

The Early Classic Genesis of the Royal Maya Capital of Tamarindito

Markus Eberl, Sven Gronemeyer, and Claudia Marie Vela González

Polities require individuals who envision and materialize them; in turn, people's political identity as residents depends on them. The polity and the resident are self-evident only in hindsight, and we discuss their co-constitution. During subjectification, people create and submit to an authority. Our case study is the Early Classic (AD 350–600) emergence of Tamarindito in the south-central Maya Lowlands (modern Guatemala). The Petexbatun Regional Archaeological Project and the Tamarindito Archaeological Project have extensively studied this capital of the Foliated Scroll polity. Although its divine rulers present themselves as fully formed since time immemorial, we discuss how they built their authority through self-serving narratives. Tamarindito originates in the Early Classic, and in the late fourth or fifth century, rulers selected a 70 m high hill as seat. Plaza A's monumentality conceals a small-scale labor effort and a slowly growing polity. Only two non-elite households attached themselves to the royal court during the fifth and sixth centuries, suggesting that non-elites recognized the royal authority only slowly. The formation of the Foliated Scroll polity was an immanent process. Self-aggrandizing divine kings struggled to claim authority, and non-elites subjectified themselves over several centuries.

Keywords: polity formation, subjectification, Tamarindito, Early Classic, Maya

Los Estados requieren individuos que los visualicen y los materialicen; a su vez, la identidad política de las personas como residentes depende de ellos. El Estado y el residente son autoevidentes solo en retrospectiva, cuya co-constitución discutimos aca. Durante su subjetivación, las personas crean y se someten a una autoridad. Estudiamos el surgimiento de Tamarindito en el Clásico Temprano (350-600 dC) en las tierras bajas mayas del centro-sur. El Proyecto Arqueológico Regional Petexbatún y el Proyecto Arqueológico Tamarindito han estudiado extensamente esta capital del Estado de la Voluta Foliada. Si bien sus gobernantes divinos se presentan como completamente formados desde siempre, discutimos cómo construyeron su autoridad a través de narraciones autocomplacientes. Tamarindito se origina en el Clásico Temprano. A fines del siglo cuatro o cinco, gobernantes seleccionaron una colina de 70 m de altura como sede. La monumentalidad de la Plaza A esconde un esfuerzo laboral a pequeña escala y una polis de lento crecimiento. Durante los siglos V y VI, solo dos hogares no pertenecientes a la élite se vincularon a la corte real, lo que sugiere que las personas no pertenecientes a la élite reconocieron la autoridad real muy lentamente. La formación del Estado de la Voluta Foliada fue un proceso immanente. Reyes divinos que se engrandecían a sí mismos lucharon por reclamar autoridad y personas no pertenecientes a la élite se sometieron a lo largo de varios siglos.

Palabras clave: formación de Estados, subjetivación, Tamarindito, Clásico Temprano, Maya

Classic Maya rulers presented themselves as divine pivots. People revolved around them, drawn in and guided by their authority. The hieroglyphic texts present fully formed and unchanging royal personas. Instead of accepting

this narrative, we ask how Classic Maya naturalized sociopolitical roles and institutions.

The formation of polities offers the opportunity to study subjectification; that is, the process of creating and eventually submitting to a political

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authority. From our relational perspective, leaders build their authority. Materialized narratives allow them to set themselves apart from competitors and attract non-elites. Although elites claim absolute power, we argue that rhetoric should not be mistaken for reality. Subjectification requires non-elites to recognize the emerging political hierarchy and its leaders. It calls attention to co-constitutive processes involving collaboration and negotiation.

Our case study is the Foliated Scroll polity in the south-central Maya Lowlands; its capital was the site of Tamarindito in Guatemala (Figure 1). The polity's origins have been linked to environmental changes and elite intervention. At the end of the Preclassic (around AD 350 in the Petexbatun region), environmental degradation is assumed to have forced people to move from riverine settlements to Tamarindito where they encountered deep virgin soils (Dunning et al. 1991; O'Mansky and Dunning 2004). Foliated Scroll rulers made the site their capital at least as early as the fifth century AD and expanded their reign from there across the Petexbatun region. The Petexbatun Regional Archaeological Project (PRAP) and the Tamarindito Archaeological Project (TAP) investigated Tamarindito extensively. Their findings suggest that earlier models fail to fully explain the site's emergence. Instead, we propose a centuries-long process of subjectification during which Foliated Scroll rulers built their authority while non-elites subjectified themselves slowly.

Forming Polities and Subjectivities

The anthropology of becoming locates people in immanent fields (Biehl and Locke 2010). By studying what people do and might do, scholars reveal forces that circumscribe actions while leaving room for potentiality. This future-oriented perspective challenges archaeologists to question hindsight's certainty. Recent archaeological discussions of polities exemplify the shift from a preordained rise, peak, and fall to experiments, fragility, and alternative pathways (Fargher and Heredia Espinoza 2016; McAnany 2019; Yoffee 2019). As they form a polity, people create novel sociopolitical roles, relations, and institutions. The outcomes—encapsulated in terms like

“citizen” and “state”—conceal a process of becoming and changing subjectivities.

We define subjectivity as the interweaving of people's inner lives with institutions, knowledge structures, and symbolic forms (based on Biehl et al. 2007:5–6). This definition harks back to the Middle English *subject* as a person who “owes obedience.” As social beings, individuals act within mutually constituted systems of meaning-giving relations. They restructure these relations in emerging polities by beginning to share a political identity (Paynter 1989:383) and becoming members of what Durkheim (1965:62) calls a moral community (Davenport and Golden 2016; Houston et al. 2003).

Polity formation involves subjectification. People create a political hierarchy and eventually see themselves as subjects to an authority. We agree with Smith (2011:416) that authority is “not a substantive quality to be possessed but rather a condition of political interactions, embedded in the ‘actualities of relations.’” Correspondingly, we speak of interweaving to foreground the co-constitution of hierarchical political relations. Leaders in certain kinds of political structures project absolute power and present themselves as uniquely endowed individuals. Traditionally, studies focused on them as creators of polities. Segmentary state, theater state, and galactic polity models revolve literally and metaphorically around the ruler (Geertz 1980; Southall 1988; Tambiah 1977). Noble households often seed a settlement and form its core (Fox 1977; Sanders and Webster 1988:524; Weber 1958:66–67).

Royal activities and monuments have been seen as representing the entire polity (Granet 1934; Wheatley 1971). In recent years, scholars have used the concepts of cooperation, collaboration, and collective action to conceptualize the previously neglected or implicit contributions of households, lineages, and other social groups (Blanton and Fargher 2008, 2016; Carballo and Feinman 2016; Fargher and Heredia Espinoza 2016; Halperin 2017; Jennings and Earle 2016). Feinman and Carballo (2018) debate the sustainability of different modes of governance that vary between authoritarian and collective. Polity formation rests on leaders negotiating and building alliances while non-elites engage, avoid, and

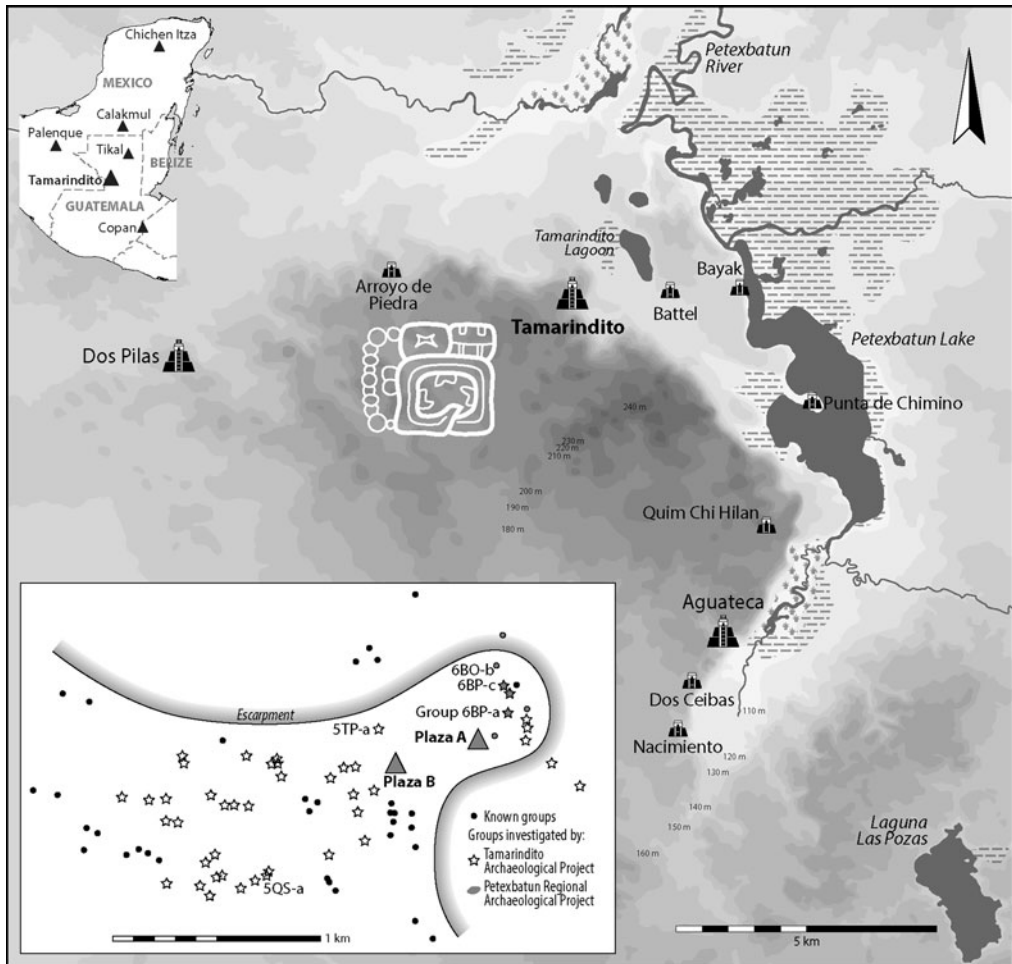


Figure 1. The royal Maya capital of Tamarindito in the Petexbatun region; the emblem glyph of the Foliated Scroll dynasty is shown between Arroyo de Piedra and Tamarindito. Insets: (upper left), Tamarindito's location in the Maya Lowlands; (lower left), schematic site map identifying known residential groups and those investigated by PRAP and TAP; groups with Early Classic ceramics are labeled (all figures by Markus Eberl except where noted).

resist them (Eberl 2017:92–95; Joyce et al. 2001; Schortman et al. 2001; Scott 1985).

The creation of polities is future oriented. People envision a new sociopolitical organization and persuade others to join. Their discourses are not second-order representations but “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1972:49). Elites play a privileged role: power allows them to establish totalizing discourses and marginalize alternatives (Asad 1993). However, elite discourses are not simply confining subjectivities, as Foucault implies. Deleuze and Guattari (1986) understand them as immanent fields that

enable potential actions. We argue that this forward-looking perspective characterizes actors in emerging polities. Their discourses do not determine but outline desired political structures and may fail or have unforeseen outcomes.

Material forms are inherent in immanent fields. We differ in this respect from other scholars who differentiate discourse from matter and see the latter mediating the former (Coole and Frost 2010:26). For us, people's situatedness forms the lay of the land and facilitates relations not between but along (Ingold 2010:12); places and things form vectors of subjectification (Kosiba 2015). Leaders materialize the

sociopolitical persona in their public persona and behavior. In medieval Europe, officeholders merge with their office (Kantorowicz 1957). The medieval Western concept of the body politic and comparable concepts elsewhere (Houston and Stuart 1996) are not simply gestures but are critical to the implementation of polities.

The Royal Capital of Tamarindito

Topographically, Tamarindito is one of the most prominent sites in the south-central Maya Lowlands (Figure 1). It occupies the elbow of the L-shaped escarpment that rises up to 70 m above the surroundings. Plaza A, a leveled hill-top and the royal seat during the Early Classic (AD 350–600), marks the elbow's joint and offers imposing views to the north and east (Figures 2 and 4). It offers limited space, however. Late Classic (AD 600–830) rulers focused on Plaza B 400 m to the southwest. Residential groups clustered to the east of Plaza A and to the west and southwest of Plaza B. A few residential groups spread from the foot of the escarpment toward the Tamarindito Lagoon and the site of Battel (O'Mansky 1996; O'Mansky and Demarest 1994; O'Mansky et al. 1994; Van Tuerenhout et al. 1993).

After Tamarindito's discovery in 1958, scholars documented its hieroglyphic inscriptions (Greene Robertson et al. 1972; Houston 1987, 1993). In 1984, Stephen Houston (1993:50) and his team created the first map of Tamarindito's Plazas A and B. During the 1990s, PRAP extended the map's coverage and started excavations, particularly in the center (Demarest 2006:121–122; Valdés 1997). All Early Classic inscriptions come from Plaza A, and the archaeological studies documented substantial building activity there from this and later time periods. Plaza B became prominent during the Late Classic.

Two of the authors codirected the Tamarindito Archaeological Project (TAP) since 2009 (Eberl and Vela González, eds. 2016). Grone-meyer (2013) documented all the hieroglyphic inscriptions and summarized the history of the site and of its royal dynasty. Our archaeological survey produced a topographic map that extends over 1 km². Illegal deforestation of most of the site allowed us to identify and document even

small and low archaeological features. In seven field seasons, we explored Plaza B, a nonresidential group, and 43 non-elite residential groups through 204 test pits, the cleaning of 13 looted buildings, and four extensive excavations. After documenting looted buildings, we refilled them. About 80% of Tamarindito has been surveyed, and we estimate that our investigations cover two-thirds of all residential groups. PRAP and the current project studied all residential groups near Plaza A, except one.¹

Two explanations have been offered for the emergence of Tamarindito and the Foliated Scroll polity. First, scholars observed that Petexbatun settlements concentrated along rivers, lagoons, and lakes during the Preclassic (Dunning et al. 1991; O'Mansky and Dunning 2004). Overuse degraded these riverine environments, and at the end of the Late Preclassic, people abandoned their settlements. It was proposed that they moved to Tamarindito, the most prominent Early Classic settlement in the region where virgin soils, terraces, and other forms of intensive agriculture assured their survival. Urbanization would then have led to the formation of a polity (see Jennings and Earle 2016). Second, Tamarindito served as the capital of the first Classic period polity in the Petexbatun region (Houston 1993). Its divine rulers identified themselves as *k'uhul ajawtaak* or “divine lords” over the foliated scroll (inset in Figure 1; see the later discussion of the Foliated Scroll moniker). Hieroglyphic texts detail Tamarindito's history from the fifth through eighth centuries AD. Together with the archaeological record, they allow us to ask which roles were played by divine rulers and non-elites in establishing Tamarindito and the Foliated Scroll polity.

Creating Royal Authority

In the Maya Lowlands, divine rulers and rulers project fully formed subjectivities. They portray themselves as time-honored authorities with invariant roles and individuals as institutions. For example, dynasties often trace their origins to a deep and mythological past (Grube 1988; Schele 1992; Stuart 2004). Titles like *ajaw* allow nobles to claim seemingly unchanging roles. Elites also institutionalize themselves



Figure 2. Tamarindito's Plaza A and its surrounding area (maps of Groups 6BO-b, 6BP-e, 6BP-g, and 6BQ-b after Chinchilla 1993:115). Insets: (upper left), Stela 5 (after Houston 1993:77); (lower right), Stela 3 (after Lehmann and Lehmann 1968: Figure 103).

through impersonation. In one case, the noble Nabnal K'inich conflates the person with the office by calling himself the "personification" (*u b'aah-ahnul*) of his house (Supplemental Figure 1). These statements need to be critically examined, however. The title for *k'uhul ajaw* or "divine lord" emerges, for example, only during the Late Classic (Martin 2020:102–142). We argue that individuals formed subjectivities narratively in Classic Maya society. This dynamic process is evident during polity formation when elites claim authority.

In a similar fashion as their peers, Foliated Scroll rulers portray themselves as having been in charge since time immemorial and as being part of an institution that transcends individual lives. They kept track of their royal dynasty by noting their position and that of their dynasty's founder. Although some of these founders like Tikal's Yax Ehb' Xook were historical people, others go back thousands, if not millions, of years and are fused with timeless supernatural beings (Eberl 2014b). The Foliated Scroll's founder belongs in the latter category, appearing at the beginning of

Table 1. Chronological Distribution of the Ceramic Assemblage Excavated by the Tamarindito Archaeological Project.

Time Period (Ceramic phase)	Number	Number (%)	Weight (grams)	Weight (%)
Late Preclassic (Faisan Chicanel; 300 BC–AD 350)	99	0.47	1,230	0.45
Early Classic (Jordan Tzakol; AD 350–600)	152	0.72	2,098	0.76
Late Classic (Nacimiento Tepeu; AD 600–830)	20,741	98.53	270,497	98.49
Terminal Classic (Sepens Boca; AD 830–950)	56	0.27	365	0.13
Postclassic (Tamarindo New Town; AD 950–1300)	27	0.13	587	0.21
Datable sherds	21,075	100.00	274,776	100.00
Eroded and other sherds ^a	23,426		139,337	
All sherds	44,501		414,113	

Note: The investigations covered 43 non-elite residential groups, a possible lookout, and Plaza B.

^a “Other” sherds include temporally disputed types and sherds classified only to the ware level.

time or 3114 BC in the Western calendar (Houston 1993:100–101). A Classic ruler wears a face mask presumably with the hieroglyphic name of his dynasty’s founder on Stela 3 (lower-right inset in Figure 2). In this way, the king claims a past beyond the reach of normal mortals. He embodies his ancestor and, in a process of subjectification, takes on a predefined identity. Fittingly, the ruler is unnamed and could be any one of a long line of kings. With his ancestor as template, he is *the* Foliated Scroll ruler. He and other Foliated Scroll rulers project continuity.

On Hieroglyphic Stairway 3, an early eighth-century ruler claims to be the twenty-fifth descendant of the founder. However, only 12 rulers are attested so far (Gronemeyer 2013:8–27). Assuming an average reign to be between 22.5 and 30.6 years (Grube 2006:154; Martin 1997:853–854), 24 predecessors would push the Foliated Scroll dynasty’s beginning to the Preclassic (the Foliated Scroll emblem refers to the Petexbatun region, as we discuss later; therefore, its rulers did not establish their dynasty elsewhere in Preclassic times and then move to the Petexbatun region). In intertwining narratives, Foliated Scroll rulers consecrate themselves with a mythological ancestor, see themselves as an institution, and claim to have reigned for many centuries.

Overburden has often made it difficult to study the foundations of royal dynasties archaeologically in the Maya Lowlands (Golden et al. 2008; Sharer et al. 1999). Extensive investigations at Tamarindito, however, allow us to evaluate the royal narratives. In the Petexbatun region, Preclassic settlements existed at Agua-teca, Bayak, Dos Ceibas, and Punta de Chimino

(Figure 1; Bachand 2006; Eberl 2014a:179–215; Eberl et al. 2009; Foias 1996:262; Inomata 1995:274–281; O’Mansky 1996; O’Mansky et al. 1994; Van Tuerenhout et al. 1993). They were hamlets mostly near rivers and lakes. Tamarindito’s ceramic assemblage dates from the Late Preclassic to the Postclassic (300 BC to about AD 1300; Eberl et al. 2016:147–153; Foias and Bishop 2013:77). PRAP excavated a few Faisan Chicanel ceramics at Plaza A, Plaza B, and residential groups near Plaza A (Foias and Bishop 2013:77) but encountered no Preclassic constructions. TAP investigations complement earlier studies. Most of our ceramic assemblage comes from nonroyal residential groups and has a striking temporal distribution (Table 1). More than 98% of all ceramic sherds date to the Late Classic, and Late Preclassic sherds account for less than 0.5% of all datable sherds. Faisan Chicanel ceramics are not only rare but also are scattered indiscriminately across the site and mix with later materials. We found no Preclassic buildings or construction levels (Eberl and Vela González 2016:162–163). The comprehensive investigations indicate that Tamarindito lacks a Preclassic predecessor.

Early Classic Genesis of the Foliated Scroll Polity

The first historically attested Foliated Scroll ruler was born in AD 472 (Houston 1993). In the following decades, Tamarindito and Arroyo de Piedra became the dynasty’s capitals (Figure 1; Valdés 1997; for Arroyo de Piedra, see Escobedo Ayala 1997).² Inscribed monuments proclaim

the official history. The foliated scroll emblem of the royal dynasty consists of glyph T856—sometimes suffixed with the syllable *la*—and remains undeciphered (on Arroyo de Piedra Stela 6, the foliated scroll is called *nal*, or “place”; the *la* may phonetically complement the latter and not the foliated scroll glyph). An inscription shows the foliated scroll as the curly stalk of a water lily (Figure 3a; also Buechler 2012:533). These vegetal elements set the foliated scroll emblem apart from scrolls at Altun Ha and other sites.

Unlike many dynasty-specific emblem glyphs, the foliated scroll references locale (see also Gronemeyer 2016). On Aguateca Stela 1, a period ending was celebrated in AD 741 “at the great-sun split mountain [the Classic Maya name for Aguateca] in the foliated scroll” (Figure 3b; also Figure 3d). By this time, Tamarindito’s rulers had ceded control over Aguateca

to Dos Pilas’s *mutul* dynasty. Therefore, the foliated scroll is best explained as a regional place name that refers to the Petexbatun region and includes Aguateca and Punta de Chimino (Buechler 2012:21; Tokovinine 2013:66).

Maya kingdoms like the Foliated Scroll polity did not exist in the abstract but materialized in specific places and people: royal actions are grounded. The phrase *u kabjiiy* refers to events that a Maya ruler directed or oversaw. It likely means the tilling of fields and links the ruler’s statecraft to a farmer’s agriculture (Houston and Inomata 2009:145; see Jackson 2013). In hieroglyphic texts, royal dynasties and arguably polities are called *chan ch’een* or “sky (and) cave” (Hull 2012:107–108; Stuart and Houston 1994:12–13). As in the altepetl in Highland Mexico, *chan ch’een* refers to an institution in both abstract and graspable ways. For example,

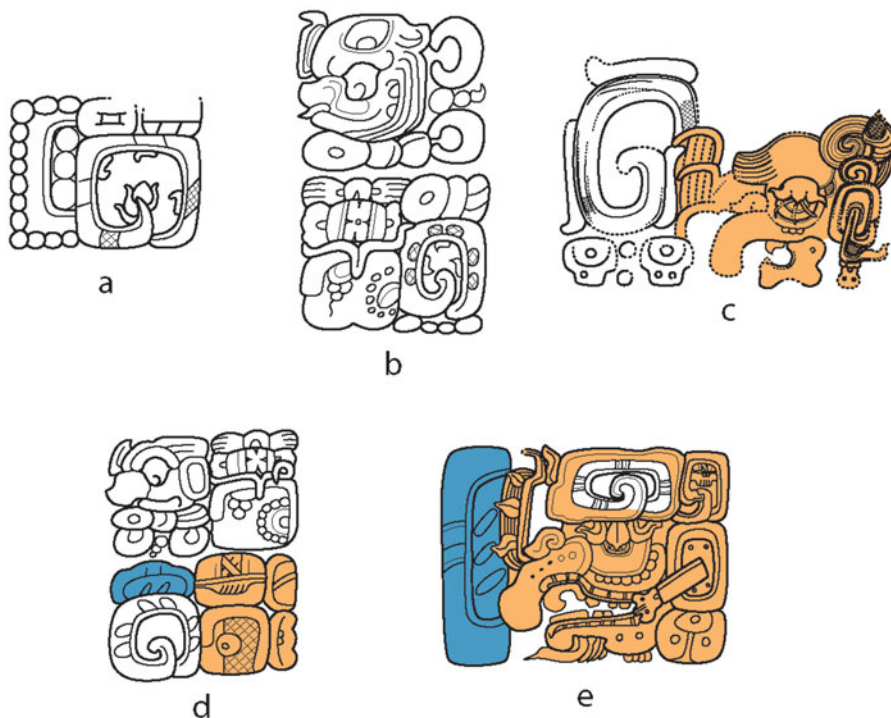


Figure 3. The foliated scroll in selected hieroglyphic texts and art (orange background highlights *chan ch’een* “sky (and) cave” and green-blue *yax* “green-blue, first”; color version available online); (a) *k’uhul* “foliated scroll” *ajaw* from Tamarindito Miscellaneous Text 2, glyph B (redrawn from Gronemeyer 2013:95); (b) “it happened at Aguateca in the ‘foliated scroll’” from Aguateca Stela 1, glyphs D9 and D10 (redrawn from Graham 1967:4); (c) “foliated scroll” *chan ch’een* from Arroyo de Piedra Stela 1 (dated to AD 613); (d) *yax* “foliated scroll” *chan ch’een* from Aguateca Stela 2, glyphs G6 and G7 (redrawn from Graham 1967:10); (e) *yax* “foliated scroll” *chan ch’een* from Tamarindito Stela 3 (redrawn from Lehmann and Lehmann 1968: Figure 103).

successful wars eradicate the *ch'een* of a Maya kingdom, destroy the statues of its patron gods, and crush the bones of their enemies' ancestors (Brady 1997; Eberl et al. 2019:669–970; Martin 2020). The foliated scroll is one of these *chan ch'een* “sky-caves” (Figures 3c and 3d). Tamarindito's Plaza A was likely the or one of the landmarks that embodied it.

Foliated Scroll rulers saw themselves as hegemons. On Stela 3 and elsewhere, they had the glyph *yax* carved before the foliated scroll toponym (Figures 3d and 3e). *Yax* means “green-blue” and, more broadly, “fresh, new” (Houston et al. 2009:40–42). As the color of jade, it denotes precious objects. Ancient Maya qualified water with *yax* to highlight its life-giving importance. The second set of meanings is apparent in phrases like calling each of humankind's ancestors *yax winik* or “new person.” *Yax* is also the color of the center around which the world revolves. Since at least AD 573 when they call the foliated scroll *yax* on Arroyo de Piedra Stela 6, rulers ascribed temporal and spatial prominence to their polity. They expressed this aspiration not only in their emblem glyph but also visually. Erected in front of or on Plaza A's pyramid (Structure 6AQ-2), Stela 3 shows a Late Classic ruler standing on the foliated scroll (Figure 3e; lower-right inset in Figure 2). Perched on the highest point in the region, the stela manifests the ruler's claim over the region at large. The Lowlands are literally at his feet.

Foliated Scroll rulers stress their uniqueness, but their political reality was more complex. The “*yax* foliated scroll” statement replicates the self-identification of Tikal or ancient *mutul* as *yax mutul* (Martin 2020:403n12). This link to the powerful Early Classic center seems no coincidence. The Lady of Tikal, an early sixth-century ruler, possibly supervised a Tamarindito ruler during the period-ending celebrations in AD 534 (Gronemeyer 2013:12; Martin 2020:245). Early Foliated Scroll rulers may have been acting under Tikal's hegemony. They also started to expand beyond their capitals only in the mid-fifth century; that is, several generations after their dynasty's foundation (Eberl 2014a:35–38; Houston 1993). The earliest evidence comes from Punta de Chimino; a Foliated Scroll ruler gifted an inscribed Early Classic

ceramic bowl to a Punta de Chimino noble. This likely took place during the latter part of the sixth century because this site's center was abandoned until at least the AD 530s (Bachand 2006, 2010). Foliated Scroll rulers then expanded their reign farther south. For example, one ruler celebrated a period-ending ceremony at Aguateca in AD 613. They governed the then-settled parts of the Petexbatun region only by the beginning of the Late Classic.

Materializing a Divine Pivot

The Foliated Scroll rulers constituted themselves and their polity in Tamarindito's Plaza A. There they built their first pyramid, palace, and plaza during the Early Classic (Figure 2). Deep soils nearby promised sustainable and bountiful harvests. Yet, we argue that the rulers' choice reflects more than only a favorable environmental setting. Over the course of the Early Classic, rulers made Plaza A *their* place.

Because the bedrock was uneven, rulers first had Plaza A's hill leveled. Their workers then built gravel or stucco floors in front of the palace and the pyramid. At some time later, during the Early Classic, they resurfaced the plaza and extended it across the western part of the hill (Figure 4). They also added a low platform in front of the pyramid (Foias 1993:101). The plaza covered the entire hill only during the Late Classic. The pyramid (Structure 6AQ-2) dominates the southern part of Plaza A. The association of the Early Classic Stela 5 with Pyramid 6AQ-2 or a predecessor suggests that the Early Classic version of Plaza A looked like its final version, with a palace in the north, a central plaza, and a pyramid in the south (the pyramid was not excavated due to extensive looting). Three buildings—Structures 6BP-29, 6AP-3, and 6AP-4—and both the West and East Courts are attested for the Early Classic palace (Foias 1993, 1994). The best-studied example is Structure 6BP-29 (previously known as Structure 13; inset in Figure 4). Its Early Classic predecessor was a platform that rose 1 m above the East Court plaza.

As part of the site-wide survey, we remapped Plaza A and calculated construction volumes and plaza areas. Plaza A's buildings and plaza

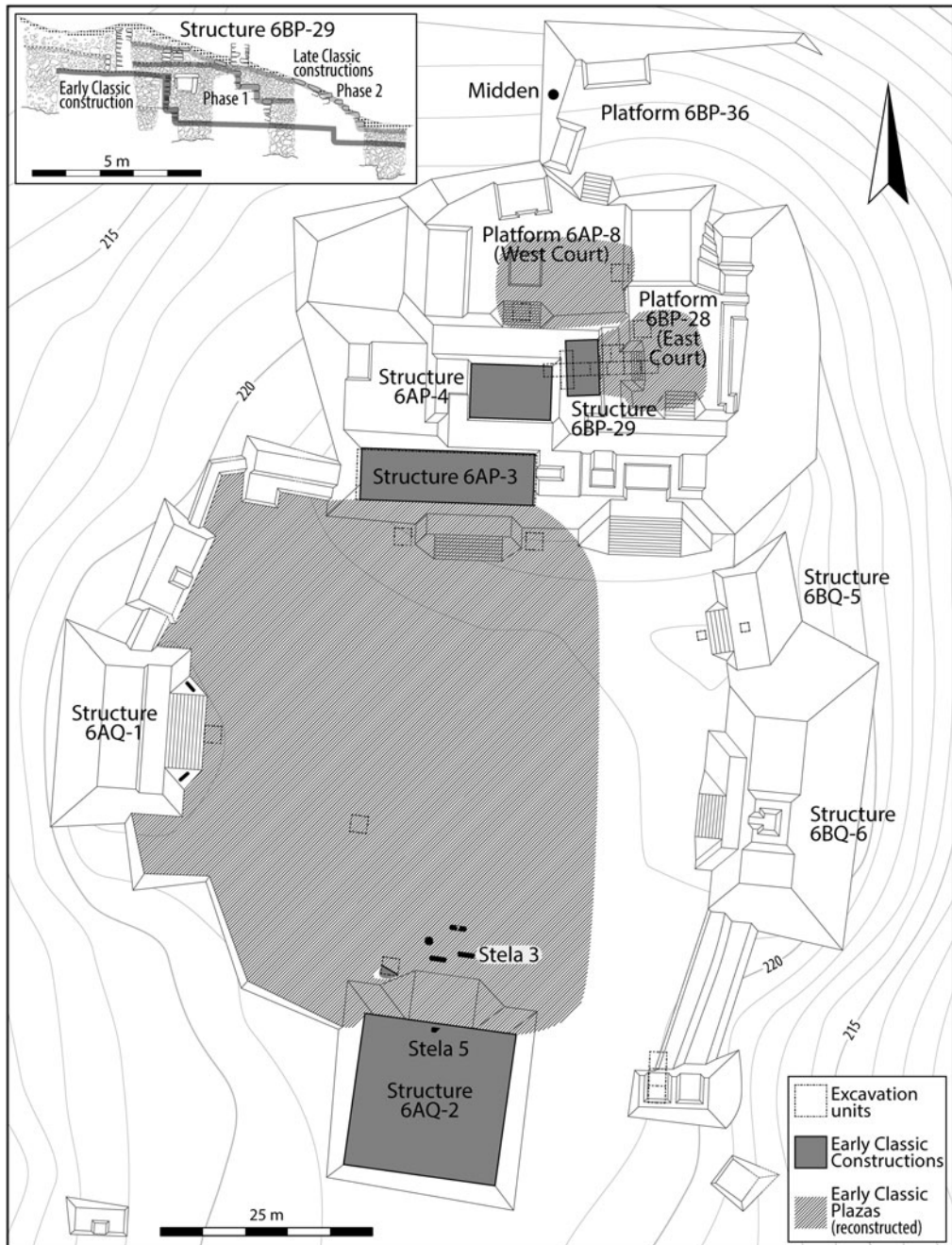


Figure 4. Plaza A during the later part of the Early Classic (only the northern and central part of Plaza A are shown). Inset, construction sequence of Structure 6BP-29 (previously known as Structure 13; north profile modified after Valdés 1997:324).

have a total construction volume between 8,200 and 11,000 m³ and represent 17,000–23,000 person-days of labor.³ Almost 80% of the labor effort involved quarrying limestone, roughly

10% went to transporting the limestone, and another 10% to the construction of platform and structure fill. These estimates do not account for manufacturing veneer stones and dressing

façades. Plaza A was smaller during the Early Classic before later additions to the palace, so less labor would have been needed for its Early Classic version (Valdés 1997:322–325). Nonetheless, the rough estimate shows that the scale of construction was limited. The combined labor effort equals about 579–781 person-years, based on the assumption that preindustrial farmers can set one month annually aside for nonagricultural work (Lewis 1951:156). Twenty-three to 31 workers could have built Plaza A in 25 years.

The construction history of the plaza in Plaza A attests to a slow growth that mirrors Tamarindito's settlement history. Antonia Foias (1993) identified two Early Classic and one Late Classic construction episodes. First, builders smoothed out the hill's surface with a floor that was 0.06–0.11 m thick. Because test pits encountered the floor at different depths, we assume that it covered only parts of the hill, likely forming plazas before the palace and the pyramid. The total volume of 250 m³ represents the labor of at least 530 person-days (this estimate omits the making of lime for the stucco surface). A handful of laborers could have completed this task within a few years. Later during the Early Classic, Plaza A was resurfaced. The construction volume for this second construction episode varied between 750 and 2500 m³ and required a more substantial labor effort: 1,600–5,300 person-days. During the Late Classic, a third construction episode extended the plaza to its final version by adding 660–1,770 m³ of fill requiring 1,420–3,800 person-days of labor.

Plaza A was designed for large crowds. Like large plazas elsewhere, people gathered there to witness their rulers during period-ending ceremonies and other events (Inomata 2006). Its Late Classic version extends more than 3,334 m² and could hold approximately 3,300 people (estimates range from 926 [at 3.6 m² per person] to 7,248 people [at 0.46 m² per person] based on Inomata [2006:816]). The plaza was smaller during the Early Classic and, after its first extension, provided room for approximately 1,650 people (Figure 4).

Although few buildings studded Tamarindito's Plaza A during the Early Classic, they must have appeared imposing because they formed a ring around an isolated 70 m high

natural hill. Springs are at its foot, and cave-like quarries pockmark its sides. These features characterize the flower mountain that figures prominently in the Maya cosmovision. The ancestral couple emerges from a cave in it to establish humankind (Eberl 2017:2, 116; Saturno et al. 2005:14–21; Taube 2004). Plaza A resonates with the aspirations of the Foliated Scroll rulers. From there, the Petexbatun region lay at their feet, and thousands of people could gather for their public ceremonies. Rulers transformed Tamarindito's Plaza A into their divine pivot: a seat for a divine dynasty, a place of sustenance, and the center of a regional polity.

Non-elite Subjectification

An emerging polity offers the opportunity to study how people subjectify themselves as they become residents. During the Early Classic, rulers established the Foliated Scroll polity. Their *chan ch'een* places them in the center of the cosmos and materializes in Tamarindito's Plaza A. Our archaeological investigations allow us to suggest how non-elites responded to the royal grandeur. Although their internal motivations often remain opaque, the non-elite took advantage of the politically fragmented Maya Lowlands and, voting with their feet, decided under whose authority to live (Inomata 2004). Recent studies link successes or failures of divine rulers to rapidly increasing or falling populations at their capitals (Martin 2020:231–333). Settlement histories thus offer a way to reconstruct non-elite subjectification.

In the case of Tamarindito, our evidence points to a very small Early Classic settlement. Corresponding construction levels and buildings were only found in Plaza A, Plaza B, and two nearby residential groups (Groups 6BO-b and 6BP-a; Figure 3). Plaza B's Early Classic construction is limited to a stuccoed floor below the southwest corner of its Late Classic palace (between Structures 5TR-6 and 5TQ-22; Valdés 1993:90–91). No building is associated with this floor, and Plaza B's Early Classic appearance remains unclear.

Outside the royal center, PRAP detected an Early Classic occupation in Group 6BO-b (previously known as Group Q5-1; Valdés et al.

1994). All visible buildings date to the Late Classic (Valdés et al. 1994:116), but the northern building may have had an Early Classic predecessor (Valdés et al. 1994:109). Foias and Bishop (2013:112n2) identified Early Classic ceramic deposits in three additional buildings and the plaza. It is unclear, however, whether these deposits correspond to Early Classic construction levels.

Group 6BP-a is less than 200 m east of Plaza A (Supplemental Text 1). Four buildings group

around a leveled plaza, with a fifth building off to the southeast (Figure 5). We cleaned the looter's pit into Structure 6BP-5 and excavated it down to bedrock to reveal three construction episodes (Figures 6 and 7). The ceramic assemblage dates Floors 1 and 2 to the Late Classic (Supplemental Table 1). The third stucco floor was at a depth of 1.2 m, and its support fill was noticeably more compact than the fills above. The ceramic sherds from Floor 3 and its fill are from Early Classic ceramic groups

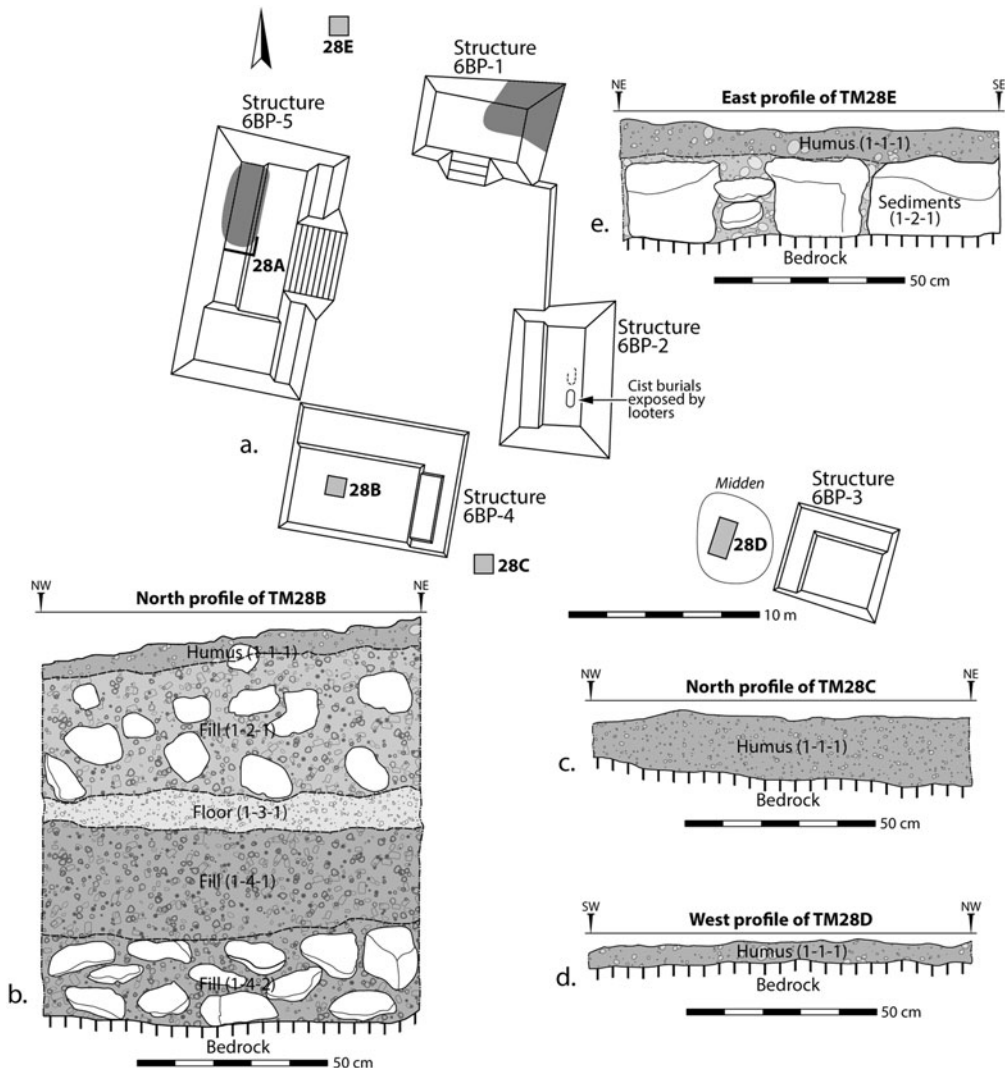


Figure 5. Investigations in Tamarindito Group 6BP-a (profile drawings by Claudia Vela González): (a) Map of the group (dark-gray areas mark looter's pits); (b) north profile of the test pit into Structure 6BP-4 (TM28B); (c) north profile of the test pit into midden TM28C; (d) west profile of the test pit into midden TM28D; (e) east profile of the test pit into midden TM28E.

like Quintal, Balanza, and Dos Arroyos and from Late Preclassic groups like Flor and Iberia. Together with the construction technique, they date Floor 3 to the Early Classic (Supplemental Text 2). Structure 6BP-5 started as a 0.5 m high building. So far, it is the only Early Classic building in Group 6BP-a and may have been an isolated building before the rest of the residential group was added.

Although Early Classic ceramic sherds are dispersed widely at Tamarindito, they concentrate at and near Plaza A. PRAP encountered Jordan Tzakol ceramic sherds in Plaza A, Plaza B, and Group 6BO-b (Foias and Bishop

2013:112n2). In our excavations, Early Classic sherds account for less than 1% of all datable sherds (Table 1). About three of four Early Classic sherds are unslipped ceramic types like Quintal Unslipped and Triunfo Striated (Figures 8a and b). Slipped ceramics include Dos Arroyos Orange Polychrome sherds from plates with characteristic Z-shaped flanges (Figure 8c). Several Balanza Black sherds constitute the hollow foot of a cylinder vessel (Figure 8d). The only partially reconstructible Early Classic vessel is an Urita Gouged-Incised cylinder (Figure 8e). Most of the Jordan Tzakol ceramics (83.6%) come from four residential groups east of Plaza A (Groups

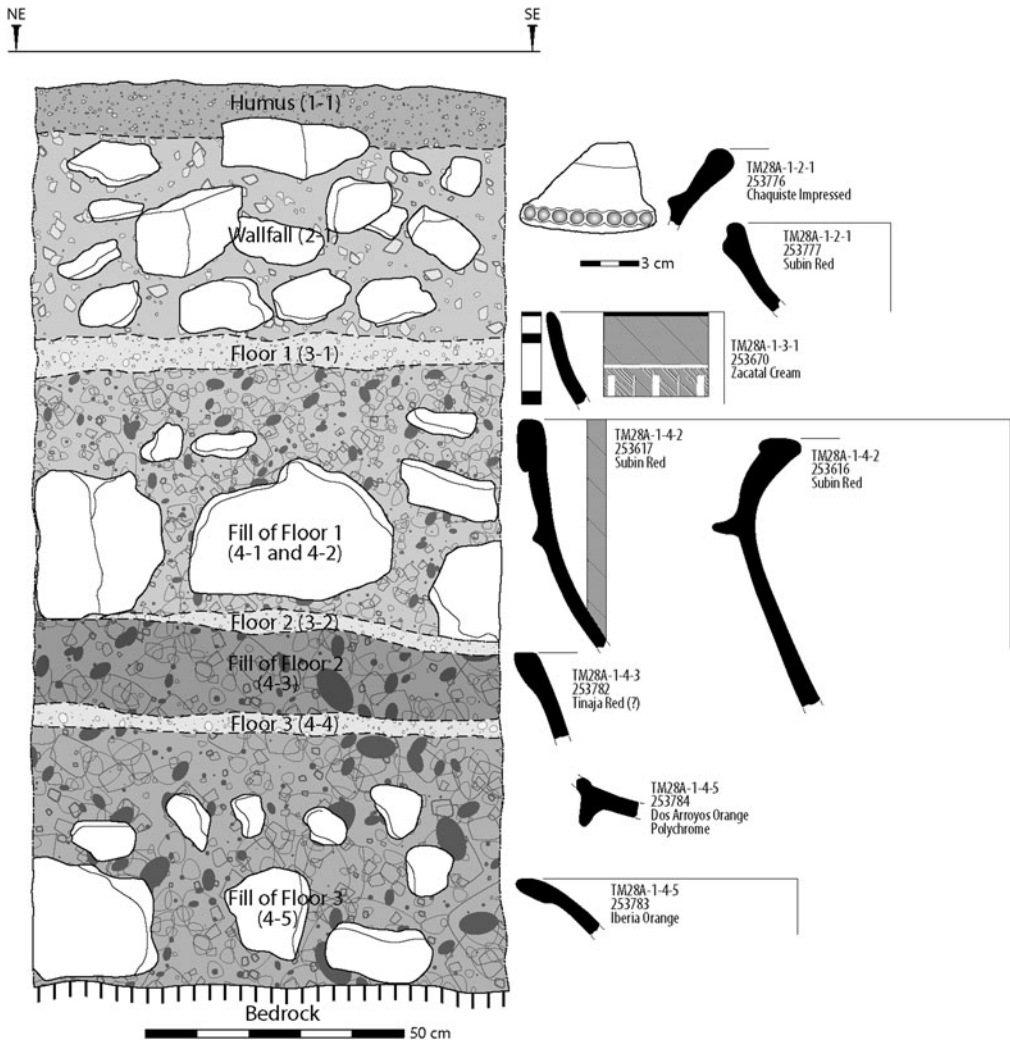


Figure 6. Excavation into Tamarindito Structure 6BP-5 (TM28A): drawing of the east profile with associated ceramic sherds (profile drawing by Claudia Vela González).

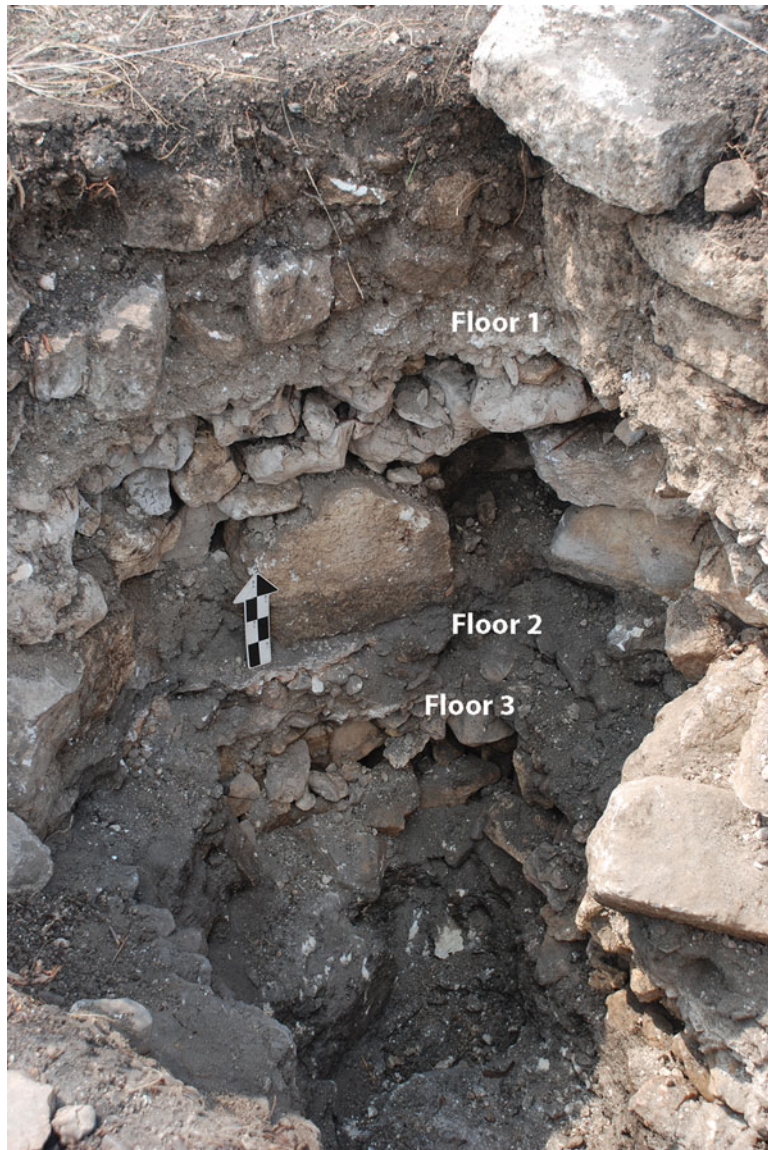


Figure 7. Excavation into Tamarindito Structure 6BP-5 (TM28A): photo of the cleared looter's pit (north arrow for scale, not direction).

6BP-a through -d) and from Group 5PS-d at the southwestern edge of the site (indicated in [Figure 1](#)). Except for Groups 6BO-b and 6BP-a, Jordan Tzakol sherds are mixed into Late Classic deposits (Eberl et al. 2016:148; Vela González et al. 2016:56).

During the Early Classic, non-elites lived at Tamarindito in small numbers and likely arrived only during the latter part of the Early Classic. The Jordan Tzakol ceramics from non-elite

contexts lack early types like *Aguila Orange*. In Structure 6BP-5, ceramic sherds from Floor 3 were highly eroded (75.6%; Supplemental Table 1): they were likely exposed to the elements for a long time before being reused as construction fill. This suggests that Structure 6BP-5 was first built toward the end of the Early Classic. In contrast, *Aguila Orange* ceramics date the earliest constructions of Plaza A to the early part of the Early Classic (Foiás 1993; Valdés 1993).

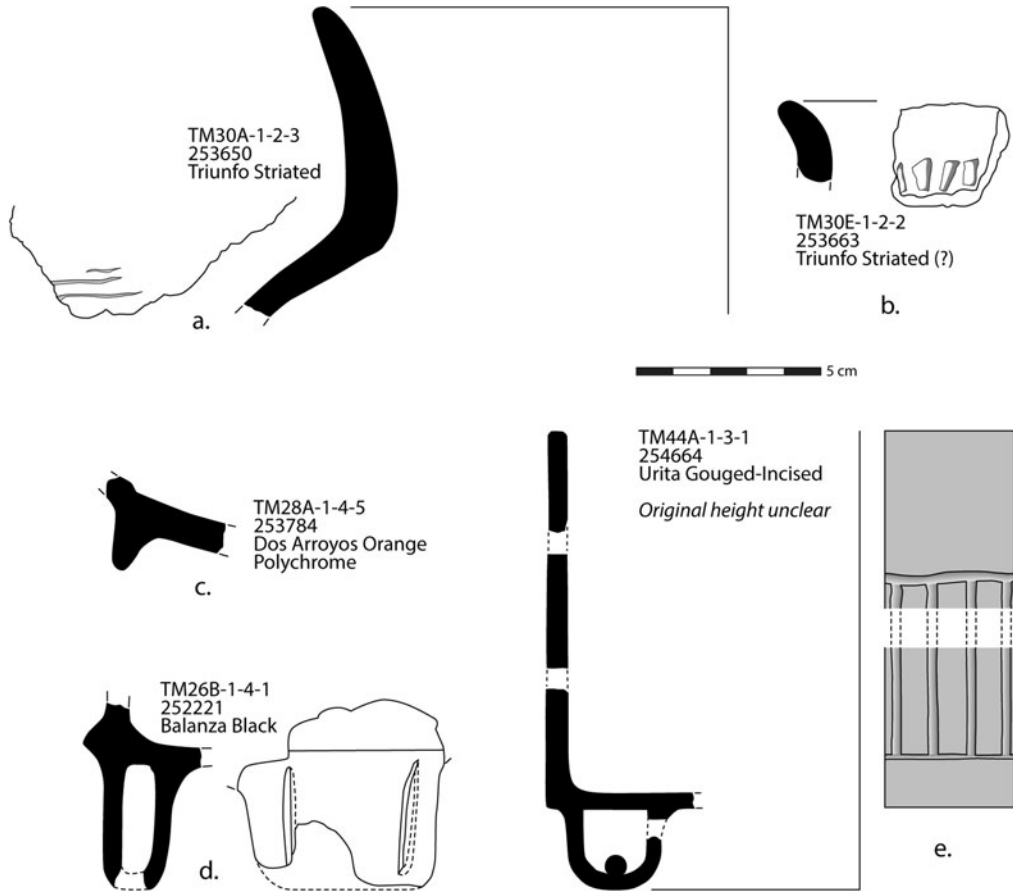


Figure 8. Early Classic sherds from non-elite residential groups at Tamarindito: (a) Triunfo Striated jar neck from Group 6BP-c; (b) possible Triunfo Striated sherd from Group 6BP-c; (c) Dos Arroyos Orange Polychrome sherd from Group 6BP-a; (d) foot of a Balanza Black cylinder from Group 5QS-a; (e) partially reconstructible Urita Gouged-Incised cylinder from Group 5TP-a.

The archaeological investigations at Tamarindito help us reconstruct non-elite subjectification. The royal seat of power in Plaza A was Tamarindito’s nucleus around which the later settlement grew (also Houston et al. 2003:219–226; Kingsley et al. 2012). Urbanization, however, did not initiate the institutionalization of the Foliated Scroll polity (see also Jennings and Earle 2016). Elites likely founded the site a few generations before the earliest hieroglyphically attested event in AD 472. Rulers presented themselves as hegemons and converted Plaza A into an impressive monumental space. However, their aspirations clashed with reality. Plaza A’s crowd capacity exceeded the local and likely even regional population multiple times (for similarly supersized building projects, see Stark and Stoner

2017:423; Sullivan 2015:455–456). We show that non-elites started to settle at the site in small numbers and likely not until the later part of the Early Classic. During the fifth and sixth centuries, Tamarindito was a hamlet with possibly only a few dozen inhabitants.

The Making of a Maya Court, Capital, and Polity

The royal capital of Tamarindito sheds light on polity formation in the Maya Lowlands. PRAP and TAP studied approximately two-thirds of all residential groups at Tamarindito and almost every residential group near Plaza A, its Early Classic center. Our comprehensive archaeological and epigraphic investigations show that

environmental changes and elite decision making fail to fully explain the site's foundation. Instead, we propose a co-constitutive process of subjectification.

Tamarindito was founded during the Early Classic at a previously uninhabited location. The lack of a Preclassic predecessor sets it apart from the origins of Piedras Negras, Yaxchilan, and Copan where investigations detected Preclassic settlements (Golden et al. 2008; Sharer et al. 1999). Our investigations show that the Petexbatun region collapsed even more pervasively than previously thought at the end of the Preclassic. This makes Tamarindito an ideal place to study the formation of a polity. We outline distinct stages. Elites founded Tamarindito's royal court perhaps as early as the late fourth century AD. Non-elites then trickled in over the following centuries. The Foliated Scroll polity emerged slowly. Rulers expanded their rule over the Petexbatun region only in the 500s.

Classic Maya rulers, courts, and polities tend to be seen from a Late Classic perspective when they were fully institutionalized. We critique the assumption of fully formed subjects and the resulting difficulty of explaining change. Hieroglyphic texts and art allow us to reconstruct how Maya elites claimed authority. Like their peers, Foliated Scroll rulers presented themselves as timeless. Their self-subjectification is evident on Tamarindito Stela 3, where a ruler impersonates his dynasty's founder and, by remaining nameless, transcends his person to embody an institution. The world revolved around the Foliated Scroll rulers, and they were ever ready to shape the rest of Maya society. However, this is a self-serving narrative. The inscriptions of the Foliated Scroll dynasty were—like other Maya hieroglyphic texts—not meant as objective history (Martin 2020:48–64). They tell the origin story of royal elites through their eyes and create the perception of antiquity.

Subjectification rests on recognizing an authority. The Foliated Scroll rulers' aggrandizing rhetoric makes this seem self-evident, yet our archaeological findings point to an immanent process. During the fifth and early sixth centuries, Foliated Scroll rulers struggled to impose their authority. They could draw only on a limited

number of workers to build Plaza A. Outside Tamarindito's center, we found only two Early Classic nonroyal buildings. Tamarindito grew from an Early Classic hamlet to a Late Classic town over the course of two centuries. This slow transition suggests that non-elites did not accept royal hegemony as natural and instead played a more active role than traditionally envisioned in subjectifying themselves.

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Supplemental Figure 1. The embodiment of the house of Río Azul noble Nabnal K'inich (detail of Maya polychrome vessel K2914; redrawn from Schmidt et al. 1998: 290–291).

Supplemental Text 1. Investigating Tamarindito Group 6BP-a.

Supplemental Text 2. Reconstructing Early Classic Tamarindito.

Supplemental Table 1. Ceramic Assemblage from Tamarindito Structure 6BP-5 (TM28A, Unit 1).

Competing Interests. The authors declare none.

Notes

1. Group 6BP-g is the only group near Plaza A that remains unexcavated. In 2009, the senior author observed several looter's pits in this group. The exposed loose construction fill and Late Classic ceramic sherds in a looted tomb suggest that this group dates to the Late Classic. It was not investigated further because of the extent of destruction.

2. The Early Classic extension of Arroyo de Piedra remains unknown but was likely very small. Several carved monuments in Arroyo de Piedra's center attest to the Early Classic history of Foliated Scroll rulers. Test pits in surrounding residential groups identified only Late Classic constructions (Escobedo Ayala 2006:323–357).

3. Plaza A's buildings and plaza total between 8,177 and 11,027 m³. The range reflects the minimum and maximum construction volume of the plaza, as judged from test pits TA7A-1, TA7A-2, TA10A, and TA24A. The building effort required between 17,370 and 23,440 person-days (based on labor estimates in Abrams 1984:149–154, 160–162, 180). Quarrying 8,177–11,027 m³ of limestone took 13,630–18,380 person-days at 0.6 m³ per person-day. Transporting the limestone to the Plaza A hilltop added 2,040–2,760 person-days at 4 m³ per person-day; the limestone likely came from the hilltop sides and was therefore readily available. Construction of the plaza, platform, and structure fill required 1,700–2,300 person-days at 4.8 m³ per person-day.

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