1 *CENTRAL BELIZE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MAYA ARCHAEOLOGY: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT*

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Maya archaeology has changed substantially since its inception - and the role of Belize, within the broader field of Maya Studies, has been transformed as well. Once considered a backwater for the Maya region, Belize has been at the cutting edge of Maya archaeology for some time. This paper first reviews the changes that have occurred in Maya archaeology over the last century, specifically focusing on the practice and goals of archaeology; it then positions archaeology in Belize relative to these transitions with a specific focus on research carried out in the central part of the county. Once the past-time of wealthy individuals interested in spectacular tombs, architecture, and artifacts, the field of Maya archaeology now includes a broader spectrum of practitioners and field research that includes a focus on domestic remains to answer more mundane and academically-oriented questions. Over the last 40 years, archaeology in the central part of Belize has also been responsible for providing the field of Maya Studies with significant data relevant to: (1) the earliest Maya, (2) both localized and regional politics during the Classic Period, and (3) the Postclassic Maya, including Spanish contact. Since the 1980s, research in Belize has truly been at the forefront of Maya archaeology, resulting in striking challenges to disciplinary dogma in Maya studies.

Introduction

Aldous Huxley wrote in 1934 that "If the world had any ends, British Honduras would be one of them. It is not on the way from anywhere to anywhere else. It has no strategic value. It is all but uninhabited, and when Prohibition is abolished, the last of its profitable enterprises – the re-export of alcohol by rum-runners, who use Belize as their base of operations – will have gone the way of its commerce in logwood, mahogany and chicle" (p.25). This was a rather harsh assessment of the country and is directly in contrast with Belize's key role in the development of modern lowland Maya archaeology. Early on, Belize City and El Cayo served as the ports-of-entry for archaeologists on their way into the Southern Maya lowlands; while many continued into neighboring Guatemala, others stopped and stayed in Belize to practice their trade. By the late 20th century, Belize had become a hub for archaeological research, which resulted in the documentation not only of major Classic Period centers but also earlier and later Maya society, as well as long distance trade and sustainable subsistence systems. Yet, impressions of Belize as being on the fringes of Maya Classic Period culture persisted well into the 1980s. Harriot Topsey, the former archaeological commissioner for Belize (obituary - Pendergast et al. 1995), used to jokingly refer to his country as "the armpit of the earth," building metaphorically on Huxley's quote. However, almost half of all practicing archaeologists involved in Maya research today view Belize as being the center of their universe – quite a change from 85 years ago.

Archaeology in central Belize has substantially changed over the course of the last century. While initially a more avocational activity, archaeology has become a profoundly professional academic enterprise that contributes to Belize's tourism and economy – and, continued work on its sites has revolutionized the field of Maya Studies. The site of Xunantunich provides a good example of this historic progression. An initial excavation program at Xunantunich in the 1890s was carried out by Thomas Gann (1894-1895; 1925), an English colonial doctor stationed within then British Honduras, who dug throughout the country largely for his own edification and collections (Collins 2011), often leaving unsupervised individuals to excavate and also reportedly using dynamite to hasten results (McKillop and Awe 1983; Pendergast 1984:4). Xunantunich was subsequently the location of excavation programs carried out by a number of researchers (in chronological order: Thompson 1940a; Satterthwaite 1950, 1951; Anderson 1966; MacKie 1961, 1985; and, Pendergast and Graham 1981). The site was more intensively excavated in the 1990s (LeCount and Yaeger 2010; Leventhal and Ashmore 2004) and continues to be a focus for important archaeological research today. Yet, even after all this research, new finds are continuing to be made involving its physical layout (A. Chase et al. 2014a), an early E Group (Brown et al.

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2017), and important new monuments and deposits (Helmke and Awe 2016a, 2016b).

The repeated return of multiple researchers and projects to a single site, like Xunantunich, is also fairly typical for other sites that dot the Belize Valley (e.g., Chase and Garber 2004). Because these archaeological efforts have taken place over a span of almost 125 years under the aegis of a wide variety of projects and individuals, the Belize Valley data are not always as easy to integrate as they are for a site like Caracol, which has seen 35 years of continuous excavation by the same project (D. Chase and A. Chase 2017). However, the research is no less significant. In attempting to summarize the archaeology of central Belize 15 years ago, Diane Chase (2004:348) noted that:

> "There are also a plethora of different models and theoretical perceptions that can be and have been applied to the ancient Maya, often in conjunction with differing archaeological methodologies, techniques, strategies, and standards. In truth, the multiple projects and multiple researchers in the Belize valley make it difficult to synthesize the extant data to answer broader questions. Each project operates to a large degree as a microcosm, focusing on specific questions that vary from site to site and excavation to excavation. Each project also seeks to emphasize the importance of their specific database. It is only by collecting these diverse data and voices into one place … that one can begin to understand and appreciate the complexity of the archaeological record that comprises our interpretation of the ancient Maya."

The open communication of data and results in a small venue like the Belize Archaeology Symposium is important to providing necessary cohesion.

The extended array of archaeological research and researchers in central Belize (Figure 1) has been collectively responsible for moving the entire field of Maya archaeology forward. Three key research advances stand out. First, the archaeology of central Belize permitted a different and insightful view of the early development of complexity within this portion of the Maya area, one that suggests the possibility of local origins as well as the interaction of multiple ethnic groups (Awe 1992; Ball and Taschek 2003; Garber et al. 2004; Healy et al. 2004). Second, archaeological research in central Belize provided the initial definition of the Maya Postclassic Period in the Southern Lowlands (Bullard 1973; Willey 1973; Willey et al. 1965; Sharer and Chase 1976), although identifying Postclassic remains took some time. In 1956, upon the conclusion of his Barton Ramie Project, Gordon Willey (1956:781) initially noted that "Not a single one of the numerous test excavations in the Belize Valley has brought to light ceramic or other evidence that would demonstrate a Postclassic period occupation of any of the village house mounds." However, post-field analysis and later work in fact demonstrated that substantial Postclassic occupation existed in central Belize (Aimers 2003; Sharer and Chase 1976; Willey et al. 1965). Third, the archaeology carried out in central Belize has been responsible for a vibrant discussion of broader interlinkages and political relationships among various Classic Period centers (A. Chase 1991, 2004; A. Chase and D. Chase 1996, 1998, 2012, 2020; D. Chase and A. Chase 1992, 2017; Helmke and Awe 2016a, 2016b; Helmke et al. 2017, 2019; Lecount and Yaeger 2010; Martin and Velasquez 2016) that squarely positions this part of the Southern lowlands as a prime mover during the Classic Period. While the results of the archaeological research in central Belize have cumulatively added to our interpretations about the ancient Maya, the various social and academic contexts within which the archaeology has taken place have also substantially changed over time.

Background

If we look at early syntheses of Maya archaeology, what is striking is the insistence that substantial archaeological work already had been undertaken in central Belize, even if the outcomes weren't always a focus of mainstream publications. In 1940 Thompson (1940b:129) proclaimed that: "The Peten-British Honduras area has been unduly emphasized in this summary not because it would seem to be of overwhelming importance, but because it has been the scene of most active excavation." Here he was referring to his own research at "Mountain Cow," San Jose, and Xunantunich, as well as that of Ricketson (1929) at Baking Pot.

Figure 1. Archaeological Project Directors and Principal Investigators of Central Belize.

Since he felt that he had already established stratigraphic control in central Belize, he (1940b: 137) argued that "it should be simple to work outward from that area in jumps of fifty to a hundred miles, which should yield material associated with already classified material as a control," thus increasing "our knowledge of Maya history." Realistically, this strategy of interlinking chronological sequences has been accomplished by the widespread research in Belize and the Southern lowlands carried out by more recent archaeological projects.

Of course, the establishment of a chronological sequence is not an end-to-itself. However, at the onset of research in the Maya area, there were no securely established

chronologies. The early years of Maya archaeology were focused on defining where sites were located and when they dated. Much of the early archaeology of Central Belize was undertaken by J.E.S. Thompson. Although his research focused on secondary centers and on residential "housemound" groups, foreshadowing Willey's Barton Ramie Project some two decades later, Thompson was not motivated by "settlement patterns." Rather, Thompson's research locales were selected to gain ceramic samples for cross-comparison (explicitly noted in the 1928 Directors Report for the Field Museum), something he did in the Mountain Cow region in 1928 and 1929 for Chicago Field Museum (Thompson 1931), at the site of San Jose in 1931 and 1934 for the Field Museum and the Carnegie Institution (Thompson 1937), and also at Xunantunich in 1939 (Thompson 1940a). Thus, Thompson's archaeological approach focused on establishing traditional "ceramic chronology" – the kind of low-level, non-interpretive archaeology that was critiqued by Walter Taylor (1948; Willey 1988:299), but that is so important as a first stepping stone for underpinning future socio-cultural interpretation.

Walter Taylor (1948) extensively critiqued the Carnegie Institution of Washington for its investigations throughout the Maya lowlands; in his estimation, this research was flawed in having an overt focus on ancient elites, monumental architecture, and art. Yet, as can be seen from Thompson's early research (and in spite of its ceramic emphasis), Maya archaeology has always exhibited a focus on both the elite and non-elite in the archaeological record. And, efforts in Belize subsequent to Taylor's critique brought settlement studies to the forefront of the Maya field. Although we are more familiar - simply because of the visually beautiful artifacts - with the elaborate tombs of Holmul (Merwin and Valliant 1932) and Uaxactun (Smith 1932, 1955), early "housemound" excavations were undertaken both at Uaxactun (Wauchope 1934) and in western Belize. Thompson's excavations in the Mountain Cow region of Caracol incorporated both residential groups and mid-level sites. And, although he (1940b:140) explicitly noted that "The recent shift of emphasis from the hierarchic traits to the underlying lay elements is a healthy sign" for Maya archaeology, he did not concentrate on placing his excavations into broader social or political contexts until his later popular writings (Thompson 1966, 1970).

Gordon Willey is often credited with being instrumental in spotlighting research on the non-elite Maya "peasantry" (e.g., Sabloff 2004:15); and, indeed, his fieldwork on the housemounds at Barton Ramie served to demonstrate that these non-urban dwellers had access to a wide variety of local and imported goods (Willey 1956). However, by focusing on settlement without discussion of nearby monumental architecture, Willey's research did not provide a more holistic societal framework, something noted in a review of his Barton Ramie volume (e.g., Coe and Haviland 1966). While not easily addressed in the early exploratory days of Maya archaeology, the political, social, and economic contexts of Maya society are approached with relish by today's archaeologists working in central Belize (e.g., D. Chase and A. Chase 2017; Garber 2004; Helmke and Awe 2013; Lecount and Yaeger 2010).

Barton Ramie as Representative of a Changing Field

Settlement pattern studies have been called "the single most critical theoretical or methodological innovation in archaeology since World War II" (Sabloff and Ashmore (2001: 14). But, why start at Barton Ramie? When Willey became the Bowditch Professor at Harvard in 1950, Alfred Tozzer, the long-standing head of Mesoamerican archaeology at Harvard, insisted that he shift his research from Panama to the Maya area. Given that San Ignacio, Cayo functioned as the gateway for archaeological research into the Peten (Black 1990) and western Belize, Willey arranged for an introduction to the region from Linton Satterthwaite (1951) who had been working at Cahal Pech, Caracol, and Xunantunich. In his initial reconnaissance to Belize in 1953, Willey settled on working in Cayo. While drinking in a local "gentleman's club," he learned that the land in the Barton Ramie area had just been cleared, which made surveying easier than if it had been in the bush. After half a day of chopping through brush in search of outlying

settlement at Cahal Pech (where Satterthwaite wanted Willey to work), Satterthwaite suggested that Willey was "afraid of the bush" and wanted his sites "already cleared off," something that Willey (1988:330) subsequently noted "had certain advantages."

Barton Ramie was selected for excavation by Gordon R. Willey (1988:328) from 1953 through 1956 because of its "bloody little mounds." Willey (et al. 1965:15-16), noted that Barton Ramie was selected for four reasons: (1) its clusters of small mounds; (2) its ecological siting in a river valley; (3) the fact that its ceramics could be articulated into a known chronological sequence with Uaxactun; and, (4) its location on the eastern edge "of Classic Maya cultures." In 1954, Willey began excavation at Barton Ramie with the first NSF grant awarded to a Maya archaeologist. While his professional reasons for the selection were sound, its location near Cayo also meant that some "creature comforts" were available, something not only appealing to Willey but also still appreciated by current researchers.

In Vogt's (2004) biographical memoir about Willey for the National Academy of Sciences, he noted that during excavation at Altar de Sacrificios in 1961, "work stopped in the hot late afternoon and we would go for a swim or take one of the boats and go fishing. At sundown Ledyard would have one of his men cut a heart of palm for hors d'oeuvres. Then Ledyard would break out a bottle of S.S. Pierce whiskey. He always alternated between scotch and bourbon. When the bottle was empty, it would be time for dinner at the camp." In Belize, proximity to Cayo's Western and Stork Clubs also provided venues for congregation for an early generation of Maya archaeologists across projects. That establishments like these were widely (and frequently) patronized has been amply documented by Willey (1988) in his brief biographies of William Bullard, H.E.D. Pollock, and A. Ledyard Smith.

We generically credit Willey's Barton Ramie Project for spurring settlement archaeology in the Maya area by building on his earlier Viru Valley research published in 1953. However, Willey himself did not originally emphasize regional relationships within the Belize Valley. In fact, Willey (1988:329-331) credits Bullard for the regional studies that were pursued around Barton Ramie. It is perhaps a disagreement with Linton Satterthwaite about whether Barton Ramie was the appropriate locale for research that puts Willey's contributions into clearer focus. Satterthwaite argued that Willey could not position Barton Ramie in terms of a Maya settlement hierarchy and argued that Willey should do settlement work at Cahal Pech in order to determine its "sustaining area" (Willey 1988:330), meaning that at Cahal Pech he could move from the architectural center outwards. However, Willey elected instead to focus on the everyday Maya. In hindsight Willey's selection of Barton Ramie was fortuitous in that it provided an alternative view to the Maya "sustaining area" approach espoused by Satterthwaite and the Tikal Project (Culbert et al. 1990). This *a priori* model was unknowingly predisposed to western perceptions that saw agriculture as separate from urbanism, something that is now recognized as one of the issues complicating any consideration of the ancient Maya as being urban (A. Chase 1998:28; A. Chase and D. Chase 2016a; A. Chase et al. 2014b:211; Hutson 2016).

Yet another contribution of the Barton Ramie Project was that it framed the way that ceramic analysis is carried out throughout the Maya area. James Gifford (1976) published not only detailed descriptions of the sherds and pottery found at Barton Ramie but also a methodological treatise on type-variety-mode analysis that has become the mainstay for processing Maya ceramics (e.g., Aimers 2013).

Changes in Practitioners of Maya Archaeology

As a field, Maya archaeology in central Belize has seen significant differences in the perspectives of various researchers. Maler (1908) described Benque Viejo as a "wretched" town occupied by "miserable traders" and "good-for-nothing, inconsiderate persons." J. Eric S. Thompson (1931: 223) refers to the District Commissioner (R. Wyatt) of Cayo as the "virtual ruler of the area" and takes an extremely condescending attitude in describing the residents of El Cayo (something not reflected in Willey's [et al. 1965:23] later report). There is a sense in the archaeological writings through at

least the mid-20th century that at least some Maya archaeologists were very conscious of their own social class/status – and that these innate perspectives impacted not only their view of the country but also their interpretations of the past.

Wealth, social connections, and academic pedigree appear to have been necessary components for the researchers initially attracted to Maya archaeology; many also appear to have had connections with U.S. intelligence services. Sylvanus Morley was mentored by Alfred Kidder, known as the Dean of American Archaeology, from 1914 onward (Willey 1988:309); Morley not only had a solid academic pedigree represented by his Harvard degree, something crucial in early Maya archaeology, but he was also connected with the Office of Naval Intelligence (Harris and Sadler 2009). He also worked closely with Oliver Ricketson, a Uaxactun archaeologist with a Harvard background and the nephew of Andrew Carnegie, the individual responsible for the Carnegie Institution of Washington and its initial funding of a program in Maya research. Morley's social and intelligence connections protected him politically from William Gates, who attempted to revoke his permit in Guatemala in 1923 (Black 1990:260). Attitudes focused on wealth and relationships also are evident in later contexts. Vogt (2004) compares Gordon Willey to Alfred M. Tozzer, noting that both individuals had been sons of "middle-class status" pharmacists, continuing that through marriage to a wife who was from "one of the wealthy and famous 'five families' of Hawaii," Tozzer "became a member of the elite" in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Willey did not have that kind of wealth, but his Harvard affiliation established him as part of the academic elite and he dressed the part of gentleman. Also associated with this focus on gentility was an emphasis on the cocktail hour, both within and outside of the field (Willey 1988; Vogt 2004). It is within this milieu that we should frame the importance of the Stork Club and the Western Club in early Belizean archaeology – even to the point of Linton Satterthwaite maintaining a bottle in the Western Club that said "Have a Drink on Dr. Satterthwaite," ostensibly because it was "good for public relations" (Willey 1988:327).

On a slightly later horizon, William Coe and Michael Coe were both grandchildren of William Robertson Coe, the son-in-law of Henry Huttleston Rogers, one of the original "robber-barons" of the late 1800s and a key individual in Standard Oil (Destler 1946; Lawson 1905); the older Coe was already a successful business man and his marriage to Rogers' daughter provided his family with even greater prosperity, social connections, and luxurious surroundings. Maya archaeology was an appropriate profession for someone who could afford to establish a career based on interests; but, this affluent upbringing may have impacted how at least one of the brothers conducted research. In commenting about the Tikal Project, Shook (and Houston1990:248) noted that William Coe was not sympathetic to the needs of his workers in that he "never seemed to grasp the fact that labor had to have a place to sleep, had to have food, had to be healthy, and had to be physically capable of appearing the next morning for work. Bill was only concerned that they be there to dig and to quit at a certain time." The importance of wealth in 20th Century Maya archaeology was directly conveyed to us personally by William Coe; he told us that one "'needed to have money' in order to be successful in archaeology" and recommended that we work on Wall Street in New York to make the requisite funds for fieldwork (Sharer 2011:41). He did not recommend the intelligence service as an avenue to furthering one's career, but his brother did originally work for the Central Intelligence Agency (M. Coe 2006: 64,73-93).

We would note that Maya archaeologists, on the whole, have always been resourceful in terms of finding funding sources and that affluence is no longer a requirement for entry into the field of Maya Studies.

Changes in Archaeological Pedigree

Because Maya archaeology had a relatively limited set of players in its early days, there has also been a concern with foundations, founders, and pedigrees as a way of assessing different perspectives in the field (see Figure 2 for modern pedigrees and academic backgrounds). Originally, archaeological

University	Founder	Generation 1a	Generation 1b	Generation 2a	Generation 2b	Generation 3
HARVARD	Gordon Willey (Columbia 1942)	Richard Adams (Harvard 1963)	Joseph Ball (Wisconsin, Madison 1973)			
		Jeremy Sabloff (Harvard 1969)		Patricia McAnany (New Mexico 1986)		Eleanor Harrison-Buck (Boston 2007)
			Paul Healy (Harvard 1974)		Jaime Awe (London 1992) Gyles Iannone (London 1996)	
			David Freidel (Harvard 1976)	James Garber (SMU 1981) Vernon Scarborough (SMU 1980)		M. Kathryn Brown (SMU 2003)
			R. Leventhal (Harvard 1979)		Lisa Lecount (UCLA 1996) Lisa Lucero (UCLA 1994)	
				Fred Valdez (Harvard 1987)	Marilyn Masson (Texas, Austin 1993)	Terry Powis (Texas, Austin 2002)
PENNSYLVANIA	L. Satterthwaite (U Penn 1943)	William R. Coe (U Penn 1959)		Arlen F. Chase (U Penn 1983)		John Morris (UCLA 2002)
		Robert J. Sharer (U Penn 1968)		Diane Z. Chase (U Penn 1982)		
				Wendy Ashmore (U Penn 1981)		Cynthia Robin (U Penn 1999) Jason Yaeger (U Penn 2000)
UCLA		D. Pendergast (1961)				
SANTA BARBARA				Anabel Ford (1981) Heather McKillop (1987)		
CAMBRIDGE		Euan MacKie (1963)		Elizabeth Graham (1983)		
ARIZONA		T.P. Culbert (1962)		Anne Pyburn (1988) Scott Fedick (ASU 1988)		Gabriel Wrobel (Indiana 2004)
SUNY, BUFFALO						Holley Moyes (2006)

Figure 2. Generational Linkages of Project Directors and Principle Investigators in Central Belize.

pedigrees were tied to socio-economic status and university degrees (as mentioned above); this can be seen in Stephen Black's (1990) history of the Uaxactun Archaeological Project that emphasizes the importance of a Harvard degree. The Harvard pedigree continued in force, as can be seen in the various festschrifts to Gordon Willey (Fash and Sabloff 2007; Leventhal and Kolata 1983; Vogt and Leventhal 1983). But two other academic pedigrees also emerged, one based at Tulane derived from William Gates and Robert Wauchope (Giardino et al. 1978) and the other based at the University of Pennsylvania derived from Linton Satterthwaite and William R. Coe (as can be seen in Robert Sharer's [2011, Sharer and Jones 2011] compiled eulogy for William R. Coe that emphasizes archaeological projects carried out by the University Museum). The Mayanists associated with the Carnegie Institution of Washington were physically located at the Harvard Peabody Museum for their Mayapan Project and merged with a Harvard lineage of Maya researchers that was originally anchored by Alfred Tozzer (festschrift = Hay et al. 1940). Wauchope, who anchored the Tulane pedigree, had been trained for his work by the Carnegie Institution of Washington and was part of that tradition. The Pennsylvania lineage, however, was largely independent until it converged with Carnegie traditions at Tikal. Yet, the field methodologies of the Carnegie-based lineages and the Penn lineages were largely distinct.

The Carnegie Institution of Washington carried out field research that used methodologies largely developed independently, although some of its practicioneers, particularly its Mesoamerican director Alfred Kidder, had extensive training in the U.S. Southwest. The Pennsylvania lineage built on Satterthwaite's

background in law and legal briefs and carefully documented appropriate strategies for the presentation of an archaeological record and the associated architecture that was often quite complex (Satterthwaite1943). In contrast, the Carnegie excavation traditions in the southern Maya lowlands developed in the field and many of its standards were developed post-field. Edward Shook (and Houston 1990:247) noted that, in spite of not knowing anything about "Uaxactun, or for that matter the Maya," his initial employment by the Carnegie Institution in 1933 was as a drafting-person to "clean up [Oliver G.] Ricketson's drawings of excavations at Uaxactun." By 1934 he became "a surveyor and general factotum" at Uaxactun to 50 laborers and A. Ledyard Smith (who had been operating by himself at the site). When Willey dug Barton Ramie, he brought with him an extensive archaeological background and training from both the Southeast U.S. and Peru that he applied in this situation; his field director, William Bullard, had training in the U.S. Southwest (with Jo Brew) and at Mayapan with members of the Carnegie Institution. Yet, for excavations at Altar de Sacrificios and Seibal, Willey explicitly continued with the standards adopted by the Carnegie Institution of Washington through his field director, A. Ledyard Smith (Willey 1988). When Edward Shook became the director of the Pennsylvania Tikal Project in 1958, the Pennsylvania and Carnegie field systematics became intermarried and the methodology was formalized and published (Shook and Coe 1961; Sharer and Coe 1979), a first for Maya archaeology.

Early field research in central Belize included an amalgam of approaches and strategies. The initial research undertaken in Belize by Thompson and others was largely independent of the Carnegie tradition, although Thompson became part of the Carnegie Institution in 1936 – and largely stopped doing fieldwork. Both Anderson and MacKie, early excavators of Xunantunich, derived from British archaeological traditions (even if self-taught). Satterthwaite introduced his own brand of archaeological pedigree briefly to central Belize, but (like Thompson) his real interest was in Maya hieroglyphs. Willey represented the second appearance of a university project

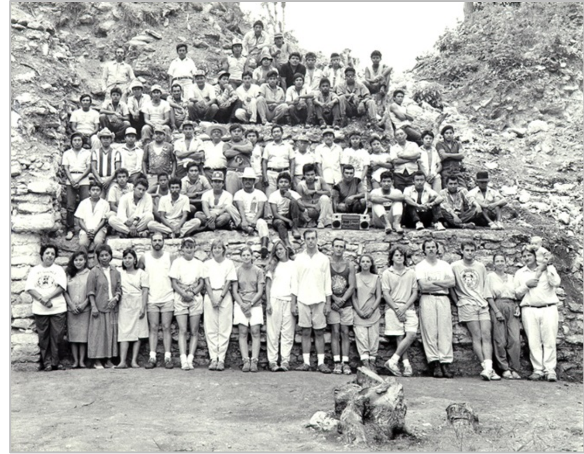

Figure 3. Example of a "traditional" archaeological project in the Maya area: Caracol Archaeological Project 1990.

(Satterthwaite was the first) in Belize; he used his own archaeological background at Barton Ramie, but subsequently adopted the Carnegie traditions. Oliver Ricketson, an early excavator at Baking Pot, was a Carnegie product and Bullard, a later excavator at Baking Pot, had training in a wide variety of approaches. Before moving to northern Belize, David Pendergast carried out and published on cave archaeology in central Belize (as well as undertaking some excavation at New Maria Camp); his training was in California archaeology with Clement Meighan. What this means is that the early excavation projects in central Belize employed a wide variety of strategies and terminologies that were somewhat distinct from each other.

The late 1970s saw the full-scale transition in Belize to archaeological projects based at universities that were committed to long-term research. While some researchers used their funding to run large projects with a small student staff dependent on many local employees, following the Carnegie and Pennsylvania traditions (Figure 3), other projects focused on field-schools, popularized in the American Southwest for research training and intensive mentoring, as a way of providing experience to budding archaeologists. In Belize, field schools became popular as a way to provide support for field research. Shorter field experiences were also popular with students and resulted in the exposure of a far larger group of students to Maya archaeology than had been previously accomplished under more traditional

Table 1. Recent Archaeological Projects in Central Belize

Archaeololgical Project	**Director(s)**	**Date**
Actuncan	Lisa LeCount	2001-present
Aguacate	John Morris	2009-present
BAAR	Richard McNeish	1979-1982
Blackman Eddy	James Garber	1990-1996
BRASS	Anabel Ford / Scott Fedick	1983-1992
BREA	Eleanor Harrison-Buck	2011-present
Buena Vista	Joseph Ball / Jennifer Taschek	1981-1992
	Jason Yaeger	2008-2017
BVAR (Cahal Pech; Pacbitun; Baking Pot; Lower Dover; Xunantunich)	Jaime Awe (incorporated Paul Healy's BVMPP)	1988-present
Caracol	Arlen Chase / Diane Chase	1985-present (recon. 1983-1984)
CBAS (Tipan Chen Uitz)	Gabriel Wrobel	2009-present
Chan	Cynthia Robin	2002-2009
El Pilar	Anabel Ford	1993-present
Las Cuevas and BCRP	Holley Moyes	2011-present
Minanha and SARP	Gyles Iannone	1998-2013
Mojo Cay	Heather McKillop	1979
Negroman Tipu	Elizabeth Graham (Grant Jones / Robert Kautz)	1981-1987
Pacbitun	Paul Healy	1980-1992
	Terry Powis	2008-present
Petroglyph Cave	Dorie Reents / Barbara MacLeod	1977-1978
Saint George's Caye	James Garber (Jaime Awe / Lauren Sullivan)	2009-present
Sibun / Hershey / Belize City	Patricia McAnany	1997-2005
Vaca Plateau Terraces	Paul Healy	1978-1981
Valley of Peace / Yalbac	Lisa Lucero	1997-present
Xunantunich	Richard Leventhal/Wendy Ashmore	1991-1998
	M. Kathryn Brown	2008-present

ways of carrying out fieldwork. Importantly, some Belizean students also received formal archaeological training. Thus, although larger numbers of individuals have been exposed to Belizean archaeology, the number of projects has unintentionally limited the integration of data across sites.

At least twenty different archaeological projects populated central Belize from the late 1970s through the present (Table 1). Some of these projects were site-focused while other focused on multiple sites and broad areas. Some sites have hosted continuous projects while others have had a variety of researchers. Significantly, there have been and are a number of female project directors, something rarely seen in an earlier era. If there is a sense of pedigree today, it is usually based upon the

projects with which one has been associated. While the academic research legacy may still be important, another change is that projects are no longer limited to Ph.D. granting institutions. For instance, BVAR has not been affiliated with a Ph.D.-granting institution, but many students proudly claim a BVAR pedigree (having earned their Ph.D.s at a variety of institutions) and have gone on to gainful employment. Although not involving as many students as a field school, the Caracol Archaeological Project (which operated for many years from a non-Ph.D.-granting institution) has similarly seen both directly and indirectly successful academic "descendants." Other field programs in central Belize have comparable track records (for instance, the Xunantunich Archaeological Project produced a series of researchers who have been or are PIs in active archaeological projects in Belize and elsewhere). Thus, many Mayanists have received their initial archaeological training in central Belize, meaning that this part of the Maya area has had widespread impact on the broader field.

Yet, while the focus of field work has become more theoretical in its research contributions over time, Mayanists also find themselves returning to issues of basic chronology and culture history.

Changing Research Foci in Maya Archaeology

Culture history, with its concern with chronology and descriptive archaeology, continued unabated in Maya archaeology through the 1970s. As noted above, a large part of this focus, so brutally critiqued by Taylor in 1948 in relation to the Carnegie Institution of Washington research, was a necessary pre-requisite to later work. It is very difficult to place the ancient Maya into socio-economic, religious, and political contexts without understanding space and time. Continued longer-term research is often necessary to resolve complex problems of culture organization and change. An example of this may be seen in relation to the Postclassic Period.

Although excavations were carried out at Mayapan in the 1950s to define the Postclassic in the Northern lowlands (Pollock et al. 1962; Smith 1971), the Postclassic in the Southern lowlands was largely a blank slate. Initial syntheses, largely based on excavation materials from Barton Ramie and limited data from Macanche and Topoxte in Guatemala, were first attempted by Bullard (1973) and only synthesized a decade later (A. Chase and D. Chase 1985; Chase and Rice 1985; Sabloff and Andrews 1986). Given their often low-lying constructions, Postclassic materials were also difficult for archaeologists to recognize. At the conclusion of his field research at Barton Ramie, Willey (1956:781) wrote that no Postclassic materials had been found at the site; yet, subsequent ceramic analysis revealed Postclassic ceramics in 63 of 65 excavations undertaken at Barton Ramie (Sharer and Chase 1976:291; Willey et al. 1965), suggesting how difficult it can be to locate and identify Postclassic remains. A similar situation occurred at Tayasal, Guatemala; initial excavations there in 1971 were categorized as having failed at locating Postclassic materials; later analysis, however, revealed Postclassic ceramics in 46 of 99 locales excavated (A. Chase 1983, 1990). Thus, while socio-cultural analyses may be a laudible goal, it is realistically difficult to accomplish if the archaeological data cannot be properly placed within a spatio-temporal frame. For the Postclassic Period in central Belize, this did not realistically occur until the late 1970s. Advances in radiocarbon dating through the use of AMS and Bayesian approaches also mean that the spatio-temporal frame is still of concern today (e.g., Hoggarth et al. 2014; Inomata et al. 2017).

Other advances in understanding the socio-complexity of the ancient Maya were similarly hampered by our inability to conjunctively approach the Maya with historic information and archaeological data. One part of this issue was an inability to fully understand the scale of Maya sites. This changed with the regional application of LiDAR to eastern Belize. The initial LiDAR campaign, flown at Caracol in 2009, resulted in: new insights into the extensiveness of ancient Maya subsistence systems (A. Chase et al. 2011); a detailed record of the extensive landscape terraforming carried out by the Maya (A.S.Z. Chase and Weishampel 2016; A. Chase and D. Chase 2016a); and, the documentation of the scale of Maya urbanism

(A. Chase and D. Chase 2016b). A second LiDAR campaign in 2013 represented the first multi-project collaboration for LiDAR acquisition and resulted in the discovery of new sites, new architectural features at sites like Xunantunich that had been worked for more than a century, and insight into the regional dynamics of ancient Maya society (A. Chase et al. 2014a, 2014b). Thus, LiDAR provides Maya archaeology with a fuller view of past landscape features that is helping to change our views of ancient Maya complexity and urbanism (A. Chase et al. 2012; Canuto et al. 2018).

A second part of our inability to examine past complexity among the ancient Maya related to the interpretation of their hieroglyphic records. With the exception of materials related to Caracol, Belize and late Xunantunich, Classic Period carved stone hieroglyphic monuments are rare in central Belize. While some linkages of texts and archaeology have been attempted in the Belize Valley (Helmke and Awe 2013), the data set is not yet rich enough to shed light on polity composition and borders. Because of the personal details about individuals found in the hieroglyphic record, our history of the ancient Maya has come to be dominated by epigraphic interpretations usually related to political histories of sites having an extensive corpus of monuments (Schele and Freidel 1990; Martin and Grube 2000). Some areas – including much of Belize – are under-represented in such a history (but see Helmke et al. 2018), but it is clear that the Belizean site of Caracol was a major political force in the Guatemalan Peten during the Late Classic Period (A. Chase and D. Chase 2020) and also had an extended relationship with Copan, Honduras (Helmke et al. 2019). The importance of the ancient textual information cannot be understated, but importantly, archaeological data can add significantly to both fleshing out and reconsidering epigraphically-based interpretations.

Not only does archaeology provide new texts that force epigraphic revision, but the accumulation of archaeological data can also revive and recast past archaeological interpretations, amplifying the epigraphic record and also leading to new interpretations (e.g., Helmke et al. 2018). Examples of this can be seen in the recovery of new carved panels at Xunantunich (Helmke and Awe 2016a, 2016b) that record historic data pertinent to Caracol, Naranjo, and broader interpretations concerning the Snake Kingdom (e.g., Martin and Velasquez 2016). A shattered vase recovered in palace trash at Baking Pot contains texts that permit new insight into personages, locations, and warfare carried out by Naranjo and amplify a series of events known from Naranjo stelae texts, potentially placing central Belize within the confines of these events (Helmke et al. 2017). The recovery of Caracol Altar 21 (e.g., A. Chase 1991) modified our interpretation of epigraphic history in that it recorded the conquest of Tikal, Guatemala and foreshadowed the discovery of unusual relationships between Caracol and Tikal in the early part of the Late Classic. Conjoining the long-term excavations at Caracol with the archaeological record at Tikal, Guatemala have permitted us to assert that two of Caracol's most important rulers, Yajaw Te' and K'an II, were buried in the North Acropolis at Tikal (A. Chase and D. Chase 2020; D. Chase and A. Chase 2017:219). Texts, artifacts, and carving styles also suggest an enduring relationship between Caracol and Copan (Helmke et al. 2019). Thus, the conjunctive use of multiple Maya data sources is only now permitting us a fuller insight into the importance of central Belize in the broader Maya area by permitting a window into the socio-political integration of central Belize with sites in the Peten of Guatemala and possibly even Honduras.

The shift from a focus on chronology to more conjunctive interpretations about socio-political contexts is relatively recent. One of the most impactful venues for sparking this transition in archaeological paradigmatics in central Belize has been the Belize Archaeology Symposium. The first symposium in 2003 was initially undertaken "to address the concerns of the general public's demand for information regarding Belizean archaeology, given the sizable increase in tourism related activities in the country," but once the initial papers were submitted, it became clear that issues of "both methodological and theoretical concerns of Maya archaeology" were being addressed, specifically in relation to "Maya economy,

political organization and ideological factors" (Morris et al. 2004:1). Recognizing the importance that these meetings could have, the Institute of Archaeology subsequently oriented them around specific topics. Many of the synthetic papers published in the formal volumes that resulted from the symposium were derived from archaeological work carried out in central Belize, especially since the majority of all projects have always been housed in this part of the country.

Following the inaugural symposium, subsequent meetings focused on temporal frames – Early Classic [2004], Preclassic [2005], Terminal Classic [2006], Postclassic [2007] – and then moved on to a series of synthetically broad topics – Socio-Political Organization [2008], Ritual [2009], Status and Power [2010], Trade and Exchange [2011], Time and the Maya [2012], Household and Social Identity [2013], Domestic Economy (Subsistence, Commerce, and Industry) [2014], Settlement and Landscape Archaeology (Social Organization and Political Boundaries) [2015], Architecture and Urban Design (Kingly Power and Hegemony of State) [2016], Origins of Ancient Maya Lifeways and Society (Preclassic and Early Classic Developments) [2017] – all designed to challenge methodological and theoretical boundaries. The most recent series of symposiums, beginning with this one on central Belize, are designed to examine the hermeneutics of our archaeological narratives. This represents a significant advance to early Belizean archaeology and to Taylor's critique of Maya research.

Conclusion

In order to understand the past, like any good archaeologist we need to contextualize it by understanding our backgrounds, our connections, and our entanglements. While there are certain strands of archaeological thought in our field that remain important for each individual researcher, such as a basic interest in the lifeways of the ancient Maya, the accounts about the past that we build are shaped by our education, training, and contacts. As in all fields, significant challenges exist and opportunities abound for constructing narratives about ancient Maya civilization. Schiffer (1972) viewed this as an issue of rectifying the archaeological and systemic contexts, while Shanks and Tilley (1987:107-108) framed the issue in terms of a fourfold hermeneutic. But it is not just the archaeological record that affects the narrative. Each individual also has become embedded within the archaeological discipline in different and unique ways, meaning that there will be differences in: theoretical approaches used to define a specific problem; methodologies related to data collection that are utilized in the field; analytic techniques used to gain knowledge about the collected data; interpretations that "are" versus "can be" made; and, finally, the ability of each individual to synthesize the archaeological data into a constructed narrative. The backgrounds, training, and historical connections that are embedded within each of us means that our ability to interpret the archaeological record is both vested in the past and in our own unique experiences. While there may be some commonalities that have been passed down to us through our participation within a specific academic system or in a particular archaeological field program, our narratives will likely vary. Thus, the past is always included within the archaeological present. And, that present will constantly be impacted by the published results of archaeology carried out in a key sector of the ancient Maya world – central Belize.

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