

January 2009

Exploring Highland Maya Ritual Cave Use: Archaeology & Ethnography in Huehuetenango, Guatemala

James E. Brady

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EXPLORING HIGHLAND MAYA RITUAL CAVE USE

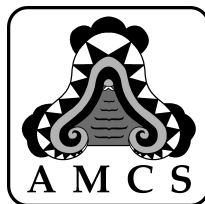
ARCHAEOLOGY & ETHNOGRAPHY
IN HUEHUETENANGO, GUATEMALA

EXPLORING HIGHLAND MAYA RITUAL CAVE USE

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Edited by

James E. Brady



ASSOCIATION FOR MEXICAN CAVE STUDIES
BULLETIN 20
2009

Cover photo:

Association for Mexican Cave Studies
PO Box 7672
Austin, Texas 78713
www.amcs-pubs.org

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Printed in the United States of America

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This volume is dedicated to
Lloyd Cotsen,
whose generosity made this project possible.

PREFACE

This report presents the results of fieldwork undertaken by the 2007 Summer Field Program in Anthropology run by the Anthropology Department at California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA). The project was conceived quite accidentally. Former CSULA undergraduate Sergio Garza had met and become friends with a number of Q'anjob'al Maya in Los Angeles. When Garza mentioned this to me, I acquainted him with Oliver La Farge's classic ethnography, *Santa Eulalia: The Religion of a Cuchumatán Town*, and asked if his friends knew anything about Yalan Na', the cave mentioned by La Farge. His friends not only knew of the cave but were quite willing to discuss it.

Garza's friendships grew into plans for him to visit his friends' relatives living in the town of Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango during a previously planned trip to Guatemala in 2005. When Garza mentioned the trip to me, I immediately saw the opportunity to expand our understanding of Yalan Na' and somewhat naively hoped that we might get permission to conduct an archaeological reconnaissance of the cave. A CSULA graduate student, Arnulfo Delgado, was completing his thesis on the nearby town of Jacaltenango but more importantly had been pastor of the Catholic church in Santa Eulalia in the late 1970s. I introduced the two and Delgado immediately offered to help Garza by taking him to Santa Eulalia and making introductions. Finally, I mentioned Garza's trip to University of Texas graduate student Ann Scott and she forwarded me a copy of the document on idolatry in Santa Eulalia that she had been given by Stacey Schwartzkopf.

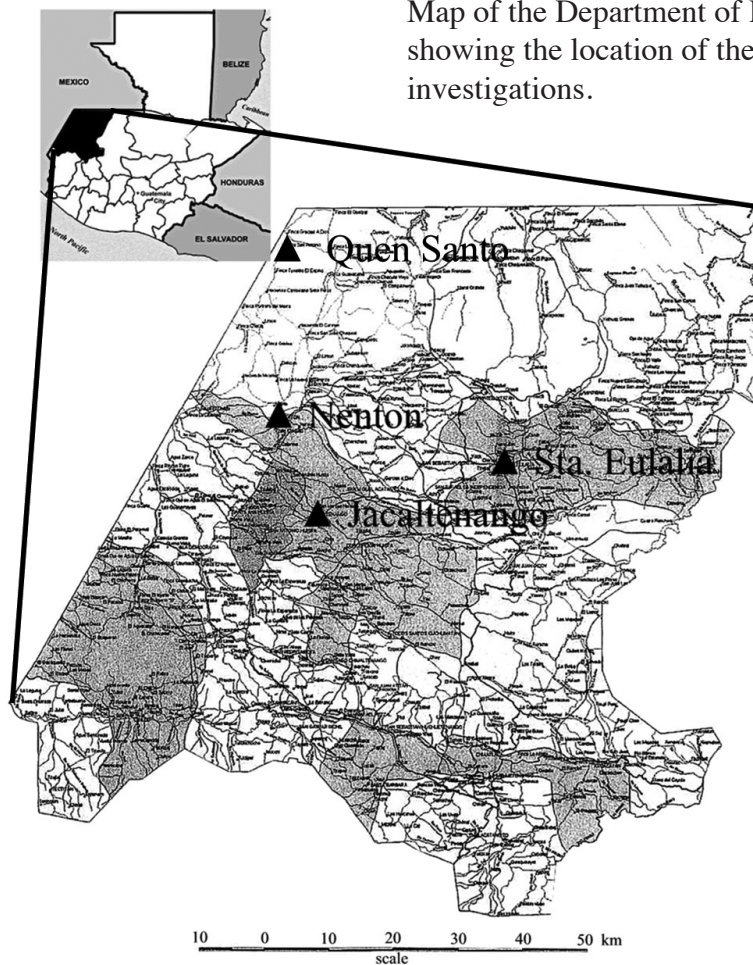
Garza's trip produced mixed results. On the negative side, Garza had not been allowed to enter Yalan Na' and reported emphatically that there was no way that we would be allowed to conduct any

type of activity in the cave. On the positive side, Garza had been treated well and had learned a great deal about the cave in the process of discussing the matter with the town's prayer leaders [*alcaldes rezadores*]. An unanticipated discovery grew out of Garza staying in Nentón because Delgado was able to take him to the nearby cave at Quen Santo. When Garza recounted his trip, I was most excited by his account of Quen Santo and we made plans to visit the site in 2006 to look into the feasibility of conducting a restudy of the caves reported by Eduard Seler.

In the summer of 2006, Garza, Allan Cobb and I returned to Nentón to assess the facilities in the town as a base of operation for a field project. We also visited Quen Santo and were immediately impressed by the number of features that had not been recorded by Seler. It was felt that a systematic restudy would allow a reinterpretation of this important site.

Shortly after returning from Guatemala, I learned that Lloyd Cotsen was giving a five-year, \$200,000 gift to the anthropology department to develop the archaeology program at Cal State L.A. This unexpected gift allowed me to begin the immediate planning of the project for the summer of 2007. The month long investigation was carried out by a team consisting of cavers Allan Cobb, Linda Palit, and Donald Arburn, CSULA students Lauren Alejo, C. L. Kieffer, and Arturo Perez, Guatemala student Jenny Guerra, Sergio Garza and myself.

While only a superficial survey was possible in the time allotted, the project was nevertheless quite successful in allowing us to update our interpretation of the very important caves at Quen Santo. This was in part due to the fact that we focused our archaeological efforts narrowly on caves that



Map of the Department of Huehuetenango, showing the location of the principal sites of investigations.

Seler had studied. Our decision to treat the chasm as a single archaeological unit did force us to investigate a number of new caves in the chasm (see chapter 3) but we resisted the temptation to expand the study to include a number of other caves that were discovered along the barranca. We are hopeful that additional work can be carried out at the site in the future.

Throughout our work we were very conscious that we were working at sacred sites that are still being utilized by the Maya. At every stage of our work we consulted with our hosts in Santa Eulalia, Jacaltenango and Quen Santo before undertaking anything but the most superficial survey. As a result, our hosts volunteered a great deal of information about their sites. This allowed us to address some issues and amplify descriptions in Oliver La Farge's classic ethnographies. As this volume reflects, our contributions in this area are substantial.

Finally, the project would like to express its gratitude to Adalberto del Toro, owner of Finca Tunalito, who very generously allowed us to work on his property and use his facilities. Julio Domingo, our Jakaltek *alcalde rezador*, accompanied us in both 2006 and 2007 and said the prayers and made the offerings at the start of each work day. We are grateful for his kind patience in explaining the significance of sacred sites to us. We would like to thank our guides from La Trinidad for their enthusiasm for our project, especially Pasqual & José. In Los Angeles, the chair of the Anthropology Department, Dr. ChorSwang Ngin, was always an enthusiastic supporter of our field project. Finally, our deepest thanks go to Lloyd Cotsen whose generosity provided funding for this project and fieldwork opportunities for students at California State University, Los Angeles.—James E. Brady

1

Quen Santo Revisited: Updating Eduard Seler's 19th Century Cave Investigations

James E. Brady, Allan Cobb, Linda Palit, Donald Arburn, Sergio Garza, Christian Christiansen,
Arturo Perez, Ann Scott, and Arnulfo Delgado

In reviewing the history of Maya cave archaeology, Brady and Prufer (2005) have pointed out the high quality of four studies conducted at the end of the 19th century: Henry Mercer's (1896) *The Hill-Caves of Yucatan*, Edward Thompson's (1897) Cave of Loltun, George Gordon's (1898) Caverns of Copan, and Eduard Seler's (1901) investigation of Quen Santo. Although the Quen Santo discoveries are arguably the most spectacular, Seler's report is the least well known of the four because: 1.) the book is rather rare; 2.) it is written in German; and 3.) there has been relatively little subsequent archaeological work in this remote, Chuj-speaking area of Huehuetenango, Guatemala [Figure 1]. Nevertheless, when J. Eric Thompson (1959) wrote the first synthesis of Maya cave use, *The Role of Caves in Maya Culture*, he cited Seler's work more frequently than any of the others.

During the summer of 2006, a California State University, Los Angeles field project visited the site and returned in 2007 conducted a more detailed reconnaissance. The purpose of the project was to gather sufficient data to allow us to better assess the significance of Seler's finds and to reinterpret them in light of advances in Maya studies in the century since his work. Quen Santo appeared to contain all the elements for doing the type of investigation that could exemplify the value of archaeological restudies. Seler visited the site in 1895-97 just after the caves had been found, looted, and vandalized by *ladinos*¹. The event had occurred so recently that Seler was able to reconstruct much of the pre-discovery context from testimony of a witness. He also documented many other features that are simply no longer available to current archaeologists. Modern archaeologists, on the other hand, bring a much clearer picture of cave use to the table and are trained to see features that investigators prior to the 1990s simply ignored. The combination of these two perspectives allows us to present a synthesis that is greater than the sum of the parts.

Quen Santo

Quen Santo is a large surface site located on a plateau surrounded by canyons or, *barrancas* as they are called in

Guatemala. Seler recorded three caves at the base of the western face of the barranca and suggested that many more were undoubtedly present (Seler 2003:131). During our project Christian Christensen concentrated on exploring the barranca more thoroughly and located a total of six additional caves. He also took GPS readings on the tops of many of the surface structures allowing us to verify that Seler's pace map is in fact fairly accurate. By overlaying Christiansen's GPS readings on Seler's map, we were also able to verify that one the caves located by Christiansen was Seler's Cave 1. The expedition focused its greatest attention on Seler's Caves 2 and 3 since these features had been the focus of the earlier study as well. Cave 1 was also restudied and will be reported on in the next chapter.

Ethnoarchaeological investigations by Sergio Garza and, to a lesser extent, by Arnulfo Delgado allowed us to clear up a confusion created by Seler that was of fundamental importance. Seler appears to have been ambivalent about



Figure 1: Map of Guatemala showing the location of Quen Santo.

¹*Ladinos* are individuals who identify with European as opposed to Maya culture. *Ladinos* tend to speak Spanish but many *ladinos* in Guatemala, such as the *finca* owner, Gustav Kanter, were of German descent and also spoke German.



Figure 2: The importance of the caves is reflected in the site's name *Quen Santo*, which means "Holy Stone." According to Chuj Maya informants, it refers to the large exposed rock face at the entrance to Cave 3.

that draws worshippers from Mexico as well as from the Chuj, Jalkatek, and Kanjobal speaking areas of Guatemala. Although Seler (2003:131) noted that the caves had long been visited by the Maya, no ritual activity by living people was mentioned in his report. The fact that Seler took no note of the cave's singular religious importance to contemporary populations may have contributed to his failure to embrace the fact that the site name referred directly to the caves and to explore the implications of that naming.

Seler also vacillates on the significance of the caves even as he is finding large quantities of stone sculpture. In Cave 1, he discovered two monumental sculptures, a large carved trough, a series of smaller sculptures, and a heavy concentration of incense burners, ceramics and other artifacts. He does not see these items as part of a cave assemblage. He says, "The [cave] entrances indicated on the plan probably served in ancient times as sanctuaries and other places of concealment. Idols, incense vessels and other objects used in religious rituals were present when the first cave was discovered a few years ago. ... A large number of idols and other objects were found in other caves, which also served as hiding places" (Seler 2003:131). He did not consider the caves, however, to be ordinary storehouses for he says, "I was of the opinion

what the name *Quen Santo* referred to and this caused him to waffle on the translation. As he correctly notes, the word "Quen" in Chuj means "stone" and "Santo" is a Spanish adjective meaning "sacred" or "holy." He concludes in one place that this "refers to the entire plateau and the ruins, and not only the cave" (Seler 2003:131). Seler is far from certain about this and plays with the idea that "santo" was being used in the sense of "saint." Thus he concludes that the name means "Cave of the Saints," and refers most specifically to Cave 1, which contained several large stone sculptures (Seler 2003:131). In other places, he translates *Quen Santo* as "Sacred Rock," "Cave of Stone Images" and "Saints of the Ancients" (Seler 2003:158, n. 2). Most of these translations seem to center on the caves because he states "I have heard the name *Quen Santo* applied only to the caves" (Seler 2003:131). While it appears that Seler sensed that the caves were somehow special, he never came to a clear idea of their significance.

Our Chuj informants were very definite that the name means "holy stone" and refers specifically to the large exposed rock formation in which Cave 3 is located [Figure 2]. This makes sense in that Cave 3 is the focus of pilgrimage

that this cave was not selected arbitrarily as a hiding-place, but rather that these caverns were located directly below the temple pyramids and platforms of Pueblo Viejo *Quen Santo* and must have been of importance when the site was occupied" (Seler 2003:135). What that importance was, however, we are never told.

We noted earlier that our expedition focused its greatest attention on Seler's Caves 2 and 3. The caves are interesting in that they are tectonic rather than solutional. Cave 2 is located at the southern end and Cave 3 at the northern end of a long fissure [Figure 3]. It is possible to descend into the fissure near the southern end but moving northward, the ground level drops and the area is enclosed by high, sheer stone walls. The fissure is, therefore, a bounded natural feature. Seler notes that fact but it was never important in his interpretation of the caves. We will return to this issue later.

Cave 2

Seler entered the fissure at the southern end and Garza notes that pilgrims today also climb down in the south and stop first at Cave 2 to petition for permission to enter the sacred area before continuing on to Cave 3. The cave itself

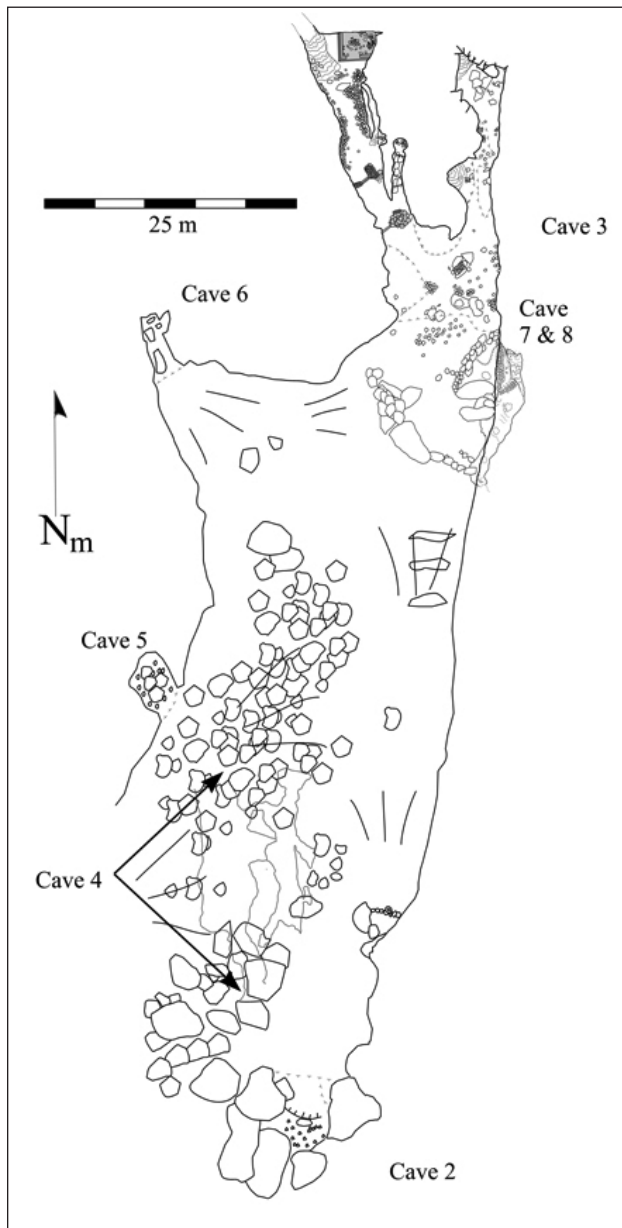


Figure 3: Map of the fissure along the western side of Quen Santo showing the location of Caves 2 and 3.

Figure 4: Map of Cave 2

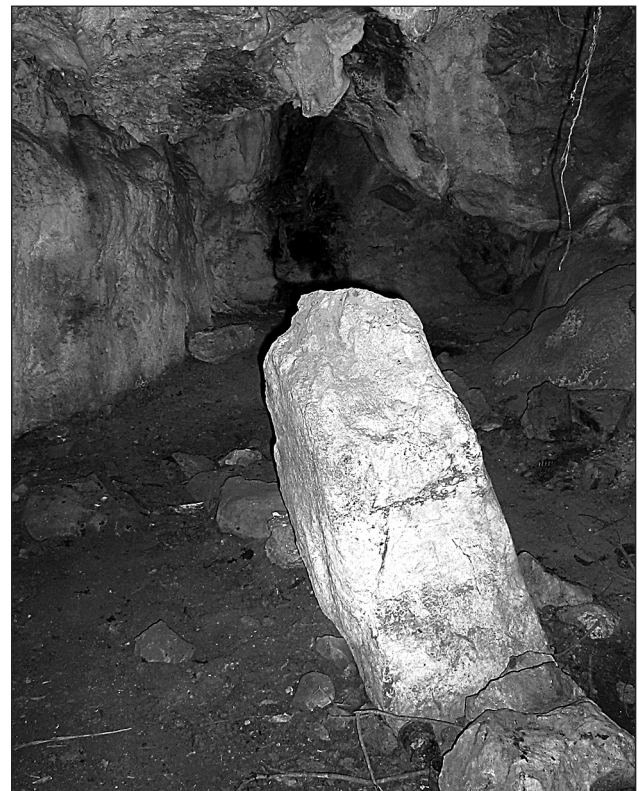
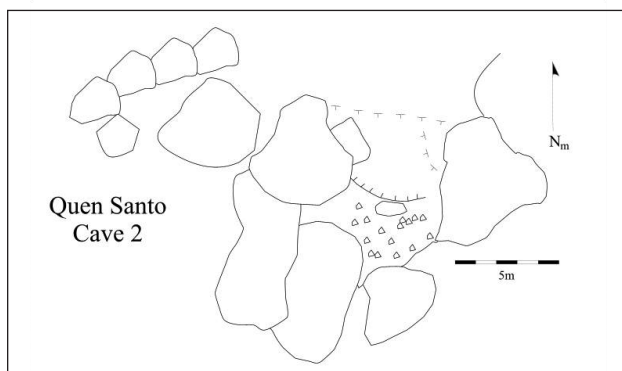


Figure 5 Top: The vertically standing stone at the entrance to Cave 2 was reset by Seler in the 1890s. Bottom: A closer view of the same stone.

Figure 6: The stacked stone along the right side of the photo and the built up slope at its base suggest that in the past this niche may have been enclosed with a wall.

is small and without an actual dark zone except in an area described below [Figure 4]. Near the entrance is a vertically standing stone projecting 90 cm above the ground that Seler (2003:147) reset in this position in the 1890s [Figure 5]. The stone is directly below an area of low ceiling (150 cm) where there are a number of stumps of broken stalactites. One of the stalactites is substantial (30 cm in diameter) and regrowth at the base suggests that it was broken in antiquity. The combination of the low ceiling and the standing stone effectively divides the cave in an eastern and a western niche.

The western niche contains a large, heavily used altar that was constructed in an alcove. Although the altar was described by Seler (2003:147) our survey recovered far more detail that needs to be set out to properly appreciate this feature. At present, the outer boundary of the altar consists of a constructed wall of which the upper two courses of stone are still visible. The wall, 3.24 m across, spans the natural opening to the alcove, effectively enclosing the interior space. The top course of stone is approximately 130 cm above the level of the cave floor and a rock strewn pile of rubble slopes up from the floor to the base of the wall. It appears that the pile of rubble is from the wall that either collapsed or was torn down [Figure 6]. If this is the case, then the feature in Pre-Columbian times may not have been an altar but rather a sealed chamber. Because of the enormous religious significance that the altar holds today and its constant use, there was no way of further investigating this possibility. Before the looting in the 1890s, Seler (2003:147) reports that there had been two large, red incense burners set in front of the altar.

In the center of the alcove, which is 158 cm deep, is an altar that consists of a number of rocks. A large piece of speleothem, 52 cm long and 15 cm wide, is lying on its side on the altar [Figure 7]. The altar, the rocks on the ground and the walls are heavily blackened from the constant burning. The altar and the rocks on the floor are also thickly encrusted in melted wax.

Figure 7: The altar described by Seler in Cave 2 is still heavily used today by the Maya as reflected in the candles and flowers on the altar. The white stone at the back is a speleothem.

²*Veladores* are candles in a glass container. They come in two sizes. The smaller candles are about 10 cm high and the glass container is wider at the rim than at the base. The larger *veladores* are made in a tubular glass container about 30 cm high. Some of the larger *veladores* have images of Jesus, saints or the Virgin of Guadalupe painted on the glass.

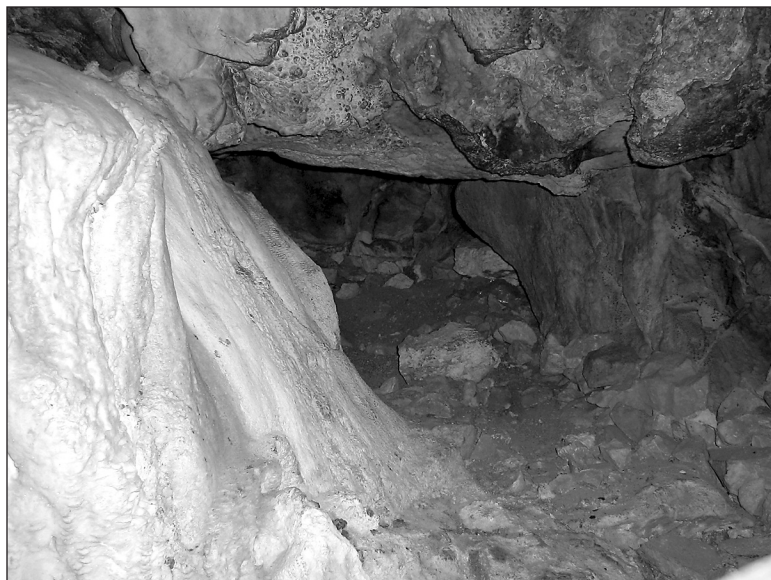


There are sherds of broken glass strewn across the floor of the alcove and the remains of at least four large broken *veladores*² could be recognized. Behind the altar were the bases of several plastic water bottles that had been cut in half to make containers to hold liquids. There was also a very rusted sardine can. At the back of the alcove there is an opening into another small chamber that has the only dark zone in the cave. At one time the opening had been blocked by a stone wall but that been knocked down. The interior of the chamber was badly disturbed.

On the western cave wall near the altar we found two simple rock art faces of a type that are frequently encountered in caves (Brady 1999). The two, one set above the other, consist of a horizontal line representing the mouth and two round circular indentations for eyes. The mouth of the lower face is 126 cm above the ground and the mouth of the second is 151 cm above the ground.

The eastern niche of the cave has a very flat floor which may have been leveled in antiquity. At the back of the passage,





there are signs of burning but not nearly to the extent that is present around the altar. A broken *velador* was found on the floor at the terminus of this passage [Figure 8].

Altar A

One of the more obvious of the features not recorded by Seler is an altar like construction built along the eastern chasm wall about 20 m north of Cave 2 [Figure 9]. The feature consists of a retaining wall, 112 cm high, constructed with 4 - 5 courses of unshaped stones. The retaining wall, 4.15 m long, spans a space between the cave wall and a large block of breakdown. The triangular space behind the wall, 3.07 m deep, was filled with dirt to create a level surface. A number of chunks of charcoal were noted on the surface of the soil suggesting that the altar had been used in modern Maya rituals.

Several lines of evidence suggest that this altar was of importance in ancient times. First is the position. The block of stone forming the western border of the altar is paired with



Figure 8: A view of the eastern niche of Cave 2.

another large piece of breakdown a little farther to the west and forms a “gateway” through which the path running from Cave 2 to Cave 3 passes. The path slopes downward approaching the doorway and drops again a little farther north. Thus, this altar is a landmark in the middle segment of the chasm between Caves 2 and 3. Finally, just in front of the retaining wall is a large stalagmite, 123 cm high. The formation is old and inactive but it is well documented that cave formations are often seen as deities by the modern Maya (Brady 1999). The stalagmite is the most prominent feature here because the stones of the retaining wall are braced against its backside so it protrudes from the wall and sticks up 37 cm above the wall at this point. At one time there were a number of stalactites above the stalagmite but all of these have been broken off and only stumps remain. Cave formations are associated with water and water is a sacred element so once again the altar is marked as a ritually important feature (Brady et al. 1997).

Cave 3

Of the three caves, Cave 3 is the only one that Seler mapped, reflecting the fact that it is clearly the most important feature in the fissure. As already noted, Cave 3 is located at the northern terminus of the fissure and sits in a natural bowl. The ground slopes sharply downward into this bowl on both the south and the west. Seler mentions in passing that the floor in the eastern branch of Cave 3 is level. As modern cave archaeologists we immediately picked up on this fact and noted that the first 5 m of the cave entrance and at least 10 m in front of the cave appears to have been artificially leveled [Figure 10]. In other words, the entire bottom of the bowl had been leveled. Along the eastern wall of the fissure just in front of Cave 3 there is a small chasm 9.5 m long that descends 2-3 m to Caves 7 and 8. These caves will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3. The western wall of this small chasm is formed by stone retaining walls on either side of a larger breakdown boulder. This offers clear evidence that at least part, but probably all, of the leveled area is an artificial construction.

Along the western side of the base of the bowl is a natural feature that we labeled Altar B [Figure 11]. The altar is formed by a large block of breakdown with a large, flat surface facing upward. That surface is 316 cm long, varies between 73 and 104 cm deep and is 131 cm above the ground surface. A large piece of speleothem, 36 cm long and 17 cm wide, has

Figure 9: Altar A consists of a retaining wall constructed behind a large stalagmite. Filling behind the wall created a flat raised surface.



Figure 10: The broad, flat area in front of the entrance to Cave 3 is an artificial construction.

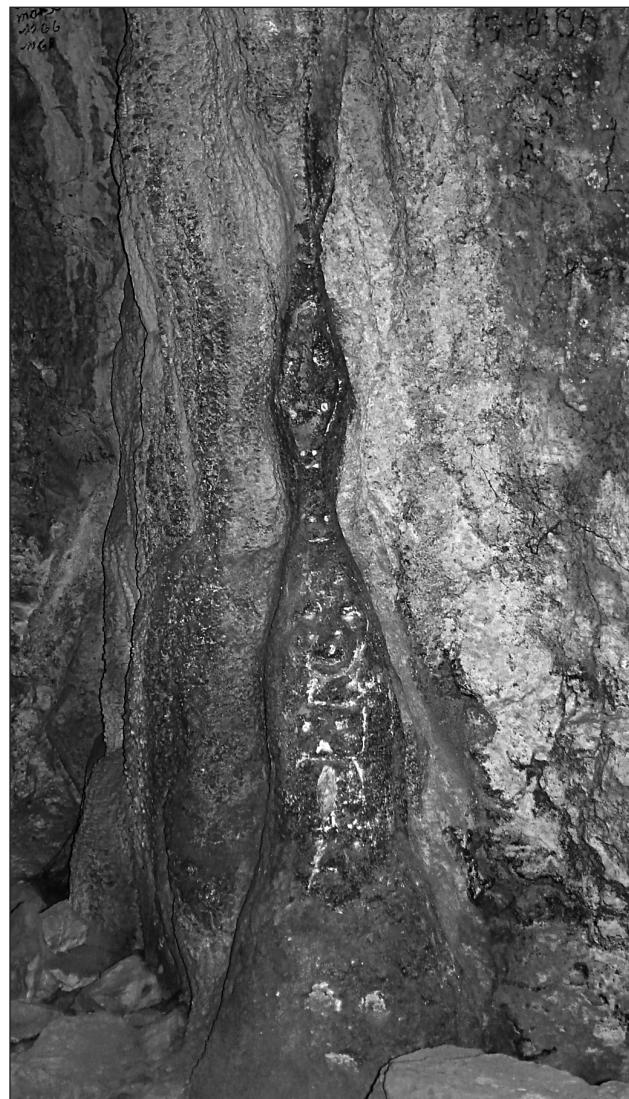
Figure 11: Altar B is a natural rock outcrop with a flat shelf. A piece of speleothem has been set on the left hand side of the altar.



been placed on the altar. After descending into the bowl, the Jalkatec prayer leader (*alcade rezador*) who accompanied our project immediately recognized this as an altar, lit candles on it, and petitioned permission here before entering Cave 3 itself.

Our restudy documented a number of additional elements related to Cave 3 that were not mentioned in Seler's report. Two panels of rock art were discovered. The first is pecked into eastern cave wall as one descends from the south along what appears to be a badly deteriorated stairway. A number of pecked faces, consisting of a horizontal pecked line to indicate the mouth and two roughly circular indentations for the eyes, are present. On the eastern cave wall, just inside the drip line of Cave 3, we noted a series of crude faces pecked in a flowstone curtain. The rock art started 19 cm above the ground surface and ran to 172 cm above the ground. We counted a total of seven faces, a number of which had been retouched with a machete [Figure 12].

Figure 12: Rock art faces, retouched in recent times with a machete, were placed along the eastern wall at the entrance to the cave.



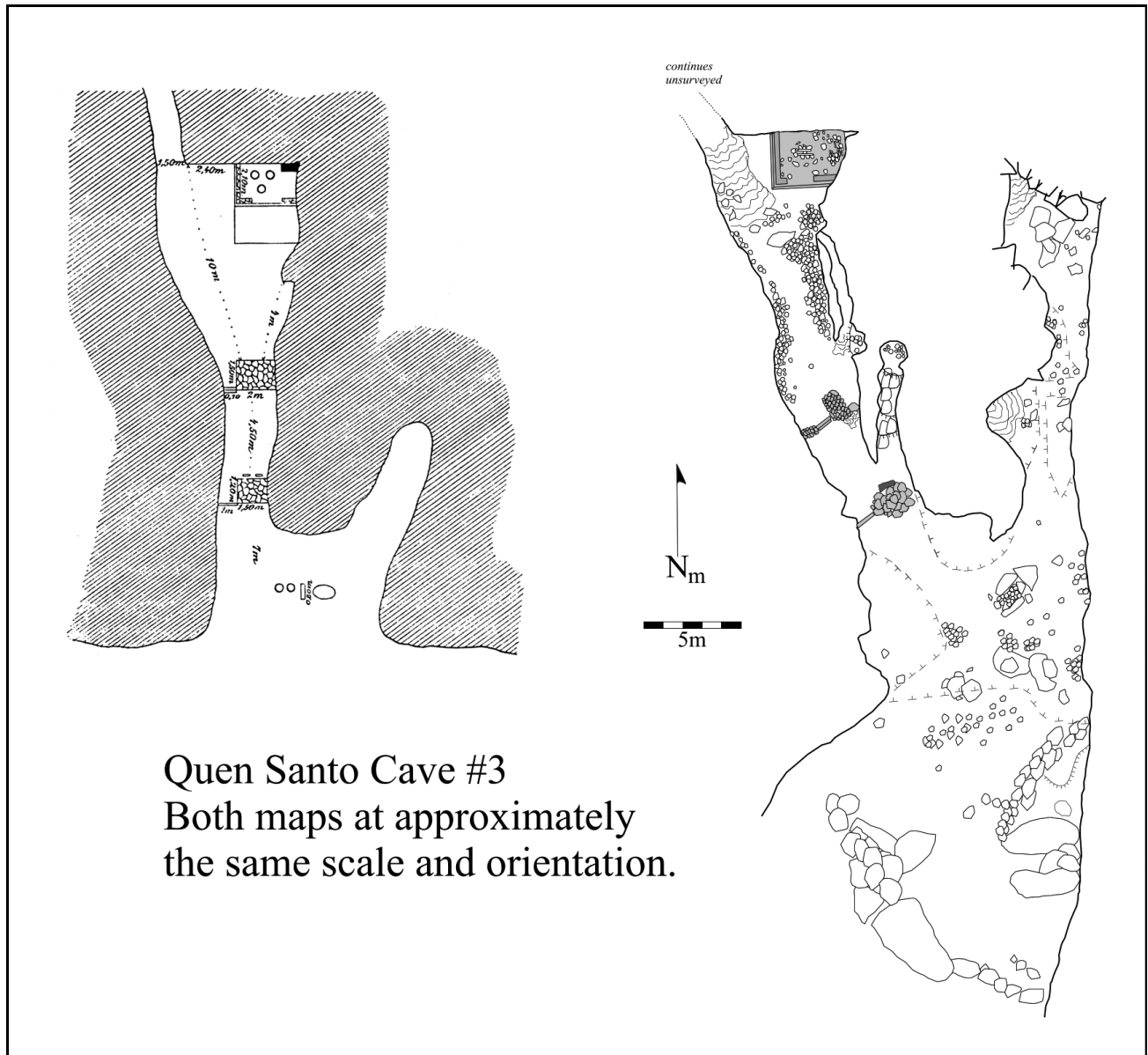


Figure 13: Seler's map of Cave 3 (left) recorded the general form and orientation of the passages as well as the cultural features but appears to have underestimated the size and captured far fewer details than the map by Allan Cobb.

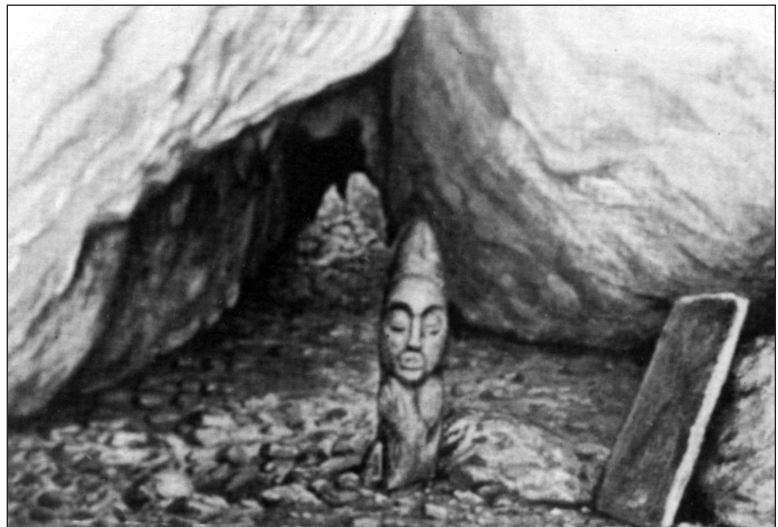


Figure 14: This drawing shows one of the two sculptures and large slab of stone that were set up at the entrance to Cave 3 at the time of Seler's visit.

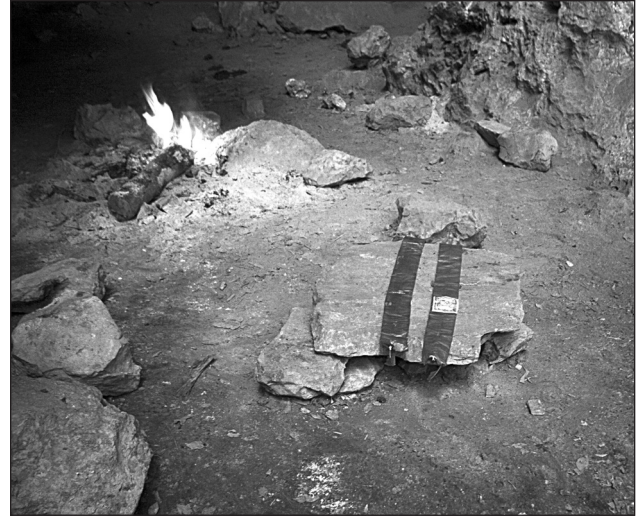
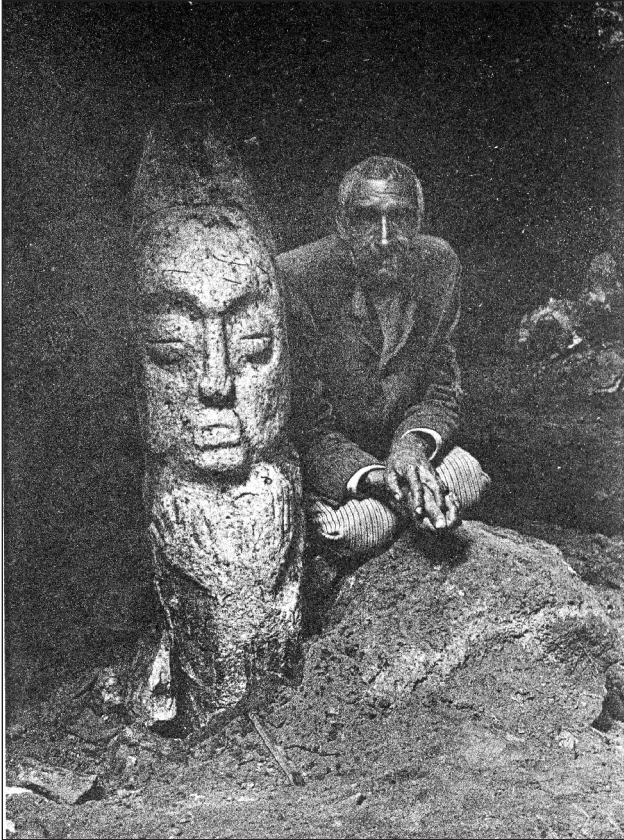


Figure 15 (left): Seler's photograph of the sculpture at the entrance to Cave 3.

Figure 16 (below left and right): These two sculptures at the finca house are said to have come from Cave 3 and one may possibly be the one that Seler had carried from the cave.

Figure 17 (above): This table altar is located at the entrance to Cave 3 just in front of the hearth. Two strings of firecrackers have been laid across the altar in preparation for the ceremony of thanksgiving at the end of the project.



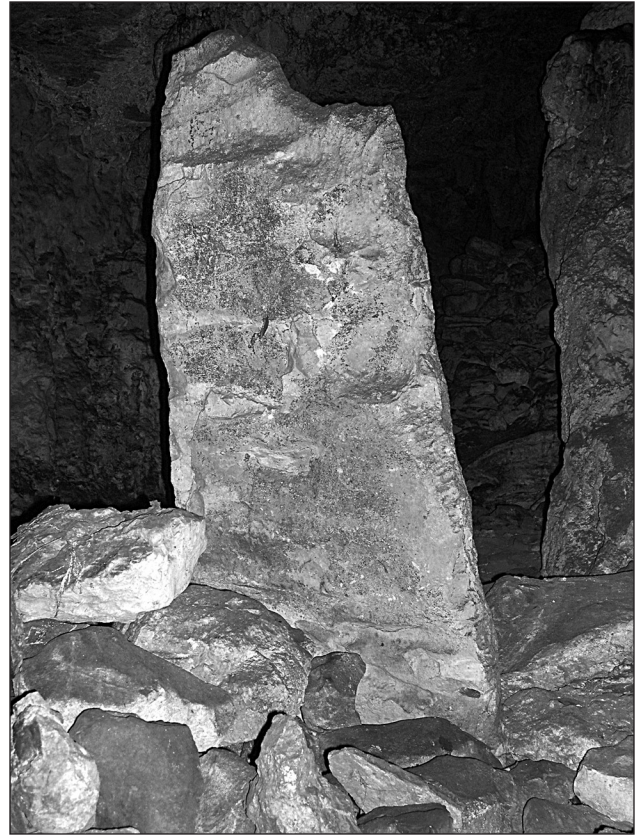
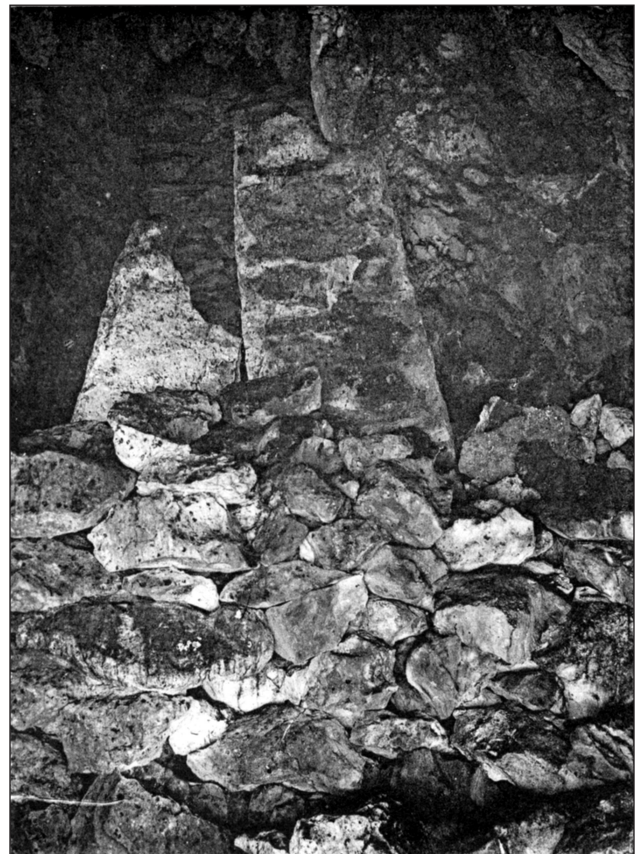


Figure 18 Left: This photograph shows the modern condition of the first wall in Cave 3 with the large slab of stone or stela set up at the rear of the wall in the same position recorded by Seler. Right: A closer view of the stela with the upper corner missing.

Allan Cobb's remapping verifies that Seler's original map captured the general size and orientation of the cave [Figure 13]. At the entrance to the cave, Seler observed two stone sculptures and a flat, stela-like slab of stone 2 m high by 80 cm wide [Figure 14]. One of the sculptures was photographed [Figure 15] while Seler (2003:147) says of the other only, "The other image I had dragged off on the backs of my Indians to the *hacienda*, planning to take it to Europe, although the owner of the land, Mr. Kanter, decided to keep it." The second image may be one of the two sculptures at the current *finca*³ house that are said to have come from the cave [Figure 16]. No sculpture is presently found at the cave but people that came to the cave to conduct a ritual said that two statues were still there in the mid-1980s.

Just inside the drip line of the cave, in the general area when the sculptures had formerly been set up, there are several modern features. One of these is a large hearth.

Figure 19: Seler's photograph of the first wall took a half hour exposure and was lit by candles. The stela in the rear had the corner missing even at that time.



³*Finca* is a term used in Guatemala to refer to a large farm or plantation. In his quote, Seler refers to it by the more Mexican term *hacienda*.

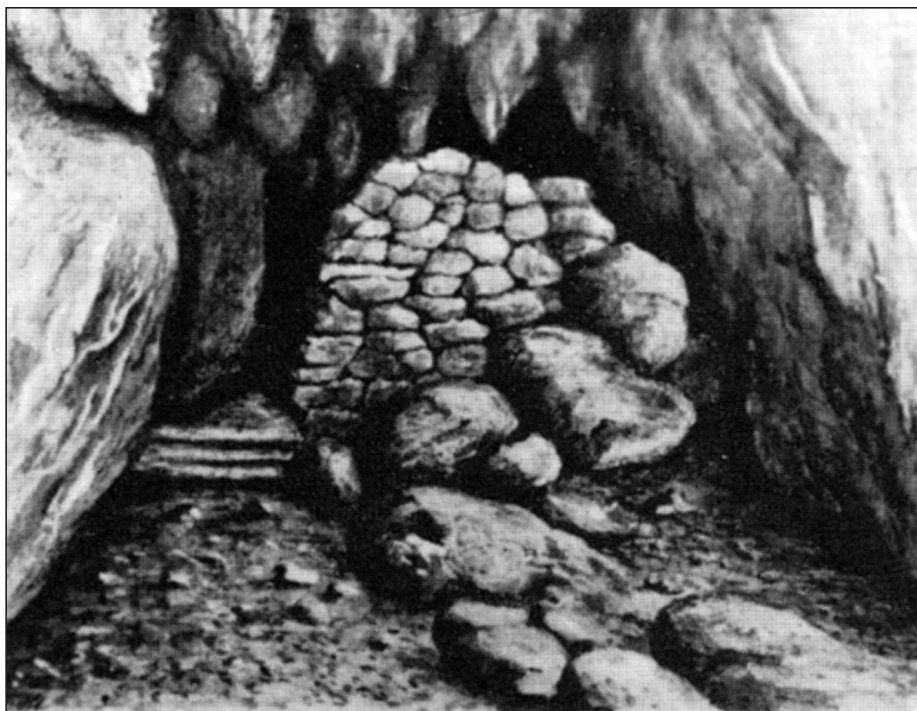
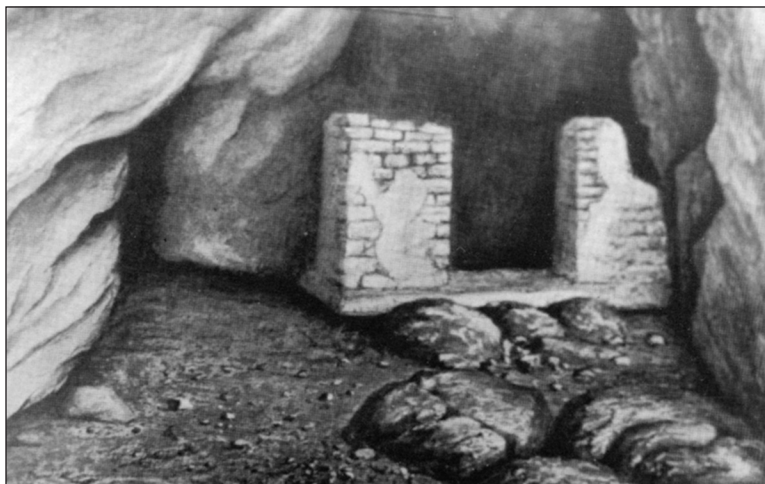


Figure 20 Above: Seler provides a drawing of the second wall in Cave 3. Below: The photograph taken during our project shows the wall to be essentially unchanged from Seler's visit over a century ago.



Figure 21: This drawing by Seler shows the red-painted “temple room” as it looked in the 19th century.

Fire is so intimately tied up with ritual that the K’iche’ refer to ceremonies as “burnings” (Cook 1986:139) and the places where they take place as “burning places” (*quemador*) (Bunzel 1952:431), so this is likely a powerful place although we did not see it used frequently. In front of the hearth is a flat slab of stone, 86 x 23 cm and 10 cm thick. It sits 23 cm off the ground on three stones. This appears to have been a *mesa* [Figure 17]. We were told that we could not eat our lunches on it but later in the project one of our guides sat on it.



Some 7 m beyond the entrance, the cave splits into an eastern and a western passage. On the western side, the passage slopes slightly upward and is partially blocked by a wall of dry laid, but well-set, unshaped stones. The wall is 1.5 m high, 3.1 m long, north to south and 1.2 m thick. The wall directs traffic through a meter wide passage along the western cave wall and there is a single step upward at the beginning of the wall. At the back of the wall a flat slab of limestone 1.51 m high, 72 cm wide and 9 cm thick at the base has been vertically set up like a stela [Figure 18]. One of the corners was missing at the time that Seler recorded it and the piece appears to be unmoved from that time. Seler mentions a second slab, 2 m tall that we did not see but which is shown in his photograph [Figure 19].

The floor beyond the first wall slopes gently upward to a second, more formal wall [Figure 20]. The access way is once again along the western cave wall, in line with the previous passage. There are two steps connected with this wall, the first rising 20 cm and the second 17 cm. The wall is 197 cm high, over a meter thick and runs for 2.5 m north to south. Because the floor slopes upward, the walls are high enough to block vision of anything beyond the wall. The access along the western wall also sets up a dramatic entry into the third chamber.

On entering the third chamber, one is immediately confronted with a stuccoed, masonry structure built into the northeastern corner of the chamber [Figure 21]. The room actually consists of only two walls, on the northern and western sides, that utilizes the natural cave wall for the southern and eastern sides of the chamber. The structure is set on an ancient platform 368 cm east to west, 272 cm north to south and 52 cm high. The walls of the room do not sit flush with the edges of the platform but are indented about 10 cm. The western wall is 170 cm high while the southern wall is 211 cm high. There is a doorway, 148 cm wide, in the southern wall. At the time of Seler’s visit the stucco on the walls was still painted a deep red. The stucco today is white and the top two to three courses of stone at the top of the wall of the room do not match stones below them. This suggests that the Maya may have refurbished this building during the last century [Figure 22].

Unfortunately, the “temple room,” as Seler calls it, had been looted only a few years before by *ladinos* but using an informant who had been present at the event, Seler provides a reconstruction of the original setting [Figure 23]. In the doorway were “ceramic jaguars as large as dogs” (Seler 2003:151). Behind these were six large, pronged incense burners with elaborately modeled faces. The *finca* owner, Gustav Kanter, who appears to have looted the structure, had the largest of these at his house until it was broken. Seler recovered the central fragment of the face and provided an illustration [Figure 24a]. Kanter also gave Seler another of the intact incense burners, which was painted with blue stripes and had calcium carbonate adhering to it in some places. At the rear of the chamber were two stone figures. Seler recovered fragments of one of these and restored it in Berlin [Figure 24b]. In the center between the sculptures was a perforated stone with a carved face. Plain bowls were also packed in along the floor [Figure 25].

Most of the data concerning the final chamber are Seler’s for several reasons. The area described by Seler has not changed greatly except that the contents of the “temple room” are all completely missing as are the sculptures that he described. In this respect, his descriptions of the context that existed over a century ago simply cannot be matched today. Today, the room is dominated by a wooden cross that has been set up behind an “altar” that is a low jumble of stones [Figure 26]. A second, badly rotting wooden cross, leans against the back wall of the room, just behind the main cross.

Dating

Our project did not conduct any excavations that might have revealed a deep stratigraphic sequence. A few sherds from the surface of Caves 1 and 3 were collected and shown to Dr. Marian Hatch who placed them within the Late Classic. The date is in basic agreement with the dates of A.D. 874 for Sacchana Stela 1 and A.D. 879 for Sacchana Stela 2 from Quen Santo (Kowalski 1989:177). Navarette and Martinez (1977:64) mention that they recovered Late Classic ceramic from Quen Santo as well as Tohil Plumbate dating to the



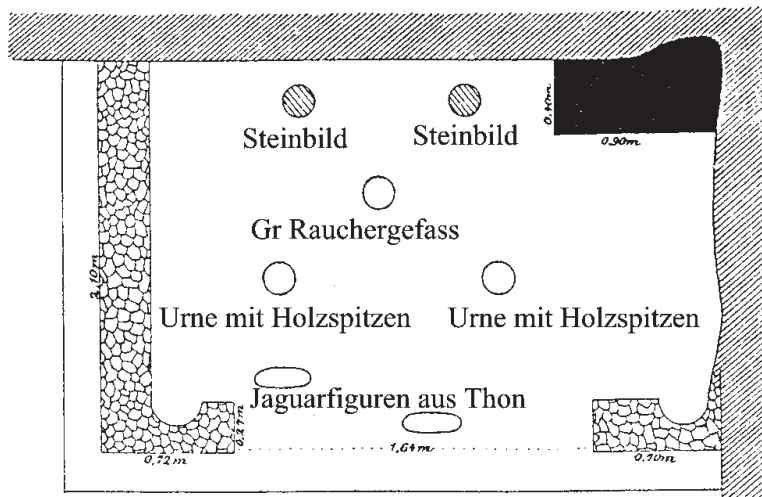
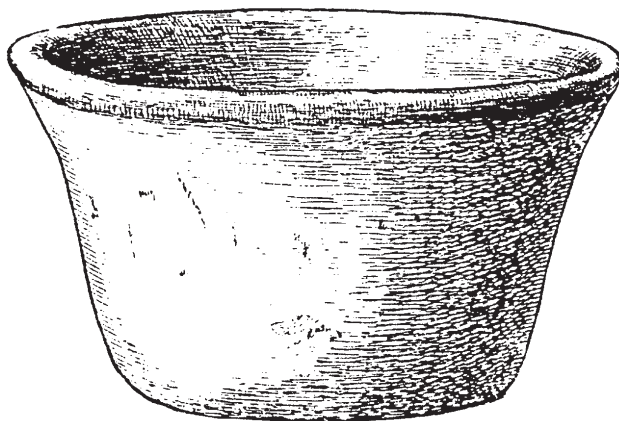


Figure 22 (facing page): Photographs taken during our project show the room to be little changed from that time.

Figure 23 (above): This drawing by Seler provides a reconstruction of the layout of the most important artifacts in the “temple-room” before it was looted in the 1890s.

Figure 24 (right): Top: This stone sculpture stood at the back of the room. It had been smashed but Seler recovered the fragments and restored it on his return to Berlin. Bottom: Seler provides this drawing of the appliqué face that was attached to the central incense burner in the “temple-room.”

Figure 25 (below): A number of plain bowls of this general type filled the floor of the “temple-room” when it was first discovered.



Early Postclassic. They also date the crossed-arm pose of several of the Quen Santo sculptures to the Late Classic (Navarette and Martinez 1977:63). Baudez and Mathews (1979:3) date the style more widely from the Middle Late Classic to the Early Postclassic.

Discussion

The glimpse that Seler provides of the caves of Quen Santo is both tantalizing and frustrating. Tantalizing because of the architecture and preservation of an incredibly rich artifact assemblage but frustrating because Seler could never quite appreciate the importance of what he was seeing. Certainly there were clues. He had a premonition that the entire site was somehow named after the caves; he recognized the relationship between the caves and surface architecture, and he documented the architecture and monumental sculpture. In the end, his own preconceptions prevented him from accepting the caves as anything more than storerooms. Seler appears to have shared a widespread Eurocentric view of caves that grew out of the raging battle over evolution. Evolutionists were excavating in caves for fossil evidence of pre-modern humans to support their argument. Caves came to be seen not simply as places of habitation but habitation at a low, primitive, or even pre-human level. At the very time that Seler was working in Guatemala, we see this attitude

Figure 26: The “temple-room” today contains a large wooden cross hung with pine branches. An older cross leans against the wall just behind the first.



illustrated in Henry Mercer's (1896) excavations in caves in Yucatan in search of Pleistocene human remains. Thus, it is not surprising that Seler had difficulty in understanding how the caves could play an important role at a highly developed, sophisticated site like Quen Santo.

Simply by applying more recent understandings of ancient Maya cave use, our very superficial restudy of the site and caves allows us to advance a very different interpretation. Our discovery of additional caves documented that the relationship between caves and surface architecture noted by Seler occurs consistently and, therefore, must be accepted as deliberate. The fact that surface architecture is consistently and deliberately built over caves argues that the builders were linking the site and the caves. The caves, therefore, must be considered as part of the site complex. Seler's site map suggests further relationships. At the northern end of the site, a formal masonry stairway leads from the plateau down to the level of the lip of the fissure [Figure 27]. There appears to be a wide flat path that leads to the fissure but excavation will be needed to determine if this is natural or artificial. At the very least, we can say that there is nothing else of note, other than the fissure, in the area of the stairway. Thus, it appears that the fissure was of such importance that a major architectural feature was constructed to facilitate access to it.

We have argued further that the fissure represents a single ritual complex. This is very much in accord with ethnographic data collected by members of the project. Quen Santo is an important modern pilgrimage center that draws worshippers from Mexico as well as from the Chuj, Jakaltek, and Kanjobal speaking areas of Guatemala. Modern pilgrims descend into the chasm on the south and first visit the smaller Cave 2 where they solicit permission to continue and make offerings at Cave 3. Thus the caves are linked as two stops in the pilgrimage circuit.

This conclusion is even clearer in the archaeological evidence. Close attention was paid to the natural environment. The sheer walls of the fissure demark it as a clearly bounded feature. A pathway along the eastern wall extends the entire length of the fissure tying it together. What appear to be the remnants of stairs were noted in the two places where the ground slopes precipitously downward. Our survey also recorded many previously unrecognized features including several altars and at least five caves not noted by Seler. The presence of these features changes our perception of the spatial organization of the fissure.

At the southern end of the fissure, Cave 2 is the only feature of ritual significance today and its importance pales in comparison to that of Cave 3. The discovery of Cave 4 just south of Cave 2 and Altar A just east of the entrance to Cave 4 suggests that these features constituted a complex covering the southern third of the fissure in prehispanic times. As a complex, the area would have been highly significant ritually and the two ends of the fissure would have been more balanced in their importance, although Cave 3 would still have been the most sacred area.

It is interesting to speculate on how the discovery of

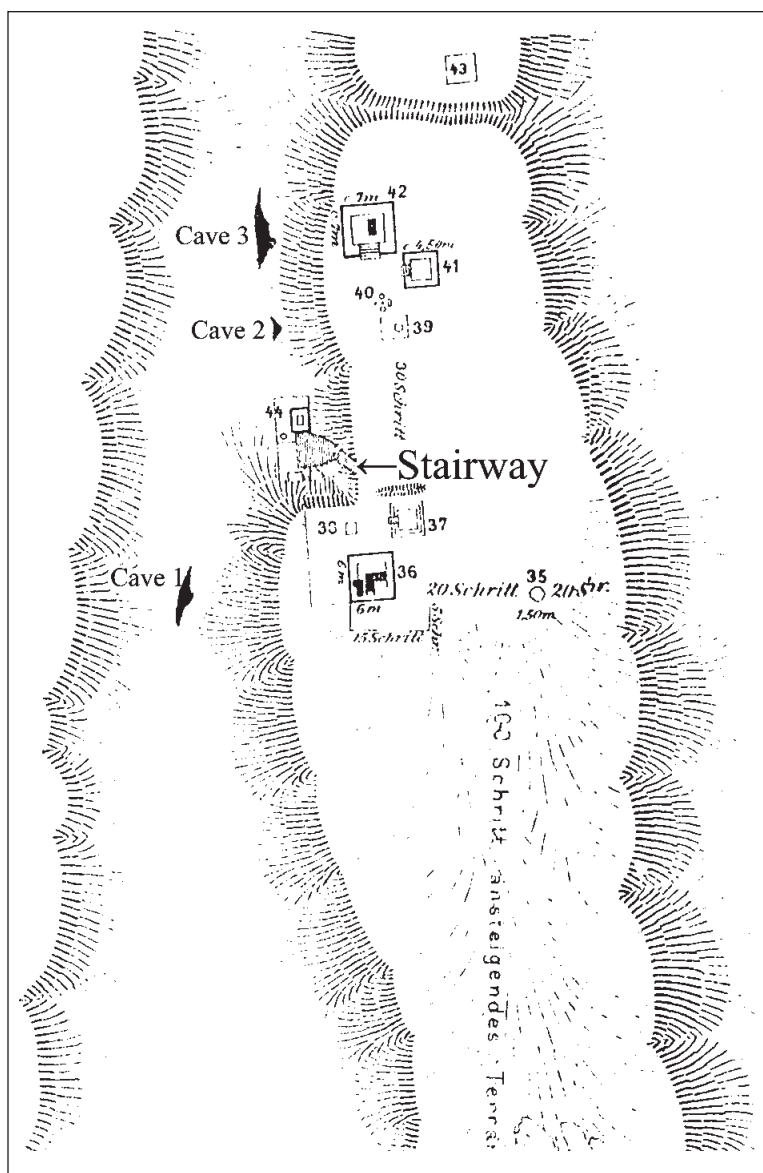
Figure 27: Seler's map of the site shows the location of the cave relative to surface architecture. A stairway leads from the site down to the level of the fissure.

Cave 4 might have impacted Seler's thinking because, in addition to being the largest of the new caves, it contains an elaborate masonry tomb (see chapter 3). The presence of burials appears to have been a matter of importance for early archaeologists. George Gordon (1898) proposes that Cave 3 at Copan was the scene of a religious cult because of the hundreds of burials in the third chamber. Thomas Joyce (1929) thought that a cave at Pusilha had been used as a garbage dump but held out the possibility of its having a religious function based on the presence of burials in the midden. The real shame is that the tomb might have been unlooted a century ago.

Our survey also altered our perception of Cave 3, which we now appreciate as a far more elaborate and highly modified complex. The large scale filling and leveling in the entrance to the cave and in front of the cave created a flat plaza area that runs up to the sharply ascending ground surface on the south and west. This created a flat stage surrounded by a natural amphitheater. The plaza area contains Altar B on the western side and Caves 7 and 8 on the eastern side. It is likely that these were preparatory ritual stops before one entered Cave 3.

While one cannot help but be impressed with the wealth of material Seler describes in Cave 3, his account must be critically examined. It was noted at the beginning of the chapter that while Seler acknowledged that the site had continued to receive visitation after its abandonment, no evidence of contemporary ritual activity was mentioned. Seler appears to believe that the reconstruction of artifacts in the "Temple Room" reflected a Pre-Columbian arrangement. We strongly suspect that this is not the case although no vestiges of any of the material described by Seler remain. It appears more likely that the material represented a collection of objects that had been brought to the cave as part of the continued use of the spot by the local Chuj Maya after the site's abandonment. Seler states for instance that, in addition to the more impressive objects that he described, the floor was packed with plain vessels. At the end of the 19th century, a remote area like Quen Santo still relied heavily on local ceramic production so many of those vessels may have been produced quite recently. The very simple form and finish ensures that they would have few if any temporally diagnostic features.

The items that Seler describes individually were a combination of elaborate prehispanic ceramics plus small and relatively unimportant stone sculptures. In other words, this



was a hodge-podge of material that does not resemble a functioning ritual assemblage that was abandoned as a unit in the Postclassic. Rather, this appears to be items assembled after the abandonment of Quen Santo by the people still visiting the cave. A similar process has been observed at Naj Tunich since it began receiving pilgrimage visitation in the 1980s. A number of intact ancient vessels have been brought to Naj Tunich, probably from other caves, and used to burn incense during ceremonies. The smaller sculptures noted by Seler may also have been moved to the cave by post abandonment visitors as has been documented at other sites like Tikal (Coe 1967) and La Milpa (Hammond and Bobo 1994).

If this is the case, how was the "Temple Room" actually used when the site was functioning? We simply do not know and the centuries of use since the abandonment of Quen Santo have altered contexts and destroyed evidence that may have once existed. Having stated that warning, however, we would like to cautiously lay out several suggestions. First, the cave is

an important regional pilgrimage site today. We suspect that when Quen Santo was at the height of its power, its draw would have been even greater. Second, Cave 1, which was clearly of less importance than Cave 3, held several large and important sculptures. While Seler does note the presence of sculptures in Cave 3, all are smaller and may have been set up there after the abandonment of the site. As the most important cave at the site, we suspect that the structure in Cave 3 would have held the largest and most impressive sculpture and that this would have represented the most important deity at Quen Santo.

One of the curious features of the structure in the "Temple Room" is a rectangular pit, 97 cm long east to west, 56 cm wide north to south, and at least 68 cm deep, in the floor of the northeastern corner of the room. The depth is a minimum because the floor of this pit was covered with trash, which we simply were not permitted by the local Maya to clean out. Because we could not remove the trash, it is also uncertain whether the pit articulates with a passage to the outside. At the very least, the pit is large enough to fit a person inside. We mention this because it appears to have been fairly common practice and to have a place where a person could hide and become the voice of a speaking idol. Cozumel Island is famous for its talking statute of Ixchel (Patel 2004:50) and it appears again with the Speaking Cross movement during the Caste War of Yucatan (Reed 1964). I would also note that there is still a documented tradition of divination and prophesy connected with caves in this area. La Farge (1947:128-129) notes that the cave of Yalan Na in Santa Eulalia is important as the source of prophesy which is given to the *acalde rezador*. Up until 1957, the *alfereces* of a village in nearby Chiapas went to the Cave of the Ancestors not only to ask for rain but also to consult with the ancestors (Nash 1970:22-23).

Because of Seler's ambivalence over the meaning and the function of the caves, he never addressed the issue of what segment or segments of society were utilizing the cave. His own statement that surface architecture had been constructed in relation to the caves logically implies that those who planned and directed the surface construction also had a stake in the cave as well. The incorporation of caves into core architecture has since Seler's times been noted at numerous sites in the Maya area (see Brady 1997:611-612; 2005:f11-f15 for a more complete listing) and Mesoamerica (Aguilar et al. 2005; Heyden 1975) so it should be considered part of a larger pattern and one should suspect that the alignment served political ends. This would imply that it was planned and controlled by the elite.

Our archaeological survey has reinforced that conviction. The evidence of large scale leveling at the entrance to Cave 3 represents a project that required labor recruited on the level of the polity. The discovery of the elaborate masonry tomb is also significant. Until this discovery, masonry tombs had been unknown in caves, with the exception of Naj Tunich where inscriptions on ceramics suggest that they held bodies of rulers (Brady and Stone 1986). It was also suggested that burials in more crudely blocked natural alcoves at Naj Tunich may have been early examples of a long tradition of elite cave burial at the site (Brady 1989). Greater credence

was given to this suggestion by the discovery of a series of looted Preclassic burials in blocked alcoves in Balam Na Cave 4. The presence of jade and pyrite within the rubble suggests that the tombs once held rich offerings (Garza et al. 2001). Nevertheless, lacking additional evidence, elite tomb burial was seen as at best a practice restricted to a small area in southeastern Peten (Scott and Brady 2005:268-269). Given the strong ties between tomb burial and royalty at Naj Tunich, it appears likely that the Quen Santo tomb also held an individual of great importance. While it is pure speculation at this point, the burial may have held the founder of the ruling dynasty.

All of the above points indicate that the area would have been controlled by Quen Santo's elite. The leveling of the plaza in front of Cave 3 and the amphitheater like slope surrounding the plaza suggest that large crowds could have been accommodated in the fissure for public celebrations that included the general populace.

Conclusions

The discussion above has documented the presence of cultural features throughout the fissure that tied it together as a functioning entity. The alignment of surface architecture with caves and the construction of a staircase from the top of the plateau down to the level of the fissure indicate that the fissure was integrally woven into the very fabric of the overall site. The fact that the surface site appears to be structured around the caves suggests that the fissure, in Angel García-Zambrano's (1994:218) words, formed, "the pulsating heart of the new town, providing the cosmogonic referents that legitimized the settlers' rights for occupying that space and for the ruler's authority over that site" We can glimpse something of that importance in the impressive modifications made to the caves and in the sanctity that they still command centuries after their days of glory.

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2

A Restudy of Cave 1 at Quen Santo

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Cave 1 is located at least 75 m to the southwest of the Cave 2 and directly beneath Structures 36, 37 and 38 on Seler's map [Figure 1]. Cave 1 is basically a rock shelter, 25 m long and 4 m high and is oriented roughly north-south. During the project's visit in 2006, the area around the entrance to the cave appeared to be only superficially impacted by looting. Our 2007 season found a number of looter's pits and the rock fill along one side of the cave had seen extensive movement. The presence of four looter's pits, one in outer part and three in the inner part, resulted in extensive destruction of much of the original archaeological context.

Even in the 1890s, however, the cave was not in a pristine state. Seler (2003:135) states, "Cave 1 was originally sealed by rubble but has been exposed for a long time. Many of the objects placed in this cave were probably removed." Among the objects removed were what he called a "stela with a sun-wheel" which the finca owner, Gustav Kanter, had set up at his house (Seler (2003:29) [Figure 2] and fragments of two stelae he found at a finca in Sacchaná (Seler 2003:7) [Figure 3]. Despite the looting, this small cave contained an impressive amount of stone sculpture in the nineteenth century. Seler's Plate 34 [Figure 4] pictures additional items such as two large sculptures, a large carved trough, and a series of smaller sculptures. The large sculpture of the "janus-faced" jaguar is 81 cm tall (Navarrete 1979:18) [Figure 5]. In his analysis of this figure, Seler (2003:135) once again repeats his opinion that the sculpture was only being store in the cave in saying that, "This image must have been preserved in this cave as a precious possession, when for some reason it was deemed unsafe to keep them in their original places." He also mentions a heavy concentration of incense burners [Figure 6], ceramics and other artifacts and also illustrates additional sculpture [Figure 7].

In front of the entrance to the cave is an

area gently sloping to the south with outcrops of natural limestone surrounding the crescent shaped entrance. A few meters in front of the entrance, a retaining wall follows the natural contour of the terrain and appears to fill a gap in the bedrock outcrops. This wall runs east-west, measuring 70 cm in height and 90 cm wide. The wall is constructed of

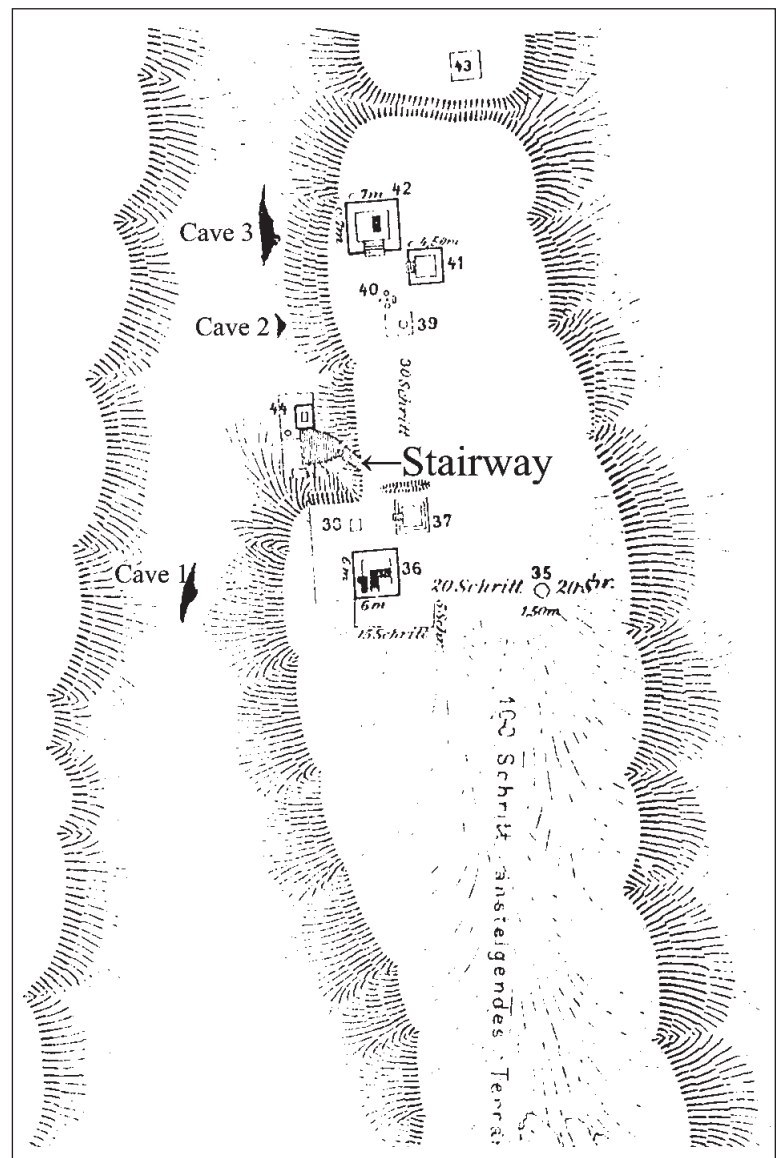


Figure 1: Seler's map of Quen Santo showing the location of Cave 1 and its relationship to site architecture.



Figure 2 (left): Stela that had been taken from Cave 1 and set up at the finca owner's house.

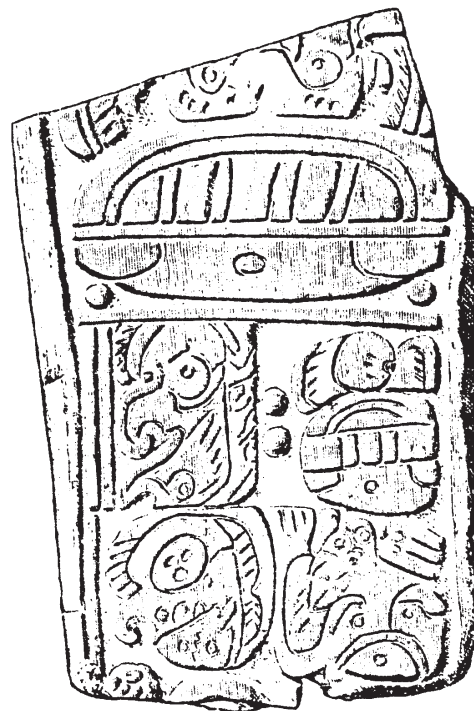


Figure 3 (below): Two fragments of stelae that Seler believes to have come from Cave 1 but which were at a finca in Sacchaná.

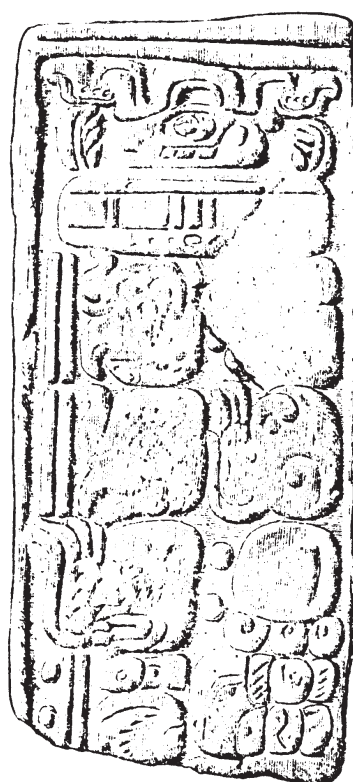




Figure 4: Plate 34 showing Cave 1 as Seler found it.

Figure 5: Drawing of the large, two-faced jaguar sculpture found in Cave 1.



unworked, dry-laid stone and has three rows of stone arranged horizontally in four courses set vertically [Figure 8]. It is apparent that it functioned as a retaining wall to prevent soil from eroding into the cave.

The cave itself has four chambers of various sizes and shapes [Figure 9]. The first chamber is the entrance. It consists of open area that runs north-south for a maximum of 15 m and is in the light zone. It leads into the second chamber where most of the archaeological material is found. Chamber 2, located on the western side of the cave is a small area separated from Chamber 1 by ceiling collapse that created a second access to the cave. Chamber 3 is a hole approximately 2 x 3 m located on the west side of the Chamber 1 and directly above the entrance to Chamber 2. The entry to Chamber 4 consists of an extremely small oval opening in central-west part of Chamber 1 that gives access

to a chamber of 2 m high by 2 m long.

Chamber 1 consists of an elongated space with several natural formations, some showing modifications or petroglyphs. It should be noted that this is the part of the cave receives the greatest amount of light and it corresponds to the highest density of archaeological material. The floor is covered with rocks of various sizes and mixed with ceramics. It appears that these rocks are part of the collapse of the walls at the entrance. Seler (2003:135) comments on this “rubble” which he also felt was from a wall that at one time had sealed the cave.

Two collapsed walls were documented at the entrance of the cave (Chamber 1) in the west and south. Wall 1 is positioned directly at the entrance on the west side of the chamber and consists of an elongated modification that spans almost the entire entrance of the cave. It consists of two or possibly three courses of dried laid stones. It is difficult to define the length and height of the construction due to the growth of trees that have changed the original structure [Figure 10]. Wall 2 is located at the entrance to the cave and runs perpendicular to the Wall 1 along the west side of the chamber. It is so badly collapsed that it is impossible to determine the height and width of the wall [Figure 11], although it is possible that it might have reached the roof of the cave. This wall is also built of dried laid stones of different sizes.

Seler (2003:143) discusses at some length the large quantity of broken ceramic in Cave 1. The large quantity of sherds still littering the floor of the cave in 2007 is impressive. No attempt was made to conduct a surface collection of this material. It is important to note, however, that particularly large quantities of sherds were noted around looter’s pits. This suggests that substantial subsurface deposits may be present.

Chamber 2, located in the western part of the cave, is no more than eight meters long and five meters high. The chamber is triangular in shape and ends in a series of formation that form a small niche where no archaeological material was found. The material encountered in Chamber 2 is similar to that in the main chamber. As in the main chamber, many rocks litter the floor but there is no apparent association with construction. The presence of ceramics is notable over the entire surface but the density was about half that of the main chamber. Rims and body sherds of both monochrome and polychrome vessels were noted. Red paint was found in dense patches on the North wall of the chamber and will be discussed later in this report.

Chamber 3 is a space 2 m by 3 m located

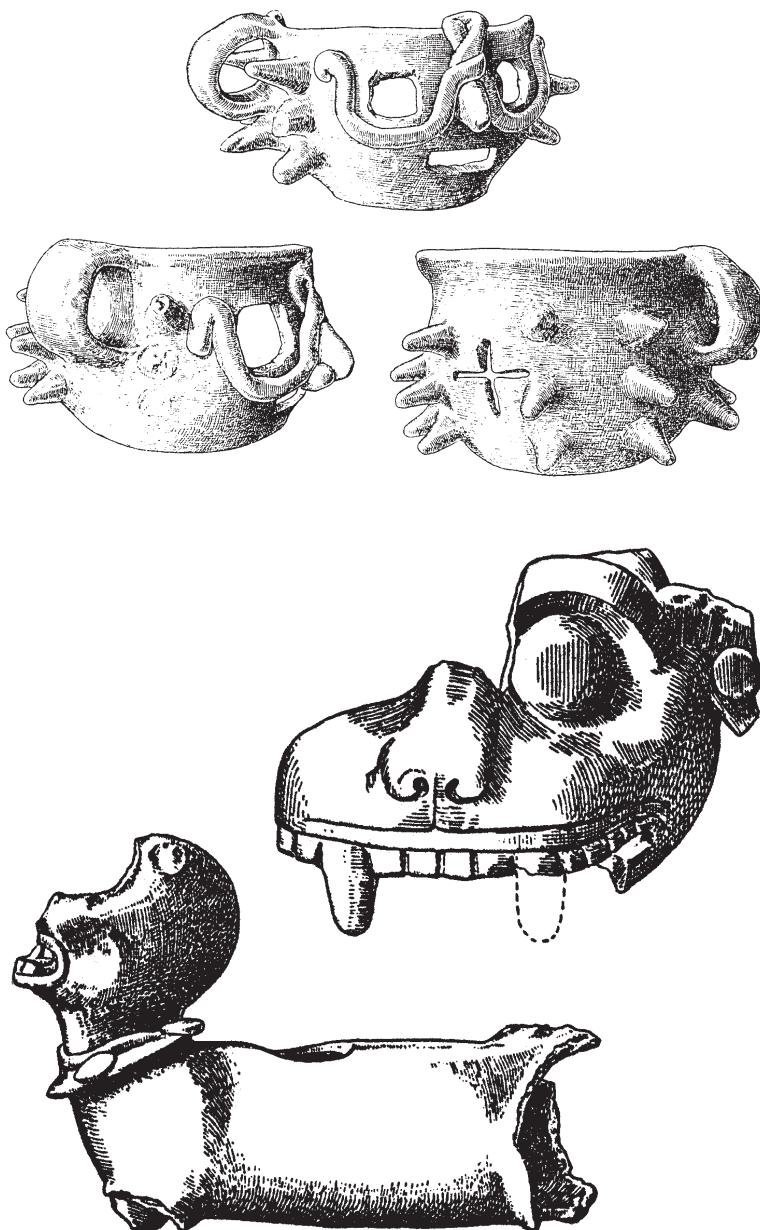


Figure 6: Some of the ceramic illustrated by Seler from the floor of the cave.

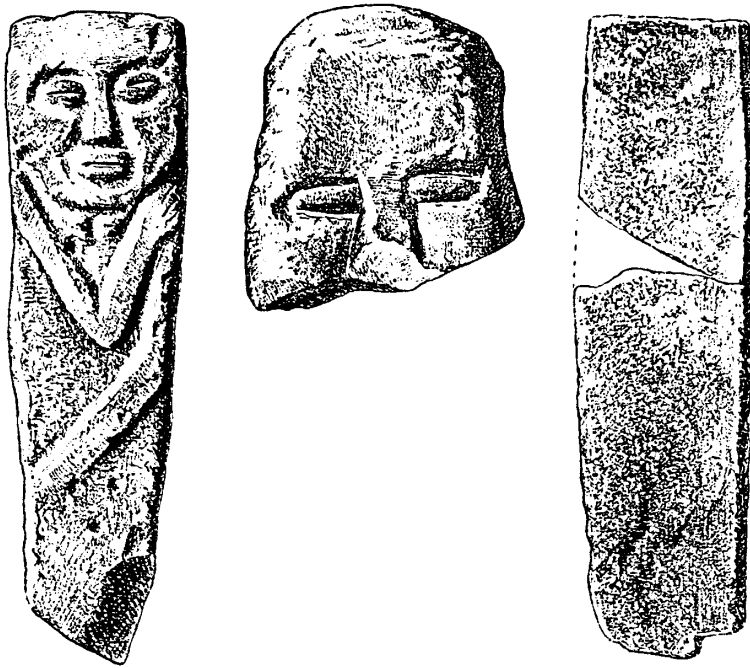


Figure 7 (above): Seler's drawings of other sculptures found in Cave 1.

Figure 8 (below): Wall just outside the entrance to the cave.

Figure 9 (right): Map of Cave 1.

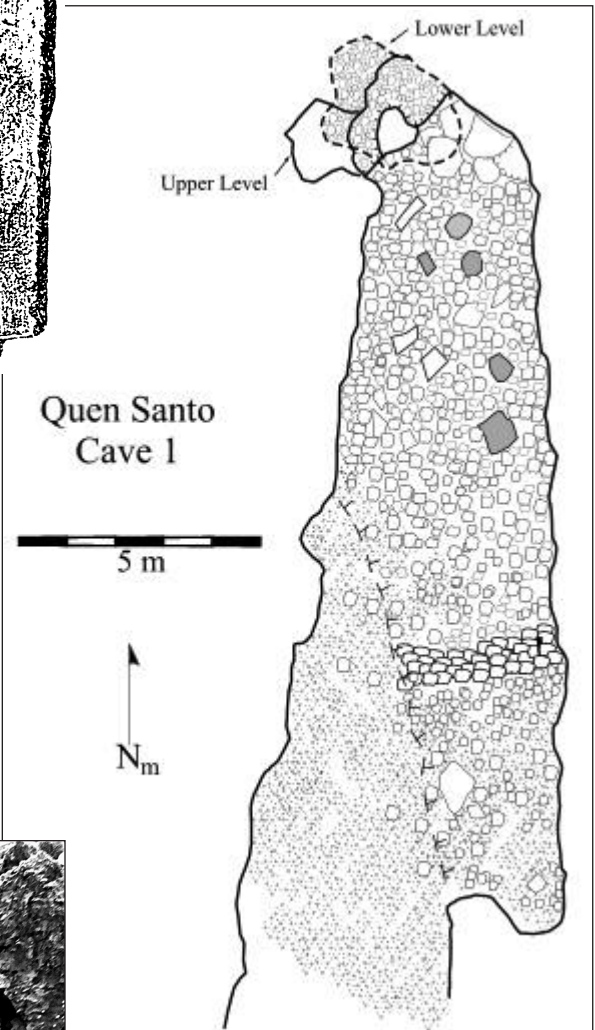




Figure 10: Wall 1.

the “rear of the cave” (probably Chamber 2) and discovered the burials of three badly deteriorated individuals that he describes as young males. One of the burials had a slate disk on its forehead. Two human bone rasps also accompanied the burials. Thus, human skeletal material was found buried in what appear to be intentional interments as well as on the surface.

Rock Art

Chamber 1 contains a good deal of rock art on both walls of the cave. Pecked faces, arranged for the most part in groups of three, vary in degree of elaboration. A number of stains on the walls of the cave appear to represent what might have been paintings in red and green with different patterns and designs.

above the entrance to Chamber 2. Access is from the western side of Chamber 1 along the southern wall. The survey conducted in 2007, noted that the chamber contains a low incidence of pottery but some bones.

The entry to Chamber 4 is accessed from Chamber 1 through an extremely small oval opening in the southern cave wall. It is the small chamber 2 m long by 2 m wide containing natural cave formations and layer of fine silt on the floor. No artifacts or evidence of use were found in this chamber.

A final note needs to be made about the archaeology of Cave 1. Seler (2003:135) notes the presence of “a few skulls” in among the stone rubble in the area where the sculptures had been set. He was of the opinion that they looked fresh. Seler noted the presence of “red staining” on one, however, which he attributed to mineral infiltration but this would suggest greater age. Seler (2003:135) also excavated at

Petroglyphs

Several faces have been pecked in the cave formations. In general, petroglyphs are located on rounded formations that give the faces a three-dimensional appearance. Seven faces, were distributed in groups of three except for one lone example. The individual example has been labeled Petroglyph 1, while the first group of three has been designated Petroglyphs 2, 3 and 4 and the second group Petroglyphs 5, 6 and 7.

Petroglyph 1 is a crude face located on a thin column with a bulb that forms the contour of the face on the east wall of the cave. The face measures 22.5 cm at its widest point, 10 cm at the narrowest and 20 cm high. The petroglyph faces south and is composed of three holes: two circular ones at the top that form eyes and an oval on the bottom to form the mouth [Figure 12]. An interesting aspect of this petroglyph

is its association with traces of red and green paint. The green paint covers the entire surface of the face starting at the top of the formation and continues to the bottom. The upper part is associated with spots of red paint.

Petroglyphs 2, 3 and 4 are located opposite Petroglyph 1, on the west wall of the cave and are facing northeast. Petroglyph 2, the first of the three, is small and located in the highest position. It measures 3 x 3 cm and consists of three circular holes that form the face [Figure 13]. Petroglyph 3 is the central face, located underneath Petroglyph 2 and above Petroglyph 4. A small protuberance gives curvature to the face with circular eyes and another portion of formation accentuates the mouth, a natural cut that has been enlarged [Figure 14]. The mouth is 8 cm in length. The face measures 10 cm wide



Figure 11: Wall 2.

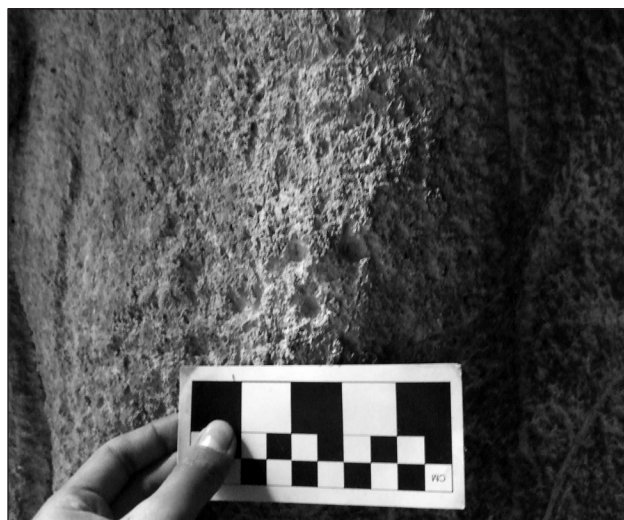
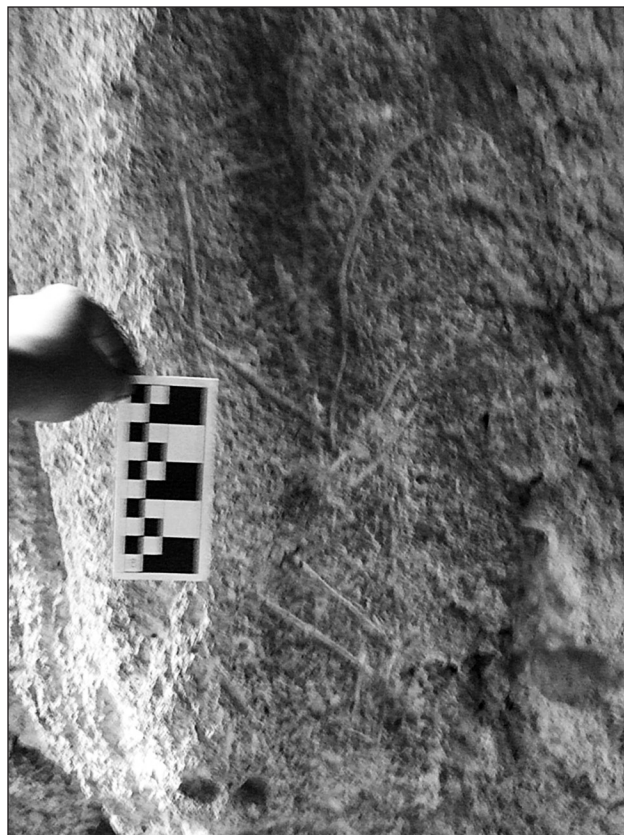
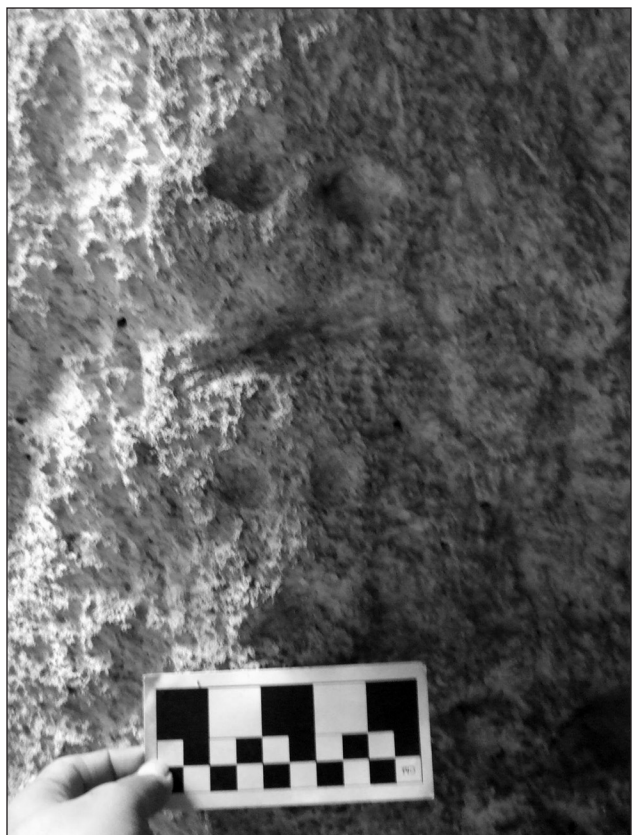


Figure 12 (upper left): Petroglyph 1.

Figure 13 (upper right): Petroglyph 2.

Figure 14 (lower left): Petroglyphs 3 and 4.

Figure 15 (lower right): Incised lines associated with Petroglyphs 2 and 3.



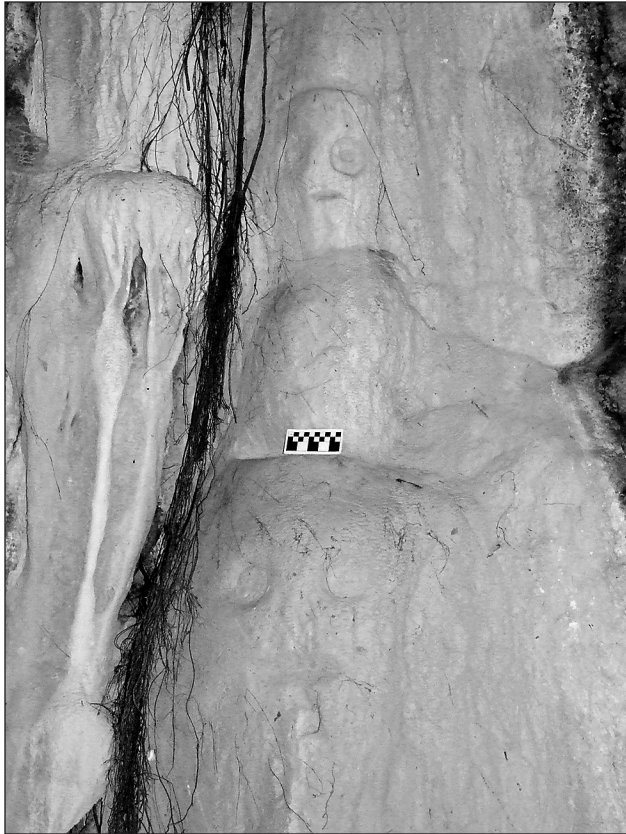


Figure 16 (above): Petroglyphs 5, 6, and 7.

Figure 17 (right): Petroglyph 5.

in the upper portion around the eyes, each of which measures 2.1 cm in diameter. Associated with Petroglyphs 2 and 3 are a series of shallow straight and curved lines incised into the column [Figure 15]. Petroglyph 4 is located directly underneath Petroglyph 3. It appears to be out of proportion with Petroglyphs 3 and displays a different style than the others. It measures 8.5 cm at its widest, 5 cm at its narrowest and 12 cm in height. Petroglyph 4 faces northeast and consists of three holes; two circular ones that forms the eyes and a triangular gouge that forms the mouth.

The Petroglyphs 5, 6 and 7 are located west the previous group on the west wall of the cave on a flat gray formation [Figure 16]. The arrangement of the petroglyphs is in a row similar to the previous three and facing northeast. In this case the smallest, Petroglyph 6, is in the center, and the largest, Petroglyph 7, is at the bottom.

Petroglyph 5 is a face located at the top of the formation above Petroglyph 6 and is oriented northeast. A large protuberance gives shape to a face comprised of two circular holes that represent the eyes and an elongated mouth. The interesting feature of this face is that the eyes contain two holes, making it a rather special discovery [Figure 17]. The petroglyph is 28 cm high by 20 cm wide. The eyes measure 4.5–5 cm in diameter and the mouth is 6 cm long. The central face, Petroglyphs 6, is located on a large protuberance, only



part of which was used for carving [Figure 18]. It measured 13 cm high by 7.5 cm wide and is composed of three circular holes 1 cm in diameter which form the eyes and mouth. Petroglyphs 7 is located on the lowest protuberance of the natural formation [Figure 19]. The face measures 29.5 cm at its widest and is 38 cm high. It faces northeast and consists of three deep cavities. Two circular holes at the top form the eyes and an elongated trough at the bottom forms the mouth. Petroglyphs 5 and 6 are pecked to a greater depth and because the formation is quite smooth and round the face is fairly uniform. These faces are associated with the remnants of red paint. During our first visit in the 2006 the formation containing Petroglyphs 5, 6 and 7 was dry but on during our second visit the formation was observed to be active.

Paintings

Along the two walls of the cave are a number of splotches of red and green pigment. According to Allan Cobb these are not a result water staining, but rather reflect the application of paint. On the east wall of the cave, paint is visible from the entrance starting after Wall 2. In this case red pigment is visible as patches of up to 2 meters high on the wall [Figure 20]. Further north, a combination of red and green is visible,

as scattered dots or circles on the walls. These circles are approximately 4 cm in diameter. As already mentioned Petroglyph 1 is completely covered with green paint. North of this petroglyph is a set of curtains that contain a number of red dots running along the formation and are only visible from the dark side of the cave [Figure 21]. The painting continues to the west, intermixing green paint with red dots and further on in Chamber 2 there is evidence of both colors on columns and formations.

The west wall of the cave also shows traces of paint, but unlike the east wall, patches of green are more prominent than the red [Figure 22]. Again the paint runs westward onto Petroglyphs 2, 3 and 4 (mostly green with red elements) and to the side of the formation of Petroglyphs 5, 6 and 7. This culminates in curtain formations with predominantly green paint [Figure 23].

It is interesting that Seler does not mention painting on the walls. As noted earlier, he does attribute the “red staining” on a skull to mineral infiltration so it is possible that he thought that the pigment on the cave walls was natural. On the other hand, Seler repeatedly notes that sculptures and even ceramics

in Cave 1 were covered with red paint. Likewise, he noted that the “temple room” in Cave 3 had been painted a dark red (Seler 2003:147). Given all of the intentional painting that was observed and the patterns noted, there appears to be little doubt that the wall painting was deliberate as well. The painting in some cases appears to be red circles on a green background. In other cases isolated patches may possibly be the remains of larger paintings that are no longer visible or have flaked off the wall. In some sections, pigment is visible but is very eroded and only traces can be seen. It is difficult to attribute any role to these paintings because of our inability to recognize a pattern.

Stone Disks

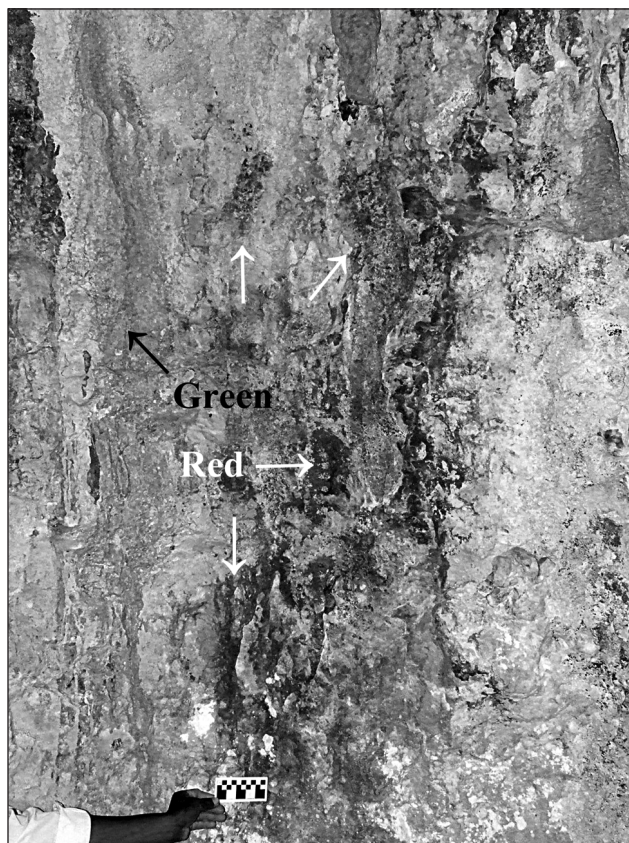
During the 2006 visit, a number of circular stone disks were noted on the floor of the cave. In 2007 many had been moved as a result of looting. A total of six disks, all made of worked limestone, were documented. The first was located in the outer part of Cave 1, just south of wall outside of the cave. It was the only disk not under the drip line of the cave and so was covered with moss. This stone is 33.5 cm in diameter and 10 cm thick. It is coarsely worked and is broken [Figure 24]. The second disk has a smooth, grey-brown surface, while the sides are not smoothed [Figure 25]. The disk measures 28 cm in diameter and 10 to 12 cm thick. The third stone has an eroded upper surface, nevertheless, its sides have been smoothed. This disk measures 46 cm in diameter [Figure 26]. The fourth stone has a diameter of 15.8 cm and displays working and smoothing on all surfaces



Figure 18 (left): Petroglyph 6.

Figure 19 (below): Petroglyph 7.





[Figure 27]. The fifth disk is 21.3 cm in diameter and shows smoothing on its upper surface. It has a slight depression in its center that contains an incised decoration consisting of a series of parallel and crossed lines. The sides of the stone are worked although not well finished. Along the edge, there is a circular hole about 5 cm in diameter [Figure 28]. It was only possible to observe the edge of the sixth stone since it is stuck vertically between a number of rocks. This stone is 18 cm thick and unlike the others it retains remnants of red paint [Figure 29].

It is uncertain how these stones were used. Seler (2003:135) mentions two disks, including a red painted one that he took to Germany [Figure 30]. He describes the other, which we did not locate, as, "A disk-shaped stone, measuring 25 cm. in diameter and 6 cm. in thickness, had on its top a circular groove and the remnants of dark red paint [Figure 31]. Above was a vessel illustrated in Fig. 214 [Figure 32] with its mouth downward and fitting into the circular groove of the stone. On this was balanced the large bowl with a boldly

Figure 20 (above left): Red pigment visible on the east wall of the cave.

Figure 21 (below left): Much of the red pigment was in the form of circles or splotches.

Figure 22 (below): In some cases red circles are painted on top of the green pigment.

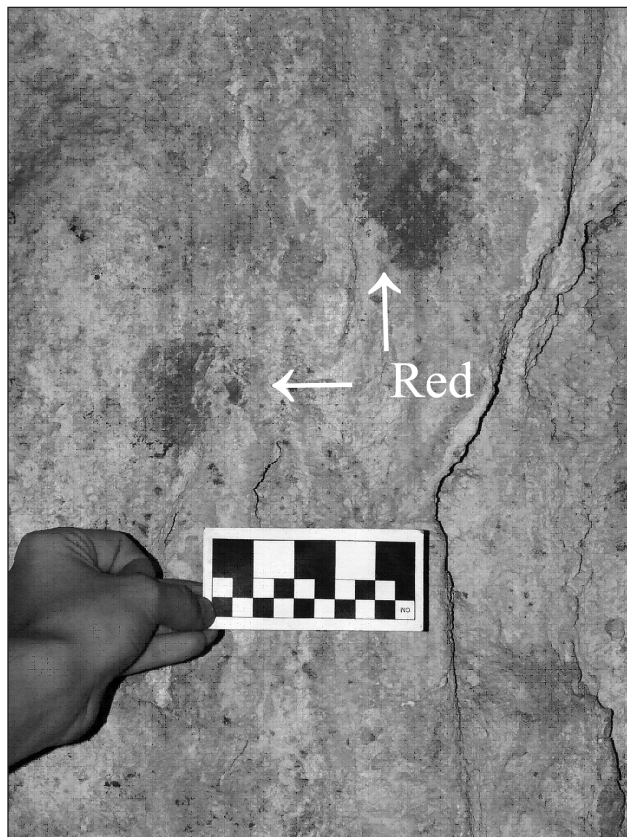
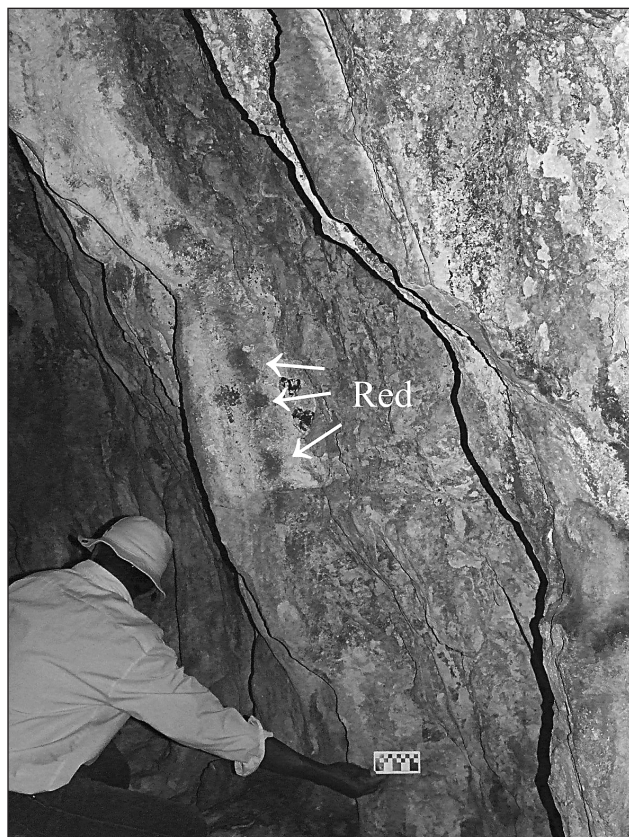




Figure 23 (above): Green pigment on the western cave wall.

Figure 24 (right): Stone disk 1.

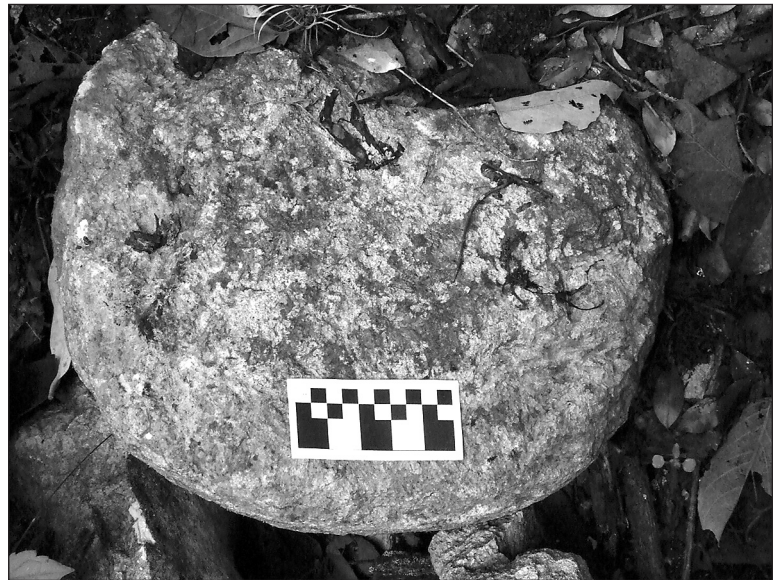


Figure 25 (below): Stone disk 2.

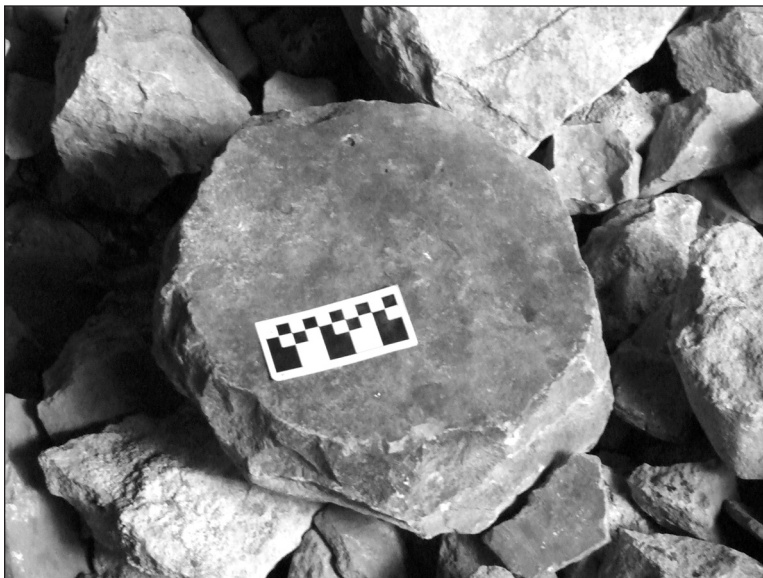




Figure 26 (above): Stone disk 3.

Figure 27 (left): Stone disk 4.

Figure 28 (below): Stone disk 5.





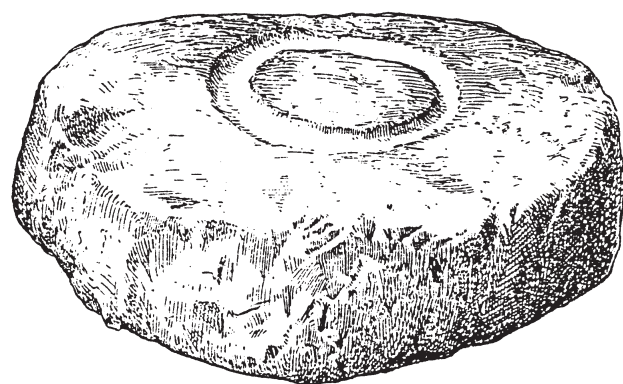
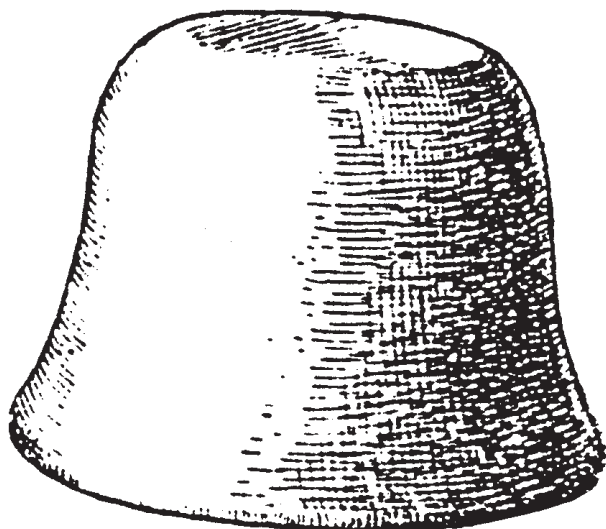
Figure 29 (above): Stone disk 6.

Figure 30 (upper right): Seler took this red painted disk to Germany.



Figure 31 (lower right): A second disk, also painted red, had a circular groove incised in the top.

Figure 32 (below): This vessel was set upside down on the stone disk with the rim of the vessel set in the groove.



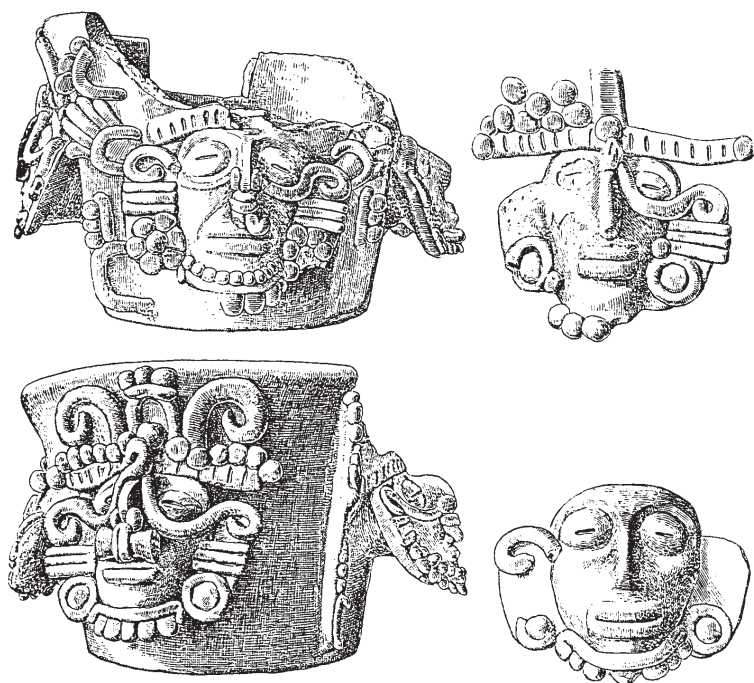


Figure 33: This *incensario* was set on top of the vessel pictured in Figure 32.

worked pottery *adorno* with the face of the deity of the west on four places below the exterior rim...” (Seler 2003:131) [Figure 33]. The fact that the *incensario* was broken suggests to us that the arrangement may have been set up by Chuj speakers in the area after the collapse of the site. If this is the case then we cannot be certain that Seler’s description reflects the original function of these disks.

Conclusions

The placement of architecture on the plateau in direct relationship to Cave 1 signifies, as it does with Caves 2 and 3, that the feature was of importance to the entire polity. The placement of architecture immediately above the cave is interpreted as further elaboration of a complex around this sacred landmark. Finally, the corpus of large sculptures in the cave is a further indication of elite involvement and enhancement of the site. Taken together, it is clear that Cave 1 was a highly significant feature within the larger site of Quen Santo.

Having made this point, one must also note that Seler, because of the large corpus of sculptures, blew the significance of Cave 1 totally out of proportion. His translation of Quen Santo as “Cave of the Saints,” “Cave of Stone Images” and “Saints of the Ancients” (Seler 2003:158, n. 2) all were meant to refer specifically to the carvings in Cave 1. He says, “Cave 1 is in a large depression south of the land bridge identified as Structure 44. The name *Quen Santo* (cave of stone images) belongs here in the strictest sense” (Seler 2003:131).

As was shown in chapter 1, these translations are mistaken and if the name refers to only one feature, it is to Cave 3. It has also been shown that the architectural elaboration of the chasm in which Caves 2 and 3 are located far exceed that associated with Cave 1.

Seler (2003:135) expressed the opinion that Cave 1 had been sealed by what he referred to as “rubble” walls. Even at that time, however, he said that the entrance had been opened for a long time. The looting and destruction over the last century has made the function of these walls even more difficult to interpret. We would like to offer several possibilities. First, given Seler’s statements and our own observations, we think it likely that one or both of the walls went from floor to ceiling, which would have been important in blocking out most of the light that now enters the cave. Second, Wall 1 in conjunction with Wall 2 could have restricted entry to a small opening between the two walls. Finally, it is possible that

the two walls closed the entrance altogether and forced people to enter through a small opening in the ceiling at the back of the cave. The cave, full of large sculptures shown in Plate 32, would have been a dramatic setting if the construction plunged the cave into total darkness and the only lighting was supplied by torches.

In this same vein, the high frequency of petroglyphs and remnants of painting indicate that the cave itself was highly decorated although too little of the paint now remains to reconstruct the original pattern. Nevertheless, the picture that emerges of Cave 1 is of a highly modified feature that may have been enclosed with walls, paved with stone slabs and filled with sculpture. Access to the cave may also have been controlled by an architectural complex set on a shelf immediately above the cave. The evidence suggests that, although small, the cave was a significant sacred landmark for the site of Quen Santo.

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2003 *The Ancient Settlements of Chaculá in the Nentón District of the Department of Huehuetenango, Republic of Guatemala*. Labyrinthos, Lancaster, CA.

3

New Cave Discoveries at Quen Santo, Huehuetenango, Guatemala

C. L. Kieffer

During his investigations of Pueblo Viejo Quen Santo at the end of the 19th century, Eduard Seler (2003) documented three caves in the barranca that runs along the western side of the site. In August 2007, the California State University, Los Angeles Archaeological Field Project in Guatemala conducted a month long restudy of this site located in a relatively remote area of Huehuetenango, Guatemala near the town of Nenton. Five additional caves were discovered and mapped within a deep chasm, less than 100 m long, running along the site's western border that contained Seler's Cave 2 at the southern end and Cave 3 at the northern end [Figure 1]. Overall, the chasm gives the impression of being longer because the floor drops sharply as one moves from south to north creating a multi-tiered space.

Caves 5 and 6

Caves 5 and 6 are located in the western chasm wall. Both are small, only a few meters long, and low, less than a meter and a half high. Nevertheless, both contained cultural material in the form of ceramics. Because of their small size, neither was intensively investigated.

Caves 7 and 8

At the northern end of the chasm near the entrance to Cave 3 is a small trench about 10 m long along the eastern chasm wall. The western wall of the trench is a retaining wall indicating that much of the area at the entrance to Cave 3 was artificially leveled. The retaining wall was a deliberate and significant architectural feature of the leveling project because it was designed to preserve access to two small caves designated Caves 7 and 8 [Figure 2]. The surface of the trench contained a surprisingly high density of sherds and animal bone considering the current visitation focuses on Cave 2 and 3. Some of the sherds were heavily burned, and most dated to the Late Classic.

Cave 7, located at the northern end of the trench, is the smaller of the two caves and consists of two areas. The first is a north/south running space beneath a stone overhang. This space is divided into an upper and lower level by a stone shelf. The upper level is less than a meter high, and continues to the northwest where it appears to open into a small chamber approximately one meter in diameter beyond a restriction, but I was unable to reach that chamber. Both levels are in the light zone. A number of pottery sherds and a few animal bones were found on the upper shelf. A smoke

blackened spot, possibly from a candle was noted on the ceiling. The area beneath the shelf is over a meter high, and continues to the north and to the west. The passage to the west continues for a least a meter but is too narrow to enter. The area to the north extends no more than a meter but a large pottery sherd was discovered here. A recently burnt stick approximately 15 cm long, 2.5 cm wide and an empty beer bottle were also noted.

The second area of Cave 7 slopes downward about a meter into an inaccessible tunnel approximately two meters long but no termination was sighted. A single sherd was the only indication of ancient utilization. An empty beer bottle, an empty hot sauce bottle, and a fragment of glass from a *velador* indicated modern visitation.

Cave 8 is located at the southern end of the trench. The most noticeable feature in this cave is the smoke blackened back wall [Figure 3], with large amounts of candle wax buildup on the floor in front of it. This is clearly the focus of considerable recent ritual activity. The black and white candle wax appears to have flowed downward into a depression in the floor prior to hardening [see chapter 4 for a discussion of black and white candles]. An examination of the backdirt of a small looter's pit revealed three burnt pottery sherds, various small animal bones, two species of land snails, and a clear glass sherd. To the east of this pit, bones of a small animal (probably rodent) were discovered protruding from the soil. In addition to the burned material at the back wall; a hearth-like, fire blackened area was discovered between the looter's pit and the wall. Four burned marks, probably from candles, were noted along the eastern wall of the main chamber at various heights and intervals [Figure 4]. Only a single spot of smoke blackening, probably from a candle, was noted on the western wall of the cave under a narrow shaft that extended vertically 3 meters before turning and being lost from sight. A restricted opening in the western wall near the cave's entrance extends beyond what has been mapped was explored for an additional three meters. Three burnt sticks were found at the point where the tunnel becomes impassable indicating that someone had squeezed into this very narrow passage possibly to conduct some type of ritual.

Cave 4

The largest and most important of the newly discovered caves is Cave 4, located at the southern end of the chasm, just north of Seler's Cave 2 [Figure 5]. The cave has several

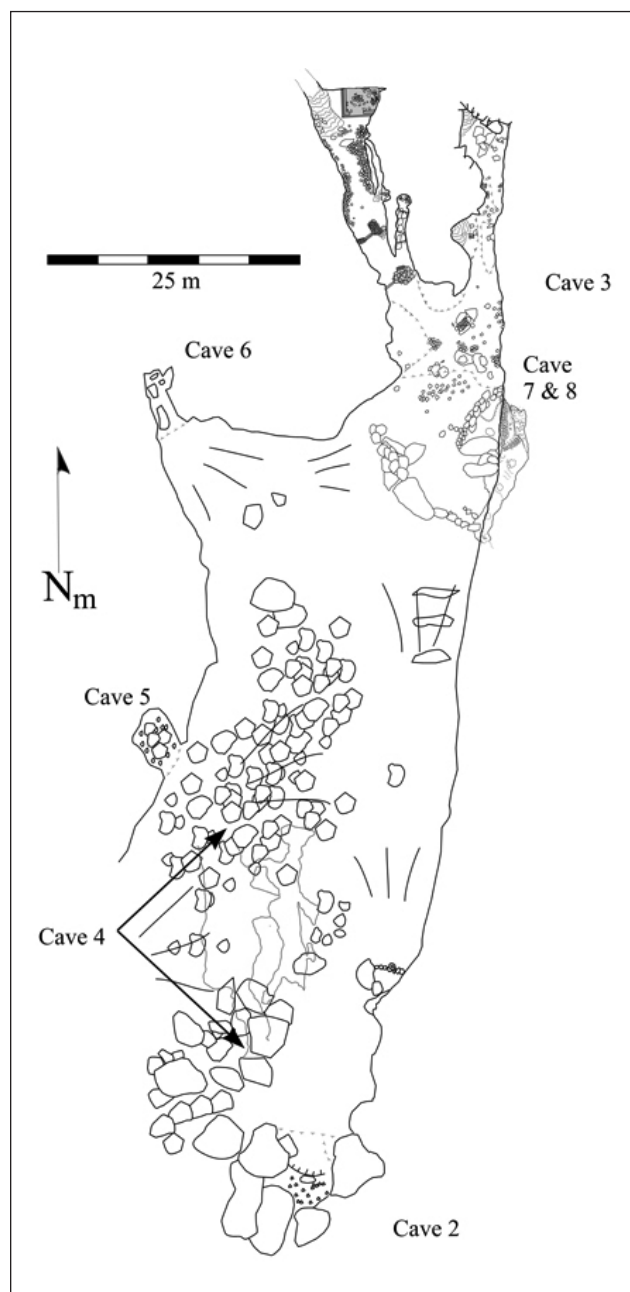


Figure 1: Map of Quen Santo chasm.

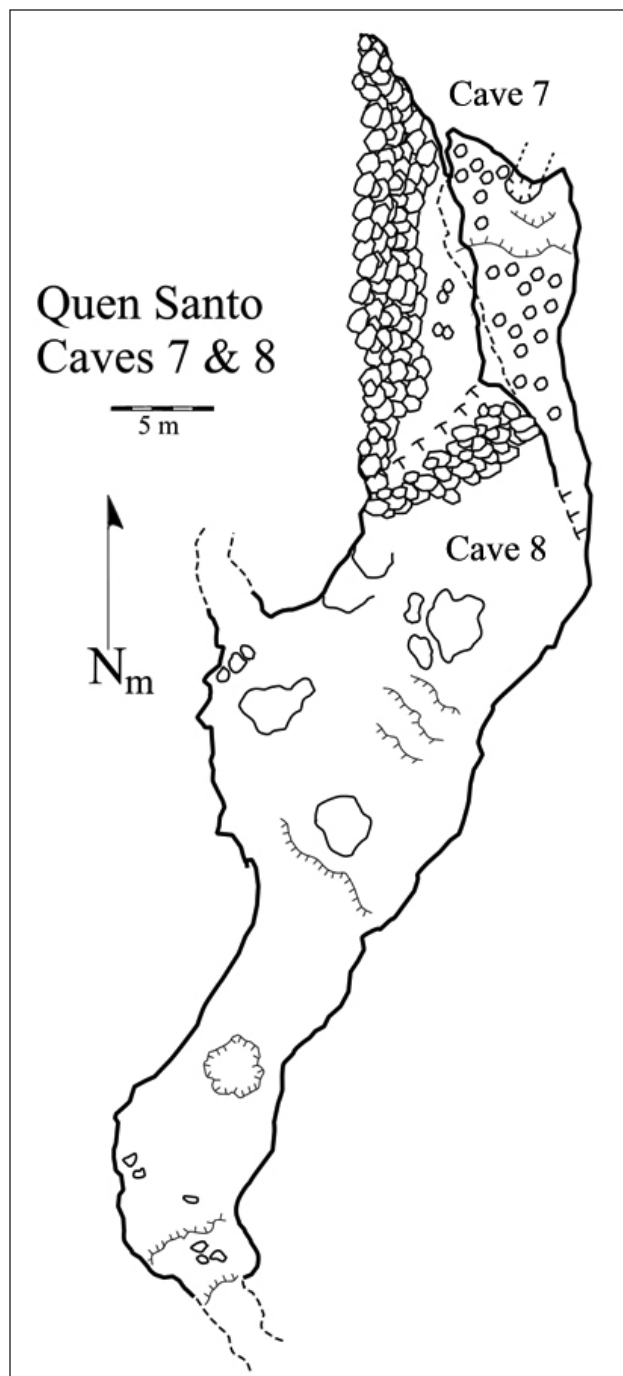


Figure 2: Map of Caves 7 and 8.

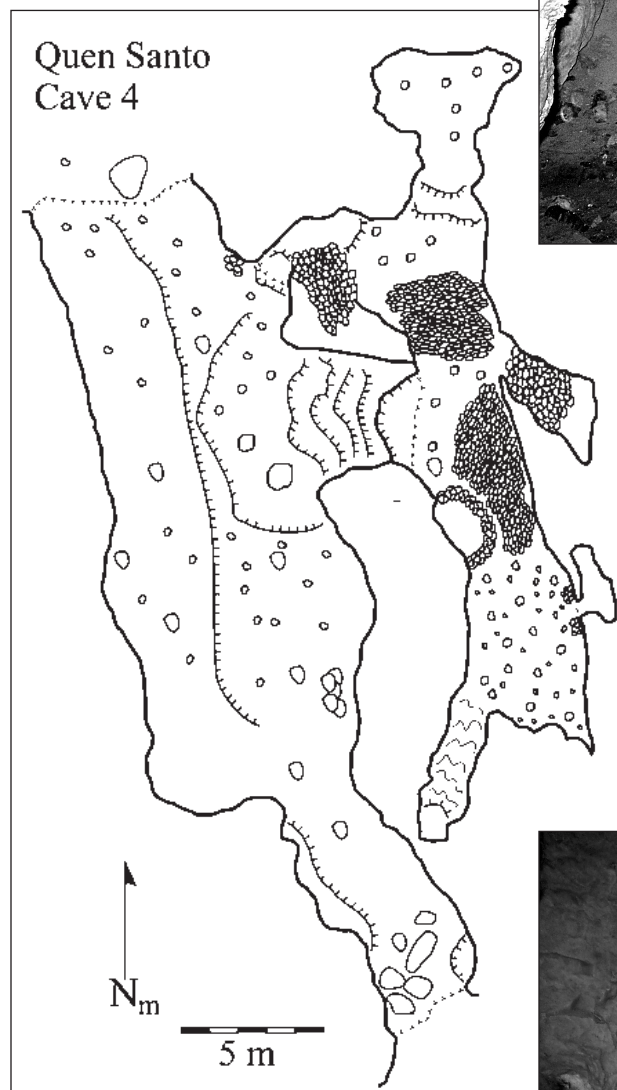


Figure 3 (above): Burned altar area with wax deposit in the back of Cave 8 along the southern wall.

Figure 4 (below): Two of the burn marks along the eastern wall of Cave 8, possibly caused by candles.

Figure 5 (left): Map of Cave 4.





Figure 6 (above): The southern entrance of Cave 4.

Figure 7 (below left): The northern entrance to Cave 4.

Figure 8a (below right): Exterior view of the southeastern wall of the tomb structure in Cave 4.

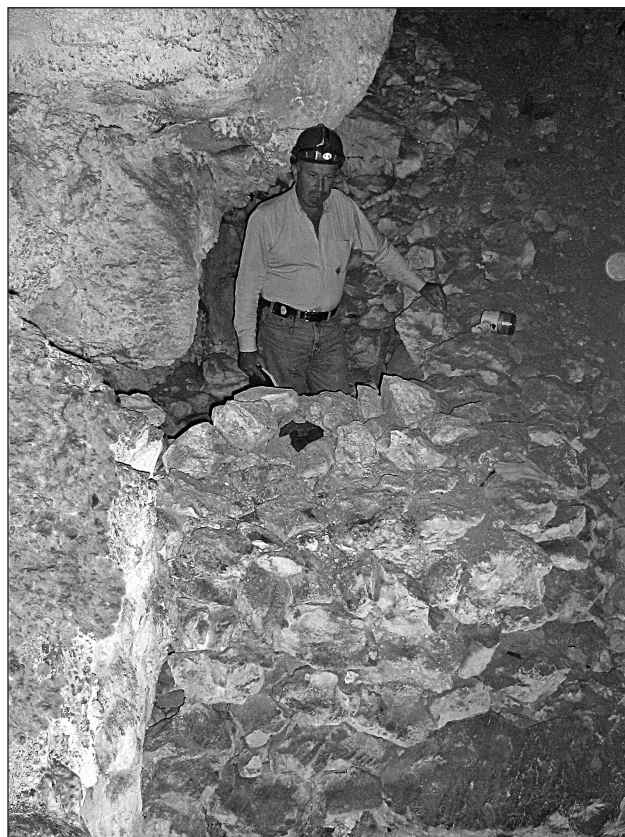


Figure 8b: Exterior view of the southeastern wall of the tomb structure in Cave 4.

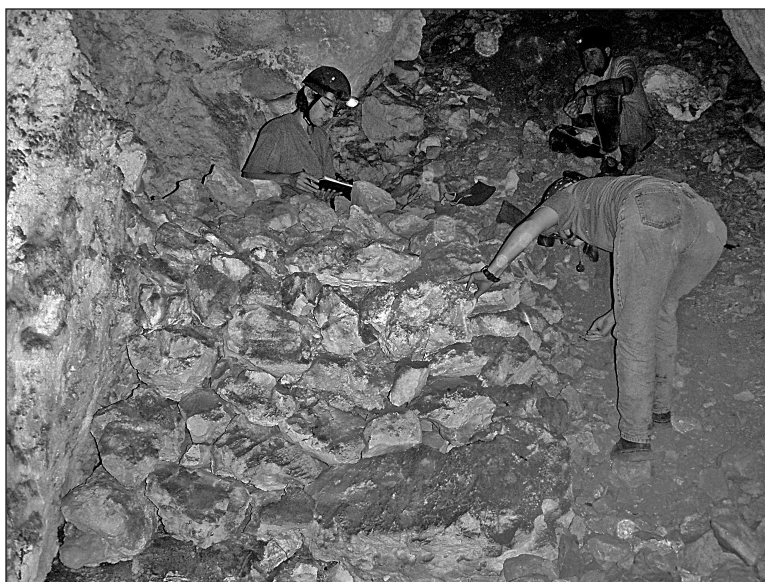
entrances. In passing from Cave 2 to Cave 3, Seler almost certainly used the path along the eastern chasm wall where he would have passed a mound of breakdown with an abrupt descent quite visible [Figure 6]. At the northwestern end of this small enclosed area is an opening that leads into the first of several chambers that drop progressively deeper as one moves from south to north. The soil in this chamber is dry and powdery. Pottery was noted in several areas and more could probably be found just below the powder. A large entrance along the western side of the chamber allows a fair amount of light to enter so that most of this chamber would be considered to be in the twilight zone [Figure 7]. The northern boundary of the chamber is a sharp 3–5 m drop. The descent is easiest along the western edge and the floor of this chamber drops as one moves east. Additional ceramic was noted in this area but the density was not great.

A masonry tomb is found in the lowest chamber. The tomb was constructed against the cave wall so it consists of three masonry walls of roughly rectangular shaped, well-fitted, dried laid rocks. The structure is 294 cm long, 185 cm wide and the walls are still preserved to a height of 148 cm at the eastern end but only 89 cm at the southern end [Figures 8]. It is possible that the tomb was roofed with perishable material such as logs or planks, similar to what Pendergast (1971) proposes for a tomb discovered at Altun Ha.

The tomb had been extensively looted at some point in the past and modern visitation may have resulted in other surface artifacts being lost. The outer wall of the tomb adjoins a steeply sloping pile of rubble that is now covered with a thick layer of fine powdery soil in most areas. It is possible that many of the original artifacts are buried in this material. Within this chamber, only two pottery sherds were found in the tomb itself and another three sherds were found outside the structure. There were no bones in the tomb but a metatarsal bone was found against the exterior northeastern tomb wall and a humerus was discovered against the southeastern side of the tomb.

Discussion

The two bones recovered in association with the tomb in Cave 4 appear to be from two different individuals. The metatarsal bone is 63 mm in length minus the deteriorated distal end [Figure 9]. The length indicates that it is from an adult. Lacking complete metatarsal length, little information can be determined from the



bone's morphology, including sex and estimated stature of the individual.

The humerus is 134.63 mm in length [Figure 10]. The epiphyseal plate is unfused indicating a juvenile individual. The shaft length, before the distal and proximal ends flare out, measures 87.31 mm. This diaphyseal length further narrows the age range to approximately 2–4 years (Hoffman 1979). There is a five degree difference in the ranges of the carrying angle for the elbow between men and women which results in the olecranon fossa being more oval in shape for women and more triangular in shape for men (Grabiner 1989). The humerus discovered in Cave 4 has an olecranon fossa that is more oval than triangular in shape. Rogers' (1999) morphological study of the olecranon fossa indicates that there is 88% likelihood that this individual was female [Figure 11]. Falys et al. (2005) confirmed the high accuracy of this method with 80.2% accuracy with women.

The lack of a burial assemblage and the dearth of osteological evidence hinder our ability to discuss the social



Figure 8c: Interior view of southeastern wall of the tomb structure in Cave 4.

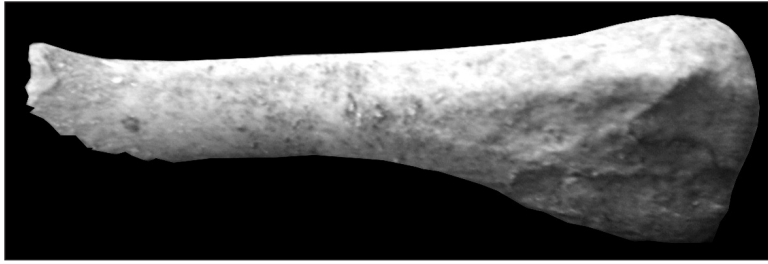


Figure 9: Lateral view of the proximal left second metatarsal fragment that was discovered on the wall of the tomb.

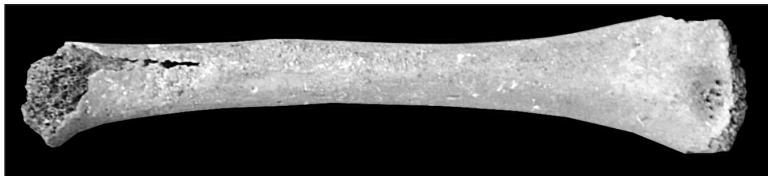


Figure 10: Anterior view of the juvenile left humerus discovered on the wall of the tomb.

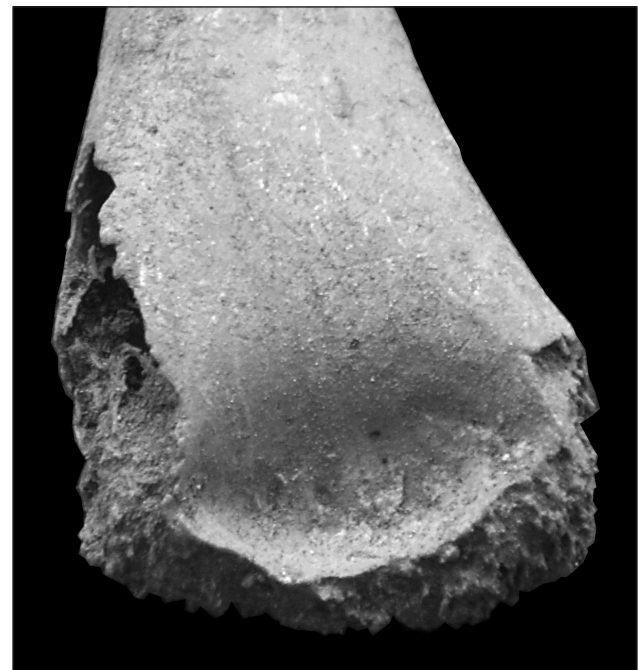
positions of the individuals associated with the tomb in Cave 4. The structure itself, however, argues strongly for elite burial. Elaborate burials structures are typically only available to the elite class. Such structures are almost unknown in caves with Naj Tunich producing the only other documented examples (Brady 1989). The Quen Santo discovery is particularly significant because it demonstrates that the Naj Tunich tombs are not anomalous occurrences but part of a larger pattern. Furthermore, since Naj Tunich is on the eastern border of Guatemala, Quen Santo's location on Guatemala's western border suggests that the pattern is widely distributed.

The question of elite burial is important because as Scott and Brady (2005:269) note in their survey of Maya cave burial, "Within the limited corpus of cave burial data, a few clear examples of elite burial have been documented. Nevertheless, it appears to be rather rare." It is interesting to examine the question in terms of Seler's interpretation of other burials discovered at Quen Santo. He excavated three burials in Cave 1. Seler felt that Cave 1 was important because pyramids and platforms of Pueblo Viejo Quen Santo were constructed directly above it. These three males were noted to be of greater than average stature, indicating a nutritional advantage and possibly elite status. Their burial assemblage also corresponded more to the typical elite assemblage in comparison to the burials on the surface site. The Cave 1 burials contained ornamental jewelry and incised human bones rasps. One of these rasps was attached to a copper chain and included a black obsidian and red shell mosaic overlay, while the other was carved to look like a serpent with inlaid turquoise eyes. Seler (2003:139) pointed out that such items have been documented to be trophies made from the bones of prior enemies (Lumholtz and Hrdlicka 1898) and to be associated with other elite burials in Mexico (Alvarado Tezozomoc 1878; Mendoza 1869:55–59). Thus, it appears that cave burial at Quen Santo was reserved for the elite.

The mapping and exploration of Caves 7 and 8 are noteworthy because the discovery of the retaining wall in relation to them and Cave 3. Without the trench, the dramatic

modification of the large flat area in front of Cave 3 would not be as apparent. This trench enhances one's appreciation for the extent of modification in the chasm as a whole. While the relationship of the retaining wall to the construction of a plaza in front of Cave 3 is clear, the implications of the wall for our understanding of Caves 7 and 8 need to be explored. It would have been easier to eliminate the trench and extend the plaza all the way to the eastern wall of the chasm. This would have buried both of the caves. The construction of the retaining wall was necessary precisely because the preservation of access to the caves would have been a primary concern for the ancient Maya. Unfortunately, Seler never saw and/or documented these caves so we have no idea what

Figure 11: Posterior distal detail view of the juvenile humerus demonstrating the oval shape of the olecranon fossa which indicates a probable female.



they contained a century ago. They are now so badly looted that the task of reconstructing their entire function will be daunting. Nevertheless, I will discuss some possibilities.

The discovery of five new caves in the chasm allows the entire area to be reinterpreted. Earlier, Brady (2007) suggested that the entire chasm should be treated as a single ritual complex. My investigations suggest that a far more detailed interpretation can be advanced. Seler's discoveries tend to focus our attention on Caves 2 and 3 at the southern and northern ends of the chasm respectively. In terms of size and amount of construction, I would argue that Cave 4 was also a major focus of devotion, more important than Cave 2 but subordinate to Cave 3. As noted a year ago, pilgrims enter the chasm on the south and make offerings in Cave 2 before descending to the north toward Cave 3. I would envision a general south to north movement with Cave 4 also being a mandatory stop.

Caves 7 and 8, on the other hand, appear to be part of the Cave 3 complex that includes the large plaza area and a large constructed altar in front of the cave. It is likely that prayers and offerings in Caves 7 and 8 were required as well before passing into Cave 3 itself.

Caves 5 and 6 were of less importance but, nevertheless, were landmarks that did receive some visitation. The project also documented an altar along the eastern wall of the chasm near Cave 2 that may have been another landmark of similar importance. The picture that emerges definitely reinforces the idea of the entire chasm as a single integrated ritual site. The ritual circuit would have been far more complex than the one that we see today with a half a dozen or more stops being made before pilgrims arrived at their destination, Cave 3.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the Anthropology Department at California State University, Los Angeles, Dr. James E. Brady, Sergio Garza, Allan Cobb, Anne Scott, and the Autry National Center (especially the Southwest Museum and the Braun Research Library).

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4

The Social and Cosmological Significance of Quen Santo in Contemporary Maya Society

Sergio Garza

In chapter 1, we noted that, in his initial exploration of Quen Santo, Eduard Seler felt the caves he had discovered below the site were important but that he was never able to articulate the nature of the significance. We suggested that this was in part due to his failure to consult the local Chuj speaking informants or at least a failure to give their responses proper weight. As Seler correctly noted, the word “Quen” in Chuj means “stone” and “Santo” is a Spanish adjective meaning “sacred” or “holy.” He concluded in one place that this “refers to the entire plateau and the ruins, and not only the cave” (Seler 2003:131). But almost immediately he changed his mind and said that it meant “cave of stone images” and referred most specifically to Cave 1, which contained several large stone sculptures. In other places, he translated Quen Santo as “Sacred Rock,” “Cave of the Saints,” and “Saints of the Ancients” (Seler 2003:158, n. 2). Most of these translations seem to center on the caves since the term “saints” refers once again to the sculptures.

During a California State University, Los Angeles survey of Quen Santo conducted in 2007 and 2008, I had the opportunity to discuss the nature and significance of the site with our workers and with people living in the community of La Trinidad near the cave. My Chuj informants were very definite that the name means “holy stone” and refers specifically to the large exposed rock formation in which Cave 3 is located. Here, as in other places, the site takes its name from a sacred cave that has been incorporated into the site structure (Garza et al. 2007; Holland 1963:27).

The name, however, should alert the anthropologist that the site carries a far more profound significance. One of my informants, Pascual Espinoza, told me, “The name of La Trinidad in our language [Chuj] means the place where the sun was born and is related to Quen Santo the very place where the sun was born.” Another informant, Nasareo Jacinto, touched on the same idea while discussing the symbolism of colored candles. He remarked, “The colors of the candles are for the cardinal points and the black candles mean that it is when the sun goes away. Now, the white candles mean that the sun is at the break of dawn. . . . The elders say that in Quen Santo we must always put black and white candles because it is the place where the sun was born and the sun lives there.” The birthplace of the planets was profoundly sacred place because it announced metaphorically that this was the center of the cosmos where all the great acts of creation occurred. This significance is reflected in the

Aztec myth that places the creation of the sun and moon at Teotihuacan (Codex Chimalpópoca 1975:121; Sahagún 1959-1982:7:4–8). The concept continues to be potent to this day. One group of Lacandon live in an area with poor soil in order to be close to a cave that the sun is believed to enter at night (Duby and Blom 1969:292). In a Q’eqchi’ Maya community that I studied, the sun and the moon were also believed to have emerged from the community cave (Brady and Prufer 2005:371).

In discussing the matter of creation, it becomes clear that the cave is an anchor for the community and the people as well. The continued devotion to the cave validates a relationship that allows the community to merge its history with that of the cave, and which, therefore, is seen as extending back to an ancient mythic time. Pascual Espinoza explains that, “The people of La Trinidad are natives and since the beginning they have been here. Just like the cave has been since the beginning so have the people of La Trinidad and everything else.” This statement struck a cord with our Jakalteko *alcalde rezador*, Julio Domingo, who compared this to his own beliefs concerning the cave of Yulá near Jacaltenango. He replied, “Just like in Yulá, the founding couple came out of the earth and still live there. There with Jich Mi (old grandfather) and Jich Mam (old grandmother) is where everything began, where all the people began—it is like that. Here in Yulá it was also like that because everywhere it was like that. Here there must be a Jich Mam, a founding couple where everything is born from the earth.” To this Espinoza responded, “Let me tell you that just like in Jacal [Jacaltenango], there in Yulá, is the founding couple the people from here also know that the couple that bore them also lives here.” The Jich Mi and the Jich Mam, who live in the cave at Yulá, are important for the creation of human beings because they are primordial grandparents from whom all Jakaltekos today are descended. This idea is related to the belief documented by Guiteras Holmes (1952:103) for the Tzeltals of Oxchuc and Cancuc where the first members of the four clans emerged from four sacred caves.

The significance of the cave is multifaceted and not limited to its being the place of creation. The cave is also known to residents of the village of La Trinidad as La Cueva del Rayo [the Cave of Lightning] and is associated with rain. Pascual Espinoza, said “here lives lightning and when it looks like rain, people already know where it is coming from.” I received very much the same information from an informant

in the village of Tunalito who said, “Many people also call Quen Santo the cave of lighting and they say that is was the ancient ones who gave it that name. Yes, Quen Santo is well-known and many people call it the cave of lighting because clouds and lighting come out of caves and that is why they call it that. But it is scary because one cannot be there when lighting comes out.” This relates to the widespread Maya idea that rain is a terrestrial phenomenon in which clouds, lightning and rain come out of the earth and enter the sky (Cruz Guzmán et al. 1980; Holland 1963:93; Morris 1986:57; Thompson 1970:267–268; Vogt 1969:303).

Because of the connection with rain, the cave is very much tied into the agricultural cycle. May 3rd, the Day of the Cross, is celebrated across the Maya area with petitions for rain and a good harvest. Not surprisingly, Tunalito celebrates the holy day in the cave at Quen Santo. An informant told me:

All the people of Tunalito, where we are from, and people from several villages come. Also, people who come from Mexico also have to come to Tunalito first and from there we all go together. And all the people of Tunalito come, just a few stay. And if they come with their children then we are more because just from Tunalito we are about 60 or more.

Another man present, feeling that the first speaker had not properly stressed the purpose of the ritual on the Day of the Cross, cut in and added:

Once inside the cave, people pray to the cross because it is the ancient ones’ belief, because it is May 3rd and every May 3rd people come and they pray to the cross for water, for the rains and that is what they all come to do and the elders know this. But people also pray for their own things, if they have problems and since this is a special day almost everything is granted, therefore on this day many come from all over. But some elders do not like people asking for other things because they say that that day is only to ask for rain and since on that day we ask the cave and Mother Earth then they say that we should not ask for other things because it is only to ask for the rains and it is a day of celebration.

Underlying all of these beliefs, one also finds the universal Maya belief in the sacred animate earth, which is personified as *Madre Tierra* (Mother Earth). Also present is the belief in the Earth Lord (*Señor del Cerro*) who is the owner and caretaker of the land, plants and animals in his dominion. José Tadeo of La Trinidad said:

Here in Quen Santo there many small caves, here and there, and those caves are from the ancestors and left them for us. They are beautiful and are made by the ancient ones and the ancient ones also prayed to Mother Earth and in that place the owner of the mountain is also there—he is there. Nobody has seen him, but they

come to make their promises they can talk to him and they might even find him.

Don Felipe of Tunalito also mentions communicating with the supernatural at these rituals but here the communication is more directly with the save itself. He explained, “When people come to the celebration the cave looks beautiful because it is well-lit with the candles light and there is so much smoke, and since the smoke cannot go anywhere it has to go back to the entrance and when the smoke is coming out people look at it because it looks like the cave is talking and maybe it is because these sacred places are alive.”

To sum up, a number of highly charged ideological concepts are tied to the caves of Quen Santo that make this site a sacred landmark of unrivaled importance in this area. The caves are seen as the place where the sun was born and where people emerged. La Trinidad’s tie to the cave marks the community as important and creates the belief that the community had existed in this place since the time of creation. The association of Mother Earth, the Earth Lord and Lightning with the caves are critically important religious concepts related to the agricultural cycle and the day-to-day concerns of peasant farmers.

The Day of the Cross

It appears that the celebrations on the Day of the Cross are the most important which suggests that the connection with rain is of paramount importance. As far as the actual ceremony on that day, a man explained, “The day of the celebration we all come together, from Tunalito, and go down to the cave and we all go back together.” On arriving at the fissure they go to Cave 2 where they perform the first in a number of rituals. My informant said, “When the people arrive, first they stop at this altar and then they set up their candles and then they light firecrackers there, at the entrance, and after that they go down to the cave” The people then pass to the bottom of the fissure where Cave 3 is located. Offerings in the form of candles are made in Cave 3, first at the entrance to the cave, and then in the inner chamber where Seler’s “temple room” is located. The people then make their petition to the cross for rain and a good harvest.

A very important element of the celebration is the communal feast that takes place after the prayers have been completed. One man noted, “And the food is cooked down there, by the cave, and everybody eats together and it is every year.” This is such an important aspects that many of the women don’t take part in the prayers because they are busy preparing the meal (“*Pero muchas mujeres se quedan afuera preparando en almuerzo*”). Another man described the feast saying:

On May 3rd, the Day of the Cross, My family and I come here to Quen Santo to have lunch, to celebrate, and for food people bring chicken and some others bring canned sardines, they bring tortillas, whatever they can, and aguardiente. People also drink aguardiente.

The celebration ends around 2:00 p.m. and entire group prepares to return to Tunalito. It is interesting that in a country where trash is generally discarded on the spot without a second thought, considerable attention is paid to cleaning up the area before leaving. It was surprising to have the issue raised without any prompting. My informant told me that:

When the celebration ends people already know what to do and we all take back the trash and when we get back to the community we burn all the trash there. But because it is a lot of people we cannot take back everything and some trash stays there and it accumulates inside the cave, but people try to clean because everybody knows that this is a sacred place and the Lords do not like when people leave the place dirty, and their petitions might not be answered and also things might happen because we need to respect. It is like if you came to my house you would not leave trash because you are respectful.

Extension of the Sacred Landscape

The sacredness of the spot affects everything in the environment of the cave. An informant noted, “There by Quen Santo there are *copál* (incense) trees and there are people who when they come to visit the sacred temple they take *copál* because although *copál* can be bought in many places, the *copál* from Quen Santo is better because this is a sacred place.” This point was verified by Julio Domingo, a Jakateko *alcalde rezador*, who said, “In my house I have a few *copál* trees, but when I am in Quen Santo I bring a little because the lords at Yulá like it a lot.” [Yulá is a sacred cave near Jacaltenango where Domingo lives.] The practice bears out Lévy-Bruhl’s (1938:183; cited in Eliade 1958: 367) observation that, “To these natives, a sacred spot never presents itself to the mind in isolation. It is always part of a complex of things which includes the plant or animal species which flourished there at various seasons. . . .” A similar custom has been documented in Yucatan where plants and animals found near cenotes [a cave feature] are associated with the rain god and the plants are preferentially selected for ritual use (Redfield 1941:117). Thus the potency of the landmark is expressed and underscored in a multiplicity of ways.

Altars & Speleothems

In chapter 1 several altars were described. One is the central focus of devotion in Cave 2. Altar A is a separate feature located some 20 m north of Cave 2 and Altar B is located in the plaza in front of Cave 3. It was noted that pieces of speleothem have been set on Altar B and on the altar in Cave 2. In both cases the speleothems have not been heavily fire blacked, which suggests that they have only recently been placed on the altars. This would not be surprising in that the practice using speleothems on altars has been documented ethnographically in Chiapas among the Tzeltal (Deal 1988:74) and among the Q’eqchi’ in Peten, Guatemala

(Brady et al. 2005:219). The fact that the speleothems had been recently set raised the possibility that I might be able to collect data about the function and meaning of speleothems. An informant from La Trinidad told me:

People pray to those water-rocks out of respect. Those water-rocks belong to Mother Earth and the cave and they are alive and they are alive like the saints at churches. Maybe you people say that those are just rocks, but they are not because they are alive and people know that many of them are keepers and therefore they pray to them and they also ask them for permission to enter or to be here.

The man’s comparison of the speleothem to a saint (*santo*) is interesting because J. Eric Thompson had a similar experience in Belize. After persuading a man to bring his “santo,” Thompson (1963:148–149) was presented with an unmodified piece of stalagmite.

When asked, “Why don’t you put on the altar a rock from the ground instead of those water-rocks?” he responded:

Because those rocks are from there and are not sacred like the rocks that people put on their altars. Those who make them know why and those who come by also know that. Those water-rocks have powers and you know what they are because they put their candles and candle jars there. Those rocks have a meaning because they belong to the Mother rock and the Mother rock is also the cave and therefore it has a meaning. It is sacred rock and its sacredness comes from the Mother and so, I have told you, there are some that have power and the Lords tell them what it is that they need to do to find more suitable rocks for our prayers; let’s say, we need to respect because there are some who just come, say, to just have fun and do not know what it means or nothing.

The ethnographic data concerning the recent placement of speleothems on Altar B and on the altar in Cave 2 make it clear that the stones themselves carry a great deal for significance for modern Maya. This is in line with our developing appreciation of the importance of speleothems both in the modern and ancient context (Brady et al. 1997; Peterson et al. 2005). The data reinforce the conclusions reached in chapter 1 about Altar A. The stalagmite at the front of the retaining wall is much larger than either of the recently placed speleothems so it would likely have been considered to have even greater power than the ones in contemporary use. It is also possible that the stalagmite was active before the stalactites above it were broken off and so the spot would have been associated with dripping water. The connection with water would certainly have attracted the attention of the ancient inhabitants of Quen Santo. The elaboration of the area with the construction of the retaining wall and the filling behind it bears out these suggestions.

The Relationship between the Cave & Other Religious Practices

In Guatemala there is a good deal of tension between Catholics and Protestants and both of these groups tend to be hostile toward those practicing indigenous Maya religion, often referred to as *costumbre* [custom]. There appears, however, to be a certain amount of interaction between the traditionalists and the Catholics at Quen Santo. An informant noted, "Father Fermín, the one who was in Nentón before, came here to give mass and he also went deep inside the cave where the cross is. People bring candles and the mass there is like mass at church, just the same, and the priest brings his sacraments, the host, he brings everything. And all those who have confessed do receive the host." Another man commented:

On May 3rd, the Day of the Cross, I come here to Quen Santo with my family. Last year I brought an *animador de la fé* (promoter of the faith connected to the Catholic Church) from Subajasun. He comes to our church every month and there we invited him to come on May 3rd, the Day of the Cross. He says some sort of mass where the cross is, deep inside where the cross is and afterwards we all have lunch and at two o'clock we go back home.

While traditionalists are well aware of the negative opinion of both Catholics and Protestants, their belief in the superiority of their own religion becomes obvious in conversation with comparisons between their own sacred sites and the Christian churches. One man in Tunalito said, "Yes, the cave is like a church, it is a church because the cross is there and it is respected like a church because it is more powerful because the Lords and Mother Earth also live there." An informant in La Trinidad echoed this same sentiment in saying,

people pay their guides whatever they can afford and they come to visit this cave because it is very miraculous. Many people go to church and always ask God for their problems, but here in the cave there is always more power because it is a live cave and we can pray and ask to many. Yes, here in the cave we can ask and Mother Earth, and the keepers, to the Lord of the mountain (*el señor del cerro*), to whom people want to and everything is granted.

Pilgrimage & Hierarchy

The extraordinary nature of the cave is attested to by the fact that it is so well known in the region. Pascual Espinoza notes that, "The people know that there are caves all over the place, but this is the most sacred place and many people from far away know about this place and this is from way back in time. The elders say that for centuries people come and everybody knows that this is a powerful place." Crisanto

Garcia of La Trinidad was more specific that Quen Santo is actually a pilgrimage site in saying, "people from different villages come here to the cave, even Mexicans from Hidalgo, Cardenas, Santa Rita, from Comitán come and from around here many come from Bulej, from San Mateo and from Soloma, Santa Eulalia, from Jacal."

The issue of pilgrimage is certainly important to the community of La Trinidad on a number of scores. This is most evident in community pride. Quen Santo is what separates La Trinidad from thousands of similar communities in Guatemala. It is with great pride that Trinideños say, "people from great distances know it" [*gente de muy lejos lo conocen*]. They are also very possessive of the cave and make it clear, "but, always that cave belongs to La Trinidad" [*pero siempre esa cueva es de La Trinidad*].

My own visits to the region occurred during the rainy season and near the end of the growing season so this was not a good time to observe pilgrimage. Nevertheless, a steady stream of small groups of people arrived at the cave on an almost daily basis. Discussing visitation in general, an informant said, "Around 10, 15 people come daily and about once a week or every 15 days many people come and there are fiestas like the Day of the Cross many more people come, but it is not a whole lot because since there is a *feria* many people stay at the *feria*. It is more during the week when people come, but most come on May 3rd, the Day of the Cross."

In addition, my discussions of pilgrimage repeatedly elicited statements that referenced the great antiquity of the relationship between pilgrimage, the cave, and La Trinidad. For instance, one informant says, "And yes, my grandfather used to tell me that for a long time people have come here and my grandparents and the grandparents of my grandparents would say that people would come here to ask for abundance, for their animals and all that is asked here." Pilgrimage, once again, provides a venue for the community to assert a primordial relationship with the cave that validates their claim of this space.

As with pilgrimage centers in general, there are economic aspects connected to the religious importance of the Quen Santo caves. Many of the men act as guides. Crisanto Garcia said, "some people when they come here first they come to La Trinidad to hire people who can take them to the cave because many people from the different villages do not know how to get to that place." Another man noted:

The people who come to the cave first go to the church and only ask for a few people who can take them, just like you people did, and it is better if they already know someone like yourself who already know Pascual and Marcos and some Mexicans already know someone who can take them to the cave and it is better like that. There are people who come in cars or walk, but all cars stay in La Trinidad and we walk from there."

The economic aspect is well recognized by Trinideños

and separated conceptually and behaviorally from their own devotion in the cave. When contracted to take people to the caves, guides do not enter the caves themselves or make offering in the belief that this would offend the owners or guardians of the caves.

Conclusion

This paper has explored contemporary Maya views of the caves at Quen Santo to provide a developed *emic* model of the meaning these features. The caves hold deep cosmological significance for the Chuj Maya since they are considered to be the place where the sun was born, the residence of the ancestral couple who produced the Chuj and the place where rain is produced. Quen Santo marks the village of La Trinidad as something special and the community's tie with the cave gives residence a primordial claim to the space where they reside.

Although it is impossible to ignore the impact of 500 years of Catholicism in the region it is interestingly to see how Catholic and traditional beliefs are integrated by the Chuj. People in La Trinidad often make statements that contain comparisons between the cave and Christian deities and places of worship. One informant stated, "They come to visit this cave because it is very miraculous. Many people go to church and always ask God to help them with their problems. But here in the cave there is always more power because the cave is alive and we can petition to many. Here in the cave we can petition to God and Mother Earth, to the keepers, to the owner of the mountain, whatever people want, and everything is granted." The approach to a cave is contrasted conceptually and behaviorally with that of a church. Another informant stated, "This sacred place is not like a church. There when people go before entering they make the sign of the cross and that's it, but it is not like that here. Here, in this holy place, we have to make offerings and pray and ask for permission because here there is a lot of power and it's different."

Although Seler (2003:131) noted that the caves have long been visited by the Maya, no evidence of on-going religious activity at the site was mentioned in his report. My research shows that the chasm containing Caves 2 and 3 is the focus of pilgrimage that draws worshippers from Mexico as well as from the Chuj, Jalkatek, Mam and Kanjobal speaking areas of Guatemala. In addition, Quen Santo is considered to be part of the highest order of region sacred landmarks that includes Yalan Na, the cave near Santa Eulalia in the Q'anjob'al area, and Yulá, the cave near Jacaltenango in the Jakalteek area. The repeated statements by informants of traditions and information being passed down from grandparents and grandparents of grandparents strongly suggests that a similar pattern was in place at the time of Seler's visit.

The tremendous ideological and social importance of the chasm to the modern Chuj provides archaeologists with a model that can then be judged against recent archaeological discoveries presented in other chapters in this volume. The extensive modification of the chasm containing Seler's Caves 2 and 3 documents the fact that it was a far more important

than previously appreciated by archaeology. This strongly argues that, in attempting to reconstruct the significance of the chasm, archaeologists would be better informed by approaching the issue from an indigenous perspective. In this vein, the sacredness of Quen Santo, unlike other sites, appears to be connected primarily, if not exclusively, to the caves rather than surface structures in that we did not observe rituals and offerings being made at the surface ruins. This suggests that the chasm may have been the religious heart and soul of the settlement in Pre-Columbian times as well. Adopting an indigenous perspective allows us to appreciate and explain the importance of the Quen Santo caves that Seler sensed but was never able to articulate.

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5

Caves and Fish in Mesoamerica: An Initial Consideration

James E. Brady and Sergio Garza

The exploration of the Cueva de Villa Luz in Tabasco, Mexico during the 1990s uncovered evidence of what appeared to be a unique cave ritual (Eliot 2001; Hose 1999, 2001; Hose and Pisarowicz 1999). The ceremony reported was a recent resurrection of a traditional indigenous rite that had died out in the 1940s (Hose and Pisarowicz 1999). During Holy Week, at the height of the dry season, the Zoque inhabitants of the nearby town of Tapijulapa, come to the cave and pray at the mouth to the old ‘grandfather’ and ‘grandmother’ for permission to enter and fish. They then dump a powder made from *barbasco* root and *cal* into the stream about 100 m inside the cave. When the substance forces the small fish to come to the surface along the edges of the stream to breathe, the villagers scoop them up in baskets. In its traditional context as an annual event, Hose (1999) estimate that the ceremony likely yielded several thousand pounds of fish but more recent conservation efforts have reduced yields to ‘token’ levels (Hose and Pisarowski 1999) of several dozen kilos (Hose 2001:221; Porter Núñez 2003:22). Although the unusual cave ecosystem, dependent on the oxidation of sulfur compounds, appears to support the annual harvest of fish, the smaller size of fish near the entrance in comparison to those deeper in the cave is likely the result of the harvesting connected with the ritual (Dietrich and Lavoie 2006).

The California State University, Los Angeles Archaeological Field Program investigating the site of Quen Santo discovered a ritual in the town of Nentón, Huehuetenango, Guatemala that shares many similarities with the ceremony documented at the Cueva de Villa Luz. While both Maya and *ladino* residents of the town participate in the ceremony, the origin of the practice appears to have originated within the Chuj Maya speaking segment of the population because descriptions by that element still preserves elements of indigenous social organization and the heavy ritual overtones connected with the agricultural cycle. Within that segment, the ceremony is seen as being ancient and the information about it has been passed down through generations. An informant, José Luis Hernandez Escobedo, says:

OK, the versions that have come from the elders, and the information that has been transmitted to us from generation to generation, and what I know is just what an elder said to me in 1978. He was an old man about 88 years old and he told me that when he was a child another older man said the same thing

The Ceremony

The ceremony occurs during Holy Week. On Monday, all of the men assemble at the Río Legarto that runs along the edge of the town and work to clear the entrance to a small cave along the bank. The entrance to the cave is partially blocked during the rest of the year by a dam that keeps river water from entering the cave [Figure 1]. This blockage is removed and the cave is cleaned of any trash that has accumulated there. An informant says:

My grandfather told me that the prayer specialists were in this town before and before doing anything the people had to unblock the entrance to the cave because when the river water rises it carries everything and leaves it there, in the cave, and then on Holy Monday, we call it the unblocking of the cave, all the men go to unblock it and to take trash out and in there are places that are very narrow and the men have to sit on the ground and pull and with their feet they push the trash *costales* [cloth bags large enough to hold 100lbs of maize or beans] until we reach a place that we call the third balcony and there the entrance is fairly big and in there is hardly any trash but the descent is very difficult.

On Tuesday, the men build a low dam that diverts the river into the cave. Hernandez describes it as follows:

On Tuesday, it's when it's time to dam the river with *costales*, with straw, with grass, with whatever can be used to change the river's waterway into the cave. On Tuesday we do this and since the *cerro* is nearby we cut down trees of good length and we make tripods, as we call them, and we put rocks at the base to hold them in place and we tie nylon cord and we put grass and dirt and the river's waterway is changed and the water flows into the cave.

In the afternoon, people begin to gather as the riverbed dries. An informant says, “On Holy Tuesday the river is dammed and then all the families prepare their provisions, their food and there is a meal that we call *pixque* which is a ball of prepared maize dough and we wrap it and we all go to the river bank.” Another informant observed, “All Tuesday night, until Wednesday's daybreak, it's just a big party by the

river bank. Yes, it's all happiness because all over the river there are people and Nentón is deserted because everybody is at the river playing their music in their tape recorders."

As the water is cut off, fish and crabs down stream are forced into water filled holes in the riverbed. The actual fishing takes place on Wednesday morning. The process was described by an informant thusly:

The wells are cured with a root called *barbasco*. We say we cure the wells when there is no more water current and then we put in that root. The root is crushed and the sap is poured in the water and the fish is stunned and begins to come up the well, the little cave, and then with some baskets we fish it out and yes, it comes out of the cave because the well is the cave because the cave is a rock and there is always water around it; therefore like the water flows into the cave these wells are like that—I do not know why it is like that but it comes from the ancient ones. Once the water is cured, because some of us put in that root that is called *barbasco* or some others use lime, and the fish is stunned and fished out with baskets everything is happiness. It's a fiesta! It's the moment! It is about ten, 15 minutes that the fish are stunned but since many of us are already in the water if a fish gets away from someone, the other gets it and that's the fiesta!

Another confirmed the method of fishing saying, "Our ancestors left us the *barbasco* root and it is not harmful and we wash the fish just out of the water and eat it and nothing happens to us.

An informant nicely summed up the ceremony saying:

Figure 1: The Río Legarto is diverted into this small cave during Holy Week. The rocks near the bank are part of the dam that is removed and the reconstructed each year.



And that is on Wednesday; it's happiness all night long and some are talking, some others are already crushing the *barbasco* root to leave it in plastic bags and nobody sleeps that night. Some stop by to visit you, some are in the *cerro*, a few others are a little drunk, and youths do not sleep that night. It all begins on Monday, we stay up all Tuesday night, and on Wednesday, by noontime, everything is taken down. On Wednesday, from 9 to 11 we fish, and all those from around here already know that by 11 the last family already fished and then they all go to take down the dam and those of us who are down river leave as the water starts flowing again

The fish that are harvested are similar to those described for the Cueva de Villa Luz. A boy with a small casting net showed us his catch of small, finger length fish. Such fish are considered a delicacy over a wide area of Mexico and Guatemala. A common term for them is *charales*. They are a regional dish around Lake Chapala, Jalisco where they are dried and eaten as a snack or fried crisp. They are also dried, then fried, and eaten whole around Lake Patzcuaro, Michoacan. Charales from Mexico are even sold in markets in the U.S. that serve a Hispanic clientele.

Social Organization Surrounding the Ritual

The brief description presented above of the actual physical events has, of necessity, slighted consideration of social organizational features that are essential for understanding how deeply rooted this ceremony is within the social fabric of the community. The pools in the riverbed are very well defined. They are the property of particular families and passed down through the generations. As an informant explains:

All along the river are the places of each family. It's like they are all parceled out and nobody can or should enter some family's place. Each family has their own little wells and we all know where the boundaries of everyone's wells are. For example, everybody knows where are the wells of Don Celo, of Don Rogelio López, the well of Don Elpidio Samalloa, the well of Doña Amalia Montejó, and in this way the river is parceled out since ancient times.

A number of informants stressed the fact that family ownership of the pools was different than ownership of land and did not operate under legal regulation of the state. Many proudly pointed to this distinction in the case of residents that fled during the civil war. As one informant put it:

During the war Nentón was largely deserted and then people came and took over some land and it was difficult to drive them out and also other people took possession of land whose owners had not yet returned, but they all respected the wells of Semana Santa. Nobody, nobody tried to take over the wells even when they knew that a family had not yet returned—they

respected them. They would say, this is their well let's not get in it and when they saw that a family had not yet returned for a year or two and suddenly they would show up they would say to them, look, I was here in your well but now that you have returned it's up to you if you allow me to fish with you here in this well if not, I will leave with my family. There was not one problem with the return of people and the rightful possession of the wells. That has been respected as opposed to other cases.

The importance of ownership of pools is also reflected in the fact that families know how pools came into their possession and were passed down through the generations. The comments of this man are typical:

For example, the camping site where I go with my family belonged to my grandfather and now we are the third generation and still own that little place, that well, and for my children this is happiness and my children have fallen in-love with that little place and when we are no longer here my children will be the owners of that little place. I remember that when we started going there this well belonged to my mother because this well also used to belong to my maternal grandfather and my paternal grandfather also had his, but the whole family, we are now seven families, we all go there and it is something that has not been lost and there is never any fights because everybody knows what belongs to who.

Religious Aspects of the Ritual

While the event itself appears to be tightly integrated into the community social organization, it appears to have become for secularized during the last two decades, especially among the *ladino* segment of the population. At one time, the ritual was controlled by prayer specialists, the *alcades rezadores*, who have since disappeared. The ritual may also have been integrated into the civil-religious hierarchy and organized under a religious *cofradía*. An informant stated, "The *alcades rezadores* were from here, Nentón, and it was an organized group that composed the *cofradía*. The organization was here but because of external influences we are losing much and customs have also been lost. It is possible that the *alcades rezadores* actually set the time when the ceremony was performed.

The perspective on the event differs between *ladinos* and the Chuj. Even among *ladinos*, however, there is a marked generation difference with younger *ladinos* viewing the event as a secular fiesta focused on family and community. Older *ladinos*, however, remember a strong religious element. One older man remarked:

But nowadays it is just like a common thing. My grandfather used to tell me that before they would do ceremonies and apparently the last one was done by

a man named Don Sebastián Antonio. He would take candles, would take everything and before getting to work he would do his ritual and there is a rock at the entrance of the cave that cannot be moved and they have already tried to take it out because it sort of blocks the water flow into the cave and wood sticks and all kinds of things get stuck there, but it can be taken out and there is where this man used to do his things. And all the women would cook, there was *marimba* music, firecrackers, praying to especially thank God for all his giving and also ask for forgiveness for the water that has been taken away from the animals and for people fishing there and also it would be asked for permission to do all those things, but now all that has been lost. All that was still done between 1960 and 1970 because I met the man in 1975, but he did not do it anymore.

The Maya still view the ritual in strongly religious terms. The older Chuj informants noted that:

On the rock outside the cave is where the *alcade rezadores* would go to give thanks to Mother Earth for the water and the fish and they would ask that everything would go well so that there would be plenty of food for everybody and they also would ask for forgiveness for damming the river, but the water would not be wasted because it would go back to Mother Earth's house.

The Chuj still see the fishing as a religious event connected with the sacred earth. The protocol of asking for permission and giving thanks for the food received are still seen as important. The failure to carry out such obligations is also worrisome in that it invites supernatural retribution.

All that is the *pesqueria* is not new. The cave has always been there and people have always had their little wells because like that is also like Mother Earth has her cave and people have a lot of love for their little wells because Mother Earth gave them to all to eat, but they also have to venerate her and ask for permission because the wells are sacred and because they were given to the families nobody can just go in there because the Mother Earth would get angry and that is why every family has their own well. People no longer make petitions or pray there but she knows that they are not doing anything wrong because they do not waste the food. Even though there are people who no longer pray like the prayer specialists used to, a few go to the cerro and there they ask for permission and do their petitions because all this is not ours and I think that people should show respect because Mother Earth can take everything away from us and the river would dry up if we do not do what she asks.

Discussion

The discovery of a second fishing ritual that shares many elements with the ceremony at Villa Luz but which is separated geographically from it and practiced by a different linguistic group, suggests the possibility that a ritual with this basic structure and grammar was once shared across a wide area. While the lack of other examples in the ethnographic record might argue against a wide distribution, we are not convinced on this point. It should be noted that the ritual at Villa Luz was not discovered or reported by ethnographers and we stumbled on the second case purely by accident while inquiring about caves for archaeological investigation. Therefore, it may simply be that the ritual is obscure, largely fallen into disuse and has, therefore, been totally overlooked. The differences between the two rituals appear to be adaptations to local conditions which means that a form of the ritual could occur wherever there are bodies of water containing fish, whether a cave is involved or not. While the cave may not be an indispensable element, the ritual is important to cave studies because water and fish are so frequently associated with caves and, in many areas, caves are the only sources of water. At Dos Pilas, all of the large caves contained both water and fish.

While a cave is involved in the ritual at Nentón, our overview gives the impression that its role is somewhat peripheral. This is not the case. As already noted above, the prayers that were offered in the past at the beginning of the preparations were done at the entrance to the cave. In addition, during the entire ritual, the cave is a central motif in the minds of the people. One man explained:

The fish and the crabs live in the river but first Mother Earth has them with her and therefore sometimes they are in the caves and because the caves are sacred places only Mother Earth can give them to us and we have to thank her because the water, the animals, the *ceros*, the caves, everything is hers.

Another person noted:

Mother Earth knows what she is going to give us because when the river is dammed she leaves a lot of fish on the other side, but the water that goes into the cave has many more fish but they are hers and keeps them in the cave so they will not run out. Inside the cave lots of fish remain and there are crabs but in there is not like outside, like the wells, because in there, there is no owner because the cave cannot belong to anybody because it belongs to Mother Earth and the owner of the mountain. But if people go in there and want to get the fish, it is very dangerous because the fish in there Mother Earth did not give them to us and if one gets them he can die or many bad things can happen to him or his family. If we make petitions and pray to Mother Earth outside maybe she would let us take the fish, but not anybody can do it and it's better

not to do it because many bad things can happen. And Mother Earth is happy because the water from the river returns to her and she takes it so there is always water to have good harvests.

Earlier, it was noted that the pools in the riverbed are explicitly conceptualized as being caves. In the quote above, comparisons and contrasts are made between the cave and the pools. The pools are small caves owned by families while the cave is the great pool owned by Mother Earth and the Earth Lord. So while no fish or crabs are taken from the cave, the removal of the fish and crabs from the pools is seen as an analogy in miniature to fishing from the cave.

One of the important similarities in the two rituals is the timing. The association with Holy Week probably occurred during the colonial period when indigenous rituals came to be celebrated as part of Christian holidays as a means of escaping persecution by the Catholic Church. One of the best examples of this is the celebration of the Day of the Cross on May 3rd when Maya traditionalists conduct ceremonies in caves asking for rain and a good harvest. The fishing rituals have similar associations. This suggests that the significance is not so much the tie to Holy Week but rather, as Hose astutely points out, to its being celebrated at the height of the dry season. The relationship between Easter and rain is not lost on agriculturalists. An old man in San Miguel Acatán stated at the beginning on Lent, "Easter will come in forty days and then the rains" (Deuss 2007:163). In the quote given above, the informant sees the diverting of the water into the cave as giving it to Mother Earth so that it can be returned in the form of rain for agriculture.

Finally, these fishing ceremonies point out a gaping hole in our knowledge of both the ancient and modern Maya. Fish utilization has been examined archaeologically but chiefly from a subsistence perspective for coastal sites (Wing 1977; Hamblin 1984) or from the perspective of trade in non-utilitarian items (shell, stingray spines, sharks' teeth, and corals) to inland sites (Beaubien 2004; Borhegyi 1961; Hamblin 1984:31–33, 43–47; Moholy-Nagy 2004; Wing 1977:50–51). Relatively little attention has been paid to the exploitation of freshwater resources at inland sites (Healy et al. 1990; Lange 1971; Powis 2004) probably because the quantity of material recovered does not suggest a heavy reliance on them for subsistence.

The impact of the two fishing rituals discussed in this article on annual subsistence is most likely negligible. Far more important is the fact that the Nentón ritual, and probably the one at Villa Luz as well, is associated with community-wide feasting. In a far more hierarchical Pre-Columbian society, these events would have been of great social and political importance (Brumfiel 1987; Dietler 1996; Goody 1982; LeCount 2001). This underscores the basic fact that the ritual's significance is and was clearly in the social, rather than the subsistence, realm.

The implications extend beyond the boundaries of the community. There are indications that the event in Nentón has traditionally drawn visitors from a larger region to the

fiesta. An informant, referring to his youth, told us that, “The *pesquería* is not only for Nentón because before even people from up there like the village La Fortuna come to the fiesta and all the men help to get the water into the cave. Everybody helps and like my father says and my grandfather used to say, the great fiesta was in Nentón and everybody knew and would come and always would bring things for the town because they would also give them fish and crabs because there was plenty.” Another informant says that with the paved roads even more people come. He commented, “All the communities around the river participate in the fiesta but many are new even those that are here by the highway; Catarina, Limonar, La Laguna now come, but this fiesta for a long time has always been Nentón’s.” It is fiestas such as this that help establish and legitimize a community’s claim to leadership over a region.

Conclusion

The fishing ritual in Nentón is interesting in and of itself but may have a larger significance because of its similarities to the ritual held at the Cueva de Villa Luz. The similarities raise the possibility that rituals involving fish may have been widely distributed in Mesoamerica. These rites would have been conducted during or at the end of the dry season and their purpose would have been most directly related to agricultural concerns for adequate rain during the growing season. The strongly religious nature of the event, because of its intimate tie to the sacred Earth, is still evident in the Chuj Maya segment of the population. For both the Chuj and *ladinos* there is a very obvious and very important social function derived from the community-wide fiesta and feasting that accompanies it. It has been suggested that in Pre-Columbian times, such rituals could have been used to legitimize social hierarchies not only between social strata but also between communities.

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6

The Gendered Use of Caves in the Jalkatec and Chuj Areas

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Introduction

Because female students worked on the California State University, Los Angeles Archaeological Field Program in Guatemala in both 2006 and 2007, the project was in constant negotiation with local norms that prohibit women from entering caves. The senior author was briefed before the 2007 season of certain incidents that had occurred the year before and had hoped to gather additional information on the subject. Unfortunately, she quickly learned that, because of her age and gender, she was rarely included in discussions between local men and the project's two senior males, Brady and Garza. Garza in particular collected most of the information presented here because he was working with the group's prayer leader (*alcalde rezador*) and because of his gift for establishing rapport with visitors rapidly. This article represents a genuine collaboration on the part of all parties to describe and analyze the incidents occurring during our field research in the hope of deepening our understanding of the cultural rules governing cave use.

In presenting the data in this paper, we wish to acknowledge explicitly that we will be presenting a male perspective. The project had hoped to have the team's three women engage visiting women in conversation in order to provide a more balanced picture. In actual practice few women came to the cave; they were often monolingual Maya speakers, and they were reticent to discuss anything with strangers. While this was unfortunate, it is important to view the present contribution in a broader context. Considering how little has been published on the issue of gender in relation to caves, this paper's presentation of detailed information on the male perspective adds significantly to our knowledge of one aspect of the gendered use of caves.

Women and Caves in the Anthropological Literature

The prohibition against women entering caves is well documented in the ethnographic literature and even ethnohistorically. The *Relación de Valladolid* mentions that 'virgin water' is "brought from the woods where a woman has never penetrated" (Tozzer 1941: 106n). In the 1840s, John Lloyd Stephens was struck by the prohibition in his observation of a ceremony at the Gruta de Chac. He commented, "We noticed that there were no women, who, throughout Yucatán, are the drawers of water and always seen around a well, but we were told that no women ever

enters the well of Chaac; all the water for the rancho was procured by the men, which alone indicated that the well was of an extraordinary character" (Stephens 1962:2:17). Similar types of rules were still alive when Robert Redfield and Alfonso Villa Rojas worked in Yucatan in the 1930s. The well in the village was considered "mundane" space but cenotes in the bush retained a sacred character and women were forbidden to visit them (Redfield 1941:119, 121) and they were often excluded from indigenous rituals held outside of caves as well (Redfield 1941:314; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:371). The gender inversion noted by Stephens in regard to water gathering held for other typically female activities when performed as part of religious rituals. Cooking (Redfield 1941: 314) and even maize grinding (Villa Rojas 1945:71) were performed by men in ritual contexts. Celinda Gómez (1974:8) observed such restrictions in the 1970s and Marianna Kunow (2003:44, 46-47) notes that some of these restrictions persist to the present.

A similar pattern has been recorded among the Lacandon Maya. Alfred Tozzer (1907:149) noted that he was forced to wait in the canoe with the women while a man and his son went to perform a cave ceremony and he noted that women did not take an active part in other ceremonies either (Tozzer 1907:105). Nevertheless, Gertrude Duby (Blom and Duby 1957:348-350), although well aware of the prohibition, asked for and received permission to enter one of the important caves in the 1950s. This case raises questions about how frequently and under what circumstances might these cultural rules be negotiated. Georgette Soustelle (1961:67) states simply that in all regions, religious ritual is performed by men, not women.¹ More recently, Virginia Davis (1978:56, 136) noted widespread prohibition against women participating in ritual activity among the northern Lacandon and Dieder Boremanse (1998:55) found that those rules are still in force today.

Moving to the highlands, Patricia Carot (1989:26) mentions being excluded from a Q'eqchi' cave ritual because of her gender. Richard Gould (1968:167) observed a Q'eqchi' pilgrimage which began with a ceremony at the church in which both sexes participated but only men went on to the cave for the second ritual. Richard Wilson (1995:69) also

¹"En todas partes, sea en el noreste o en San Quintín, los ritos no son practicados sino por los hombres. La religión no es una actividad femenina."

observed that only men enter caves. Abigail Adams and Brady (2005:315) note that the Q'eqchi' prohibition against women entering a cave is based on their concept of *muxuk* meaning "to profane or to cast a shadow." The prohibition against women entering caves has been noted among some Q'eqchi' living in Belize (Cayetano 1982:6) and in the Peten on previous CSULA projects. Elsewhere in the highlands, Frances Toor (1947:34-36) describes a Tzeltal cave ritual that is only attended by males and Villa Rojas (1969:210) states that the most important rituals are performed by men. Among the Chorti, the wife of the rain maker helps in the preparation, but no women take part in the rain ritual itself (Wisdom 1940:374-375).

While some might be tempted to ascribe the pattern of exclusion to Western influence, on close inspection there is little support for such an attribution. The rules only apply to rituals of indigenous origin. Over fifty years ago, anthropologists recognized the exclusion of women as a characteristic of Mesoamerican indigenous culture. Redfield and Tax (1952:33) observe, "In ceremonial activity of native origin the leadership, and often the exclusive participation, comes from men, while women play a much larger part in ceremonies of European origin."

Field Experiences

As noted earlier, the project visited a number of caves in the Western Highlands of Guatemala in both 2006 and 2007. In one case, an attempt was made in 2006 to visit the cave of Yulá, which is considered to be the home of the founding couple who produced the Jakaltekos living around Jacaltenango (Delgado Montejó 2004). Because of the extreme religious importance of the cave, Garza was accompanied by a Jakalteko prayer leader (*alcalde rezador*), the sister of a well known Jakalteko Catholic priest, and a female student from the project. Attempts to get directions to the cave from men were difficult and resulted in only the vaguest instructions. The men often questioned the group about its intentions and these sessions often focused on the student who had the misfortune of being the only non-Hispanic person as well as being a woman.

When the group arrived at a house close to the cave, they learned from an old woman that the cave was actually on her property. The woman, speaking to the priest's sister, questioned the group about its intentions and was again particularly interested in establishing the identity of the student. After the exchange, the woman thought for a moment before giving permission and ordered one of her daughters to guide the group to the cave. The cave was located only about 30 meters from the house and was fairly small. The floor of the cave was composed of a soft mud and no evidence of artifacts was noted. The group was in the cave for about a half an hour when one of the girls came to the entrance of the cave. She was very agitated and told the group to leave quickly because the men would return from work soon.

The incident was interesting in several respects. Although the men had been bothered by the student's presence, the old woman had made the decision to allow the student to

accompany the rest of the group to the cave. At the same time when another woman came to warn the group that they must leave, she did not enter the cave. It was also clear that none of the woman wanted a confrontation with the men over the breaking of the rules.

Another important aspect of the visit was the behavior of the *alcalde rezador*. On arriving at the cave, he had set up candles on a stone altar about one meter high and began asking for permission to enter the cave. This type of prayer is very standard and includes asking pardon for any bother, slight, or insult that might be unintentionally given. The unusual aspect was asking for pardon for the presence of the student by name and explained that she did not intend to show any lack of respect.

Several days later, the prayer leader confided in Garza that he was afraid that the student might be menstruating when the group had visited the cave. He then asked Garza to translate something that he wished to tell the student. The *alcalde rezador* told her:

And as I told Sergio, be careful wherever you go and always pray to God for his protection and always be very careful when you go inside caves and remember to have faith in God always. And I want to talk to you about menstruation. I want to tell you that if you are going to be like that, do not go inside any caves because you do not want to offend Jich Mi and Jich Mam. Because when a woman is like that she is not pure and all that attracts mean animals and many bad things can happen because in a sacred place a woman cannot be like that. I tell you this so you can be careful and if you are like that do not try to go inside caves because they (Jich Mi and Jich Mam) warned me about it. Therefore, I ask you to swear that if you are like that, you will not go into any caves."

When the work shifted from Jacaltenango to Quen Santo in 2006, the situation was more relaxed and the female student was allowed to enter the caves by the Chuj speaking guides. Our Jakalteko prayer leader accompanied the group but he also appeared more relaxed, perhaps because these were not his caves. One day while working with Brady, the student slipped on some wet flowstone and fell. The fall was not serious but the student warned Brady that she often fainted in these situations. No sooner were the words out of her mouth than her eyes rolled upward and she passed out. She regained consciousness within minutes and showed no ill effects of her fall. Fortunately, none of the Guatemalans witnessed the student fainting because it would almost certainly have been interpreted as soul loss.

Nevertheless, both the Chuj guides and our Jakalteco *alcalde rezador* were very disturbed to hear about the fall. The guides insisted on being shown the exact spot where the fall had occurred because they said that accidents were very rare. On the return at the end of the day, the guides seemed to be of the opinion that the student had been punished because she had offended the cave in some way and

the *alcalde rezador* wondered again if she were menstruating. After the incident, the Chuj insisted that women must be accompanied at all times by a male while working in the cave. The following day Brady was asked to purchase an unusually large number of candles for the ceremony that always preceded the project beginning its work. The *alcalde rezador* also spent a long time in prayer attempting to discover the reason for the fall.

Discussion

In reviewing the anthropological literature on the exclusion of women from cave rituals, it was noted that in the Heritage of Conquest symposium, Redfield and Tax (1952:33) note that women play a much more prominent role in Christian rituals of Western origin. This is interesting in that informants frequently compare caves to churches. For instance, the trip to Yulá described earlier started with a visit to the Catholic church in Concepción. The *alcalde rezador* explained that if “one wants to be visit Yulá this must be the first step and here it’s where we tell God what our intentions are and this is done with reverence and respect because in the same manner we show much respect at church, Yulá is like a church and we must have the same respect, but more offerings must be made in Yulá.”

If informants draw these close parallels between the two types of sacred places, church and cave, why are the rules of access so different? In this volume we present evidence that the caves at Quen Santo and Santa Eulalia have a deep cosmological significance such as being the birth place of humanity or the emergence point for planets that is simply not ascribed to churches. Garza (2005) found that the Q’eqchi’, like the Chuj, also believe that caves gave birth to the planets. The simplest explanation is that the rules are different because in reality the two types of sites are not seen as being closely similar. The simple explanation, however, is too simplistic and ignores the power differential inherent in colonialism. Christian rituals were always controlled by Western society and so follow Western rules of access, which are different than indigenous rules.

The treatment of the female student’s fall in 2006 by our Maya guides needs to be analyzed in greater depth. Earlier that season, Garza had tripped after visiting a shrine on a sacred mountain. In his attempt to protect his camera, he hit his head and the resulting cut bled profusely. The injury was interpreted by the *alcalde rezador* as Garza being punished for failure to ask permission of the mountain before visiting the shrine. In this respect, accidents by either males or females can be attributed to a supernatural cause. Concern over the incident passed quickly, however, when the prayer leader noted that Garza had bled on the earth and this blood offering had satisfied the owner of the mountain.

In 2007 another male student had an accident as he descended the steep, muddy slope in front of Cave 3 at Quen Santo. Just at the entrance to the cave, the student’s feet flew out from under him and he was dumped unceremoniously in the mud. Embarrassed, the student jumped up and just as quickly fell a second time. Now even more self-conscious, he

jumped up once more and fell a third time. If ever the Earth Lord was sending someone a message, this would seem to be it. The Maya, however, found the student’s predicament hilarious. The fact that the student took the resulting ribbing in good humor and even joined in with the joking in Spanish allowed the incident to pass without further notice.

The female student’s accident from the previous year, however, had not been forgotten. On the contrary, the fact that the student had not returned with us allowed our guides to speak openly of her and by name. It was also clear that gender was at the heart of the issue. One of the guides from La Trinidad began the discussion with a general statement of the Chuj normative position.

Many men come with their women but they do not enter the cave. They stay out here preparing food and they pray and wait for their husbands because men are the only ones who can go inside and they themselves make their promises and offerings. But some men do let their women go in the cave, but they have to —pray much more and the husband has to ask for forgiveness and he has to ask the cave for permission for her to go inside, and she also has to pray the same so she is allowed to go in there. And if the woman is in her month, not that; like that they cannot go inside because it is bad and they have to keep away, not too close to the cave and when their men know they are like that it’s better not to bring them.

Another guide then jumped in and turned the discussion directly on to the student.

If a woman is menstruating, if a woman is not well, I already told you that if they are like that it is not possible because the Lords already said that if they are like that they cannot enter here because it is dangerous for everybody because bad animals may be attracted by the smell and thus they told me that in a sacred place the blood of women is not good. And therefore, when people say that women cannot go inside sometimes they do not know why, but the Lords do know because they are the owners of the holy place; they command us and therefore women cannot be alone. Just look at what happened to [student named] last year. They cannot be alone because the *Señores* [Lords] do not like that and they do not want it like that because it is dangerous and as they say, only men should do all the ceremonies. Therefore, when something happens like what happened to [student named] it is like a warning that the place is not being respected. If they got permission to be there then the keeper will not harm them because they know. They understand and if the woman is pregnant we also have to ask for permission because it is just like going to somebody’s office and we ask permission to come in — we must ask.

The incident in 2006 continued to have repercussions in

2007 in that out Chuj guides were very insistent that all the women be accompanied in the cave by a man. On one occasion, our guides discovered that one of the male students had left two of the women alone in Cave 4. This resulted in a loud argument with the director in which it was clear that the Chuj men were both angry and worried. In the end the male student was roundly chastised by the guides.

Our Jakalteek *alcalde rezador* who accompanied the project discussed the dangers of entering caves for women. He said that, “Many bad things can happen and that is why is also dangerous that women are by themselves. They say there are spirits that can harm them and they could even end up pregnant. If people do not know, it is better that they are not alone because bad things can happen to them and that is why we need to tell the female students because something could happen to them.” When questioned on the matter, he elaborated, “If a woman is by herself and goes inside a cave, she is not a good woman because that should not be done; but there a few who do not believe it and do go inside the caves but there are always spirits in there and things they do not know and they could end up pregnant. And this is bad because they would not know who the father is and it is like punishment because they do not have respect.”

The concern that women might be impregnated in a cave has counterparts in Mesoamerican literature. It certainly recalls Ixquic being impregnated when Hun Hunahpu’s skull spits into her hand. More specifically, however, the warning about spirits in the cave seems to be drawn from widespread mythology about supernatural beings that have amorous relations with humans of the opposite sex (Brady 1988). This idea is illustrated in the Tepozteco myth, in which the Central Mexican hero was produced by the union of a princess and cave wind in a cave in the Hill of the Treasures (González Casanova 1928:218). The highland Chontal have a genre of “superman” tales in which a person with super-human power is born to a woman in a cave. Turner (1972: 82) states that, “No mention is made of the father of the boy but the setting is such that it can be inferred that a god of the earth copulated with the woman.”

As we have become more attuned to the indigenous view of caves, we have begun to appreciate that this danger is “obvious” to the indigenous observer. It has been noted that stalagmites are equated with penises by the Maya and they often have a very phallic form (Brady et al. 2005:219). If a woman was walking in a cave in a native skirt and stepped over a stalagmite, it would expose her uncovered genitalia to the phallic stone. The situation is very similar to that discussed by Garza in chapter 10 about prohibitions against a woman stepping over a man lying in the street. Garza’s informant says, “. . . the woman is opened (*la mujer está partida*) and she can get pregnant and be ruined.”

In other ways, the warning about the possibility of becoming pregnant appears related to a type of tale that is designed to illustrate the dire consequences of women entering caves. The earliest of these was recorded by John Lloyd Stephens back to the 1840s. At Bolonchen, Stephens (1962:2:98) was told that women are not permitted to enter the cave because

40 women had once fainted in the passages. Considering the difficulty of descent, it is difficult to believe that 40 women had ever congregated in the cave. More recently, Oliver La Farge (1947:128–129) was told that a Ladino woman had entered the Yalan Na cave. The cave had closed in around her, trapping her and serpents had bound her limbs. The *alcaldes rezadores* succeeded in freeing her but she went mad because of the experience. Since La Farge has said that *ladinos* do not even approach the cave, the story has more of the character of a morality tale than a historical incident.

Conclusion

The California State University, Los Angeles Archaeological Field Program in Guatemala encountered evidence of the exclusion of women from caves during its work in 2006 and 2007. At the Jakalteek site of Yulá, the women in the group were able to enter the cave because an old woman granted permission and because the men were not present. They were forced to leave after a short time because of the fear that the men were returning. At the Chuj site of Quen Santo, the project was able to negotiate an arrangement whereby women could enter if accompanied by a man. The guides made it clear that this was not what generally happened.

It was also noted that members of the project had fallen on a number of occasions. In analyzing the cases, it is clear that incidents involving men were interpreted differently than those involving women. The fall taken by the female student was interpreted in far more negative terms and was considered to have far more serious consequences.

As noted at the beginning, data was collected almost exclusively from males and the views presented above reflect this bias. The exclusion of woman from caves was most often tied to taboos relating to ritual impurity stemming from menstruation. Garza once asked a Mopan Maya woman why women were excluded from caves, to which she replied, “A woman cannot enter herself.” Her answer was surprising because it so closely resembled a statement by one of Sahagún’s 16th century female informants in Central Mexico who said, “we who are women In us is a cave, a gorge” (quoted in Heyden 1975:134). These statements point out how strikingly different female responses are from those of males. There is a pressing need to gather those views and present a more balanced view of ritual cave use.

As much of the above discussion has revolved around the issue of menstruation, the senior author would like to close with a humorous incident on the subject. My room mate, Ann Scott, and I were both having our periods near the end of the project. Each day’s work at Quen Santo began with prayers led by the *alcalde rezador* in Cave 2 before the archaeology could commence. As the prayers were ending I leaned over to Ann and asked lightly, “I wonder what the Earth Lord would do if he knew we were both menstruating.” The prayer ended; I stood up and promptly slammed my head into a low hanging formation hard enough to suffer a mild concussion. After I stopped seeing stars, Ann and I were able to laugh that my question had been answered with a bitch-slapped from the Earth Lord.

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7

The Chicomoztoc in the Context of Modern Jalkateko Ethnic Identity

James E. Brady and Arnulfo Delgado

One of the most widely distributed concepts in Mesoamerican is the belief in group emergence from a seven-chambered cave of origin. This is generally referred to by the Nahuatl name “Chicomoztoc,” which literally means “seven caves.” Susana Miles (1965:285) notes that the basic motif of the seven caves of origin is widely distributed in the Maya area among the Pokam, K’iche’, Kaqchikel, and the Chiapas Maya and is documented in the Popol Vuh. During fieldwork in Jacaltenango we encountered a modern folkloristic variation on this theme which is still an important element of indigenous belief.

Juvenal Casaverde (1976) in his ethnography on Jacaltenango asserts that one of the pillars of Jalkateko ethnic identity is the belief in their descent from a founding couple, Jichmam and Jichmi. Casaverde (1976:37) says:

According to the myth of origin (see p.17) the mythical founding ancestor *Jichmam* was directly appointed by God and left in charge of the future welfare of his descendants. He was given a book containing the regulations for maintaining an orderly social life and became the political and religious leader of the Jakalteco stock. It is said that he governed his people directly until he retired from active life. The first installation of the *alcaldes rezadores* politico-religious organizations is attributed to Jichmam, who is believed to have been the first *alcalde rezador*.

Jichmam is the great culture giver who founded the ethnic group, gave the territory to his descendents, established landmarks, provided seeds for planting, instituted ethnic dress and the Jakalteko language (Casaverde 1976:Chapter 2). It is descent from the primordial couple that allows Jalkatekos to use the expression, “*jik’alto ko b’a*” which Delgado’s informants translate as, “we come from the same seed, the same blood, or the same origin.” Jichmam and Jichmi now reside at Yula, a cave located between San Juan Ixcoy and Jacaltenango. According to Jakalteko mythology, Jichmam originally migrated from *Yich Kanh*, meaning “the place where the sky begins,” located to the north. The origin in the north causes consternation among some Jakaltekos who do not want to accept that Jichmam could come from the Lacandon region because the Lacandon are not considered human. One resolution to the problem has been to assert that he came from Tikal.

While Jichmam is a central figure in the ideology of Jacaltenango, he is also part of a more extensive myth. Casaverde (1976:19) states that Jichmam was one of seven brothers who migrated from the north, the others being: Ochewal, K’anil, Wamu’, Tzipo’, Ixtenam I, and Ixtenam II. According to the myth, Jichmam was the founder of the Jakalteko ethnic group. The seven brothers relate to a frequently referred to geographical unit, the *Huista*, that is made up groups that see themselves as closely related and includes territory in Mexico as well as Guatemala. An informant stated the relationship explicitly in saying, “The seven *Huistas*: Nentón, Santa Ana, San Antonio, Jacaltenango and Concepción Huista are the seven brothers. *Huista* are brothers.” The same informant recognized seven as being an important or sacred number but did not know the significance. He remarked, “The number seven has a meaning and it comes from the ancient ones but I do not know what it is, but if they want to tell me what it means they will tell me.”

Some of Delgado’s informants disagree with the names Ixtenam I and II and assert that they are Ixtenam and Yultenam, which seems more likely. Ixtenam may be the founder of the Chuj ethnic group because *ixtenam* is a Chuj word meaning knoll, peak or cave. In fact, there is a site in the Chuj territory at the foot of the hill that is named Itz’nal and there is a cave in this site named Ichtenam. The *ah b’eh* of San Mateo celebrate rites at the beginning of the Maya calendar in this cave.

Although, K’anil, Wamu’ and Sipo’ are not mentioned as founding fathers of specific groups and informants did not know where they reside, they are accepted as part of the seven brothers who founded the *Huista*. The names are remembered because hills in the area are named for the seven founders. For instance, a hill devoted to *K’anil* is located to the south in the Mam region.

Discussion

Because the seven brothers are seen as founders of particular groups and because they now reside in caves immediately suggests a relationship to the motif of the Chicomoztoc. While specialists often conceptualize the Chicomoztoc as a single cave with seven internal chambers as pictured in the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (Kirchhoff et al. 1976) [Figure 1], considerable variation actually exists in the way that it is depicted. In some cases, the Chicomoztoc is depicted as seven separate caves arranged lineally (Codex

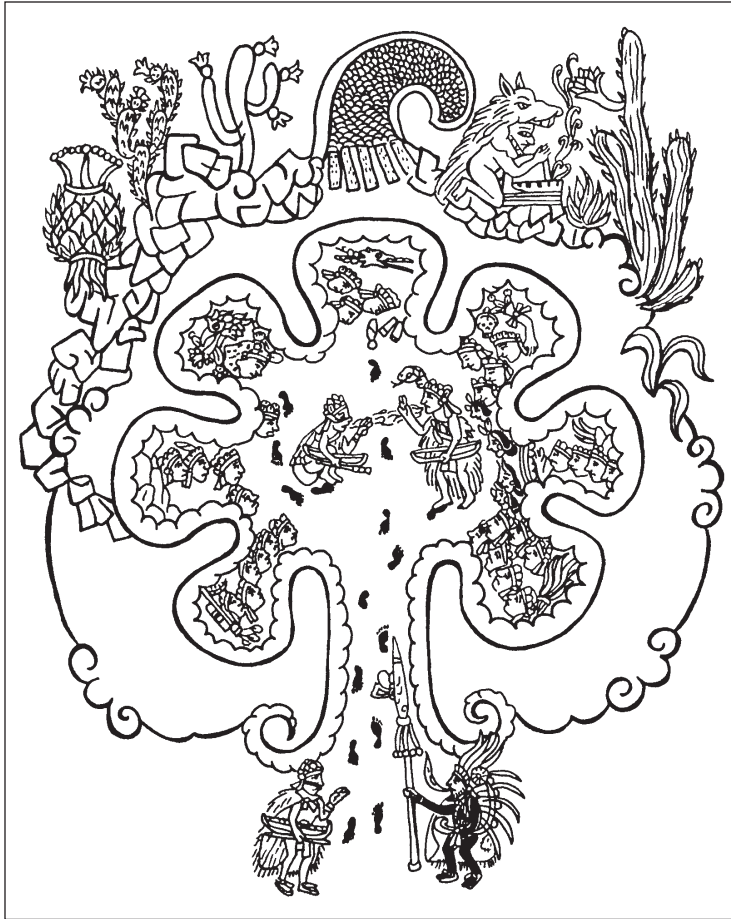


Figure 1: The Chicomoztoc is most often conceptualized as a single cave with seven internal divisions as portrayed in the *Historia Tolteca-Chchimeca*.

Vaticanus A) [Figure 2], seven caves in a curving enclosure (Yoneda 1981) [Figure 3] or as two rows of horizontally arranged caves one set above the other (Durán 1995) [Figure 4]. In the two cases of artificial caves that are thought to represent Chicomoztoc complexes, one in highland Guatemala (Brady 1991) [Figure 5], the other in Puebla, Mexico (Aguilar et al. 2005) [Figure 6], the caves differed considerably in form from each other. Thus, it appears that the form of the Chicomoztoc was not rigidly defined in indigenous thinking.

We would argue further that the concept was flexible enough that it could be applied by analogy to issues unrelated to the cave of origin. Thus Ruiz de Alarcón (1984: 172, 178, 183, 223) uses the term Chicomoztoc to refer to the seven openings in the human body. This use of the concept of Chicomoztoc was apparently built on a well established Mesoamerican metaphor in which individual body openings were equated with caves. We see this in one of Sahagun's 16th century female informants who says, "In us a gorge, a cave" in reference to her womb (Heyden 1975:134) and modern Maya link cave and vagina in joking (Bricker 1973:65–66, 150–151; Laughlin 1975:132).

The use of the term Chicomoztoc to refer to the seven body openings has further significance in that, taken together, the seven caves can be used to indicate the entire body. A very similar use of one of these sacred numbers to indicate the whole has been noted among the Q'eqchi' Maya in reference to sacred mountains. Each community has its own sacred mountain and its own earth lord [*Tzuultacaaj*] who inhabits that mountain. At a higher level, the Q'eqchi' recognize 13 hierarchically arranged sacred mountains. It should be noted that 13, like seven and nine, are sacred or highly significant numbers. To use the expression, "The Thirteen" either in reference to the mountains or to the *Tzuultacaajs* carries a sense of completeness than signifies the totality of the Q'eqchi' area (Schackt 1984:20). In the same way, to refer to the seven, either in reference to the brothers or to the caves they inhabit, would

Figure 2: The *Codex Vaticanus A* depicts the Chicomoztoc as seven linearly arranged caves.



signify the entire *Huista*.

In Mesoamerican mythology the motif of the Chicomoztoc, is used to formalize and validate relationships of commonality and difference with surrounding groups. Commonalities are recognized in terms of the different groups having emerged together from the Chicomoztoc but, at the same time, these groups are different because they did not emerge from the same cave or chamber.

In Jakalteko mythology, the Chicomoztoc emerges in a slightly different fashion in which the seven brothers migrate from the lowlands and settle in the highlands. At the end of their active lives, they retreat into caves where they continue to live. Here the caves of the Chicomoztoc are not the point of origin but final ending places, which have become sacred landmarks and these tie together the area know as the *Huista*, the brothers. Informants could not name the location of all seven caves but for Jakaltekos *Yula*, the residence of Jichmam and Jichmi defines and anchors their position at the center of the *Huista*. As one informant says, “Life began here and the founders stayed in their sacred place and they sent out their children to find other lands but they stayed here, here in the center of it all.”

It is interesting that the Chicomoztoc/seven brothers motif is deeply interwoven with other widely distributed Maya mythology. After a disagreement, Ochewal left and founded the Kanjobal ethnic group. Delgado’s informants state that Ochewal is recognized as the founding father of San Miguel, located north of Jacaltenango. These informants also state that the conflict between Jichmam and Ochewal occurred because Ochewal seduced Jichmam’s wife, Jichmi. This is interesting because it appears to be an adaptation of the widely distributed Maya myth of the seduction of the Sun’s wife, the Moon, by his brother, Venus (Thompson 1930). It should be noted, however, that this ancient mythology continues to color modern day perceptions because people believe that each ethnic group assumes the character of its founder. Jakaltekos say that men from San Miguel practice polygamy because Ochewal, their founder was famed as a seducer of women stemming from his seduction of Jichmi.

It should also be noted that more recent Spanish elements are interwoven into the Maya as well. Casaverde (1976:39) mentions that myths about patron saints describe relationships between different saints. One myth presents the Virgin of Candelaria, the patron saint of Jacaltenango; Santa Eulalia, the patron

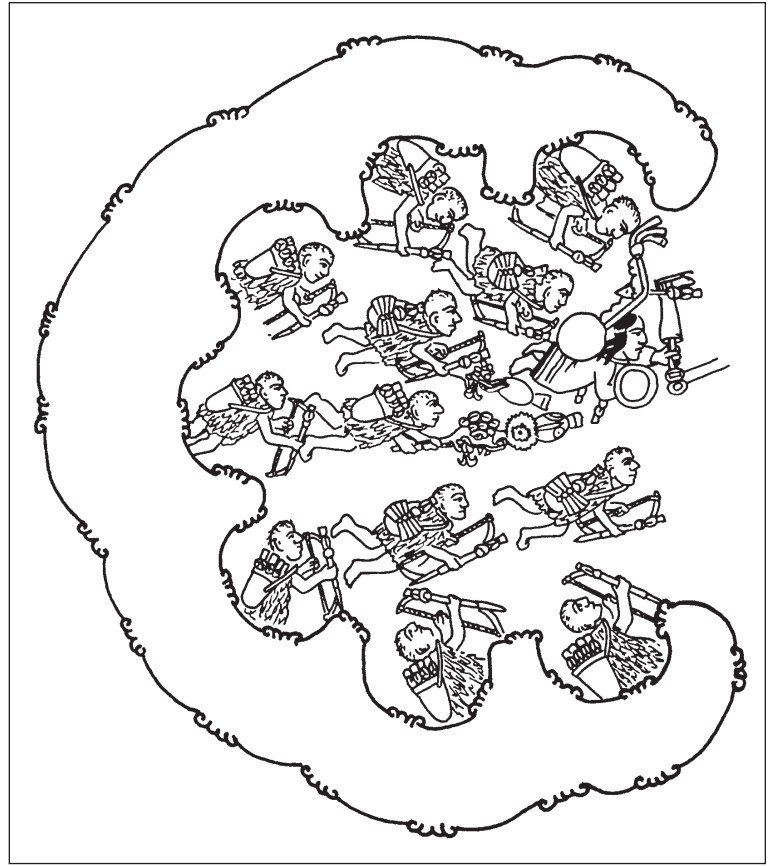
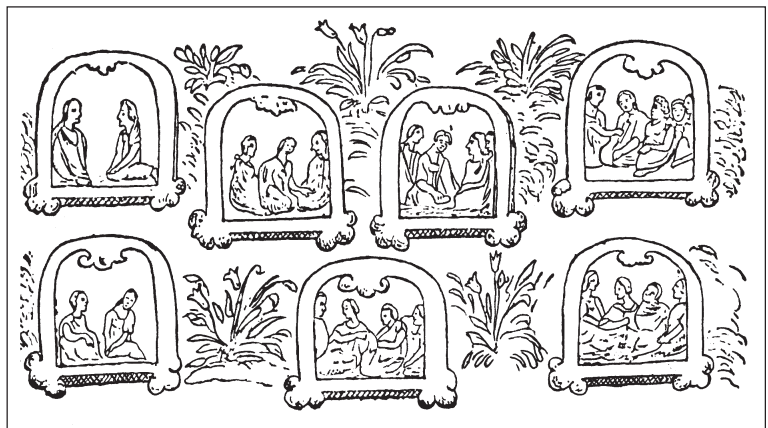


Figure 3: The *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2* presents the Chicomoztoc as seven individual caves or niches inside of a curving enclosure.

Figure 4: The *Atlas de Duran* shows the Chicomoztoc as seven individual caves arranged on two levels.



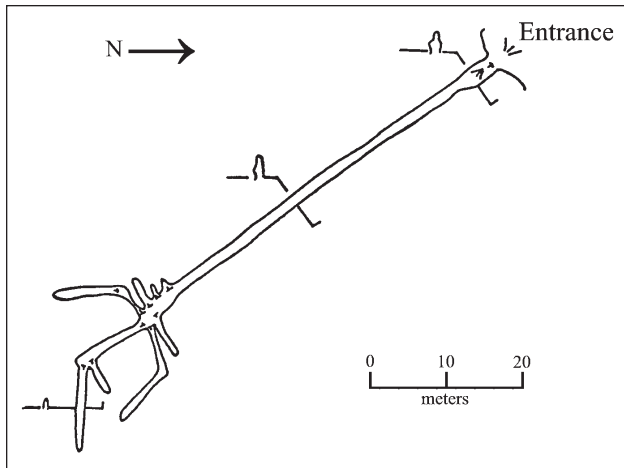


Figure 5: Cave 1 at Utatlan was constructed to represent the cave of origin with seven terminations.

saint of Santa Eulalia; and the Virgin of Candelaria, also the patron saint of Chiantla as sisters. Long ago they came from Spain and each chose a place to found their town. The relationship of the Catholic saints parallels the relationship of the seven brothers. The similarities do not stop there. In another myth, San Miguel courted Santa Eulalia unsuccessfully and so wooed the Virgin of Candelaria. As we noted earlier, Ochewal, the seducer of Jichmi, founded the town of San Miguel. Thus, the Maya and the Spanish figures are not separate and independent spheres. The Maya prototypes provide the models onto which the Spanish characters are fit. Santa Eulalia, for instance, is under the protection of, interacts with, and is helped by the indigenous cave dwelling deity, Yalan Na' (La Farge 1947: 63, 105).

There is also a tendency to conflate the founding couple with the widespread belief in the Earth Lord, the *Señor del Cerro*. One informant makes this explicit in saying, "The owners of the mountains (cerros), the Jichmam, are the same and we call them Jichmam but they all have different names and therefore each *cerro*, the place itself then, has a different name and he is the owner of the *cerro* but he is

the Jichmam." Interestingly, however, the founding couple does not become conflated with the figure of Mother Earth or *Madre Tierra* indicating that Madre Tierra occupied a different conceptual space or plan from the founding couple. An informant explains, "In their places they all have their caves and have a keeper (*cuidador*) who is the Jichmam and he has his wife and they both live there, but Mother Earth is also there because we plant in Mother Earth and Jichmam and Jichmi take care of her and there we can make our candles offerings."

Conclusions

This article has analyzed a modern origin myth that appears to have its roots in the Pre-Columbian concept of the Chicomoztoc, the seven chambered cave of origin. The motif is used, as in Pre-Columbian times, to emphasize the interrelatedness of peoples who see themselves as an ethnic group. In the modern case it serves to define *los Huista*, a geographical area that cross-cuts the modern Guatemalan-Mexican border. At the same time our focus on Jichmam and Jichmi, the Jakaltecko founding couple, shows how the same motif simultaneously allows subgroups to assert their own separate and independent identity.

The modern use of the motif varies from recorded ancient uses in that the seven caves represent the final dwelling places of the seven brothers rather than their initial point of departure on a journey to a new homeland. As a consequence, the seven caves were never meant to designate a single place as in the Chicomoztoc in the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*. It seems likely instead that, in the past when the myth was remembered in more detail, caves were located in each of the major areas of the *Huista*. "The Seven" taken together thereby serve to define the region.

In reviewing depictions of the Chicomoztoc in ethnohistorical documents, the lack of uniformity in the form of the cave was noted suggesting that variation in the employment of the motif may have existed. The use of the term Chicomoztoc to refer to the seven openings in the human body reinforces this inference. If that were the case, the modern variations on the myth may be illustrative of ways in which the motif

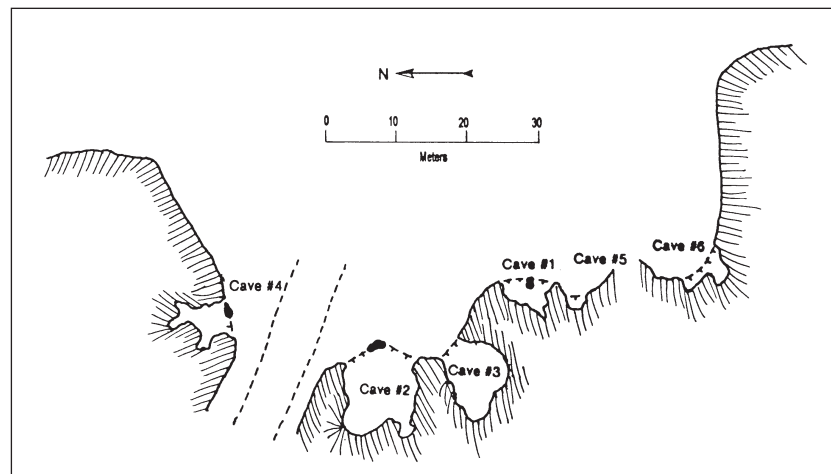


Figure 6: At Acatzingo Viejo seven small caves were excavated into the side of the escarpment beneath the site. One of the seven caves was destroyed by the construction of a road.

was used in the past. Clearly myths of ancient origins are representations, explanations, idealizations and negotiations of ongoing relationships that may be dynamic and evolving. This applies to the past as much as the present.

Finally, the tremendous adaptability of the myth needs to be recognized. The motif of the Chicomoztoc is woven around what is probably a more ancient story of the Sun, Moon and Venus but can also incorporate Spanish patron saints. It is just such adaptability that allowed the myth, not only to survive, but to remain meaningful to this day.

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8

A Reassessment of Ethnographic Data on Cave Utilization in Santa Eulalia

James E. Brady and Sergio Garza

This paper presents an ethnographic and ethnohistoric study of cave use in the Q'anjob'al Maya speaking community of Santa Eulalia, Guatemala. The community is of particular anthropological interest because it was the subject of a three-month study by Oliver La Farge in 1932 and by Krystyna Deuss (2007) in the 1980s and 1990s. Neither La Farge nor Deuss (2007:44), however, were ever permitted to enter the cave, Yalan Na'. Additionally, La Farge says, "I was warned emphatically and many times not to approach it [the cave]. Many of these warnings were given out of a perfectly clear sky, when I had not brought up the subject in any way" (La Farge 1947:127). Nevertheless, he concluded that, "I suspect from these indications that the cave is the true center of the ceremonial" (La Farge 1947:128).

The type of restrictions faced by La Farge are not surprising in that caves are at the heart of indigenous ritual and, as Ralph Beals (1945:84) notes among the Mixe, these rituals "have a connection with the most intimate details of daily life in a way which the Catholic rituals do not." Beals mentions his extreme difficulty in obtaining information on cave rituals. What information he did obtain came mostly from stumbling on caves and shrines while hiking in the mountains (Beals 1945:85–65). One of his principal informants was particularly helpful in recommending trails that led to important caves (Beals 1945:87). Alfred Tozzer (1909:149) was not so lucky in recording that he was forced to wait in a canoe with the women while a Lacandon man and his son conducted a cave ritual. Many decades later Jon McGee (1990: 58) did better but, nevertheless states, "One final class of ritually important sites are cave shrines. Although there are apparently several such sites, I have been allowed to visit only one that is situated in a rock overhang on the shore of Lake Itsanok'uh near the community of Mensabak."

Although we were also not permitted to enter the cave during our initial visit, we were able to gather a large amount of information for several reasons. First, Sergio Garza had established friendships with a number of Q'anjob'al families in the Los Angeles area who were instrumental in gaining us acceptance in Santa Eulalia. Second, these families were less reticent to discuss the Yalan Na' and so provided us with a solid foundation of information that we were able to build upon during our visit. Finally, we were also aided by having a copy of a document written in 1800–1801 from the Archivo General de Centroamérica (AGCA)¹ in Guatemala City about the use of the cave at Santa Eulalia. We were

able to broach the topic of cave use by providing copies of the map that was part of the document to the *alcaldes rezadores* in Santa Eulalia who had not been aware of the its existence [Figure 1].

What's in a Name?

In discussing the cave, La Farge (1947:127) states that the name Yalan Na' means "under the house" and refers to the fact that the cave is suppose to terminate beneath the church (see chapter 11 for a discussion of this in more detail). Our informants, however, translated Yalan Na' as meaning "the house beneath." In several references to the cave they referred to it as "the house." For instance, when we first arrived in Santa Eulalia as spoke to the *alcades rezadores*. Each of us wrote our names on a piece of paper and handed a candle to the *alcalde rezador* of the cave. He put the paper and candles into a shoulder bag and said, "Now I am going to consult with the cave (Yalan Na') about your lives. I will return at 11:30 A.M. and then I will tell you what it spoke to me." After the rezador left, Garza asked an informant where exactly he was going and was told,

the *señor* is going to the house and when he is at the doorway (*cuando esté en la puerta*) he is going to ask for permission to enter and he is going to go way inside, to the end of it, (*hasta adentro, hasta el final*) and he is going to go to the altar with the crosses they have there and he is going to light the candles there and see everything about you. The cave is going to tell him everything and nobody can hide anything from it (*nadie puede esconder nada*). The cave knows everything and when he comes back he is going to give us the news. Let's hope that everything is fine."

We again encountered references to the idea of caves as houses at Paiconop. While hiking to a sacred water fall is we passed two small caves on the slope of the mountain. The interiors of both caves had collapsed but nonetheless the mouths were still used as places of worship as evident by the wax stains on the rocks and a few used votive candles (*veladoras*) inside. Garza asked his informant what the places were and he was told, "Those are doorways (*Esas son puertas*)."

Garza asked, "Doorways for what?" (*¿puertas*

¹AGCA A1 Leg. 2804 Exp. 24640.

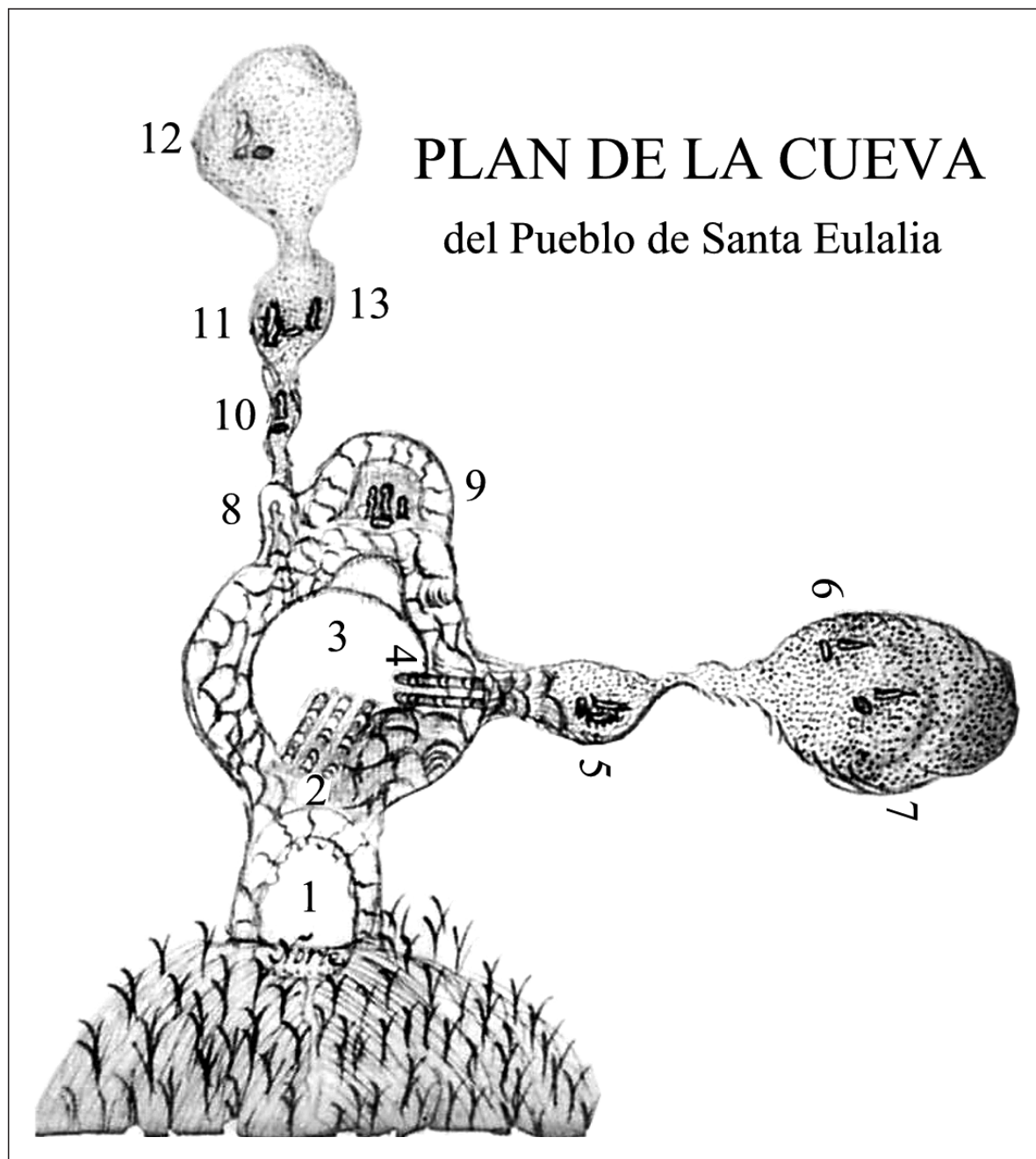


Figure 1: This is copy of the map drawn in 1800 or 1801 of Yalan Na' in Santa Eulalia. The map, now in the Archivo General de Centroamérica, has south at the top of the page.

para qué?) to which the informant responded, “Those are doorways to the mountain’s house” (*Esas son las puertas de la casa del cerro*). It’s just like our houses; they all have doorways and doors. It’s just like that.”

The equating of caves to houses is not uncommon in the Maya area. Soustelle (1937: 53) notes that among the Lacandon, “They rather regard the caves as sacred living places of their gods and Boremanse (1998:27) states, “The gods are thought to dwell in huts, as the Lacandon do. To humans the palm leaves of which the roofs of the gods’ houses are made look like stones, but the gods see the stone structures and the rocks as thatched huts.” Finally, a number of Maya languages have terms for “cave” that translate as “stone house,” for example, *naj tunich* in Mopan Maya and *ochoch pek* in Q’eqchi’ (Haeserijn 1979:243).

The Yalan Na’ and the Layout of Cosmic Space

We noted, as did La Farge (1947:64) before us, that Santa Eulalia sees itself as the center of the universe. While it is not uncommon for communities to see themselves as occupying the cosmic center, La Farge (1947:162) cautiously acknowledges that there is a basis for the belief in the region in saying, “One must take with a good deal of salt the claims that such individuals make for themselves, but there are vague indications in other villages, as well, that Santa Eulalia is somewhat a center.” In discussing this with an *alcalde rezador*, our informant made it clear that the centrality is linked to the cave. As one man said,

the cave is sacred because God gave it to us. Here in Santa Eulalia it has been said for years that Santa Eulalia is number one. Why? Because of this, because of the cave and here Santa Eulalia is the center. People come here from other communities. They come from Soloma, Barrillas, San Mateo, San Rafael, San Miguel, even people from Mexico. Even people from Jacaltenango come here sometimes. The people from Mexico come from Chiapas to make their petitions because here, at the house of the *alcaldes rezadores* is the first step—the first entry, the second step is down below in the cave, and then there is another place on the mountain where two crosses are. Mother Earth lives here in Santa Eulalia. She also lives in the cave and they say that Mother Earth is our mother. She is everyone’s mother.

The role of the Yalan Na’ as a fundamental element in the “centering” of Santa Eulalia appears to have been implicitly recognized by La Farge because he comments on the logical problem this creates when discussing an earlier settlement at La Farge [i.e. *paykonob* - “old village”] that is seen as ancestral to the current location. La Farge (1947:64) noted, “There is also a pre-Columbian ruin of some importance at Paiconop. Presumably there, not at the present village, was the center of the world, although the cave of Yalan Na’ may have been ceremonially important before the move.” In point of fact, there is another cave associated with the ruin that it

is still recognized by the people of Santa Eulalia as having been the principal focus of ritual before the move. Thus the current relation between Santa Eulalia and the Yalan Na’ is seen by the Q’anjob’al themselves as being a replication of the earlier relationship between Paiconop and its cave.

On a lower symbolic level, the Yalan Na’ also structures residents’ conceptualization of community space. The Yalan Na’ is thought to run under the community and the main passage is believed to terminate beneath the Catholic Church. La Farge (1947:127) says, “The cave is supposed to communicate directly with the church, ending “at the feet of the Virgin.” Father Daniel Jensen, who was a parish priest in Santa Eulalia in the 1960s, was told that the cave ended directly beneath the altar (personal communication, Daniel Jensen, September 5, 2008). This relationship is mutually supportive and symbolizes the fusing of the indigenous Maya and Christian beliefs into a single, unified system.

Cave Space: Restricted or Unrestricted?

Given the tremendous cosmological significance of the Yalan Na’ an immediate question arises as to whether access to this source of supernatural power is restricted. The issue is relevant to archaeology because, in recent years, it has been proposed that caves were appropriated by communities or by political elites (Brady 1997). Epigraphic evidence appears to refer to Classic Period rulers “owning” particular caves (Brady and Colas 2005) and Garza (2005) has discussed the ownership and restriction of access to caves in a modern Q’eqchi’ Maya community.

In some cases the close proximity of a cave entrance to prominent architecture suggests that access may have been controlled or restricted. At the Cueva de El Duende and the Cueva de los Murciélagos at Dos Pilas the entrances to the caves are directly under palace complexes (Demarest et al. 2003). This would have allowed the immediate residents of those complexes to observe anyone approaching the entrance and to restrict access to the cave.

In other cases, elaboration of architecture and walls, often around natural restrictions, may have been employed as “gates” to limit access to progressively more sacred areas. At Naj Tunich, two mounds span the arroyo in front of the cave entrance (Brady 1989:158–159). These structures may have defined the boundaries of the sacred precincts but the structures were also strategically placed to utilize the natural restrictiveness of the arroyo to allow them to control entry into the cave. Naj Tunich is not the only case. It appears that an architectural complex existed in front of Balankanche Cave before it was bulldozed for road fill (Skook and Smith 1954:289).

In examining restrictiveness we do not want to limit ourselves exclusively to points around the entrance where access to the cave could be denied. Restrictions can occur within caves as well. At Naj Tunich, a large natural rise created by ceiling collapse saw major cultural modification with the construction of a large number of retaining walls. Filling and level of floors behind them created a two-tiered, 14 m high balcony structure (Brady and Stone 1986:21). When

completed, access from the floor of the cave to the first tier and from the first tier to the second tier were restricted to one or a few routes that could be easily monitored. Although excavation revealed intense ritual activity along the floor of the cave in front of the retaining walls, modern Maya rituals are conducted on the first level of the balcony in front of a huge stalagmitic column and the second level contains important tomb structures that were the focus of ancient ritual activity. It is not unlikely that access to the upper levels was restricted, perhaps on the basis of social class.

The 3.5 km of tunnel passage could only be reached through a small opening on the second tier. Thus, in many ways, it was the most restricted of areas. The dramatic drop in artifact densities between the balcony and the tunnel system argues that access to the tunnel system was highly restricted and utilized by far fewer people (Brady 1989:402–406).

Finally, access to a cave might be restricted even without the construction of physical barriers. Entrance to the cave beneath the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan may have had no obvious restrictions because the entrance was in a large open plaza (Heyden 1975). If access to the plaza had been unrestricted, the presence of people constantly passing through the plaza would make surreptitious entry into the cave difficult if not impossible. If access to the plaza were restricted, simply the act of entering the plaza by an unauthorized person would have drawn attention.

Until recently, there were no types of architectural restrictions associated with Yalan Na'. Does the lack of physical restrictions indicate that access to the cave was unrestricted? Cave archaeologists have not as yet attempted to deal with this question systematically. In the Q'eqchi' Maya community of Santa Cruz studied by Garza (2005) there is strong normative pressure against using another community's cave and access is mildly restricted by the need to ask permission of the cave's owner. Santa Cruz, however, is a relatively recently settled community. Is access more restricted in communities that have been in place for centuries?

Despite the fact there were no physical barriers controlling entry into the Yalan Na', access to the cave appears to be highly restricted. La Farge (1947:127) stated, "I could find no Ladinos . . . who had been even near the mouth of it. . . ." A 47-year-old informant of Deuss' admitted that he had never been in the cave so even local Q'anjob'al residents have little access to the cave (Deuss 2007: 44). According to current community norms, only the *adivina*, the *alcalde rezador* in charge of the cave or those accompanied by him can enter. An informant says, "The *alcaldes* are the only ones allowed in the cave because the cave has chosen them and not even the town's mayor (*alcalde municipal*) can enter. No one can enter." This restriction appears to have some antiquity. The document of 1800–1801 states that it is the First *Alcalde* who is allowed to enter the cave and he might be accompanied by other officials such as a *Regidor* or a *Principal*.

The prohibition against entry is buttressed by a number of supernatural sanctions. Throughout Mesoamerica

unauthorized entry into a cave can lead to sickness, madness or death. During our visit we were told,

Petra's father once entered Yalan Na' without permission, he went down a passage but when the road ended he saw that the place had no end and at that moment a shadow entered his eyes and almost caused him to slip and fall. After this he came back out. My father then told him that he should not have gone in there and that there are people who do not listen, and Petra's father felt very bad for his transgression but said that being in the cave was like seeing the entire world—it was big and beautiful but that it was dangerous because those visions and the shadow that the cave put into his eyes almost made him slip and fall. But the knowledge that all can be seen in the cave is known only to the *alcaldes* because they are the only ones who can be there.

Such stories are not new. La Farge (1947:128–129) records a story about a Ladino woman who supposedly entered the Yalan Na' but was stopped by the cave closing in on her and a serpent binding her legs. After the *alcaldes rezadores* secured her release from the cave she went mad. This story is interesting in light of Fr. Jensen being told that, should he enter, he might become stuck. Nor are these stories recent inventions. The eighteenth century document says that unauthorized entry leads to death and asserts specifically that a Catholic priest, Padre Monteceros, died after entering the cave.

In the 1980's a wall and gate were placed at the entrance to physically restrict access. The reason given for the construction was fear that evangelical Protestants might vandalize the cave, something that has repeatedly happened in Guatemala. The Catholic priest, however, said that the *alcalde rezador* discovered that black magic had been performed in the cave so it was closed (Deuss 2007:44). It is difficult to know whether to accept the statement at face value. The priest did not say that he learned this directly from one of the *alcaldes rezadores* and so it may have come to him as gossip passed on by a parishioner. La Farge (1947:128) acknowledges that curses are performed in Yalan Na' noting that, "an individual, having a quarrel with another and some semblance of justice on his side, may have it laid against his enemy for a fee." Even here, La Farge implies that it is an *alcalde rezador* who makes the curse. If the priest is correct, then a sorcerer entered the cave without permission. This would be enormously dangerous since it is not unlikely that a person caught in the act would be killed (Deuss 2007:219; Nash 1970:244–250; Vogt 1969:412–415).

Interior Cave Space

Perhaps because ethnographers rarely have had access to important caves, we know relatively little about the utilization of interior space within them. This has meant that ethnographers have had to rely on second or third-hand information about cave rituals. For instance, La Farge presents

an account of a ceremony that Bertha Dutton collected from a *ladino* informant who claims that he was allowed to attend a ritual in Yalan Na':

According to him, "all the people" bring tribute and meet in the cave. "There are no crosses or Christianity at all in Santa Eulalia." Inside the cave are two stairways of cut poles [ladders?] leading to some sort of inner chamber, where he entered to witness the ceremony at about two o'clock on March 15th. Thirty years ago this would have been the entrance of the Uayeb. The *Holom Konop*, a large, crudely carved log, was lying on the floor of the cave.

Only the prayermakers can attend and pray [this conflicts with the statement above]. They tell the people at what hour the souls will pass over the bridge, and at that hour, all married couples pray. Incensarios are brandished along with pine torches. A chicken is hung up by its legs and cut at the neck, so that the blood drips onto the fire. This enables the souls to pass between the good and bad worlds. Sometimes deer or other animals are sacrificed. If a soul falls off the bridge during its journey, it is lost. The souls spend one year in the bad world, and the next in the good, and so on. At the end of the ceremony "the people scratch themselves" with the *tcai*, drawing blood from their backs. They drink *aguardiente*, although their prayers mention only chicha [a fermented beverage]. "They get drunk, and then go out to tell other people how the ceremony came out." [This presumably refers to announcement of the prophecy.] The ceremony lasts an hour or an hour and a half. Twenty days earlier, a similar one is held for the souls of the children. "This falls on an ahau, a day for ceremonies" (La Farge 1947:124).

La Farge shows skepticism that the individual had actually witnessed the ceremony, characterizing it as "a remarkable feat if true." He also points out the discrepancy between the statement in the first paragraph that "all the people attended" and the one in the second paragraph that says that only the prayermakers can attend. Both La Farge and Deuss (2007:67) state that only the prayermakers go to the cave for the prophesy which pretty much precludes a *ladino* from having witnessed it.

Deuss provides a second detailed description of the interior of the cave from an individual who is supposed to have actually entered the cave and passed to the very back. She writes:

I received a description from Chico Juárez, the sacristan who had accompanied him [Fr. Daniel Jensen, a Maryknoll priest]: there were steps leading downhill at the cave entrance, after which the path flattens out until they crossed a stream. Then it was an uphill walk of perhaps fifteen minutes until they reached the end

of the passage (supposedly directly under the church) and the large round stone altar on which the sacrificial candles and *copal* are burned. All along the passage were various stone idols with candles burning in front of them. Chico said the cave had never been used by private individuals, just Prayersayers and shamans. According to Antonio, visits were limited to days of sacrifice (Deuss 2007:45).

Unfortunately, Juárez's description is probably not reliable. Fr. Jensen was allowed into the cave in 1966 but he only went in a short distance because he was warned that, as a big person, he might get stuck. Neither he nor Juárez went to the back of the cave on that occasion. Interestingly, Fr. Jensen said that he had a blueprint map of the cave that was in the church archives and he wondered if it had been made by Oliver La Farge. Sadly, all of the papers were destroyed in a fire in 1975 (personal communication, Daniel Jensen, September 5, 2008).

As far as what he could ascertain on his own about the utilization of Yalan Na', La Farge (1947:127) reports, "Don Antonio Sota once went into the mouth of the cave and saw nothing but a simple altar and small cross." In another place he says, "Apparently the cave now contains little more than the altar and cross seen by Sr. Sota, along with the usual incense burners. The Prayermakers and other officials who are allowed inside have each a special place, such as a flat ledge in the rock, known as *mesas*, although, in fact, they are in no sense tables" (La Farge 1947:128).

As already noted, like others before us, we were not permitted to enter Yalan Na'. By presenting a copy of the 1800–1801 cave map to the *alcaldes rezadores* we were able to engage them in a discussion about the cave interior and recover more details than La Farge was able to provide. One man said:

The *alcalde rezador* enters the deepest part of the cave and there are three *mesas* there. The first *mesa*, the middle *mesa* and the principal *mesa*. The principal *mesa* is in the deepest part of the cave, at the end, and it is there where they see the visions, the signs. And in the first *mesas* it is only prayers and requests for permission. At the last *mesa* is where they go to 'see' and is the most sacred one because it is the principal *mesa* - it is the last *mesa* and the keepers (*cuidadores*) keep it clean, they keep the whole cave clean.

Another individual in the town of Nentón knew Santa Eulalia well and provided additional data.

When the *alcaldes* go and pray in the caves, some stay at the front but some may go further in. Just like at church before. At church there are three sections: first there is the protector, this is the stone that is placed here first and called *Makse*. *Soral* is the stone that is placed in the middle and protects the home. The stone

that is in the back is the main *jefe*. So three stones they place-- the one they place first protects from enemies so that they do not enter and that is why they place candles there. They say, if one does not pray here, there is no presence and the enemy can easily enter because there is no presence, no protector. Next is the *Soral*, here it is safe; then is the *jefe*, the one who protects everyone—it is the god and the most sacred.

At the beginning of this section, La Farge mentions ledges which were called *mesas* although he feels compelled to state that “they are in no sense tables.” Lest the reader take this statement as dismissive of the importance of these features it needs to be noted that *mesas* are used throughout Mesoamerica as ritual spaces in which ceremonies are performed and offerings made. Their form can be extremely variable and consist of nothing more than a square or rectangle scratched on the ground (Sharon 2003a). As Sharon (2003b) notes, however, *mesas* are cosmograms that carry enormous religious meaning. Their use has been documented archaeologically so that, despite the near universal adoption of the Spanish name, the form has its roots in Pre-Columbian religion (Brady 2003). If the term “altar” had been used, readers would be more likely to appreciate the deep religious significance. In point of fact, features described as altars probably are considered *mesas* by their indigenous users.

Discussion & Conclusions

This paper has considered several dimensions of space. At the highest level, the Yalan Na’ appears to anchor cosmic space and to define Santa Eulalia as the center of the Q’anjob’al universe. Oliver La Farge noted this belief in the 1930s and pointed out the logical problem connected with the fact that before the founding of Santa Eulalia, the community had resided at Paiconop. Presumably the cave near that ruin, and not the Yalan Na’, had been considered the cosmic center. While Paiconop is still recognized as an ancient and ancestral settlement, the problem of re-centering the cosmos with the founding of the current town is not one that appears to have concerned any of our informants.

It was also noted that because the cave is so important, access to it is extremely restricted. Until recently, no physical barriers or demarcations were present that might alert an archaeologist to this fact. The restriction appears to be enforced only through strong social norms. La Farge made it clear that Ladinos do not even go near the entrance and the Q’anjob’al can only enter in the company of the ritual specialists. These restrictions were clearly in force when the 1800-1801 document was written so they are not a recent invention.

Finally, in examining the utilization of space within the cave, three defined locations where rituals are performed were consistently mentioned. The most sacred space is the deepest in the cave. To visit that location, petitions must be made at the first two before approaching the final altar. It appears that many who enter the cave are not permitted beyond the first altars. This presents a dilemma for archaeologists. If

the most sacred space is also the most restricted, religious importance may be inversely related to artifact density.

How ancient is this three part division of the cave? That is unknown. The 1800-1801 map identifies 13 different places, eight of which have “images.” This would suggest a far more complex organization of space two centuries ago. La Farge (1947:5) was told that a governor of Huehuetenango entered the cave in the early years of the twentieth century and removed a number of ancient idols. It seems likely that these were the images to which the 1800–1801 document refers. Lacking the images, some of the original places may have lost their importance and chambers with multiple images may have had attention refocused on only a single location. It should be noted, however, that the sacred spots in the 1800–1801 map appear to be concentrated in the farthest reaches of the passages. In that sense, some continuity in the use of space has been maintained.

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9

Aspects of Ritual Organization in Santa Eulalia, Guatemala

Sergio Garza and James E. Brady

During the 1960s anthropologists attempted to use analogies drawn from their studies of modern Maya communities to suggest models of ancient Maya society and ideology. Evon Vogt's (1964:194) suggestion that ancient pyramids may have represented sacred mountains was an important contribution has been shown to be correct. A less successful attempt was made to apply models of political organization drawn from descriptions of indigenous Maya civil-religious hierarchies, often called the "cargo system" (Vogt 1964). In its idealized form, the system consists of two parallel tracks of public offices, one political, and the other religious. The analogy at its heart was highly flawed because it attempted to project the political organization of minimally stratified peasant villages onto large, highly stratified, autochthonous states. Political changes in Guatemala at the end of the 20th century have altered the system as political offices are now elected by popular vote and hotly contested by national political parties.

This study examines a system of religious offices called *alcaldes rezadores* (prayer leaders) that remain extremely powerful in the operation of the Q'anjob'al Maya speaking community of Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango. The intent is not to project this system onto the ancient Maya. Rather, the offices will be analyzed to illustrate how the appropriation of important indigenous sacred landmarks and objects has allowed the *alcaldes rezadores* to substantially change the nature of the offices from what has generally been described in the anthropological literature. This issue is relevant to cave archaeology because the appropriation of sacred landmarks has been documented archaeologically but there appears to be little appreciation of power inherent in the control those landmarks.

Focuses of Worship

The offices of the *alcaldes rezadores* in Santa Eulalia are unusual in that they are not tied to sodalities or brotherhoods (*cofradías*) connected to the devotion to particular saints in the Catholic Church. Instead, the positions are tied to the community cave, a sacred mountain, a Pre-Columbian sculpture called the *Jolom konob*¹ and the care of the communal house where the *alcaldes rezadores* reside. An informant explained:

In Santa Eulalia is the *alcalde rezador* of the house, the *alcalde rezador* that goes to the cave and the one who also goes to the sacred mountain, and the *alcalde* in charge of the *Jolom konob*. The job of the *alcalde* of the house is just to be there in the house. It is a committee of ten members: the principal woman, the *alcalde* of the cave, the one of the house, and the one in charge of the *Jolom konob*, and the others are keepers. The *alcalde* of the cave is the president of the committee and they all have their assigned jobs and nobody can interfere with someone else's job.

As the statement indicates, each *alcalde rezador* is in charge of a particular sacred landmark and communicates with that landmark. As one person notes, "Each *alcalde* has his function and each one has especial communication powers for their jobs. Like the *alcalde* who communicates with the sacred mountain or the *alcalde* who communicates with the spirits in the house or the one who communicates with the *Jolom konob*. Thus they all communicate like the *alcalde* who goes to the cave he talks to the cave and the cave also talks to him and the mountain talks to the one who goes there and they all communicate." Their function is to pray for the community. An informant says somewhat idealistically, "They pray almost twenty four hours a day and they grow tired of all the candles smoke and *copal* and they get exhausted."

The most sacred of Santa Eulalia's landmarks is the cave of Yalan Na'. La Farge (1947:128–129) notes that the cave is important as the source of divination and prophesy. The Old Father and the Old Mother who reside in the cave are the source of the prophesy which is given to the *alcalde rezador* who carries the title "Giver of the Road." La Farge (1947:128) says it was believed in the 1930s that the *alcaldes rezadores* could see all the goings on of all nations from within the cave. He noted that the prophesy of 1927 was discussed in Jacaltenango while he was there even though this is not a Q'anjob'al speaking community.

During our stay we found that the tradition of receiving the prophesy is still strong. An informant told us that, "And in that cave, Yalan Na', is where they see what is going to happen to the town. When it is harvest time they see if there is going to be a good harvest. If there is going to be a hurricane and also if ice falls if it is going to snow that will burn the *milpas* and they go to that cave and announce to

¹We have adopted Deuss's spelling rather than La Farge's (1947) who refers to the sculpture as *holom konop*.

the people that this year there will be plenty of food, we will have maize, we will have beans, we will have everything, we will have a good harvest”

At the time that La Farge resided in the community the most sacred landmark after the Yalan Na’ was the mountain referred to as Yalan K’u’. Both Yalan K’u’ and Yalan Na’ were considered to be personages and given the title “lord” (*señor*). Deuss (2007:45) states that the altar at Yalan K’u’ has not been used in the memory of one of her informants. More recently, however, we have found that this is not the case and Yalan K’u’ remains one of the principal landmarks. Another landmark is the house occupied by the *alcaldes rezadores*, although the house itself is extremely modest [Figure 1].

The final *alcalde rezador* serves the *Jolom konob’*, which is not a landmark but a Pre-Columbian carved stone sculpture. Its origin is uncertain. La Farge (1947:124) quotes a ladino who supposedly observed a ceremony at the beginning of the 20th century who said that the *Jolom konob’* resided in the cave and one of the *alcaldes rezadores* also said that the *Jolom konob’* came from the cave long ago. This account of the *Jolom konob’*’s origin is interesting because it falls into a common pattern of using the motif of cave origin to establish the object’s legitimacy and supernatural power. It has been noted ethnographically that many Christian objects such as statues of saints and crosses now have this motif attached to them (Brady 1989:54). Perhaps the most striking example of this is the story that the cross of the Black Christ of Esquipulas was discovered in a Pre-Columbian cave near the town (Brady and Veni 1992:155).

It is important to note, however, that there is no consensus within Santa Eulalia about the origin this very important religious symbol. An informant stated that, “The *Jolom konob’* was not made or fabricated. He was already like that and the mountain gave him to us and therefore he could not be moved and stayed there in the municipality. That is why I do not understand how they moved him to where he

is now because he could not be moved, even if one wanted to, he could not be moved because he was like very, very heavy. Therefore through the years they built the room and the *Jolom konob’* stayed there and they made him a little house” [Figure 2].

A second man expressed a similar idea that is interesting for the function that he ascribes to the *Jolom konob’*. He said, “Some people say that the *Jolom konob’* comes from the cave, but my grand father used to tell me that where the town is now it used to be a mountain; it was a forest of pines or something like that and there were no houses. A lumberjack found the *Jolom konob’* in the mountain, there where the municipal hall is, exactly there, where the man was procuring lumber, was where he found him.” These statements imply that the placement of the community of Santa Eulalia was determined by the location of the *Jolom konob’* and that Santa Eulalia then grew up around the statue. The implications do not stop there. The discovery of the *Jolom konob’* indicated that the placement of Santa Eulalia was supernaturally ordained, in the very same way as the location of Tenochtitlan was supernaturally revealed to the Mexico through the sign of the eagle and serpent.

It should be noted that these two versions are not as different as they may sound. The mountain on which the *Jolom konob’* was supposedly found is Jolom Witz [Figure 3] which contains Yalan Na in its flank. Even the two variations of the *Jolom konob’*’s origin related above do not cover all of the opinions expressed by informants. The *alcalde principal* said simply that it had always been in Santa Eulalia and had come from the sky. The lack of a proscribed orthodoxy indicates to us that the question of the statute’s origin is not one of major importance. The most important point for most residents is simple that the *Jolom konob’* has always been in Santa Eulalia.

Regardless of its origin the sculpture is very important to the community. An informant states, “The *Jolom konob’* is very miraculous. People respect him and worship him and he helps with all our problems.”

An *alcalde rezador* elaborates that, “The *Jolom konob’* is sacred because he is the head of the town—he is the boss of the town just like the virgin Santa Eulalia. The virgin Santa Eulalia is more the catholic church but the main head of the town, the root of the people, because he has a lot of power, it’s the *Jolom konob’* because he is the boss of the town.”

Alcaldes Rezadores

It appears that it is customary for an *alcalde rezador* to serve for one year. An informant explained, “According to tradition, after a year they change them. For example, in the tradition of Coatán, it is for a year. I think everywhere is the same, San Miguel, Santa Eulalia, it is for a year.” However, a man may continue

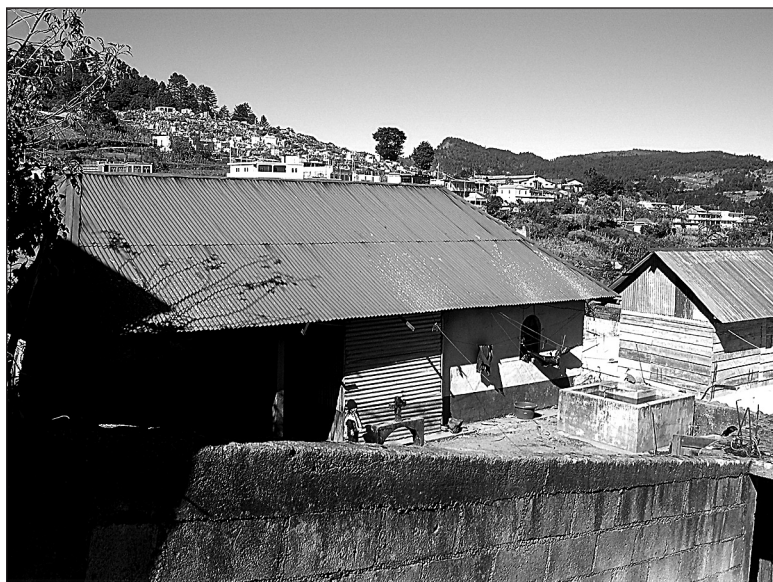


Figure 1: House of the *alcaldes rezadores*.



Figure 2: Building in which the *Jolom konob'* is now kept (arrow) with the roof of the house of the *alcaldes rezadores* just visible in front.

for a number of years. An *alcalde* explains, “The *alcaldes rezadores* can stay as *alcaldes* all their life, but they only change if they want to. There some who last up to twenty years or more and the ones who want to leave say that it is because of their families and not enough sleep.” This is an important point because the mechanism appears already to be in place in Santa Eulalia that permits individuals to hold long tenure in these positions of power.

When an *alcalde rezador* is replaced, he is selected by the remaining *alcaldes*. “When an *alcalde* is needed or a diviner, the committee of *alcaldes* knows because all the people know who has those powers and the committee gets together and says these are the peoples who have power and the *alcalde* of the cave goes to the cave and says to it: “We need a person and who among all these people do you choose to do the job? Someone who is going to serve you, someone who is going to visit you here” and there they tell the *alcalde* who is the person.” The authority of the *alcaldes rezadores* rests in part on the belief that they have been selected by Yalan Na’ itself. We were told that, “When an *alcalde* dies the committee chooses another one, but they have to do everything that has to be done and the cave has to tell who that person is and that person can be from another village and many times they already know they are going to be chosen because the cave itself already calls on them.”

It appears that the actual selection and

installation has alternating public and private aspects that resembles the selection and investiture process described for Aztec rulers (Townsend 1987). The choice is made in private by the committee within the cave. An informant explained, “The main *alcalde* presents him to the cave, to the world, and the cave talks to them and says to him that it chose him and what he needs to do to serve the cave.” At the same time a portion of the town holds a vigil outside. “When they are inside they people stay outside to wait for them so that when they come out the people celebrate and the people wait because they know they cannot enter because something bad could happen to them; they get sick and they have to be there with much respect and humility and without bad thoughts.”

When the selection is publicly announced to those waiting there is a procession to the new *alcalde*’s house. “When they chose the *alcalde* they go in a procession to get him. After the cave tells them who it wants as an *alcalde* they all go in processions to where the person lives and they carry a tree branch that is covered with flowers and they carry a cross and they play drums and they all go in groups with the people and when they get to the person’s house, the one who is going to be the *alcalde*, the one who is already chosen, they celebrate there and they eat and talk and converse.” The investiture then returns to a private venue as the candidate is formally presented to the cave. “Afterwards they bring him and he will be presented to the cave—deep inside the cave and only the *alcaldes* can go inside, not the people.”



Figure 3: Altar at the top of Jolom Witz is regularly visited by the *alcaldes rezadores*.

On taking office, *alcaldes rezadores* observe certain restrictions. An *alcade* explained that, "When the *alcaldes* begin they cannot have sexual relations with their wives for a year, but after they year they can. Therefore, as I say, they cannot have sexual relations before going to cave either because it is the same and if they do it then their prayers are worthless and nobody communicates with them." If an *alcalde rezador* continues beyond a year they must observe sexual abstinence for 3 or 4 days before entering the cave. If the prohibition is broken and "if the rezador touches his wife punishment will befall the town." This is taken quite seriously. La Farge (1947:185) noted that during a drought in May "the Prayermakers found themselves in real danger of being put in jail for their fail to produce the necessary weather. It will be remembered that such a failure is commonly attributed to some misbehavior on the part of the ceremonial group."

The position of *alcalde rezador* in Santa Eulalia differs fundamentally from what has been described for cargo positions in other communities. The town actually provides much more for the office holders than is the case elsewhere. For instance, the house, which is one of the sacred landmarks, was built by the community. A townspeople noted, "The little house where they live was built by the *pueblo* but it does not belong to them—it belongs to the people. It is a small humble house and when they need something the people take it to them there." Another person said, "Then, the people make their offerings to the *rezador*, firewood, beans, maize so he can eat. They send *copal*; every community sends something." Several women also cook for the *alcaldes* and wash their clothes. An assistant, the *magul*, is in charge of seeing to the needs of the *alcaldes rezadores*. The *magul* goes to the outlying communities and arranges for offerings of maize, firewood and other good. This includes money to buy the *alcaldes* clothes. As an informant notes, "Nowadays people help a little more because they have more money. It is not like before when people would give 40 cents, 15 cents, 10 cents and it is not like that anymore. Now they give 10 quetzales, 15 quetzales and this helps the *alcaldes* who in turn can do more for the people."

The support does not stop there. An informant stated that, "The *alcaldes* have to be *alcaldes* for a minimum of one year and if they stay longer the community will take care of their wives and families. The community gives more maize, beans, eggs, clothes, whatever they need, because they always help the people and the people respect them a lot."

More research is needed to determine exactly how the power of the *alcaldes rezadores* in the religious realm articulates with the political/administrative structure in Santa Eulalia. At least in normative statements, the *alcaldes rezadores* appear to be masters of their domain. One person asserted that,

the *ichamalcales* (*alcaldes rezadores*) know everything. They know everything. Neither the town major nor the judge has the right to go to their house. Even though they are the law still they cannot go there.

They cannot force the *ichamalcales* to do anything and if they want to enter their house or the cave just because they say they are law, let them go in there for they do not know what can happen to them. They do not know what they will receive there. They do not have the power to go in there. They are the law outside but not in there. The *ichamalcales* would say to them, go ahead enter but you already know what it is going to happen to you. They could never come out or on another day, outside, something could happen to them. Anything could happen to them."

Discussions and Conclusions

Santa Eulalia has maintained a strong indigenous religious organization headed by a functioning set of *alcaldes rezadores*. As noted at the beginning of the paper, the organization differs in a number of respects from what is generally described as the cargo or *cofradia* system (Vogt 1969:246–271). In most villages the positions are organized around devotion to particular saints in the Catholic pantheon. In Santa Eulalia each of the four *alcaldes rezadores* has specific duties that, with the exception of the *alcalde* in charge of the communal house, are related to pre-Christian supernatural symbols. Two are important features in the sacred landscape: the cave of Yalan Na' and the sacred mountain, Yalan K'u'. The final object is a Pre-Columbian sculpture, the *Jolom konob'*.

Traditionally the cargo system is seen as a wealth leveling mechanism where office holders spend considerable amounts of money in the sponsorship of the fiesta connected with the patron saint of the *cofradia* (Cancian 1965:82; Vogt 1969:262–264). In return for the expenditure, the office holder and his family gain prestige. The junior author observed such an arrangement in which his father-in-law, who was living in Guatemala City, was expected to make a sizeable contribution when his brother took the highest position in a *cofradia* in San Marcos.

In Santa Eulalia the situation is markedly different in that the *alcaldes rezadores* are supported in a number of ways by the community. While admittedly the level of support is modest, nevertheless, women cook for them and do their laundry. An individual of lesser rank has the job of collecting food and money for the *alcaldes* and the community even provides the incense needed for rituals. It has already been noted that office holders can serve more than one year in their position and that the *alcaldes rezadores* wield a good deal of authority within the town even in matters within the political realm. Under the conditions described here is easy to see how the control of religious office could become the basis of social hierarchy.

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10

Gender Complementarity and Separation in Maya Ritual

Sergio Garza

Over the years there has been a good deal of discussion of gender relationships in the ethnographic literature on Maya society. At the *Heritage of Conquest* symposium, the hierarchical nature of gender relations was noted with Benjamin Paul stating simply, “Men are superior; men say so and women say so” (Tax et al. 1952:273). More recently there have been attempts to deny or downplay the existence of gender hierarchies but Marianna Kunow (2003:48) notes, “As objectionable as the fact may be to feminist scholars, Maya society is hierarchical in terms of male-female relationships.” Such general statements about hierarchical arrangements, however, have drawn attention away from the fact that actual relationships are complex. This paper explores aspects of gender complexity found in the Q’anjob’al Maya speaking community of Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango, Guatemala. Initial research was carried out over a nine month period among Q’anjob’al speaking Maya in Los Angeles which permitted me to carry out additional research in Santa Eulalia itself. During the stay in Santa Eulalia, I was accompanied by Arnulfo Delgado, a CSULA graduate student who is also a Jalkatek Maya Catholic priest. Delgado served as the pastor of Santa Eulalia in the late 1970s and speaks Q’anjob’al and Chuj in addition to Jalkatek.

Gender Complimentarity

Gender complimentarity appears to be a central element of Maya thinking, not only about male - female relationships, but about the very make-up of the world. We were confronted with this idea when I asked permission to visit the cave, Yalan Na’, located just below the town. We were immediately asked if we were married. Since Merino was single and Delgado was a priest, the consideration of our request rested on the fact that I was married. The *alcalde rezador* (the religious specialist leader) asked for my wife’s name and during a prayer repeatedly mentioned the two of us as a paired unit by name. This certainly was not confined only to us. An informant explained, “It is all a couple (*todo es pareja*), but they have to be married because boyfriend and girlfriend cannot be - they all have to be married.” An informant in Los Angeles said, “A priest cannot be married but a community man can—like the *alcaldes rezadores*. But the *alcalde* must have a wife if he wants to speak and be heard and this is demanded by Yalan Na’—the cave itself—and they all have wives and therefore they have to be married because if one does not have a wife then it is only one and

he cannot be in the cave. It is always like this—they must be married, not cohabitating.”

The necessity of being married, of being paired male and female, as a requirement for holding social and religious position in Maya society has not received adequate attention. Redfield and Tax (1952:33) note that, “. . . an office, especially one of religious or ceremonial significance, is frequently conceived of as being held by a married couple” [Figure 1]. The statement by Redfield and Tax may be understating the extent to which strong normative rules absolutely require office holders to be married. Adams and Brady (2005:317) note that “For single men or women ritual office is much more limited.” More to the point, they discuss a Q’eqchi’ woman in a village near San Juan Chamelco who held a powerful position by acting as a medium who received the Earth Lord [*Tzuultaq’a*] during rituals (Adams and Brady 2005:309–310). She lost this position and was unable to receive the *Tzuultaq’a* after her husband left her for another woman (Adams and Brady 2005:317). The same requirements were in force in Santa Eulalia and applied to both men and women. An informant in Los Angeles says, “the lady, the diviner, is married because they all have to be married for if they are single it cannot be because this is like the word of God. And like the *señora* and the *señores*, if the wife dies he cannot continue being an *alcalde* and maybe, because he has great knowledge, he may stay in their house but he cannot enter the cave anymore.”

La Farge (1947:71) in the 1930s noted the need for individuals to be in a paired union by saying, “There seems to be a definite idea that one is not competent, or perhaps authorized, to pray until there is more than one’s self to pray for.” La Farge’s statement, however, misses the essence to the point that it is male and female elements that must be united. Tarn and Prechtel’s (1986:173) express the idea much more precisely in noting that among the Maya around Lake Atitlan, “it would appear that Atiteco thought conceives of male and female as aspects of one original unit and that no unit can be other than both male and female. Certainly, nothing complete, nothing fully fulfilling its function in the world, can be other than this.”

In Santa Eulalia this was expressed as an analogy to the cave Yalan Na’ as the normative model for humans. An informant says, “The cave is like two things that are one. There is Mother Earth (*la Madre Tierra*) and the owner of the mountain is also there and, therefore, we all have to be

married because the two are there. We must be married and therefore we must be couples.”

Gender Separation

Despite the fact that a man must be married in order to be an *alcalde rezador*, office holders are expected to live apart from their families and abstain from sex during their term of office. One *alcalde rezador* explained, “We, the *alcaldes rezadores*, live in this house without our wives and for one year we cannot be with our women; but in this place we have three or four keepers (*cuidadoras*) who cook for us and when people come to us with their petitions and as offerings bring maize and beans the *cuidadoras* receive all this. They are in charge of the *alcaldes*’ necessities and because we are separated from our wives and families they take food and money to them. Like *alcalde Caño*, he is not from Santa Eulalia. He is from Barillas and all his family is there and all what his family needs is taken there. That is the keepers’ job.”

Gender separation also appears to be a general requirement for special rituals. One informant said, “In other places it is always three or nine days, before and after something important, that we cannot be with our wives.” This applies particularly to cave rituals. An informant in Los Angeles says, “Also if the *alcaldes* go to Yalan Na’, the cave, they cannot have sexual relations three or four days before their visit because they must show respect and if they do not do it and have sexual relations then their visit is a waste because the cave will not help them.” The prohibition against sexual intercourse has been widely documented in the ethnographic record with the length of the period of abstinence ranging from one day to as much as 40 days (La Farge 1947:140).

She Who is Seated on the Chair (Xal’ Chotan Yul Xila’)

Discussions of civil-religious hierarchies invariably focus on male positions of individuals often called *pincipales* or *alcalde rezadores*. The system of *alcaldes rezadores* is still very active and important in Santa Eulalia. Nevertheless, we discovered a female position of diviner (*adivina*) that is not mentioned in La Farge’s description of Santa Eulalia. At this point it is not clear if the position did not exist at that time or if La Farge (1947) was simply unaware of it. A male informant describes the *adivina* as, “*la señora grande* (the great lady), she is the one ‘who is seated on the chair’ and the most important one. She has worked, as a diviner, for more than forty years but before she began she was not the most important one. There was a man but then she became the chosen one.” La Farge (1947:134) notes that the expression “in the seat” was given to one of the prayer makers and “refers to the official chair or throne of office”

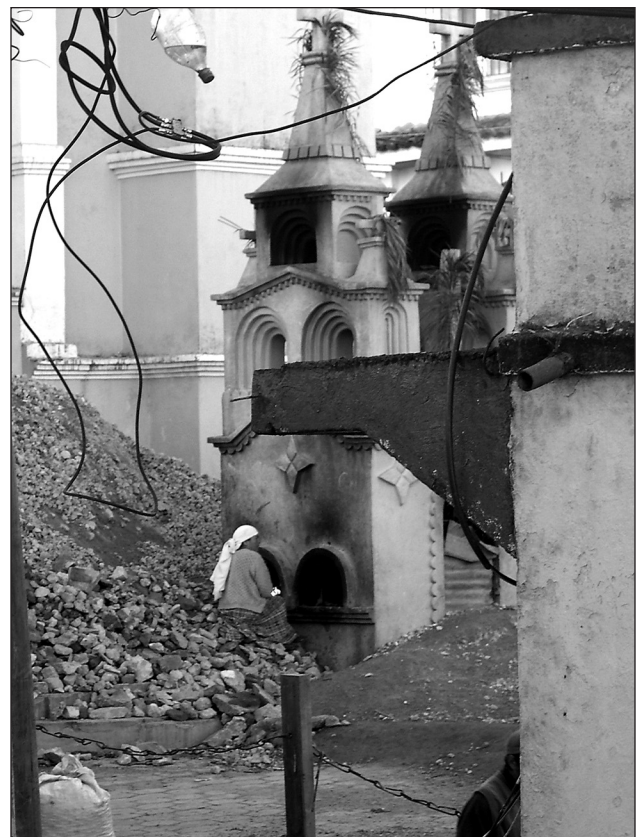
A male informant in Los Angeles elaborated that, “the job she has and her position, she is very powerful, very powerful (*muy poderosa*). I tell you, not just any person can be who she is. But some elders say that there have always been men but because for a long time she has had great powers that is why she is there.” In Santa Eulalia this same informant

says, “the diviner, the lady who sits on the chair, is like the *alcaldes rezadores*—they are all the same but she is the boss (*la jefa*). She has her chair there in the house and she is like the mayor of the town—she is the law. Let us say, she is the head of the community and her orders are commands—she is the law (*ella es la ley*).”

Another male informant in Santa Eulalia commented on her relationship to the *alcaldes rezadores* stating that, “Although the first *alcalde rezador* is the principal one he cannot make any decisions without the diviner’s advice. She is the greatest and she is the one who grants permission or says if something is fine.” One of the *alcaldes rezadores* added, “*la señora* is the diviner and I assist her in whatever needs to be done. We have two female assistants who help us work with the people, but *la señora principal* is above everyone and even the *alcaldes rezadores*’ committee is less because the committee is only to protect and meet people’s needs.”

We witnessed concrete evidence of the power of the *adivina* when we sought permission to visit the *Jolom konob*, a pre-Columbian sculpture held to be sacred by Santa Eulalia. The *Jolom konob* is kept in a locked room in a municipal building and permission of the *alcalde rezador* who holds the key is required to gain entry. As this was being explained to us,

Figure 1: Positions in the civil-religious hierarchy are often seen as being held by a couple. Although she cannot enter the cave herself, the wife of the *alcalde rezador* of the cave makes an offering at the altar next to the church.



the *adivina* appeared, listened to our request, and opened the door with a key that she had in her possession. The incident was interesting in a number of respects. The original explanation of the process of securing entry had focused exclusively on the need to approach the male *alcalde rezador* who was supposed to be holding the only key. Clearly the *adivina* also had a key and so controlled access to this sacred object. Furthermore, it was evident that she was free to act without consulting the *alcalde rezador*. Finally, several of the town residents who had been listening to our request asked if they could also enter the room in a manner that suggested entry to the *Jolom konob* was tightly restricted. Thus the *adivina* had taken action in an area where only the most powerful members of the community have authority.

Interestingly, the initial indications were that the *adivina* was not permitted to enter the cave. Yalan Na' is the domain of one of the *alcalde rezadores*. An informant explained the relationship between the two as, "La señora is the diviner but the *alcalde* of the cave is the priest. They may be about the same level but the priest is the one who goes to the cave to sacrifice turkeys, roosters, and to ask for the people's petitions. He has to be very knowledgeable and know how to put fire in people's hearts."

This appeared to be consistent with the widely documented prohibition against women entering caves in the Maya area (Adams and Brady 2005:315; Blom and Duby 1957:348; Carot 1989: 25–26; Cayetano 1982: 6; Gómez N. 1974: 8; Gould 1968: 167; Hernández Pons 1984: 39; Redfield 1941: 119, 121, 314; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934: 139; Shook 1952: 250; Toor 1947: 34–35; Villa Rojas 1969: 210; Thompson 1975: xxi; Wilson 1990, 1995:68; Wisdom 1940: 374–375;). The prohibition does not appear to be a recent development since the pattern was noted by John Lloyd Stephens (1962 II:16) in the 1840s and by Alfred Tozzer (1907: 149; 1941: 106n, 128n) at the beginning of the twentieth century. In a number of cases this prohibition is explained in terms of ritual pollution (Thompson 1970:184). Informants in Santa Eulalia, however, do not accept the idea but say, "she is the diviner but she does not enter the cave. She does not enter the cave because there might be problems if she does. It is like this, if a man is lying on the street, a woman cannot walk over him. If the man is lying she cannot walk over him because the woman is opened (*la mujer está partida*) and she can get pregnant and be ruined. Just like an opened fruit—it is no good any more. Then, it is not that women are not pure, it is just that they can be ruined (*se pueden malograr*). That is why she must be careful."

An informant in Los Angeles made an exception from the prohibition against women entering caves for the *adivina*, saying that, "Women cannot enter the cave of Yalan Na' but the diviner can. She is the only one. No other woman in the town or another place can enter because if they do, very bad things can happen and she will also get very sick." This is particularly interesting because it indicates that a particular woman, because of her status can enter the cave. One has to wonder if, in the more stratified pre-Columbian social situation, women of high status were permitted to

enter caves. Clearly, if this were the case, it would considerably complicate archaeological attempts to elucidate gender relations with respect to cave use since one would have to deal with class or status at the same time

Conclusion

This presentation has attempted to point out the complicated nature of gender relations that cannot be described in terms of simple principles of hierarchy. In Santa Eulalia a woman, the *adivina*, is widely described as the most powerful individual in the town. Nevertheless, the relationship between her and the *alcaldes rezadores* appears to be complementary and cooperative. In addition, office holders, whether male or female, depend on their spouses to be eligible for high office. Office holders who lose their spouses either through death or abandonment must step down from their office. Despite this insistence on gender pairing, actual ritual practice requires periods of gender separation and abstinence from sexual intercourse. Finally, the widely documented prohibition against women entering caves was observed in Santa Eulalia although it is possible that the rule is not applied to the *adivina*.

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11

Ritual Cave Use among Q'anjob'alan Peoples in Colonial Northern Huehuetenango

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Caves have long occupied a prominent place in the ritual landscape of northern Huehuetenango, as evidenced by sustained ethnographic investigations over the last century among the Q'anjob'alan Maya-speaking peoples who reside in the region (La Farge and Byers 1931; La Farge 1947; Collins 1970; Davis 1970; Casaverde 1976; Deuss 2007). Specifically, caves have been (and in many cases continue to be) sites of rituals related to the agricultural calendar of maize production, ancestor veneration and community identity, and the propitiation of local spiritual figures identified with specific places. While both local narratives and ongoing archaeological research [Brady and Prufer 2005; Prufer and Brady 2005] ascribe great antiquity to ritual practices related to cave ritual, opportunities to directly compare the ritual use of specific caves in the present with that of the past can be rare, due to the caves' continued use, sacred nature, and restricted access. In turn, this situation may make it difficult to evaluate both oral historical and archaeological claims of continuity in ritual practice in relation to specific caves.

In this article, I discuss late colonial ethnohistoric evidence demonstrating patterns of continuity in ritual practices over nearly two centuries in relation to Yalan Na', one of the most prominent caves in the entire northern Huehuetenango region. I originally based my translation on La Farge's statement, "At once places of great ceremonial importance and very powerful deities in their own right are the cave of Yalan Na' and the hill of Yalan K'u'. The first name means 'under the house,' referring to the church; the second means 'under the sun'" (La Farge 1947:127). Grammatically, *yalan* is a relational noun, which when it is used in the third person can function as a preposition, as it does in this case. However, it is also possible to say *walan* - "below me", by substituting the first person ergative case marker (w-) for the third person (y-). Essentially, what this means is that the relation (in this case "below") is relative to some entity (a person or a place) that is specified following the noun. Hence the names Yalan K'u' "beneath the sun" and Yalan Na' "beneath the house".

In chapter 8, Brady and Garza translate Yalan Na' as "the house beneath" leaving this entity implied—the implication being "the house beneath (the earth)". While in a generic sense we might think of a cave as being relationally beneath the earth, or more ethnographically for the Maya a "hill" (*witz*), in this case we know specifically that it is beneath the church (*yatut tioxh*—his-house god—"god's house"),

a point emphasized by many informants of La Farge and Deuss when they describe the cave as ending at the "feet of the Virgin". All of this would support the idea that the house being referred to in the name Yalan Na' is the church.

However, one of Garza's informants referred to the cave as a "house" and that he said he was "going to the house" when he was going to the cave. As described below, in the 1800–1801 document, the priest also reports that the name of the cave in the local language is Nimanna' (i.e. *Mimanna'*—"big house" or "great house"). This would indicate that conceptually the cave is regarded as a house or, as I'll argue below, a part of a house, along the analogy with names such as Nimajay, which is the cognate phrase in Kaqchikel, and the name of a cave above Lake Atitlán. A translation of *nimajay* from a modern Kaqchikel dictionary (Cojtí Macario et al. 1998:208) gives "*casa grande habitación principal*". More ethnographically, this term is used to refer to what in Spanish would be called a *sala* or great room. These references support the general assertion that Maya peoples often conceptualize caves as houses, although that doesn't change the translation of Yalan Na' described above. This would seem to leave a contradiction: the name of the cave refers to its spatial relationship below the church/house, while the cave itself is also regarded as a house (of course, it is also personified as a "lord", along with many other sacred places). How to reconcile these ideas?

Following a suggestion from archaeologist and epigrapher Adrienne M. Tremblay, one possible solution to this apparent contradiction is to avoid treating references to the church and to the cave separately. Rather than seeing these as two places or two "houses", one "Maya" and the other "Christian", we should think of them as one place/house, divided into two parts along a vertical dimension, an upper (public) part—the church, and a lower (restricted) part—the cave. She made the analogy to the relationship between temples and tombs among the Classic Maya, or more humbly to the way many Maya have buried their dead below the floors of their houses, and that these wouldn't be thought of as separate places. These are pertinent examples because of the fact that the cave is also the tomb of the ancestors *Jichmam* and his wife, who are explicitly regarded as the source of the cave's power to prophesy. With this idea in mind, the following entry from a modern Q'anjob'al dictionary appears to offer support to this view of the spatial relationships involved: Yalan na

topon. Place or sacred cave of Santa Eulalia (it is believed that it ends under the church). Comment. Cavern where the *cofrades* (officers on the religious side of the civil-religious hierarchy) go to receive enlightenment. Lit. Part below the foundation of a house, lower part of the house (Diego Antonio et al. 1996:369–370)¹.

While possible English equivalents to “*parte de abajo del cimiento de una casa, parte baja de una casa*” might be “basement”, “cellar”, or even “downstairs” (vs. “upstairs”), all of these terms are unsatisfying from a Maya architectural standpoint. “Lower portion of a house” seems cumbersome. Although it is not very good English, “underhouse” would be a rough way to express the idea. In light of these possibilities, I have chosen to retain La Farge’s translation in the text.

Located near the center of the Q’anjob’al-speaking community of Santa Eulalia, Yalan Na’ was ethnographically documented as occupying a central role not only in the ritual life of that community, but of the larger northern Huehuetenango region (La Farge and Byers 1931; La Farge 1947; Davis 1970; Deuss 2007). Some measure of its ritual centrality, as well as its name, derived from its location: while its entrance was located a short distance from the town center, the cave is said to extend directly below the main church (i.e. the “house”), reportedly ending at “the feet of the Virgin” (a wooden figure of Santa Eulalia). Based on this location, scholars have pointed to the likelihood that the placement of the town on its current site in the early colonial period was influenced, at least in part, by its proximity to the cave and other sites of Pre-Columbian worship (La Farge 1947:130, Lovell 1992:224).

This view was supported by oral history, which described the establishment of the town as the result of a pact between Santa Eulalia (identified with the wooden figure and the community as a whole) and local spiritual figures, specifically Yalan Na’ and the nearby hill of Yalan K’u’ (“under the sun”), the location of an earlier village now called Paiconop [*paykonob*’—old town] (La Farge 1947: 62–63; Comité de Vecinos 1968). This same oral history also explained the origin of some of the ritual practices performed in the area, notably scourging and turkey sacrifice (*xajamb’al*), as an obligation to honor Santa Eulalia’s pact on the part of her “children”; that is, the members of the community (La Farge 1947: 63). Further links between Yalan Na’ and community members were based on the fact that the cave was also understood to be the resting place of *Jichmam* [ancient father, also known as *Komam*—our father] and his wife, the couple regarded as the ancestors of the town’s residents (La Farge 1947: 127). All of which suggests the likely prehispanic roots of ritual attention to the cave as a site of ancestor veneration and sacrifice to local spiritual figures, literally overlain with elements and practices derived from Christian worship.

While many of the individual rites involving Yalan Na’

have been treated in greater detail elsewhere (La Farge 1947; Deuss 2007:35–175) and cannot be related fully here, two aspects of these rituals bear directly on questions of cultural continuity between the late colonial period and the twentieth century. First, the primary purpose of most of the rituals involving Yalan Na’ (and much of the ritual life of the community as a whole) was agricultural propitiation and prognostication, in conjunction with the annual and Maya ritual calendars. Specifically, some of the most important rites conducted at the cave occurred as part of the Year Bearer ceremonies marking the intersection of the ritual and annual calendars, while other rituals were performed as part of the yearly round of prayer and sacrifice undertaken by members of the town’s ceremonial organization (see below). During the Year Bearer ceremonies, among other events, the souls of the town’s residents traveled to Yalan Na’ for several days before being called back by the town’s religious officials. At this point a divination concerning the coming agricultural year was taken at the cave and the resulting “great prophecy” was pronounced by the officials. The power of this prophecy explicitly derived from the ancestors (La Farge 1947:127–129) and it was widely shared throughout the northern Huehuetenango region. Other sacrifices and divinations were performed in Yalan Na’ during the year, both at calendrically-determined intervals and in response to significant events ranging from agricultural phenomena such as frosts and droughts to national political events (La Farge 1947:127–129). Finally, as noted above, all other ceremonies involving turkey sacrifice performed by religious officials (that is, virtually all community ceremonies), entailed an offering of blood to the cave and the hill of Yalan K’u’ as an expression of their pact with Santa Eulalia and her children. The cave therefore figured centrally in most town rituals, which again were primarily focused on agricultural propitiation and prognostication.

The second relevant aspect of the rituals involving Yalan Na’ concerns its highly restricted access, in comparison to other sacred sites that might be approached by laymen. Only selected members of the town’s ritual organization were permitted to enter the cave at certain times and under designated circumstances. This organization, a regionally-specific example of the well-known Mesoamerican “civil-religious hierarchy” (Cancian 1967), contained two types of members: annually selected male representatives of community households who served in ranked ritual offices, the most senior of which were known as *alcaldes rezadores* (“praying mayors”); and individuals drawn from the class of diviners, one or more of whom served as spiritual advisers to the *alcaldes rezadores* (La Farge 1947:131–162; Wagley 1969) The hierarchy as a whole was overseen and controlled by a group of senior men known as *principales*, most of whom had served as first *alcalde rezador* at one time or had attained prominence in some other fashion (La Farge 1947:131–162).

Although ethnographic authorities vary as to which specific officials were given primary responsibility for particular rituals (cf. La Farge 1947:127–129; Deuss 2007:44),

¹Yalan na topon. Lugar o cueva sagrada de Santa Eulalia (se cree que llega bajo la iglesia). Comment. Caverna donde se iban los cofrades para ver señales. Lit. Parte de abajo del cimiento de una casa, parte baja de una casa.

it is generally acknowledged that access to the cave was restricted to the *principales*, designated diviners, and the highest members of the *alcalde rezador* hierarchy. As with all rituals involving interaction with sacred figures and places throughout northern Huehuetenango, officials entering the cave were expected to observe further restrictions (notably sexual continence) for designated periods in anticipation of this interaction. Failure to do so could result in negative consequences, not only for the person(s) performing the ritual, but for the entire community they were representing.

Even more critically, of course, laymen and outsiders were not permitted to enter the cave, and its spiritual guardians could inflict dire consequences on trespassers and the community as a whole if they attempted to do so. An important example of this scenario was recounted in local oral history and recorded by anthropologist Oliver La Farge in the early twentieth century. He described a well-known event “twenty or thirty years ago” in which a departmental governor known as a *jefe político* “entered the sacred cave of Yalan Na’ and, to the Indians horror, took from it a collection of idols, which were carried to Huehuetenango and have since been dispersed” (La Farge 1947:5). Although La Farge does not go on to relate the effects (beyond “horror”) of this despoliation on the perpetrators or on the community, in another anecdote he records the story of a Ladina woman who illicitly entered the cave becoming bound by rocks and a snake, until she was freed by the *alcaldes rezadores*. She later went insane (La Farge 1947:128–129).

Based on the preceding ethnographic summary, several questions regarding the antiquity and continuity of beliefs and practices relating to Yalan Na’ can be addressed ethnohistorically. Namely, to what earlier periods can we document the ritual use of this cave? To what degree does this use reflect the ethnographically described patterns of ritual centrality, the continuation of indigenous religion under the guise of Christian worship, agricultural propitiation and prognostication, and highly restricted access enforced by supernatural penalties? Finally, are there specific beliefs and practices that can be documented in earlier times?

Ethnohistoric Evidence

Ethnohistoric evidence relating to the ritual use of Yalan Na’ comes from a late colonial document in the Archivo General de Centroamérica (AGCA), located as part of a larger research project on indigenous-state relations in northern Huehuetenango during the nineteenth century (Schwartzkopf 2008). This document,² badly water-damaged [Figure 1], is obviously the same as that used without citation by Recinos (1954:454–458). The following account is drawn from the undamaged portion of the original and Recinos’ summary, which closely followed the original text. However, before turning to this account, a few basic demographic, religious, and political facts drawn from the larger study will provide some necessary background regarding late colonial Santa Eulalia.

First, to an even greater degree than in the twentieth century, when roughly 98% of the population was Maya,

in the late colonial period Santa Eulalia was more or less completely indigenous, with the only regular (or legal) non-Maya visitors likely to be religious personnel and colonial officials. Religiously, Santa Eulalia belonged to the parish of San Pedro Soloma, another Q’anjob’al-speaking town, from which a small contingent of Mercedarian priests oversaw five other northern Huehuetenango Indian towns, known in terms of religious administration as *pueblos de visita*. As such, Santa Eulalia would have received visits from a parish priest infrequently (if at all) over the year, typically on holy days in the Catholic calendar, such as the town fiesta in February, when the priest would deliver a mass, perhaps lead a procession, and perform or record any baptisms, marriages, or funerals that had accumulated since his last visit. During the rest of the year primary responsibility for maintaining the church and leading the congregation in worship fell to indigenous religious officials known as *fiscales* (churchwardens) or *maestros de coro* (choirmasters), most of whom were at least rudimentarily literate (Schwartzkopf 2008:113).

Politically, Santa Eulalia mirrored this pattern of administrative neglect and local control in relation to the regional colonial government, operated from the town of San Miguel Totonicapán, several days travel to the southeast. Overseen by an official known as an *alcalde mayor*, the sprawling administrative division encompassing Santa Eulalia contained roughly fifty other indigenous *pueblos* speaking a dozen Maya languages. Given this situation, it is unsurprising that visits from *alcaldes mayores* were also rare, and were generally undertaken only for official purposes. Apart from the priests and a few minor officials who resided in the parish who could be called upon to execute colonial commissions, day-to-day administration of local government therefore fell upon the indigenous officials known as *alcaldes* and *regidores* (Schwartzkopf 2008:204–228). As the following discussion makes clear, in addition to their civil functions, these officials were also frequently involved in indigenous ritual, making them the apparent predecessors of the ritual organization of *alcaldes rezadores* in the twentieth century. As well, based on this and other evidence (Collins 1980; Schwartzkopf 2008), it is clear that the group of *principales* also dates back to the colonial period, and they are also referred to in the following account, which I will now outline before considering its significance.

In early September 1800, as part of what might have been part of an ongoing regional effort to stamp out ‘idolatry’,³ Francisco Xavier Aguirre, the *alcalde mayor* of Totonicapán and Huehuetenango, reported a significant discovery to his superiors in the capital, based on information communicated to him by the interim priest of the parish of Soloma, Fr. Juan José Juárez. Two months earlier, an indigenous *fiscal* had alerted Juárez of pagan practices occurring in the *visita* of

²AGCA A1 Leg. 2804 Exp. 24640.

³Collins (1980: 164–165) reports a similar set of events, also involving Aguirre, with regard to a “pagan temple” in the northern Huehuetenango town of Jacaltenango in 1797.

Santa Eulalia, which the priest in turn communicated to the *alcalde mayor* when the latter came to tax the church silver. Aguirre's summary of Juárez's initial account is worth quoting at length:

An Indian *fiscal*, speaking of the uses and customs that from ancient times the natives conserved; one of these was that to a Cave that there was about six blocks from the town, under the Calvary, entered only the First *alcalde*, two times a year, at night, accompanied by a *regidor*, or by an Indian *principal*, who remained at the door [while] the *alcalde* entered, and made prayer for the *pueblo* in order that the *milpas* give well, and that frosts would not fall, that [thus] they would lose their harvests, because in that Cave was the Heart of the Maize, the elders (*ancianos*) of the town [in this way] persuading the common folk of the *pueblo*, that only the *alcalde* could enter into the said Cave, and that if another entered he would die, as had occurred now twenty years ago with the Father Priest Monteceros.

Given the dire nature of these warnings, and fearing a popular revolt if he took too direct an action, Juárez had not attempted to enter the cave, but instead had preached indirectly against “pagan omens and idolatries”. However, taking advantage of the presence of the *alcalde mayor*, he placed the matter under his authority. Perhaps no more eager, Aguirre waited until just before he was to leave, the better to take the “idolators” by surprise. Assembling a handful of local officials and non-indigenous residents, including the priest and his nephew, some schoolteachers, and the indigenous *alcaldes* from the parish town of Soloma, Aguirre set off toward the mouth of the cave with the stated intention of entering it. However, upon arriving, given that it was the middle of the rainy season, it was determined to be too muddy and hazardous for the high official to scramble around inside the cave. In the event, the task was delegated to one of the teachers and some other locals, who entered the cave accompanied by various indigenous officials.

Based on this visit, and others subsequent, both the *alcalde mayor* and the priest left detailed physical descriptions of the cave, including a map [Figure 2], in all likelihood drawn by the latter. Written roughly a year later, Juárez's account also added important details about use of the cave and other religious practices in the region. Although much of this portion of the document is damaged and illegible, certain extremely interesting details are clear. First, he noted, the name of the cave in the local language was *Nimanna* [i.e. *Miman Na*’ — “big house”], and that its care was especially dedicated to

eight members of the community, unequally drawn from the two “parts” in which the town was divided. Five members, all of them over forty and listed by name, were drawn from the “*calpul grande*”, while three more were drawn from the “*calpul chico*”. Upon the death of any of these, his successor was chosen by the *alcaldes* of that year; all had been taught by “the old ones their ancestors” and memorized the necessary prayers. These men⁴ were highly venerated as “Fathers of the Pueblo, in the manner of priests”, to the extent that even when they committed crimes, the *alcaldes* left them unpunished for fear of the consequences should the cave go untended. Only they could placate and appease the “images” through “fasts; the chastity that they guard with their women; the scourges they give themselves; their prayers and with the copal and candles they offer.”

There were four principal occasions in which these men made their “entrances” (*entradas*) into the cave: the first days of January, in February, April, and the middle of June. While the description of each of these is not clear enough to describe them individually, each seemed to follow a similar pattern and involve more or less the same procedures. At least some rituals were specifically directed toward prognostication, and to warding off potential misfortunes such as damages to crops, the death of livestock, and more positively to ensuring an abundance of maize. Although in some cases these entrances were made at night, at least in some cases they were clearly public affairs, as there is reference to the ringing the church bells and the performance of a “*zarambando*” or dance. Similarly, other prominent members of the community besides the principal five or eight played a role in at least some of the events surrounding the entrances, as in places the *maestro de coro* and minor civil officials are specifically mentioned.

In addition, Juárez was able to uncover something about the cave's origins; or more specifically, that of its dozen or so “images”, to which all of these prayers and sacrifices were specifically directed. According to the information he could

⁴It is unclear whether this description refers to all eight of the men or just the five of the “*calpul grande*”

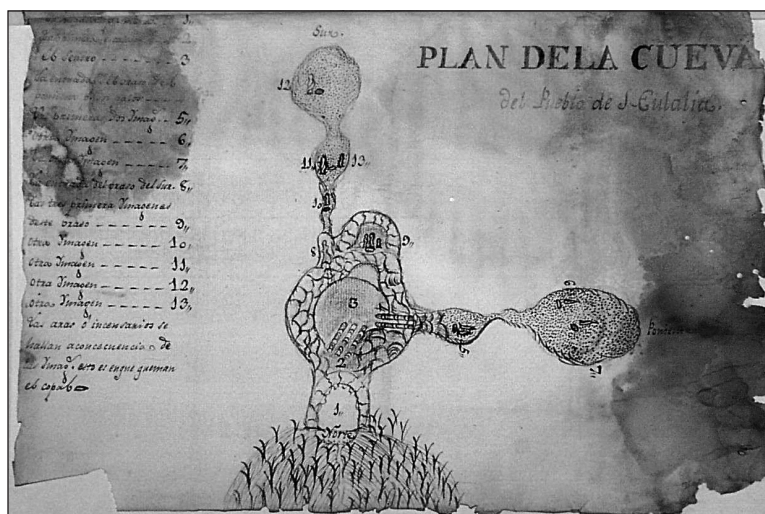


Figure 2: The original map of the cave at Santa Eulalia.

gather, local tradition had it that these images were placed in the cave in “pagan” times, and Juárez agreed. Moreover, the very location of the town was attributed to its proximity to the cave; regular trips from an earlier settlement at Paiconop had been too arduous (*penoso*), hence the current location of the town virtually on top of the sacred images and their home. Juárez reported that the indigenous name of these images was “*Comam*” [i.e. *Komam*], “which in Castilian means Father”, and that “the five appointed Indians, the *principales*, and the rest of the pueblo are of the understanding, that the said Images do miracles, that they become angry, and are appeased” by the fasting, chastity, and scourging of the appointed ones. In sum, they believed:

That in the will of the images consists the weather’s rain or calm; that they move the frosts; that they cause sickness, and death among the Indians of the Pueblo and other animals (!); and that lastly they are found with the formed concept that by the Images, and customs, and uses of their Ministers [they] eat, drink, and live. . . . These residents have not been able to hide their feelings at the destruction of the Images.

For destroyed they were, and the cave ordered sealed, and several of the officials were given a dozen lashes. Yet even the cruelty of whipping likely paled beside the potential danger wrought by the “removal of the Saints from their house” as several anguished witnesses described the extraction and destruction of the images.⁵ Their consternation and fear was such that Juárez felt compelled to point out that, in the intervening year, crops were relatively abundant and there had been no extraordinary frosts or deaths.⁶ Notwithstanding his opinion, the psychological and emotional impact of these events on the inhabitants of Santa Eulalia (and nearby) was likely considerable, and as a result they may even have entered in local oral tradition (with considerable telescoping of the time involved) as the account later recorded by La Farge described above.⁷ In spite of this trauma, neither whippings nor other precautions were apparently sufficient to keep the residents of Santa Eulalia out of the cave forever, as indicated by twentieth-century ethnographic accounts.

⁵In contrast, for Juárez the cave could “properly be called the house of the Prince of Darkness”.

⁶Just two years later, however, in 1803, the parish of Soloma, including Santa Eulalia, experienced what Lovell (1992: 164) refers to as “a dramatic outbreak of [typhus] (accompanied, in some instances, by measles, smallpox, and an invasion of locusts)”, which caused many deaths.

⁷In her study of Maya myth and history, Victoria Bricker (1981) argues that many documented historical events (such as Maya rebellions or the French intervention into Mexico) have entered into local ritual discourse, although the emphasis is on the structural features of these events, rather than on their exact chronology. Thus, although the dates are often vague, oral accounts of the past can sometimes be correlated with written history, as may be occurring here.

Significance

In tracing out the details of these events, their similarities (and some differences) with early twentieth century belief and ritual practice are clear. Based on the description of the location of the cave entrance and other indications, there is no doubt that the cave being described is Yalan Na’. Although the name given is the semantically-distinct Miman Na’, this might be attributable to terminological variation, linguistic change, or a simple confusion of translation. More strikingly identical to ethnographic accounts and oral history is the story of the relocation of the town from Paiconop for the purposes of being closer to the cave, and its identification as the home of *Komam* and other “idols”, to whom prayers and worship had been directed since “pagan” (i.e. prehispanic) times.

The nature of that worship is also strikingly similar to later practice, namely the focus on agricultural propitiation and prognostication, the nature of sacrifice, the sexual continence and scourging of participants, and the timing of entrances to the calendar or extraordinary events. While the lack of detail about individual rituals prevents a direct correlation with specific twentieth century ceremonies, which at any rate may have changed in detail, many broad outlines of the beliefs and practice appear essentially identical across the two periods. Specifically, the overarching idea that the cave and its spiritual guardians had control over the weather; that rituals and prayers focused on the cave were directly responsible for the success or failure of maize production; that the moral status of its human caretakers could be related to the efficacy of these prayers, and thus to the well being of the community as a whole; and that violation of the cave by anyone other than designated individuals could result in supernatural penalties to the entire town, and certainly to the trespasser(s) (e.g. Father Monteceros).

It is in regard to the individuals permitted access to the cave and given primary responsibility for it that we find the greatest variation between the two periods, though some of this may be attributable to ambiguity and conflicting accounts in both the present and the past. In the twentieth century, across varying ethnographic accounts, we find primary responsibility for cave ritual falling upon members of the *alcalde rezador* hierarchy, *principales*, and soothsayers; that is, individuals selected largely through service to the community or an inborn magical ability. In the late colonial period, in contrast, in spite of initial indications given by the *alcalde mayor* and the priest that the first *alcalde* was the only one permitted to enter the cave, Juárez’s later account describes primary responsibility as falling upon the group of eight men selected from the two *calpules*. As indicated by research among Maya groups elsewhere in Guatemala, Spanish officials sometimes used the Nahuatl term *calpul* to refer to social divisions within communities (or their leaders), such as the *chinamit* among the Kaqchikel and other K’iche’an-speaking peoples (Hill and Monaghan 1987; Hill 1992:38–42). In northern Huehuetenango, it is unclear what these divisions would have been, as subcommunity

divisions analogous to the *chinamit* are not characteristic of Q'anjob'alan peoples in the present or the past (Schwartzkopf 2008). Instead, the nearest ethnographic analogy to this pattern comes from the nearby town of Jacaltenango, where in the early twentieth century the *principales* selected eight of their number to serve for life as *watx'winaq'* (literally "good men"), a sort of executive committee directly overseeing the *alcalde rezador* hierarchy (La Farge and Byers 1931:143). In that town, however, there is no indication of subcommunity divisions providing a basis for their selection, leaving the matter obscure.

In summary, while there are minor variations and ambiguities between the ethnohistoric and ethnographic accounts from the late colonial period and the twentieth century, these divergences are far outweighed by the evidence of direct and broad continuity in ritual practice related to Yalan Na' across the two periods. Given this durability over nearly two centuries (1800–ca. 2000), there seems little reason to doubt oral historical and ethnohistoric claims of great antiquity for the ritual use of the cave, which in its current form can likely be located in the early colonial period, and in all likelihood represented a continuation of many prehispanic practices. As with the maintenance of other indigenous religious practices over the more than four centuries of colonial rule, independence, economic transformation, and civil war, it stands as a testament to the tenacity of Maya peoples, and their commitment to their heritage, in the face of great adversity.

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