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POLITICAL INTERACTIONS AMONG SOCIAL ACTORS: SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AT THE CLASSIC MAYA POLITY OF EL PALMAR, CAMPECHE, MEXICO

Kenichiro Tsukamoto, Javier López Camacho, Luz Evelia Campaña Valenzuela, Hirokazu Kotegawa, and Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín

This article examines the significance of outlying groups in the spatial organization of Classic Maya settlements. The relative scarcity of textual records concerning outlying groups has often made it difficult for researchers to analyze in detail the political interactions between individuals associated with these groups and the royal authority. The recent discovery of a hieroglyphic stairway at the Guzmán Group, an outlying group of El Palmar, Campeche, Mexico, provides an exceptional opportunity for understanding the constitutive process of spatial organization during the Late and Terminal Classic periods (ca. A.D. 600–900). Epigraphic studies of the Guzmán Group stairway have identified a main individual who emphasized his genealogical ties to lakam (banner-bearer) officials and his political relationship with foreign rulers of Copán and Calakmul. The results of archaeological and epigraphic studies suggest that the Guzmán Group was a locus for negotiating power and ideology among different social actors.

En el presente artículo se examina el proceso de formación de los grupos arquitectónicos apartados de los núcleos urbanos en la organización espacial de las entidades políticas mayas durante el período Clásico (ca. 250–900 d.C.). La escasez de estos grupos discretos con registros epigráficos que mencionen a los personajes que los habitaron ha limitado el conocimiento sobre la interacción política entre dichos actores con la autoridad real. El reciente descubrimiento de una escalinata jeroglífica en un grupo discreto designado como Grupo Guzmán, ubicado 1,3 km al norte del sitio arqueológico de El Palmar, ofrece una excelente oportunidad para entender el proceso constitutivo de la organización espacial de esta entidad política maya durante el Clásico Tardío y Terminal (ca. 600–900 d.C.). En los textos epigráficos de la escalinata se identificó un protagonista que enfatiza su vínculo genealógico con oficiales que poseen el título de lakam (abanderado) y sus nexos políticos con gobernantes de Copán y Calakmul. Las investigaciones arqueológicas y epigráficas sugieren que el Grupo Guzmán era un espacio político en donde los diferentes actores sociales negociaban poder e ideología.

Over the past few decades, Maya archaeologists have contributed greatly to uncovering the nature of spatial organization in ancient Mesoamerica. Above all, studies of spatial organization associated with outlying groups surrounding the urban core of Classic Maya settlements have revealed the representation of cosmological ideology in the site layouts (e.g., Ashmore

1991; Ashmore and Sabloff 2002), the detailed activities of nobles (e.g., Haviland 1981; Webster 1989), the integrative process of political centralization (e.g., Chase and Chase 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Cheetam 2004), and identity formation (e.g., Tsukamoto 2014; Yaeger 2003).

This article presents an additional line of evidence about the significance of outlying groups

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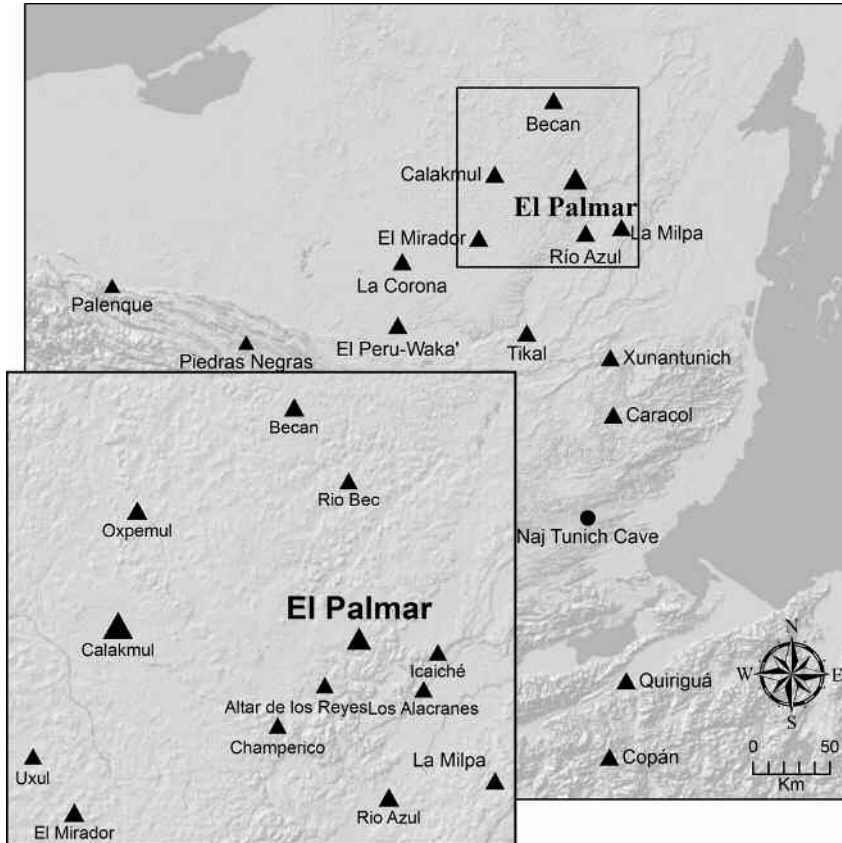


Figure 1. Map showing the location of El Palmar and other archaeological sites (map by Kenichiro Tsukamoto).

for understanding Maya spatial organization during the Late and Terminal Classic periods (ca. A.D. 600–900). Archaeological and epigraphic data suggest that the Guzmán Group, an outlying group of the Classic Maya polity of El Palmar (Figure 1), was a political arena in which different social actors negotiated power and ideological relations. Outlying groups have been called by different terms, including “architectural groups” (Ashmore 1991), “building clusters” (Kurjack and Garza 1981), “hinterland settlements” (Yaeger 2003), “*plazuela* groups” (Thompson 1931), and, more commonly, “minor centers” (Bullard 1960). The latter term could be useful because Bullard (1960:359–360) originally designated a minor center as a cluster of pyramidal temples with lower buildings arranged around plazas. Nonetheless, it is a loaded term, and a consensus has not been reached among Maya archaeologists regarding its meaning (Chase 2004; Chase and Chase

2003:108; Conlon and Powis 2004; Iannone 2004; Iannone and Connell 2003). The present study uses the term “outlying group,” a designation that implies no specific function or meaning, but instead designates a discrete cluster of buildings that form one or more plazas in the vicinity of the urban core.

The scarcity of textual records concerning outlying groups has often made it difficult for researchers to analyze in detail the interactions between the royal authority in the urban core and those individuals who were associated with the outlying groups, as well as how these interactions contributed to the constitution of the overall political landscape (Chase and Chase 2003; Smith 2003). In this sense, the discovery of a hieroglyphic stairway at the Guzmán Group of El Palmar provides an ideal opportunity for examining power and ideological relations between the royal authority and the occupants of outlying groups in

the spatial organization of Classic Maya settlement. This study assesses political interactions among different social actors who played important roles in the spatial organization of the polity of El Palmar.

The Study of Spatial Organization in Lowland Maya Archaeology

Understanding the spatial organization of settlements has been a principal concern of Maya archaeology. The results from over half a century of settlement pattern research have revealed that lowland Maya centers tend to be characterized by dispersed spatial organization, that is, an urban core surrounded by dispersed outlying groups (e.g., Ashmore 1981; Bullard 1964; Driver and Garber 2004; Kurjack 1974; Willey et al. 1965). The robust data provided by settlement pattern studies have been used to address the role of outlying groups in the overall spatial organization of centers. Above all, the degree to which cosmological ideology is represented by Classic Maya urban landscapes has been broadly discussed (e.g., Ashmore 1989, 1991; Ashmore and Sabloff 2002; Brady and Ashmore 1999; Kowalski 1994; Schele and Freidel 1990). In examining the spatial configuration of Tikal and Copán, Ashmore (1991) suggests that Classic Maya polities tended to have quadripartite spatial arrangements, emphasizing a north-south axis. Structures placed to the north represent the celestial supernatural realm or heaven, while those to the south symbolize the underworld, or *xibalbá* (Ashmore 1989). To evaluate this hypothesis in the placement of outlying groups, Ashmore (1991) excavated the North Group of Copán. There she recovered the remains of sculptures—one of the Principal Bird Deity—as well as ritual deposits associated with symbolic representations of the celestial realm, thus corroborating the proposed correlation between north and sky.

Ashmore and Sabloff (2002) further assert that the cosmological template of directionality and emulation of spatial designs constituted the most prominent ideational foundations of Maya royal authority. They argue that Maya site plans were laid out as microcosms for the legitimization of royal power through the spatial arrangement of outlying groups at the cardinal directions. This influential model has led other researchers to ex-

amine the degree to which cosmological ideology is embedded in the layouts of other Maya sites, concluding that Classic Maya rulers promoted the symbolic representation of a cosmogram in order to reinforce their political centralization (e.g., Demarest et al. 2003; Estrada-Belli and Tourtellot 2005; Houk 1996; Houk and Zaro 2010; Mathews and Garber 2004; Tourtellot et al. 2000). Nevertheless, the scarcity of textual data in outlying groups has made it difficult for other scholars to prove the materialization of cosmograms in Maya urban planning (Smith 2003, 2005; but see Ashmore and Sabloff 2003). While the ideational model of cosmological ideology has unveiled a potentially crucial political strategy of Classic Maya dynasties, we should consider that such cosmological representation could also have been transformed, erased, or newly created by subsequent practices (Ashmore and Sabloff 2002; Knapp and Ashmore 1999).

Outlying groups could have had different functions and trajectories. Chase and Chase (2003) have demonstrated a variety of functions embedded in outlying groups around the urban core of Caracol. Careful ground mapping and systematic excavations show that some of these outlying groups did not contain residential and ceremonial deposits and debris, but rather had large plaza spaces, suggesting that they served as integrative facilities (Chase and Chase 1996). Meanwhile, others were residential groups that included formal tombs and cache deposits (Chase and Chase 2003). Furthermore, their excavations show that some of those groups existed independently during earlier periods, but were integrated by a causeway into the overall political landscape of Caracol at a later date. This process of integrating outlying groups as a means of political centralization has been reported at other Maya sites (e.g., Cheetham 2004).

Multiple lines of evidence suggest that the function of outlying groups could change over time. Haviland (1981) has demonstrated this through extensive excavations of an outlying group called Group 7F-1, located 1.25 km southeast of the Great Plaza at Tikal. Haviland's excavations revealed that the inhabitants of Group 7F-1 modified the spatial organization of the group, transforming it from an informal residential cluster into a formal plaza compound. Material remains show discontinuous activities associated with cer-

emonial deposits in a temple structure located on the east side of the plaza, a spatial arrangement known as “Plaza Plan 2” (Becker 1991). The discontinuity of ritual deposits suggests to Haviland (1981:116) that ceremonial activities took place intensively in Group 7F-1 from ca. A.D. 593 to ca. A.D. 682, but in other periods the group served as a residence of the royal lineage.

The combination of archaeological research with epigraphic studies has provided an explicit relationship between people who lived in outlying groups and royal authority. An elaborate residential complex called Group 9N-8 at Copán is located near the Las Sepulturas causeway, about 500 m from the Main Group. Magnificent architecture with numerous mosaic sculptures, prestige goods, and a hieroglyphic bench suggest to researchers that the inhabitants of Group 9N-8 were noble families (Webster 1989). Jackson and Stuart (2001) have deciphered the texts of two hieroglyphic benches that recorded an intimate connection between *ajk'uhuun* officials and specific rulers of Copán (see also Zender 2004). The political interactions between local nobles of secondary centers and the rulers of major centers have been studied at great length in the Usumacinta region (e.g., Chinchilla and Houston 1992; Jackson 2005). The rich data from this region indicate that even in the same region political trajectories vary among centers (Golden et al. 2008; Houston and Stuart 2001).

Symbolic, political, and economic factors may not have been mutually exclusive, but rather are likely to have been interrelated in the process of generating Classic Maya spatial organization. Various researchers have demonstrated that a diachronic approach through careful excavations and material analyses is indispensable for our better understanding of the dynamic nature of outlying groups in the Maya Lowlands.

El Palmar

The archaeological site of El Palmar is located in southeastern Campeche, Mexico, about 30 km and 25 km from the current borders with Guatemala and Belize, respectively (Figure 1). The site was originally discovered by J. Eric S. Thompson in 1936 (Thompson 1936a, 1936b, 1994:262–266) and subsequently investigated by

Carlos Brokmann (1996, 1997). They reported the monumentality of the urban core or Main Group and documented over 40 carved monuments with caches, including elaborate eccentrics (Thompson 1936a). Their results provided the basis for our archaeological research at El Palmar (Tsukamoto et al. 2010). Since 2007, the first and second authors have co-directed the El Palmar Archaeological Project: Urbanization of Social Space in the Maya Lowlands. The project focuses on political interactions among different social actors in the urbanization process of the El Palmar polity during the Classic period (ca. A.D. 250–900). Our topographic mapping during four field seasons from 2007 to 2014 has covered over 100 hectares, detecting several outlying groups around the Main Group. Figure 2 shows the map of the Main Group and two outlying groups, including the Guzmán Group. Excavations at the Main Group have uncovered a long construction sequence from the Late Preclassic (ca. 300 B.C.–A.D. 250) to the Terminal Classic periods (ca. A.D. 800–1000; Tsukamoto et al. 2012). While extensive excavations at structures have yet to be carried out, data from test pits suggest that most of the plazas of the Main Group were constructed before the eighth century.

Guzmán Group: An Outlying Group of the El Palmar Polity

The Guzmán Group is an outlying group located 1.3 km north of the Main Group. Surface survey and topographic mapping between these groups have detected a causeway. This causeway was clearly visible in only four sections (A to D) of the transect in the field (Figure 2). Recent road construction activities in 2010 destroyed part of the causeway, exposing sherds dating to the Late Classic period (ca. A.D. 600–800). This evidence suggests that the causeway was built or remodeled during this period.

The Guzmán Group consists of one temple mound (Structure GZ1) in the east and six low structures (Structures GZ2–GZ6 and GZ9) surrounding a small plaza named Plaza A (Figure 3), a spatial configuration similar to Group 7F-1 at Tikal (Haviland 1981). A hieroglyphic stairway is attached to Structure GZ1, with an orientation of about 17 degrees east of true north. Unlike

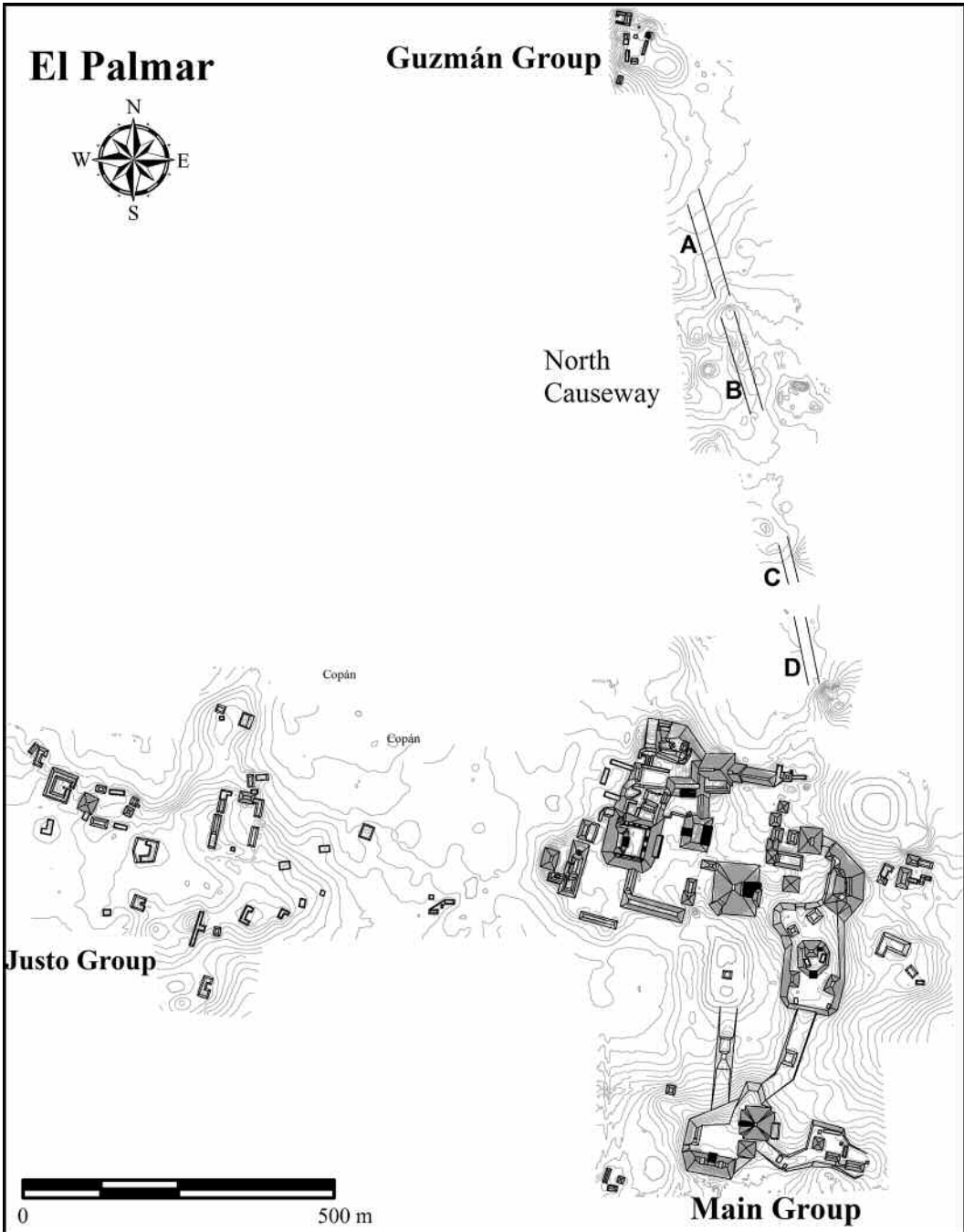


Figure 2. Map of El Palmar, showing the location of the Main Group, Guzmán Group, Justo Group, and visible sections of the north causeway (map by Kenichiro Tsukamoto and Javier López Camacho).

Structures GZ1 and GZ2, Structures GZ3–GZ6 and GZ9 are oriented about five degrees east of north. Structure GZ1 is 3 m high, while all the other structures are less than 2 m in height. When

discovered, the structures were covered with soil, vegetation, and architectural debris without evidence of looting. To date, our research has focused on the north half of the plaza.

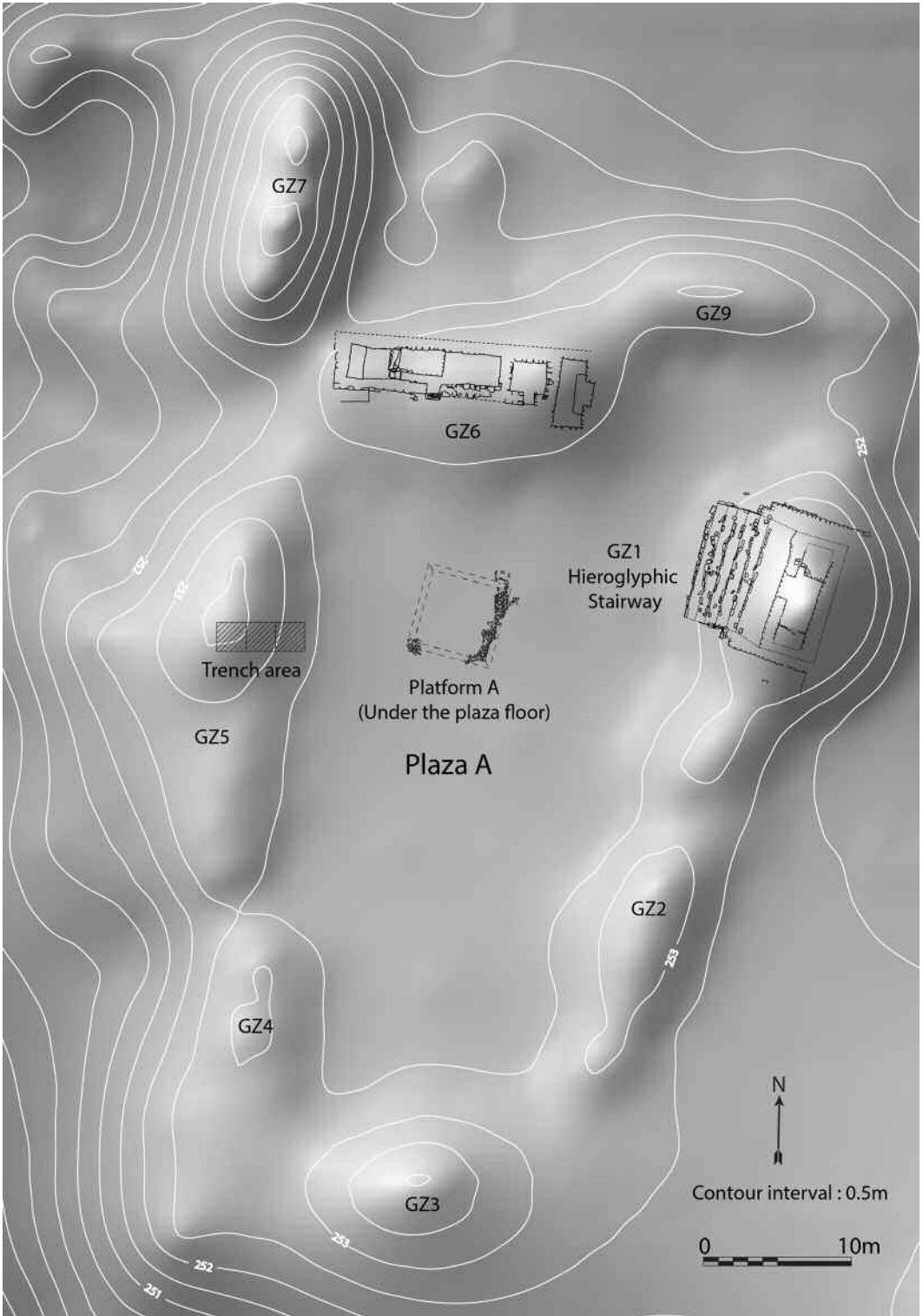


Figure 3. Map of the Guzmán Group, showing the location of the hieroglyphic stairway (GZ1) and associated structures (map by Kenichiro Tsukamoto).

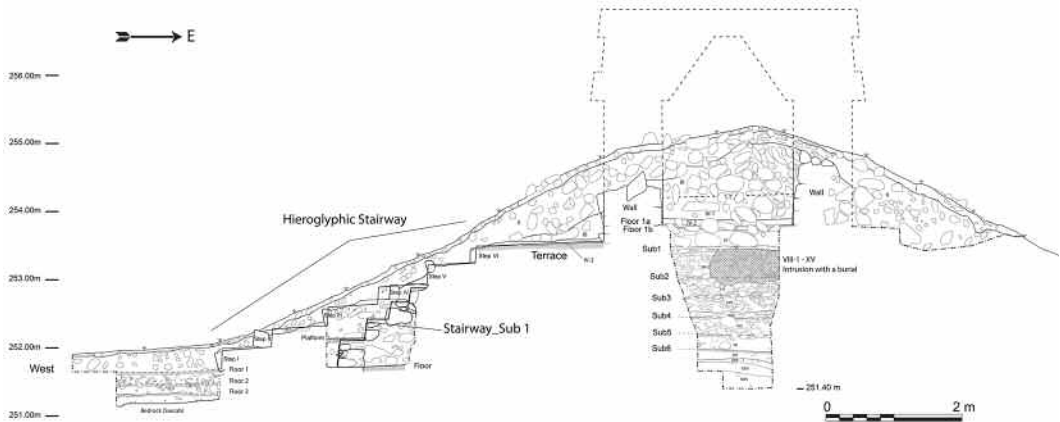


Figure 4. Section of Structure GZ1 (section by Kenichiro Tsukamoto and Luz Evelia Campaña Valezuela).

Excavations in three structures (GZ1, GZ5, and GZ6) and Plaza A show that the north half of the Guzmán Group was inhabited during the Late and Terminal Classic periods (ca. A.D. 600–900). Termination rituals carried out during the renovation and abandonment of the structures left artifacts on burned floors, which allowed us to establish the chronology of the Guzmán Group. All radiocarbon determinations are shown in Table 1. The following section summarizes the results of excavation in each structure.

Structure GZ1

Structure GZ1 is a temple structure with a hieroglyphic stairway (Figure 4). The hieroglyphic stairway consists of six steps, and the inscriptions indicate that it was built around A.D. 726 (Tsukamoto and Esparza 2015). Most carved blocks of the stairway were found in situ or slightly moved forward from their original positions due to post-abandonment disturbance. When relocating the blocks to their original position, we noted that each step had been 77 cm in width, which is wider than usual for the architectural style of this region. The highest step (Step VI) of the stairway connects to a terrace, which, along with the hieroglyphic steps, could have served as a stage for ritual performances.

Architectural remains revealed that the upper shrine of Structure GZ1 was decorated with finely cut cornices and had a masonry vault. The shrine contains two low benches at its north and south

ends. On the western wall and adjacent to a doorway, two cord holders are framed by red jar necks. Although there is no direct evidence, they may have served to sustain a curtain or to partition the space from the outside area. Textile curtains are frequently observed in court scenes on polychrome vessels (e.g., Kerr 1997:K2573; Kerr 1998:K1453, K1728). The outer facing stones of the structure are limestone veneers, finished with thin plaster and red paint.

The excavations detected evidence of a termination ritual (TR1) in and around Structure GZ1. A radiocarbon sample (AA95402; 1220 ± 37 B.P.; wood charcoal) recovered from the termination ritual dates to cal A.D. 687–890 at 2σ (Table 1). A large number of broken artifacts with black and ashy soil were found on the burned floor. Meanwhile, no artifacts were found in front of the stairway. There is no evidence that the hieroglyphic stairway was dismantled, suggesting that the broken artifacts were deposited by people living in the Guzmán Group rather than by enemies or other elite factions.

The excavations discerned different architectural characteristics prior to the construction of the hieroglyphic stairway. The structure was modified at least six times, including a termination ritual (TR2) under Structure GZ1-Sub 6. The latest modification before the construction of the hieroglyphic stairway represents a non-hieroglyphic stairway built with roughly cut stones. The steps of this stairway are narrower than those of hieroglyphic



Figure 5. Different depths of the stairways at Structure GZ1 of the Guzmán Group; on the left is the substructure and on the right, the hieroglyphic stairway (photograph by Kenichiro Tsukamoto).

stairway, with a tread width of only 23 cm (Figure 5). Although our excavation area is limited, this critical architectural modification suggests that the function of Structure GZ1 changed along with the building of the hieroglyphic stairway.

Beneath the second-to-last floor of the upper shrine, the excavation detected a cist burial (Burial 1), which was intrusively cut into the fill of the previous plaster floors. Burial 1 contained an adult male interred along with two polychrome vessels. The individual's front teeth had small circular inlays of jade and pyrite (Tsukamoto and Cerezo-Román 2013). A piece of femur was used for radiocarbon dating (AA95405; 1820 ± 100 B.P.), but the small proportion of collagen (.2 percent) remaining in the bone resulted in imprecise dating (Table 1). One of the two polychrome vessels has a bird represented on two sides of its walls. The bird has trisected black feathers with a cormorant-like beak and a heron-like eye, which may symbolize an aquatic bird (Schele and Miller 1986:55).

A fire ritual is indicated by both archaeological and iconographic evidence at Structure GZ1. In the archaeological record, we identified a large quantity of charcoal without other artifacts above

the cist of Burial 1. A radiocarbon sample (AA95401; 1311 ± 37) taken from the charcoal dates to 653–770 cal A.D. at 2σ (Table 1). This date range encompasses the inauguration of the hieroglyphic stairway in A.D. 726. In terms of iconography, another cylinder vessel from the burial depicts two mythological scenes of fire rituals (Figure 6). In each scene, an individual in a luxurious headdress is seated on a decorated bench. Flames or smoke issue from the hands of the main individual, and a servant stands in front of (and in one case also behind) the individual. Three bands of pseudo-glyphs are drawn on the upper register and in between scenes. Obviously, the fire rituals seen in the iconography and in archaeological remains are not one and the same, but both lines of evidence suggest that people associated with the Guzmán Group recognized the symbolic significance of fire rituals.

Structure GZ5

Structure GZ5 is a rectangular building located to the northwest of Plaza A. The structure is 1.3 m in height, including collapsed debris. A trench excavation in Structure GZ5 did not successfully define

Table 1. AMS Radiocarbon Dates from the Guzmán Group.

AA #	Structure	Context	Material	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$	Uncal ^{14}C Age(BP)	2σ Cal Age	%
AA95398	GZ5	Ritual dump	Charcoal	-23.9	1446 \pm 38	551–656 cal A.D.	95.4
AA95400	GZ6	Termination Ritual 1 (TR1)	Charcoal	-25.4	1180 \pm 44	765–974 cal A.D. 713–745 cal A.D.	90.1 5.3
AA95401	GZ1	Fire Ritual	Charcoal	-24.1	1311 \pm 37	653–770 cal A.D.	95.4
AA95402	GZ1	Termination Ritual 1 (TR1)	Charcoal	-26.2	1220 \pm 37	687–890 cal A.D.	95.4
AA95404	GZ5	Termination Ritual 2 (TR2)	Burned seed	-23.4	1334 \pm 37	642–727 cal A.D. 737–769 cal A.D.	76.5 18.9
AA95405	GZ1	Burial 1	Bone (Femur)	-12.3	1820 \pm 100	3 cal B.C.–415 cal A.D. 38–9cal B.C.	93.9 1.5

*The analyses took place at the AMS laboratory of the University of Arizona, calibration at 2σ range with InterCal 13 atmospheric curve and the program Oxcal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2014).

the original shape of the structure, but provided robust data for establishing the chronology of the Guzmán Group (Figure 7). The excavation reached the bottom of the structure where marl (bedrock) was excavated and paved with a plaster floor on the one side and linearly cut and leveled on the other side. This indicates that the bedrock was modified to create a platform (Structure GZ5–Sub 5). Unlike the latest construction episode, the east-west alignment of this bedrock platform is about 17 degrees east of north, an orientation adopted for Structures GZ1 and GZ2. Decades later, a termination ritual (TR2) was conducted on the surface of the platform. The termination deposits contained burned seeds of a palm tree (*Orbignya cohune*). Since a palm tree annually produces seeds that cannot be preserved in a tropical environment over an extended period, the carbonized seeds most likely point to the precise date of the termination

ritual. The sample (AA95404; 1334 \pm 37) dates to cal A.D. 642–769 at 2σ (Table 1).

Structure GZ6

Structure GZ6 is a rectangular structure that defines the north end of the plaza. Collapsed architectural debris suggests that it was originally vaulted. Extensive excavations uncovered three rooms (Figure 8). These rooms are not interconnected via interior doorways; rather, each room has a different entrance.

The west room is the largest rectangular room of Structure GZ6. The excavation suggests that this room played both public and private roles. The room has a single doorway on the south and two masonry benches: a central throne-like bench located at its center and another lateral bench at the west end. The central bench is .7 m in height and more elaborate than the lateral one. The cen-



Figure 6. A rollout drawing of a polychrome vessel found in Burial 1 (drawing by Kenichiro Tsukamoto).

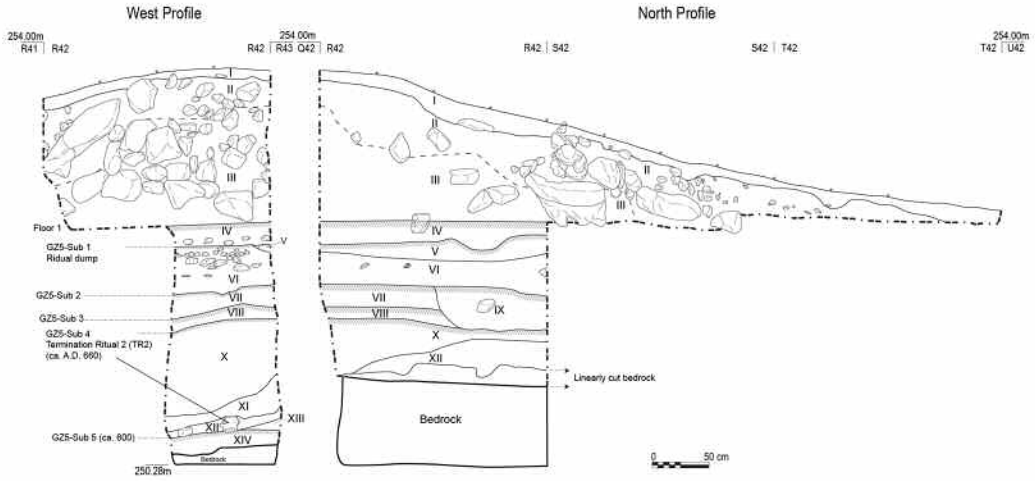


Figure 7. North and West profiles of Structure GZ5 (drawing by Hirokazu Kotegawa).

tral bench divides the room into east and west parts, but its location is asymmetrical because it is 1.5 m to the west of the central axis of the doorway. The west end of the bench appears to have had a step. The doorway in front of the central bench suggests that the bench served for public events such as receptions and meetings (Harrison 2001), although its asymmetrical location might have interfered with function. The east part of the room may have served for such public activities,

but this is unclear due to a lack of material remains on the floor. This space is likely to have been swept out when abandoned, so that the excavations recovered only a piece of a broken greenstone artifact and a few ceramic sherds on the burned floor (Figure 9c).

Meanwhile, the west part of the room, associated with the lateral bench, was likely used for private activities. Access to this bench was restricted by a narrow passage with a limestone block

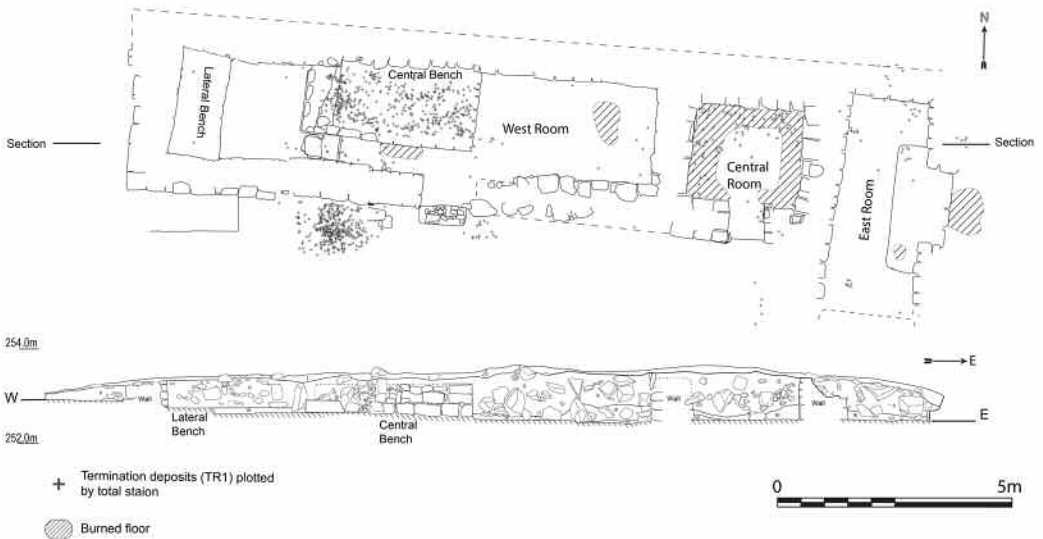


Figure 8. Plan and section of Structure GZ6. Hatched areas show burned floors (plan and section by Kenichiro Tsukamoto).



Figure 9. Artifacts on the surface of the plaster floor at Structure GZ6: (a, e) mollusk shell; (b) miniature ceramic bowl; (c) greenstone artifact (Termination deposit); (d) greenstone celt; (f) obsidian prismatic blade (Termination deposit); (g) eccentric flint (Termination deposit); (h) groundstone sphere (photographs by Kenichiro Tsukamoto).

that created a partition (Figure 8). The lateral bench is .2 m in height, its low height and restricted access suggesting that it was used for private activities. In fact, on the northwestern corner of the lateral bench our excavations found a miniature bowl used as an incense burner (Figure 9b) and a groundstone sphere (Figure 9h). A large number of termination deposits were found in the room and outside the doorway, including a chert eccentric (Figure 9g), an obsidian prismatic blade (Figure 9f), and unworked mollusk shells (Figures 9a and 9e). Even though the termination ritual made it difficult to distinguish abandoned artifacts from the termination deposits, the absence of burned floor and material concentrations in the area around the lateral bench may indicate that the miniature bowl and ground stone are related to the use of the room rather than termination deposits.

The function of the other two rooms is unclear. The central room is a small quadrangular space

with a single doorway on the south. After removing the collapse debris inside the room, we detected heavy traces of burning on the floor surface, on which termination deposits were placed. The small size of the room and the location of the doorway in front of the public space might indicate that the central room served as a temporary storage space for collecting tribute or other goods, although we do not have direct evidence to support this hypothesis. The east room is a T-shaped rectangular space. Unlike the other rooms, it has a doorway on the east side, suggesting that it was used for different activities. The room appears to have been swept out when abandoned, but the excavations recovered a few termination deposits on the burned floor. A complete greenstone celt with evidence of heavy use wear was found in a niche-like space (Figure 9d). The context suggests that the celt was an artifact related to the use of the room, rather than part of the termination de-

posits. The lack of other in situ artifacts, however, makes it difficult to infer the specific function of this room.

A radiocarbon sample (AA95400; 1180 ±44 B.P.; wood charcoal) recovered from the burned floor of the central room at Structure GZ6 dates to cal A.D. 713–974 at 2σ (Table 1). This range overlaps with the radiocarbon date from the termination ritual at Structure GZ1 (cal A.D. 687–890). We categorized the sherds recovered from the termination deposits as Late Classic types mixed with Terminal Classic types and were able to refit sherds found in the shrine of Structure GZ1 and the central room of Structure GZ6. Considering this evidence, we can assume that the termination rituals at both Structures GZ1 and GZ6 took place contemporaneously around A.D. 800–900.

Plaza A and Platform A

Plaza A, the main plaza of the Guzmán Group, measures 45 m north-south by 25 m east-west (Figure 3). Extensive excavations revealed that the north half of Plaza A was leveled concurrently with the construction of the hieroglyphic stairway. Excavations at the center of the north half of the plaza detected a possible quadrangular platform (Platform A) below the latest plaza floor. Platform A was built at the beginning of occupation at the Guzmán Group and continued to be exposed until the hieroglyphic stairway was built. The square platform measures 5.8 m to the side at its base with an orientation of 17 degrees east of north, the same orientation as Structure GZ1 and the bedrock platform (Structure GZ5-Sub 5). Platform A was built with uncut and roughly shaped stones covered with stucco, a construction technique employed for the building of the non-hieroglyphic stairway at Structure GZ1. Stratigraphic correlations between Structure GZ1 and Plaza A also suggest that Platform A coexisted with the non-hieroglyphic stairway. The platform was partially razed and completely buried in order to level the plaza surface when the hieroglyphic stairway was built around A.D. 726. The presence of the platform occupying a significant part of Plaza A suggests that the audience capacity requirements and function of Plaza A were different before the building of the hieroglyphic stairway. If an upper building existed above the platform, it may have ham-

pered visibility of ritual performances at Structure GZ1.

To summarize, the results of our excavations show that the spatial layout of the Guzmán Group changed during the Late Classic period. The latest plaza configuration appears to have been tied to the construction of the hieroglyphic stairway around A.D. 726. Before this time, the plaza area was not an open space and the building previously occupying the northern half of the plaza may have impeded visibility of ritual performances conducted at Structure GZ1.

The Inscriptions of the Hieroglyphic Stairway at the Guzmán Group

Epigraphic studies of the hieroglyphic stairway at the Guzmán Group have revealed that the inscriptions record a diplomatic event that occurred in A.D. 726 (Figure 10). The texts are extensive and their comprehensive epigraphic study is being published elsewhere (Tsukamoto and Esparza 2015). Here we focus on the content of the texts associated with the present study of spatial organization (Table 2). The texts begin with a historical event on June 24, A.D. 726 (*9.14.*14.*13.19), when Ajpach' Waal, the protagonist of the stairway text, meets the thirteenth ruler of the Copán dynasty, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil (Step I:S1–Y1). Ajpach' Waal holds a string of titles: *ajpach' waalajtixahchansoon(?)xaman ...ch'e'n* (Step II:G1–I1). His title, *xaman ...ch'e'n*, appears to be associated with the northern location of the Guzmán Group, as seen from the Main Group, or the northern location of the El Palmar polity, as seen from Copán, but a portion of the glyph block is broken.

Evidence for the social status of Ajpach' Waal in the texts is complex. His mother, Lady Winik Ajaw, carried the title *baahajaw*, “head lord” (Step II:N1), but from our limited data we cannot determine whether she was a noble from El Palmar or from another polity. Between her name and titles, an iconographic scene shows two ball players facing off on either side of a large ball. Despite the high status of his matrilineage, a considerable part of the texts is dedicated to Ajpach' Waal's paternal bloodline, which was tied to officials who held the title of *lakam*. In 1992, Stuart (2010) originally deciphered the *lakam* glyph as “banner,”

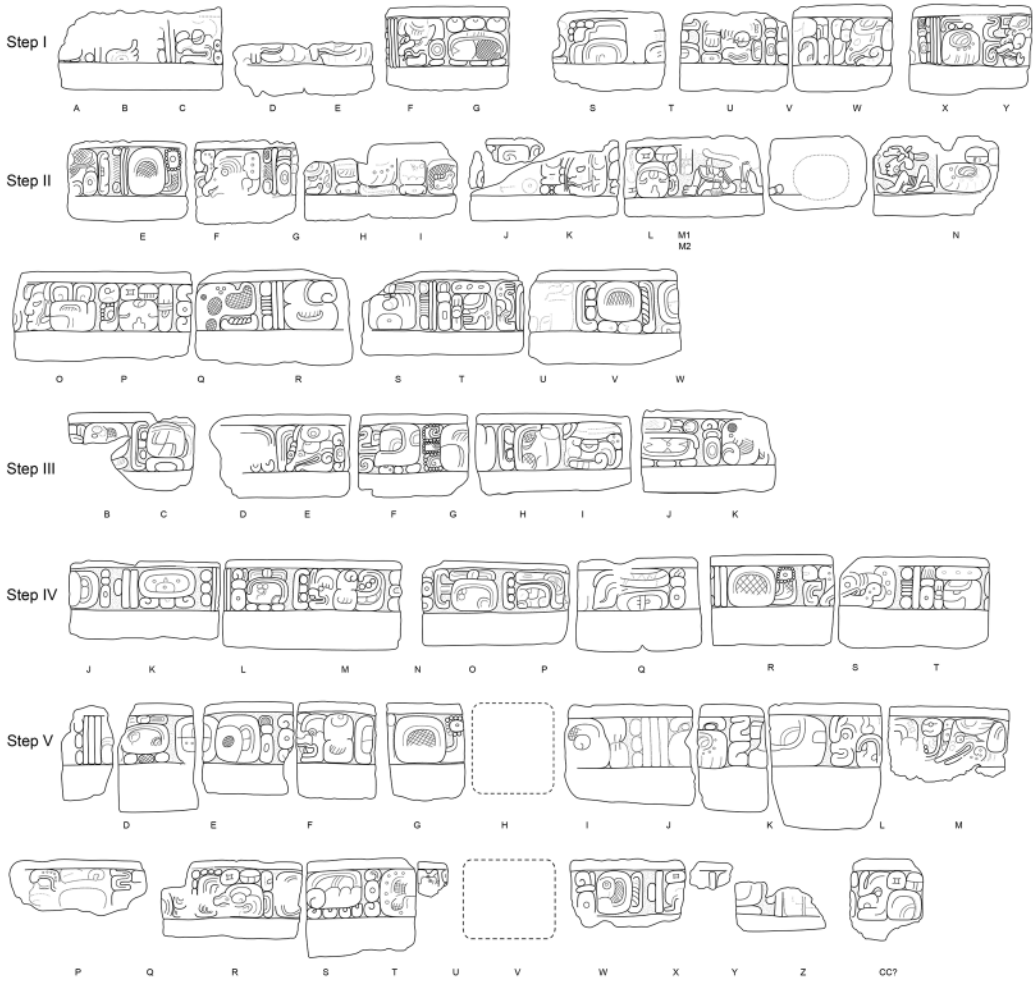


Figure 10. Selected drawings of Steps I–V of the hieroglyphic stairway (drawings by Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín).

associating it with banner-bearers and ambassadors (see also Tsukamoto and Esparza 2015). Through the analysis of polychrome vessels, Lacadena (2008) further elaborated upon the *lakam* title, suggesting that it was an administrative title held by intermediate elites or non-nobles who played tributary and military roles (see also Foias 2013; Houston and Stuart 2001:69–70).

Beginning with Ajpach’ Waal’s father, Ajlu... Chih, who was a *lakam* of the lord Upakal (Step II:Q1–X1), the stairway lists the preceding ancestral *lakam* officials and their associated rulers. Ajpach’ Waal’s grandfather or ancestor was K’awiil Took, who was a *lakam* official associated with lord Ahk... of El Palmar (Step III:C1–K1).

The glyph block *sakho’ok(?)* is the royal title of El Palmar (Tsukamoto 2014:60). The texts continue recording the *lakam* officials and associated rulers by repeating the same syntactic structure, creating regulated verse: *utz’akbuul* (or *utz’akbuuj*) *ukabjiiy*, the person’s name, *ulakam*, the ruler’s name, and *sakh’ook(?)*. This ancestor veneration indicates that Ajpach’ Waal claimed genealogical ties to *lakam* officials.

Three months after the first event, on September 13, A.D. 726 (9.14.15.0.0, a Long Count period ending date), Ajpach’ Waal celebrates the completion of the hieroglyphic stairway in the company of a ruler of El Palmar (Step IV: K1–M1). It is intriguing that the text states on two oc-

Table 2. Transcription, Transliteration, and Translation of Selected Texts from the Hieroglyphic Stairway.

Step I

B1-F1	*9.14.*14.*13.19.		June 24, A.D. 726
S1	T'AB'[-yi]	<i>t'ab'ayi</i>	to go up
T1-U1	*3-wi-ti-ki CHAN-na CH'E'N	<i>ux wiitik chan ch'e'n</i>	Ux Witik (Copán's toponym) sky-cave
V1-W1	ti-BAT-ku-pi? a-AJAW	<i>ti BAT kuup (?) ajaw</i>	to [meet] the lord of Copán
X1-Y1	ti-18-u-BAAH-K'AWIL	<i>ti waxaklajuun ubaah k'awiil</i>	to [meet] Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil

"On June 24, A.D. 726 [Ajpach' Waal] went up to Copán to [meet] the lord Waxaklajuun Ubaan K'awiil."

Step II

E1-F1	AJ-pa-ch'a wa-li	<i>ajpach' waal</i>	Ajpach' Waal
G1-H1	AJ-ti-*xa-ha CHAN-na so?-ni	<i>ajtixah chan soon</i>	he of Tixah four soon
I1	*xa-MAN-na #-CH'E'N	<i>xaman ...ch'e'n</i>	north...place
J1	ya-YAL	<i>yaal</i>	the child of mother
K1-L1	*K'UHUL?-INVERTED VESSEL-la-IX	<i>k'uhul (?)...ix</i>	holy?...Lady
	IX-WINIK AJAW-wa	<i>ixwinik ajaw</i>	Lady Winik Ajaw
N1	ba-AJAW-wa	<i>baah ajaw</i>	the head lord
O1-P1	IX-to-k'a a-AJAW-WINIK-ki	<i>ixtook' ajaw winik</i>	Lady Flint Ajaw Winik
Q1	yu-ne	<i>yunen</i>	the child of father
R1-S1	AJ-lu-#-chi-hi	<i>ajlu...chih</i>	Ajlu...Chih
T1	AJ-ti-xa-ha	<i>ajtixah</i>	he of Tixah
U1	u-LAKAM	<i>ulakam</i>	he is a lakam of
V1-X1	u-pa-ka-la-#	<i>upakal...</i>	Upakal...

"Ajpach' Waal. His title is Tixah, Four soon, and north...place. His mother is Lady Winik Ajaw. She is the head lord Lady Flint Ajaw Winik. His father is Ajlu-Chih [who holds the title] of Tixah. He is a lakam of [the El Palmar lord] Upakal..."
Note that the term *soon* does not mean the English word "soon."

Step III

B1	SAK-o-ka	<i>sakho'ok(?)</i>	White Valley(?)
C1-D1	u-TZ'AK-bu-li *u-*KAB-ji	<i>utz'akbuul ukabji</i>	he fulfills the work of grandfather
E1	MAM	<i>maam</i>	grandfather
F1	K'AWIL-la to-k'a	<i>k'awiil took'</i>	K'awiil Took'
H1	u-LAKAM	<i>ulakam</i>	He is a lakam of
I1-J1	AHK-QUADRIPARTITE BADGE	<i>ahk...</i>	Ahk...
K1	SAK-o-ka	<i>sakho'ok(?)</i>	White Valley(?)

"It fulfills the work of grandfather K'awiil Took'. He was the lakam of Ahk ...[who holds the title] of White Valley(?)."

Step IV

K1-L1	11-AJAW 18-SAKSIHOM-ma	<i>buluk ajaw</i>	[on the day] 11 Ajaw 18 Saksihoom
		<i>waxaklajuun saksihoom</i>	(September 13, A.D. 726 or 9.14.15.0.0)
M1	u-BAT-lu-ja	<i>u...l-aj (?)</i>	it is carved
N1	Broken
O1	NAAH-hi	<i>naah</i>	a group of structures
P1	u-K'ABA'	<i>uk'aba'</i>	it is its name
Q1	yo-OTOOT-ti	<i>yotoot</i>	the house of
R1-S1	AJ-pa-ch'a wa-li	<i>ajpach' waal</i>	Ajpach' Waal
T1	AJ-ti-xa-ha	<i>ajtixah</i>	he of Tixah

"...on September 13, A.D. 726 [the hieroglyphic stairway] is carved...a group of structures. It is its name, the house of Ajpach' Waal. His title is Tixah."

casions that Ajpach' Waal commissioned and is the owner of the hieroglyphic stairway, implicitly claiming that this stairway was not given to him by the ruler of El Palmar (Step IV:M1 and Step

V:F1–H1). He also asserts that Structure GZ1 is his temple (Step IV:Q1–S1).

Step V represents Ajpach' Waal's unusual political relationship with both foreign and local

Table 2 (continued). Transcription, Transliteration, and Translation of Selected Texts from the Hieroglyphic Stairway.

Step V

D1	18-SAKSIHOM-ma	<i>waxaklajuun saksihoom</i>	[on the day] 18 <i>Sak</i>
E1	i-u-ti	<i>iuti</i>	and then it happens
F1	yu-BAT-lu-li	<i>yu...lil (?)</i>	it is his carving
G1-H1	AJ-pa-ch'a *wa-li	<i>ajpach' waal</i>	Ajpach' Waal
I1	*u-CHA'N-nu	<i>ucha'n</i>	he is a guardian? of
J1-K1	18-u-BAAH K'AWIL	<i>waxaklajuun ubaah k'awiil</i>	Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil
L1-M1	BAT-ku-pi? a-AJAW	<i>BAT-kuup (?) ajaw</i>	the lord of Copán
P1	*YUKNOOM *TOOK' K'AWIL	<i>yuknoom took' k'awiil</i>	Yuknoom Took' K'awiil
Q1	K'UHUL-ka-KAN AJAW-wa	<i>k'uhul Kaan ajaw</i>	the holy lord of Kaan
S1	yi-ta-ji	<i>yitaaj</i>	in the company of
T1-V1	yu-ne?	<i>yunen(?)</i>	Yunen(?)
W1	SAK-o-ka	<i>sakho'ok (?)</i>	White Valley(?)
X1	6-PIIT? AJAW	<i>wakpiit (?) ajaw</i>	the lord of Six Litters
CC1	BAT-ku-pi? AJAW	<i>BAT-kuup (?) ajaw</i>	the lord of Copán

"On September 13, A.D. 726, and then it happens. It is the carving of Ajpach' Waal. He is a guardian? of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil, the lord of Copán. ...Yuknoom Took' K'awiil, the holy lord of Kaan, in the company of Yunen. His title is White Valley(?). He is the lord of Six Litters. ...the lord of Copán."

rulers. Ajpach' Waal claims his political relationship with Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil of Copán by employing the term *uch'an* (Step V:I1). The meaning of *uch'an* might be "guardian" or "master," as seen in Dos Pilas Panel 19 and other monuments (Houston 1993:118, Figures 4–22; Lacadena and Wichmann 2004:140–141), although this reading remains tentative because the glyph block is heavily damaged. Subsequently the text mentions Yuknoom Took' K'awiil, lord of Calakmul. In contrast to these foreign lords, the ruler of El Palmar, who holds the royal title *sakho'ok(?) wakpiit(?)ajaw*, "White Valley(?), the lord of Six Litters," appears with the relational term *yitaaj*, "in the company of," without any specific indication of esteem. The ruler of El Palmar is referred to only once and almost at the end of the texts, while at the very end of Step V the text closes with the royal title of Copán (Step V:CC1). It is important to note that the *k'uhul* (holy) sign is lacking from the royal titles of both El Palmar and Copán. The textual narratives record unusual political relationships between the descendant of *lakam* officials and both foreign and local rulers.

Discussion

Historical Significance of the Hieroglyphic Stairway of the Guzmán Group

The diplomatic event carved on the hieroglyphic stairway suggests that El Palmar was involved in

the political network of Calakmul during the early eighth century. The relationship between these two dynasties had already been established by the time of the reign of Yuknoom Took' K'awiil (Esparza and Tsukamoto 2011), and the lack of a *k'uhul* sign accompanying the royal title of El Palmar may signal its subordination under the realm of Calakmul (Grube 2005). The absence of a *k'uhul* sign next to the royal title of Copán in the hieroglyphic stairway may represent diplomatic pressure from Calakmul. Unfortunately, a missing relational glyph in the stairway makes it difficult to reconstruct the political relation between Calakmul and El Palmar in detail. Given historical analogies from other polities, however, we can assume that Calakmul attempted to establish a political alliance with Copán through El Palmar, and Ajpach' Waal was its emissary. Furthermore, when we compare our data to recent epigraphic evidence about the political interventions of Calakmul in the affairs of western polities, including Caucuen, Dos Pilas, El Peru, La Corona, and Uxul, and of eastern polities such as Naranjo (Martin and Grube 2008:109–112), we can infer that Calakmul strategically attempted to encircle the Tikal dynasty (Martin 1996; Schele and Friedel 1990). Despite the diplomatic relation negotiated through El Palmar, the alliance network with Copán did not last, judging from the possible involvement of Calakmul in the rebellion of Quirigua against Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil in A.D. 738 (Looper 1999, 2003; Martin and Grube 2008).

*Power and Ideological Negotiations
in the Outlying Group*

The hieroglyphic stairway of the Guzmán Group embodies the complexity of power relations. The genealogical list of *lakam* officials lends legitimacy and authority to their political position in the El Palmar polity. The textual narratives repeatedly claim that the hieroglyphic stairway was owned by Ajpach' Waal, a descendant of the *lakam* officials, connoting that it was not sponsored by the ruler of El Palmar. Ajpach' Waal also emphasized his identity as affiliated with a foreign ruler and descendant of *lakam* ancestors, rather than as a subordinate of the ruler of El Palmar (Tsukamoto 2014). As described above, the historical narrative begins with the appearance of the ruler Waxakla-juun Ubaah K'awiil of Copán and ends with a statement of Ajpach' Waal's political affiliation with him. The text states that Ajpach' Waal played a key role in the diplomatic relation, meaning that his political status in the El Palmar polity must have been high.

Ajpach' Waal's distinctive political position stems not only from power struggles but also from cooperation with the royal authority. Corporate activities such as the diplomatic event described in the hieroglyphic stairway enabled the polity of El Palmar to negotiate power relations with Calakmul and Copán. Ajpach' Waal could not have become an ambassador without recognition by the royal authority of El Palmar. Thus, the hieroglyphic stairway of the Guzmán Group reflects both competitive and cooperative power relations.

Archaeological, iconographic, and epigraphic data suggest that the Guzmán Group was a space for multiple activities. Around A.D. 726, *lakam* officials built a hieroglyphic stairway at the eastern side of Plaza A. The plaza layout with an eastern temple is widely distributed throughout the Maya Lowlands (Becker 1991; Chase and Chase 2004). Architectural emulation enhances local prestige and legitimacy (Ashmore and Sabloff 2002), and our data testify that spatial organization through architectural emulation was a political strategy not only for the central authority but also for *lakam* officials. The newly created space at the Guzmán Group would have altered and regularized ritual practices at Structure GZ1 and daily routines associated with Structure GZ6. When building the

hieroglyphic stairway, the *lakam* officials modified the plaza space to accommodate a larger audience with higher visibility. The enlarged steps and the upper terrace of the hieroglyphic stairway served as a political stage upon which Ajpach' Waal would have conducted ritual performances and speeches, creating distance between the performer (or performers) and the audience. The elaborate shrine of Structure GZ1 may have been a theatrical space that highlighted the sacred character of this place, and termination rituals may indicate that the place was ideologically charged. The central bench installed in the west room of Structure GZ6 may have formalized and regularized human interactions during meetings and receptions of visitors, while both the west and the east rooms may have served for private activities. The ground stone, incense burner, and green stone celt recovered from the rooms support the idea that different activities took place in the structure. Therefore, the Guzmán Group probably had multiple functions, at least after the construction of the hieroglyphic stairway.

Unlike monumental architecture such as Temples I and II, located around the public plazas of the Main Group (Tsukamoto 2014), Structure GZ1 and Plaza A are small enough for the audience to hear a performer speak during ceremonies. Public speaking does not only describe social relations. Rather, it also consists of performative utterances that affect social relations (Austin 1975). Ritual performances and political speeches on the hieroglyphic stairway would have not only expressed cultural values and symbolic codes, but also induced changes in social situations (Bell 1997:73–75; Coben and Inomata 2006). Classic Maya phrases in inscriptions are iterable and regulatory in nature, and most phrases used in the hieroglyphic stairway of the Guzmán Group were shared at many Classic Maya polities. The citational nature of sentences creates a norm that authorizes performers to exercise political power (Butler 1993). By uttering the inscriptions of the hieroglyphic stairway, the *lakam* officials could have legitimized their political position in the El Palmar polity.

Archaeological and iconographic data evidence ritual performances in the Guzmán Group. In Mesoamerica, scholars have increasingly explored the significance of a fire ritual that gives perform-

ers powerful insignia of office linked to cosmological symbolism (e.g., Fash et al. 2009; Grube 2000; Stuart 1998). The mythological scenes of fire rituals drawn on the polychrome vase from Burial 1 may display the ideologies of *lakam* officials, which was reinforced by performing a fire ritual above the cist. Mortuary practices with offerings provided a vehicle for constituting an identity that brought ancestors, lineage, and the local landscape together, and such practices have long historical continuity in the Maya region (McAnany 1995). Many Classic Maya outlying groups share the practice of building ancestral temples on the eastern side of plazas (e.g., Becker 2004:128–129; Iannone 2003; Welsh 1988:190). Burials and offerings deposited within the eastern temple create a genealogy of place linking the descendants to that land. Ancestor veneration at Structure GZ1 may have played “a vital role in establishing the criteria of group membership and, conversely, exclusion from membership” (McAnany 1995:113). Termination rituals detected at the bottom floor of Structures GZ1 and GZ5 may have manifested the ideological symbolism of the Guzmán Group. We suggest that the *lakam* officials declared their land holdings by performing fire rituals, termination rituals, and mortuary practices, which bound together ancestors, *lakam* officials, and the Guzmán Group.

Spatial Organization of the El Palmar Polity

Archaeological and epigraphic studies provide clues as to the spatial organization of El Palmar. The causeway detected between the Main Group and the Guzmán Group indicates the special relationship of *lakam* officials with the central authority during the period of A.D. 600–900. Longstanding investigations have demonstrated that a causeway is a physical index of the special relationships between the urban core and outlying groups in the Maya Lowlands (e.g., Chase and Chase 2001a; Cobos and Winemiller 2001; Folan 1991; Kurjack and Andrews 1976; Sabloff and Tourtellot 1991). As Folan (1991) has suggested for the northern Maya Lowlands, cosmological implications might be attached to the causeway, but our available data cannot prove or disprove this possibility. Instead, we can surmise the ritual function of the causeway. The terminus of the causeway at the Main Group was at the main ac-

cess to the Great Plaza, where the largest audience at El Palmar could be accommodated for spectacles (Tsukamoto 2014). Multiple lines of evidence in Maya society show that spatial organization of the urban core and outlying areas is frequently associated with ritual circuits (Gossen 1974; Reese-Taylor 2002, Tozzer 1941, Vogt 1976:42–44). The physical connection between the Guzmán Group and the large plaza of the Main Group through the causeway may have made possible its use for ritual processions. The texts of the hieroglyphic stairway recorded that El Palmar’s Yunen lord was present at the unveiling ceremony of the hieroglyphic stairway, suggesting that he came to the Guzmán Group via the causeway.

With regards to cosmological directionality, the spatial order of the Guzmán Group remains ambiguous. The placement of the Guzmán Group in the north might have emphasized the cosmological ideology of the central authority. Nevertheless, archaeological data do not indicate an investment by the central authority to create the cosmological representation of the Guzmán Group in the overall landscape of El Palmar. On the contrary, the modified bedrock that served as a platform for Structure GZ5-Sub 5 likely reflects local efforts. From an epigraphic perspective, the title of Ajpach’ Waal, *xaman...ch’e’n*, “north...place” might represent the northern location of the Guzmán Group, but a broken glyph between “north” and “place” prevents us from interpreting the specific meaning of this glyph block. The iconographic image of the water bird drawn on a polychrome bowl from Burial 1 might symbolize not so much north-sky-heaven as watery underworld. The ballgame scene may also represent the underworld. The epigraphic depiction of WaxaklajuunUbaahK’awiil appears at both the Guzmán Group and the North Group of Copán, but the incomplete text of the latter group prevents us from examining their symbolic relationship (Ashmore 1991). It is equally possible that the symbolic significance of outlying groups in the El Palmar polity changed during the Classic period, as Haviland (1981) and Chase and Chase (2003) demonstrated at Tikal and Caracol, respectively. Furthermore, we cannot reject the possibility that the rulers of El Palmar assigned the land of the Guzmán Group to the *lakam* officials without allocating construction materials, in order

to enhance the cosmological directionality in the site planning. The data with regard to the foundation of the Guzmán Group are limited, and so more excavations are needed to examine the relationship between the Guzmán Group and the possible cosmological order emanating from the central authority.

Conclusion

We have examined how an outlying group of a Maya polity was created and transformed by political interactions. Extensive excavations in conjunction with epigraphic studies of the north outlying group at El Palmar provide alternative perspectives into the nature of spatial organization in Classic Maya society. The results of our research at the Guzmán Group suggest that the outlying group was a political arena in which different social actors negotiated power and ideology. Cosmological representation at the Guzmán Group is more complex than the north-sky symbolism. Further research at the Guzmán Group in conjunction with the study of the Main Group will delineate the diverse nature of spatial organization in Classic Maya society. To this end, extensive excavations with careful documentation of materials are integral. Steady advances in Maya epigraphy also allow us to analyze at great length events that occurred in a specific temporal and spatial framework.

The El Palmar Archaeological Project is ongoing. The everyday practices of *lakam* officials remain underexplored. Extensive excavations at Structure GZ7, located outside the plaza, could potentially reveal an intersection between public and private lives. Likewise, the social status of *lakam* officials remains elusive. The current understanding of their social status relies largely on epigraphic data (Lacadena 2008), but our data suggest that Ajpach' Waal's political status was high. Excavations at Structure GZ7 have the potential of yielding material correlations with the social status of the inhabitants of the Guzmán Group. Our future research at the Main Group will also shed light on political strategies of the royal authority. Interestingly, Thompson (1936a, 1936b) reported two stelae that date to A.D. 731 and A.D. 746, carved monuments erected at the Great Plaza of the Main Group after the building of the hieroglyphic stairway. The detailed epi-

graphic study of these stelae in conjunction with extensive excavations of associated structures will reveal how rulers reacted to the political claims of *lakam* officials. The diplomatic events tied to Copán and Calakmul open a new window for our understanding of political interactions in the Maya Lowlands during the Late Classic period, an important topic that has been broadly discussed among Maya scholars (e.g., Grube and Martin 1998; Marcus 1973; Martin and Grube 2008). We hope that the archaeological and epigraphic data presented here will be useful for a better understanding of Classic Maya society.

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