ABSTRACT

The goal of this project was to understand the identity of the residents of the site known as El Cafetal, located in El Paraiso, Copan, Honduras within the larger regional cultural milieu of the South East Maya Area. This Area includes Western Honduras, Eastern Guatemala, and El Salvador. 

I used data from my own excavations, which were carried out in the 1996 field season of the Kenyon Honduras Program, as well as project reports and direct communications with Honduran program directors and members to represent El Cafetal. I completed an exhaustive literary review and examination of data sets from surrounding archaeological sites in order to gain comparative data about other regional sites. These comparisons focused on site layout and site style. El Cafetal and 15 other regional sites were then classified on the basis of site plans and site style. These comparisons highlight possible relationships between El Cafetal and several of the major sites in the South East Maya Area. This Area includes Western Honduras, Eastern Guatemala, and El Salvador.

METHODS

The table I created, which uses 14 categories, compares the site cores of sixteen sites from the South East Mesoamerican Area. A site core constitutes the formalized political and ceremonial center of a given site. The basic spatial unit of a core is a plaza, which is typically an open space bounded on four sides by inward facing structures. In order to define the core, I found the plaza on a site map that contained the highest concentration of monumental structures or the largest monumental structure. I defined the core as the space as well as any plaza that abuts the site space or were oriented similarly to this space. Some sites have multiple areas that can be defined as a core and I took into account all of these areas in my counts as well as definitions.

Most of the categories on the table I created are self explanatory and have to do with simple qualitative observations. I systematically counted plazas and buildings within the area I marked as the site core for the building and plaza counts. I used a hierarchical created by Wiley and Levonthal at Copan as a comparative framework in the site type category (Wiley and Levonthal 1979).

RESULTS

The presence of a similarly sized site less than 1 km away from El Cafetal as well as another site similarly positioned in relation to El Cafetal is another pattern that may shed some light on regional identity. El Paraiso and El Abra are the names of these two sites. They each have more typically Maya quadrangular site plans. These sites were probably outposts used either for trade or more direct control. In any case they demonstrate something of the nature of relations between the Maya and their neighbors.

DISCUSSION

El Cafetal shows both striking similarities to its Maya neighbors as well as other sites in the region. We found Maya style sculpture as well as some pieces of sculpture (which may well have been stolen from a neighboring site) in the Maya style within the El Cafetal site core. Other elements such as the use of masonry within the site as well as the orthogonal orientation of the site fall into the Maya pattern of site design. However, El Cafetal's site layout may have more in common with other centers to the east and south than cloudy Maya centers. El Cafetal as well as the centers El Puente and Los Higos from the La Entrada region and El Coyote from the Santa Barbara region all have large, relatively easily accessible, and roughly orthogonally oriented plazas. A typical feature of these sites is also can be seen by the presence of relatively long residential structures that help to define these plazas. This style is absent in many of the more typically Maya sites such as Rio Amarrillo and El Paraiso, where relatively private enclosed quadrangles are favored and residential structures are grouped within these quadrangles. The grouping of residential buildings in private patios versus opening onto large, accessible public spaces may connote a major difference in values between Elites in these different sites. The large, open plaza at sites like El Cafetal, El Puente, and El Coyote may indicate different elite views on privacy as well as a kin structure.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
