

MACHAQUILA FROM A REGIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Juan Pedro Laporte

Héctor E. Mejía

Jorge E. Chocón

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Machaquila has always shown an existence of its own in the archaeological scheme of the Lowlands, located at a considerable distance from other neighbors: Ceibal, Dos Pilas and Aguateca to the northwest; Polol and El Chal to the north; Ixkun and Ixtutz to the northeast; Xutilha and Poptun to the east, and Cancuen to the southwest. Although Ceibal is the nearest one, 30 km away, the distance between all these cities and Machaquila is of average 45 km, that is, it triples the average 15 km between the cities in northeastern Petén, or even the 10 km between the sites located in the region of the Belize and Mopan rivers (Laporte and Mejía 2000; Ford 2004; Driver and Garber 2004). This contrast shows the absence of archaeological reconnaissance in the Machaquila region.

Although Machaquila is not the only case that features a remarkable disinformation regarding settlements in Petén, it is indeed one of the most outstanding examples of this archaeological malpractice, while at the same time it is extraordinary that a conjecture of this sort still exists, except when epigraphic issues come forth in support of some connection of a historical type.

Thus, whenever reference is made to a Terminal Classic model of occupation, some connection is usually made between Machaquila and Ucanal, on the Mopan River, Ceibal, on the Pasión River, or –more recently- Cancuen, another city on the Pasión, in an attempt to design a model with three capitals for a presumed regional polity – with a third nucleus represented by Tres Islas. This is indeed a novel approach, but one that lacks grounds in political theory.

There are several questions that need to be answered: how does a state with multiple sequential capitals work?, which is the mechanism that activates the transfer of the seat of power from one city to another?, and, what happens with the capital left behind in the spiral of political turmoil that may have brought about such an amazing decision of change? These and other questions should be clarified when trying to apply such novel model to the territorial and political history of Machaquila and its neighbors. It should be noted that the concept of city applied here takes into consideration three basic aspects: the center of wider social networks, a physical location, and a symbol of identity.

Therefore, and with the purpose of contributing to the search of a heuristic model of political functioning for the southern Petén region –that is, a non rigorous model with empirical rules- Machaquila is placed within a geographical setting that makes it

easier to observe the process of interaction that seeks to establish the creation of Machaquila as the core of a political entity, and in turn, as a regional power, based on the knowledge of the population distributed in neighboring areas. Such an analysis responds to geographic issues only.

The Machaquila River is among the most important ones in Petén, and one of the main sources of the Pasión (Figure 1; Laporte *et al.* 2001). In sectoring the Machaquila River, the upper section appears as a 50 km long strip, with just a few tributaries that carry a limited water flow (*Las Lajas, San Pedro, Mollejón, La Canoa*); along its way, the river irrigates several villages (*the hamlets of Machaquila, Concoma, El Achiotal, and El Chilar*). Although the Archaeological Atlas of Guatemala conducted a previous reconnaissance of the territory of the upper Machaquila (Quezada 1995; 1996; Quezada *et al.* 1999), Laporte and Mejía 2000; Laporte 2002), for now, only the information regarding the lower section of the river where the archaeological city is located is under consideration (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Geographic region where Machaquila is located.

THE EAST OF MACHAQUILA

The eastern edge of the lower Machaquila is rich in karstic hills, some of which are isolated, while others integrate sierra ranges that at times reach a height of 400 m above sea level (Mejía 2002) and represent a wide territory of 350 m² (Figure 2). The steep sierra range and the swamps close to the river bed of the Machaquila leave little opportunity for human settlement; therefore, this was probably used as a forestry area, to exploit fine timber and wood by-products such as tar, ocote, and incense, besides hunting.

However, this is not so for the entire area, as towards the southeast of the river –in an area connected to the brooks that flow downstream from Poptun (*El Pañuelo*), and with a floristic system that still has pinewoods (Quezada *et al.* 1999; Laporte 2001)-, there is a territory with a good agricultural output defined by the progress of the El Chilar River, which flows west and empties in the Santa Amelia River, where the Machaquila River empties as well.

Thus, in the area of confluence with the upper Machaquila, the prehispanic settlement comprises two entities: El Achiotal and El Frutal. On the other hand, towards the south of the city of Machaquila, right in the mountain zone and already associated with the flow of the El Chilar River, there is another archaeological core integrated by the caves, and the site of San Miguel. A third sector is the southeast edge of the territory, with a more flattened and swampy topography; close to the village of Esquipulas there are two archaeological centers nearby the border between the townships of Poptun and San Luis. Therefore, there are four polities in this territory (El Achiotal, El Frutal, San Miguel and Esquipulas).



Figure 2. Geographic sectors in the Machaquila region.

Even though these are not major sites, they present architectural groups that point to their complexity, but with a remarkable little importance of Acropolis-type Assemblages and causeways. Notwithstanding this limitation, the presence of

Ballgame courts in three of the four main sites is impressive (moreover, El Achiotal features two courts), as well as Group E-type Assemblages in Esquipulas and El Achiotal –considered to be the southernmost ones known so far in Petén.

Such configuration affiliates them with the cities located at the north and northeast, such as those from the upper Mopan River where these features are common, and not with Machaquila or the cities from the Maya Mountains, such as Poptun and Xutilha.

Although one of the sites –El Achiotal- suggests a remarkable Late Preclassic population that led to the construction of a Group E-type Assemblage, it was in the Late Classic when all sites were built and occupied. However, there is a notorious absence of population during the Terminal Classic period, a stage of progress in the region, including the nearby Machaquila, when this extended territory finally came to integrate their forestry and animal exploitation zone.

The San Miguel Cave must be additionally mentioned, with Terminal Classic or even later features. By then, the sites nearby were no longer occupied, so that suggesting any specific affiliation would be mere speculation, moreover when considering the conspicuous style used in paintings (Mejía 2001).

NORTHEASTERN MACHAQUILA AND THE LOWER BASIN OF THE POXTE RIVER

On the other hand, in the northeastern area of the lower Machaquila the sites are more complex and less dispersed than those found in the previous zone associated with the Poxte River, the course of which flows west to join the San Juan River, and eventually, the Pasión (Laporte and Chocón 2001). With a level topography, the superficial drainage network is incomplete and disintegrated, with several drains or cavities (Valdizón 1995). This basin encompasses a narrow strip 5 km wide and 20 km long, that is, a territory of 100 km², within which there are isolated limy hills and several sierra ranges with exposed walls (Figure 2).

The primary headwaters of the Poxte River originate in the Dolores table, where several major rank sites are associated with this watercourse, particularly those of Ixtutz and Curucuitz. Nonetheless, as far as the population environment of Machaquila is concerned, the lower section of the river is the one that matters, where the presence of six archaeological settlements encompassing two polities has been established: Pueblito and El Edén Sur.

The core conformation of these two entities is different, particularly due to the absence in El Eden 2 of a Group E-type Assemblage, and of a Ballgame court.

In turn, Pueblito happens to be a complex site in which throughout time, all features taken into consideration at the time of defining a city in the Lowlands, were developed (Laporte 2001), and –in addition to the two assemblages mentioned- it presents several causeways, two Acropolis-type Assemblages, several vaulted palaces, and abundant residential groups surrounding the site. It is evident that it also had carved monuments, as suggested by looting remains observed there.

The Preclassic occupation in this area was only diagnosed at Pueblito, and at an additional minor site (*Nuevas Delicias 1*). The Group E-type Asemblage at Pueblito is one of the features originated in this earlier stage.

As to the Terminal Classic, it appears as well restricted to Pueblito and to the small center of La Lucha. The Postclassic occupation was documented only at Pueblito, both in groups within the central and peripheral areas, a phenomenon likely related to the volume of the exploration already accomplished at the site.

Thus, the picture observed in the zone as of the end of the Late Classic period reflects concentration in one center only –Pueblito- with the corresponding ending of the ancient process of fission encouraged by the periodical formation of new centers, a process that had prevailed in the past centuries. Machaquila may have been undergoing a similar process.

NORTHERN MACHAQUILA AND THE MIDDLE SAN JUAN RIVER BASIN

The geographical section of the confluence of the San Juan and the Poxte rivers and their separation of the Machaquila River at south, defines a plain territory with isolated limy hills comprising 140 km² (Figure 2). The villages there, nowadays, are small, but there are nonetheless several prehispanic settlements: four on the east bank of the river, and three others on the west bank (*La Pajarera, Actela, La Mojarra, Fuentes Azules, Santa Rosa, La Ginebra and Las Papayas*; Urbina 2000; Chocón 2001).

This group of sites and habitation settlements form one single political entity headed by Santa Rosa on the west bank. With this distribution, it is clear that most of the population preferred to settle down on that bank, particularly because of the additional presence of the considerably developed site of La Ginebra.

Santa Rosa, as well as La Ginebra and La Pajarera –the latter is the largest site on the east bank-, were built during the Late Preclassic period. Even though it is not possible to define, for that period of time, their position as political entities and what kind of relationship existed between them, it is clear that by the Late Classic period they all were dynamic and densely populated centers.

Due to the presence of the Group E-type Assemblages that form the core area of these three sites, they would seem to have had a minor connection with Machaquila during the Late Classic, though the absence of excavations reflecting specific architectural aspects in these three major sites prevents us from going deeper into this issue. Even so, it is interesting to note that –except for La Ginebra- the presence of Ballgame courts was not promoted.

With no evidence of occupation after the VIII century, these cities seem to have been assimilated by Machaquila, early in the Terminal Classic period. The huge expansion of Machaquila as a political aggregate seems to have annulled Santa Rosa, together with all other sites within its territory, as a way of exerting an effective control over that sector and its clear strategic significance regarding the trade routes created

between the water systems of the Pasión River at west, and the Mopan River at east.

WESTERN MACHAQUILA AND THE LOWER SAN JUAN RIVER BASIN

Reconnaissance in the area expanded to the zone comprised between the San Juan River at north, and the Santa Amelia River at south –where the Machaquila River converges- with 18 km between both torrents. This is a wide zone with a predominance of *bajos*, due to the confluence of both these rivers with the Pasión. It should be noted that distances between the San Juan River and Ceibal, and the Santa Amelia River and Cancuen are quite similar, averaging 17 km. This zone between rivers exceeds 200 km²; currently, it is populated and cleared, with wide pasture grounds (Figure 2). The area falls in the Sayaxche's township jurisdiction.

At the banks of the Santa Amelia River, the four known settlements are of smaller proportions, and perhaps were only Machaquila subsidiaries in the control of this navigable zone (*Canaan, Machaca 2, El Mirador and Santa Amelia*; Beekman 1991, 1992; Chocón and Mejía 2002). Only one very large quarry is present there, reported prior to our reconnaissance (Las Planchas); it should be as well mentioned that in the small site of Santa Amelia there was a stela and an altar, both, probably, plain monuments.

Besides, six sites have been recently located in relation with the flow of the lower San Juan, all of them on the northern shore of the river (*El Botán, San Juan, El Frijolar, Nueva Democracia 1 and 2, La Reinita*). These were minor settlements under the control of the major center, Nueva Democracia 1. This zone is equidistant from the major sites of Machaquila, Santa Rosa and Ceibal.

The occurrence in these six minor centers of Group E-type Assemblages is important, and some of them exhibit a conspicuous regional style that recalls the center of San Valentín in the nearby San Martín River, to the north –the current township of San Francisco- where some specific affiliation may have also existed.

Given the association of this zone between rivers with the flow of the Pasión, we should refer to the presence of other archaeological centers discovered on the west bank a long while back when this area was explored, one century ago (Maler 1908), namely La Reforma III and Tres Islas, in the Santa Amelia Zone, El Cedral at the north of the San Juan River mouth (Tomasic, Quintanilla and Wolff, n.d.), El Prado, between the confluences of both rivers, and El Toro, close to the Machaquila River, more to the south. At La Reforma III the fragments of two carved stelae were reported (Maler 1908).

Several if not all of these sites may have been outposts for Machaquila on the west side of the Pasión River, with a commercial, ritual, or defensive function. Even if this was so, there is a considerable distance of 22 km between the city of Machaquila and the mouth of the Santa Amelia River, diminished, perhaps, when considering the possibility that this distance could be navigated.

One of the most important findings is no doubt the fossil with evidence of human activity found five decades ago near the village of Santa Amelia (Brown 1958).

However, and because not all is just a simple “walk in the park”, it is also true that our reconnaissance encountered a number of problems, and that there were some minor zones which could not be explored, like some associated with the San Juan and Machaquila rivers due to the refusal of the nearby villages that are now occupying those areas, and the major sector to the south, the junction of two projects, or the “no-one land” of the Cancuen Project and the Archaeological Atlas. It is our hope that one of the two will finally make the decision to cover the territory, because until that happens, we shall ignore whether some other site exists –large or small- between these two presumably interrelated cities.

GENERALITIES

In short, what is this geographic and settlement revision of the Machaquila region teaching us? First, it is of help to gain knowledge about the environmental complexity of a zone with 800 km², with mountains, karstic areas, swamps, tropical vegetation and pine groves, with an abundance of water everywhere, and what is most important, an area where the communication between the east and west of this wide sector of the Lowlands was facilitated through the Santa Amelia, the Machaquila, and the San Juan rivers.

Despite these benefits, even that of exposing the settlement in that area, Machaquila still remains an isolated center. Machaquila’s closest neighbors are still far away, with Santa Rosa, 12 km to the northwest, and Pueblito, 30 km to the northeast.

Likewise, Machaquila features some peculiar characteristics that are not consistent with the territorial pattern (Figure 3). That which surprises the most is the absence of a Group E-type Assemblage; we should remember that this is a primary component in most cities in the region, even at the north and east of Machaquila. Moreover, at Ceibal –the most developed city in the region of the Pasión River, this architectural assemblage gives shape to the main and most ancient center.



Figure 3. Plan of the city, Machaquila.

The absence of such an assemblage in Machaquila comes together –against every expectation- with the parallel absence of a Ballgame court, and even more so when observing that a good number of the nearby sites do include this second urban component, as are the cases of Pueblito, La Ginebra, El Frutal; moreover, there are two Ballgame courts at El Achiotal, a much smaller site than Machaquila.

However, there is neither a Ballgame court in the nearby sites of Santa Rosa, El Edén or Nueva Democracia, so that such a distribution may be indicating that this component was associated with the centers created since the Preclassic period, and not with those with a Classic occupation (except for controversial Santa Rosa, which very well may have not been the core of the Preclassic in that territory).

Besides, more common urban traits shared with its neighbors are the presence of Acropolis-type Assemblages and causeways, components that are only missing in several cores of entities with smaller dimensions.

Overrating Machaquila as a Lowland city is not a consequence of a particular interest on its architecture, much less for the limited dimensions of the settlement, but rather for its abundance of carved monuments. Due mostly to the ups and downs of destiny, Machaquila has been subject of explorations since the 1960's, so that we now have the much timely information recorded by Ian Graham when 17 stelae, six altars, and a number of sculpted stones were discovered (Graham 1967; Fahsen 1983; Grube 1989). One additional stela appeared at a later time in the market of art (Riese 1988a, b). Presently, the site is devoid of monuments: some were moved elsewhere for their adequate protection, while most were looted and have gone missing.

The good fortune of Machaquila was not shared by other sites in the region. Thus, cities with carved monuments like Pueblito, Santa Rosa or La Ginebra were plundered, for having been discovered only in the 1990's, long after looting activities were perpetrated. Still to this day, some monuments subjected to illegal trafficking may have originated in the region; some recent news place an Early Classic monument in Dolores (Mayer 2001), and there is also a stela, apparently found at some site west of Poptun; in other words, they may have originated in any one place among those mentioned so far.

In addition to the similarities and differences regarding the internal structural aspects of these cities, attention should be paid to a more significant factor connected with political organization. The regional settlement provides a range of sites of different sizes and complexities, usually with well defined central areas, and relatively short distances between one another, replicating each other in political and even physical structure.

This is the form of social and political organization usually present in a wide area of Petén, a layout that is at times enunciated as a political system where segmentation predominates in formation and consolidation processes (Laporte 1996). Segmented entities are a weak aggregate of sites, whereas the principles of authority that rule political relationships are based on a lineage system. These entities are considered to be rather unstable, tending towards the separation of their component parties.

Though controversial in a certain way, this process of political formation also encompasses the region of the Pasión River, considering the process of fission occurred at Ceibal for the emergence of secondary and dependant settlements such as El Anonal, 3 km at west (Tourtellot 1988), and El Cedral, 10 km to the south (Smith *et al.* 1962).

Nevertheless, it is not possible to assure that this same political process characterized Machaquila, where the increase of population did not lead to such process of fission. The reason for disagreeing with the regional trend may be based on the late formation of Machaquila, an occupation not earlier than the VII century, while those entities thought to have been of a segmentary formation usually included some settlement originated at an earlier Classic stage.

If so, which is the alternative political formation characterizing this city? The concentration of population in Machaquila and its relative isolation correspond to a process of the unitary type, as opposed to the segmentary type, through which

relatively stable entities developed, with strongly integrated centers aimed at avoiding processes of fission and replication. This political formation has been previously documented in the outer limits of zones with a segmentary formation, such as the Salsipuedes River, one of the Mopan tributaries (Laporte 1996; Mejía *et al.* 1998), or in part of the dry savannah section near Central Petén. The area where the city of Machaquila is located is another such border, but to the south.

On the other hand, a historic situation may have strengthened the centralized character of Machaquila, a city that was young when the new regional political configuration took place as a result of the decay of many primary cities within Petén, early in the IX century.

The most evident result in this chain of events was the retreat and population concentration in just a few centers capable of preserving stability, which took advantage of this moment. Machaquila showed a rapid adjustment to this new situation, as the segmentation process that other nearby entities had been experiencing for centuries was just beginning. This new political situation in the region fostered in Machaquila the process of unitary formation.

Thus, by the IX century, only one of the centers close to Machaquila achieved a similar successful reorganization: Pueblito, on the Poxte River. The other Terminal Classic cities were more remotely located, like Cancuen and Ceibal on the Pasión River, and Ixtonton in the eastern mountain area.

Although at this time it is not possible to elaborate on the kind of relationship that may have existed between Machaquila and Pueblito, there are indeed shared features, mainly in the field of architectural decor –sculpted stones in front walls and cornices-, and the use of veneers in the façade of buildings. Nevertheless, this construction technique and decorative style is not just limited to these two centers, and they are also present at El Chal on the San Juan River, Ucanal and Calzada Mopan in the middle Mopan, and Ixtonto and Ixkun, in the upper Mopan. In this case, the five sites –in addition to Pueblito- experienced a segmentary development in the Late Classic that shifted to centralization in the Terminal Classic period.

This conjunction of traits can hardly represent just a simple internal movement of evolution, so that the introduction of probable foreign features should be examined. In former studies about Ucanal on the Mopan River (Laporte and Mejía 2002), it was corroborated that there were several introductory waves of new cultural traits since the end of the Late Classic period, by AD 800, tangible through the presence of a new trend of architectural sculpture with assemblages of perfectly cut limestone mosaics, as well as façade veneers in the constructions, a technique that greatly differed from the earlier form of face wise placed stones that had been used in all the cities in Petén for centuries.

No doubt, the Terminal Classic innovations were not of a local origin, although, almost for sure, the elaboration and later development were. The extraordinary stylistic similarity of the many innovations with other zones in the northern Yucatán Peninsula, including of course Mayapán (Thompson 1975; Chase 1985), is a clear indication of their origin and affiliation. Trade activities may have as well attracted a greater migratory movement from the northern peninsula which may have blended

with the original population, that is, a second wave early in the Terminal Classic period. This flourishing lived on for a long time.

Along this process of cultural and political growth there was a remarkable reduction in the significance of the Group E-type Assemblages, the center and pride of every city for the former 15 centuries, to glorify the Acropolis-type Assemblages.

Even though dating this kind of event is complicated, it is also clear that a prudential time had to elapse –an extended one in this case- to achieve the assimilation of the new features and to justify the necessary investments in construction, use and reshaping of so many buildings and plazas. Finally, how long did the Terminal Classic period extend is something that cannot be established at this time, although it probably extended to the XII century, that is, 300 years after the end of the Late Classic period.

Despite having overcome the events that caused the eclipse of the large Classic metropolis, and when the delayed Postclassic period finally arrived, activities suffered a drastic fall, apparently with an impoverished population, one that nonetheless continued to use the same ritual spaces of the previous centuries; besides, whenever construction works were involved, they were carried out to remodel the buildings that had always been central and sacred places, an indication that the inhabitants constituted the same population distinguished in the Terminal Classic period. Only further explorations will allow for defining how longer Machaquila maintained its privileged situation of isolation.

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ANNEX 1

SITES CONSIDERED IN THE REGION NEARBY MACHAQUILA

EL ACHIOTAL

It is located 10 km at west of the village of Machaquila, at the south of the river (Quezada 1995, 1996). The site center area is a Group E-type Assemblage, the two main structures of which were built in the Late Preclassic period. There is no Acropolis-type Assemblage, while there are two Ballgame courts, both of the open type, with a north-south orientation and courts that average 17 m, which correspond to the Late Classic construction. No Terminal Classic occupation was detected. With such a complexity, it represents a Rank 1 site that constitutes the core of the political entity of El Achiotal.

EL FRUTAL

It is located on the south banks of the El Chilar River (Mejía 2002). The site has no Group E-type Assemblage and no Acropolis-type Assemblage. The main plaza or Group 1 is defined by a patio with structures at each of the sides, two of which exceed 3 m in height, with one featuring a circular ground plan. Towards the west end of this patio there is an annexed Ballgame patio of the open type. We assume this is a Late Classic settlement. The site corresponds to Rank 1 and integrates the core of the political entity of El Frutal.

EI CHILAR 2

This is a dispersed settlement with a central area formed by six groups, while the periphery revealed several other minor habitation groups (Mejía 2002). The main group includes seven structures placed on a wide leveling terrace. We assume this is a Late Classic settlement. The site corresponds to Rank 2 and integrates the political entity of El Frutal.

SAN MIGUEL CAVES

The San Miguel Caves have been reported previously, at different times. Its inside presents built walls and decorations with human and animal figures, with abundant representation of snakes of a black color (Mejía 2001); they are believed to be Terminal Classic or even Postclassic (Siffre 1993: 144-151; Grube 1989:45; Siller 1989; Mejía 2002). These are two caves –the cave of the Paintings and the cave of the Ceramics- separated barely by 200 m, and as their names indicate, they have an intense human activity, mainly of a ritual character.

SAN MIGUEL

San Miguel is the site close to the caves (Mejía 2001). Plaza A includes seven structures, being the main ones located at east and west, but it features no Group E-type Assemblage. Apparently, the main building is the one located on the east edge of the patio. Plaza B is annexed on the west end, while at the other end there is a causeway 160 m long and 16 m wide, with parapets 5 m wide and 1 m tall. This causeway is the main axis of the settlement. Test pits suggest that San Miguel was built and occupied during the Late Classic period. No evidence was found of a Terminal Classic or Postclassic occupation. This is a Rank 1 site, and forms the core of the political entity of San Miguel/Poptun.

ESQUIPULAS 1

It is located adjacent to the village of Esquipulas (Mejía 2002). Plaza A is the main plaza of the site and represents a Group E-type Assemblage. The East Platform is 80 m long and 8 m high, with the typical lateral platforms. On the west side of the patio there is a rectangular ground plan building, 6 m tall. There is a Ballgame court at west of Plaza A, with an open patio at north and south. It is probable that Group 5 represents some pattern of the Acropolis type. Test pits suggested that Esquipulas 1 was built and occupied during the Late Classic period. No evidence was found of a previous or subsequent occupation. This is a Rank 1 site of the political entity of Esquipulas.

ESQUIPULAS 2

It is located 2 km south of Esquipulas (Mejía 2002). The main group is Group 1, with seven low structures. No test pits were excavated, and therefore its chronological spectrum is unknown. This is a Rank 2 site of the political entity of Esquipulas.

PUEBLITO

It is close to the village of Nuevas Delicias (Mayer 1994; Valdizón 1995; Laporte *et al.* 1997; Chocón 2004). Different works have been conducted there both for the survey and exploration of the site. This is a site featuring a complex arrangement, the central are of which includes a Group E-type Assemblage (Plaza A), a group of palace-type structures (Plaza B), two Acropolis-type Assemblages (Central and South), and a Ballgame court, causeways, and different relevant groups of residential and habitation character. Although there is an absence of carved monuments, there are at least eight plain stelae and altars, as well as abundant

evidence of mosaic figures that resemble those reported at other Terminal Classic sites in the region. The settlement of Pueblito reveals a wide chronological spectrum initiated in the Late Preclassic, and seems to have been permanently occupied up to the Terminal Classic period. The constructions currently on the surface refer mostly to the Late Classic period. This is a Rank 1 site, the core of the political entity of Pueblito, and no doubt one of the major centers in southeastern Peten.

LA LUCHA

The central site area features a Group E-type Assemblage, consisting of two structures conventionally arranged (Urbina 1997, 2000). A causeway with an east-west orientation, 125 m long and 10 m wide delimited by parapets, connects several groups though it is not related to the main assemblage. Test pits show that it was built during the Late Classic period, and that occupation took place during the Terminal Classic. This is a Rank 2 site and corresponds to the political entity of Pueblito.

MACHACA 2

Regardless of the fact that this is not a conventional example of a Group E-type Assemblage, Group 1 exhibits the largest structures of the site, consisting of seven mounds arranged after an enclosed pattern, with the main structure on the east side of the patio (Valdizón 1995). This is a Rank 3 site of the political entity of Ixtutz. Occupation has not been ascertained so far, because no test units were excavated here.

EL EDEN 2

It is located 800 m towards east along a causeway, from the road that connects Agricultores Unidos with Las Nuevas Delicias, 6 km away from the first one mentioned. It was discovered by Marco Antonio Urbina, Atlas Arqueológico de Guatemala, on June, 1997. This site does not include a Group E-type Assemblage (Urbina 2000). Interestingly, the site shares this absence with the nearby center of Machaquila. The Acropolis-type Assemblage built at Plaza A includes seven structures arranged on a leveling platform, and its main structure is 3.50 m high. Plaza B is also important, with its nine mounds. There are two causeways at the site, one at east and the other one at west, both delimited with parapets. A plain fragmented stela accompanied by a plain altar were found on the West Causeway. Test excavations show that the construction and occupation of the site date to the Late Classic period. No evidence of population was found during the Terminal Classic period. This is a Rank 1 site, the core of the political entity of El Edén Sur.

NUEVAS DELICIAS 1

The Group E-type Assemblage constitutes the central area of the site, though it is of an unconventional character (Urbina 2000). No other relevant assemblages were observed. Test excavations show that the site may have corresponded to a construction originated in the Late Classic period, with a primary occupation that dates to the Late Classic. This is a Rank 3 site corresponding to the political entity of El Edén Sur.

NUEVAS DELICIAS 3

Of a dispersed character, it is located on the crest of three hills with different altitudes and an east-west alignment. The settlement includes two plazas arranged on top of the highest hill, with a seemingly residential layout. Test excavations show that the construction and occupation of the site took place during the Late Classic period. This is a Rank 2 site and corresponds to the political entity of Pueblito.

LA PAJARERA

The site is located on middle-sized hills (Chocón 2001). It features a lineal layout and extends across an area approximately 2 km wide and 4 km long; the area has evidence of an important concentration of mounds, most of which are low. The Group E-type Assemblage constitutes the central sector of the site (Plaza A), and includes eight structures arranged in a plaza that is opened on its west side. However, this assemblage does not include the usual pyramid structure at west; instead, there is a causeway that runs on a north-south direction and connects the other two plazas that form the central area of the site. There are five structures in this patio, consisting of foundations built with stone courses and forming some sort of residential unit. This situation remembers what we previously mentioned about the site of Santa Rosa and others within the region (such as Pueblito), regarding an occupation of a residential character within a space that had been previously restricted to functions of a ritual type. La Pajarera shows neither an Acropolis-type Assemblage nor a Ballgame court, and no carved or plain monuments were seen. The first construction stage of the Group E-type Assemblage dates to the Late Preclassic period. This assemblage was expanded during the Late Classic period with the construction of additional structures. Although we know of no occupation for the Terminal Classic or the Postclassic periods, it should be noted that test excavations were too restricted to indicate the chronological spectrum of the occupation in this extended settlement. This is a Rank 1 site, and the core of the political entity of La Pajarera.

LA GINEBRA

The Group E-type Assemblage is located in the upper section of the ground, and consists of an East Platform 95 m long and 9 m high, thus representing one of the largest structures of this type throughout the region (Chocón 2001). For what it seems, the structure, in its first construction stage, might not have achieved its current dimension, as expansions were aggregated at each end, making the foundation of the structure to reach such a dimension. This is an assemblage of a conventional character. The Acropolis-type Assemblage lies at the southwest of the central assemblage, with two groups distributed on top of a basal platform. The Ballgame court is at a distance of 1.2 km to the northwest of the central assemblage. The occupation corresponds mostly to the Late Classic, but the construction of the site may have taken place in the Late Preclassic period. No further evidence was observed of a Terminal Classic or Postclassic occupation. This is a Rank 2 site corresponding to the political entity of Santa Rosa.

LAS PAPAYAS

It consists of five groups, two of which are major groups, located on pasture grounds. However, there is no nearby central area to which they could be assigned. The groups are small in size, with low structures delimiting patios with a habitational function (Chocón 2001). The occupation could not be established, as test excavations were not conducted here. This is a Rank 3 site, corresponding to the political entity of Santa Rosa.

SANTA ROSA

The course of the San Juan River is 1 km away, while the archaeological groups seat on the high portions of the fertile river. The Group E-type Assemblage includes 10 structures which integrate a conventional assemblage. It would seem that this complex underwent two construction stages. The East Platform is 4.50 m high, and has a total length of 40 m. There are no lateral platforms on the foundation. In turn, the West Pyramid is 5 m high, and its pyramidal ground plan has 17 m at each side. Inside the patio and at some later stage, several minor structures were built to form a patio group, a case similar to others previously documented in sites such as Ixcóxl 2, Pueblito and El Chapayal, among others. The Acropolis-type Assemblage is Santa Rosa's Group B. No Ballgame court or causeways are associated with the site.

In Santa Rosa there is clear evidence of a Preclassic occupation, and with a lesser frequency, of a Late Classic occupation; therefore, it is presumed that the initial version of the Group E-type Assemblage was built during the earlier stage. Only the lower layers of two pits yielded samples connected with the Mamom sphere (the beginning of the Late Preclassic period). On the other hand, it is clear that the construction of the other buildings of the assemblage dates to the Late Classic period. However, the absence of evidence of a Terminal Classic occupation prevents us from ascribing to that stage the construction of a small habitational group within the plaza area of an ancient ritual assemblage, as corroborated in other sites of the region. There are no records of a Postclassic occupation. This is a Rank 1 site and the core of the political entity of Santa Rosa.

LA REINITA

Through a ballast road that connects Nueva Democracia with the village of La Reinita, the site lies 500 m at west, on a hill. It is associated with the banks of the Río Pasión. The Group E-type Assemblage is integrated by an East Structure approximately 6 m tall, with two small platforms placed adjacent to the north and south sides, like an East Platform in this type of assemblage, and shows no pyramidal structure on its west side. There is no evidence of other architectural groups or causeways.

NUEVA DEMOCRACIA 1

One must walk 1 km south of the community of Nueva Democracia, along a trail; the site lies on a small hill. In the Group E-type Assemblage there is an East Platform of small dimensions and conventional shape, with lateral platforms. The West Structure

is rectangular in shape and low in height (1 m). The south and north sides include two groups with Acropolis characteristics that close the group.

NUEVA DEMOCRACIA 2

Through a ballast road that unfolds from Nueva Democracia to La Reinita, the site is located nearby some pasture grounds, at the sides of the street. The Group E-type Assemblage consists of an East Platform of large proportions, approximately 60 m long and 6 m tall in its central platform, and does not include a West Pyramid. On the north side there is a plaza integrated by four low mounds, with well defined walls. On the south end of the platform there is an Acropolis-type Assemblage integrated by four structures arranged on a 4 m tall platform. There is no Ballgame court and no causeway.

EL BOTÁN

Along a ballast street that leads from El Botán to the community of La Reinita, the major mound lies on the west side of the street; the survey of this site was not allowed, though we were able to draw a plan of the central area. The Group E-type Assemblage consists of a considerably large structure (6 m tall) with two platforms placed aside on its north and south edges; this allows for considering it the East Platform of this type of assemblages. Mounds 0.50 m tall closing the plaza on its north and south sides were identified, but there was no structure on the west side of the plaza. No other architectural groups were observed.

SAN JUAN

One must walk 6 km to the south of the community of Nueva Democracia along a trail, up to the San Juan River. The site is located on top of low hills. In the Group E-type Assemblage there is a small East Platform with the conventional shape. The West Structure has a rectangular ground plan and a low height. Towards the north side there is a group enclosing the patio, while the south side shows two low mounds. There are no other specific architectural assemblages.

EL ANONAL

It has carved monuments, one temple that could easily form an unconventional Group E, in addition to some vaulted palace and several plazas. In the exploration conducted at the central area, a Middle Preclassic (Escoba phase) and a Late Classic occupation were established (Tourtellot 1988).

EL CEDRAL

It includes four ceremonial mounds around a patio, with two plain stelae and the fragment of a carved scene (Tourtellot 1988; Smith, Willey and Adams 1962).

**TABLE 1
SOME REGIONAL TRAITS**

Keys: **Group E** = Group E-type Assemblage
BG = Grounds for the Ballgame
LPC = Late Pre Classic
LC = Late Classic
TC = Terminal Classic

Group		E	BG	Acropolis	Causeway	LPC	LC	TC
El Achiotal	X	X	---	---	X	X	---	
El Frutal	---	X	---	---	---	X	---	
San Miguel	---	---	---	X	---	X	---	
Esquipulas 1		X	X	---	---	---	X	---
Pueblito	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
La Lucha	X	---	---	X	---	X	X	
Machaca 2	---	---	---	---	---	X	---	
Nuevas Delicias 3	---	---	---	---	---	X	---	
El Edén 2	---	---	X	X	---	X	---	
Nuevas Delicias 1	X	---	---	---	X	X	---	
Santa Rosa	X	---	X	---	X	X	---	
La Pajarera	X	---	---	X	X	X	---	
Actela		---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Puertas Azules		---	---	---	---	---	---	---
La Ginebra	X	X	X	---	X	X	---	
Las Papayas		---	---	---	---	---	---	---
La Mojarra	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
Canaan	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
Machaca 3	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
Nueva Democracia 1		X	---	X	---	---	---	---
Nueva Democracia 2		X	---	X	---	---	---	---
La Reinita	X	---	---	---	---	---	---	
El Botán	X	---	---	---	---	---	---	
San Juan	X	---	---	---	---	---	---	
El Frijolar	X	---	---	---	---	---	---	

Figure 1 Geographic region where Machaquila is located

Figure 2 Geographic sectors in the Machaquila region

Figure 3 Plan of the city, Machaquila