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## **Aguateca Archaeological Project: A Study of Classic Maya Household Organization and Domestic Activities**

**Research Year:** 1997

**Culture:** Maya

**Chronology:** Classic

**Location:** Petén, Guatemala

**Site:** Aguateca

The 1997 season of the Aguateca Archaeological Project was carried out in June 1997 with support from FAMSI. The principal objective of the project was to examine household organization and domestic activities in Classic Maya society. Aguateca is located in the southwestern Petén, Guatemala. Previous investigations have demonstrated that Aguateca was heavily fortified during the latter part of the Late Classic period (late eighth century A.D.) in response to escalating warfare. Despite these defensive efforts, Aguateca was finally attacked and brought down by enemies at the end of the Late Classic period. Numerous structures in the Aguateca epicenter were burned, and the residents fled or were taken away leaving most of their belongings behind. Rich floor assemblages in burned houses provide an unusual opportunity to examine the lifeways of the Classic Maya.

Since 1996 the members of the Aguateca Archaeological Project have been conducting extensive excavations of burned structures in the site epicenter. To record detailed information on these rich deposits, we adopted an intensive excavation procedure, which included the screening of excavated soil through 1/4" or 1/16" mesh, the point-plotting of on-floor artifacts with a total station and data collector, and the analysis of soil chemistry at the floor levels. During the 1997 season we excavated Str. M8-10, M8-13, and M8-8.

Str. M8-10, a range structure with five rooms, was excavated in 1993 down to the last occupation floors. The discovery of an adult burial in the center room and an infant burial in the south room in 1997 accords with our earlier hypothesis that the center room was used by the head of the household and that a female occupied the south room.

Str. M8-13, located to the southeast of Str. M8-10, was a smaller structure with two rooms. The assemblages of utilitarian objects, such as storage vessels and stone tools, were similar to those found in Str. M8-10, but Str. M8-13 lacked prestige goods. This presents a clear contrast to Str. M8-10, where numerous shell ornaments, carved

bones, and greenstone objects were found. Str. M8-8 was a large range structure with five rooms, located to the north of Str. M8-10. Its northern half was excavated in 1997. While the center room contained a small number of objects, the north room was full of artifacts, such as grinding stones and storage jars. Eighteen polished stone axes were found in front of the north room and in the northern annex. These objects were most likely used for carving.

The results of the 1997 season confirmed our earlier observations. First, the center rooms of these residential structures usually contain a small amount of artifacts and were probably used for meetings and receiving visitors. Second, at least one of the side rooms contains a large amount of domestic objects, indicating their domestic functions. Third, a significant portion of the elite engaged in artistic production. Fourth, clear differentiation in the status of residents can be observed within this elite residential area. Continuing excavations at Aguateca are expected to provide extraordinary data on the Classic Maya household.

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