

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SALVAGE AND RESTORATION AT COROZAL TORRE AND NARANJITO, PETÉN

Varinia Matute
Raúl Noriega

Keywords: Maya archaeology, Guatemala, Petén, Corozal Torre, Naranjito, Quemada Corozal, restoration, looting

Guatemala is a land rich in archaeological relics, spread throughout the entire national territory. In certain areas concentrations are larger, and range from small residential settlements and modest ceremonial groups, to massive cities such as Tikal, Naranjo, Mirador, Río Azul and many others. Petén could be placed among the regions with the largest concentration of archaeological sites, most of which have not been documented so far, while the presence of abundant additional examples lost in the dense forest or within plots and rural establishments throughout the territory, still remain to be discovered (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Location of the area of study on a general map.

The Instituto de Antropología e Historia, through the “Archaeological Sites from Northeastern Petén Protection Program” is currently conducting works at three monumental sites –Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo-; in addition, the organization of the Project includes other components, such as an Intersite Program and a Salvage Program. Here, we shall refer only to the results achieved to this day by the Salvage Program. The primary purpose of this effort is to create a regional coverage of the built patrimony, by documenting sites and buildings, and by assessing the different degrees of deterioration to further come forth with an intervention proposal, be it for the completion of preventive conservation works, or else for accomplishing permanent interventions that will help stabilizing the buildings. To this day, the Salvage Program has recorded over 100 archaeological sites, with schematic maps that record looting trenches and damages suffered by the visible architecture and a modest photographic record (Figure 2).

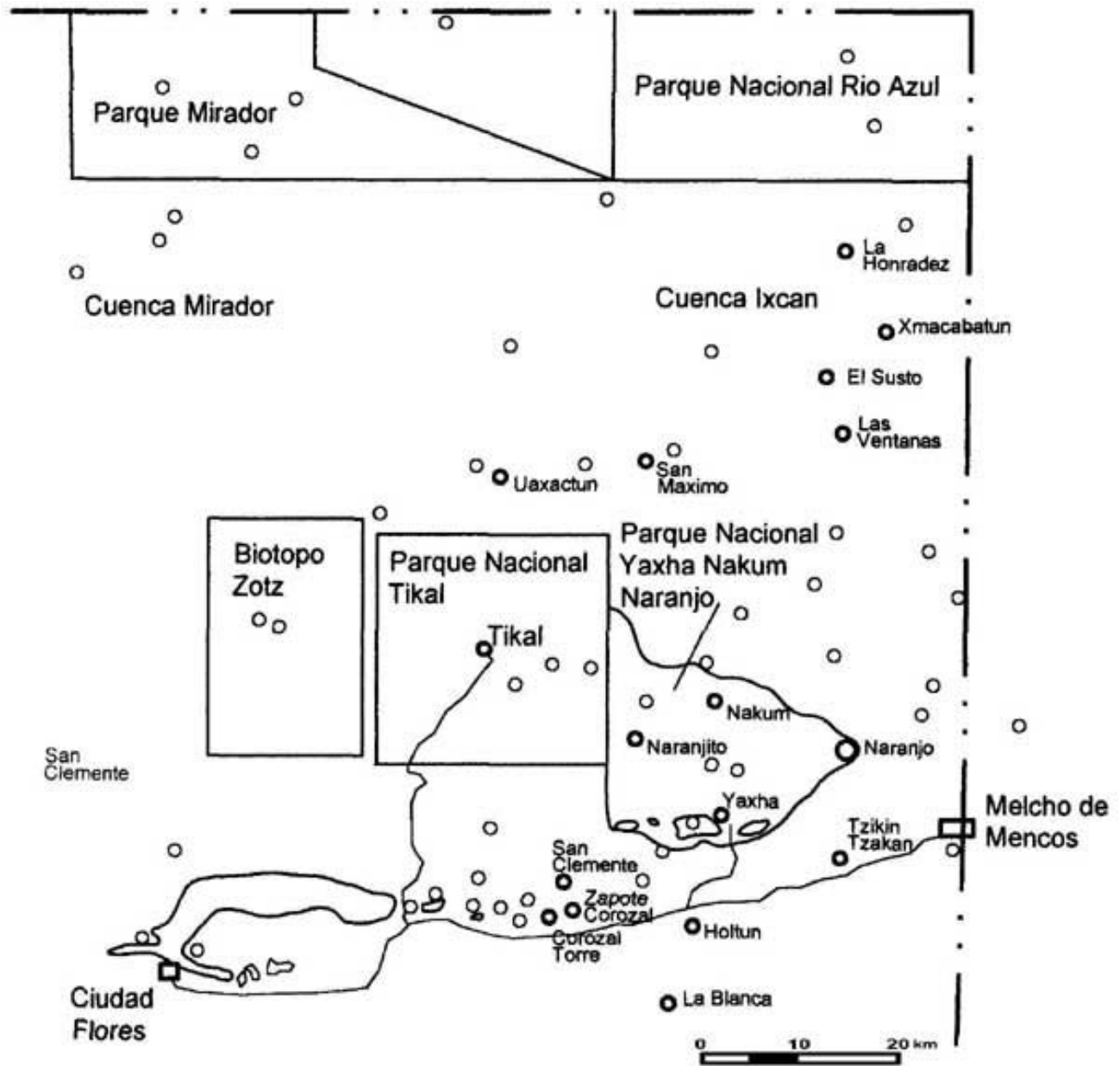


Figure 2. Area of study showing the location of archaeological sites with exposed architecture.

The Salvage Program has accomplished conservation efforts at different sites, like Naranjito, Quemada Corozal, Corozal Torre, La Blanca, San Clemente, and Tzikin Tzakan, among others. The majority of such activities were limited to the placement of temporary bracings and vegetation control. However, there are sites where works accomplished went beyond mere prevention activities, like Naranjito, Corozal Torre and Quemada Corozal, Holtun, Ixtinto, La Pochitoca and others.

NARANJITO

This archaeological site is located within de Yaxha-Nakum-Naranjo National Park, at coordinates N 17° 07.71' and 89° 30.15' (Mayer 1999), in the close vicinity of the southeast apex of the Tikal National Park. The site still has exposed architecture that risks collapse, and the architecture involved includes vaults, some crest remains and walls; in addition, there is a Ballgame, more than a single Acropolis, and two causeways. The site was looted throughout, and the vegetation present, trees mostly, are causing severe damage to the visible architecture (Figure 3).

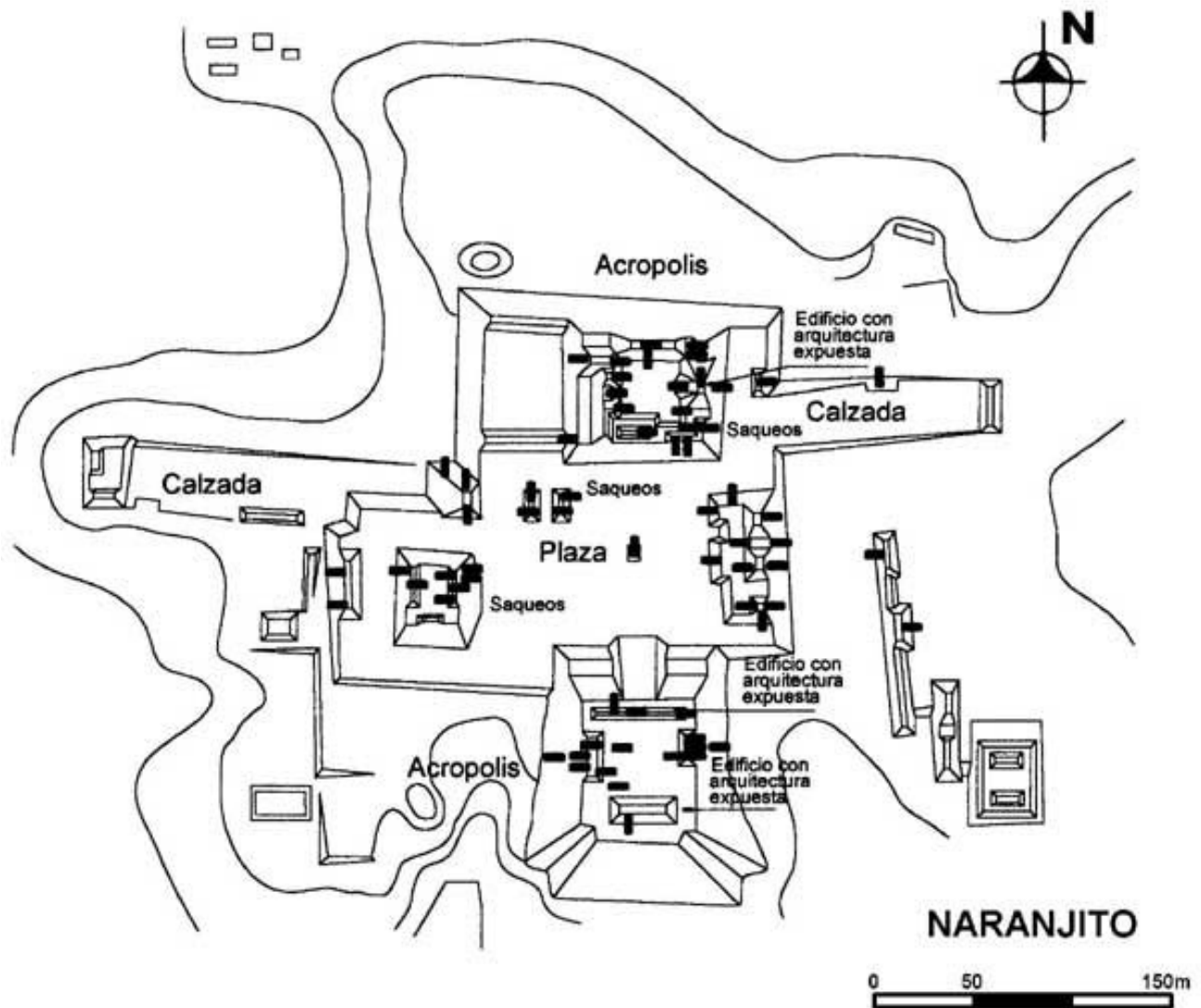


Figure 3. Plan view of the archaeological site of Naranjito, showing the location of the looted areas.

NARANJITO

The project initiated interventions at this site through the Salvage Program in 1994, 1995, 1999, and 2003. The initial activities accomplished at the site comprised: the elaboration of a first schematic map, followed by works of basic archaeological investigation that included the documentation of lootings (a work accomplished by Rosa Maria Chan) and the first vegetation control works. In the year 2003, the salvage program completed 95 % of the backfilling of the looting trenches, and the vegetation control at the site, all actions that will be of help to slow down the irreversible deterioration process.

QUEMADA COROZAL

The site is located within a parcel 8 km north of the village of El Zapote. It has scarce visible architecture, and only one wall is seen at the back side of a building, with a Group E type Complex and a Ballgame. This site has been severely looted with trenches, tunnels, and pits, and the very limited portion of its exposed preserved architecture is quite deteriorated (Figure 4). The project initiated activities at this site in 1995 with monitoring activities. Monitoring continued in 1996 and 1997, but it was only until 2004 when direct interventions were conducted on the buildings, with archaeological research works to recover information from looting trenches and tunnels (see Paulino Morales, this volume), to later backfill the lootings found at the site, using the same material originated in the lootings.

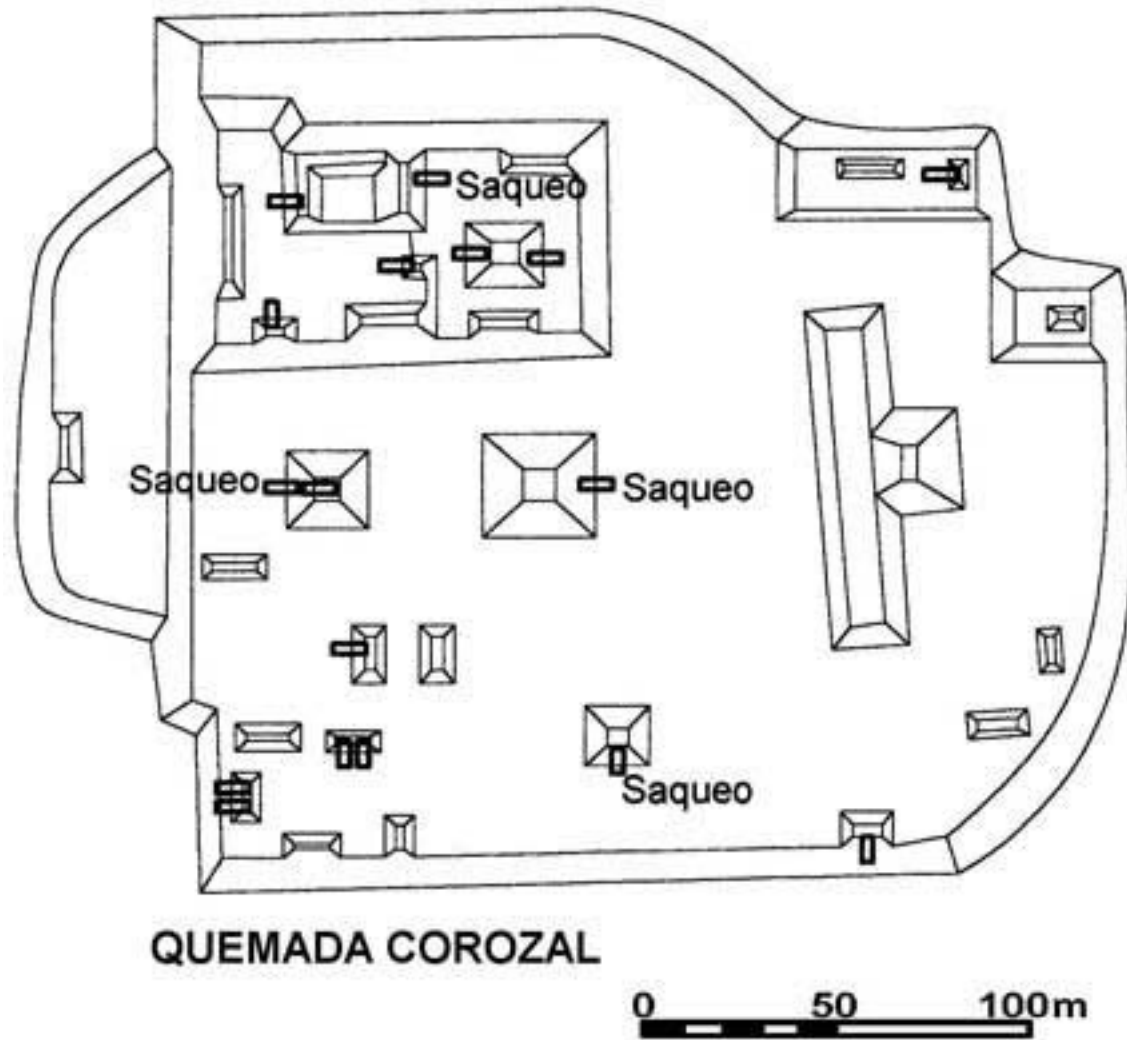


Figure 4. Plan view of the archaeological site of Quemada Corozal, showing the location of looted areas.

COROZAL TORRE

Just like Quemada Corozal, this site is located 8 km away from the village of El Zapote, and is one of the most representative sites of the Salvage Program; there, restoration works were conducted on one of the buildings. This is a site of small dimensions known as Corozal Torre, a name derived from its major building described by local inhabitants like a tower, as this is the impression caused by this building at first sight. However, the construction is a temple type building of which only the back wall still remains, with relief works on the cornice.

The site had been completely looted, with clear indication that the looters found at least two tombs, one within the main building (The Tower), and the other within the building located south of the main one, both with its funerary niche very clearly defined. The only

building with exposed architecture is the one known as The Tower, with serious damage that includes the loss of volume in the basal support, the formation of cracks in the walls caused by the mechanical broadening action of roots inside the walls, as well as the loss of the lintel on top of some sort of niche still preserved on its west face.

The Salvage Program first visited the site in 1991. In 1995, a vegetation control was conducted at the temple, and the first schematic plan of the site was drawn; damage monitoring continued in 1997 and 1998, and the first drawings of the main building were elaborated in 2000. In 2003, the first conservation works were completed in a three-month period of time, two of them devoted to archaeological investigation, and one to restoration works.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION AT COROZAL TORRE

Research conducted at the site was made within the scopes of salvage archaeology. According to this, the survey was completed and the architecture exposed by the looting trenches was documented; sections of mounds and buildings were drawn, and materials were recovered both from the looting trenches and test pits for dating purposes.

THE SETTLEMENT

The site has a total of 16 buildings, 12 in the middle area adjacent to four *chultuns*, and four structures and one *chultun* in the close periphery of the north and south borders. The central area consists of five patios. In Patio 1, to the south, there are two temples on the east side and a low, large platform. Patio 2 consists of two structures, a rectangular one on the northeast side, and another one in the shape of a T, on the southeast side; this patio is at the same level of Patio 1. Patio 3 is located north of Patio 1, on a foundation that raises it above the level of the first. A structure in the shape of an “L” to the south, and another, quadrangular one to the north, compose the complex. Patio 4 is located to the east of Patio 1, raising it above its level. It is composed of one structure to the west and one structure to the north. To the east of Patio 4 is Patio 5 on an additional elevation, composed of one structure to the north, one to the east and yet another one to the south.

The unevenness of the patios confers a special character, and reflects the esthetic used by the Maya architects who designed this site. The excavations revealed these to be natural elevations of the ground. All of the structures were erected on the bedrock, with the exception of those found in Patio 3, as it was its foundation –which presented sub-structures- which was built on the bedrock. The architectural scheme noticed the superficiality and unevenness of the bedrock for building purposes, and took advantage of the limestone outcrops. In several cases, the rock was carved to accommodate the buildings (Figure 5).

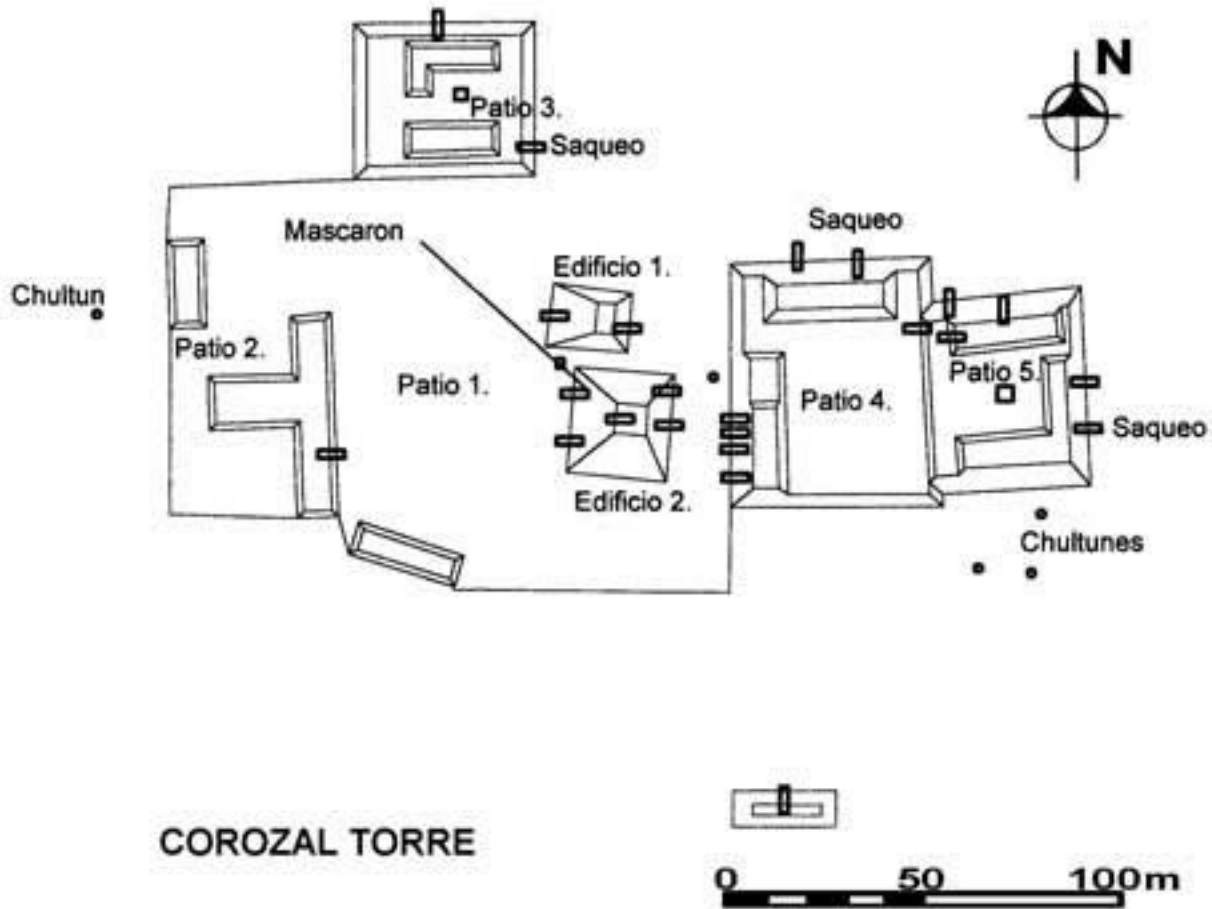


Figure 5. Plan view of the archaeological site of Corozal Torre, showing the location of the looted areas.

LOOTING TRENCHES-TUNNEL

Ten out of the 25 looting trenches were investigated, given the quality and volume of the information they revealed: one trench opened in The Tower, two in Temple 2, two in the foundations of Patio 3, three in Building 2 of Patio 4, and two in Building 1 of Patio 5. The general average dimensions of the looting trenches are 5 m long and 1 m wide. These illegal excavations exposed different construction stages. As was mentioned earlier, the west looting trench of The Tower and one of those located on the east side of Temple 2, presented a looted funerary vault.

FUNERARY CHAMBERS

Tomb 1, found inside The Tower, is a chamber 3.05 m long, 0.87 m wide, and 1.65 m tall, with a height of 1.35 m from the floor to the soffit. Looters penetrated the vault through the west wall, where it was observed that the bottom had been carved in the limestone (Figure 6). When the tomb was emptied, the materials mixed down to a depth

of 1.20 m were recovered. From then on, there was a matrix of light gray, fine earth, which was not removed by the looters. This level yielded abundant obsidian and flint flakes, obsidian eccentrics, one carved spindle made of a yellow, crystallized stone (dating to the Late Classic period), two types of seeds, and very tiny, undefined bone fragments, in addition to a green stone hatchet found in the middle section of the trench, apparently left behind by the looters. The central area of the tomb's floor presented a cylindrical hole with a 0.25 m diameter, and a depth of 0.15 m, carved in the bedrock, as well as an additional rectangular hole which probably served as a cache. A sample of the inner matrix was taken, which probably contained organic material, while more flint and obsidian flakes, as well as seeds were recovered.

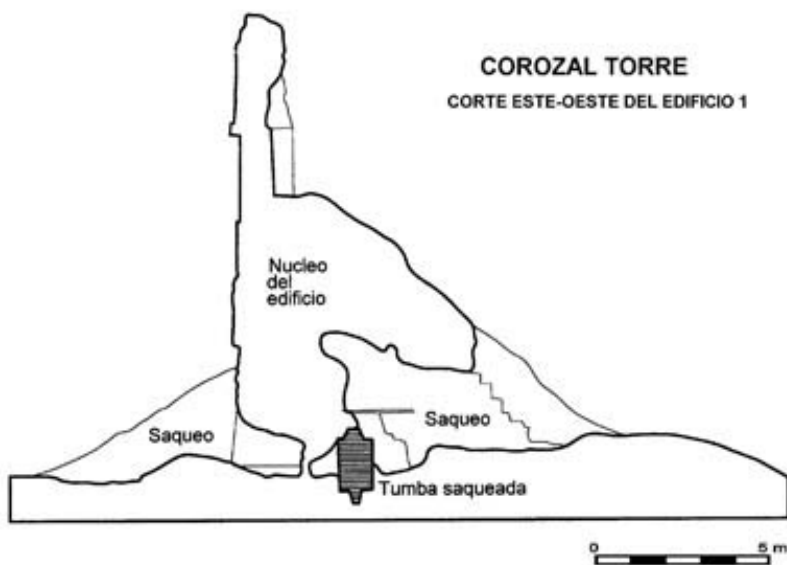


Figure 6. East-west section of Building 1, showing the location of the looted tomb.

Tomb 2 was located inside Temple 2, at the end of the second looting trench on the east side. It is 3 m long, 1 m wide and 1.52 m tall, with a height of 1.10 m from the floor to the soffit. The spring line of the soffit showed marks of the hands that fixed the mortar that gave shape to the vault. Like in the previous one, its bottom part was carved in the bedrock. The final 0.10 m of light gray, fine earth inside the funerary chamber were not touched by the looters, and the following materials could be recovered in situ: sherds, an obsidian eccentric, obsidian and flint flakes, malacological material (fresh water snails) and seeds, in situ. Small bone fragments were recovered, including 23 skull fragments, 12 eroded fragments of long bones, three proximal phalanxes of the hand, one fragment of the distal epiphysis of a proximal phalanx, one distal phalanx, two heavily eroded tarsuses, one fragment of the distal epiphysis of a metatarsus, three proximal phalanxes of a foot, and undefined fragments.

Both tombs seem to have had exceptional materials, now entirely out of context. The body of the individual buried there was laid on thick layers of flint and obsidian flakes, in

addition to other precious artifacts. The funerary culture of the site seems to have had a complex richness.

TEST PITS AND MATERIALS

A test pit was excavated in each one of the patios, with the exception of Patio 2, and a pit at the beginning of the second looting trench, to the east of Temple 2. The latter was the only one practiced at the beginning of a looting, because when the trench was cleared, no bedrock level was found, like in the others. The larger pits, almost 3 m deep, were those of Patios 3 and 5, that is, the more elevated spaces. The pits opened in Patio 1 and 4 were less than 1 m deep. No formal stucco floors were identified in the patios, though there were layers of probable levelings. Stucco floors and mix levelings were present in the construction of the buildings.

The material obtained from the excavations was abundant and varied, with a total of 2721 sherds, approximately 518 fragments of lithic material, including grinding stones, obsidian and flint flakes, obsidian eccentrics and general cut stones, approximately 81 small bone fragments, ten elements of phytologic materials (seeds), 49 elements of malacological material (fresh water snails), and one green stone artifact.

The ceramic analysis for chronology purposes, completed through the collaboration of Bernard Hermes, yielded interesting perspectives on the site; however, a thorough investigation is required in addition to this salvage research, to draw any specific conclusion.

Torre Corozal seems to be mostly a site of the Late Classic period, when the constructions visible today were built, and its occupation continued in the Terminal Classic period. However, the finding of materials corresponding to the Postclassic period on the surface of The Tower suggests probable visits to the site during this time span. One interesting thing is the finding of material corresponding to the Protoclassic period in Patio 3, encouraging us to go deep into the study of the area. The early material dating to the Late Preclassic period was found in the context of construction refills.

However, material corresponding to the Late and Middle Preclassic periods were found in the context of an artificial, cylindrical cavity with 0.85 m in diameter and a depth of 1.84 m carved in the bedrock, located behind the first wall of the west looting trench of Building 2, in Patio 4. On the east side of this cavity, a small canal also carved in the rock was found, with dimensions of 0.48 m wide and 0.48 m deep, and an approximate exposed length of 0.30 m. The cavity was refilled with a matrix of gray earth with large and middle-sized stones, mixed with sherds and malacological material: 25 *Pachychilus larguillerti* and 11 *Pomacea flagellate* snails, both fresh water species identified thanks to the collaboration of Zoila Calderón. At a depth of 1.40 m, the ceramic corresponds to the Late Preclassic period (lot 8), while the remaining 0.44 m contained materials dated to the Middle Preclassic period, the earliest date for the site. The cavity probably worked

as a well for the storage of fresh water for the first settlers of the area, when most of the buildings visible today had not yet been erected.

FAÇADES DECORATION

Together with the tombs and the water well, there are two additional features that have drawn our attention. While investigating the routing of a looting tunnel that crosses Temple 2, a mask that looters had broken into pieces to get out of the structure was found. It was part of the last construction of the building, and was located on the west façade. When the tunnel was backfilled, it was carefully covered with fine earth and a wooden panel, awaiting the forthcoming intervention of the site.

The frieze in the outer part of the east wall on the cornice of The Tower constitutes the other interesting feature. It depicts three characters seated on a probable throne with the appearance of an Earth Monster; there is a character on each corner, and the other one is in the middle section. Because of their attires, headdresses and ear flares, they probably were elite members. The one with the best state of preservation was that of the southwest corner; he seems to be holding an object in his hands, his left arm on the upper part of the object and his right arm as a support.

GENERALITIES

In sum, the salvage intervention at Torre Corozal allowed for bringing into light the small settlement composed by two temples, four residential groups, four *chultuns* in the central area, one structure with a *chultun* on the north end, and three more structures on the south end. It would suggest a main ceremonial area surrounded by groups that housed high ranking people, who probably also watched over the access to the site by means of sentry boxes located in the main accesses. This is not the only site in the area, the others being La Quemada, Zapote Corozal and San Clemente. Future research will provide information on the links with one another and on the role played by Torre Corozal during the Late Classic period.

Following the archaeological investigation, the Salvage Program undertook interventions for the conservation of the main building. The work was focused on the structural stabilization of the still existing architecture, so as to delay for a few more years its gradual deterioration. The interventions accomplished in the building comprised the backfilling of two looting trenches on the east-west axis; a funerary niche was found in one of them. The supporting foundation of the temple was liberated to observe the springing line of the walls and use them as a base for re-wedging the lost volume. Wall cracks were filled and the lost lintels above the niche were replaced, as well as the lost volume on top of them. The looting trenches were 100 % backfilled, and vegetation control works were carried out throughout the site.

This region has countless of small sites, which nonetheless are interesting and rather important: sites like Zapote Corozal with remains of exposed architecture, poorly preserved and looted, like the majority of them. Many of them are located within plots, and it is practically impossible to conduct any kind of activity to stop their deterioration. The salvage program will go on trying to work to offer as much protection as possible, in the attempt to salvage an area that gathers such a wealth of both information and cultural patrimony.

Figure 1 Location of the area of study on a general map.

Figure 2 Area of study showing the location of archaeological sites with exposed architecture.

Figure 3 Plan view of the archaeological site of Naranjito, showing the location of the looted areas.

Figure 4 Plan view of the archaeological site of Quemada Corozal, showing the location of the looted areas.

Figure 5 Plan view of the archaeological site of Corozal Torre, showing the location of the looted areas.

Figure 6 East-west section of Building 1, showing the location of the looted tomb.