



FUNDACIÓN EL CAÑO

2025 Annual Report — Fundación El Caño

Summary of Activities

1. 2025 Excavation Season

The excavation season began on January 13, 2025. The team was composed of Dr. Julia Mayo, Dr. Carlos Mayo, physical anthropologist Alexa Hancock, and field members Elías Zaldívar, Abdías Meneses, Armando Vargas, Alonso Vargas, Gabriel Correa, Tiara Ayala, Gabriel Rodríguez, Abdiel González, and Amalie Hipp (PhD candidate, University of Kansas). Volunteers included Beatrice Di Biase, María Chapman, Jim Allen, and Marisela De León.

The main objective for the year was to complete the excavation of Tomb T9. Although the funerary assemblages associated with the primary burial were recovered in 2024, the skeletal remains of the high-status individual—identified as “the Shaman”—and another individual were left in situ at the close of that season. As occurs annually during the rainy season, the tomb was flooded due to the rising water table and inflow from nearby rivers and the Gulf. Prior to resuming excavation, accumulated water had to be pumped out, and sandbags placed during the previous season to protect the excavation and stabilize the profiles had to be removed.



Work in Tomb T9 progressed to the bottom of the burial pit. As in other tombs within the sector reserved for high-status individuals in the necropolis, a multiple, simultaneous burial was identified. A total of 13 individuals were documented: five pairs of bodies arranged in two stacked levels, placed one atop another and generally oriented with heads to the east; one individual positioned at the feet of these groups; a second individual placed beside their heads; and, finally, the highest-status individual located at the center of the burial.

The skeletal remains were in a very poor state of preservation. Given the two-level arrangement, separating skeletal elements by individual required a slow, carefully controlled process. Prior to removal, key aspects such as position, orientation, and depositional sequence were systematically documented. The human remains will be studied to estimate age, sex, and stature, and to identify possible evidence of disease or trauma.

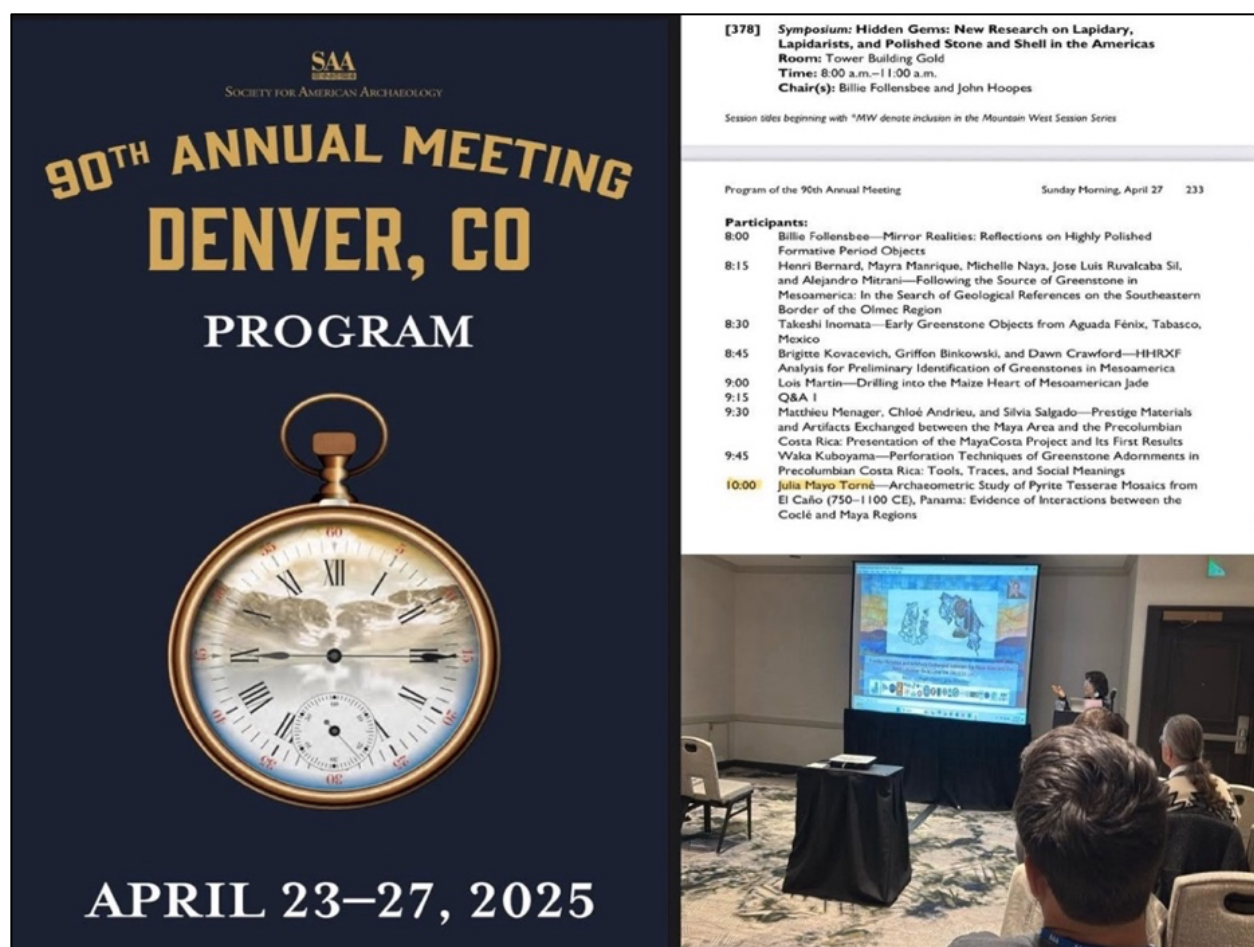
The excavation season concluded on February 26. The team then returned to the laboratory at Ciudad del Saber, where activities focused on the analysis and conservation of materials recovered from the El Caño necropolis and on planning for the 2026 season.



2. Academic Presentations and Outreach

April 2025

Dr. Julia Mayo participated in the 90th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (Denver, Colorado), presenting Archaeometric Study of Pyrite Tesserae Mosaics from El Caño (AD 750–1100), Panama: Evidence of Interactions between the Coclé and Maya Regions.

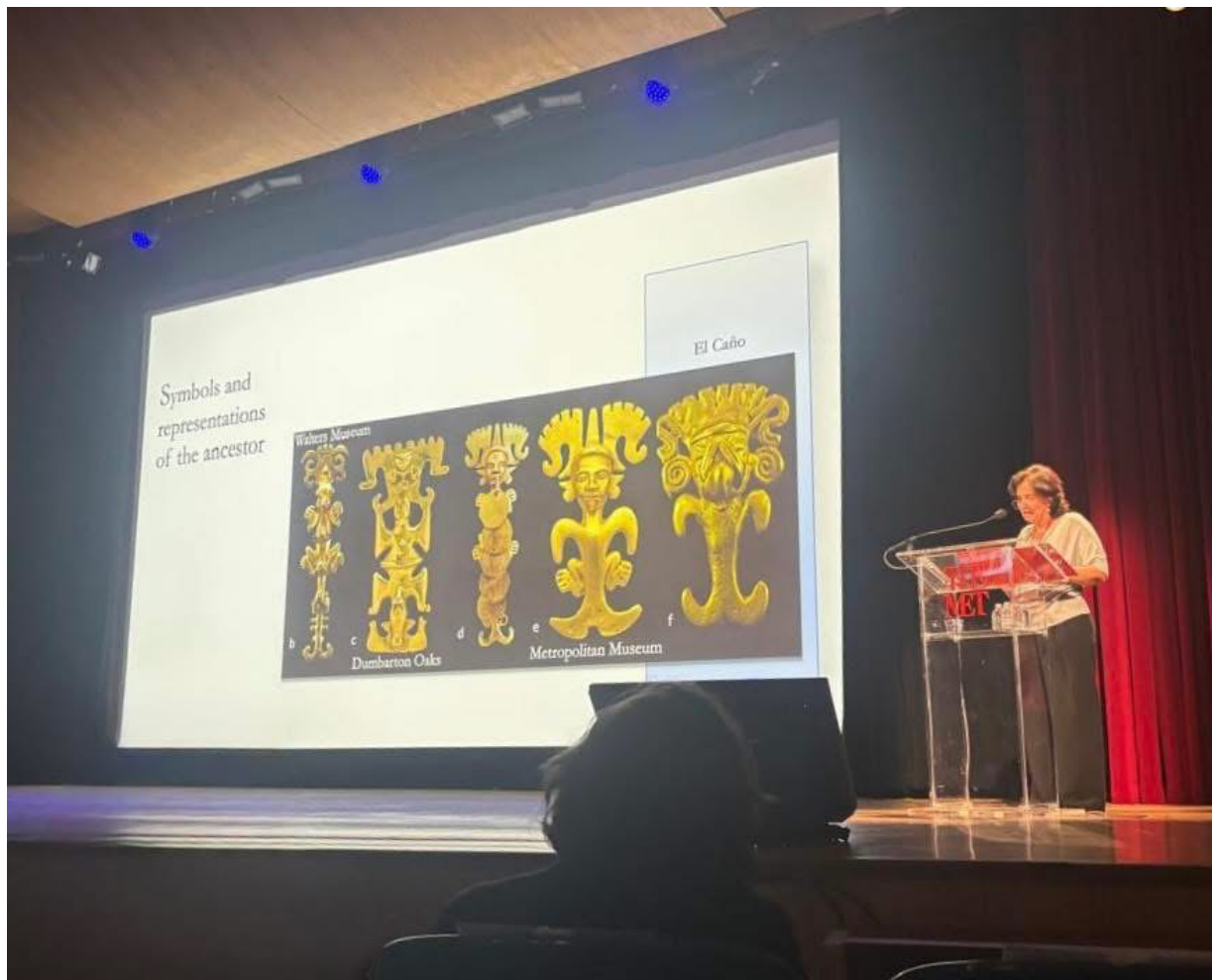


August 2025

Dr. Julia Mayo took part in the symposium Conservation and Protection of Panama's Cultural Heritage, organized by the Interamerican University of Panama, with the lecture Gold, Ancestors, Rituals, and Sacred Spaces: Recent Discoveries at El Caño.

September 2025

Dr. Julia Mayo presented at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) during the symposium New Discoveries / New Directions in the Archaeology of the Ancient Americas. Her paper, The El Caño Archaeological Site: Rituals, Ancestors, Gold, and Power in Ancient Panama, examined Coclé ritual and funerary practices, highlighting high-status burials, offerings, and symbolically charged artifacts.



October 2025

Dr. Carlos Mayo delivered the lecture 100 Years between Looting and Science: El Caño (1925–2025) at the University of Panama (Faculty of Humanities, Department of Anthropology), offering

a historical overview of the development of archaeology in Panama—from early discoveries often associated with looting to the rigorous scientific research conducted today.



That same month, Fundación El Caño co-organized the lecture Archaeomagnetism: Science and Time in Archaeological Materials, presented by Dr. Avto Gogichaishvili (Institute of Geophysics, UNAM), Head of the National Archaeomagnetism Service. The talk explained how archaeomagnetism enables dating and interpretation of the past through magnetic signatures preserved in ceramics and other archaeological materials.

3. Community Engagement

22nd National Youth Camp (REJUV 2025)

In February, Fundación El Caño participated in a thematic exhibition as part of the 22nd National Youth Camp (REJUV 2025) held in El Valle de Antón. At an interactive booth, staff explained the significance of the El Caño archaeological site and presented images, a 3D model of Tomb T9, and representative artifacts from the 2024 and 2025 excavation seasons.

May: Museum Month

As part of Museum Month, the El Caño Archaeological Park Museum invited Dr. Carlos Mayo and three students from the University of Panama—Gabriel Rodríguez, Gabriel Correa, and Abdiel González—to deliver public talks on Panamanian archaeology and history to students, educators, and community members.

4. Publications and Editorial Production

The Shaman's Last Flight

Fundación El Caño collaborated with Ciudad del Saber on the publication of the book accompanying the exhibition *The Shaman's Last Flight* (November 2024) and participated in its launch, together with editor Walo Araújo, at the Panama International Book Fair.

lanzamiento junto al editor Walo Araújo en la Feria Internacional del Libro de Panamá.



Arqueología Iberoamericana

The article Stylistic and Chemical (pXRF) Characterization of Funerary Assemblages from Tomb 9 at El Caño, Panama (AD 770–950) by Carlos Mayo-Torné, Julia Mayo Torné, and Mercedes Guinea Bueno was published.

Caribbean Journal of Science

The article Analysis of Pigments Used in the Ceramic Decoration of El Caño, Panama (AD 600–1520) by Carlos Mayo, Geraldín Martínez, Matthieu Ménager, and Jorge Ceballos was published, examining materials and techniques used in ancient ceramic decoration.

Book Review

Dr. Carlos Mayo published a review of Painting the Cosmos: Art and Iconography of the Ceramics of Ancient Panama by Alan Grinnell (University of New Mexico Press) in the Revista Colombiana de Antropología.

Societas

The undergraduate thesis by Yadixa Mayín Del Valle Guardia, Study of Dulegan Fingerprint Patterns (Dermatoglyphs) in Panama and the Creation of the YDG Paleodermatoglyph Reference Model, was published in Societas (University of Panama). The study analyzes fingerprints from Naso, Bribri, Ngäbe, and Buglé populations to assess dimorphic patterns.

5. Student and Ongoing Research Projects

Pyrite Tesserae Mosaics

Antonio Zamora and Delvis Hernández (Geology, Technological University of Panama) worked with Dr. Julia Mayo on petrographic and elemental characterization of lithic bases from pyrite tesserae mosaics recovered from El Caño tombs, as well as experimental analyses of manufacturing traces.

Gold Survery

Gabriel Correa (Anthropology, University of Panama) is developing the thesis Chemical and Morphological Characterization of Gold from Alluvial Deposits in Panama, aimed at determining the origin of the gold used in El Caño funerary artifacts. Together with María José Esquivel and Gabriel Rodríguez, he collected samples from the Torio River (Veraguas) and Tebario

River (Herrera) using traditional panning techniques. Laboratory analyses employed portable X-ray fluorescence to quantify gold, silver, and copper in each sample.



Petroglyphs

Gabriel Rodríguez is updating the rock art registry for the Coclé region, focusing on systematic documentation of petroglyphs at Quebrada Mojapollo (El Caño) to expand knowledge of this archaeological heritage.

Manufacturing Traces on Gold Artifacts

Abdiel González (Anthropology, University of Panama) is developing the thesis Physical Characterization of Manufacturing Traces on Gold Artifacts from the El Caño Archaeological Site. The study analyzes how different lithic tools produced surface traces on gold objects and how these traces may be used to identify production workshops.



6. Ceramic Collection Management

Elías Zaldívar (Anthropology, University of Panama) is developing the project Management Plan for the Tomb 9 Ceramic Collection, aimed at conserving and organizing one of the most important pre-Hispanic ceramic collections in Panama. The project includes conservation protocols, registration standards, database design, and the creation of an illustrated technical catalog.



Crab Imagery

Amalie Hipp (PhD candidate, University of Kansas) visited Fundación El Caño to continue her research on Coclé ceramic art. She documented 42 vessels bearing crab imagery from several tombs at the site. Her study will analyze the symbolism of the crab in pre-Columbian art of the Greater Coclé region.

Pre-Hispanic Ceramics

Gabriel Díaz (Anthropology) is investigating the chemical and mineral composition of purple and blue pigments in pre-Hispanic ceramics from Greater Coclé using techniques such as FTIR, with the goal of understanding variability in raw materials across the region.



7. Laboratory Work

The team continuously photographs and analyzes artifacts, updates inventory records, and incorporates new discoveries into the public database. Human remains from Tomb T9, as well as from other tombs in the necropolis, are in a very poor state of preservation, which in many cases makes sex determination impossible.

Physical anthropologist Beatrice Di Biase has proposed analyzing all existing bioanthropological documentation to establish a reliable correlation between sex and estimated stature. If a strong correlation is identified, this criterion could serve as an auxiliary tool in cases where diagnostic skeletal elements are not sufficiently preserved.





8. Museum Maintenance

In collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Fundación El Caño completed essential maintenance and restoration work at the El Caño Archaeological Museum. The project was carried out by a team of archaeological assistants—Alonso Vargas, Abdías Meneses, and Armando Vargas—under the supervision of Dr. Carlos Mayo, all of whom also participated in recent excavations.

Work included replacing balustrades in the north and south corridors and repairing sections of the north corridor and several pillars in the south corridor damaged by termites. For the restoration, 30 hand-turned cedar balusters were commissioned from an expert woodturner in Aguadulce, following the museum's original design. Three pinewood beams were also replaced. All new elements were planed, sanded, and painted with colonial-style oil paint, preserving the museum's traditional aesthetic. As a result, the El Caño Archaeological Museum has been renewed and is ready to continue preserving Panama's cultural heritage.



8. Institutional contact

Website: www.fundacionelcano.org

Contact us by email: info@