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Palenque's ceramics: searching for a methodology for their study and classification

Translation of the Spanish by Eduardo Williams

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Culture: Maya
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Introduction: an Atypical Research Project and Reports

The report I am about to develop does not conform to the characteristics of a conventional research project, since I do not start from a previous hypothesis which I attempt to corroborate with the present study. As the person in charge of the ceramic analysis for Palenque as part of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), my intention has been to strengthen my knowledge about the studies performed by Dr. Robert L. Rands about the site and its surrounding areas, with the objective of being better qualified to give continuity to the task of deciphering all the archaeological information derived from the ceramic analysis. Therefore, my proposal's importance rests in the need to establish a direct connection between two researchers who are working on the basis of a common research object, the ceramics from Palenque.

Ceramic analysis constitutes one of the main sources of archaeological information for understanding a site's cultural development. Palenque, as one of the most important of all Maya enclaves in the Late Classic period, presents serious difficulties as far as its ceramic materials are concerned, such as the high level of erosion and fragmentation of the remains, the lack of a straightforward stratigraphy, the marginality of Palenque's ceramic tradition as opposed to most sites from the Petén, and the particularity of many of its formal and stylistic attributes. All of this has contributed to making ceramic analysis in Palenque one of the most suggestive and necessary challenges within the investigations in this site. It is not possible to talk about Palenque without making a very special mention of the research carried out by Dr. Robert L. Rands, who has dedicated most of his professional life to the analysis and understanding of ceramics from Palenque and its surrounding areas. Dr. Rands' work has made it possible to date constructions, to identify production areas, to establish exchange and trade relationships, and lastly to propose the most widely accepted occupation sequence for Palenque. Therefore, the results of Dr. Rands' research constitute the foundation on which all future work should be based, and from which all new contributions should be evaluated.

Before proceeding I would like to mention a delicate matter derived from my close collaboration with Dr. Rands. I mean my free access to part of the information generated by him in over fifty years of research. Much of his data have become part of

my own learning process, therefore they have become an integral part of my knowledge of Palenque ceramics and of my own research. Although it may be obvious, I don't want to fail to emphasize the credit due Dr. Rands for his enormous contribution to the study of Palenque ceramics, as well as for his precision in recording the information he now wants to share with us.

This work includes a synthesis of two preliminary reports about the activities carried out in my work sessions with Dr. Robert L. Rands, as well as the results derived from them. These results have been included in the following papers presented at two international meetings on Maya culture: "The ceramics from Palenque: the occupation sequence of Groups1 and C", presented in the International Congress of Mayanists organized by the Center for Maya Studies of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, held in Villahermosa in 2004, and "The Early Classic in Palenque through its ceramics", presented in the Symposium of Archaeological Research in Guatemala City in 2005. It should be pointed out, however, that one of the most outstanding achievements of my close collaboration with Dr. Rands is the elaboration of a co-authored article about the evolution of diagnostic forms of Palenque ceramics throughout the site's sequence of occupation. This work, based on the results of the analysis of ceramic materials recovered from the excavations conducted by Rands and Ruz in Palenque, is still being written.

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Research Goals

In the context of research and conservation work in Palenque's archaeological zone, which was coordinated by INAH and directed by archaeologist Arnoldo González Cruz, the "Project on the Analysis of Materials" was integrated. The aim of this project is to perform a long-term analysis of ceramic remains from the excavation of housing units. In order to accomplish this task we needed to have perfect knowledge of all ceramics studied so far in Palenque, in order to have an academic and methodological basis on which to support the contributions of the new material under study. On this basis, this project has had three primary objectives, all of them with a direct reference to the utmost need to know first hand Dr. Rands' work:

To know in detail the research carried out by Dr. Rands on the ceramics from Palenque and its neighboring areas, and to reflect upon the methodology applied in its analysis; to contrast the new data gathered by the study of materials from domestic units through the Palenque Archaeological Project with the data so far analyzed by Dr. Rands

recovered from other areas within the site. Finally, to establish an academic link between Dr. Rands and the team of researchers who, under the direction of archaeologist Arnoldo González Cruz, are dedicated to a greater or lesser degree to the analysis of Palenque's ceramic materials.

Background of research on Palenque ceramics

The analysis of ceramics from Palenque started in 1951, when Dr. Robert L. Rands took on the responsibility of establishing a ceramic sequence which would enable us to answer many of the questions about the history of this site. This investigation has continued to this day, and there are many results derived from it, such as the proposed ceramic complexes clustered in specific chronological frameworks, the identification of production areas in the region based on the analysis of paste composition, and the establishment of possible commercial exchange routes with sites around Palenque.

Up to 2002 Dr. Rands' research constituted a unique and valuable source of information to understand all the cultural data that the analysis of Palenque's ceramics could contribute. The aforementioned Project on the Analysis of Materials undertook the goal of proposing an alternative study that would enable us to corroborate Dr. Rands' theses and to gather new data to enable the possible revision and refining of his ceramic sequence. Upon reaching this point it became imperative for both researchers to collaborate, which was possible thanks to FAMSI's support. Therefore, a series of joint work sessions started, which were based on the direct observation of the materials studied by both: the collection housed in Dr. Rands' lab in Maryland and the collection belonging to the Palenque Archaeological Project sponsored by Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History.

Dr. Rands' intense and thorough research

As is widely known, Dr. Rands has dedicated a good deal of his professional career to studying the ceramics from Palenque and its region. His work is based on the study of ceramic materials from the excavations directed by archaeologist Alberto Ruz in Palenque between 1949 and 1958 and the excavations conducted by Rands himself between 1951 and 1962. Thanks to a detailed record of archaeological data, to sophisticated analytical techniques, and to a classification system mainly based on the evolution of vessel forms through time, Dr. Rands has established the ceramic phases widely accepted for Palenque. Several methods of analysis have been applied in his intense investigation: (1) petrological study from thin sections and microscopic observation of texture and temper; (2) re-firing of small ceramic fragments under controlled conditions with the purpose of obtaining a color description of the standard paste; (3) neutron activation analysis in order to identify several elements in the paste composition. Data derived from the application of these methods constitute a source of archaeological information as exhaustive as it is valuable. Thanks to this information Dr.

Rands has been able to establish several distinct paste groups, to identify the deposits where clay was obtained, and lastly to infer production techniques.

Palenque ceramic sequence (alter Rands)

DATE	PERIOD	PHASES
300 B.C.		
	LATE	PRE-PICOTA
A.D. 250	PRECLASSIC	
		PICOTA
	PROTOCLASSIC	
	AND	
	EARLY CLASSIC	MOTIEPA
A.D. 600		
		OTOLUM
	LATE CLASSIC	MURCIÉLAGOS
A.D. 800		BALUNTÉ
A.D. 900	TERMINAL CLASSIC	HUIPALE

INAH's Project on Analysis of Ceramic Materials

The Project on Analysis of Ceramic Materials was started by selecting two domestic groups as complementary units of analysis, with the aim of obtaining new data about domestic contexts whose materials had not been studied so far. These were the C and I Groups, located in the east and north sections of the site respectively. They were excavated in the sixth field season of the Special Palenque Project in 1993 and 1994. We intended to obtain a solid descriptive basis upon which to eventually infer ceramic properties capable of refuting hypotheses related to dating, function, specialized activities and patterns of growth in the site.

With the aim of recording as much data as possible from the materials under study I tried to follow several tasks in a rigorous order:

- Description of formal and technical characteristics of each one of the ceramic groups identified;
- Quantification of all fragments attributed to each one of the said groups, specifying the vessel form to which they pertain;
- Drawing of all vessel forms identified and their variants;
- Progressive elaboration of a collection of samples with the most representative and best preserved fragments;
- Reintegration of whole or semi-complete pieces, with the aim of obtaining a better record of forms.

This initial task of visual examination, provisional classification and detailed description resulted in establishing a preliminary typological series upon which we could infer the lines of research that would determine further work. This seriation was substantially modified on the basis of my collaboration with Dr. Rands, therefore we still are a long way from establishing its definitive acceptance. For the time being, thirty types have been identified in the materials so far analyzed: eighteen were established by my study, and fifteen by other researchers in different sites within the Maya area. The Picota (Protoclassic and Early Classic) and Otolúm (Late Classic) phases haven't been well defined yet on the basis of our materials; therefore we decided to leave the identification and type designation for a later, more advanced stage of the analysis. Likewise, the remainder of phases already represented –Pre-Picota (Late Preclassic), Motiepá (Early Classic), Murciélagos (Late Classic), Balunté (Late Classic) and Huipalé (Early Postclassic) – are not finished yet. Although we had enough materials for establishing several types, these require a more thorough process of observation and comparison. The series I present below is the result of a preliminary examination undertaken before my collaboration with Dr. Rands, therefore I will only show the entries for some types, with the sole aim of illustrating my system of analysis and description (see Appendix 1).

PROVISIONAL TYPOLOGICAL SERIATION

LATE PRECLASSIC

PRE-PICOTA PHASE

Sierra Group
Sierra Rojo Type: Unspecified Variety
Alta Mira Acanalado Type: Alta Mira Variety
Ciego Compuesto Type: Ciego Variety

EARLY CLASSIC

MOTIEPA PHASE

Aguila Group
Aguila Naranja Type: Unspecified Variety

Balanza Group
Paradero Acanalado Type: Paradero Variety

Dos Arroyos Group
San Blas Rojo sobre Crema Type: Unspecified Variety

LATE CLASSIC

MURCIÉLAGOS PHASE

Mapastepec Group
Mapastepec Rojo Type: Mapastepec Variety
Mapastepec Rojo Type: Impreso Variety

Margaritas Group
Margaritas Gris Type: Masojá Variety
Male Rojo sobre Crema Type: Male Variety
Multajo Impreso Type: Multajo Variety
Marte Compuesto Type: Marte Variety

Marqués Group
Marqués Crema Type: Marqués Variety
Maravilla Inciso Type: Unspecified Variety
Metapa Compuesto Type: Metapa Variety

Mitontic Group
Mitontic Rojo sobre Crema Type: Mitontic Variety
Mitontic Rojo sobre Crema Type: Negativo Variety

Mexiquito Group
Mexiquito Acanalado Type: Mexiquito Variety

Yalcox Group [Murciélagos (Balunté)]
Yalcox Negro Type: Yalcox Variety
Tekanto Inciso Type: Tekanto Variety
Xtab Compuesto Type: Xtab Variety
Xnoria Acanalado Type: Xnoria Variety

BALUNTÉ PHASE

Mapastepec Group
Mapastepec Rojo Type: Barrancón Variety

Margaritas Group
Margaritas Gris Type: Badenia Variety

Chablekal Group [Balunté and Murciélagos Phases]
Chablekal Gris Type: Chablekal Variety
Chicxulub Inciso Type: Chicxulub Variety
Cholul Acanalado Type: Cholul Variety
Telchac Compuesto Type: Telchac Variety

Encanto Group
Encanto Estriado Type: Unspecified Variety

EARLY POSTCLASSIC

HUIPALÉ PHASE

Balancán Group
Provincia Plano-Relief Type: Unspecified Variety

Plumbate Group

The Classification System: a matter for debate

Although it is obvious, I would like to point out the difference between two widely used concepts in the study of archaeological ceramics: the *method of analysis*, which refers to the procedures used for gathering data about the study collection, and the *system of classification*, which consists of creating artificial taxonomic units in order to put some order into the chaos among the data. Such units –like varieties, types, groups or wares– must be understood as a means to give meaning to archaeological evidence. Bearing in mind this distinction between concepts, we should point out that the possibility of using several classification systems for the study of Palenque ceramics has been one of the fundamental axes of my work sessions with Dr. Rands. The methods of analysis employed by Dr. Rands, however, have never been a matter of disagreement; rather they have been one of the fundamental sources of my learning process.

After many work sessions with Dr. Rands, throughout which we both had an opportunity to exchange our experiences derived from the analysis of our respective collections, we reached an agreement about the classification of the materials. The peculiarities shown by Palenque ceramics have dictated the application of a method of analysis much more complex than the one being used traditionally. The lack of surface finish due to the high state of erosion, the lack of good stratigraphic contexts in the site because of the constant reuse of fills in construction, and the marginality of the ceramic typology compared to that of the Maya nuclear area, mean that Palenque is a special case. The utilization of a single classification system, therefore, is not enough to span the huge degree of variability encapsulated in the analysis of ceramic materials of remarkable complexity.

Therefore, ceramics from Palenque must be analyzed by means of four independent (but mutually complementary) classificatory systems: (1) the type-variety system is being applied in those cases where the preservation conditions of the materials make it possible; (2) the analysis of pastes that can be accomplished through direct observation of ceramics, or using more precise research equipment; (3) the study of decorative techniques and motifs from the perspective of art history; (4) the analysis of the evolution of vessel form through time.

The Type-Variety System

One of the most frequent debates in my work sessions with Dr. Rands was about the convenience of using the type-variety system for the classification of Palenque ceramics. It should be pointed out that we both believe in the system's effectiveness, although we disagree about its degree of viability once applied in the classification of ceramic materials as complex as ours. Dr. Rands has chosen to use the type-variety system in a conventional way, in spite of the fact that the scarcity of well-preserved surface finish greatly limits its application. I on the other hand have attempted to flexibilize the traditional parameters of the system in order to extend its degree of viability.

I regard the type-variety system to be the most effective classificatory method to reflect the chronological sequence of the material under study, as well as for making comparisons with ceramics from other sites within the Maya area. As is well known, the type-variety system is based on the classification of archaeological ceramics on the basis of its attributes –especially surface finish– which define four main taxonomical units: ware, group, type and variety. This system, which has been used in most sites of the nuclear Maya area, allows for establishing the degree of affinity, divergence or cultural interaction between sites (Forsyth 1983: 229), as well as dating (albeit relative dating) of other archaeological characteristics and their contexts (Smith *et al*. 1960: 330). Therefore, my goal is to work with this traditional classification system, in spite of the difficulties derived from the poor preservation of most pottery recovered from Palenque. In order to do this I have decided to give priority to the formal attributes of the vessels, above the surface finish and decoration. This way I have made the system

more flexible, which is a little rigid in its conception, but allows for small modifications, provided they are duly justified by the nature of the materials and clearly explained in the presentation of the classification.

The Paste Analysis

I will again refer to Dr. Rands' research. He has dedicated a good deal of effort to the study of pastes through the three systems of analysis already mentioned (petrological study, re-firing of fragments, and neutron activation).[1] This exhaustive analysis has had many results, foremost among them is the configuration of a data base with the provenience of different clays, as well as the identification of production workshops.

After a first approach to my study materials I spotted several well-defined kinds of paste, which I later had the opportunity to contrast with data provided by Dr. Rands. Although this is a simplification of the tremendous diversity of clays used for making the ceramics found in Palenque, it is interesting to point out the presence of three very characteristic kinds of paste:

Reddish-brown paste, obtained in deposits found in the low sierras, with a high content of quartz sand in its composition and a reddish color which is produced by an incomplete oxidation. This is a tradition which extends from the Late Preclassic to the end of the site's occupation, therefore it is most likely to be a locally produced pottery.

Brown-orange paste, which comes from the plains –more specifically from the margins of the Michol River, to the west of Palenque. It is characterized by a very dark core, resulting from a high phytolith content in its composition. Like the former case, this kind of paste was utilized throughout virtually the whole of Palenque's sequence of occupation.

Yellowish paste, which comes from the Chacamax River, to the east of the site, and is characterized by having an even higher phytolith content in its composition. This kind of paste started being used in the Late Classic, perhaps because of the depletion of some clay deposits which were being exploited.

The Art-Historical Study of Decorative Techniques and Motifs

Although I have reiterated over and over the scarcity of well-preserved surface finish in the ceramics from Palenque, this doesn't mean to say that there is no evidence of decorative techniques and motifs. It is interesting to point out the surprising paucity of polychrome decoration in our pottery, although we don't know if this is due to bad

[1] It should be pointed out that the paste analysis by neutron activation is being carried out by Dr. Ronald Bishop. He has contributed to the study of Maya ceramics an approach which is hard to attain for most archaeological research projects, and whose results are truly extraordinary.

preservation or to a low production of this kind of pottery. However, the preference for monochrome slips is outstanding, as well as the relatively frequent application of incision and impression techniques for the production of geometric, zoomorphic, phytomorphic, and anthropomorphic decorative motifs.

Like any other artistic manifestation, the decoration applied to vessels shows an evolution through time which in many cases derives from certain socio-economic factors. The pottery from Palenque is no exception, and there are many chronological data derived from the presence of one type of decoration or another. Therefore, throughout Palenque's ceramic sequence it is possible to see some tendencies, such as the profusion of incised decorative motifs –primarily geometric and zoomorphic– as well as greater care given to the manufacture during the Murcielagos complex, or a greater standardization of decoration (derived from a considerable increase of production) during the Balunté complex.

Vessel form	**Decorative technique**						**Funerary Offerings**
	Smoothed	**Polished**	**Slip**	**Incision**	**Impression**	**Paint**	
Bowl	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	4
Dish	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	2
Deep Bowl	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	2
Beaker	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	2
Vase	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	3
Olla	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	1
Pan	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	0
Tecomate (seed jar)	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	0

Note: The information in this table derives from the analysis of vessels found in burials in Groups I and II of Palenque.

Analysis of the Evolution of Vessel Form through Time

The analysis of the evolution of vessel form through time is the fundamental axis of the research carried out by Dr. Rands on Palenque ceramics, as well as the most crucial aspect of my learning process. The regrettable lack of good surface finish in virtually all of our material has influenced the importance given in this study to vessel form as a more or less reliable chronological marker. These forms evolved through time according to patterns influenced by such factors as the different fashions in the fabrication techniques and decoration styles, the need to supply a growing demand for vessels, or the influence of ideas from other sites with different production ways.

This is not the first case in which the use of an independent system of analysis based on the observation of forms is proposed in order to complement the information obtained through more conventional systems. In Tikal, for example, three systems of ceramic classification were used, each one different and independent from the others. The first one was the traditional "type-variety system" (Smith *et al*. 1960), the second was a classification of vessel forms and the third one was a paste classification (Culbert 2003: 52). It should be pointed out that vessel forms in Palenque also show important peculiarities compared to other sites in the Maya area (an example of this would be the virtual lack of handles and spouts in jars, or the extreme thinness of walls in the great Murcuiélagos jars).

After our work sessions Dr. Rands and I decided to use the terminology coined by Culbert (1993) regarding the *form classes*, which are seen as very general categories for classification, taking into account vessel function and size. We established nine basic form classes for the analysis of Palenque ceramics: (1) jars, (2) bowls and dishes, (3) vases, (4) serving bowls, (5) utility bowls, (6) basins, (7) *tecomates* (seed jars), (8) braziers, (9) cache vessels.

In order to have a better understanding of the chronological framework employed in the classification of Palenque's ceramics, we should bear in mind two basic concepts on the evolution of pottery traditions through time. First, we understand the definition of a *ceramic complex* as a cluster of forms and decorative styles which share their greatest popularity in the same period of time. Therefore, the frequency percentages of a certain attribute flow through the chronological sequence from its initial point to its decadence (both can be either gradual or sudden), passing through a point of greatest production.

In order to name the different types of form classes within each complex we have decided to use a descriptive name, which will usually refer to rim characteristics. These types will have their corresponding varieties in cases where it is possible to establish important differences in the characteristics that have defined their classification. Furthermore, we will use the term *mode* to describe other attributes not considered in the types of form classes, which also perform as chronological markers: form characteristics of supports, bases and bodies, or decorative motifs and techniques.

It is important to point out the usual overlap between certain forms through several complexes. This occurs when a certain form starts to wane in popularity and another

one, with relatively new characteristics, starts being produced in increasing amounts until it replaces the first form. These overlaps, which pertain to transition periods that are generally ignored by most researchers, make it even more complicated to classify the material on the basis of specific ceramic complexes. In reality the chronological borders indicating the separation between the periods are just for descriptive purposes and extremely flexible.

Another problem related to the evolution of ceramics through time is the fact that not all classes of forms are represented in each and every one of the ceramic phases (see Appendix 2: distribution of the classes of forms by phase). Therefore, the beakers for example are nowhere to be seen in the Pre-Picota, Picota, Motiepa and Cascada phases (Late Preclassic and Early Classic), and then have their moment of highest production between the Murcielagos and Balunté phases (Late Classic), while the dishes have a higher presence in early phases than in the late ones.

Works Derived from my Collaboration with Dr. Rands

Occupational Sequence of two housing units in Palenque. Analysis of ceramic remains recovered from Groups I and C.

Introduction

The ancient city of Palenque, one of the most outstanding Maya enclaves of the Late Classic period, has been the object of fascination for explorers, archaeologists and other researchers from several disciplines since its discovery in 1750. Since that time many studies have been undertaken about the site's history, its artistic manifestations and its inhabitants' life ways. However, there are still many unknown facts to be deciphered and many questions to be answered. One of these challenges is the revision of Palenque's occupational sequence in relation to its pattern of growth. This is in essence our present subject of research.

As is widely known, pottery analysis gives the researcher a valuable source of archaeological information. It not only allows us to infer questions about the techniques and places of production, the trade routes and the dispersal of ideas, or the function of vessels and the status of their owners; it also allows us to establish the chronology of occupation of the site under study.

Before carrying on I would like to point out the intensive study performed by Dr. Robert L. Rands on the ceramics from Palenque. Among many other contributions, his work has resulted in establishing a sequence of the site's occupation on the basis of stratigraphic information and the contexts associated with the materials in many excavations in which he took part as director. Thanks to a thorough recording of the archaeological data, to sophisticated analytical techniques, and to a classification system based primarily on the evolution of vessel form, Dr. Rands has established the ceramic phases which are widely accepted for Palenque. Therefore, his research results constitute the basis on which all further work should rest, and all new

contributions should be examined. It should be pointed out as well that a good deal of the ideas put forth in this paper derives from a close collaboration by Dr. Rands with our project.

Groups I and C

The present study is based on the ceramic remains of two housing units, Groups I and C. Both are located in the eastern sector of the site, and were chosen as complementary study units with the aim of obtaining new data about domestic contexts whose materials had not been studied yet. In this way se tried to use, as far as possible, Rands' proposals, as well as to contribute new information upon which to revise his ceramic sequence.

Group C is located between the Murcielagos and Balunté streams, and consists of several plazas on different levels, among which Plaza 1 stands out because of its size and the great amount of buildings located there (see Figure 1). Excavation work focused on buildings number 1, 2 and 3 of this plaza, which show different architectural features. Buildings 1 and 3 have a spatial distribution organized on the basis of vaulted bays subdivided in small rooms. They show the characteristics of palaces related to the domestic activities of elite groups (see Figure 2). Building 2 is made up of three foundations upon which must have rested structures made of perishable materials. Three cist burials were found associated with this building, as well as fragments of composite censers of Palenque style. Therefore, everything seems to indicate that this building had a funerary as well as ceremonial function (López Bravo 2000).

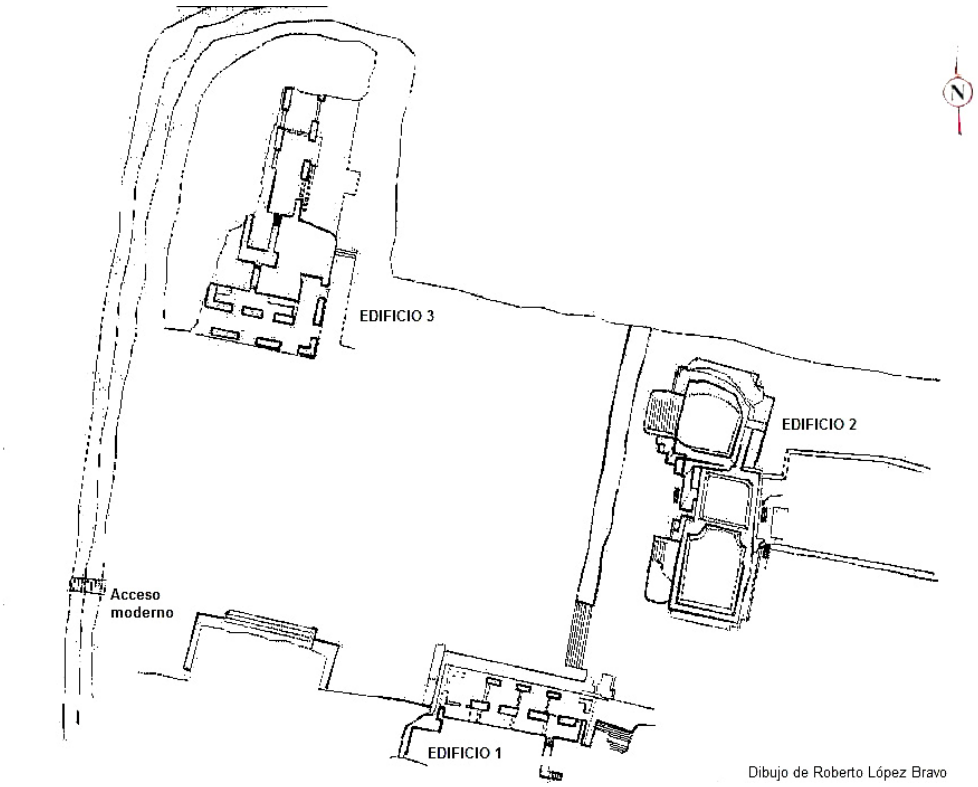

Figure 1. Sketch map of Palenque Group C (drawn by Roberto López Bravo).

Group I is located at approximately 100 m to the north of the North Group. It consists of a great platform resting on a mountain slope and is supported by a thick contention wall (Figure 3). Attached to this platform we found several vaulted rooms which turned out to be funerary chambers, and must have been conceived at the same time the complex was built. The presence of stairways giving access to the upper level makes one think of a possible use given to the platform, not just as a mausoleum, but also as a place for ceremonies or perhaps as a defensive fort on the threshold of the climb toward the ceremonial area. On this platform are located three buildings with a spatial distribution organized on the basis of bays divided up in small rooms. Buildings 1 and 2 (see Figure 4) are laid out in the shape of an "L" bordering a great patio, while Building 3 is located on a higher level on the SW corner of the platform. A total of 22 burials within 12 tombs were also found on this level, many of which contained vessel offerings (Ruz 1952).

Figure 2. Building 1 from Group C.

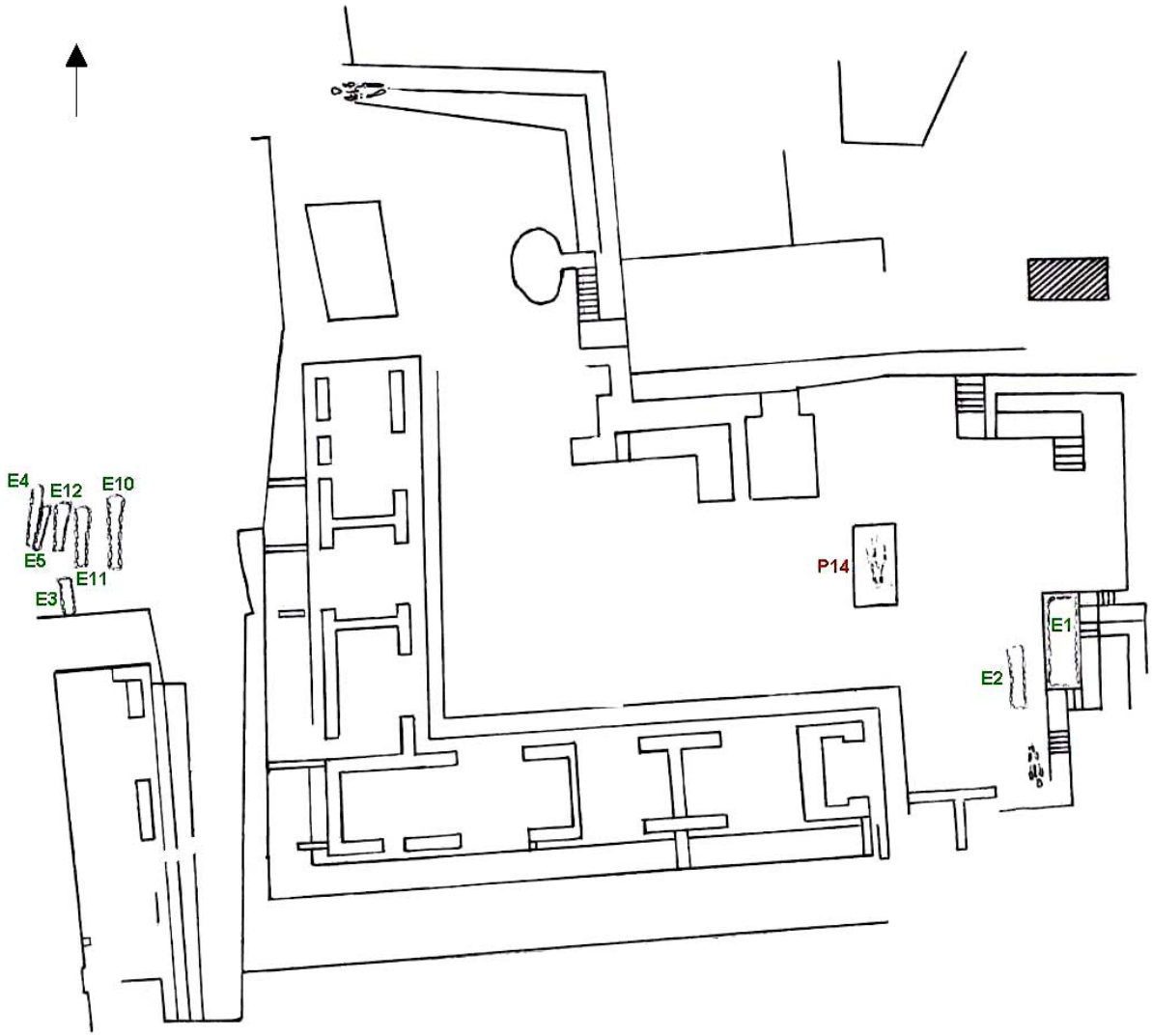

Figure 3. Sketch map of Group 1 (drawing from Palenque Archaeological Project, INAH).

Figure 4. Buildings 1 and 2 of Group I.

Therefore, the spatial organization of Group C and Group I follows three basic functions: housing, ceremonial, and funerary. These may have been architectonic compounds where the members of important lineages or powerful social groups lived and/or participated in civic-religious activities.

Classification Systems for the Ceramic Materials

Let's concentrate on the analysis of the ceramic material recovered from both groups, which has been a complex and arduous task. Many mistakes have been made on the course of the classification, and not all of them have been solved yet. As alarming as this statement may seem, I believe that our object of study hardly lends itself to definitive conclusions. I prefer to regard this as an auxiliary of the archaeological work, which is affected by constant changes related to advances in the research. But let's stop on the particular case of Palenque, not before outlining some examples of the obstacles we have encountered while classifying its ceramic material.

1. The vast majority of sherds under study, especially the ones recovered from Group I, come from construction fills and from the rubble produced by collapsed buildings. Therefore, we are faced with deposits of ceramic material which are totally mixed up and of dubious provenience. The pits we have excavated have produced materials which are very fragmented, highly eroded, and –even worse– very scarce. What would account for this absence of pottery in the stratigraphy not only of the housing groups under discussion, but of many others in the site? This may be related to the fact that these are housing places for elite groups, with a low number of people whose activities were under control according to their status. About this we should point out that the need for a good stratigraphy on which to base our sequence is one of the main reasons for implementing the "Project on Palenque's urban growth". This ongoing project is already giving satisfactory results.

2. Among all the material so far studied there are very few fragments in which we can see remains of polychrome decoration. Not only are they scarce, but they also show a very poor state of conservation (see Figure 5). Therefore, we don't know if the almost absolute lack of polychrome ceramics in Palenque is due to bad preservation or to a low level of production. However, the extreme level of erosion is a problem affecting not only polychrome fragments, but the vast majority of fragments so far analyzed. Therefore, the lack of good surface finish has been the main obstacle at the time of making the classification.

3. The marginality of Palenque's pottery is another one of the aspects making our work tremendously difficult. Although this subject has been dealt with abundantly by Dr. Rand's in his research, allow me to show you some examples derived from the observation of the material currently under study. The great jars for liquid storage, for instance, lack handles and their necks are extremely fragile and short. Their walls are thin, and most of them are made of a very brittle paste. All these characteristics are not very suitable for transport and manipulation during domestic tasks. The jars belonging to striated types, which are so frequent in the Petén and are present in sites close to Palenque, such as Yaxchilán, are totally lacking here. Well, I'm lying: among more than 18,000 analyzed fragments we counted just nine, belonging to the same jar, pertaining to the characteristics of the *Encanto Estriado* type (see Figure 6).

Figure 5. Ceramic fragment with polychrome remains.

Figure 6. Ceramic fragments of a striated jar (Encanto Estriado).

As I was saying, there are virtually no handles in Palenque, in jars or basins. The thing most similar to a handle we have found is one with half-moon shape, crudely applied on a fragment of a little jar which has not been assigned to any phase yet. Curiously, spouts also are lacking in all vessel forms; I haven't found a single one and I think Rands only has one crude example in his collection.

In view of these peculiarities of Palenque's ceramics, and aware of the fact that this is not the moment for a profound methodological discussion, I would like to briefly outline my system of work. The nature of our study material has made it necessary to try several ways of classification. In this sense pottery recovered from Group I, most of which lacks a good archaeological context, has been a good test material for defining the research lines to be used from now on. I have used three systems of analysis in order to obtain the greatest possible amount of information.

1. First, I have tried to use the *type-variety* system for the classification of all those fragments that have allowed me to do so. As is well known, this system lets us establish degrees of cultural affiliation, divergence and interaction from one site to another, as well as dating other archaeological characteristics and their contexts. Therefore, my aim has been to work with this traditional system of classification, in spite of the difficulties derived from the bad state of preservation of most of the analyzed sherds. Because of this problem, in many cases the form attributes of the rims and to a lesser extent the paste have received priority over surface finish and decoration. My aim has been to integrate the ceramics from Palenque into a system which is accepted by most scholars, in order to make comparisons with other sites in the Maya area.

2. The second system of classification refers to the **evolution of forms** through time. In many cases one can detect changes in different forms or shapes of vessels, which can serve as chronological reference for establishing a sequence of the material under study. Although these changes are quite subtle sometimes, in fact forms not only evolve faster that types, but they also show a greater degree of variation. In this respect, the research carried out by Dr. Rands is one of the key contributions to the study of Palenque's ceramic sequence.

   This is not the first work proposing the independent use of a system of analysis based on the observation of forms in order to complement the information obtained from other, more conventional, systems. This has been done in Tikal, and the results have been quite satisfactory.

   In order to record all forms and their variations through time we have chosen to use two levels of classification. First, the *form classes* (a term coined by Culbert [1993] in Tikal), which in the case of the materials from Palenque have been divided in the following categories: jars, basins, bowls, dishes and seed jars. This is, therefore, a very general level which alludes to the function and size of vessels. The second level of classification refers to the phase to which each form class belongs, on the basis of the modifications experienced through time, such as rim orientation, wall thickness, or the application of decorative techniques.

3. With **paste analysis** we enter the third system of classification. In this regard we can point out the achievements made by Dr. Rands, although in my work I am just using a simplified version of them. There are three main types of paste identified in our ceramics:

Reddish-brown paste, collected in deposits located in the low sierras, with a high content of quartz sand in its composition and reddish in color. This constitutes a long ceramic tradition, extending from the Late Preclassic to the end of the site's occupation (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Bowl fragment with finger impression band on the basal flange ("red-brown" type of paste).

Brown-orange paste, which comes from the plains, especially from the margins of the Michol River, west of Palenque. This is characterized by having a very dark core and a finer texture than the one mentioned above. Like the former case, this class of paste was used virtually throughout the whole sequence of occupation in Palenque (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Vase fragment with zoomorphic incised decoration ("orange-brown" type of paste).

Yellowish paste, which comes from east of the site, especially the Chacamax River, and is characterized by having a very grainy and sometimes crumbly texture. This class of paste started being used from the Late Classic, probably because of the extinction of some clay deposits which were being over-exploited (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Jar fragment with globular body and thickened neck ("yellowish" type of paste).

One of the most interesting aspects of this distinction between clays is the tendency to use a certain class of paste for making a certain type of vessel. For instance, the reddish-brown paste was used primarily for making basins, *apaxtles*, big bowls, censers and figurines, while the brown-orange paste was more suitable for making vases and small bowls, usually with some kind of decoration. The yellowish paste, which is more crumbly and porous, was usually employed for making great jars and basins.

Now let's discuss the ceramic sequence itself. The chronology employed in our classification is based on a free interpretation of the sequence contributed by Dr. Rands (see Figure 10). We accepted his phases, built from the data obtained from his own contexts and stratigraphies, however we have preferred for the time being to ignore the dates bordering them, and to use broader chronological margins framed on the periods which are commonly accepted in the Maya area. In this regard all that remains is to wait for the results of the analysis of the material recovered from the pits excavated in the context of the "Palenque Urban Growth Project" to compare our data to those produced by the excavations performed by Dr. Rands.

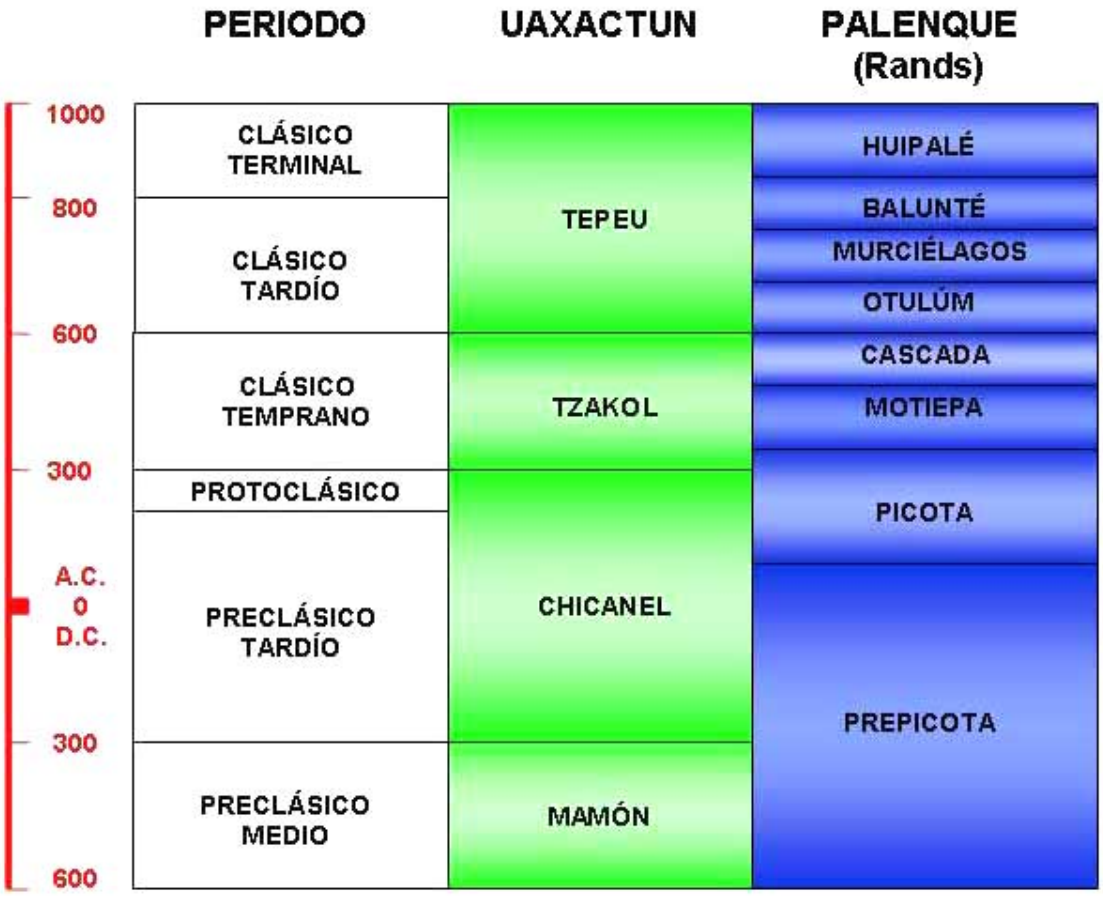

Figure 10. Palenque ceramic sequence (according to Robert L. Rands).

Although it is obvious, I would like to point out the fact that the types –understood as an abstraction to facilitate classification– are not found within perfectly-defined chronological boundaries. In actual fact, in many instances they overlap with each other, extending their presence beyond the boundaries of the phase in which they have been placed. Therefore, the assignation of a type to a certain phase has been done on the basis of its greatest frequency percentage in a certain moment. On the other hand, different vessel forms do not evolve al the same pace through time. For instance, the earliest jars experienced very subtle changes in their rims through four consecutive phases (Picota, Motiepá and Otolum), while the bowls show very distinct characteristics in each phase. Therefore, it is difficult to establish diagnostic features for every vessel in each and every phase, especially in the earlier ones, where the frequency of material is certainly low.

The Preclassic

In spite of being very poorly represented, the truth is that we have unequivocal evidences for a Preclassic occupation in Palenque, so much so that fragments belonging to the *Sierra Rojo, Altamira Acanalado and Hongo Compuesto* types (Figure 11, Figure 12, Figure 13 and Figure 14) have been found in the two habitation units under study. They certainly are scarce, but there they are. In Group C, for example, out of 7,266 fragments found 29 belong to the Sierra Group, which is 0.39% of the total. While they are all part of construction fill, their presence seems to indicate that at least around these groups there was a certain human activity during the Late Preclassic. This is in a way new information, since up to now no intensive analysis had been performed on the material from the housing groups of the eastern sector of the site. Now we can include it among the locations where a Preclassic occupation has been detected, among which the western sector stands out, and to a much lesser extent the ceremonial area. Although many test pits and analyses have yet to be carried out, one of the most likely hypotheses about Palenque's origins refers to a very dispersed settlement, with a very low population that was probably attracted to the area by the abundant water courses which run by the site.

Figure 11. Bowl fragments (Sierra Rojo).

Figure 12. Jar fragment (Sierra Rojo).

Figure 13. Bowl rim fragment (Sierra Rojo).

Figure 14. Vessel fragment (Sierra Rojo).

The Early Classic

We now enter the Early Classic. Between its chronological boundaries we find two ceramic phases[2]: Picota and Motiepá. One of the most characteristic forms of the first

[2] For those familiar with the ceramic sequence established by Dr. Rands for Palenque, it may be interesting to know of the recent elimination of the Cascada complex and the subsequent widening of the chronological boundaries encompassing the Motiepá Complex.

phase is a great bowl with high walls with thick grooves on the outer side, outflaring rim and trapezoidal supports (see Figure 15). Globular-shaped jars have very thickened rims, very short necks and thick walls. It is very common to see in this type of vessel great calcite particles coming to the surface; this kind of temper was commonly used in this period (see Figure 16).

Figure 15. Bowl fragment belonging to the Picota complex (Early Classic).

Figure 16. Jar rim fragment (Picota complex).

Figure 17. Bowl rim fragment (Águila Naranja).

Figure 18. Bowl rim fragments (Águila Naranja).

Figure 19. Bowl fragment (Paradero Acanalado).

In the Motiepá phase we find some of the most representative types of the Early Classic in the Maya area. However, again we have to point out that their presence is quite limited compared to later phases: three fragments of the *Aguila Naranja type* (unspecified variety) belonging to the *Aguila Group* (see Figure 17 and Figure 18) and other three fragments of the *Paradero Acanalado* type (*Paradero variety*) (see Figure 19). From the *Balanza Group* come the few examples we have of already established early types, from the total sherds recovered in the excavations of Group C. These and other similar fragments belonging to Group I apparently show foreign characteristics: pink-colored compact paste, ground-calcite temper and strikingly well preserved, polished and shiny surface finish. In this respect, perhaps we could talk about a brief and specific exchange of vessels or production modes with the closer sites in the Petén area. Therefore, this would be a sub-complex of imported products. But in the Motiepa phase we also have vessels made in Palenque, among which three forms stand out for their greater degree of representation: (1) short-necked jars with slightly out-flared rim, thick calcite slip and fingerprints as a means of decoration in the body's upper part (see Figure 20); (2) bowls with straight-divergent walls, direct rim and incised decoration consisting of cross-hatching framed in quadrangular spaces (see Figure 21); and (3) bowls with curved-divergent walls, direct or slightly out-flaring rim, beveled lip toward the inside and ring base. In the case of bowls it is relatively common to find the remains of a cream-colored slip under another layer of orange slip (see Figure 22 and Figure 23).

Figure 20. Jar fragments (Motiepá complex).

Figure 21. Bowl fragments (Motiepá complex).

Figure 22. Bowl fragment (Cascada complex).

Figure 23. Bowl base fragment (Cascada complex).

The Early Classic is generally better represented than the Preclassic. This was the period when dispersed groups settled in Palenque apparently started to unify. This is the time when, according to the epigraphy, the Palenque dynasty originated, specifically

with K'uk' B'alam I, the first ruler of Palenque in real historical time, whose reign started in 431. In this context the sub-complex of imported products identified in the Motiepá phase is very important. The city of Palenque, already constituted in a sovereign state, seems to integrate itself into the regional dynamics.

The Late Classic

The Late Classic is the period of maximum splendor for Palenque, starting with the reign of K'inich Janaab Pakal. Three ceramic phases were established by Rands between A.D. 600 and 800: Otulúm, Murciélagos and Balunté. From this moment the frequencies of material belonging to this period increase enormously, especially in its two last phases. But let's start with Otulúm, whose most diagnostic form we see in many samples: this is a tripod bowl, with solid supports and extended, slightly thickened rims (see Figure 24). According to the information provided by Dr. Rands, this kind of bowl used to have polychrome decoration inside, although I have just found tenuous remains of this in very few sherds. At the beginning of this period a previously unknown vessel form makes its first appearance in Palenque, namely the so-called "beakers" or bowls with high walls, of which we have a good sample from the offering located in room 2 of Building 2 in Group I (see Figure 25). However, it is in later phases when this kind of vessel acquires more notoriety.

Figure 24. Bowl fragment (Otolúm complex).

Figure 25. Beaker (Otolúm complex).

The Murciélagos phase is the moment of most precious elaboration in Palenque ceramics: although the scarce evidence of polychrome decoration disappears, we find many examples of printed, incised, grooved and pointed decoration. The most elaborate vessels are tripod vases with nubbin supports, cylindrical body, very thin and straight walls, and a profuse incised decoration, usually consisting of aquatic motifs such as water lilies and fish (see Figure 26, Figure 27 and Figure 28). This is also the phase where we find the greatest variety of vessel forms, of which we have several whole vessels located in the offerings of many burials found in Group I: vases with different shapes and sizes, and bowls with incised decoration or monochrome slips, al of them very carefully made (see Figure 29, Figure 30, and Figure 31). Besides, fragments of several different models of censer have been rescued: incense burner handles (see Figure 32), pedestal braziers (see Figure 33) –one with reed mat impression in the bottom– bowl-shaped braziers, and even many fragments of wings and cylinders belonging to the characteristic Palenque incense-holders (see Figure 34). It is also in this phase that the characteristic globular-bodied jar suffers an important change. Rims become longer, walls become thinner, the calcite temper disappears, and more important, the decoration is applied based on fingernail impressions in the labial flange or lines and points painted in red over rims and shoulders (see Figure 35 and Figure 36). Another diagnostic form for the Murciélagos phase is a basin with straight-divergent walls, thickened rim –direct or slightly out-flaring– and flat base. They are made with the typical local red, crumbly paste, with abundant quartz sand in its composition (see Figure 37). Both the basins and the previously described jars constitute the two vessel forms of greatest frequency among all the analyzed fragments.

Figure 26. Vase fragments with incised and grooved decoration (Murciélagos complex).

Figure 27. Vase fragment with incised zoomorphic decoration (Murciélagos complex).

Figure 28. Base fragments with nubbin supports belonging to tripod vases (Murciélagos complex).

Figure 29. Tripod bowl with nubbin supports and cream slip (Murciélagos complex).

Figure 30. Bowl with incised geometric decoration (Murciélagos complex).

Figure 31. Vase (Murciélagos complex).

Figure 32. Incense burner handle (Murciélagos complex).

Figure 33. Brazier pedestal (Murciélagos complex).

Figure 34. Fragments of wing and cylinder of a incense-burner holder (Murciélagos complex).

Figure 35. Jar rim fragments with printed and red painted decoration (Murciélagos complex).

Figure 36. Jar rim fragments with red painted decoration (Murciélagos complex).

Figure 37. Basin rim fragment (Murciélagos complex).

During Balunté, the last Late-Classic-period phase in Palenque, the trend to increase production started in the Murcuiélagos phase reaches its peak. Tripod bowls with big, hollow supports constitute one of the most representative and frequent forms in this moment (see Figure 38, Figure 39 and Figure 40). Something similar happens to the jars, whose rims once again become shorter and thicker and walls become considerably more rounded (see Figure 41 and Figure 42), as well as to the basins, whose most distinctive trait are the extended rims (see Figure 43). The items commonly called "fine grays" deserve special mention. Of these we have many fragments belonging to all types integrated within the *Chablekal Group* (see Figure 44), as well as an equal amount of examples of the *Yalcox Group*. Differences between both groups basically refer to the paste and the surface finish, since the forms and the decorative techniques and motifs are virtually the same (see Figure 45). In our classification the *Yalcox Group* has been ascribed to the Murciélagos phase, while the *Chablekal Group* reaches its highest frequency percentage in the Balunté phase. This is a good example of two ceramic groups ascribed to different phases, but whose production must have been contemporaneous during a certain period of time.

Figure 38-40. Hollow supports from tripod bowls (Balunté complex).

Figure 41-42. Jar rim fragments (Balunté complex).

Figure 43. Basin fragment with extended rim (Balunté complex).

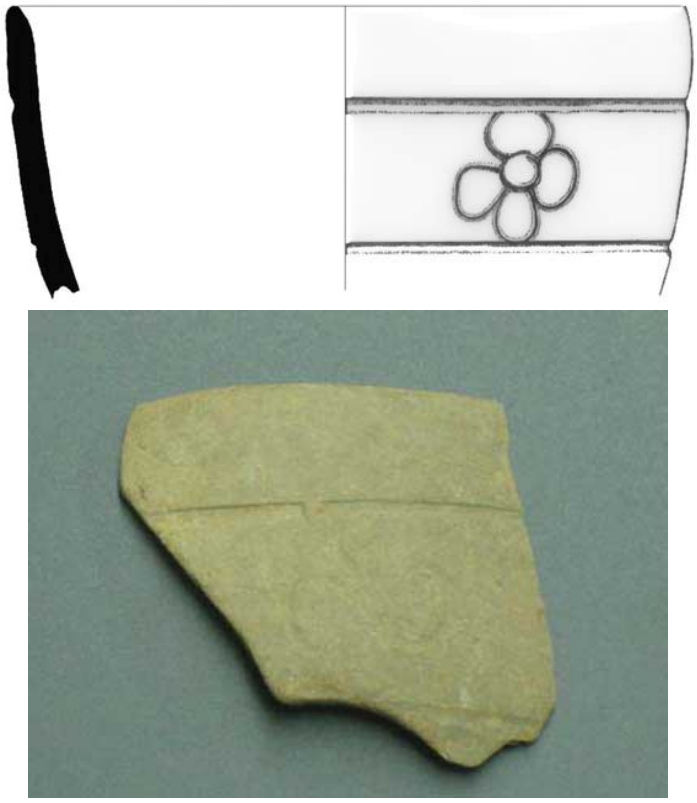

Figure 44. Bowl fragment with incised geometric and phytomorphic decoration (Chicxulub Inciso).

Figure 45. Pottery fragments belonging to the Chablekal (left) and Yalcox (right) groups.

Although this has been a very quick and simple journey by the most characteristic forms in the Late Classic, it gives us an idea of the social, economic and political changes seen in Palenque during this period. The high percentages of material and the great diversity of vessels indicate a considerable increase in ceramic production, especially in the Murciélagos and Balunté phases. A significant increase in population and an incipient regional political hegemony are expressed in a greater demand for ceramic objects, a standardization of production, the search and control of new clay deposits, and a commercial exchange with sites integrated into the Palenque polity.

Conclusions

Therefore, we can come to the conclusion that the pottery found in the excavation of C and I Groups has given us evidences of a continuous occupation from the Late Preclassic to the end of the Late Classic. Regarding the Postclassic, however, I haven't been able to convincingly identify the most diagnostic characteristics of pottery belonging to the Huipalé phase, therefore its analysis has been postponed for a later stage of our research. It just should be pointed out that for this period Palenque had started its decadence. The ruling dynasty disappears, the site is gradually abandoned, and invaders start arriving sporadically to reuse the architectonic spaces. As an example of this late occupation we have a whole vessel belonging to the *Plumbate Group*, found in the C Group (see Figure 46).

Figure 46. Tripod jar of globular body (Plumbate group).

Comparison of the material from different sites constitutes one of the fundamental keys for gaining a better knowledge of the development of pottery traditions within an area, as well as the degree of cultural interaction between one site and another, and the chronological boundaries of different sequences. In order to facilitate this task we are working on a sampler reflecting the results of the classification of pottery from the excavation of Groups C and I (see Figure 47 and Figure 48). My intention here is to present the preliminary results from this classification, with the aim of sharing our information with other researchers in the area, and to open up my work to possible suggestions, criticisms or modifications. Therefore, I just would like to invite everyone who is interested in Palenque ceramics to consult the sampler. This way we'll be able to establish a dialog to make everybody's work easier.

Figure 47. Collection of pottery samples in the process of elaboration.

Figure 48. Collection of pottery samples in the process of elaboration (Yalcox group).

The Early Classic Palenque through Ceramics

The Early Classic is one of the most interesting periods in the history of the ancient Maya. This is the moment when the origin of the ruling dynasties was forged, the dynasties who ruled the destinies of the great Maya capitals for more than five hundred years. The interest generated by this particular period of time is emphasized by the difficulty entailed in its thorough understanding. This is so because the earliest remains usually lie under the later superstructures, so that access to the former depends on an intense and careful excavation work. Palenque is no exception to this rule. Although it has traditionally been known as a Late-Classic-period city, in actual fact there is enough archaeological evidence to assume that since earlier times it constituted a settlement with a relatively considerable population. We will present these evidences in this study, making special emphasis on early ceramics found throughout several excavations conducted on the site since the fifties.

But what was Palenque like during the Early Classic? If we understand the word center as a place from which the power of a ruling dynasty emanated through royal symbols and ritual practices, then it is very likely that Palenque was such a center since early times (see Figure 49). Many of the inscriptions that have been found in this site, although dating to the end of the seventh century, make a retrospective history of the city's legendary origin and of its first rulers. Therefore, we know that in the year 431

K'uk' B'alam I rises to the throne, the first ruler of Palenque in actual historic times, whose reign coincides with the moment of Tikal's greatest might in the Petén. After him a long list of rulers follow one after the other through almost two hundred years, or until the end of the period known as Early Classic. I don't deny the idea that this information, given by the kings from the Late Classic with the aim of legitimating the origins of their own dynasty, may have some elements of propaganda not always adhering to the truth. However, the comparison of these data with those obtained through other sources of archaeological information –such as art-history studies of architecture and sculpture, or the analysis of ceramic remains– can aid to unveil the true nature of the city of Palenque in the Early Classic.

Figure 49. Known Palenque rulers belonging to the Early Classic.

The existence of ceramic types belonging to the Sierra Group in the housing units of the northeast sector, in several parts of the ceremonial area, and to a greater extent in the west sector of the site, unequivocally indicates an occupation in Palenque in the Late Preclassic. One of the most probable hypotheses about the city's origin makes reference to a very disperse settlement, with a very low population and probably attracted by the various water courses running through the site. It won't be until the Early Classic that these disperse groups start their unification, probably fostered by a dynastic organization that starts gaining strength gradually. Therefore, an incipient ancient urban center starts to take shape.

Although most of the exposed architecture in Palenque pertains to its moment of greatest splendor in the Late Classic, we also have a few architectonic evidences of early construction in the site (see Figure 50). I mean the substructures of the Palace, the North Group, the Temple XVIII-A, and the central platform of the patio of Group IV. All these are examples of the earliest building phases of structures that would reach their highest peak in the Late Classic. Such is the case of the Palace, a magnificent residential-administrative complex built through several phases lasting over two hundred years. Although its moment of greatest building splendor pertains to the reign of the great K'inich Janaab' Pakal in the seventh century, the discovery of a series of substructures hidden within the great platform supporting the Palace takes us back to the Early Classic (see Figure 51). Also in the North Group –a long platform supporting five temples– it has been possible to detect a long building sequence starting with the construction of the substructure of Temple V. Later Temple II rose at the east of the group. In its foundation were found two masks modeled in stucco, one of which shows features of unquestionable Teotihuacan influence (see Figure 52).

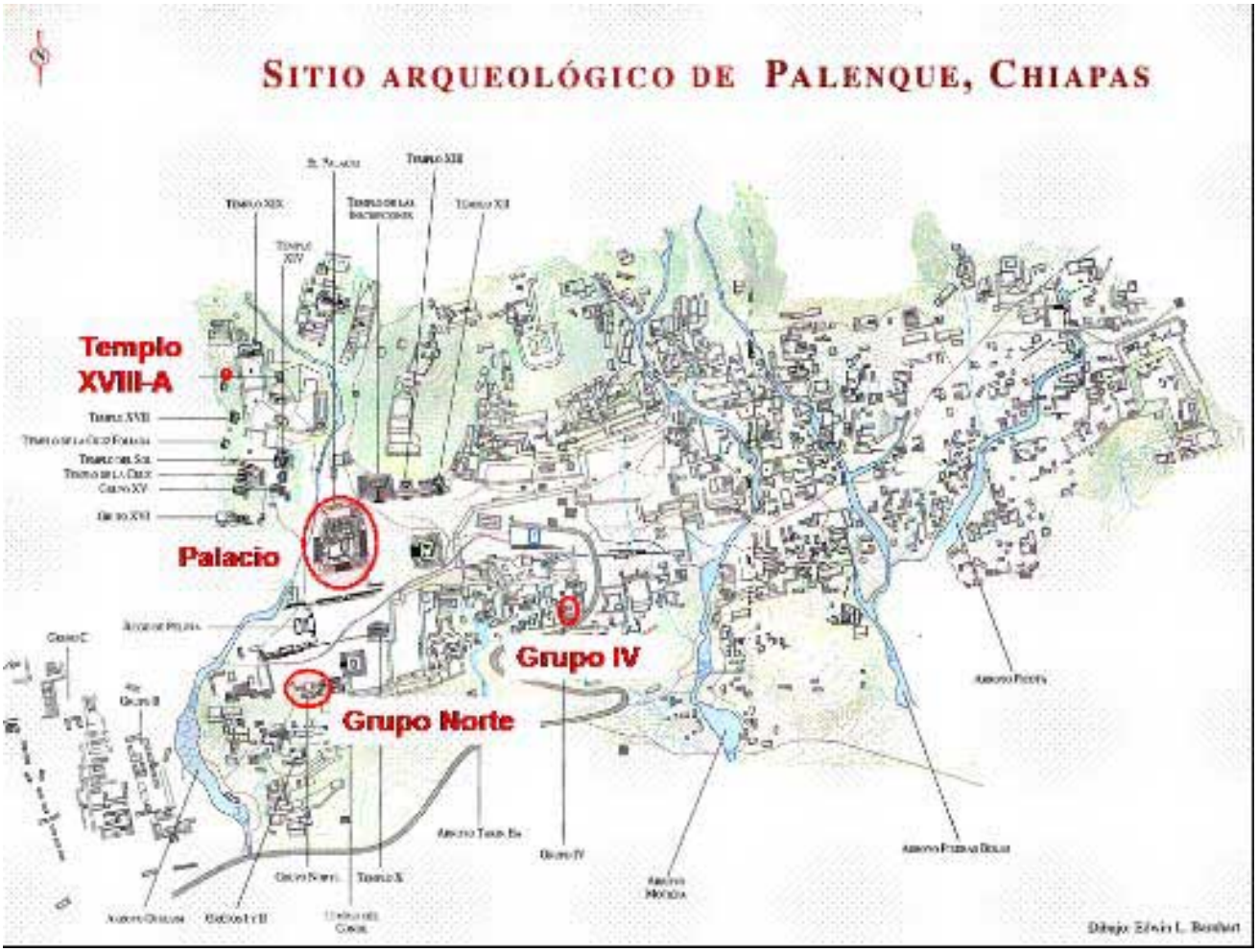

Figure 50. Architectonic evidences from the Early Classic in Palenque (map by E. Barnhart).

Figure 51. Palace substructure (photo by Ruz).

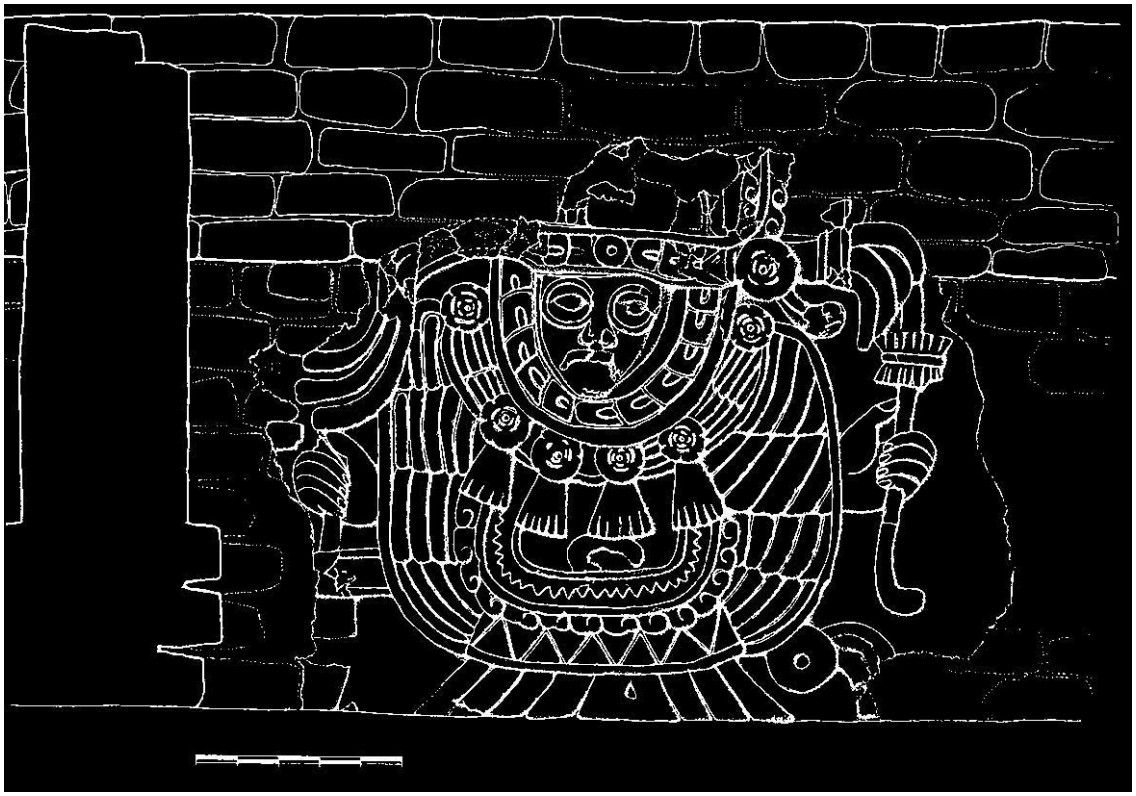

Figure 52. Tlaloc mask from Temple V in the North Group.

In addition to the above, we have evidence in Palenque of construction fills with ceramic materials inside belonging to the Early Classic: in the first foundation of the Temple of Inscriptions, in sectors of the XVI, I and C Groups, the ball court and a good deal of the western sector where most of the ceramic material has been found, both Preclassic and Early Classic. According to the results provided by the Urban Growth in Palenque Project, during this period in the western sector of the site we see an increase in habitation and building density, as well as a trend toward adapting the terrain to the new constructions by means of leveling and terraces (López Bravo *et al*. 2004). Of course, it goes without saying that these data about early architectonic evidences are subjected to the work so far carried out in Palenque, and that future excavations and analyses may broaden the insufficient knowledge we have today of Early Classic architecture at the site.

On the other hand, also in the Early Classic –but more so from the Late Classic– Palenque starts to become integrated into the regional dynamics. The inscriptions found in several of the sites with greater influence in the general Maya area show this by mentioning Palenque as a city to be reckoned with in the interregional political relations. Sites as close as Toniná or Piedras Negras start to define themselves as Palenque's main rivals for the control of the lower Usumacinta, while great powers such as Calakmul carry out Palenque's first sacking in 579. But not everybody was an enemy; mighty Tikal "protects" the foundation of Palenque's dynasty, and far-away Copán seems to seal its traditionally good relationship with Palenque through the marriage of one of its kings with a lady from Palenque's high nobility (see Figure 53). Besides, in the Early Classic Palenque is the site with the greatest extension of the whole northwestern zone and as such, it is very likely that it performed the functions of capital in relation to the minor sites surrounding it.

The inscriptions making a retrospective reference to the past and the scarce architectonic constructions are the evidences we have used so far to give a very general vision of the Early Classic in Palenque. But we have yet to discuss one of the most useful tools for reconstructing the occupational sequence of a site, as well as to know more about the way of life of its inhabitants. I mean pottery, which in essence is the subject of this paper.

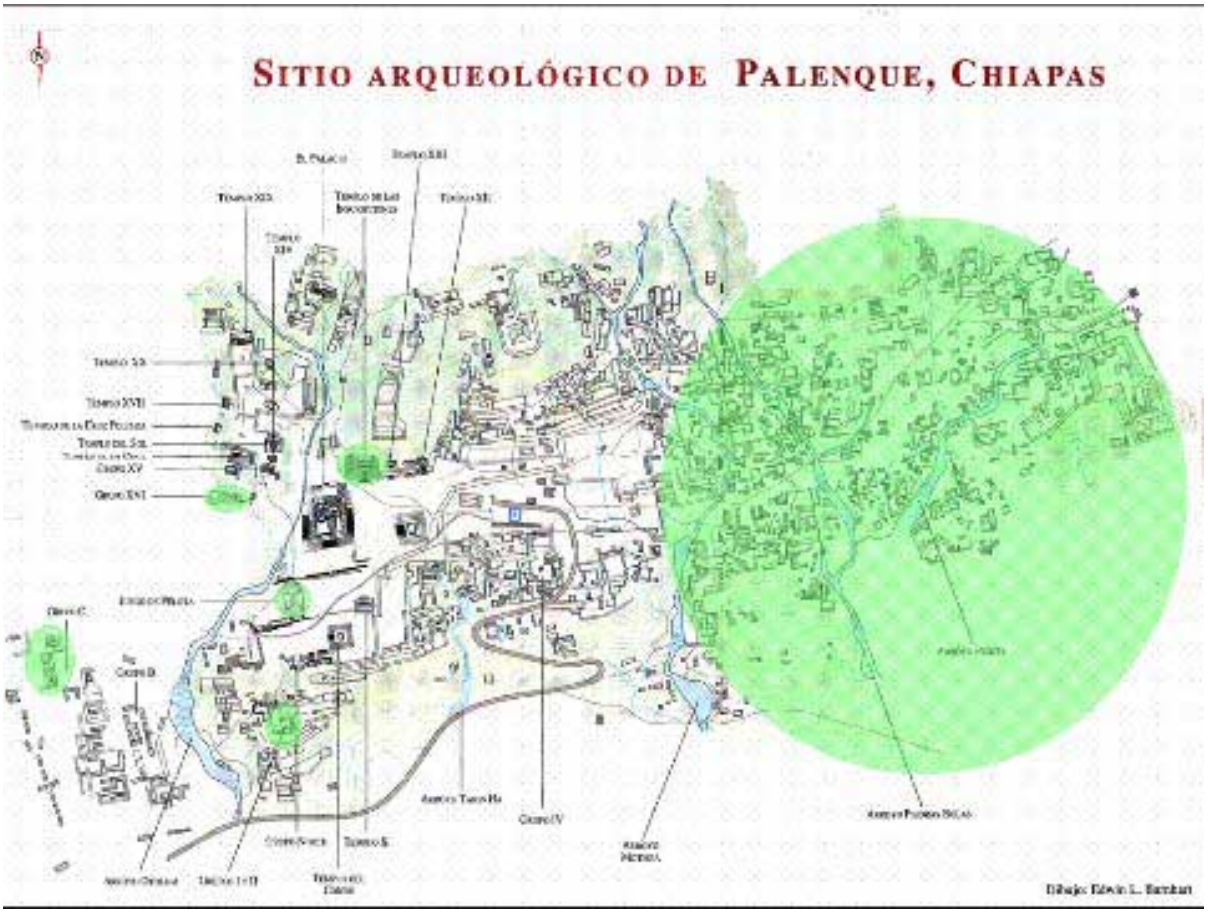

Figure 53. Areas where ceramic materials belonging to the Early Classic have been found (map by E. Barnhart).

Ceramic material constitutes a tangible testimony of the activities performed by its makers and users, as well as about the social and economic organization of a given culture. In the case of the ancient Maya we not only have the vessels associated to their archaeological contexts, but we also have very explicit images of the way in which the ruling elite used them. Courtly scenes portrayed in the codex-type vases give us valuable information about vessel function and about the status of their owners. Jars, vases, bowls and dishes for serving and consuming cacao, pulque, atole, and tamales, as well as bowls for storing utensils as diverse as mirrors, cotton cloths, codices or masks, form an important part of ritual ceremonies, diplomatic encounters or palace celebrations carried out in Maya centers of the Classic period. Therefore, it is not difficult to imagine a king of the newly founded Palenque dynasty to perform his government duties in one of the rooms of the earliest substructures of the Palace. However, imagination is not enough and luckily we have evidence which is sufficiently meaningful to infer the way in which Palenque's pottery was used in the Early Classic.

Although significantly lower than ceramic remains from the Late Classic, the complexes pertaining to the Early Classic are relatively well represented in the total collection of ceramics from Palenque. I would like to use this opportunity to point out that in my

classification work of ceramic materials from two housing units I've decided to use a chronology based on a free interpretation of the sequence elaborated by Dr. Rands. I accept his phases, which are constructed from data obtained from his own contexts and stratigraphy. However, I have decided for the time being to ignore the dates bordering them, and instead to use wider chronological margins framed in the periods usually accepted in the Maya area.

Before starting to analyze the ceramics from the Early Classic in Palenque, I would like to point out three general premises that have tremendously limited our approach to the material under study. First, the high degree of erosion in the pottery has meant that a good deal of the original surface finish has been lost, making the classification work enormously difficult, especially regarding the application of the type-variety system. Because of this we have been forced to use, along with this traditional system, other two complementary means of classification: the analysis of pastes, and above all the evolution through time of vessel form. Therefore, in many cases we can see changes in different vessel forms which may serve as chronological references for establishing different phases in time. Although these changes sometimes are quite subtle, forms certainly not just evolve faster than types, but they also show a higher range of variation. In this respect the research conducted by Dr. Rands is one of the key contributions to the study of ceramic sequence in Palenque.

Secondly, the marginal status of Palenque's ceramics has made it impossible in most cases to make associations with the types already established in the rest of the Maya nuclear area. But let us mention several examples to illustrate this peculiarity of our study material. The great jars for storing liquids, form example, lack handles and their necks are extremely fragile and short, walls are thin and most of them are made with a very crumbly paste. All these characteristics are not very suitable for transportation and handling during domestic chores. Besides, the jars belonging to striated types –so frequent in the Petén and present in sites as close to Palenque as Yaxchilán– are conspicuously absent. We have virtually no type belonging to the Encanto or Triunfo Estriado Groups, just to mention some of the most common ones. As I was saying before, there are virtually no handles in Palenque, neither in jars nor in utility bowls, and curiously enough, there are no spouts either. The most reasonable explanation to account for this lack of formal attributes; so practical for transporting and handling liquids, could be the existence of several water currents throughout the site, and therefore a relative proximity between water sources and places of consumption.

The third premise which has conditioned the classification of our material refers to the fact that a good deal of ceramic remains come from construction fill and rubble from collapsed buildings. Therefore we are faced with deposits of ceramic material which are totally mixed-up and of dubious provenience. Regarding the excavated pits, these often provide very fragmented material, extremely eroded and worse still, very scarce. In this respect we just have to point out that the need to have a good stratigraphy on which to support our sequence is one of the main reasons behind the implementation of the "Urban Growth in Palenque" project, which is currently underway and has started to produce satisfactory results (see Figure 54).

Although this may be obvious, I think it is also important to point out the fact that types –understood as an abstraction to facilitate classification– are not framed within perfectly defined chronological margins. In fact, in many instances they overlap with each other and extend their presence beyond the boundaries of the phase where they have been placed. Assigning a type to a certain phase, therefore, has been done on the basis of its highest percentage of frequency in a given moment. On the other hand, different vessel forms do not evolve at the same pace through time: the earliest jars, for instance, experience very subtle changes in their rims through three consecutive phases (Picota, Motiepa, and Otulúm), while bowls show very distinctive characteristics in each phase. Therefore, it is difficult to establish diagnostic features for each vessel in every phase, especially in the earlier ones where frequencies of material are certainly scarce. An added difficulty refers to a very well established trend in Palenque's ceramic material to maintain long traditions through different phases. Such is the case of the widespread use of the same local paste from the low sierras from the Late Preclassic to the Terminal Classic, or the preference for an incised decoration based on triangles or cross-hatched crosses from the Motiepa phase through the Late Classic.

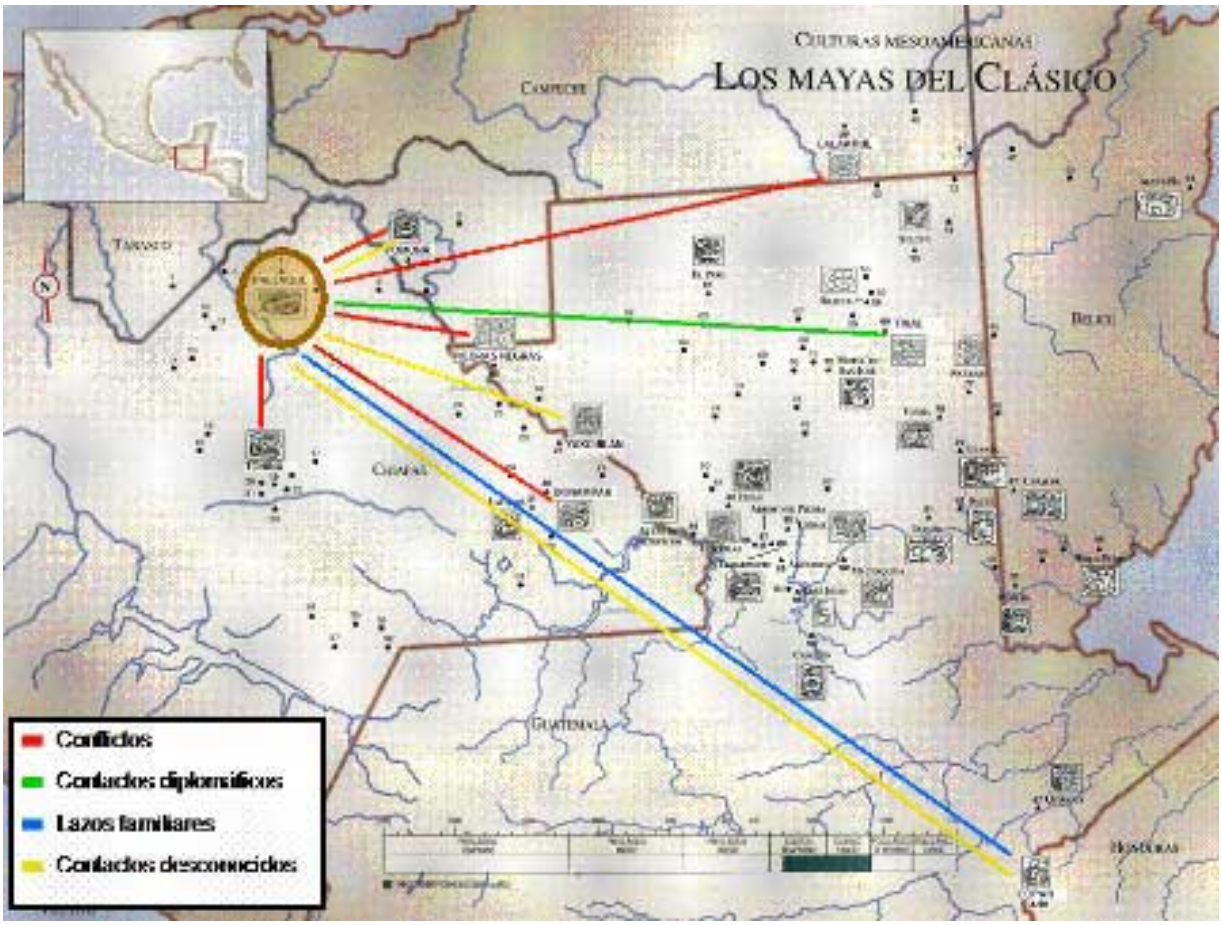

Figure 54. Relationships between Palenque and other Maya capitals at the end of the Early Classic (taken from Arqueología Mexicana).

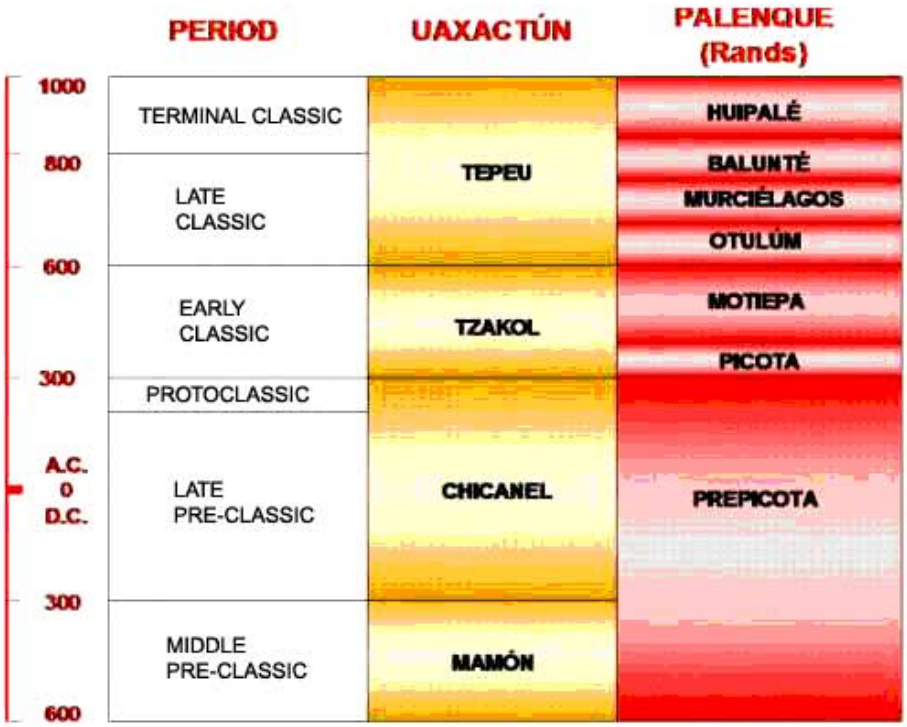

Figure 55. Palenque ceramic sequence (after Rands), excluding the Cascadas complex.

For those familiar with Palenque's ceramic sequence established by Dr. Rands, it might be interesting to point out the recent elimination of the Cascada complex and the subsequent broadening of the chronological boundaries for the Motiepa complex. This change –I use Dr. Rands' own words– derives from both the lack of consistency of the "old" Cascada complex and from practical reasons in the classification of his collection (see Figure 55).

Now let's see the ceramics. The *Picota* complex can be understood as a transition period between the Late Preclassic and the Early Classic. One of its most characteristic forms is a tripod bowl with high walls and out-flaring rim which shows two diagnostic features for this complex: thick vertical grooves running along the body from rim to base (see Figure 15) and trapezoidal supports. It should also be pointed out that, although I don't have in my study material any fragment of this type of bowl with remains of slip, Dr. Rands does have several in which one can see a red slip which probably covered the whole vessel. Jars, on the other hand, are characterized by having a globular body, a short neck and an out-flaring rim with a curvilinear thickening at the level of the lip. The thick calcite particles visible on the surface of the jar's rim (seen in the figure) constitute a kind of slip whose use will also be quite frequent in the next complex (see Figure 16).

Let's now discuss the Motiepá complex, which coincides with the beginnings of Palenque's dynasty and, as mentioned earlier, represents one of the key moments in the origins of the city of Palenque and its later development as one of the most important Maya sites in the Usumacinta region. We could assume that at the beginning the characteristics of the ceramics from this complex would correspond to a great extent to the characteristic types of the Early Classic, and even that a certain influence from Teotihuacan would be seen in the forms and decorative styles. Therefore, let's see a few examples of pottery belonging to the Motiepá complex.

Like the earlier Picota complex, jars have a short neck and a thickened rim, although in the Motiepa complex it is very common to have an incision dividing the lip in two sections. Besides, it is relatively usual to find some examples of jars with rough finger impressions at the level of the shoulder (see Figure 20). Another type of jar also started being made, with equally short necks but with a massive thickening in the rim.

For the description of the characteristic bowls from this complex it is convenient to dwell on one of the most interesting discoveries made in Palenque in the 1950's. This is Tomb 3 in Temple XVIII-A, whose location in the southeastern sector of the ceremonial center we can see in the figure. Temples XVIII-A and XVIII are the so-called "twin temples" (see Figure 56 and Figure 57), since they share the same foundation and have common building characteristics, such as the spatial layout and the use of a core of rocks and earth.

Figure 56. Location of Temple XVIII-A (map by E. Barnhart).

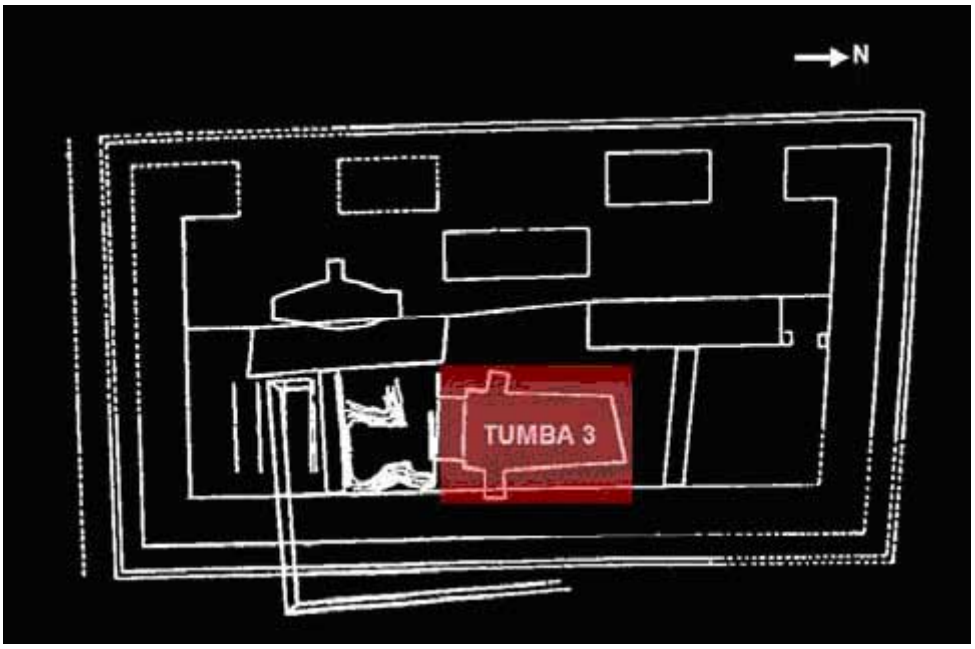

Figure 57. Ground plan of Temple XVIII-A and location of Tomb number 3 (drawn by Ruz).

The discovery in 1956 of a tubular conduit under the floor of the XVIII-A Temple led in its turn to find a vaulted funeral chamber built under a pyramidal substructure (see Figure 58). Here lay the remains of two adult individuals covered with cinnabar: the main character was a man around 19 years old lay in a dorsal decubitus position oriented to the north, with a female companion of around 25 years of age lying in the southeastern corner of the tomb. The door jambs framing the entrance located on the south side were painted with motifs in red over a white background. The funerary offering accompanying the deceased consisted of a jadeite mask with shell, obsidian and rock inlay (which was likely part of a ceremonial belt), as well as beads and ear spools of jadeite, lip-plugs made of shell, and stone pendants (see Figure 59).

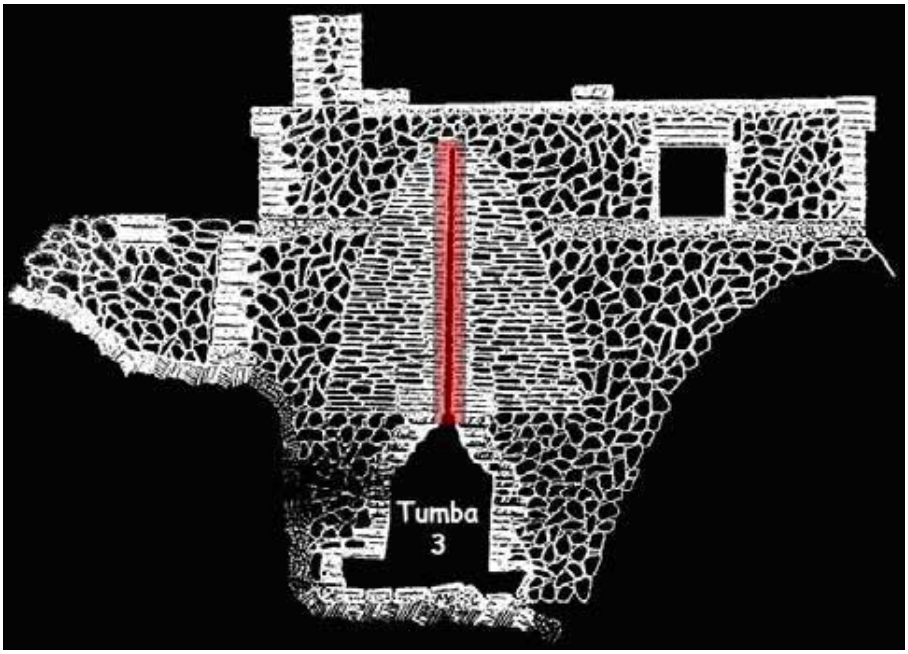

Figure 58. East-west section of Temple XVIII-A and location of Tomb number 3 (drawn by Ruz).

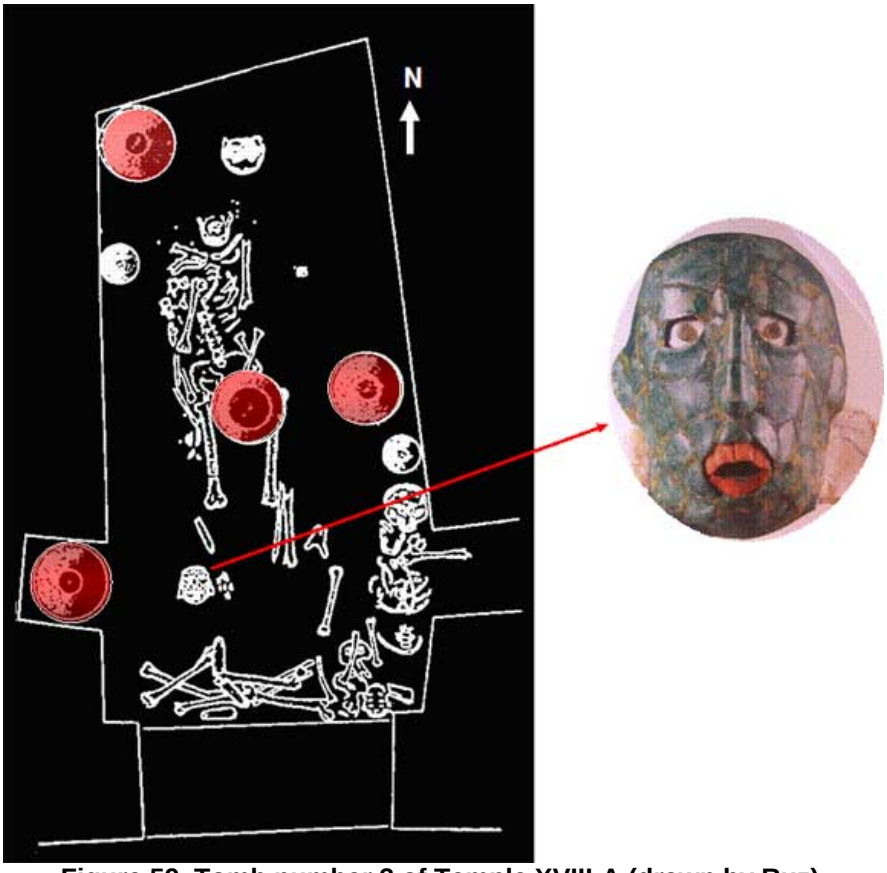

Figure 59. Tomb number 3 of Temple XVIII-A (drawn by Ruz).

Save for the distance in time, space, and magnificence, we are dealing with a very similar case to Pacal's tomb in the Temple of the Inscriptions, pertaining to the Late Classic. Both have a tubular conduit or psicoducto (conduit for the soul of the deceased) which connects the tomb to the exterior temple, as well as access stairways leading to a vertical slab sealing the tomb, the main character with a north orientation, and the remains of sacrificed individuals surrounding him. These similarities, together with a rich funerary offering, make us think that the personage buried in Tomb 3 of Temple XVIII-A could be one of the founders of Palenque's dynasty.

As for the pottery offerings, four bowls were found with diagnostic characteristics of the Motiepá complex: solid, semi-round supports, straight or curved diverging walls, slightly thickened rim and slightly leveled interior lip. No remains of slip are seen, and the exterior wall surfaces show an irregular and wrinkled aspect (see Figure 60). This type of bowls will be a constant feature through the Motiepá complex, although we can also find variations of the same type: bowls with ring base (see Figure 23) and bowls with thinned rim and an incised decoration based on cross-hatching framed in quadrangular spaces, and sometimes appliqué decoration (see Figure 21).

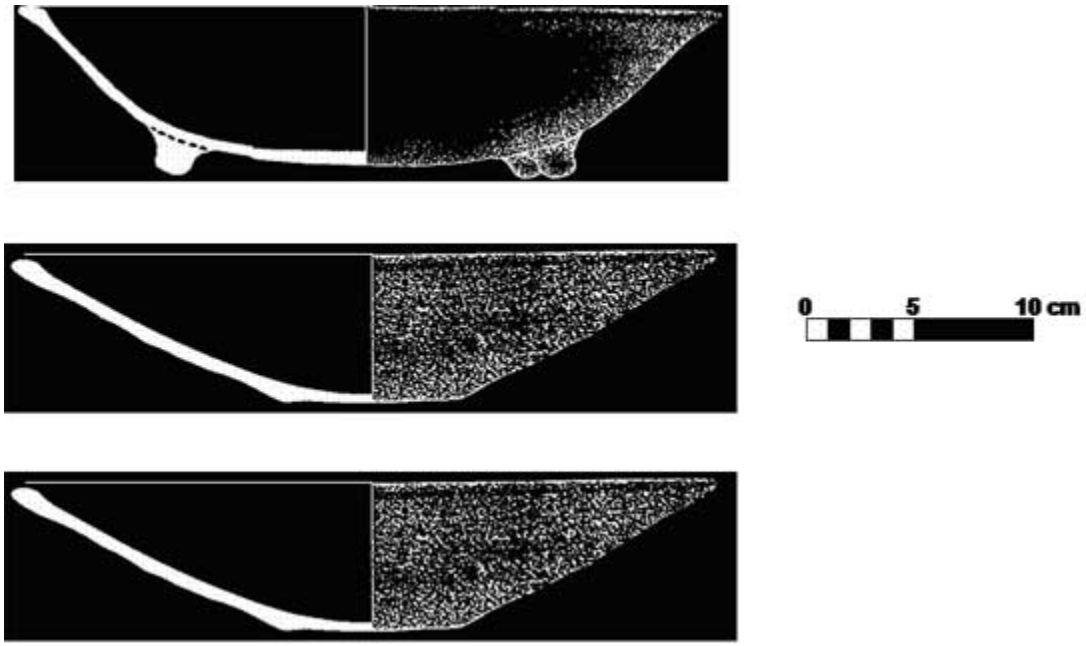

Figure 60. Part of the ceramic offering recovered from Tomb number 3 of Temple XVIII-A (drawn by Rands).

The vessels described so far belong to a local production which exploited the clay deposits near Palenque and in the low sierras. Use of these pastes –which usually show a reddish-brown color and a high content of quartz sand in their composition–

constitutes a long ceramic tradition extending through the site's whole sequence of occupation. On the other hand, so far we haven't seen an example of a vessel with remains of paint or slip on its surface, and the truth is that we don't know with certainty if this is due to bad preservation or to a low level of production. These vessels are scarce, but they do exist. In fact, apart from the local production corresponding to the typical marginality of a good deal of ceramics from Palenque, the Motiepá phase represents a sub-complex whose characteristics refer directly to the types established in the rest of the nuclear Maya area. This is the only moment in Palenque's entire occupation sequence in which we have detected with total clarity a permeability of its ceramics to external influences. Therefore, we have found fragments belonging to polychrome types (*Dos Arroyos Policromo*), bichrome (*San Blas Rojo sobre Naranja*) and monochrome (*Aguila Naranja* and *Paradedro Acanalado*) types (see Figure 61 and Figure 62). All these are pottery fragments which show atypical attributes for Palenque. First, the paste shows apparently foreign characteristics, which on the other hand are very common to the mentioned types. Unlike the local paste –remember it's reddish-brown, of grainy texture and with plenty of quartz sand in its composition– the paste of this sub-complex is compact, pink-colored and has a temper of ground calcite. Secondly, surface finish also shows new aspects. I mean the adoption of painted decoration. As mentioned earlier, Palenque ceramics have a marked tendency to continuity in their traditions. The preference of an incised and printed decoration over a painted decoration is certainly one of these traditions. If we ignore the bowls with extended rims that were so characteristic of the Otulúm complex from the beginnings of the Late Classic, we have no evidence for another example of polychrome vessels in the whole ceramic sequence of Palenque.

Figure 61. Bowl fragment (Águila Naranja).

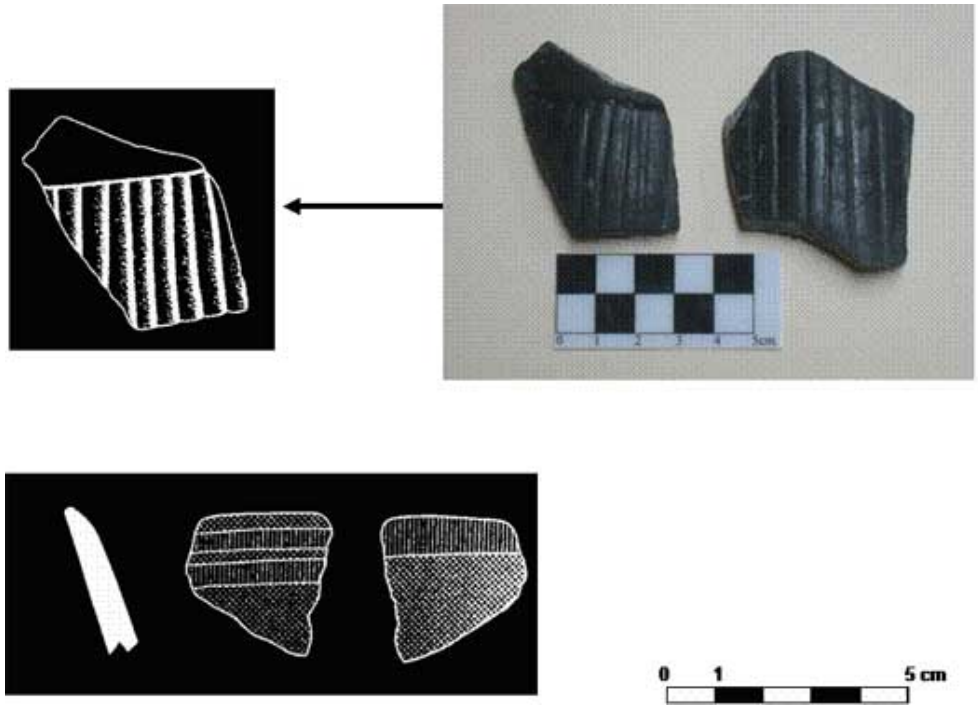

Figure 62. Vase fragment, Paradero Acanalado (above) and rim fragment, San Blas Rojo sobre Naranja (below).

Therefore, this sub-complex within the Motiepá phase constitutes a brief and specific moment in history, in which Palenque seems to open up to external influences from the Petén. But what did this influence really consist of? Are vessels being traded, or is it just that the modes of production are being imported? I personally tend to think that trade in vessels must have been a reduced activity, or even restricted to a social elite. However, I do believe that the expansion of ideas was more feasible, such as the fabrication techniques or the decorative styles. A possible way in which to answer the question of whether the vessels pertaining to this sub-complex influenced by the Petén were imported, or were made in Palenque with foreign techniques and styles, would be to conduct an analysis of paste composition. If these vessels turned out to be from clay deposits far from the deposits traditionally exploited by Palenque potters, we might be dealing with a sub-complex of imported materials. In this respect, we should point out that the neutron activation analysis being conducted by Dr. Ronald Bishop based on the samples obtained by Dr. Rands could shortly give us an answer to this question.

Figure 63. Composite censer found in Palenque's Group B.

As far as the possible Teotihuacan influence in Palenque during the Early Classic is concerned, for the time being we have no evidence to support such notion. On the other hand, during the Late Classic Palenque does seem to echo a widespread fashion consisting of the adoption of *teotihuacanoid* stylistic features. Such is the case, for instance, of the pottery medallion found in Building 3 of B Group, in which Tlaloc is shown coming out of the maws of an animal (see Figure 64), as well as the composite censer found in the same group, in which there is a headdress with Tlaloc attributes (see Figure 63), or the stucco mask in the North Group, which we mentioned at the beginning of this presentation.

Figure 64. Ceramic medallion found in Building number 3 of Palenque's Group B.

In light of the data presented throughout this paper, we can conclude with the idea that during the Early Classic Palenque was already formed as a political center of the first order, which would reach its highest peak during the Late Classic. The start of its dynasty, which coincided with the Motiepa complex, constituted a political event of such importance that the great capitals took it into account. Therefore, it does not seem to be pure chance that just in this moment Palenque's ceramic material was influenced by ceramic fashions from the Petén. However, this influence would be ephemeral, since in later phases belonging to the Late Classic Palenque ceramics adopt some autochthonous characteristics which had little to do with the types already established in the Petén.

Acknowledgments

First I would like to thank the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI) for its financial support and its understanding, which have allowed me to carry this research project to conclusion. I would also like to give very special thanks to Dr. Robert L. Rands. My work would not have been possible without his extraordinary research about Palenque, or his invaluable willingness to share his data with me. To Dr. Ronald Bishop and archaeologist Erin Sears my thanks not just for their suggestions and comments, but also for their hospitality and their kindness during my stay in Maryland. Lastly, I also would like to mention the invariably valuable observations of archaeologists Sylviane Boucher and Sara Dzul, as well as the unconditional support given by archaeologist Arnoldo González Cruz.

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Sierra Rojo Type: Sierra Variety

Group:	Sierra
Phase:	Pre-Picota
Period:	Late Pre-Classic
Provenience:	Groups I and C
Frequency:	Very Scarce
Established by:	Smith and Gifford: 1966

Main Characteristics

1. Yellow-reddish paste with coarse and grainy texture.
2. Red slip with waxy touch.
3. Long-necked ollas with out-flaring rim, and bowls with thick walls.

General Description

The paste is between fragile and hard, and has a coarse and grainy texture. Its color shows several shades of reddish-brown; reddish yellow (7.5YR6/6, 7/6) and yellowish red (SYR 5/6). The vessels are fired in an irregular oxidizing atmosphere, based on the reddish color of the paste and the dark core which is seen in most sections. About the clay composition it should be pointed out that there is plenty quartz sand as natural inclusions. There is no significant evidence of the use of any kind of temper.

The surface finish has a smooth, polished aspect. One of the diagnostic characteristics of the Sierra group is the presence of a red-red (2.5YR 4/6, 4/8), 10R (4/6, 4/8) and dark red (2.SYR 3/6) slip which has a waxy touch and is usually well adhered to the paste. Although its state of conservation is relatively good, one frequently finds a slight cracking of the slip and areas with firing stains or blackish smoke stains.

As for the forms, we have found a scant representation of the great variety of vessels which traditionally have been assigned to the Sierra group. Therefore, we only have fragments belonging to four form classes:

1. Jars with long neck and out-flaring rim. Occasionally the lip shows an incision dividing it in two sections (Figure 1 a-c). Likewise the neck usually shows undulations on its exterior side, which result from using the coiling technique for modeling the vessel (Figure 1 a-e). Although

we have no evidence for the shape of the body, it is possible to infer through comparison with whole jars found in other sites, that the body had a globular shape.

- Mouth diameter: 20-27 cm
- Neck wall thickness: medium (0.8-
- 1 cm) Neck height: medium-high (3.6-6.5 cm).
- Height of whole vessel: unknown.
- Illustrations: Figure 1 a-e
- Record number of sample: Figure 1 a (DI), b (D2), c (D10), d (D3), e (D4)

2. Bowls with very thick curved, converging walls, inverted rim and rounded lip.

- Diametro de la boca: desconocido
- Espesor de la pared: grueso (1.1 - 1.4 cm.)
- Altura de la vasija completa: desconocida
- Ilustraciones: Figura 1 f- h
- Numero de registro del muestrario: Figura 1 f (D5), g (D7), h (D6)

3. Cajetes de paredes recto-divergentes, horde directo y labio redondeado.

- Mouth diameter: unknown
- Wall thickness: thick (1.1-1.4 cm)
- Height of whole vessel: unknown
- Illustrations: Figure 1 f-h
- Record number of sample: Figure 1 f (D5), g (D7), h (D6)

4. Dishes with straight-divergent walls, direct rim, and rounded lip.

- Mouth diameter: unknown
- Wall thickness: thick (1-1.1 cm)
- Height of whole vessel: unknown
- Illustrations: Figure 1 k-m
- Record number of sample: Figure 1k (D28), 1 (D29), m (D30)

Aguila Naranja Type: Unspecified Variety

Group:	Aguila
Phase:	Motiepa
Period:	Early Classic
Provenience:	Groups I and C
Frequency:	Very Scarce
Established by:	Smith and Gifford; 1966

Main Characteristics

1. Pink paste with abundant temper of ground calcite.
2. Orange-color slip, usually over a cream-slip base.
3. Dishes with high curved, divergent walls and bowls with interior-beveled lips.

General Description

The paste is hard and has a medium texture. Its most characteristic colors are pink, reddish yellow (SYR 6/6) or light red (2.SYR 7/6, 6/8; 10R 6/6). Firing took place in an oxidizing atmosphere, which was not always well under control, as surmised by the dark core which can be seen in the section of some of the fragments. About the composition of the paste it can be said that abundant ground-calcite temper was employed, as well as the occasional presence of iron oxide nodules.

The surface finish shows a smooth, polished and shiny aspect. One of the diagnostic characteristics of the Aguila Group is the presence of an orange-colored slip (red 2.5YR 4/8, 5/8; reddish-yellow SYR 6/8; yellowish-red SYR 5/8), which was usually applied over a base of cream-colored slip (pink 7.SYR 8/4; very light brown 10 YR 7/4). This slip was applied on the inside of walls, on the exterior, or on both, depending on the shape of the vessel.

Since the frequency of the Aguila Naranja type is very scarce in Palenque, we don't have a good representation of the variety of forms which characterize this group. Therefore, for the moment we only have the following vessel forms:

1. Dishes of straight-divergent walls and direct rim with a 2.5 cm-wide molding. These dishes usually have slip both on the interior and the exterior of walls.
    - Mouth diameter: 20 cm
    - Wall thickness: medium (0.7 cm)
    - Height of whole vessel: unknown

2. Bowls of curved-divergent walls, direct rim and beveled lip on the inside. These bowls only have slip in the inside of walls.
    - Mouth diameter: 32 cm
    - Wall thickness: medium (0.7 cm)
    - Height of whole vessel: unknown
    - Illustrations: 1 a

3. Vases with straight walls, direct rim and rounded lip. The slip only covers the outside of the walls.
    - Mouth diameter: 15 cm
    - Wall thickness: medium (0.5 cm)
    - Height of whole vessel: unknown
    - Illustrations: 1 b

Marques Crema Type: Marques Variety

Group:	Marques
Phase:	Murcielagos
Period:	Late Classic
Provenience:	Groups I and C
Frequency:	Abundant
Established by:	San Roman, this study

Main Characteristics

1. Orange-colored paste with fine to medium texture.

2. Well-polished surface finish and covered by a cream-color slip.

3. Tripod vases with nubbin supports, cylindrical body and direct rim; dishes with thin, out-flared walls and flat base.

Photo 1: Dish from Burial 18, Group I

General Description

The paste is of fine to medium texture and is orange-colored, including a broad spectrum of shades, among which the following stand out: reddish-yellow (7.SYR 6/6, 7/6; 5YR 6/6), light brown (7.5YR 6/6) and yellowish-red (SYR 5/6). The presence of a light gray core (bluish-black GLEY 22.5/1; very dark bluish-gray GLEY 2 S in the sections is indicative of a high percentage of phytoliths in the composition of the paste.

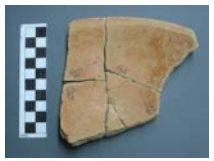
Surface finish shows good smoothing and in some cases a cream-colored slip that often covers both the exterior and interior sides of walls. The most characteristic shades of this slip are as follows: very light brown (10YR 8/2, 8/3, 8/4), pink (7.SYR 7/3, 7/4), and reddish-yellow (7.5YR 7/6). It is likely that in some cases a good polishing of the surfaces resulted in a finish with a different color from that of the paste, which might be mistaken for a slip (Rands, personal communication 2003).

The most characteristic forms in this type are vases, of which we find two variants. On the one hand are tripod vases with nubbin supports, cylindrical body with thin walls and direct rim (see Figure 3 a-o), and on the other hand are cylindrical vases with thin, slightly curved walls, direct rim and no supports (see Photo 2). This vessel form can be found in both Murcielagos and Balunte phases, although it is more common in the first one. Te difference between each one lays in the fact that the walls tend to be more straight in the Balunte phase than in the Murcielagos phase, in the latter moment the rim tends to curve to the outside.

Photo 2: Vase from Burial 18 of Group I, belonging to the Murcielagos phase.

Another form which is characteristic of this type are dishes with thin walls and, in many cases, lower that in other phases of the ceramic sequence. The rim can be direct (see Photo 1 and Figure 3 p-q, t) or slightly out-flaring and thickened (see Photo 1 and Figure 3 p), although most commonly rims are lacking. Lastly, for the moment we have detected another form which is characteristic of this type: thin-walled jars with high necks, and direct rim (see Figure 3 v-y), or with a slight rounded thickening (see Figure 3 u).

Appendix 2: Distribution of Form Classes by Phase

PERIODS	PHASES	FORM CLASSES						
		Dish	Plate	Bowl	Beaker	Vase	Jar	Pan
Late Pre-Classic	Pre-Picota							
	Picota							
Early Classic	Motiepá						 	

Periods	Phases	Dish	Plate	Bowl	Beaker	Vase	Jar	Pan
Late Classic	Otulúm							
	Murciélagos							
	Balunté							

Note: This table was made with data obtained from the Project of Analysis of Ceramic Materials (INAH), and more specifically from the study of the ceramic recovered from I and C Groups. Therefore, the information contained herewith is just for informative purposes and is subject to changes derived from the advances made in our research.