

**REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT AT SAN BARTOLO,
PETÉN:
RESULTS OF THE THIRD FIELD SEASON OF 2004**

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The two field seasons completed in 2002 and 2003 have corroborated the importance of San Bartolo and its cultural meaning for Guatemala. During this new field season, the San Bartolo Archaeological project conducted new investigations, which have revealed chronologic, architectural and artistic details that reinforce many of the statements made in the past season.

This time, research works continued in the pyramids of Las Pinturas and Las Ventanas, as well as in the Tigrillo Palace, while new areas were excavated, namely, the Main Plaza and the Las Plumas Group, located southwest of the causeway. Excavations were also initiated in the Jabalí Group, located northeast of the site, and moreover, studies were conducted as well at a lithic workshop found within a residential group northwest of Las Ventanas (Figure 1).

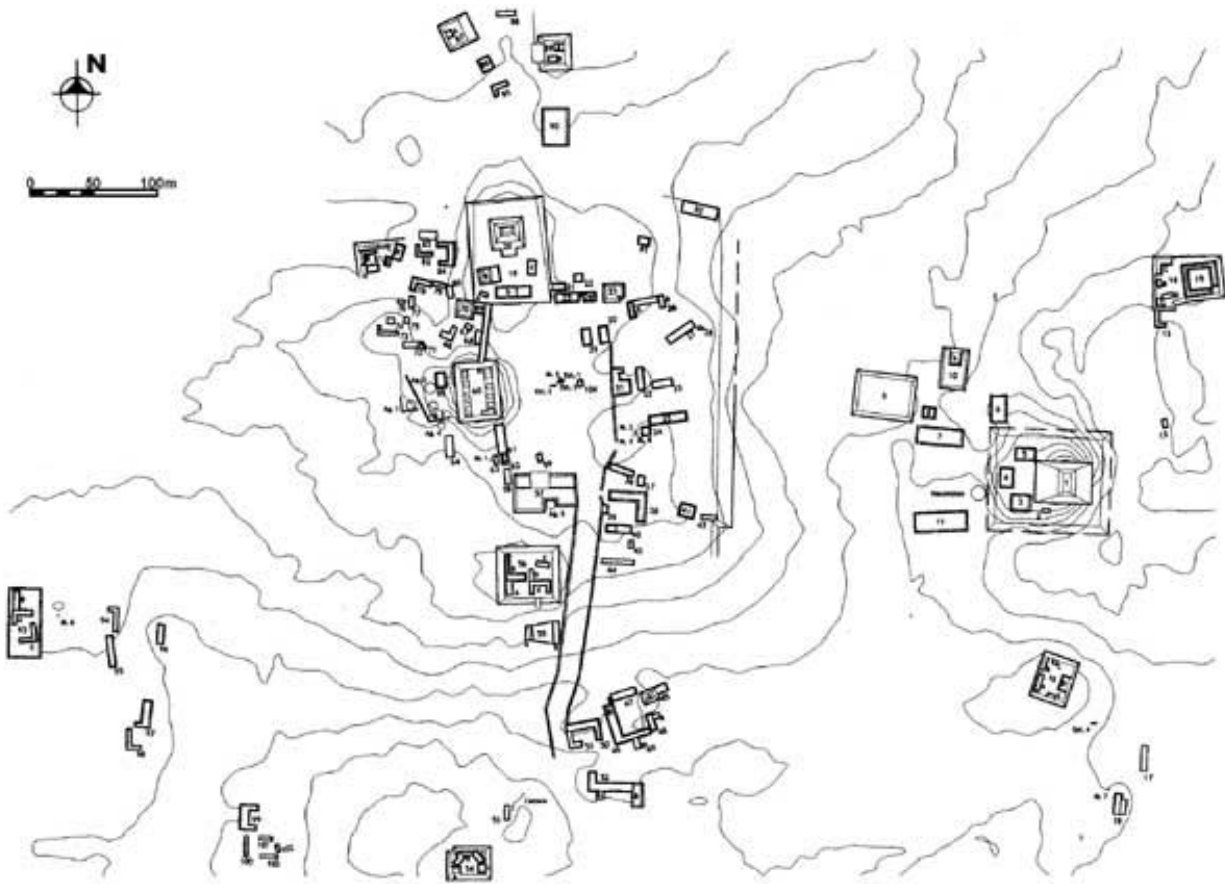


Figure 1. General map of the site of San Bartolo.

This entire work has produced very important and valuable information about the inhabitants of San Bartolo and their progress throughout time. Therefore, these findings are now being presented, together with new ideas about the residents of this small site from northwestern Petén.

EXCAVATIONS AT CHAJ'KEK'QUE

This year, the regional aspect of the San Bartolo Project included new excavations at the site of Chaj'Kek'Que. During the field season 2003 and as part of satellite imaging tests, the survey team mapped most of the site, located at the edge of the lowland Azúcar, 3 km southwest of San Bartolo. This site had the potential to produce information on ancient adaptations, and work was initiated with an excavation program displayed around the groups and structures located in this area.

Excavations in Structure A exposed a floor that presented a remodeling level with no refill; in addition, the east and west walls were found, as well as a small plaza that continued east of the structure. Most of the ceramic date to the Late Classic period, though several Late Preclassic period sherds were also present. It would seem that this

structure was built during the Late Classic period, and that Preclassic period sherds were used in some portions of the refill. Collaterally to this excavation, a GPS survey made it possible to locate additional areas with mounds, chultuns and terraces that will be examined in the years to come, and gradually proceed with the reconnaissance that will no doubt increase the regional interest of this project.

RECONNAISSANCE

This year, the reconnaissance team was directed by Thomas Garrison and was concentrated on two areas. The first one was focused on making progress with the mapping within the limits of San Bartolo. New areas of the site were mapped, such as the Jabalí Group located northeast of the site, while other previously surveyed areas were refined once the excavations were concluded; they included the Group of Las Plumas located southwest of the causeway, as well as the structures of Las Ventanas and the Tigrillo Palace.

The second area of interest for the survey team was the intersite zone of Xultun-San Bartolo. This area comprises 25 km², of which a 10% sample is being mapped. With satellite images supplied by NASA, a number of quadrangles were drawn within this area with dimensions of 250 m² each, and which were selected to be minutely surveyed through a higher resolution GPS and a total station. The team included several U.S. graduate students, while José Garrido, a Guatemalan trainee, mapped 25% of the sample during this season. In the future, efforts will continue for a more intensive mapping. The goal of the intersite study resides in understanding the dynamics of the populations throughout the transition from the Preclassic period to the Classic period, using the data obtained through the reconnaissance works and test pits. Finally, a team of experts in mapping and satellite imaging from NASA carried out a verification of the data retrieved in the field, which were compared with the information supplied by the satellite images.

CERAMIC ANALYSIS

The analysis was conducted by Patricia Rivera. The occupation of the site extended throughout the Middle Preclassic and Terminal Classic periods. With the preliminary analysis, 17 complete vessels were identified, eight of which corresponded to the excavations and nine to the reconnaissance. Of the excavation vessels, six dated to the Late Preclassic period and two to the Late Classic period, while among those recovered during the reconnaissance, only two corresponded to the Late Preclassic period.

The ceramic sample obtained shows a different surface finish for the three main structures examined: Las Pinturas, the Palace, and Las Ventanas. The Late Classic period was not present in the major architecture investigated, except for those residential areas with a wide typological pattern that extended between the Late Preclassic and the Late Classic periods. Issues related to technological functions and

raw materials will be specifically examined, to understand the development and specialization of the craftsmen who manufactured the ceramic.

STUDY OF LITHIC ARTIFACTS

During the season of 2004, lithic studies were undertaken in San Bartolo by Joshua Kwoka, who discovered a workshop of lithic artifacts in the vicinities of Structure 86, approximately 150 m north of Las Ventanas. The excavations concentrated on a dump adjacent to Structure 86. The analysis of this material provided ideas about the production of ancient tools, as well as about the volume of artifacts manufactured at the site itself. Future investigations will concentrate on the excavation of Structure 86, as well as on the platform adjacent to it, and which is designated as Structure 87, and on the low L-shaped Structure 85, located within this group.

EXCAVATIONS AT THE JABALÍ GROUP

This group is located 470 m west of the pyramid of Las Ventanas. It is an architectural complex of the Triadic Pattern with a Late Preclassic period occupation, discovered through NASA satellite photographs in 2003. Its architectural characteristics are similar to those of contemporary groups from other sites, such as Group H at Uaxactun, the North Acropolis at Tikal, and the Danta Complex at El Mirador.

This work was carried out by Mónica Pellicer. The group consists of a platform with inset stairways on its east side. Its upper part supports three well defined structures and a central patio. The structure with the largest dimensions (Structure A) is to the west, on a long platform that presents a central stairway and corners formed by lateral stairways. The building and the platform feature an east-to-west orientation, while the north and south sectors have undergone a number of remodeling works, probably during the Classic period.

The most relevant evidence produced by this group included a finding in the central sector of the patio. Julio Cotón collaborated in this excavation. It was a ritual deposit formed by two stuccoed walls in the shape of a sloping panel, whose center was formed by a slight depression.

TEST PITS AT THE CENTRAL PLAZA

Test pits were placed on the Central Plaza with the purpose of recovering ceramic material that might help define the chronology and identify the different construction and remodeling stages, as well as its association with the different structures and its function. This work was carried out by Boris Beltrán, with the assistance of Hugo Ortiz. The test pits were initially oriented towards the cardinal points and were excavated close to each one of the structures that surrounded the plaza (Figure 1). The

investigation resulted in the finding of an average of 13 floor levels that corresponded to the Central Plaza, eight of which represented remodeling works. Preliminary analysis of the major part of the material recovered from the excavations shows that they date to the Late Preclassic period.

THE PYRAMID OF LAS VENTANAS

These excavations were conducted by Mónica Urquizú with the collaboration of Orlando Moreno. The test pits detected the presence of architecture consisting of a foundation with an apron moulding and no room on its pinnacle (Figure 2). No evidence of a house built with perishable materials was found. The stone used was rather porous and poorly cut because it was covered with a very thick and well preserved stucco layer.

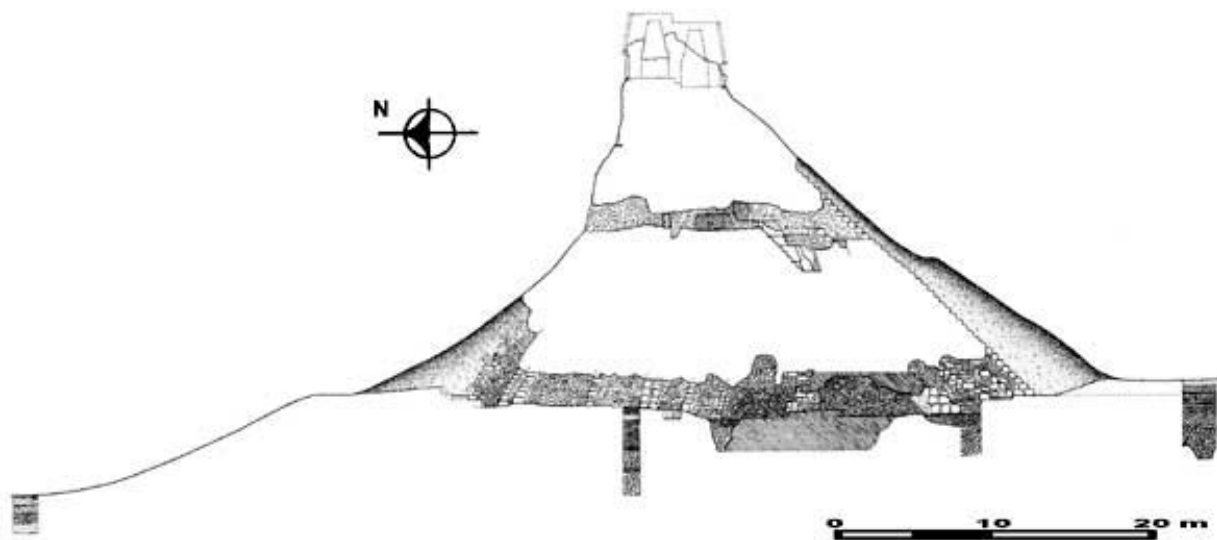


Figure 2. North-south profile of the Pyramid of Las Ventanas.

The beam of the stairway was partially uncovered, making it possible to observe the architectural similarities with Building E-VII-Sub from Uaxactun. The second body of the building used to have masks, which have been unfortunately destroyed (Figure 3).

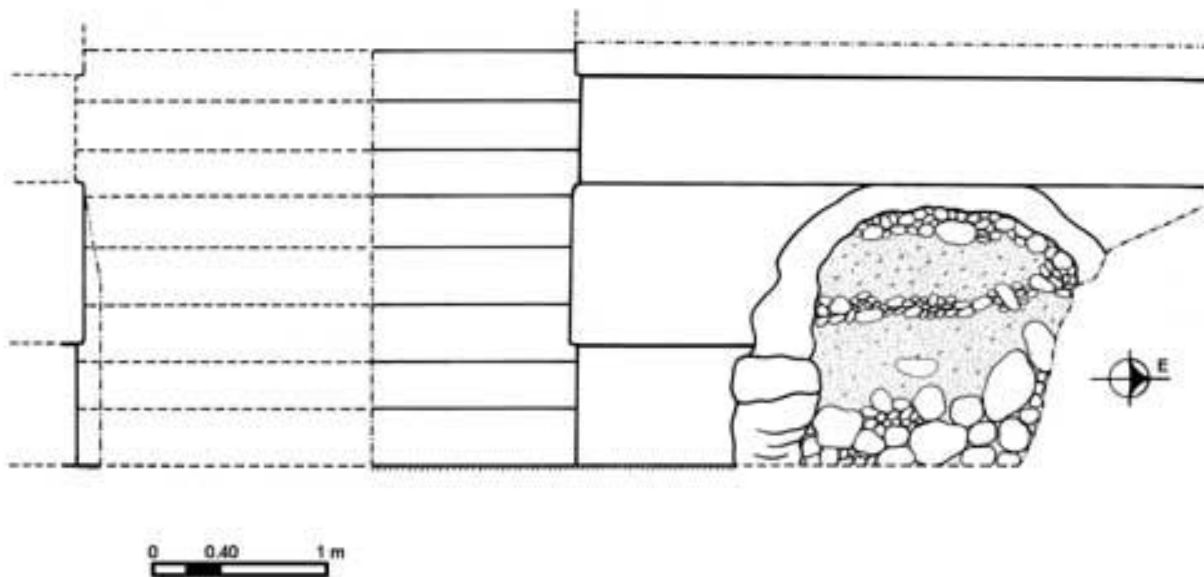


Figure 3. Elevation of the mask inside the Pyramid of Las Ventanas.

With the purpose of uncovering the second and fourth construction stages, looting tunnels were refilled and several test pits opened. Investigation continued inside the looting tunnel located in the middle section of the pyramidal foundation. There, tunnels were excavated to uncover the second construction stage of the building, with the axis oriented from east to west and from north to south.

On the other hand, several additional test pits were opened to expose the corners and part of the stairways corresponding to the final stage of construction. The presence of lateral stairways that flanked the central stairway was corroborated. The corners feature inset angles. Research will continue in the future, to widen our knowledge about the architecture of this construction stage and the presence of additional masks inside the pyramid (Figure 2).

THE TIGRILLO PALACE

This year, research continued in the Tigrillo Palace group, located along the west side of the Main Plaza and southwest of the Pyramid of Las Ventanas. Last year, preliminary excavations had pointed to the presence of architectural phases corresponding to the Late Preclassic period.

As a continuation of those works, Astrid Runggaldier expanded the test pits to examine the architectural form, the remodeling works and the dating of the final stage of construction, all these focused on the outer part of the rooms and the front access stairway. Among the major excavation units, the main stairway was exposed, and the central axis of the architecture was defined (Figure 4).

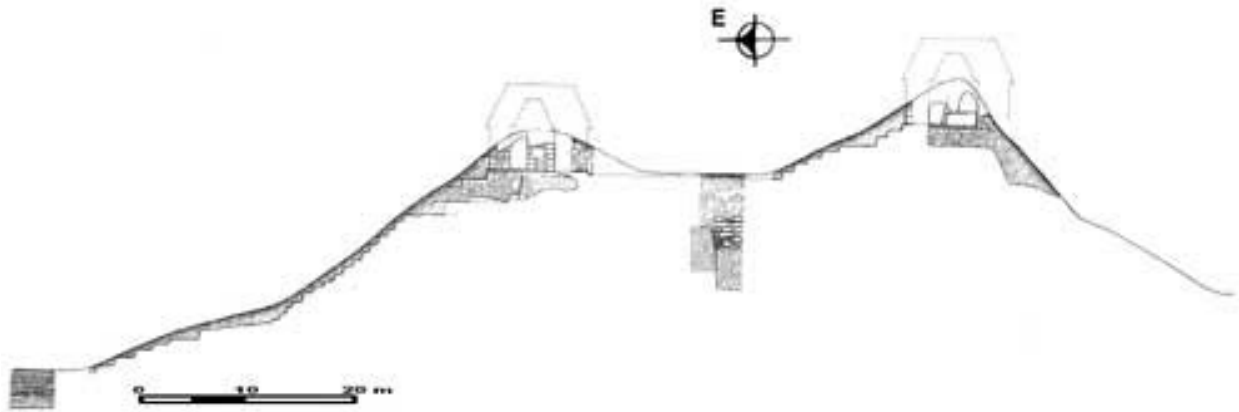


Figure 4. East-west profile of the Tigrillo Palace.

The upper portion of the stairway made it possible to establish that the architecture had suffered three modification stages that ended with the central access to the structure of the façade, which resembled in size that of the west side, though with a few differences in the accesses and lateral rooms. The main access to the Upper Plaza was accomplished through two doors, as the parallel structures of the building offered a wide view between the upper plaza and the main plaza. In addition, an intrusive burial was found in front of the main access, placed under the doorway after the group was abandoned. This was excavated by Astrid Runggaldier and Boris Beltrán. The skeleton represented a young individual deposited in the extended dorsal decubitus position and on a north-south axis, perpendicular to the door, with his head towards the north, who was buried with a necklace of 32 shells accompanied by two vessels in an upside-down position, one on his right shoulder, and the other one by his left femur.

An additional difference was established between the structure located west of the Upper Plaza and that of the façade, in the shape of an L and with rooms at the corners. One such room was excavated by Joseph Stair, outside its southeast side, showing a well preserved masonry work.

EXCAVATIONS AT THE GROUP OF LAS PLUMAS

Also called Group 56, this group served a residential function with administrative characteristics. It is located at the south of the Main Plaza, and at the west of the Causeway. It is on top of a rectangular platform with two small patios formed by two major structures, with the access stairway to the south. Structure A features the shape of an L, and Structure B the shape of a C. This group is closed by another rectangular structure located at the northeast end of the platform.

The goals had to do with learning more about the construction and architectural development, and about its chronology. To this purpose, several test units were

excavated and looting trenches cleared. It was possible to define the jambs of the structure's door and its precincts; also, the room at the back had a bench and a more elevated level than the outer room. Both presented very well preserved stucco floors with remains of red paint. In between the remodeling works, it was possible to corroborate that originally, this was a structure with three doors, later modified to two. Structure B showed a wall placed against Structure A, and all these architectural modifications were associated with an ash layer that covered them entirely. Finally, a pit was placed at the plaza, revealing several floor modifications and the presence of a platform remains corresponding to an earlier stage (Figure 5). All the material recovered showed an occupation that extended from the Late Preclassic to the Late Classic periods.

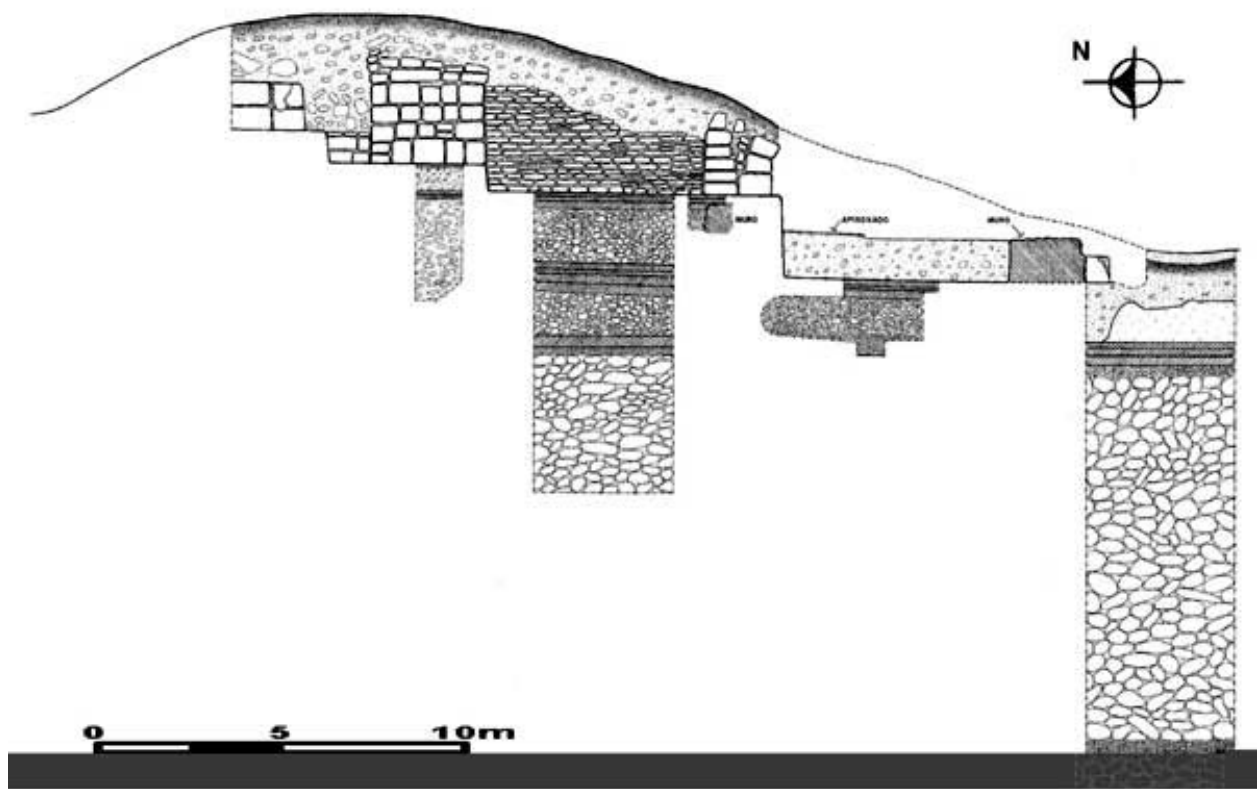


Figure 5. North-south profile of the Group of Las Plumas.

PYRAMID OF LAS PINTURAS

Conservation and consolidation works were carried out both at the chamber and on the mural paintings. The team of Angelyn Bass, Leslie Rainer, Lauren Meyer, Harriet Beaubien and Claudia Chemello conducted a climate monitoring both at the inside and outside of the pyramid; they cleared the mural's surface to facilitate the study of images; treated the unstable areas; injected mortar both in superficial cracks and under the mural; stabilized the fallen stucco edges; reintegrated fragments already treated in 2003 which were placed once again in their original position, and finally, they created a

photographic record to document their present condition and treatment. In turn, Asisclo Alvarado and Miguel Caal refilled the tunnels for the structural stabilization of the chamber.

The research works inside the room were conducted by William Saturno and Jessica Craig. A medial tunnel was excavated in the chamber, using a record completed in 2002. Stucco pieces were recovered everywhere in the tunnel.

The west wall of the chamber included mythological representations, particularly related to the origins of the cosmos: other scenes had to do with the Maize God, and depicted different stages of birth and rebirth. Likewise, it featured ritual aspects entailing sacrifices. The design of the lines and colors evidenced great mastery and delicacy, with very well preserved colors and skillfully executed details (see Heather Hurst, and Saturno *et al.*, in this volume).

DATINGS

Four carbon samples were retrieved at Pinturas Sub-1 from the jamb of the south door, from the refills that covered the mural, as well as from the refills above and under the chamber's floor. The results have yielded interesting information confirming the antiquity of the mural, which may be traced back to 100 BC. The last stucco prepared and used for the murals seems to have been kept resting for a long time, showing the existing knowledge on how to prepare top quality materials when the mural was created.

CONCLUSIONS

The third field season of the Regional Archaeological Project at San Bartolo has achieved the goals established for the archaeological investigation both in the field and at the laboratory. The excavations conducted at the Tigrillo Palace revealed high quality architectural features and a well preserved masonry, while at the Pyramid of Las Ventanas, the finding of masks and stuccoed architecture similar to the one present in the area of Uaxactun shows the religious significance the site had during the Preclassic period. The research works at the Pyramid of Las Pinturas continue to reveal the mastery of the artists who executed the San Bartolo mural, revealing an important degree of sophistication and representing a window to the religious thinking of the ancient residents of the site. The work of those curators and specialists who have carried out different research and conservation efforts has contributed to the rescue and preservation of the cultural patrimony within the area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Figure 1 General map of the site of San Bartolo
- Figure 2 North-south profile of the Pyramid of Las Ventanas
- Figure 3 Elevation of mask inside the Pyramid of Las Ventanas
- Figure 4 East-west profile of the Tigrillo Palace
- Figure 5 North-south profile of the Group of Las Plumas