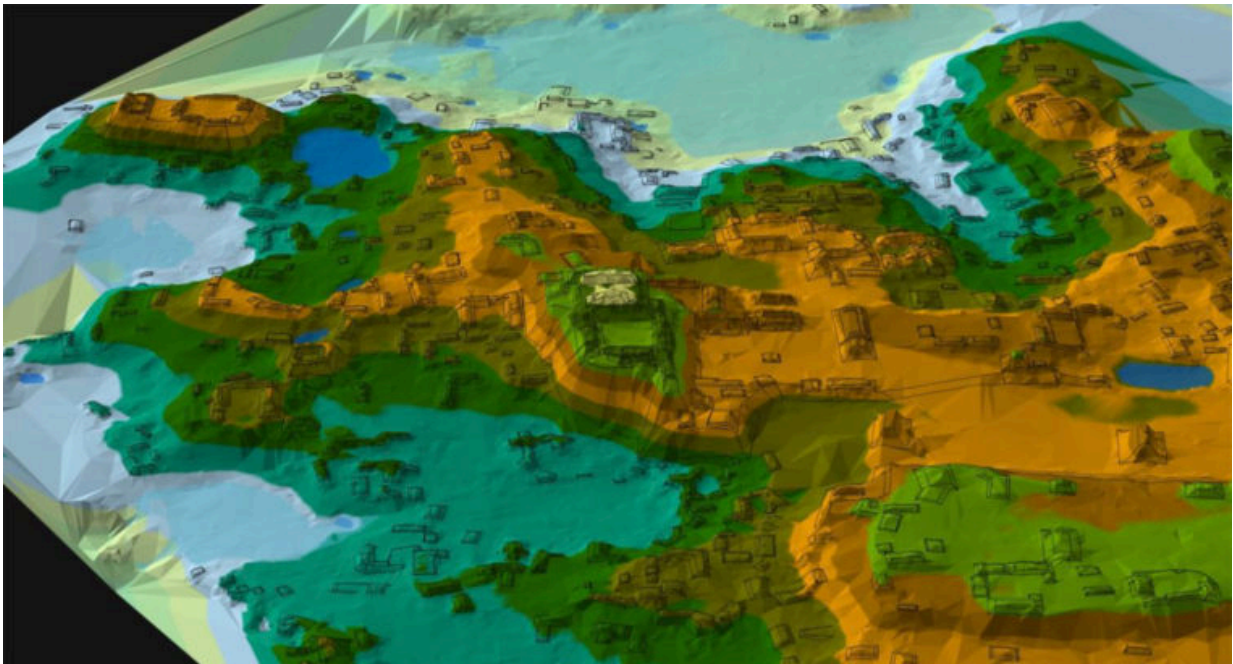


Tomb of early classic Maya ruler found in Guatemala

September 14 2017, by Gerry Everding



Palace Acropolis at the Maya city of El Peru-Waka in northern Guatemala.
Credit: Damien Marken

The tomb of a Maya ruler excavated this summer at the Classic Maya city of Waka' in northern Guatemala is the oldest royal tomb yet to be discovered at the site, the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Guatemala has announced.

"The Classic Maya revered their divine rulers and treated them as living souls after death," said research co-director David Freidel, professor of anthropology in Arts & Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis.

"This king's tomb helped to make the royal palace acropolis holy ground, a place of majesty, early in the history of the Wak—centipede—dynasty. It's like the ancient Saxon kings England buried in Old Minister, the original church underneath Winchester Cathedral."

The tomb, discovered by Guatemalan archaeologists of the U.S.-Guatemalan El Perú-Waka' Archaeological Project (Proyecto Arqueológico Waka', or PAW), has been provisionally dated by ceramic analysis to 300-350 A.D., making it the earliest known royal tomb in the northwestern Petén region of Guatemala.

Previous research at the site has revealed six royal [tombs](#) and sacrificial offering burials dating to the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries A.D.

El Perú-Waka' is about 40 miles west of the famous Maya site of Tikal near the San Pedro Martir River in Laguna del Tigre National Park. In the Classic period, this royal city commanded major trade routes running north to south and east to west.



Map of the Maya world. Credit: Keith Eppich

The findings, first disclosed at a Guatemalan symposium sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, suggest the new tomb, known as "Burial 80," dates from the early years of the Wak (centipede in Mayan) royal dynasty.

One of the earliest known Maya dynasties, the Wak is thought to have been established in the second century A.D. based on calculations from a later historical text at the site.

Although the ruler in Burial 80, identified as a mature man, was not accompanied by inscribed artifacts and is therefore anonymous, he is possibly King Te' Chan Ahk, a historically known Wak king who was ruling in the early fourth century A.D., the research team suggests.

Freidel has directed research at this site in collaboration with Guatemalan and foreign archaeologists since 2003.



Jade mask from Burial 80, painted red with cinnabar paint. Credit: Proyecto Arqueológico Waka' and the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Guatemala

Anthropologists Juan Carlos Pérez Calderon of San Carlos University in Guatemala and Damien Marken of Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania are project co-directors. Olivia Navarro-Farr, assistant professor at the College of Wooster in Ohio, is co-principal investigator and long-term supervisor of the site.

Calderon and Guatemalan archaeologists Griselda Pérez Robles and Damaris Menéndez supervised tunnel excavations inside the Palace Acropolis that led to the new tomb.

Identification of the tomb as royal is based on the presence of a jade portrait mask depicting the ruler with the forehead hair tab of the Maize God. Maya kings were regularly portrayed as Maize God impersonators. This forehead tab has a unique "Greek Cross" symbol which means "Yellow" and "Precious" in ancient Mayan. This symbol is also associated with the Maize God.



Burial 80 during excavation shows stone cup in the center surrounded by bones. Credit: Proyecto Arqueológico Waka' and the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Guatemala

Robles and Menéndez discovered the mask under the head of the ruler, and it may have been made to cover the face rather than as a chest pectoral. Archaeologists at Tikal in the 1960s discovered a similar greenstone mask in the earliest Maya royal tomb, dating to the first century A.D.

Additional offerings in Burial 80 included 22 ceramic vessels, *Spondylus* shells, jade ornaments and a shell pendant carved as a crocodile. The remains of the ruler and some ornaments like the portrait mask were painted bright red. Burial 80 was reverentially reentered after 600 A.D.

at least once, and it is possible that the bones were painted during this reentry.

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

Citation: Tomb of early classic Maya ruler found in Guatemala (2017, September 14) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-09-tomb-early-classic-maya-ruler.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.