

# The San Bartolo Regional Archaeological Project: Results of the Second Field Season 2003<sup>1</sup>

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The San Bartolo Regional Archaeological Project is a multidisciplinary program of investigation jointly conducted by the universities of New Hampshire and San Carlos de Guatemala. It brings together specialists in archaeology and anthropology whose work has provided new data of great importance for the interpretation of the social and geo-political context of the site as well as the surrounding area.

In pursuit of its objectives in 2003 the Project undertook a diverse range of activities, allocating half of its time to following up on the work conducted the previous year as regards architectural investigation, site mapping, ceramic analysis, and the investigation and preservation of San Bartolo's murals. Other activities were initiated in this field season and will be continued in the next. All have been directed toward understanding and preserving the cultural patrimony of Guatemala. Here we present new findings and the results obtained in the second field season of work.

## General Description

San Bartolo is a small city, but it possesses all of the hallmarks of a complex society that interacted with other cities of greater and lesser size. This has motivated us to undertake long-term investigations in order to understand the social, religious, and political ideologies of the city's inhabitants, as well its relationship with other sites of greater importance such as Uaxactun, Tikal, and El Mirador.

The site, occupying an area of one square kilometer, is surrounded by *bajos* and features two principal

architectural groups (Figure 1). The largest is associated with the Ventanas pyramid. The sector of the site in which this is located comprises an important palace structure, a ballcourt, and a causeway oriented north and south, as well reservoirs and important residential groups. The other principal architectural complex is that centered on the Pinturas pyramid, which is located approximately 500 m east of Ventanas. It is within construction phase Sub-1 of this pyramid that the polychrome murals of San Bartolo are found, as was reported last year in the XVI Simposio de Investigaciones en Guatemala.

One of the objectives of the San Bartolo project is to reconnoiter and map the site, as well as the adjacent areas. This activity was undertaken by Thomas Garrison, Robert Griffin, and William Saturno, who conducted three phases of reconnaissance work. The first was within the site and consisted in the refinement on the map of architectural features in the areas excavated this season, including the Palace, Las Ventanas, Las Pinturas, and the residential areas adjacent to the Main Plaza. Surprisingly, they encountered a new complex called "Grupo Jabalí," which is located 430 m northeast of the Ventanas pyramid.

Another accomplishment was a transect between San

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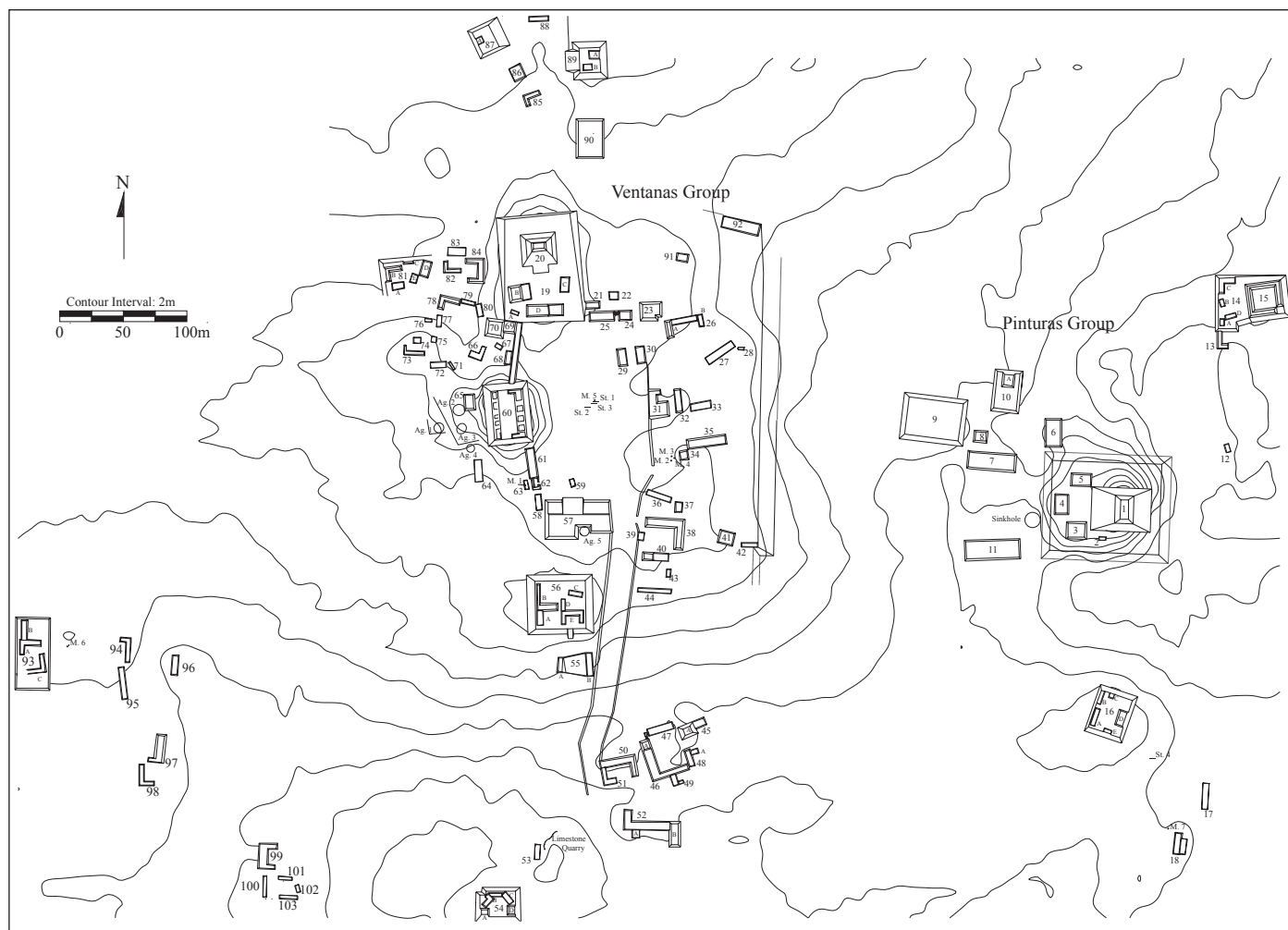


Figure 1. Map of the San Bartolo archaeological site.

Bartolo and the archaeological site of Xultun, located eight kilometers away. In this zone the reconnaissance team cut a *brecha* which will serve as a baseline for the future, and they proceeded to map the intersite zone, including the site of Chaj Kek' Cue. Finally, they undertook a preliminary reconnaissance of the San Bartolo regional zone, in which they located four sites including La Prueba, Las Minas, Oxtun, and Xixi.

For this reconnaissance work they used maps provided by NASA and Geographic Information System (GIS) as well as Global Positioning System (GPS) technology.

### Analysis of Ceramic Material

Kerry Sagebiel, Patricia Rivera, and Mónica Pellecer were in charge of the work of cleaning, cataloging, and analyzing the materials recovered in field investigations this season, in consultation with Fred Valdez.

Based on preliminary studies, the time period in which San Bartolo flourished extends from the Middle Preclassic (700–300 BC) to the Late Preclassic (300 BC – AD 150). The majority of the units analyzed correspond to the Late Preclassic, with intrusions of Middle Preclassic material. There is also some Protoclassic (AD 150–300) material present.

San Bartolo presents a pattern similar to that of other nearby sites, with a light occupation in the Middle Preclassic and the greatest peak in the Late Preclassic and Protoclassic, followed by a clear absence in the Early Classic (AD 300–600) and then a Late Classic (AD 600–900) resurgence. In general, an occupation corresponding to the Late Preclassic Chicanel ceramic phase has been identified in the larger structures such as Las Pinturas, Las Ventanas, the Palace, and the Ballcourt. In the residential areas, various remodelings have been identified, in the first construction phases of which Late Preclassic materials are present while Late

Classic materials predominate in the later construction phases.

Finally, Harriet Beaubien and her team have been working in the laboratory on the cleaning, conservation, and restoration of the archaeological materials such as vases, stuccoes, bones, etc.

### Residential Group Adjacent to the Ventanas Pyramid

This area was excavated by Mónica Pellecer. The residential group is located immediately to the west of the platform that supports the Ventanas architectural complex (Figure 3). The buildings sit on a leveling surface of sand and brownish, gravelly soil over bedrock. The group consists of three structures and a small, open patio. Structure 82 is L-shaped and sits in front of Structure 83, a rectangular platform. Structure 84 is U-shaped and located to the east of the two other buildings. The excavations revealed that these structures were originally rectangular platforms before various remodelings. But in general each takes the form of a low platform with an access step and a house of perishable material on top, although Structure 83 has the remains of very badly preserved walls.

Other interesting findings include the stones of the last construction phase, which are of different composition than those used earlier, and in the eastern section of Structure 84 one exterior wall is decorated with a cornice. Finally, a looters' tunnel was cleaned and found to contain the remains of two individuals whose funerary context was destroyed by the looters.

### Structure 63

This building is found to the south of the Palace. In the previous field season, the cleaning of one of its looters' trenches revealed the presence of a carved monument, which was partially excavated and designated Monument 1 (Figure 2). This sculpture in the round was found in the context of a ceramic deposit dating to the Late Classic period. Jessica Craig and Astrid Runggaldier completed the investigation in the current season. Complete excavation of the monument revealed a figure in the form of a monkey with a turtle on its shoulder. Some details are difficult to discern given the state of erosion due to natural factors like plant roots, rain, and solar radiation in the areas exposed to those elements. Cleaning and conservation of the monument was undertaken to address the fact that the head of sculpture was found in a fragmentary and unstable condition. This was addressed by positioning a supporting base of bags filled with sand. The monument

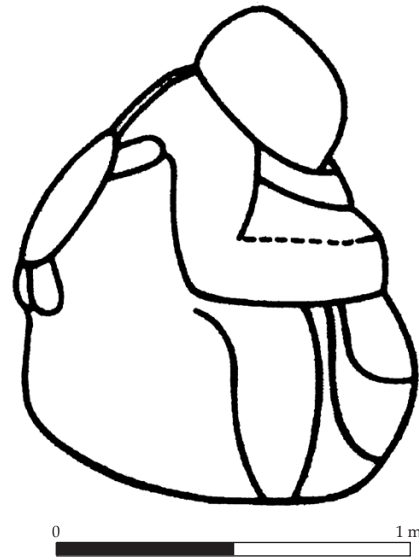


Figure 2. San Bartolo Monument 1 (from Craig 2005:Fig. 3).

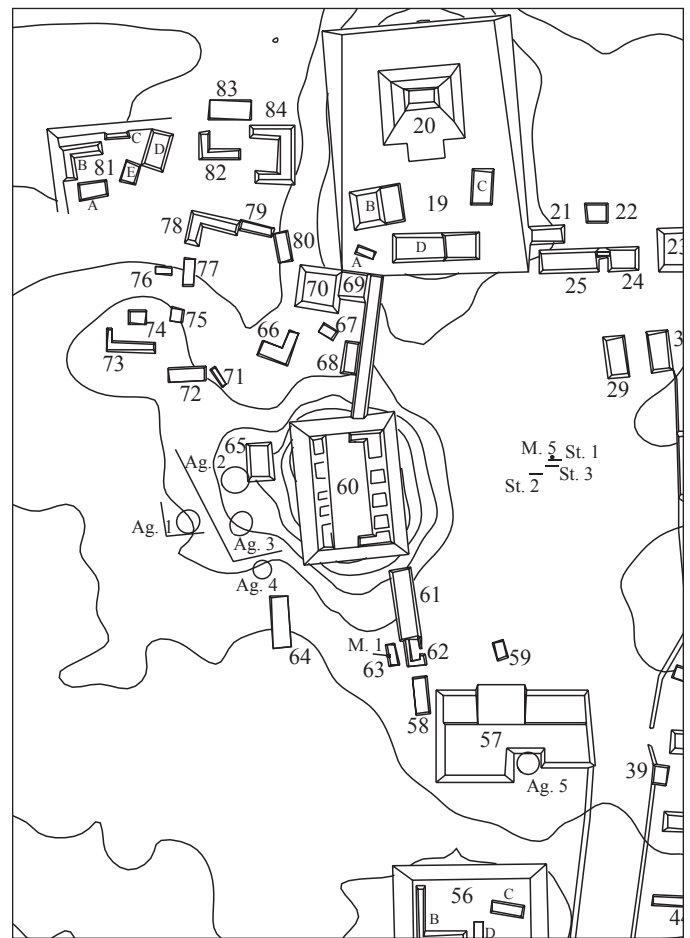


Figure 3. Detail of San Bartolo site map showing Ventanas architectural complex and pyramid (Structure 20), Structures 82-84, Tigrillo Palace (Structure 60), Structure 63, and find-spot of Monument 1 (M. 1).

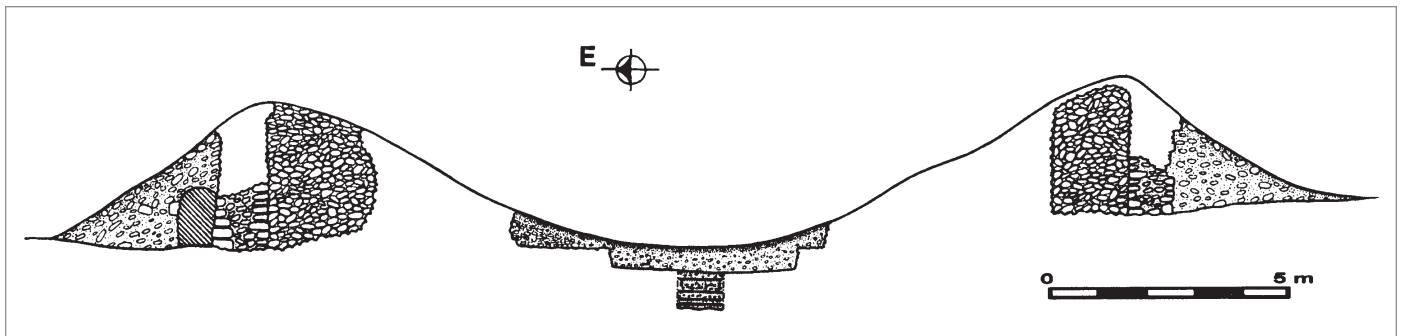


Figure 2. Cross-section of the San Bartolo ballcourt.

fragments were cleaned with water and brushes to be later joined together with Formula B-48N, a reversible polymer that holds up well in the ambient temperature of San Bartolo.

The excavations in Structure 63 detected at least four construction stages. The first corresponds to a leveling of clay over bedrock, followed by a series of floors associated with an unworked stone abutment which could have been a retaining wall. In the second phase a new floor was laid in association with a wall which seems to include a door jamb. For the third phase a stucco platform was constructed on top of the previous floors and it also was covered with a floor. These three phases have been dated to the Late Classic. The fourth phase saw the covering of the platform for the construction of a small enclosure that functioned as a shrine for Monument 1. This construction material also dates to the Late Classic, as does the associated ceramic deposit and a cache composed of two vases. In addition, cleaning and excavation of a long platform located between the Palace and Structure 63 was undertaken. The cleaning of a looters' tunnel in this building exposed a wall and two floors, one with an associated step. A test pit was sunk in order to observe the other side of the structure, but without success given that trees had destroyed the greater part of the architecture.

### Main Plaza

In the Main Plaza of San Bartolo, Robert Griffin sunk a five-meter test pit to the west of the Palace, on an alignment between the center of that complex and the Ventanas pyramid. This pit revealed a succession of compacted floors, which measured 15 m in total and reached a depth of 1.75 meters. The majority of these floors were .05–.10 m in thickness, and in some cases one was located beneath another with no intervening stratum. Other floors consisted of remodelings or levelings of the plaza. One thousand sherds dating to

the Late Preclassic were recovered.

### Ballcourt

The ballcourt of San Bartolo, located on the east side of the Main Plaza, is comparatively small in size. Excavations by Carolina Díaz-Samayoá exposed the architecture of this small complex. The open-ended playing field is marked off by two parallel platforms, each with a bench, talud, and cornice. A succession of floors was found to cover parts of the benches of both structures, down to the level of the field (Figure 2). In general, the architecture is in a very poor state of preservation, in that trees have displaced many of the stones. In addition, seven looters' pits and trenches have left the structure in a sorry state.

### Tigrillo Palace

The Tigrillo Palace is found to the west of the Main Plaza (Figure 3). Astrid Runggaldier and Mónica Pellecer undertook investigations of its final construction phase, cleaning and recording looters' trenches. In addition they cleaned and excavated the exterior architecture on the western and northern sides. This area was found to be comprised of a building with five rooms, access to which was defined by eight stairs and a landing, which runs the length of the entire complex.

Other activities included the shoring up of sections damaged by looting and the construction of platforms on scaffolding for the collection of dirt from the excavations, in order to prevent it from falling into the plaza.

### Ventanas Pyramid

Mónica Urquizú undertook new explorations of the Ventanas pyramid. Data recovered from illicit excavations and the investigation carried out the previous year by Héctor Escobedo reveal that the pyramid is comprised of four construction phases and

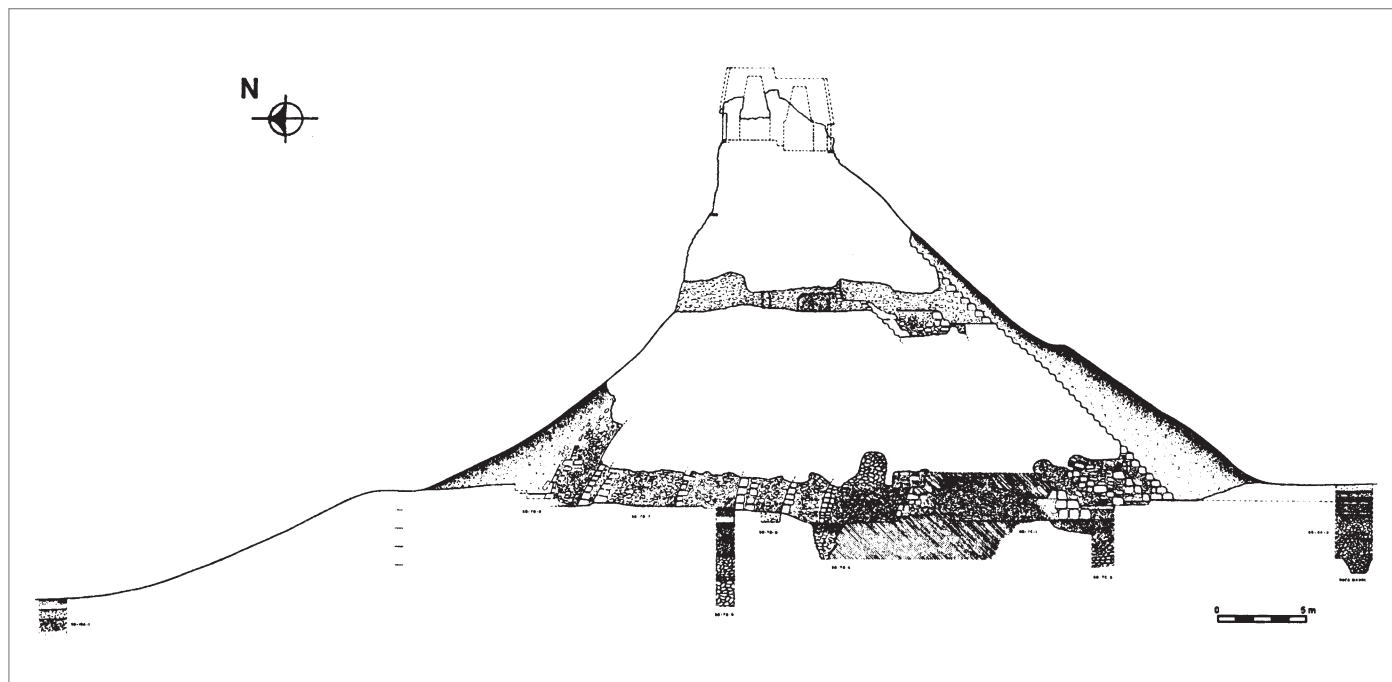


Figure 3. Cross-section of the Ventanas pyramid.

at least four remodelings (Figure 3). The architecture is characterized by terraces with apron moldings and fill composed of a large proportion of flint with particulate limestone. The upper portion supports chambers with masonry walls, and although no remains of vaults were found in the earlier constructions, part of a vault and its support were present in the final phase. In addition, some of the benches were uncovered as well as one of the windows that gives the pyramid its name (this was in the north wall of the sanctuary). The greater part of the building is made up of fill with very little mortar and consequent instability.

New investigations in 2003 began with the plotting of test pits in a tunnel located in the base of the pyramid at the rear. In this area the architecture of the first construction phase could be defined, with five terraces and the remains of the sanctuary wall. The masonry of this wall shows evidence of having been covered with stucco, with some signs of burning. As with the subsequent constructions, this one was partially destroyed and later covered with fill in order to begin construction of the next phase. The floors pertaining to each construction phase were identified, thereby more clearly defining the construction sequence of the building.

A looters' tunnel located in the upper part of the pyramid and running its entire length once more revealed the four construction phases. These were defined by means of very well preserved stairways, the

earliest of which date to the Mamom ceramic phase. A newly discovered looters' tunnel at the base of the pyramid on the front side was also cleaned. And this tunnel also revealed the four construction phases by transecting the stuccoed stairways. The stucco here is thick and very well preserved.

A test pit was also sunk in front of the pyramid, encountering a substructure representing an earlier version of the platform that supports the building complex. This entails a platform with a talud and a well-stuccoed surface. Apparently some sections were painted red, judging by the recovered fragments in this color.

Parallel to the work of excavation, that of consolidation and preservation was begun in the Ventanas pyramid, with the reinforcing and consolidating of the building's internal fill. This was made necessary by the looters' tunnel in the rear of the building at its base and the instability of the fill, which had partially collapsed. By means of reinforcements and bracing using stones from the fill itself, the building was stabilized and work could proceed with safety. In a similar fashion, the looters' tunnel on the facade side of the structure was also shored up. Finally, some of the trees that were damaging the architecture of the vault were cut down, thereby relieving pressure on the walls, and these were also braced as necessary. All the work was carried out by Aciscio Alvarado, Miguel Caal, and Leslie Rainer.

## Pinturas Pyramid

The Pinturas pyramid is located about 500 m east of the Ventanas complex. Four different illicit excavations have penetrated the pyramid, two in the front and two in the rear. The main one consists of a tunnel starting in the base of the pyramid and revealing a minimum of six construction phases. In the Pinturas pyramid Sub-1 structure, William Saturno and Diana Davies completed the exposure of the mural on the north wall, and in an excavation on the exterior side of that wall they discovered a frieze with red painting. The newly cleared section of the mural shows a number of ornately attired figures, as well as motifs symbolic of creation and power, while the exterior frieze represents a stylized bird. In addition to this work, the murals on the east and west walls were partially revealed. These display scenes with courtly figures.

A smaller side door to the murals chamber was located in the south wall close to the southeast corner. And cleaning of a portion of the mural on the east wall revealed a figure in a scene of autosacrifice. Also on the east side, the facade of another construction phase of the building was located and found to be attached to the southeast corner of Pinturas Sub-1. Meanwhile, on the north side, a newly excavated tunnel encountered a wall and a corner of another structure. Another tunnel was begun in the exterior facade of the pyramid with the intention of determining the architecture and construction sequence of this sector.

Aciscio Alvrado, Miguel Caal, and Leslie Rainer erected a wall that will serve as a base for the mural on the north side of Pinturas Sub-1 and provide for permanent stability. For this they utilized the same construction materials as those of the building itself, adding lime to the mixture in order to achieve greater solidity for the wall. They left a side door opening in the northeast corner of the building because the architecture *in situ* showed that one had existed there in the past.

A team made up of Angelyn Bass, Leslie Rainer, Harriet Beaubien, and Batyah Shtrum undertook the tasks of cleaning, conservation, and consolidation of the newly excavated sections of mural, as well analysis of the climate monitoring inside and outside the pyramid in order to establish the necessary regimen for the conservation of the mural.

## Conclusions

In its second field season, the San Bartolo Regional Archaeological Project has achieved its objectives in the field and in the lab.

Preliminary excavations in the Ventanas pyramid

have revealed the structure's considerable complexity, while the construction technique seems to point to a rapid planning and execution of the work.

Investigation and conservation of the Pinturas Sub-1 building proceeded apace with the clearing of the chamber and the careful preservation of its murals and surviving architecture. The scenes of the murals display a rich political and religious ideology. This heritage of San Bartolo's inhabitants would evolve and defuse through other regions and eras.

The second field season also saw the drafting and refinement of 80% of the site map, while the discovery of new settlements around San Bartolo has shed light on the geopolitical conformation of the area.

Ceramic analysis now provides a clearer picture San Bartolo's occupation and ritual activity from the Middle Preclassic to the Late Classic. This season's finds in Structure 63 provide valuable information on religious activities from the earliest times up until the Late Classic, the final moment of the site's occupation. This was also documented by the materials recovered in the residential areas adjacent to the Ventanas pyramid.

Finally, all of the work accomplished by the multidisciplinary team of the San Bartolo Project has gone toward a greater understanding of the architectural, social, and religious development of this region from its Preclassic beginnings, when the Maya founded settlements with great civico-religious works bespeaking a complex social organization.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our workers from the communities of Dolores and Uaxactun, without whose help the second field season would not have been possible.

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