



Contributions to the Archaeology
Of Tikal, Naranjo-Sa'aal, Yaxha, and Nakum
Northeast Region of Peten, Guatemala

Mano de León: A Minor Elite Residential Group of the Maya City of Naranjo-Sa'aal, Peten, Guatemala¹

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Introduction

The archaeological site of Naranjo Sa'aal is located within the Yaxha-Nakum-Naranjo National Park (Figure 1). Between the years 1999 and 2001, the archaeological site was badly affected by intense depredation. Since the year 2002, the Institute of Anthropology and History of Guatemala, through the Department of Conservation and Rescue of Prehispanic Archaeological Sites (DECORSIAP), recovered control of the site and started activities to document cultural loss at the site epicenter using a methodology that allowed not only the registration of architectural features shown inside the looters' trenches and tunnels but also the recovery of broken cultural materials left in funerary and ritual precincts, all of them important for the understanding of local traditions, and the process of cultural evolution of Naranjo at the level of the city monumental epicenter.

Since the year 2005, the DECORSIAP project started an intensive reconnaissance of the periphery of Naranjo, over an area of 100 square km, activity that is still in progress. At the present time 1,000 residential groups have been mapped, making a sample of more than 4,000 structures corresponding to residential units, temples, palaces, and ritual platforms (Fialko et al. 2007; Fialko and Barrios 2017). In addition to the identification of the morphology of Naranjo's residential groups, we are working through an exhaustive salvage and research excavation to determine the evolutionary

process of what we call Minor Elite residential groups (Fialko and Barrios 2013, 2016, 2017) (Figure 2). The archaeological studies at the periphery of Naranjo include establishing a database that records the extent of the looting, as well as the hierarchy and organizational pattern of the residential groups. At this time it is considered that approximately 80% of the residential structures have been affected by trenches and tunnels.

The southern periphery of Naranjo has been visualized in three environmental areas: 1) The Bajo La Pita zone, 2) the Manantiales zone, and 3) the Colinas zone (Fialko et al. 2007). To understand the characteristics of the settlement pattern of the hinterland of Naranjo, systematic excavations have been conducted in various selected residential groups, beginning with the Manantiales zone (Figure 3), to determine similarities and differences among the groups at a level of their period of development, specific activity areas, funerary tradition, and ritual activities. The ultimate goal is to attain a general vision of function and meaning related to specific area groups.

The Manantiales area is located 1 km south of the monumental epicenter (Figure 4). It is characterized by including approximately 30 residential groups, most of them representatives of a Plaza Plan 2 arrangement (Becker 1971). One of the most relevant

¹ The original version of this article was published as Barrios and Fialko 2012.

characteristics of the residential groups of the area relates to their elite range. All the area groups so far have been depredated. There are looting trenches and tunnels not only in relation to the east temples but also in palace range structures and apparently in ritual small platforms located at the center of the plaza. The Mano de León group is one of the most relevant of the Manantiales area, considering that it includes two adjoining Plaza Plan 2 patios, one of them with double eastern temples (Figure 5).

This paper presents a synthesis of the results of archaeological excavations at the Mano de León residential group, during the 2010–2011 seasons, as part of the exhaustive archaeological research at the epicenter and periphery of the site of Naranjo-Sa'aal, which still continues to the present.

Methodology

A systematic documentation was carried out on the looting of the Mano de León Group in order to identify and define the architectural features of the buildings and their relation to the area of immediate influence, as well as to establish the different construction sequences.

The archaeological interventions consisted in mapping the group and the removal of debris from looting that allowed a determination of the different constructive stages of the structures in plans and sections. The studies in plazas and structures have permitted the identification of areas of ritual and productive activity, as well as characteristics of funerary pattern (Figure 6).

The identified funerary areas were measured, drawn, and photographed (Figures 7 and 8). The human bone remains abandoned by the looters were collected and classified according to their contexts in order to be later evaluated by a physical anthropologist, with a future goal of developing studies of DNA components that allow us to determine their possible biological correlation with bone collections related to other peripheral residential groups, and with bone recovered in royal tombs from the monumental epicenter of the city.

For the definition of activity areas a grid was drawn over the entire group with squares of 1.50 m x 1.50 m (Figure 9). A stratigraphic test pitting was carried out in the two patios of Mano de León with the objective of determining temporal and spatial occupational characteristics associated with activities of an elite social group, which allowed us to document burial areas, a lithic workshop, a quarry area for extraction of stone for construction, areas for water deposit, and a precinct carved in

the bedrock for ritual uses (Figure 6). At the end of the season, all identified looting and research excavations were consistently filled in.

The Mano de León Group

According to the assigned nomenclature for the investigation of residential groups of the periphery of Naranjo-Sa'aal, the group Mano de León was designated as Operation 22P. The layout of the group refers a pattern identified as Plaza Plan 2B, which is characterized by the presence of two adjacent patios, each with temples to the east (Becker 1971). The east courtyard stands out for including two temples separated by an altar and two palace-like structures that define the north and south sectors (Figure 10). The west patio includes only one temple that is delimited by low platforms on the north and west ends and a palace-type structure that occupies the south sector. The ceramic analysis indicates an occupation that begins in the first part of the Late Classic period in the east courtyard, with extensions into the west courtyard made in the Terminal Classic period.

Becker (1971) proposed several types of Plaza Plan in order to recognize different settlement patterns in Tikal; it is considered that these different models of Plaza Plan may indicate that Tikal had a stratified and complex society. It is estimated that the Plaza Plan 2B format with two eastern adjoining temples was formalized after 800 AD (Becker 1971; Fox 1981; Haviland 1981); however, at least in Naranjo-Sa'aal this type of plaza pattern had started by the first part of the Late Classic period as was observed at the group Mano de León.

Eastern Temples: Architecture and Burials

In relation to the two adjoining temples in the east courtyard (Strs. 2 and 4) of Mano de León group, these also show the addition of lower square platforms in the outer corners of the facades, which apparently were used as altars for ritual use, considering that they contained remains of fire areas and fragmented pots with cinnabar. In relation to the altar located between the two temples, evidence of burned stones was detected (Figures 5, 10).

In the investigation of the damages caused by the looters' trenches and tunnels in the Eastern temples of Mano de León, it was possible to determine the existence of floors and walls that correspond to several construction stages.

Inside the twin temples of the eastern court

there is no evidence of elaborate tombs; the funerary manifestations are circumscribed to cysts and simple funerary bedrock cavities which also were located below the plaza floor, at the base of the stairway of one of the temples, and in the interior of the constructive fill related to the axis of the structures (Figure 7).

Mostly the burials were of direct type, the few human bone material recovered indicating that the skulls probably were oriented towards the north (Figures 11–13). Physical anthropology studies are still needed.

In relation to the eastern temple (Str. 8), corresponding to the west patio of Mano de León, several simple cysts were carved in the bedrock, and some interments were improvised between floors of substructures; the skeletal remains were partially removed by the looters out of their contexts, so it is impossible to determine aspects of orientation and original position (Figure 8).

Part of the materials related to the offerings were remains of lithic objects that include obsidian and flint eccentrics, as well as fragments of polychrome vessels, some of them with glyphic designs of the Late and Terminal Classic periods (Figures 14–20).

Activity Areas

In relation to the two Mano de León patios the following areas of activity were determined (Figure 6):

1. A water collection area in the format of two small cisterns.
2. A quarry area to cut limestone ashlar at the SW corner of Str. 1.
3. A ritual precinct adapted in the bedrock.
4. Funeral activity areas.
5. A flint workshop area.

Cisterns

In the central area of the East patio, the presence of two small cisterns carved in the bedrock was detected (Figures 5 and 6).

Cistern 1

This was used to collect the runoff from the rain that ran from the highest part of the east patio; when it had been filled, the overflowed water was directed towards the northern area of the patio (Figures 21 and 22). Retaining walls were carved into the bedrock to prevent the water from spreading to the south. In the western sector of the cistern, near the stairs of Structure 6, a small cavity of .34 cm deep, carved into the bedrock was documented,

containing an offering which consisted of a small pot with its lid located in an inverted position, corresponding to the Late Classic ceramic group Cambio unslipped. The body of the pot was partially decorated with red paint. The paste of the lid has mica inclusions in both sides. The vessel contained an oval polisher made of dark gray and cream flint, with one end narrower than the other; it also included a fragment of shell.

Additional shell material was collected to the northeast of Cistern 1, consisting on 37 *Pachichilus larguiratti* with fractures at the lower end, and two medium size fresh water *Pomacea flagelatta* snails of brown/cream color.

Cistern 2

This is located 4.50 m north of cistern 1 (Figures 21, 24, 25); it has an irregular rectangular shape (2.06 m E/W, 1.80 m N/S, 0.80 cm deep). Inside the cistern there is a kind of small bench also carved in the bedrock. After having been in use, the cistern was filled with a mixture of compact gray earth mixed with limestone material, and finally sealed by a layer of small pebbles.

The existence of a drainage channel which forms part of the north wall of Temple 2 was determined; it is also associated with a platform between Structure 1 and the temple. The inclined channel directs the waters outside the limits of the eastern patio of Mano de León towards a sunken area, where a larger cistern might exist.

Quarry

At the NW corner of the eastern patio, only 1.50 m away from the SW corner of Structure 1, a rectangular quarry was identified (Figures 26 and 27). There is clear evidence of the cracks left by the limestone blocks extracted from the bedrock. During the Terminal Classic period, the quarry was sealed with limestone fill. At the NE corner of the quarry and the SW corner of Structure 1, there is a smudged sector related to a fire area. The Terminal Classic activities also included the construction of a platform at the NW corner of the patio.

Ritual Precinct

This consists of a cavity partially elaborated in the bedrock. The east sector has a maximum height of 2.35 m, while the west sector only reaches a maximum height of 1.30 m. It was possible to identify two areas of activity described as front and rear chambers (Figures 25 and 28).

The front chamber is the most external and highest, which allowed adequate space for two

or three people (Figures 29 and 30). On the other hand, the Rear Chamber is the innermost one, whose roof is lower (Figure 31). It was obvious to appreciate that the external area is lighter, and the deepest one, of greater darkness, which would indicate a specific functional or ritual meaning (Brady and Prufer 2005). During the course of the excavations it was observed that the sunlight enters the center of the precinct at 9:00 am in the month of September lasting until 10:00 am.

Remains of a pathway leading to the ritual precinct were identified. Access to the Front Chamber is through three steps carved into the bedrock that reach the East wall. The North wall was formed by the carved bedrock, and the South wall was built with stones (Figure 28). At the Northeast corner of the Front Chamber, over the floor was collected an anthropomorphic whistle decorated with blue paint, and a black ceramic cylindrical object, which apparently was in contact with fire, it refers a design of eyes, nose and a mouth. Both findings can be considered as a shamanic devices (Figures 32, 33, 34).

The Rear Chamber, a sort of lower and darker area, has walls blackened by a fire, of which only fractions of coals remain. In relation to the Southeast wall, there is a circular hole of 0.25 cm in diameter identified as a probable psychoduct which connects with a specific place in Structure 9 (Figures 6, 28, 31). There is evidence that the chamber was sealed with black earth, during the process, there were left in the West sector various fragmented jars (Figure 35).

Among the cultural materials associated with the sealing of the ritual precinct was a small polychrome vase decorated with glyphs (Figure 36). Also, a large amount of sherds were used in the event of the closing of the precinct, there are examples of orange and red pastes associated with glyph designs on the surface, also polychrome vases painted with dancing characters and geometric designs in the form of triangles, circles, dots and cream- black bands (Figures 37, 38, 39, 40). Additional ceramic materials include a dish with circular designs, and a black on cream bowl decorated with insects (Figures 41, 42). It is important to mention the recovering of polychrome sherds representing snake designs (Figures 43, 44, 45), and a vessel handle with the shape of a monkey (Figures 46a, 46b).

After the cancelation of the ritual precinct, a large slab or ashlar, simulating a small plane stela was placed over a layer of light gray ash and a

large number of sherds, associated to the upper step of access to the precinct (Figure 47). The event of the Termination Ceremony of the ritual precinct including its pathway was celebrated with the additional spreading of large quantities of pottery sherds, ash, whistles, and figurines (Figure 48).

Funerary Activity in Patio Context

At the Mano de León group were discovered eleven burials disposed in bedrock carved areas. Ten of the burials relate to a patio contexts in the following way:

1. In front and corners of structures.
2. In a corridor.
3. In front of an altar.
4. Between structures.
5. At the back wall of one of the temples.

Some of the interments indicated a *perimortem* treatment while others a *postmortem* intervention (Figure 11). The following are general aspects of the observed funerary pattern (see Table 1):

- (a) All burials were placed directly on the bedrock (Figures 12, 49)
- (b) There were four primary burials (Figures 50 and 51).
- (c) Seven secondary burials were identified (Figure 52).
- (d) All the skulls were oriented to the north.
- (e) Three burials were associated with offerings (Figures 53–55).
- (f) Eight burials had no offering.
- (g) Five burials were related to bedrock burned areas.

Lithic Activity Area

A flint workshop area was located between Structure 6 and Platform 6A related to a cavity carved in the bedrock. Also under Structure 6 there is evidence that the bedrock was leveled with an accumulation of stones (Figure 11). A similar feature was documented in structure 4H-7 of Tikal (Becker 1999:Fig. 25). It is considered that at the Mano de León group the accumulation of stone material could have been used in two ways: 1) for ceremonies as indicated by Diego de Landa (1978) related to the stacking of stones, or 2) to contain the sludge and filter the water conducted to the cisterns. Grindstone materials were recovered in temples E-4, E-8, SW corner of E-1, and in patio areas (Figure 56).

Sequence of Constructive Elements Identified in the Patios

The development process of Mano de León began in the eastern patio, gradually extending the occupation toward the western patio; the group was modified approximately four times between the beginnings of the Late Classic and the Terminal Classic in an estimated time span of approximately 250 years.

At the beginning of the Late Classic period, in relation to the east and west courtyards, the Maya dwellers of Mano de León built the first structures on the bedrock. Since that time the four areas of activity recognized during the excavation process were established: a) quarry, b) cisterns, c) lithic accumulation area, and d) ceremonial activities in relation to the temples located to the east (Figures 6, 9).

During the Terminal Classic period, several remodeling works and additions were carried out; for example, low platforms were added between Structures 1 and 2, and a pathway was built between Structures 4 and 5. The cisterns and their related bedrock were covered with compact gray earth mixed with limestone particles, before the laying of a stucco floor. In a later remodeling effort the ceremonial precinct including its access pathway were sealed with the construction of a low platform (Figures 5 and 10).

It is important to mention that the cancellation ceremony of the ritual precinct was related to the deposition of Burial 9 in a sector between the northern end of the platform that sealed the ritual precinct and the back of Structure 8 (Eastern Temple). The burial was associated with a female character who was placed in a semi-flexed, right lateral position, accompanied by an offering of red plates and incense burners (Figure 55). Also, an isolated skull apparently related to Burial 8 could be associated (Figures 57 and 58). Finally, the access corridor was sealed with large limestone slabs and a thick stucco floor.

During the Terminal Classic period, access between the East and West courtyards was through two narrow pathways located in relation to two platforms near the corners. A last remodeling of access areas made by the Mano de León dwellers consisted in the covering and replacing of one of the platforms, including the narrow pathways, by means of a ramp (Figure 59).

Conclusions

The Mano de León residential group could have corresponded to a Minor Elite family belonging to a lineage not directly affiliated with the royal

family, which we consider represents a Major Elite hierarchy. Royals of Naranjo-Sa'aal occupied the major palace compounds of the monumental epicenter. Naranjo has two royal palace compounds located at the Central and West Acropolis.

On the other hand, Minor Elite families could be related to Plaza Plan 2 groups surrounding the monumental epicenter of the city that includes important palace type structures. The presence of eastern temples or sanctuaries makes it a place where family ancestors were ritually commemorated. This type of plaza plan has also been documented in several sites in the northeast Peten region, such as Uaxactun, Yaxha, Nakum, Holmul, and La Honradez, indicating that this plaza format is not unique to Tikal. Near the monumental epicenter of Naranjo other PP2 groups have been investigated, such as Yaxnic (Fialko and Barrios 2013), Cola de Pava (Barrios and Fialko 2014), La Bolsa (Fialko and Barrios 2017), and Las Palomas (Barrios, in prep.), all of them indicating occupation since the beginning of the Late Classic period.

The ritual activities observed in Mano de León, Naranjo, indicate similarities with Tikal and the Belize region. In relation to the ritual precinct identified in Mano de León, there is some affinity with ritual cave manifestations in the Maya Mountains sites of southern Belize such as Mayahal Xheton and Xmuqlebal Xheton, related to burials covered with many sherds and ashes, some placed in corridors. It is believed that ceremonies in this kind of context represent a connection between the physical and metaphysical, between the world of the surface and the world within the earth (Prufer 2005:205).

With regard to the ceremonies held in the Mano de León group, at least three events can be identified: a) those associated with funeral activities with or without offerings, b) ceremonies related to ancestor commemoration practiced in the temples, c) ceremonies for fertility and abundant crops probably associated with sacred water management practiced indoors and in outdoor contexts, related to the cisterns and nearby platforms. The pristine water of the cisterns could have been collected either from rain or from the nearby springs. The low platforms between the east and west patios could have functioned as stages accessed by narrow pathways. Interestingly, both platforms coincide in an extreme corner with a cistern.

The Minor Elite family of the Mano de León group, and those from other similar nearby groups according to their social ranks, maintained a constant struggle for prestige and authority as did their Major Elite lords in the monumental epicenter of the city. For this, the Mano de León

group dwellers had access to the intervention of ritual specialists such as a shaman, to carry out their secret and public ritual ceremonies to obtain the favor of their gods and ancestors.

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Tabla 1
Entierros - Grupo Mano de León # 22P
Naranjo-Saal

	Entierro # 1	Entierro # 2	Entierro # 3	Entierro # 4	Entierro # 5	Entierro # 6	Entierro # 7	Entierro # 8	Entierro # 9	Entierro # 10	Entierro # 11	Totales
Contexto: Patio Este												
Esquina estructuras		X					X					1
Patio enfrente de estructuras			X		X							3
Dentro de estructura			X									2
Patio detras de estructuras	X							X				1
Colocados entre estructuras						X						1
Colocados entre pasillos								X				1
Directos												13
Colocados sobre /entre cenizas				X	X							2
colocados entre cenizas/tiestos/vasijas								X	X	X	X	4
Colocados en cavidad en la roca caliza	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					7
Indirectos												1
Colocados dentro del recinto ritual										X		1
Cistas												
En cavidad expuesta al fuego				X	X	X		X				4
Tipos - Características												
Primarios			X	X	X	X	X					5
Secundarios	X	X			X			X	X	X	X	6
esqueletos completos (Articulados)		X		X	X	X						4
esqueletos incompletos			X		X					X	X	4
Esqueleto sin cráneo							X					1
Solo cráneo					X			X				2
Fragmentos de huesos cortos	X		X						X			3
Fragmentos de huesos largos				X					X	X	X	3
Posicion												
Flexionado decubito dorsal				X			X					2
Flexionado lateral derecho			X					X				2
Flexionado lateral izquierdo						X						1
Orientacion con respecto al Cráneo												
Norte			X	X		X		X	X			5
Este					X							1
Ofrendas Funerarias												
Con ofrendas					X	X			X			3
Con ofrendas indirectas							X					1
Cráneo ofrenda					X			X				2
Sin ofrendas	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	7

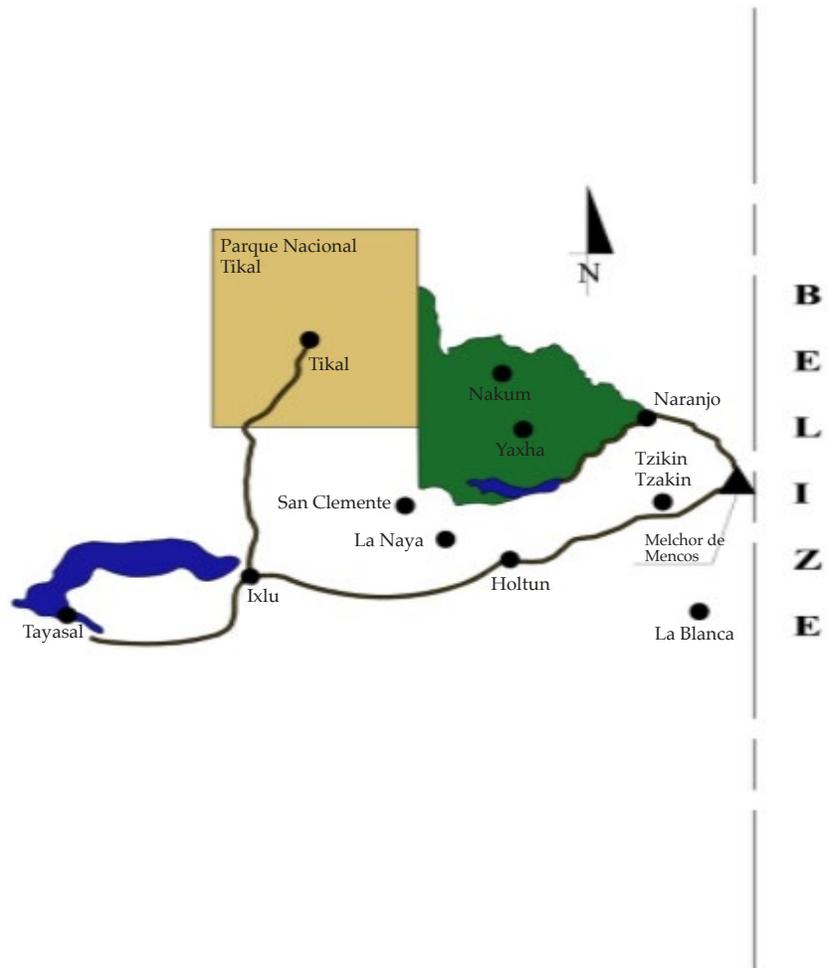


Figure 1. Location of the Yaxha-Nakum-Naranjo National Park.

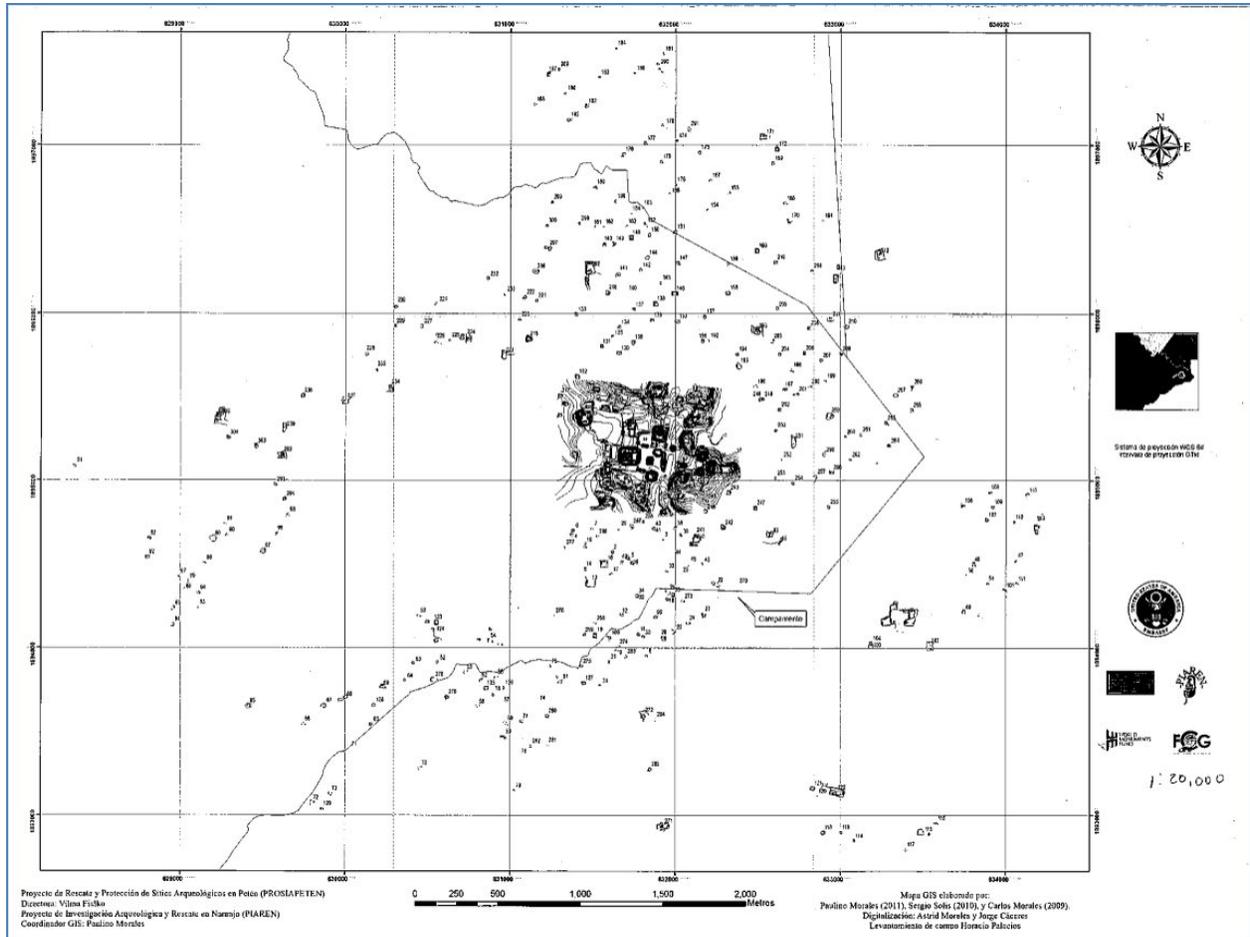


Figure 2. Location of the epicenter of Naranjo and its surrounding elite residential groups.

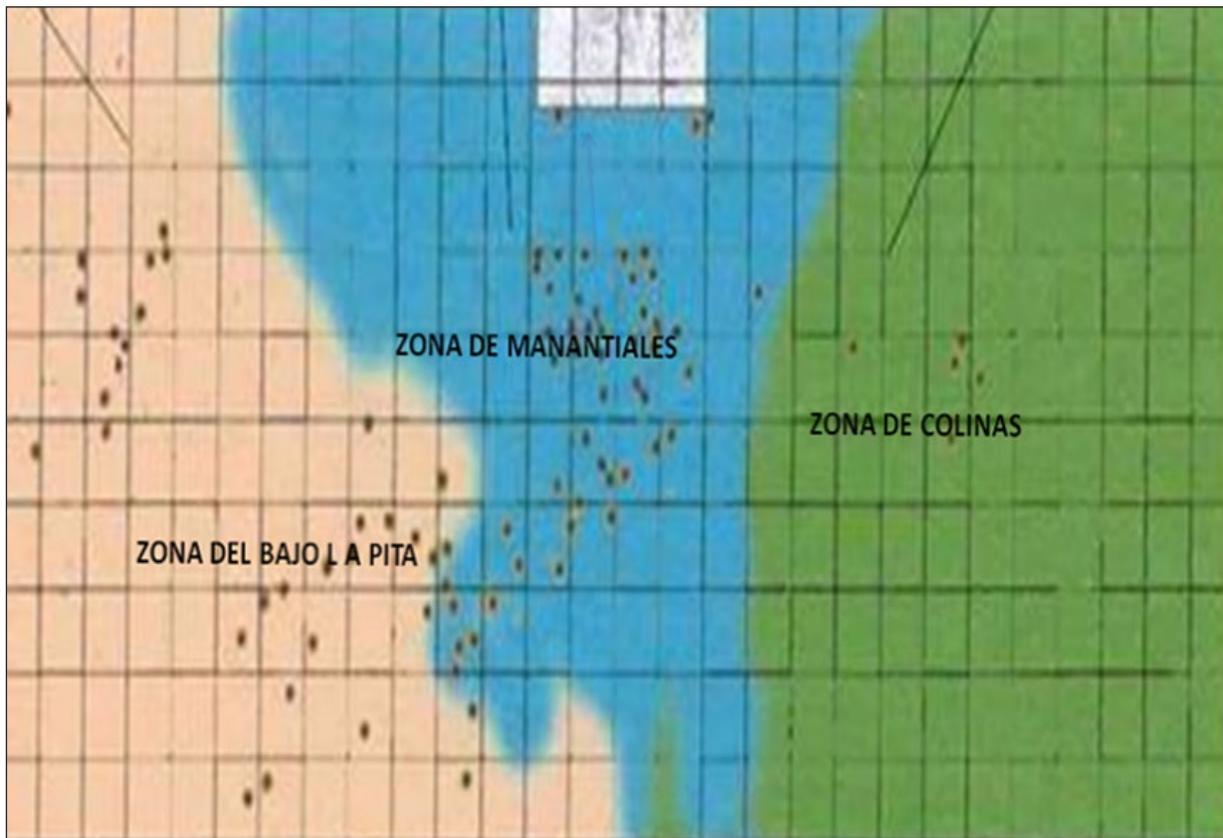


Figure 3. Location of the environmental zones related to residential groups.

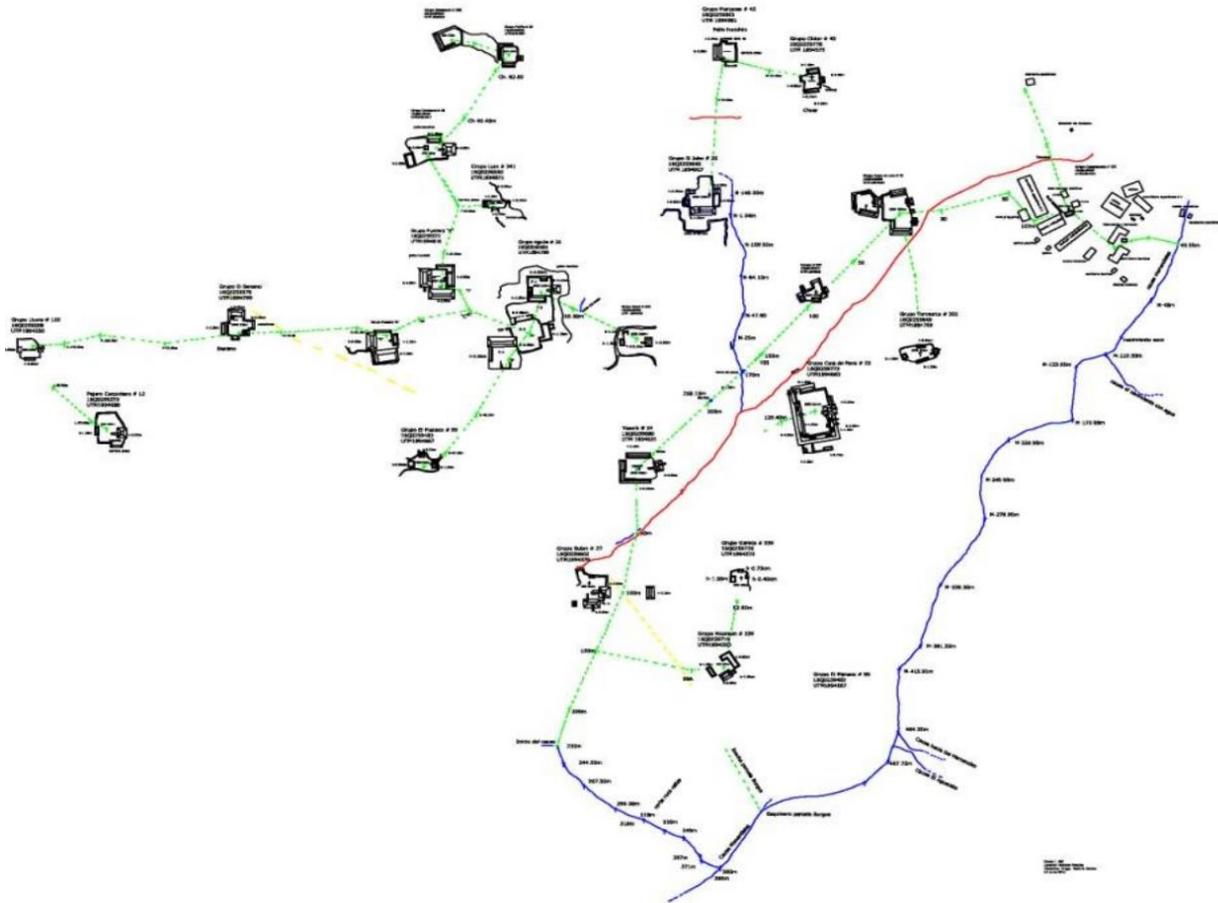


Figure 4. Residential groups of the Manantiales Zone, including the Mano de León group.

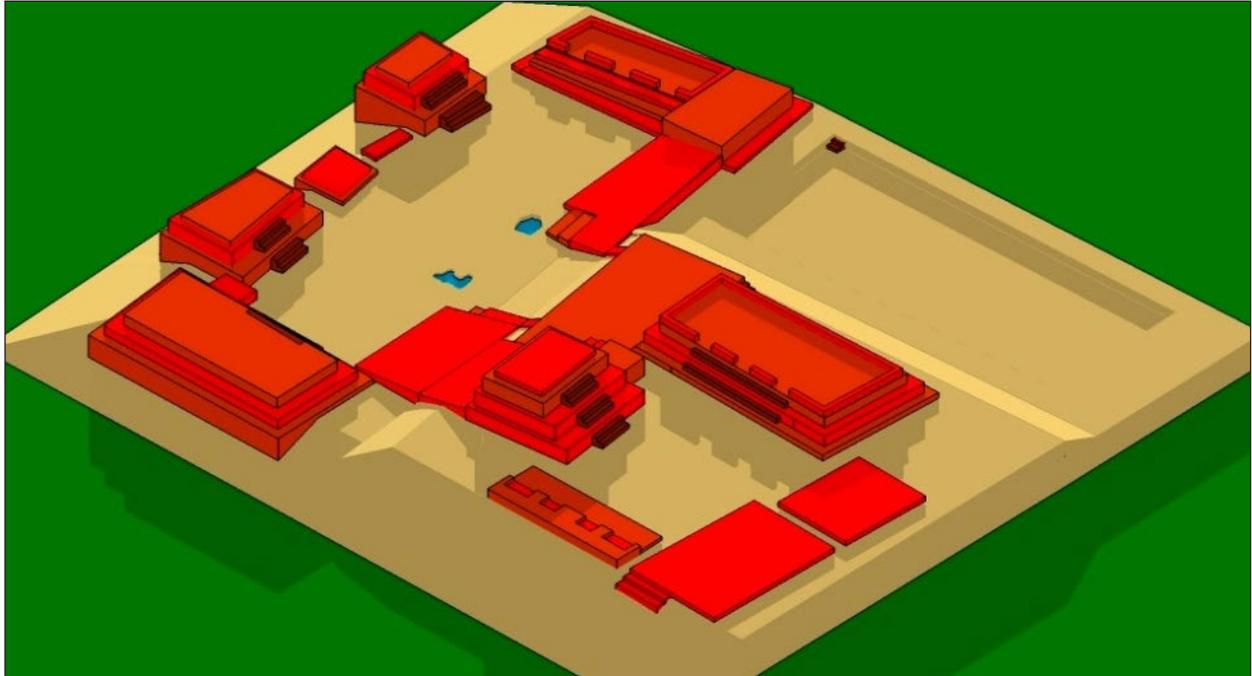


Figure 5. Mano de León residential group.

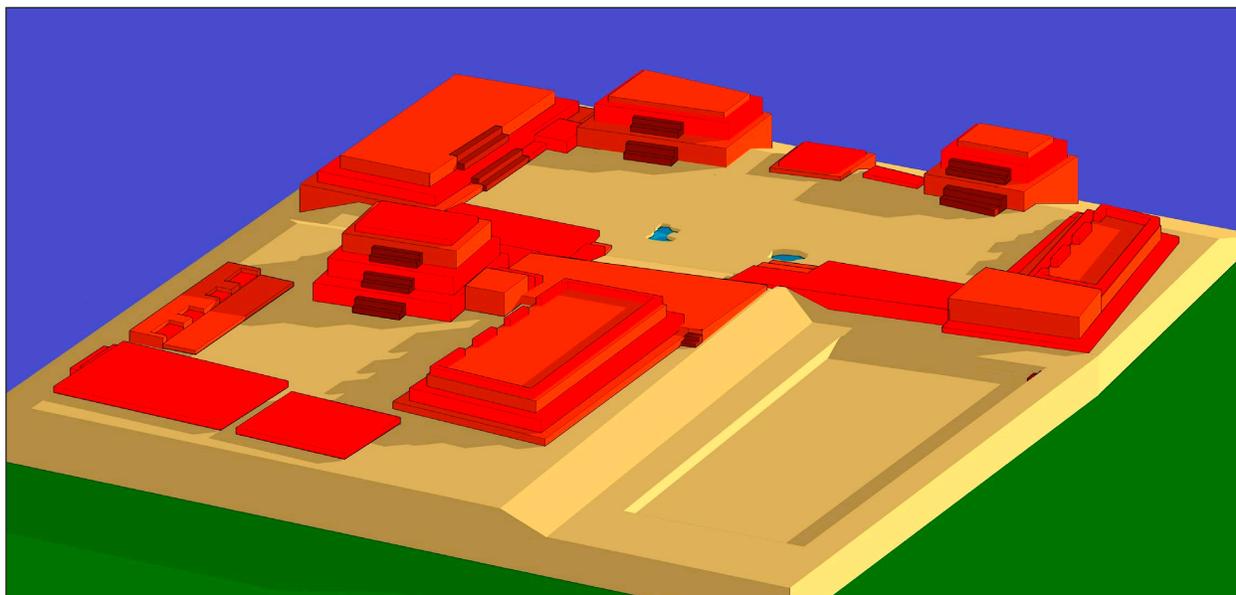


Figure 10. Mano de León residential group.

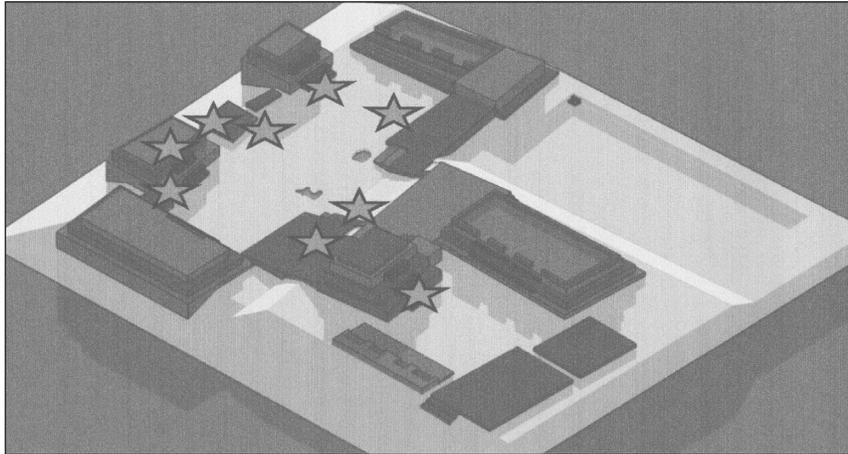


Figure 11. Funerary activity locations.



Figure 12. Burial # 5, Structure 3.



Figure 13. Burial # 9, in ritual precinct.



Figure 14. Str. 8. White flint eccentrics, left by the looters.



Figure 15. Str. 8. Brown flint eccentrics, left by the looters.



Figure 16. Str.8. Samples of obsidian offerings.



Figure 17. Fragment of black on orange bowl with glyphic designs.



Figure 18. Fragment of cream polychrome vase with vegetation and glyphs designs.

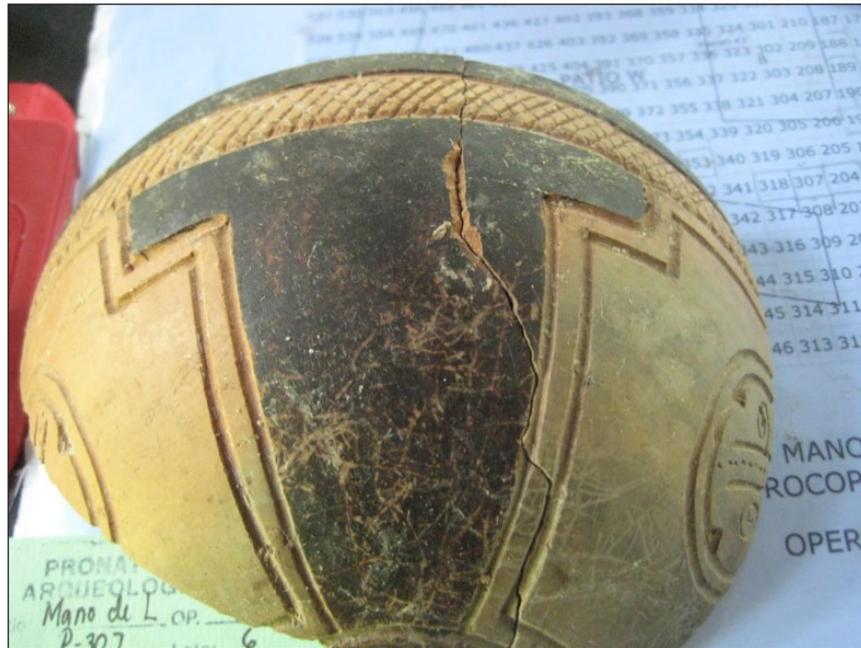


Figure 19. Terminal Classic, incised bowl.



Figure 20. Terminal Classic, incised-punctuated vessel.

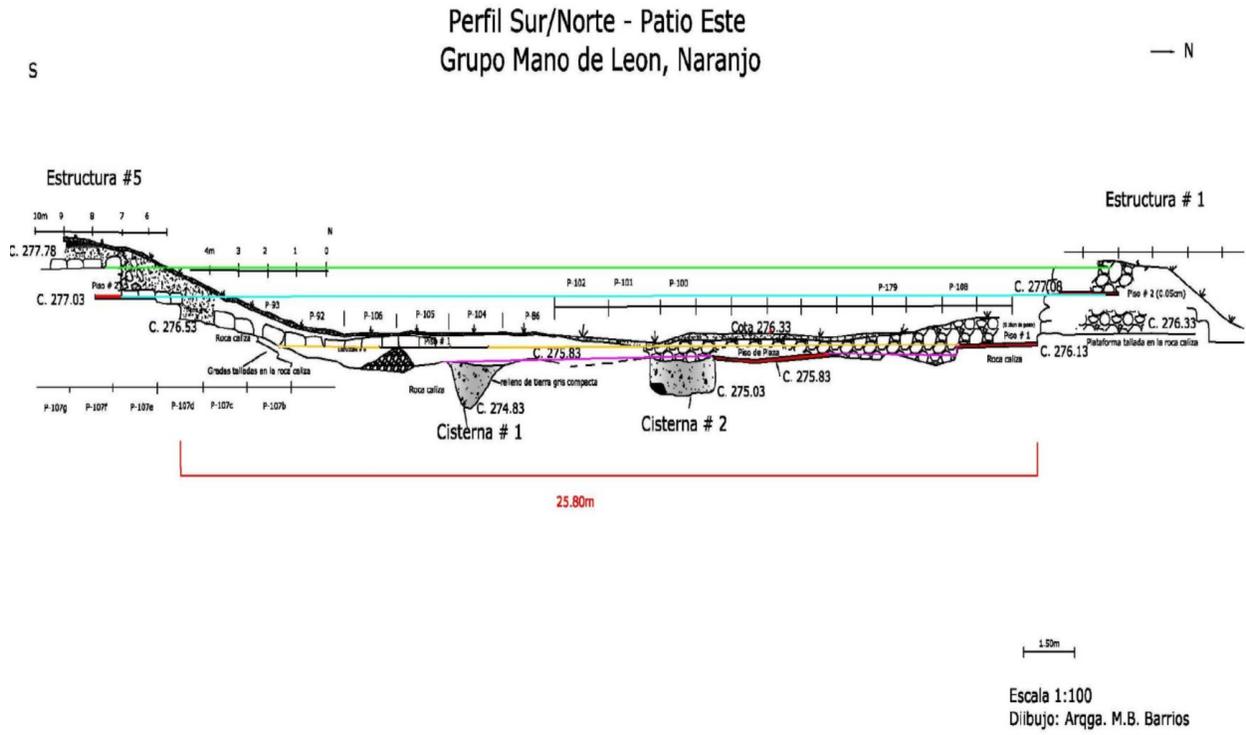


Figure 21. East Patio, north-south section. Structures 1, 5, and cisterns.



Figure 22. Cistern 1.



Figure 23. Cambio unslipped pot associated to Cistern 1.



Figure 24. Cistern 2.

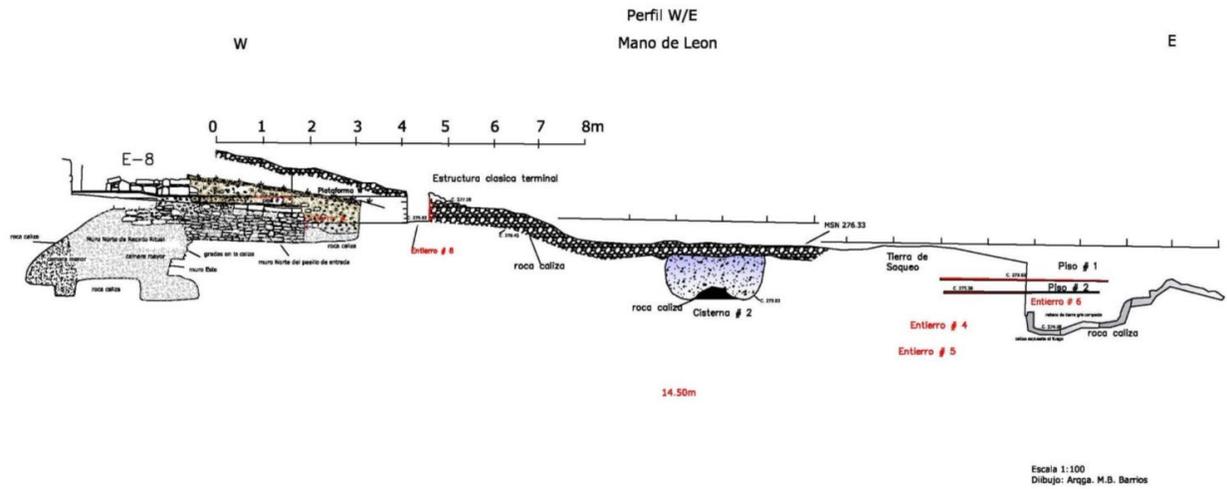


Figure 25. East Patio, east-west section. Ritual precinct, cistern 2, and burials location.



Figure 26. Quarry.



Figure 27. Quarry and fire area.

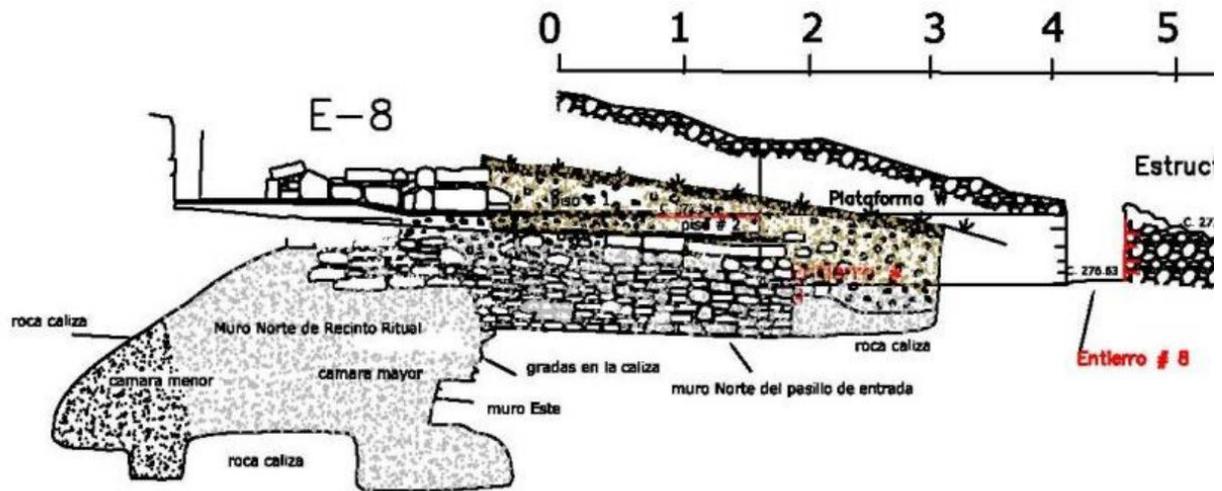


Figure 28. Ritual precinct and pathway.



Figure 29. Ritual precinct, front chamber.



Figure 30. Ritual precinct, front chamber.



Figure 31. Ritual precinct, rear chamber and psychoduct.



Figure 32. Anthropomorphic whistle, with blue paint. Front view.



Figure 33. Anthropomorphic whistle, with blue paint. Lateral view.



Figure 34. Anthropomorphic black ceramic cylindrical object.



Figure 35. Rear chamber fragmented jars.



Figure 36. Miniature polychrome vase.



Figure 37. Fragment of a cream polychrome dish portraying a human character.



Figure 38. Two fragments of a squared polychrome vase.



Figure 39. A fragment of a Cabrito type vase portraying a dancer.



Figure 40. A fragment of a Cabrito type vessel with complex iconographic designs.



Figure 41. A fragment of a Joyac cream polychrome type dish with geometric designs.



Figure 42. A Chinos Black on Cream type bowl decorated with glyphs and insects.



Figure 43. A fragment of a Joyac cream polychrome type dish with snake-related designs.



Figure 44. A fragment of a Joyac cream polychrome type vase with snake-related designs.



Figure 45. A fragment of a Joyac cream polychrome type vase with snake-related designs.



Figure 46a. A fragment of a handle representing a howling monkey. Side view.



Figure 46b. A fragment of a handle representing a howling monkey. Front view.



Figure 47. A stone ashlar, used to commemorate the cancelation of the ritual precinct.



Figure 48. Fragments of whistles found inside the ritual precinct.



Figure 49. Burial #4, in front of Structure 2.

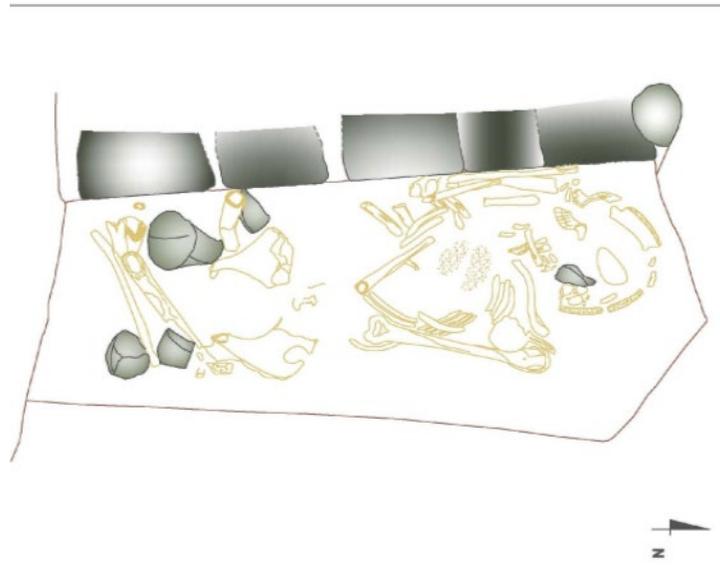


Figure 50. Burial #3, cyst details.



Figure 51. Burial #3, in front of Structure 4.

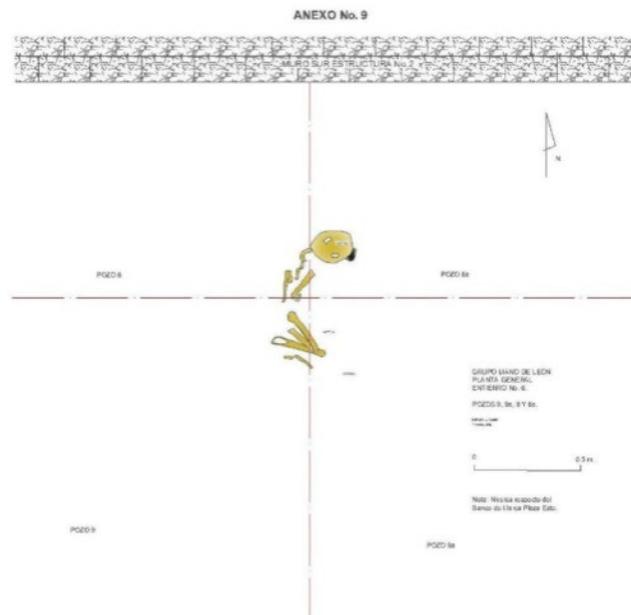


Figure 52. Burial #6, southern side of Structure 2.



Figure 53. Burial #2, associated with Structure 2, offering materials.



Figure 54. Burial #2, a Palmar orange polychrome bowl with anthropomorphic designs.



Figure 55. Burial #9 and associated offering.

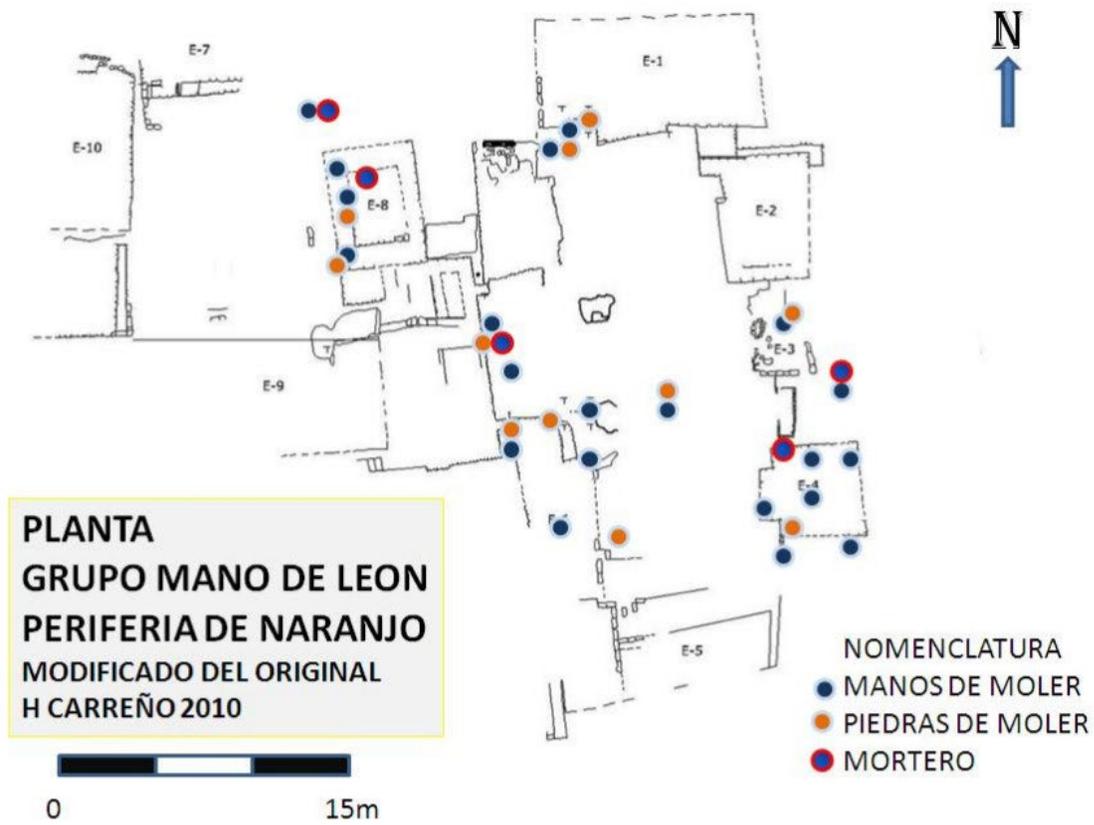


Figure 56. Distribution of grindstone material.

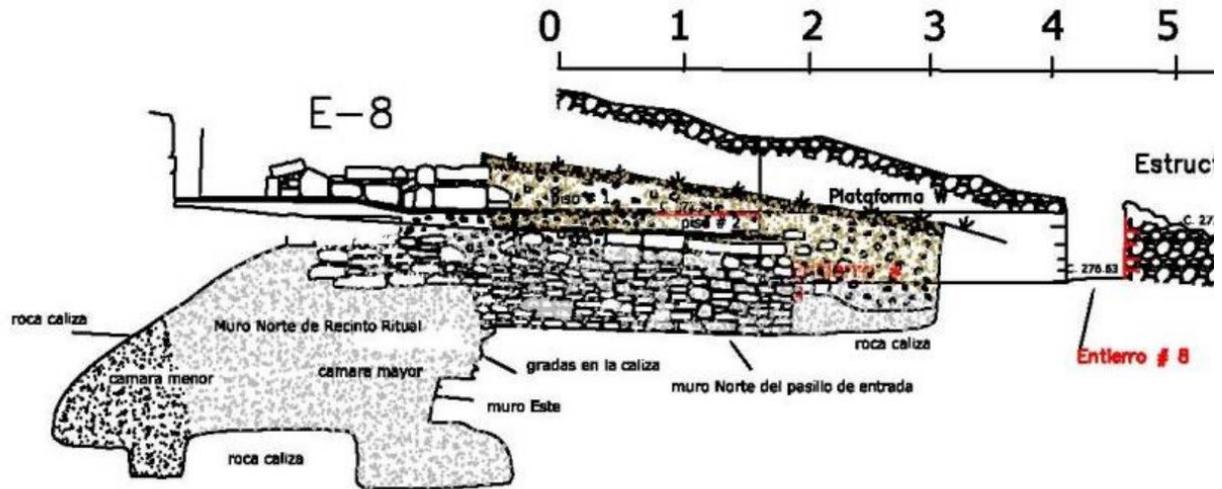


Figure 57. Burial #8, between Structure 8 and ritual precinct.



Figure 58. Vessel related to Burial #8.

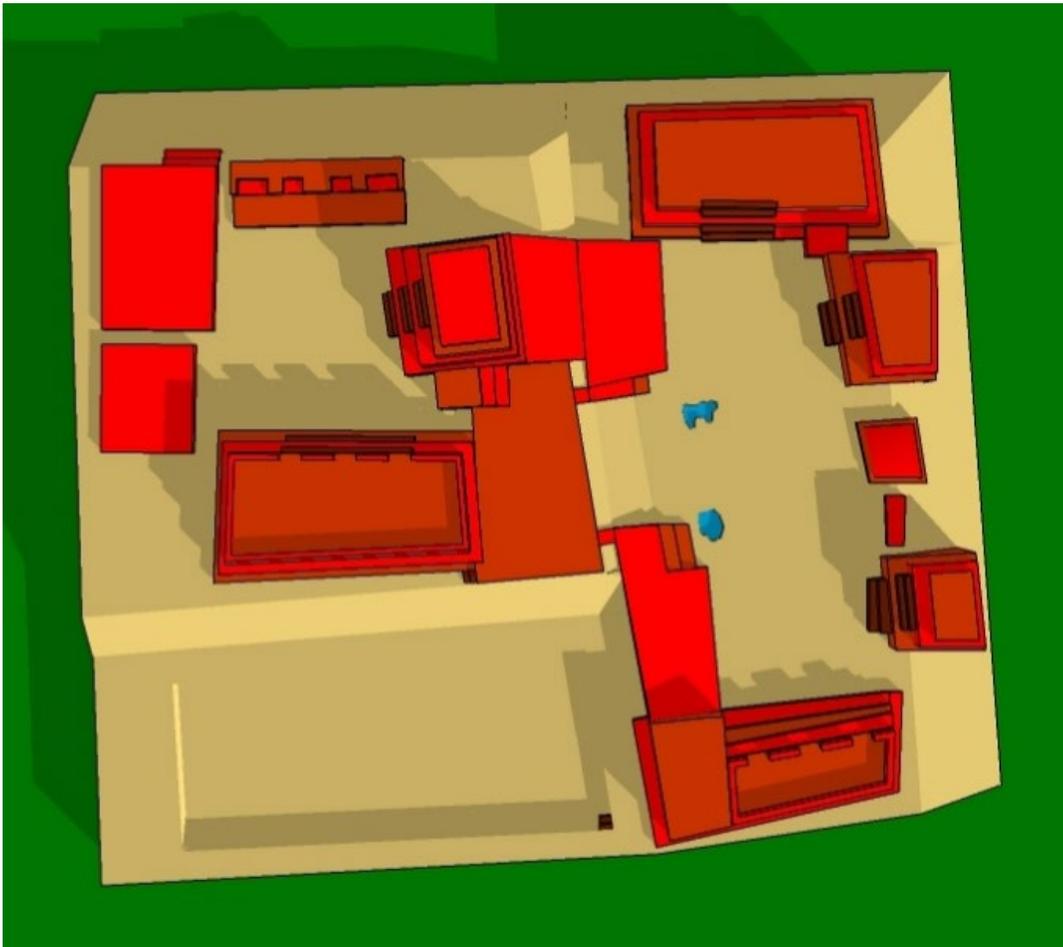


Figure 59. Idealization of the last architectural version of Mano de León.