

Voices and Narratives beyond Texts: The Life-History of a Classic Maya Building

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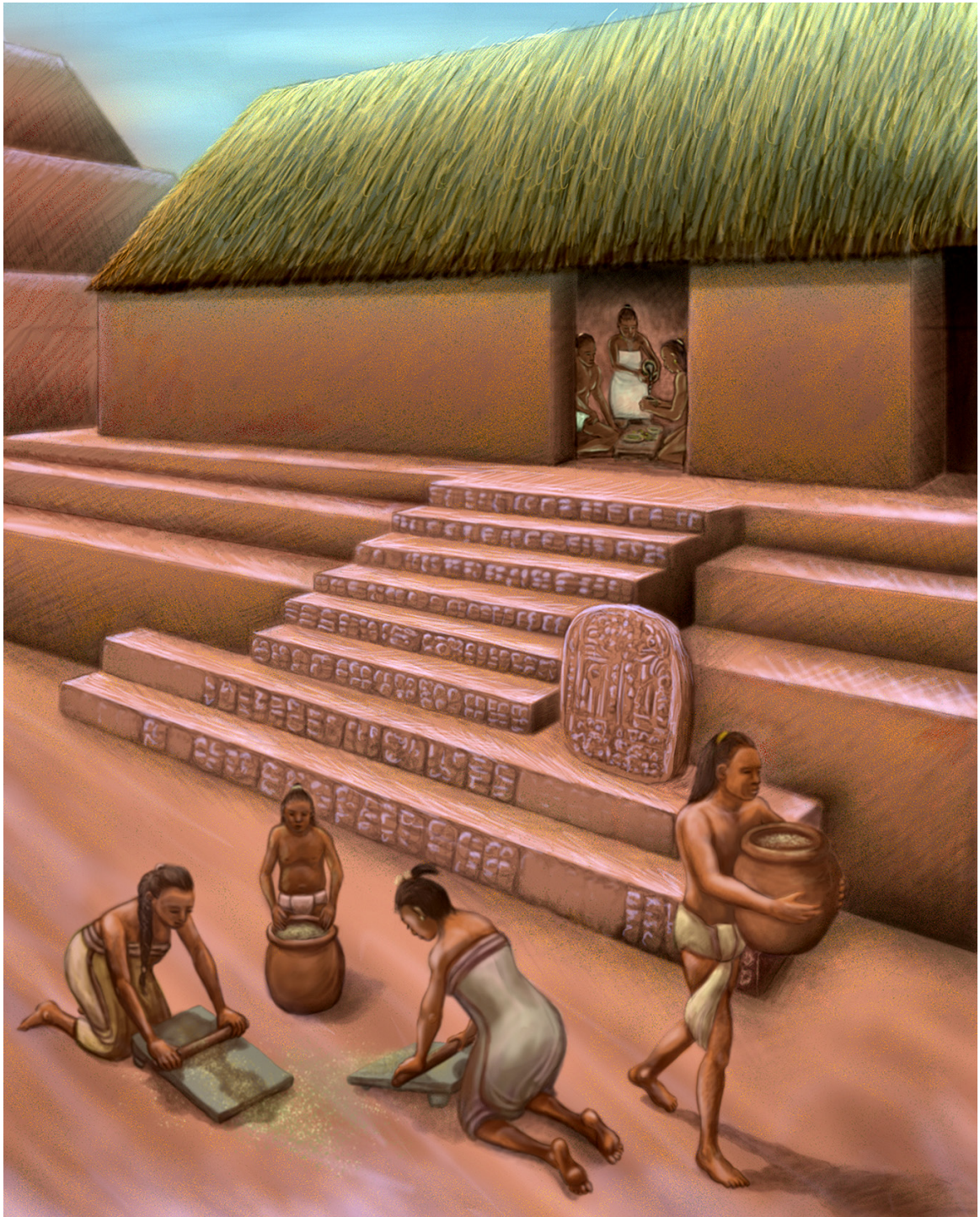
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This paper traces the life-history of a Classic Maya building at the site of La Corona in northwest Petén, Guatemala. Structure 13R-10 is a looted range structure located in La Corona's ceremonial core, the Coronitas Group. Structure 13R-10's construction stages and associated caching episodes, feasting deposits, and domestic refuse were used to reconstruct its life-history from its foundation in the Early Classic period until present day. While several archaeological life-history studies have typically focused on the shifting meanings of places, we use this approach to identify the active participation of groups underrepresented in elite-dominated hieroglyphic texts. By doing this we show how epigraphy and archaeology complement each other to offer a fuller historical narrative. La Corona's rich hieroglyphic record provides ample information on its sociopolitical history. As a heavily looted site, detailed archaeological research at La Corona has been key to reconstruct and differentiate between primary contexts, monuments in secondary contexts following relocation by the ancient Maya during spolia events, and recent looting activities. Shifts in the use of space and reinterpretation of the historical past are identified in this case study as mechanisms of biographical change.

Keywords: *life-histories; biographies; architecture; Maya Lowlands; Classic period*



People are inherently interconnected with material objects and their built environment. Archaeological artifacts reflect social relations and meanings through their depositional contexts, transformations, and movements across space and time. The archaeological study of biographies or life-histories of objects follows the ‘lives’ of things in the past from the procurement of raw material, use, and eventual deposition in the archaeological record (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 170; Joy 2009: 540; Kopytoff 1986; Shanks 1998). As objects are modified and moved around by people, they become vested with meaning. The biographies of buildings can also be followed through their initial foundation and subsequent construction, remodeling, and destruction (Ashmore 2002; Tringham 1994, 1995). As receptacles for communal memory, changes in architecture and the movements of portable artifacts can help identify how the built environment was perceived and experienced by different groups of people through time.

Studies from the Maya Lowlands show how architectural features can acquire histories as they are built, occupied, renovated, and abandoned (e.g. Abrams 1998; Brown and Garber 2008; Garber et al. 1998; Sharer et al. 1999). In this study we show how a biographical approach to a Classic Maya building at the site of La Corona, Guatemala, enables the recreation of narratives beyond elite-dominated epigraphic texts. Questions of how artifacts and built spaces acquire, accumulate, and change meanings through time are considered from a variety of perspectives as outlined below. But how can the biography of a building help identify the voices of different individuals and groups through time? At La Corona, detailed archaeological data has been key to reconstruct and differentiate the behaviors that led to: 1) primary construction episodes and deposition of artifacts and burials; 2) the movement of carved monuments by the ancient inhabitants; and 3) disturbed archaeological contexts by recent looting activities. Our study demonstrates how a biographical approach provides unique insight into the relations between people and their built environment through the experiences of diverse social strata that are not always identifiable through the epigraphic record alone. Despite the challenges associated with investigating looted contexts, we show how epigraphic and archaeological data complement each other for a more nuanced historical narrative.

The Biographies of Objects and Buildings

Archaeologists have used multiple approaches to discuss the life-histories of artifacts. An initial use-life approach was focused on the formation processes and morphological changes of artifacts through the application of Leroi-Gourhan’s (1945) concept of *chaîne opératoire*. From this functional perspective artifacts were considered mere reflections of behaviors and patterns in the archaeological record such as production, discard, and reuse (Joy 2009; LaMotta and Schiffer 2001; Schiffer 1987; Schiffer and Miller 1999; Tringham 1995). The use-life of buildings is observable through physical changes that signaled construction, occupation, maintenance, and abandonment. Use-life analysis documents how long an object or building was used and how it entered the archaeological record. However, the role of social interactions was overlooked, and objects were perceived as passive entities.

Subsequently, a biographic or life-history approach considered the roles of artifacts and buildings as dynamic and culturally vested with meanings (Appadurai 1988; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Kopytoff 1986; Thomas 1996; Tilley 1996). This paper explores the life-history of a Classic Maya

building from this perspective: Structure 13R-10 from La Corona. Drawn from anthropology, this perspective emphasizes how objects and places become imbued with significance through social interactions. Mechanisms of biographical change include exchange and circulation (e.g. Jennings 2014; Lillios 1999; Oras et al. 2017), performance (e.g. Gosden and Marshall 1999; Inomata 2006; Moore 1996), interment of the dead (e.g. Buikstra et al. 2004; Last 1998; McAnany 2014), and reinterpretations (e.g. Barrett 1999; Gillings and Pollard 1999; Moreland 1999). The meaning of artifacts and places can thus change diachronically and derive from events and people to which they were connected to at different points in time.

Built and natural places can also accumulate significance through personal and collective experiences (Bradley 1998; Ingold 1993; Low 2009; Thomas 2012). Social relations and the built environment are linked recursively as they are considered arenas in which individuals and groups actively construct and negotiate their histories (Ashmore 2002; Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Tringham 1994, 1995). A place may be perceived in a particular way individually, but social context highly influences the meanings and narratives that become dominant. As active repositories for communal memory, the same place may be experienced in diverse ways by different social classes, ages, genders, and factions (Crumley 2002; Ingold 1993).

Changes in the meanings of places are not necessarily driven by their physical transformations. While the act of building and rebuilding may reflect the dispositions of ruling elites, material remains can point to diverse uses and interpretations. Since places are experienced differently by diverse groups, it opens up an opportunity to make visible the behaviors of non-elites and other non-dominant groups (Meskell 2003; Mixter 2017). Shifts in the use of space and reinterpretation of the historical past are identified in our case study as mechanisms of biographical change.

Present Day Life-Histories

Artifact and building biographies do not end with their deposition and abandonment. Life-histories continue with modern activities such as discovery, retrieval, and archaeological analyses (Gillings and Pollard 1999; Holtorf 1998, 2002). The rigorous documentation of archaeological contexts allows field archaeologists to assemble detailed histories of the past through material remains. The missing contextual information from looted archaeological sites – which is pivotal for archaeological interpretations – poses difficulties for tracking life-histories (Brodie and Tubb 2003; Elia 1997; Mackenzie et al. 2019).

Copious information is lost through looting, but the study of plundered monuments, vessels, and other artifacts allows reattaching part of their life histories to contextual data. Context provides clues on broader events and relations, as has been the case at La Corona. One example is the Classic Maya Ik'-style cylinder vessels that share pink-hued calligraphy and the Ik' emblem glyph. Several of these looted vessels lack contextual data, but have been traced to Motul de San José and the Lake Petén Itzá region through epigraphic and Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis (INAA; Foias and Emery 2012; Just 2012; Reents-Budet et al. 2012).

Conversely, the context of objects rather than the objects themselves can reveal significant information about past human behavior. For instance, burial goods provide information on the identity and status of interred individuals, which are lost if extracted from their context. Polychrome

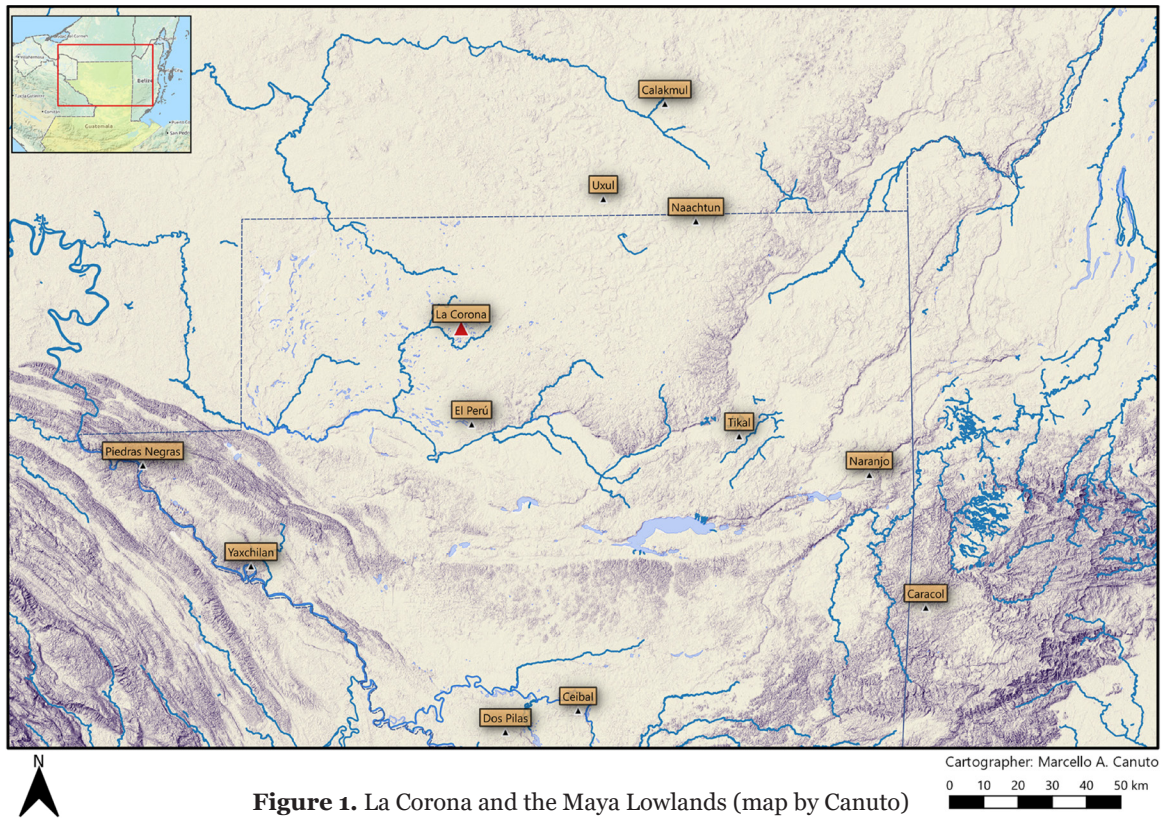


Figure 1. La Corona and the Maya Lowlands (map by Canuto)

vessels gifted between Maya elites for political alliances also exemplify the importance of archaeological context. The Komkom vase, for instance, was found at Baking Pot, Belize, and traced to the royal court of Naranjo, Guatemala (Helmke et al. 2018). The vase represents a material link between the two localities during the Late Classic period – a connection which is further supported by similar vessels recovered from neighboring sites such as Buenavista del Cayo (Audet and Awe 2005; Helmke and Awe 2012). Although these few contextualized examples do not allow us to fully understand the relationship between these royal courts, they effectively place artifacts within the chronology of their architectural setting, settlement, and region more broadly.

Thus, looting, archaeological research, and other modern activities have profound impacts on artifact and building life-histories. Given the extent of looting at La Corona, extensive detailed archaeological research was necessary for distinguishing primary and disturbed contexts. This work also tracked and contextualized the repositioning of carved monuments across the site in *spolia* events by the ancient inhabitants (Barrientos et al. 2016). *Spolia* refers to the reuse and repositioning of sculptures and other material elements as means to reinterpret and reference a historical past (Brilliant and Kinney 2011; Elsner 2000). While epigraphic analysis of the monuments provides ample information on La Corona’s political history, it was archaeological excavations that identified the *spolia* events. Excavations in La Corona’s central Coronitas Group were

instrumental for contextualizing this phenomenon and for reconstructing a more detailed history through material and architectural data.

La Corona and the Coronitas Group

La Corona is located in the Maya Biosphere Reserve in northwest Petén, Guatemala (Figure 1). The site displays a scattered settlement pattern with groups located in elevated areas surrounded by seasonal streams and rain-fed water basins or *civales*. The site was occupied from ca. 200-900 CE. Although relatively small, La Corona revealed many carved monuments that provide a rich historical record of the royal family and its sociopolitical relations with the Kaanul kingdom, whose political seat of power was first in Dzibanché and then Calakmul (Martin and Velásquez García 2016). This abundant epigraphic record indicates that La Corona forged a political alliance with Kaanul in 520 CE which lasted over two centuries.

La Corona was identified as the enigmatic ‘Site Q’ from which dozens of carved stone monuments were looted in the 1960s and 1970s (Canuto and Barrientos 2013; Matthews 1988; Schuster 1997). Some of the looted monuments were sawed with power tools to remove the carved surface and ease transport, leaving bulky carcasses behind. Since then, substantial efforts have been made to trace the monuments, many of which are currently in art museums and private collections throughout the world (Stuart et al. 2015).

The Coronitas Group is one of three main architectural groups located in La Corona’s core. Evidence from the group’s caches, burials, hieroglyphic texts, and feasting deposits suggest it was mainly used for ceremonial purposes. The Coronitas Group plaza is bounded on the east by five aligned funerary temples and to the northwest by five range structures and a pyramidal structure (Figure 2). The group was initially a necropolis for Kaanul-era rulers of la Corona. Plentiful archaeological and epigraphic data from the Coronitas Group indicate that Kaanul-era rulers undertook a program of political renovation and legitimation by associating themselves with patron deities in order to legitimize authority over historically established local lineages (Canuto and Barrientos 2020:190–193; Stuart et al. 2018). This paper focuses on data from Structure 13R-10, a 2.7 m-tall platform that measures 30 x 20 m and is flanked to the west by the pyramidal Structure 13R-9. As discussed below, material evidence from Structure 13R-10 supports the idea that Kaanul-era rulers used charismatic strategies to overcome traditional sources of authority by claiming La Corona as a place of ideological importance. Charismatic refers to religious and moral authority, where the ruler functioned as a medium between people and the supernatural realm (Canuto and Barrientos 2020: 190)

Archaeological research in the architectural complex began in 2008 with the discovery of hundreds of polychrome sherds associated with Structure 13R-9, which signaled its use by ruling elites (Acuña 2009). More research by the La Corona Archaeological Project discovered that Structure 13R-10 featured a hieroglyphic stairway (Ponce and Cajas 2013; Stuart and Baron 2013). The stairway was likely repositioned by the ancient inhabitants of the site and subsequently looted in the 1960s along with the carved monument known as Panel 6 or the Dallas Altar. Our narrative follows the life-history of Structure 13R-10, beginning with how it was initially vested with ideological



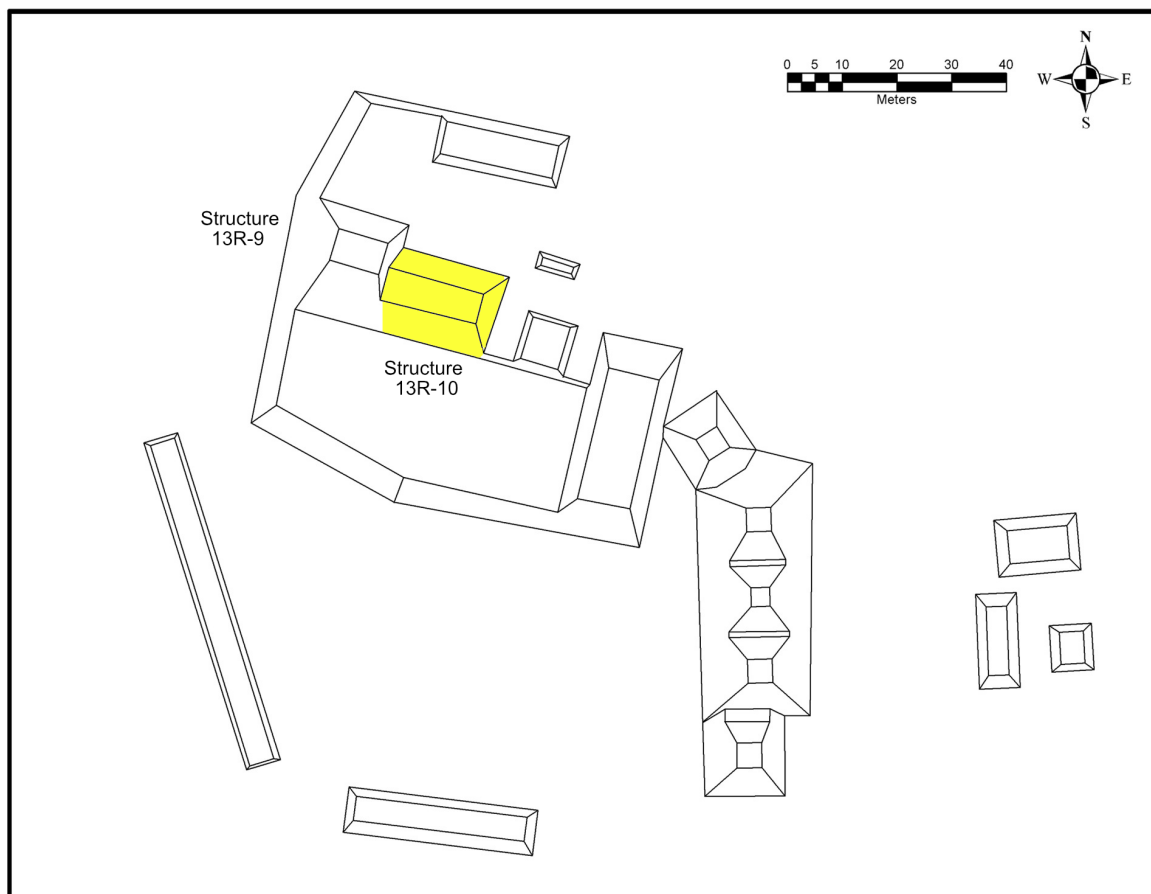


Figure 2. Structures 13R-9 and 13R-10 in the Coronitas Group (map by Canuto).

significance and how its associated materials signal different interpretations of the area through time.

The Birth of a Ceremonial Place: 4th-6th centuries CE

Structure 13R-10 was a ceremonial building during most of its lifetime. During the 3rd or 4th century CE, elites of La Corona commissioned the building of a low clay platform on the northwest side of the Coronitas Group. Since it predates most surrounding structures, its foundation likely dedicated a novel ceremonial place. The establishment was commemorated by an event materialized in a midden deposit along its central axis. The deposit contained around 1900 Late Preclassic and Protoclassic (300 BCE-250 CE) sherds and large amounts of charcoal (Parris and Barrientos 2014: 156–158). Additionally, over 50 freshwater snails were recovered in the fill, many of which were potential ornaments (Ponce 2014:93–97). This deposit included a cache composed of two lip-to-lip Aguila Naranja bowls containing a greenstone effigy (Figure 3). This deposit – which also

contained fragments of marine shell, a snail carved in stone, and ceramic seals – suggest a founding event where aquatic resources were used for commensal and ceremonial purposes.

The burial of a middle-aged woman was also found in this clay platform accompanied by an Ixcancario Orange Polychrome vessel (Patterson and Kate 2015:349–350; Ponce 2014:104–107). Given the dominant ancient Maya practice of placing burials for establishing physical connections with landscapes (McAnany 2014), this burial of a probable ancestor further imbued the building with meaning. A tangible link was thus established with past generations and Structure 13R-10 was born as an ideologically salient place.

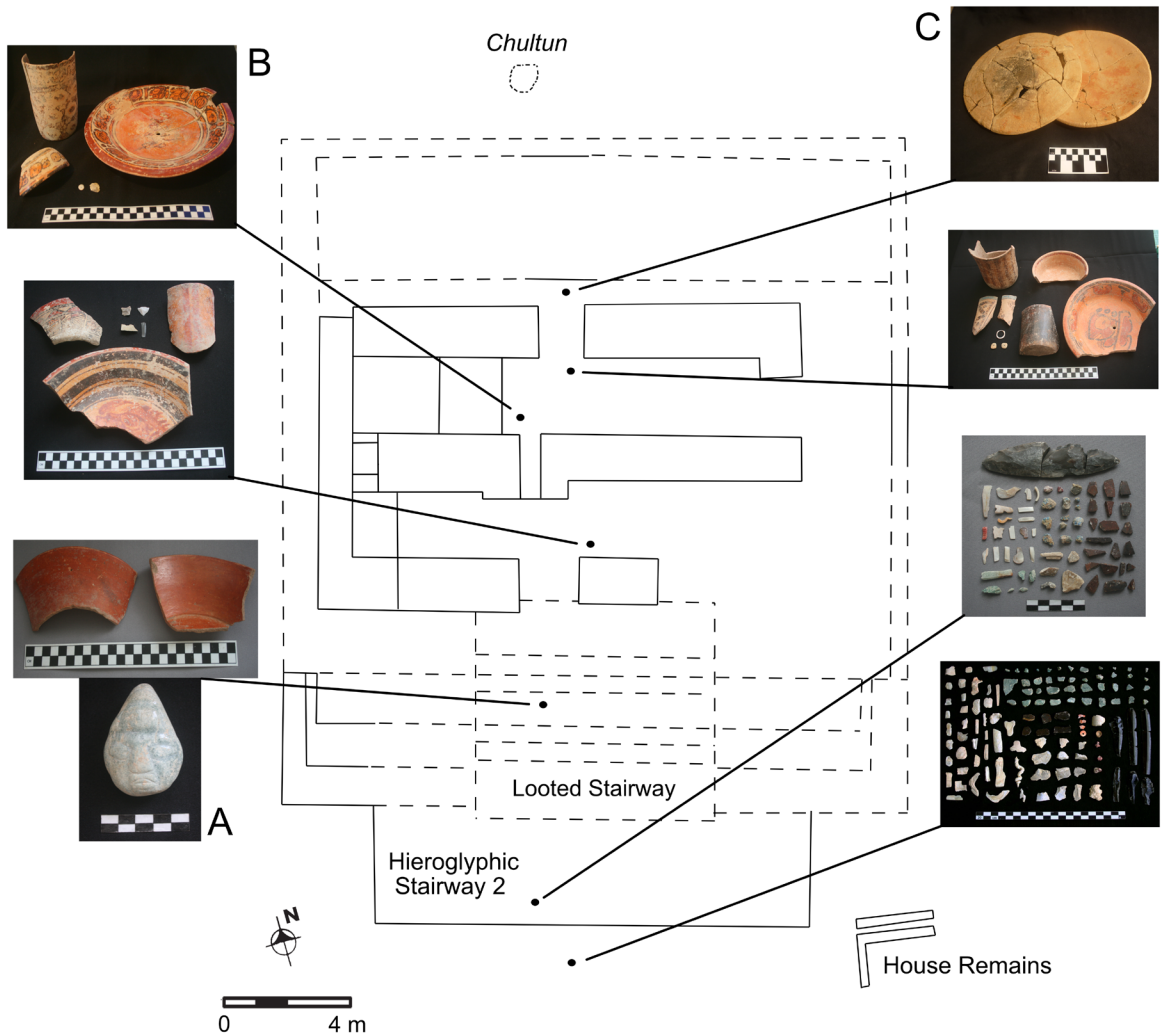


Figure 3. Caches in the central axis of Structure 13R-10 mentioned in the text. A) 4th century foundation cache. B) 7th century cache with plate from La Florida. C) 9th century cache of lip-to-lip comals (graphic by Ponce).

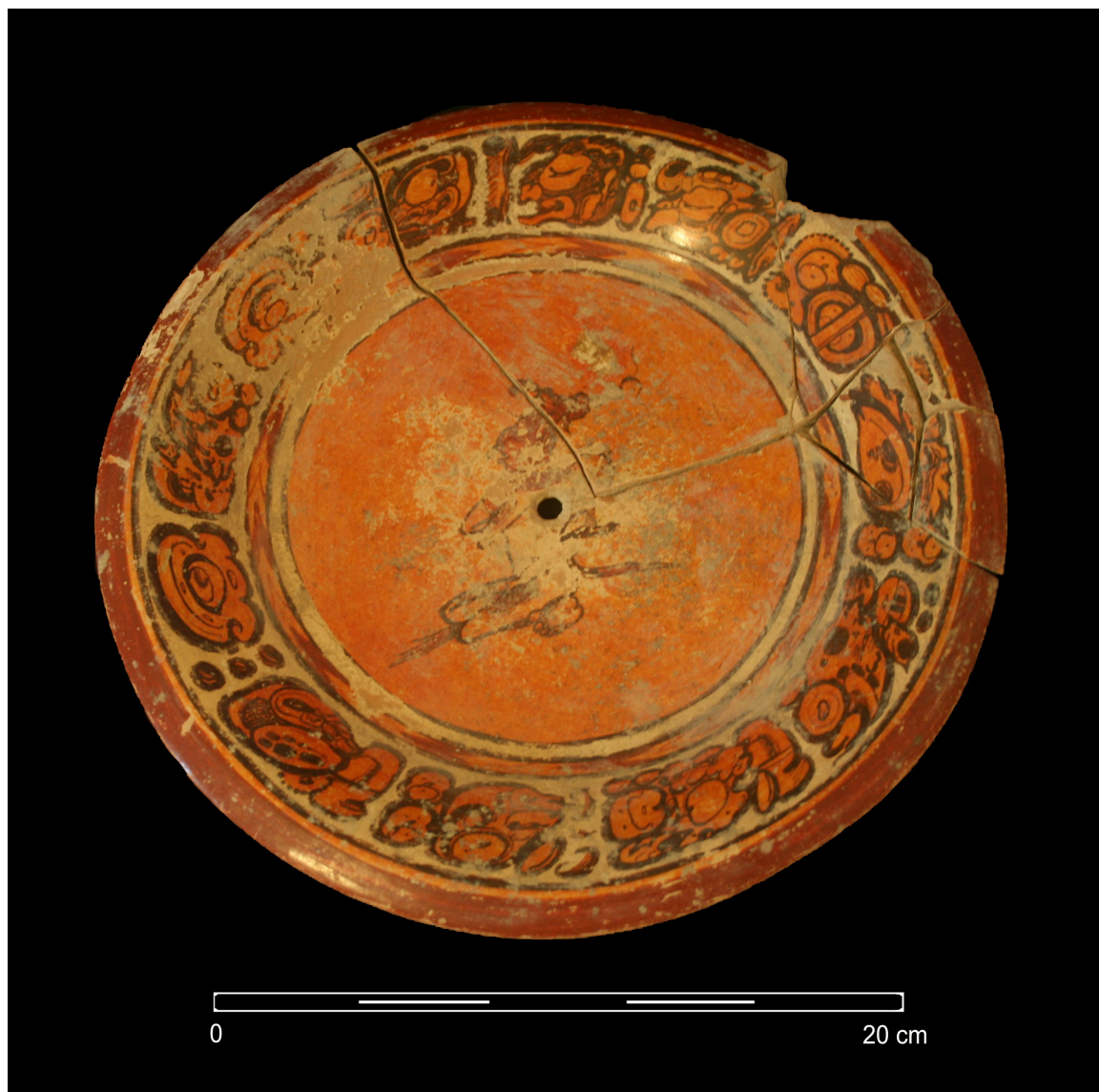


Figure 4. Plate from Namaan or La Florida (photo by Ponce).

Epigraphic evidence provides complementary data for this early life stage. Panel 1, an in-situ Late Classic hieroglyphic monument discovered in the Coronitas Group, records the arrival of a patron deity four millennia earlier, in 3805 BCE (Canuto and Barrientos 2020: 190; Stuart et al. 2014: 436). This panel and Altar 5, also found at Coronitas, indicate that the 6th century rulers associated themselves retrospectively with this early patron deity to claim authority over previously established lineages of La Corona (Canuto and Barrientos 2020: 190–193; Stuart et al. 2018). The

burial points to the potential significance of local ancestry for the community, but epigraphic evidence indicates that rulers intentionally associated themselves with deities instead of any historical local lineages as a political strategy. This suggests that rulers who commissioned these texts were clearly aiming to proliferate a specific narrative focused on mythological events, but archaeological data provides a different side of the story. Contrasting voices and intentions are thus perceivable when combining epigraphic and archaeological data.

The Growth of a Ceremonial Building: 7th- 8th centuries CE

During the 7th century Structure 13R-10 and the Coronitas Group were remodeled and grew as ceremonial places. The attached Structure 13R-9 was built in two episodes. The first episode's construction fill was found with a dense layer of polychrome sherds, faunal bones, and charcoal dated between 638 and 688 CE. This rich matrix points to a food consumption event associated with this new construction episode, itself reflecting a desire by ruling elites for more ceremonial space (Cajas 2013: 132). A cache in the final construction phase of Structure 13R-9 contained a polychrome vessel decorated with the image of the god K'awiil containing stingray spines, lightly used obsidian blades, coral, and shells (Gómez 2010: 179–185). The presence of these prestigious religious artifacts in this cache suggests that La Corona rulers may have been responsible for its deposition.

Seven additional dedicatory caches were placed in consecutive construction episodes of Structure 13R-10 (Ponce 2014, 2015). These successive dedicatory rituals were placed along the central axis of the building and signal continuous ceremonial events (see Figure 3). Several vessels displayed aquatic imagery, showing this ideological theme's enduring prevalence (Parris 2015; Parris and Barrientos 2014). Four of these caches contained a number of polychrome vessels, human bones and teeth pertaining to adults and children, shell, and jade (Patterson and Kate 2015:347–348). One of the cached vessels, a polychrome plate dated to phase Tepeu 1 (600-650 CE) from Namaan or La Florida represents a gift between ruling elites (Figure 4; Canuto and Barrientos 2014: 8). This suggests the involvement of non-local elites in the ceremonies.

At La Florida the vessel was likely originally used for ritual or serving purposes. Its meaning changed when it became a gift, henceforth materializing a link between the royal courts. This vessel was likely cached because of its foreign origin and the relationship that it represented between La Corona and La Florida elites. A kill hole in the middle of the plate signals that it was terminated before being deposited. Far from ending the vessel's life-history, its meaning remained and accumulated as reflected in repeating caching events. Each cached object's life-history eventually became part of the merged meaning of Structure 13R-10.

Architectural data also suggests that Structure 13R-10 was expanded during the 7th century CE. The plaza on the south side of Structure 13R-10 could have hosted a large number of people attending public events and the platform would have been ideal for staging purposes. As such, both elites and non-elites possibly participated as spectators of these events. It is likely that La Corona's Kaanul-era rulers used the complex to perform as intermediaries between the local community and patron deities, an idea supported both by epigraphic evidence from Panel 1 and Altar 5, and

archaeological evidence in the form of the dedicatory caches.

Three intrusive burials belonging to three women were placed throughout the 8th century. The most ostentatious one was Burial 13, which was placed between AD 700-720 in a cist carved in bedrock with over 300 greenstone beads, Spondylus shells, four vessels, weaving tools, and stingray spines that probably served as bloodletting implements (Ponce 2015: 243–250). One of the stingray spines featured the short carved inscription *Ix Yax ? K'ik'* (Blue/Green Blood Woman), which probably refers to the name of the buried individual (David Stuart, personal communication). This burial of a previously undocumented noble La Corona woman reiterates the importance of this building as a resting place for the site's ruling elites, following the ancestral veneration pattern established in the first construction phase.

Although the archaeological evidence points to Structure 13R-10 and its surroundings as a mostly elite space, non-elites held an important role in the construction and expansion of the building. The presence of construction bins in the 7th century fill of Structure 13R-10 shows organization of labor, possibly through different groups participating in the expansion of the building. This contrasts with the building's uniformly built early clay platform, evidencing the increasing investment in labor as the ceremonial space became more significant.

Death and Rebirth of a Ceremonial Place: 8th century CE

In the 8th century, the life of Structure 13R-10 as a ceremonial platform came to an end and it was reborn as an area for preparation of commensal events. This shift was probably related to broad political changes in which Kaanul's hegemonic influence diminished and affected strategic centers like La Corona. A large midden found in a *chultun* – a storage pit dug in bedrock – was found in the patio behind Structure 13R-10 (Fernández 2011). Recovered materials include over 6000 sherds, figurines, obsidian blades, chert fragments, fauna and paleoethnobotanical remains (Parris 2014). Similar deposits recovered from the temples on the east side of the complex point to multiple feasting events. Chablekal Fine Gray ceramics date these events to the end of the Late Classic (750-800 CE; Baron 2016; Perla Barrera 2013). These deposits share various commonalities including cooking, storage, and serving vessels, drums and censers, fragments of figurines, marine shells, chert, obsidian, and ashes. Additionally, deer, turtle, fish, mollusks, maize, chili, amaranth, and leafy greens were consumed during these events (Cagnato 2017a, 2017b; Fridberg 2015). These findings point to the continued symbolic importance of the complex through large numbers of people engaged in feasts.

Architecturally, Structure 13R-10 went from being an open platform for performance to a stepped building with private rooms. Based on the close proximity of Structure 13R-10 to the *chultun*, it is likely that this structure was used for preparation activities related to feasting. As mentioned earlier, Panel 1 records the arrival of a patron deity in 3805 BCE to which Kaanul-era rulers associated themselves (Stuart et al. 2014: 436). The feasts signal a broader communal involvement in activities related to the commemoration of patron deities, pointing to a shifting strategy of political legitimation by La Corona rulers (Baron 2016: 157–160). A cache with two lip-to-lip comals was found in the final construction phase of Structure 13R-10. In comparison to the

earlier prevalence of serving vessels in caches, the deposition of mundane cooking vessels points to the shifting function of the building. While in the 7th century ceremonial events featured mostly ruling elites participating in ritual performance atop the 13R-10 platform, the association with feasting events in the 8th century indicates a change in focus to broader community participation. The shifting use of space and widespread archaeological evidence for commensal events thus reveal activities and meanings assigned by people not recorded in the hieroglyphic texts. Evidence thus suggests that the Coronitas Group became increasingly accessible and meaningful to a broader range of La Corona's inhabitants.

As discussed above, archaeological research at La Corona indicates that many monuments were moved from their original location by the Late Classic inhabitants. Panels, stelae, altars, and hieroglyphic stairways were dismantled from their original locations in *spolia* events and repositioned across the site core including the northeast courtyard of the Regal Palace and Structure 13R-10 (Barrientos et al. 2016; Canuto et al. 2017; Canuto and Barrientos 2020; Lamoureux-St-Hilaire 2018: 127; Ponce 2013). A hieroglyphic stairway and the looted Panel 6 – a monument commemorating the marriage alliance between three Kaanul women and La Corona rulers – were repositioned on the façade of Structure 13R-10 (Figure 5; Canuto and Barrientos 2020:184; Martin 2008). The last recorded date on the monuments is 716 CE, and they were likely repositioned around 750 CE (Stuart and Baron 2013). The carcass of Panel 6 and most of the carved blocks were archaeologically recovered from looters' back dirt, which suggests the monuments were set in this building in antiquity and subsequently looted in the 1960s. However, looters missed the lowermost step (Hieroglyphic Stairway 2), which was excavated by the authors in 2012 (Ponce and Cajas 2013). The blocks originally came from at least five different sources, which makes it difficult to track their individual life-histories, and their texts generally relate to La Corona's relationship with Kaanul (Figure 6).

Archaeological excavations further support the idea that Hieroglyphic Stairway 2 was a later addition to Structure 13R-10. Excavations uncovered part of the original staircase of the building, composed of rustically carved blocks that contrast starkly with the high-quality carved limestone blocks from Hieroglyphic Stairway 2. Contextual data thus facilitate the interpretation of the stairway in its architectural setting and further informs on the *spolia* events. The panels of Hieroglyphic Stairway 2 seem to have been placed in sets with some intentionality, but not following their original arrangements. For example, the blocks in the corners were placed upside-down while blocks featuring Calakmul ruler Yuknoom Ch'een II and La Corona ruler Sak Maas comprise the center of the arrangement (Figure 7).

The long-held ideological significance of Structure 13R-10 and the Coronitas Group which materialized in activities related to political legitimation and ancestral and patron deity veneration made it an ideal location to reset the monuments. Variations in the backgrounds of participants and how space was experienced led to reinterpretations of Structure 13R-10, but shared meanings of the complex endured despite political changes. The building was probably also physically ideal in terms of space, access, and visibility. Although we cannot know where blocks were first set, their repositioning mode suggests that a group of non-royal elites or commoners, or even a new local elite were involved.



Figure 5. Panel 6 (Dallas Museum of Art) and its carcass (Element 54) found in looters' back dirt (photo by Ponce).

The resetting order indicates that while they may not have been fully aware of how the monuments were meant to be read or interpreted, they were entirely aware of their broad historical significance. The intent was unlikely to evoke a single narrative, but rather to transfer a collective history to Structure 13R-10. The way in which the historical past was referenced in this particular



Figure 6. La Corona's Hieroglyphic Stairway 2 (photo courtesy of David Stuart).



Figure 7. Elements 35 and 36 in the center of Hieroglyphic Stairway 2 (photo courtesy of David Stuart).

case suggests enduring social memory of La Corona's Kaanul-era history. Despite shifting identities and experiences, distinct groups made the Coronitas Group a significant venue with an overarching meaning predisposed for communal gatherings and the repositioning of the monuments.

New Voices and Final Life Changes: 9th century CE

Excavations in the last architectural phase of Structure 13R-10 yielded evidence of small-scale household activities through domestic refuse (Ponce 2013). In comparison to the feasting deposits, recovered ceramics were mostly for food preparation and storage. Fragments of Fine Orange ceramics date the last occupation to the Terminal Classic (> 800 CE) and indicate that it was not contemporary with the aforementioned feasts. This also indicates that the function of Structure 13R-10 shifted once again in the Terminal Classic, when it was reborn as a household. The exact reasons for this drastic change are unknown but are likely related to broad sociopolitical circumstances, in which the long-held alliance with Kaanul came to an end. Relatively equally distributed refuse in the structure's rooms and in a dwelling in the plaza point to the possibility of small groups using the area. The materials suggest this location was likely reinhabited by non-royal elites or commoners, once again incorporating people of different social backgrounds into our narrative.

The facts that the hieroglyphic stairway remained in place and that people chose to continue living in Structure 13R-10 and its immediate surroundings speak to the importance of this location for the local community. The presence of monuments signaled the memorialization of a historical past but did not dictate how this place was meant to be experienced or remembered. Rather, contextual data reflect diverse interpretations of the past by groups not mentioned in elite-dominated

texts. Performances by ruling elites and carved monuments were initially significant to establish a normative narrative. La Corona's community was subsequently incorporated as spectators and as participants in feasting events. *Spolia* and the reuse of Structure 13R-10 for household activities show how it was reinterpreted centuries later by non-royal elites and commoners. Altogether, these distinct sets of evidence juxtapose power dynamics and the voices of different social groups in events surrounding the life-history of Structure 13R-10.

Conclusions

In this study we have used epigraphic, architectural, and material data to reconstruct the life-history of La Corona's Structure 13R-10. A life-history approach offers a unique perspective on the relations between people, material culture, and their built environment. This case study highlights how the layering of meanings over time impacts interpretations of the built environment. Following the complex life-history of a single building also informs on activities and long-term renegotiations of meanings that are not recorded in hieroglyphic texts. Structure 13R-10 was initially a platform for ceremonies hosted by charismatic Kaanul-era rulers. Non-elites likely participated as



laborers in the expansion of the building and as participants of ceremonial events. During the 7th century it was used for the preparation of feasts for patron deities in which elites and non-elites likely participated. The feasts were part of a program of political legitimation by La Corona rulers. These events likely bonded people of different social strata and facilitated the remembrance of a common historical past. The repositioning of monuments in the façade in the 8th century and its reuse as a dwelling in the 9th century speak of broader sociopolitical changes. More importantly, they point to an

enduring social memory of La Corona's Kaanul-era history despite diverse local understandings and reactions to those changes. Structure 13R-10 was subsequently visited by Postclassic pilgrims and rediscovered in the 1960s by *chicleros* and looters. Since 2008, archaeological research has been undertaken by Guatemalan, North American, and European archaeologists by the La Corona Archaeological Project, who continue to transform this landmark and its meaning.

Relations with the built environment are not uniform. Built spaces may influence the communal experiences of people who in turn physically transform buildings based on their historic past and future desires. A biographical approach allowed us to identify power dynamics and the participation of different groups of people in the life cycle of Structure 13R-10. Hieroglyphic texts and rich iconographic data document the lives and roles of the ruling elites but provide limited information on non-dominant groups. In turn, archaeology can provide a glimpse into the activities and experiences of a more diverse group of people. A finer interpretation of the social characteristics of these groups is largely dependent on contextual data, but our study evidences how the same place was meaningful in different ways to people of diverse social strata. Lastly, this study shows that even with detailed historical data from abundant epigraphic texts, Classic Maya history is never complete without archaeology.

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