William A. HAVILAND, *Excavations in the West Plaza of Tikal. Tikal Report No. 17*

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REFERENCES


1 Tikal Report No. 17 is the 27th published volume of the Tikal Reports series, a monographic collection detailing the excavations carried out between 1956 and 1969 by the University of Pennsylvania at Tikal, a major Maya capital in Guatemala. Based on the field notes of the late Peter d’Arcy Harrison, William Haviland undertook the difficult task of publishing the data concerning the West Plaza. This architectural group was excavated intermittently between 1959 and 1968.

2 This report is of primary importance, since it completes the documentation of the monumental epicenter. Even if the Tikal Reports concerning the Twin Pyramid Complexes and the Central Acropolis have yet to be published, the data are nevertheless available through doctoral theses (Jones 1969; Harrison 1970, see also his 2003 book chapter). Although the field operations were completed more than 50 years ago, the colossal amount of data explains why the last volumes of the collection are still being compiled. However, according to the editorial program of the series (Coe and Haviland 1982, p. 57-59), only the volumes concerning some test pits in a few minor structures are missing to document the last excavations (Tikal Reports 23e-j). The future reports (24a-e, 26, 28-30, 32, 33b-d, 35, 36, 38-39) should be dedicated to
specific types of artifacts (such as censers), or special contexts (such as burials, caches and problematical deposits).

3 The West Plaza is thus the last of the civic-ceremonial groups studied by the Pennsylvania team to be published. It should not be inferred, however, that it is an architectural unit of secondary importance. It fits perfectly into the epicenter plan and was the only access point to the Great Plaza during the Late Classic and perhaps even before. The West Plaza was investigated through a series of 34 trenches. The earliest evidences of occupation, two *chultunes*, date to the Middle or Late Preclassic (600-350 BCE). These underground structures could indicate that this space was first residential before being converted to a plaza, like the earliest occupation under the nearby North Acropolis. The first plastered floor appears to be a westward extension of floor 4B of the Great Plaza, as are the three following ones. It is dated to the Cauac ceramic complex, in the first decades of our era, half a century before the accession of the dynasty’s founder (Martin and Grube 2008, p. 26). Possibly as early as 325 CE, Temple II was interposed between these two architectural groups. The last floor was laid during the Late Classic (Imix ceramic complex, 692-869 CE) and the plaza was definitively abandoned before 950 CE, that is, at the end of the Terminal Classic. Above the last plaza floor, abandoned artifacts may represent late termination deposits rituals, a recently identified category of deposits that was not used in the previous Tikal Reports. Haviland nevertheless proposes this hypothesis for some of these deposits.

4 Structure 5D-11 flanks the plaza on the west side. Its east and west façades were excavated by two axial trenches. In addition, the entire northeastern front part was cleared, and some peripheral pits dug. Around 625 CE, a first version of the structure was built (5D-11-2nd). This platform seems to take an elongated north-south plan, which is rather unusual at Tikal. Around 731, its top part was demolished and a burial (Bu.77) was installed against the western façade in a pit cut into the bedrock. The grave, covered by wooden beams, contained the remains of an adult, lying supine on what appeared to be two jaguar skins. The material included six polychrome Imix ceramics and numerous jade ornaments. This is undoubtedly an elite burial, confirming the importance of the West Plaza at this time. Above the levelled remains of 5D-11-2nd and this burial was built structure 5D-11-1st. It is a pyramidal platform with a very unusual shape: it does not have the same number of levels on its east and west façade. Moreover, the north and south façades do not seem to be stepped. The extension of the test pits did not locate any post holes but it is possible that a pole and thatch structure covered the top.

5 Structure 5D-15, which sits to the north, is the main building of the West Plaza. In our view, its architectural sequence is questionable. The axial trench and tunnel excavation leave some doubt about the successive architectural developments. This is indeed the main difficulty of taking over archival data without having been able to observe the stratigraphy in the field. Thus, the author proposes that two successive painted staircases could constitute the only surviving remains of 5D-15-6th and 5th, or those of an earlier buried structure (Sub) with no relation at all to 5D-15. In our opinion, these stairs may not be those of a building, but could have led to an elevated part of the plaza during the Late Preclassic period. 5D-15-4th is even more hypothetical, since nothing remains visible, except for the ritual deposit Ca.167, associated with an Early Classic floor. The first well-attested architectural development is 5D-15-3rd, dated to the Late
Classic period (Imix ceramic complex). It is a range structure of two rooms, with nine doorways on its main—southern—façade. It probably had a palatial or administrative function. The lower part of the stairs and the front terrace were later modified, before the stairs were completely rebuilt. This building appears to have been occupied until the Terminal Classic, despite the beginning of the collapse of the masonry. An inscribed ball game marker was reused as an altar and placed on the steps at this time. In addition, a hearth in front of the central doorway contained, among other things, seven pieces of a single burned mano (cylindrical tool to grind corn). This very specific deposit is probably evidence of another terminal ritual event.

6 Structure 5D-144 was brought to light by the excavation of 5D-15. Very late in the chronology, this small three-level platform seems to have been built around 800 CE. According to the author, and considering the material, it could be a habitation. Based on the plan, it could also form a patio with Structure 5D-14.

7 The last structure is 5D-19, built at the end of the Late Classic period (likely in the 9th century) to the east of the plaza, behind the western pyramid 5D-35 of the North Acropolis. The excavation included an axial trench and a clearing of the southwestern corner. Only one architectural development was identified. It is a five-level platform accessible by a staircase with irregularly deep steps. Two lots of artifacts are identified by the author as post-abandonment deposits (47A/3, 4), perhaps related to the Terminal classic occupation of 5D-15. Five unexcavated structures still remain around the West Plaza.

8 The monuments are divided into two groups. The first, in the center of the Plaza, comprised the altar P26, and stelae P30, P31 and MS.38 (a fragment of Stela P21 still stuck in the ground while the upper two-thirds were reinstalled on the Great Plaza). These three stelae seem to have been placed in a regular north-south alignment. Various ritual deposits accompanied the erection of these monuments. The second group of monuments was erected in the northwestern part of the plaza. Despite its apparently erratic placement, it may also have been a north-south alignment of regularly spaced stelae. Stela 15, which bears an epigraphic Early Classic date, is clearly in a secondary position. Its dedication deposit, Ca.122, appears to have been moved at the same time as the monument, which is a unique case in the Tikal record (see, for example, the four empty stelae pits that still contained the associated deposits in front of Temple 5D-33: Coe 1990, vol. 6, fig. 168b). The other two stelae, P32 and P33, are probably in primary position and may have been placed during the Late Classic (Imix). The three altars (P27-P29) do not appear to have been paired with the stelae. They may nevertheless have been moved since.

9 This Tikal Report also includes four appendices, whose interest is very secondary, but their presence shows the author’s desire for exhaustivity. The first concerns a campaign of 12 test pits carried out in 1960, sometimes quite far north from the West Plaza in an apparently remote area. Appendix II gives the results of an unsuccessful resistivity survey conducted by Richard Linnington in 1961. Appendix III is a preliminary classification of chultunes. Fourteen types are listed for a total of 65 underground cavities. Finally, Appendix IV concerns the artifacts found in the West Plaza, the corresponding illustrations for which can be found in Tikal Reports 27a and b (Moholy-Nagy 2003, 2008).

10 In conclusion, this new Tikal Report completes the documentation of the monumental epicenter. It informs us about the buildings, monuments, ritual deposits and chultunes.
of this important architectural group. The descriptions, drawings and illustrations are particularly detailed and precise. It is a constant of the Tikal Reports which deserves to be noted. In spite of the passing of Peter d’Arcy Harrison, his work is published today thanks to the endeavors of William Haviland. This particularly successful effort to revive the data should be emphasized once again. In spite of its convenient monographic format, this specialized publication is complex and therefore reserved for a public of archaeologists seeking above all to complete their knowledge about Tikal.

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MOHOLY-NAGY Hattula

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NOTES

1. Bottle-shaped cavities dug in the bedrock, with a reduced size entrance. In Tikal, some chultunes have from one to nine secondary chambers.

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