

Poster

Ceremonial caches and associated plant materials at the ancient Maya site of Lamanai, Belize

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Introduction. Lamanai is an ancient Maya site situated along the west bank of the New River Lagoon in Northern Belize. Ritual deposits from two Postclassic buildings in the Ottawa Courtyard indicate a thriving Postclassic period in Lamanai, unlike other lowland Maya areas.

Objectives. To identify carbonized plant remains from selected caches at Lamanai to determine which plants were being used in ritual contexts by the Maya.

Methods. 27 archaeobotanical samples from 15 contexts in 2 temples, representing successive phases at Lamanai, were examined. Samples were viewed using light and electron microscopy, compared to botanical reference collections and identified to family, genus, or species.

Results. The overwhelming presence of pine (*Pinus cf. caribaea*), both by weight and ubiquity, indicates that this wood type may have been preferentially selected for burning in caches and ritual offerings. The presence of carbonized food plants (corn and beans) found with the pine indicates that these were burned and also interred as an offering. The only sample lacking pine charcoal came from a deposit listed as “fill” by archaeologists.

Conclusion. The archaeological contexts of the pit features suggest that these caches were offerings. The overwhelming presence of pine charcoal in the sampled caches representing different time periods indicates that the ritualistic use of pine wood among the Maya remained a uniform practice into the Postclassic period. When compared with other Maya archaeological sites in the region, these recovered macroremains provided an excellent example of cultural continuity that endured through what some scholars have labeled the “Maya Collapse.”

Keywords: Maya ritual burning, paleoethnobotany, pine

Selected References

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