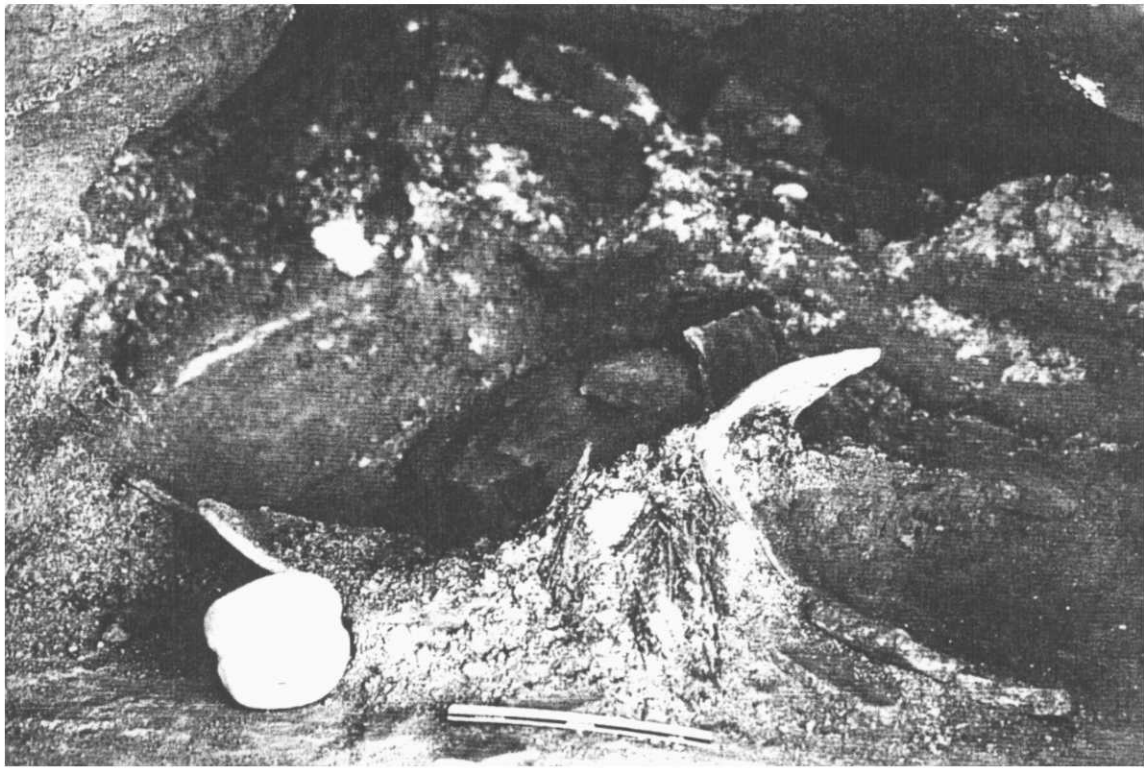


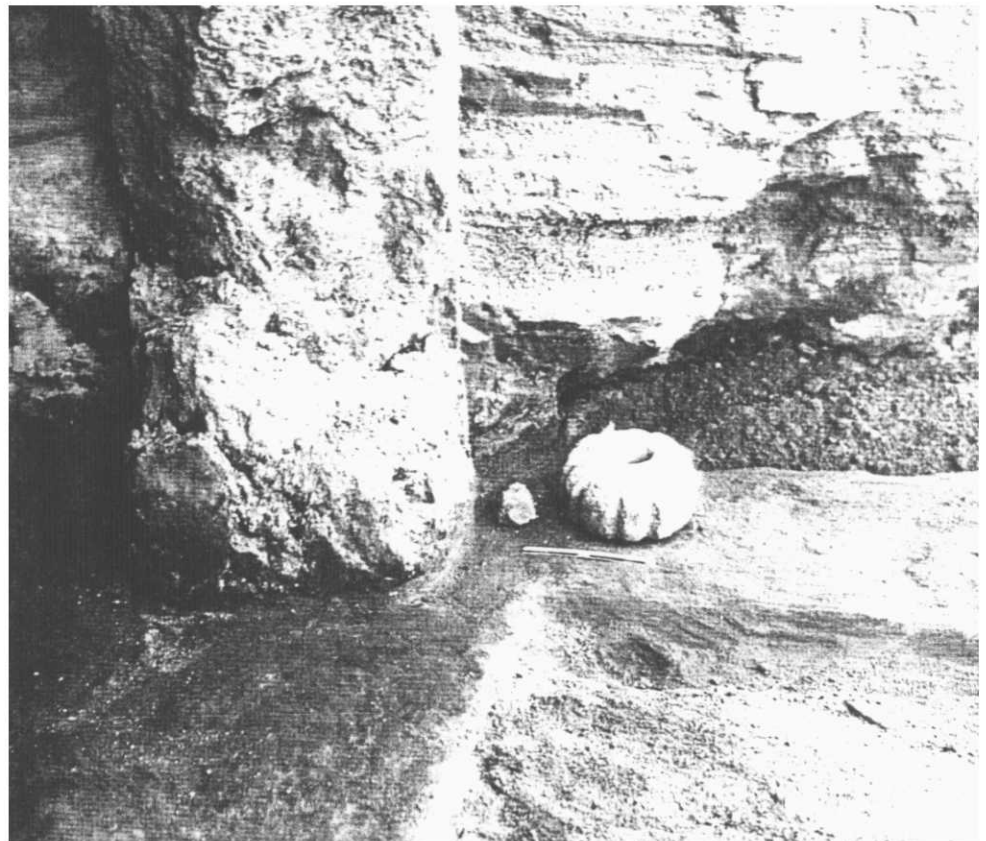
**"Documento original en mal estado"**



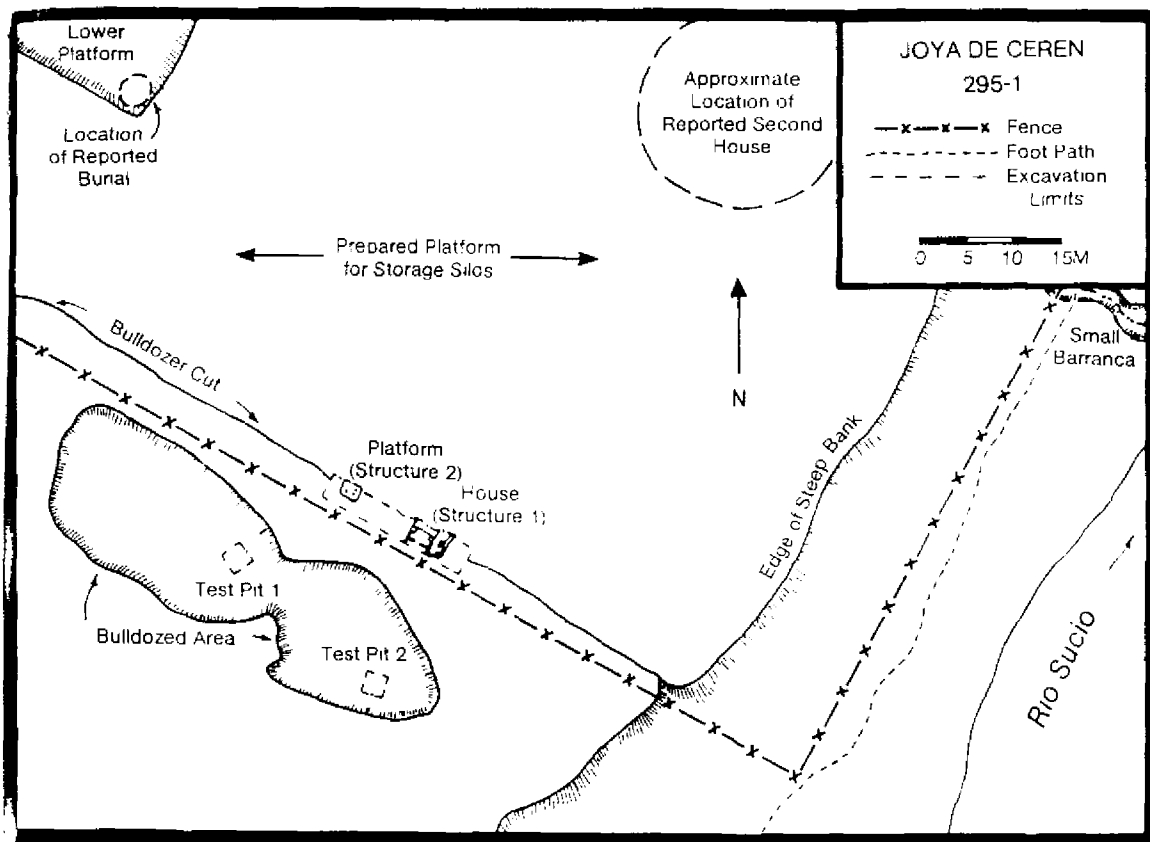
*Pantry of farmhouse at Cerén. On the floor were four large storage vessels, two of which were two-thirds full of beans. The other two were empty or contained a liquid at the time of the eruption. A grooved stone maul was found with the vessels. The tephra collapsed and carbonized the palm thatch roofing (visible in center), breaking the vessels and spilling the beans on the floor.*



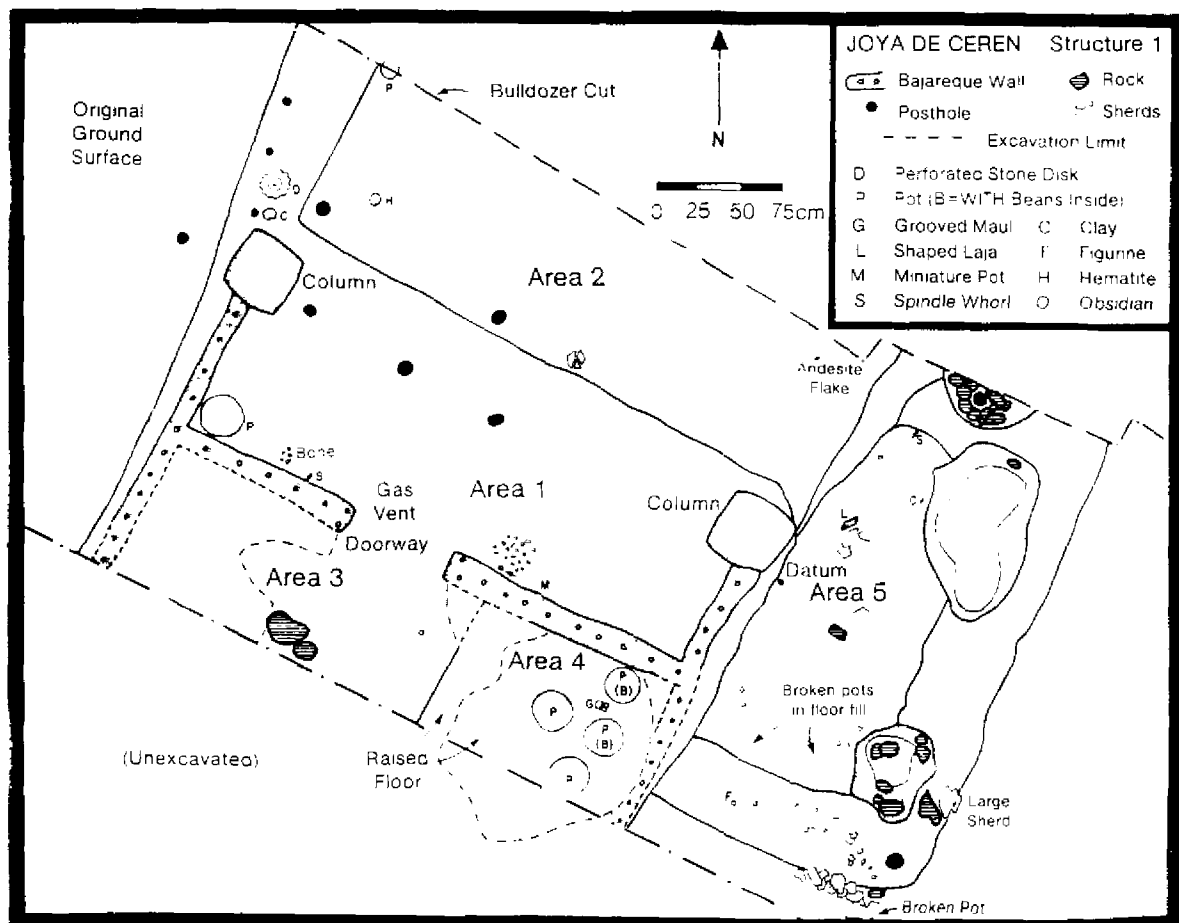
*This fired clay figurine found near the farmhouse at Cerén was probably part of family ritual practices of the Classic Maya.*



*Excavation of Cerén farmhouse Area 2 which was a pottery working area. By the column base are a lump of clay and a large grooved and perforated stone disc of unknown function. The scale measures 15 centimeters.*



Plan of Cerén including the farmhouse (structure 1) and the platform or ramada (structure 2) which were buried by a layer of hot tephra four meters thick.



Plan of Cerén farmhouse. The western part of Area 1 was used for artifact storage and perhaps for weaving cotton garments; Area 2 was used for pottery manufacture; Area 4 was the pantry; Area 5 was a storage and work area with vessels suspended from the roof.

prerogative. Within the farmhouse itself, functional areas were extraordinarily well preserved and easy to define. A pantry contained large ceramic storage vessels, two of which were still full of *frijoles de arroz*, a local variety of bean. A possible pottery-making area contained three items, a hand-formed ball of fine clay, a lump of hematite which is a red iron oxide used in painting pottery and an andesite smoothing and polishing stone. Other living-space and working areas were also found, among them a place for cotton weaving.

The eastern part of Area 1, the room in the central part of the house, was generally free of artifacts and was kept that way when the house was occupied. The only exception was one particular area where a small crude miniature pot and 20 potsherds were found. According to ethnographic evidence, the pottery makers in Maya households were almost always female. Since this pot was much more crudely made than the others found in the house, it is possible that its creator was a young girl just learning the craft. The 20 sherds found on the floor close to the pot may have been counters, since the Maya numerical system is based on the number 20. If the room itself had been a little girl's room, her age would have been about five or six—or so one might guess.

Behind the house and platform, test excavations revealed a cultivated field in use when the eruption struck. Apparently, the field was not an irrigated one, but it had been ridged for water retention and corn seeds had been sown along the ridges at intervals of approximately 50 centimeters. The corn had sprouted and grown to a height of five to ten centimeters when Laguna Caldera erupted and the plants were preserved beautifully by the tephra as casts. Given the seasonality of rainfall in El Salvador and the height of the plants, the Laguna Caldera eruption probably occurred in May or early June.

Much remains to be learned about Protoclassic Maya society. The well preserved house at Cerén will be helpful in determining the nature of Maya life and some large scale seasons are being planned there for the future. As new information is unearthed, our notions of Maya society will be modified. But the impact of the eruption of Ilopango is still reasonably clear: the devastation of the southeastern Maya highlands suddenly disrupted Protoclassic Maya society by killing or displacing a great number of people. Migrating survivors forced changes on lowland communities, shifts that accelerated the pace of cultural evolution. Tikal, especially, benefitted from the disaster by taking advantage of the economic

disruptions resulting from Ilopango. The recolonization of the highlands was slow and, as the Cerén site attests, was again disrupted at least in a small area by the Laguna Caldera eruption. The soils of El Salvador must still fully recover and the whole story of the Maya is yet to be told. But beneath the blanket of tephra lies, and has now for centuries, an invaluable body of evidence which must still be explored.

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FOR FURTHER READING on volcanoes in general: F.M. Bullard, *Volcanoes of the Earth* (University of Texas Press, Austin 1976), authoritative, well-written and well-illustrated overview of volcanology.

On the archaeology of El Salvador: R.J. Sharer, "The Prehistory of the Southeastern Maya Periphery," *Current Anthropology* 2(1974):165-187, recent summary of the prehistory of El Salvador from 1200 B.C. to A.D. 1500.

On specific excavations: S.K. Lothrop, "Pottery Types and their Sequence in El Salvador," *Indian Notes and Monographs* 4 (Museum of the American Indian, New York 1927):165-220, the first careful examination of artifacts under the Ilopango ash layer with quite accurate conclusions; R.J. Sharer, editor, *The Prehistory of Chalchuapa, El Salvador*, 3 volumes (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1978), detailed descriptions of excavations and survey of this major center of the southeast Maya Highlands; P.D. Sheets, "Ilopango Volcano and the Maya Protoclassic," *University Museum Studies* 9 (Southern Illinois University, Carbondale 1976), summary of the 1975 research of the Protoclassic Project with sections on archaeology and geology; G.R. Willey, W. Bullard, J. Glass and J.C. Gifford, "Prehistoric Maya Settlements in the Belize Valley," *Papers, Peabody Museum* 54 (Harvard University, Cambridge 1965), detailed account of excavations at Barton Ramie, an apparent recipient of disaster victims at about A.D. 300; G.R. Willey and J.C. Gifford, "Pottery of the Holmul I Style from Barton Ramie, British Honduras," in S.K. Lothrop, editor, *Essays in Precolumbian Art and Archaeology* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1961):152-170, still the best well-illustrated summary of the Protoclassic artifact distributions in the Maya lowlands.

On the Chorti Maya: Sir Eric Thompson, *Maya History and Religion* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman 1970), chapter 3, a well written account of the Chorti Maya expansion from the eastern Maya lowlands southward into Honduras and El Salvador during the Middle Classic Period dating to the fifth and sixth centuries after Christ.