

What Were the Elites Doing?
Understanding Late Classic Elite Practices at Lower Dover, Belize

by

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This paper explores elite practice at a Late Classic to Early Postclassic (700-1050 AD) Maya center, Lower Dover, in western Belize. Archaeologists studying the Maya have spent considerable time and effort attempting to understand the material culture and activities preserved at sites throughout Belize and other parts of the ancient Maya world. Following its discovery in 2010, Lower Dover offers new opportunities and challenges for research attempting to add to our understanding of ancient elite practices in the Belize River Valley. In 2012, excavations in Lower Dover's Plaza Group F recovered a large artifact deposit on both the adjacent patio floor and face of a collapsed elite residential platform. Coming from an elite living space, the deposit offers an intriguing record of the intersection of elite Maya social, political, and religious life. Considering Lower Dover's position in a larger geopolitical setting, I try to determine the functional and ritual significance of the artifacts deposited. Results of my analysis suggest that at Lower Dover's Plaza Group F, elite persons engaged in food processing, craft goods production, and ceremonial observance. As members of an elite social group, these people had a diverse array of occupations and mental and material pursuits to which they devoted their time. Further, the artifacts' context indicates that elites ritually terminated their residential platform before leaving Plaza Group F in the Late Classic to Early Postclassic transition. By studying the relationships between the practices observed here, I develop a multidimensional account of daily activities in an elite residence at Lower Dover and the elite residents' potential interactions with others in the greater Belize Valley political and economic settings.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Elite monumental centers marked by grand pyramids contributed to archaeological and the public interest in the Maya for hundreds of years (Houston and Inomata 2009). However, early interest in Maya “commoner” life (e.g., EH. Thompson 1939, Willey et al 1965) pioneered the later shift toward investigations in rural or periphery Maya communities. Recent studies in the Belize Valley suggest that household spaces offer an invaluable record of the intersection of Maya social, political, and religious life (e.g. Yaeger 2000, LeCount 2001). These studies have contributed to growing literature on the diversity among Belize Valley commoner households and communities. Similar approaches to understanding elite activities and persons are valuable because they provide insight to societal leadership. Elite Maya maintained complex, interesting relationships and pursued various mental and material occupations. Integrating interpretive techniques developed to understand community structure (Canuto and Yaeger 2000) and house group practice (Hendon 2010) into elite spaces will create a more complete picture of elite life.

This paper attempts to discern and critically evaluate elite practices by focusing on the activities that took place in and around their residences. Specifically, I will explore elites through a Late Classic to Early Postclassic lowland Maya assemblage from an elite residential area, Plaza Group F, at the site of Lower Dover, a polity in western Belize. Following excavation of the assemblage in 2012 and 2013, I conducted a more thorough artifact analysis during the Summer of 2014. Recovered artifacts include ceramics, chert debitage, stone tools,

and faunal remains. In combining household and practice approaches at this micro scale, I develop a multidimensional account of elite activities and social relations in Plaza Group F at Lower Dover.

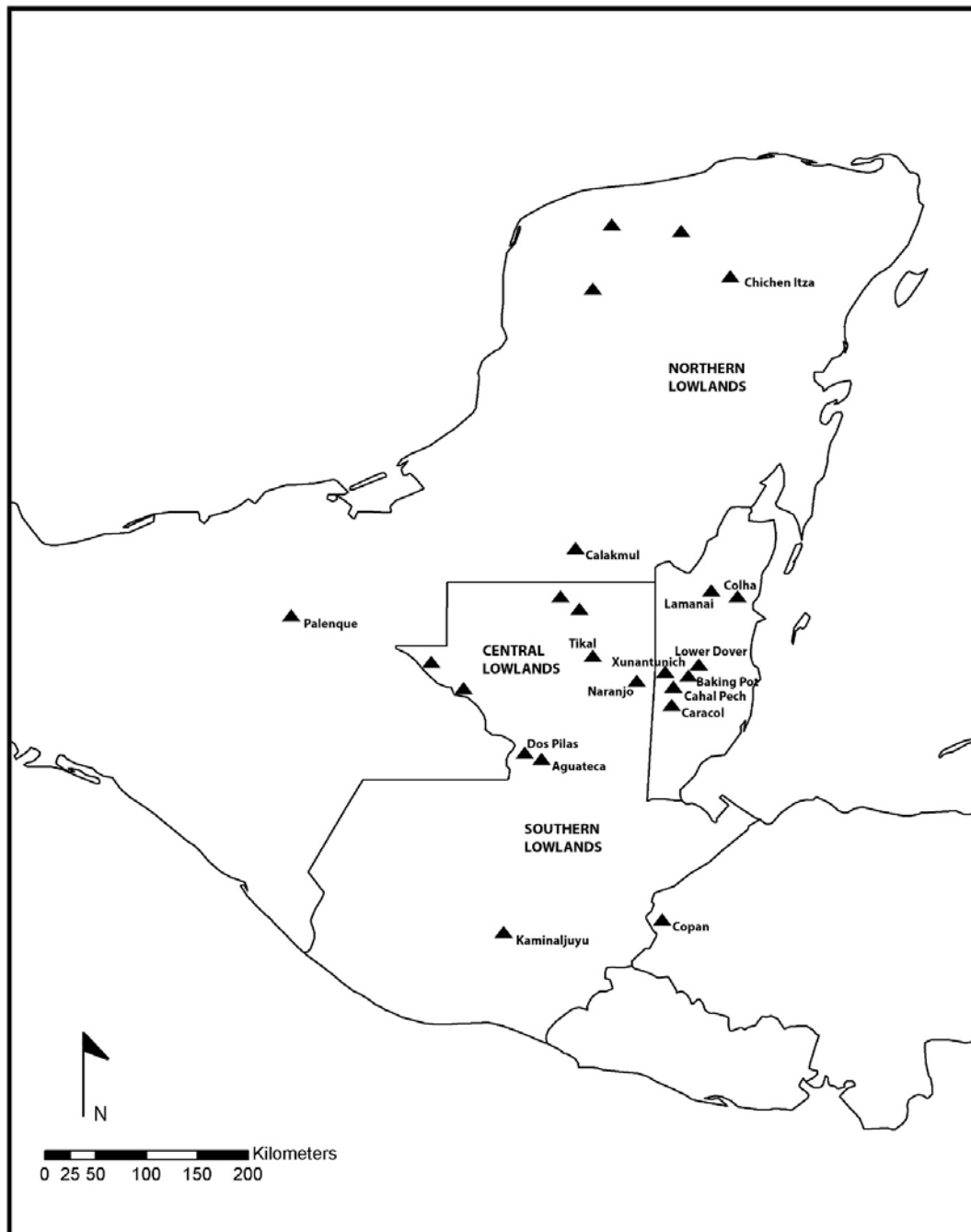


Figure 1.1 Map of the Maya Lowlands highlighting the position of Lower Dover

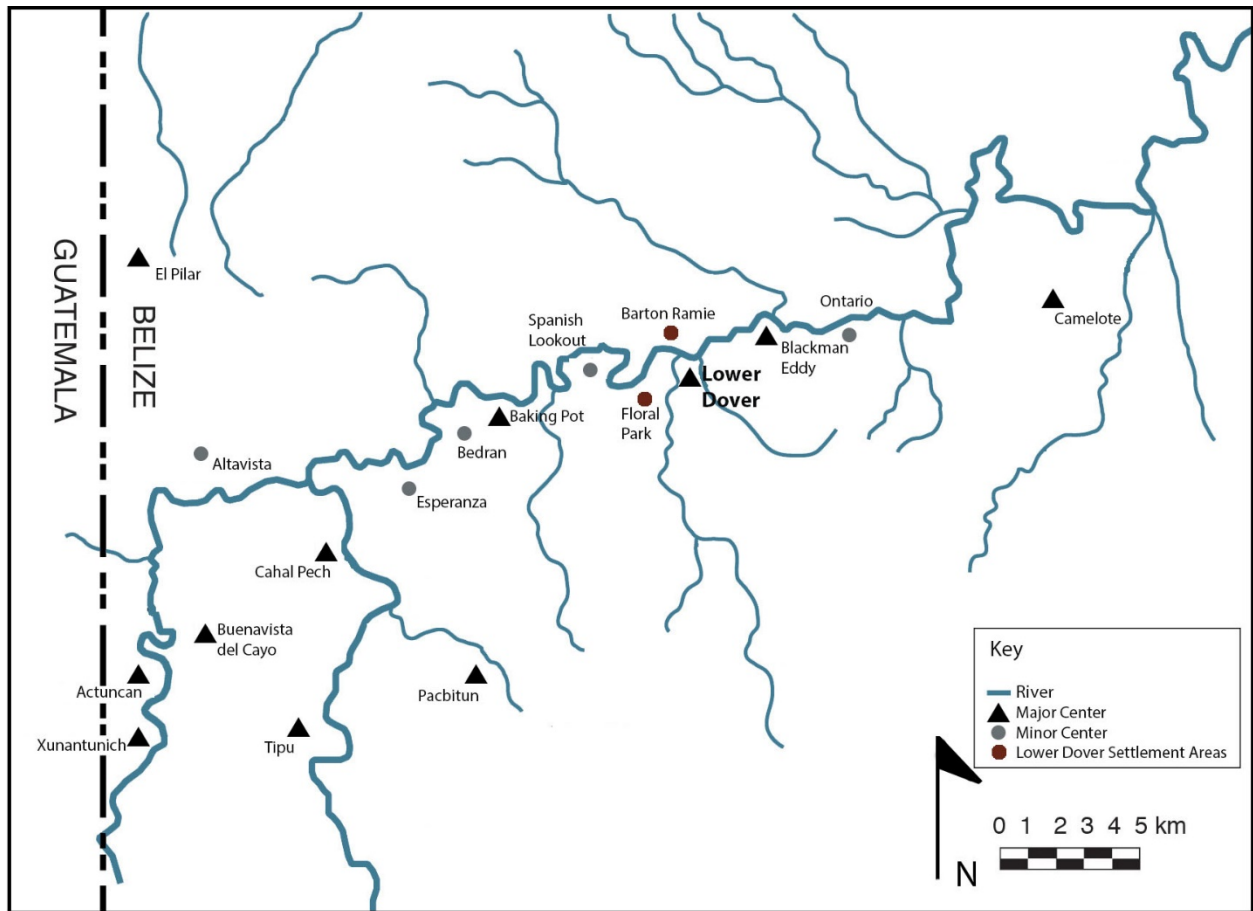


Figure 1.2 Political capitals and relevant sites in the Upper Belize River Valley

Table 1-1. Chronology of periods documented in the Maya Lowlands and the ceramic phases associated with each period in the Belize Valley.

PERIOD			BARTON RAMIE (Gifford et al. 1976)
POSTCLASSIC	Late	1500	New Town
		1400	
		1300	
		1200	
	Early	1100	
		1000	
		900	
CLASSIC	Terminal	800	
	Late	700	Spanish Lookout
		600	Tiger Run
	Early	500	Hermitage
		400	
		300	
PRECLASSIC	Proto-Classic	200	Floral Park
		100	
		AD/BC	Mount Hope
	Late	100	
		200	Barton Creek
		300	
	Middle	400	Jenney Creek
		500	
		600	
		700	
		800	
		900	
		1000	
		1100	
		1200	

1.1 HOUSEHOLD STUDIES AND ANCIENT PRACTICES

Household studies have a long history in Mesoamerica beginning with descriptive ethnographic and archaeological accounts (Willey et al 1965, Wilk and Ashmore 1988). Edward Thompson initiated household studies in monumental epicenters (1886, 1892). These efforts were continued throughout the 1900s, but increased in frequency as household theory and method developed in the 40s and 50s. As a concept, the Maya house reflects a corporate entity and a social identity. Definitions suggest that a household is not only an architecturally bounded space, but instead a space where different kinds of activities play out (Houston and Inomata 2009: 27). These activities included craft production, reproduction of people and culture, sharing, redistribution, consumption, and property transmission. Every household has a social, material, and behavioral component (Wilk and Rathje 1982: 618). These core characteristics, although at times variable, make households the building block for social and economic relationships.

If archaeologists understand the household as a space for domestic activities, they cannot confine their attention to its structures. Maya domestic activities occurred outside the house in addition to inside its walls. Therefore, the Maya household had several components including the dwellings, kitchen, storage areas, patio, and garden area where people deposit refuse. While household studies provide a “microscale” lens from which to observe and interpret the

archaeological record, they are problematic. Refuse disposal outside the household and regular cleaning practices reduce the visibility of different activity zones. Archaeological traces of food and craft production often are swept away. However, the assemblage evaluated from Plaza Group F was not swept away or cleaned up, but left purposefully as a terminal deposit. While not associated with a specific activity zone or household component, the assemblage represents the household residents' activities.

Moving away from basic resident occupations, archaeologists began to combine household and social theory (Gillespie 2000, Hendon 2000, Robin 2002). Because the household is the center of daily activity, it is connected to people's identity. Households structure how the Maya conceived their world. Gillespie draws from Lévi-Strauss to describe houses as a way to,

“Link social groups with architectural units that facilitate their physical delimitation and position in society, thereby integrating the social with the material life in its pragmatic and semiotic aspects,” (2000: 2).

Her conclusion has more depth when considering that the Maya may have understood their houses as living entities, imbued with cosmological significance (Houston and Inomata 2009: 27). These characteristics allow household studies, as Robin suggests, “To bring us close to the level of ancient individuals and their lives...peopling ancient living spaces,” (2003:308). Adopting this approach allows archaeologists to understand the daily occupations, activities, and identities of ancient peoples better. Where commoner household studies created an increasingly complex picture of lower class Maya society, elite households have the potential to do the same (Robin 2003: 319). Elite household based activities contributed to and demonstrated their social

position and identity. Although historically used to “Understand ordinary people,” (Robin 2003: 309), household studies in elite residences can generate similar characterizations.

Without epigraphic or extensive iconographic records, elite persons, such as those residing at Lower Dover, remain unclear. Still, Awe (2008) is able to compare elite residences in the Belize Valley to draw conclusions about differential social prestige and power at Cahal Pech, Xunantunich, and Caracol. He suggests based on patterns observed at the three sites, that households in the site core existed at various places on a social hierarchy. Similarly, excavations at several royal courts, including distant Calakmul and Caracol, indicate that some elite residences never partook in production activities, instead concentrated solely on politics and rituals (Robin 2003: 324). Household variability is not isolated to commoner households, but also pertains to elites. Assuming this pattern holds true, a practice-oriented study in a household at Lower Dover should provide a more accurate depiction of a specific elite family, which was one of several elite families at the settlement.

1.2 ELITE MAYA LIFE

Houston and Inomata suggest that there are two ways to approach Maya nobility. The first identifies noble status as a condition of social and aesthetic refinement. The second describes noble members in their relationships with others (2009: 163-164). Using the second approach to

build a more comprehensive understanding of elites living in Plaza Group F at Lower Dover, this paper will evaluate three realms of existence – domestic, socioeconomic, and religious. In providing distinctions between these elements, I acknowledge that they are not mutually exclusive or disparate; instead, the three interconnect. There is not a Maya domestic existence or space that is not also socioeconomic and ritual in nature (Robin 2003: 312). I separate them only to provide the paper with analytical structure.

Accessing practice through archaeological investigations in elite household help recreate sociopolitical structures and occupations. Further, including the many discarded objects in interpretations of Maya practice helps to maintain the connection between people and their possessions (Jackson 2009: 80). Plaza Group F elite were associated with politics and rituals, but also had other duties. Practice variability likely differentiated elites at Lower Dover and contributed to a local noble hierarchical structure. Finally, I conclude based on the association between household occupation, enduring practice, and object discard that the Maya living around Plaza F carried out termination rituals before vacating their house group.

2.0 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2.1 GEOGRAPHY

Lower Dover is located in Unitedville, a town in the Cayo District of Belize (Figure 1.1). Geographically, the site is on the southern bank of the Belize River, bordered to the west by Upper Barton Creek, and to the east by Lower Barton Creek (Figure 1.2). The Belize River, which begins in the Maya mountains and empties in the Caribbean Sea, influenced where the Maya established settlements and polities in Western Belize. A tropical area with great biodiversity, the Belize River floodplain has particularly fertile soils. The valley has alluvial river terraces and the Maya in Lower Dover's northern settlement area, across the Belize River at Barton Ramie likely capitalized on the available water and intensified agricultural production (Kirke 1980: 285). This helps to explain the prolonged occupation at Barton Ramie (near to Lower Dover) for some time following the regional population decline during the Terminal Classic and Early Postclassic (Lucero 2008: 817) (Table 1-1). Although weather patterns vary by region, the Belize River Valley generally experiences wet and dry seasons during the year. Dry seasons can have considerably less rainfall than wet, which led to the construction of reservoirs at many sites to manage and control available water supplies (Lucero 2008).

Most underlying geological formations in Belize are limestone. Other natural resources include chert and slate outcroppings throughout the region and considerable granite deposits in the nearby Maya Mountains (Houston and Inomata 2009: 10). Regional trade networks facilitated resource movement across both long and short distances, providing people with access to local and non-local goods, while increasing sociopolitical integration (Shafer and Hester 1991: 94).

2.2 REGIONAL POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

In their consideration of warfare and Late Classic Maya political superstructure, Chase and Chase (1998) organized the central lowland polities with primary capitals and border centers. Their efforts considered epigraphy, architectural magnitude, and population. These large political capitals, such as Tikal, Caracol, and Naranjo, maintained some control over a fluid and variable periphery influenced by many different social, historic, and geographic factors. Although at a much smaller scale, archaeologists working in the Belize Valley have taken a similar approach (Figure 2.1) to hierarchically organize the political centers (Garber et al 1993, Helmke and Awe 2012). Most civic ceremonial centers in the Belize Valley lack an epigraphic record, so Helmke and Awe use architectural traits to establish significance and controlling power, relative to other sites in the Belize Valley area. Although some variability exists, major political centers in the Belize Valley have nucleated monumental epicenters, pyramidal temple

structures, eastern triadic temples, royal palatial groups, ballcourts, stelae or altars, causeways, sacbeob termini groups, and royal tombs (Helmke and Awe 2012: 64). Using an abridged version of central place theory, major political centers in the Belize Valley are separated by about 10 km (Garber et al 1993) (Figure 2.1). Geographically, Lower Dover is in a border zone outside Blackman Eddy, making it a minor center. However, in terms of architecture typology and size, Lower Dover is in a gray area between major and minor center classifications. This makes elite purpose and power in the Belize Valley difficult to determine. Archaeological research has indicated possible political shifts and if evaluated sequentially, it is likely that Lower Dover incorporated Blackman Eddy's population after construction ceased at Blackman Eddy during the Early Classic (Helmke and Awe 2012: 73). For the purpose of this study and pending future archaeological investigations, I consider Lower Dover to be a minor border center based on its geographic location and known architectural traits.

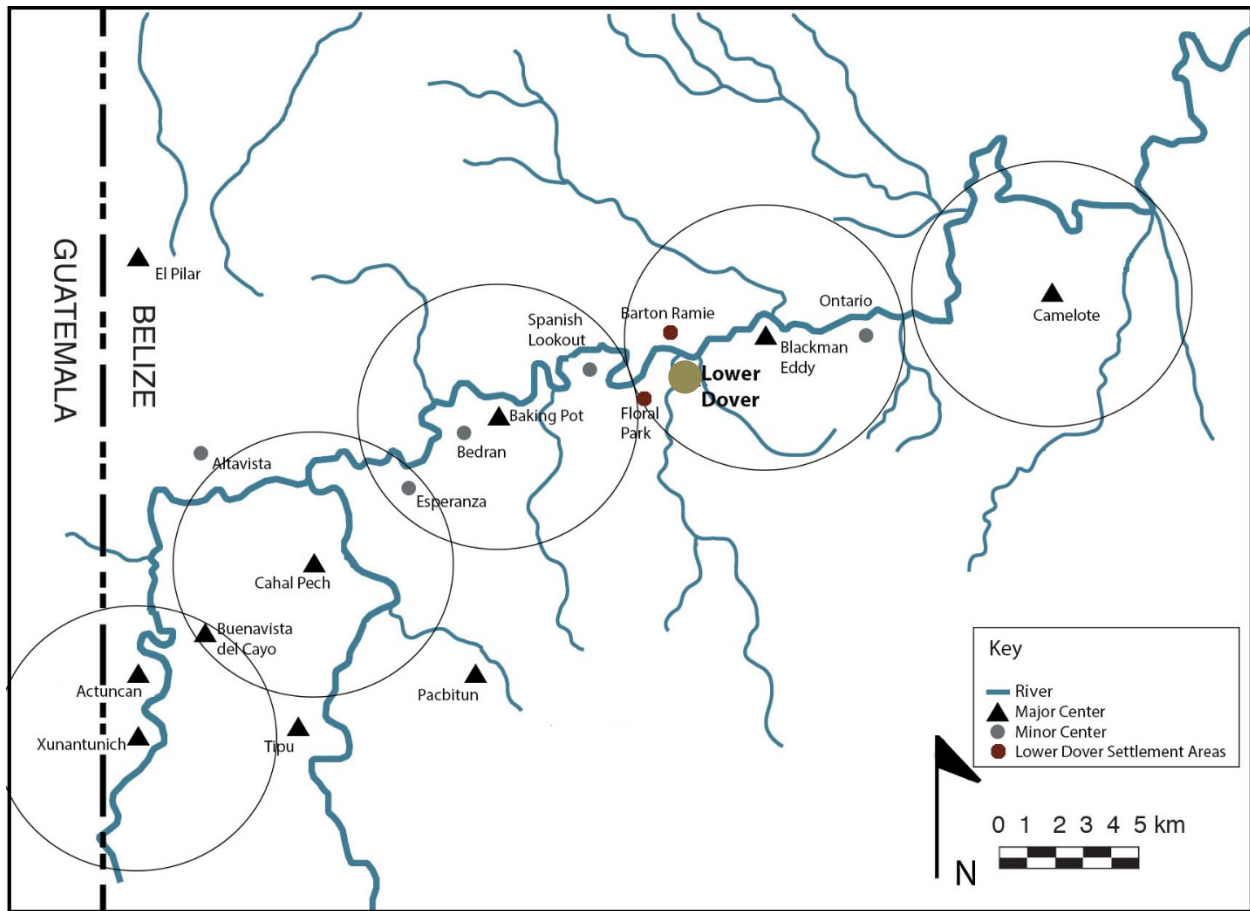


Figure 2.1 Political hierarchy in the Belize River Valley in the 10 km model.

2.3 LOWER DOVER

The Belize Institute of Archaeology (NICH) and Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance Project (BVAR) worked at Lower Dover. The BVAR project's objectives at Lower Dover include determining the Lower Dover's function, establishing a working chronology, and evaluating Lower Dover's role within Belize Valley geopolitics (Guerra et al

2013). To meet these goals, the project has combined mapping, settlement survey, and excavation at Lower Dover for the last five years. Survey and mapping at Lower Dover began in 2009 (Guerra 2011: 2-3) (see Figure 2.2).

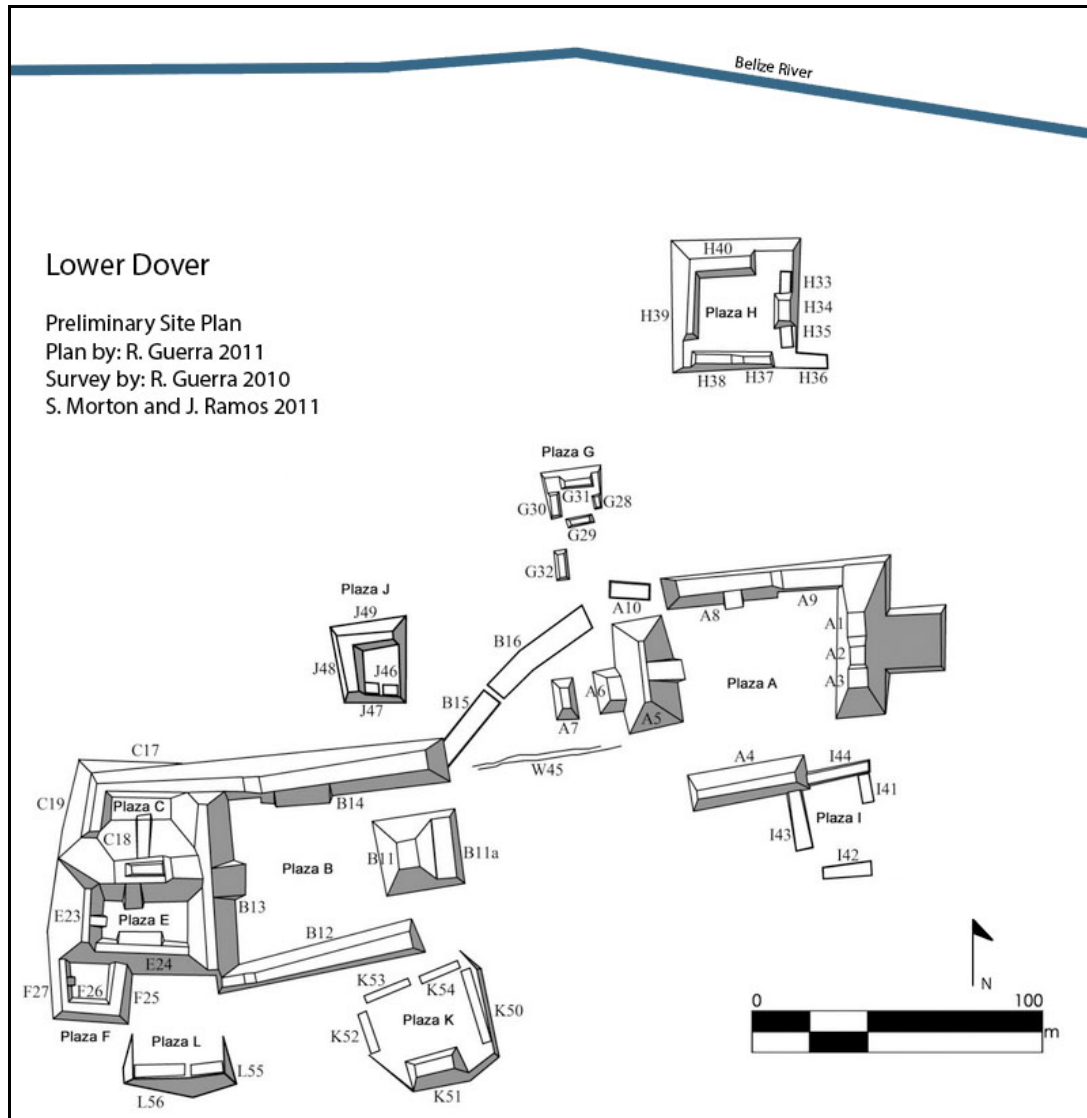


Figure 2.2 Map of the Lower Dover site core showing the proximity to the Belize River (adapted from Guerra and Morton 2012, Figure 2). There are at least 6 elite residential areas in the civic ceremonial center at Lower Dover, Plazas H, G, J, K, L, and F.

Although Gordon Willey conducted pioneer surveys throughout the upper valley during the 1960s, Lower Dover was just outside of his study area - across the river from Barton Ramie. Relative to other local political centers, the site is about 6 km east of Baking Pot and 3 km west of Blackman Eddy (Guerra and Morton 2011) (see Figure 1.1). Architecturally, the site has some characteristics of a major center (Helmke and Awe 2012: 64), but future excavations may change this conclusion. Those who mention Lower Dover in Belize Valley archaeological reports (Hoggarth 2012, Helmke and Awe 2012) often compare the center with other local centers such as Cahal Pech, Baking Pot, Buenavista del Cayo, and Xunantunich (see Figure 1.2).

The mapped settlement areas associated with Lower Dover are to the north and south of the civic ceremonial center (see Figure 2.3). Previously believed to be a satellite community of Baking Pot (Guerra et al 2012), Barton Ramie now looks to be Lower Dover's northern settlement area, across the Belize River. Lower Dover's southern settlement area is approximately 500 meters south of the civic ceremonial center. Current estimates for the Lower Dover population during the Late and Terminal Classic, about 2,100 people, include the identified house mounds to the south and the estimates Willey and his colleagues provided in their report from Barton Ramie. To reach this estimate, I multiplied the number of house mounds (262 at Barton Ramie, 120 to the south) by 5.5 individuals.

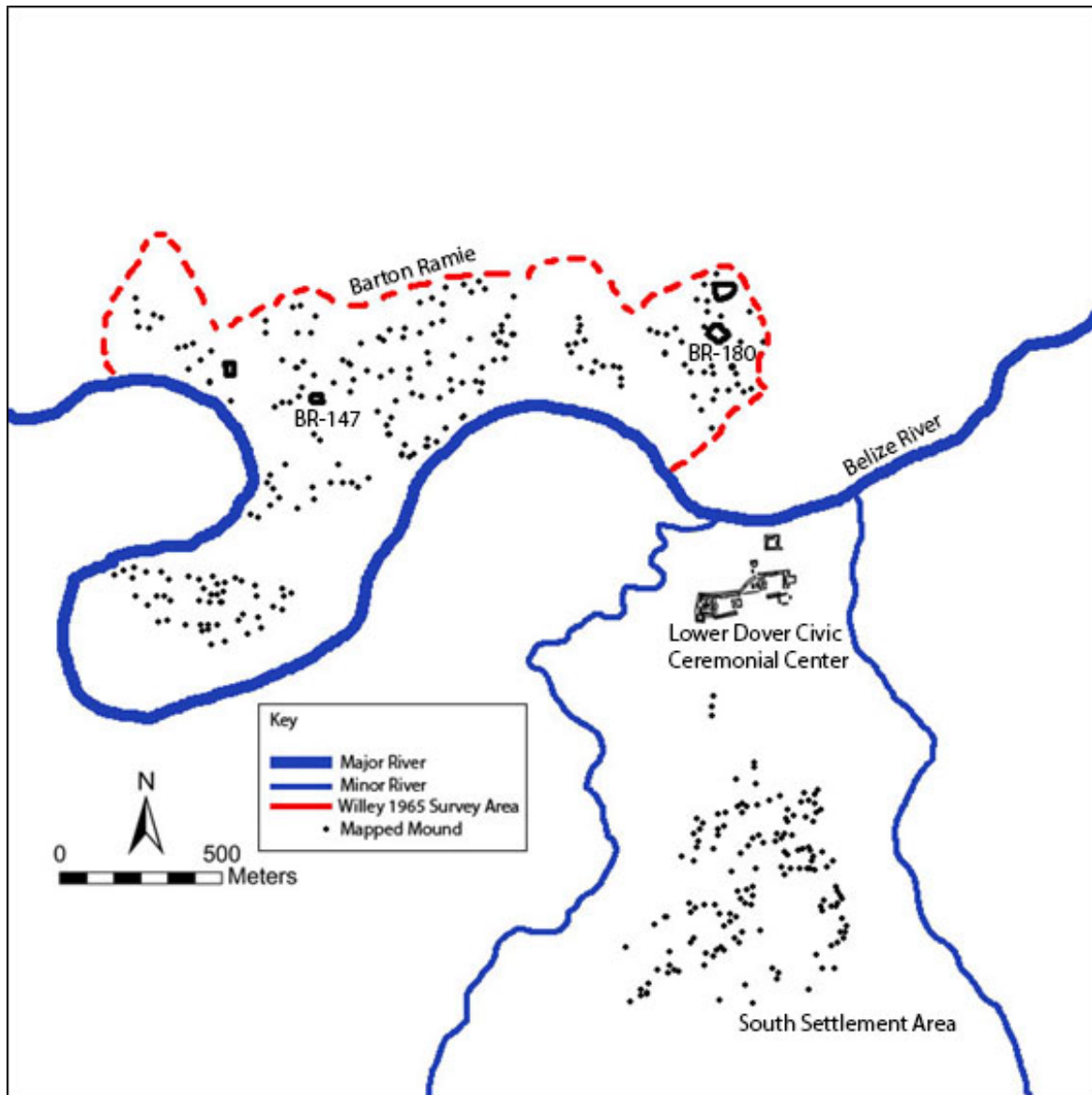


Figure 2.3 Map of the Lower Dover settlement area. Willey's 1965 survey area is outlined in red to the north and bordered to the south by the Belize River. Willey excavated only one plazuela group, BR-147. He believed BR-180 was a pyramid mound, the only monumental structure at Barton Ramie (Adapted from Guerra 2010 and Willey et al 1965, Figure 2).

2.4 ELITE HOUSE GROUPS

Cultural logic and spatial understanding underlie construction practices, which allows archaeologists in the Maya area to use architectural organization and features to draw conclusions about social relationships (Stuardo 2003: 184, Awe 2008: 159, Christie 2003: 331). Common principles and techniques may also create architectural similarities between civic ceremonial centers, such as Cahal Pech and Lower Dover (see Figure 2.4).

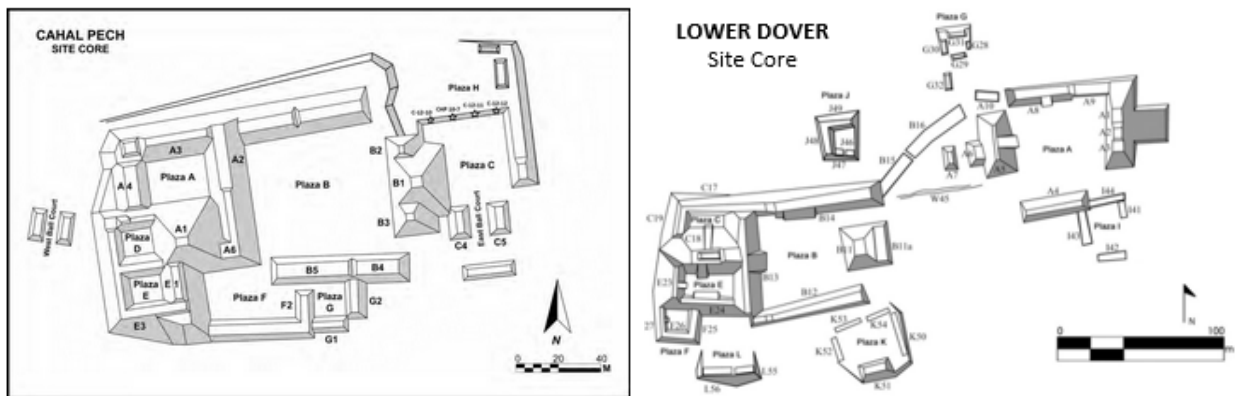


Figure 2.4 Comparison of Cahal Pech (left) and Lower Dover (right). Note the similarity in architectural configuration. (Cahal Pech map used by courtesy of Jaime Awe, Lower Dover map used by courtesy of Rafael Guerra).

Architectural studies in the Maya area rely on plaza or courtyard size, elevation, accessibility, and labor investment to conclude that constructed boundaries and entrances allowed residents or occupants to manipulate the movements of others within and around structures (Houston and Inomata 2009: 177). After comparing architectural configurations in site cores at Caracol, Xunantunich, and Cahal Pech, Awe concluded that spatial organization and architectural boundaries can demarcate hierarchical relationships among the elite (2008: 170). Based on

architectural organization alone, there appears to have been several elite residential groups within Lower Dover's site core (see Figure 2.2). By briefly comparing Lower Dover's Plaza Group F architectural configuration and position to those of other elite residence groups, I can situate the elite residents in the Lower Dover and Belize Valley noble hierarchy.

Houston and Inomata suggest that most Maya elite dwellings and royal courts were modelled on the modest patio grouping, houses (sometimes on platforms) surrounding an open space for activities (2009: 178). At Lower Dover, Plazas H, G, J, K, and L have house group configurations or multiple structures that surround an open patio. However, each group has a different size and configurations vary (see Table 2-1 and Figure 2.2).

Table 2-1 Areas of Lower Dover Plaza Groups

Plaza	Function	Area (m ²)
Plaza H	Elite Residence	1050
Plaza G	Elite Residence	100
Plaza J	Elite Residence	85
Plaza K	Elite Residence	1100
Plaza F	Elite Residence	100
Plaza L	Elite Residence?	50
Plaza A	Public Plaza	12,000
Plaza B	Public Plaza	10,000

These groups may have housed elite people of varying status. In his efforts to develop an elite hierarchy at Cahal Pech, Awe (1990) uses courtyard size, accessibility, and elevation. I adapted his method to understand the rank of Plaza Group F elites at Lower Dover within the elite hierarchy based on excavated elite residences civic ceremonial center (Plazas G and F) and

the settlement area at Barton Ramie (BR-147). Awe concludes based on a comparative sample from the Belize Valley that activities with restricted participants took place in smaller, more elevated courtyards where access could be easily controlled (2008: 162). In addition to courtyard size, accessibility, and elevation, I include construction materials and necessary labor intensity in my evaluation of Lower Dover's elite hierarchy (Table 2-2). When compared to the other residential plaza groups, Plaza F is relatively small (Table 2-1). However, it is attached to the Acropolis Complex, defined as the raised Plaza Groups C and E (Figure 2.2). The structures and courtyard that make up Plaza Group F are at a lower elevation than the Acropolis Complex. Small courtyard size and absence of entrances, stairs or doorways, into the plaza from either Plaza E or outside make it very unlikely that the Maya held community events in Plaza F. The amount of open space, 100 m², does not accommodate a large population or audience (see Section 3.2). Further, the difficulty associated with accessibility indicates that only a very particular set of Lower Dover occupants could use the space. The central, restricted location in which the Plaza Group F residents lived makes it likely that they were high on the elite hierarchy at Lower Dover. Plaza Group F's presence in relation to the Acropolis Complex (Guerra et al 2013), suggests it is an elite space. Instead, it is probable that interactions there were limited to family or household use.

Table 2-2 Ranking the previously excavated elite residences at Lower Dover and Barton Ramie based on architectural traits. Comparison includes only excavated residences.

Hierarchical Trait	Lower Dover Plaza F	Lower Dover Plaza G	Barton Ramie BR-147
Size	Small (100 m ²)	Small (85 m ²)	Large (450 m ²)
Elevation	Below the Acropolis Complex, but higher platforms than other elite residential groups (L, G, H)	Possible single course platform	Platforms between 0.7 m and 2.8 m above ground level
Accessibility	Entirely bordered by structures, absence of doorways	Two openings to the south, around G29	Not restricted, but neighboring mounds are at least 50-75 m away
Proximity to Acropolis Complex	Attached to south	Approximately 150 m to the northeast	Approximately 1,000 m northwest, across river
Construction Materials	Stone platforms, plaster floor, pole and thatch superstructures, possible staircase	Plaster floor, stone architecture, bench	Stone platforms, plaster floor, stone retaining walls, benches (3), staircase, pole and thatch superstructures
Necessary Labor Intensity	Stone platform (Structure F26) is approximately 0.7 m tall, 14 m long, and 4 m wide, low labor intensity compared to pyramidal structures in Plazas B and A	Uncertain, stone architecture is extremely eroded and collapsed, but there are multiple construction phases	Stone platform (Structure 147) is approximately 1.3 m tall, 26 m long, and 10 m wide, high labor intensity when compared to mounds at Barton Ramie
Necessary Labor Intensity	Stone platform (Structure F26) is approximately 0.7 m tall, 14 m long, and 4 m wide, low labor intensity compared to pyramidal structures in Plazas B and A	Uncertain, stone architecture is extremely eroded and collapsed, but there are multiple construction phases	Stone platform (Structure 147) is approximately 1.3 m tall, 26 m long, and 10 m wide, high labor intensity when compared to mounds at Barton Ramie

The larger, unstudied groups in the site core, Plaza Groups H and K, may indicate residential longevity or increased construction efforts, but they are detached from the Acropolis Complex. They are not located geographically in spaces of central importance (Figure 2.2). While the second largest plaza group, Plaza H is furthest (approximately 250 m) from the Acropolis Complex. Excavations in Plaza G evaluated a group of structures believed to house elites. Plaza G is a small, but formal plaza group north of the ball court (see Figure 2.3). Two burials were recovered in Plaza G. The burial goods associated with these individuals included an olla, a vase, and shell (marine and freshwater) beads. Guerra and Arksey suggest the interred individuals were closely connected to or members of an elite family due to the jade inlays in their incisors (2012). However, Plaza G's ease of access indicates that the area was not entirely restricted and its size is quite small. These individuals, while appearing wealthy, may have been of lesser status than the residents of Plaza Group F. Other elite residences associated with Lower Dover include those in the settlement areas, such as Barton Ramie-147. This is the largest house group or plazuela excavated at Barton Ramie. There is considerably more effort put into the construction in the settlement residence (BR-147) than that put into construction in Plaza Group F (Table 2-2). Further, BR-147 is over four times larger than Plaza Group F. This suggests that elites hierarchies are complex and that those living adjacent to the Acropole, Plaza Group F occupants, may not have the most significant or highest level positions.

2.5 PLAZA F: SITE FORMATION

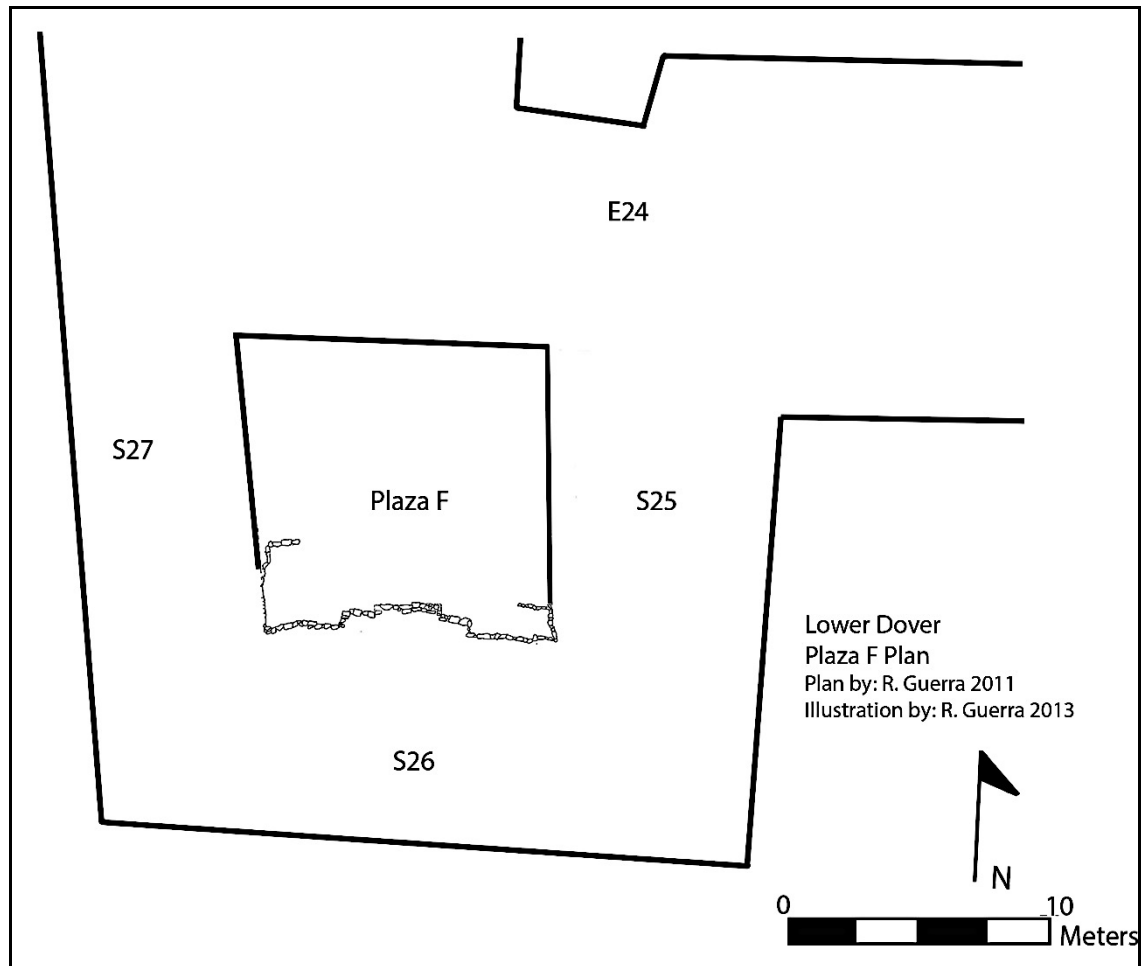


Figure 2.5 Plan map of Plaza Group F at Lower Dover, the southernmost space in the acropolis group (adapted from Guerra and Morton 2011 and Guerra et al. 2014).

Excavations in Plaza Group F began in 2012 and continued in 2013. Plaza Group F is the southernmost group attached to the monumental site core at Lower Dover (Guerra et al 2013). Designating the area as a plaza is a product of naming conventions common in the Belize Valley. Somewhat problematically, this convention also brings with it certain expectations and interpretive complications. Although platform structures entirely border the 10 x 10 meter space, the area is more similar in size to a patio than a civic ceremonial plaza (see Figure 2.5). Patios or “courtyards” are generally open, leveled, paved over, but defined by buildings (Andrews 1975: 38). For Plaza F, poorly preserved plaster covers the terminal floor and architectural features provide boundaries for the open space. Three identified residential structures demarcate the south, east, and west courtyard edges, Structures F25, F26, and F27. The northern edge is the backside of the neighboring Acropole, Structures E23 and E24 (Guerra et al 2013). A single staircase extending about 0.6 meters into the open courtyard was located along Structure 26 (Guerra et al 2012). At present, this is the only architectural feature providing access to the inset patio from the bounding platforms, although it is possible that another is along the east side of Structure F27.

The platforms are the only identified residential features around Plaza F. There is no evidence for stone masonry buildings topping the basal platforms. When occupied, these basal platforms likely had perishable superstructures, similar to those expected to have been on Structure E24 atop the Acropole (Guerra et al 2013). Wattle and daub or pole and thatch structures often were efficient and effective substitutes for stone masonry buildings. Some suggest that elites, in attempts to convey their power, only lived in dwellings constructed with stone materials also used to build ceremonial structures (Andrews 1975: 47, McKillop 2006: 235), but there are examples of perishable elite residential buildings. The motivations to build

perishable superstructures at Lower Dover are not clear. It may be that the residents in Plaza Group F chose to sacrifice grand appearances for comfort. Alternatively, the predicted rapid rate of construction and remodeling at Lower Dover during the Late Classic may have made permanent residential structures unjustified. This will be considered again when discussing political and economic relationships at Lower Dover in Section 3.2.

2.5.1 Site Formation and Archaeological Units

The excavations in Plaza Group F¹ began at the base of Structure 26 along the building's north side to recover possible offerings along the plaza's south edge (see Figure 2.6). The units pertaining to this study were excavated using first natural and then cultural levels. Natural levels were comprised of humus and collapse from nearby structures, while cultural levels included the materials from the terminal occupation deposit. 2012 excavations in units F26-1 and F26-2 began to yield large dense concentrations of broken pottery directly on and above the floor. The first lot included all those materials sitting above the floor (on collapsed stair) and the second contained artifacts sitting directly on the plaster floor (see Figure 2.7). This strategy aimed to increase the precision and document provenience. To evaluate possible stratigraphic differentiation in the assemblage, excavators bisected units PF-21, PF-16, PF-11, and PF-6. They found no discernable levels and collect the assemblage above the floor as a single layer. Adjacent units, F25-6 and F26-7 were then opened to determine the horizontal extent of the assemblage (Guerra et al 2012, Guerra et al 2013).

¹ All excavations were under the direction of Rafael Guerra. The excavation strategies were not my own. For this study, I was kindly granted access to excavated materials and field reports. I was in the field for the 2013 excavation season as a student.



Figure 2.6 Plaza Group F plan map with excavation units overlaid. Shading illustrates the year of excavation. Labels in the center of each unit were assigned in the field during excavations (PF=plaza floor, F26=associated with Structure 26, F25=initially thought to be associated with Structure 25, actually associated with Structure 26).

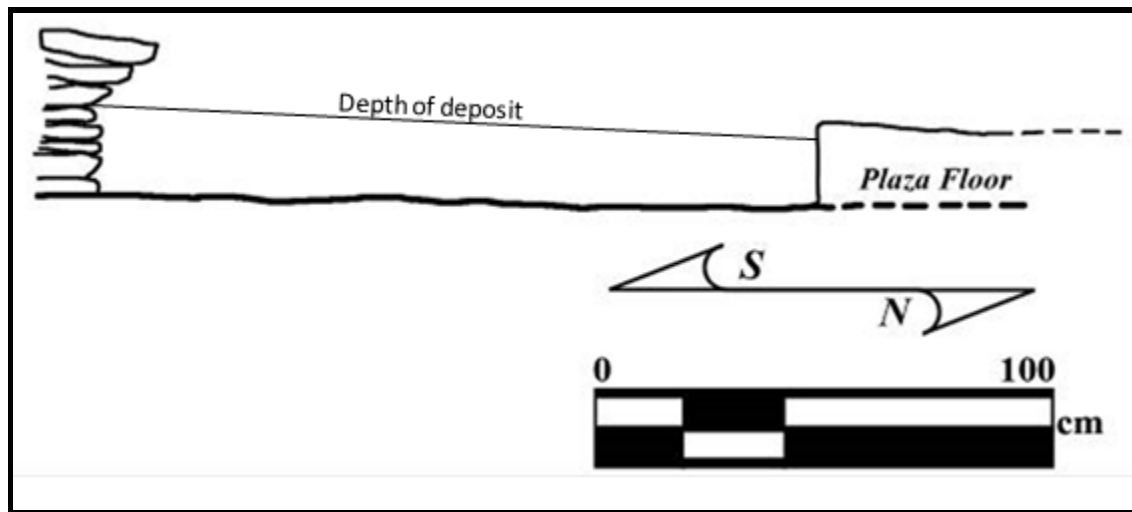


Figure 2.7 Depth of deposition against Structure 26 in Plaza Group F, measures 20 cm against an 8 course basal platform.

The sheet deposit covered from about 20 cm above floor to directly on the floor and stairs of Structure F26 (Guerra et al 2012). While the assemblage recovered in F26-1, F26-2, and F26-3 was recovered in two levels, the deposit in Plaza Group F against Structures 25 and 26 was associated with a single occupation level – that of terminal construction. Because the assemblage was horizontally continuous, not differentiable vertically, and ceramic sherds from multiple units belonged to the same vessel, I believe it is acceptable to evaluate the assemblage *en masse*, rather than by individual unit. Further, excavations to the southern side of the plaza did not cut through the topmost plaster floor to reveal possible earlier construction phases. This prevents my analysis from evaluating Plaza Group F residential activities diachronically.

2.5.2 Termination Rituals

This section will consider the assemblage's manner of deposition and the significance residents likely attached to materials deposited (see Appendix B). Mayanists are increasingly concerned with site formation and distinguishing types of "assemblages", creating labels such as problematical deposit, terminal occupation deposit, and kratophanous deposit (Stanton et al 2008). More simply defined, these are artifact assemblages that, "Resemble middens in composition, but appear ritual in context," and therefore create an interpretive conundrum (Clayton et al 2005: 120). The Plaza Group F assemblage at Lower Dover has provided a window into the possessions and practices of an elite group living in the civic ceremonial center. I was capable of drawing these conclusions because people chose to leave these items in this manner. They preserved very specific activities that I believe made up important parts of their lives. The depositional context, smashed artifacts on the floor and stair outcropping of terminal

architecture suggests the residents conducted a termination rite before leaving their home on Structure 26.



Figure 2.8 On-floor artifact deposition against Structure F26. Clockwise from top right, Unit F26-2 plan, horizontal exposure of Units F26-2 and F26-3 facing west, Units F26-1 (partial) and F26-2 plan (Photographs courtesy of Renee Collins).

Termination rituals are part of cyclical Maya ideology. The Maya consecrated their structures by caching objects beneath the floors. Conversely, they deconsecrated the structures before reconstruction, modification, or following terminal use. While the Maya interred intact items to dedicate and animate a sacred space, they destroyed items to deactivate a space – removing its supernatural power (Matthews and Garber 2004: 53). Broken (in use) artifacts are

common in the archaeological record, but purposeful breaking has alternate implications.

Smashing objects had economic and ideological significance for the Maya. The practice is not limited to termination processes, but used in several different ritual contexts. Most artifacts, particularly ceramics, from Plaza Group F were intentionally broken before deposition. The breaks were sharp and purposeful. The evaluated materials contained no complete ceramic vessels and those that were scattered rather than broken in situ. I will discuss religious activities and ceremonies further in Section 3.3 in regards to the assemblage materials.

It requires clarification that in the following arguments, I characterize the assemblage in its entirety because I believe the materials represent a large ritual event followed later by a series of similar ritual events. The rituals associated with the assemblage suggest people chose each material particularly for deposition. It is for this reason that I use the assemblage composition to indicate what Plaza Group F residents possessed, determine the activities commonly associated with these items, and infer that these goods were of some significance. People desired to preserve their practices based on the ritualized nature of deposition.

3.0 ELITE HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES

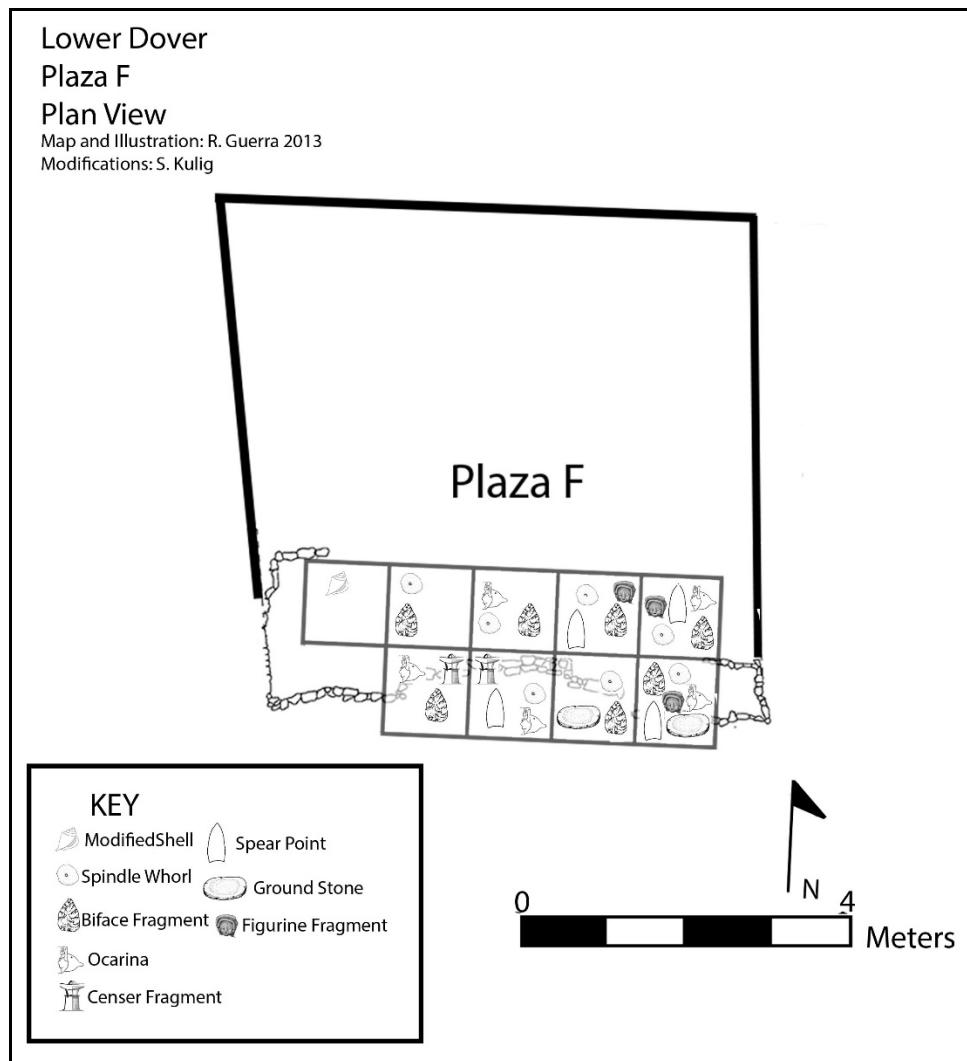


Figure 3.1 Artifact distribution across the north face of Plaza F. Note that ceramic sherds and lithic debitage were recovered in all units in great abundance and are not included in the Figure.

3.1 DOMESTIC PRACTICE

Under the assumption that people, likely elites, lived in and around Plaza F, their everyday life or common domestic tasks should be represented in the material record they chose to preserve.

Although daily life differed for various Maya individuals, there are some activities that are, for the most part, universal to the household space. Everyday tasks are often associated with craft production and food – procurement, cooking, storage, and consumption (Wilk and Rathje 1982: 622). Robin suggests the Maya living in households at Chan, a farmstead village, prepared food and made stone tools simultaneously outside their homes (2002: 257-258). While elites participated in activities different from those of farmers, the people who lived at Lower Dover in Plaza Group F procured, cooked, and stored food in addition to crafting. Artifacts in Plaza Group F that indicate these practices include cooking vessels, grinding stones, hunting tools, storage jars, and crafting (represented by debitage). While these represent everyday domestic practices, I will also consider more specialized craft production (making jewelry, thread).

3.1.1 Food Procurement, Cooking, and Storage

Lowland Maya have many different available foodstuffs, such as corn, beans, squash, deer, snail, freshwater fish, and turkey (White and Schwarcz 1989: 452). These foods were either intensively grown, as evidenced by the terraces around Barton Ramie, or hunted. While no artifacts found in Plaza Group F are directly associated with farming (stone hoes), it is

impossible to conclude whether residents grew their own crops. Farming tools may have been discarded elsewhere or made of perishable materials. However, there are items potentially used for hunting. Stone tools, such as chert spear points (4 fragments) or bifaces (5 fragments, 2 complete), might have been hafted onto a shaft and used to hunt game. Net sinkers (4) or line weights suggest the people in Plaza Group F relied on freshwater fish and snails from the local rivers as viable food sources. Hunting and fishing tools are the only items that suggest Plaza Group F residents procured their own food. Faunal analyses conducted following excavations in 2012 by Norbert Stanchly (Table 3-1) suggest that residents had access to and were eating food in Plaza Group F; they likely hunted several protein-rich animals including deer (Stanchly 2013). However, foodstuffs may be given to elites in Plaza Group F as tribute rather than the elites procuring food themselves.

Table 3-1 Distribution of Zoological Taxons represented in the faunal remains from Plaza F assemblage. Measurements are NISP or number of identified specimens, a gross count of bones.

Zoological Taxon	NISP	%NISP
<i>Oliva</i> sp. – Olive snail	1	2.32
Family Scaridae – parrotfish	1	2.32
Family Kinosternidae – kinosternid turtles	4	9.30
Order Testudines – turtle	12	27.91
Class Aves –unidentified bird	1	2.32
<i>Canis familiaris</i> – domestic dog	1	2.32
<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i> – white tailed deer	2	4.65
Class Mammalia – unidentified mammal	12	27.91
Unidentified bone	9	20.93
Total	43	

Following food procurement, it was processed in several stages. Prior to cooking, animals had to be cleaned and corn was ground. While there are no farming implements in Plaza Group F, there are manos and metates. The Maya ground their primary foodstuff, maize, into a flour using manos and metates made from various ground stone materials including limestone, granite, and basalt (Inomata and Stiver 1998: 440). Granite is the most common raw material the Belize Valley Maya used to make ground stone tools (Hoggarth 2012: 117). Two mano fragments and one metate fragment (Appendix B) suggest people in Plaza Group F processed maize for dietary use. Other processing items include obsidian blades and chert bifaces that could be used to cut food or clean meat. Obsidian blades also have potential ritual purposes that I will cover in Section 3.4.

Maya cooking vessels include ollas or jars and comales or griddles that were placed over a hearth. Only one griddle fragment was identified in the assemblage, but olla fragments were more abundant (Table 3-2). Based on the presence of ollas and a griddle, it is an acceptable conclusion that elites in Plaza Group F were cooking. Their elite status did not exempt them from preparing their nourishment. The foodstuffs, corn and beans, processed and prepared in Plaza Group F also required storage. Storage vessels provided the residents with a method to keep food and water near to the home and preparation area, as well as protected from the elements. Storage vessels include several types of large, unslipped jars (Table 3-2). The presence of jars indicates that food was prepared and stored in and around Plaza F residences.

Table 3-2 Counts and proportions of cooking, serving, and storage ceramic sherds relative to total sherds from Lower Dover Plaza F.

Ceramic Vessel Function	Count	Vessel Function Sherd Count / Total Sherd Count
Cooking (griddle, ollas)	106	7.8%
Serving (plates, dishes, bowls, vases)	843	61.9%
Storage (jars)	413	30.3%
Total	1362	

3.1.2 Craft Production

Household or domestic based craft production is an important characteristic of Mesoamerican society (Hirth 2009: 18). People made tools and craft items for their own use, as well as for economic exchange. Based on the assemblage outside Structure 26, people in Plaza Group F practiced multicrafting. Items associated with crafting found in the Plaza Group F assemblage include jewelry, stone tools (bifaces, obsidian blades), bone (pin, flute), and spindle whorls. This section will evaluate more everyday practices, such as stone tool reduction and sharpening, in addition to specialized crafting practices. Specialized crafting includes jewelry making and thread spinning, or more generally textile production.

Everyday craft production generates artifacts used on a daily basis and not solely on special occasions. The presence of not only completed spear points, obsidian blades, and bifaces (Appendix B), but also raw materials in early processing stages suggests that people were actively crafting in Plaza Group F. Chert debitage (2461 flakes recovered) in Plaza Group F increases the likelihood that residents created stone tools and maintained them by sharpening.

People in Plaza Group F worked with some more rare raw stone material, such as quartz and petrified wood. Polished and modified crystals are somewhat common in the Belize Valley, particularly in burial contexts and caves (Brady and Prufer 1999:139). However, petrified wood is rare and attempts to modify the wood beyond polishing are unique in the Belize Valley. The residents at Plaza Group F reduced the petrified wood using lithic reduction techniques, possibly attempting to make a tool from an abnormal raw material.

In addition to stone tool production, crafting with bone may have been common to the residents in Plaza Group F. Preliminary faunal analysis of the 2012 material indicated that 28.9% of the bones from units F26-1, F26-2, and F26-3 (currently the only faunal remains analyzed from the assemblage) showed various degrees of modification or intentional working (Stanchly 2013: 240). The remaining bones have natural modifications like rodent gnawing, burning, or are too poorly preserved to draw any conclusions. The modified bones were worked to remove primary and secondary debitage. Incomplete tools manufactured from bone include a bone pin, a bone flute, and a bone tube (Stanchly 2013: 240-242). While at present items from 2013 excavations have not been analyzed as thoroughly, similar bone artifacts were recovered including a drilled pendant made from a canine tooth (Figure 3.2). Partially worked faunal remains, bone debitage, and lithic debitage allow the conclusion that Plaza Group F residents were producing craft items from bone, shell, chert, and obsidian.



Figure 3.2 Canine tooth pendant recovered in Unit PF-6, Lot PF-48. Olive tinklers (snail shells that rattle when knocked together) recovered in Unit PF-2, Lot PF-52 (from right to left).

While they worked with raw materials such as bone, shell, and stone to make everyday (common) craft items, Maya in Plaza Group F also created specialized (rare) items. A cobble (Figure 3.3) from PF-6 has a hole drilled through it similar to those drilled in the canine tooth and olive tinklers (Figure 3.2). It was a pendant that someone hung on a cord. These completed items do not directly indicate production; they could instead be traded objects. However, a semi-drilled, unfinished ceramic pendant (Figure 3.3), also found in PF-6, suggests the Maya did produce pendants in Plaza Group F.

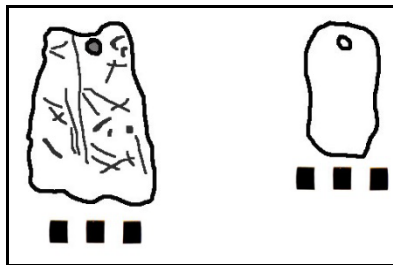


Figure 3.3 Sketch of cobble pendant, right, and unfinished (half drilled) ceramic pendant, left (S. Kulig).

There was also a chert drill in the assemblage. At Aguateca Aoyama recognized the simultaneous occurrence of shell bead production and manufacture with drills and stone tools in the archaeological record. Although found at a much larger production center, the association between drills and raw materials suggests that drills served to carve and perforate shell and bone (Aoyama 2007: 21). It is possible that residents used the chert drill from Plaza Group F to make some of the pendants recovered.

Another form of specialized craft production that likely took place in Plaza Group F was thread spinning. Spindle whorls, 28 total, were all made from disks that appear to be recycled potsherds. No spindle whorls were specially constructed from limestone. Additionally, makers did not decorate their spindle whorls beyond a basic slip (red), which more likely was applied to

the original ceramic vessel. At other Belize Valley sites, Baking Pot and Xunantunich, spindle whorls have geometric designs incised in their surfaces. The Maya used spindle whorls to spin thread, a significant part of the sewing and weaving process (Hendon 1997:38-39). Hoggarth's (2012: 128) study in Baking Pot settlement clusters of varying status suggests that cloth production is an elite pursuit. She found fewer spindle whorls in commoner households relative to noble households. The spindle whorl distribution relative to total sherds in Plaza Group F (0.17%) is similar to the Terminal Classic noble households in Baking Pot's settlement (roughly 0.25%). Some spinning production may have allowed the Plaza Group F residents to exchange cotton or maguey cloth. This also implies that the residents had access to the cotton or maguey fibers grown locally and necessary to spin thread. Other textile production artifacts include at least one pin/bodkin made from an unidentified mammal bone (Stanchly 2013: 242) used for weaving and six roller stamp fragments. Roller stamps or cylinder seals are deeply carved, could be dipped in pigment, and used to transfer designs or glyphs on to the body, textile, or plaster (Rice 2009: 409). The combination of spindle whorls for thread production, a pin/bodkin for weaving, and roller stamps for decorating textiles suggest Plaza Group F residents participated in all stages of textile production.

3.1.3 Conclusions about Domestic Practices

Based on the materials recovered from the Plaza Group F assemblage, the resident elites were active outside ritual and politics. They took on at least some of their own food procurement, and much of their cooking, and storage. Producing for other elites in the Acropole and civic ceremonial center may explain some crafting by residents in Plaza Group F. At Aguateca, Inomata suggests artistic production was common to some Maya elites. He attributes elite

interest in crafting to both economic and ideological pursuits. Elites drew on the connectivity between created objects and supernatural power when they produced craft items; it enabled them to embody the divine (2001: 329-331). Inomata's conclusions contradict those drawn for the urban centers of Caracol and Tikal. Chases and Haviland suggest that workshops and production spaces were never attached directly to elite households. Instead, production took place throughout the urban center in specialized production areas (1990: 503). It is possible that the prestige craft production center location varied across polities or kingdoms. It may depend on circumstances such as center size and elite control of workshop production or distribution. If at smaller polities, such as Lower Dover, elites had difficulty managing external workshops and trade, they may have chosen to take on production tasks themselves. In Plaza Group F, there is some evidence for elite craft production.

3.2 ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The proliferation of small, potentially autonomous (Audet and Awe 2005: 363), polities in the Belize Valley during the Late Classic would have increased the likelihood of elites interacting (Cioffi-Revilla and Landman 1999:585-586). Economic integration in the Belize Valley and canoe accessible transportation along the Belize River facilitated resource movement across both long and short distances, which provided people with access to local and non-local goods (Shafer and Hester 1991: 94). These relationships, when combined with craft production discussed in

Sections 3.2 and 3.4, were necessary if elites wanted to maintain control and restrict the distribution of certain items.

3.2.1 Trade

The Belize River is only 50 meters north of Lower Dover's civic ceremonial center, which eased trade and made items more accessible. Economic connectivity allowed elites to have access to restricted items or non-local raw materials needed to make new wares. Elites used craft specialization and control over prestige items as political currency. Regulated craft production and circulation could be monopolized by elites through marriage, alliances, or patron-client relationships. Restricted items often included those made with labor-intensive techniques (LeCount 1999:240-241). People in Plaza Group F at Lower Dover produced their craft items with both local and non-local raw materials, which they likely traded to gain political and economic advantages.

Some non-local materials Plaza Group F residents accessed were marine shell, obsidian, and exotic fauna such as parrotfish and marine crustaceans (shell). Freshwater animals including turtles, jute (snails), and fish were readily available to Lower Dover residents, although fish are underrepresented in Plaza F (Stanchly 2013: 239). However, the Belize Valley Maya traded to gain access to restricted marine resources from the Caribbean Sea. The coast is about 95 km from Lower Dover and people likely traveled in canoes along the Belize River. Marine shell is a rare, but accessible resource to people in the Belize Valley (Hoggarth 2012: 106). While people may have eaten marine fish and crustaceans, it is more likely that those living in Plaza Group F used the shells (*Olivia* sp. and an unidentified gastropod) and bones (parrotfish, Family Scaridae) for ornament production (Stanchly 2013: 244), as indicated by worked remains (see

Appendix B for complete list). Belize Valley Maya likely displayed the marine shell ornaments in public or private contexts to demonstrate their status through their ability to possess prestige items. Ornaments were also given as gifts to political allies and family members (LeCount 1999:241).

People living in Plaza Group F not only traded within a coastal network and distributed traded raw materials, but had access to a larger exchange system to the west and north. Some Maya pottery or molds for making the pottery were distributed through an exchange system in the lowlands. Elite or trade wares can be distinguished using some stylistic or decorative techniques (Helmke and Reents-Budet 2008: 46). Elite ceramic vessels or those with restricted production could provide information regarding both the local interactions at Lower Dover and regional political relationships in the Belize Valley. Namely, the elites at Plaza Group F had access to the Ahk'utu' Molded-carved type, fitted with a Primary Standard Sequence (a series of dedicatory glyphs) and to other examples of fine orange ware (see Appendix B). Helmke and Reents-Budet suggest these kinds of vessels are associated with a single patron who managed either mold or completed vessel distribution, isolated to the Belize River area (2008: 46). Maya royalty may have given molded carved vessels to lesser elites, possibly to establish social and political relationships, distributing them through settlements and minor political centers in the Belize Valley (LeCount 2001: 948). While less prevalent in the Plaza Group F assemblage than Ahk'utu' Molded-carved (0.7% Ahk'utu' to 0.1% Fine orange), fine orange ash ware has a larger exchange network throughout the lowlands. In either case, Group F residents were probably part of a greater regional ceramic exchange system that allowed elites to access other non-local materials.

3.2.2 Conflict and Violence

Violence in the Belize Valley and Maya lowlands, like violence elsewhere in Mesoamerica, was both political and ritual. While epigraphic inscriptions have provided some information about conflicts between large Maya political capitals, the relationship lesser Belize Valley polity elites have in geopolitical affairs remains unclear. Long-term hostilities between Tikal, Caracol, and Naranjo, may have had dramatic demographic or territorial consequences that influenced the lesser polities in a Belize Valley periphery (Webster 2000: 96-97, Chase and Chase 2000: 21-22). Even if enemies never invaded and occupied Lower Dover, it is still possible that the elite population engaged in ritualized violent processes similar to the captive exchange depicted on a ceramic vessel in Plaza Group F.

While the material record does not appear to reflect a violent end like that suggested at Caracol (Chase and Chase 2000:74) or Aguateca (Inomata and Stiver 1998: 432), local iconography reflects the violent political and religious environment in which elites lived. The molded-carved vases found at Lower Dover in Plaza Group F depict the presentation of a captive to an elite warrior wearing a headdress and carrying a staff. Marcus suggests this kind of image is a prisoner-taking event and associates such iconography with conquest memorials (1974: 86). When placed on a large drinking vase used by elites during special events or public displays, this scene shares a message about the owner with those who observe it. Further, it indicates that elites at Lower Dover may have had experience with captive taking practices.

Objects present in front of Structure 26, in every unit except PF-21, are indicative of violent practices. While likely related to hunting, it is possible that those in Plaza Group F used weapons – spears and bolas – to engage in violent conflict with humans, as well as animals. It is possible that they made spears by hafting bifaces onto long poles or used the grooved granite

spheres (2 broken spheres) as bolas. If archaeologists expect evidence such as fortifications, desecrated buildings, and burial destruction to determine whether violent conflict occurred (Pagliaro et al. 2003:79-80), then the archaeological record at Lower Dover does not reflect instances of violent conflict, but Plaza Group F residents had stone tools they could have used as weapons.

3.2.3 Feasting

Feasting, when observed in relation to competition and power development, may be one of several tools Maya elites and possibly commoners used to manipulate political hierarchies and manage their alliances. By displaying and exchanging wealth items, families and individuals gained prestige and built relationships within their communities (LeCount 2001:937). However, feasting did not serve a single purpose. While politically and economically charged, it also had extensive ritual significance for the Maya (McAnany 1995: 8). Should the people in Plaza Group F have feasted, it is likely that they were responsible for providing food and table settings for those in attendance. In my consideration of feasting in Plaza Group F, I first consider the ratio of serving vessels to cooking vessels. Should feasting have taken place, the residents would need ceramic vessels to display and serve food. Second, I consider the practices associated with different forms – chocolate consumption from vases, small bowls for individual dining, and plates/dishes for tamale serving. Finally, I will compare decorated serving vessels to non-decorated serving vessels. This will provide a better understanding of the serving vessels that might have been used for more special circumstances and practices, such as offerings. In this section, I will also consider artifacts used to display status, like pendants. These would likely have been worn during political or community events, such as feasting.

In her examination of feasting at Xunantunich, LeCount examined the distribution of serving vessels and food preparation vessels in various functional contexts including elite housing, commoner housing, and temples (LeCount 2001: 947). However, without a comparative ceramic sample from other areas at Lower Dover or its periphery, I compared ceramic assemblage composition from a Late/Terminal Classic elite dwelling space at Baking Pot (Table 3-3) and Xunantunich (Table 3-4) to those in Plaza Group F. When compared to Late to Terminal Classic ceramics at Baking Pot's Settlement Cluster C, Plaza Group F at Lower Dover has a much higher serving to cooking vessel ratio. This ratio may indicate that residents held feasts in Plaza Group F.

Table 3-3 Distributions of cooking and serving vessels in Late/Terminal Classic elite or noble households at Lower Dover Plaza F and Baking Pot Settlement Cluster C (Hoggarth 2012: 166). Proportions are based on diagnostic rim sherd counts. The ratio at Baking Pot is reported as a range because a distinction was made between serving and cooking vessels from the Late Classic and the Terminal Classic.

Site and Area	Serving: Cooking Vessels
Lower Dover Plaza F	7.95
Baking Pot Settlement Cluster C	1.49-1.57

In addition to establishing that feast givers possess more serving vessels, LeCount suggests that specific vessel forms are associated with different feasting behaviors – offerings of sacred food, chocolate consumption, and eating (LeCount 2001: 946-947). At Xunantunich, she suggests that the Maya served tamales in plates and dishes (2001: 946). Should this be the case, the people in Plaza F may frequently hold feasts where they serve food in plates and dishes (Table 3-5). However, if residents use only the decorated plates and dishes at Lower Dover for serving people at public or private feasting events, the percent of plate and dish forms decreases

to 7.56%. This is much more similar to the reported value for elite residence Group D at Xunantunich. Using decorated vessels may indicate the feasting event at Lower Dover had a more specialized or ritual purpose, this will be explored further in reference to religious practices (see 3.4.2). This makes the elite feasting and redistribution behaviors in Plaza Group F similar to those practiced elsewhere, but possibly still not greatly influential to political manipulation (LeCount 2001: 949).

Table 3-4 Comparison of vessel forms at Xunantunich Group D and Lower Dover Plaza F (count of x form rim sherds/total sherd count). In her comparison, LeCount grouped plates and dishes because of their similar function, tamale serving.

Vessel Form	Xunantunich Group D All Vessels		Lower Dover Plaza F All Vessels		Lower Dover Plaza F Decorated Vessels	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Plates and Dishes	16	6.84	410	27.21	69	4.58
Vases	2	0.85	23	1.53	14	0.93
Bowls	154	65.81	410	27.21	21	1.39
Jars	62	26.5	519	34.44	38	2.52

In her feasting scenario at Xunantunich, LeCount also examined the distribution of vases across the site in various contexts. She concluded that the Maya drank cacao, a politically charged act, from special vessels (2001: 947). Elite consumption at Lower Dover in Plaza Group F appears to support LeCount’s conclusion. Although Plaza Group F has a relatively higher percentage of vase forms than Group D at Xunantunich, it is not quite as high as that expected for a temple (4.34% also from LeCount 2001). LeCount argues that cacao was a controlled substance and became a political currency similar to other prestige goods. Here, drinking, “Cacao condensed religious, economic, and social meaning into a single material referent,” (LeCount 2001: 948). Should this be the case the elites in Plaza Group F had access to cacao and

the political, economic, and social power to drink the beverage. Further, they had the vases needed to drink the cacao in private or public events.

Plaza Group F Maya could use decorated serving vessels, modeled vases, and restricted food or beverage consumption, cacao drink, to display personal status at feasts. However, another means to display status is on one's person. Jewelry and body paint provide a medium to communicate status visually. While I discussed jewelry production in Section 3.2, three pendants in Plaza Group F were complete rather than in production. Possession of a dog tooth pendant or cobble pendant could represent a person's ability to access specially crafted items. People may also have communicated status and familial connections with designs marked on the body using the roller stamp (Section 3.2). Roller stamps might allow the possessor to paint glyphs or geometric designs on their skin or clothes to communicate status.

3.2.4 Conclusions about Political and Economic Relationships

The people in Plaza Group F managed their political and economic presence both at Lower Dover and throughout the Belize Valley. By crafting items and integrating themselves into larger exchange systems, the elites in Plaza Group F were able to receive marine resources, non-local pottery, restricted cacao, and obsidian. This access encouraged the elites at Lower Dover to maintain their relationships with other polities in the Maya area. Although Lower Dover was not involved in sudden violent conflict, the residents likely negotiated their political and ritual obligations through trade and feasting activities. It is possible that craft goods produced in Plaza Group F were part of an attached trade effort and distributed to lesser elites throughout Lower Dover's settlement communities, such as those living in BR-147 at Barton Ramie. These efforts

could consolidate power at the center, necessary for elites to retain control in a dynamic sociopolitical environment.

3.3 RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Maya elites use theatrical performance to retain political power and present ideology to large audiences. Elites also performed rituals at smaller scales for a more select audience (Demarest 2004: 205). Few if any grand displays could take place in Plaza Group F. The open space is too small to accommodate an audience larger than 100 people seated (see Figure 3.3). However, it would be extremely odd if the elites were not participating in non-public religious ceremonies and rituals in their living space. Household based ritual practices are common in the ancient Maya record. Domestic places are arenas for family-level ritual performances (Robin 2003: 312). The following section will evaluate religious practices that may have taken place in Plaza F including ceremonies and a termination event. At ceremonies, Plaza Group F residents and visitors used musical instruments (flutes, ocarinas) and incensarios to create a complete sensory experience. These artifacts allowed people in Plaza Group F to manipulate sound and smell, while creating different visual aids or restricting sight with smoke. This section will also evaluate the context of the Plaza Group F assemblage to determine whether a termination event led to its deposition.

3.3.1 Ceremonies

The size of Plaza Group F's patio or open central space makes large ceremonies difficult to imagine. Three basal platforms supported at least three superstructures around the plaza's periphery. If each structure housed an average 5.5 people (Haviland 1972: 136), then about 16 people lived around Plaza F. It is possible that others had access to the plaza area. While the permanent residential population is significant, maximum capacity may more accurately reflect the number of people who could participate in ceremonies or rituals. Based on comparative studies, Inomata and others outlined the connection between plaza size and audience size (Inomata 2006). The open courtyard in Plaza F is relatively small compared to other Plazas (Table 2-1), but its position in the monumental site core indicates its sociopolitical importance at Lower Dover (refer to Section 2.4). Images on buildings and ceramic vessels depict spectacles at varying scales. Inomata suggests the Maya frequently used open spaces, including those in residential areas, to perform certain rites or facilitate ceremonies (2006: 809-810). Spectacles occurred in both public and private and participation was restricted to reflect these spaces. Rituals that occurred in Plaza F would have been at a small scale and consequently included few people. Due to the restrictedness of Plaza Group F, it is likely that the residents explicitly invited ceremony participants. Although few certainties exist when estimating plaza audiences, previous studies have employed ethnographically or experimentally produced numbers from 0.46 to 21.6 square meters of space a person (Inomata 2006) (Table 3-5).

Table 3-5 Comparison of Lower Dover residential Plaza F occupancy limits to larger public Plazas A and B. Total population estimate at Lower Dover is conservatively 2,100 people (Section 2.3).

Behavior	Ethnographic Persons per Square Meter	Lower Dover Occupancy Limits (number of people)		
		Plaza F	Plaza A	Plaza B
Standing	0.46	217	26,086	21,739
Sitting	1	100	12,000	10,000
Movement (dancing)	3.6	27	3,055	2,778

Based on conservative occupancy limit, as people needed space for ritual practices, about 11 non-residents or 2 other elite families could attend ceremonies in Plaza F. Large public ceremonies and rituals would have been coordinated in Plaza A or B, the larger open spaces (Figure 2.2). Plazas A and B have large open spaces and access is not restricted. People would have been able to come from the settlement areas and congregate in these Plazas for rituals and ceremonies. This is not to suggest that ceremonies never took place in Plaza F.

Residences were often stages for ritual practices. Hendon argues that the home environment exists as a background for ritualized life; households, “Are physical and social spaces that actively contribute to the development of identity and memory from which local and localized histories grow,” (2010:96). Elites and commoners alike cached valuable objects, buried their dead beneath, and renovated their houses. Some artifacts in the Plaza Group F assemblage associated with ceremonial activities include *incensarios* and musical instruments. Maya used incense burners in various ritual contexts, but their purpose dependent upon the ritual context does not differ dramatically. Incense burners encourage a transition from and facilitate communication between the earthly realm and that of the divine. Smoke emerges from the burning material and rises to meet the ancestors and gods (Rice 1999: 28). Plaza Group F residents left two three-prong censer fragments in Plaza Group F on the stair of Structure 26 (Figure 3.1, Units F26-3 and F26-2). The fragments, together, make up the upper portion of the

incensario; the accompanying base was not identifiable. Burning incense during a ritual in Plaza Group F would add to the sensory experience, as incense generates both smells and smoke. Often, censers mark termination rituals (Rice 1999: 38); this will be explored further in the next section.

Musical instruments also played a significant role in ceremonies. People in Plaza Group F had ceramic ocarinas in anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms, ceramic flutes, and olive tinklers (drilled shells that when knocked against one another rattle similar to the coins on a belly dancer's skirt). Music added another dimension of performance, sound, to Maya spectacles and ceremonies. Cartwright, in reference to the Bonampak murals, suggests that the Maya used instruments during celebrations, in funerary contexts, and likely everyday life. Further, flute and ocarina production required skilled craftsmanship (Cartwright 2014:4-6). The three olive tinklers from Plaza Group F were crafted from marine shell, an imported resource. That the Maya used this material to produce instruments indicates music's importance. Inomata stresses the theatricality of Maya ceremonies (2006:809). Music contributed to this environment. Instruments (see Appendix B for complete list) in Plaza Group F suggest that the elites did rely on music to heighten their ceremonial experiences.

3.3.2 Terminating Plaza F

As I discussed in Section 2.5.2, termination rituals are a way to deconsecrate spaces by breaking objects and releasing their supernatural powers. If, as I have concluded, these efforts led to the formation of the assemblage in Plaza Group F, it is likely that some recovered materials played an active role in the ritual. Based on the abundance of serving vessels (see

Table 3-3), feasting may have accompanied the termination ceremonies. This would explain the immense number of broken potsherds and decorated serving vessels in the assemblage (see Table 3-4). The musical instruments, figurines, stone tools, and bone were also fragmented. Very few artifacts, only net sinkers and spindle whorls, were intact. This suggests the Maya actively broke and then scattered their possessions outside their home, which prevented reentry and rendered the objects unusable.

The broken incense burner left on the stair had a significant role in termination rituals. In her summary of censer production and use, Rice evaluates several reports from Late Classic sites in Belize where the Maya smashed censers on steps, in front of alters, or around stelae as part of termination rites. She explains this practice in relation to mortuary contexts, “The burning of incense ritually activates the sacred space of the structure, opening communication with the gods; the subsequent smashing of the censers deactivates it,” (Rice 1999:45). The incense burner fragments on the stair to Structure 26 suggests the Plaza Group F residents carried out termination processes and broke the connection between their home and the gods.

Other practices that sometimes accompany ethnohistoric accounts of termination include building destruction. Often, Mesoamerican house abandonment involves removing the roof or pulling down a corner post (Stross 1998: 37). At Lower Dover, this concept is difficult to examine archaeologically because the houses were perishable superstructures. A terminated pole and thatch house does not leave an impact equal to that made by defaced stone buildings. It remains unclear whether the Maya forcibly pulled down the houses atop platforms in Plaza Group F or their destruction resulted from natural deterioration. Daub, a material used in house construction, was distributed across the underlying plaster floor, but also throughout the

collapsed platform architecture suggesting that it is more likely the structure fell naturally. To this end, the precise circumstances of Plaza Group F termination remain speculative.

3.3.3 Conclusions About Religious Practices

As members of the elite subset at Lower Dover, residents of Plaza Group F performed certain rites and entertained practices to meet their religious needs. They played musical instruments and burned incense to enhance the sensory ritual experience via sound, smell, and sight. They communicated with their ancestors and gods with smoke. Their activities support conclusions that the Maya, particularly elites, commonly practiced household oriented rituals. Household based rituals at Plaza Group F likely culminated in termination before civic ceremonial center abandonment or desanctification. The ritual remnants present in Plaza Group F suggest that the termination ritual encouraged cultural remembering. Schwake and Iannone associate cultural remembering events with multiple people, object mediated recollection, a spatial referent, and a non-routine occasion (2010: 332). The residential group (multiple people) joined in Plaza Group F (spatial referent) to deposit significant items (object mediators) to terminate their homes before abandonment (non-routine occasion). I will evaluate the longevity of the Plaza Group F residents' collective memories in Section 4.2.

4.0 POST-OCCUPATION ACTIVITY

Postclassic activity is not common in the Belize Valley, particularly in civic ceremonial centers. Most centers in the Belize Valley were abandoned toward the end of the Late/Terminal Classic. However, some centers in the Belize Valley show similar indications of post-abandonment activity. At Cahal Pech, people remained in small numbers. Some constructed a, “crude low structure,” with recycled stones, while others returned to restricted plazas to conduct rituals (Hoggarth 2012: 22, 41-42). Early Postclassic ceramics (Table 4-1) and net sinkers (associated with Postclassic fishing methods) in Plaza Group F (see Appendix B) mixed with collapsed architecture, suggest that some people continued to engage in activities after construction in Lower Dover’s civic ceremonial center ceased and structures were terminated.

Table 4-1 Ceramic sherd counts from Plaza F at Lower Dover in relation to ceramic phase (Gifford 1976) and temporal association.

Ceramic Phase	Temporal Association	Sherds (raw count)
Tiger Run	Late Classic 1	2
Spanish Lookout	Late Classic/Terminal Classic	1352
New Town	Early Postclassic	59

Sparse activity in Plaza Group F at Lower Dover following abandonment may have resulted from continuity in the settlement areas. Low intensity persistence into the Postclassic in Plaza

Group F is mirrored in Lower Dover's northern settlement, Barton Ramie. Occupation at Barton Ramie decreased by only 5% during the Terminal Classic to Early Postclassic transition, whereas nearby populations decreased from 32% to 100% (Hoggarth 2012: 45). Hypotheses put forth to explain post-abandonment activity at Lowland Maya political centers include Thompson's temporary reoccupation (squatter) hypothesis and a revisiting hypothesis (Guerra et al 2013). Believing that practices of reoccupation and squatting have very different interpretive merit, the following section will explore the two hypotheses in light of the observed post-abandonment activity in Plaza Group F.

4.1 TEMPORARY REOCCUPATION, NONREMEMBERING

In reference to post-abandonment deposition, Thompson (1954) suggested that squatters lived in abandoned civic ceremonial structures and did not ascribe to acceptable refuse deposit behaviors. Squatter residence therefore generated midden like deposits in centers in and among abandoned architectural complexes (Stanton et al. 2008: 228). Following civic center abandonment, it is possible that some people decided to reoccupy certain spaces. However, without additional construction efforts like those observed at Cahal Pech (Hoggarth 2012:41), identifying patterns of post-abandonment refuse disposal and occupation is difficult because it has few analogous contexts (Stanton et al. 2008: 233). Should later excavations at Lower Dover reveal that the Maya did continue building, even informal structures, into the Early Postclassic, it is possible that some people reoccupied Plaza Group F at a low intensity.

4.2 REVISITING, REMEMBERING

Another approach to post-abandonment object discard in monumental civic centers suggests that Maya visited the spaces and conducted rituals. Post-abandonment visits to large ceremonial centers during the Early Postclassic may have offered remaining people an opportunity to connect with and venerate their ancestors preserved in tombs. These spaces also had associated power that visitors could harness and use following the appropriate rituals and offerings (Hyde and Martin 2006: 237). Postclassic ceramic wares in Plaza Group F scattered throughout the Late Classic on-floor materials and building collapse suggest people returned in some capacity and left broken vessels (Table 4-1). The relative lack of Postclassic and abundance of Late Classic ceramic wares leads me to conclude that there were multiple deposition events. The Late Classic event likely took place at a much greater scale than those that occurred during the Postclassic. So, while there are Postclassic materials mixed with the Late Classic materials on the plaza floor, this is the case because the events were not separated by enough time for considerable stratigraphic differentiation to appear. Further, the breaks, of these Postclassic wares, most often feet detachment, suggest that people did not leave intact vessels. Instead, they broke vessels and scattered their pieces, replicating the practice of the earlier residents' termination rituals (Section 3.4). Because daily life and practices create group histories and communities of memory (Hendon 2007:4) Plaza Group F became a spatial referent for its once residents. Although they released the supernatural power imbued in the Plaza Group F structures during termination (Section 3.4), the space likely remained significant. By revisiting Plaza

Group F to make offerings after abandonment, people may have fulfilled social obligations or physically relived certain memories and experiences. For those who lacked the collective memories associated with Plaza Group F, not once residents, visiting may have provided an opportunity to access the supernatural power contained in an elite area in a civic ceremonial center.

5.0 FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND REMARKS

This paper attempted to understand the ritual and functional significance of materials deposited in an elite Maya house group at Lower Dover, a minor center in the Belize Valley. To meet these goals, I wanted to develop and explore the Plaza Group F elite persons and their practices. After comparing basic architectural patterns at Lower Dover and its settlements, it is clear that a local elite hierarchy exists. The artifacts that make up the assemblage in Plaza Group F suggest that within the household residents' domestic, political, and religious lives merged. Plaza Group F residents had a diverse set of daily occupations in addition to more specialized practices. They may have crafted bone and stone tools, made jewelry, spun thread, hunted, and fished. Serving and cooking vessels suggest residents made food for themselves and potentially feasted with guests. I believe the assemblage from Plaza Group F represents a termination ritual that may have reinforced and generated collective memories, while deconsecrating the residential area before elites left the civic ceremonial center. Plaza Group F was either then reoccupied or more likely visited by people during the Early Postclassic. They appear to have carried out individual or smaller scale ritual ceremonies in the plaza, leaving behind some Postclassic ceramic vessels around the collapsing architecture.

Although Lower Dover is a minor center in the Maya lowlands, the elite hierarchy seems quite developed and Plaza Group F residents engaged in many mental pursuits. When compared to elites at larger centers, their magnitude and possessions may seem less impressive – their

jewelry is ceramic and bone, rather than jade – but they represent part of the diversity in Maya elite status and more generally, life.

5.1 FUTURE RESEARCH

Future projects could expand to compare multiple residences within Lower Dover's civic ceremonial center and settlement areas to evaluate the differences between different elites' practices. I began brief comparisons between elite residential architecture in Section 2.1, but additional excavations should provide a more comprehensive understanding of the elite variability and function. Excavations might be started in Plazas H, J, and K (Figure 2.1) to recover other possible termination events and generate an assemblage comparable to that from Plaza Group F. To increase the efficiency of possible termination deposit detection and recovery, these excavations should target the base of structures. At Blackman Eddy, termination deposits were placed at similar locations in several plaza groups (Matthews and Garber 2003). To minimize time expended, excavations could begin along the base of southern structures in Plazas H, J, and K. Additional excavation in Plaza Group F to the north plaza edge and analysis of excavated materials, particularly in regards to lithic debitage could better define elite production activities. Finally, additional survey to locate simpler elite house groups in the southern settlement area would add to the comparative sample of Lower Dover elites. These, along with other suggestions for continuing research throughout this paper, will enable others to

make more accurate conclusions in regards to elite relationships and practice at Lower Dover in the future.

APPENDIX A

METHODOLOGY

All artifacts were catalogued and curated by bvar during the years following excavation. While most levels containing deposit materials were noted during excavation, i used field notes regarding material distribution and soil characteristics to establish the boundaries of the deposit.

This method discerned nine adjacent units in which the deposit appeared. Several units spanned across the front of structure 26, the remainder sat on the courtyard floor directly in front of the structure. In the field, basic distinctions are used to separate particular diagnostic and non-diagnostic sherds. Diagnostic sherds include those that have a significant feature differentiating them from others. Generally, these sherds have well-preserved slip, decoration, are made of a distinct paste, or are part of a vessel rim. Non-diagnostic sherds are less distinct. They are often unslipped body sherds; however, the size and condition of preservation are also factors.

Diagnostic and non-diagnostic sherds were counted and separated based on lot number. Following separation, the diagnostic sherds were numbered and recorded to maintain provenience.

A.1 TYPE-VARIETY CLASSIFICATION

Further analysis and sorting focused on the sherds identified as diagnostic (defined above). This was a selective sample, but very few analyses are possible when using non-diagnostic sherds. The relatively large number of diagnostic sherds also suggests they form a representative sample of the deposit ceramics. After washing thoroughly, an initial sort evaluated paste and slip. While efforts did not concentrate solely on putting sherds into previously defined type-variety categories, many sherds fit descriptions of types offered by Gifford (1976). As this was the case, additional evaluation placed sherds in the most exclusive taxonomic category - ware, type, variety - possible. The separation of ceramic into types requires knowledge of ware or specific attributes of paste and surface finish. While type-variety is an abstraction, it represents ceramic construction techniques and communication. Types are associated with particular stratigraphic complexes defined at Barton Ramie (Table 1-1). The persistence of these complexes across the Belize Valley suggests they are a reliable form of relative dating. They also offer a manifestation of cultural phenomena. The types Gifford defined have been adapted and refined over the past forty years, but they remain a unit of regional comparison and synthesis. After sorting diagnostic sherds by paste and slip, evaluations shifted to vessel form.

A.2 FORM CLASSIFICATION

Forms provide information about use of vessels. Form analysis was adapted from Sabloff (1975:227) who differentiated between plates, dishes, bowls, jars, and vases.

Primary Form	Formal Description	Form's Function in Analysis
Plate	Height is less than one-fifth its maximum diameter	Serving ware
Dish	Height is more than one-fifth but less than one-third its maximum diameter	Serving ware
Bowl	Height is more than one-third but no more than its maximum diameter; orifice may be restricted (a rimmed bowl) or unrestricted	Serving ware
Jar	Height is greater than maximum diameter, and it has a neck	Storage and preparation ware
Vase	Height is greater than maximum diameter with a neck very narrow in comparison with its height and width	Serving ware, particularly cacao or special beverage drinking

The categorizations Sabloff offered were somewhat problematic when applied at Lower Dover. Many sherds are not large enough to differentiate between particular forms, especially dishes and plates. Additionally, it requires note that Gifford makes little to no distinction between dish and plate forms in his analysis of materials at Barton Ramie (1976), although his investigation used the form specifications Sabloff put forth. Other ceramic materials from the deposit included net sinkers, spindle whorls, a pendant, and fragments from ocarinas, figurines, and roller stamps. These materials were quantified and their significant characteristics noted, but additional analysis was not undertaken.

APPENDIX B

THE ARTIFACTS

Artifact Class	Category	Count	Middle Range Theory (Bridging Arguments)	Analytical Category (in Section 3)	Activities
Ceramic	Decorated	166	decorated vessels for special occasions	Political	Feasting
	Undecorated	1339	everyday use	Domestic	
	Cooking (ollas and griddle)	106	cooking food for everyday use	Domestic	Everyday eating
	Serving (plates, dishes, bowls, vases)	843	vessels for cooking food for feast attendees serve tamales, chocolate storing water and foodstuffs	Political Political	Feasting Feasting
	Storage	413	near the home	Domestic	Storing food
	Plate	13	See serving		
	Bowl	410	See serving		
	Dish	397	See serving		
	Jar	519	See storage		
	Vase	23	cacao serving vessels		Akhiutu molded carved for trade
	Unknown	143			
	Censer	2	create smoke to communicate with gods, build a sensory environment during rituals	Religious	Ritual ceremonies held in Plaza F
	Net Sinker	4	weigh down fishing nets, catch fish in the Belize River or either Barton Creek	Domestic	Everyday eating
	Spindle Whorl	28	spin thread, necessary to make cloth cloth production and weaving, not an everyday activity	Domestic Domestic	Crafting Making clothes to display status
	Figurine Fragment	14		Religious	High status good
Chert	Pendant	1	unfinished pendant people made jewelry in Plaza F		High status good
	Roller Stamp Fragments	6	apply paint decoration to textiles or plaster paint decoration on the body	Domestic Political	Decorating clothing Displaying status
	Debitage	2461	accumulates when making tools	Domestic	Making everyday tools
	Spear Point Fragments	4	hafted to a spear to hunt game hafted to a spear for violent conflict	Domestic Political	Hunting Warfare

Artifact Class	Category	Count	Middle Range Theory (Bridging Arguments)	Paper Section	Activities
	Biface (Complete)	2	hafted to a spear to hunt game knife for cutting meat	Domestic Domestic	Hunting Cutting/preparing food
			hafted to a spear for violent conflict	Political	Warfare
	Biface Fragments	5	hafted to a spear to hunt game	Domestic	Hunting
			hafted to a spear for violent conflict	Political	Warfare
	Drill	1	perforate raw materials (ceramic, stone)	Domestic	Perforating raw materials
Daub		1016	building material for houses	Domestic	Constructing houses
Freshwater Shell	Unworked	1	remnant of snail eating	Domestic	Eating
	Unanalyzed (2013 Excavations)*	681			
Marine Shell	Worked (olive tinklers)	3	woven together in a "net" skirt, shells rattle, ritual theater	Religious	Dancing/making noise
	Unworked	2	remnant of sea snail/crustacean eating	Domestic	Eating
	Unanalyzed (2013 Excavations)*	4			
Faunal Bone	Debitage	10	flakes from reducing bone to make crafts (flute) or tools (pin)	Domestic	Stone tool production
	Unworked	26	remnant of meat eating	Domestic	Eating
			drilled with holes and worn on a necklace, possibly a more rare item, not an everyday craft produced	Political	Displaying status
	Dog Tooth Pendant	1			
	Flute	1	contributes to the sensory experience of ritual ceremonies	Religious	Playing music
	Pin/bodkin	1	weaving implement	Domestic	Producing textiles or clothing
Ground Stone	Unanalyzed (2013 Excavations)*	266			
	Mano Fragment	3	grind corn, a food staple	Domestic	Food processing/grinding corn
	Metate Fragment	1	grind corn, a food staple	Domestic	Food processing/grinding corn
			attached to a rope, similar to a bola, swung to injure others	Political	Warfare
	Grooved Sphere	2			
			drilled with a hole and worn on a necklace, rare item, not an everyday craft produced	Political	Displaying status
Obsidian	Cobble Pendant	1			
	Adze	2	house maintenance	Domestic	
	Blades	4	cut meat or scrape hides bloodletting ceremonies	Domestic Religious	Cleaning meat Bloodletting
			waste from reducing obsidian to make blades or resharpen blades		
	Debitage	42		Domestic	Producing stone tools
Quartz	Polished Crystals	36	contain supernatural power	Religious	Displaying status
			large flake removed from an "odd" raw material, possibly believed to be chert/stone, used to make a stone tool or knife(?)		
Wood	Petrified Wood Debitage	1		Domestic	Producing stone tools

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