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POSTCLASSIC MAYA RITUAL AT LAGUNA DE ON ISLAND, BELIZE

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Abstract

Ritual contexts at Laguna de On Island are identified in two structures that form part of a single household cluster in the central area of the site. The features and artifact assemblages of these structures indicate that a continuum of domestic-to-ritual debris is found at each location. Variation in the content of these assemblages is used to identify the degree of ritual activity and the function of each structure. Structure I is identified as a dwelling where ritual activity was conducted. Structure II is identified as a specialized household shrine or oratory. This examination of the contexts for ritual practice at Laguna de On addresses the issue of "secularization" of Postclassic Maya religion and the connection between status and ritual at a small, rural, Postclassic community.

Recent investigations at the Postclassic site of Laguna de On, Belize, provide evidence of an increase in ritual activity at the site during the Late Postclassic within a single, centrally located domestic zone. This paper examines the features and assemblages that signify Late Facet Late Postclassic (A.D. 1250–1450) ritual activity at this island settlement. Two contexts for ritual are identified at this site: a residential building (Structure I) and a rubble platform (Structure II) of specialized ritual function. Both structures form part of the same residential group, amid a zone of other domestic features in the north-central area of the site. In this paper, the examination of ritual contexts at Laguna de On employs a detailed analysis of features, artifacts, and depositional processes. A domestic-to-ritual continuum in assemblage composition is identified at these structures, and comparative frequencies demonstrate assemblage signatures that express the degree of ritual practice in each context examined. Late Postclassic Maya ritual at the community of Laguna de On illustrates a clear link between ritual activities and social status, and was a primary manner in which social power was manifested at this site. This examination of ritual contexts and assemblages at a small, rural community addresses the important issue of the degree of religious "secularization" in Postclassic Maya society.

THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

The Postclassic community of Laguna de On was located on an island and the shores of Honey Camp Lagoon in northern Belize (Figure 1). Investigations at this site under the auspices of the Belize Postclassic Project (Masson and Rosenswig 1997, 1998a) and the Honey Camp–El Cacao Project (Masson 1993, 1997; Valdez et al. 1992) have examined diachronic patterns of community organization after the collapse of southern-lowland, Classic-period polities in northern Belize. This Postclassic community was located in a rural setting at a considerable distance (see Figure 1) from political centers of this period, such as Lamanai (Pendergast 1981, 1986), Santa Rita (Chase 1982, 1986; Chase and Chase 1988), and Caye Coco (Masson and Rosenswig 1998b). Laguna de On was likely in the political domain of the newly discovered Postclassic center of Caye Coco on Progresso Lagoon (Masson and Rosenswig 1998b), located 20 km north down the Freshwater Creek drainage (see Figure 1).

Laguna de On is thought to have occupied a third-tier position in the Late Postclassic political hierarchy of northern Belize, based on a three-tier model of centralized province organization originally proposed by Roys (1957) and recently reexamined by Marcus (1993). Laguna de On's classification is based on the spatial extent of the settlement around the shore (Waid and Masson 1998) and on the island, and the lack of elevated platform architecture of Postclassic date at this site. Laguna de On is tentatively classified as a third-tier site that would not have served as the seat of a primary (*halac uinic*) or secondary (*batab*) administrator in this region.

Settlement data suggest that Laguna de On was positioned within a nested hierarchy of communities (Masson 1998:Figure 2.1). At least four Late Postclassic centers have been identified within the Chetumal-province parameters (as defined by Jones [1989:Map 2]) to which Laguna de On was probably linked. These Chetumal-province centers include Caye Coco (Masson and Rosenswig 1998b), Santa Rita (Chase and Chase 1988), Ichpaatun, and Sarteneja (Sidrys 1983). Laguna de On may have been part of a geopolitical unit formed by the Freshwater Creek drainage to the north, which linked it to the center of Caye Coco at Progresso Lagoon, the Last Resort site at Laguna Seca, and perhaps other communities along this waterway that are yet to be identified (see Figure 1; Masson 1998:Figure 2.1). Four such linear aquatic political systems may have existed in northern Belize, organized along such prominent features as the Río Hondo, the New River, the Freshwater Creek drainage, and the Belize coast and cayes (Masson 1998).

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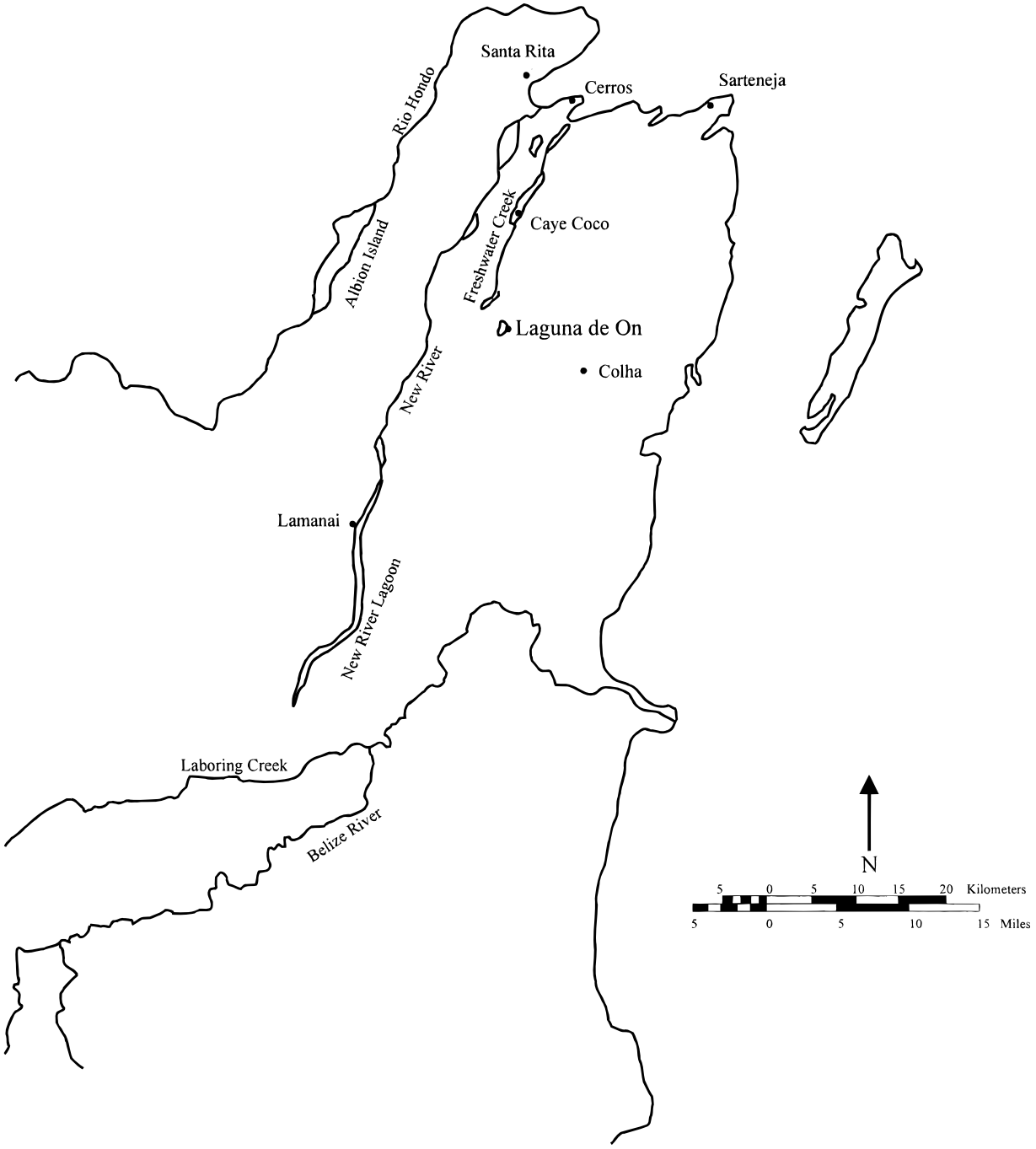


Figure 1. Location of Laguna de On and other selected Late Postclassic Maya sites.

LAGUNA DE ON STRATIGRAPHY AND CHRONOLOGY

The island site of Laguna de On comprises three basic stratigraphic units (Masson and Stafford 1998). The lowest and earliest of these (Level 4) includes fine white clays intermingled with marl *sascab* limestone bedrock (Rosenswig and Stafford 1998). The clays are located in patches across the east side of the island and are absent in other locations tested, in which only bedrock was encountered. Overlying bedrock and white clays, Level 3 is defined as an interface zone (a mixture of two deposits) that combines overlying brown-gray loam deposits (Level 2) and bedrock. Level 2 is a layer of brown-gray loam that extends across the island in a 30-cm-thick layer from 15 to 45 cm below the surface. Level 1 is a layer of humic topsoil, riddled with roots, which overlies the brown-gray loam across the island. This topsoil layer extends from the surface to an average depth of 15 cm (Masson and Stafford 1998).

Two facets of Late Postclassic occupation are defined in these deposits at Laguna de On (Masson and Stafford 1998:Figure 1), the Early Facet (A.D. 1050–1250) and the Late Facet (A.D. 1250–

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1450). Thought to represent a linked, continuous occupation, these facets are defined on the basis of stratigraphic position and radiocarbon dating (Masson and Stafford 1998). Features and artifacts from the island's Early Facet Postclassic deposits are found within the brown-gray loam (Levels 2 and 3) that overlies bedrock across the island. A subsequent assemblage of Late Facet features and artifacts is found within the humic topsoil (Level 1) across the site.

Clear breaks in ceramic traditions are not observed among these two facets of occupation, which include primarily Payil Red, Rita Red, Zakpah Orange Red, Santa Unslipped, and unslipped censer forms (Mock 1997, 1998). The sherds at this site are highly fragmented and eroded, which makes the identification of types difficult, especially when vessel form is the most diagnostic attribute (Mock 1998). The assemblage is dominated by Payil Red ceramics that link deposits of the Early and Late Facets in a continuum of ceramic production, despite an increase through time in the amounts of Rita Red and effigy censer forms observed at the site (Masson and Stafford 1998:Figure 3).

In spite of ceramic similarities, differences are observed between the types of features occurring in the Early Facet deposits (Levels 2 and 3) and those associated with Late Facet deposits (Level 1). Radiocarbon dating of lower and upper feature clusters suggests that these stratigraphic patterns are temporal, rather than horizontal, phenomena (Masson 1998; Stafford 1998; Masson and Stafford, 1998). The assignment of stratigraphic deposits to the Early and Late Facet components is, thus, based on radiocarbon dating of vertically distinct features.

CHANGES IN EARLY AND LATE FACET FEATURES AND ASSEMBLAGES AT LAGUNA DE ON ISLAND

Early Facet features and artifacts found within Levels 2–3 across the island suggest that Laguna de On was a stable, prosperous community focused on the economic production of ceramics, textiles, and agricultural products; chalcedony quarrying; and extracting forest resources. Few Early Facet features or artifact distributions from the island appear to be related to a concern with public works or ritual. Household architecture is difficult to detect, limited to eroded dirt and marl floor surfaces and occasional postholes (Aguilera 1998; Sheldon 1998). Five large pits found at these lower levels were filled with ashy soil and other debris (e.g., broken metates, stone slab linings, and large sherds) that suggest they were used for firing ceramics (Aguilera 1998; Masson et al. 1997; Rosenswig and Becker 1997; Wharton 1998a).

It is clear from the presence of utilized stone tools and cores (Masson 1997; Oland 1998), large amounts of debitage (Masson 1993, 1997), a range of utilitarian ceramic forms (Mock 1998), spindle whorls (Murray 1998), manos and metates (Masson 1999), faunal remains (Masson 1993; Wharton 1997, 1998b), and post molds, hearths, and fire pits (Aguilera 1998; Sheldon 1998) that the island was the site of domestic occupation and that a variety of household maintenance and production activities was performed there. Domestic debris is associated with architectural remains and is also found in sheet midden deposits that extend across the entire island. The settlement at the island was part of an occupation also found on the shores of the lagoon (Masson 1993, 1997; Waid and Masson 1998). Differences are not observed in the utilitarian debris found in Early Facet and Late Facet deposits, and all of the categories of debris listed above are included in each component. Like the ceramic assemblages, other utilitarian artifacts do not significantly change from the Early to the Late Facet. It is, thus, within a context of domestic continuity that the acceleration of ritual activities is observed between the Early and Late Facets.

Features of the Late Facet suggest an additional suite of community activities at this site that are not observed among Early Facet features. Five additional behavioral patterns reflected in Late Facet features include: (1) the construction of a defensive fortification (Barnhart and Howard 1997), (2) increased investment in household architecture (Aguilera 1998; West 1998; Wharton 1998a), (3) increased status differentiation in household assemblages (Masson 1999), (4) increased ritual activity practiced in higher-status domestic zones (Masson 1999), and (5) the construction of formal ritual facilities (Masson 1999). The first three patterns are described elsewhere (as referenced above), and the latter two patterns are the focus of the descriptions and analyses below.

A continuum of ritual-to-domestic zones is identified in Late Facet features at Laguna de On through variability observed in artifact assemblages (Masson 1998). The phrase "domestic zone" refers to an area that was either the site of a domestic structure or a sheet midden that is presumed to have derived from nearby structures. Ritual activity is identified in this study by the following indicators: the presence of concentrated, broken incense-burner ceramics; caching of exotic or whole, unused, formal lithic tools; concentrations of cranial elements of large game animals; and concentrations of burned rock that do not appear to represent domestic activities. Although some features were constructed and reserved primarily for ritual practice (e.g., Structure II; Figure 2), ritual activities are also found in upper-status domestic zones (primarily Structure I, but also Suboperation [Subop] 5; see Figure 2). Some domestic zones exhibit no ritual indicators at all (e.g., Subops 17, 2/3, 7, 9–11, 15, 16, and 18; see Figure 2), even though two of these zones (Subops 2/3, 17) were located in proximity to ritual activities performed at Structures I and II and are thought to form part of the same upper-status domestic group as these structures at the site (Aguilera 1998; Masson 1993). Household architecture

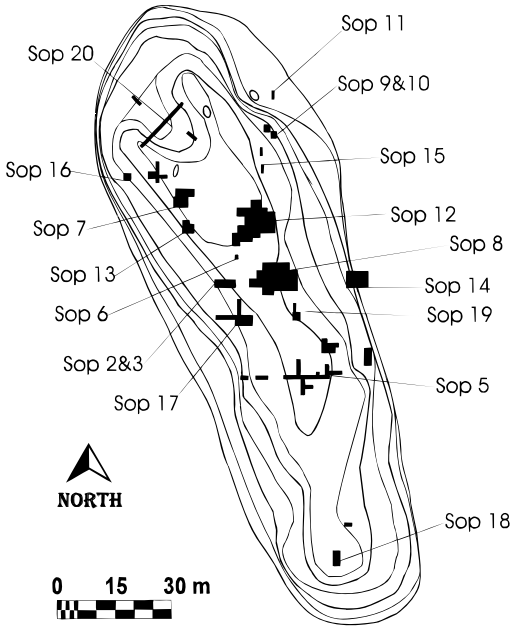


Figure 2. Location of excavation units on Laguna de On Island.

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across the site includes stone wall alignments, cobble floor foundations, and plaster floors; this architecture does not appear to vary according to social status at the site (Aguilera 1998; West 1998; Wharton 1998a). In fact, ritual activity is one of the primary indicators of status differentiation among domestic groups. This pattern suggests that ritual at Laguna was not completely "secularized"; access to ritual knowledge and paraphernalia was not equal for all occupants of this settlement as has been previously suggested for Postclassic society (Smith 1962:267; Thompson 1957:634).

RITUAL ACTIVITY IN THE LATE FACET OCCUPATION OF LAGUNA DE ON

The remainder of this paper will present the analysis of ritual indicators at Laguna de On Island, as observed at the Structure I upper-status residence where ritual activity was concentrated and at the Structure II rubble platform. This examination will also address key issues of how ritual activity can be identified through assemblage analysis, and how domestic and ritual activities were combined in the Late Facet of the Postclassic occupation of Laguna de On Island.

Structure I—Architecture and Features of a Ritual and Domestic Nature

The stone alignment that marks Structure I overlies two fire-pit features, 30 cm of brown loam sheet midden, and three burials (Masson et al. 1997). A portion of this underlying midden dates to the Late Facet, as a fire feature yielded a calibrated radiocarbon date of A.D. 1280–1420 (Stafford 1998). Structure I overlies this feature and is, therefore, at least this old.

Structure I is defined by a three-sided wall foundation comprised of a single-course line of stones located on the north, west, and south sides (Figures 3 and 4). An area of 67 square meters was excavated to expose features located within and outside of this foundation. The structure is open to the east, where no foundation stones were located (see Figure 4). The upper portion of the building would have had perishable pole walls and a thatch roof. Three-sided "C-shaped" configurations have been reported among Classic and Postclassic architectural forms from northern Yucatan (Bey et al. 1997; Pollock 1965:Figure 10) to the Peten (Rice 1986; Tourtellot 1988:247–260), and from earlier in the Classic period at Uaxactun (Pollock 1965:Figure 22). At the southwest corner of the building, a west-running alignment may have framed part of an additional room.

Near the southwest corner of the structure, a God K effigy eccentric chert artifact (Figure 5) was found at a depth of 15 cm below the surface. The artifact was probably cached in this location, but depositional evidence for near-surface caching is difficult to document in root-riddled humic topsoil and its transition to underlying brown loam, which does not preserve evidence of intrusive sediment features. However, the artifact was found below the humic root mat at the base of Level 1 topsoil deposits that contain Late Facet deposits and artifact concentrations at this location. In addition, the artifact was 40 cm southwest of a child burial (Burial 6), which was located at a slightly lower depth (20 cm below the surface; Masson et al. 1997:17). Over this child burial was one of the most extensive concentrations of smashed censers and animal skulls found at the site (described later). The God K eccentric may be associated with these additional ritual features, further suggesting that it was buried beneath the surface at this location as an offering.

The God K effigy form of this artifact is identified by the smoking torch feature on each of the two heads depicted (see Figure 5; Masson 1997). Such elaborate eccentrics are unknown from other Postclassic contexts, and deity eccentrics from the Classic period are rare. Finely made eccentrics are recovered primarily from Classic-period funerary or cache contexts at such political centers as Altun Ha (Pendergast 1982:121–124), Copan (Fash 1991:Figures 53–57), El Palmar (Morley et al. 1983:448), El Pozito (Hester et al. 1991), and Quirigua (Morley et al. 1983:448). Eccentrics in northern Belize were made at the site of Colha (Eaton et al.



Figure 3. Structure I, facing east. Stone alignment overlies 30 cm of brown loam deposits. Stones at bedrock level in foreground mark fire features that underlie Structure I and intrude into bedrock.

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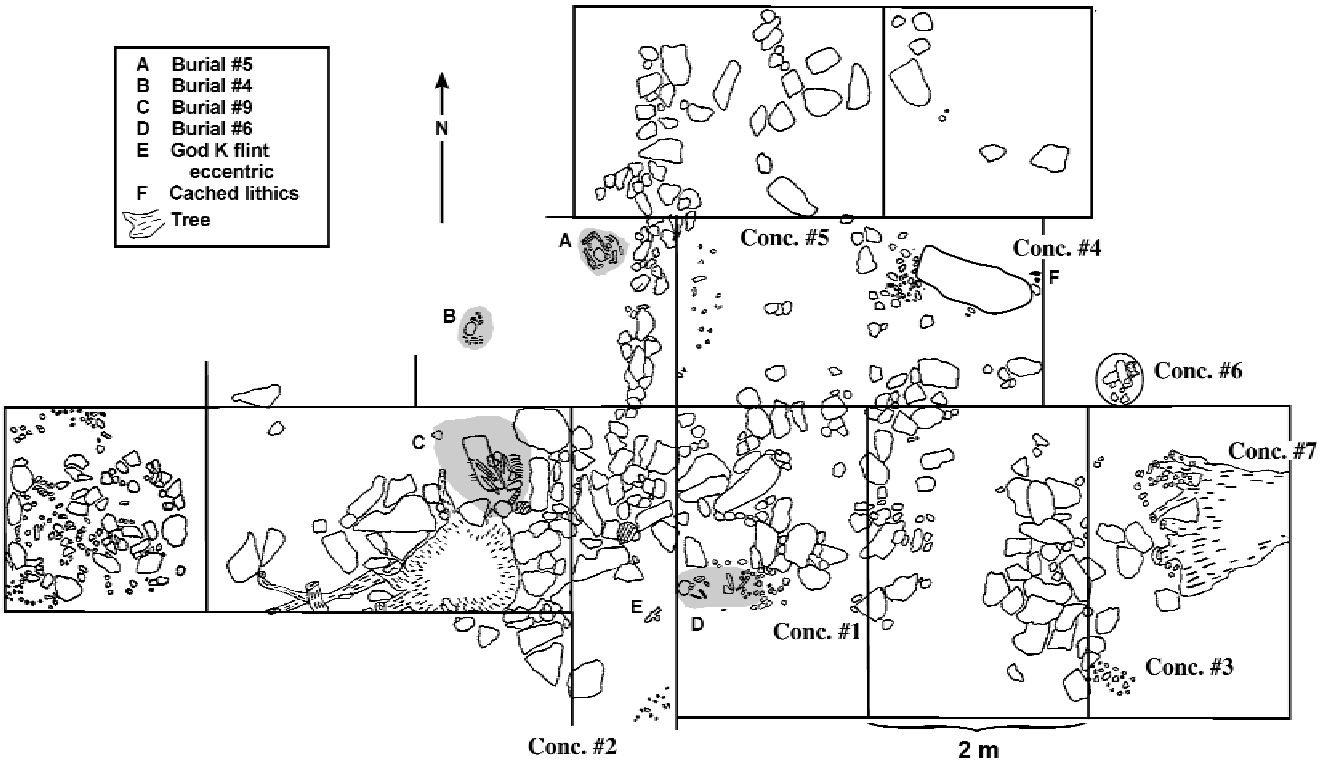


Figure 4. Composite map of features, Structure I.

1994; Shafer and Hester 1983), and the Laguna de On eccentric is made of Colha chert. It is probably in secondary context, looted during the Postclassic period from a Classic-period monumental structure nearby. The base of the artifact is broken. Caching of eccentrics or other lithics in Postclassic contexts has been observed at Santa Rita (Gann 1918:68), although it is unclear whether these artifacts were manufactured in the Postclassic. God K effigy flints were used as scepters of political authority in the Classic period (Coggins 1988; Schele 1976). This deity had close symbolic associations with royal ancestors and passage into death (Grube 1992:209–210; Schele and Miller 1986:73, 286, Plate 114). The God K deity was also an important figure in the Postclassic codices, and retained its association with offices of political authority (Love 1994:18). Thus, this object may have symbolized important links to the past, as well as current political authority for the agents of ritual at Structure I (Masson 1997).

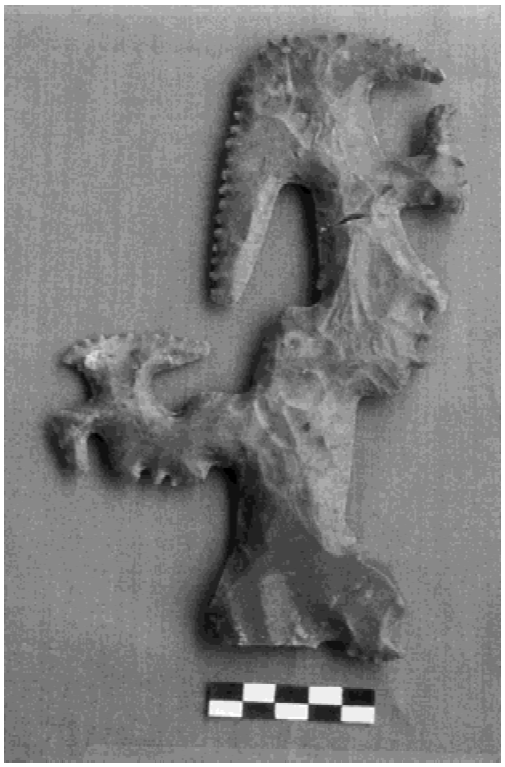


Figure 5. God K effigy eccentric flint from Structure I.

Concentrations of Artifacts at Structure I

Seven concentrations of ceramics and other artifacts were mapped around Structure I (Figure 6). Each concentration included various amounts of censer sherds, red slipped and unslipped or eroded ceramics, animal bones, freshwater snail shells, flakes, and (rarely) obsidian (Masson et al. 1997). One of these, in the base of a tree root in Subop 8L (see Figure 4), was highly disturbed. The contents of the other six are listed in Table 1, which lists the number of lithic tools, lithic flakes, faunal bone, and types of ceramics recovered from these concentrations and de-

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Table 1. Contents of artifact concentrations at Structure 1

Concentration #, Location at Structure I Lot #	Lithic Tools	Lithic Flakes	Faunal Remains	Slipped Ceramics	Unslipped Ceramics	Eroded Ceramics	Censer Fragments	Total
Concentration #1, south exterior (Lot 27/36)	3 (2.8%)	61 (5.4%)	174 (15.4%)	60 (61.4%)	38 (3.4%)	103 (9.1%)	27 (2.4%)	1,127
Concentration #2, southwest exterior (Lot 21/44)	3 (14.3%)	56 (25.1%)	36 (16.1%)	39 (17.5%)	12 (5.4%)	40 (17.9%)	8 (3.6%)	223
Concentration #3, southeast exterior (Lot 135/142)	3 (15.4%)	25 (12.0%)	10 (4.8%)	38 (18.3%)	5 (2.4%)	98 (47.1%)	0	208
Concentration #4, east interior (Lot 91/100/104)	1 (.5%)	104 (48.4%)	85 (39.5%)	8 (3.7%)	2 (.9%)	15 (7.0%)	0	215
Concentration #5, interior (Lot 92/101)	0	11 (5.9%)	99 (52.7%)	20 (10.6%)	43 (22.9%)	13 (6.9%)	2 (3.6%)	188
Concentration #6, east exterior (Lot 167)	0	8 (80%)	0	0	0	2 (20%)	0	10

Note: Percent shown is that within each concentration.

fines the material signature of a high-status domestic context for ritual.

The depositional context of these concentrations is unclear. No concentrations contained the remains of a single reconstructable vessel. Pieces of several vessels are represented in most concentrations, a pattern best demonstrated in Concentration 1 (Figure 6), which had portions of at least eight bowls (direct rim, basal break, tripod, collared, and incised forms), one plate, one jar, one chalice, one *comal*, and two censer vessels represented by the sherds recovered. Censer forms included Cehac-hunacti Composite, Thul Appliqué, Onha Perforated (colander), and Kol Modeled, according to Mock (1997, 1998 [partially following Walker 1990]). Un-



Figure 6. Ceramic and bone concentration Lot 27 (Concentration 1)/36, south side of Structure I.

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slipped wares primarily included Santa Unslipped (Mock 1998), and slipped wares included Payil Red, Rita Red, and Zakpah Orange Red (Mock 1997, 1998 [following Chase 1982; Mock 1994]). Forms were not as diagnostic in concentrations other than Concentration 1 because of the lower number of sherds found in them (see Table 1).

Lithic tools in the concentrations included six utilized flakes (in Concentrations 1, 2, 3), two cores (in Concentrations 2 and 3), and two formal-tool fragments (in Concentrations 1 and 4). A proximal lenticular biface fragment was found in Concentration 4, and a medial oval biface fragment was found in Concentration 1, typed according to lithic classifications established at Colha (Hester and Shafer 1991; Michaels 1987; Shafer and Hester 1983). Lithic tools were recovered primarily from south side concentrations (Concentrations 1–3), except for the lenticular biface found to the east (in Concentration 4). It is unclear whether they were used for ritual purposes or whether they represent domestic debris mixed into these concentrations.

Concentration 1 is the most extensive of all those recorded at the site. It was located on the south exterior side of the building, 10–20 cm above the child burial mentioned above. Other concentrations were noted along the east side of the building (see Figure 4) and inside the building. Concentrations were not found on the north side of the building, but isolated Kol Modeled effigy-censer elements were found on all four exterior sides of it. In fact, four different sherds recovered from four sides of Structure I were refitted to form part of an hourglass censer vessel (Figure 7). The location of these sherds suggests that they and other ceramic vessel fragments recovered with them were intentionally broken and scattered prior to deposition. Concentrations listed in Table 1, other than Concentration 1, exhibited low quantities of expedient lithic tools, occasional formal-tool fragments, and various quantities of flakes and faunal remains. The faunal assemblage from Structure I features is distinguished from the rest of the site by the inclusion of cranial elements of large game animals, including brocket and white-tailed deer, peccary, tapir, and alligator (Masson 1993; Wharton 1997, 1998b), which are not found elsewhere at the site. The cranial elements of these species resemble the ceramics in their broken, disarticulated state. Reconstructable skulls were not represented in any single concentration, but whole jaws of deer and peccary were occasionally found. The materials found in concentrations around Structure I (see Table 1) resemble the materials found in the entire assemblage of Late Facet sediments around the building (discussed later). Censers, cranial elements of large game, and lithics are generally found in the sediments surrounding this structure, although they are concentrated in certain areas. This pattern is attributed to diachronic activities occurring at this location that collectively contributed to concentrated features and a general spread of debris that provides this assemblage with its mixed residential and ritual signature.

Variability is observed in the percentages of materials comprising different concentrations, which may indicate functional variability in the kinds of activities that occurred around this building. Minimally, this variability indicates the range of activities that occurred through time at Structure I. The percentages shown in Table 1 indicate that material classes are not uniformly found in each concentration. Lithic tools are low in most concentrations, and only form significant percentages of two concentrations that are located at the southwest (Concentration 2) and southeast (Concentration 3) vicinities of the building (see Table 1). Lithic flakes were most common along the east side of the building, in percentages indicated for Concentration 4 (48.4%) and Lot 167 of Concentration 6 (80%). These high numbers of flakes may attest to a high index of domestic activities at the east side of the building. As the building opened to the east, this may have been a frontal patio zone where general household production activities were per-



Figure 7. Censer fragments from Structure I.

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formed. Concentration 4 also has one of the highest percentages of faunal remains (39.5%), although even more faunal remains were found within a concentration inside of the structure's walls (Concentration 5; 52.7%). Slipped ceramics are most commonly found in concentrations on the south side of the building, notably in Concentration 1 (61.4%), and also in Concentration 2 (17.5%) and Concentration 3 (18.3%). Unslipped ceramics are shown in low percentages, but many of these sherds may be masked in the "eroded" category, as they were difficult to identify to type in initial preliminary lab identifications. Censers, as identified by appliqué or effigy elements, are present in three concentrations (i.e., Concentrations 1, 2, and 5), and are most numerous in those located along the south exterior of the building (see Table 1).

These comparisons indicate that the south concentrations contained greater percentages of slipped ceramics and censers. Other concentrations on the east side and in the interior of the structure had greater percentages of faunal remains and lithic flakes. This variation in contents suggests that much of the ritual activity at Structure I may have been concentrated along the south side of the building. It is possible that this activity was related to the location of Burial 6 in this vicinity. However, the recovery of refitting pieces to a single effigy censer from around all sides of the building (see Figure 7) and the presence of censer sherds and large-animal cranial elements in general lots (outside of concentrations) suggests that the practice of ritual at this domestic location was not an isolated event, but part of ongoing activities that resulted in the mixture of features and ritual and domestic assemblages at this location.

Structure II—Artifacts and Features from a Nondomestic Rubble Platform

Structure II was constructed in the Late Facet, based on a calibrated radiocarbon date of A.D. 1228–1390 from a carbonized wooden disk recovered from within its rubble matrix (Stafford 1998). One Colonial-period ceramic cup was recovered from its surface (Gann 1928; Masson 1997:Figure 9), suggesting its continued use in some capacity into the historical period. No ritual indicators were found beneath Structure II. A 40-cm-thick zone of brown-loam sheet midden or midden fill was encountered below the structure, above bedrock (Rosenswig and Becker 1998).

Structure II is located at the high point of the island, 10 m north of Structure I (see Figure 2). An area of 77 m^2 was excavated around this building. The top portion of much of the rubble from this building was visible on the surface prior to excavation. Also visible from the surface was a row of vertical stones embedded into the rubble along the west half of the north edge of the building. Structure II's appearance and dimensions prior to excavation match a description of a "pavement of stone" reported by Thomas Gann (1928:54), who visited the island in 1927.

Excavations at Structure II revealed a 3-×-4-m rubble platform (Figures 8 and 9) raised 25–40 cm above the surrounding terrain. Along the south, presumably frontal, edge of the rubble platform, a rubble patio (2 × 9 m) extends to the southeast (see Figure 9). The platform and patio are oriented 10° west of magnetic north and face Structure I. This architecture was probably originally covered in limestone plaster that has since eroded because of its



Figure 8. Structure II, facing northwest from far southeast corner of patio. Rubble platform in background, rubble patio in foreground.

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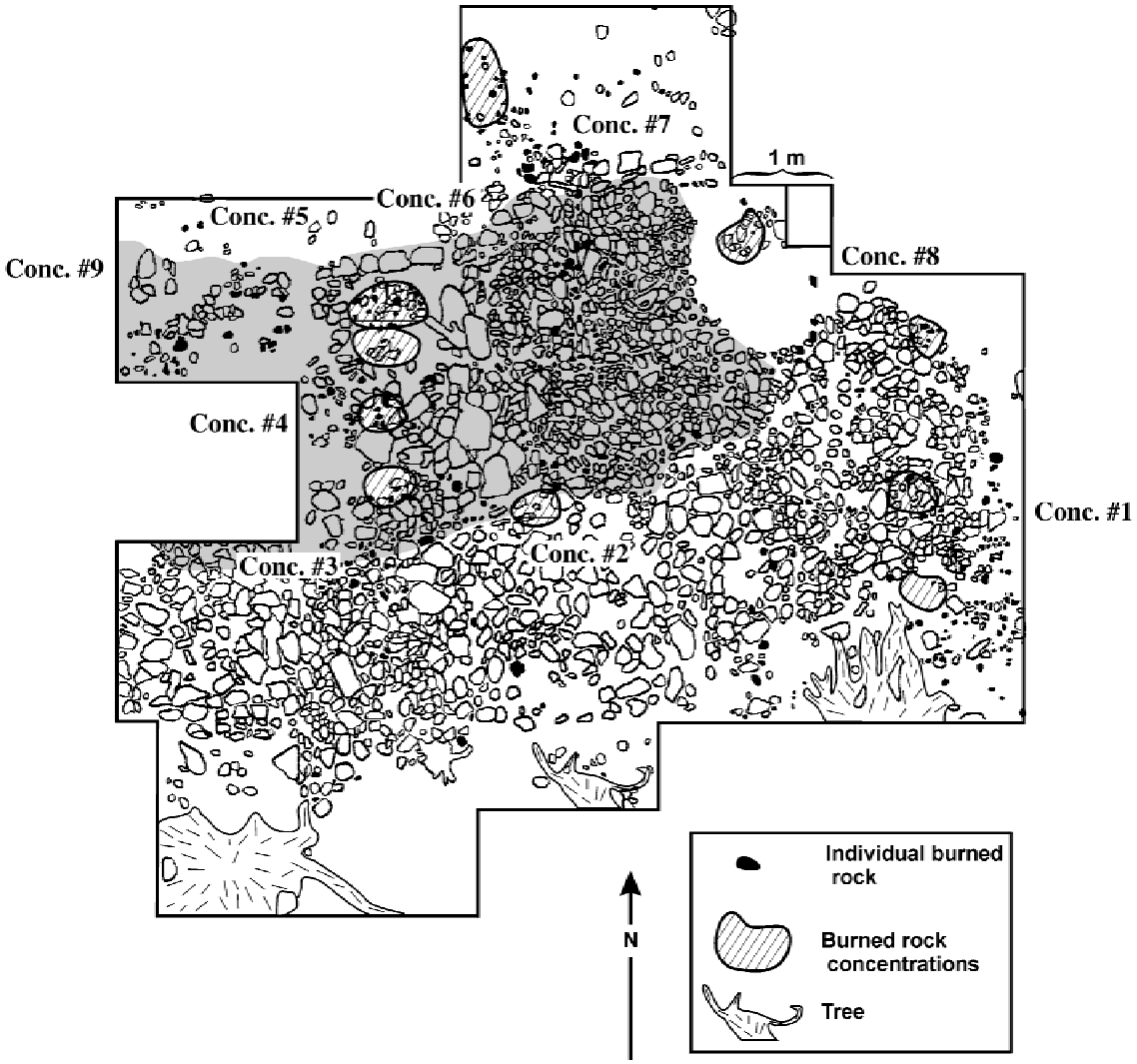


Figure 9. Composite map of features, Structure II. Rubble platform is indicated by shaded area, rubble patio is unshaded.

proximity to the surface. The platform consisted of two distinct spatial features on its east and west halves (Rosenswig and Becker 1997:31–32) (see Figure 9). The west side is framed by a vertical wall alignment on the north and contains less surface rubble, which appears to indicate the location of an enclosed room. The east side consisted of densely packed rubble. Both sides of the platform, including the west room and the east rubble surface, were functionally linked by dense concentrations of burned rock and other features and artifacts.

Ten burned-rock concentrations were identified in the rubble of Structure II (see Figure 9), from 20 to 50 cm in diameter. They consisted of clusters of 5–30 highly charred, cube-shaped, golf-ball-sized limestone rocks. These clusters did not form depressions, and very few artifacts were recovered among them that might indicate their function. No burned matrix is associated with them, but their proximity to the surface could have resulted in the erosion of such sediments. The locations of these burned-rock features is plotted on Figure 9. They generally encircle the rubble platform located on the east, south, west, and north sides of it. Three burned-rock concentrations are located farther away from the platform than the others, aligned along the east edge of the rubble patio (see Figure 9). Two burned-rock concentrations are adjacent to the platform on the east and north sides, and one concentration is located on the south edge. Four additional concentrations are lined up in a row along the west side of the platform. They lie directly south of a vertical stone wall alignment that defines the rear (north) boundary of the room located on the west of Structure II; they appear to be located within this room and to define its east boundary.

Unique artifacts at the site were also recovered from the surface of this rubble platform (Figure 10). One carbonized-disk wooden artifact was found embedded in the rubble of Structure II near the south (front) edge. One engraved ceramic object was found on the surface of the platform (Figure 10a). An unused, complete, triangular biface (Figure 10b) was found on top of the stones in the east side of the building. This tool may represent a cached lithic item, although the same difficulties in identifying topsoil caching for the God K eccentric (discussed earlier) also apply to this artifact. Its complete, unused state suggests that it may have been placed in this location as an offering. Other stone tools were found em-

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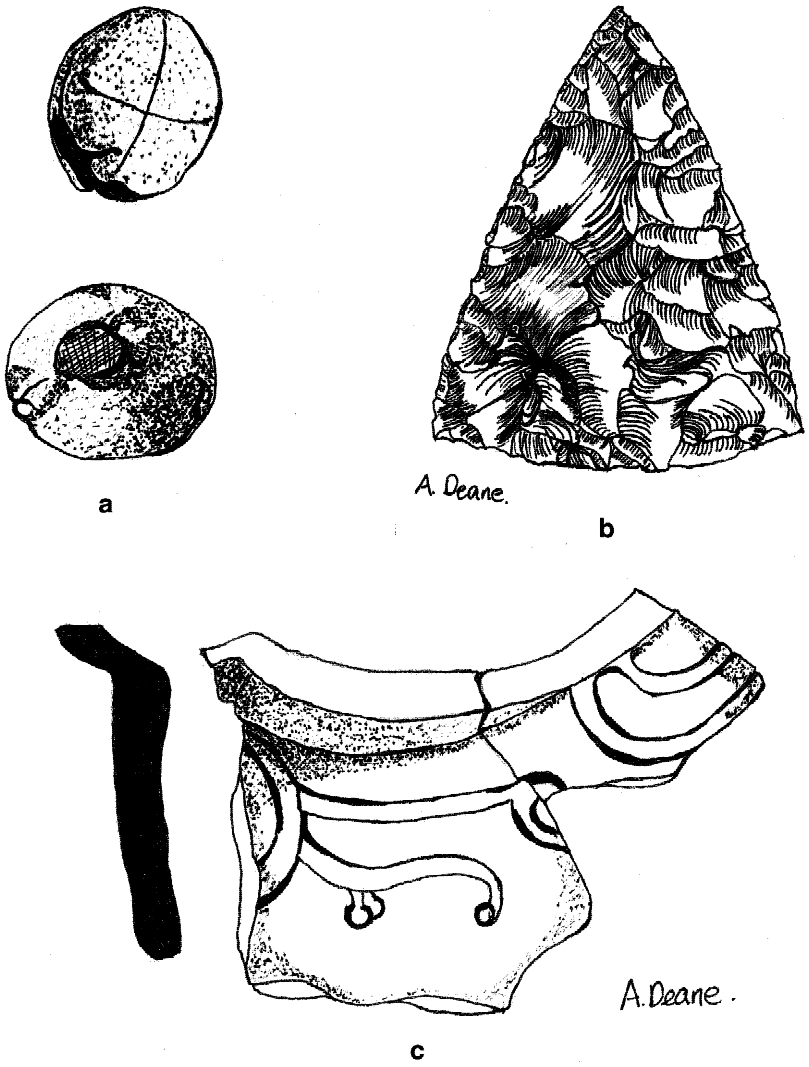


Figure 10. Artifacts found on surface of Structure II: (a) engraved ceramic object, (b) triangular biface, (c) engraved ceramic (refitted with piece from Structure I). Illustrations by Anne Deane.

bedded in the rubble patio in front of Structure II (Rosenswig and Becker 1997:33), although these artifacts were heavily used and utilitarian in nature. It is unknown whether they are related to activities performed at this location or if they were part of the rubble fill in which they were found. One sherd from Structure II was refitted with a sherd from Structure I (Figure 10c), suggesting that the structures were used contemporaneously.

Concentrations of Artifacts at Structure II

Nine concentrations of artifacts were documented around this structure (see Figure 9). The contents of eight fully excavated concentrations are shown in Table 2 (omitting Concentration 9, which was not fully excavated). The artifact concentrations follow the same pattern of spatial distribution around the structure as the burned-rock features. In general, they are found on all four sides of the structure, or adjacent to its edges, with one outlier located at the far southeast corner of the rubble patio (Concentration 1; see Figure 9). Concentration 2 is located (adjacent to a burned-rock feature) near the south edge of the platform, and four features (Features 3–5 and one incompletely excavated feature, Feature 9) are located on the west side of Structure II. Two additional concentrations (Concentrations 6 and 7) are located north of the rear wall or edge of this structure, and one (Concentration 8) is located off of its east edge. Most concentrations appear paired with one or more burned-rock features, but functional links between these deposits are unclear.

The highest percentages of flakes are found on the west side (Concentrations 3 and 5; 24 and 36%, respectively). Faunal remains are also common in features to the west (Concentration 3, 72%), far southeast (Concentration 1, 42%), and north (Concentration 7, 34%). High frequencies of flakes and faunal remains are not found in the same features, but the highest percentages of each were found within the west portion of the structure. Although high percentages of flakes are reflected in features located to the west, higher quantities of faunal remains occur in features dispersed around the structure. Faunal remains from Structure II do not include the specialized assemblage of large-game cranial parts observed at Structure I. Fish, turtle, and bird bones, as well as various mammal-bone fragments, are common in this vicinity. Slipped ceramics occur in higher percentages in concentrations on the west side (Concentrations 4, 76.2%; 6, 39.3%) and off the east edge (Concentration 8, 62%). These figures functionally link the east and west sides of the platform, both on and off of the rubble sur-

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Table 2. Contents of artifact concentrations at Structure II

Concentration #, Location, Lot #	Lithic Tools	Lithic Flakes	Faunal Remains	Slipped Ceramics	Unslipped Ceramics	Eroded Ceramics	Censer Fragments	Total
Concentration #1, southeast corner, patio (Lot 41)	0	13 (15.3%)	36 (42.4%)	19 (22.4%)	1 (1.2%)	16 (18.8%)	0	85
Concentration #2, south/center, off platform (Lots 33/10)	2 (1.2%)	27 (16.3%)	38 (22.9%)	21 (12.7%)	12 (7.2%)	64 (38.6%)	2 (1.2%)	166
Concentration #3, west side, interior (Lot 102)	0	12 (24%)	36 (72%)	0	2 (4%)	0	0	50
Concentration #4, west side, interior (Lot 29)	0	2 (9.5%)	1 (4.8%)	16 (76.2%)	0	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.8%)	21
Concentration #5, west side, interior (Lot 52/42)	0	26 (36.6%)	17 (23.9%)	11 (15.5%)	16 (22.5%)	1 (1.4%)	0	71
Concentration #6, north exterior, rear wall (Lot 23/194)	0	3 (10.7%)	3 (10.7%)	11 (39.3%)	0	11 (39.3%)	0	28
Concentration #7, north side, off platform (Lot 71)	0	7 (10.9%)	22 (34.4%)	10 (15.6%)	3 (4.7%)	22 (34.4%)	0	64
Concentration #8, east side, off platform (Lot 198)	0	0	8 (11.3%)	44 (62%)	9 (12.7%)	4 (5.6%)	6 (8.5%)	71

Note: Percent shown is that within each concentration.

face. Slipped ceramics were less common in other concentrations (see Table 2). Ceramic-vessel forms were determined for several concentrations (identifications made by Shirley Mock), as follows: Concentration 1 had pieces of an outflaring bowl; Concentration 2 had a mixture of bowl and plate forms and an unslipped jar; Concentration 4 had portions of a shallow bowl, a basal break bowl, and an effigy-support bowl; Concentration 6 had portions of a basal break bowl and a direct rim bowl, and Concentration 7 had pieces of a small jar or bowl, an incised jar, and a parenthesis-rim jar. These vessel forms indicate that serving dishes were used extensively at Structure II. Mixed pieces of different vessels in these concentrations follow the pattern observed for Structure I.

Unslipped ceramics and censers in concentrations on the platform were most common off the northeast edge (in Concentration 8). Unslipped sherds were also common to the west of the structure (in Concentration 5). Although highest on the northeast (in Concentration 8), censers were also found on the west side (in Concentration 4), off the south edge (in Concentration 2); a ladle-censer fragment was found off the north side (in Concentration 7). The distribution of censers (in low identified numbers), thus, follows that of high percentages of slipped ceramics in east and west Concentrations 4 and 8. The co-occurrence of high frequencies of slipped-ware censer sherds was previously observed within concentrations at Structure I.

Subop 17—A Domestic Zone near Structure I

Subop 17 represents a domestic zone that is located 5 m southwest of Structure I (see Figure 2; Aguilera 1998). Its identification as a domestic zone is based on the recovery of a marl-covered cobble platform, hearth feature, ground stone, and large quantities of utilitarian debris (Aguilera 1998). Although concentrations of *Pomacea* shell and scattered ceramics were found in the topsoil zones above and surrounding the cobble platform, few censers were recovered from this location. Subop 17, a domestic zone lacking evidence for ritual activity, is used in the assemblage analysis below as an index of comparison for Structures I and II. Subop 17 is one of the largest domestic-zone excavations on the island (see Figure 2), and, therefore, possesses the greatest sample size of materials for comparison to Structures I and II. Comparing Structure I and Subop 17 provides a productive contrast, as they are located in the same central area of the site and share common utilitarian assemblages.

Assemblage Comparisons

What does the variation in feature content at Structures I and II signify? The interpretation that Structure II was used for special ritual purposes must account for the fact that lithic tools, flakes, and nonspecialized faunal remains are found within concentrations of materials at this location. Structure II's ritual function may be more realistically identified based on relatively low numbers of domestic materials, rather than an absence of them altogether. Although this rubble platform may have been used for special purposes, it was located within a busy domestic zone represented by Structure I, and surrounding domestic sheet-midden deposits and house platforms detected in Subops 17, 2/3, 6, 7, 9/10, 13, and 15 (see Figure 2). It is, thus, likely that domestic materials resulting

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Table 3. Raw counts of materials recovered at three Laguna de On Late Facet structures, by material class

Structure, Function	Lithic Tools	Lithic Debris	Faunal Remains	Obsidian	Slipped Ceramics	Unslipped Ceramics	Censer (Appliqué) Fragments	Total	Volume
Structure II, ritual	25	138	799	73	616	716	3	2,370	11.55
Structure I, residence/ritual	73	3,596	3,249	219	1,012	1,649	80	9,878	9.9
Subop 17, residence	36	3,220	575	81	541	671	0	5,124	2.025
Whole site	216	12,220	7,149	809	2,349	4,390	83	27,216	—[a]

[a]Not available.

from nearby activities would infiltrate the deposits of Structure II, and it is even possible that domestic activities were conducted at this location at various times in the structure's use. The identification of a "ritual" feature is, therefore, dependent on the degree of domestic materials relative to specialized features, and also the quantity of the materials recovered. Tables 3–6 illustrate the characteristics of Structure II's materials relative to Structure I and Subop 17, where a greater degree of domestic activity is represented.

Differences observed in the content and range of features around Structures I and II are described relative to the set of features at each structure in the paragraphs above. Some important patterns emerge when the concentrations as a group are compared between structures. Concentrations around Structure I contained more crania of large game, whereas Structure II features had a more mixed faunal signature of mammalian, aquatic, and avian species. Structure I also lacked the burned-rock concentrations that were common at Structure II. Ceramic concentrations at Structure II did not have many censer fragments in them as compared to Structure I. Concentrations at Structure II had less materials than did those of Structure I, with only one feature exceeding 100 pieces, whereas all but one of Structure I's features had more than 100 pieces. Most features in Structure II had 50–85 artifacts or bone fragments (with one outlier, n = 166), while features in Structure I most commonly ranged from 188 to 215 pieces (with two outliers: n = 10, n = 1,127). This pattern reveals an important differentiation between Structure I and Structure II; the latter has far less debris and contains far more ceramics relative to other categories of material than has Structure I (Figure 11).

When the entire material assemblages are compared, Structures I and II exhibit very different compositions (see Tables 3–6). The data described below document these patterns through comparison of the content of the entire assemblage of each structure (features and general soil lots), which illustrates important differences in the function of activities performed at these two places. In Tables 3–6, these structures are compared to a domestic zone, Subop 17, and to the entire site (Late Facet deposits). The data from the entire site include deposits from domestic zones in addition to Subop 17, as well as areas of ritual activity.

Tables 3–6 reveal an important contrast between Structure II and Structure I and Subop 17. These data help to distinguish primarily ritual deposits from primarily domestic deposits at this site, as well as deposits that represent a mixture of both activities. Despite having the greatest excavation area and volume of any excavation at the site (see Table 4), Structure II has a low overall artifact density (204.9 items per m^3) when compared to that of Structure I (997.8 items per m^3). This relatively low density suggests that fewer domestic production and maintenance activities were performed in this location. Low artifact density may be linked to concepts of cleanliness or purity that universally define ritual places (McGee 1990:55; Renfrew and Bahn 1991:359). Structure I has almost five times more materials than does Structure II, and Subop 17 has more than twice as many materials as does Structure I. These figures place Structure I midway between Structure II and Subop 17 in terms of density of materials, in keeping with the interpretation that this structure represents an upper-status residence where ritual was performed. Mixed activities at this location appear to result in a mixed material assemblage.

An examination of the quantity of each class of material by volume (see Table 5) indicates that Structure II has fewer of each artifact category than do the areas with residential components (Figure 12). Specifically, when material per cubic meter is compared, Structure I has about three times more lithic tools, more than 30 times more lithic debris, more than four times as many faunal remains and obsidian, more than two times the slipped ce-

Table 4. Percentages of artifacts at three Laguna de On Late Facet structures, by material class

Structure, Function	Lithic Tools	Lithic Debris	Faunal Remains	Obsidian	Slipped Ceramics	Unslipped Ceramics	Total Materials/ Structure	Materials/ Volume
Structure II, ritual	1.1%	5.8%	33.8%	3.1%	26.0%	30.2%	2,367	204.9
Structure I, residence/ritual	.7%	36.4%	32.9%	2.2%	10.2%	16.7%	9,878	997.8
Subop 17, residence	.7%	70.9%	12.7%	1.8%	6.2%	7.7%	5,124	2,530
Whole Site	0.8%	44.9%	26.3%	3.0%	8.6%	16.1%	27216	—[a]

[a]Not available.

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Table 5. Materials per cubic meter (N/volume) at three Laguna de On Late Facet structures, by material class

Structure, function	Lithic Tools	Lithic Debris	Faunal Remains	Obsidian	Slipped Ceramics	Unslipped Ceramics	Volume
Structure II, ritual	2.2	11.9	69.2	6.3	53.3	62.0	11.55
Structure I, residence/ritual	7.4	363.2	328.2	22.1	102.2	166.6	9.9
Subop 17, residence	17.8	1,590.1	284.0	40.0	267.1	331.3	2.025

ramics, and more than three times as many unslipped ceramics. When various lithic and faunal remains to ceramic ratios are compared between these structures (see Table 6), some proportions are the same, and some differences are reduced. However, the overall pattern of Structure I far exceeding Structure II in the quantity of utilitarian debris is maintained. The lithic tool to ceramic ratio continues to indicate that Structure I has three times more lithic tools than does Structure II. According to these ratios, lithic debris is 10 times greater in Structure I, the amount of faunal remains is doubled, and the amount of obsidian is tripled. The ratios of lithics or faunal remains to ceramics is dependent on the amount of ceramics within each assemblage. Structure II has proportionately far greater quantities of ceramics than do the other areas. The ceramics to all lithics and faunal remains ratio for Structure II is 1.29, four times greater than for Structure I (.37). This value for Structure I is close to that of Subop 17 (.31) and of the entire site (.25).

Structure I continues to lie midway between Structure II and Subop 17 in most comparisons (see Tables 5 and 6). Subop 17 exceeds the density of materials (see Table 5) from Structure I in lithic artifacts, including lithic tools and obsidian (more than twice as much); lithic debris (five times as much); and slipped and unslipped ceramics (twice as much). Subop 17 has slightly fewer faunal remains than does Structure I. These relationships are also reflected in the ratios of various materials to ceramics (see Table 6). Lithic tools are almost identically proportioned, but Subop 17 has twice the lithic debris, one-third the faunal debris, and less obsidian than Structure I. Ratios calculated for the entire site resemble Structure I for lithic tools, lithic debris, and faunal remains. The obsidian to ceramic ratio of the site is higher than for Structure I or Subop 17. In most categories, then, Structure I broadly resembles the entire site, and Structure II appears anomalous. Subop 17 has comparable amounts of lithic tools, but higher percentages of lithic flakes, relative to Structure I, probably attesting to its domestic function.

Table 4 allows the relative percentages of materials that comprise the assemblages of each area to be compared (Figure 13). The aforementioned relatively high proportion of ceramics in Structure II when compared to the other areas is expressed in these percentages, which show that 56.2% of Structure II's materials are ceramics. The structure has over 2.5 times the amount of slipped ceramics, and almost double the amount of unslipped ceramics, as Structure I. Structure I has more of each category of ceramics than does Subop 17. The percentages of slipped ceramics are closer between these two assemblages than are those of unslipped ceramics, probably because of the high number of unslipped censer fragments (body sherds not specifically identified as censers) in Structure I. Censer fragments tabulated in Table 3 represent only appliqué, effigy, or rim elements that can be conclusively identified as being from censers. Structure I has proportions of unslipped sherds comparable to the entire site (16%; see Table 4), although more of these may be censers as few censer elements are identified outside of Structure I (N = 6 for the entire site).

DISCUSSION

Comparison of materials recovered from Structures I and II suggests that these buildings were the focus of ritual activity. Variability within concentrations located at each structure illustrates a continuum of domestic and ritual materials and activities at each location. At each structure, more-specialized ritual concentrations are identified by higher percentages of slipped sherds and appliqué or effigy censer sherds, with the additional large-game cranial elements found at Structure I. At Structure I, the south side of the building was the location of concentrated materials with these ritual indicators. The east and interior areas of this building contained higher numbers of lithic flakes and nonspecialized faunal remains, perhaps indicating that more domestic activities were performed at this location. At Structure II, concentrations with greater numbers of slipped ceramics and censers were found at east and west areas of the rubble platform, but high quantities of slipped ceramics were found to the north, and censers were found on all sides. This pattern suggests a more generalized dispersal of ce-

Table 6. Ratio of lithic tools, lithic debris, faunal remains, and obsidian to total ceramics at three Laguna de On Late Facet structures

Structure, Function	Lithic Tools	Lithic Debris	Faunal Remains	Obsidian	Ceramics (Total #)	Ratio Ceramics/ All Lithics and Faunal Remains
Structure II, ritual	18.8	103.6	599.8	54.8	1,332	1.29
Structure I, residence/ritual	27.4	1,351.4	1,221.0	82.3	2661	.37
Subop 17 (residence)	29.7	2656.8	474.4	66.8	1,212	.31
Whole site	32.1	1,813.3	1,060.8	120.0	6,739	.25

Note: Quotients multiplied by 1,000.

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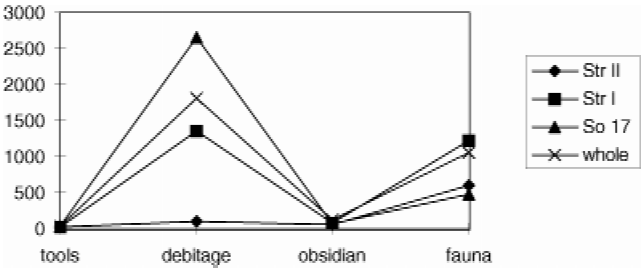


Figure 11. Ratio of nonceramic artifacts (and ecofacts) to ceramics by area at Laguna de On. Subop 17 and the entire site show higher amounts of debitage than the elite dwelling area of Structure I or the ritual zone of Structure II.

ramic types at Structure II as compared to Structure I. Flakes and faunal remains formed the greatest proportion of concentrations on the west side of Structure II; perhaps this was related to activities performed within this interior room.

Some degree of mixture with "background noise" of general midden debris probably occurred in concentrations at both structures and is to be expected. Chase (1986:177) has noted the difficulty of differentiating between domestic and ritual deposits using comparisons of ceramic frequencies, advocating the use of whole vessels for such determinations. However, as no whole vessels were recovered from Laguna de On, the comparison of sherd frequencies appears to be an effective method at this site. At Mayapan, Smith (1971:Tables 12–19) demonstrated clear utilitarian and ceremonial ceramic-assemblage dichotomies according to structure type. He used diagnostic forms (i.e., censers, cups, effigies, and vases), rather than comparing slipped and unslipped ceramics and censers to other artifact categories as in this investigation of Laguna de On. There are, thus, several methods that have been developed in studies of the Maya Postclassic to determine the degree of ritual activity and type of ritual context. Despite inevitable mixture with domestic debris, relatively low quantities of materials, high proportions of slipped ceramics, and the presence of censers appear to be the best indicators of degrees of ritual function at Laguna de On. An examination of variation among individual feature content at Structures I and II indicates that some features have greater quantities of slipped sherds and censers than do others. Partial testing of either building may have resulted in the recovery of concentrations with greater quantities of faunal remains or flakes, which would not fully represent ritual activities conducted at each of these places. The variation observed in concentration content at each structure also indicates that uniform patterns of directional symbolism are not reflected, with the south-side features exhibiting the greatest frequencies of slipped sherds and censers at Structure I and the east and west sides exhibiting these trends at Structure II. Comparative information from other sites is needed to fully determine whether vessel breakage varies consistently according to direction among structures at Postclassic Maya sites.

While the assemblages of Structures I and II may indicate degrees of mixing of ritual and domestic debris, they may also represent overlap in dual contexts for the use of utilitarian objects. McGee (1990:55) notes that Lacandon god houses are places "where everyday items become sacred offerings"; plainware cooking jars are primary components of altar assemblages recorded ethnographically (Deal 1988:74). Food and alcohol are important components of ethnographic ritual, as are the serving vessels that contained them (Deal 1988:86). At Laguna de On, however, relative percentages of ceramic types indicate that the overlap in domestic and ritual assemblages does not render them indistinguishable from one another.

The analysis of the entire assemblage of features and artifacts at Structures I and II reveals that ritual activities occurred in an upper-status domestic zone (Structure I) and a specialized structure (Structure II) at this site. The comparison of these structures to Subop 17 (and elsewhere) indicates that ritual activities did not take place at all domestic localities on the island. This pattern addresses important questions pertaining to the organization of ritual in Postclassic society. Postclassic religion is often described as "secularized" when compared to the Classic period (Pollock 1962:16–17; Proskouriakoff 1962:136; Smith 1962:267; Thompson 1957:634). In the secularization model, common households are inferred to have had unrestrained access to religious paraphernalia in the Postclassic period—in contrast to the Classic period, when religious practice was monopolized by royal sectors of society (Smith 1962:263). This model is primarily based on the distribution of religious artifacts at Mayapan, where a typology of household altars and shrines was defined by the Carnegie Institution (Smith 1962). It must, however, be remembered that Mayapan was a Postclassic political capital. If religious practice was a prerogative of those in political power during the Late Postclassic

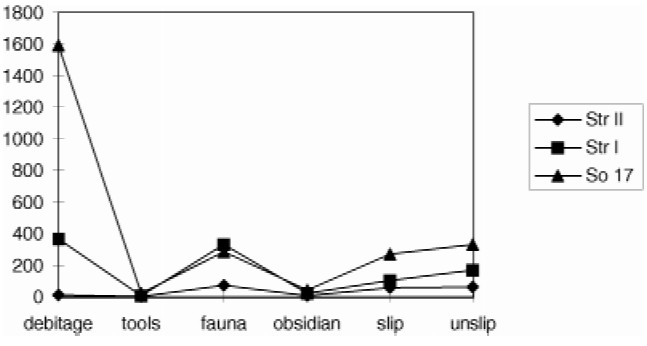


Figure 12. Material count per cubic meter by area at Laguna de On. Subop 17 shows much more debitage than the other elite or ritual zones. Fauna distinguishes residental zones Subop 17 and Structure I from Structure II. Slipped and unslipped ceramics are found in far greater numbers at Subop 17 than in the other two areas.

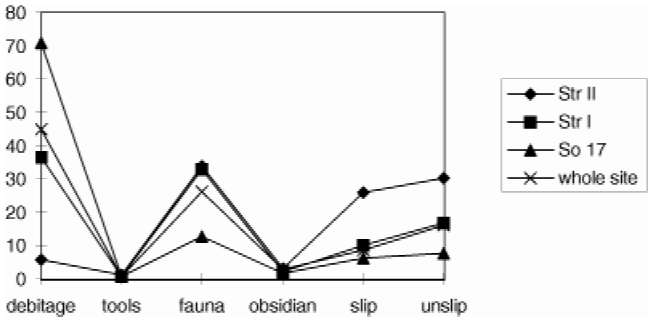


Figure 13. When relative percentages of materials within each zone are compared, Structure II, the ritual area, is distinguished from other zones by higher proportions of ceramics and lesser amounts of debitage.

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period, Mayapan would definitely be a location where this privilege would be exercised. In fact, comparative research at other sites indicates that religious paraphernalia was not generally available to all sectors of society during the Late Postclassic (Freidel and Sabloff 1984:184). Mayapan appears anomalous when compared to such sites as Cozumel, where ritual facilities were distinct from domestic facilities and were dispersed in a carefully organized pattern (Freidel and Sabloff 1984:184). Even within Mayapan itself, variability is noted in the spatial distribution of public buildings—with most of this architecture concentrated in a plaza complex in Quadrant Q of the site (Pollock et al. 1962) or not far from it (Chase 1992:128–130, Figure 8.4). The distribution of caches (Chase 1992:128–130, Figure 8.6) and sculptures also suggests that ritual paraphernalia was hierarchically distributed within Mayapan. Distribution of ritual features outside the center may more reflect a pattern of barrio elite settlement (Chase 1986:362–367, 1992:123–131) than generalized household practice in commoner contexts.

Despite the fact that ritual artifacts and features may conform to a hierarchical distribution at Mayapan and other Postclassic-period sites, it is probable that household religion was practiced to some degree regardless of social status. However, household practice is not strictly a Postclassic pattern, nor is it necessarily evidence of increased religious "secularization." The prevalence of household religion, at least in terms of the construction of household shrines or temples, has roots in the Maya formative (McAnany 1995:55–60). Classic-period household groups have long been noted to include lineage temples or shrines in their midst (Becker 1971; Gossen and Leventhal 1993:211; Leventhal 1983:75–76; McAnany 1995:53). Such structures replicated on a household scale the larger, more public versions of royal temples found in political centers. This phenomenon was observed ethnographically by Vogt (1969:572), who noted that ceremonial practice was manifested through ascending scales of social order between the political center of Zinacantan and its surrounding communities. This phenomenon has more recently been referred to by Gossen and Leventhal (1993:207) as integrated cults of "periphery" and "center." As scales of social status are reflected in Postclassic domestic settlement at sites such as Cozumel (Sabloff et al. 1974:406–408) and Santa Rita (Chase 1986:356, 1992), scales of religious practice may also be reflected among them. Indeed, this pattern has been observed in the distribution of household shrines among various barrios at Santa Rita (Chase 1986:365–366) and among communities of living highland Maya (Deal 1988:72).

Identifying ritual in the Postclassic period can thus occur in the context of a domestic dwelling, in the context of a specialized household-group ritual structure, or in a public monumental context. Ethnographically, household altars throughout the Maya area are placed either in the "main" structure of a household cluster or in a separate oratory (Deal 1988:64). At Laguna de On, two out of three of these scales of ritual practice are observed. Structure I illustrates a household context, and Structure II represents a probable household shrine or oratory. Public-scale monumental structures are not located at Laguna de On, but have been documented at the nearby Postclassic center of Caye Coco (Masson and Rosenswig 1998b) and other Postclassic capitals such as Santa Rita (Gann 1900:662–677) and Lamanai (Pendergast 1981), where they are represented in the use, modification, or construction of conspicuous, public, monumental architecture.

The Laguna de On structures examined here not only illustrate two contexts of Postclassic household ritual, but also the form of ritual that is found at a third-tier site in a regional hierarchy. Structure I differs from almost all other domestic zones in its smashed censer and animal-crania pieces, although a few censer fragments at this site were recovered in soils above burials in Subop 5. This site illustrates a continuum of domestic-to-ritual deposits, and demonstrates that ritual artifacts are primarily concentrated at one upper-status residence and its associated rubble-platform shrine. On a small scale, these patterns suggest that religious practice at Laguna de On was not "secularized," and equal access to ritual paraphernalia was not available to all members of this small community. One household group monopolized most of this activity.

A survey of the shore of the north end of the lagoon in 1997 (Waid and Masson 1998) revealed the existence of an extensive sheet midden, reflecting a dispersed Postclassic community along bluffs located to the west, north, and east of the lagoon. Only one ritual feature was located in that entire area, suggesting that specialized ritual facilities were constructed on the shore, as well, and that certain social groups sponsored ritual activity, whereas others did not. Censer fragments were not found in any of the 15 areas tested except for the single locality where a line-of-stone shrine was recovered. Chase (1982:132) has similarly noted that censers do not occur in low-status households at Santa Rita, and the limited distribution of censers on the island and shores of Laguna de On indicates the same pattern.

CONCLUSION

This investigation of ritual and domestic features and assemblages at Laguna de On Island illustrates variation in the context of Postclassic ritual practice at a small community. Even in a rural settlement located at a considerable distance from political centers, the practice of religious activities occurred in the context of spatially distinct ritual zones. Although religious ritual was probably incorporated as part of the activities of a single household on the island (occupying Structure I and its vicinity), it was clearly not practiced by all households in this community. Not only does one household group exhibit a near monopoly on domestic ritual, it also probably sponsored the operation of a specialized ritual building, Structure II. However subtly defined, the organization of ritual practice at this community suggests that an internal social hierarchy was present, and that one of its primary manifestations was the appropriation of ritual activity. The analysis of ritual deposits provides important clues regarding the organization of Postclassic Maya society, as well as the links of this society to its past and present legacies of ritual practice.

RESUMEN

Recientes investigaciones en el sitio Postclásico de Laguna de On en Belice proveen evidencias de un incremento en la actividad ritual del sitio durante el período Postclásico Tardío dentro de una zona domestica de alto estatus localizada centralmente. Este ensayo examina rasgos y colecciones que indican actividad ritual en el asentamiento insular durante la Faceta Tardía del Postclásico Tardío (1250–1450 d.C.). Dos contextos rituales son descritos: un edificio residencial (Estructura I) y una plataforma de escombros (Estructura II) de funciones rituales especializadas. Ambas estruc-

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turas forman parte del mismo grupo residencial, que está localizado en el centro de una zona con otros rasgos domésticos en el área norte y central del sitio. Este trabajo examina contextos rituales por medio de un análisis de rasgos, artefactos y procesos de deposición. Un continuo doméstico-ritual es identificado en la composición de la colección de estos contextos, y curvas de frecuencia de diferentes proporciones de artefactos parecen diferenciar entre zonas de actividad principalmente ritual y zonas de actividad principalmente doméstica. Las comparaciones entre los materiales de estas estructuras con los del resto del sitio y otras residencias carentes de indicadores rituales sugieren que el estatus social estaba estrechamente ligado al comportamiento ritual en esta comunidad. Estos patrones en el pequeño asentamiento de Laguna de On son análogos a patrones observados a mayor escala en otros centros postclásicos cuyos indicadores rituales presentan mayor concentración en residencias de élites y zonas públicas. Estas evidencias sugieren que las prácticas rituales no estaban tan "secularizadas" en el período Postclásico como se había pensado anteriormente. En otras palabras, los rituales no fueron practicados principalmente al nivel doméstico o a un grado uniforme entre todos los miembros de las comunidades de este período. De una forma similar al período Clásico, los miembros de mayor estatus en la sociedad Postclásica parecen haber patrocinado un mayor grado de ritual en sus aposentos domésticos y en complejos especiales bajo su control que lo observado en las residencias de los grupos de menor estatus social.

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