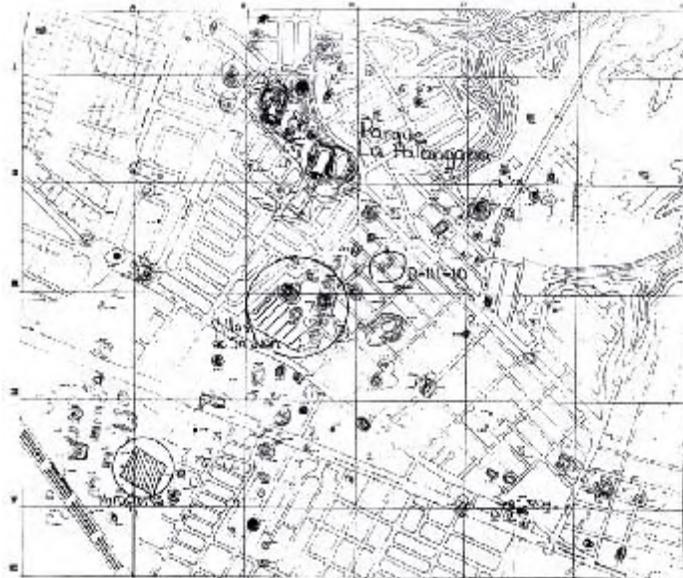


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Kaminaljuyú Archaeological Project: A Study of the Ancient City of the Southern Guatemalan Highlands: New Perspectives



Research Year: 1998

Culture: Maya

Chronology: Pre-Classic

Location: Kaminaljuyú, Guatemala

Site: Kaminaljuyú

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Introduction

The Kaminaljuyú Archaeological Project was carried out with FAMSI funds from July 1, 1998 until January 22, 1999. This period exceeds the time included in the original

proposal due basically to the enormous amount of material that had to be processed. Two archaeology students and two workers were hired to do the lab work. All the lab work was supervised by the applicant during the period mentioned above.

Even though there was information available about the location and conditions for the material, there were too many bags with quantities of cultural remains that needed to be rebagged and relabeled. Besides, the cultural materials that were compiled and synthesized had come from the rescue projects Kaminaljuyú Villas de San Juan (Quinta Samayoa), Kaminaljuyú Villas de Miraflores I and Mound D-III-10. Even though not all of the proposed materials were analyzed, the main goals and objectives of the project were met regarding the economic and social organization during the Preclassic period.

Changes from the original proposal

A change was made from the original proposal to the study of cultural materials due to unconsidered external circumstances. This has to do with the materials from the rescue projects Majadas and Villas del Rosario. Since the Majadas and Villas del Rosario materials were transferred to a different locality by the Institute personnel as part of a plan to relocate cultural materials "sorted" by provenience I selected the cultural materials from the rescue project Mound D-III-10 to be analyzed instead. The movement of the materials resulted in a difficult task to follow since the purposes were quite different. Then I selected the material from the rescue project mound D-III-10, since I was part of the team who worked in the rescue operation. It was considered that this material was also part of the process of materials from Kaminaljuyú that need to be analyzed. Besides the material was more accessible and was ready to be analyzed.

Submitted 03/01/1999 by:
Erick Ponciano

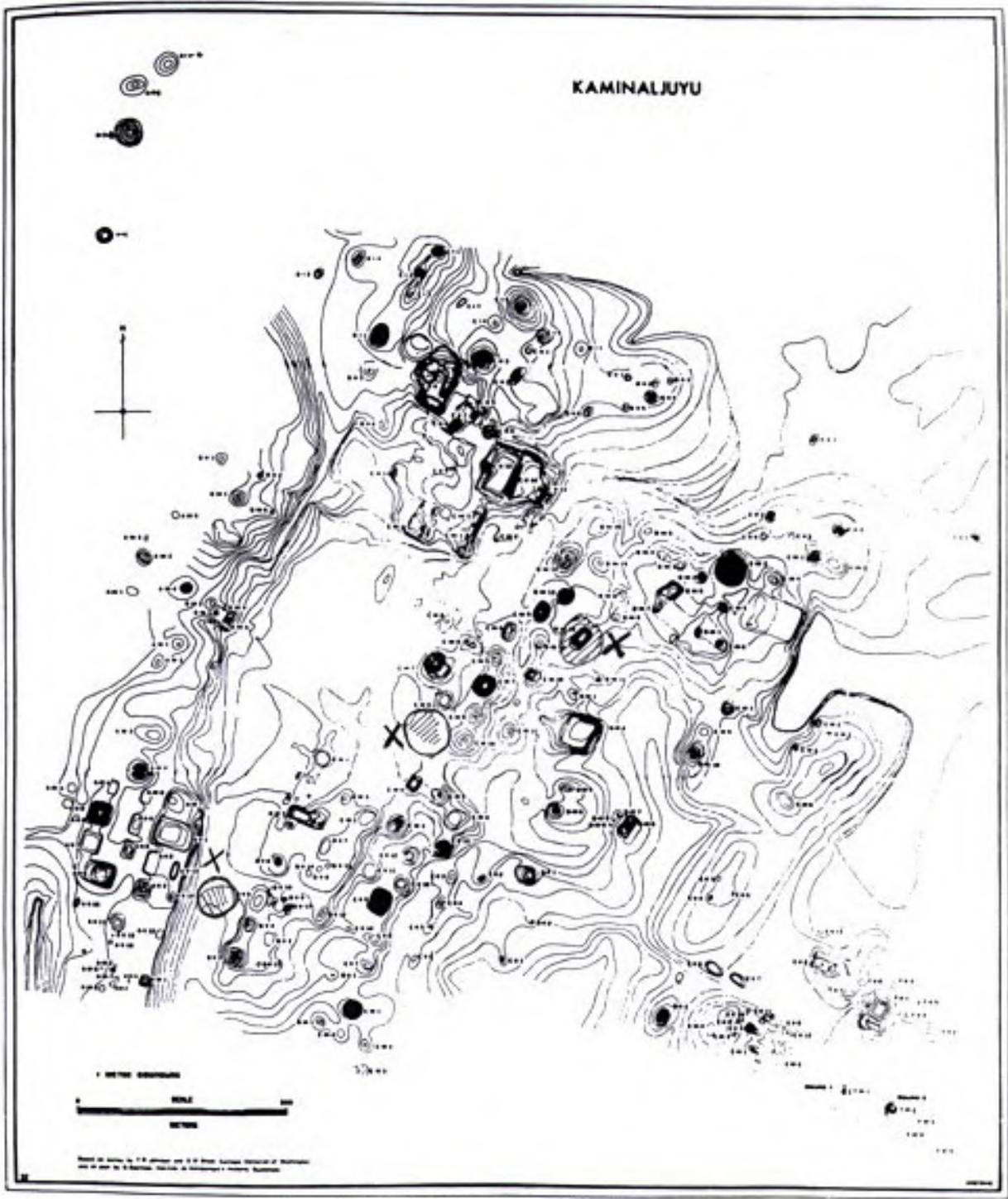


Figure 1. Kaminaljuyú Map (Sanders, 1979).

General Characteristics

The ceramic remains, from all the three rescue projects under study, were classified following the same methodology. This methodology included the Ware system analysis, which is carried by the specialist Dra. Marion Hatch. Along with this was created a recording sheet to include the materials from different projects following the same format. With this procedure, the ceramics were recorded in a standardized format in order to have a systematized, and hopefully, a uniform set of data, regardless of the procedure followed by the researcher during the original excavation.

Since the areas where the rescue operations took place were developed for urbanistic purposes there is no archaeological evidence left to be preserved nowadays. The data and information from there is invaluable since there is no other way to know about the areas. This is particularly true when specific and particularistic set of new data is recovered from the areas.

As in all cases, the areas were generally located in the vicinity south of the central area of Kaminaljuyú. These areas were relatively flat and extensive. The Villas de San Juan area is located to the west side of C-IV-10 group, 500 m south of the acropolis or the central area of the site covering an area of about .4 km². The Villas de Miraflores I area to the northeast of the B-IV-4 group is about 1,000 m south and covers .2 km² and the Mound D-III-10, which is the closest, is about 300 m away with an area of .02 km².

Specific characteristics

The Kaminaljuyú archaeological project could finish the analysis of materials from the D-III-10 mound. The material from this mound can be generally described as "ceremonial" in function but domestic for the provenance of construction materials. This is a ceremonial structure of about 13 m high. It was part of a complex along with the structures D-III-13, C-III-9 and D-III-12. The ceramics and lithics (except for the obsidian) were classified completely. The ceramics produced information about the chronological location for the construction and use of the structure. This structure is dated for the last part of the Middle Preclassic (500-300 B.C.) during the Providencia-Verbena phases. It was found evidence about the ceremonial use of the structure due to findings of several broken incense burners (Terra ware). If the date about the ceramic analysis is correct, this structure may represent one of the earliest ceremonial structures built in Kaminaljuyú, since it has been generally accepted that the ceremonial construction activity began not earlier than Late Preclassic. This is new data for the chronological frame of Kaminaljuyú since it moves backwards the origin of cultural complexity for the site's prehistory.

The Kaminaljuyú archaeological project analyzed and compiled about 87% of the cultural material from the Kaminaljuyú Miraflores I Sub-project. This is strong enough to be a representative sample of the collection from the rescue project materials. The area for the location where this rescue project took place is worth mentioning since it may be

crucial for the site. It layed on the south margin of an extinct lake, Miraflores. The area is tightly packed with archaeological remains showing a high density of remains. It is located within two major mound groups. The Mirador group (B-IV-2, B-IV-3 and B-IV-5) to the east and the Giordani group (A-V-1, A-V-2 and A-V-13) to the west. It reported the existence of at least three "invisible" structures which have been called "houses" with all of its domestics artifacts, refuse and associated perishable architecture. There are domestic wares with evident signs of intense burning and use for cooking along with big jars for the storage of food. Also associated with the domestic materials were several incense burners, of different sizes but with the same motives. This can be an indication of a ritual that took place at a domestic level. The chronological position for this area starts at the end of the Middle Preclassic (400 B.C.) up until Early Classic (Aurora phase) around 350 A.D.

An unusual type of evidence of economic activities was found on "worked or cut sherds" in several parts of the area. There is no doubt that the Kaminaljuyú people had a way to make transactions and exchange. These "worked or cut sherds" were originally defined on the analysis from the Miraflores II Sub-project (Hatch, 1999, personal communication). The worked sherds have specific shapes and sizes. The sizes are related to the width of two, three or four fingers of a hand set together. Another shape is a triangle about 3-4 cm on each side and a half moon shape sherd with 3-4 cm long. Each shape was made out from jar sherds, basically domestic in nature. It is suspected that each shape had a specific "value" recognized for the people involved in the activity. This is an assumption that needs more research. But if this is the case it can be a clue to understand the existence of a "market" in Kaminaljuyú. This can be another argument to the fact that Kaminaljuyú certainly controlled the source and distribution of obsidian from the El Chayal as part of a complex economic activity.

Another important aspect or characteristic of this area is the fact that it was continually occupied even when the lake Miraflores had disappeared (Santa Clara phase). In the northwest part of this area were found for the first time the "canal" system that operated along with the Miraflores lake. A cluster of "canals" have been found in the vicinity south and east of the area providing new important evidence about economic and agricultural activities in the site during Preclassic times.

The Kaminaljuyú Archaeological project analyzed and compiled 64% of the Quinta Samayoa (Villas de San Juan) Sub-project. It was also located on a flat terrain associated with the structures C-IV-9, C-IV-10, C-IV-8 and C-III-7. This is clearly an open area or plaza for the structures that are on the east and north sides. Even though the area presented a "residential" or domestic nature, the density of complete and fine wares poses a dilemma for the function of the group and the type of activities that took place there. It has been considered that the findings of fine and complete vessels should be associated with sealed deposits or caches. There were at least three cases where cluster of vessels were found in what has been called "botellones" or bottled shaped deposits in the ground. In this case there was found no evidence of architecture associated to the "botellones."

There is a magnificent sample of human figurines. Even though the chronological sequence has been established from the Late Preclassic (200 B.C.) until the first part of Early Classic (300 A.D.) the figurines seem to have been in use for more years since some of them were found in later contexts. There is no general agreement about the function of the figurines. From the materials recovered and analyzed, the sample from Villas de San Juan not only is the bigger but also is the most "rich" in terms of representations and variety. There is evidence of ritual activities that took place in the plaza. Once again the existence of a "market" or place for exchange in Kaminaljuyú has not been archaeologically identified yet but the possibility to describe these areas with such a function is very appealing.

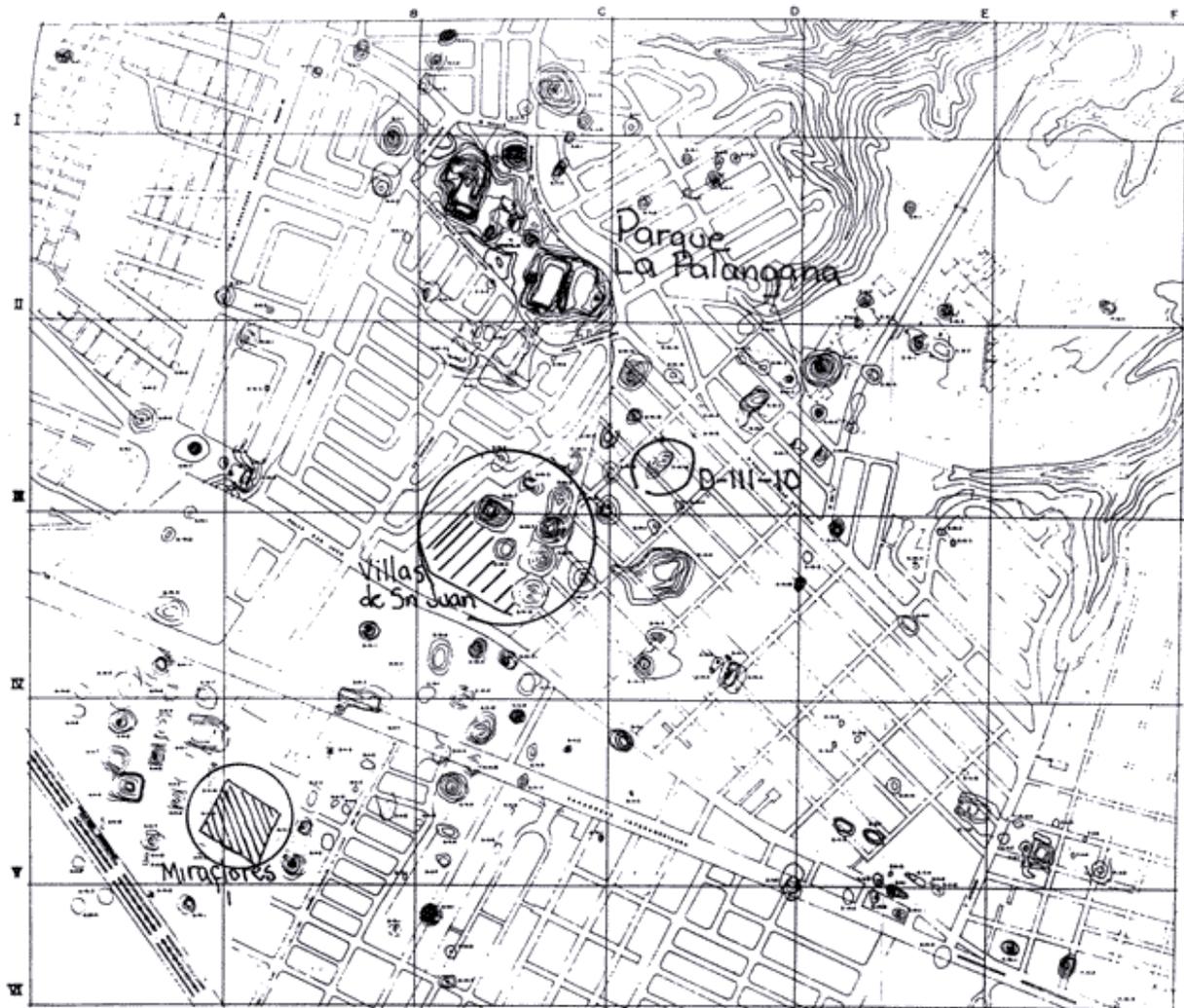


Figure 2. Location of project areas Miraflores I Villas, Villas de San Juan and D-III-10.

Conclusion

Since Kaminaljuyú was possibly the center of influence of a vast region in the central valley of Guatemala, it should be anticipated that these specific places with the inferred function had a proportion related to the size of the site. This is particularly true to the Middle and Late Preclassic period when the site reached a size unparalleled in the Guatemalan highlands.

This is also evidence for the argument that Kaminaljuyú in fact could have reached a more complex social organization during the Middle Preclassic with public and ceremonial architecture along with development of economic transactions and exchange as evidence for contacts with the coastal lowlands to the south and Petén lowlands to the north. By integrating the data from several sections or portions of the site, it is possible to grasp a more holistic picture of the city as part of an intricate set of relationships that took place among the heterogeneously segments of population.

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[Figure 1.](#) Kaminaljuyú Map (Sanders, 1979).

[Figure 2.](#) Location of project areas Miraflores I Villas, Villas de San Juan and D-III-10.

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