

The San Bartolo Regional Archaeological Project: Results of the Third Field Season 2004¹

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The first two field seasons of our project in 2002 and 2003 disclosed the importance of San Bartolo and its cultural value to Guatemala. Continuing investigations in the current season have provided further details on chronology, architecture, and artwork, reinforcing many of the findings of the previous year.

In this season, work continued on the Pinturas and Ventanas pyramids and the Tigrillo palace, while new excavations were begun in the Main Plaza and the Las Plumas group, located southeast of the Causeway. The Jabalí group to the northeast of the site was also investigated for the first time, as well as a lithics workshop located in a residential area northeast of Ventanas (Figure 1).

Excavations in Chaj K'ek' Cue

This year the regional component of the San Bartolo project included excavations at the site of Chaj K'ek' Cue. While ground-testing satellite imagery in the 2003 field season, the reconnaissance team mapped the majority of this site, which is located on the shore of the Bajo Azúcar, three kilometers southeast of San Bartolo. The site has the potential to provide information on ancient adaptations to the regional landscape.

Excavations in Structure A revealed a floor with a level of remodeling without fill. The east and west walls were located, as well as a small plaza to the east of the structure. The majority of the ceramics were dated to the Late Classic but also included some Late Preclassic sherds. It seems that the structure was built in the Late Classic using Late Preclassic materials in some of the fill. Concurrent with this excavation, GPS reconnaissance

located further areas with mounds, chultuns, and terraces, which will be investigated in future years.

Reconnaissance

This year's reconnaissance team was directed by Thomas Garrison. The site map of San Bartolo was expanded to include new areas, like the Jabalí group, while previously mapped sections were corrected following excavations, as in the Las Plumas group, as well as the Ventanas and Tigrillo structures.

A second area of interest for the reconnaissance team was the intersite zone between San Bartolo and Xultun. In this 25 km² area, a ten percent sample is being mapped. Using satellite images from NASA, a series of 250 m² quadrangles have been plotted and designated for detailed reconnaissance using high-resolution GPS and a total station. The team, consisting of students from various universities in the U.S. and Jose Garrido López of Guatemala, mapped 25% of the sample area this season. These efforts will be followed up in the future with a more intensive mapping. The goal of the intersite study is to understand population dynamics during the Preclassic–Classic transition, using reconnaissance data and test pitting.

Finally, specialists in mapping and satellite imagery at NASA verified the data obtained in the field, comparing it to their satellite images.

Ceramic Analysis

This was undertaken by Patricia Rivera. The site's occupation begins in the Middle Preclassic and extends to the Terminal Classic. Preliminary analysis identified 17 complete vessels, eight from excavations and nine from reconnaissance. From the first group, six were assigned to the Late Preclassic and two to the Late Classic, while all of the vessels from reconnaissance date to the Late Classic.

The ceramic sample obtained shows a different surface finish in the three largest structures investigated, Pinturas, Ventanas, and the Palace. Late Classic material

¹ This article is a translation of Mónica Urquizú and William A. Saturno, 2005, Proyecto Arqueológico Regional San Bartolo, Petén: resultados de la tercera temporada de campo 2004, in *XVIII Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2004*, edited by Juan Pedro Laporte, Bárbara Arroyo, Héctor L. Escobedo, Héctor E. Mejía, v. 1, pp. 283-290. Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes; Instituto de Antropología e Historia; Asociación Tikal; Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Guatemala.

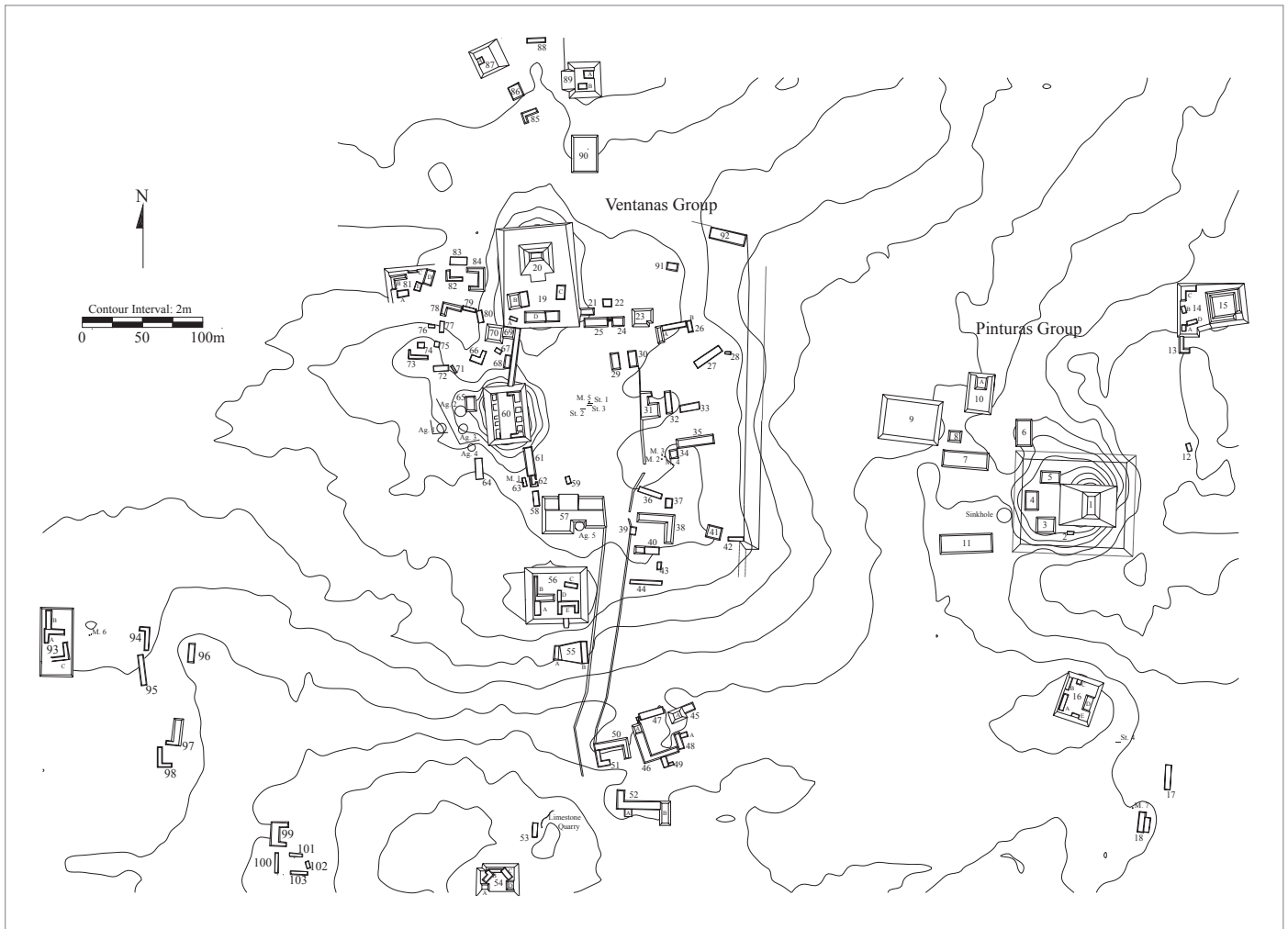


Figure 1. Map of the San Bartolo archaeological site.

was not found in these structures, only in the residential areas. Here a broad typological pattern extends from the Late Preclassic to the Late Classic. It is hoped that an investigation focused on technological function and raw materials will lead to an understanding of the development and specialization of the artisans manufacturing these ceramics.

Study of Lithic Artifacts

During the 2004 field season the study of San Bartolo's lithic artifacts was initiated by Joshua Kwoka, who discovered a lithic workshop in the vicinity of Structure 86, about 150 m north of the Ventanas pyramid. Excavations concentrated on a trash deposit next to Structure 86. Analysis of this material should throw light on the manufacture of tools as well as the quantity of lithic artifacts produced at the site. Future investigations will focus on the excavation of Structure 86 and the platform beside it (designated Structure 87), as well as the low, L-shaped Structure 85, also in this group.

Excavations in the Jabalí Group

The Grupo Jabalí is located 470 m west of the Ventanas pyramid. This is an architectural complex of the Triadic form, with a Late Classic occupation. It was discovered through NASA satellite photographs in 2003. Its architectural characteristics are similar to those of other contemporaneous sites like Group H at Uaxactun, the North Acropolis at Tikal, and the Danta complex at El Mirador.

This work was carried out by Mónica Pellecer. The group comprises a platform with inset stairways on its east side supporting three structures with a central patio. The building with the biggest dimensions (Structure A) is found on the west, on top of an elongated platform with a central stairway and corners formed by lateral stairways. The structure and its platform are oriented east-west. Its northern and southern sectors underwent a series of remodelings, probably during the Classic period.

One of the most interesting finds in this group

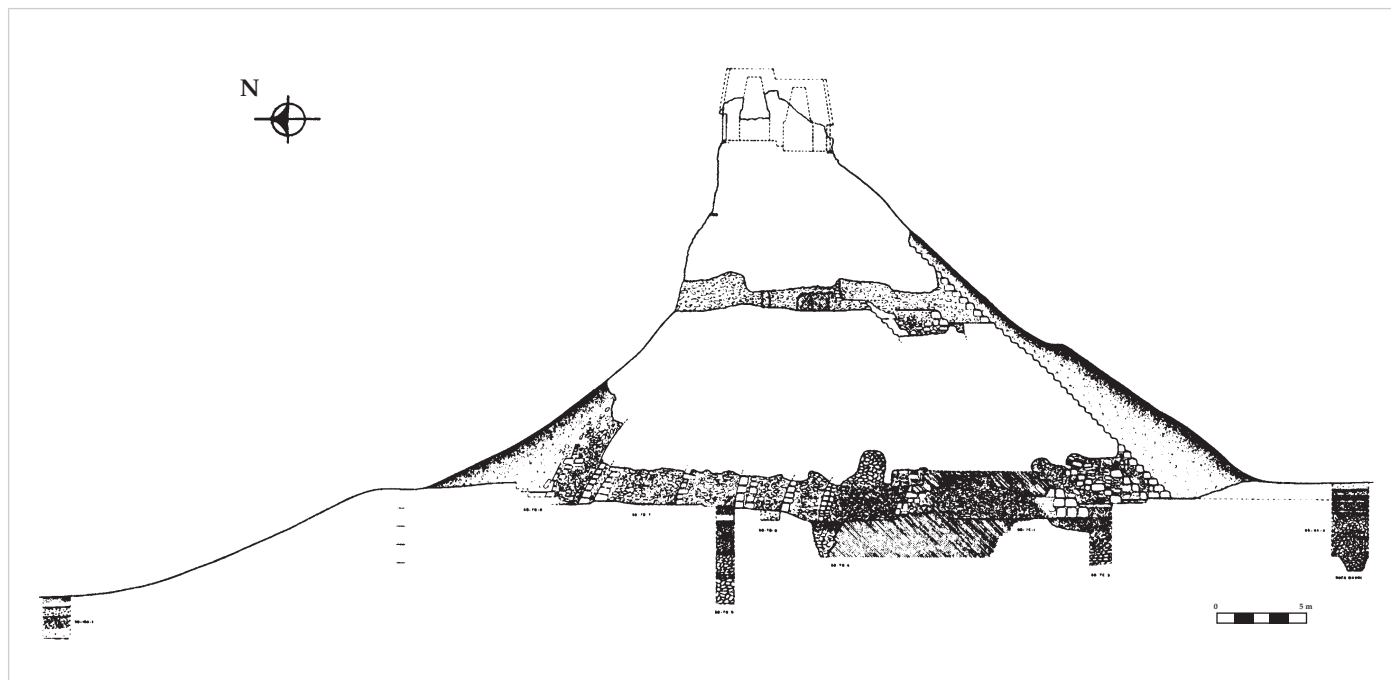


Figure 2. North-south profile of the of the Ventanas pyramid.

resulted from an excavation in which Mónica Pellecer was assisted by Julio Cotón. It involved a ritual deposit composed of two stuccoed walls sloped like taluds, with a slight depression in the central space between them.

Test Pitting in the Central Plaza

A program of test pitting was undertaken in the Central Plaza to obtain ceramic material in order to determine its chronology, as well as to identify the different construction phases and remodelings and the plaza's association with the different structures and their function. This work was done by Boris Beltrán with the assistance of Hugo Ortiz. The test pits were initially oriented to the cardinal directions, digging near each of the structures which surround the plaza. The investigation located thirteen distinct levels of plaza flooring on average, of which eight were remodelings. The preliminary analysis of the majority of the material recovered from the excavations pertains to the Late Preclassic.

Ventanas Pyramid

These excavations were conducted by Mónica Urquizú in collaboration with Orlando Moreno (Figure 2). Test pits detected the presence of architecture comprising a platform with apron molding, without a temple on its summit. No evidence of a perishable structure was encountered. The notably porous stone used in the pyramid's construction is largely unworked since it was

covered with a thick coating of stucco, which remains in a good state of preservation.

The alfarda of the pyramid's stairway was partially uncovered and observed to be similar to that of Structure E-VII-Sub at Uaxactun. Masks that had once decorated the second terrace of the building were found to be destroyed (Figure 3).

In addition to the work of filling in looters' tunnels, various test pits were sunk in order to find the second and fourth construction phases. The interior of a looters' tunnel in the middle of the pyramid's base was investigated. These tunnels were excavated on east-west and north-south axes in order to find the second construction phase of the pyramid.

Other test pits were sunk to locate the building's corners and a portion of the stairway of the final construction phase. The presence of lateral stairways flanking the central stairway was verified. And the building's corners were found to have insets. Investigation will continue in the future in order to completely understand the architecture of the final phase and probe for other masks within earlier versions of the facade.

Tigrillo Palace

This year saw continuing investigations of the Tigrillo palace complex, located along the west side of the Great Plaza to the southeast of the Ventanas pyramid. Preliminary excavations in the previous season had indicated the presence of Late Preclassic architectural phases.

Following up on this work, Astrid Runggaldier extended the program of test pitting in order to study the architectural form, remodelings, and dating of the final construction phase, focusing on the exterior of the rooms and the frontal access stairway. The largest excavation units exposed the principal stairway and investigated the central axis of the architecture.

It was determined that the upper part of the stairway was remodeled three times, culminating in a central access in the structure's facade, which is equal in size to the west side but with some differences in the doors and lateral rooms. The main access to the Upper Plaza was by way of two doors, given that the parallel structures of the palace offered ample visibility between the Upper Plaza and the Great Plaza. In front of the principal doorway, an intrusive burial was found, placed beneath the doorway opening after the abandonment of the complex. This was excavated by Astrid Runggaldier and Boris Beltrán. The skeleton was that of a young individual in an extended supine position, perpendicular to the door with the head to the north, interred with a necklace of 32 shells and accompanied by two inverted vessels, one on their right shoulder and the other on the left femur.

Also investigated was the structure located to the west of the Upper Plaza, an L-shaped building with rooms on the corners. One of these was excavated by Joseph Stair on the exterior southeast side and was found to have masonry in a good state of preservation.

Excavations in the Las Plumas Group

Also known by the designation Group 56, this is a

complex of residential function with administrative characteristics. It is found at the extreme south of the Main Plaza and west of the Causeway. It sits on a rectangular platform with two small patios formed by the largest structures, with the access stairway on the south. Structure A is L-shaped, while Structure B is in the form of a C. This pair closes off another structure of rectangular form in the extreme northeast of the platform.

The objectives were to understand the construction sequence and architectural development, as well as the chronology. This was achieved by excavation of a number of test pit units and the cleaning of looters' trenches. It was possible to define the door jambs of the structure and its enclosures. The room at the rear was found to have a bench and to be elevated on a higher level than the front room. Both had very well preserved stucco floors with traces of red paint. In terms of remodelings, it was originally a structure with three doors, which was later changed to two. One wall of Structure B is attached to Structure A. All of these architectural changes were associated with a level of covering ash. Finally, a test pit sunk in the plaza revealed various remodelings of its floor, as well as the remains of a platform belonging to an earlier phase (Figure 4). All of the recovered material is consistent with an occupation extending from the Late Preclassic to the Late Classic.

Pinturas Pyramid

Conservation and consolidation work was carried out in the room of the painted murals. A team made up of Angelyn Bass, Leslie Rainer, Lauren Meyer,

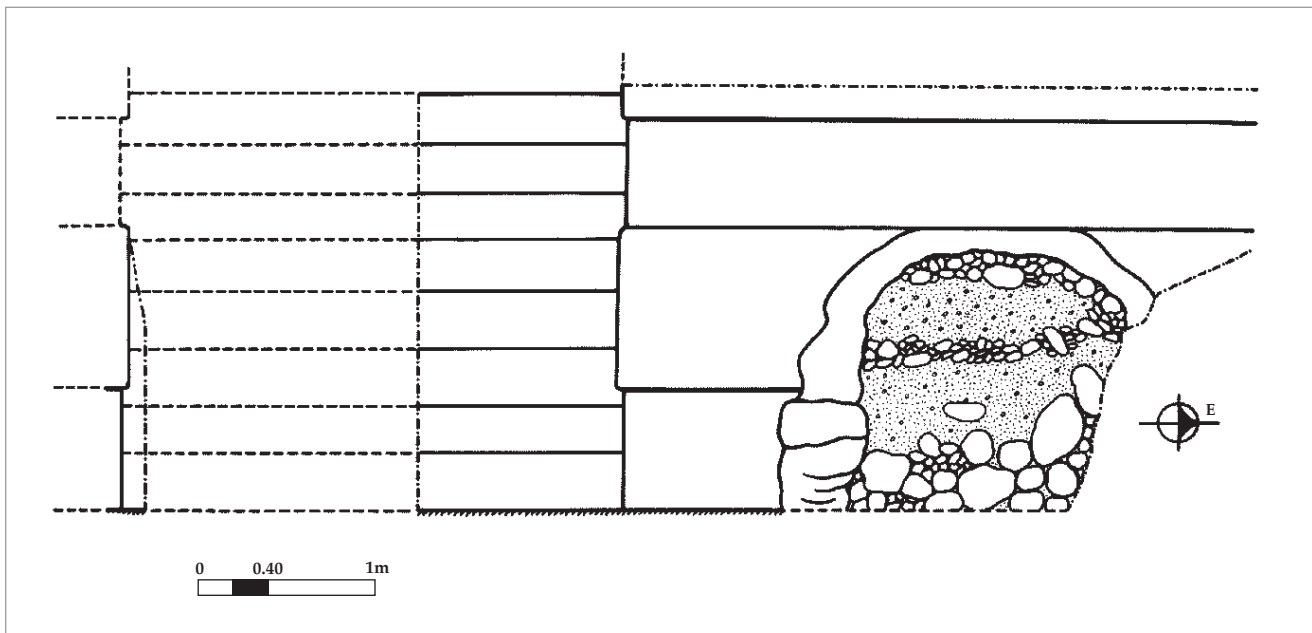


Figure 3. Elevation view of mask within the Ventanas pyramid.

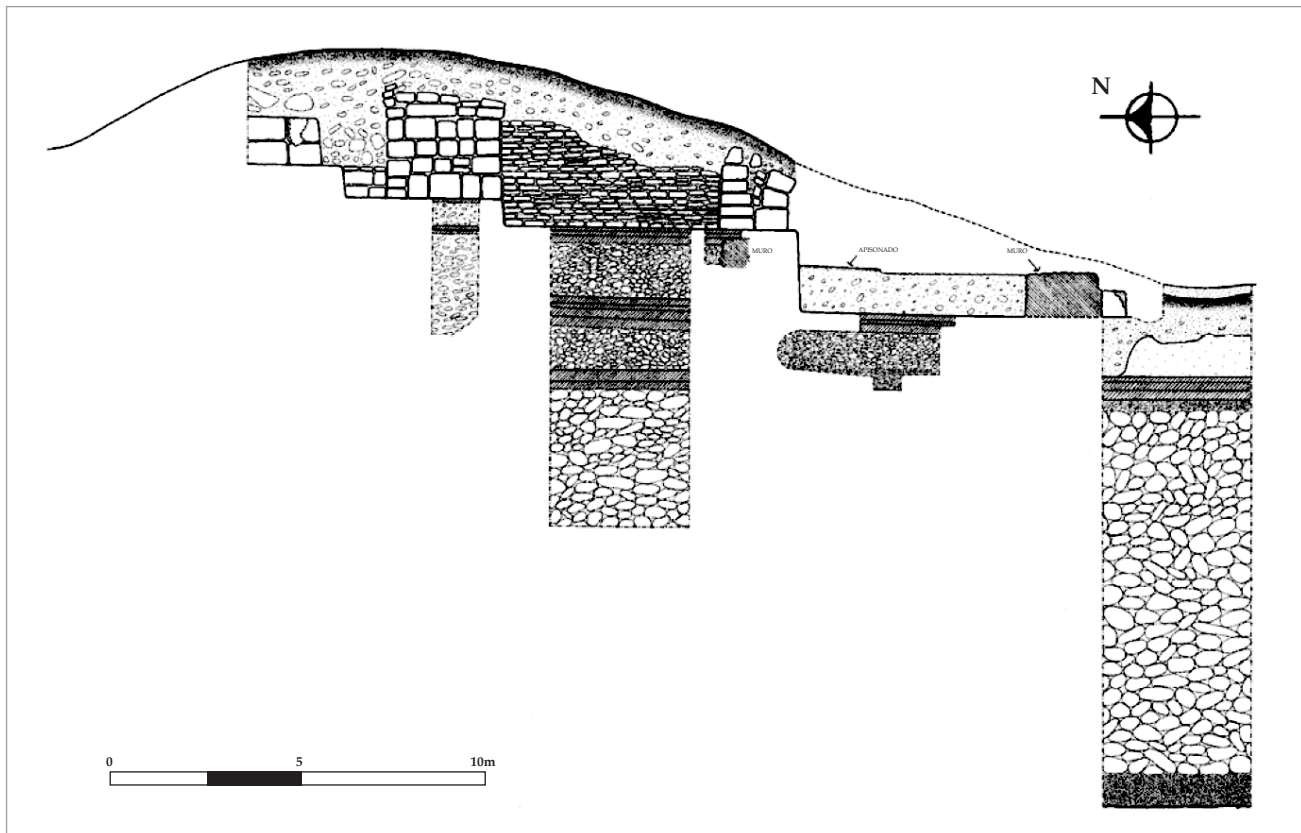


Figure 4. North-south profile of the Las Plumas Group.

Harriet Beaubien, and Claudia Chemello undertook the monitoring of the climate inside and outside the pyramid, cleaning of the surface of the mural to facilitate the study of its imagery, treatment of unstable areas, injection of mortar in superficial cracks, stabilization of the edges of fallen stucco, reintegration of fragments previously treated in 2003 into their original places, and photographic documentation of the mural's condition and treatment. Asisclo Alvarado and Miguel Caal filled in tunnels for the structural stability of the chamber.

William Saturno and Jessica Craig investigated the interior of the room, excavating a medial tunnel based on measurements from 2002. They recovered pieces of stucco throughout the tunnel.

The west wall of the mural displays mythological scenes with an emphasis on the origins of the cosmos. Others relate to the Maize God, showing stages of his birth and rebirth. Rituals of sacrifice are also depicted. The lines and color are executed with great mastery and delicacy, with well preserved colors and extremely well executed details.

Dating

Six carbon samples were taken in Pinturas Sub-1, from the jamb of the southern door, from the interior fill, and from beneath the floor of the chamber. The results

confirm the antiquity of the mural at a date reaching 100 BC. The preparation of the stucco used for the murals has resulted in their remaining in place for centuries, demonstrating a knowledge of the highest quality materials for the creation of the mural.

Conclusions

The third field season of the San Bartolo Regional Archaeological Project has achieved its objectives in the field and in the lab. Excavations in the Tigrillo palace revealed architectural features of great quality as well as masonry in a good state of preservation, while the discovery in the Ventanas pyramid of masks and stuccoed architecture similar to Uaxactun shows San Bartolo's religious importance during the Preclassic. Investigations by the project continue to reveal the mastery of the artists who executed the murals of San Bartolo, showing a high degree of sophistication and offering a window into the religious thought of the ancient inhabitants of the site. The work of the conservators and specialists has contributed to the rescue and preservation of the cultural patrimony of the zone.

Acknowledgments

To Leon Reinhart and National Geographic for their support.



Figure 5. Inside the Pinturas pyramid. From Leslie Rainier and Angelyn Bass, 2003, "Trabajos de conservación y restauración en los murales de San Bartolo," in Proyecto Arqueológico San Bartolo, informe preliminar no. 2, segunda temporada 2003; report submitted to the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala.



Figure 6. Condition of north wall beneath medial molding at start of excavation and conservation work in 2003. From Leslie Rainier and Angelyn Bass, 2003, "Trabajos de conservación y restauración en los murales de San Bartolo," in Proyecto Arqueológico San Bartolo, informe preliminar no. 2, segunda temporada 2003; report submitted to the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala.



Figure 7. Preliminary conservation work was undertaken at the same time as the excavations, with conservation specialists working together with the archaeologists. Using syringes, mortar was injected into the larger cracks. From Leslie Rainier and Angelyn Bass, 2003, "Trabajos de conservación y restauración en los murales de San Bartolo," in Proyecto Arqueológico San Bartolo, informe preliminar no. 2, segunda temporada 2003; report submitted to the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala.

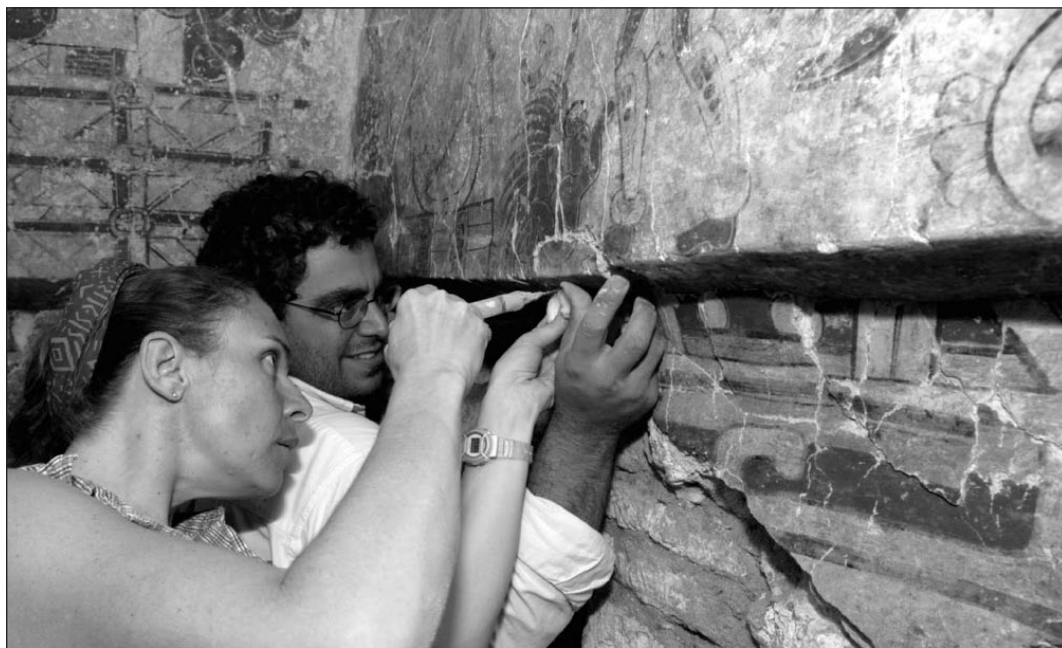


Figure 8. A fallen stucco fragment of mural painting found in the chamber fill is re-adhered to the West Wall. From Angelyn Bass Rivera, Leslie Rainier, and Lauren Meyer, 2004, "Trabajos de conservación en Pinturas Sub 1, Las Pinturas," in Proyecto Arqueológico San Bartolo, informe preliminar no. 3, tercera temporada 2004; report submitted to the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala.