

# **KA'KABISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROJECT (KARP) REPORT ON THE 2017 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SEASON**

## *Submitted to*

The Institute of Archaeology, NICH  
Archaeology Museum and Research Centre  
Culvert Road  
Belmopan, Belize

## *Edited by*

Dr. Helen R. Haines  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Anthropology, Trent University

## *And*

Dr. Kerry L. Sagebiel  
Visiting Assistant Professor  
Department of Anthropology, Northern Illinois University

Permit Number IA/H/2/1/17(17)

June 2018

Department of Anthropology  
Trent University  
DNA Building, Block C, Room C207  
2140 East Bank Drive  
Peterborough, Ontario  
L1H 7L7, CANADA  
Mobile : 416-209-2029  
E-mail: [helenhaines@trentu.ca](mailto:helenhaines@trentu.ca)

Department of Anthropology  
Northern Illinois University  
Grant Tower South A  
DeKalb, Illinois  
60115 USA  
Mobile: 480-415-3972  
E-mail: [ksagebiel@niu.edu](mailto:ksagebiel@niu.edu)



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>LIST OF FIGURES</i> .....	4
<i>LIST OF TABLES</i> .....	4
<i>PROJECT PERSONNEL</i> .....	5
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i> .....	6
<b>Chapter 1:</b> Overview of the 2017 Field Season .....	7
<i>Helen R. Haines</i>	
<b>Chapter 2:</b> The 2017 Excavations of Structure D-14 Operation 7 .....	13
<i>Gabriela K. Dziki</i>	
<b>Chapter 3:</b> The 2017 Excavations of Structure D-10 Operation 15 .....	21
<i>Angela Craig and Helen R. Haines</i>	
<b>Chapter 4:</b> Analysis of Ceramics from the KARP 2017 Field Season.....	27
<i>Kerry L. Sagebiel</i>	
<b>Chapter 5:</b> Report on Recent Looting and Land Clearing Activities.....	39
<i>Helen R. Haines</i>	

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-1. Map of Ka'kabish.....	7
Figure 2-1. Placement of the three rooms uncovered by the Looters' trenches of structure D-14. (Map by Claude Belanger and Gabriela Dziki 2016).....	14
Figure 2-2. The placement of the 2017 units.....	15
Figure 2-3. Map of Ka'kabish Structure D-14 showing the 2017 excavations together with the 2011 drawings and 2016 map by Claude Belanger and Gabi Dziki. ....	18
Figure 3-1. Composite profile of Str. D-10 showing three construction episodes (D-10-1st, D-10-2nd, and D-10-3rd) along with two subsequent additions to D-10-1st (B and C) the extended the front of the platform.....	22
Figure 3-2. Sketch map of Structure D-10-2nd (Haines 2017) [not to scale].....	23
Figure 4-1. Torro Gouged-incised Vessel 6 from Cache 1.....	33
Figure 4-2. Paixban Buff-polychrome, exterior.....	36
Figure 4-3. Paixban Buff-polychrome, interior and profile.....	36
Figure 5-1. Looters' trench on south side of Structure FA-2.....	40
Figure 5-2. Looters' pit on top-south side of Structure FA-2; a) wall on north side of pit; b) wall on south side of pit. ....	40
Figure 5-3. Photos of looters' trench in the south side of Structure FA-4; a) photo showing trench and both floors; b) photos showing close up of portal with part of fill remaining. ....	41

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4-1. Ka'kabish Ceramic Complexes.....	28
Table 4-2. Ceramics from 2017 excavations on top of Str. D-10 .....	29
Table 4-3. Ceramics from 2017 excavations on east half of Str. D-10.....	30
Table 4-4. Ceramics from 2017 excavations of Str. D-14.....	31
Table 4-5. Ceramics from 2017 excavations of Str. D-14, Cache 1 .....	32
Table 4-6. Ceramics from 2017 collections from disturbed and looted contexts.....	34
Table 4-7. A comparison of the diagnostic sherd types found in the north and south looters' trench backdirt at FA-3 .....	35

## PROJECT PERSONNEL

### ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

<b>Project Director:</b>	Dr. Helen R. Haines, Trent University
<b>Co-Director; Laboratory Director</b>	Dr. Kerry L. Sagebiel, Northern Illinois University

### MATERIAL ANALYSTS

<b>Archaeometallurgist</b>	Aaron Shugar, Buffalo State University
<b>Ceramic Analyst:</b>	Dr. Kerry L. Sagebiel, Northern Illinois University
<b>Epigrapher:</b>	Christophe Helmke, University of Copenhagen
<b>Zooarchaeologist:</b>	Norbert Stanchly, Trent University

### EXCAVATION STAFF AND STUDENTS

<b>Graduate Student Supervisors:</b>	Gabriel Dziki, University of Cambridge UK
<b>Belizean Field Crew:</b>	Jaime Yanes Gregorio Rodriquez Daniel Salguero Elmer Cardenas
<b>Undergraduate Students:</b>	Amber Johnson, Windsor University Assa Kouma, Trent University Conal O'Neil, University of Dublin (exchange student) Deanne Dennally, (exchange student) Kieran Way, Trent University Lesley Sinopoli, Trent University

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*We would like to thank the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, for their assistance and permission to work in Belize. In particular we would like to thank Dr. John Morris for his advice and support, and Sylvia Batty and Melissia Badillo for help co-ordinating equipment and artefact importing and exporting. We would also like to extend our gratitude to our fellow archaeologists at the Lamanai Archaeology Project, particularly Dr. Elizabeth Graham and Claude Belanger. We look forward to continuing future collaborations between our two projects.*

*As archaeological work would not be possible without the co-operation of the local people who have as much invested in our work as we do, if not more, we would also like to thank the following individuals: Ben and Margaretha Dyck of the Blue Creek Community for helping with the project logistics both during and between the field seasons; Srs. Blanco, Che, and Magana, and Mr. Johan Wall and Mr. Adrian Wall for allowing access to their land; the ladies of Las Orquideas for keeping us well fed; and all the members of the various communities, Indian Church, Indian Creek, and Shipyard, that provided us with information and assistance in myriad ways.*

*We would like to acknowledge the National Geographic Society Committee for Research and Exploration and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their support of previous research.*

# Chapter 1

## Overview of the 2017 Field Season

by  
**Helen R. Haines**

Archaeological excavation work focused on two structures in the Group D-complex during the 2017 field season. Structure D-10, had been investigated previously in both the 2015 and 2016 field seasons (Baker 2016; Haines 2017), while work at Structure D-14 had been initiated in 2010 (Demarker 2012) but then halted until a more comprehensive map of the structure and looters' trenches could be produced. These maps (see Figures 2.1 and 2.3 Dziki this volume), were produced after the close of the 2016 field season by Claude Belanger as part of a National Geographic grant application to obtain funding to excavate and consolidate the structure. While the grant application was unsuccessful, it was decided to resume excavations at Structure D-14 regardless. This work formed the basis for a Master's dissertation by Gabriel Dziki at Cambridge University (Dziki 2017).

Additionally, artefact collections were made from several recently dug looters' trenches in Group F, as well as a newly identified, and recently cleared, Courtyard to the northwest of Ka'kabish (see Sagebiel this volume). At least four buildings in Group F were looted during the interim between the 2016 and 2017 field seasons; FA-2, FA-3, FA-4, and FA-6 (see Haines Chapter 5 this volume).

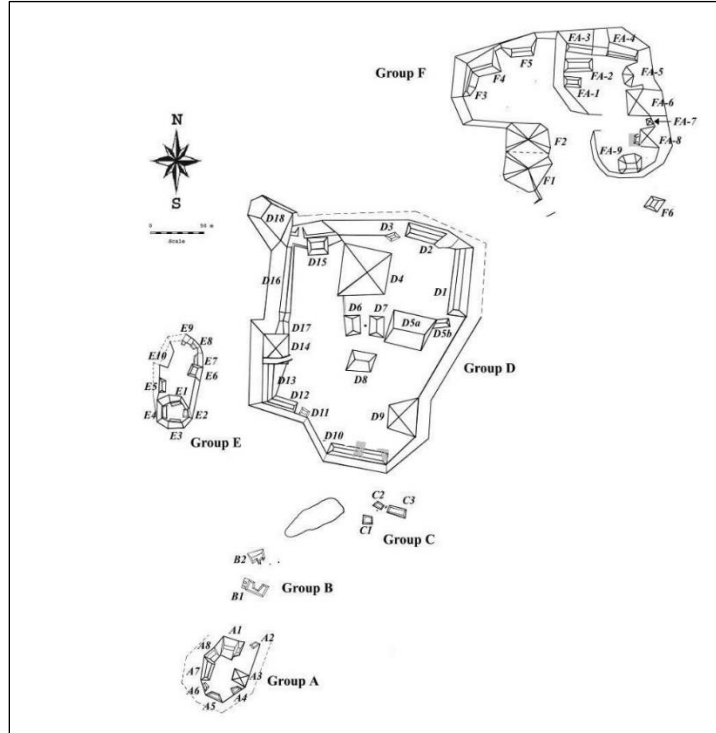


Figure 2-1. Map of Ka'kabish.

### **STRUCTURE D-10 (OPERATION 15)**

The 2017 season excavations provided important information about the configuration and construction history of what is arguably the longest range-building at Ka'kabish, Structure D-10. This building is a long range-structure anchoring the south side of the Group D plaza. Investigations at D-10 (Operation 15) began in 2015 with a series of units positioned to locate the front door of the superstructure and the rear wall of the structure. This work continued in 2016 with test excavations along the top of the structure to identify the number of doorways and clearing of the area around the east looters' trench and a small trench across the lower east face of the building to define the ultimate occupation phase. The 2017 field season excavations focused on continuing the 2015 excavations into the structure to gain further information about the inner structure (D-10-3<sup>rd</sup>), initially discovered as a tall wall in Unit 8 (Baker 2016).

Excavations have revealed that Structure D-10 was built in at least three phases, with the 2017 excavations suggesting that earliest phase potentially was originally two separate buildings (D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> and a yet unidentified building), that were subsumed with the construction of the longer D-10-2<sup>nd</sup> (Craig and Haines this volume). This latter building appears to have been a roughly 60 m long range building, constructed with nine doorways and a perishable roof (Haines 2017). It is highly probable that the room lacked interior dividing walls and was one single room. Evidence currently suggests that the sides of the room were open, although this will require verification from excavations at the undamaged west end of the building. It appears that the superstructure room of D-10-2<sup>nd</sup> may have still been in use when the substructure was remodelled to extend farther forward (north), initially in a substructure platform, then with a series of low, wide step-like terraces (D-10-1<sup>st</sup>) (Haines 2017).

Ceramics collected during the 2017 field season indicate that the earliest structure D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> was likely constructed during the Early Classic period, as was the second architectural phase (Sagebiel this volume). However, ceramic sherds discovered in association with the replastering of the floor in the D-10-2<sup>nd</sup> room suggest that the room was likely still in use during the Terminal/Early Post-Classic period (Sagebiel this volume). This information corresponds with the data collected from the 2016 and 2017 excavation units along the front of the structure (Craig and Haines this volume; Haines 2017; Sagebiel this volume).

### **STRUCTURE D-14 (OPERATION 7)**

Structure D-14 is an anomalous structure that has been badly impacted by both looters and logging activity at the site. The looting activity has resulted in a complex next work of tunnels in three of the four sides (west, north, and east), with the logging removing an indeterminate amount of the south side through what appears to have been a bulldozer to create a road onto the plaza. This damage, particularly the latter road work, has given the structure a distinctly pyramidal temple-form, however, inspection of the looters' trenches, combined with excavations suggests that the building was originally a tall, rectangular range structure (Dziki 2017; Haines 2008).

The West Looters' trench enters through the back of the structure and passes through a rear room, before terminating at a second room. This trench likely dates to the late 1980s or early 1990s and was



first reported by the Maya Research Program (MRP) as part of their mapping of the site (Guderjan 1996). The rear room remains filled with rubble, however, the looters cleared the inner room likely thinking it was a tomb (see Figures 2.1 and 2.3 Dziki this volume). The clearing of the room was done after the 1995 MRP (personal observation). This room was painted red while the rear room, which was partially cleared through a doorway at the north end of the red room appears to have been white. A trench high on the north side, enters through the corbelled vault of a third room that was painted black. This room, like the rear west room, was not significantly cleared and, like the two other rooms, appears to have been deliberately filled so that the vaults were preserved when the building was buried.

Two trenches on the east side of the structure, are joined by a lateral trench that runs north/south under the front of the final building phase. During the 2017 field season, this trench was filled to preserve the structural integrity of the building and permit safe excavation of the front of the building. These trenches revealed the presence of additional rooms on the front of the structure, the existence of which was confirmed in the 2017 field season.

Our current understanding of Structure D-14 suggests that it was originally an important range structure, and possibly a royal palace or residence. The building appears to have been ritually buried at the end of the Early Classic Period with the inner red and white rooms filled. The final architectural form of the structure appears to have had a broad staircase across the front of the structure, composed of five wide, terrace-like steps. A large 2 metre wide central door was placed on the primary axis of the building. Excavations into the room only cleared to the inner edge of the 1.2-metre-wide walls. Further clearing of the room is planned for 2019, which will involve a substantial removal of overburden. It is surmised that the final building form may resemble that of Lamanai Structure N10-9, with a room at the lower front, with a second staircase in the back leading up to a second room at the summit of the structure. A summit room was identified during the post 2016 mapping of the structure.

Very few ceramics have been recovered from the building. What has been recovered suggest that the inner red and white roomed structure was initially constructed in the Early Classic period, and then remodelled and used in the Terminal and Early Post-Classic period. It is currently unclear exactly where the black room fits into this chronology.

A circular feature found on the plaza floor just to the north of the building contained Late Post-Classic material (Sagebiel this volume). While it is not clear if the structure itself was still in use in the later Post-Classic ritual activity appears to have continued in this area until quite late.

#### **RECENT LOOTING AND CLEARING ACTIVITIES**

Regrettably Ka'kabish is subject to ongoing looting during the intervals between field seasons. Between the 2016 and 2017 field seasons looting activities appeared restricted to the north side of the site (Group F), possibly due to the recent purchase of the south side by Mennonite farmers. While their continued presence to monitor their cattle herds may have dissuaded night-time activity, an elder gentleman from San Filipe was encountered on the south side of the site one weekend cutting trees for firewood.

Of the four structures in the F-Group that were impacted (FA-2, FA-3, FA-4, and FA-6), only FA-6 had been previously looted. As with other looting activity, the looters left piles of broken and unwanted ceramics on the sides of the trenches. As the trenches cut through multiple phases of construction the ceramics cannot be used to securely identify any discrete aspect of the buildings. However, the assemblages suggested offer tantalising evidence that the missing early Late Classic (Tepeu 1 ca. AD 550-700) period occupation may be found in these northern-most structures (Sagebiel this volume).

As part of the ongoing development of the area along the San Filipe/Indian Church road an additional field was cleared to the west of the site. Exposed in this field was another courtyard complex (Courtyard K) (see Haines Chapter 5 this volume). A small collection of ceramic sherds found in front of one of the structures yielded Early Classic and Early Post-Classic material (Sagebiel this volume). The discovery of this courtyard brings the number of groups and courtyards at Ka'kabish to 11, with Groups A to F under jungle cover and Groups/Courtyard G to K being in the cleared fields around the site. Ongoing work at Ka'kabish and in the surrounding areas may yet reveal additional occupations.

## REFERENCES

Baker, J.

2016 Initial excavations of Structure D-10 at Ka'kabish. In *Ka'kabish Archaeological Research Project (Karp). Report on the 2015 Archaeological Field Season*, edited by K.L. Sagebiel and H.R. Haines, pp. 36-43. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belmopan, Belize.

Demarker, S.

2012 Ka'kabish Excavation Report for Structure D-14. In *Ka'kabish Archaeological Research Project (KARP) Interim Report on the 2011 Field Season*, edited by Helen R. Haines, pp.39-48. Report on File with Institute of Archaeology, Belize.

Dziki, G.

2017 "Don't judge a mound by its dirt": A study of Structure D-14 at the Site of Ka'kabish, Belize, and its implications at the Time of the Terminal Classic to Postclassic hiatus. MPhil Dissertation, University of Cambridge, UK.

Guderjan, Thomas H.

1996 Ka'kabish: Mapping of a Maya Center In *Archaeological Research at Blue Creek, Belize. Progress Report of the Fourth (1995) Field Season*, edited by T.H. Guderjan, W.D. Driver and H.R. Haines, pp. 170-190. St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas.

Haines, H.R.

2006 *Report to the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belize Of the June 2005 Reconnaissance of Ka'kabish, Orange Walk District*. Report on File with the Institute of Archaeology, Belmopan, Belize.

- 2008 Causeway Terminus, Minor Centre, Elite Refuge, Or Ritual Capital? Ka;kabish A New Puzzle On The Maya Landscape Of North-Central Belize. *Research Reports in Belizean Archaeology* 5:269-279.
- 2017 Structure D-10 Excavations. In *Ka'kabish Archaeological Research Project (Karp). Report on the 2016 Archaeological Field Season*, edited by K.L. Sagebiel and H.R. Haines, pp. 21-30. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belmopan, Belize.



## Chapter 2

### The 2017 Excavations of Structure D-14 Operation 7

*by*  
**Gabriela K. Dziki**

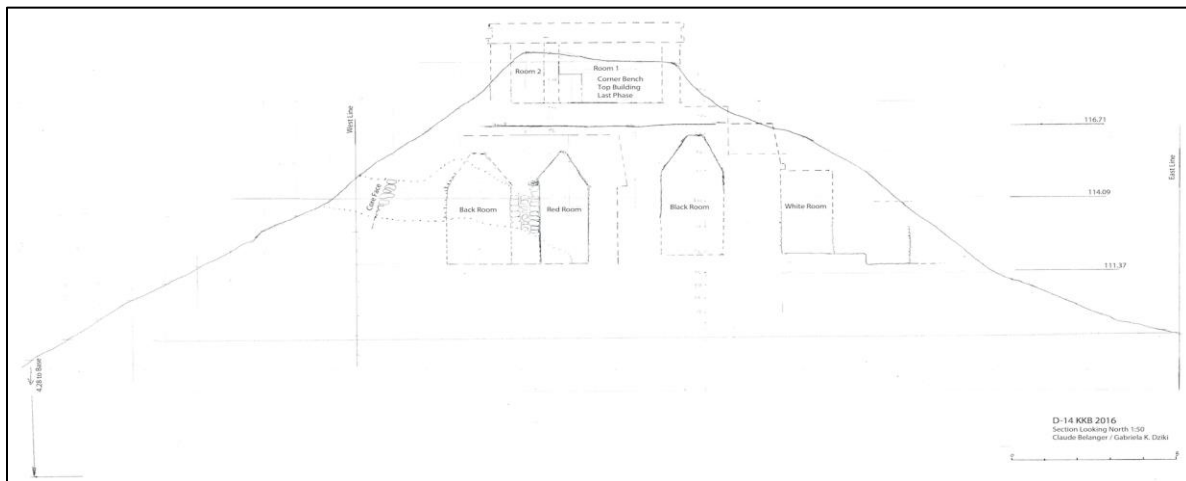
As part of group D, the largest plaza group at the Ka'kabish site core (Haines 2008: 272), Structure D-14 lies along the east edge of the group. Roughly 6 m tall from the plaza floor (Haines 2006: 9), the west wall of the building forms part of the 10m rise of the plaza wall. First recorded work conducted on the structure was done by Thomas Guderjan in 1995 (1996:117) as part of the Maya Research Program (MRP). This work consisted exclusively of mapping site and Structure D-14 using a transit, however, there is confusion regarding numbering of the structures and the corresponding descriptions. Initial mapping report suggests that two masks were visible on the eastern wall of Structure 6, which although the description in the MRP report closely resembles D-14, no traces of these masks could be found. Indeed, in 2011, Units 1 and 2 were opened on the eastern terrace steps to find these masks, but none were found (Demarker 2012: 39).

Similar to many of the structures at Ka'kabish, D-14 has been heavily looted. The western trench cuts right into a Red Room, the northern trench exposes the top of a Black Room, while two trenches penetrate the east side of the building, where the 2017 field season focused. Even though looting prevents archaeologists from getting a better understanding of the past as information is lost, in the case of D-14 it allowed us to access the rooms without major excavations taking place. Therefore, in 2016, the structure was mapped using a digital theodolite and the rooms were placed within its baselines in order to get a better understanding of their position within the structure (Figure 2.1). Moreover, small investigations began on top of the structure where a room was uncovered. Ceramic material recovered suggested that the room either dated to, or was at least in use during, the Post Classic Period. The interior rooms posed more of a dating problem as they seem to have been completely cleared by the Maya before being filled and sealed. In 2017, further investigations were planned to gain a better understanding of the building as well as gather enough data to be able to date each phase of construction.

#### **2017 EXCAVATION**

The aim of the 2017 field season was to establish dates for the different building phases of the structure. This data forms the basis for an MPhil dissertation written by Gabriela Dziki at the University of Cambridge (Dziki 2017). During the five weeks of the season, a team of three workmen, four undergraduate students and the field director, opened 9 units on the East side of Structure D-14 (Figure 2.2). Although the initial plan was to also investigate the room at the top of the structure as well, upon further inspection by Dr. Haines it was concluded to be too unstable to carry excavations. Therefore, using the 2011 units as a guide, we focused on exposing the eastern face of the structure, part of which was made visible when the northern-east looters trench was made. One set of units was placed from the exposed wall down until the plaza floor was found, while the other was to go up from the base of the structure on the east side in order to determine where the plaza floor was as well as find the edge of

the building. As this work builds on that started by Demaker in 2011 the first unit of the 2017 field season was given number 3 to prevent confusion.



*Figure 2-2. Placement of the three rooms uncovered by the Looters' trenches of structure D-14. (Map by Claude Belanger and Gabriela Dziki 2016).*

## **Unit overview**

### ***Unit 3***

This 2x2 m unit was the first of the 2017 season and was placed at the foot of the east side of Structure D-14. After clearing the collapse, a plaster floor was exposed, which following further investigations seems to have been placed directly on top of bedrock. This matches with the stratigraphy identified by Demaker in Unit 2 (2012), which also encountered bedrock almost immediately below the plaster plaza floor in front of the south side of the staircase.

### ***Unit 4***

This oddly shaped unit, 2x1.4m, was placed on the southern edge of the north eastern looter's trench. The measurements are a result of a tree trunk having fallen from the top of the structure onto the area we wanted to excavate. The west side of the unit abutted the east face of the structure exposed as part of the north eastern looters' trench. The purpose of this unit was to uncover more of the wall with the hope of better defining the architectural form and, based on the previously identified wide terraced staircase, a central doorway. The north edge of a doorway was encountered about 1 meter from the south from northern edge of the unit. Using the newly exposed plaster floor of the fifth terrace step as a guide (based on the profile drawings made in 2011), we followed the cut stones down to the fourth terrace step. A few large ceramic sherds were found in the bend between step 5 and 4.

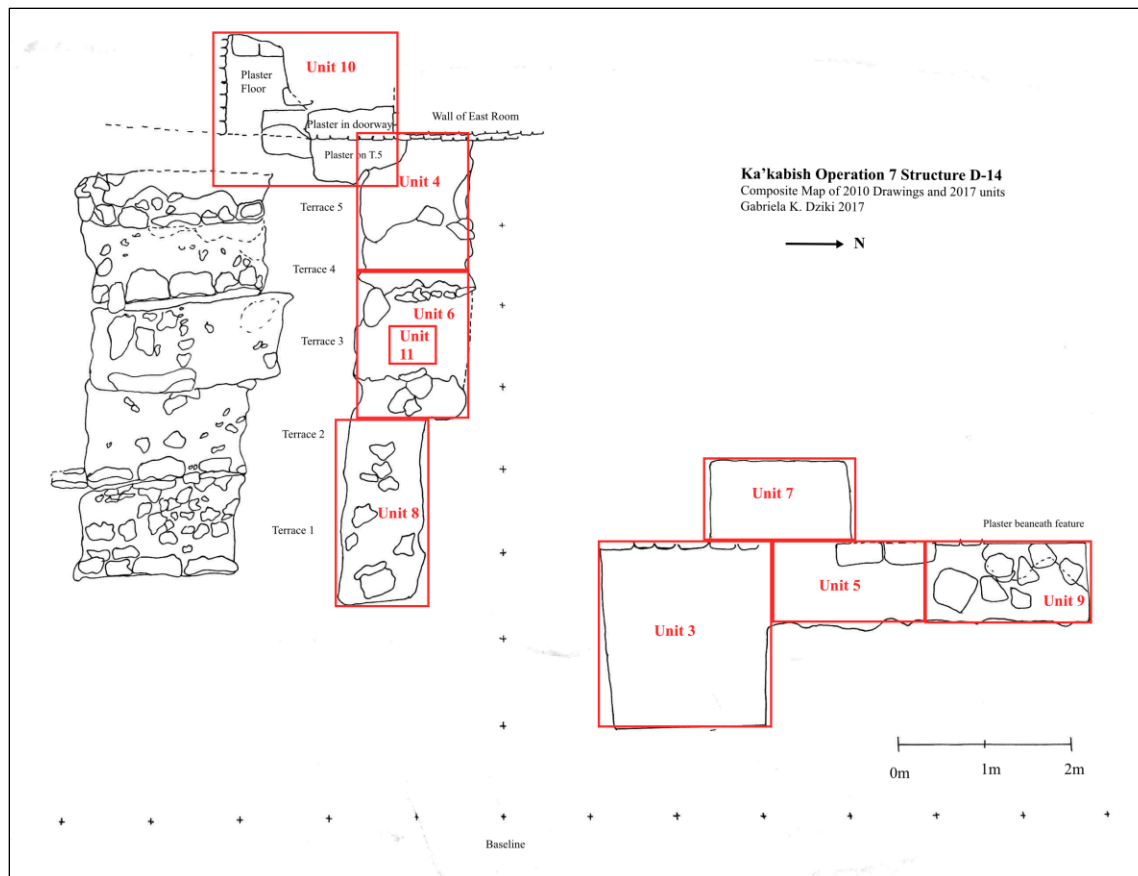


Figure 2-3. The placement of the 2017 units.

### Unit 5

Following the exposed wall of the substructure found in Unit 3, a 2x1m designated as Unit 5 was placed to the north of Unit 3. Although we were expecting to find a continuation of the wall, it appears that it was cut at some point as it disappears in the middle of the unit and reappears in the north west corner. Two large stones were found that appear to have been pushed out alignment with the wall by the weight of the collapse from the top of the building.

### Unit 6

Laying directly east of Unit 4, this unit was designed to find the next terrace staircase step as we moved away from the exposed eastern wall of structure D-14. Another oddly shaped unit, this 2x1.4m unit uncovered the third terrace step, however, the plaster here was poorly preserved due to the collapse of material from the top of the building.

### Unit 7

Placed directly west of Units 3 and 5, this 1.7x1 m unit followed the disappearing wall found in Unit 5 in order to uncover if anything was placed there. Nothing of significance was found, just collapse from the

top of the building. This unit was closed before reaching the plaza floor after a consultation with Dr. David Pendergast. He suggested that the floor was most likely deliberately cut by the Maya in the past.

#### ***Unit 8***

Another unit on the south side of the looters' trench, Unit 8 was opened directly east of Unit 6 and measured 2.1m. The change in measurement results from it having to fit between two trees. The purpose of the unit was to find the first two steps. Unfortunately, these steps were too eroded to detect, likely having been damaged by the falling trees and a the growth of a third tree near where the bottom step should have been.

#### ***Unit 9***

Another unit on the north side of the looters trench, Unit 9 measured 2x1 m and was put directly north of Unit 5. A single course of stones suggests that the wall found in Unit 5 continues for a short distance. An arrangement of large stones in the north end of the unit formed a round feature, designated Feature 1. Several large ceramic sherds were recovered from inside this feature dated to the Late Post-Classic period (Sagebiel this volume).

#### ***Unit 10***

A cache of vessels was identified in the ceiling of a small, side looters' trench that extended off of a longer north/south looters' trench that connected the north-east and south-east trenches. The secondary trenches ran under the front room of Structure D-14, with the smaller side trench extending eastward along the building's primary axis and terminating in front of the main doorway. Unit 10 was opened to follow the doorway visible in Unit 4 as well as to recover the cache of vessels. The plaster floor in front of the doorway terminated in the area above the area where the cache was located. It is possible that a patch may have been installed above the cache once it was interred but it did not preserve as well as the original floor. It is clear, however, that the cache was placed in a cut in the floor, suggesting it was placed there after the D-14 staircase was built. The cache consisted exclusively of ceramic vessels, stacked on top of/inside each other and then broken *in situ*, likely through continued use of the structure. All the vessels date to the Terminal Classic/Early Post-Classic period (Sagebiel this volume).

#### ***Unit 11***

This 0.8x0.8m unit was placed into the third terrace step in order to find ceramics that could help date the construction of the building. Surprisingly, the unit encountered what appeared to be bedrock almost immediately below the surface suggesting that the building incorporated outcrops in the terrain into its design rather than modify the area.

#### ***Plaza Floor***

After the end of the 2016 season, Hurricane Earl hit Northern Belize creating a lot of the trees on site to topple over. One such trees close to the south east corner of Structure D-14 revealed a well-preserved plaster floor. Using a Dumpy Level, we determined that the plaza floor raises 36cm over 19cm towards



the floor found in Unit 3. Suggesting that either there was a step in between that was covered by the forest debris or that there was a slope of 1.89cm every 1 meter.

## **EVALUATION OF THE 2017 FINDINGS**

The 2017 field season and investigations at Ka'kabish Structure D-14 uncovered new information that allows us to gain a better understanding of the site as a whole, and particularly the structures within Group D. Figure 2.3 shows the 2017 excavations as related to the 2016 mapping of the structure as well as the 2011 investigations. The east side of D-14 faces the plaza and had an addition added in the Terminal Classic/Early Post Classic. This is based on the ceramics found in the doorway cache (Unit 10), that Dr. Kerry Sagebiel dated to the time of transition (see Sagebiel this volume).

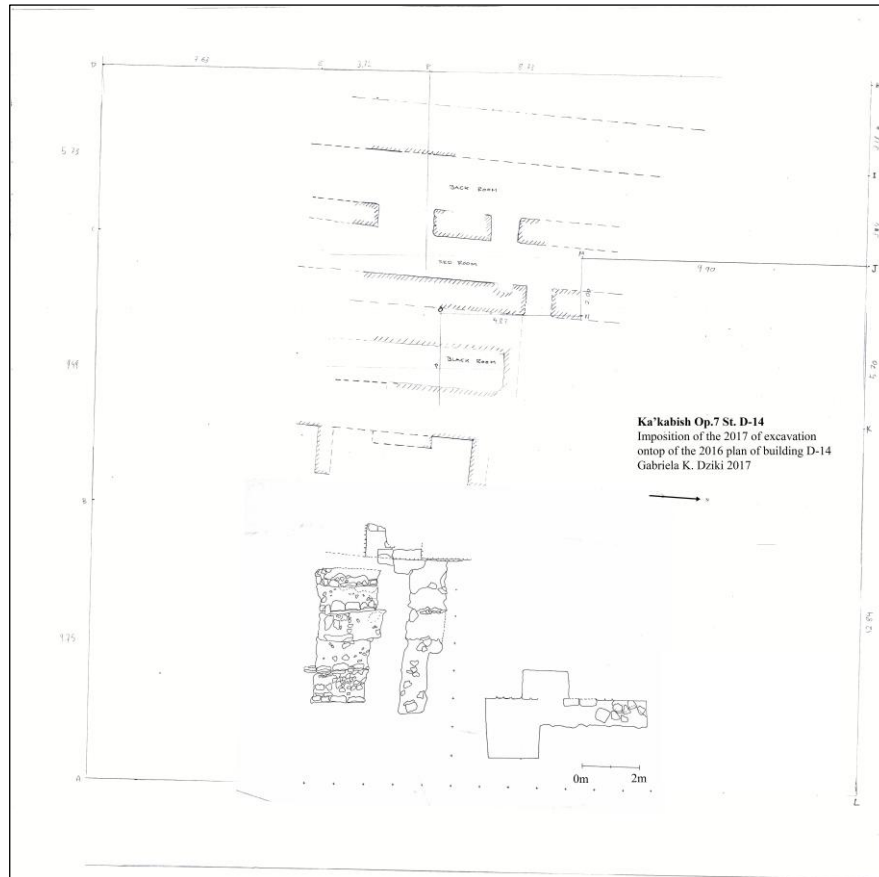
Unit 11 ceramics, those found in the fill of terrace step 3, suggest that the five terrace steps leading up to the structure were built around the same time as the cache was placed. Our findings on Structure D-14 support the on-going evidence that a hiatus occurred at Ka'kabish at the beginning of the Late Classic period (Tepeu 1 and 2), that ended during the Terminal Classic period. The fact that monumental construction was still occurring at Ka'kabish during the Terminal Classic Period when many Classic Maya sites in the Petén were declining, makes it comparable to many other sites in Northern Belize.

One of the main questions of Structure D-14 is whether it is a palace or a temple. Based on the 1995 survey, its position within the site, and exterior appearance, Structure D-14 resembles a temple. According to Rivet (1962: 100), Bishop De Diego de Landa described temples as standing in the centre of towns. This can be used to describe the location of Structure D-14 as it is part of the largest group at Ka'kabish. The exterior pyramidal shape of temples was often thought to reflect the mountains, a place of the elites within the natural world (von Schwerin 2011: 271), and the exterior, earth-covered form of Structure D-14 conforms to this shape. Moreover, Spinden (1913: 98) argues that that residential structures, like an elite palace, are longitudinal multi chambered structures; however, these characteristics are reflected in the interior of D-14.

Benches, an important characteristic of residential rooms (Christine 2001: 293), are argued to indicate throne rooms where the elite conducted their duties (Harrison 1971: 258). Although the Black Room was filled nearly to the top and therefore no bench was found, there are benches present in both the East Room and the West Room. Consequently, while Structure D-14 at Ka'kabish seems to have the exterior form of a temple, it more closely embodies aspects of a palace.

The maps made in 2016 together with the 2017 excavations seem to suggest a possible change in the function of the building from a palace structure in the Classic Period to a temple in the Postclassic. This is largely based on the fact that the shape of the Top Room, where preliminary investigations found Postclassic pottery sherds, seems to resemble a temple structure (Demarker 2012: 39), while the elongated parallel interior rooms, especially the vaulted red room, suggest a palace. The Maya modified their structures instead of demolishing old ones and building new structures from the beginning (Webster 1998: 27). A political or social event was often accompanied by structural modifications.

Therefore, it is possible that when socio-political organisation in the Maya region shifted at the time of transition from the Classic to Postclassic period, the function of the building changed as well.



*Figure 2-4. Map of Ka'kabish Structure D-14 showing the 2017 excavations together with the 2011 drawings and 2016 map by Claude Belanger and Gabi Dziki.*

## REFERENCES

Christie, J.J.

- 2003 Introduction. In *Maya Palaces and Elite Residences An Interdisciplinary Approach*, edited by J. Christie, pp. 1-12. University of Texas Press, Austin.

Demarker, S.

- 2012 Ka'kabish Excavation Report for Structure D-14. In *Ka'kabish Archaeological Research Project (KARP) Interim Report on the 2011 Field Season*, edited by Helen R. Haines, pp.39-48. Report on File with Institute of Archaeology, Belize.

Dziki, G.

- 2017 "Don't judge a mound by its dirt": A study of Structure D-14 at the Site of Ka'kabish, Belize, and its implications at the Time of the Terminal Classic to Postclassic hiatus. MPhil Dissertation, University of Cambridge, UK.

Guderjan, Thomas H.

- 1996 Ka'kabish: Mapping of a Maya Center In *Archaeological Research at Blue Creek, Belize. Progress Report of the Fourth (1995) Field Season*, edited by T.H. Guderjan, W.D. Driver and H.R. Haines, pp. 170-190. St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas.

Haines, H.R.

- 2006 *Report to the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belize Of the June 2005 Reconnaissance of Ka'kabish, Orange Walk District*. Report on File with the Institute of Archaeology, Belmopan, Belize.
- 2008 Causeway Terminus, Minor Centre, Elite Refuge, Or Ritual Capital? Ka;kabish A New Puzzle On The Maya Landscape Of North-Central Belize. *Research Reports in Belizean Archaeology* 5:269-279.

Haines, H.R., A. Gomer, A., and K. Sagebiel

- 2014 "Plant Thou No Roses at My Head": A Discussion Of The Middle Formative period Buried Deposits At Ka'kabish, North-Central Belize. *Research Reports in Belizean Archaeology* 11: 337-346.

Harrison, P.

- 1971 *The Central Acropolis, Tikal, Guatemala: A Preliminary Study of the Functions of Its Structural Components during the Late Classic Period*. PhD. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

McLellan, A. and H.R. Haines

- 2013 Casting a light in the wilderness: The Ancient Maya site of Ka'kabish, northern Belize. *Research Reports in Belizean Archaeology* 10: 187-198.

Rivet, P.

- 1962 *Maya Cities*. 2nd ed. Elek Books Limited, London, UK.

Spinden, H. J.

- 1913 A Study of Maya Art: Its Subject Matter and Historical Development. *Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*, 8. Harvard University, Cambridge, MASS.

von Schwerin, J.

2011 The Sacred Mountain in Social Context. Symbolism and History in Maya Architecture: Temple 22 At Copan, Honduras. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 22: 217-300.

Webster, D

1998 Classic Maya Architecture: Implications and Comparisons. In *Function and Meaning In Classic Maya Architecture*, edited by S.D. Houston, pp. 5-48. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.

## Chapter 3

### The 2017 Excavations of Structure D-10 Operation 15

*by*  
**Angela Craig and Helen R. Haines**

Structure D-10 is one of the longest structures at Ka'kabish, measuring roughly 67 metres in length. This building, rising over 5 metres from the plaza floor, defines the south edge of Group D, the core area of the site. The south side of Structure D-10 is roughly 10 metres high, as this building, like other structures located around the plaza periphery, appears to have been built into, or form part of the plaza wall (Haines 2008).

Excavations at Structure D-10 were initiated in 2015 with the primary focus on establishing a chronology and identifying the sequence of building phases. Work continued in 2016, focused on locating and mapping possible doorways in the north face of the building superstructure. As anticipated, nine doorways were identified in the front of the structure. This pattern is believed to ideologically represent the Nine Lords of the night, who are accordingly associated with the underworld and the south.

The primary focus for the 2017 field season concentrated on continuing to investigate the building phase construction and chronology, with the re-opening of Units 7 and 8 (started in 2015 [Baker 2016]). Due to the central location of these units, and the Maya propensity for locating burials along the primary axis of structures it was hoped that the 2017 excavations would encounter an undisturbed burial that would provide much needed information about the elite occupation at the site. Additionally, four new units (Units 19, 20, 21, and 22) were excavated, with Units 20, 21, and 22 being positioned at the east end of the structure and across the eastern face of the building with the intent of gathering information about the building design and chronology.

#### **UNIT OVERVIEW**

At the end of the 2015 field season, Units 7 and 8 were covered with zinc sheets at the level of the plaster floor of the interior room. These, along with the plaster floor, were covered with plastic sheeting and the entire area was backfilled to a depth of approximately 0.50m. The 2017 field season commenced by removing this backfill along with the plastic and zinc coverings to re-expose the plaster floor and the previous excavation units. Units 7 and 8, which were still open into the building below, provided the starting elevation and parameters for Unit 19.

#### **Unit 19 – Structure D-10-2<sup>nd</sup>**

The first unit excavated in 2017 was Unit 19. This consisted of removing the 1x1m block left between Units 7 and 8 (also both 1x1m units). It was excavated stratigraphically using handpicks and screening all material through 6mm mesh until reaching the closing elevation of Unit 7, which was the top of Structure D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> (Figure 3.1). A difference in the surface of D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> was noted between Units 7 and 19; the surface in Unit 19 had a thin layer of dark soil over the plaster, which was not present in Unit 7,

and the plaster surface in Unit 7 was denser and more compact than that in Unit 19. Ceramic material from Str. D-10-2<sup>nd</sup> dated largely to the Early Classic period, although a few Terminal/Early Post-Classic sherds were found in the plaster surface of the floor. It is possible that these represent a replastering episode of an early room, as no material from this date were recovered from the core of the building (Sagebiel this volume).

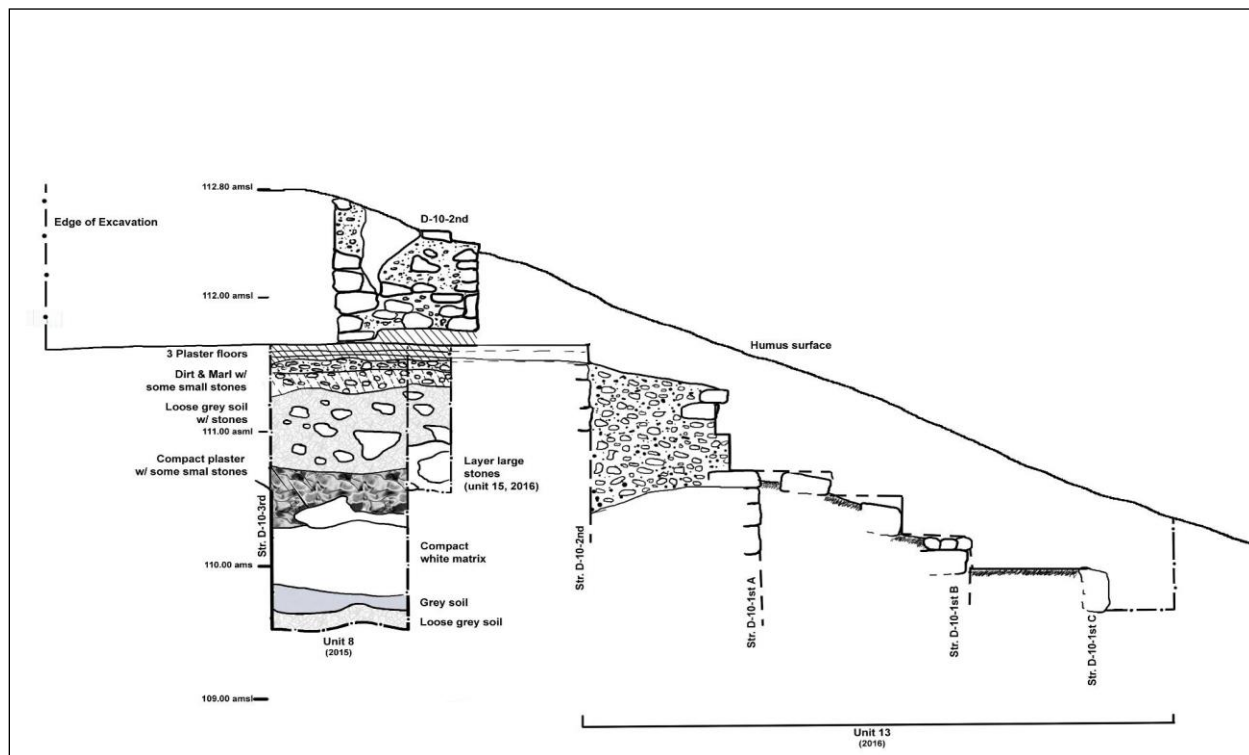


Figure 2-5. Composite profile of Str. D-10 showing three construction episodes (D-10-1st, D-10-2nd, and D-10-3rd) along with two subsequent additions to D-10-1st (B and C) that extended the front of the platform.

### **Unit 7/19 – Structure D-10-3<sup>rd</sup>**

Upon encountering the surface of Structure D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> the Units 7 and 19 were amalgamated into a single unit and excavations continued into the interior of the earlier structure using the same methods employed above. The north wall of the unit was moved 40 cm south to ensure the integrity of the front wall of the Structure D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> would be maintained.

The construction of Structure D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> was found to be significantly different from that of the succeeding Structure D-10-2<sup>nd</sup> (see discussion of Unit 8 below). Beneath a thick layer of plaster and granular aggregate that formed the top of D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> the core of the building consisted of large, loose-laid 40 to 60 cm stones. The nature of the fill created large crevices, impeding excavation and creating concerns for the integrity of the unit. The unit was eventually reduced to a small 50x50cm unit at an approximate depth of 2 metres below the surface of D-10-3<sup>rd</sup>, at which point the unit was closed.

Ceramic material recovered from this structure suggest an Early Classic construction date (see Sagebiel this volume).

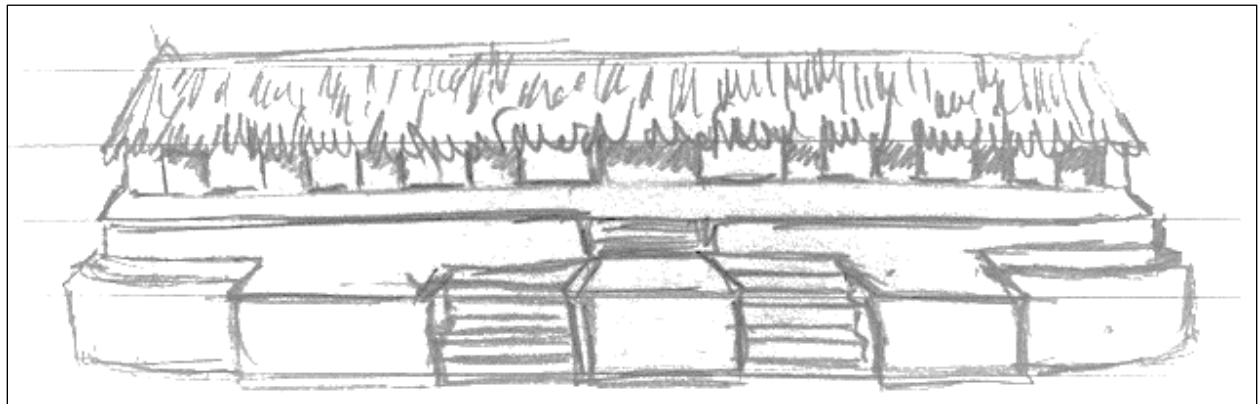
#### **Unit 8 – D-10-2nd**

Unit 8 was reopened in 2017 starting at Level 11, with the goal of following the face of Structure D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> to determine the original height of the building. Level 11 consisted of a thick plaster that yielded an extremely high number of artefacts. The majority of the ceramics from this period date to the Early Classic period, however, a few Formative period Sierra Red and Society Hall sherds were also recovered (Sagebiel 2017 pers. comm.). The unit continued for another metre when it became obvious that the front of the structure was well below the plaza floor identified in Unit 1 in 2015. The unit was closed with the intention of returning to it in 2019 when it could be expanded by creating a trench through the front of the building.

#### **Unit 20 – D-10-1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>**

Unit 20 consisted of a long roughly 14m long by 50cm wide trench excavated across the east face of the structure. It used the looters' trench at the east end of the structure as a starting point and the exposed architecture as a guide. The trench followed what appears to have been the plinth for the room at the top of the substructure. A badly eroded plaster surface, assumed to be the surface of the substructure terrace, formed the bottom of the unit. To control for spatial distribution of artefacts the trench was divided into six roughly 2.5m sections (Labelled A to F).

The trench revealed that contrary to expectations, the penultimate building form did not have a single central staircase. Instead, the structure appeared to have been designed with a large central stair-block that was flanked on the east (and presumably the west) by a staircase (Figure 3.2).



*Figure 2-6. Sketch map of Structure D-10-2nd (Haines 2017) [not to scale].*

The ceramics recovered from this trench date largely to the Terminal and Early Post-Classic period (Sagebiel this volume). Artefacts of note included a large, broken granite metate and mano in the first section of the trench and a shell labret in the second section of the trench. The section the

encompassed the eastern staircase yielded several Early Classic jar rims and one Early Post-Classic Lamanai/Zakpah Orange chalice rim (Sagebiel pers. comm. 2017).

### **Unit 21 and 21A**

Unit 21 was initially a 1x1 metre unit directly to the west of the northeastern looters' trench. It was determined that this unit came down on top of a terrace surface. The unit was extended 50cm to the east, placing it directly in front of the looters' trench, where excavations had occurred in the 2016 field season and uncovered what appeared to be a poorly constructed Post-Classic staircase (Haines 2017). Excavations in this area in 2017 followed the cut stones in front of the looters' trench down, revealing that, as surmised, the Post-Classic addition was constructed abutting, and partially covering, an earlier terrace face.

Unit 21A was a 50cm extension excavated to the north of Unit 21 to help define the possible terrace. Along with identifying the north face of the substructure terrace, this unit also revealed what is the now badly damaged east side of the terrace outset.

### **Unit 22**

A 1x0.5m unit was excavated behind and to the south of the terrace face exposed in Unit 20. The goal of this unit was to try and identify additional sections of the wall seen in the looters trench to the east. However, this unit proved inconclusive.

## **INTERPRETATIONS**

One of the most interesting result of the 2017 field season is the discovery that the configuration of Structure D-10 may have changed significantly over the use-life of the building. The Structure D10-3<sup>rd</sup> encountered in Units 8, 7, and 19, and the wall seen in the east looters' trench and assumed to also be D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> may be separate structures. If this is true, then it is probably that Structure D-10 had four construction phases: the Early Classic building encountered in Units 8, 7, and 19; the wall seen in the looters' trench; the Early Classic penultimate construction that is seen in Figure 3.2; and the final Terminal/Early Post-Classic modification and reoccupation discovered in 2016 (Haines 2017).

It is also probably, based on the length of the final structure that the building may have originally been two structures that were subsumed in the construction of the late Early Classic penultimate range structure. This theory would account for the lack of a central staircase and the presence of the high single wall found on Structure D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> in Unit 8, as the central axis for this structure may be further to the east. Following this theory then the wall seen in the looters' trench that lacks architectural correspondence with the other phases, would be the second interior structure. Unfortunately, there is no way to currently test this theory short of tunneling laterally through the building, something not possible with the current dimension of the unit.

During the 2017 field season we also solved the enigma of where the staircase was located for the penultimate structure. As the central doorway, discovered in 2015, was the widest (Baker 2016) it was assumed that the staircase would be centrally located along the buildings primary axis. However, work



conducted on the central axis at the base of the structure failed to yield any evidence of a staircase. During the 2017 field season we discovered that the penultimate phase of the building appears to have had two staircases flanking a large central stairblock.

Excavation work is expected to continue at Structure D-10 in 2019 with additional clearing of the east staircase and clearing of the front area of the building to better define the possible central stairblock. Once this has been done, it is expected that an excavation trench will be excavated along the central axis to connect the front of the building with Unit 8. This trench will allow us to continue excavations downward to determine with which plaza floor Structure D-10-3<sup>rd</sup> was originally associated.

## REFERENCES

Baker, J.

2016 Initial excavations of Structure D-10 at Ka'kabish. In *Ka'kabish Archaeological Research Project (Karp). Report on the 2015 Archaeological Field Season*, edited by K.L. Sagebiel and H.R. Haines, pp. 36-43. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belmopan, Belize.

Haines, H.R.

2008 *The Spring Mapping Project of the Ka'kabish Archaeological Research Project (KARP)*. Final Report of the 2007 Field Season submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belmopan, Belize.

2017 Structure D-10 Excavations. In *Ka'kabish Archaeological Research Project (Karp). Report on the 2016 Archaeological Field Season*, edited by K.L. Sagebiel and H.R. Haines, pp. 21-30. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belmopan, Belize.



## Chapter 4

### Analysis of Ceramics from the KARP 2017 Field Season

*by*  
**Kerry L. Sagebiel**

During the 2017 field season of the Ka'kabish Archaeological Research Project (KARP), ceramic sherds were recovered from two archaeological operations and four disturbed and looted contexts. Operation 15 on Structure (Str.) D-10 continued work carried out in 2015 (Baker 2016) and 2016 (Haines 2017) on the top of the structure along the final primary axis to uncover the room at the top of the substructure platform and identified earlier architectural sequences. Clearing work was also conducted along the lower front (north face) of the Str. D-10 superstructure from a looters' trench on the east end to the center to uncover the latest architectural phase.

Operation 7 on Str. D-14 continued the clearing of looters' trenches started in 2007 (Haines 2007), and preliminary excavations conducted in 2011 (Demarker 2012), and the comprehensive mapping completed at the end of the 2016 field season by Claude Belanger (see Dziki Figures 1 and 3 this volume). The 2017 excavations were on the east/front of the structure to expose more of the front staircase, originally identified by Demarker (2012), with the idea of locating the central doorway and better defining the architectural form of the final structure. Additional units were placed at the base of the building to the north of the north-east looters' trench to uncover the final architectural phase of the substructure platform.

Collections from disturbed and looted contexts were also made in four areas in 2017: Courtyard K, Str. FA-2, Str. FA-3, and Str. FA-6 to get some indication of when those structures were built and occupied.

#### **METHODS**

Sherds equal to or greater than the size of a United States quarter (ca. 2.5 cm), as well as smaller sherds with diagnostic features (e.g., decoration, appendages), have been collected from all excavated contexts at Ka'kabish. Some special contexts, particularly the chultuns and the "smash and trash" deposit (Operation 8 in the Group D South Plaza), have had 100% of sherds collected. Once in the laboratory, bags of sherds were logged into the log books with their provenience information and checked that they had correct labels and tags. The sherds were washed with plain water (soaking was avoided) and soft toothbrushes, unless fugitive paint or other decoration was present, in which case, they were left alone or gently dry brushed. They were dried on ¼-inch mesh screen along with their associated bags and tags. Once dry, they were re-bagged with new bags and tags as necessary. The sherds were also labeled (for full discussion of laboratory procedures see Gomer and McCollum 2012). The sherds were then ready to be analyzed.

Analysis followed the type/variety/mode method of analysis (Gifford 1976; Sagebiel 2005; Smith et al. 1960). An initial analysis separated the sherds into proposed types and varieties and was used to help date the lots. In 2017, these analyses were conducted by the author. A second, more-intensive analysis

of diagnostic sherds (e.g., rims, bases, handles, painted body sherds) has emphasized attribute analysis, particularly of form and visual paste characteristics. The latter data are still being processed and analyzed by the author.

The renamed ceramic complexes and associated dates for Ka'kabish were presented at the Belize Anthropological and Archaeological Symposium in 2014 (Sagebiel and Haines 2014) and are presented in the table below (Table 4.1). These complexes should be considered working complexes, as they will undoubtedly be revised as further analysis is completed.

COMPLEX	TIME PERIOD	DATES
Mormoops	early Middle Formative	800–600 B.C.
Noctilio	late Middle Formative	600–400 B.C.
Rhogeesa	Late/Terminal Formative	400 B.C.–A.D. 300
Desmodus	Early Classic	A.D. 300–600
Trachops	Late Classic	A.D. 600–750/800
Vampyressa	Terminal Classic	A.D. 750/800–900/1000
Artibeus	Early/Middle Postclassic	A.D. 900/1000–1350/1400
Centurio	Late Postclassic	A.D. 1350/1400–1500
Molossus	Terminal Postclassic/Colonial	A.D. 1500–1700

*Table 2-1. Ka'kabish Ceramic Complexes*

## **CERAMICS FROM STR. D-10**

### **Operation 15: Units 7, 8, and 19**

Unit 19 was a new unit on top of Str. D-10 opened adjacent to Unit 7, which had been opened in 2015. It was excavated down to the lowest previously excavated level of Unit 7 (Level 5) and then they were continued together as Unit 7/19 through Levels 6 and 7. Unit 8, which also was originally opened in 2015, was reopened to its last level (Level 10) and continued with Levels 11, 12, and 13. As discovered in previous excavations (Haines 2017; Haines and Sagebiel 2017; Sagebiel 2016), the upper levels consisting of topsoil and collapse and, possibly, the last construction phase (D-10-1<sup>st</sup>) contain sherds of types dated to the Terminal Classic and Early Postclassic across Northern Belize (Chase 1982; Fry 1987; Graham 1987; Sagebiel 2005; Walker 1990) (Table 4.2). These include Terminal Classic types that probably continued into the Early Postclassic such as: Achote Black, Cubeta Incised, Tres Mujeres Mottled, Tinaja Red, Subin Red, “Lamanai” polychrome, Cambio Unslipped, Lemonal Cream (similar to Savinal Cream at Nohmul), Dumbcane Striated, and types dating to the Early Postclassic such as “Lamanai” orange (similar to Taak Orange-red at Nohmul and Zakpah Orange at Cerros), Red Neck Mother, and an early Postclassic red (similar to Kik Red at Nohmul). Common forms include plates with widely flared rims or “chalices” on pedestal bases; pyriform vases on pedestal bases; bowls with carinated or angled sides and direct rims with square lips or exteriorly bolstered rims; slipped jars with

small, folded, triangular-shaped rims or small bolstered rims; unslipped jars with short, collared rims; striated and red-slipped jars with everted rims and thick, round lips; and striated comals. Slips are often thick, slightly waxy, and may have some patchy mottling, which gives them a “slatey” appearance. These same types were found in the upper levels of excavations on the east half of the front of Str. D-10 (Units 16 [2016] and 20, 21, and 22 [2017]) (Table 3) and in the upper three levels of the test unit in the plaza directly in front of Str. D-10 (Unit 1 [2015]).

UNIT	LEVEL	CERAMIC DATE	NO. OF SHERDS
7	Reopened	Classic	3
19	1	Terminal Classic	40
19	2	Terminal Classic/ Early Postclassic	137
19	3	Preclassic? (small eroded sample)	18
19	4	Early Classic	76
19	5	Early Classic	160
7/19	6	Early Classic	86
7/19	7	Early Classic	14
8	11	Early Classic	283
8	12	Early Classic	24
8	11/12	Early Classic	69
8	13	Early Classic	32

*Table 2-2. Ceramics from 2017 excavations on top of Str. D-10*

To date, the lower levels and the bulk of the architecture of Str. D-10 (D-10-2<sup>nd</sup>) date to the Early Classic, including material from the 2017 excavations beginning in Level 4 of Unit 19 and Level 5 of Unit 7 and continuing through Level 7 of Unit 7/19 (Table 2). This accords with previous excavations. Unit 8 (2015 and 2017) dates to the Early Classic from Level 4 to Level 13. Unit 10 Level 4 (2015) is Early Classic and Unit 15 Levels 2 through 6 (2016) are Early Classic. In the plaza unit directly in front of Str. D-10 (2015), Unit 1 Level 4 is Early Classic. Small test units placed in the east half of Str. D-10 in 2017 also hit Early Classic levels (Unit 21 Level 3 and Unit 22 Level 4). The Early Classic types are typical Petén types such as Aguila Orange, Balanza Black, Early Classic red, Early Classic cream, Triunfo Striated, Quintal Unslipped, and Dos Arroyos Orange-polychrome. The only variation from the typical Petén repertoire is the use of Puletan Red-and-unslipped jars and small unslipped “crud ware” bowls.

The only Late Preclassic levels found associated with Str. D-10 so far are the lower levels of the plaza Unit 1 Levels 5–9. Late Preclassic types are those typical of the Maya Lowlands and Northern Belize, including Sierra Red, Society Hall Red, Polvero Black, Flor Cream, and Chicago Orange.

UNIT	LOT (UNIT 20)* LEVEL (UNITS 21 & 22)	CERAMIC DATE	NO. OF SHERDS
20	1123	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	55
20	1124	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	129
20	1136	Postclassic	50
20	1137	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	37
20	1138	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	45
20	1149	Postclassic	71
21	1	Indeterminate	8
21	2	Indeterminate	15
21	3	Early Classic	76
21A	1	Postclassic	80
22	2	Indeterminate	4
22	3	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	41
22	4	Early Classic	11

*Table 2-3. Ceramics from 2017 excavations on east half of Str. D-10*

*\*Unit 20 was a narrow clearing excavation with a single level, therefore, lots were assigned ca. every 2.5m*

## **CERAMICS FROM Str. D-14**

### **Operation 7: Units 3 through 11**

Operation 7 consisted of clearing excavations of little depth to uncover the latest phase of architecture. A Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic cache (Cache 1) was encountered in front of the building, just outside the central door along the primary axis, which had been missed by looters. An odd, circular feature (Feature 1) that dates to the Late Postclassic was found near the front base of the building.

Because they are from shallow contexts, the ceramic samples from Str. D-14 are small and eroded. Most of the ceramics are Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic, although some Early Classic sherds were found on the surface, likely from interior structure fill that was hit by the looters (Table 4.4). The Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic ceramics consist of the same types described for the latest levels of Str. D-10 above.

Feature 1, an odd depression surrounded by with in Unit 9 in front of Str. D-14 (Dziki this volume), likely dates to the Late Postclassic as a sherd from a “torch”-style jar with a wide, slightly concave rim (Chase and Chase 1988, Pendergast 1990), along with sherds of coarse red paste, including gouged-incised sherds from a vase and sherds from a collared jar were recovered from inside this feature.

UNIT	LEVEL	CERAMIC DATE	NO. OF SHERDS
3	1	Early Classic	11
3	3	Indeterminate	1
4	1	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	10
4	2	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	73
5	1	Early Classic	3
5	2	Late/Terminal Classic	3
5	3	Postclassic	30
6	3	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	27
7	3	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	52
8	1	Early Classic	2
8	2	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	139
8	4	Late/Terminal Classic	4
9	2	Indeterminate	15
9	3	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	123
9	3 Feature 1	Late Postclassic	195
10	1	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	13
10	2 Fill	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	18
10	2 Cache 1	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	39, including 6 vessels
10	3	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	9
10	5	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	8
11	1	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic	8
11	2	Indeterminate	4

*Table 2-4. Ceramics from 2017 excavations of Str. D-14*

Cache 1 was found in Unit 10 Level 2, in a pit dug into the top staircase step (Terrace 5) immediately in front of the doorway along the primary axis. The cache was first identified in the ceiling of a small looters' trench that ran underneath the room. It is surmised that the looters did not attempt to retrieve the cache as it manifested itself as a stack of broken sherds. The cache was excavated from above as part of Unit 10. Although not completely clear, it appears that the floor may have been opened to place the cache and then patched, as no plaster was found above the cache area.

Cache 1 contained six broken vessels stacked one-on-top-of-the-other. These vessels all date to the Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic period and are described in the following table (Table 4.5). The “Lamanai” types are similar to types found at Lamanai that have yet to be given a formal type name.

VESSEL NO.	TYPE	FORM	DIAMETER CM	HEIGHT CM	DESCRIPTION
1	Lamanai polychrome	Dish	50	10	Slightly round walls, direct rim, beveled-in lip, 0.5 cm high ring base, interior design around rim may be a prowling jaguar alternating with geometric designs
2	Lamanai orange	Chalice	32	9.5	Slightly round walls, everted rim, round lip, pedestal base height is 4.0 cm, total vessel height is 9.5 cm
3	Lamanai red	Dish	42	Indeterminate	Outflared walls, everted rim, round lip, 1.0 cm high ring base, black fire clouds similar to Daylight/Darknight, possible kill hole in center
4	Cameron Incised	Bowl	15	11	Round sides, direct rim, square lip, lightly incised line just below exterior rim
5	Tinaja Red	Vase	15	19.25	Pyriform, small exteriorly bolstered rim, 1.15 cm high ring base
6	Torro Gouged-incised	Vase	11	Indeterminate	Pyriform, small exteriorly bolstered rim, cross-hatched scroll and volute design with some empty cartouches; See Figure 1

*Table 2-5. Ceramics from 2017 excavations of Str. D-14, Cache 1*





*Figure 2-7. Torro Gouged-incised Vessel 6 from Cache 1*

#### **CERAMICS FROM DISTURBED AND LOOTED CONTEXTS**

##### **Courtyard K, Str. FA-2, and Str. FA-6**

A small number of sherds was recovered from recently disturbed (Courtyard K) and looted contexts (Str. FA-2 and Str. FA-6). The Courtyard K collection consisted of Early Classic and Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic sherds. Str. FA-2 and Str. FA-6 collections were all Early Classic sherds (Table 4.6). The Early Classic dates from the latter two buildings accord with the larger number of sherds collected from two looters' trenches in nearby Str. FA-3, which will be discussed in more detail below.

UNIT	LEVEL	CERAMIC DATE	NO. OF SHERDS
Courtyard K	Surface	Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic, Early Classic	8
Str. FA-2	Looters' backdirt	Early Classic	12
Str. FA-6	Surface	Early Classic	3

*Table 2-6. Ceramics from 2017 collections from disturbed and looted contexts*

### **Str. FA-3**

The two looters' trenches in Str. FA-3, one on the north side and one on the south side, appear to have gone through different phases of the building and displaced many sherds from structure fill. The types of sherds from each trench may indicate that the South Looters' Trench hit an earlier construction phase, as it contains Early Classic sherds along with a few Late Preclassic sherds, whereas the North Looters' Trench backdirt consisted of Early Classic sherds and Tepeu 1 sherds. Tepeu 1 dates to the early part of the Late Classic ca. A.D. 550–700 in the Petén and has, so far, been extremely rare at Ka'kabish, as it is at many Northern Belize sites, such as La Milpa (Sagebiel 2005). The difference in the number of sherds recovered from each trench (288 in the South Trench vs. 81 in the North Trench) is likely skewing the sample, but it is still worth comparing the two to begin to tease out possible chronological differences. A comparison of the diagnostic sherd types found in each trench's looters' backdirt is provided in the table below (Table 4.7).

### **DISCUSSION**

The 2017 excavations continued to clarify the ceramic sequence of Ka'kabish and the chronology of the site as a whole. It is becoming clearer that much of the standing architecture at Ka'kabish consists of Early Classic construction, likely over Late Preclassic and Middle Preclassic components that are largely untouched by archaeological excavations. There still seems to be a hiatus from ca. A.D. 600–900, or Tepeu 1 and 2, although the sherds from the North Looters' Trench in Str. FA-3 suggests that there may be some construction that occurred during Tepeu 1, but that it may be largely confined to the north end of the site where we have conducted little excavations so far.

Many of the structures in site center have a Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic final architectural phase or refurbishment that coincides with the Terclerp and Buk phases at Lamanai (Graham 1987). So far, these contexts have contained ceramics that are a mix of typical Petén Terminal Classic types and Early Postclassic types recognized throughout Northern Belize. There are Late Postclassic ceramics at Ka'kabish but to date they have not been associated with architectural phases and are primarily from chultuns and Feature 1 in front of Str. D-14.

TYPE AND DATE (DIAGNOSTIC SHERDS)	SOUTH TRENCH (LOT 1147) RIMS/TOTAL SHERDS	NORTH TRENCH (LOT 1148) RIMS/TOTAL SHERDS
Late Preclassic		
Sierra Red	2/2	
Early Classic		
Puletan Red-and-unslipped	10/15	
Quintal Unslipped		1/1
Triunfo Striated		1/1
Aguila Orange	60/164	7/22
Nitan Composite	1/1	
Aguila/Balanza Dichrome	1/5	2/2
Boleto Black-on-orange	2/4	
Dos Arroyos Orange-polychrome	14/28	2/3
Early Classic red	1/5	0/18
Early Classic cream	1/2	0/2
Yaloche Cream-polychrome	6/6	
Balanza Black	1/10	0/4
Lucha Incised	1/2	
Pucte Brown	1/1	
Tepeu 1		
Alexanders Unslipped	1/1	3/3
Tepeu 1 red		3/6
Saxche Orange-polychrome		2/2
Juleki Cream-polychrome		1/1
Paixban Buff-polychrome (see Figures 2 and 3)		1/1
<b>Total Sherds (Diagnostic and Non-diagnostic)</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>81</b>

Table 2-7. A comparison of the diagnostic sherd types found in the north and south looters' trench backdirt at FA-3



*Figure 2-8. Paixban Buff-polychrome, exterior*



*Figure 2-9. Paixban Buff-polychrome, interior and profile*

## REFERENCES

Baker, John W.

- 2016 Initial Excavations of Structure D-10 at Ka'kabbish. In *Ka'kabish Archaeology Research Project (KARP) Report on the 2015 Archaeological Field Season*, edited by Kerry L. Sagebiel and Helen R. Haines, pp. 36–43. Report on file with the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belize.

Chase, Arlen F., and Diane Z. Chase

- 1988 *Investigations at the Classic Maya City of Caracol, Belize: 1985–1987*. Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute Monograph 3. Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute, San Francisco, California.

Chase, Diane

- 1982 The Ikilik Ceramic Complex at Nohmul, Northern Belize. *Ceramica de Cultural Maya* 12:71–81.

Dermarker, Susan

- 2012 Ka'kabish Excavation Report for Structure D-14. In *Ka'kabish Archaeology Research Project (KARP) Interim Report on the 2011 Field Season*, edited by Helen R. Haines, pp. 39–48. Report on file with the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belize.

Fry, Robert E.

- 1987 The Ceramic Sequence of South-Central Quintana Roo, Mexico. In *Maya Ceramics: Papers from the 1985 Maya Ceramic Conference*, edited by Prudence M. Rice, and Robert J. Sharer, pp. 111–122. BAR International Series Vol. 345(i). British Archaeological Reports, Oxford.

Gifford, James C.

- 1976 *Prehistoric Pottery Analysis and the Ceramics of Barton Ramie in the Belize Valley*. Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 18. Harvard University, Cambridge.

Gomer, Alice, and Siobhan McCollum

- 2012 Details of 2011 Laboratory Procedures. In *Ka'Kabish Archaeological Research Project (KARP) Interim Report on the 2011 Field Season*, edited by Helen R. Haines, pp. 25–28. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belmopan, Belize.

Graham, Elizabeth A.

- 1987 Terminal Classic to Early Historic Vessel Forms from Belize. In *Maya Ceramics: Papers from the 1985 Maya Ceramic Conference*, edited by Prudence M. Rice, and Robert J. Sharer, pp. 73–98. BAR International Series Vol. 345(i). British Archaeological Reports, Oxford.

Haines, Helen R.

- 2007 *The 2007 Spring Mapping Project of the Ka'kabish Archaeological Research Project (KARP)*. Report on file with the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belize.

- 2017 Structure D-10 Excavations. In *Ka'kabish Archaeology Research Project (KARP) Report on the 2016 Archaeological Field Season*, edited by Kerry L. Sagebiel and Helen R. Haines, pp. 23–32. Report on file with the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belize.

Haines, Helen R., and Kerry L. Sagebiel

- 2017 Overview of the 2016 Field Season. In *Ka'Kabish Archaeological Research Project (KARP) Report on the 2016 Archaeological Field Season*, edited by Kerry L. Sagebiel and Helen R. Haines, pp. 54–63. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belmopan, Belize.

Pendergast, David M.

- 1990 *Excavations at Altun Ha, Belize, 1964–1970*, Volume 3, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

Sagebiel, Kerry Lynn

- 2005 Shifting Allegiances at La Milpa, Belize: A Typological, Chronological, and Formal Analysis of the Ceramics. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Arizona, Tucson.

- 2016 Analysis of Ceramics from the KARP 2015 Field Season. In *Ka'Kabish Archaeological Research Project (KARP) Report on the 2015 Archaeological Field Season*, edited by Kerry L. Sagebiel and Helen R. Haines, pp. 70–83. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, NICH, Belmopan, Belize.

Sagebiel, Kerry L., and Helen R. Haines

- 2014 Never Ending, Still Beginning: A New Examination of the Ceramics of Ka'Kabish, Belize. Paper presented at the Belize Archaeology Symposium 2014, San Ignacio, Cayo, Belize.

Smith, Robert Eliot, Gordon R. Willey, and James C. Gifford

- 1960 The Type-Variety Concept as a Basis for the Analysis of Maya Pottery. *American Antiquity* 25(3):330–340.

Walker, Debra Selsor

- 1990 Cerros Revisited: Ceramic Indicators of Terminal Classic and Postclassic Settlement and Pilgrimage in Northern Belize. Ph.D. dissertation, Dedman College, Southern Methodist University.



## Chapter 5

### Report on Recent Looting and Land Clearing Activities

*by*  
**Helen R. Haines**

Ka'kabish has regrettably been the site of on-going looting since the early 1980s when the site was logged for mahogany by the Loscott family (Belanger pers. comm. 2016; Pendergast 1991). The site is now possibly one of the most looted sites in Belize with every building hosting at least one, if not multiple trenches. Moreover, due to its present location spanning the San Filipe/Indian Church Road Ka'kabish is an even easier target for looting with new trenches being dug between each field season. In the interim between the 2016 and 2017 field seasons four buildings in Group F were discovered to have been looted (FA-2, FA-3, FA-4, and FA-6).

The area around the site has also been severely impacted, although here the cause is the swift and on-going clearing of land around the site for agricultural and ranching purposes by the rapidly expanding Mennonite communities of Shipyard to the north and Indian Creek to the south. In one of these recently cleared areas to the northwest of Ka'kabish a newly identified courtyard was found. This courtyard (Group K) is the eleventh group to be associated with Ka'kabish.

#### **RECENT LOOTING IN GROUP F**

Although most of the temple structures in Group F, particularly those on the acropolis had been looted earlier (i.e., F1-2, FA-5, FA-6, FA-7, FA-8 and FA-9), the remaining buildings on the acropolis had been only minimally impacted, or in the case of FA-2 and FA-3 left relatively untouched.

Structure FA-2 had a new trench the entered from the northwest corner and angled southeast into the building. The trench removed a giant slice out of the building and went through a beautiful plaster floor at the interior end. It appears that the looters' found and followed the floor along into the trench then, when the reached the interior of the structure, they dug a large round hole through the floor (Figure 5.1).

Structure FA-3 had trenches on both the north and south sides. The trench on the south side of the structure resulted in a giant slice being removed from the building, with a future tunnel leading down into what may be the platform. The trench on the north side is more in the nature of a deep pit near the top of the structure that exposed two high walls of a narrow room (Figure 5.2). The south wall possessed an odd outset portion.



*Figure 2-10. Looters' trench on south side of Structure FA-2*



*Figure 2-11. Looters' pit on top-south side of Structure FA-2; a) wall on north side of pit; b) wall on south side of pit.*



Structure FA-4 also had two new trenches near the top of the building. These trenches exposed two sides of an odd room. A small rectangular opening approximately 40x40 cm connected the north and south rooms at the level of the first floor, which had been broken through by the looters (Figure 5.3a). This opening appeared to have been filled at some point (Figure 5.3b), possibly when the room was filled and capped by another floor that is visible in the top of Figure 5.3a.



*Figure 2-12. Photos of looters' trench in the south side of Structure FA-4; a) photo showing trench and both floors; b) photos showing close up of portal with part of fill remaining.*

Additionally, there are two trenches in Structure FA-6. One in the south-west corner near the plaza floor looks completely new, while the second trench on the west fact near the north side may be an older trench that has recently been deepened. Numerous pieces of broken red-painted stucco were recovered from the back fill of the south-west trench, however, this appears to have come from the fill of the building and was not damaged caused by the looters.

Ceramics were collected from the FA-3 north trench, the FA-3 south trench, and the FA-2 trench. All the material came from piles the looters had left at the side of the trenches. While this material can not be used to securely date any of the various construction phases it is interesting to note the presence of Late Classic Tepeu 1 material in the collection from FA-3 (Sagebiel this volume). Material from this period has been notably absent to date at Ka'kabish. This absence of material from this period occurs at other sites in Northern Belize including Lamanai to the west (Sagebiel 2005) and, to a lesser extent, Lamanai to the east (Graham 2004; Pendergast 1981).

Significantly more material was collected from the south looters' trench, however, this is likely due to the nature of the diggings. The south trench penetrated into the core of the building, while the smaller, north trench appears to have cleared a filled, possibly partially collapsed room.

## **COURTYARD K**

Located on the south side of the road 1.4 km to the west of Ka'kabish was a recently cleared, and previously undocumented courtyard complex. Approximately six structures sat on a roughly 2 metres high platform. The tallest structure, located along the north-east edge, was a roughly 3 metres high pyramidal mound. Immediately to the east, and slightly touching Mound 1, was a second mound roughly 2 metres in height and relatively square in form. On the south side of the platform were two small roughly 1.5-metre-high rectangular structure, one at each end. The west side of the platform had a third small 1.5-metre-high rectangular structure. The sixth structure was located in the north-west corner and was a low 1-metre high rectangular structure. Two possible additional mounds were spotted as a conjoined pair further to the southwest but were not investigated due to the impassible nature of the recently burned fallen trees. All of the structure heights have been impacted by the clearing activities.

A collection of ceramics was taken from a scatter detected at the base of the first mound where it joined the platform surface. This was the only area of ceramics noted in the courtyard. As with most of collections from Ka'kabish, the ceramics collected consisted of Early Classic and Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic sherds (Sagebiel this volume) and lacked any noticeable Late Classic material.

## **SUMMARY**

As was made apparent by the gentleman found cutting trees at the site for fire, despite the fact that the land is privately own plots, the site represents one of the last areas of forest resources for the inhabitants of San Filipe and they feel at liberty to trespass in order to obtain the resources they require. This acquisition seems to extend to looting as well. The previous owner of the south group (Sr. Blanco) encountered men from San Filipe in the main plaza of Group D excavating where in previous years we had found caches of jade in the bedrock (Locket-Harris 2016) and, when he questioned their presence, they claimed they were working for Dr. Haines, indicating that the looters are both well informed and bold. Regrettably, very little can be done at this current time to stop the looting at Ka'kabish, beyond public education about the importance of the site, which, based on the looters encountered by Sr. Blanco may be a double-edged sword, and collecting and documenting both the material they expose and artefacts they leave behind.

The clearing around the site also is regrettably unstoppable. Grants have been applied for to conduct LiDAR surveys of the area but thus far have been unsuccessful. However, efforts on this front will continue, with another SSHRC application planned for October 2018.

## REFERENCES

Graham, E.

- 2004 Lamanai Reloaded: Alive and Well in the Post-Classic. *Research Reports in Belizean Archeology* vol. 1: 223-241.

Lockett-Harris, J.J.

- 2016 Sacred Space, Ancestors, and Authority: New Evidence of Developing Middle Formative Period Socio-Political Complexity from Ka'kabish, Northern Belize. Master Thesis, Department of Anthropology, Trent University, Peterborough.

Pendergast, D.M

- 1981 Lamanai, Belize: Summary of Excavation Results, 1974-1980. *Journal of Field Archaeology* vol. 8: 29-53.

- 1991 And the Loot Goes On: Winning Some Battles, But Not the War. *Journal of Field Archaeology* 18(1):89-95.

Sagebiel, Kerry Lynn

- 2005 Shifting Allegiances at La Milpa, Belize: A Typological, Chronological, and Formal Analysis of the Ceramics. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Arizona, Tucson.