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TEST EXCAVATIONS AT MARIA CAMP,
BRITISH HONDURAS

by David M. Pendergast

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In the latter part of February, 1963, following excavation of Eduardo Quiroz Cave (Pendergast 1964a), a brief test excavation was undertaken at the surface site of Maria Camp. The site, which is located 5 road miles south of the Macal River, is crossed by the Mountain Pine Ridge Road, the sole link between Augustine Forest Station and the Chiquibul section of the central Cayo District. Maria Camp lies approximately 8 miles northwest of Eduardo Quiroz Cave, and roughly 1½ miles west of Cubeta Cave, in an upland limestone area with elevations ranging around 2200 - 2400 feet (see fig. 1). Vegetation and topography in the Maria Camp area are generally typical of the region between the Macal and Chiquibul rivers south of the Mountain Pine Ridge, a granitic upthrust with a maximum elevation of 3000 feet.

Previous excavations in the central Cayo District have included those at the Mountain Cow sites (Thompson 1931), Caracol (Satterthwaite 1954; Wilcox 1954; Anderson 1958, 1959), and Las Cuevas, tested by Anderson and Digby in 1956 and not yet reported.

Selection of Maria Camp for testing was motivated in part by the danger of destruction occasioned by location of the site near a well-traveled road, construction and repair of which have already resulted in leveling of several mounds and minor damage to others. In addition to the salvage aspect of work at Maria Camp, the site was viewed, because of its size and location, as likely to provide data on the characteristics of small ceremonial centers possibly related to cave sites such as Quiroz. The site also appeared to offer an excellent opportunity of obtaining a comparatively large site sample with relatively little expenditure of time and funds.

Maria Camp was visited briefly during a reconnaissance in 1961 (Pendergast 1962: 198-9), and was thought at that time to consist of a single plaza

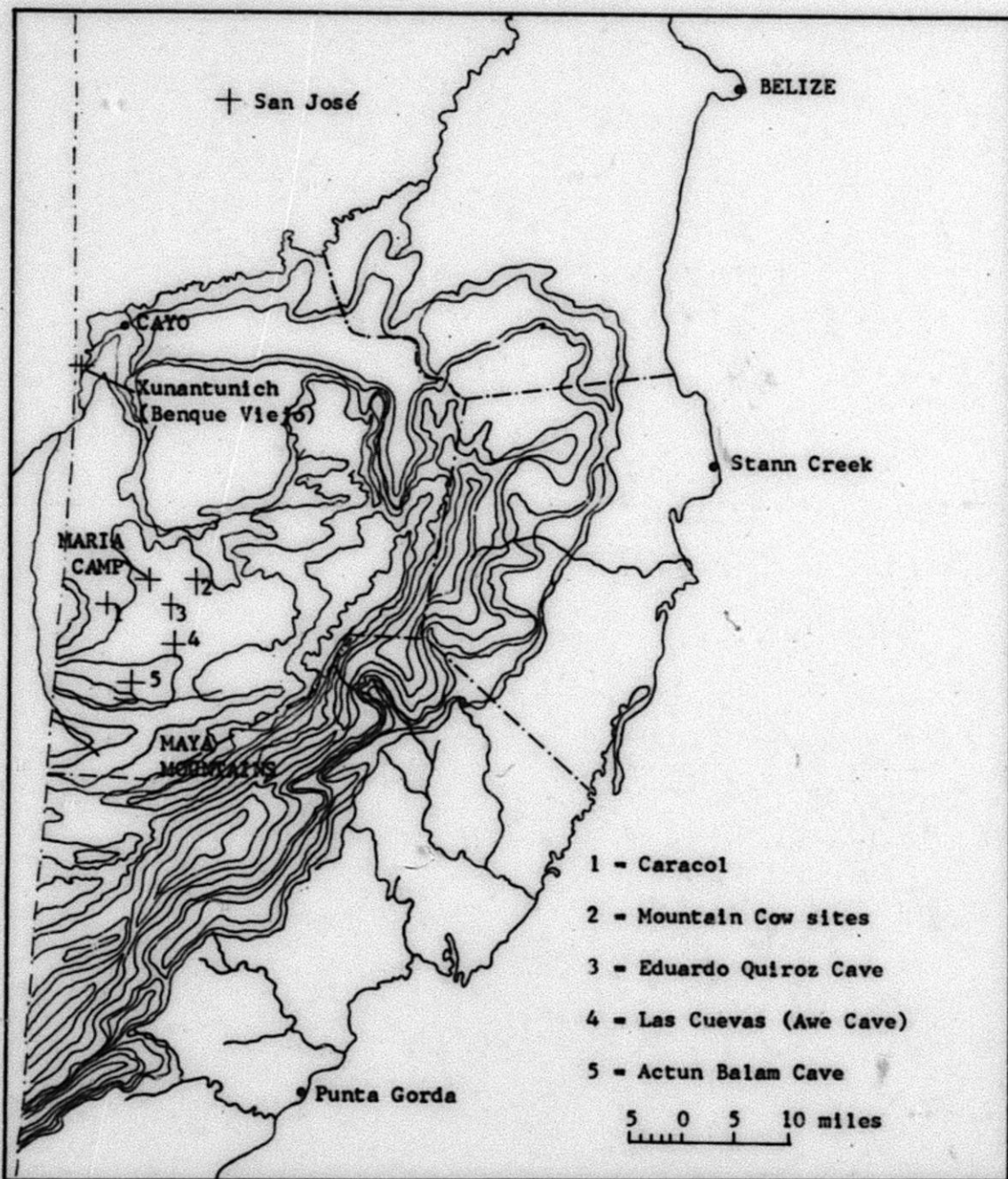


Fig. 1. Map of central and southern British Honduras, showing location of Maria Camp and other archaeological sites.

bordered on three sides by low mounds and on the fourth by a mound approximately 8 to 10 meters in height. In addition, a portion of a sacbe was noted, extending southwestward from the plaza area. Further reconnaissance of the site prior to and during excavation revealed the existence of a second mound approximately 10 meters high, lying across the plaza from the mound noted earlier. The former was designated A-2, and the latter A-1. On the southwest side of the plaza, a mound 3.4 meters high completes the central group; this mound was designated A-3. Southwest of A-3 lies a pair of mounds roughly parallel to each other, ca. 2 meters high; these appear to be the remains of a ballcourt. The Pine Ridge Road has destroyed some mounds near the site center, but two small plazuela groups were located on the opposite side of the road from the main group, $\frac{1}{2}$ mile north. Portions of two sacbes were located, but neither appears to extend beyond the immediate environs of the site center. Reports from mahogany workers and others familiar with the Maria Camp area indicate that scattered ruins may be found between the site center and the region of Cubeta Cave, where another mound group is located approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ mile west of the cave. From their proximity it appears likely that the Maria Camp and Cubeta sites are closely related, if not in fact portions of a single ruin complex.

The excavation at Maria Camp here reported was envisioned at the time as an adjunct to the work at Quiroz, and also, more importantly, as no more than a limited test which, it was hoped, might provide the basis for a more extensive excavation project at the site. Mound A-3 was selected for testing, due to its moderate size and to the small amount of time available for excavation. Since no further excavation is now planned at Maria Camp, the expanded field notes of the 14-day test excavation are presented here in

the hope that the data contained therein may prove of use to others working in the Chiquibul region.

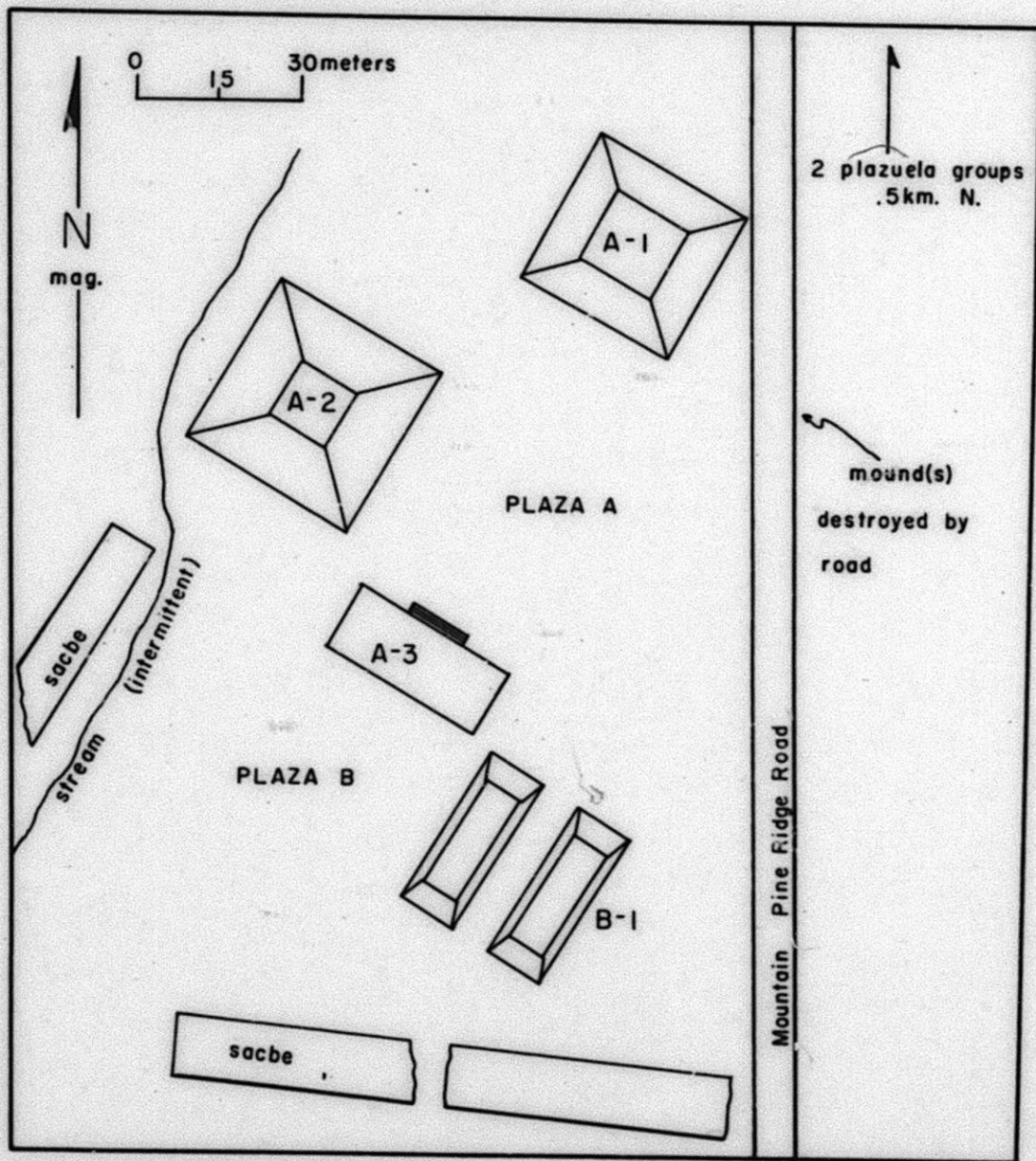


Fig. 2. Combined sketch and tape-and-compass traverse map of Maria Camp.

Mound A-3 at Maria Camp, discovered during the second reconnaissance of the site, was distinguished from other mounds in the site center by the presence on the surface of several blocks of cut stone, suggesting that the mound, which was determined by hand level sighting to be 3.4 meters in height, might be the ruin of a small vaulted structure. Removal of vegetation cover weakened this suggestion, but revealed the existence on the Plaza A (NE) side of a stairway composed of large, well-shaped limestone blocks, rising approximately one-half the total height of the mound.

Fig. 3.
NE face
of A-3
after
clearing.



Excavation of Mound A-3 was begun on and above the stairway and in the level area at the base of the lowest visible riser. A fallen sapote at the right (west) edge of the stairway had dislodged two of the riser blocks, and some displacement of blocks could also be seen at the top center of the

stairway as a result of root growth; otherwise the visible portions of the structure seemed in reasonably good condition, although only at the apex of the mound was a small section of standing wall visible.

The absence of major damage to A-3 is generally paralleled in the other mounds examined at Maria Camp. Despite the extensive damage to vegetation in the Chiquibul region resulting from Hurricane Hattie in 1961, Maria Camp seems to have suffered only slightly; undergrowth is tangled with the roots and branches of several fallen trees, but structural remains escaped all but minor damage.

In the initial excavation of Mound A-3, a 1 x 2 meter pit was dug in the level area in front (NE) of the stairway, with a trench continuing up the stairway, exposing approximately half its width, and extending to a point at which a small level area, presumably the platform surface, was visible. Excavation was begun in the area northeast of A-3 (Plaza A) to permit location of flooring, if any existed. Following removal of accumulated vegetal debris, a number of cut stones were encountered, scattered at random over the area at the base of the stairway, and apparently representing fallen wall or other structural material from the top of the mound. At a depth of 32 cm. below ground surface, remains of a poorly preserved plaster floor were encountered in Plaza A. A small number of sherds were recovered from the overlying fill, all with surfaces so badly eroded as to defy classification.

A cut made through the flooring in the Plaza A area revealed the existence of underlying cultural debris. At a depth of 43 cm. below the surface of the upper floor, 75 cm. from ground surface, an earlier floor was struck, below which lay the sterile yellowish base clay of the site. Estimated

thickness of the badly eroded upper floor is 10 cm.; the lower floor has a maximum thickness of 11 cm. The presence of the two plaster floors in the Plaza A area suggests that the plaza may originally have been completely floored; however, the upper floor could not be traced beyond the western balustrade area of the A-3 stairway, and the cut made to the level of the lower floor did not extend beyond the portion of the plaza immediately in front of A-3.

In conjunction with clearing of the stairway area, excavation was begun both at the top of the uppermost riser and in the area west of the west balustrade. The first of these revealed the existence of a badly fragmented plaster floor extending back (S.) from the top of the stairway. The floor, with a maximum N-S width of 1 meter, is bordered on the south by a rough stone alignment, initially taken to be the crude outer wall of a structure atop the platform. On following the alignment eastward, toward the mound mid-line, a N-S line of cut facing stones, apparently one jamb of an entryway, was cleared; this was in turn pursued, and a southern wall face was encountered. The relationship between the various portions of the wall suggests strongly that the rough alignment on the northern face is in fact the hearting of what was once a thicker wall, the northern facing stones having fallen down the stairway, to lie in the plaza below.

The second frontal cut, west of the stairway, sectioned an area of light-colored fill, clearly the hearting of the platform. Within this fill is a series of stone alignments, apparently designed to serve as revetments or supports for the platform fill. No facing wall of the platform was in evidence, and the absence of cut stone in the debris at plaza level in this area suggests that the platform lacked cut stone facing (fig. 4).

Unfortunately, further excavation could not be undertaken in the frontal area of the platform, and hence description of the platform structure must of necessity remain incomplete.

Fig. 4. West balustrade area of A-3, showing balustrade blocks, upper Plaza A floor, and revetment walls in fill of platform to right. Portion of A-3-II wall visible at top of stairway.



With the clearing of the area west of the stairway carried as far as practicable into the platform hearting, attention was turned to the west balustrade of the stairway itself and to additional clearing of the stairs and upper areas of the mound. This work permitted the following observations regarding the form of A-3 and the relationships among several of the structural elements:

1. The stairway on the front (NE) face of A-3, lying as it does at ground

surface and at the outer level of the structure, must have been in use during the later period of utilization of A-3. The stairway was provisionally considered to be a separate unit, possibly associated with late construction phases. Risers are formed of large, relatively thin rectangular limestone blocks, set vertically on one long edge. Treads are at present simply areas of dark soil, but there are small traces of whitish material which suggest that plastered treads were originally present. The lowest riser line is set directly upon the upper floor of Plaza A.

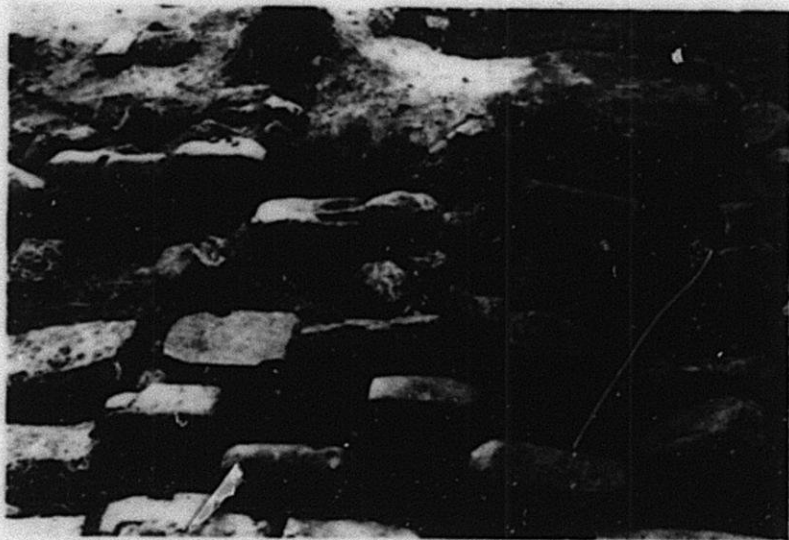


Fig. 5. A portion of the western section of the A-3 stairway, with A-3-II wall line visible at top.

Dimensions of individual elements in the stair construction, as well as of the stairway as a whole, can be determined from the plan drawing of the excavated portion of A-3 (fig. 14). The western balustrade of the

stairway was probably never clearly defined, but seems rather to have been marked by scattered vertical stone slabs similar to those forming the risers, and generally placed behind one riser line and below the next higher line (fig. 4). For convenience in notation, the stairway was designated A-3-I; following completion of the test excavation, this and other structural elements were grouped together in construction phases, which are discussed below.

2. At the top of stairway A-3-I there is a low alignment of unshaped and roughly shaped stones, parallelling the riser lines of the stairway. This is topped by the plaster floor mentioned above (p. 7), and the alignment, or conceivably a facing of cut stone now fallen away, appears to have served as the support for and frontal limit of the flooring. While initial clearing pointed to the low stone wall mentioned above as the southern border of the floor, further excavation revealed that the floor extends beyond the rear face of the wall. Hence the floor was considered provisionally to be a portion of the A-3-I construction, while the low wall, as well as a mass of fallen masonry immediately behind (S. of) it, were designated A-3-II.

3. A-3-II includes not only the abovementioned low wall and masonry mass, but also an alignment of stones lying 15 cm. higher than the upper edge of the front wall, and parallelling it. The two alignments thus appear to have served as borders, possibly retaining walls, for the mass of masonry. While the masonry had the appearance of having tumbled from higher points on the structure, the possibility of its being purposeful construction cannot be discounted.

4. Ca. 125 cm. behind the rear face of the frontal wall of A-3-II a low wall of shaped stones was encountered, marked by a bench or small platform

of lower height extending toward the A-3-I stairway for a distance of 60 cm. 205 cm. SSE of this extension lies a second, possibly the same sort of construction, which extends to the top of the wall at its junction therewith, but slopes downward toward the front of A-3 to join the rear line of A-3-II.

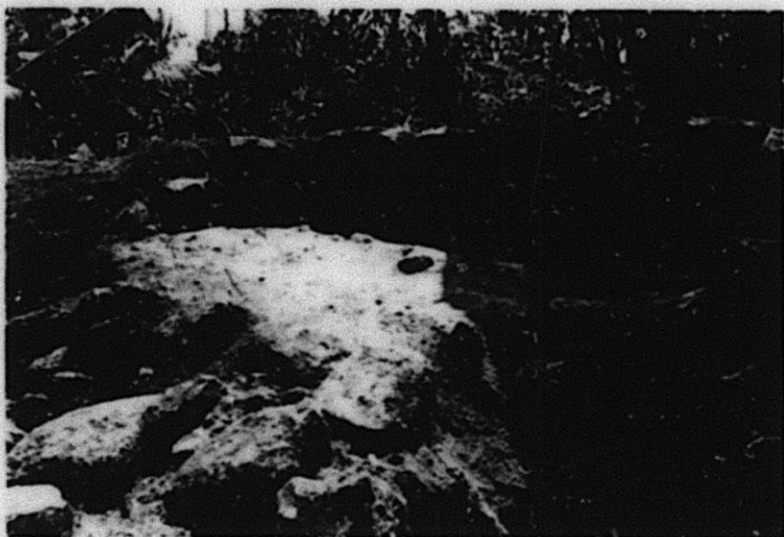


Fig. 6. Face of A-3-III, showing second protruding extension. A-3-II rubble in foreground.

The wall serves, in effect, as the front edge of a small platform, clearly separate from the other structural elements thusfar described, and hence designated A-3-III. A cut sectioning the A-3-III platform showed it to be composed of heavy rubble fill, and demonstrated that the entire A-3-III construction is separate from, although butted directly against, element A-3-IV, described below (fig. 7).

Fig. 7.
Cut made
through
rubble
fill of
A-3-III,
at R., show-
ing relation-
ship to
A-3-IV, at
L.



5. Immediately adjoining the rear of A-3-III there was encountered a rubble-filled wall, faced on both surfaces with cut stone blocks (fig. 8). The wall originally served to bisect the platform surface area longitudinally, but at present is marked by considerable slump toward the rear of the mound, due to the unstable footing on which it rests. The upper courses of the wall have fallen away in many areas, but near the center of the excavation a small section of the wall remained visible at mound surface. The maximum present height of A-3-IV is 112 cm.; at the base of the wall, fragments of a badly deteriorated plaster floor were visible. Both the wall and the floor were laid upon loose rubble-earth fill, which accounted for wall slumpage, and perhaps for some of the damage to the floor. It is clear, however, that the floor had been largely destroyed during the construction of A-3-III.

Fig. 8.
Front
(NE)
face of
A-3-IV,
central
section.



Much of the rear face of A-3-IV has fallen away, and tracing of the wall line in portions of the excavated area proved extremely difficult. It was possible, however, to locate portions of a very badly fragmented plaster floor lying slightly below the level of that occurring on the front side of the wall. The floor is distinctly lipped at the line of the A-3-IV wall, and clearly does not extend below the wall, which suggests that the wall may have served to separate two floored areas.

While clearing of the upper portions of the mound had revealed several structural elements, limitations of time precluded complete excavation of these segments of the mound. For this reason, excavations were generally limited laterally to the test trench, and efforts were concentrated on obtaining a full cross-section of the mound and on testing of the rear of

the mound and the adjoining Plaza B.

Excavation below the level of the plaster floor at the front edge of the A-3-IV wall sectioned 37 cm. of rubble-earth fill, laid up as support for A-3-IV, and capping a lower plaster floor in association with a fragmentary wall paralleling that of A-3-IV. Little more than a single course remains of the wall of the unit designated A-3-V, but it was possible to determine that the front face of the wall lies 10 cm. closer to the front of the mound than does that of A-3-IV.



Fig. 9.
Central
section of
A-3-IV, with
remnant of
A-3-V wall
below.

The plaster floor of A-3-V gives evidence of having been repaired at least twice and perhaps three times, suggesting a longer use than may have been made of the A-3-IV floor.

An additional floor fragment appears below the rear face of A-3-IV,

almost certainly, judging by its level relative to other construction, a part of A-3-V. The rear floor segment has largely fallen away, but at the front (NE) border there is very distinct lipping, suggesting that the A-3-V wall separated two rooms or use areas. The small remaining portions of the A-3-V construction are in better condition than A-3-IV, perhaps due to a more stable footing than that provided by the loose fill underlying the later construction.



Fig. 10. Rear floor fragment, A-3-V, showing overlying fill and lower courses of A-3-IV wall.

A cut was made through the floor of A-3-V in the front section of the mound to test the nature of the subfloor fill. The floor was found to have been laid up on fill consisting primarily of large stones, with small

quantities of earth. Below the fill of heavy stones, the soil changes color, and rocks are smaller and less frequent; this change in fill character results from the intentional creation of a bed of material below the heavy fill, capping earlier construction. At varying depths below the floor surface of A-3-V, averaging 69 cm., a plaster floor designated A-3-VIII was discovered. (For discussions of elements A-3-VI and VII, on the rear portion of the mound, see below.) The floor of A-3-VIII is in better condition than the two overlying floors, and was found to extend both southwest beyond the line of the wall of A-3-V and beyond the line of the facing stones of A-3-III to the northeast.



Fig. 11. Cut through floor of A-3-V, above, showing underlying fill and highly irregular floor of A-3-VIII below.

A trench was cut from the area of the mound midline to the top of the A-3-I stairway to clarify the relationship between A-3-VIII and A-3-I, since level-line measurements showed the floor of A-3-VIII to lie only 10 cm. higher in the mound than the floor at the top of A-3-I. Excavation north-east of A-3-III and in the fill below the facing of A-3-III and the floor of A-3-V for the purpose of following A-3-VIII revealed that the A-3-V floor continues, sloping upward, until it reaches the rear line of A-3-II. It is extended both in front of and behind wall A-3-IV. The mass of fallen stone in A-3-II might be from a front bordering wall of A-3-V, which would indicate that such a wall might have been incorporated in later modifications of the structure. Excavation below the level of the A-3-V floor along its front line tends to confirm the presence of a bordering wall, since two additional courses of cut stone blocks were found in line with the so-called rear line of A-3-II, below the A-3-V floor.

The floor of A-3-VIII was found to continue beyond the front edge line of A-3-V, rising sharply approximately mid-way between the line of A-3-III and the edge of stairway A-3-I. This floor proved to be the same as that previously cleared at the top of A-3-I, making it clear that A-3-VIII and A-3-I are elements of the same construction phase.

Following clearing of the front portions of A-3-VIII, the floor was pursued toward the rear of the mound. No wall or other construction was in evidence on the floor, but the floor itself was traced beyond the mound midline, appearing below the fragment of the A-3-V floor described above. No border or indication of a facing wall was located at the present rear edge of the floor, suggesting that either there was little more than a low edging

along the rear of the platform or, more probably, that heavy slumpage and disturbance has occurred along the rear face of the mound, affecting A-3-VIII as well as A-3-IV and V.

Further clearing of the A-3-VIII floor showed it to extend across the full width of the stairway, and possibly farther, although slump damage made tracing of the floor eastward impossible. It appears likely that the front wall of A-3-II, now fragmentary, originally covered the portion of the A-3-VIII floor near the top of the A-3-I stairway, and it is probable that the floor was damaged to some extent by this later construction.

Subsequent to examination of A-3-VIII, a cut was made through the floor in the area immediately in front of the line of walls A-3-IV and V. This cut revealed, at a depth of 37 cm. below the surface of A-3-VIII, an additional plaster floor, designated A-3-IX. The intervening fill is of essentially the same character as that found between other construction elements in the mound. Floor A-3-IX was followed toward the mound front, but lack of time prevented removal of the mass of overburden capping the front section of the construction, and hence nothing can be said regarding the relationship between A-3-IX and the A-3-I stairway. Section measurements (see fig. 15) suggest, however, that A-3-IX may in fact be tied to the stairway, with A-3-VIII being a later addition thereto.

As the final step in the section cut of Mound A-3, a 1 meter square pit was cut through the floor of A-3-IX. This revealed, first, the existence of a partial repair floor in the western section of A-3-IX; secondly, excavation through 105 cm. of earth-rock fill cleared a small section of an earlier plaster floor, lying 117 cm. below the surface of A-3-IX. This, the

earliest construction recognized in the mound, was designated A-3-XII, A-3-X and XI having been used to denote elements in the rear portion of the mound, discussed below. The press of time prevented further examination of A-3-XII, and hence nothing more than its stratigraphic position in the mound could be ascertained.

In conjunction with the section cut described above, excavations were carried out in a restricted portion of the rear area of the mound. Initial testing was commenced in the area of what appeared to be a second plaza, bordered on the north by Mound A-3 and on the east by one mound of an apparent ball-court (see fig. 2). Trenching was begun on the plaza level near the edge of Mound A-3, and revealed, at a depth from surface of 28 cm., a plaster floor. Again, the floor could not be traced for any great distance, but there is at least an indication that Plaza B, like Plaza A, may have been plaster floored. A pit 1 meter square was cut through the Plaza B floor, revealing that the flooring is ca. 10 cm. thick, varying as the sub-floor fill varies. The floor is laid upon a base of light colored earth and small stones; this material, averaging 28 cm. in thickness, was placed directly upon the sterile clay base soil of the site. Maximum depth of cultural deposit in Plaza B in the area adjacent to Mound A-3 is, then, including the thickness of the plaster floor, 66 cm.

The Plaza B floor was followed toward Mound A-3, and a single course of cut stones, set below floor level, was discovered. This appears to mark the limit of A-3 construction on the rear face, and probably is the edge of a sloping stone facing designated A-3-VI (see fig. 12). None of this construction can be directly related chronologically with the elements recognizable

on the front face of the structure, but other evidence discussed below under construction phases indicates that A-3-VI may be relatively early.



Fig. 12. View of rear of A-3, showing Plaza B floor in foreground, edge and sloping face of A-3-VI in midground, and A-3-VII revetment wall at rear.

150 cm. into the mound from the border of A-3-VI lies a roughly shaped alignment of stones capped by several courses of cut stones. This is facing for a mass of large rubble fill, and apparently the alignment, designated A-3-VII, served as a revetment for the hearting of the platform. It is likely that A-3-VII is contemporaneous with A-3-VI; it should be noted, however, that only the cut stone portion of A-3-VII may have been visible, the remainder being covered with rock fill behind A-3-VI. Several carved

and painted stucco fragments were recovered over and in the upper portions of the fill of A-3-VI and VII, but their origin in A-3 is questionable, since no evidence exists for the presence of a structure on A-3 likely to have been thus ornamented.

Further excavation continuing toward the mound center from A-3-VII cleared portions of two additional rough stone walls, the positions of which can be determined from the cross-section drawing (fig. 15). These, designated A-3-X and XI, appear to have served, like A-3-VII, as revetments or buttresses for mound construction. A-3-XI, the higher of the two and that closer to mound center, is almost certainly associated with A-3-VIII (and hence with A-3-I), and may well have formed the rear border of the platform section topped by the A-3-VIII floor. In no case, with the possible exception of A-3-VI and the upper portion of A-3-VII, is there any indication of well-constructed stone platform facing on the rear face of A-3; this, together with the evidence from cuts in the front face, suggests that the structure was, in fact, never faced with cut stone.

The final excavation undertaken in Mound A-3 consisted of a test trench cut into the A-3-I stairway with the aim of elucidating the relationship between this construction element and the lower Plaza A floor, as well as demonstrating the presence or absence of earlier stairway construction. The upper floor of Plaza A was followed southwest of the lowest riser line of the stairway, and it was found that the floor continues below the riser, making it clear that the plaza floor was laid prior to erection of the stairway. It appears likely, however, that there was no appreciable gap in time between the two portions of the construction.

Following removal of stones from the stairway, three alignments of stones were discovered. These consist of one to three courses of shaped stones, which served as bases for the first three riser lines of the stairway. The bulk of the fill supporting the stairway is heavy, rough stone, and it appears that the courses of shaped stones were added atop the fill to provide a level base upon which the risers could be placed. The horizontal and vertical relationships of the three alignments are as follows: lowermost - rests on upper floor of Plaza A, and is 10 cm. high; second - 70 cm. back (SW) of the first and 39 cm. (base of second to top of first) above it; third - 76 cm. back of second and 38 cm. above it.



Fig. 13.
Cut made
through
A-3-I stair-
way, showing
3 stone align-
ments below
first 3 riser
lines.

The third alignment follows a line which is also visible in the west balustrade area of the stairway; here, however, the rough stone fill does

not extend to the border of the stairway, and hence the alignment of stones reaches from the level of the upper floor of Plaza A to the base of the third riser line. The plaster flooring of Plaza A was found to extend to the lowermost of the stone alignments, which lies 41 cm. behind the face of the lowest riser line.

Removal of the lowest stone alignment cleared a layer of mezcla or cement, lying at the same level and extending to the rough stones below the second alignment. The mezcla is butted against the rough stone fill, and clearly terminates at this point. The relationships among these several construction elements make it clear that the alignments are not part of an earlier construction, but are simply footings for the stairway.

Further excavation in the fill of the stairway revealed the existence of two floors which lie below the level of the upper floor of Plaza A, but which are visible only below the stairway, extending to the line of the rear riser of A-3-I and possibly beyond. For convenience in distinguishing among the four floors recognizable in the A-3-I and Plaza A areas, the following designations have been adopted:

upper Plaza A floor - Floor Ia

lower Plaza A floor - Floor Ib

upper of two fragmentary floors below A-3-I - Floor Ic

lower of two fragmentary floors below A-3-I - Floor Id

Neither Floor Ic nor Floor Id appears to be in direct association with the floors of Plaza A, since neither extends into the plaza area in front of the stairway. It seems likely, however, that the two are in fact fragments of flooring laid down prior to construction of A-3-I in what was then the

plaza area. Floor Ic lies 35 cm. above (surface to surface) Floor Ib, and Floor Id lies 21 cm. above Ib. An alignment of unshaped stones, 1 course high, lies across Floor Ic, the front edge of the line falling 96 cm. behind the line of the lowest riser of A-3-I.

Clearing of Floors Ic and Id completed test excavation of Mound A-3.

CONSTRUCTION PHASES

For ease in judging the relationships among the several phases discussed below, reference should be made to the plan and section drawings of the tested portions of A-3 (figs. 14 and 15).

Phase I

The earliest recognizable construction in Mound A-3 consists of a low, plaster-surfaced platform, probably 1 meter+ in height, built in conjunction with the flooring of Plazas A and B (Plaza B floor, Plaza A Floor Ib, and elements A-3-VI and XII). Owing to the small amount of surface area cleared on the platform, no statements can be made concerning presence or absence of a structure during Phase I.

Phase II

Superposed on the Phase I construction is a platform, again plaster-surfaced, now rising ca. 235 cm. above the surface of Plaza B (Element A-3-IX). A rough stone revetment or retaining wall may have been added at the rear of the mound in conjunction with the raising of this second platform (Element A-3-VII). A new floor, perhaps shortly later covered with a second, was probably added in Plaza A (Floors Ic and Id), perhaps extending over the entire plaza area. Height of the Phase II platform above Plaza A

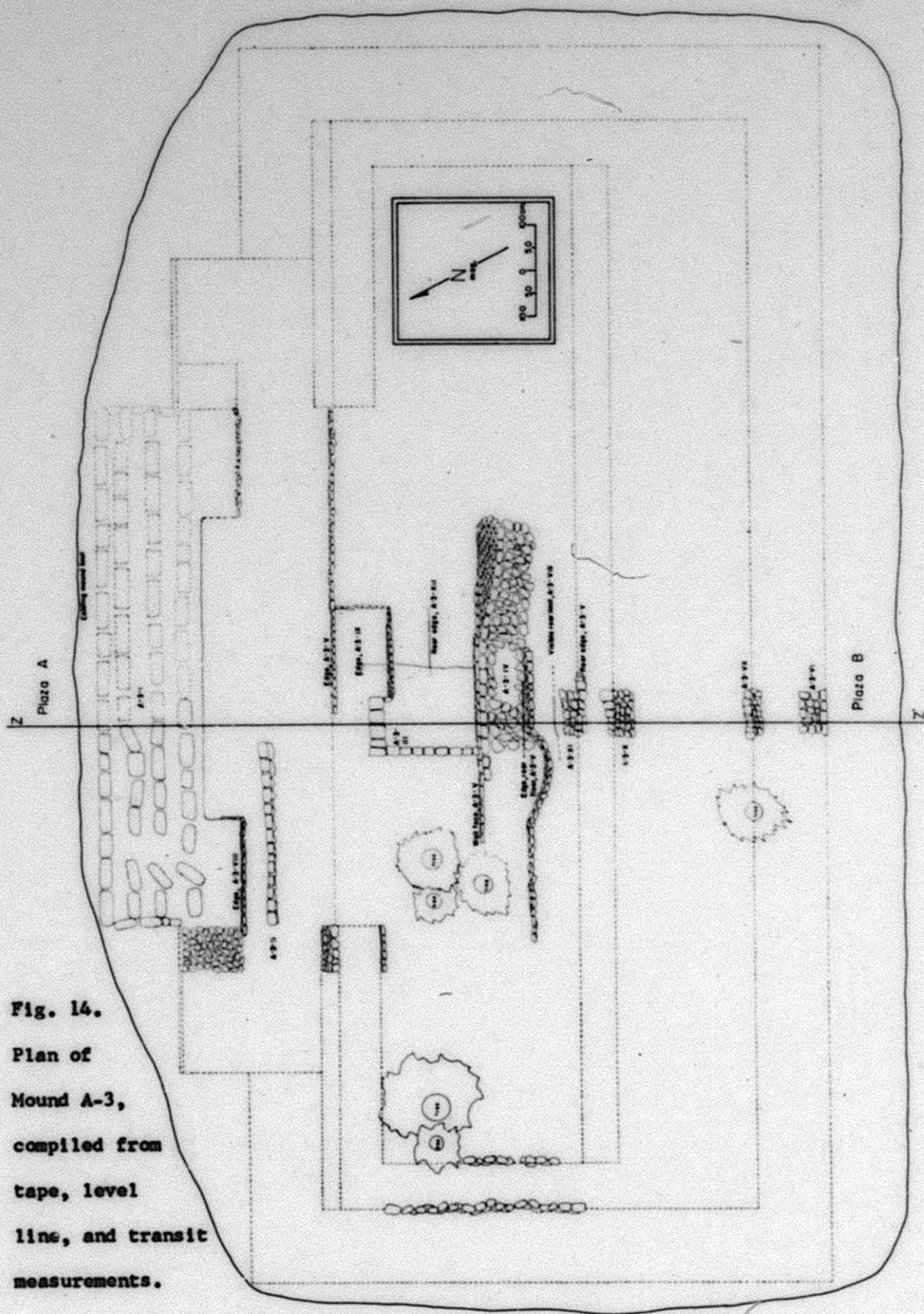


Fig. 14.
Plan of
Mound A-3,
compiled from
tape, level
line, and transit
measurements.

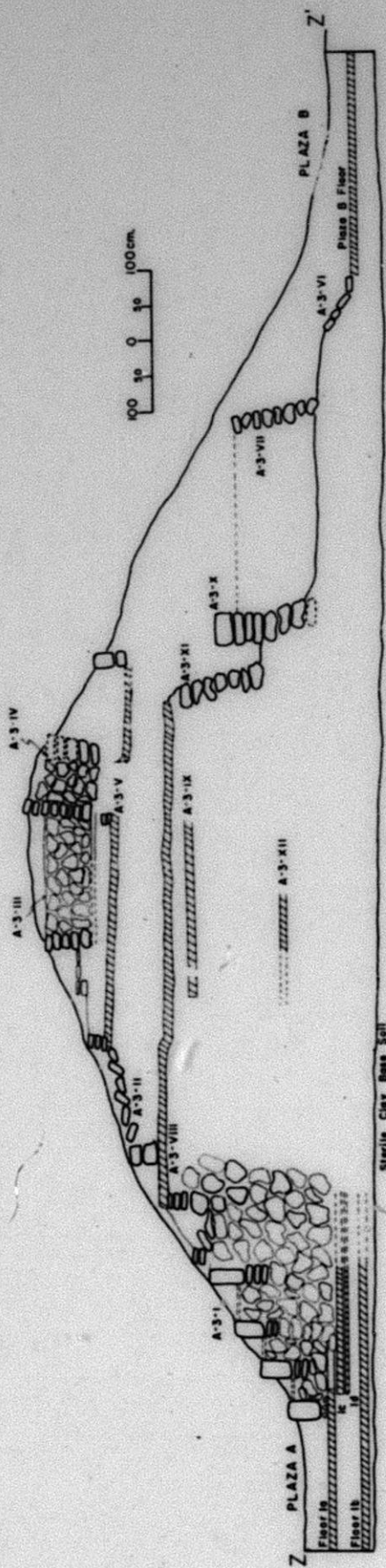


Fig. 15. Cross-section of Mound A-3, showing construction elements A-3-I through XII. Compiled from tape and level line measurements.

is therefore likely to have been originally ca. 2 meters, later to be reduced to ca. 185 cm. With this height, a stairway or other means of access to the platform top would have been necessary, and it is conceivable that the stairway of A-3 (Element A-3-I) is contemporaneous with the Phase II platform, since the top riser reaches approximately the same level as the surface of the platform. However, excavations were not sufficiently extensive to shed light on this aspect of the construction. Again, as in Phase I, nothing can be said regarding presence or absence of structures topping the platform.

Phase III

Following construction of the second platform, a third, possibly more extensive than the preceding two, was built (Elements A-3-VIII, XI, and X). Association with the stairway (A-3-I) indicates that this element is part of Phase III, although the character of the uppermost portion of the stairway suggests that the upper area may have been a later addition to Phase II construction. At the rear of the structure, one and probably two revetments were added to support the platform, now rising ca. 270 cm. above the Plaza B floor and 230 cm. above the upper floor (Floor Ia) of Plaza A, which probably formed a part of Phase III construction. Excavation was sufficiently extensive to indicate that no walls or other structural elements exist in the central portion of the Phase III platform, and it appears likely that the platform either supported temporary structures or was not topped by a building.

Phase IV

The fourth superposition in Mound A-3 consists of a plaster-floored

platform which was bisected laterally by a masonry wall of undeterminable height, and also bordered at front and probably rear edges by masonry walls (Element A-3-V and rear wall line of A-3-II). Probably constructed at the same time was a low wall (Element A-3-II) which was set atop the floor of the Phase III platform, leaving 60 cm.+ of that floor visible at the top of the stairway, which continued in use. The area between this frontal wall and the edge wall of the Phase IV platform may have been an inclined ramp, providing access to the platform from the stairway, but disturbance in this area is so great as to preclude any final judgement. Of the two rooms or use areas produced by bisection of the platform area by a lateral wall, the front is considerably larger, being 297 cm. wide, while the rear area has a width of only 132 cm. Due to the destruction of much of Phase IV during later construction, it is impossible to determine whether a structure existed atop the platform, but the nature of the two bordering walls suggests that no vaulted building was present.

Phase V

The penultimate phase in A-3 was marked by destruction of much of Phase IV in the building of a plaster-surfaced platform bisected by a longitudinal wall (Element A-3-IV). The extent of the plaster flooring of Phase V cannot be determined either at mound front or rear; in the latter area, slumpage has destroyed all but a small portion of the floor, while in the former, later construction served to erase much of the floor. At the mound front, it is likely that the floor once extended to the front border wall of Phase IV, which almost certainly remained in use, along with the putative ramp, after other parts of the construction had been razed or capped. We

cannot be sure of the maximum height of the bisecting wall of Phase V, but the absence of large quantities of fallen masonry suggests that the present height of 112 cm. is not far from the original maximum. Given this height, Phase V stood 410 cm. above the surface of Plaza A, and 465 cm. above that of Plaza B. It is unlikely that Phase V was marked by presence of a vaulted structure or other building.

Phase VI

The final recognizable construction consists of an addition, in the form of a somewhat irregular masonry platform, to the Phase V wall (Element A-3-III). This platform, which appears to have incorporated the front edge wall of Phase IV, is limited to the front portion of A-3; no construction appears to have been undertaken during Phase VI in the rear area of the mound. The Phase VI construction, leaving a small part of the Phase V wall visible above its surface, reduced the usable width at the top of the structure to 190 cm., and created two additional steps in what had become a series of ten steps of varying heights, plus a probable ramp, leading from Plaza A to the top of the structure. As is true for all preceding phases as well, no statements can be made concerning the lateral extent of the Phase VI construction.

The pattern of modification and addition recognizable in Mound A-3 suggests that the continual focus of importance for the structure was Plaza A. Not only is the sole visible access to the platforms located on the Plaza A face, but the generally greater amount of modification here in comparison with the Plaza B face indicates that activities carried out on the platforms of A-3 were centered on the main plaza. What the uses of A-3 may have been remains unclear; that it was a minor structure is obvious, although the

quality of the stairway construction lends an air of importance to an otherwise undistinguished effort by Maya builders. From the position of A-3 in the site center it can be suggested that the platforms, perhaps topped for brief periods by thatched shelters, were the scenes of ceremonies honoring or propitiating gods of lesser status and power than those for whom the somewhat more imposing structures at Maria Camp were raised.

ARTIFACTS

The artifact yield from the excavation of Mound A-3 was extremely small, probably due primarily to the limited nature of the testing. In Table 1, below, provenience and phase association, as well as total numbers of sherds and other artifacts, are given for the twenty lots of material collected during excavation of Mound A-3. It should be noted that the variations in lot size do not necessarily reflect actual variations in the amount of cultural debris present in various segments of the fill; rather, limitations of time prevented excavation of more than small samples of some portions of the fill, especially those in the lower area of the mound, and hence the total sample from early constructions is comparatively small.

Table 2 presents a breakdown of individual lots of ceramic material by ware, wherever such a determination is possible, and in addition provides similar data for the six suggested construction phases. In both tables, 2 or more sherds which have been joined to form a larger fragment of a vessel are tabulated as a single sherd, and the tabulation is extended to include many small sherds (less than 2 cm. square), which are considered primarily because of the small size of the total ceramic sample.

TABLE 1. Provenience, Phase, and Yield of Artifact Lots, Mound A-3

<u>Lot No.</u>	<u>Provenience</u>	<u>Phase</u>	<u>Sherds/Other *</u>	
1	Top 8 cm. of deposit above Floor Ia, Plaza A	p	4	-
2	Remainder of deposit above Floor Ia	p	118	-
3	Fill of platform W. of W. balustrade of stairs	III(?)	139	-
4	Surface of A-3-II and fill of same	IV	25	5
5	Fill over stairway A-3-I	p	54	-
6	Surface and top of fill, A-3-VI and VII	I & II	108	2
7	Fill between A-3-IV and A-3-V	V	29	2
8	Fill above floor of Plaza B	p	52	1
9	Rubble fill of A-3-III	VI	68	2
10	Fill between A-3-V and A-3-VIII	IV	51	1
11	Fill between Floors Ia and Ib, Plaza A	III	19	-
12	Fill below floor of Plaza B	I	47	-
13	Fill between A-3-VIII and A-3-IX	III	249	1
14	Pit SW edge A-3-VIII, 30 cm. below floor	III	26	3
15	Fill below A-3-I, above Floor Ic	III(?)	92	2
16	Structure fill NE of A-3-X	III	13	1
17	Fill between Floors Ic and Id	II	37	-
18	Fill between Floors Id and Ib	II	18	-
19	Plaster of Floor Ib	I(?)	1	-
20	Fill between A-3-IX and A-3-XII	II	<u>31</u>	<u>1</u>
Totals			1181	21

p = probably deposited subsequent to abandonment of A-3

* = includes ceramic artifacts other than vessel sherds

TABLE 2. Tabulation of Ceramics by Lot and Phase

Lot Number	Phase	Orange ware glazed and engraved	Polychrome (R & B/O)	Slipped Orange ware	Slipped Red ware	Black/red bichrome	Slipped Gray ware	Unslipped Orange ware	Fugitive-black and un- slipped black wares	Unclassifiable	Totals
12	I		3 (6.8)				16 (34%)	18 (38%)	10 (21.2)		47
17	II		5 (13.5)	1 (2.7%)			19 (51.3)	10 (27%)	2 (5.4)		87
18	II						9 (50%)	9 (50%)			
19	II		1 (100%)								
20	II		4 (12.9)	1 (3.2%)			13 (41.9)	11 (35.5)	2 (6.5%)		
3	III						90 (64.8)	37 (26.6)	12 (8.6%)		538
11	III						10 (52.6)	8 (42.1)	1 (5.3%)		
13	III	1 (0.8%)	4 (1.6%)	8 (3.2%)	1 (1.2%)		146 (58.6)	80 (32.1)	6 (2.5%)		
14	III		2 (7.7%)				19 (73%)	4 (15.4)	1 (3.9%)		
15	III			1 (1.2%)			37 (40.2)	30 (32.6)	24 (26%)		
16	III		1 (7.8%)				6 (46.1)	6 (46.1)			
4	IV		2 (8%)				2 (8%)	19 (76%)	2 (8%)		76
10	IV	1 (2.1%)	4 (7.8%)			1 (2.1%)	19 (37.2)	14 (27.4)	12 (23.5)		
7	V	6 (20.7)	3 (10.3)				6 (20.7)	13 (44.8)	1 (3.5%)		29
9	VI		2 (2.9%)		2 (2.9%)		21 (30.9)	20 (29.4)	23 (33.9)		68
1	P								4 (100%)		336
2	P		1 (0.8%)				74 (62.7)	33 (28%)	10 (8.5%)		
5	P		1 (1.9%)	1 (1.9%)			14 (25.9)	11 (20.3)	7 (13%)		
6	P	4 (3.7%)	1 (0.9%)	3 (2.8%)			58 (53.7)	37 (34.3)	5 (4.6%)		
8	P	8 (13.5)	8 (15.3)				11 (21.2)	14 (26.9)	12 (23.1)		
Ware Totals		11 (0.9%)	9 (0.8%)	42 (3.6%)	15 (1.3%)	5 (0.4%)	1 (0.1%)	570 (48.2)	374 (31.7)	154 (13%)	1181 (100%)

In every case in Table 2 in which phase ascription is uncertain, the latest possible phase designation is used, as for example in Lot 6, which is ascribed entirely to the deposition following abandonment of A-3, although parts of the lot may be representative of phases I and II.

From Table 2 it will be noted that construction phase III is most heavily represented in the collection, accounting for slightly over 45% of the total. At the other end of the scale lies Phase V, which with a total yield of 29 sherds amounts to only 2.5% of the total sample. As noted above, these variations are likely to be due primarily to the differences in the amount of excavation carried out in the several phases; however, the far higher yield in Phase III is not totally explicable in these terms, and selection of fill material from an area of intensive refuse dumping is suggested.

Table 2 further shows unslipped wares to predominate in all phases, constituting approximately 80% of the entire sample. The preponderance of household wares in the A-3 fill appears to indicate that much or all of the fill was derived from areas in which domestic refuse had been dumped, an indication supported by the non-ceramic artifacts as well; this in turn suggests that the fill for A-3 was brought to the site center from outlying areas. It is worth noting, in addition, that few sherds exhibit the worn, rounded edges which are indicative of extensive handling after breakage. This may indicate that the fill of A-3 is not reused material from other construction, and hence that the sherds may in some cases be at least roughly contemporaneous with the structure in which they lie.

The small size of many sherds, plus the absence of rim sherds in any

appreciable quantity, make discussions of the Maria Camp ceramics of limited value at best. However, occasional sherds offer clues to vessel form, making possible the following suggestions regarding forms associated with each ware category:

Orange ware, gadrooned and engraved - cylindrical vessel, perhaps tripod

Polychrome (Red and black on orange) - small, shallow bowls; thin walls

Slipped orange ware - small to medium shallow bowls; thin to medium walls

Slipped red ware - small to medium shallow bowls; platters or shallow basins; medium to thick walls

Black-on-red bichrome - small bowl or plate of medium depth, flaring sides; medium walls

Slipped gray ware - large bowl, narrowing from orifice to base, perhaps with annular base; thin walls

Unslipped orange ware - ollas; globular bowls; shallow basin/platters; medium to thick walls

Fugitive-black and unslipped black - ollas; possibly medium size globular vessels with constricted orifice; medium to thick walls

The two categories of unslipped ware, represented primarily by ollas, are highly heterogeneous, both in color and form. In the black wares particularly, combination of what Thompson (1940: 6, figs. 52 & 53) recognizes as fugitive-black with unslipped black wares produces a highly variable grouping of sherds, but the fact that a great deal of variation is discernible in a single vessel seems to make further distinctions within the domestic wares meaningless in view of the restricted nature of the sample.

Temper in Maria Camp pottery offers few clues to temporal placement of the A-3 deposit. Temper consists primarily of calcite fragments, varying in size from large to extremely small relative to sherd thickness. Grains of calcite are frequently visible in sherd surfaces, and overall quantity is high relative to total sherd mass. Occasional sherds contain tuff temper, usually in combination with other materials, and there is at least a weak suggestion that the pattern of change in temper preference observed by Thompson (1940: 24-5, Fig. 56a-b) at Benque Viejo was also characteristic of Maria Camp. No proportional analyses of tempering materials were carried out, due to the small size of the total sample and the resulting possibility that such analyses would be badly skewed.

A notable characteristic of the Maria Camp pottery is the high incidence of small flakes of golden mica, both in paste and in sherd surfaces, often resulting in a shimmering appearance, especially in unslipped orange ware sherds. The mica appears to have been a constituent of the tempering material rather than an intentional inclusion designed to enhance vessel appearance. Mica sources in and near the Chiquibul are likely to be limited to granitic outcroppings, which suggests that temper may have been collected at some distance from the Maria Camp site.

Chronological placement of the A-3 materials rests primarily upon the small number of sherds which admit comparison with other collections. Unfortunately, the sample from Phase I yielded no sherds with distinctive form or design characteristics. From Phase II, however, come 2 olla body sherds (Fig. 17 a,b) with surface decoration. The decoration consists of

notched appliqué fillets, a trait most common in Tepeu 1 vessels at Uaxactun (Smith 1955: 51), although there usually adorning other vessel forms.

From Phase III we have 2 additional sherds with impressed appliqué fillet decoration (Fig. 17c,e), and a decorated lug from an unslipped, polished orange ware vessel (Fig. 17d), for which there are no reported parallels from Uaxactun or Benque Viejo, nor from sites closer to Maria Camp.

Phase IV yields the first polychrome sherd (Fig. 16a). Although too little of the design is visible to permit close comparisons, the style is essentially similar to that illustrated by Thompson (1940: Fig. 35) from Benque Viejo IIIb contexts. Phase IV is also represented by a single unslipped orange ware olla sherd with impressed appliqué fillet and an incised X in the vessel body (Fig. 17f). Ascription of Tepeu 1 date to this sherd is consistent with the Benque Viejo IIIb dating of the associated polychrome sherd.

Phase V is represented by a single polychrome sherd (Fig. 16b), the style of which is within the range of Tepeu 2 polychromes from Uaxactun (Smith 1955: passim).

From Phase VI comes a single black-on-red bichrome fragment of a dish or bowl with flaring sides (Fig. 16c), and 1 sherd with impressed appliqué fillet decoration (Fig. 17g). Black-on-red bichrome is not common at Benque Viejo, where the ware ranges from Benque Viejo IIIa to IV, centering in IIIb (Thompson 1940: Fig. 31).

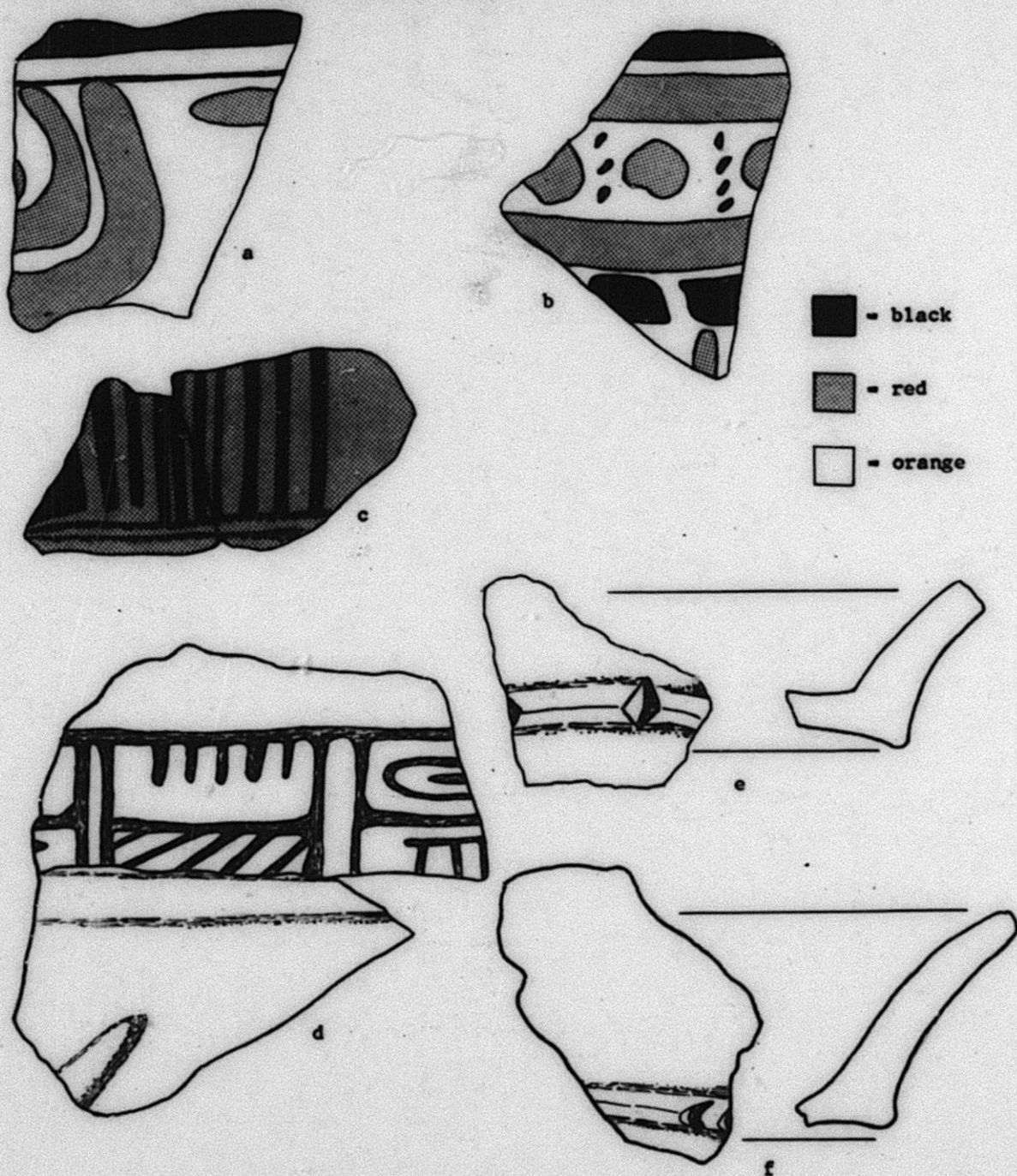
Finally, from the post-abandonment accumulation of debris over and near A-3 there are several sherds of a gadrooned and engraved vessel, probably

slipped orange ware, but with the surface so badly eroded as to preclude firm identification (Fig. 16d). The vessel combines two decorative techniques, gouged-and-incised design and gadrooning, which span a considerable range at Uaxactun (Smith 1955: 45). At Benque Viejo, gadrooning is found in both Benque Viejo III and IV contexts, while incising is limited to Benque Viejo IV (Thompson 1940: Figs. 19,22,25, and 48). On the basis of the chronological placement of incising at Benque Viejo, and the resemblance of the Maria Camp specimen to a Tepeu 3 fragment from Uaxactun (Smith 1955: Fig. 44d), a Tepeu 3 - Benque Viejo IV date seems acceptable for this form.

Also from the post-abandonment materials are 2 sherds of flaring-sided vessels with notched bases (Fig. 16e,f), perhaps similar in form to red ware tripod pans from Benque Viejo (Thompson 1940: Fig. 47). Notching of basal angles of red ware tripod plates is common in Tepeu 3 at Uaxactun, as well (Smith 1955: 48). It would appear, therefore, that the 2 sherds with notched bases are of Tepeu 3-Benque Viejo IV date, consistent with the date suggested for the associated gadrooned and engraved vessel.

Despite the fact that the Maria Camp sample is too small to provide a solid basis for discussion of the date of A-3 construction, there is a strong suggestion in the few distinctive sherds that a specific temporal range can in fact be recognized. Taken together, the ceramics from A-3 appear to indicate a Benque Viejo III-IV (Tepeu 1-3) date for the construction, while relationships among the several phase lots from A-3 suggest that the pottery may represent an internally consistent sequence, and may therefore at least come close to providing precise dates for the phases. The question of relating the A-3 materials to the occupation span of the site cannot, however, be resolved on the basis of present data.

Fig. 16. Examples of surface treatment, A-3 sherds. a - Phase IV; b - V; c - VI; d,e,f - post-use deposition(p). (actual size)



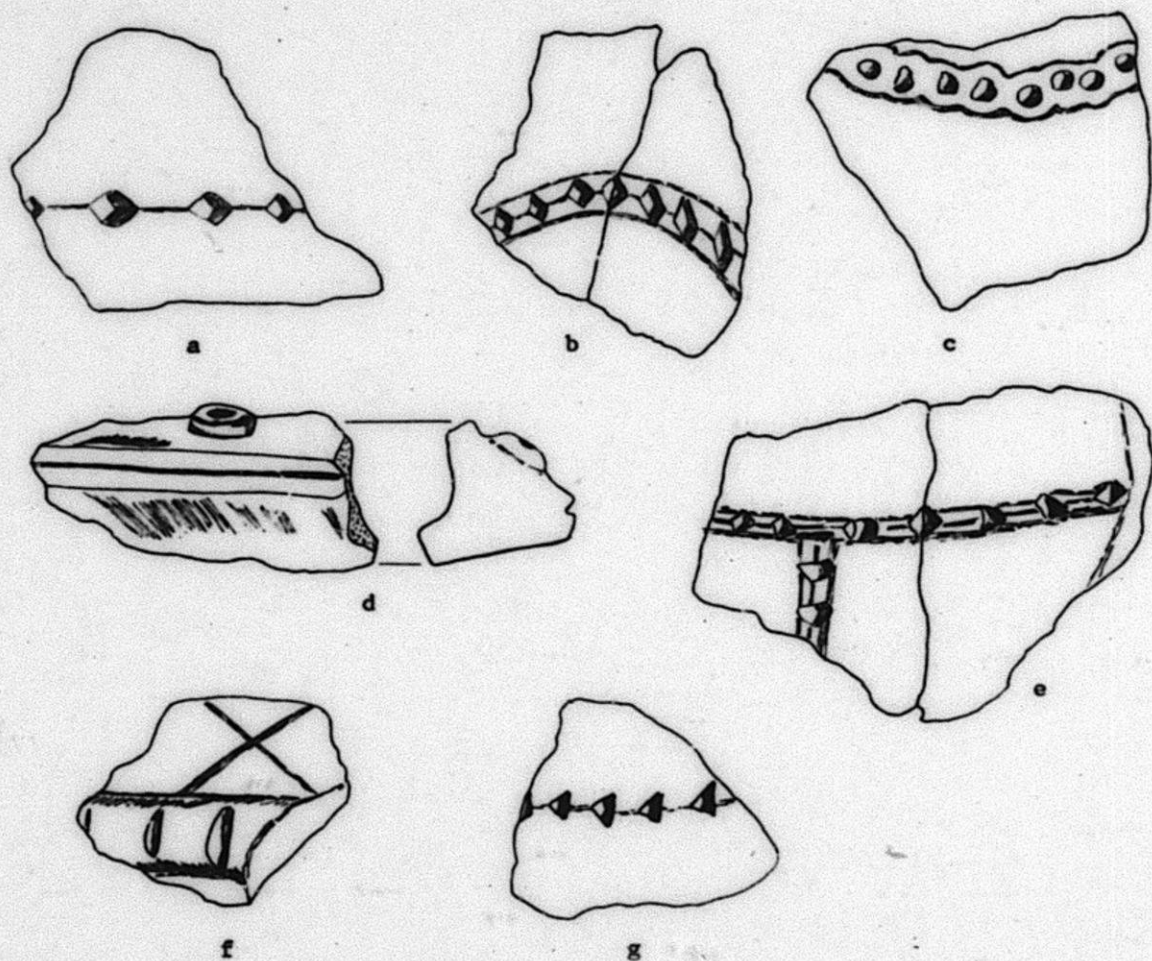


Fig. 17. Examples of surface treatment, A-3 sherds. All except d olla body sherds; all except a, which is unslipped black ware, are unslipped orange ware. a - Phase II; b - Phase II; c,d,e - Phase III; f - Phase IV; g - Phase VI. (actual size)

In addition to sherds, only two ceramic artifacts were recovered from A-3. The first of these is a fragment of a figurine or whistle, of orange ware, badly eroded, consisting of approximately one-half of a tapered tube with an encircling band near one end. The specimen, from Lot 7 (Phase V), is 41 mm. long, and thickness of the tube wall is 7 mm. The second ceramic artifact is a crudely manufactured elongated conical object with a bulbous area at one end, showing fingernail indentations as well as marks of the manufacturer's fingers on the elongated portion. Broken above the bulbous area, the specimen may be a portion of a figurine, although identification is far from certain. Length is 58 mm., and average diameter is 26 mm.

Chipped Stone

Both the 8 chipped stone and the 11 ground stone artifacts recovered from A-3 are surely chance inclusions in fill material. In no case is there any suggestion of intentional deposition of artifacts on platform floors or elsewhere in the structure.

Included among the chipped stone artifacts are 3 obsidian flake blades, from lots 3, 6, and 9, average width 12 mm., and average thickness 3 mm. Since such artifacts are ubiquitous in Maya sites, comparisons with similar objects from other sites are not useful; the same holds true for a single exhausted core of flint from Lot 16, a use-chipped flake from Lot 6, and a chopper made from a flat fragment of slate, chipped on the edges, length 97 mm., width 92 mm., and thickness 25 mm., from Lot 10 (Phase IV).

The only chipped stone artifacts sufficiently distinctive to warrant broader consideration are two base fragments of stemmed projectile point/blades

or knives. The first of these, from Lot 3 (Phase III), is of whitish flint, length 51 mm., width 34 mm., thickness 9 mm., and stem width 18 mm. The second, from Lot 8 (p), is of brown flint, and has a length of 46 mm., width 32 mm., thickness 8 mm., and stem width 22 mm. Stemmed projectile points or knives are common in many Maya sites, and their form and distribution are discussed by Kidder (1947:8-9). Artifacts of this type are also known from Eduardo Quiroz Cave (Pendergast 1964a) and Actun Balam Cave (Pendergast 1964b) in the Chiquibul region.

Ground Stone

The 11 ground stone artifacts from A-3 fall into 4 categories, of which only 2 are marked by distinctive forms or types. Nondistinctive forms from A-3 include a single fragmentary irregular flint cobble hammerstone from Lot 20 (Phase II) and 3 cobble rubbing/polishing stones from lots 3, 7, and 9, each nothing more than a natural cobble with one or more surfaces smoothed by use. Fairly dense, hard limestone appears to have been preferred for rubbing stones, although one of the specimens is of gray granite.

Four fragments of granite metates, all attributable to Phase III, were recovered from A-3. From Lot 3 came a single fragment, thickness 57 mm. A

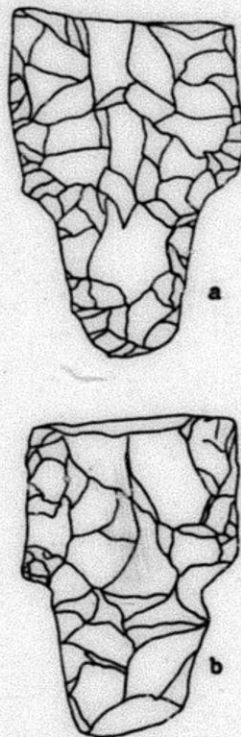


Fig. 18. Stemmed blade/
knives. a - Lot 3; b -
Lot 8. (actual size)

second, from Lot 14, has a thickness of 65 mm. Lot 15 yielded 2 fragments, one of which (Fig. 19b) is 58 mm. thick, the other (Fig. 19c) 54 mm. thick. The latter has been reused as a grinding/polishing stone, resulting in smoothing of 2 broken edges of the fragment. All specimens probably represent the legless type of metate discussed by Kidder (1947: 33-5), and widely distributed in the Maya area. The granite ranges from gray to pinkish in color.

Lots 3 and 14 also produced fragments of three manos, all of gray or pink granite. All of the specimens appear to fall within Kidder's flat type (Kidder 1947:34), but there is considerable variation within the group. One of the 2 specimens from Lot 14 (Fig. 20a) is an end fragment of a unifacial mano, oval in cross-section, length 92 mm., width 92 mm., and thickness 74 mm. The second fragment, also an end section, is part of a bifacial mano, with a flattened oval cross-section, 102 mm. long, 87 mm. wide, and 47 mm. thick (Fig. 20b). The third specimen, from Lot 3, is unifacial, and has a plano-convex cross-section. Thickness of the fragment is 51 mm.

The concentration of metate and mano fragments in Phase III fill appears to lend support to the suggestion made above, based on ceramic distribution,

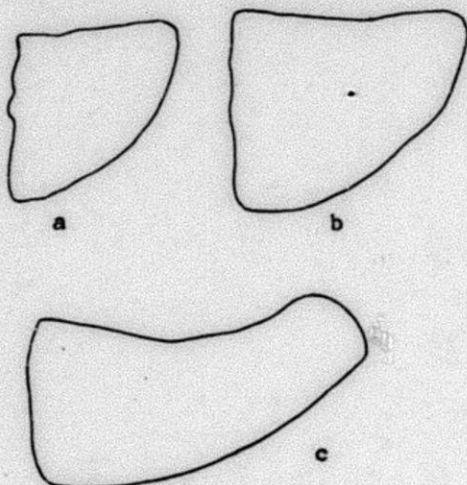


Fig. 19. Cross-sections of metate fragments. a - Lot 3; b & c - Lot 15. ($\frac{1}{2}$ actual size)

that Phase III fill was derived from a concentrated refuse dump, in which such utilitarian objects as milling stones might be expected to occur with higher frequency than in random accumulations of debris.

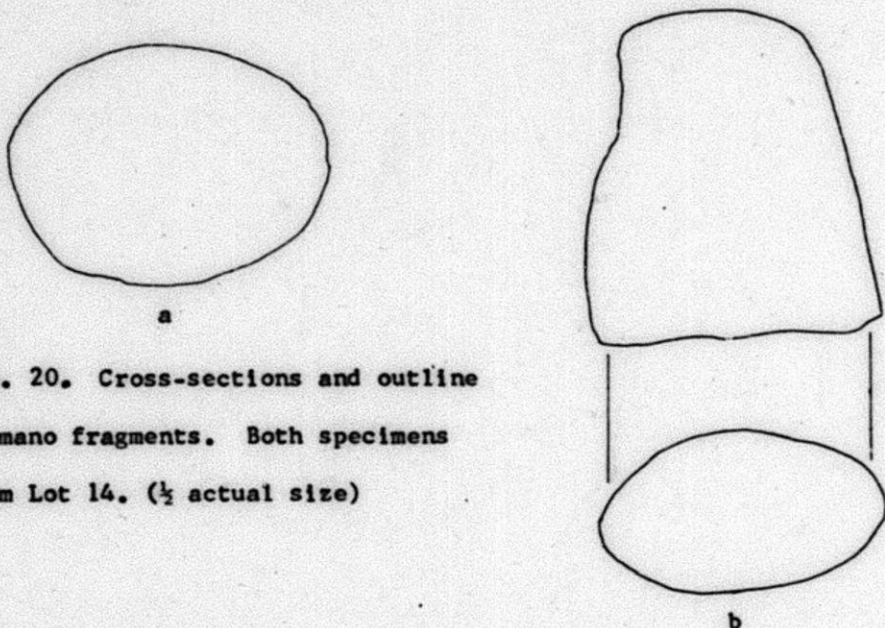


Fig. 20. Cross-sections and outline of mano fragments. Both specimens from Lot 14. ($\frac{1}{2}$ actual size)

A source for the obsidian at Maria Camp, which ranges in color from clear with gray-black inclusions to dark gray, cannot be specified, although it appears likely that obsidian may occur in small quantities in some portions of the Cayo District. The granite used in manufacture of manos and metates probably derives from one of the granitic upthrusts in the Cayo, either the Mountain Pine Ridge proper or one of the small pine ridges found south and east of Maria Camp. Flint occurs locally, and slate may be found scattered throughout the Chiquibul, often in stream beds. There is, then, nothing in the lithic materials which suggests far-flung trade relations for the occupants of Maria Camp.

SITE STATUS AND RELATIONSHIPS

As can be noted from the discussion presented above, the ceramics of Maria Camp, while they may serve to delimit the time span for the A-3 structure, do not indicate close relationship with known sites in the Cayo District. Ties with Benque Viejo appear to be minimal, despite the relatively small distance which separates the two sites; there is, in fact, as much similarity between Maria Camp and Uaxactun as between Maria Camp and Benque Viejo. Similarly, no parallels can be discerned between the Maria Camp pottery and that from the Mountain Cow sites. While the Maria Camp sample is admittedly a slim basis for assessing relationships, I suspect that further excavation at the site would tend to substantiate the assessment presented here. This suspicion is supported in part by the resemblances which can be noted in the Maria Camp pottery to that of Eduardo Quiroz and Actun Balam caves, both of which sites lie comparatively close to Maria Camp. In both of these cases, however, the suggestion of relationship rests upon impressions rather than detailed analyses of the two cave collections.

While the ceramics fail to reveal a pattern of relationships for Maria Camp, architectural features yield a single clue. The stairway of A-3 is very closely similar to that of pyramid D at Hatzcap Ceel (Thompson 1931: 251, Plate XXVI,2), a site of the Mountain Cow group. Hatzcap Ceel was occupied during the Holmul V (Benque Viejo III) phase (Thompson 1931:334), and hence pyramid D and mound A-3 at Maria Camp are likely to be roughly contemporaneous. Similar stairway construction is also reported from Caracol (Anderson, personal communication), from an unspecified time period. On this weak basis

it may be suggested that there existed in the Benque Viejo III time period some interrelationships among sites in the Chiquibul region and surrounding areas, possibly involving general similarities in architectural style, but apparently not extending to ceramic affinities.

In the absence of detailed data on ceramics and architecture at Caracol, it is impossible to assess the nature of putative ties between this major center and sites at the level of Maria Camp. In view of the spatial relationship between Maria Camp and Caracol, however, it is conceivable that ties did in fact exist. The size of Maria Camp indicates that the site may well have been part of the type of pattern recognized by Bullard (1960) in the northeastern Petén, possibly serving as the nucleus of a zone, surrounded by several house clusters. Assuming such a function for the Maria Camp site, it appears likely that the zone of which the site was a part was one of several which together made up a district with the major ceremonial center of Caracol as the nucleus. It is to be hoped that additional work both at Caracol and at outlying minor sites such as Maria Camp will be undertaken in the future, perhaps thereby clarifying patterns of stratification and authority in this still poorly understood portion of the Maya area.

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