

Queer Experiences of Sacred Space:
Ancient Maya Cosmivision and Geomantic Disorientation

By

Zachary A. Nissen

Thesis
for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
In
Liberal Arts and Sciences

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
University of Illinois
Urbana Champaign, Illinois

2015

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	3
Queer Theory.....	4
Ancient Maya Sacred Landscapes.....	6
Cara Blanca.....	7
Pool 20.....	9
Challenging Normative Assumptions: Queer Experiences of Space.....	12
Acknowledgements.....	15
References Cited.....	16

Abstract:

As a method of deconstructing and disrupting what is normative, archaeologists have used queer theory to explore aspects of the formation and intersection of identities. However, the excavation of Cara Blanca Pool 20 in Central Belize illustrates how queer theory can be used beyond the study of identity by exploring the relationships between people and “things.” I use a framework of critical queer theory to explore two topics: 1) how landscapes would have disrupted Maya understandings of space and ritual; and 2) how moments during excavation deconstruct contemporary interpretations of space and ritual. Comprised of 25 *cenotes*, or karstic sinkholes, Cara Blanca represents one of the highest concentrations of *cenotes* in the Southern Maya lowlands. Within this unique environment, the landscape of Pool 20 stands out as exceptional and distinct: consisting of a *cenote*, and a “modified” natural limestone hill that connects the human world to the supernatural realms of the heavens and the underworld. The Maya imbued the, already sacred, landscape with an animate power that would have been experienced by pilgrims visiting the pool during a period of several prolonged droughts (about 800-1050 C.E.). Through queer investigation of this sacred space, I explore the affective nature of space itself: detailing how it disorients and redirects focus to create and disrupt particular worldviews and experiences, both in the past and in the present.

Key Words: Maya Landscapes, Queer Theory, Phenomenology, Affect

Introduction

Though shaping, recreating, and renewing cosmological worldviews, landscapes played an active role in Maya ritual and religious practices. Recent developments by scholars of sacred landscapes have led to more nuanced and complex understandings of Maya cosmology and both the production and experience of sacred spaces (e.g., Brady and Ashmore 1999; Dowd 2015; Woodfill et al. 2015). Using relatively recent concepts of “cosmovision” and “geomancy” (Dowd 2015), as well as a framework of critical queer theory, I explore a period of heightened pilgrimage due to a period of several multi-year droughts, around 800-1050 C.E. to the site of Cara Blanca Pool 20, Central Belize in the Late Classic to Early Terminal Classic periods.

Exploring how the Maya related to Cara Blanca Pool 20 as a space that is outside the norm of everyday experiences of ritual and religion I seek to explore how: 1) references to cosmological ideas in landscapes themselves would have shaped Maya understandings of space and supernatural experiences; and 2) how moments during excavation deconstruct contemporary archaeological interpretations of space and ritual. I begin my discussion by drawing on works of queer theorists, feminist theorists, and social archaeologists to define what exactly a queer theoretical framework is, how they have been used by archaeologists, and how I specifically will use queer theory to provide a new insight into Maya cosmology and sacred landscapes. I then turn to a broad discussion of the normative practices of ritual and religion that structured the daily lives of the classic Maya. Transitioning to a discussion of the sacred landscapes of the pools of Cara Blanca, I explore how natural environments served as spaces with affective atmospheres and heightened supernatural powers. Ultimately concluding with a phenomenological discussion of queer spaces, I tie together studies of sacred landscapes and critical queer theory to understand how Cara Blanca Pool 20 produced affective atmospheres that

would have enhanced and encouraged altered states and provided a new outlet for addressing climactic conditions.

In my investigation of Maya landscapes, I focus on the Late to Terminal Classic time periods, specifically the “collapse period”, from about 750 to 1050 C.E. (Coe 2011:169; Harrison-Buck 2007:1). Towards the beginning of this period (751-790 C.E.), long standing alliances between Maya centres (i.e. Tikal, Copan, Palenque, Calakmul, etc.), began to break down and violence between neighboring cities fluoresced (Coe 2011:169-170). Geochemical evidence suggests that one of the factors contributing to the “collapse” of the classic Maya was a series of droughts in the Maya lowlands from 800 C.E. to 1050 C.E., that peaked around the year 862 C.E. (Coe 2011:32,171). During the “collapse” period, overpopulated cities began to reject the authority of the ruling elite, who could no longer “call down the rains from Chahk” (Coe 2011:171). Ultimately resulting in the institution of kingship losing its relevance to and grasp on the everyday lives of the Maya people (Coe 2011:171). With elites no longer controlling access to fresh water and the portals to the supernatural realms, the Maya of the “collapse” period turned to alternative sources to fulfill daily needs.

Using a framework of critical queer theory I identify moments that would be considered queer, or abnormal, in the past as well as the present to further understandings of sacred landscapes and ritual and religious practices. I argue the Maya of central Belize sought for alternative ritual practices to cope during a queer climatic event. Ultimately turning to a sacred space that was in line with classic Maya cosmology yet was modified to challenge concepts of space and ritual producing an affective atmosphere that would have connected the Maya to their cosmology in a way that could be considered to be not normative.

Understanding the drastic ecological changes occurring in the Late and Terminal classic periods, this paper seeks to understand the relationships the Maya of this “collapse” time period had to landscapes and cosmological worldviews. In understanding how this time period produced unforeseen ecological challenges, I look at the Maya of the southern lowlands in central Belize, to understand how religion and landscapes are both shaped by and shape cosmological worldviews. By taking a critically queer approach to the site of Cara Blanca, I look specifically at how the landscape challenges “normative” classic Maya ritual and religious practices, lending itself to an affective atmosphere that would have amplified and encouraged supernatural experiences of space.

Queer Theory

Queering archaeology does not involve digging for homosexuals, or any other supposed sexual deviant for that matter, in the past. Nor is it concerned with the origins of homosexuality. It is not a manifesto for promoting homosexuality. Queer theory forces us to explore practices that openly exist in our cultures today, that have existed for a long time in all cultures, but are today branded as deviant or excluded altogether. Queering archaeology empowers us to think what is often the unthinkable to produce unthought-of pasts (Dowson 2000:165).

Siobahn Somerville argues that the term “queer” often causes confusion when used in academic studies (2007:187). In both academic and popular use, the word “queer” is used as an “umbrella term” for categories of sexual orientation that are “not straight” (Somerville 2007). However, in more political and theoretical contexts, the word “queer” can refer to a critique of

the organization of sexual orientation, or a way to denaturalize the very categories of “heterosexual” and “homosexual” (Somerville 2007). Re framed as a way to refer to something that is considered “strange,” “odd,” or “peculiar,” queer is used as a tool to identify something that is not normal and challenge the very structures that create normalcy (Somerville 2007; Chen 2013; Ahmed; 2006; Arjona 2015).

As the very word implies, ‘queer’ does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant (Halperin 1995:62)

Adopted by archaeologists shortly after its inception, queer theory has been used to critique the practice of archaeology itself (e.g., Dowson 2000, 2008, 2009; Voss 2000; Voss and Schmidt 2000). Used as a political tool to reevaluate and rethink previous narratives of the past, the practice of queer archaeology began challenge practices, techniques, and methodologies that were fundamental to the field of archaeology (Dowson 2000:163).

Refusing hegemonic notions of what is normal or natural, the queer movement challenges the very ideas of normality which underpin social institutions and practices. From a queer perspective nothing is natural, nothing is normal. Everything is a social and cultural construct...identities are acquired, at least in part, through performance...queer theory is in many ways, postmodern, since it renounces any fixed notions of difference...Binary oppositions are replaced by a proliferation of differences which queer theory and politics refuse to hierarchize (Weedon 1999:73).

‘Queer’...describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. It is from the eccentric positionality occupied by the queer subject that it may become possible to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviors, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, modes of self-constitution, and practices of community-for restructuring, that is, the relations among power, truth, and desire (Halperin 1995:62).

Established as the practice of “queering,” archaeologists have been able to use queer theory as something that “challenges the idea of normality.” Its ability to transcend the boundaries of sexuality allowed it to become used as a framework for the study of many processes in the past (Blackmore 2011).

To truly understand queer theory’s relationship to archaeology, it requires two parts: 1) the identification of something queer, peculiar, or at odds with the norm; and 2) the identification of how this queer moment, object, or experience shapes and challenges dominant and normative ideologies. For the purposes of this paper, I use queer theory not only as a tool for deconstructing the normative practices of archaeologists, but also as a tool for identifying moments in the past that would have not been considered abnormal, producing affective experiences of space. For it is in the identification of queer moments, or the moments that are

abnormal, peculiar and disorienting that we as archaeologists can truly call into question the normative practices and categories that construct narratives of the past. I assess that through a focus on sacred landscapes, a lens of queer theory can identify the moments that the Maya would have perceived as peculiar/queer, as well as challenge the dominant and normative assumptions present within the practice of archaeology itself.

Ancient Maya Sacred Landscapes

Cosmovision is defined as a cultural group's view of the world, the structure of the universe and ideas about its origin or development, as interpreted through selected sets of symbols in the built or modified natural environment (Dowd 2015:211).

The Maya cosmos consists of three distinct worlds: the heavens or upperworld with 13 levels, the earth or human world, and Xibalba or the underworld with 9 levels (Lucero 2011:12; Schele and Freidel 1990:67). Natural landscapes like mountains, caves, hills, bodies of water came to be seen as active representations of Maya world views (Lucero 2006; Taube 2013). Seen as entrances to the various levels of the cosmos, they were also physical manifestations of supernatural beings and deities themselves (Woodfill et al. 2015:4). The ancient Maya reference their cosmology through built environments, and through the establishment of sacred spaces or environments that naturally embody this cosmology.

For the Maya, artificial landscapes, created through architecture, actively referenced cosmology on a daily basis (Joyce 2003). Monumental architecture, like pyramids and temples, represented the various natural environments: mountains, caves, and even water that embodied cosmology. These built environments were used to harness the power of the supernatural realms creating physical markers of social memories, that were simultaneously stratified through selective access to the sacred spaces themselves (Joyce 2003; Lucero 2006; Taube 2013). Maya cosmology was so heavily incorporated into daily life and built environments that even households themselves were constructed to reference cosmological notions of direction and the natural environment (Brady and Ashmore 1999:138; Robin 2013).

Everyday ritual practices and even going about ones daily life would have involved constant references to cosmology through everyday objects such as heirlooms and even the organization of space (Joyce 2003; Robin 2013). I argue that it is through these daily references to the cosmos and the sacred that particular practices of ritual and religion are naturalized and would have become an unconscious part of daily life. It would be in the absence or changes in cosmological references would have been considered out of place or not normative and brought these references to one's consciousness. These abnormal experiences of ritual and religion would have given sacred landscapes a power that is not seen in the daily lives of the Maya.

Cara Blanca

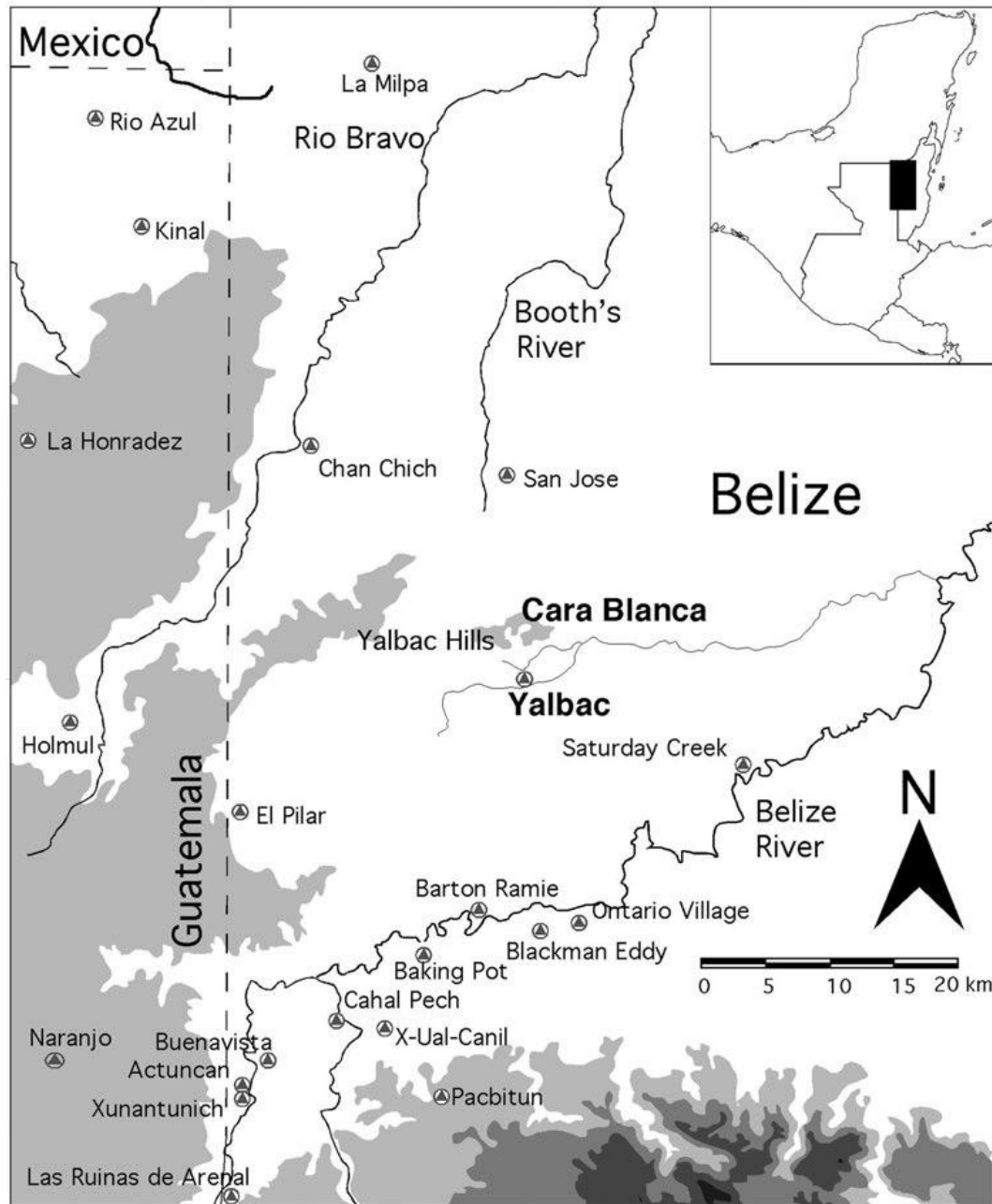


Figure 1 Map of the research area highlighting research area and several Major Maya sites.

Located in the southern Maya lowlands of central Belize, Cara Blanca, or ‘white face’, gets its name from a limestone escarpment (80-100 m high). At the base of this escarpment are 25 pools, and patches of fertile soils (Figure ; Lucero et al. 2004; Lucero and Kinkella 2015). The pools to the far west, as well as those in the east are level to the ground surface and are classified as lakes or ponds, while the central pools, with steep-sided and exposed bedrock cliffs are classified as cenotes, or karstic sinkholes (Lucero and Kinkella 2015; Lucero 2011).

Exploratory diving of the pools resulted in a distinction between the lakes/ponds and the *cenotes*. Divers, several of whom have explored pools in other parts of the Maya region, note that the cenotes are unique, reaching up to 40 m in depth, compared to the shallower pools to the east and west (Lucero 2011, 2015; Lucero and Kinkella 2015).

Of the 25 pools, only 5 have associated settlement: 1, 7, 8, 9, and 20 (Kinkella 2009; 2011). Survey conducted in the *bajos*, or seasonal swamps, to the south and the cliffs to the north has revealed little additional settlement (Lucero 2009; Kinkella 2011). Due to its rich agricultural land and easy access to water source, sparse settlement in the Cara Blanca area indicates that the pools served as a sacred place to the ancient Maya due to its “concentration of natural, sacred features in the form of mountains and portals” (Lucero 2011:12).

As discussed above, access to the sacred realms of the heavens and the underworld through physical representations on the landscape was critical to ancient Maya religion, politics, and everyday life. However, the Maya at Cara Blanca did not have to build artificial mountains or caves; physical portals to sacred realms were already provided by the gods (Lucero 2011; Lucero and Kinkella 2015:164). Excavations at Cara Blanca Pool 1 have shown that specific water based rituals, took place at these pools, coinciding with a period of prolonged droughts between 800 and 900 C.E. (Harrison 2015a; Lucero and Kinkella 2015). Principal Investigator (P.I.) Lisa Lucero has argued that these ritual practices would have been performed by pilgrims and served as a way to connect with and appease the gods in a desperate attempt to gain favor and ensure rainfall (Lucero and Kinkella 2015).

Pilgrimages to the pools of Cara Blanca would have extended beyond the locals of the Cara Blanca area, or even the nearby centre of Yalbac; it is likely that individuals from many surrounding centres would have made pilgrimages to the pools of Cara Blanca (Harrison 2015b; Lucero and Kinkella 2015). Upon arrival to Cara Blanca, pilgrims would have performed rituals to gain the favor of ancestors, rain and water deities, and other supernatural entities in order to ensure rain and bountiful crops during times of environmental stress (Lucero 2015).

As an established sacred environment, Cara Blanca would have possessed queer or disruptive qualities. Drawing on direct connections to supernatural realms the pools would have represented aspects of cosmology that were not felt on a daily basis. The fact that it was not utilized until a series of prolonged droughts, what I would consider to be a queer environmental period, rendered the normal ritual and religious activities of daily life ineffective shows that it would have possessed supernatural powers that exceeded those needed to negotiate life before these droughts. I argue that it is Cara Blanca’s abnormal qualities that make it the “natural” next step for the Maya to engage with their cosmological worldview on a higher level.

Pool 20



Figure 2 Map of the 25 Cara Blanca Pools (from Kinkella 2011 Figure 5.1).

Cara Blanca Pool 20, approximately 100 m in diameter and 40 m in depth, is deeper, more circular, and more “*cenote*-like” than many of the other 24 pools of Cara Blanca (Kinkella 2011). Andrew Kinkella surveyed Pool 20 in 2010, noting settlement to the north and northeast of the pool (Kinkella 2011:54). The settlement, noted by Kinkella, consists of two structures approximately 40 meters to the north, and a small group of 7-8 structures approximately 450 meters to the northeast (Kinkella 2011). In 2014, the Valley of Peace Archaeology project, led by Dr. Lisa Lucero, revisited Pool 20 with the goal of mapping and strategically excavating the settlement directly North of Pool 20 (Nissen 2015). As Pool 20 is one of the five Pools with known architecture sought to uncover if there were any similarities in artifact assemblage, site layout and overall purpose of the site. The excavation team also sought to find any similarities between Pool 1, a previously excavated site (Figure X; Nissen 2015).

I initially became interested in Pool 20 after we noticed its striking layout, which was incomparable to that of the lay out of Pool 1 (Nissen 2015). At the time I was unaware, but there would be several experiences through out the course of the excavation that would stump not only me but the seasoned excavation crew. From struggling to capture the exact dimensions of the site in a plan map to the encounter of a peculiar limestone surface there was a constant tension between what seemed familiar and the reality of the unfamiliar that drew me to this site and compelled me to question my own thoughts about the archaeological material that we were uncovering.

M208 lies 45 meters to the north of Pool 20 (Kinkella 2011; Nissen 2015). Consisting of a structure (Str. 1) built into a natural limestone hill, a raised platform extending from the south edge of the hill towards the pool, and a second structure (Str. 2) located directly southwest of Str. 1, on the northwest corner of the raised platform (Figure X; Nissen 2015).

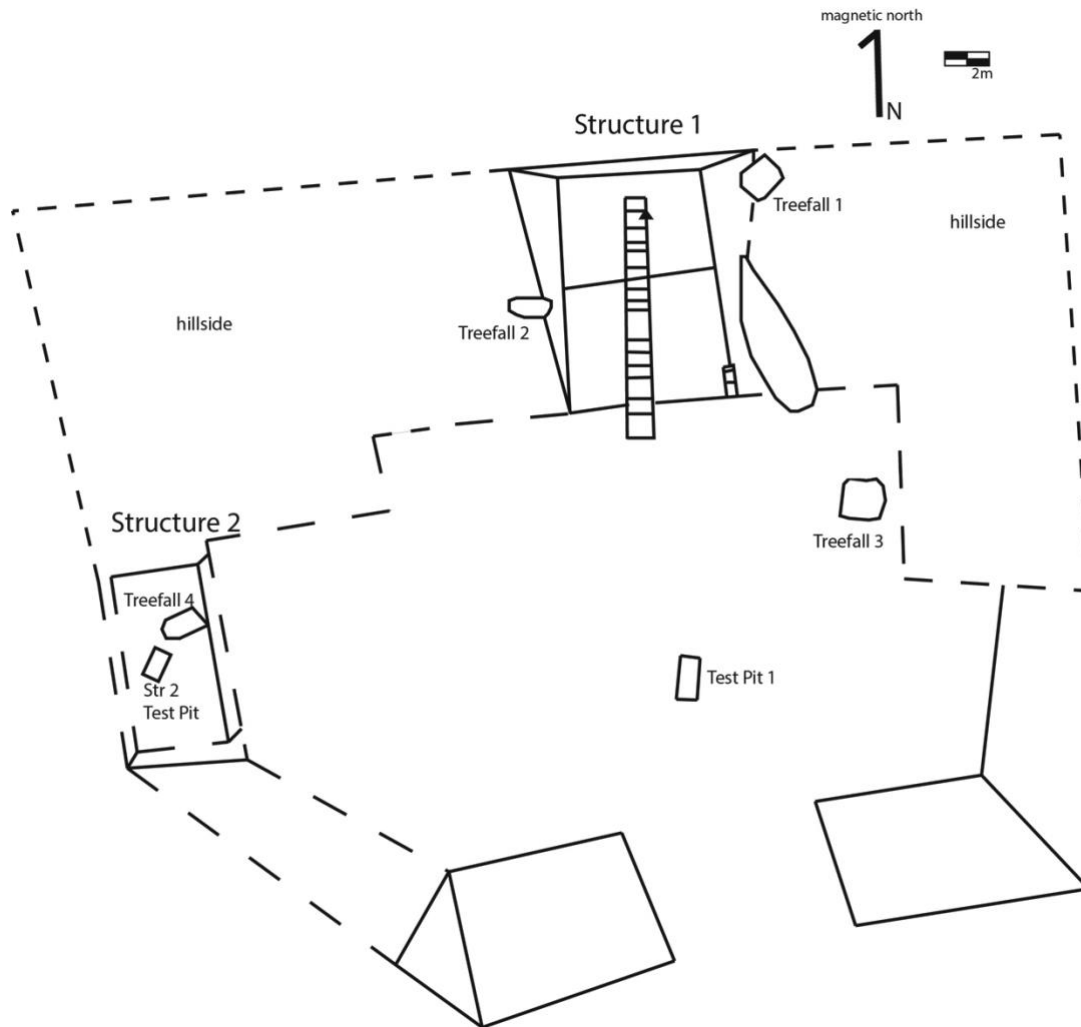


Figure 3 Map of Cara Blanca Pool 20 M208 and Associated Features

The 2014 excavation team placed a 10 x 1 m trench running directly north/south through the approximate center of Str. 1 (Figure 3). The trench began 2 m in front of the structure and was eventually extended an additional 3.5 m to cut through the entire length of Str. 1. The trench became the primary focus of the 2014 excavations but four additional test units, with no definite dimensions, were excavated, one on each corner of the structure, as well as a 2 x 1 m test unit in the approximate center of the platform and a 1 x 1 m text unit in Str. 2 (Nissen 2015).

The excavation of Str. 1 was halted by the encounter of a peculiar limestone surface that stumped the excavation crew. However, through continued excavation it was concluded that the odd limestone surface was actually a staircase carved into the limestone bedrock of the hill. This staircase runs the entire front of the structure from the bottom to the top. Ceramic vessels were found on various steps of the staircase, again dating to the Late Classic and early Terminal Classic periods, about 700-900 C.E. (Harrison 2015a). The platform was also a product resulting from the modification of the limestone bedrock. Even Str. 2 appears to be influenced by the manipulation of the limestone bedrock. Why is this? Why would the Maya not have used traditional building materials in the construction of this “architecture”?



M208 Northwest Test Area
Looking East



M208 Northeast Test
Area Looking East



M208 Str. 1 Trench
Looking North

Southwest Test Area
Looking Northwest



Southeast Test Area
Looking West



It is clear that the Maya manipulated the natural landscape at Pool 20. Using the limestone bedrock as the primary construction material. The work that would have gone into creating a staircase in the bedrock and creating a distinct platform from the surrounding area would have been a monumental undertaking. However, the final result did not greatly

distinguish the built forms from the unbuilt landscape. Is this because the Maya wanted the architecture at Pool 20 to appear as if it was natural to the landscape?

From the first few days of excavation it was clear that the artifact assemblage recovered from Pool 20 was unlike that recovered from the excavations conducted the same season at Pool 1 (Harrison 2015a; Nissen 2015). The ceramics collected date Pool 20 occupation to the Late Classic and Early Terminal Classic periods, about 750-900 C.E. (Harrison-Buck 2007). Of the ceramics collected, 66% are Jars, primarily those that would have been used in rituals pertaining to water (Figure 4; Harrison 2015a). This assemblage is relatively consistent with the ceramics recovered at Pool 1. However, the Pool 1 jars are relatively standardized with an range of 10 cm difference in orifice diameter, while the jars from Pool 20 vary in size, with a range of about 40 cm difference in orifice diameter, indicating no clear formula or standard of production. This difference in ceramic assemblage may indicate that the rituals and religious ceremonies that necessitated these particular water jars would have been different, or at the very least carried out differently.

Furthermore, the very presence of lithic and groundstone tools at Pool 20 distinguishes it from the other Pools of Cara Blanca. The excavation of a large portion of Pool 1's architecture only uncovered a few lithic and groundstone tools, primarily consisting of one partially exhausted obsidian core and a few mano fragments. The smaller scale exploratory excavations at Pool 20 found two obsidian blades and multiple manos and metates. This probable difference in lithic and groundstone tool distribution needs to be tested through further excavation of Pool 20, but could indicate a difference in ritual practices occurring between the pools.

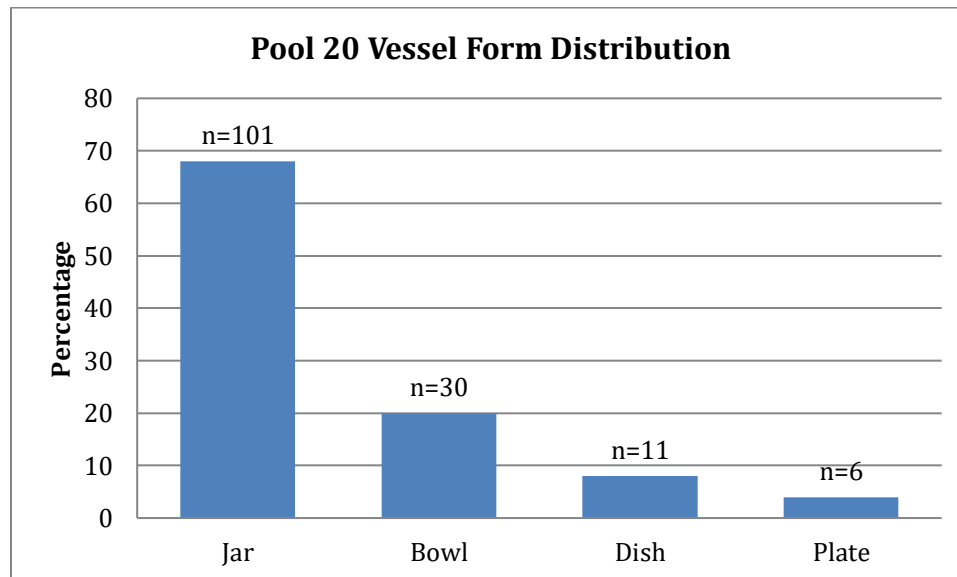


Figure 4 Pool 20 vessel form distribution taken from Harrison 2015b Figure 32

Challenging Normative Assumptions: Queer Experiences of Space

Brady and Ashmore argue that "...Maya landscapes are far from passive arenas or stage sets; then as now, they have played tangibly active roles in constant creation and shaping of Maya life" (1999:126). Excavations at Cara Blanca Pool 20 show just how landscapes actively shaped experience of space. Unlike many other spaces that are considered to be sacred in the

Maya region, Pool 20 stands out as dissimilar, even from the other pools of Cara Blanca. What is it about this space that drew such a unique and distinct expression of the Maya cosmos?

As discussed above, hills and *cenotes* were seen as the entrance to the various levels of the cosmos, but were also seen as the physical manifestations of supernatural beings themselves (Woodfill et al. 2015:4). The Cara Blanca pools would have each served as a bridge between the supernatural realms of the cosmos and the surface world, creating a physical and conceptual marker of sacred space. The coexistence of the natural limestone hill and the *cenote* would have served as an axis mundi, connecting all three realms of the cosmos together in one space (Brady and Ashmore 1999:127). The ancient Maya capitalized on this connection and built architecture that was directly tied into the landscape itself.

...geomancy, refers to an auspiciously arranged group of buildings relating to existing topographic features to create an architecturally enhanced landscape, one with significant natural and man-made features incorporated into the whole (Dowd 2015:212).

Geomancy is frequently seen in contexts of elite's displays of power through their connections to the supernatural realms (Woodfill et al. 2015:8). However, M208 does not appear to have been controlled by Maya elite (Lucero 2011). On the contrary, M208 appears to have more connection to pilgrims and local farmers. Possibly cared for by local religious figures that may have lived northwest of M208 in residential structures (Kinkella 2011; Nissen 2015). Establishing an extreme connection to the supernatural realms, the Maya would have participated in rituals designed to connect pilgrims with the gods on a deeper level, in a desperate attempts to appease the gods and overcome or negotiate periods of extreme drought.

Queer theorist, Sara Ahmed argues that "the work of inhabiting space involves a dynamic negotiation between what is familiar and unfamiliar..." in this negotiation of the familiar and unfamiliar bodies are affected by the world around them (2006:7, 9). Ahmed argues that bodies are shaped by their environment and take shape by the act of dwelling within particular environments (Ahmed 2010:9). For Ahmed,

...the normative can be considered an effect of the repetition of bodily actions over time...The normative dimension can be redescribed in terms of the straight body, a body that appears 'in line.' Things seem 'straight' (on the vertical axis), when they are 'in line,' which means they are aligned with other lines...lines disappear through such processes of alignment, so that when even one thing comes 'out of line' with another thing, the 'general effect,' is 'wonky' or even 'queer' (Ahmed 2006:66).

Effectively meaning that repetitive actions, motions, and experiences create normalcy. In most cases, when experiences are normal or "aligned with other lines", no one notices them. It is when something appears out of line do we notice them.

As discussed previously, for the Maya normative experiences of space, exist in everyday experience. Normalcy exists in walking through ones house or interacting with heirlooms that all reference cosmology in the process. However, at Cara Blanca, it is clear that space itself would have been considered queer because it is "out of line" with the normative environment and experience of daily life. Even compared to the other pools Cara Blanca, Pool 20 stands out as a unique space with multiple connections to the supernatural realms (Nissen 2015).

Participants in ritual practices at Cara Blanca Pool 20 would have likely looked for some of the normalized features of the landscape that are familiar to them. Yet as I have shown, even compared to the other pools Cara Blanca, Pool 20 stands out as a unique space with multiple connections to the supernatural realms. Pool 20 is the epitome queerness.

Ahmed clarifies queer experience by stating that "...when one thing is 'out of line,' then it is not just that thing that appears oblique but the world itself might appear on a slant, which disorients the picture and unseats the body" (Ahmed 2006:67). Experiences at Cara Blanca pool 20 would have done just that. They would have challenged the normalcy of everyday life. The Maya visiting the Pool would have been disoriented and affected by the space itself. This experience could have been connected to a supernatural realm or connection with a deity. It is this slant...disconnect...disruption...disorientation, experienced by those that partake in the rituals of the pool that gives Cara Blanca's sacred landscapes part of its power. The pools induce heightened experiences of memory and perceived connections to supernatural realms because they stand outside of what is considered normal. Through imbuing space with cosmological ideas and principles the Maya created an affective environment that would have greatly impacted the pilgrims visiting Pool 20.

Sacred landscapes clearly impact how the ancient Maya relate to, interact with, and experience the world. Through imbuing space with cosmological ideas and principles the Maya created an affective environment that would have greatly impacted the ritual and religious practices taking place at Cara Blanca Pool 20. While the 2014 Field Season at Pool 20 left me with more questions than can be answered in the short time we spent exploring the site, it is clear that M208 and its surrounding structures will provide insightful understandings about Maya experience of landscapes, but also of the practice of archaeology itself.

Pool 20's built yet unbuilt environment defies contemporary understandings of space and forces us as archaeologists to think outside of a normalized narrative of space and landscape, rather thinking about the people that we study and how the construction and experiences of space would have resulted in various distinct understandings of landscapes and space.

While archaeological sites and their interpretations will always be context specific, queer moments can lead us as archaeologists to question how we interpret archaeological materials and the narratives that we construct to interpret those materials. It is often through heterogeneity and the unthinkable difference between spaces that we can truly understand how we as archaeologists need to think about how the people of the past would have experienced space differently than how we do today. Identifying queer moments allows us to do just that, in identifying moments, materials, or spaces as peculiar we can interrogate what about those experiences challenge the ways we think about the past and the narratives that we construct about them.

Acknowledgements

I was funded by the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Undergraduate Research Grant and the Department of Anthropology Liebman Undergraduate Research Award, which is greatly appreciated. I would like to thank Lisa Lucero for inviting me to participate in the 2014 VOPA excavations and for being a mentor and friend in ways that I never could have asked for. I would also like to thank Kristin DeLucia for encouraging me to play with the interaction between queer theory and archaeology and to push the boundaries of what is possible for an undergraduate. As well, I thank Drs. Fiona Ngo, Cheryl Cole, Samantha Frost, and Timothy Pauketat for stretching the limits of my theoretical understanding. Special thank you to the Valley of Peace Archaeology project field assistants and the entire Banana Bank staff and family, for without them the 2014 field season would not have been possible. Additional thanks to the Department of Anthropology and the Archaeology Student Society for support and advice throughout my time at UIUC. Last but certainly not least, I owe a great debt to Erin Benson, Jean Larmon, Jessica Harrison, Nicholas Vale, and Mazie Vale-Nissen for their comments and ensuring my general sanity throughout the process of writing.

References Cited

- Ahmed, Sara
2006 *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, Durham and London.
- Arjona, Jamie
2015 Disorienting Affects: Capturing Uncanny Atmospheres in Mississippian Ruins. *Journal of Social Archaeology*, In Press.
- Beddows, Patricia A.
2003 Yucatán Phreas, Mexico. In *Encyclopedia of Cave and Karst Science*, edited by J. Gunn, pp. 794-796. Routledge, New York.
- Blackmore, Chelsea
2011 How to Queer the Past Without Sex: Queer Theory, Feminisms and the Archaeology of Identity. *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress* 7(1): 75-96.
- Brady, James and Wendy Ashmore.
1999 Mountains, Caves, Water: Ideational Landscapes of the Ancient Maya. In *Archaeologies of Landscape; Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Wendy Ashmore and Bernard Knapp, pp. 124-145. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.
- Brady, James
2005 The Impact of Ritual on Ancient Maya Economy. In *Stone Houses and Earth Lords: Maya Religion in the Cave Context*, edited by Keith Prufer, pp. 115-134. University Press of Colorado, Bolder.
- Chen, Mel
2012 *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Duke University Press, Durham and London.
- Coe, Michael
2011 *The Maya Eighth Edition*. Reprinted. Thames & Hudson Inc., New York. Originally published 1966, Thames & Hudson Inc., New York.
- Dowd, Anne
2015 Cosmovision in New World Ritual Landscapes: An Introduction. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 25(1): 211-218.
- Dowson, Thomas A.
2009 Queer Theory Meets Archaeology: Disrupting Epistemological Privilege and Heteronormativity in Constructing the Past. In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, edited by Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke, pp. 277-294. Ashgate Publishing Company, Vermont.
2000 Why Queer Archaeology: An Introduction. *World Archaeology* 32(2): 161-165.
2008 Queering Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt. In *Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt: 'Don your wig for a joyful hour,'* edited by Carolyn Graves-Brown, pp. 27-46. The Classical Press of Wales.
- Halperin, David
1995 *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Harrison Buck, Elanor
2007 *Materializing Identity Among the Terminal Classic Maya: Architecture and Ceramics in the Sibun Valley, Belize*. Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, Boston. University Microfilms, Ann Arbor.

Harrison, Jessica

- 2015a Cara Blanca Pool 1: Structure 1 Excavations and Comparison of Cara Blanca's Ceramics. In *Results of the 2014 Valley of Peace Archaeology Project: Underwater and Surface Explorations at Cara Blanca*, edited by L. J. Lucero, pp. 12-59. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, National Institute of Culture and History, Belize.
- 2015b Ritual Intensification and Regional Interaction in Terminal Classic Belize: A Comparative Analysis of the Ceramics of Cara Blanca and Saturday Creek. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign.

Joyce, Rosemary A.

- 2003 Concrete Memories: Fragments of the Past in the Classic Maya Present (500-1000 AD). In *Archaeologies of Memory*, edited by Ruth M. Van Dyke and Susan E. Alcock, pp. 104-126. Blackwell Publishing Company, Massachusetts.

Kinkella, Andrew

- 2009 *Draw of the Sacred Water: An Archaeological Survey of the Ancient Maya Settlement at the Cara Blanca Pools, Belize*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. University of California, Riverside.
- 2011 Return to Pool 1 and Reconnaissance at Pool 0: The 2010 Cara Blanca Settlement Survey. In *Results of the 201 Valley of Peace Archaeology Project: Cara Blanca and Yalbac*, edited by L. J. Lucero, pp. 53-68. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, National Institute of Culture and History, Belize.

Lucero, Lisa J.

- 2015 VOPA 2014 Underwater and Surface Explorations at Cara Blanca. In *Results of the 2014 Valley of Peace Archaeology Project: Underwater and Surface Explorations at Cara Blanca*, edited by L. J. Lucero, pp. 1-11. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, National Institute of Culture and History, Belize.
- 2011 Exploring the Sacred Pools of Cara Blanca, Belize. In *Results of the 201 Valley of Peace Archaeology Project: Cara Blanca and Yalbac*, edited by L. J. Lucero, pp. 12-27. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, National Institute of Culture and History, Belize.
- 2006 Water and Ritual: The Rise and Fall of Classic Maya Rulers. University of Texas Press, Texas.

Lucero, Lisa J. and Andrew Kinkella

- 2015 Pilgrimage to the Edge of the Watery Underworld: an Ancient Maya Water Temple at Cara Blanca, Belize. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 25(1): 163-185.

Nissen, Zachary A.

- 2015 Geomancy at Cara Blanca Pool 20: Mapping and Excavation. In *Results of the 2014 Valley of Peace Archaeology Project: Underwater and Surface Explorations at Cara Blanca*, edited by L. J. Lucero, pp. 76-101. Report submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, National Institute of Culture and History, Belize.
- 2014 Ritual as Intersectional: Queering Archaeological discussions of Maya Religious Practices. Paper presented at the 113th Annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington D.C.

Robin, Cynthia

- 2013 *Everyday Life Matters: Maya Farmers at Chan*. University Press of Florida, Florida.
- Schele, Linda and David Freidel

- 1990 *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*. William Morrow, New York.
- Somerville, Siobhan
- 2007 *Queer*. In *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, edited by Bruce Burgett and Glen Hendler, pp. 187-191. New York University Press, New York.
- Taube, Karl
- 2013 *The Classic Maya Temple: Centrality, Cosmology, and Sacred Geography in Ancient Mesoamerica*. In *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Ritual, and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World*, edited by Deena Ragavan, pp. 89-126. University of Chicago, Illinois.
- Voss, B. L.
- 2000 *Feminisms, Queer Theories, and the Archaeological Study of Past Sexualities*. *World Archaeology* 32(2):180–192.
- Voss, B. L., and R. A. Schmidt
- 2000 *Archaeologies of Sexuality: An Introduction*. In *World Archaeology*, edited by R. A. Schmidt, and B. L. Voss. Routledge, London, pp. 1–35.
- Weedon, Chris
- 1999 *feminism, theory, and the politics of difference*. Blackwell Publishers Company, Massachusetts.
- Woodfill, Brent K.S., Jon Spenard and Megan Parker
- 2015 *Caves, Hills, and Caches: The Importance of Karst Landscapes for the Prehispanic and Contemporary Maya*. *GSA Special Volume Caves and Karst Across Time*, In Press.