

Pre-Columbian Maya Graffiti: New Insights from Xunantunich, Belize



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Abstract

The study of Pre-Columbian Maya graffiti has gained popularity since its initial discovery at Tikal, Guatemala in the late nineteenth-century. Since then it has been recorded at a number of sites throughout the Maya region. Graffiti etchings onto plaster in elite structures mostly date to the Late and Terminal Classic periods. This dissertation discusses prevailing interpretations surrounding who created graffiti and why, using research from current scholarship to inform new insights. In addition to existing scholarship, this dissertation draws on new evidence from Xunantunich, Belize. In particular, I examine the spatial association of graffiti images with graffiti *patolli* boards in Structure A13 at Xunantunich, considering the potential relationship and meaning between the two. I conclude that scholars should consider refocusing their research onto the process of creating graffiti rather than limiting their insights to the images themselves.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures	5
Introduction	7
Research Question	7
Chapter 1: Contextualising graffiti	9
1.1 Definitions	9
1.2 Governance	12
1.3 Chronology	13
1.4 Maya world view	14
Chapter 2: Maya Artistic Expression	18
2.1 Typical Maya Art styles	18
2.2 Graffiti	21
Chapter 3: Method and Theory	22
3.1 Methods	22
3.2 Theoretical background of interpretations.....	25
Chapter 4: The archaeological sites and graffiti images	29
4.1 Tikal, Peten, Guatemala	30
4.2 Nakum, Peten, Guatemala	38
4.3 Yaxhá, Peten, Guatemala	44
4.4 Río Bec, Campeche, Mexico	48
4.5 Plan De Ayutla, Chiapas, Mexico.....	52
4.6 Xunantunich, Cayo, Belize.....	57
4.7 Summary	73
Chapter 5: Prevailing interpretations	74
5.1 Initial interpretations at Tikal, Peten, Guatemala.....	74
5.2 A change of interpretation: Nakum and Yaxhá, Peten, Guatemala.....	81
5.3 Private space: Río Bec, Campeche, Mexico	82
5.4 Plan De Ayutla, Chiapas, Mexico.....	82
5.5 Some interpretations of graffiti at Xunantunich, Cayo, Belize:	83
5.6 Summary	85
Chapter 6: New Insights from Structure A13 at Xunantunich, Cayo, Belize	86
6.1 Space	86
6.2 Memory.....	89
6.3 Creation.....	90
6.4 Summary	94

Chapter 7: Conclusions	96
7.1 When were the graffiti images etched onto plaster?	96
7.2 Where do we find graffiti and is there a pattern seen in their location?	96
7.3 Who created the images?	97
7.4 Why were the images made?	97
References cited	99

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

1	Chronology of the Maya Area.....	14
2	Entopic Forms.....	77

Figures

1	Map of the Maya region.....	17
2	Cylinder vase Alter de Sacrificos.....	18
3	Cylinder vase (Close up) Alter de Sacrificos.....	18
4	Architectural Mask, Structure 5D-44, Tikal.....	19
5	Stelae 21, Tikal.....	20
6	Carved bones, portable Maya art.....	21
7	Site plan of Tikal.....	31
8	Graffito from Structure 5D-65, Tikal.....	32
9	Graffito from Structure 5D-65, Tikal.....	32
10	Graffiti from Structure 5D-65, Tikal.....	33
11	Graffiti from Structure 5D-65, Tikal.....	33
12	Graffiti from west wall of Temple II, Tikal.....	34
13	Graffiti from multiple structures, Tikal.....	34
14	Graffiti from Structure 3D-40, Tikal.....	35
15	Graffito from Structure 5D-65, Tikal.....	35
16	Graffiti from Structure 5D-43, Tikal.....	36
17	Graffiti from Structure 5D-52, Tikal.....	37
18	Site Plan of Nakum.....	38
19	Graffiti from Nakum.....	39
20	Graffiti from Nakum.....	40
21	Graffiti from Nakum.....	41
22	Graffiti from Nakum.....	41
23	Graffiti from Nakum.....	42
24	Graffiti from Nakum.....	42
25	Graffiti from Nakum.....	43
26	Site plan of Yaxhá.....	45
27	Graffiti from Yaxhá.....	46
28	Graffiti from Yaxhá.....	47
29	Site plan of Río Bec and surroundings.....	49
30	Drawing of the western wall of Structure 6N1, Room 9, Río Bec.....	49
31	Graffiti from Río Bec.....	50
32	Graffiti from Río Bec.....	50
33	Post-abandonment graffiti from Río Bec.....	51
34	Site plan of Plan De Ayutla.....	52
35	Graffito from Structure 2, Plan De Ayutla.....	53
36	Graffito from Structure 13, Plan De Ayutla.....	54
37	Graffito from Structure 13, Plan De Ayutla.....	55
38	Graffito from Structure 13, Plan De Ayutla.....	56
39	Site plan of Xunantunich.....	58
40	<i>Patolli</i> board from Structure A11, Room 9, Xunantunich.....	58
41	Graffito from Structure A11, Room 9, Xunantunich.....	59
42	Graffiti from the 'Tut' Building, Xunantunich.....	59
43	Drawing of the North wall of the 'Tut' Building, Xunantunich.....	60

44	Map of Rooms 6, 7, and 8, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	60
45	Map of Room 6, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	61
46	G1, partial <i>patolli</i> board, Room 6, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	61
47	Map of Room 7, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	62
48	G1 <i>patolli</i> board, Room 7, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	63
49	G1 (partial), G2, and G3 from Room 7, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	64
50	G4, from Room 7, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	65
51	G5, from Room 7, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	66
52	G6, from Room 7, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	67
53	G7, from Room 7, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	68
54	G8, from Room 7, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	69
55	Map of Room 8, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	70
56	G1, from Room 8, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	71
57	G2, from Room 8, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	72
58	G3, from Room 8, Structure A13, Xunantunich.....	73
59	Modern children's drawings.....	78
60	Lintel 3, Temple 1, Tikal	80
61	Corbelled arch at Cahal Pech, Cayo District, Belize.....	87

Introduction

The study of Pre-Columbian Maya graffiti has grown consistently in scholars' interests after the initial discovery of a variety of images found etched into plaster in the late nineteenth-century by explorers in the Maya area. Although Pre-Columbian Maya graffiti has become increasingly popular, some questions can still be addressed. The nature of the graffiti and its unknown creators make the topic an ever-evolving area of scholarship and discussion.

Inspiration for this study came after joining the Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance (BVAR) Project, excavating Structure A13 under the supervision of Tia B. Watkins and Jaime Awe. I was fascinated by these fragile images and excited to learn more about them. After my interest was ignited I began researching previous studies and with permission and encouragement of the BVAR project I decided to write my dissertation on the topic.

Research Question

This study aims to characterise the variety and purposes of Pre-Columbian Maya graffiti. The word 'graffiti' itself will be defined by its etymological origins, in Greek γράψω (graphō) 'write', in Italian graffiare 'to scratch'. Thus the definition does not adhere to the modern English vernacular usage of spray painting in mostly urban environments. This study will use the definition of graffiti as intentional images or writing etched onto hard surfaces, usually plaster. The use of this definition for the discussion of Pre-Columbian Maya graffiti is fairly uniform across the scholarship and is used recently in Żrałka's (2014:37) summative book on the subject. This study ultimately seeks to discover:

What characterises graffiti in the Maya world? What is its context, and what social, cultural or artistic purposes does it serve?

In order to answer this overall question, I shall contextualise the environment in which graffiti was found and pose the following sub-questions:

1. When were the graffiti etched onto the plaster?
2. Where do we find graffiti and is there a pattern seen in their location?
3. Who created the graffiti?
4. Why were the images made?

Each of the following chapters in this study addresses the overall research question by focusing on topics raised by the sub questions above. Chapter 1 contextualises the cultural and natural environment in which the graffiti has been found and establishes the definitions of terms which this study will use. Chapter 2 further contextualises the Maya, but in an artistic context specifically, providing images for readers to contrast formal Maya art with graffiti. Chapter 3 then outlines the various methods used by past and recent excavations for the recording of graffiti and the theoretical positions taken to explore and interpret the data. Chapter 4 presents the evidence for the reader to consider. Chapter 5 discusses the data presented and the prevailing interpretations among scholars. Chapter 6 focuses on the data gathered in June and July 2017 by the BVAR Project from Structure A13 at Xunantunich, Belize. I use the sixth chapter to explore my own interpretations of the graffiti, informed by the in-depth study of the subject, and applied to the material collected by the BVAR project. Finally, Chapter 7 presents my conclusions, and addresses the major research question.

Chapter 1: Contextualising graffiti

In order to assess the graffiti presented in this study I contextualise the world of the Maya including the political, spiritual and physical elements of the culture. I first attend to the definition of the terms which I will be using throughout this study. By contextualising the world in which the graffiti occur we can better understand not only who created it, but why they did so.

1.1 Definitions

Vandalism

Modern painted graffiti is largely associated with criminal activity and vandalism in particular. The word ‘vandalism’ itself originates from the Vandals, a Germanic people who sacked Rome in the fifth century CE. Although many sackings in the ‘Old World’ included indiscriminate damage to express disrespect for those being sacked, ‘vandalism’ is taken from the Vandals (Merrillis and Miles, 2010:10). The British Crime Survey describe vandalism as “intentional and malicious damage to private households and their property” (British Crime Survey, 2011). Intentional and malicious damage is not obvious in the case of the Maya; intent and accident can cause the same damage, while malice is subjective and may produce different physical results in ancient Maya culture than our own. While Pre-Columbian Maya graffiti is certainly damaging to the plaster upon which it is etched, scholars, and my study, continue to speculate on the reasons for the damage. This study discusses the interpretations that suggest Pre-Columbian Maya graffiti may be vandalism, but will do so with the knowledge of present-day negative connotations associated with the term.

Ritual and Religion

Religion is not a term that will be in regular use in this study, but it is useful in order to explain ritual. Here, I define religion as an institutionally structured practice of belief (Britannica Academic, 2017d). In this way one may attempt to separate religion from other elements of society such as family or education. This separation is not to deny the involvement of religion in wider society, but to prevent

the conflation of the terms 'belief' and 'religion'. Belief here is defined as an unyielding trust in an operation, system, or divinity, without the need to fully understand it (Britannica Academic, 2017b). Belief is usually associated with spirituality, morality, the afterlife and life cycles, but is not limited to these topics. Religion provides ideological structures for belief and teaches its followers how and potentially when to apply that belief to their lives, for example by conducting ritual (Britannica Academic, 2017e) In the context of the Maya there has been debate over the extent to which religion is an appropriate term to apply to Maya culture. There is no word for 'religion' in Mayan (Pharo, 2007:43-45), and Maya religion has largely been defined in contrast to Christianity (Graham et al., 2013:162).

Ritual will be a term put to regular use in this study and here is defined as the physical practice of spirituality that may be structured by religion (Britannica Academic, 2017e). Ritual consists of spiritually meaningful repeated practices, intended to influence practitioners or beings of supernatural (higher power to humans) or preternatural (equivalent power to humans) worlds. Ritual practice may, but does not necessarily, produce material remains. In this study graffiti may be seen as the physical remains of rituals, or completely separated from ritual, depending on the scholarly perspective. One key facet to ritual practice is that, without the express explanation of the ritual practitioner, we shall never fully know the individual intention behind each ritual.

Royal, Noble and Elite

Some of the key aspects of Maya city-state governance will be explained in the following section of this study. Those who are involved in that governance hold a large amount of power in relation to others within their community. Those at top of the community hierarchy are encompassed by the term 'elite' (Britannica Academic, 2017c). The actual rulers and holders of the majority of power are described as 'royalty', and according to deciphered stelae gain their power at least in part through inheritance from their parents, marriage, or other family relations (Chase and Chase, 2004:139). Those who belong to the nobility are still part of the elite, but hold less political, economic, and

social power than royals. These groups are separated from common people by an extravagant show of wealth and more reliable access to resources, including food and building materials. The elite generally have better preserved material remains because of their access to high quality resources; elites also tend to live in the centre of communities (Chase and Chase 2004:142).

Shamans and Priests

The term 'shaman' came to scholarship from the anthropological study of Siberian healers (Klein et al., 2002:386-7). The term has since been used to group individuals who perform similar roles within societies found in the Americas including Mesoamerica, the Andean mountain range, and the Amazon basin (Brightman et al., 2012:392-4). The term 'priest' is usually more recognisable to Euro-American readers since the role of priest is well known within Christianity. Like shamans, priests are figures of authority within the belief system of the Maya. Confusingly, because shaman and priest are sometimes conflated there are those who advocate for combining the roles and using one term, namely 'priest' (Klein et al., 2002:400-401). It is far from clear if these roles should remain separated or should be combined, and while I accept that such a decision will be problematic for some, 'shaman' will be used in this study.

Structure functions

Finally I shall briefly comment on the types of use which a building or physical structure containing graffiti may have. While a structure may have many uses, one may be highlighted over others by scholars based on evidence or interpretation. Residential structures are those within which people sleep, shelter, and generally live their day-to day-lives. Administrative structures may not be used for sleeping, but rather for governing, political or otherwise organisational tasks. The definition of a palace seems to encompass both of these descriptions as they are compounds in which the royal court operated, fulfilling both residential and administrative functions (Yaeger, 2005:3).

1.2 Governance

The Maya were not one homogeneous political entity. Although Pre-Columbian Maya peoples were connected linguistically and in their world view, they did not make up one empire and were not bound by one political system. Instead, Maya peoples were autonomous in their governing practices. The Pre-Columbian Maya peoples ruled in confined city states or kingdoms, but had a linguistic and cultural connection, similar to Medieval Saxon England and Ancient Greece (Sharer, 1983:74). The nature of the ruler or the ruling party has long been discussed in scholarly circles regarding the Maya. One of the initial ideas surrounding Maya governance draws on neo-evolutionary theory which proposed a trajectory of progress from band to tribe, chiefdom, and culminating with state (Flannery 1972). Such a progression or evolution of society may be described as unilinear (only one path towards statehood) or multilinear (multiple paths towards statehood).

Flannery (1972) describes and assesses the ways in which a 'civilisation' (a term that he is wary of) is proposed to have developed. In his consideration of multilinear causes for the evolution of the Maya he disregards the proposal that irrigation aided a population's trajectory towards statehood. He also criticises ideas that warfare, population growth, social circumscription (where people are forced to organise through a limited availability of fertile land), trade, and symbiosis contributed to the success of the Maya cultures. 'Symbiosis' is a term that Flannery (1972:407) criticises because of its potentially inappropriate use, and yet never actually provides his readers with an adequate alternative term. Instead we are told that symbiosis is "related to trade" and is "proposed as a mechanism in areas with clear-cut environmental diversity on a 'biome' or order of magnitude such as Mexico...but never in areas where most of the 'civilization' lay within one biome" (1972:407). He concludes by providing readers with a likely set of 'rules' although they are more akin to stages of supposed development. The problem that one faces with Flannery's ideas of evolution is that while it is multilinear, it is unidirectional, not allowing for oscillation between types of governance; instead he focuses on autocratic governance and eventual collapse.

A “Dual-Processual Theory” was developed by Mesoamericanists Blanton and colleagues (1996) in part in reaction to Flannery’s rules of development. They propose two political-economic models which could be used to explain different types of governance within the Maya region and throughout Maya history. They theorise that ‘exclusionary’ networks operate in a way that benefits a small group of rulers (which could possibly be called plutocrats) or one autocrat who has control over the trade of surplus goods, thus creating a disparity in economic power. These two systems of governance are detected in city states that clearly display their power through the use of grand stelae boasting of their lineage and military defeats, for example Classical era Caracol (Chase and Chase, 1996). The ability to hold on to such power implies access to vast amounts of wealth and thus an exclusionary network. In the case of corporate networks, Blanton and colleagues theorise that more parties are involved in the control of trade, and thus there is a greater sharing of wealth among powerful groups. Blanton and colleagues’ model allows for the oscillation between the systems of governance; one system may ‘collapse’ but the culture and prosperity of the people may be allowed to thrive.

1.3 Chronology

Table 1, below, is an outline of the chronology of the Maya. The Terminal Classic is a key period which much of the graffiti examined in this study are believed to have been created (Navarro-Castillo et al., 2017:1; Patrios 2013:435; Žračka and Hermes, 2009:137, 149), another is the Postclassic. A key marker for the chronological difference in the graffiti is not only the distinct style of the images, influenced by the prominent central Mexican cultures of the time, but also the difference in the height of the wall upon which the image is etched. One site in particular, Río Bec, demonstrates these differences as the heights indicate that the Postclassic era graffiti were created by people standing or sitting atop fallen debris, indicating that the graffiti were produced after the abandonment of the site (Patrios, 2013:437).

Period Name	Sub-Period Name	Date
<u>Postclassic</u>	Terminal	1492—1544
	Late	1350—1492
	Middle	1200—1350
	Early	900—1200
<u>Classic</u>	Terminal	750/800—960
	Late	600—750/800
	Early	250—600
<u>Preclassic</u>	Terminal	CE 1—250
	Late	300 BCE—CE 1
	Middle	600—300 BCE
	Early	2000-600

Table 1 Chronology of the Maya area.

1.4 Maya world view

The ancient and modern Maya live across three distinct biomes in Mesoamerica (Carrasco, 2001:181). Figure 1 indicates the key areas across modern day Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. The Northern Maya Lowlands is an area of largely temperate rainforest, humid, but somewhat cooler than the tropical rainforest of the Southern Maya Lowlands. The Southern Maya Highlands lie to the south west and are mainly made up of a large volcanic mountain range from which much Maya black and grey obsidian originates (Braswell et al., 2000). All but one of the sites examined in this study (Río Bec) lie within the Southern Maya Lowlands.

Much of our knowledge of the mythology of the Maya is informed by a source called the *Popol Vuh*. The text is a collection of myths written by Maya at the time of Spanish contact (Tedlock, 1985:25), and thus must be used with caution when attempting to understand the beliefs of the Maya before Spanish contact as it may be anachronistic. The key features of the text include a legend akin to the

Greco-Roman Ages of Man as described by Hesiod and Ovid. In addition, there are two pairs of Hero Twins separated by a generation, all of whom compete with the Maya gods of the underworld in a ball game. The ball courts in which something similar to this game were played are found not only throughout the Maya area but further into central and northern Mexico, even into the southwestern USA (Scarborough and Wilcox, 1991:vii-ix). The distribution of ball courts does not attest to a wide belief in a single Maya world view, but indicates that there was a very good network of communication amongst communities throughout Mesoamerica and beyond. This sort of communication may have facilitated the sharing of ideas and thus resulted in similar actions taken by multiple communities. Such shared ideas are found in imagery and media (for example Figure 6) revealing how the Maya interacted with their surroundings (Miller and O'Neil, 1999:8).

It is believed by scholars that in the Maya world view all things have some sort of life force (Freidel et al., 1993:234). Ceremonies are thought to have been conducted to imbue human-made objects with a life force, and 'killed' or intentionally destroyed to rid them of their spirit once they were no longer used (Sharer, 1983:215; Freidel et al., 1993:234-5). Tsukamoto (2017:1632-33) provides an excellent overview of the archaeological study and determination of ceremonial termination of objects and structures by Maya peoples which have been discussed by Mesoamericanists since the middle of the twentieth-century.

Finally, although all Maya people had (and have) their own individual beliefs and practices, public ceremonies, dances and rituals were carried out by elite or ruling groups in part to secure their own power as well as to celebrate their spirituality (Freidel et al., 1993:259). As is the case in many cultures throughout the world, the influence of leaders over their people is likely to have been paramount to the society and the ruler's association with the supernatural or preternatural world is bound to have increased the power and respect commanded by these leaders. We may describe leaders closely associated with spiritual leadership or governance as priests or shamans (depending on how one defines his or her terms). In Early Modern Europe (even up to the present day) kings and

queens assumed a divine right to their position, ordained by the Christian God; but the only way in which such power could be maintained was with the support of the people. In the event that the majority of people no longer supported the monarch their faith does not change entirely, it is merely altered to accommodate more desirable social and institutional hierarchies. One of the best examples of this phenomenon is the French Revolution when church and government separated, yet the populace continued to remain religious (McManners, 1969:106). Understanding the governmental and social structures of Maya communities is essential in order to understand the art which people produced in their communities. Knowledge of hierarchical social systems not only informs iconography, but also the media through which images are displayed.

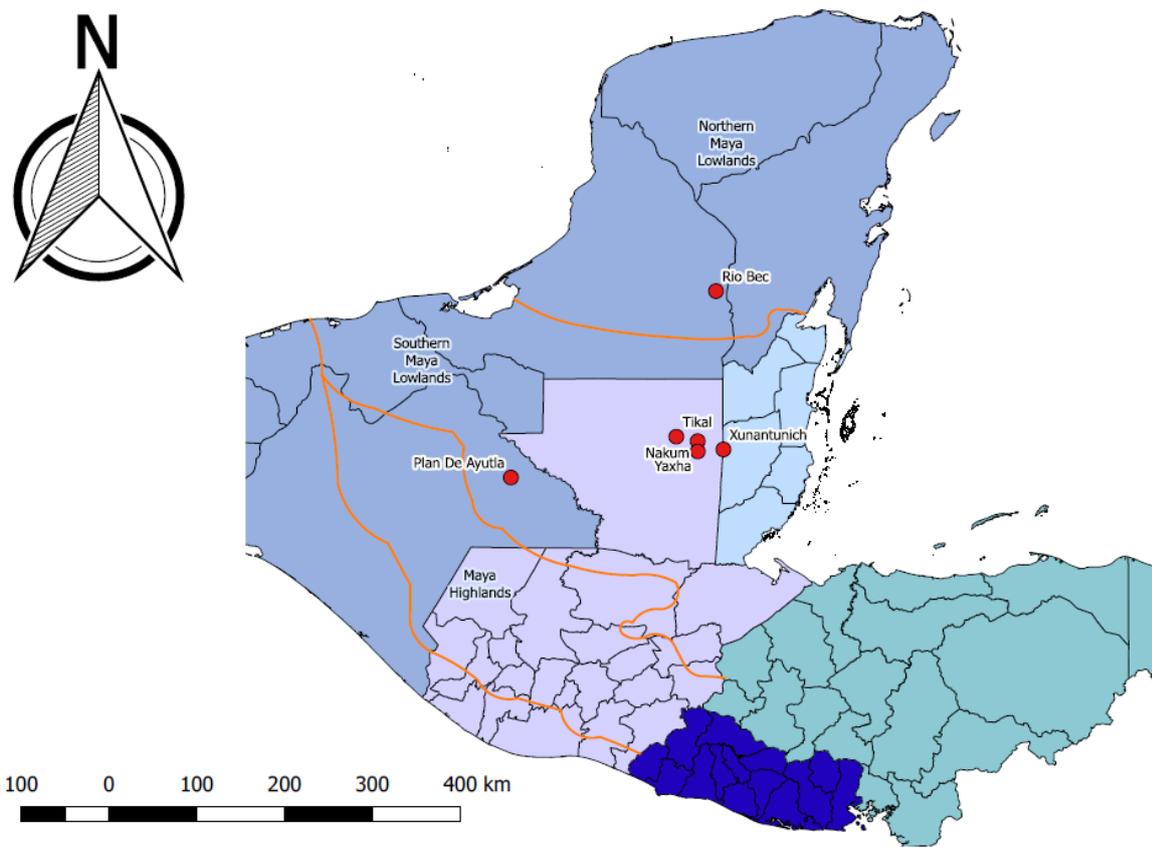


Figure 1: Map of the Maya regions and the sites which will be examined in this study. Orange lines indicate and estimate of the Northern Maya Lowlands, Southern Maya Lowlands and Maya Highlands. Regional information from latinamericanstudies.org date accessed:05/09/2018.

Chapter 2: Maya Artistic Expression

In order to understand the iconography and the formation of Pre-Columbian Maya graffiti we should first examine the artistic context in which it was created. This section highlights the media which the Classic and Terminal Classic Maya used preferentially and briefly comments on some of the iconographic content.

Figure 1: (Right) cylinder vase with dancing figure clothed in jaguar skin and accompanying glyphs. Late Classic from Alter de Sacrificios. From FAMSI, Mesoamerican Pottery Collection.

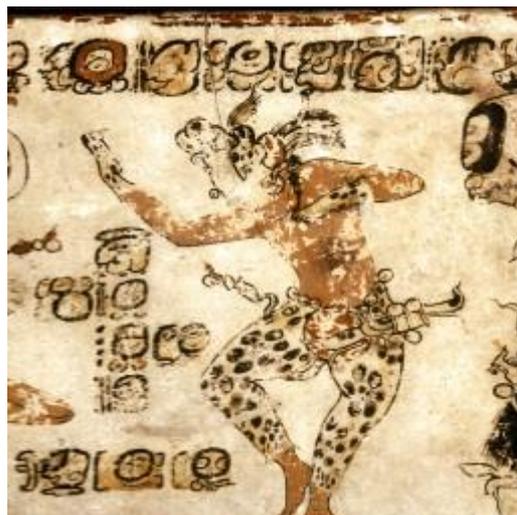


Figure 2: (Right) close up of Figure 2. From FAMSI Mesoamerican Pottery Collection.

2.1 Typical Maya Art styles

The best surviving media available to archaeologists pertaining to Maya art are pottery, stelae and lintels, architectural facades and masks, and wall paintings. Although different media require different techniques of execution, consistency in execution and iconography from ‘professional’ artists and builders appears to have been more important than individual expression in art depicting courtly life (Schele and Mathews, 1998:28). Another form of artistry is in the form of Maya textiles. Although none survive, there are other ways to archaeologically detect the presence of textiles such as spindle whorls and bone needles (Chase et al., 2008). Furthermore, one may argue that the hieroglyphic script itself is also an art form, each scribe forming the shapes according to his or her own skill and preference; this variability of form is also reflected in the difference between glyphs on different media from bark paper to stelae (Figure 5) to pottery (Figures 2 and 3). Art need not be created by ‘professionals’ to be classified as art (Britannica Academic 2017a). Anyone who

intentionally creates a visual image is, in this study, defined as an artist. Graffiti in this situation may thus be described as folk art as it may have been created by people untrained in art (Britannica Academic, 2017a). In my study those who created graffiti are described as graffiti artists, regardless of skill or training. In contrast the term 'professional' is employed to differentiate those who appear to have received training, or created images which appear to have been commissioned.



Figure 3: Architectural mask, facade of Central Acropolis Structure 5D-44 south wing, south side, Tikal, Guatemala. From FAMSI, Tikal Digital Access Project.

Many surviving Maya pictorial scenes, including scenes on pottery depict elite rather than commoner life (Freidel et al., 1993:259-60). Sometimes pictorial scenes reflect public ritual, and many scenes are paired with hieroglyphic script (Figures 2 and 3). The predominance of elite imagery may be because of our heavy excavation bias in the Maya area. Archaeologists tend to focus on the centres of Maya urban areas containing large, attractive temples. Thus, available samples are likely to have been owned, made, or commissioned by royalty or wealthy nobles trying to show off their wealth and power. Other ceramic materials include figurines, incense burners (usually referred to as censers) and adornments. Scenes on Maya stelae also depict royalty, although they may also on occasion show non-royal nobles. Sanchez (2005) outlines how the depiction on stelae tends to correspond with their location. Royals used prominent, publicly placed stelae to show off their power and enhance the importance of a single ruler, whereas lintels (an integral part of a structure

found above doorways as a horizontal support), while still likely to depict rulers, also depicted non-ruling nobles (Sanchez, 2005:270). Other architectural decoration was in the form of facades and masks (Figure 4). Masks may be included in façades along with other iconography or be the sole feature of the façade. Many of these masks allude to Maya mythology or depict Maya deities. The Maya also engaged in wall painting for example the famous murals at Bonampak.



Figure 4: Close up of Stela 21, Tikal, Guatemala. From FAMSI Tikal Digital Access Project.

Finally, the Maya also created portable pieces of art, usually found in caches, ritual deposits, or graves. These are usually called ‘small finds’ or ‘special finds’ and include stone artefacts made of obsidian or jade, but also items made from animal and human remains usually bone or teeth (Burdick, 2016:41-2). From other media we also know that the Maya had ornate headdresses. Burdick (2010:136) describes headdresses as, “A complex array of brilliant feathers, fragrant blooms, clinking jade ornaments, and stacked masks was attached to the main form of Classic period headdress, and composed a towering object that tantalized the senses and seemed to take on a life of its own.” Burdick also notes that the headdresses included heavier items such as stucco.



Figure 5: Carved bones, portable Maya art. Left human femur from Xcalumkin, Mexico; middle mammal long bone (possible human), Terminal Classic, Tikal Guatemala; right human femur, Late Classic. Figure 13 from Burdick (2016:42).

2.2 Graffiti

It is within this artistic world that the Maya produced graffiti. Since the Maya did not possess an empire we may assume that each site where graffiti was found had a distinct community, one with separate autonomous governments. Each community likely shared many aspects of life with other Maya groups: myth, games, artistry, diet, and for the sites considered in this study, environment. Those who produced graffiti were influenced by their cultural and physical environment, and thus a general understanding of that environment is essential in order to recognise potential patterns in the data. Patterns may include how graffiti was made, the imagery and possible iconography present in the images, and where the graffiti was found.

Chapter 3: Method and Theory

Graffiti, in the way it has been defined in the introduction, as images scratched onto a hard surface, can be difficult for archaeologists to record. Graffiti are rarely found totally intact due to the fragile surface in which they are incised, thus unintentional marks may mark an image or distort it, potentially confusing the graffito. Such markings may come from a variety of sources: the process of excavation; other graffiti artists, whether recent or ancient; and natural weathering processes such as animal scratches or plant growth distorting or splitting the image (Webster, 1963:37). Thus, excavators must be careful in their recording methods to ensure that they record the ancient graffiti alone and avoid unrelated markings. This chapter discusses the available methods for recording graffiti, selection of sites for study and the location of the graffiti within those sites. In doing so I will also consider how the location of graffiti influences theoretical ideas at site level, and on the physical structures and surfaces upon which the graffiti were incised.

3.1 Methods

The methods outlined in this chapter are intended to address where graffiti is found and determine if there is any pattern in their distribution. The sites selected for study are limited to those with published examples of graffiti which I was able to gain access to, and the excavation conducted by the Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance (BVAR) Project at Xunantunich, Belize. In addition, data are harnessed from a separate project based at Xunantunich conducted by researchers at the University of Texas, Arlington and University of Texas, San Antonio as part of the Mopan Valley Preclassic Project. The map above (Figure 1) highlights the key sites that will be discussed in the following chapters. It is important to note that there may be some inherent biases in the publication of graffiti found at archaeological sites. Firstly, excavators tend to produce relatively short publications. Only Jaroslaw Żrałka (2014) has produced a full book collating and assessing Maya graffiti. Thus, we may only be privy to a few examples of graffiti, perhaps the best preserved or the most interesting; thus, our corpus for study is limited. Secondly, much Maya archaeology is limited

by excavation bias and preservation bias. Not only are excavators attracted to the high temples and complex structures at site cores, but core structures tend to be better preserved and thus easier to research than periphery structures. Core structures are largely constructed in stone, while periphery structures are built from less durable building materials. The rise of household archaeology highlights the research obstacles for those studying structures at the periphery of sites (Robin, 2003).

The climate of the southern Maya lowlands is known for its pronounced dry and wet seasons and thus is not ideal for the preservation of plaster. Plaster, the surface upon which much graffiti was engraved, crumbles and deteriorates in these conditions. Indeed it is likely because of the crumbling of the plaster that re-plastering would have been a standard practice for the central and southern lowland Maya, thus affecting which graffiti were preserved (Webster, 1963:38; Patrios 2013:435).

One of the most influential sites studied for its graffiti is Tikal. Webster (1963) was the first to systematically record the graffiti found in the structures of the site. Her recording techniques consisted of field sketches produced by copying the images as seen by the naked eye, using natural light or torchlight (Trik and Kampen, 1983:2). Webster also traced some of the examples (Trik and Kampen, 1983:2). Trik and Kampen (1983:2), also operating at Tikal, explain that their main method of recording was rubbing using “anything available: pencils, lumber crayons, onion skin, brown wrapping paper, and so on and so forth.” One of the key difficulties that most of the people recording the images have discovered is how the images have been affected by subsequent damage or the overlapping of other images (Webster, 1963:38; Patrios, 2003:434). As a result, the images portrayed on the plastered surfaces may be misrepresented owing to the subjective nature of the recording process (Christophe Helmke, 2018, personal communication). Excavators untrained in illustration or unaware of Maya imagery may fall victim to including etched lines that are not truly part of the image represented; or they leave out lines that had been part of the original image

(Christophe Helmke, 2018, personal communication). Conversely, those familiar with Maya imagery may impose their own ideas of what an image may be, thus also attributing false marks to the figure.

The BVAR Project excavated three rooms on the western side of Structure A13 in June and July 2017 (Watkins et al., 2018:336). Well preserved graffiti was found under a thick layer of white marl (a compacted form of powdery limestone). The marl protected the graffiti etched into the plaster (and even some pigment on the plaster) from the damage caused by the tropical climate. Upon discovering graffiti present in the rooms, a number of recording methods were used. Christophe Helmke produced initial field sketches, and then photographed the images using light raking (Watkins et al., 2018). Light raking is a technique that is usually used to discover blemishes or damage to easel paintings on canvases but can also be used to highlight bulges or grooves in other surfaces (van Asperen De Boer, 1989:279). This method is usually performed at night under naturally low light levels. Shining a light at a low angle to highlight the grooves in the plaster, the resulting images have exaggerated shadows and are then photographed. Further drawings were then made by Christophe Helmke from the photographed images. A similar technique was used by the Mopan Valley Preclassic Project for the graffiti present in the 'Tut' building on El Castillo at Xunantunich (McCurdy et al., 2018). Polynomial Texture Mapping also uses low light levels but highlights the image with more angled artificial lighting than light raking. In this way the grooves in the plaster are more clearly shown. Both projects also mapped the graffiti by hand and specified their positions in the maps of the rooms. Previous efforts to photograph graffiti systematically were also attempted at Tikal but the photography was inconsistent and thus deemed inappropriate for recording (Triak and Kampen, 1983:2). Photogrammetry, a technique using 2D photographs to create a 3D image was attempted by the BVAR project in order to digitally reconstruct the rooms and the graffiti within them, but photos taken for the programme were not deemed adequate for use (Tia B. Watkins, 2018, personal communication). 3D modelling was successfully achieved, however, with new data from the 2018 field season and will be available in future publications (Tia B. Watkins, 2018, personal communication).

Despite difficulties in excavation, preservation, publication biases, and the methods of recording graffiti, efforts have been made to mitigate these undesirable complications. With the use of techniques including light raking and Polynomial Texture Mapping, excavators are clearly attempting to record as much of their discovered graffiti as accurately as possible. These innovations in recording graffiti are welcome since archaeology is commonly a destructive process. Furthermore, the preservation of graffiti post-excavation is notoriously difficult. Temporary preservation may be achieved by dampening the plaster upon which the graffiti is found and covering it in thin plastic sheeting to prevent drying and crumbling. Such a method of preservation requires substantial maintenance and therefore is not practical for long term use. Thus, sites with exposed graffiti are faced with the decision to rebury the images and their structures, leave them exposed to the elements incurring further damage, or plaster over them in the process of conservation of the structures. In the case of Tikal, excavators decided to allow the graffiti to remain exposed. As a result, more graffiti were added to the plastered surfaces throughout the site as visitors added their own etchings to the corpus, destroying or damaging the original graffiti (Webster, 1963:37). Indeed, such additions were not uncommon before the graffiti was fully studied, as even some archaeological explorers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries added their signatures to the plaster (Webster, 1963:37). More recently the BVAR Project developed plans to experiment with preservation for public display by placing clear fibreglass over the benches upon which graffiti were found at Xunantunich (Tia B. Watkins, 2018, personal communication).

3.2 Theoretical background of interpretations

While this section considers interpretations that will be further explored in Chapter 5, it is important to note that much of the discussion of graffiti is based on trying to understand the intentions of the individual creating the image. From a historiographical perspective we may define this as post-processual archaeology, a theoretical basis which evolved from a critique of processual archaeology (Trigger, 1996:450). Moreover, post-processual archaeology encompasses ideas relating to the

agency of individuals within society, rather than individuals being exclusively controlled by society (Trigger, 1996:469-70). While deciphering the intentions of individuals may be impossible without some form of written account of their thoughts and feelings on their creations (such as graffiti) we may still attempt to interpret the art that has survived. This section defines and classifies some previous interpretations of graffiti into three somewhat overlapping categories based largely on motivation for their creation: spiritual motivation, educational motivation, and aesthetic motivation.

Spiritual

This category is associated with the ritual and 'religious' environment of the Maya as it is defined for the purposes of this discussion in the Introduction to this study. This category involves discussion of animism, shamanism, magical healing and recording of ritual events.

The interpretations of Webster (1963:39) that the graffiti are a consequence of "curative magic" could be placed in the category of spiritual motivation. She suggests that due to the presence of animals and the depiction of elite persons with elaborate headdresses and temples, graffiti images may reflect a sort of sympathetic magic (Webster, 1963:39), i.e. the process of depicting something that one desires evokes the physical presence of it. For example, in the case of failing crops, one would depict abundance of food in the graffiti in the hope that the depiction would come to fruition; if one desired upward social mobility he or she would depict elite persons; if any wanted an increase in the number of animals they would depict animal images. Kampen's (1978) interpretation could also fall into the category of spiritual motivations. He focuses on the destructive connotations of graffiti and how graffiti might have been used to 'terminate' a structure at the end of its use. Although later discredited because of his inaccurate use of relative chronology by Haviland and Haviland (1995), Kampen's interpretation highlights the symbolic nature of graffiti as potential evidence of attempted interaction with preternatural or supernatural beings. Finally, Haviland and Haviland's (1995) interpretations fall into the category of spiritually motivated graffiti. Their hypothesis surrounds the idea that select royal or otherwise elite persons such as priests or shamans

created the graffiti while under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs to create altered states of consciousness.

Education

This category deals explicitly with children and their formal or informal education. Although interesting, this category inherently suffers from a lack of visibility of childhood in archaeology. Thus, theories extending the creation of graffiti to children may prove useful in learning about the experiences of children in the past.

The interpretations of Hutson (2011) and McCurdy and colleagues (2018) consider the possibility that graffiti was created by children. Hutson (2011) suggests that some of the images at Tikal were produced by children to reflect their cultural environment and thus help them to learn about adult society, how to behave and what to expect. McCurdy and colleagues (2018) consider the 'Tut' room on El Castillo at Xunantunich to be an exclusive training area for young noble scribes in particular.

Aesthetic

This category is arguably the loosest in its parameters for inclusion. Graffiti, like all art, is aesthetic by nature. This category considers the motivation for graffiti to be the image itself. This category neither precludes nor excludes the need for further symbolic meaning to the graffiti beyond the artists' personal motivations.

The interpretations of Żrałka (2014), Patrios (2013), Navarro-Castillo and colleagues (2017) and Żrałka and Hermes (2009) could also fit this category as they consider the graffiti to be largely decorative. One could suggest that the interpretations of Żrałka and Hermes (2009) could be put into the "spiritual" category as they suggest that some of the images may be a way of recording important events or of memorialising them. Olton (2015) considers a political motivation for some of the graffiti at Tikal; she conducts a case study through the lens of political critique or satire.

The theories surrounding the creation of graffiti all largely stem from post-processual thinking. They are based on trying to understand the life and experience of an individual. Paradoxically however, while graffiti may provide the best examples for demonstrating the individual nature of ancient lives, and the differences between them, we may never fully know the motivation behind each image. With further insights into Maya graffiti, however, we may be able to contribute to the discussion of individual agency and post-processual thought. My working hypothesis for this dissertation is that Pre-Columbian Maya etchings into the plaster are intentional and meaningful images for the person or persons who created them.

Chapter 4: The archaeological sites and graffiti images

All but one of the sites that make up this study are found in the southern Maya lowlands in the modern-day countries of Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize (Figure 1). The sites cluster around the region of the Peten in Guatemala, with three sites in the Peten itself: Tikal, Nakum, and Yaxhá. There are two sites in Mexico: Río Bec in Quintana Roo, and Plan De Ayutla in Chiapas. To the east of the Peten is the country of Belize with the site of Xunantunich in the Cayo District near the border of Guatemala and Belize. This chapter presents the graffiti for the reader to view while providing some context for each of the sites. The graffiti is presented as such: individual images classified as standalone compositions; narrative scenes made up of multiple separate but related images; and miscellaneous images of note, including *patolli* boards and glyphs. A scale is provided when included by authors, but many do not use scales to show the size of the graffiti. Although *patolli*, a sort of board game, is predominantly known from the ethno-historic accounts from the conquest period in the Aztec area, the use of the game in a Maya context is also attested (Walden and Voorhies, 2017). The selection of images for this study is motivated by a desire to show the variety of images at each site. While themes are shared among sites, the individual images are unique.

It should be noted that the dating of the graffiti has prompted much debate. Although the topic will be discussed further in Chapter 5, one logical conclusion may be reached before debate ensues: the law of superposition requires that a structure upon which there is graffiti must be older than the graffiti itself. Such a law does not date the graffiti as contemporary with the structure but gives the earliest time at which the graffiti may have been inscribed. Regarding the preservation of graffiti, no research has been done on the degradation of graffiti itself. The lack of research is likely due to the nature of the plaster surface upon which the graffiti are incised. Plaster may be preserved if it is well protected from the weather, plants and animals, either intentionally as it may have been covered, or unintentionally, for example in the event of a collapsing building (as was the case in Structure A13 at Xunantunich). Regardless, the results mean that graffiti may be found on any surface and date from

any time after the building was constructed. Scholars thus largely use relative dating depending on the presence of ceramics, and comparative dating based on the iconography and style of image incised.

4.1 Tikal, Peten, Guatemala

The city-state of Tikal was established in the Preclassic period, with a small cluster of temples erected around the North Acropolis around 350 BCE (Martin and Grube, 2000:26, 43). Although the city came under the influence of the central Mexican city state of Teotihuacan during the Classic period, it remained occupied until the Maya Collapse of the 8th and 9th centuries (Martin and Grube, 2000:25). Graffiti are found on a multitude of surfaces at this site including difficult to reach roof combs (Webster; Trik and Kampen, 1983:4). Only a sample of the whole corpus will be featured in this study. One interesting facet of the graffiti at Tikal is that it is largely, but not wholly, made up of individual images rather than the narrative scenes found in other communities. All of the images of graffiti from Tikal featured in this dissertation date from the Classic period and are taken from multiple publications (Webster, 1963; Kampen, 1978; Haviland and Haviland, 1995; Hutson, 2011; Olton, 2015). The images are collated for the benefit of the reader and I have separated individual images from narrative scenes. I have chosen to show multiple representations of the same image produced by different authors as display of the images themselves may affect how readers will interpret the image.

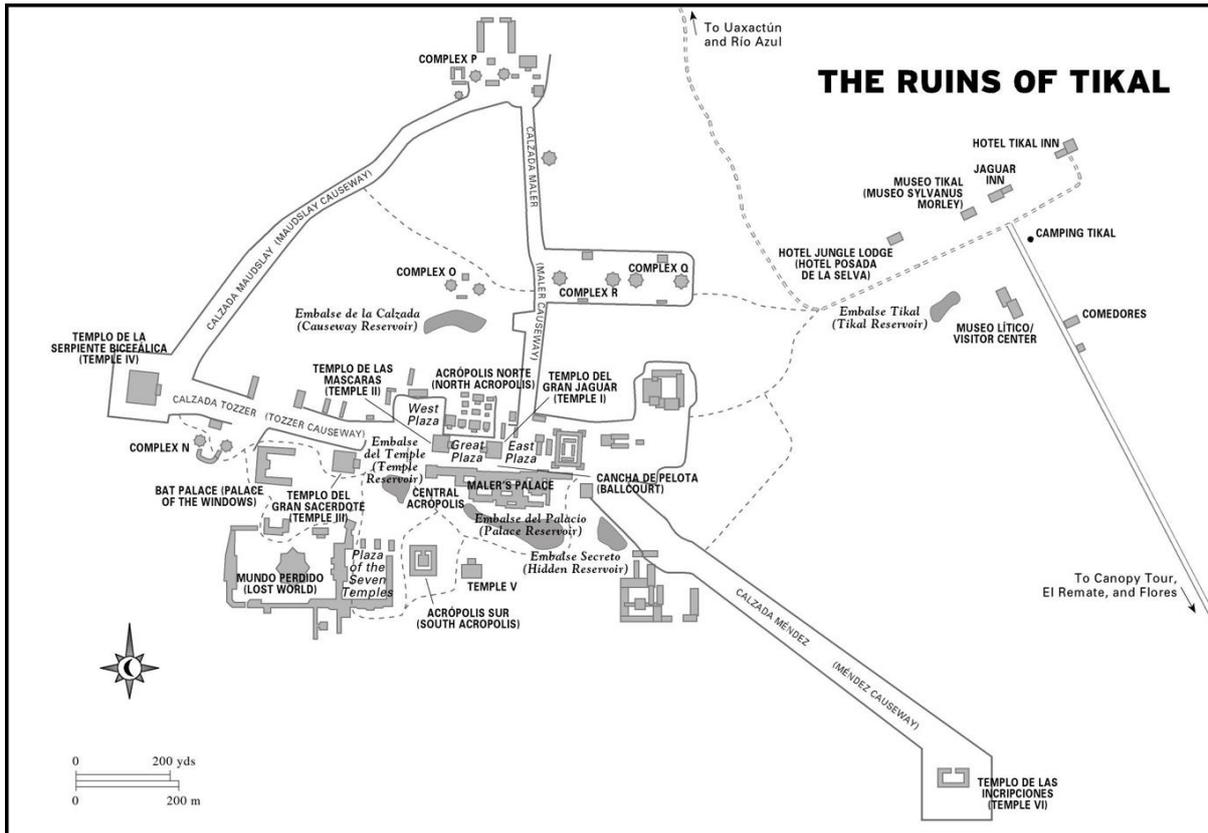


Figure 7: Site plan of Tikal with relevant structures labelled. From latinamericanstudies.org date accessed:27/08/18.



Figure 8: Graffito from Structure 5D-65. Figure 1 from Kampen (1978:75).



Figure 9: Graffito from Structure 5D-65. Scale 1:4 cm. Figure 11 from Webster (1963:41).



Figure 10: Graffiti from Structure 5D-65. Figure 11.6 from Olton (2015:168).

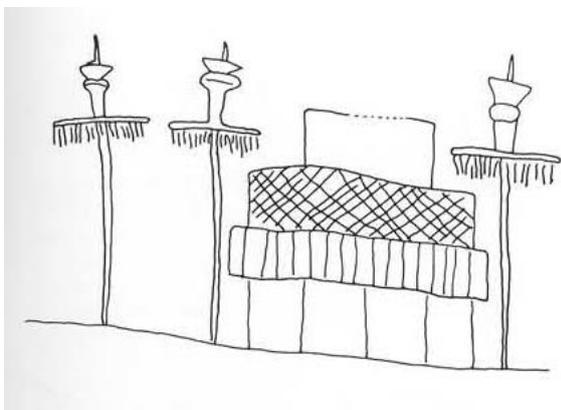


Figure 11: Graffiti from Structure 5D-65. Scale 1:4 cm. Figure 13 from Webster (1963:41).



Figure 12: Graffiti from the West wall of Temple II. Figure 12 from Hutson (2011:419).

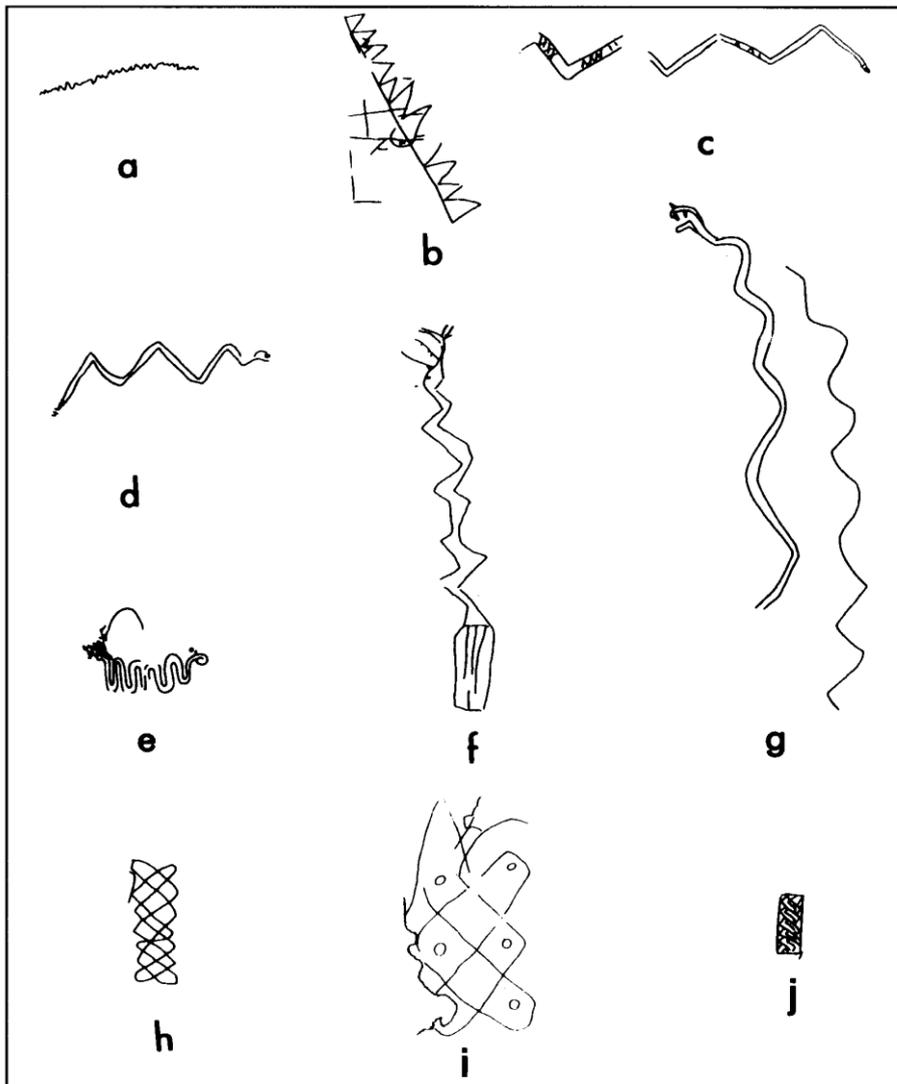


Figure 13: Graffiti from multiple structures. Figure 7 from Haviland and Haviland (1995:301).



Figure 14: Graffiti from Structure 3D-40. Figure 5 from Kampen (1978:177).

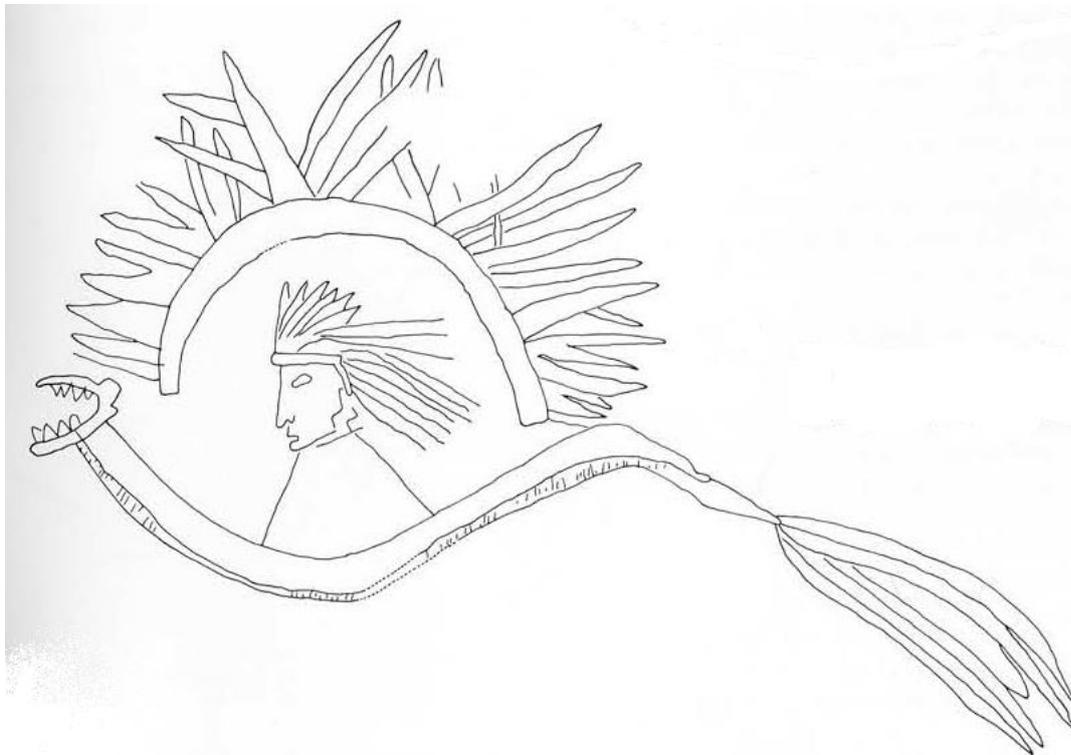


Figure 15: Graffito from Structure 5D-52. Scale 1:4 cm. Figure 40 from Webster (1963:47).

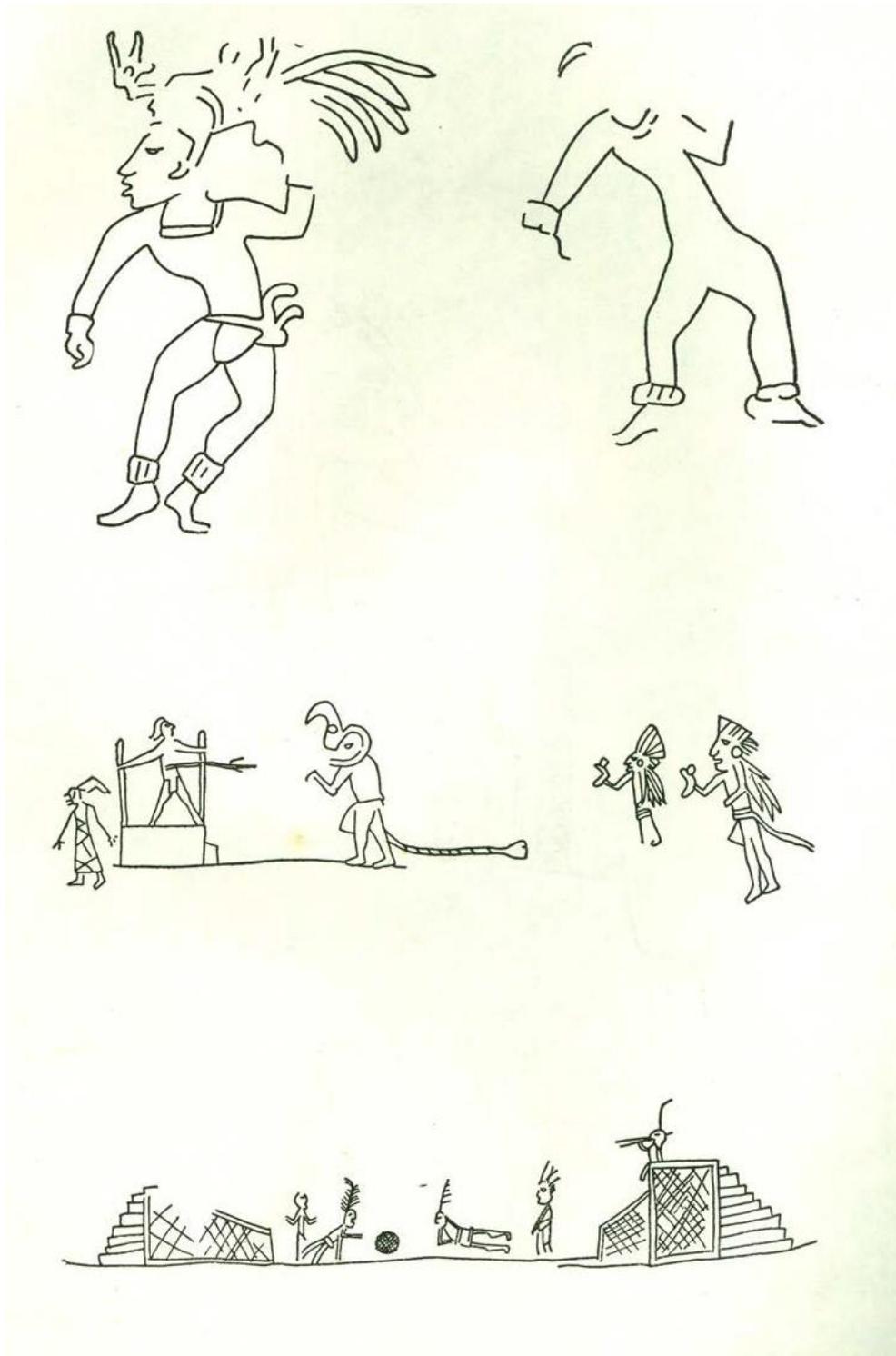


Figure 16: Three separate graffiti. Top from Structure 5D-65; middle from Structure 5D-2; bottom from Structure 5D-43. Figures 2, 3, and 4 from Kampen (1978:76).

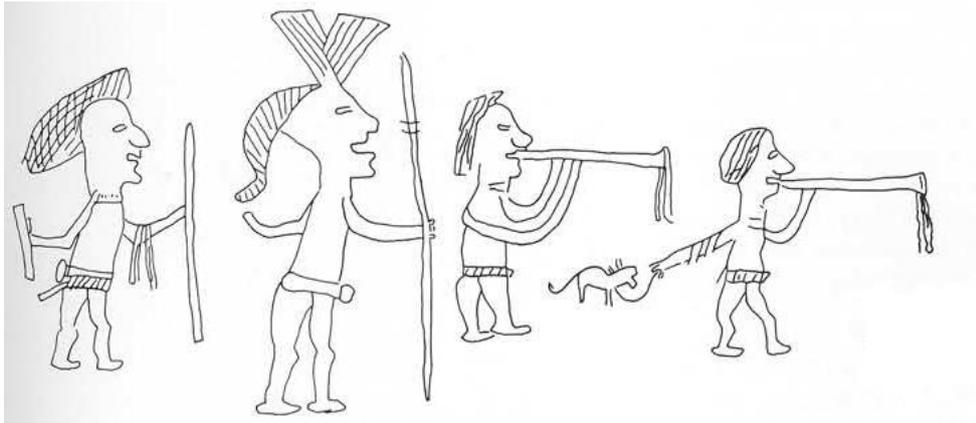


Figure 17: Graffiti from Structure 5D-52. Scale 1:4 cm. Figure 38 from Webster (1963:47).

4.2 Nakum, Peten, Guatemala

Nakum is located to the east of Tikal, still within the Peten region. Information on Nakum is derived from a single publication by Žračka and Hermes (2009) in which they review graffiti at two sites, Nakum and Yaxhá. As a result, the dataset for this section is limited. Possibly by virtue of studying the graffiti at two different sites, Žračka and Hermes (2009:136) explicitly comment that graffiti should be studied in its individual context. The graffiti at Nakum were found within monumental buildings in the centre of the site, most of which were found upon the acropolis towards the southern end of the central complex (Žračka and Hermes, 2009:136-7; Figure 18). Dating of the graffiti is largely Late Classic, with some examples dating to the Early Classic (Žračka and Hermes, 2009:136). Žračka and Hermes (2009:142) also indicate that there are some examples of graffiti with “influencia foránea a la tradición maya clásica”¹ (Figure 22), although they are unwilling to ascribe a date later than the Classic period.

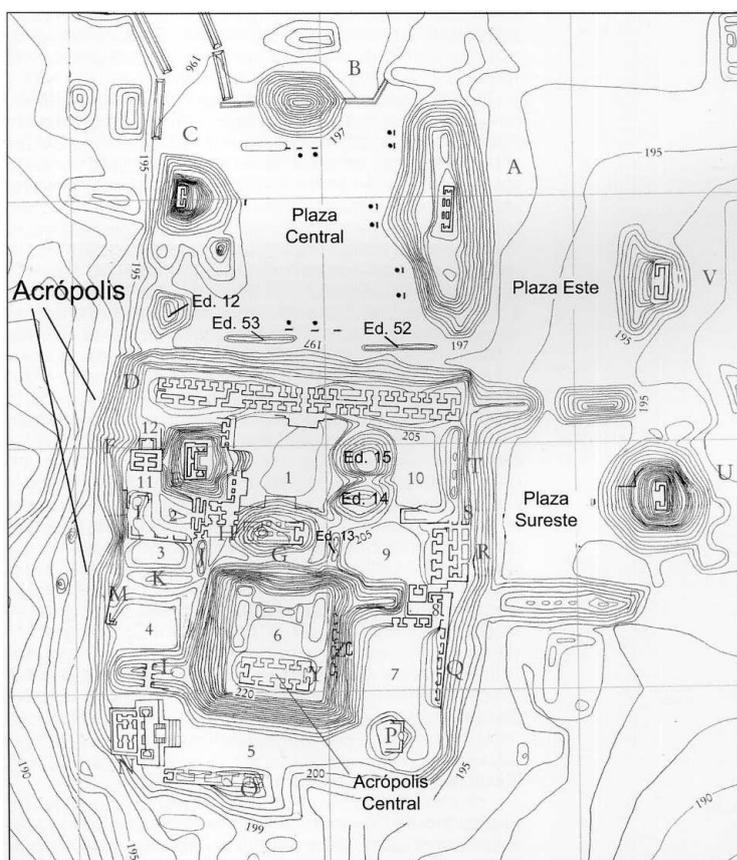


Figure 18: Site plan of Nakum showing the buildings within which graffiti was found. Figure 2 from Žračka and Hermes (2009:137).

¹ “influence foreign to the Classic Maya tradition”

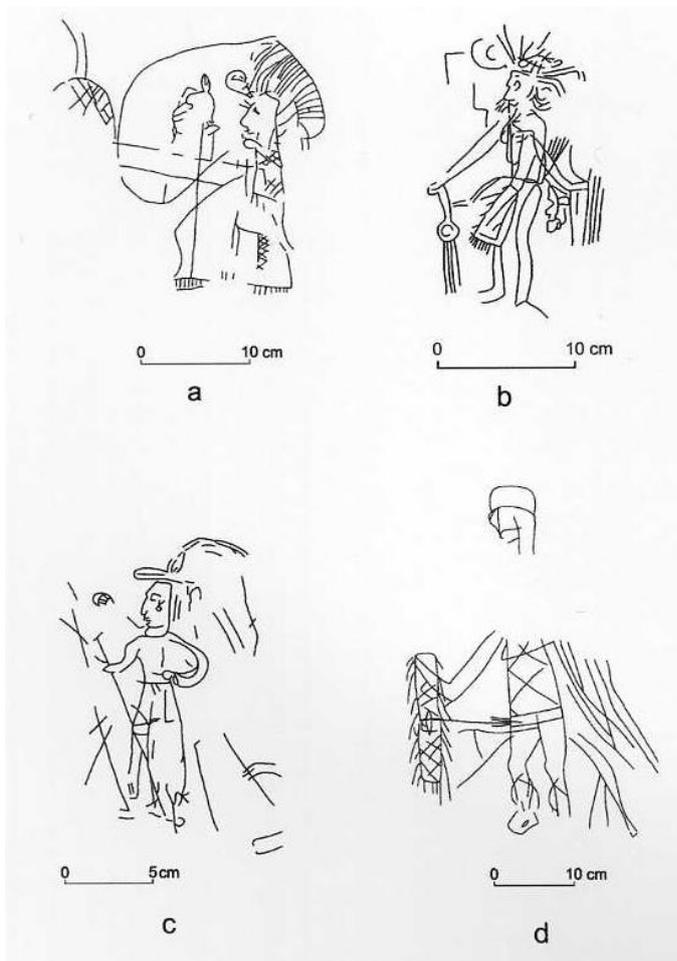


Figure 19: Figure 3 from *Żrałka and Hermes (2009:140)*.

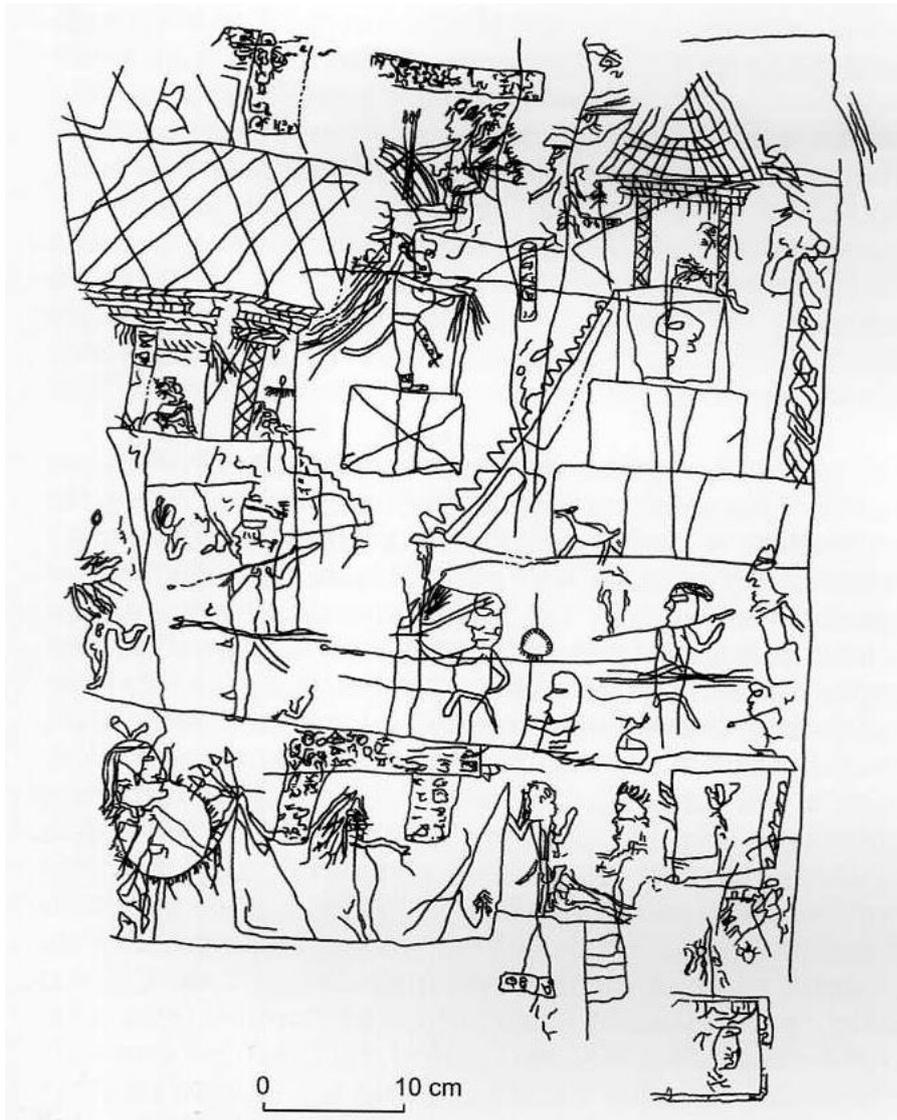


Figure 20: Figure 4 from Źrałka and Hermes (2009:141).

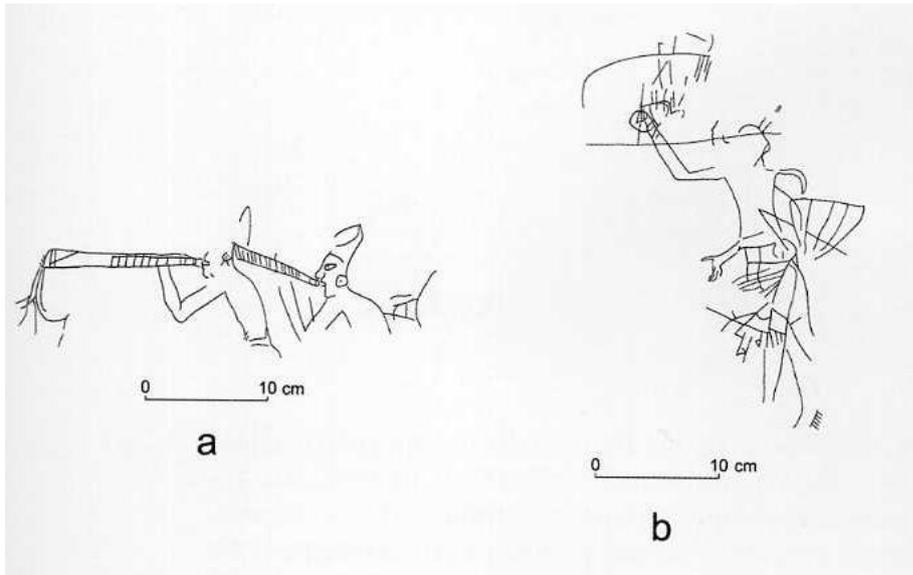


Figure 21: Figure 6 from *Żrałka and Hermes (2009:141)*.

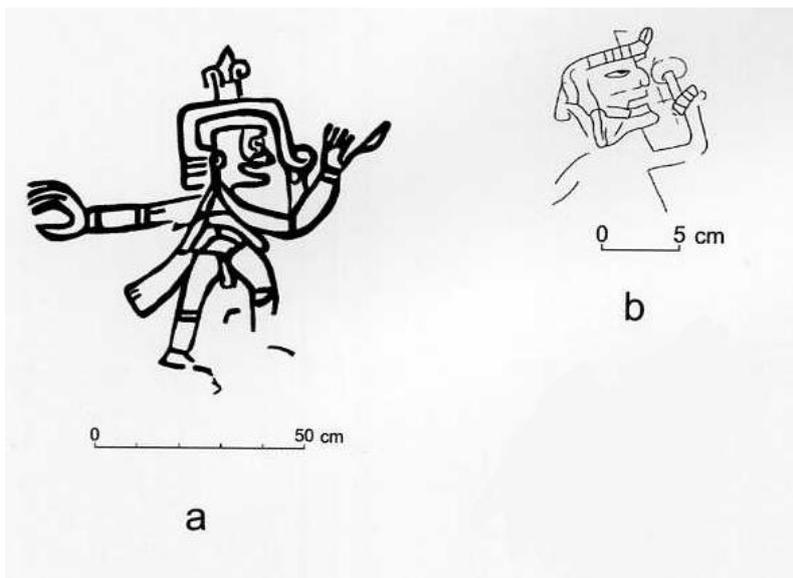


Figure 22: Figure 8 from *Żrałka and Hermes (2009:142)*.

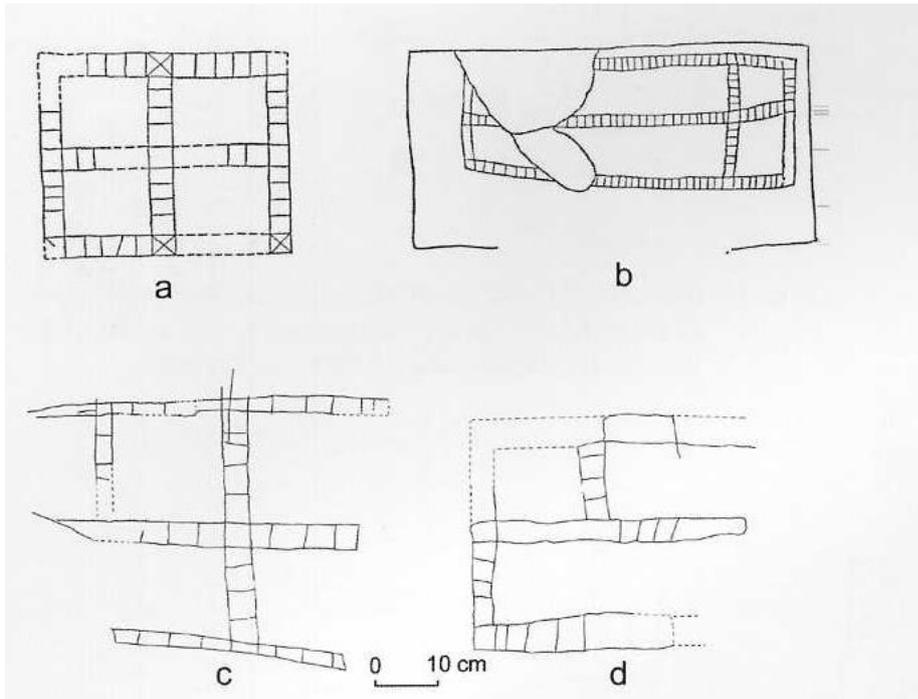


Figure 23: Patolli graffiti. Figure 17 from *Žralka and Hermes (2009:146)*.

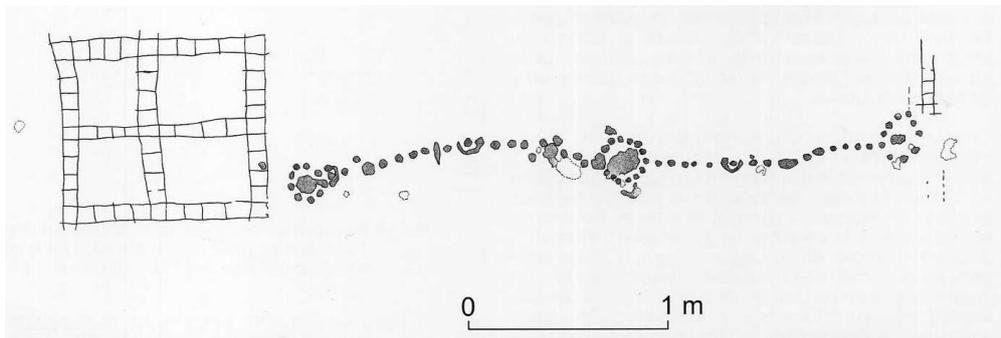


Figure 24: Patolli graffiti. Figure 18 from *Žralka and Hermes (2009:146)*.

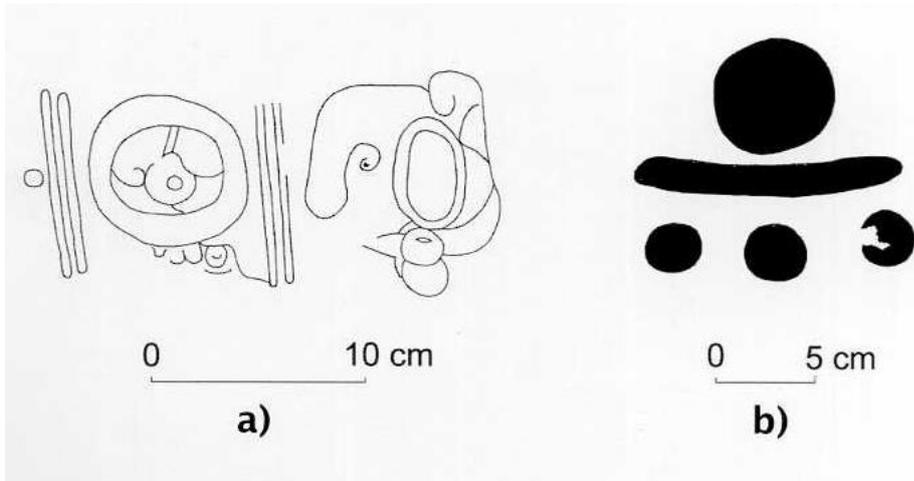


Figure 25: Glyph graffiti. Figure 19 from Żrałka and Hermes (2009:147).

4.3 Yaxhá, Peten, Guatemala

The documentation for Yaxhá are drawn from the same publication which provided information and images for Nakum, namely, Żraŕka and Hermes (2009). Yaxhá is located 11 kilometres south of Nakum, still within the Peten region. It lies just north of the large lake Yaxhá. The graffiti found in Yaxhá are located in the central area of the site with many finds focussed in the Eastern Acropolis, but also documented on the North-eastern and Southern acropoli (Żraŕka and Hermes, 2009:149-151, Figure 26). The authors highlight that much of the graffiti found were in Structure 216, a terraced structure supporting a temple. The structures containing graffiti largely date to the Terminal Classic and the second half of the Late Classic (Żraŕka and Hermes, 2009:149). The temple contains some narrative scenes, while other buildings have anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and architectural themes. Images illustrated here consist of narrative scenes and stand-alone images with foreign influence. Individual images without foreign influence will not be included, because although they are reported by Żraŕka and Hermes (2009:149) the authors do not provide illustrations.

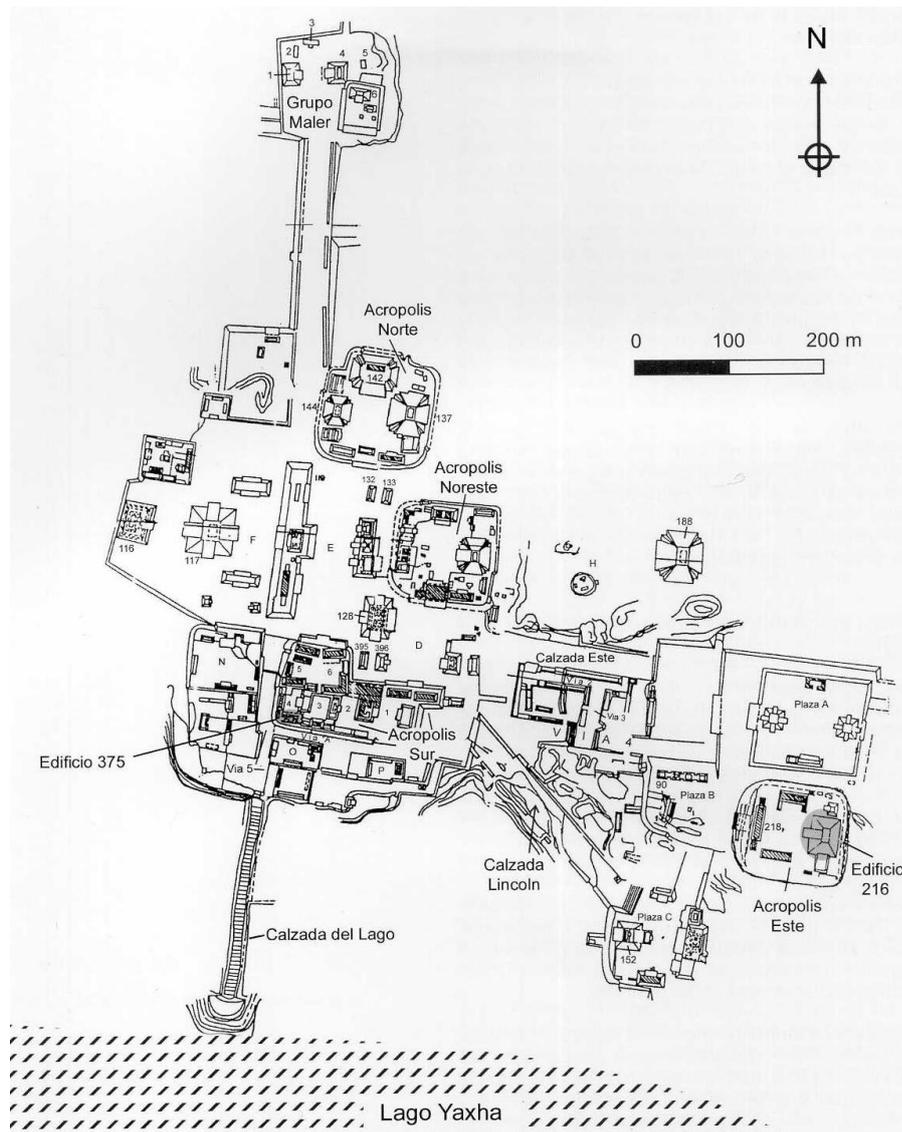


Figure 26: Site plan of Yaxhá figure 21 from Żrałka and Hermes (2009:150).

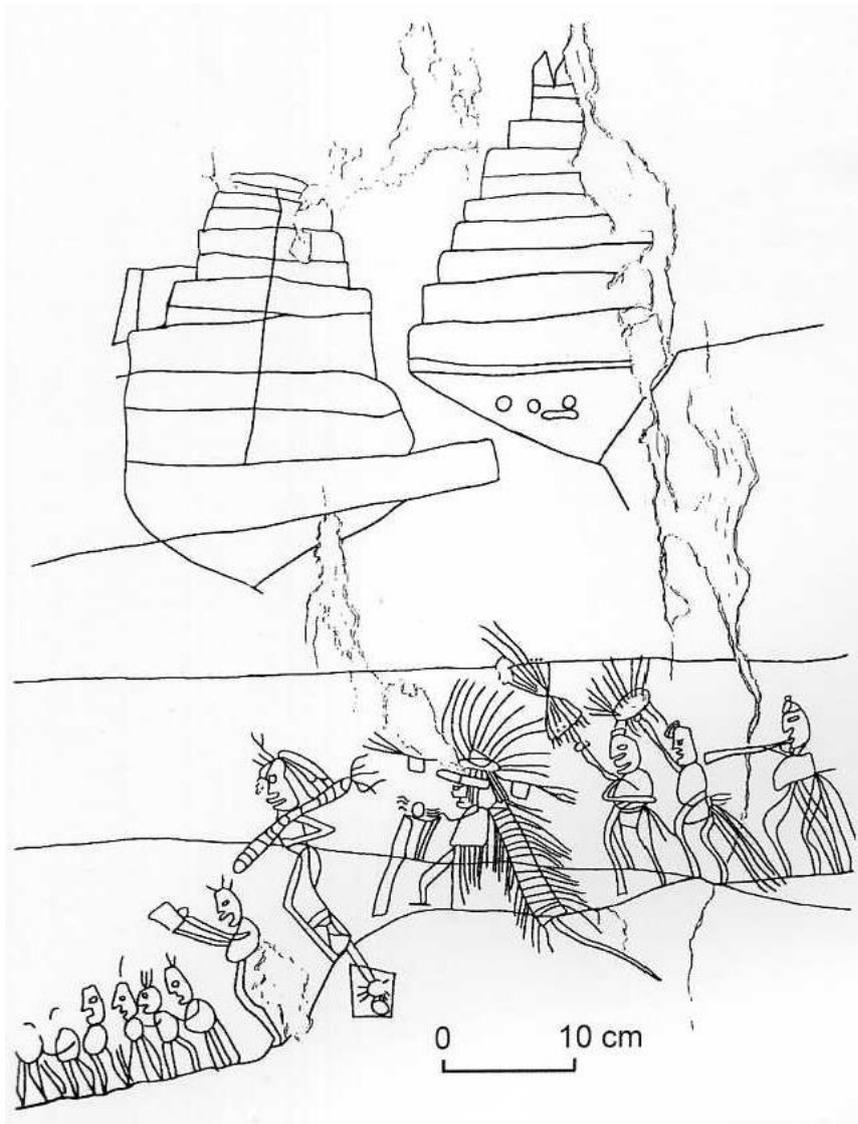


Figure 27: Figure26 from Źratka and Hermes (2009:154).

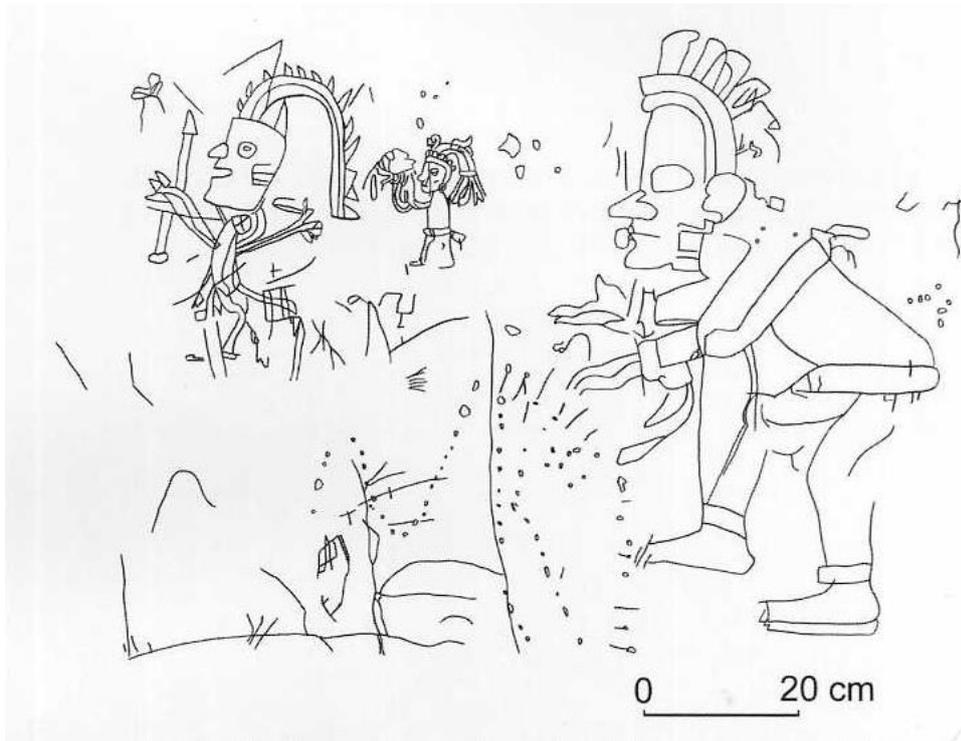


Figure 28: Figure 23 from Žratka and Hermes (2009:151).

4.4 Río Bec, Campeche, Mexico

The information on graffiti from Río Bec is drawn from Patrios (2013). According to Patrios, graffiti can be found in many different structures throughout the site, some of which are indicated in Figure 23. Structures containing graffiti occur in groups A, B, D, II, III, V, Ceibarico A, La Tortuga, Thompson, and El Porvenir (Table 1 in Patrios, 2013:436). Patrios also notes that all of the structures in which graffiti were found are residences, “from single-room ordinary houses to imposing palaces of 13 rooms” (Patrios, 2013:433). Patrios emphasises that there are two distinct corpora of graffiti: occupational graffiti and post-abandonment graffiti (Patrios, 2013:433). These corpora are defined by stylistic, thematic, and spatial distinctions. The stylistic distinctions are based on the Classic Maya art style, although Patrios makes very clear that the graffiti of the occupational period does not conform to the rigidity of royally commissioned monumental art (2013:37). The change in style for the chronologically later corpus of graffiti is paired with a thematic evolution restricted to the corpus (not found during the occupational period) incorporating more sexualised and female imagery (Patrios, 2013:444). Patrios’ dating is based in part on the height of the graffiti, arguing that occupational graffiti would have been covered by post-abandonment architectural debris (2013:435) upon which later graffiti artists would sit or stand to create their own images (2013:434). Patrios also makes some mention of *patolli* boards found at the site only in the context of the occupational graffiti, but does not illustrate them (2013:437). Thus, images of *patolli* boards from Río Bec are not included in this study as I do not have access to them. What is included in this study are images from both chronological categories of graffiti: occupation and post-abandonment.

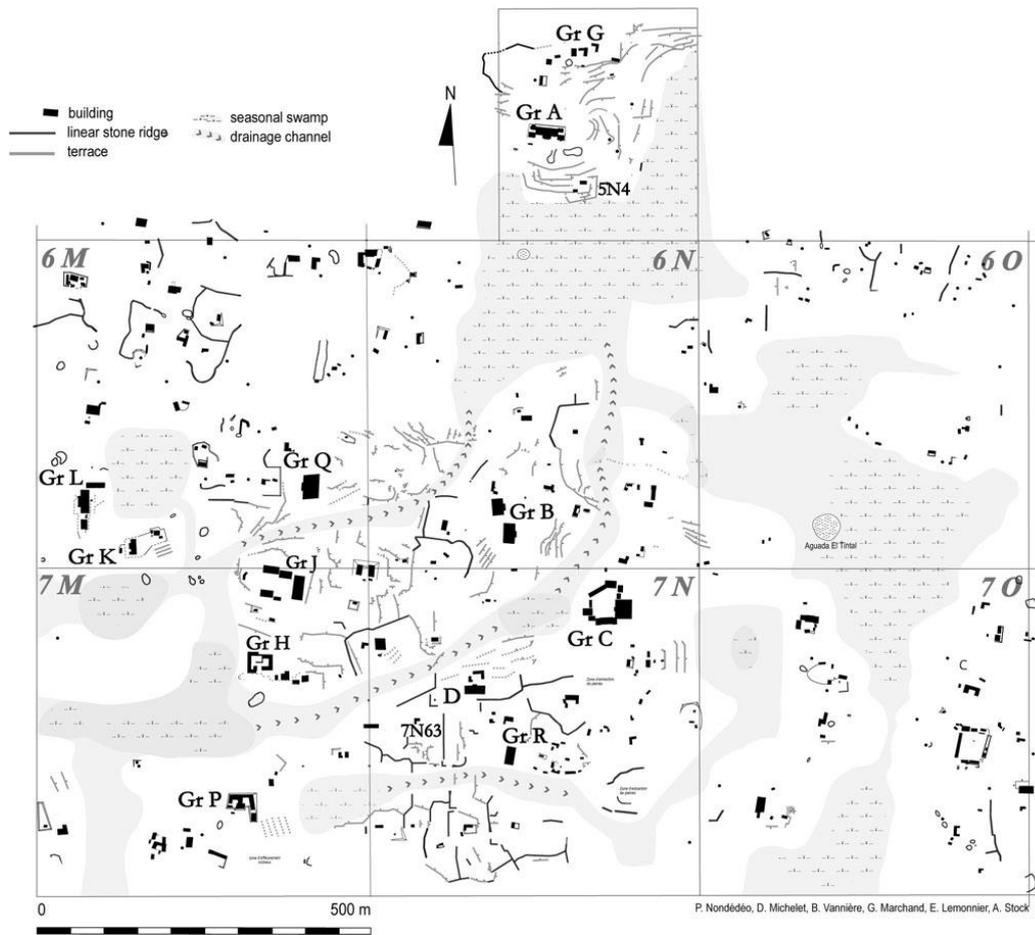


Figure 29: Plan of the area of Río Bec. Figure 2 from Arnauld et al. (2013:472).

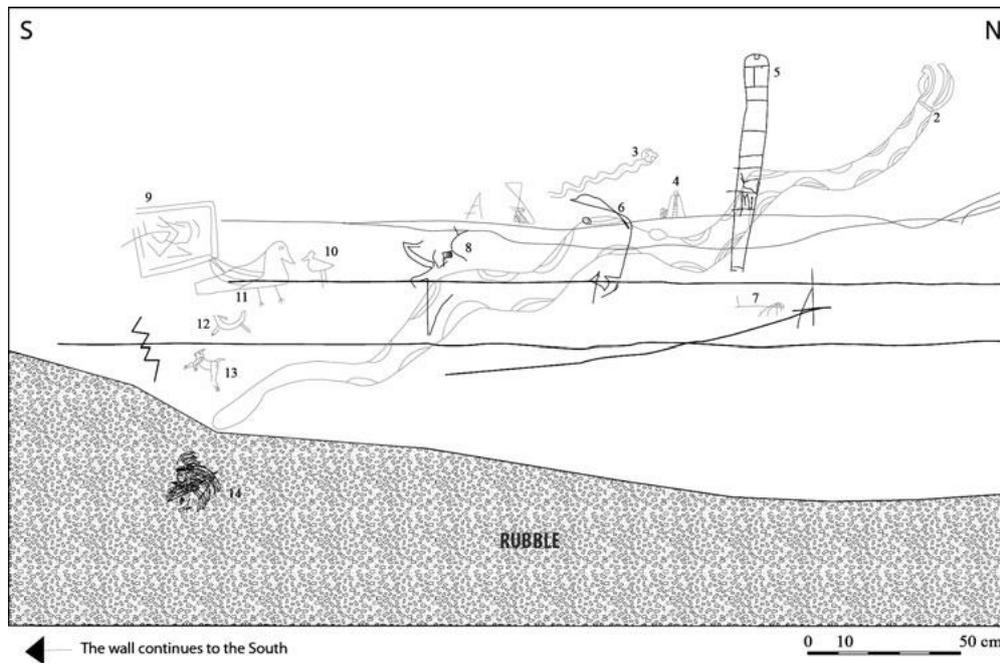


Figure 30: Scale drawing of the Western wall of Structure 6N1, Room D, depicting post-abandonment graffiti above the rubble and occupational graffiti below the rubble. Images in black are believed to predate those in grey. Figure 1 from Patrios (2013:435).

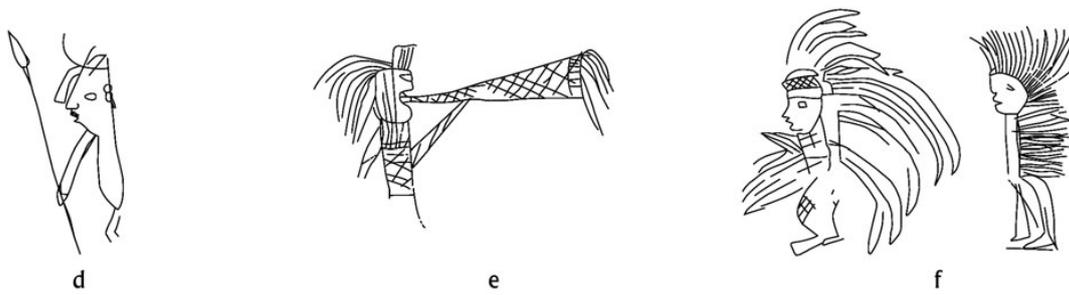


Figure 31: D and E found in Group A Structure 5N2; F found in Group B Structure 6N1. Figure 4 from Patrios (2013:438).

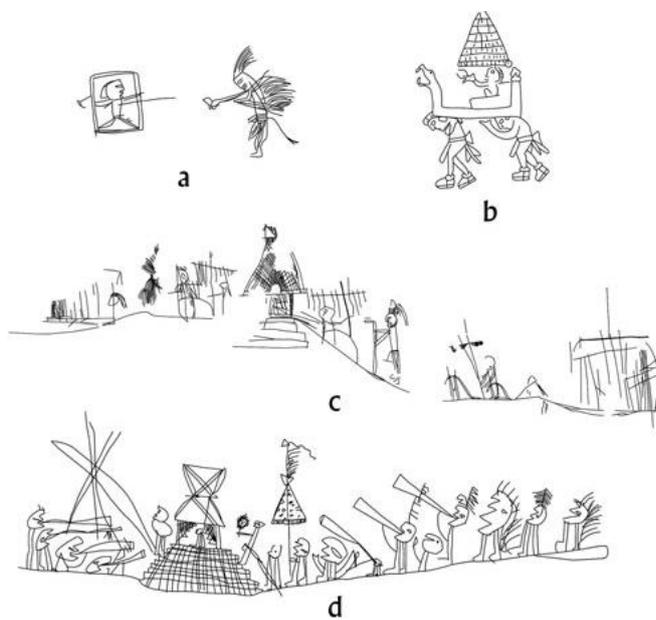


Figure 32: Graffito A Group D, Structure 7N1; B Group B Structure 6N1; C Group A, Structure 5N2; D Group V, Structure IV. Figure 5 from Patrios (2013:439).

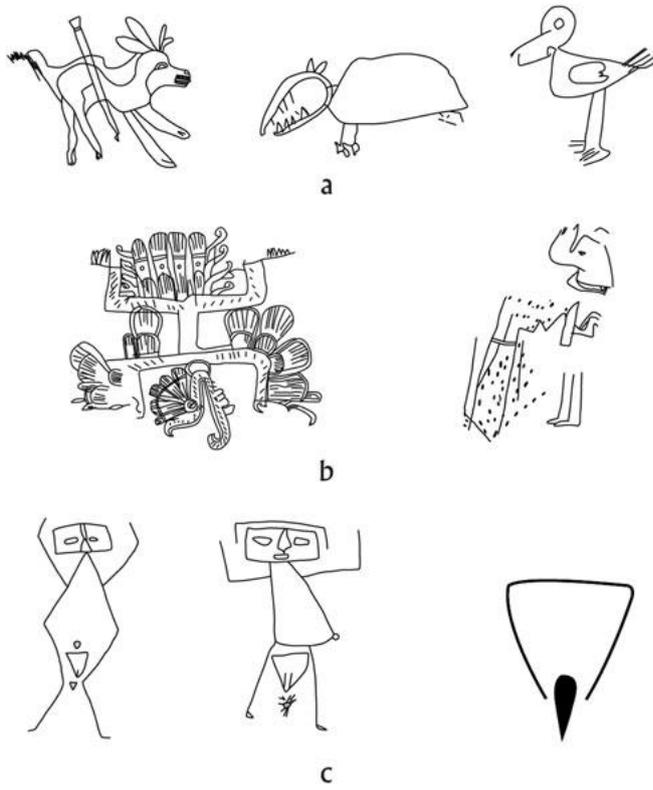


Figure 33: Post-abandonment graffiti. A found in Group B, Structure 6N1; B found in Ceibarico A, Room D; C left and middle, found in Group B, Structure 6N1; C right found in El Porvenir, Structure 5. Figure 8 from Patrios (2013:444).

4.5 Plan De Ayutla, Chiapas, Mexico

Navarro-Castillo and colleagues (2017:1) discuss graffiti at Plan De Ayutla, explaining that graffiti were found in only two structures and three rooms at the site. Structure 2, described as a temple, is atop the Northern Acropolis, as is Structure 13, presumed to be an administrative building (Navarro-Castillo et al., 2017:1). Graffiti are believed to date to the Late Classic based on the style and iconography (Navarro-Castillo et al., 2017:6). Plan De Ayutla is one of the sites at which there are no narrative scenes, instead there are stand-alone anthropomorphic or architectural images. Thus, this study will show all four graffiti which Navarro-Castillo and colleagues provide.

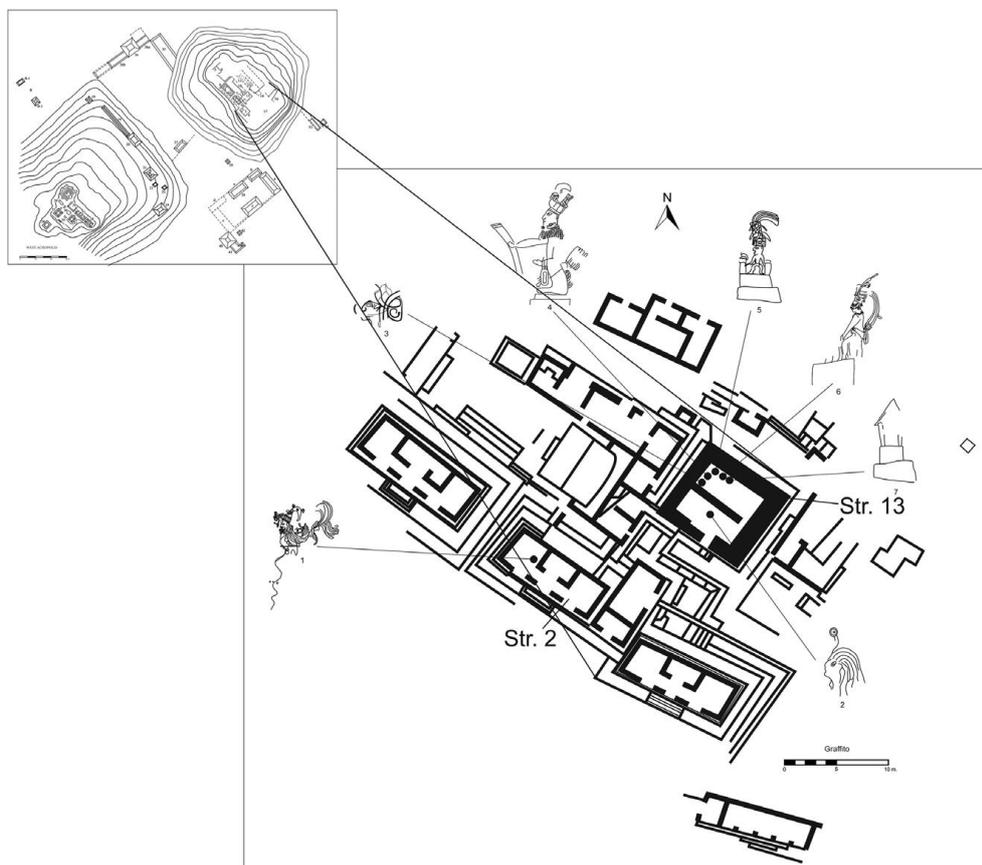


Figure 34: Plan of the Northern Acropolis at Plan De Ayutla, smaller map indicating the centre of the site and the larger map highlighting the structures on the acropolis within which graffiti were found. Small renditions of each of the graffiti surround their marked location. Figure 1 from Navarro-Castillo et al. (2017:2).

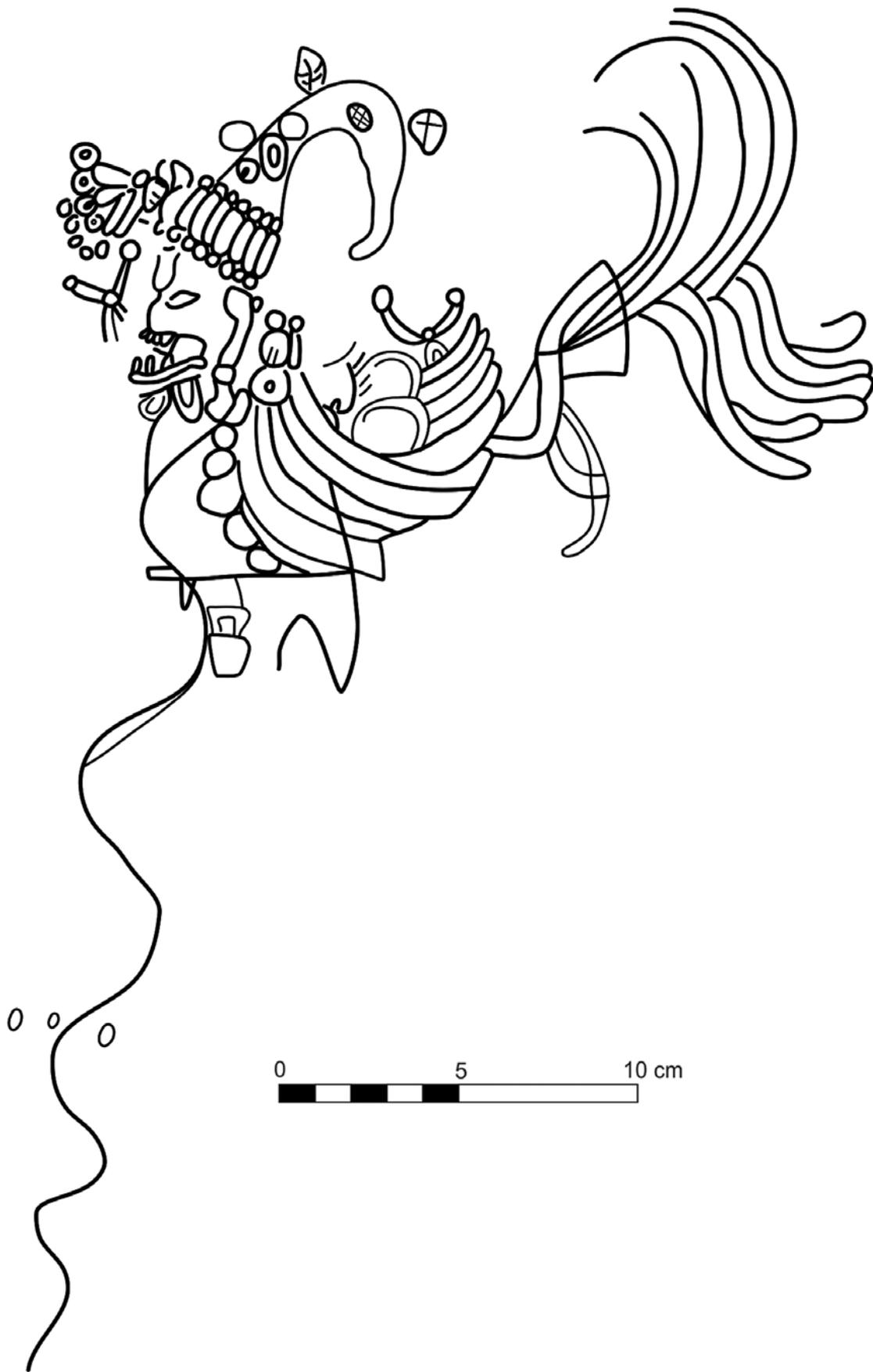


Figure 35: Graffito from Structure 2. Figure 3 from Navarro-Castillo et al. (2017:4).



Figure 36: Graffito from Structure 13. Figure 4 from Navarro-Castillo et al. (2017:5).



Figure 37: Graffito from Structure 13. Figure 5 from Navarro-Castillo et al. (2017:6).



Figure 38: Graffito from Structure 13. Figure 6 from Navarro-Castillo et al. (2017:7).

4.6 Xunantunich, Cayo, Belize

In his 2003 excavation of Xunantunich, in the Cayo District of Belize, Yaeger (2005:16-20) found graffiti in Structure A11: one graffito depicting an individual and four *patolli* boards in either full or fragmentary form. McCurdy and colleagues (2018) found a number of images and scenes in the 'Tut' building on El Castillo. However, while McCurdy and colleagues (2018:192) mention graffiti, including *patolli* boards which they discovered within 'Group C' outside the central temple complex, they did not find *patolli* etchings in the 'Tut' building.

Images uncovered by the BVAR Project in summer 2017 (Watkins et al., 2018) were discovered in Structure A13, believed at one point to either be an elite palace residence or an administrative centre. The rooms on the western end of the entrance each have partial or whole *patolli* boards etched onto the benches in the eastern half of the rooms (Figures 46, 48, 56). There are also a few individual images depicted and some abstract forms. Finally, there is also a date glyph "11 Ajaw" (Figure 53) that has been deciphered by Christophe Helmke to read the 11th October 790 CE (Watkins et al., 2018). All the images depicted have either come from publications by Yaeger, McCurdy and colleagues or are courtesy of the BVAR Project. All graffiti from Structure A13 are displayed in this chapter as these images will be key to new insights in Chapter 6. Materials from A13 are from the BVAR Project, containing maps created by Merle Alfaro, Christophe Helmke, Britt Davis, Shawn Morton, Jorge Can and myself, graffiti by Christophe Helmke, Merle Alfaro, and Tia B. Watkins, all digitised by Christophe Helmke and Tia B. Watkins.

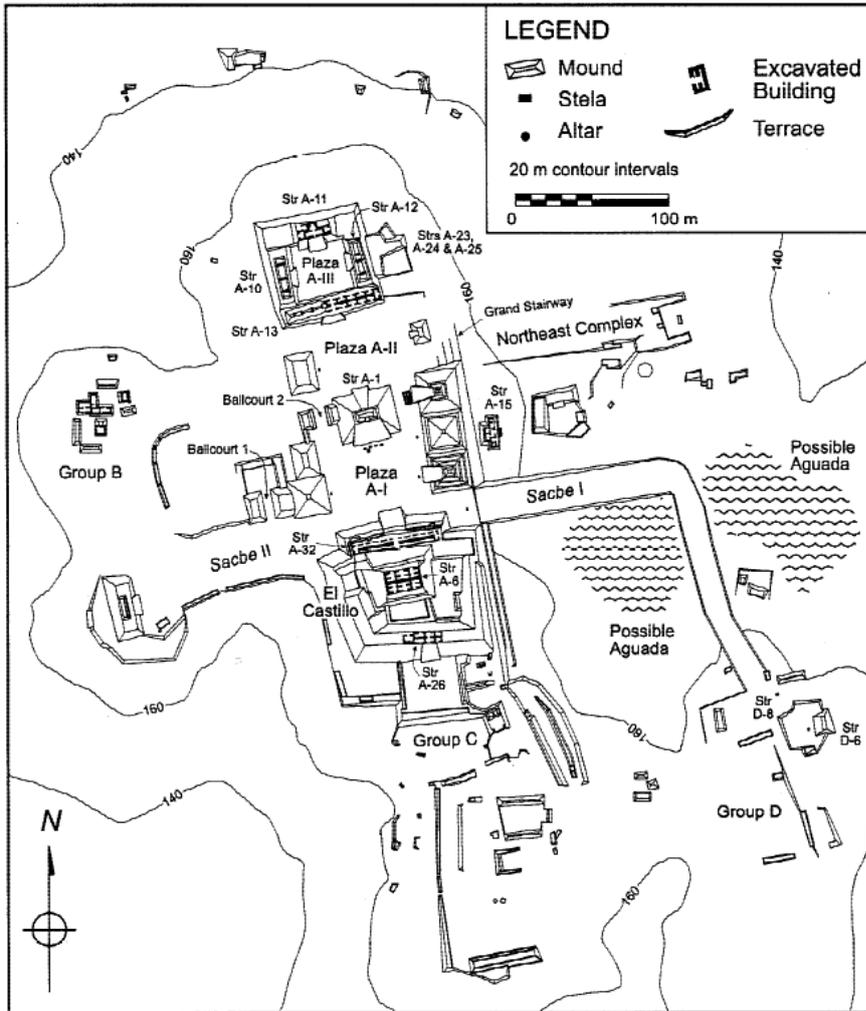


Figure 39: Site plan of Xunantunich. Figure 2 from LeCount et al. (2002:44).

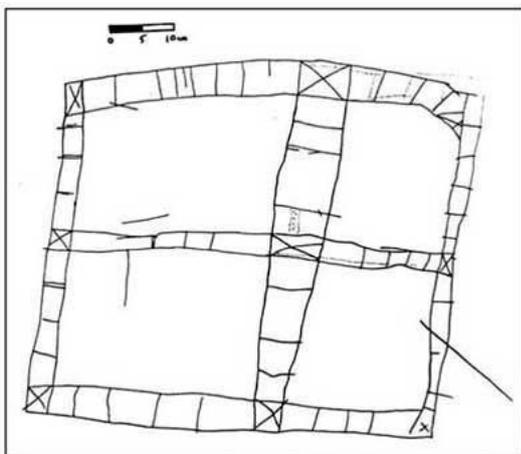


Figure 40: Patolli board from Structure A11, floor of Room 9. Figure 13 from Yaeger (2005:17).

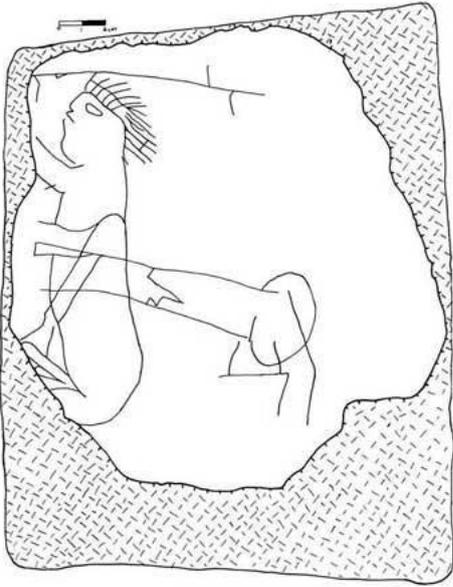


Figure 41: Graffito from Structure A11, floor of Room 9. Figure 14 from Yaeger (2005:18).

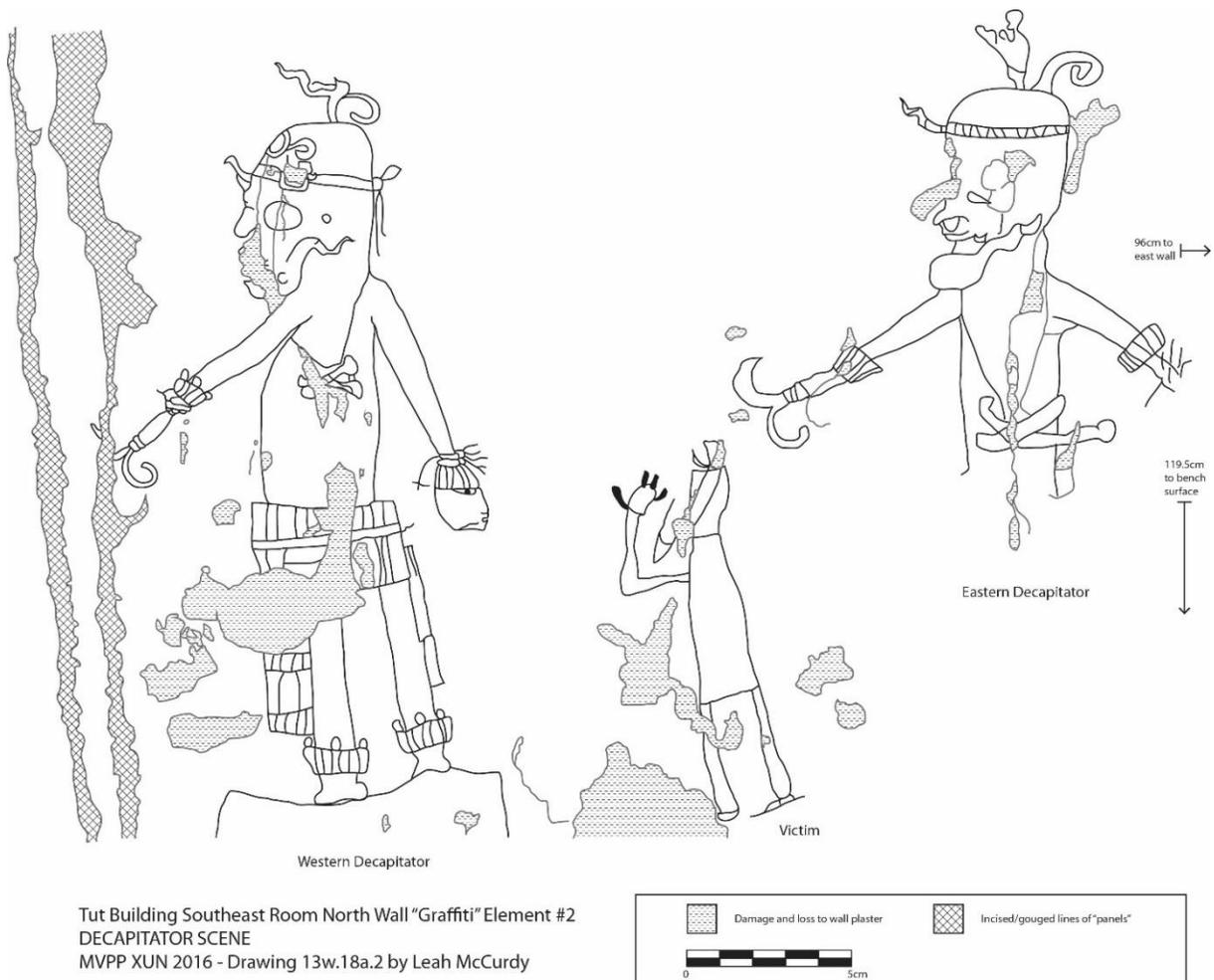


Figure 42: Graffiti from the 'Tut' building. Figure 7 from McCurdy et al. (2018:188).

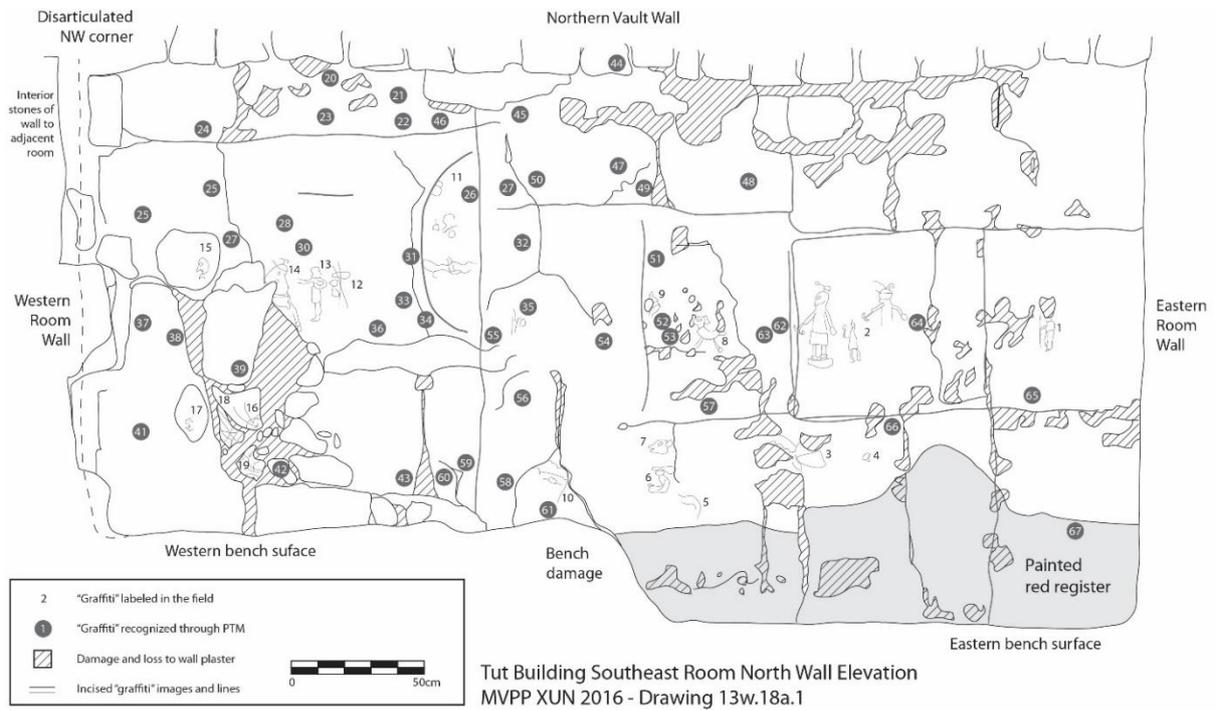


Figure 43: Northern wall of the 'Tut' building showing distribution of graffiti images. Figure 4 from McCurdy et al. (2018:186).

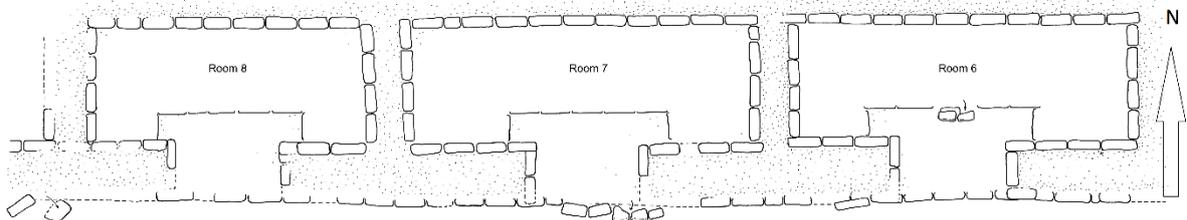
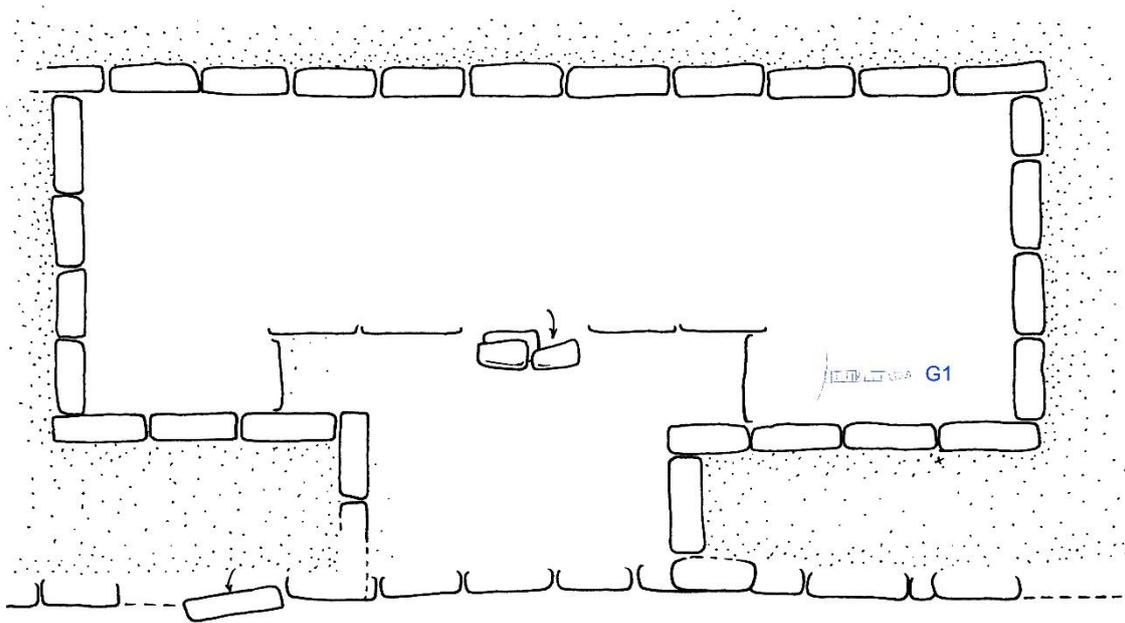


Figure 44: Map of the western side of Structure A13, marked as unexcavated in Figure 33 above. Courtesy of BVAR Project.



Room 6

+

+

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Figure 45: Map of Room 6 from Structure A13 in the eastern most excavate room. Graffiti found within the room indicated in blue. Scale: 1:20 cm. Courtesy of BVAR Project.

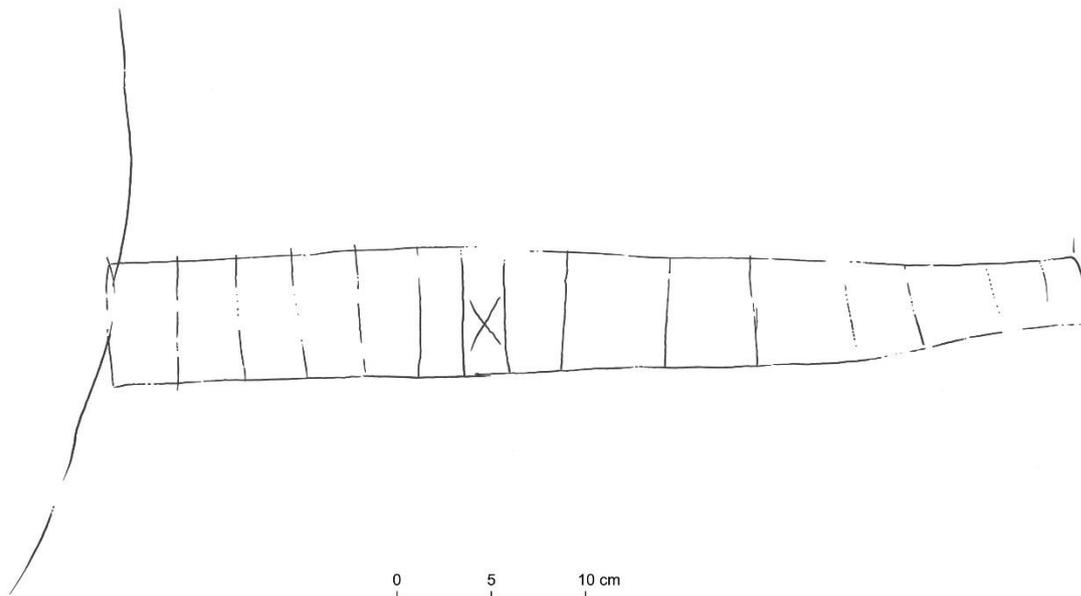


Figure 46: G1, Partial patolli found on the eastern section of the bench of Room 6. Courtesy of BVAR Project.

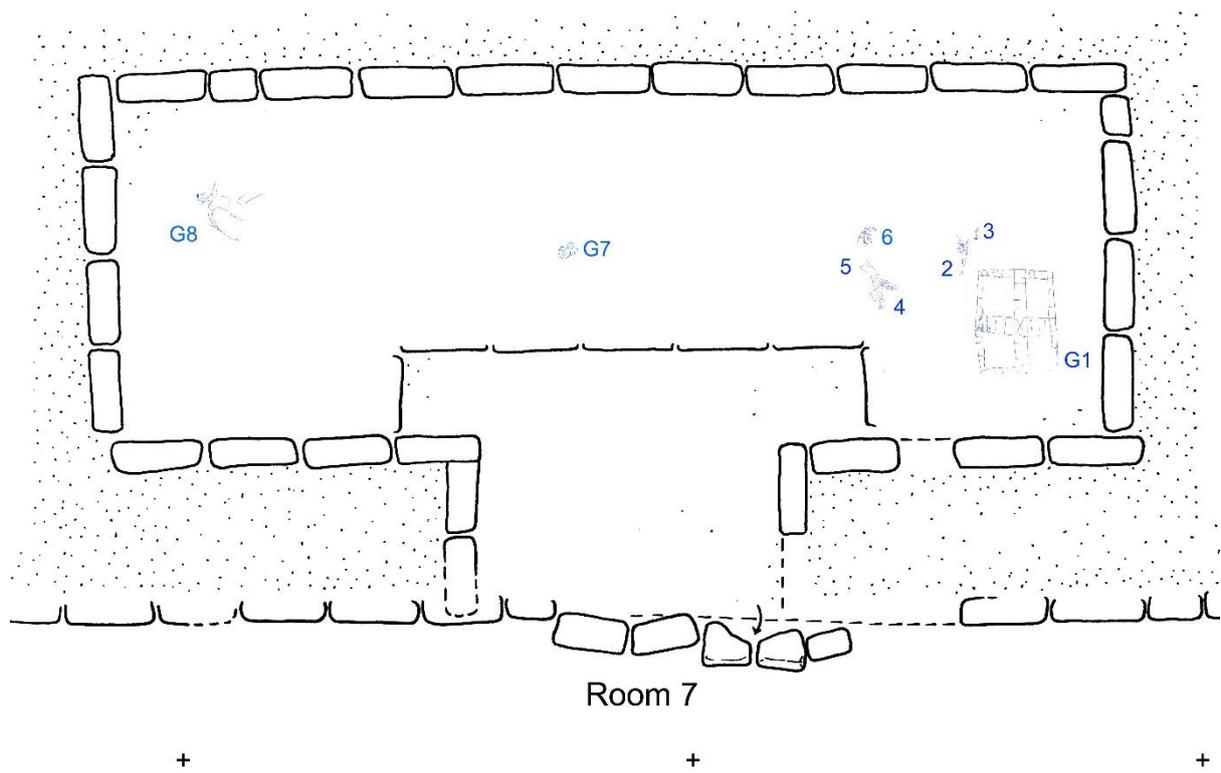


Figure 47: Map of Room 7 from Structure A13. Middle excavated room. Graffiti found within the room indicated in blue. Scale: 1:20 cm. Courtesy of BVAR Project.

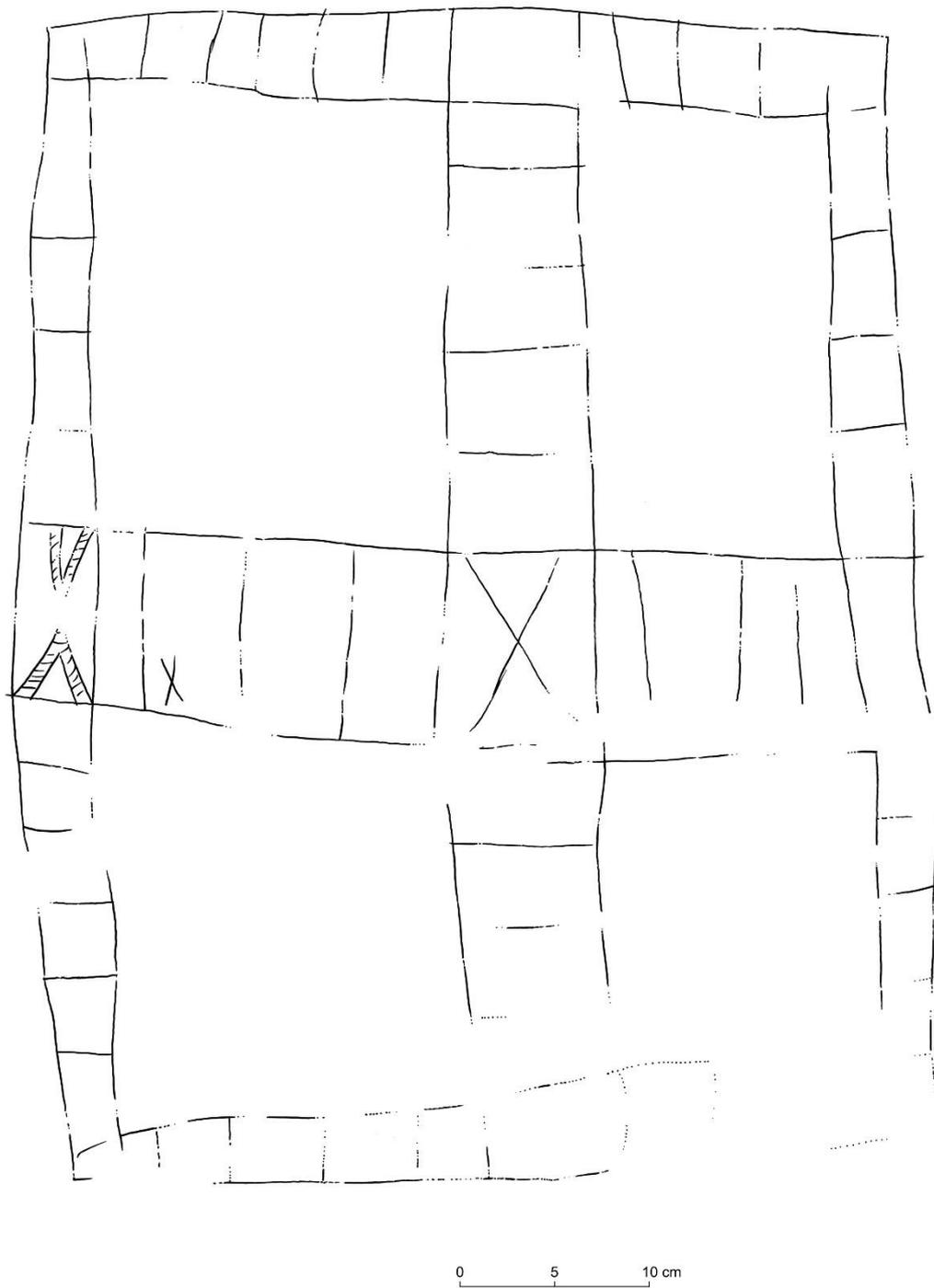


Figure 48: G1, patolli board from eastern portion of Room 7. Courtesy of BVAR Project.

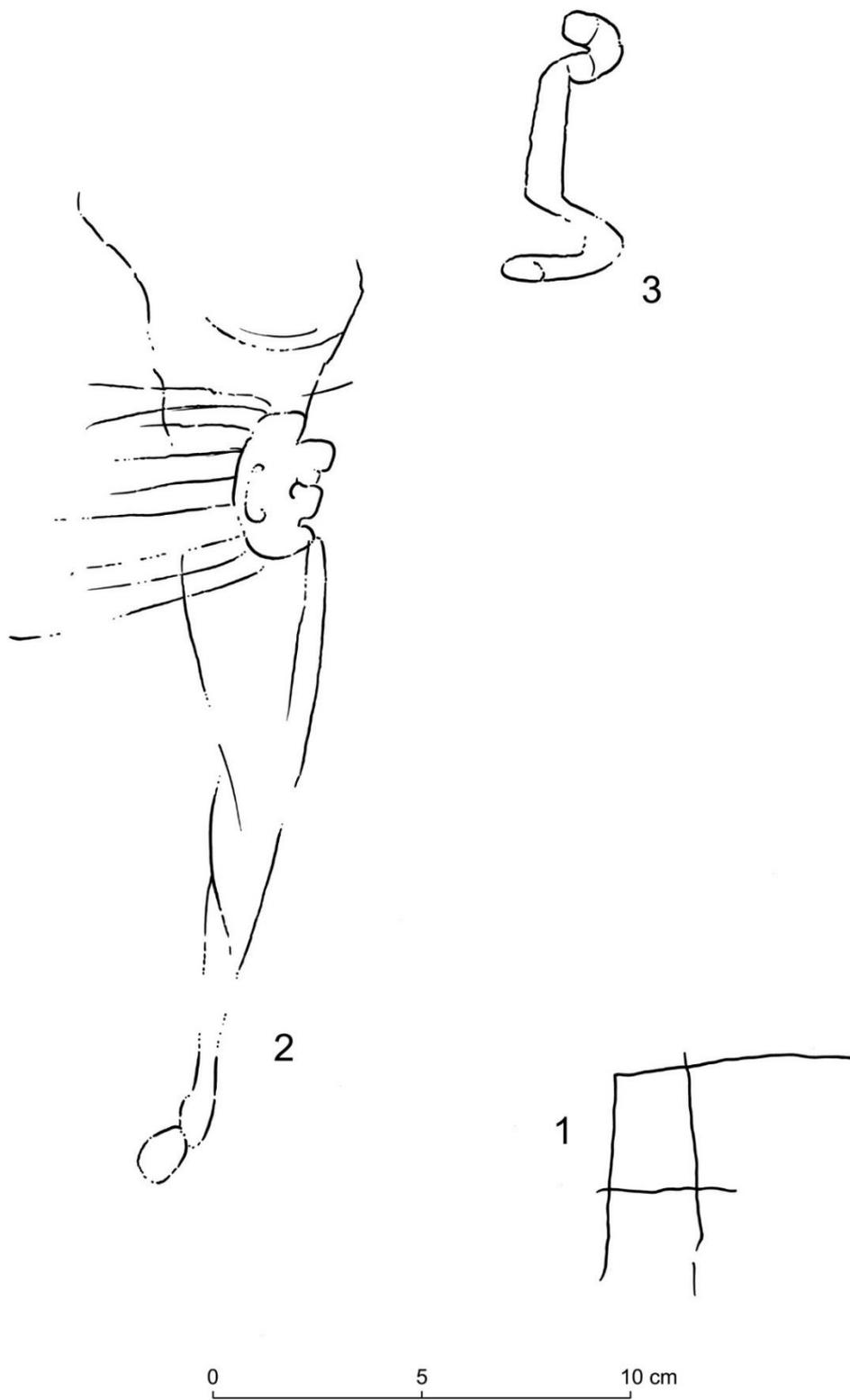


Figure 49: Partial section of patolli board G1, and graffiti G2 and G3 from Room 7, Structure A13. Courtesy of BVAR Project.



0 5 10 cm

Figure 50: G4, from Room 7 Structure A13. Courtesy of BVAR Project.

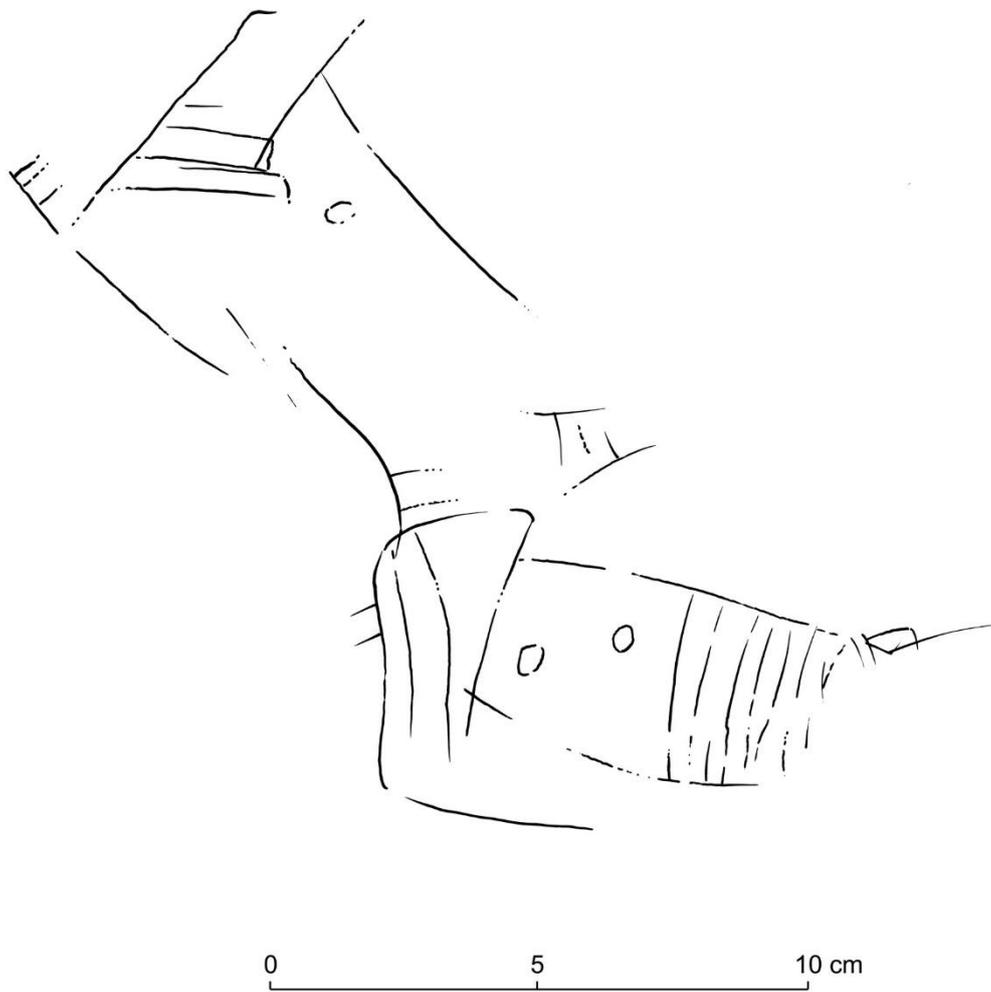


Figure 51: G5, from Room 7 Structure A13. Courtesy of BVAR Project.

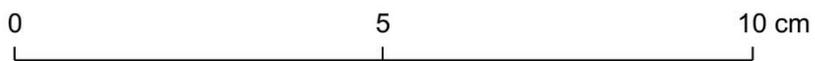


Figure 52: G6, from Room 7 Structure A13. Courtesy of BVAR Project.

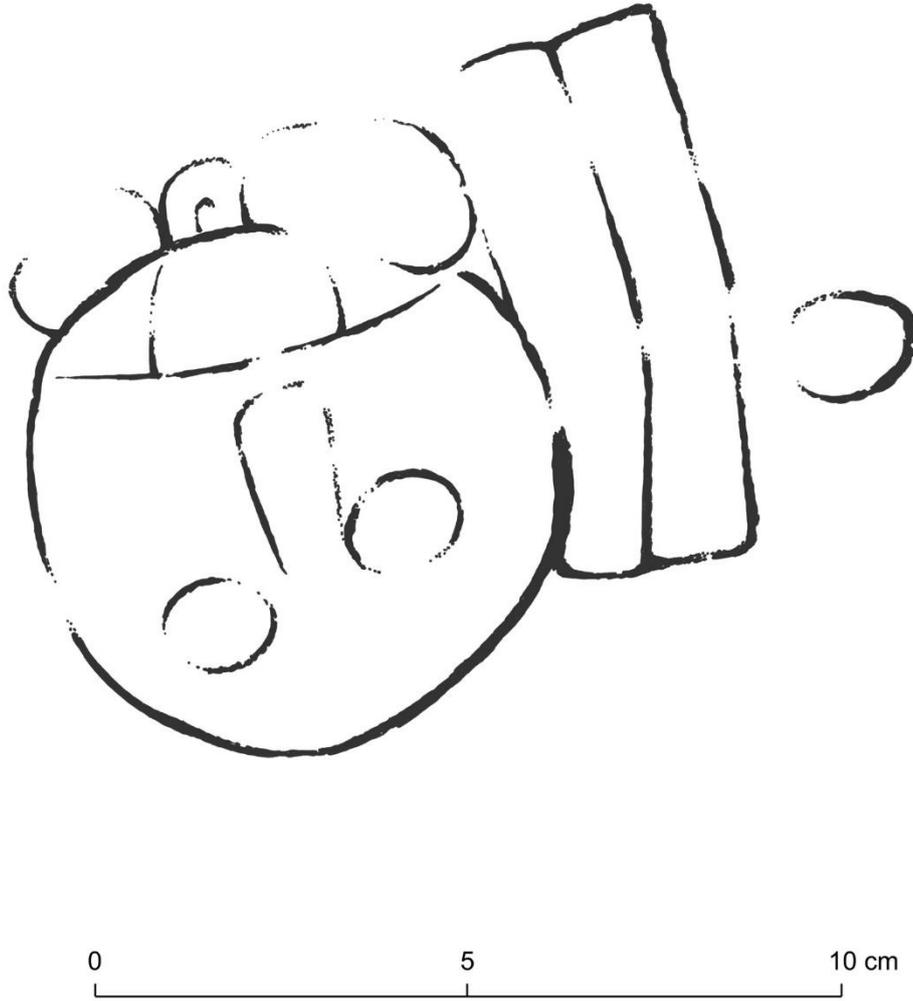


Figure 53: G7, Ajaw glyph from Room 7 Structure A13. Courtesy of BVAR Project.

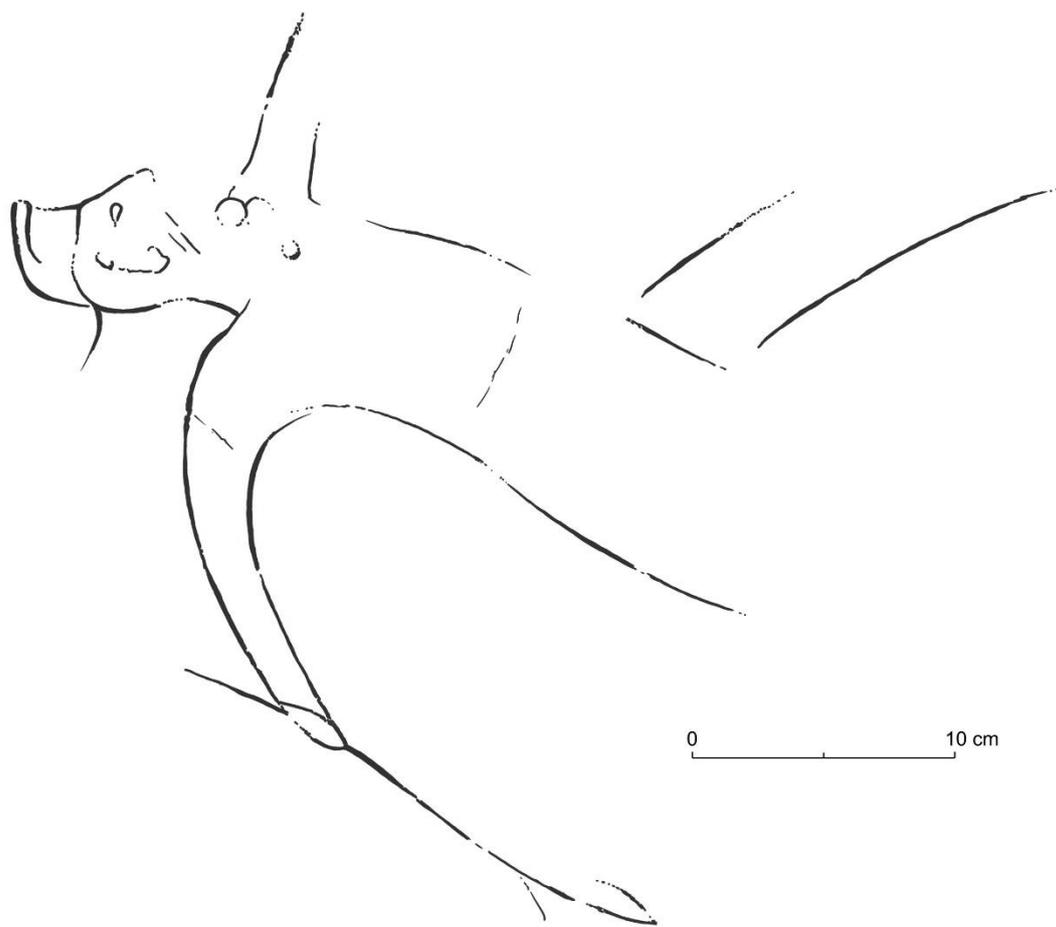
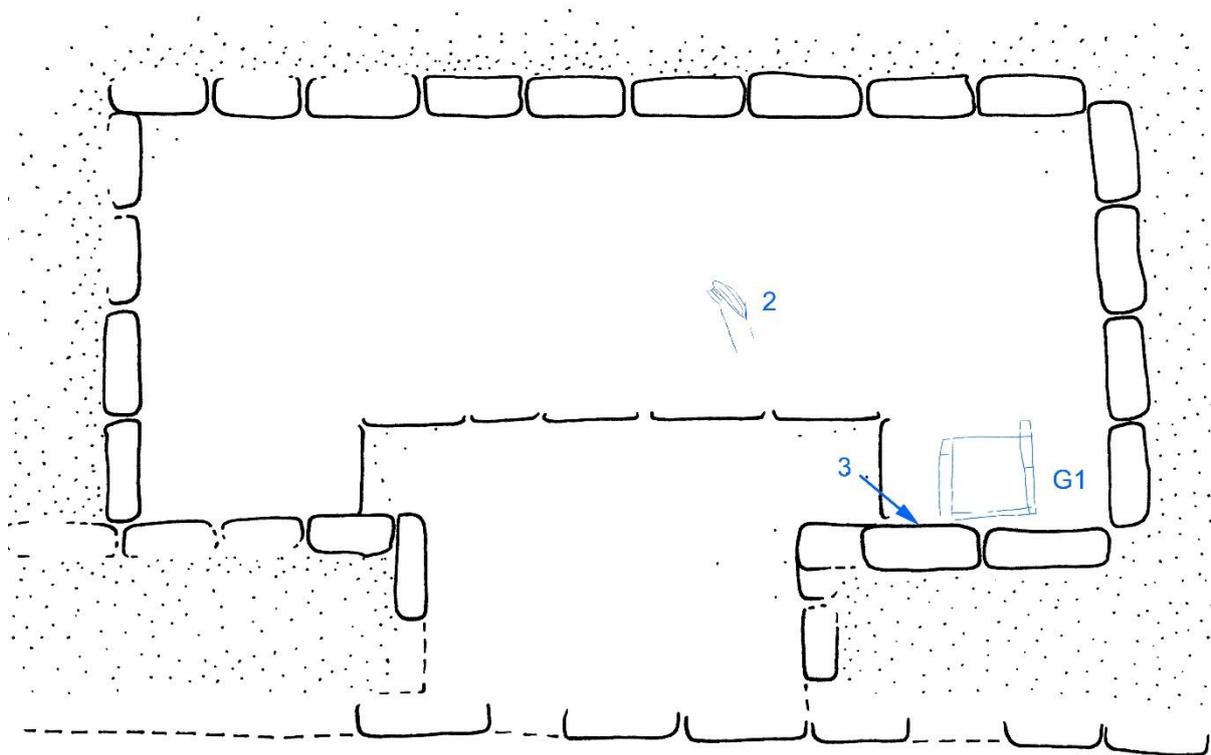


Figure 54: G8, from Room 7 Structure A13. Courtesy of BVAR Project.



Room 8

Figure 55: Map of Room 8 from Structure A13. Western most excavated room. Graffiti found within the room indicated in blue. Scale: 1:20 cm. Courtesy of BVAR Project.

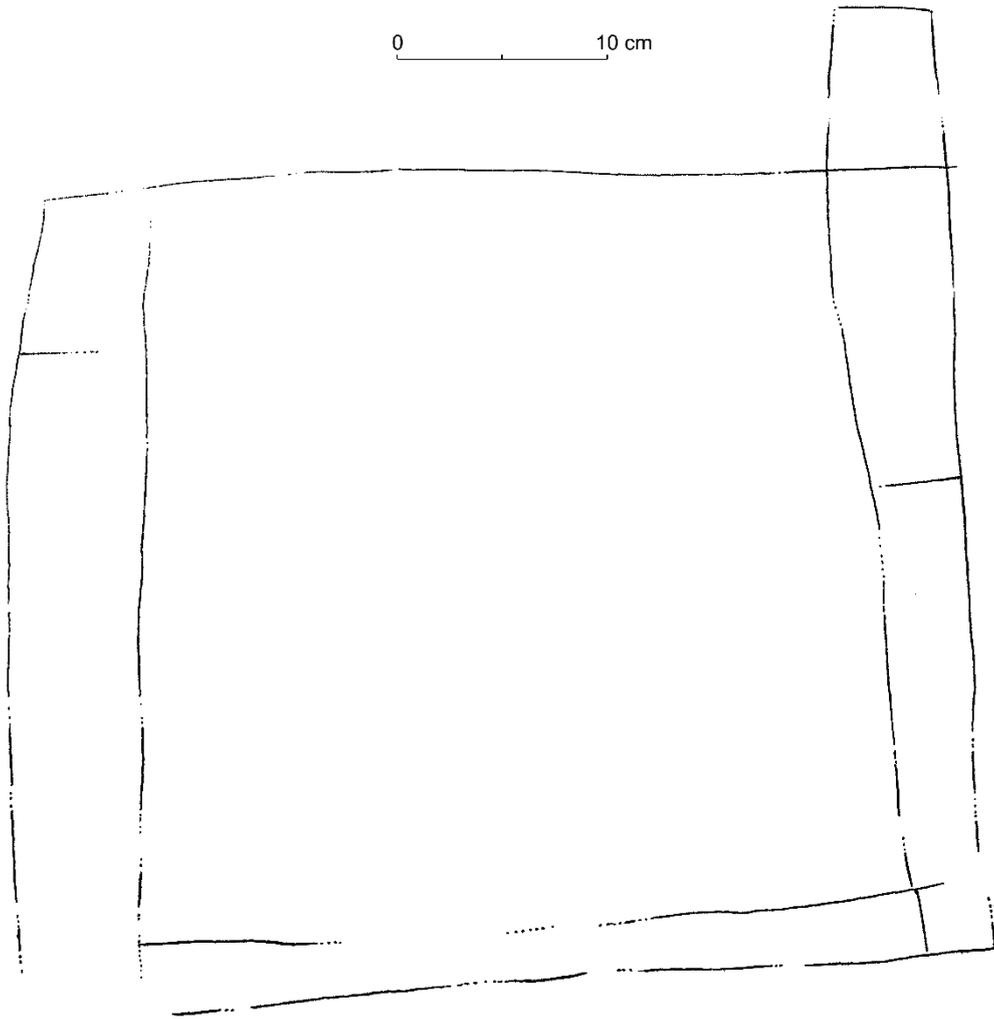


Figure 56: G1, Partial patolli board from Room 8. Courtesy of BVAR Project.



Figure 57: G2, from Room 8. Courtesy of BVAR Project.

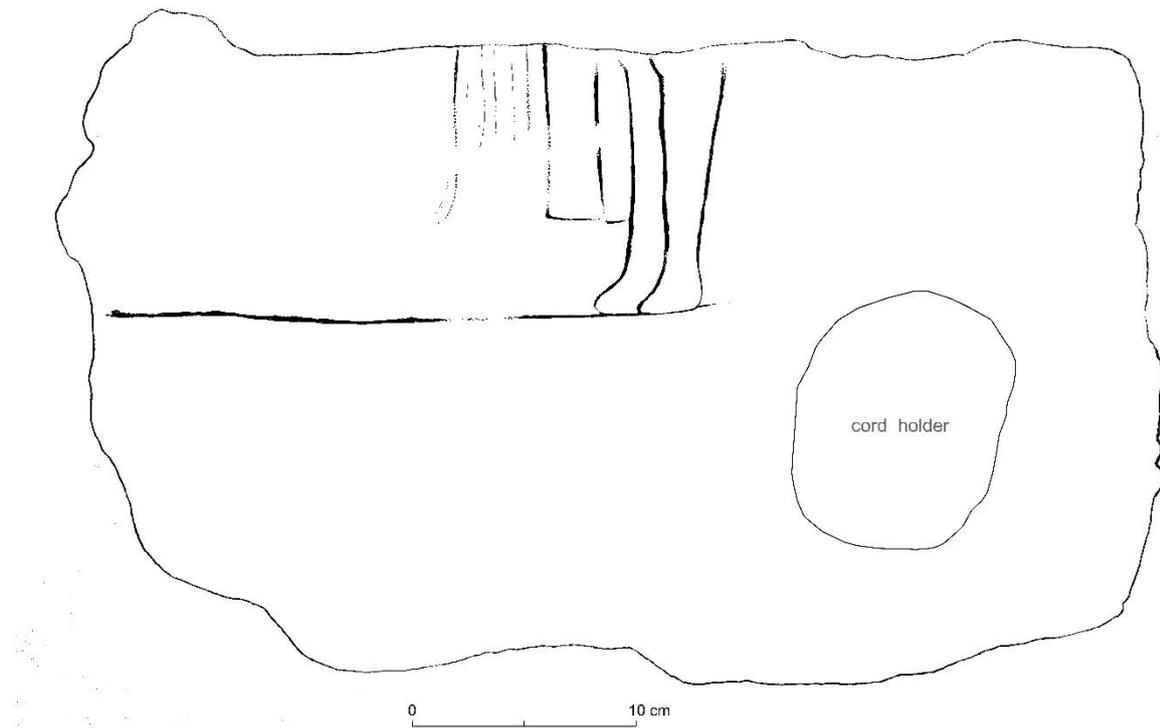


Figure 58: G3, from the southern wall of Room 8. Courtesy of BVAR Project.

4.7 Summary

Overall one clear point can be made to conclude this chapter: all sites and areas exhibit unique graffiti in different contexts. Graffiti are not all incised upon walls, but are also incised on benches, floors, and even roof combs. Graffiti appear in all contexts, from residential, to palatial, to temple. Graffiti take all forms, from the abstract, geometric, anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, to architectural and glyphic. The following chapter critically assesses prevailing scholarly ideas surrounding graffiti; its dating, formation, who made it, and the motivations behind it.

Chapter 5: Prevailing interpretations

Pre-Columbian Maya graffiti have garnered interest from explorers and archaeologists since the late nineteenth-century. In the study of Maya graffiti it is necessary to understand the history of interpretations from previous archaeologists in order to understand how new graffiti findings are assessed, analysed and interpreted. Chapter 2 broadly categorised the available interpretations of graffiti into Spiritual, Educational, and Aesthetic motivations for creating graffiti. This chapter explores and analyses past interpretations chronologically leading up to what could be considered a general consensus among many Maya archaeologists.

5.1 Initial interpretations at Tikal, Peten, Guatemala

Graffiti at Tikal were first recorded by Edward H. Thompson (1898:226). He commented very little on the graffiti, believing it to be relatively recent vandalism left by post-abandonment squatters. He described them as doodles and children's games, inconsequential to the study of the ancient society that had lived in the once powerful state. This interpretation of the graffiti of Tikal was likely influenced by negative connotations of graffiti which prevail even now in our modern-day society. Studies of nineteenth-century (contemporary with Thompson) graffiti tend to concentrate on working class contexts (such as nineteenth- and early twentieth-century farms in Yorkshire [Giles and Giles, 2010]) or contexts associated with social deviance (such as nineteenth-century Australian convict graffiti [Casella, 2014]). In a study specifically examining positive and negative language surrounding graffiti, Eyck (2016) in a random survey of newspapers from across the USA in the calendar year of 2012 discovered that the production of graffiti was largely associated with negative language, run-down or abandoned urban areas, and was believed to disrupt civic order. Thus, we should be aware of these sorts of inherent biases that may affect not only past archaeologists, but our own interpretations.

The recording and study of Pre-Columbian Maya graffiti faltered after the initial assessment from Thompson, potentially because of the biases he had regarding the graffiti or simply lack of interest from the archaeological community. It was not until the middle of the twentieth-century that Webster (1963) published her drawings of the graffiti of Tikal, concluding that there are two types of graffiti: descriptive and demonstrative graffiti; and graffiti that represented offerings to the gods (1963:39). She considers that many images of people and dates are descriptive or demonstrative iconography pertaining to ritual activities including priests and rulers. Those of animals and plants she interprets as offerings to the gods (1963:39). Both of these interpretations draw on the idea of sympathetic magic (Frazer, 1911:13-15), that with prayer or the creation of an image or artefact dedicated to a god, the god is likely to provide more of that which is offered. She suggests that, for example, in times of a dearth of crops or animals to hunt, one would intentionally etch an image of the desired item on plaster in order to promote the abundance of crops and animals. Webster (1963:39) briefly mentions that the anthropomorphic images may be individuals associated with particular households; they may have been drawn to indicate the benefactor of sympathetic magic of chosen favours from gods. By etching ones' family onto plaster one could promote upward social mobility for himself/herself or his/her children. Indeed, by recording public ritual events which the artist attended, the images of priests and royals could promote a closer association between the artist and the upper echelons of society.

Later in the twentieth-century, Kampen (1978) reassessed the graffiti of Tikal. He suggested that images etched into the walls of elite structures were part of termination rituals which marked the room as no longer in use (Kampen, 1978:169-70). The context of Kampen's discussion of termination rituals is supported by studies which examine how structures and artefacts appear to have been ritually killed in order to release the soul of the structure or artefact in order to mark the end of its use (or life) (Sharer, 1983:215; Freidel et al., 1993:234-5; Tsukamoto, 2017:1632-33). Haviland and Haviland (1995:305) however, point out the difficulty with this interpretation because of the lack of consistency with which one may link graffiti and termination rituals. The terminated structures

examined by Kampen were identified as such because they were sealed to mark the end of their use (what Kampen describes as “terminal activities associated with their abandonment”, 1978:169). However, graffiti were also found in unsealed, arguably not terminated rooms; yet Kampen does not consider such a distinction, grouping all forms of graffiti into terminal activity. If the Maya of Tikal intended to use graffiti as a formal marker of the destruction of the rooms or structure, why did they seal some rooms, and leave others open? Although one may theorise that the graffiti could be a quick and efficient way of ritually terminating a room, I do not find this argument convincing. The images portrayed by the graffiti appear to be too varied in their subject matter, and I argue, too meaningful to simply be a means of “desecrating and razing” a room (Kampen, 1978:169). A reasonable counter argument for Kampen would be that the effort which goes into the creation of these specific images in the graffiti could be a sort of abbreviated termination ritual to avoid the level of effort exerted to seal the room with stone and marl. Yet Kampen (1978:166) indicates that although the images present are clearly in the same style as contemporary art, they are not comparable in terms of skill. Does this mean we should consider them comparable in terms of effort? Surely to create a quality graffiti it would take more effort than a scrawl. We thus fall into the argument: if one plans to desecrate a room, why not do it properly?

A bold and controversial paper by Haviland and Haviland (1995) suggests that the graffiti were the product of a drug-induced hallucinogenic state or an altered state of consciousness. Their position reassesses the dating of the graffiti as contemporary with the occupation of the structures rather than as a marker for their termination or abandonment. The inspiration for their interpretation comes from a paper by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988) who they consider “entopic” forms in African rock art as inspired by the use of hallucinogenic drugs. Entopic forms consist of abstract images and patterns which then can morph into recognisable shapes as the stages of hallucinogenic trance proceed (Table 2). Haviland and Haviland (1995:297-303) use this neuro-psychological model and apply it to the interpretation of the images present in the graffiti at Tikal hypothesising that between 66% and 90% of the images are built up from or inspired by entopic images as they are

projected in the mind of the artist who is entranced. Stage one of this process is an image of a simple entoptic form (Table 2; Figure 7); in the second stage the artist sees the entoptic form as a recognisable object or individual; finally, in stage three the artists sees “iconic” or detailed, complex images. The authors argue that the images present in the graffiti at Tikal are traced from visions projected from the artist’s mind onto the physical surroundings of the individual (Haviland and Haviland, 1995). The element of chaos in the drug-induced trance is the authors’ justification for what they judge to be the poor execution of much of the graffiti and for the overlapping elements (Haviland and Haviland, 1995:304). However, an underlying weakness of the Haviland and Haviland argument is that, in general, all entoptic forms are the basis for images in any art form. Claiming that a stair is inspired by a zig zag entoptic form becomes problematic when the scene depicted is fully coherent and does not appear to have been inspired by a chaotic trance state (Žračka, 2014:215; Hutson, 2011:409). Other criticisms for their interpretation come from the potentially poor recording methods in which etched lines unrelated to the graffiti were recorded (Christophe Helmke, 2018 personal communication). Others feel that the Havilands’ interpretation does not give enough

	ENTOPTIC PHENOMENA		SOUTH AFRICAN ROCK ART		COSO	EUROPEAN PALEOLITHIC ART			
	A	B	ENGRAVINGS	PAINTINGS	E	MOBILE ART		PARIETAL ART	
			C	D		F	G	H	I
I									
II									
III									
IV									
V									
VI									

Table 2: Entoptic forms. Figure 1 from Haviland and Haviland (1995:297).

credit to the artist creating the image (Olton, 2018:118; Christophe Helmke, 2018 personal communication). Haviland and Haviland use the poor execution of the graffiti to make their point that the artists were under the influence of hallucinogens, but perhaps we should question not the state of consciousness but the level of skill of the graffiti artists.

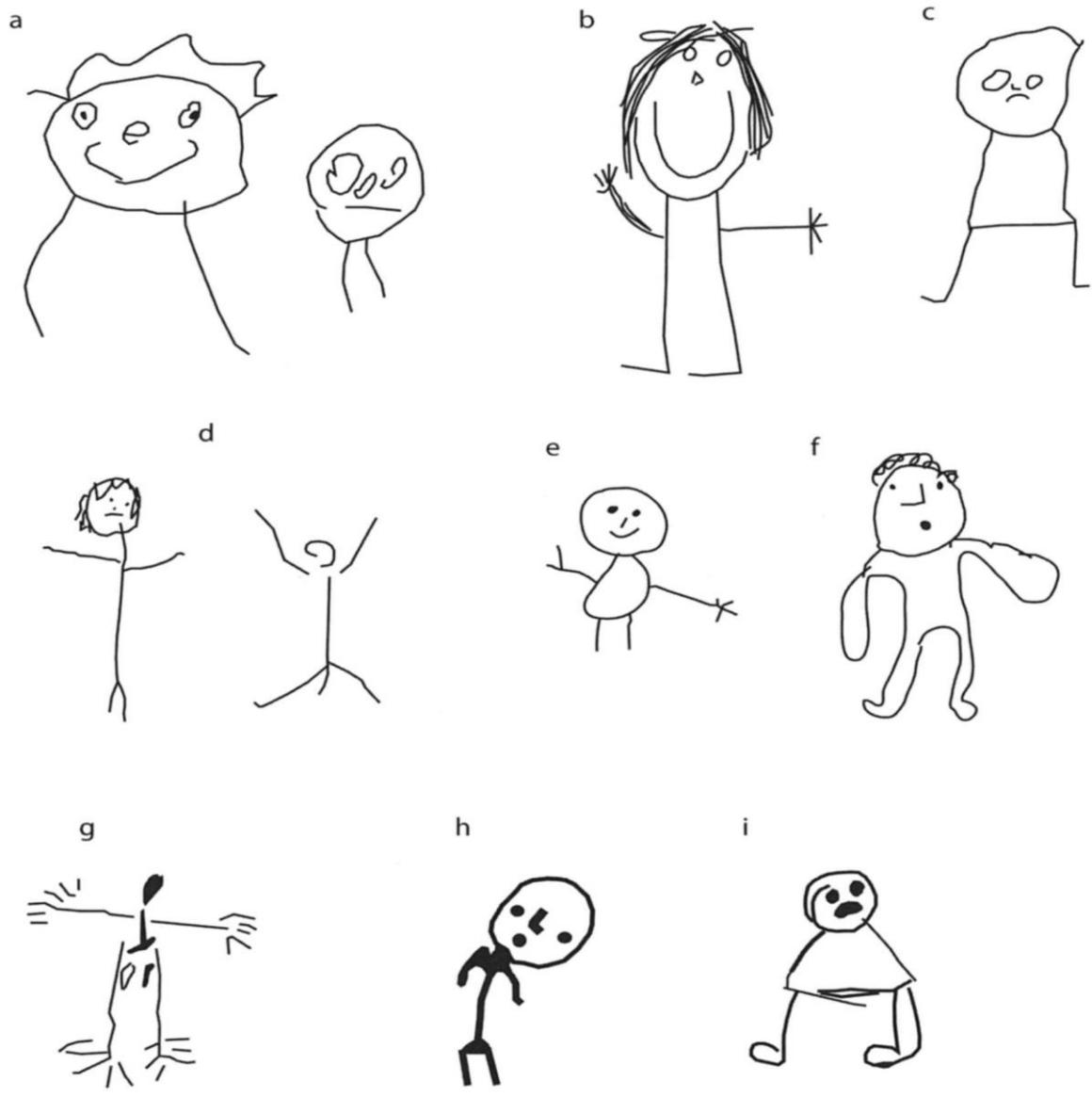


Figure 59: Modern children's drawings. Figure 6 from Hutson (2011:412).

A further suggestion for the purpose of graffiti at Tikal comes from Hutson (2011) who posits the idea that children created the forms in order to better learn about their social environment. Hutson compares drawings by western and non-western children (Figure 59) to those of the graffiti of Tikal. For example Hutson (2011:419) considers the repeated architectural images of Figure 12 to be an

example of different skill levels, possibly indicating practice and/or teaching. He emphasises the open trunk of anthropomorphic figures, and the exaggerated head size, arguing that children highlight not the largest parts of the body but those which are culturally important. Hutson makes his argument in conjunction with that of Haviland and Haviland's (1995) interpretations. He explains that some but not all images show evidence of repetition indicating teaching and/or practice (Hutson, 2011:410). One interesting aspect of the two interpretations is that they both share the idea that those who create the images are attempting to visualise an experience or a setting that seems bizarre or chaotic. The creation of graffiti is itself a form of expression.

Olton (2015) diverges from previous interpretations of graffiti at Tikal, she suggests instead that graffiti were politically motivated commentary. She closely analyses the graffiti of Room 9 in Structure 5D-65 at Tikal (Figures 8, 9, 10), concluding that the series of "protector-ruler" images are in fact a commentary on the nearby protector-ruler image on Lintel 3 in Temple 1 (Figure 60), a royally commissioned official work. Thus, Olton (2015) suggests that the Tikal graffiti should be reconsidered as potentially "sub-rosa" acts of political commentary meant for a contemporary audience. This interpretation is suited to the fragile and temporary nature of plaster as an artistic surface, since political commentary is usually only relevant to a contemporary audience (Olton, 2015). She further bolsters her interpretation by noting the explicitly elite area in which the graffiti are found (Olton, 2018:118-121). Thus, these images may best be compared to the modern political cartoon depicted in newspapers. However, the weakness of her argument comes from the sheer volume of graffiti found at the site. Although those in Structure 5D-65 (Figures 8, 9, 10) may be politically motivated, not all graffiti are found in such explicit contexts as those near Lintel 3 in Temple 1. Thus we should be cautious not to label all graffiti as explicitly political. Furthermore, an alternative interpretation may be based upon the proximity of the protector-ruler graffiti to the lintel; the graffiti may have been a form of copying in order to understand the original image, or

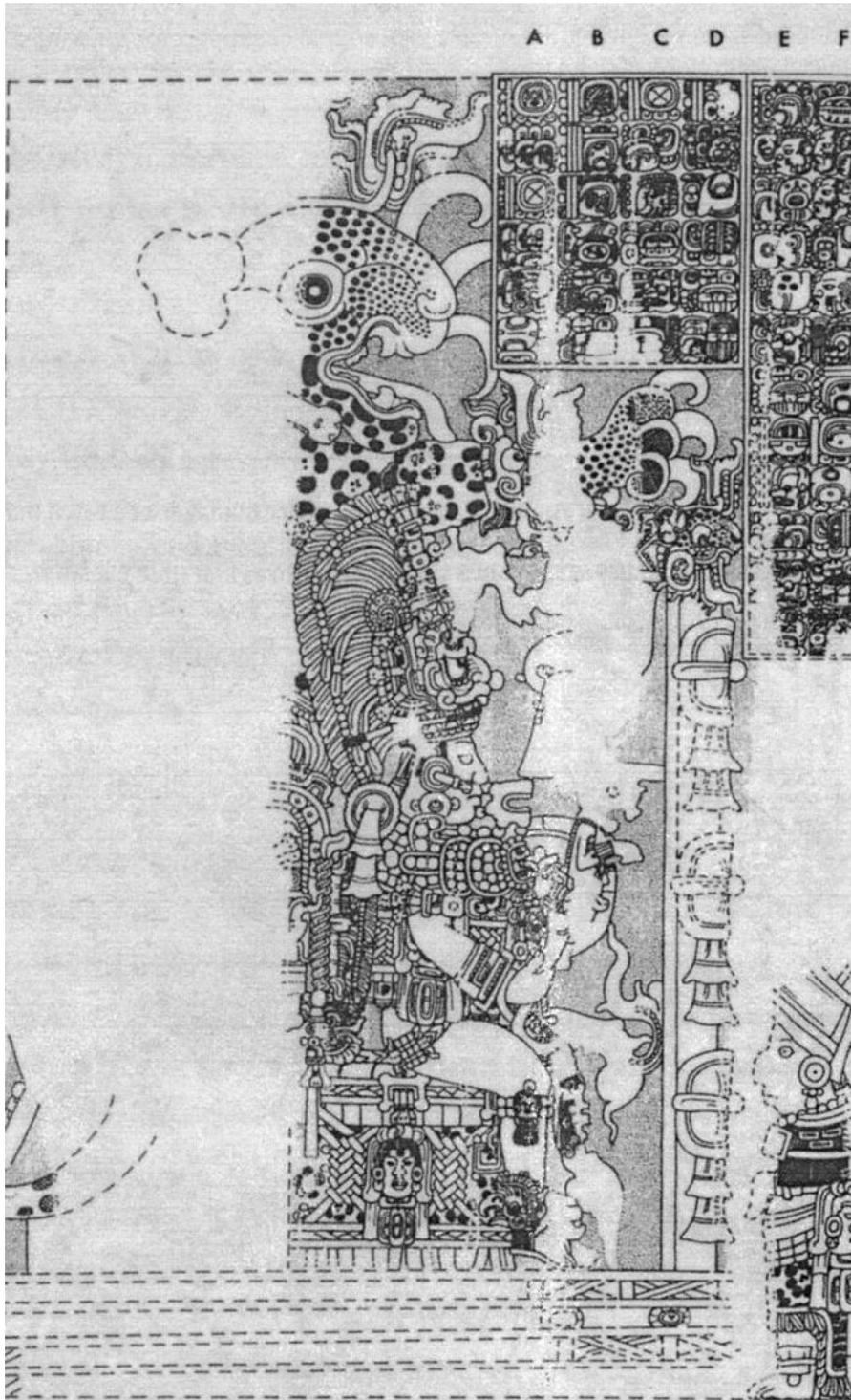


Figure 60: Lintel 3, Temple 1. Figure 7.2 from Olton (2018:124).

even to hone the skill of the person depicting it. Similar interpretations of practice and understanding are explored by Hutson (2011) and McCurdy and colleagues (2018).

5.2 A change of interpretation: Nakum and Yaxhá, Peten, Guatemala

Żrałka and Hermes (2009) give an overview of the graffiti found at Nakum and Yaxhá where they establish that much of the imagery depicts processions, with the likely function of memorialising the events. One key point Żrałka and Hermes make is in reference to the dating of the graffiti. They contend that much of the graffiti was contemporary with the occupation of the building with only a few examples representing influences from central Mexican cultures or “Grafitos con influencia foránea a la tradición maya clásica”² (Żrałka and Hermes, 2009:142). However, the authors do not only note the presence of parade scenes and individual figures in the corpus at Nakum and Yaxhá, but also the presence of *patolli* boards. The etching of *patolli* boards is not discussed at length by Żrałka and Hermes, but they do explain that the *patolli* found at Nakum were discovered inside, in private space. *Patolli* in private and public space is discussed by Walden and Voorhies (2017:215-16) who suggest that while in the Aztec-Mexica empire *patolli* was a game played in more public spaces, in the city states of the Maya it was a more private affair. The idea that graffiti were used for memorialising purposes is attractive, but this interpretation also has its problems. One is where the graffiti are found. In the case of memorialising, one would expect that these images would be found in a public area. The best examples of memorialising images are in the form of stelae looking outward to public places, or on a less public scale, lintels in royal or noble complexes (Sanchez, 2005). It could be that similar images may have been depicted on the outside of buildings, and yet not survived in the archaeological record. Sadly, we cannot make assumptions about such practices until evidence is uncovered for it. However, another drawback is the very fragile and temporary nature of the plaster that the graffiti is etched into. Regular plastering would have taken place throughout the Maya area, destroying the supposed memorialising images. Is it possible to

² “Graffiti with influence foreign to the Classic Maya tradition”

memorialise on a temporary surface? Is such an idea paradoxical, or should we consider memorialisation in a different light?

5.3 Private space: Río Bec, Campeche, Mexico

Patrios (2013) emphasises the private nature of the graffiti that is found at Río Bec. She focuses on the elaborate scenes that appear on the walls of residences, suggesting that these etchings may simply be a way to enliven the otherwise simple space on the inside of residential buildings. In this way residents could display a particularly private form of art, akin to us choosing paint, wallpaper, posters, or other decorations for our residences. Patrios (2013) also clearly separates the graffiti into two chronological categories, those made during the building's occupation and those made in the time following abandonment. She determines these differences not only through analysis of the imagery, but based on the height at which the images are found in relation to the floor. Patrios also mentions the presence of *patolli* boards but does not discuss them at length because they make up only a small portion of the corpus at Río Bec. Patrios' interpretation is attractive as it incorporates Żrałka and Hermes' ideas of visual memorialisation since scenes are either elaborate representations of processions, or of individuals, potentially even showing portraits of those who occupy the residence. She suggests that children may have attempted to represent the patriarch of the household, in reference to Hutson's (2011) work on the graffiti in Tikal. The interpretation that household residents created the graffiti in conjunction with the regular re-plastering that took place for general home maintenance as it allows for creativity for the members of a shifting family dynamic. It also democratises the potential for the graffiti artists to be any resident, and therefore any member of the family could potentially contribute to the decoration.

5.4 Plan De Ayutla, Chiapas, Mexico

Recently Navarro-Castillo and colleagues (2017) have recorded a number of individual graffiti at Plan De Ayutla in Chiapas, Mexico, not too far from the border of Guatemala. This minor site has

produced seven graffiti made by both specialists and non-specialists, of daily life and of ceremonial events (Figures 34, 35, 36, 37, 38). In this context the authors suggest that the majority of the graffiti was used to create a sort of memory store, mirroring the interpretations of Żrałka and Hermes (2009). However, Navarro-Castillo and colleagues note that one of the graffiti, that of the Principal Bird Deity (Figure 35) may have been created in a ceremonial context as it is located in a structure that had a ritual function (Navarro-Castillo, 2017:6-7). The Principal Bird Deity (Figure 35) was found as an isolated graffito and it certainly displays the highest level of skill among the published corpus at Plan De Ayutla. Indeed, the level of artistic skill demonstrated at Plan De Ayutla is quite varied and is also reflected in the types of tool used to execute the graffiti. The Principal Bird Deity and some of the heads in profile (Figures 36, and 38) are especially well executed, whereas others (Figure 37) are much more rudimentary in style. The graffiti found together in one room share a number of similar themes and clearly related features. There is a stand-alone structure (a small image of which can be seen in Figure 34) whereas the rest are anthropomorphs either alone or atop a structure. Such repeated forms may indicate practice creating graffiti, or be a marker for the function of the room. Navarro-Castillo and colleagues (2017:6) believe that the room where much of the graffiti was found could have been the residence of a noble or political figure. One could extend Patrios' (2013) interpretation of private decoration for this room, or alternatively one could see it as a practice area. Such an interpretation is considered for the 'Tut' building at Xunantunich, Belize below.

5.5 Some interpretations of graffiti at Xunantunich, Cayo, Belize:

Jason Yaeger (2005) was one of the first to report graffiti in his excavation which took place in 2003. He comments that previous excavations in the same structure, A11, found an asterisk (*) graffito in one of the upper rooms. Yaeger describes finding four full or partially incised *patolli* boards upon the floor with one incised on a wall (2005:16). There is one stand-alone anthropomorphic figure which looks as though it may be sexually charged (Figure 41). This is my own interpretation due to the positioning of the hands near what could be interpreted as a phallus. Yaeger does not comment on

the figure. Instead, Yaeger uses the interpretation of Haviland and Haviland (1995) to identify the rooms with graffiti as private spaces within which royals or nobility would retreat in order to enter into hallucinogenic trances (2005:20). Yaeger does not critically assess the interpretation of Haviland and Haviland (1995), but rather uses it as a tool to identify the functions of the rooms. He further supports the interpretation of ritual use by the presence of ritually charged artefacts, namely a broken drum (2005:16). He also notes that owing to the presence of particular types of ceramics found in the rooms with graffiti that the rooms might have been used as storage rooms beneath royal residences (2005:18-20).

The Mopan Valley Preclassic Project also discovered graffiti in 2016 and 2017 field seasons. McCurdy and colleagues (2018) believe that a graffiti room in the 'Tut' building on the acropolis, beside El Castillo, may even have been used as a scribal training room for noble children. The identification of repeated patterns and the potential demarcation of wall space with vertical lines indicate practice space and multiple attempts at the same image (McCurdy et al., 2018). Alternatively, this space could have been used for private trances if McCurdy and colleagues' interpretation is not entertained. Instead, McCurdy and colleagues believe that noble children were trained for scribal duties in this setting, following Hutson's (2011) interpretations of the graffiti at Tikal.

The Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance (BVAR) Project recently published its report on the 2017 field season, which included the discovery of graffiti in Structure A13 (Watkins et al., 2018). The authors' main interpretive ideas follow Żrałka and Hermes (2009) ideas of memorialising real events. Following Watkins and colleagues' (2018:339, 343) hypothesis that Structure A13 may have acted as a meeting place for the different classes in society, the graffiti exhibited (Figures 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 58) could gain extra societal meaning related to class and social relationships.

5.6 Summary

Overall there are a number of approaches to the interpretation of Pre-Columbian Maya graffiti that have been described in this chapter. Few scholars past the nineteenth-century have given credence to the idea of graffiti as simply children's doodles. After the initial influence of the interpretations of Haviland and Haviland (1995), their interpretive approach has waned. Instead, memorialisation and personal expression are the preferred interpretations. These interpretations, however, need not be mutually exclusive. Furthermore, in the next chapter I consider the benefit of examining graffiti from a different perspective, namely from the point of view of its creation rather than its presentation.

Chapter 6: New Insights from Structure A13 at Xunantunich, Cayo,

Belize

The focus of this chapter is to assess the graffiti of Xunantunich, in particular the data gathered from Structure A13 with a view to adjudicating among the interpretations considered thus far and adding my own. The graffiti which have been illustrated in Chapter 4 are assessed in their settings and are compared to the wider corpus of Maya graffiti across Xunantunich and from the other Maya sites which have been discussed. This chapter also explores key themes in the discussion around the creation and imagery of Maya graffiti. First I consider the space in which the graffiti were created, inspired by Patrios' (2013) ideas of private space. I then turn to a consideration of memory and temporality, drawing on discussions by Żrałka and Hermes (2009). To what extent were the images created to last? I also consider the act of creation itself and thus revisit the ideas proposed by Haviland and Haviland (1995), Hutson (2011), and McCurdy and colleagues (2018). The final section considers *patolli* boards and what the game meant to the Maya in the Late and Terminal Classic periods, and the relevance of the game to the image-based graffiti.

6.1 Space

It is difficult to detect a discernible pattern in the location of graffiti across all the sites studied. Although all recorded graffiti appear in the centre of the sites, I believe such a pattern is heavily influenced by the biased sampling methods used by archaeologists to determine where to excavate. I have addressed such concerns in Chapter 3, also commenting on preservation bias. Beyond appearing in the elite centre of communities, graffiti do not appear in any one type of building. At Tikal they are found throughout the site without being limited to any particular type of functional structure (Trik and Kampen, 1983:4), although Olton (2018:118-121) emphasises the presence of graffiti in elite areas. At Nakum graffiti were found at the southern end of the central acropolis (Żrałka and Hermes, 2009:136-7). Acropolises are generally used for administration or elite residence in

the Maya area as they are usually the most prominent and protected point within the site. At Yaxhá graffiti were more dispersed, yet many examples were found in what Žraňka and Hermes (2009:149) describe as a temple. At Río Bec, because Patrios (2013) discussed graffiti only found in residential structures, we might assume that they were limited to these kinds of residences. At Plan De Ayutla, graffiti were found only in two structures. One is described as a temple and had only one graffito in it whereas the structure described as a potential residence for a governor had six graffiti (Navarro-Castillo et al., 2017:6). Finally at Xunantunich graffiti has been found in three areas of the site: in the 'Tut' building on 'El Castillo', the most imposing and central structure of the site (McCurdy et al., 2018:182); in two structures in Plaza AIII (Yaeger, 2005; Watkins et al., 2018); and in Group C, a residential group slightly outside the centre of the site (McCurdy et al., 2018:192). The one key aspect of space that all the graffiti share is that they are found in interior spaces, in or around rooms. Rooms within stone structures in the Maya area are small owing to the limits of the corbelled arch (Figure 61; Sharer, 1983:215). Rooms are usually long and narrow and fit few people within them,



Figure 61: Corbelled arch at Cahal Pech, Cayo District, Belize. Source: https://nichbelize.org/ia_photos/#jp-carousel-707 date accessed:27/08/2018.

making them ideal areas for privacy. It seems therefore that creation of graffiti is a private act, and display of graffiti has a restricted audience. Privacy has also been discussed by scholars in their work on graffiti, most notably Patrios (2013) and Haviland and Haviland (1995). For further insight we may then contrast the private nature of graffiti with the public nature of state art. Sanchez (2005) assesses the content and placement of stelae and lintels at Copan, Palenque, Quirigua, Tikal, and Yaxchilan, noting that both content and placement are politically motivated in order to maintain the ruler's power. Sanchez (2005) comments on the different audiences who see the monumental work, from the general public regularly seeing the stelae in the centre of plazas on market days and during public ritual events to the more exclusive audience of nobility who are allowed to view the lintels within the royal structures.

Grffiti could have been used for the same political purposes throughout Maya communities. Olton (2015, 2018) in particular favours a political motivation for graffiti, as she considers the protector-ruler graffiti (Figures 8, 9, and 10) in Structure 5D-65 at Tikal to be a direct comment on the nearby protector-ruler Lintel 3. Thus, we may reinterpret the graffiti found at Yaxhá of parades and processions (Figure 27), and the anthropomorphic graffiti found in the governor's residence at Plan De Ayutla, as political mockery or subterfuge (Figures 36, 37, 38). If these graffiti are recordings of real events or people, they are only on display in private areas and thus are likely to be connected to the residents' personal political feelings, be they pride, disdain, or humour towards the events.

While the graffiti at Xunantunich in Structure A13 are certainly found in private space, their lack of narrative scenes or direct comparison to monumental art makes the interpretation outlined above seem inappropriate. The anthropomorphic figures identified by Christophe Helmke as priests and warriors (Watkins et al., 2018: 339, 351, 352) could be recordings of real people, but in the context of the *patolli* boards and what could be interpreted as entopic imagery, other interpretations explored below may be more convincing.

6.2 Memory

The idea of creating a memory store by inscribing graffiti on plastered surfaces is attractive, especially if the images created are reflections of real life. However, not only does this idea falter when we consider that the images may not be recognisable within 'real life', but when we consider the temporary nature of plaster itself. In the re-plastering process graffiti incised on the plaster would have been lost and thus would have only had a temporary display life. It is likely that the creators of the graffiti, living in the tropics, would be aware of this phenomenon and therefore know that their creations would be temporary. Alternatively, squatters who did not intend to live long-term in abandoned communities, or residents who knew that they were about to abandon their community, may have had different motives, perhaps intending to make the images last for future visitors.

Our perspective shifts if we consider that the Maya intended the graffiti images to be temporary or permanent. Naturally the imagery portrayed is bound by the cultural context within which the artists lived, therefore it is likely that their creations related to the world around them. However, are these artists showing actual re-creations of reality or are they creating fictional narratives for us to follow? Is it likely that the artists are creating images which are important to them? Such individuality of motivation would explain the vast corpus of forms, while also accounting for the general themes that emerge from the graffiti, such as anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, and architectural features. Scenes depicted may have been witnessed or even simply imagined by the artists; such scenes could have been kept in their residences and administrative areas as mementoes of the past, or used to prompt future action. Modern day humans keep such temporary images too: printed photos remind us of important events in our lives: births, graduations, weddings, or inspire us, such as travel posters.

Ultimately, we will never know the motivations of the individuals who created these images; indeed we are unlikely to know the individuals themselves since as yet no signatures or tags indicating

ownership have been discovered. We might consider that it was the act of creation itself that was important to the graffiti artists. It may have been irrelevant to the graffiti artist whether or not the surface on which their work was etched would be re-plastered in ancient times or that it would survive as long as it has.

6.3 Creation

It may be valuable to shift the perspective of the discussion now to the creation of graffiti itself, rather than considering the surviving remains in isolation. The temporary nature of the plaster surface allows a legitimate emphasis on the act of creation itself. Discussion of creation allows us to consider closely the physical evidence: what was used to incise these images? What materials have been found in association with the graffiti? Where have they been found? This section also considers more conceptual ideas such as the use of hallucinogenic drugs in the context of Maya art more generally, not exclusively in relation to graffiti.

Scholars who have emphasised the creation rather than the display of graffiti include E.H. Thompson (1898:226) who initially regarded graffiti as doodles. Thompson focussed upon the act of creation rather than on the creator's intention that the work remain for a long period to be viewed by others. One may also interpret Webster's (1963) ideas around graffiti as being fixed in the creation of the graffiti rather than the lasting remains. Webster considered the graffiti to be a form of sympathetic magic after the ideas of James George Frazer, specifically what Frazer described as "homeopathic magic" (1911:13-15). Thus, the act of creating graffiti of animals will conjure animals (Webster, 1963). Kampen (1978) also focused on the creation and effect of graffiti upon the function of the structures rather than the lasting state of the structure. Haviland and Haviland (1995) consider the creators of much of the graffiti at Tikal to have been made as a result of an altered state of consciousness, thus as a by-product of ritual. Finally, Huston (2011) and McCurdy and colleagues (2018) see the graffiti as by-products, but by-products of learning rather than ritual.

Haviland and Haviland's (1995) ideas may be re-evaluated in the context of the general use of hallucinogenic drugs in the Maya area. Carod-Artal (2015:43, 48) summarises the hallucinogens available in Mesoamerica, including some examples of how drugs would have been used. The majority of these examples suggest that any hallucinogens would have been used by shamans. Shamans are identified as the creators of the graffiti discussed by Haviland and Haviland (1995). However, Klein and colleagues (2002:389) suggest a loosening of the narrow view that only shamans used drugs. They situate their argument in a critical assessment of the appropriateness of labelling figures in art as 'shamans' in the first place, because the term exoticises the Maya and other Mesoamerican cultures in modern western scholarship (Klein et al., 2002). To expand the cultural context of hallucinogenic drug use, Schele and Miller (1986:39) comment on the use of hallucinogens and heavy alcohol consumption in the creation of both official art and inscriptions. They contend that art and inscriptions are not always free of mistakes and that such mistakes could be caused by lack of proofreading, an extended period of fasting, or the attainment of a natural high due to bloodletting activities (Schele and Miller 1986:39). The authors even suggest that the presence of mistakes may have been overlooked or actively ignored if they were executed during a ritual practice or in a ritual setting; such mistakes could have been considered divine intervention as a result of the ritual or ritual setting itself (Schele and Miller 1986:39). Indeed Schele and Miller suggest that monumental portraits are not merely commissioned to create a likeness of the ruler but to reflect the ritual activity in which the ruler was involved (1986:66).

Given the overarching ritual context of the suggested drug use, one may consider the socio-economic status of Maya scribes and painters, and their access to such drugs. Should we consider scribes and painters as individuals separate from shamans? If we consider the rulers to have been different from the artists then we could suggest that graffiti were created by rulers untrained in art. Such a perspective would explain the varied execution of the graffiti since rulers are thought to enter into hallucinogenic trances privately when conducting rituals (Martin and Grube, 2000:15). Haviland and Haviland consider those who entered these rituals to be shamans, not rulers (1995:296),

whereas Yaeger leaves room for us to interpret that rulers themselves did engage in trances (2005:20). Regardless, these interpretations do not consider those who created the graffiti to have been specially trained. Such an interpretation is complicated in the case that rulers and scribes were the same individuals. If the ruler/scribe was well trained and executed well-made pieces in other contexts, then why are the graffiti so different from the officially commissioned art? Unfortunately only speculation is available to us in this context; it could be that graffiti were executed during the trance, while monumental art was made after the trance. If this seems reasonable, graffiti might be seen as a sort of sketch or precursor to the monumental art, altered state of consciousness or not. However, such an interpretation is flawed when faced with the vast corpus of graffiti throughout the Maya area. Not all graffiti is poorly executed: the Principal Bird Deity was incised with obsidian at Plan De Ayutla; it possesses fine detail (Figure 35). Thus, it could be that those who created the graffiti were not trained artists and were not under the influence of drugs at the time of creation. That is not to say they did not take part in the trances but rather that they were not entranced during creation of the graffiti. It may be that post-trance, the graffiti artists recorded their visions on the plaster upon which their mind projected images. They might then be able to return to the images to better divine or discern their meaning. The overlapping characteristics of some of the graffiti may be thought to hinder this interpretation, but alternatively, overlapping elements may inform diviners as effectively as separate elements. The preparedness of the artist may explain the intentionality of graffiti. In cases in which finer tools such as obsidian were used, one may consider that these images were not casually drawn because a sharp precision tool was used for their creation. There is a clear difference in the level of effort put into the image incised with obsidian compared to images for which chert was used. Graffiti created with chert, one could argue, was casual, still intentional, but less precise and therefore meaningful than those executed with precision obsidian tools.

Graffiti has also been used to contest the exclusive use of hallucinogens for ritual based on the number of graffiti found away from elite or ritual buildings, yet still in site centres (Hutson,

2011:410). Furthermore, Haviland and Haviland (1995:306-7) note the presence of graffiti in what they determine to be intermediate structures (occupied by neither highest nor lowest classes) but are reluctant to suggest that common people also partook in trances because of the lack of preservation of plaster in these areas and thus lack of graffiti.

Incised *patolli* boards have been found and recorded at three of the six sites explored in this study. Nakum, Río Bec, and Xunantunich. Figure 24 shows a large *patolli* board, around a metre long connected to a partial *patolli* board with punctated marks (Żrałka and Hermes, 2009:146). Some of the marks encircle some large gouges in plaster. *Patolli* is mostly known from Spanish chroniclers commenting on the gambling culture in the Mexica-Aztec empire, usually associated with drinking and divining (Walden and Voorhies, 2017:198). Żrałka and Hermes (2009:146) do not comment particularly on the *patolli* board found at Nakum beyond suggestion that the gouges and punctated marks may indicate how the game was played. Watkins and colleagues (2018:338) consider that these games were played simply for entertainment and are not directly associated with the graffiti found in the rooms.

The graffiti and the *patolli* found in the rooms of A13 and A11 at Xunantunich may well be connected and significant for our understanding of creating graffiti. Walden and Voorhies's (2017) recent review of *patolli* in the Maya areas point out Sweezy and Bittman's (1983:386) association between rock art and *patolli* boards at Lactún River, Chiapas, Mexico in their paper categorising types of *patolli* boards. The key difference between Mexica-Aztec *patolli* boards and Maya *patolli* boards is that many Maya boards have been found in a much more closed, private context (Walden and Voorhies, 2017:215-16). Some *patolli* boards in the Maya area appear to be more portable, incised on slate, and thus readily available for play in a public setting (Graham, 1994:289-90). Although it is likely that *patolli* was played throughout the socio-economic spectrum of Maya culture, those found incised on plastered surfaces have been found in elite contexts (Walden and Voorhies, 2017; Watkins et al., 2018; Yaeger, 2005; Żrałka and Hermes, 2009).

Patolli board etchings in Rooms 6, 7, and 8 of Structure A13 at Xunantunich were all discovered in the eastern half of the rooms, so the best light for playing the game would then have come from the west in the evening as the sun was setting. The placement of the boards in this position seems deliberate and appears to limit the number of players who could use them based on the limited space available, not only in the room, but around the board in the eastern part of the room (Figures 45, 47, 55). For access for more players one would expect a more central placement of the boards. These boards were clearly meant for actual playing, not only because three were found, all in similar context, but because they were placed on benches in an easily playable area. Other examples outside of Xunantunich have been found on walls in less playable positions, although one could presumably use chalk or paint to indicate play rather than the standard bean used as a counter (Walden and Voorhies, 2017:215; Tia B. Watkins, 2018, personal communication). The context of these rooms in A13 could tempt people to reconsider Haviland and Haviland's argument that these graffiti may have been inspired by altered states of consciousness. To speculate: after heavy drinking, possibly enhanced with hallucinogenic drugs, a limited number of people in one or all of these rooms decide to play *patolli* for divining purposes; during this state the people etch graffiti into the benches and walls. Some of the images in the rooms, including Figures 49, 51, and 57, could even be interpreted as entopic forms unrecognisable as representing real life objects or events (although 49, G2 has been described as a figure with a headdress, Watkins et al., 2018:351). For clarity, I wish to emphasise that this intoxicated diving interpretation pertains to the graffiti contents of Structure A13 only, and that overall it is rather difficult to draw such conclusions across the communities which created graffiti. I argue however that, rather than an emphasis on the result that is the lasting image, scholars should consider the act of creation more carefully.

6.4 Summary

It is essential that scholars refrain from over-generalising in the study of graffiti. As Źrałka and Hermes (2009:136) comment, each graffito is revealed in a different context. Thus, graffiti in part

reflect the uniqueness of its creators, and yet graffiti also reflect the culture that the creator was drawing from.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

My overarching research question was: What characterises graffiti in the Maya world? What is the context, and what social, cultural or artistic purposes does graffiti serve? My conclusions largely reflect the active scholarship on the topic, but also emphasise the act of creating graffiti itself rather than limiting interpretations to the images produced.

7.1 When were the graffiti images etched onto plaster?

Despite early suggestions from Thompson (1898:226) that graffiti were a foreign element doodled onto Classic Maya structures, scholars now agree that the majority of graffiti found in Pre-Columbian Maya communities was created at the time of the site's occupation. Indeed, some graffiti have been dated to the Postclassic period (Patrios, 2013), whereas others have been labelled as a result of foreign influence (Żrałka and Hermes, 2009).

7.2 Where do we find graffiti and is there a pattern seen in their location?

It is clear from the methodological outline of this study that much of the recorded graffiti are located in the elite core of Maya communities. Some notable exceptions are at Río Bec where Patrios (2013) has established that graffiti can be found in domestic homes, and Group C at Xunantunich (McCurdy et al., 2018) peripheral to the core. However, the pattern which has emerged is likely a result of preservation and excavation bias. The rise of household archaeology in recent years may result in more graffiti discovered in non-elite contexts. Indeed, simply because there is no evidence that common people also partook in graffiti need not mean that they did not.

7.3 Who created the images?

Of the four questions I have used to approach this study, this is one of two which may in fact be unanswerable. As alluded to in the previous section, current evidence indicates that it was largely elite persons who etched graffiti, an inference based on restricted access to structures in which the graffiti have been found. Evidence comes from the fact that much graffiti is found in the core of Maya communities, where administrative and ritual practices were controlled by the elite. However, without signatures, personal seals or stamps, or accompanying descriptive glyphs, we will never know the identity of the individual who created the image. While the people may have been elite, we also are unsure about their role in Maya society. Given the execution of the subject matter, those who created the images may have been artisans. Given the quality of some of the examples, the image-creators may have been children (Huston, 2011; McCurdy et al., 2018), or inebriated adults (Haviland and Haviland, 1995). The creators may have been the most elite persons in the community such as kings or shamans (Haviland and Haviland, 1995), or may have been their political rivals (Olton, 2015; 2018). Ultimately while we cannot know precisely who created the images, many have considered the kind of people who would create them.

7.4 Why were the images made?

This question is equally if not more difficult to answer than the previous one. Yet who made graffiti and why graffiti were made is inexorably related. Those who believe graffiti to be the work of children (Huston, 2011; McCurdy et al., 2018) do not consider children to be engaged in political satire (Olton, 2015; 2018). While all the interpretations offered and critiqued are worthy of serious consideration, previous interpretations will be enhanced by further study of the material associated with the graffiti. Residue analysis on pots may allow us to identify alcohol or hallucinogens. Scrutiny of the graffiti and comparison to surrounding monumental art will aid efforts to discern potential political comment or satire. Determining the use of artefacts associated with the graffiti will inform who possibly made it: were artefacts made for children for example? Are the associated artefacts

contemporary to the structure? Can we, with certainty, recognise figures in the graffiti as recreations of actual events or people?

For me, the question of why the graffiti were made was largely shaped by assessing the data from Structure A13 at Xunantunich. In doing so I realised that many of the prevailing interpretations of the motivation for creating the graffiti fell into two categories: those who emphasised the creation process and those who emphasised the display of the graffiti. If one privileges the presentation of graffiti over the creation of graffiti then one must ignore the temporary nature of plaster upon which graffiti is incised. By privileging the creation of graffiti over presentation one may further consider the seemingly counter-intuitive overlapping designs and the individualistic content. My interpretations closely align incised *patolli* boards with other graffiti images within Structure A13, recalling Sweeny and Bittman's (1983:386) examination of *patolli* boards found near rock art along the Lactún river in Chiapas, Mexico. While I focussed my discussion on the graffiti in A13 at Xunantunich, each corpus of graffiti should be examined in its own context (Żrańka and Hermes, 2009:136). All interpretations can be convincing in their own setting, for if we find such reasons for creating graffiti compelling it would not be amiss to suggest that the Maya would consider them too.

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