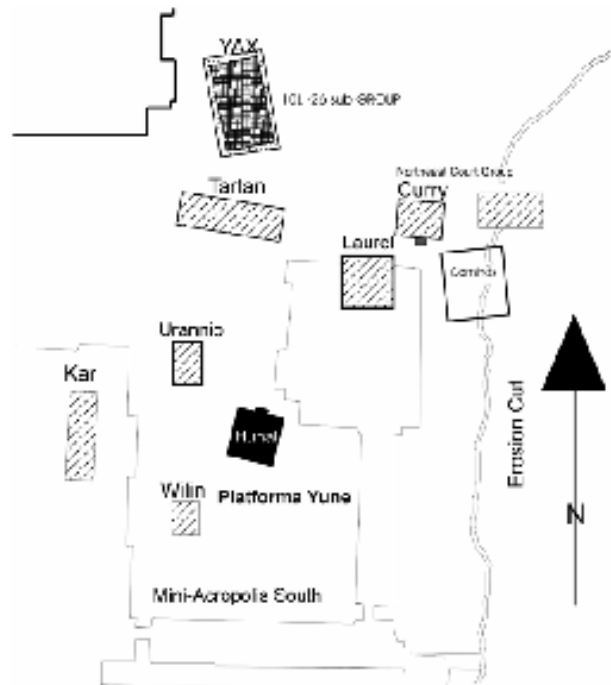


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Early Copán Acropolis Program 1995-1997 Field Seasons Latest Findings at Copán, Honduras

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Research Year: 1995-1997
Culture: Maya
Chronology: Early Classic
Location: Copán, Honduras
Site: Copán Acropolis

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Introduction

The Early Copán Acropolis Program (ECAP) of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, working under the auspices of the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (IHAH)¹ has completed nine field seasons of research within the Acropolis of the Classic period Maya site of Copán, Honduras (1989-1997).²

¹ ECAP's research has been made possible by the assistance and support of the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia, Dra. Olga Joya S., Gerente, Licda. Carmen Julia Fajardo (Jefe, Depto. de Investigación Arqueológica), and Prof. Oscar Cruz M. (Jefe, Región Nor-Occidental del IHAH).

² Since its beginning in 1989, ECAP's investigations have been carried out by some 50 professional researchers and consultants, a loyal work force of local laborers who have excavated and consolidated over 3 kms of tunnels, and an IHAH staff that has provided vital support for administration, conservation, architectural consolidation, and architectural recording. ECAP Director is Dr. Robert J. Sharer, Curator of the American Section of the University of Pennsylvania Museum. David W. Sedat, Research Specialist in the American Section of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, is Field Director. The computer mapping of all buried architecture beneath the Acropolis has been conducted by Loa P. Traxler of the Museum Applied Science Center for Archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Sharer, Sedat, and Traxler have also supervised specific excavation areas during the course of ECAP's research, as have Alfonso Morales (University of Texas), and Julie Miller (University of Pennsylvania). The consolidation of all Acropolis architecture has been under the overall direction of Rudy Larrios, ably assisted by Fernando Lopez, who has been especially helpful to ECAP's research. The entire assemblage of buried Acropolis architecture has been catalogued by Christine Carrelli (Rutgers University). The cataloguing and analysis of the artifacts recovered by ECAP's excavations has been carried out by Ellen Bell (University of Pennsylvania). The conservation of artifacts has been expertly handled by a team of professional conservators composed of Lynn Grant, University of Pennsylvania Museum, Harriet Beaubien, Smithsonian Institution, and several consultants and trainees from both the US and Honduras. A separate FAMS Grant (number 95061) was awarded in 1996 to ECAP for archaeological conservation and the training of Honduran conservators (see the Appendix to this report).

ECAP has relied on a variety of professional consultants over the course of its research. Linda Schele has visited ECAP's tunnel excavations almost every field season, providing vital expertise on epigraphic and iconographic matters. ECAP has also benefited from the contributions made by many other individuals, including David Stuart, Stephen Houston, Pat Culbert, Dorie Reents-Budet, Simon Martin, Justin Kerr, Christopher Jones, and John Carlson.

Over the past decade of research, a cadre of graduate and undergraduate students have played vital roles as Field Assistants for ECAP's excavations. These individuals are Marcello Canuto, Charles Golden, and Laura Pillette (all of the University of Pennsylvania), Edward Barnhart and Christopher Powell (both of the University of Texas), and David Browning (University of Illinois), along with Luis Centeno and Eva Martinez (both Honduran college students). Last, but not least, ECAP has also greatly benefited from the contributions of volunteers, including Eleanor Coates (architectural and artifact photography), and William Castleman (excavation and mechanical engineering).

The Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., through the awarding of Grant 95060, provided vital support for ECAP's Acropolis excavations over the past three seasons (1995-1997) during which all tunnel excavations were completed.³ This report will summarize the results of ECAP's research conducted under the support of this grant in each of these three field seasons. An Appendix to this report summarizes the results of a one year (1996) collateral award (Grant 95061) for the training of conservation personnel at Copán.

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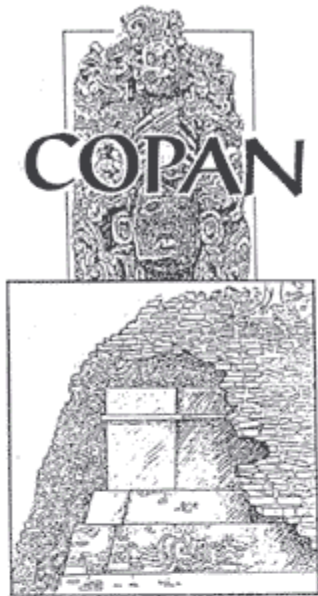
Research Goals and Methods

The Copán Acropolis is an architectural complex used by Copán's 16 kings from ca. A.D. 420 to 800. The overall objective of ECAP research is to document the architectural history of this famous complex. To meet this goal, ECAP has excavated some 3 kms of tunnels from the "corte," or river cut along the east side of the Acropolis. As a result, an unprecedented sequence of buried buildings dating to the Early Classic era (ca. A.D. 420-600) has been revealed, recorded, and conserved for future study and appreciation. The tunnels follow known architectural remains (floors, terraces, building walls, etc.) to reveal the form of buried architecture. Tunneling is far less destructive than conventional trenching since most of the excavated material is composed of the fills placed by the Maya when they buried their buildings prior to replacement by subsequent construction. The result is a sequence of superimposed Acropolis buildings that comprise the architectural history of this complex. Each individual building in this sequence is recorded by photography, drawings, and computer-generated plans. The sum of this documentation is a unique record composed of both stratigraphic sections and a series of computer-generated plans of each stage in the growth of the Acropolis. A series of computer-generated schematic plans (Figures 1-10) is hyperlinked to this report as a guide to the architectural sequence.

Excavation and documentation are followed by consolidation of both tunnels and architecture. Tunnel consolidation insures that the architecture buried beneath the

³ In addition to the research grants from the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (1995-1997), support for ECAP research has been provided by the University of Pennsylvania Museum (Boyer and Shoemaker Chair Research Funds), the University of Pennsylvania Research Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the National Geographic Society, the Maya Workshop Foundation, the Kislak Foundation, the Selz Foundation, the Holt Family Foundation, the Segy Foundation, and numerous private donors.

Copán Acropolis will remain accessible to both scholars and visitors. One former ECAP tunnel is already open to visitors (see [Figure 11](#)); plans call for others to be opened to visitors in the future. Architectural consolidation is carried out according to UNESCO standards so that the long-buried Maya buildings beneath the Acropolis are preserved for future study and appreciation.



PATIO DE LOS JAGUARES Circuito "A"

El recorrido en los túneles, nos da la idea de dos elementos esenciales:

- a) la metodología de investigaciones arqueológicas mediante la excavación de túneles, y
- b) la superposición de construcciones como un patrón tradicional en la arquitectura maya.

Sin embargo, es muy importante explicar, que aunque los vestigios más antiguos de ocupación en el Valle de Copán, se remontan a unos 1,200 años a.C. La "Acrópolis" donde se han excavado los túneles, posiblemente fue fundada alrededor del año 420 de nuestra era.

En el año 820 d.C., es decir 400 años después, este Centro Cívico habría crecido hasta unos 4,000 metros cuadrados, y su volumen se habría multiplicado grandemente. No obstante, la actividad constructiva se termina y da lugar al abandono total de la ciudad, y con ello, también el proceso de deterioro transforma su esplendor en ruinas.

El río Copán por ejemplo, corta la Acrópolis en su extremo Este, como quién parte un pastel de varias capas, en una longitud de más de 200 metros y una altura entre los 25 y 30 metros y destruye un área aproximada a los 10,000 metros cuadrados.

Este fenómeno dejó al descubierto la secuencia estructural e histórica de la Acrópolis, mostrando diferentes capas constructivas y restos

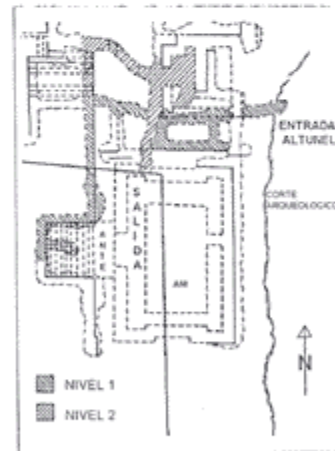
arquitectónicos, permitiéndonos entender sobre la tradición maya, que las construcciones eran constantemente renovadas, y en algunos casos, destruidas parcialmente, para luego volver a construir sobre sus restos, una nueva estructura de mayores dimensiones.

La excavación por túneles, es un método puesto en práctica desde hace más de medio siglo, pero en Copán, adquiere una utilidad especial, ya que el arqueólogo puede seguir los contornos de estructuras antiguas, y caminar por los diferentes pisos con una mínima excavación y un máximo de conservación, en un viaje por el tiempo, hacia el pasado.

La tradición maya incluía además de la remodelación de sus casas, palacios y templos, renovaciones totales del Centro Cívico. Los arqueólogos han logrado distinguir cinco renovaciones o "FASES", enumerándolas en sentido inverso al tiempo, es decir, que la fase # 1 es la última renovación, representada por los edificios que vemos exteriormente y la # 5, está representada por las más antiguas.

El circuito "A" nos permite hacer un viaje a través de algunas construcciones de la Fase # 2. Y al iniciar el recorrido en el gran corte, podemos ver muchas superposiciones.

Las estructuras tienen nombres arbitrarios, que



Circuito "A"

solo nos ayudan a referirnos a ellas durante la excavación, y ahora, para que el visitante las pueda identificar: "Arte, Cisne y Rojo", formaron el extremo norte del patio oriental o Patio de Los Jaguares, y su ocupación como fase # 3, se desarrolla entre los años 540-650 d.C. La fase # 1 fue construida y ocupada entre los años 650 - 820 de nuestra era. Recuerda que nos referimos como fase # 1 a todas las estructuras visibles de la acrópolis y no solamente al Patio de Los Jaguares.



Basamento de Estructura "ANTE" Fachada norte

Figure 11. Tunnel I/7, excavated by ECAP between 1989 and 1994.

THE 1995 FIELD SEASON

Excavations during the 1995 season revealed and documented several important new buildings that date to the earliest period of the Acropolis. This era corresponds to the founding of the Copán ruling dynasty (ca. A.D. 420-440). The 1995 excavations were concentrated in two areas of early Acropolis architecture, the Northern Court Complex (excavations supervised by Loa P. Traxler), and in the Southern Temple Complex (excavations supervised by David W. Sedat).

The Northeast Court Complex

ECAP's excavations have revealed a complex of residential-type buildings located beneath the northeast sector of the Acropolis (Maps 1-3 and Figures 1-9). The origins and development of this Northeast Court Complex during a span of about 150 years in the Early Classic period (ca. A.D. 400-540) have been documented by ECAP research. During this span a succession of large multi-roomed buildings arranged around several central courtyards were constructed, used, terminated, and replaced. The evidence indicates that throughout its history, the Northeast Court Complex was the earliest royal residential area of the Copán Acropolis.

Court Groups 4 and 3

Beginning in 1989, ECAP's tunnel excavations have defined and recorded the sequential development of this complex. As a result, by 1994 much of the latter portion of the sequence was documented, consisting of two major stages of masonry residential-type buildings. These were arranged around a series of courtyards that extended from the bank of the Río Copán for about 100 meters to the west (the easternmost courtyards were all but destroyed by later erosion from the river). The earliest stage of these masonry buildings, Court Groups 4A through 4C, are dated to ca. A.D. 480-520 ([Figure 7](#) and [Figure 8](#)). This was followed by a second stage, Court Groups 3A and 3B, dated to ca. A.D. 520-540 ([Figure 9](#)).

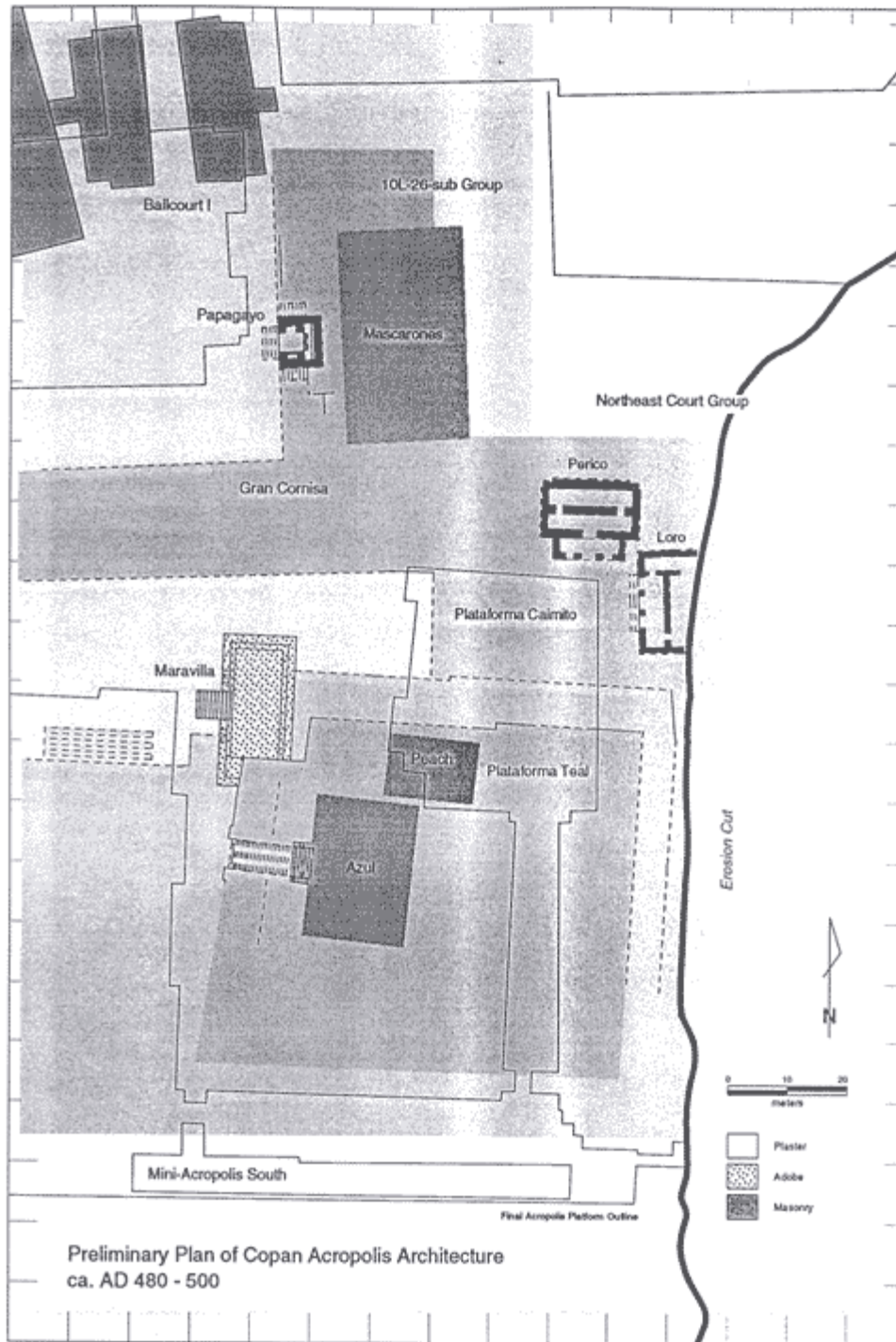


Figure 7. Computer-generated map. (Stage 7).

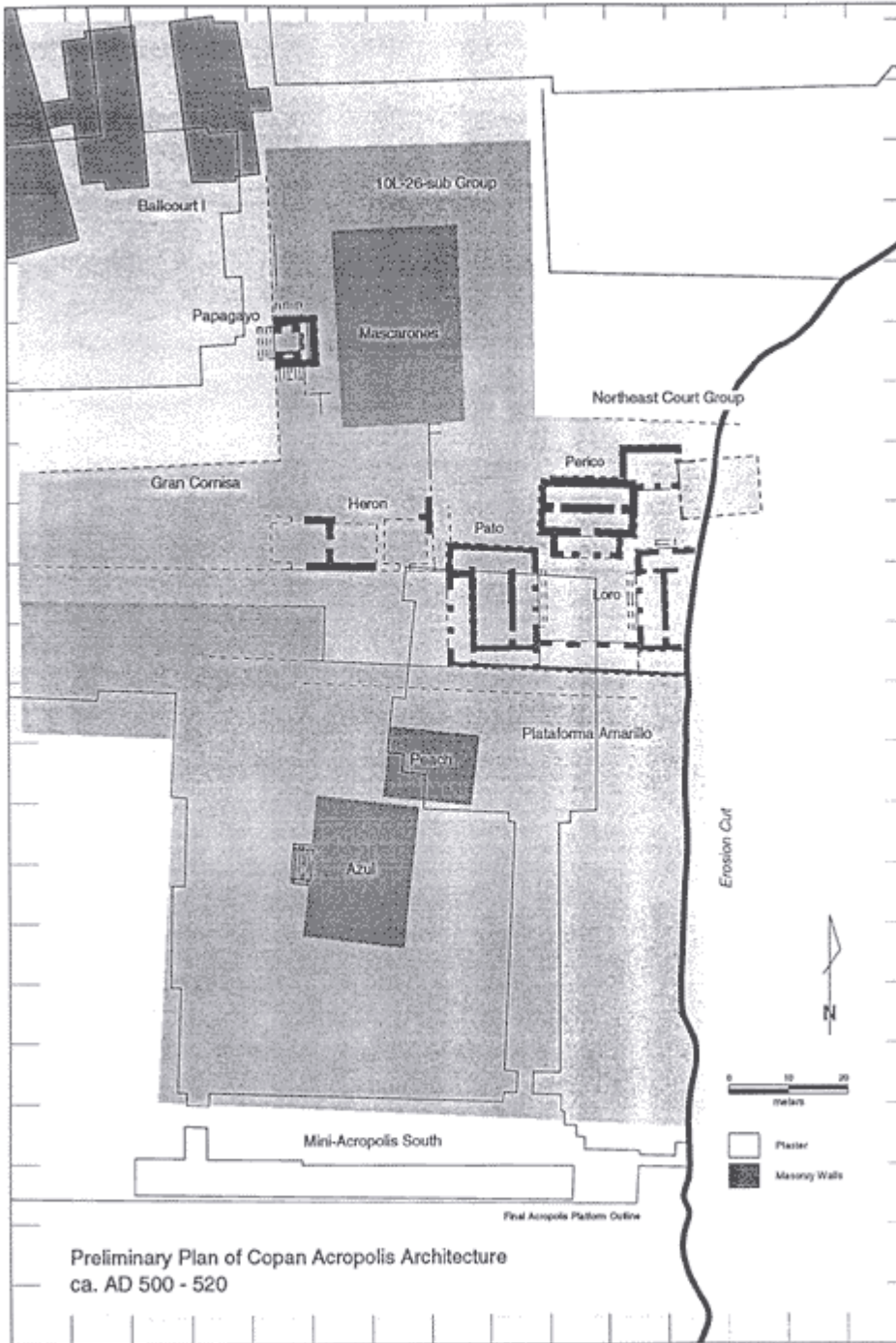


Figure 8. Computer-generated map. (Stage 8).

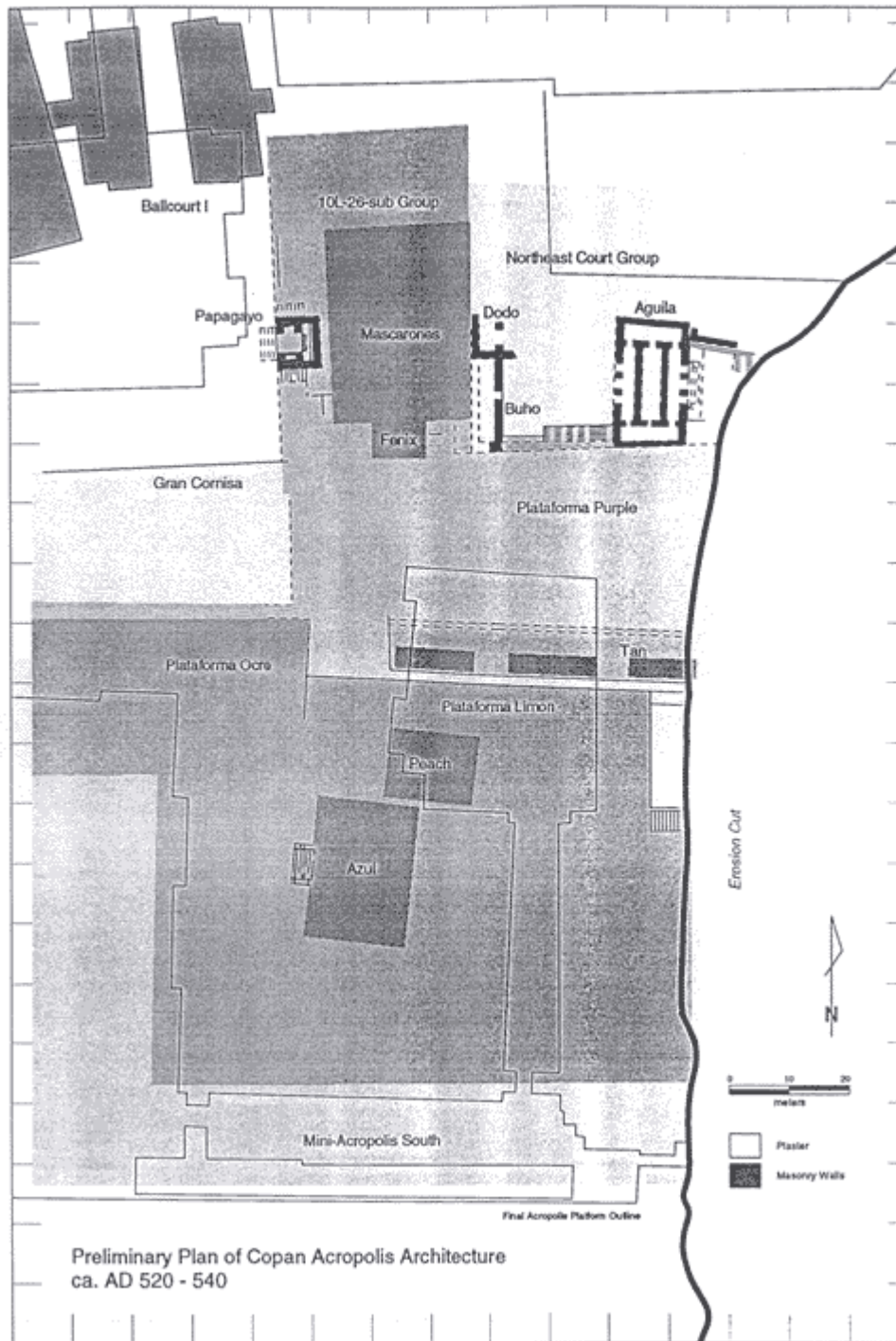


Figure 9. Computer-generated map. (Stage 9).

Court Group 5

Based on this knowledge, beginning in 1995 excavations in the Northern Court Complex were devoted to excavations in the levels beneath these masonry residential buildings to document the origins and development of the preceding phases of construction. These excavations consisted on a tunnel beneath Court Complex 4B, and a series of deep stratigraphic probes beneath the floors of the Court Group 4 buildings. This work revealed that the sequence of masonry residences was preceded by platforms and buildings constructed of earth and adobe. Four earthen building platforms were defined by the end of the 1995 season. These formed a newly defined complex designated Court Group 5A and 5B (Maps 1-3 and Figures 1-6). To the west is a lower outlying platform (field designation, "**Tartan**" structure).

Like its successors, the eastern group (Court Group 5A) was almost totally destroyed by river erosion. But the building platforms of the westernmost group, Court Group 5B (field designations, "**Laurel, Curry, and Cominos**"), were found to be well preserved directly beneath part of the earliest masonry residential complexes, Court Group 4B. Several traces of wall foundations were found, showing that the adobe buildings on the summits of the Court Group 5B earthen platforms were destroyed when Court 4B was constructed. But the large supporting platforms of Court Group 5B survive, encased in later construction. These represent part of the initial stage of the Northern Court Complex, and date to the earliest dynastic period (ca. A.D. 420-480).

The Southern Temple Complex

To the south of the Northeast Court Complex lies a cluster of early construction designated as the Southern Temple Complex (originally called the "Mini-Acropolis of the South"). Investigations of this complex began in earnest during the 1991 field season and have continued during each subsequent season. During the 1995 field season this work culminated in the documentation of the earliest buildings in the central core of the Acropolis. As a result, the Southern Temple Complex is now known to comprise the earliest royal center associated with the initial historically identified kings of Copán (the Founder and his immediate successors). As such, the Southern Temple Complex represents the architectural foundation of the Late Classic Acropolis that remains visible today.

This royal complex expanded around three sequential structures situated deep beneath the very center of the Acropolis (Maps 1-3 and [Figure 1](#), [Figure 2](#) and [Figure 3](#)). These three buildings were constructed within a span of perhaps no more than ca. 20 years (ca. A.D. 420-440). The first of these platforms has the field designation "**Hunal**." It was replaced by a larger platform given the field name "**Yehnal**." This second structure was buried by an even larger platform, designated "**Margarita**."

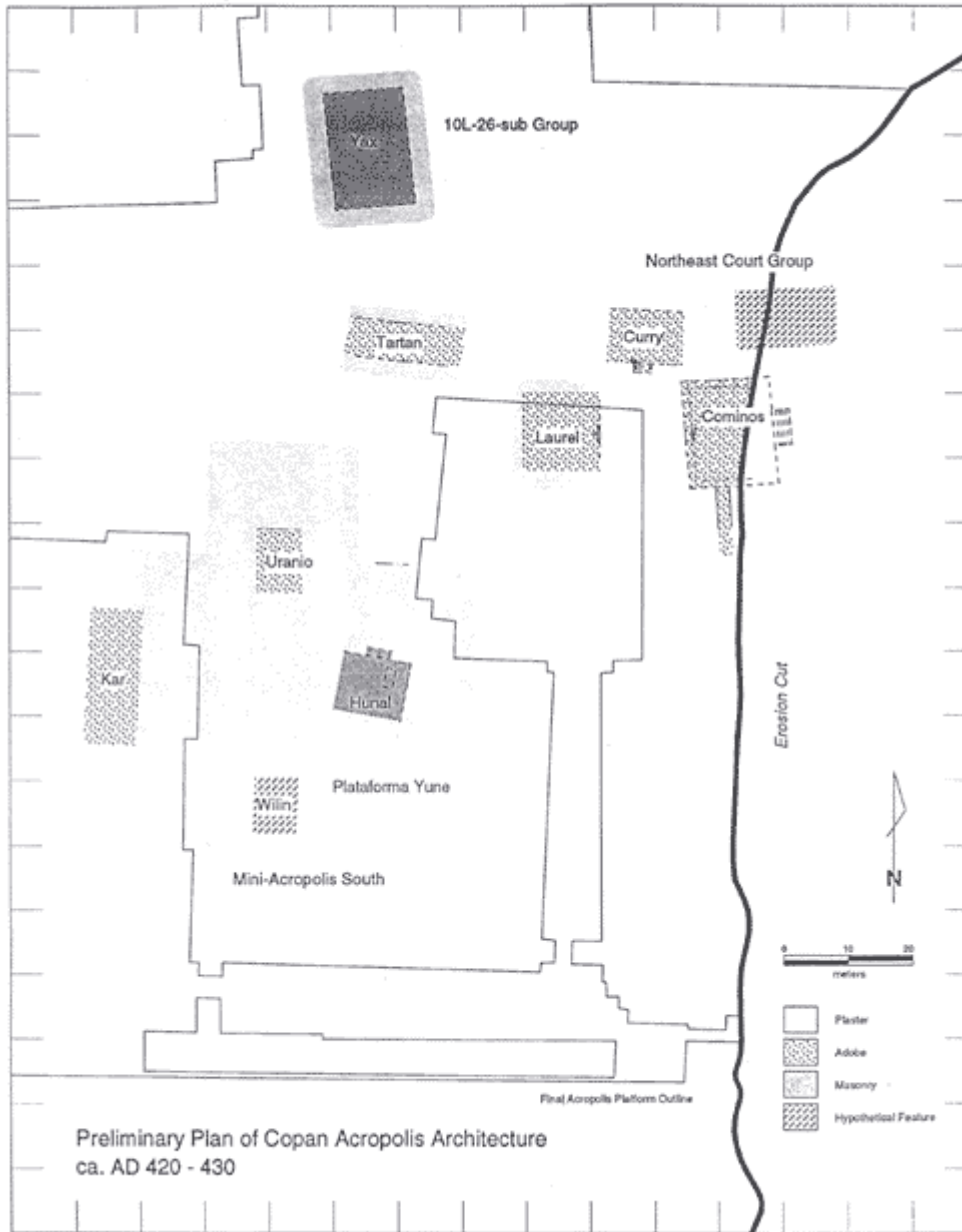


Figure 1. Computer-generated map. (Stage 1).

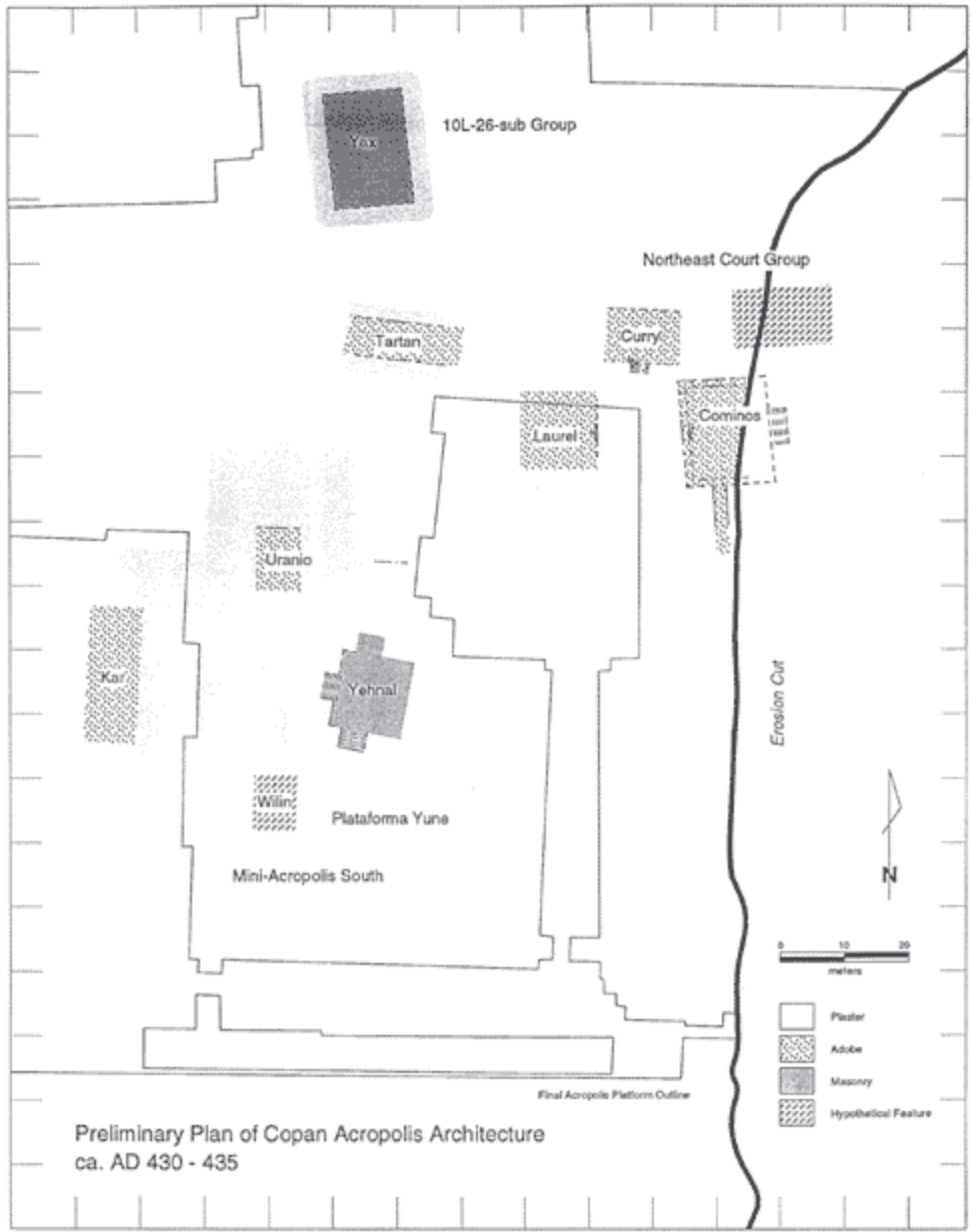


Figure 2. Computer-generated map. (Stage 2).

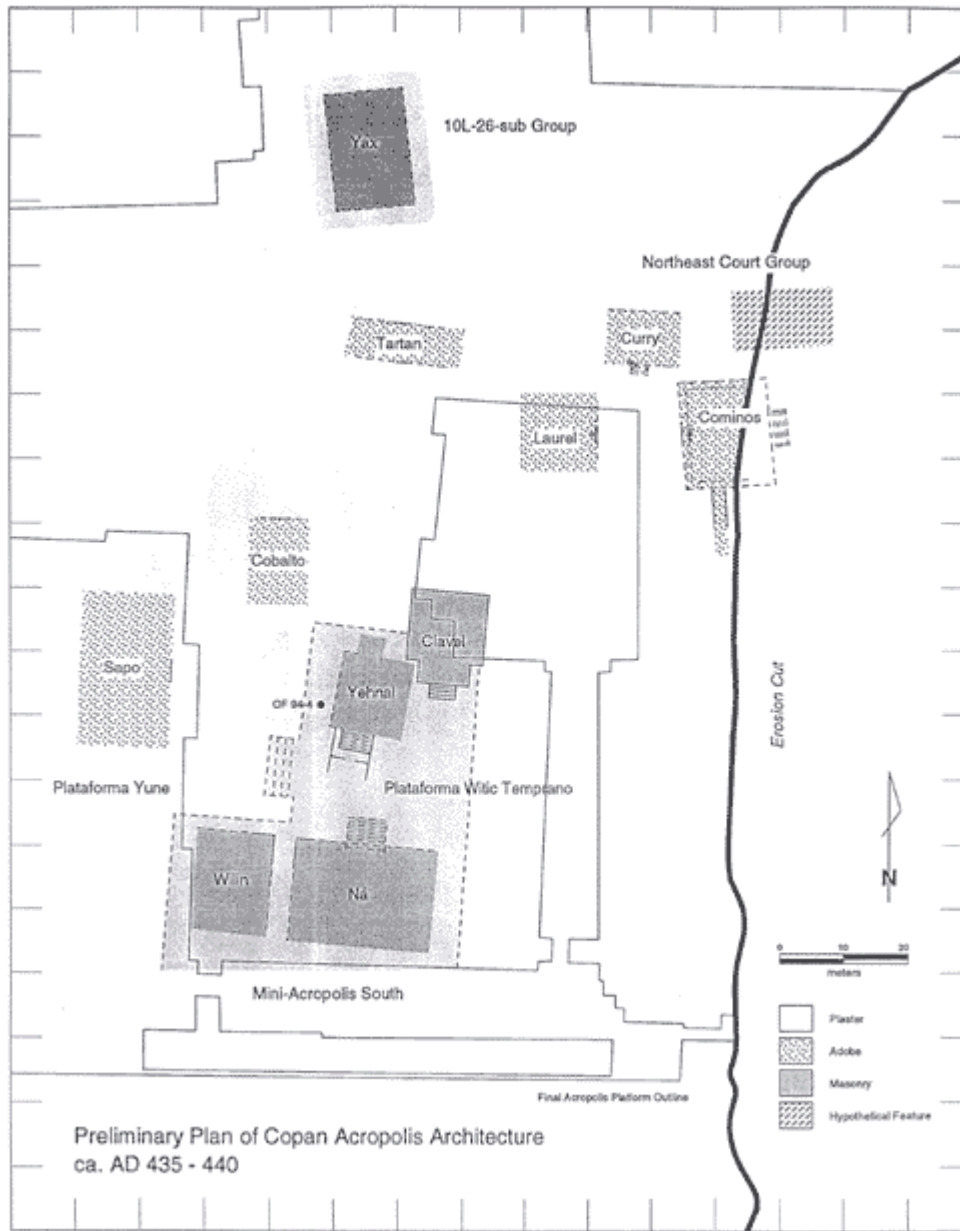
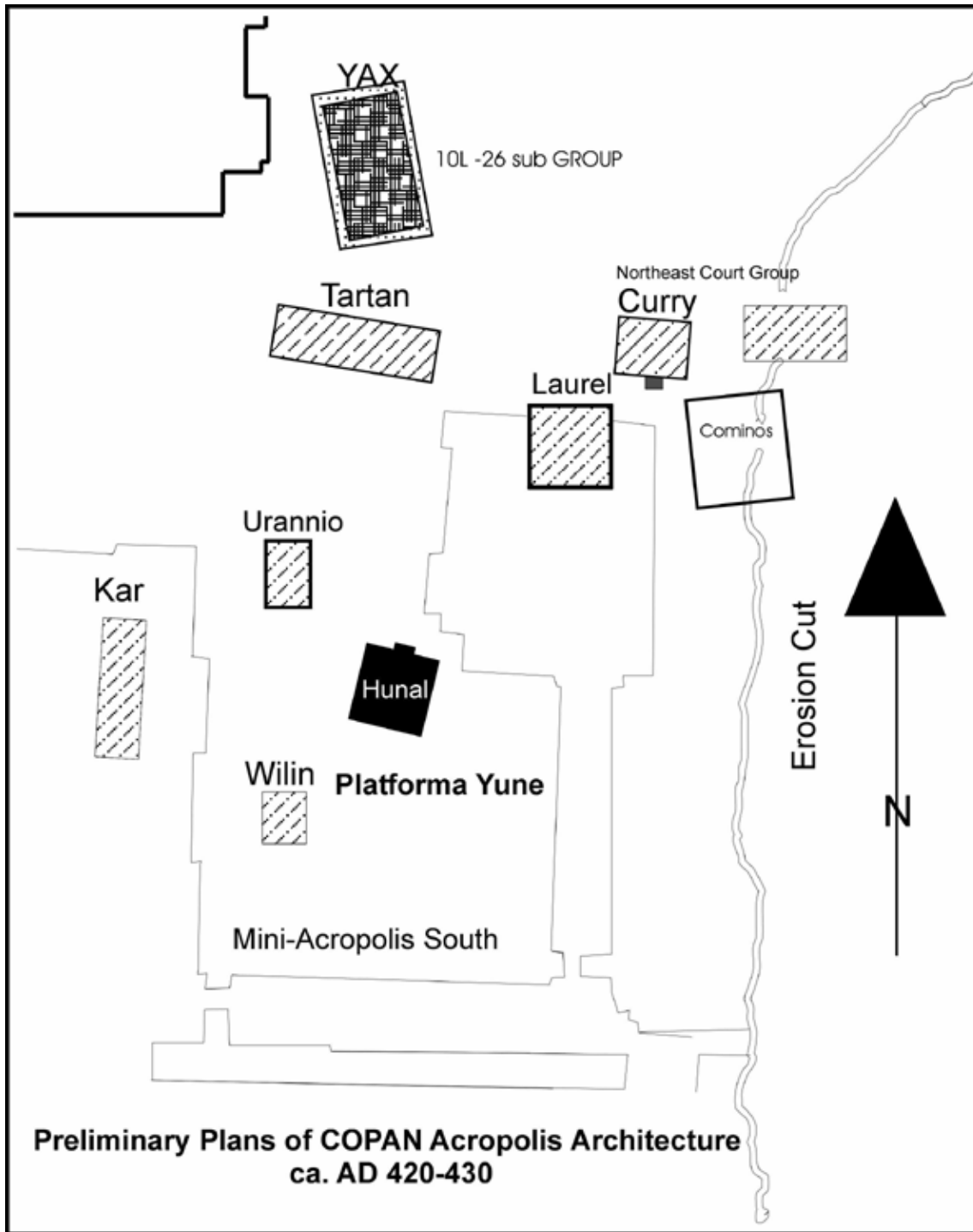


Figure 3. Computer-generated map. (Stage 3).

Hunal

The earliest known structure beneath the core of the Acropolis, Hunal, was discovered during the 1995 season ([Map 1](#) and [Figure 1](#)). Hunal is a substructural platform that once supported a building, but that building was almost completely demolished by the Maya prior to Hunal's burial beneath its successor, Yehnal platform. The trace of a east-west medial wall on Hunal's summit indicates its building originally had two rooms. The

demolition debris found during the excavation of Hunal shows that this building once had brilliant painted murals on its interior walls. Based on the 1995 and subsequent work we can hypothetically reconstruct something of what Hunal may have looked like during its use.

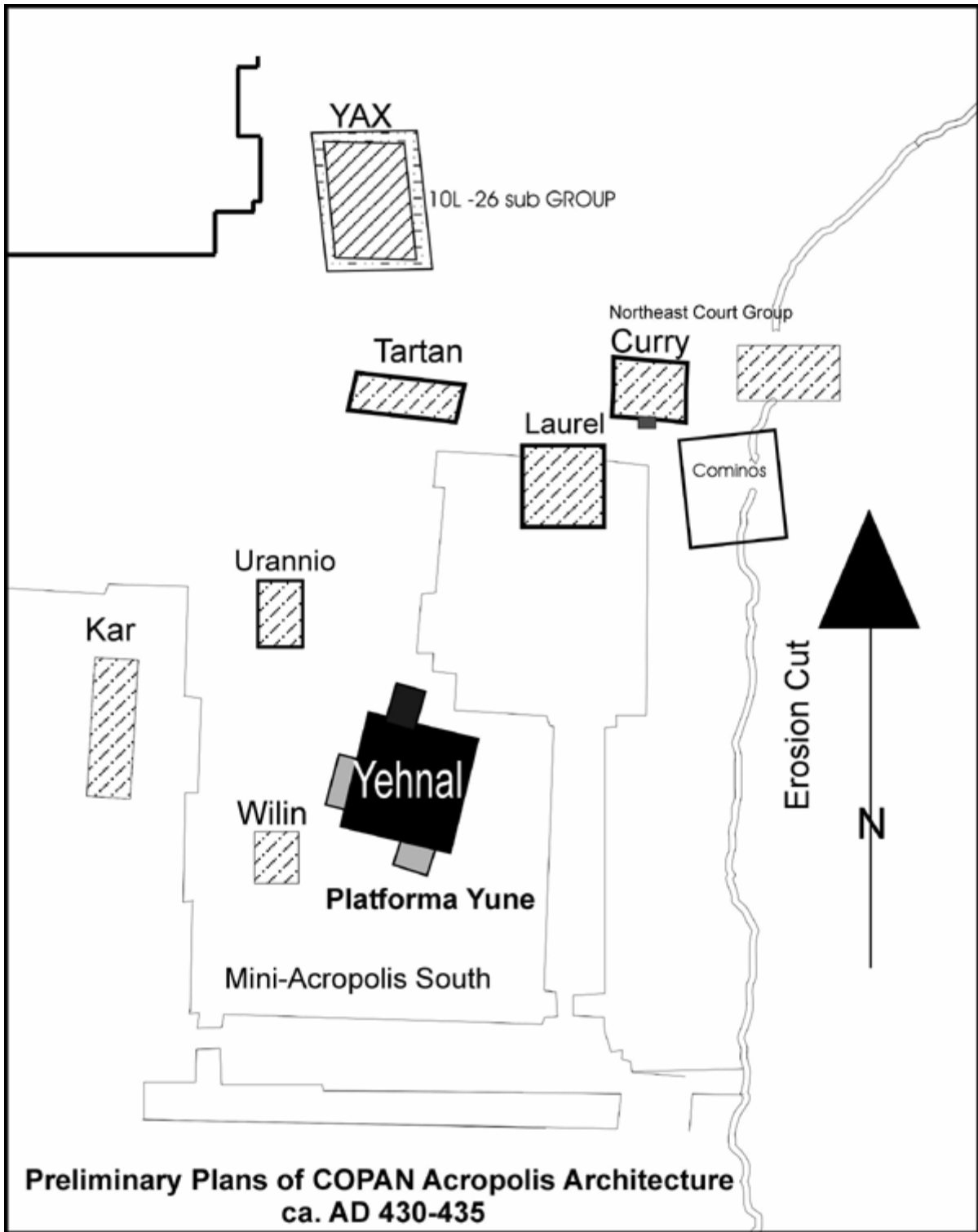


Map 1. Preliminary plans of Copán, Honduras. (ca. A.D. 420-430)

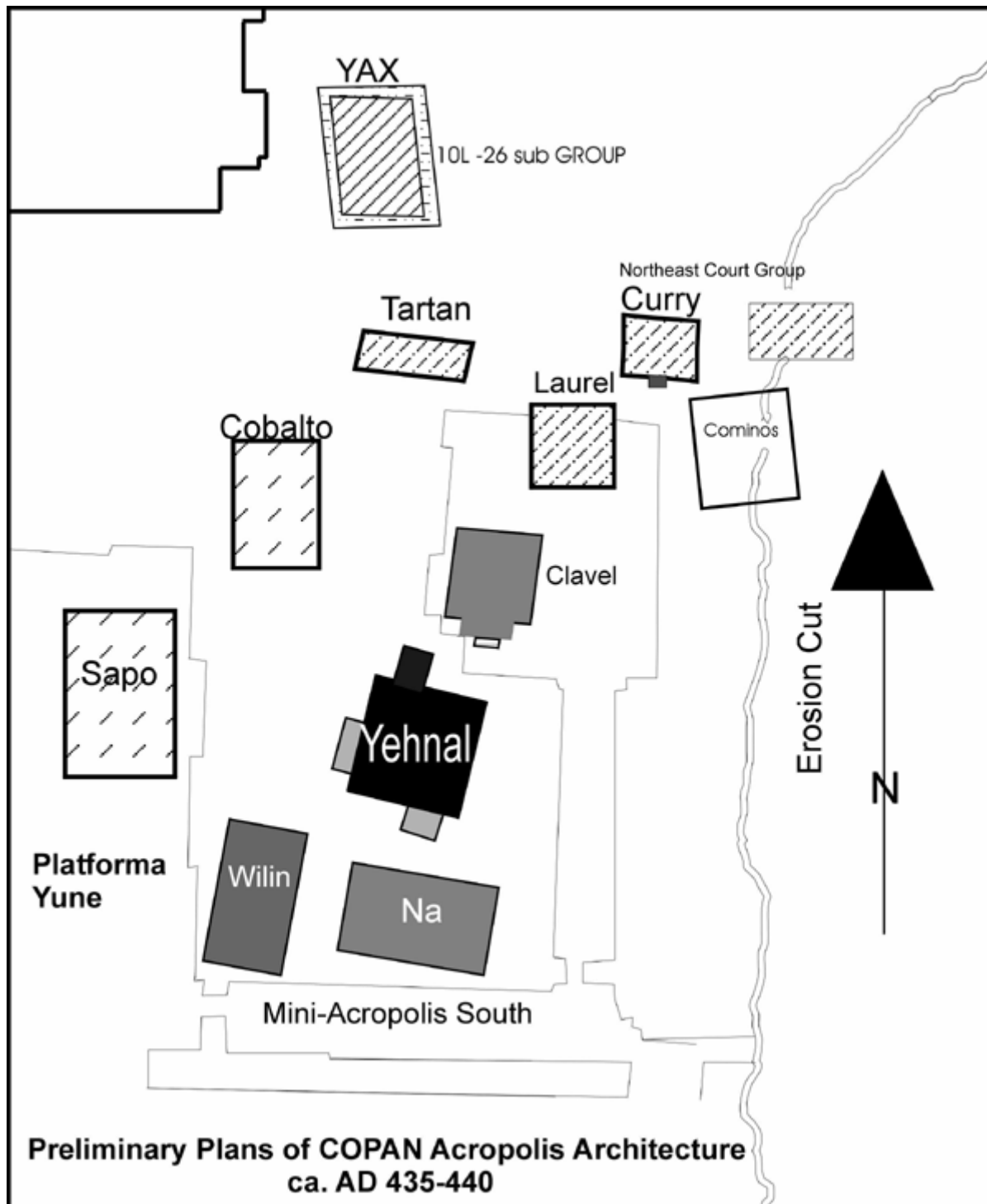
Any reconstruction of Hunal's appearance must be largely conjectural, since the later construction of Yehnal also destroyed much of Hunal's low building platform. But a surviving portion of the eastern facade of Hunal platform was discovered in 1995, revealing it to be constructed in the Early Classic talud-tablero style of Central México. This was a most significant finding, since it represents the *first* and *only* Early Classic talud-tablero platform ever discovered at Copán. The other significant finding from the 1995 excavation of Hunal came from the tunnel probing the summit floor. In the northeast quadrant of the floor a masonry-vaulted tomb was found intruded into the building platform. The investigation of the Hunal tomb was then scheduled to begin during the 1996 field season.

Yehnal

Immediately after the demolition of most of Hunal, the second building in the core Acropolis sequence was constructed. This successor, Yehnal ([Map 2](#) and [Map 3](#) and [Figure 2](#) and [Figure 3](#)), was larger than Hunal, and elaborately decorated. Because of the lack of space to safely tunnel along the summit of Yehnal, we know almost nothing about its summit building, although there are indications that it was also destroyed when its successor was constructed. But excavation found that much of Yehnal's platform has survived, revealing that it was constructed in the prevailing apron molding style of the central Petén. The full extent of the southern side of the western facade was cleared during the 1995 season, revealing a beautifully preserved stucco-modeled mask of the Maya sun god painted in red, and accented in blue-green and yellow. A probe to the north indicates that there are two such masks, one flanking each side of Yehnal's western staircase. Excavation also revealed that when Yehnal was terminated, the Maya carefully preserved both masks, although the stairway was almost completely demolished. The results of our investigation of Yehnal allows a hypothetical reconstruction of its appearance during use, although once again the summit building is purely conjectural.



Map 2. Preliminary plans of Copán, Honduras. (ca. A.D. 430-435)



Map 3. Preliminary plans of Copán, Honduras. (ca. A.D. 435-440)

Margarita

After a relatively short interval, Yehnal was buried by a larger platform, Margarita ([Figure 4](#)). The evidence for a relatively brief use-span comes from the uneroded condition of Yehnal's painted stucco surfaces. First revealed in 1993, the western facade of Margarita was decorated with beautifully modeled stucco reliefs, painted in red, green, yellow, and cream, that also flank either side of a western stairway (also anciently demolished by the Maya). The Margarita stucco panels are larger and more elaborate than those of Yehnal, but were also carefully preserved when Margarita was terminated. During the 1995 season, after consultation with expert architectural conservators (Lic. Luciano Cedillo of the Mexican Institute of Anthropology and History, and Arq. Carlos Rudy Larios, Copán Project Director of Architectural Consolidation), the panel on the southern side of Margarita's western facade was fully exposed. Its central scene is framed by an elaborate sky band (top), an earth band (bottom), and two deities (north and south). The central scene depicts two intertwined birds; on the left is a quetzal bird (Mayan, *k'uk'*) and on the right is a macaw (Mayan, *Mo'*). Both birds are surmounted by yax glyphs ("first" or "precious"), so that the entire composition is a full figure emblem of the name *Yax K'uk' Mo'*, the Founder of the Copán dynasty. Both birds stand on a giant "9 imix/moon" glyph, believed to represent a sacred location in the afterworld (thus, the facade may depict *Yax K'uk' Mo'* after his death, residing in the afterworld).

Based on ECAP's investigations we can present a hypothetical reconstruction of Margarita's appearance during use, although as was the case with its predecessors, the summit building is purely conjectural.

In 1993 an elaborate chambered tomb was found inside Margarita, composed of an upper (offering) chamber, and a lower (burial) chamber reached by a stairway from the summit of Margarita. The investigation of this tomb was continued during the 1995 season. The major results of the 1995 work was the conservation and removal of the pottery vessels from the upper chamber and the clearing of fallen debris from the lower burial chamber. The debris on the stone burial slab, ancient broken by partial collapse of the chamber, was hindered by the need to wear respirators and protective garb due to the presence of large quantities of toxic mercuric sulfide (cinnabar, a red pigment). But once the debris was cleared the skeletal remains of a single individual of apparent advanced age was revealed interred supine with head to the south. After clearing the interment was fully documented by photography, scaled drawings, and video taping. Post-mortem entry into the tomb and ritual treatment of the buried individual is indicated by the painting of the skull and several other bones with cinnabar. In addition to the cinnabar, the bones are associated with many objects of bone and shell, along with thousands of jade beads.

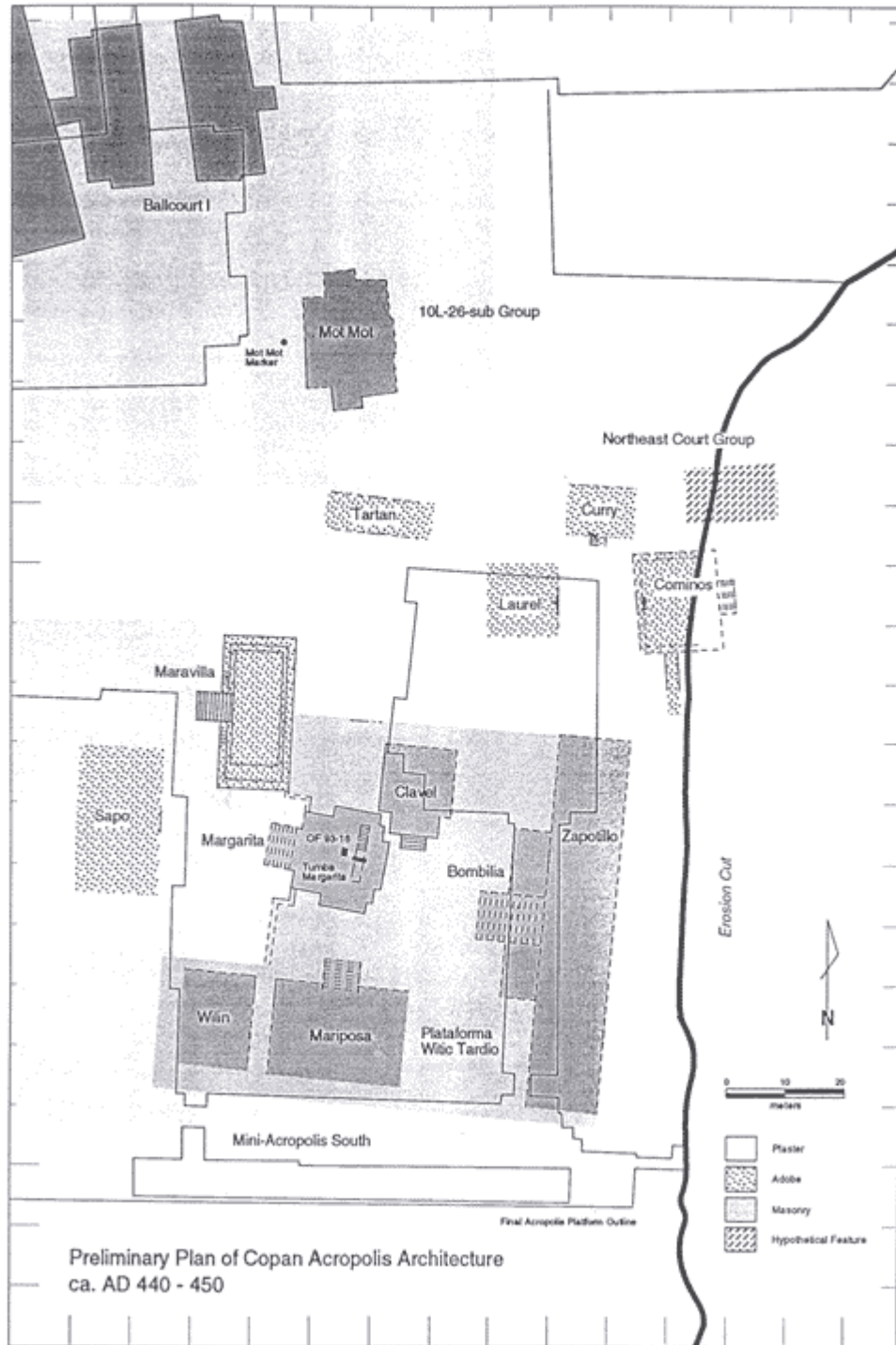


Figure 4. Computer-generated map. (Stage 4).

Burial 95-1

Further excavation of a deposit found two seasons previously revealed that it was a human burial accompanied by several elaborate but perishable offerings. Located directly west of Margarita, Burial 95-1 was cleared to reveal an extended interment of an apparently sacrificed male wrapped in a mat and adorned by a pair of shell goggles, a bundle of atlatl darts, jade and shell mosaics, and painted organic objects. Work in 1995 succeeded in the clearing, conservation, and documentation of this interment, which quickly became informally known as "the Tlaloc Warrior," and plans were made for the continuation of this effort in the 1996 season.

THE 1996 FIELD SEASON

The 1996 ECAP research supported by FAMSI continued the excavation, documentation, and conservation efforts already described. Much of this effort involved excavations conducted to verify horizontal and vertical architectural connections in both the Northeast Court and Southern Temple Complexes, representing two of the earliest areas beneath the Acropolis. The major goal of the 1996 season was met when, by the close of work, all tunnel excavations had been completed.

The Northeast Court Complex

In this area some of the earliest remains of activity beneath the Acropolis were investigated by several stratigraphic excavations. The previously excavated stratipits in the masonry buildings of Court Group 4 were used to further probe deeper underlying levels, revealing traces of the earliest constructions in this area.

Court Group 5

Further excavation of the tunnel beneath Court Group 4B defined the south facade of the eastern substructure of Court 5B (Cominos; see [Map 1](#) and [Figure 1](#)). Additional work in several stratipits also improved the definition of the other early adobe palaces of Court Group 5. To the west of Court Group 5B, continued tunneling defined the southern side of Tartan, a low adobe structure that defines the boundary between the earliest Ball Court Complex to the north, and the Acropolis to the south. In the course of this work several partially preserved painted graffiti, apparently representations of Maya deities, were found on the plaster floor adjacent to Tartan structure. These graffiti were carefully cleaned and recorded by both conventional and infrared film.

Court Groups 3 and 4

Work in Court Complex 3 ([Figure 9](#)) was completed during 1996 by several brief excavations. A small probe was placed beneath a burned area of floor in one of the masonry buildings of Court Group 4B (Loro; see [Figure 7](#)) to check for possible earlier construction or activity, but no signs of unusual activity were found.

Court Group 2

In 1996 work in the penultimate court complex was resumed ([Figure 10](#)). The tunnel west of the Sub-Jaguar Tomb was extended to trace the eastern edge of an extensive floor cut. This proved to be the line of an anciently demolished terrace that defined the western edge of Court Group 2B. In the Sub-Jaguar Tomb itself, the last objects on the tomb floor were cleared and conserved, concentrating on a cluster of cut shell discs beneath the burial slab and fragments of two now-disintegrated stuccoed gourds along the southern wall. Once registered these objects were transported to the field laboratory for conservation and study.

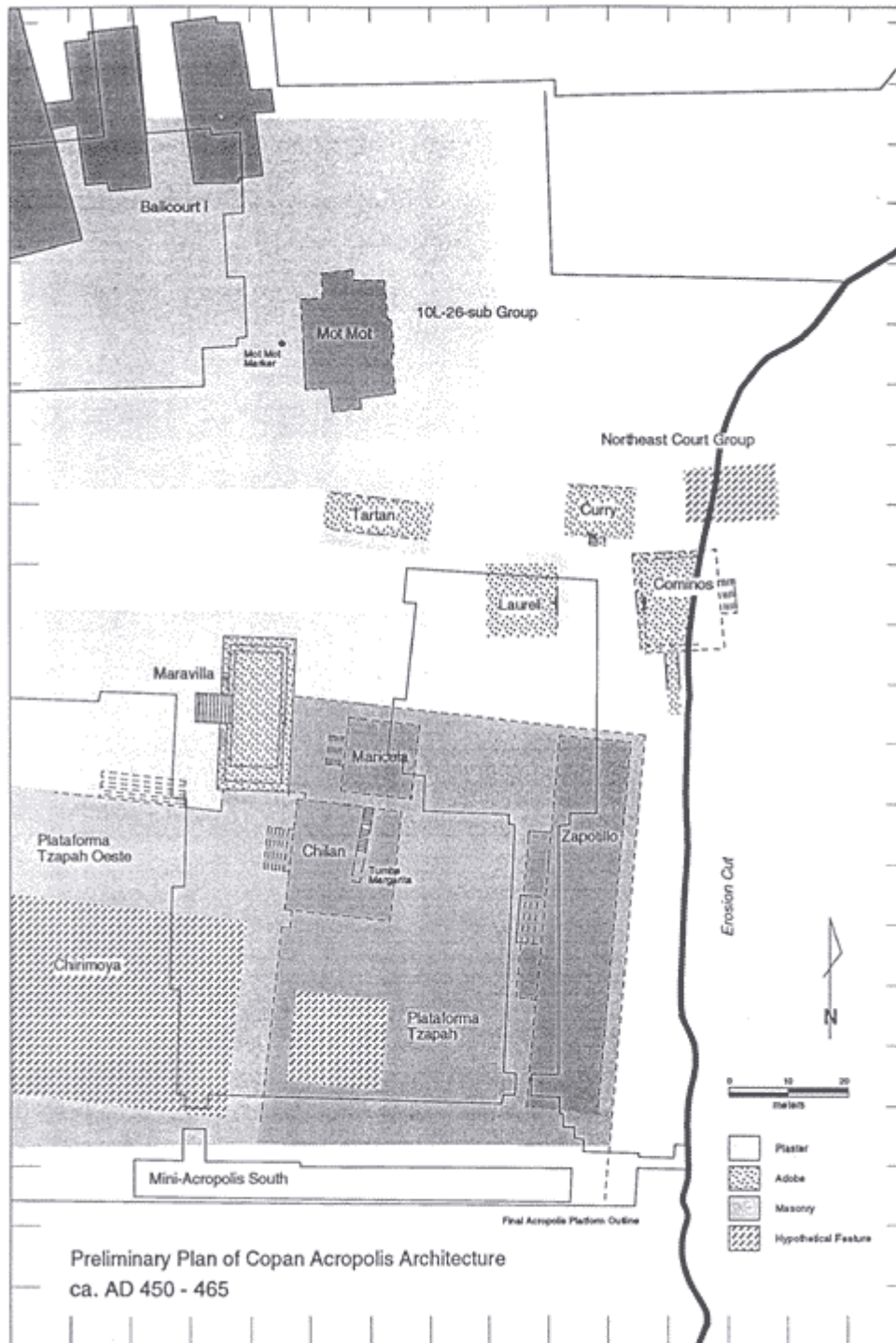


Figure 5. Computer-generated map. (Stage 5).

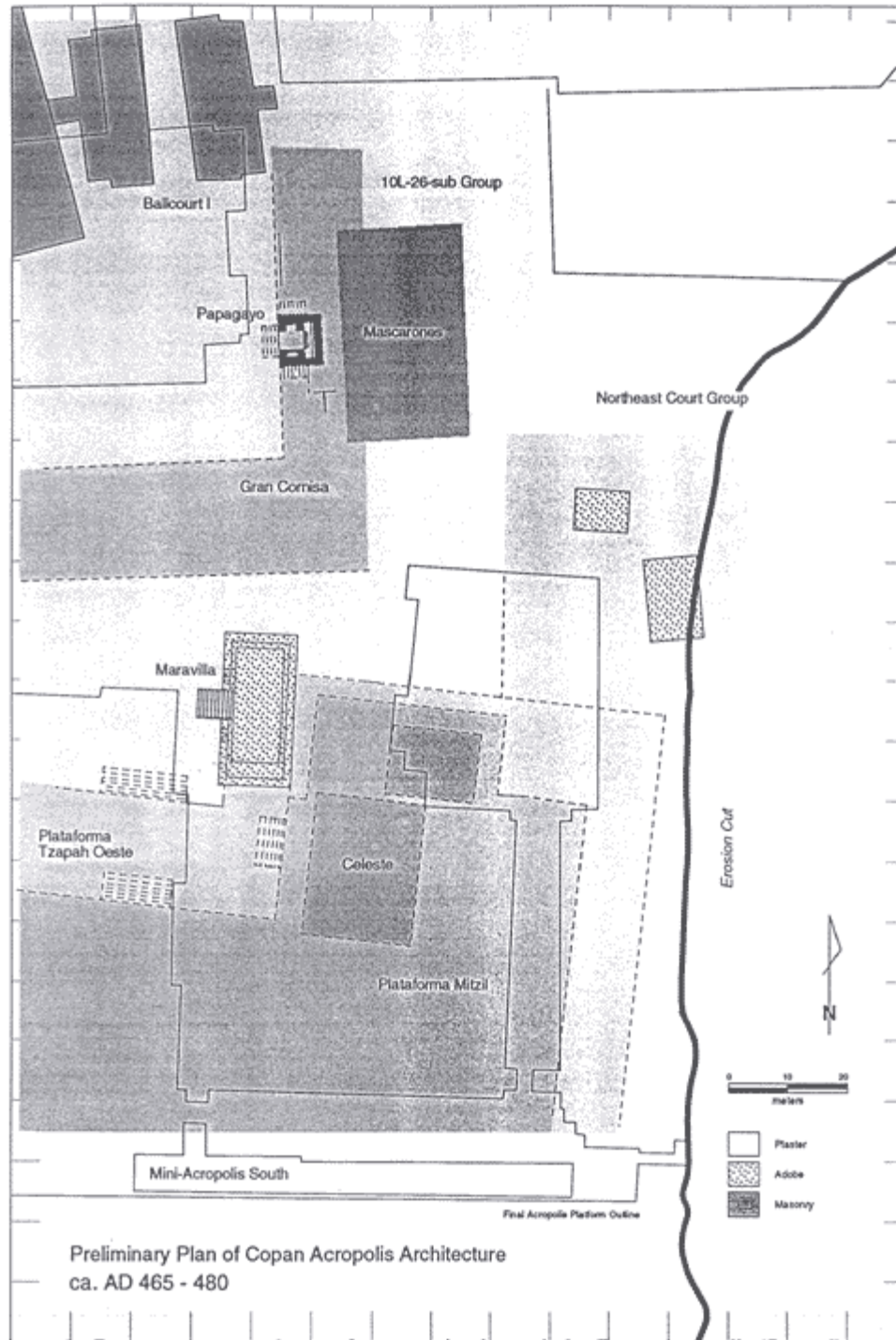


Figure 6. Computer-generated map. (Stage 6).

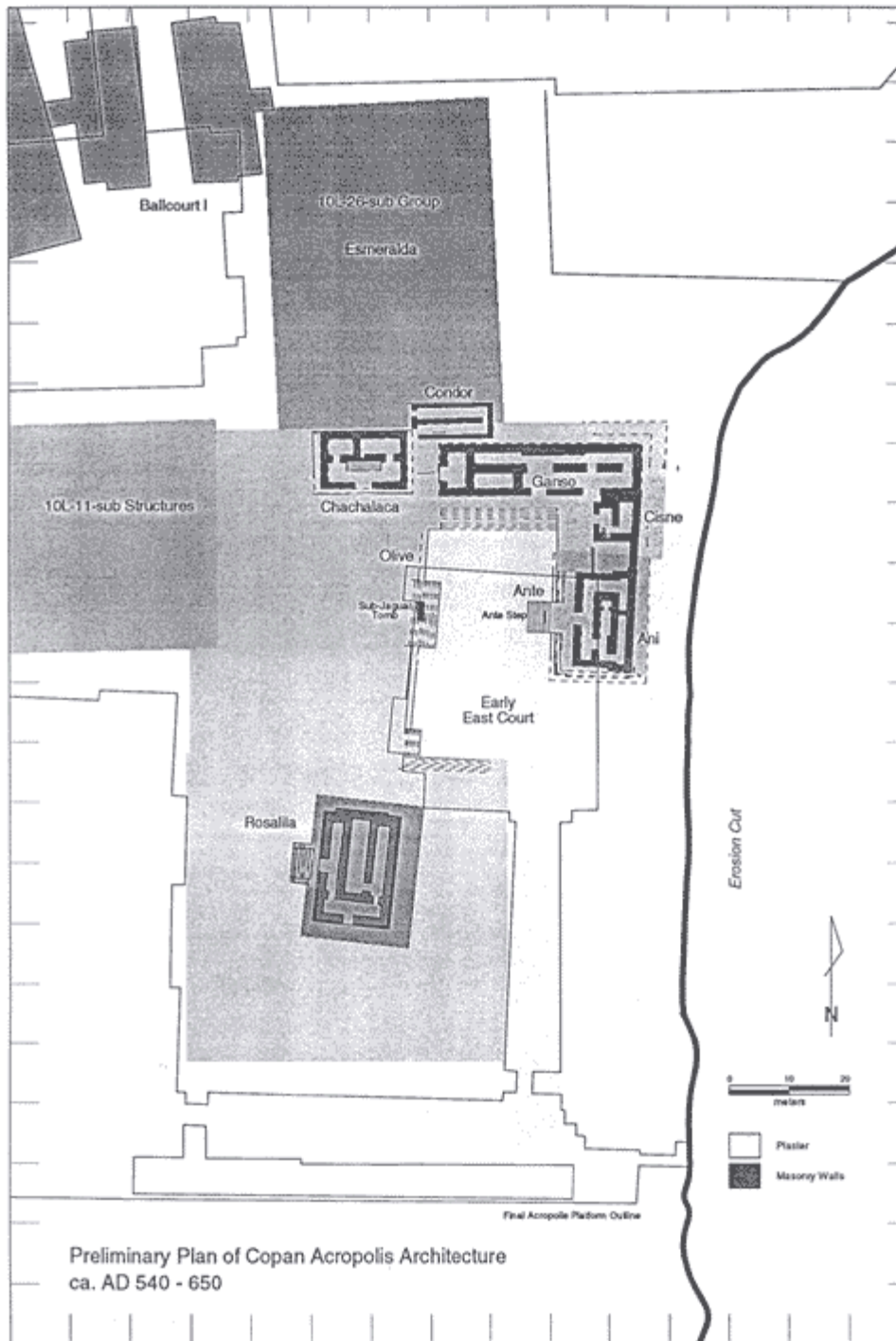


Figure 10. Computer-generated map. (Stage 10).

The Southern Temple Complex

Continued tunnel excavations defined the extent and limits of the earliest Acropolis platforms and their structures, along with associated features (tombs, burials, and drains). At the eastern base of the early Acropolis complex, the major axial tunnel was deepened to clarify and record the stratigraphic relationships within the core of the first Acropolis Platform.

Hunal

The pivotal structure on this initial Acropolis platform, Hunal ([Map 1](#) and [Figure 1](#)), was a major focus of work during the 1996 field season. Some 4 meters of new tunnel was excavated on the north side of the substructure to further document its unique talud-tablero facade. This work discovered a vestige of a north-facing outset staircase and a well-preserved portion of the talud-tablero facade extending east of the stairs (both originally painted red). This verified a northward orientation for Hunal first proposed as a result of the 1995 excavations. This orientation is especially significant since it contrasts with the western orientation followed by all its successors constructed at this same location, right up to the final structure, 10L-16, built during the reign of Copán's last known ruler.

The vaulted masonry tomb chamber intruded into Hunal was also the focus of work in 1996. This effort was aimed at recording the structure and contents of the tomb as a prelude to consolidation and detailed investigation (planned to begin in 1997). As a result, the size and condition of the tomb were documented. A small opening in the vault allowed visual inspection, measurements, and photography. The tomb measures some 2.5 m long, 1.5 m wide, and 1.7 m high. It holds a single raised stone burial slab, completely intact, that occupies most of the floor area. On this slab the bones of a single individual could be seen, although obscured by fallen debris.

By the midpoint of the 1996 season a short excavation reached the best entry point along the western wall of the tomb. On March 12, after exposing and recording the exterior wall masonry, several masonry blocks were removed to open the first entrance to the burial chamber.

From this entry an array of undisturbed Early Classic funerary vessels was recorded beneath the burial slab. Also revealed were several carved jade ornaments among the fallen debris on the burial slab. The entire tomb and its contents was recorded by photography, video tape, and scaled drawings. Dr. Jane Buikstra made a preliminary assessment of the bones on the burial slab, indicating that the buried individual was a robust adult male over 50 years of age at death. The remainder of the 1996 season was devoted to beginning the consolidation of the interior masonry of the Hunal tomb.

By the end of the 1996 season it was clear that the Hunal Tomb was the earliest of a sequence of royal tombs beneath the Acropolis. Furthermore, the stratigraphic position and context of the Hunal tomb suggested it most likely held the remains of Yax K'uk'

Mo', identified in later Copán inscriptions as the dynastic founder who reigned at ca. A.D. 426-437. The means to test this postulated identity were defined as part of subsequent research planned for the Hunal Tomb beginning in 1997.

Margarita

During the 1996 season the other major focus of research in the early Acropolis was the Margarita Tomb. Work throughout the season continued to record, conserve, and remove the fragile organic offerings (matting, textiles, and similar materials) in the upper chamber of this elaborate tomb. In the lower burial chamber careful excavation of fallen debris by Christopher Powell succeeded in fully exposing and documenting the bones and associated adornments of the single interred individual inside. Dr. Jane Buikstra also made an assessment of these bones, indicating that the buried individual was an adult female 50 years or older at death. This finding indicates that Copán's most elaborate and venerated tomb was that of the most important woman in Copán's history. Based on the 1996 findings a working hypothesis, to be tested by subsequent research, was formulated, namely that this woman was the wife of Yax K'uk' Mo' and mother of the second king, honored as the dynastic matriarch.

The woman in the Margarita Tomb was adorned by a stunning array of jade, shell, and other artifacts, all recorded by photography, video tape, and scaled drawings. After their full documentation *in situ*, David Sedat and Helen Bell began the removal of these adornments, starting with the materials around the feet and leg bones (north end of the northern burial slab fragment). All artifacts removed from the tomb were registered into the ECAP computer database and transported to the field laboratory where they were conserved and placed in secure storage pending further recording and study.

Burial 95-1

Work also continued on Burial 95-1 ("the Tlaloc Warrior"), begun in 1995. According to plan, the previously conserved adornments of jade and shell that accompanied this burial were removed after final documentation *in situ*. Dr. Jane Buikstra again made an assessment of the bones, indicating that the buried individual was a robust adult male approximately 40 years of age at death. As part of this assessment, the fragmentary skull was removed for examination. Both the skull fragments and adornments were registered and transported to the field laboratory for conservation and study.

THE 1997 FIELD SEASON

With the ending of all new tunnels excavations in 1996, the focus of ECAP field research in 1997 shifted to completing a series of tasks begun in previous seasons. This involved intensive investigations in the two earliest royal tombs (Hunal and

Margarita), final research in a third royal tomb (Sub-Jaguar), and the completion of work in Burial 95-1, in addition to a multitude of recording tasks. But the major focus of the 1997 research was the continuation of work in the Hunal and Margarita Tombs. Two teams of ECAP researchers conducted the Hunal and Margarita tombs simultaneously, with assistance from several consultants (Loa Traxler for excavation and recording, Lynn Grant and Harriet Beaubien for conservation, Jane Buikstra for physical anthropology, and Bunny Coates and Bill Castleman for photography).

Hunal Tomb

As revealed during preliminary investigations during the previous two seasons, this vaulted tomb chamber contains the bones of a single individual placed on a stone bier, adorned by several large and spectacular jade objects. The bones are of a robust male, a little over 5' 6" tall, who was probably 55 or older when he died. Investigation in 1997 was conducted by an excavation team composed of Robert Sharer and Christopher Powell. The initial effort succeeded in clearing the fallen debris from the burial slab, and the bones and artifacts thus revealed were thoroughly recorded by photography, plan drawings, video tape, and digital images. The adornments on the burial slab consist of an array of cut shell spangles (associated with the cranium), an apple green jade bead carved with a mat motif (probably originally placed in the mouth of the individual), a large plain jade bar pectoral, a jade ear flare and perforated disk (all associated with the torso area), an array of stingray spines and cut bone awls or perforators (adjacent to the lower left leg), and a cluster of jaguar canines (associated with the right lower leg).

The tomb floor was also cleared, and as a result more objects were discovered on the floor along the sides of the burial slab. These include shell and jade beads, two shell earflares, an array of cut shell "spangles," a jade earflare and perforated jade disk (matching the set found on the burial slab), and two additional pottery vessels. In addition, most of the bones from the arms, hands, and feet were found on the tomb floor. While the pottery vessels and at least some of the smaller objects must have been deliberately placed on the floor during interment, it seems clear that the bones, the jade earflare and disk, and some of the other objects were subsequently displaced to the floor from the burial slab.

In the course of this work several pigment samples were taken for identification by analysis at the Smithsonian Institution. Also removed were three carbon samples for potential radiocarbon age assessments. The clearing of the bones, and Dr. Jane Buikstra's detailed assessments, revealed that there was a severe premortim fracture of the right forearm, an injury that apparently crippled the individual for the remainder of his life, and severe arthritis of the left shoulder.

Limited in situ conservation was done by Lynn Grant in three areas within the tomb: one stuccoed vessel accessible along the east wall of the chamber, a small shell cluster near the position originally occupied by the right hand bones (displaced to the floor), and several threatened cut shell "spangles" immediately west of the cranium. The 1997

works established the foundation for the registry and removal of the objects in the tomb, planned to begin in the 1998 season.

Margarita Tomb

The 1996 excavation team composed of David Sedat and Ellen Bell continued the work in the Margarita burial chamber during the 1997 field season. The 1997 season work was devoted to carefully recording and conserving this burial, and continuing the process of registering and removing objects from the burial slab. Previous work had identified the burial to be that of an elderly female individual, age of 55 years or older, interred on a stone burial slab now broken into a northern fragment (legs and feet) and southern fragment (upper body). This individual was honored by an extraordinary display of adornments of jade, shell, and other materials. By the end of the 1997 season, Sedat and Bell had succeeded in clearing the northern portion of the broken burial slab, including the recording and removal of well over 10,000 tiny jade beads, the leg bones (stored in an adjacent tunnel storage area), a large quantity of red pigment, and other associated artifacts. A continuous record of this process was made by photography, drawings, video tape, and digital images. As with Hunal, pigment samples (hematite and cinnabar) were removed for analysis by Smithsonian Institution.

Dr. Jane Buikstra continued her assessments of the interred bones. *In situ* conservation consultation was done by Lynn Grant during the process of clearing of the contents on the northern slab. The completion of clearing the northern slab fragment, and its protection by the construction of wooden decking, sets the stage for the research planned for the 1998 season. This will involve further entry to the south to remove fallen debris remaining on the tomb floor, and ready access to the southern slab fragment where the upper portion of the interment and the bulk of the jade and shell adornments remain *in situ*. The same process used for clearing the northern slab fragment will be used to register and remove the complex array of objects on the southern slab fragment.

In the adjacent upper offering chamber, following further recording and documentation measures, Harriet Beaubien and Lynn Grant succeeded in lifting the remainder of the objects scheduled for registry and removal. These included a completely disintegrated jade mosaic object and most of the remains of an apparent basket and its contents. Other organic remains on the floor of the upper chamber were tentatively identified as animal pelt(s), woven textile(s), and petates. Plans call for these to be removed in 1998.

After renewed consultation with William Fash and Rudy Larios, plans were made for casting the adjacent Xucpi Stone which contains an especially important text from the reign of Ruler 2 (9.0.2.0.0 or A.D. 437). Once cast, plans call for the removal of the stone for eventual museum display. As a first step in the process, the stone was thoroughly cleaned, threatened surface areas were consolidated, and a detailed scaled drawing of the text begun. A comprehensive plan for the conservation, casting, and

removal of the Xucpi Stone has been drafted by David Sedat, based on the recommendations of Grant, Beaubien, and Larios.

Other Human Burials

Final work on Burial 95-1, the "Tlaloc Warrior," (located west of Margarita structure) was completed in March 1997. This was accomplished by the lifting of the final grave offering, a large fill block containing a fragile stucco-painted object, slated for detailed excavation and consolidation in the Centro laboratory in 1998. Dr. Jane Buikstra then made her final assessments of the *in situ* bones, and removed all samples deemed necessary for her research. At the end of the season the remaining bones were cushioned with fine earth and the excavation containing this burial was backfilled.

A similar process completed work on a second interment, Burial 94-1, the "Northern Guardian" (located north of the Margarita Tomb). Dr. Jane Buikstra completed her final assessments of the *in situ* bones, and removed all samples deemed necessary for her research. The remaining bones were cushioned with fine earth and the excavation containing this burial was then back filled.

Court Group 2

The 1997 season saw the completion of ECAP investigations in the Northeast Court area. This work involved the registry and removal of a broken Early Classic vessel cached above the Sub-Jaguar tomb, and the final mapping of adjacent Court Group 2A areas. In addition, the last architectural units in Court 2A levels were catalogued. The remainder of the ECAP tunnels in the Court 2A area are now ready to be fumed over to IHAH for expanded future visitor access (adjacent to the presently open visitor tunnels; see [Figure 11](#)).

Conclusions

Building on the initial work done between 1989 and 1994, over the final three seasons of tunnel excavations, due largely to the crucial support of the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Research Inc., the Early Copán Acropolis Program has been able to reach a series of fundamental and significant findings about the origins and early history of the Copán Acropolis. These findings are based on dirt archaeology, in this case evidence gained through difficult and tedious tunneling deep into the heart of the Copán Acropolis. In addition to documenting the early buildings of Copán's Acropolis, over the years this tunneling effort has discovered seven new Early Classic texts directly associated with architecture. These texts have provided crucial new information about the individuals and events of Copán's Early Classic era, and have

demonstrated once and for all the actual existence of the kings and events associated with Copán's Early Classic beginnings.

The final results of ECAP's research must await the completion of the next stage in the research process—the analyses of all the archaeological excavation data. But for the time being, it is apparent from ECAP's research that the architectural development of the Acropolis began at the time of the founding of Copán's royal dynasty, and ended at the time of the fall of that dynasty, a span of time between ca. A.D. 426 and 820 (as defined from Maya inscriptions that refer to the reigns of 16 Copán kings). The tunnels excavated by ECAP have documented several hundred buildings, platforms, and plaza floors, that were constructed during the Early Classic portion of this time span. In fact, ECAP research has shown that most of the underlying bulk of the Acropolis was built during the reigns of the first ten Copán kings between ca. A.D. 426 and 578.

As already stated, this sequence of construction activity began at the time of the founding of the royal dynasty of kings at A.D. 426. Our deepest probes have found traces of mundane domestic platforms that predate the founding era. But the absence of monumental buildings beneath the Acropolis before ca. A.D. 400 indicates that Copán's earlier political and ceremonial center must have been located elsewhere, and that the first monumental buildings beneath the Acropolis, what we have termed the Southern Temple Complex, represent the founding of a new political and religious center shortly after A.D. 400. Thereafter, this Southern Temple Complex was continuously rebuilt and rapidly expanded until it evolved into the Acropolis visible to this day. Throughout its history, this complex was the setting for the kings of Copán to conduct their ritual and administrative affairs. We conclude that for at least part of their careers, each of Copán's rulers lived on the Acropolis, although during the Early Classic period each probably had their royal lineage residences immediately adjacent to the Acropolis in what we term the Northeast Court Group.

The core of the Acropolis grew from a single building, Hunal, constructed in the Central Mexican Talud-Tablero style without any known local precedent. From various clues gleaned from its orientation (north), lack of exterior decorations (although the interior of its summit building appears to have been decorated with painted murals), and a single medial wall with one surviving curtain holder, we conclude that Hunal's function was primarily residential. Given its place in time, and its central place in the newly-founded royal complex, we venture to conclude that Hunal was the royal residence of the dynastic Founder, the house of Yax K'uk' Mo'.

After Hunal was terminated, a vaulted tomb was intruded into its substructure. The tomb's position in time and space indicates that it probably holds the remains of the dynastic Founder. Thereafter Hunal was succeeded by a series of buildings with characteristics that contrast to those of Hunal. These successors were built in the prevailing Maya style, their exteriors were elaborated decorated, and their orientations were all to the west. All of these buildings were supported by relatively low substructures. There were at least six successors built during the Early Classic era, culminating in the best preserved example, known as Rosalila (excavated by our Honduran colleague, Ricardo Agurcia), dedicated during the reign of the 10th Copán

king in A.D. 571. The attributes of all of these successors to Hunal, beginning with the structure we have named Yehnal, indicate that they were shrines dedicated to the veneration of the dynastic founder.

The second successor to Hunal, Margarita, represented the third structure built in the center of the new royal complex. Margarita also contains a tomb, certainly the most elaborate and long-venerated of any found at Copán. The occupant of the Margarita tomb is a woman. Unlike the many inscriptions that record the name of Yax K'uk' Mo', there are no known texts that mention a woman from this era at Copán. So we have no historical clues as to her identity. But based on the archaeological information, and plain common sense, it seems likely that she would have been the wife of the Founder, and the mother of Ruler 2, who was the Founder's son and successor. What is especially significant about the Margarita Tomb is that it offers dramatic new evidence of the great importance of this woman to the origins and sanctification of Copán's dynasty. Together the Hunal and Margarita tombs hold key evidence of the origins of the Classic Maya political order at Copán, and its underpinnings in ritual aimed at the long-term veneration of royal ancestors, specifically the first father and first mother of the dynasty.

The reign of Ruler 2 is estimated at ca. A.D. 437-465. After the death of Ruler 2, a dynasty of 14 kings reigned at Copán, and continued to reinforce their authority by claiming to be successors of Yax K'uk' Mo'. The most explicit evidence for this is explicitly carved on Copán Altar Q, dedicated in A.D. 776 by the 16th and final successor of Yax K'uk' Mo', Yax Pasah, to commemorate the continuity of royal rule. And the location of both Altar Q and the great temple of Yax Pasah, Str. 10L-16, are especially significant, for they are in the sacred center of the Acropolis, directly above Hunal and its tomb that were the focus of the initial royal complex built by the Founder 350 years earlier.

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Appendix by David Sedat

FAMSI Grant 95061 in Support of Archaeological Conservation and Conservator Training

During the 1996 field season another vital area of ECAP research was supported by FAMSI. Through the award of Grant 95061 ECAP was able to augment its facilities and personnel dedicated to archaeological conservation. As ECAP's excavations have come to a close, efforts to secure long-term storage and conservation of all artifacts recovered from the site have been accelerated. Plans were initiated in 1995 for expanding the ECAP field laboratory space in the Centro de Investigaciones building located adjacent to the ruins of Copán. In 1996 the ECAP facility was completed, comprising a four room complex with enhanced-security that totals some 600 square feet of space. The complex includes a Conservation Laboratory (furnished with 8 lockable metal storage cabinets and metal shelving), a Ceramic Storage Room, a Small Finds Storage Area, and an Isolated Storage Area for mercury-contaminated artifacts. Henceforth all artifacts recovered by the ECAP research will be conserved, recorded, catalogued, and placed in permanent and secure storage in this new facility.

During the 1996 season ECAP brought two professional conservators to Copán to attend to the critical tasks of preserving a variety of artifacts recovered by ECAP. Lynn Grant from the University of Pennsylvania Museum returned for her second season at Copán, and was joined by Julie Troesper from the University of California (Berkeley). After opening and stocking the new laboratory, they conserved a backlog of previously excavated artifacts and worked in the field to conserve and transport to the laboratory the newly removed offerings from the Margarita tomb and Burial 95-1. By the end of the 1996 season all artifacts from the tombs and caches excavated by ECAP were secured in the steel storage cabinets in our new Conservation Laboratory.

A major new undertaking for ECAP during 1996, supported entirely by FAMSI Grant 95061, was the training of local individuals in archaeological conservation. In consultation with local IHAH officials, several Honduran citizens were identified as qualified candidates for further conservation training under the auspices of ECAP and IHAH. The training of these individuals was designed to meet ECAP's diverse conservation needs in both the field (focused on architectural recording and consolidation) and the laboratory (especially artifact recording and conservation).

In 1996, six local Hondurans (all residents of the town of Copán Ruinas) were trained by ECAP in various aspects of archaeological conservation. One individual was trained in architectural stucco conservation utilizing methods recommended in 1995 by both Lic. Luciano Cedillo A., Head of the Conservation Laboratory of the Mexican Institute of Anthropology and History, and Arq. Carlos Rudy Larios, Copán Project Director of Architectural Consolidation. Also in 1996 ECAP was able to train a cadre of excavation workers in the techniques of structural conservation. This was done by selecting four qualified workers who were assigned to tunnel consolidation crews where they

conducted closely supervised masonry tasks throughout the 1996 season. These measures, again due to FAMSI support, solved the recurrent problem created by the local shortage of experienced architectural consolidation masons necessary to consolidate the Acropolis tunnels.

An especially talented local conservation trainee, Nelson Paredes, was selected and given in-depth instruction in the field recording of architecture by scaled drawings, and was later given further training in using scaled drawings to record artifacts by Helen Bell. Sr. Paredes has considerable talent as an artist and shows great promise for career development in archaeological conservation. During the 1997 season he continued his training and assisted the ECAP conservation effort under the supervision of both ECAP and IHAH conservators.

In combination, the facility development and training efforts supported by FAMSI funding enabled ECAP to meet and even exceed its archaeological conservation goals for the 1996 season. Further successes in 1997 were gained by building on the strong foundation that now exists for the conservation of Copán's excavated architecture and artifacts, so that both can be preserved for future scholarly study and the appreciation of visitors.