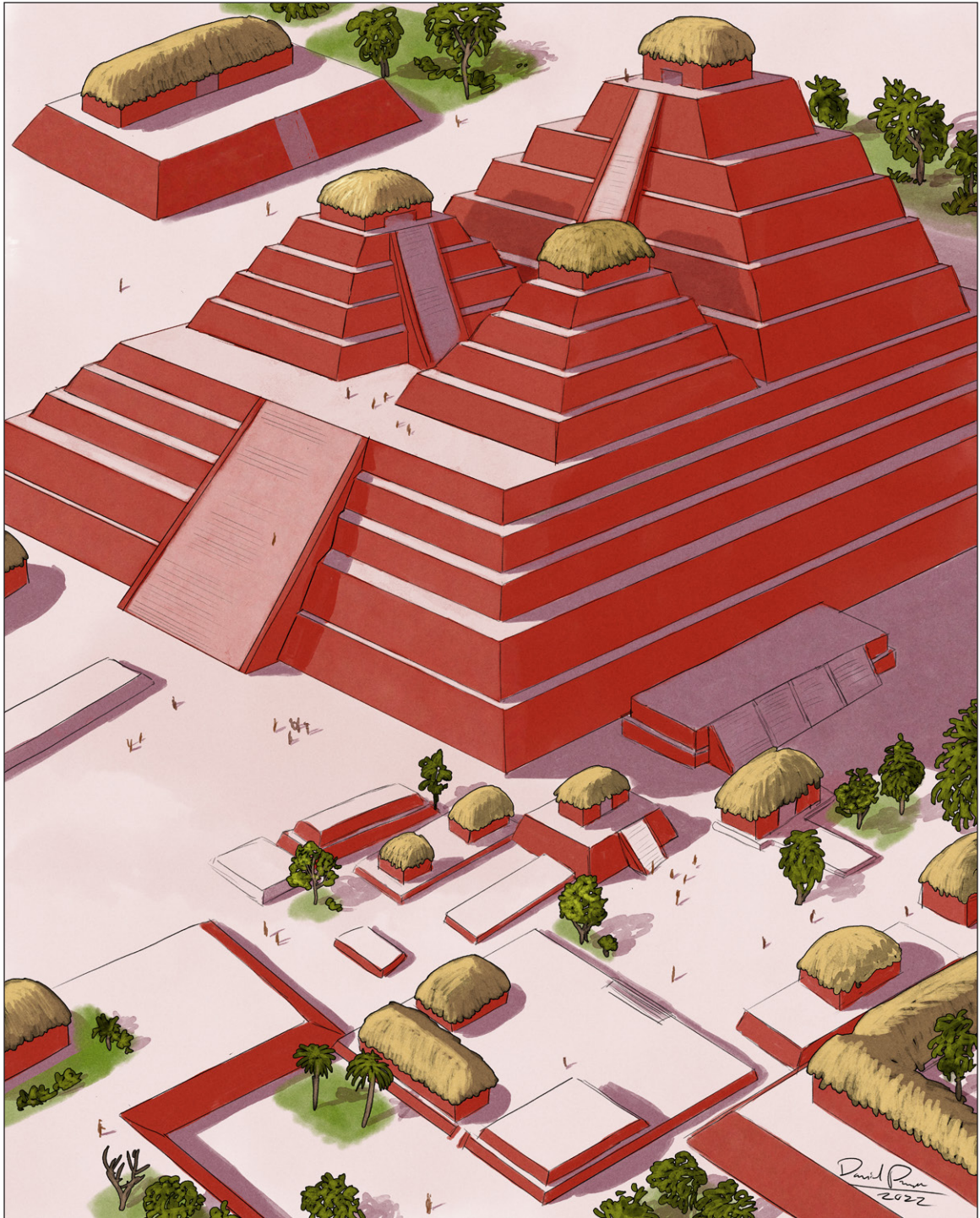


A Diachronic Assessment of Rulership at El Tintal

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The purpose of this paper is to review the characteristics of rulership at the site of El Tintal as they manifest diachronically in the documented archaeological record. El Tintal is situated on the Central Karstic Uplands of northern Petén, a region in which settlements are well-known for their Late Preclassic Period occupation (350 BCE-250 CE), poorly understood during the Classic Period (250-900 CE), and notorious for their absence of carved monuments and a limited iconographic and epigraphic corpus. I therefore rely on architecture in conjunction with material culture and settlement patterns to discern the nature of rulership in each period. The results indicate the presence of systems of government that adapted to circumstances in each period in response to both local and external factors.

Keywords: *El Tintal, rulership, monumentality, royal tomb, elite residences*



A great deal is known about ancient Maya rulership from the vast corpus of hieroglyphic inscriptions and iconographic programs found on portable objects, stone monuments, and buildings. The depth of that knowledge varies among different subregions of the Maya world, with the southern lowlands tilting the balance in its favor with Preclassic iconographic programs and epigraphic records (Estrada-Belli 2006; Freidel and Schele 1988; Taube et al. 2010) and long dynastic sequences from many cities in the Classic Period (Houston and Mathews 1985; Martin and Grube 2008). Traditionally, these expressions of rulership are associated with divine kingship (Fields 1989:9-10), and commonly thought of as lineage-based. Yet, within the southern lowlands there are areas for which we know comparatively little about rulership in that traditional sense, generally due to the absence of epigraphic and/or iconographic records, particularly on carved stone monuments. The

dearth of texts and images may hinder our ability to discern dynastic rulership but does not correlate with the absence of the office of rulership or of governance, as we can discern their qualities from alternate sources of evidence such as architecture, material culture, and funerary and settlement patterns. Here, I use the term rulership in a broader reference to the position and not specifically to dynastic kingship.

The ancient Maya embedded meaning in buildings, manifested through particular styles, configurations, layouts, and locations within a settlement (Ashmore 1991; Flannery 1998; Houston 1998). Architectural functions ranged

from the highest ritual level to the basic utilitarian dwelling. When evaluated alongside associated material culture and settlement patterns, architecture can be informative about rulership. Burials were particularly riddled with meaning: through type of interment, layout, accoutrements, location, and, often, epigraphic and iconographic content. Classic Period Maya rulers, for instance, were notorious for their elaborate tombs containing insignias of power. The degree of specificity to which we can describe rulership varies according to the available evidence and can range from discerning presence or absence to having biographical information about rulers. Levels of detail fluctuate over space and time depending on regional cultural canons, and sociopolitical and economic circumstances.

This article reviews archaeological correlates for rulership at the site of El Tintal from the Late Preclassic (350 BCE-150 CE) through Late Classic (550-800 CE) Periods in order to illustrate its changing nature diachronically. El Tintal – located on the Central Karstic Uplands (CKU) of north-central Petén, Guatemala (Figure 1) – was part of a network of sites with strong Late Preclassic occupations characterized by architectural monumentality and strong Late Classic occupations largely devoid of carved stone monuments, but rich in other material culture and architecture.

Evidence for Rulership at El Tintal

Late Preclassic Monumentality

The population at El Tintal thrived between 350 BCE and 150 CE. Major construction projects took place during this period, defining a built landscape that continues to characterize the ancient settlement. Concurrent with site planning, emphasis on scale and volume in construction projects was a hallmark of the times and region, and is generally considered evidence – in conjunction





Figure 1. Location of El Tintal on the Central Karstic Uplands. Light gray line delineates the greater San Juan River drainage system (map by C. R. Chiriboga).

with iconographic programs and homogenous material culture – for the existence of centralized authority in these early societies (Doyle 2013:187; 2017; Estrada-Belli 2011; Hansen 1998; Sharer and Traxler 2016:13). Filled with meaning, built environments were expressions of political power, social relationships, and strategies (Ashmore 2015; Houk et al. 2020; Koontz et al. 2004; Rosenswig 2010), and Preclassic communities on the CKU clearly made statements to signify their complexity through monumental architecture and site layouts, among other features. The existence

of monumentality alone is insufficient to determine the presence of political power (Rosenswig and Burger 2012:6), as it can result from ritual practices among diverse peoples not integrated into a formal urban setting (Inomata et al. 2021). However, when monumentality develops as part of an urban design, it requires planning and organization to ensure its successful integration into the settlement and achievement of its intended function. Thus, in order to use monumentality as an indicator for rulership, we must view it in conjunction with other evidence and within a broader context in order to gain insight into other factors—including the means by which monumentality occurred (e.g. labor force, organization, and cooperation strategies) and the motivations behind it (e.g. political, economic, social, practical, and ideological).

The most salient monumental features at El Tintal are its pyramids, namely the Triadic Group, Henequén, and Catzín (Figure 2). Architecturally, these buildings share similarities in construction and style (e.g., tenon blocks, inset corners, apron-moldings, sheer volume) with analogous structures at other CKU sites, reflecting a degree of sociopolitical cohesiveness. Of particular importance are Triadic Groups, considered emblematic of Late Preclassic rulership, as they became focal points for displaying and enacting ideological narratives through symbolic representations and performances (Doyle 2013:185; Freidel 1985; Freidel and Schele 1988; Velásquez 2014). In addition to the primary pyramids, however, other monumental features – structures, terraces, causeways, hydraulic and defensive systems – characterized the built landscape of Late Preclassic El Tintal (Figure 3). Six causeways have been securely identified that connect locations within the settlement, as well as with other sites in the region, such as El Mirador, La Ceibita, and possibly La Florida (Chiriboga 2017, 2020). Their existence alludes to the regional integration of El Tintal in sociopolitical and

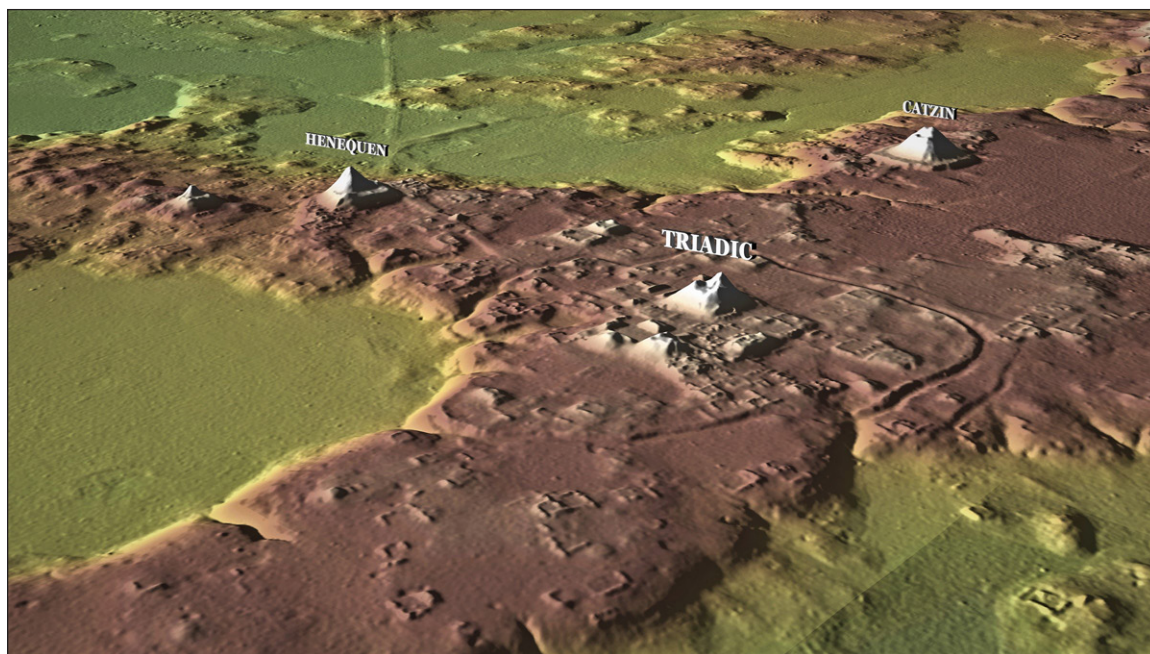


Figure 2. Northeastern perspective in 3D of El Tintal's central area showcasing the three largest pyramids (map by C. R. Chiriboga).

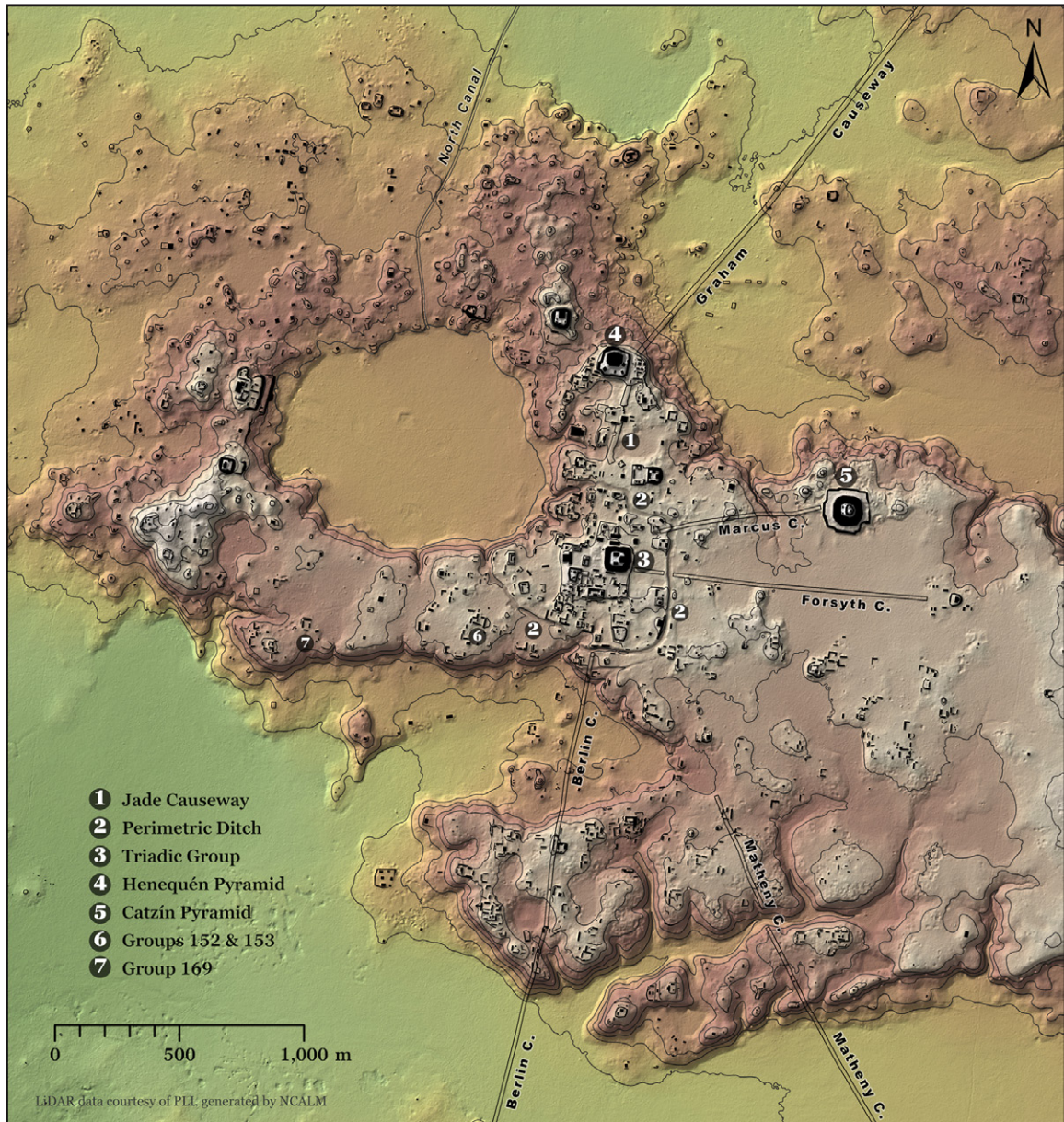


Figure 3. Map of El Tintal showing the location of structures and features discussed in the text (map by C. R. Chiriboga).

economic networks, which were essential elements of political authority. Causeways linking two separate settlements not only signal affiliation and possibly common worldview, but also cooperative efforts among communities resulting from perceived shared benefits (Carballo 2013; Smith 2021). Moreover, the North Canal that connected Chacamatzal lagoon with a flow system feeding

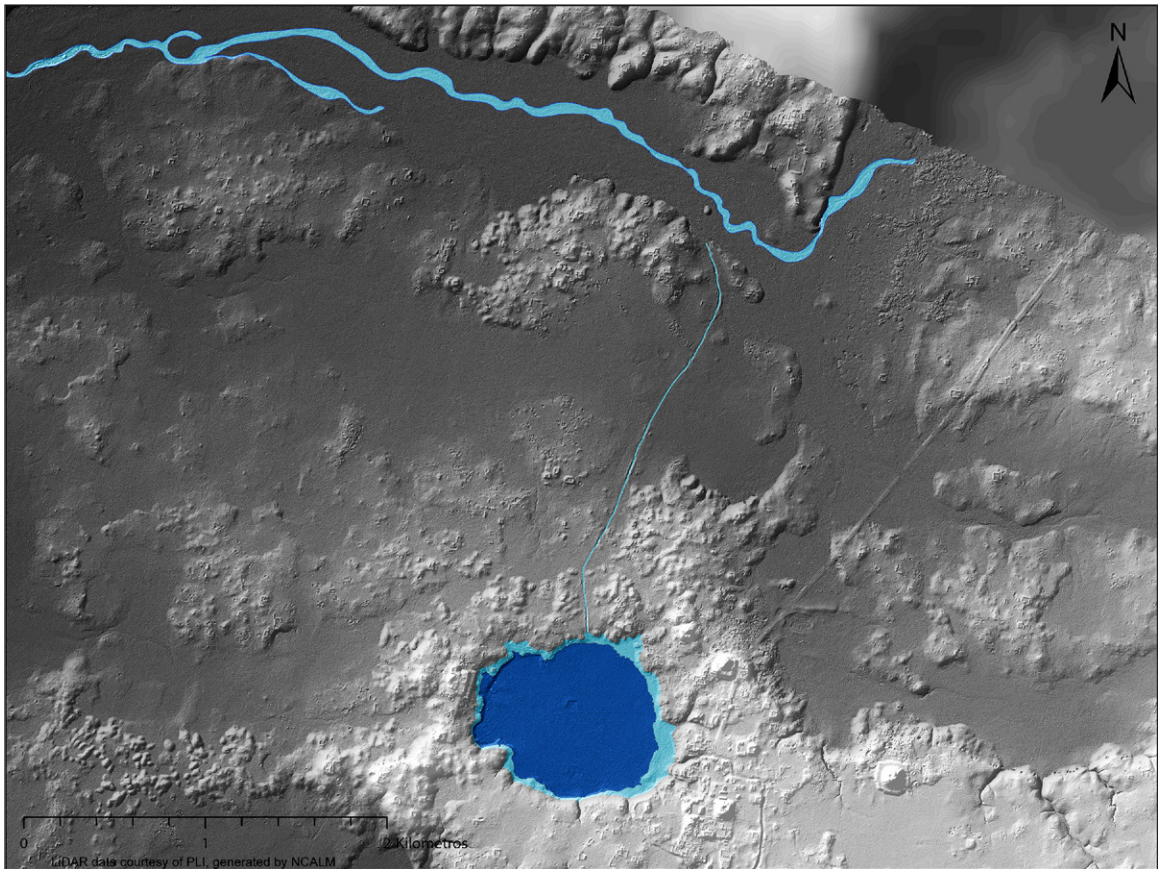


Figure 4. Map showing the trajectory of the North Canal that drained the lagoon's overflow into a drainage system that is now seasonal (map by C. R. Chiriboga).

into the greater San Juan drainage (Figure 4; Chiriboga 2017:171) increases the possibility for the existence of seasonal fluvial networks for canoe transportation, thus broadening the regional scope of interactions. Excavations in this 2.4 km-long canal revealed it was a complex engineering feat comprising tunnel sections necessary to traverse the southern elevated terrain and an open-air channel for its trajectory through the northern *bajos* (Chiriboga and Castañeda 2019, 2020).

All of these projects required a substantial labor force. I infer that the Late Preclassic population of El Tintal was large enough to meet the required labor force based on high frequencies of pottery combined with the widespread construction of patios and plazas, indicative of the conglomeration of inhabitants within the urban settlement limits. Participation of a rural population is also probable, not only for construction work but for supplying subsistence and material resources and partaking in projects integral to a developing urban center. Participation in community-wide projects may have provided benefits that attracted dispersed populations towards the urban center, similar to what has been described for E-Groups and other monumental constructions since the Middle Preclassic Period (Doyle 2012; Estrada-Belli 2011; Freidel et al. 2017; Inomata et al. 2017;

Inomata et al. 2020).

Excavations into the large pyramidal platforms revealed that their monumental volume resulted from single-phase construction efforts in the Late Preclassic Period (Hansen and Rodas 2015; Hernández 2014; Pérez 2019), implying high levels of social organization, administration, and leadership to accomplish them. Precise planning to determine the location of each feature was important to the integrated layout of the settlement. Research has shown that site planning was prevalent in Preclassic settlements, with layouts serving functional purposes, but also signaling ideological and sociopolitical worldviews (Clark and Hansen 2001; Doyle 2012, 2017; Freidel et al. 2017; Inomata 2017; Inomata et al. 2021; Inomata et al. 2020; Šprajc 2021a, b; Šprajc et al. 2009). The study of the symbolic significance of El Tintal's layout is only beginning. Carlos R. Chiriboga's analysis of the settlement patterns using LiDAR data has revealed preliminary evidence suggesting that the layout of some Preclassic buildings and open spaces may have had calendrical significance with important sightlines for sunsets and sunrises (see also Aveni 2001; Šprajc 2021b). If confirmed, the results of this analysis have multiple layers of relevance for ancient Maya sociocultural dynamics, ranging from a practical function for time-keeping to the more complex ideological one of authority being linked directly to agricultural cycles through the myth of the Maize God (Fields 1989; Freidel et al. 1993; Taube 1996).

The Perimetric Ditch was a feature of monumental proportions that restricted access to and protected the settlement core, including buildings and spaces that were vital symbols of the sociopolitical ideology, namely the Triadic Group, the Ballcourt, and Plaza B (inferred as the locus of government-related activities; Figure 5). It is preliminarily dated to the late facet Late Preclassic or Terminal Preclassic Periods (ca. 0-250 CE) based on diagnostic pottery found in the bottom sediment layers and construction of the southern embankment over Late Preclassic floors (Chiriboga and Castañeda 2020; López 2015:564). As such, it played a similar role as the West Group Wall System at El Mirador (Matheny and Matheny 2011:99-108) and as ditches like the one at Becan, with which it also shares physical correspondences (Webster and Ball 2021).

An Early Classic Ajaw

The transition into the Early Classic Period (250-550 CE) is underrepresented archaeologically at El Tintal. What is readily apparent is the significant reduction in construction activity and dramatic drop in artifactual frequencies that ensued from regional instabilities in the 2nd to 3rd centuries, inferred to represent a notable depopulation (Doyle 2017:109-118; Hansen 2012). Very little is known about the persistent population, except that they primarily continued to use earlier infrastructure and produced Tzakol sphere ceramics. Yet, the existence of a royal tomb containing insignias of power indicates that rulership existed during at least a portion of this time period.

Tomb 1 was excavated by the Mirador Basin Project in 2004 and was dated to between 300-400 CE based on its ceramic offerings (Figure 6; Hansen et al. 2005; Hansen et al. 2006:747). Its chronological placement is further confirmed by similarities found with 4th century elite burials from El Zotz, Tikal, Dzibanche, Calakmul, and El Palmar (Meléndez 2019:174-176, 890-891). Tomb 1 was found in Structure 14N-71, located at the base of the northwestern corner of the Triadic Group, with characteristics befitting the interment of a ruler (Hansen et al. 2005): its prominent location next to an ancestral building symbolizing rulership; the architecture of the funerary chamber;

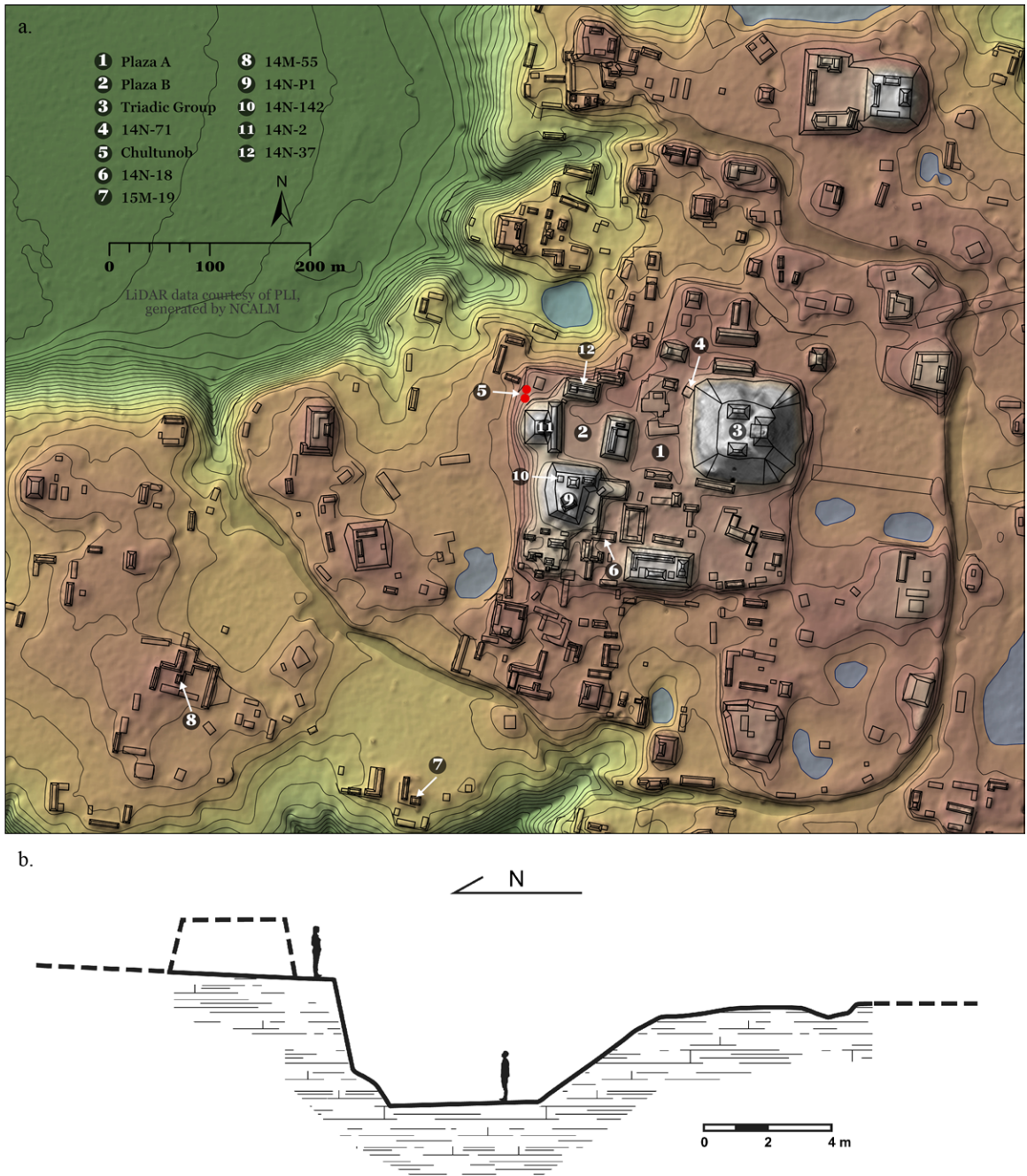


Figure 5. a) Close-up of the central precinct surrounded by the Perimetric Ditch; b) cross-section of Perimetric Ditch based on excavations in its southern area (map and drawing by C. R. Chiriboga).

human offerings; and the complete assemblage of artifacts, including greenstone, shell, obsidian, a stingray spine, and six ceramic vessels. Among the greenstone artifacts were pieces that pertained to a mosaic mask and plaques incised with glyphs. One of the plaques was carved in the shape of a trilobe or trefoil, a form known for its association with Maya royalty and authority, standing as the semantic equivalent for the ruler title *ajaw* (Fields 1989:19; 1991:167-168; Houston and Inomata 2001:59; Martin 2020:69). Moreover, this artifact was incised on one side with an emblem glyph employing an early form of *ajaw* and the presence of possibly two names on separate greenstone pieces within the tomb further confirm the status of this individual as a ruler (Guenter and Hansen 2019; Hansen et al. 2005; Hansen et al. 2006).

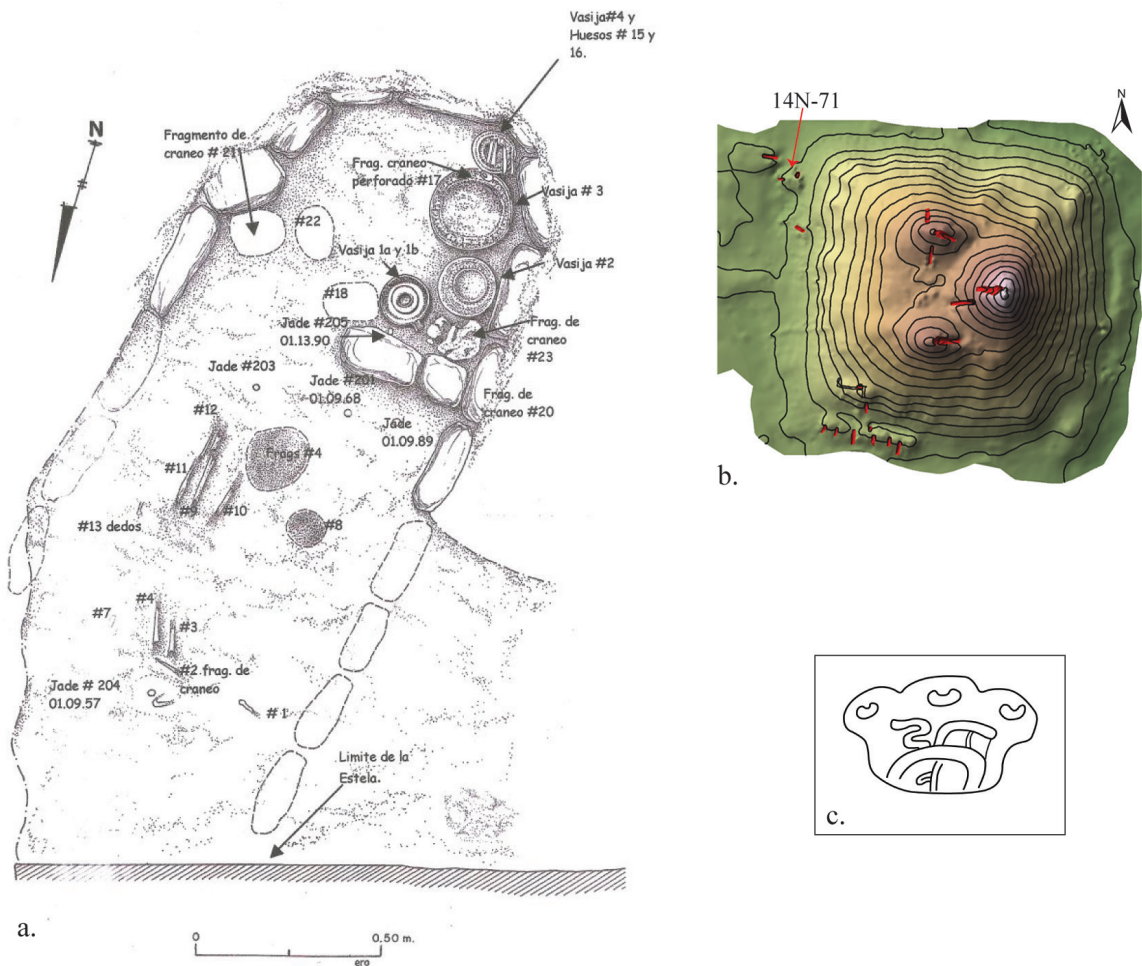


Figure 6. a) Plan map of Tomb 1 found inside Structure 14N-71 (after Hansen et al. 2005:Fig. 12b); b) topographic map of Triadic Group showing the location of Structure 14N-71 (map not at scale by C. Chiriboga); c) drawing of greenstone plaque incised with early glyph utilizing early format of *ajaw* (drawing by M. J. Acuña).

Late Classic Nobility

An era of cultural revitalization and population growth occurred between 550 and 800 CE, evinced archaeologically by a spike in material culture and a surge in construction projects ranging in functions throughout the settlement, including a large number of residential groups. Absent from El Tintal's Late Classic dataset are carved stone monuments depicting rulers and detailing their historical accomplishments. This deviation from the tradition seen at major polity centers throughout the Classic Period elsewhere in the southern lowlands is not unique to El Tintal; it is rather a subregional phenomenon incorporating settlements in north-central Petén, many of which had been major Preclassic centers. Other evidence, including architecture, artifacts, and settlement patterns shed light on the nature of Late Classic rulership.

In contrast to Preclassic volumetric monumentality, Late Classic construction emphasized quantity and density. The primary ceremonial precinct remained centered around Plazas A and B, with investments in new administrative and residential buildings and renovations in older ones (Figures 3 and 5a). The Triadic Group continued to dominate the space in Plaza A with its Preclassic summit architecture exposed, unchanged, and seemingly still used. Whether used with the same purpose as in the Preclassic remains unresolved. However, excavations at the southwestern base of the platform revealed large concentrations of artifacts over the Late Classic surface, including broken pottery, chert tools, and several figurines (Pérez 2019), signaling the enduring symbolic significance of the Triadic Group. The Ballcourt was remodeled one final time, resulting in a 40 x 15 m court space, continuing to reify the ritual significance of the core through its multi-layered meanings tied to mythology, warfare, and politics (Whittington 2001).

As is frequently the case, royal residences, palaces, and courts are located adjacent to ceremonial buildings within the core of Maya urban settlements. Despite the current absence of overt evidence for Late Classic royalty, such as tombs or carved monuments, the location and architectural arrangement of Plaza B, including adjacent groups south and east of 14N-P1, suggest they served courtly and palatial functions (Christie 2003; Christie and Sarro 2006; Flannery 1998). The complex is characterized by a relatively restricted arrangement of structures with intricate architecture of varying sizes and designs centered around patios and courtyards (Figure 5a). Key features include structures with multiple rooms and/or reception hallways containing benches; a temple; decorated façades; private and elevated spaces; annexed residential compounds; burials; an adjacent *aguada* and two large *chultunob*; and an artifactual assemblage incorporating prestige items and polychrome pottery (Figures 5a and 7). Furthermore, Plaza B has a long history of occupation with the oldest floor dated to cal. 360-103 BCE, followed by five, possibly six, subsequent floor re-surfacing events through the Late Classic Period (Acuña 2019:84-89; Acuña et al. 2014:62-63). With associated buildings also containing earlier iterations, including one documented Early Classic phase in 14N-2, the continued occupation underlines the longstanding significance of Plaza B. The Late Classic revitalization of the space began between 550-610 CE, and the similarities in architectural styles and refuse from associated buildings in Plaza B indicate their constructions were functionally and temporally integrated.

Observations of architectural styles, layouts, and associated artifacts found in looters' trenches suggest that many other compounds were occupied and used by high-status groups in the core



Figure 7. Example of material culture found in Plaza B contexts: a) fragments of modeled stucco that decorated the façade of Structure 14N-142 (photos by M. Colín); b) fragment of greenstone tubular pendant, Structure 14N-P1 (photo by R. Rodas); c) shell artifact (*Jenneria pustulata* sp. of Pacific origin) from Structure 14N-P1 (Cotóm 2020:305; photo by J. Cotóm); d) shell artifact (*Americoliva reticularis* sp. of Caribbean origin) from Structure 14N-2 (Cotóm 2020:304; photo by J. Cotóm); e) partial headdress of a fragmented figurine (photo by R. Rodas); f) miniature jar found in Burial 9, Structure 14N-37 (photo by M. Colín); g) chert bifaces, Structures 14N-142 and 14N-7 (photos by M. Colín).

area enclosed by the Perimetric Ditch and along the Jade causeway. The occupants were seemingly nobles privileged to live within the ceremonial precinct. These “fancy” types of residential groups, however, also encompass much of the Late Classic settlement outside the core.

Group 152/153 – a double patio residential compound – is a good example of such an elite family living outside the ceremonial precinct (see Figure 3). Excavations there revealed intricate

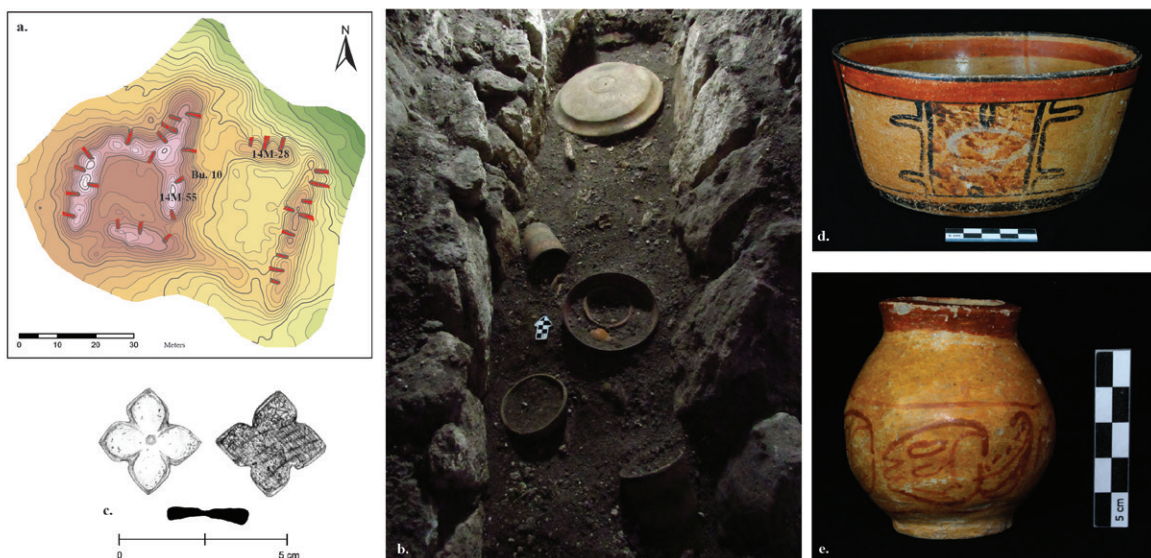


Figure 8. a) Topographic map of Group 152/153 showing location of referenced buildings and looters' trenches (map by C. R. Chiriboga); b) Burial 10 (photo by A. Cajas); c) flower ornament carved in Caribbean shell (*Lobatus costatus* sp.) found in Burial 10 (Cotóm 2020:306; drawing by A. Cajas); d-e) polychrome vessels from Burial 10 (photos by M. Colín).

masonry architecture of equal quality and style to that of buildings in the core (Cajas 2017a, b, 2019). The rectangular structures contained multiple rooms with private benches offset from the doorways, in association with a diverse assemblage of finely crafted artifacts, including polychrome pottery, obsidian and chert tools (some from Colha), regional freshwater shell, marine shell, and carved bone objects. Architectural and funerary evidence indicate Structure 14M-55 was reserved for the highest ranked members of the family inhabiting Group 152/153, evinced by the discovery of Burial 10—an elaborate crypt containing seven polychrome pots and a carved shell ornament that contrasted with simpler interments from neighboring buildings (Figure 8; Cajas 2019:183-186). Moreover, Edgar Suyuc (2005), from the Mirador Basin Project, recovered a polychrome cylinder vase decorated with a dedicatory text naming Yopaat Bahlam bearing the title *K'uhul Chatahn Winik*, a few meters south from Burial 10. This individual is named on several unprovenanced codex-style vessels, though his place of residence continues to elude scholars. While the vessel's discovery in association with a looted burial context in Structure 14M-55 provides clues about social dynamics and relationships of the Late Classic population, it is insufficient evidence to ascertain that this compound was his residence.

Group 169 is a residential group of slightly more modest architecture exhibiting comparable material culture. Varinia Matute (2016:121-124) recovered several fragments of finely painted polychrome pottery from one of the looted burials, including a partial codex-style plate, and several chert tools that Project lithicist, Jason Paling, identified as tool-making tools (Figure 9). We surmise from this that the interred individual might have been a craftsman of elevated social rank specializing in tool production.

Many more groups comprised of single or multi-patio compounds with intricate architecture,

vaulted roofs, benches, and multiple sub-floor burials are spread throughout the settlement. Some evince buildings with sculpted façades, such as Structure 15M-19 – located in a small compound southeast of the core – that had been decorated with stucco elements similar in quality and representation to those from Plaza B (Mauricio 2015). Overall, the frequency of architectural units with similarities in style, artifactual assemblages, and burial practices is increasing across much of the settlement and bespeaks a highly visible and non-royal Late Classic elite.

A sherd recovered from looters' backdirt outside Structure 14N-18 in the greater Plaza B area is painted with two glyphs representing the beginning (**a-LAY?-ya**) and end of a dedicatory sequence (Figure 10). In this case, only a portion of the ending glyph survives and can be transcribed as **WAY**, the logogram found in the title *Sak O' Wahyis* (Velásquez and García 2018:4). A comparison with two codex-style vessels (e.g. K3229 and K1810) reveals similarities in calligraphic style with the Tintal sherd, but they also illustrate examples of *Sak O' Wahyis* utilized in combination with *Chatahn Winik*. Both of these titles were used, individually or combined, by individuals or groups considered to be of high social rank affiliated with the Kanu'l regime (Velásquez and García 2018). The discovery of both titles in contexts at El Tintal provides clues about the social networks and affiliations of the Late Classic population, which I return to below.

Discussion

This article aims to diachronically review archaeological evidence for rulership at El Tintal. In the Late Preclassic, we cannot speak of individuals or lineages, as there are no such records in



Figure 9. Artifacts recovered from a looted burial in Group 169: a) codex-style fragmented plate (photo by V. Mendoza); b) chert tool-making tools (photo by R. Rodas).

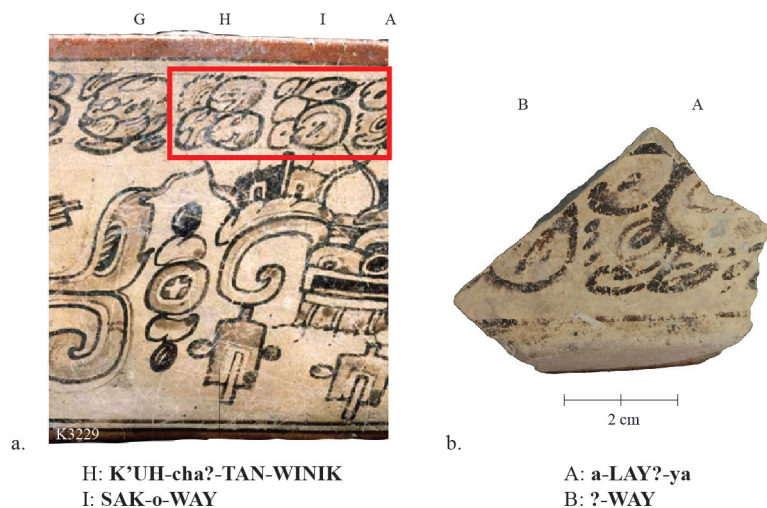


Figure 10. a) Section of vessel K3229 showing the combined use of titles *k'uh[ul] Chatahn winik* and *Sak O' Wahy[is]* (photo by Justin Kerr ©; transcription after Velásquez García and García Barrios 2018); b) example of probable *Sak O' Wahy[is]* title on a sherd from El Tintal associated with Structure 14N-18 in the greater Plaza B area (photo and transcription by V. Mendoza).

the dataset to date. The existence of the office of rulership is most evident in the built landscape, through single-phase constructions of massive architectural and engineering projects that served ideological and practical functions. Each feature is a receptacle of managed labor and resources, and their integration into an urban landscape signals sophisticated planning and leadership. This leadership developed material manifestations of power harnessed in monumentality and expressed through particular types of buildings such as Triadic Groups. Architectural similarities and causeway connections indicate strong interactions between contemporaneous regional centers, although the particularities of these relationships are still being defined. Furthermore, causeways facilitated the movement of people and goods over the landscape in a region of abundant *bajos*, which was vital for a successful political economy on which Preclassic Maya rulership depended (Freidel and Reilly 2010). By adding a canal that linked the settlement with a broader fluvial network, Preclassic rulers turned El Tintal into a nexus of sociopolitical and economic consequence. Ceramic types from the regions of Tikal, eastern Petén, and Belize, such as Ainil Orange and San Antonio Golden Brown, as well as paste compositions from areas near El Zotz and La Joyanca, indicate El Tintal's Preclassic interactions spread beyond the CKU (Acuña and Alvarado 2022; Bishop 2017).

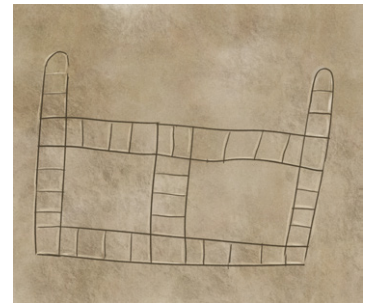
Following an apparent regional political disintegration at the end of the Preclassic era that contributed to a substantial out-migration, rulership at El Tintal is manifested in the 4th century by way of the royal tomb of an *ajaw*. The available evidence is insufficient to understand how the office of rulership transitioned alongside major, regional sociopolitical shifts from the preceding period. A royal tomb sharing characteristics with analogous interments elsewhere in the lowlands bespeaks sociopolitical relationships developed by the ruling group at El Tintal, also evident in the

local production of common Tzakol sphere ceramics. Sociopolitical affiliations notwithstanding, it appears that local circumstances, including a probable shortage of labor, prevented whatever political power rulers had from being materialized architecturally. Furthermore, despite regional interactions and shared cultural traditions, local rulers did not adopt the custom of carving stone monuments, in contrast with Classic Period rulership at many other southern lowland centers. This raises questions about the degree of power they held, how they came into positions of power, and whether those practices were associated with Preclassic antecedents. With few exceptions, this was the case at several settlements with important Preclassic occupations on the CKU.

The absence of carved monuments continued into the Late Classic Period and to date, no royal tombs have been found from this era. In comparing the features and layout of the Plaza B complex with palaces elsewhere (Christie 2006; Flannery 1998), architectural evidence suggests that these buildings catered to both government-related activities and residential quarters for the highest ranked group at El Tintal in the Late Classic Period, and possibly earlier given the long history of Plaza B. This architectural complex stands out from other residential units because of its size, integration, and proximity to the ceremonial core. Yet, the material culture, burial patterns (sub-floor crypts), and even sculpture decorations are otherwise analogous to those found in residential units throughout El Tintal.

The pattern that begins to emerge for El Tintal's Late Classic occupation is one of multiple non-royal elite groups engaged in a complex and prosperous economy with a less-apparent, local centralized authority (see Chase 1992; Christie 2006; Demarest et al. 2020:245). Elaborate assemblages of diverse artifacts, including some accessible through long-distance trade, found in residential compounds across the settlement imply these groups enjoyed access to an open, though complex, economic system perhaps facilitated by their privileged social status. As our research advances, there is increasing evidence to suggest the elite population maintained relations with or identified as individuals that used the *Chatahn Winik* title, and tenuously *Sak O' Wahyis*. Studies have shown that these titles were used by elite groups who specialized as scribes and sculptors, particularly in association with codex-style pottery production, monument carving, and esoteric knowledge (García and Velásquez 2016). There is ample evidence linking individuals who used these titles to the Kanu'l regime (García 2011; Velásquez and García 2018), particularly in the region of north-central Petén and southeastern Campeche. Thus, it is doubtfully a coincidence that the revival of El Tintal occurred in the 6th century alongside that polity's growing political influence (Martin and Grube 2008:104). Moreover, El Tintal remains a contender for a production center of codex-style pottery (Bishop 2017; Reents-Budet, et al. 2010) and perhaps also the residence of specialized carvers. Despite our improved understanding of the Late Classic occupation, more research is needed to continue elucidating details about the sociopolitical organization and the degree of political centralization.

In conclusion, the evidence to date reveals distinct manifestations of rulership and governance in each period. In the Late Preclassic, the programmatic investment in large-scale construction projects to create an integrated and regionally interconnected settlement indicates the presence of



centralized authority with considerable power, albeit otherwise mostly invisible due to the absence of texts and images. In contrast, during the Early Classic there is supporting evidence for political authority focused on an individual (an *ajaw*), though with seemingly attenuated power ruling a smaller population overcoming hardships. In the Late Classic, the existence of courtly and palatial architecture in the ceremonial precinct suggests the presence of a ruling class, although the increase in non-royal elite residential households and possible secondary, peripheral administrative centers allude to a rather decentralized government. Unfortunately, some major gaps in the timeline prevent a discussion about *how* rulership changed and much remains unknown about its various compositions. Our current understanding of the record recognizes distinct strategies adapted to broader sociopolitical circumstances and that El Tintal held close connections with powerful neighboring settlements throughout most of its occupation, predominantly with El Mirador in the Preclassic and with the Kanu'l regime in the Classic Period.

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