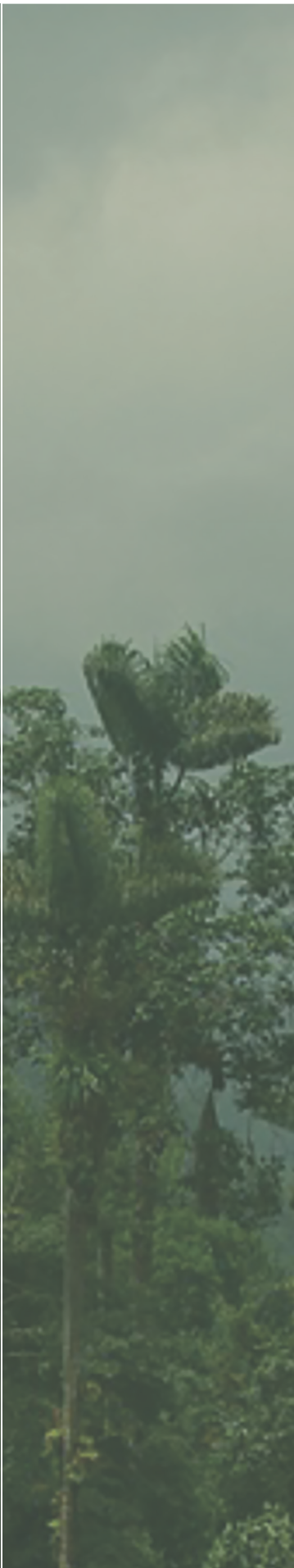# PRE-COLUMBIAN CENTRAL AMERICA, COLOMBIA, AND ECUADOR

Toward an Integrated Approach

PRE-COLUMBIAN CENTRAL AMERICA, COLOMBIA, AND ECUADOR

Toward an Integrated Approach

Colin McEwan *and* John W. Hoopes, *editors*

With additional contributions by

ANTONIO JARAMILLO ARANGO • BRYAN R. COCKRELL • RICHARD G. COOKE
L. ANTONIO CURET • CARRIE L. DENNETT • JAMES DOYLE • CLARK L. ERICKSON
MONICA FENTON • ALFREDO FERNÁNDEZ-VALMAYOR CRESPO • R. JEFFREY FROST
ALEXANDER GEURDS • MERCEDES GUINEA BUENO • JESÚS HERRERÍN LÓPEZ
MIGUEL ÁNGEL HERVÁS HERRERA • ROSEMARY A. JOYCE • MATTHEW LOOPER
MARCOS MARTINÓN-TORRES • CARLOS MAYO TORNÉ • JULIA MAYO TORNÉ
GEOFFREY MCCAFFERTY • MARY ELLEN MILLER • DAVID MORA-MARÍN
KAREN O'DAY • JOSÉ R. OLIVER • EDITH ORTIZ DÍAZ • JUAN PABLO QUINTERO GUZMÁN
RENIEL RODRÍGUEZ RAMOS • JOSÉ LUIS RUVALCABA • SILVIA SALGADO GONZÁLEZ
MARÍA ALICIA URIBE VILLEGAS • JAMES A. ZEIDLER

We dedicate this volume to the memory of

Colin McEwan
(1951–2020)

and to our spouses,

Norma Rosso and Lauren Mattleman Hoopes,

without whose constant love and support
this project could never have been completed.

Social Complexity at El Caño

JULIA MAYO TORNÉ • CARLOS MAYO TORNÉ

MERCEDES GUINEA BUENO • MIGUEL ÁNGEL HERVÁS HERRERA

JESÚS HERRERÍN LÓPEZ • ALFREDO FERNÁNDEZ-VALMAYOR CRESPO

HUMAN SOCIETIES ARE STRUCTURED SYSTEMS THAT ARE regulated and articulated by socially accepted norms. With the complexity of relationships and the great variety of aspects involved, social order has been analyzed and explained from multiple perspectives (economic, social, and cultural, among others) (Durkheim [1895] 1974; Hechter and Horne 2003; Hobbes 1651; Marx [1867] 1977; Parson 1937; Weber 1978). Despite their abstract nature, the rules that regulated people's lives in antiquity can be discerned, and archaeological patterns reveal the tangible expression of them. Their analysis has ultimately served to categorize ancient societies according to the evolutionary scheme—band, tribe, chiefdom, and state—proposed by Service (1962) as well as alternative schemes such as the one proposed by Fried (1967)—egalitarian, ranked, and stratified.

What we present here is an archaeological study structured in three parts, with different but complementary aims. The first focuses on El Caño, a necropolis[1] of the Greater Coclé archaeological tradition (ca. 700–1000 CE), located on the west bank of the Río Grande in Central Panama. This encompasses two subjects: 1) hereditary inequality and 2) segregation according status—both conditions or circumstances that are typical of stratified societies. In the first part, we deduce the rules that regulate the possession of status in El Caño society from the analysis of the organization of the mortuary space and the distribution of wealth among the infants and adults, male and female, to then infer social complexity. In the second part, we consider the same variables for Sitio Conte, another site with a necropolis located on the east bank of the river 2.5 km downstream (Briggs 1989; Hearne and Sharer 1992; Lothrop 1937; Mason 1942).

Finally, we compare both cases. The purpose of the second and third parts of the investigation is to explain the phenomenon of two contemporary necropolises existing in the Río Grande valley. To this end, we consider whether both were handled in the same way, according to the same social norms. This helps us determine whether Sitio Conte and El Caño are the necropolises of two different chiefdoms—our hypothesis—or two aspects of the same large burial site administered by a single chiefdom—the traditional explanation (Cooke et al. 2003; Fitzgerald 1992). The long-term aim of our project will be to determine the degree of social, political, and economic evolution of the societies that lived and established their necropolises in the Río Grande valley as well as the processes that influenced the formation and subsequent transformation of these societies.

As we will discuss in more detail below, evaluation of the previously described variables showed that high-status subadults at El Caño were buried in a specific area of the necropolis, separated from low-status individuals. At Sitio Conte, as far as we have been able to observe, no high-status subadults were buried at all. High-status and low-status people were placed in the same area—this means that the norms governing social behavior in these two societies differed at least in the variables observed. Therefore, their relative social order or complexity also differed. We propose that Sitio Conte's society was hierarchical and El Caño's was stratified. Our study indicates a regional political scheme such as that proposed by Briggs (1989) of a territory that shared traditions but employed different administrative and political solutions.

Below, we review theoretical approaches to the use of mortuary data as the basis for our reconstructions of social

structure. We examine mortuary practices and sites with graves in the Greater Coclé Semiotic Tradition (Cooke 2004a), with special emphasis on the period from about 700 to 1000 CE and on the necropolises at Sitio Conte and El Caño. We will also briefly review the data collected and analyzed by Briggs (1989). We introduce the El Caño Archaeological Project, describe specific methods and data, and present the results of a cluster analysis. Finally, we discuss the data and our plans for future investigations.

Theoretical Approaches to the Analysis of Mortuary Data

In archaeology, there is a general consensus about the value of mortuary evidence for reconstructing important aspects of a society. It is "an extremely valuable archaeological resource since it represents the direct and purposeful culmination of conscious behavior, rather than casual residue" (O'Shea 1981:39). Nevertheless, social reconstruction through mortuary data analysis has been a controversial subject and the object of intense debate for a long time. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the processual archaeologists of the New Archaeology (Binford 1971; Saxe 1970) pointed out that inductive methods were inadequate and that these should be augmented by deductive methods and statistics. They asserted that ritual and social organization could be tested if the hypotheses were formulated correctly and if quantitative data were collected systematically (Pearson 2008:72). They also noted that it was useful to assume—while acknowledging exceptions—that in all societies individuals were buried according to the social statuses they occupied in life. The diversity of burials observable in cemeteries and other sites with burials could be interpreted as a reflection of the diversity of social statuses in the society to which the deceased belonged. Some interpretations went even further. The burial of children dressed in adult mortuary attire, including high-status symbols, has been interpreted also as evidence of the inheritance of high status. Regarding the latter, Renfrew (2015:7) says this: "A particularly persuasive indicator of the inheritance of high status is the burial with rich grave[2] goods of children who have died young. In most such cases, it may be inferred that these were children who were 'born great.' Too young to achieve greatness, they did not live to see the fulfilment of the expectations due to their rank or class, but yet were buried with clear indications of their status."

The postulates and methods of this specific application of the processual archaeology were criticized soon afterward. Numerous ethnographic cases revealed societies that did reproduce roles and statuses through burials (Brown 1981:29). In some cases, burials are used for personal or group political purposes (Barrett 2000:66; D'Altroy 2015). In other cases, survivors show solidarity by helping to create funerary rituals "worthy" of families who cannot have them (Brown 1995; Goody 1962; Pader 1982). In the specific case of the rich burials of children, it has also been noted that some ethnicities objectify the social position of the parents who, through the ritual, offerings, and mortuary ensembles in the burials of their deceased children, express their own status (Pader 1982:62). Therefore, on their own, the burials of children dressed in rich funerary outfits are not evidence of inherited status. At this point, we ask ourselves how these two key concepts in our research—hereditary inequality and social stratification—are expressed archaeologically. What can we do to find enough evidence? We think, as Kerber (1986:62–63)—who sees the funeral as a political act—that the theory that mortuary remains represent social status in life works in societies where status is finite and somewhat defined. This situation usually occurs in groups in which the transmissibility of power through inheritance is greater, because in these cases it is common for the deceased to be buried for political reasons in a manner more in line with their original status. Given that wealth and the treatment of small children could be related to other social variables, research on this must take other factors into account. Brown (1981) proposes that special burial spaces—because of the degree of structural and spatial separation in a cemetery or necropolis—can be, as in a village, the reflection of the organizational principles of the society that built it (Goldstein 1981:57).

With this in mind, we have based our research strategy on six expectations proposed by Brown (1981:29):

1. as long as hierarchical aspects of society are minimal, distinctions chosen for symbolic treatment will be based on age, sex, personal skills, personality, death, and social deviance;
2. societies exhibiting minimal hierarchy will record symbolic distinctions with a minimum of wealth, the average depending upon availability;
3. as the hierarchical aspects of society increase, burials will record gradation in treatments among otherwise equivalent statuses;
4. as the hierarchical aspects increase, children will be accorded relatively more elaborate attention in

proportion to the decline in the opportunity for replacement of the following generation;

5. as authority increases, the amount of wealth and effort expended on the burial will increase; and

6. as power increases, the attachment of the powerful exclusively to locations indicative of their power base will emerge.

Based on these expectations, and since the existence of rich children's burials alone is insufficient evidence of the inheritance of status, we will examine adults' and childrens' mortuary ensembles as well as investigate the places occupied by the richest burials of adults and subadults within the necropolis. The existence of spatial segregation by status would serve to demonstrate that the children buried with rich mortuary ensembles of El Caño inherited their status. These two pieces of evidence suggest the existence of social stratification.

Funerary Treatments and Mortuary Chronology in Greater Coclé

In Central Panama, the main known archaeological sites at which burials have been documented are Cerro Mangote, Abrigo Capacho, Sitio Sierra, Cerro Juan Díaz, La Cañaza, El Indio, Playa Venado, Finca Calderón, El Caño, and Sitio Conte (Figure 14.1; Table 14.1). Cerro Mangote (5500–2500 BCE) (McGimsey 1956, 1959) is a Preceramic settlement currently located near the shoreline of Parita Bay that was at one time farther inland. The site has evidence for two mortuary treatments: 1) secondary burial in bundles; and 2) primary flexed burial. Both were found under or near dwellings. These mortuary practices appear to have been most common before 700 CE; however, the relevant data between 2500 BCE and 500 CE remain extremely limited.

Starting around 500 CE, the practice of secondary burials in bundles and primary flexed burials was maintained at some sites, while new practices arose (see Table 14.1). This diversity in mortuary practices, along with small stylistic and technological differences seen in ceramic and lithic artifacts, are cultural and technological manifestations that call attention to the lack of cultural homogeneity. These phenomena have been explained as the results of fission and fusion, reproductive isolation, linguistic fragmentation, and adaptation (Cooke and Ranere 1992b:247). Cooke and Ranere suggest that the region was inhabited by different ethnic groups united by common ancestral bonds. Whether it was inhabited

by several ethnic groups or just one, the ways in which they were organized appear to be different according to a study carried out in the region by Briggs at the end of the 1980s. Briggs (1989) used mortuary data from Sitio Conte, a site excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop (1937, 1942) and J. Alden Mason (1942; Hearne and Sharer 1992), and from El Cafetal, La Cañaza, El Indio, and La India, sites excavated by Alain Ichon (1980). Briggs concluded that between 500 and 1000 CE the region was inhabited by groups from the same tradition but with different levels of sociopolitical complexity. The least complex societies were represented by El Indio and El Cafetal and the most complex by Sitio Conte. In El Indio and El Cafetal, the deceased were buried in cemeteries, but the only social identities, expressed through mortuary arrangements, were sex, age, and skills—an approach characteristic of nonhierarchical societies (Binford 1971:18–19). In contrast, Sitio Conte presented a cumulative pattern of objects in graves, with the richest burials containing a representation of all the types of objects present in the cemetery. This expresses status, another social identity. Briggs's study included about one hundred graves. Most contained simple burials, but thirteen had multiple burials (Briggs 1989). In most cases—72 percent of two hundred skeletons (Briggs 1989)—the burials were of adult males. Burials of women and children have also been found, although in smaller numbers. Analysis of the relationship between sex and age and this pattern led Briggs to argue that only the adult males could achieve high status, as is typical of a hierarchical society with achieved status—that is, in which power and wealth are based on personal achievements. The absence of the bodies of elite women and children[3] suggested that, although hierarchical, this society was not stratified (Briggs 1989; Cooke, Isaza, et al. 2003).

We have researched El Caño for a decade. It is the site we know best and for which we have firsthand data. The site contains graves with single burials and others with multiple burials. Women, men, and children with different social statuses were buried there, which means different statuses, age groups, and sexes are represented. The whole of society seems to be represented; in any case, it is not a cemetery for the burial of a specific social subgroup. With respect to graves with multiple burials, we have observed the following patterns: 1) in all but one case, high-status individuals are at the center of the group of skeletons; 2) no burials of high-status individuals without companions; 3) all are located in a specific sector of the necropolis; 4) iconography that includes images related to human sacrifice (e.g., decapitated prisoners, and ritual officiants

Figure 14.1

Distribution of sites with mortuary features from Central Panama. Drawing by Carlos Mayo Torné.

carrying children as offerings, among others) (Guinea Bueno 2018a, 2018b); 5) remains of poisonous animals possibly used in human sacrifices; 6) the presence, in all multiple burials, of a companion with high status; 7) evidence of practices such as dismemberment, quartering, and defleshing; and 8) burials are inside large wooden graves (Hervás Herrera 2018). We believe that graves containing multiple burials are those of high-status people in El Caño society, and that multiple burials are the result of the organization of lavish funerals that included, among other practices, human sacrifices (Mayo et al. 2020).

The organization of rich funerals that included human sacrifices is a cross-cultural phenomenon (Morris 2014) in the Pre-Columbian Americas, including

Mississippians (Emerson et al. 2016), Maya (Cucina and Tiesler 2006, 2007; Houston et al. 2015), and Moche (Alva and Donnan 1993). The Spaniards observed the inclusion of human sacrifices among the Inca, Mexica, and Tarascans (Sahagún 1982) as well as groups in Panama (Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés 1853:454; Jopling 1994:64) and Colombia (Cieza de León 1553). Although human sacrifice occurred at many times and in many places, it appears to be mostly associated with early stages of hierarchical development, and associated with an emerging elite who presumably used these rituals to display their power and wealth and to ensure comfort in the afterlife (Steel 1995). According to Renfrew (2015:1), "the magnificence of the rituals and of the tomb goods

Table 14.1 Archaeological sites containing burials and types of burial, in the central region of the Isthmus.

SITE	PERIOD	BURIAL MODE	LOCATION	BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES
Cerro Mangote	Late Preceramic (5500–2500 BCE)	Secondary burial (package) Primary burial (flexed position)	Below the houses	Cooke et al. 1998; Linares 1977b; McGimsey, Collins, and McKern 1986–1987
Sitio Sierra	Middle Ceramic (200 BCE–700 CE)	Primary burial (flexed position)		Cooke et al. 1998
	Late Ceramic (700–1550 CE)	Extended primary burial (individual)		Cooke 1984c
Cerro Juan Díaz	End of Middle Ceramic (500–700 CE)	Secondary burial (package)	Reserved area near the village	Cooke et al. 1998
	Late Ceramic (700–1550 CE)	Secondary burial (urn) Primary burial (flexed position) Extended primary burial (individual) Secondary burial (package)		Cooke et al. 1998; Carvajal et al. 2002
La Cañaza	Late Ceramic (700–1550 CE)	Secondary burial (package) Extended primary burial (individual)	Cemetery	Cooke et al. 1998
El Indio	Middle Ceramic (200 BCE–700 CE)	Primary burial (flexed position) Secondary burial (urn)	Below the houses	Cooke et al. 1998
Playa Venado	End of Middle Ceramic and Late Ceramic (500–1550 CE)	Primary burial (flexed position) Extended primary burial (individual) Secondary burial (urn) Secondary burial (package)	Cemetery	Lothrop 1954
Finca Calderón	Late Ceramic (700–1550 CE)	Extended primary burial (individual) Secondary burial (package) Secondary burial (urn)	Cemetery	Bull 1965; Ladd 1964
El Caño	Late Ceramic (700–1550 CE)	Extended primary burial (multiple) Extended primary burial (individual) Secondary burial (package)	Necropolis	Cooke et al. 1998; Lleras-Pérez and Barillas Cordón 1985; Mayo Torné and Mayo Torné 2013
	End of Late Ceramic (700–1550 CE)	Secondary burial (urn)		
Sitio Conte	Late Ceramic (700–1550 CE)	Extended primary burial (multiple) Extended primary burial (individual) Primary burial (flexed position)	Necropolis	Lothrop 1937; Hearne and Sharer 1992
Abrigo Capacho	End of Late Ceramic (1500–1550 CE)	Secondary burial (urn)	Rock-shelter	Griggs 2005
Parita	End of Late Ceramic (1519 CE)	Extended primary (mortuary bundle)	Mortuary house	Jopling 1994

GRAVE CODE	NA2OA1T1	NA2OA1T2	NA2OA1T7	NA2OA1T4	NA2OA2T4	NA2OA2T5	
Dimensions (m³ of the fossa)	27	70	60	60	1	1	
Individuals (only individuals from burials)	8	27	43	30	1	1	
Orientation (individual[s] principal[s])	north	east	east	east	east	east	
Variety of attires	18	61	46	36	1	1	

played an active role in both the constitution and the subsequent perpetuation of the dynasty."

El Caño and probably also Sitio Conte were sites intended exclusively for burial and funerary rituals. The existence of cemeteries and/or necropolises—places of mortuary rituals that offer evidence of the sociocultural groups that created them—has several implications. They constitute, in themselves, places with their own structures and sociocultural relations that become dynamic as a result of the confrontations between the functionality of what is created and the individuals and collectives who make use of them (Velásquez-López 2009:1). Such organization needs administration and through it death takes on a more institutional role. Furthermore, the fact that new spaces focused upon death are created must be linked to the emergence of a new territorial order. The cemetery's initial construction may have been related to population growth and to the intention of some groups to claim territory, in most cases to control the richest agricultural lands through the manipulation and appropriation of cemeteries (R. Chapman 1995:47)—when communities created historical linkages with the spaces in which the burials of their ancestors were located.

The necropolises of both El Caño and Sitio Conte ceased to be used around 1000 CE; we have no information about graves in the Río Grande valley after that until the Spanish conquest. We know from the discovery of mortuary urns in Capacho, a rock-shelter located on the Caribbean slope of El Valle volcano (Griggs 2005), that nonelites at that time maintained mortuary customs such as secondary burial. These practices differed from those of *caciques* and other people of high status. In 1519, Gaspar de Espinosa, a Spanish captain who was in charge of organizing the conquest of Central Panama, wrote to the king and queen of Spain to inform them of his progress (Jopling 1994:63). In his letter, he describes in great detail the place and sumptuousness of the funeral of the

cacique Paris, also known as Antatará, that occurred in the Parita River basin 100 km west of El Caño. In his account, Espinosa describes the manner in which the *cacique* was treated and adorned with armbands, a helmet, and pectorals of gold, among other articles. He also relates that next to the *cacique* there were other richly attired deceased and, at the gates of the enclosure, a group of prisoners waiting to be sacrificed. Similar attire to that of the *cacique* and those accompanying him has been found in the graves of El Caño and Sitio Conte, attesting to the fact that these traditions had been practiced hundreds of years earlier in elite burials. Espinosa's letter points out some important differences, however. First, the bodies of the contact-period chiefs were neither buried nor deposited in exclusive burial sites; rather, they were dried and stored, together with the mortuary bundles of their ancestors, in a special house of the village in which they lived, thus indicating that necropolises were not used at that time. However, this act of maintaining elite lineages through preserving elite bodies and depositing the deceased in reserved spaces clearly shows that these bodies and ancestral bundles were venerated objects at the time.

The El Caño Archaeological Project

El Caño was first excavated in 1926 by Alpheus Hyatt Verrill, a U.S. zoologist and explorer who found rows of basalt columns and some stone sculptures. Since then, the location has been interpreted as a ceremonial center linked to Sitio Conte (Cooke, Isaza, et al. 2003; Fitzgerald 1992). In 2008, a team of archaeologists headed by Julia Mayo Torné started the El Caño Archaeological Project (Mayo Torné et al. 2020; Mayo Torné and Mayo Torné 2013; Williams 2012) after observing that the column alignments of El Caño were similar to those excavated by Lothrop (1937:40–41, figs. 23–24) at Sitio Conte.

	NA2OA2T6	NA2OA2T7	NA2OA2T8	NA2OA2T9	NA2OA2T11-13	NA2OA2T12	NA2OA2T15
	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
	east	east	east	east	east	east	east
	1	1	1	3	1	2	1

Initially, the objective of the project was to test the hypothesis that El Caño contained high-status graves. Once we had confirmed this, new questions emerged: How can we explain the existence of two contemporaneous sites for burials of the same tradition that were built such a short distance from each other? Do they represent graves of people from the same society? If they do, why were there two locations? If they do not, how can we explain why these contemporaneous cemeteries were so close together?

Burial Areas at El Caño

At El Caño, we have found graves in two different areas of the necropolis: Area 1, where Julia Mayo Torné's team has been excavating since 2008; and Area 2, 110 m west of Area 1. Students excavated burials in Area 2 from 1983 to 1985 in a course organized by the Centro Regional de Restauración de Bienes Muebles of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Instituto Nacional de Cultura de Panama (INAC) (Lleras-Pérez and Barillas Cordón 1985). The dimensions, number of individuals, and artifacts of graves in Area 1 and Area 2 appear in Table 14.2.

Seven graves—T1, T2, T4, T5, T6, T7, and T8—were excavated in Area 1. Inside the fossae of T1, T2, T4, and T7, six types of deposit were identified: multiple burials, with mortuary ensembles and offerings deposited on the floor of the fossa (Type 1); ceramics and other artifacts collapsed on a layer of sediments (Type 2); ceramics placed on a layer of sediments (Type 3); ceramics and skeletons, or "substitute effigies,"[4] placed on a layer of sediments (Type 4); human bones placed on a layer of sediments (Type 5); and layers of sediments (Type 6).

Deposits are not distributed randomly. Rather, they have a basic pattern consisting of rich, multiple burials on the bottom of the fossa that are covered by a layer of sediments that formed as a result of the deposition of eroded and/or waterborne sediments and, on these, a sequence of offerings (artifacts and human bones and/or corpses), and deposits of sediments. The objects and human bones had been placed inside the graves after the act of burial in different moments (Mayo Torné, Mayo Torné, and Guinea Bueno 2021). We interpret these as offerings that those close to the deceased placed inside the graves during the time the souls of the deceased were believed to travel toward a transformation. In all the cases observed, the stratigraphic sequence of offerings on top of the layer of sediments covering the burials is similar (Table 14.3; Figures 14.3–14.6).
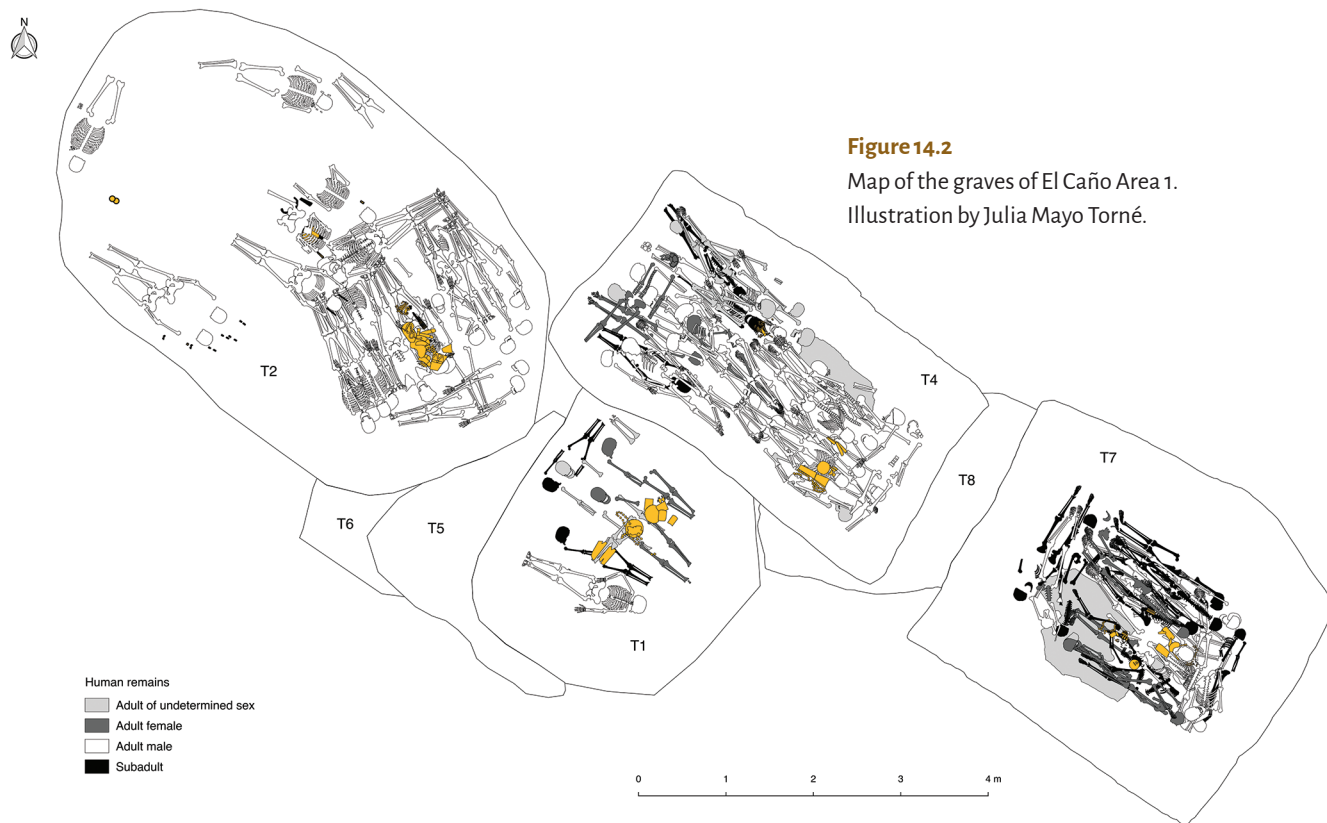
We have identified three types of graves (Table 14.4): Type 1 corresponds to the largest (T2 and T7), which contain more artifacts and more variety than the others. In addition, they contain more individuals. The higher-status individual occupies the central space, with the head oriented toward the east. Type 2 is a large grave (T4) with several individuals, a large number and variety of artifacts, an asymmetrical skeleton arrangement, and the higher-status individual's head facing east (as in the Type 1 graves). However, Type 2 differs in that the higher-status individual does not occupy the center. Type 3 is a small grave with few individuals; the small number and variety of artifacts are unique features of this type (T1).

Ten graves were excavated in Area 2. The excavators did not report sex or age. The skeletons drawn on previous plans of this area (Lleras-Pérez and Barillas Cordón 1985:27) seem to be adults buried individually, except in two cases (T11 and T13) that could be multiple burials of two adults (Figure 14.13). All graves (T4–9, T11–13, and T15) contain ceramics from the Late Conte and Macaracas stylistic groups, so they are concurrent with T1, T2, T4, and T7 of Area 1.

Table 14.3 Types of archaeological deposits at Area 1.

GRAVE CODE	TYPES AND QUANTITY OF DEPOSITS
T1	1 (1), 3 (1), 5 (1)
T2	1 (3), 2 (2), 3 (1), 4 (1), 5 (1)
T4	1(1), 3 (1)
T7	1 (1), 2 (2), 4 (1)

Figure 14.2

Map of the graves of El Caño Area 1.
Illustration by Julia Mayo Torné.

MAYO TORNÉ • MAYO TORNÉ • GUINEA BUENO • HERVÁS HERRERA • HERRERÍN LÓPEZ • FERNÁNDEZ-VALMAYOR CRESPO

Figure 14.3

a) Burial (SU105) from Grave T1 (photograph by Julia Mayo Torné); b) Type 5 deposit (SU096); and c) Type 3 deposit (SU099) (photographs by Mercedes Guinea Bueno).

a

b

c

Figure 14.4 a) Burial containing the main occupant of Grave T2 (SU134); b) burials (SU088 and SU106) and Type 2 deposits (SU103 and SU104); c) Type 3 deposits (SU131 and SU138); d) Type 5 deposit (SU100); and e) Type 4 deposit (SU087). Photographs by Julia Mayo Torné.

MAYO TORNÉ • MAYO TORNÉ • GUINEA BUENO • HERVÁS HERRERA • HERRERÍN LÓPEZ • FERNÁNDEZ-VALMAYOR CRESPO

a

b

Figure 14.5 a) Burial (SU391) from Grave T4 (photograph by Miguel Ángel Hervás); and b) deposit Type 3 (SU110) (photograph by Julia Mayo Torné).

Table 14.4 Grave types at Area 1.

CLASSIFICATION CODE	GRAVE	SIZE (M³ OF THE FOSSA)	Nº ARTIFACTS	Nº ARTIFACTS CATEGORY	Nº INDIVIDUALS	COMPOSITION	ORIENTATION OF THE PRINCIPAL OCCUPANT	LOCATION OF THE PRINCIPAL OCCUPANT
1	T2	70	1,239	61	27	symmetric	east	center
1	T7	60	921	46	28–41	asymmetric	east	center
2	T4	55	439	38	32–36	asymmetric	east	sideward
3	T1	27	197	18	8	symmetric	north	center

Goals, Methods, and Materials

Goals

The goals of this research have been to determine the social complexity at El Caño and to investigate whether it is the same as at Sitio Conte. To this effect, we first examined two topics: 1) the social distribution of wealth as represented by mortuary goods among people of different sex and age in El Caño graves; and 2) the distribution of graves of individuals of high and low status. We next looked at these same variables at Sitio Conte. Finally, we compared the results.

Methods

To evaluate the distribution of wealth, we observed the relationship between the quantity and variety of mortuary ensembles and the sex and age of individuals, paying special attention to children's burials. El Caño's graves contain many offerings, some of which were not part of the burials but were placed inside graves sometime after the act of burial (that is, after the bodies were interred). In the first part of the analysis procedure, we classified the offerings, burials, and graves. This part of the process has been fundamental in determining which items were placed in the grave during the funeral and which are the product of post-funeral ritual behaviors, and therefore, which buried individuals, mortuary ensembles, offerings, and other furnishings are relevant to the study. We classified offerings based on their contents, the spatial relationships among them, and their locations within defined pits. Graves were classified based on the quantity and variety of mortuary ensembles and other artifacts found next to the individuals. We observed the relationships among the sets of artifacts and the sexes and ages of the individuals. Finally, we classified the graves to observe whether there was consistency among their sizes and the statuses of the principal individuals—that is, the individual(s) buried with the greatest amount and variety of artifacts. This classification considered the grave size, the number of individuals, the quantity and variety of artifacts, the total number of artifacts, and the orientation of the principal individual(s).

To strengthen our interpretation of the possible differences between the societies represented by El Caño and Sitio Conte, we compared the distribution of wealth in both necropolises. The variables observed at Sitio Conte are not the same as at El Caño, so we adjusted the data we used to two variables observed in both places:

1) the quantity and variety of artifacts, and 2) the quantity of sumptuary artifacts.[5] El Caño's and Sitio Conte's sumptuary artifacts are similar and seem to have the same social value or importance, because they have been found only in large, rich graves in both sites. We used the Ward Analysis Cluster with Euclidean Distance, which Briggs also used, in order to compare our results with his. We use the concept of "cluster cutoff" (Greenacre 2017)—the value of the distance at which clusters are formed—to reveal the categorical variable that underlies our data set. For that, we add a third variable to the two variables described below: the proportion between the variety of total artifacts and the variety of sumptuary artifacts, measured as a percentage. Subgroups that join at a distance less than this value are put in the same cluster; subgroups that join at a distance greater than this value are placed in a different cluster.

Materials

In the classification of graves at El Caño, we used data from graves T1, T2, T4, and T7 of Area 1. We selected them because they date to the same phase (900–1000 CE) and were not disturbed. We included T1 because, although it was affected by the excavation of T4, the damage was small. In the classification of burials, we took mortuary ensembles into account. Sometimes we encountered limitations relating to mortuary ensembles and individuals due to their proximity. For this reason, our records have two levels of information: 1) mortuary ensembles that are clearly related to specific skeletons, usually objects of their dress or headdress, and/or artifacts that were placed on or next to the body; and 2) objects whose association with a specific skeleton is unclear. We did not consider cases in which the associations were unclear in the classification of burials, although we did take them into account in the classification of graves.

In the comparative analysis of mortuary space organization, we considered data from Sitio Conte as revised by Briggs (1989:242–250, 251) and the drawing of Trench I as excavated by Lothrop (1937:210, fig. 203; Figure 14.11). This map contains twenty-three graves: six with Late Conte ceramics, fourteen with Early Conte ceramics, and three with Late Conte ceramics (Lothrop 1942:199).[6] For El Caño, together with our own data (Area 1), we used the data and a map of the 1982–1984 excavations (Lleras-Pérez and Barillas Cordón 1985:21–26, 27) of Graves T4–T9, T11–T13, and T15 of Area 2 at El Caño. All of these tombs contained Late Conte ceramics.

MAYO TORNÉ • MAYO TORNÉ • GUINEA BUENO • HERVÁS HERRERA • HERRERÍN LÓPEZ • FERNÁNDEZ-VALMAYOR CRESPO

Results

Distribution of Wealth in the Graves

As we illustrate in Tables 14.5–14.7, the majority of the most richly dressed individuals are males and subadults. Males have forty-six categories of associated artifacts, of which seventeen are sumptuary. Subadult individuals have seventeen categories of associated artifacts, of which nine are sumptuary (Figures 14.6–14.7). Women have five categories of associated artifacts, of which three are sumptuary. Thus, males, followed by subadult individuals, have a greater variety of sumptuary artifact categories.

The individuals with the most artifacts, in absolute terms, are also males and subadults. Subadult individuals do not have artifacts uniquely related to their age, and women's attire has also been observed in males. This presence of subadult individuals within the elite group at El Caño conforms to a pattern very different from that of Sitio Conte, where the elite group is formed exclusively by adult males and burials of elite women and children were absent. We interpret the use of a special necropolis and the evidence for ascribed status of children as indicating social stratification.

Table 14.5 Infant mortuary ensembles: Graves T1, T4, and T7.

CLASSIFICATION CODE	MORTUARY ENSEMBLE	GRAVE CODE: INDIVIDUAL CODE
1	gold armbands	
1a	gold armband (4), gold pectoral (2), gold pendant (1), pendant of gold and resin (1), pendant of resin (3), necklace of feline phalanxes (1), gold belt of spherical beads (1), artifact of greenstone beads (1), and stone pendant (1)	T7:I4
1b	gold armband (2)	T1:I2
2	quartz crystal, gold bead	T4:I4
3	adze (2)	T7:I21
4	dog-teeth belt (1), package of projectile points (1), and stingray spine (1)	T7:I21
5	flute (1)	T7:I35
6	drilled shark tooth (3)	T7:I27
7	stingray spine (1)	T7:I3
8	without attire	T1:I3; T4:I16, I22, I37; T7:I22, I24, I43, I5, I9, I14, I23, I19, I45, I46, I47

Table 14.6 Female mortuary ensembles: Graves T1, T4, and T7.

CLASSIFICATION CODE	MORTUARY ENSEMBLE	GRAVE CODE: INDIVIDUAL CODE
1	bone pendant (1)	T7:I6, I13
2	dog-teeth artifact (1)	T7:I2
3	belt of feline teeth and flute (1)	T7:I12
4	dog-tooth artifact, flute, and nose clip (1)	T7:I18
5	without attire	T1:I6, I7; T4:I2, I17, I24, I36; T7:I28, I33

Table 14.7 Male mortuary ensembles: Graves T1, T2, T4, and T7.

CLASSIFICATION CODE	MORTUARY ENSEMBLE	GRAVE CODE: INDIVIDUAL CODE
1	gold armbands and disk	
1a	gold armband (6), gold pectoral (4), plaques (14), belt (2), necklace (1), ear rod of gold (6), ear rod of stone and gold (4), ear rod of wood and gold (8), ingot (1), pectoral fragment (1), pendant (1), gold figure (1), belt of whale and feline teeth (1), skirt of bird bones (1), bone accessory (3), artifact of shark-teeth beads (1), bone and ivory pendant (8), stone axes (4), necklace of greenstone beads (1), pyrite mirror (2), stone pendant (2), and package of stingray spine (1)	**T2/UE134**:I7
1b	gold armband (2), gold pectoral (2), belt of spherical beads with gold covers (1), ear rods of gold (2), ear rods of gold and wood (2), ear rods of gold and stone (2), belt of dog-teeth beads (1), bracelet of teeth from various species of animals (2), shark-tooth artifact (1), bone or ivory pendant (2), adze (2), greenstone artifact (1), and stone pendant (1)	**T7/UE301**:I7
1c	gold armband (4), gold pectoral (1), belt of spherical beads with gold covers (1), necklace of gold circular beads (1), earrings, each a gold-covered sperm whale tooth (2), bracelet of dog teeth found with gold beads (2), copper pendant (2), artifact of greenstone beads (1), perforated emerald (1), bracelet of perforated dog tooth (2), belt of greenstone beads (1), necklace of double pendants of tumbaga (1)	**T4**:I1
2	pyrite mirror (1), artifact of greenstone beads (1), artifact of gold beads (1), pendant of resin and gold covers (1), and gold pendant (1)	**T4**:I6
3	belt (1), chisel (2), gold pendant (2), artifact of gold beads (1), mirror base (1), ear rod (1), pendant (2), and stone projectile point (2)	**T2/UE134**:I16
4	ear rod of wood and gold (1), pendant of gold (1), adze (2), polisher stone (1), stone point (6), and hammer stone (1)	**T2/UE134**:I13
5	axe, adze	**T2/UE134**:I1, I2, I3, I11
5a	axe, adze, and/or chisel, bracelet of dog teeth (1), and ear rod (1)	**T2/UE134**:I4
5b	axe, adze, and/or chisel, bracelet of dog teeth (1), and bracelet of bone or ivory (1)	**T2/UE134**:I10
5c	axe, adze, and/or chisel, bracelet of dog teeth (1), and dog teeth artifact (1)	**T7/UE301**:I15
5d	axe, adze, and/or chisel, bracelet of dog teeth (1), and wood and gold figure (1)	**T1/UE105**:I4

Table 14.7 *continued*

CLASSIFICATION CODE	MORTUARY ENSEMBLE	GRAVE CODE: INDIVIDUAL CODE
5e	axe, adze (1), and projectile point (1)	**T4**:I8
6	adze (1)	**T4**:I5;**T4**:I30
7	adze (1), bone artifact (1), perforated dog-teeth artifact (1), artifact of perforated shark and dog teeth (1), and artifact made of bird bones (1)	**T4**:I35
8	axe (1) and artifact of perforated human teeth (1)	**T4**:I12
9	bracelet of bird-bone beads (1), package of projectile stone (1), and hammer stone (1)	**T2/UE134**:I9
10	gold ear rod (1)	**T2/UE134**:I12
11	pendant (1) and artifact made of bird bones (1)	**T2/UE134**:I14
12	shark-tooth artifact (1)	**T2/UE134**:I15
13	necklace of deer teeth (1)	**T2/UE134**:I18
14	bone or ivory artifact (1)	**T7/UE301**:I1; **T4**:I7; **T4**:I29
15	dog-tooth artifact (1)	**T7/UE301**:I11
16	artifact of human teeth (1)	**T7/UE301**:I16
17	stingray spine (3)	**T7/UE301**:I25
18	necklace of feline teeth (1)	**T7/UE301**:I30
19	stingray spine (1), belt of the teeth of a dog and other species (1), artifact of shark teeth (1), and adze (1)	**T7/UE301**:I31
20	flute (1)	**T7/UE301**:I34
21	gold pendant (1)	**T7/UE301**:I36
22	necklace of tumbaga pendants (1) and bone artifact (1)	**T4**:I10
23	arrowhead (1), polisher stone (1), and peccary tooth (1)	**T4**:I11
24	without attire	**T2/UE134**:I5, I6, I8, I17, I19; **T4**:I14, I18, I21, I23, I25, I26, I27, I28, I31, I34

a

b

c

Figure 14.6 a) Burial (SU301) from Grave T7; and b–c) Type 2 deposits (SU252 and SU257). Photographs by Miguel Ángel Hervás and Manuel Antonio Franco Fernández.
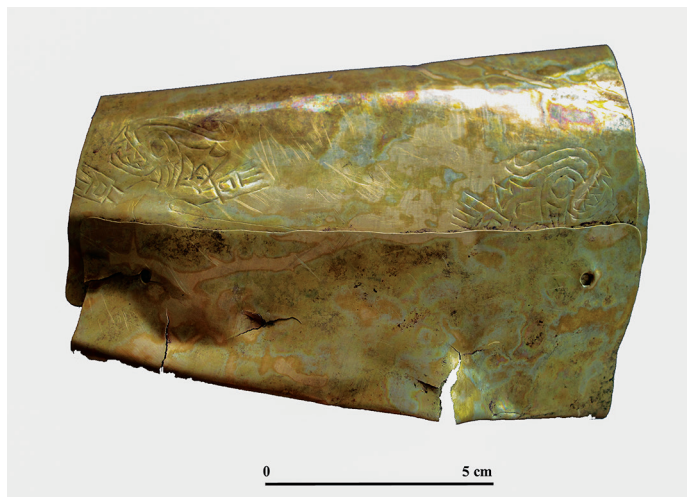
MAYO TORNÉ · MAYO TORNÉ · GUINEA BUENO · HERVÁS HERRERA · HERRERÍN LÓPEZ · FERNÁNDEZ-VALMAYOR CRESPO

Figure 14.7 The mortuary ensemble of subadult Individual I4 of Grave T7 includes: a–b) armbands (4); c–d) pectorals (2); e) gold pendant; f) pieces of a headband of gold and copper; g) wax beads covered in gold that made up a necklace; h) wax beads covered in gold that made up a belt; i) resin pendant covered in gold; j–l) resin pendants; m) resin beads (2); n) beads of greenstone that made up a necklace; o) pyrite mirror; p) agate pendant; q) quartz crystal; r) projectile point; s) phalanges of an unspecified animal that made up a necklace; t) spines of a pufferfish (Tetraodontidae); and u) perforated antler from a deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). The pyrite mirror was found covering the head of Individual I4. On it were placed the agate pendant and pufferfish spines, which were articulated. One of the gold armbands of a subadult individual buried in Grave T1 is pictured to the left. Photographs by Julia Mayo Torné and Mercedes Guinea Bueno.
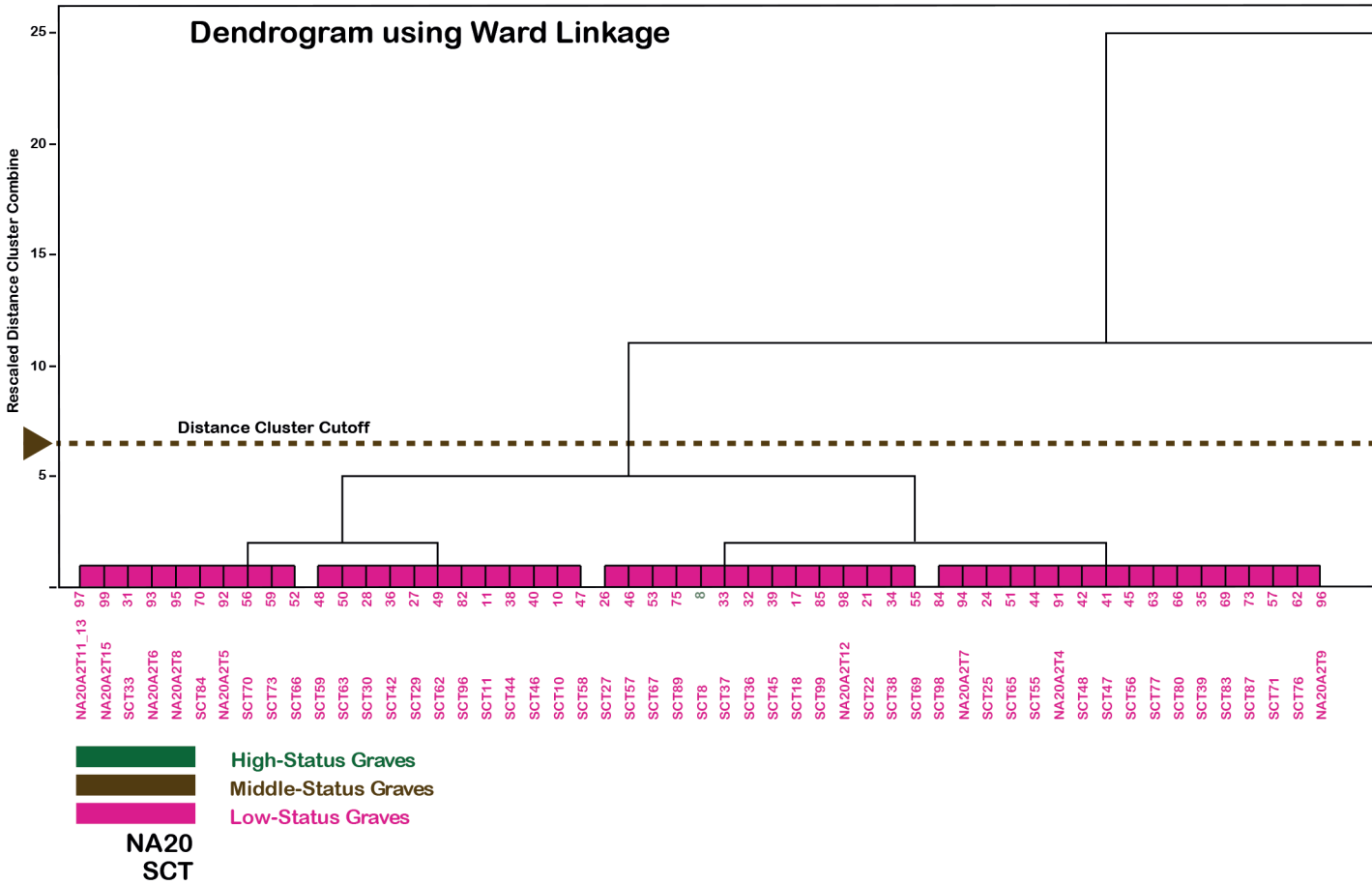
Figure 14.8 Clusters of graves at Sitio Conte and El Caño based on the data referring to the number of categories of artifacts of gold, bone, stone, and ceramics. The codes of Sitio Conte's graves are those assigned by Briggs. To these codes, we have added the abbreviations SC. We have added NA20A1 to the codes of the El Caño graves of Area 1 and NA20A2 to the codes of the graves of Area 2. Dendrogram by Julia Mayo Torné and Liliane Fernández Mayo.

Cluster Analysis Results and Differences between El Caño and Sitio Conte

The data (Figure 14.8) suggests a categorical variable that underlies the structure of our data set that we call "grave status." This variable partitions our data into three clusters that we call "high status," "middle status," and "low status" (Figure 14.9). A bidimensional approach to the clusters (Figure 14.10) reveals the following:

CLUSTER I (HIGH-STATUS GRAVES)

A linear correlation exists between the number of non-sumptuary and sumptuary objects in each grave, indicating that the cumulative pattern observed by Briggs at Sitio Conte is also observed at El Caño. There is also a tendency, which is much stronger at El Caño, to form

two groups that could be related to the size of the graves and the number of individuals buried in them. El Caño's high-status graves are the largest and contain a greater number of individuals; however, at Sitio Conte there are small-dimension graves with only one or a few individuals that contain a large amount and variety of burial goods.

CLUSTER II (MIDDLE-STATUS GRAVES)

This includes only Sitio Conte graves; their absence at El Caño could indicate that middle-status graves, if any exist, are in a different, and as yet unidentified, location.

CLUSTER III (LOW-STATUS GRAVES)

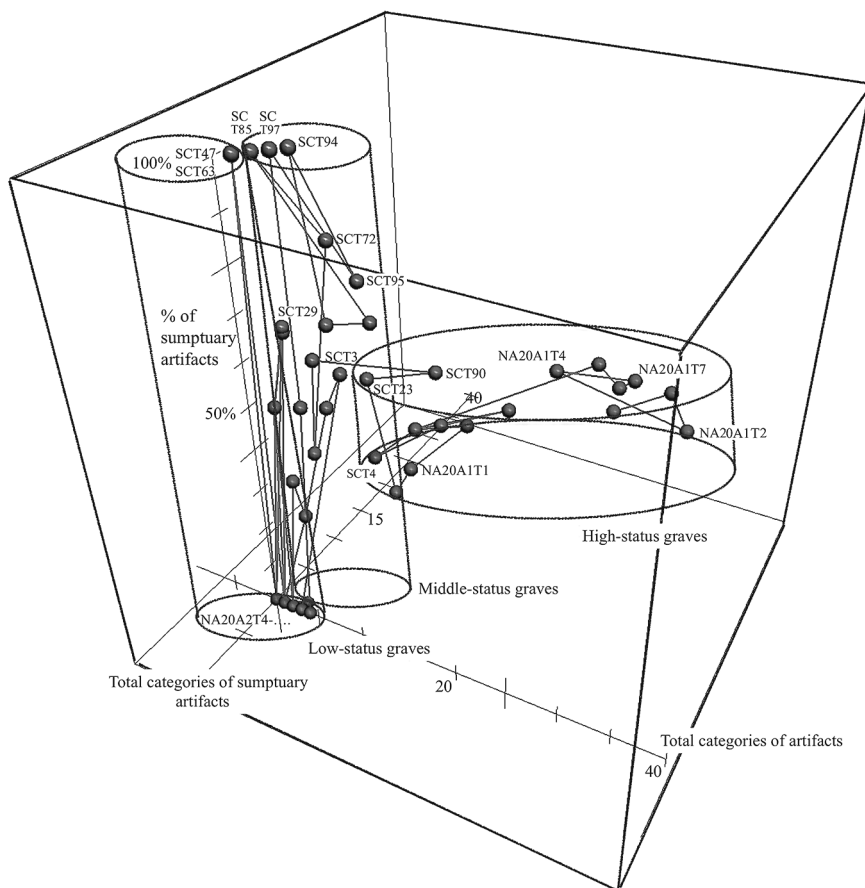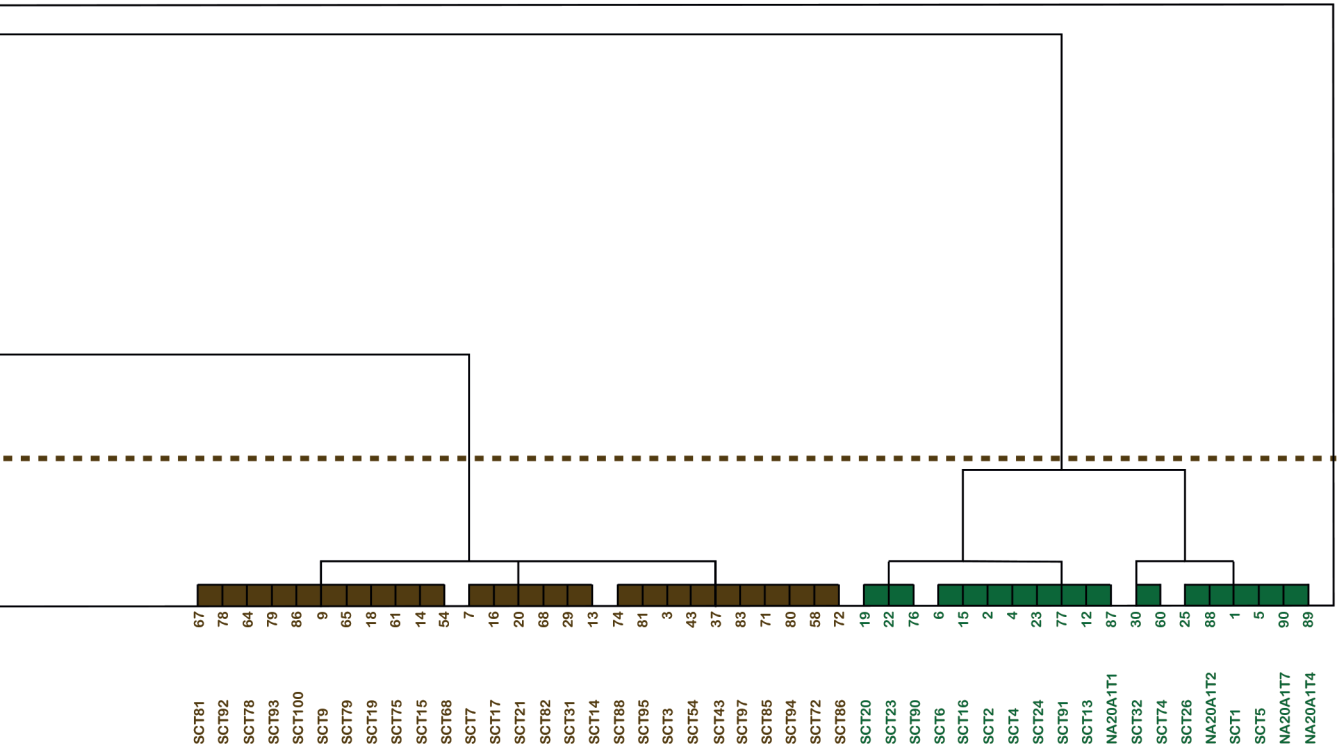This is the most abundant cluster and includes graves of Sitio Conte and El Caño.

The dendrogram at the top shows a cluster analysis with labels:

67 78 64 79 86 9 65 18 61 14 54 7 16 20 68 29 13 74 81 3 43 37 83 71 80 58 72 19 22 76 6 15 2 4 23 77 12 87 30 60 25 88 1 5 90 89

SCT81 SCT92 SCT78 SCT93 SCT100 SCT9 SCT79 SCT19 SCT75 SCT15 SCT68 SCT7 SCT17 SCT21 SCT82 SCT31 SCT14 SCT88 SCT95 SCT3 SCT54 SCT43 SCT97 SCT85 SCT94 SCT72 SCT86 SCT20 SCT23 SCT90 SCT6 SCT16 SCT2 SCT4 SCT24 SCT91 SCT13 NA20A1T1 SCT32 SCT74 SCT26 NA20A1T2 SCT1 SCT5 NA20A1T7 NA20A1T4

Figure 14.9
Tridimensional projection of the cluster analysis. Illustration by Alfredo Fernández-Valmayor Crespo.
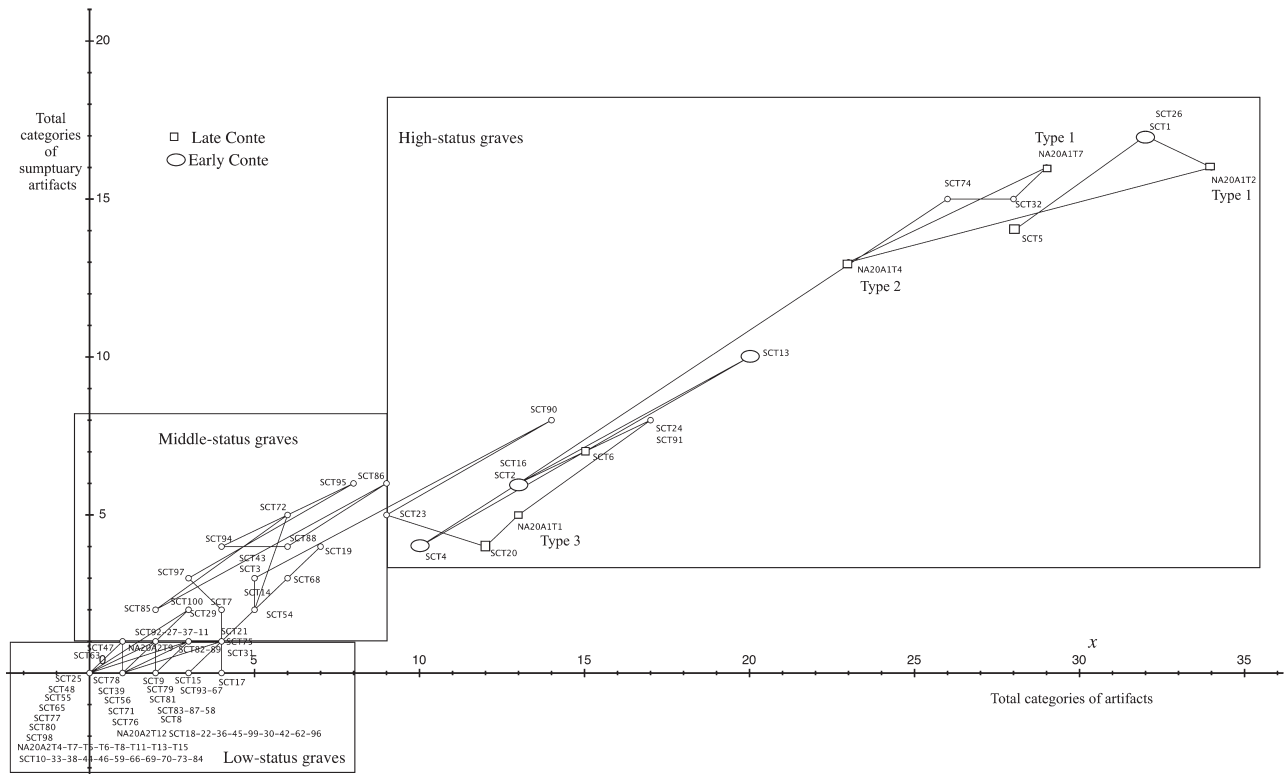
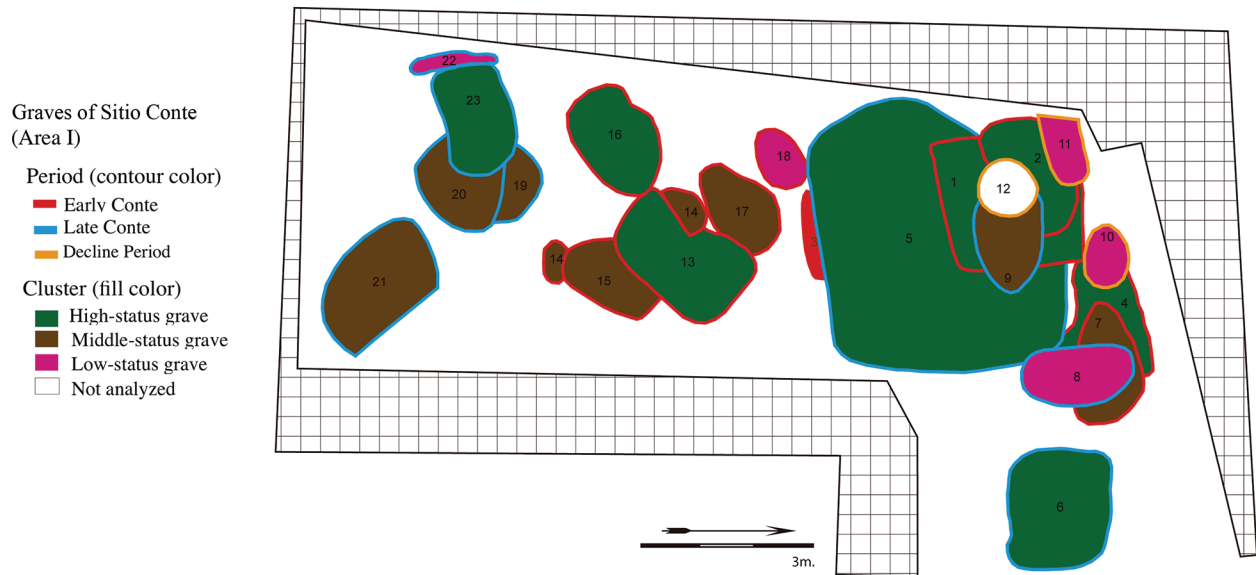**Figure 14.10** Bidimensional projection of the cluster analysis. Illustration by Alfredo Fernández-Valmayor Crespo.

Figure 14.11 Plan of the graves (fossa edges) located in Trench I at Sitio Conte (Lothrop 1937:210, fig. 203). Drawing by Carlos Mayo Torné.
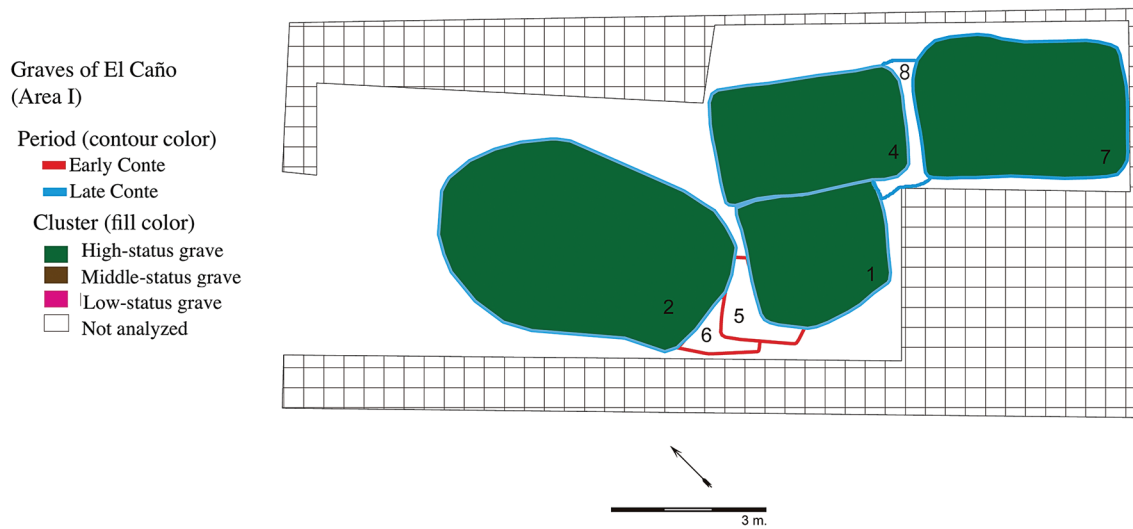
   MAYO TORNÉ · MAYO TORNÉ · GUINEA BUENO · HERVÁS HERRERA · HERRERÍN LÓPEZ · FERNÁNDEZ-VALMAYOR CRESPO

Graves of El Caño
(Area I)

Period (contour color)
■ Early Conte
■ Late Conte

Cluster (fill color)
■ High-status grave
■ Middle-status grave
■ Low-status grave
□ Not analyzed

3 m.

Figure 14.12 Plan of the graves (fossa edges) located in Area 1 at El Caño. Drawing by Carlos Mayo Torné.
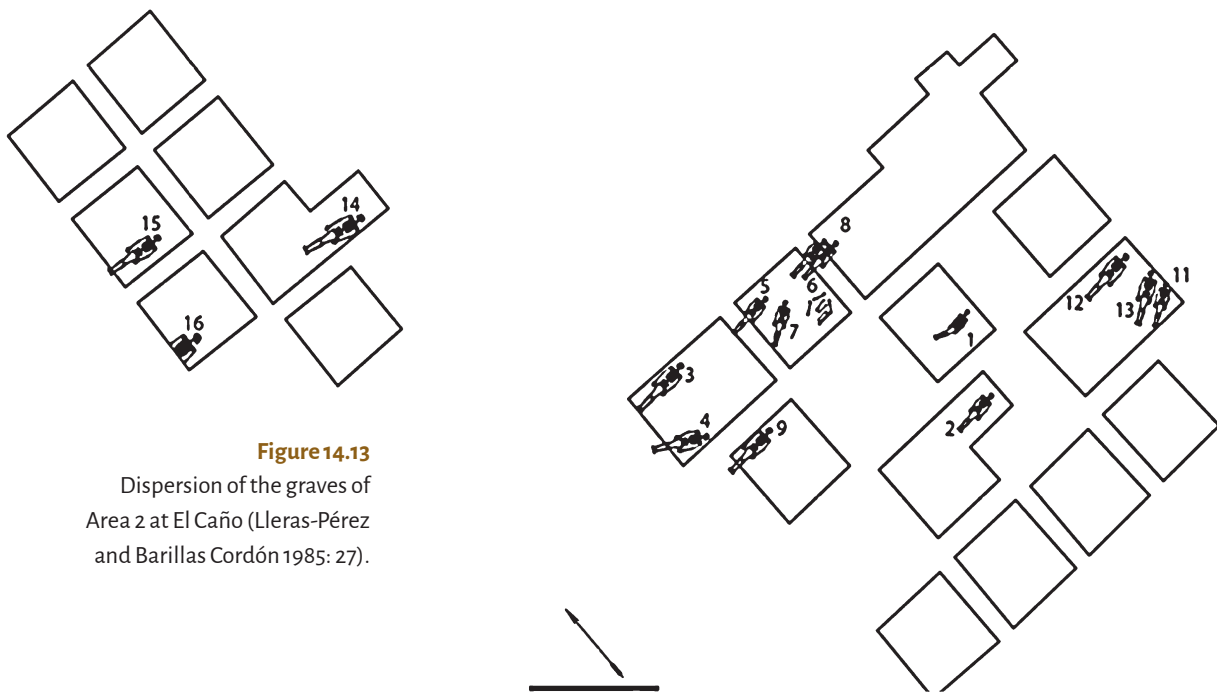

Figure 14.13
Dispersion of the graves of
Area 2 at El Caño (Lleras-Pérez
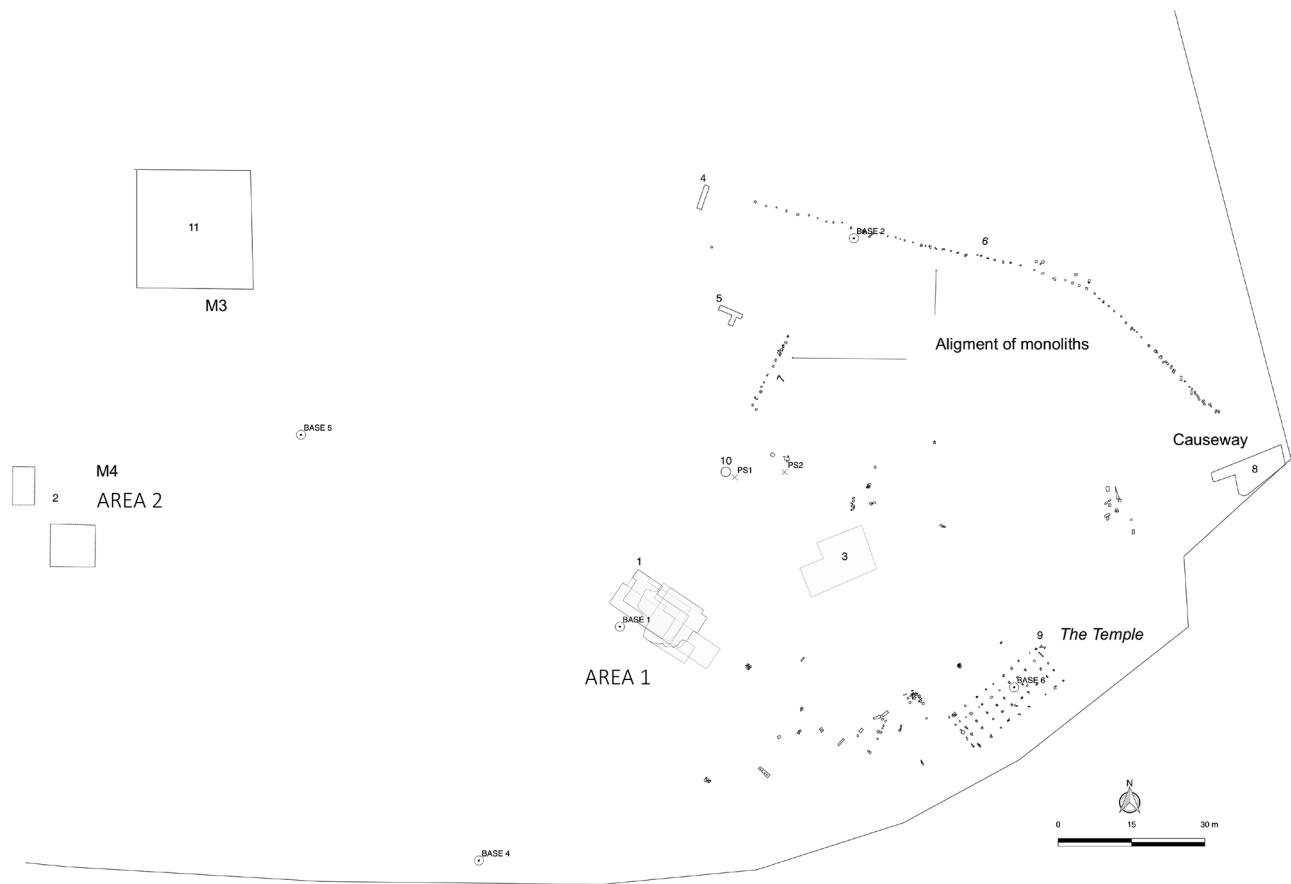and Barillas Cordón 1985: 27).

Figure 14.14 Map of the El Caño Archaeological Park, archaeological structures and excavation areas. Drawing by Carlos Mayo Torné.

A comparison of the distribution of clusters at Sitio Conte and El Caño shows some significant differences between them. The map of Sitio Conte's Trench I (Figure 14.11) shows that there are clusters with low-, middle-, and high-status graves. In contrast, Area 1 of El Caño (Figure 14.12) contains only high-status graves. Low-status tombs are located in Area 2 (Figures 14.13–14.14). Another important difference between the two sites relates to the spatial organization of the graves. In Areas 1 and 2 at El Caño, the graves are aligned and parallel; however, graves in Trench I at Sitio Conte are distributed without apparent orientation.

Discussion

Briggs identifies the society responsible for Sitio Conte as having been hierarchical with acquired status. At Sitio Conte, high- and low-status people were buried close to one another. Graves containing low-status burials are in the majority and those containing high-status burials are in the minority, so the apparent social structure is pyramidal. The pattern observed by Briggs suggests that only a few people had access to artifacts with the highest social value, a characteristic of hierarchical societies in which differences among individual access to goods is based on status (Tainter 1978). For Briggs (1989), Cooke, Isaza, et al. (2003), and Linares (1977b), the absence of rich subadult individuals at Sitio Conte means that this society, although hierarchical, was not stratified. These authors were probably right. This pattern also occurs at El Caño, but here we also find burials of subadult individuals with rich mortuary ensembles. Moreover, the necropolis at El Caño was organized spatially according to wealth. Rich, subadult individuals and the existence of a special area only for people of high status (Area 1) and another for people of low status (Area 2) are two complementary

indicators consistent with the existence of a society that, besides being hierarchical, was stratified, with at least some status being inherited. Our analysis of El Caño adds the stratified society to the variety of sociopolitical complexity previously observed in the Greater Coclé tradition by Briggs (1989). How can we explain these differences between El Caño and Sitio Conte when we are considering two necropolises of the same cultural tradition that were contemporaneous and in close proximity? El Caño is very close to Sitio Conte, but one necropolis sits on the west bank of the Río Grande (El Caño) and the other on the east bank (Sitio Conte). It is possible that they were built out of what Renfrew (Renfrew and Bahn 2011) calls "competitive rivalry" and that the river marked the boundary between two chiefdoms at the time. Engaged in a fierce competition to appear more powerful than the other, two chiefdoms may have measured their strength by building necropolises and preparing lavish funerals. How these two societies lived within this relationship of inequality is a crucial issue to be addressed in future studies. El Caño promises to be one of the most important sites for the study of the regional political relationships among groups and the factors involved in the processes of change that occurred in the societies of the Isthmo-Colombian Area. The analysis we present here allows us to approach an understanding of the regional political landscape, something fundamental to refining future models of sociopolitical organization in the Isthmus.

Conclusion

When the results of Briggs's studies of Sitio Conte are compared with ours at El Caño, it appears that these Greater Coclé necropolises represent two different societies with dissimilar norms of social behavior—both to regulate how they demonstrated their status and how they organized their mortuary spaces. The burials of two high-status subadult individuals at El Caño suggest that the group buried there was composed of people with inherited status and that the lineages were hierarchical. This interpretation is reinforced by how the rich and poor interments were distributed. The society of El Caño may have organized its mortuary space seeking to segregate lineages based on their respective social statuses.

Acknowledgments

NOTES

1 We use the term *necropolis* to refer to a constructed space intended for funerary rituals. The necropolis at El Caño was organized in two spaces: a cemetery that contained graves with structures made of wood, and a ceremonial space that contained structures made of wood and of stone.

2 Throughout this essay we will use the term *grave* to refer to the constructed space—apparently made of wood—in which the bodies of the deceased were placed, and we will use the term *burial* to refer to the body or bodies of the deceased as well as the mortuary ensembles and offerings with which they were interred.

3 Recently, Fenton (2015) examined the unsexed individuals and associated artifacts from the Penn Museum burials; she determined the possible sex of the deceased based on patterns that seem to indicate that projectile points, winged stone pendants, and ornaments with animal or human iconography are more likely to be associated with males.

4 In T2 (ODA, ID 421 and ID 969), T7 (ODA, ID 2688), and T3 (an unexcavated tomb [ODA, ID 968]), we found small pectorals, armbands, and a gold necklace not associated with human remains. They were interpreted as the high-status mortuary ensemble of a child whose bones had disappeared through decay, or as artifacts representing children. Fundación El Caño maintains a data repository (ODA) that holds records and study objects with descriptions, photographs, plans, and videos; see http://oda-fec .org/nata/view/paginas/view_paginas.php?id=1.

5 Of the sixty-nine categories of artifacts described by him, twenty-two are sumptuary mortuary objects: 1) stone pendants, 2) stone beads, 3) ear decorations, 4) metal plates, 5) metal disks, 6) metal beads, 7) metal figures, 8) metal pendants, 9) cuffs or shin guards, 10) metal rings or armbands, 11) helmets or headgear, 12) bone pendants, 13) bone figures, 14) bone beads, 15) sperm whale teeth, 16) shark teeth, 17) jaguar teeth, 18) dog teeth, 19) unknown animal teeth, 20) peccary canine teeth, 21) stingray spines, and 22) resin figurines.

6 Lothrop referred to them as Late Period.