



Welcome to the tour of K'axob. The following images and text will orient you to the archaeological site of K'axob. You will meet the archaeologists and excavators whose fieldwork produced the archaeological materials upon which this study is

based. Some of the research issues that have emerged from this archaeological project are presented and illustrated with both field and artifact photos and maps. More information about artifacts and stratigraphy is available in the accompanying [Databases](#). Interpretive narratives also are available in the [book](#).

## Page 1

First, let's head to K'axob which is located in the Central American country of Belize, home to Maya people for over 3,000 years.



The small Caribbean country of Belize is very mountainous in its southern portion while the northern part, where K'axob is located, is elevated less than 100 meters above sea level.



A gently rolling landscape of slow-moving rivers and wetlands, the environs of K'axob are ideal for canoe travel and aquatic resources, such as fish and turtle, are plentiful.



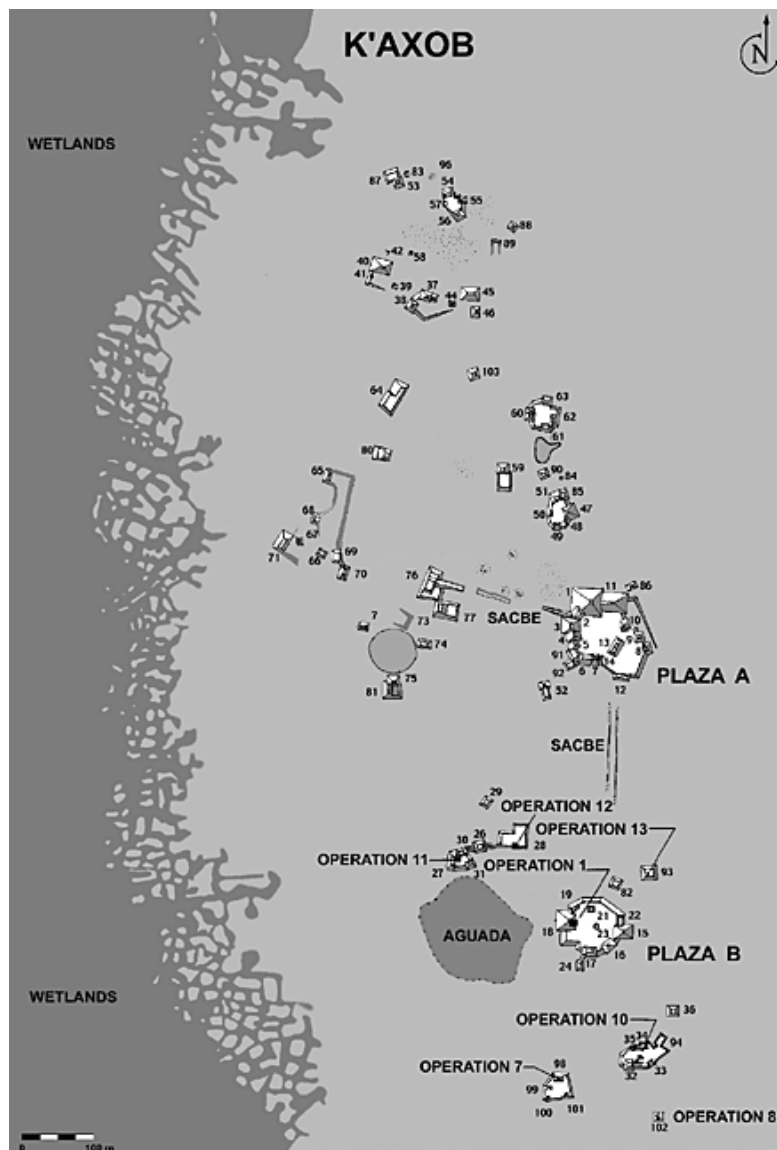
Today, the fertile drought-resistant soils of K'axob are planted in sugarcane by the landowner, Concepcion Campos. Our studies show that, in the past, a variety of crops were grown including maize, manioc, and orchard species. Both the high ground and the adjacent wetlands were brought into cultivation, the latter by construction of a system of canals (now filled with water lilies) and raised beds.





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By the end of the Classic period (around A.D. 900), the built environment of K'axob including two pyramid plazas and about 100 residential platforms, many of them grouped on top of large basal platforms. Labeled "A" and "B" on the map, the pyramid plazas are shown in their usual "bushy" state in the photos.





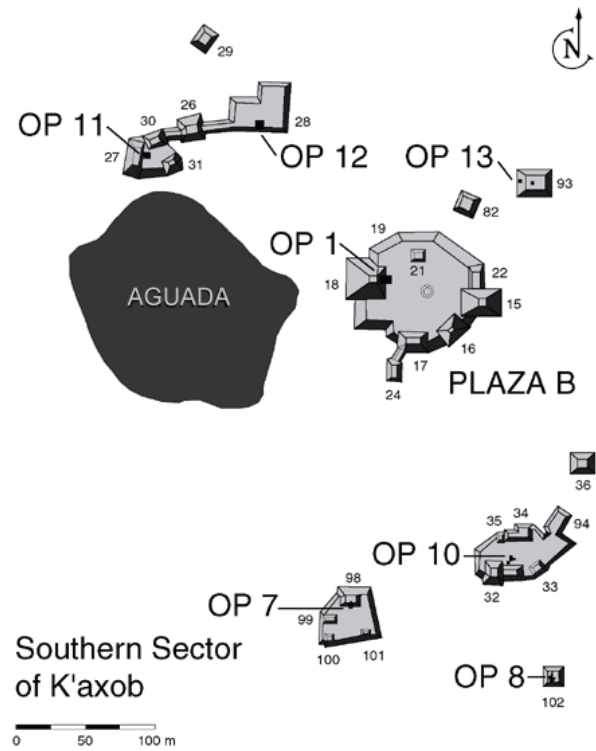


Pyramid Plaza A



Pyramid Plaza B

Our excavations (here called "operations") indicate that the ancestral heartland of K'axob was located in the southern sector of the site. Buried deeply beneath Plaza B and found at the base of operation 1, the earliest known K'axob domicile (a large, oval structure with an appended kitchen) was built around 600 B.C. or during the Middle Formative period. Domiciles built during the Late Formative and initial Early Classic periods (400 B.C. - A.D. 350) were plentiful at K'axob with examples excavated from all six operations conducted in the smaller, "satellite" platforms encircling Plaza B (clockwise from upper left: operation 11, operation 12, operation 13, operation 10, operation 8, and operation 7). Structures are visible as an arc or rectangular alignment of stones delimiting a prepared, packed-marl surface.



Operation 1



Operation 11



Operation 12



Operation 13



Operation 10



Operation 8



Operation 7



## Page 3



Patricia A. McAnany, director of the K'axob Project during all three seasons (1990, 1992, and 1993), was assisted by field school and graduate students, specialists, and volunteers. Key financial support was provided by the National Science Foundation and Boston University Division of International Programs.



Field Crew 1990



Field Crew 1992



Field Crew 1993

Men from the nearby villages of San Jose-San Pablo and Trial Farm cleared the brush with razor-sharp machetes and provided valuable assistance during excavation.



Early morning machete sharpening at K'axob, 1993. Shown are (L-R) Julian Escalante, Urbano Novelo, Ovel Martinez, and Amir Gonzalez



Local worker Julian Escalante, three-year veteran of the K'axob Project, excavating the marl construction fill of Operation 1.

Located at the end of a long and often muddy road, K'axob posed a challenge of access during many mornings of the 1992 summer (wet) season. The crew, stranded when the van bogged down in the mud, includes Francisco Estrada Belli (far right), director of excavations at operation 7. While our rented Land Rover was a more rugged and unstoppable vehicle, delicate artifacts had to be cushioned from the rough ride. The crew unpacks the vehicles at the end of the day with Howard Wellman (lab co-director, 1992) shown at the far left.



Field van mired in the mud on the road to K'axob. Stranded staff members (L-R) include H. Hope Henderson, Robert St. Laurent, Howard Wellman, Lorren Jackson, Valerie McCormack, Lisa Hilborn, Matthew Bobo, Sandra L. Lopez Varela, and Francisco Estrada Belli (director of Operation 7, 1992).



Unloading the Land Rover after a day at K'axob: (L-R) Howard Wellman, Matthew Bobo, Robert St. Laurent, H. Hope Henderson, and Eric Poeschla.

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Each of the 7 excavations was supervised by an operation director: shown here are Marc Wolf, operation 8 (1990), Valerie McCormack, operation 8 (1992) and operation 11 (1992, 1993); Robert St. Laurent, operation 12 (1992); H. Hope Henderson, operation 10 (1992) and operation 12 (1993); Ingrid Martonova, operation 13 (1992); Lorren Jackson, operation 1 (1992); Matthew Bobo, operation 1 (1993), and Marilyn Masson, field director (1992).



Marc Wolf, 1990 field school student, at Operation 8.





Valerie McCormack, director of Operations 8 and 11, positions a photo board.



Robert St. Laurent (left), director of Operation 12, shown with Amir Gonzalez (center) and Urbano Novelo (right).



H. Hope Henderson, director of Operations 10 and 12, with Vildo Gonzalez (left) and Santiago Martinez (right).



Ingrid Martonova, director of Operation 13, seen here as a 1990 field-school student mapping with the aid of a planning grid.



Lorren Jackson, 1992 director of Operation 1, shown here as a 1990 field school student.



Matthew Bobo, three-year veteran of the K'axob Project and 1993 director of Operation 1, seen here as staff member in 1992.



Marilyn Masson, 1992 field director, and project visitor Javier Urcid.

During each field season, lab directors supervised the processing of artifacts. During the initial season, this job was undertaken by field school student Lisa Shaul (assisted by Mari Sunahara). Our lab co-director in 1992 was Annabeth Headrick. in 1993, Timothy Scarlett and Stefan Claesson each split their time between field and lab.



Lisa Shaul and Mari Sunahara, 1990 field school students, working on vessel consolidation.



Annabeth Headrick, 1992 lab co-director.





Timothy Scarlett, 1993 lab co-director



Stefan Claesson, 1993 lab co-director.

Project ceramicist, Sandra L. Lopez Varela, conducted pottery analysis in the field lab and was able to identify 5 temporally distinctive Formative-period ceramic complexes. Our osteologist, Rebecca Storey, faced the challenge of piecing together the story of the ancestors of K'axob from fragmentary and poorly preserved skeletal remains.



Sandra L. Lopez Varela, project ceramicist, and Dolph Widmer, visitor, 1992 field season.



Rebecca Storey, osteologist for the K'axob Project.

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The artifacts retrieved from carefully documented contexts provide valuable insights regarding life in an ancient Maya village. For instance, residents of K'axob were vitally concerned with the material bases of life as well as ritual practice and reproduction of the domestic unit. We uncovered ample evidence of small-scale production activities, such as paper-making, shell-bead fabrication, and pottery artisanship. Although pottery production displayed a strong streak of conservatism, long-term changes in vessel form and decoration (apparent in vessel photos) facilitated the construction of a relative chronology. Chipped stone tools provided further evidence of daily practice. We found that the broken distal portions of large, oval bifaces had been ground and polished from repeated use in percussion-free contexts, such as the fertile, stone-free soils of the uplands and wetlands of K'axob. Agricultural production appears to have been a central and consuming activity organized at the level of the domicile.



Barkbeater showing medial groove (GT #068, 070)



Worked shells and lithic drill tools from an Early Chaakkax midden deposit.



Joventud Red, unspecified variety.



Sierra Red, Sierra variety.





Society Hall Red, Society Hall variety bowl, cross painted on exterior base.



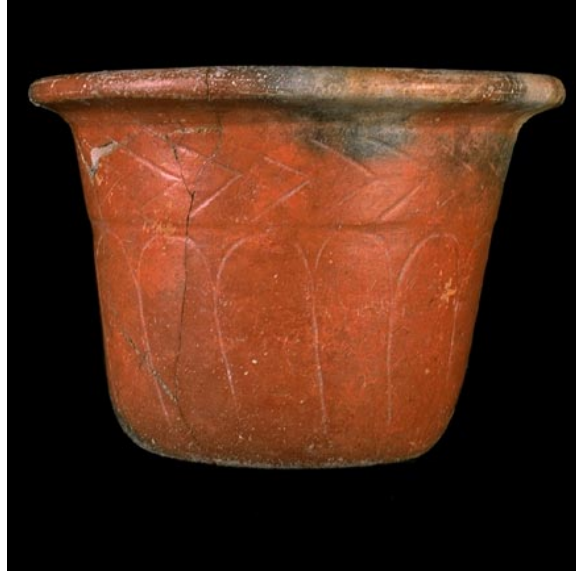
Chicago Orange, Chucun variety jar.



Sierra Red, Unspecified variety spouted vessel with duck effigy, in situ.



Sierra Red, Gadrooned variety bowl.



Laguna Verde Incised, Laguna Verde variety flared cylindrical form from a cache.



Actuncan Orange Polychrome, Actuncan variety flanged bowl with ring base and kill hole.



Actuncan Orange Polychrome, Actuncan variety with tetrapodal feet shaped and painted as peccary heads, in situ.



Distal fragment of oval biface. Note polish. LT# 1014.

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Ritual activity took place in the residence and adjacent plaza spaces and is most conspicuously displayed in caches and burials. During the Late Formative period, plaza spaces were sometimes dedicated by the burial of two pottery vessels, one inverted over the other. In one case, three pieces of limestone--evocative of the 3 hearth stones mentioned in Maya creation narratives--were placed in the lower, upright vessel. The cosmic significance of numerical groupings of triadic and quadripartite elements also structured cache deposits as can be seen in the color-coded "threesomes" of small figurines and shells of a Terminal Formative cache (elements of this cache



are shown here in triadic arrangement but they were found in a small cluster at the base of a vessel). A quadripartite structure can be clearly discerned in the arrangement of 4 small pottery vessels in a Late Formative cache (northern vessel removed, south vessel and rims of underlying east and west vessels visible). During the early facet of the Early Classic period, the construction of a raised platform was dedicated with a deposit of two complete stemmed macroblades and one distal biface fragment.



Cache deposit showing lower, upright vessel of lip-to-lip cache with three stones, Operation 10, Zone 9a, Construction phase 3.



Cache deposit of shell and greenstone objects found inside of upright Vessel #025; arrangement shows triadic schema of contents, Operation 1, Zone 17, Construction phase 9.



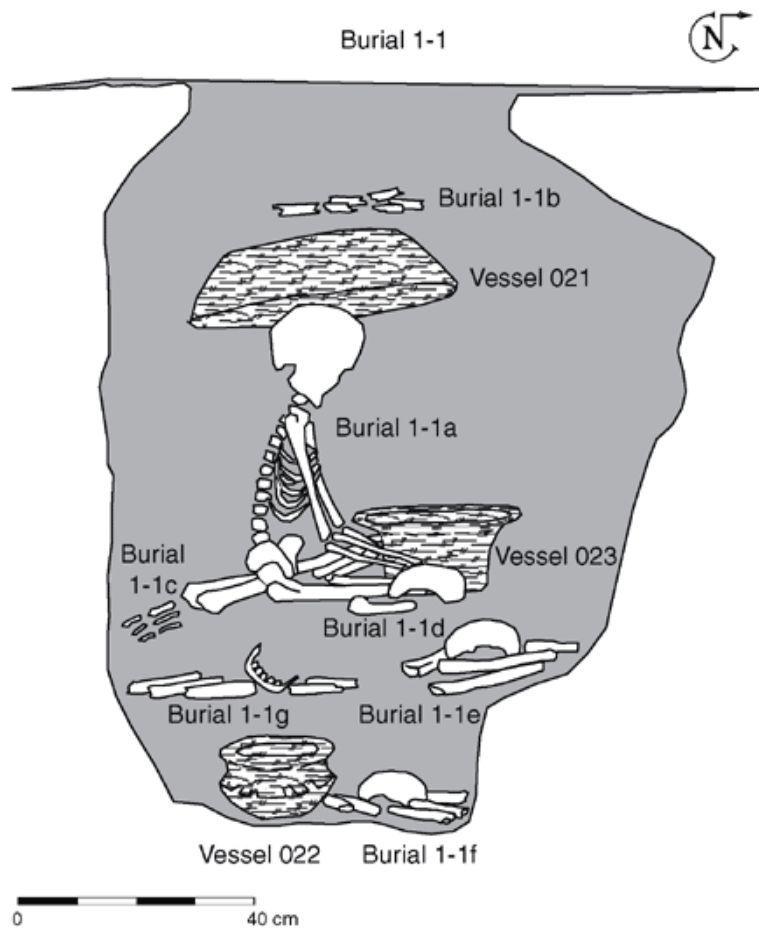
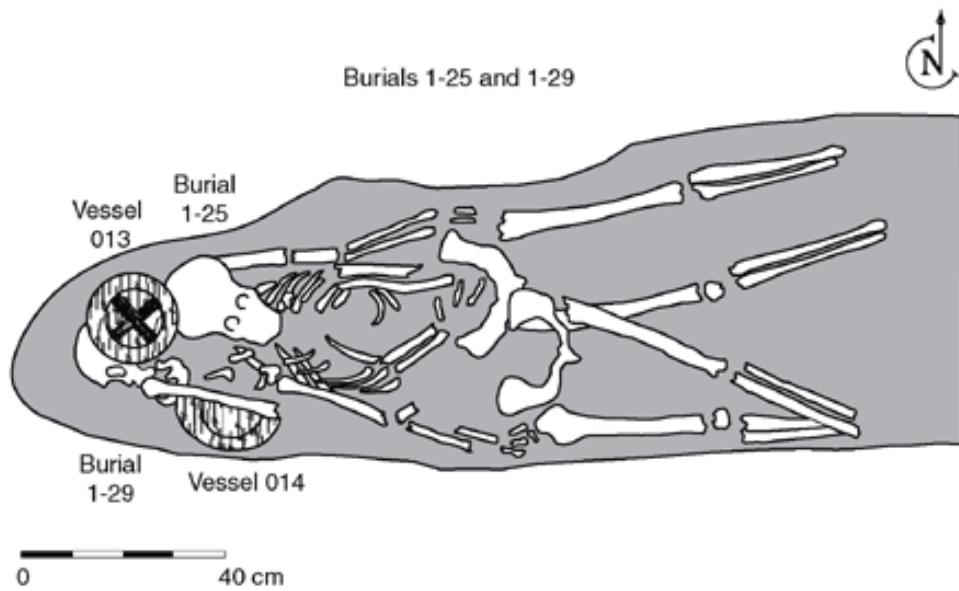
Cache deposit of four vessels arranged in a cruciform pattern. Top southern vessel (V# 030) is visible in photo and the rims of lower east-west vessels (V #035 and V #032) can be seen, Operation 1, Zone 77, Construction phase 8c.



Lithic cache of two stemmed macroblades and a distal biface fragment (LT #0022, LT #0026, and LT #0023), Operation 7, Zone 6a.

At K'axob, mortuary ritual was a domestic affair and many, but not all, deceased family members were interred in burial pits under the floors of domiciles and plazas. The earliest ancestors tended to be placed in an extended position and often more than one were interred together. In operation 1 (Burials 1-25 and 1-29), two males were buried together along with two small Sierra Red bowls, each with a painted cross on their base. This earliest known case of the painted cross at K'axob was soon followed by several more interments that prominently featured a vessel with a painted

cross, such as Terminal Formative Burial 1-1 in which a central, seated male was interred with the secondary remains of six other individuals.





Two shallow Sierra Red dishes, both with crosses painted on their exterior bases. Left vessel is 013, right is 014.

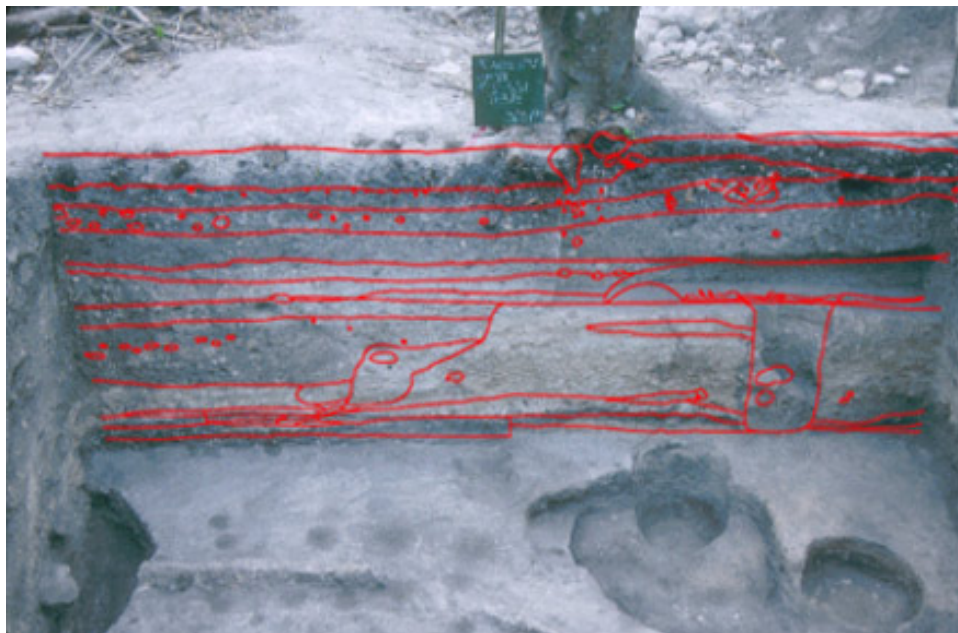


Society Hall Red: Society Hall bowl with a cross painted on the exterior base, Operation 1, Zone 15g.

Continuity of the family was anchored materially in mortuary rituals conducted at the domicile. Ancestral interments at these locales signified both termination of life (and perhaps of a generation) and a renewal that was expressed through the expansion and refurbishing of a domicile which often followed on the heels of a burial event. This sequence of events can be "read" in the stratigraphy of our excavations. For example, the placement of



Burial 11-4 terminated the use of the phase 5 floor of operation 11. Apparently, new construction commenced immediately as the deceased was placed in a very shallow depression and was covered only by the construction fill of the subsequent phase. At operation 11, variations on this pattern were repeated many times over a period of approximately 800 years, yielding a total of 8 construction phases and 13 burial interments. In cross-section, this pattern of repeated domicile refurbishing and ancestral interment yielded well stratified and richly textured chronicles of domicile construction.



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Along with small-scale production activities, ritual practice, and reproduction of the domestic unit, four additional trends bear mentioning because of their strong impact on the material remains of K'axob. They include (1) the close interdependence of ritual and mundane activities, (2) recurrent evidence of artifact recycling, (3) scarcity of "precious" materials acquired through long-distance trade connections, and (4) the intensive exploitation of local resources. The close spatial connection between ritual and food-preparation features is well illustrated by the sherd-lined pits and burials of operation 12. Construction phase 5 shows the outlines of an apsidal structure that contained three sherd-lined pits (zones 29, 35, and 37). In schematic profile

view, the zone 37 pit clearly was lined with sherds and contained freshwater gastropods and burned rocks. Likely used for roasting and steaming foods, the sherd-lined pits are located only meters away from three extended Terminal Formative burials. This proximity suggests a spatial integration of activities that, in Western society, are relegated to very separate and spatially distinct realms.

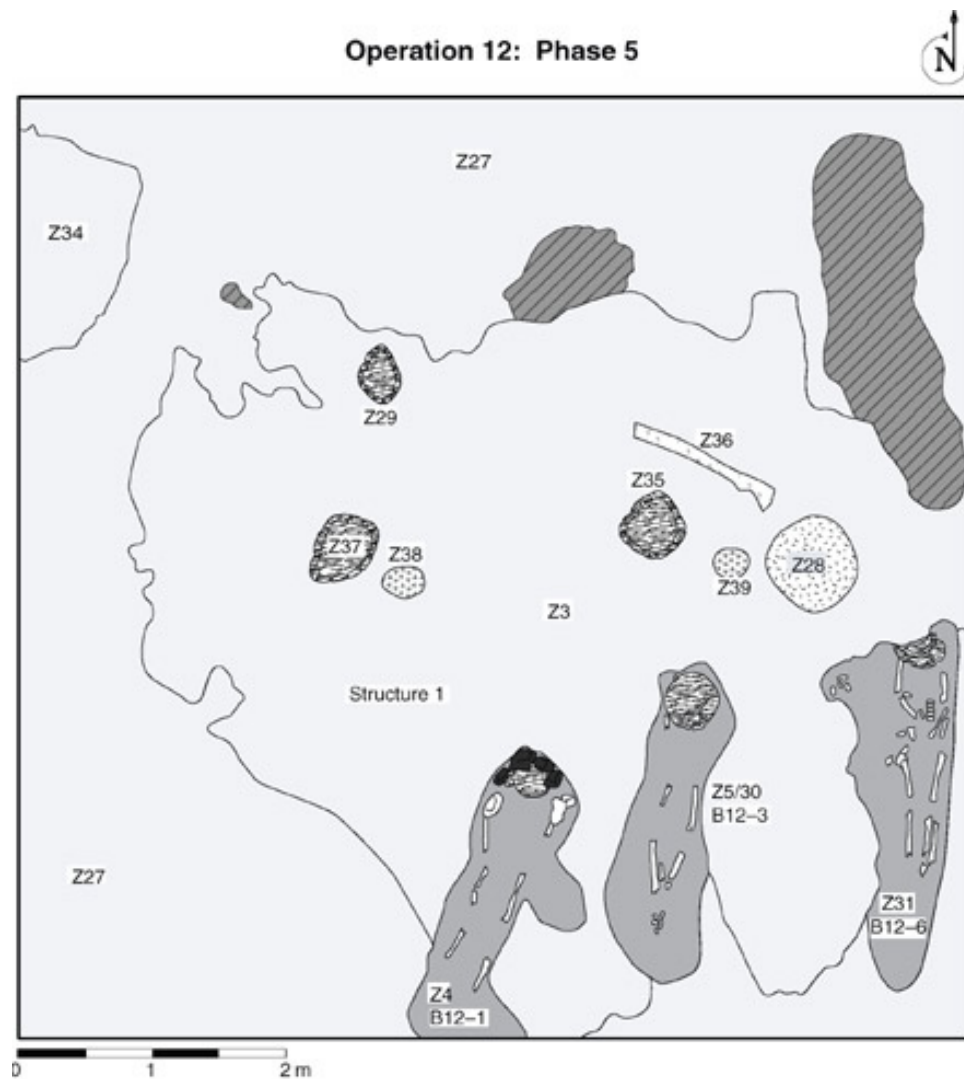
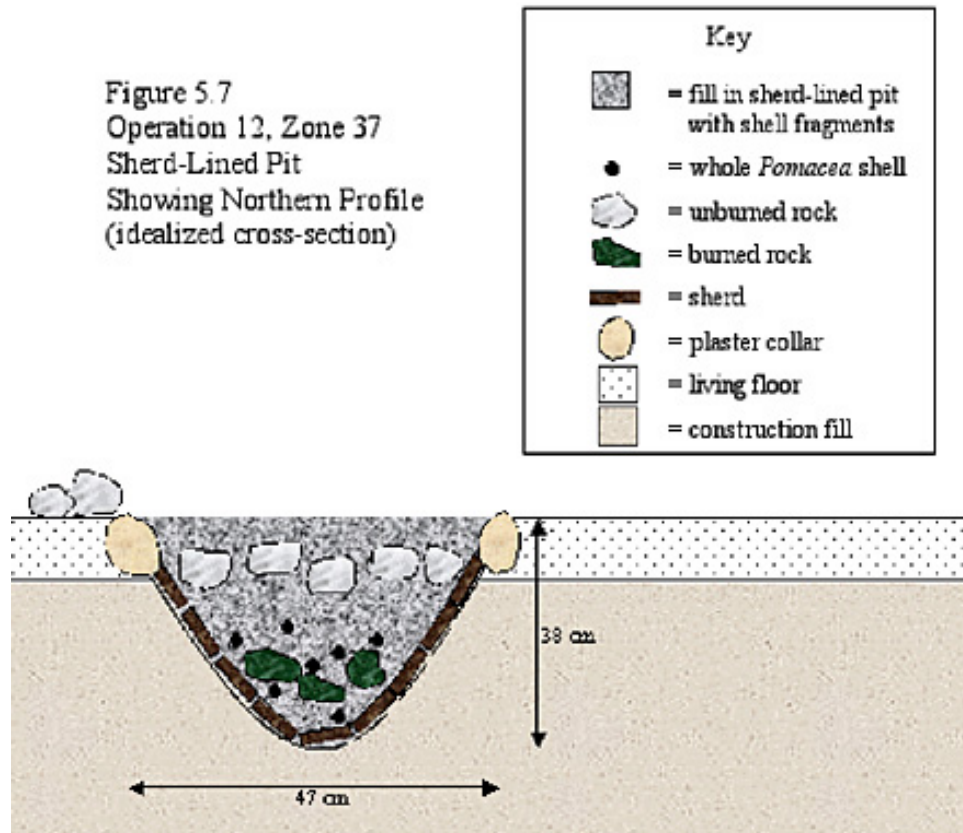


Figure 5.7  
Operation 12, Zone 37  
Sherd-Lined Pit  
Showing Northern Profile  
(idealized cross-section)



Sherds were not only recycled as linings for cooking pits, however, many were shaped into a quadrilateral form and notched on two sides to serve as weights for a fishing net. Called net sinkers, the prevalence of this artifact at K'axob indicates the important role of fish in the diet of this village. For some types of pottery, sherds were added to the paste during pottery production as is apparent in this thin-section of a sherd from K'axob. Golden-yellow chert bifaces, imported from chert producers to the south of K'axob, also were subjected to protracted recycling efforts. After breakage rendered them unfit for agricultural tasks, fragments often were reused as cores (as in the image shown here). Finally, fragments of hard-stone metates made excellent "pot rests" or hearth stones and many were broken into cubes (as in the fragment shown here) and placed in proximity to a fire hot enough to produce oxidation and spalling. Taken together, this recurrent evidence of recycling indicates that K'axob residents used all conceivable means to extend the use of their raw materials.



Five net weights from Operation 1.



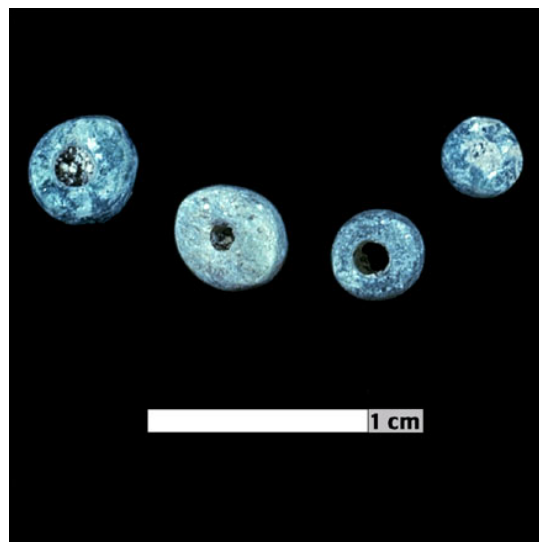
Reworked chipped stone biface from Operation 8, Zone 1, LT# 0001.





Profile view of metate fragment from Operation 11, Zone 2, GT #042.

At K'axob, "precious" materials such as jadeite (or greenstone) and obsidian were scarce. The paucity of materials acquired through long-distance trade suggests that localized exchange networks predominated. The Guatemalan highlands and Motagua valley--respective sources of obsidian and jadeite--were very far from the world of Formative K'axob residents. Jadeite occurred primarily as single occurrences of small beads in burial contexts while the sharp-edged volcanic glass is present in very low frequencies and principally as small fragments of prismatic blades.



Four greenstone beads from Operation 1: (L-R) Z220 (paleosol), Z59 (midden), Z80 (Burial 1-12a), and Z233 (Burial 1-43).



Obsidian from the Chaakk'ax complex, top row, blade fragments from the Early Chaakk'ax (Op 1, Z59; Op 1, Z59; and Op 1, Z58). The first blade is San Martin Jilotepeque obsidian. Bottom row, blade fragment from Chaakk'ax (Op 1, Z57) and two from the Late Chaakk'ax (Op 1, Z56 and Op 1, Z160). The first and third blades on the bottom row are from San Martin Jilotepeque. (Top OB #012, OB #030, OB #029; Bottom OB #106, OB #057, and OB #091)

In contrast to the low frequency of long-distance imported goods, local resources were intensively exploited. Mary Lee Bartlett's analysis of local clays and pottery pastes indicates that during the Late Formative period, most pottery was made from locally available materials. Local food resources, likewise, were harvested in large quantities. When Marilyn Masson and Ryan Harrigan analyzed the animal bone and shell remains, they found thousands of freshwater fish and turtle bones as well as mollusc shells from locally available aquatic species. These remains reinforce the overriding importance of the wetlands and the nearby river to the inhabitants of K'axob. Arguably, K'axob Maya framed their lives within a very local existence and within that world, they seem to have prospered and fared well.



Sierra Red: Gadrooned variety, one of four upright vessels of the quadripartite cache, Operation 1, Zone 77.



Unworked *Pomacea flagellata* (juvenile).

This concludes the tour of K'axob and the introduction to the place, the researchers, and the themes that have emerged from our field research. Much more can be learned about the material remains of K'axob by perusing the illustrated databases, the 3-D excavation module, and the accompanying book.

