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**Correlating Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence at La Sufricaya,
Holmul, Petén**



Research Year: 2005

Culture: Maya

Chronology: Early Classic to Terminal Classic

Location: Holmul, Petén, Guatemala

Site: La Sufricaya

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Site History](#)

[Objectives of 2005 Season](#)

[Mural 7](#)

[Structure 1](#)

[Group 16](#)

[Conclusions](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[List of Figures](#)

[Sources Cited](#)

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Introduction

This report summarizes the results of the 2005 field season at La Sufricaya, located in the Holmul region of the eastern Petén, Guatemala (Figure 1). Funding from FAMSI supported a team of archaeologists, epigraphers, conservators and specialists in the excavation, conservation and documentation of an important hieroglyphic mural. This mural, which dates to the Early Classic period (A.D. 250-500), commemorates events associated with the Teotihuacán "entrada" to the Petén and the accompanying sociopolitical changes in the region during this time period (Coggins 1975, 1976; Proskouriakoff 1993; Martin and Grube 2000; Stuart 2000). The mural is also one of the few glyphic texts recovered *in situ* from the Holmul region and provides crucial information concerning the ruling elite and their role in the larger region of the Maya lowlands.



Figure 1. Map of Mesoamerica with location of La Sufricaya.

This exciting and intriguing discovery has generated numerous questions about the sociopolitical history of La Sufricaya and the role of its inhabitants in both local and regional history. Based on numerous lines of evidence suggesting foreign contact between La Sufricaya and central México (Estrada-Belli 2003a; Estrada-Belli and Foley 2004; Grube 2003; Foley 2005), the foremost question concerned the degree and nature of this foreign influence at the site. Specifically, we wondered if La Sufricaya was the site of a foreign enclave, and therefore direct contact between the sites, or if the foreign styles were restricted to the elite and ritual contexts within Structure 1 and reflected indirect contact. Therefore, a new phase of excavation was initiated during the 2005 field season with the objective of determining the extent of foreign influence at La Sufricaya. Test excavations in residential complexes surrounding the ceremonial core were carried out with the hope that they would provide information concerning the identity and role of the inhabitants of the site and their possible sociopolitical connections to Teotihuacán. This correlation of archaeological and epigraphic data will constitute a solid basis for applying and evaluating models of interaction between the Maya and Teotihuacán.

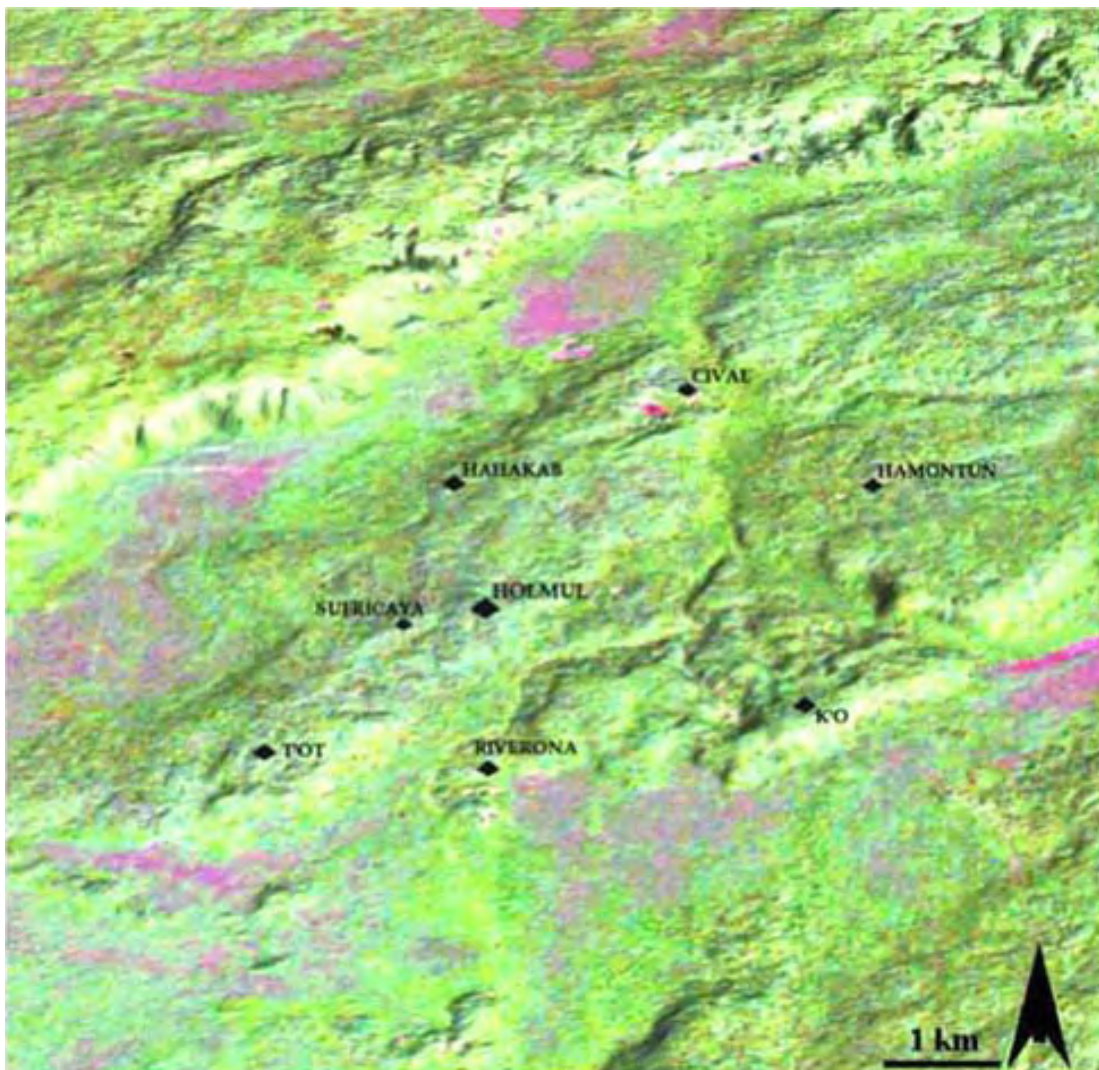


Figure 2. Map of the Holmul region with the location of La Sufricaya. (Map courtesy of F. Estrada-Belli.)

Site History

La Sufricaya is a minor center located 1.2 km from the Holmul site center, and consists of a ceremonial core located atop a large platform approximately 3 m high (Figure 2, shown above). The ceremonial core is comprised of a modest acropolis atop an 11 m high basal structure, a ball court and a funerary temple. The ceremonial core is surrounded by residential groups, most of which date to the Late and Terminal Classic periods; although we presume that an Early Classic phase of occupation contemporary with the ceremonial core is buried beneath the last construction phase of these groups. A number of re-deposited stela fragments have been located throughout the site, which represent the only known carved and dated monuments within the Holmul region. One of these fragments, Stela 6, may contain the name glyph of S'ihyaj K'ahk', the foreign lord mentioned on Tikal Stela 31, Uaxactún Stela 5 and monuments throughout the Petén (Grube 2003; Martin and Grube 2000; Stuart 2000).

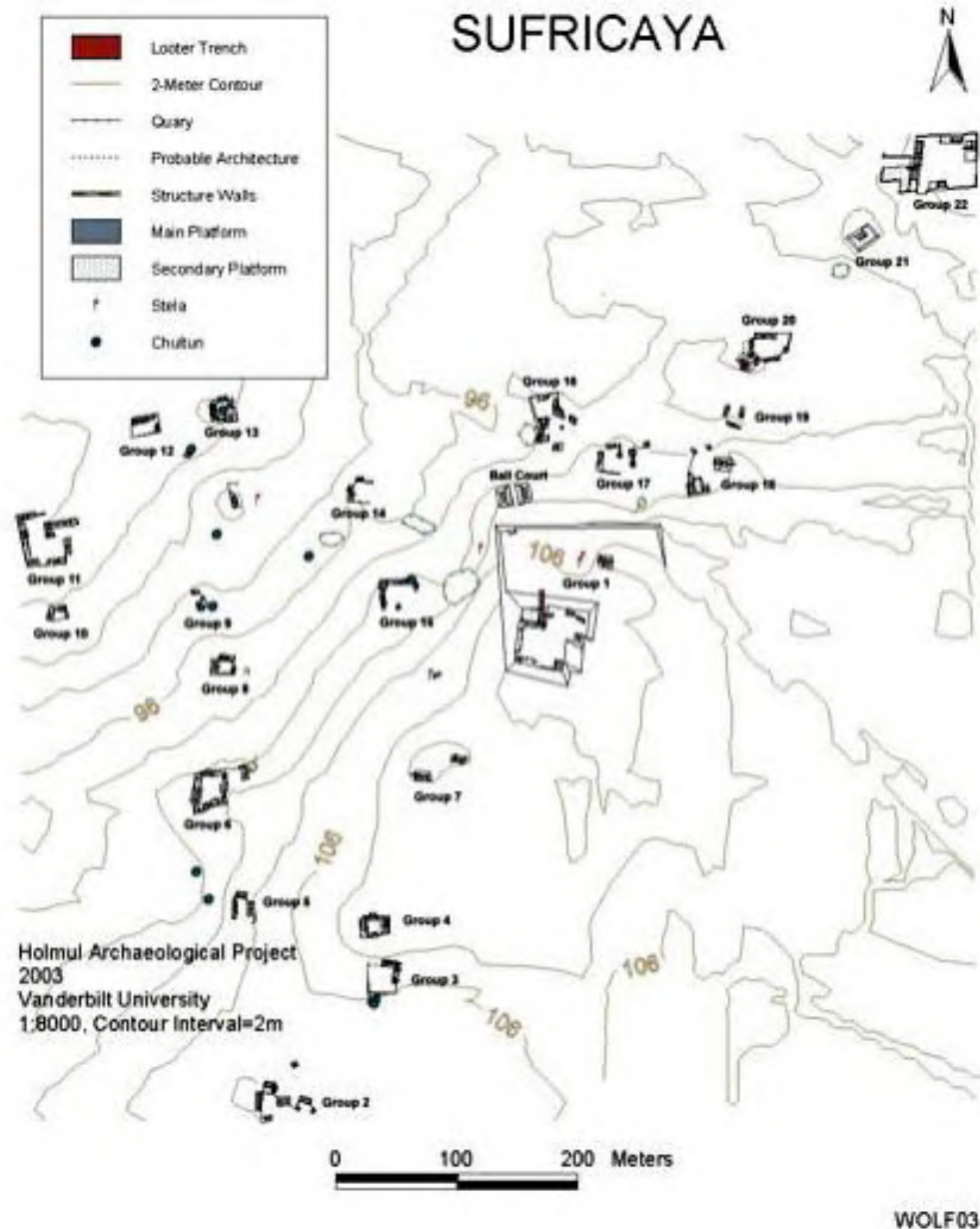


Figure 3. Map of La Sufricaya. (Map created by Marc Wolf.)

Since 2001, excavations at the site have focused on Structure 1, which has been revealed to be a complex of individual structures surrounding an interior courtyard (Figure 3, shown above). A number of these structures contain murals, which though poorly preserved, have provided intriguing glimpses into the political history of La Sufricaya. Murals 1-3, located within room 1, depict Maya lords along with seated figures wearing central Mexican attire and carrying *atlatis* and dart points (Estrada-Belli 2003a, 2003b, 2004). While much of the murals have been destroyed, it is tempting to interpret these figures as emissaries from Teotihuacán who have come to La

Sufricaya, or the Petén, to bear witness to an important dynastic event. Mural 6 and 6 North portray processions of costumed figures as well as a Maya figure ascending a temple followed by a trail of footprints. This figure extends his arm as if to grasp the object proffered by a seated figure on top of the temple. This tableau may represent the mythical, or actual, attainment of royal power by a lord from La Sufricaya (Foley 2005).

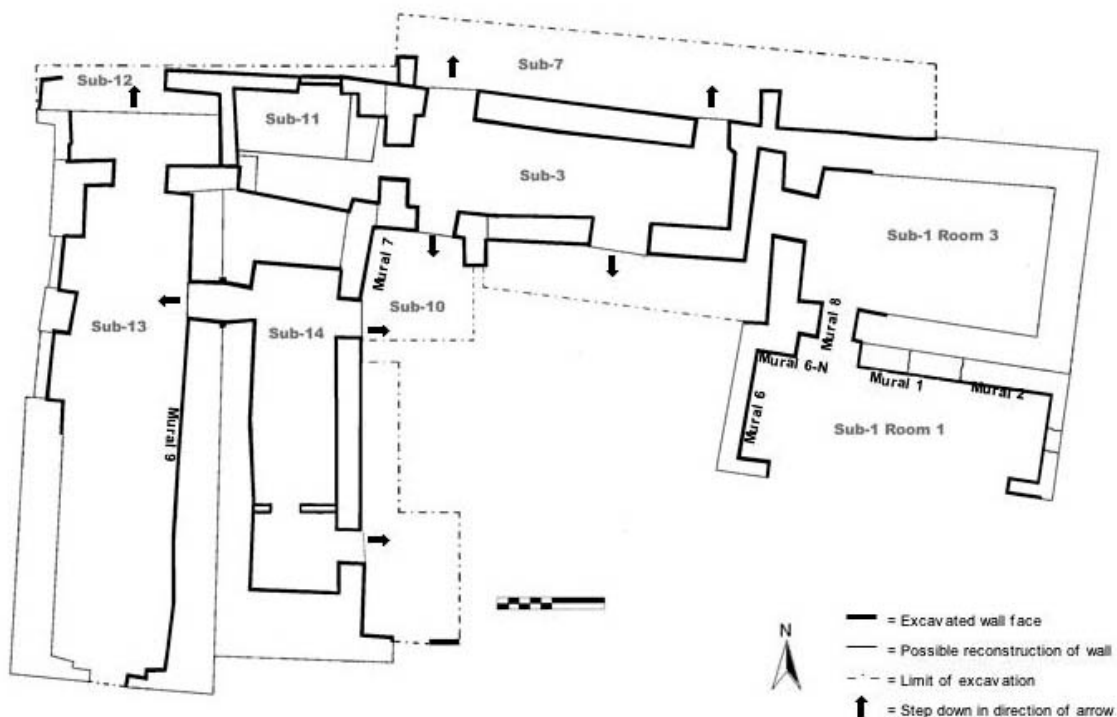


Figure 4. Plan of La Sufricaya Structure 1 with the locations of murals. (Plan drawn by the author.)

At the end of the 2004 field season, Mural 7 was discovered while clearing rubble fill from another section of Structure 1 (Foley 2005). This area, which was designated sub-10 during excavation, is actually the northwest corner of the interior courtyard formed by the adjoining corners of the individual structures denominated sub-3 and sub-14 (Figure 4, shown above). Mural 7 is painted on the outside of the eastern wall of sub-14, which is a long, vaulted structure measuring 6.2 m long and 1.5 m wide with doors at the northern and southern ends. The mural was discovered at the end of the 2004 season, after the project conservator had left the field, and therefore was only partially excavated because several portions of the mural were being held in place by the rubble fill. FAMSI supplied emergency funds, which allowed us to build a protective roof over the entire complex and protect the mural until it could be conserved, documented and fully excavated during the 2005 field season.

Objectives of 2005 Season

As in past field seasons, the objectives of the 2005 season at La Sufricaya combined conservation, epigraphic analysis, archaeological excavation and artifact analysis to form a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding sociopolitical dynamics on a local, regional and interregional scale. The research objectives during the 2005 season were fourfold and included:

1. Completion of the excavation of the room containing Mural 7, with the assistance of conservator Alberto Semeraro.
2. Record the mural with multi-spectral and infrared imaging and a 1:1 scale reconstruction drawing.
3. Continued excavations in Structure 1 to provide an archaeological context for the murals. Specifically, the excavations aimed to understand the function, layout and construction sequence of the structure and the purpose of the murals within it.
4. Initial excavations in the residential complexes surrounding the ceremonial core in order to assess the degree and nature of foreign influence.

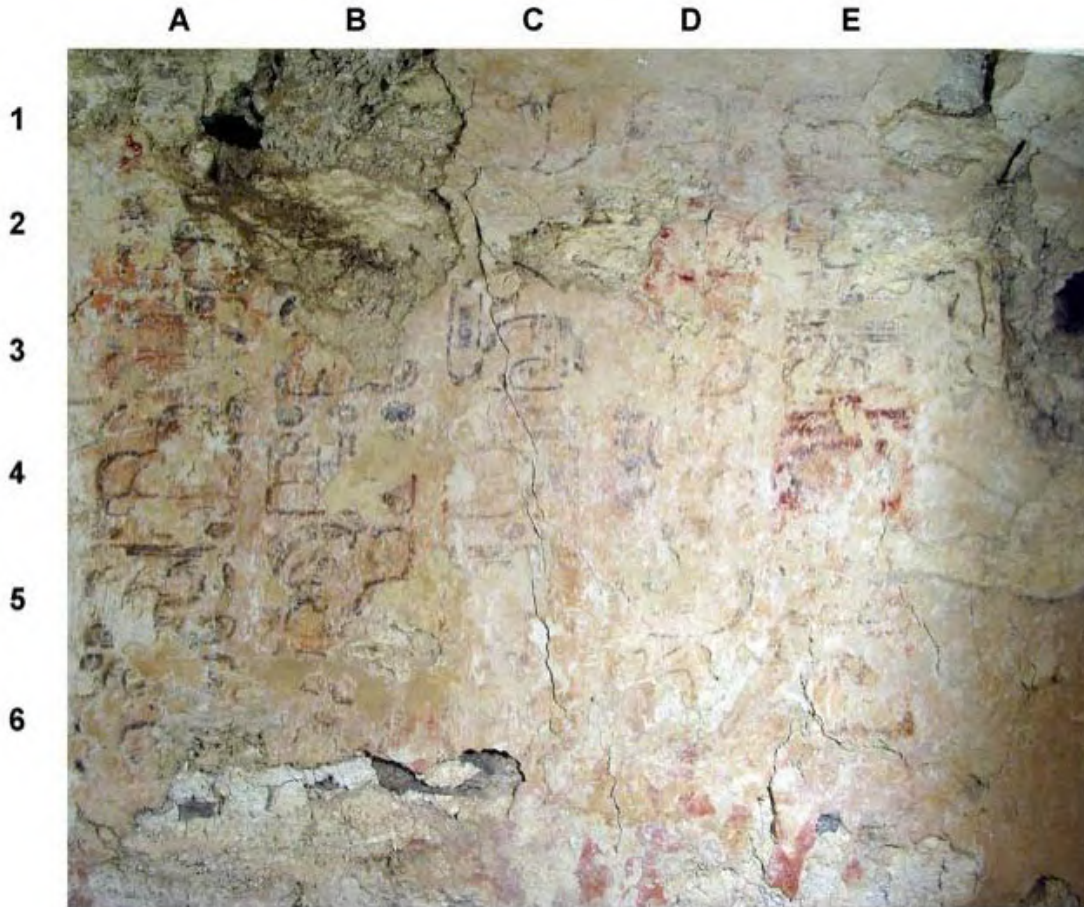


Figure 5. Photograph of Mural 7 fully excavated. (Photo courtesy of A. Tokovinine.)

Mural 7

Francisco Estrada-Belli, Director of the Holmul Archaeological Project, carried out the excavation of Mural 7. The mural was later conserved by Alberto Semeraro, who consolidated fragments of plaster that were cracked and in danger of falling from the wall and applied a protective coat of paraloid. Dr. Gene Ware photographed the mural using multi-spectral and infrared technology. While the results and analysis of the photography have not yet been synthesized, we hope that the images will provide additional information not visible to the naked eye, such as the black outline used to draw the glyphs, which will clarify some of the unidentified and indeterminate characters in the text. In addition to providing a comprehensive record of the mural, these photographs aided Heather Hurst in the completion of reconstruction drawings ([Figure 5](#), shown above, and [Figure 6](#), shown below). Harvard University graduate student Alexandre Tokovinine initially read and translated the text while in the field, and David Stuart and Nikolai Grube both confirmed the initial reading and contributed important insights into the interpretation of the text.



Figure 6. Drawing of Mural 7 by Heather Hurst.

The text of Mural 7 consists of three clauses which begin with a dedication event (A1-C3). The text continues with two retrospective references (C3-D3 and D4-E4), which are introduced by distance numbers and tzolk'in and haab' dates that appear at the end of the clause in reverse order. This reverse order of the text followed by dates is found on other Early Classic monuments like Stela 31 at Tikal. Unfortunately, we cannot read the last two blocks of the text because they are poorly preserved. Therefore, it is unclear whether these blocks relate to the first or third clauses, or perhaps a new clause altogether. However it seems most likely that the two blocks refer to a dedication event.

Mural 7, Clause 1			
A1	MISSING [11 KIB']	<i>b'uluk kib'</i>	[on the day] eleven kib'
A2	14? ma-ka	<i>chanlaju'n[te'] mak</i>	fourteen [day of] mak
A3	"G6"	...	[when] ...
A4	TI'-HU'N-na	<i>ti' hu'n</i>	[is] in the border of the paper (sixth day of the week of nine days)
A5	8-HUL-ya	<i>waxak [k'in] huliyy</i>	eight days since the arrival
A6	GLYPH C	...	... (the name of the lunar month)
B1	MISSING	...	...
B2	MISSING	...	...
B3	INDETERMINATE-TUUN- ni?	<i>tuun</i>	... stone (panel, stela)
B4	3-'TEMPLE'-NAJ	<i>hux ... naj</i>	[In?] the house of three 'temples'
B5	MAM	<i>mam</i>	revered ancestor/grandfather
B6	MISSING	...	...
C1	INDETERMINATE	...	...
C2	INDETERMINATE	...	...
C3	CHAK-TOK-WAY-b'i	<i>chak tok wayaab'</i>	cloud-red diviner

Mural 7, Clause 2			
C4	16-he-wa	<i>waklaju'nhew</i>	for sixteen days
C5	6-WINAAK	<i>wak winaak[jiiy]</i>	six months
C6	1-HAAB'	<i>ju'n haab'[jiiy]</i>	one year
D1	K'AL-TUUN-ni	<i>k'al tuun</i>	since the setting of the stela
D2	MISSING-1-AJAW	<i>[ta] ju'n ajaw</i>	on [the day] one ajaw
D3	8-IK'-SIHO'M	<i>waxak[te'] ik' siho'm</i>	eighth [day of] ch'en

Mural 7, Clause 3			
D4	4-he-wa	<i>chan hew</i>	for four days
D5	1-HAAB'	<i>ju'n haab'[jiiy]</i>	one year
D6	HUL-ya	<i>huliiy</i>	since he arrived
E1	MUT-la	<i>mutal</i>	at Mutal (Tikal)
E2	K'AWIIL-la	<i>k'awiil</i>	K'awiil
E3	16-ma-ka	<i>waklaju'n[te'] mak</i>	[on the day] sixteen (fifteen?) mak
E4	11-EB'	<i>b'uluk eb'</i>	eleven eb'
E5	INDETERMINATE-li/ji-INDETERMINATE		
E6	K'AHK?-INDETERMINATE-ya?		

The text of the inscription can be read as: *b'uluk kib' chanlaju'n[te'] mak ... ti' hu'n waxak [k'in] huliiy ... tuun hux ... naah mam chak tok wayaab' waklaju'nhew wak winaak[jiiy] ju'n haab'[jiiy] k'al tuun [ta] ju'n ajaw waxak[te'] ik' siho'm chanhew ju'n haab'[jiiy] huliiy mutal k'awiil waklaju'n[te'] mak b'uluk eb' ...*

"...On the day 11 *Kib'* 14 *Mak* when "G6" is at the edge of the paper, eight days since the lunar month of ... days named ... arrived, the stone of Grandfather ... Cloud-Red *Wayaab'* is ... at the Three-"Temple"-House. Sixteen days, six months, and one year have passed since the stone-binding on the day 1 *Ajaw* 8 *Ch'en*. Four days and one

year have passed since *K'awiil* arrived to *Mutal* on the day 16 *Mak* 11 *Eb'*..." (Estrada-Belli et al. 2006; Tokovinine et al. 2006).

The text has been interpreted as a dedication event that took place at La Sufricaya and commemorated the one-year anniversary of the arrival of *k'awiil* to the site of *Mutal*, which is now known to be the ancient name of Tikal. The arrival occurred on the day 16 *Mak* 11 *Eb'* which we assume corresponds to 15 *Mak* 11 *Eb'* due to a computational error or a different calendrical system. The date 15 *Mak* 11 *Eb'* (8.17.01.4.12 which corresponds to January 16, 378), is associated with the arrival of the foreign lord Sihyaj K'ahk' to Tikal and the establishment of a new political order in the Petén. The dedication event of the Three-"Temple"-house (which may perhaps be Structure 1 itself) a year after the arrival of Sihyaj K'ahk' was carried out by a lord of La Sufricaya, who carries the title of *Mam*, or Revered Grandfather/Ancessor, and *Chak Tok Wayaab'* (Cloud-Red Diviner), which also identifies him as a member of the same lineage as the rulers of Holmul (Beliav 2004, Tokovinine et al. 2006). It appears that this lord was either witness to or involved in the events surrounding the 11 *Eb'* events at Tikal, which heralded the Teotihuacán *entrada* into the Petén.

While the connection between La Sufricaya and Tikal is not clear, it seems apparent that there were dynastic ties between the two polities, and the fortunes of the La Sufricaya lord were tied to the arrival of *k'awiil* to Tikal. From the events described in the passage, we can deduce that the power and wealth of the La Sufricaya *Wayaab'* was derived from his participation in or association with the sociopolitical change at Tikal. If the three-temple-house mentioned in the text actually refers to the construction of Structure 1, it would seem that a lord of the Holmul dynasty established a new palace at La Sufricaya one year after Sihyaj K'ahk' arrived at Tikal. What remains unclear is why La Sufricaya was established 1 km away from the Holmul site center and palace. An intriguing question naturally arises as to whether these events represented a power struggle within the Holmul dynasty between members of the Holmul *Wayaab'* lineage. If this was indeed the case, one side, represented by the lord from La Sufricaya, apparently had foreign support from Tikal, and by extension, Teotihuacán.

Structure 1

Minor excavations were carried out within Structure 1 in order to clarify the construction sequence and function of the various rooms within the complex. Although five seasons of excavation elucidated many facets of the complex, we could not positively identify the function of Structure 1. Although we assumed that the complex of rooms served as a palace with residential, administrative, and ritual functions the lack of conclusive evidence of these functions was unsettling. Unlike the Late Classic palace in the Holmul site center, Structure 1 does not contain finely carved stone masonry, benches, burials or caches. In addition, the layout and construction techniques of the complex are very different from the Holmul palace and Structure 1 almost appears to be crudely and

hastily constructed, which belies the significance of the structure, as evidenced by the various murals within the rooms.

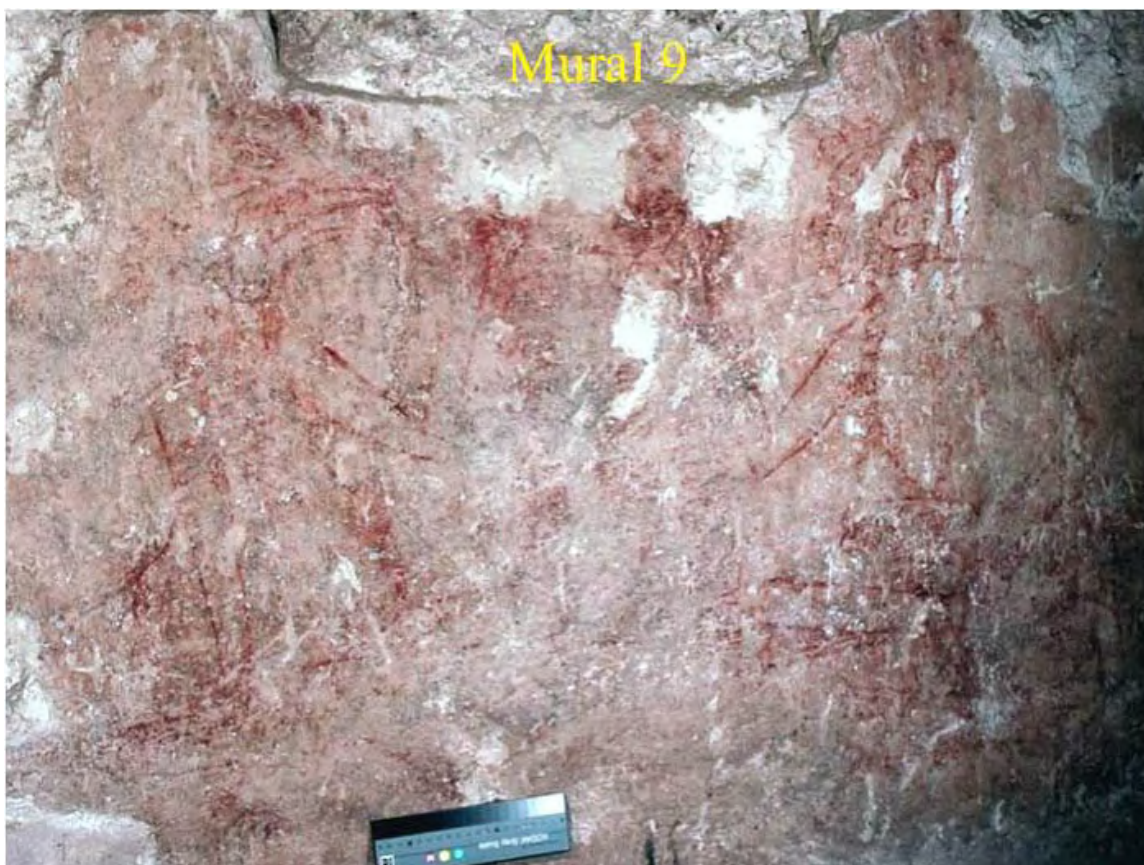


Figure 7. Photograph of Mural 9. The seated figure on the right has been identified as God D, Itsamnaah. (Photo taken by Gene Ware.)

The excavations have revealed that the complex of rooms within Structure 1 was constructed during at least three phases. The first phase consisted of the construction of Sub-1 and Room 3 on the eastern side of the complex. Sub-1 is decorated with Murals 1-3 and an elaborate frieze along the outside (Foley 2005). This area appears to have been used for ritual activity with the adjoining Room 3 serving as a preparation area for the rituals. During the same phase Sub-13 was built on the western side of the platform. This vaulted room may have served administrative functions, as indicated by Mural 9, which was uncovered in 2004 and conserved in 2005 ([Figure 7](#), shown above). This mural depicts two seated figures facing each other with three columns of glyphs between them. The figure on the right side of the scene has been identified as God D, (*Itsamnaah*), who was the god of gods and patron of priests. The mural, which was painted just above the floor line and covers an area 1 × 2.5 m, may have served as a backdrop for the lord of La Sufricaya as he sat upon a mat made of perishable materials and faced an open doorway to the west.

During the second phase of construction, two rooms were added to the complex, Sub-3 to the north and Sub-14 to the east of Sub-13. These rooms may have served a combination of residential and administrative functions. Both were vaulted and contain multiple entrances. In both rooms, the doorways that open onto the inner courtyard of the complex are flanked by cord holders, which provided a certain degree of privacy for the occupants. During this phase, Mural 7 was painted on the outer wall of Sub-14, which faced the inner courtyard; therefore the hieroglyphic text could only be read by the inhabitants of the complex.

The third and subsequent phases of construction consisted of various remodeling projects that created additional spaces within the complex. Sub-10, which appears to be a private patio with a bench adjoining Sub-3 was created during the third phase. Additional projects included walling off various areas of the complex (Sub-2) and courtyard and the construction of an inner platform and staircase (Sub-4 and Sub-5) (Estrada-Belli and Foley 2004).

Group 16

A new phase of excavation was initiated in 2005 with the goal of clarifying the role of La Sufricaya within the Holmul region and ascertaining the nature and degree of interaction with Teotihuacán at the site. These planned excavations were placed within the residential groups surrounding Structure 1 and sought to discern the extent and nature of foreign influence at La Sufricaya. These excavations were designed to test four models developed by Marcus (2003) that synthesize evidence of Teotihuacán interaction in the Maya region, in order to understand the role, nature and degree of foreign influence at La Sufricaya.

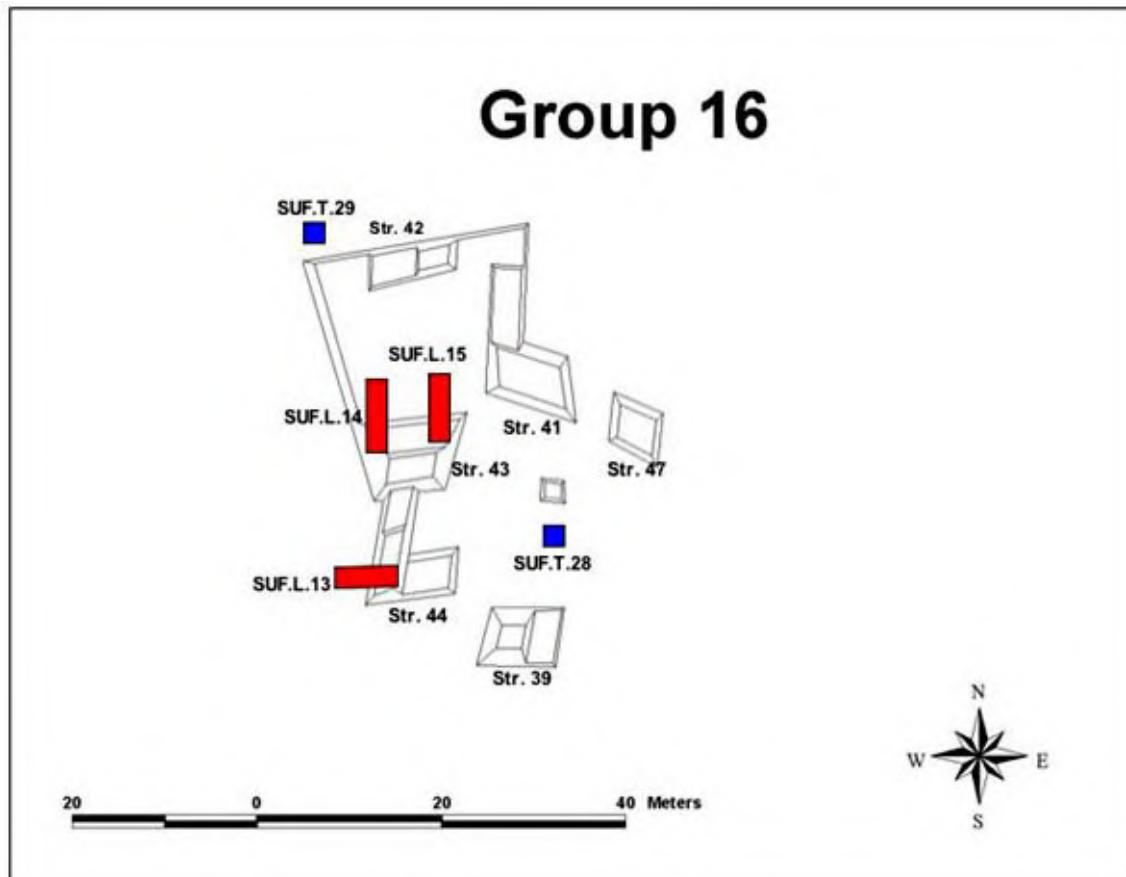


Figure 8. Map of residential group 16 with locations of excavations (in blue) and looters' trenches (in red).

Unfortunately, as is often the case in archaeological research, time and other factors did not permit us to fully reach our fourth objective. However, we were able to investigate one of these groups, Group 16, by clearing out and documenting looters' trenches in the structures of the group as well as placing two test pits within the group (Figure 8, shown above). These investigations did not reveal any Teotihuacán-style artifacts, but they demonstrated that the construction and occupation of the residential group began in the Early Classic period. Future investigations into this and other groups may shed more light on the identity and role of the La Sufricaya inhabitants, and the extent of foreign influence at the site. These investigations will examine both domestic and ritual contexts, such as burials and caches, for evidence of Teotihuacán-style artifacts and iconography.

Conclusions

The work at La Sufricaya is providing important information regarding the Teotihuacán "entrada" into the Petén and the sociopolitical effects of foreign interaction throughout the region. Mural 7 has elucidated the identity of the lords who resided in and likely ruled from Structure 1, but many questions remain. First and foremost, why was La

Sufricaya established during the Early Classic period? What role did the La Sufricaya lords play in the entrada events at Tikal? Did they have direct contact with foreign emissaries, or were they merely witnesses to the events at Tikal? What effects did the entrada have on Holmul dynastic history? And finally, did foreign influence from Teotihuacán extend beyond the elite and ritual spheres of La Sufricaya? These questions can only be answered by further research at both La Sufricaya and Holmul.

Acknowledgements

In addition to FAMSI, the 2005 field season at La Sufricaya would not have been possible without generous support of the Holmul Archaeological Project from Peter and Alexandra Harrison and The Reihnhart Foundation. We would also like to thank IDEAH for permission to work at La Sufricaya and the local inspectors, including Francisco Mora, who facilitated our work. Thanks are also due to Marco and Inma Gross for their hospitality and logistical help. None of this would have been possible without the hard work and cooperation of the team of specialists, excavators and local laborers from Melchor de Mencos.

List of Figures

[Figure 1](#). Map of Mesoamerica with location of La Sufricaya.

[Figure 2](#). Map of the Holmul region with the location of La Sufricaya. (Map courtesy of F. Estrada-Belli.)

[Figure 3](#). Map of La Sufricaya. (Map created by Marc Wolf.)

[Figure 4](#). Plan of La Sufricaya Structure 1 with the locations of murals. (Plan drawn by the author.)

[Figure 5](#). Photograph of Mural 7 fully excavated. (Photo courtesy of A. Tokovinine.)

[Figure 6](#). Drawing of Mural 7 by Heather Hurst.

[Figure 7](#). Photograph of Mural 9. The seated figure on the right has been identified as God D, Itsaamnaah. (Photo taken by Gene Ware.)

[Figure 8](#). Map of residential group 16 with locations of excavations (in blue) and looters' trenches (in red).

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