INTRODUCTION

ONE OF THE major conceptual problems that inspired the Selz Foundation Yaxuná Project was the search for evidence of divine kingship in the northern lowlands. Freidel (1979) had hypothesized that divine kingship had first crystalized as an institution in the geographic interior of the southern lowlands and throughout the region, including the so-called peripheries such as the northern lowlands. By the early 1980s Peter Mathews (1985) and other experts in Maya epigraphy had clearly determined the presence and distribution of divine kings throughout the southern lowlands. Meanwhile in the north, Jeff Karl Kowalski (1985) had identified a major divine king at Uxmal; David H. Kelley (1976) had provided the first deciphered name of a Maya king, K’ahk’ U Pakal, at Chichén Itzá; stelae at Cobá clearly implied the presence of divine rulers (Guenter 2014; Stuart 2010; Thompson et al. 1932); and there was a scattering of stelae elsewhere that supported the existence of this institution in the northern lowlands. Yet the contrast between the monuments and physical remains of rulers in the south and in the north was, and still is, striking.

The extensive explorations by the Selz Foundation’s Yaxuná Archaeological Project led to the discovery of two royal chamber tombs in 1993, labeled subsequently Burial 23 and Burial 24. For this study, we have revisited both contexts and their taphonomic signatures. From here, we will recount the death and deathways of several royals from Yaxuná who lived during the fourth and fifth centuries AD. As previously noted in this volume, their bodies were found in two radically distinctive contextual situations: while the mortuary program materialized in Burial 23 is clearly of a revered ancestor, all indications point to a violent end of the group of occupants recovered from the simultaneous multiple interment inside Burial 24. This tableau macabre resembles a terminal deposit (Mock 1998) but also points to royal resurrection following sacrifice and also to the dedication of a new phase of the pyramid and temple.
The range of treatments of remains and furniture exemplified in the Yaxuná tombs is commensurate with what we know from Early Classic tombs in the southern lowlands. Undisturbed or modestly disturbed royal tombs are an expression of the changing political scenery of the Maya governments. They can declare the establishment of dynasty, as in the case of the Huunal and Margarita tombs at Copán (Bell et al. 2004). They can display the need for dynasties to reassert their legitimate claims to rulership as in the case of Burial 48 and Stela 31 at Tikal (W. Coe 1990). And, in the case of dynastic replacement, they can ritually eradicate the placeholders of previous ruling families or usurpers as in the case of PNT 019 at Tikal (Laporte and Fialko 1995). In all cases the dramatic arrangements of people and things in royal mausoleums show that they were conceived not as containers of passive repose but rather as houses of the dead in performance. We note that this performative arrangement is a common feature of other Maya burials (Scherer et al. 2014). The ancient Maya lived with their ancestors (McAnany 1995), and the ancestors dwelt among the living. This chapter provides a contextual analysis of the treatment of Yaxuná’s dead royal elite to discern their perpetual performances.

THE NORTH ACROPOLIS AS A REGAL PERFORMANCE SPACE

The Selz Foundation Yaxuná Project proposed, in its seventh season of summer field research, to carry out investigations in two of the three major pyramids of the North Acropolis, one of the major triadic groups in the city. This proposed work followed detailed mapping of the site center, test excavation of both civic-religious and residential architecture, and select horizontal exposure of residential and public architecture, including the Late to Terminal Classic period 5E-73 Group directly south of the Central Acropolis, the Formative Str. 5E-19 Group, the unexpectedly discovered early Late Formative dance platforms (structures 6E-53 and 6E-120) adjacent to the East Acropolis, and the 5E-50 Group, a likely Early Classic royal palace complex in the southern part of the site zone. The objective of extensive investigation of the North Acropolis was to better understand governance through monumental architecture during the Classic period (figure 7.1).

Test excavation on the summit of Str. 6F-3 showed that the final major construction effort on the summit pyramid dated to the Early Classic. Freidel had identified a regular slump trending east-west on the summit of Str. 6F-3 and suggested in his proposal to the INAH that this might be an Early Classic collapsed royal tomb worthy of investigation. As it turned out, this surface slump was over the terminated remains of a subsurface corridor that was part of an elaborate performance space built into this structure (Freidel and Suhler 1998; Stanton et al. 2010; Suhler 1996). Our investigations showed that the eastern structure in the triad, Str. 6F-4, particularly 6F-4-3 associated with Burial 24, was also designed as an elaborate performance space with summit terraces providing a high theatrical stage and the range structure below with five doorways and a broad stairway (Stanton et al. 2010; Suhler and Freidel 1998).
We have only very limited exposures of the earliest construction phases of the buildings, but these indicate initial construction during the Late Formative; excavations in the plaza confirm that the bulk of the basal platform was raised at this time and then subsequently abandoned for a period (Stanton and Collins, n.d.a). We presume that the Formative North Acropolis, even in decay or ruin, would have had the recognizable appearance of a place of public performance to the Early Classic people who chose to refurbish and develop it. Moreover, given the flat landscape of Yaxuná and the sacbé extending south from this the northern apex of the center, the very act of reoccupying the North Acropolis was a way of resetting the primary cosmic axis of the city as north-south rather than east-west as represented in the E-Group, the East Acropolis, and the triadic groups to the east of the center (Stanton and Freidel 2005). Following the evident collapse of Late to Terminal Formative Yaxuná as a royal city, perhaps in the same second-century era that witnessed the fall of El Mirador and many other cities, it would seem that the ruler who reestablished kingship there in the fourth century quite literally refurbished a masonry building on the 6F-3 locality, Str. 6F-3-6.

**THE CYCLING OF A ROYAL MAUSOLEUM INSIDE STR. 6F-3**

Given the lack of preserved inscriptions we do not know if the same ruler who during life had ordered the rearrangement and expansion of Yaxuná’s North Acropolis would be laid to rest.
in one of its central structures after death. An exquisite mausoleum was discovered by the Selz Foundation on September 3, 1993, and was excavated during the following weeks, revealing a richly attired mature male who had been placed on the marl-embedded floor of a stuccoed and vaulted chamber, located deep inside of Str. 6F-3 (sub-5), the northern temple of this acropolis triad (Stanton et al. 2010:164–174; Suhler 1996) (figure 7.2 and plate 7.1). When Charles Suhler discovered Burial 23, the eastward-facing entrance was still blocked only with the white marl that filled the antechamber. Rough blocks of stone were scattered on the floor. When David Freidel subsequently entered the chamber, he crawled carefully using only those stones and saw that the stones had not fallen from the roof or walls of the chamber. Moreover, it was clear that many funerary offerings appeared to be in place and undisturbed. Remains of an individual were exposed in the middle of the chamber between the rocks.

As the explorations show, the tomb of Burial 23 was constructed using existing north and south walls that belonged to a Formative era building. There are additional wall features in the antechamber of Burial 23 that appear to be part of the same room as the north and south wall features used to construct the tomb and the north wall of the antechamber, according to Charles Suhler (1996:100–102). Suhler observed through excavation that the walls in the antechamber were finished masonry and, in at least one instance, were backed by construction fill. That means that the feature was likely subsurface and not a superstructure. Although no direct radiocarbon dates could be obtained from the organic bone substrate of Burial 23, the architectural sequence, together with iconographic and ceramic associations, place the death of its adult occupant at around AD 400 (Yaxuná II Complex).
Given the width of the space between the northern and southern wall features attributed to Str. 6F-3-6, at 1.28 m, and the walls in the antechamber, we suspect that Burial 23 may have been built into a room or corridor segment of a preserved Terminal Formative subsurface labyrinth analogous in function to the earlier subsurface corridors and rooms of the early Late Formative dance platforms and the later Early Classic period subsurface corridors and rooms of Str. 6F-3-3. As a practical matter, if this interpretation holds, it seems likely that this king used such a labyrinth performance space for resurrection rituals before he was ultimately buried in it.\(^1\)

The floor of the mausoleum had been filled in with fine whitish marl. In its center rested the body of this Early Classic king surrounded by his royal regalia (plate 7.1). The twisted disposition of the corpse is partly explained by the advanced, deforming arthritis, which this king had suffered prior to death. One or more flooding events of the chamber must have turned the marl into a sticky mud, causing the remains to sink. Most of the king’s body and his provisions sank by different degrees into the wet ground, except for the head and the shoulders, which had come to rest on sturdy matting.

The regal corpse was covered by a single scorched censer fragment and surrounded by several angular stones, most of them visibly scorched with charcoal. The distribution of angular stones appears peculiar in this context granted their form and size (plate 7.2). It is also noteworthy that the chamber vault above was found intact, which precludes the possibility of them having fallen to their present position from above. Given the absence of visible signs of smoking or charring, the depth of ash volume recovered from above the original arrangement on top of the marl floor is just as telling as the absence of signs of skeletal disturbances or direct body singeing. All these observations lead us to infer that both the ashes and the angular stones were introduced during a reentry event long after the corpse had decomposed and after gravity had caused it to sink into the muddy bottom (plate 7.3). This reentry likely occurred through the only tomb doorway, facing east into the antechamber. Excavators discovered the antechamber filled in with white marl, effectively sealing the doorway.

As other colleagues and we have concluded (Stanton et al. 2010; Suhler 1996; Tiesler 2016; Tiesler and Scherer 2017), the charred rocks and the ashes on top of the mausoleum floor were introduced from outside the tomb and were probably extracted from hearths. This idea is consistent within copious examples of ash-associated tombs and graves throughout the Maya region, just as Grégory Pereira (2013) described for a series of burials from Río Bec in the northern Petén area. He interpreted the documented massive ash fillings as part of the mortuary programs that in all likelihood went along with the continued occupation of the platform above. With the ash deposits the deceased completed his or her posthumous cycling while family life went on above.

If this scenario holds true (plate 7.3), the builders of Str. 6F-3-4, who cut through the upper plaza floor of Str. 6F-3-5 and dug out the antechamber to access the tomb, laid the rough stones carefully in the chamber as part of reentry rituals. Stratigraphically it is feasible that a ritual fire (plate 7.3) preceded the creation of the burnt rock and ash pile surrounding the dead king. Yet it is impossible to know with any certainty whether such a ritual fire was
part of the original interment ceremony, which according to Suhler (1996, n.d.) involved water, or was part of the reentry ceremony. Reentry of royal tombs elsewhere did sometimes involve fire rituals (Eberl 2005; Fitzsimmons 2009; Stuart 1998).

This was the final performance for the king buried here. The people carrying out the reentry rituals placed the stones to the north and south of the king, with some over the area of his legs. They did not cover the ceramic offerings to the northwest of the king’s head, most of the offerings to the southwest, or the decorated plate at his feet. Now the head of the dead ruler emerged from the midst of a symbolic hearth laid out around the mausoleum’s central east-west axis. This image draws parallels with contemporary Yukatec Maya domestic hearths. Placed in the central parts of residences, these hearths connect with ropes hanging from the ceiling. On a cosmological plane, contemporary axial hearths evoke mythological navels and umbilicus cords that connect the human world with the celestial sphere (Tiesler 2016; see also Taube 1994:668–669). Having completed lustration and vitalization in the otherworldly womb, this venerated ancestor was now reckoned in a different time-space context (McAnany 1995; Taube 1994). It is quite noteworthy that the monarch of Burial 23 was ritually revitalized not only by firing or smoking the chamber’s interior as in other documented cases but mainly by placing in the chamber symbolically charged hearth matter. In both cases the association of the deceased with the hearth, with its allusion to the Creation Hearth (Freidel et al. 1993; Taube 1998), conjured the transformation of the dead paramount into an ancestor and encouraged his ascent into otherworldly celestial spaces.

After reentry, those who sealed Burial 23 covered the antechamber and tomb with an impressive mass of rubble construction with a plaster floor that was part of a summit platform surface on the pyramid some eight meters above the main plaza of the acropolis. We know from our excavations of this phase (identified as Str. 6F-3-5) that it also had subsurface corridors and chambers in it (figure 7.2, Stanton et al. 2010; Suhler and Freidel 1998). We also know that the people who built the next phase, Str. 6F-3-4, must have known with precision where the tomb and the antechamber were in order to revisit it, long after the skeletonization process of the deceased was finalized, as we have argued above. Therefore, the builders of Str. 6F-3-4 certainly regarded the king in Burial 23 as an eternal performer. As they covered over Str. 6F-3-5, they built masons’ walls into a U-shape enclosure facing east over the antechamber of Burial 23, a symbolic cleft in the mountain facing toward the rising sun and resurrection.

It is also clear that the reentry rituals were associated with resurrection and connected the tomb to the subsurface corridors they built inside Str. 6F-3-4. The king, as resurrecting deity, is a performer in architectural space designed to facilitate the journey from the underworld into the heavens from at least the Early Classic through the Postclassic periods when the subsurface corridors and chambers were ritually terminated for the last time (Stanton et al. 2010; Suhler 1996). If we are right in our assessment of Str. 6F-3-6, this thematic function spanned the Formative to the Postclassic. Indeed, if the king who reestablished royal government at Yaxuná in the Early Classic knew about and used an existing subsurface performance place on Str. 6F-3, it would suggest that the north-south axis was an important royal design in
the Late to Terminal Formative, and it would help explain why he chose to be buried in the North Acropolis rather than in the East Acropolis or elsewhere in his new capital.

**A SUN KING FROM THE SOUTH**

As we have mentioned, Burial 23 contained a mature male who was placed on the marl-embedded floor of a stuccoed and vaulted chamber within Str. 6F-3-5, the northern temple of an acropolis triad (Stanton et al. 2010:164–174; Suhler 1996). His bone chemistry suggests that this man was a foreigner to the immediate vicinity (see chapter 2) who came to serve as the ruler of the Yaxuná, perhaps on behalf of Kaanul, the kingdom of the Snake Kings, further south. Before passing during his fifth life decade, this dignitary likely had time to establish himself among Yaxuná’s local aristocracy, reflected not least of all by the exquisite attire inside his mausoleum. The king lay lavishly adorned with royal regalia; among the offerings figured stacks of polychrome vessels, some with avian motifs, a trefoil greenstone royal diadem jewel (matched with two others from the antechamber and construction fill), and other carved objects, deer antlers, and a turtle carapace. The overall assemblage, to be described in detail below, recalls in style and meanings the regal attires of other Maya lowland kings of its time, which strongly evoke the fiery rebirth of the Maize God (Coggins 1975, 1979; Houston et al. 2015; Schele and Freidel 1990; Stuart 2004; Taube 2004a).

The decorated plate next to his head, discovered on its side, may have been displaced through taphonomic processes; but it may have been positioned there during the reentry. We think the contextual pattern here shows that the people who reentered the tomb used the burnt hearth rocks and ash that they brought in to build a new symbolic mountain around the body of the king. The image of mountain in Classic Maya iconography is a zoomorphic mask with a cleft in the top, called *witz* in ancient Mayan (Stuart 1987). From this cleft arise resurrected beings, like King Kan Bahlam of Palenque garbed as the Maize God standing on the clefted true mountain of maize on the Panel of the Foliated Cross (Schele and Freidel 1990). As Schele and Mathews (1998:42–43) describe, the clefted mountain place of the Maize God’s resurrection was a widely understood sacred locality. We think it quite possible that the exposed area of the body of the Burial 23 king was designed to place him in the mountain cleft formed by piling the burnt rocks and ash to either side of him.

There is another kind of sacred mountain that has fire in its cleft, as in the case of the base panel mask of Stela 9 dedicated in AD 504 at the site of El Perú-Waka’ in Guatemala (Freidel et al. 2013). Another name associated with this fire mountain on this stela is *Wite’ Naah*, which translates as Origin or Foundation House according to David Stuart (2004). That is a reference to a fire-and-water–related religious cult introduced into the Maya world from highland Mexico (Fash et al. 2009) by a Teotihuacan lord named Sihyaj K’ahk’. This is relevant to the present discussion because underneath the rough rock-clefted pattern in Burial 23 archaeologists discovered traces of a small, intense fire on a flat rock placed next to the middle of the king on the south side. On top of that fire the devoted had placed a large fragment of a
striated water jar. The symbolic association of fire and water is an important part of the Wite’ Naah cult. The people who reentered Burial 23 were the same people who overbuilt the tomb with a new pyramid. In the course of raising this new pyramid they built a large U-shaped construction pen around the antechamber entryway of Burial 23. This construction pen was basically a cleft in the mountain facing east. The ash and hearth rocks placed inside Burial 23 transformed this clefted mountain into a Fire Mountain like the one depicted on El Perú-Waka’ Stela 9 described above. In light of the evidence for Teotihuacan involvement in this tomb reentry as seen in the incised bone depicting a ko’haw battle helmet place in the tomb, the builders of the new pyramid here may have regarded it as a commemorative Wite’ Naah Fire Shrine.

In Charles Suhler’s (Stanton et al. 2010; Suhler 1996) reconstruction of events based on observation during the process of excavation, the majority of artifacts were arranged in the tomb prior to the introduction of the body of the deceased. These concentrations of artifacts were in themselves contextually significant and provide the basis for understanding aspects of the eternal performance of this ruler. As the artifacts have been technically described elsewhere (Stanton et al. 2010), we will focus on the significance of the inferential function and material symbolism of these offerings and use these interpretations to better situate the new forensic study of the remains of the deceased. In general, the theme evinced in the tomb furniture is the transformational journey of the ruler through death to resurrection of the soul. In this theme the ruler in Burial 23 conforms to the expectations of Maya divine kingship as practiced elsewhere and as documented pervasively in Classic tomb contexts of the southern lowlands.

In the northwest corner of the chamber, mourners placed a collection of ceramic vessels that included two small straight-rimmed jars with sherd lids, a small flaring rim jar with lid, and a larger flaring rim jar with a lid. These vessels showed traces of wrappings, and we infer that they were deposited with liquid contents because of the lids. Adjacent to these lidded jars, they placed a pedestaled cup upside-down in a gutter-spouted bowl set inside a basin. The straight-rimmed bowl showed evidence of much wear on the bottom and blackening from heating. Next to this assemblage and set on edge we found a basal-flange bowl with what Michael Coe (1978:78, Plate 11) identifies as the “anus” glyph around the outer wall and a depiction of a person in ecstatic trance transforming into a flying creature. The glyph in question (T61.77.585a) occurs in the text and is painted on the vessel discussed by Coe as a series of red-centered circles separated by crossed-bands. On a picture of a vessel published by Kerr (K1890), a similar band of circles separates two scenes of enema users in the characteristic pose of self-administration. But in this case the circles are clearly variants of the anus glyph with fine black swirling lines depicting the sphincter muscles within the circles. On the outer surfaces of the basal-flange bowls in Burial 23, the sphincter muscles are depicted as fine undulating black lines on beige backgrounds (see Stanton et al. 2010:figure 5.189). The rims of the vessels are decorated with circles like those forming bands on the vessels depicting enema rituals described above. Returning to the vessel in question at the western end of Burial 23, this person is in the pose of self-administered enema (Barrera Rubio and Taube
1987; Furst and Coe 1977; Stross and Kerr 1990) with the clyster evolved into a scorpion tail. In addition to the vessels discussed above, other examples of paintings depicting more realistic individuals in this pose are well represented in the corpus of Maya vases published online by Justin Kerr (e.g., K5011, K5025, K5067). The strange transformation creatures have a certain resemblance to the Caban glyph that reads *chi*, ‘sweetness,’ and that marks vessels of intoxicating drink in the enema and drinking scenes of the Classic vase corpus (Stross and Kerr 1990:figure 17b). Returning to the clyster, the modern Maya identify the constellation Scorpio as this insect and likely did so as well during the Classic period (Freidel et al. 1993).

The face of this flying transformation person has the wide-open eye denoting intoxication or a trance in Maya vase imagery (see K5067) and a spiked corona around the head, perhaps a form of entopic hallucination depicted elsewhere in Classic Maya graffiti (Haviland and Haviland 1995).

Yet this spiked corona may also depict a *Datura* blossom. Barbara Kerr (2007) made a cogent iconographic argument for the identification of a spiked feathery element ornamenting the snout and head of Classic Maya vision serpents as blossoms of *Datura*. This plant is found pervasively in the Maya area and its seeds, blossoms, and stem contain powerful hallucinogenic narcotics well known to many indigenous peoples of the Americas. While enema potions might have contained other active ingredients, the atropine and scopolamine in *Datura* have the effect of confusing nerve messages from the extremities to the brain, resulting in an experience of flying. These drugs also deaden pain. As detailed in the forensic analysis, the deceased was suffering from painful degenerative arthritis of the spine. A polished hollow deer bone tube was directly south of this bowl and above the head of the deceased. We identify this as the syringe of an enema clyster made with a flexible leather bladder (Stanton et al. 2010). Such flexible clysters with rigid syringes are depicted in the several Classic painted vase scenes showing enema use and rituals surrounding this use (Stross and Kerr 1990). There is a second plate, almost identical to the one described but with the variant that the entopic hallucinations are depicted as a shower of dots. The body of the deceased, once introduced into the chamber, was framed on the sun path by these two flying trance transformation figures (plate 7.4).

In light of this contextual analysis so far, we suggest that the ceramic vessels in the northwestern corner of the chamber are an Early Classic variant on the feasting serving vessel and container set often found in Classic royal tombs in the southern lowlands and that a variant is a set of vessels for holding enema potions, warming potions for pouring into clysters, and a basin for the ensuing vomit produced while the performer goes into a trance. The jars depicted on Classic Maya vases identified by Stross and Kerr (1990) as containing intoxicating liquid for enema rituals have the general shape of the jars in this chamber and are sometimes depicted bound in rope or cloth. If we are on the right track with this analysis, there are several other Early Classic tomb chambers containing gutter spouted cups and bowls, pedestaled cups, and pedestals (plate 75). Some of the tombs containing such ceramics are undergoing contextual analysis (Freidel et al. 2010; Houston et al. 2015; Juan Carlos Maldonado, personal communication to Freidel), but so far these investigations do not show clear
association with enema ritual such as that found in Burial 23. Merwin and Valliant (1932) illustrated assemblages with these characteristics from Holmul found in Early Classic burials inside reused and buried temple rooms. They also reported discovery of three deer bone polished tubes, two pierced for attachment by sewing to flexible material and one with a bone ring on it suitable for fastening a flexible clyster. Unfortunately they did not report the context for these tubes explicitly. However, it is possible to infer that the tubes came from the rooms with the ceramics in them. Finally, with regard to enemas and transformation as part of Classic Maya rituals, Michelle Rich and her colleagues (Freidel and Rich 2015; Freidel et al. 2010; Rich et al. 2010) discovered a unique figurine funeral assemblage in El Perú-Waka’ Burial 39 dating to the seventh century. In that assemblage is a young man carrying a gourd enema clyster, a seated old shaman “howling,” a visage associated with enema ritual by Stross and Kerr (1990), and an image of the deceased king as a kneeling penitent Maize God preparing for resurrection (Rich and Freidel 2017). The Early Classic enema potion ceramic assemblage is not present in this Late Classic tomb.

The southwestern sector of the Burial 23 chamber contained a complex assemblage of materials. Segueing from the theme of enema ritual and inebriation, one of the artifacts in this assemblage is a small, well-crafted ceramic object (figure 7.3) that depicts the severed head of a deity. The slack jaw and lolling tongue of the head make this identification clear and unequivocal. Although Charles Suhler (1996; Stanton et al. 2010) suggests that this is a carved ceramic talisman, we now propose that it is the snapped-off and reworked head of a jar lid. This tradition in lowland ceramics of small cylindrical jars with effigy deity lids began in the Early Classic and continued into the Late Classic. Unfortunately looters have found most of the jars and lids. A high-end jade mosaic version of one of these effigy lid jars found

![Ceramic lid knob depicting Chaak or Akan](photo by Yaxuná Project, Selz Foundation).
in Burial 196 at Tikal appears to portray the ruler, Yik’in Chan K’awiil, and to show that it is a White Flower Soul Cache vessel, a distinctive reliquary, for one of that eighth-century king’s souls (Freidel and Guenter 2007). A second mosaic jade cup in Tikal Burial 116 portrays King Jasaw Chan K’awiil and is inscribed with a text declaring that it is his chocolate cup. If we are correct in our assessment, then our effigy head was originally part of such a sacred container. The deity depicted on this ceramic head from Burial 23 is not obviously Akan (Grube 2004), the spirit companion and god associated with self-decapitation and enema ritual inebriation. The visage has the alveolar bar and beard associated with K’awiil (Kerr 7023, 7024), a well-represented deity in the looted corpus of lidded effigy knob soul cache vessels. Yet the slack jaw and lolling tongue on this head, pierced (presumably from autosacrifice), is unique and declares this a severed head. Akan, the god in question, is repeatedly depicted severing his own head from his body (Grube 2004). The Burial 23 artifact was well finished to obscure snapping off of a lid. Akan is a way spirit specifically associated with enemas (Grube and Nahm 1994), and we think that the inclusion of this carved head reinforces the thematic concern with transformation through ecstasy. The ceramic head, however, also relates to the tripod of deer bones discussed below.

The southwestern assemblage includes one part of a remarkable incised bone in the shape of a weaving batten or the inset backing of a throwing stick (figure 7.4). This artifact was located in fragments against the western wall of the chamber, evidently disturbed by rodents. The closest artifact comparison would be the famous scrimshawed bones discovered in Late Classic Tikal Burial 116 (Moholy-Nagy 2008), which Freidel and Rich (2015) suspect were used as bone dice in casting and divination. The images on this bone appear to be a combination of glyphs and pictographs, perhaps analogous to the remarkable inscriptions found on the summit temple of Structure 10L-26 at Copán (Stuart 2005). The top glyph may read nikte’, ‘flower,’ and it suggests that the object is perhaps related to the idea of sak nikte’, ‘white flower,’ a metaphor for tomb chamber (Freidel et al. 2007; see Scherer 2015 for a nuanced discussion of this glyph and its possible decipherments and meanings). The next glyph reads ajaw. This is followed by a depiction of a skeletal bird in profile, possibly an owl or other raptor. This image surmounts a profile depiction of an Early Classic style ko’haw or plated war helmet of the kind introduced from Teotihuacan during the New Order. Finally, there is an image that appears to combine the crossed-band decorated shell headdress of Chak-Xib-Chak with a hand carrying an axe. This artifact is unique, so such interpretations must be tentative.

Nevertheless, if there is a reference to kaloomte’ then it is possible that this artifact relates to the reentry of the tomb and to the protagonist of the interments in Burial 24 to be discussed below. The title kaloomte’ was used exclusively by Teotihuacan-affiliated lords Siyaj K’ahk’ and Spearthrower Owl before the fifth century AD, and Burial 24 and the cache above it in Str. 6F-4 show evidence of Teotihuacan affiliation. This bone was discovered along the western wall of the chamber. A small turtle carapace was also located near the western wall. Turtle shells were used as drums or rasps in musical performances, although this shell is small and likely served as a symbol of such instruments or of the resurrection of the Maize God
(Suhler 1996), associated with the music of the carapace. Stross and Kerr (1990) note that the turtle drum could be associated with the deity Akan.

Near the head of the deceased, in the southwest corner of the chamber, the ritual specialists placed a concentration of materials associated with divination and sacrifice. At the center of the concentration are three worked deer bones with incised decorations. One of these deer bones had a ceramic ring around it (figure 7.5). The trefoil jade royal diadem jewel mentioned previously was jammed into one end of one of the deer bones. The incised decoration on these bones depicts knots framed above and below by hafted blades. These blades, in turn, pierce bifurcated scrolls. We know that these three bones together constituted a tripod. On the West Wall of the Pinturas Building at San Bartolo (Saturno 2009; Taube et al. 2010) there are three such bone tripods with sacrifices on top of them. In the case of these Late Formative examples, the individual bones are decorated with twisting motifs, but the tripods are bound with knots like those that appear on the Burial 23 examples. The association with sacrifice is conveyed on the Burial 23 bones by the sacrificial knives framing the bundle knots. The West Wall mural scene references the ordering of the world with four trees and four sacrifices and the establishment of the center with the sacrifice of the Principal Bird Deity, solar spirit companion of the Creator God, by the Maize God. These acts of sacrifice are exemplary for Maya divine rulers, who personified the Maize God and the Sun God. The West Wall mural includes a royal accession of a human king emulating the accession of the Maize God.

The other example of the bone tripod is the seat of a remarkable effigy deity in Burial 10 at Tikal, the likely tomb of King Yax Nuun Ahiin dating to the early fifth century (W. Coe 1990; Kerr 4884). This image, often interpreted as a god of decapitation sacrifice (e.g., Schele and Freidel 1990), is of an old snaggle-toothed god seated on a bone tripod and displaying a small head in his uplifted hands. The bone tripod is covered in the front by what appear to be jagged knives. It is the head held by this deity that gives rise to his identification with decapitation. In light of our discussion of the ceramic severed head talisman and the god of
inebriation Akan, such an association with the bone tripod seems plausible. However, the pose of holding the head horizontally on open hands, the small size of the head, and the calm open-eyed, closed-mouth expression of the face all suggest that this is not a sacrificial severed head but rather a talisman mask of a kind that occurs frequently in later Classic painted vase scenes. Erik Boot (2005) has identified the masks held by scribes in these scenes as evidence that these are mask sculptors as well as painters and scribes. He associates texts on the vases with the verb *pak'*, which evidently means to carve but also to shape and to arrange. Freidel and his colleagues (2015) point out that most of the scribes holding these masks on open palms are gazing at them without any suggestion that they are carving or painting. They

**FIGURE 7.5.** (a) Manatee bone disassembled tripod with ceramic ring and shell tokens, deer cowrie (broken) in the lower left corner; (b) close-up of the tripod’s supports (photo by Yaxuná Project, Selz Foundation).
propose that the primary metaphorical reference here is to shaping and arranging, which are acts associated with divination and prophesy as in the creation text of the Quiche Popol Vuh (Christenson 2007).

The headdress of the Tikal old god is decorated with two disks on which are arranged four olive shells in the pattern of the day glyph $k’\text{in}$. Freidel and his collaborators suggest that ancient Maya used shells for casting, divination, and for currency. There are many examples of olive shells arranged in patterns in the painted vase corpus, and shells are one of the materials depicted as cast by Maya on Classic stelae and incorporated into the shower of precious materials reading $k’ubul$, ‘holy,’ in the emblems of Classic dynasties. Finally, we will see that there is a carved jade in the form of a profile face in Burial 24 that has a crossed-bands motif in the headdress. This may reference the same deity, as it resembles the arrangement of shells on the Tikal Burial 10 figure’s headdress.

The carved greenstone diadem jewel we discovered jammed into the end of one of the bones underscores the royal nature of the bone tripod sacrifice discussed in the context of the San Bartolo mural (figure 7.6a). This jewel is of a type distinctive to northern lowland Maya Early Classic and otherwise found in Early Classic context at Dzibilchaltún (Taschek 1994:figure 24). The Yaxuná jewel depicts a face outlined in polished grooves with a tripartite headdress. It is the tripartite design of the headdress that we take as diagnostic of its significance as a royal diadem jewel of a kind originally termed jester god (Schele 1978) and later traced to Olmec Middle Formative origins by Virginia Fields (1989, 1991). The other two greenstone jewels associated with Burial 23, one found in the antechamber white matrix and the other evidently deposited in construction fill above that level, also have tripartite headdresses. One of the jewels found at Dzibilchaltún certainly has a tripartite headdress; the other is undulated but less clearly tripartite. Jennifer Taschek proposed (1994:82–84) that the closest jewels resembling the Dzibilchaltún ones came from the Early Classic tombs discovered at Nebaj in the Guatemalan highlands (Smith and Kidder 1951). However, those jewels do not have the tripartite headdress, although the grooved outline carving is similar. There are other Early Classic diadem jewels at Yaxuná, discovered in Str. 6F-4 as discussed below. These jewels are later than the Burial 23 diadem and evince the range of variability in diadems used in the Early Classic at Yaxuná, including several likely Formative era heirloom jewels as also discovered at Dzibilchaltún. David Stuart (2012) narrowly defines Classic period jewels of majesty based on careful epigraphic and iconographic arguments, and the Yaxuná diadem jewels would all likely fall outside his range of “$huunal$” jewels. Nevertheless, the wide-ranging variations on tripartite headdress found in these jewels still fall within the consensual parameters of Maya and Olmec specialists as royal jewels declaring owners to have status as rulers (Freidel 1991, 1993; Freidel and Suhler 1995). In this analysis, the important point is that the royal jewel associated with the deceased in Burial 23 is a northern lowland type.

To the south of the three-bone tripod, mourners placed two concentrations of shells, one of 37 small cowries and the other of 40 small limpets. Both of these shell species can be linked to ancient Maya religious thought. The limpets reference the giant limpet, which,
when its center is carved out, is a sacred jewel worn as a pectoral by Maya kings of the Classic period. The cowries reference a giant cowrie to the south of these two shell concentrations. This giant cowrie is unusual. It is a deer cowrie in modern parlance, and in our view it is visually referenced in the painted vase corpus of the Codex Style (Grube and Nahm 1994) as the embodiment of the Chichan, the Deer Snake spirit who is the ally and companion of the K’uhul Kaanul Ajawob, the lords of the hegemonic power based at Dzibanché in the Early Classic period. The deer cowrie has two patterns—one displays white dots on a brown field (like the back of a fawn) and the other displays beige stripes on a brown field. We propose that the first pattern depicts the open deerskin bundle with white diving tokens on it;
The second pattern depicts the closed deerskin diving bundle. The way spirit of Chichan is depicted as this second, closed-bundle representation of the shell. We suggest that the deer cowrie shell represents the divining face described above in relation to the old god seated on the three-bone altar, holding a face as discovered in Tikal Burial 10. Our identification is based on a specific contextual comparison.

Specifically at El Perú-Waka’, Michelle Rich and her colleagues (2010) discovered a seventh-century royal tomb of a vassal king of Kaanul who had a bundle of 64 miniature effigy spindle whorl diving tokens and a cut upper section of a giant deer cowrie shell. Next to the shell Rich found a concentration of dozens of carved bone sticks. These elaborate polychromed sticks included several depictions of hands holding shells with faces inside them. Others just showed hands holding faces. Erik Boot (2005) argued that the hands holding faces on the corpus of Late Classic painted vases depicting scribes with this gesture references the ancient Mayan verb *pak’, 'to carve masks' but also ’to shape by hand, to order, to arrange.' We propose that this verb alludes to casting tokens, both small ones as ”ones” and sticks as “fives” in numerical prophecy. The El Perú-Waka’ Burial 39 bundles of sticks, tokens, and giant deer cowrie suggest that the deer cowrie in Burial 23 was such a ”face” and references conjuring the Chichan Deer Snake spirit companion of Kaanul kings. Such a contextual interpretation is commensurate with the conjuring of a deer way spirit in an assemblage of 23 figurines at the foot of the Waka’ king in Burial 39. If we are correct in this assessment then the king in Burial 23 was not only from the south but also from Kaanul.

Adjacent to the giant deer cowrie, excavators discovered concentrations of small cowries and limpet shells, three of which were painted red. In light of the foregoing discussion we are of the view that these were casting tokens used in divination. Among these shells were some splinters of manatee bone, possibly calculating sticks. Giant marine limpet shells were carved by the Early Classic Maya to be worn as royal pectorals. One such ornament discovered in the Hunal royal tomb at Copán in Honduras (Bell et al. 2004:134, plate 4) was inset with an elaborate mosaic depicting the Feathered Serpent with an ancestor emerging from its mouth. It is possible that these tiny limpets also carried important sacred meaning. Reinforcing the notion that shells relate to faces, there was a carefully carved effigy olive shell ”skull” in *Spondylus in this assemblage. Olive shell ”skulls” are well documented in royal tomb contexts elsewhere, and in Burial 24 discussed below, but this Spondylus effigy is remarkable and unique. King U Kan Le’k Tok’, a late eighth-century ruler discovered at Ek’ Balam, was also interred with large quantities of shell tokens, along with unique carved shell cacao bean counters. There are other examples of such tokens in elite tombs at El Perú-Waka’ (Eppich 2007; Freidel et al. 2012). Thus, the ruler in Burial 23 was not unique in his eternal performance as a numerate individual using calculating and divining tokens.

Another shell talisman next to the ruler on his left side was carved in the form of a crouching creature with cross-hatching on the back and a nimbus around the head. This looks very much like stylized creatures embroidered onto Maya textiles in contemporary societies in both the highlands and lowlands. It might represent a frog or toad of the kind that symbolized royal rebirth. It is crouching on a profile polymorphic head with a beard. This might
depict a way spirit companion (for discussion of way spirits, see Grube and Nahm 1994; Houston and Stuart 1989). The theme of rebirth is evident in a concentration of objects placed in the vicinity of the hands over the groin (figures 7.7b and 7.7c), the birthing place as seen in other royal tombs such as the sarcophagus of K’inich Janaab Pakal at Palenque, where the object in the groin was a jade image of the Maize God. These materials in the Burial 23 case likely were bound into the wrappings of the body. Clutched in the hands of the ruler were three large, fine jade beads, possibly representing the Three Stone Place of Classic creation mythology (Freidel et al. 1993). Karl Taube (1998) made the case for this hearth being the jade hearth. Below these beads was a carved Spondylus face of the youthful Maize God. This image can be identified as the Early Classic Maya Maize God as defined by Karl Taube (1985) by the presence of the frontal tonsure and the flanking side curls. Along with these features this image has the upper buckteeth characteristic of the Early Classic Maize God. The material, Spondylus shell, is red, the color of east and resurrection, and it is this shell that is part of the cosmic womb called the Xok Shell girdle ornament worn by the Moon Goddess and the Maize God. This image of the reborn Maize God is accompanied by two “Charlie Chaplin” figures (Mora-Marín 2015) of a kind of deity shown with arms in the bundle-cradling position pervasively distributed in the Late Formative and Early Classic lowlands, and a very fine-quality jade profile face of a beaked personage wearing a headband. This last jewel might represent the logograph for itz’at, ‘sage’ (see Freidel et al. 1993:figure 2:28).

All together, we propose that the materials in the groin area explicitly denote resurrection in emulation of the Maize God. Placing god figures in the groin area may be a trope in interment of divine kings and queens. King K’inich Janaab Pakal was buried with a jade figure tentatively identified by Linda Schele and Peter Mathews as the Maize God (1998:figure 3:39). In our view, and that of Scherer (2015:108, figure 3.2), this is clearly again a tonsured Maize God. Queen K’abel of El Perú-Waka’ (Navarro-Farr and Rich 2014:figure 1.18) had in her groin area a stalactite fragment carved in the image of one of her polity’s tutelary deities, Akan, bleeding his neck with an axe. The blood here was depicted with cinnabar across the neck area of the figure. It is certainly the case that, when preservation of context allows, in the case of Maya royal tombs we can discern the deliberate arrangement of materials. Most commonly stingray spines and other bloodletting instruments are placed in the groin area (Fitzsimmons 2009:90). Variations on royal performance in death include the placement of the famous Altun Ha Huunal Jade of royal majesty (called the Sun God) on the right hand of the ruler in Tomb 4 of Str. B4 (Pendergast 1982:figure 33, Tomb B-4/7). A most intriguing example of this kind of tableau macabre is in the tomb of the Red Queen at Palenque (very likely Queen Ix Tz’akb’u Ajaw, Pakal’s wife [Tiesler et al. 2004]). There, a whole Spondylus shell, symbolic of the cosmic womb, was placed above the queen in the position of an ancestor as seen typically on carved stone monument depictions. Within the Spondylus shell was a small carving of a royal figure wearing a dress and the same three-celt royal belt insignia that adorned the queen herself. So here perhaps is the queen being perpetually reborn in heaven (González Cruz 2011:175). The materials we discuss here and their contextual pattern in our case confirm that the Yaxuná Burial 23 ruler was indeed a divine ruler in the mainstream
fashion of the Classic period, despite the absence of royal inscriptions at Yaxuná declaring the presence of such divine rulers such as those discovered in the southern lowlands.

Other artifacts directly associated with the body of the ruler include a remarkable composite drumstick made of deer antler and bone (figure 7.6). This was placed above the head in the position of antlers, suggesting that the deceased was performing as the human Chichan, an anthropomorphic deity wearing antlers, sometimes shown with deer ears, on codex-style vases from the Mirador area. A small turtle shell found west of the headdress might represent the kind of drum the Maize God played with an antler tine drumstick, as depicted, for example, on the West Wall mural of the Pinturas Building at San Bartolo in Petén (Taube et al. 2010). Jade and shell beads of various sizes were scattered around the upper torso of the deceased, some likely adornments of the body and others possibly sewn onto the bundle shroud. Yet the most astonishing artifacts were two finely carved sprocketed *Spondylus* ear-flares. A similar flare was reported at Dzibilchaltún, but not as clearly carved and not in such a context. These flares certainly declare that this ruler was eternally performing as the deities who characteristically wear such *Spondylus* adornments. The deities are the rain god Chaak and the watery sun god Hun Yeh Winik, One Tooth Person (God I of the Palenque Triad), both of course associated with the return of the beneficent rains to nourish the crops.

A final performance feature of the original interment of the ruler in Burial 23 was discerned by Charles Suhler (Stanton et al. 2010; Suhler 1996). That was the likelihood that the bundled body was “floated” into a thick slurry of white marl poured into the chamber after the surrounding artifacts were arranged in it. The body slowly sank into this white water, “entering the water” being a prime metaphor for royal death in the glyphic texts of the Classic period. Suhler speculates that this white marl symbolized the cosmic east-west path of the sky, with the ruler entering the road in the west in order to resurrect in the east. Such reasoning makes sense in light of the earflares of the dawning eastern sun on this king. In light of the evidence suggesting that this ruler also entered the supernatural world in ecstasy engendered by psychogenic enemas and drinks, it is possible that the metaphor of white dreaming place, *sak waybil*, was also symbolized here. *Sak waybil*, as well as referencing such an occult locale, also resonates with an important royal title, *sak wayis*, sometimes glossed as ‘white goblin’ or ‘bright spirit’ in the historical literature. It is a title favored by rulers of Classic period Kaanul and their vassal kings and queens in inscriptions in the southern lowlands.

Given the limited information available on Classic period royalty at Yaxuná, it is quite feasible that the king in Burial 23 was a foreign interloper, simply given his isotopic profile as a foreigner, as discussed in previous chapters. Likewise, the location of his tomb suggests that he was indeed a founder of a new government there. The ceramic offerings are decisively southern in style, so he may well have come from a kingdom in the southern lowland area to reestablish Yaxuná to something of its former greatness. Yet his royal diadem jewels are of northern lowland style, so his kingship references the ambient politics of the northern lowlands. He may have been an emissary of Kaanul, the hegemonic polity based in southern Quintana Roo and Campeche in the Early Classic period. In light of the possibility that Formative Yaxuná was a salient of a southern hegemony, as discussed earlier in this volume,
such a return of a king might have been regarded as not only acceptable but celebrated by those living in the shadows of the ancient temples there. The notion of a dynasty at Yaxuná is predicated on the principle that divine kings were dynastic in the southern lowland Classic period. That may or may not hold as the research has to date produced only two royal tombs at the site. What can be said with certainty is that this mature man, although he suffered physical ailments like degenerative arthritis, was a true divine king in the centuries-old tradition of divine kingship found depicted in the southern lowlands on the Formative period Pinturas West Wall mural at San Bartolo, in the carved precious royal jewels of Cache 1 at Cerro Maya, and in the myriad Early Classic expressions in that part of the Maya lowlands. He was not the first king in the Yaxuná community, for Cache 2 in Str. 6F-4/4th, as discussed below, contained heirloom Formative-style diadem jewels in what was certainly a cache of royal insignia jewelry. And, as we discuss in the following section, the lords of Yaxuná strived to legitimize their succession even when it was the result of conquest and replacement of a vanquished king.

ROYAL BURIALS AS FORCED TERMINATION

Just like Str. 6F-3, the Str. 6F-4 locality was actively used in the Terminal Formative. Excavations in the plaza in front of it show that the eastern support platform for the North Acropolis was in place and within 50 cm of its final elevation at that time. The deepest exposure by the Selz Foundation project in the building locality itself, Str. 6F-4-6, yielded Late Formative sherd material (Stanton et al. 2010:182). The nature of the Phase 6 building remains enigmatic, but it was probably for public purposes given its location and orientation as part of a triadic group. The ensuing two building phases were certainly Early Classic pyramids. Stair treads of 6F-4-5 accessing the summit were preserved under the masonry chamber of Burial 24. Apparently the laborers responsible for creating that chamber dug deep enough to remove all traces of the Str. 6F-4-4 stairway that must have lain over this earlier one. By footing the masonry chamber on stair treads, the people buried inside that chamber were eternally performing on the stairway, which in turn ascends from west to east in the direction of the dawning sun. While we have no evidence from our summit excavations of a superstructure associated with Str. 6F-4-5, we found the remains of 6F-4-4 on a summit temple.

This masonry superstructure had at least one rectangular room narrow enough to spring a corbel vault. All traces of such a roof were deliberately removed when the temple was terminated, stripped of wall and floor plaster, and encased inside retaining walls of a platform associated with the major redesign of the locality in Str. 6F-4-3. Because of our limited summit exposure we cannot be certain that the eastern-finished block-stone retaining wall of the Phase 3 platform was not also the inner surface of a standing wall of a two-roomed tandem-plan Phase 4 summit temple. The distance of that wall from the eastern doorway of the one certain summit room is appropriate for a second room also spanned by a corbel vault. Given the ubiquity of two-room tandem-planned temples, this seems a likely prospect, but
the outer masonry facing of this western wall slumped off the summit long ago. Whether the summit temple faced both east and west or just west, its principal orientation was certainly to the west and to the plaza of the triadic group.

With the above structural evidence, we believe that the king buried in Burial 23 evidently rebuilt the triadic group when he came to power in Yaxúná, refurbishing the 6F-4 locality along with the 6F-3 apical pyramid of the acropolis to the northwest. In contrast, this elaborated westward-facing shrine on a pyramidal building platform in its final Phase 4 design reemphasized the east-west axis of the Formative ceremonial center (Stanton and Freidel 2005) and complemented the north-south axis of the city enhanced by the stranger king and his Early Classic refurbishment of Str. 6F-3. As we will show in our discussion of Burial 24, we think its placement in this building is specifically related to the east-west axis of Str. 6F-4 and to the dedication of the new temple to sun and moon deities and to the agrarian year.

The radical redesign of the Str. 6F-4 locality (structural phase 6F-4-3) as a performance place included the building of the tomb chamber for Burial 24 in a terrace over a new frontal range structure (figure 7.7). That structure had a large corbel-vaulted chamber with five doorways facing a broad new stairway giving wide visual and physical access to the plaza below. Above the terrace, which had three distinct levels, was the summit platform encasing the terminated shrine of Phase 4. Along the east-west centerline of the floor area of the terminated shrine, the builders placed two cached offerings. These symbolically charged offerings are clearly coeval with the overall transformation of the building, the creation of the Burial 24 tomb chamber, and the interment of the people in it, and so we will discuss them in the section concerning the contextual analysis of the tomb offerings and arrangement of the individuals. A relatively narrow stairway on the northern side of the new building gave access to the terraces from the stairway area below. Altogether, the new building had three major performance places: the lower stairway and area fronting the five-doorway façade; the terraces, including the tomb chamber of Burial 24; and the open summit of the new upper platform encasing the terminated temple. The individuals interred in Burial 24 were thus doubly engaged in performance, once in a stairway of the original building design on which the tomb was footed, and then again in the upper terraces, which were clearly made for wide visual access from the plaza of the North Acropolis.

In light of the sacrificial nature of the Burial 24 tomb contents in Str. 6F-4 and its near contemporaneity with Burial 23, we have previously argued (Freidel and Suhler 1998; Stanton et al. 2010; Suhler and Freidel 1998) that the regal occupant of Burial 23 was perhaps affiliated with the royalty placed into Tomb 24. This high elite status is manifest in the royal jewels and diadem fragments accompanying the hypothesized king and two of the women in the tomb. It should be noted that no evidence from the human remains has been discovered to test the hypothesis of family affiliation, although the first Yaxúná Project did attempt some DNA extraction. This context and the coeval caches deposited in the summit of 6F-4 point to an adoption by the king commissioning these deposits of symbols reminiscent of Teotihuacan and the New Order alliances of Kaloomte’ Sihyaj K’ahk’, adversaries of the Kaanul hegemony (Martin and Grube 2008; see also Freidel et al. 2007, 2013). These
offerings include slab-footed tripod vessels (plate 7.7a), a signature of the era of the New Order whether emulative and commemorative local vessels, as in the present case, or rare imports as in the Hunal Tomb at Copán (Bell et al. 2004).

While we have no written evidence of dynasty at Yaxuná, and indeed believe that no such evidence is ever likely to be forthcoming because the northern divine kingship appears to have been non-dynastic until the advent of the Ek’ Balam dynasty in the ninth century, it is clear from our tombs that continuity in the tradition of kingship was important, however that continuity was attained (Freidel et al. 2013). The context of Burial 24 shows the extraordinary lengths that royalty went to in showing continuity through sacrifice and rebirth.

**SACRIFICE AND ROYAL SUBSTITUTION IN A TABLEAU MACABRE**

People could enter the Burial 23 tomb chamber through a trapdoor in the broad terrace surface above the five-doorway masonry-vaulted building fronting the structure. Recall that the upper plaza of the coeval phase of Str. 6F-3 also had a trapdoor entry into the subsurface corridors and subsurface chamber used for royal rituals there. In this manner the tomb
chamber was similarly designed for royal accession rituals like Str. 6F-3, but in this case the human performers would remain deceased and apotheosize as divinities accompanying the new conqueror king. The terraces on top of the vaulted palace of Str. 6F-4 were accessible by a narrow stairway on the northern side of the building. The tableau performance arranged with bundled and unbundled bodies inside the tomb defined and commemorated the ritual and mythic framework of the sacrifice and succession events for which the overall building was evidently designed. This intention by the successor ruler to reference the whole new building can be inferred from the symbolic connections between the tomb tableau and the coeval cached offerings inside the open summit platform. As we have argued above, Burial 24 most probably marks the end of the city’s dynastic rule in the Early Classic (Ambrosino et al. 2001; Stanton et al. 2010; Suhler et al. 2004). Archaeologists of the Selz Foundation Yaxuná Project have interpreted this as a termination of a local ruling family carried out by the conquering outsiders who wished to continue the tradition of divine kingship in the city. Its chronological range (late Yaxuná II) falls into Tikal’s Manik IIIa construction period, which materializes in Teotihuacanoid ceramics among the offerings. Burial 24 is a complex ritual deposit in the tradition of Teotihuacan’s Early Classic dedicatory offerings in the Pyramid of the Moon (Sugiyama et al. 2014; Sugiyama and López Luján 2007). It contains an array of human interments arranged in and around a large number of artifacts referencing divine authority, deities, and other supernatural beings. The new archaeothanatological analyses of this deposit significantly advance and clarify the reading of this context to discern the performance intended by its makers.

The chamber for Burial 24 was integral to the design of the terraces above the five-doorway palace below and the open-summitted platform above. The chamber had probably been set up to emphasize the principal deceased ruler in a similar fashion as Burial 23, especially considering its dimensions and orientation (plate 7.7a). However, if we take a look at the stratigraphically and taphonomically reconstructed depositional sequence (plate 7.7b, 7.8, and 7.9; table 7.1), it is evident that the tableau represented the ruler’s resurrection in the person of his executioner and that he and his entourage symbolized the new meaning of this sacred mountain pyramid. Appropriately, the first bundle on the floor of the tomb chamber was the sacrificed ruler placed at the southern end. He was most likely a mature male who had been half-burned in a fleshed state somewhere outside the tomb (plate 7.8). We infer this progression since the chamber itself did not show marks of the sort and volume of burning required to consume an adult body in place over several hours. The bundle was filled with cremation slag, charred strips of soft tissue, bone scraps, and ashes. The extremities did not show signs of heat exposure, making a case for incomplete combustion and subsequent bundling of this middle-aged male, prior to being tied and placed within the womb of the mountain. The skull, the base of which is banded and charred, was separated from the rest of the scorched remains and placed on a plate together with other offerings at one side of the cremains.

We identify Burial 24-14 as the principal performer and ruler because his bundle was directly associated with a distinctive Early Classic form of royal crown (plate 7.10) composed of polished and pierced segments of white *Strombus* shell (plate 7.10a) accompanied
TABLE 7.1. Chronological range and burial characteristics assigned to the two royal burials from Yaxuná, as discussed in this chapter and updated from Stanton et al. (2010). The list of individuals of Burial 24 is organized according to the inferred depositional sequence. Containers (EXE) are separately listed from the main occupants (MAIN).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOMB #</th>
<th>PHASE</th>
<th>ARRANGEMENT</th>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>DECUB.</th>
<th>ORIENT.</th>
<th>ARTICUL.</th>
<th>ANTHROPOGENIC MARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. 23 (FUN)</td>
<td>Yaxuná IIa</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Dorsal</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(AD 250–400)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 24-14 (MAIN)</td>
<td>Yaxuná IIb (AD 400–500)</td>
<td>Southern Triad (M)</td>
<td>Bundle?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>No Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 24-7 (MAIN)</td>
<td>Yaxuná IIb (AD 400–500)</td>
<td>Southern Triad (M)</td>
<td>Tied?</td>
<td>Seated</td>
<td>N-S</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Unhealed Hemorrhage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 24-10 (MAIN)</td>
<td>Yaxuná IIb (AD 400–500)</td>
<td>Northern Triad (F)</td>
<td>Tied?</td>
<td>Seated</td>
<td>SE-NW</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 24-11 (MAIN)</td>
<td>Yaxuná IIb (AD 400–500)</td>
<td>Southern Triad (M)</td>
<td>Tied?</td>
<td>Seated</td>
<td>SE-NW</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Unhealed Chopmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 24-5 (MAIN)</td>
<td>Yaxuná IIb (AD 400–500)</td>
<td>Northern Triad (F)</td>
<td>Tied?</td>
<td>Seated</td>
<td>SW-NE</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Unhealed Chopmark?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 24-6 (MAIN)</td>
<td>Yaxuná IIb (AD 400–500)</td>
<td>Northern Triad (F)</td>
<td>Tied?</td>
<td>Seated</td>
<td>S-N</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 24-2/12 (EXE)</td>
<td>Yaxuná IIb (AD 400–500)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Dorsal</td>
<td>S-N</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 24-3 (EXE)</td>
<td>Yaxuná IIb (AD 400–500)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
<td>Ventral</td>
<td>SW-NE</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 24-4 (EXE)</td>
<td>Yaxuná IIb (AD 400–500)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
<td>Lateral</td>
<td>SE-NW</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 24-1 (EXE)</td>
<td>Yaxuná IIb (AD 400–500)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
<td>Lateral</td>
<td>W-E</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No Data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
by a single jade diadem jewel (plate 7.10b). We discovered three shell segments of this crown together, all badly burned, as was the jade diadem jewel, concentrated in the bundle zone. Segmented headband crowns are rarely depicted on Early Classic jade portraits of rulers, as in the case of one illustrated in the exhibition Lords of Creation (Fields and Reents-Budet 2005:121, figure 25) and probably from the southern lowlands. The color white is pervasively associated with the Classic royal headband. The bioanthropologist who excavated Burial 24, Sharon Bennett (Stanton et al. 2010), reported discovering a second shell headband of this sort in situ on the skull of Individual 24-6. The photographic record of this discovery has been lost, so this observation must be taken as provisional, but it was corroborated by Charles Suhler, who was the field director during the excavation and who incorporated this observation into his doctoral dissertation on the North Acropolis of Yaxúná (Suhler 1996; see also Ardren 2002; Stanton et al. 2010; Suhler and Freidel 1998).

Further corroboration for the importance of this distinctive shell band can be seen in the context of Early Classic (AD 378) PNT 019 at Tikal (Laporte and Fialko 1990, 1995), identified by the Guatemalan project as the tomb of a ruler and probably King Chak Tok Ich’aak I (figure 7.8). The published illustration of the context shows a band of four polished and carved segments of white shell pierced for sewing onto cloth or leather adjacent to the skull of the deceased. The location of the shell band suggests that it had been placed around the neck of the individual as a necklace along with a real necklace of four tubular jades carved in the mat symbol of royalty. However, the star-shaped ear flares of this ruler were placed to either side of the head, suggesting that these shell insignia were arranged in proximity to the head rather than on it at the time of interment.

The jade diadem jewel in Burial 24 depicts a profile quetzal bird. Quetzals inhabit the cloud forests of the Guatemalan piedmont, and the feathers of this bird were highly prized by the Maya at all times. This bird, k’uk’ in Mayan, was incorporated into the royal name of the famous early fifth century AD king K’inch Yax K’uk’ Mo’ of Copán, Honduras (r. AD 425–436), and he was later depicted with Quetzal features on his headdress. Royal name diadem jewels are known from the Maya Classic record. On Tikal Stela 31 King Siyaj Chan K’awiil II (ca. AD 411–456) holds a crown ornamented with a diadem jewel depicting an owl pierced by an atlatl javelin, Spearthrower Owl, his grandfather’s name. King K’inich Bahlam II of El Perú-Waka’ (r. AD 657–711) had himself portrayed with his name diadem jewel on El Perú-Waka’ stelae 1, 33, and 35. King Yuknoom Yich’aak K’ahk’ (r. AD 686–697) was interred in Calakmul Tomb 4 with a fiery claw as a diadem on his elaborate headdress (García-Moreno 2003:figure 4), confirming that the deceased was indeed him and not his illustrious father Yuknoom Ch’een II. So the use of a personal diadem jewel by the ruler interred in Yaxúná Burial 24 is part of a broad pattern in Maya royal practice.

The skull of this king was discovered in a plate adjacent to the bundled cremains, evidently intentionally placed there. Also in the plate was a pair of star-shaped ear flares like those discovered in PNT 019 (plate 7.11a). Other artifacts included a bone stylus, a polishing or grinding stone, and lumps of black and green material suitable for painting. The most significant symbolism in this plate is painted on its inner surface (plate 7.11b). The scene shows
FIGURE 7.8. PNT Burial 019, context and associated artifacts (from Laporte and Fialko 1995).
a lord dressed in a full Scarlet Macaw suit embellished with multiple tails of the kind worn by Teotihuacano lords in this period (e.g., Yaxuná Stela 1, Tikal Stela 31). This costume is a clear example of what Karl Taube (2009) has identified as the Avian Maize God. In his cogent interpretation, this image represents the incorporation of the attributes of the Solar Scarlet Macaw deity known as the Principal Bird Deity by the Maize God following defeat and sacrifice of that bird. By the Late Classic period this idea has evolved into the Holmul Dancer version of the Maize God, wearing a back rack decorated with Quetzal plumes. Taube affirms the association of Quetzal plumes with growing maize, symbol of the resurrected Maize God. The lord on the plate in Burial 24 is carrying a turtle carapace, which is both a drum and also a symbol of the earth out of which the Maize God resurrects. The association of this painted sacrifice and resurrection performance with the skull of the postulated king in Burial 24 suggests that the lord depicted on the plate is the conqueror and executioner in the performance. It situates the sacrifice of this king and his entourage, and the advent of the new king, in mythical narrative time and causality. It is also relevant that the red feathers of the Scarlet Macaw symbolize fire.

In light of the reality, detailed below, that Burial 24-14 was just the first of an assembly of bundled and unbundled individuals concentrated in this tomb chamber, it is highly likely that his death was sacrificial, and it is logical to explore the prospect that he was killed with fire. The condition of his cremains show that his body was only partially burned and that in particular the extremities were not burned. It is significant that his partially burned body was bundled and placed in the tomb chamber. Vera Tiesler and her colleagues (Chinchilla Mazariegos et al. 2015) have recently reported on a sacrificial cremation offering at Tikal that also dates to the Early Classic period and has affiliations with Tikal in the era of the Teotihuacan alliance—indeed it is on the centerline axis of the Lost World Pyramid Group, a solar commemorative E-Group, directly west of Str. 5D-86, the building holding PNT 019 discussed above. In the case of PNT 7TT-01, the cremains of the victims were also only partially burned while fleshed (Chinchilla Mazariegos et al. 2015:93), and then the pit fire was finally extinguished with earth. Chinchilla Mazariegos and his colleagues make an interesting case for this double sacrifice by fire being related to myths about the Maize God, the Hero Twins, and solar and lunar deities.

A case can also be made for Burial 24-14 as a victim of sacrifice by fire related to myth and ritual. Karl Taube (1988), in a seminal article on scaffold and fire sacrifice in ancient Mesoamerica, proposes that a Contact period rain and agriculture ritual called *tup k’ak’, ‘put out fire,’ has clear iconographic Classic period antecedents (figure 7.9). In the *tup k’ak’ wild animals were captured, had their heart sacrificed, were placed on a pyre and partially cremated, and then the fire was extinguished with water. Taube shows that a variant of this ritual also described by Landa had clear martial connotations and likely involved human sacrifice of victims captured in war. He proceeds to show how a human victim adorned as a deer is depicted in Classic Maya art tied to a scaffold and burned to death. A variation on this form of fire sacrifice has the victim with opened chest splayed across a container holding bundles of firewood at the base of an accession scaffold. These scenes are particularly represented in stelae.
at the site of Piedras Negras. In both of these kinds of fire sacrifice, the extremities are less exposed to the fire than the torso, commensurate with the body of the ruler in Burial 24. Further, the burning on the skull of this individual would compare with the positioning of the victim in scaffold sacrifice if lashed into a quadrupedal pose. Finally, it would be fair to deduce that the partial burning of the body, the strips of flesh included in the bundle, would point to the prospect that the fire was extinguished before the process of cremation was completed. Chinchilla Mazariegos and his colleagues (2015) conclude that the cremation sacrifice at Tikal involved putting out the fire with dirt and stones. The fire burning Burial 24-14 may have been put out with water, and then the sacred remains of this sacrificed king bundled and interred at the southern apex of the tomb chamber. Why the apex of the tableau is in the south, when in general that direction is down, not up, in Maya cosmology, will become clearer as the contextual analysis proceeds.

The theme in these rituals reviewed by Taube and possibly represented at Yaxuná is renewal, either of the agrarian landscape in the period between the planting of the fields and the coming of the rains, or between one ruler and another. While we can never be certain of such contextual interpretations in the absence of historical glyphic commentary or iconographic depiction, they are commensurate with other evidence from the tableau in Burial 24.
It is worth attempting to place such extraordinary complex ritual deposits into narrative mythic and ritual context as done by Chinchilla Mazariegos and colleagues in the case from Tikal. We surmise that the intention of the ritual was to celebrate the transition from one government and ruler to another and perhaps also to insist that this transition would bring beneficent rains and prosperity to the city. We have other evidence relevant to this notion described below. In light of the complex arrangement in close space, it can be asserted that the ritual specialists who arranged the bodies in Burial 24 had some such significant ritual and mythic frame of reference in mind.

The archaeothanatological analysis here described by Vera Tiesler and Andrea Cucina effectively replaces all prior efforts to understand Burial 24 and forms the basis of the contextual symbolic analysis to follow. Therefore, we begin with that analysis and then consider possibilities of interpretation. After the initial placement of the bundled cremains of the ruler, ten more individuals from his entourage were arranged in the cramped space of the stone chamber. We could distinguish two concentrations: one orderly placed southern assemblage and a second one of cast-in corpses, including that of a pregnant woman still holding a baby in her womb. None of the bodies showed any clear evidence of prolonged fire exposure. Although we cannot prove that all the bodies were placed in one single event, there are strong indications favoring a scenario of a hasty mass burial. First, at least half of the corpses (the haphazardly disposed northern concentration) shared the decomposition process, as is suggested by the final disposition of their articulated skeletons. This indicates that they were deposited in a fleshed state in one single event. Second, toward the center and the southern section of the chamber, most bodies have an orderly posture and appear to have been tied tightly together in a seated position although not properly wrapped in blankets. Therefore, the decomposing corpses would have soon fallen over, the disarticulated heads falling and rolling together with their first vertebrae still attached to the skull base. Note that all the individuals in the southern half are males, while the group in the northern sector of Tomb 24 is composed of females, youngsters, and children, apparently dumped directly from the entry hole on the ground. Third, a pair of centrally accommodated bodies, which were laid sitting back to back, bore fresh hemorrhagic, possibly traumatic, lesions (plate 7.12). Two additional bodies exhibited marks of perimortem violence in the form of blows to the chest, limbs, and the head. Taken together, the data confirm a scenario of violence and collective death rather than a gradual succession of revered ancestral kin.

Building on the observation that is likely that the deceased interred in Burial 24 were all victims of sacrifice, we infer that the arrangement of males in the south end of the chamber versus females in the north end was deliberate and part of the tableau. At this juncture it is important to focus on one of the females formally seated in the west central part of the tomb, Burial 24-6, a robust young woman in her twenties who was, according to Sharon Bennett, interred with a royal headband on her head (figure 7.10a). As previously mentioned, we cannot confirm this observation from the photographic record. Burial 24-6 was further associated with ceramic containers, including a gutter-spouted cup and pedestaled cup that we previously associated in our discussion of Burial 23 with the preparation of potions for
ecstatic vision states. We also found another deer bone tube here of the kind that may have served as the syringe of an enema elyter. Relevant to this theme of visions, a carved bone stylus in a bowl next to this woman depicts (figure 7.10b) a distinctive spirit companion, way being, identified by Grube and Nahm (1994) as the flea-headed spider monkey. While we think that such ornate bone pins likely functioned as styluses for writing on wax, they certainly were insignia of literate and numerate elite worn as hairpins. The flea-headed monkey is depicted on tomb offerings discovered at Dzibanché, the Early Classic capital of Kaanul, and there is a painted scene of way spirits in which this spider monkey carries the Chihchan, Snake Deer way of the Kaanul rulers.

In the original analysis of the deposit this woman was cradling a unique ceramic effigy of a Teotihuacan-inspired goddess figurine (see Ardren 2002), painted in the canons of the Dos Arroyos ceramic group, that we now identify as the Moon Goddess (plate 7.13a). In the new and more accurate interpretation she was bundled or tied up in a fleshed state adjacent to this image, and as her body decomposed she slumped toward the figure. This analysis calls into question the possibility that the shell crown was still on her head when discovered, but in the last analysis the point is moot—the royal crown was next to this woman if not on her head. This crown has a variant of the trefoil jade diadem typical of Maya royal crowns (Freidel and Suhler 1995). The figurine is unequivocally a local ceramic artist’s effort to create an image of a Teotihuacan deity, a pubescent goddess like the female effigies found in several complex ritual deposits in the Pyramid of the Moon excavations at Teotihuacan (Sugiyama and López

**FIGURE 7.10.** (a) Shell segments and jade diadem jewel from the royal headband associated with Burial 24-6; (b) carved bone stylus in the image of the Flea-Headed Monkey spirit (photo by Yaxuná Project, Selz Foundation).
Luján 2007). Indeed, it is quite possible that the same artist created the goddess effigy and the Scarlet Macaw plate discussed above, as the color palette is the same.

This unique ceramic figure was certainly made by a master ceramic artisan of the Maya world being instructed by Teotihuacanos. The image shows a stylistically Teotihuacan pubescent female with a stepped mountain motif painted across her face. She has a black scroll painted on her right arm, the “lazy S” motif (plate 7.13b) that from Middle Formative times signified rain clouds into the time of the Classic Maya and later (Reilly 1995). This “lazy S” symbol, *muyal* in Mayan, is painted or tattooed onto images of the Classic Maya Moon Goddess as seen, for example, on K559 (plate 7.14a) where the goddess is giving birth to the rabbit she often carries on her lap. In another Classic scene K4022 (plate 7.14b) a god paints the Moon Goddess, who wears the scroll on her arm and holds the shell paint pot, as a *muyal* scroll cloud embraces both. Janet Berlo (1992), following Taube (1983), proposed that the Pyramid of the Moon was dedicated to a great goddess who was depicted on the Tepantitla Mural as an effigy mountain being composed of a fire censer sprouting entwined trees, the goggle eyes and fangs of the Storm God with water pouring from an upturned crescent basin representing her womb, and fire and rain coming off her hands. Within the mountain analogy, the womb waters represented the springs at the base of Cerro Gordo, while the trees grew on its extinct volcano summit. Susan Milbrath (1996) further explained that this upturned basin represented the crescent moon at the season of the returning rains, a Classic prelude to the Postclassic Aztec goddess Yacamitzli.

The face paint on the Burial 24 figurine depicts a stepped motif found on mural images at Teotihuacan, and in general this motif represents a mountain in Mesoamerica. The Pyramid of the Moon is an effigy of Cerro Gordo directly to the north of it, and a greenstone adolescent female figure from the complex deposit designated Burial 2 in the pyramid wears a stepped headdress, which could also represent a mountain. Nawa Sugiyama (2014), the excavator of Burial 2, identifies this figurine, along with a monumental sculpture discovered in the plaza of the Moon Pyramid, as a female deity associated with water. He suggests this in the context of a hypothesis that the Moon Pyramid is associated with a Teotihuacan Measurement Unit (TMU) of 105, the number of days when the sun moves northward between April 29th and August 12th, which symbolizes the rainy season.

Sugiyama in the same paper suggests that the Sun Pyramid is associated in terms of TMUs with the other half of the year that represents the dry season. He builds on this urban design to show that the Sun Pyramid is associated with fire rituals as evinced in sculptured elements of bundles of firewood and the presence of a massive monumental fire censer on the summit. Fash and colleagues (2009) have also identified the Sun Pyramid as a *wite’ naah* Fire Shrine and a place for new fire rituals. Sugiyama goes on to suggest that the direction north in this primordial cosmogram is associated with the rainy season, the feminine divine and water, while the direction south is associated with the dry season, the male divine, fire, and heat.

There are several reasons to posit that the arrangement of individuals in Burial 24 might reflect the Teotihuacan cosmogram described by Sugiyama. In the south there is the fire intrinsic to the cremains of Burial 24-14, the solar and fire connotations of the Scarlet Macaw
impersonator, and the aggregation of males. To the north of this pattern, beginning in the center, there is a royal woman who is associated with a Teotihuacan-style Moon Goddess figurine. This individual is also associated with a shell pectoral, a reference to water and the sea. The aggregation of females in the north continues with a mature woman to the north of Burial 24-6 who was associated with pierced pieces of coral, possibly part of a headdress and another reference to water. This woman also had a figurine (figure 7.11a), but this one was of unfired clay painted red. This unique figurine has peculiar rectangular ears. We posit that these represent rabbit ears, which are often depicted as lying flat against the side of the head in Maya art. While this is just a supposition, it makes sense in light of the identification of Burial 24-6 with the Moon Goddess. The elder goddess in the K559 scene is Chak Chel, the old midwife goddess in Maya myth. There she is bringing the rabbit up to the breast of the Moon Goddess.

The theme of fecundity referenced in the two women with figurines is continued in the case of Burial 24-2, a supine pregnant young woman on the eastern side of the chamber in a line with individual Burial 24-6 and flanking two seated men in the middle of the chamber. This woman had an elaborate pectoral composed of white olive shells carved as skulls with three jade jewels arranged in a line inside this cluster of shells (figures 7.11b and 7.11c). The Jade Hearth of Creation (Taube 1998) is here referenced against white shells that could represent the Milky Way. That hearth is associated with rebirth and resurrection. Alternatively, these three jades could represent the “in-line triad” of circles that surmount the

**Figure 7.11.** (a) Unfired clay figurine painted red and with tab rabbit ears; (b) pectoral of olive shell skulls and three royal jewels; (c) the profile head of the Old God of Sacrifice (photo by Yaxuná Project, Selz Foundation).
upturned crescent in the girdle of the Teotihuacan goddess on the Tepantitla mural. In this way the jades might reference the Moon Goddess depicted in the figurine. The individual jades include another trefoil royal diadem jewel, a very worn dancing “Charlie Chaplin” figure associated with the conjuring of vision serpents, and a profile head with a St. Andrew’s crossed-bands in the headress (figure 7.11c) that could be a variant of the Old God of sacrifice and divination with his headress of cross-shaped badges of shells briefly mentioned in the section on Burial 23. Certainly the royal diadem identifies this woman with royal status.

The flanking of two seated males by two females signaling fertility and fecundity suggests that the tableau here is a resurrection scene. There are several painted scenes of resurrection in which the Maize God (or a ruler impersonating him) rises out of a turtle shell and is greeted by two nude fertile and fecund young women. In this reading of context, the seated men between the women would represent the Hero Twins sons of the Maize God (who are also featured in this pageant), while the cremains and Scarlet Macaw performer in the plate scene would represent the sacrificed and resurrected Maize God himself. The piling of women and children at the north end of the chamber would mark the end of the formal arrangement and underscore the relationship of the north with women, as suggested in the cosmogram. Finally, a plain, flat rectangular stone was placed between the two seated men and the bundle of cremains. This artifact is of a size and shape that Freidel and his colleagues (2017) identify as a palette used for divination or, coated with wax, for writing. It could mark the inscribing of this ritual and tableau onto the history of Yaxuná.

Two cached offerings dedicating the open summit platform of the rebuilt Str. 6F-4 are relevant to the themes described in the Burial 24 tableau. Cache 2 consisted of a black-painted jar with an animate sculptured black axe head jammed down into it (figures 7.12a and 7.12b).

Within the “chopped” jar were royal jewels, collar beads, ear flares, hair binders, and diadem jewels. It clearly registered the “axing” of the sacrificed king in Burial 24. On top of the array of diadem jewels that likely belonged to this king (figure 7.12c) was an owl diadem jewel with the symbol for shiny on its back. The owl was the pervasive symbol of the Teotihuacan presence in the Maya lowlands in this era, and a major image of war in art at Teotihuacan. Cache 3, set to the east of Cache 2, was a red painted jar with a large pink shell bead buried below it, a Spondylus plaque inside it accompanying a finely carved diadem jewel (figure 7.12d) depicting a person with the head tab and scrolls of the tonsured Maize God. This unique jade appears to be a portrait and not a generic face, and it strongly resembles the face of the Scarlet Macaw Maize God performer in Burial 24. It is possible that this jewel represents the successor to the sacrificed king.

Revealing in this case is the apparent absence of ritual tomb impregnation or protracted cycling, although we noted intense smoking around the entrance void. Indeed, Str. 6F-4 could have served as a Wite’ Naah Fire Shrine of the New Order era (AD 378–520), as the “doll” in Burial 24 as a Teotihuacan-inspired effigy of the young Moon Goddess suggests, and because the tomb contains evidence of the psychedelic potion practice that is associated with the Feathered Serpent, a deity also part of the Wite’ Naah Fire Shrine cult.
In this chapter we have revisited the first two scientifically documented royal tombs from the northern lowlands in light of updated forensic and archaeothanatological methods and skeletal analysis by the UADY bioarchaeology team. This study corrects and adds to our knowledge of these still rare burial contexts from the Early Classic. Burial 23 represents a foreign-born very early member of dynastic leadership. Past his death and primary sepulcher, the remains of this ruler were eventually revisited and terminated ritually to provide cycling and continuity for his subsidiaries. Different from Burial 23, there is substantial evidence...
that the dignitaries allocated together with several containers inside Burial 24 concluded the local dynastic line. On that occasion, a first burnt body was accommodated together with the unexposed-to-fire corpses of the royal family, accompanied by several containers; most probably all had been sacrificed, their fleshed bodies covering up the royal remains in the mortuary mausoleum at a time when Yaxuná was to lose its role as a dynastic player in the lowland regional networks.

What has strengthened this interpretation is our conviction that the bodies and artifacts were deliberately arranged in both tombs to evince an eternal performance by the spirits of those people (Freidel and Suhler 1998; Suhler and Freidel 1998). This is not a new or novel idea regarding the arrangement of Maya people and things in tombs and graves. It was clearly articulated by Michael Coe (1988), reviewed comprehensively by James Fitzsimmons (2009) for royal contexts, compellingly illustrated by Stephen Houston and Andrew Scherer and his colleagues as a society-wide Classic Maya mortuary principle (Houston et al. 2015; Scherer 2015; Scherer et al. 2014) working at El Kinal in the Usumacinta River region, and discussed by Traci Ardren (2015) as a transformation of social identity with regard to child burials in the northern lowlands, including burials at Yaxuná. It is the working premise of deliberate arrangement that demands the most of forensic and contextual analysis. Our record is not perfect, particularly with regard to the complex deposit of Burial 24; but we can attempt to make useful sense of the information, as we understand it. And yes, already during the Early Classic, semi-divine kings were venerated high up in the northern lowlands, as we have made the case for Yaxuná’s royal burials.