In the Shadow of a Giant

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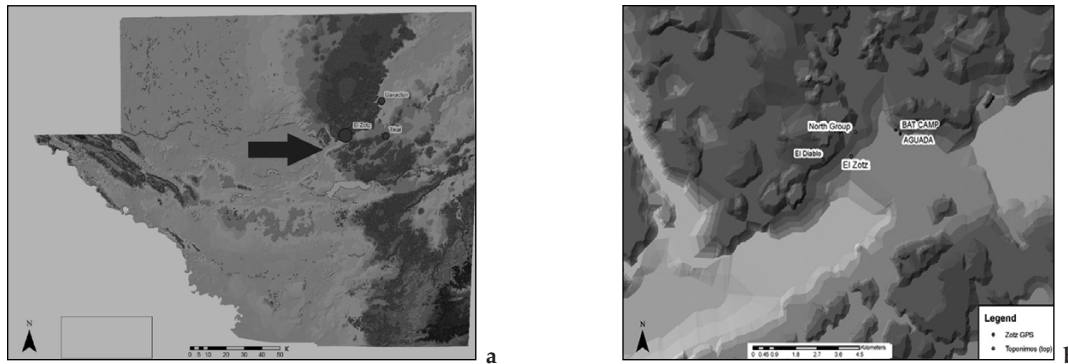

Figure 1. Physical setting of El Zotz, Guatemala: (a) the wider context (note valley); (b) close-up of El Zotz and area.

Abstract

An enduring problem in studies of history and society is the question of political domination over people and landscape: how was such control achieved, and what were its varieties? An ideal setting to investigate this problem is ancient Maya kingdom of El Zotz, Guatemala, which flourished in the middle years of the first millennium CE. At El Zotz, preliminary evidence indicates the sudden creation of a dynastic seat, with all the palatial and mortuary facilities associated with Maya rulership. The city appears to result from geopolitical strategy: (1) it was placed close to the immense Maya city of Tikal, with historical evidence of support from long-standing enemies of the Tikal dynasty; (2) it controlled a key route connecting two major regions of the Maya world; and (3) it flourished precisely when Tikal was weakened by surrounding dynasties of hostile intent. As a new royal court, El Zotz bears all the marks of a "founded" city or, in a recently developed label, a "reembedded capital." It existed, not as an organic growth from local agriculture and settlement, but as the center of an innovative, reconfigured polity that flourished along a borderland between two larger kingdoms. As such, El Zotz relates to key debates about the nature of governance in traditional, pre-industrial polities of relatively modest scale: namely, whether decision-making was diffuse and conflictive ("heterarchical") in such "city-states," or centralized and hierarchical. El Zotz and its environs are targeted as part of a three-year investigation of broad scope and collaborative intent. The goal is to test explicit expectations of El Zotz as a "reembedded capital," with a number of provable or deniable predictions: (1) poor linkages to agriculture; (2) disarticulation from earlier settlement; (3) novel religious and courtly practices; (4) relative instability and fragility; (5) deliberate contrasts in material culture, diet, and demography with competing kingdoms, and (6) further historical evidence from a region that remains poorly known, if savagely looted. The result will be fresh insights into the formation, growth, and decline of pre-industrial kingdoms and royal courts.

Introduction

The Classic Maya settlement of El Zotz, Guatemala, is within a day's walk of Tikal, the largest and most renowned Maya city (Figure 1, Martin and Grube 2000:24-53). Yet El Zotz and the zone around it are virtually unknown to scholars, if looted with vigor

by traffickers in antiquities. El Zotz supervises a key valley, with adjacent uplands, that communicates between two parts of the Maya Lowlands, and would seem, on archaeology alone, to represent a subordinate of Tikal. However, recent mapping at El Zotz and re-evaluation of texts linked to it compel a substitute view: that the city flourished opportunistically, as a royal court nurtured by powers hostile to Tikal when this major capital stumbled and slowed its erection of monuments and dynastic buildings. The possibility of such rapid and strategic settlement runs counter to a recent body of thinking in archaeology that favors "heterarchical" or non-hierarchical decision making in the conduct of traditional polities. An alternative model for many societies, and, as suggested here, for El Zotz and neighboring kingdoms, is one that emphasizes ruler and court within a system that balances hierarchy and faction, all flowing around the person of the ruler and the processes of patronage found around such a figure. On present evidence, El Zotz corresponds closely to royal, courtly establishments and, as strategic settlement, to "reimbedded capitals," elite-centered communities of rapid origin that were often unstable and short-lived (Joffe 1998:573). Beginning in May, 2008, a three-year archaeological project at the site will test and extend preliminary results that show the rapid florescence and decay of a single court over a relatively brief span of time. Processes and sequences concealed and blurred by heavy overburden at other sites are exposed more easily in El Zotz, a city that grew, and expired, in the shadow of a giant.

Hierarchy and Heterarchy

A long-standing theme in historical and anthropological research is the control of people and land. In most political theory the more traditional orientation is to see such control as the result of central decision-making, with two variant forms of hierarchical organization or domination (*Herrschaft*) in polities of the past (Weber 1978:53-56, 948-953, 1013-1015, 1055-1059). The first is "sovereignty," an arrangement of direct, *de facto* rule that serves and depends on the allegiance of sectional interests, particularly elites (Hinsley 1966:26). The second might be called "suzerainty," which acknowledges the role of *de jure* authority, a fluid by-product of asymmetrical relations between people or groups (Lincoln 1994:4; Smith 2003:106). Sovereignty hints at coercion and command over substantive

resources—the "objective bases of power" that revolve around production, exchange, and consumption, usually vested in one person and the institution he or she represents (Blanton 1998:Table 152; Wolf 1982:97). Suzerainty tends to rely, in its classic formulation by Max Weber, on symbolic underpinnings, claims to legitimacy, and perceptions of social contract. Ideally, the two systems of rule converge in one person or group of people so as to create an effective form of governance.

The difficulty with such formulations is their reliance on abstract concepts that, in application, bear multiple exceptions (Smith 2003:93). For example, terms such as "state" project a notion of bureaucratic control that often pertains best to the modern period; for some scholars, the very terms of political theory do not have much utility away from particular settings viewed over time (e.g., Aretxaga 2003:398; Onuf 1991:426-427). In response to such criticisms, another, opposed perspective has come into the scholarly literature: "heterarchy," which describes simultaneous rule or decision-making by different, often cross-cutting groups or people choosing either to cooperate or conflict with one another (Crumley 1995, 2003:137; Crumley and Marquardt 1987; Yoffee 2005:179). Raising doubts about the self-descriptions of polities, this alternative emphasizes the relative autonomy of constituent groups, "self-organization" as a mode of non-centralized, non-hierarchical decision-making, multiple frictions between them, the overall complexity of human interaction, and ruptures between the declared operation of states and their actual performance, which, contrary to proclamation, can be inefficient or ill-informed (Blanton 1998:167; Scott 1998:352-345; Yoffee 2005:92-94). The dispersed nature of resources in the Maya Lowlands lends itself to heterarchical views, as multiple interactions are necessary to exploit such a mosaic of microzones (Scarborough 1998:137). Further reflection suggests that the opposition of hierarchy to heterarchy is valuable as a way of honing thought. But, as even proponents acknowledge, it is illusory to make a radical distinction between the two. All complex polities display elements of both kinds of organization: heterarchical components of society (i.e., opposed groups or institutions) seldom exist without their own forms of hierarchical organization (Crumley and Marquardt 1987:618-619; Crumley 2003:144; Yoffee 2005:179). The question is, which tendency—conflictive and deliberate or top-down and faster-paced—comes to dominate and under what conditions?

Classic Maya Polities

The Classic Maya, who lived in the millions across the Yucatan peninsula from about CE 250 to 850, fit a variety of societal models, depending on local patterns and scholarly predisposition. The most cautious labels are "polity" or "kingdom" (Webster 2002:164), but many others make an appearance (Lucero 1999:212-216): "regional state" (Adams 1990:Fig. 1), "superpower" (Martin and Grube 1995:45; since modified to "overkingship" or "hegemony," Martin and Grube 2000:19-20), "segmentary state" (Houston 1987), "city-state" (Webster 1997), all of which savor of diverse opinion, ranging from centralized to non-centrist models of governance (Fox et al. 1996). Some of the models are doubtful, such as the versions positing large-scale polities run from Tikal, Guatemala during the late first millennium CE (e.g., Adams 1999:17). Fine-grained historical evidence does not support such a view, although it confirms the existence of broad and orderly patterns of overlordship and subalterns, some with the highest *social* rank, that of "holy lord." Indeed, one site, Calakmul, appears to deserve the label of a hegemonic polity employing a "grand strategy" of expansive influence over a century or so (Martin and Grube 2000:25; Parker 1998:1). Nonetheless, all models have some validity in that they capture the diverse realities of political organization during the Classic period. No polity escapes the centripetal and centrifugal forces that result variously in the fission or fusion of social groups.

An abstract model is a dry exercise in typology without cultural and historical detail. This is where *process*, a series of operational principles (e.g., "rulers seek allies," "elites wish for greater autonomy from rulers," "non-elites tend to farm," "giving and taking creates bonds within communities"), becomes refined by *sequence*, the actual interplay of processes over time in certain political and ecological settings. This refinement must be done, however, with tight control over data and consideration of the social thrust and pull within polities. For example, attempts to craft so-called "dynamic models" that describe aggregation and decomposition of Maya polities are deficient in addressing either process or sequence (Marcus 1998:59-60). One chart presents a horizontal pattern of specified time and an unspecified vertical dimension of undulating lines that are meant to show "consolidation and breakdown" (Marcus 1998:Fig. 3.2). A chart with determined x-axis and undetermined y-axis is not an explanation; it is merely an impression. Small-scale polities absorb into large ones and then fracture again into constituent polities, but without any clear focus on internal structure or process. A wavering line inferred in this fashion for the ancient Maya, the Andes, the Aegean, Mesopotamia, and Egypt does not address how polities came together, sustained themselves, and disintegrated at a later time (e.g., Marcus 1998:Figs. 3.4, 3.5, 3.8, 3.13, 3.14); nor does it reveal the actors, values, beliefs, institutions, social distinctions, physical setting that factor into a sequenced account of how land and people are governed—or control of them relinquished.

Maya Royal Courts

An undeniable feature of Classic Maya settlements of any size is the presence of king, magnate, and court (Inomata and Houston 2001). These, as people, places or institutions, play a central role in any discussion of Classic Maya governance. Some influential studies of Maya polities do not once refer to them, preferring depersonalized terms like "state" or their hypothesized precursors, "chiefdoms" (e.g., Marcus 1998:61-66). Despite this, a growing body of evidence suggests that Classic-period rule took place as part of the process and sequence of courtly systems and kingship. The system itself probably began to develop during the final centuries of the Preclassic period, when palace facilities and identifiable images of kings came into existence, perhaps as imitations of practices in the area of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and beyond (Clark and Hansen 2001:32-36). By the Terminal Classic period (c. CE 850) the courtly system was in active decay throughout much of the southern Lowlands in the Yucatan peninsula (Houston et al. 2001).

According to current evidence, a Maya king operated within a court, an entity that was at once spatial and relational (Inomata and Houston 2001:3; see also the classic exposition by Sanders and Webster 1988, where Maya settlements of larger size often correspond to hypertrophied courts). As a *place*, the court housed the ruler and equated to "palaces," so-named after the Palatine hill in Rome where imperial quarters could be found (Christie 2006:3-6, 14-17). Sometimes, the court was impermanent or highly peripatetic. Possible seasonal palaces among the Maya attest to such movement (Iannone 2001, 2004; Taschek and Ball 2004:198). As a *group*, the court consisted of a central figure and

the people who tended to royal needs and lived off lordly largesse. To be sure, there were genuine contrasts arising from local court practices, royal personality, and the effects of scale and population. Face-to-face governance probably differed from contacts lacking in direct familiarity, perhaps the crucial distinction between dynastic seats like Dos Pilas, of small size, and Calakmul, with its far larger and more complex set of facilities (Martin 2001:175).

Cross-cultural comparison suggests that only five elements were required for a Maya court: (1) a monad (a human pivot to which others defer); (2) others that seek contact with, and control over, the monad (courtiers and servitors); (3) the resources, symbolic and real, to make this striving worthwhile and to support such extravagance; (4) an acute understanding of hierarchy—of how to behave in socially asymmetrical encounters that characterize courts; and (5) a physical setting for such encounters. A vast literature documents these elements, allowing the possibility of broad generalizations about courtly behavior and its recurrent patterns (e.g., Adamson 1999; Brown and Elliott 1980; Costa Gomes 2003; Elias 1983; Geertz 1977, 1980; Howes 2003; Ladurie 2001; Steane 1993, including models from Mesoamerica, Inomata and Houston 2001). For example, as a concept, "court" blurs the distinction, rarely evident in most societies, between bureaucrats and courtiers, administrative duties and the person and spiritual role of the ruler (Inomata 2001:31; Vale 2001:298-299). And it makes clear that, without the monad—the ruler—the system must wither until another monad is found. Against this is a demonstrable predisposition: the physical mass of the court and the many needs it serves create an impetus to maintain the court system and its many practices (Webster 2001:131-132). Logically, a system sustains itself if participants "buy into" its predicates. A firm blow must occur, as it did during the so-called Maya "collapse," to neutralize such a node of joint self-interest.

The "human pivot" of Maya courts is the "holy lord," *k'uhul ajaw* or, rarely, the "lady holy lord," *ix k'uhul ajaw* (Houston and Stuart 2001:59-61). Around that pivot operate: family members, near, far, even fictive; courtiers, including "favorites"; servants and those generally in attendance; slaves and purveyors of goods and services; allies of varying fidelity; and, in replications across the landscape, the smaller courts of magnates and lesser nobility (Miller and Martin 2004:23-27, passim; see Water-

field 2003:10-12; Woolgar 1999:8-29). Whatever its scale, the court contains many features of a household, a place of procreation, production, pleasure, and consumption (Fowden 2004:64-84). Among the Classic Maya, scholars now know, some goods and services came from tribute (Houston et al. 2006:244-248), but other economic underpinnings remain unclear: did rulers rely on personal estates for their foodstuffs or on plantations of exportable plants such as cacao and tobacco? The answer to this question is not easily resolved, but courts did at least embody the good life, indulging whim yet allowing displays of exemplary piety (Brown and Elliot 1980:193-199).

Making and Unmaking a Royal Court at El Zotz, Guatemala

If strong cases can be made for both hierarchy centered on kings and courts and heterarchy resulting in part from tensions around rulers, then the question posed before remains front and center: how can the workings of such processes be discerned archaeologically and historically? And when does one process, either of heterarchy or hierarchy, clearly dominate over the other? An excellent setting to answer such questions is the in the region in and around the Classic settlement of El Zotz, Guatemala (Figure 1, c. N17.23265 W89.82425). The site came to official attention in 1977, after which time it was assigned, in 1987, to the San Miguel la Palotada Biotope, a natural reserve of some 34,934 hectares under the care of the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (Congreso de la República de Guatemala 1990). A preserve for several endangered species of mammal, the biotope is now under acute threat from agriculture, poaching, forest-fires, and illegal extraction of non-timber forest products (ParksWatch n.d.:9). According to a monitoring group, ParksWatch, the lack of archaeological exploration and full cultural inventory limits effective management of the park.

At its main pyramid, El Zotz lies 23 km from the main plaza at Tikal, Guatemala, the largest settlement in this sector of Guatemala. A matter of astonishment to many visitors is that the largest pyramids at Tikal are fully visible from the summit of the highest structures at El Zotz (Figure 2d). As to its ecological setting, El Zotz overlooks a long, seasonally swampy valley that connects two regions of intense Maya settlement, the bajos and uplands extending from Tikal north to Uaxactun and beyond,
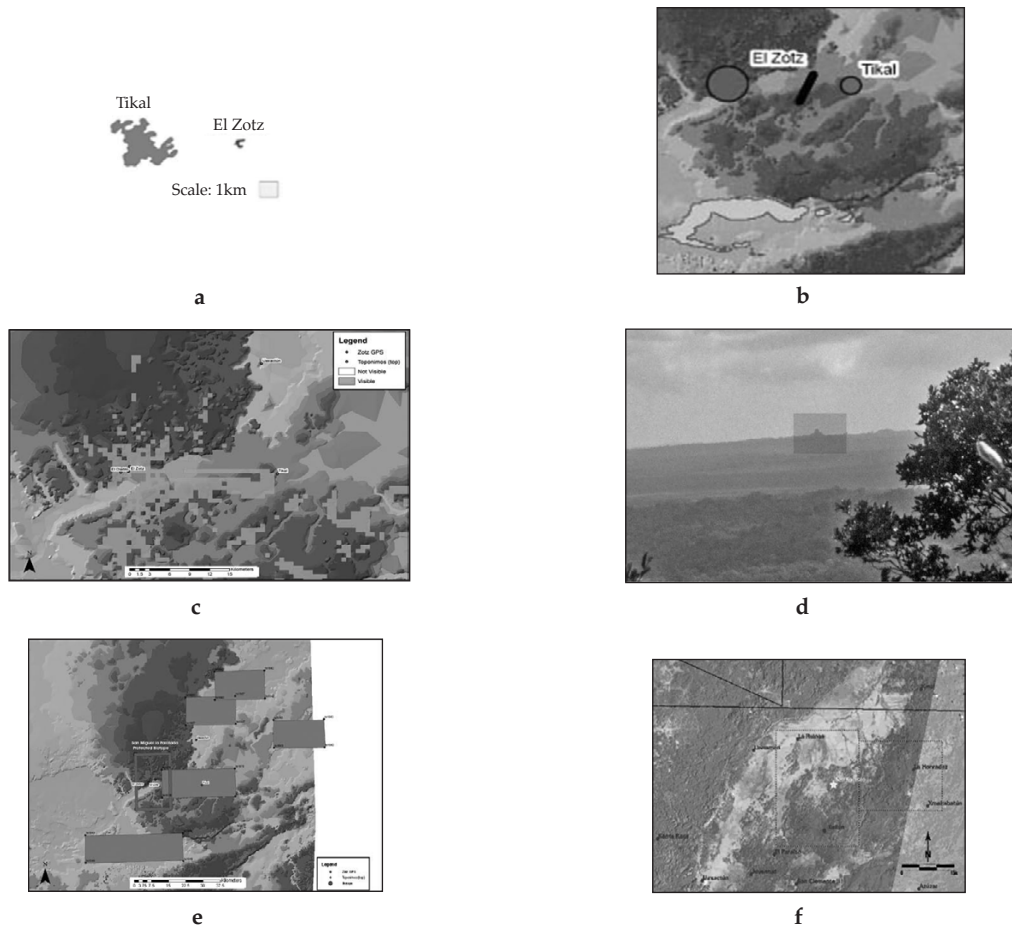
Figure 2. Regional perspectives of El Zotz: (a) comparison of Tikal to El Zotz; (b) earthworks between El Zotz and Tikal; (c) viewshed from El Zotz; (d) Tikal Temple IV from El Zotz; (e) satellite coverage near El Zotz; (f) satellite view, San Bartolo (Saturno and colleagues).
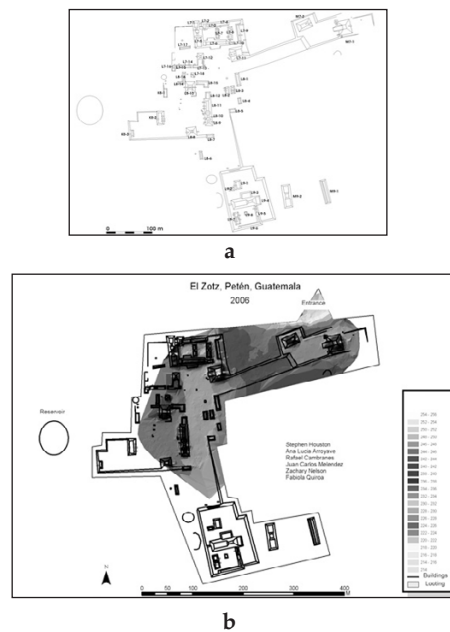

Figure 3. El Zotz, Guatemala: (a) site numeration; (b) contour map, 2006.

and a vast area that opens into the drainage of the San Pedro Mártir River. Agriculturalists today find the land swampy and unsuitable for sustained cultivation, although this would need to be evaluated by archaeo-pedology. The name of the site, "the bat" in several Mayan languages, is not original. El Zotz seems first to have been termed "Dos Aguadas" after the two natural reservoirs within a kilometer of the ruins. To avoid confusion with many places of the same name, this was changed in 1977 to "El Zotz," after a large population of bats living in a partly collapsed sinkhole nearby (Laporte 2006:878). Today, the site lies along an eco-touristic path operated by a local community of Q'eq'chi Maya at Cruce Dos Aguadas (InfoHub n.d.).

Earlier research

El Zotz suffered heavily from looting in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Heedless of prosecution, looters recorded their names and date of work ("1969") on the plastered walls of Structure M7-1 (Andrews 1986:124). More than 89 trenches disfigure the center of the ruins, some passing from one side of a pyramid to another (Figure 3). The amount of fill moved by looters comes to approximately 900 m^3, but with little evidence that much was encountered—thieves appear to have sacked only one royal tomb, in Structure L8-13. The sole archaeology done prior to 2006 consisted of five useful, if limited, efforts: no systematic or large-scale excavations have ever taken place at El Zotz. The first exploration occurred in 1977, under Marco Antonio Bailey, who created a map of the ruins and registered the site with the Guatemalan government (Laporte 2006:Fig. 4). The following year, George Andrews documented a large group 1 km to the west, labeling it El Diablo, "the Devil" (Andrews 1986:123-124). Andrews (1986:Figs. 4-7) described similarities between pyramids at Tikal and El Zotz and revealed the existence of heavy stucco and polychromed ornamentation on buildings visible in trenches at El Diablo.

At about the same time, Ian Graham also visited El Zotz. He prepared what was, until recently, the most detailed plan of the site, carefully noting the location of each looter's trench (Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions files, Peabody Museum, Harvard University, and personal communication 2005). This plan served as a guide for project mapping efforts in 2006. During his visit Graham recorded texts on the stelae still at El Zotz—at least two sawn butts at the site attest to the presence of stolen monuments (see also Mayer 1993). Later, Graham showed that a carved lintel of chicozapote wood, then in the Denver Art Museum, came originally from Structure M7-1, a fact proved by matching the size, pigment, and carving style of fragments left at El Zotz with the sculpture at Denver (Figure 4). With this compelling evidence, Guatemala secured the return of the lintel in 1998 (Schuster 1999). The monument is now on display in the National Museum, Guatemala City. A crucial addition to Graham's work was the documentation of two stelae and a carved altar at Bejucal, some 7 km to the northeast of Zotz.

A separate series of visits was carried out by members of the Proyecto Nacional Tikal and the Departamento de Monumentos Prehispánicos (DEMOPRE) of the Guatemalan Institute of Anthropology and History (IDAEH). These efforts in-
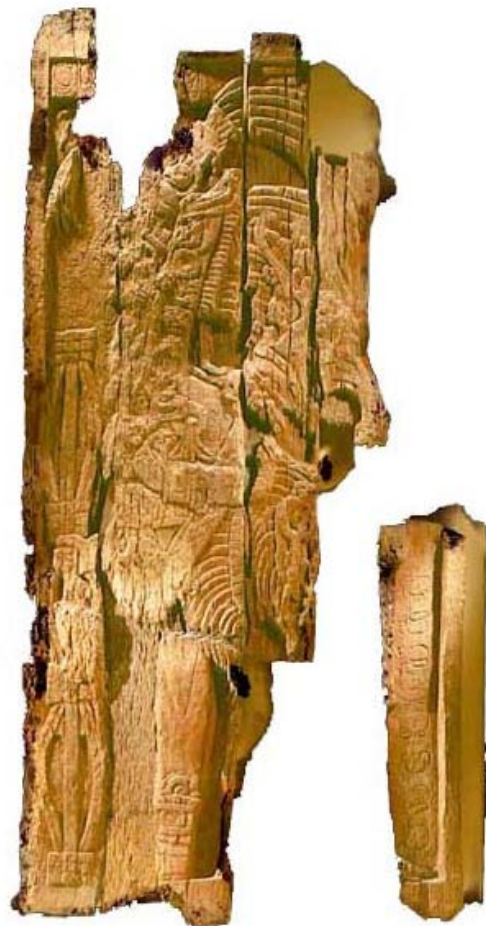

Figure 4. Wooden Lintel 1, El Zotz (Museo Nacional, Guatemala City; photo: Justin Kerr).

volved additional mapping (1987, 1995, 1999, and 2000), architectural consolidation (1989), and limited test-pitting and salvage (1983, 2000, Laporte 2006:880; Quintana and Wurster 2001:38-40). Published results come mostly from the 1983 fieldwork, which recovered Late Early Classic and early Late Classic ceramics (Tzakol and Tepeu 1) from the "Acropolis," the likely palace at El Zotz. Other finds included Late Classic offerings near Stela 1 and cache vessels from Structure M7-1 that appear to date to the early years of the Late Classic period, c. AD 600-650 (Laporte 2006:888-889). A thin scrim of Terminal Classic sherds lay on the surface of the Acropolis, but not enough to show evidence of substantial occupation (Laporte 2006:891).

Prior work by present team

The current project began its work in January 2006 with special authorization from the Guatemalan authorities. The goal was to map El Zotz with more refined equipment—earlier maps resulted from measurements with compass or theodolite—and to record accurate profiles of looters' trenches (Houston et al. 2006). Team members discovered that the city appeared to be bulky with monumental architecture, particularly its "acropolis" or palace. But the dates were of relatively short duration, as determined from ceramics extracted from looters' tunnels at the site. Visible stratigraphy did not show levels beyond ones that could be dated, from collected sherds, to the final years of the Early Classic period, and possibly, from information supplied by the Proyecto Nacional Tikal, to the beginnings of the Late Classic period. In effect, El Zotz seemed to be a city with explosive, relatively late expansion, heavy investment in palaces and mortuary pyramids, and rapid decline within century or so.

Epigraphy

Hieroglyphic texts linked with El Zotz and its subsidiary of Bejucal have fleshed out the picture considerably. Several years ago, David Stuart recognized, in the wooden lintel from Structure M7-1, the presence of two, exalted titles or "Emblem glyphs" associated with El Zotz (Figure 5). One included a sign with the image of an ear ornament, the other a sign with a "split sky," probably read *pa' chan* or *sihyaj chan*, "broken sky" or "sky-born" (Martin 2004). The finding was surprising, for both
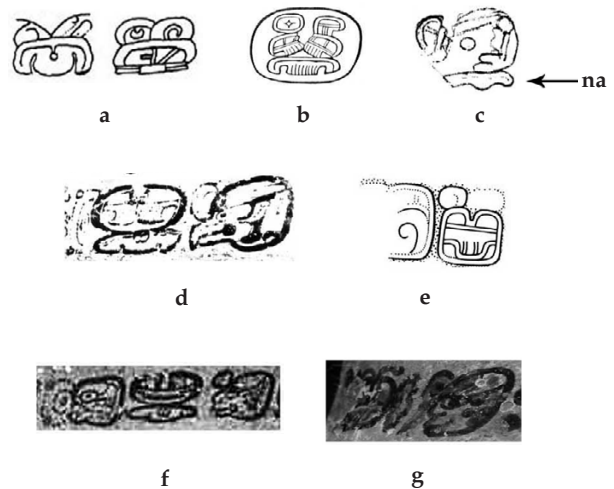

Figure 5. "Split-sky" Emblem title of El Zotz: (a) jade plaque; (b) Canberra Vase; (c) El Zotz wooden lintel; (d) Hellmuth Archive, Dumbarton Oaks; (e) Uaxactun Stela 2:A9-B9; (f) Kerr 8389; (g) El Peru (outskirts of).

emblems were none other than those linked to the major dynastic seat of Yaxchilan, Mexico (Martin and Grube 2000:117). A few years before, Peter Mathews had suggested that these glyphs not only served the city of Yaxchilan, but Uaxactun, a major site to the north of Tikal (Peter Mathews, personal communication 1982). Perhaps the dynasty of Yaxchilan, a more recent capital, had "hived off" from the original family in Uaxactun, an identification that made sense of several looted objects with the Emblems (e.g., K8458a in Justin Kerr's database at MayaVase.com). For stylistic reasons, none could have been made in Yaxchilan. They are artifacts linked to the general region of Uaxactun, in the north-central Peten, Guatemala.

The ties with Yaxchilan are difficult to evaluate. Available data from Yaxchilan, where such a question must be resolved, are inadequate (e.g., García Moll 2003). Moreover, present evidence proves that the Emblem titles in question belong, not to Uaxactun, but to the ruler of El Zotz, as first proposed by David Stuart (personal communication, 1999). Uaxactun has its own, distinct Emblem, as seen on several stelae at that site (Stela 12:B3, Stela 14:C14). At Uaxactun, the only occurrence of the "split-sky" Emblem, refers, on Stela 2:B9, to an act of offering at a foreign center, not Uaxactun itself. The proximity of El Zotz—26 km from Uaxactun—strengthens this view.

With the Emblem identified, much history locks into step. The rulers of El Zotz employed a repeat-

ed name, consisting of a color adjective, "red" or *chak*, a fish, a dog or fox, and, occasionally, a turtle as the final element: [CHAK-?-?-ahk] (Figure 6). A vase in the collection of the Museu Barbier-Mueller in Barcelona spells out the name, along with that of the ruler's mother (K679, Museu Barbier-Mueller 1997:Pls. 288, 289*)*; the same combination appears with a far earlier ruler on one of the stelae from Bejucal, confirming El Zotz's connection to that smaller site. The Bejucal stela is also important in geopolitical terms. It indicates that *Sihyaj K'ahk'* or "Born-from-fire," a personage linked to incursions from Teotihuacan, Mexico, or sites related to it, was the overlord (*yajaw*) of the king of El Zotz (Stuart 2000:479). Another finding is that many dozens of looted vessels with a distinctive red background probably come from the area of El Zotz (e.g., K1743, 2699, 3060, 5350, 5465, 7147, 8393, 8418). All vessels date to the transition between the Early Classic and Late Classic periods, the span to which preliminary fieldwork assigns much of El Zotz. The vessels are doubly intriguing for being the first programmatic display of *way* spirits, a group of sinister supernatural entities (Houston and Stuart 1989).

Three final pieces of evidence create a political setting for the El Zotz texts. A mirror-back from Bagaces, Costa Rica—clearly not its place of manufacture—refers to a ruler of El Zotz and indicates that this mirror-back was the gift [si] of a ruler of El Peru, a large city about 56 km due west from El Zotz, in straight-line along the valley that opens up below the center. This offers direct evidence of a pattern of gift-acceptance and, in view of other, parallel texts, testimony to political subordination: El Zotz as a subaltern dynasty of El Peru's. (Traffic went two ways: a bowl from El Zotz was also found on the outskirts of El Peru by Fabiola Quiroa and identified as such by Stanley Guenter; Héctor Escobedo, personal communication, 2005). A far later reference, on Tikal Temple IV, Lintel 2:B8, describes a war against El Zotz and another major city, Naranjo, on Feb. 4, CE 744 (Julian calendar).

Plainly, the rulers of Tikal and El Zotz did not get along. An initial linkage to the same shadowy figure, "Born-from-fire," was replaced by instances of outright antagonism. El Zotz enjoyed a close bond to El Peru, a city known to have warred with Tikal (Martin and Grube 2000:46, 49), and it received the brunt of an attack from Tikal at a later date—the last known reference to El Zotz in the in-
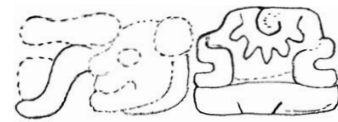
Figure 6. Royal name, El Zotz: (a) Museu Barbier-Mueller; (b) Bejucal Stela 1:B6; (c) Bagaces mirror back; (d) Canberra Vase; (e) El Zotz Wooden Lintel.

scriptions of the Classic period. This long-standing hostility elucidates a singular feature between the two cities: an earthwork, still not well dated, that runs between the two cities (Webster et al. 2004:Fig. 25). The function of the earthwork remains elusive. But, according to Webster and his colleagues, it may well have served a role as a marker of territory.

Preliminary conclusions

- Bejucal and Tikal display subordination to an enigmatic, foreign personage, "Born-from-Fire." Bejucal is an early seat of the dynasty that eventually flourishes at El Zotz; the capital appears to have relocated from one place to the other.

- El Zotz had poor relations with Tikal, its close, vastly larger neighbor. An earthwork of uncertain date and function separates the two, perhaps as a marker of territory.

- El Zotz had amicable relations with a third city, El Peru. This city battled Tikal and served as an ally of Tikal's archenemy, the aggressive and influential dynasty of Calakmul, Campeche (Martin and Grube 2000:108-111). A jade plaque from a royal tomb at Calakmul even refers to a procession and arrival at El Zotz (Fields and Reents-Budet 2005:Pl. 77).

- El Zotz experienced a limited occupation, from c. CE 6th century to early 7th, corresponding closely to periods of dynastic turbulence at Tikal (Martin and Grube 2000:38-41). All palace facilities and pyramids have limited stratigraphy and appear to have been constructed over shorts span of time.

- Large quantities of looted vessels reveal that new religious preoccupations emanated from the area of El Zotz. Some ceramics record explicit ownership by the royal family.

In more general terms, El Zotz has the features of what French and Italian scholars call a *fondation* or *fondazione* (Elisséeff 1983:151; Margueron 1994:4; Mazzoni 1991:319-321): a sudden establishment, not only of a large settlement, but of expensive facilities to house a royal court and service its need for deity or ancestral cults. Anthropological researchers have used another term for such urban creations, "disembedded capitals" or, in what may be a more accurate label, "reembedded capitals" (Joffe 1998). According to one recent review, these represent: (a) sudden foundations that (b) depart from previous settlement by (c) rearranging the layout and distribution of human populations, (d) adding centralized facilities (such as palaces) with strong evidence of (e) planning and (f) "new symbolic vocabulary(ies)" (Joffe 1998:551).

The initial impression, which can only be tested by mapping and excavation, is that the development of El Zotz conforms to "reembedding," hierarchical—not heterarchical—decision-making, regional or geopolitical levels of strategy, and the deliberate placement and nourishing of a hostile kingdom on the boundary of a city, Tikal, whose dynasty conflicted with powerful rivals at El Peru and Calakmul. The presence near El Zotz of a crucial valley indicates another strategic aim, to control movement between two major sectors of the Classic Maya world. The rulers of El Zotz appear to have exploited regional antagonisms to local benefit, taking advantage and perhaps leading in part to disruptions in daily life and royal dynasty at Tikal. The royal family of El Zotz both mimicked its rival—recall the close similarity of pyramids at the sites—and nurtured a new and distinct spiritual emphasis on "companion-spirits" of particular lords, the novel "symbolic vocabulary" predicted by comparative studies of "reembedded capitals." As some anthropologists suggest, it is precisely in border zones that group competition and recombinant identities play a strong role, where rivalries play out, and novel formations become both possible and, under certain conditions, necessary (Adelman and Aron 1999:839; Donnan 1999:4-5; Hegmon 1994:172-173; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995:478). A prediction might be to see close similarities to palatial establishments at El Peru and Calakmul rather than Tikal. Recent research by Golden and his colleagues (2005) highlight the fluid landscapes of border zones in the western Peten, Guatemala, where central powers arranged settlement along political boundaries. But the case of El Zotz is on an entirely larger scale: that of a dynasty rather than magnates or lower-level elites. In the unraveling, El Zotz could not sustain itself in a region that also contained a resurgent Tikal. A city predicated on hierarchy collapses when such asymmetries come undone.

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