

Comparing Preclassic Sequences at Cahal Pech, Belize: Reply to Horn

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We thank our colleague for his comment, address concerns raised, and encourage future collaborative research to answer important questions about the Middle Preclassic at Cahal Pech.

Keywords: Preclassic Maya, monumental architecture, radiocarbon dating, Cahal Pech, Belize

Agradecemos a nuestro colega por su comentario, abordamos los problemas mencionados y alentamos investigaciones colaborativas para responder preguntas importantes sobre el Preclásico Medio en Cahal Pech.

Palabras clave: Preclásico Maya, arquitectura monumental, datación por radiocarbono, Cahal Pech, Belice

In his comment on our article reporting excavations of a Middle Preclassic platform (Str. B8; Ebert et al. 2021) at Cahal Pech, Belize, Sherman Horn offers additional information to contextualize contemporaneous activity at the site. Unfortunately, the limited space of a report did not allow us to detail links between Str. B8 with all data published over 32 years of research at Cahal Pech. This could only have been achieved through a monograph-length treatment. Instead, our goal was reporting new excavation and ^{14}C information about a probable E-Group so that it might reach a wide audience beyond the gray literature. We additionally provided a chronology for broad trends in architectural change described in the initial report and based on our previously published research, which Horn does not describe. This space, however, provides an opportunity to address some specific points that he raised.

Given the decades of excavation and variable reporting, it is challenging to tie together some sequences at Plaza B stratigraphically in the absence of direct dates. For example, during our Str. B8 excavations we did not find evidence

for the 18 m² masonry platform revealed by the BVAP trench (Horn 2015:587). The 1 m wide trench provided only limited exposure of the architecture encountered by BVAP in this part of the site, including the 18 m² masonry platform. In contrast, we exposed almost the entire perimeter of Str. B8, because existing spatial data suggested that other structures potentially overlapped the building. In the process, we did not locate any cut stones or wall alignments that could be associated with the BVAP platform noted by Horn. It is possible that building bisected part of Str. B8. This is perhaps suggested by a human burial recovered from the BVAP trench platform excavations (Op. 10-10 Burial 1; Garber et al. 2006:13), which was radiocarbon dated to the Late Preclassic around 170–40 cal BC (UCIAMS-167920, 2085 ± 20; Ebert et al. 2019). Although we hypothesized that parts of Str. B8 were dismantled in the Late Preclassic, a possible overlap of buildings could also explain the poor preservation of Str. B8's eastern façade. In the absence of direct dates or datum information from the BVAP excavations, only further testing can confirm whether

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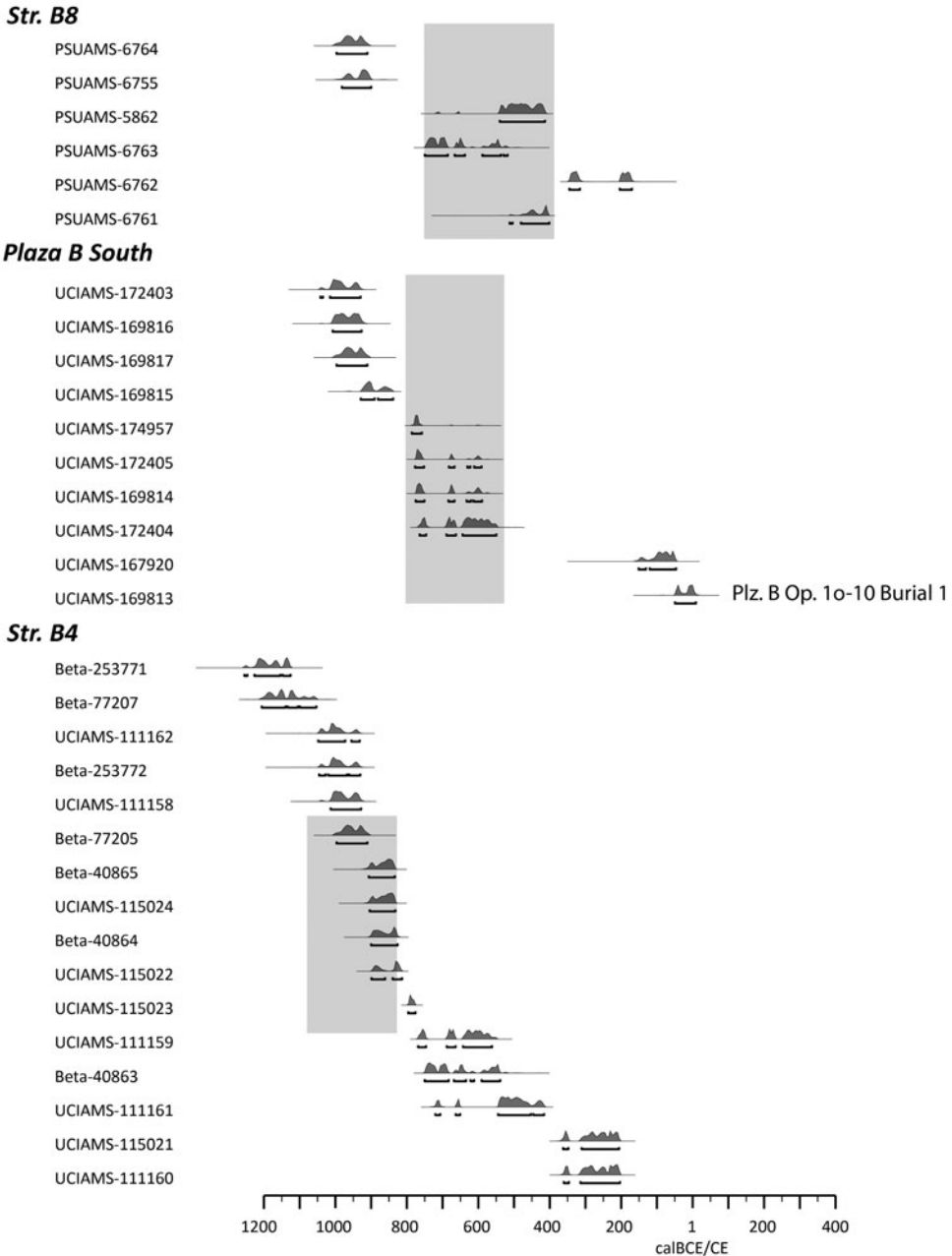


Figure 1. Published Preclassic radiocarbon dates for Plaza B, Cahal Pech. Gray bars indicate initial monumental construction at each location.

and how the two buildings are chronologically related, stratigraphically related, or both.

The Str. B8 ¹⁴C sequence *does* allow us to examine the timing of construction as it corresponds to architecture elsewhere at Cahal Pech. For example, our previous research has produced

33 published ¹⁴C dates from Preclassic contexts primarily on the south side of Plaza B at Str. B4 and in the plaza directly in front of that building (Figure 1; see Awe 1992; Ebert et al. 2017). Domestic buildings dominate this part of Plaza B prior to 950 cal BC, corresponding well with

previous observations for the late Early Preclassic (Cheetham 1996; Horn 2015; Peniche May 2016). During the early Middle Preclassic (~900 cal BC), several building phases at Str. B4 terminated with the construction of a 1.5 m tall, round structure. Several low rectangular platforms were also built in the plaza, which likely served as higher-status residences (Peniche May 2016). This construction was followed by a larger rectangular platform and subsequently a round structure between ~790–550 cal BC. Based on ¹⁴C dates, Str. B8 was constructed during or slightly after these more expansive Middle Preclassic building episodes.

The results of our new excavations and previous research, as well as that of Horn (2015:288–293), show a *general* shift toward monumental public architecture beginning around 700 cal BC. Though residential and other types of buildings were still present, what is more interesting is *why* we see these changes, which also reflect broader patterns across the Maya Lowlands related to emerging hierarchies. By presenting our new data, we are actively engaging with issues related to architecture and social complexity through local and regional comparisons. We welcome open dialogue and encourage collaborative efforts with Horn and other archaeologists as we continue answering these important questions.

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Data Availability Statement. Original field notes, drawings, and photographs from the Str. B8 excavations are curated by BVAR and available on request from the authors. All other data presented can be found in the publications cited in text.

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