



# SITE LAYOUT AND STYLE A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN THE SOUTH EAST MESOAMERICAN ZONE



COURTESY OF FAMSJ



## 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 2006 field season of the Kenyon Honduras Program, as well as project reports and direct communications with Honduras program directors and members to represent El Cafetal. I completed an extensive literature review and examination of data sets from surrounding archeological 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 using 14 categories ranging from site size, to building material. These comparisons highlighted possible relationships between El Cafetal and several of the major sites in the La Venta and La Florida valleys as well possible relations with the farther away sight of El Coyote in the Santa Barbara region.

## METHODS

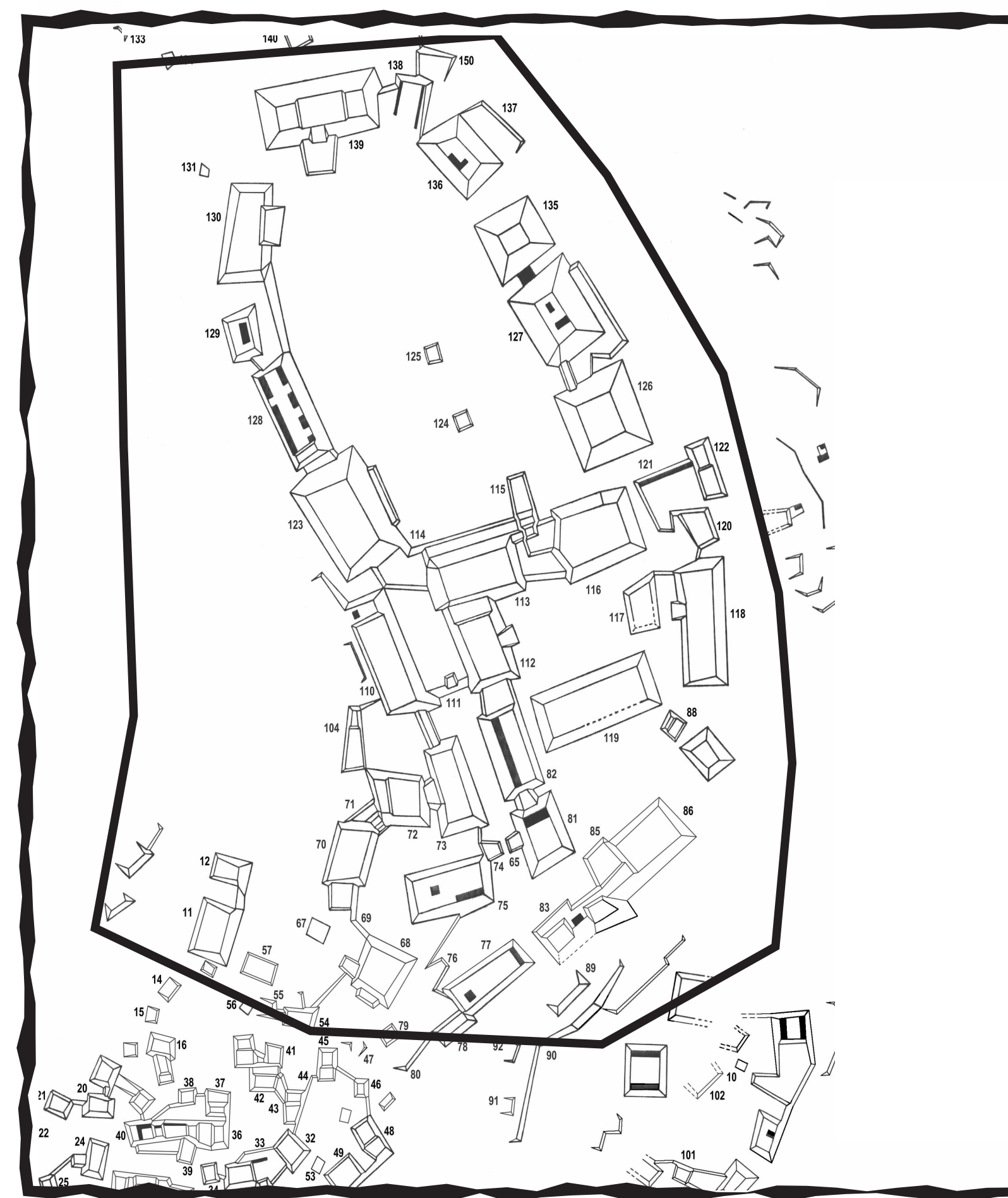
The table I created, which uses 14 categories, compares the site cores of sixteen sites from the South East Mesoamerican Area. A site core constitutes the formalized political and ceremonial center of a given site. The basic spatial unit of a core is a plaza, which simplistically is an open space bounded 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 monumental structures or the largest monumental structures. I defined the core as this space as well as any plazas that abutted this space or were oriented similarly to this space. Some sites have multiple areas that can be defined as a core and I took into accounts 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 hierarchy created by Wiley and Leventhal at Copan as a comparative framework in the site type category (Wiley and Leventhal 1979).



EL PUENTE

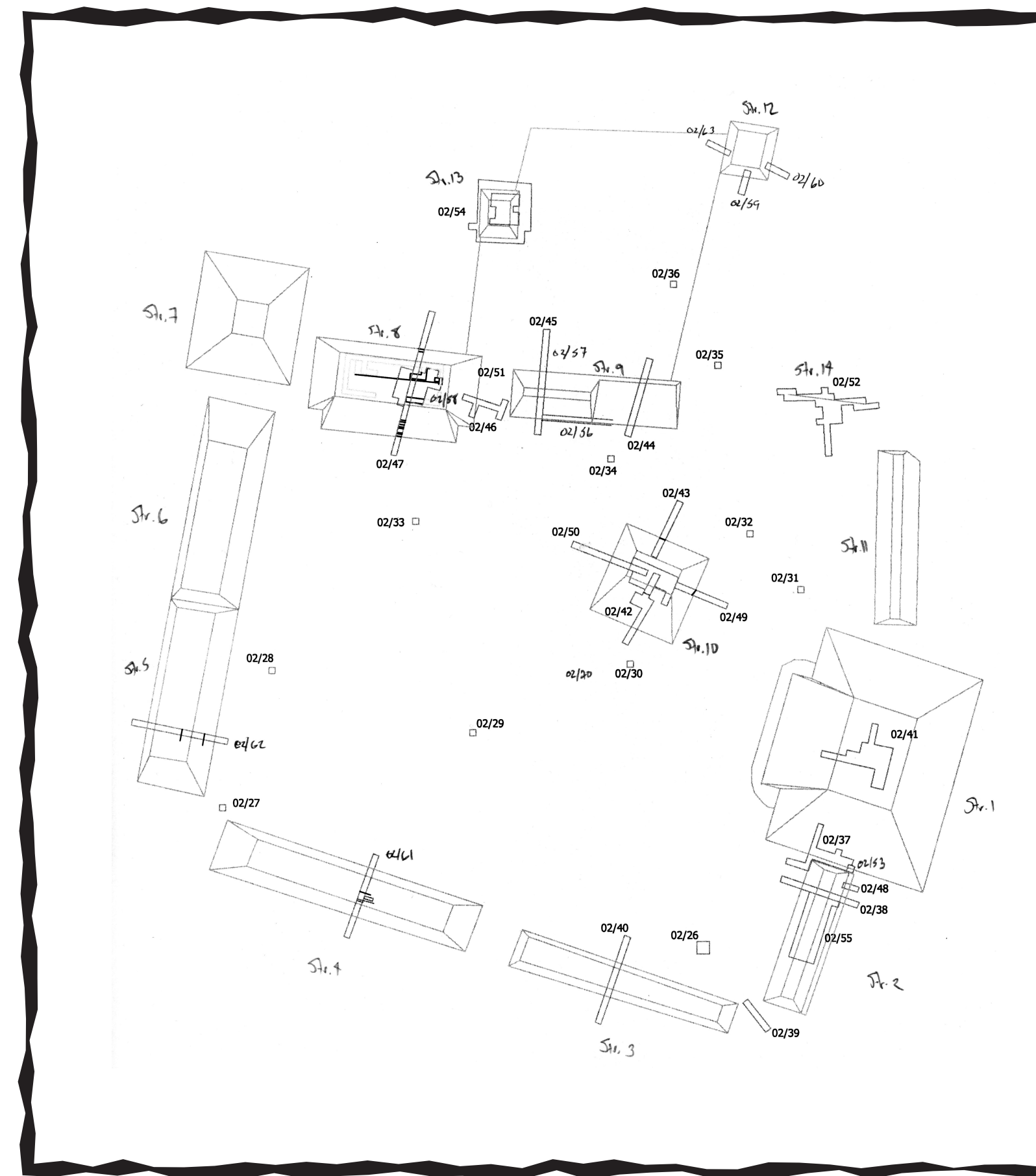
EL COYOTE SITE MAP



COURTESY OF PVC AND IIAH

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EL CAFETAL SITE MAP



COURTESY OF PVEP AND IIAH

EL ABRA AND EL PUENTE SITE MAP

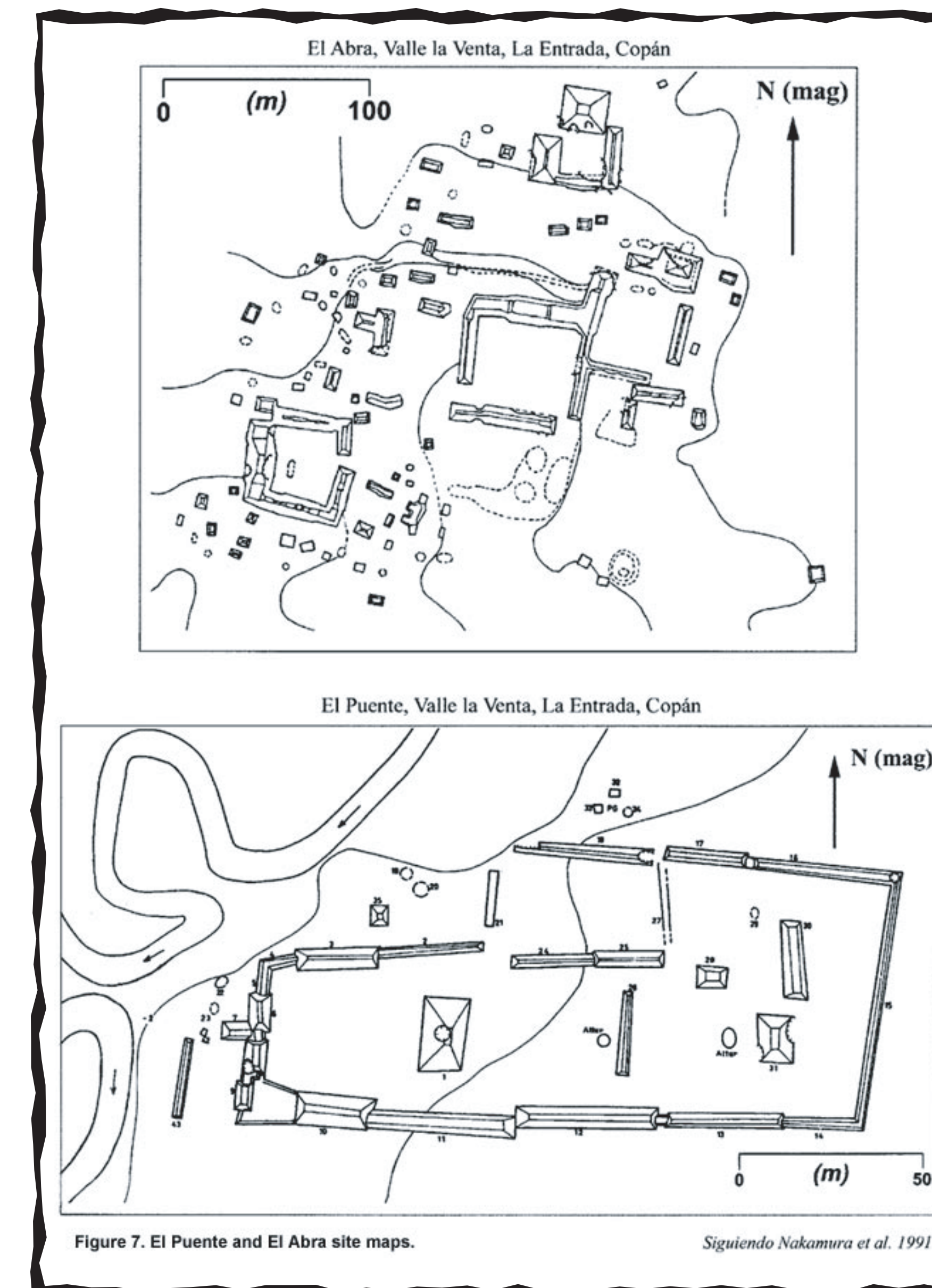


Figure 7. El Puente and El Abra site maps.

Sigüendo Nakamura et al. 1991

## 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 stucco 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 closely 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 sights also can be seen by the presence 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 Amarillo 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 plazas at sites like El Cafetal, El Puente and El Coyote may indicate different elite views on privacy as well as kin structure.

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 Puente 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 Mayan 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.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Wiley, Gordon and Leventhal, Richard  
1979. *Prehistoric Settlement At Copan*. Cambridge Symposium on Recent Research in Mesoamerican Archaeology, 2d, 1976. Maya archaeology and ethnohistory. -- Austin : University of Texas Press, c1979. p. 75-102



EL CAFETAL

## RESULTS

Site Name	Site Size				Site Organization		
	# of Strs?	# of Plazas?	Site Type?	Paired site?	Core Organization	materials used for plaza surface?	Cosmologically oriented?
El Cafetal	13	2	III	Yes	orthogonal plaza	tamped earth, cobbles	No
El Paraiso	14	4	IV	Yes	sunken quadrangle	stucco	No
Copan	52	12	IV	No	orthogonal plaza, sunken quadrangle, acropolis	stucco, earth, masonry	Yes
Quirigua	19	3	IV	No	orthogonal plaza, sunken quadrangle, acropolis	stucco, earth, masonry	Yes
Rio Amarillo	20	7	IV	No	quadrangle	plaster, gravel,	No
El Raizal	17	4	II	No	quadrangle	tamped earth	No
El Puente	27	6	IV	Yes	orthogonal plaza	stucco, earth	No
El Abra	37	9	IV	Yes	sunken quadrangle	stucco, earth	No
Los Higos	28	9	IV	No	informally aligned plaza	stucco, earth, masonry	No
El Coyote	42	7	III	No	raised, partially restricted orthogonal plaza	stucco	No
El Roncador	49	10	III	No	informally aligned plaza	stucco	No
Las Quebradas	44	14	III	No	sunken quadrangle	stucco	No
La Sierra	39	4	III	No	informally aligned plaza	earth	No
Gualjoquito	36	6	III	No	informally aligned plaza	stucco, earth	Yes
El Balsamo	21	4	II	No	random dispersal	earth	No
Morja	12	3	IV	No	sunken quadrangle	Earth	No

Site Name	Structure Types		Building Materials, Architectural features and embellishments				
	Pyramidal struc?	Ballicourt?	Building materials used	Masonry superstructures	Stone vaults?	Stuccoed?	Glyphs or sculpture?
El Cafetal	Yes	No	shaped stone, cobble	Yes, limited	No	Yes	No
El Paraiso	Yes	No	cut toba, shaped stone, cobble	Yes, normal	No	Yes	Yes
Copan	Yes	Yes	cut toba, piedra rustica, cobble	Yes, abundant	Yes	Yes	Yes
Quirigua	Yes	Yes	cut toba, cobble, marble	Yes, abundant	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rio Amarillo	Yes	No	cut toba, cobble	Yes, normal	Yes	Yes	Yes
El Raizal	No	No	cut toba, cobble	Yes, limited	No	No	No
El Puente	Yes	No	cut toba, cobble	Yes, limited	Yes	Yes	Yes
El Abra	Yes	No	cut toba, cobble	Yes, normal	Unknown	Yes	Yes
Los Higos	Yes	No	cut toba, cobble	Yes, normal	Yes	Yes	Yes
El Coyote	Yes	Yes	cobble (need to look at pictures)	No	No	Yes	No
El Roncador	Yes	Yes	uncut limestone, cut toba	No	No	Yes	No
Las Quebradas	No	No	cobble	No	No	Yes	No
La Sierra	Yes	No	cobble, some shaped stone	Yes	No	Yes	No
Gualjoquito	Yes	Yes	cobble, some shaped stone	No	No	Yes	No
El Balsamo	No	No	cobble	No	No	No	No
Morja	Yes	Yes	shaped marble, cobble	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown