
30 THE MAYA OF AMBERGRIS CAYE AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

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Ancient Maya occupation on Ambergris Caye has been documented from Preclassic through Postclassic times. Work at the sites of San Pedro and Marco Gonzalez has concentrated on several structures in which solid evidence has been found for connections to Maya polities in northern Belize and beyond. Other sites on the caye have also yielded evidence of these connections. Nonetheless, relationships between island communities, as well as those between island and mainland communities, changed substantially over time. There is evidence that connections with northern Belize in particular intensify in Terminal Classic times and continue through the Postclassic. All of the communities on both the caye and the mainland of northern Belize were well integrated into a larger, macroeconomic system encompassing different areas of Mesoamerica. Here we discuss the material evidence for these connections through time, focusing primarily on the Late and Terminal Classic Periods as well as Postclassic times.

Introduction

One of the most promising yet still understudied areas of inquiry into the ancient Maya world is the role of the sea in linking and integrating peoples living in coastal and island communities with those residing in interior mainland communities. In addition to connecting peoples throughout their world the Maya viewed the sea as a special place for a number of other reasons. Perhaps most important was how the sea figured so prominently into the Maya worldview. It was the place where the Sun was reborn each day, and so it was a symbol of life itself and viewed as a source of great supernatural power (Miller and Taube 1993). The sea also provided a wealth of economic benefits, including vitally important commodities such as salt, fish, shellfish, stingray spines, seashells and bones from marine mammals (McKillop 2007). It was used to move all manner of crafted items made of hard stone, pottery, and metal, among others. The Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and their associated river systems played critical roles in facilitating the movement of goods, commodities, products, and raw materials, as well as people and ideas, throughout the ancient Maya world. But recognition of the centrality of the sea in the Maya worldview has been slow to emerge (Finamore and Houston 2010). Here we review some of the archaeological evidence for various kinds of symbiotic connections between island and mainland Maya groups in northern Belize. We also examine various social and economic linkages that appear to have existed between Maya peoples in these communities

over time, focusing on evidence from Classic and Postclassic sites on Ambergris Caye, including Marco Gonzalez, San Pedro and other sites as well as those on the mainland of northern Belize, specifically that area north of the Belize River. Here the main focus is on Late and Terminal Classic communities, and those few occupied through Postclassic times, where we have solid evidence for the exchange of material goods as well as ideas between island and mainland communities in northern Belize and beyond.

The Sea and Coastal Maya Canoe Trade

Coastal canoe trade has been documented from the Late Preclassic Period through European Contact, although it appears to have reached a peak in intensity during Terminal Classic times (McKillop 2010). Perhaps the most well-known account of a Maya trade canoe and its contents comes from the son of Cristobal Columbus on his fourth voyage to the New World. This sea-going canoe, which was encountered near the Bay Islands of Honduras, was described as being roughly 8 feet wide and 50 feet in length, with a cabin amidships, carrying various sorts of passengers, almost certainly including merchants, and propelled by 25 paddlers (Colón 1959 [1502]:231-232). The Spanish description of goods they observed matches the material remains found by researchers at Classic and Postclassic sites throughout northern Belize and beyond. It appears that Maya mariners were successful in facilitating the spread of certain kinds of cultural materials as well as culturally and socially

specific ideas among both island and mainland Maya groups in northern Belize. The results of archaeological research at sites on Ambergris Caye indicate that the Maya who lived there were quite well integrated into what has been termed the “Mesoamerican World System” (Smith and Berdan 2003). These coastal Maya not only participated in a well-developed and extensive trade network that stretched around the Yucatan Peninsula and deep into its interior, they also specialized in the production of certain key commodities and objects, some of which are discussed below.

Settlement and Research History of Ambergris Caye and its Sites

Ambergris Caye is located on the east coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, and the island is 39 km long and no wider than 4 km at any point (Figure 1). Thomas Gann was the first to survey Ambergris Caye nearly a century ago (Gann 1926). Roughly sixty years later Tom Guderjan and the other members of the Ambergris Caye Archaeological Project conducted the first truly comprehensive archaeological survey of the island between 1983 and 1990 (Guderjan 1995). They identified 22 separate sites and 2 canal complexes, but more recently three additional sites have been documented by Simmons (see Belize Institute of Archaeology site files), bringing the total of known sites on the island to 25, although the actual number of Maya settlements is certainly higher. Marco Gonzalez, located near the southern tip of the island, appears to be the largest site on the caye, measuring approximately 6.6 ha in size. It was first investigated between 1987 and 1993 by Liz Graham and David Pendergast and more recently from 2010 to present by Graham and Simmons (Graham and Simmons 2012a, 2012b; Simmons and Graham 2016). The great majority of the 25 known sites on the island were occupied most intensively during Late and Terminal Classic times. Only one of these, Marco Gonzalez, shows definitive evidence of occupation from Late Preclassic through Classic and Late Postclassic times (Graham and Pendergast 1989:13-14). Two other sites, Los Renegados and San Juan, appear to have been occupied into the early part of the Postclassic Period.

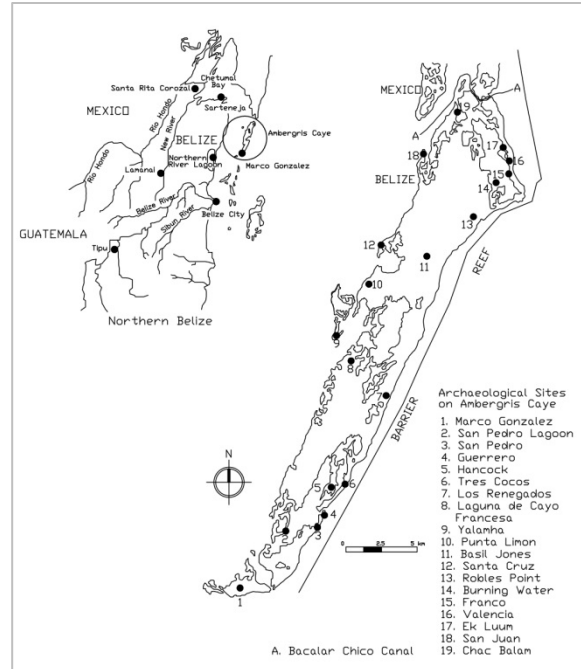


Figure 1. Map of Ambergris Caye and Northern Belize sites.

Maya Sites on Ambergris Caye Sites and Mainland Maya Sites in Northern Belize: both Similar and each Different

Broad similarities as well as specific differences exist between mainland Maya sites and coastal island sites dating to the Late/Terminal Classic and Early Postclassic Periods in northern Belize. Here we outline some of these, focusing first on architecture and site layout, the general characteristics of ceramic and lithic assemblages, and mortuary behavior.

Architecture and Site Plan

During the Classic Period sites on Ambergris Caye and on the mainland of northern Belize share similar arrangements of substructural platforms supporting several structures surrounding at least one and sometimes several small patio groups. These substructural platforms most likely supported pole and thatch perishable superstructures. The main differences between island and mainland sites appear to be related to the scale of both individual structures and the sites themselves. Maya communities on Ambergris Caye tend to be somewhat smaller in overall area than those on the mainland, probably due at least in part to the limitations of the coastal geography of the

island. The largest of these, Marco Gonzalez, measures roughly 355 x 185 m in size, while moderate-sized sites, such as Chac Balam and Burning Water, measure approximately 150 x 60 m and 150 x 50 m in size, respectively.

Many Late and Terminal Classic sites on the mainland of northern Belize include both domestic and non-domestic structures (monumental architecture), the latter being erected on elevated platforms. In contrast, just over one-quarter (7 of 25) of the sites on Ambergris Caye exhibit what Guderjan (1995:9) calls 'formal architecture,' which he defines as "...any substructural construction which may or may not be formally arranged." Four of these six sites - Marco Gonzalez, Laguna de Cayo Francesa, San Juan and Chac Balam - are found on the leeward side of the island, and all were most intensively occupied during Late and Terminal Classic times.

The same arrangement of generally small structures (<3-4 m in height) erected on low platforms and situated around a small plaza is seen at other sites on the cayes, including Ek Luum, Santa Cruz, Chac Balam, Laguna de Cayo Francesa, and San Juan. Near the southern tip of the island at Marco Gonzalez six separate patio groups were constructed. To the north at Chac Balam four large substructural platforms are grouped around a rectangular patio or courtyard. In comparison, other Classic Period sites on the cayes, including Ek Luum and San Juan, are comparatively smaller with fewer patio groups. Recent work at the San Pedro site has shown that by the end of the Postclassic Period small residences may have been arranged around patios, but this has yet to be determined.

Unlike the Classic and Early Postclassic limestone structures on the mainland of northern Belize, those on the cayes were not uniformly constructed of limestone. In the central and northern part of the cayes limestone outcrops do exist, but are largely absent in the south. As a result, formal architecture at sites in the north, such as San Juan and Chac Balam, includes limestone marl and earth platform fill that was faced with either unmodified or shaped upright limestone blocks. At Marco Gonzalez, most structures were faced with a hard, dense conglomerate of sand, shell, and dead coral called 'reefstone'. This facing concealed

platform fill comprised of varying quantities of shells, earth and midden material. Recent excavations at the San Pedro site indicate that by the end of the Maya occupation sequence on the cayes, probably by the early-mid sixteenth century, domestic structures were built directly on beach sand with lime marl and packed sand floors and pole and thatch superstructures; they were not faced with any kind of limestone or reefstone.

Ceramic Assemblages

Because most of the pottery on Ambergris Caye appears to be imported, connections to the mainland are clear from the earliest pottery on the cayes. However, the probable sources of pots and styles changes from the central/southern Maya lowlands in the Preclassic and Classic periods to northern Belize and the northern Maya lowlands in the Terminal Classic and Postclassic periods. Both the Late and Terminal Classic ceramic assemblages from island and mainland sites in northern Belize reveal the breadth of trade connections between communities in this area with those in more distant parts of the Maya world. Many coastal communities such as Marco Gonzalez, as well as some on inland rivers and lagoons like Lamanai, certainly functioned in some capacity as hubs in a circum-peninsular exchange network that brought a wide range of ceramic vessel types to northern Belize. This included Early Classic Tzakol I vessels recovered just above the water table at Marco Gonzalez (Figure 2). Late Classic Achote Black, Daylight Orange, Roaring Creek Red, and Kik Red slipped vessels found at Lamanai are also found at Ambergris Caye sites including Marco Gonzalez, Ek Luum, Chac Balam, and San Juan. In the northern part of the mainland these types are also present at Laguna de On and Caye Coco on Freshwater Creek, the Northern River Lagoon site, Colha, Patchchacan, Sarteneja, Cerros, Santa Rita, and Saktunja (Boxt 2005:400; Chase and Chase 1987:61; Masson and Mock 2004:392-394; Mock 1994:242-314; Sidrys 1983:211).

During the Late Classic connections with the Belize Valley and Petén are evident given the presence of Palmar Group vessels at Marco Gonzalez and San Juan, as well as Subin Red sherds, which have been found at Marco



Figure 2. Tzakol I polychrome vessels from Marco Gonzalez, Ambergris Caye, Belize.

Gonzalez, Ek Luum, San Juan and Chac Balam (Aimers et al. 2017; Valdez et al. 1995:Tables 10-14). Subin Red vessel fragments and occasionally whole vessels also have been recovered at Northern River Lagoon, Colha, and Kichpanha (Mock 1994; Potter 1982) as well as in the Three Rivers Region of northwestern Belize at the sites of Dos Barbaras and Dos Hombres (Sullivan et al. 2007).

Unslipped types found in Late Classic contexts include Encanto striated and Coconut Walk Unslipped, which were most likely used in the production of salt, possibly as early as the 6th century AD (Graham et al. 2015:4). This crude, quartz sand tempered vessel type is ubiquitous in Late Classic contexts along the coast of Belize, including Ek Luum, Chac Balam, Taab Ha, Guerrero, San Juan, and Marco Gonzalez on Ambergris Caye, as well as on mainland coastal sites including Northern River Lagoon, Potts Creek Lagoon, Rocky Point, Saktunja and the Last Chance site (Graham 1983:379; Mock 1994:82-92). The production of salt using the *sal cocida* method was likely an important economic activity that bound the Maya of Ambergris Caye to consumers in mainland communities. It appears that the production and shipment of salt from Ambergris Caye to the mainland reached a peak in Late Classic times, but by the end of the 8th century it declined just prior to the Maya collapse (Graham et al. 2015:4). Late and Terminal Ceramic vessels



Figure 3. Nearly identical tulip vessels, possibly an undesignated composite type from the Augustine Group, from San Juan Burial 5 (left) and Marco Gonzalez Burial 14/32 (right).

from the Petén, northern Yucatán, and the Pacific coast of Guatemala have been found at most leeward sites on the caye (Guderjan 1995). Polychromes, generally simple in design, are present but give way to monochrome wares such as Fine Orange and Plumbate Ware, as well as Augustine Red, and possibly Teabo Red.

Types of Plumbate Ware have been found at several sites on Ambergris Caye, including Marco Gonzalez, San Juan and Ek Luum (Graham and Pendergast 1989; Valdez et al. 1995). A small number of mainland sites in northern Belize have yielded Tohil Plumbate sherds or whole vessels, including Aventura and Santa Rita Corozal (Chase 1982). The arrival of Tohil Plumbate vessels at other sites on the caye as well as on mainland sites in northern Belize and beyond is roughly contemporaneous, between AD 850/900 and AD 1100 (Cobos 2004:522). Plumbate's common co-occurrence with Fine Orange ware points to the great breadth of commercial interaction that was taking place throughout the region, beginning in Late Classic times, and becoming greatly amplified by the Early Postclassic Period. Fine Orange ceramic sherds are not found in abundant quantities at Marco Gonzalez, or at the other sites on the caye, nor are pieces of Trickle ware, except at San Juan. Fine Orange was produced in the Gulf Coast region and the similarities of some of the Postclassic pottery forms and design motifs at Lamanai, Cerros, and Marco Gonzalez suggest that northern and coastal Belize had some sort of connection to the Gulf Coast (Aimers 2014).

Ceramic evidence suggests that integration of communities in northern Belize with those in other parts of the Maya world was occurring at both local and regional levels during Terminal Classic and Early Postclassic times. Some evidence for this close contact is seen in two nearly identical orange-red slipped vessels recovered from Marco Gonzalez and San Juan that may be an undesignated composite type from the Augustine group (Figure 3). In the Terminal Classic sites on the caye begin to receive the kinds of pottery that characterize the circum-peninsular sites, including the Fine Orange, plumbate, slate wares, and trickle wares.

As the Early Postclassic approaches, probably in the late 10th century, vessels in the Zakpah Group appear, but the production and distribution of these wares appears to be a regional phenomenon that is restricted to northern Belize (Masson and Rosenswig 2004:379). Some of these flanged, pedestal-based jars were probably produced at Lamanai, but others come from different areas of northern Belize; they are found mostly as sherds at Cerros, Caye Coco, Altun Ha, and Chau Hiix (Ting 2013:Figure 3.10). The distinctive incised surface designs, as well as the shapes of these vessels, were defining characteristics of what Graham (1983) first termed Buk ceramics, many of which were found accompanying burials in Early Postclassic structures at Lamanai. Fragments of these vessels found in surface contexts at Marco Gonzalez, though, are more variable in terms of their compositions than those from Lamanai. The local production of these gouged and incised decorated ceramics seems to represent a flurry of activity in northern Belize and some areas to the south, but the pottery is not seen in Yucatan. Stylistically distinctive Late Postclassic Tulum Red Ware fragments (e.g. Payil Red and Palmul Incised) and Chen Mul Modeled ceramic system sherds are found only in surface contexts at Marco Gonzalez. But these ceramic types have been recovered during excavations at a number of sites on the mainland of northern Belize including Santa Rita Corozal, Patchchacan, and Sarteneja (Boxt 2005; Chase 1982; Sidrys 1983), as well as at Ek Luum and Los Renegados on Ambergris Caye (Valdez et al. 1995).

Lithic Assemblages

The flaked stone assemblages of sites on Ambergris Caye as well as on those on the mainland of northern Belize are dominated by tools made of chert from the northern Belize chert bearing zone (CBZ), centered around the manufacturing center of Colha (Stemp 2001). Stemmed macroblades, large oval and thin bifaces, and general utility bifaces were some of the most common forms found at both Ambergris Caye and mainland sites in northern Belize during the Late Classic Period. Comparisons of the relative percentages of chert formal tools from several sites on the island, including San Juan, Marco Gonzalez, Chac Balam, and Ek Luum, indicate that tools made from chert from the CBZ made up over 85% of all the stone tools found at those sites (Stemp 2001:Table 1). A number of sites on the mainland of northern Belize, including Pulltrouser Swamp, Cuello, Cerros, Nohmul, El Pozito and Kichpanha, have produced large numbers of Colha manufactured utilitarian tools (Chiarulli 2012), and percentages of tools from the CBZ at these and other mainland sites in the area are similarly high, averaging over 75% (Stemp 2001:Table 2).

It appears that the residents of a number of communities on Ambergris Caye were regular consumers as well as distributors of finished chert tools originating from Colha, and they facilitated their movement as part of a pan-Mesoamerican exchange network that operated at macro-regional, sub-regional, and local levels. Chert tools produced at Colha served not only local needs on the island, but their presence at other communities along the Belizean coast, such as Moho Caye, located at the mouth of the Belize River, and Placencia Caye, situated nearly 100 miles (160 km) to the south, suggests that chert tools were moved along the coast as trade items along with other goods and materials (MacKinnon 1990; McKillop 2010). This movement was facilitated by generations of Maya living on Ambergris Caye, who engaged in economic exchanges with coastal merchants and mariners and were thus integral parts of a vibrant economy that spanned Early Classic through Late Postclassic times. Recent preliminary analyses of the chert tools and debitage from 2017 excavations at the

Postclassic-Spanish Colonial Period site of San Pedro revealed that over 70% originated from the Colha area. The San Pedro Maya relied heavily on the acquisition of finished formal tools, specifically lenticular and lozenge bifaces of the same forms as Early to Middle Postclassic tool types from Colha. There is not enough debitage, specifically early stage reduction debitage, to support formal tool production at San Pedro, but it appears that San Pedranos also acquired some nodules/cores of CBZ chert, which they used for basic or expedient flake production. Many of the chert bifaces from sites on the caye were heavily used and recycled as hammerstones (Stemp 2001).

Obsidian found on the island was derived from highland sources located some distances away from northern Belize. Recently completed XRF analysis of 111 pieces of obsidian from various contexts at Marco Gonzalez indicates that this important material was obtained from eight different sources found throughout Mesoamerica. Just over 80% of the assemblage comes from El Chayal and Ixtepeque, while lesser amounts of central Mexican obsidian from sites like Pachuca, Ucareo and Paredon are present (Simmons and Graham 2016). Based on visual sourcing of 309 obsidian artifacts (99% of which were prismatic blades) from the San Pedro site the Maya of Ambergris Caye continued to acquire Guatemalan obsidian through Postclassic times, primarily from the Ixtepeque source (Stemp et al. 2011). It appears that throughout Classic and Postclassic times trade in ceramic, lithic, and other materials continued to play an important role in connecting the Ambergris Caye sites to those on the mainland.

Mortuary Behavior

Maya burials encountered in Late and Terminal Classic contexts at the Ambergris Caye sites as well as those on the mainland in northern Belize share a number of similarities. Typically buried beneath house floors, individuals have been found in flexed, seated, and extended (supine and prone) positions. At several sites on both the caye and on the mainland some burials have been recorded in either supine or prone positions with legs flexed and knees bent back toward the pelvis (Figure 4). Terminal Classic



Figure 4. Burial 14/35 at Marco Gonzalez, Belize. Note the cache of nine objects at the left elbow.

burials at Chac Balam and Marco Gonzalez were found in this manner, and the practice continued at least through the early sixteenth century at San Pedro (46 of the 48 burials found thus far).

At Marco Gonzalez the origins and kinds of grave goods found accompanying many of the 38 sub-floor burials in Str. 14 indicated that its residents had enjoyed some elevated level of social standing in the community. Perforated jaguar canines, shell mosaic wristbands, pendants and ear ornaments as well as carved olive shell faces were found accompanying these burials. In some cases individuals were interred with a range of artifacts, including an individual of indeterminate sex found in 2010 that was interred in a dorsally placed, legs flexed position (Figure 3). The left arm of the individual was bent at the elbow, where a group of nine objects had been placed, including two exhausted El Chayal obsidian cores, a bone spatulate-shaped object, and a shell quincunx with five perforations.

At Colha several burials excavated in the eastern part of Structure 41 appear to have been interred in the same way, lying prone with their



Figure 5. Shell ornaments from Marco Gonzalez, Ambergris Caye, Belize.

legs bent back toward the pelvis (Hammond 1975:174-180). These burials likely date to Terminal Classic times based on stratigraphy and associated ceramics, so they are coeval with the burials at both Marco Gonzalez and Chac Balam. Barton Ramie is the only known Maya site other than the Ambergris Caye sites and Colha where the prone, legs bent back over their pelvises burial type has been found in Late or Terminal Classic contexts (Willey et al. 1965). This same burial style was noted by Pendergast at Lamanai; fifty-two have been found thus far at nine different structures at the site (Graham et al. 2013:15). Based on the presence of associated orange-red monochrome slipped ceramic vessels identified as Zakpah Orange-Red and Zalal Gouge-incised the Lamanai burials date to several centuries later than those found at Barton Ramie, Colha and the Ambergris Caye sites, probably beginning in the late tenth century AD. But the mortuary behavior persisted even after it waned and disappeared at Lamanai. At the San Pedro site 96% (46/48) of the skeletal remains found were interred in these same two unusual types of positions, indicating a degree of longevity in this particular cultural behavior spanning at least 500 years.

Integration of Sites in Northern Belize and Beyond

Sites on Ambergris Caye appear to have been linked to those on the mainland of northern Belize in a variety of ways. Shared similarities in artifact types, site layout, burial characteristics, and occupation histories exist between Marco Gonzalez, other sites on Ambergris Caye, and those in northern Belize.

The presence of Chicanel pottery indicates that Marco Gonzalez was occupied during the Late Preclassic—to be conservative perhaps around 100 B.C., but very possibly earlier. Early Classic and specifically Tzakol 1 deposits have been delineated in test pits excavated in 2013. These Early Classic deposits at Marco Gonzalez are reasonably substantial, and have produced thousands of fish bones and shells that were apparently food refuse, as well as a great deal of debris from chert knapping. Some of this chert knapping may be related to the production of shell tools and ornaments at the site. Shell tool and ornament production has not been studied formally at any of the Ambergris Caye sites. But the abundance of shell debris, finished objects, and blanks found at Marco Gonzalez suggests that Maya artisans there were producing shell objects for exchange with other Maya communities (Figure 5). Some of the shell ornaments found at Marco Gonzalez are very finely made, and there are a variety of designs, several of which are similar to those found at other sites in northern Belize. The Maya of Marco Gonzalez were heavily involved in marine resource extraction but were also involved in trade, with a main item being polychrome pottery, which was also transported up and down the coast and then to inland trade networks.

By the beginning of the Late Classic Period we see a remarkable change at coastal sites on both Ambergris Caye and the mainland as relationships with Maya sites throughout northern Belize and beyond intensified. Large quantities of Coconut Walk Unslipped sherds are found layered with spreads of ash and charcoal at Marco Gonzalez. Substantial numbers of these sherds have also been reported from San Juan, Ek Luum, Chac Balam and San Pedro (Valdez et al. 1995). The sherds were part of poorly fired ceramic bowls, which initially were thought to have functioned as moulds for salt cakes. The bowls seem to have been used to contain brine as the water was driven off by heating (McKillop 2007). Large quantities of these sherds have also been found at several coastal sites on the mainland of northern Belize, including Northern River Lagoon and Saktunja, and Mock (Masson and Mock 2004:381; Mock 1994:85) notes that sherds of what Bennyhoff

and Meighan (1952) called Potts Creek Plain and Salt Creek Plain wares are identical to Coconut Walk Unslipped. These sherds, along with over 400 clay cylinder fragments, were found during surface reconnaissance of the Potts Creek Site, located just west of Hicks Caye. These cylinder fragments, which may have been used to support saltmaking vessels, were also found with Coconut Walk vessel fragments at Rocky Point and the Last Chance Site (Mock 1994:86, 89). Certainly, there was a huge market for salt throughout the Maya world, particularly as population densities rose throughout the Classic Period, and coastal sites on Ambergris Caye and the mainland of northern Belize may very well have supplied salt to a number of sites throughout the interior of Belize and beyond, possibly into the Petén.

After the great need for salt at inland centers had diminished to virtually nothing by AD 900, coastal trade became a prominent part of economic life in northern Belize once more. While maritime trade had its origins in Preclassic times, when similar polychrome ceramic types appear along the Belizean coast, it was in the Late Classic and then throughout the Terminal Classic and Postclassic Periods that coastal trade in goods and commodities increased exponentially. The earlier part of this sequence, particularly the end of Classic Period, coincides with Chichen Itzá's hegemony over much of Yucatan. Cobos (2016:329) has recently argued that the main function of the Ambergris Caye sites was as "trans-shipment stations that were managed or controlled by Chichen Itzá." The larger, leeward sites on Ambergris Caye, including Marco Gonzalez, Chac Balam and San Juan, almost certainly were coastal transshipment ports, where cargo was transferred both onto and from canoes of the kind encountered by Columbus. These sites also served as stop-over points where merchants and crew could rest, share news from both local and distant places, and conduct business. But the idea that these coastal sites were 'controlled' by Chichen Itzá is worth discussing further. The similarities in artifact types, and the round structure reported at San Juan that is Yucatecan in style, provide some level of support for at least the influence of Chichen Itzá on these and other coastal sites (Driver et al. 1995). But it is

equally likely that the Maya of Ambergris Caye enjoyed some degree of autonomy in managing their own economic affairs during Classic times and beyond.

By Middle and Late Postclassic times only a small number of sites identified thus far on Ambergris Caye were occupied, and the level of activity, including waterborne trade, appears to have diminished. The only site occupied through the Postclassic and into early Spanish Colonial was San Pedro, where investigations in 2017 revealed at least two separate domiciles identified by thin marl and sand packed floors punctuated by numerous post and pit features and sub-floor burials. Earlier work at the site yielded evidence of other house floors and sub-floor burials, almost all of which were found in the unusual prone position of legs drawn back over the pelvis, or dorsally placed with legs flexed and crossed at the feet (Pendergast and Graham 1991). The persistence of this particular burial pattern could reflect some kind of shared worldview among the Maya of Ambergris Caye, as well as some Maya residing on the mainland of northern Belize, that endured for at least five centuries. Clearly, the investigation of other cultural behaviors that were shared between the island and mainland Maya of northern Belize and beyond is warranted, and hopefully forthcoming.

The Belizean cayes played a vital role in the developmental histories of both island and mainland Maya peoples. Islanders provided many valued commodities to mainland Maya communities. Both the larger polities on the mainland of northern Belize and the Ambergris Cay Maya settlements profited in numerous ways from their mutually beneficial relationships, economic and otherwise. Diego de Landa (Tozzer 1941:94) stated "the occupation to which they had the greatest inclination was trade..." Judging by the wealth of locally available goods and materials as well as those acquired via long-distance trade at both mainland and island sites, the Maya who lived in these communities in northern Belize enjoyed strong and long-lasting social and economic relationships over time. By the time Landa had written those words in the mid-sixteenth century, the movement of goods, commodities, people, and ideas over the course of many centuries had

effectively bound the Maya of northern Belize together for millennia. In the end, this constant interaction and interdependence made island and mainland Maya communities more similar to one another than they were different.

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