

## THE LIFE, DEATH, AND AFTERLIFE OF AN ANCIENT MAYA KING: A STUDY OF PUSILHA RULER G

ANDREW D. SOMERVILLE<sup>1</sup> AND GEOFFREY E. BRASWELL<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Anthropology, California State University, Dominguez Hills, USA.*

*Email: [asomerville@csudh.edu](mailto:asomerville@csudh.edu)*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Anthropology, University of California, San Diego, USA. Email: [gbraswell@ucsd.edu](mailto:gbraswell@ucsd.edu)*

### Abstract

It is often thought that the individual is invisible to archaeology. In this paper, we adopt a developmental approach to the life history of a single individual nicknamed “Ruler G,” an ancient Maya king who ruled at Pusilha, Belize in the first half of the eighth century. Using epigraphic, biological, chemical, and archaeological data, we examine his childhood, adulthood, death, and afterlife in order to better understand life in the ancient city of Pusilha and the history of that polity.

**Keywords:** Pusilha, Belize archaeology, bioarchaeology, epigraphy, life history, human development

### Resumen

A menudo se piensa que el individuo es invisible a la arqueología. Adoptamos en este trabajo un enfoque de desarrollo a la historia de vida de un solo individuo que llamamos “Gobernante G”, un rey maya que gobernó en Pusilha, Belice, durante la primera mitad del siglo VIII. Utilizando datos epigráficos, biológicos, químicos y arqueológicos, examinamos la niñez, la edad adulta, la muerte y la vida futura del Gobernante G con el objetivo de comprender mejor la vida en la antigua ciudad de Pusilha y la historia de esa organización política.

**Palabras claves:** Pusilha, arqueología de Belice, bioarqueología, epigrafía, historia de la vida, desarrollo humano

## INTRODUCTION

Between 2001 and 2008, members of the Pusilha Archaeological Project conducted research at the Classic Maya city of Pusilha, in southern Belize (Figures 1-2). Artifact analysis, epigraphic studies, and radiocarbon dates demonstrate an occupation from the Early Classic to the Postclassic period. Within this longer timeframe, Pusilha was an important city for the relatively brief period of AD 574 until about 800. As such, it was a Late Classic dynastic capital of the ancient Maya.

Our excavations uncovered the remains of 22 individuals within and among the structures of the Gateway Hill Acropolis (Figure 3), the elite administrative and ceremonial center of the city. These include people of all ages and both sexes. The wide range in the quality and quantity of goods included in the burials implies great differences in social status. Of all the interments, Burial 8/4 stands out