RETHINKING THE BECÁN CERAMIC SEQUENCE—DISJUNCTIONS, CONTINUITIES, SEGMENTATION, AND CHRONOLOGY

Joseph W. Ball

One of the benchmark ceramic chronologies for the Central Maya Lowlands—that of Becán, Campeche—was critically flawed in its inception. Its flaws resulted from a perceived need to parallel the established Uaxactún bellwether and a failure to recognize that the typological and modal content of the sequence of assemblages defined was not continuous but disjunctive in character. In fact, this sequence reflected a broken continuum of discrete segments separated by a major break representing an actual occupational and historical gap in the site history of Becán. This paper reexamines the premises of the original Becán sequence, reassesses its structure and chronology, and offers a new alternative for its replacement and future field-testing. Reassessments of individual types and groups and their relationships and established chronologies, joined with a fresh consideration of Bejuco-phase depositional circumstances and stratigraphies, suggest that the political failure of Becán and the consequent abandonment of the center may have occurred as early as A.D. 730–750. The resulting gap in the occupational and ceramic sequences of the site lasted into the early ninth century. The suggested changes have significant ramifications not only for the chronologies of the site and the surrounding Río Bec region, but also for their cultural, architectural, and political histories.

Una de las cronologías cerámicas fundacionales para las tierras bajas mayas centrales—la de Becán, Campeche—sufrió graves defectos en su inicio. Estos resultaron de una necesidad percibida de imitar la secuencia arquetípica de Uaxactún y de una falta de reconocimiento de que el contenido tipológico y modal de la secuencia de ensambles cerámicos definidos no era continuo sino disyuntivo en carácter. De hecho, esta secuencia refleja una serie discontinua de segmentos discretos separados por una ruptura importante. Esta ruptura representó no sólo una disyunción tipológica, sino un verdadero vacío ocupacional e histórico en la historia del sitio de Becán. Este trabajo reexamina las premisas de la secuencia original de Becán, reevalúa su estructura y cronología y ofrece una nueva alternativa para su sustitución y futuras pruebas en el campo. Reconsideraciones de los tipos y grupos individuales, sus interrelaciones y sus cronologías establecidas, unidas a un nuevo examen de las circunstancias y estratigrafías deposicionales de la fase Bejuco, sugieren que el fracaso político de Becán y el consiguiente abandono del centro pudieron haber ocurrido tan pronto como el 730–750 d.C. El resultante vacío en la secuencia ocupacional, y por lo tanto en la secuencia cerámica del sitio, duró hasta principios del siglo nueve. Los cambios propuestos tienen ramificaciones importantes no sólo para la cronología del sitio y sus alrededores, la región Río Bec, sino también para sus desarrollos culturales e historias arquitectónicas y políticas.

For more than 40 years, the ceramic sequence developed for Becán, Campeche, Mexico (Ball 1973a, 1974, 1977) has served as a relative and absolute comparative chronological standard on which multiple local and regional sequences throughout the Yucatan peninsula north of Guatemala have been grounded (e.g., Arnauld et al. 2010 [Río Bec]; Balanzario 2011 [Kohunlich]; Delgado 2002 [El Tigre]; Domínguez 1994 [Calakmul]; Dzul and Taladoire 2010 [Río Bec region]; Forsyth 1983 [Edzná]; Johnstone 2001 [Yaxuná]; Nalda 2004 [Kohunlich]; Robles 1990 [Cobá]; Varela 1998 [Oxkintok]; Witschey 1993 [Muyil]). Research programs at sites from southwestern Campeche (El Tigre) to northeastern Quintana Roo (Cobá) have relied on the Becán sequence routinely for this purpose. Together with Robert E. Smith's (1971) monograph on the pottery of Mayapán and George W. Brainerd's (1958) foundational survey, it has served a role in the literature of the Central and Northern Maya Lowlands that is broadly analogous to that of the Uaxactún sequence (Smith 1955; Smith and Gifford 1966)—upon which it itself was based—in the Southern zone. Topically,

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it has been used to frame examinations and interpretations of Maya settlement patterning, architecture, and political history from early Middle Preclassic through Terminal Classic times throughout southern Campeche, most especially in the Río Bec architectural region (e.g., Bueno 1987, 1999; Carrasco 1989; Dzul and Taladoire 2010; Gendrop 1983; Jiménez et al. 2006; Nondédéo 2003; Nondédéo and Dzul 2010; Nondédéo et al. 2010; 2013; Taladoire et al. 2013; Thomas 1981; Vargas and Delgado 2003; Webster 1976).

As a typology and a comparative relative chronology, with some very minor additions and tweaking to its typological inventory, it has withstood the tests of time and multiple subsequent investigations well. The most recent syntheses of archaeology and cultural history both in the immediate area and farther afield on the peninsula continue to rely on it unhesitatingly (Nondédéo et al. 2010, 2013; Taladoire et al. 2013). Nonetheless, recent work by the author in neighboring central-western Campeche (Ball and Taschek 2007, 2013, 2015) has occasioned a reexamination and scrutiny of the sequence, its component elements, and its stratigraphic and comparative typological underpinnings. This has brought to light what appears to be a significant, albeit quite fixable, flaw in its basic structure. Given the continuing importance of the Becán sequence as a chronological standard for research throughout the region, it is important to call attention to the substantive and interpretive flaws in its original formulation and to present a tentative restructuring of this sequence. It is my hope that other researchers will take the proposed revisions into consideration in their own formulations of local and regional culture history and explicitly field-test the validity of the revised sequence in future investigations.

A Realization, The Problem, Some Questions

After revisiting the extensive Becán type collections curated in the Ceramoteca of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), Centro Regional de Yucatán (CRY), Merida, and reexamining my own substantive treatments of these materials (Ball 1971, 1972, 1973a, 1977), I became convinced that the Becán ceramic sequence in fact comprises two separate, discontinuous segments, rather than a single continuum as originally assumed and established (Figure 1). Segment I extended as an intergrading series of wares, types, and modes from the Middle Preclassic Acachen complex/phase through the full Late Classic Bejuco complex/phase, ending sometime in the early eighth century. Segment II begins with the ill-defined Chintok ceramic complex and continues with typological and modal additions into and through the Xcocom complex, until ending sometime in the late eleventh century. There is a significant disjunction between the two segments, which I now believe reflects a real break or gap in the sequence for an undefined length of time in the middle and late eighth century, possibly extending into the early ninth. Manifestly, the temporal, and so cultural and historical, segregation of the two ceramic, and thus occupational, segments has important potential ramifications for the associated settlement, architectural, and broad sociopolitical histories of the greater Becán and Río Bec zones.

The principal questions engendering this reexamination of the established Becán sequence were the following:

(1) What, in fact, constituted the complete, true Chintok ceramic assemblage at Becán? What was its full typological content and its actual character (complex, subcomplex, facet, or other)? Did it even exist as a distinct entity apart from Xcocom (see Ball and Taschek 2013, 2015)? Forty years ago, this basic question remained unresolved, but subsequent work both at Becán and throughout the surrounding Río Bec region has now provided some clear, concrete answers (Taladoire et al. 2013; Supplemental Table 1).

(2) Granting the existence of Chintok as a complete, stand-alone complex, when did it actually appear? Its dating was determined 40 years ago based largely on only two identifiable types securely associated with the assemblage—Palmar Orange-polychrome and Zacatel Cream-polychrome—and a handful of highly questionable radiocarbon determinations on architectural lintel beams (Ball 1977:186–187; Andrews IV and Andrews V 1980:281–285), coupled with the implicit presumption that Chintok developed out of and followed directly from Bejuco. At the time, no other solid presence or absence criteria could be brought to bear on the question. In defining the related—in actuality, parent—Río Bec regional

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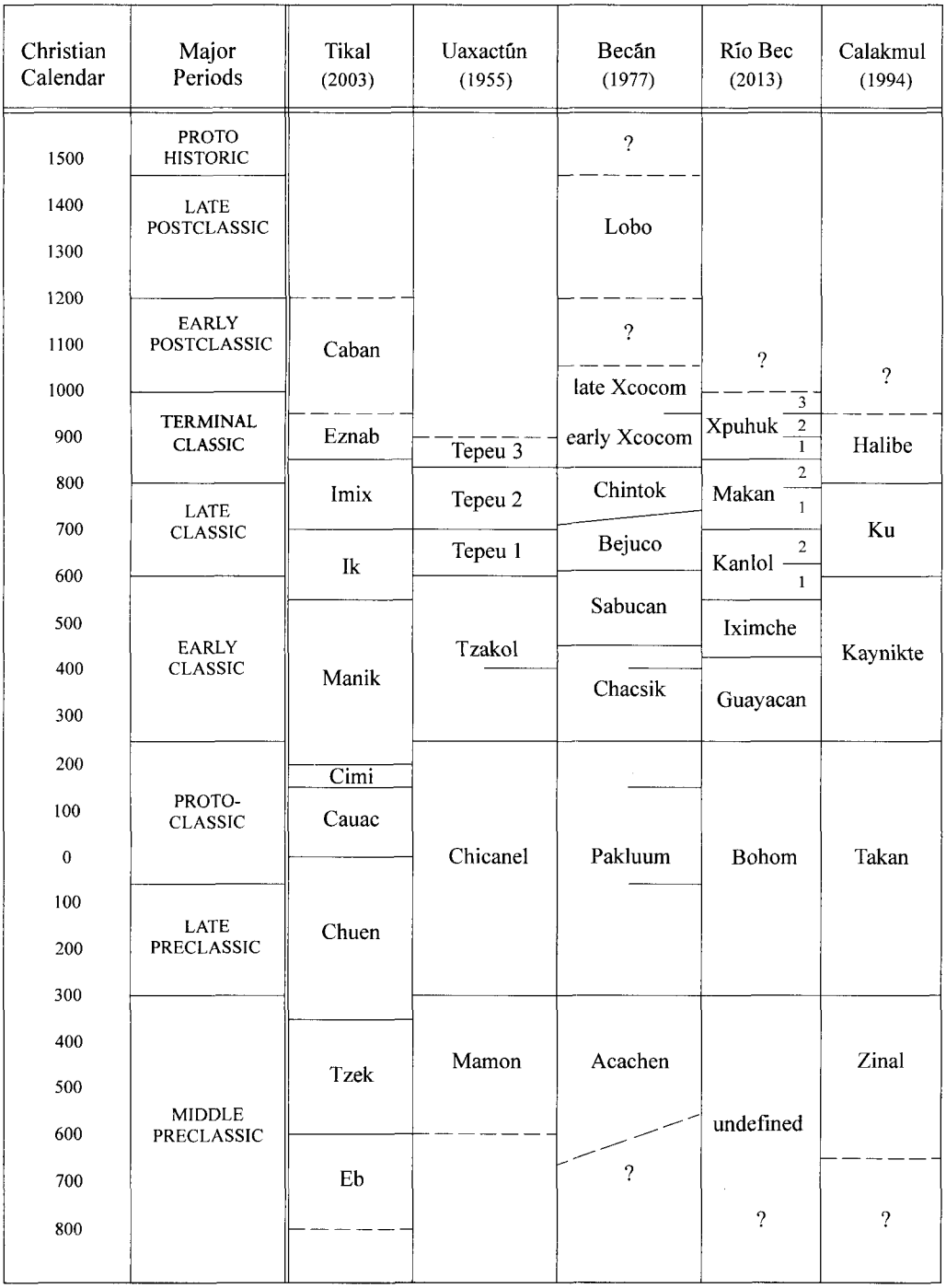


Figure 1. The 1977 Becán sequence and other representative Maya Lowlands ceramic columns (graphic by Jennifer Taschek based on chart by the author).

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complex, Makan ("rural Chintok"), Sara Dzul and her colleagues pushed the developmental beginnings of that assemblage back to ca. A.D. 700 (Dzul and Taladoire 2010:Cuadro 2, 132), with a facet change around A.D. 790 (Taladoire et al. 2013:357–358). It is now evident that Chintok simply represents one site-specific aspect of a larger regional ceramic sphere, Makan. So, does the dating of the latter (A.D. 700–850) also apply to its expression at Becán?

(3) How long did the Late Classic Bejuco assemblage/phase actually persist? When did it terminate? In this case, comparative typological evidence for the inception and early decades of Bejuco was strong and well tied into established Petén sequences, but after roughly A.D. 700/720, a significant decrease in dateable exotics (see Supplemental Table 1) made the question of duration uncertain, and I opted to assume replacement of the assemblage by a Tepeu 2-equivalent successor by A.D. 730–750. Forty years later, better dating of some east-west traveling ceramic wares and types and a reappraisal of the limited Tepeu 2-horizon polychromes recovered from some mixed Bejuco-Chintok deposits allow for a fresh assessment. Combined with some very limited credible radiocarbon dating and the incorporation of depositional information not previously brought into play, an early eighth-century termination for the Bejuco ceramic assemblage now appears even more probable than it was 40 years ago.

(4) Are the very real typological and modal disjunctions between the Bejuco and Chintok/Xcocom assemblages (Figure 2; Supplemental Tables 1 and 2; Supplemental Figure 1) indicative of an actual gap between the end of Bejuco and the appearance of Chintok ceramics at Becan? If so, how long did this hiatus last?

Based on a fresh review of the original data, together with the enormous volume of additional research conducted over the last 40 years, I will attempt to address some of these questions. Others must await further focused investigations and additional data.

"Chintok"—The Heart of the Problem

Much of the overall problem stems from the weak original definition and establishment basis of the Chintok ceramic complex, a circumstance that four decades of extensive subsequent field and lab work have failed to improve (Campaña et al. 2000, 2001, 2004; Dzul and Taladoire 2010; Nondédéo and Dzul 2010). The "Chintok complex" was and remains the most poorly defined or documented ceramic complex at Becán (Ball 1977:133–134; Dzul and Taladoire 2010: 126). Its original definition and dating were tenuously based on mixed core deposits in constructions overlying and underlying depositional contexts dating to the very well-defined and heavily represented Bejuco Tepeu and Xcocom assemblages, and on what types and modes were *not* present, rather than on those that were present. In retrospect, its existence and definition owed as much to early 1970s conventional dogma regarding the "necessary" existence of a traditional Tepeu 1, 2, 3 sequence at sites linked to the Petén as to archaeological realities. Two strongly opinionated research directors—E. Wyllys Andrews IV and Richard E.W. Adams—also played roles in the need to "find" a Tepeu 2 horizon complex at Becán. I have reexamined Chintok and its predecessor (Bejuco) and successor (Xcocom) assemblages with special attention to the securely dateable polychromes and exotic pottery definitely associated with each. I have also reviewed the depositional circumstances and distributions of the two as represented in the 1969–1971 National Geographic Society (NGS)–Tulane University and 1973 NGS–University of Wisconsin, Madison, projects, and the more recent (1999–2004) INAH program directed by Arqueóloga Luz Evelia Campaña. My conclusions from this review are at considerable variance with those reached in the early 1970s.

The factored distinction of Chintok from Xcocom may well have been more arbitrary than real (see Ball and Taschek 2013, 2015) and very likely reflects differential access circumstances among the overall Terminal Classic (Xcocom) population, rather than purely temporal factors alone. More important has been recognition that the presumed continuity between the successive Bejuco and Chintok assemblages was far more an artifact of assumptions and expectations in the late 1960s regarding the historical structure of ceramic sequences at major lowland Maya centers than it was an analytical or cultural reality. What truly characterizes the types, groups, wares, and modes

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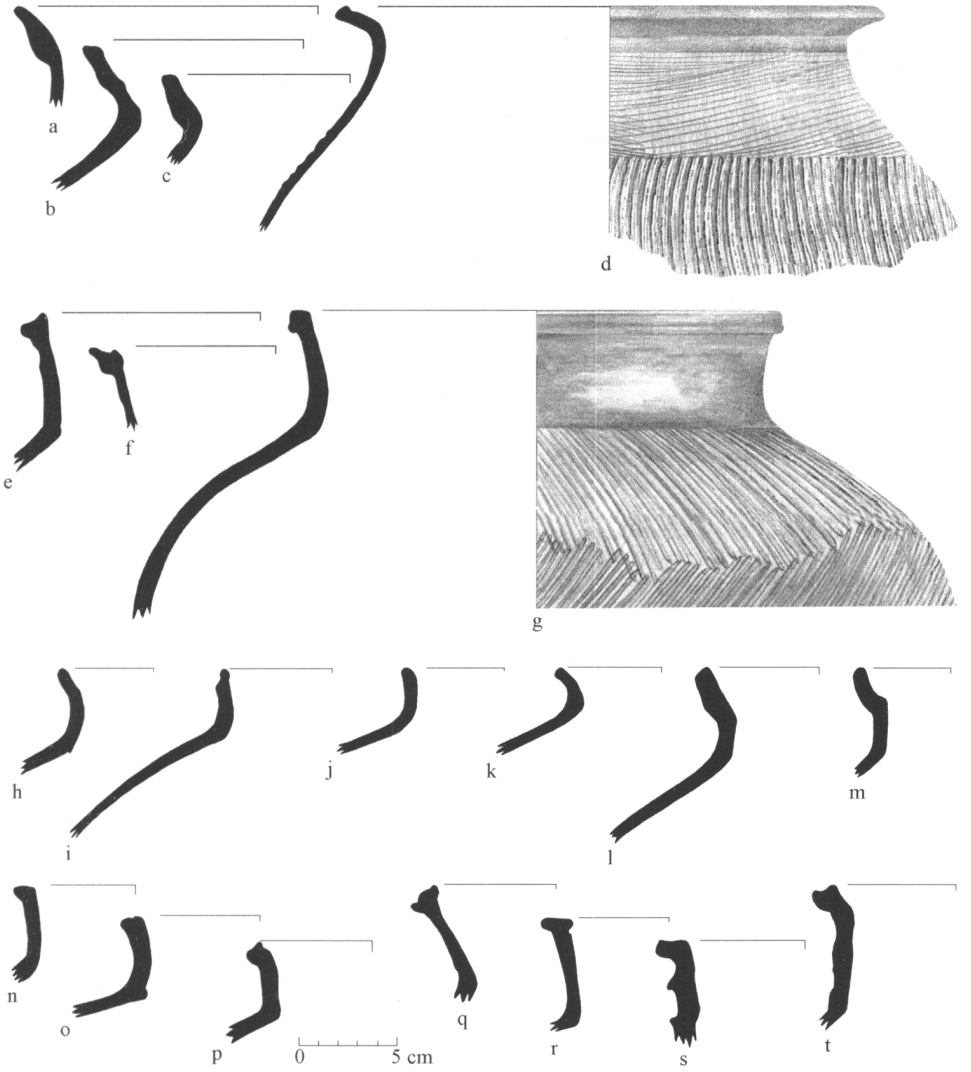


Figure 2. Diagnostic rim and striation modes, Bejuco and Chintok jars: (a–d) Bejuco Encanto Striated: Alambre Variety; (e–g) Chintok Encanto Striated: Pepino Variety; (h–m) Bejuco Becanchen Brown; (n–t) Chintok Traino Brown. Illustration Plate by Jennifer Taschek based on Dolores Skaer (Ball 1977). For an expanded comparison of Bejuco and Chintok diagnostic rim and form modes, see Supplemental Figure 1.

of the two complexes is their overall distinctness and general dissimilarity—qualities that suggest discontinuity and a rupture between the two assemblages, rather than a developmental continuity or devolutionary relationship (Figure 2; Supplemental Figure 1; Supplemental Table 2).

The comparative typological relative dating, and hence the "absolute" chronology of Chintok, were reliant on the presence of just four diagnostic ceramic types, each represented by no more than a handful of highly fragmentary and eroded sherds. These were all recovered from mixed structural core contexts including both Bejuco and Chintok sherds, as well as earlier trace contaminants. All four types were—and still are—believed to have been exotics from north-central

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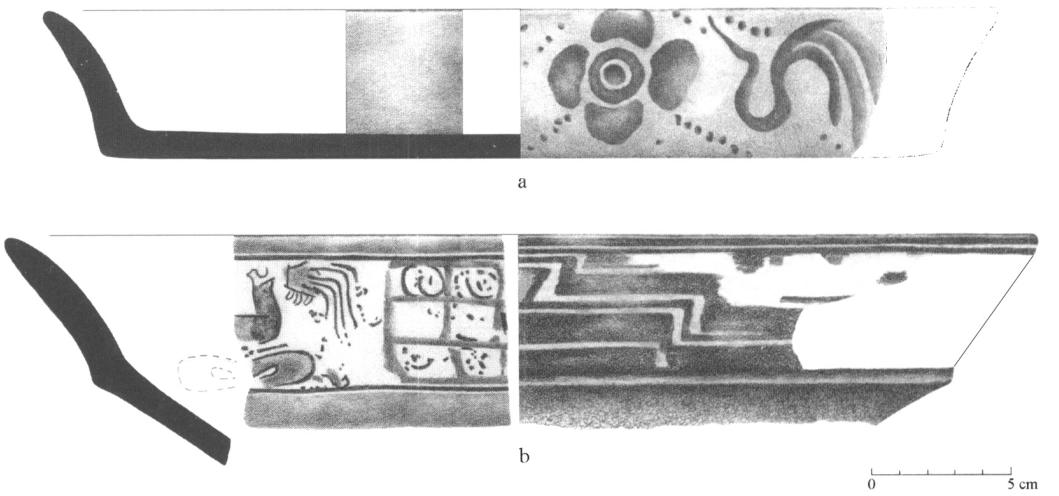


Figure 3. Late Palmar and Zacatel polychromes from admixed Bejuco-Chintok/Xcocom structural core contexts, Structure IV, Becán. (a) Palmar Orange-polychrome: Danta Variety; (b) Zacatel Cream-polychrome: Joyac Variety. Drawing by Jennifer Taschek based on digitally enhanced 35 mm photos taken by the author in 1971.

Petén, the two most critical and best represented being Palmar Orange-polychrome (Figure 3a; Ball 1977:76; Figure 28e; 28 sherds) and Zacatel Cream-polychrome (Figure 3b; Ball 1977:78; 9 sherds). Reexamination of the curated material at the INAH CRY Ceramoteca in 2011 revealed that all retained Chintok "Palmar" and "Zacatel" sherds in fact belong to the Danta and Joyac varieties of those respective types, both identified by Robert E. Smith (1955; Smith and Gifford 1966:173) as constituents of the Terminal Classic Tepeu 3 ceramic complex at Uaxactún. Smith and Gifford (1966:157, 158) classified this material as two separate types and a group distinct from the Tepeu 2 Palmar and Zacatel variants, but Smith (personal communication, 1978) subsequently indicated that this decision was made by Gifford in what he, himself, felt was an overly rigid application of the then very new type-variety system rules of taxonomy. At issue was not the *classification* of the pottery, but its *naming*, and this was a point on which Gifford was adamant and Smith did not see any compelling reason for argument. Smith did footnote (Smith and Gifford 1966:171–173) a hint of his discomfort with the potential taxonomic segregation of what were not such very different units at the level of the ceramic group, but the issue was not elaborated on in what was intended only as a provisional taxonomic key or index to the previously published monograph on Uaxactún ceramics (Smith 1955).

In his final classification of the comparable Late and Terminal Classic polychromes from Tikal, T. Patrick Culbert (1993:10–12) assigned both the Tepeu 3-horizon Eznab material and the Tepeu 2-equivalent Imix examples to the Palmar and Zacatel types of the Palmar group. Classifying and describing the Becán material in 1970–1972, I, like Culbert, saw the published Palmar and Zacatel types as providing the best matches to my own sherds, and, believing that I was dealing with a full Late Classic Tepeu 2-equivalent assemblage, I classified them as such, thereby concomitantly forcing the dating of Chintok into the Tepeu 2 horizon. Returning to this material after four decades of work with Maya polychrome sherds and vessels and the nuances of type-variety systematics, I would still, like Culbert, classify the Becán material as Palmar Orange-polychrome and Zacatel Cream-polychrome, but of the Tepeu 3 Danta and Joyac varieties, respectively.[1]

As for the two other apparent Tepeu 2 minority types associated with Chintok deposits, (Yuhactal Black-on-red, 1 sherd; undesignated red-slipped, gouged-incised, 1 sherd), I would today reassign these to Bejuco based on their recovery from heavily mixed core deposits and on my original observation of Chintok: "No pure middens [deposits]

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were encountered; all surface material was badly eroded and mixed with Xcocom pottery; structural fill derivatives were scanty and mixed with probable Bejuco sherds" (Ball 1977:161). I would additionally note, however, that at Tikal, Culbert (1993:11) found Yuhactal Black-on-red to be present in both the Tepeu 2-equivalent Imix and the Tepeu 3-equivalent Eznab complexes, so the issue may be moot for the solitary occurrence at Becán. Gouged-incised redwares are, of course, far more typical of the Tepeu 3 than the Tepeu 2 horizon.

The indisputable presence of the Tepeu 3-horizon types Tinaja Red and Achote Black as clear constituents of Chintok and of Xcocom, based on multiple occurrences in architectural core fill, was somewhat contradictorily taken to represent a prevenient local occurrence of these wares, even while noting their distinctiveness from and lack of any clear relationships to the Bejuco redware and blackware types, Corona Red and Molino Black (Ball 1977:21–23, 34–36, 134). True Achote Black pottery, including a number of the several elaborate decorative variant types of the ceramic group, now appears to have emerged as a diagnostic component of the regional Makan assemblage by early in the eighth century (Taladoire et al. 2013:Table 2). Rather than taking this as support for assigning Chintok to a pre-Tepeu 3 position, however, I see it as evidence for establishing the local origins and developmental history of Achote group pottery. Given the group's known archaeological and chronological distributions, I believe it quite conceivable that this popular blackware spread outward in all directions from a Río Bec zone of origin in the early decades of the Terminal Classic era, including southward into the north-central Petén. This well fits the historical distribution of the ware and also accords neatly with Nondédéo's (Arnauld and Nondédéo 2010; Nondédéo et al. 2010) suggested spread of cultural influences and stimuli originating in the Río Bec zone during precisely this interval.

Although based on Chintok (Arnauld et al. 2010; Dzul and Taladoire 2010; Taladoire et al. 2013), Dzul's equivalent Río Bec regional complex, Makan, does not equate with or even parallel Chintok in its own developmental history and chronology. It is marked by clear derivatives and influences from the south and east in its constituent redwares, blackwares, and vessel forms, and it likely spread across southern Campeche and into the greater Becán hinterland well before its appearance as the Chintok assemblage around and at the abandoned center. Today, I would argue that "Chintok," as I defined it for Becán, is nothing other than a derivative member of Dzul's more robust full Makan complex and sphere. Dzul has fixed the first appearance of Tinaja Red in Makan at ca. A.D. 790/800 (Taladoire et al. 2013:Table 2), recognizing two temporal varieties of the type, Nanzal Variety (A.D. 790–850) and Tinaja Variety (A.D. 850–900/950). The curated Chintok examples from Becán are classifiable only to the type level, but this would still make them chronologically indicative of a date no earlier than the start of the ninth century, once more placing the complex on the Terminal rather than Late Classic horizon. All identifiable Xcocom sherds are definitively of the Tinaja Variety.

The comparative typological diagnostics used to establish the broad relative and narrower absolute chronology of the Chintok assemblage either were improperly classified and evaluated or—less likely—represented Bejuco assemblage contaminants in mixed deposits. Reconsideration of these aspects of the assemblage supports realignment of Chintok on the full Tepeu 3 horizon and indicates a far shorter independent history than originally proposed. On these criteria, I would reset its inception at Becán from ca. A.D. 730/750 to around A.D. 810/830 or even later.

As to the duration of the Chintok ceramic phase, this remains difficult to determine on the available data, but the new exotic groups and types and new local wares mimicking "northern" ones that join together with persisting Chintok wares to define the Xcocom complex could have been present by as early as A.D. 800/810 and are likely to have been well established by no later than A.D. 860/880 (Ball 1977; Ball and Taschek 2013, 2015). This would leave only a very short span for Chintok—realistically no more than 40 to 60 years—a possibility that accords far better with the overall archaeological record than do the original formulations of 40 years ago (Ball 1973a, 1977).

In sum, although intergrading significantly with Xcocom (Supplemental Tables 1 and 2), the Becán Chintok assemblage does represent a functionally complete, full ceramic complex. It was a

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member of a larger Makan ceramic sphere found at sites throughout the Río Bec architectural region within which the latter emerged and evolved over the eighth century. At and around Becán, Chintok was compositionally little different from Xcocom, if we exclude the multiple exotics and finewares that define the "early" and "late" facets or "a" and "b" subcomplexes of the later complex (Supplemental Tables 1 and 2; see Ball 1986:400–402; Ball and Taschek 2013, 2015). Its most salient distinguishing elements are those few polychrome exotics from the Petén that also serve to reset its local, site-specific chronology to A.D. 810/830 and after.

The Bejuco Complex

The Bejuco complex remains today essentially as originally defined, with a few minor additions by later investigators, but the radical realignment of the succeeding Chintok-Xcocom ceramic continuum to after A.D. 830 demands a reexamination of its own true duration, estimated in the early 1970s at ca. A.D. 620/630 to around 730–750. As noted, the comparative typological evidence for the inception and early decades of Bejuco is strong and well tied into established Petén and southwestern lowland sequences. Fixing the correct temporal endpoint for Bejuco, however, is not so easy a task. There are few late Tepeu 2 indicators (Palmar and Zacatel appear in trace amounts), but then there is little strong evidence of interaction between Becán and the Petén after the Sabucan ceramic phase (ca. A.D. 450–630). My 2011 reexamination in Merida of the handful of securely (stratigraphically) associated Palmar and Zacatel polychrome varieties from the Bejuco complex confirmed that they are good, full Tepeu 2 ceramics—but from when within that production phase? Applying the Uaxactún and Tikal ranges for the types alone allows their occurrence as early as A.D. 690–710 to as late as A.D. 825–845, and that is for true Tepeu 2 Imix varieties alone. Incontestably identified varieties of the Palmar type from pure Bejuco deposits are all of the established Resist and Huisquil varieties that have been securely dated at Altar de Sacrificios to before A.D. 770, with the Resist Variety placed in the Early Pasión complex of A.D. 610–695 (Adams 1971).

Although a substantial number of site reports and new sequences have been published for southern Campeche, Quintana Roo, the northern Petén, and northern Belize over the last 25 years (e.g., Balanzario 2011; Delgado 2002; Domínguez 1994; Forsyth 1983; Nalda 2004; Robles 1990; Varela 1998; Witschey 1993), so many of these have relied either directly or indirectly on the Becán sequence for their own temporal frames that applying their datings of these types and wares to Becán becomes perilously circular. The few conclusive new datings of chronologically still "loose" but potentially later Bejuco indicators that have been obtained since the 1970s have served only to affirm a full seventh-century positioning for these wares, rather than to extend their duration. Such is the case, for example, of three beautiful Chimbote Variety Chimbote Cream-polychrome bowls and a Petkanche Variety Petkanche Orange-polychrome vase from a well-dated tomb (Burial 39) at El Perú-Waka' (Rich 2011:311–312, Figures 7.40, 7.41, 7.47–7.51). Moro Orange-polychrome, another important Bejuco type with an extensive geographic distribution, has been demonstrated to date to no later than A.D. 650 at Piedras Negras, in its likely zone of production (Holley 1983; Muñoz 2004). At Altun Ha, extensive refuse and special deposits containing multiple examples of the important Bejuco exotics Petkanche Orange-polychrome and Egoista Resist, independently dated by associated radiocarbon and typological cross-dating, securely placed these types within a span of A.D. 650–750 (Pendergast 1979). All of the foregoing, and other Bejuco exotics such as Azcorra Buff-polychrome, also dated to ca. A.D. 550–650 at Naachtun, Petén (Walker and Reese-Taylor 2012), and Xbanil Light Brown-polychrome, are far more widely reported today than they were in the 1970s (e.g., Eppich 2000; Fry 1983, 1987 [northern Belize, southern Quintana Roo]; Forsyth 1983 [central-western Campeche]; Robles 1990 [northeastern Quintana Roo]; Walker and Reese-Taylor 2012 [northern Petén]). Nonetheless, most still largely depend for their absolute chronology on their original Becán dating.

One possible, albeit perhaps tenuous, line of argument that might at least provide a reasonable *terminus ante quem* for the end of the Bejuco ceramic phase and associated occupation is the

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reciprocal presence and absence of two fine paste potteries of the Late to Terminal Classic period: Fine Buff, or Orange-Buff, and Fine Gray. I deem the approach tenuous because the archaeological patterns involved could owe their existence to systemic distributional factors other than chronology.

The Fine Paste-Wares

Together with the multiple groups of Fine Orange Paste-Ware, Fine Buff and Fine Gray are recognized as important commercial products of the Mexican Gulf coast and proximate riverine interiors from along a band extending from southern Veracruz, through Tabasco and Chiapas, to western Campeche (Bishop 2003; Bishop et al. 2006; Bishop and Foias 2013; Bishop and Rands 1982; Foias and Bishop 2005; Forné et al. 2010, 2011; Jiménez et al. 2006; Rands et al. 1982). Temporally, the fine paste-wares span the full Late Classic and Terminal Classic through Protohistoric eras, but the peak of their popularity and distribution occurred in the later Late Classic and Terminal Classic. The distribution of Fine Orange pottery during this interval was virtually pan-lowland, varying somewhat regionally by period (Bishop 2003; Forsyth 2005). Fine Gray is found throughout the southwestern lowlands of Tabasco, Chiapas, and far western Campeche, with a bifurcate distribution of which one arm extends up the Usumacinta and Pasión Rivers and into the southern Petén, and the other extends up the west coast of the peninsula to the northern plains and to sites along the east coast (Bishop and Foias 2013; Foias and Bishop 2013a). There is a trace occurrence of Late Classic Fine Gray in northwestern Belize (Kosakowsky et al. 2013).

Chemically and stylistically defined subsets (groups) of both Fine Orange and Fine Gray have been successfully associated with specific production source areas and temporal intervals and have been used effectively to document and map a number of interaction patterns (Bishop et al. 2008; Bishop and Foias 2013; Demarest 2013; Foias and Bishop 2005, 2013b; Forné et al. 2010; Forsyth 2005; Rands et al. 1982). Fine Gray has been separated into two macrogroups, Chablekal and Tres Naciones, associated, respectively, with the full Late into Terminal Classic timespan and with a fully Terminal Classic dating (Bishop and Foias 2013; Bishop and Rands 1982; Foias 2013a).

Fundamentally, Chablekal group pottery was a product of the greater Palenque region, the surrounding coastal plain of Tabasco and western Campeche, and the lower and middle Usumacinta drainage. While its chronology in the northern Lowlands and along some parts of the Usumacinta might appear from the general literature to be as yet unfixed (see Foias 2013a; Foias and Bishop 2005), the time of its appearance in its source zone has been well established as being no earlier than the middle eighth century, ca. A.D. 750/760 (Bishop and Foias 2013; Foias 2013a; Foias and Bishop 2005). At Aguateca, Dos Pilas, Cancuen, and in the broad environs of the upper Usumacinta and Pasión drainages, the ware has been securely established to have appeared no earlier than A.D. 760 and to have peaked in importance during the following decades (Bishop and Foias 2013; Demarest 2013; Foias 2013a; Foias and Bishop 2013b; Forné et al. 2010, 2011). A chronologically corroborative late Late Classic occurrence has been reported for northwestern Belize (Kosakowsky et al 2013).

From along the coast of Campeche and across the northern plains, reported datings of Fine Gray are largely impressionistic and wide-ranging, spanning the decades from the early seventh century—impossible given the chronology of the ware in its area of origination—to the late ninth century and even later (e.g., Ball 1978; Forsyth 1983; Jiménez et al. 2006; Robles 1990; Smith 1970; Varela 1998). In the case of Dzibilchaltún, however—the sole northern plains site at which Chablekal Group Fine Gray is richly and abundantly represented in a variety of solid stratigraphic and contextual situations (Andrews IV and Andrews V 1980)—Michael P. Simmons (1980; Andrews V 1981) was able to securely date the time of arrival and importance of the ware to the very late eighth into the early ninth century, independently duplicating and supporting the southern evidence for its spread. A radiocarbon-supported ceramic sequence established by Fernando Robles for Isla Cerritos also put the arrival of Chablekal Fine Gray there at some time after A.D. 750 (Andrews et al. 1988). Forsyth (1983) assigns the ware to the Muralla complex at Edzná, cross-dated to ca. A.D. 750/800–900/950.

Fine Buff or Orange-buff Paste-Ware pottery has been found at sites along the southern Gulf

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coast, from southern Veracruz to northern Campeche, well up the Usumacinta River, and on the northern Yucatan coastal plain, as well as at a scattering of interior central lowlands sites, including Becán (Ball 1977, 1978; Bishop et al. 2006; Jiménez 2009; Jiménez et al. 2006; Piña Chan 1968; Ruz 1969; Smith 1970). Its chronology has yet to be satisfactorily documented, or even systematically explored. Jiménez Álvarez (2009; Jiménez et al. 2006) has implied a seventh- to middle eighth-century date, but has also suggested a duration well into the Terminal Classic, as did Robert Smith (1970). Depending on the source, its duration has been given as extending from ca. A.D. 590 to either sometime around A.D. 750 or well into the ninth century. By the latter, it would have been moving contemporaneously with Fine Gray via the same networks linked to the Gulf coast. At Becán, Fine Buff pottery (Dzitbalché Orange-buff and Xlatun Incised types) is present only as part of the Bejuco assemblage. Although speculatively assigned to a hypothetical late aspect of the complex, its precise temporal placement was never determined. Plainly, systematic documentation of its chronology remains sorely needed. Here, the importance of the ware is that its presence as a common component of the Bejuco assemblage establishes the fact of recurrent, stable interactions between Becán and the fine paste-ware distribution networks of the Tabasco-Yucatan coastal zone during at least some part of the pre–Terminal Classic seventh- through eighth-century period. These were the same systems through which first Chablekal and then Tres Naciones Gray would have moved during the later Late Classic and Terminal Classic periods.

The distribution patterns of all of the fine paste potteries are extensive, but those of each individual group do differ considerably and are often exclusive of each other. The mechanisms involved in their movements clearly were varied. Nonetheless, group-by-group vessel form repertoires, quantitative abundance, and overall recovery contexts tend to controvert their likely roles as high-status or otherwise socially significant currencies for gifting or formal exchanges, as was the case for so much of the polychrome-painted ceramic fineware produced by the Late Classic Maya. Instead, a role as high-value, but not necessarily high-status, quotidian commercial exotica seems more appropriate to these wares—a role not unlike that of obsidian.

At Becán, the full Terminal Classic Xcocom complex counts both Fine Gray and a good array of Fine Orange types among its components. These were recovered by both the NGS and INAH efforts at the site (Supplemental Table 1; personal observation, 2011). In the 1970s, the specific ceramics involved were visually, rather than chemically, identified as members of the Chablekal and not the Tres Naciones ceramic group, but their Xcocom association is conclusive and their presence does document a Terminal Classic–era (ninth century or later) connection with the Gulf coastal interaction network, whatever their proper taxonomy.[2] This is reaffirmed by the strong Fine Orange (Balancan and Altar groups) representation (Supplemental Tables 1 and 2). As noted, Fine Buff pottery is present only as part of the Bejuco complex.

All substantiated temporal ascriptions for the spread of Fine Gray Paste-Ware pottery out of its coastal plain homeland and across the Maya Lowlands put this event/process at no earlier than A.D. 760. Had Fine Gray ceramics reached Becán, they could have done so no earlier than this. The absence of the ware from Bejuco-phase Becán does have a number of possible economic and political explanations, but one very plausible one is that by the time of its widespread trafficking and availability, Becán no longer existed as a viable political and economic center. Given the presence at Becán of seventh- to eighth-century Fine Buff trade ceramics known to have been circulating via the same general coast-and-river routes as Late Classic Fine Gray, I would argue this to have been the case. By the time that Fine Gray became a major exotic commodity in widespread demand, the great transpeninsular crossroads had ceased to function as such and lay moribund, if not actually abandoned.[3]

The presence of Fine Orange-buff as a common constituent of Bejuco, combined with the absence of Fine Gray from the complex, suggests that Bejuco no longer existed as a functional assemblage by A.D. 760. At the same time, I would still radically reset the appearance of Chintok at Becán from ca. A.D. 730–750 to around 810/830, or even later. When I originally undertook my reexami-

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nation of the Becán sequence, I had anticipated extending the duration of Bejuco further into the late eighth century to compensate for the younger redating of the Chintok-Xcocom continuum (see Ball and Taschek 2013) and thus to close the apparent temporal "gap" between the two assemblages. All indicators point to the contrary, however, and I am left to accept a terminal date for the Bejuco phase little changed from that originally proposed of around ca. A.D. 730–750. What is different—and radically so—is that, rather than demarcating a blended developmental transition between two continuous Late Classic complexes, the Bejuco boundary now appears to have coincided with an abrupt and significant break in the ceramic and occupational sequences at the site. Thus, it identifies the failure of Becán as a major regional center and political capital. What followed, I believe, was a period of abandonment and dormancy, one not fully broken again until an early ninth-century resettlement and population concentration in the immediate vicinity of the center during the Chintok phase (Thomas 1981:102), and the subsequent large-scale reoccupation and urban revival by intruders from the north during the Xcocom phase (Ball 1974, 1977; Ball and Taschek 2013; Rovner 1975). Are these new assessments reconcilable with the existing Becán sequence as defined? What is their import for the sequence and its chronology?

Discontinuity, Disjunction, Hiatus, Resurgence

Typologically and modally, there are major disjunctions between full Late Classic Bejuco complex ceramics and the diagnostic groups and types that make up the Chintok-Xcocom continuum (Figure 2; Supplemental Table 2; Supplemental Figure 1). This fact was recognized 40 years ago (Ball 1977:134, 161), but its likely significance was not then appreciated. Joined with the considerable volume of construction history and settlement data accumulated over the last 45 years (Bueno 1983, 1987, 1994; Bueno and Gutierrez 1986; Campaña 2005; Campaña et al. 2000, 2001, 2004; Carrasco 1989, 1994; Dzul and Taladoire 2010; Messenger 1975; Nondédéo 2003; Nondédéo and Dzul 2010; Thomas 1981), this typological and modal discontinuity very much suggests a real break between the two assemblages and a corresponding abandonment of the site of Becán and its immediate environs. As stated, I now believe that the Late Classic "collapse" of Becán actually corresponded with the end of Bejuco and that the center thereafter lay abandoned for some indeterminate length of time before its revitalization and refurbishment by regional hinterland (Chintok Makan) and more exotic (Xcocom) populations. The Chintok complex did, without question, follow Bejuco as originally established (Ball 1977:133–134), but it was not its evolutionary outgrowth or derivative. Instead, Chintok, like its own additive successor, Xcocom, represents a new arrival to Becán—the introduction of a new and different pottery assemblage to a production and consumption vacuum, and the reoccupation of some sectors and buildings around and within an otherwise abandoned center.

It is of course well understood that, with only rare exceptions, most archaeological complex/phase divisions and boundaries are arbitrary and that various modes, types, wares, and styles will regularly interlace or overlap two or more such assemblages and only rarely actually stop or start at, and so define, their boundaries. Within the Becán sequence and throughout the Río Bec archaeological region, typological, formal, and other modal continuities involving surface finishes, slip qualities and colors, vessel forms, paste fabrics, and other attributes interfinger and overlap from the Middle Preclassic Acachen through the Middle and early Late Classic Sabucan and Bejuco complexes. Similarly, the Chintok and Xcocom assemblages manifest high degrees of interdigitation and sharing. In sharp contrast, there is an obvious and pronounced disjunction between the rich and vibrant Bejuco assemblage and the impoverished, drab Chintok ceramic set (Figure 2; Supplemental Figure 1; Supplemental Table 2).[4] In addition to a few predictable persistences in the omnipresent unslipped Encanto/Yokat striated jar series, there are a handful of minor, form-related overlaps and continuities in the quotidian domestic utility wares (basins and jars) of the brown Becanchen ceramic group (Bejuco) and the brown Traino group (Chintok-Xcocom). Even given these, however, those two groups differ so greatly in slip charac-

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ter, luster, and color as to have been placed in two separate surface-wares: Yucatan Gloss (Becanchen, continuous back through the Middle and Early Classic Sabucan and Chacsik complexes) and Campeche Gloss (Traino, continuous into and through Xcocom). The overwhelming impression resulting from a comparison of the two assemblages is one of unlikeness and separation (Figure 2; Supplemental Figure 1; Supplemental Table 2). Their degree of dissimilarity is so great as to be best explained by a real break in the local sequence and, presumably, in the occupational history of the center as well.

Depositional Contexts and Circumstances

Comprehensive final reports detailing the excavations and depositional stratigraphies encountered by the major NGS and INAH programs and several minor secondary projects at Becán (and Chicanná) have not been published. However, field reports for many of these are available on file at appropriate institutional repositories (Andrews 1971; Ball 1973b; Ball et al. 1971; Bueno 1983; Bueno and Gutierrez 1986; Campaña et al. 2000, 2001, 2004; Taschek 1973), and a small number of monographs and articles detailing some of the contributing subprojects have been published (Ball 1983; Carrasco 1989, 1994; Eaton 1972, 1975; Messenger 1975; Thomas 1981; Turner 1983; Webster 1976). A few synthetic treatments also have provided some depositional data (Ball and Andrews V 1978; Bueno 1987, 1994, 1999; Campaña 2005; Campaña and Boucher 2002). Although a systematic discussion of site depositional—as opposed to construction or gross occupational—history is infeasible based on the foregoing, a suite of significant trends or patterns is discernible across the myriad accounts represented. I here summarize these in their relative chronological order.

Large, undisturbed Bejuco "middens" representing a full range of de facto, primary, and secondary refuse (sensu Schiffer 1987, 2010) are commonplace throughout the center of Becán beyond the southeastern architectural complex made up of Structures I–V (Figure 4; Andrews 1971; Ball 1973b; Ball et al. 1971; Campaña et al. 2000, 2001; Messenger 1975; Taschek 1973; Webster 1976). They consistently lie directly on contemporary or earlier floors or ground surfaces and are consistently "open" or unsealed by later material, only very rarely carrying trace sprinklings of generic Chintok-Xcocom sherds on their upper surfaces. In most cases, whether inside rooms or around the exterior bases of buildings and platforms, on-floor Bejuco deposits were encased in and covered over directly by B-horizon and A-horizon soils and were the last archaeological body represented. In the westernmost ranges of the central and south courtyard groups of the West Acropolis-Palace (Structure XIII), Bejuco-phase floors consistently were covered directly by Bejuco or pure Xcocom refuse or were clean. Not a single trace of "Chintok" material was encountered.[5] Open accumulations of trash were found throughout the overlapping western and northern halves of the site by both the NGS and INAH programs, both as primary, on-floor deposits and as redeposited secondary refuse. The contexts included building interiors, exterior terrace surfaces, courtyard floors, and off-platform ground surfaces in and around the complexes of Structure XIII and Structures X-XI.

Perhaps most telling is the depositional stratigraphy of the great encircling ditch. Created as part of the defensive earthworks system of Becán in the late second to early third century A.D., the 16-m-wide, 5-m-deep, and 1.9-km-long trench was used as a convenient, massive trash dump for the center beginning sometime between A.D. 590 and 620. Trash accumulated to depths of 2 m and more along most of its length. Systematically sampling the ditch-bottom deposits by means of 11 well-spaced test units, David Webster (1976) found them to consist all but entirely of open-surface Bejuco garbage. Ninety percent of the recovered ceramics were of pure, full Bejuco identity; nine percent were of mixed earlier date; and only one percent consisted of a surface scatter of generic Chintok-Xcocom material (Ball 1976).[6]

The overwhelming impression conveyed by Bejuco depositional circumstances is that of a terminal occupational episode. Throughout the site, on-floor Bejuco deposits of all types were left as final, unsealed, and not reused cultural accumulations, with humus and eventual full soil horizons evolving directly over and enveloping them. When not overlain by such deposits, Bejuco floorings typically are clear of later materials or directly topped by Xcocom deposits. In only a few, rare

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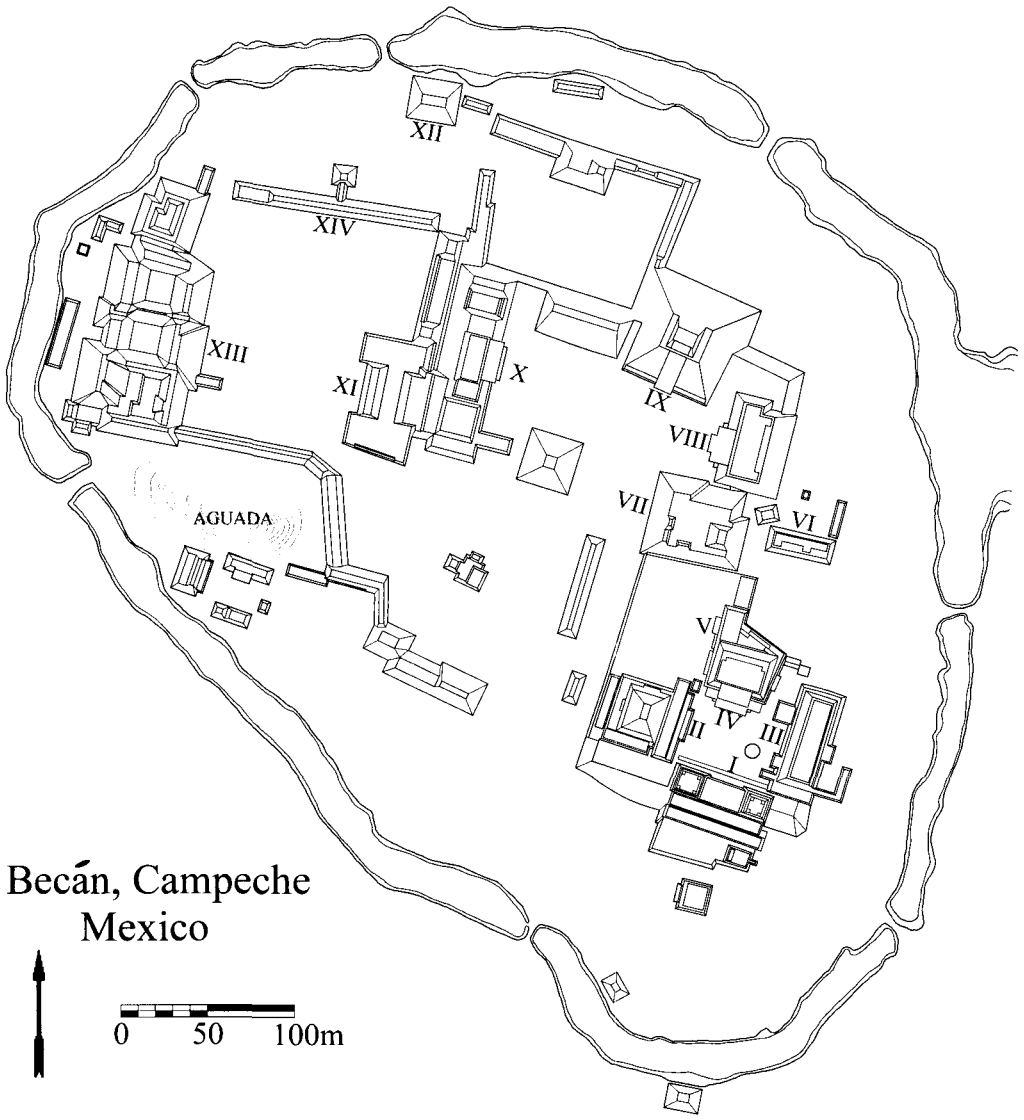


Figure 4. Map of Becán showing structures and site areas referred to. Map by Jennifer Taschek based on Ruppert and Dennison (1943:Plate 62) and Campaña (2005:Plate 49a).

architectural contexts are they covered over by admixed Chintok-Xcocom structural core.

For Chintok, there are effectively no depositional contexts known from either Becán or Chicanná other than mixed, typically redeposited structural fill and mixed open-surface scatters (Ball 1977:5–6; 133–134).[7] Farther afield (between 14 to 30 km east of Becán, immediately north and south of Highway 186), investigators of the 1973 NGS Río Bec Ecology Project found pure "Chintok" (Makan)—but not Xcocom—deposits as on-floor de facto and primary refuse in dispersed, rural patio groups to be at least as common as were Bejuco occurrences, not infrequently stratigraphically superposed over the latter (Eaton 1975; Taschek 1973; Turner 1983). Other investigators also have found Makan ceramics to be widely distributed throughout the Río Bec region, albeit in somewhat reduced frequencies from the previous phase and in a manner sug-

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gesting a significant reorganization of zonal settlement patterning involving widespread population concentration, if not reduction: "la fase Makan demuestra una fuerte continuidad con la fase anterior. *Su representación es globalmente más reducida en los sondeos*, pero las excavaciones en los grupos B... y D confirmaron ampliamente su importancia" (Dzul and Taladoire 2010:132; emphasis added).

Prentice Thomas (1981:102–103) characterizes the Chintok phase as a time of significant population compression and reduction with a decided concentration of occupation in the immediate vicinity of Becán, but outside the great ditch. Philippe Nondédéo (2003:241) and his colleagues see this concentration as characterizing and spanning the entire eighth century (Nondédéo et al. 2010:50), but I am left wondering to what extent it might actually have been a phenomenon of the early ninth, or even have been associated with the Xcocom incursion and revitalization of the center proper. This seems more plausible than congregation around a waning and largely deserted one-time center.

If there ever was a significant, coherent, stand-alone late eighth-century occupation at Becán, it was on the southeastern prominence that underlies the massive complex of Structures I–V, and it is probable that the remains of any such manifestation were largely reused as structural core in the construction of the latter and other nearby buildings. Campaña's (2005:51–52) conclusive dating of Structure I to terminal Chintok-Xcocom or, more probably, full early Xcocom and later, together with Bueno's (1983, 1994; Bueno and Gutierrez 1986) earlier ascriptions of Structures II, III, and V to that same time, leaves no question but that the entire southeast group, including Structure IV, dates from the full Tepeu 3-equivalent ninth- to tenth-century Terminal Classic, not from the Tepeu 2-equivalent middle to late eighth century, as originally believed (Ball 1977:172; Potter 1977:14). Campaña (2005; Campaña y Boucher 2002; Campaña et al. 2000; 2001; Nondédéo et al. 2010:50–51) also documented a number of large-scale architectural undertakings ostensibly of Chintok-phase date, but all of these actually involved the additive creation of high-rise annexes through the superposing of stacked, vaulted chambers atop the exteriors of the already monumental Bejuco-phase Structures IV, IX, and X. The actual occupational chronologies of these constructions remain unclear. Nearby secondary refuse deposits were of Bejuco composition, but in 1970 this author recovered numerous early-facet Xcocom ladle censers from around the base of the shattered but still standing Bejuco-phase Stela 3 (Ball 1977:117–120, 143–148).

Xcocom depositional circumstances have been described and discussed extensively since the early 1970s (e.g., Ball 1977; Ball and Taschek 1989, 2013; Messenger 1975; Rovner 1974, 1975; Thomas 1981), and there is little new to add here. Xcocom deposits occur as de facto, primary, and secondary refuse throughout Becán, at Chicanná, and at a number of plaza groups with vaulted buildings in the immediate vicinity of both sites. They are often associated with, and found lying directly on, the floors of buildings of Bejuco-phase construction, as for example in the cases of the Structure XIII complex at Becán and Structure XI at Chicanná (Ball et al. 1971). All extant Xcocom settlement, depositional, and construction data from the center of Becán and its environs for at least the surrounding three kilometers clearly link the assemblage to zonal reoccupation from the north and an initial reinhabitation of abandoned structures (Thomas 1981:103–104). From this followed a new occupational continuum and cycle of major architectural undertakings and a new era of dynamic east-west commercial engagement for the greater Becán zone (Ball and Taschek 1989; Bueno 1987, 1994, 1999; Campaña 2005; Campaña and Boucher 2002; Carrasco 1989, 1994; Rovner 1975).

Although they are clearly from the north or northwest of the peninsula, the precise identity of the newcomers and the cause for their emigration remains elusive and open to alternative interpretations (Ball 1977; Ball and Taschek 2013, 2015; Rovner 1975; Rovner and Lewenstein 1997). What differs importantly from earlier appraisals of their local impact is the appreciation that, rather than simply reoccupying earlier, abandoned eighth-century architecture, the ninth-century Xcocom inhabitants of Becán were themselves responsible for some of the most impressive monumental construction at the site, including the massive Structure I–V complex and much of the imposing Structure VIII.

Exactly when the Chintok and Xcocom reoc-

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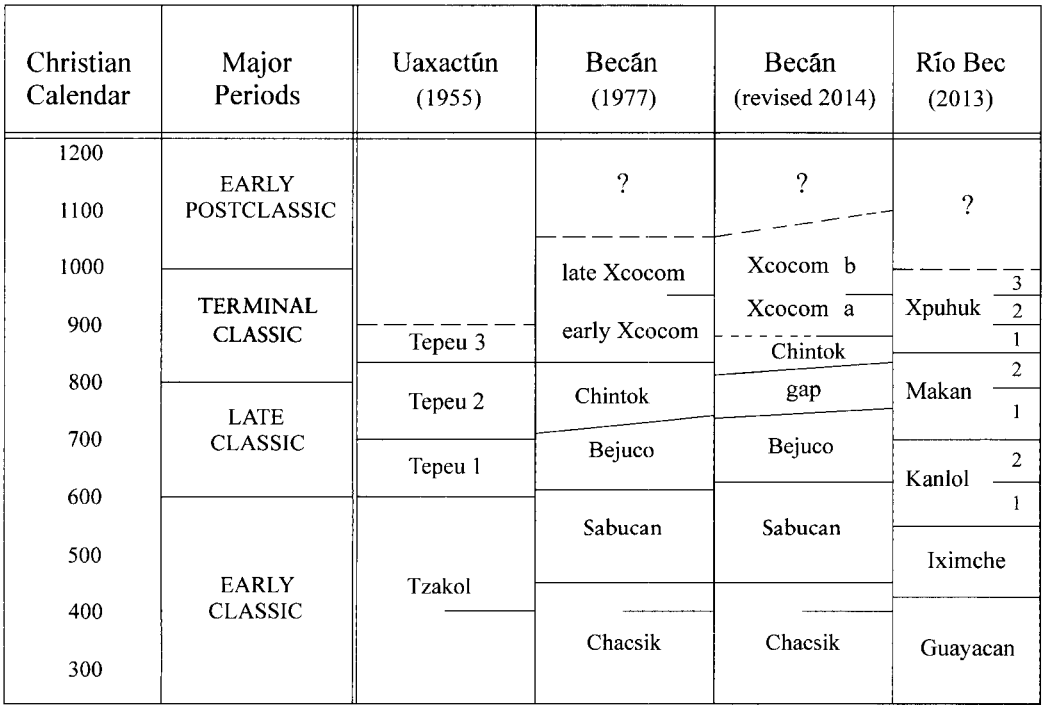


Figure 5. Original (1977) and revised (2014) Becán ceramic sequences with corresponding Río Bec and Uaxactún column segments.

cupations took place remains difficult to say with certainty. There is no direct or reliable epigraphic or radiometric dating available for the events or processes involved, and typological cross-dating provides only the very broad possible range of as early as ca. A.D. 810/830 to well into the middle or late ninth century. Indirect evidence based on radiocarbon-dated events and their aftermath at the central-west Campeche site of Acanmul suggests that the second stage Xcocom incursion most likely postdated A.D. 860 (Ball and Taschek 2015). Multiple independent assessments of Xcocom architectural, radiometric, and ceramic data obtained over the last 30 years strongly support persistence of this second continuum in Becán's occupational and cultural history well into the eleventh century (Ball and Taschek 1989; Bueno 1999; Carrasco 1989, 1994; Nondédéo et al 2010).

Implications and Conclusion

The proposed restructuring of the Becán ceramic sequence does not affect the relative ordering of the dependent site or zonal occupational, settlement pattern, or architectural histories in any significant way, but the revisionist chronology (Figure 5) does hold significant ramifications for their absolute dating, and so potentially for broader regional cultural history. Review of the most recent formulations of the latter (Campaña 2005; Nondédéo et al. 2010, 2013; Taladoire et al. 2013) suggests that the new chronology may actually bring Becán and its Late and Terminal Classic history into better conformity with these than did the original schema.[8]

Monumental architecture and settlement features previously assigned to the Bejuco ceramic phase of ca. A.D. 620–730 or later by any investigators from the time of the 1969–1971 NGS–Tulane project up through the most recent work by Campaña in 2004 are unaffected by the revision. This is also the case for all architecture and other features dated to the corresponding Kanlol Río Bec regional ceramic phase of A.D. 550–700 (Dzul and Taladoire 2010; Michelet et al. 2013; Nondédéo and Dzul 2010; Nondédéo et al. 2010;

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2013; Taladoire et al. 2013). Construction originally linked to the chronologically more nebulous Chintok Makan complex is another matter. In these cases, careful considerations of raw chronology, depositional logic, and architectural stratigraphy must be brought into play on a real case-by-case basis (see Arnauld et al. 2010, esp. 139–140; Michelet et al. 2013, esp. 422–423). Becán Chintok should be understood as a relatively late ceramic phase within the Classic period (post-A.D. 810/830), and the incorporation of Chintok sherds as redeposited, typically mixed core also should be appreciated to be an indication of construction activities as likely dating to initial Xcocom times (post-A.D. 860/870) as to late or full Chintok days (see also Carrasco 1989). Both Bueno (1983, 1994; Bueno and Gutierrez 1986; Bueno et al. 1992) and Campaña (2005; Campaña et al. 2004) each express some sense of the latter likelihood in their individual assessments of the southeastern group (Structures I–V) architecture and the major structural additions and modifications to Structures IX and X. Carrasco (1989) likewise suspected a similar scenario to be likely at nearby Chicanná. The reality is that many of the structural modifications and additions at Becán previously ascribed to the Chintok ceramic phase far more likely pertain to early Xcocom or later. This would put most of the late construction boom and architectural florescence at Becán at sometime after A.D. 850/860, although still allowing for the possibility of its inception as early as A.D. 810/830—but certainly no earlier than that. A post-A.D. 830–900 dating places the late Becán boom far more in line with the timing for the broader, regional, grand florescence of Río Bec–style architecture established by researchers of the 2002–2010 French Río Bec Project (Taladoire et al. 2013; Michelet et al. 2013).

It is important to emphasize that the foregoing arguments do not apply, and should not be extended, to architecture and construction associated with the broader regional Makan complex. Makan was defined and dated on extensive independent grounds quite different from those used in establishing Chintok, and the assemblage appears to document continuous, widespread occupational activity across the greater Río Bec region from its inception around A.D. 700 through the early ninth century (Arnauld et al. 2010; Dzul and Taladoire 2010; Nondédéo and Dzul 2010). More significantly, Makan is associated with the apogee of the distinctive Río Bec tradition of multiroom "great houses" and dispersed residential population concentrations (Taladoire et al. 2013; Michelet et al. 2013), this at a time when Becán likely lay enfeebled or abandoned. Members of the French Río Bec project have dismissed the idea of any cause-effect relationship between the failure of a neighboring political power or center (Calakmul or Becán) and the emergence of the robust Late Classic Río Bec tradition (Nondédéo et al. 2010:50), but I find it difficult to believe that these closely synchronous events were no more than temporally coincident. The disappearance of an effective royal central authority might well have proved a liberating and empowering catalyst across the agriculturally rich Río Bec landscape, enabling the development of a decentralized bourgeoisie heterarchy of prosperous farming families.

On the basis of the literature, all researchers active in the area appear to be in accord on occupational persistence at Becán, Chicanná, and Xpuhil to as late as ca. A.D. 1050–1100, although more widely afield, the greater Río Bec region appears to have been in serious demographic decline by A.D. 950–1000 (Bueno 1999; Campaña et al. 2004; Carrasco 1989, 1994; Nondédéo et al. 2010; Taladoire et al. 2013).

There remains one more question to consider, of course—what might have lain behind the early failure of the flourishing Bejuco phase center? In approaching this, it is impossible to ignore the coincident deteriorating fortunes and declining power of neighboring Calakmul in the decades following major military defeats by Tikal in A.D. 695 and 736. Members of the 2002–2010 French Río Bec Project have considered this in examining the rise and florescence of the Río Bec phenomenon, but with a markedly different situation and circumstances and so from a very different perspective than in the case of the failure of Becán (Nondédéo et al. 2010:50). They perceive little, if any, social or economic impact arising from the decline of Calakmul on the emergence of Río Bec society and its distinctive settlement and organizational patterns, and emphasize instead its largely autochthonous origins of the zonal tradition. For Becán—throughout most of its archaeologically documented history a pivotal

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crossroads on the overland transpeninsular route of passage between the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico (Ball 1977; Ball and Taschek 1989; Rovner 1974, 1975; Rovner and Lewenstein 1997)—it is inconceivable that the weakening political power and economic influence of the giant center to the southwest would not have had serious reverberations for its own economic and political role and viability. I submit that this was exactly the case, and that the defeats of Calakmul in the very late seventh and early eighth centuries had devastating consequences for Bejuco-phase Becán. Quite conceivably, the newly reported (Šprajc 2013, 2014) major center of Chactún, situated only 24 km north-northwest of Becán and manifesting strong Petén-oriented epigraphic and architectural remains dating to the first half of the eighth century (thus far six stela dates corresponding to A.D. 731 and 751), also figured into the equation in some way, but whether in a causal, an exploitive, or a purely incidental role will have to await more substantive information about this important site and its history. The story of Becán is as yet far from over.

Dominant as the historical paradigm has become in Lowland Maya studies, and as vital as inscriptions and the contributions of epigraphers and iconologists have grown over the last 35 years, basic dirt archaeology and a very mundane concern with establishing sound, reliable chronologies based on excavated materials and depositional stratigraphies still remains a fundamental and essential aspect of getting the whole story "right," especially for the more than 95 percent of the ancient Maya whose stories are not told in the inscriptions. Getting the Becán story to where it is now has taken many contributions and much tweaking over more than four decades by numerous separate projects, researchers, students, and laborers, and there is still much more to learn. To repeat, the story of Becán is as yet very far from over.

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The numerous, extraordinary contributions of the several INAH efforts at Becán and Chicanná are acknowledged by my bibliography, as are those of the 2002–2010 French Río Bec Project and the many other multinational ceramic analysts who have made this revision possible.

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Data Availability Statement. Large, comprehensive, clearly labeled ceramic type collections from the 1969–1973 NGS program supplemented by additions from the 1999–2004 INAH project are curated in permanent open storage at the INAH Centro Regional de Yucatán Ceramoteca in Merida, Yucatán. Original Field Notes and Reports are on file at the several institutions cited.

Supplemental Materials. Supplemental materials are linked to the online version of the paper, which is accessible via the SAA member login at www.saa.org.

Supplemental Table 1. Typological Compositions of the Late and Terminal Classic Becán Ceramic Complexes.

Supplemental Table 2. Ware and Group-Level Quantification of the Late and Terminal Classic Becán Ceramic Complexes.

Supplemental Figure 1. Diagnostic rim and form modes, Bejuco Tepeu and Chintok Makan Complexes. Illustration Plate by Jennifer Taschek based on Dolores Skaer (Ball 1977).

Supplemental Note 1. The Dating of Chicanná Structure II and the Paaktzatz Modeled Cache Vessel Subcomplex.

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Notes

1. For conservative purists who believe that the original, admittedly tentative taxonomy should be adhered to, I would redesignate the respective Becán material as Danta Orange-polychrome (Figure 3a; Ball 1977:76; Figure 28e) and Joyac Cream-polychrome (Figure 3b; Ball 1977:78), both of full Tepeu 3 vintage. That said, Laura Kosakowsky (personal communication 2014), who has recently assumed responsibility

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for completing Culbert's unfinished monograph on the Tikal ceramics for the University Museum Tikal Reports series, points out that using the type-level designations for these units obscures and even denies the very real continuities in their production traditions embodied in distinguishing them at the variety level, something that both she and Culbert mean to call attention to by their own taxonomic choices, and something with which I am in complete accord. Let it be Palmar: *Danta* and Zacatel: *Joyac* wherever these units occur.

2. In 2011 I was able to reexamine the curated Fine Gray sherds from the Tulane and INAH programs stored at the CRY Ceramoteca in Merida and found that all retained materials in fact belong to the Tres Naciones rather than Chablekal ceramic group.

3. If correct, this scenario would also accord well with and provide explanation for the seeming absence from Becán of stelae, inscriptions, regal iconography, high-status tombs, and other trappings of kingship and royalty dateable to the middle and late eight century or associated with Chintok ceramics. Failure and abandonment of the center seems more plausible an explanation in this regard than the surrogation of a new and radically divergent form of political structure and authority (Nondédéo et al. 2010:51).

4. It is noteworthy that, with respect to vessel forms, it is the presentation and service fineware classes of vessel—tureens, platters, plates, and vases—such as would have been employed in high status and formal feasting activities that are deficient in Chintok. These are present in both the Bejuco and the Xcocom assemblages, a distinction suggesting significant social variance among the three associated populations.

5. This pattern was mirrored in several buildings at nearby Chicanná, most notably Structure XI (Ball et al. 1971; Eaton 1972).

6. Over the years, a number of unsupported and unfounded assertions have been made to the effect that the great ditch and parapet system amounted to nothing more than a giant borrow pit or drainage system and bordering commoner residential platforms (Campaña 2005:49–50), possibly dating to no earlier than the initial Terminal Classic period (Bueno 1999). These assertions are both groundless and puzzling, as Webster's (1976) thorough publication of his extensive and meticulous 1970 investigations leave absolutely no question as to either the nature and purpose or early dating of the imposing defensive system.

7. What was thought to be a rare exception to this was the discovery of a single household equivalent deposit of de facto domestic residential pottery and artifacts in a structurally refurbished chamber of a Bejuco range building (Structure XXV) on the interior western lip of the ditch-defined center (Webster 1976:62–74). The bare-bones assemblage of pottery and stone implements conformed exactly to what would have been expected in the case of a post-Collapse, early Terminal Classic "squatter occupation," and a preliminary 1970 field assessment identified the ceramics as belonging to the then still tentative "Chintok complex." More complete post-field season study of the deposit resulted in its reclassification as an early Xcocom assemblage, however, eliminating the sole "certain" pure Chintok context recovered at Becán (Ball 1977: Figures 11, 37d).

8. Unlike the subsequent INAH and French projects of the 1980s through the 2000s, which enjoyed the time, resources, and official (INAH) sanction to carry out extensive horizontal and deep architectural excavations, the 1969–1973 NGS programs were sorely limited by funding, duration, and severe restrictions on the number, size, and placement of test units and larger excavations involving monumental architecture. The very predictable consequences of this were small samples, in general barely adequate and often ambiguous or inadequate, from which to evaluate construction chronologies or to draw interpretive conclusions. If anything, it is remarkable that the findings of nearly 50 years ago are as sound and on the mark as they have proved to be. All things considered, the pioneering efforts by the NGS field teams were nothing less than heroic.

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