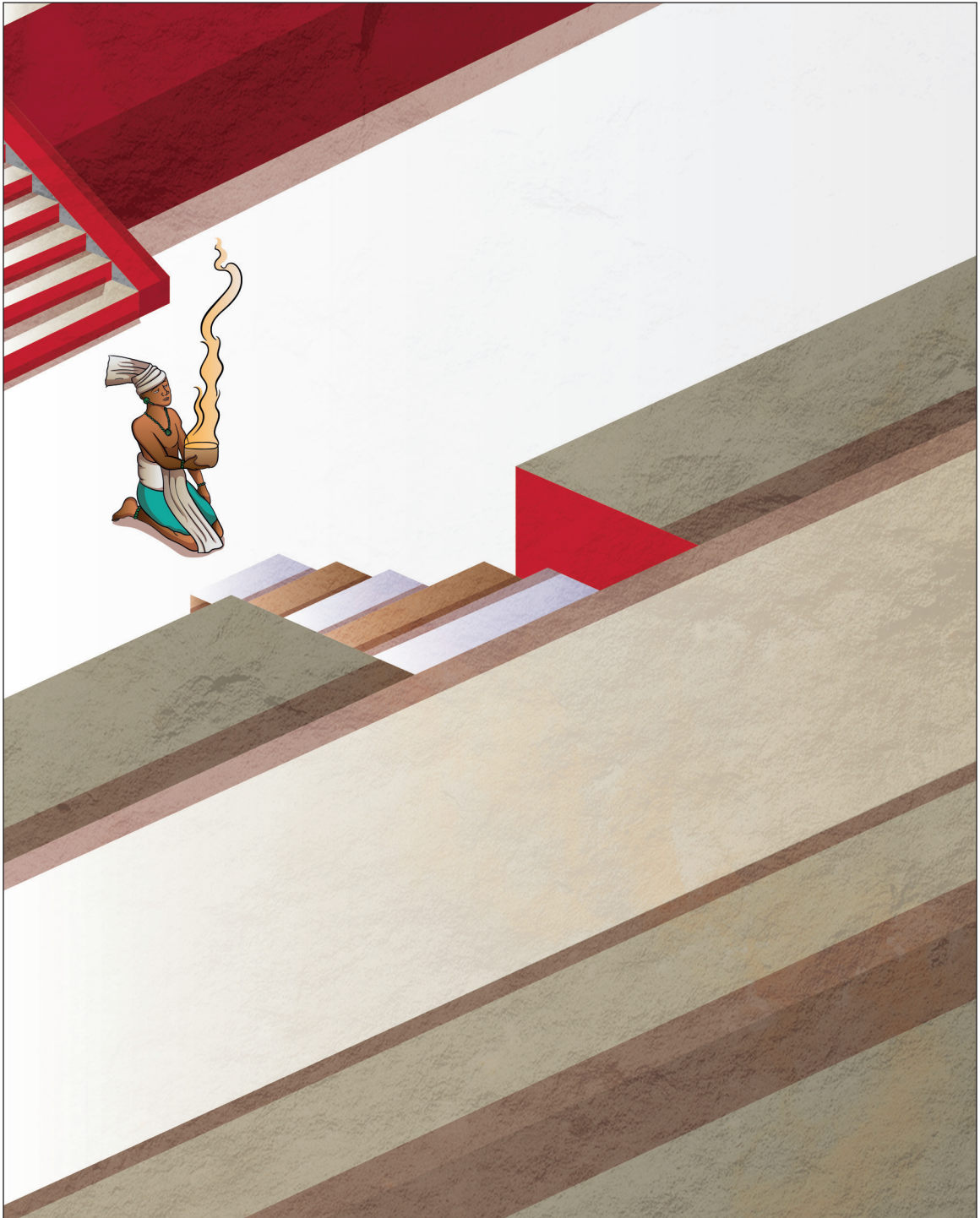


Becoming an Intermediate Elite: Ritual Cooperation and Urbanization at Late Preclassic Ceibal

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Abstract. *Classic Maya art and texts detail the deeds not just of royalty, but also of nobles, priests, and subordinate rulers who comprised the intermediate elite echelon of society. However, much less is known about the intermediate elites of the Preclassic, even though it is widely accepted that the first states, along with some of the first dynasties, were established by the end of this period. In a similar vein, although we know intermediate elites played important roles in integrating large and dispersed populations of ancient Maya polities, we know less about the processes and social relations that gave rise to these midlevel ranks. This paper explores these issues by focusing on data collected from outlying minor temples at Ceibal, Guatemala. More specifically, I examine evidence that intermediate elites resided in outlying areas during the Late and Terminal Preclassic periods, when the settlement grew into a thriving regional center. As people settled permanently in different areas outside the epicenter, the residents built a minor temple complex. Most minor temples are associated with at least one large domestic platform or truncated pyramid that was possibly an elite residence. This close association between temple and elite residence suggests emergent elites oversaw the construction of and ceremonial life at minor temples. Furthermore, drawing from the theory of collective action, I examine how central and intermediate elites developed reciprocal and interdependent relationships as they collaborated to create and diffuse ritual practices during the Late Preclassic. By mediating ritual knowledge from center to outlying populations, local leaders may have gained an elevated status in their own communities.*

Keywords: Preclassic Maya, ritual, collective action, incipient elites, Preclassic elite residences



Classic Maya art is replete with imagery of rulers and nobles performing sacred ceremonies, waging ritualistic warfare, and convening with deities. Although they were the heads of states, there is limited evidence that rulers exerted great amounts of control over the daily lives of the populace, particularly when it comes to economic activities (e.g., King 2016; Triadan and Inomata 2020). These findings have instigated longstanding debates about the degree and nature of centralization of ancient Maya polities (Fox et al. 1996). Most scholars now favor loosely centralized models of organization that pay particular attention to integrative mechanisms operating at different levels of society (e.g., Foias 2013; Marken and Fitzsimmons 2015). It is not surprising, therefore, that a growing body of research (e.g., Elson and Covey 2006a) focuses on sub-royal and local leaders, often called “intermediate elites” because of their important roles as intermediaries between lay-

people and higher-level rulers.



Most studies on intermediate elites focus on the Classic Period, after dynastic rulership and social hierarchies were well established. However, much less is known about intermediate elites of the Preclassic period (ca. 1000 BC–AD 300) or their roles in the emergence of the earliest Maya states. Yet, the developments of the Preclassic arguably laid the foundation for Classic period polities (Estrada-Belli 2011). Studying the roles of emergent leaders at all social scales during the Preclassic can thus inform our understanding of Classic period organization more broadly. This paper explores the emergence of intermediate elites at Ceibal, Guatemala (Figure 1) during the Late and

Terminal Preclassic periods (ca. 350 BC–AD 300), when the settlement grew into an important regional center. More specifically, I focus on identifying intermediate elites at outlying minor temple complexes and explore how they supported social cohesion in the face of increased urbanization, social stratification, and political centralization.

Becoming an Intermediate Elite

In the simplest terms, intermediate elites are individuals whose rank is below top-tiered, central decision/policy-makers (referred to here as central or ruling elites) and above that of commoners (Elson and Covey 2006b:4-9; Lohse and Valdez 2004). Some have highlighted the precarious positions intermediate elites held, since they had to appease both their constituents as well as their overlords (e.g., Marcone and López-Hurtado 2015). Nevertheless, intermediate elites occupied a pivotal position to uphold, question, or effectively rebel against the ruling body. While it is important to consider the strategies that intermediate elites employed to integrate the populations that supported them (e.g., Walden et al. 2019), we must pay equal attention to the dynamic relationships between ruling and intermediate elites to explore how the fragile structures of ancient Maya polities were maintained over centuries.

As Elson and Covey (2006b:8) explain, segmenting political authority – including granting power to subordinate elites – ironically helps maintain central power and prevent political upheaval. This framework implies that subordinate elites exist at the behest of their overlords specifically for supporting a central regime, a perspective that some Mayanists have leaned into (e.g., Chase and Chase 1996). However, competition among ruling and subordinate elites can create unstable

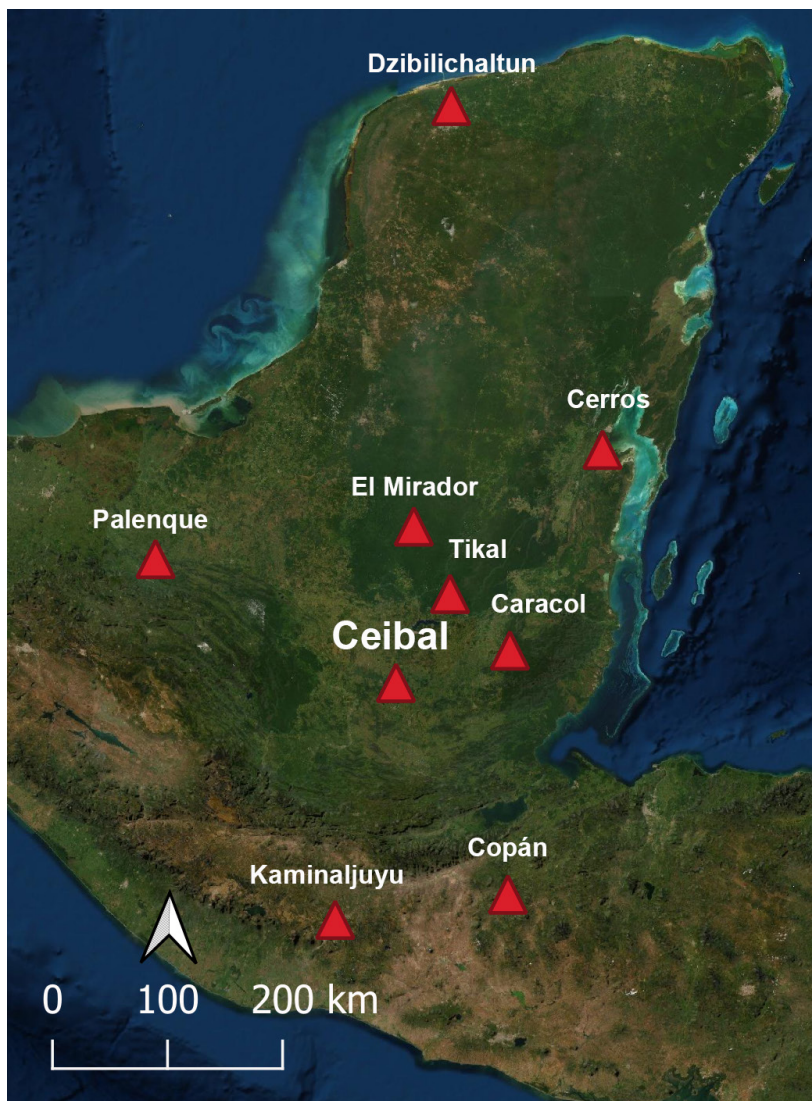


Figure 1. Location of Ceibal in the Maya region (map by author, modified after Burham 2022:Figure 1).

relationships and cause factionalism (Elson and Covey 2006b:14-15). Arguably, the relationships between ruling and intermediate elites need to be mutually – though not equitably – beneficial to alleviate the tensions born out of competing interests and uneven power relationships.

The theory of collective action (Blanton and Fargher 2008) is a useful framework in this regard because it focuses on the ways in which people simultaneously support mutual interests and individual agendas. The key idea is that by investing in common interests, people enhance their own well-being on greater levels than they would alone. Following others, Carballo and colleagues

(2014:106-108) suggest that four key, overlapping mechanisms underlie cooperation, including reciprocity, reputation, retribution, and reward. Epigraphic studies demonstrate that Classic Maya rulers enlisted sub-royal individuals at varying levels of society to support their authority (e.g., Foias 2013:117-123). In exchange, both rulers and intermediate elites may have been rewarded through inclusion in (or punished through exclusion from) prestige exchange networks, participation in local and public rituals, and/or exchange of ritual knowledge (e.g., Lamoureux-St-Hilaire 2020:260-263). Because the status of both ruler and intermediate elites relied on mutual support and recognition of each other's authority (i.e., reciprocity and reputation), they developed interdependent relationships. While ranking between ruling and intermediate elites appears to be hierarchical at face value, the codependent nature of their relationships arguably created counterbalancing and complementary power dynamics (Crumley 1995), which helped maintain an otherwise fragile system. Although I focus on collective action between ruling and intermediate elites, it is worth noting that these same mechanisms help explain the establishment of hierarchies between elites and commoners more broadly.

We need to be careful not to assume these arrangements were created consciously with much foresight of the eventual outcomes. In fact, the collective action framework emphasizes the organic nature behind the emergence of social hierarchies, as people “self-organize” into specialized roles to achieve collective goals (Scarborough et al. 2003). For example, while not using the collective action model, Spencer (1993:48-58) suggests that institutionalized authority followed the construction of the Purrón Dam in the Tehuacán Valley, which was originally built by small, de-centralized groups. In this case, some “aspiring leaders” achieved status by coordinating construction and maintenance of the dam, which was a crucial source of water in the arid landscape. Although Spencer places emphasis on self-aggrandizers, his study importantly demonstrates how the fleeting and unstable nature of authority in egalitarian societies can become formalized and longstanding as people willingly follow – and as a result become subordinate to – the leaders of a system in which individual success relies on group cooperation. Alternatively, Joyce (2004) suggests that collective efforts to build public ceremonial architecture unintentionally created and naturalized social divisions, as access to certain spaces and practices became increasingly restricted to fewer individuals. It is important to remember that even as they gain social standing, leaders were bound by responsibility to their people and to the ideology that justified their higher status. These perspectives shy away from the view that elites were self-aggrandizing power mongers and instead examine how leadership gradually translated into rulership at different social scales.

In a previous publication, my colleagues and I explore the relationships between ritual and the emergence of social complexity at Ceibal (Burham et al. 2020). Here I briefly revisit those arguments to focus on the emergence of early intermediate elites later in the paper. As many have noted (e.g., Bell 1992; Turner 1969), ritual simultaneously unites people through common experiences while fostering social hierarchies, since few specialists are recognized as possessing the knowledge and ability to perform certain rites, to handle sacred objects, or to access ritual spaces. Many scholars agree that the power of ancient Maya rulers and sub-royal elites was grounded mainly in their roles as ritual-religious leaders (e.g., Demarest 1992; Freidel and Schele 1988). This has led some to suggest that emergent elites strategically employed ritual to elevate their status, eventually leading to divine rulership in the Classic period (e.g., Lucero 2003). Research at Ceibal suggests

that the development of public ceremonialism was a complex process involving negotiations and participation among people in the center and outlying areas (Inomata et al. 2015a). A collective action framework allows us to consider how sharing ritual knowledge, rather than monopolizing it, helps create reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships between different social actors.

Incipient Elites at Ceibal

Identifying Elites

Although the archaeological identification of elites has been a subject of debate among Mayanists (D. Chase and A. Chase 1992), they are commonly identified on the basis of greater access to exotic items, use of status symbols, extravagant burial treatments, and association with elaborate architecture (A. Chase and D. Chase 1992:4-7). Elite residences, in particular, have often been distinguished from those of non-elites based on assumptions that they are located close to public architecture, constructed of special materials and techniques, and are more sizeable than non-elite domiciles (Christie 2003:4; Inomata and Triadan 2003:157-158). While the size and amount of buildings in a residential compound may reflect the development cycle of a domestic group more than social standing (Tourtellot 1988a), domestic architecture can be used to determine higher status if we consider whether the buildings required supra-household labor organization to construct. Larger domestic buildings reflect the ability of the residents to compel labor outside their household, while the size and grandeur may have symbolically differentiated the residents from others in the community (Inomata and Triadan 2003:157). This reasoning has been particularly fruitful for distinguishing elites in the Early and Middle Preclassic/Formative settlements across Mesoamerica (Blake et al. 2006; Spencer 1993; Triadan et al 2017). In this paper, I consider all these principles to assess whether (intermediate) elites resided in outlying areas of Ceibal.

Middle Preclassic Elites and Ritual

Ceibal became a permanent ceremonial center around 950 B.C., when an E-group assemblage was carved out of natural bedrock in the Central Plaza (Figure 2; Inomata et al. 2013). At the same time, a substantial clay platform, called Platform Sulul, was constructed approximately 100 m to the southwest of the E Group (under the A-24 platform, see Figure 2), and possibly had a domestic function (Triadan et al. 2017:235-237, 260). Most people, however, did not begin to use ceramics or build permanent dwellings (i.e., durable, often elevated constructions repeatedly rebuilt over time) until a couple centuries later (Inomata et al. 2015b). At the East Court, northeast of the Central Plaza (see Figure 2), Triadan and colleagues (2017:247-253) found a tall, expansive platform (K'at) dating to the end of the Early Middle Preclassic (Real 3 facet, ca. 775-700 BC), which supported domestic buildings. The construction of the K'at and Sulul platforms clearly involved communal labor and great material investment. The fact that these buildings were occupied by few people suggests the residents were early or incipient elites.

Some evidence of status differentiation during the latter centuries of the Middle Preclassic has been identified in outlying areas of Ceibal as well, including personal adornments, elaborated

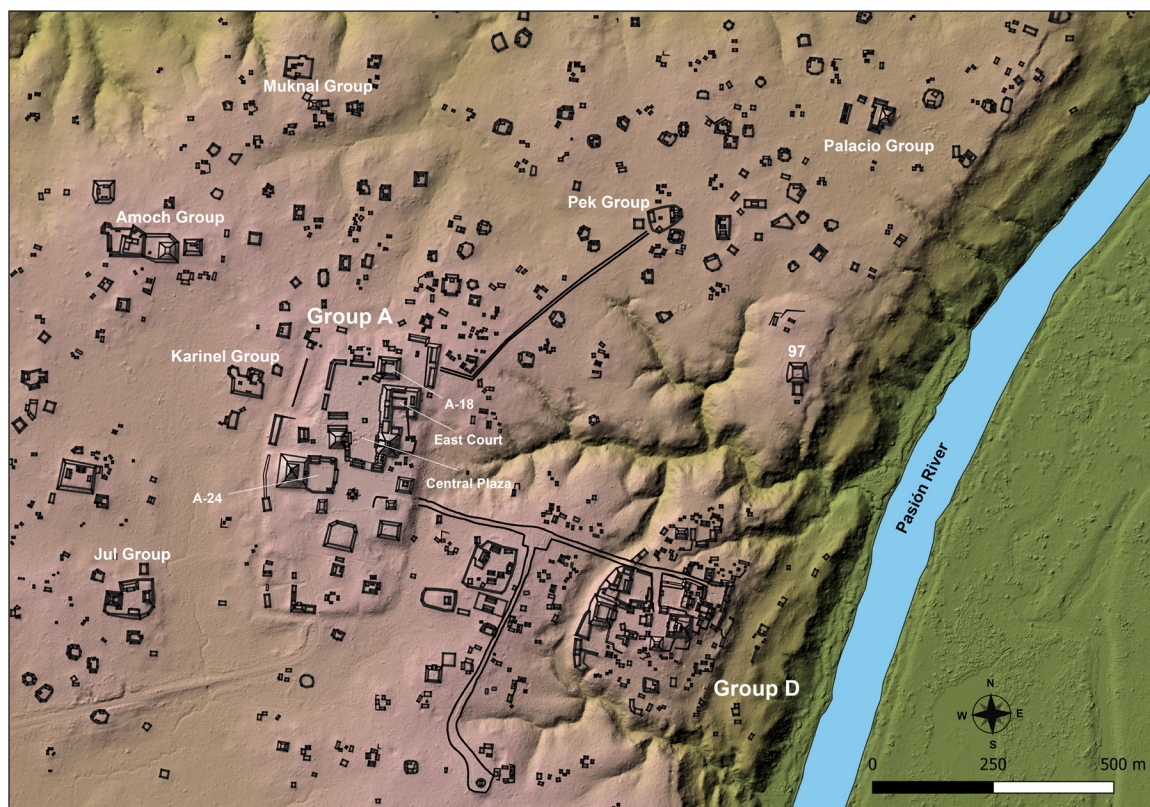


Figure 2. Map of Ceibal center, showing locations of groups discussed in the text (map by author).

burials, and supra-household ritual activities (Burham 2019:148-151; MacLellan 2019:93-9,138). However, it is unclear if any individuals were *intermediate elites* in the sense they served to support a central regime, or if they even could be considered elites (see A. Chase and D. Chase 1992). The relationships between emergent elites in the center and people in outlying areas were complex and appear to have been horizontally oriented (MacLellan and Castillo 2022). Regardless, a degree of social ranking was established on public and local scales by the end of the Middle Preclassic period.

Outlying Elites in the Late and Terminal Preclassic

A profound social and cultural shift occurred across the Maya region beginning in the Late Preclassic, including mass urbanization and the emergence of dynastic rulership at some centers (Ringle 1999; Saturno 2006). As I describe elsewhere (Burham 2022), Ceibal grew into a large regional center in a piecemeal fashion over the Late and Terminal Preclassic periods. Minor temples (pyramid-plaza complexes built on smaller scales than their counterparts in monumental cores) were systematically constructed as people settled permanently in new outlying areas (see Figure 2). This pattern suggests that ritual was an important consideration during urban expansion.

Many Mayanists have argued that minor temples, and minor centers more broadly, were

important ritual and administrative centers that helped integrate dispersed populations into larger political domains (Bullard 1960; Iannone 2004; Ringle 1999; Tourtellot et al. 2003). However, it is not clear who was involved in establishing or governing them, especially during the Preclassic. Did central elites commission their construction and select local (intermediate) elites to oversee them, or were local people emulating the monumentality of the center and choosing their own leaders? Did elites even preside over each temple? While it is reasonable to assume that construction of these temples required leadership, that access was restricted to few specialists, and that ruling elites were involved in their construction on some level, we need to consider different lines of evidence to understand the relationships between minor temples and intermediate elites, and between minor temples and monumental epicenters. Gair Tourtellot (1988b:377), who conducted an extensive survey of outlying areas of Ceibal, noted that some minor temples were associated with large domestic platforms or other possible residences of local elites (who he references as “chiefs”). Below I focus on five minor temple groups to explore his suggestion in detail. Following the arguments outlined in the beginning of this section, we would expect the houses of intermediate elites to be more elaborate than those of non-elites, denoting the residents’ status. I concentrate mainly on size and elaborateness of the domestic architecture and their association with temples to evaluate if they could have been elite residences.

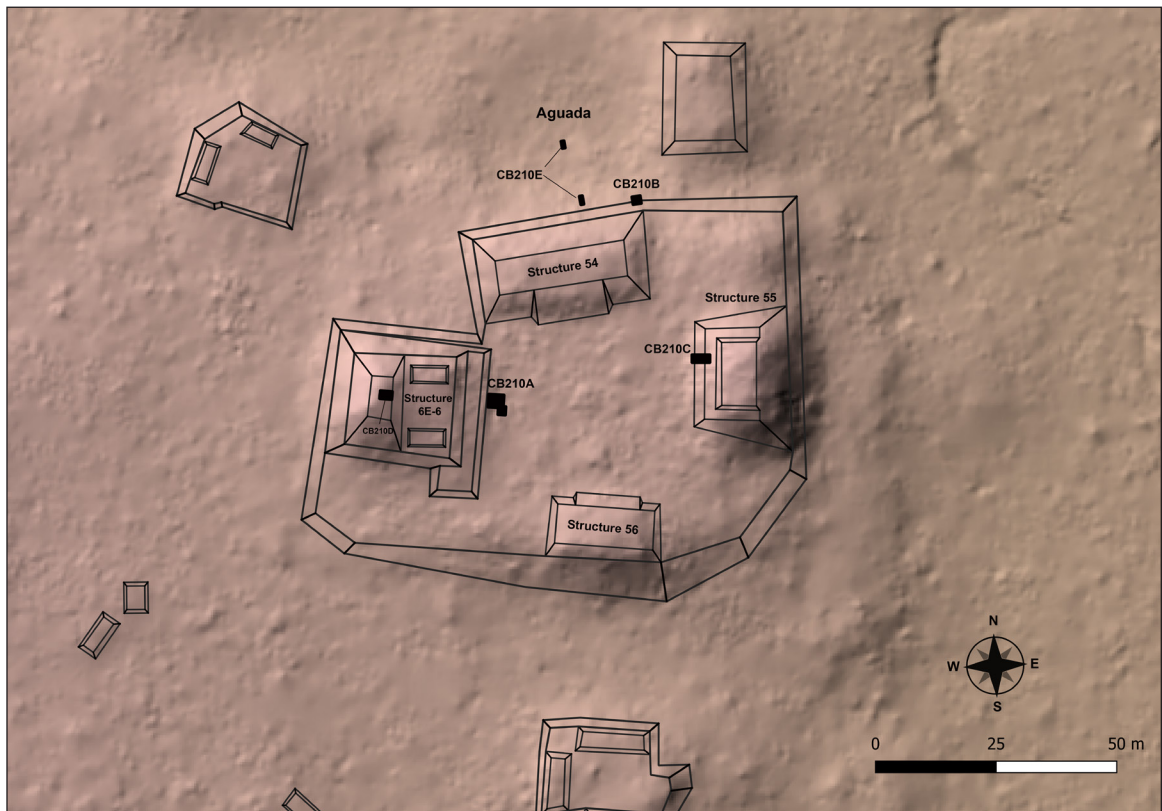


Figure 3. Map of the Jul Group, showing locations of excavations (map by author).

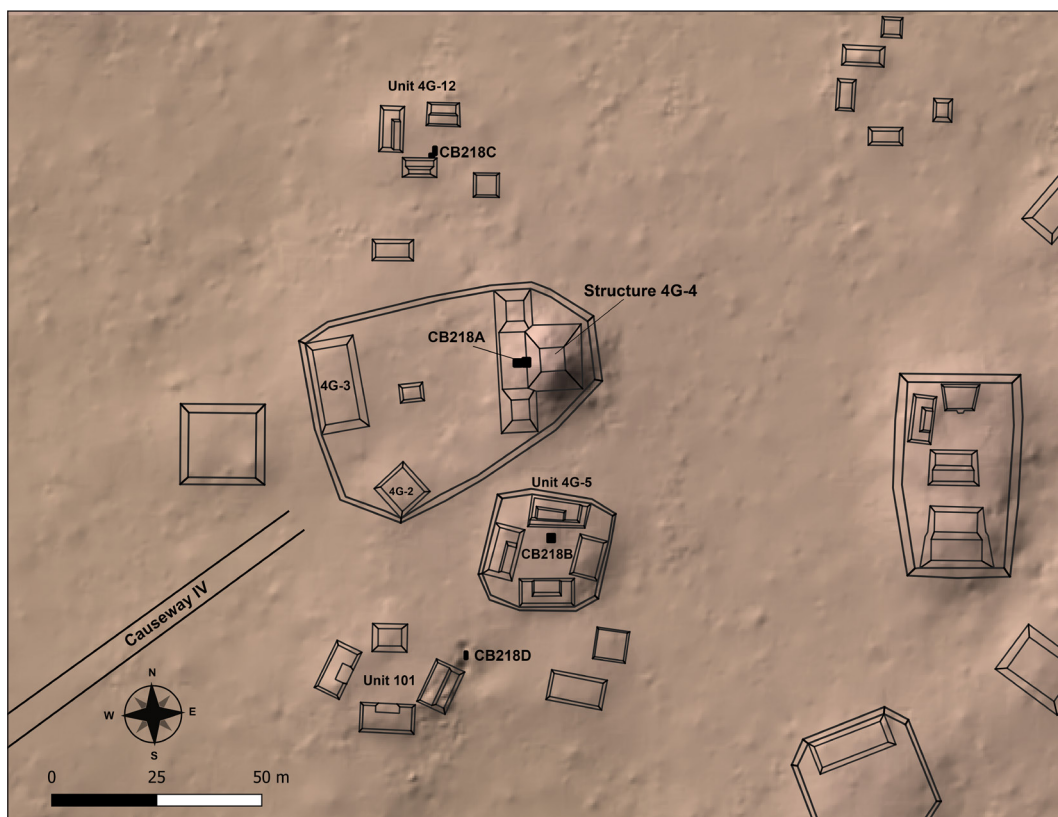


Figure 4. Map of the Pek Group, showing locations of excavated areas (map by author).

The Jul Group. The Jul Group is located ca. 600 m southwest of the Central Plaza. The group consists of four buildings, including two standalone pyramids and two large range structures, facing inward onto a plaza (Figure 3). The complex sits on a large basal platform, possibly built on a natural rise. Superficial excavations of Structures 6E-6, 54, and 55 revealed their final versions date to the Late Classic, although the group was occupied through the Terminal Classic. Excavations in front of the western pyramid, Structure 6E-6, revealed the group was established at the end of the Middle Preclassic (Escoba 3 facet, ca. 450-350 BC), but both pyramids were probably built in the Late Preclassic, like most others in outlying areas (Burham 2022; Tourtellot 1988b). Excavations behind Structure 54 revealed the northeast edge of the basal platform extended to this area by the Late Preclassic. The final iteration of Structure 54 measured 35 x 18 m at its base, while Structure 56 was approximately 24 x 14 m. These versions were built of stone masonry and possibly had vaulted roofs, indicating high levels of material and labor investment. Although we did not excavate deeply into the structures, their size and morphology suggest they served administrative and residential functions, and thus, were possibly the residences of local elites during the Late Classic. However, like most large buildings at Ceibal, these structures may have Preclassic cores. This interpretation is supported by the fact that Structure 54 was built over Late and Terminal Preclassic strata. In other words, these structures could have been elite residences as early as the Late Preclassic, but

more work needs to be done to confirm this interpretation.

The Pek Group. The Pek group is located ca. 750 m northeast of the Central Plaza and is connected to Group A by Causeway IV (Figure 4). The main complex consists of a winged pyramid (Structure 4G-4) facing westward on a plaza and a low, Late Preclassic platform (Structure 4G-3), where Tourtellot (1988:180) found a tayra skull amulet. Excavations at the foot of the temple revealed the first version was built during the Late Preclassic Cantutse 1 facet (ca. 350-300 BC) and was occupied through the end of the Terminal Preclassic (Junco 1 facet, ca. AD 175-300). To the south of the temple, the residents built a substantial (approximately 30 x 30 m at its base) domestic platform (Unit 4G-5). Excavations in the middle of the platform revealed the first version was constructed in the Cantutse 2 facet (ca. 300-150 BC). While we do not know the horizontal dimensions of the earliest version of the platform, it was approximately 30 cm in height, and was raised an additional 40 cm during the same facet. The platform was eventually built up to 2 m by the end of the Terminal Preclassic. Given its proximity to and contemporaneity with the temple, it is possible that this was the residence of an early elite.

The Amoch Group. The Amoch Group is located approximately 570 m northwest of the Central Plaza. The standalone pyramid is massive, measuring 34 x 36 m at its base and 9 m in height. A large, multi-tiered residential platform was built across the plaza of the pyramid (Figure 5). The

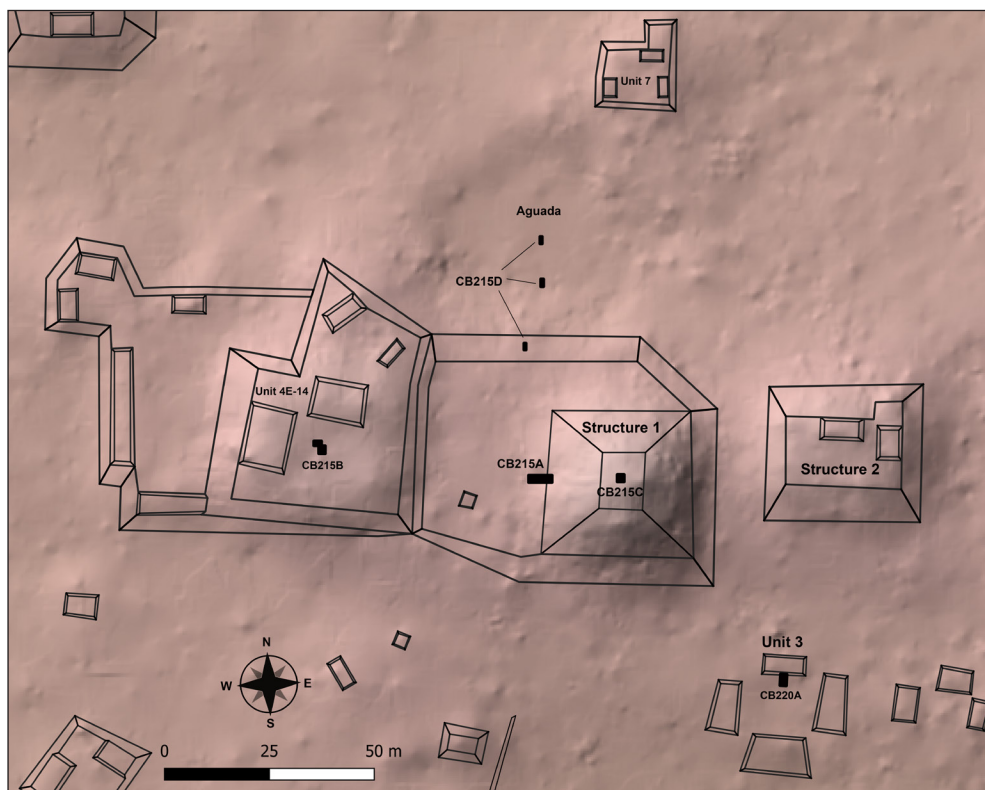


Figure 5. Map of the Amoch Group, showing locations of excavated areas (map by author).

highest tier of the platform towers 3 m above the plaza below. Standing atop the platform offers an impressive view of the plaza and pyramid, and one could imagine how the sound of ceremonies would have reverberated between the buildings. Excavations of Structure 1 suggest the first version was built in the Late Preclassic Cantutse 2 facet (ca. 300-150 BC) and was remodeled many times until the end of the Terminal Preclassic. Although we did not reach bedrock in the excavation of the residential platform, we found that it was built up mostly, if not entirely, during the Late Preclassic and resurfaced during the Terminal Preclassic, making it contemporaneous with the pyramid. To the east of Structure 1, the residents built a truncated pyramid (Structure 2), which closely resembles Structure A-18 in the center and Structure 97 located northeast of Group A (see Figure 2). The bulk of each of those seemingly residential structures was built during the Late Preclassic (Triadan 2015; Triadan et al. 2017:254). Structure 2 was possibly also a tall residential platform dating to the Late Preclassic. The platform and Structure 2 are closely associated with Structure 1, and both clearly required communal labor to construct. These buildings may have been occupied by local elites who presided over the pyramid during the Late and Terminal Preclassic periods.

The Muknal Group. The Muknal Group is a modest minor temple complex located ca. 700 m north of the Central Plaza. It consists of a standalone pyramid facing south with two low platforms flanking its east and west sides (Figure 6). Tourtellot (1988b:148-153) extensively excavated the pyramid, finding that it dates entirely to the Late Preclassic and was ritually buried at the end of the Terminal Preclassic, when the group was abandoned. Our test excavations revealed the group was established more specifically during the Cantutse 3 facet (ca. 150-75 BC). During the Late Classic, after the group was reoccupied, the residents built a lavish patio group, including stone buildings

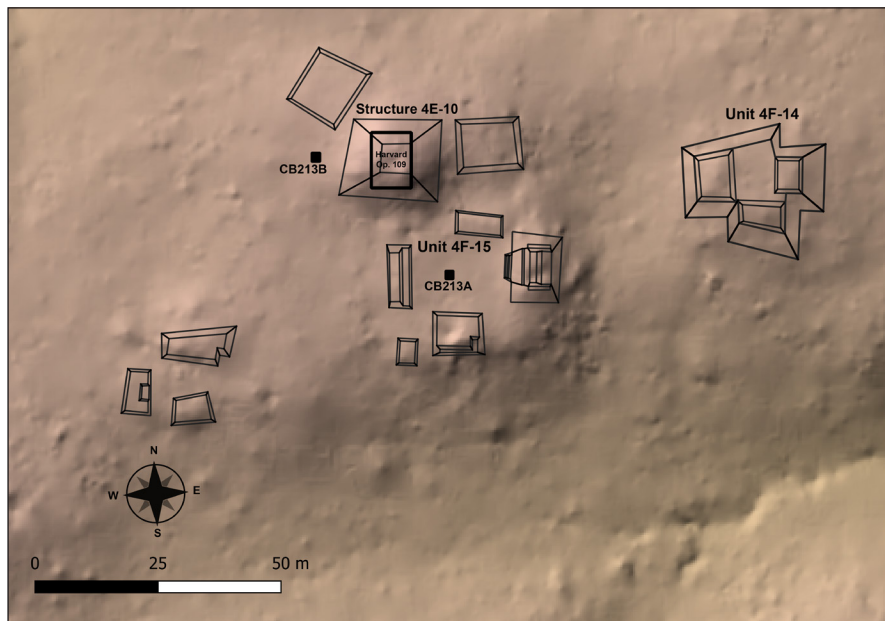


Figure 6. Map of the Muknal Group, showing locations of excavated areas (map by author).

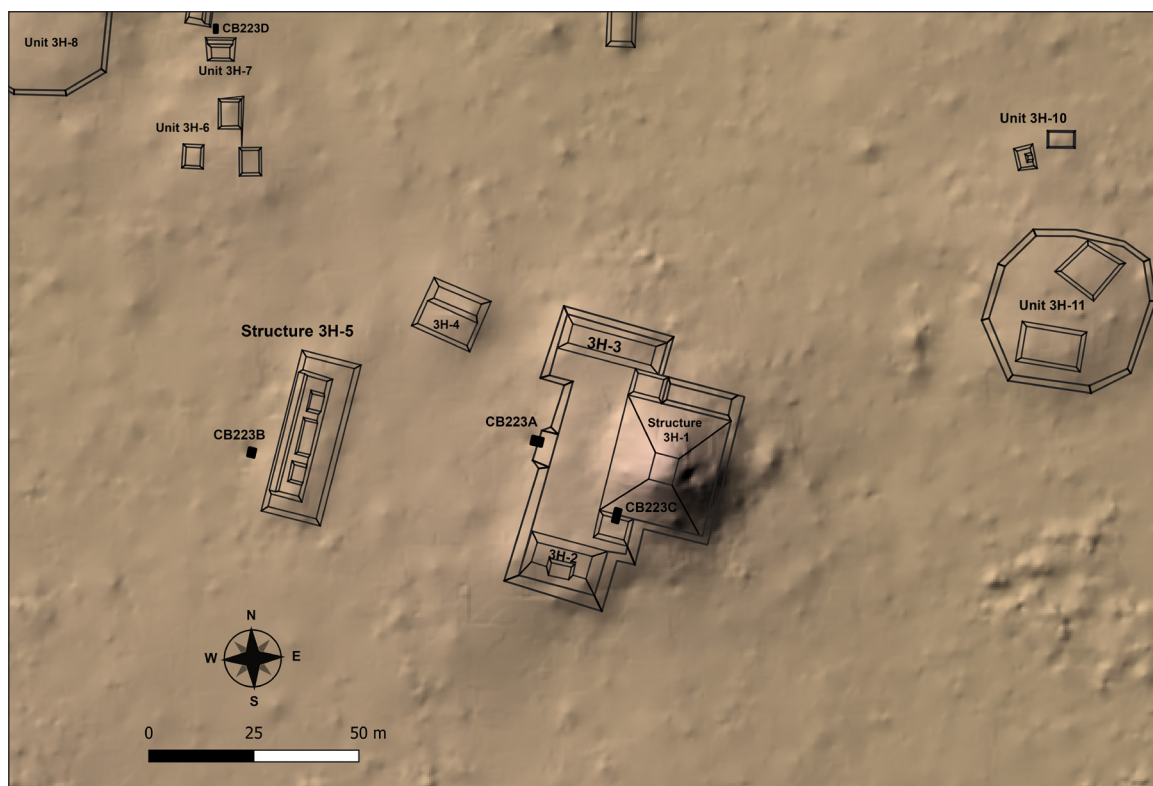


Figure 7. Map of the Palacio Group, showing locations of excavated areas (map by author).

with benches and possibly vaulted roofs, to the south of the pyramid (Tourtellot 1988b:180-182). There could be an earlier patio group underneath, but it was more likely an open plaza in Preclassic times. A LiDAR survey (Inomata et al. 2017) revealed a substantial residential platform a short distance to the east of the pyramid. Like many platforms at Ceibal, it was probably constructed in the Late Preclassic, which means it would have been occupied contemporaneously with Structure 4E-10. Given its proximity to the temple and its large size, it is possible that this platform was the residence of a local elite.

The Palacio Group. The Palacio Group, located 1.2 km northeast of the Central Plaza, is a large, impressive complex, consisting of a 10 m tall pyramid on the east side and a palace on the west side of a plaza (Figure 7). The bulk of the pyramid was built in the Late and Terminal Classic periods, but the first version of the temple and plaza date to the Junco 1 facet (ca. AD 175-300). The Palacio Group is the latest minor temple complex in the sample to be built, and it was occupied for a short time before outlying areas of Ceibal were abandoned for approximately 200 years. Our test excavation behind the palace revealed a shallow Terminal Classic midden, but no earlier Classic or Preclassic layers were found underneath. It is therefore unclear if a Preclassic construction is underneath the later version. While this was certainly the residence of a local elite during the Terminal Classic, we cannot determine if or where an elite resided in the group during the Terminal Preclassic.



Figure 8. Top: Monument 2 in façade of Structure 1-Sub 2 (photo by author). Bottom: Sierra Red vessel that contained Burial 147 (photo by T. Inomata, courtesy of the Ceibal-Petexbatún Archaeological Project).

Two large residential platforms to the northwest and northeast of the complex are potential locations (see Figure 7), though they are not located as close to the temple as the large residential platforms are in the other cases discussed above.

Late Preclassic Ritual Practices

In contrast to previous periods, ritual practices of the Late and Terminal Preclassic periods undertaken in the Central Plaza, at minor temples, and in domestic contexts became remarkably similar (see Inomata et al. 2015b). In the Central Plaza, caches consisting of sacrificial burials, often placed in large Sierra Red pots, became common. At the Amoch Group, during the Cantutse 3 facet (ca. 150-75 BC), the residents placed a large limestone altar in front of an earlier version of Structure 1. The altar is associated with various construction episodes and was eventually incorporated into the façade of the structure during the Terminal Preclassic (Figure 8). Similar to contemporaneous caches

in the plaza, a child sacrifice (Burial 147) was placed in a large pot underneath the altar. Ritual similarities at all scales of society continued in the Terminal Preclassic period. For instance, at the Karinel Group, MacLellan (2019:84-85) found Cache 159, a large deposit of Sierra Red and Achiotes Unslipped bowls and round stone artifacts placed in a large intrusion. A child burial was interred higher in the intrusion, possibly as an offering. At the Amoch Group, the residents deposited Cache 166, consisting of a partial Iberia Orange bowl and a large sherd from a Velorio Dichrome vessel, into a Terminal Preclassic floor atop the large residential platform (Figure 9). Caches 159 and 166 closely resemble larger, contemporaneous caches deposited in the Central Plaza (see Burham et al. 2020).

Discussion

To summarize, I have explored evidence for the existence of local elites in outlying areas of Ceibal during the Preclassic period. Excavations at Ceibal also provide an idea of what Preclassic elite residential groups looked like. Similar to their Classic Period counterparts, Preclassic domestic compounds consisted of patio groups at least as early as the late Middle Preclassic (MacLellan 2019:137-138; Triadan et al. 2017). However, elite patio groups were probably built on large basal platforms, some of which towered 3-6 m above surrounding areas. With the possible exception of the Palacio Group, each minor temple is associated with at least one potential elite domestic platform that was occupied contemporaneously with its associated temple during the Late and Terminal Preclassic. This evidence suggests local elites resided at each temple. If this interpretation is correct, it is reasonable to conclude they oversaw construction and ritual activities at the respective complex.

Ritual practices at Ceibal further elucidate the relationships between central and emergent intermediate elites. In the Middle Preclassic, domestic rituals bared little resemblance to public rituals in the Central Plaza (MacLellan 2019). While public ritual helped integrate populations, sacred knowledge and access to specialized objects used in those rites was restricted to few people in the center. Middle Preclassic public rituals, which involved greenstone and obsidian objects exchanged through elite-led networks, promoted hierarchical power structures between central elites and the rest of the population (Aoyama et al. 2017). However, MacLellan and Castillo (2022) suggest that Middle Preclassic domestic and supra-household ritual practices existed in tension with public rituals in the Central Plaza. Smaller-scale rituals in domestic settings may have counteracted the centralizing forces of public ceremonies in the center for some time.

In contrast to previous periods, similarities in ritual deposits and ceremonial architecture between the center and minor temple groups during the Late and Terminal Preclassic periods show that some people in outlying areas had access to specialized ritual knowledge. The lens of collective action allows us to explore the significance of these patterns in relation to the formation of intermediate elites. The development of these new practices likely resulted from negotiations among various community members to foster consensus



Figure 9. Top: In-situ photo of Cache 166 from the Amoch Group. Bottom: Detail photos of vessels from Cache 166 (photos by author).

and community in the face of exploding population sizes and increased social differentiation. People in outlying areas were not simply emulating rituals originating in the center, but rather, some were actively involved in creating them (Burham and MacLellan 2014). Rather than co-opting or monopolizing ritual practices, established central elites cooperated with other, local ritual leaders to reach common goals, which included integrating larger populations into one cohesive society.

Through this collective involvement in creating dominant ritual practices, the power that would have been exclusive to the central elites was dispersed among different social actors in the community. These arrangements arguably fostered reciprocal and interdependent relationships among central and newly established intermediate elites: the authority of local leaders hinged on their relationships with established central elites, while central elites relied on intermediate elites to integrate subordinate populations so that they would willingly provide tribute and labor for the

central regime. In a way, by entering these relationships, new intermediate elites gave up part of their autonomy, as they assumed specialized roles in society that required (quite literal) sacrifices on their part. Both central and intermediate elites may have taken these positions not as a power grab, but because of their deep sense of responsibility to their people and their commitment to the beliefs they were imparting on the community.

Central elites undoubtedly held more prominent positions than did their intermediate elite counterparts. Even still, at Ceibal, there is little evidence that a preeminent central ruler existed during the Preclassic, and there is limited evidence of ranking among different minor temple groups (Burham 2019). There was undoubtedly competition and factionalism among different intermediate elites and temple communities during the Preclassic. However, the relationships between, or rather the social network comprised of intermediate and central elites may have helped mitigate conflicts among distinct sectors of society and promoted social cohesion among a growing populace. At the same time, because they all drew from the same source of power (ritual knowledge) and because they relied on their counterparts to recognize and legitimize their individual authority, elites may have developed mutually beneficial yet counter-balancing political relationships amongst themselves. The presence of so many recognized elites may have limited the power that any one individual could achieve.

We cannot be sure how specific individuals in outlying areas were positioned to become intermediate elites. Were they aspiring aggrandizers or were they established leaders that naturally took the responsibility of communicating with central elites? This point warrants further research. However, we can say their roles as ritual leaders were crucial for solidifying their higher status and involved collective cooperation with the center. Similar to their Classic period iterations (Tsukamoto et al. 2015), outlying temples were important venues for social and political negotiations of different leaders, as well as between leaders and subordinate populations. They were places where local ritual specialists mediated the knowledge they gained from working and learning with central elites. In this way, these specialists assumed an elevated status among their own communities while also supporting the authority of central elites. Rituals performed at minor temples



resembling ceremonies in the Central Plaza may have allowed people to more closely observe and participate in them, and, in turn, perform the same rites in domestic settings on their own. Access to and acceptance of this knowledge may have motivated laypeople to accept the authority of local elites, even though it meant they became political subjects. Shared practices at all levels of society would have been crucial for alleviating tensions arising from increased social stratification and stress as people continued to settle in early urban centers.

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