Investigating Maya Terminal Classic Period Architecture at Plaza H, Cahal Pech, Belize

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Plaza H, Cahal Pech

During the Terminal Classic period (750-900 A.D.) in the Upper Belize River Valley the Maya went through extreme sociopolitical change. This is often referred to as the ‘collapse’ of the Maya, a time period characterized by the decline of their divine kingship. The Plaza is semi-restricted and is made up of four total structures: two ceremonial, and two residential. This plaza represents the last elite residential holdout for the site of Cahal Pech.

Research Questions

• What role did Plaza H play in the last occupation of the site?
• What household activities took place at Plaza H?
• What inferences can we make from the construction of feature C-3?
• Was there another existing structure on the western portion of the plaza?

Methods

• Excavations were in partnership with the Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance Project (BVAR) archaeology field school.
• Excavations were conducted using vertical and horizontal control, using both arbitrary and natural levels when necessary.
• Levels were halted when there was a significant change in the deposits, generally signifying architectural features: fill, walls, or floors. All deposits were screened through a ¼” screen.
• All material cultural materials were collected; with the exception of undiagnostic ceramic body sherds smaller than 2.5 cm.

Results

• Total of 18 units excavated.
• Range of artifacts uncovered including special finds such as shell beads, cores, bifaces, projectile point, ceramic hand figurine among others.
• Concluded there were no additional structures.
• Discovered two phases of construction in feature C-3.

Significance

• Excavations this field season gave further insights into the Terminal Classic construction phases of the structure, including the possibility of two phases of construction evident by the units opened.
• Allowed us to have a deeper understanding into the activities on the structure from the artifacts uncovered.

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