

PRE-COLUMBIAN ART *from*  
CENTRAL AMERICA  
*and* COLOMBIA  
AT DUMBARTON OAKS

Pre-Columbian Art at Dumbarton Oaks, Number 5



COLIN MCEWAN *and* JOHN W. HOOPES, *editors*

PRE-COLUMBIAN ART AT DUMBARTON OAKS • NUMBER 5

PRE-COLUMBIAN ART *from*  
CENTRAL AMERICA  
*and* COLOMBIA  
AT DUMBARTON OAKS

COLIN MCEWAN *and*  
JOHN W. HOOPES  
*editors*

*With additional contributions by*

HARRIET F. BEAUBIEN • WARWICK BRAY • DIANA ISABEL CALDERÓN  
KIM CULLEN COBB • BRYAN R. COCKRELL • RICHARD G. COOKE  
FRANCISCO CORRALES ULLOA • CLAUDIA P. DÍAZ • JAMES DOYLE  
PATRICIA FERNÁNDEZ ESQUIVEL • GLENN GATES • MERCEDES GUINEA BUENO  
AMANDA GUZMÁN • AINSLIE HARRISON • MÁXIMO JIMÉNEZ ACOSTA  
BRIGITTE KOVACEVICH • JULIE LAUFFENBURGER • CARLOS MAYO TORNÉ  
JULIA MAYO TORNÉ • DAVID MORA-MARÍN • JUAN ANTONIO MURRO  
KAREN O'DAY • MICHELLE PAWLIGER • JUAN PABLO QUINTERO GUZMÁN  
ANTHONY J. RANERE • STEWART D. REDWOOD • SEBASTIÁN RIVAS ESTRADA  
JUANITA SÁENZ SAMPER • SILVIA SALGADO GONZÁLEZ • LUÍS A. SÁNCHEZ HERRERA  
NICOLE E. SMITH-GUZMÁN • MARÍA ALICIA URIBE VILLEGAS

DUMBARTON OAKS RESEARCH LIBRARY AND COLLECTION | WASHINGTON, D.C.

© 2021 Dumbarton Oaks  
Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D.C.  
All rights reserved.  
Printed in China through Martin Book Management.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

*Names:* McEwan, Colin, editor. | Hoopes, John W., editor. | Dumbarton Oaks. | Robert Woods Bliss  
Collection of Pre-Columbian Art.

*Title:* Pre-Columbian art from Central America and Colombia at Dumbarton Oaks / Colin McEwan and  
John W. Hoopes, editors ; with additional contributions by Harriet F. Beaubien [and thirty others].

*Other titles:* Pre-Columbian art at Dumbarton Oaks ; no. 5.

*Description:* Washington, D.C. : Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, [2021] | Series:  
Pre-Columbian art at Dumbarton Oaks ; no. 5 | Includes bibliographical references and index. |  
Summary: "Catalogue of the collection of Pre-Columbian Art from Central America and Colombia  
at Dumbarton Oaks. The catalogue, written by leading international scholars of Pre-Columbian art  
history and archaeology, contains detailed analyses of specific works of art along with thematic essays  
situating these works within the broader context of greater Central American culture"—Provided  
by publisher.

*Identifiers:* LCCN 2020042809 | ISBN 9780884024699 (cloth)

*Subjects:* LCSH: Dumbarton Oaks—Catalogs. | Robert Woods Bliss Collection of Pre-Columbian  
Art—Catalogs. | Indian art—Central America—Catalogs. | Indian art—Colombia—Catalogs. |  
Indians of Central America—Antiquities—Catalogs. | Indians of South America—Colombia—  
Antiquities—Catalogs.

*Classification:* LCC F1434.2.A7 P735 2021 | DDC 975.3—dc23

*LC record available at* <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020042809>

GENERAL EDITOR: Colin McEwan  
MANAGING EDITOR: Sara Taylor  
ART DIRECTOR: Kathleen Sparkes  
DESIGN AND COMPOSITION: Melissa Tandysh

PHOTOGRAPHS:

(*front jacket and frontis*) Pendant, PC.B.372 (Plate 102)

(*back jacket*) Pendant, PC.B.390 (Plate 105)

(*front flap*) Dipper, PC.B.422 (Plate 205)

(*back flap*) Pendant, PC.B.295 (Plate 85)

Photographs of catalogue objects by John Tsantes.

[www.doaks.org/publications](http://www.doaks.org/publications)

# Funerary Rituals among the Elite of the Río Grande Chiefdom, Panama

## *Preparations for the Final Voyage of a Powerful Coclé Warrior*

— JULIA MAYO TORNÉ • CARLOS MAYO TORNÉ • MERCEDES GUINEA BUENO —

### The El Caño Necropolis

The site of El Caño is situated on the banks of the Río Grande (Figure 120), in the alluvial floodplains of Parita Bay, on the Pacific side of the Isthmus of Panama. It was the setting for important Coclé funerary rituals that culminated in elaborate burials between 680 and 1020 CE (Mayo Torné and Carles 2015; Mayo Torné and Mayo Torné 2013).<sup>1</sup> Adjacent to the cemetery is a ceremonial area comprising different archaeological components, including a path of rounded boulders (17 m × 4.5 m), with an east–west orientation that we infer connects to the river (460 m east of the site); an alignment of sixty-seven basalt columns (105 m long), which is oriented northwest–southeast; and an alignment of fourteen basalt columns (67 m long), which is oriented northeast–southwest (Figures 121–122). In addition, there is a group of twenty-six stone figures, two altars, two basalt columns with relief, and thirty-six sculptures in volcanic tuff and basalt. Approximately 2.5 km south of El Caño lies the contemporaneous site of Sitio Conte, which was excavated in the 1930s and 1940s, revealing dozens of graves with multiple burials and rich mortuary assemblages and offerings (Erickson and Fenton 2021; Hearne and Sharer 1992; Lothrop 1937, 1942; Mason 1940a, 1942).<sup>2</sup> For

a long time, Sitio Conte was understood to be the principal site of the Río Grande chiefdom, while El Caño was interpreted as a related “ceremonial center” (Cooke, Isaza, and Griggs, et al. 2003). Our discovery at El Caño of large graves containing multiple burials with rich mortuary assemblages and offerings now indicates that this was an important cemetery for the Coclé elite and that its ceremonial functions involved the sequence of funerary rituals described in this essay. El Caño boasts sophisticated pottery and artifact assemblages belonging to the Coclé tradition; however, the postburial ritual offerings made here distinguish it from Sitio Conte, where there is no evidence for this practice. Thus, there appear to be significant differences in funerary practices between these two sites.

In this essay, we will describe the funerary rites of an important warrior-chief buried at El Caño one thousand years ago.<sup>3</sup> Our description draws on a close reading of the funerary rites described in sixteenth-century ethnohistoric accounts; this description of the funerary process will, in turn, inform our interpretation of the stratigraphic sequence of deposits excavated within the grave itself. The archaeological evidence, therefore, enables us to reconstruct a key stage in the sequence of events involved in the funerary rites and suggests that these broadly followed the stages involved in similar “rites of passage” documented for other cultures.

1 The oldest date from the El Caño necropolis [Beta-338006, 1250 ± 30 bp, 680–870 CE] was obtained from the remains of a covering structure made of mangrove wood (*Rhizophora* sp.) that was associated with an unexcavated grave located 2 m northeast of *Tumba* T2.

2 The term *grave* is used here following Lothrop (1937), who used it to refer to complex interments of multiple individuals while using *burial* to refer to features specific to individuals. Although the Spanish word *tumba* is frequently used for complex mortuary features such as those of the Coclé culture, the English word *tomb* has the connotation of a cist, crypt, mausoleum, or

more elaborate structure constructed from stone. The term *burial* is used here to refer to deposits composed of human skeletal remains and their associated funerary offerings. *Grave* is used to refer to the burial space and associated features that contain the burials themselves.

3 The term *warrior-chief* (*cacique guerrero*) refers to an individual who fulfilled both military and political roles. These roles may have combined secular and religious functions.

**Figure 120**  
Río Grande.  
Photograph by Alfredo  
Fernández-Valmayor.



**Figure 121**  
Alignment of the  
main basaltic  
columns of the  
El Caño necropolis.  
Photograph by  
Julia Mayo Torné.

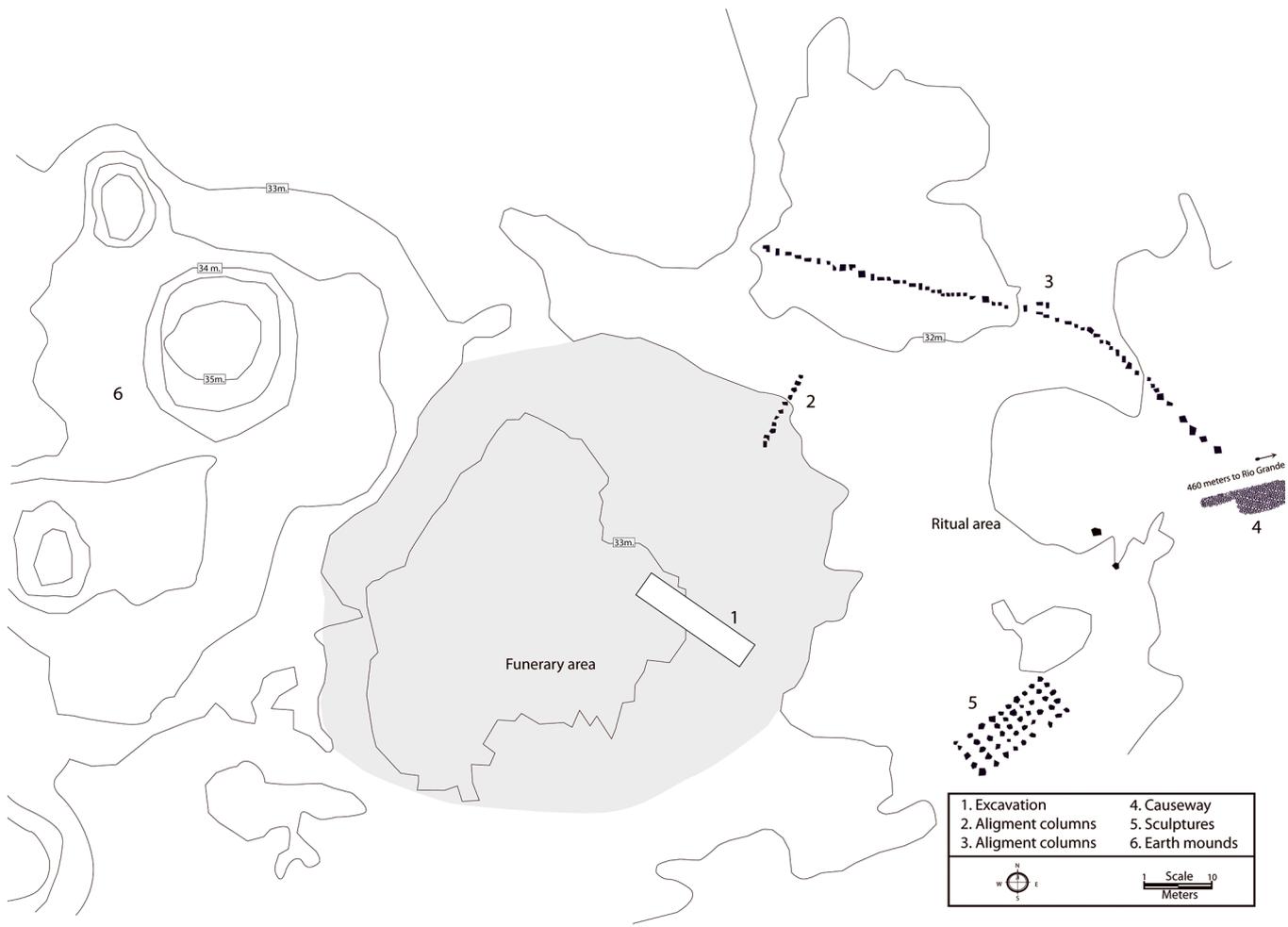


### The Sources: Ethnohistory and Archaeology

Much useful information about funerary rituals among the Indigenous cultures of the Isthmus of Panama comes from ethnohistoric documents: the *Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y tierra-firme del mar océano*, written by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés in the sixteenth century and published in its entirety three hundred years later; and a letter written by the captain Gaspar de

Espinosa to the Spanish monarchy in 1519. A second source is the contextualized archaeological information from excavated mortuary contexts.

Besides El Caño (Mayo Torné and Carles 2015; Mayo Torné and Mayo Torné 2013), there are at least six other well-studied cemeteries in the Greater Coclé cultural region: El Indio, La India, La Cañaza, El Cafetal (Ichon 1980), Cerro Juan Díaz (Carvajal et al. 2006; Cooke, Sánchez Herrera, and Udagawa 2000; Díaz 1999), and Sitio Conte (Hearne and Sharer 1992; Lothrop 1937, 1942; Mason 1940a, 1942).

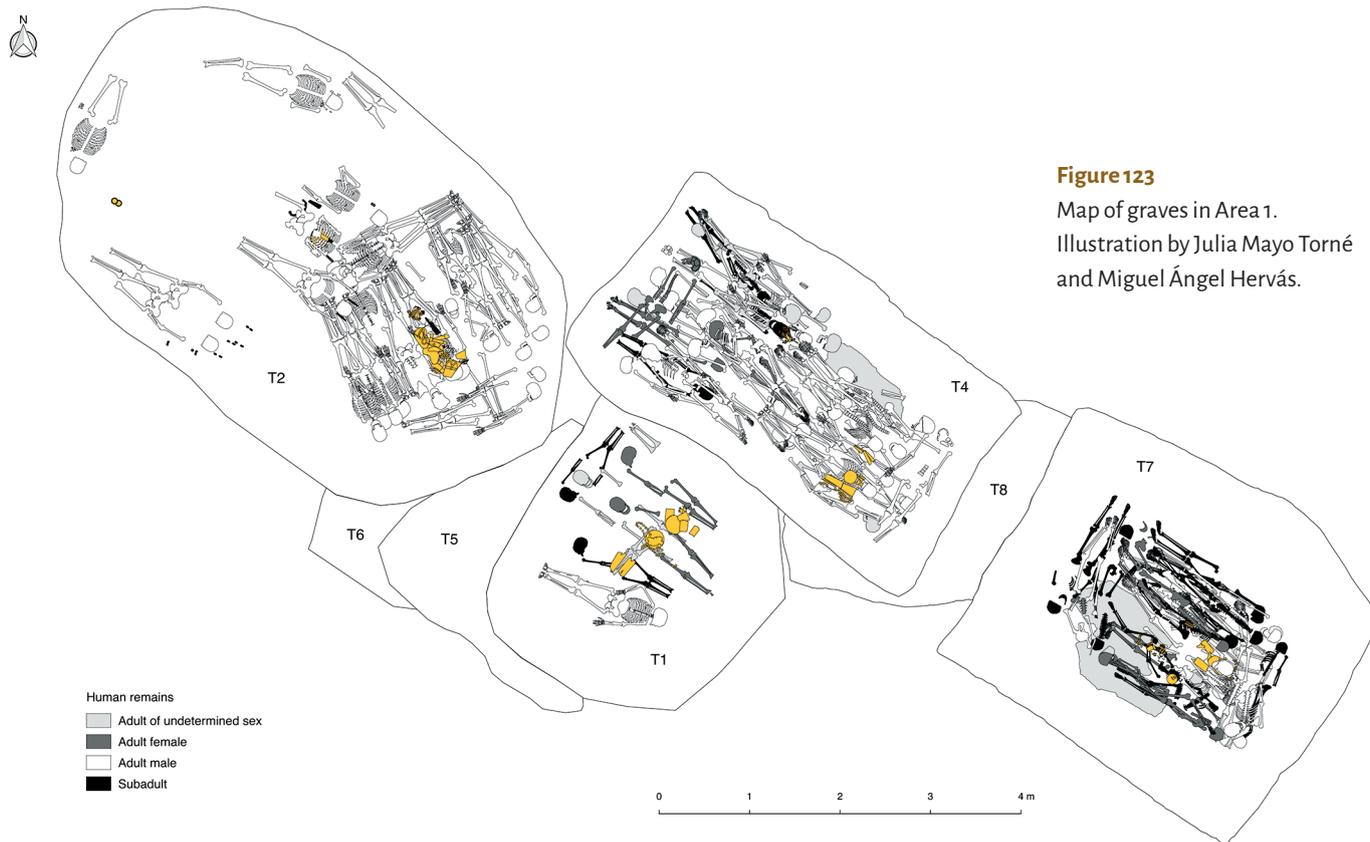


**Figure 122** Map of the archaeological site of El Caño. Illustration by Carlos Mayo Torné.

Comparative studies among the cemeteries on the Azuero Peninsula and at Sitio Conte, as well as among the Sitio Conte graves themselves (Briggs 1989), show that different kinds of chiefly societies coexisted in the region over a span of at least two hundred years, and that the cemetery at Sitio Conte represents a distinct aspect of hierarchical social organization. This approach to studying cemeteries, which has the objective of analyzing social structures and mortuary customs, is a valid point of departure for any investigation, but the mortuary patterning also offers insights into broader aspects of ideology, symbolism, and ritual (Hodder and Hutson 1988). This can be achieved by examining the stages in funerary rituals and reading the sequence of archaeological depositions within a grave along with the associated objects in context, which vary in number and composition depending on the complexity and duration of the ritual.

As we shall see, the main differences among the various cemeteries are primarily due to variability in their internal complexity. The graves at El Indio, La India, La Cañaza, El Cafetal, and Cerro Juan Díaz involve only one identifiable deposit, although

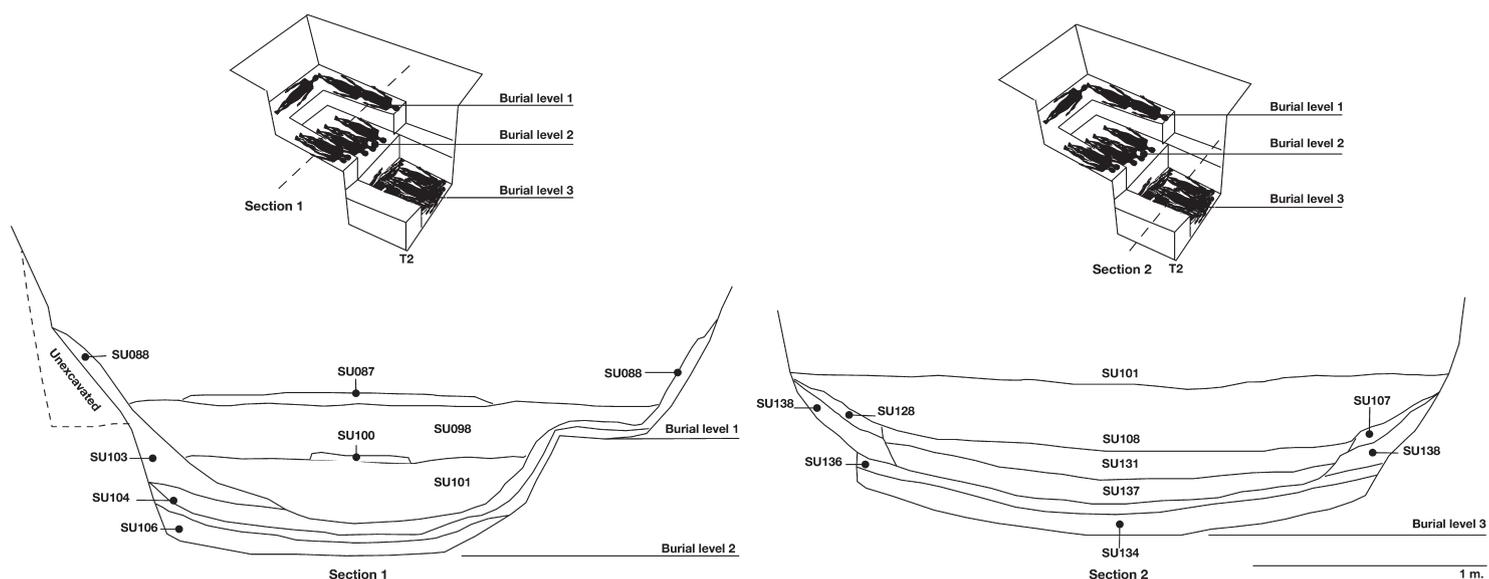
there are some graves, such as those documented in Operation 31 Cerro Juan Díaz, that contain the remains of several phases of occupation (Carvajal et al. 2006). At Sitio Conte, there are no records of ritual stages that relate to any post-occupation use of the graves. This cemetery contrasts with that at El Caño (Mayo Torné and Carles 2015; Mayo Torné and Mayo Torné 2013), where five graves with ritual deposits have been excavated (T1, T2, T5, T6, and T7) (Figures 123–124), which contain artifacts and, in some cases, human remains placed in the grave after burial, indicating that they were not abandoned and that the funerary ritual did not end with the burial itself (Mayo Torné and Carles 2015; Mayo Torné and Mayo Torné 2013). The excavations at El Caño closely followed the cultural stratigraphy, which allows other graves with similar structured deposits to be compared, along with the transitions between different ritual deposits. This approach has allowed us to reconstruct a key segment of the funerary ritual sequence within *Tumba* T2 (Figure 125). We will analyze the archaeological data gleaned from this grave's excavation, along with other archaeological



**Figure 123**  
Map of graves in Area 1.  
Illustration by Julia Mayo Torné  
and Miguel Ángel Hervás.



**Figure 124** View of the excavation of Area 1. Excavation process of *Tumba* T1, T2, and T5. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.



**Figure 125** Cumulative stratigraphic profiles of *Tumba T2* of El Caño. Illustration by Julia Mayo Torné.

features and artifacts from the area that are spatially and chronologically related to the cemetery in which they were found. We will also draw upon the available historical sources to present a narrative that describes the funerary ritual of a Coclé warrior-chief in a sequence of discrete stages, thus shedding light on the specific symbolic behaviors that composed this rite of passage.

### Characteristics of the Units and Materials from *Tumba T2*

All materials collected in *Tumba T2* were located inside a pit (5.73 m × 3.16 m), excavated in a stepped fashion in three levels. The bottom of the pit was found at a depth of 4 m. In this pit, sixty-six stratigraphic units of different types (Table 9) were found, of which six burials should be highlighted. All of the cultural deposits were strongly impacted by natural taphonomic processes. The units of *Tumba T2* are not the product of a single moment but rather index different phases of occupation; all the burial deposits and offerings that were consolidated in the same pit correlate with discrete, horizontal depositions of sediments and sands (SU101, SU098, SU137, and SU108)

(Figure 125). These depositional units were produced by sedimentation, wall collapse, and wet-season flooding. This has enabled us to identify distinct occupational phases and has facilitated a detailed understanding of the site’s ritual sequence. Table 10 presents a comparison between the occupational phases and the stratigraphic units contemporaneous with the ritual episodes discussed later in this essay. In *Tumba T2*, 1,364 artifacts made of ceramic, metal, stone, animal bones and teeth, resin, shell, and metal with wood were recovered, located mainly (95.5 percent) from the different burial offerings (Table 11). A radiometric analysis of two carbon samples recovered from the two main burial units—SU134 and SU088-SU106—yielded two dates [Beta-303193, 1070±30 bp, 900–1020 CE and Beta-294052, 1120±30 bp, 860–1000 CE]. The human remains appear to be grouped, with multiple individuals in each burial (with one exception). In total, three burials (SU088, SU106, and SU134), in spite of being located at different depths, are contemporaneous and in contact with each other. They follow a broadly symmetrical burial scheme. The principal burial (SU134), located in the deepest level, contains the body of the highest-status person accompanied by eighteen other individuals.

**Table 9** Stratigraphic units of *Tumba T2*.

| STRUCTURES |         | DEPOSITS  |                        |         |                       |      | TOTAL STRATIGRAPHIC UNITS |
|------------|---------|-----------|------------------------|---------|-----------------------|------|---------------------------|
| Graves     | Columns | Offerings | Collapse of offerings* | Burials | Shifting of materials | Fill |                           |
| 1          | 21      | 7         | 2                      | 6       | 5                     | 24   | 66                        |

\* In these units, samples of wooden coverings have been collected.

**Table 10** Order of occupation of *Tumba T2*.

|            | DESCRIPTION        | RITUAL EPISODE | STRATIGRAPHIC UNITS  |
|------------|--------------------|----------------|--|
| PHASE I    | construction phase |                | SU249, SU219–235, SU019  |
| PHASE II   | occupation phase   | Episode 5      | SU088, SU103, SU104, SU106, SU107, SU128, SU134, SU135, SU136, SU161, SU182, SU183 |
| PHASE III  | abandonment phase  |                | SU108, SU127, SU129, SU130, SU131, SU132, SU133, SU137, SU138, SU139, SU202–218    |
| PHASE IV   | occupation phase   | Episode 6      | SU130  |
| PHASE V    | abandonment phase  |                | SU101  |
| PHASE VI   | occupation phase   | Episode 7      | SU100  |
| PHASE VII  | abandonment phase  |                | SU098  |
| PHASE VIII | occupation phase   | Episode 8      | SU087  |

**Table 11** Distribution of artifacts and ecofacts, by industry, for the *Tumba T2* stratigraphic group. Some artifacts noted in this table have numerous components. This is the case, for example, for the beaded necklaces, axe bundles, and projectile points. For more detail, consult the data repository at the Centro de Investigaciones Arqueológicas del Istmo (CIAI) of the Fundación El Caño, at <http://oda-fec.org/nata>.

| UNIT CODE | FEATURE TYPE                       | CERAMIC ARTIFACTS | SHELL ARTIFACTS | RESIN ARTIFACTS | HUMAN TEETH ARTIFACTS | STONE ARTIFACTS |
|-----------|------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| SU087     | burial                             | 50                |                 |                 |                       | 16              |
| SU088     | burial                             | 127               | 1               |                 |                       | 52              |
| SU098     | fill                               |                   |                 |                 |                       |                 |
| SU100     | burial                             | 2                 |                 |                 |                       |                 |
| SU101     | fill                               | 3                 |                 |                 | 4                     |                 |
| SU103     | shifting of materials <sup>2</sup> | 43                |                 |                 |                       |                 |
| SU104     | collapse of offering <sup>3</sup>  | 144               |                 |                 | 7                     |                 |
| SU106     | burial                             | 5                 |                 |                 | 2                     |                 |
| SU107     | offering                           | 4                 | 1               |                 | 1                     |                 |
| SU108     | fill                               | 5                 | 3               |                 | 3                     |                 |
| SU127     | fill                               | 4                 |                 |                 |                       |                 |
| SU128     | burial                             | 48                | 4               |                 | 31                    | 3               |
| SU129     | shifting of materials              | 6                 |                 |                 |                       |                 |
| SU130     | shifting of materials              | 15                |                 |                 | 4                     |                 |
| SU131     | offering                           | 54                |                 |                 |                       |                 |
| SU132     | shifting of materials              | 7                 |                 |                 |                       |                 |
| SU134     | burial                             | 47                |                 | 2               | 20                    | 152             |
| SU135     | offering                           | 27                |                 |                 | 2                     |                 |
| SU136     | offering                           | 80                |                 |                 | 1                     |                 |

### Individual I7: The Principal Person in Tumba T2

The role and status of the principal occupant of Tumba T2 probably determined the specific funerary treatment that he received. He was male and about forty-five years old at the time of his death; his approximate age was calculated based on an analysis of his teeth—the loss and the occlusal wear of those that were preserved as well as the partial erosion of the mandible—and by the presence of arthritis, a degenerative bone disease common in adults over the age of forty. He was buried with fifty-two objects of stone, bone, metal, and resin (Figure 126) that represent his different “social identities” (Binford 1971) through a nonlinguistic means of social communication (Ingold 2000, 2007). He was probably regarded as a warrior, owing to the presence of weapons, such as projectile points (Figure 127) and axes (Figure 128) (J. Mayo Torné 2015b:87–95). Actually, these weapons and artifacts incorporating animal bones and teeth, as well as perforated human teeth, are integral elements of the

funerary offerings accompanying him and the eight individuals interred in the upper part of the grave (levels 1 and 2). They are also the most common artifacts in the third level of the grave, where it has been difficult to establish a secure association between the offerings and the skeletal remains because many of the artifacts were placed as group offerings.

Weapons, bones, and perforated teeth represent artifact assemblages of complementary significance. Given the hierarchical nature of El Caño society, we believe that the individuals buried with weapons and artifacts made of animal bones, animal teeth, and perforated human teeth were warriors. This warrior role does not exclude other roles and responsibilities, as warriors also could have been hunters, spiritual leaders, and priests or healers.

The richest burial, with the most elaborate and complete funerary assemblage, is the principal person, who is placed in a central position in SU134. Associated with this individual is a belt (Figure 129) made from the teeth and bones of a range of large, powerful mammals, including the cougar (*Puma concolor*),

|  | WOOD ARTIFACTS | BONE OR ANIMAL TEETH ARTIFACTS | HUMANS (MNI) IN PRIMARY DEPOSITS <sup>1</sup> | HUMAN (MNI) IN SECONDARY DEPOSITS | METAL ARTIFACTS | STONE ECOFACTS | ANIMAL ECOFACTS | TOTAL |
|--|----------------|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------|
|  |                |                                | 4 (?)   |                                   | 2               |                | 4               | 76    |
|  |                | 11                             | 5   |                                   | 20              | 2              | 14              | 232   |
|  |                |                                |   |                                   | 1               |                |                 | 1     |
|  |                |                                | 1   |                                   |                 |                |                 | 3     |
|  |                | 2                              |   |                                   | 3               |                | 9               | 21    |
|  |                |                                |   |                                   |                 |                |                 | 43    |
|  | 1              | 2                              |   |                                   | 1               |                | 4               | 159   |
|  |                | 6                              | 3   |                                   | 6               |                | 11              | 33    |
|  |                |                                |   |                                   | 1               |                |                 | 7     |
|  |                |                                |   |                                   |                 |                |                 | 11    |
|  |                |                                |   |                                   |                 |                |                 | 4     |
|  |                | 14                             | 1 (?)   |                                   | 6               |                |                 | 107   |
|  |                |                                |   |                                   |                 |                |                 | 6     |
|  |                |                                |   |                                   |                 |                |                 | 19    |
|  |                | 1                              |   |                                   |                 |                |                 | 55    |
|  |                |                                |   |                                   | 1               |                |                 | 8     |
|  | 1              | 39                             | 19  |                                   | 73              |                | 11              | 364   |
|  |                | 6                              |   |                                   | 4               |                |                 | 39    |
|  |                |                                |   |                                   | 1               |                |                 | 82    |

**Table 11** *Continued*

| UNIT CODE    | FEATURE TYPE          | CERAMIC ARTIFACTS | SHELL ARTIFACTS | RESIN ARTIFACTS | HUMAN TEETH ARTIFACTS | STONE ARTIFACTS |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| SU138        | collapse of offering  | 5                 |                 |                 |                       |                 |
| SU139        | shifting of materials | 5                 |                 |                 | 10                    |                 |
| SU161        | offering              |                   |                 |                 | 1                     | 1               |
| SU164        | shifting of materials | 58                |                 |                 |                       |                 |
| SU182        | offering              |                   |                 |                 |                       |                 |
| SU183        | offering              |                   |                 |                 |                       |                 |
| <b>TOTAL</b> |                       | <b>739</b>        | <b>9</b>        | <b>2</b>        | <b>86</b>             | <b>224</b>      |

- 1 Miniature pectorals and gold bracelets were found in units SU087 and SU128; no human bones associated with these artifacts were found.
- 2 Units containing materials that slipped inside the grave or that are part of the burial of another grave.
- 3 Units containing materials that were originally placed on the wooden lids that covered the burials of levels 1 and 2.



**Figure 126** Mortuary ensemble of the warrior-chief of *Tumba T2* of El Caño. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.

jaguar (*Panthera onca*), sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*), and manatee (*Trichechus manatus*). The belts of lower-status individuals were made with the teeth of dogs (*Canis lupus*), a less powerful animal in terms of physical stature and strength. We propose that this reflects a ranked, hierarchical order among the different individuals.

Nonetheless, a comparative analysis of *Tumba T2* and the nearby *Tumba T1* indicates that certain objects, such as pectorals and armbands, are markers of high status, but are not exclusive to warriors, as they have been found in other graves of the Coclé elite who were not warriors (as is the case of Individual I, the principal occupant of *Tumba T1*) (J. Mayo Torné 2015b:94). In addition to these markers of high status and warrior paraphernalia, the warrior-chief was buried with twenty-six other warriors of lower rank. It is possible that the way in which he died influenced certain aspects of his funerary ritual, but unfortunately the precise cause of death cannot be determined. The performance of the different stages of the funerary ritual of this warrior resulted in the deposition of thousands of artifacts in his grave.

### Reconstruction of the Funerary Ritual of the Warrior-Chief Buried in *Tumba T2*

#### *Episode 1: The Funerary Treatment of the Body of the Warrior-Chief*

After death, the body underwent preparations for interment. There is no evidence that the preparations took place inside the grave, but, as we will see, there were some objects used in the process that were later deposited there. The ritual may have taken place in

|  | WOOD ARTIFACTS | BONE OR ANIMAL TEETH ARTIFACTS | HUMANS (MNI) IN PRIMARY DEPOSITS <sup>1</sup> | HUMAN (MNI) IN SECONDARY DEPOSITS | METAL ARTIFACTS | STONE ECOFACTS | ANIMAL ECOFACTS | TOTAL |
|--|----------------|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------|
|  |                |                                |   |                                   |                 |                |                 | 5     |
|  |                |                                |   |                                   |                 |                |                 | 15    |
|  |                | 6                              |   |                                   | 3               |                |                 | 11    |
|  |                |                                |   |                                   |                 |                | 1               | 59    |
|  |                |                                |   | 1                                 |                 |                | 1               | 2     |
|  |                | 1                              |   |                                   |                 |                | 1               | 2     |
|  | 2              | 88                             | 33  | 1                                 | 122             | 2              | 56              | 1364  |



**Figure 127**  
Projectile points, made from flakes of chalcedony. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.



**Figure 128**  
Basalt axes associated with the burial of the warrior-chief. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.

**Figure 129**

Pieces of a belt made of jaguar and puma canines, sperm whale teeth, and manatee ribs associated with the main individual buried in *Tumba T2*. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.



the town from which the deceased originated, similar to what happened in the funerary ritual described by Captain Gaspar de Espinosa in his 1519 account to the Spanish crown. The captain observes the preparation of the burial of the Parita *cacique*, describing how the ritual was centered around three funerary bundles found in the interior of his hut, in his “old seat,” a term used by the Spanish to refer to towns where chiefs lived (Espinosa 1994).

The warrior was adorned with four gold bands on his arms and forearms, a belt of perforated animal teeth, and necklaces of gold and greenstone. His arms were flexed and clasped to his chest, and his hands were positioned under his chin. After this treatment, he was desiccated and bundled. To desiccate the body, a heat source was applied, probably in the way it was still done in the Darién in the sixteenth century:

It is the same in the region of Castilla del Oro, in certain parts, that when a man dies, they take his body and set it on a stone or boulder and near it, without the embers or the flames touching the flesh of the deceased, they have a large, controlled fire, so much so that all of the fat and moisture are exuded from the nails of the feet and hands as sweat and the body dries out, so that the skin joins with the bones, and all of the flesh is consumed or distilled (Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés 1851–1855:3:155).

The custom of desiccating the deceased was also used in the provinces of Central Panama. Espinosa

refers to the body of the Parita *cacique* as a “roasted dead person” and to his funerary wrappings as a “long bundle” (Espinosa 1994:63). It is important to mention that these accounts only describe the treatment of the *caciques*’ bodies; we do not know if the drying custom was applied more generally to deceased individuals in Panama.

The archaeological evidence for desiccating the body of the warrior-chief includes the reduced width of the body after the process, which was calculated at 20 cm, based on the space occupied by the four pectorals that were gathered on his back—measuring 20.1, 23.5, 21, and 26.5 cm wide, respectively—and that ended up folded from the bundling. Aligned with the vertical axis of the skeleton is a large Conte Red bowl (Figure 130) of a size—18 cm high, with a diameter of 53 cm—much larger than that of similar artifacts in the grave. Organic residues were found inside the bowl, which is not common at El Caño. Unfortunately, we were not able to obtain precise results from samples that were taken, but we infer that the residues in the vessel (Fundación El Caño, Panama, registration no. 10808)<sup>4</sup> relate to the human corpse. The placement in the grave of tools used in

<sup>4</sup> El Proyecto Arqueológico El Caño maintains a data repository that links records and study objects with descriptions, photographs, plans, and videos. It can be accessed at <http://oda-fec.org/nata>. In order to facilitate access to data that is especially important, we have flagged specific objects throughout this text.



**Figure 130**  
 Conte Red bowl.  
 Fundación El Caño,  
 Panama, registration  
 no. 10808. Photograph  
 by Julia Mayo Torné.

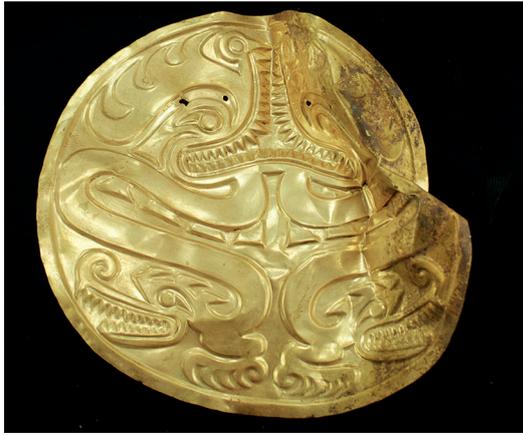
the funerary treatment of the bodies appears to have been a custom among the Coclé. According to Lothrop (1937:50, fig. 30, 213, fig. 206, 226–227, pl. 1, 263, fig. 239, 270, fig. 245), in Graves 1, 5, 24, and 26 of Sitio Conte, the primary occupants were found over stones used especially for drying out bodies.

After desiccation, his body was positioned face down and on it were placed four pectorals (Figures 131–134), superimposed in pairs, two on the upper back and two slightly lower. Eight pendants—four of bone and four of tooth—were placed on the lower back and hips. Next to these was placed one more pendant, made with tumbaga in the shape of two birds and a human head, to which we will refer in another section. On his chest was placed a figure in human form, made of gold-covered resin. On his knees were placed other artifacts: nine pairs of earrings (of gold and probably wood, and of gold and stone also combined with gold), eight circular plaques, seven cross-shaped plaques, a quarter of a pectoral, a quarter of a gold ingot, a pendant representing a seahorse, two bells, and a group of large stingray spines. Afterward, the body was bundled, from right to left, along with the aforementioned objects. The process and direction of the bundling is evident in the four pectorals, which suffered stresses along their symmetrical axes (their edges were bent) (Figures 131–134). Resins were used in the process, as indicated by the fact that their residues are found on the bones and mortuary assemblage (Kaal et al. 2020). At one time, they also covered a long, cylindrical artifact that was not preserved, something akin to a rope, which wrapped around his legs. The resin had to be applied hot, given that it was soluble and malleable only in this state and that the stresses on the pectorals could only have occurred with the application of heat. This is the first

time on the Isthmus that a burial with these characteristics has been identified. None of the Coclé pectorals known to date show deformations similar to those noted here, nor are there references to burials covered with resins. Espinosa does not mention resin in his description of the Parita funerary bundle, but he does allude to the use of ropes: “There was each of them in a long bundle, covered by hammocks made of fine straw, well-made and some of the better ones that are made in this land, and tied above with rope like the bundles of Flanders are tied; and inside, another wrapping and covering of many fine, painted sheets, tied in the same way with cotton cords; and inside another wrapping of thinner and finer sheets, tied in the same way as indigenous hair is tied; and inside of which was the body of the roasted dead person” (Espinosa 1994:63). Once the body was prepared, it was taken to the cemetery. We do not know the exact route except for the final stretch leading to El Caño. We have already noted that the ceremonial sector of the cemetery is connected to the Río Grande by a path that forms at least one of the preferred routes of access to this site.

*Episode 2: The Transport of the Body to the Ceremonial Sector of the Funerary Complex*

Rivers are a metaphor for the passage of time as well as the threshold between the terrestrial world and the beyond, which is why they are a mythological setting for the journey of the soul among many cultures. Though we lack archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence to document specific aspects of the warrior-chief’s funerary ritual as it proceeded along the Río Grande, we believe that the Coclé took advantage of the river’s symbolic power and incorporated the journey down it as an essential part of the ritual.



**Figure 131** Gold pectoral (H. 18 cm; W. 18 cm) embossed with the representation of a supernatural being (zoomorphic hybrid bird and reptile), discovered in *Tumba T2*. Fundación El Caño, Panama, registration no. 9268. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.



**Figure 133** Gold pectoral (H. 21 cm; W. 24 cm) embossed with the representation of the face of a supernatural being with features of a mythical crocodile, discovered in *Tumba T2*. Fundación El Caño, Panama, registration no. 9266. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.



**Figure 132** Gold pectoral (H. 23 cm; W. 26 cm) embossed with the anthropo-zoomorphic representation of a supernatural being in bipedal position and open limbs, discovered in *Tumba T2*. Fundación El Caño, Panama, registration no. 9246. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.



**Figure 134** Gold pectoral (H. 19 cm; W. 23 cm) embossed with the representation of the face of a supernatural being with a big mouth and features typical of an old man, discovered in *Tumba T2*. Fundación El Caño, Panama, registration no. 9267. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.

An interesting question to explore is the time of the year when these journeys are likely to have occurred. According to Lothrop (1937:51), they took place in the dry season, as it was unlikely that bodies could have been buried beside a river—4–5 m underground—if the level of the water table was high. We have observed that the water table can be 4.5 m below ground even during the dry season. The need

to wait for favorable weather may have been one of the reasons for desiccating the corpse, which would have preserved it until the time of burial. All the evidence of ritual episodes observed in the graves was recovered above significant depositions of sediment produced by the silting of the grave during the rainy season. Hence, we believe that these events and ceremonies took place during the dry season, or the

Panamanian “summer,” from the middle of December until May, and the sediments covered everything that was placed in the grave (burials first and, in later years, other offerings arranged in the graves), during the wet seasons, from June to December.

### *Episode 3: The Areytos*

Once it arrived at El Caño, the body of the warrior-chief was off-loaded, along with the materials and individuals with which it would be later buried. The funerary procession would then advance along the stone-paved pathway connecting the river to the ceremonial sector of the cemetery, where two rows of basalt columns and the remains of a group of stone sculptures still stand today. Here, a special ceremony (*areyto*) was performed; the officials and twenty-six individuals participated in the ritual, which ended in the ritual death of the deputies. The ceremony may have included other activities, such as violent ritual contests, since perimortem fractures were identified on the femurs of Individuals I12 and I18.<sup>6</sup> It also included songs and dances, and the feline bone flutes found in the graves and represented in the sculptures may have been used in these activities. The ceremony could have transpired over several days, similar to what Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (1851–1855:3:155–156) observed five hundred years later among certain Isthmian groups.<sup>7</sup>

The iconography of the sculptures around the necropolis and in the graves themselves offers supporting evidence for these activities. The sculptures were excavated and sold by a collector in 1926; hence, we lack complete or even adequate information about their context. We know that they were found at a distance of 50 m from our excavation and that they represent local fauna, flutists, dancers, and other individuals, perhaps supernatural figures that are not easily identified (Mayo Torné and Carles 2015:33–35; Mayo Torné, Mayo Torné, and Karas 2010). Two

sculptures, which are especially informative because of their narrative aspect, represent individuals in submissive positions. One individual is depicted beneath the claws of a feline with large teeth, while the other is tied to a monolith (Figure 135). The spatial associations of the sculptures that we found close to the necropolis suggest that they are contemporaneous with those that were found in the graves.<sup>8</sup> For example, the “captive” monolith finds its parallel in the other monoliths at El Caño. These sculptures likely allude individually to some of the participants in the funerary ritual and collectively to one of the episodes—the ritual deaths—marking the location where these took place. These practices endured for a long time, as noted by Espinosa: “the aforementioned cacique had in his hut up to twenty Indians tied with cords around their necks, who had been brought from the provinces of Escoria and Cherú, where there had been wars. Among them was the son of the cacique of the province of Pacora . . . he held all of them there to be killed the following night” (Espinosa 1994:64). Although we know that these kinds of deaths occurred, we have not been able to determine from the bioanthropological analysis exactly how they were carried out. We believe that an effigy pot (Figure 136) recovered inside the grave and representing a round fish may have been involved, as the spines of three *Spherooides annulatus* and *Guentheridia formosa*, poisonous species of puffer fish whose toxins can cause death by asphyxiation, were found inside the pot (Patocka and Stredav 2002). Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés mentions death by poisoning—suicide—of the relatives of the *cacique* and describes this part of the ritual in the following way:

In Panama, Nata, Pacora, and other provinces where Cueva is spoken, along the southern coast and nearby, it is customary, on the death of the cacique or principal person, that all of the relatives and domestic caretakers and women of the house, that always served him, were killed . . . The manner of their deaths, that is, how the caretakers and servants kill themselves, is that together, they make a celebration, and recalling first the life and works of the deceased man, they set up a large *toreba* (or pot) and an oyster shell or a *calabacillo* or the neck of a *calabaza*, which acts as a spoon, and they take a sip of the drink that is in the pot; and they fall dead given the great strength of the poisonous drink (Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés 1851–1855:3:454–455).

8 Two trenches were established here in which were found hundreds of sherds from the Conte and Macaracas complexes (750–1100 CE) (Sánchez 2006).

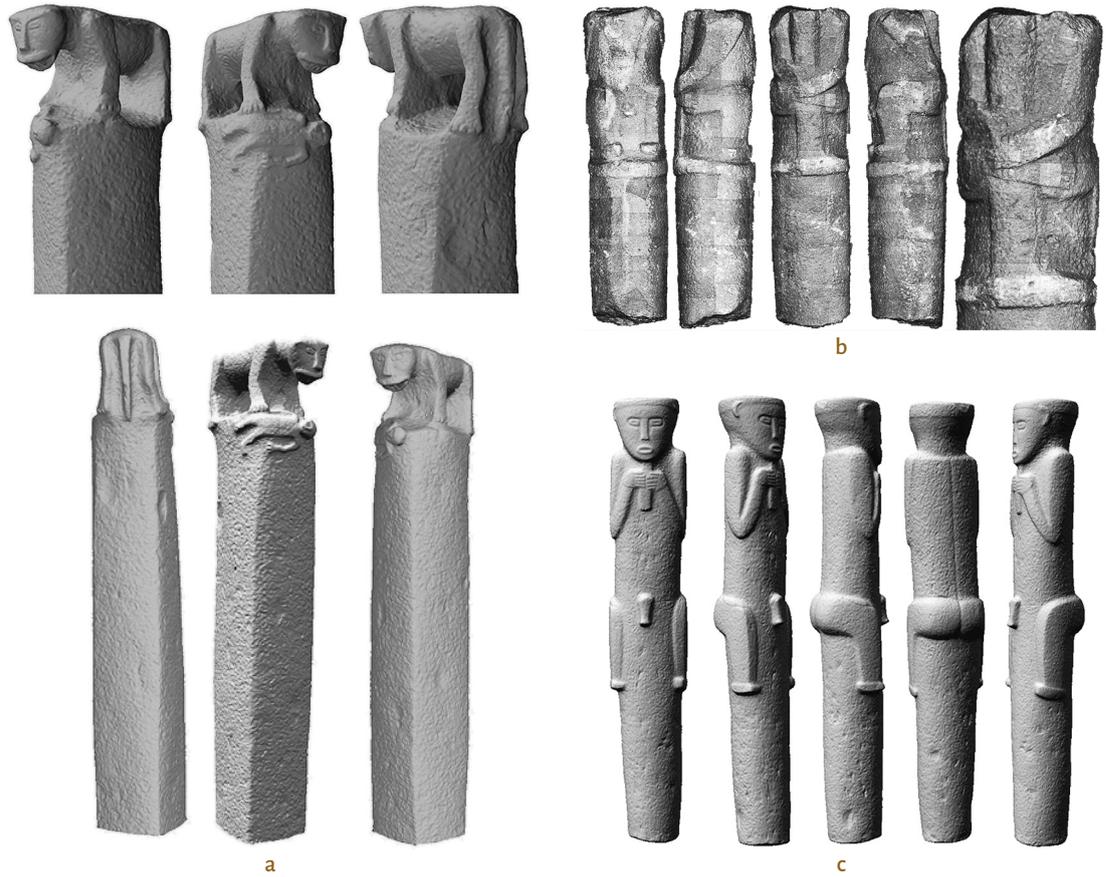
5 The Taíno word *areyto* was recorded by Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (1851–1855:vol. 3), who used it as a general descriptive term for the ritual dances that were performed with chants and songs during important Indigenous festivals in the Antilles and adjacent continental mainland.

6 We have recently published a detailed study of all the bone evidence of ritual violence at El Caño (Mayo Torné et al. 2020).

7 Editor’s note: The term *Isthmian* was first applied to “all the nations occupying the territory lying between the San Juan River and the southern shore of Lake Nicaragua on the north, and the gulf of Urabá, or Darien, and the River Atrato on the south” by Bancroft (1874:747). Gabb (1875:525) identified it as “an appropriate name, since the family seems to cover all of Costa Rica and most, if not all of the state of Panama.”

**Figure 135**

El Caño stone sculptures:  
a) representation of a feline attacking a man;  
b) representation of a man tied to a monolith;  
and c) representation of a man playing a flute. Photographs by Vicky Karas.



**Figure 136**

Zoomorphic image representing a puffer fish and belonging to the White-on-Red tableware of the Late Conte period (H. 11.8 cm; Diam. 13.7 cm).  
Fundación El Caño, Panama, registration no. 9603. Photograph by Carlos Mayo Torné.



In death, the bodies were dressed in their own warrior paraphernalia, to which we have referred previously, and three of them were bundled together: Individuals I13, I14, and I16 in the third layer of the grave. All of this must have happened in a chosen locale in the ceremonial sector especially reserved for this purpose.

#### *Episode 4: Journey from the Ceremonial Sector to the Grave*

Once the *areyto* had finished, the bodies of the warrior-chief and his companions, along with the materials that would later be gathered together for interment, were transported from the ceremonial precinct to the grave. The two spaces were adjacent, but we do not

know if there was an established path for processing from one to the other.

### *Episode 5: Burial of the Warrior-Chief*

While it was preceded by other ritual acts, the burial of the warrior-chief was the main event that took place in the grave itself. Before burial, the large grave was ritually prepared, as evidenced by the traces of an ash deposit and the remains of an incense burner (SU218). The grave was later lined with mats and/or cloths, whose textile impressions are preserved in the clay. A row of shark teeth found along the length of the southeast wall of the grave's third layer probably was sewn along the edge of these cloths.<sup>9</sup>

After these preparatory acts, the bodies were deposited in three layers (Table 12). We do not know the order, although those that would occupy the deepest—the third—were probably gathered first, and the task continued upward. In this way, those conducting the ritual avoided treading on top of previous deposits as they prepared the platforms or higher levels of the burial. In the third layer, nineteen individuals were deposited in horizontally extended ventral position, with different orientations and positions for the head, in order to achieve a balanced symmetry along the north–south and east–west axes with the warrior-chief at the center (Figures 137–138). The initial task was to gather, in the center of this massive chamber, the organic residues to which we have referred in the description of the first episode (see Figure 130). They deposited the corpse of Individual I13 along the western axis; its head was oriented to the south, and it was covered with the largest group of accoutrements after that of the main occupant. The body of Individual I17 was deposited with its head oriented in the opposite direction along the eastern axis, covering the left half of the large Conte Red bowl mentioned earlier and separated from Individual I13 by the width of one body.

<sup>9</sup> Digging tools of stone or metal have not been found on the Isthmus. It may be that the large burial chambers at El Caño and Sitio Conte were excavated with wooden tools. Since the clay soils in which these chambers were created are extremely hard when dry, we surmise that this work would have been undertaken in the rainy season. If we suppose that the burial itself was effected in the dry season, then it is likely that the chambers were excavated in the rainy season and certain arrangements were made before they were used. We have documented this possibility clearly in *Tumba T7*, which was excavated during the dry seasons of 2014 and 2015 (Mayo Torné et al. 2016); here, we found silts and sediments on the floor of the chamber, 30 cm in depth, which suggests that the burials did not take place immediately after the chamber was excavated.

Three pairs of individuals were subsequently placed along the northwest–southeast axis of the chamber. Each pair was on top of each other, the one below with the heads facing north/northwest and the one above with the heads facing south/southeast. They placed one pair, Individual I6 and Individual I8, in the center; a second pair, Individual I12 and Individual I19, to the southwest; and a third pair, Individual I3 and Individual I2, to the northeast. They deposited two groups of three individuals partially overlapping each other with the heads facing south/southeast. The group formed by Individuals I18, I14, and I15 was along the southwest wall, while the group formed by Individuals I16, I5, and I4 was along the northeast wall. Then, on top of the central pair (Individual I6 and Individual I8), they placed the bundled body of the warrior-chief (Individual I7) with his head to the south and the face turned toward the east. Finally, at each end of the north–south axis, they placed a pair of partially overlapping individuals. The pair formed by Individual I9 and Individual I10, with their heads to the east and facing in opposite directions, was to the south. Individuals I1 and I11 were to the north, with their heads facing west and their chests covering the feet of the warrior-chief.

Afterward, they placed other artifacts, the majority of which were axes and clusters of projectile points, with the different individuals, pairs, and groups (Table 13). Two clusters of long bones were then placed in parallel clusters over each of the two groups of three individuals. The largest (Unit SU182, which was positioned over the group located to the east) contained more than twenty long bones (femurs and tibias), fragments of mandibles and human teeth, and the antler of a deer; the other cluster (Unit SU183, which was positioned over the lesser members of the group located to the west) contained long bones of humans and felines. Further groups of artifacts were deposited in at least two of the four corners of the chamber. Unit SU135, located in the northeast corner, contained three ceramic plates, three copper plaques, six pendants of carved teeth (probably part of a belt), and a gold pectoral, while Unit SU161, located in the southeast corner, contained flutes fashioned from a feline humerus, a belt of spherical beads (possibly of wood with gold sheath), three carved manatee ribs, a greenstone pendant with gold sheath, an artifact of gold tubular beads, an artifact of greenstone beads, and a gold bell with a suspension loop.

They then covered the burial and offerings in the third layer of the grave with a wooden lid, supported by posts along the length of the chamber; on it were placed ceramic plates, bowls, and pots of the Conte Red, Early Conte Polychrome, and Guácimo

**Table 12** Bioanthropological information.

| STRATIGRAPHIC UNIT | INDIVIDUAL | SEX  | AGE GROUP              | AGE RANGE | BODY PLACEMENT |
|--------------------|------------|------|------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| T2-SU087           | I1         |      | child (?)              |           | prone position |
| T2-SU087           | I2         |      | child                  | 6±2       |                |
| T2-SU087           | I3         |      | adult                  |           |                |
| T2-SU087           | I4         |      | adult                  |           |                |
| T2-SU088           | I5         | male | adult                  |           | prone position |
| T2-SU088           | I6         | male | adult                  |           | prone position |
| T2-SU088           | I7         | male | adult                  |           | prone position |
| T2-SU088           | I8         | male | adult                  |           | prone position |
| T2-SU088           | I9         | male | adult                  |           | prone position |
| T2-SU100           | I10        |      | adult                  |           | prone position |
| T2-SU106           | I11        | male | adult                  |           | prone position |
| T2-SU106           | I12        | male | adult                  |           | prone position |
| T2-SU106           | I13        | male | adult                  |           | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I1         | male | adult                  | 20–30     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I2         | male | adult                  | 30–35     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I3         | male | adult                  | 30–35     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I4         | male | adult                  | 30–35     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I5         | male | subadult               | 18–20     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I6         | male | subadult               | 18–20     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I7         | male | middle adult           | 40–50     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I8         | male | adult                  | 18–20     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I9         | male | adult                  | 20–25     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I10        | male | adult                  | 20–25     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I11        | male | adult                  | 25–30     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I12        | male | subadult               | 18–20     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I13        | male | adult                  | 20–25     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I14        | male | adult                  | 25–30     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I15        | male | subadult               | 16–18     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I16        | male | adult                  | 18–20     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I17        | male | adult                  | 20–25     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I18        | male | subadult               | 18–20     | prone position |
| T2-SU134           | I19        | male | subadult               | 18–20     | prone position |
| T2-SU128           | I20        |      | child <sup>4</sup> (?) |           | prone position |

1 Funerary treatment consisting of the dehydration of the body using a heat source.

2 Funerary treatment consisting of the wrapping of the body with fabrics or canvases.

3 Trauma occurred at a time close to death.

4 No bones were found but only a miniature pectoral and bracelets articulated. A miniature pectoral plaque and bracelets were found in the positions where they would have been located on a buried corpse, but there were no human remains.

|  | ORIENTATION | MORTUARY TREATMENT                               | ORDER OF THE PLACEMENT OF BODIES               | PATHOLOGIES                            | NUMBER OF FUNERARY OBJECTS |
|--|-------------|--|--|--|----------------------------|
|  | NE          |  |  |  | 3                          |
|  | SW          |  |  |  | 0                          |
|  | NW          |  |  |  | 0                          |
|  |             |  |  |  | 0                          |
|  | SE          |  | over I9  |  | 10                         |
|  | SE          |  |  |  | 9                          |
|  | SE          |  |  |  | 0                          |
|  | NE          |  |  |  | 5                          |
|  | SE          |  |  |  | 4                          |
|  |             |  |  |  | 0                          |
|  | SE          |  |  |  | 2                          |
|  | SE          |  |  |  | 10                         |
|  | SE          |  |  |  | 3                          |
|  | SW          |  | under I12 and over I2, I3, I16                 |  | 5                          |
|  | SE          |  | over I16, I3, I17, I4, I1, I11                 |  | 3                          |
|  | NW          |  | under I2, I1, I11                              |  | 3                          |
|  | SE          |  | over I2, I16                                   |  | 5                          |
|  | SE          |  | over I16                                       |  | 0                          |
|  | NW          |  | under I17, I11                                 |  | 0                          |
|  | SE          | desiccated <sup>1</sup> and bundled <sup>2</sup> | over I8, I13 and under I11                     | arthrosis and loss of teeth            | 53                         |
|  | SE          |  | under I11 and over I17                         |  | 1                          |
|  | NE          |  | under I10                                      |  | 1                          |
|  | NE          |  | over I9  |  | 5                          |
|  | SW          |  | over I1, I12, I7, I8, I6, I3 and under I2, I16 |  | 3                          |
|  | NW          |  | under I19, I13                                 | perimortem <sup>3</sup> femur fracture | 1                          |
|  | SE          | bundled  | under I19, I9, I10, I12                        |  | 20                         |
|  | SE          | bundled  | under I15, I12 and over I18                    |  | 2                          |
|  | SE          |  | under I14                                      |  | 1                          |
|  | SE          | bundled  | under I5, I4                                   |  | 13                         |
|  | NW          |  | under I2, I8, I9, I1                           |  | 0                          |
|  | SE          |  | under I19 and over I14, I12                    | perimortem femur fracture              | 1                          |
|  | SE          |  | over I18, I13, I12                             |  | 0                          |
|  | NE          |  |  |  | 7                          |

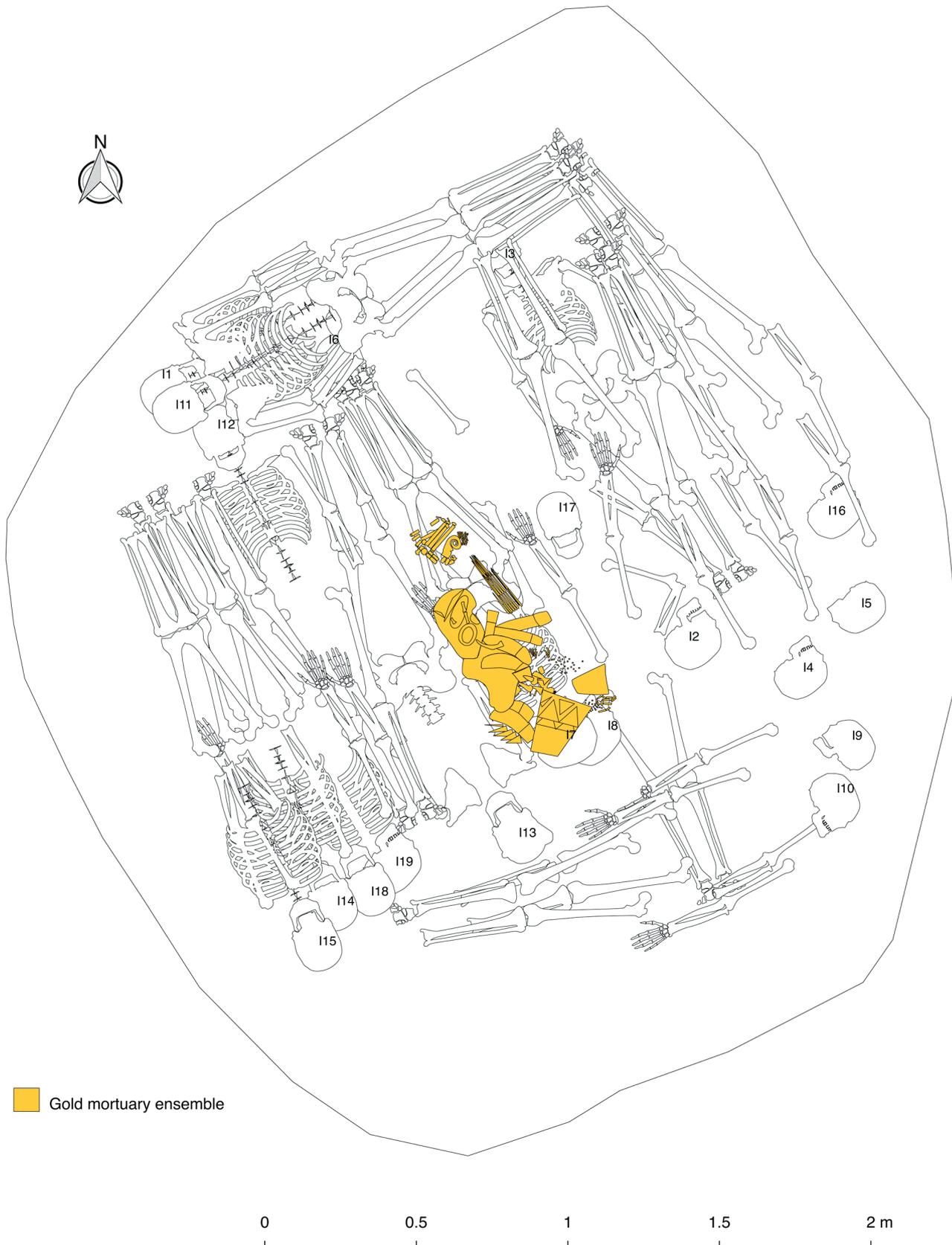


**Figure 137**  
 Orthophotography of  
 the burial located on the  
 third level of *Tumba T2*.  
 Photograph by Manuel  
 Antonio Franco.

types. We recovered the mortuary assemblage of what we believe to be a high-status newborn infant in the southwest corner of the lid, although the skeleton was not preserved. This (Figure 139) displays markers of high status—four armbands and three gold pectorals—that are arranged in a manner identical to that seen for the warrior-chief and the principal occupants of other graves. This point, and the fragility of the infant bones, leads us to think that this formed the attire of a newborn. Not only is the location of the components of the funerary attire identical to that of warrior-chief but the icons that are represented on them—images of diverse personages or transfigurations of a supernatural being in the form of a mythical reptilian—are the same (Guinea Bueno and Mayo Torné 2013:312–323), suggesting that there may have been a social or parental link between the

two.<sup>10</sup> The rest of the infant's mortuary assemblage comprises gold ear ornaments and greenstone artifacts. Projectile points and harpoons made of sawfish teeth were deposited near the pectorals and armbands along with thorny oyster (*Spondylus*) beads, bone tubes, perforated teeth, tubular bone pendants, and a pyrite mirror—Units SU128 and SU138—which testify to the status and ritual significance of this particular deposit.

<sup>10</sup> This is a good moment to consider whether it is possible to correlate certain icons seen among the graves at El Caño with a particular rank, social position, or lineage (Cooke 1998b:109); we venture to propose the last as the most likely possibility, taking into account that while each of the three graves that has been excavated revealed pectorals with shared icons, they are different from those of the other two.



**Figure 138** Plan of the main grave located on the third level of *Tumba T2*. Illustration by Carlos Mayo Torné.

**Table 13** Sex, age, funerary treatment, and funerary objects of the individuals in the burial units SU087, SU088, SU106, SU128, and SU134 of *Tumba T2*. For more information about the objects and context, visit the data repository of El Proyecto Arqueológico El Caño at <http://www.oda-fec.org/nata>.

| STRATIGRAPHIC UNIT | INDIVIDUAL  | ARTIFACTS             |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |          |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|------|----------------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|--------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|-------------|-------|----------|
|                    |             | ANIMAL BONES OR TEETH |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      | GOLD AND ALLOYS            |                 |          |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
|                    |             | PENDANT               | SPEAR STUDDED WITH SHARK TEETH | TUBULAR BEAD ARTIFACT | PERFORATED TOOTH | PERFORATED TOOTH ARTIFACT | BEADS | FLUTE | BELT | GROUP OF PROJECTILE POINTS | PACKET OF TUBES | BRACELET | NECKLACE | TOTAL ANIMAL BONE OR TOOTH ARTIFACTS | NECKLACE | ACCESSORY IN THE FORM OF A BUTTERFLY | BEAD ARTIFACT | GROUP OF CLOTHING ACCESSORIES | WOODEN FIGURE WITH GOLD SHEATH | INGOT | GROUP OF CHISELS | GROUP OF BEADS | SHEATHS OF FIGURES AND/OR PENDANTS | EAR SHEATHS | BEADS | PECTORAL |
|                    |             | T2-SU087              | I1                             |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |          |          | 0                                    |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU088           | I5          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            | 1               | 1        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU088           | I6          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           | 2     | 1     |      |                            | 1               | 4        | 1        |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU088           | I7          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU088           | I8          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU088           | I9          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU088           | Group 15-19 |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       | 1     | 4    |                            |                 | 5        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU100           | I10         |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU106           | I11         |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                | 1     |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU106           | I12         | 1                     |                                |                       |                  |                           |       | 1     | 1    | 1                          |                 | 4        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             | 1     |          |
| T2-SU106           | I13         |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       | 1     |      |                            |                 | 1        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I1          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I2          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I3          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I4          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      | 1                          |                 | 1        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                | 1                                  |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I5          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I6          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I7          | 8                     |                                |                       | 1                | 3                         |       | 1     |      |                            |                 | 13       | 1        | 1                                    |          | 2                                    | 2             | 1                             |                                |       |                  | 2              |                                    |             | 4     |          |
| T2-SU134           | I8          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I9          |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      | 1                          |                 | 1        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I10         | 1                     |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 1        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I11         |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I12         |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 0        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                | 1                                  |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I13         |                       |                                | 1                     |                  |                           |       |       |      | 1                          |                 | 2        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  | 1              | 1                                  |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I14         |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      | 1                          |                 | 1        |          |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |

|  | ARTIFACTS         |                 |      |                      |         |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  | ECOFACTS |       |        |                       |       | TOTAL ARTIFACTS AND INDIVIDUALS |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                |             |                |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|------|----------------------|---------|--------------------------------|---------|--------|----------|---------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------|----------|-------|--------|-----------------------|-------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|
|  | GOLD AND ALLOYS   |                 |      |                      |         | STONE                          |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  | RESIN    | STONE | ANIMAL |                       |       |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                |             |                |
|  | PECTORAL FRAGMENT | SET OF ARMBANDS | BELL | SET OF EAR ORNAMENTS | PENDANT | TOTAL GOLD AND ALLOY ARTIFACTS | PENDANT | MIRROR | NECKLACE | EAR ROD | SET OF EARRINGS | GREENSTONE ARTIFACTS | PROJECTILE POINT | STONE FLAKE | BUNDLE OF PROJECTILE POINTS | AXES AND CHISELS | POLISHER | BEADS | HAMMER | TOTAL STONE ARTIFACTS | BEADS |                                 | TOTAL RESIN ARTIFACTS | QUARTZ CRYSTAL | STINGRAY SPINE | PACKET OF STINGRAY SPINES | SPERM WHALE VERTEBRA | TORTOISE SHELL | DEER ANTLER | TOTAL ECOFACTS |
|  |                   | 1               |      |                      | 2       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             | 1                |          |       |        | 1                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 3              |
|  |                   |                 | 1    | 1                    | 2       | 3                              |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             | 4                           |                  |          |       |        | 7                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 10             |
|  |                   |                 | 1    |                      | 2       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 | 1                    |                  |             | 2                           |                  |          |       |        | 3                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 9              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |       |        | 0                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 0              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  | 1           | 4                           |                  |          |       |        | 5                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 5              |
|  |                   |                 | 1    | 1                    | 2       | 1                              |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             | 1                           |                  |          |       | 2      | 0                     |       |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 4              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 | 3                    | 1                | 1           | 2                           |                  |          | 1     | 8      | 0                     | 0     | 1                               |                       | 1              |                |                           |                      |                | 2           | 15             |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |       |        | 0                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 0              |
|  |                   |                 | 1    |                      | 2       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |       |        | 0                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 2              |
|  | 1                 |                 | 1    |                      | 3       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |       |        | 0                     | 0     |                                 |                       | 1              | 1              | 1                         |                      | 3              | 10          |                |
|  |                   |                 | 1    |                      | 1       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             | 1                           |                  |          |       |        | 1                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 3              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 | 3                    |                  |             | 2                           |                  |          |       |        | 5                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 5              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             | 3                           |                  |          |       |        | 3                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 3              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             | 3                           |                  |          |       |        | 3                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 3              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 1       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             | 3                           |                  |          |       |        | 3                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 5              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |       |        | 0                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 0              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |       |        | 0                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 0              |
|  | 1                 | 3               | 2    | 8                    | 1       | 28                             | 1       | 2      | 1        |         | 1               |                      |                  |             | 4                           |                  | 1        | 10    | 1      | 1                     |       |                                 | 1                     |                |                |                           |                      | 1              | 53          |                |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             | 1                           |                  |          |       |        | 1                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 1              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |       |        | 0                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 1              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  | 1           | 3                           |                  |          |       |        | 4                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 5              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             | 3                           |                  |          |       |        | 3                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 3              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 1       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |       |        | 0                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 1              |
|  |                   |                 |      | 1                    | 3       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 | 8                    |                  |             | 5                           | 1                |          | 1     | 15     | 0                     | 0     |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 20             |
|  |                   |                 |      | 1                    | 1       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |       | 0      | 0                     |       |                                 |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                | 0           | 2              |

Table 13 Continued

| STRATIGRAPHIC UNIT | INDIVIDUAL        | ARTIFACTS             |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 |           |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|------|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|-------------|-------|----------|
|                    |                   | ANIMAL BONES OR TEETH |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | GOLD AND ALLOYS |           |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
|                    |                   | PENDANT               | SPEAR STUDDED WITH SHARK TEETH | TUBULAR BEAD ARTIFACT | PERFORATED TOOTH | PERFORATED TOOTH ARTIFACT | BEADS | FLUTE | BELT | GROUP OF PROJECTILE POINTS | PACKET OF TUBES | BRACELET        | NECKLACE  | TOTAL ANIMAL BONE OR TOOTH ARTIFACTS | NECKLACE | ACCESSORY IN THE FORM OF A BUTTERFLY | BEAD ARTIFACT | GROUP OF CLOTHING ACCESSORIES | WOODEN FIGURE WITH GOLD SHEATH | INGOT | GROUP OF CHISELS | GROUP OF BEADS | SHEATHS OF FIGURES AND/OR PENDANTS | EAR SHEATHS | BEADS | PECTORAL |
| T2-SU134           | I15               |                       |                                |                       | 1                |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 | 1         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I16               |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 | 0         |                                      | 1        |                                      |               |                               |                                | 1     |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I17               |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 | 0         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I18               |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 | 1               | 1         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | I19               |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 | 0         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | Group I1-I11      |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 | 0         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | Group I9-I10      |                       |                                | 1                     |                  |                           |       |       | 1    |                            |                 |                 | 2         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       | 1                |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | Group I16-I5-14   |                       |                                | 1                     |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 | 1         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  | 1              |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | Group I18-I14-I15 |                       | 1                              |                       | 2                |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 | 3         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       | 2                |                |                                    | 2           |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | Group I2-I3       |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 | 0         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | Group I8-I6       |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 | 0         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU134           | Group I19-I12     |                       |                                | 1                     |                  |                           |       |       |      | 1                          |                 |                 | 2         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |
| T2-SU128           | I20               |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 | 0         |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             | 3     |          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>       |                   |                       |                                |                       |                  |                           |       |       |      |                            |                 |                 | <b>44</b> |                                      |          |                                      |               |                               |                                |       |                  |                |                                    |             |       |          |

For more information about the objects and context, visit the data repository of El Proyecto Arqueológico El Caño at <http://oda-fec.org/nata/view/login.php>

|  | ARTIFACTS         |                 |      |                      |         |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          | ECOFACTS |        |                       |       |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                |             |                |                                 |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|------|----------------------|---------|--------------------------------|---------|--------|----------|---------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------|----------|----------|--------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
|  | GOLD AND ALLOYS   |                 |      |                      |         | STONE                          |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          | RESIN    | STONE  | ANIMAL                |       |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                |             |                |                                 |
|  | PECTORAL FRAGMENT | SET OF ARMBANDS | BELL | SET OF EAR ORNAMENTS | PENDANT | TOTAL GOLD AND ALLOY ARTIFACTS | PENDANT | MIRROR | NECKLACE | EAR ROD | SET OF EARRINGS | GREENSTONE ARTIFACTS | PROJECTILE POINT | STONE FLAKE | BUNDLE OF PROJECTILE POINTS | AXES AND CHISELS | POLISHER | BEADS    | HAMMER | TOTAL STONE ARTIFACTS | BEADS | TOTAL RESIN ARTIFACTS | QUARTZ CRYSTAL | STINGRAY SPINE | PACKET OF STINGRAY SPINES | Sperm whale vertebra | TORTOISE SHELL | DEER ANTLER | TOTAL ECOFACTS | TOTAL ARTIFACTS AND INDIVIDUALS |
|  |                   |                 | 1    | 2                    | 0       |                                | 1       |        | 1        |         | 1               | 2                    |                  |             |                             |                  |          | 2        |        | 0                     |       | 0                     |                |                |                           |                      |                |             | 0              | 1                               |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 5       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |          |        | 7                     |       | 0                     | 1              |                |                           |                      |                |             | 1              | 13                              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |          |        | 0                     |       | 0                     |                |                |                           |                      |                |             | 0              | 0                               |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |          |        | 0                     |       | 0                     |                |                |                           |                      |                |             | 0              | 1                               |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          | 1       |                 |                      |                  |             | 4                           |                  |          |          | 1      | 6                     |       | 0                     |                |                |                           |                      |                |             | 0              | 6                               |
|  |                   |                 |      | 1                    | 2       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 | 1                    | 1                |             | 9                           |                  |          | 1        | 12     |                       | 0     |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                |             | 0              | 16                              |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 1       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             | 1                           |                  |          |          | 1      |                       |       | 0                     |                |                |                           |                      |                |             | 0              | 3                               |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 4       |                                |         |        |          |         | 1               | 5                    |                  |             | 2                           |                  |          |          | 8      |                       | 0     |                       |                |                |                           |                      | 1              | 1           | 16             |                                 |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |          | 0      |                       | 0     |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                |             | 0              | 0                               |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  | 1           | 4                           |                  |          |          | 5      |                       | 0     |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                |             | 0              | 5                               |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 0       |                                | 1       |        |          |         |                 | 1                    |                  |             | 9                           |                  |          |          | 11     |                       | 0     |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                |             | 0              | 13                              |
|  | 2                 |                 | 1    |                      | 6       |                                |         |        |          |         | 1               |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |          | 1      |                       | 0     |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                |             | 0              | 7                               |
|  |                   |                 |      |                      | 66      |                                |         |        |          |         |                 |                      |                  |             |                             |                  |          |          | 125    |                       | 1     |                       |                |                |                           |                      |                |             | 8              | 244                             |

**Figure 139**  
Mortuary ensemble.  
Fundación El Caño,  
Panama, registration  
nos. 9140, 9128, 9141  
(pectorals, left to right);  
and 9130, 9144, 9142,  
9143 (armbands, left to  
right). Photograph by  
Julia Mayo Torné.



After these offerings were placed over the covering to the mortuary chamber of the warrior-chief, a group of three individuals—I11, I12, and I13—were deposited in a horizontal, ventral, extended position with heads oriented to the east (Figure 140). Individual I12, situated in the center with arms folded over the chest, was accompanied by substantial warrior paraphernalia: a belt, bracelet, and necklaces made of dog and shark teeth and human incisors, along with a group of stingray spines and high-status markers, including ear ornaments, armbands, and a gold pectoral (Figure 141). To determine the identity of this individual, we must account for two pieces of complementary evidence: the body was buried in a separate chamber, and the pectoral (Figure 142), featuring an image of a flying squid (Guinea Bueno 2015), is the only accoutrement in this grave that does not share the iconography of those of the warrior-chief. We think Individual I12 belongs to another clan or lineage group, different from the warrior-chief, or may have been an important prisoner of war sacrificed at the time of the burial (Espinosa 1994:64). Given the high status, uniqueness, and isolation of Individual I12, it is very likely that the two bodies that flank him are his own companions.

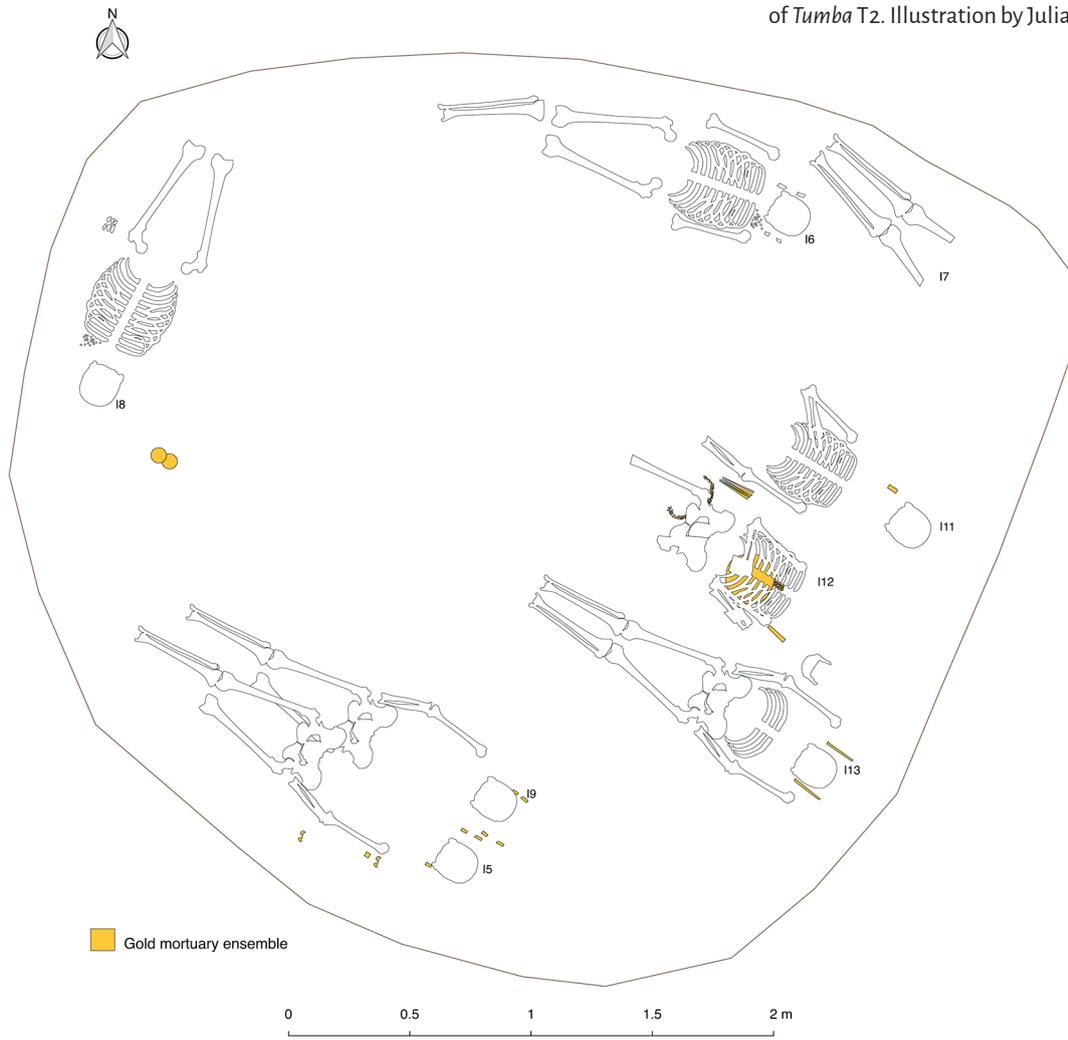
The second layer of the grave had a perishable, wooden, and supported covering or lid that lay over the platform upon which the burial of the second

level was placed. Bowls (Unit SU104) were placed on this covering, along with ceramic effigy vessels, carafes, miniature vessels, jars, pots, and plates in the Late Conte Polychrome, Conte Red, Panel Decoration, Black-and-White on Red, and Guácimo types. Coinciding with the perimeter of the platform, two groups of two individuals—I5 and I9 to the east, and I6 and I7 to the west—were deposited, along with an isolated individual (I8) to the north. All were in a horizontal, ventral, and extended position with heads oriented to the south, except for Individual I8, whose head was oriented to the east and turned to the south. These individuals were likely *guardianes de la tumba* (“guardians of the grave”). Although the components of their mortuary assemblages are identical to those of the other warriors, these individuals are the only ones who were partially exposed, visible from the edge of the chamber, and near the mouth or entrance of the grave. We say “partially exposed” because they were covered with ceramics; moreover, the remnants of animal pelts were found on the group formed by Individuals I5 and I9.

These pelts were possibly used to wrap the bodies, as indicated in the record mortuary assemblages (Repository of the project, ODA ID no. 375) of Unit SU088 in the data repository of El Proyecto Arqueológico El Caño. The placement of ceramics over the bodies of the “guardians of the grave” was the

**Figure 140**

Plan of the burials located on levels 1 and 2 of *Tumba T2*. Illustration by Julia Mayo Torné.



**Figure 141**

Skeleton and mortuary ensemble of Individual I12, on the second level of *Tumba T2*. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.

**Figure 142**

Gold pectoral (H. 18 cm; W. 19.8 cm) with a representation of a supernatural hybrid of a squid and bird; this was part of the mortuary ensemble of Individual I12 from *Tumba T2*. Fundación El Caño, Panama, registration no. 6604. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.



final step in the ritual burial episode. Over time, the chamber filled with sediment, a process that happens each rainy season when the level of the water table rises. This process led to the silting among the deposits of the third layer of the grave. Later, the wooden lids that covered the second- and third-level burials collapsed, after which a ceramic offering was made.

#### *Episode 6: Offering of Effigy Vessels and Other Ceramics*

The sixth episode consisted of the deposition, over the collapsed wooden lid that originally covered the warrior-chief's burial, of twenty-six ceramic vessels, six of which were effigies—three of warriors and two of offering-bearers who wear vessels on the head—and two large pots split in half in which incense was burned (Unit SU131) (Figure 143). It is possible that another five effigy vessels that represent warriors, which we will see later, were deposited next to the bodies of the “guardians of the grave” in the same episode, as they appear to form a group with this deposition. In short, three effigy vessels are located over the units that cover the third level of the grave and represent the warriors buried in the second level, and five vessels are found in different locations in the first and second levels and represent the warriors in the first level (Figure 144).<sup>11</sup>

After this episode, during the rainy season, the chamber filled again with silty sediment and sand up to 2.8 m deep, this time the product of a flood that led to the displacement of many artifacts and human bones from the first and second levels to the bottom of the grave.

#### *Episode 7: Human Offering*

Another ceremony took place after the ceramic offering. This episode is difficult to describe in detail given

<sup>11</sup> This unit is equivalent to the Unit SU096 in *Tumba T1*.

the scarcity of preserved evidence, but it includes the remains of a human offering (Unit SU100; Repository of the project, ODA ID, no. 1965). Only three long bones of the body are preserved; they were arranged on the same plane and are parallel to each other. No artifacts were recovered in association with them.<sup>12</sup> We did record a deposition of sediments that covered it. This likely resulted from a new flood, indicating that at least one rainy season occurred between Episodes 7 and 8.

#### *Episode 8: Ritual Burial*

After this flood, a new ceremony that is similarly difficult to reconstruct took place inside the grave. Many of the materials in this stratigraphic unit (SU087; Repository of the project, ODA ID, no. 2138) are mixed, except for in one area, the southeast quadrant, in which a mortuary ensemble composed of a miniature pectoral and two little armbands (Figure 145) was found. We believe that this deposit could be the remains of a buried infant or an effigy substitute. As in the case of the infant offered in Episode 5, the skeleton was not preserved, but the layout of the high-status components of its mortuary assemblage is comparable to that seen in other infant burials. The designs of the pectoral and armbands—identical to those on the smaller pectorals found on the remains of the wooden lid covering the third level of the grave (SU128)—are also similar to those represented on the pectorals of the warrior-chief, suggesting a specific lineage or relation. Around the armbands and pectoral, we found fifty ceramic vessels that appear to outline the missing infant body. He or she was interred with another child and two adults, all without adornment, whose bones are in a poor state of conservation. Along with these materials, we recovered sixteen stone artifacts—projectile points and axes—and stingray spines, which may indicate that the two adults were warriors. Unit SU087 is the last indicator of activity detected in the grave, and thus we believe it represents the end of the funerary ritual. On top of this deposit, we encountered a deposition of sediments that filled the chamber to its edge.

Finally, it is important to mention that the mortuary assemblages and offerings were produced between Episode 1 (the treatment of the body, and probably what took place beforehand) and Episode 6. All were made exclusively for burial. Indeed, many of the artifacts show no signs of use, as is the case with the edges of the weapons and artifacts of gold. They were made in sequence (the case, for example, of the clusters of stone projectile points made from the same core), or they were never finished.

<sup>12</sup> This unit is equivalent to the Unit SU099 in *Tumba T1*.



**Figure 143**  
View of the ceramics offering in Unit SU131. Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.



**Figure 144**  
Effigy vessels in Units SU131 and SU088. These represent warriors and officiants carrying ceramic offerings: a) officiants; b) warriors buried at the second level of the tomb; and c) warriors buried at the first level of the tomb. Illustration by Julia Mayo Torné, Miguel Ángel Hervás, and Aurelio Sánchez.

0 20 cm

**Figure 145**

Small mortuary assemblage with pectoral (H. 10.4 cm; W. 10.4 cm). Fundación El Caño, Panama, registration nos. 4757, 4756, 4758 (left to right). Photograph by Julia Mayo Torné.



### Interpreting the Funerary Ritual of *Tumba T2* as a Rite of Passage

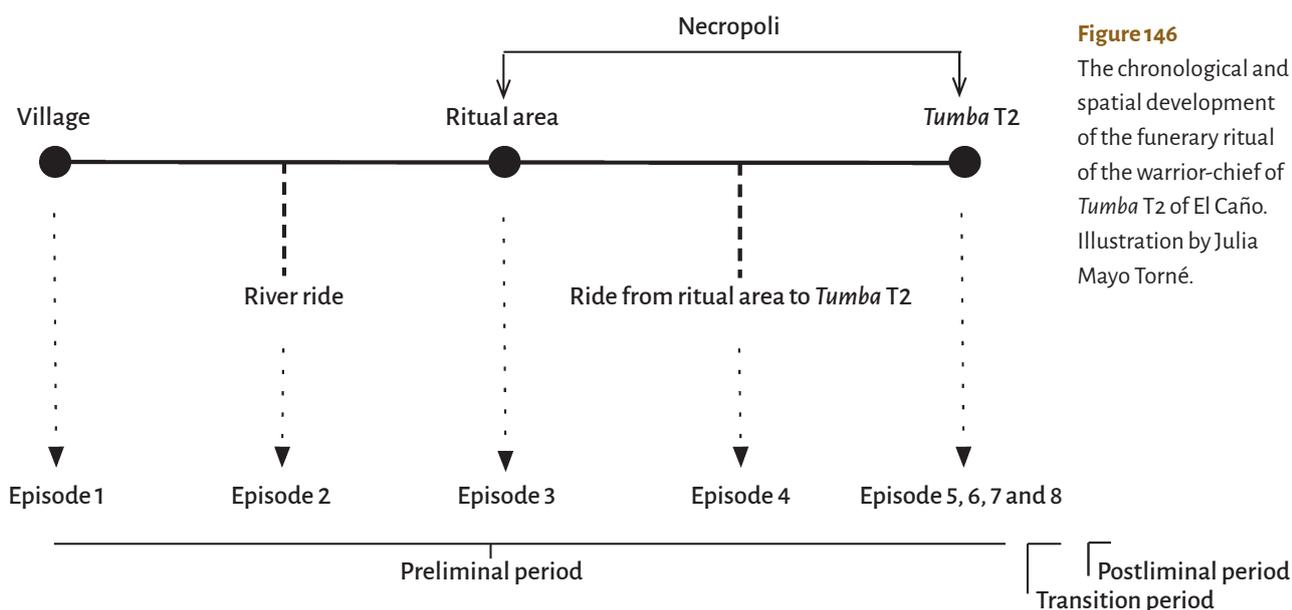
The activities that compose a funerary ritual are likely to reflect the identity and social importance of the deceased individual, while also serving to maintain group cohesion and affirm collective identity (Durkheim 1993). These rituals also have the potential to materialize prevailing beliefs (Chicoine 2011:525) and to create a separation between the dead and the living, so as to minimize possible danger to the group as a whole and to reestablish the social personage of the dead in the collective memory, often in the form of an ancestor (Bloch and Parry 1982:32–37). The structure is similar to that of any rite of passage: a separation or preliminary phase in which the elimination of the individual from their position in life is enacted; a transitional or liminal phase in which the deceased is guided into the world of the dead; and an incorporation or postliminal phase that represents the adoption of the deceased's new status (Van Gennep 1960). The rituals of the transitional phase are always more fully elaborated and assigned more importance (Van Gennep 1960:146).

From an anthropological perspective, it is possible to interpret the evidence of a funerary ritual in the context of the sequential organization of a rite of passage. Thus, we propose a sequence of formal episodes, Episodes 1–8 (Figure 146), involving the separation of the deceased from the community of the living (Episodes 1–4) and a liminal phase transiting the threshold between the two worlds (Episodes 5–7). Evidence of the postliminal phase is difficult to establish without any texts, but we interpret Episode 8 as the beginning of this stage. It is equally challenging to

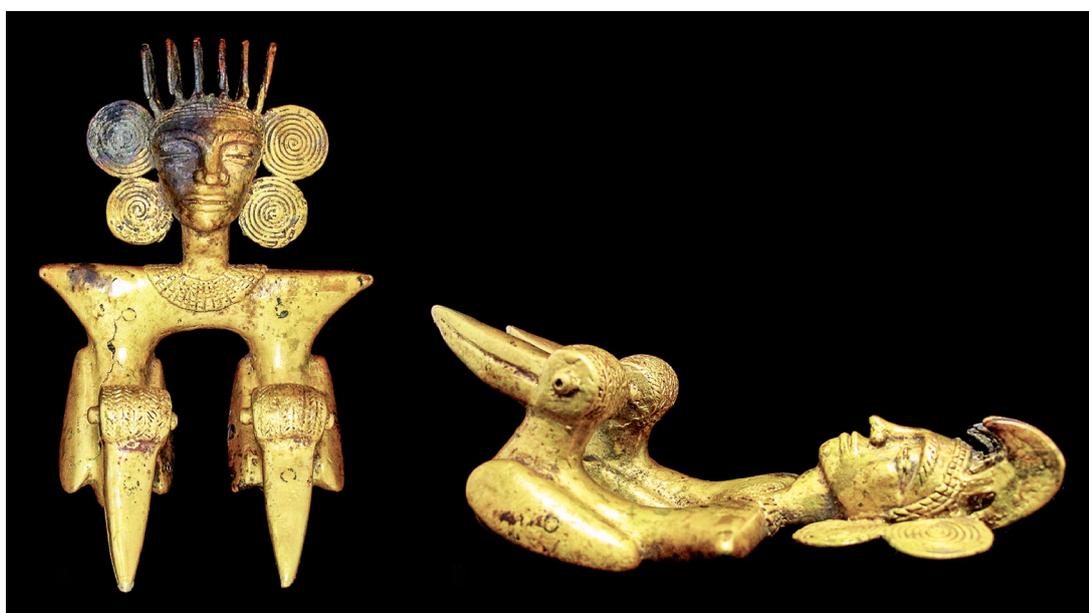
estimate the duration of each stage. For the first episodes, we have seen that the duration would depend, at least in part, on the moment when death occurred, given that burial only is possible during the dry season. For the second episode, we consider the information yielded by the sediments and collapses between distinct episodes, which occurred in three different moments. Given that these are deposits resulting from taphonomic phenomena and processes that occur in the rainy seasons, we calculate the duration of the liminal phase to be at least three years. During this time, the people mourning the deceased individual led different ceremonies, offerings, and sacrifices—Episodes 6 and 7—to help him happily complete his journey to the beyond. The iconographic analysis of a cast gold pendant, part of the attire of the warrior-chief (Figure 147), suggests that a pair of twin birds might have served as spirit companions, as we will see in the next section.

The beginning of the postliminal phase is marked by Episode 8, the final ceremonial event in the grave, which centers on an infant with insignia marking its status similar to those of the principal individual and represents a situation repeated in other graves.<sup>13</sup> In this phase, the Coclé celebrated the rebirth of the warrior-chief in a new reality. It is practically impossible, with the sources that are

<sup>13</sup> The remains of this ceremony are similar to those of the final ritual episode of *Tumba T7*, which was excavated in 2014 and 2015. The only remains that are preserved of one deposit, found inside a small chamber excavated in the sediment that covered the principal burial, include a necklace of resin beads with gold sheaths similar to that used by the principal occupant of this grave.



**Figure 146**  
The chronological and spatial development of the funerary ritual of the warrior-chief of *Tumba T2* of El Caño. Illustration by Julia Mayo Torné.



**Figure 147**  
Figurative pendant in cast gold made from the lost-wax process (H. 12.1 cm; W. 7.5 cm; Th. 6.8 cm); the pendant belongs to the mortuary ensemble of the warrior-chief. The image allows double reading according to the viewing angle. Fundación El Caño, Panama, registration no. 9281. Photographs by Mercedes Guinea Bueno.

available, to know what this world of the afterlife would be like, but we agree with Fowler (2015:45) when he argues that the objects recovered from the preliminal phase are not only the remains of rituals that took place during this phase—they also contain information about what would be expected in the postliminal phase. This argument could also be applied to the liminal phase. In the case of the Coclé warrior-chief, the treatment of the body, its mortuary assemblage, and its offerings suggest that the deceased would preserve his status in the afterlife and would be attended to by those who accompanied him. Distinct from other graves that were excavated and with the exception of the human offerings, these attendants are undoubtedly warriors. Perhaps the warrior-chief had to fight a final battle to arrive

at his destiny or the warriors were the only companions allowed, because he was taken to a place in the spirit world reserved only for them. In reality, we will never know if the rite of passage in the third phase included trials or judgments by deities, ancestors, or others, before finalizing the incorporation of the warrior-chief into the new community.

### How to Arrive at the Beyond: A Pendant of the Warrior-Chief with Mortuary Information

It is essential to reserve some space for the iconographic analysis and interpretation of a cast tumbaga pendant present in the mortuary ensemble of the warrior-chief (Figure 147). This provides a clear

example of how the reading of an object is enhanced by knowledge of its archaeological context. The figure represented on the pendant is composed of two birds and a human head. It is organized in an anatomic form,<sup>14</sup> and its visual significance is preserved even when the figure is rotated. Stylistically, it is identified in the metallurgical group known as the International Group (400–900 CE), according to the classification by Bray (1992:33–40). The pendant does not show any traces of having been used before being placed horizontally on the back of Individual I7, just as other objects in his mortuary assemblage were before the body was wrapped. In this position, we see twin birds, paired and connected by their tails, with bent wings and a long beak; where their tails meet, a human head is attached. This head, with semiclosed eyes and composed features, is adorned with an elaborate headdress, which suggests the high status of its wearer. The prominent larynx on the neck, which is adorned with a necklace of seven rows, indicates that the figure was an adult male.

In order to understand the symbolic and semantic character of the image and to interpret the message it communicates, we have assumed that the goldworker codified it employing two of the visual metonymies most frequently used in Coclé iconography: “the part for the whole,” in which the whole is represented by a part with which it maintains a semantic relationship sufficient to identify it; and “the whole for the part,” in which a complete figure is used to refer only to some of its diagnostic qualities. Looking at the figure in context, lying horizontally along the back of the deceased, we can interpret the human head as the “part” that refers us to a “whole,” as a metaphor for the complete man, or perhaps only his soul or souls. If we reconcile this with the tranquility of his features, his semiclosed eyes, the luxury of his adornments, and, very importantly, the burial as a context of use, it becomes possible to interpret the pendant as depicting a scene in which two birds lead the body of the high-status deceased person toward his journey into the spirit realm. If we turn the figure ninety degrees and think about it vertically, what comes to mind<sup>15</sup> is

14 It is said that an image is anatomic when, on rotating the position of the observer, a complementary opposite or an identical image appears—that is, it can be “read” from two different perspectives.

15 We say “comes to mind” because the figure that is represented has not changed in its rotation, but the Coclé artisan is able to play with a peculiarity of human psychological perception: the observer tends to recognize visual forms with which they are already familiar and to give these a greater significance. In this position, first the head is noticed, and most emphasized, and we expect to find the usual below: a human body. Thus, we try to

an image of a man with legs flexed toward the chest and a body that has been completely, with the exception of the head, replaced by the two birds: the tails are the chest and the shoulders, the arms are the wings, and the necks and beaks are the legs. Now, with the man as the protagonist, it is the birds who can be considered as a visual metonymy in which a “whole” refers only to a “part.” As we have not recognized any species of bird that allows us to refine our interpretation, we will use the most universal metaphorical associations of birds: flight, travel, ascent, descent, and communication between worlds. We, thus, see that the icon communicates basically the same concept in both positions—a man, deceased, flying, traveling between worlds, guided by birds—but it does so with distinct emphases that facilitate different readings. Recall that the pendant never seems to have been used in life<sup>16</sup> and, therefore, in its context in the grave, horizontal on the back of the deceased, it suggests the first reading, which emphasizes the aspect of travel and calls the observer’s attention to the two bird guides. Once the trip was complete, the pendant would fulfill its function hanging from the chest of the warrior-chief in the beyond, pointing the observer’s attention to the head of the transformed man with his high-status symbols now very visible. Thus, we see that the anatomic composition of the image is an effective stylistic tool that helps the goldworker to communicate the idea of transformation that unfolds in the rite of passage.

The interpretation that we propose is reinforced by similar objects—one or two birds with a human head appearing at the tail—among which the same interpretation is possible, albeit without the valuable aid of context. We have located another five cast tumbaga pendants within the metallurgical region of Costa Rica, Panama, and northern Colombia (Cooke and Bray 1985:45): four are associated with the International Group and one with the Openwork Style. They all show the same icon. One pendant, currently in the Norweb collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art (1939.509), was found on the neck of a mummy looted from the Isthmus of Panama (Bray 1992:40, fig. 3.6); it is practically identical to the one from El Caño, except for minimal differences among the adornments on the head. Another two, smaller in size and with a simpler headdress, show variation in the execution of the birds, reaffirming our interpretation that the person dragged by the birds is the deceased: the bodies of the birds have fused into a

recognize it in the contours of the birds and in some ways we see it although it does not exist.

16 It includes a suspension loop on the back part that shows no trace of having served this role.

single body, in which the wings are tentatively indicated, forming one unique, two-headed bird with a narrow outline and a human head in place of a tail, in such a way that the compressed body of the bird from which a head emerges resembles a wrapped deceased person. One of these two unprovenanced pendants is in the collection of the Museo Antropológico Reina Torres de Araúz in Panama (Araujo 2005:44–45). Richard G. Cooke and Luis A. Sánchez Herrera write that it “represents a seated human being or a two-headed bird with its wings and feet” (Araujo 2005:48). The other, from Parita in the Azuero Peninsula (Labbé 1995:138, fig. 99), forms part of the present-day Broad collection; it is, among all of the figures of this group, the one in which the composition and execution suggest most clearly a funerary bundle, although the author describes it as a shaman in transformation. Finally, there are two other pendants that vary by depicting a single bird with visible wings. One of them, from San Pedro de Urabá, is found in the collection of the Museo del Oro in Bogotá (Uribe Villegas 1988:50, pl. 12), and the other, recovered by Lothrop (1956:33–40) in the Panama Canal Zone, is held in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (PC.B.372, Plate 102). The Dumbarton Oaks pendant was made in the Openwork Style, whereas all of the previous objects were in the International Group. It differs from the other pendants because the human figure has open arms and holds bars with danglers with its hands, but its torso, which is extended, rounded, and without detail, was made like all of the others, as the body of a bird. Its difference from the object from San Pedro de Urabá is not so great if we see in this latter piece that the emphasized ends of the bird’s tail are serving the role of suggesting open arms.

In proposing that the icon contains mortuary information and symbolizes the deceased in his journey into the spirit realm, we are considering the possibility that the deceased individual is not represented by the person who wears the object in the mortuary assemblage. The scene could be situated in a mythical moment and refer to a deity, hero, or mythical ancestor and, from its content, could play the role of a fetish in the burials, fostering the same destiny for the deceased person. Today, the Bribri of Costa Rica and Panama believe that birds bear souls of the deceased

along the path into the “otherworld” (Bozzoli de Wille 1986:132, 185).

## Conclusion

The Coclé warrior-chief buried in *Tumba* T2 in the El Caño necropolis died at the age of forty-five at some point between 900 and 1020 CE. His funerary ritual lasted three to four years; in its development through distinct episodes and ceremonies, the ritual featured the participation of members of his group as officiants, mourners, companions, or victims. Twenty-six warriors were chosen to accompany him in his journey to the beyond, to which he was guided by a pair of birds and where, already transformed, he would preserve his high status. One adult and possibly two infants linked to him were sacrificed in order to ensure that all would go well.

The above is a summary of what has been presented in this essay, in which, thanks to the abundant archaeological evidence at the site of El Caño and the careful excavation of its graves, we have been able to construct a framework of what could have been the symbolic behaviors associated with this final rite of passage for the Coclé warrior-chief. We expect that, given the progress of the studies of the necropolis, it will be possible to refine the interpretations proposed here, once more and newer information becomes available that refutes or corroborates our current hypotheses. At this moment, comparing the excavated graves, we note that the oldest ones, *Tumba* T5 and T6, dated between 750 and 900 CE, apparently do not contain ritual deposits dating to after the principal burial, which may indicate that the rituals that accompanied the transitional/liminal and cumulative/postliminal phases occurred outside of them.<sup>17</sup> To the contrary, these postburial deposits, very similar to what we have seen here in *Tumba* T2, were indeed found in the later tombs, *Tumba* T1 and T7, which suggest that a change in funerary patterns took place starting in 900 CE.

<sup>17</sup> These graves were cut by *Tumba* T1 and T2, the reason for which we do not know their complete structure and contents.