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**Naachtún, Petén, Guatemala: First Analyses, Guatemala**

**Appendix: Looted Vessels Recovered by the Naachtun Site Guardian 2004-2005**

***Discovery and Documentation***

On August 15, 2004, Naachtun site guardian Oracio Trujillo was patrolling the eastern perimeter of the site concession when he encountered a deserted camp consisting of a tarp set up in the middle of a group of over a dozen mounds. In the camp he discovered flour sacks filled with ceramic pots. The camp had been abandoned only about five days before his arrival. He brought the vessels back to camp over the course of a few visits as he could not carry them all at once. The vessels collected from this region of the NAP concession were referred to as Operation 9 for recording purposes ([Table A1](#), [Table A2](#)). They were brought in sequentially; Op 9A was in camp when we arrived for the 2005 season. Op 9B refers to pots from the same location that were collected at the end of April during the 2005 season. It is unclear if they are part of the same looting incident or a subsequent foray.

During a survey south and west of central Naachtun on April 26, 2005, Chris Morehart and Trujillo encountered another active looting camp. This time, they found sugar, water and masa stored in a looted tomb. The vessels they collected south and west of the site core were designated as Op 10.

The author documented and photographed most of the vessels in the field during the 2005 season<sup>1</sup> and made sketches of their forms and decoration in field notes, but there was not time to do formal illustration. Calgary student and conservator Alejandra Alonso reconstructed some of the fragmented vessels in the field using natural amate gum; other pots were left unreconstructed for ease of transport. As the vessels were not part of the NAP excavations, it was decided that they should be left in the Naachtun field camp in 2005. Eventually they were transferred to the IDEAH Ceramoteca in Guatemala City by NAP Co-Director Martin Rangel.

***Description***

The 59 looted vessels from the NAP concession are more or less contemporary, dating to Late Classic Maax Phase, perhaps occasionally overlapping with Middle Classic Batz' Phase. Most seem to have been produced locally as they share myriad technological and stylistic modes. Measurements that were taken during analysis are reported on [Table 2](#), although some vessels lack measurement data. These are reflected as blanks in the table.

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<sup>1</sup> Op 10A-5 to 10A-8 arrived after Walker's departure on May 4, 2005.

Monochrome reds (Nanzal Group) and blacks (Infierno Group) make up about 50% of the sample, including bowls with incised design ([Table A2](#)). While the Nanzal Red color is a consistent 2.5 YR4-5/8 red, Infierno Black slips exhibit a wide range of mottling, which seems to have been the intent, although some vessels are true black. Monochrome vessels fall into two basic forms, bowls and plates. Simple bowls average 20 cm in diameter and share direct rims and plain lips. A certain outflaring bowl form with flat bottom is a distinctive shape which seems to have been popular, done in both red and black ([Figure A1](#)). Plates have wide bases, often set on tripod feet; they also share short widely flaring sides with direct rims and plain lips ([Figure A2](#)). Plates average just under 30 cm in diameter. Most plates have kill holes<sup>2</sup>, while a smaller percentage of bowls have them. All but one of the incised bowls has a black slip with the type designation Carmelita Incised. A repeated scroll-step motif is the most common incised design ([Figure A3](#)) although one example of a spider monkey is also present in the collection ([Figure A4](#)).

In contrast to the relatively well preserved monochromes, most of the polychrome vessels left behind by looters are either eroded, broken or otherwise undesirable. Of the four cylinders collected, the two intact ones have virtually no paint or slip remaining. The two with remnant designs are fragmentary and at least partially eroded. Polychrome vessels fall predominantly into two types, orange-based and cream-based painting surfaces; vessel forms crosscut the types. Besides cylinders, vessel forms include simple bowls, most with flat bottoms, and large plates, some of them with tripod feet and kill holes.

It seems likely that under certain conditions, rainwater that entered a tomb might drip through a plate or bowl via its kill hole, speeding up the erosion of paints and slip nearest the kill hole and producing a pattern of differential wear. Those better protected from water were better preserved and were more likely to be removed by looters. Eroded pots were more likely to be left behind at sites such as Naachtun where looters arrived on foot and could only remove what they could carry. It also stands to reason that, in the corpus of looted pots now in museums and private collections, central images on plates, particularly where a kill hole is present, were more likely to have been restored or otherwise altered prior to being put on the market for sale.

It is beyond the scope of this report to describe each vessel in detail, but a few deserve specific mention.

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<sup>2</sup> A kill hole is a small hole punctured in the base of a vessel. It is generally associated with burial furniture and was probably done for a religious reason. It also renders the vessel useless for holding liquids, which may have functioned to discourage looting in antiquity.



Figure A1. Op 10A-2 Popular bowl form in Naachtun region during Maax Phase.



Figure A2. Op 9A-38 Common plate form in Naachtun region during Maax Phase.



Figure A3. Op 9A-12 Carmelita Incised bowl with step design.



Figure A4. Op 9A-11 Carmelita Incised bowl with spider monkey motif.



## ***Special Comments on the Palmar Orange Polychromes***

Most of the ten Palmar Group bowls have plain orange or red interiors and geometric designs on the exterior, including diamonds, scrolls, and zoned bands of color ([Figure A5](#)). Each of the five Palmar Orange Polychrome plates originally held unique central designs on their interior bases; they are all eroded to some extent. They all have kill holes and most have tripod feet ([Table A2](#)). Two of the Palmar Group plates in this collection exhibit what appears to be iconographic elements in the central image.

**Op 10A-1** is a Palmar Orange Polychrome plate with a concave base that was found glued together in the looters' camp. It exhibits a faded but visible motif composed of two tripartite scalloped zones with inset semicircles ([Figure A6](#)). The image might represent a pair of shell cutouts, or perhaps a snake or sky band, but it is very iconic and contains no other visual cues.

**Op 9B-12** is a Palmar Orange Polychrome plate. It was not examined and described in the field due to time constraints. The central image is quite eroded but it seems to include a smoke or blood scroll perhaps as part of a quadripartite design. It is ringed by a clearly visible repeated step scroll motif ([Figure A7](#)).

Two of the Palmar Orange Polychrome plates feature human figures as the central image. Both were broken when discovered but were glued together in the field.

**Op 9A-28** is a Palmar Orange Polychrome tripod footed plate that illustrates a probable male military figure seated on a raised red painted bench ([Figure A8](#)). The vessel has a kill hole puncturing the middle of his body and details of his features are eroded. He faces to his right and wears a spotted balloon headdress from which long feathers extrude in both directions. Feathers are also visible around his midsection extending from his costume, although his body is not visible. A circumferential band on the vessel illustrates a repeated step scroll motif.

**Op 9B-8** is a Palmar Orange Polychrome tripod footed plate that illustrates a probable male dancer in the central image ([Figure A9](#)). Like Op 9A-28, it has a kill hole and most of the features of his body have eroded away; only the extremities are visible. The dancer stands facing the audience, right arm outstretched, left shoulder raised, with head turned to the right toward a band of three abstract probably repetitive pseudo-glyphs<sup>3</sup>. In profile view the dancer reveals his extreme cranial deformation. He wears a black stripe on his cheek and appears to have red ear flares. His delicately painted headdress consists of long thin feathers that extend in both directions through the field of view; they almost seem to be in motion. Finely illustrated red feathers extrude from his midsection, hinting at movement; they probably stem from an elaborate backrack that has otherwise eroded away. Red cloth strips dangle below near his bare feet. He wears black and white wristlets and anklets. His outstretched right hand appears to grasp at the dangling tip of his headdress feather, while his left hand is extended toward

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<sup>3</sup> Pseudo-glyphs have the shape of real glyphs but lack decipherable meaning. They may have been produced in haste or by non-literate pottery artists. They are Late to Terminal Classic diagnostics in Peten.

a feather at the other end of the headdress. The pottery artist's hand clearly conveyed a sense of movement with this image.

**Op 9B-9**, the fifth Palmar Orange Polychrome vessel, is a tripod footed plate, but the feet had been broken off prior to its arrival in camp. It is also missing one rim segment, yet the rim band is clearly visible as a large sized step scroll design that repeats four times ([Figure A10](#)). The central image includes a thick red and black band ringing a very eroded center in the vicinity of the kill hole. There appears to be one red scroll and some intricate black painted line work, but there is not enough information to determine whether the central element is figural or iconic.



**Figure A5. Op 9B-2 Palmar Orange Polychrome bowl with geometric design.**



Figure A6. Op 10A-1 Palmar Orange Polychrome plate with scalloped shell motif.





Figure A7. Op 9B-12 Palmar Orange Polychrome plate.





Figure A8 Op 9A-28 Palmar Orange Polychrome plate with military figure in central image.



Figure A9 Op 9B-8 Palmar Orange Polychrome plate with male dancer in central image.





Figure A10. Op 9B-9 Palmar Orange Polychrome plate.

### ***Special Comments on the Zacatel Cream Polychromes***

There are eight Zacatel Cream Polychromes in the collection, including two cylinder vases as well as two bowls and four plates. All four plates have kill holes. The base cream slip on these vessels has a distinctive matte finish unlike the glossier Palmar Orange Polychrome. Besides offering a neutral white base color for fine line painting, perhaps the slip formula produced a surface that made it easier for artists to apply the paint evenly. These vessel surfaces were used to convey the most complicated artistic

images in the collection. Vessel forms clearly crosscut the types, however; they are very similar in dimension and shape to the orange polychromes.

Both Zacatel Cream Polychrome hemispherical bowls have plain orange interiors and zoned geometric design on the exterior ([Figure A11](#)). For comparison, an identical Zacatel Cream Polychrome vessel fragment was found in the Rio Azul type collection located in the IDEAH Ceramoteca in Guatemala City ([Figure A12](#)).

**Op 9A-29** is a Zacatel Cream Polychrome tripod footed plate with an extremely eroded central image. Only a red band is visible on the edge of the plate base ([Figure A13](#)). Its flaring wall is decorated with a clear patterned design alternating between a 5x3 checkerboard block and a set of four pseudo-glyphs that alternate between a red glyph and a black glyph. This pattern repeats four times around the vessel interior.

**Op 10A-4** is a Zacatel Cream Polychrome tripod footed plate with a similarly eroded central image ([Figure A14](#)). Nothing can be recovered from the base, however, a glyph band encircling the interior wall is preserved. The glyphs are large and delicately rendered in two groups of three separated by red bands. These are true glyphs and not pseudo-glyphs. Epigraphic analysis is pending. The text probably begins with the initial series introductory glyph ([Figure A15](#)). One phrase may identify the owner, beginning with the phrase his plate, *u lak*, followed by a personal name or title. Both phrases end with the same glyph, what appears to be a right facing monkey ([Figure A16](#)).

**Op 9B-10** is a Zacatel Cream Polychrome tripod footed plate with an extant iconic central image and a glyph band along the interior vessel wall; the feet are now broken ([Figure A17](#)). The central image is a quadripartite arrangement of crosses situated around four concentric bands enclosing a central red circle. Likely a representation of the ik glyph for breath, wind or life, the four cross elements probably reference something directional, such as the four winds. The kill hole fits within the red circle. Like Op 10A-4, the flaring vessel wall is used as a background for a text, which is comprised of two groups of three large glyphs separated by wide red bands. The glyphs are somewhat eroded but both bands include the glyph *ch'ok*, meaning youth, in the middle of each text. Poor preservation renders the rest of the text difficult to decipher.

**Op 9B-14** is a Zacatel Cream Polychrome large flat bottomed plate with a partially preserved central image and clearly defined step pyramid band ringing it ([Figure A18](#)). The step pyramid repeats 13 times. The central image appears to be a stylized coatimundi sitting atop a cut shell. The central portion of its body near the kill hole is eroded, but it is clearly visible in black paint outline on a red background. The coati is pictured in profile facing the viewer's left. It has a teardrop shaped eye, short snout and black button nose. The mouth is curved open exhibiting red lips and at least three long teeth. The coati's ear is extended upward above and just behind its eye. Below the face, a reaching paw is visible exhibiting three sharp claws and a bracelet before it disappears into the eroded center of the body. At the top right, the outline of a long thin, perhaps black dotted tail curls across the frame above the body, seemingly balancing it on the shell. Although the hind legs are not easy to identify, the animal appears to be



perched atop the shell cutout, which itself is clearly visible. Its scalloped exterior is painted a paler orange and the interior oval at the very base is red.

**Op 9A-31** is a Zacatel Cream Polychrome fragmentary cylinder vase which was reconstructed in the field ([Figure A19](#)). It is heavily eroded, but exhibits the remains of a sky band in red paint across the top, including a cross bands glyph and *k'in* glyph, referencing the sun and other celestial bodies. The vessel was probably decorated with other fine line designs, but only traces of red paint remain.

**Op 9A-34** is a Zacatel Cream Polychrome fragmentary cylinder vase with better iconographic preservation ([Figure A20](#)). It is, in fact, the finest artistic rendering in the collection, and was probably left behind because it was broken, missing a significant portion of the rim and about 50% eroded. The image is of an ornately appointed left facing bird, probably an owl, emitting a large red bifurcate scroll, probably blood. To the left of the blood scroll is a pair of vertically stacked *k'an* cross glyphs rendered in cartouches. This design repeats on the other side of the vessel. One bird is much better preserved than the other, yet the better preserved bird is missing a portion of its headdress due to breakage ([Figure A21](#)). Fortunately, a portion of the other bird's headdress is preserved sufficiently to get some idea of its overall design ([Figure A22](#)).

The better preserved bird, rendered in great detail, exhibits a short pot bellied body and stubby wings with black tipped feathers. Only the front portion of its face is visible above the body before the vessel break. The visible portion of its face is best interpreted as a Tlaloc mask covering an unseen owl head. A mask is suggested because the large red ring designating a goggle-eyed *Tlaloc* is oddly offset from the axis of its body. Ornate flourishes above the eye represent parts of a large headdress that extends behind the head, visible only in profile on the obverse bird image. In sum, imagery on this vessel, including the owl, goggle eyes, blood scrolls and *k'an* crosses is consistent with the iconography associated with *Tlaloc* worship in the Late Classic.

**Op 9B-11** is a Mataculebra Cream Polychrome tripod plate with a set of repair holes<sup>4</sup> on one side wall. Although it has a kill hole, the image is fairly well preserved on both the base and interior walls of the vessel ([Figure A23](#)). A deep red (2.5YR4/8) ring framed by black bands is the only design on the flaring walls, although there is a pattern of large semicircles on the rim which runs 3 black, 3 red, 3 black, 4 red, for a total of 13 semicircles. The central image is quadripartite, consisting of bifurcate red (blood) scrolls and opposing profile flower images organized around a red circle that anchors them. The heavy black line design is rendered rather casually compared to the precise brushwork of the Zacatel Cream Polychrome vessels.

**Op 9B-13** is an unidentified Red-on-cream tripod plate with a kill hole and eroded interior base ([Figure A24](#)). There are traces of a red ring around the interior basal edge, but no other design is visible. The interior side walls are painted with an enigmatic non-Maya set of icons. Decoration consists of two pairs of images arranged opposite one another. One set includes a pair of red circles enclosing horizontal or arcing concentric

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<sup>4</sup> Repair holes refer to holes drilled in cracked or broken pots which were then presumably lashed together with a cord and perhaps also glued with rendered amate sap.

lines. Very broadly, these might represent the goggly eyes and blunt nose of a *Tlaloc* image. Counterpoint to them is a longer pair of designs that include a horizontal T-like element on the outer frame followed by a series of eight or more dots looped around the interior end of the T. Nested inside this is a pair of L-shaped elements framing a central ovoid shape. While it could be interpreted in many ways, this may represent the Mexican year sign. Clearly, the vessel form and slip colors are consistent with other plates in the collection, yet the iconic design is not painted in Peten Maya style. This may reflect the foreign origin of a pottery artist working with Maya potters in Peten.

**Op 9A-27** is an unidentified polychrome painted deep bowl with flaring walls and slight medial carination. The vessel is slipped orange on the interior with a red rim band on both the interior and exterior ([Figure A25](#)). Below the carination on the exterior, the vessel is slipped buff to brown with 4 red circles applied around its circumference. On top of the red areas, a white painted design was applied to the exterior rim and four circles. Painted design on the rim includes an iconic four-petaled flower from which two sets of long squared horizontal lines emanate, each of which frames six short vertical lines. This design repeats on the obverse of the vessel. Separating them is a curled scroll-like motif that is applied rather like cursive script. Each of the four large red dots has a white ring painted around its edge and outside that is a series of small white dots. There is white paint applied between the red dots, but it is not very well preserved on top of the buff to brown slip. For comparison, an identical vessel fragment from Rio Azul was located in the type collection at the IDAEH Ceramoteca ([Figure A26](#)). It was listed as an undesignated special at Rio Azul as well.



**Figure A11. Op 9A-22 Zacatel Cream Polychrome bowl.**



**Figure A12. Zacatel Cream Polychrome bowl fragment from Rio Azul type collection.**



Figure A13. Op 9A-29 Zacatel Cream Polychrome plate with checkerboard motif.





Figure A14. Op 10A-4 Zacatel Cream Polychrome plate with large glyph band.



**Figure A15. Op 10A-4 probable initial series introductory glyph.**



Figure A16. Op 10A-4 right facing monkey, probable name or title.





Figure A17. Op 9B-10 Zacatel Cream Polychrome plate with quadripartite design.





Figure A18. Op 9B-14 Zacatel Cream Polychrome plate with coatimundi image.



Figure A19. Op 9A-31 Zacatel Cream Polychrome cylinder with sky band motif.





Figure A20. Op 9A-34 Zacatel Cream Polychrome cylinder with owls and k'an crosses.





Figure A21. Op 9A-34 close up of owl illustrating vessel break.



Figure A22. Op 9A-34 close up of owl headdress.



Figure A23. Op 9B-11 Mataculebra Cream Polychrome plate with quadrapartite central image.





Figure A24. Op 9B-13 Unidentified Red-on-cream plate.



Figure A25. Op 9A-27 Unidentified Polychrome plate with white line painting.



Figure A26. Unidentified Polychrome Special bowl fragment from Rio Azul type collection.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

The 59 looted vessels recovered by site guardians during the NAP excavations are indicative of the ongoing looting problem that still plagues Classic era sites in the region on both sides of the Mexico-Guatemala border. It can be argued with some amount of certainty that these pots represent a cross section of burial furniture for the burgeoning middle class who constructed family tombs in their plaza compounds in what would be considered the suburbs. These smaller settlements seem to have expanded dramatically across the regional landscape during Maax Phase. Population expansion at this time depth is likely linked to Naachtun's success during the era of Tikal king Jasaw Chan K'awil and his immediate successors. It seems likely that a single burial might have contained an incised bowl, a plate and a cylinder, representing the dinner service of the individual interred, however, in the absence of controlled excavation, this is merely conjecture.



**Table A1. Vessel Forms Collected 2004-2005**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Bowl</b>	<b>Plate</b>	<b>Cylinder /Jar</b>	<b>Number</b>
Nanzal	Nanzal Red	5	5		10
	Corozal Incised	1			1
Infierno	Infierno Black		6		6
	Carmelita Incised	11			11
	Chilar Fluted			1	1
	Unnamed Gadrooned			1	1
Palmar	Desquite Red-on-orange	1			1
	Palmar Orange Polychrome	9	3		12
	Composite Carved		1		1
	Composite Incised		1		1
Zacatel	Zacatel Cream Polychrome	2	4	2	8
Undesignated	Mateculebra Cream Polychrome		1		1
	Unidentified Red-on-cream		1		1
	Unidentified Polychrome		1	2	3
Cambio Unslipped	Ucum Unslipped		1		1
	<b>TOTAL VESSELS</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>59</b>

**Table A2. Naachtun Looted Vessels Inventory**