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DECODING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PROBLEMATIC DEPOSITS IN THE MAYA LOWLANDS

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Abstract

The term "problematical deposits" was coined decades ago at Tikal to refer to special deposits that were neither burials nor caches. Since that time, the term has been expanded to refer to a range of deposits that have puzzled archaeologists. In this paper we review the various interpretations that have been offered for these deposits including *de facto* refuse, squatter deposits, and the remains of dedication or termination ritual, feasting, or pilgrimage. We argue that the superficial similarity of these deposits can make it difficult to identify the range of activities that they represent and that detailed contextual analysis is required to distinguish them. We offer some of the archaeological correlates that have been associated with different types of problematic deposits.

INTRODUCTION

The term "problematical deposits" (hereafter shortened to "problematic deposits"), was a provisional term coined to designate a range of "special deposits of uncertain function" (Moholy-Nagy 1997:302) at Tikal that were neither burials nor caches (Coe 1982:49, 1990:930–939; Moholy-Nagy and Coe 2008:67–71). Since that time, the term has been expanded to refer to a range of deposits that have puzzled archaeologists. Unlike caches, which are buried, or middens, which are typically found at the sides or backs of structures (or far away from them), problematic deposits tend to be found in prominent locations in monumental centers, often in association with elite residences and plaza floors. Mock (1998a:115) noted that many of these deposits are located along the central axes of buildings, in doorways, and in the corners of plazas. Although the term problematic deposit is occasionally criticized for being too vague (Lamoureux-St. Hilaire and Snetsinger 2020), we believe that in some ways the term's vagueness is an advantage because it does not ascribe function to the deposits nor intention to their deposition (e.g., "ritual deposits").

Problematic deposits identified across the Maya lowlands (Figure 1) are often linked to abandonment (Ambrosino et al. 2003; Ardren 1999; Brown and Garber 2003; Chase and Chase 2004; Clayton et al. 2005; Freidel 1998b; Guderjan 2004; Houk 2016; Inomata 2016; Mock 1998a; Navarro-Farr 2016; Navarro-Farr et al. 2008; Stanton et al. 2008; Tsukamoto 2017). Similar deposits, however, have also been identified in Preclassic and Early Classic contexts (Hansen et al. 2008; Walker 1998), so the use of this term is not restricted only to the remains of the final activities in ceremonial spaces at the end of the Classic period, but may also indicate similar phenomena separated by centuries at the same site (Walker 1998:85). For this reason, archaeologists working in the Belize Valley (cf. Awe et al. 2020a; Hoggarth et al. 2020) prefer to use the term "peri-abandonment deposit" for a variety of features directly associated with abandonment contexts. This term does not encompass problematic deposits not related to abandonment events (e.g., consecration events); it is an umbrella term that is more specific than "problematic deposits" but still does not assume a function for these features.

We present a brief typology of problematic deposits in this article and Table 1 summarizes some of the important material correlates of each type. We see two broad categories of problematic deposits: those associated with mundane activities (*de facto* refuse and artifacts left by squatters) and those associated with dedication and termination rituals, feasting, and pilgrimage, in which broken, smashed, or scattered objects are intentionally deposited in what can be compared to other sorts of sacrificial offerings (Mock 1998b:5). Problematic deposits can be found in elite and non-elite contexts. We do not claim to have identified all the possible behavioral correlates of problematic deposits in this paper.

We caution, as many others have, that artifact content alone is not enough to distinguish the varied meanings that problematic deposits may have had for the ancient Maya—detailed contextual analysis is essential. Furthermore, as Houk (2016:205) notes, these deposits "could represent a palimpsest of material, potentially the result of multiple events that spanned days or decades." For example, Freidel (1998a:192) discusses "compound contexts" where "dedication and termination rituals…occur together" (see also Becker [1988:122–123] and Navarro-Farr [2016]) and Aimers (2003:160) discusses multiple abandonments difficult to separate stratigraphically (see also Awe et al. 2020a, 2020b and Aimers and Awe 2020).

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Figure 1. Map of sites discussed in this issue. Map © 2019 Walter Witschey, with data from the Electronic Atlas of Ancient Maya Sites (http://MayaGIS.smv.org).

DE FACTO REFUSE

Because problematic deposits are often on or just above floors, in the Maya area they have often been assumed to be *de facto* refuse representing the last activities conducted prior to a rapid, unplanned abandonment (Inomata and Sheets 2000:6). As defined by Schiffer (1987:89), *de facto* refuse "consists of the tools, facilities, structures, and other cultural materials that, although still usable (or reusable), are left behind when an activity area is abandoned." *De facto* refuse does not include trash that has been moved from its systemic context. *De facto* refuse in site cores is expected to reflect the activities of the last elite occupants but, as Schiffer (1987:89) notes, "variability in *de facto* refuse is marked, both within and between settlements" and when using the concept of *de facto* refuse archaeologists may downplay or ignore some of the complexities of its deposition. For example, evidence from Ceren suggests that *de*

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Table 1. Archaeological and chronological correlates for behaviors and hypotheses related to problematic deposits.

Activity Type	Material Correlates
De facto refuse	Objects left in context of use. Many objects in areas expected to be maintained and cleaned, but not in locations where they would interfere with normal activities (doorways or stairs). Mostly reconstructable vessels, although incomplete garbage collection might have taken some partial vessels. Typical elite domestic debris (see section Squatter Activity, but with more elite activity, food, and paraphernalia). Chronological data from ^{14}C dates or ceramics from deposits date to the same time as the final use of ceremonial space (evidence of a sacking, burning, or abandonment event).
Squatter activity	Relative abundance of domestic materials, including: plain ceramics; food preparation items, such as *manos* and *metates*; and evidence of butchery on faunal remains. Evidence of low-scale production of household goods, including: spindle whorls; bone tools; ceramic, lithic, and textile production; and obsidian and other utilitarian items. Absence/low relative abundance of elite prestige goods. Chronological data from ^{14}C dates or ceramics from deposits post-date royal activity in the center, although can be contemporaneous with remaining occupation in the settlement.
Dedication or consecration deposits	Ritual features (e.g., caches and burials) in direct association with architectural construction or remodeling. Complete ritual objects. Ritually charged "powerfacts." Cosmological patterning. Burials establishing ancestral connections to land. Lavish burials with investment in mortuary architecture and grave goods. Chronological data from ceramics or ^{14}C dates that suggest feature predates significant activity at the site.
Termination deposits: general	Smashed/broken artifacts in high amounts. Deposition of white marl. Large numbers of ceramics can be re-fitted. Presence of kill-holes on some artifacts. Ideologically important locations (center axes and corners). Ritual artifact classes in relative abundance, such as censers, figurines (broken), and musical instruments. Association with death (burials or human remains, which are sometimes scattered). Faunal materials sometimes present. Rooms made unusable by filling with marl or other materials. Relative abundance of high value materials (e.g., polychrome pottery). Chronological data from ^{14}C dates or ceramics from deposits date to the same time as the location was actively in use (construction or mortuary activity).
Desecration deposits	Extensive damage to structures. Intensive burning. High percentage of non-local types of ceramics. Floors cut open. Burials looted. Monuments defaced. Evidence for violence. Decapitation/scalping. Relative abundance of weapons, both in deposit and other, nearby, similarly dated contexts. Evidence for "scattering" of materials. Sherds can be refitted and/or vessels can be reconstructed (even between deposits). Large quantities of elite objects (from location being sacked?). Chronological data from ^{14}C dates from burning episode is largely contemporaneous with the final royal/elite activities in ceremonial center.
Reverential termination deposits	Archaeological signatures of desecratory and reverential termination are similar. Burials are not expected to show evidence of violence. Evidence of ancestor veneration, including: secondary burials, where human remains have been moved from primary locations; inclusion of human remains in ritual contexts; and materials with hieroglyphic texts naming known rulers or other individuals that are thought to pre-date the context in which they are found.
Feasting deposits (modified from Hayden [2001]:40–41).	Food. Rare or labor-intensive plant/animal species. Larger species such as deer. Larger cuts of meat to feed large number of participants. Exotic species such as marine fish or other non-local species. Waste of food items. Articulated joints. Unprocessed bone.

Continued

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Table 1. *Continued*

Activity Type	Material Correlates
	Recreational foods.
	Cacao (or cacao drinking vessels).
	Tobacco.
	Preparation vessels.
	Unusual or rare ceramic types.
	Unique forms.
	Unique decoration (e.g., molded-carved).
	Unusual numbers/sizes of plain bowls.
	Unusual numbers/sizes of jars.
	Serving vessels.
	Unusual quality (e.g., highly decorated).
	Relative abundance of decorated serving vessels.
	Unusual size of serving vessels.
	Unusual numbers of serving vessels.
	Special food disposal features.
	Bone dumps (processed bone from butchery).
	Special refuse fires containing feasting items.
	Feasting middens.
	Feasting facilities.
	Special structures for high-ranking guests or large numbers of people.
	Special display facilities, scaffolds, poles, or other features.
	Special locations.
	Loci associated with residential corporate households, central community spaces.
	Ideologically important locations.
	Associated prestige items focused on entertainment/presentation.
	Presence or absence, and relative abundance of prestige items typically used in features, including: ritual paraphernalia, Jewelry or other carved adornments, musical instruments, decorated serving vessels, and associated ritual materials.
	Ritual objects (censers and figurines).
	Human remains (ancestor bundles and/or burials).
	Chronological data from ^{14}C dates or ceramics from deposits date to the same time as the location was actively in use (construction or mortuary activity).
Transposed feasting deposits	Relatively large amount of ceramics cannot be re-fitted.
	Some ceramics in other deposits can be refitted with materials in other contexts.
	Typical evidence of feasting materials (see section Feasting Deposits).
	Chronological data from ^{14}C dates or ceramics from deposits pre-date or are contemporaneous with the timing for the last use of the ceremonial space.
Pilgrimage deposits	Soil matrix level above floor but below deposit.
	Relatively higher numbers of ritual artifact classes.
	Censers.
	Figurines.
	Musical instruments.
	Connections with ancestor veneration.
	Burials.
	Ancestor bundles.
	Anthropogenic figurines representing ancestors.
	Low abundance of domestic activities (see section Squatters).
	Some prestige goods, but relatively low abundance in comparison with total artifacts.
	Ideologically charged ritual items "ideofacts."
	Food or items intended for food/use by gods.
	Ideologically important locations for rituals.
	If conducted by locals, local isotopes for burials, if conducted by non-locals, non-local strontium values and possible foreign material types.
	Chronological data from ^{14}C dates or ceramics from deposits post-date period of initial decline of ceremonial center or are contemporaneous with final activities.

facto refuse is more likely to be found in storage locations (Cameron 2003:208; McKee and Sheets 2003) than its context of use. Archaeologically, *de facto* refuse would include objects left in the context of their use, or as Chase and Chase (2020) describe, materials that were left in a temporary location upon the breakdown of formal removal systems. In site-core deposits, we would expect vessels that are largely reconstructable, with items similar to other elite domestic debris.

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Even the concept of "abandonment" becomes complicated in relation to *de facto* refuse because abandonment varies in speed and range, from individual structures and sites to entire regions (Stanton and Magnoni 2008:8). As Cameron (2003:208) notes, elites and the poor may leave a location first, whereas middle rank people like artisans and merchants may stay longer "because they had little to lose by doing so; they continued to participate in local craft production and trade." A final issue is that, as Schiffer (1987:96) notes, when "archaeologists do find assemblages of apparent *de facto* refuse; usually on the floors of structures, they can seldom resist the temptation to treat such artifacts as systemic inventories" left in their place of use. Cameron (2003:207) discusses a number of issues related to rate of abandonment and the number and types of artifacts left behind.

SQUATTER DEPOSITS

Interpretations closely linked to *de facto* refuse suggests that some problematic deposits are the remains of squatters, usually thought to be non-elite, inhabiting otherwise abandoned site centers. Stanton et al. (2008:234) describe a squatter as "someone who reuses architecture in a domestic fashion after an abandonment episode without the express consent of the previous owners-users." In this vein, we describe squatter deposits as representing post-abandonment activity that is domestic in nature, often by individuals of a lower status if the locale of study is ceremonial in nature. Suggested archaeological correlates of squatters are found in Table 1. The domestic, non-elite nature of these remains are what sets them apart from *de facto* remains. Quantitative assessments of artifact assemblages can help identify deposits related to squatter activity. For example, Hoggarth and colleagues (2020), compare artifact assemblages of deposits in ceremonial areas with typical Late/Terminal Classic household assemblages at Baking Pot. They find that artifacts in ceremonial areas are very different in composition than those related to commoner domestic activities, suggesting that the deposits at Baking Pot are not likely the result of squatter activity.

As noted by Stanton et al. (2008:228) the "squatter model was advanced by Thompson (1954) over 50 years ago without much supporting evidence" and is not particularly well-supported ethnoarchaeologically. Nevertheless, squatters are sometimes evoked when depositional layers are found above floors but below problematic deposits, suggesting that re-occupation has occurred (Inomata 2016:96). Overall, the presence of soil matrix offers important information about the tempo (gradual or abrupt) and nature of the end of activities at a given site. A cautionary finding was made by Inomata (2016) at Aguateca where about 60 centimeters of soil was intentionally deposited in some areas of the site-core prior to the complete abandonment of the center, which suggests that not all soil matrix on floors can be contributed to natural formation processes after abandonment. Several papers in this special issue (Aimers and Awe 2020; Awe et al. 2020a; Hoggarth et al. 2020) describe a thin soil lens that lies directly on a terminal floor, below the level of the deposit. In those articles, the authors attribute natural versus artificial depositional processes to them, given that they tend to be thicker near corners (where wind-blown dirt might blow in and become trapped) and taper off outward from these areas. The matrix often contains few to no materials that are made or processed by humans. Given the ubiquity of this pattern across sites in the Belize Valley, it is unlikely that human-driven activities would have formed such similar soil formations. Unlike at Aguateca, where the depth of the soil suggests that it was moved to this location, soil matrix in the Belize Valley appears to be the result of natural processes after spaces were no longer maintained.

DEDICATION OR CONSECRATION DEPOSITS

Dedication or dedicatory deposits are also known as consecration deposits because they are related to ritual acts related to the consecration of structures and spaces. Freidel (1998a:189) notes that "broadly, what we term "dedication rituals" are acts of ensouling or engendering built places and made things; what we call "termination rituals" are acts of killing, sacrificing, capturing, or exorcising spiritual force from such places or things." Dedication deposits are typically in the form of caches, but may include deposits on floors (Mock 1998b:6; Navarro-Farr 2016:253) especially when associated with renovation or rededication (Iannone et al. 2016: 151–155; Walker 1998:83–85). Although the material correlates of consecration and termination may include similar sorts or valued and ritual objects, consecration rituals are "not typically associated with destructive behavior" (Shelton 2008:1). Brown and Garber (2003:159) discuss a possible consecration deposit above a "white marl lens" that included full and partial vessels and may have been the remains of dedicatory feasting (see section Feasting Deposits below).

Dedication deposits are identified within the archaeological record by the presence of ritual objects in direct association with new construction or remodeled architecture (Table 1). Caches can be evidence of dedication activity, particularly when those features exhibit ideological patterning (e.g., directional patterning). Burial activity can also serve to reinforce ancestral ties to land or the legitimization of power (McAnany 1998), serving as a dedicatory reference point for lineages or households at a site. These may include lavish burials of royal or elite individuals within ceremonial centers.

TERMINATION DEPOSITS: INTRODUCTION

The concept of termination offering was developed by Coe (1959: 94–95) at Piedras Negras (also see Mock [1998c]). Several authors (Aimers 2003; Canuto and Andrews 2008:260; Inomata 2003:44; Walker 2002) have noted that, although termination deposits are planned and systematic because they are associated with ritual behavior, they can be mistaken for evidence of rapid abandonment, where large numbers of broken artifacts may be left behind. Termination deposits are associated with the ritual deactivation of various loci from the Preclassic period on (Mock 1998b: 5), but as far as we know, no termination deposits have been identified in Postclassic contexts (Canuto and Andrews 2008:260).

Table 1 lists some of the materials typically associated with termination deposits, including large quantities of smashed or broken items, often of high value. These objects include polychrome and unusual ceramics, musical instruments, greenstone adornments, broken projectile points, manos and metates, spindle whorls, and figurines. Pottery sherds from these deposits are often larger with sharper edges than those in middens, presumably because they were not exposed for a long time: "[u]nlike domestic refuse, which is continually subjected to churning and the process of bioturbation, termination sherds were usually quickly covered, either by new construction following their cleaning powers, or by collapsed architecture" (Suhler and Freidel 2003:141–142). Human bone is often found in these deposits (Navarro-Farr 2009:96), both in scattered form that might be indicative of ancestor bundles as well as in

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complete and articulated human burials (Hoggarth et al. 2016). Navarro-Farr and Prera (2014:40) suggest that termination deposits have a "notable absence of faunal bones" and this distinguishes them from middens (see also Houk 2016:205), but Hoggarth and colleagues (Burke et al. 2020; Hoggarth et al. 2014, 2016) have found faunal material in these deposits (see especially Burke et al. [2020]). At Baking Pot, faunal remains represent a relatively low proportion (approximately three to six percent) of the total assemblage in three of the deposits, while the fourth deposit at B6-6, a locale that is located within Plaza B, had a much higher amount (approximately 16 percent). Various sorts of destruction such as architectural burning, structural damage, and smashing/breaking/scattering of artifacts are typically associated with termination deposits (Pagliaro et al. 2003:79–80).

Together, regional and site-specific data show a great degree of variability in the artifact assemblages and contexts of deposits, resulting in varied interpretations. As Navarro-Farr (2016:262) notes, "the challenge here lies in distinguishing termination rituals from a suite of other differentially motivated ritual acts that may on the surface look a lot like ritual termination" (see section Dedication or Consecration above).

Negative or Desecratory Termination Deposits

Desecratory termination deposits are thought to be associated with the ritual decommission of buildings and spaces (Navarro-Farr et al. 2008; Schwake and Iannone 2016; Stanton et al. 2008; Suhler and Freidel 2003). Desecratory termination deposits are typically found at points of transition between rooms, courtyards, or stairways and are often associated with the burning, destruction, or defacement of carved monuments, buildings, and objects. Pagliaro et al. (2003:79–81) describe primary- or secondary-context human remains as key elements of negative or desecratory ritual deposits, which may represent the "purposeful disturbance and/or desecration of elite burials as well as the remains of ritually sacrificed elite inhabitants of a Maya community" (Pagliaro et al. 2003: 80).

Reverential Termination Deposits

Freidel (1998a:190) sees reverential termination as an intermediate between dedication and termination ritual (see also Walker [1998]). As Navarro-Farr notes (2016:263), however, "attempts to differentiate between interpretations of intentional desecrating violence and reverential behavior in ancient Maya contexts are fraught with challenges…From an indigenous worldview, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive domains" (see also Navarro-Farr [2009: 437]). For example, Mock (1998b:5) describes the challenge faced by Becker (1988:122–123) in distinguishing termination from dedication in reference to Burial 160 at Tikal: "As a source of power, the interment of human skeletal material can animate or 'ensoul' the building, yet at the same time the physical act of cutting through the floor of the structure to enclose the burial offering is analogous to the ritual killing or defacement of the existing architectural structure" (see also Freidel [2016:278] and Schele and Freidel [1990:428, n421]). According to Navarro-Farr (2016), the Late Classic deposits at Waka' may be termination-related but later Terminal Classic ones may be reverential deposits left by people still living around otherwise abandoned royal spaces. A similar sequence may be present at Minanha, Belize (Schwake and Iannone 2016:151, 153–154). The material correlates of ancestor veneration include evidence of movement of human bones from their primary interment into a secondary location, inclusion of human bone within ritual contexts, or materials with hieroglyphic texts naming known rulers or other individuals that are thought to predate the context in which they are found.

Pagliaro et al (2003:81) note that the "core signatures" of desecratory and reverential termination are "very similar" and thus distinguishing them is difficult (see also Garber [1986:117]). Houk (2016:218) has similarly suggested "avoiding the categories of 'reverential' and 'desecratory to describe the nature of these surface deposits because they often represent multiple events forming a complicated palimpsest of material" but argues, as we do, that the nature of the remains and their context may indicate one interpretation over others (see also Navarro-Farr and Prera [2014]). When burials are identified in deposits, reverential deposits may include evidence of ancestor veneration, while desecration deposits might exhibit evidence of violence that might include osteological evidence of decapitation or scalping.

FEASTING DEPOSITS

Problematic deposits are sometimes interpreted as the remains of feasts which are defined as events "constituted by the communal consumption of food and/or drink… and are distinguished from daily meals because they are part of a ritual activity" (Dietler and Hayden 2001:3). According to Shelton (2008:2) "signatures of feasts include, but are not limited to, whole or partial vessels, faunal remains, abundant charcoal, prestige or ritual items, pictorial or written records of feasts, and their placement in a significant spatial location (Hayden 2001:40–41)." Feasting remains may be in primary context (i.e., *de facto* refuse; Brown and Garber 2003: 50; Hansen et al. 2008:49–50; Navarro-Farr and Prera 2014:51) or secondary/transposed contexts (Clayton et al. 2005:128; Sullivan et al. 2008:102; Tsukamoto 2017:1641–1643).

Feasting remains are often associated with ideologically important locations. Material correlates (Table 1) include the remains of food, including recreational and highly-valued foods, unusual pottery forms and/or types with an abundance of (often large) serving vessels. Burke et al. (2020) describe specific faunal correlates that might be used to identify feasting activity. These might include specific skeletal elements that yield more meat, as well as larger species such as deer, rare or exotic animals identified in deposits, or the presence of cut marks or other evidence of butchery.

PILGRIMAGE DEPOSITS

Pilgrimage activity is generally linked to concepts of social memory, "ritual maintenance" (Nelson 2003:78), and ancestor veneration. Visits of contemporary people to ancient sites for ritual activity is well-documented (Brown 2004; McGee 1998; Oakes 1951; Tedlock 1992) and pilgrimage is indicated archaeologically at a number of sites across Mesoamerica, for example at La Quemada (Nelson 2003:88) and Monté Alban (Winter 2003: 114–115). In the Maya area, Howie et al. (2014) describe stylistic and petrographic evidence at Lamanai suggesting that a large deposit of broken Late Postclassic Chen Mul Modeled system effigy censers were deposited by visitors to the building after its abandonment. Hansen and colleagues (2008:52) discuss pilgrimage activities and the ideas around them:

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> Terminal Classic residents returned to abandoned Late Classic structures to carry out ritual activities. In the Danta Complex at El Mirador, for example, three Terminal Classic burials were recovered from the crest of a collapsed Late Classic-period mound (Structure 2A8-5), placed there after the Late Classic residential structure had been abandoned and left to fall into ruin. The residential building apparently held sufficient importance in the minds of the living that they retained knowledge of its location and returned there to bury the deceased. This behavior is perhaps similar to that described by Gillespie (2002) in which a small corporate group retains possession not only of property but also of the ancestral spirit by curating the dead in the ancestral place. Such activity would require that the corporate group, in this case a "house" (to infer the extension of a contemporary social norm into the past), maintain a memory of an ancestral place through time.

Archaeologically, evidence of pilgrimage activity would include contextual information that indicates the site had been abandoned prior to the deposition of materials. Evidence of soil matrix above the architecture or floor but below the deposit, as described by Awe and colleagues (2020a), or gaps in the chronological sequence as indicated by ceramic types or radiocarbon dates, might indicate that deposits are the result of pilgrimage. Finally, isotopic data on human remains or burials within the deposit can help to identify whether the individuals interred within these features were local or from a geochemically different region. The presence of ritually-charged "ideofacts" within deposits (Iannone et al. 2016:18) may also be evidence of ancestor veneration and pilgrimage. Another variant of pilgrimage activity are ritual deposits placed in sections of sites by small remnant populations that continue to occupy peripheral sections of the center. This explanation aligns with the process of gradual abandonment described by Stanton and Magnoni (2008:8) for the Yucatan peninsula, by Cameron (2003: 208) for the American Southwest, and by Awe et al. (2020a) for the Belize Valley.

CONCLUSIONS

The term "problematic deposit" has been used to provisionally designate the remains of a wide range of behaviors. In this brief overview, we have outlined some of the possibilities and problems in the behavioral interpretation of problematic deposits. Other articles in this special section provide more specific examples of the complexities of the interpretation of problematic deposits at a range of sites using a variety of artifact classes. Regardless of one's interpretive perspective, this special section makes it apparent that peri-abandonment and other types of problematic deposits have a widespread geographic distribution in the Maya area (Figure 1). They are present at primary, secondary, and tertiary level centers, as well as within subterranean sites (Awe et al. 2020a). These diverse characteristics make ancient Maya problematic deposits difficult to interpret, but we hope that the papers in this issue will help in the development of more rigorous interpretations of their significance.

RESUMEN

El término "depósitos problemáticos" fue acuñado hace décadas en Tikal para referirse a depósitos especiales que no eran entierros ni ofrendas. Desde entonces, el término se ha utilizado para referirse a una gama de depósitos que han confundido a los arqueólogos. En este trabajo revisamos las diversas interpretaciones que han sido propuestas para estos depósitos incluyendo desecho "*de facto*," depósitos de ocupantes usurpadores, y restos de rituales de dedicación o terminación, banquetes, o peregrinación. Sostenemos que la semejanza superficial de estos depósitos puede hacer difícil de identificar la gama de actividades que representan y que el análisis contextual es necesario para distinguirlos. Ofrecemos algunos de los correlatos arqueológicos que se han asociado con diferentes tipos de depósitos problemáticos.

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