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Archaeology and Indigeneity, Past and Present: A View from the Island of Roatán, Honduras

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Archaeology and Indigeneity, Past and Present: A View from the Island of Roatán, Honduras

by

Whitney A. Goodwin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Department of Anthropology College of Arts and Sciences University of South Florida

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Dedication

To my mother, my inspiration, and my husband, my motivation.
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Abstract

Project Roatán was initiated in 2008 as a collaboration between the University of South Florida (USF) and the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History (IHAH) to investigate the prehistory of the island of Roatán, Bay Islands, Honduras. Based on data from the 2009 field season of Project Roatán, this study examines the ways in which native islanders of the Postclassic period (A.D. 900-1500) expressed their social identity and cultural affiliations with contemporaneous groups on northeastern mainland Honduras through their ceramic traditions. These initial investigations serve to evaluate the relationship between islanders and mainland groups and any major differences in terms of their status or occupation, islanders’ ties into regional trading systems, and the primary function of sites on the island. Although the materials presented demonstrate a strong tie to the indigenous groups of the mainland, which were most likely ancestors of present-day Pech populations, a significant difference is apparent in the types and quantities of exotic materials present on the island, as compared to those found on the mainland. Published accounts and reports from previous expeditions to the island are examined to support this trend. It is argued that models of political economy are best suited to address the heightened importance of social relationships within economic interactions of the indigenous Bay Islanders. The practice of creating an inclusive group identity, deemed the corporate strategy of power, was employed by elites in the region
with the aim of maintaining the status-quo. Extreme exploitation and the accumulation of resources were not necessarily central goals in an environmentally self-sustaining region, and the practice appears to have contributed ultimately to long-term cultural stability in the region. Drawing from external connections, indigenous populations of this region appropriated symbols and designs in an emblemic manner to express a common identity and reinforce a cultural practice of inclusiveness. Within this setting, the data indicate that the island of Roatán likely either represented a special physical location for the northeastern region – in terms of access to outside trade networks and resources, or perhaps in terms of spiritual or ideological significance – or was inhabited by group of individuals that enjoyed privileges not shared by those on the mainland. A combination of emblemic style and corporate strategy is presented as a possible explanation for standardization within the ceramic assemblage of the island in the absence of mass production. Lastly, the results of the study are used to critique the ways in which archaeological data have been exploited within the heritage tourism industry to represent past inhabitants of the island and commoditize identity. The future of tourism and issues of representation on the island are also considered in light of recent political disruption.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to examine inter- and intraregional influences and interactions at the Postclassic (A.D. 900-1500) site of El Antigual and nearby sites on the island of Roatán, off the north coast of Honduras. The focus of the analysis is the ways in which native islanders expressed their social identity and cultural affiliations with contemporaneous groups on mainland Honduras through their ceramic traditions. Influences from beyond this area will also be evaluated through comparison of the characteristics of the Roatán ceramic assemblages with examples from other cultural groups or regions using typologies previously defined by Epstein (1957), Healy (1993), Begley (1999), and Dennett (2007). A discussion of strategies of elite power creation and maintenance, their relation to participation in economic systems throughout the region, and the evidence for these within the archaeological record follows. The political and economic context of current archaeological research on the island and a critique of the ways in which archaeological data have been used in the heritage tourism industry to represent past inhabitants of the island will also be presented.

The cultural affiliations of the Bay Islanders have been heatedly debated and are still very much contested today, mainly due to a lack of sustained research on the islands (Wells 2008:69). It has been suggested that the islanders were Pech, Maya, Lenca, or Jicaque, but most of the current evidence suggests the strongest connection with the Pech
of northeast Honduras (Davidson 1974:19-20; Wells 2008:73). The Pech are a contemporary indigenous group believed to be the descendants of prehispanic occupants of the area who migrated from South America over 3,000 years ago (Cuddy 2007:34-35).

The ceramic assemblage from the mainland sites, within what is believed to be Pech territory, provide a foundation upon which to evaluate the material presented in this thesis, but it is not expected that the islanders would have shown cultural affiliation with only one particular group. Islands have typically been ports of trade and commerce with constant movement of people and things, and for this reason, boundaries are understood in very different ways among island communities and we should not expect to see clear or static expressions of affiliations. Just like the Roatán islanders today, indigenous islanders were probably multiethnic and multilingual. The resulting mixture of South or Central American with Mesoamerican styles and influences produced a unique material record that provides clues about shifting alliances of the indigenous populations throughout the history of occupation in the region. Inhabitants of the island appear to have been included in the cultural sphere of northeastern Honduras (Figure 1.1), deemed Pech in modern terms, but are a special case within the region. Based on the abundance of materials present in the island assemblages that are rarely found on the mainland, the islanders most likely held a special social status or the island itself was regarded as a place of importance for the society that contributed to the presence of materials, which suggests direct contact with outside groups from both Mesoamerica and Lower Central America.
Where North becomes South (or vice versa): Northeast Honduras

Since the earliest definitions of Mesoamerica (Kirchoff 1943) and the Intermediate Area (Haberland 1959; Rouse 1962; Willey 1971), eastern Honduras has repeatedly been depicted as a “frontier of the frontier,” not entirely attributable to either category (Healy 1984, 1993). Recent investigations have defined the Intermediate Area...
as encompassing everything from the southern periphery of Mesoamerica to the northern border of Andean cultural groups, including eastern Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, northern Ecuador, Colombia, and western Venezuela (Lange 1992:3). As knowledge of the area continues to develop, an increasingly complex picture of the prehistory of the region emerges, and more diachronic explanations are sought to explain the regionalism and long-term cultural stability of its constituents.

Northeast Honduras has been an especially difficult region to characterize in relation to surrounding regions. Whether the inhabitants should be classified as belonging to Mesoamerica, the Intermediate Area, or neither has been a source of much debate among those scholars who pay it any attention, and for good reason. Although many have presented convincing theories about the cultural affiliations and the social organization of its prehispanic inhabitants from the earliest hunter-gatherer groups to the complex chiefdoms present at the time of the Spanish conquest (Healy 1984; Lara Pinto 2006), all agree that more data are needed to better understand the complexities and refine the occupation sequence of this area. From the earliest known dates for occupation, dating to the Cuyamel Period (1000-300 B.C.), two sites are known: the Talgua caves, which show evidence of reliance on root-crops rather than maize, and the Cuyamel caves, which produced pottery of a distinctly Olmec style. Following this period, no securely dated evidence exists until the noted rise of complexity between A.D. 250 and 600. While interaction and influence from Mesoamerica were consistent, evident in the similarity in site planning, polychrome ceramic styles, and the direct importation of obsidian, there was a shift around A.D. 600 that seems to mark a focus or increase in this direction of
interaction, which may have coincided with the introduction of maize agriculture. Around A.D. 1000, roughly coinciding with the end of the Maya Late Classic Period, groups in this area began to show a greater affiliation with southern groups but did not, in either case, conform completely to outside norms or directly incorporate outside influences without some form of adaptation or appropriation, suggesting an *in situ* development of many of the cultural traditions for these groups (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1997; Begley 1999; Healy 1974). As one archeologist (Begley 1999:292) working in the region stated, “By exploring the internal aspects of external affiliations, it is possible to examine internal processes without assuming that these societies constituted closed systems and to discuss Mesoamerican influence without oversimplifying the power-strategies of eastern Honduran elites.” Following this precept, chronological periods defined for the northeast Honduras region (Figure 1.2) are used throughout the remainder of this thesis.

![Figure 1.2. Chronology chart of periods defined for Northeast Honduras in relation to those of Mesoamerica and Lower Central America (after Dennett 2007: Figure 2.1; Henderson and Beaudry-Corbett 1993:9).](image-url)
The Study Area: Roatán and the Bay Islands

The island of Roatán is located 30 miles off the north coast of Honduras in the Caribbean Sea (Figure 1.3). It is the largest of the Bay Islands, a string of islands consisting of the islands of Guanaja, Utila, Barbareta, Helene, Morat, and numerous smaller islands. Roatán has an approximate length of 30 miles running east-west and reaches five miles wide at its center. It is characterized by a heavily vegetated mountainous terrain reaching a height of 1200 ft in some locations, with relatively little flat land in comparison with the other Bay Islands, as well as several mangrove swamps towards the eastern portion of the island (Conzemius 1928; Nance 1965; Strong 1935). Although seasonal streams exist, there are currently no permanent sources of freshwater on any of the islands, and it is said that, although hunting and fishing opportunities were plentiful on the island at one time, water has always been scarce (Juarros 1808:45). Springs existed as recently as the 1930s (Strong 1935) and may have disappeared as a result of significant changes in the environment caused by a rapidly growing population within the past 20 years.
In 2003, 157 whole pottery vessels and a number of associated sherds from Roatán were rediscovered in the collections of the Department of Anthropology at the University of South Florida (USF). The vessels were donated to the university in the 1990s by a local Tampa family originally from Roatán. Conversations with the family revealed that the vessels had been removed from the site of El Antigual in the 1960s. Preliminary analysis of the USF El Antigual pottery collection, now known as the Haxton Collection (Moreno-Cortés and Wells 2006:5), indicated strong similarities with the Dorina variety of the Dorina Abstract Incised Punctate type described by Epstein (1957) and Healy (1993) and later expanded upon by Dennett (2007), and also suggested ties with mainland Pech populations based on historical descriptions of ceramic vessels used in ritual contexts. A careful catalogue of the materials was constructed and examples
from this collection are presented in the following chapters of this thesis. In March 2008, USF repatriated the collection to the IHAH in Tegucigalpa and, at the request of the IHAH in the following months, Project Roatán was created in order to begin a full-scale investigation into the culture history of the island (Wells 2008:74-75). The inaugural field season of the project took place during the summer of 2009 under the USF Mesoamerican Archaeological Field School and the data collected during that time are presented in this thesis.

With the recent boom in tourism on the Bay Islands, home to the second largest coral reef system in the world, different groups and individuals are competing to find the most effective ways to capture the attention of visitors and secure their space in the ever-expanding tourism market. To better understand this struggle and the economic complexities surrounding it, questions concerning the future of tourism on the island must be contextualized historically. Issues of representation and identity surrounding lesser known groups on the island are central to many of these complex questions being encountered today, including the marketing of heritage as part of the tourist experience. Anthropological findings, particularly the more tangible work produced by archaeologists, have been at the center of contested presentations of heritage (Cronin and O’Connor 2003; Lowenthal 1985; Urry 1990; Zimmerman 2003).

On the island of Roatán, heritage tourism has mainly focused on presenting more well-known indigenous groups, namely the Maya, which helps attract visitors while subsequently marginalizing contributions made by less familiar groups, such as the Pech. The link between cultural heritage management and tourism lies in mediators, or
“information gatekeepers” (McKercher and du Cros 2002:153), who negotiate representations of the island’s history based on public or tourist expectations and historical reality. Considering gatekeepers on Roatán are often business owners, tour operators, and travel agents, the products of archaeological research must reach beyond academic settings to have an impact on the management of heritage with respect to tourism.

The unique position of the island, on the frontier of the ancient Mesoamerican world and at a junction with numerous and often competing cultures, economic groups, and businesses today, makes questions of identity and representation all the more fascinating and complex. Questions of indigeneity and representation in modern Latin America and on the prehispanic Mesoamerican frontier have equal relevance in contemporary anthropological and archaeological discourse. As a result, future research on the island should be performed at the crossroads of archaeological research, cultural sustainability, and tourism in Latin America.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of nine chapters, including this chapter, which outlines the goals of the study and provides a brief introduction to the northeast region of Honduras, including the Bay Islands. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework within which the data are analyzed. Ritual economy provides the broad structure for examining the possibility of the employment of the corporate strategy of power by the indigenous elite.
groups in prehispanic society. Emblemic style is considered as the motivation in the creation and persistence of far-reaching motifs and symbols within ceramic traditions.

Chapter 3 provides a brief summary of known historical accounts concerning indigenous populations and practices in this area. Early expeditions to the island, followed by several brief scientific investigations, are outlined and discussed in terms of their importance in modern interpretations. Chapter 4 describes the site of El Antigual and the other nine sites identified during the Project Roatán (PR) survey and includes the methods used during survey, excavation, and laboratory analysis that resulted in this thesis.

Chapter 5 begins with a brief description of the PR survey sites followed by a detailed presentation of the excavations of El Antigual, divided by Operation. Chapter 6 consists of the ceramic data collected by Project Roatán in 2009 and several examples from the Haxton Collection. The discussion of the materials is divided into two broad sections: El Antigual Ceramics and Modal Analysis and Stylistic Comparisons. The first section is a classification of the materials recovered from PR excavations. The Modal Analysis and Stylistic Comparisons section is further divided into a series of modal analyses that explore motifs, styles, and design techniques as well as bases and appendages present in the materials. This section also includes comparisons and connections from other collections or sites on the mainland and beyond.

Chapter 7 is a discussion of the PR excavations at El Antigual and the ceramic analysis presented in Chapter 6. Additionally, the importance of incorporating historical records and data from previous projects is demonstrated. Several models presented in the
theoretical framework chapter are revisited and their relevance for the Roatán assemblage is considered. Lastly, questions and possibilities for future research are highlighted.

Chapter 8 establishes the current context of archaeological research on the island. Heritage tourism and its history within the development of Honduran state identity, especially in the form of “Mayanization” (Euraque 2004), are introduced. Economic inequalities present on the island are briefly outlined and the implications for future archaeological investigation and interpretation on Roatán and the other Bay Islands are offered. Chapter 9 is a summary of important conclusions of the thesis as well as a compilation of final recommendations and possibilities for future research.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

To evaluate the meaning of differences in the assemblages studied, models are needed to understand how the island of Roatán fit within the northeastern region of Honduras, how that connection was maintained, and why and how the island might have served a special function within this region. These models outline requirements of the data needed to support or refute hypotheses about the island’s past. First, models for understanding the nature of prehispanic economic systems of the region are presented, with an emphasis on the ways in which political economy models have recently changed in order to incorporate more input from social mechanisms. This leads to a discussion about the use of different types of power in economic and political strategies that seek to define, reinforce or change group identity. To conclude, several studies concerning the use of style as it relates to cultural affiliation and the expression of identity in archaeological interpretation are addressed. Studies with particular relevance to northeast Honduras are introduced where appropriate.

Recent Responses to Critiques of Political Economy

Recent critiques of political economy have called for the inclusion of the possibilities and limits implied by social relationships in their models of economic activity and the evaluation of the ways in which these restrictions shape every aspect of
the economy from production to trade and consumption (Wells 2006:265-266). Polanyi (1944, 1957) pioneered the idea of substantivism, which argues that economies prior to modern market systems cannot always be viewed in terms of pure maximization of motivation, and that modern economics, with its concern for price mechanisms controlled by supply and demand, cloud the interpretation of pre-market economic systems that were often infused with social institutions. Building on work by Mauss (1925) concerning the nature of so-called “primitive” economic interactions, Polanyi argues that early local economies were characterized by the principles of reciprocity and redistribution. In his words, “Reciprocity and redistribution are able to ensure the working of an economic system without the help of written records and elaborate administration because the organization of the societies in question meet the requirements of such a solution with the help of patterns such as symmetry and centricity.” (Polanyi 1944:48) In this model, redistribution implies hierarchy while reciprocity does not, and trade does not necessarily mean risk or profit but the establishment of systems meant to satisfy material needs through the exchange of goods (Stanish 1992). Long-distance trade, rather than being subject to the “higgling and haggling” often found in local markets, was administered and operated through fixed prices and neutral “ports-of-trade,” which facilitated trade among groups often in competition. Chapman (1957) uses Polanyi’s (1944) model to argue for the existence of several ports of trade controlled by the Maya and the Aztec throughout Mesoamerica. According to Chapman’s (1957) argument, long-distance trade differed from local markets in that it concerned luxury goods or raw materials, was performed by specialized
personnel, and took place in towns or cities that had the sole function of providing a neutral ground for the administered trade of governmentally sanctioned business.

Chapman (1957) briefly mentions the Bay of Honduras as one area in the vicinity of the Bay Islands that served as a port-of-trade. Describing the area as, “a trading bridge connecting Mesoamerica with Central America,” she (Chapman 1957:145) says that at least four trading centers existed here, corresponding with the major rivers: the Sarstoon, the Rio Dulce and Lake Izabal, the Motagua, and the Ulúa. Yet the vagueness of her description of the actual ports of trade and their positions leaves many questions open for future research. As is discussed later in this study, however (see Chapter 7), the Ulúa Valley proves to be especially important for the interpretation of the Bay Island ceramic material, supporting her claim that its consideration is a special case in terms of trade contacts and conduct.

Although her detailed accounts of the trading habits of Aztec and Maya merchants may prove useful for the evaluation of the possible existence of Nahua communities in mainland Honduras (see Begley 1999; Lara Pinto 1991 for arguments for and against this idea), problems with the rigid application of the port-of-trade model in Mesoamerica have been duly noted (e.g., Berdan 1978; McKillop 1996, among others). Rathje and Sabloff (1973) address some of these issues in their evaluation of a port-of-trade model for the island of Cozumel, Mexico. Their model suggests that ports of trade share certain characteristics concerning location and population, and that consideration of behavioral expectations particular to this type of settlement should be included in studies of this unique social arrangement. Cozumel may serve as an especially relevant case for
comparison in future studies on Roatán considering the similarities in their geographic location and size.

Stanish (1992), in the same vein as earlier migration models posited by Willey (1971) or Rouse (1962), applies Polanyi’s (1944) concepts to settlements in the Andes, providing a specific model for testing whether the presence of exotic materials is indicative of colonizing forces or represents interaction taking place between independent polities. The main contribution of Stanish’s (1992) work is in the presentation of a model for testing the existence of these forms of economic systems. Using contemporary anthropological research on nonmarket economies, he shows that goods acquired from trade, barter, and indirect exchange are disproportionately found in nondomestic contexts, reflecting the exchange systems or alliances of the community. Meanwhile, those found in domestic contexts represent the resident population. Stanish (1992:49) concludes that indirect or administered nonmarket trade should be characterized within the archaeological record by the presence of exotic artifacts, homogenous settlement types with contiguous political and/or ethnic boundaries, continuous evolutionary changes in archaeological sequences rather than abrupt or discontinuous changes, and agricultural production consistent with maximization principles. In his discussion of Polanyi’s (1944) theory, Rotstein (1970:121) notes that, “In the absence of such an ancillary network of markets, however, the supporting elements of trade must be handled through specific administered methods, although custom and prestige also play their part here,” hinting at later discussions that stress the importance of social concerns in these types of interaction.
Driven by the wish to eradicate the false dichotomy of verticality versus craft specialization in the Andes, Stanish (1992) argues that both models of direct control and indirect vertical exchange were present in different areas and at different times throughout history. He (Stanish 1992:5) states that the most important lesson learned is that both methods are documented, but that consistent methodology is needed to test their presence, time-depth, and socio-political contexts. This lesson is exceedingly important as changes in the archaeological record of the Bay Islands increasingly reveal significant differences in the nature and scope of the populations present on Roatán throughout its different occupational periods. It also allows for the operation of multiple economic systems occurring at the same time on different levels within a society – an important notion further discussed below. Begley’s (1999:267-271) work in eastern Honduras presents a detailed discussion of the model proposed by Stanish (1992) and other migration models and their application to this region as well as ensuing issues and possible directions for further research. Yet this model may serve in future studies to investigate the claims of Nahua settlements on the mainland coast mentioned above. Interestingly, Gasco and Berdan (2003:115) list the occurrence in clusters or strings as an important characteristic of international trade centers of the Postclassic world, which may help explain the suggested presence of numerous Nahua and Maya settlements along the coast of northern Honduras – an issue which Chapman (1957) seemed to avoid by listing larger geographic areas, such as the Bay of Honduras, as possible ports-of-trade without addressing the identification of individual sites.
McKillop (1996) rejects this port-of-trade model for the populations on Wild Cane Cay, located off the coast of present-day Belize, on the basis that there was a marked integration of local and long-distance economies as evidenced by the presence of elite goods from distant locations (in this case obsidian in the form of cores) in non-elite contexts, suggesting the involvement of these groups in production and trade of these nonlocal materials and their resulting products. Smith and Berdan (2003:316) also argue that there were no strict distinctions between market places in which local and long-distance trade was conducted, nor were certain materials restricted to specific contexts. However, recent arguments (Ossa 2011) have stressed the fact that although economic systems were “dynamic, interlinked exchange networks” (Gasco and Berdan 2003:116), different goods may have traveled in restricted systems of exchange at different levels and that the actual process of transforming some materials into elite goods, or the knowledge of how to do so, provided value, not the raw material itself. These ideas have important implications for the data requirements involved in recognizing economic systems in the archaeological record. Models such as those recently produced by Dahlin and colleagues (2007), which aim to identify physical markers of the presence of ancient markets, will fall short in this region considering the known differences in environment and spatial use or site planning patterns.

Gasco and Berdan (2003) approach Chapman’s (1957) idea from a different perspective and without preconceived ideas concerning internal organization, choosing to call the long-distance trade centers that they discuss “international trade centers” to differentiate their viewpoint. Interestingly, areas of northwestern Honduras, specifically
the Ulúa and Naco valleys, are identified by both these authors and Chapman as significant centers of international trade in the Postclassic world. Important here is the connection noted in both instances between major cacao production centers and international trade centers or ports-of-trade. (The Naco Valley may have also been involved in copper smelting – relevant to Hosler’s (2003) discussion about axe-monies – and both valleys are thought to have had established outposts of outside populations.) Not only does this recognized trait lend itself to the identification of such locations in the archaeological record, it also emphasizes the important role of currency in the Postclassic regional economic system. According to Braudel (1981:316), money is a technique, a position often filled by the most valuable good or goods that allows for the, “fixing of the value of an item according to the predetermined prices set by outside parties. It replaces face-to-face barter, in which worth is calculated by the involved individuals’ need or desire for the items being exchanged. Mesoamericans no doubt bartered in some cases, but Spanish documents repeatedly record the common use of several kinds of currency: axe-monies, shell beads, cotton mantles, and especially cacao.” (If copper is added to this list, it almost exactly coincides with the list of materials commonly found on the Bay Islands but often lacking in mainland assemblages – an interesting connection considered below in Chapter 7). The idea of set prices, controlled by forces above the actual exchange networks, connects to earlier notions of administered trade in Polanyi’s (1957) work.

Smith and Berdan (2003:316) also note that production for exchange occurred at the household level and removed some labor from the domestic economy – creating an
increased need for local or regional markets. This too may also provide a basis for creating models that can be tested at the household level in the archaeological record. While current studies may vary in their focus, this idea also connects to traditional archaeological uses of Polanyi’s (1944) work in that they have focused on interpretations at the household level because it is the unit that operated in economic production, consumption, exchange, and surplus appropriation at virtually all levels (Stanish 1992). These models of interpretation will become more important with the study of residential settlements on Roatán as they are identified and quantifiably compared to those on the mainland.

McKillop (1996) and others (Freidel and Sabloff 1984, 1990; Rathje and Sabloff 1973) also propose that the visitation by traders to distant markets was regulated and maintained by the creation of pilgrimage sites in conjunction with markets. Gasco and Berdan (2003:110) note that, “Pilgrimage centers not only attract a constant stream of devotees, but they also create an atmosphere conducive to peaceful interaction – precisely the atmosphere that is desirable at an international trade center.” Wells and Nelson (2007:141) note that documents from early Spanish colonizers recorded the coupling of economic markets with exchange networks within indigenous cultures. Connecting the merchant and the pilgrim, these authors (Wells and Nelson 2007: 152) argue that the integration of economic exchange with ritual pilgrimage would allow for greater agency for physically or socially peripheral groups. Their model for distinguishing pilgrimage exchange in the archaeological record relies on the evaluation of settlement patterns and household consumption (Wells and Nelson 2004:148-152) and their observation
concerning formal causeways may prove especially important considering findings on other Bay Islands (Hasemann 1975:4; Rose 1904:41-42) and on the mainland (Lara Pinto 1991:236). Most importantly, all of these authors, especially Wells and Nelson (2007: 137-138), highlight the tie between ritual practices and economic systems, a focus emerging explanations in political economic theory that seek to rectify previous critiques of classic models.

One particular framework, ritual economy, circumvents the formalist/substantivist debate and recognizes that rational economic choices are culturally and historically situated (Wells 2006:288; Wells and Davis-Salazar 2007). The development of these models also stemmed from the belief that theories of political economy needed to be better account for cultural motivation in order to address instances in which, “tensions between self-interest and socially shared values contextualize individual choice as it is confronted with technological or ecological constraints.” (Wells 2006:268) These changes helped to move political economy away from an exceedingly materialist point of view, manifesting in several different types of models (see Wells 2006), for this study the most useful of which are those that incorporate aspects of world-systems theory.

According to Schortman and Urban (1999), core-periphery relation models within world-systems theory frameworks need to be reexamined. The idea of a completely dependent periphery does not seem to fit with the data from recent research. They suggest that emphasis needs to be placed on multi-directional interactions. Though cores may have possessed authoritative resources, defined as, “practices through which meaning is imposed on life and nature,” (Schortman and Urban 1999:126) the peripheries often had
more immediate access to allocative resources, including, “material features of the environment, production technologies, and finished goods.” (Schortman and Urban 1999:126) The idea that settlement size is not always the most important factor, but rather that availability of resources plays a large role in settlement patterns as well, is present in other theories explaining patterns of disbursement. In locations where there were several cores competing for the same peripheral goods, the peripheries had more power since they could play the cores against one another – there were probably very complex cases in which the limits were fluid and constantly in flux (Wells 2006:275). Within world-systems theory, this component is termed a semi-periphery, an area characterized by rapid social change due to the variety of options presented through interaction with both cores and peripheries (Kardulas 2007).

The new models emerging from a ritual economy framework have also incorporated an increased awareness and concern for agency in contemporary archaeological interpretation. While political economy approaches often only allow for agency insofar as it explains behavior related to optimized personal gain or efficiency, newer models allow for actions that are explained by social contexts in economic realms. Drawing on some of Polanyi’s (1944) original concepts, Wolf’s (1990) idea of structural power suggests that possibilities of social behavior are able to be defined (Wells 2006:278). These possibilities are often defined through control of productive activities in ritual or in the materialization of ideological systems and organizational power, including the ability to control the arena in which these powers are displayed. In these models, then, agency comes not from the individual but from those who possess the ability to define
these boundaries and express them in ways which reinforce their power, though often discreetly, and ensure the cooperation of others (Wells 2006:278-279). The study of the employment of varied strategies of power is discussed in the following section.

Strategies of Power and Group Identity and Interaction

Blanton and colleagues (1996) point to the need for more diversity in models explaining societal changes, especially with regards to the unilinear stages present in neo-evolutionary models. They call for the development of a, “political behavioral theory of social change” that takes into account the various strategies employed by those who seek to create or maintain social institutions or polities (Blanton et al. 1996:2). They argue that conflict is inherent in politics but that constraints are placed on actors within a society based on shared values and beliefs. The knowledge of these societal traits is actually a form of power in that it may be reproduced, modified, or rejected by those who know and understand their existence based on desired outcomes. The introduction of new terms to explain a wider range of organizational strategies makes this resource especially useful and marks a move towards a more open and coherent discussion of Postclassic social and economic systems (Wells 2006:277).

It seems that northeastern Honduras could very likely represent an example of an instance in which, “cognitive code and ritual experience may also support a corporate political structure,” wherein, “monopoly control of sources of power is precluded by restrictions on the political behavior of those vested with power.” (Blanton et al. 1996:2) Wealth-based systems, concerned mostly with objective sources of power, tend to focus
on the acquirement of regional prestige and outward expressions of power. Knowledge-based systems, such as those that appear to have operated in this region, co-opt religious and ritual symbols and tend to focus more on the cohesion of the group as perceived by group members. Corporate strategy is the tactic that employs inclusive approaches using symbolic power, rather than schemes of exclusion (Blanton et al. 1996:5-7). While northeastern Honduras was by no means a stranger to the long-distance trade taking place throughout the region, it seems there was a decided and purposeful dedication to the prevalence of local styles in everything from ceramic forms to architectural patterns. Using styles reminiscent of neighboring cultures, they sought to define themselves in relation to groups but not as part of them, a strategy Cuddy (2007:10-15) refers to as constructing themselves in opposition to other groups, as “the Other.” Perhaps future research might prove this is not the case, but based on the current data it is the most probable fit in terms of an explanatory model.

Several examples in Wells (2006) provide similar cases in which it appears that the success of the elite relied on the continued participation of the non-elite, where both parties agreed to comply with a set of standards that – as long as these requirements were perceived as being met – did not need to be preemptively enforced by either side. As a counter example to inclusionary strategies, Junker (2004) argues that chiefdoms in Southeast Asia emphasized network strategies of political power relations, as Blanton and colleagues (1996) suggested characterized most of the Postclassic Maya polities. In contrast to inclusionary strategies, these networks focused on exclusionary personal networks and were often prone to short cycles of expansion and collapse, whereas polities
characterized by corporate power strategies tended to have greater levels of consensus, solidarity and collective action, as well as a strict code governing the actions and interactions of all parties within the society (Blanton et al. 1996:228).

Within the Maya territory, McAnany (2004) notes a similar reliance on the cooperation of the non-elite commoners in specific contexts. In opposition to areas under direct control of large centers, McAnany (2004:164) argues that populations said to be peripheries often had a great amount of political and economic flexibility and quicker rates of response to changes or new opportunities, owing to their position and the fact that many of these areas had goods or the ability to produce goods desired by elites, in this case the environment and space for cacao cultivation. This aids in the emerging view of so-called peripheral communities as adept political negotiators. Within world-systems theory, this is a common notion. A peripheral site’s advantage might be amplified by geographical location and interaction with multiple core or central places. Parkinson and Galaty (2007), espousing a theory that the authors deem “processualism plus,” also offer explanations for the extended duration of secondary states as opposed to primary states in which they suggest that because of the process of formation of secondary states, either as remaining parts of larger states or as forming on the edges of larger, more complex states, are structured in such a way as to be more adaptive to dealing with political turmoil. These secondary states have created systems of legitimation and reinforcement of political and ideological organization that are more stable. The importance of establishing relationships with larger centers also explains the degree of similarity in architectural and symbolic material at smaller states.
Similarly, Schortman and colleagues (2001) have evaluated what the authors call the politics of identity formation on the southeastern Mesoamerican periphery, by looking at how symbols critical to this process were manipulated by those seeking to maintain interaction networks while creating localized corporate identities (Wells 2006:277). While we have no evidence for elite-controlled production, these same authors (Schortman and Urban 2004) argue that this form of organization may be difficult to identify in the archaeological record. Begley (1999:220), following this work, notes that indicators of wealth, power, and status are difficult to identify, especially when comparing this region to Mesoamerica, but he does suggest that the usefulness of monumental architecture has been overshadowed by the examination of only exotic goods to indicate differentiated status. He (1999), in a similar fashion to the model proposed by Stanish (1992), also calls for a contextual analysis of rare goods, rather than a presence/absence evaluation of exotic materials.

Stanish’s (2004) model for the evolution of chiefdoms at first glance does not seem to fit here, given its focus on surplus production, but his discussion of the conditional-cooperator espouses mechanisms similar to those of the corporate strategy. In this model, “people act in their own self-interest and are aware of the costs and benefits associated with those acts, but they act without knowledge of all information…cooperation actually constitutes one evolutionarily stable strategy for individuals acting in their own self-interest under the appropriate conditions…the emergence of rank can be modeled as a voluntary, not coercive, phenomenon adopted by cognizant and active agents.” (Stanish 2004:8) In this statement, Stanish (2004) addresses
both the issue of individual agency in these models, and the array of possibilities as it is restricted through the withholding of information by those in power. He (Stanish 2004:9) continues, describing methods used to keep elite power in check:

The establishment of rituals of production and exchange that sanctify and ‘schedule’ the cancellation of deferred debts by the elite to the commoners can overcome this resistance to more complex labor arrangements. These rituals, embodied in material features such as platform mounds, elaborate public monuments, special buildings, valuable objects, and the like, serve as a type of ‘guarantee’ for the redistribution of wealth that is produced. In this model of chiefdom (not state) evolution, ideology is not viewed as a mechanism to mask inequality as it is in state societies. Rather, some kinds of ideologies, given in formal ritual, provide a series of benchmarks that an elite must obey that will ultimately result in a redistribution of wealth. Failure to follow those benchmarks will result in a collapse of that labor organization. Adherence to those ritual obligations provides some guarantees necessary to keep that organization together.

Then, in his discussion of recent advances in evolutionary game theory and their relevance to anthropology, he notes (1992:10) that it has been consistently shown that people often act “irrationally prosocial;” in other words, not always in ways that would align with the idea of maximized economic benefits. Here, Stanish (1992) highlights the
importance of social relations in economic interactions discussed above and integrated within ritual economy frameworks. While household-to-household interaction may have relied on reciprocal relationships, within the chiefdoms, redistribution was probably the main source of maintaining the cancellation of these debts, both likely driven by social mechanism and relationships. Polanyi (1957:48) notes, “Reciprocity and redistribution are able to ensure the working of an economic system without the help of written records and elaborate administration because the organization of the societies in question meets the requirements of such a solution with the help of patterns such as symmetry and centricity,” a statement that seems to fit the situation of the complex chiefdoms that existed in northeast Honduras.

Smith and Berdan (2003:5) suggest an increased commoditization of economic interactions in Mesoamerica during the Postclassic period. Although northeast Honduras may have been involved in this type of interaction, an export commodity for the region has yet to be identified. Possibilities previously mentioned for the northeast, along with some new insights on this subject from the Bay Islands, are discussed in later chapters.

One unique possibility deserves a brief discussion here. In his seminal work on trade within ancient economies, Polanyi (1957:261) argues, “What nature made distinct, the market makes homogenous. Even the difference between goods and their transportation may be obliterated, since in the market both can be bought and sold…Eventually, we will find that trade routes, too, as well as the means of transportation may be of no less incisive importance for the institutional forms of trade than the types of goods carried.” Chapman (1957) in the same volume discusses the importance of a distinct class of
traders within the Aztec and Maya societies, for which there is an abundance of support from historical records. More recently, work by Dewan and Hosler (2008) demonstrates the rapidly growing body of knowledge relating to long-distance trade that opens up new avenues and possibilities for exchange networks. The importance of ocean transport in trade dramatically increased for Mesoamerican groups during the Postclassic period and evidence points to a similar trend in northeast Honduras, pointing to the possibility of an especially important and perhaps newly developed role for indigenous Bay Islanders at this time (see Chapter 7).

Helms’ (1979, 1988, 1998) esoteric knowledge model relates to the manipulation of symbols, rather than goods or labor, and provides an explanation for the role of long-distance interaction in the power strategies of chiefdoms, stemming from her work in Panama. According to Begley (1999:275-276),

Helms notes the strong tendency for esoteric knowledge or ritual knowledge to play significant role in the legitimization of power in chiefdoms. One of the most important ways in which the elite in rank societies verified or legitimized their position was through the convincing display that they were in control of, or capable of, influencing all aspects of the social, natural, and supernatural worlds…Helms demonstrates a strong connection between geographical distance and supernatural distance in societies throughout the world, suggesting that there is something intrinsically associated with distant areas that can be converted into sacred esoteric knowledge.
Begley (1999) relies heavily on the work of Helms in the construction of his model of activity in northeast Honduras, concluding that the long-distance relationships maintained by the elite were primarily for the purpose of creating and maintaining internal power structures. He (1999:285) outlines the process of the production of truth (an idea related to power that he admittedly borrows from Foucault) – the materialization of ideology begins with the creation of ritual; here, he notes, the participation in these rituals can be restricted and their complexity increased, resulting in the necessitation of the presence of these elite classes. In turn, monumental architecture is then created by these elites as a more permanent representation of the transient ritual (Begley 1999:285). These spaces become arenas that serve as stages for social and ritual interaction in which the elite control the realm of possibilities as well as the admitted players. Consumption involved in mortuary ritual is also considered a stage for the negotiation and reinforcement of social and economic status (see Wells 2006:283,287).

As argued above, agency in models of ritual economy is limited by the possibilities defined by those in structural institutions or ideological systems, but knowledge of these systems is a form of power in that it allows the consumer to also become the producer – maintaining, changing, or rejecting the status quo (Blanton et al. 1996). In this system, goods and preferences are both a product of and players in a system of social communication (Wells 2006:288). This idea is further explored below in its connection to style as an expression of cultural affiliation or identity.
Use of Style in Identity Expression

While northeastern Honduras was by no means a stranger to the long-distance trade taking place throughout the region, it seems there was a decided and purposeful dedication to the pervasiveness of local styles and symbols in everything from ceramic forms to architectural patterns (Cuddy 2007). The evaluation of style in archaeological materials and its relationship to ethnicity and identity has been the topic of debate for several decades (Brumfiel 1994; Hodder 1989; Renfrew 1987; Watson 1995) and are only briefly addressed here.

Moving beyond the etic categories of culture area studies (i.e., Kroeber 1939); Barth’s (1969) seminal work discusses many of the inherent and yet often unexplored or ignored issues in the study of ethnicity and identity. Culture, he argues, is not static, and if interpreted as such may lead to confusion and misclassification at the least. Ethnicity, in contrast, is defined by the broadest classification identified by an individual based on origin or background. The realization that identity is not formed in a vacuum has very important implications for the archaeological study that aims to grasp ethnicity or cultural boundaries that have since been dramatically shifted, altered, or altogether abolished. He (Barth 1969:14) outlines some of these issues in the following passage:

It is important to recognize that although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which
the actors themselves regard as significant. Not only do ecologic variations mark
and exaggerate differences; some cultural features are used by the actors as
signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships
radical differences are played down and denied. The cultural contents of ethnic
dichotomies would seem analytically to be of two orders: (i) overt signals or signs
- the diacritical features that people look for and exhibit to show identity, often
such features as dress, language, house-form, or general style of life, and (ii) basic
value orientations: the standards of morality and excellence by which
performance is judged… In other words, ethnic categories provide an
organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in
different socio-cultural systems.

In spite of these difficulties, studies have shown the usefulness of material
markers in recognizing the delineation of ethnic groups in a variety of settings. Within
archaeology, ethnoarchaeological studies have created a particularly large body of work
on the subject of identity and its material expression. One of these studies, the Kalinga
Ethnoarchaeological Program, has produced an exceptional amount of material based on
ethnographic research and material studies in the Philippines (Longacre and Skibo 1994;
Skibo et al. 2007).

Emberling (1997:306) states that, “Ethnicity is best seen as a process of
identification and differentiation rather than as an inherent attribute of individuals or
groups…The ‘primordialists’ think that ethnic groups maintain their identities because of
emotional attachment to the symbols of the group. The ‘instrumentalists’, on the other hand, suggest that ethnic groups maintain their ethnicity for political or economic gain.” Others have shown that this division is not realistic, as symbols of the group may change over time in conjunction with or in response to political or economic changes. Followers of Barth have developed the term “situational ethnicity” to describe this phenomena in which the manipulation of symbols can alter the ethnic identity of individuals (Emberling 1997:306).

Barth’s (1969) work influenced many others, most notably that of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984). The application of these theories to archaeological contexts resulted in Wobst’s (1977) work on the conveyance of cultural information through artifact style. In response to his ideas, a debate emerged between two prominent scholars: Sackett (1982, 1985, 1986) and Weissner (1983, 1985). In a series of articles and responses, Sackett (1982, 1985, 1986) argued for the importance of artisan choice in variation and how style may demonstrate the information gained historically or socially by individuals, but not necessarily cultural messages. Weissner (1983, 1985), on the other hand, followed the iconological approach to Wobst (1977) more closely, and argued that style not only conveys messages but can be employed strategically in social relations (see Novotony 2007 for a more detailed description of this debate). Defining style as, “formal variation in material culture that transmits information about personal and social identity,” Weissner (1983:256-258) distinguishes two strategies in which the passage of information is accomplished: emblemic and assertive. The first, emblemic, possesses a clear referent, and transmits a specific message to a targeted group. Assertive styles are
those based in providing support for personal or individual identity but do not necessarily aim this message at a particular recipient, and their main use in earlier societies may have been in individual expression in relation to reciprocal interactions. Further, according to Weissner (1983:257-258) there are certain expectations regarding the assemblage created by emblemic styles:

Through time, emblemic style would be expected to change gradually only with errors in reproduction and to undergo rapid change only when its referent changes or when it is detached from its referent…Because it carries a distinct message, emblemic style should undergo strong selection for uniformity and clarity (Wobst 1977), and because it marks and maintains boundaries, it should be distinguishable archaeologically by uniformity within its realm of function. Finally, Wobst has predicted that this kind of stylistic signaling will be poorly developed in hunter-gatherer societies because few messages are sufficiently replicative to justify the investment in energy and matter required by stylistic communication, and/or because in societies with limited social networks, most of these messages are already known.

Drawing from the work of Weissner (1983), Beaudry-Corbett and Cuddy (2001:7) present a study of developing chiefdoms in northeast Honduras and how elites used animal motifs. In their colorful summary of Weissner’s theory, they state that, “Emblemic styles act as emblems, like a modern day flag, and the referent of the emblem
is most frequently the social group and the norms, values, goals, or property associated with the group.” (Beaudry-Corbett and Cuddy 2001:2)

Interpreting the use of animal motifs or symbols and their evolution as indicators of major social change within the region, they argue that internal group dynamics, over external relations, had more of an effect on the growth and consolidation of the region. Though the prevalence of manatee and tapir motifs is not surprising, as they are the largest mammals found in their respective habitats (coastal and inland), later research by Cuddy (2007) has shown that their presence within faunal remains and their appearance on ceramic wares is proportionately higher than that of other animals in the region. Beaudry-Corbett and Cuddy (2001:4) suggest that, “it is possible that their co-occurrence on ceramics relates to shared cosmology or religious beliefs as well as a shared habitat.” Interestingly, these authors (2001) also find that tapir motifs developed first inland, while the manatee was more coastal, but by the Basic Selin Period (A.D. 600) these pieces were more widely traded and represented an increased cohesion among these groups. These pieces did not change to a more general symbol but instead became more emblematic of a larger group over a larger area, which reflects a growing political organization (Beaudry-Corbett and Cuddy 2001:7).

It remains that even within advances in archaeological theory and the extensive ethnographic study of the definition and expression of ethnicity and identity, defining and studying indigenous populations is still a complex task with numerous difficulties. Four possibilities have been tried in modern delineations of ethnic boundaries: race or phenotype, tongue or language used, presence in ethnic territories, and "self description".
None of these by itself allows for a clear account of this population. In working with the modern Pech communities, Aguilar (2006:20) makes a fitting observation, “We consider that for an adequate determination of indigenous populations, it is not enough to use a ‘previous’ definition or self description, it must be done through a mixture of both, to give greater richness and dynamism to the definition. The criteria for the first must be focused on the usage of a tongue or language and variables of the culture (customs, rituals, and others alike) and in no case subject to the "racial" definition and even less to the phenotype.” I might add, and I believe others would agree, that attention should also be paid to the production and use of material culture as not only an indicator but an expression and a construction of identity.

Summary

Emblemic style as a strategy of inclusive social groups provides a plausible explanation for the use of consistent motifs on ceramic materials that were not designed for export but rather for use solely by members of that group, as seen on Roatán (see Chapter 6). Although a modified port-of-trade model may provide a useful framework for explaining the disparity in Bay Island and mainland ceramic assemblages, more data are certainly needed to determine if trade alone is a suitable explanation for these differences. These theories provide the basis for the discussion of the data presented in this study, but gaps in both the data and the theoretical framework are many and noted.

While these models provide some basis from which to begin evaluation of native Bay Islander cultural affiliation and interaction, what is currently needed is a model that
fits northeast Honduras and that is relevant to an economy operating at the level of what was most likely a complex chiefdom. Regional centers are known on the mainland but more information is needed to connect how these centers may have interacted with outside groups, as well as to examine what role Roatán islanders could have played in this system. In this region, we do not have enough evidence to closely examine differences in social classes or to securely state if wide gaps even existed, and even the divide between ceremonial and residential contexts is still poorly understood. Essentially, there is a severe lack of the comparative data called for by Polanyi (1957) and many other theorists who followed. In this instance, we must rely on stylistic evaluations to develop a skeleton model of identifiable interactions that can be expanded upon and filled in by future research. The importance of the development of a standardized system of data collection, description, and sharing is highlighted in this thesis.
Chapter 3: Exploring the Prehispanic Identity of Indigenous Bay Islanders

Geographic Setting and Environment

The climate of the islands is similar to that of the mainland and is typical to the region with a rainy season lasting from September to February with higher temperatures averaging 80°F during the rest of the year (Nance 1965:9). Due to their location, the islands are especially susceptible to both hurricanes and earthquakes. Positioned near the boundary of the North American and Caribbean plates, the islands are cross-cut by numerous fault lines and, due to this precarious position, experienced significant and frequent seismic activity throughout history and into the present (Cox et al. 2008).

Geologic formations of the islands are varied and complex but the majority of deposits on Roatán are made up of pre-tertiary biotite schist and gneiss (McBirney and Bass 1969:232-33). A complex coral reef system, the second largest in the world, is located off the northern and western shores of the island and provides a habitat for thousands of diverse marine animal species.

Early Europeans in the region considered the islands a favorable location for raising their imported hogs, which quickly multiplied in the wild and became an important source of meat for islanders. In addition to large quantities of fish, during this time the islands were also well-known for the exportation of Chrysotis auripalliata or yellow-headed parrots, desired for their capacity to learn to speak easily (Conzemius
Strong (1935:6) describes flora and fauna of the islands in some detail, noting in addition to the abundance of pine a variety of plant species commonly found in rainforests, especially palms. All large mammals and birds, with the noteworthy exception of the manatee, are absent on the islands, but the smaller agouti was an important source of sustenance for the native islanders. Iguanas and other lizards are found in abundance and are likely to also have been used as sources of meat in antiquity as they are today. As can be expected, marine species such as mollusks, whelk, conch, and crayfish are reported by Strong (1935:7) as important in the diet of islanders. The faunal remains founds at the site of Rio Claro provide an inventory of animals and plants most likely exploited by Bay Islanders as well (Dennett 2007:9).

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<th>Mammalia</th>
<th>Cetacea (Cetacea)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bats (Chiroptera)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Leaf-nosed (Phyllostomidae)</td>
<td>- Mouse (Muridae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Funnel-nosed (Natalidae)</td>
<td>- Philander (Philanderidae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnivores (Carnivora)</td>
<td>- Woolly (Otomysidae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gray fox (Urocyon)</td>
<td>- Water (Methohiidae)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Coyote (Canis)</td>
<td>Pelagic mammals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Raccoon (Procyon)</td>
<td>- West Indian seal (Monachus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Kinkajou (Potos)</td>
<td>- Porpoises and Dolphins (Delphinidae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Coati (Nasua)</td>
<td>Primates (Primates)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Skunk (Mephitis and Spilogale)</td>
<td>- Monkeys (Cebidae)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Cats (Felidae)</td>
<td>- Howler (Alouatta)</td>
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<td>- Ocelot (Felis concolor)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Jaguarundi (Panthera onca)</td>
<td>- Capuchin (Cebus)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Margay</td>
<td>Rodents (Rodentia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Tapir (Tapirus)</td>
<td>a) Sigmodontinae</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Collared peccary (Tayassu tajacu)</td>
<td>- Tree squirrel (Saimiri sciuereus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- White-lipped peccary (Tayassu pecari)</td>
<td>- Ringing squirrel (Glaucomys volans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- White-toothed deer (Odocoileus virginianus)</td>
<td>- Pocket gopher (Mammiidae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bracket deer (Mazama americana)</td>
<td>b) Myomorpha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edentata (Edentata)</td>
<td>- commuter (Peromyscus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Ameiurina (Ameriodontidae)</td>
<td>- Brown mouse (Uromyidae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Common (Capybara)</td>
<td>- Water mouse (Rhyomys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Anteater (Myrmecophagidae)</td>
<td>- Cotton rat (Sigmodon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Sloth (Bradypodidae)</td>
<td>- Rice rat (Orzyomys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insectivora (Insectivora)</td>
<td>- Wood rat (Neotoma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Small-eared shrew (Cryptotis)</td>
<td>- Vesper rat (Nyctomys)</td>
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<td>Lagomorphs (Lagomorpha)</td>
<td>- Climbing rat (Tylomys)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Cottontail rabbit (Sylvilagus)</td>
<td>a) Hysticomorpha</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- Porcupines (Erethizontidae)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Agouti (Dasyproctidae punctata)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Paca (Agouti pacus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirenia (Sirenia)</td>
<td>- Manatee (Trichechus)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1. List of mammals identified in the faunal assemblage of Rio Claro (after Dennett 2007:9)
Routes to Discovering the Prehistory of the Bay Islanders

This section is further divided into two subsections that reflect both the depth and variety of the existing literature and the gaps that exist in data. The first subsection presents the known mentions of the native Bay Islanders in historical records and the second subsection outlines visits to the islands by curious explorers in the early 20th century and later, brief, and sporadic archaeological investigations through the present day.

**Historical Accounts of the Islands**

Numerous historical accounts of the region exist and although lost documents, tampering, and poor and conflicting translations plague the serious study of these sources, many have used ethnohistoric reports to make claims about the social affiliations of the prehispanic Bay Islanders. Considering the multiplicity of names given to the islands in the historical records, it is likely that many descriptions of the islands have either been mistaken for others or been overlooked entirely (Bancroft 1886:207).

It has been suggested (Strong 1935) that Vincente Yañez Pinzon, Juan Diaz de Solis and Americus Vespucius were actually the first to have mapped the islands but the date of the voyage, whether before 1500 or in 1506, is still in question. Most famously, Christopher Columbus (Columbus 1732, 1959) visited the islands during his fourth and final voyage to the new world in July of 1502. His son and biographer, Ferdinand Columbus (1732), asserts that Pinzon, Diaz, and Vespucius gave a different name to the region his father had already mapped and it is because of their bad measurements that
they appear to be different locations on maps of the time (Columbus 1732; Strong 1935).
In any case, the point on the northeastern shore of mainland Honduras that Columbus (1732) refers to as Casine or Caxinas is given the name Cape of Honduras after the records left by these explorers. Strong’s (1935) reconstruction of the historical record is fairly complete and follows Las Casas’ account, as he believes the historian had access to the massive collection of books and manuscripts gathered or written by Ferdinand Columbus and thus avoided the corruptions of other translations that contain clear alterations of the original texts.

There are at least five eye-witness accounts of the Columbus voyage and numerous records of the expedition as captured by historians (Lothrop 1927:352; Strong 1935:7-8). It is said that Columbus landed on the island of Guanaja, but according to earlier accounts, the island on which he went ashore is described as “the biggest” in the chain of islands, and therefore it is possible that the island was simply misnamed in their accounts and was in fact the island of Roatán (Columbus 1732, 1959; Strong 1935). This is also supported by the distances and measurements given in several other sources (see Strong 1935:8-9), including a distance of 10 to 12 leagues from the Cape of Honduras (roughly equal to the distance to the western end of Roatán) and a perimeter of 20 leagues (while Guanaja measures merely half this distance). Davidson (2009:248) has recently made this same claim but fails to provide any evidence as to why he believes this theory.

Even more troubling are the numerous interpretations of Columbus’ encounter with a passing canoe while in Honduras. The canoe of such controversy is described as being eight feet long, constructed from a single tree trunk, and with an awning made of
palm leaves which protected all twenty-five aboard from the waves and rain (Columbus 1959:231). Ferdinand (1959:232) recounts that his father took the goods he believed most valuable, “cotton mantles and sleeveless shirts embroidered and painted in different designs and colors, breechclouts of the same design and cloth; long wooden swords with a groove on each side…in which were fastened with cord and pitch, flint knives that cut like steel; hatchets resembling the stone hatchets used by the other Indians, but made of good copper; and hawk’s bells of copper, and crucibles to melt it.” He (1959:233) also makes note of the roots and grains they carried for food, a fermented drink made from corn (or yucca?), and cacao beans of great value to those aboard the canoe.

There are several controversies surrounding the story of this meeting and the origin of the people and goods found on the canoe, especially concerning the word Maya in these accounts. Lothrop (1927) argues that the word Yucatan did not come into use until 1517, over ten years after it is supposedly used in original accounts describing either the destination or origination of the canoe encountered by Columbus. He believes that later historians mistakenly associated the word Maya with the more well-known settlements in the Yucatan, eventually replacing the word Maya altogether, but the original texts actually refer to a province of the Maya that was once located on the northern coast of Honduras. Lothrop (1927:355) also argues that a canoe carrying goods of flint and copper was more likely to have been traveling from Honduras, where these goods are found or made, towards the Yucatan where neither are produced.

Other historians (Strong 1935) propose that Ferdinand wished to credit his father with being the first to have contact with the “higher civilizations” of New Spain, such as
the Maya, and worded his recordings of the interaction accordingly. There are also several mentions of the natives calling certain regions of the mainland “Taia” and other areas “Maia” (Lothrop 1927:351; Martyr 1812:116). Davidson (2009:256) proposes these terms were actually Pech terms for “mine” and “theirs” in reference to the different territories. This portion of the narrative appears differently in almost every account found and the interpretations range from the natives in the canoe telling Columbus of the rich and ingenious peoples to the west, the canoe coming from the west and carrying Maya goods, or the canoe coming from a Maya settlement on the coast of Honduras.

According to all versions of this account, the island was covered in pine trees, earning it the name of the 'Isle of Pines' in Columbus’ notes, and although Columbus states (1959:233) that, “there was nothing of importance in those Guanaja Islands,” the sailors were excited by the presence of calcide, which they believed was gold but which in reality was used in the process of casting copper. The indigenous people encountered were said to resemble those of other islands visited by the explorers, except for their narrower foreheads, and it is stated that all of the islands were well populated at the time (Herrera y Tordesillas 1944:16).

Impressed by their modesty, as demonstrated by their evident embarrassment upon being stripped naked, Columbus felt inclined to let them free, keeping with their party one elderly man named Yumbe (Columbus 1959:232). This man was taken along with the party to serve as a translator and was released from this duty when he no longer understood the language of the populations on the mainland coast, somewhere west of the Cape Gracias a Dios (Columbus 1959:232-233). This has of course sparked great
controversy and endless speculation concerning the exact location of this linguistic barrier. Further supporting the idea that Columbus encountered two distinct cultural groups – one including the Bay Islanders and those in the area of Cape Honduras and the other somewhere near this point – are his other observations (enlightening in spite of his value-laden judgments) on the dress and behavior of the people he encountered, “The Indians in the vicinity of Point Caxinas were dressed like those in the canoe…But the people who live farther east, as far as Cape Gracias a Dios, are almost black in color, ugly in aspect, wear no clothes, and are very wild in all respects. According to the Indian who was our prisoner they eat human flesh and raw fish, and pierce holes in their ears large enough to insert a hen’s eggs,” (Columbus 1959:234) hence the name Columbus gave to this portion of the coast: Costa de las Orejas.

Herrera y Tordesillas (1944:12) recorded Lopez de Salcedo’s inquiry into the customs of the people of the region upon his appointment as governor of Honduras in 1527, which is summarized and speculated on by Strong (1935:14):

He states that there were three principal idols near Trujillo which were worshipped in temples. One of these was located on an island about 15 Spanish leagues from Trujillo. Possibly this was at Plan Grande on Bonacca, but at any rate it would seem to have been on the Bay Islands. The idols were all of female shape and of a green marblelike stone. They were attended by a priest with long hair, who was forbidden to marry and who, through the power of the idol, had great influence in the community. In addition, the Indians had other idols and
adoratios to which they made sacrifices. The idols served to ward off bad luck and bring good fortune to the farms and towns. The priest is called Papa and taught the sons of the upper classes at the temple.

Herrera y Tordesillas (1944:19) also briefly mentions that one of the islands, presumably Roatán, had such fine crystals that some was transported to Spain. Vasquez (1944:156) writes of the native islanders from Roatán being used as translators for Franciscan missionaries working with Pech populations on the mainland in the year 1622. Interestingly, Vasquez (1944:159, translation mine) later says that as the Pech built a church and began to congregate, the islanders guided them as they were, “already Christians and more political.”

Beginning in 1516, regular slave raids were carried out in the Bay Islands by Spanish seeking labor for their needs in Cuba and Jamaica. By 1526, the Bay Islands population had been nearly entirely depleted by these raids (Conzemius 1928:59). Hernán Cortes, posted in Trujillo from 1525 to 1526, gained the allegiance of the Bay Islanders to the Spanish crown. They were hereafter required to supply Spanish settlements with fish, cassava and maize, and to labor on public works. They were noted for their skills as fishermen, their ability to make cables from tree bark, as well as pitch, tar and lime, and were also used for the transportation of goods and peoples on the seas (Conzemius 1928:62). There is a brief description (Martyr 1812:531) of the infamous slave raid in which Bay Islanders were captured, taken to Cuba, revolted and sailed over 650 miles
back to the islands in 1555. The islanders were described as, “Idolaters and circumcised”, and were since admired for their considerable navigating skills and fierce fighting.

According to Strong (1935:11), De Avila was sent to take an inventory of the natives still living on the islands. He reported that there were four main settlements, among which around 400 islanders lived. Of these, he spoke of the settlement of Roata, approximately 7 miles from a port called Barerros, “a port on the southern shore of Roatán marked by red barrancas visible from the sea”. This is interesting for several reasons. The term barrancas can mean quebrada, creek or canyon, while barerros can be translated as either potters or a source of clay, which quite possibly could signify a source of clay for pottery produced on the island, which would be the first of such identified. If the location of this port could be discovered, it could also be used as an initial point for the identification of the main settlement on the island during this time. Squier, describing the island and its two settlements of Roata and Masa (the latter believed to be located on the island of Helena), writes of two ports farthest east on the southern coast of the island, the second – which would correspond with present day Old Port Royal – he names as the port of Barreros.

Squier (1858:609) further elaborates on this report made by De Avila by saying that the two towns were separated by a canal so narrow that not even the lightest vessel would pass and so the islands were considered one. Squier (1858:610) also states that the islands were all fertile, supplying a variety of edible root plants, palms, fruits, and dye-woods for the mainland population. By the year 1639, in which De Avila wrote, the “laborious and faithful” islanders of Roatán, under the encomienda of Cosmo Gonzalez,
spoke Spanish, had churches, and were supplying Trujillo with fish, cassava, maize, and manual labor for public works (Squier 1858:610). It is also noted that in this year the Dutch (possibly under the leadership of van Horne) burnt several settlements on the island, including that of Roata (Conzemius 1928:64; Squier 1858:613).

The following period of time is marked by constant conflict, mainly between the various English, Dutch, and French buccaneers and the Spanish for control over the islands. Many buccaneers were fond of Roatán because it provided easy access to the mainland ports, preferred targets for their raids, and provided an easily defensible escape in the time between these attacks, made more desirable during this time by the erection of several fortifications (Conzemius 1928; Squier 1858). Although the population of the islands had already decreased significantly as a result of these struggles between outside powers and numerous slave raids (Squier 1858:604-605), in the year 1650 by order of the Spanish, and to prevent their future cooperation with buccaneers (or the English) or the exploitation of the resources they produced by these groups, the remaining islanders were removed and resettled in the Alcaldia Mayor de Amatique in the neighborhood of Puerto Santo Tomas de Castilla, between the Motagua and Polochic rivers, near present day Puerto Barrios, Guatemala (Conzemius 1928:65; Juarros 1808:45). It is unclear how many native islanders remained at this time, why this location was chosen for their relocation, or the fate of those who were removed.

After several failed treaties and numerous battles, the Spanish once again reclaimed possession of the island in 1786 (Squier 1858:618). Several groups, including the well-known Garifuna in 1797 (now mostly situated along the northern coast of
mainland Honduras) and many Cayman Islanders, arrived on the island before the last
dispute involving a British claim to the islands was peacefully settled in 1850 and
wherein the islands were returned to Honduras and have since been named the
Department of the Bay Islands, one of the seventeen departments of the Republic of
Honduras (Strong 1935:16).

**Archaeological Investigations on the Bay Islands**

Accounts from numerous visitors to the islands in the mid-19th century describe
curious, obviously “uncivilized” artifacts being taken out of mounds or found in the
collections of local inhabitants (Mitchell 1850; Squier 1858; Young 1847). Spinden
(1925:539) in his travels along the north coast of Honduras briefly mentions the islands,
saying, “The shores of these islands have shell heaps resembling the ones on the
mainland near Trujillo and having the same kind of pottery. Also metates have been
found on these islands but not in large deposits.” His collections from the north coast
were analyzed by Vélez (1972).

The journals of Mitchell-Hedges (1954), written more like an adventure novel
than a scientific report, chronicled his journey throughout the islands in 1930 and 1934.
Working under the Heye Foundation, now known as the Museum of the American
Indian, the self-proclaimed explorer collected a large amount of material from the islands
yet left little record as to their context and rather filled his story with speculation on the
fantastic origins of the native islanders. In 1931, Junius Bird led the Boekelman Shell
Heap Expedition and excavated several sites across the islands and performed a number
of small excavations. Strong (1935) evaluated the materials collected by both Mitchell-Hedges (probably independently based on the evaluation of the collection and in light of the lack of interpretation provided by the explorer himself) and Junius Bird (with the help of detailed notes and personal communication) within his monograph and in conjunction with information gathered during his own journey throughout the islands in 1933.

Strong’s presentation, synthesis, and analysis of this wealth of data is remarkable and remains the most complete compilation of information on the culture of the Bay Islands to date. While several specific examples from the excavations and materials detailed in this report are discussed below, it should be noted here that scientific excavations were undertaken by both Bird and Strong (Strong 1935) on several sites on Roatán as well as Helena, Barbareta, Utila and Guanaja. Strong’s (1935) initial interpretation of the data leads him to conclude that the indigenous populations of the Bay Islands were heavily influenced by South American groups throughout their history, while Mesoamerican influences were introduced later in their history. He (1935) also stresses that his hypothesis is based on an insufficient amount of data, owing to a lack of sustained research on the Bay Island culture and their likely counterparts on the mainland. In the years since Strong’s report was published, numerous authors have drawn further conclusions from his data, some more successfully than others (Cuddy 2007; Nance 1965).

In 1937, Lord Moyne, also known as Edward Guiness, visited the Bay Islands and collected over 3,000 artifacts (Cuddy 2007:166; Feacham and Braunholtz 1938; Moyne 1938). His often overlooked account of this voyage includes several photographs of the
items collected and many interesting – and often infuriating – observations. On the heels of the Mitchell-Hedges expedition, he notes that the islanders had been trained in digging for pottery and were eager to begin their work once informed that any and every piece would be paid for in spite of its value. So skilled were these workers that Moyne felt no need to oversee their work and left to explore other locations while they dug (Moyne 1938:92-98). Moyne (1938:92) notes that the most important sites were located on Helene, Punta Gorda, and Pollatilla Bight on the northern coast. Although his interpretations of the affiliations represented by the pottery are certainly skewed, the few photographs in his work are certainly intriguing and depict forms unseen elsewhere or mentioned in any other source known by the author (including ocarinas and rollers; see Plates 26-31 in Moyne 1938). An analysis of this collection would surely provide an invaluable glimpse into the past of the Bay Islands and while its current location is currently unknown, it is likely that it could be found at either the British Museum or the Cambridge University Archaeological Museum, as Moyne (1938:94-95) mentions portions of the collection being sent to both. One other interesting piece of information from his chronicle comes from his brief visit to the Swan Islands, which although located roughly 90 miles off the mainland coast, are considered part of Honduras. During his visit, his group hired islanders to dig into a shell midden on the largest of these islands and uncovered, “a pile of thick broken pottery which when reconstructed proved to be of a calabash shape.” (Moyne 1938:82) This shape is commonly associated with Preclassic ware in northeastern Honduras and has considerable Olmec influence, and its presence on these islands would have major implications for the history of the islanders of this region.
It seems his party also took a great amount of professional photographs that would also provide a great resource on the materials, remains, and environments they encountered during this trip.

The first modern excavations on the islands were performed by Gordon Ekholm, A.V. Kidder, and Gus Stromsvik and took place in 1950 at the 80-Acre site on Utila (Epstein 1957, 1959) a site identified earlier by Strong (1935). Interestingly, this work only spanned three days and would be considered rescue archaeology by contemporary standards, considering the investigators were called in to examine material exposed by the building of an airstrip. From this research and the data collected by Bird at the mainland sites of Selin and Cocal, Jeremiah Epstein (1957) first categorized the ceramic materials and defined the Selín Horizon (A.D. 600-900) and the Cocal Horizon (A.D. 900-1520), creating the ceramic classification system that is still in use today for Bay Island ceramics. Further revisions (Epstein 1959) allowed for the application of this system to material from Strong’s excavations in the Olancho valley and refined dates for the Ulúa Polychromes in this region (Epstein 1975).

Modern archaeological surveys of the islands began in 1965 with a short survey on Guanaja by Alan Craig (1967, 1977), who focused on cataloguing the prehispanic fishing activities of the islanders. In 1973, Véliz, Healy, and Willey (1977) identified three sites on the west end of Roatán, including two on Difficulty Hill, later excavated by Begley (1999), and one north of Coxen Hole (possibly the Dixon Hill site?), where they excavated a small test pit that produced pottery that appeared to be of Lower Central American origin. Véliz and colleagues (1977) also collected a large amount of ceramic
sherds belonging to the Cocal period from surface deposits, and concluded that the islands were inhabited from at least A.D. 600, that the earliest period, the Selin (A.D. 600-900) was heavily influenced by Mesoamerican cultures, while finds from the Cocal (A.D. 900-1500) exhibited South American influences (Véñezuela et al. 1976, 1977).

Goodwin (1979) carried out a survey on the island of Utila and a brief excavation on the site of 80 Acre in Utila in 1974. This was followed by the work of Epstein, Smith and Hasemann in 1975 (Hasemann 1975, 1977). In a period of six weeks, the team thoroughly mapped the 80 Acre site on Utila and recorded 33 sites on Roatán (Epstein 1975; Epstein and Véñezuela 1977). Epstein (1975:8) states that the original goal of their 1975 survey of the islands was to identify coastal sites that may have served as trading centers or ports of trade (see Chapter 2 above) yet they found that coastal sites were rare and quite small. The extreme looting noted by Epstein and his team (1975:8) caused him to state that, “Unless serious archaeological studies are carried out on the Bay Islands within the next decade, the site destruction cause by modern relic hunters will soon make it impossible to answer any of the questions raised in this paper.” The great quantity of survey work performed during this period is summarized and placed within its larger historical and geographical context by William Davidson in his book, *Historical Geography of the Bay Islands, Honduras*, published in 1974. A brief, opportunistic, yet extensive survey of all of the Bay Islands was carried out in 1985 by a group originally in the region on other duties (Horton 1985), and located a total of 246 sites, 99 on Roatán alone. Despite the large number of sites recorded, the data has yet to be fully organized, classified, or interpreted and therefore has not yielded much useful information.
In the early 1990s, Begley’s (1999) work at the site of Difficulty Hill led to the creation of a new typology for Roatán ceramics. The use of this typology has been limited due to the lack of archaeological research on the island but Begley’s (1999) analysis provides some interesting insights and observations, which the proposed study seeks to develop. Dennett’s (2007, 2008) more recent analysis of the data collected in 1975 at the Río Claro site provides a detailed classification of the material stored at Trent University according to Healy’s (1993) typology for ceramic material of northeast Honduras and a modal analysis for appendages that serves as a guiding example for portions of this thesis.

Further excavations on Roatán were conducted in 2000 at the site of Charlie Brown in response to the threat of possible destruction due to development (Cruz Castillo and Orellana 2000). This site had been previously identified as a large settlement by the 1975 survey team (Epstein 1975), and excavations were carried out by Oscar Cruz Castillo and Ildefonso Orellana of the IHAB (Cruz Castillo and Orellana 2000). Also, Cuddy’s (2007) *Political Identity and Archaeology in Northeast Honduras* synthesizes much of the work done in the northeastern region of Honduras to date, and makes important connections about the cultural heritage of the area and the modern day Pech populations.

**Ethnographic Analogies**

Given the likelihood that the majority of settlements on the islands throughout the prehispanic period were either Pech or a of very closely related population, historic and
ethnographic material about the Pech is invaluable to the field of archaeology because it allows researchers the possibility to contextualize archaeological findings on the island. In addition, given the estimate that 95% of known material comes from looting, it provides some context for private collections to be interpreted when archaeological context is unknown. Familiarity with Pech culture and practices, as well as the material manifestations of those practices, may be the key to understanding the function of artifacts found on the island, what role they may have played in the lives of prehispanic islanders, and the associations between these artifacts and ceremonial or domestic activities. This is especially important considering the lack of sustained academic research into the past of the native Bay Islanders, which has resulted in very little, if any, interest in island prehistory or perceived value of its knowledge.

Until very recently, little had been written about the culture of the Pech, previously known as the Paya, with the exception of Conzemius' study (1927). His article is a very detailed description of what was known of the Pech at the time, and summarized previous written records that mentioned the Pech. In the section on geography, Conzemius (1927:247-254) states, “The Pech Indians occupy the central part of the Honduran Moskitia and the northeastern portion of the department of Olancho…the least explored part of the Honduran Republic…The physical aspect of the Pech territory is very uneven and mountainous…scored by very many rivers that in certain parts are the only route of communication. Most of the region inhabited by the Pech is covered with lush forests where sunlight never penetrates… the rivers that irrigate this region have abundant fish… their actual number is a little more than 600.”
Davidson (2009:245-260) also suggests that the main divisions between groups in northeastern Honduras were geographic, whether valleys, mountains, or rivers. He delineates the territories of the Pech, Lenca, Jicaque indigenous groups based on this assumption and on archaeological, historical, and current data collected in the region. He also states that at least two Mexican populations existed in this area; one in the southern portion of the Agúan Valley and the other east of Trujillo, based mainly on the presence of Nauhautl words and names in early records collected by Columbus and explorers or missionaries (see also Lara Pinto 1991 for a discussion of this hypothesis and Begley 1999 for a counter argument).

Conzemius (1927) also acknowledges the fact that indigenous groups were often lumped together by Europeans, which has important implications regarding the use of historic documents in this research. He notes (1927:255) that the Pech were most often mentioned either under Mexican terms, “Chontales” or “Populcas” – both translating as “barbarian,” because most Europeans were more familiar with languages of that territory, or lumped together with the Lenca or Jicaque. Conzemius (1927:281-286) then outlines several important aspects of Pech culture, from physical appearance to social organization:

The Pech are of small or medium stature…they have long backs, a short neck, prominent cheekbones, large lips, hairless, or a small, low, and flat nose. They are generally very humble… The Pech rarely sing…some of them know how to play the accordion and the guitar. Men dress in a similar way to ladinos. The Pech
greatly value an abundant head of hair and very rarely is a bald Indian found. Generally, every family has their own house, and only the son-in-law lives in the house of his in-laws. The houses are of an oblong shape and of a single story; the floor is made of leveled dirt and the roof of palm leaves, while the walls, when they exist, are almost always made of bamboo. Metates, flat stones over which yucca and corn are crushed, are not missing in any household…the women sit around the fire on low stools, while the men lay in hammocks…They used big wooden spoons to stir the food…the machete, a form of large knife in the shape of a sword…is the most important utensil for work and both sexes easily wield it…pines serves to light the fire…Instead of soap they use limes…

These practices are exceedingly important because they often leave physical evidence of their occurrence, which may be found by archaeologists hundreds or thousands of years later. Descriptions of perishable items used today also serve to fill a very large gap in the archaeological record. This section of his study also summarizes the different occupations and then the resources, foods and drinks, family life, religion, leaders, beliefs, sicknesses, and death rituals of the Pech. All of these topics are extremely important to archaeological research because they cover some aspects of society that are often impossible to interpret based solely on material remains. Because studies carried out on Roatán have determined that the majority of ceramic materials found on the island are associated with death and burial rituals, the section covering this topic was perhaps the most important for this thesis:
When a person dies those Pech with shotguns fire several shots to scare away the evil spirit that has caused the misfortune. Immediately after death, the body is wrapped and sown in a blanket made of 'tuna' bark, and placed in the center of the house. The bed in which he slept is thrown outside; the house is also abandoned as soon as a new one is built, and when several people die in a household in a short period of time, the site is abandoned. Women, relatives of the deceased, braid their hair and do not take any food until after the burial, but they rarely cry. A pipante (river raft) serves as a coffin; in one half the body is placed and in the other is used to cover it. They bury with the deceased some victuals and his personal effects: shotgun, machete, harpoons, bow, arrows, flint, tabaco, etc. For women this is placed in the coffin: iron and ceramic pot, metate, etc. And for children the mother's milk gourd. The deceased will need all of these articles during his trip to paradise; however, they only bury the articles that are broken or have little utility. Before they killed the domestic animals (cows, pigs, chickens, etc.) and destroyed the fruit trees and the crops of the deceased, but this is no longer practiced today. [Conzemius 1927:300]

The book *Etno-demografía de la étnica pech, Honduras* by Aguilar (2006), is a census study of the current state of the Pech indigenous group, including the distribution of sex, age, and occupation of those people interviewed, as well as common forms of work and materials used daily. This study is vital to understanding how ethnicity is
defined, with specific relation to the Pech, and identifies several issues in such
definitions, especially considering the drastic changes in language and agricultural
practices imposed by Europeans. Gonzalez and colleagues (1995) address similar issues
with the definition and delineation of ethnic groups, while Holt’s (Holt 1986; Holt and
Bright 1976) work has focused solely on the origins, development, and geographical
limits of Pech language. For over twenty years, Honduran anthropologist Lazaro Flores
Mejia and Wendy Griffin (Flores Mejia 1989; Flores and Griffin 1991; Griffin et al.
2009) have published the most comprehensive, and possibly the only available, profiles
of contemporary Pech language and culture. Their work, along with the information
compiled by Conzemius (1927), has the potential to serve as a foundation for future
ethnoarchaeological inquiries in this region. Several descriptions from Griffin et al.
(2009) are presented as ethnographic analogies to prehispanic activities in order to aid in
the interpretation of the archaeological record in the discussion of Roatán populations
below (see Chapter 7).

Summary

While many of the historical sources presented above provide invaluable,
otherwise unattainable information, the biases present in these accounts must be taken
into consideration. The overall atmosphere of the contact period was one of excitement
and curiosity mixed, with a fear of the unknown and a sense of superiority on the part of
those producing the written history that has survived. As these original accounts passed
hands through the years and were rewritten or translated, many additions and extractions
occurred and interpretations were made. Consequently, the lenses through which we view and assess these narratives are actually greater than those we may acknowledge as ours alone. In addition, the written history only tells one side of the complex story of the interaction taking place during this tumultuous time period. After centuries of silencing and displacement, archaeology remains one of the few methods able to uncover the story of the indigenous Bay Islanders. Studies of contemporary Pech communities grapple with issues of defining and delineating the Pech culture even when allowed direct access to the group today, hinting at the difficulty of performing a similar task hundreds of years later through archaeological data alone. The combination of continued archaeological research with studies of probable living descendant communities will set the framework for a more holistic approach to the study of the region and serve to connect contemporary groups with disconnected material remains. The aim of this study is to provide a basis for such research to build upon by providing a summary of work done in the region, presenting data that supports the connection of the indigenous island populations to descendant populations on the mainland, and preliminarily identifying key stakeholders and mediators that should be involved in future endeavors in public archaeology on the island.
Chapter 4: Field and Laboratory Methods for Evaluating Affiliations on the Island of Roatán

To begin to evaluate the affiliations of the prehispanic native Bay Islanders, several approaches were taken to collect and analyze archaeological data. During the 2009 field season, excavations were performed on the site of El Antigual over a period of five weeks (Figure 4.1). The excavation aimed to provide a chronological sequence of the site to determine if changes in materials or styles could be identified over time. Based on the theoretical models presented above, such differences may indicate changes in population affiliation in certain circumstances or shifting trade patterns of stable populations. The area surrounding the site was also surveyed and surface collections were made at each site identified. This allowed for a preliminary conclusion that sites in this region shared similar features in their ceramic assemblage and likely came from contemporaneous groups and had similar functions. This supported the idea that the island was home to a fairly homogenous population. Protocol in the field and the laboratory assured that the data collected was comparable to that in other studies done in this region to facilitate comparisons and classification of ceramic materials especially.
El Antigual and the Survey Area

The site of El Antigual is located near the center of the island of Roatán (N16°22’57”’, W86°24’23”’) (Figure 4.1). It is spread out across two hilltops and the saddle that connects them, covering an area of approximately 800 m². To the south of the site is a major stream, 2-3 m wide and 1-2 m deep, running north to south and emptying into Caribe Point Bight on the southern coast. The site's hilltops are covered with tall grass and low lying vegetation, while the saddle is forested by palms and ferns. There is a clear view of both the northern and southern coasts of the island as well as the north coast of mainland Honduras.

The site was visited by Epstein and his team in 1975, and he noted (1975: 39-40) that the site was well-known by local islanders and was clearly looted, as evidenced by several crude excavations visible near the peak of the mountain were the highest concentration of surface artifacts could be seen scattered down the south slope for a
distance of at least seventy five years. Epstein (1975: 39-40) also noted that there were large rock slabs near the top of the hill, one “monkey” lug similar to handles found on San Marcos ware, and one cut conch. He (1975: 39-40) concludes, “The hilltop seems to have served as an offertory or burial area since it is too small to have contained even a single family unit. It is possible that a small population lived further down the south slope. There seems little here that is left to excavate.”

In spite of this grim conjecture, the construction of a large cell phone tower on the site's eastern hilltop by the national telephone company revealed an A-B-C soil horizon with a considerable amount of ceramic material visible. Unfortunately, the tower now covers about 40 m² and appears to have damaged significant portions of the site. Sandstone bedrock was exposed near the base of the northern tower. While no architecture was visible, the presence of terracing was noted as a possibility but could not be confirmed due to the thick vegetation throughout the site (Wells 2008:75).

The survey component of the project focused on the immediate vicinity of El Antigual and aimed at recording other presumably contemporaneous sites but also documenting the impact of human development on these sites, especially those located on hilltops. Locations of these sites can be seen in Figure 4.2.
Methods

The inaugural season of Project Roatán, with Dr. Christian Wells as project director, began in June, 2009 with 14 graduate and undergraduate students, USF M.A. student Alejandro Figueroa as survey manager, and the author as excavation manager. Survey, excavation and laboratory work was carried out simultaneously by groups of four
to five students who rotated among the tasks and spent a total of two weeks performing each duty. Giovanni and Herman, members of our host family, aided in the clearing of portions of the site, though much of the site remained unobservable throughout the season because of the dense vegetation.

Survey

Survey teams covered the terrain on foot, proceeding in two-meter transects where the topography allowed and otherwise following topography, where possible. Dense vegetation and rough uneven topography proved to be more problematic than anticipated and survey was performed as systematically as possible given the circumstances. The western boundary of the survey area was marked by Caribe Point Bight while the eastern boundary extended as far as the road leading to the settlement of La Punta, both located on the southern coast of the island. The survey began at the main highway that crosses the island, dividing this area into northern and southern portions, of which the southern portion was investigated first.

A Garmin Etrex GPS device was used to track the team’s progress and paths were recorded on a topographic map. UTM coordinates using datum: WGS-1984 were recorded and a unique number was given to each site identified, preceded by the project's initials (i.e., PR 02). El Antigual was labeled as PR-01 in this notation sequence. Sites were defined by Project Roatán as a locality consisting of more than ten artifacts of a single artifact type within an area of 15 m diameter, 20 or more artifacts of at least two artifact types within an area of 15 m, one or more anthropogenic features associated with any number of artifacts, or two such features not associated with artifacts. To represent
distinct sites, a space of 100 m must exist between such occurrences (Wells and Davis-Salazar 2009:33).

Based on the quantity of material visible at each site, either general or diagnostic surface collections were made at each site. From sites with little visible material, estimated at less than 100 artifacts, general collections were made and diagnostic samples collected and recorded where present. For sites with larger scatters, judgmental samples were collected based on the evaluation of pieces as either useful in determining site function or in estimating temporal placement. Impact assessment data for each site were also collected through the use of a standardized form and later adapted into a geospatial database allowing for the examination of patterns in the effects of development on archaeological sites (Figueroa n.d.).

Excavation

During the 2009 field season, excavations focused on the northern hilltop of the site, marked by a vertical drop to the north of about 75 feet and a slope extending from the hilltop south at an angle of 30 to 45 degrees (Epstein 1975:39). Excavation aimed to cover the site both horizontally and vertically to gather information about activity areas and provide data for the chronological dating of the site and materials. Excavation units, measuring one meter by one meter, were placed on an imaginary grid covering the entire site, wherein the first unit was randomly chosen and thereafter the units were placed within the grid. Units were marked with stakes at each corner and delineated using string. Long lines of units running together in one direction formed trenches and were called
operations. These operations were given numbers sequentially (1-4) as excavations proceeded (Figure 4.3). Each new suboperation represented a specific purpose in the expansion of the excavated area and in this case all represented extensions either north or south of Operation 1 in areas where artifact concentrations were high. The locations of these varied from hill summit to saddle, to slope. Within each operation, two excavation units in a row were labeled as a suboperation and given a letter designation, forming a two-meter by one-meter area which was excavated and recorded together (Figure 4.4). Stratigraphic layers removed vertically within these units were called lots. These numbered lots were intended to correspond to changes in soil horizons but the unusual nature of the geology of the site, especially the shale bedrock and the sloping surface of the investigation area, made this undertaking difficult in many cases.

Figure 4.3. Locations of Operations within excavations at El Antigual.
Students were assigned responsibility for suboperations and instructed on a specific procedure for taking notes which included a standardized lot form that required important information specific to each lot excavated, including deposition, soil type and color, artifacts removed, photograph or drawing numbers and other pertinent information. Notation procedures began with a record of the general location of the suboperation in relation to features of the site and were followed by a designation of the operation, suboperation, and lot in which the student was working (i.e., 15 m west of the cell phone tower, 01 – A – 02). All of this data were also recorded in the individual field notes taken by each student, essentially providing two records of the same excavation, in addition to their other observations on the site, setting, etc. The compact nature of the soil necessitated the use of pick-axes in the upper levels of excavation, where we had established that little if any cultural materials would be encountered. Trowels were used to remove soil in the layers where materials were present. Each lot was also screened through ¼ inch screens to recover any small materials. The majority of the artifacts
encountered were ceramics but any possibly significant find, including modern materials, were collected. Counts for each lot were recorded and the materials were placed in plastic bags labeled with the location, excavator, date, and contents. Bags were transported to the lab at the end of each field day. Initial and ending lot elevations were measured from several datum points throughout the site.

The absolute elevation of these datum points were recorded using an EDM total station. Data were also collected for each suboperation and other accessible areas of the site to be used in future analyses and in the creation of a site map. Profile drawings for each suboperation were drawn and final photographs taken at the conclusion of the field season. Plastic tarps were placed at the bottom of each operation before the site was backfilled.

**Laboratory**

Artifacts were cleaned and catalogued by students in the lab, in most cases on the day immediately following their excavation. Ceramics were washed and dried before being analyzed. Data on the material, quantity, weight, class, and category were recorded for each artifact. Additional data on the form, fragment, fabric, paste, interior and exterior finishes, slips, and decorations were also recorded for ceramic sherds. To facilitate comparisons with other assemblages, especially the ceramic data collected at the Rio Claro site, a standardized ceramic data sheet, adapted from Dennett (2007) was used to record information on all “special” sherds. Special sherds were defined by those with decoration or intact portions of the rim or any diagnostic material as described above.
Photographs were taken and drawings made for each special sherd, including rim profiles, by the students. Survey materials were treated in the same manner.

For each of the special sherds, paste color was recorded using Munsell charts, while harness, temper, texture and firing results were based on individual observations. All data were then entered into Excel spreadsheets and also in an MS Access database. Initial findings were provided in a report to the IHAH at the end of the field season. All artifacts, together with all Project Roatán original notes, lots sheets, and drawings were copied and delivered to the IHAH storage facility in La Lima in the summer of 2010.

Analysis

Given the limited number of ceramic sherds available for this study, a detailed type-variety classification system was not deemed useful. Groups, with significance only at the site level, were instead created mainly on variations in paste characteristics and decoration. Although paste types are believed to be of local origin, descriptive qualities of each encountered paste were recorded in an effort to make this material available for future researchers.

SPSS analytical software was used during the analysis, mainly to facilitate the grouping of materials based on recorded observations, and in the creation of graphs presented in this chapter. Although the total number of ceramic sherds (n=4345) was used in the definition of larger groups during the ceramic analysis, only the special sherds (n=283, 126 from PR and 157 from the Haxton Collection) were considered when evaluating cross-ties or ceramic modes. It should be noted here that discrepancies in the
records based on differences in recorder were apparent but could not be avoided in this type of project. The multitude of individuals collecting and studying the data caused several confusions but did allow for an expedient and immediate processing of all materials collected during the field season.

**Summary**

Several special sherds from the collection along with material from the Haxton Collection were evaluated according to a conceptual modal analysis, as defined by Rice (1987:277). This analysis was performed based mainly on appendages, such as lugs, handles, or supports, and decoration motifs or execution. Appendage classification closely follows the work of Dennett (2007). Comparisons to known examples are made where possible and several tentative ties are established through the evaluation of these modes. General motifs present in the northeast, as identified by Cuddy (2007), were also considered. Possibilities for areas of future study have also been outlined.
Chapter 5: Archaeological Evidence for Inter- and Intraregional Interaction on the Bay Islands

This chapter presents the data collected during the 2009 field season of Project Roatán through both survey and excavation using the methods outlined in the previous chapter. Survey and excavation locations and objectives are detailed with preliminary findings discussed where possible. Potential site functions and activity areas are considered, similar features recorded in other literature are presented for comparison, and the possible implications of these in relation to cultural affiliations and trade relations are proposed.

Because of their durability and abundance, ceramics are often the most numerous material present in the archaeological record (Rice 1987:24). Ceramic analysis ranges from the qualitative description of surface decoration to the quantitative analyses of various aspects of ceramic materials down to their chemical composition. Ceramic studies often seek to answer questions about site formation processes, preservation of sites, and trade or interaction among ancient societies. Specific aspects of ceramic materials, such as the raw material source exploited, production techniques, form and use, are appropriate for addressing different research questions (Orton et al. 1993; Rice 1987; Sinopoli 1991).
If excavation combined with ceramic analysis can reveal information on site function and patterns in activity areas on the site, it may be possible to provide evidence that supports particular hypotheses concerning the cultural affiliations of islanders in the past (Orton et al. 1993:26-28) and then expand upon that information to evaluate the status of the islanders and the purpose of the occupation and use of the island. Were they using sites like the Pech groups? Was their use and disposal of ceramic material similar to that of the Maya? Given the presence of modern descendents of these groups in Honduras, these questions have immediate relevance in terms of issues of representation and identity.

Survey

The Survey team covered roughly seven square kilometers over the course of the season. Ten sites were identified and recorded. All sites, excluding PR 03, were located on hilltops. PR03 was a large rockshelter, with a late occupation date (see below). PR05 featured a relatively large and flat summit, and was located at the top of the southernmost hill in a north-south chain of hilltops that had evidence of occupation, including El Antigual to the north. PR06 was by far the largest site and featured the largest concentration of surface materials within the survey area. This hill also features a large, flat summit with the majority of ceramics found on the southwestern slope. All of the other sites were relatively small and had proportionately-sized ceramic surface scatters.

PR 10 was the only site where historic materials were found on the surface. The majority of the sites recorded had been significantly impacted by looting and
development (Figure 5.1). See Figueroa (n.d.) for a detailed description of the sites and an analysis of impacts. At several of the sites, sherds were found stacked and topped by broken portions of conch shells which may represent a ritual activity (Figure 5.2). No comparable practice was encountered in the literature.

Figure 5.1. A road cut and private residence representing only a small portion of the damage done to PR06 by recent development on the island.

Figure 5.2. Partial conch shell found with several sherds located underneath and in the immediate vicinity of the shell at PR 05.
Excavation

During the 2009 field season of Project Roatán, excavations focused on the northern hilltop of the site of El Antigual. Fourteen students and the author were involved in these excavations over the course of five weeks. Each student was responsible for taking detailed notes on his or her excavation units while the author supervised student progress and synthesized the information collected (Figures 5.3 and 5.4).

Figure 5.3.View of El Antigual, taken from the eastern hill summit, looking west.
Beginning nearly 15 m west from the base of the cell phone tower, one long trench stretching over 100 m and running east-west was laid out at the summit and was labeled Operation 1. The purpose of this portion of the excavation was to provide an uninterrupted profile of the site. Excavations in the trench confirmed that the A-B-C horizon sequence revealed by the cut for the cell phone tower was consistent with deposits over most of the site at this elevation. The nature of the bedrock, which softened and flaked when left exposed to the sun, made the task of keeping the units level and clean very difficult (Figure 5.5).
As excavations extended south towards the saddle, deposits became much thicker, allowing excavations to reach nearly two meters before hitting bedrock (Figure 5.6). This allowed for a clearer, if not more complicated, stratigraphic profile of the site, which helped in the chronological sequencing of excavated materials and the task of relative dating for the site as a whole. The easternmost extension off of Operation 1 was named Operation 2 while its western extension was labeled Operation 3. Operation 4 was the only northern extension of Operation 2 and was located off of the westernmost unit in Operation 1, at the top of Garrapata Hill.
Operation 1

Beginning 15 m to the west of the northern cell phone tower of the site, Operation 1 ran parallel to the vertical drop noted previously as located just north of the summit. This operation included Suboperations A through T, running east to west and covering a total of 78 m, of which 28 m were excavated during this season. The purpose of this operation was to provide a profile of the extent of the site. Many of the units were left unexcavated owing to either the erosion of all top soil and the related exposure of the shale bedrock or due to time constraints. Most units were characterized by a sandy, light yellowish brown (10YR 6/4) humus layer of 2-5 cm, a cultural living surface of averaging 10-15 cm thick (5-20 cm BGS) characterized by a grayish brown (10YR 5/2) soil of a clayey nature, followed by a 10 cm-thick deposit of a mixture of sandy, yellowish brown (10YR 5/4) soil with unconsolidated shale (20-30 cm BGS), and lastly...
a sterile layer of unconsolidated shale (30-40 cm BGS), above a solid shale bedrock at around 40 cm BGS. Most artifacts were recovered from 5-15 cm BGS with some being found in the topsoil or humus layers and several recovered from the unconsolidated shale level at 20-30 cm BGS (Figure 5.7).

Located at the base of the western hilltop of the site, called Garrapata Hill, Suboperations L-T contained the same profile with considerably deeper deposits of each type and fewer artifacts recovered overall. Suboperations D and J produced what was perceived as unusually high numbers of artifacts per unit, although subsequent analyses comparing the volume of soil excavated to the number of artifacts recovered have shown this was not the case (Figure 5.8). To investigate these deposits, Operations 2 and 3 were opened as southern extensions of these units, respectively.

Figure 5.7. Typical soil profile at El Antigual.
Operation 2

Operation 2 was placed south of Unit A of Suboperation 1-D for the purpose of investigating the high number of artifacts recovered from that unit. This operation extended south, down the slope of the hill, around 30 m west of the cell phone tower (Figure 5.9). Suboperations for this Operation were A-H and, excluding Unit 2 of Suboperations E and B, all units in this operation were excavated. The disorderly nature of the labels in this unit resulted from an original plan to excavate every other suboperation, hoping to uncover a longer profile of this portion of the site. However, as the soil profiles here proved to be more complex than Operation 1, our team chose to return to the remaining units in order to reveal an uninterrupted profile of this operation and in hopes of gaining a better understanding of the stratigraphy as well as some
interesting anomalies. Unfortunately, this goal was not completed in light of our shortened field season. Intrusive deposits of unconsolidated, sterile shale throughout the southern portion of this operation, Suboperations E, B, and F, along with the presence of a lighter colored soil at the lowest levels of Suboperation B, and two large rocks in Suboperations F and C, taken together seem to indicate a unique stratigraphic profile that is likely to have resulted from human actions rather than natural formation processes.

There were several large rocks located throughout this operation in the humus and cultural living surface layers (A and B respectively). Most were sketched and removed due to their haphazard organization. The two large rocks in Suboperations F and C were left in place, as they represented the most likely indicators of a terraced portion of the slope that we encountered in the entire site (Figure 5.10). Suboperations G and H were opened to investigate the nature of this possible terrace but did not provide any evidence that allowed for any conclusions to be drawn. The distribution of ceramics within the Operation did not reveal any discernable pattern.

Given the nature of the excavation and finds of Cruz Castillo and Orellana (2000), higher terraces on the slope may have been poorly preserved. If the structure of El Antigual was similar to that of Charlie Brown and other sites on the island, it is likely that burials, if present, would be located within the lowest terrace of the slope, which this portion of the Operation 2 would represent. Sharply broken edges and evidence of burning on much of the ceramic material found within this operation are suggestive of a midden deposit. It is interesting to note that the highest summit of the site, which is now covered by the base of the cell phone tower, appears to have been fairly devoid of
artifacts. The patterning of material on the site seems to be in line with the activity and use areas detailed for Pech religious or burial ceremonies, though closer examination of the site, comparable site analysis, and a better understanding of the material correlates of these ceremonies and the pattern of their disposal are needed.

Figure 5.9 View of Operation 2 from the north, looking south down the slope. Suboperation D of Operation is in the foreground, already backfilled.

Figure 5.10. View of portions of a possible terrace in Suboperations C and G.
Operation 3

Located on the western portion of the site, Operation 3 began at Unit 1 of Suboperation J in Operation 1 and extended south down the slope of the hill. This operation contained Suboperations A-F and was created in order to investigate the high number of artifacts recovered in Suboperation 1-J. Despite the shallow nature of the deposits here, this area yielded by far the most material overall and in terms of artifacts per cubic meter excavated, having 3-6 times that of the other operations (Figure 5.11). It was also the only operation to contain both bajareque and greenstone artifacts. One miniature vessel was also recovered from this part of the site (Figure 5.12). These artifacts suggest possible wattle and daub architecture as well as ritual activities, including caching. These materials suggest an original assemblage similar to that found by Strong (1935) at the Dixon Hill site, located on the western portion of Roatán, in a similar context (i.e., hill summit and associated slope). Looting and erosion may account for the differences in the nature of the assemblages and the poor preservation of materials at El Antigual.

Figure 5.11. Sherds per cubic meter by Suboperation within Operation 3.
The geology of Operation 3 was also the most unique encountered on the site. The excavation team encountered a “shelf” in the shale bedrock, which appears to be a natural formation within Suboperation D. An associated pit measuring roughly 33 cm across and extending 41 cm into the bedrock was encountered within 0.5 m of this “shelf” (Figure 5.13). The cavity may have been naturally created but at the very least it is likely that human action resulted in the extreme smoothing of the bottom of this cavity. It was also noted that several sherds, of the Raised Band Punctate Incised type described below, were found in association with several pieces of carbon and a soil type dissimilar to that of the surrounding matrix. The sandy brown soil contained no rocks or unconsolidated shale fragments, and more than 43 sherds were found within this deposit. Interestingly, Begley (1999:117) found a nearly identical feature at the site of Difficulty Hill, located on the western end of Roatán, which he noted also contained ceramics. It was from Suboperations A and D that Suboperations E and F were opened to the west to investigate the extremely dense deposits of artifacts found here. The high number of artifacts continued west and perhaps further. This excavation was closed due to time restraints.
Figure 5.13. View of Operation 3 from the south, looking north. The pit-like feature is visible near the raised stake. The shale “shelf” falls just to the north of the pit.

**Operation 4**

Operation 4 extended north from Suboperation T of Operation 1, up the slope of Garrapata Hill. Although Suboperations A-F were staked out in preparation for excavation, only Unit 1 of Suboperation F was opened. A depth of 35 cm BGS was reached and, in relation to the other operations, a fairly high number of ceramic sherds per cubic meter of soil excavated were recovered. Soils, deposit depths, and the range of ceramic types encountered did not seem to differ from those of the other operations. One large, black rock with a smoothed surface was located at the summit of this hill and Suboperation F was placed roughly 15 cm to the east of this rock (Figure 5.14).
Figure 5.14. View of Suboperation F, Operation 4 from the north, at the summit of Garrapata Hill, looking south. The stone slab is visible in the foreground.

Similar stones were also sound at the Difficulty Hill site by Begley (1999:169-170) and he notes that Strong (1935:Plate 33) found standing monoliths of this type at the Plan Grande site on the Bay Island of Guanaja. Epstein (1975) suggested that several of the stone slabs he found during his Survey on Roatán were probably once upright. Many have been removed from their previous locations since his survey of the island.

Summary

It appears that erosion and aeolian processes have lessened the abundance of artifacts near the summit of El Antigual, and there is a high probability that the greater number of artifacts found in the deeper deposits on the slope of the saddle were carried there by these natural processes. Concentrated and spatially discrete refuse deposits suggest that certain areas at the summit were swept or kept clean, perhaps following ritual activities. Comparison with historically known or contemporary practices of land-
use, architectural features or ritual practices may provide further insights into these findings. Interestingly, artifacts collected during excavation did not include the full range of materials observed during a preliminary site visit in 2008, indicating that surface materials do not necessarily represent the full range of subsurface deposits. This discrepancy has important implications for the planning of future large-scale excavations on the island, as well as models and historical reconstructions based on surface collections alone. In spite of this, the ceramic assemblage did provide supporting evidence for the cultural ties suggested during analysis of the Haxton collection.

Excavations were not conclusive as to whether or not the site had been terraced but given the findings of other investigations on the island (Cruz Castillo and Orellana 2000) and patterns in soil composition and color on the southern slope of this area, it is likely that further excavation will reveal that at least some portion of the site was artificially terraced in the past. While no rock slabs of the type recorded by Epstein (1975:39) were found, the large rock present at the top of Garrapata hill could possibly be of some significance but the immediate area may have been especially targeted by looters because of its presence. Evidence of other forms of architecture was not encountered but materials at the site included small pieces of daub, which had not before been reported on the island. This may have drastic implications for ideas about architecture on the island, although the quantities of materials recovered does not allow for the formulation of any supportable hypotheses at this time.

The timeline for excavations was cut short by over a week with the evacuation of the field school participants in light of the military coup that occurred in Honduras at the
end of June of 2009. With cooperation from the entire Project Roatán team, open units were excavated until sterile soil was reached and the final wrap-up of the season, including backfilling, was performed in a period of two days. Units that had been laid out but not yet opened were mapped but not investigated.
Chapter 6: Ceramic Analyses

While most of the materials collected during survey serve to connect Roatán to outside influences, the pottery found at El Antigual serves as an example of the importance of local adaptations of widely distributed motifs. Based on a total sample of 4345 sherds resulting from excavations at El Antigual, several broad and tentative types were defined. The poor preservation of most sherds combined with the small sample size did not allow for many meaningful categorizations at this level. Types, names, locations, forms, surface treatments, and decorations are recorded and presented below.

El Antigual Ceramics

Plain Coarse Group

Lacking any form of decoration, this group is characterized by pastes ranging from coarse to medium and includes colors from dark brown or brown and gray to orange. This group could be further divided, as only dark brown and gray pastes included examples that were smoothed on both sides, while all orange and most brown-colored paste examples were rough on both sides or smoothed on the exterior only. Predominant forms include bowls as well as a few jars and basins. The low number of rim sherds does not allow for further discussion of common forms or sizes. This group was fairly evenly
distributed across the site and at all depths of the excavation. There were no comparative groups identified either on the PR survey sites or beyond.

**Plain Fine Group**

**Brown Polished**

This group is defined by two body sherds recovered from the lowest portions of Operation 3. These are described as having a medium brown, medium textured paste with a polished (glazed?) surface. It is possible that these sherds are an example of Plumbate pottery. Found also by Epstein (1957:116), the presence of Plumbate has been previously noted in the Bay Islands (Rose 1905; Strong 1935) and is likely indicative of trade during the Cocal or Post Classic period either directly with groups in the Maya highlands or with other areas known to have the same class of pottery, most notably Wild Cane Cay in present day Belize, located 100 miles west of the Bay Islands.

**Orange Slipped**

This variety is present only in small amounts and may be representative of the earlier types of pottery described by Epstein (1957:125) belonging to the Selin Horizon. The paste is fine and gray in color and the surfaces are usually smoothed on both sides. Both bowls and jars were represented. Although only a few sherds of this variety were present, they were found throughout El Antigual at a variety of depths.
Plain Fine

This group is characterized by a fine textured paste that ranges in color from gray to orange or light red. Bowls were the most prominent form but a few jar fragments were identified. Both interior and exterior surfaces were smoothed. No decorations were present but one small entire vessel was recovered from Operation 3. This variety, or portions of it, particularly one special sherd from Suboperation 3-B, may correspond to the Corocito Chalky type as defined by Healy (1993:204-205). This would indicate a possible occupation for the site during the Basic Selin Phase.

Decorated Group

Antigual Type

This group represents the only set that could be further divided into tentative varieties (see below). The paste ranges from coarse to medium and includes a broad spectrum of colors, from brown to orange but is most often described as reddish brown. All examples were smoothed on both interior and exterior. Decorations included appliqué, incisions, punctates, and jab marks and were present in particular modes that allowed for a further division of varieties based only on design. Bowls, jars, and basins are present, with bowls again being the most abundant. This group represented a large portion of all materials uncovered during excavation and was found throughout the site at all levels. The variety most common at El Antigual was also found in surface collections at other survey sites. Although some of the motifs were comparable with published descriptions, most of the designs were not limited to a specific recognized group with an
established date. This lack of truly diagnostic materials limits the assignment of dates for the occupation of the site to a very broad range. The pervasiveness of certain decorations across types is known in this region but seems to be especially customary here.

*Modal Analysis and Stylistic Comparisons:*

Lacking the cohesiveness of a type, examples from survey sites appeared to have fewer variations in paste associated with particular motifs that were noted where possible, but lacked the sample size needed to create true type-variety distinctions. Several examples from this category did allow for comparisons with El Antigual and other collections described in the literature but due to the small sample sizes and lack of context, the examples are examined through a modal analysis discussed mainly in terms of their diagnostic value. Modes are discussed within three categories: motifs, styles and design techniques, and bases and appendages. Motifs are representations of general symbolic themes believed to be related to ideological beliefs and follow Cuddy’s (2007) analysis. Styles and design technique refer to specific patterns in design or execution of the design and are generally drawn from Healy’s (1993) classification of these designs in his type-variety analysis, with some exceptions. The analysis of bases and appendages is similar to that performed by Dennett (2007). Comparisons with examples found within the literature on northeastern Honduras and elsewhere are made wherever possible.
Motifs

Manatee

Cuddy (2007:82-87) discusses in detail the importance and persistence of this motif across northeast Honduras, which spans over a thousand years from around A.D. 300 to the time of the Spanish Conquest (Figures 6.1-6.3). This motif is found at every site that has been even briefly investigated in the region and is prevalent throughout Bay Island assemblages as well. The implications for its consistent presence and the motif as a marker of the culture area of northeast Honduras are discussed below (see Chapter 7).

Although it shares some similarities with the bird head lugs from Orosí, in the highlands of Costa Rica (Epstein 1957:211), and has a striking connection to material from Playa de los Muertos in the Ulúa Valley, the manatee lug appears to be a creation indigenous to northeastern Honduras. It is unknown outside of the region and was apparently not traded outside of this area. However, a similar depiction of the manatee head lug was recently found on Isla de Idolo in the Gulf of Mexico, near present-day Tampico, Mexico (Figure 6.4). Further investigations into this connection are forthcoming (Corey Ragsdale, U. New Mexico; personal communication).

Figure 6.1. Manatee head lug found near PR01.
Figure 6.2. Splayed foot support from PR06; likely a representation of a manatee tail.

Figure 6.3. Slab support from PR06; with indentations possibly representative of a manatee tail.

Figure 6.4. Possible manatee head found on Isla de Idolo, Gulf of Mexico (photograph courtesy of Corey Ragsdale, U. New Mexico; 2011).
Tapir

The tapir motif is distinguished by a solid conical support that features two punctate eyes with the tapir snout forming the distal end of the support (Figure 6.5). Depictions of this motif on supports showed a varied range of styles from naturalistic to abstract. Cuddy (2007:91) even suggests some of the slotted vent holes may be abstract representations of this animal motif. He suggests that this animal, being the largest land mammal in the region, was important both as a source of subsistence and in ritual contexts, although not at the same level as the manatee. Beaudry-Corbett and Cuddy (2001) argue that northeastern Honduran ideology in prehispanic times was animalistic, much as it is today. Indigenous groups today recount tales of the manatee and especially of the tapir that are related to creation myths among indigenous populations of the region. The use of the tapir motif was first seen on assemblages from inland populations and later spread throughout the region, suggesting that two groups either came together or strengthened their political and social ties at this time. The tapir motif is seen as early as the Selin Period on several polychrome wares and may be present as late as the Dorina wares of the Cocal Period (Cuddy 2007:87-93).

Figure 6.5. Tapir hear support from the Haxton Collection.

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Waves and Foam

Often described in the literature as the “lazy – S” motif, Cuddy (2007:93-98) argues that this long-employed design is likely representative of waves and foam, especially important to the northeastern region during the Cocal period, when the largest settlements were found along the Atlantic coast and probably the Bay Islands. Cuddy (2007) notes its occurrence as early as Rio Agúan Incised Scroll and Punctate ware (Healy 1993:207) during the Basic Selin Phase (A.D. 600-800), which continues into the Transitional Selin Phase within the Cristales Incised and San Antonio Carved wares. I would argue that it has an even wider dispersion. The piece in Figure 6.6 below shares certain similarities with the Orion Orange Incised ware (Healy 1993:205), also of the Basic Selin Phase, and appears to have some of the basic elements later manipulated into the waves and motif design. This motif is also certainly similar to designs common in the Dorina Abstract Incised Punctate Ware (Healy 1993:209). The Antigual Type, found to date only on Roatán, features an undulating, raised band that could also indicate some symbolic connection with waves.

Figure 6.6. Waves and foam motif on sherd from PR05.
Face on Foot

This motif, seen on our human head supports (Figures 6.7 and 6.8), is more typically seen at the juncture of the supports with vessel bodies and often features more detailed depictions of human faces than our examples. Cuddy (2007:98-99) notes that this motif is also present throughout the entire span of occupation for northeast Honduras and is found over the entire region, although much like the manatee this representation changes. Although Cuddy (2007:98-99) argues that the incisions featured on the later Dorina Incised Punctate wares may represent feline features, it seems more likely, especially considering our appliquéd beard examples, that those may also represent facial hair (see Healy 1993:211 for an example of the incised beard).

Figure 6.7. Human head/bearded man support from PR06.

Figure 6.8. Humanoid head support from the Haxton Collection.
Man from Animal

This motif is epitomized in the “Rider lugs” that are attributed to the Dorina Incised Punctate ware. Cuddy (2007:99-102) discusses the occurrence of this motif on northeast Honduras ceramics and concludes that it begins during the Early Cocal Period and occurs on the majority of ceramic wares following its introduction. Similar to Nicoya styles, Cuddy (2007) notes that many of the best examples come from the Bay Islands. None were found during our season but the Haxton Collection featured two probable examples, as seen below (Figure 6.9). It seems that the “El Rey” lugs, common on San Antonio Carved wares, may also feature similar motifs in some instances, but designs on these lugs vary greatly from humans to rodents (see Stone 1941:Figure 21; Strong 1935:99, 101).

Figure 6.9. “Rider” lug examples from the Haxton Collection.
Figure 6.10. Possible bird lug from the Haxton Collection.

Others

With further investigations in the region, bird or monkey motifs as a long-standing pattern may also emerge (Figure 6.10). Stone (1941) had numerous examples of birds, represented mainly on lugs and in ocarina form. Monkey images are less well-represented, though the collection gathered by Moyne (1938) may indicate the importance of monkey representations.

Styles and Design Techniques:

Angular, Rectilinear Incised Punctate

This category is characterized by decorations consisting of angular, rectilinear, often diagonal incised lines accompanied by punctations. Lines are often parallel and the design occurs below two roughly parallel incised lines that run the circumference of the vessel just below the rim. The typical chevron motif is most clearly demonstrated by Figure 6.11a. All three examples, but especially Figure 6.11b and 6.11c, show similarities with the Orion Orange Incised ware (Healy 1993:205). In the majority examples from
this category, both the incision and punctate designs were very deeply executed. Designs were also often poorly executed. The slight curvature of the diagonal lines in Figure 6.6 (above) is reminiscent of the “lazy-S” featured in many of the ceramics from this region. The vertical lines are also similar to those seen in the geometric step-motif below. This piece may actually bridge several design motifs, as many of the materials from this and other projects do. These designs also share some similarities with Dennett’s (2007:58) Arena Variety of the Dorina Abstract Incised Punctate ware, especially Figure 6.11a, where the diagonal lines are really two connected punctations.

Figure 6.11. Examples of angular, rectilinear incised punctate from PR05.
*Geometric Step Incised Punctate*

This motif is very similar to the designs in the angular, rectilinear category because of the presence of angular, rectilinear, incised lines accompanied by punctuations (Figure 6.12). However, it also features different angles present in the lines and is banded by single occurrences of incised lines rather than the double parallel lines seen below the rim of those in the other category. It appears that the tool used to create the punctations was drawn across the surface, creating what could be called an incised line framed by punctations. The designs, like those of the previous group, are also very deeply executed. Although this category may share some characteristics with the Orion Orange Incised ware (Healy 1993:205), it also appears to have some connection to the San Antonio Carved described by both Dennett (2007:63-64) and Healy (1993:209), especially in the deep execution of the designs.

![Figure 6.12. Example of the geometric step incised punctate design from PR06.](image)
Curvilinear Incised Punctate

This category is characterized by a design featuring one or two curvilinear incised lines accented by a single punctuate (Figure 6.13). The design occurs just below the opening of the vessel or at the neck on jars. Due to the persistence of the curvilinear scroll or “lazy-S” motif in northeastern ceramics, it is nearly impossible to place this feature within a single ware. These pieces may represent portions of vessels from the Rio Agúan Incised Punctate ware, San Antonio Carved Ware, or Dorina Abstract Incised Punctate Ware (Healy 1993). Because of the deep execution of these particular examples, they may be most closely associated with either the San Antonio Carved-Arena Variety, or the Castilla of the Dorina Abstract Incised Punctate ware due to the placing of the punctate within the looping tail of what Dennett (2007:58) calls the “lazy 8” (Arena Variety), or the deep execution of the design coupled with the single, linear, horizontal incised band framing the incised band.

Figure 6.13. Examples of the curvilinear incised punctate from PR06.
**Raised Band Incised Zoned Punctate**

This group is predominant in the assemblage of El Antigual but also shows up at several of the survey sites. It is characterized by a seemingly mismatched concoction of designs present in a range of wares described in the literature. The design motif is characterized by a zone of punctate, always randomly patterned, never in rows, with several roughly parallel incised lines forming the frame close to the mouth or opening of the vessel, and a raised band forming the bottom frame (Figure 6.14). The punctates are often formed from hollow objects. The band is always either incised with short lines or, more rarely, punctated, sometimes by the same instrument used for the punctations within the framed zone. The raised band also varies between undulating and rectilinear, though the undulating variety seems more common. Although the elements present on this design are noted in other groups, the incisions and punctates present on various wares and over a long period of time and the raised band, in particular on the Tegucigalpa Raised Band Ware (Healy 1993:203) of the Early Selin Phase, the combination of these elements is unique to the assemblage collected from Roatán as far as the author can tell from published literature. The undulated raised band is also a seemingly local creation and may be reminiscent of the “lazy-S”, or the waves-and-foam design. Typical pastes for this type are outlined above within the El Antigual ceramic descriptions. A punctated design is also described by Begley (1999:149) in his Cordelia Incised and Punctate wares.
Incised Punctate

This category is identical to the Raised Band Incised Punctate above except it does not feature the raised band. Punctations also seem to occur in a more ordered fashion, sometimes in one or two rows of evenly spaced punctuations (Figure 6.15). Interestingly, one example was encountered in which the raised band was not present but the short, vertical incisions, typical of those usually carved into the raised band, were present as the bottom frame of a single row of punctuates (Figure 6.16). Tools used in the formation of the punctuations vary and several examples of fingernail punctates were recorded (Figure 6.17).

This group clearly shares some features with the Dorina Abstract Incised Punctate ware, but lacks the complex designs and the appliqué designs, or any evidence of handles or lugs similar to those found on the Dorina wares.
Figure 6.15. Example of the incised punctate design from PR01.

Figure 6.16. Example of the incised punctate design that features a design similar to that of the raised band incised punctate from PR06.

Figure 6.17. Example of a similar punctate design on jar shoulders from the Haxton collection.
**Appliquéd and Incised Punctate**

This category is characterized by complex designs featuring parallel, lightly incised lines running around the exterior of the vessel near the opening, similar to the two previous design motifs discussed above (Figure 6.18). This type also features undulating incised lines, offset by punctuations either above or below these lines, appliquéd loops and elaborate strap handles. This type is very similar to the Dorina Abstract Incised Punctate ware described by Healy (1993:209) and the Dorina Variety of this ware as described by Dennett (2007:52). This design occurs on tecomate forms; in accordance with Dennett’s (2007:52) description of the Dorina Variety as well.

One isolated occurrence of an appliqué snake design was found near the excavations at El Antigual (Figure 6.19). This piece was especially interesting because of the punctations found on the appliqué and the associated punctations found to one side of the design, both characteristic of the Raised Band Incised Punctate designs discussed above. This may further suggest similarities between that type and the Dorina Abstract Incised Punctate Ware. It is also interesting in its resemblance of a small appliquéd snake shown on Strong’s (1935:79, Figure 18) example of an elaborate monochrome vessel he encountered on the island of Helene, which shows a number of associations with other types, including the Río Agúan Incised Scroll and Punctate (Healy 1993:207).
Figure 6.18. Appliquéd and incised punctate design on a sherd with an elaborate loop handle from PR06.

Figure 6.19. Snake appliqué design from an isolated find near PR01.

Abstract Incised

Identified on the basis of one nearly complete vessel from PR05 (Figure 6.20), this design is vaguely reminiscent of the San Antonio Carved ware described by Healy (1993:209) and Dennett (2007:63). It is often described as very similar in style to the incisions found on Ulúa Marble Vases, for which there has been some debate about the origin of the design (see Chapter 7). Overall, this seems a very simplistic rendition of the designs described in those cases. Although the use of paste as a surface treatment, described as a fine textured light gray paste with an external light orange slip, is unique to this one instance and indicates the importance and possible importation of the piece, they do not match those described by others for similar styles. The vessel form is also more of
a basin than the typical cylindrical form noted for this style. The presence of a ring stand base is important but again it is different in the absence of designs on that portion of the vessel where others describe undulating incisions and punctates.

The vertical orientation of the volute designs and their framing by vertical incisions is typical but overall much more simplistic than other examples. Interestingly, the ―punctations‖ found in alternating rows with the vertical volute designs seem to be crudely inscribed circles, rather than actual uniform punctations made by a singular tool. This piece, like many others from the island, may represent experimentation in both design and form.

Two complete vessels of this type were found by Strong (1935: plate 24) at the Indian Hill Site on Helene and were classified as Elaborate Monochrome vessels of the Ulúa marble vase type of decoration. Although no lugs were found in association with this particular vessel, common lugs are known for this type and were found in other locations (see “El Rey” Lugs below).
Abstract incised basin with ring stand from PR05.

Crosshatch Incisions

Found only on one example from PR06, this bowl rim sherd features an incised crosshatch design in a band just below the rim (Figure 6.21). In some places the diagonal lines cross over the horizontal, linear incised bands that frame the design. Although the piece shares certain characteristics with Dennett’s (2007:59) Durango Cross-Hatch Incised Punctate ware, it lacks both the characteristic punctations found in association with the design she describes and also the outcurving rim and rounded or pointed lip. This is only found on surface collections at Rio Claro as well, which Dennett dates to the Late Cocal. She also concludes these forms served as serving dishes.
Simple Incised

This design is characterized by the presence of several, usually four, curved incised lines running roughly parallel (Figure 6.22). The lines tend to be haphazardly executed and the spacing between them is not even. Incisions were made while the vessel was still wet as indicated by the raised edges on the incisions. The exterior was smoothed but the interior was rough. The paste is reddish yellow (7.5 YR 6/6), well sorted, and with granite inclusions. All examples were found at site PR03 and appear to come from a few number of vessels. Forms include jars and bowls.

Figure 6.22. Simple incised design from sherd at PR03.
Other

Several pieces found at PR06 appeared to be characteristic of the Marañonez Orange described by Healy (1993:201). The paste is red (2.5 YR 5/8), with poorly sorted mica-schist inclusions. Associated pieces had repairs in the form of drill holes for crack lacing (Figure 6.23). Two types of rims were noted and one (Figure 6.24) had clear ties to Epstein’s (1957:305, Figure 16d) split neck rim on the Plain Utility type, a type which Healy notes closely resembles his Marañonez Orange, further supporting this similarity.

Figure 6.23. Drill holes for crack lacing, from PR06.

Figure 6.24. Split neck rim from PR06.
Bases and Appendages:

Ring bases

Hollow

This hollow ring base is associated with the Abstract Incised design described above. The paste is fine textured and light gray. Surface treatment includes an external light orange slip and a smoothed interior. This is the only example encountered on the island. Similar to the ring stand bases described for the San Antonio Carved ware and measures a near the average 3 cm height for that ware. This example was found on site PR05 (see Figure 6.20 above).

Solid

Two examples of solid ring stand bases were also recovered from site PR06. No recognizable designs or any possible associations were recognized but it seems likely that ring stand bases may be typical of basins associated with San Antonio carved designs (Healy 1993:209) from the Transitional Selin Period (A.D. 800-1000), especially the more rare globular forms like the example from the Haxton collection (Figure 6.25). This example from a private collection features a rare type seen before only in Strong (1935:Plate 24) at the site of Indian Hill on the island of Barbareta, and expands the range of neck forms, designs, and lugs associated with this particular type.
Figure 6.25. Rare globular jar form of the San Antonio Carved Style, San Antonio Variety mounted on a ring base stand.

**Lugs**

**Manatee Lugs**

Manatee lugs are well represented in the literature beginning with Strong (1935, Figure 24). Our one example from the 2009 field season came from site PR01 (Figure 6.26). Several examples, representing almost the full spectrum of the developments in its representation (from naturalistic during the Selin to abstract forms during the Cocal) were found in the Haxton collection (Figure 6.27). See above for a full description of the Manatee ware and associated lugs and supports. The manatee lug persists for over a thousand years within the northeastern Honduran wares and is mainly associated with the Manatee ware during the Selin Period and later the Dorina Abstract ware of the Cocal Period. Begley (1999:38) notes the presence of this lug on a paste that does not correspond to Strong (1935), Epstein (1957) or Healy’s (1993) descriptions. He agrees with Healy (1993) that this mode spanned all of the Selin Period and perhaps beyond, giving sufficient reason to believe that this mode probably transcended a single type. See discussion of manatee motif above for further evidence to support this idea.
Other Bird/Dolphin Lugs

Although no direct correlate for this animalistic representation could be found in the literature, a lug recorded in the Haxton Collection appears to the author to possibly represent a dolphin (Figure 6.28). Others have noted lugs with similar eyes that appear to be representations of birds. One other bird lug was found in the Haxton Collection (Figure 6.29). Stone’s (1941: Figures 13 and 27) demonstrate depictions of waterfowl and porpoises on lugs from the region.
“El Rey”/Rodent/Humanoid Lugs

These lugs are characterized by a vertical orientation and a long attachment surface (Figures 6.30-6.31). Although Stone (1941:31) has several examples of convincingly “kingly” or humanistic lugs, others tend to represent more abstract human or animal figures, usually interpreted as rodents. Several examples appear to represent human heads and incisions on phalli-like forms. These lugs range widely from highly elaborate to very simplistic.
Strong (1935) also describes double-ended vertical lugs, of which the finest, marked by an absence of perforations at the lower end of the lugs, attaches to vessels of this type. His figures resemble the “El Rey” lug. Healy (1993: Figure 11.16a) also depicts this lug on the San Antonio Variety. Although Dennett (2007:72) identifies this lug type and credits Stone (1941) with the name, no mention of these associations is made.

**“Rider” Lugs**

Rider lugs generally portray what is commonly interpreted as a man riding a larger animal, usually a manatee. These are generally associated with the Dorina Variety of the Dorina Abstract Incised Punctate type. The only examples from our project came from the Haxton collection (see Figure 6.9 above).
Pinched Lugs

Very small pinched or possibly appliquéed nub lugs appear infrequently in ceramic assemblages in this region. There are no known associated types. Paste type and color varied in the examples from El Antigual (Figure 6.32).

Other

One example of a lug similar to those seen on Corocito Chalky type in Healy (1993:204) but found on a dissimilar paste was encountered within excavations at El Antigual (Figure 6.33). This type dates to the Basic Selin Phase. One sherd that matched the paste description given by Healy was also found during excavation (Figure 6.34).

Figure 6.32. Pinched lugs, probably paired, from El Antigual.

Figure 6.33. Possible Corocito Chalky Lug from PR01.
Supports

Plain Supports

Plain supports vary widely in paste, shape and the wares commonly associated with them. Due to this, they are not particularly diagnostic but are listed here in groups by basic shape in case future research reveals further information regarding their associated context or importance. The first group, plain conical supports (Figure 6.35), is likely related to the longer, more elaborated decorated conical supports of the Dorina Incised Punctate and the Concha Simple Incised wares. The second group, rounded supports (Figure 6.36), has no known correlates. The third group, plain slab supports (Figure 6.37), may prove to be associated with Rio Agúan Incised Punctate wares.

Plain Conical Supports:

Figure 6.34. Sherd with paste matching Healy’s Corocito Chalky from El Antigual excavations.
Rounded Supports:

Figure 6.36. Rounded supports from PR06.

Slab Supports:

Figure 6.37. Slab supports from PR06.

Punctate Conical Supports

Similar to the plain supports, the punctate conical support has no known associated types and appears to be formed from a variety of pastes. This type was found on PR06 and within the Haxton Collection (Figures 6.38-6.39). It is similar to the longer conical supports of the Dorina Incised Punctate and Concha Simple Incised Punctate wares. The Haxton Collection example shown here also exhibits a punched feature, a technique often used to represent a nose. Punctates are also often seen as eyes in animal or human representations but the number of punctates in there examples does not suggest such a depiction.
Stylized representations of human heads are common on supports from northeast Honduras (see the examples of the “Face on Foot” motif above). Our example from PR06 is characteristic of one particular expression of this motif, the conical bearded man support. Solid, with deep punctations forming the eyes, mouth, beard, and nose appear to either have been formed through a pinching or appliqué technique. The paste was poorly sorted with quartzite and feldspar inclusions and of a yellowish red (5YR 5/8) color. The support measured 47.4 mm in height. A strikingly similar example was featured in Strong (1935: Figure 25) and is similar to those depicted in Healy (1993: Figure 11.19, d).
The Haxton Collection also featured an apparently human face on a support of a different style. The short, rounded support with punctate eyes and an appliqué nose was apparently oriented with the “head” upside down. Similar examples have also been labeled as anthropomorphic or manatee-like.

*Splayed foot*

These supports are solid, conical supports with stylized extensions on the distal end. Splayed foot supports are common on the Dorina Abstract Incised Ware (Healy 1993:209; Dennett 2007:68) but differ greatly in their design from our example. These may be stylized representations of manatees, and our particular example appears to support this hypothesis (see Figure 6.2 above).

*Slotted Conical Support*

Characterized by a long, vertical opening, this support is very clearly related to the Dorina Abstract Incised Punctate ware as pictured in Healy (1993:211). This is similar to Dennett’s (2008:14) vertical groove support but lacks the typical stylized, abstract appliqué and punctate “face” at the top of the support. Her supports are generally solid, while our example is hollow (Figure 6.41). The base or distal end of the support may have been once been a representation of an anthropomorphic figure often found on these supports, but is not well preserved in our example.
Figure 6.4. Grooved hollow support from PR06.

Long Slotted Supports

Distinguished immediately by its length, this support is usually hollow and features perforations, four or more on each of our examples (Figure 6.42). The perforations are usually vertical and arranged in pairs. Some featured horizontal incisions across one side of the support. These supports are associated with the Concha Simple Incised ware (Healy 1993:211). Similar supports found by Dennett (2007:68) feature slots rather than perforations, generally have a higher number of openings, and feature stylized distal ends. These are generally found on Dorina Incised Punctate wares (Healy 1993:211). Examples of our long slotted support type came only from the Haxton collection.
Miniature vessels

Although varied in their form, miniature vessels were found in high proportions in the Haxton collection (Figure 6.43) and at least one example was recovered during excavations at PR01 (Figure 6.44). Although they appear to be crudely formed, Moreno-Cortés and Wells (2006) demonstrated that the collection exhibited a high level of standardization. The implications of this finding are discussed below (see Chapter 7). Our one example from El Antigual featured a well sorted paste of a light red (10YR 6/8) color with a gray slip. Miniature vessels are associated with a variety of both ancient and modern Pech ceremonies, which will be discussed in Chapter 7 below.

A miniature vessel of the same type that Strong (1935:Plate 8) found was identical to one found in Muy Muy, Matagalpa, Nicaragua, and was identical to a form found with a burial at the 80 Acre site on Utila (Epstein 1957:31).
Figure 6.42. Miniature cup from the Haxton Collection.

Figure 6.43. Miniature vessel (cup?) excavated during El Antigual excavations.
Other Artifacts

Greenstone

One example of polished greenstone, most likely talc, was found in Operation 3. It appeared to be a portion of a mace head. It was the only nonceramic artifact, excluding modern debris and historic glass, found during excavation or survey surface collection during the entire 2009 season. Possible causes for the discrepancy between the few materials found during the inaugural year of Project Roatán and the wide range of materials reported by others as being found on the islands are discussed in Chapter 7 below.

Summary

This chapter served to demonstrate the connection of Roatán to the larger northeastern Honduras cultural group present in their ceramic traditions, as well as the possible meaning of local adaptations of these styles and motifs. Small sample sizes did not allow for meaningful comparisons at the site level and the general homogeneity of the Antigual assemblage did not lend itself to a useful type-variety classification scheme. Modal analyses and stylistic comparisons were the most helpful in drawing connections with mainland assemblages and in calling attention to unique or otherwise unidentified tendencies in the ceramic assemblages of Roatán sites.

The apparent local origination of the majority of the materials found at El Antigual and the Haxton collection, indicated by the lack of variety in pastes, as well as the restricted number of sherds in the sample limits the definition of types comparable to
mainland assemblages. Extremely poor preservation of materials has also made the
distinguishing of surface treatment, slip, and design difficult in many cases. Epstein
(1957) noted the same problem on Utila and observed that many of the varieties present
in the mainland assemblages, especially painted wares, were probably also abundant on
the islands but could not be identified as such due to extreme conditions. Epstein (1957)
also experienced some difficulty in distinguishing wares based on paste, and abandoned
his attempt at some of the separations he initially outlined in the materials he analyzed.

Healy’s (1993) classification was most useful for categorizing material that had
trade connections on the mainland and beyond, while Epstein’s (1957) was the most
detailed and aided the most in understanding the general established typology for the
region. The usefulness of Epstein’s (1957) utility ware classifications hints at the
homogeneity of the islands' cultures. Dennett’s (2007) analysis and Begley’s (1999)
classification schemes were narrower, based mainly on the assemblages from individual
sites, Rio Claro and Difficulty Hill, respectively. Dennett’s work, however, was
especially useful in the modal analysis. Both Cuddy’s (2007) summary of work within
the region and Begley’s (1999) work in the Culmi Valley aided in clarifying broader
themes within the northeast ceramic traditions.
Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter evaluates the data presented above by applying the theoretical framework and relevant literature to synthesize the broader arguments supported by the data. Data from the island of Roatán and northeast Honduras in general available from other sources, such as the local museum or private collections, are drawn upon to further support these arguments (Figure 7.1). Results of the study, including preliminary evaluations of the cultural affiliations and social roles of the islands and the probable function of the island, are also presented. Areas in which further study is needed are outlined and recommendations or suggestions based on lessons learned from this study are included.

Given the general trends noted in decoration differences among the Selin and Cocal periods, with a dramatic shift from polychrome and appliqué designs to incision and punctate techniques, the frequency of the latter in our assemble support the proposed date of our site, and the survey sites, as falling within the Cocal Period.
One survey site, PR03, appears to have been inhabited mainly during the Late Cocal period, while PR06 shows a possibility of having a longer occupation sequence than El Antigual, from at least the Transitional Selin to the Cocal period.

In addition to a shared ceramic tradition for the Bay Islands, the similarities among modes from several mainland sites and those present in our study support a general cohesiveness of the area in prehispanic times. Roatán appears to have been occupied from the Early Selin through the Conquest period, with a marked population increase during the Cocal Phase, coinciding with a change in type of the majority of island sites from ceremonial to residential. Based on Strong’s (1935) observations,
ceremonial sites are distinguished from residential sites by the presence of greenstone, beads, and copper, most often found in ritual contexts in association with polychrome ceramics. Again, the presence of greenstone at El Antigual suggests the main function of this site was ceremonial, and the absence of polychromes and other materials may be attributed to looting or poor preservation at the site.

Patterns in the presence and distribution of materials at sites may be partially explained by the use of ethnographic analogies, drawing on work done in modern Pech communities. There is a noted preference among Pech groups for the use of hilltops, especially outside of residential areas, for burial grounds. Burials are often revisited and human remains are sometimes exhumed, cleaned, and redeposited (Griffin et al. 2009). This gives considerable credit to Strong’s (1935) conjecture that hilltop offertories on Roatán were revisited over hundreds of years. Griffin and colleagues (2009) also described several ceremonies performed by a *wata* or shaman that may have significant importance for archaeological research on the Bay Islands. Specifically, Pech communities have retained sacred fields for burials separate from the ladino communities. During funerals, called *kesh* ceremonies, specific drinks and foods are made according to the requirements of the ritual, including *otía* (chicha made of corn), *muñía* (yucca wine), and a beverage made from chocolate. Spirits are called by the playing of the flute. On the ninth evening after the passing, the community is called to a feast in which the adults eat and drink all night. Leftovers including tortillas and bones are gathered and wrapped in a special sheet called a *tapukah* and left by a large tree (Griffin et al. 2009:79).
A nearly identical ceremony is performed at the birth of a child, and ceremonies that require a wide variety of foods are also preformed if an animal is wounded but not eaten during a hunt, when a person recovers from a sickness, when a new house is built, and one especially relevant ceremony involved in hunting and fishing (Griffin et. al 2009). According to Griffin and colleagues (2009:83), during this latter ceremony nine bowls, two of regular size and the rest miniature, are filled with cacao powder or yucca, mixed with water, and left for the “water sirens” to drink. Small huts were built in which the catch was cooked and prepared. Several mentions of the hiding of materials used during these ceremonies and subsequent preparations of food are made, which are usually left under a tree. At the end of this ceremony, all meat and fish is brought back to the community and shared among everyone (Griffin et al. 2009:83). Sweeping, caching, and the building of ceremonial huts, as well as the usage of both flutes (or ocarinas, Figure 7.2) and miniature vessels have been reported in the archaeological record of the region and the modern ceramic traditions of the Pech share certain similarities with prehispanic techniques. Additionally, the consumption of chicha and yucca drinks during feasting is noted in historical records. Further investigations in this region may shed light on these similarities and a greater ability to distinguish between the residential and ceremonial contexts will allow for the application of a larger number of theories aimed at determining forms of social and economic organization, subjects that are currently very difficult to address.
Returning to the prehispanic period, the lack of data for the occupation of the islands during the Selin period may be attributed to the nature of the early sites, which are believed to have been mainly coastal and predominantly ceremonial. The materials in these types of deposits, more valuable in most instances, may have lead to a disproportionate rate of looting at these sites and of these materials. Additionally, shell mounds were probably associated with earlier settlements of the Selin period (Begley 1999:184; Healy 1984) from which Healy excavated well-preserved faunal remains on the mainland site of Selin farm, dating to this period. Shell heaps were noted to be present along the coasts on the Bay Islands by earlier visitors (Spinden 1925:539) and may have either been developed over or erased by coastal erosion due to sea level rise, as McKillop (1996) notes is common on Wild Cane Cay in Belize. With the increase in population on the islands it also seems that settlements were also located on hilltops. Although the exact reason for this remains unknown, defense has been proposed as a motivation (Véliz et al.
1977), especially in consideration of the fortified settlements being constructed on the mainland during the Cocal period (Healy 1978; Spinden 1925:534-535).

Another problem that seems to be unique to the island is the long-term use of offertories. Strong (1935:146) had considerable difficulty in establishing chronological sequences based solely on materials from the islands and explained the comingling of artifacts from different time periods by assuming the repeated visitation of these sites over hundreds of years for the purpose of placing ritual or ceremonial deposits. Healy and others have addressed this problem through the excavation and evaluation of materials from contemporaneous mainland sites, but considering the differences in artifacts classes, materials, styles, or even features present on the islands and absent or found less frequently on the mainland sites, summarized in Table 7.1 below, further investigation is needed.

Previously, Nance (1965) evaluated Strong’s (1935) materials and suggested that the culture of the Bay Islands, heavily influenced in the distant past by South America, was especially active in trade during the Post Classic period, as evidenced by the presence of metals, Plumbate, and the Bay Islands Polychrome unique to this time. Nance (1965:13) also states that while the material culture of the islands was similar to that of the nearby mainland, the Bay Islanders were more heavily influenced by their constant interaction with the Maya. Over forty years ago, this brief work highlighted the need for a more in-depth study of the complex networks of Post Classic period trade in which the Bay Islanders participated and highlighted the usefulness of existing collections. Little has changed in the state of Bay Island prehistory since this work.
Table 7.1 Artifacts, materials, styles, and features identified by various projects on the Bay Islands in comparison to those found on the mainland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Found by PR</th>
<th>Found in other excavations</th>
<th>Found by early expeditions</th>
<th>Reported in historical records</th>
<th>Reported on the mainland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cruz Castillo and Orellana 2000</td>
<td>Begley 1999</td>
<td>Vélez et al. 1977</td>
<td>Epstein 1957 (Kidder; Boeckelman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenstone</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenstone axe gods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper Bells</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked Shell</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shell from the Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Roller stamps</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ulúa style figurines</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocarinas</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other figurines</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Funerary Urns</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Plumbate pottery</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ulúa style pottery</td>
<td></td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obsidian</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flint</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ground stone artifacts</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chipped stone artifacts</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bark beaters</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cacao</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spindle whorls</td>
<td></td>
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<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Candelero</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miniatures</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Burials</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Obsidian, in general, is not found in great quantities on the mainland or on the Bay Islands. Copper bells and rings, to date, are found only on the Bay Islands, particularly on Roatán (Figure 7.3). While greenstone is common on the mainland, jadeite, copper and bark beaters are more abundant on the Bay Islands (Figure 7.4). Interestingly, these classes of artifacts are found in the Ulúa Valley, suggesting that not only did Roatán share close ties with this valley, but that it was more integrated into the regional trade systems than were mainland settlements. The presence of copper, cacao, and axe-gods also reinforce their involvement in these economic systems, as these were often used as forms of currency. Additionally, stylistic studies of the copper bells (Hosler 1994) could provide some further insights into the exchange networks of the islanders. Studies of the origin or style of greenstone artifacts, along with the sourcing of obsidian, may also prove useful in filling in gaps in our understanding of material and information exchange in the region. Could it be that material found on Roatán from outside the region traveled through the Ulúa Valley before reaching the island? New models must be developed to test emerging questions about the indigenous Bay Islanders. The variety of materials on Roatán as opposed to the mainland speaks to the potential of focused research on the island, although if continued uninterrupted, the rate of destruction by development and looting may soon render the richness of the material record unimportant.
The combined data indicate that the island of Roatán likely either represented a special physical location for the entirety of the northeastern population – in terms of access to outside trade networks, resources, or perhaps of spiritual or ideological significance –, or was inhabited by special group of individuals that enjoyed privileges that those on the neighboring mainland did not. Given the nature of the island's richest deposits, in votive caches rather than in demonstrations of personal wealth through
architecture or individual burial goods, as well as the high number of graves encountered on the islands in relation to the little amount of work performed, the first scenario seems more likely. The two scenarios, however, are not mutually exclusive.

It seems highly possible that prehispanic Bay Islanders, because of their strategic location and the developed nature of their ocean navigation skills, may have been especially employed in trade or exchange networks. Although the direct nature of their contact with other major groups is unknown, it is probable that much of their efforts may have focused on the Ulúa Valley, highlighted by Chapman (1957) as a possible port-of-trade for the region, at many points in time throughout the occupation of the islands. The temporary shift away from Maya/Mesoamerican influences does not seem to be complete, especially on the islands, nor does it seem likely that it was due to any difficulty in transportation or communication, as evidence of the far-reaching networks connecting Mesoamerican with South American groups has shown (i.e., Dewan and Hosler 2008).

In connection with their involvement in broader exchange networks, theories about the commodities traded by the islanders have been developed. Apart from their navigation skills, islanders were well known for their skill in making cords, growing root crops, and fishing (see Chapter 3). Calcide, used in the process of smelting copper, was also noted to be present on the islands in early accounts (Columbus 1959). Within the northeast region, Griffin and colleagues (2009: 59-65) report that Tunu trees are important for the Pech and are used in the production of bark cloth used for making clothing and special sheets of paper that are painted for religious purposes. Stone bark
beaters, found throughout northeast Honduras and on the Bay Islands, are indicative of a similar practice in prehispanic times. Additionally, the Pech are also known to grow a certain plant that attracts the insects that produce cochineal, an important ingredient in dyes, cited in many historical records as an important product of this area for hundreds of years. Begley (1999:177-178) notes that there may be interesting connections between an increase in the use of greenstone throughout Central America, including Roatán (see Strong 1935:62-66), and the increasing complexity of settlements in northeastern Honduras where natural sources of greenstone are abundant.

With an increase in coastal settlements during the Postclassic period, it seems that social complexity was increasing as well. By the time of the Spanish Conquest, several complex chiefdoms were documented in this region, and some of the larger settlements were said to have at least ten subordinate villages paying tribute. The appearance of defensive fortifications, noted by Healy (1978) at Rio Claro, coincides with an increase in population on the coasts and the preference of hilltop sites. These changes also coincide with an important change in the nature and number of settlements on Roatán, namely a marked increase in residential settlements as opposed to ceremonial sites, more prevalent during earlier periods. Together with the trends of shifting alliances as expressed in the ceramic materials, these pieces of evidence suggest a more complex and more centralized system of organization during the Postclassic period throughout the region and a major change in the populations on the Bay Islands in particular.

Epstein (1957) remarks that despite changes in settlement patterns, there are few differences in vessel form or decorative motifs within the ceramic traditions in the Selin
and Cocal horizons, but the way the decorations were applied changed from earlier polychromes and appliqué decorations to mostly incised or design techniques. Given this, the work by Moreno-Cortés and Wells (2006), in combination with observations from the ceramic assemblages discussed above might suggest that while the execution of decoration was not highly standardized and pastes varied widely, form may have played a more important role in the qualities desired for certain ceremonial ceramic pieces. Perhaps the presence of certain elements, rather than the quality of their appearance, was more important. This might also be supported by the presence of miniature vessels found at El Antigual and elsewhere in the region. Another explanation may be the importance of experimentation, as indicated by the seemingly purposeful mimicry of artifacts or styles in larger or smaller forms seen across the northeast region, especially in groundstone work (Begley 1999:247). It seems that symbols or symbolic elements and even forms were most important, while the medium of their portrayal was not. This also relates to the purposeful way in which outside elements were always adapted to fit the needs of the group, never simply borrowed. The nature of the symbols as emblematic, and their subsequent use as material propaganda within a corporate strategy of power, is evident most simply in their lack of production for exportation. Worked goods (as opposed to raw materials) produced in the northeast have not been identified outside of the immediate northeastern region. The persistence of motifs, as well as their presence across space and time, also supports the use of symbols in this fashion.

Given this information, it seems that the knowledge or skills of individual craftsmen was not necessarily as important as the use of symbolic elements, where
knowledge of these elements was apparently not particularly restricted. This is in opposition to the main characteristic of Maya economy, where skilled labor and centralized production provided the value of many of the commodities and allowed for stricter control by elites. This does not seem to be the case for any of the material traditions known throughout northeast Honduras, as very few possible workshops have been even tentatively identified (Begley 1999) and elite goods, whether locally made or imported, seem to have been few. There does seem to be a marked abundance of monumental architecture in the region, especially when compared to the chiefdoms of most of Lower Central America. Begley (1999) suggests that these architectural forms were borrowed from Mesoamerica but were subsequently adapted and promoted in ways that fit seamlessly with previously existing ideological beliefs and worldviews. It may be that ritual and its associated material counterparts were important in society but in very different ways and performed with different motivations than those known throughout Mesoamerica. If we ascribe to Mann’s (1986) list of primary sources of power utilized by chiefs – economy, military, and ideology – it is easy to understand why elites in the northeast may have relied most heavily on ideological sources of power, rather than on direct control of resources, considering the general self-sustaining environment available and the amount of energy that would need to be exhausted in order to sustain a military presence throughout the region.

As Moreno-Cortés and Wells (2006) demonstrated with vessels from the Haxton Collection, the absence of centralized production does not necessarily imply a lack of standardization. It seems then that the motivation for standardization was the corporate
strategy employed by those with power, demonstrating two routes that may produce similar results. While the one may seem more appealing, northeast Honduras demonstrates that the chiefdom level of organization was a stable system for the region for over a thousand years, while the centers of state-level societies around them expanded and contracted in much shorter spans of time. Increasing attention is now being given to studies demonstrating that hierarchical and heterarchical systems operated intermittently and often contiguously even within the Maya territory. Chase and colleagues (2009:182) observe:

Traditionally, Mesoamericanists have used the concept of a power elite—a group of people who managed to achieve centralized control over power and resources—as the rulers of Mesoamerican polities. However, there is great variation among Mesoamerican polities over time and space. Both collective and centralized states likely existed side-by-side throughout Mesoamerican prehistory… Our traditional anthropological models based on “one-size-fits-all” progressive evolution do not fit the recovered archaeological data. Instead, these data demonstrate different pathways to complexity based upon variable uses of hierarchy and heterarchy to meet local political, social, and economic needs.

In terms of cultural traditions, social organization, and subsistence practices, northeastern groups were similar to other chiefdoms throughout Central America. The exact nature or process of their interactions with southern groups is also still unclear but
the same pattern, with the possible export of raw goods and the importation of stylistic traditions or symbols, appears to have applied to this direction of interaction as well. The stability of heterarchical organization developed through an inclusive strategy of identity formation is a topic that will likely receive a great amount of dedicated study in the near future, especially within the Intermediate Area. The connection between emblemic style, corporate strategy, and standardization without mass production deserves further attention as well. Perhaps comparative material from the mainland can help elucidate the possibilities in the connectedness of the subjects. Further research is also needed to investigate the possibility of colonizing group settlements in the region, particularly the Nahua within the Agúan Valley, as the confirmed presence of such a colony would have many implications for both past and future research. Although there are fascinating ethnohistoric clues that suggest the existence of such settlements, firm archaeological data supporting this hypothesis has not yet been produced.

While many brilliant minds have theorized about the endless possibilities for the prehispanic settlements in northeast Honduras, considerably little work has actually been done on the ground. Save for a few studies (Begley 1999; Véliz et al. 1977), there also seems to be a major disconnect between those doing the work in the field and those examining the materials and synthesizing the results. This, however, does not necessarily represent a problematic pattern, so long as the two groups are openly sharing and discussing their work. Sharing of the data and the standardization of the terminology used, especially in the description of ceramics, would contribute greatly to the proliferation of future research in the region as well as to its relative usefulness. One
impressive step in this direction was the work of Henderson and Beaudry-Corbett in 1993, titled *Pottery of Prehistoric Honduras: Regional Classification and Analysis*. The second edition, currently set to be published within the next year, is much-awaited by this researcher, certainly among many.

**Summary**

As others have demonstrated, the northeast region seems to have been a cohesive unit for most of the time span for which we have data based on the continuities in modes and styles present in material culture. What is still lacking in the region is an examination of how this unit was formed, how it was organized, and how the system was maintained. Economically, it seems trade and even redistribution was not based on fulfilling daily needs that could not be met by the immediate environment. Commodity trading, if it occurred, appears to have been one-sided in this region, with goods flowing out and ideas streaming in. Intra- and interregional interactions were also not based on compiling mass amounts of resources, gaining the most wealth, or in other words, economic rationality. Even the use of wealth or elite trade goods, it seems, were not central within society as a means of distinction. Symbols of power do not seem to have the same fear-inspiring connotations or class-distinguishing motivations within this region as they often do in Mesoamerica. Power was not expressed or exploited for personal or elite gain, but for the maintenance of the status-quo, an inclusive identity built in a self-sustaining environmental region as a product of and a contributor to long-term cultural stability.
While earlier models cited migrations from Mesoamerica or Central American
groups for developments or changes within this region (Chapman 1957), newer models
are addressing the much likelier theory that many of these changes can be explained by
autochthonous development. Debates concerning the level of independence enjoyed by
the groups of northeastern Honduras now seem to be more about the scale of integration
with other groups and level of organization than actual outside dominance (Cuddy 2007;
Dennett 2007). Our data support the apparent homogeneity previously noted within Bay
Island ceramic traditions and their clear connection to the broader northeastern cultural
unit (Epstein 1957). The chronological sequence and the trends in external affiliation or
at least mimicry are also consistent with those previously outlined for the region,
demonstrated by the ceramic analysis above (Chapter 6). The site of El Antigual was
likely primarily used for ceremonial purposes based on the nature of the material remains
and the information gained from ethnographic analogies among Pech traditions.
Similarities with previously recorded offertory, burial, or cache sites on the island and
within northeastern Honduras are noted throughout the presentation of the data. When
previous literature is considered, Roatán does however seem to represent a unique case
within the larger cultural groups of northeast Honduras in terms of the degree of
interaction with outside groups and the primary function of the majority of the island sites
based on significant differences in the nature of artifact assemblages found on the islands
compared to those on the mainland.
Chapter 8: Current Context of Archaeological Investigations on the Bay Islands

Current Setting

With over 800,000 visitors from cruise ships alone in 2010 (Proceso Digital 2011), the island of Roatán is the main tourist destination of Honduras and is a community increasingly driven by tourism. It is a little known fact outside the island that it is divided into two townships – a division representing the underlying struggle taking place between competing stakeholders on the island. The western half, outlined by sandy beaches, has been developed for tourism almost without restraint, to which the restaurants and souvenir shops full of tourists are testament. The mayor of this portion of the island owns two of the oldest and most successful resorts on the island and, within those resorts, he has constructed two very different museums. One museum – a multi-million dollar replica of the Maya site of Copan – has literal boatloads of tourists arriving daily, while the other is a more honest representation of the limited archaeological data that have been collected on the island; like a twisted mirror image to the eastern portion of the island, it is run-down, neglected, and was last updated in the early 1990s.

Coxen Hole, located on the western half of the island, is the capital of the Department of the Bay Islands and serves as the center of government for Roatán and the other Bay Islands. Roatán is quickly becoming one of the top destinations for scuba
diving in the world and, in turn, a cruise ship terminal recently constructed near Coxen Hole is anticipated to bring in several hundred thousand tourists a year.

El Antigual is located in the direct center of the island, at the place where paved roads and sandy beaches give way to dirt paths and sharp cliffs. And it is in this position, at the center of the struggle for power and wealth, that the archaeology of the island is situated today. On the one hand, archaeology and cultural heritage are being co-opted to further the economic goals of those already in power. On the other, this misuse serves to continue the silencing of the lesser-known groups on the island, including the descendant populations of the original island inhabitants. In this context, continued archaeological research has the potential to redirect the future of heritage tourism on the island and by doing so may serve to help shift the lines of seemingly inflexible socioeconomic divisions present today.

**Heritage tourism**

The marketing of heritage as a tool to promote tourism mixes together concerns of representation and business management resulting in a product that is then filtered by gatekeepers and stakeholders and is interpreted by the consumers, in this case tourists. The cyclical process continues as reactions are evaluated and the product is reformulated. Most often, the major concern of those promoting or marketing products is reducing “strangeness” (McKercher and du Cros 2002:120) or, in other words, tapping into what the audience recognizes or is comfortable with prior to this experience. Archaeology must break into this cycle at multiple levels, with stakeholders such as indigenous groups,
gatekeepers such as business owners or tour operators, and consumers in the form of tourists visiting the island.

Museums serve as a stage in which many of these issues play out on a material level. Currently, there are two museums on the island that focus on the use of archaeological data. One of these, known as the Roatán Museum and housed on the grounds of Anthony’s Key resort, occupies a space of about 500 m², requires a one U.S. dollar donation to enter, and was installed in 1992 (Figure 8.1). The building in which the exhibit is located is part of the Roatán Institute for Marine Science, which was founded in 1989 as a facility to promote research and education concerning the marine ecosystems of the island. The information in the exhibit is based on archaeological data, created with input of experts from the IHAH (Anthony's Key Resort 2011). In addition, most of the material presented was recovered from the island through brief investigations on the islands by archaeologists or through donations from personal collections.

In contrast to the Roatán museum, the newly constructed “Maya Key” day resort was built as an off-shore excursion option for cruise ship passengers traveling to the island and began operation in 2009, within months of the opening of the Mahogany Bay cruise ship terminal in Coxen Hole (Figures 8.2-8.4). Admission to the interpretive center, mini-zoo, and replica of the World Heritage Maya site of Copán costs 30 U.S. dollars (Figueroa et al. 2011). Questions regarding the management of the island’s heritage, the commoditization of culture, and the unequal distribution of the economic benefits of these practices have been left unaddressed.
Figure 8.1. Images from the Roatán Museum. Anthony’s Key Resort.

Figure 8.2. Aerial view of Maya Key (from the company website, http://www.mayakeyRoatán.com/en/index.html).
Figure 8.3. Recreations of the ballcourt and “temple entrance” at Maya Key, modeled after features of the archaeological site of Copan.

Figure 8.4. Grand opening, Maya Key Resort, Roatán. Scarlet macaws, traditionally representative of Copán, along with other animals on the island, were imported.

The use or misuse of archaeological data is well documented for both touristic objectives and in agendas revolving around the building of state identities throughout the world (Cronin and O’Connor 2003; Lowenthal 1985; Urry 1990; Zimmerman 2003). Within the Mundo Maya region in particular, from Mexico to northern Honduras, a pan-
Maya identity is widely promoted towards both ends. Not only does this strategy underscore the cultural heterogeneity of Maya groups (Magnoni et al. 2007), it also serves to devaluate contributions made by less well-known groups. The commoditization of the Maya culture and its archaeological sites is especially out of place on Roatán, where no evidence of Maya occupation has been found to date.

In Honduras, Dario Euraque (2004), a former director of the IHAH, has traced the growth of what he terms “Mayanization” within business marketing schemes and the creation and reinforcement of a national identity across the country for both internal (national) and external (international) consumption through tourism. Images, terms, symbols, and stories are all transformed into logos, landmarks, and building fronts (Figure 8.5). Euraque’s (2004) work on heritage in Honduras, and where and how this Mayanization movement developed, is vital to reversing its proliferation. In his book on the history of national identity in Honduras he states (Euraque 2004:42-44):

This process was tied, among other factors, with certain elements of North American archaeology and banana company hegemony in Honduras, and in part with efforts to integrate various discourses in a postcolonial national identity…This has as an end, among other purposes, to educate the citizens through official discourses about the indigenous past and its role in the historic evolution of the country. This discourse presumes the inevitable collapse of the "remains" of indigenous civilizations, but also the rescue of the monumental "ruins" that remained inert on the territory. Therefore, a first approximation to the
notion of "the mayanization" recognizes this process simply with an official emphasis for rescuing ruins as ancestral legacy of a "nationality" to be built.

In this excerpt, Euraque is referring to western researchers' concerns for finding the greatest, most complex, or 'first' finds in any region in which they study. By focusing only on these aspects of ancient culture, those groups who are perceived to have left a lesser impact on the past are often completely ignored or even robbed of any credit for their achievements and the political, social, and economic protections and benefits for themselves and for their physical cultural heritage. In this process, groups with legitimate ties to cultural heritage are being silenced and are not receiving much needed social and economic benefits that can stem from heritage management.

Figure 8.5. One Lempira (Honduran currency), detail shows images of Copan.
Economic Inequalities

While the majority of island inhabitants are employed in the tourism industry (Stonich 2000), the economic benefits of these activities are concentrated in a small and powerful population. As in other areas of the world, locals are also reluctant to follow the land-use and subsistence practice restrictions that have been imposed in accordance with sustainability reforms or, in many cases, and in an effort to restrict access to valuable resources such as particularly picturesque landscapes, legitimize the removal of unwanted populations (Stonich 2000:142).

Resentment for these increased hardships and exaggerated inequalities is most often directed at tourists, though a closer evaluation of the situation reveals the mediators in the tourism industry play a large role in creating and directing the interests and actions of visiting tourists (Chambers 2000:30). Additionally, a clear hierarchy exists within the positions occupied by residents within the tourism industry on the island that is closely related to their cultural affiliations:

It is clear that those who have benefited the most from the tourism industry are those who were initially wealthy enough to have the resources needed to invest in these enterprises or to become mediators themselves…Often working in the higher paid positions within larger businesses are the English-speaking Bay Islanders, a heterogeneous group made up of…Anglo- and Afro-Antilleans with further social, economic, and even spatial distinctions and stratifications found within. Hindered by their lack of knowledge of English, the primary language of
the majority of island tourists, the mainlanders (ladinos or “Spanyards” as they are called by “native” islanders), also lack the local social networks needed to serve as a system of support during the off-season periods when work is scarce (Figueroa et al. 2011).

As the tourism industry continues to expand on the island, multiple groups often find themselves in fierce competition to capture the attention and imagination of visitors who may spend no more than several hours on the island but spend an average of 86.6 U.S. dollars each per visit (Proceso Digital 2011). Many of these groups rely on the selling of commoditized aspects of their culture, or of sometimes distantly related and drastically modified cultural practices or products. If archaeologists seek to be a part of the identity formation of ethnic groups by providing them with knowledge that has been lost over the years due to oppression and decimation of populations, it is important that they understand what culture means to the groups they are studying and which aspects of that culture are important to the people, not just the archaeologist. This is especially relevant when marketing for tourism is taken into consideration. The commoditization of some rituals and objects may or may not be seen as unacceptable to certain groups. Also, the ruins and buried remains of ancestors can often be considered sacred and these beliefs must be respected and taken into account by archaeologists.

In a forthcoming article, Jackson (2011) argues that descendant knowledge has the power to transform long-held beliefs and popular public perceptions on important topics, and suggests scholars can contribute to the reconfiguration of these
characterizations using multifaceted research strategies. Likewise, Trouillot (1995) has argued that static and dominating interpretations developed through historical or anthropological research have been used to silence certain interpretations of the past in favor of others. As colleagues and I have stated elsewhere (Figueroa et al. 2011) concerning the silenced voices of prehispanic islanders and their possible descendant communities, “As archaeologists, we seek to bring their narrative to life through research that may uncover histories unwritten by the winners of the past, those with the power to write. Being involved in writing the history of the islands, we cannot forget that power is not a property of the past. There is power in the interpreting, displaying, and the writing that we do today. If we seek balance among the stakeholders in today’s Roatán as we situate ourselves into the traditions of the past, we cannot forget the political and social contexts of the present.”

Implications for future archaeological investigation and interpretation

If we continue to excuse the misuse of archaeological data as a problem caused by others, namely government and business mediators, and subsequently leave the solution of the resulting problems to these same individuals and organizations, the situation is likely to remain unchanged. We may continue to point out the issues caused by such misuse, catalogue such occurrences, or even identify the root causes of the popularity of certain misrepresentations, but until we address the role archaeologists play in creating this option as a possibility for mediators we must admit at least some fault. While it is increasingly acknowledged that archaeologists need more sufficient training in areas such
as media relations and even in the advantages of the use online social networks, little attention is paid to the power that archaeological interpretations possess within tourism marketing. Ardren (2004:109) observes that archaeologists are trained in the use of words but not in the importance and persistence of the visual ideas created through the use of archaeological images, especially in the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes and inequalities of power. To improve this situation, Ardren (2004:112) suggests that archaeologists should begin by acknowledging their role in the production of knowledge that often reinforces this misuse, understanding the manipulation of knowledge by political and economic forces, recognizing the power of visual images, and working in partnership with local communities.

Additionally, mediators are especially important for archaeologists as they are the business owners and tourist operators that are designing attractions that use archaeological materials or ideas and interpreting the history of the island for direct consumption by visitors. If archaeologists wish to play a larger role in the marketing of heritage, they must increase interaction with these important players in the integrated social, economic, political system of the island, while also keeping in mind the complex and varied set of stakeholders that are seeking alternative economic possibilities. We have a responsibility to understand how our interpretations can contribute to the current dialogue, both positively and negatively, and make a conscious effort to control the larger messages we help to create.
Chapter 9: Conclusions

The fact that an area in which any shred of data is lacking for a period of over 600 years is defined as being comparatively “known” (Lange 1996:308) gives some impression as to the incredible scarcity of data along this borderland. Accordingly, the Caribbean is noted as one of two (the other being the Pacific Gulf of Fonseca) areas of Honduras highlighted by Healy (1984; 1993) as particularly important targets for information that may contribute to further understanding the nature of the frontier of northern Central America (Lange 1996:319). Cuddy (2007:75) concluded that northeast Honduras was, “the outer side of the inside of Central America. Always positioned in relation to other power centers…a culture region with a legacy of mimicry best displayed through the lenses of ideological expression and economic interactions. It is an example of power crafted through an image, a social phenomenon seen in many contexts.”

Experimentation with different designs on familiar forms or vice versa might be expected here considering the adaptation of many varied designs and styles borrowed from outside groups seen throughout time and across the region for northeast Honduras. The Bay Islands, due to their unique location, might be even more open to experimentation and more constantly and consistently exposed to outside styles and influences. From the presence of shells and other materials found as far away as the Pacific coast of western Mexico, to the clear influence of Central and South American
styles in their use and production of everyday and ceremonial items, prehispanic Roatán islanders provide a sense of the timelessness of questions concerning identity and expression, and were nearly as cosmopolitan as the present day islanders.

Roatán is a fascinating case in that it is clear that both outside influences and materials from an excess of sources were present, yet the actual direction, nature, and timing of these contacts and transfers are unclear. Was the material first transferred through the hands of Mesoamerican traders? Did Central or South American groups exist in the immediate area? If so, what was the nature of their interactions with native northeastern Hondurans? In short, future research must expand on both the amounts and types of data available in the region. To compare elite and non-elite households, residential and ceremonial spaces, trade and local goods, these contexts and items must first be identified within the archaeological record with an increased certainty. Once established, comparative examples from various sites in the region must be gathered. Finally, this process needs to take place concomitantly across the Central American landscape to allow for stronger, more empirically based studies to occur.

Most importantly, we must keep in mind that the inhabitants of this island were not Maya, nor did they belong to a particular South American or Mexican group. They were actively producing and reproducing their identity in relation to these groups, much as the modern islanders are struggling to do in the face of larger groups threatening to silence their voices. Our data support many of the previous hypotheses proposed for the region but much more research is necessary to support any model that sufficiently explains changes apparent in the archaeological record over time and space in this region.
It can only be assumed that the processes involved in these changes were complex and, although a direct cause and effect relationship cannot (and should not) be attributed to changes within the study area to occurrences outside of the area, a broad perspective, both spatially and chronologically, is needed to understand the full spectrum of cultural change and the expression of identity that the archaeological record can provide here.

Additionally, in an effort to address the wide gap that exists between the ethnohistoric accounts of the richness and diversity of material goods being traded into and out of the Bay Islands, and what is found in the archaeological record, catalogues of known private collections of archaeological artifacts on the island need to be compiled. Because the majority of archaeological sites on Roatán have been deeply damaged and disturbed in the past, collections are possibly the only remains that we have available to understand part of the island's complex and rapidly disappearing history. It seems very likely that our collections, as well as those of others, were heavily skewed due to the activity of looters over hundreds of years and rapid rates of development on the island within the last few decades. Few sites on the island are unknown among local populations and it seems even small surface scatters have attracted significant attention from looters. In combination with the extreme weathering and rapid geological processes occurring, suitable opportunities traditional archaeological research are rapidly disappearing. The extent of variety in the material record of the Bay Islands is little realized and will not become so until drastic measures are taken to record materials generally considered outside the realm of traditional archaeological research, including those in personal collections. A bold effort also needs to be made in the location and cataloging of known
collections currently residing in museums across the world. These catalogues should also be combined with the careful use of ethnographic analogies supported by archaeological and historical data.

In order to improve our understanding of how the accelerated expansion of the tourism industry affects local communities, as well as their level of participation within it, future research on the island will need to collect information on the feelings of community members towards the tourism industry, the roles of the various individuals and institutions involved in it, as well as their perceptions on future heritage tourism through written surveys and opportunistic interviews.

The overthrow of Honduran president Manual Zelaya in June of 2009 has significantly affected the structure and the amount of archaeological research taking place throughout Honduras. The interruption of previously organized projects and plans undermined many of the goals that were in place for Project Roatán and many other long-term projects from the mainland that have been in steady operation for decades. Many sources of funding and governmental support in essence collapsed with the breakdown of the previously established connections between international researchers and government officials within the IHAH, the single branch of the Honduran government charged with preserving and investigating the history of an incredibly rich and diverse country. The current political situation further complicates the struggle of those invested in the heritage of a country plagued by poverty and an uncertain future.
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