

# **The Absence of Other Jade Workshops or Jade Production Areas at Cancuen: Excerpts from Andrieu 2014**

## **(Beyond the one Preform Workshop Near the NE Port)**

Background and Synthesis (P. Torres, A. Demarest, et al)

The absence of any jade workshops other than the northeast peninsula preform workshop has been explained and demonstrated in great detail in many reports, monograph chapters, and publications by Andrieu and her colleagues (e.g. Andrieu 2010, Andrieu et al 2010, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014). These have demonstrated that with the exception of the NE jade preform workshop immediate area (97% of all Cancuen jade pieces and debitage) no structure and/or midden has more than 13 pieces of jade debitage. All work at that one NE jade processing area was initial stages of production to break boulders open, to extract portions of good quality jade, and in some cases, to make unfinished preforms of earspools or beads perhaps with some polishing. All of these heavy, laborious, minimally skilled activities are never associated with elite levels of jade production anywhere in the world including Mesoamerica. They generally would not be described as “artisan” activities, but there are great ambiguities and debate on all of these terms.

There are neither tools nor debitage from anywhere in the site from later levels or “elite level” of production and commodity differentiation (polishers or simple cutting tools and debris are from the early stages mentioned by Andrieu and others). The only other specific loci that had even been proposed as a “jade workshop” is the K7-24 structure, based on its alleged “cache” and as critiqued below the cache does not exist and the ceramic import associations are skewed or misrepresented. The entire K7-24 structure and its midden only has a jade boulder in a trash pit (there are many such boulders and chunks at Cancuen) and only one broken jade bead fragment, and only three small unworked fragments that were identified as “jade” debitage. After analysis it was found that only one of those three was actually jade and from the early percussion stages of production like the NE workshop debris that is scattered all over in tiny quantities in other fill and contexts at the site. The other two of those three fragments turned out to not be jade or nor jade debitage at all, but simply greenish stones.

Thus, K7-24 is not a workshop and there are no indications of any kind of a jade working at Cancuen, other than the NE peninsula preform workshop, that only in the last 10 to 15 years of the site occupation.

From the actual data described and analyzed in Andrieu’s et al’s publications (see especially Andrieu et al 2011, 2012, and 2014) they have demonstrated a “commodification of jade” as Andrieu terms it as an export commodity in only preforms. This also corresponds to the extreme paucity of jade artifacts of any kind in burials and even elite contexts at the site despite over 150 excavated burials as well as two mass burials with offerings of over 50 more individuals. There is a near absence of finely carved objects in the actual period of the workshop (very securely and specifically dated to A.D. 790-800). Other finely carved jade objects presented

in various publications (e.g. Kovacevich, Callaghan et al, Kovacevich et al 2003-2016) are from a royal burial with dated inscription, artifacts, and architecture that is almost 50 years before any jade workshop existed at Cancuen (absolutely dated by a sealed contexts, ceramics, and an *in situ* dated monument to 757). Similarly, the famous mask of Pakal from Palenque, while made of jade from the same highland Verapaz source, dates to over a century earlier than the existence of Cancuen's preform workshop. We now know that the Verapaz highland jade source that was used at Cancuen was used by other sites from PreClassic times on and throughout the Classic Period, and probably after. Pakal's mask preform pieces did not come from the Cancuen preform workshop, but only from the same highland source.

### Production and Distribution of Jade at Cancuen : Key Points

Key points relevant to these issues have already been summarized in Andrieu et al (2014) and many other sources (see pubs and recent pubs on website).

Some excerpted synthetic statements from Andrieu et al 2014 Ancient Mesoamerica are provided here:

p. 151 (Andrieu et al 2014) Therefore, by reanalyzing this material, we were able to show that the workshop was not only involved in a preliminary stage of production (Kovacevich 2006; 2007), we were also able to specify exactly what those productions were and how preliminary the work actually was.

p.152 Of the 3,725 fragments of jade debitage found in Cancuen, 97% were concentrated in the workshop, but 119 fragments and blocks of the same material as that found in the workshop were also found elsewhere on the site. Interestingly, these fragments were found scattered in a large variety of different contexts, and always in relatively small quantities (Table 6) within structures of different architectural quality. A single concentration was found in the northern part of the site, with 57 fragments of jade deposited on the stairs of an elite structure that probably correspond to a form of ritual deposit (Kovacevich 2003b). Apart from that context, no more than 13 pieces of jade debitage were found concentrated together in any area outside the workshop.

p.152-153 In fact, 84% of the debitage from outside the workshop is percussion waste, so on that basis we cannot suggest that the inhabitants of these other structures were involved in a later stage of the bead and earflare production process that would have been complementary to production activities in the workshop.

p.156 But the inhabitants of Can 24 were only involved in a very preliminary stage of the earflare and bead production process, and the identity of the artisans involved in the remaining stages is still unknown.

p.156 Further, the missing stages of production are very laborious, implying repetitive and heavy work. While Mesoamerican elites were often involved in artistic work (Inomata 2001; Reents Budet 1998), there is no suggestion that they practiced any form of laborious activity or that their power derived from such activities (McAnany 1993:69–70, 1995).

p. 156 Despite the fact that many stages of bead and earflare production were clearly lacking in the Cancuen workshop, which indicates a spatial division of work, an important stage in the fabrication process is still missing (the cutting of the earflares and the drilling of the beads), and we cannot say who was involved in that part of the production until we find the corresponding waste. In all cases, however, the fact that the producers from Can 24 were not finishing the artifacts implies that they did not have immediate access to the final products.

p.158 There was a very clear opposition between the quantities worked and the lack of access to the final jade objects, implying that the craftspersons were not the owners of the material they were working. Despite the fact that they worked most of the jade found in Cancuen, they did not have access to these objects. Such data clearly confirm that they were working for someone else who enforced the sumptuary laws that guided these different productions and exchanges.

p. 159 With more than 60 kg of jadeite blocks and débitage, Cancuen appears to have had very easy access to that raw material. Despite<sup>2</sup>that abundance of workshop jade and the fact that 117 burials have been excavated—in addition to two mass deposits of sacrificed nobles with artifacts (Suasnavar et al. 2007)—there is a large discrepancy between the quantities of jade débitage found in the site and the number of finished objects.

p. 160 The discrepancy between the quantities of raw materials and the finished objects probably indicates that most of these productions were meant to be exchanged outside the site. The lack of unperforated beads (n = 5) and the lack of string-cut fragments corresponding to the production of ear- flares at the site could indicate that the majority of the exchanged material was actually composed of preforms and blanks rather than finished artifacts.

p.160 Regarding the value of the exchange, it is important to note that exchanging preforms or blanks certainly did not have the same implications as the exchange of finely crafted finished objects. While these objects could have been exchanged through gifting obligations (Godelier 1996; Mauss 2007[1924]), blanks, on the other hand, are more easily commoditized (Kopitoff 1986), especially since they are easily standardized and could have been exchanged in a more mundane way. The crafting of blanks probably conveyed less meaning than the carving of finished artifacts.

p.161 The Cancuen workshop probably exported shaped preforms to consumer sites, which then worked them the way they wanted, according to their own lapidary traditions. These productions probably correspond to very different contexts of exchange, and each object type likely had different values. Exchanging a finished object, a block of raw material, or a preform did not imply the same obligations between the actors of the exchange as the gifting of a pendant, for instance.

### Conclusion (Demarest, Andrieu, Torres)

Thus, all of the evidence, if carefully reported and analyzed, negates both the elite level production hypothesis for Cancuen in general and the inaccuracy of basic key primary data on the K7-24 structure and a number of claims regarding jade production at Cancuen in general. It also calls into question the application to the Cancuen evidence of some of the interesting recent models for “artisan identity”, “inalienable property”, non-elite crafting activities, gender, etc.

### Reference:

Andrieu, Chloe, Edna Rodas, and Luis F. Luin  
2014 The Values of Classic Maya Jade: A Reanalysis of the Cancuen’s Jade Workshop. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 25:141-164.