

1-1-1989

A preliminary investigation of structure 10L-16 and the West Court of the Acropolis of Copan, Honduras

Jeffrey A. Stomper

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

A Preliminary Investigation of Structure 10L-16 and the West
Court of the Acropolis of Copan, Honduras

A Report submitted to the
University Honors Program
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree
With University Honors

Department of Anthropology

by
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DeKalb, Illinois
May, 1989

Approved: _____

Department of: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgments

I would very much like to thank Dr. William Fash for all the help he has given me. It was he who introduced me to the mysteries of the Ancient Maya and has taught me much about the Maya. Most importantly, he has instilled within me the desire to uncover and solve new mysteries. I would also like to thank Barbara Fash whose drawings, insights and opinions have left a positive impact on this report.

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PART I

Introduction

For the past 100 years the jungles of southern Mexico and Central America have been slowly yielding their secrets of the ancient peoples who had once ruled them. These people, the Maya Indians, are considered to have created one of the major civilizations of the New World. These people grew from the jungle and it is from the jungle that the order of their society is derived.

The Maya had a complex social structure, an intricate religious system that had many dieties, a primarily agrarian base that was inexorably intertwined, creating a society never before seen. It is the job of archaeologists today to find out how and why this complex society evolved the way it did.

The ancient Maya occupied an area roughly the size of the state of New Mexico. Today this area consists of the southeastern extremity of Mexico; including the whole of the Yucatan Peninsula, the nations of Guatemala, Belize and parts of Honduras and El Salvador (Figure 1.) (Morley, Brainerd and Sharer, 1983). The influence of their culture could be found well beyond these boundries, extending into northern Mexico and Costa Rica.

The Maya civilization had its origins in the Preclassic Period. This time spanned more than 2 millenia from 2000 B.C. to about A.D. 100. The Maya civilization flourished from about A.D. 100 to about A.D. 850. This time period is called the Classic Period. The Classic Period can be divided into the Early Classic (A.D. 100 to A.D. 550) which is considered the rise of the civilization and the Late Classic (A.D. 550 to A.D. 850) which is considered the pinnacle of the Maya civilization. The Maya

civilization existed both before and after this period, but in dramatically different forms. The Postclassic Maya survived from A.D. 850 to the Spanish Conquest in the 1500's.

As stated briefly above, the jungle played an important part in shaping the whole of Maya life. This is not to say that the entire Maya civilization was homogenous. Quite the contrary, the geography of the Maya region is very diverse ranging from the northern lowlands which are relatively flat, hot and geologically stable, to the southern highlands which have high peaks and valleys, a cool climate and are geologically active. These factors combined with the dense jungle and no wheel or animal for transportation led to a relative degree of isolation.

This isolation led to the eventual rise of large regional ceremonial centers with a number of smaller satellite centers a short distance away. This clearly demonstrated in the Petaxbatun area of the Peten in the Late Classic period. Many of these large ceremonial centers such as Tikal, Palanque, Yaxchilan and Kaminaljuyu have been investigated rather thoroughly. The site of Copan, located in western Honduras has hosted many investigations in the area around the ceremonial center.

It was not until 1985 with the inception of the Copan Mosaics Project (now called Copan Archaeological Project/Acropolis or P.A.A.C.) that the core of the center came under intensive study. At the time of this writing, several projects in the site core are in progress or have been completed. The excavation and restoration of structure 10L-26, the structure upon which the hieroglyphic stairway was built has been completed. The work

concerning the stairway inscription and the temple facade of 10L-26 is still in progress. Other work in progress at this time is the excavation, reconstruction and interpretation of structures 10L-22, 22a, 21, 21a and 16.

In the spring of 1988 preliminary investigations were made of structure 10L-16 in order to determine if it was feasible and worthwhile to begin a large scale investigation of the structure the following year (1989). The 1988 field work would also better prepare the investigators if indeed a large scale operation were to commence the following year by providing stratigraphic data, carbon samples and ceramics. The second half of this paper is concerned with the findings of the 1988 field season and includes a brief interpretation of the information extracted. In order to better understand the context of the 1988 findings a very brief history and explanation of the layout of the site of Copan is necessary.

A Brief History of Copan

The archaeologist's history of the site of Copan and the surrounding area is an ever changing one in light of the many recent archaeological and epigraphic discoveries. As recent as April 1989 new evidence was uncovered that showed stela erection as early as A.D. 435 (Fash and Williamson, personal communication). In addition to this new information on stela erection, the Copan dynastic sequence is continually being uncovered through the work of epigraphers Linda Schele and David Stuart. Though as much as we know about the sequence there is still more that needs to be uncovered.

There is evidence of occupation in the Copan dating back to

the second millenium B.C. (Fash, 1983). It isn't until the Early Classic Period that the seeds of a city-state are planted. During the later part of the Preclassic Period a complex society emerges. It is during this time also that the process of urbanization of the Site Core begins, albeit, slowly. This process of urbanization, which was carried out into the Classic Period, resulted in a maladaptive settlement pattern. That is the rich aluvial soils were being used as a cityscape instead of being farmed. Thus, the crops were slowly pushed to less fertile lands as Copan grew putting even greater pressure on the ecosystem. During the Late Classic Period this became a major problem as over 90% of the population showed some symptoms of malnutrition (Storey, personal communication).

Copan's rise to a major center didn't occur until the middle of the 7th century under the reign of the 12th ruler, Smoke Imix. He is beleived to have brought the local elite of the entire area under his control. On altar L a seated figure is holding the emblym glyph of the neighboring site of Quirigua. The date on the monument is A.D. 652 and coincides with the statements made by Smoke-Imix on the other stela erected around the valley at that time. Smoke-Imix lived into his eighties and was succeeded by his son 18-Jog in A.D. 702.

The reign of 18-Jog is considered a "boom" time in Copan. Several major structures were built as well as many of the stela left in the main plaza. During this time, as well as the time of his father, the population of the valley grew at a rapid pace thus providing the extra labor for all the monument building.

This "boom" period in Copan came to a stunning and rapid close with the capture of 18-Jog by a rival ruler, Cauac Sky, from the once satellite site of Quirigua.

The 14th ruler, Smoke Squirrel soon takes power, but it is widely believed that he is just a puppet. It is not sure whether he is a puppet for Quirigua or the Copan elite. Copan's response to the capture of 18-Jog is to ultimately build the immense Hieroglyphic Stairway.

The Stairway is completed during the reign of the 15th ruler, Smoke Monkey, in A.D. 756. This dedication is the ruler's most famous act during his reign.

The 16th and last ruler of Copan is Yax Pac. He came to power in A.D. 762 and presided over a new building "boom" in Copan. This "boom" most likely caused the demise of the city-state by sapping valuable agricultural resources in return for larger monuments. The fall of the Copan political city-state occurred shortly after the beginning of the 9th century. It is remarkable, though, that new evidence uncovered indicates that the majority of the late 8th century population remained in the valley after the collapse of the city-state.

The political events of the latter part of the eighth century show a society on the brink of decline. The leaders of the society attempted to divert the attention of their subjects by engaging them in large construction projects. This, rapidly depleted the food and timber resources even more. One must remember that the politics of the Maya was also the religion. If it was politically necessary to build massive temples, then it was justified through their religion.

The layout of the Main Group (Site Core) at Copan has a definite plan in its later stages. The intersections of many of the buildings show that this plan was regularly amended as each new building was erected, but a general scheme was still intact. In its simplest form, the Main Group is made up of a large plaza area and an adjoining Acropolis.

The layout is more complex when examined closer. The Plaza-Acropolis complex is roughly oriented north-south with the Plaza to the north of the Acropolis (Figure 2.). The Plaza is divided into three smaller ones. The Main Plaza to the north is the most open being surrounded by only small steps. In addition to being the most open, the Main Plaza is connected to several settlements by raised roadways called sacbeob. The next is the middle plaza, this is bordered by the Ballcourt, Structure 4 and low steps thus limiting access somewhat. The most restricted plaza is that of the Plaza of the Hieroglyphic Stairway which abuts the Acropolis. This plaza is surrounded by Structures 11 and 26 along with the Ballcourt.

The Acropolis itself is divided into two parts, the East Court and West Court. The East Court is the more private of the two due to the one entranceway between Structure 18 and the east side of Structure 16. The East Court is surrounded by several other structures (10L-21, 21a, 22, 22a, 25, 20, and 17).

The West Court is a little less private. The front side of Structure 16 and the back side of Structure 11 loom over the court at great heights, while two low mounds to the west (Structure 13) and south bound it.

The architecture and iconographic imagery indicate that the West Court is some sort of model/representation of the underworld. It may also be a representation of the underworld interacting with the living world of the Maya. The archaeological evidence uncovered, and to be discussed later, would also indicate this.

Upon observing the West Court from the perspective relative to that of the Maya belief system, it appears that half of the court is under water (where the underworld is believed to be). The top of Structure 13 appears to have two carved reptilian creatures. These could represent the surface of the water because the Maya believe that the land of the earth is on the back of a large alligator. At the same elevation, on an outset on Structure 11 are three large conch shells. These are believed to represent where water meets the land lending further credence that this elevation is the mythical water level. To the south, the low mound is at the same elevation as the conch shells and reptiles, but this mound has been trenched and little remains of its top surface. Another remarkable find is that the lowest "rack of skulls" on 10L-16 is at an elevation just above the level of the other mounds giving it the hypothetical appearance that it is rising out of the watery underworld (FIG). On a larger scale, it seems as though the entire Structure 16 is floating or emerging from the watery realm.

The iconography located in the court supports the underworld theories proposed earlier along with ancestor worship by the Copan rulers. Located just to the west of a low broad staircase are three markers similar to those found in a Ballcourt. If

these markers are viewed with the low stairs, it gives the appearance of half a ball court. The Ballgame is considered by some as the journey of the sun through the underworld. Also, the Hero Twins of the Popol Vuh traveled to the underworld to play ball against the underworld lords.

Also located in the court are two important monuments in the the Copan dynastic sequence, Stela P and Altar Q. Stela P, now believed to be a representation of Butz' Chan, the 10th ruler of Copan, was moved to this location well after the death of its patron, giving Butz' Chan an honored place in the underworld.

Altar Q is clearly an important monument in the decipherment of the dynastic sequence and is the most important monument in the West Court. This monument depicts all 16 rulers of Copan sitting upon their name glyphs. This monument was erected by Yax Pac to commemorate his accession to power. The front side depicts Yax Pac (the Present ruler) receiving the baton of office from the first ruler, Yax Kuk Mo' thus asserting his lineage and right to rule. Besides asserting his right to rule, Yax Pac is descending into the underworld to communicate with his dead ancestors, specifically his oldest and the founder of the lineage, making this a most appropriate accession monument.

All of this iconography and architecture undoubtedly point to an underworld realm that is represented in the West Court. Further research and investigation was needed to strengthen this argument. This new research would be able to begin to shed light on the mystery surrounding Structure 10L-16 and the West Court. The discoveries of the 1988 field season that will be discussed in Part II begin to answer some questions, but raise many others.

PART II

Suboperation One

When excavations commenced for suboperation one, there was a twofold objective. The first was to investigate the immediate vicinity around Altar Q. The second was to clear and investigate the area between Altar Q and the base of Structure 16. By the end of the 1988 field season, these two objectives had been met and produced numerous pieces of interesting material. So much, that at this time, not all of the materials excavated have been cleaned and processed.

Initial excavations were concentrated in front of Altar Q. A 1 meter by 1.5 meter area was marked off approximately 40 cm to the west of the altar. Our primary goal was to find, if it existed, an offering associated with Altar Q. The most likely spot was either in front or directly under the altar, citing past examples of Copan caches. The 1 x 1.5 meter excavation area was dug in 20 cm levels to a depth of 120 cm. There was careful separation of the ceramics from all levels, but only secondary context artifacts were found.

A tunnel was then started from the same pit and proceeded under the altar. A tunnel was chosen rather than a trench because the amount of earth that needed to be moved, combined with the weight of the altar might cause the whole area to collapse.

The tunnel excavations did not produce any evidence of a cache, nor was there any disturbed area under the altar. The tunnel was 65 cm wide, 170 cm long and its length traversed all but the easternmost 23 cm of area under the altar. This was due to the cramped confines of the tunnel. We were certain that

there was nothing of value to be found in that area.

After mapping and backfilling the lots of the operation in front of Altar Q, we then proceeded to work in the area between Altar Q and Structure 16. It was our intent to clear off the area between the altar and the front of the superstructure, locate the lower steps of the building and clear off as much of the basal portion of the building as time allowed (Figure 4.).

Work was begun in the area between Altar Q and Structure 16 with another 1 m x 1.5 m area selected for investigation. Almost immediately, two interesting finds were made. The first was a plain round altar (CPN 13470, diameter of 36cm). The second was what appeared to be several large cut stones (Feature 8), in a line, below the level of what remained of the plaza floor. The area of investigation was quickly expanded to uncover the extent of this feature (Figure 5.).

After more area was cleared it was determined that these stones were capstones of some sort. There were a total of three capstones, all very large (the largest seen by the author in Copan). The alignment of stones was North-South, and there was an absence of "chink" (small stones to plug the spaces between the larger ones) stones between the central and southern capstone. This immediately suggested that the offering might have been tampered with. Another unusual feature of these capstones was the severe sloping of them from east to west. There was a considerable difference in elevation between the eastern edges of the stones and the western edges (Figure 5.).

The subsequent removal of the capstones explained the reason

for the severe sloping. The west wall of the chamber had collapsed. It was not a complete collapse, the courses of stone of the west wall were still articulated, thus enabling reconstruction at a later date. The slumped wall covered almost the entire chamber, this necessitated its complete removal before work could begin on the contents of the chamber.

The chamber (also called a cyst or crypt in this writing) was designated as Features 8 (capstones), 9 (cyst walls) and 10 (the artifacts uncovered in the cyst) of Operation 41. The cyst measured 131 cm long and 48 cm wide with the long axis North-South. The cyst walls were 8 courses of finely cut building stone with a height of 117 cm. The top of the highest course was at an elevation of 599.87 m.

Under approximately 5 cm of soil that had accumulated from the collapse of the wall and other sources, bones were encountered. It was soon determined, thanks to several well preserved portions of mandibles, that these were the remains of several jaguars. The first level of bones were cleared off, pedestalling as much as possible. As can be seen in Figure 6, the bones were strewn in the cyst apparently in random order. Throughout the entire excavation of the cyst, few bones were found in an articulated fashion, and in those instances that were, it was usually part of a mandible and part of a skull. Upon removal of the first level of bone, a very irregular intrusion of lime plaster was found in parts of the cyst, particularly heavy concentrations in the northern half. Excavations of this area revealed more bones in the layer of plaster and more below the plaster.

The removal of the second layer (those in the plaster and below it) of bone was more controlled than the first. The cyst was divided into 5 sections (areas around the four corners and a central area). Since there was little evidence of bone articulation, bones were grouped with others in the immediate area in order to aid in the restoration and cleaning of the bones.

After the removal of all the jaguar bones in the cyst, it was decided to excavate the fill below the cyst. This was done in order to obtain a date of the cyst by ceramic dating methods, and to be sure that the cyst area had been thoroughly investigated. Excavations were continued to a depth of nearly two meters below the original floor of the cyst. Only 7 fragments of ceramics were uncovered during this time, but we assured ourselves that there was nothing else associated under the cyst. At an elevation of 596.96 m, approximately 198 cm below the original cyst floor, we encountered a well preserved plaster floor (Figure 7.). This was believed to be an earlier plaza floor for the West Court of the Acropolis. Due to the depth of the excavations, confined conditions and lack of datable material, the excavations of this area were terminated.

During the mapping of the cyst excavation, a small shaft, located to the east of the cyst and adjacent to it, was uncovered (Figure 8.). Later investigations were concentrated on this shaft and its twin to the south (discovered during the investigation of the first shaft). Before investigating the shafts, a larger work area needed to be cleared. The entire area

between Altar Q and Structure 16 was cleared in a three meter wide path with the southern and northern boundaries of this path being 1.5 meters from the central axis of the building respectively.

During these excavations, a round platform (Feature 12) of faced stones, two courses high in some places, but one course in most, was uncovered (Figure 9.). Unfortunately the whole platform was not preserved. A deposit of yellowish clay was uncovered where the rest of the platform should have been. It was later discovered that this platform was located in front of an old tunnel entrance made by Gus Stromsvik and never documented. Part of the platform was probably removed during the trenching to find the front of the superstructure. It was logical that the northeast portion of the platform was removed, because the trench had to begin on an angle in order to avoid Altar Q. The yellowish deposit left in this area was probably discarded fill from the tunnel excavations.

Located in the center of this round platform was an oval shaped stone with a smooth upper surface. The surface of this oval stone had a charred appearance, probably from fire. The excavations atop the platform and in the immediate vicinity around it yielded a large sample of ceramics, almost exclusively incensario fragments. Resting atop the platform, 12 cm from the center, was a small, highly polished jade fragment (Feature 13). In an adjacent area to the west of the platform, along the central axis of both Structure 16 and the platform, and just below the plaza floor level, there was found a small cache of obsidian lancets (Feature 21). This was a small offering

associated with the construction of this sacred area.

Once a large enough area was cleared and the previous discoveries documented, work began on the first of the two shafts. A small area immediately to the east of the shaft was excavated. The tenons of the shaft blocks were followed until they terminated approximately 146 cm below the surface of the last plaza floor. The bottom two blocks of the first shaft were removed in order to excavate the contents of the shaft. The inside of the shaft, roughly square, measured 22cm a side. Located at the bottom of the shaft were nine whole obsidian lancets and parts of two others. Twenty-five centimeters above the obsidian were the remains of what has now been determined as a bird, probably a macaw (Figure 10).

It was during the excavation of the aforementioned shaft that a second one was discovered to the south. These two shafts are symmetrical to each other with respect to the jaguar cyst and a clearly associated with the cyst construction sequence. Excavations of the second shaft (Feature 20) was facilitated by the knowledge gained from the previous work. It was assumed that the contents would be similar. The south shaft contained no obsidian, but did contain bird remains similar to the first shaft. Of note, these remains were found at an elevation higher than those of the north shaft.

The final portion of the excavations of this suboperation consisted of clearing a two meter wide section of the steps of Structure 16. From the tunneling operations of suboperation 2, it was determined that the entrance to the old tunnel was below

the area we were excavating. Subsequently, the area uncovered was in a disturbed context and the ceramics found were not to be included in any analysis. A rather large amount of faced stones were found. These were placed there by Stromsvik and these sat upon the replaced steps that were originally taken out to make the tunnel entrance. There was no plaster coating on any of the stairs that had been suspected of being moved, but there were generous coats of plaster on the adjacent stairs that were cleared off in our excavations. We removed the stairs in order to gain access to the tunnel, thus terminating suboperation 1 for the season.

Suboperation Two

The original research design for suboperation 2 called for the investigation of the lower outset panel on the west side of Structure 16 and then to begin tunneling into the structure from that locus. Midway through the 1988 field season, the discovery of an existing tunnel changed the focus of this particular suboperation from the middle of the structure to the base of the temple structure. A total of ten lots were excavated in this suboperation the first three were for the investigation of the outset panel itself and the other seven were from the tunnel.

The lower outset panel was chosen for investigation because of its location on the superstructure and the iconography associated with it. (Figure 11) The skulls, being everpresent symbols of death and sacrifice, that once adorned the panel, lay in disarray at the base of the structure. All that is left of the panel is lowest course, containing five death skulls. On the north side of the panel, which actually extends onto the stairs,

three more skulls remain in-situ. As mentioned before, the elevations of the skulls are just above those of the mounds to the west (10L-13) and south (10L-14), and the conch shells on Structure 11. The surface rubble of what was left of the panel was mapped in. Because many of the panel's skulls had found their way to the bottom of the structure, it was assumed that something was amiss with the context of the panel. The subsequent excavations revealed a large number of faced building stones were found where there normally should have been rough fill rocks. All this led the author to believe that the panel was tampered with in ancient times. (With that kind of iconography I don't see why not.) A drain stone was found atop the rubble. This would indicate that the temple itself collapsed after the panel was looted. If this was true, the temple would almost certainly have been looted in antiquity also.

The excavation of the panel was done in three levels. Level one was the temple fall, structure fall accumulation and the beginning of a yellow-brown fill. Level two contained the yellow-brown fill. Level three contained an orange-brown fill down to the level of the bottom of the panel. The fill of the entire panel consisted of mainly faced blocks, but these were strewn in a random order. A deposit of yellow clay (Feature 3), which could have served as a floor was roughly level to the bottom of the panel.

A tunnel was started into the structure just below the level of the previously mentioned floor. The floor eventually abutted a 5 course high wall (Feature 4). This, along with the large

amount of faced stones and the discovery of a fragment of a human mandible (Feature 14) led the author to believe that the area might have been a burial crypt. But owing to the actions of ancient looters, all the evidence had been destroyed.

The 5 course wall was removed after being recorded. Approximately 70 cm to the east another wall (Feature 5) of faced stones was encountered. This appeared to be a terrace wall to an earlier structure. The wall extended beyond the limits of investigation to the north, south and upwards into the ceiling of the tunnel. This wall was also recorded and removed.

Lots were located behind the Feature 5 wall in the tunnel, now designated as tunnel 1. These lots continued east until a wall of rough masonry (Feature 29) at approximately the west 14 line of our temple grid. This wall was a little over a meter in height and occupied the lower half of the tunnel only. It was decided to leave the wall in-situ and excavate above this wall. Immediately behind the rough wall, another, of fine masonry construction was uncovered (Feature 30). Excavations were then concentrated in front of those two walls in order to find a floor associated with them.

The excavations in front of Features 29 and 30 was lot 8. In addition to finding a floor, excavations of this area also found an old tunnel partially backfilled that was made by G. Stromsvik. One of the first things to be discovered was that parts of this old tunnel were directly under our new tunnel. Sometimes with less than 50cm of fill between them. Work was discontinued at once in tunnel one for obvious safety reasons and we began to look for the entrance of the tunnel near the base of

the structure (explained in the previous section).

After little work in the newly discovered tunnel (designated as tunnel 4), it was clear that the old access at the base of the structure must be reopened for ventilation and to ease the removal of the fill from excavations. Work was then concentrated near the base of the structure. While clearing the access, a top of a terrace (Feature 23) was uncovered. This was believed to be the first terrace of Structure 16-2nd. This wall was then cleared downward in hopes of finding a floor. These excavations were designated as lot 9. The wall is 2.12 m high with a thick coat of well preserved plaster on top. The wall runs north-south coming from beyond the limit of investigation, and then corners to the west at a near perfect 90 degrees.

The wall then proceeds west for 270 cm from the corner until a small 5 course wall of rough masonry construction (Feature 26) abuts it. This wall was a retaining wall for the fill of the last construction. This retaining wall also separates lot 9 from lot 10. Lot 10 begins to the west of this wall. The aforementioned terrace wall (F 23) continues for an additional 74 cm. In all the length of the wall is 334 cm, and is abruptly cut off at the western end. It was hoped that at least the basal course of this wall cornered, but this was not the case.

A new tunnel, tunnel 5 was started where the wall had ended and proceeded north. After a meter of excavations to the north, an attempt was made to uncover the floor and to try to determine if the floor lipped up to the wall and if so locate the extent of the wall. No lipping was found, as the terrace wall was

determined to be resting atop the floor. A slight downward slope to the east was found. This could have been the spot where the wall had rested, but there is no stronger evidence. At this time we are not sure that the floor that was uncovered (Feature 32) was a plaza floor or if it was just another terrace wall. This matter will be addressed in later field seasons.

With no north-south wall intact, our goal of finding a central stair or axis (if it existed on the west side) became more difficult. the floor that the terrace wall (F 23) and retaining wall (F 26), sat on was then questioned as to whether it was an earlier plaza floor or the top of another terrace. There is a possibility that the floor is a terrace because Feature 31, what we are calling the second terrace to Structure 16-2nd also rests atop the terrace below. (In the excavations in the plaza, particularly the jaguar cyst, no evidence of floors were found until 152 cm below the floor in question.)

Two short walls of a maximum 3 courses each were found in tunnel 5. The first is located resting atop the floor in the tunnel and is 226 cm north of the edge of the Feature 23 terrace wall. The second rests on the tennons of the first, giving the combination a step-like appearance. This wall is 47 cm to the north of the first. These have been designated as Features 24 and 27 respectively.

All lots in this suboperation contained samples of Late Classic ceramics with a few samples identifiable as Middle Classic pieces. Samples of obsidian were obtained in all the tunnel lots as well as various amounts of snail shells (both the kind that were eaten and the kind that were worn as

ornamentation). In lot 10, level 2, tunnel 5, a worked small stone in the shape of a deer head was found. In levels 2 and 3 of lot 10, fragments of human skull bones were found.

Suboperation Three

Excavations of suboperation 3 were concentrated in the upper portion of the superstructure. This location was selected because of the presence of the remains of another outset panel. Before excavations of the panel had begun, it was deemed that the panel had already been tampered with. The excavations later confirmed this. A main reason was that there was no sculpture or large blocks for that matter, adorning the upper outset whatsoever. Also, found at what would have been the bottom level of the panel was a small, flat, broken capstone measuring 45 cm by 23 cm with a thickness of about 5 cm. This capstone is similar to the one found by Stuart in his investigations of the Structure 11 outset panel in 1987 (Stuart, personal communication).

The main tunnel for this operation was designated as tunnel 2 and began at the outset panel and continued into the structure (east) until about one meter away from the center of the last phase of Structure 16-1st. Only three features of architecture were uncovered during the entire excavations. A large sample of ceramics were uncovered along with shell, obsidian and flint.

A total of 9 lots in two tunnels were excavated in this suboperation. Lots 1 and 2 were located in the actual outset panel and lots 3 through 9 were located in the tunnels.

The actual excavation of the outset produced Feature 6 a

continuation of a step into the area of the outset. Though badly slumped, the step continued for 74 cm into the area of the outset. This would suggest that this outset was a later addition to the structure. The author thinks that this might just be a construction technique. The other feature of note found in the excavation of the panel area was the previously mentioned capstone (Feature 7). It was found atop a clay floor that could have formed the base of the outset and having an elevation of 610.55 m. The fill of the outset contained an extraordinary number of faced stones as opposed to rough tuft and river cobbles normally found in the fill.

Initially, the tunnel from the upper outset was called tunnel #2. Tunnel #2, began in a easterly direction along the central north-south axis of the building. The first lot of the tunnel, lot 3 included the entire tunnel area, as there was no distinct stratigraphic separation yet visible. Approximately 1m into the actual tunnel, a stratigraphic separation of the fill became apparent.

Two distinct bands of a yellowish clay appeared on the fill, thus three new lots are created. They were lots 4,5, and 6. Lot 4 was the area from the uppermost layer of clay in the fill to the ceiling of the tunnel. Lot 5 was the level between the two layers of clay. Lot 6 was the lowermost level from the bottom layer of clay to the floor of the tunnel. It is important to note that although there were three different lots, they all represent the same construction sequence.

These three lots (4-6) were excavated east until Feature 19 was encountered. Feature 19 is a two course wall that runs

north-south and cornered to the west is tunnel 2. It was located and runs roughly parallel to the W 5.2 line at our excavation grid. Since this was the first architectural Feature found in 8.8m of excavation, it was decided that a new tunnel (tunnel #3) would follow this feature to the south. The same three lots were used with a tunnel #3 designation. Tunnel #3 proceeded to follow art Feature 41-19 for a distance of 5.5m. No other architecture was found, and it was decided that the tunnel would be terminated for the time being.

Lot 7, Level 1, tunnel #2 was begun with excavations above Feature 19 along the central axis. An emplantillada that was laid down above the fill was uncovered 136cm to the east of the Feature 19 wall. This emplantillada was designated feature 25. It is 106 cm wide and extends beyond the limit of excavation to the north and south. Since it has been placed on top of fill and that there is no architecture associated with the emplantillada, it has been suggested that it was a construction causeway for bringing material across the fill.

The final Feature of 1988 (Feature 28), found in tunnel #2, was located 108 cm east of the emplantillada. This was a two course wall of fine masonry with some plaster still adhering to the blocks. This was found in the second to last day of excavations and has yet to be investigated thoroughly.

A small area of the emplantillada was removed and the fill under was excavated to a depth of 40cm (lot 8). Only a few fragments of ceramics were uncovered. On the last day of excavations a new lot was opened (lot 9). This was area above

the Feature 19. Few ceramic samples were uncovered in the short time the area was excavated.

All the tunnel lots for Suboperation 3 (3-9) except for lots eight and nine have late classic ceramics distinctly present. A complete analysis of the pottery has not yet been undertaken, but the study should show a mix of both late and middle classic wares. In Lot 5, tunnel #2 a sample of mica was uncovered in the fill. In lot 5 tunnel #3, a spring oyster shell (spondylos) was uncovered. It was coated in red cinibar with a small pebble on the inside which also was coated in cinibar. Lot 3, of tunnel #2, yielded a nearly complete ceramic earflare with a mat weave design, a motif of royalty. All lots, save eight and nine, contained samples of obsidian and snail shells, both the kind that were eaten and the kind worn for decoration.

There is a definite lack of large well defined architecture in the suboperation 3 tunnels. The tunnel was dug almost to the center of the last phase construction without finding any architecture. This might indicate a large shift in locus for the last phase of the building or a dramatic increase on the height of the structure.

Implications and Conclusions

The discoveries of the 1988 field season were numerous and intriguing. The jaguar cyst and its associated altar features were totally unexpected finds. The tunnel operations were also surprising operations by the fact that only a small amount of architectural information was uncovered. In the case of the tunnels, what one doesn't find is often as important as what one finds.

It is in my opinion that the jaguar cyst found at the base of the structure is primarily associated with Structure 16 and that its association with Altar Q is a secondary one. Secondary, in this context means that Altar Q was probably dedicated after the construction of the cyst. I say this because the cyst is located on the central axis of Structure 16, whereas Altar Q is not. Also, the cyst's close proximity to Altar Q would have made its construction rather difficult if Altar Q was left in place. The small round altar was probably found in-situ between the two shafts that contained the macaws. Feature 12, the round implant of faced stones located just to the east of the cyst was also used for rituals pertaining to the building and the cyst.

The information obtained from the excavation of the cyst and shafts has several positive implications in the theory that the West Court was a model underworld. The first and foremost implication is the presence of the jaguars themselves. The jaguar is a water loving species, and in Maya mythology it is seen to dwell on the earth (above water) and in the underworld (in or below the water), as depicted on the many funeral vessels. A minimum count of the bones done by Diane Ballinger of the University of Indiana indicates that there were at least 13 separate jaguars and possibly as many as 15. A count of 15 jaguars would be significant because that is the same number of rulers that preceeded Yax Pac in his lineage. The macaws of the associated shafts could represent the lineage founder, Yax Kuk Mo' (Quetzal Macaw).

As mentioned above the jaguar bones appeared to have been

strewn about in a random fashion. This randomness could be explained if the cyst was used several times over a period of time. Each new jaguar that was cast into the cyst would disrupt the earlier bones beneath it. It also appears that each jaguar sacrifice was a fresh kill and still had some meat on its bones (but probably minus its sacred and valuable pelt). There is evidence of rodent gnaw marks some of the bones and several rat mandibles found mixed in with tiny bone fragments. Finally the plaster like material that was found in the cyst could have been lime used to speed the decay of the flesh, but D. Stuart (personal communication, 1988) suggests that it could have been ritually poured into the cyst in order to keep the spirits of the jaguar from escaping. This was practiced with some human burials in the Yucatan.

The sculpture that adorned the building was inclined to represent sacrifice, ancestor worship and death. Tlaloc imagery like that of Temple 26 is prevalent here also. Kan crosses which are often associated with blood letting are a principle component of the temple motif. Several seated figures can be said to be associated with Temple. One was found amid the rubble just above the second outset panel on the west side of the structure. The aforementioned and everpresent death skulls are also a powerful reminder of the general theme of the building.

The interpretation of the tunnel finds was the most difficult. With almost no architectural features uncovered in the uppermost tunnel the analysis of the artifacts was concentrated on the lower tunnels. Because the penultimate superstructure of 10L-16 was uncovered in the lower tunnels,

ceramic dating was attempted. In Copan ceramic dating the time periods could be rather large at times and usually their boundaries are not precisely defined. This prevented the accreditation of the structure to a specific ruler. In any case, the ceramics from the fill of the last construction are believed to be transitional Acbi (A.D. 400-650 or 700) and Coner (A.D. 700-1,000) phase. Thus, by this determination, the structure can be from the reign of at least 5 different rulers.

Recent finds not yet fully documented from the 1989 field season further supplement the earlier findings. In the excavation of the entire west and north sides of the superstructure, large glyphs representing Yax Mo' and a lineage founder were uncovered. This leads the author to believe that the structure might be associated with Yax Pac because of his references to his esteemed ancestor on other monuments. Also a large sun shield was found that is similar to the one that Yax Kuk Mo is wearing on Altar Q. This further supports a Yax Pac construction.

The archaeological evidence uncovered in the 1988 field season has lent further support to the theory that the West Court and its component buildings are indeed a model/representation of the Copan Maya vision of the underworld domain. The jaguars seem to be the appropriate sacrificial victims for communication with the underworld due to their multi-planar existence. The number of jaguars may be inconsequential, but the termination of sacrifices at 15 might have some meaning unknown to us at this time.

The fact that the jaguar cyst, macaws and Altar Q are all located in front of Structure 16 attest to the importance of its role in anchoring the West Court both architecturally and spiritually. Further investigation is indeed merited and openly encouraged. It is hoped that the 1989 field season will uncover even more evidence to support the aforementioned theories on the West Court.

As stated in the introduction, the 1988 field season has answered a few questions, it has laid the foundation for solving others in the near future, but most importantly, it has unearthed an entire new set of questions that need to be answered. It is in this way that the goals of the 1988 field season were met.

Figures

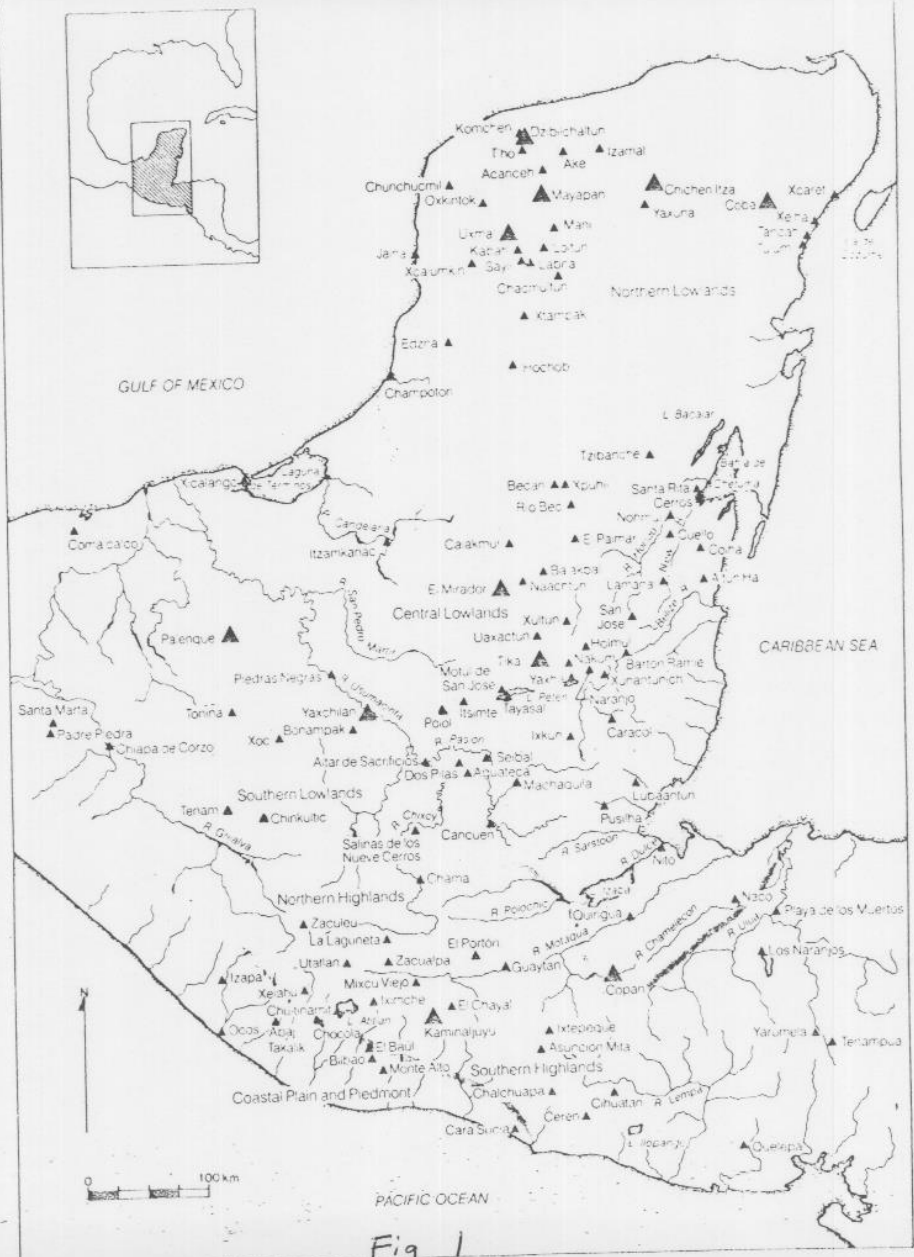
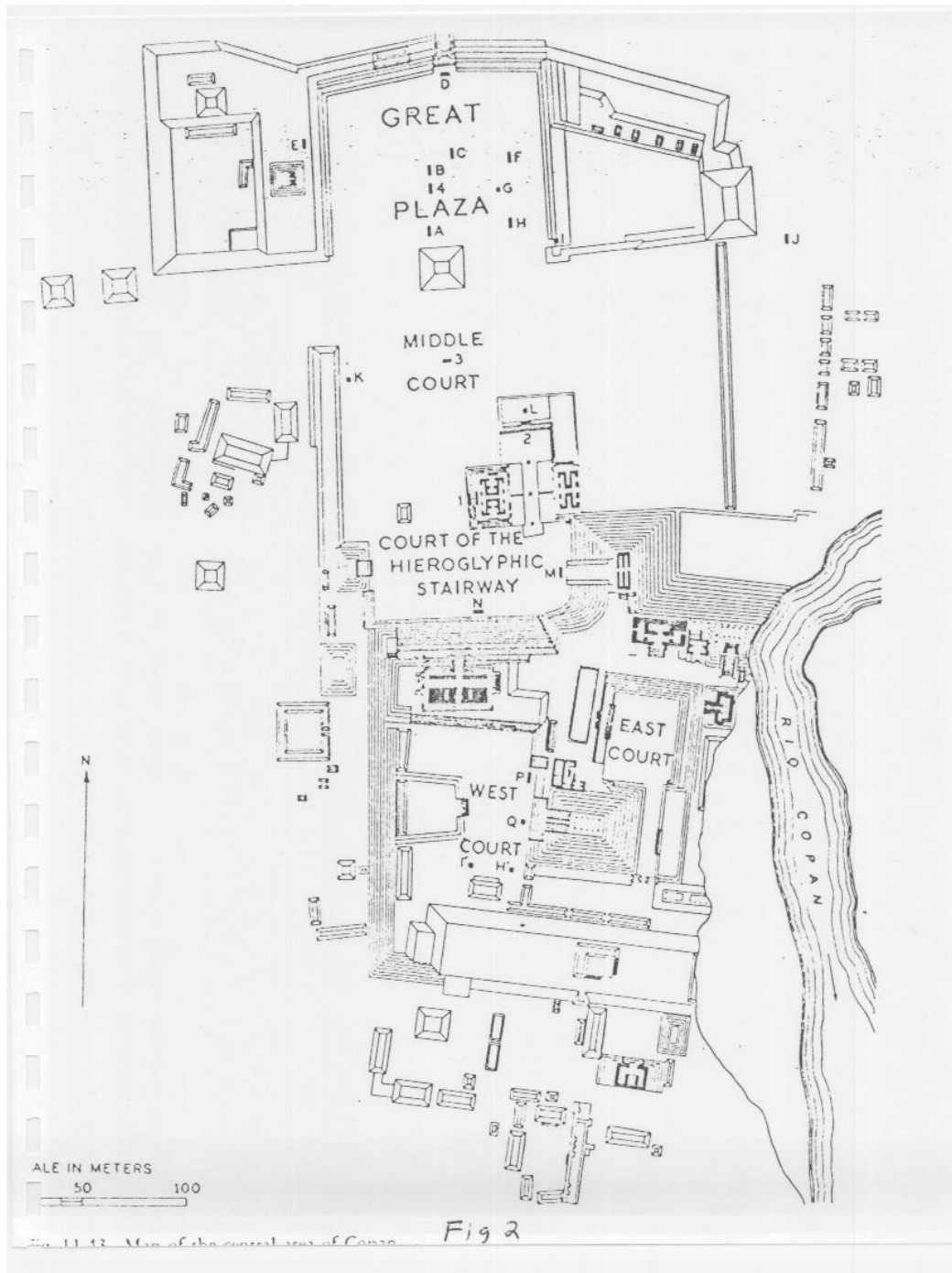
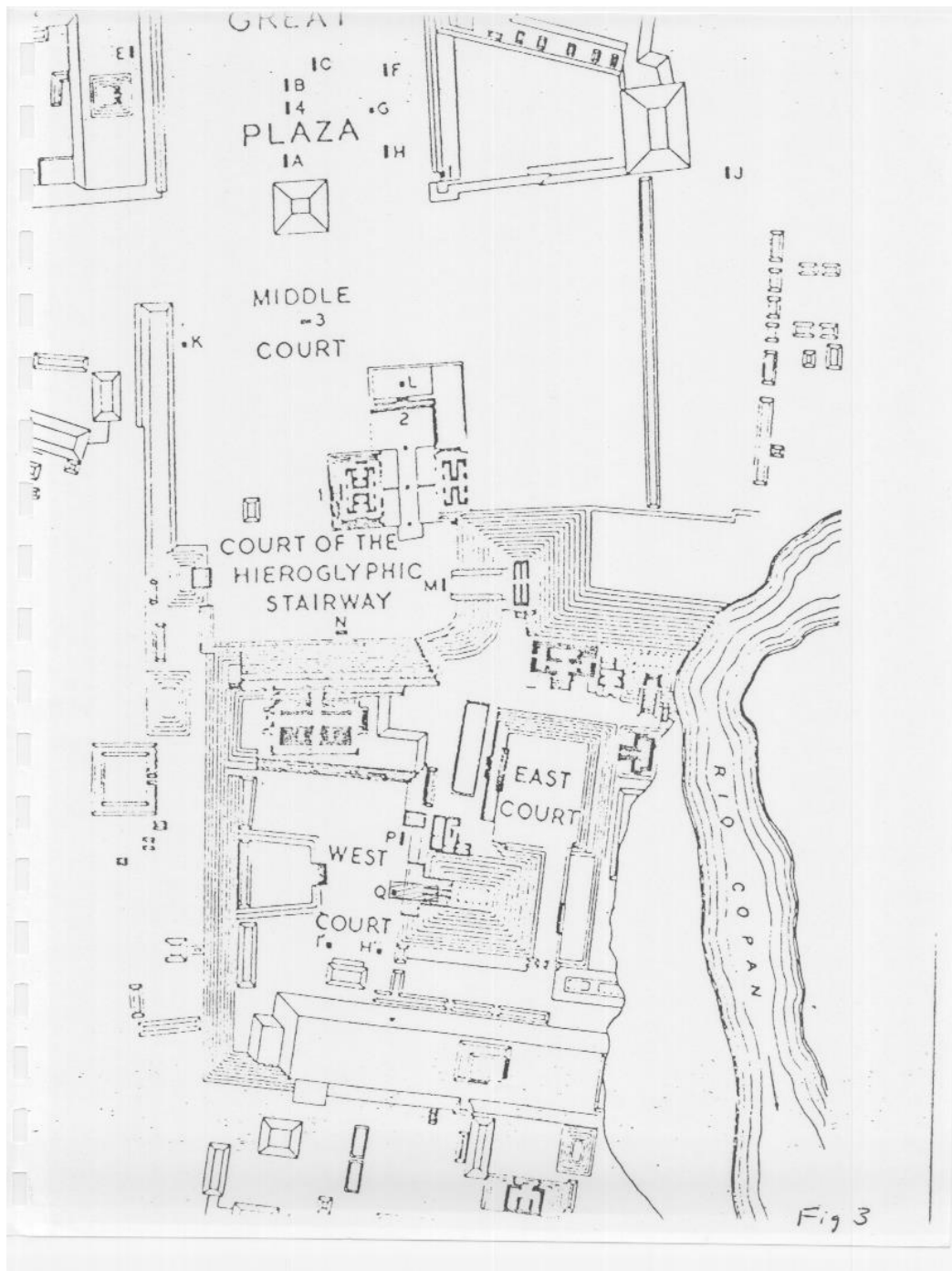


Fig 1

Fig. 1.1. Map of the Maya area, showing principal archaeological sites, major rivers, and





Boy. Fash.



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47-24 TH 13 S. B.

Altar Q ↑

49cm to rock of Spontane

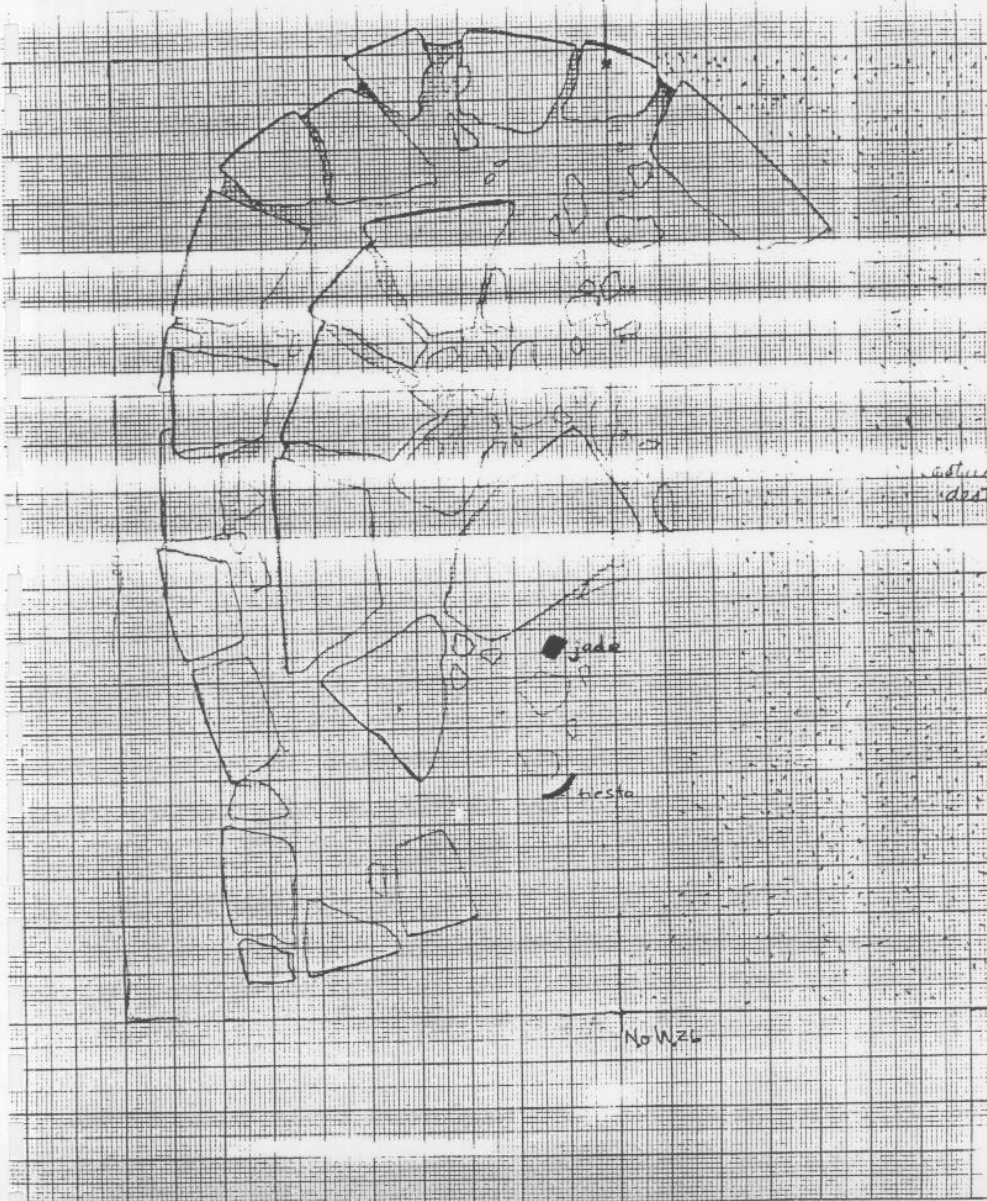
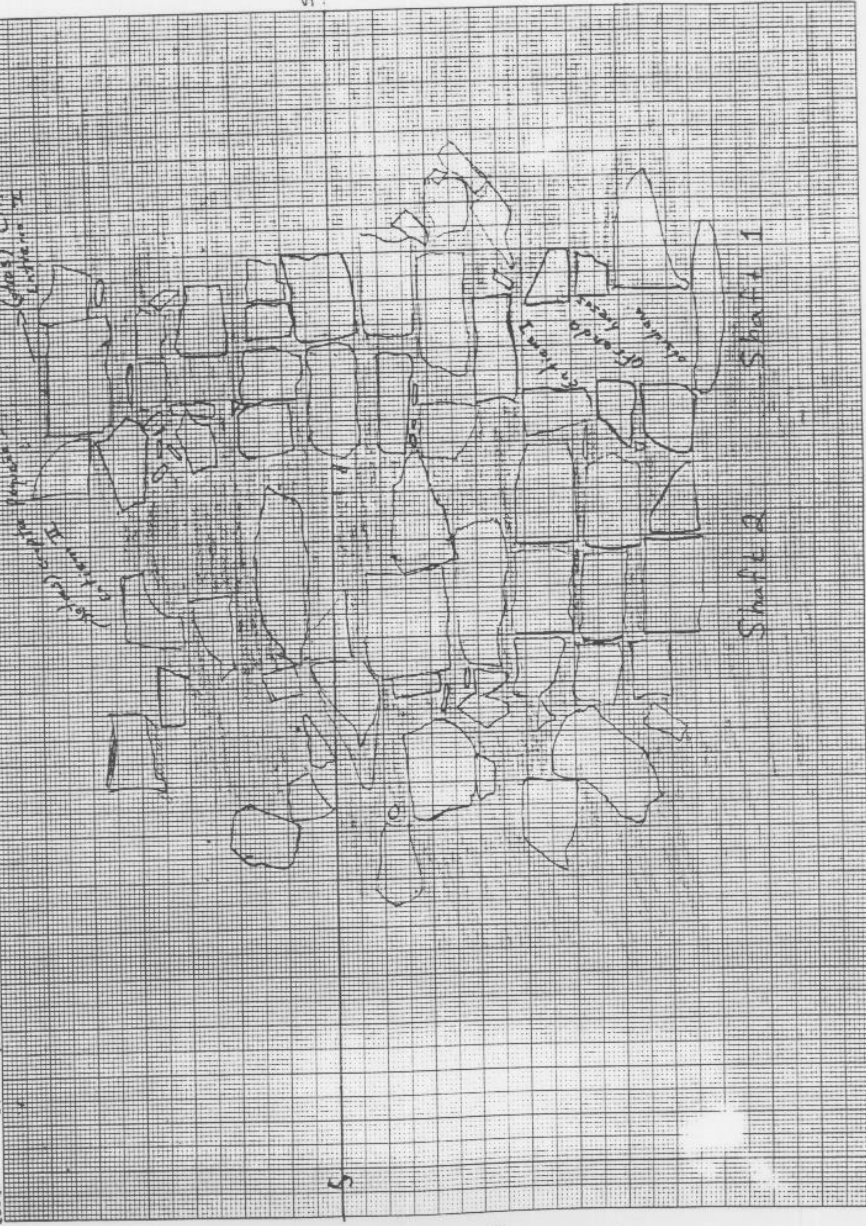


Fig 8

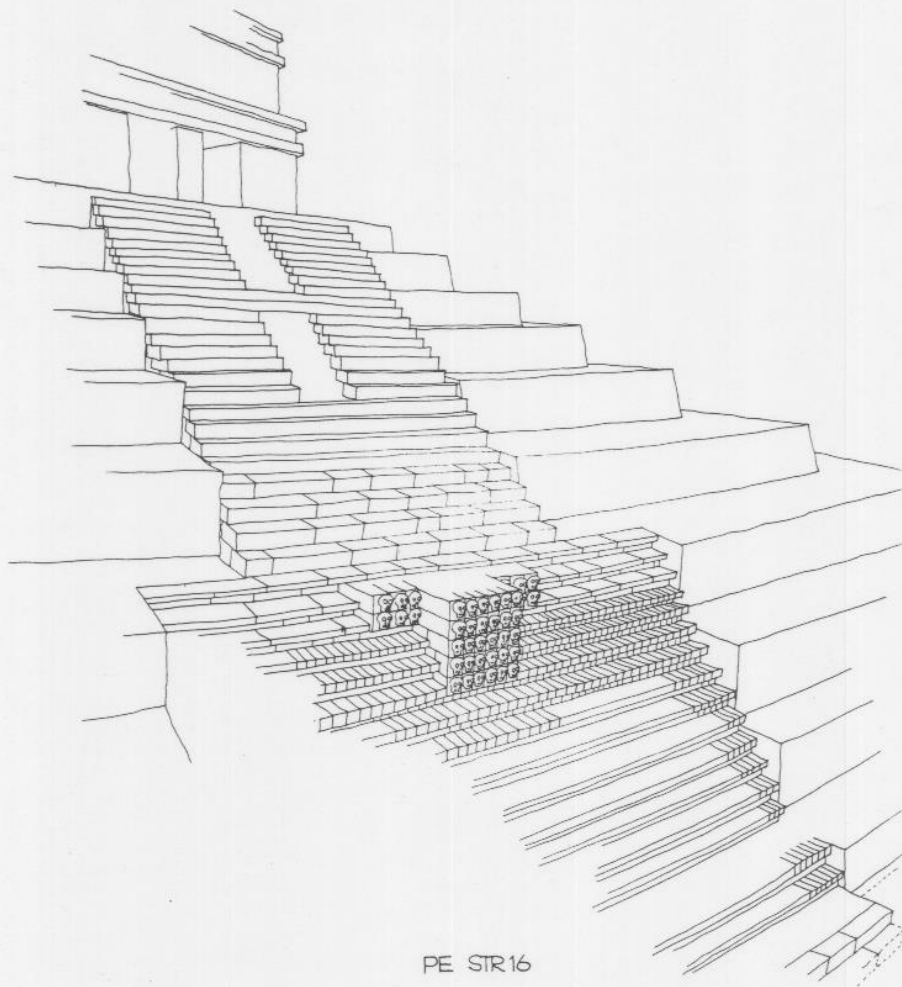
Cetr. mesa 101-16

escala 1:20 OP 41. Plan map of Parte de las Criptas Pequeñas hacia lago 20.may.78



63
N
m.
d.
p.

Fig 9



PE STR16

Abb. 163

Fig 10

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