
2 **COMMON HOUSE, ELITE HOUSE, COUNCIL HOUSE: REPORT OF THE 2010 FIELD SEASON OF THE ACTUNCAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT**

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This report summarizes the fieldwork conducted during the 2010 field season of the Actuncan Archaeological Project, the goal of which is to examine the processes that led to the institutionalization of kingship and state-level society during the Late Preclassic and Early Classic periods from B.C. 400 to A.D. 500. The project is investigating the centralization of authority from the perspective of household archaeology. We start with the premise that individual households would have participated differentially in kingly practices aimed at the centralization of power and authority. Some long-established families might have resisted royal strategies, while other families might have sided with leaders as a means to achieve greater socio-economic influence. Periods of highly centralized authority may correlate with archaeologically identifiable disruptions in long-term household growth and activity patterns, as well as an increase in socio-economic disparities between groups. This paper describes our 2010 excavations at Actuncan residential and civic areas, where deep excavations provide evidence for changing household layout and activities in response to increasing political centralization.

Introduction

The goal of the Actuncan Archaeological Project is to examine the processes that led to the institutionalization of kingship and the rise of state-level society during the Late Preclassic and Early Classic periods from B.C. 400 to A.D. 500. During this time span, many Maya sites became sufficiently large and complex to be considered archaic states. At Late Preclassic sites such as El Mirador and Tikal, monumental civic architecture was built at this time, including E-groups, ball courts, and pyramids that reflect the development of practices and institutions associated with complex political organizations. During the Early Classic period, the histories of the first royal dynasties were recorded in hieroglyphic texts at sites such as Tikal, and rulers at smaller centers, such as Actuncan, commissioned the building of palaces, courts, and temples.

To investigate the rise of Maya states, the Actuncan Archaeological Project is exploring the organizational changes that occurred in households coeval with the centralization of authority of a few local rulers. A household approach to understanding the rise of Maya kingship has rarely been attempted, since most researchers investigating emerging polities focus on the monuments and tombs of

rulers. The actions of rulers, however, cannot be fully understood without an understanding of the surrounding households that had long held kin-based power through their control of land, labor and ancestral sources of religious authority. Individual households might have participated differentially in kingly strategies to consolidate power since long-established families likely would have resisted mandates to relinquish resources, while upstart families may have sided with leaders to achieve greater socio-economic prominence. If leaders were able to usurp local kin-based power and wealth, and redistribute status and power to loyal followers, early statecraft should be marked by the fragmentation of large households and the appearance or expansion of others that look larger than expected given normal developmental cycles.

William Haviland's (1988) "household development cycle" is an important starting point for the development of a model of household responses to emerging polities. Haviland suggests that ancient households grew in size and composition as new members were added and domestic space was modified to incorporate them (also see Tourtellot 1988). Based on this model, archaeologists typically infer that single mounds housed nuclear families, while

larger groups were the homes of extended families occupied over generations. Work by Jason Yaeger (2000) and Cynthia Robin (1999) at patio-focused groups in rural communities near Xunantunich in the upper Belize River valley, such as Chan Nòohol and San Lorenzo, support this model.

However, there are significant problems with Haviland's model. First, his model attributes all household development to internal family dynamics, disregarding external factors such as political strategies that often profoundly reorganize household composition and practices. Elizabeth Brumfiel (1991) illustrates how increased tribute demands by the Aztec Empire fell especially hard on women, who responded by reorganizing household work to meet the new imperial demands. Some women specialized in the production of foods sold in markets, while other specialized in the production of cloth to pay tribute demand. In the Aztec case, centralized government policies resulted in increased household specialization and the reorganization of household activities.

Second, Haviland's model does not address the development and organization of elite monumental residential groups, such as those found at Copan (*sensu* Ashmore 1981). At the Copan site, elite residences, such as 9N-8 and 9M-22, are composed of a palace complex surrounded by multiple patio groups containing domestic, ritual, and ancillary structures. According to Julia Hendon (1991), Copan elites ranked family members and organized their residential group and household labor in distinctly different ways than families living in lower-status, patio-focused groups. Household growth and membership in monumental elite residential groups is expected to be more variable, since ties within and between families were based on a number of factors beyond natural family growth, including patronage.

Third, Haviland's model does not address the possibility that Maya elites established estates similar to those described by Levi-Strauss in his "house society" model (Levi-Strauss 1982, 1987; also see

Gillespie 2000). Levi-Strauss defines "houses" as corporate entities that organize members around social, political, economic, kinship, residential, or ritual structures. Archaeologists often focus on the physical structure of a house, itself, as a representation of the corporate entity; identifying grand residences with limited and segregated domestic spaces as corporate houses. There is an ethnohistoric precedent for inferring the existence of Levi-Strauss type houses in ancient Maya polities. Principle lineages of the K'iche' Maya referred to actual physical houses, and the powerful lineages that lived within them, as *nimja*, which means literally 'big house' (Braswell 2003; Carmack 1981). According to Robert Carmack (1981:157), the *nimja* title may have arisen during times of political expansion and competition for power in the Postclassic period; a situation analogous to the Late Preclassic period, when kingship was institutionalized across the Maya lowlands. Houston and McNany (2003), however, have raised concerns about applying the house society model to all elite social groups. They suggest that a royal court model may be more appropriate for the uppermost, ruling stratum of Classic Maya society, who lived in large, agglutinated palaces, like those found in Tikal or Palenque. In these expansive stone residences, royalty likely lived alongside an array of people related by blood, marriage, and fictive ties, as well as temporary residents, and unrelated courtiers and royal favorites (also see Harrison 1999).

The developmental processes that shaped the architectural layouts of patio-focused groups, elite compounds, elite houses, and royal palaces are unlikely to conform to a single organizational model such as Haviland's developmental household cycle. Ancient households were not sheltered from the social, economic, and political dynamics that existed outside their walls. Furthermore, inside those walls, household membership may have been quite diverse and fluid. Periods of highly centralized authority may have resulted in the attenuation of previously powerful

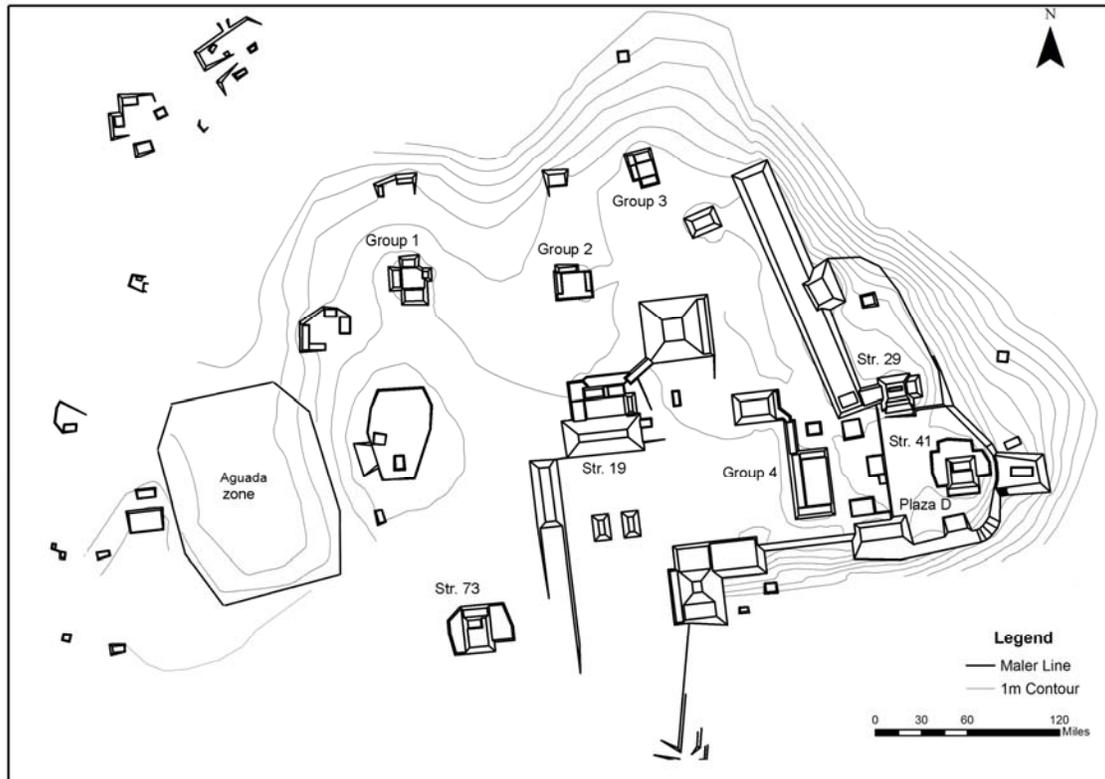


Figure 1. Revised Map of Actuncan North. Map by Don Perez and Angela Keller.

households and the proliferation of new forms of social groupings with social or political ties to kings. If so, then the institutionalization of kingship may be marked in the archaeological record by disruptions in long-term household growth patterns, the opening of a significant gap in household prosperity across groups, and development of elite houses. This chapter reports on our 2010 investigations in some of Actuncan's residential areas where our ongoing excavations provide evidence for changing household layout and activities in response to increasing sociopolitical centralization.

Actuncan

Actuncan is situated on a low ridge overlooking the Mopan river valley 2 km north of Xunantunich. The first systematic investigation of the site was conducted by James McGovern in the early 1990s under the auspices of the Xunantunich Archaeological Project (XAP). McGovern

(2004) mapped the 14 ha site using a total station, documented building sequences by profiling looters trenches in pyramids, and tested eight civic structures. He divided the site into two sections: Actuncan South, an acropolis-like temple complex, and Actuncan North, the Classic period civic center.

According to his work, the bulk of the temple complex was built in the Late Preclassic, and an early carved monument, Stela 1, was erected in front of the largest structure. Painted stucco masks adorned the main temple façade in the Early Classic reflecting the site's close connections with other Maya kingdoms. Using construction volumetrics, McGovern estimated that bulk of Actuncan North's civic architecture was built during the Early Classic period.

Our work at Actuncan North, which focuses specifically on households, has found a different pattern. All house mounds sampled so far were occupied in the Late and Terminal Classic periods. Additionally,

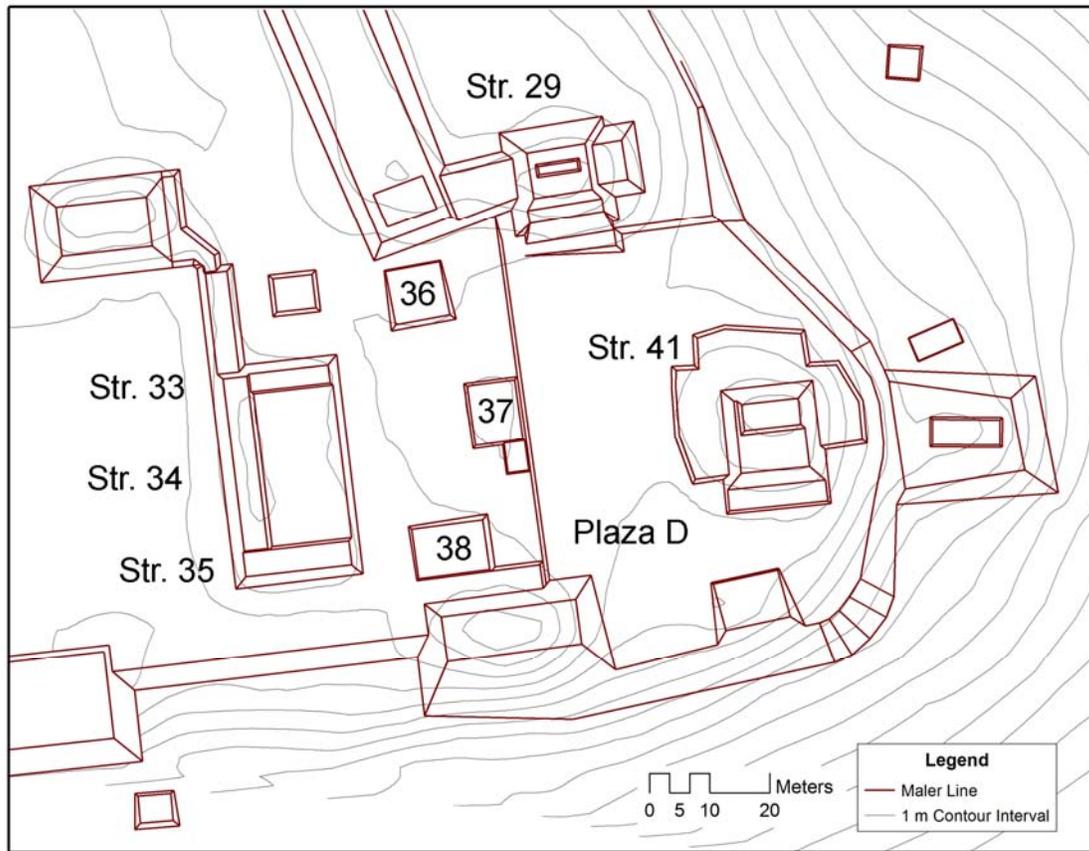


Figure 2. The Eastern Zone of Actuncan. Map by Don Perez and Angela Keller.

a courtyard platform behind Structure 19, the ostensible royal palace, was built entirely in the Late Classic. Although Actuncan is known locally as a Late Preclassic and Early Classic center, its role in Late and Terminal Classic political dynamics is likely far greater than previously assumed given its large urban population.

Field work 2010

Remapping Actuncan

When McGovern mapped the site in the early 1990s, the civic core was forested in dense secondary growth. Transects had to be chopped, and visibility was poor. Today, much of Actuncan North has been cleared for cattle grazing and farming making Actuncan's architecture more visible; therefore, remapping the site at this time was appropriate. We had two primary goals for

the 2010 mapping program: (1) to create a more detailed topographic relief map that could be used as a base layer for McGovern's Malerized drawings of the structures, and (2) to revisit important structures and architectural features in Actuncan North to better understand the layout of the site and residential groupings (Figure 1). All areas that were the focus of excavations---Group 1 (Structures 59, 60, 61, and 62), Group 4 (Structures 33, 34, and 35), and Structure 41--- were remapped this year by Don Perez with some assistance from Angela Keller. In addition, a large swath of the northern civic center received considerable attention and some reinterpretation. Both topographic and architectural data are essential in interpreting the ways in which ancient peoples made use of the landscape.

Mapping began at Structure 41, a large structure that was the focus of excavations

discussed in depth below. Most significant was the discovery of a previously unmapped terrace appended to the southern edge of the structure. Upon closer inspection, we found that the terraces on all sides of Structure 41 were subtly misrepresented on McGovern's map. A similar representation problem was discovered at Structure 29, which was also remapped in 2010. Both of these structures were found to have similar layouts---a central pyramidal structure surrounded by low broad terraces---comparable to the architectural form McGovern identified at Structure 73 (Figure 2). Further, all houses of this form appear to be oriented at 8 degrees west of true north, as is most of the civic and residential architecture in Actuncan North. These residential mounds do not form part of typical patio-focused residential groups, and, currently, LeCount interprets them as elite houses.

McGovern represented the area east of Structure 41 as an oddly shaped platform appended to Plaza D that supported a rectangular structure. Our findings confirmed this, and we discovered an additional rectangular structure to the north of the appended platform. We also identified a small staircase that extends down the southern side of Plaza D immediately east of Structure 41. Terracing was also found off Plaza D on the southern and eastern slope of the Actuncan ridge. These modifications may be the result of subsistence activities associated with the residents of Structure 41.

To the west of Plaza C is an enigmatic area containing Structures 67, 68 and 69 and an *aguada* to the west. Upon remapping, Structures 67 and 68 were found to be situated on top of a rise that appears to have been modified to form a broad, low platform. Keller suggests that this area, and the level open area to the east of the low platform, may have been a market place, given the location and lack of architectural elaboration. From surface observation, the broad platform appears to be primarily earthen, but Keller and Perez identified a stone staircase extending off the southeastern corner toward the *aguada*

identified initially by McGovern in 1993. After a particularly hard rain during the 2010 field season, the *aguada* feature held water to a depth of approximately 15 to 20 centimeters. The extent of this water was approximately 20 m east-west by 30 m north-south. The *aguada* is large and roughly rectangular. To the north, the edges of the *aguada* are more difficult to discern and the feature appears to narrow. During the heavy 2010 rains, we noted subtle features at the northern extent of the *aguada* feature that seemed to act as a check to the flow of water. Perhaps a dike or check-dam feature was constructed in this area to control the flow of water held in the *aguada*.

Excavations at Group 1

In the 2010 field season, excavations continued at Group 1, a patio-focused group located northwest of the civic core, where excavations were conducted in 2001 and 2004 (LeCount 2004; LeCount and Blitz 2002, 2005; LeCount et al. 2005). Caroline Antonelli concentrated on exposing the front façade of Structures 62 and 61, the western and southern structures, as well as the patio space directly in front of them. Structure 62's terminal façade was constructed by placing a large cobble retaining wall along the exterior edge of the structure platform and facing it with small cut stones. This Late Classic building was built on an Early Classic patio floor that extends across the entire patio. In the Late Classic, a prepared dirt floor accumulated, or was constructed, over the plaster patio surface. Interestingly, near the southeastern corner of Structure 62 we found an informal construction consisting of a 1 m line of large cobbles, oriented east-west, and a tamped earth surface, which dates to the Terminal Classic period.

Structure 61, located to the south, is the tallest platform in Group 1. The front of this structure is poorly preserved, with large cobbles strewn over the entire structure. A trench into the center of the platform revealed a retaining wall that holds in place dry-laid, large cobble fill. Ceramics from this fill dates the final construction phase to



Figure 3. Chert Eccentric (Op6RR/1).

the Terminal Classic period. The Terminal Classic dirt floor found between Structures 61 and 62 is probably associated with the final construction and occupation of Structure 61. Beneath the large cobble fill, we encountered a Late Classic platform and nicely prepared front step made of small cut-limestone blocks. Apparently, the Late Classic structure was cut down to the first course of the stairs in order to build Structure 61-1st using dry-laid large boulders which were then faced with boulders. No cut-limestone blocks were associated with this final construction phase.

Kara Rothenberg directed excavations at Structure 59, located on the northern edge of the patio. Like the western and southern structures, Structure 59 was built atop the Early Classic patio floor, although a later prepared dirt floor, dating to the Late Classic period, is evident abutting the front of the structure. The platform is terraced along the southern extent of the building. Low, inset platforms or structural wings were appended to the eastern and western sides of the central platform of Structure 59 forming small work areas raised slightly above the patio surface. Artifacts from surface and use-related contexts at Structure 59 are abundant and varied. Along with ceramics, there are large amounts of lithic debris, ground stone, slate, ocher, bark beaters, obsidian, and ferruginous concretions. Given the diversity and moderate density of materials, this staged platform may have functioned as a multi-use workshop area.

Interestingly, although significant quantities of Terminal Classic period ceramics have been found at both the southern and western structures (Structures 61 and 62), Terminal Classic material is scarce at Structure 59. This suggests that

residents were not living or working on the northern structure, rather they appear to have focused their activities in the southern portion of the patio group.

Excavations at Structure 41

Structure 41 is a large elite house located on the eastern edge of Plaza D. In 2004, LeCount and Blitz (2005; LeCount et al. 2005) placed test excavations off the northern edge of the structure and identified two phases of plaster floor construction dating to the Early Classic period. During the 2010 field season, David Mixter supervised excavations at Structure 41 aimed at 1) defining the architectural arrangements and the developmental history of this household's architecture, and 2) determining the spatial organization of household activities over time.

The top of the pyramidal platform appears to have been modified numerous times in antiquity. During the final construction phase, the pyramidal substructure supported a large (southern) front terrace and a smaller (northern) upper platform. The terminal architecture on the top of the pyramidal platform was difficult to interpret. Beneath the humus layer, a level of expansive rubble and chert cobbles covers most of the upper platform or dais at the northern end of the structure. Cut blocks define the original southern edge of the dais, to which a 1 m extension was added during the Terminal Classic. In the Terminal Classic period, the Maya apparently created a large, multilevel platform on top of the pyramid. At some point, possibly as part of the final termination of the building, fine bifaces were finished on this structure. Excavators collected hundreds of small chert flakes concentrated on the top of the rubble. The flakes were associated with a chert eccentric (Figure 3) and two projectile points likely dating to the Terminal Classic period (Figure 4). Ongoing microartifact analysis may help clarify the Terminal Classic use of this structure.

Below the Terminal Classic construction, Mixter encountered a large Late Classic masonry structure with three



Figure 4. Coarse, Cryptocrystalline Projectile Point (Op6GGG/2).

doors and three benches facing south. A single step leads from the central platform up to the western door. The construction of the Terminal Classic extension to this upper platform appears to have destroyed the matching steps associated with the middle and eastern doorways; however, the eastern step's location was marked by large (50 cm in diameter) sandstone boulder. The western and central benches have been cleared, but the eastern bench proved to be enigmatic due to a complex palimpsest of renovations on that side of the structure. The central bench rests on top of a low plinth.

The nature of the Late Classic structure remains enigmatic due to the lack of evidence for standing masonry walls. Instead, this structure likely supported perishable *bajareque* walls, possibly footed into the edges of the benches and the plinth. The recovery of *bajareque* from surface and collapse lots on the structure supports this reconstruction. The entire surface of the upper dais was apparently plastered in antiquity, although few remnants of the plaster surface remain today. Stepping down to the south from the uppermost platform is a wide flat terrace that also appears to have been plastered. Near the southern extent of the terrace are two possible masonry wall stubs, the sole remaining indicators of a probable southern wall for the structure. Without the size restrictions of corbelled vaults, the Late Classic inhabitants of Structure 41 may have created a very large interior space with a

spacious front room and smaller, raised back rooms with low benches.

Excavations off the western edge of the pyramidal substructure revealed the construction of a possible wide stair or sequence of wide terraces that led from Structure 41's western terrace up to the top of the platform. The wall supporting the outer edge of the terrace was built with large, finely cut-limestone blocks.

As mapped, Structure 41 appears to face south. In the 2010 field season we tested this interpretation by placing a long axial north-south trench measuring 2 m wide by 16 m in length up the southern face of Structure 41. The trench revealed an unusual building style and a complex construction history. Although the pyramidal substructure does appear to be oriented south, facing the temple complex of Actuncan South, no staircase or cut-stone block faced terminal front façade was encountered. Rather, the terminal southern façade of Structure 41 appears to have consisted of a massive battened wall of boulders covered thickly with modeled stucco, at least some of which was painted bright red. The style and effect of this large stuccoed façade is reminiscent of the façades documented on Early Classic monumental architecture. Most of Structure 41's terminal southern façade has eroded, but a layer of large river cobbles covering some of the front and sides of the central platform remain. Remnants of stucco adhering to the cobble retaining walls suggest that the stucco was applied directly to a layer of fine ballast and soil packed between the river cobbles to form a sloped surface. Below this unusual cobble and stucco façade, Mixer encountered the penultimate construction phase. This earlier southern façade is also slightly battered, but unlike the Terminal Classic wall, it was constructed of cut-limestone blocks neatly fitted with small, cobble-sized stones. The wall was originally plastered, and remnants of the original plaster are preserved covering the façade in small patches.

Along the base of the southern face of Structure 41, Mixer identified two low terraces stepping down to a plaza floor.



Figure 5. Postclassic Jars Stylistically Related to Pozo Cream (Op8B/3 and Op6WW/2).

Based on ceramics within the terrace fills, the construction of the lower terraces dates to the early Samal phase (A.D. 600-670) of the Late Classic. The prevalence of later Hats' Chaak (A.D. 670-780) phase ceramics in the collapse above the lower terrace suggest that this surface continued to be used throughout the Late Classic. An Early Classic plaza floor runs under these terraces and also runs under the penultimate southern façade of the substructure described above.

In sum, the 2010 excavations at Structure 41 focused on understanding the subtle final construction phases of the building. During the Terminal Classic period, the Maya seem to have dismantled the Late Classic building to widen and level the platform. According to Mixter, this act may represent an intentional termination of the elite house or the creation of a ritual space associated with the construction of Group 4 to the west. The Terminal Classic construction features at Structure 41 lack the quality typically associated with Late Classic masonry construction. Rather than building with cut-stone blocks, the Maya built rough retaining walls of stacked cobbles and boulders that they then plastered over with a thick layer of stucco. This construction technique may be an indication of economic hardship or it may point to the development of a local façade style. The discovery of Structure 41-2nd shows that Structure 41 was at one time constructed using greater care and precision, as is typical for elite architecture of the Classic period.

Excavations at Structures 33, 34, and 35

The most unexpected discovery this year was the identification of a large platform supporting a C-shaped arrangement of

superstructural elements previously mapped as Structures 33, 34, and 35. The platform appears to be part of a group of structures that includes three small structures (Structures 36, 37, and 38), possibly shrines, in front and to the east of the main platform. The small structures face one another across a small, raised patio in the eastern portion of Actuncan North. The entire complex is separated from the residences in Plaza D by a low wall or step extending north to south from Structure 29 to Structure 39.

Before excavation, the complex seemed oddly placed in relation to the larger civic design of Actuncan and in need of exploration. Initially, LeCount was perplexed by the layout and positioning of the group, waffling between interpreting it as a residential group related to the other elite structures to the west or an oddly placed civic structure backing Plaza C and Late Classic monuments. While visiting the Actuncan Project, Richard Leventhal suggested that the oddly placed group might be a C-shaped complex, commonly interpreted as a Postclassic or Terminal Classic *popol nah* or council house (Bey et al. 1997; Rice 1986). Leventhal's inference is well supported by our work thus far.

Our assessment of the group as a C-shaped complex is based on the construction, design, and placement of the structures, as well as Terminal Classic and Early Postclassic diagnostics recovered in preliminary excavations here and elsewhere on the site (Figure 5). Similar platforms have been documented in late Terminal Classic to Early Postclassic contexts at numerous sites including Ek Balam in Yucatan, Seibal and Lamanai in the southern lowlands, and at island sites in the Peten Lakes region.

As with other Early Postclassic buildings and groups constructed within the confines of Classic centers, Actuncan's C-shaped building appears to sit within but apart from the Classic site. It is, more accurately, a site within a site: a new public space carved out of the earlier civic center. The surrounding Classic buildings are not incorporated into the design of the C-shaped

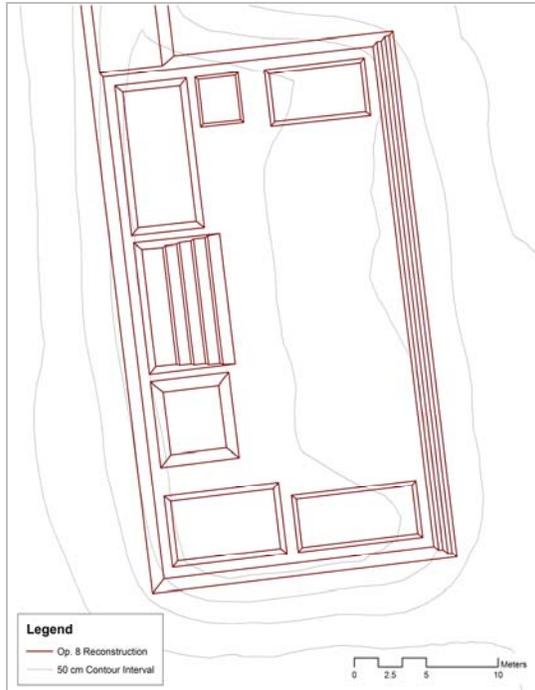


Figure 6. Reconstruction of Actuncan's C-shaped Structure. Map by Angela Keller.

complex as useable structural elements. Rather, the Classic buildings seem to serve as a potent landscape within which the Terminal Classic and Postclassic Maya constructed a new type of civic space using new architectural cannons reflecting profoundly altered socio-political circumstances.

Becky Mendelsohn directed axial excavations atop the platform. Just centimeters below the present ground surface, her clearing excavations revealed a prepared surface that slopes gently up to the west toward Structure 34. The surface may have originally been plastered directly over a dirt and gravel ballast, although we found no plaster remnants in the 2010 clearing excavations. Alternatively, the sloping surface may have been finished with packed silt and clay (Rice 1986:305), which is prone to erosion. The sloped surface consists of carefully placed size-sorted fills. The uppermost fill is a fine-grained, wet-laid fill placed over a fill of medium-sized stones, which in turn rested on a large cobble fill.

To better understand the construction history of the C-shaped complex, we placed

a probing unit roughly in the center platform. The unit revealed a well-preserved Early Classic structure that was apparently truncated in antiquity and then completely engulfed by the Terminal Classic platform. The exposed portion of the Early Classic structure consists of a facing wall of tightly fitted cut-limestone blocks backed by a core of chert and limestone fill consistent with the construction techniques previously identified in Early Classic structures at Actuncan (McGovern 1994) and other sites (von Falkenhausen 1985:129). The cut-limestone facing stones are large, with most measuring between 40 and 60 cm in width and 15 and 20 cm in height. Wall courses are fitted with layers of chinking consisting of small limestone pieces roughly 5 to 10 cm in size. The structure seems to have been cut down prior to the construction of the Terminal Classic sloped surface above. Fine, light-colored, clay loam fill was packed against the wall and used for roughly the first meter of fill, presumably to aid in the preservation of the structure. Next, the builders laid four fill layers alternating between very large limestone-and-cobble fill and finely sorted silty loam soil before laying down the three uppermost size-sorted fill layers under the sloped surface as described above.

From surface inspection, the eastern edge of the platform appears to be a continuous stair, allowing unrestricted access to the platform. In places, the steps along the eastern platform edge can be identified as lines of large cut-limestone blocks, possibly robbed from Classic building façades elsewhere in the site. The apparent lack of mortar in this low stair is consistent with Terminal Classic and Early Postclassic architecture elsewhere, and it has resulted in its exceeding poor preservation.

We suspect that the C-shape superstructural elements found on top of the platform are actually several distinct smaller platforms, some with possible low benches (Figure 6). From surface inspection and limited clearing excavations, each of the platforms seems to differ slightly in height, size, and construction technique. Some

appear to be built with large cut-limestone blocks, others with small blocks, others with cut slabs, and still others with large river cobbles. This structural diversity suggests to us that these platforms were built by distinct groups, possibly individual lineages who came together in the Terminal Classic to build this structure.

Along the central axis of the western edge of the platform, which is also the highest portion of the complex, we identified the remains of an enigmatic superstructural feature constructed at the apex of the sloped surface. This structure consists of a concentration of severely eroded cut-limestone pieces of varying size, with as large as 50 cm in greatest dimension. Unfortunately the terminal architecture in this area is so poorly preserved as to be virtually unintelligible. Many stones have been upturned and displaced through the action of roots, cohune palms, and fallen trees. An apparent lack of mortar and possibly of plaster likely hastened the deterioration of the terminal architecture.

Conclusions

The 2010 season of the Actuncan Archaeological project focused on clearly defining the terminal architecture at a patio-focused group, an elite house, and a C-shaped administrative structure. All three groups demonstrate very different approaches to the organization of people and space.

Group 1, the patio-focused group, appears to conform to Haviland's household developmental cycle model, at least in part. The group was founded early in the Middle Preclassic period and grew in size and architectural complexity over many generations. However, based on our combined 2001, 2004, and 2010 excavations, we now know that the group did not grow consistently or predictably over time. It experienced two growth spurts: one in the Terminal Late Preclassic and one in the Late Classic. LeCount would argue that these growth spurts had less to do with internal family affairs and more to do with

political dynamics and how families cope with the external forces impinging on them.

The developmental cycle of Structure 41 also does not entirely conform to Haviland's model either. Based on our preliminary studies, we believe the structure to be a large, urban elite house. In its penultimate form, the house was a single, multi-roomed structure perched atop a high pyramidal platform flanked by low terraces that could have supported a variety of activities. The Late Classic architectural form of Structure 41 conforms to the physical description of an elite estate or house. This layout indicates highly segregated work and living areas reminiscent to those described by Folan and colleagues for elite structures at Calakmul (Folan et al. 2001). Extended family members may have lived and worked in the small structures and terraced fields to the east. The estate may have been founded as early as the Late Preclassic period, but certainly no later than the Early Classic period, and its inception speaks to the centralization of power at Actuncan and the interaction between rulers and households during this dynamic period.

In the Terminal Classic period, the relations between divine rulers and households soured and a new kind of political organization united the disparate groups located across the upper Belize River valley. Although our data are entirely preliminary, the diversity of platform construction in a C-shaped arrangement atop a large Terminal Classic platform oriented to the Actuncan 8 degrees west of north alignment suggest that the C-shaped complex was constructed by local peoples, not an invading force. The diversity of the superstructural elements speaks to a diversity of interests and traditions that would not be expected in a single invading group. Further, the orientation of the Terminal Classic structures matches that of the buried Early Classic building, as does the majority of the architecture in Actuncan North. The use of a common orientation also may indicate that the builders of the Terminal Classic complex were local people, converging on the center of

Actuncan to form a new confederated authority in a place with a deep history of local rule.

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