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Feast and Sacrifice at El Perú-Waka': The N14-2 Deposit as Dedication

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The man was aged between 25 and 45 when he was killed and placed beneath the stair. His head was not cut off, nor is there any apparent major blunt force trauma. The manner of death left no significant damage to the skeleton, or at least none that could be detected. His cranium possesses tabular modifications, in which binding and shaping during infancy creates a long, sloped skull considered an idealized form of beauty for the Classic Maya. Tabular modification is generally, but not always, considered a mark of the aristocratic classes of Classic society (see Tiesler 1999).

His skeleton lay in a supine position, the head tilted forward at an awkward angle, chin pressing against his chest. The remains, however, were not alone, the Maya also burying an infant to accompany him. Together the two individuals lay on top of a dense layer of ceramic sherds, obsidian, chert, faunal bones, and figurine fragments. The bodies and the material represent a single depositional event, the N14-2 deposit described here. It occurred at some point in the later portion of the eighth century, when the elite culture of El Perú-Waka' seemed to enjoy a brief, final florescence. The deposit itself is directly associated with the main residence of an elite compound, the Tolok Group, located in the site core of the Classic center of El Perú-Waka'. It lay in a shaped bedrock concavity on and under the centerline of a small, northern staircase. Above it, the Maya placed a series of packed plaster floors and the treads and risers of the steps. Then, apparently, it seemed largely forgotten about.

The N14-2 deposit consists of a single

event in the archaeological record. It is a large and complex deposit, one deserving the special treatment given here, as opposed to remaining buried in the gray literature of excavation reports. Altogether, this ritual event seemingly involved feasting, dedication, and sacrifice. It holds the remains of a substantial feasting event, involving turkey and deer, the vessels deliberately smashed and scattered in the bedrock hollow. On and under the centerline of the stair, it is dedicatory in nature. The two likely sacrifices were placed carefully on the centerline on top of the debris, probably placed to "en-soul" the residence. The social dimension, as well, remains intriguing. The Classic inhabitants of the compound were elite, but they were not rulers. The ceremonial event that produced the deposit occurred during a surge of construction activity during which the entire compound and all its structures were raised. The N14-2 deposit represents the remains of a large ritual event with multiple components, an example of ceremonially conspicuous consumption. As such, it offers both an interesting perspective on the ritual activity itself and a glimpse into the social mechanics behind it.

Like many important discoveries, the N14-2 deposit was uncovered quite by accident. The team of excavators and I were specifically looking for residential middens in order to study the occupational sequence of the building compounds at the site core. Located on the sides and the backs of residences, these domestic middens provide excellent data on the differential degrees of prosperity present for each lineage group. On the northern and

eastern side of Structure N14-2, we encountered large Terminal Classic sheet middens (Eppich 2006). The sheet middens did yield excellent information, including that the ninth century Maya here were eating forest animals like tepezcuintle and deer, and, oddly enough, salt water oysters. Towards the end of the 2005 field season, I made the decision to take the midden excavations down to bedrock, to get a sample of the construction fill under the stucco plaza floor. For the N14-2 east midden, this went according to plan; under the floor was the packed fill, a dense mix of Classic-period material packed into and between large bedrock outcroppings, exactly what we had encountered in our earlier testpits. But for the north midden, the excavations went decidedly off-script. Under the plaza floor was a second, third, fourth, and fifth stucco floor, each packed neatly on top of the other. The excavators lifted off the final layer and uncovered two skeletons lying on their backs, resting on a dense carpet of ceramic sherds, figurines, and animal bones. The matrix changed noticeably as well, shifting from the grayish-white construction fill to a dark brownish-black material associated with decayed organic remains. This deposit was slowly recorded and recovered during the end of the 2005 and the beginning of the 2006 field seasons. Together with fellow archaeologists Varina Matute and Jennifer Piehl, we lifted out the construction fill to expose the ceramic concentration, discovering that the leg bones of the male adult, Burial 19, extended beneath the nearby staircase, necessitating an expansion of the excavations into this architecture. When it was all said and done, the N14-2 deposit yielded the complete remains of two individuals, an adult male and an infant, and some 2,269 ceramic sherds representing at least seventeen partially reconstructible vessels. These vessels include a ceramic drum, polychrome serving bowls, and large jars. The faunal material consisted of burned turkey and deer bones, including burned deer femurs, probably cooked by roasting instead of boiling. The lithics material consisted of 12 obsidian and 25 chert flakes, blades, and angular debris fragments, including examples of a rare dark black chert. Figurine fragments—jaguars, men, and monkeys—were scattered in the material, as were large pieces of charcoal and carbon. Taken as a whole, the N14-2 deposit does a much better job of indicating the inhabitants' degree of prosperity than the quotidian domestic debris from the middens. For some period in the late eighth century, the inhabitants of the Tolok Group were doing very well for themselves indeed.

The Tolok Group, though, does not greatly predate the N14-2 deposit. The site, and the site core in particular, were already densely settled by the middle of the 700s and had been for centuries. Yet the Tolok Group appears in one surge of construction, both platform and structures right at this time, almost shouldering its way into El Perú-Waka'. The cultural and political context of

late eighth century El Perú-Waka' remains essential in trying to understand the social mechanics behind this material. It is a tentative reconstruction of such that is attempted here.

The description and interpretation of the N14-2 deposit should be considered a companion piece to an earlier report issued on the nearby ancestor shrine of Structure M14-15, published earlier in *The PARI Journal* (Eppich 2007). Together, the two excavations nicely frame the rise and fall of an elite lineage group living on the cusp of the Classic Maya collapse.

El Perú-Waka'

By AD 750, El Perú-Waka' was already an old city. From what appears to be a scattered settlement in the Late Preclassic, the site core begins to take shape in the first few centuries AD. Large platforms with Protoclassic ceramics form the bulk of the building material underlying the major plazas at the site center (Eppich et al. 2005; see also Brady et al. 1998). But it is in the Early Classic that the site takes full form, most of the big pyramids and palace compounds going up between 250 and 550. The site develops around the long central concourse of Plaza 1 with residence compounds clustering on the plazas flanking this concourse (Figure 1). Beginning in the Early Classic, El Perú-Waka' becomes one of the major centers of the Central Peten and probably the paramount city of the western Peten. That El Perú-Waka' should develop in such a manner is unsurprising. The site rests on a limestone escarpment overlooking the nearby Río San Pedro Mártir and would have dominated any riverine traffic along that waterway. For the entirety of the Classic period, El Perú-Waka' exists as a major political player, being deeply involved in all the significant events of the period, from the *entrada* of Sihyaj K'ahk' to the final eighth century reascendancy of Tikal (Martin and Grube 2008:29, 49). The first known stela from the site, Stela 15 from 416, bears the names of previous rulers going back well into the mid-fourth century, as well as recording the appearance of Sihyaj K'ahk' himself (Guenther 2005:365-366, 383). The route of Sihyaj K'ahk', west to east, confirms the site's position as the western gateway to the great cities of the Peten.

El Perú-Waka' suffers badly following the collapse of the Teotihuacanoid "New Order," enduring an epigraphic hiatus from 554 to 657 that parallels that of Tikal (Guenther 2005:371-372; Martin and Grube 2008:39-40). No known monuments were erected at that time, and the tempo of architectural construction and elaboration seems muted, if not halted altogether.

After 657 a fully Calakmul-affiliated series of dynasts emerges, rulers aligning themselves with the symbols and personalities of that powerful northern city. The period from 657 to 743 seems to be one of potent royal figures. This comes to a second end with the defeat and

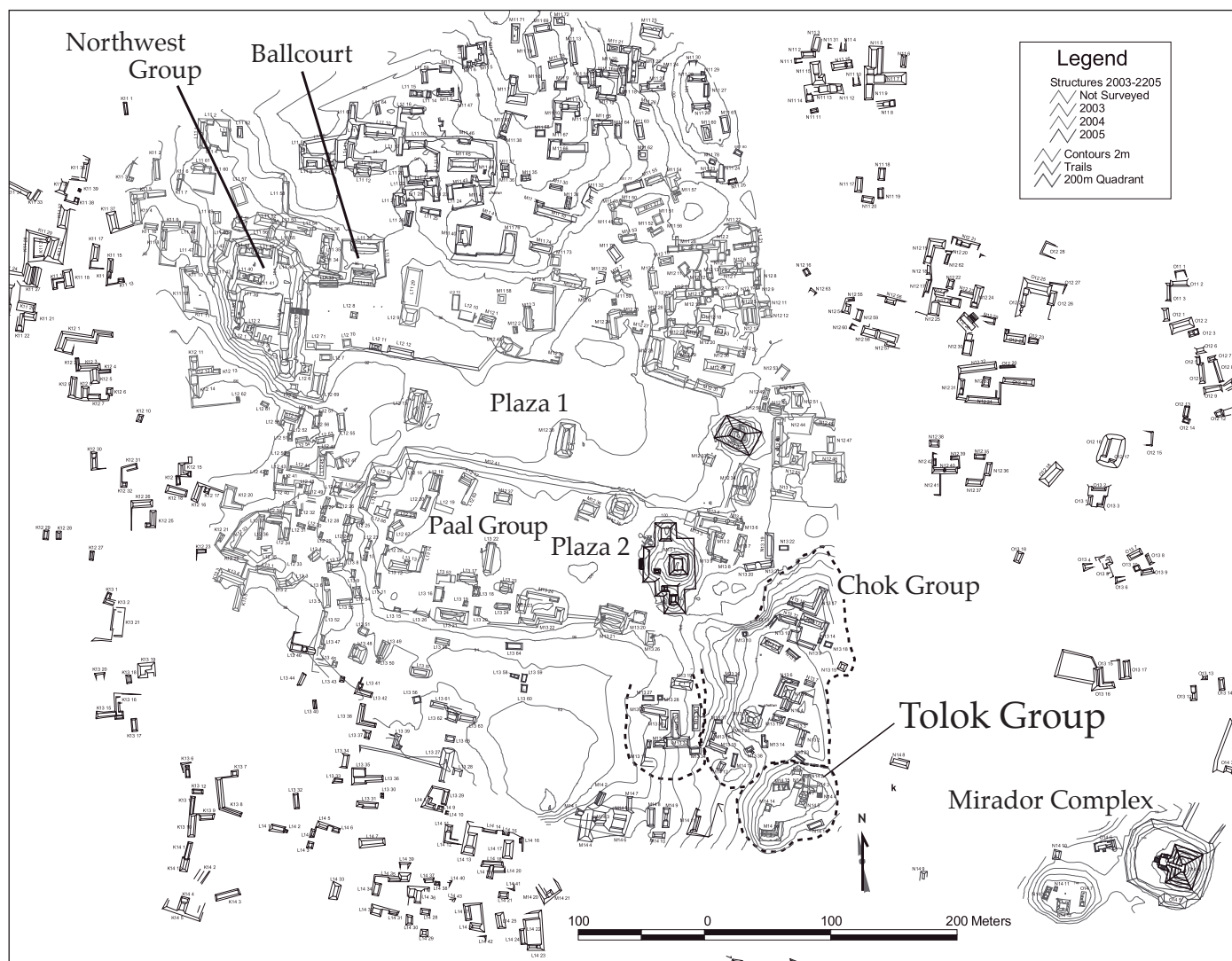


Figure 1. The site core of El Perú-Waka'.

capture of Bahlam Tz'am, the ruler of El Perú-Waka', by Tikal in 743. This victory by Yik'in Chan K'awiil of Tikal is celebrated in none other than Tikal's Temple 4 itself (Martin and Grube 2008:48-49). Rulership at El Perú-Waka' appears subdued following this defeat and we lack names for the next three rulers. There is a site-wide attempt at restoration in the last few decades of the eighth century with a new ruler, Aj Yax Chow Pat, and his queen, Lady Pakal. This abortive renaissance seemingly dies with the passing of these two royals from the epigraphic record, and Aj Yax Chow Pat is the last known, named ruler of El Perú-Waka' (Guenther 2005).

The vicissitudes of the archaeological record have yet to be fully integrated with Stanley Guenther's painstaking epigraphic work, and so we do not fully know the impacts of these political ups and downs on the general population. This remains an ongoing endeavor. However, it is in this social milieu, following the defeat of one king and the reanimation attempts of another, during

which the inhabitants of the Tolok Group fashion their structures. It is somewhere in this period, between 750 and 800, that the events behind the N14-2 deposit occur.

The Tolok Group and Structure N14-2

The Tolok Group is located immediately to the southeast of Plaza 2, near the ritual architecture of the Mirador Complex (Figure 1). Prior to 750 or so, this residential compound did not exist. It is unknown exactly what was there before, but given the large and irregular outcroppings of limestone bedrock, it remains most likely that it was just a jumble of boulders and slab-sided stones. After about 750, though, this changes considerably (Eppich 2006; Eppich and Matute 2007). Dark black matrix, identified as muddy lake or bajo sediment and often containing highly eroded and fragmentary Protoclassic and Early Classic ceramics, fills the hollows and cavities

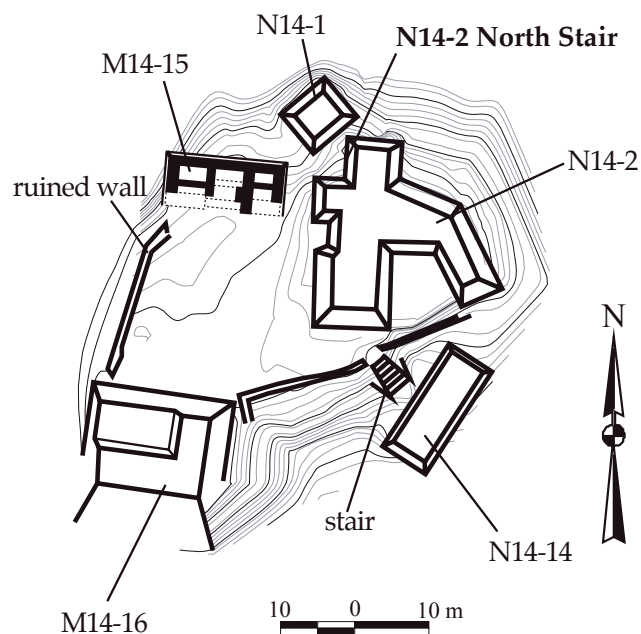


Figure 2. Map of the Tolok Group.

of the bedrock, shaping this small, level hill (Figure 2). In the mid-eighth century this hillock is filled, raised, and shaped, with the architecture placed on top, including the main residence of Structure N14-2. The group appears to have been walled and fortified, ringed by a set of stone foundations similar to those documented at Dos Pilas (Demarest et al. 1997:233-236).

Excavations to the north and east of the structure confirm the residential function for N14-2. These middens contained domestic kitchen debris, smashed and eroded ceramic sherds, heavily worn lithics, and butchered and discarded animal bones (Eppich 2006). On the whole, the domestic debris held all the markers of the early facet for the site's Terminal Classic Rax Complex: bolstered rims, fine pastes, and thinly slipped red and black monochromes (Eppich et al. 2005). The Q'eqchi' excavators identified the faunal remains in the field as deer, turkey, and tepezcuintle, as well as numerous birds. Burned oyster shell also turned up with some regularity (Eppich 2006). Both the recovered material itself as well as its placement indicate a domestic midden and therefore residential function for the structure (see Johnstone and Gonlin 1998:168-169). N14-2 itself consisted of a series of distinct rooms placed on top of a large common platform wrapped around an interior patio. The structure faced west and on the western side was a large pile of masonry rubble, including visible vaultstones. The eastern "arms" of the structure lacked vaultstones as well as significant amounts of rubble. N14-2, then, possessed an impressive front, a small staircase, and vaulted architecture, but in the interior the roofs, and probably the walls, were perishable.

N14-2 did not resemble an elite "palace" so much as a humble, albeit large, Classic residence with a facade of a palace attached to the front. Excavators also uncovered a small blank stela face-down on the front portion of the facade's rubble.

The plaster plaza floor lay beneath these sheet middens on both the northern and eastern sides. Excavations penetrated both floors, looking for material from the construction fill. For the eastern side, this went as expected and the construction fill mentioned above was recovered and the limestone bedrock mapped. On the northern midden, however, excavators found the series of stacked plaster floors, a small staircase, and below that the N14-2 deposit (Figure 3).

The N14-2 deposit

The N14-2 deposit lies in a shaped bedrock concavity, the limestone sloping from south to north forming a slightly hollow shelf. The material of the deposit rests directly on the bedrock itself as well as on the limestone blocks that make up the partial cists of Burials 18 and 19. The matrix of the deposit was a dark, rich brown to grey-black color, being moist to the touch with a thick clay-like quality about it. It remains strongly reminiscent of large amounts of decayed organic material. It also possessed flecks of carbon and charcoal, evenly distributed throughout.

As described, the N14-2 deposit possesses two distinct elements, the burials and the artifactual material on which they lay (Figures 4-7). The raw counts of artifacts are given above, but it is the precise relations between different elements of the deposit that indicate both a single deposition for the material and the intentionality of their placement. Firstly, the bedrock concavity shows signs of having been shaped to fit the deposit with most of the artifacts lying on a roughly level bedrock floor. The rock does slope upwards and bulge towards the surface in the southern portion of the deposit. Secondly,



Figure 3. The exposed North Stair of N14-2.



Figure 4. The N14-2 Deposit during excavation.

both individuals lie in their own partial cists. The Burial 19 cist covered the upper body and extended beneath the centerline of the staircase above. The Burial 18 infant rested next to a pair of shaped limestone blocks. These partial cists would have sheltered the remains as they were physically buried. The blocks of both cists directly touch the bedrock shelf and no artifacts lay between cist-stone and bedrock. Clearly then, the placement and construction of the partial cists predate the placement of the artifactual material. The dense carpet of material was generally between 8 and 10 cm thick and followed the slope of the bedrock, being thickest when directly beneath the interments and thinnest when lying on the bedrock slope. There are three vital attributes in the placement of the material. One, that underneath the bodies, the material was fairly level, not perfectly so, of course, but looking at the profile of the deposit, the artifacts are much more level than one would expect from casual dumping of kitchen debris. Two, no artifacts lie on top of the human remains while the bones of the two individuals rest directly on the shattered ceramics. This indicates that the placement of the bodies and the material was considered and intentional. Three, the vessels, when reconstructed, showed different portions, perfectly fitting together, coming from different sections of

the deposit. The vessels, then, were smashed and broken before deposition, being almost deliberately “scattered” and mixed together. Altogether, the superposition of these different elements indicates the following sequence of activity: the shaping of the bedrock, the placement of the cist-stones, the deposition of the artifactual material, and then the placement of the human remains.

The remains themselves were analyzed by Jennifer Piehl in 2008 and published in the excavation report for that year (Piehl 2008). Both sets of remains survived in poor condition and were in danger of crumbling as they were lifted from the matrix. Analysis took place both in situ and in the project laboratory, the results largely correlating. The Burial 18 individual was aged roughly two years, based on Piehl’s analysis of the surviving teeth and vertebrae. The Burial 19 individual, placed beneath the staircase, was a male of middle adult age with pronounced tabular modification of the skull (Figure 5–7). In Piehl’s most recent analysis (in press), a strontium analysis of the teeth indicates a non-local adolescence, one probably spent in the Yucatan or Northern Belize. The remains were too deteriorated to allow clear determination of pathologies or physical trauma, this last attribute remaining critical in the attempt to ascertain whether or not the two individuals served as human sacrifices.



Figure 5. Burial 19 lying in the partial cist.

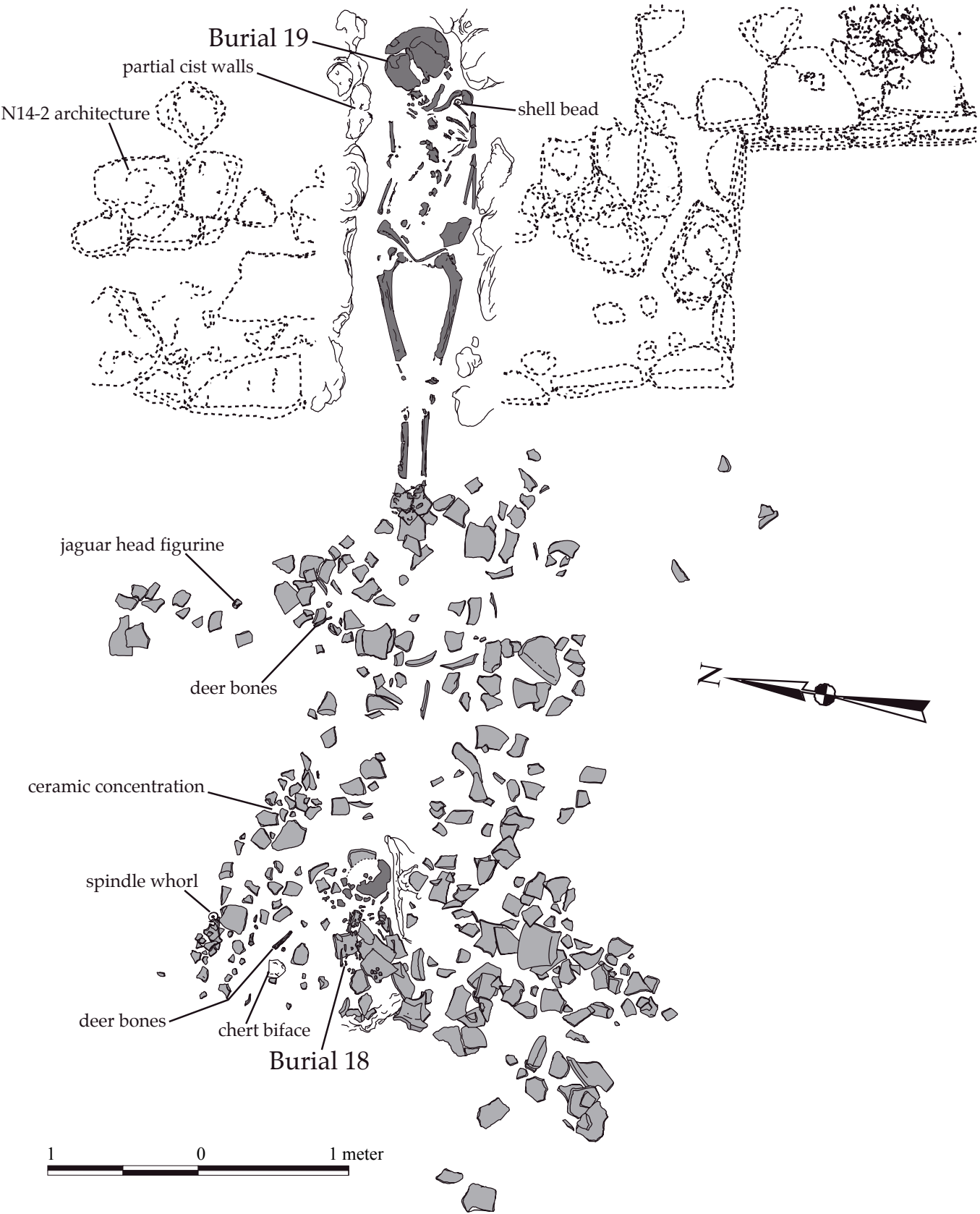


Figure 6. The N14-2 dedication deposit, 2006 excavations, El Perú-Waka' Operation 9.



Figure 7. The Burial 19 skull.

Elements of ritual

Both the position and composition of the N14-2 deposit speak to the different ritual elements it contains. The artifactual material strongly suggests a feasting event, the placement of the deposit indicates a dedicatory nature, the two burials are likely sacrificial, and, finally, the whole of the deposit serves to “ensoul” Structure N14-2, providing the new construction with a kind of guardian soul or spiritual force. Due to the superposition of the deposit’s different elements, the basic depositional sequence is known, and substantial portions of the ritual can be reconstructed and interpreted.

If just the artifacts from the N14-2 deposit were removed and placed in a different context, they would be interpreted as the remains of a significant feasting event. The material is certainly indicative of known feasting debris (Fields and Reents-Budet 2006:205-217; LeCount 2001:944-946; Reents-Budet 2000:1029, 2006:206-207; see also Pendergast 1979:127; Yaeger and Robin 2004:155, 161). Together, this would seem to be a large proportion of servingware, bowls, plates and possibly vases, accompanying cooked and roasted faunal

bones and “ritual ceramics” such as figurines, censers, and musical instruments (Hendon 2003:216-220). Classic period ceremonies are known from the epigraphic record, with glyphs for “eat,” *WE’*, and “drink,” *UK’* (Houston et al. 2006:127-130). The smashed debris, then, stands for the remains of a feast, a feast in which the vessels themselves were intentionally destroyed. Such kratophanous deposits are usually associated less with the careful placement of preciosities and more with building termination or ceremonial refuse (Kunen et al. 2002:200-201; Walker 1995). As LeCount (2001:941) adroitly points out, ritual food and drink is not merely consumed but “sacrificed,” showing that feast and sacrifice stand as intertwined ritual concepts. Through the act of destruction and sacrifice, such materials are transformed into a kind of “soul-force” which can pass into the spiritual world (see Freidel et al. 1993:241-242, 246). Thus the practices of feasting and sacrifice appear linked. The feast was held and the vessels smashed and then placed to serve as a floor for the next stage of the ceremony.

While the recovered animal bones have yet to be examined by a faunal specialist, observations in the field by local Maya familiar with forest species identified examples of deer and turkey. The remains, when such identification was possible, consisted of the long bones of the limbs. No skulls or vertebrae or non-meat-bearing bones were identified. One excavator in particular, José Luis Tzalam Caal repeatedly identified cooked and burned turkey and deer bones. Burn marks on the bones suggest direct contact with open flame, indicating the meat was roasted, as opposed to boiled (Sutton and Arkush 2005:245). The lithic material, the obsidian and chert, seems to be freshly struck blades and large, circular angular debris fragments. The edges look fresh and unused, probably struck during or just prior to deposition. Excavators recovered one eccentric, of a pronounced dark black chert. Furthermore, the deposit contained a number of ceramic figurine fragments, including a jaguar head and a small monkey with attached headdress. These may have been portions of the shattered incensario described below or small figurines on their own, but they reinforce the ritual aspect present throughout the deposit.

The placement of the N14-2 deposit strongly suggests a dedicatory ritual (Coe 1959:77-79; cf. Chase and Chase 1998:303). Epigraphic evidence places dedication rituals on the fronting stairs of newly constructed architecture (Schele 1990:156; Stuart 2005:18-19). Such rituals are even known by their Classic name, *OCH-OTOT*, *och otot*, “enters house,” with inscriptions placed on the flanking balustrades of stairs (Stuart 2005:18-19). That the centerline of the stair in N14-2 passed through the center of both Burials 18 and 19, the partial cists of both, and the majority of the artifactual material clearly indicates a direct relationship between the material, the interments, and the nearby architecture. Such placement fits precisely the original definition for dedicatory deposits given by William Coe (1959:78; see also Becker

Vessel number	Description	Form (as per Sabloff 1975)	Condition	Type-variety designation	Figure
1	large unslipped jar	jar with outcurved neck	highly fragmented	Cambio Unslipped	
2	fragmentary small polychrome olla	"bowl with incurved sides, restricted orifice"	partial vessel	Palmar Orange Polychrome	8d
3	large red-slipped jar	jar with outcurved neck	highly fragmented	Subin Red	
4	flat-bottomed polychrome bowl	dish with incurved sides	partial vessel	indeterminate polychrome	8c
5	flat-bottomed polychrome bowl	dish with flared sides	whole vessel	Palmar Orange Polychrome	8b
6	fine-line incised ceramic drum	n/a	whole vessel	Torres Incised	8a
7	small red-monochrome jar	jar with vertical neck	fragmented	Subin Red	
8	distressed polychrome plate	plate with outcurved sides	fragmented	indeterminate polychrome	
9	red-monochrome jar with bolstered rim	jar with vertical neck and exterior folded rim	fragmented	Subin Red	
10	distressed flat-bottomed polychrome bowl	dish with flared sides	fragmented	indeterminate polychrome	
11	incensario fragments	n/a	partial vessel	Pedregal Modeled	10
12	black-monochrome olla with bolstered rim	"bowl with incurved sides, restricted orifice"	fragmented	Infierno Black	
13	impressed dark red olla with bolstered rim	"bowl with incurved sides, restricted orifice"	fragmented	Chaquite Impressed	
14	small unslipped striated jar	jar with outflared neck	partial vessel	Encanto Striated	
15	distressed flat-bottomed bowl	dish with vertical sides	partial vessel	indeterminate	
16	flat-bottomed polychrome bowl	dish with flared sides	highly fragmented	Palmar Orange Polychrome	
17	flat-bottomed polychrome bowl	dish with flared sides	partial vessel	Palmar Orange Polychrome	

Table 1. Ceramic vessels from the N14-2 deposit.

1992). The ritual behind the N14-2 deposit then is very likely to dedicate the stair it lies under, if not the whole of the residence itself. Dedication, as pointed out in *Maya Cosmos*, possesses direct links to both ritual destruction, feasting, and sacrifice (Freidel et al. 1993:244-245, 249, 312). In the course of the ritual dedication, these cached materials are broken or buried, if not both. This explains the smashed and scattered ceramic vessels present in the N14-2 deposit. Furthermore, it may even explain the presence of the two bodies.

Are Burials 18 and 19 human sacrifices? The inclusion of two individuals is somewhat unusual for a dedicatory deposit, but not wholly unknown. Welsh (1988:169-170), in his groundbreaking analysis of Maya burials, determined that some human remains are included in dedication deposits, in what he terms "dedicatory cache-burials." However, such deposits usually involve only infants or body parts. Complete human skeletons occur in only a few cases. He lists another kind of human sacrifice as well, consisting of paired adult-child burials, usually being located in residential platforms (Welsh 1988:167-168, Table 101). Of the adult-child sacrifices he mentions, some bear direct evidence of trauma, including decapitation, flaying, and blunt force applied to the cranium. Unfortunately from our perspective, no such direct physical evidence exists in the surviving remains for either Burial 18 or 19. Their context, however, suggests sacrifice rather than veneration and burial. They remain associated with kratophanous materials, objects deliberately smashed and broken, the remains of which are placed in an entrance stair, a liminal space (see Tiesler 2007:20, 29). Burials 18 and 19 are linked to both feasting and dedication, which in turn possess elements relating to death and sacrifice. It is likely then, albeit supported by decidedly circumstantial evidence, that the burials are sacrificial in nature, part of the ritual event that dedicated the structure and led to the creation of the N14-2 deposit. If so, both interments show that hu-

man sacrifice was not limited to the royal actors associated with the Classic Maya state, but could be practiced by lesser elites as part of their own private ceremonies. In this context, human beings, like pieces of precious jade or exquisite obsidian blades, could just as easily be broken, buried, and given over to the otherworld.

The purpose of the dedication event, which involved feasting, deposition, and potential sacrifice, served to "ensoul" Structure N14-2 itself. The material objects, through the act of consumption and destruction, are transformed into a kind of supernatural sustenance by which the structure and its inhabitants can pay their spiritual debt to otherworldly forces (Hamann 2002:353; Vogt 1993:56-57). Especially in terms of the potential human sacrifice, the spirit of those sacrificed can become the "soul" of the structure. In his work in and around Santiago Atitlan, Allen Christenson (2001:50-51) describes the discovery of pieces of jade and a human skeleton beneath the western stair of the main church. The modern Tz'utujil Maya viewed the skeleton as belonging to a woman sacrificed there during the church's original sixteenth-century construction. With her death and burial, she became *ruk'u'x qmuq*, *ruk'u'x iglesia*, "heart of the steps, heart of the church" (Christenson 2001:51). The N14-2 deposit, then, exists as the remains of a ritual feast that ensouled the compound's main residence, the means by which the building, in a manner, was itself brought to life.

The feasting vessels

Sets of Classic period servingware have been identified at other Maya sites, indicating the manner of vessels used in the feasting events (Hendon 2003:218-219). One of the more striking features of the materials recovered from the N14-2 deposit is the vessels used in the course of the ritual meal (Table 1, Figure 8). These vessels were recovered in a highly scattered and fragmentary state.

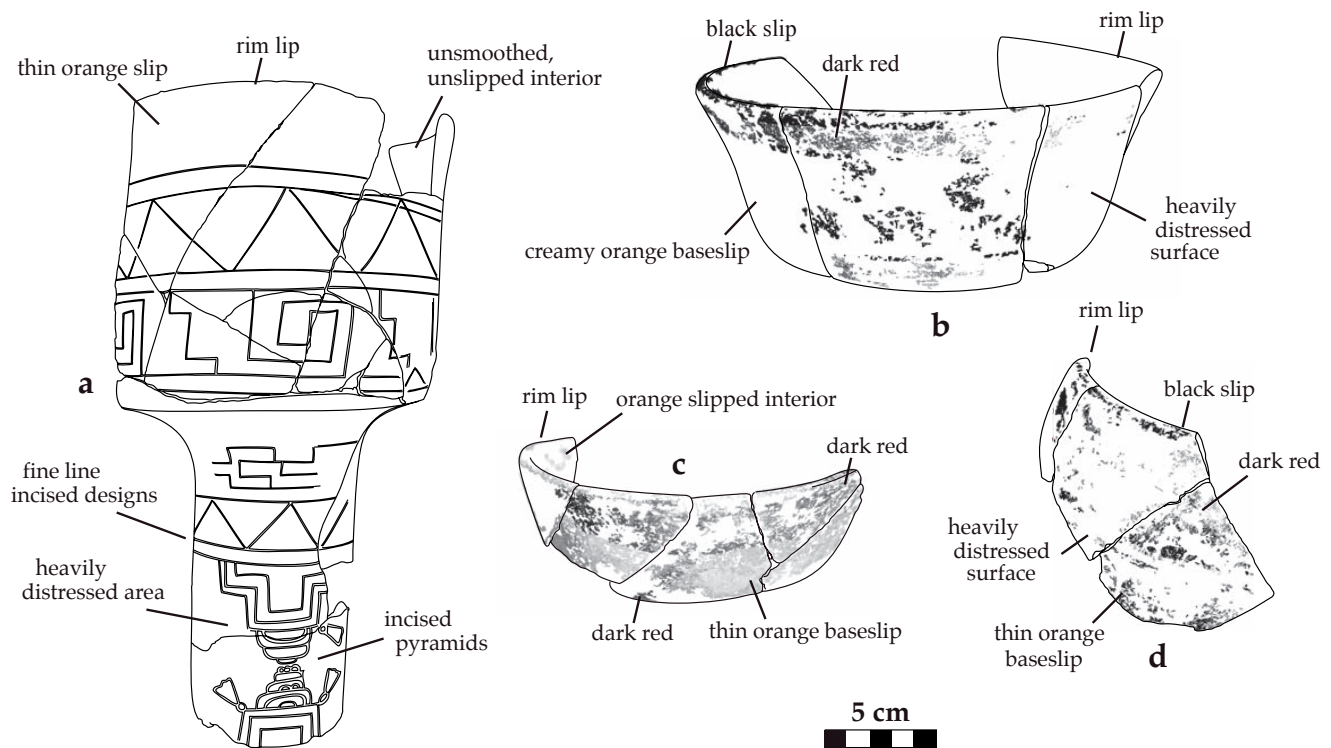


Figure 8. Ceramic vessels of the N14-2 deposit.

They were not smashed in place, but must have been broken elsewhere and then redeposited into the bedrock concavity, as indicated by the large numbers of refits from different portions of the deposit (see Reents-Budet 2000:1029). To aid in mapping, excavators divided the deposit into 15 sections measuring 15 x 30 cm. Sherds from the fine-line incised ceramic drum, Vessel 6 (Figures 8a, 9), were recovered from 11 of these 15 sections, some fragments separated by up to a meter. These sorts of relations proved common among the vessels of the N14-2 deposit, the small polychrome bowl, Vessel 4, being scattered across five of these sections. Excavators recovered sherds from Vessel 5 from four widely separated sections. So, while definitely in less than ideal condition inside the N14-2 deposit, we appear to have recovered at least a portion of a set of servingware used in a Classic Maya feast.

In all, there are fragments of at least seventeen identifiable vessels, three of which are largely reconstructible (Figures 8–11). The remaining fourteen exist only in fragments, but are generally sufficient to give an idea of their size, form, and type-variety designation (Table 1). The vessel surfaces were often distressed, a result of the thin Late Classic slips, and many of the design elements can only be guessed at (Figure 8). Chronologically, the ceramics fit in perfectly with the late facet of the site's Late Classic Q'eq' Complex, containing thin, poorly bonded slips, elaborate polychromes, complex fine-line

incised designs, and the presence in low frequencies of bolstered rims on jars (Eppich et al. 2005:325–326). Towards the end of the Q'eq' Complex at El Perú-Waka', we see the Terminal Classic potting traditions entering the ceramic corpus while assemblages remain dominated by Late Classic ceramic attributes. Markedly absent are the more pronounced ceramic markers of the site's Terminal Classic Rax and Transitional Morai Complexes. Clearly then, this positions the deposit at or around the final portion of the eighth century, occurring at some point between 750 and 800, with the latter end being considered the more likely. In terms of Guenter's reconstructed king list for the site, this would place the ceremony between the ill-fated Bahlam Tz'am, captured by Tikal, and the final known ruler of El Perú-Waka', Aj Yax Chow Pat (Guenter 2005). This makes the events of the N14-2 deposit roughly coeval with the early portions of the ancestor shrine of M14-15 (Eppich 2007). The polychrome bowls from that structure's Burial 21, in particular, closely match those recovered from N14-2. Indeed, especially given the brief period for the Tolok Group's occupation, it is not unlikely that the Burial 21 individual may have been physically present for the ritual events described here.

In terms of the ceramic assemblage, three considerations immediately come to mind. First is the near-total lack of cooking vessels. Missing are the thick, heavy unslipped sherds of kitchen debris; absent completely



Figure 9. The ceramic hand drum.

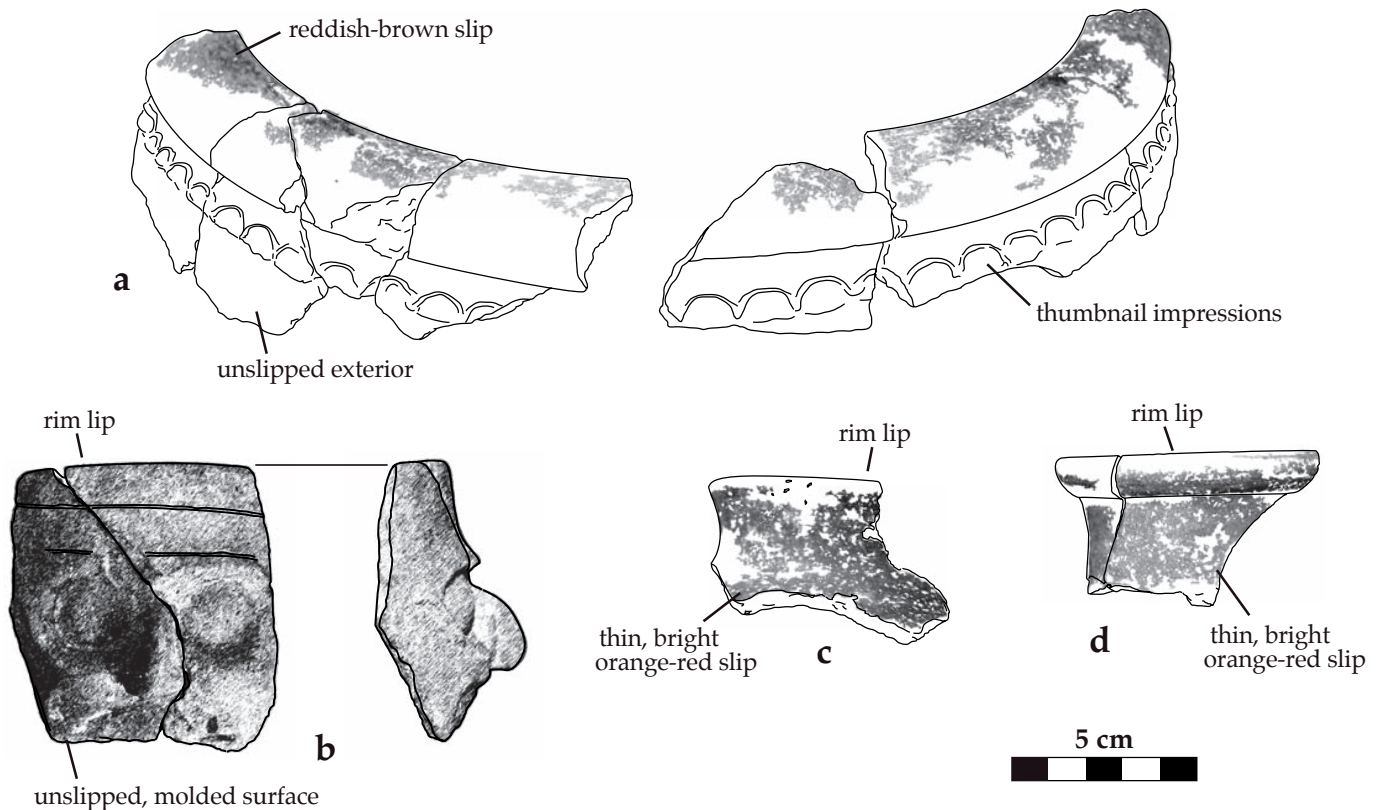


Figure 10. Ceramic vessels of the N14-2 deposit.

are fire-marked sherds, ceramics that have sat for some time on an open flame. Nowhere in the deposit are there even fragments of a mano or metate. Secondly, the assemblage clearly possesses a high proportion of polychrome serving vessels. Six of the seventeen identifiable vessels are polychromes, 35% of the entire assemblage. Even though the design elements are quite simple, circumferential bands or geometric or animal patterns, this remains a high proportion of polychromes, especially when compared to the kitchen debris of N14-2's East Midden, which contained 1.3% polychrome sherds, by count. Third is the presence of ceremonial ceramics, being the ceramic drum, figurines, and the incensario fragments, including the leering god-face (Figures 10–11). Both remain very typical for the late facet of the Late Classic ceramic corpus, indicating a pronounced ritual element for the assemblage. Additionally, the edges of the sherds require some mention. They are fresh and uneroded, lacking any significant degree of weathering, the refitting sherds snapping neatly into place. Clearly these ceramic fragments saw little or no degree of water action across their surfaces, further distinguishing them from the ceramics of regular kitchen middens.

Four vessels in particular stand out (Figure 8). Largely reconstructed during analysis, the distressed surfaces are unfortunately a result of the thin, poorly-bonded slips produced towards the end of the Late Classic. The

first is Vessel 5, a small polychrome bowl with designs executed in black and dark red on a creamy baseslip (Figure 8b). The main design, located on the exterior, appears to be an “animal print” of irregular spots, executed in black (see Smith 1955:62). It is similar to vessels recovered from Tikal and assigned to that site's Late Classic Imix Complex (Culbert 1993:Figs. 61a2, 63c). Such bowls are very common and have been found with glyphs describing their use, from serving *atole*, *u-lu*, to cleaning the brushes of scribes (Stuart 2005:130, 142). A similar vessel, K9112 in the Kerr Archive at www.mayavase.com, held *atole*, and also dates from eighth century El Perú-Waka'. Given the ubiquity of this form, it can be suggested that such bowls most likely served as general utility serving vessels for soups, gruels, sauces, or drinks of any manner (see Houston et al. 2006:107-113).

Vessel 4 is a slightly smaller, less elaborate version of Vessel 5 (Figure 8c). It consists of a dark red design and black rim band placed on a bright orange baseslip. Like Vessel 5, the slip is thin and poorly bonded to the underlying paste. The design, what remains of it, consists of simple geometric red bands cutting diagonally across the exterior surface. Vessel 4 is one the flat-bottomed polychrome bowls mentioned above, known to be associated with *atole*, but more likely used to hold most any manner of soup or sauce. A superficial glance at Classic period foodstuffs would indicate a cuisine heavy on



Figure 11. Ceramic incensario with modeled face.

saucers and soups, perfect for drinking or the dipping of tamales. Bowls like Vessels 4 and 5 constitute roughly a third (29%) of the identifiable vessels from the N14-2 deposit. Certainly comparative studies from similar deposits would make very interesting reading as to the proportion of various vessel forms.

Vessel 2 is somewhat unusual, a hemispherical bowl with a restricted orifice, a tecomate (Figure 8d). It is additionally a polychrome tecomate, possessing a design of simple geometric bands of black and red executed on a creamy orange baseslip. The manner of slip is very similar to that used on Vessel 5. Tecomates, however, are not generally used as servingware, and rarely show polychrome designs (see Culbert 1993:Table 5, "Barrels," Fig. 131b; Sabloff 1975:Fig. 267). In the recovered ceramics of El Perú-Waka', the known tecomates either show a simple monochrome red slip or no slip at all. Like the flat-bottomed bowls above, it would seem that Vessel 2 most likely functioned as a piece of general purpose servingware. However, ritual meals known from

Colonial-period documents involved the participants drinking chocolate, specifically using small tecomates (Norton 2006). Decorated tecomates for ritual meals are well known for the Formative and Preclassic periods (see Clark and Blake 1994; Culbert 1993:Fig. 116). While Vessel 2's function in the ritual meal can only be guessed at, its usage as a chocolate-drinking cup does not seem unreasonable.

Vessel 6 is the striking ceramic hand drum found scattered across the whole of the N14-2 deposit (Figures 8a, 9). The exterior surface holds a thin, poorly-bonded, bright orange slip. The distressed surface has lost most of this and the slip is present only in irregular patches. The interior surface is unslipped and unsmoothed, the soft folds of the clay rings used in its construction being easily visible. The main design consists of a series of fine line post-slip incisions on the exterior surface. The lines largely form simple geometric circumferential patterns, including a repeated pattern of step-fret motifs (see Smith 1955:67). Towards the base of the hand drum



Figure 12. Hand drums in Classic Maya vessel scenes: (top) photograph K1082 © Justin Kerr, (bottom) photograph K1549 © Justin Kerr.

appears to be an incised design of a pair of inverted pyramids. The designs certainly resemble known depictions of Classic-period architecture (Houston 1998:335-336). The figures seem to consist of a stepped structure with flowery plumes coming from the upper corners. Ceramic hand drums like this are not a common occurrence in the archaeological record (Hammond 1972:127-128; Inomata et al 2001:298). Examples such as Vessel 6, termed “pedestal-vase drum” by Norman Hammond (1972:128), would have been covered at the larger end with a taut animal skin and played by the hand or with a rubber-tipped stick (Houston et al. 2006:261-262; Tozzer 1941). Such hand drums appear in the corpus of painted Maya ceramics, associated with processions, dances, sacrifices and feasts (Houston et al 2006:261-263). In short, percussive music occurs in tandem with most of the known Classic Maya rituals. In the Kerr Archive, K1082 pictures a Maya lord playing a drum tucked under one arm during a war event (Figure 12 top). On K1549, a musician accompanies an erotic dance while playing a ceramic drum virtually identical to Vessel 6, holding it

in one hand while playing it with his palm (Figure 12 bottom). Ceramic hand drums seem associated with deposits in elite compounds, an association that Vessel 6 clearly supports (Bourg 2005:75).

Of the remaining vessels, most remain in a highly fragmentary state, being reconstructible only along the rim and base. Four of these require some mention here. Modeled ceramic sherds, flares, small flowers, and earflares were recovered from different sections of the deposit. These are almost certainly part of a single broken incensario (Figure 10b). A large rimsherd, that of a god face was recovered not only in two widely scattered portions of the deposit, but actually recovered in two different field seasons, the left side in 2005 and the right the next year. They fit together perfectly. There is a single, large vessel that may be associated with food preparation, a large, wide-bodied jar with a bolstered rim (Figure 10a). Only the rim could be reconstructed, but a large number of bodysherds of this same vessel are present throughout the deposit. So, at least partially, at this feast some of the food may have been brought

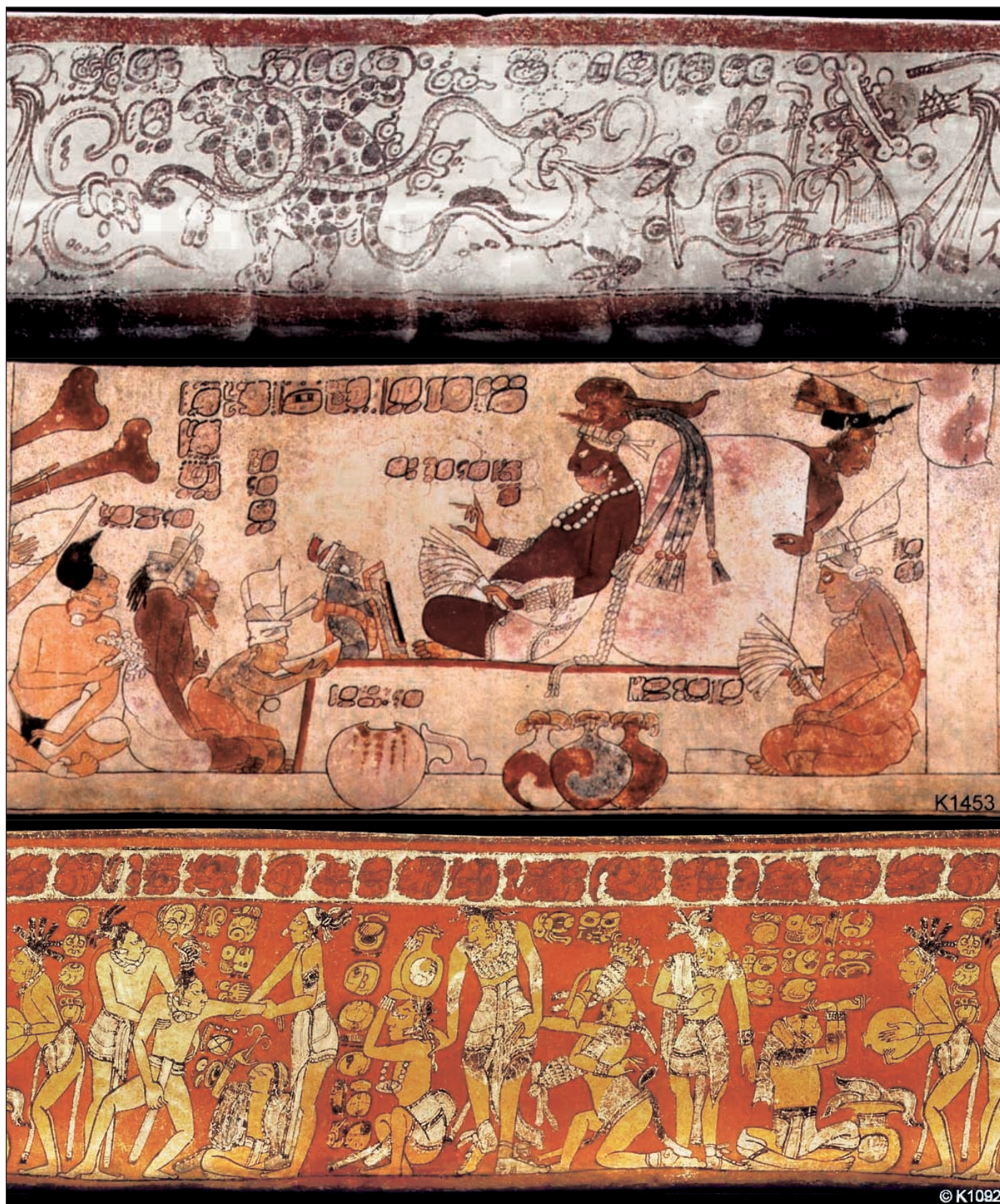


Figure 13. Ollas in Classic Maya vessel scenes: (top) photograph K2284 © Justin Kerr, (center) photograph K1453 © Justin Kerr, (bottom) photograph K1092 © Justin Kerr.

directly from the “kitchen” and served in the container in which it was cooked. There are two large, orange-slipped jars present as well (Figure 10c–d). Jars are generally associated with food preparation, and, indeed, in Hendon’s excellent typology of Maya vessel forms are grouped with “functional storage” (Hendon 2003:219). However, such jars appear as servingware in the corpus of Maya art, serving a very specific role. Some appear to be carried by gods or spirits and are associated with an *ak’bal*, “darkness” glyph, emergent bees, and fermenting honey. In the Kerr Archive, on K2284, God A’ holds a large olla with bees flying out of it (Figure 13 top). On K1453, a lord appears in a scene with honey fermenting in ollas beside him (Figure 13 center). There seem to be connections between God A’, feasts, honey, and ollas, sometimes in use in enema scenes (Kerr n.d., see also K1092, K1890, K3431, K4922, K5070, K7152). On K1092, amidst a scene of general debauchery, a figure balances a jar on his head marked with the T671, Manik glyph, which may be related to the *aj chi* glyph, meaning drunkard (Kerr 1989:58) (Figure 13 bottom). Jars, then, fit into a type of servingware present in Classic feasts, probably holding sweet, fermented honey. Admittedly speculative, Vessels 7 or 9 may have functioned in this role, holding honey or some honeyed beverage.

There remains one final observation concerning the vessels of the N14-2 deposit. In feasting depicted in the corpus of Maya art, there appear slender cylinder vases indicative of the Late Classic (Reents-Budet 2000:1025; Reents-Budet et al. 1994:74–83). These vessels, whether simple monochromes or elaborate full-figural polychromes, functioned as holders of various flavors of chocolate (Reents-Budet 2006; Stuart 2006). Indeed, so central is the role of drinking cacao in Classic society that it remains conceptually difficult to conceive of a Maya ceremony occurring without its consumption (see LeCount 2001). This seems doubly true of feasting events, in which cacao drinking largely served as the central point and primary component of the meal itself (see Reents-Budet 2006:205–206). However, the N14-2 deposit lacks any of these drinking vessels, the slender cylinder vases known from the period. The tecomate, Vessel 2, may have served cacao, but this remains far from certain. Also, it is not as if such cylinder vases are unknown at El Perú-Waka’. Burial 21 from the nearby Structure M14-15 holds a beautiful Ik’-style polychrome cylinder vase (Eppich 2007). The L13-21 cache also contains a pair of beautiful, if highly distressed, full-figural polychrome vases (Arroyave 2006; Arroyave and Matute 2005). Such vessels are present at El Perú-Waka’ for the Late Classic in the burials and caches of the eighth century. So why are they missing from the N14-2 deposit? In the elite feasts of the day, almost as important as the social gathering itself was a tradition of gifting, specifically of beautiful vessels (Reents-Budet 2006:206–207). This would impact the archaeological record in highly

predictable ways, in that gifted items are unlikely to turn up in the kratophanous debris following such events. In other words, chocolate vases were almost certainly present at the feast, but instead of being smashed with other servingware, these tall drinking vases were taken home by the participants. Whether this holds true in other deposits of feasting debris is an intriguing possibility, but one well beyond the capacity of this small paper.

Conspicuous consumption and social mobility

In conclusion, feasting events, like the one that created the N14-2 deposit, did more than serve a purely ritual function. Feasts played an important role in the fabrication and maintenance of social position, acting as one of the means by which a societal elite fashioned and sustained their station in life. Elite lineages manifested their wealth through such acts of conspicuous consumption, securing social and political alliances and displaying the wherewithal to gather and expend considerable largesse (Hendon 2003:204–206; Reents-Budet 2000:1029, 2006:206–207; Smith et al. 2003:25). In this way, in the accumulation of social position through the expenditure and distribution of material resources, Classic feasting events may be considered as a kind of “Maya potlatching” (Rathje 2002). Elite groups utilized such acts to establish their own internal hierarchies as well as a social pecking order in relation to other, competitive noble lineages and probably in relation to the ruling family (Hendon 2003:226; Pohl and Pohl 1994:141–142; see also Houston 2006:144–145). In many ways, to be considered elite one needed to possess wealth enough to dispose of it in ritual feasts.

It would follow then that groups initially establishing themselves in new areas must demonstrate their status through ritual acts of conspicuous consumption. This would apply equally to lineage groups seeking elite status or for an elite group entering new surroundings. Certainly some degree of spatial and social mobility is known for the Colonial Maya, with strong arguments that such mobility, among elites and commoners alike, was present in the Classic period (Ball and Taschek 2001:168–170; Inomata 2004:182–183; Palka 1997:303–304). Additionally, some degree of purely social mobility was likely present as well with groups capable of shifting status from “commoner” to “elite” (Chase 1992:37–47; Demarest 2005:171; McAnany 1993:69–70; Rathje 1970:366–368). Definitely, no one has ever suggested that Classic Maya society resembled a rigid caste system. This social mobility is essentially William Rathje’s 2002 argument, that the politics of social production and dispersal would impact the social order in predictable ways, i.e., creating groups of nouveau elite. The modification added here would add that such social dynamism would not necessarily be limited to the Late Preclassic, as Rathje suggests it is, but such mobility may have very well been present throughout Classic civilization.

Archaeological evidence for such mobility would consist of large ceremonial deposits that coincide with the foundation of residence compounds, especially one being established in the midst of a long-occupied settlement. In other words, deposits just like the one recovered from under the staircase at Structure N14-2. This group, new on the landscape, demonstrates elite status by holding a large ritual feast.

It would, however, take many more instances of similar correlations to state in any definitive way the relations that exist between Classic feasting deposits and the social mechanisms that fueled them. Hopefully in the near future this deposit may serve as part of some larger, comparative study of the same. The variation present in the archaeological record of Classic civilization can illuminate the social dynamism that was present in Classic society. At present, the N14-2 deposit simply allows a peak through the keyhole, so to speak, at one event taking place at eighth-century El Perú-Waka'. There occurred a ritual feast in a newly founded residence compound, one involving the smashing of vessels from the feast and the potential gifting of others; there may have been human sacrifice, and it might have impressed the neighbors to some extent. We will need many more such keyholes into the past to fully understand the ceremonial, social, and spiritual details of Classic Maya ritual.

The N14-2 deposit remains a complex intersection of ritual, feast, sacrifice, and social dynamism, one at least partially explored and explained here.

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Morley's Diary, 1932

Editor's note

A leading archaeologist of his time, Sylvanus Griswold Morley was an Associate of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, the foremost organization excavating archaeological sites in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras in the early part of the twentieth century. This diary continues his account of the Carnegie Institution's expedition to Calakmul begun on April 3, 1932. Morley's professional companions were his wife Frances, Karl Rupert, John Bolles and Gustav Stromsvic. Reference is made to biologist Cyrus L. Lundell, who conducted the first scientific investigations at Calakmul and brought the site to the attention of the Carnegie Institution.

April 26 - Tuesday

We were pretty tired out – as they express it down here “estropiada del viaje” – this morning. A chicken had been ordered yesterday from the bush. That is when I wrote in to Señor Bolívar, I had requested him to have a chicken prepared for supper, believing at first that we would be in by seven at the latest. This chicken deliciously garnished with saffron, frijoles, tortillas, and eggs made a very palatable breakfast which we did not finish until ten o'clock.

Karl, in spite of the beating he took yesterday, is much better this morning. His fever, vomiting, racking pains, etc. are gone. He remains very weak much as yesterday but on the whole is definitely better. He talks like himself and is on the mend. We are plying him with 25 grains a day, however, to sop up the end of the business.

We spent the morning variously waiting for Don Francisco's remaining White truck to take us on the next lap of our journey to La Gloria. Karl slept until after ten, Gustav and John returned to their hammocks by the aguada and Francisco was busy repacking and superintending luncheon. Arturo is blah a good half of the time, and either stupid or stubborn, cannot or will not do what he is told.

I foresaw a long session with my diary as I had two

eventful days to write about. So after breakfast I went into Don Manuel's office and wrote until after one.

There are various estimates as to when the truck will arrive from La Gloria; these ran from 11 A. M. to 6 P. M. Don Manuel's messenger reached Tanché this morning at six and probably found the truck somewhere between there and La Gloria. Don Manuel says it will be here anywhere between 2 and 6.

There was one false alarm during the morning, when some idler outside said he heard the truck but this proved to be a dud.

While I was writing, Frances arranging about lunch, Gustav and John sleeping under their pabellones, Tarsisio gave Karl a hot bath and a shave. He had perspired heavily during the night, and when Tarsisio had finished with him, Karl said he felt like a new man.

The youth, who had come out yesterday with Don Manuel's message, one Carlos Herrera, turned out to be a brother-in-law of Pablo Guerra, at Benque Viejo. Not the Pablo Guerra, who used to be comandante of Plancha Piedra back in 1916 at the time of Moises La Fleur's tragic death, but that Pablo's son.

He knew many people both at Benque Viejo and El Cayo whom I knew: Father Versavel, Father Stevenson, Domingo Espot, Eduardo Savala, Alvaro Habet, Messiah and others. He – this young Carlos – is also a son of a sister of Don Francisco Buenfils, which accounts for his being here at El Rio I suppose. He is an amiable youth of about 20.

Having had breakfast so late, it was ten when we finally left the table, we did not have lunch until two which gave me almost four hours which I devoted to writing up diary with the result that I had caught up to yesterday before lunch.

We had another one of the Señora's chicken luncheons; a toothsome mixture of chicken, rice and chayotes, which was delicious.

After luncheon Frances and I tried to take a siesta but what with the fleas and the heat we could not make the grade.

Last night when we got here I put my note case on a stone water filter and found a hen sitting inside! This morning the first thing I did on getting up was to see a tiny white rabbit not more than 2 weeks old, playing around my cot. Later in the day Tarsisio picked a pig louse off Frances, and still later through an acute sense of smell detected two small dead rabbits in the room which we occupied temporarily.

I wrote in my diary until four and then Frances and I took a shower bath. Very primitive but cooling. Afterward I brought this diary up to last night.

At 5:30 the camion (truck) had not come and Don Manuel wanted to know what I was going to do i.e. whether I would send our baggage on to Tanché by carts at six this evening, leaving ourselves riding animals; or whether I would sit by and wait for the camion to come.

I decided at once that we would have to get on as far as possible anyway possible and that we could not wait for a truck which might or might not show up.