Latin American Antiquity (2025), 1–21
doi:10.1017/laq.2025.10110

SAA
Society for American Archaeology

ARTICLE

Exclusivity in Early Maya Monumentality: Querying Egalitarianism at Ucí, Yucatán

Scott R. Hutson[1], Mario Zimmermann[2] and Iliana Ancona Aragón[3]

[1]Department of Anthropology, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, USA; [2]Department of Anthropology, Boise State University, Boise, ID, USA and [3]Centro INAH Yucatán, Mérida, Mexico
Corresponding author: Scott R. Hutson; Email: scotthutson@uky.edu

(Received 9 August 2024; revised 26 April 2025; accepted 28 April 2025)

Abstract
Datasets from around the world suggest that people completed early monumental construction projects without long-term structures of hierarchy or authority. In the Maya area, some of the first monuments produced by semisedentary societies, such as those at Yaxuna and Ceibal, were built in the absence of substantial social inequality. The focus of these monuments was a relatively inclusive plaza. This article presents evidence of an eighth-century BC monumental construction at Ucí, another site that was probably not fully sedentary. At Ucí, however, the first large architecture is not inclusive. Structure 14sub5 lacks a front stairway, separating people in the plaza from those who could ascend the building from the back. The difference between the inclusivity at Ceibal and Yaxuna and exclusivity at Ucí suggests variation in degrees of inequality. Different societies experimented creatively with social and political organization. This aligns with the inherent complexity of egalitarian societies as well as the possibility that not all complex societies began as egalitarian. Consonant with the idea that people had power to act otherwise, early exclusivity at Ucí developed into inclusive forms of governance in the Late Preclassic.

Resumen
Datos por todas partes del mundo sugieren que proyectos de construcción monumental fueron logrados sin estructuras de jerarquía ni autoridad a largo plaza. En el área Maya, algunos de los primeros monumentos construidos por sociedades semi-sedentarias, como en Yaxuna y Ceibal, surgieron sin desigualdad social sustancial. El enfoque de estos monumentos era una plaza relativamente inclusiva. El presente estudio resume evidencia de un edificio monumental del siglo ocho aC en Ucí, otro sitio que probablemente no era completamente sedentario en esta época. Sin embargo, en Ucí la primera arquitectura no fue inclusiva. La estructura 14sub5 no tiene una escalera al frente, separando gente en la plaza de los que pudieron ascender el edificio desde la parte trasera. La diferencia entre la inclusividad de Ceibal y Yaxuna y la exclusividad en Ucí sugiere una variación en el grado de desigualdad. Varias sociedades experimentaron creativamente con diferentes formas de organización social y política. Esto va de acuerdo con la complejidad integral de sociedades egalitarianas y con la posibilidad de que no todas las sociedades complejas empezaron en el egalitarianismo. De acuerdo con la idea de que la gente tenía el poder de gestión, la exclusividad temprana en Ucí se transformó en formas inclusivas de autoridad en el Preclásico Tardío.

Keywords: Ancient Maya; egalitarianism; monumentality; Middle Preclassic

Palabras claves: Maya antiguo; egalitarianismo; monumentalidad; Preclásico Medio

Traditionally, archaeologists have held that enduring social inequality and monumental construction go hand in hand. More recently, interpretations of data from around the world suggest that massive

construction projects were completed with minimal social inequality or long-term structures of authority. In the Maya area, aspects of both of these positions may be correct. In the Upper Belize River Valley, archaeologists have detected social inequality in small, sedentary communities prior to the construction of monumental architecture. Elsewhere in the Maya Lowlands, such as Ceibal and Yaxuna, monumental architecture appears with minimal or uncertain evidence of social inequality at a time when some of the population was still seasonally mobile. Among these partly sedentary communities, the focus of the first monumental constructions is a relatively inclusive plaza, suggesting egalitarian social relations.

This article presents evidence of early monumental construction at Ucí, another site that was probably not fully sedentary when people began to build big. At Ucí, however, the first large architecture, which dates to the early eighth century BC, is not inclusive. As detailed in the text that follows, the front of this building—Structure 14sub5—lacks a stairway, promoting a separation between people in the plaza and those who could ascend the building from the back. The difference between the inclusivity of the first monuments at semisedentary Ceibal and Yaxuna and the exclusivity at semisedentary Ucí suggests slipperiness in defining and identifying egalitarian societies. We expand on this difficulty in the following section. This difference also suggests the existence of yet more variety in the social and political organization of early Maya communities. While it would be useful to attempt to explain this variety in comparative context with reference to forms of governance, household economies, or some other axis of variation, these buildings and their plazas are often the only archaeological evidence available, making explanation difficult.

Inequality, Monumentality, and Egalitarianism

The literature contains many interpretations of the relationship between social inequality and monument building. A traditional position holds that social hierarchy accompanied the first episodes of monument construction. In his fourth of 10 criteria for distinguishing cities from villages, Gordon Childe (1950:12) argued that "truly monumental public buildings" were dedicated to "imaginary deities" (if not built for Pharaoh-like principals) who shared wealth and power with civil rulers served by a hierarchy of officials. Bruce Trigger (1990:122) wrote that monumental architecture is "universally associated with . . . class-based societies." More recently, Haas and Creamer (2012:289–291) claim that "the construction of monumental architecture is generally connected to and/or correlated with a number of other significant changes in human history," including "the emergence of political centralization and social hierarchies." In some parts of the Maya area, a degree of social inequality does indeed precede monument building. For example, houses that immediately predate monumental construction at Blackman Eddy and Cahal Pech, both in the Belize River Valley, exhibit variation in size and quality of construction. People living in the bigger and costlier houses acquired finer material goods (Brown et al. 2018:98–99; Garber et al. 2004; Sullivan et al. 2018:41).

Several authors present alternatives to the traditional position. Ethnographers in Lowland New Guinea in the Sepik River Basin have shown that "Big Men" organized the construction of 100-foot-high spirit houses requiring up to 10,000 person days of labor (Roscoe 2012:50–51). Although these leaders were skilled orators, had multiple wives and followers, organized competitive presentation of pigs and food, and possessed extensive ceremonial knowledge, their status was not hereditary and their societies lacked political centralization. At fourth millennium BC archaeological sites such as Watson Brake in the Lower Mississippi Valley (Louisiana) and the Mount Taylor Shell Ridge in the Middle St. John's River basin (Florida), people built monuments in the absence of well-established social ranking (Sassaman and Randall 2012; Saunders 2012). Cahokia became the hub of regionally powerful leaders in the beginning of the second millennium BC, but Pauketat (2000) argues that the first monumental construction episodes do not reflect the ambition of preexisting elites seeking to legitimize authority (see also Jennings 2016:123–124). Instead, Pauketat notes that Monks Mound, the largest construction at Cahokia, was built incrementally, implying that the goal was to bring people together on multiple occasions for communal rituals. The process was more important than the product and people did not foresee that those who came to be elites would appropriate the product (Monks Mound). Further examples (Norte Chico, Poverty Point, Gobekli Tepe) lead Rosenswig and Burger (2012:6) to state that huge labor projects can arise without strong central authority or instruments of coercive control.

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Recently excavated examples from the Maya area contribute to this discussion. The first monumental construction in the Maya area—the gargantuan plateau at Aguada Fénix, dating between 1000 and 800 BC—was built in multiples stages without coercion from powerful elites (Inomata et al. 2020). Inomata and coauthors interpret the plateau as an inclusive space for the gathering of communities that were not fully sedentary and did not exhibit marked social inequality. At Ceibal, the first public buildings became what Inomata and colleagues (2015:525) call monumental during the Real 2 phase (850–800 BC). These buildings include the Ch'och' structure (built above the earlier Sulul platform), which was between 3.5 and 6 m tall and probably more than 34 m long, and the 3 to 5 m high B'ehom pyramid (built above the earlier Ajaw structure). B'ehom/Ajaw and the elongated Xa'an platform to the east form what Mayanists call an "E Group." E Groups normally consist of a broad, flat plaza with a radial pyramid on the west and a longer, north–south oriented platform to the east. They are found at many other sites and are often the first form of public architecture. Complementing the Ceibal example, recent excavations at Yaxuna reveal that the first public architecture, dating perhaps to the ninth century BC, was an E Group (Stanton and Collins 2021). The orientations of many E Groups permit people to mark the solar calendar and the agricultural cycle.

Because early E Group plazas are inclusive (no secluded courtyards nor towering temples for private ceremonies), they are thought to promote gatherings in which various social groups convene on relatively equal footing. Several authors mention the origins of political authority in the context of E Groups (Aimers and Rice 2006:93; Chase and Chase 2017:20; Doyle 2012:370, 374; Stanton and Collins 2021:111), and it is likely that E Groups played a role in the development of more permanent forms of inequality. Nevertheless, other archaeologists (Canuto and Estrada-Belli 2021:84; Inomata 2017:240–241) suggest that the intentions behind the initial construction of E Groups may differ substantially from later strategies of appropriation and exclusion that entangled these buildings with hierarchy. At Ceibal, the Sulul platform, located southeast of the E Group and dating to the tenth and ninth centuries BC, had a pair of greenstone axe caches. Inomata and coauthors (2015) suggest Sulul could be either a communal space or a residence. If it were a residence, the axe caches may imply the existence of "emergent elite" (Inomata et al. 2015:525). Yet in the context of monumentalization, Inomata and coauthors (2015:528) deemphasize the notion of elites and aggrandizers and suggest that "large constructions can be achieved through communal consensus and mutual obligations among participants in the absence of institutionalized, managerial elites." Likewise, in an argument that closely resembles Pauketat's and Jennings's ideas that hierarchy often does not immediately accompany the congealing of larger social groups, Canuto and Estrada-Belli (2021:84–85) propose that early monumental construction among the Maya manifested the coordination of collective action for the sake of community integration, not the establishment or legitimization of authority.

A remarkable feature of the first public buildings at Aguada Fénix, Ceibal, and Yaxuna is that they were built without clear evidence of a fully sedentary population. At Ceibal, the presence of pottery suggests that at least some people had settled down. Yet extensive excavation sampling at dozens of residential groups beyond the site core by the 1964–1978 Harvard Project (Tourtellot 1988:376) and broad residential excavations by Inomata's Ceibal-Petexbatun Archaeology Project at more than half a dozen groups beyond the site core failed to find a single domestic structure dating to the Real 1 or 2 phases (1000–800 BC). This leads Inomata and coauthors (2015:527–528) to suggest that some of the labor required to build the Real 2 phase monuments must have come from mobile groups. At Komchen, the earliest public architecture was constructed by people exclusively using the first pottery in the area—the Early Middle Preclassic Ek ceramic complex. A very thorough sampling program at Komchen, including buildings of all sizes beyond the site core, test excavated 162 platforms to bedrock (Ringle and Andrews 1990:215) and also failed to find any domestic structures with Ek pottery, moving Andrews and Bey (2023:391) to conclude that "the transition to a fully sedentary life with domestic pottery may have been gradual in the northern lowlands."

While it takes leadership to organize complex construction projects, leaders during platform building at Aguada Fénix, Ceibal, Yaxuna, and Komchen probably lacked the power to order people around in other contexts. Without full commitment to sedentism, these leaders were probably not like the big men building spirit houses along the Sepik River. Instead, they are more likely to have come from egalitarian

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

societies. There is much to say about egalitarianism, and perhaps the first point is to recognize, following the structuration theory articulated by Wiessner (2002:234), that egalitarian societies are not simple. Rather, egalitarianism is a complex structure consisting of historically specific values, ways of viewing the world, and understandings of what is appropriate. This structure also consists of the material world, shaped or unshaped by antecedent, historically specific action (Sewell 1992; Olsen 2003). Actors born and socialized into egalitarian ideological and material structures may have ambitious personalities that dispose them to aggrandize. But in the absence of precedents for persistent inequality, the pursuit of personal prestige and renown will not transform structures immediately (Clark 2000:98–100). When unmistakable grabs for power violate long-standing traditions of egalitarianism, things get clumsy and chaotic (Jennings 2016:17–18, 276). People resist; the structure strikes back (Wiessner 2002:234). Undoubtedly, conditions emerge that can bolster challenges to egalitarian structures.

Settlement aggregation is one of the strongest conditions. At the same time, the archaeological record teaches us that humans have devised a variety of creative responses to stresses that accompany population aggregation, of which the development of social hierarchy is but one (Jennings 2016:275). Fissioning is well known ethnographically and also occurred in ancient societies overwhelmed by growing pains (Bandy 2004). Other societies, such as those of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Near East, buffered continued growth with architectural strategies for maintaining privacy (Kuijt 2000). According to Kuijt, when "powerful individual leaders did emerge in the Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B, they were unable to consolidate authority within these communities and perhaps were instrumental in the social fragmentation that occurred within prehistory's earliest known agricultural villages" (2000:99). In the large, densely populated settlement of Çatalhöyük, Hodder and Cessford (2004) argue that order was maintained in the absence of centralized authority by minute spatial divisions within houses. Daily routines in these spaces engendered the embodied, nondiscursive rules and understandings necessary for life in a crowded yet acephalous society. Graeber and Wengrow (2021:289–297) review a panoply of fourth millennium BC cities in Ukraine, Moldova, and Southeast Russia whose occupants preserved egalitarian ideals.

Graeber and Wengrow's (2021:8–9) broader point is that humans, while always shaped by historical circumstances, are creative. The commonplace that foragers reveled in unbound freedom until agriculture brought about irreversible oppression (Harari 2015) does not fit all the data and also portrays humans as mindless marionettes denied the credible power to make decisions (Clark 2000:92). Embracing the notion that some early monument builders, pastoralists, horticulturalists, farmers, and even urbanites retained egalitarian structures, however, also means that we must be ready to accept that foragers and not yet fully mobile societies, with or without monuments, may not have been egalitarian. Instead, they may have experimented with a "carnival parade of political forms" (Graeber and Wengrow 2021:4). In fact, this crossroads invites interrogation of the concept of "egalitarianism."

As several authors have argued, egalitarianism does not appear to be a simple default state but rather a complexly girded levee holding back an ever-pressing storm surge of inequality (Boehm 1993:238; Roscoe 2000:124). Egalitarianism is not ground zero of human relations, not the social order at its most basic. Instead, given the proliferation of inequality in other upper primate societies, inequality is bedrock: "Humans are likely to develop dominance relationships and hierarchies as a matter of course, unless constrained from doing so" (Ames 2010:23; Wiessner 2002:233). In fact, the deep and refined literature on egalitarianism sometimes shows it to be a mirage. To begin with, different authors define it differently. Which is more important: autonomy or equality (Ames 2010:24)? When we talk of equality, do we mean that there is absolutely no hierarchy? Or merely that some hierarchy is present but not in key domains of life? Or that hierarchy exists even in key domains (hunting, combat, oratory) but is not egregious? Are we talking about equal *access* to resources, or equal *distribution* of resources? Are such resources merely physical (land, sources of food, portable valuables) or less tangible (dignity, spiritual knowledge, social contacts, freedom to speak in major assemblies)? Can a society be equal if elders are very powerful, as long as anyone who lives to be 50 gets to be an elder (Graeber and Wengrow 2021:75)? What about gender inequality? Of course, even foundational texts (e.g., Fried 1967) underscore the presence of such inequalities in egalitarian societies. With all the different ways of defining egalitarian, egalitarian societies predictably exhibit broad variation (Hayden 1995; Roscoe 2012:51; Wiessner 1996),

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

much more than the straightforward distinction between immediate return or delayed return societies (Woodburn 1982; see also forager vs. collector in Binford 1980). Egalitarian societies may have just as much competition between their members as other societies but competition is simply cheaper and less ostentatious; it may be over who can be more generous and humble (Ames 2010:30). Or, domination may exist in egalitarian societies, but in reverse: followers dominate leaders (Boehm 1993). Finally, returning to the notion of a mirage, Ames (2010:26) asserts that there are no positive methods for detecting egalitarianism in the archaeological record. Instead, archaeologists posit egalitarianism on the basis of negative evidence: a lack of evidence of ranking. Peterson and Drennan (2018:57) insist that the contrast between egalitarian and nonegalitarian is overly simplistic.

In sum, egalitarianism is a slippery concept, "perhaps the most infamous malapropism in anthropology" (Clark 2002:255). The takeaway for this article is that even in cases in which the builders of the first monuments may have been partly nonsedentary and left no evidence of wealth differences or ascribed status, we should be open to the possibility that some of these societies had appreciable hierarchies. While semisedentary Early Middle Preclassic Ceibal may have lacked such hierarchies, incisions on a K'in Orange urn, part of the Early Middle Preclassic (ninth-century BC) Ek complex, excavated at Flor de Mayo near Mérida (Hernández Hernández et al. 2010), depict a possible throne, suggesting to Andrews and Bey (2023:378) "an advanced level of social and political complexity." Excavations at Ucí provide another potential line of evidence for hierarchy among semisedentary mound builders. It is important to note that this hierarchy would be far less developed than the political centralization and social hierarchies mentioned by Childe, Trigger, and Haas and Creamer at the beginning of this article.

Excavations at 14sub5

The Ucí-Cansahcab Regional Integration Project (UCRIP) began archaeological investigations at Ucí and other nearby sites in 2008 and continued research for much of the 2010s (Figure 1). An 18 km long system of causeways connects Ucí with three other ancient settlements (Kancab, Ucanha, and Cansahcab) with monumental architecture. Building on earlier research by Rubén Maldonado Cárdenas, UCRIP set out to assess social and political changes that accompanied the construction of the causeway connecting these four sites. Ucí, the largest, reached its peak in the Late Preclassic, when 93% of its residential platforms show evidence of occupation, suggesting a population of around 5,000 (Vallejo Cáliz and Hutson 2023).

The focus of this article, of course, is the earliest architecture: a buried building—14sub5—within Structure 14 at Ucí. Excavations (258 m^2) of Structure 14 provide useful details about the first monumental construction. Structure 14 was one of the largest buildings at the site (Figure 2) and comprises the west side of Compound 3, Ucí's largest architectural group. Heavy machinery damaged parts of Structure 14 while extracting fill for a nearby road in the 1950s. What remains of the platform measures about 75 × 60 m with a maximum height of 4 m (Figure 3). Excavations probed the east (Op. 46A), north (Op. 46B), south (Op. 46C), and center (Op. 46D) of the building (Figure 3) and revealed that the final major construction stages date to the Late Classic period (600–800 CE). Beneath the Late Classic levels, we uncovered Late Preclassic constructions on the east and north sides. Likewise, Ucanha has a platform of similar dimensions (80 × 55 × 2 m) in which Late Classic layers buried Late Preclassic features such as a pair of architectural masks (Welch 2024) and a superstructure painted with the mat motif (Hutson et al. 2020).

14sub5 Architectural Details

In the very center of Structure 14, the 1950s disturbance removed some of the Late Classic overburden, facilitating the partial excavation (Op. 46D) of 14sub5, a Middle Preclassic plastered platform with two terraces (Figure 4). We dug the northeast corner and a portion of the east side of the lower terrace, which was very well preserved (Figure 5). For the upper terrace, we exposed the northeast and southeast corners, most of the east side, and portions of the west side. The east sides of the lower and upper terraces have slopes of 55° and 54°, respectively. The north, south, and west sides of the upper terrace are nearly vertical, as is the north side of the lower terrace. The east side of the lower terrace rises between 1.25 and 1.3 m above a well-preserved plaster floor named Floor 1. While we were not able to dig below

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

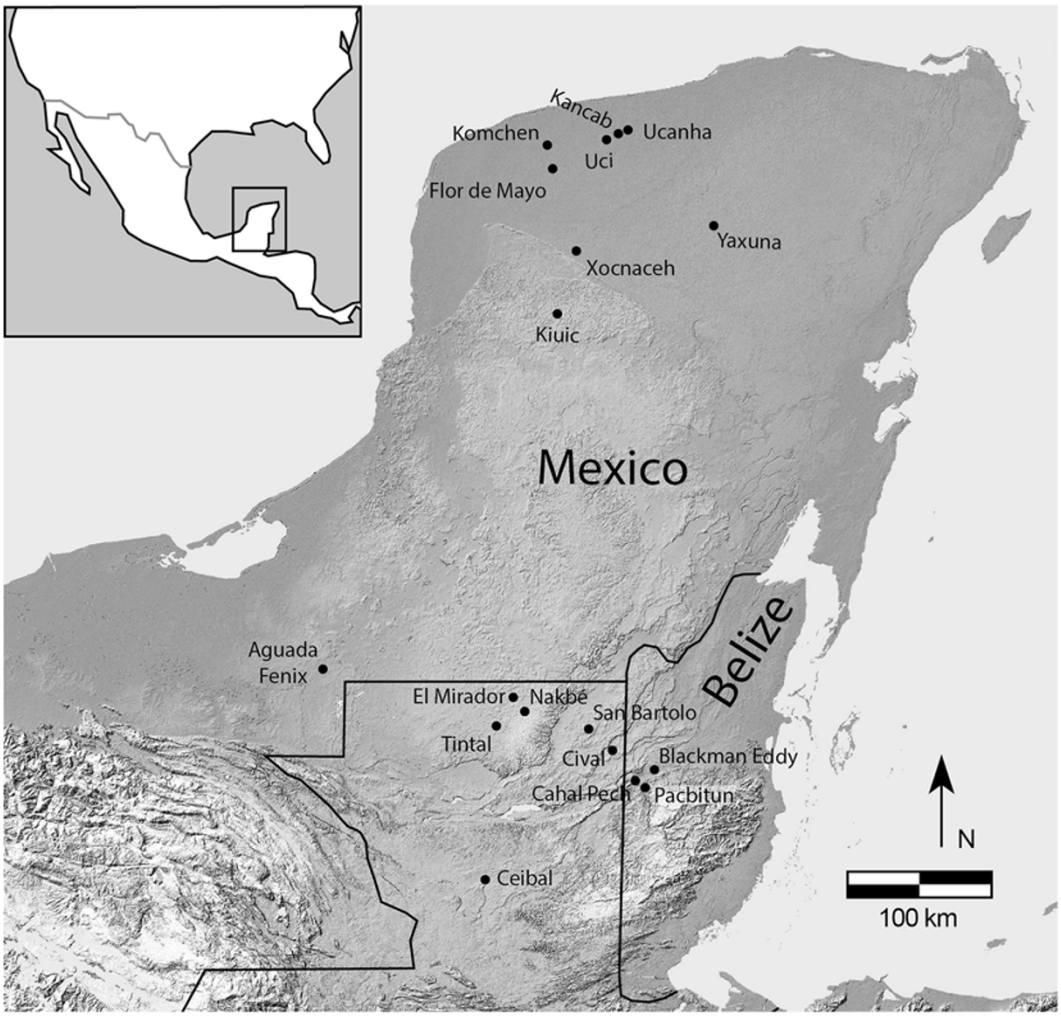

Figure 1. Map with Maya sites mentioned in the text.

Floor 1, excavations in other parts of Structure 14 indicate that the natural bedrock is approximately 60 cm below Floor 1's surface. The long axis of the east side of the lower terrace is 12° east of north. The top of the upper terrace has been destroyed but its highest remaining point is 2 m above the lower terrace. Combining the two terraces, Structure 14sub5 was therefore at least 3.25 m tall. The base of the east side of the upper terrace, which also has an orientation of 12° east of north, begins 5.3 m west of the base of the east side of the lower terrace. Thus, the flat top of the lower terrace provides a 4 m wide landing (Figure 6). The north side of the upper terrace (wall 3, Figure 4) is 3.15 m south of the north side of the lower terrace (wall 8), creating a narrower landing between the two terraces on their north sides. The east side of the base of the upper terrace measures 27.85 m long. Assuming that the distance between the two terraces on the south side is the same as on the north, the length of the east side of the lower terrace would be 34.15 m.

The south and north portions of the west side of the upper terrace (walls 5 and 7; Figure 4) are vertical and, measured from the base of the sloped east side, the widths of these two portions of the upper terrace are 6.6 m. About 7 m north of the SW corner of the upper terrace, stairway 1 begins on the surface of the west side of the lower terrace, ascending northward toward the top of the upper terrace (see Figure 4). Portions of three steps are preserved, each perpendicular to and connected to the west side of the upper

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

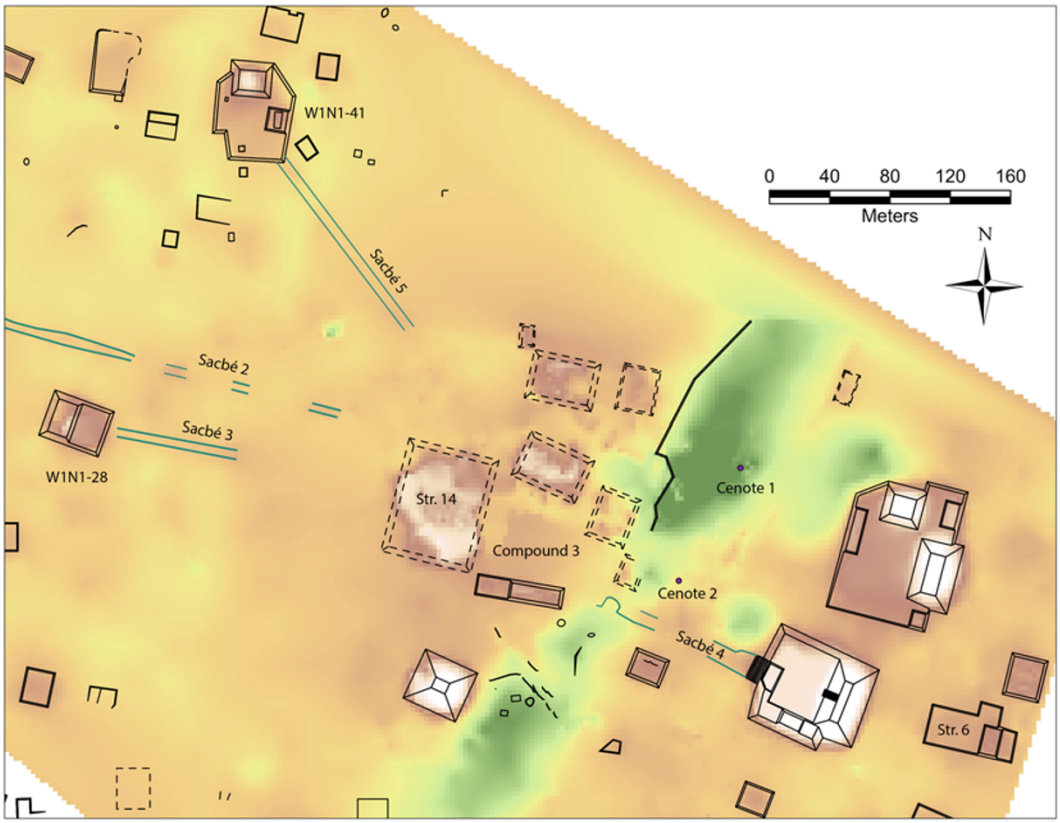

Figure 2. Map of Ucí site core. (Color online)

terrace. Stairway 2, a mirror image of stairway 1, begins about 7 m south of the NW corner of the upper terrace and ascends southward. At 2.4 m west of the point where stairway 1 abuts the west edge of the upper terrace, we uncovered the remains of a west-facing wall (wall 6) that postdates 14sub5. Wall 6 has a different style compared to the terrace walls of 14sub5: it is not as heavily plastered and its orientation differs (15° east of north versus 12°). No evidence of the lower terrace was found in the vicinity of wall 6, suggesting that the western edge of the lower terrace is just to the east of wall 6.

The base of wall 6 rests on a single, poorly preserved plaster floor (Floor 3) that is 0.7 m above the level of the well-preserved Floor 1. Excavations extending 1.12 m below Floor 3, to a depth of 42 cm below the elevation of Floor 1, failed to recover any evidence of a floor. A deep trench (Op 46c; Figure 3) that reached bedrock south of Structure 14sub5 also failed to find clear evidence of a floor anywhere near the depth of Floor 1. While we encountered Floor 1 at the northeast corner of the lower terrace, excavations 8 m to the north (Op 46B-1, 2, 3, and 6) reached bedrock but only located floors pertaining to a substantially later construction phase. On 14sub5's east side, Floor 1 was exposed to a distance of 6 m east of the base of the terrace, and the floor continues eastward beyond the edge of the excavations. Thus, only the east side of 14sub5 has a floor connected to and extending well away from the building. Additional floors at the same approximate depth as Floor 1 were found in excavations 16 m to the east of the base of the lower terrace (Op 46A-2, 3), near what would be the final eastern edge of Structure 14, and 36 m to the east in the plaza of Compound 3. Thus, it is possible that Floor 1 extended over 36 m to the east of 14sub5, though we can't be certain. To reiterate, the ground surfaces beyond the south, west, and north edges of 14sub5 either lack a floor or contain a floor that does not extend more than a few meters from the base of 14sub5. Also, 14sub5's terraces are sloped only on their east sides. The front side of 14sub5 is therefore its east side. This is consonant with later versions of Structure 14 which also face

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

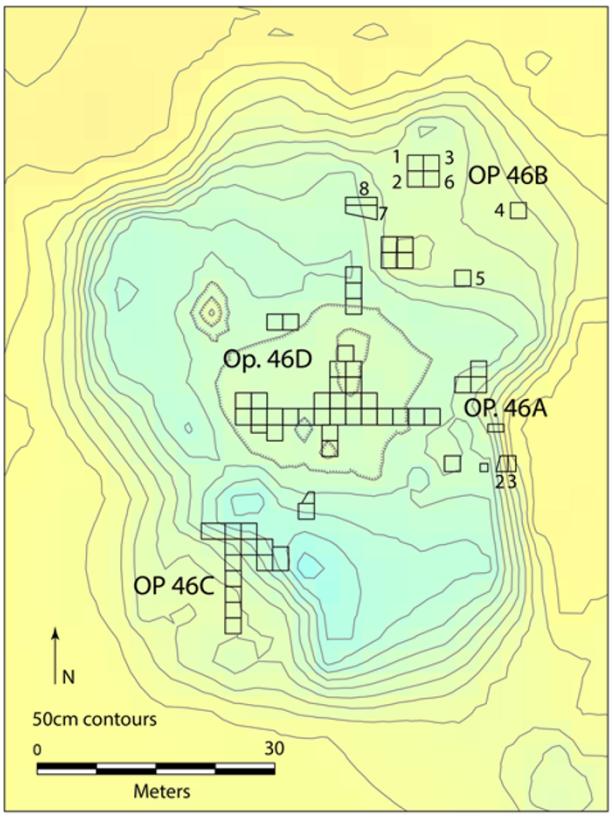

Figure 3. Map of Structure 14 with excavation units. (Color online)

east and consonant with the fact that Structure 14 is on the west side of Compound 3's plaza. While the site plan (Figure 2) shows causeways to the west of Structure 14, these date to the Late Preclassic (Vallejo Cáliz and Hutson 2023) and therefore cannot be used to argue that the west side of Str. 14sub5 was the front. In sum, the Structure 14sub5 faced east with a pair of concealed stairways summiting it from the back, west side.

14sub5 Chronology

Structure 14sub5 can be tentatively dated with the help of diagnostic pottery and radiocarbon assays. A 1 × 1 m excavation along the centerline of 14sub5 probed beneath the top surface of the lower terrace (in unit 7; Figure 4). This excavation showed that the top floor of the lower terrace consists of a 12 cm thick layer of plaster and hard-packed marl/sascab directly above a second plaster floor that measures 6 cm thick, which is directly above a third plaster floor measuring 7 cm thick. Beneath the third floor we found 18 cm of packed sascab. While cleaning the profile, fragments of a fourth plaster floor, 2 cm thick, were visible in the middle of this 18 cm level. Underneath, we encountered dry core fill that extends to a depth of 142 cm below the level of the top floor. Due to cramped space, excavations stopped at this point, which is approximately 15 cm below the level of the Floor 1 (as found just to the east at the base of the lower terrace) and about 45 cm above the level of bedrock as exposed in other areas of Structure 14. The top floor of this excavation is in fact continuous with Floor 1: its plaster extends unbroken eastward down the slope of the lower terrace, continuing as Floor 1 at the base of the terrace.

AMS dating of carbonized wood from the 18 cm level of sascab below the third floor returned a date of 2590 ± 30 BP (1σ), 820–750 cal BC (91.2% likelihood; ICA-20C/0927). It is important to note that hard-packed sascab is a specialized material used for constructing sequences of plaster floors (Littman 1960), not all-purpose fill that could have come from anywhere. As with any carbon sample, the charred wood that is part of the sascab ballast that went into the construction of the floor might be old wood,

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

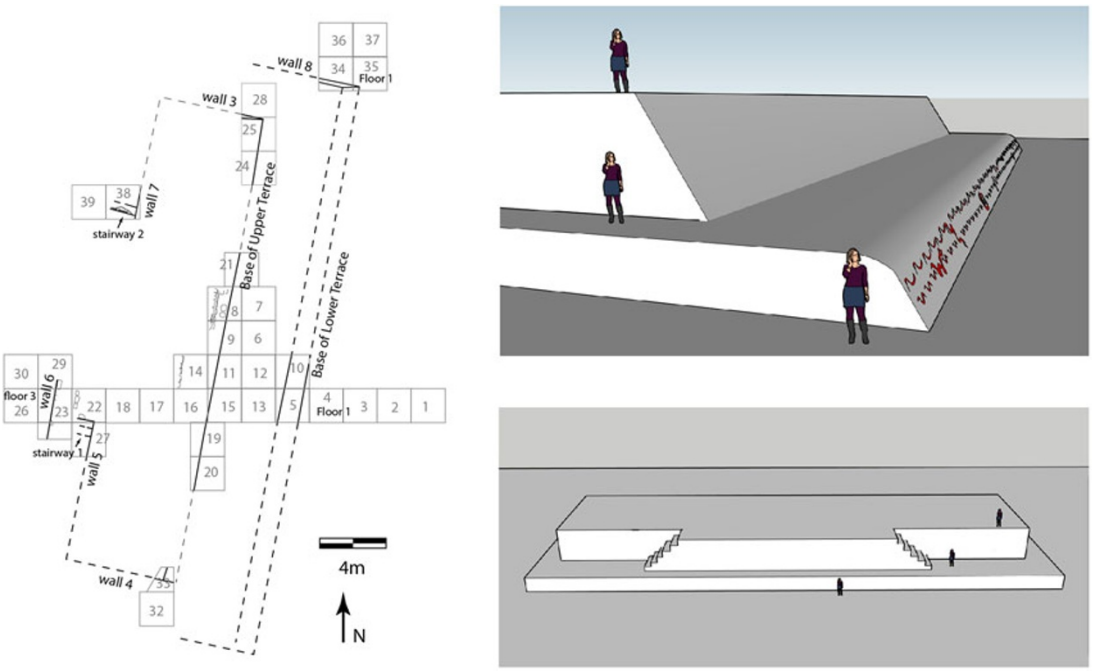

Figure 4. *Left:* plan of 14sub5. *Top right:* reconstruction illustration of southeast portion of 14sub5, facing northwest. *Bottom right:* reconstruction illustration of west side of 14sub5, facing east.

Figure 5. Structure 14sub5, northeast corner of lower terrace, looking south. (Color online)

but the sascab context raises the likelihood that this wood was carbonized specifically as part of plaster floor construction. Andrews and Bey (2023) suggest that there was a period between 800 and 700 BC during which Early Middle Preclassic Ek ceramics were produced at the same time as ceramics from the

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 6. Structure 14sub5, eastern surface of lower terrace with slope of upper terrace at right, looking south. (Color online)

ensuing Late Middle Preclassic Early Nabanche phase. At Yaxuna, the Late Laapal phase, dating from 900 to 700 BC, contains similar overlap of Early and Late Middle Preclassic pottery (Stanton et al. 2023). Since the radiocarbon date from the lower terrace fits these two time spans comfortably, the pottery from this sealed lot should be a mix of Early and Late Middle Preclassic. Though woefully small, the sample of 10 sherds that came from the 18 cm layer directly underneath the third floor nevertheless meets this expectation. The pottery consists of eight sherds pertaining to the Early Middle Preclassic Ek Complex (see Andrews and Bey 2023), including a K'in Orange/Red sherd and seven Almeja Burnished Gray sherds (variety unspecified), and two Unto Negro sherds from the Late Middle Preclassic.

Thus, the lower terrace appears to have been constructed at the end of the ninth or beginning of the eighth century BC. The upper terrace, the top of which is not preserved, has two coats of plaster on its sloped east side. The top coat is continuous with the top plaster floor of the lower terrace, which is continuous with Floor 1 of the plaza east of 14sub5. Because the upper terrace has only two layers of plaster whereas the lower terrace had four layers, it is possible that the lower terrace first existed on its own and the upper terrace was added when the lower terrace received the third of its four floors. We were not able to trench into the core of the upper terrace to test this. Nevertheless, the excavations below wall 6 and Floor 3, on the west side of 14sub5, support the position that the upper terrace was also built in the eighth century BC. Wall 6 pertains to 14sub4, a modification to the west side of 14sub5, immediately postdating 14sub5. Ceramics from below the wall and floor consist of 31 sherds, all of which date to the Middle Preclassic. Four of these pertain to the Early Middle Preclassic Ek complex (two K'in Orange/Red and two Almeja Burnished Gray). The remainder pertain to two groups (Dzudzuquil and Pital) from the Late Middle Preclassic. (The pottery from the stratum above the base of the wall is also pure Middle Preclassic with a similar mix of Early and Late Middle Preclassic.) Two carbon samples from immediately beneath Floor 3 returned AMS dates of 2640 ± 30 BP (1σ) (840–770 cal BC, 90.0%

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

likelihood; ICA-20C/0928) and 2960 ± 30 BP (1230–1040 cal BC, 92.2% likelihood; ICA-20C-0929). The latter date is too old yet the first date agrees with the pottery, which represents a late ninth- / early eighth-century transition from the Early to Late Middle Preclassic (Andrews and Bey 2023). Thus, the wall representing 14sub4 is unlikely to date to later than the eighth century BC. Because both of the terraces of 14sub5 were constructed before the 14sub4 wall, neither can be later than the eighth century BC.

14sub5 Function

Excavations and analysis do not tell us precisely how 14sub5 was used but nevertheless provide some clues. To begin with, it is not part of an E Group and therefore is unlikely to have been used to mark calendrical cycles. Yet Floor 1, extending east from 14sub5, can be considered a plaza. The building is fairly closely aligned with one of Ucí's two cenotes: 14sub5's centerline, if extended eastward, passes a few meters north of the edge of Cenote 2, located about 150 m away. Structure 14sub5's size—34 m long—and paved eastern plaza suggest it was ceremonial. It resembles no early residences in the Maya Lowlands and the measly amount of utilitarian material culture argues against a domestic function. We encountered no concentrations of sherds or other artifacts on Floor 1 nor on the upper surface of the lower terrace. In fact, the amount of broken pottery recovered from all excavations at the core of Structure 14 (Op 46d, not counting sub-ops a, b, c, e, and f) was very small: fewer than 700 sherds, most of these from fill (disturbed by heavy machinery) above 14sub5, across 145 m^3 of excavation (<5 sherds per cubic meter). The majority of the pottery from Op. 46D above 14sub5 is Middle Preclassic (75.9%) with small amounts of Late Preclassic (17%), Late/Terminal Classic (6.9%), and Postclassic (0.2%).

Perhaps the most remarkable detail is that the front of the building appears to lack stairways. We uncovered 72.4% of the east side of the upper terrace, including a 14.3 m long swath at the center, and found no steps. We uncovered much less of the east side of the lower terrace, but we did expose the terrace's centerline and found no stairway. While 14sub5's scale and rectangular form resemble Middle Preclassic ceremonial buildings in Belize, the ones in Belize have central staircases on their front sides. Whereas 14sub5's back stairways are narrower than 2 m, the 17 m wide front face of Str. Q at Pacbitun is almost entirely stairs, consisting of three south-facing stairways: a 7 m wide central staircase and a pair of 3 m wide flanking staircases (Powis et al. 2019). Likewise, the front faces of Middle Preclassic B1-4th and B1-5th at Blackman Eddy are dominated by the central stairway, leading Brown and Garber (2005:43) to remark on "the openness and unrestricted nature" of these ceremonial structures. In contrast, the lack of frontal stairways at 14Sub5 and narrowness of its back stairways result in restricted access, a point to which we return. The terraces fronting the plaza are too steep and high to ascend; only people already "backstage" can get to the top, using steps not visible to people standing at the front of the building.

Wavy lines painted on the slope of the lower terrace in dark red may represent serpents (Figures 5 and 7). In later periods at places like Chichén Itzá, the ancient Maya prominently adorned buildings with serpents. Buildings with serpent iconography have engendered many interpretations: mountains of creation, locations of cult investiture, conduits to different worlds, paradisiacal places of riches for slain warriors, and more (Headrick 2018; Ringle et al.1998; Schele and Mathews 1998; Taube 2004). Other decorations on 14sub5 include two sets of pecked lines on the top surface of the lower terrace. The first set, located in excavation unit 15, about 3 m south of the building's centerline, consists of a 90 cm line with 16 peck marks and a 40 cm line with 8 peck marks. Both lines run roughly perpendicular to the long axis of the building. The second set, located at the base of the northeast corner of the upper terrace in unit 28, consists of a straight line that extends beyond the limits of the excavation (we documented 23 peck marks along 1.1 m) and a "C" with a hook consisting of 25 peck marks (Figure 8). At the E Group at Yaxuna, a pecked line on Late Preclassic Floor 6 marked the location of buried caches associated with earlier floors (Collins 2022). We did not excavate underneath the pecked lines on Structure 14sub5.

Middle Preclassic subfloor centerline/axial caches are common at Ceibal, which has a plethora of pottery and greenstone offerings (Inomata et al. 2015). Caches have also been documented at Yaxuna (Collins 2021; Stanton and Collins 2021). They may also exist at 14sub5, but, as at Komchen, our excavation strategy did not include extensive center-line trenching geared to find such deposits. We exposed

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

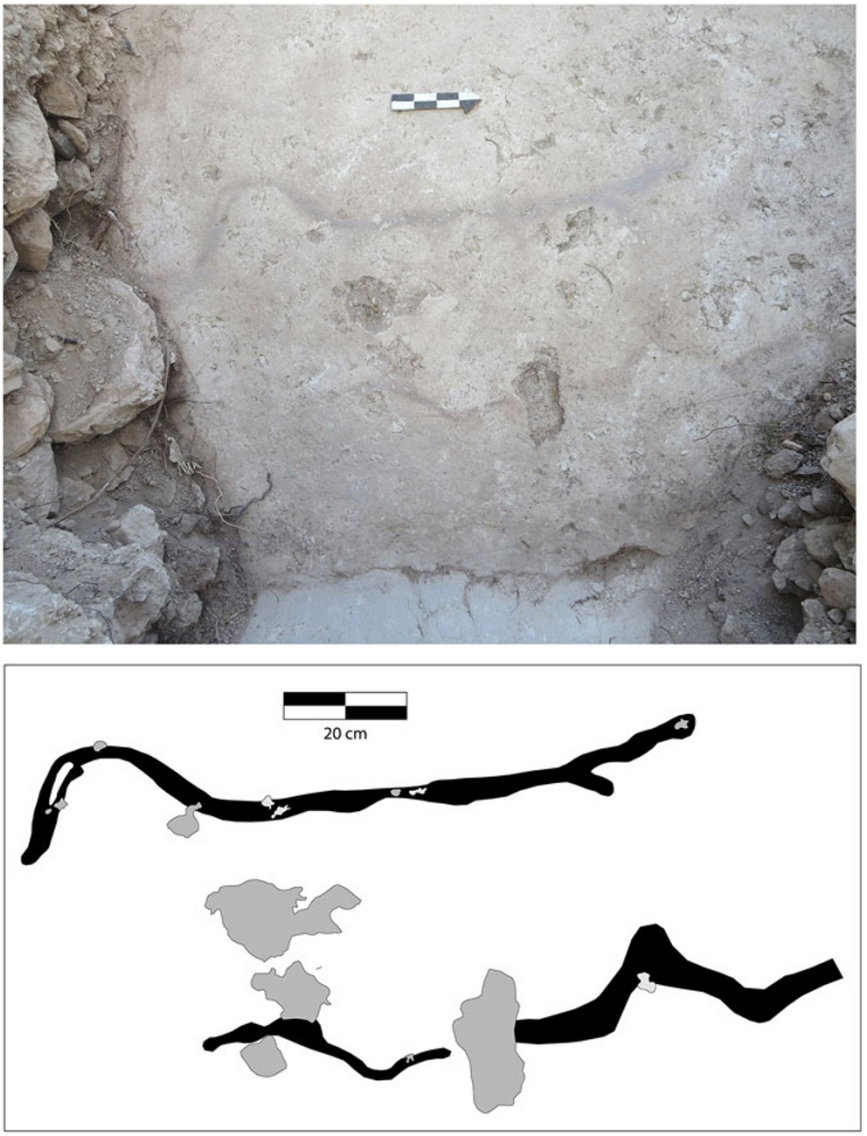

Figure 7. *Top:* photo of wavy painted lines on eastern slope of the lower terrace. *Bottom:* illustration of wavy lines. (Color online)

45 m^2 of the flat, plastered surface of the lower terrace of 14sub5 (visible in Figure 4). Finding no holes (patched or unpatched) indicating postconstruction subfloor offerings, we dug a single centerline pit that did not reveal any offerings.

We found a single greenstone bead on 14sub5's centerline on the surface of the lower terrace in excavation unit 12. In the fill of the main plaza at Kancab (located 8 km east of Ucí), a test pit located a cache of two Early Middle Preclassic pots: a K'in Orange/Red vessel with incision (Supplementary material 1–2) and a poorly preserved Almeja Burnished Gray vessel. Kancab's main group received only six test excavations (totaling 24 m^2), all in the plaza. These excavations did not furnish details of unambiguously Middle Preclassic architecture.

Our excavations exposed approximately 45 m^2 of the flat, top surface of the lower terrace of 14sub5 (visible in Figure 4). In an attempt to infer how this space was used, 51 plaster samples from this surface underwent chemical analysis as well as two from the slope of the upper terrace, one from the slope of the lower terrace, and one from Floor 1. The residue analysis, which included phosphate,

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

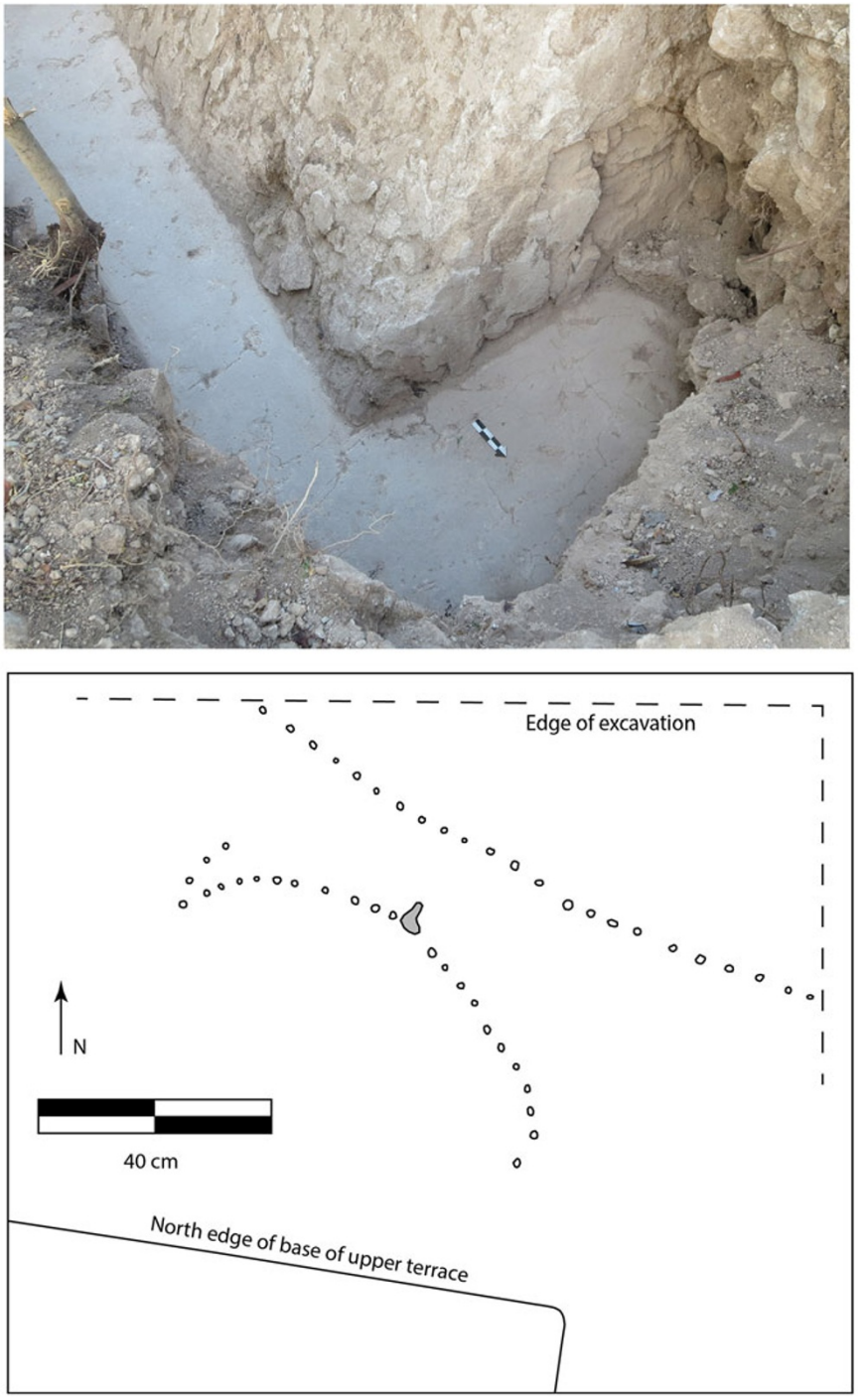

Figure 8. *Top:* photo of the northeast corner of upper terrace. North arrow is 20 cm long and placed in area of peck marks. *Bottom:* plan of the top surface of the lower terrace, showing the northeast corner of the upper terrace and the location of peck marks.

protein, carbohydrate, and fatty acid assays, followed protocols established by Barba (2007) with one exception. Instead of the more commonly employed spot test, phosphate residue concentrations were determined using the HI717 Checker HC colorimeter (Woonsocket, Rhode Island). Overall, the results

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

indicate comparatively low enrichment with residual organic matter. Nevertheless, the distribution maps (Figure 9) display what appear to be significant spatial patterns.

As the most general proxy, phosphate residues concentrate in the center of the lower terrace, as well as in two roughly equidistant spots to the north and south. Protein and fatty acid residues were detected in trace amounts only. However, while the former also accumulate in the middle of the lower terrace, the areas of enrichment of the latter appear to overlay with the previously mentioned spots off the center. The residual carbohydrate concentrations, however, display a significantly different spatial pattern. Here, the strongest results are associated with the slope of the upper terrace. The residue analysis demonstrates the existence of distinct activity areas on Structure 14sub5. Most organic matter was deposited in the center of the lower platform and the adjacent slope of the upper platform. Secondary concentrations occur about 4 m to either side, as well as in the northeastern corner of the lower platform.

In sum, the chemical analysis shows that the building was indeed used in patterned ways, though the exact uses are unclear. The size, shape, distinctive decoration, and lack of household artifacts (no stone tools, minimal pottery) suggest 14sub5 was ceremonial as opposed to domestic. The greenstone bead on the centerline adds to the ceremonial inference. Fronting a plaza to the east that could hold many people, 14sub5 was a performance space, a stage only accessible from the back, segregating people on top from the larger crowd below.

Discussion

Structure 14sub5's size (34 × 13 m and over 3 m high) is comparable to what Inomata and coauthors (2015) identity as the first monumental structures at Ceibal and, much closer to Ucí, a roughly contemporary building at Xocnaceh: the first version of the Acropolis substructure (Gallareta Negrón 2018). Although these early buildings are much smaller than later Maya pyramids, they are monumental in the sense that they required the labor of dozens of households and they created a new sense of connection to place (Powis et al. 2020). They served as the cornerstones for hundreds of years of later modifications that resulted in large- scale complexes and anchored what would become their respective site cores (Hutson 2024:377–378). As has been suggested for Early Middle Preclassic Aguada Fénix, Ceibal, Komchen, and Yaxuna, not all the people contributing labor to 14sub5 were necessarily fully sedentary. UCRIP excavated nearly 2,000 shovel tests and more than 300 test pits at 125 architectural compounds at Ucí, Kancab, Ucanha, Santa Teresa, Ticopo, Hubichen, Chunhuayum, and a rural area south of Chunhuayum. We also conducted horizontal excavations at 20 of these architectural compounds. Importantly, these excavations include both small and large platforms from both site cores and peripheries. While ceramic analysis across these contexts is preliminary, Ek pottery beyond the two contexts discussed previously—14sub5 and the Kancab main plaza—consists of just 10 K'in Orange/Red sherds spread across three locations. Of the 35 UCRIP excavation contexts at Ucí (and the 11 from Maldonado Cárdenas's project), Ek pottery comes from only one context beyond 14sub5. Thus, if we equate pottery use with sedentism, there were probably not enough fully sedentary people to build 14sub5. Obviously, fully sedentary populations existed in other parts of Mesoamerica at this time and earlier. A lack of evidence for full sedentism does not mean Ucí (or Ceibal or Komchen) lacked full sedentism, but parsimony would discourage declaring the existence of full sedentism without any evidence for it. Possibly the demand to feed the people building 14sub5 and engaging in ceremonies served as an impetus for the transition to full-time agriculture and permanent settlement.

Returning to the topic of inequality, there is an important difference between the first monumental spaces at places like Ceibal, Cival, and Yaxuna, on the one hand, and 14sub5 at Ucí, on the other. At the former sites, the focus is the plaza. For example, at the E Group at Ceibal, the most important archaeologically detected rituals consist of deposits of greenstone and pottery in the plaza itself (Inomata et al. 2015). Plazas at this and other E-groups are eminently accessible and inclusive. For Cival's E Group, Estrada-Belli (2006:64) states this well: there is no separation between ritual actors and ritual observers (see also Brown and Garber 2005:43). Only later, with the construction of triadic groups (a more exclusive form of monumental architecture), do performers and audience separate. Saturno and coauthors (2018:329) emphasize this same point for San Bartolo, where the burial of the E Group by the

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

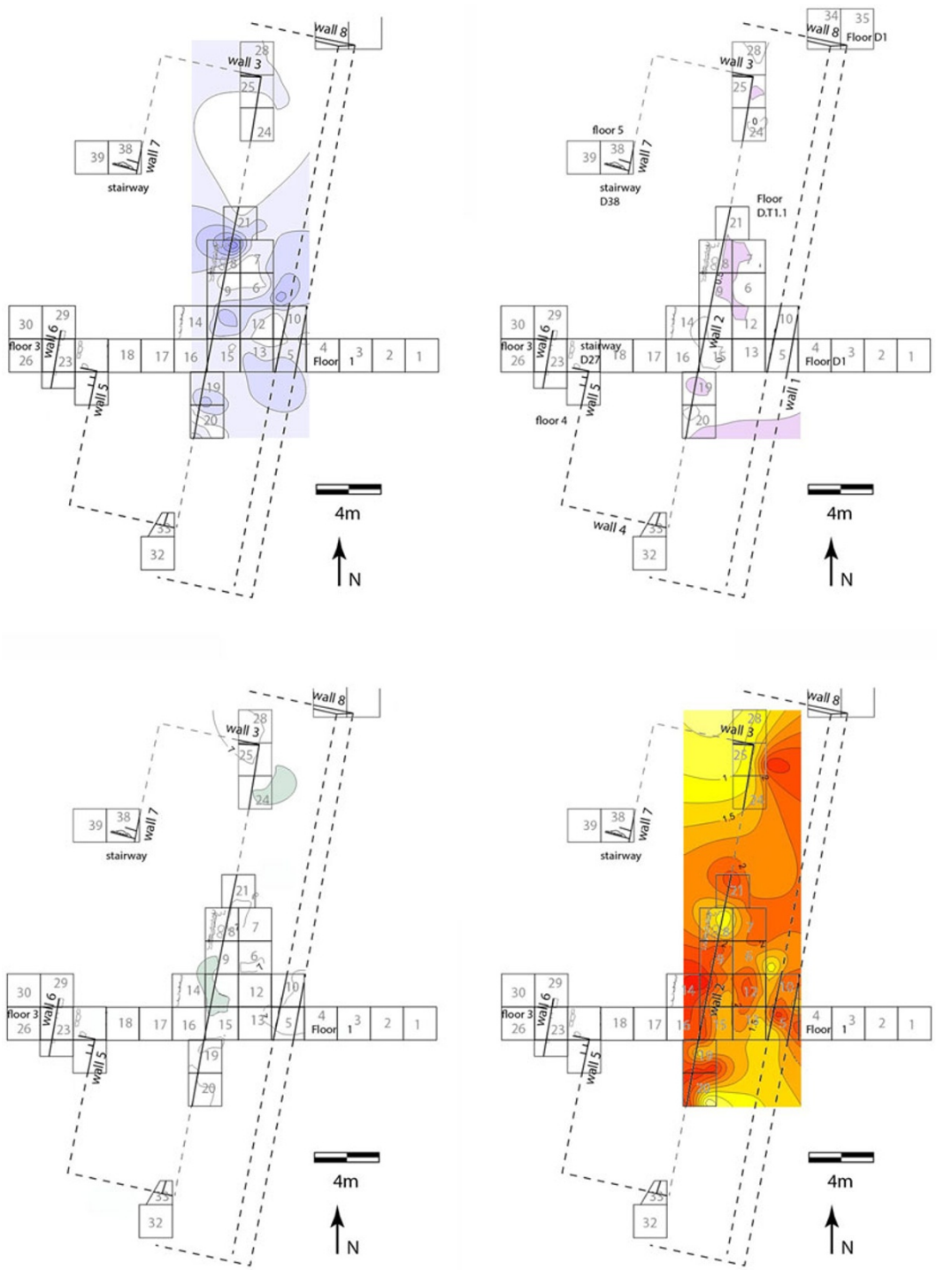

Figure 9. Maps of chemical distributions on the plaster surfaces of 14sub5. *Top left:* phosphates. *Top right:* fatty acids. *Lower left:* proteins. *Lower right:* carbohydrates. (Color online)

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

construction of the triadic group represents a shift from a "less restricted, ground level, E-Group plaza to an elevated and architecturally 'closed' space, immediately hinting at the seeds of a more pronounced hierarchy."

At 14sub5, the focus is the platform, not the plaza. The platform was a painted stage. Although the platform faces a probable plaza to the east, the lack of an eastern stairway creates a forced separation between people on the platform and the audience down below. Such spatial segregation can be an exercise of power (Giddens 1984:119). Unlike Blackman Eddy and Pacbitun, people could only summit the building from a pair of staircases on the west/back side of the terrace, hidden from observers on the plaza. Thus, in contrast to the first Middle Preclassic monuments elsewhere, which are often said to be communal and inclusive (Stanton and Collins 2021:115), 14sub5 was exclusive. We do not see exclusivity and inclusivity as dichotomous, and the degree of exclusivity at 14sub5 was less than at the large, Late Preclassic triadic groups. But, following Love (1999:134), we suspect this exclusion at Ucí may have produced hierarchical relations. The clear segregation between those on top of the mound and those below and in front, with no way of ascending, introduced or heightened divisions and role differences. Such distinctions between people may have been fluid, not likely carrying over into all axes of social life. Inequality takes many different forms: people who gain prominence in one pursuit may lack it in others (Drennan et al. 2010; Hutson 2023). But could such distinctions have been stepping stones for settlers at Ucí to stray from their presumed egalitarian roots as mobile foragers? Could such exclusive role-taking break through the complexly girded levee of historically specific norms, values, and ways of viewing the world that hold inequality back?

We could respond that these questions are misguided (Graeber and Wengrow 2021); that early human societies experimented creatively with a variety of political forms such that we are wrong to assume that the predecessors of the builders of 14sub5 were egalitarian. Another response, this one more closely tailored to the ancient Maya, draws on Sahlins's (2017) elaboration of cosmopolitical ideas presented some 90 years ago by Hocart (1970). For the Maya, life depended on satisfying sacrificial covenants with powerful, if sometimes petulant, other-than-human beings (Houston 2014; Monaghan 2000). To the extent that these relations between humans and nonhuman persons and forces were hierarchical, such that humans were indebted, ancient Maya cosmology was political: cosmo-political. Relations of inequality between spirits and humans may have inspired performance spaces like 14sub5, where people manifesting gods could be elevated and separated from onlookers. Such relations may also have provided a template for inequality to transition to the human sphere.

Structure 14 continued to be the center of the site in the following Late Preclassic period. The platform was expanded multiple times and a trench in Structure E1N1-18, located on the south side of the plaza, east of Structure 14, supports the notion that an early version of Compound 3, the largest at Ucí, was now in place. Other large platforms with Late Preclassic construction faced Structure 14 and some (Structures W1N1-28 and W1N1-41) linked themselves directly to Structure 14 / Compound 3 with causeways. This network of major platforms linked to the main compound suggests that authority was in some sense shared (Hutson 2024; Vallejo Cáliz and Hutson 2023). This is an important possibility as it implies that a Middle Preclassic society whose central architecture suggests an exclusive form of ceremonial authority could precede a Late Preclassic polity with some degree of shared governance.

A remarkable piece of evidence for a more inclusive form of governance in the Late Preclassic is the existence of a small, blank stela at Structure 6, a large but not monumental compound on the east edge of Ucí's core (Figure 2). Structure 6 consists of a 60 × 30 m platform measuring 0.8 m high on average, supporting west-facing Platform 6A on its east edge (Figure 10a). Platform 6A rises 70 cm above the basal platform and supports three superstructures, each rising about 50 cm above Platform 6A, in a triadic arrangement. While this compound is extensive, we do not consider it monumental because its size is not historically salient for Ucí and it did not initiate or reorient a broader sense of place (Hutson 2024:377–378). The stela (Figure 10b) was anchored in the plaster floor (with a dedicatory offering of a greenstone bead and a Dzilam Verde cajete) on the centerline of Platform 6A, in front of Structure 6A1, a two- room ceremonial building in the center of the triadic arrangement, and measures 60 cm above the floor. It was uncarved and covered in two coats of plaster, though the plaster on its front side had been

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

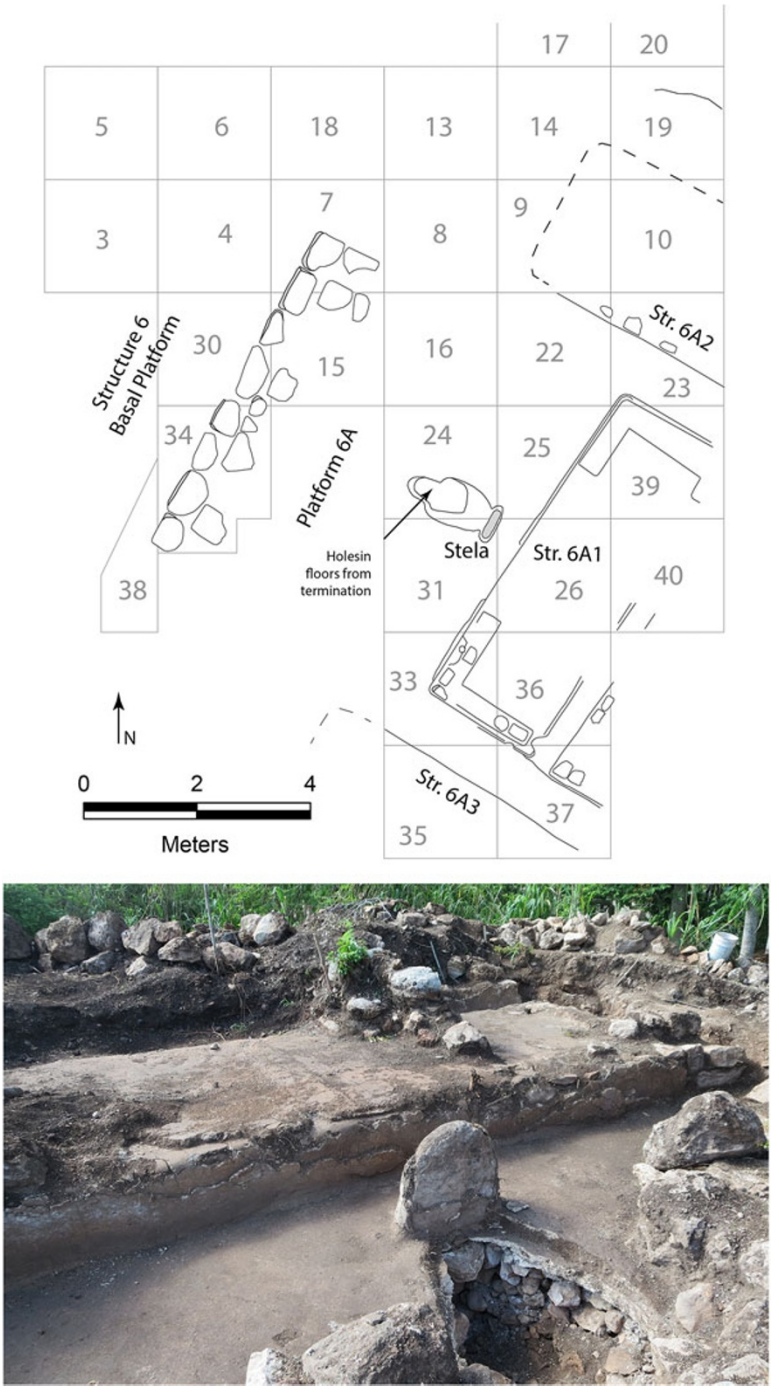

Figure 10. *Top:* plan of excavations of Structure 6, showing the location of the stela. *Bottom:* photo of stela, looking southeast, with Structure 6A1 in the background. (Color online)

removed as part of what we interpret as a termination ritual. As far as we know, this is the earliest stela in the northern Maya Lowlands. Early stelae at southern Maya Lowland sites such as Nakbé, Tintal, and El Mirador have been argued to legitimize rulership (Hansen 2017:372). Yet Structure 6, whose highest point (Structure 6A1) barely reaches 2 m above the natural ground surface, was not the seat of a monarch.

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The fact that this architectural group has a stela implies that expressions of authority were permitted in nonroyal contexts, indexing a degree of decentralization of power or shared governance, in line with the multiple prominent Preclassic architectural groups linked to the Ucí's main Compound.

Conclusion

The excavation of Structure 14sub5 revealed a two-level monumental ceremonial platform built in the early eighth century BC (possibly the late ninth century BC) with linear patterns of peck marks and painted designs that might be snakes. While the chemical residue analysis demonstrates the existence of distinct activity areas, the signatures were faint. Few artifacts were found on 14sub5's surface, the most notable being a single greenstone bead. In contrast to early buildings at Ceibal and Yaxuna, the early platform at Ucí, not to mention those at Komchen, are not E Groups. This variety, as well as the diversity from one E Group to another (Canuto and Estrada Belli 2021:84), illustrates the heterogeneity of cultural practices across the lowlands (compare Inomata 2017:20). These communities would share some of the same pottery types in the Late Middle Preclassic, but at the beginning of this period, monument-building diverged creatively. The most remarkable and divergent detail from 14sub5 is the lack of staircases on its front side, which segregated performers from observers. We take this exclusive separation to be evidence of a less egalitarian community (see also Andrews and Bey 2023). Borrowing from Saturno and colleagues (2018:332), this exclusivity may represent the "social distancing that is part and parcel to establishing political legitimacy and institutionalized hierarchy." Alternatively, we might still call Ucí egalitarian if we recognize the various forms of inequality (more than those mentioned by Fried) found within egalitarian societies.

More broadly, given the creative assortment of political and social structures with which mobile and early sedentary societies experimented all over the world, we should not be surprised to find different levels of exclusivity and inequality among early Maya societies. Even not-fully-sedentary Maya with no evidence of wealth differences or ascribed status could have had hierarchies beyond gender and age. Explaining this variation is difficult because so little else is known about these societies beyond the monuments. We proposed that cosmo-political hierarchy—enduring inequality between humans and supernatural beings—may have provided an intelligible model that allowed for experimentation with enduring inequality among humans. Cosmopolitics were probably also present among builders of E Groups because these compounds foregrounded natural forces like the sun. Aligned with our endorsement of the view that humans had credible power to change the path of their history, it is interesting to note, as we did in the discussion, that the exclusive tendency we see in the early eighth century at Ucí did not preclude an inclusive form of governance in the Late Preclassic, when people linked multiple architectural compounds to the site core and erected a stela at an unassuming one.

Acknowledgments. For permission to work in the site core of Ucí, we acknowledge the support of the comisariado ejidal of Ucí and landowner Roberto Tec Chalé. The Consejo de Arqueología, INAH, granted permission for multiple field seasons (C.A.401-36/1032, C.A.401-36/0971, C.A.401-36/1139, C.A.401-36/0588, C.A.401(B)19.2013/36/0320, C.A.401.B(4)19.2013/36/2418, C.A.401.B(4)19.2016/36/1184, C.A.401.1S.3-2017/1185). Shannon Plank contributed to the ceramic analysis.

Funding Statement. For funding, we acknowledge the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky, the National Science Foundation (BCS-1063667), and the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections.

Data Availability Statement. Annual reports on UCRIP fieldwork can be found online (https://www.mesoweb.com/informes/informes.html).

Competing Interests. The authors declare none.

Supplementary Material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110.
Supplementary material 1: Photos of K'in Orange/Red vessel excavated in the Main Plaza at Kancab (figure).
Supplementary material 2: Drawing of K'in Orange/Red vessel showing fine parallel line incisions on exterior (figure).

References Cited

Aimers, James J., and Prudence M. Rice. 2006. Astronomy, Ritual, and the Interpretation of Maya "E-Group" Architectural Assemblages. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 17(1):79–96.

Ames, Kenneth M. 2010. On the Evolution of the Human Capacity for Inequality and/or Egalitarianism. In *Pathways to Power: New Perspectives on the Emergence of Social Equality*, edited by T. Douglas Price and Gary Feinman, pp. 15–44. Springer, New York.

Andrews, E. Wyllys, V., and George J. Bey III. 2023. Early Maya Settlements and Ceramics on the Northern Plains and the Puuc Region of Yucatan: The Early Middle Preclassic Ek Complex. In *Pre-Mamom Pottery Variation and the Preclassic Origins of the Lowland Maya*, edited by Debra S. Walker, pp. 369–407. University of Press of Colorado, Louisville.

Bandy, Matt. 2004. Fissioning, Scalar Stress and Social Evolution in Early Village Societies. *American Anthropologist* 106(2):322–333.

Barba, Luis. 2007. Chemical Residues in Lime-Plastered Archaeological Floors. *Geoarchaeology* 22(4):439–452.

Binford, Lewis R. 1980. Willow Smoke and Dogs' Tails: Hunter-Gatherer Settlement Systems and Archaeological Site Formation. *American Antiquity* 45(1):4–20.

Boehm, Christopher. 1993. Egalitarian Behavior and Reverse Dominance Hierarchy. *Current Anthropology* 34(3): 227–254.

Brown, M. Kathryn, Jaime J. Awe, and James F. Garber. 2018. The Role of Ideology, Religion, and Ritual in the Foundation of Social Complexity in the Belize River Valley. In *Pathways to Complexity: A View from the Maya Lowlands*, edited by M. Kathryn Brown and George J. Bey III, pp. 335–362. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Brown, M. Kathryn, and James F. Garber. 2005. The Development of Middle Formative Architecture in the Maya Lowlands: The Blackman Eddy, Belize Example. In *New Perspectives on Formative Mesoamerican Cultures*, edited by Terry G. Powis, pp. 39–49. BAR International Series 1377. British Archaeological Reports, Oxford.

Canuto, Marcello A., and Francisco Estrada-Belli. 2021. Patterns of Early Urbanism in the Southern Maya Lowlands. In *Early Mesoamerican Cities: Urbanism and Urbanization in the Formative Period*, edited by Michael Love and Julia Guernsey, pp. 73–98. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Chase, Arlen F., and Diane Z. Chase. 2017. Maya E Groups: Calendars, Astronomy, and Urbanism in the Early Lowlands. In *Maya E Groups: Calendars, Astronomy, and Urbanism in the Early Lowlands*, edited by David A. Freidel, Arlen F. Chase, Ann S. Dowd, and Jerry Murdock, pp. 31–73. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Childe, V. Gordon. 1950. The Urban Revolution. *Town Planning Review* 21(1):3–17.

Clark, John E. 2000. Towards a Better Explanation of Hereditary Inequality: A Critical Assessment of Natural and Historic Human Agents. In *Agency in Archaeology*, edited by Marcia-Anne Dobres and John Robb, pp. 92–112. Routledge, London.

Clark, John E. 2002. Comment on Wiessner. *Current Anthropology* 43(2):255–256.

Collins, Ryan H. 2021. Selective Memory: Monumental Politics of the Yaxuná E Group in the First Millennium B.C. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 34(1):140–159.

Collins, Ryan H. 2022. Incised Lines: Planning and Design in the Late Formative E Group at Yaxuná, Yucatán, Mexico. *Latin American Antiquity* 33(3):548–657.

Doyle, James. 2012. Regroup on E-groups: Monumentality and Early Centers in the Middle Preclassic Maya Lowlands. *Latin American Antiquity* 23(4):355–379.

Drennan, Robert D., Christian E. Peterson, and Jake R. Fox. 2010. Degrees and Kinds of Inequality. In *Pathways to Power: New Perspectives on the Emergence of Social Equality*, edited by T. Douglas Price and Gary Feinman, pp. 45–76. Springer, New York.

Estrada-Belli, Francisco. 2006. Lightning, Sky, Rain, and the Maize God: The Ideology of Preclassic Maya Rulers at Cival, Peten, Guatemala. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 17(1):57–78.

Fried, Morton H. 1967. *The Evolution of Political Society*. Random House, New York.

Gallareta Negrón, Tomás. 2018. At the Foot of the Hills: Early Monumentality at Xocnaceh, Yucatan, Mexico. In *Pathways to Complexity: A View from the Maya Lowlands*, edited by M. Kathryn Brown and George J. Bey III, pp. 276–291. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Garber, James, M. Kathryn Brown W. David Driver, David M. Glassman, Christopher J. Hartman, F. Kent Reilly III, and Lauren A. Sullivan. 2004. Archaeological Investigations at Blackman Eddy. In *The Ancient Maya of the Belize Valley: Half a Century of Archaeological Research*, edited by James Garber, pp. 48–69. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Graeber, David, and David Wengrow. 2021. *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.

Haas, Jonathan, and Winifred Creamer. 2012. Why Do People Build Monuments? Late Archaic Platform Mounds in the Norte Chico. In *Early New World Monumentality*, edited by Richard L. Burger and Robert M. Rosenswig, pp. 289–312. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Hansen, Richard. 2017. Cultural and Environmental Components of the First Maya States: A Perspective from the Central and Southern Maya Lowlands. In *The Origins of Maya States*, edited by Robert J. Sharer, pp. 329–416. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

Harari, Noah Yuval. 2015. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Harper Perennial, New York.

Hayden, Brian. 1995. Pathways to Power: Principles for Creating Socioeconomic Inequalities. In *Foundations of Social Inequality*, edited by T. Douglas Price and Gary Feinman, pp. 15–86. Plenum, New York.

Headrick, Annabeth. 2018. The Osario of Chichen Itza: Where Warriors Danced in Paradise. In *Landscapes of the Itza: Archaeology and Art at Chichen Itza and Neighboring Sites*, edited by Linnea Wren, Cynthia Kristan-Graham, Travis Nygard, and Kaylee Spencer, pp. 198–225. Routledge, New York.

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Hernández Hernández, Concepción, Iliana Ancona Aragón, and Socorro Jiménez. 2010. Secuencia ceramica del sitio "Flor de Mayo i6Qd (7) 122," Municipio de Kanasin, Yucatan. Paper presented at the VIII Congreso Internacional de Mayistas, Centro de Estudios Mayas, Instituto de Investigaciones Filologicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City.

Hocart, Arthur M. 1970. *Kings and Councillors: An Essay in the Comparative Anatomy of Human Society*. Edited and with an Introduction by Rodney Needham. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Hodder, Ian, and Craig Cessford. 2004. Daily Practice and Social Memory at Çatalhöyük. *American Antiquity* 69(1):17–40.

Houston, Stephen D. 2014. *The Life Within: Classic Maya and the Matter of Permanence*. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut.

Hutson, Scott R. 2023. Inequality of What: Multiple Paths to the Good Life. In *Realizing Value in Mesoamerica: The Dynamics of Desire and Demand in Ancient Economies*, edited by Scott R. Hutson and Charles Golden, pp. 425–446, Palgrave McMillan, New York.

Hutson, Scott R. 2024. Governance, Monumentality, and Urbanism in the Northern Maya Lowlands During the Preclassic and Classic Periods. *Journal of Archaeological Research* 32(3):367–425.

Hutson, Scott R., Jacob Welch, Shannon E. Plank, and Barry Kidder. 2020. Buried Alive: Buildings, Authority, and Gradients of Being in Northern Yucatan, Mexico. In *Sacred Matter: Animism and Authority in the Americas*, edited by Steven Kosiba, John W. Janusek, and Thomas B. F. Cummins, pp. 299–326. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC.

Inomata, Takeshi. 2017. The Isthmian Origin of the E Group and Its Adoption in the Maya Lowlands. In *Maya E Groups: Calendars, Astronomy, and Urbanism in the Early Lowlands*, edited by David A. Freidel, Arlen F. Chase, Anne S. Dowd, and Jerry Murdock, pp. 215–252. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Inomata, Takeshi, Jessica MacLellan, and Melissa Burham. 2015. The Construction of Public and Domestic Spheres in the Preclassic Maya Lowlands. *American Anthropologist* 117(3):519–534.

Inomata, Takeshi, Daniela Triadan, Verónica A. Vázquez López, Juan Carlos Fernandez-Diaz, Takayuki Omori, María Belén Méndez Bauer, Melina García Hernández, et al. 2020. Monumental Architecture at Aguada Fénix and the Rise of Maya Civilization. *Nature* 580:530–533.

Jennings, Justin. 2016. *Killing Civilization: A Reassessment of Early Urbanism and Its Consequences*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

Kuijt, Ian. 2000. People and Space in Early Agricultural Villages: Exploring Daily Lives, Community Size, and Architecture in the Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 19(1):75–102.

Littmann, Edwin R. 1960. Ancient Mesoamerican Mortars, Plasters, and Stuccos: The Use of Bark Extracts in Lime Plasters. *American Antiquity* 25(4):593–597.

Love, Michael. 1999. Ideology, Material Culture, and Daily Practice in Pre-Classic Mesoamerica: A Pacific Coast Perspective. In *Social Patterns in Pre-Classic Mesoamerica*, edited by David Grove and Rosemary Joyce, pp. 127–153. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC.

Monaghan, John. 2000. Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions. In *Supplement to the Handbook of Middle American Indians Volume 6: Ethnology*, edited by John Monaghan, pp. 24–49. University of Texas Press, Austin.

Olsen, Bjornar. 2003. Material Culture after Text: Re-Membering Things. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 36(2):87–104.

Pauketat, Timothy R. 2000. Politicization and the Community in the Pre-Columbian Mississippi Valley. In *The Archaeology of Communities: A New World Perspective*, edited by Marcello A. Canuto and Jason Yaeger, pp. 16–43. Routledge, London.

Peterson, Christian E., and Robert D. Drennan. 2018. Letting the Gini out of the Bottle: Measuring Inequality Archaeologically. In *Ten Thousand Years of Inequality: The Archaeology of Wealth Differences*, edited by Timothy A. Kohler and Michael E. Smith, pp. 39–66. University of Arizona Press, Tucson.

Powis, Terry G., George J. Micheletti, Kaitlin Crow, Sheldon Skaggs, Norbert Stanchly, Nicaela Cartagena, and Jeffrey A. Powis. 2019. Early Maya Ceremonial Architecture at Pacbitun. *Latin American Antiquity* 30(4):836–842.

Powis, Terry G., George J. Micheletti, Jon Spenard, and Sheldon Skaggs. 2020. A Discussion of Early Monumentality at Pacbitun, Belize. *In Approaches to Monumental Landscapes of the Ancient Maya*, edited by Brett A. Houk, Barbara Arroyo, and Terry G. Powis, pp. 268–289. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Ringle, William M., and E. Wyllys Andrews V. 1990. The Demography of Komchen, An Early Maya Town in Northern Yucatan. In *Pre-Columbian Population History in the Maya Lowlands*, edited by T. Patrick Culbert and Don S. Rice, pp. 215–244. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

Ringle, William M.,Tomás Gallareta Negrón, and George J. Bey III. 1998. The Return of Quetzalcoatl: Evidence for the Spread of a World Religion during the Epiclassic Period. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 9(2):183–232.

Roscoe, Paul B. 2000. Costs, Benefits, Typologies and Power: The Evolution of Political Hierarchy. In *Hierarchies in Action, Cui Bono?*, edited by Michael Diehl, pp. 113–133. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale.

Roscoe, Paul B. 2012. Before Elites: The Political Capacities of Big Men. In *Before Elites: Alternatives to Hierarchical Systems in Modelling Social Formations*, Vol. 1, edited by Tobias L. Kienlin and Andreas Zimmerman, pp. 41–54. Rudolph Habelt, Bonn, Germany.

Rosenswig, Robert M., and Richard L. Burger. 2012. Considering Early New World Monumentality. In *Early New World Monumentality*, edited by Richard L. Burger and Robert M. Rosenswig, pp. 3–24. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Sahlins, Marshal. 2017. The Original Political Society. In *On Kings*, edited by David Graeber and Marshal Sahlins, pp. 23–64. Hau Books, Chicago.

Sassaman, Kenneth E., and Asa B. Randall. 2012. Shell Mounds of the Middle St. Johns Basin, Northeast Florida. In *Early New World Monumentality*, edited by Richard L. Burger and Robert M. Rosenswig, pp. 53–77. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Saturno, William, Franco D. Rossi, and Boris Beltran. 2018. Changing Stages: Royal Legitimacy and the Architectural Development of the Pinturas Complex at San Bartolo, Guatemala. In *Pathways to Complexity: A View from the Maya Lowlands*, edited by M. Kathryn Brown and George J. Bey III, pp. 315–335. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Saunders, Joe. 2012. Early Mounds in the Lower Mississippi Valley. In *Early New World Monumentality*, edited by Richard L. Burger and Robert M. Rosenswig, pp. 25–52. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Schele, Linda, and Peter Mathews. 1998. *The Code of Kings: The Language of Seven Sacred Maya Temples and Tombs*. Scribner, New York.

Sewell, William H., Jr. 1992. A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency and Transformation. *American Journal of Sociology* 98(1):1–29.

Stanton, Travis W., and Ryan H. Collins. 2021. The Role of Middle Preclassic Placemaking in the Creation of Late Preclassic Yucatecan Cities: The Foundations of Yaxuná. In *Early Mesoamerican Cities: Urbanism and Urbanization in the Formative Period*, edited by Michael Love and Julia Guernsey, pp. 99–120. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Stanton, Travis W., Sara Dzul Góngora, Ryan H. Collins, and Donald A. Slater. 2023. The Early Laapal Complex at Yaxuná: Early Middle Preclassic Ceramics from the E Group. In *Pre-Mamom Pottery Variation and the Preclassic Origins of the Lowland Maya*, edited by Debra S. Walker, pp. 430–457. University of Press of Colorado, Louisville.

Sullivan, Lauren, Jaime J. Awe, and M. Kathryn Brown. 2018. The Cunil Complex: Early Villages in Belize. In *Pathways to Complexity: A View from the Maya Lowlands*, edited by M. Kathryn Brown and George J. Bey III, pp. 35–48. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Taube, Karl. 2004. Flower Mountain: Concepts of Life, Beauty, and Paradise among the Classic Maya. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 45:69–98.

Tourtellot, Gair. 1988. *Excavations at Seibal, Department of Peten, Guatemala: Peripheral Survey and Excavation: Settlement and Community Patterns*. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Trigger, Bruce. 1990. Monumental Architecture: A Thermodynamic Explanation of Symbolic Behavior. *World Archaeology* 22(3):119–132.

Vallejo Caliz, Daniel, and Scott R. Hutson. 2023. Causeways and Geopolitical Connections in the Ucí-Cansahcab Region, Yucatán. In *Construction of Maya Space: Causeways, Walls, and Open Areas in the Ancient and Historical Maya Landscapes*, edited by Thomas H. Guderjan and Jennifer P. Mathews, pp. 17–48. University of Arizona Press, Tucson.

Welch, Jacob. 2024. Ancient Maya Labor Relations: Building a Palace at Ucanha, Yucatán, Mexico. PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

Wiessner, Polly. 1996. Leveling the Hunter: Constraints on the Status Quest in Foraging Societies. In *Food and the Status Quest: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, edited by Polly Wiessner and Wulf Schiefenhövel, pp. 171–191. Berghahn Books, Providence, Rhode Island.

Wiessner, Polly. 2002. The Vines of Complexity: Egalitarian Structures and the Institutionalization of Inequality among the Enga. *Current Anthropology* 43(2):233–269.

Woodburn, James 1982. Egalitarian Societies. *Man* 17(3):431–451.

Cite this article: Hutson, Scott R., Mario Zimmermann, and Iliana Ancona Aragón. 2025. Exclusivity in Early Maya Monumentality: Querying Egalitarianism at Ucí, Yucatán. *Latin American Antiquity.* https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2025.10110.