

**QUADRANGLE A-19:  
A RESTRICTED ARCHITECTURAL COMPLEX  
AT THE EPICENTER OF NARANJO, PETÉN**

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The remains of a prehispanic city covered by the jungle were discovered in 1905 by Teobert Maler (1908), who made it known to the world through a unique description in which he made special emphasis on the site-planning, architecture and monuments built in ancient times. Since then and up to now, Naranjo has drawn the attention of scholars and amateurs particularly interested in the sculptural works, the dynastic history and the grandeur of the urban center.

Two distinguished visitors conducted important works of archaeological documentation at the site. With three visits accomplished during the 1920's, Sylvanus Morley (1938) may be attributed the nomenclature now in vigor in regard to structures and monuments, which he organized in Groups A, B, and C. Later, between the end of the 1960's and the beginning of the 1970's, Ian Graham (1975, 1978, 1980) created a detailed record of the sculpted monuments and discovered Group D, located to the north of the Main Plaza. Since 1931, the archaeological site of Naranjo was declared National Prehispanic Monument (IGN 1981); and it is now a part of the Yaxha-Nakum-Naranjo National Park, occupying the east end section of it (Figure 1).

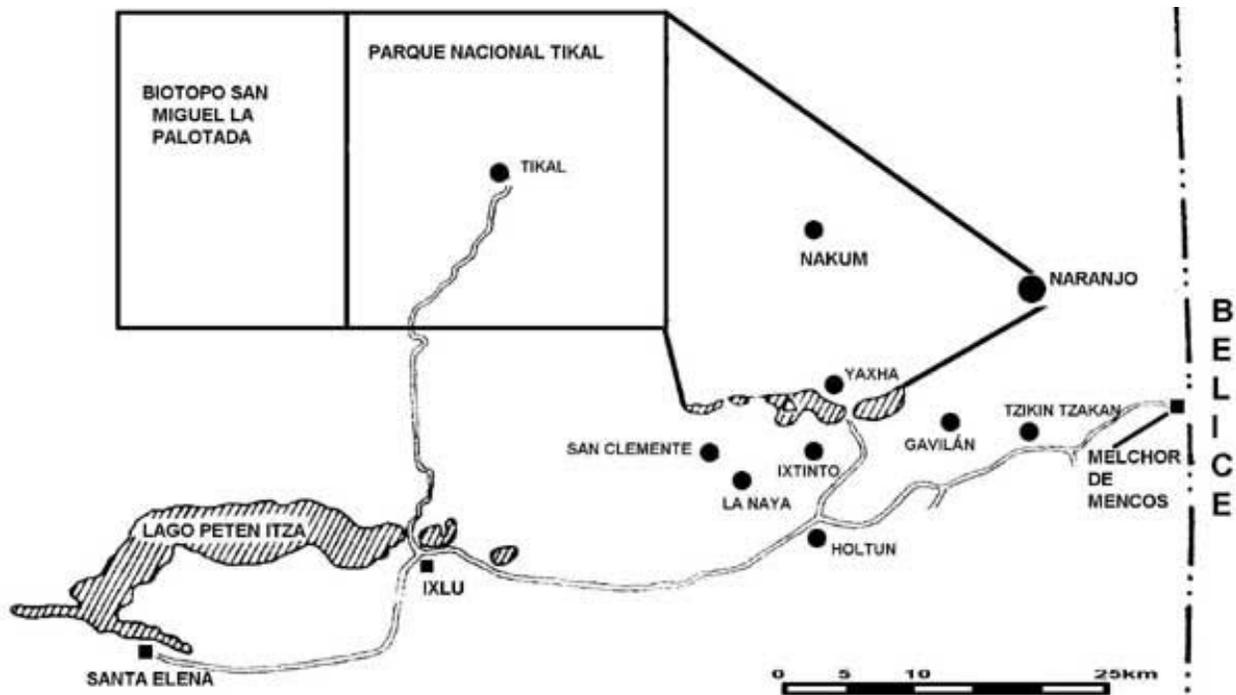


Figure 1. Location of Naranjo and other sites within the region (Fialko *et al.* 2003).

Unfortunately, Naranjo has been the victim of a systematic looting that caused the destruction of most of the sculpted monuments, with over 2000 m<sup>3</sup> of illegal excavations represented in more than 150 looting trenches opened throughout a four-year span (Fialko *et al.* 2002, 2003). The first stage of archaeological investigations at Naranjo was initiated in 2002 and continues up to date, although circumscribed to salvage activities aimed at documenting the cultural evidence revealed by the lootings, in order to gain knowledge on the evolution processes and the architectural sequence of the looted structures. The conservation and salvage works are being conducted by the IDAEH, through PROSIAPETEN, with funds graciously granted by the Development Bank of Germany (KFW).

## QUADRANGLE A19

This architectural complex is located right in the epicenter of the site, to the north of the Central Acropolis and adjacent to the Plaza, to the west. Because of its location, it is possible to argue that this complex was highly significant and used only by a restricted group of individuals. The complex was penetrated nine times by looting trenches, four of the trenches were opened in Palace A22, one tunnel in A24, one trench in A25, two additional trenches in A26, and a last tunnel in A19. Platforms A23 and A29 are the only ones that remained free of looting (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Location of Quadrangle A19 in the epicenter of Naranjo (Graham 1975, with modifications).

The group has been identified, technically, like a variable of the Plaza 2 Pattern, thoroughly investigated by Becker (1971, 1979, 1986, and 2003). Quadrangle A19 consisted of a patio surrounded by vaulted palaces, platforms and shrines located over a large artificial and relatively elevated ground. The interior dimensions of the patio were of 29 m from north to south, and 23 m from east to west. The north section was occupied by Palace A22, Platforms A23 and A29 were located to the northeast, the east end was delimited by Oratory A24, Palace A25 was located to the south, Palace A26 to the west, and on the northwest corner, crowning the complex, was Temple A19, whose name was used to identify the group.

Two access stairways were recorded, both combining masonry construction with modifications in the limestone. The first one, on the west sector, connected the platforms associated to the plaza with Palace A26, prior to walling up the access documented in the central chamber. The second stairway was located on the southern sector of the complex, and was extendedly used as a main access during most of the occupation of the group, until Palace A25 was built at a later stage, closing the patio of the quadrangle.

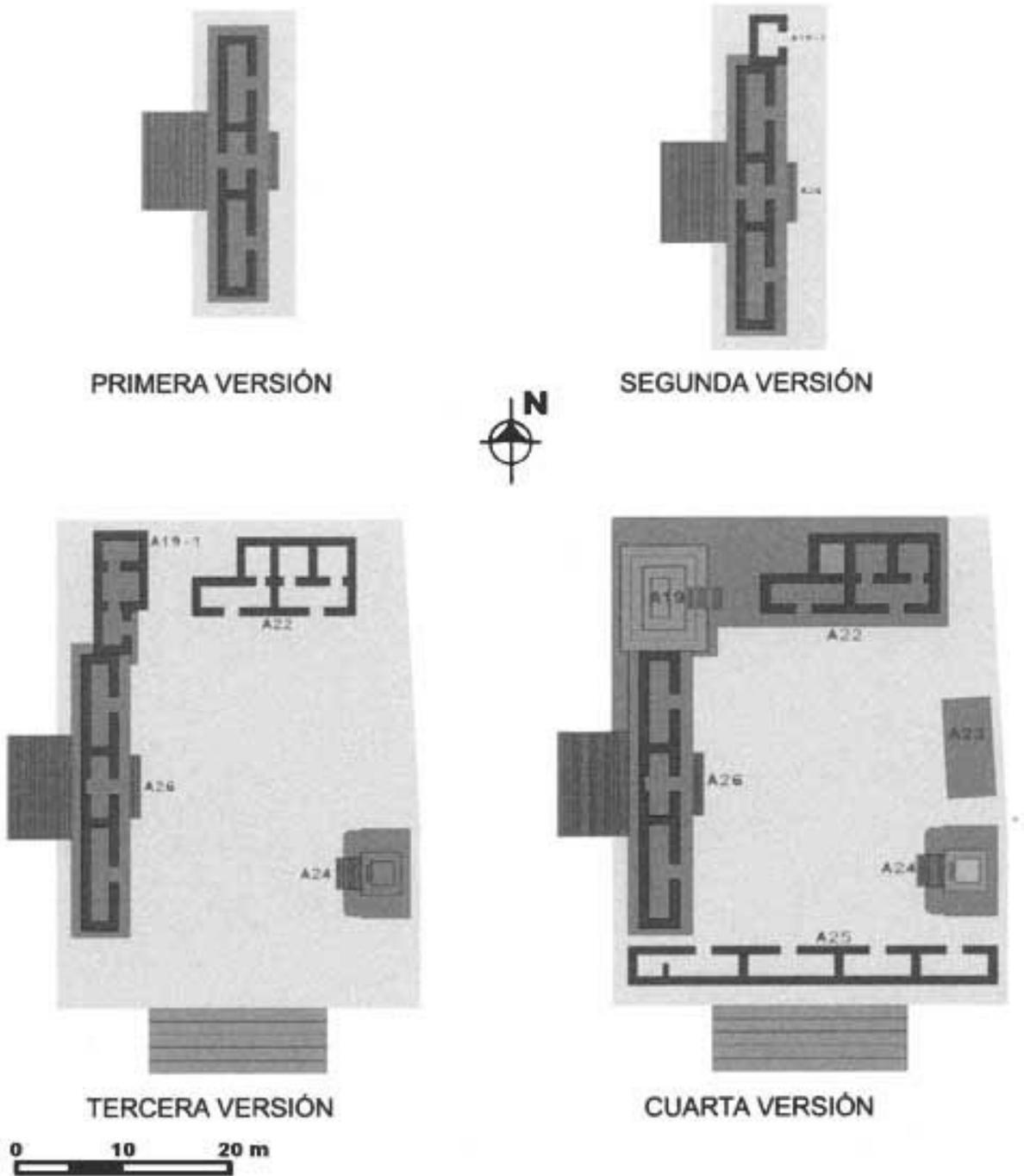


Figure 3. Architectural evolution of Quadrangle A19.

There is ground to argue that the complex was built on an ancient quarry of construction material, which was readapted and leveled to support the architectural group. Thanks to the complementary excavation, it was possible to define at least five versions of the inner patio. Apparently, it originated in the west sector, where up to six stucco floors on a thick layer of construction refill were identified. Up to this time, the quadrangle itself

was non-existent. Later, construction works were undertaken in the north sector, both in Palace A22 and Temple A19-1, together with the construction of Oratory A24, thus creating a nuclear group opened to the south.

Finally, and in association with the last floor of the plaza, the construction of Palace A25 and Platform A23 were initiated, thus closing the patio on its four sides. Corresponding to this span, only two accesses to the patio were recorded, one in the form of a hallway between Palaces A25 and A26, and an additional one on the northeast corner (Figure 3). With the reoccupation of the complex in the last span recorded, Platform A29 was built on the northeast corner, as well as a bench attached to the north façade of A25, emphasizing even more the restricted nature of the group.

### QUADRANGLE A19: ARCHITECTURAL EVOLUTION

As previously noted, the group achieves an outstanding architectural complexity, where the restricted character of the group is easily observed; though now, the different stages this group saw since it was founded will be defined.

#### FIRST VERSION (Figure 4)

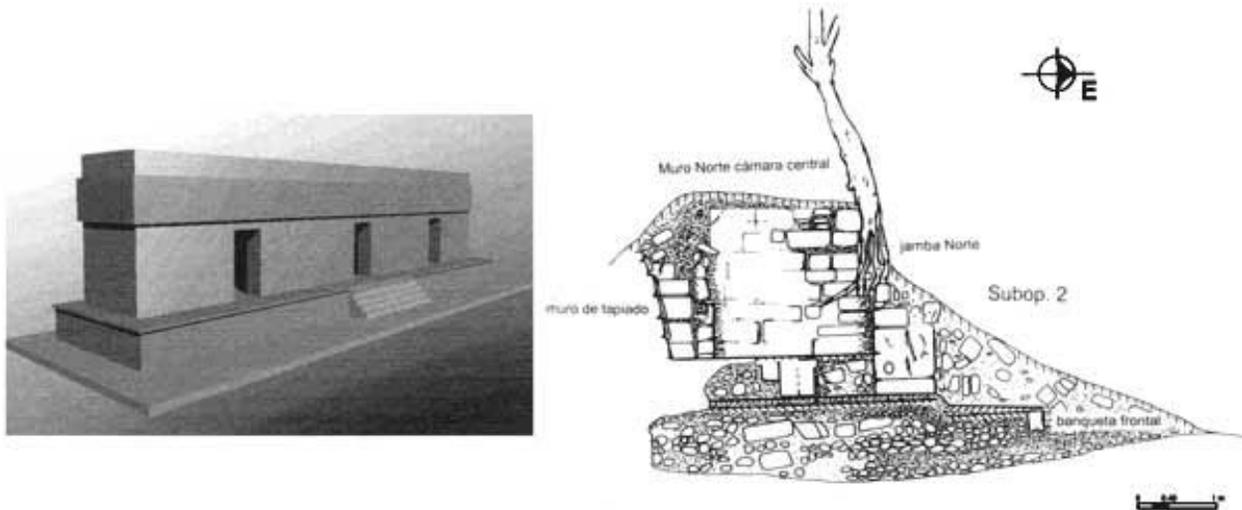


Figure 4. First architectural version of Quadrangle A19.

The architectural complex was initiated with the construction of a vaulted palace with a north-south orientation identified as A26 and dating to Tepeu 1, based on the ceramic evidence recovered. Only the central chamber could be examined, because the two looting tunnels that destroyed the structure had been opened precisely there. According to the morphology of the mound, it was possible to define three longitudinal chambers that rested on a platform with a landing of 1 m and a height of 1 m. The central chamber at that time featured two symmetrical accesses on the east and west façades, respectively, which allowed walking from the West Plaza to the quarry area, after using an outset stairway that allowed access to the level of the palace. During the first

architectural version of the complex, administrative activities related to the acquisition of raw materials for construction works may have possibly taken place there, both because of the location as well as the time span, since this period shows precisely the decrease and remodeling of the site's epicenter.

### SECOND VERSION (Figure 5)

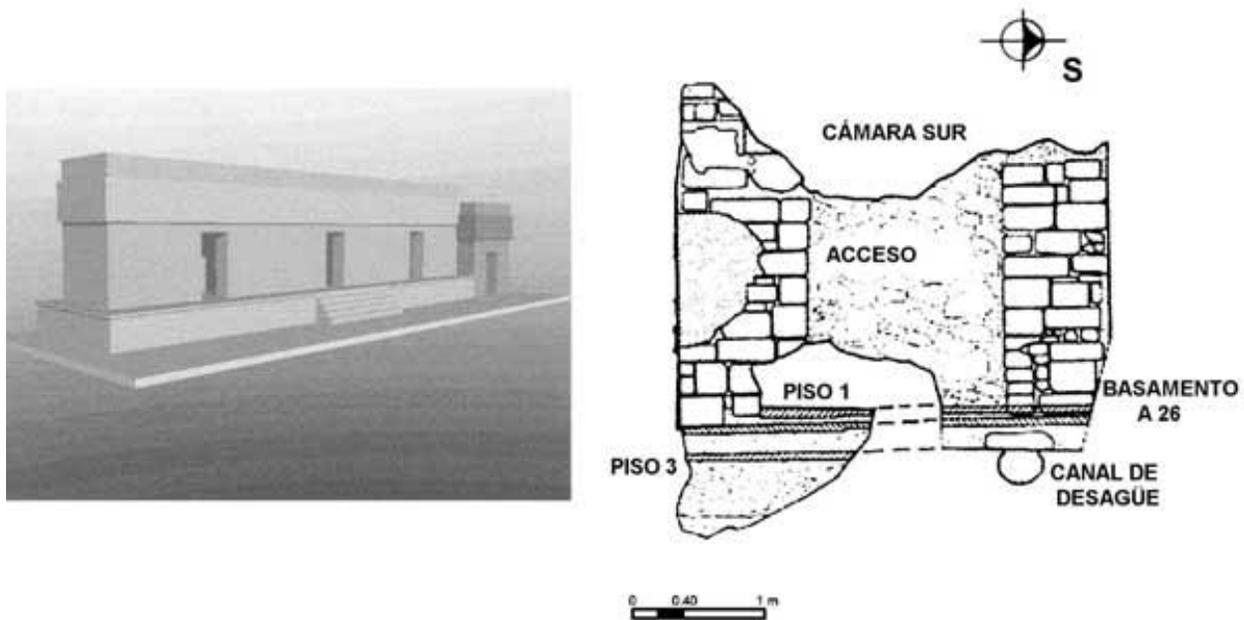


Figure 5. Second architectural version of Quadrangle A19.

Not too far in time, a limited but significant remodeling work was accomplished. In the north sector of Palace A26 a precinct was added with an access to the east, which was part of A19-1. The south wall of the chamber was directly placed on the platform that supported the palace, while the rest of it corresponded to the second floor of the patio. This construction covered the first floor of the patio, where a drainage channel was recorded, used to evacuate the rain water towards the west sector of the group. The major significance recorded in this remodeling work has to do with the presence of a ritual area of a restricted character, expressed through the cultural remains recovered at the looting.

### THIRD VERSION

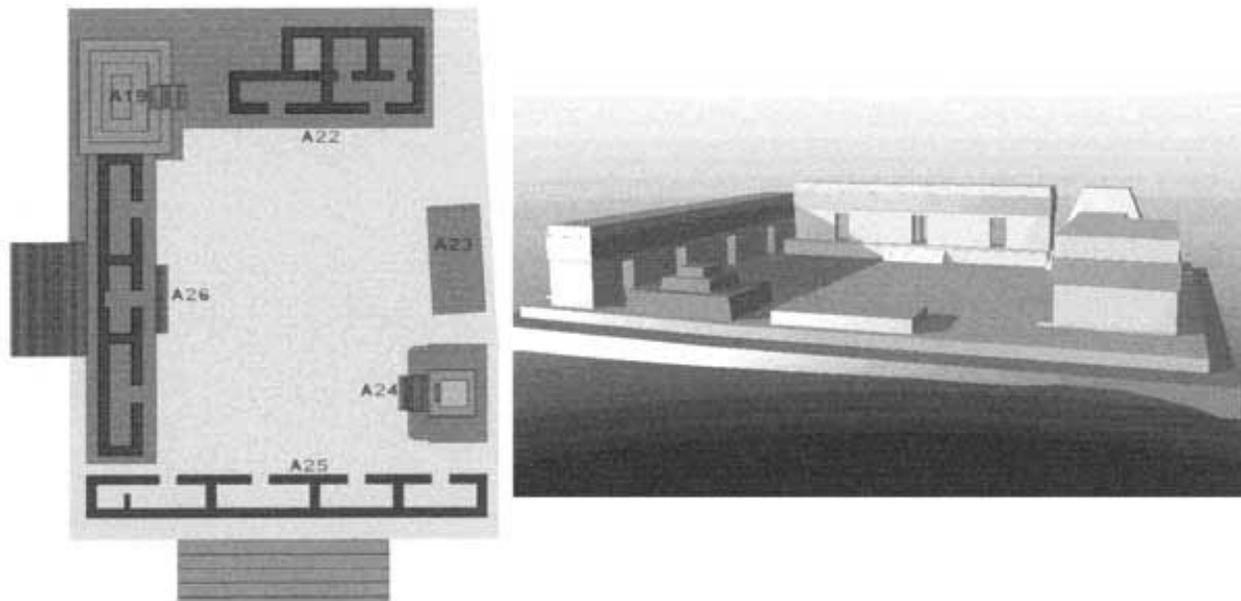
For the first time, it is possible to refer to a nuclear complex formed by two palaces, one temple and one oratory. Temple A19-1 achieved its maximum complexity with the addition of two precincts on the north side, which could be accessed only through the South Chamber. Palace A22 was built during this time, formed by two longitudinal chambers and three inner precincts. On the other hand, the construction of Oratory A24

was initiated on the east sector of the group. The west access, previously accomplished through the central chamber of A26, was cancelled with a masonry wall.

The elevated platform that supported the complex definitely canceled the quarry and achieved its top dimensions. During this time, the main access of the complex was moved to the south sector, where an outset stairway was built combining remains of quarry stone cuts with masonry blocks. Based on ceramic evidence, the construction of the third architectural version has been dated to the early Tepeu 2 period. Corresponding to this time frame, it was possible to identify several areas of activity that were combined in sectors of a private and semi-private ritual character, as well as areas for receiving visitors, for storage, and for temporary accommodation. According to the areas defined so far, it is considered that during the occupation of the third architectural version, bureaucratic and administrative activities were carried out there.

Structure A24, previously defined as an oratory, is consistent with other ones identified elsewhere in the Maya Lowlands (Leventhal 1983; Tourtellot 1983; Ashmore 1988), as well as with the altars or family oratories that integrated the Plaza 2 Pattern proposed by Becker (1971, 1979, 1986, 2003), where the interment of the family founder was accomplished and from where several bone fragments were recovered, mostly consisting of long bones. Because of the remarkable state of destruction shown by the structure as a consequence of the large looting tunnel, it was not possible to define the presence of any funerary architectural feature. Only the remains of artifacts that were once part of the offering could be recovered, such as shell, carved bones and fragments of lithic tools.

#### **FOURTH VERSION (Figure 6)**



**Figure 6. Fourth architectural version of Quadrangle A19.**

After around one century of occupying the site for identical purposes, a significant change was observed. During the fourth architectural version, the construction of Platform A23 and Palace A25 was accomplished. Besides, an inner precinct of Palace A22 was refilled, the north façade of A19-1 was mutilated, and the remaining precincts were similarly refilled, with the purpose of building a new version of Temple A19, most likely on a stepped pyramidal foundation. Unfortunately, not one single feature of such construction could be recorded.

In turn, Palace A25 closed the access through the south sector, delimiting the Quadrangle in that area. It was formed by a number of longitudinal vaulted chambers, placed with an east-to-west orientation. Only one of them could be partially recorded to confirm that it was a construction associated with the last level of the patio floor. Similarly, the construction of Platform A23 was completed in the east sector of the patio, with a height of less than 1 m and with no stucco floor on the upper surface. The platform was probably protected by a cover made of some perishable material of which no remains were found. Due to the finding of a grinding stone with its corresponding hand, it is possible to posit this was the kitchen of a residential unit.

Based on ceramic, it was dated through a dedicatory cache that contained a Tinaja Red vase found within the construction refill that corresponded to the transition span from Tepeu 2 to Tepeu 3, or in other words, it corresponded to some time between the end of the VIII century and the beginning of the IX. By this time, the complex could be considered to be a residential unit occupied by a large family. The presence of a relatively high number of precincts, residential areas, storage spaces, areas where visitors were received, areas where meals were prepared and ritual activities were conducted, may be taken as an archaeological indication that defines this unit (Nalda and Balanzario 1997; Wilk and Ashmore 1988).

## THE TEPEU III OCCUPATION (Figure 7)

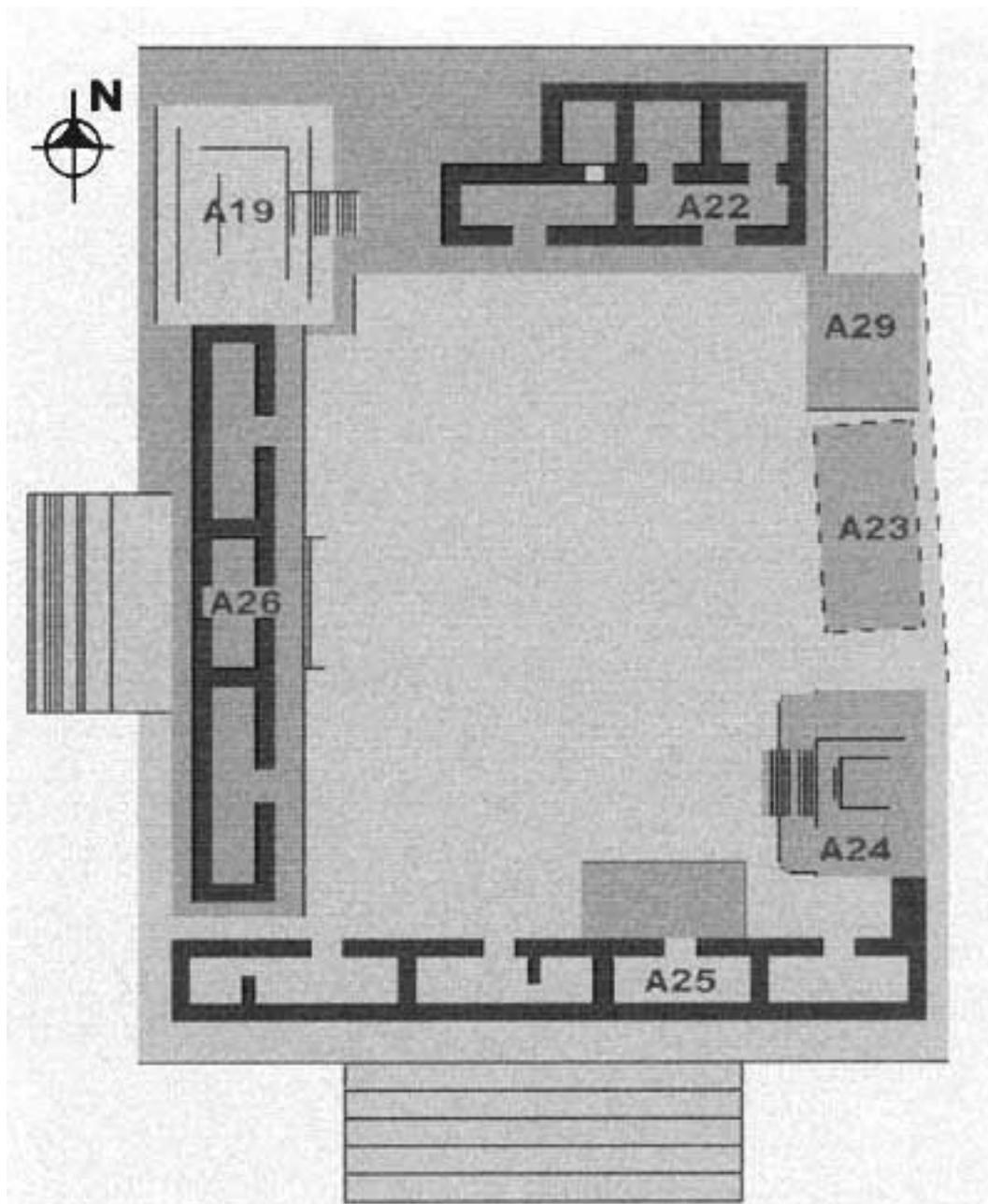


Figure 7. Floor plan of Quadrangle A19 during Tepeu 3.

On the surface of the last floor recorded at the complex, an important Terminal Classic occupation evident through different aspects was detected. The construction of Platform A23 was completed on the northeast corner, and a bench was attached to the north façade of A25 and the southeast access was disabled with a wall that joins together the foundation of A21 and the north façade of A25. The constructions were made with reused limestone blocks, placed directly on the patio floor.

On the other hand, a layer of at least 0.30 cm in thickness, mostly consisting of ash and ceramic remains was recorded, in every test pit excavated within the patio. Among the material remains recovered, a considerable amount of fragments of utilitarian vessels of a large capacity were recorded in association with lithic tools such as flint knives and scrapers, among others. A 2 m deep midden was recorded in the outskirts of the Quadrangle, at its eastern sector. It apparently was a *chultun* which possibly collapsed at some earlier date and was reused to deposit the garbage generated in the complex. Interestingly, the gradient observed in the patio floors points towards that direction.

According to the ceramic remains recovered, this occupation dated to Tepeu 3. It is possible to say that the collection of such time span is integrated by a 90% of utilitarian ceramic, though it includes as well an interesting sample of polychromed sherds. From the point of view of architecture, the restricted character of the complex achieved its maximum expression, with a surviving hallway at the southwest corner and possibly another one between A19 and A22, both in places where no stairways existed, and which probably represented spaces that helped to keep some control on the access to the complex.

## **DISCUSSION**

Thanks to the archaeological works conducted throughout the Maya Lowlands, today it is commonly accepted that the Maya civilization achieved a high degree of social complexity and that it was divided in levels, strata, or social classes (Fash 1991; Chase and Chase 1992; Sharer 1993; Inomata *et al.* 1998). Archaeologically, social stratification has been defined based on the differential access to basic resources, a situation that is customarily determined by social factors such as inheritance, matrimony and rank. The archaeological data obtained reflect this overall distinction between the Maya elite and non-elite groups, with wealth, represented in architecture and life style (Braswell 1998) as the main differential indicator. Although basically two main strata may be defined, each one of them likely encompasses several levels which may be recognized by means of the archaeological remains. Ethnographically, there is enough ground to confirm that those who lived within Quadrangle A19 were members of the Naranjo elite (Landa 2001), a notion which is backed up by ethnological studies conducted on Maya dwellings, where variables such as the amount, quality, volume and location of the structures are equivalent to social category (Wauchope 1938).

The architectural group identified as Quadrangle A19 in Naranjo unfolds a cultural evolution that extends along the Late Classic period and a good portion of the Terminal Classic period. Four construction versions have been identified since the earlier times, which finally yielded such a remarkable complexity level. In addition, an important Terminal Classic period occupation was recorded in this complex. Quadrangle A19 only represents a short span in the history of Naranjo; however, it is possible to infer the social change that occurred in its environment, reflected in the inhabitants and the activities identified for each period. As years went by, Quadrangle A19 was witness to

different activities, including control over the obtention of raw materials for construction, events of a bureaucratic and administrative nature, as well as all other activities that are typical of a residential unit.

Inferring social change in those times, the first period would correspond to the highest peak in the construction activity recorded at the site, one that took place at the beginning of the Late Classic period. When the quarry was canceled and the first nuclear complex was acknowledged, administrative activities, considered as markers of a high social level, were initiated by family members or individuals close to the courts (Fash 1991; Chase and Chase 1992; Inomata *et al.* 1998). This construction stage represents an important element, as throughout a century, the group was used with an identical purpose, suggesting social and political stability and evidencing a period of prosperity, considering that this complex was used like some kind of governmental office.

With the arrival of the Terminal Classic period, the generalized instability at the Central Lowlands became evident in Quadrangle A19, as a complex of an administrative character turned into the home of the bureaucratic family. Most likely, those people who previously used the complex as a working area moved there permanently, to combine working and residential areas.

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Figure 1 Location of Naranjo and other sites within the region (Fialko *et al.* 2003)

Figure 2 Location of Quadrangle A19 in the epicenter of Naranjo (Graham 1975, with modifications).

Figure 3 Architectural evolution of Quadrangle A19

Figure 4 First architectural version of Quadrangle A19

Figure 5 Second architectural version of Quadrangle A19

Figure 6 Fourth architectural version of Quadrangle A19

Figure 7 Floor plan of Quadrangle A19 during Tepeu 3