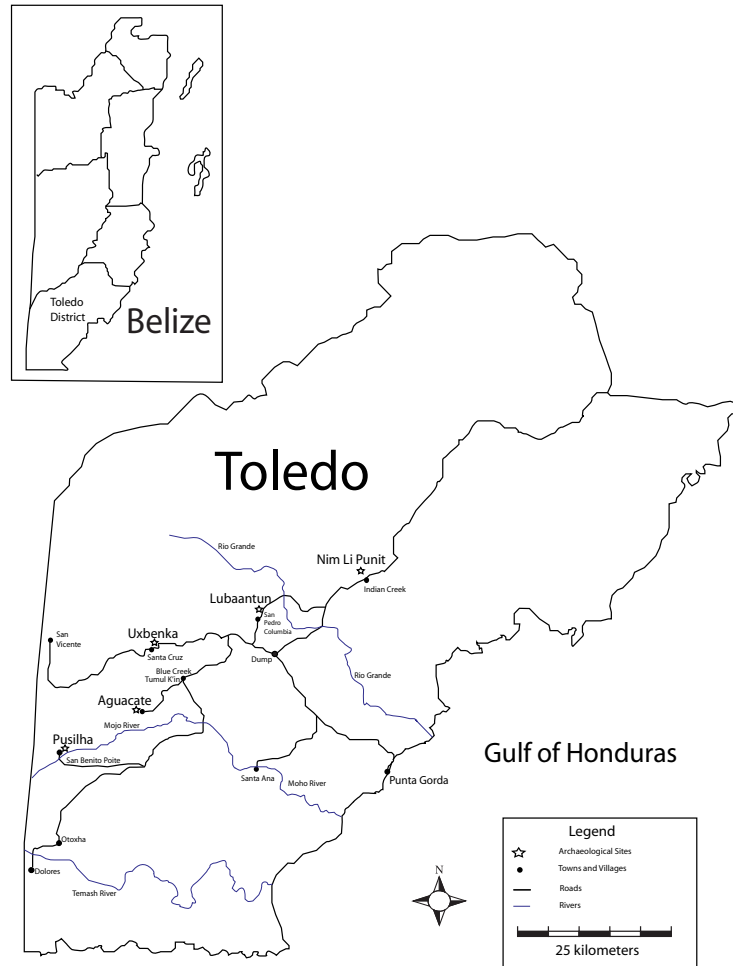


Figure 1.2 Map of Belize and the Toledo district, showing archaeological sites and modern towns and villages mentioned in the text.

## 1.2 Contextualizing Kaq’ru’ Ha’

Kaq’ru’ Ha’ is located on Aguacate community land in the foothills of the resource-rich Maya Mountains. The land was inhabited for millennia by Maya people who inscribed their histories and identities on the landscape in the form of settlements, stone buildings, and burials. Today, the Q’eqchi’ community of Aguacate village is marginalized socioeconomically and culturally in relation to the nation-state of Belize. Centuries of colonialism, nation-building, and a lack of educational resources about the ancient past have created a significant degree of what Patricia McAnany and Shoshaunna Parks call heritage distancing – “the alienation of

contemporary inhabitants of a landscape from the tangible remains or intangible practices of the past” (2012:80). The result is a landscape replete with archaeological remains – from city-states to humble settlements – that modern villagers encounter and appreciate on a daily basis but of which they have limited access to archaeological knowledge.

Consequently, the Aguacate Community Archaeology Project as a whole seeks to answer questions about the social identities of the ancient Maya people who lived at the site of Kaq’ru’ Ha’, while including the local community in the research process. Thus, the research presented here is an archaeological study of Maya household social identity in an under-studied region of Belize that contributes a hinterland perspective towards a holistic understanding of ancient Maya society. This study refrains from separating archaeological interpretation from the social experience of archaeological knowledge production; instead, it shows that archaeological interpretation can create new knowledge while serving the interests of local communities. The southern Belize region is ideal for investigating issues of rural social identity among the ancient Maya while involving local Maya communities in the research process because there are communities of Q’eqchi’ and Mopan Maya people and little research has been conducted on ancient rural households in this region.

Most recent studies of the region focus on the epigraphic and political histories of larger political centers, primarily Pusilhá (Braswell et al. 2014), Uxbenká (Prufer et al. 2011), Nim Li Punit (Fauvelle et al. 2012), and Lubaantun (Hammond 1975a). These studies have been crucial to understanding the chronology of occupation of the region, inter-regional interactions among political centers, and extra-regional trade connections. Absent from the epigraphic history is the role of communities and households, many of which are located on rural hilltops. This study uses data collected from households located in rural area 10km from Pusilhá and 10km Uxbenká to

address questions about access to resources and power inequalities during the Classic period (AD 250-900). The overarching questions of this study are: When were hinterland sites on Aguacate land established and for how long were they inhabited? Were there shifts in social or economic connections over time? How did the burgeoning of Late Classic political centers affect the lived experience of hinterland communities? How would access to the abundant resources of the region be affected by the centralization of power in cities?

Ultimately, this study adds to regional questions as to whether political centers were independent or united politically and economically by providing data on the degree of influence certain centers had on rural settlements. For the purposes of the 2012 and 2013 seasons, ACAP had the following three archaeological objectives:

- Analyze the spatial patterning of ancient settlements on Aguacate community land;
- Establish a preliminary chronology for the study area, and
- Expand current understanding of economic and social dynamics in the southern Belize region.

In order to address these objectives, a research program was undertaken consisting of 1) archaeological reconnaissance, 2) topographic mapping, 3) salvage and targeted stratigraphic excavations, and 4) laboratory analysis of ceramic and lithic artifacts, as well as human skeletal remains.

A second goal of this study is to expand the participation of local Maya people in archaeological practice. For at least the last decade, researchers in the Maya area have been exploring ways to involve descendent Maya communities in archaeological research (e.g. Ardren 2002, 2004; Breglia 2006; Davis-Salazar et al. 2007; Magnoni et al. 2007; McAnany and Parks 2011; Parks 2009; Parks et al. 2006; Yaeger and Borgstede 2004). Indeed, community and

indigenous archaeologies have gained traction worldwide (Atalay 2006; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008; Marshall 2002; Moser et al. 2002; Nicholas 2010; Smith and Wobst 2005). These scholars seek to transform a discipline that has constrained access to knowledge production and dissemination to such a degree that descendent communities have become alienated from their past (Atalay et al. 2014:9). This distancing often contributes to larger processes of disenfranchisement of descendent communities, socially as well as economically (McAnany 2014). With a critical eye towards these social issues, this dissertation was designed as a multi-vocal, community-based project in order to create a dialogue about archaeological research with the Q'eqchi' community of Aguacate.

### **1.3 Characterizing the Toledo district: Climate, Environment, and Politics**

Southern Belize is classified as a wet tropical climate with an average annual temperature of 24 degrees Celsius (Wilk 1997:76). The wet season ranges from June until December, and the dry season January through May. Annual rainfall in Toledo is the highest in the country, between 3,000-3,800 millimeters, though the rain can vary in strength and duration over short distances in the district (Wilk 1997:77). May is a variable month for heavy rainfall, but the heavy rains start sometime in June, and come once per day and sometimes at night. Rainfall and flooding are important for subsistence farming patterns and may affect planting schedules and harvesting. There are generally two agricultural seasons in Toledo, with harvest times in March and October.

Toledo is divided into upland limestone hills and coastal, swampy lowlands. The rugged inland area of the foothills of the Maya Mountains were created by Jurassic limestone covered with softer Eocene sediments called the Toledo beds (Romney 1959). Over time the limestone bedrock has formed and eroded into the foothills of the Maya Mountains and into anomalous jagged hills on the coastal plain. Four major rivers cross the coastal plain – the Rio Grande,

Moho, Temash, and Sarstoon – and flow into the Bay of Honduras. Seasonal flooding and swampy terrain has restricted settlement along the coastal plain, though several communities exist along the coast: Punta Negra, Punta Gorda, and Barranco. The Q’eqchi’ and Mopan Maya villages are located primarily in the uplands, as were the ancient political centers (Uxbenká, Pusilhá, Lubaantun, and Nim Li Punit). The natural vegetation is a highly diverse rainforest, though human interference over thousands of years has shaped the types of species present today. Tree species such as *ceiba* (*Ceiba pentandra*), the cohune palm (*Orbignya cohune*), and *quamwood* (*Schizolobium parahybrum*) dominate in well-drained areas with fertile soil. In less fertile or swampy areas the vegetation includes marshland grasses or pine savannahs.

Aguacate village is located in the upland area, on a patch of Toledo bed soils that are seasonally flooded by Aguacate Creek, a tributary of the Moho River. Slash and burn maize agriculture is the primary subsistence practice in the village, which is common among other Toledo Maya villages. Some villagers grow cash crops, such as cacao or rice, or keep livestock, such as pigs or cattle, to sell in the market town of Punta Gorda.

Over 72% of the Toledo population self-identifies as indigenous Q’eqchi’ or Mopan Maya (SIB 2013). Further, most economic ventures in Toledo focused (and continue to focus) on exports of resources such as logwood, mahogany, sugar, bananas, citrus, and oil. Valuable on international markets, the cultivation and export of these resources is controlled by the state or international corporations, with no long-term investment in the region resulting in the marginalization of rural Maya people. The common perception of Toledo as “poor and backward” (Wilk 1997:66) has historical antecedents and results in underdevelopment and deficient maintenance of roads, schools, and communication systems (Wilk 1997:66).



Maya populations have been confined to the edge of the national economic system by boom and bust cycles of investment during the colonial era that extended through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to the present day (Wilk 1997:xxvi). Logging operations would run for several years and then become bankrupt, leaving local Maya laborers with no wage-earning jobs but with tax obligations for living on Crown lands. For example, Bernard Cramer, a German colonist, bought logging concessions from a failed business venture (Young, Toledo, and Co.) in the 1890s and established the largest agricultural enterprise in southern Belize, producing coffee, rubber, cocoa and bananas (Wainwright 2008:4). When the Cramer enterprise became bankrupt around 1914, the land reverted to Crown control, leaving no investment or local capital accumulation. The Toledo economy was characterized by investment, extraction, and then decades of neglect and recession (Wainwright 2008:45; Wilk 1997:xxvi). The response of Maya people living in Toledo was to avoid taxes, move frequently, live far from state institutions, and try to secure land titles by leasing, which not many people were able to afford (Wainwright 2008:59). Cooperation between the colonial government, the Catholic Church, and plantation owners to settle Maya people in an effort to control their labor and their souls resulted in a reservation system.

A reservation system created in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century left land farmed by Maya people at risk of usurpation by the government. In 1995 logging concessions were sold to a Malaysian-financed corporation called Atlantic Industries, Ltd., who ignored a forestry management plan that called for government oversight and community involvement in managing the Columbia River Forest Reserve. The company began harvesting timber and clearing land for a sawmill without government clearance or consultation of local communities (Wainwright 2008:177). The encroachment of foreign companies on Maya lands led the Toledo villages to bring a lawsuit

against the government of Belize, the purpose of which was to compel the government to recognize their aboriginal rights to customary land tenure and occupancy in southern Belize (Wainwright 2008:197). Though the villages won two cases in international court but have yet to see substantial shifts in how the government cedes rights to the land and its resources (Campbell and Anaya 2008).

The recognition of customary land rights has important implications for indigenous rights to archaeological resources (Parks 2011:118). Customary land tenure is defined as “collective and individual rights to the lands and resources” (Campbell and Anaya 2008) that Maya villages have traditionally used in southern Belize. The court decision for customary land tenure is based on ancestral connections to the pre-Hispanic past. Expert testimony provided by Richard Wilk, Joel D. Wainwright, Grant D. Jones, and Elizabeth M. Grandia marshaled ethnographic, geographic, and archaeological research that connected contemporary Maya people to sustained land use and occupancy in southern Belize for thousands of years (Jones 1997; Grandia 2006, 2012; Wainwright 2008; Wilk 1997).

The ancient Maya populations of the region likely spoke Chol’an (Houston et al. 2000), an ancestral Maya language from which others are derived. Though the ancient group may not have been the same linguistically, Parks (2011:119) claims, “many Maya people and their advocates feel that present national borders and geographic boundaries of linguistic communities falsely represent Maya peoples who, in the past, would have moved freely across a shared landscape.” Connections to an ancestral past shape contemporary identities and articulate with claims to self-determination and land rights.

According to the Ancient Monuments and Antiquities Act (2000) legislated by the government of Belize, all antiquities and ancient monuments are the property of the government,

including those found on private property. Even though Toledo Maya land rights are acknowledged, any “ownership” or management of archaeological materials continues to fall under the purview of the government. However, the 2007 and 2010 rulings by Judge Conteh also inform the relationship between heritage and the human rights of indigenous peoples. According to International Labor Organization (ILO)’s Convention No. 169, Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, “the social, cultural, religious and spiritual values and practices of these peoples shall be recognized and protected.” Unfortunately, Belize has not ratified this document, and therefore it is not legally binding. The successful 2007 court case cited it extensively, providing a logical basis for working towards the inclusion of Maya voices in management of archaeological resources.

Though there is no legal requirement in Belize to consult indigenous people, the archaeological community increasingly acknowledges an ethical responsibility to involve multiple stakeholders, including local and indigenous people (McAnany 2014; Parks 2009, 2010; Parks et al. 2006; Pyburn 2003; 2009). Following community archaeology from across the globe, this dissertation provides one pathway for the engagement of local, indigenous people in the Maya region. By approaching archaeological questions with consideration of the historical and social context of the Toledo district, this dissertation shows that community engagement can be integrated into archaeological research design. Methods for community archaeology include listening actively to community concerns at meetings, respecting the local authority and consulting with village leaders, compromising when necessary, incorporate others’ ideas, and maintain transparency with research goals and practices.

## **1.4 Introducing Aguacate village**

Aguacate is a Q'eqchi' Maya-speaking community located at the end of an unpaved road on the western edge of the Toledo district (see Figure 1.2). Richard Wilk (1997) and Joel Wainwright's (2008) work in the Belizean national archives reveals that the village was established during the 1880s. An indigenous mapping project in the late 1990s conducted with the University of California, Berkeley and led by geographer Bernard Nietschmann, provided a map, demographic information, and descriptions of the village from the perspective of the villagers themselves (Figure 1.3). One man from each village was trained in basic cartographic and community research methods and sent back to his village conduct surveys and produce maps (Wainwright 2008:242). The goal was to decolonize space in southern Belize in order to claim the region for indigenous people. The result was the Maya Atlas, a compilation of maps, oral statements, photos, and drawings compiled by Maya leaders (TMCC 1997). Figure 1.3 shows the map made by Domingo Cal and published in the Maya Atlas.



Figure 1.3 Map of Aguacate village for the Maya Atlas by Domingo Cal (TMCC:53).

According the Maya Atlas, the population of Aguacate was 296 in 1997. Today there are about 400 people in the village, 65 families, and 118 students in the primary school (Louis Cucul, personal communication 2014). Domingo Cal worked on the Maya Atlas project and provided hospitality when I stayed in Aguacate. He wrote this description of Aguacate for the Atlas:

“This is mostly a Ke’kchi village, the oldest and most traditional in Toledo. People from this village have been instrumental in beginning other villages in the Toledo District. They are very progressive. Many have completed high school and one has gone to university; they have a village phone, a health center, and a few churches.

About one hundred years ago, the village was called Moho River Aguacate. Most people came from Guatemala and a few came from Pueblo Viejo to be the first settlers of Aguacate village. During those days the indigenous people in Guatemala were slaves; many escaped and returned to Toledo seeking survival.

In the old days, people traveled in dorys [sic] on the Aguacate River and the Moho River. It took them a week of paddling to go from Aguacate to Punta Gorda town. Then in the late seventies the road was built, and after that the community center, the health post, and a concrete Catholic church. The village of Aguacate is progressing and improving and the people are friendly” (TMCC:52)

According to the information collected by the mapping project, the “family work” was 50% raising animals such as chickens, pigs, and cattle, 15% farming and hunting, and 20% fishing. Today livelihoods include subsistence farming, cash crops such as cacao, cattle, and day labor in construction or other impermanent jobs in Punta Gorda, Placencia, or other larger villages. For example, during the summer of 2014 the church roof in San Antonio village was being replaced and several men from Aguacate biked there daily to work (a distance of about 15 miles one way; bus service from Aguacate stopped in 2013). When Dr. Patricia McAnany and I approached village leaders in 2011 concerning a community archaeology project, economic opportunities were prioritized. While providing jobs for local men was a large part of our negotiations, the dialogue also included long-term management of archaeological resources (see Appendix A).

The nexus of the dialogue is the site of Kaq’ru’ Ha’, located half a mile outside of Aguacate village, along a trail traversed daily by local farmers. Against a dramatic cliff face overlooking Aguacate Creek, the ancient Maya constructed three wide platform terraces to support eight structures, both residential and administrative. Ceramic chronology suggests that

Kaq'ru' Ha' was used as a gathering place since at least the Early Classic period (AD 250-600), while at least one structure (Structure A) was episodically remodeled throughout the Late Classic period (AD 600-900) and eventually included the burial of seven individuals. Obsidian from the Guatemala highlands, abundant local chert, as well as worked jadeite and serpentine from the Motagua Valley in Guatemala, indicate that site residents were integrated into local and regional economies. A shallow rockshelter was a site of ritual deposition containing curated polychrome ceramic vessels and at least two distinct burials.

In this dissertation I analyze the landscape, architecture, ceramic and lithic artifacts, and mortuary pattern at Kaq'ru' Ha'. Research shows that Kaq'ru' Ha' was constructed during the Early Classic period, and based on ceramic data, was most closely affiliated with the Uxbenká and Lubaantun social and economic spheres. I argue that as political centers expanded during the Late Classic period residents reinforced their claim to the land by increasing the intensity of their mortuary program, which was focused on an ancestor shrine on the western side of the site (Structure A). These data show us that rural sites were participating in a region-wide social identity, while maintaining a strong connection to a local place. The practices and interactions between people living at these sites created fields of action in which a regional identity was generated and sustained.

Secondly, I propose that descendent community priorities and goals can be incorporated into archaeology research design without sacrificing scientific rigor. Activities designed to engage Aguacate villagers in the research process created a community of practice (see Chapter 2) with the common goals of understanding local history, providing economic opportunities, and conserving heritage. The resultant model of community archaeology contributes to a larger dialogue within the discipline about public involvement in research.

## 1.5 Organization of the Dissertation

In Chapter 2 I construct a conceptual framework that draws on theories of practice. A practice theory perspective emphasizes how social structures shape behavior while being reproduced and transformed by members of a society (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984). Practices are “what people do” (Ortner 2001); they leave material residues that can be used to interpret social and political integration and social identity. I use the concept of “fields of action”, defined as “the locus of specified and relational power and agency” (Robb 2010:500), as a conceptual framing. There are two fields of action in this study: the Maya Mountains region of ancient times and the contemporary discipline of archaeology. Conceiving of fields of action places the interpretive emphasis on relationships and interactions between people – engagements whose outcomes are reflected archaeologically.

These interactions are captured at the analytical level of rural households. I review scholarship on household archaeology in Mesoamerica to situate my own interpretations of Kaq’ru’ Ha’ as a residential group. Furthermore, I find the concept of dwelling (Ingold 2000) germane to relational interpretations of archaeological materials. Dwelling synthesizes different scalar registers – landscape, site, structure, artifact – and allows one to consider how they are related across space and time. I discuss how dwelling on a particular landscape unites ancestral Maya populations and contemporary villagers; the site of Kaq’ru’ Ha’ was a nexus of meaning for ancient people and is a focus of heritage for contemporary villagers. Practice theory and dwelling on a landscape provide a conceptual departure for considering Aguacate village as a community of practice.

In order to understand how these two fields of action came to be, I provide a detailed history of the Maya Mountains region in Chapter 3. Scholarship on the archaeology of the



Toledo district is reviewed, with attention to political and economic integration and social identity. My discussion includes time periods not often considered in archaeological studies of the Classic period (e.g., Paleoindian, conquest, colonial) in order to illustrate the deep history of people dwelling on the Maya Mountains landscape. This historical perspective contributes to my rationale for a community archaeology project in the Toledo district.

Chapter 4 outlines a community archaeology research design. The literature on community archaeology projects from around the world provides context for this contribution. The model for community engagement enacted in collaboration with Aguacate community members is presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the methodology and results of archaeological excavations of the built environment of Kaq'ru' Ha'. The landscape, site plan, architecture, and mortuary program are analyzed in order to build an argument that residents of Kaq'ru' Ha' were participating in a regional social identity in addition to maintaining a local identity. Chapter 6 includes the methodology and results of the ceramics, lithics, and special finds from Kaq'ru' Ha'. These data indicate that residents were participating in regional economic and sociopolitical networks. The patterns indicate a close connection to Uxbenká during the Early Classic period (AD 250-600) and to Lubaantun during the Late Classic period (AD 600-900), in addition to a strong connection to the Petén region of Guatemala.

Chapter 7 is a discussion of the multiple lines of evidence presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Results of the archaeological excavations and analysis are interpreted in a relational light (i.e., materials are related to practices and social interactions) to show how the Maya Mountains region was a field of action with a highly integrated hinterland shaped by the social practices of crafting, gifting, and trading during the Classic period. Ethnographic vignettes at the beginning

of each section relate community members' perspectives and thoughts on the material culture recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha'. This contributes to my aim of showing that archaeology can be used in service of community goals as well as scientific knowledge.

Chapter 8 includes my concluding thoughts and future directions for community archaeology in southern Belize. I describe the efforts of the Aguacate Conservation and Development Committee, which is working to conserve Kaq'ru' Ha' as a park and establish a heritage center in the village where artifacts will be stored and educational materials will be housed.

One goal of this dissertation project is to answer recent calls from scholars (Atalay et al. 2014; McAnany 2014) to move beyond critiques of archaeology as a discipline with colonial roots towards an active and transformative practice of engaged archaeology. Engaged archaeology acknowledges the social context of knowledge production and encourages democratization of the research process. By broadening participation archaeological practice gains increased relevance for descendent communities, as well as enhanced protection of archaeological sites, stronger capacity building, and greater empowerment through heritage awareness.

## **CHAPTER 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I outline my conceptual framework, which draws on ideas subsumed under social archaeology. The two-fold problem addressed by this dissertation is outlined – specifically, historical inequalities in access to knowledge about the past and questions about the social identity and integration of ancient settlements in southern Belize -- in order to show that a conceptual framework based in theories of practice can be used to explain ancient residues as well as contemporary relationships between communities and archaeologists. Linked to theories of practice is the concept of fields of action (Bourdieu 1977), which are defined by a shared project or engagement (such as living together in shared space). This project has two fields of action: the creation of the material record in the past, and the interpretation and appreciation of that record in the present. Interactions within and between social groups create these two fields of action and frame my questions about social identity in the past and heritage in the present. I argue that it is important to consider these two fields of action in the same study; the results are holistic interpretations of the past that do not lose sight of the social context of practicing archaeology in the present. In the following section, the tensions in our discipline surrounding the creation of and access to archaeological knowledge are highlighted in order to build my argument that community-based archaeology is a crucial method for the Maya region.

### **2.2 The problem: restricted access to archaeological knowledge**

The site of Kaq'ru' Ha' is located in the Maya Mountains region of the eastern Maya lowlands. This land has been inhabited for millennia by people who inscribed their histories and

identities on the landscape in the form of dispersed communities, stone buildings, ceramic and lithic artifacts, burials and other landscape modifications. Political centralization in the region started in the Preclassic period (AD 73-211), which has been documented by excavations at the monumental site center of Uxbenká (Prufer et al. 2011:208). However, very few excavations have been conducted at hinterland settlements in order to understand who lived in rural areas and how they were integrated into regional interaction spheres.

Research in the hinterlands lends important insights into social organization, political affiliations, and economic connections (e.g. Iannone and Connell 2003; LeCount and Yaeger 2010). The lack of such investigations in the Maya Mountains region has resulted in an uneven understanding of regional dynamics and interactions. I argue that architecture, ceramics, lithics, and burials recovered from rural sites were the materialization of intelligible cultural activities that defined identities and shaped interactions between hinterlands and centralized polities, an idea I explore in further detail below.

Beyond the creation of archaeological knowledge lie questions about who has access to that knowledge. In Belize, archaeological remains are the legal property of the state, and permits are granted to researchers with PhDs; since there is no doctoral-granting institution in the country permits are mostly granted to foreign archaeologists (Belize Department of Archaeology 2014). This means that, historically, the knowledge created by researchers exists outside of the country and is published in academic journals and edited volumes not available in Belize, though there are notable exceptions to this trend, such as

There are public outreach programs run by the Institute of Archaeology, though they are mainly focused on the public in the Cayo and Belize districts, not the southernmost Toledo district. The annual Belizean Archaeology and Anthropology Symposium (BAAS) is sponsored

by the National Institute of Culture and History and the Institute of Archaeology, and serves as a venue for researchers to communicate and share their work with other archaeologists. Though the proceedings are published in a book, it is relatively expensive and inaccessible to many Belizeans.

Researchers have contributed educational materials to the wider Belizean public. In the Toledo district specifically, Patricia McAnany's MACHI/InHerit project partnered with the Julian Cho Society, a local NGO, to develop workbooks, coloring books, and school workshops on the ancient Maya for Q'eqchi' and Mopan communities ([www.in-herit.org](http://www.in-herit.org); McAnany 2014). Keith Prufer's project at Uxbenka has conducted classes in the primary school at Santa Cruz, the village on whose land Uxbenka is located (Parks 2009). Applied anthropological fieldwork also has been carried out in Santa Cruz by Dr. Rebecca Zarger and Dr. Kristina Baines on the articulation of ecological knowledge and heritage; Zarger and Baines recently published a workbook to be used in primary schools (Baines 2012; [www.teacha.org](http://www.teacha.org)). Anne Pyburn's work with the community of Crooked Tree included classes and community outreach (Pyburn 2003). Heather McKillop's research on coastal southern Belize has resulted in exhibits in the Punta Gorda community center. These efforts have been well-received and form a foundation for further involvement; specifically, the participation of communities in the archaeological research process. The Toledo district, with a significant descendent community, presents a unique opportunity to engage Maya communities in archaeological research.

Today, the Q'eqchi' village of Aguacate is marginalized socioeconomically and culturally in relation to the nation-state of Belize. Archaeological research in the Toledo district generally has not included the participation of local people beyond that of hired day laborers; public outreach has been continuous but the flow of knowledge is still one-directional (Parks

2009). This reflects broader epistemological paradigms within the discipline of archaeology, in which specialized knowledge has been the purview of highly trained North American practitioners. Research was perceived to be conducted in a value-free manner with little acknowledgement of the social context or consequences of research. It is also linked to the colonial registers of the discipline, in which historical knowledge has been created and controlled by nation-states; at times this included forming a cohesive historical narrative, a legitimizing charter, or racial harmony (Politis and Gollan 2004; McAnany and Parks 2012:81; Yaeger and Borgstede 2004:268).

One goal of this dissertation is to address the power imbalance of archaeology by contributing a model of community-based archaeology that shares theoretical underpinnings with my archaeological focus to demonstrate that this perspective can be incorporated into research designs. The model uses practice theory to outline how people, as social actors, interact with each other and recursively shape and build fields of action; these fields form when people participate “in actions whose meanings they negotiate with one another” (Wenger 1988:73) towards a common goal or project. Here, the two intersecting fields of action include one shaped by the ancient inhabitants of Kaq’ru’ Ha’, which I investigate by examining the material remains of negotiated engagements, and another shaped by relationships between archaeologists and the contemporary Aguacate community. Here I attempt to untangle the two-fold problem outlined above – hinterland identity formation and sociopolitical integration during the Classic period on the one hand and the exclusion of descendent communities in the creation of archaeological knowledge on the other. I argue that the very nature of fields of action as responsive to human intentions means that 1) these relationships are interpretable from the archaeological record, and

2) we have the opportunity to shape the field of archaeology into an inclusive and socially just practice.

### **2.3 A practice theory framework**

*Doxa*, according to Bourdieu (1990), consists of implicit and unquestionable values that are learned through intensive socialization. An element of this intelligible universe is *habitus* – “principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (Bourdieu 1990:53). In other words, *habitus* are practices that generate social life, that form our identities as culturally appropriate, intelligible people in a certain context. *Habitus* is enacted through activities and projects that leave material traces. Action includes shared awareness about the appropriateness of activities, how and by whom activities are enacted, and an understanding of the range of possible meanings and constraints related to the activities. Knowledge and actions are implemented by people; thus continual enactment is more important than a fixed set of rules. *Habitus* and *doxa* co-constitute each other and occur recursively, creating space for ambiguity, contradiction, interpretation, and social change. *Doxa* and *habitus* are immaterial and abstract; the field of action can be identified through material residues that prepare the possibility for action (Robb 2010:501). This study investigates the interplay of social structures (*doxa*) with daily practices in rural settlements (*habitus*) in order to gain insight into how a regional social identity was created in the hinterlands of the Maya Mountains region (the field of action). For example, social structures may be materialized by political centers through architectural styles, restricted access to imported goods, or participation in ritual practices. Excavations in the hinterlands address the degree to which people living outside political centers were involved in regional patterns in their daily lives. If we

consider hinterland groups to be knowledgeable of regional patterns, then we can evaluate to what degree they are participating in these patterns.

Agency explains how social actors can be very knowledgeable about social structure and can act to change it. Agency and practice theory draw their ideas from Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984), who were reacting to structuralist (Levi-Strauss 1968) concepts that portray humans as mindlessly following predetermined cultural rules. With an eye towards how societal structures originate and change, Giddens argues for a dialectic between structure and action; human action, while framed by social rules and structures, both “enables and constrains” (Giddens 1984:169). While human action clearly occurs at the individual and group registers, for the purposes of this study I conceptualize agency as a collective action; social interactions and their materialization are considered to be negotiated compromises within a group. That is, I see the construction of a house or participation in a burial is an expression of collective intent.

Being a recognizable person in culturally appropriate terms engenders a process of becoming, or subjectification (Butler 1997). The process of subjectification also provides space for the creation of different identities; distinct subjects make up a diverse social field that can be contested by groups with varying goals. Becoming an intelligible social subject requires references to familiar norms, but not exact mimicry; norms or structures only exist through actions of practice (Butler 1997). A relational approach to subjects emphasizes the entanglement between subjects and the material objects that people produce; in turn, materials influence human behavior. That is, a person’s intentionality has a material manifestation that can impact social structures (Hendon 2010). This perspective is critical for archaeologists because it links social identity to material production and practices. For example, archaeologists working in the Maya Mountains region have identified enclosed ball courts and modifying the landscape as



architectural practices unique to the region (Leventhal 1990). Examining rural settlements for similar practices is one way to identify a regional social identity.

The creation and shaping of social structures occurs in part through objects that play a role in that recursive process. Objects can be used purposefully by people to invoke meaning and to structure social interactions; “material culture is used actively to have an effect in the social world” (Hodder 2004:28; see also Hodder 2012). A relational approach to subjects emphasizes the entanglement between people and the material objects that they produce; in turn, materials influence human behavior. A person’s intentionality has a material manifestation that can impact social structures (Hendon 2010). Engagements between socially informed actors, the objects they produce, and broadly accepted social networks create identities. For example, figurine manufacturing occurred in the civic ceremonial center at Lubaantun during the Late Classic period (Hammond 1975a; Wegars 1977). The presence and frequency of Lubaantun figurines at hinterland settlements could indicate the degree of social and economic integration of the region. The movement of figurines suggests communication between socially informed actors extending political ideologies to the hinterlands through material culture; in this case, figurines (Halperin 2014).

Fields of action move away from the duality of *habitus* and *doxa* in order to be “the means through which day-to-day reality is produced and changed over time” (Hendon 2010:61). That is, fields of action create a more flexible position from which to interpret the significance of daily practices and identify formation (Robb 2010:500). These daily activities are projects, “narrative forms and conclusions which shape the unfolding of action” (Robb 2010:500). In a material sense this includes making useful objects such as ceramic vessels or stone tools and building houses. Houses can be seen as projects that create the context for fields of action.

At the site of Penitenzeria, a Middle Neolithic habitation site in Italy, John Robb (2010:509) interprets houses as the materialization of social relationships; building houses was a labor intensive process that signified a collective activity showing support for the group that was to inhabit the house. Houses also created spatial divisions that delineated public and private locales, generating differences between the people who had access to the space and who did not.

Households are foundational elements of societies, recursively shaping the identities of social subjects and providing a locale for the collective pursuit of projects. Fields of action are “the locus of specified and relational power and agency” (Robb 2010:500). Since fields of action are linked to the materialization of agency, I will look at how certain materials are significant at this locus. It is through this materialization that social actors express themselves, define identities, and construct relationships. In order to better appreciate the role of dwellings as contexts for fields of action, the household as it is understood in Mesoamerica and its material correlates is examined here.

## **2.4 Households as fields of action**

As outlined above, a framework grounded in practice theory is a powerful tool for evaluating the materiality of daily household practices and how those practices may have changed over time, informing our understanding of shifting power dynamics between communities in the Maya Mountains region. In Mesoamerica, the field of social and material production is the household; therefore it is the unit of analysis employed here for examining how identity is produced and reproduced (Hendon 2010; LeCount and Yaeger 2012; McAnany 2004; Robin 2002; Wilk and Ashmore 1988). As a fundamental attribute of daily life and experience, households contribute significant insights into our understanding of social organization, economic production, distribution, ritual systems, and social ranking (Leventhal 1983).

Households include the ongoing projects of building, storing, burying, and crafting that recursively create identities. They also can be sensitive indicators of broader social patterns and interactions.

The intensive examination of households in Mesoamerica grew out of settlement archaeology – the study of the distribution and patterning of sites on a landscape (Willey 1953; Willey and Sabloff 1980; Wilk and Rathje 1982). Motivated by questions of urbanization, demography, and subsistence, Maya archaeologists recognized that in order to understand complex societies they had to look beyond ceremonial centers to the numerous settlements of the hinterlands. Survey, mapping, and excavation at Tikal (Haviland 1953), Copán (Willey and Leventhal 1979), Seibal (Tourtellot 1982; Willey et al. 1975), and the Belize Valley (Willey et al. 1965) resulted in an interpretive shift from “empty” ceremonial centers to thriving cities with urban and rural populations.

Archaeologists defined settlement patterns as systems composed of sites with varying sizes and functions (Willey et al. 1965). In the Maya Lowlands a regional hierarchy was developed to rank sites according to size. Single mounds or small groups (2-3 mounds) were considered houses based on the principle of abundance (Haviland 1966; Willey et al. 1965), which asserts that since there are so many small mounds scattered throughout the landscape, they must be houses. A cautionary corollary to this principle is that many structures at a site probably did not function as dwellings, but as ancillary structures used for cooking, storage, ritual practices, and animal husbandry, among other activities. This claim has been supported in two ways: by archaeological evidence, including architecture and ceramic and stone artifacts (Willey et al. 1965), and by ethnographic analogues with contemporary Maya communities (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934; Wauchope 1938; Vogt 1969). Identifying the function of buildings is an

important step in analyzing ancient Maya households; it also reminds us that both sites and structures are multifunctional nodes in a wider social network held together by shared practices.

Following Ashmore and Wilk (1988:6), I consider a household to be a group of people who share a physical dwelling and are engaged in a variety of activities, including production, reproduction, consumption, coresidence, shared ownership, pooling of resources, and ritual practices. Importantly, dwellings also provide context for the creation and practice of identity (Hendon 2010:99). These projects and their resultant materiality that is spatially and temporally patterned provide meaning and sociality in peoples' everyday lives. In addition, households are germane to understanding power relationships at different registers – intracommunity relations as well as dynamics between political centers and hinterland communities (e.g., LeCount and Yaeger 2010; Lohse and Valdez 2004; McAnany 2004; Yaeger 2003; Yaeger and Robin 2004). The projects conducted at household sites leave material residues linked to status and power.

Archaeological markers of wealth differentiation include house size, architectural design, and artifact assemblage (Pluckhahn 2010:347; Smith 1994). These signals of differential access to resources are echoed in North American examples as well. While Moundville household size and associated assemblages were fairly equal in early Mississippian times, Wilson (2010) found that inequality became more distinct among households around AD 1200 at Moundville. Similarly, Pluckhahn (2010) interprets the appearance of new vessel forms and decorations at Kolomoki in Georgia as an increase in status distinction during the Middle to Late Woodland transition. Wilson and Pluckhahn's interpretations suggest that household architecture and assemblages are sensitive indicators of status and social change.

How do we recognize households in the archaeological record? Based on her extensive survey and excavation work of the land surrounding Quirigua, Guatemala, Wendy Ashmore

(1988:156) asserts that “the single structure and the patio or courtyard group are good provisional means of recognizing Maya households.” Patio groups consist of several structures clustered around a rectangular courtyard and are recognized as an elemental settlement form across the Maya lowlands (Ashmore 1981; Ashmore and Wilk 1988; Flannery 1976; Haviland 1963:518-521; Willey et al. 1965). While patio groups can vary widely by form or function, they remain the essential component of residential groups. This pattern is shared in the Maya Mountains region. During his survey and excavations at Lubaantun, Hammond (1975:75) defined structure function based on height and basal area, which is summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Structure function as related to size at Lubaantun (adapted from Hammond 1975:75)

<b>Structure Class</b>	<b>Height</b>	<b>Basal Area</b>
Residential/domestic	1.2 m	100 m <sup>2</sup>
Ceremonial	1.3-3.6 m	150-330 m <sup>2</sup>
Elite residences	1.3-2.0 m	150-275 m <sup>2</sup>
Ceremonial	2.0-3.6 m	180-330 m <sup>2</sup>
Religious/ritual	5.0 m (and above)	500 m <sup>2</sup>

While Hammond does point out that these definitions apply only to Lubaantun, he uses them in his interpretation of the regional survey he conducted in the early 1970s. While not the final word on structure function, Hammond’s definitions are a place to start when identifying houses in the archaeological record. Further analysis of architecture can include the location of the structure within the settlement area, the architectural layout, quality of construction and materials, and associated cultural deposits such as middens, burials, and caches (Leventhal and Baxter 1988:58-59).

For her dissertation work, Cynthia Robin (1999) included a comparative table of household material correlates from the Maya sites of Copán, Honduras (Gonlin 1994), and Cerén, El Salvador (Sheets 1992).

Table 2.2. Material correlates of houses and ancillary structures (adapted from Robin 1999:94).

Characteristic	Copán (e.g., Gonlin 1993)	Cerén (e.g., Sheets 1992)
Houses		
Area	13.50 - 66.00 sq m	14.72 sq m
Height	0.15 - 1.00 m	0.75 m
Basal Platform	Usually rectangular and more than one level	Rectangular and one level
Location in Compound	Usually central	in front
Ceramic Vessels Present	Vessels for storage, cooking, food preparation and serving;	some vessels for storage, cooking, food preparation and serving
Production Present	Lithic	lithic, cloth and ceramic
Presence of Bench	Rarely present <sup>1</sup>	always present
Presence of Burials	Rarely present	-
Ritual Artifacts Present	Usually present	usually present
Ancillary Structures		
Area	12.62 - 25.22 sq m	10.0 - 10.4 sq m
Height	0.20 - 0.50 m	0.5 - 1.0 m
Basal Platform	Usually square and one level	square or circular and one level
Location in Compound	Usually in a non-central location	in back
Ceramic Vessels Present	Same but usually higher frequencies than houses	same but higher frequencies than houses
Production Present	Same but usually higher frequencies than houses	same but higher frequencies than houses
Presence of Bench	Never present	never present
Presence of Burials	Never present	-
Ritual Artifacts Present	Usually present	usually present

It is useful to clarify how to differentiate residences from ancillary structures (see also Webster et al. 1997). In terms of the area and height of residences, the Copán examples seem to be the most similar to those defined by Hammond for Lubaantun (see Table 2.1). In both cases residences are centrally located in the residential compound, and they both include examples of ceramic storage, cooking, and serving vessels. Evidence of lithic tool production is present in both Copán and Cerén houses. Interestingly, burials are not common at either site, though burying individuals beneath house floors is a common practice throughout Mesoamerica

(McAnany 2014). Ancillary structures differ from residences mainly in the size of the structure and the higher frequency of ceramic and lithic artifacts.

## **2.5 Households in Mesoamerica**

While dwellings in the Maya lowlands are quite heterogeneous (Iannone and Connell 2003; Robin 2002, 2012; McAnany 1995, 2004; Hendon 1996, 2004, 2010; Yaeger and Robin 2004) there are consistent artifact assemblages associated with dwellings. These include items used in daily domestic practices such as building, cooking, crafting, socializing, venerating, and resting. Household assemblages can include ceramic vessels, (especially those used for cooking and serving), figurines, censers, spindle whorls, manos and metates, chert and/or obsidian bifaces, retouched flakes, cores, hammerstones, faunal remains, human burials and associated mortuary artifacts, and freshwater and marine shell items (Haviland 1981:103; Hendon 2010; Hutson 2010; Robin 2002, 2012; McAnany 1995, 2004; Willey et al. 1965:16-17). These artifacts have a functional everyday use, but their creation, meaning, and deployment recursively shaped ancient Maya society and the people that crafted and used them.

The focus on social actors and their roles in households built on feminist scholarship (e.g., Spector 1993) and was brought to the fore in Mesoamerica by Rosemary Joyce (1998; 2000; 2004) and Julia Hendon (1996). Hendon incorporated feminist theory into her analysis of households, which focused attention on people as diverse actors who, by creating and engaging in the practices of daily life, shape their society (e.g., Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984; Hendon 1996; McAnany 2004, 2010; Robin 2002). As contexts for identity formation, Hendon argues that "...households [are] the result of the interaction of structure and agency, larger social forms, and the individual" (Hendon 2004:272). As revealed here, studying everyday life sheds light on

the dynamic interplay of structure and agency that ancient Maya farmers negotiated in the development of their political and economic strategies.

Practice theory provides a holistic frame for interpreting the archaeological record. Here I build on recent applications of practice theory in the Maya region, in order to frame archaeological interpretations of household data (e.g., Hendon 2010; Hutson 2010; McAnany 2010; Yaeger and Robin 2004). The interpretation of houses as “structuring structures” (Bourdieu 1990:53) of society is relevant to ancient Mesoamerica. Scott Hutson (2010:69) argues that the construction and remodeling of houselots at Chunchucmil differentiated people according to gender, status, and identity. He demonstrates that buildings unevenly contain knowledge of group identities, such as the location of ancestor burials, to which only some members of a group have access. Differences in access to knowledge create unequal relationships between people, shaping social interactions.

As a result of an extensive survey in the hinterlands of the upper Belize River Valley, members of the Xunantunich Archaeological Project found that households and farming communities are ubiquitous on the landscape but in no way redundant (Yaeger and Robin 2004:150). At San Lorenzo, Jason Yaeger identified a correlation between longevity and house size, with evidence of feasting and worked marine shell at larger residences (Yaeger and Robin 2004:153). At Chan Nóohol, Robin (2002:259) found that over time some farming families increased their access to non-local goods and remodeled their dwellings to replicate elite residential architecture at the political center of Xunantunich. Architectural references to Xunantunich and increased wealth indicate that hinterland communities were linked to broader sociopolitical maneuvers in the upper Belize River Valley, and that some families used these connections to emphasize difference. Further, Robin argues that the use of ambient space



surrounding households shapes meaning making: “People actively construct experience and meaning through their ... experience of spaces” (Robin 2002:248). Thus, built environments are important features of social reproduction.

Also referencing Xunantunich and its hinterland, Samuel Connell (2010) interprets an architectural re-orientation towards the city’s towering temples and the increased frequency of black- and red-slipped pottery as evidence for shifting economic attachments. Special deposits indicative of increased wealth included greenstone beads, polychrome vessels, lithic eccentrics, worked stone, and shell pendants (Connell 2010:306). Feasting and ancestor veneration by some households suggest differential integration into the Xunantunich polity. The strategic use of space and artifacts among residents of the Belize Valley communities provide a view of how past people materially transformed their social universe and were concurrently shaped by the objects they produced. As representations of human intentionality, objects such as architecture, ceramic vessels, stone tools, and the agricultural landscape convey knowledge of the social world and the practices that constitute that world. I focus on identity as a materially and socially constituted practice and a strategy of affiliation that, when analyzed from a relational perspective, brings the entangled nature of fields of action to the fore of interpretation.

Importantly, theories of practice weave together interactions between people, the material culture that mediates interactions, and the landscape that provides an intelligible background for these interactions. “In all cases, the important relations and interactions are not just between people but also between people and the places they inhabit and the material culture they deploy” (Hendon 2010:60). Here I consider the landscape of Kaq’ru’ Ha’ as something of a fulcrum for my interpretations of meaning in the past and heritage in the present.

## 2.6 Dwelling on the landscape

A practice theory framing encourages consideration of the engagements of two groups of people (past and present) against the backdrop of the Kaq'ru' Ha' landscape. Meaning is shaped as much by the location as by who is involved and what is being done (Hendon 2010:60). In the past, residents of Kaq'ru' Ha' constructed the site and undertook projects that shaped their households and broader society in the Maya Mountains region. Contemporary people find the locale meaningful because of their proprietary connection to community land as an economic and cultural resource.

The ancient residents of the site constructed households and terraces in a meaningful locale and buried their ancestors within them; contemporary villagers consider the site a significant place on their landscape as well. Interactions between people at a specific locale can be understood as the act of dwelling (Heidegger 1996; Ingold 2000). The dwelling perspective emphasizes that “the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it” (Ingold 2000:189). Dwelling inscribes the past and present onto the landscape, and makes this inscription permanent and available to future people. I argue that through the process of dwelling, which includes material practices such as crafting, gifting, building, and burying, household practices produce and re-produce social life (Hutson 2010:7; Robin 2012). These materials, and the tasks that produced them, are inscribed on a landscape that is a dynamic representation of sociality (Van Dyke 2010:277). Kaq'ru' Ha' is a significant locale that marked the landscape for the ancestral Maya and provides a point of departure for a dialogue about archaeological collaboration with contemporary villagers (Hutson et al. 2013; McAnany 2014; McAnany and Parks 2012).

Using Kaq'ru' Ha' as the background locale, I consider two fields of action: 1) the

engagement of Kaq'ru' Ha' inhabitants with each other and the surrounding region in deep history, and 2) the interactions among archaeologists, Aguacate village, and the archaeological site. The second field of action includes a community of practice – personified by an organization that was founded jointly by the community and myself, the Aguacate Conservation and Development Committee, which shared the common goal of the excavation and conservation of Kaq'ru' Ha'.

## **2.7 Aguacate as a community of practice**

A community of practice occurs within a field of action; in this case, engagements between individuals working towards a common goal. The Aguacate Community Archaeology Project can be considered a community of practice because knowledge about the past was constructed and shared through dialogue and communication (Wenger 1998).

In archaeology, social actors include: 1) the government and its officers, who oversee archaeological research in the country, 2) the foreign archaeologist as “expert”, who plans, funds, and oversees the research process, and 3) local people who are un- or under-educated and may work as day laborers. A field of action is formed through engagement with a common project -- conducting archaeology. Subjects have diverse identities and priorities and form a field of action through engagement. “Structuring of social existence is constituted in the daily practices and lived activities of subjects who participate and produce cultural forms that mediate it” (Holland and Lave 2001:4). Therefore an archaeological project can be seen to exhibit a social existence created through lived experiences.

As archaeological practice endures, it creates distinctive subjects; archaeologists who, by their practice within the discipline, acquire the specialized skills and authority to interpret the past. Maya subjects within archaeology often are laborers whose embodiment constitutes

unskilled day laborers with little training in the method and theory behind archaeology. There is distinct inequality embedded in the tools that people use to complete an archaeological project; those that require specialized training (Total Station, drawings) versus those that, arguably, do not (shovels and screens). Thus inequality and access to information is already built into the daily practices of archaeology.

Inequalities are made salient by the creation of objects; in the case of archaeology, unequal access to knowledge about ancient objects creates inequality in reference to a study of the past. A relational perspective argues that social subjects can use objects to change social norms. Therefore, including in Maya voices and goals in the planning, implementation, and management of archaeological projects could transform the relationship between descendent communities and archaeologists. Through education, practice, and negotiation, we can re-shape the praxis of archaeology. Given that practices are materialized in fields of action that continually mold the social structures, there is space for archaeologists and Maya people to cite the norm while transforming it at the same time.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Social archaeology recognizes the importance of meaning in material culture, not just function. As such, it is a perspective that accounts for issues such as power, politics, gender, class, postcolonialism, identity, landscape, and heritage. These perspectives emphasize “the relationships between ourselves and others, society and history in both past and present contexts” (Pruecel and Meskell 2004:3). In other words, social archaeology is about the ways that people materially express themselves and shape their world.

An ethical production of historical knowledge using the material remains of ancestral peoples creates a praxis of archaeology. Praxis refers to the way that theories of practice and

transformation take shape in the material world. It is what Randall McGuire calls “theoretically informed action”:

The task of scholars is to produce knowledge and critique. For those scholars who seek to engage in praxis, that knowledge and critique should be based in a genuine understanding of the experience of the social group whose interest their scholarship serves. Praxis, therefore, flows from a dialogue or dialectic between intellectuals and the communities they serve (McGuire 2008:3).

Scholarship should serve local communities, in addition to the scholarly community of archaeologists. The information include here was produced in collaboration with Aguacate villagers (and made accessible to them) while adhering to the method and theory of archaeology. As such I take a social archaeology perspective, which shifts archaeological interpretations to the social realm by focusing on the active negotiation of social roles as a prime factor in cultural (re)production, and it departs from positivist and objectivist approaches that claimed science as socially neutral. I elaborate on these two concepts by drawing on theories of practice. The following chapters on Kaq’ru’ Ha’ and Aguacate deploy social interpretations of the past as well as contextualizing how that knowledge was produced.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE MAYA MOUNTAINS REGION**

### **3.1 Introduction**

One critique of Bourdieu's (1977) concept of practice theory is that it does not account for the historical development of subjects within social structures (Smith 2001:10). That is, people engaged in social practices that shape fields of action are not vacant, unsituated subjects, but knowing actors with complex identities and motivations. This chapter attempts to explain the development of the two fields of action identified in Chapter 2. The deep history of the Maya Mountains Region shows the active negotiation of social roles through time, and provides a background for my argument that ancestral heritage is grounded in dwelling on an historical landscape.

### **3.2 The Maya Mountains Region**

Framed by the Maya Mountains to the north and west, the Bay of Honduras to the east, and the swampy wetlands of the Sarstoon Temash to the south, southern Belize occupies a strategic location connecting the Caribbean coast with lowland cities such as Tikal and the southeastern centers of Quiriguá and Copán. This region is rich in natural resources that were traded to the central Maya lowlands, such as raw material for paints, dyes, mirrors, and ceramics as well as important food resources such as cacao, fish and salt (e.g., Braswell et al. 2005; Hammond 1975b; McKillop 1996, 2005). In order to extract these valuable resources the four political capitals of Lubaantun, Nim Li Punit, Pusilhá and Uxbenká were strategically located in

an intermediate zone between the coastal plain and the Maya mountains, proximate to the richest soils (Hammond 1975a:98). AMS radiocarbon dates from the Uxbenká civic center and the surrounding settlements date the founding of the site to the Late Preclassic period (AD 80), making it the oldest known site in the region (Prufer et al. 2011). Other evidence of the early occupation includes Early Classic (AD 250-500) stelae and associated monumental architecture at Uxbenká (Prufer et al. 2006; Wanyerka 2009), as well as Early Classic ceramics recovered from cave contexts (Braswell et al. 2005:67; Dunham et al. 1989:268). The Late Classic was a period of florescence for the Maya capitals of southern Belize; they experienced unparalleled levels of growth and monumental construction. For reasons that remain unclear, by the end of the Terminal Classic period (AD 800-1050) these cities were steadily depopulated except for evidence of an ephemeral Postclassic presence at Pusilhá and strong evidence for coastal trade (McKillop 1996). Material evidence of participation in wider trade routes and the Late Classic Maya cultural sphere include imported polychrome ceramics, architectural styles, and specially nonlocal goods such as crafted jade and obsidian blades and cores.

### **3.3 Paleoindian and Archaic Periods (11,500 – 1200 BCE)**

Paleoindian habitation of the Maya Mountains region occurred between 13,500 and 10,000 years ago (11,500 – 8,000 BCE), at the end of the Pleistocene epoch (Lohse et al. 2006:210). People living during this time period were mobile, subsisting on hunting and exploiting forests for plant resources. This period was pre-ceramic and recognized archaeologically by distinctive fluted fishtail points, which have been surface collected from four locations in Belize. One such point was collected from a field in the Rio Grande drainage in southern Belize by a local farmer (Lohse et al. 2006:215). The Archaic period started at the beginning of the Holocene, about 10,000 years ago (8,000 BCE). A warming climate and rising

sea levels brought shifts in subsistence and technologies, which are archaeologically visible through artifact, pollen, and geomorphological analyses. Though the Paleoindian and Archaic periods are not well-documented in Central America, recent work in southern Belize is expanding our knowledge of early human occupation.

Archaeological work in the caves lining the Rio Blanco drainage by the Uxbenká Archaeological Project has revealed Paleoindian and Archaic materials (Meredith 2013). In particular, excavations at a cave called Tzib'te Yux revealed a pre-ceramic level that includes three Pre-Archaic scrapers and a Lowe point radiocarbon dated to cal. 10,277–10,441 BCE (Meredith 2013: 91). Carbon dates associated with the bottom of this level date to cal. 8,577–8,430 BCE, indicating that the cave may have been used for thousands of years between the Paleoindian and Archaic periods. Substantial faunal remains, including tapir, pacas, deer, turtle, howler monkey, and conch shell suggest that this was a butchering and habitation site. Importantly, one human burial was encountered in the cave; a Preclassic (350 BCE-AD 100) bowl with several obsidian blades was found beside the cranium. The individual was interred in a supine position oriented to the north (Meredith 2013:92). This burial position is significant because it is the earliest example of a mortuary pattern that persists at other southern Belize sites through the Classic period. In Chapters 5 and 7 I will argue that this burial position is a common mortuary program for the region; its intrusion into much earlier occupation levels indicates that has considerable time depth in the Maya Mountains region.

The Late Archaic (3,400-900 BCE) was a time of horticultural adaptation and landscape modification as populations increased, people formed settlements close to important resources such as rock outcrops, and cleared the landscape for farming (Lohse et al. 2006:216). Lowe points are diagnostic of this period and have been recovered from the northern, western, and



southern regions of Belize (Kelly 1993; Lohse et al. 2006). Sediment cores and pollen data from across the lowlands indicate widespread deforestation and maize cultivation starting around 2500 BCE (Estrada-Belli 2011; Neff et al. 2006; Pohl et al. 1996; Wahl et al. 2006), suggesting that small groups of people were settling in semi-permanent communities and starting to farm, though they were not yet producing ceramics. This pattern extends to the Maya Mountains region, where a Lowe-style point was discovered in Tzib-te' Yux cave by the Uxbenká project, expanding the geographic range of the Archaic period in the Eastern Maya lowlands (Meredith 2013:90).

### **3.4 Preclassic Period (1200 BCE – AD 250)**

Between 1200-900 BCE people living in the Maya lowlands established permanent settlements. Their dwellings were plastered earthen platforms with postholes to support perishable superstructures. In Belize, early residential architecture has been found at Cuello (Hammond 1974), K'axob (McAnany and Lopez Varela 1999), Blackman Eddy (Garber 2004), and Cahal Pech (Awe 1992). In some places, ceramic production co-occurs with settlements, likely because production requires consistent resources for production (e.g., clay, temper, and water) and stable locales for storage. The appearance of both architecture and ceramics can signify the beginnings of social differentiation. For example, at Cahal Pech, in the Belize River Valley, excavations in Plaza B recovered several earthen house platforms and one ritual structure constructed on a stone platform with postholes, which was coated in lime plaster and whose outer walls were painted red (Awe 1992). Cunil (Early Preclassic) phase ceramics were found associated with this special structure. Excavator Jamie Awe interprets differences in architecture and access to ceramics as evidence of status differentiation. Furthermore, ceramics consisting of serving vessels and jars are consistently found in ritual or elite contexts, suggesting that early

ceramics were a high-status item in the Maya lowlands (Estrada-Belli 2011). In the Maya Mountains region, Uxbenká is the earliest inhabited site with evidence of a small farming community dating to the Early Preclassic (Prufer and Thompson 2013:2).

Geomorphological evidence indicates that people were clearing the land surrounding Uxbenká for farming by the Early Preclassic (1500 BCE). The name “Uxbenká” is an Anglicized version of the Mopan phrase *uch ben ka*, which means old village or place of the ancestors. A jade spoon discovered on the ground surface next to a looted tomb was dated to the Middle Preclassic (900-350 BCE) based on stylistic components (Healy and Awe 2001; Prufer et al. 2011:216). The spoon’s Olmec aesthetic suggests that it may have been a curated heirloom; curation or caching of Olmec-style jade artifacts is a wider Mesoamerican practice, known from at Chaksinkin in the Yucatán as well (Andrews 1986). Prufer’s team further reports Preclassic-era earthen and plaster platforms with postholes for perishable superstructures and associated radiocarbon dates of AD 73-211 (Prufer et al. 2011:208). These platforms pre-date later monumental stone architecture and correspond to Preclassic architectural styles elsewhere in Belize and greater Mesoamerica (e.g. Garber 2004; Flannery 1976; McAnany 2004). Thus, the farming community that would become Uxbenká appears to be the earliest settlement in the Maya Mountains region; the people living there chose to settle on a series of defensible, verdant hilltops with access to good soils and year-round water sources. Since these early earthen platforms were superseded by monumental stone architecture, interpretations of social or political organization are difficult to make. It is clear that the wider Mesoamerican patterns of the Middle Preclassic – permanent settlements, maize cultivation, ceramic production, social inequality – were occurring in the Maya Mountains region as well. However, by the Late

Preclassic major political centralization and monumental cities are constructed elsewhere in Mesoamerica, while the Maya Mountains region remained politically decentralized.

The Late Preclassic in the Maya lowlands includes the rapid development of some of the hallmarks of Classic Maya civilization: polychrome ceramics, masonry architecture, and hieroglyphic writing (Estrada-Belli 2011). The Petén region of Guatemala was the heartland of these developments, and was the locale of several powerful cities – El Mirador, Nakbe, and Tikal, among others. Powerful rulers constructed massive temple complexes adorned with brilliantly painted stucco masks that conveyed supernatural and iconographic themes tied to rulership (Houston and Inomata 2009:89). Thus, there was a cosmological charter for power and wealth disparity. The construction of monumental pyramids and temples likely was accomplished through communal work parties organized by a ruling class drawing on “cosmic authentication” (McAnany 2010:146). Monumental architecture constructed by work parties involved a reciprocal relationship with the supernatural. Construction of pyramid shrines for public rituals in return for abundant harvests, fertility, and well-being (i.e. Aimers and Rice 2006:92). Therefore, the advent of monumental architecture produced shifts in identities within the social field of action (McAnany 2010:157).

At the household level, domestic structures at lowland sites included plastered platforms around a patio; these corporate group clusters signify that group resources and membership were organized spatially (Houston and Inomata 2009:94). The remodeling and expanding of semi-permanent, perishable structures with permanent stone masonry suggests that certain lineages emphasized their own ancestry and heritage as a way to claim a place (McAnany 2013; Hendon 1999:106). During the Late Preclassic there was a decline in household ritual practices, which reinforced that divine rulers exerted ritual and ideological control over the supernatural (Halperin

2007, 2014a, 2014b; Ringle 1999). However, the domestic economy seems to have been fairly autonomous, with agricultural activities and local production of goods the cornerstone of economic activities (Houston and Inomata 2009:95). Ringle (1999:196) argues that social organization at the local level mirrored that of larger polities, suggesting that there was internal group differentiation and authority vested in local leaders. Evidence suggests that some of these wider patterns took hold in the Maya Mountains region during the Late Preclassic as well.

Monumental stone architecture was first constructed at Uxbenká around AD 200, signaling a social and political transition from a farming community to a complex polity with social divisions materialized through defined public and domestic spaces, specialized architecture, and carved stelae (Prufer et al. 2011:200). Though not at the scale of El Mirador or Cerros, monumental architecture at Uxbenká suggests control over local labor, the centralization of political power, and heightened social divisions. Further, Late Preclassic Sierra Red ceramics have been recovered from construction fill; though they were mixed with later Petén Gloss Wares, their presence indicates connection with broader lowland styles and ideas (Jordan 2013:117). In addition, Late Preclassic ceramics were found at Nim Li Punit and Ek Xux (the latter located in the Maya Mountains), also from mixed contexts (Wilk 1976, 1977; Wanyerka 2009). In 1976, Richard Wilk argued that Nim Li Punit was founded during the Late Preclassic, though no evidence has been collected to confirm this date.

Although populations at Uxbenká seemed to transition smoothly into the Early Classic period, elsewhere the end of the Preclassic period was marked by extreme social upheaval as the major cities of the Mirador Basin were rapidly abandoned (Houston and Inomata 2009:100). Though the cause of this collapse remains enigmatic, Hanson (2002) suggests that extreme droughts, caused in part by humans, were at least one factor in the decline.

In summary, the first evidence of human presence are stone tools recovered from cave and surface contexts, which suggest that groups of highly mobile people were hunting and gathering here during the Paleoindian and Archaic periods. The first known evidence of a farming settlement with earthen mounds, ceramic vessels, and jade items comes from Uxbenká. Monumental architecture was constructed by the Late Preclassic period, signaling pronounced social divisions and political centralization. Preclassic ceramics at Nim li Punit and Ek Xux suggest that there were settlements in other areas of the region, though this occupation was not concentrated and remains poorly understood. The intrusive burial in Tzib' Te' Yux cave placed in a supine position with the head oriented to the north suggests a Maya Mountains mortuary program with roots in the Late Preclassic. Monumental architecture, ceramics, and burials signify a shift in social organization and identities as powerful rulers drew authority from the supernatural.

### **3.5 The Early Classic Period (AD 250-600)**

Tikal, located in the southern Petén region of Guatemala, survived the upheaval at the end of the Preclassic period to become a major political influence in the region. Though the city was founded around AD 90, the first carved monument dates to AD 292, indicating the initiation of a “stela cult” (Martin 2003:5). Divine kingship was partially materialized through carving divine portraits of rulers on stone monoliths, which were enshrined in ceremonial centers. One of the most significant political events of the Early Classic period was the intrusion of political actors from Teotihuacan, a powerful city located in central Mexico. Inscriptions at Tikal places the *entrada* at AD 378, and material evidence (e.g., talud/tablero architecture, slab-footed tripod ceramic vessels, green obsidian, feathered serpent imagery) recovered from sites across the lowlands indicate that Teotihuacan profoundly influenced social and political processes in the

lowlands. Epigraphic evidence from Uxbenká provides evidence that leaders at that site were linked to Tikal (Prufer et al. 2011:218; Wanyerka 2009:270-275) and so may have been indirectly impacted by their events.

Uxbenká contains the earliest monument outside of the Petén region, linking it to Chak Tok Ich'aak I, or Jaguar Paw, a Tikal king responsible for construction of the North Acropolis, which would become the resting place of Tikal's Classic period dynastic line (Wanyerka 2009:270-275). In an effort to remain the preeminent hegemonic power in the Maya lowlands, Tikal controlled the fortunes of strategic peripheral centers, such as Uxbenká. The placement of carved stelae referencing Jaguar Paw at outlying sites was a potent reminder of Tikal's authority (Martin 2000:58). It is likely that Tikal made Uxbenká a client state in order to maintain access to important resources such as game, marine and riverine specimens, and botanical resources such as cacao. The "planting" of Stela 11 at Uxbenká during the 4<sup>th</sup> century coincides with the transition from earthen platforms in the main plaza to monumental masonry architecture.

Modifying the landscape with monumental stone architecture is a hallmark of ancient Maya claims to a place. Literally modifying the land by flattening bedrock hilltops for monumental construction is particularly emblematic of southern Belize architecture. Masonry architecture at Uxbenká has been described as a "Hollywood set" (Leventhal 1992:145). That is, in some places the bedrock was excavated and then shaped with a prepared stone block façade giving the appearance of monumental architecture with less material and effort (Prufer et al. 2011:210). Nevertheless, the stela plaza, Plaza A, and a second public plaza, Plaza B, were reorganized during the Early Classic with the addition of masonry architecture. The earliest building in Plaza A was constructed sometime between AD 256 and AD 402 (Prufer et al. 2011:212). Lip to lip caches and other ceramic evidence tie these construction episodes to

influences from the Petén region.

Early Uxbenká ceramics are part of the “Peripheral Chicanel” sphere defined by Juan Pedro Laporte (2001:17), which is characterized by a continuation of Preclassic forms and slips into the Early Classic. The ceramic sequence at Uxbenká is separated into two phases, which may reflect the increased attention of Tikal after AD 400; however, due to poor preservation of the waxy slips this distinction is difficult to recognize. In some places, the Early Classic I phase is characterized by waxy slipped red monochrome wares with a large number of Sierra forms, including sharply everted rims (Jordan 2013:118). Crystalline calcite temper characterizes the paste, but it decreases in use by the Early Classic II phase. The second phase shows more diversity in forms and types and resembles southeastern Petén types, such as Aguila Orange, Balanza Black, Orange Polychromes, and Triunfo Striated (Jordan 2013:118). Polychromes are present but severely eroded. A comprehensive series of radiocarbon dates reinforces these ceramic data, placing the increase of social complexity at Uxbenká to the Early Classic period.

Ceramic information at Uxbenká comes primarily from structures in the site core, though there is some evidence of early settlements outside of the central zone. One earthen platform close to Plaza A was completely buried beneath 1.3m of mudstone around AD 134, likely during the reorganization of the site core. A waxy, red-slipped Sierra Red jar was excavated from a cache within the structure, suggesting a Late Preclassic dedication of the building (Prufer et al. 2011:214). There are extensive settlement groups surrounding Uxbenká, and while many have been mapped, few have been excavated and analyzed; ceramic analysis of these excavations is ongoing so all conclusions are tentative.

Ceramic data from elsewhere in southern Belize suggests Early Classic occupation at Pusilhá and Nim Li Punit. At Pusilhá, ceramics recovered from Pottery Cave and several test

units included fragments of Tzakol 2-3 (AD 400-500) flanged bowls (Leventhal 1990). These data come from mixed contexts and have not been reconciled stratigraphically. No Early Classic architecture has been identified at Pusilhá, though this may be because earlier platforms were thoroughly buried beneath later structures.

Recent work at Nim Li Punit by Geoff Braswell's team revealed an Early Classic occupation phase. Early Classic ceramics were found in both fill and primary contexts in the royal residential complex (Fauvelle 2012; Fauvelle et al. 2013). Types include red monochrome wares similar to those at Uxbenká; however, the defining Early Classic feature at both sites is vessel form. Common forms are bowls with everted rims and jars with short necks and sharply outcurving rims. Single or double-grooved incising along the inner jar rims is also a common decoration. Structure 7, a royal residence, included a tomb containing three complete slab-footed tripod vessels, which is a style linked to Teotihuacan (Fauvelle et al. 2013:250). These ceramic data come exclusively from the royal residential complex at Nim Li Punit, which, though a narrow sample of the total site area, suggests that a founding lineage settled at the site during the Early Classic and was connected to wider Maya lowland ceramic traditions, and possibly to political maneuvers as well.

Mortuary data from Nim Li Punit suggest that burial practices were an important facet of ritual and authority at the site. The Early Classic crypt from Structure 7 included the remains of at least one individual, but Braswell and colleagues report that most of the skeletal elements had been removed when the tomb was reopened during the Late Classic. Orientation of the remaining individual was difficult to determine. As the structure was remodeled, subsequent tombs were constructed and excavators theorize that teeth from this earlier burial were re-cached as part of a Late Classic tomb. Place-making through burials was a way for lineages to lay claim to land and



maintain authority (McAnany 2013; 1999; 2010). Along with architectural evidence, Structure 7 is interpreted as the residence of Nim Li Punit's ruling lineage throughout the Classic period (Fauvelle et al. 2013:250).

During the Early Classic, it is clear that wider social and political patterns reverberated through the Maya Mountains region, which were materialized through the erection of stelae, monumental architecture, ceramic styles, and mortuary patterns. Use of the natural landscape to elevate bi-level conjoined plazas with monumental stone architecture materialized the authority of rulers at Uxbenká and Nim Li Punit. Residents were participating in ceramic spheres that extended to the west; further ceramic evidence signifies that the Teotihuacan influence felt at Tikal resonated with the founding lineages at Uxbenká and Nim Li Punit. The mortuary pattern is distinctly regional, however, with individuals buried in a supine position with their heads oriented to the north. The mortuary pattern argues against the idea of an intrusive group from Tikal replacing a local lineage at Uxbenká. Burials indicate the importance of ancestors and the claiming of place – a wider Mesoamerican pattern.

Tikal underwent a hiatus in monument dedication and building construction that lasts for about 130 years, signaling its decline in influence and defeat by a political alliance between Calakmul and Caracol (Houston and Inomata 2009; Martin and Grube 2008:39). This event marks the close of the Early Classic period and the opening of the Late Classic, with a political landscape of competing city-states, an increase in monument dedication commemorating the actions of kings, an overall population increase, and the establishment of new settlements. The Late Classic period includes the florescence of the Maya Mountains region, where there is a significant increase in monumental construction at site centers and the expansion of hinterland settlements.

### **3.6 Late Classic Period (AD 600-900)**

The seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries (AD 600-900) in the Maya lowlands were the height of architectural and artistic achievements at many sites. Regional powers fought each other in a series of wars recorded on monuments. Tikal had long-standing political and military conflicts with Calakmul and Caracol; Dos Pilas was founded by a cadet lineage of Tikal, though it later broke away to establish its dominance over the Pasión region (Houston and Inomata 2009:110). Copán and Quirigua, in the southeastern lowlands, fought a series of battles resulting in the capture and execution of the Copán king, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil, at Quirigua in AD 738. Despite the increase in warfare, ruling families built ceremonial complexes with plazas, residences for nobility, and temple pyramids (Houston and Inomata 2009:112). The burgeoning of monumental stone architecture further naturalized the authority of rulers. Public monuments memorialized victories in battle, celebrated the performance of calendrical rituals, and commemorated political alliances in order to advertise the dominance and permanence of lineages. In addition, the basic scheme of hieroglyphic writing was embellished at the beginning of the Late Classic with new phonetic elements (Houston 2000). Texts were carved on monuments and architectural features and painted on ceramics. The material correlates of elite Maya culture suggest that inequality and hierarchy were firmly in place during the Late Classic.

However, populations grew exponentially during the Late Classic across the lowlands. Regions that had little to no settlement during the Preclassic and Early Classic periods filled with sites of modest to medium size. The southern Belize region was no exception to this pattern; populations were present but sparse in the Early Classic, though by the Late Classic two new political centers were founded, Pusilhá and Lubaantun, and numerous smaller sites blanket the landscape. How and why did this happen? Were these noble lineages from the Petén looking for

new domains? Did population pressure elsewhere force a migration towards the Caribbean coast? Or did the southern Belize resources increase in value as populations soared and elites relied on the material manifestations of power and prestige?

### **Late Classic Uxbenká**

The ruling elite at Uxbenká remodeled Plazas A and B around AD 600, at the beginning of the Late Classic, adding to the monumental core of the site. In total, 23 stelae have been found in Plaza A, commemorating not only the lineage's relationship with Tikal but also glorifying ancestral rulers and their link to the land (Prufer et al. 2011:218). Plaza B also underwent reorganization, adding elite residences, a ballcourt, and administrative structures. Monuments and ambitious building programs suggest the rulers of Uxbenká has control over a local labor force, whose population was expanding during this time.

Domestic settlements surrounding the site center occur on nearly every hilltop, and generally consist of between 1-7 domestic and public structures with stone foundation walls that would have supported perishable superstructures. Social diversity is clearly indicated, however, by the number of structures, quality of construction materials, structure size, and artifact quality, leading Prufer to argue that there was a rural elite and perhaps a nested hierarchy in the zone surrounding Uxbenká (Prufer et al. 2008:4). For example, Settlement Group 28 includes formal architecture and facing stones along the natural hillside to enhance the monumentality of the site (Prufer et al. 2008:47). Unfortunately, heavy looting precludes an in-depth analysis of status differentiation.

Ceramic assemblages define Uxbenká as a Tepeu 1-2 (AD 600-900) site with a Terminal Classic component (Jordan 2013). During the Late Classic, Uxbenká and its surrounding settlements feature ceramic assemblages dominated by local ceramic types, including

monochrome red open bowls (Remate Red) and black bowls and jars (Chacluum Black), and many unslipped jars and bowls (Turneffe Unslipped, Puluacax Unslipped) (Jordan 2013:133). Imported ceramics include Belize Red and Fine Orange wares, suggesting connections with the Belize Valley and the Petén, likely during the Terminal Classic. Polychrome types are similar to those in the Petén, but may have been made locally based on paste composition. Cream-slipped Zacatel polychromes are similar to the Louisville polychromes identified at Lubaantun by Norman Hammond, which were made locally. Orange-slipped Palmar polychromes are found mostly in tomb contexts at Uxbenká (Jordan 2013). Polychrome forms include bowls and dishes with outflaring walls and flat bases, and cylinder vessels (Jordan 2013:144-147).

Uxbenká reached its peak monumental construction, monument dedication, and hinterland settlement between AD 500 and 900. Rulers consolidated their authority over the Rio Blanco drainage by controlling local labor resources and maintaining a vibrant stela tradition memorializing their ancestors. Ceramic assemblages suggest that people living in the site core and the settlements were part of a region-wide ceramic tradition that took stylistic cues from Petén complexes. While regional patterns are evident in the material culture, people in the Maya Mountains were aware of and participating in the broader Maya cultural sphere. During the Late Classic, other sites grew in importance and influence as well.

### **Late Classic Nim Li Punit**

Nim Li Punit is located on an east-facing ridge overlooking the coastal plain (Hammond et al. 1999). As stated in section 3.5, recent excavations have established that the site was founded during the Early Classic period, and may have been occupied during the Late Preclassic (Fauvelle et al. 2013). The site core consists of several architectural groups, stela plaza, ball court, royal residences with elaborate tombs, and a possible council house (Fauvelle et al. 2013:

247; Leventhal 1990, 1992). These groups were constructed in a conjoined, bi-level fashion that uses the topography to its advantage - a distinctive southern Belize architectural style (Leventhal 1992).

Ceramics from test pits excavated in the West Group divide the site into two Late Classic phases: an earlier complex dating to the Late Classic and early facet of the Terminal Classic period (AD 600-830), and a late facet dating purely to the Terminal Classic (AD 830/850-900) (Fauvelle et al. 2012). Therefore, Nim Li Punit has a three phase ceramic chronology from the Early to Terminal Classic (AD 400-850/900), a period spanning 400-450 years. The ceramic assemblage fits with other regional types, with red-slipped bowls and jars from the Remate Group most frequently represented, along with examples from the Belize and Hondo ceramic groups (Fauvelle et al. 2012:55). The assemblage fits within the wider Petén Gloss sphere, including black and red monochromes and Zacatel and Palmar polychromes (Fauvelle et al. 2012). Fauvelle argues that the Hondo group, while limited at Lubaantun, comprises 12% of the total diagnostics at Nim Li Punit, and may have been manufactured there, suggesting that economic interactions between the two sites may have been limited. Ceramic pastes shift from calcite-based to non-calcite temper during the Late Classic, which differentiates paste characteristics from ceramics at Lubaantun and Uxbenká; Fauvelle and Braswell point to this line of evidence as support for limited interactions between the two sites.

At Nim Li Punit, 25 stelae were found in the stela plaza, which span 119 years (AD 711-830). Interestingly, the title Ek Xukpi, or “Black Leaf-nosed Bat”, was included in inscriptions on several stelae, suggesting connections with the polity of Copán to the southeast (Wanyerka 2009). Further evidence for connections with Copán include images of Nim Li Punit rulers wearing turban headdresses, emblematic of rulership at Copán, and the memorialization of a

Copán lord visiting Nim Li Punit for a fire ceremony. Structure 22A, Copán's putative council house (*popol nah*) includes the Nim Li Punit emblem glyph, suggesting that Nim Li Punit was a client polity of Copán (Wanyerka 2009:476). It is clear that polities in the Maya Mountains region, while regional in style, are connected to the political concerns of larger polities in the Maya region.

Several tombs have been excavated at Nim Li Punit, one described above and several other Late Classic crypts in the plaza of the royal residence. These tombs included multiple individuals, some of whom are oriented with their heads to the north, re-deposited tooth caches (which Geoffrey Braswell argues may also be a regional tradition), and grave goods such as complete vessels (Braswell et al. 2012:34).

Very little is known about settlement surrounding Nim Li Punit, since recent research has focused on the site center and its dynastic history. One monument bearing site, Xnaheb, is theorized to be a satellite site founded by an offshoot lineage from Nim Li Punit during the seventh century (Dunham et al. 1989: 272-275). It may have been settled to as they Lubaantun and Nim Li Punit dynasties began to decline during the late eighth century (Dunham 1990:177).

Nim Li Punit reached its apogee during the Late Classic period, similar to other sites in the region. Monumental architecture focusing on a royal residence with several tombs indicating the importance of ancestors to the ruling lineage. Inscriptions indicate that the rulers had ties to the southeastern lowlands, particularly the site of Copán.

### **Late Classic Pusilhá**

Pusilhá is located 3km east of the Guatemalan border in the southwestern Toledo district, close to the modern Q'eqchi' village of San Benito Poite. One of the largest sites in the Maya lowlands, it was constructed at the confluence of the Pusilhá and Poite rivers at the place where

they meet to form the Moho River. The soils are some of the best in the region, and each river is deep enough to allow canoe access from the Caribbean coast to the Petén region of Guatemala. Clearly the location of the site played a crucial role in its political and economic development.

Geoffrey Braswell argues that Pusilhá was founded during the Late Classic by lineages from southwestern Petén who fled dynastic conflict and warfare in that region. Fertile soils and a north/south trade route may also have been factors in their settlement choice (Braswell et al. 2005:83). Site survey revealed 500 structures surrounding a massive acropolis, with settlement densest along ridges that run roughly east-west, a settlement pattern common to the region (Braswell et al. 2005:74).

Epigraphic analysis by Christian Prager (2013) reveals that Pusilhá was founded after the “hiatus”, with a founding date of AD 571. He identified a 220 year span of dates from AD 571-798 with 40 named rulers. Braswell’s team identified 22 carved stelae, sculpture fragments, and a hieroglyphic stairway. The Pusilhá emblem glyph is read logographically as Un, or avocado, so Pusilhá’s 10 recorded kings and one queen may have entitled “Divine Avocado Lords” (Wanyerka 2009:312, or “Lords of extensive avocado groves). Six male rulers and the single queen comprised an uninterrupted dynasty from AD 571-731 (Wanyerka 2009). Pusilhá’s inscriptions use an unusual syntax and include calendrical errors in the lunar series, suggesting that scribes were only partially literate.

Ceramist Cassandra Bill corroborates the epigraphic record with four-phase sequence at Pusilhá: early and late facets of the Late Classic (AD 600-700; AD 700-780); the Terminal Classic (AD 830-950); and the Postclassic (AD 950-1100) (Braswell et al. 2005:66). Ceramics suggest a connection to the Pasion and Petexbatun during the Late Classic, with an increase in Belize Red during the Terminal Classic (8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries) pointing to a shift in regional

connections to the Belize Valley (Braswell et al. 2005). A change in ceramic styles may suggest a shift in political power from the Pasion region to the Belize Valley during the Terminal Classic (Wanyerka 2009).

During the Late Classic, the ruling lineage embarked on an ambitious architectural program, using the natural hills above the river to construct massive monumental architecture. Similar to other political centers, plazas in the site center were conjoined at differing levels, manipulating access to public spaces and private royal residences. In an impressive display of engineering, the residents of Pusilhá built a stone bridge across the Pusilhá River, one of the only known ancient Maya bridges besides Palenque.

Burials recovered from the Acropolis at Pusilhá include individuals interred in residences, and a royal tomb with jade, complete ceramic vessels, chert and obsidian eccentrics, and Teotihuacan imagery (Braswell et al. 2005). Almost all of the burials at Pusilhá were interred in a supine position with their heads oriented to the north, though some secondary burials were flexed (Braswell et al. 2005:80). If the founding lineage originated elsewhere in the Maya area, their mortuary pattern quickly conformed to the Toledo region.

Pusilhá declined towards the end of the Late Classic, although it was inhabited as late as the Postclassic period. The decline was followed by the sudden rise of Lubaantun, suggesting to some that the royal court moved from Pusilhá to Lubaantun at this time (Hammond 1975b). However, there is no archaeological evidence to support this theory.

### **Late Classic Lubaantun**

Lubaantun is located on a ridgeline defined by two creeks that join with the Rio Grande just south of the site. The site is situated at the base of the foothills of the Maya Mountains,



where the Rio Grande opens onto the Machaca Plain (Hammond 1975b). Presently, San Pedro Columbia is the nearest village of Q'eqchi' Maya people, and is one of the largest villages in southern Belize.

Hammond's stratigraphic excavations in the site center and careful analysis of the ceramics indicate that Lubaantun was inhabited for a period of only 130 years AD 730-860 (Hammond 1975:133b). The ancient Maya flattened the steep ridgetop to construct monumental architecture in a series of conjoined and descending plazas. Modifying the landscape to enhance the size of site cores is a commonality between the political centers in southern Belize, as is the joined and descending or "stepped" plazas (Leventhal 1992). At least four ball courts were constructed, suggesting that the ball game was an important component of Lubaantun social life and culture.

Among his many contributions to the archaeology of southern Belize was Hammond's construction of a ceramic typology and associated chronology (Hammond 1975c). Hammond analyzed ceramics using the type-variety system, with attention to paste, temper, and time sensitive-indicators such as vessel form and decoration. Hammond (1975c; 1976) identified several common forms at Lubaantun: large-necked jars, thick-rimmed jars, deep bowls, and hemispherical bowls. He also identified four main ceramic types based on fabric, form, and surface treatment: Turneffe Unslipped, Puluacax Unslipped, Remate Red, and Louisville Polychrome (Hammond 1975c). These four types account for 97% of the Lubaantun ceramic complex; neutron activation analysis demonstrates that these were made with local clays (Hammond 1976). Vessel form and decorations follow the groups and types established by Sabloff at Seibal, suggesting that the Maya Mountains sites were more closely connected to this sequence from the Pasión region of the Petén; local polychromes fit into the Saxche/Palmar

groups based on slip and decoration. Chronologically there is little Early Classic material and no Preclassic ceramic forms at Lubaantun. This further supports Hammond's argument that the site was inhabited for a relatively short period of time during the Late Classic period.

Lubaantun is also noted for its manufacturing of mold-made ceramic figurines and whistles (*ocarinas*). Found throughout the region, production areas have been identified in the site center. Forms include ball players, boxers, female "market women" with dogs or children, animals, and people engaged in everyday activities such as grinding corn and hunting, among others (Wegars 1977). Figurines provide an unparalleled view into social identity for the region, in addition to possibly delineating trade relationships (Halperin 2014a; 2014b). Particularly interesting are the so-called "pocket stelae", which are small clay tablets, also mold-made, that include scenes of feasting and ritual gatherings. Rulers are shown sitting on thrones or benches with hieroglyphic inscriptions (Wanyerka 2009). Wanyerka (2009) argues that these may have been gifts given to visitors commemorating ritual gatherings at Lubaantun. Fragments recovered at Kaq'ru' Ha' support this claim and suggest that hinterland sites were affiliated with political centers through trade and ritual cycles.

Another category of evidence that supports ties between political centers and hinterlands are mortuary patterns. At Lubaantun, at least one tomb has been excavated, in addition to other poorly preserved human remains found in the site core. A multi-generational tomb with up to 18 adult individuals was excavated in a residential group during Hammond's 1970 expedition. It was used episodically over a period of about 100 years, possibly between AD 672-711 and AD 889-948 (Hammond 1975b:67). Four individuals were interred supine with their heads to the northwest, as successive individuals were interred the bones were swept to the sides and the

skulls stacked in the western corner (Hammond et al. 1975:62). Other burials include teeth caches and individuals supine with their heads to the north (Hammond 1975b).

### **3.7 Postclassic in Belize (AD 900-1525)**

The Terminal Classic to Postclassic transition was characterized by a power shift from the highly centralized, hierarchical sociopolitical and economic structure that was the hallmark of Classic period lowland Maya civilization to decentralized settlements focused on commercial activity (Kepecs and Alexander 2005:5). While there were some “core zones” of political and economic power where elites still controlled long-distance trade goods, such as at Mayapan (Masson 2000) or the Aztec Triple Alliance in the Basin of Mexico (Smith and Berdan 2003), the lowland Maya constructed smaller cities along riverine and coastal trade routes, expanding markets for trade and increasing affluence among the population.

Scholarship during the last two decades has expanded our understanding of the Postclassic period from focusing on the collapse of Classic period Maya civilization towards one of cultural change and transformation (McAnany and Gallareta-Negron 2010). The Classic period emphasis on hierarchy and divine kingship with its associated investment in elaborate monumental architecture gave way to a society focused on efficiency and commercial trade. The Postclassic period in Mesoamerica is characterized by an expansion of boundaries and an international interaction sphere that bound regions together in shared styles of ritual iconography and trade (Masson 2000; Sabloff and Rathje 1975). Sabloff and Rathje’s (1975) mercantile model proposes that effort was invested in the commercial exchange of a wide variety of commodities. Participation in far-reaching exchange networks was open to many members of society, not just royals or elites. The result was a higher degree of affluence among the

population and a reduction in the size of monumental public buildings (Masson 2000).

Generally, Belize's intermediary position between the Petén and the Yucatán meant that they were a crossroads for population and cultural fluctuations after the Classic Period decline. Lamanai and Santa Rita were major political capitals in northern Belize during the Postclassic Period (Pendergast 1985; D. Chase 1982; Chase and Chase 1988). Lamanai has a very long occupational history and is thought to be a locale of stability through the Late-Terminal Classic transition (Pendergast 1986). Remodeling of Classic period structures and the recovery of burials containing effigy censers suggest that Lamanai was an important center during the Postclassic. Santa Rita was another important Late Postclassic site in northern Belize and because of its evocative caches of effigy censers, most likely celebrated calendrical ceremonies (D. Chase 1982). In the Belize River Valley, Baking Pot had an important Postclassic occupation (Hoggarth 2012), as did Barton Ramie (Gifford 1976).

In southern Belize, Lubaantun, Nim Li Punit, Uxbenká, and Xnaheb are all abandoned sometime before the Postclassic. There is an ephemeral Postclassic presence at Pusilhá, evidenced by ceramics (Braswell et al. 2005). Coastal sites, including Wild Cane Caye and Frenchman's Caye, show an increase in the north-south coastal trade of regional exotics during the Postclassic period (Healy et al. 1994; McKillop 1996). Not only does the amount of obsidian increase by 800%, but it has been sourced to multiple quarries (McKillop 1996). Exotics include copper and gold, Tohil Plumbate from the Pacific coast of Guatemala, Pachuca obsidian from Mexico, basalt, Tulum Red pottery, and high-quality chert from Colha on the central coast of Belize (McKillop 1996:55). McKillop links the increase in northern exotics to the political strength of Chichen Itzá in the Yucatán following the decline and abandonment of lowland Maya sites, indicating that the Maya of Wild Cane Caye re-oriented their commerce from the lowland

interior to coastal trade routes connecting all regions of Mesoamerica.

The Maya Mountains region follows wider economic and political Mesoamerican patterns during the Postclassic period. Classic period sites are depopulated and commercial exchange shifts to the coast, where smaller sites such as Wild Cane Caye and others were constructed to take advantage of passing trade canoes. Additional evidence from Juan Pedro Laporte's work in the southeastern Petén has documented two sites with Postclassic occupations located between Dolores and Poptun (Laporte 1996:264). These sites, and the Maya Mountains, would come under the political sway of the resilient Itzá kingdom situated on Lake Petén Itzá during the Spanish conquest and the centuries immediately following.

### **3.8 Colonial Period-20<sup>th</sup> century**

The Postclassic period closed at the time of contact with European Spaniards. In 1525, Hernán Cortés conducted an *entrada* across the Petén region and into Honduras, encountering Itzá speakers who had fled political and military turmoil in Yucatán around AD 1441-61 (Jones 1998:12-13). Based on the ethnohistoric record compiled by Grant Jones (1998), it seems likely that there were scattered Chol and Manche Ch'ol-speaking settlements in the southern Belize region at the time of Spanish contact; however, these sites have not been identified archaeologically. Spanish missionaries record the presence of Chol and Manche Ch'ol speakers present in the Sarstoon region of southern Belize (Thompson 1938). Records indicate that Chol Maya were forcibly removed from villages in the Manche Chol region (i.e., southeastern Petén and southern Belize) by Spaniards in the 1630s (Jones 1998:50), in order to be "reduced" into centralized villages with churches. The draw down of the Maya population can be attributed to colonial pressures, not indifferent abandonment.

During the Late Postclassic and early Colonial period, the Itzá controlled the area south of the Petén lakes region (Figure 3.1). This included the overland trade route through it, to beyond the Sarstoon River in Manche Ch'ol territory, where the Itzá kept cacao orchards (Rice and Rice 2005:153).

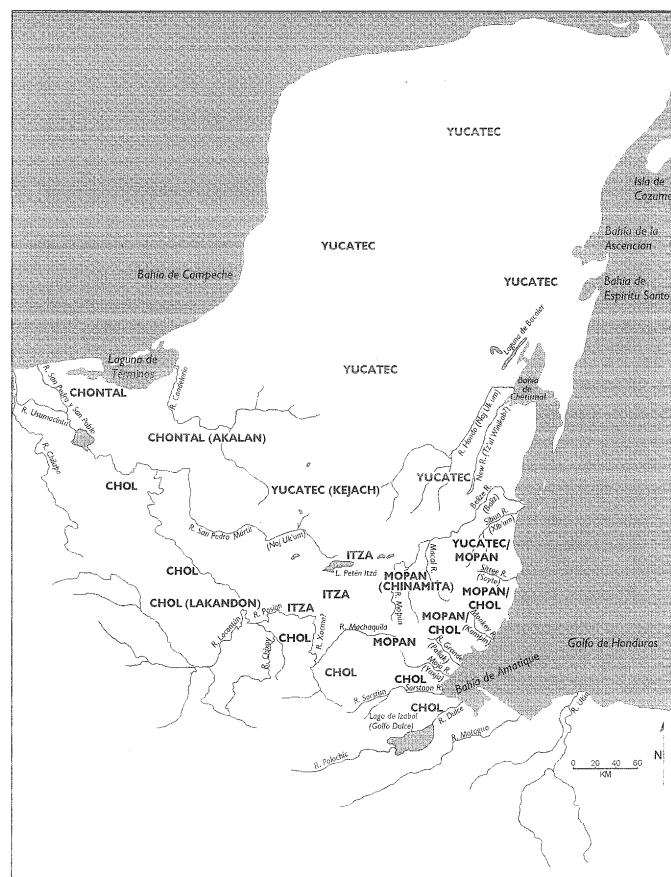


Figure 3.1. Lowland Maya language distribution during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (from Jones 1998:6).

In 1677 Fray Joseph Delgado crossed what is now the Toledo district from the town of Manché (close to Poptun, in Guatemala), traveling through southern Belize and then heading

north to the Belize River. He noted that there were many Chol and Mopan speakers in the region, specifically, he recorded people with Mopan patronyms (Yajkab', Tzak, K'in, and Chikuy) living between the Moho River and the area around present-day San Antonio village (Jones 1998:433). Jones writes, "The large population there was said to have moved from elsewhere to escape the Itzás; many more were hiding in the forests" (Jones 1998:433; see Thompson 1970:22-29). Geographer Joel Wainwright (2008:61) draws on archival evidence to argue that there was a village called Cantelac in this area that was the home to Mopan and possibly Manche-Chol speaking people during the conquest. Eighteenth and early nineteenth century residents of San Luis, just across the border in Guatemala, bore both Mopan and Itzá patronyms as recorded in baptismal registries. In 1883, a group of Mopan-speaking families from San Luis decided to establish a new community in British Honduras in order to escape heavy taxation, harsh labor conditions, and forced military service by the Guatemalan government (Jones 1998:420). This town is now known as San Antonio, and is in close proximity to the ancient city of Uxbenká.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Q'eqchi' Maya speakers from Verapaz had lost control of their land and were reduced to indentured laborers on coffee plantations run by foreign companies. They also were subject to similar forced military programs and the high taxes from which the San Luisenos had fled. Their influx into Belize has been steady since the 19th century, resulting in the founding of most of the 38 Toledo villages, including Aguacate village. Wainwright (2008:44) places the founding of Aguacate village in the 1880s. Contemporary patronyms of families in Aguacate suggest historical marriage patterns in the Maya Mountains region (the Chol/Manche Chol region) of Mopan, and Q'eqchi' families. For example, families with the surname Kan and Tut live in Aguacate today, and these patronyms have been found by Grant Jones (1998: 24-27) to have Itzá and Mopan roots.

Archaeologists have never systematically looked for sites from this time period in southern Belize, though historical period pottery has been found in the Uxbenká study area (Jordan 2013). Maya-Spanish contact sites in northern Belize at Lamanai and Tipu (Pendergast et al. 1993) have been identified through survey. Researchers point out the considerable difficulty in identifying colonial period sites, which consist of low mounds not visible unless fields are cleared. Ethnohistoric documents are also very unclear and potentially unreliable. When people were “reduced” into central towns, the towns were often given the same names as before; geographical descriptions are often not more precise than, “we crossed the river and walked through the jungle” (Pendergast et al. 1993:60). Despite this, Pendergast and colleagues (1993) recommend conducting reconnaissance in transects extending outwards from areas with Postclassic occupation, not Classic period sites, as a methodologically sound way to identify colonial settlements.

### **3.9 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries in southern Belize**

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Spanish empire struggled to maintain its monopoly on territory and resources in the Americas. Consistent encroachment by British, French, and Dutch trading companies eventually resulted in the ceding of territory to the British after the Battle of St. George’s Caye in 1798. Through diplomatic maneuvering, the colony called British Honduras was eventually extended south to the Sarstoon River. This area remained under British colonial rule until September 1981, when it gained independence as the nation of Belize. During the British colonial period English became the official language and archaeological research was first conducted in the newly-formed Toledo district.



## **Archaeological investigations in southern Belize**

Lubaantun was the first site investigated in the southern Belize region. Its presence was first reported in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Thomas Gann, a physician and amateur archaeologist was sent to document the site by the Governor of British Honduras. In 1915, R.E. Merwin's expedition to Central America on behalf of the Peabody Museum of Harvard University included Lubaantun on its tour of Maya sites. Merwin drew a very detailed plan map of the site's architecture, and excavated the south ball court (Morley 1938: Vol. IV: 2). The only known carved monuments from Lubaantun were recovered during this expedition – three ball court markers -- and subsequently were exported to the Peabody Museum at Harvard.

In 1926 Gann returned to Lubaantun with T. Mitchell-Hedges, as part of an expedition funded by the British Museum. It was during this trip that Mitchell-Hedges “discovered” the Crystal Skull and gifted it to his daughter for her seventeenth birthday. Though the skull has gained notoriety for having supernatural powers, researchers at the Smithsonian Institution have demonstrated that it was made with modern tools and is not an artifact created by the ancient Maya (Sax et al. 2008). During Gann's 1926 expedition, he named the site Lubaantun, which means “place of the fallen stones” in Yucatec Maya (Hammond 1975:33). Accompanying Gann on the project were influential archaeologists T.A. Joyce and J. Eric S. Thompson, who assisted in clearing the site, making further maps, and excavating for three seasons.

While working at Lubaantun in 1927, word reached the British Museum expedition that a site with many carved monuments had been discovered to the southwest. Dispatched to investigate, Thompson confirmed the discovery of Pusilhá, and work was suspended at Lubaantun in favor of investigating the monuments of Pusilhá. Several years later a mapping crew led by Geoffrey Laws (1928) would return to Lubaantun to produce the first topographic

maps of the site, but no excavations were conducted until Norman Hammond's efforts in the early 1970s.

Pusilhá was discovered by a logger named Mason, who was cutting a trail through the main plaza to cut mahogany trees in 1927. He alerted Gann, who was working at Lubaantun, who sent J. Eric S. Thompson. The project identified 10 architectural groups and 22 stelae, some of which they shipped back to England, as described in Chapter 1. Pottery Cave was excavated by Joyce and Thompson in 1928, where they recovered broken potsherds, stone tools, and human remains (Joyce et al. 1928:343). As work carried on at other sites in Toledo, Pusilhá remained something of an enigma, but was visited periodically by archaeologists for the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Hammond visited the two excavated caves during his Lubaantun excavations in 1975. By the end of the decade (1979-1980) Richard Leventhal excavated test pits in the site core of Lubaantun and identified and mapped outlying architectural groups (Leventhal 1990:131). Work at Pusilhá faltered again until the 1990s, when Gary Walters documented further architectural groups in unpublished reports (Walters and Weller 1990; cited in Wanyerka 2009). Archaeological research resumed in 2001 with Geoff Braswell's Pusilhá Project (PUSAP).

Nim Li Punit was discovered in 1976 by oil prospectors who reported their discovery to the Archaeology Commissioner. Hammond visited the site in order to produce a preliminary map, excavate test pits in the main plaza, and to examine several carved monuments (Wilk and Hammond 1976). Excavations were resumed by Richard Leventhal's Southern Belize Archaeological Project in 1983. The team expanded the original map and excavated two tombs (Leventhal 1990:132). Geoffrey Braswell's Toledo Regional Integration Project (TRIP) returned to Nim Li Punit in 2009 in order to investigate how the political centers functioned as a region

(Braswell et al. 2012:1). Braswell's team has conducted horizontal excavations at several important structures in the site center, one of which has been interpreted as a royal palace compound (Braswell 2010; Fauvelle et al. 2012). TRIP has also excavated test units at Lubaantun in recent seasons (Braswell et al. 2011).

Uxbenká was reported to archaeologists working in the region in 1984 by Santa Cruz villagers. Leventhal (1990:134) conducted mapping and excavations for several seasons in 1984, 1989, and 1990. The team abandoned the project after 1990 because of tensions with the village (Parks 2009). Keith Prufer's team, the Uxbenká Archaeological Project (UAP), has conducted research at the ceremonial center of Uxbenká since 2005. Excavations in the site center combined with extensive settlement survey, an aggressive radiocarbon dating program, and paleoclimatology research have provided much of our chronological information for the Maya Mountains region.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

Writers often refer to the Toledo district as the “forgotten district” because it is the least populated in Belize, and the least experienced by foreign tourists. This chapter demonstrates the deceptiveness of that statement – “forgotten” is a colonial designation without meaning for those who have lived in and shaped the region.

The Maya Mountains region has been continually occupied since the Paleoindian period, and the Classic period of Maya civilization fostered the florescence of several political centers and can be viewed as a field of action. The historical view presented here informs our understanding of how its development over time relates to shifting regional power dynamics. The material correlates linked to this field of action include: 1) sites constructed on modified ridges or hills located along waterways or natural corridors, 2) epigraphic evidence that describes

political connections with outside regions, 3) ceramic types that illustrate trade and identity, and 4) burial patterns that are emblematic of a regional social identity. These patterns recursively shape and maintain social identity in the Maya Mountains region.

The second field of action is archaeological research in the Maya Mountains. Archaeology parallels the colonial project of the British to extract the natural and cultural resources of the territory. Each site was (re)discovered by westerners who were searching for natural resources to export – logwood, mahogany, oil – but found cultural resources to extract as well. The exception to the rule is Uxbenká, which was reported to Richard Leventhal by local villagers in the 1980s. For decades, the extractive relationship extended to archaeological as well as economic resources and arguably strained the relationship between local people and archaeologists.

Through this history we can see how Maya people were affected by conquest and colonialism. They resisted Spanish and British control of their settlements and subsistence for centuries, but were eventually “reduced” into centralized villages on reservation lands. Marginalization and lack of self-determination with regards to land tenure created a population anxious for economic opportunities and cultural acknowledgement. The friction between contemporary Maya people and archaeologists within this field of action provides a rationale for a community-based archaeology project in Toledo.

## **CHAPTER 4: DESIGNING COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter traced the history of two fields of action in this study: the ancient Maya Mountains region and the discipline of archaeology. I proposed that a community archaeology research design could address the tension between archaeologists and descendent communities within the second field of action. Emphasizing how historical knowledge is produced, and for whom, is a cornerstone of community-based archaeology, the goal of which is to decolonize the discipline and address power imbalances. In this chapter I present the rationale for a community archaeology project in the Maya Mountains region and review models of community participation from across the globe. Drawing from that literature, I present my own research design for the Aguacate Community Archaeology Project.

### **4.2 Heritage Distancing in the Toledo district**

I became interested in engaging the public in archaeological research during my first visit to southern Belize in 2008 as an intern with the Maya Area Cultural Heritage Initiative (MACHI; now InHerit: Passed to Present). Founded by Dr. Patricia McAnany and Dr. Shoshaunna Parks in 2006, MACHI aimed to generate formal and informal educational programs for Maya descendent communities to foster engagement with the past (McAnany 2014:165). Their collaborator in southern Belize was a local NGO, the Julian Cho Society, directed by Cristina Coc, a Q'eqchi' Maya land rights activist. Working with Morvin Coc, a local Q'eqchi' man, we

developed and implemented interactive workshops on Maya archaeology and heritage for primary school children in nine Toledo district villages.

Morvin and I spent hours on the road, traveling between village schools, presenting information emphasizing the importance of conservation and engaging the children in craft projects and games. During these trips, what stood out to me was how little students learned about local Maya history in village schools; though there had been efforts by archaeologists to reach out to communities, there remained a significant divide between foreign archaeologists conducting research and creating knowledge and a rural, economically and educationally disadvantaged population who were dissociated from their ancestral heritage.

Patricia McAnany and Shoshaunna Parks call this heritage distancing – “the alienation of contemporary inhabitants of a landscape from the tangible remains or intangible practices of the past” (2012:80). While the authors coined the term with regards to the Ch’orti’ population and their relationship with the ancient Maya city of Copán, Honduras, they point out that the alienation of descendent communities from their past is linked to the historical processes of colonialism, nation building, and the destruction of indigenous identities (2012:82). The deleterious effects of these processes are clear in southern Belize, where Q’eqchi’ and Mopan villagers are struggling for land rights and cultural and political autonomy (Campbell and Anaya 2008).

In order to address historical power inequities over access to the creation and disbursement of archaeological knowledge in southern Belize, my goal was to test models of collaboration developed in North America (Agbe-Davies 2011; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006; McDavid 1997; Nicholas 1997; Silliman 2008; Watkins 2003), Australia (Smith

and Wobst 2004; Smith and Jackson 2006, 2008), and the Near East (Atalay 2003, 2007, 2012; Moser et al. 2002; Tully 2007) among descendent communities in the Maya region.

### **4.3 What is a descendent community?**

I consider a “descendent community” not as a biological/genealogical designation but one of self-identification by a contemporary population connecting themselves to a group of people in the past (Colwell and Ferguson 2008:2; Hutson 2010:159). As reviewed in Chapter 3, the Q’eqchi’ and Mopan Maya have a complex history of displacement. The Belizean government denied Mopan and Q’eqchi’ right to land based on customary land tenure, arguing that they “cannot establish a sufficiently long or continuous connection with the land they now occupy” (Campbell and Anaya 2008:379). Anthropologists, geographers, and experts on international human rights law have argued successfully against this definition (Campbell and Anaya 2008; Grandia 2007; Jones 2007; Wainwright 2007; Wilk 2007<sup>2</sup>). Their claim is in line with the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which understands “indigenous” as: “Descendents...of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived” (United Nations 2008). The definition includes a list of provisions on their understanding of the term indigenous, which include self-identification, historical continuity, strong links to territories and resources, distinctive cultural systems, and being a non-dominant social group (Parks 2009, 2011; United Nations 2008).

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<sup>2</sup> *Maya Villages* case supra n. 6. at paras 29-39, citing First Affidavit of Choc, Coc, and Chen at paras 19-28.

First Affidavit of Richard Wilk at paras 48-53, 60, 66, 70-3, 74-6.

First Affidavit of Liza Grandia at paras 24-6, 79. First Affidavit of Grant Jones at paras 63-5.

First Affidavit of Joel Wainwright at paras 48-50.

Following these provisions and scholarship I argue that the Mopan and Q'eqchi' are an indigenous descendent community by virtue of their self-identification as Maya, as well as their long-term occupation and use of the land in the greater region. Essentially, their daily life and practices are performed on this landscape and as contemporary locals they have a stake in projects that occur on their land and how those projects are carried out. Though Aguacate does not have more *legal* rights to the site or the artifacts than the government, I argue that they have a more convincing and immediate interest in learning about and conserving their ancestral heritage (Colwell-Chanthophonh and Ferguson 2008:8).

The land, therefore, is an important part of an indigenous identity in southern Belize. Other scholars (Hutson 2010:160; Sylvain 2002; Watkins 2003, 2005) have pointed out that tying indigeneity to land is dangerous because many indigenous peoples have been forcibly displaced from ancestral homelands, but are still indigenous communities. Hutson points to the example of the Omaheke San of Namibia, who were dispossessed from their traditional hunting lands, but managed to maintain kinship customs and an indigenous identity through relationships with other San (Sylvain 2002:1076, quoted in Hutson 2010:160). Tying descent and indigeneity too closely to land can be damaging to descendent communities, which is clear in the Toledo district. The state's argument in the land rights case assumes that Q'eqchi' and Mopan people have not maintained a long or consistent relationship with the land. However, Wilk argues: "The long history of dispossession and exploitation of indigenous peoples in the Americas has demonstrated over and over how important the control of land is to cultural survival" (Wilk 1997:xx). The literature and testimony of ethnographers, archaeologists, and geographers indicates that the Q'eqchi' and Mopan have consistently used and cared for the land for over 100



years, possibly more, and deserve the right of self-determination over their livelihood and heritage.

Given these definitions, my goal was to enhance the agency of Aguacate community members in regard to access and control over their material history. The concept behind community archaeology is to engage the community with local archaeology through fieldwork (Atalay 2012:49). Also critical to this engagement is the balancing of power between the archaeologist and the community. As Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson point out (2002:11), “Although it is not possible to achieve perfect parity and equal power, by merely making these our goals, it becomes possible for power to become more fluid throughout the study”. Putting this goal into practice required a community archaeology research design.

#### **4.4 Community Archaeology – Definition and Models**

Community archaeology is an archaeological practice in which communities participate in the research process and take at least partial ownership over its outcomes. This definition draws on Yvonne Marshall’s (2002:212) galvanizing description of community archaeology, “in which at least partial control of the project remains in the hands of the community.” While some scholars subsume “community archaeology” beneath the wider umbrella of public archaeology (Pyburn 2011:29), I consider these approaches to be entwined and overlapping in relation to each other. Related archaeological practices include: engaged archaeology, collaborative archaeology, community-based participatory research, cultural resources and heritage management, indigenous archaeology, tribal archaeology, and applied archaeology. While the broader goal of these approaches is to engage with the public, applying these approaches to an archaeological research design depends on factors that include project goals, identifying stakeholders, and stakeholder involvement or interest. I take this approach because of its flexibility; it necessitates

creative methods of engagement as well as a responsiveness to the priorities and goals of the community.

North American archaeologists have been involved in a variety of community approaches, public outreach, and engagement with descendent communities. Several efforts stand out as models of community engagement. An initial effort was Janet Spector's (1993) collaboration in the 1970s and 1980s with the Wahpeton community at the Little Rapids site, Minnesota, formed because of her discontent with an exclusive, scientific archaeology and her aspiration to apply a feminist approach to her archaeological practice (1993:7). Spector consulted and negotiated with the descendent Dakota tribe, resulting in a community archaeology project that was richly collaborative and drew on local oral histories, ethnography, and public outreach. She demonstrated that adding these methods can enrich her interpretations and fostered stewardship across generations of Dakota people.

Community archaeology in North America is well-established and sometimes overlaps with cultural resource/heritage management realms. In the last decade there has been an increase in collaborative efforts that include tribal archaeologies (specifically Hopi, Zuni, and Dine efforts: Ferguson 1997, 2003; Kuwanwisiwma 2008), collaborative and ethnohistoric archaeology (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006; 2008) historical archaeology (Agbe-Davies 2011; Stottman 2011; Leone 2005; 2010; McGuire 2008), and indigenous archaeology (Atalay 2006; Silliman 2008; Watkins 2000, 2004).

Marshall's (2002) community archaeology-focused issue of *World Archaeology* (34:2) signified an increase in public engagement with research. As she points out in her paper, the idea of community archaeology and public outreach was not a new development within the discipline,

though at the time she was writing it was starting to be explored further as a method (Marshall 2002).

Stephanie Moser and her colleagues (2002) working at Quseir al-Qadim on the Red Sea in Egypt, established methods for conducting community archaeology. As they pointed out more than a decade ago, “doing community archaeology means making fundamental changes to our research practice” (Moser et al. 2002:225). Changes include identifying local communities who may be interested and involving them in the planning and implementation of the project. While the authors admit that there is no “recipe” for practicing this kind of archaeology, they outline this set of guidelines to follow (Moser et al. 2002:229):

1. Communication and collaboration
2. Employment and training
3. Public presentation
4. Interviews and oral history
5. Educational resources
6. Photographic and video archive
7. Community controlled merchandising

Elements of their strategy that I found useful include communication and collaboration, public presentations, and educational resources.

Claire Smith and Gary Jackson’s “Barunga Protocols” (2008:177) were developed under the guidance of Aboriginal elders over 17 years of annual research with the Barunga-Wugularr community in northern Australia. Their protocols include: “recognize differences in knowledge systems; respect existing social and political systems; take responsibility for people you bring to the community; be flexible; publish with permission; share the benefits; think long-term” (Smith and Jackson 2008:177). These can also be thought of as a set of best practices that are flexible enough to be applied across cultures. These protocols are an important step in fostering a healthy, sustainable relationship with indigenous communities. In addition, Smith and Jackson

have formulated cultural and intellectual property kits tailored to the needs of different communities. These kits include a background history, discussions highlighting cultural and intellectual property rights, protocols developed by the media, and documents for negotiating intellectual and cultural property rights issues for both tangible and intangible heritage (Smith and Jackson 2008:194). Their project is not without its difficulties, facing language barriers, unequal power relations, and different knowledge systems (Smith and Jackson 2008:195). However, as a practical case study that directly address inequity and ethical dilemmas it offers a model that can be modified for other regions.

In Mesoamerica, there are fewer examples of community archaeology, although archaeologists working in Mexico provide examples of collaborative initiatives and heritage research. Traci Ardren's contribution to the *World Archaeology* issue was one of the first conversations about community archaeology in the Maya region. At the site of Chunchucmil, members of the Pakbeh Regional Economy Program shifted their research design to include community members in a discussion of a community museum aimed at tourists. Their idea was to enact a "collaborative plan of research and development that uses academic archaeological inquiry as a foundation from which to generate tourism within the local communities" (Ardren 2002:380). Though the museum did not materialize, Ardren (2002:393-394) makes several points that are useful to consider for archaeologists working in the Maya region. Archaeologists should be aware of 1) the historical development of the local landscape, and 2) how the archaeological knowledge produced is consumed locally. These points are profoundly relevant to archaeological work in the Toledo district, where the historical occupation of the landscape is politically contentious and ethnographic work has been marshaled by the government to argue against customary land tenure and descendent community status for Maya people (Wilk 1997).

Also located on the Yucatán Peninsula, the Kaxil Kiuic Project directed by George J. Bey III has incorporated community concerns into archaeology research. The site of Kiuic is located on the Helen Moyers Biocultural Reserve, providing a permanent and protected locale for archaeological, biological, and anthropological research (Sandlin and Bey 2006:261). In 2006 Jennifer A. Sandlin and George J. Bey conducted qualitative research into archaeological reflexivity at the site of Kiuic. By interviewing archaeologists doing research and interacting with local Maya people at the site, their study found that archaeologists have difficulty putting into practice their ideal vision of an inclusive, critical community archaeology (Sandlin and Bey 2006:268).

Methods for an inclusive archaeology in Mesoamerica have been developed in the intervening years since Sandlin and Bey's study. For example, Scott Hutson's heritage efforts in Uci and Kancabal, Yucatán, promoted bi-directional knowledge about local heritage through presentations of cultural heritage to foreign archaeologists and reciprocal presentations by archaeologists of their research into the ancient past to the community (Hutson et al. 2013:4). Methodologically these presentations included public talks on beekeeping, hunting, and traditional healing; archaeologists gave public presentations, site visits, and slide shows at local schools about archaeology. The authors recognized a shift in the value of quotidian local heritage, such as foodways or dances, when shared with outsiders. These presentations also acknowledged archaeological sites as heritage in the minds of community members, encouraging long-term conservation. This leads the authors to a crucial insight: "boosting visibility and knowledge of various kinds of heritage does not prevent local actors from making their own informed choices of what to value and what to maintain" (Hutson et al. 2013:14). Sharing knowledge about archaeology with local communities while listening to and respecting their

definitions of heritage leads to an inclusive archaeological practice.

When considering the relationship between archaeologists and the modern Maya, Jason Yeager and Greg Borgstede ask: “How can archaeologists create context-sensitive strategies to explicitly incorporate local social conditions and people in pragmatic decision-making processes?” (Yeager and Borgstede 2004:276). This study attempts to answer this question by designing a context-specific program that offers practical methods for including local people in the research process. The most explicit models that I drew on when designing this research were developed by Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T.J. Ferguson for the U.S. Southwest (2008), Claire Smith and Gary Jackson for Australia (2008), and Moser’s project for Egypt (Moser et al. 2002; Tully 2007). Although the goals of these approaches are similar, the application of methods is particular to the project, stakeholders, and region (Colwell-Chathaphonh and Ferguson 2008:21). As one approach to engaging communities, community archaeology is on the “collaborative continuum of practice” (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008:11), which outlines a spectrum on which different projects can operate.

Table 4.1. Collaboration as a Continuum of Practices (from Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008:11). Italics indicate where this project is located along the continuum.

<b>Resistance</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>
Goals develop in opposition	<i>Goals develop independently</i>	Goals develop jointly
Information is secreted	Information is disclosed	<i>Information flows freely</i>
No stakeholder involvement	Limited stakeholder involvement	<i>Full stakeholder involvement</i>
No voice for stakeholders	Some voice for stakeholders	<i>Full voice for stakeholders</i>
No support is given/obtained	<i>Support is solicited</i>	Support is tacit
Needs of others unconsidered	<i>Needs of most parties mostly met</i>	<i>Needs of all parties realized</i>

Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson developed this continuum based on the Collaborative Inquiry approach taken by educators at Columbia University. It involves “forming a group of co-researchers, creating the conditions for group learning, acting on the inquiry question, and making meaning by constructing group knowledge” (Bray et al. 2000:14). The designation of the relationship as “co-researchers” is a departure from other models of engagement which draw boundaries between researcher and community; this boundary can result in a one-way flow of information and decision-making instead of a recursive, collaborative relationship. For example, “public archaeology” implies that research is conducted by archaeologists and then relayed to the public in accessible, educational formats. While this was one aspect of the project, my overall goal was to move closer to the collaborative end of the spectrum.

In addition to building on the models outlined above, my motivation for designing collaborative research had an ethical dimension based on Virtue Ethics outlined by Chip Colwell and TJ Ferguson (2004:18) in their work with the Hopi, Zuni, Tohono O’odam, and Western Apache tribes in the US Southwest. “An ethic of collaboration involves no simple rule or moral equation; it entails the cultivation of sincere relationships guided by virtuous ideals – civility, cooperativeness, tactfulness, patience, trust, honesty, thoughtfulness, tolerance and respect” (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2004:24). While ideals to which archaeologists can aspire, these are also traits of character that contribute to being a moral person. Therefore an ethic of collaboration is rooted less in a perceived professional obligation (though there is an element of that), and more in a genuine motivation to behave morally while practicing scientific archaeology. This is not to say that all other archaeologists are behaving immorally if they choose not to collaborate, but that when collaboration is the goal an ethical framework is

necessary for building a collaborative research project (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2004:22).

Virtue ethics also fits with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2. Ethical behavior is continually enacted and habituated in a recursive process that forms a community of practice consisting of archaeologists and community members. This is especially the case in regard to trust, which is constructed through previous interactions and develops over time. In the following section I will outline how and why I worked to build a relationship of trust and collaboration with Aguacate village and Tumul K'in over the course of several field seasons. The following research design draws on the above literature and is my particular vision of collaborative archaeology in the Maya Mountains region.

#### **4.5 Structuring Collaboration with Aguacate village**

The following model outlines my strategy for collaborating with Aguacate village. It builds from the literature cited above with methodological implications for the wider Maya region.

##### *1. Recognize the historical context of the area and invest in the groundwork of collaboration*

An inclusive archaeology is firmly rooted in the historical, political, and social context of the area. Archaeologists are all too often unaware of local history and political dynamics, or how cultural resources are perceived or used by local communities and other stakeholders. Ardren (2002:392-393) argues that social contexts include the modern economic setting, the historical landscape, and the local patterns of consumption of archaeological knowledge. Methods to address this include 1) laying the foundation for collaboration by asking permission and spending time in the village, and 2) investing in conversation with community members about their goals for the community broadly.



After working with MACHI, JCS, and Tumul K'in, I returned each summer for about two months between 2009 and 2012 in order to build relationships and learn about the history, archaeology, and politics of the region. Hoping to engage Tumul K'in students, I used the school as a home base for meetings with nearby villages. I spent time with the administration and teachers, gave presentations on archaeology, and attended school events such as Maya Day (a festival of Maya heritage held at Tumul K'in) and graduation.

The Tumul K'in staff, (in particular the director, Esther Sanchez Sho, the radio station manager, Aurelio Sho, and teacher Don Victor Cal) encouraged me to contact Aguacate village. Aguacate had collaborated with Tumul K'in on a Q'eqchi' language program for their primary school; I was told that they were an open, progressive community that was friendly towards outside projects. I sent a letter to the Chairman, Salvador Ical, in the summer of 2010, but heavy rains prevented me from visiting the village that summer. Mr. Ical replied to our letter and was open to a meeting. I returned in the spring of 2011 with Dr. Patricia McAnany to meet with the Chairman, Salvador Ical, and the Alcalde, Abraham Kan, and propose the idea of a community archaeology project.

During that first meeting Dr. McAnany drew on her decades of experience conducting archaeological research in other regions of Belize and conveyed her commitment to working with Maya people. We discussed our work with MACHI in Toledo and our collaboration with JCS and its director, Cristina Coc. We proposed that I stay in the village for a week and hire men to guide me through community land to look for archaeological sites. If we identified sites that were well-preserved and appropriate for answering my research questions about household social identity and integration, then we would discuss returning the following year for excavations.

Mr. Ical and Mr. Kan were wary of our proposal. Mr. Ical was especially hesitant because of a previous experience with an archaeology project conducted at the site of Pusilhá, which is located in the village of San Benito Poite. Mr. Ical used to live in San Benito Poite and was critical of archaeologists who had been dismissive of villager concerns; they excavated a royal tomb and, according to Mr. Ical, had “stolen” the jade artifacts. In fact, the jade artifacts were not stolen, but stored at the Institute of Archaeology in the capital of Belmopan. Belizean permit regulations specify that special finds are to be given into the care of the government. However, communication between the archaeology project and villagers was clearly not prioritized since there was much misunderstanding about the goals of the project and laws governing cultural heritage and artifacts in Belize.

The cause of secrecy among some archaeologists is related to looting, which is prevalent throughout the Maya region (Coggins 1969; Matsuda 1998; Pendergast 1991). The damage that has been perpetrated on archaeological sites is significant, resulting in the loss of irreplaceable information (Chase et al. 1988:56; Parks et al. 2006:426). One strategy has been to exclude local people from sensitive excavations such as tomb and burial contexts. This exclusion only exacerbated asymmetrical power relationships between descendent communities and archaeologists (Matsuda 1998:94). Summarized by Matsuda (1998), a “purist” mentality characterizes archaeologists as selfless stewards of the ancient past fighting to protect cultural patrimony from “the uneducated masses...motivated by greed [and] plunder for profit” (Matsuda 1998:89). Though this perspective ignores the colonial processes that have marginalized indigenous people and descendent communities for centuries, it is one extreme end of a debate within archaeology over stewardship of the archaeological record. Collaborative archaeology that is open and responsive to local concerns is one way to address this divide.

Persuaded in part by our willingness to remain open about our research goals, Mr. Ical and Mr. Kan agreed that we should present our project to the entire village council, which we did the next evening. After an untranslated conversation in Q'eqchi' they agreed to show us archaeological sites on their land if we hired two men per day at an agreed upon rate, and if I stayed with families in the village through their homestay program. We agreed, and I stayed in the village for about 5 days, hiking through the surrounding hills, talking to the men, and getting to know the families with whom I stayed and ate. They showed me places on their land that they knew to be archaeological sites because of artifacts eroding out of mounds or deposited in caves and rock shelters. I saw enough evidence of rural household sites to warrant a second trip during the summer of 2011, during which I stayed in the village again and conducted a more systematic survey.

From the beginning it was clear that my goals and the community goals “developed independently”, defining the project as participatory according to the Collaborative Continuum. I was focused on surveying community land for evidence of ancient Maya households; the community was interested in a new source of income and educational opportunities for their school. However, these two trips in 2011 were important first steps during which community members got to know me and started to trust my intentions. Returning to the village when I said I would, living with families, conversing with men during hikes and over meals, and meeting with the village leadership consistently demonstrated the virtue ethics of dependability, civility, willingness to learn, trust, honesty, and respect (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2004:19; Rachels and Rachels 1993:163).

*2. Foster strong communication and collaboration with community members*

Openness of information is also a cornerstone of community archaeology. Scholars agree that a two-way dialogue about the implementation of the archaeology project, the knowledge produced, and the long-term benefits/effects of the research forms the basis of a community archaeology endeavor (Atalay 2012; Atalay et al. 2014; Colwell Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008; Moser et al. 2002; Smith and Jackson 2008).

Communication and collaboration were fostered through continuous dialogue with village leadership and community members. I developed a good working relationship with the village alcalde and chairman, as well as the village council. When I returned to Belize in 2012 to finish the survey and map the sites we had identified, we held numerous meetings with the village leaders and several community meetings where village members could ask questions and raise concerns. A community vote was held to approve the project; it passed, but not without spirited debate. These meetings were the backbone of community participation and openness throughout the research process. In this way, “information flowed freely” between myself and the village, creating a collaborative effort in the running of the project.

Another stipulation was consistent work updates and the composition of a Memorandum of Understanding between myself, the Institute of Archaeology and the community leaders (Appendix A). Mr. Ical and Mr. Kan, as village representatives, insisted on signing this document, as well as having copies of my documents from the Institute of Archaeology. Falsified government documents had been shown to other villages in the past as a way to extract hardwood from their land illegally, so they were understandably concerned with proper documentation. The work updates took the form of a daily log that recorded the date, site where we had worked, villagers that were hired that day, any visitors to the site, and details of our daily progress, including bags of artifacts taken for analysis.

### *3. Share decision making with community members*

A crucial aspect of decolonizing archaeology is correcting historical power imbalances in which archaeologists fail to consult with stakeholders, especially descendent communities. For archaeologists, the important point here is listening to community concerns and then shifting behavior to reflect compromise.

The site that we excavated most intensely, Kaq'ru' Ha', was named by the community. On my maps it was known as "Site 1" for a long time because it was the first site that we recorded in 2011. When we decided to excavate I asked the village to name it so we could reference it in a more meaningful way. Kaq'ru' Ha' means Red Water in Q'eqchi', and references a small pond about 20 meters north of the platforms that has been used as a hunting locale for generations. Language is one way that power structures are enabled, especially in collaborative archaeology (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2004:11). Names are powerful and it was important to identify Kaq'ru' Ha' as a local, Q'eqchi' place.

I agreed not to survey leased lands, which are plots of lands that individual villagers have leased from the community or government to develop for their own profit. These lands do not rotate through traditional slash and burn agricultural cycles, but are usually cleared and maintained for cattle – a significant investment. It was frustrating to be denied access to the land because at times I could see mounds from the road that I wanted to document but was unable to do so according to the agreement. In the long run I think this built trust with the community, because I showed that I respected their wishes and land tenure policies.

The community also decided where the artifacts should be stored. From the beginning they wanted the artifacts to stay in the village, which was slightly difficult to arrange because, while the permit holding archaeologist must provide storage for artifacts, the Institute must

approve the facility. In a rural place like Aguacate there were not too many secure options. During this process I was more of a consultant that helped think through ideas and the repercussions of different locations. For example, without major renovations the community center was not the best choice for storage. It needed better locks and burglar bars to keep the artifacts safe. We also discussed building a new structure in town, but when a new school was built with excellent safety features we put the artifacts there instead. We were also awarded a conservation grant from InHerit: Passed to Present, which went towards restoring an old corn mill. The walls were solid but the structure needed a new roof, doors, and burglar bars, which have been installed. The heritage center will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

#### *4. Public presentations of archaeological work*

Presenting archaeological research also contributes to openness of information and reaches a broad cross-section of stakeholders. Presenting in public ensures that women, children, and the elderly also have access to the knowledge produced. Presentations can include hands-on activities, site tours, multi-media presentations, or school projects.

Communicating the progress of the archaeological project occurred in several ways. As previously mentioned, a log was kept and the village leaders were updated weekly. I also had informal conversations with the men who worked daily with me about archaeology and what it meant. At the end of each field season I presented my findings to the entire community and brought some of the artifacts for people to see. Site tours were given each year to schoolchildren, as well as a special Mother's Day tour for the women. Other events included a site tour for an international group of Native students from Canada, a presentation at Culture Day at the Aguacate primary school, and two presentations at the Tumul K'in Maya Day festival. Each

event represented an opportunity to engage with multiple publics and answer questions about archaeology.

#### *5. Development of educational materials*

Opening access to archaeological materials in as many ways as possible has a lasting impact. Conserving the site and housing materials and replicas in the heritage center work towards this goal. Education in particular is a long-term investment that can impact how people perceive archaeology and its benefit to their community. The development of educational materials for Aguacate is ongoing; a simple English brochure with images and maps was designed by volunteer Rebecca Sgouros for community members to read and also present to tourists that visit the homestay program. A replica of a vessel recovered from the cliff face has been made; further replicas will be made and used as educational materials. Additionally to Aguacate, I worked with the local Maya high school of Tumul K'in to develop educational materials and I co-taught a Maya History class in 2012.

During the 2012 field season Tumul K'in graciously hosted the project on their campus. Project members lived on campus and participated in the daily life of the school. I was a co-Instructor for Maya History, along with a young Q'eqchi' man, Filoberto Rash. Filoberto and I talked about how to teach the class and incorporate a fieldwork section; an important facet of this effort was teaching Filoberto more about Maya archaeology. We developed a syllabus, and for three weeks in January I taught in the classroom on campus. In February and March students helped with the survey of Aguacate land, learned about mapping, and excavated test units at Kaq'ru' Ha'. Though somewhat brief, teaching at Tumul K'in laid the groundwork for further collaboration, such as training for history teachers and a field school.

#### *6. Sustainability: Seek support for long-term conservation of the site and artifacts*

“Thinking long-term” (Smith and Jackson 2008:177) is key to collaboration. Making sustainability part of the research design from the outset is one way to foster ideas from community members and keep long-term goals part of the conversation (Atalay 2012:3). Sustainability of archaeological heritage implies that cultural resources are not completely used or destroyed, but are conserved in order to meet the needs of future generations (Brundtland 1987). Engagement may be sustained through the way that it is formed – fostering awareness and knowledge of the ancient artifacts that captured our attention initially. When people engage with materials – when we make, trade, bury, curate, discard, or store things – we are participating in a process of place-making (Ingold 2000). Interactions between people and things connect us in a meaningful way to places. For archaeologists working with communities, this means working with local people to come up with creative ways to continually participate in that process of engagement and place-making. Two ways to sustain collaborative relationships are by enlisting the support of existing institutions that are meaningful to communities, and by establishing a mechanism through which communities can engage with artifacts and sites. In Aguacate, this meant constructing a heritage center for storage of the artifacts and educational materials. I will return to the results of this process in Chapter 8.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

As a community-based effort, the Aguacate Community Archaeology Project is a long-term investment in the community and the region, and there are still goals to be met by this project. For instance, interviews will be conducted with village members about their views on the archaeological project and the heritage center in order to evaluate the project. Further materials need to be collected for the heritage center, including oral histories, books, lessons plans, maps, and images. Further capacity building and training of women and young people to participate in



and run the heritage center will further integrate the center into village life. The following chapters will return to the archaeological materials recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha'.

## **CHAPTER 5. THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: EXCAVATION AND MORTUARY DATA**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Drawing on previous studies of rural complexity in the Belize River Valley (LeCount and Yaeger, 2010; Iannone and Connell 2003; Robin 2012), the Aguacate Community Archaeology Project (ACAP) seeks to expand anthropological knowledge of the social and economic negotiations that comprise complex societies. As presented in Chapter 3, little is known about the social identity of hinterland residents or for how long they inhabited the Maya Mountains region. Furthermore, it is unclear how the sudden growth of political centers during the Classic period might have impacted rural settlements. To review the questions posed in Chapter 1: When were hinterland sites on Aguacate land established and for how long were they inhabited? Were there shifts in social or economic connections over time? How did the burgeoning of Late Classic political centers affect the lived experience of hinterland communities? How would access to the abundant resources of the region be affected by the centralization of power in cities?

In order to address these questions, a research program was undertaken consisting of 1) archaeological reconnaissance, 2) topographic mapping, 3) salvage and targeted stratigraphic excavations, 4) laboratory analysis of ceramic and lithic artifacts and human skeletal remains. The above objectives were undertaken in collaboration with the Aguacate community.

Archaeological signatures can illuminate what Canuto and Fash (2004:51) call “the blind spot” between elite and nonelite strategies of political, economic, and social affiliation. Analysis of survey data sheds light on the density of regional occupation and is the first step in expanding

interpretations of the hinterlands. Material residues of varying allegiances were anticipated to include architectural differentiation, shifting ceramic styles, and the presence of imported or gifted items. Materials collected from stratigraphic excavations were used to examine the production and consumption of artifacts as well as to evaluate the use of space for household activities.

As outlined in Chapter 4, the additional goal of ACAP was to engage local communities with archaeological practice through outreach and education. This collaboration occurred on two fronts: within Aguacate village and at Tumul K'in Center of Learning. Aguacate community members are enfranchised members of the project; as such they are active participants in the management of the sites recorded on their land. The project worked closely with village leaders to ensure that community members were informed of where archaeologists were surveying and excavating, what artifacts we found, and which materials were removed from community land. The active role of the community leadership resulted in the Aguacate Conservation Committee, a newly formed group dedicated to conserving archaeological heritage on community land. A Maya History class at Tumul K'in Center of Learning took on an archaeological component during the spring of 2012. Following culture history and methods classes, the 3rd year history students accompanied ACAP to experience archaeological fieldwork firsthand. Educational and outreach programs not only promoted archaeological knowledge among Maya communities they also facilitated open communication between archaeologists and local people.

## **5.2 Survey Methods**

Previous surveys in neighboring corridors (Hammond 1975; McAnany et al. 2002; Prufer and Thompson 2007; Prufer et al. 2011) recorded settlement primarily on medium-sized hilltops. Therefore, we focused our reconnaissance on medium-sized hills and ridgelines within the study

area, which is defined as an 8km-3km area (total area 24km<sup>2</sup>) on Aguacate community land, between 272000mE – 280000mE and 1787000mN - 1790000mN. During the spring of 2011, mound groups were identified through informal reconnaissance survey. These and previous site recordings (Hammond 1975; Staski and Wilk 1985) justified a systematic archaeological survey of the hilltops.

Due to time constraints and community disagreement (e.g., pasture lands, we were unable to conduct a full-coverage survey of the study area. Pedestrian survey was conducted along two transects. The north transect extends from 275800mE – 2779000mE and covers 1km between 1789500mN and 1788500mN; the south transect extends from 277455mE – 277969mE and covers the .5km between 1788327mN and 1788262mN (see Figure 5.1). Total area surveyed was 7.5km<sup>2</sup>, or almost a third of the arbitrarily defined study area.

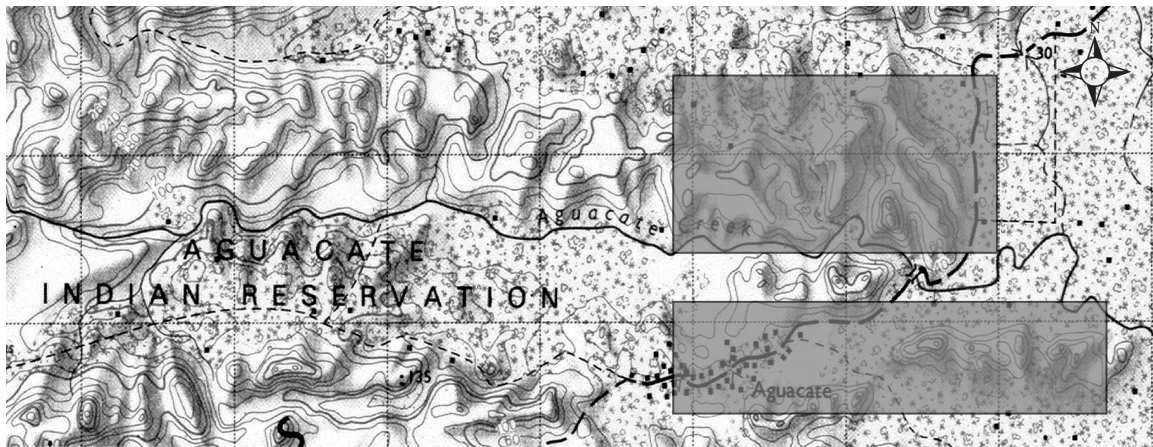


Figure 5.1. Northern and southern survey transects.

Four men from Aguacate were employed to clear pathways through dense vegetation and act as guides through community land; the non-local survey team consisted of Claire Novotny, Matthew Stirn, and Rebecca Sgouros. Surveyors walked 10 meters apart along these transects paying close attention to topographic features such as mounds as well as other surface remains such as sherds, obsidian, and chipped stone. Archaeological sites and features were recorded

with a hand-held Garmin GPS unit and mapped with a tape and compass. Altogether, 12 archaeological sites were recorded and 10 were mapped within the two transects (Figure 5.2).

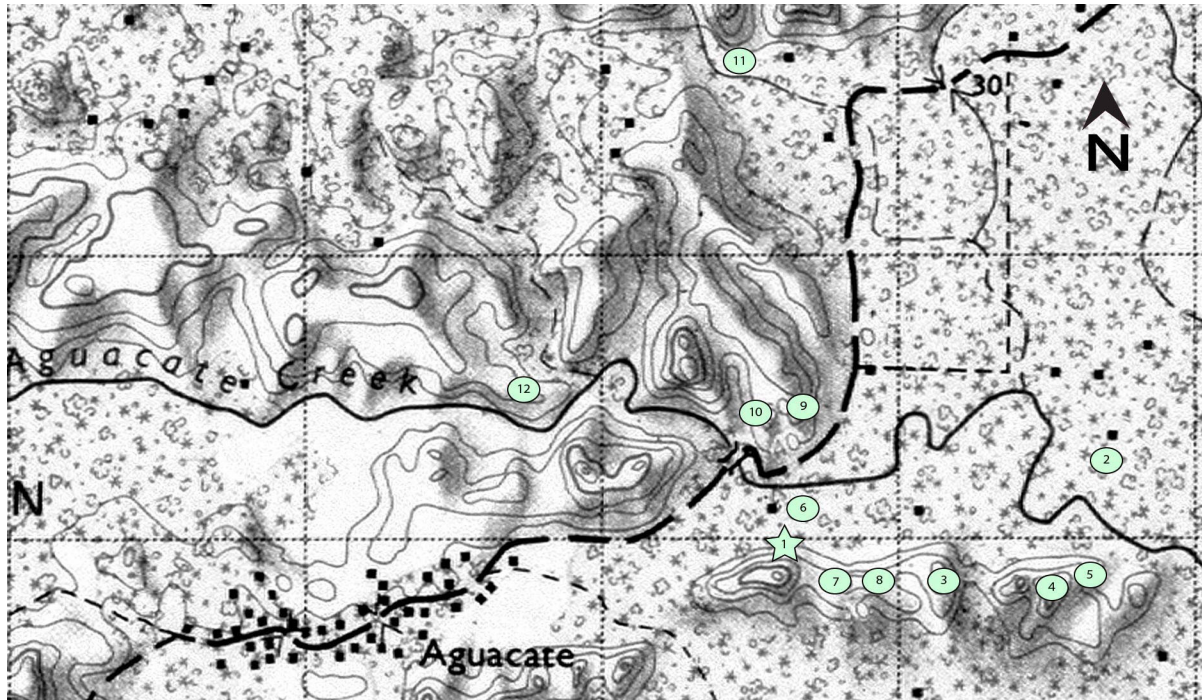


Figure 5.2. Map of sites recorded in the study area.

### 5.3 Survey Results

Overall, the settlement pattern in the study area follows the pattern recognized by previous surveys in the region (Leventhal 1992: 147-148; McAnany et al. 2002:4; Prufer et al. 2013:65). Hinterland settlements consist of one to three platforms constructed on modified, medium-sized hilltops in a either a rectilinear arrangement that follows the topography or grouped around small patios. Sites in the Aguacate corridor conform to this pattern, with the exception of Kaq'ru' Ha'. Site density was low, with only two sites per square kilometer for the 24km<sup>2</sup> study area. In contrast, Hammond (1975:89-90) recorded 40 groups per km<sup>2</sup> in the 3.1km<sup>2</sup> adjacent to Lubaantun.

Table 5.1. Sites recorded in the study area.

Site Number	Environmental Location	Number of Structures	Structure Types	Site Plan	Architectural Features	Artifacts	Time Period
1	Floodplain	9	Domestic, Public, Ritual	Terraced, patios	Platforms, Patios, Paving stones	Ceramics, figurines, chert, obsidian, human bone	Early/Late Classic period
2	Hilltop	2	Domestic	Patio Group	Paving stones, retaining wall	Ceramics, chert, human bone	Late Classic
3	Hilltop	3	Domestic	Patio Group	Walls	Ceramics, chert debitage	Late Classic
4	Hilltop	2	Domestic	Patio Group	Platforms, patio	Ceramics, chert debitage	Late Classic
5	Hilltop	3	Domestic	Patio Group	Platforms, patio	Ceramics, obsidian	Late Classic
6	Floodplain	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	Ceramics	Late Classic
7	Hilltop	3	Domestic	Patio Group	Platforms, Patios, Paving stones	Ceramics, obsidian, groundstone	Late Classic
8	Hilltop	0		Terrace	Terrace	ceramics	Late Classic
9	Hilltop	2	Domestic	Patio Group	Platforms, patio	Ceramics, chert debitage	Early/Late Classic period
10	Hilltop	3		Patio Group	Platforms, patio		
11	Hilltop	1	Domestic	Patio Group	Platform	Ceramics, lithics	Late Classic
12	Hilltop	1	Domestic	Patio Group	Platform	Ceramics	Late Classic

Table 5.1 shows the sites recorded in the study area. Most sites were located on medium-sized hilltops (83%), as expected, and consisted of one main structure with one or two smaller ancillary structures doubling as retaining walls. Several sites were vague or less well-preserved, such as Sites 6 and 8, which consisted of artifact scatters. Three sites had well-preserved architecture: Sites 9 and 10 consisted of several structures arranged around a central patio, while Site 1 (Kaq'ru' Ha') included three platforms and nine structures. Ceramics collected from the surface of sites dated to the Late Classic period (AD 600-830), with the exception of the Balanza Black (Early Classic AD 250-600) slab-foot at Site 9 and the higher diversity of artifacts (e.g., figurines, obsidian, polychrome pottery) found on the surface at Kaq'ru' Ha'.

Sites with three or less structures are termed *patio groups* to describe their configuration of dwellings arranged around a leveled area; eleven of the 12 recorded sites fit this designation. Structures are .5m-2m in height and hold dual functions as retaining walls that extend and reinforce the edge of the hill tops. Here I will only be discussing the survey results of Kaq'ru' Ha' (Site 1), Site 9, and Site 10; maps for the other sites can be found in Appendix B.

Rather than being constructed on a hilltop, Kaq'ru' Ha' was built above the floodplain against a rock shelter, and incorporates open spaces into its site plan. These are termed *platforms* because they support smaller structures and incorporate open patios; they form terraces on the

natural slope. Increasingly restricted patio space suggests a hierarchy at the site; the summit of Platform C likely was a restricted space reserved for smaller, intimate interactions.

### **Kaq'ru' Ha'**

Kaq'ru' Ha' was constructed on a modified slope rising above a seasonal swamp with a semi-permanent pond. The pond draws animals as a water source, especially peccary (wild pig), hence the name Kaq'ru' Ha' (Red Water) given to the area by local hunters. The site rests on a slope extending from a natural cliff, which forms the southern boundary of the site. Kaq'ru' Ha' consists of three terraces with two to three structures framing each terrace (Figure 5.3). Kaq'ru' Ha' served both ceremonial and residential functions based on Hammond's designation of structure function by mound height presented in Chapter 2 (Table 2.1).

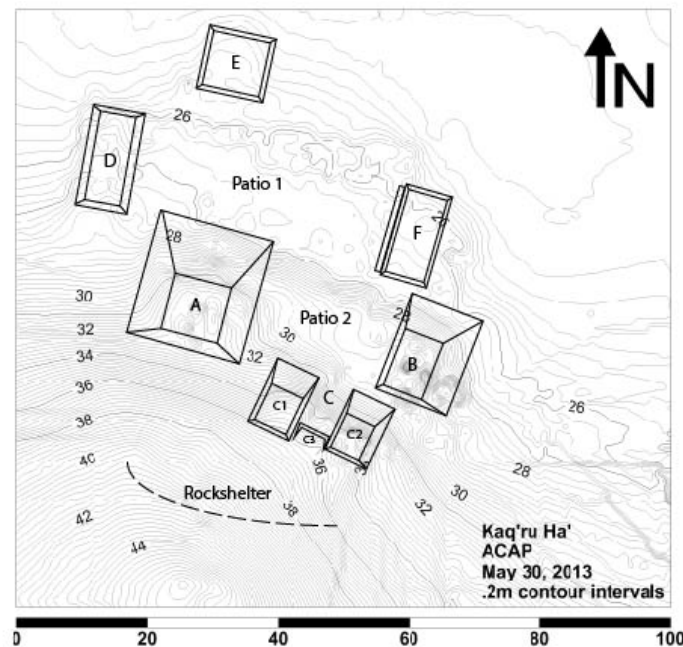


Figure 5.3. Topographic map of Kaq'ru' Ha'.

Patio 1 is a 20m x 40m rectangular construction with a height of .5m. The long axis is oriented 280° west of north. It supports structures D and G; structure E extends north from the

terrace. Structure G was damaged by a wide looter's pit. Surface collections were productive because the grader had scraped the top of the terrace. We recovered artifacts included ceramic sherds, ceramic figurine fragments, chert flakes and cores, and many chert nodules. Patio 1 was constructed with 30cm of silty clay mixed with rocks and pebbles supporting 40cm of dry limestone fill (Figure 5.4). The fill was covered with a brownish yellow silty clay mixed with sand grit and lime; the Aguacate men called this mixture “seb” and say that it makes a harder mortar than just lime alone.

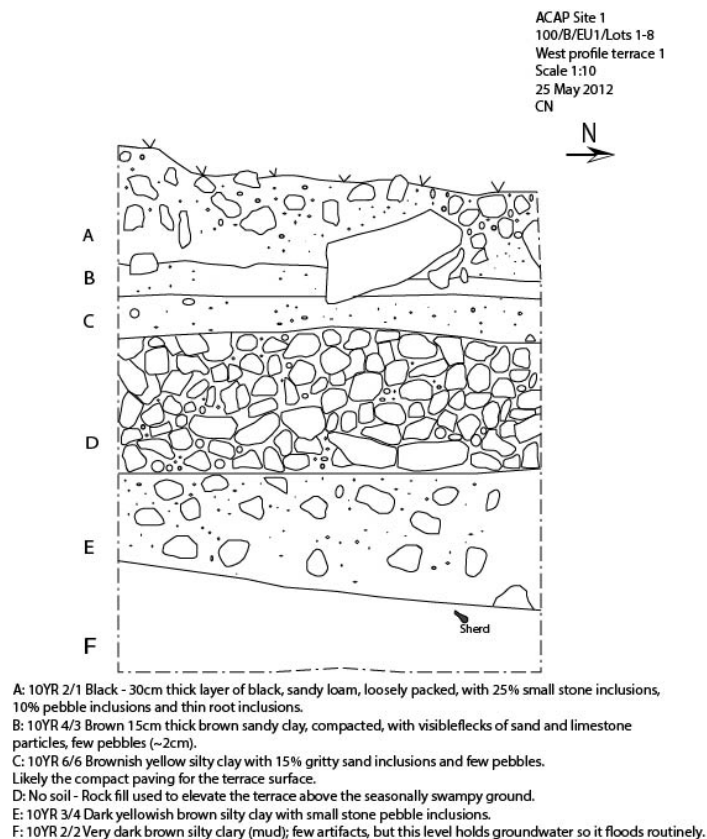


Figure 5.4. 1m x 1m unit showing the construction fill of Patio 1.

Terrace/Patio 2 is a 10m-20m rectangular construction 4m in height with a long axis oriented 280° west of north. Using the natural hill slope, Terrace 2 was constructed of modified and unmodified limestone blocks; it supports structures A and B, as well as the base of Structure



C. There are two possible sets of steps parallel to each other on the north side of the terrace. They may be recessed into the terrace wall, but they are not well-preserved so it is difficult to say for sure. Structure B was heavily looted in the recent past, and there is significant bioturbation from ground moles. Surface collections included abundant ceramic sherds, chert nodules and flakes, obsidian blades, and groundstone.

Platform C is a 5m-10m platform oriented 280° west of north that supports three small structures on a very restricted summit (C<sub>1</sub>, C<sub>2</sub>, and C<sub>3</sub>). I distinguish platforms as supporting structures, while terraces support structures but also provide ambient/outdoor space. Platform C is constructed of megalithic, modified and unmodified limestone blocks. Walls on the eastern and western sides of the platform are remarkably well-preserved (Figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5. Northeastern corner of Structure C<sub>2</sub>. Photo by Matt Stirn.

The north-facing front of the platform is less well-preserved, and no steps are evident. The southern side of Platform C is the natural hill slope that ends ~10m away at the cliff face. In addition, there is a small terraced structure off of the eastern edge of the platform. Surface collections were sparse compared to the lower terraces, and included ceramic sherds and figurine fragments, as well as obsidian blade fragments.

An interesting feature of Kaq'ru' Ha' is the cliff that delineates the southern edge of the

site. An abundance of large, well-preserved ceramic sherds at the base of the cliff along the drip line suggest a ritual deposit, while a looters' pit dug into a natural niche in the cliff exposed ceramic sherds and human bone. Though shallow, the rock shelter clearly played a role in the ritual life of the community.

In sum, Kaq'ru' Ha' is comprised of two terraces and one monumental platform supporting a total of nine structures. Surface collections indicate that the site consisted of a household as well as administrative or ritual buildings. The terraces use a natural hill slope to elevate the structures over the surrounding floodplain of Aguacate Creek. The dramatic cliff face would have been a significant feature on the landscape, as would the site, since it is the only instance of monumental architecture in the study area.

## **Site 9**

Site 9 is located at 1788500mN-2776000mE, up a steep hill wreathed with copal trees directly northeast of the road into Aguacate village. There are two structures on the summit, as well as a leveled patio between them. Structure A is oriented to the north/northeast, and is a 7m x 5m square structure 2.5m in height (Figure 5.6).

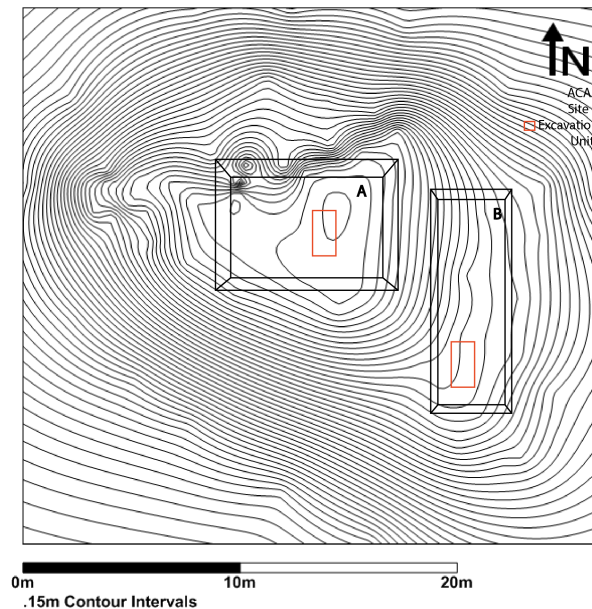


Figure 5.6. Topographic map of Site 9 showing structures and excavation units.

There are two fallen trees whose roots exposed deposits of ceramic and lithic artifacts. Several were rim re-fits, and one was a Balanza Black slab foot (Figure 5.7) suggesting an Early Classic occupation phase. Structure B is a smaller structure located to the southeast of Structure A. Only 1m in height, the walls also function as a retaining walls. There is no evidence of looting at Site 9; it was surface collected and mapped with the Total Station. The Tumul K'in students assisted in clearing and mapping Site 9, learning about rural households in the process. Interestingly, Kaq'ru' Ha' is clearly visible across the valley from the patio of Site 9.

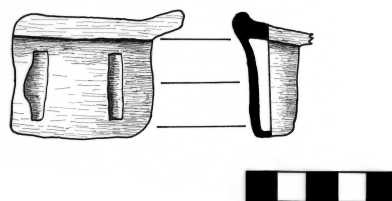


Figure 5.7. Balanza Black slab foot recovered from Site 9 during surface collection.  
Drawing by Rebecca Sgouros and Matt Stirn.

## **Site 10**

Site 10 is located southwest of Site 9, on top of a hill. There are significant bedrock outcrops on the northern side of the hill, but the southern side was leveled for the construction of three platforms (Figure 5.8). Structure A is situated to the north side of the patio and is only 1m in height from the patio side. However, the back side of the platform joins with a significant retaining wall. The front edge has a well-preserved step of partially modified limestone cobbles. Structure B is a low-lying platform (1m in height) edging the west side of the hill, oriented to the southeast of Structure A and constructed of unmodified limestone cobbles. There was a sheet midden on the hillside below Structure B.

Structure C is located southeast of Structure B and is 2m in height, it is constructed on top of a bedrock outcrop of unmodified limestone cobbles. The patio in the center of the three structures was leveled, and has a small sinkhole in the center. There were no artifacts in the sinkhole, and it looks to be naturally occurring. From Site 10, residents would have been able to see their neighbors at Site 9, and also could have seen Kaq'ru' Ha' across the valley. Only ceramic sherds were recovered from the surface; the site was also mapped with a Total Station.

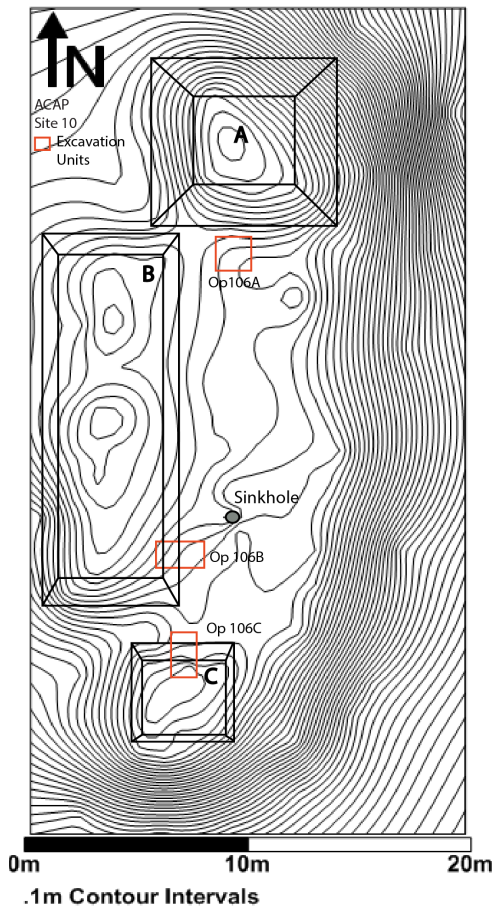


Figure 5.8. Topographic map of Site 10, showing structure and excavation units.

#### 5.4 Topographic mapping of structures

Of the 12 recorded sites, the 10 that had architecture were mapped using a TopCon CTS 3005 Total Station in order to precisely record structure height and dimensions. Volunteers Alfred Berry and Todd Carlson assisted in mapping several of the sites during February 2012. A professional surveyor, Mr. Berry established a site datum for Kaq'ru' Ha' and provided recommendations for the locations of data points for other sites. Mr. Carlson advised the team on the uploading and management of Total Station files to the Carlson Software program. SURFER was used to produce the final maps.

Local knowledge and cooperation was essential during this phase of the project. Each

day, four local men would act as our guides as well as cutters, advising us about places on the landscape where they had noticed archaeological remains. Their experience with the environment was an education for us about the local landscape. In addition, they provided cultural and political knowledge about community land use, which informed the boundaries of our survey.

The resultant map (Figure 5.2) was shared with the Aguacate community school and used during presentations to the village. It will constitute a permanent record of archaeological resources on community land. Sites were numbered sequentially according to the order that we recorded them, starting with the first site that community members showed me during the summer of 2011.

In 2012, Kaq'ru' Ha' was chosen for salvage and stratigraphic excavations because of its preservation and diversity of structure types. Salvage excavations focused on clearing two looters' pits and mitigating the damage done by a heavily used trail crossing Patio 1. Though there were looters pits in two of the structures, the rest of the site had been thoroughly covered in vegetation and was well-preserved. Based on surface collections and architectural styles, the site plan included domestic, administrative, and public spaces, which would contribute important data on regional social and economic integration and identity.

## **5.5 Notational Procedures and Excavation Methods**

Fieldwork was conducted with a field crew of men from Aguacate in cooperation with experienced volunteers from the United States. In addition to the survey and mapping team mentioned above, during the 2012 field season volunteers included the 3<sup>rd</sup> year Maya History class from Tumul K'in, as well as Paige Schull, Meg Leary, A.J. Meyer, Mikael Fauvelle, Anna

Novotny, Whitney Goodwin, and Dawn Crawford. In 2013 volunteers included Mia Cancarevic, Meghan DeVito, and Andrew Montgomery. Volunteers were paired with Aguacate men and tasked with supervising excavations, taking detailed notes (both narrative and on standardized forms), and making scaled drawings of stratigraphy and features. Before each excavation season, Kaq'ru' Ha' was cleared of vegetation and underbrush first by chopping with machetes and then with systematic burning. Other excavated sites were chopped strategically, but not burned.

### **Notational Procedures**

Detailed preliminary notes were taken to document the preservation of structures. In addition to the narrative-style field notes taken by excavators, standardized forms were completed; these included site, structure, feature, lot, and burial forms.

Excavations were conducted according to the Operation/Sub-Operation/Lot system. The operation is the highest category and identifies a cluster of excavation trenches and units, usually associated with one structure. Operations were numbered sequentially throughout the study area, with operations 100-104 (Table 5.2) occurring at Kaq'ru' Ha'.

Table 5.2. Location of Operations and SubOperations

Site	Structure	Type of Excavation	Operations	SubOperations
1	A	Stratigraphic	102	A-C
	B	Salvage	100	D
		Stratigraphic	101	A-C
	C	Stratigraphic	103	A-B
	E	Salvage	100	A
	G	Salvage	100	C
	Rock Shelter	Salvage	100	E
		Test Units	104	A-B
9	A	Stratigraphic	106	A
	B	Stratigraphic	106	B
	C	Stratigraphic	106	C
10	A	Stratigraphic	105	A
	B	Stratigraphic	105	B
	C	Stratigraphic	105	C

Operations can be subdivided into sub-operations, which have a specific rationale or purpose behind their excavation. For example, an excavator might switch sub-operations upon encountering an architectural feature or burial. Sub-operations were designated on fieldnotes, forms, and artifact bag tags with a capital letter (sequentially from A-Z) following the operation number. Sub-operations were divided into excavation units (abbreviated as EU), which are defined by the spatial dimensions of an excavation (i.e. 2m x 2m, 1m x 1m). Excavation units were numbered sequentially within each sub-operation.

The third spatial category in the system is the lot. Lots signify the stratigraphic position of excavated soil in a unit. Each excavation unit was surface collected for artifacts (Lot 1), and then initiated with a 10cm lot. Once cultural stratigraphy was encountered it was followed closely as excavations proceeded. Lots were numbered sequentially in each excavation unit until the bottom of the excavation was reached. A typical spatial designation on fieldnotes, forms, and bag tags would look like this: Site 1, 102A/EU1/Lot 1.

Once the notational procedures were clarified and the maps finished, excavations were initiated. Three methods of excavation were used – salvage, controlled horizontal excavations,



and shovel test pits. The following procedures apply to each of these methods. Separate sections on each excavation method follow below.

### **Excavation Methods**

Once a structure or area was chosen for testing, excavation trenches or units were measured and delineated with nylon mason's string. A wooden stake with a string tied to a notch 10cm below the top was established outside the excavation boundaries to be used as a datum. Measurements were taken at the four corners and center of the unit at the beginning and closing of each lot. On several of the steeper structures multiple datum points were used; these were measured in relation to each other and mapped with the Total Station to ensure the integrity of sub-surface measurements.

Excavations were conducted by men from Aguacate with picks, trowels, and shovels. If excavations revealed architecture or other non-portable elements, these were labeled as features (e.g., walls, benches, or paving stones). All soil was sieved through a ¼ inch mesh screen in order to collect small artifacts. Artifact types typical of the Maya Mountains region include ceramics (figurines, ocarinas, and vessel fragments), lithics (chert, obsidian, and greenstone), shell (marine shell and freshwater snails), bone (human and faunal), charcoal, and groundstone manos and metates. Artifacts were collected from the screen and placed in a cloth bag to await washing and analysis in the lab. Fragile artifacts such as bone and charcoal were bagged separately. Each lot was measured in each corner and recorded according to the cardinal directions on the lot sheet (e.g. northwest, southeast, etc.). In addition to measurements, information collected on lot sheets included soil texture and color, cultural context, presence and amount of disturbance (i.e., bioturbation), plan view sketches, and types and density of artifacts.

Presence of soil samples, photographs, or scale drawings were also noted on each lot sheet and in the excavators' notes.

At the close of each sub-operation the best preserved wall of the trench was selected for a detailed scale drawing. Photographs were also taken of each excavation context. At the end of each season all exposed architecture and open excavation units were backfilled using a mix of soil, gravel, and large tumbled rocks in order to create a dense matrix that would not sink after the first rain.

### **Salvage excavations**

Identified during the survey and mapping phases of the project, Kaq'ru' Ha' was clearly an important cultural resource. It had sustained damage from looting, evidenced by several looters' pits (Structures B, G, and the rock shelter), as well as the construction of a trail over the lower patio. Several years ago (circa 2008) the village employed a grader to clear a more permanent trail in order to access their farmland. The grader made one pass across the patio from west to east. In doing so, the machine pushed rocks and artifacts to each side of its blade, creating a noticeable scar across the site. The trail is heavily used by farmers year-round; it is traversed on foot, on horseback, and by truck during the harvest. Given these concerns about further damage to the site, permission was granted from the Institute of Archaeology to conduct mitigating excavations at Kaq'ru' Ha'.

Salvage excavations were designed with the following objectives in mind: 1) investigate the extent of damage to the site, 2) clear out looters' pits and retrieve artifacts, and 3) document any stratigraphy or architecture encountered. In addition, these goals paralleled the research goals of the Aguacate Community Archaeology Project. First, salvage operations contributed to research questions about structure function and chronology at Kaq'ru' Ha'. Second, these

excavations represented an educational initiative for the villagers of Aguacate, who were unaware of the extent of the archaeological resources on their community land.

Test units (Op.100/A and Op.100/B) were excavated on either side of the path (to the southeast and the northwest) made when the grader was driven across Patio 1. Starting as two separate 1m x 1m units, additional grid squares were added to each sub-operation as architectural and ecological features were encountered. Excavations were initiated in 10cm lots and followed cultural stratigraphy once it was encountered.

The looter's trenches in Structures B, G, and the rock shelter were also cleaned and excavated. Though stratigraphic context had been destroyed, horizontal excavation units were placed across looters' pits to establish some control. For example, the looters' pit in the summit of Structure G was 3m x 2m x 1m; consequently, sub-operation C consisted of a 2m x 1m unit placed in the bottom of the pit, oriented east/west.

Tumbled limestone rocks were removed from looters' pits. When encountered, architecture was followed in subsequent units. Scale drawings were made of the walls of the pits in an attempt to record any stratigraphic information, and plan view drawings were made of architectural features.

### **Horizontal Excavations**

After structures at Kaq'ru' Ha' had been cleared and mapped, several were targeted for controlled excavations: Structures A, B, and C<sub>2</sub> (Figure 5.9). The associated patios, Patios 2 and 3, were also tested. Salvage excavations and surface collections suggested that Structures A and B functioned as residences. Structure A was selected for excavations because it is the tallest structure at the site and was the best preserved, indicating that there may be intact material deposits. Structure B was selected because, despite the looters' pit in the center of the structure,

the architecture was intact and artifact deposits seemed to be abundant. Investigating two residences within one complex may help answer questions about social identity and differentiation as well as regional economic integration.

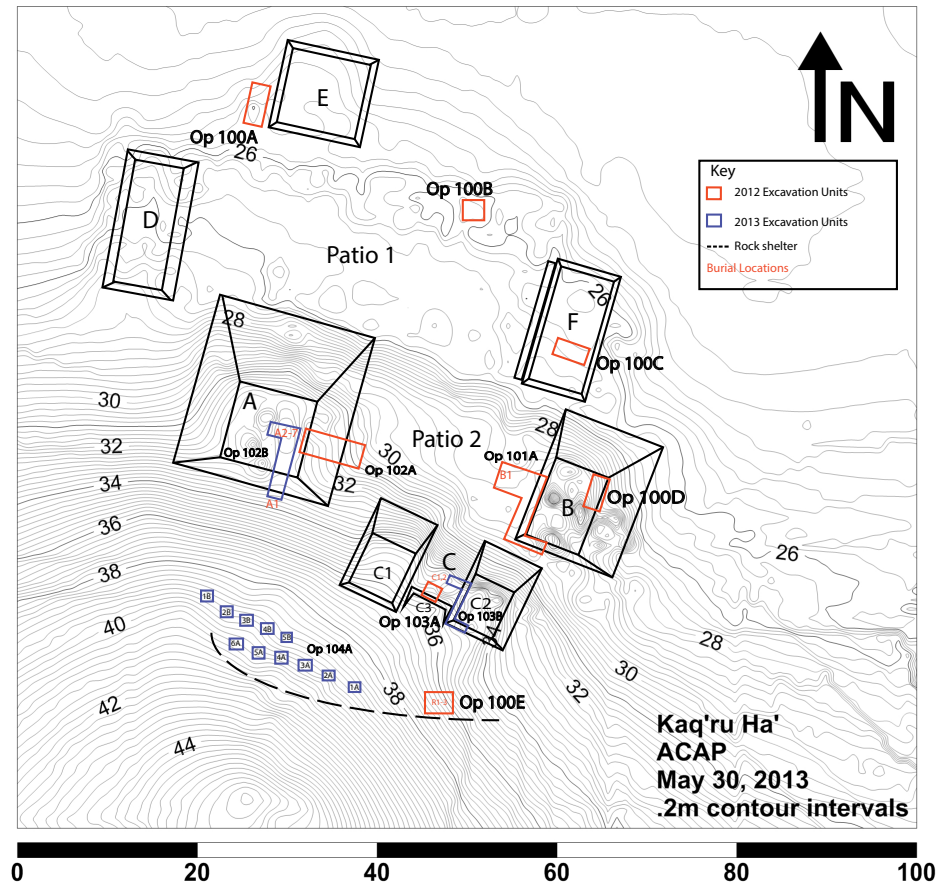


Figure 5.9. Map of Kaq'ru' Ha' with excavation units and burial locations.

As reviewed in Chapter 2, archaeological markers of differentiation can include house size and architectural design (Pluckhahn 2010:347; Robin 2012; Smith 1994). At Chan N6ohol, in the Belize Valley, Cynthia Robin (2002:259) found that over time some farming families increased their access to non-local goods and remodeled their dwellings to replicate elite residential architecture at the political center of Xunantunich. Architectural references to Xunantunich and increased wealth indicate that hinterland communities were linked to broader sociopolitical maneuvers in the upper Belize River Valley, and that some families used these

connections to emphasize difference. Jason Yaeger (2003:46) argues that a clear manifestation of social difference is the amount of labor invested in household architecture, exemplified by limestone-block masonry walls and corbel-vaulted roofs. These interpretations suggest that household architecture can be a sensitive indicator of social identity and access to resources.

With these material correlates in mind, excavations were conducted at Kaq'ru' Ha' in order to evaluate the degree of regional social and economic integration. The patios at Kaq'ru' Ha' were positioned to function as gathering places, perhaps for wider community functions. In order to evaluate this assumption excavations were carried out on Patio 2. Axial trenches were placed perpendicular to the basal walls of Structures A, B, and C<sub>2</sub> (see Figure 5.9). These trenches are referred to as "axial" because they were excavated perpendicular to the structures' central axes; the exact position and length of the axial trenches were determined based on the size and shape of the mapped structures. Trenches were laid out several meters away from where the basal walls were expected to be, so that tumble could be identified and removed to clear away preserved foundation walls.

Upon completion of the axial trench, basal walls were followed laterally in order to determine the size and dimensions of the building. Any architectural features encountered on the summit of the structure were investigated through lateral trenching. Clearing of new trenches depended on information gathered from the axial trench, and differed with each structure. Scale drawings of one well-preserved side of the axial trench as well as a plan view were made before lateral trenches were excavated.

### **Shovel test pits**

The south edge of Kaq'ru' Ha' is defined by a vertical cliff face that contains a shallow rock shelter (Figure 5.10). The ancient inhabitants of the site used the rock shelter as a locale of purposeful deposition. During the 2012 season several burials and associated artifacts were salvaged from a looters' pit dug into a niche in the cliff face, and a dense ceramic deposit was identified. The ceramic sherds visible on the surface were not only abundant but included large, re-fittable pieces. The deposit was ten meters long and between half a meter and two meters wide (see Figure 5.9). In order to evaluate the diachronic and ritual nature of this deposit eleven shovel test pits were excavated at ~1 meter intervals along the length of the midden. Six test units (Op 104A 1-6) were located in the rock shelter and five (Op 104B 1-5) were located on the slope outside of the rock shelter in order to locate the edge of the midden. All test pits were ~.25 m wide and excavated until the soil became sterile.



Figure 5.10. Test units in the rock shelter; photograph is facing east. Photo by Mia Cancarevic

## 5.6 Excavation Results

Structures A, B, and C<sub>2</sub> were chosen for excavations during the 2012 and 2013 seasons

(see Figure 5.9). Structure A was selected because it was well-preserved, and is one of the largest structures at the site. It was hypothesized that Structure A would have well-preserved, deep stratigraphy that would aid in developing a site chronology. An 8m x 2m trench was excavated along the east/west axis in 2012; in 2013, a 1m x 6m trench was excavated along the north/south axis, and was expanded to expose summit features.

### **Structure A**

Seven meters in height, Structure A is the tallest building at Kaq'ru' Ha'. The dimensions of its summit architecture are 6m x 6m, and it is oriented to the east, where it faces Structure B across a patio. The final phase summit walls were encountered in both axial trenches, outlining the final dimensions of the building. Excavations at Structure A revealed several construction phases and a potentially Early Classic basal construction phase. The building phases of Structure A reveal a lengthy and significant investment in the remodeling of the building. Altogether, four construction phases were identified.

Structure A's first construction phase occurred when the terrace/patio was constructed. The first and second steps on the east side of the structure date to this phase; they each consist of two courses of partially shaped limestone blocks (Figure 5.11). The natural hillside was leveled with 0.3m of dry limestone fill capped with a mixture of yellow clay with lime chunks, and then a plaster floor. The plaster floor seems to have extended 4m to the east, because it appears in the western profile of Unit 3 (Figure 5.11).

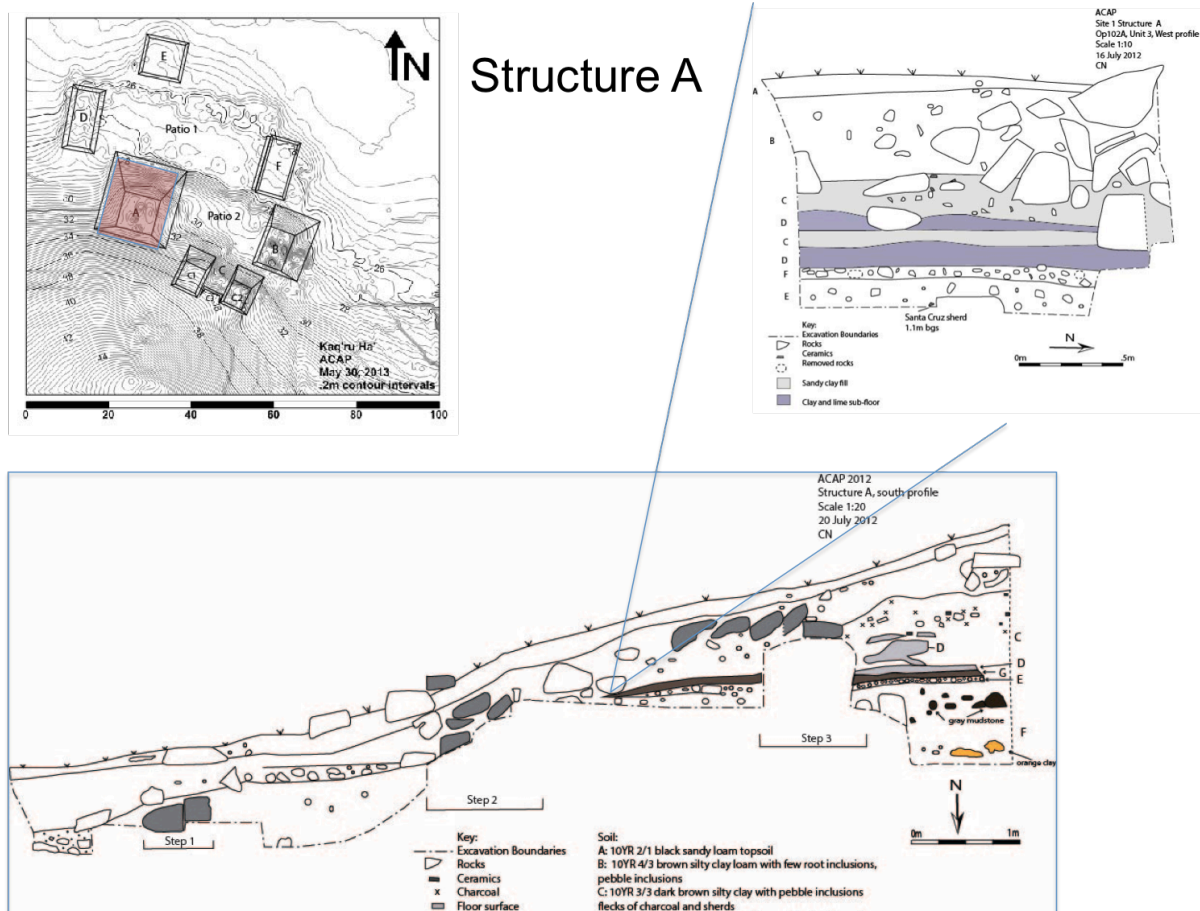


Figure 5.11. Structure A: Location at Kaq'ru' Ha' and construction phases.

Radiocarbon dates from a burial interred in the center of Terrace/Patio 2 (see Table 5.3) date the construction to the Early Classic period. A Santa Cruz Group sherd with a basal flange recovered from the west side of unit 3, beneath a later paving event, suggests that relative chronology supports this absolute date. The platform was likely rectangular at this point, reaching a more pyramidal shape through subsequent remodeling and constraining of the summit area. A burial (Burial A1) in a midden encountered on the south side of the structure could be associated with phase 1 because of its depth (Figure 5.12).





Figure 5.12. Burial A1.

It was not identified as human until Willa Trask examined the bones. The remains were found ~1m beneath the ground surface at the base of a midden deposit south of the basal wall of Structure A. The bones were identified as a human radius and ulna and were oriented east/west, but the unit was not expanded to expose the entire burial.

Table 5.3. Radiocarbon dates of bone collagen from burials at Kaq'ru' Ha'. University of Arizona dates calibrated with the IntCal13 calibration curve (Reimer et al. 2013).

Lab and Sample Number	Structure	Material	Burial ID	Ceramic Complex	Uncalibrated Age	2 $\sigma$ calibrated date range
UA X27781	Patio/Terrace 2	Human bone	B1	Tzakol	1458 +/- 55 BP	AD 430-492; AD 530-665
UA X27782	Structure C	Human bone	C2	Tepeu 1	1381 +/- 55 BP	AD 564-722; AD 740-767
Beta 381577	Structure A	Human bone	A3	Tepeu 1-2	1310 +/- 30 BP	AD 655-725; AD 740-770
Beta 381576	Structure A	Human bone	A5	Tepeu 1-2	1340 +/- 30 BP	AD 650-690; AD 750-760

Evidence of phase two included the addition of a step on the east side of the structure and the re-paving of the floor. The second paving event included a layer of yellow clay with lime

followed by a poorly preserved plaster floor. This phase is visible in the stratigraphy on the summit and in profiles from the east/west trench.

Phase three signifies a shift in the function of the structure. During this phase thick layers of dark brown soil with ceramics, clay, charcoal, and pebble inclusions was deposited over the previous floors. It is the most significant phase because it includes the interment of five individuals. There are no distinct floors or occupation layers between the burials, suggesting that the structure was not used intensively post-interment (Figure 5.13).

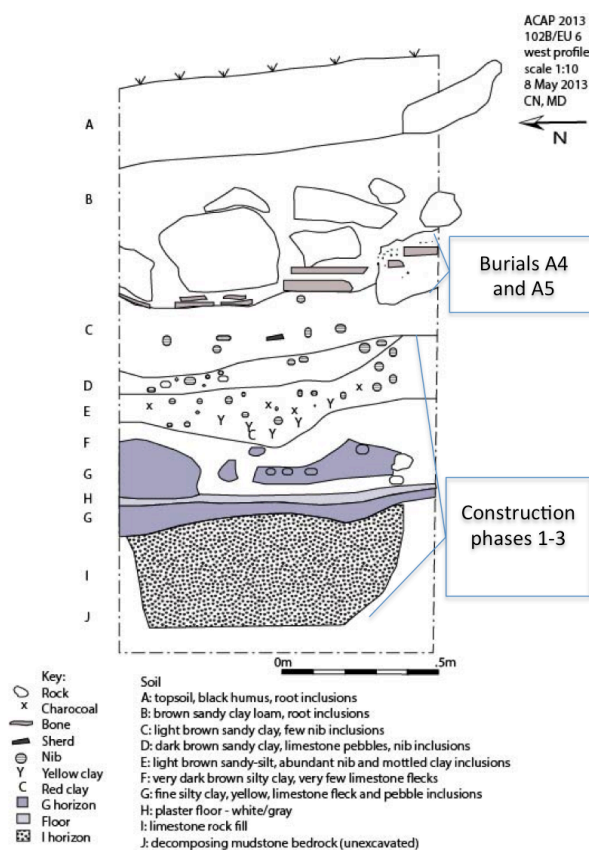


Figure 5.13. Stratigraphic profile of the summit of Structure A, facing east.

Burial A2 was located along the north/south axis of Structure A, 30cm below the ground surface, in a simple cyst grave, on top of five large limestone rocks (Figure 5.14). The rocks are

the capstones to another burial. The individual was laid in an extended supine position with the head oriented to the north. The skeleton was fully articulated and fairly well-preserved, suggesting that it was a primary interment. Grave goods included two dishes – each placed face up on either side of the head. Other possible grave goods include abundant chert flakes and nodules surrounding and covering the individual. Analysis of the teeth suggest that the individual was 18-21 years old. Though both femora and fragments of the pelvis were present, preservation did not allow for the identification of sex.

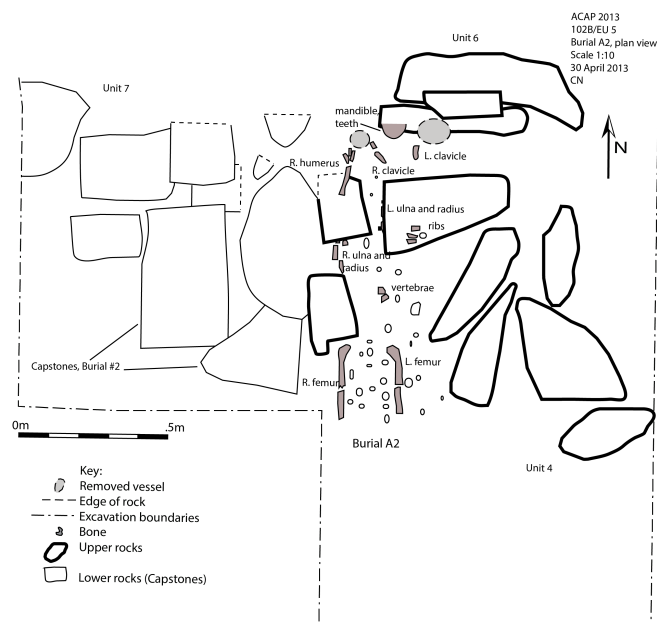


Figure 5.14. Plan view of Burial A2 with capstones of Burial A3 still in place.

Burial A3 was located west of Burial 1, 0.60 meter beneath the ground surface (Figure 5.15). The individual was interred in a 2m x .0.60m stone-lined simple crypt capped with 5 limestone and mudstone slabs. The individual was a 25-30 year old adult of unknown sex who was interred in an extended prone position with head oriented to the north. Grave goods included a tripod Zacatel/Louisville polychrome plate that was placed face up in the crypt east of the lower legs (Figure 5.15). Part of a jadeite earspool was found in the northern section, in close proximity to the teeth (Figure 5.15).

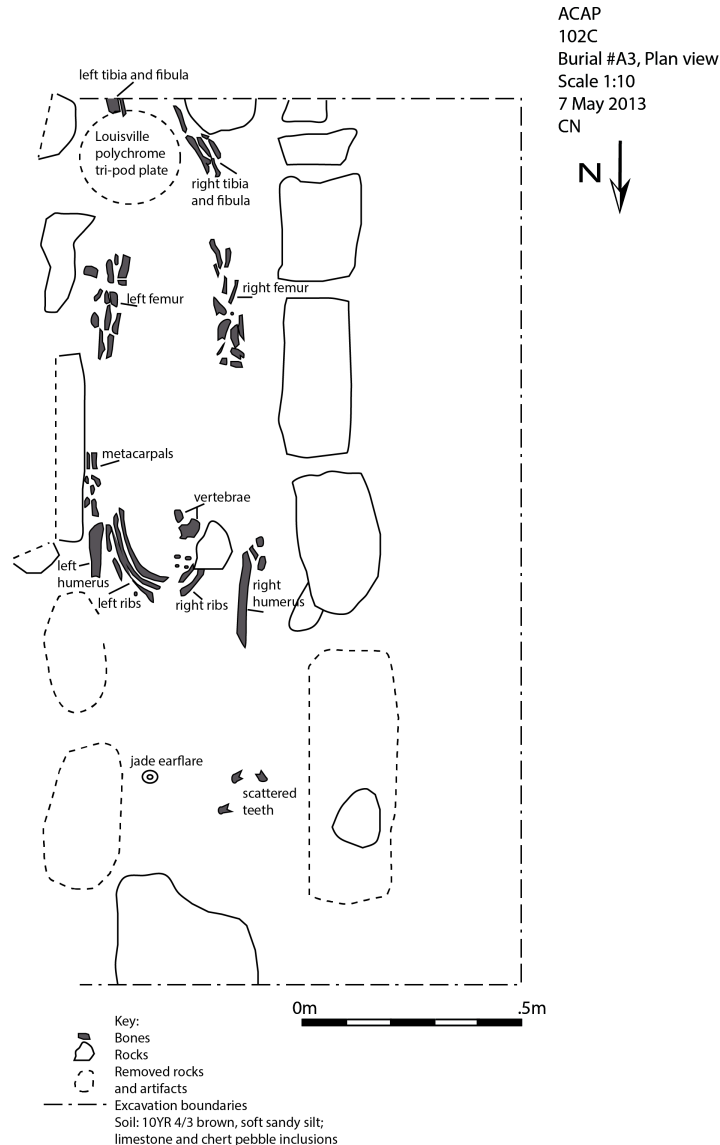


Figure 5.15. Plan view of Burial A3.

Burial A4/A5 includes the remains of two individuals who were interred in a stone-lined cyst with rough limestone capstones on which Burial A2 was eventually laid (see Figure 5.13). A missing capstone and the absence of the small bones of the hands indicate that this burial may have been disturbed in antiquity. Skeletal fragments included long bones visible in the baulk beneath Burial A2. Teeth and cranial fragments were not encountered, but the positioning of an

ulna and radius north of a tibia and fibula suggested that both individuals were oriented to the north. No grave goods were encountered. Burial A4/A5 was not excavated completely due to time constraints.

Burial A6 was located 30cm west of Burial A2 at a depth of 50cm below the ground surface (Figure 5.16). It was encountered when several loose limestone blocks were moved. The individual was extended and in a supine position and included the very fragmented and poorly preserved remains of long bones. It seems that the individual was oriented to the north/northwest. There was a concentration of sherds close to one long-bone fragment that may have once been a complete vessel, but it was difficult to tell.

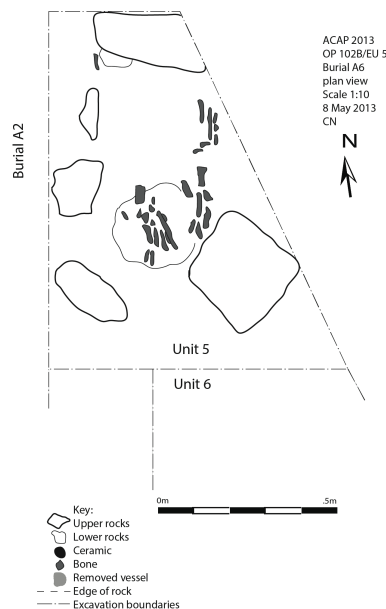


Figure 5.16. Plan view of Burial A6.

In addition to (or in preparation for) the burials, the final step leading to the summit was constructed as part of phase three. In final form, three wide steps led down to the surface of Terrace 2 (Figure 5.17). The steps consist of two courses of partially modified limestone blocks that provide facing for ~1m of packed earth.

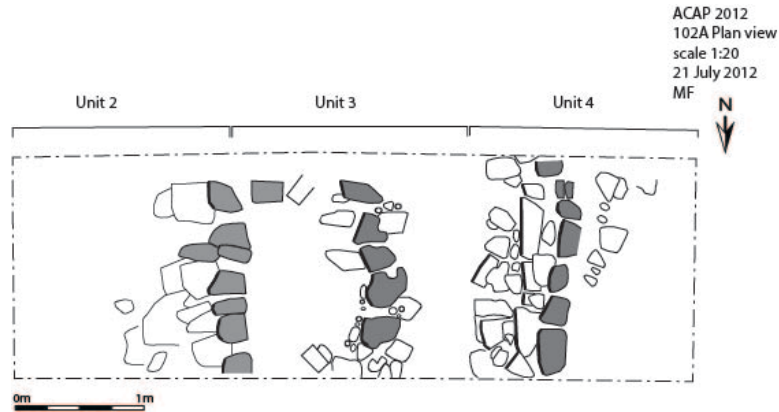


Figure 5.17. Plan view of steps from the summit of Structure A to Terrace/Patio 2.

Phase four consists of a 20cm layer of soil (B horizon) with 40% pebble inclusions (Figure 5.18). It may have served as a packed floor, and would have been the final surface. It is associated with the one-course high summit walls encountered in the west and south trenches; the north and east faces of the structure were delineated by retaining walls. A bench feature is also part of this phase, which was not followed, but runs east/west for at least 2m over the burials (Figure 5.19).

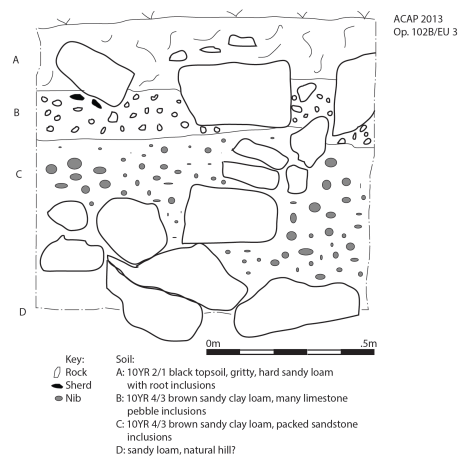


Figure 5.18. Stratigraphic profile of unit 3, on the summit of Structure A, facing north. The layer of pebbles is the B horizon.

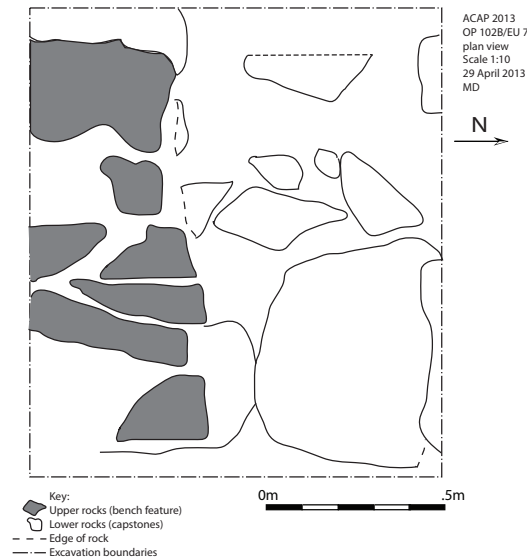


Figure 5.19. Part of the bench running east/west across the summit of Structure A.

I define it as a bench because there was no comparable one-course wall on the south side. A poorly preserved burial (A7) was found 25cm below the surface in unit 7. The remains were fragmentary and appeared to be disarticulated. Given their shallow depth this could be due to ground disturbance instead of a secondary interment. Fragments of a Chacuum Black slipped bowl were found associated with the individual. Preservation was poor and the remains were fragmented, so analysis of orientation, sex, or age could not be performed.

## Summary

The natural hillside was modified with dry limestone fill, followed by yellow clay and plaster, and then several remodels of packed earth and clay floors. Floors were swept clean before the new one was laid, resulting in very few artifacts. Remodeling events resulted in further restriction of the summit and the addition of a step to the western face of the structure. The lack of artifacts makes a fine-grained chronology for the remodeling impossible, but radio-

carbon dates taken from the earliest and latest burials indicate that the interments all occurred during the Late Classic period. In total, seven burials were encountered within Structure A (Figure 5.20).

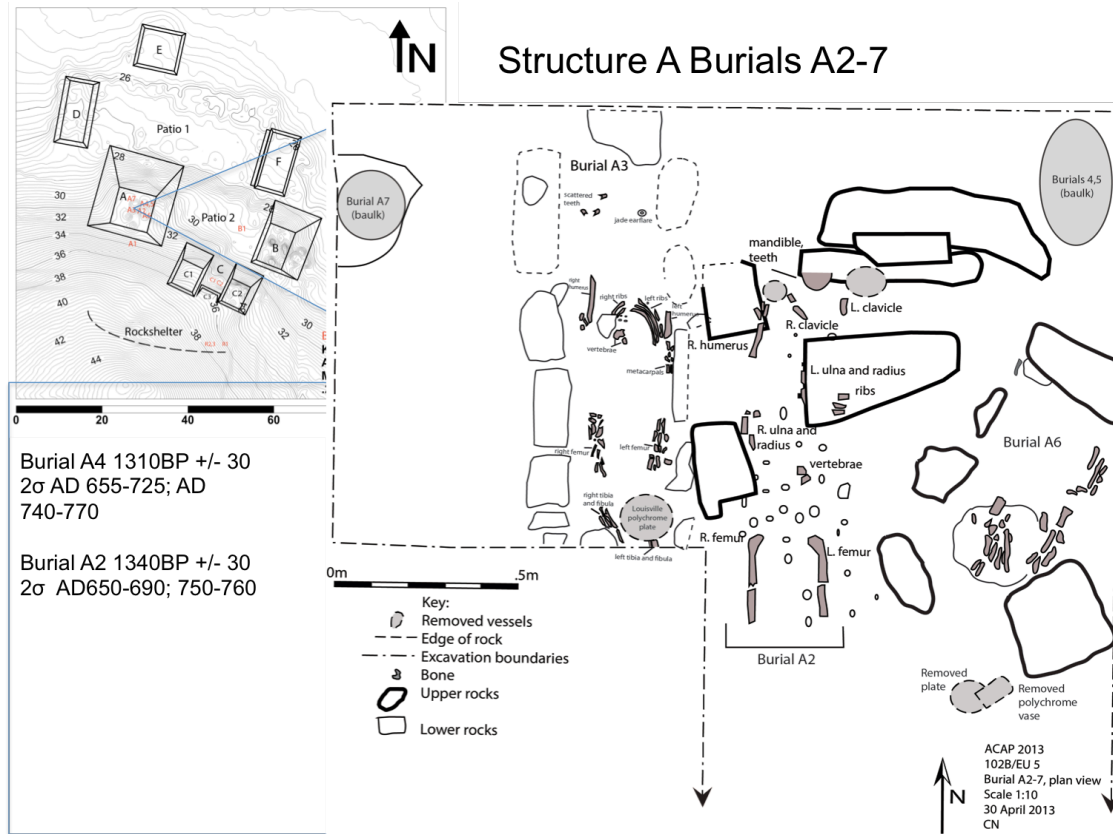


Figure 5.20. Burial sequence on the summit of Structure A.

Based on the stratigraphic and architectural evidence presented here, this building may have functioned as a residence at one point, but was remodeled into an ancestor shrine. Artifact analysis supports this claim (reported in detail in Chapter 6). As reviewed in Chapter 2 (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2), material correlates of residential architecture in the Maya region include rectangular basal platforms with an area of 15m<sup>2</sup> and a height of roughly 0.15-1.2m (Hammond 1975). They would have supported perishable walls and roofs, and platforms often had packed earth or plastered floors (Robin 1999:94). At Copán, benches and burials are rarely found within residences (Gonlin 1993), though those features are recorded for other dwellings in the Maya



area (McAnany 2004, 2011).

The original basal platform of Structure A, though not excavated completely, was likely rectangular in shape. The stratigraphic sequence reveals that the summit was increasingly restricted until its final construction phase that features a square summit with an area of 6m<sup>2</sup>; the structure is more pyramidal in shape in its final form than rectangular.

Though burials occur frequently beneath structure floors in the Maya region (McAnany 2011), there is no formal floor separating each burial from the next. The radiocarbon dates also suggest that the individuals were interred over a relatively short span of time during the Late Classic period. There is no evidence that the structure was used for living activities while the interments were occurring. While it is possible that Structure A was a dwelling in its original form, the evidence suggests that it became an ancestor shrine during the Late Classic period.

## **Structure B**

Structure A faces Structure B across Terrace 2 (Figure 5.3). Structure B was selected for excavations because its basal wall was very well-preserved on the west side. Though it had a large looters' pit on the summit, salvage excavations revealed an intact eastern basal wall. A 2m x 2m trench was excavated along the east/west axis and expanded laterally to follow the basal wall to the south (see Figure 5.9).

Salvage excavations on the east side of Structure B revealed a series of steps built of partially modified limestone blocks connecting Structure B to the lower terrace and an unexcavated (and badly looted) structure. There were two construction phases: 1) the main construction of the basal wall, and 2) the addition of the step on the west side of the structure. The basal wall of Structure B was constructed of four courses of partially modified limestone blocks. The step abuts the basal wall but does not interdigitate with it, suggesting that it was a

separate construction event.



Figure 5.21. Structure B, facing east. The step is in the foreground and the western basal wall is visible.

It is possible that it was constructed at the same time, however, the fill material from the step suggests otherwise. As identified by Dr. Laura Kosakowsky (personal communication, 2012), several of the polychrome sherds retrieved from the fill were painted in an Early Classic style. Also, the chert cores and debitage that were recovered from the step fill seemed to be eroded, suggesting that they were deposited elsewhere first and then re-purposed as fill for the step. The artifacts will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

The paving stones on Terrace 2 (Feature 1) also suggest an investment in the architecture of Kaq'ru' Ha', and contribute to my interpretation that the architecture is indicative of a Maya Mountains style (Figure 5.22). The modified limestone pavers cover an excavated area of 2.02m x 3.05m, and likely extend west towards Structure A (though they do not cover the entire patio). Paving occurs at other sites in southern Belize, most recently identified at Groups B and D at Uxbenka, and also in the settlement groups (Aquino et al. 2011; Nazaroﬀ 2013; Thompson

2013). Cultural material was sparse on top of the paving stones, indicating that the area was swept clean of debris regularly.



Figure 5.22. Paving stones on Terrace/Patio 2, west of Structure B.

The artifact assemblage further supports the interpretation that this was a residence. Artifacts expected in residential contexts include groundstone (manos and metates), lithic tools, and ceramic vessels of varying sizes and qualities. These artifacts classes are all present at Structure B, in addition to at least two exotic items: one greenstone celt and fragments of a tubular bone artifact that could be a flute. Though the ceramics and groundstone implements suggests a quotidian use of the building, the unique items suggest elite status. The presence of several figurines is not unusual in household contexts, especially in such close proximity to Lubaantun, where mold-made figurines were manufactured during the Late Classic period (Hammond 1975). These will be reported in Chapter 6 and discussed in Chapter 7.

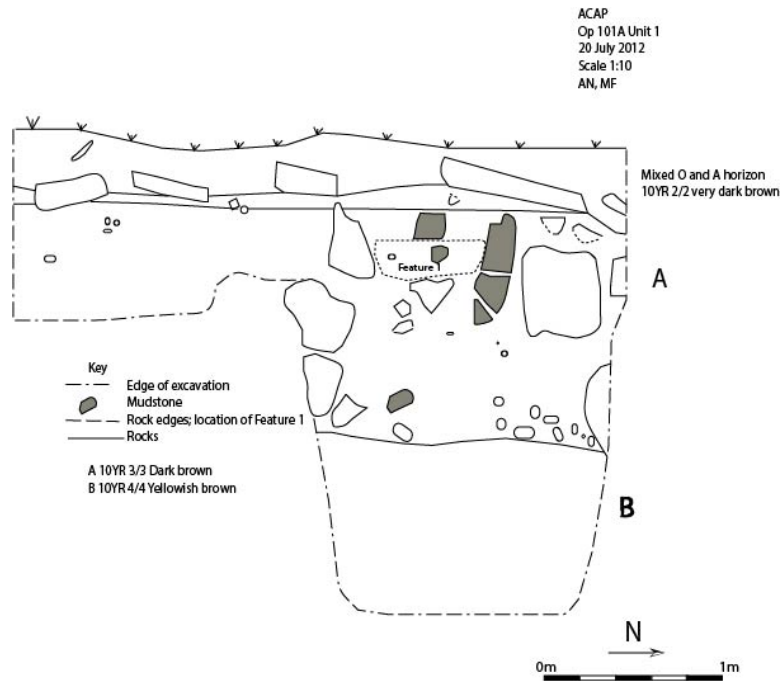


Figure 5.23. Stratigraphic profile of Terrace/Patio 2, facing west. Profile shows paving stones, Burial B1, and the natural hillslope.

The terrace itself seems to have been constructed directly on the natural hillslope, since our units became sterile when we reached a significant clay and decomposing bedrock layer (Figure 5.23). A calibrated radiocarbon date of  $2\sigma$  AD 430-492/AD 530-665 (see Table 5.3) was taken from a burial (Burial B1) interred in the terrace, suggesting that the individual was buried as the terrace was being built. The remains were not well-preserved, but included long bones, teeth, and fragments of the hands and feet. Preliminary analysis of the teeth indicated that the individual was a sub-adult, aged 8-10 years. The young person was buried with a jaguar canine and a several deer bones, in addition to a small red slipped bowl placed near the head, which was oriented to the north (Figure 5.24).

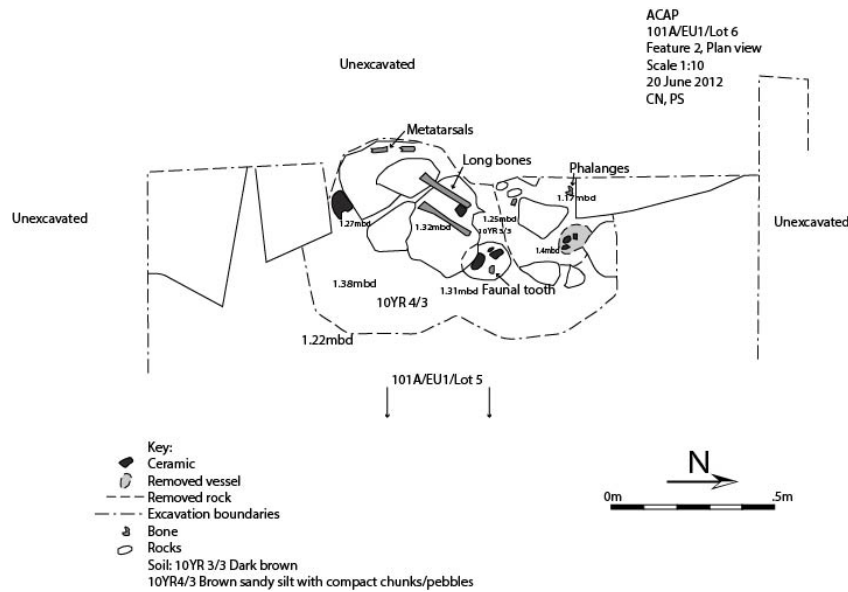


Figure 5.24. Burial B1, a sub-adult burial interred as Terrace/Patio 2 was being constructed in the Early Classic period (2σ AD 430-492/AD 530-665).

## Summary

Excavations at Structure B and the surrounding terrace indicate that its function was a residence. The basal platform is rectangular and its summit area is 12m<sup>2</sup>; though the retaining wall forming the east side of the structure reaches to 4m, the basal wall on the west side is a relatively low 1m. A natural hillslope was modified with clay fill as well as cultural material and limestone rocks to construct a flat surface on which to build further structures. The terrace signifies a monumental construction effort, since it is faced with modified and unmodified limestone cobbles and rises 4m above the lower terrace. The burial encountered in the terrace/patio (Burial B1) was not intrusive, suggesting that the individual was interred as the terrace was being built.

## Structure C and C<sub>2</sub>

In 2012, one 2m x 2m excavation unit was placed on the summit of Platform C in order to clarify the function of the structure. In 2013 additional excavations were continued to the east in order to evaluate the function of Structure C<sub>2</sub>, which defines the eastern edge of the platform. The restricted nature of the summit and the presence of groundstone, figurines, and obsidian tools on the surface suggested that these structures may have been elite residences. In order to test these ideas, excavations were conducted to identify architecture, activity areas, and further artifact deposits.

The 2m x 2m unit excavated on the summit of Structure C exposed two features. The rock alignment (Feature 2) that runs east/west across the unit seems to be a step or foundation wall of a rectangular structure that forms the southern border of the platform summit (Figure 5.25). The natural hillslope is very shallow here (.26mbgs), and was further stabilized by placing a paving of small (~8-10cm wide) limestone cobbles set into the clay. The wall or step (and presumably the rest of the structure) was subsequently constructed. Artifacts were very lightly distributed in this unit, suggesting that this area was either swept clean or was used sparsely.

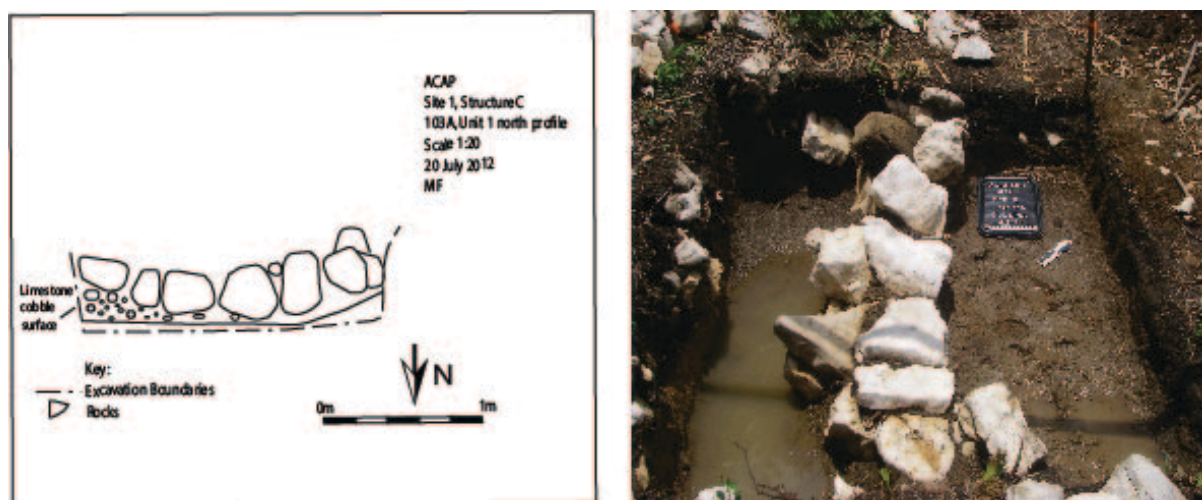


Figure 5.25. Rock alignment (Feature 2) on the summit of Structure C.



In 2013, a 1m x 1m trench was excavated perpendicular to the north/south axis of Structure C1. Two burials were encountered in the patio area, west of the basal wall of Structure C1 (MNI = 3). The first individual was laid in an extended supine position with the head oriented to the south (Burial C1). The interment lacked any formal grave goods. Preservation was poor; the mandible and teeth were recovered, though only fragments of femora and pelvis were present (Figure 5.26). Preliminary analysis of the teeth suggests that the individual was a young adult.



Figure 5.26. Burial C1.

The second interment was encountered 1m west of the first burial (Burial C2) also in the patio. This interment included the remains of two individuals, based on the presence of four femurs (Figure 5.27). Both individuals were buried in an extended supine position, with heads oriented to the north. The leg bones were clearly stacked on top of each other, suggesting that the two individuals were interred together, with no evidence of re-entry. Analysis of the teeth indicate that at least one of the individuals was between 18-35 years old. Radiocarbon dates from one of the individuals dates the interment to AD 631, or the Late Classic period. By extension, and in corroboration with ceramic evidence, the terrace platform and structures were constructed simultaneously during this period.

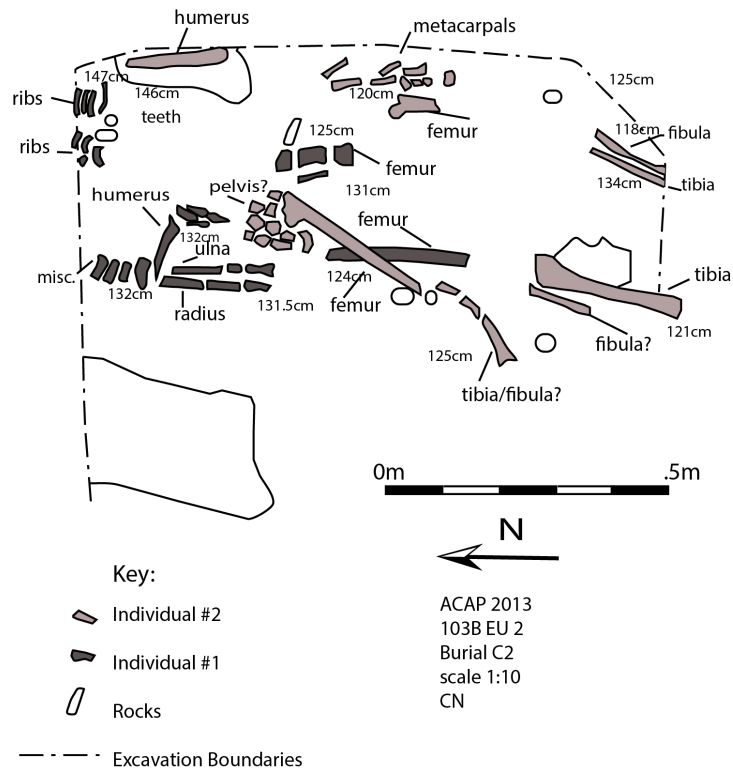


Figure 5.27. Burial C2, a multiple individual burial on the summit of Structure C.

Excavations revealed that a basal wall was constructed of three courses of partially modified limestone blocks. The walls abutted a limestone pebble paving event first identified to the west (Op 103 SubOp A) during the 2012 field season. The paving was likely laid on natural clay soil to provide a drier and more comfortable living surface.

Artifacts were predominantly recovered from the surface of this pavement. I interpret it as a residence because of the artifact assemblage, which included groundstone (from surface collection), utilitarian ceramics, ceramic figurines, exhausted chert and obsidian cores, debitage, and blades. It seems to only have one construction phase, likely dating to the Late Classic period.

## Summary



It is clear that it took a monumental effort to raise the platform above Patio/Terrace 2; the well-preserved walls of the platform functioned as retaining walls as well as support for the summit architecture. Based on the stratigraphy of the platform, it seems to have been constructed during one phase of the Late Classic period. Summit structures were constructed in one episode, coeval to the interment of several individuals in the patio. I interpret this structure as a residence, based on the artifact categories recovered.

### **Rock shelter**

Defining the southern edge of Kaq'ru' Ha' is an imposing limestone cliff with weathered niches and crevices along its face (see Figure 5.10). There is no large tumble from the cliff, but run-off has created a seasonal drip line. Scattered ceramic and lithic artifacts were deposited in niches and beneath a slight overhang. Significant lime deposits from the drip line had crystallized on the ceramic artifacts, but the sherds are large and suggest specialized deposition. A looter's pit in one niche revealed fragments of human bone and ceramics, suggesting that the area is an enigmatic combination of specialized disposal and placemaking through burial interment. A significant ritual deposit was identified; the ceramic sherds visible on the surface were not only abundant but included large, re-fitting pieces. The deposit is 10 meters long and between .5 meter and 2 meters wide.

Excavations were conducted in a 2m x 1.5m area within a naturally occurring niche in the cliff face (see Figure 5.9). While it seems that western end of the rockshelter was used as a ritual deposit, this niche was used for burials, presumably for residents of Kaq'ru' Ha'. In total, the poorly preserved skeletal remains of three individuals were recovered from the niche. A looter's pit in a niche had exposed the remains of one individual (Burial R1) – salvage excavations of this burial exposed a second individual (R2). Interred in a supine position, the location of teeth

suggested that the individual was oriented with the head to the north. Sex was impossible to determine because of preservation, but the teeth indicated that the person was an adult between 25 and 35 years of age. The vessel found associated with this person – an eroded Louisville polychrome vase - dates the burial to the Late Classic period. A third burial was a secondary deposit southwest of Burial R2; a single human phalange was cached in a Saxche/Palmar bowl found beneath a limestone rock (Figure 5.28).

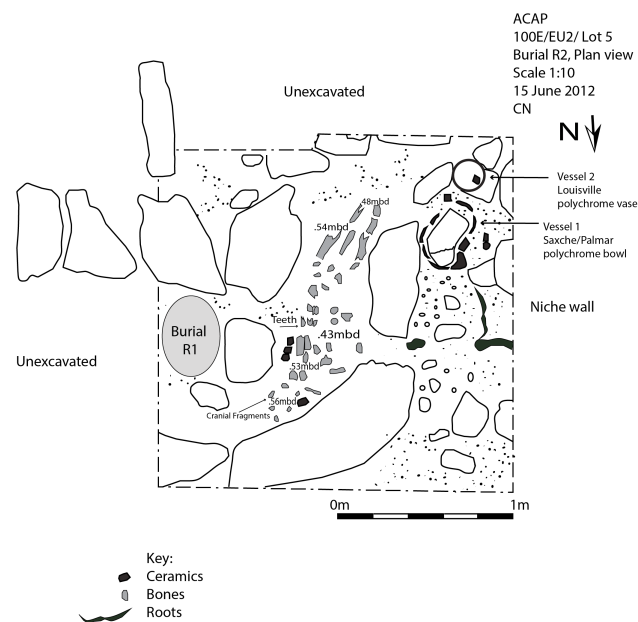


Figure 5.28. Burials R1 and R2, located in a niche in the rock shelter.

Shovel testing of the rock shelter deposit revealed artifact density to be highest in the western area of the rock shelter. Types of artifacts recovered include large fragments of water jars, bowls, cylinder vessels, and censers. Several re-fitting sherds from a polychrome cylinder vessel were recovered from shovel test 6. They were very well preserved and include a band of glyphs (or pseudoglyphs) painted around the rim. The body of the vessel portrays several figures sitting cross-legged in profile (Figure 5.29).

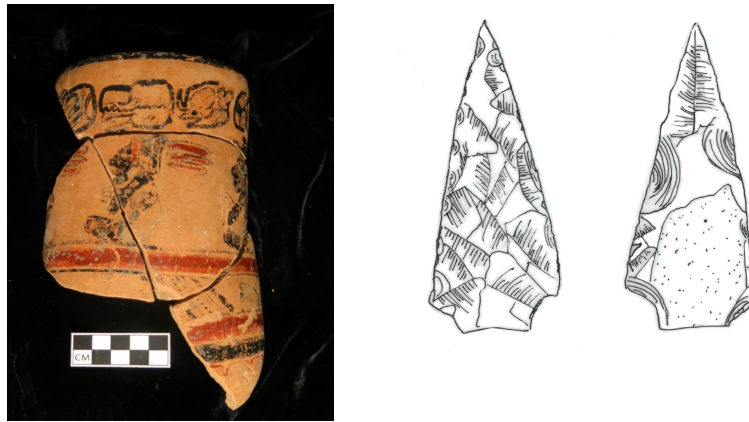


Figure 5.29. Zacatel/Louisville polychrome and chert bifacial projectile point recovered from the rock shelter. Drawing and photo by Matt Stirn.

In addition, a white chert biface was also recovered from shovel test 6 (Figure 5.31). The presence of three burials on the east end of the rock shelter combined with a midden comprised of special-function vessels suggest that this area was used as a locale of ritual deposition, likely including (but not limited to) the inhabitants of Kaq'ru' Ha'.

## Site 9

Site 9 consists of one residential structure and an associated platform (see Figure 5.6). The lack of definitive stratigraphy was disappointing and resulted in unclear occupation phases. The recovering of a Balanza Black slab foot and Santa Cruz Group bowls suggests that the structures were occupied during the Early Classic period (see Figure 5.7). A sizable sheet midden on the north side of the hill indicates a longer occupation phase, but the lack of stratigraphy is problematic. The artifact assemblage is consistent with that of a residence. It seems likely that Structure B included an activity area, evidenced by the high density of artifacts recovered there.

## **Site 10**

This site contains three structures (A-C) arranged around a patio with a natural sinkhole in the center (see Figure 5.8). Test excavations were carried out here in 2013 in order to establish chronology and collect a sample of artifacts to compare to Kaq'ru' Ha'.

### **Structure 10A**

Structure 10A is located on the northern side of Site 10. It is a 2m high platform constructed of unmodified limestone cobbles. While the other two structures at Site 10 also work as retaining walls to expand the edge of the hillside, Structure 10A was constructed on bedrock and the hill continues as a rocky outcrop to the north. Very few artifacts were recovered here.

### **Structure 10B**

Structure 10B is located northwest of Structure A and forms the western border of Site 10. It is a rectangular, 1m high x 15m long platform whose long axis is oriented 2 degrees east of north. It seems to be constructed of 1-2 courses of partially modified limestone blocks. The western wall of the structure also forms a retaining wall that expands the edge of the hillside. Excavations did not reveal formal walls or architecture. It seems that the building was constructed by piling dry limestone fill directly on top of bedrock.

### **Structure 10C**

Structure 10C is a 4m x 6m x 2m platform mound constructed along the southern edge of the hilltop. It is oriented 80 degrees east of north and faces Structure A across the patio. The northern basal wall is well-preserved, and consists of 2 courses of partially modified limestone

blocks with a 2 meter long one-course step of limestone blocks (see Figure 5.8). The southern wall also works as a retaining wall expanding and defining the edge of the hillside.

## **Summary**

Based on cobble platform architecture, Site 10 can be interpreted as a residential settlement that was likely inhabited during the Late Classic period. The structures were placed directly on the limestone bedrock with limestone cobble fill added to modify the southern and western edges of the hillside. Only one occupation phase is likely since the depth of the deposits was relatively shallow.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter included the survey mapping results from the entire study area, and the excavation results from Kaq'ru' Ha', Site 9, and Site 10. The settlement pattern identified in the study area is in line with the regional pattern of constructing settlements on modified hilltops. The exception to this rule is Kaq'ru' Ha', which was constructed on a hillslope extending from a rock shelter. However, its terraced site plan cites the layout of other Maya Mountains sites. Excavations provide relative and absolute chronological information for the site, and indicate the function of several structures. In addition, numerous burials adhering to a mortuary pattern suggest ties to a regional social identity. These results will be integrated with the artifact results presented in Chapter 6 and discussed in Chapter 7.

## CHAPTER 6. ARTIFACT ANALYSIS: CRAFTING, GIFTING, AND TRADING

### 6.1 Introduction

Ancient residences are defined in part by their architectural features, as discussed in the previous chapter, but their artifact assemblages provide information about household practices as well as regional social and economic connections. Ceramics collected from Kaq'ru' Ha', Site 9, and Site 10 shed light on the occupational chronology of the study area and provide information about household economic integration and social identity.

Previous research at Lubaantun (Hammond 1975: Appendix 3), established a ceramic chronology for the Late Classic period of the region and provided a framework for analytical comparison (Figure 6.1).

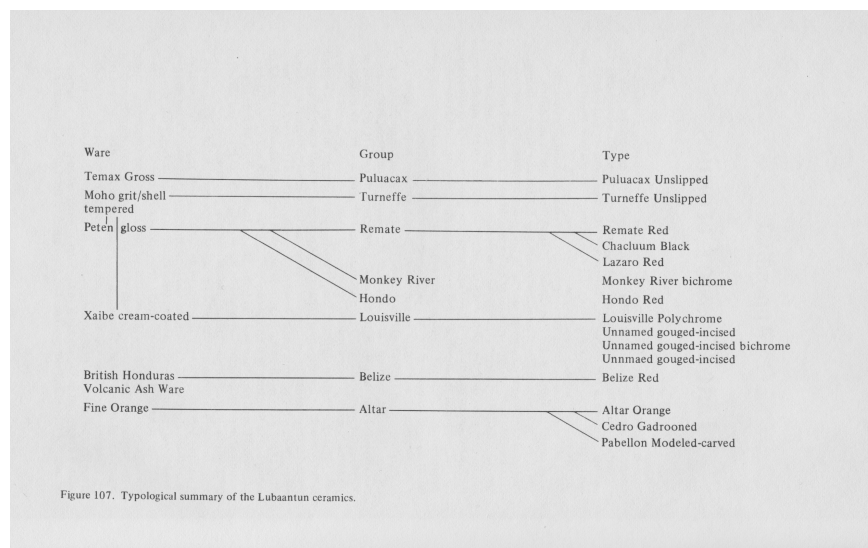


Figure 6.1. Typological summary of the Lubaantun ceramics (from Hammond 1975:294). Hammond relates that 97% of the Lubaantun assemblage consists of four types: Pualacax Unslipped, Remate Red, Turneffe Unslipped, and cream-slipped Louisville polychrome

(Hammond 1975:Appendix 3). INAA testing of sherds from these groups indicates that they were made from local clays (Hammond 1976). The Uxbenká ceramic assemblage is also dominated by the same local ceramic types, as are its hinterland settlements (Jordan 2013:133). Early Classic forms and types have been established at Uxbenká and include the Santa Cruz Group; identification of Santa Cruz Group sherds may suggest an Early Classic occupation phase for settlements on Aguacate land. Imported ceramic artifacts to the Maya Mountains region include Belize Red and Fine Orange, which suggest trade connections to the Belize River Valley. Saxche/Palmar polychromes were manufactured in the Pasión region, Guatemala, and have been recovered from political centers as well. Further evidence of regional social identity and integration would include the presence of mold-made figurines, which were manufactured at Lubaantun. Figurines can be seen as material extensions of political networks (Halperin 2014:111).

If ceramic artifacts recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha', Site 9, and Site 10 adhere closely to these types in form and style, then it is likely that hinterland groups were socially and economically integrated into the region. The presence of imported ceramics would also indicate some participation in the wider Maya cultural sphere, likely through one of the political centers. A second correlate of trade and identity would be lithic artifacts.

Lithic material can be used to discuss daily practices at the household level; in particular, stone tool debris can provide evidence of specialization for trade or production for domestic use. In the Maya Mountains region, chert occurs naturally in the limestone bedrock, and was chipped to make sharp cutting implements. Obsidian and jadeite were imported from the highlands of Guatemala to the Maya Mountains region. If non-local raw materials are present, such as obsidian and jadeite, then they provide evidence of integration into regional trade networks. The

frequency of these raw materials between sites, or between structures within a site, could suggest status differentiation. Also important is presence of production debris. The reduction stage of obsidian blades and flakes could suggest whether the material is being imported as finished blades or whether rural groups are able to import cores and shape tools themselves.

As may be evident from the stratigraphic evidence presented in Chapter 5, the artifact assemblages from Kaq'ru' Ha', Site 9, and Site 10 derive primarily from mixed contexts. The ancient Maya disposed of their refuse in complicated ways. Trash was not just swept to the rear of buildings or sites. They systematically cleaned floors and moved trash to other locations (Chase and Chase 2000), or used earlier refuse as construction fill (LaMotta and Schiffer 1998). Recycling midden materials was fairly common at Maya sites, so on-floor artifact assemblages are rare and only occur in contexts where rapid abandonment occurs because of warfare (e.g., at Aguateca, Guatemala; Inomata and Stiver 1998) or natural disaster (e.g., Cerén, El Salvador; Sheets 1992). Isolating artifact assemblages by primary context was difficult unless the artifacts were recovered from burials. While not fine-grained, comparison of artifact assemblages between structures was the most meaningful category for these analyses.

## **6.2 Laboratory Methodology**

Artifacts were taken to the field house at the end of each work day, where they were washed by project members and laid to dry on screens. When dry, ceramic sherds, lithics, and *jute* (freshwater gastropod) shells were separated by type and re-bagged in plastic bags, but kept together in one main bag according to lot. All artifacts were counted by type, briefly described and catalogued in Microsoft Excel.

Artifact analyses were conducted during the 2014 field season. After consultation with ceramicists from the Uxbenká and Nim Li Punit projects, I conducted the ceramic analysis.



Lithic analysis was conducted by Matthew Stirn and Rebecca Sgouros. Other artifacts such as *jute* shells and faunal remains were not analyzed. Ecofacts such as soil or botanical samples were not collected. All artifacts were collected and stored in the lab of Dr. Patricia A. McAnany, in the Sibun Valley at Yam Wits from 2012--2014. After laboratory analysis was conducted artifacts were stored in the Aguacate Community School. They will remain in the school until the heritage center is completed in 2015.

### **6.3 Ceramic analysis**

Ceramic analysis was conducted during the 2013 field season in order to address questions of chronology and regional economic and sociopolitical integration between Kaq'ru' Ha' and nearby political capitals. The goals of this study are to 1) establish a relative chronology for Kaq'ru' Ha', 2) reconcile this chronology with radiocarbon dates, and 3) compare these data with ceramics from other sites in the Maya Mountains region and the wider Maya region. A fine-grained chronological analysis was not possible due to preservation; rather, ceramics were separated into groups and types in order to evaluate commonalities and differences within established regional patterns.

#### **Type-variety Classification System**

The type-variety method was used in this analysis in order to compare regional collections and those from Kaq'ru' Ha'. This method has been well-established as a standard one for analyzing ceramics in the Maya region (Gifford 1960; Gifford et al. 1976; Sabloff 1975; Smith and Gifford 1966; Smith, Willey, and Gifford 1960). Type-variety is a nested classification system in which types supersede varieties. The ceramic group combines ceramic types (and varieties) that share technological attributes such as paste recipe, temper, and slip.

Types are “an aggregate of distinct ceramic attributes that is indicative of a particular category of pottery produced during a specific time interval within a specific region ” (Gifford 1976:9).

Wares are identified based on paste and temper; though these attributes were recorded in this study they were not analyzed further. Types are identified by surface finish; sherds are further defined by varieties within types, based on observed variations of one or more “minor attributes” within a type. In this study varieties are mostly left as “unspecified” because the sample size is not large enough to warrant fine-grained distinctions. The type-variety system is used in the Maya Mountains region in order to construct a region-wide chronology and trace interactions over time.

Though useful, type-variety is not without critique (Aimers 2013:229-230). Scholars have raised concerns that type-variety, as a hierarchical system, can downplay variability in assemblages. In addition, the roots of type-variety are located in the US southwest, a region with abundant polychromes and well-preserved surface treatments and decoration (Kidder 1927; Smith et al. 1960). Favoring surface treatment can be problematic in the Maya lowlands, where a tropical environment and acidic soils erode slips and paint (Rice 2013:24). Ceramicists are also not clear about why modal data and paste characteristics have been devalued in their analysis (Foias 2004:144). Importantly, Jim Aimers (2013:3) points out that imposing the type-variety classification scheme onto ceramics assemblages may reveal little about ancient culture, preferences, or practices (cf. Gifford 1963). That is, identifying patterns through the analysis of arbitrary ceramic attributes may not reflect “emic” cultural categories that were meaningful to the ancient Maya (Chase and Chase 2013:47; Rice 2013:18).

As a method, type-variety can be used to sort and identify large quantities of sherds efficiently (Adams 1971:6), and it is useful when analyzing ceramics from a newly excavated

site (Sabloff 1975:3). It also facilitates intersite comparisons and chronology building. Type-variety is used here because it addresses questions about chronology through intersite comparison and it facilitates communication among archaeologists (Rice 2013:26).

For comparative materials, this study used previously published analyses of lowland Maya ceramics, principally Jeremy Sabloff's (1975) *Excavations at Seibal: Ceramics*, and Norman Hammond's (1975) *Lubaantun: A Classic Maya Realm*. In addition, this analysis was conducted with input from Jillian Jordan (2013), ceramicist for the Uxbenká Archaeological Project, and Mikael Fauvelle (2011, 2012), ceramicist for the Toledo Regional Integration Project (TRIP), who analyzed recently recovered ceramics from Nim Li Punit. Geoff Braswell's type collection from Pusilhá was also consulted.

The names assigned to Early Classic types are those established in the Petén (LaPorte 2007; Sabloff 1975), while Late Classic types have names established by Hammond at Lubaantun (1975). This is the nomenclature used by Jillian Jordan at Uxbenká (2013:116); I chose not to assign new type names in order to promote intraregional comparisons between the Kaq'ru' Ha' assemblage and those of Uxbenká, Lubaantun, Pusilhá, and Nim Li Punit.

### **Ceramic Analysis Methods**

After the ceramics were washed and dried, they were counted and re-bagged; diagnostic sherds were bagged separately. Analysis of diagnostic sherds was conducted by excavation unit, with each lot laid out on the lab table according to vertical stratigraphy. Ceramics were sorted into groups surface finish and paste, and then identified to the type level and sorted according to form. As mentioned previously, variety was rarely identified due to small samples size and poor preservation of surface treatments. Diagnostic sherds were assigned to different groups and types, and the following attributes were recorded: primary vessel class, rim form, lip form, rim

diameter, wall thickness, paste description/temper, paste Munsell color, slip Munsell color, and surface finish/decoration. Vessel forms were identified using Sabloff's (1975:22-27) definitions for the Seibal ceramics. These data were recorded in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for chronological and attribute analyses.

### **Chronology**

One of the goals of the ceramic analysis was to establish a relative chronology for Kaq'ru' Ha' and other settlements in the study area. This was achieved through analyses of changes in stylistic and modal attributes (form and surface treatment) in comparison with collections from Uxbenká and reports from Nim Li Punit and Lubaantun. While paste characteristics were recorded, paste was not prioritized in the hierarchy of type-variety because the sample was not large and time and funding constraints limited chemical or petrographic analyses. The preliminary results indicate that Kaq'ru' Ha' was founded during the Early Classic Tzakol 2-3 (AD 400-600) ceramic phase and inhabited through the Late Classic Tepeu 1-3 (600-900) ceramic phases (Figure 6.2). In chronological terms, the ceramics bracket a time period from AD 400-900. Below I discuss the Early Classic and Late Classic types and forms recovered from sites on Aguacate community lands.

LOWLAND MAYA CERAMIC CHRONOLOGIES								
YEAR	PERIOD	UAXACTUN	TIKAL	SEIBAL	PETEXBATUN	BARTON RAMIE	SE PETEN	UXBENKA
1300 1200	LATE POSTCLASSIC					Late Facet NEW TOWN	MOPAN	
1100 1000	EARLY POSTCLASSIC		CABAN		TAMARINDO	Early Facet		
900 830	TERMINAL CLASSIC	TEPEU 3	EZNAB	BAYAL	SEPENS	Late Facet SPANISH LOOKOUT	IXMABUY	TERMINAL CLASSIC
700 600	LATE CLASSIC	TEPEU 2 TEPEU 1	IMIX IK	TEPEJILOTE — — — —	NACIMIENTO	Early Facet TIGER RUN	SILTOK	LATE CLASSIC
500 400 300	EARLY CLASSIC	TZAKOL 3 TZAKOL 2 TZAKOL 1	MANIK 3 MANIK 2 MANIK 1	JUNCO	JORDAN	HERMITAGE	XILINTE	EARLY CLASSIC II EARLY CLASSIC I
200 100 A.D. 0 B.C. 100 200	PROTO CLASSIC  LATE PRECLASSIC	CHICANEL	CIMI CAUAC	CANTUTSE	FAISAN	FLORAL PARK MOUNT HOPE BARTON CREEK	ATZANTE	
300 400 500 600	MIDDLE PRECLASSIC	MAMOM	CHUEN TZEC	ESCOBA	ESCARVADO	Late Facet JENNEY CREEK	RESUMIDERO	
700 800 900	EARLY PRECLASSIC		EB	REAL		Early Facet		

Figure 6.2 Lowland Maya Ceramic Chronologies (from Jordan 2013:117, [after Foias 1996: 1011]).

### Early Classic period (AD 250-600)

In-depth ceramic analyses and comparisons between site assemblages are furthering our understanding of the Early Classic period in the Maya Mountains region. Ceramic analyses, combined with radiocarbon dates, at Uxbenká and Nim Li Punit have shown that these sites have Early Classic phases (Fauvelle 2012; Jordan 2013). Ceramics indicative of the Early Classic period in southern Belize resemble Tzakol 1-3 ceramics from the Petén, particularly Dos Arroyos and Aguila Orange polychromes, Balanza Black, and Triunfo Striated. Common forms include dishes, bowls and cylinders, often with flanges, slab feet, incising, squared lips, and everted rims. The Santa Cruz Group was identified by Jordan at Uxbenká as the most prevalent red monochrome during the Early Classic period. Sherds have a thick red, flaky slip and many bowls

have sharply everted rims (Jordan 2013:118). Jordan separates the Early Classic at Uxbenká into two phases distinguished by the co-occurrence of waxy wares with Petén gloss wares, suggesting a Terminal Preclassic occupation phase for the site; waxy wares disappear around AD 400/450, distinguishing the Early Classic II phase (Jordan 2013:218).

Radiocarbon dates reported in the previous chapter suggest that construction began at Kaq'ru' Ha' during the latter part of the Early Classic period, no earlier than AD 430. The ceramic evidence supports this date by including groups typical of the Early Classic II phase (400-450/600 CE) identified at Uxbenká (Jordan 2013:117). The Kaq'ru' Ha' assemblage is characterized by red monochromes (Santa Cruz Group), orange-slipped polychromes (Actuncan/Dos Arroyos Group), and unslipped striated jars (Triunfo Group). Forms include jars with vertical and outcurving necks, open bowls, squared lips with grooves, incised rims, and bowls with outflaring everted and horizontal everted rims (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Distribution of Early Classic groups and types by structure

<b>Early Classic Groups</b>	<b>Structure A</b>	<b>Structure B</b>	<b>Structure C</b>	<b>Structure E</b>	<b>Structure G</b>	<b>Rock Shelter</b>
<b>Dos Arroyos/Actuncan</b>	5	19	0	1	0	6
<b>Santa Cruz Group</b>	12	24	0	6	1	15
<b>Santa Cruz Red</b>	0	3	0	1	0	6
<b>Sierra Red</b>	0	2	0	8	0	27
<b>Total</b>	17	48	0	16	1	54

Santa Cruz Group sherds were recovered from multiple structures (Structures A, B, E, G, and the rockshelter). Sherds assigned to the Dos Arroyos group were recovered from the construction fill of Structure B (Figure 6.3), suggesting that the site was inhabited during the Early Classic period and its refuse was used during a remodeling event. The presence of basal flanges in two different contexts at Kaq'ru' Ha' (at Structure A and B) also support an Early

Classic occupation phase. Further, the slab foot and flange recovered from Site 9 suggest an early occupation phase as well, though this was not supported by stratigraphy (see Chapter 5).



Figure 6.3 Early Classic ceramic artifacts. Left: Dos Arroyos/Actuncan body sherds recovered from the step fill of Structure B. Center: Balanza Black slab foot from Site 9. Right: Santa Cruz Group sherd with characteristic horizontal everted rim. Photos by Matt Stirn, drawing by Rebecca Sgouros.

### Late Classic period (AD 600-830)

Similar to the ceramic sequence at political capitals, Kaq'ru' Ha's ceramic assemblage designates it as a Late Classic Tepeu 1-3 (AD 600-900) sphere site. In fact, the bulk of diagnostic ceramics date to the Tepeu sphere (87%). The transition between Tzakol 3 and Tepeu 1 is unclear; groups often continue between time periods and the current sample is not robust enough to identify a definitive shift. Locally produced types such as Turneffe Unslipped, Remate Red, Chacuum Black, and Louisville polychromes are prevalent in the assemblage, with small quantities of imported types present as well (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Distribution of Late Classic Types by Structure.

Late Classic Types	Structure A	Structure B	Structure C	Structure E	Structure G	Rock Shelter
Pualacax	8	2	4	1	0	1

Unslipped						
Remate Red	57	82	32	26	22	54
Chacluum Black	7	26	8	13	7	4
Hondo Red	1	3	1	1	0	0
Turneffe Unslipped	67	52	7	24	10	31
Zacatel/Louisville polychrome	40	121	18	31	5	33
Palmar Orange	2	6	0	0	1	1
Belize Red	1	0	0	3	0	2
Altamira Fluted	0	2	0	0	0	0
Miseria Applique	0	0	0	0	0	3
Figurines	1	5	2	2	1	0
<b>Total</b>	184	299	72	101	46	129

The imported types consist primarily of Palmar Orange polychromes and a Miseria Applique bowl with a few examples of Belize Red body sherds. Belize Red has a distinctive ash-tempered paste and is produced in the Belize River Valley; its presence in upper stratigraphic levels at Pusilhá and Nim Li Punit lead Braswell and colleagues (2005) to consider it a Terminal Classic marker for southern Belize. However, it is a strong marker of the Late Classic period in the Belize Valley, and the limited fragments of Belize Red at Kaq'ru' Ha' prevent a solid interpretation of the type as Terminal Classic. Louisville polychrome is a local cream-slipped polychrome analogous to the Zacatel group in the Petén region. Hammond's (1976) INAA study of cream-slipped polychromes suggests that they were produced locally at Lubaantun. A particularly well-preserved Louisville polychrome vase was recovered from the rockshelter (Figure 6.7). Another diagnostic attribute from Lubaantun is unit-stamps -- one body sherd with stamped motif was recovered from Structure B, suggesting that Kaq'ru' Ha' residents were participating in regional traditions (Figure 6.4).





Figure 6.4 Unit stamped sherd recovered from Structure B. Photo by Matt Stirn.



Figure 6.5. Late Classic polychrome ceramics from Kaq'ru' Ha' burials. Left: Louisville polychrome tripod plate from Burial A2. Center: Saxche/Palmar polychrome bowl from Burial R2. Right: Louisville polychrome vase from Burial R2.



Figure 6.6. Miseria Applique fragment and drawing from the rockshelter. Photo by Matt Stirn, drawing by Rebecca Sgouros.

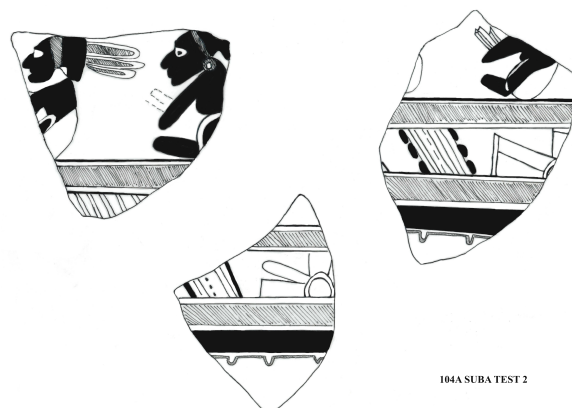


Figure 6.7. Detailed drawing of decorative elements of the Zacatel/Louisville polychrome vase.  
Drawing by Rebecca Sgouros.

Table 6.3. Summary of Kaq'ru' Ha' ceramic chronology by structure.

Site	Structure	Total Sherds	Early Classic	Late Classic	Terminal Classic
1	A	337	17	182	1
	B	453	55	299	3
	C	119	4	72	0
	E	143	8	99	3
	G	61	1	47	0
	Rock Shelter	217	32	127	2
9	A	61	4	1	0
	B	16	2	3	0
10	C	21	1	6	1
	A	12	0	6	0
	B	10	0	3	0
	C	10	2	3	0

In summary, Kaq'ru' Ha' has a two-phase chronology that places the founding of the site in the Early Classic period by AD 430 (Table 6.3). The assemblage is closely related to those at Uxbenká, Nim Li Punit, and Lubaantun. Vessels with distinctive pastes (e.g., Saxche/Palmar Orange) suggest trade links with the Petén region, likely through one of the political centers. An abundance of Louisville polychrome and red monochrome bowls and dishes suggest economic integration with the region and a shared preference for ceramics.

## Figurines

Figurines have been recovered from household refuse, caches, and burials from contexts as early as the Preclassic period (1800-300 BCE) in Mesoamerica (Halperin 2014:6). In solid or hollow forms, figurines often featured anthropomorphic, supernatural, and/or zoomorphic themes and were produced by modeling or molding techniques. Christina Halperin (2014) links the profusion of figurines during the Late Classic period to growing populations, urbanization, and increasing displays of power from political centers. She argues that ceramic figurines were “instrumental in disseminating state ideologies beyond the confines of public ceremonial spaces and into the visual culture repertoires of households” (Halperin 2014:2). In the Maya Mountains region, evidence for the manufacture of mold-made figurines was recovered from the ceremonial center at Lubaantun (Hammond 1975; Wegars 1977). Therefore, the presence and types of figurines recovered from Kaq’ru’ Ha’ could illuminate the relationship between political centers and rural households.

Table 6.4. Figurines and associated structures.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Figurines</b>
Structure A	1
Structure B	7
Structure C	2
Structure D	2
Structure E	0
Structure F	0
Rockshelter	0
Patio 1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>

Thirteen figurines and figurine fragments were recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha' (Table 6.4). Significant themes include warriors and rulers, evidenced by headdresses and spears, a helmeted figure that may be a boxer, a woman holding a dog, and two fragmentary figural plaques (Figure 6.8, 6.9). No figurines were recovered from Sites 9 or 10. The implications of this pattern will be discussed in Chapter 7.



Figure 6.8. Figurines recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha'.



Figure 6.9. Two figural plaque fragments recovered from Structure B. Photos by Matt Stirn.

#### **6.4 Lithic Analysis Methodology**

Lithics were bagged separately from ceramics but stored with the other materials from each lot. First, lithic materials were sorted according to type (chert, obsidian, quartzite, groundstone). Once lithic type, material, and color definitions were determined, individual flakes and artifacts were catalogued in an Excel database and ultimately combined into samples based on contexts within individual sites. Basic statistics were then calculated within individual samples, across samples, between contexts, between sites, and amongst the entire lithic assemblage. Definitions of flakes and tool types used in the analysis are summarized in Table 6.5 and Table 6.6.

Table 6.5. Definitions of flake types used in lithic analysis.

<b>Flake Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Core Flake</b>	A flake that retains 100% of its cortex on the outside (dorsal) surface.
<b>Primary Flake</b>	A flake that retains 75 – 100% cortex on its dorsal surface.
<b>Secondary Flake</b>	A flake that retains 1 – 75% cortex on its dorsal surface.
<b>Tertiary Flake</b>	A flake that has no cortex on its dorsal surface
<b>Shatter</b>	Debitage lacking a ventral surface, point of applied force, or intact flake margin.
<b>Retouched Flake</b>	A flake with modified edge(s) where a series of flakes were intentionally removed.
<b>Utilized Flake</b>	A flake showing a regular series of edge modifications typically due only to use.

Table 6.6. Definitions of tool types used in lithic analysis.

<b>Tool type</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Biface</b>	Chipped stone objects with flattened cross-sections which exhibit bifacially directed flake removal.
<b>Blade</b>	A flake with at least a 3:1 length to width ratio.
<b>Prismatic Blade</b>	A blade purposefully shaped and removed from a prismatic blade core.
<b>Projectile Point/Hafted Biface</b>	Bifacially flaked implement with a pointed distal end and basal modifications.
<b>Core</b>	Any nucleus of raw material which exhibits the removal of two or more flakes of sufficient size.
<b>Bifacial Core</b>	A core with flake removed on both sides.
<b>Nodule</b>	An untested/unflaked piece of raw material.
<b>Flaked Nodule/Tested Cobble</b>	A piece of raw material having a minimum number of flakes removed

Throughout the Maya lowlands, lithic implements were produced by chipping and grinding stone material into useful artifacts such as prismatic blades, bifacial tools, and grinding stones (Houston and Inomata 2009:285). Lithic materials were used in both quotidian/domestic and ritual contexts. Lithic data helps to address questions about local use of resources and regional integration. The materials from Kaq'ru' Ha' indicate both local and extra-local resource

procurement. Categories of stone materials found in the Aguacate study area are summarized in Table 6.7. The results of chipped stone analysis is presented in the following sections; contextualization and discussion of groundstone, greenstone, and hematite is included in Chapter 7.

Table 6.7. Total counts of all categories of lithic artifacts.

<b>Lithic artifacts</b>	<b>Total count</b>
Chert	912
Obsidian	83
Groundstone	5
Quartzite	8
Hematite	3
Greenstone	2

## **Chert**

Chert occurs naturally as part of limestone formations throughout the Maya lowlands. Locally sourced chert is ubiquitous at many lowland Maya archaeological sites, and Kaq'ru' Ha' is no different; it is likely that nodules and small stones were collected from surrounding streambeds by Kaq'ru' Ha' residents, since water-worn wear patterns are present on many of the tested cores and nodules. The most prevalent forms of chert are flakes, shatter, and unworked nodules. However, recovered chert tools also included bifaces, tested cores, hammerstones, and scrapers, suggesting a range of activities (Figure 6.10; Table 6.8, 6.9).

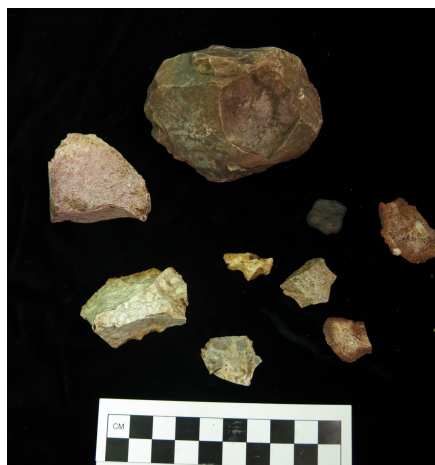


Figure 6.10. Examples of chert flakes and cores.

Table 6.8. Chert flake stages.

<b>Chert Flake Stage</b>	<b>Total of Chert Flake Stage</b>	<b>Percent of total chert flakes (n=912)</b>
Core Flakes	132	53%
Primary Flakes	33	13%
Secondary Flakes	55	23%
Tertiary Flakes	20	8%
Retouched Flakes	8	3%
Utilized Flakes	77	31%
Non-utilized Flakes	174	70%
Platform	206	83%
Non-platform	42	17%

Table 6.9. Non-utilized and utilized flakes.

<b>Chert</b>	<b>Non-utilized Flakes</b>	<b>Utilized Flakes</b>
Core flakes	104	27
Primary flakes	24	7
Secondary flakes	36	18
Tertiary flakes	12	6
Retouched flakes	3	5
Total	179	63

Ratios of utilized to nonutilized flakes can illustrate whether production was local or whether re-sharpening of nonlocal material was prevalent. Table 6.9 shows that chert flakes



primarily were nonutilized, indicating that production of expedient chert tools likely occurred at these sites.

Chert flakes were recovered more frequently from Structure A (Table 6.10). Interestingly, of the 246 chert artifacts from Structure A, 191 were from the eight units comprising Op 102 SubOp B (see Figure 5.9). These lots make up the pebble layer that was covering the burial sequence on the summit of Structure A. Additionally, fragments of bifacial projectile points were recovered in the rock shelter and in construction fill (Figure 5.29). One incised chert earflare was recovered in the rock shelter and in construction fill (Figure 5.29). One incised chert earflare was recovered from Structure C (Figure 6.11).



Figure 6.11. Chert earflare from Structure C.

Table 6.10. Total chert flakes by structure.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Total chert flakes</b>
Structure A	246
Structure B	38
Structure C	25
Structure E	25
Structure G	2

Patio 1	15
Rockshelter	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>357</b>

Chert was the most abundant lithic material at Kaq'ru' Ha'. Finished tools included seven bifacial fragments and one projectile point. However, the tables above suggest that tools were made and re-worked at the site. Stratigraphic data suggests that chert debris may have been recycled as construction fill or as ritual deposits. In the following chapter stratigraphic evidence will be reconciled with these lithics data in order to infer depositional practices.

## **Obsidian**

Obsidian is a volcanic glass that the ancient Maya mined and exported from several sources in the Guatemalan highlands (El Chayal, Ixtepeque, and San Martin Jilotepeque), about 400km southwest of the Maya Mountains region. Throughout Mesoamerica, obsidian was used for daily cutting needs, as well as knapped into eccentric shapes, incised with iconography, polished for mirrors, or cached in ritually significant locales. Prismatic blade technology was the most expedient way to produce many tools, and cores were worked into a polyhedral shape to facilitate the removal of blades. Obsidian was exported to southern Belize by way of coastal trade routes, as well as overland through the Alta Verapaz (Braswell 2005, McKillop 1996:55). Obsidian attributed to the El Chayal source was traded with inland sites such as Lubaantun and Pusilhá, while Ixtepeque was traded along the coast (Hammond 1975:341). Obsidian was both a utilitarian and exotic resource in the sense that it was widely traded and shows up in most excavation contexts (e.g., in modest and high status dwellings and ritual contexts).

Obsidian prismatic blades are most abundant at Structure A, and Structure B (Table 6.11). Interestingly, production debris in the form of flaked debitage was recovered from

Structure C. This pattern and its implications will be discussed in the next chapter.

Table 6.11. Location and types of obsidian tools.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Prismatic Blade</b>	<b>Blade</b>	<b>Flake</b>	<b>Microblade</b>	<b>Biface</b>	<b>Core</b>	<b>Shatter</b>
<b>Structure A</b>	19	0	4	0	0	0	1
<b>Structure B</b>	12	0	1	1	0	0	0
<b>Structure C</b>	4	1	8	1	1	0	0
<b>Rockshelter</b>	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	39	1	13	2	1	0	1

## Groundstone

Basaltic groundstone was an important resource from the Guatemala Highlands and the Maya Mountains that was crafted into grinding stones, which are a standard aspect of kitchen assemblages. At Kaq'ru' Ha' groundstone implements (manos and metate fragments) were recovered from surface collections of Structures B, C, and D as well as in excavations of Structure C (Table 6.12). Interestingly, Site 10 lacked grinding stones, but fragments were recovered from Site 9. The presence of grinding stones suggests food production and indicates that these structures may have partially functioned as kitchens. No further sourcing or functional analyses was conducted on the groundstone implements.

Table 6.12. Groundstone tools recovered from the study area.

<b>Site</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Site 1	C	Lithic	Groundstone	Mano	1
Site 1	B	Lithic	Groundstone	Metate fragment	1
Site 1	D	Lithic	Groundstone	Metate fragment	2
Site 9	D	Lithic	Groundstone	Metate fragment	1
<b>Total</b>					<b>5</b>

## Other small finds

Other artifacts recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha' and the study area include greenstone (jadeite and serpentine), hematite, quartzite, and unworked freshwater snail (*jute*) shells. Two pieces of greenstone were recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha'. A 30cm long serpentine celt was recovered from the construction fill of Structure B and a shaped and polished jade earspool was recovered from Burial A3 in Structure A (Figure 6.12).



Figure 6.12 Jade earflare recovered from Burial A3.

Three unworked hematite nodules were recovered – one from Site 10 and two from Site 9; no hematite was found at Kaq'ru' Ha'. Eight pieces of quartzite were recovered from the study area, which are summarized in Table 6.13.

Table 6.13. Quartzite recovered from the study area.

Site	Structure	Class	Category	Quantity
Site 1	A	quartz	axe	1
Site 1	B	quartz	bifacial core	1
Site 1	C	quartz	debitage	1
Site 1	C	quartz	pebble	1
Site 1	A	quartz	pebble	1
Site 10	B	quartz	debitage	2
Site 9	A	quartz	pebble	1
<b>Total</b>				<b>8</b>

Most were unworked nodules (n=6), but two pieces from Kaq'ru' Ha' were bifacially flaked. *Jute* shells were collected and counted, but no further analyses were performed. In total, 498 unworked jute shells were recovered from all three sites (Table 6.14).

Table 6.14. Location of recovered *jute*.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Total <i>Jute</i></b>
Site 1	459
Site 9	27
Site 10	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>498</b>

## 6.5 Conclusion

The ceramic and lithic artifacts reported in this results chapter provide information about chronology, site occupation, and structure function. The ceramic assemblage from Kaq'ru' Ha' indicates that the site was occupied during the Early Classic period. This reinforces the radiocarbon date of AD 430 that was garnered from Burial B1. However, the main occupation phase was during the Tepeu 1-2 (AD 600-900) ceramic complex. The Terminal Classic period (AD 900-1050) is less clear at Kaq'ru' Ha'. The types adhere closely to the typological summary (Figure 6.1) composed by Norman Hammond at Lubaantun, and Jillian Jordan's (2013) work on the Early Classic phase at Uxbenká. This suggests that the residents of Kaq'ru' Ha' were integrated into regional ceramic traditions. Additionally, the presence of at least one imported vessel and locally produced, Petén-style polychrome vases suggests that Kaq'ru' Ha' residents were participating in the wider Maya cultural sphere.

The lithic results from Kaq'ru' Ha' indicate that residents were making tools from locally available chert. Several hundred of these tools were re-purposed as structure fill to cover the burial sequence on the summit of Structure A. Sites 9 and 10 also had evidence of chert tool

production, but had fewer obsidian artifacts. Obsidian blades were imported in a later stage of production, since there was little production debris recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha'. Imported greenstone in the form of a celt and an earspool suggest status differentiation within the site of Kaq'ru' Ha', but also links to long-distance trade routes. These patterns suggest that residents were participating in a region-wide social identity and were well-integrated into the social and economic patterns in the Maya Mountains region.

## **CHAPTER 7. SOCIAL IDENTITY ACROSS LANDSCAPES: ANCIENT LIVES AND MODERN HERITAGE IN A Q'EQCHI' MAYA VILLAGE**

### **7.1 Introduction**

As outlined in Chapter 3, there are two fields of action in this study: the ancient Maya Mountains region and the discipline of archaeology. Fields of action structure, and are structured by, social practices (Robb 2010). Materials such as the built environment, human burials, and ceramic and lithic artifacts shape fields of action. In this chapter I discuss the implications of the site plan, architecture, and objects recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha' for social identities of the Maya Mountains region. I also consider contemporary Aguacate village as a community of practice that is, through activities related to the practice of archaeology on their land, reshaping archaeology as a field of action. In order to insert a community perspective into this discussion, vignettes precede most sections in this chapter.

### **7.2 Marcos and the ancestral built environment**

The dirt road to Aguacate was constructed in the early 1980s from a trail that had been there for decades, if not centuries. It winds through a mosaic of second growth forest, milpa fields, and cleared pasture land at the foothills of the Maya Mountains. Right before reaching the low bridge at Aguacate creek, there is a cleared cattle pasture on the left with a noticeable small hill that is an aberration on the otherwise flat grass-planted land. The summit has not been cleared of trees, so cows like to stand on the flanks of the little hill for shade; they perch on suspiciously squared limestone blocks.

The hill is not just a hill, but an small mound constructed by the ancient Maya. You can tell because of the blocks tumbled down it's sides, but also because it does not look very natural – first, it is on the floodplain of the river, and second, it looks vaguely pyramidal. It's hard to see the summit through the trees, but there are structures up there with ceramic artifacts eroding out of them. Marcos Choc told me that; he cleared the land and has maintained the cattle pasture for several years.

Investing in cattle is an expensive and environmentally destructive endeavor for subsistence farmers in Toledo (Grandia 2012). One has to acquire the capital to purchase the animals, and make sure they don't get sick or picked off by jaguars at night. It is also difficult to clear pastureland and plant edible grass. The land must be leased from the government, but permission must be granted by community members who generally share and rotate milpa lands in a communal fashion. Once the pasture is cleared and the grass has been planted, the farmer sprays pesticides such as RoundUp to keep the tropical secondary growth from coming back and it almost never does, which has environmental consequences such as increased run-off. The field is fenced off with barbed wire, consistent with Marcos's attitude towards outsiders surveying his land.

Marcos Choc has invested a lot in this small pasture, and he considers the mound to be a resource as well. I stayed at Marcos's house in 2011 when I was doing some survey and seeking permission to come back the following year for mapping and excavations. We had a long talk about it one evening after dinner, while swinging in hammocks. He told me that he considers the mound a resource for his grandchildren, and he is saving it for them. He does not want anyone in the community to look at it, and he definitely does not want to give permission to an outsider to see the kinds of artifacts that are there. Nothing I said changed his mind. I told him I only wanted



to document what was there, in case the cows disturbed it further; the map I was making would be incomplete without it; I would not remove anything, only look. We discussed this mound at every community meeting thereafter. The alcalde and village council thought that Marcos should let me include it in the survey and mapping, but Marcos was obstinate.

While I tried my best to talk Marcos into showing me the mound, in the end I had to respect his decision. Not viewing the mound did not alter my interpretations of the settlement pattern, but I suspect that it contributed to the respect and trust relationship that I was building with the community members. Time spent surveying their landscape provided an opportunity for us to become accustomed to each other and for me to learn about their land tenure system, community organization, and perceptions of archaeology.

Marco's lived experience of Aguacate community land includes the ancestral built environment. His perception of the sites in his pasture is different than mine -- he sees them as another resource for him and his family. The practice of interacting with the built environment has shaped decision making about resources. Interestingly, Marcos worked on the archaeology project and supports the idea of protecting Kaq'ru' Ha', as do many villagers.

### **7.3 Ancient social identity and the built environment**

Built environments are a crucial aspect of social life and social reproduction. As physical spaces, architecture structures how people move through a place; it is also symbolic of broader social patterns and interactions. Following Giddens (1984:25), there is duality of structure between social practices and the systems that they organize. Social actors consciously and intentionally shape their physical surroundings. "Architecture plays a central role in social reproduction by delineating physical and social boundaries and serving as the context for the social actions and interactions of knowledgeable agents" (Fischer 2009:440). The architectural

elements of Kaq'ru' Ha' served as context for social interactions, worked to affiliate residents with the wider region, and engendered exclusion from certain spaces.

Though on a smaller scale, the architecture of Kaq'ru' Ha' is comparable to the political centers. Most sites in southern Belize, including political centers, were constructed on hilltops or along ridge lines and in close proximity to a river or corridor that may have served as an important trade route. In the case of a political center, the natural topographic relief elevated their ceremonial centers and produced platforms on which to place buildings. The residents of Kaq'ru' Ha' adhered to these regional elements of site planning by locating their settlement close to a river and on a terraced hillside with an adjacent rock shelter.

Caves and rock shelters were important facets of the Maya landscape. Symbolizing the underworld, rain, and wind, caves were sites of ritual deposition, offerings, and burials throughout the Maya lowlands (Brady and Prufer 2011). Therefore, caves, mountains, and rock shelters were key ideological features of ancient Maya site planning (Brady 1997; Prufer and Kindon 2005; Vogt and Stuart 2005). Excavations undertaken by the Uxbenká team at Kayuko Naj Tunich Cave, south of the Uxbenká site core, which the team interprets as a “foundational” shrine for the ruling lineage (Prufer et al. 2011:215). The cave was modified with architectural features, including a sandstone altar, and the cave opening is visible from each of the monumental groups at Uxbenká.

Thus, the rock shelter may have been an ideological draw for the residents of Kaq'ru' Ha' in choosing where to build. It is not terribly deep or impressive in terms of subterranean features; there is no dark zone nor the water or mist evocative of a link to the primordial sea. However, the rock shelter included the ritual deposition of ceramic vessels, chert tools, and human burials. A

sustained devotional practice reinforces the importance of this particular location and signals that residents were linked to an ideologically charged landscape.

In order to materialize their link to the landscape, residents constructed buildings to serve as dwellings, ritualized places, and administrative or adjudicative locales. The architecture at Kaq'ru' Ha' was constructed in a regionally intelligible style and uses the natural landscape to elevate structures. The terracing is reminiscent of the graduated terracing at Nim Li Punit, and Groups B and C at Uxbenká. Similarities in architectural style suggest affiliation with these earlier sites. Lubaantun and Pusilha follow ridge lines, and their built environment includes terraces. Since their main occupation phases date to the Late and Terminal Classic periods, perhaps they are citing a Maya Mountains tradition that predates their founding.

The positioning of the buildings may also have been connected to cosmological principles, which were materialized by elites and rulers across the Maya region. According to Ashmore (1991), site planning principles included building along a north/south axis and marking the path of the sun by constructing ritual structures on the east and west. According to Ashmore (Ashmore 1991:201), north symbolized the supernatural realm inhabited by ancestors and south symbolized the underworld. Kaq'ru' Ha' was constructed along a north/south axis, with buildings oriented east/west. The ancestor shrine is located on the western side of the patio while residences were located on the east, which is an important divergence from Plaza Plan II at Tikal (Becker 1971), in which ancestor shrines tend to occur in eastern structures. Though the site plan opens to the north, the ancestors interred in Structure A were buried with their heads oriented in that direction. It seems logical that the rock shelter lines the southern edge of the site, since it evokes the underworld.

If architecture is an intentional delineation of space in order to shape social interactions (e.g., Giddens 1984:25), then the restricted terrace/patios suggest differential access to space and exclusion from the highest structure as well as the rock shelter. The lower patios are wide open and unrestricted, encouraging a high degree of social interaction, while the upper terraces are restricted and reserved for smaller gatherings. Exclusive interactions would have structured and reinforced social status and inequality.

As the setting for projects related to group identity, the built environment recursively shaped residents of Kaq'ru' Ha' into social actors integrated into regional patterns. The structuring structures (Bourdieu 1990:53) of architecture signaled restricted access to privileged spaces and communicated to visitors an affiliation to political centers as well as to the supernatural realm. More specifically, the largest building at the site contained the remains of seven individuals interred to establish a “genealogy of place” (McAnany 2013) that transmitted authority, power, and responsibility from generation to generation.

#### **7.4 “They must have been much bigger than we” : community reaction to burials**

People from Aguacate were intensely curious about the burials. Bones are so immediate and personal – they seemed to bring the past directly into the present in a way that other artifacts do not. As we exposed Burial A2 in its entirety (see Figure 5.14), I was surprised to see that it was a well-preserved and articulated skeleton. Since the burial “looked” like a person it made Aguacate residents ask more questions about the kind of person she/he might have been. Surveying the size of the mounds on which we were standing, Jose Bolon told me, “He must have been much bigger than we, to build these places.” The idea that giants must have built major temple complexes throughout Mesoamerica is a common one – contact period documents

record that local people believed the pyramids at Teotihuacan and Cholula, in central Mexico, were constructed by giants that lived in a previous era (Sahagun 1950, 82 [154785] vol. 10:191).

I told Bolon that the person in the burial probably wasn't much taller than he was, and I pulled out my tape measure. Measuring from the top of the exposed skull to where the bones of his feet disintegrated into the soil, I said, "Well, he would have been about 5'3". How tall are you?" I proceeded to measure Bolon and his friend Raphael who was also working that day. They were 5'2" and 5'4". The men were surprised that the person buried here may have been pretty similar to them physically. I suspect that they had not internalized the connection that *people* had lived in these places and performed daily activities and the ritual practices that left these material remains. The burials brought home that idea and helped forge a connection between the community and Kaq'ru' Ha'.

Given the community interest in Burial A2, the skeleton was exposed for at least 10 days while we continued to excavate elsewhere and conduct tours for multiple groups of people. Normally, I would not have left a burial exposed for so long, but the community was intensely curious about it. Farmers on their way to fields stopped by to visit; the entire primary school came to visit; we organized a special women's day to tour the excavations; friends from Punta Gorda -- Cristina Coc and Pablo Mis, -- brought a First Nations study abroad group from Canada. During the tours I would tell as much as I knew about height, size, and age; I was unable to determine sex, but I could tell them about the associated burial vessels that helped determine when the person had also note the items of personal adornment -- a jade earspool -- that had been found in the burial.

Human bodies are intriguing and immediate, and identifiable in a universal way. During site visits and at subsequent meetings, the burials were a popular topic of discussion. Community

members were proud of the burials, especially A2, and wanted to display the skeleton somehow, which highlights a different attitude towards death and remembrance than is present among indigenous peoples in North America. Two of the main ideas were to put the excavation unit under glass so it was visible but protected, or remove the bones and display them in the community center. They also wondered if we could obtain plastic bones and display those. I explained why the first two were not feasible, and said I would give more thought to the third idea. With the InHerit Grant, it may be possible to recreate one of the burials in the heritage center. The bones themselves are carefully wrapped in tin foil and stored in the school; they will be put in the heritage center in 2015. When excavations were finished we placed the capstones from Burial A2 on the summit of Structure A so visitors could see where the burials had been.

### **7.5 Ancestors on the landscape**

The practice of burying and remodeling a structure marks the landscape in a visible way. At Kaq'ru' Ha' that meant remodeling and expanding a prominent building, Structure A, which anchored the group to the land. In the Maya area, mortuary practices can be seen as emblematic of community ritual and social identity (Freiwald 2011; McAnany 2013, 1999); they reinforce “cosmological origins, kinship, and political histories” (Weiner 1992:9). In addition, ritual practices that accompanied burials were important opportunities for the expression of power and maintenance of the social order. Burials are “history-in-the-making” (Hodder and Cessford 2004), and the materialization of memory for a group of people (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). Control over social memory lends authenticity, but it is also a source of social inequality if access to knowledge about that history is restricted. For example, unequal access to knowledge about *how* to bury individuals in a manner that creates a legitimizing and powerful ancestor creates status differentiation. Those that knew how to connect with the supernatural realm would

also have access to the power generated from that knowledge. The material patterns that express control over access to knowledge about burials are body positioning, orientation, and grave goods.

Until recently, mortuary analysis in southern Belize has been limited to tombs found in the site centers (Braswell and Gibbs 2006; Hammond et al. 1975), and several rural settlements surrounding Uxbenká (Willa Trask, personal communication 2013). Excavations at Kaq'ru' Ha' and in the settlements surrounding Uxbenká are expanding our knowledge about a regional mortuary program. Across the region, individuals were interred in a supine position with their heads to the north. This pattern holds for elite tombs as well as simple cyst graves at Uxbenká (Willa Trask, personal communication 2013), Pusilhá (Braswell and Gibbs 2006:277), Lubaantun (Hammond et al. 1975:62) and Nim Li Punit (Braswell et al. 2012). In the Maya area there are precedents for regionally patterned body positioning in burials; one example is the Belize River Valley, where 89% of individuals were interred in a prone position with their heads oriented to the south (Freiwald 2011:317).

Body positioning in burial ritual can be interpreted as an important cultural expression linking the deceased to an overarching cosmological worldview (Freidel et al. 1993). As reviewed above, the ancient Maya found meaning in cardinal directions. Some interpretations relate north to the supernatural realm and ancestor veneration (Ashore 1991:201); perhaps the grandest example is the North Acropolis at Tikal, a prominent and architecturally massive ancestor shrine built over the course of the Classic period. The majority of burials from Tikal Plaza 5D-2, the ceremonial center that includes the North Acropolis, were interred supine with their heads oriented to the north (Coe 1990: chart 1 [cited in Moholy-Nagy 1997]).

The mortuary program at Kaq'ru' Ha' reveals a high degree of social and ritual integration with region-wide patterns. Burial rituals were enacted by the group as a way to anchor their claims to place and its resources (McAnany 2013:110). Burying significant residential group members in the terraces as they were constructed signifies a social commitment by residents to maintain and honor ancestors (McAnany 2010:14). Over time the mortuary program became focused on one structure and was particularly intensive during the Late Classic period.

Radiocarbon dates from bone collagen taken from the deepest (A5) and shallowest (A2) burials in Structure A (see Table 5.3) indicate that the sequence spanned roughly a century during the Late Classic period (AD 650-725). The careful repetition of a meaningful activity materializes social structures, belief systems, and inequality. Over the course of a century, the Kaq'ru' Ha' group remodeled an existing platform into a significant burial facility that housed the remains of important individuals. Following Hendon (2010:121), Structure A can be considered “a religiously charged storehouse” - a locale in which to keep and commune with ancestors. Knowledge about how to create and maintain an ancestor strengthened the authority of the group. The Late Classic period was a time of population increase and the florescence of political centers – perhaps a visible investment in the landscape would have signaled the cosmological claim of the group to local resources.

Kaq'ru' Ha' was inhabited by a co-residential group that was connected to political centers during the Late Classic period. While this power was materialized through the built environment and access to knowledge about mortuary patterns, regional connections were also evident in the ceramic assemblage.



## **7.6 Reproducing heritage: figural polychromes and descendent communities**

Aguacate villagers have been collecting ancient artifacts from the surrounding landscape for decades. It is likely that they have sold things, though no one will admit it directly. However, more often than not people will save sherds, or even complete vessels found in caves. Collecting, especially ancient things, is one way of engaging with the landscape and forging a relational identity.

Keeping track of the artifacts that we collected as part of the Kaq'ru' Ha' excavations was important for the villagers. Part of our agreement was to check in with a village leader daily after excavations. We also brought some of the more interesting, cleaned artifacts back to the village at the end of the season to show them and answer questions. The figural polychrome vase recovered from the rock shelter was a particularly spectacular find. Villagers were eager to display it in the community center, which echoed a desire to keep the artifacts on their land, as part of their own engagement with the landscape.

We had a replica made of the polychrome vessel; there is a talented potter who lives in the Belize Valley named Mr. Magana, and he makes replicas of ancient vessels, as well as those of his own design, to sell to tourists. I met with him last summer and he made a replica of the vase. The vase is on display in the community and has been shown at a village expo in Belize City. Replicas of ceramics have the potential to promote continued people learning and engagement with the past in a sustainable way.

## **7.7 Gifting and crafting: political/economic integration and social identity**

Kaq'ru' Ha' was founded during the Early Classic period, as indicated by the absolute and relative chronology presented in Chapter 5, but it grew substantially during the Late Classic period (600-830 CE). During the Early Classic phase, residents were participating in a ceramic tradition similar to that of Uxbenká, using primarily red-slipped bowls and jars with sharply outflaring rims and squared, grooved lips. They were also importing orange-slipped polychromes, most likely produced in the Petén region, signaling participation in a much wider lowland Maya tradition.

Whole vessels were recovered from burials, and contribute important chronological information due to their primary context (Chase and Chase 2013). Burial vessels all date to the Late Classic period and include Zacatel/Louisville polychrome vases and a tripod plate, a Palmar Orange bowl, Remate Red bowls, and a Chacuum Black bowl. On stylistic grounds, most are considered local versions of widely produced styles, such as Zacatel Cream polychromes (Hammond 1975). Palmar Orange polychromes were first identified in Petén ceramic studies (Smith and Gifford 1966), and as such are frequently considered imports into this region and evidence of trade ties with the Petén during the Late Classic period (Aimers 2002:323; Ball 1993:260; Gifford 1976:192-193).

Although no elemental or mineralogical sourcing has been undertaken, the imported Palmar polychrome and the well-preserved Zacatal polychrome vessel from the rock shelter suggest a connection to the Petén region. The polychrome vase fragments include a band of hieroglyphs encircling the rim. The preserved portion is the nominal part of a Primary Standard Sequence referring to the commissioner or owner of the vessel (see Coe 1973:18). Since the

complete text was not recovered it is difficult to translate; it could be a fragment of a standard hieroglyphic text with a couple of undeciphered signs, or the text could be composed of pseudoglyph: sometimes scribes placed known signs into odd syntactic combinations (Marc Zender, personal communication 2013). At Pusilhá scribes used an odd syntax and dates include calendrical errors in the lunar series (Wanyerka 2009).

The figural image painted on the body of the vessel shows at least three visible figures painted in black wearing elaborate headdresses and simple white loincloths (see Figure 7.1). Sitting in a cross-legged position, they are shown in profile facing away from each other; the series of figures encircles the vase in this manner. Each figure seems to be holding a folded object that could be a codex. They are sitting on a bench, which displays decorations and patterns below the figures. The vase was produced in a Petén polychrome style. Significantly, black body coloration is linked to trading and scribal knowledge in Maya iconography.

Black body coloration is a distinctive feature of God L in the Postclassic codices, as well as in Classic period representations (Taube 1992:79). During the Classic period, God L is portrayed as a merchant lord: he appears carrying a staff with a roped bundle strapped to his back, which are related to the walking staffs and carrying packs of Mesoamerican merchants (Taube 1992:81). The black body coloring may allude to rain; smoke is identified as rain clouds by contemporary Maya peoples, and copal (incense) soot is used in rain rituals or as black paint among the Lacandon Maya (Taube 1992:84). He may have been associated with the verdant and misty region of the southern Gulf Coast, an important region for trade and cacao (Taube 1992:88).

A second interpretation of black painted figures comes from a mural at Xultún, in northeastern Petén, Guatemala (Rossi et al. 2015). Three figures are painted entirely in black,

and nearby inscriptions identify them as members of two groups: “junior *taaj* (obsidian)” and “senior *taaj* (obsidian)”. They wear loincloths, headdresses, and pendants that may be badges of office (Rossi et al. 2015:120-121). Further textual evidence suggests that they were observing a calendrical ritual with the ruler. Rossi and colleagues (2015) argue that the individuals from this order were involved in “making codices and in the generation and perpetuation of these books’ written content” (Rossi et al. 2015:121).

The vessel found at Kaq’ru’ Ha’ was a unique vessel that was likely gifted locally in order to build a political alliance. It is possible that the black painted figures may have represented either merchants or scribal priests. In any case it was a special item with cosmological references that may have been used in a ritual feast to consume cacao. Elite gift-giving was a pervasive practice among lowland Maya courts: “In short, these highly distinctive and finely crafted ceramic objects were key players in the elaborate gift-giving and public and private feasting rituals that were central to processes of social identity and political integration, serving all participants as symbols of status, power, and political connections” (Reents-Budet 1998:73). Eventually the vessel was cached in the rock shelter, further materializing its ritual and political potency to residents of Kaq’ru’ Ha’.

Polychrome pottery and other portable media provide evidence for political, economic, and cultural interaction spheres. Christina Halperin (2014a; 2014b) argues that the movement of portable objects is linked to the creation of political places: “The vessels and figurines were more than just neutral objects exchanged over geographic space; they were part of the social construction of people and places manifested in their uses and meanings” (Halperin 2014a:111). The movement of objects is an index of the movement of people; the flow of goods represents interactions between people in a network (Bauer and Agbe-Davies 2010). Halperin further

argues that the circulation of ceramic figurines linked elite and commoner households and worked as a method of political placemaking.

Figurines recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha' were most likely manufactured at Lubaantun. Finished figurines and broken molds have been recovered from the ceremonial center at Lubaantun (Wegars 1977:13-16) and finished examples of figurines have been found at sites throughout the Maya lowlands. Representations from Lubaantun include ball players, boxers, animals, warriors with spears, women holding dogs or children, women using *metates*, among many others. Examples recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha' include a woman holding a dog, warriors, and rulers with elaborate headdresses. Several examples were wind instruments (*ocarinas*) that could have been used by people for household rituals, entertainment, play, or in polity-wide social gatherings.

Figurines evoke both ceremonial and quotidian practices. Halperin's (2014b:84) research reveals that figurines portraying women holding animals, baskets, children, or carrying cargo with tumplines likely represent merchants, travelers, or market vendors. Comparable examples found in the civic ceremonial precinct of Lubaantun suggest that the single female figurine recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha' may have been manufactured there as well. When produced in figurine form, images of warriors and rulers with elaborate headdresses suggest that a notion of warfare and/or rulership was perpetuated outside of civic/ceremonial centers (Halperin 2014b:46). Philip Wanyerka makes a similar argument for the figural plaques that were produced at Lubaantun.

Two ceramic figural plaques were recovered from spaces between the paving stones in front of Structure B and an additional one from midden material associated with the same structure. Wanyerka (2009:416-426) argues that these plaques were mass-produced and given as

gifts from Lubaantun kings to commemorate ritual events, such as fire dedication rituals and period ending ceremonies. Wanyerka (2009:419) further suggests that these items were emblematic of social identity because they display elites and nonelites engaged in everyday activities. The two recovered from Structure B at Kaq'ru' Ha' are fragmentary, but depict individuals kneeling on benches with cartouches incised along their edges. The cartouches may have contained hieroglyphic texts, but are too eroded to be deciphered. The presence of two figural plaques in the hinterlands suggests that residents of Kaq'ru Ha' may have been participating in regional ceremonies focused on calendrical events or the accession of rulers. Transporting visual references of rulership to rural residential contexts helps the creation of regional political places (Halperin 2014a:119).

The ceramic assemblage at Kaq'ru' Ha' provides strong evidence of regional integration and social identity. First, the assemblage closely resembles that of political centers during the Early and Late Classic periods. Hammond's (1975) group descriptions for Lubaantun are identifiable at other sites, including Kaq'ru' Ha' and Uxbenká. Second, the caching of imported polychrome vessels in burials and the rock shelter suggests that these were important items symbolic of political ties and social identity. Vessels were often used in public and private ritual meals sponsored by ruling elites before they were cached in significant locales (Reents-Budet 1994:72). Unique, high status ceramic vessels are evidence of structured social interactions with an intended outcome. Producing, using, and gifting special vessels links people together in a field of action, from the craft specialist(s) that shaped and painted the vessel, bestowing meaning and symbolism on the object, to the resident of Kaq'ru' Ha' who presumably used, received, and discarded the vessel in an ideologically charged locale.

Forming raw materials into usable objects is a quintessentially human endeavor that

involves decision making, intentionality, and creativity; social relations are entwined with productive activity (Flad and Hruby 2007:2). Crafting is “a social labor that defines and relates human social experience” (Costin 1998:4). In the case of Kaq’ru’ Ha’ evidence suggests that residents were making bifacial tools from locally sourced chert. While only a few formal tools were recovered, flakes, cores, and unworked nodules were prevalent at the site. In addition to tools, a red chert earspool was recovered from Structure C. While it is unclear if it was locally made at Kaq’ru’ Ha’, the color of the material is identical to much of the chert found at the site. If it was made on site, then it is possible that residents identified themselves, in part, as crafters of chert adornments.

Stone tool production from a local raw material for domestic use implies knowledge and skill and potentially social identity. Crafting objects in culturally specific ways reflects the social identities of producers and consumers (Costin 1998:8). While this is easier to see, perhaps, with figural polychrome vessels, local production of stone tools also suggests that people at Kaq’ru’ Ha’ were engaged in the planning, creating, and discarding of chert tools. It is also evident that they were simultaneously part of domestic and regional economies.

A more compelling line of evidence for the blending of local and regional identities is the depositional pattern of chert flakes and cores. Significant densities of chert artifacts were recovered from Structure A. Between 30 and 60cm below the ground surface we encountered a stratigraphic layer that covered the burial sequence. At Tikal, Hattula Moholy-Nagy (1997) identified Classic period chert and obsidian debitage caches exterior to chamber tombs in the ceremonial center. These deposits were so large (Moholy-Nagy 1997:304 estimates ~300,000 pieces of chert in one deposit) that they could neither be fully recovered nor recorded. Depositing lithic debitage around burials is a pattern that has been identified at Classic period sites across

the Maya lowlands: Tikal, Altun Ha, Altar de Sacrificios, Buenavista del Cayo, Caracol, Lamanai, Nakbe, Nohmul, Rio Azul, and Uaxactun (Moholy-Nagy 1997:306). The absence of typical household refuse (e.g., potsherds, broken tools, or faunal remains) in these layers suggest that they were created as a special deposit or offering. For the ancient Maya, obsidian may have been symbolic of the Underworld (Coe 1988:232), and chert of lightening (Taube 1992).

Though no formal chamber tombs were discovered at Kaq'ru' Ha', the deposit at Structure A is associated with the construction of a durable surface beneath which five individuals had been buried. The deposit differs from earlier strata composed of either packed clay or soil laid to start a new construction phase, both of which are virtually devoid of any artifacts. While the deposit may have served a functional purpose as a durable surface, the uniqueness and intentionality of the mix of unworked and worked pebbles (~30cm in diameter) suggests to me that chert material played a role in marking the structure as a place of the ancestors. Evidence from the Petén suggests that depositing lithics, both chert and obsidian, exterior to burials is a pattern common to the wider region (Moholy-Nagy 1997). Residents of Kaq'ru' Ha' may have been referencing regional identifying patterns with a local resource. Using local resources in a regional pattern suggests that Kaq'ru' Ha' residents were participating in wider social practices. Another line of evidence is the presence of imported lithic materials: obsidian, jade, hematite, and groundstone.

At Kaq'ru' Ha', obsidian prismatic blades were recovered from all contexts, though densities and tool types varied. Most of the prismatic blades (broken or whole) were recovered from Structure A, suggesting that specialized cutting activities were performed here. Any debitage or evidence of retouching was located at Structure C, an elite dwelling. The character of the debitage and presence of only one, non-polyhedral core suggests that residents did not have



the specialized knowledge required to knap raw obsidian cores, rather they imported prismatic blades from another location.

Chemical sourcing of obsidian from Kaq'ru' Ha' was not performed as part of these analyses, but future studies would contribute to our understanding of regional trade patterns. Sourcing performed on materials from Moho Caye (Healy et al. 1984:416) and Wild Cane Caye (McKillop 1996), Pusilha (Braswell 2005), and Uxbenká (Prufer et al. 2011) indicate that the El Chayal quarry produced most of the obsidian found at these sites during the Classic period. Uxbenká has evidence of polyhedral core production, but not a lot of reduction waste (Nazaroff 2008:107-110).

Obsidian prismatic blades were also found at Sites 9 (n=4) and 10 (n=4), suggesting that smaller households had access to imported goods. A complete lack of cores or reduction debris at Sites 9 and 10 may mean that residents did not have the knowledge to retouch obsidian blades, or that microdebitage fell through our screens. Obsidian suggests that residents were integrated enough into regional trade patterns to import specialized goods; jade is another example of this regional dynamic.

### **7.8 Augusto and the jade earspool: jade “lore” in Aguacate village**

Augusto held out the greenish-blue rock and asked me what it was. I told him it was a jade earspool, a piece of jewelry that may have been worn by the person buried in the stone-lined crypt we were excavating, adding that the people who lived at Kaq'ru' Ha' probably traded cacao for it. I was surprised that he and the other men had apparently never seen a piece of jade before; rumors about finding and selling the precious stones are rampant in southern Belize. With a satisfied look, he told me that he had known this place would be important because he had seen a green light over this very spot one night when he was out hunting. For Augusto, the

jade earspool was more than an interesting archaeological find. It affirmed his sense of place; his knowledge of a landscape with a deep history that he encounters every day.

Stories recounting mystical experiences with jade are common in Aguacate (and Toledo). Similar to what Augusto said about seeing a green light, others have told stories about finding a cache of jade in the forest and bringing it home, only to wake up the next morning to find that the jade had made its way back into the forest from where it had been taken. I have had numerous conversations with local people about jade: “Is there jade at the site?” “Are you going to find jade?” “Do you think there is jade here?” “How much can jade sell for?” I had so many of these questions that I was worried that things would become too complicated and political if we found any jade.

When we excavated Burial A2 and found the earspool, it was anticlimactic; villagers were intrigued by it, but were unimpressed by its size. Augusto’s inclination was not to keep it or sell it, but to link the jade to his experience of the landscape. It will be displayed in the heritage center along with the figural polychrome. I suspect that storing the jade, as well as the rest of the artifacts, in the village has neutralized somewhat the anxiety that people have about foreigners extracting resources from their land.

## **7.9 The archaeological significance of jade earspools and serpentine celts**

Greenstone (serpentine or jadeite) was an ideologically powerful material for the ancient Maya. It was mined in the Motagua Valley of Guatemala, worked and shaped in specialized workshops (Kovacevich 2006; 2010), and traded throughout Mesoamerica. Though differential mineral composition produces varieties of blue, purple, black, and white jade, the ancient Maya

highly valued green jade. Jade symbolized rulership, authority, wealth, water, maize, and centrality; it was also emblematic of wind, breath, and the soul (Taube 2005:23). It was crafted into earspools, celts, headdress plaques, pectorals, beads, and figurines, which were highly polished or decorated with incising. Olmec (900-500 CE) caches of jade celts indicate that the ritual use of jade had great antiquity, and was associated with ancestors. The celt shape was also considered cosmologically important, as it embodied the central, vertical world tree as well as a maize cob, linking worldview with agricultural success (Taube 2000:303). Stelae from the Classic period are interpreted as celtiform, and may have been regarded as “celt stones” at Copan (Stuart 1996:162). The carvings of rulers and significant events on stelae forge a connection between rulership and worldview.

Jade was also related to wind, rain, and human breath. Among the sixteenth century Pokom Maya, from the Alta Verapaz in Guatemala, jade was placed in the mouth of a dying lord in order to capture his breath soul (Coe 1988:225). The idea that jade captures a person’s soul-essence during death has great antiquity in Mesoamerica, including an example from 500 BC at Monte Alban (Marcus 1999). Karl Taube relates that “[i]n one death phrase from Palenque, the wind god substitutes directly for the *ik’* wind sign as the personified form of the breath spirit, the same soul captured by jade during death rites” (Taube 2005:32).

Earspools materialize the relationship among jade, wind, and rain, especially the bar and bead form. The bead projecting from the earspool symbolizes falling rain, but also wind or breath emanating from a cloud (Taube 2005:34). This association had deep roots in Mesoamerica, with Preclassic evidence from the San Bartolo murals of an earspool emanating wind and tipped with a raindrop.

Two pieces of greenstone were recovered at Kaq'ru' Ha' – a serpentine celt in Structure B, and a polished jade earspool in Structure A, Burial A3. The burial context of the earspool is clearly significant given the relationship between jade, breath soul, and death in Maya worldview. Though the cranium was not found during excavations, the earspool was located in close proximity to the teeth, suggesting that it was either worn or cached in a ritually significant location during burial. The bar and bead were not recovered, just the flare; it is possible that these elements were kept among the living as a physical manifestation of the ancestor's breath soul, or that they were included as part of a later cache to provide a supernatural connection to an ancestor. The jade earspool further suggests that the interred individual was of high status or held an authoritative position in the community.

The serpentine celt was recovered from the interior of Structure B. As noted above by Taube (2005) and others, greenstone celts are evocative of Mesoamerican views on rulership, authority, maize, and centrality. Though it was not encountered as part of a larger cache, its presence suggests that the residents of Structure B held elite status and authority at Kaq'ru' Ha'.

#### **7.10 Hematite and groundstone artifacts**

Two other imported lithic types included hematite and basaltic groundstone. Hematite is an iron-ore derivative present in limestone and a material that was mined in both the Guatemala Highlands and the Maya Mountains; nodules occur naturally in the Toledo limestone (Hammond 1975:357). Shaped and polished pieces of hematite were used to make slate-backed mirrors throughout the Maya lowlands (Healy and Blainey 2011); in southern Belize examples of slate mirrors have been recovered at Lubaantun (Hammond 1975:357).

Three unworked hematite pebbles were recovered, two from Site 10 and one from Site 9. Each was recovered close to the surface, and the general lack of stratigraphy on the hilltop sites

makes contextual interpretation difficult. These pebble-sized examples may be naturally occurring, but they are manuports, nevertheless.

Interestingly, Hammond (1975:343-348) recovered 101 pieces of groundstone from Lubaantun, and 90 of those pieces were imported from the Guatemala Highlands. This seems surprising because of the close proximity to groundstone sources in the Maya Mountains. Hammond was aware that there was groundstone in the Maya Mountains, but not of specific quarries; he seems to have sourced the Lubaantun assemblage visually. Nearby sources include valleys in the Bladen Nature Reserve, northwest of Lubaantun (Abramiuk and Meurer 2006). While groundstone is considered a quotidian artifact, it seems possible that acquiring high quality groundstone could have been a status distinction and is worth testing further with sourcing methods.

The practices discussed in this chapter provide multiple lines of evidence for the negotiation of social identities within a regional field of action. Agency and intentionality emerges in the activities of planning and building dwellings, producing stone tools, and burying specific ancestors. Engagement with a region-wide social structure is also evident in the consumption of imported ceramic vessels, obsidian, and jade. The activities of claiming the landscape and crafting local resources suggests a synthesis of the local and the regional; outward expression of regional social identity belies an additional concern with anchoring themselves to the local landscape.

### **7.11 Aguacate village as a community of practice**

A conceptual framework that highlights the interactions between people in the constitution of identity can also be used to interpret contemporary groups. Here I argue that the Aguacate Conservation and Development Committee, introduced in Chapter 4, constitutes a

community of practice operating within an archaeological field of action. The practice of community archaeology on their land has created new ways of learning about and interacting with the past.

To review the framework from Chapter 2, communities of practice are “formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor” (Wenger 1998). In other words, communities of practice are groups of people with a shared identity working on a common project. They constitute a community that interacts and learns together, from one another, towards a shared goal. Practices include the enacting of ideas– they are what people do (Ortner 2001).

In the case of Aguacate, the shared domain was archaeology and heritage, and the community included archaeologists and local Maya people. Communities of practice are created by engaging in joint activities and discussions to share information. Table 7.1 shows how the Aguacate community of practice was formed through specific activities. The left column includes the types of activities that create communities of practice as outlined by Wenger; the right column presents the activities engaged in by Aguacate community members.

Table 7.1 Activities that formed the Aguacate Community of Practice.

<b>Activities</b>	<b><i>Aguacate Conservation and Development Committee</i></b>
Problem solving	Community meetings; brainstorming ideas for how and where to store the artifacts in the community
Requests for information	Community meetings; assistance with grant writing
Seeking experience	Glyph workshop for Raphael, tour guide training
Reusing assets	Used UNICEF project committee and grant proposal as a starting point for heritage project; incorporated medicinal plant trail into the Kaq'ru' Ha' park
Coordination and synergy	Using the new school building to store artifacts
Discussing developments	Community meetings, emails, in touch by phone
Visits	Visits to Kaq'ru' Ha' as well as Lubaantun
Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps	Visit to Toledo Healer's Association and Rio Blanco, two local Maya-run organizations
Documentation projects	Keeping employment records for transparency

One element that crosses several activities is community meetings. These include meetings with the village leadership (chairman, *alcalde*), the ACDC committee, and the entire village. Meetings with the leadership occurred consistently from the outset of the project, and included showing the *alcalde* the artifacts recovered from the sites. These meetings built trust and highlight the fundamentality of communication to the success of a community project.

Communities of practice exist in an egalitarian fashion because they are based on sustained interactions. Wenger (n.d.) identifies “conveners of communities, *not* providers of knowledge” (emphasis added). However, my role in this community of practice encompasses both of these roles. I convened the community by approaching them with an idea, and I also provided specialized knowledge. However, my goal was not just to provide knowledge in a unidirectional manner, but to build a new practice of archaeology in which community members were participants rather than just consultants or laborers. In order to address power imbalances people need access to knowledge.

Interestingly, this table maps closely to many of the activities suggested by other community archaeology projects (see Chapter 4). To me this indicates that engaging communities also falls within the realm of anthropological theory and can be integrated into research designs from the outset. Engagement and outreach do not need to be relegated to post-fieldwork, unidirectional efforts that do not necessarily satisfy the goals or needs of the community. Integrating a community of practice model into research design ensures the development of a “shared domain of interest” and mutually constituted goals.

Implementing a community archaeology research design is a way to access previously unrecorded and uninvestigated archaeological sites. According to Wauchope’s (1938) principal of abundance, mound groups located in rural areas are ubiquitous and most likely ancient

dwellings. A research program that combines both community involvement and excavation of rural sites signifies an important contribution to our knowledge about the ancient Maya and the way that archaeology is practiced in the Maya region. It follows Moser and colleagues (2002:222), who state that “the involvement of local communities results in better archaeology”.



## **CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This dissertation has attempted to show that social relationships between people create places and give them meaning. Using a practice-based conceptual framework, I have argued that the Maya Mountains region was a field of action during the Classic period – created and maintained by the practices, interactions, and relationships among its inhabitants. A second field of action is the discipline of archaeology; as a field of action it is also shaped by the practices of its constituents. I argue that by forming a community of practice with Aguacate village, the field of archaeology was modified to include descendent communities in research. By examining one locale – Kaq’ru’ Ha’ -- and its meaning for ancient and contemporary people, I have provided a method for a socially inclusive archaeological practice in Mesoamerica.

### **8.2 Archaeological contributions**

I analyzed the Aguacate landscape through time with attention to what the archaeological remains of Kaq’ru’ Ha’ tell us about the regional connections forged through placemaking, social identity, and history. My research suggests that considering landscape as a temporal entity opens what Lazzari calls a “space of possibilities” (Lazzari 2008:645) to examine the social relationships that make place meaningful.

The human occupation of the Maya Mountains region is significant and sustained; from the earliest settlements in the Paleolithic period to the contemporary Q’eqchi’ and Mopan Maya villages disbursed across the landscape. A wealth of natural resources has drawn people to the

region for thousands of years. With settlement came the growth of a society that created meaning by settling in specific locations, constructing evocative architecture, making and trading goods, and enacting ritual practices.

The political centers of Pusilhá, Uxbenká, Lubaantun, and Nim Li Punit were constructed along major rivers or overland corridors, suggesting that they each controlled a route from the Caribbean coast inland to the Maya Mountains and beyond to the Alta Verapaz and Petén regions of Guatemala. Southern Belize is rich in natural resources that were traded to the central Maya lowlands, such as raw material for paints, dyes, mirrors, and ceramics as well as important food resources such as cacao, fish, and salt. With stratigraphic deposits dating to AD 200, Uxbenká is the oldest occupied site in the region, while Nim Li Punit has an Early Classic occupation phase. These sites expanded and flourished during the Late Classic period. Significant survey work among the settlement groups surrounding Uxbenká confirms that there was a substantial rural population outside the site centers, with some outlying settlements occupied during the Pre-Classic period.

At Kaq'ru' Ha', against a dramatic cliff face overlooking Aguacate Creek, the ancient Maya constructed three wide platform terraces to support eight structures, both residential and administrative. Ceramic chronology suggests that Kaq'ru' Ha' was used as a gathering place since at least the Early Classic period (AD 250-600), while at least one structure (Structure A) was episodically remodeled to include the burial of seven individuals throughout the Late Classic period (AD 600-830). Obsidian from the Guatemala highlands, abundant local chert, as well as one jade earspool and one serpentine celt from the Motagua Valley of Guatemala indicate that site residents were integrated into local and regional economies. The cliff face was a site of ritual deposition containing curated polychrome ceramic vessels and at least two distinct burials. I

argue that rural sites were integrated into regional social and economic spheres while maintaining a distinct sense of locality. This sense of locality was manifested in several ways.

First, Kaq'ru' is strategically positioned along east/west riverine and overland passages and is placed in reference to a distinctive geologic feature. This indicates the importance of landscape and environment to the people that lived here. During the Classic period, Kaq'ru' Ha' would have been a noticeable and significant place on the landscape. Adding to its prominence is the monumental architecture that raises the site above the valley floor. The site plan of Kaq'ru' Ha' is in keeping with the southern Belize tradition of establishing settlements along rivers or overland passages and using natural topography to accentuate the vertical dimension of the site core. However, an open architectural plan with views across the floodplain are distinctly different than the closed plaza plans constructed at political centers, suggesting that the architecture encouraged large gatherings of people intended to integrate the surrounding countryside.

Second, eleven burials were recovered from Kaq'ru' Ha'. Seven individuals were interred in Structure A, one in the patio west of Structure B, three in the patio of Structure C, and two in a niche in the cliff face. All of the individuals were interred in an extended supine position, and ten of the thirteen were oriented to the north (preservation was too poor to establish body position for Burials 2 and 11). In the Maya area, mortuary practices can be seen as emblematic of community ritual and social identity; this mortuary pattern suggests that the people of Kaq'ru' Ha' were rebuilding structures and claiming the landscape by interring ancestors.

Mortuary evidence, including burial locations, architecture, body positioning, and grave goods are sensitive indicators of social identity. Interring the deceased with their head oriented to the north was an evocative symbol of supernatural connections to ancestors, and perhaps worked

to the create the ancestors themselves. To date, this pattern holds for elite tombs as well as simple cyst graves at Kaq'ru' Ha', Uxbenká, Pusilhá, Lubaantun, and Nim Li Punit. Consistent body positioning may reinforce Richard Leventhal's (1990; 1992) assertion that southern Belize maintained distinctive, region-wide traditions.

As a region, southern Belize is considered marginal to regions like the Petén -- the "heartland" of Classic Maya kingship and civilization -- or the populous Belize Valley to the north. Therefore, Kaq'ru' Ha' is at the margin of the margins. Even so, life there during the Late Classic period was characterized materially by integration into regional social and political spheres while maintaining local patterns of site planning and architecture. Material references to locales in the Petén region as well as to political centers in the Maya Mountains suggests intensive interactions across the landscape in multiple spheres – ritual (e.g., mortuary patterns), economic (e.g., obsidian), and sociopolitical (e.g., polychrome pottery).

People traded for polychrome pottery, obsidian cores, and jadeite, while maintaining and remodeling a local gathering place. For example, Structure A, which housed six sequential burials with associated phases of remodeling, was originally a one meter tall structure occupied in the Early Classic period that grew to seven meters in total height by the end of the site's occupation in the Late Classic period. Besides the platforms themselves, it is the tallest structure at the site; in antiquity, its increased prominence on the landscape may have been a local claim to land or resources in response to the burgeoning of power located at political centers during the Late Classic period.

The ancestral field of action occurs on the same landscape as the contemporary one; taking this view expands our temporal scales to include the iterative and collective quality of landscapes. This perspective shows us that, as Lazzari (2008:645) tells us, "landscapes are

contemporary entities, embedded in living traditions with deep temporal dimensions”. Taking the Aguacate landscape as “a contemporary entity” leads us to consider an ethically engaged archaeology that takes into consideration the context of *how* historical knowledge is produced and for whom.

Despite a tenuous existence at the margins of the Belizean state, Mopan and Q’eqchi’ people are fiercely protective of the land surrounding their villages. Not only is it their primary resource, but villagers consider land to be their natural and cultural heritage. Their entanglement with the landscape results in a proprietary relationship with the archaeological materials that are part of it; Marcos’s story in Chapter 7 illustrates this point. Though the ancient political centers are located in close proximity to villages, local people do not have consistent access to them. However, they encounter the archaeological record on a daily basis in the hinterlands: figurines and stone tools erode out of agricultural fields, mounds occupy space in cattle pastures, caves contain ceramic sherds, stone tools, and sometimes human remains. I have used Shoshaunna Parks’s concept of the archaeoscape: “the physical and ideological intersection of the past with the present” (2010:437) to capture this engagement. Though Maya villagers interact with the archaeoscape consistently, a lack of access to knowledge about the ancient past results in looting and damage to archaeological deposits.

Though they procure their livelihoods from this landscape, Mopan and Q’eqchi’ people do not have tenure over the land, which is held in trust by the government of Belize. Though Maya people are fighting a legal battle for title to their land and the self-determination that comes with property rights, it is unclear how the court’s ruling will affect archaeological heritage. Consequently, contemporary Maya villagers inhabit a peripheral existence at the edge

of a nation-state that has constructed part of its national identity on the material history of Maya people.

### **8.3 Aguacate Community Heritage Center**

Impressed with the extent of Kaq'ru' Ha' once it was completely cleared, and worried that outsiders would damage it, community members wanted support to conserve it and the associated artifacts. The Aguacate Community Development Committee was elected to generate ideas for conservation and contribute to grants for funding. We received a grant through InHerit: Passed to Present, to conserve the site as a community park, thus incorporating the villagers' view of land as heritage as well.

Through this community-based project the site has renewed significance. Kaq'ru' Ha' has been integrated into the social and physical environment that villagers already encountered as part of their everyday practices – farming, hunting, fishing, visiting neighbors, among other tasks. Villagers have re-routed the footpath that was eroding one of the platforms and elected to keep the site clear of underbrush while cultivating its margins with medicinal plants and trees. A sign was erected at the main roadway to guide visitors to the site (Figure 8.1), and minimal infrastructure is being constructed to make the site into a park for visitors and community members. The village hopes that it will become another attraction for visitors who stay in Aguacate as part of their homestay program ([www.aguacatebelize.com](http://www.aguacatebelize.com)).



Figure 8.1. Refurbished corn mill remodeled to become the Aguacate Heritage Center.

With part of the funds, an abandoned corn mill with cement walls was purchased by the committee, who hired villagers to remodel it as a local heritage center (Figure 8.1). Over the course of the last year they refurbished it with a new roof, door, and barred windows for security. Shelving artifact storage will be built this summer and educational materials will be included in summer 2015. While this project is underway, the building is being used by the school as an extra classroom; the local schoolchildren will continue to use the space to learn about heritage and archaeology.

As outlined in Table 7.1, creating a community of practice included weekly meetings, community presentations, site visits, and educational programs; it involved keeping my word about returning to work every year and never misleading them about how long the project would last. For community members and myself one of the key components of collaboration was coming up with new options for how archaeological heritage could be conserved and managed. The research process was not one-directional, but a collaborative effort to which community members contributed. The result is the protection of a rural site which, though modest, houses crucial pieces of the archaeological record. Specifically, information about how people on the margins of state-level societies negotiated region-wide social identities. At Kaq'ru' Ha', we can

see this in the juxtaposition of local architectural plans that mark the land but hold the remains of ancestors buried in positions that evoke a region-wide social identity.

By considering the temporal dimensions of a landscape, we can practice a social archaeology that follows what Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and TJ Ferguson (2006) call a “middle path” between objective archaeological analysis and a multivocality that allows for local communities to make archaeology meaningful in their own lives. I would argue that local people who have a stake in our work do not need to be kept at the margins of archaeological research. Taking into account the palimpsest of meanings that create a landscape engages archaeologists in a social practice of archaeology that acknowledges the complex contemporary relationships inherent in the creation of historical knowledge.

#### **8.4 Future research and concluding thoughts**

The Toledo district remains a productive region for future research. In particular, archaeological survey has not been completed between Kaq’ru’ Ha’ and Pusilhá to the south. As one of the larger sites in the region, it would be interesting to know more about its hinterland settlements. The stated goals of the Toledo Regional Integration Project (TRIP), directed by Geoffrey Braswell, include investigating the political and economic relationships between political centers (Fauvelle et al. 2013:241). Working in the hinterlands of each large site may help clarify these relationships.

Chemical sourcing of artifacts would also contribute clarification to some of the relationships outlined in this dissertation. Specifically, chemical and mineralogical testing of groundstone implements from sites in the region against patterns established by Abramiuk and Meurer (2006) for the Maya Mountains would provide useful data on long distance trade of vital utilitarian items. Such analyses would also provide a stronger bases for evaluating Hammond’s



claim based on visual sourcing (1975:357) that most of Lubaantun's groundstone originated in the Guatemala Highlands.

Historic archaeology could be another arena for future research in southern Belize. Not many studies of colonial and historical period sites have been conducted in Belize, though that is starting to shift (Finamore 2006; Garber 2014; Brett Houk, personal communication 2015). The fascinating but poorly understood population movements in the Maya Mountains region and the southeastern Petén during the reign of the Itzá in Guatemala would make an interesting study (Jones 1998). Pendergast and colleagues' (1993) study of colonial towns in northern Belize would be a good point of departure for similar methodology in Toledo.

In addition, the community archaeology model could be expanded into other Toledo communities. The relationship forged between myself and Aguacate may have set the foundation for subsequent projects in the area. A settlement survey working south from Kaq'ru' Ha' would eventually involve other communities; following the model outlined in Chapter 4, community leaders and institutions could be contacted to discuss involvement. Some Aguacate families have ties to other communities, which could also help build trust between researchers and villages. I hope to build on my relationship with Tumul K'in Center for Learning for future field projects; a long-term goal is to involve students in a local field school.

Heritage is powerful; material heritage in particular. The destruction of someone's history is a definitive way to exert control. There are countless examples of this from across the world and through time. In Mesoamerica the most widely known event was the burning of censers, figurines, and codices by Diego de Landa at Maní in 1562 on the Yucatan peninsula (Tozzer 1941). The destruction of religious icons and accumulated knowledge was not limited to Landa, but occurred across Mesoamerica and South America during the conquest, wars, and subsequent

colonial occupation. It is the main reason that contemporary indigenous people across the Americas are divorced from their history and ancestral cultural practices. Sadly, the destruction of cultural heritage is not limited to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but is taking place right now around the globe, and is linked to violence and warfare.

There is drug trafficking through the area to reach regions controlled by major cartels, such as the Petén of Guatemala. Though direct evidence of the connection between cartels and antiquities in Guatemala admittedly is slim (Yates 2014:34), associated violence and chaos surrounding looting activities is undisputed (Yates 2014:31-33). Though less widely discussed in the press, the looting of ancient heritage is higher in unstable regions where terrorist organizations, drug cartels, and militias are active (e.g., Afghanistan, Central America, South America).

Kaq'ru' Ha' might be a small, rural site, but several structures were looted. I would argue that smaller sites perhaps are even more vulnerable to looting than larger ones that have come under archaeological purview or governmental protection. Marginalized communities without economic opportunities participate in buying and selling artifacts, mostly to middlemen, without knowing about the history of the artifacts, where they end up, or who is making a profit from their sale (Matsuda 1998:90-91). However, if the artifacts are collected through a community-based archaeology project and become part of the fabric of community life, not only do we increase our knowledge about deep history, but ancestral materials can be used as educational devices; they can be used to start a dialogue about the past and how it influences the present. Starting conversations about heritage and the role it plays in politics and religion is important at every register of archaeological research.

## **APPENDIX A: MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

To Whom It May Concern,

February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012

This letter is an agreement between the Institute of Archaeology, Aguacate village, Tumul K'in Center of Learning, Dr. Patricia A. McAnany, and Ms. Claire Novotny, for a collaborative community archaeology project and program of research. The research to be carried out on Aguacate community land includes archaeological survey, mapping, and excavations. The community has agreed to give access to their land for the purposes of this research; in return, Ms. Novotny agrees to keep the community apprised of all activities and archaeological resources encountered within their community boundaries. In addition, all parties agree that this research will be performed as a component of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year Maya History class at Tumul K'in Center of Learning.

The following are the principles of agreement:

- Permission from the Institute of Archaeology for survey, mapping, and excavation is forthcoming. Ms. Novotny agrees to provide Aguacate village leadership with copies of the letter of permission.
- Weekly meetings with the alcalde and chairman will keep the village informed of ongoing work. A written log of the days' work will be kept and reviewed during the meeting.
- Aguacate agrees to allow Ms. Novotny to transport artifacts (ceramics, lithics, groundstone, bones, soil, etc.) recovered from archaeological contexts to Tumul K'in for study and analysis. Ms. Novotny will check in with the alcalde or chairman when leaving Aguacate with artifacts. When analysis is complete Ms. Novotny will return the artifacts to Aguacate.
- Upon completion of the project, Ms. Novotny agrees to construct a facility in Aguacate village for storage of the artifacts. Construction will most likely proceed during June and July 2012. Aguacate village has been informed that all archaeological materials are property of the government of Belize.
- Participants in the project include Aguacate community members (including workmen, the village council, and the alcalde), Ms. Novotny, Mr. Filberto Rash, Tumul K'in students, and four volunteers from the United States: Mr. Matthew Stirn, Ms. Rebecca Sgourgos, Mr. Todd Carlson, and Mr. Alfred Berry. There may be other volunteers and visitors later in the project, and Ms. Novotny will keep Aguacate informed of their presence.
- Ms. Novotny agrees to hire four men per workday (5 days a week) for 11 weeks at a rate of \$50BZ per day. Hours will be 7am-3pm. Work will be cancelled if it rains very hard, or if the bridge is flooded.
- Mr. Abraham Kan and Mr. Salvador Ical agree to maintain a rotating list of men to work on the project.
- Ms. Novotny agrees to share the results of her research with community members. Possibilities include community meetings, a poster presentation by Tumul K'in students,

radio broadcasts, etc. In addition, Ms. Novotny will give the community a written report in hard copy and on a CD upon completion of the project. The report will include a narrative description of the excavations as well as select photographs, maps, and drawings resulting from the research.

This agreement can be amended if circumstances change. All parties are entering into this agreement with the best confidence that the work will be carried out according to plan.

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