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Hybridity and Mortuary Patterns at the Colonial Maya Visita Settlement of Yacman, Mexico

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Abstract
Mortuary rituals at the mission church of Yacman, a sixteenth-century rural Maya community, reflect locally specific variants of cultural hybridity relevant to the comparative study of the archaeology of agency and social change in early Colonial settings of Mesoamerica. Burial practices in this church reveal early adoption of Christian norms, followed by a return to more traditional Pre-Columbian family mausoleum-like interments. At the same time, these Maya mission residents, like many of their contemporaries in the region, co-opted the Christian church as a new community nucleus and as a resting place for ancestors. These findings, with additional evidence for hybridity from domestic contexts, reveal strategic expressions of Colonial Maya identity at Yacman, a modest and remote rural settlement that exercised options to experience social change on its own terms, far from the supervisory gaze of Spanish friars.

Keywords Colonial Maya · mortuary patterns · Yucatan · hybridity

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In the context of rapid societal change and disjunction during the early period of Franciscan missionization from the 1550s to 1580s in Yucatan, Mexico, the residents of the rural Maya visita of Yacman (Fig. 1) enacted their own concepts of social identity, in part, through mortuary ritual. Colonial-era churches ultimately became social hubs where baptisms, weddings, festivals, funerals, and other community events took place (Andrews 1991: 155) and at Yacman we document the centrality of the church structure for the most profound and personal rites of passage in the early years of missionization. Churches, constructed and used primarily by Maya people at rural mission *visita* settlements, took on significance beyond Franciscans' intentions of modelling a Christian built environment (Hanson 1995). Churches served as important material symbols of community for Indigenous actors, who appropriated this new architectural form to represent nuclei of *visita* settlements in ways not necessarily intended by Franciscan friars. Mortuary practices at Yacman reflect evolving concepts of place, reproductions of past traditions, and transformations fitting into the emerging colonial world during the second half of the sixteenth

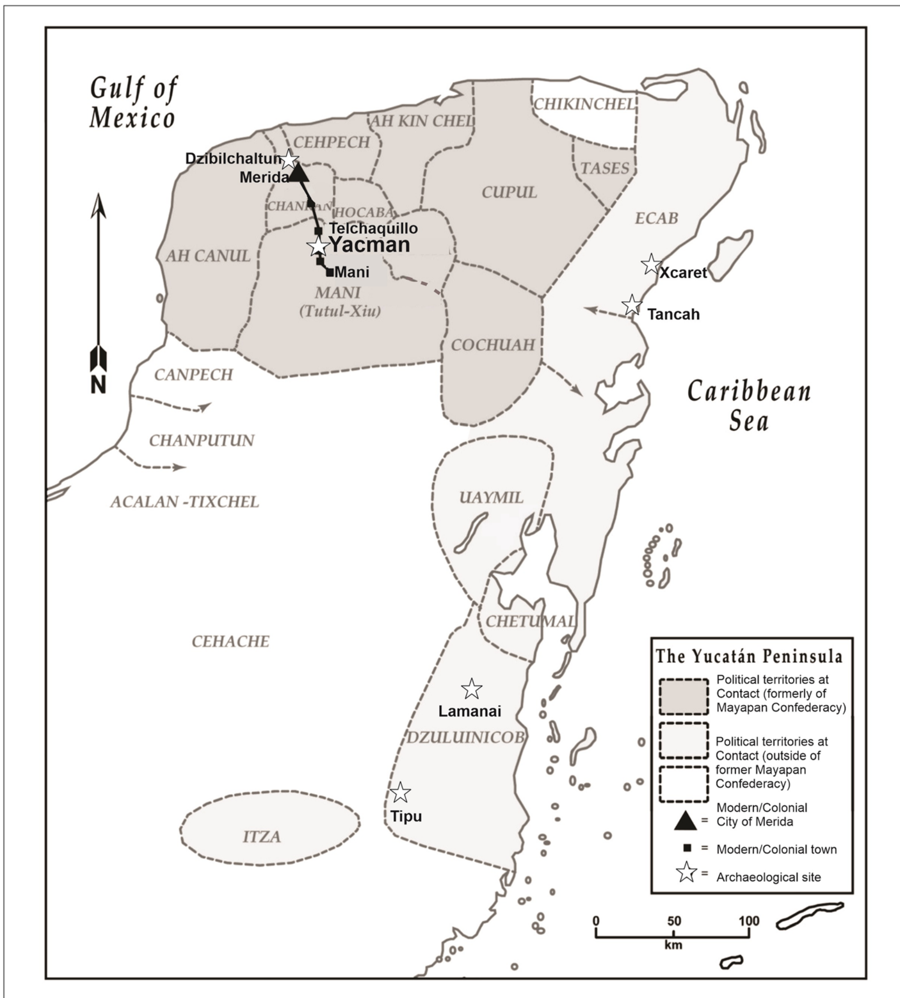

Fig. 1 Location of Yacman and other towns mentioned in the text

century. This article draws on the concept of hybridity to interpret the mortuary changes at Yacman. Considering hybridity provides a useful analytical framework that acknowledges the agency of Indigenous peoples who selectively incorporated new practices, features, and things for their own purposes and designs in contact and colonial settings (Kristensen and Davis 2015; Liebmann 2013; Silliman 2005:62; Stein 2005:7; Lightfoot 2006; Matthews 2010: 177-194; Mullins and Paynter 2000).

Hybridized material worlds are those in which people combine unlike things into new forms. As phrased by Liebmann (2013: 31), such evidence reflects the "simultaneous desire for and repulsion from" European things and ideas. Cobb and DePratter (2012:452) observe that the paradox of globalization, in which homogeneity and heterogeneity simultaneously unfold in the material worlds of cultural contact, applies to the study of hybridity, but they caution that this occurs amid the backdrop of unequal power dynamics. The concept of hybridity in Post-Colonial approaches avoids the baggage of other terms (e.g., syncretism, acculturation) that connote unidirectional influence or a passive blending of social conventions (Liebmann 2013: 31). Matthew Liebmann emphasizes that the concept of hybridity recognizes Indigenous contestation, agency, and selectivity in historical contexts following significant disjunction. Hybridity is materialized in the Indigenous mission contexts of the colonial Americas in various ways, including mortuary ceremonialism, domestic architectural design, blended artifact styles, possessions of European origin, and community religious practice (e.g., Deagan 2013: 262; Klaus and Chang 2009; Liebmann 2013; Matthews 2010: 182-192; Mills 2002; Palka 2009; Sheptak et al. 2010).

Colonial-period Maya archaeology reports interesting, local variations of the emergence of hybrid ritual practices at Christian mission settings (Folan 1970: 190; Graham 2011: 228, 233; Miller and Farriss 1979: 233-234; Pendergast 1983; Ramirez Barbosa 2016; Watanabe 1990). Hybrid practices and objects are not static, but change through time, especially in cases where oppression is magnified by ever-increasing colonizer demands, culminating in resistance or rebellion (Jones 1989; Chuchiak IV 2001, 2003; Liebmann 2010; Liebmann and Murphy 2010; Quilter 2010). Elizabeth Graham (2011: 66-80) argues against simplistic and dichotomous models of resistant versus acculturated Christian Maya identities. The "veneer" model is too simple, argues Graham (1991: 334), with its assumption that mission Maya beliefs and identity were fundamentally unchanged beneath the pretense of adopting Christianity.

Her analysis of Christian Maya settlements of Belize acknowledges the profound ways in which Maya agents leaned into the new social worlds of mission communities and how broader regional movements and processes resulted in divergent trajectories for specific towns. Graham's study does not rule out the possibility of veneer strategies for some Maya towns. A similar analysis by Mullins (1999: 170), in his article, "A Bold and Gorgeous Front," attributes consumer behavior as multivalent among African American society in Annapolis, Maryland. Consumption in this context signaled multiple, often contrastive, desires that simultaneously subverted racist characterizations of difference and satisfied personal desire in local identity construction. Interpreting hybridity is thus a complex undertaking. In early colonial Yucatan, it is clear that local Maya political authorities cultivated rewarding cooperative relationships with Spaniards, particularly in the early Colonial years (Hanks 2010: 36; Quezada 2014: 76-77, 102; Restall 1997: 3-4; Scholes and Roys 1938: 589-590). Yet historical accounts identify many of these same leaders as central to the promotion and maintenance of traditional religious practice, and in some cases, rebellious plots or actions.

The Yacman case represents a period of short duration during the second half of the sixteenth century CE. Mortuary behaviors within Yacman's church reflect aspects of both the reproduction and transformation of customs in ways shaped profoundly by social memory and Indigenous world view. Historical anthropology has long emphasized the importance of understanding Indigenous peoples' perspectives and motivations that affected social change, as well as the numerous contradictions presented by contact and colonial situations (Sahlins 1981: 7-8).

Local peoples selectively incorporate new ideas and things, and blend them in interesting ways with newer versions of traditions to fit agendas of the colonial present; this process may be nonlinear and complex (Watanabe 1990: 142-143). Even in revitalization movements, which generally seize upon a reproduction of older historical identities and traditions, new hybrid concepts of self and society emerge (Liebmann and Preucel 2007; Masson 2000: 250-253; Masson et al. 2006: 206-207; Milbrath and Peraza Lope 2010). Some religious objects or places of European origin became important for colonial-era peoples, including those in rebellion (Graham 1991: 330; Graham 2011: 213, 219; Liebmann 2010, 2013). At Yacman, initial mortuary practices in the church conformed well to Franciscan Christian norms, briefly, until families reverted to older, more traditional, conventions of grave re-use, involving crowded, bundled positions, and mingling of ancestral remains to make space for the newly deceased. Maya elites, including those of the early colonial period, were long accustomed to co-opting foreign or exotic origin myths and symbols, alongside complementary claims of local authenticity (Restall 2001:372-375; Sahlins 1981: 64). At Yacman, we also detect such dual references to heritage – foreign and local –at the smaller, local scale of a minor countryside settlement. At least one group of people from this *visita* chose the church as cemetery for the placement of traditional-style Maya graves. By doing so, they coopted the church as a local sacred place, one that linked the living to their ancestors, and underscored emergent colonial era social identities that drew new symbols into the reproduction of ancient and traditional mortuary rites.

Colonial Indigenous Christian cemeteries commonly have rows of individual, supine burials oriented east-west within the church or atrium (e.g., Charlton et al. 2005; Chuchiak 2006: 4, Chart 2; Con Uribe 2002; Elwess et al. 2015, Fig. 1; Miller 1982; Miller and Farriss 1979; Musselwhite 2015: 4, 40; Warinner et al. 2012, table 5). One or both arms of the Christian dead may be over the chest or may extend down the side of the body (Jacobi 2000: 56). These supine, crossed-arm positions were Christian grave styles promoted by Spanish friars. Such burials reflect one aspect of early accommodation to the teachings of Spanish authorities (Hanson 1995:15; Kubler 1948: 428; Restall 2001:369-370), although we do not know the degree of choice that Indigenous people may have had in the early years. Christian-style interments at Yacman represent only during the first generation of deaths - the earliest, deepest interments. Subsequently, multiple, sequential Pre-Columbian style interments indicate the use of the church nave as a mausoleum, disturbing and dispersing the bones of prior burials. Burials have not been located outside the church (in the atrium) at Yacman, in contrast to other contemporary mission settings in the Yucatan peninsula (Table 1). The soil is quite shallow in the atrium, perhaps prohibitively so. The small size of this settlement also affected the size and extent of its cemetery, as did, perhaps, the duration of occupation. Within the nave, we have excavated one 2m square unit recovering the bones of at least 15 individuals. Projecting these numbers to available space within the nave suggests that, conservatively, the cemetery houses the remains of at least 100 individuals.

Table 1 Comparisons of mortuary placement at Colonial Maya and Mesoamerican churches.

Site	Extended, supine cemetery	Location of cemetery	Disturbance in later burial layers in church nave	Caching of indigenous objects in church architecture	Grave goods	Source
Yacman (Maya)	X (at first)	Within church	X		Nails	
Lamanai (Maya)	X	Within (YDL I), outside (YDL II) church	X X	X	Iron lock, ring, needle, bone bead rosary	Pendergast et al. 1993; Pendergast 1991, p. 347; Graham 2011, p. 219- 233; Figs. 8.28-8.29; Musselwhite 2015
Tipu (Maya)	X	Within, outside church			Needles, jewelry of metal or glass, shell, or dog teeth, thurible	Graham 2011, p. 233; Musselwhite 2015
Tancah (Maya)	X One flexed burial in nave	Within, outside church		X		Miller and Farris 1979; Miller 1982
Xcaret (Maya)	X	Within, outside church				Con 2000
In general (Maya)	X	Within, outside church				Chuchiak 2006
Otumba polity (Nahua)	X	Within, outside church			Personal adornments	Charlton et al. 2005
Yucundaa (Mixtec)	X (majority, with variations)	Mixtec Pre-Columbian plaza				Warinner et al. 2012

Comingling of human bones from disturbed graves is widely reported at other rural Colonial church cemeteries in the Maya area (Danforth et al. 1997: 15; Musselwhite 2015: 43), although scholarly interpretations do not attribute such findings to changing mortuary practices from Christian to traditional practices. Franciscan priests traveled to Yacman and other rural visitas infrequently. Such settings were ideal places for resident Maya families to assert greater autonomy in contending with the circumstances of the early colonial era (Collins 1977). Enactments of everyday resistance, or hidden transcripts (e.g., Scott 1990; Zeitlin 2015) occurred in homes of leaders away from the line of sight of Franciscan authorities. Colonial Maya town leaders guarded sacred codices and deity effigies that were central to maintaining traditional beliefs and practice, according to historical records (Chuchiak 2004b). Domestic contexts with shallowly buried effigy censer sherds at Yacman affirm this practice in the archaeological record. Mortuary rites at the Yacman church are good candidates for the practice of hidden transcripts, given that they involve events of short duration. Furthermore, the buried remains, literally, hid from subsequent public view.

Yet these material remains of enacting symbolically charged aspects of Maya belief and tradition are also associated with selected contexts and objects introduced by relationships with Europeans. The most obvious choice is that of the church as a burial place, substituting for late Pre-Columbian (Postclassic Period, 1200-1500 CE) household, shrine, or oratory mortuary facilities. In Yacman's domestic contexts, the town *cacique* buttressed his status with a socially visible feature of residential architecture (a Spanish style wall) and a colonoware drinking vessel, as we describe in further detail in the body of this article.

Missionization in Yucatan: The Setting

The earliest phase of formal missionization in northern Yucatan, marked by the construction of churches and associated atriums and friaries, occurred from 1545-79, with efforts starting gradually (Hanson 1995). Even the magnificent Franciscan convent of Maní was at first a mere perishable thatch church in 1547 (Hanson 1995: 18). By 1582, 22 Franciscan missions existed, each with a major town and outlying affiliated communities (Collins 1977: 238). Maní, with four friars, served ten towns (Collins 1977, table 7.1; Hanks 2010: 39-50). Franciscan expansion into rural areas began in 1547 (Hanson 1995). Elizabeth Graham (2011: 204-205) suggests that the early church at Lamanai (Belize) may date to at least 1544, with conversion efforts intensifying in subsequent years.

Challenges of Supervising Conversion from Afar

At least initially, some mission towns were established at existing contact period settlements (Roys 1952: 164), which represented logical targets for Franciscan efforts (see also Hanks 2010: 40). Resettlement (*reducción*), involving forced removal of Maya peoples from their home towns into fewer, better-controlled mission settlements (*congregaciones*), took hold in earnest during the 1550s (Chuchiak 2006: 7; Hanks 2010: 39), but the region was often short on friars. There was an average ratio of one friar to 1,600 parishioners in the early phase, with ratios ranging from 1:685 to 1:2,960

(Hanks 2010: 41; see also Musselwhite 2015: 23; Restall 1997: 25, 163). A considerable number (40%) of relocated communities returned to their original hometowns and territories (*cahob*) by 1582 in what Restall (1997: 27, 38) terms "reduction reversal," At most *visita* settlements like Yacman, Native converts, known as a *maestro cantor* or *maestro de escuela* (schoolmaster), oversaw the bulk of daily Christian religious affairs. These officials were in charge of church teachings, religious observations, and services such as catechizing, baptizing, administering extreme unction, and hearing confessions of the sick and dying (Collins 1977: 236, 244; Graham 2011: 49, 82, 156). Friars infrequently visited rural settlements (Musselwhite 2015: 23; Scholes and Roys 1938: 586), given the arduous journeys needed to reach them (Hanks 2010: 41). The prohibitive travel distance to remote visitas thus rendered the reducción program "fragile, incomplete, and subject to resistance and flight" (Hanks 2010: 46).

Maestros cantores were often members of noble Maya families, and they represented important agents who interpreted Maya Christianity in the early years, without necessarily understanding the exceptionalism of the European faith (Collins 1977: 246). In other words, religious practice at Maya *visitas* did not embrace the exclusive monotheistic worship of the Christian god. Some *maestros cantores* served in a similar capacity to that of Pre-Columbian Indigenous high priests (*Ah Kin*), and some of them had formerly held the office of *Ah Kin* prior to conquest (Collins 1977: 244-245; Scholes and Roys 1938: 590). *Ah Kin* continued to operate in refuge zones beyond priestly control (Chuchiak IV 2003: 230). *Caciques* (town leaders or principals) also kept and practiced sacred traditional doctrine, and Spaniards prosecuted them for "idolatry" in the 1560s and beyond (Scholes and Roys 1938: 588, 595). Franciscans accused one *Ah Kin*, Juan Pech of Sotuta, of officiating at a crucifixion of two individuals chosen for sacrifice (Collins 1977: 245). Spanish priests continued to prosecute *maestros* for idolatry (including harboring Maya deity effigies) long after the Franciscan religious inquisition of 1562; *maestros* persisted in carrying on covert traditional practices until at least the early 1600s (Chuchiak IV 2003; Collins 1977: 245-246; Scholes and Roys 1938).

The trials, torture, and persecution of and accused of engaging in traditional Maya religion further eroded any sentiments of trust and good will that such initial mission settlements may have toward Spaniards, driving traditional religious practice further behind closed doors (Chuchiak IV 2003; Hanson 1995; Kubler 1948: 428). Flight to the poorly subdued central and southern peninsula accelerated, from where open rebellions were staged (Farriss 1984; Hanks 2010: 51-58, Jones 1989; Quezada 2014: 63). Franciscans responded, especially in the north, by accelerating the reducción of communities in the hope of tighter control (Hanks 2010: 38-46; Hanson 1995; Quezada 2014: 55-66; Roys 1957: 75). Yacman was probably abandoned or its residents relocated by around 1600 (Peraza Lope et al. 2021) or perhaps a few years later, in the first part of the seventeenth century (Roys 1957: 163). By 1639, Franciscans lost much of their administrative authority to the secular clergy (Collins 1977: 240; Kubler 1972: 5-6), although they continued to wield significant influence in the resistance frontier (e.g., Graham 2011: 161-163; Jones 1989). Franciscan strategies depended heavily on Native lords to help administer local populations (Hanson 1995: 15; Quezada 2014). Local lords began to lose their power by the late 1500s (Quezada 2014: 101-112).

Epidemics and Droughts

The early period of missionization was fraught with hardships affecting Mayan peoples and Spaniards alike, impacting European efforts to harness the labor of Indigenous persons and to convert them. Epidemics, droughts, famines, and related catastrophes would have profoundly influenced every facet of social stability and deathways. A demographic crisis struck from 1560 to 1580, timed almost perfectly with the Franciscan campaign to consolidate and reduce rural mission towns (Chuchiak 2006; Hanks 2010: 39-46; Hoggarth et al. 2017: 83; Quezada 2014: 61-68). Significant numbers of people fled to the frontier (the *monte*, or *despoblado* zones) during this interval and during later crises of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Farriss 1984 83, 304; Hanson 1995; Jones 1989).

The extent of the hardships was nearly unimaginable. Annual rainfall data, combined with a variety of historical sources, point to multidecadal droughts during the interval of 1530-75 (Hoggarth et al. 2017: 85). The year 1535 was especially harsh, when drought closely followed concerted Spanish military invasions, and a plague of locusts consumed crops for a period of five years. Local peoples ate the bark of a certain tree, a famine food (Hoggarth et al. 2017: 86; Tozzer 1941: 198, n.1074). More locusts and famine occurred in 1552-53, another famine followed in 1560, a devastating hurricane hit in 1561, with more drought and famine in 1564. Heightened impacts of epidemics brought suffering in the years 1566, 1569-70, 1571-72 (coupled with famine), smallpox ravaged the land in 1573, and repeated combinations of famines, locusts, and disease cycles are noted for 1575-76, 1578, 1580, 1590, 1592-93 (Chuchiak 2006, table I). Conditions were so bad that residents fled some towns in large numbers in 1571-72 (Chuchiak 2006: 9). Similar complaints continued in the 1600s, when suffering was just as bad if not worse (Chuchiak 2006: 10, table 2). In response to the difficulties of maintaining populations in mission towns and controlling rebellious religious and political actors, friars regularly moved and recombined failing settlements.

Churches, Hybridity, and Materialization of Community

The appropriation of earlier sacred space was a common and symbolic practice for the builders of new towns in the Colonial Period. For example, the Mixtec located the colonial cemetery of Yucundaa in the Great Plaza of Pre-Columbian architectural space, honoring the dead in a locality long devoted to revered ancestors and deceased elites (Warinner et al. 2012: 477). Yet, the majority of Yucundaa graves exhibit extended, supine, positions and east-west orientations in the Christian tradition.

Long abandoned monumental features often surround sixteenth-century churches in the Maya area. This large architecture usually dates to the Classic or Terminal Classic Periods, 650-1100 CE (Andrews 1991). Framing a church within a Pre-Columbian monumental plaza provides a spectacular effect (Roys 1952: 146, 167, 173-177). Less dramatic was the tendency to place churches and atria over Pre-Columbian platforms that provided height and prominence (Roys 1952: 171). In practical terms, ancient monumental buildings and platforms provided ready construction materials for new projects (Hanks 2010: 48; Hanson 1995). Yacman is located near the center of a

Table 2 Human remains from Yacman providing a Minimum Number of Individuals of 15.

Context			Age					Sex			Modifications/Impacts		
Unit	Level	Skull #	0-5	12-17	35-49	50+	A	M	M?	F	Trauma	Cranial	Dental
21-J	3		3										
21-J	3	# 1				1		1				1	
21-J	4	# 2			1			1			1	0	
21-J	4	# 3					1**			1		1	
21-J	4	# 4				1			1				
21-J	4	# 5			1					1		1	
21-J	4	# 6			1			1				1	0
21-J	4	# 7				1				1	0	1	1***
21-J	4	# 8		1*							0	1	
21-J	4	# 9			1					1	0	0	
21-J	4	# 10				1		1				0	
21-J	4	# 11											
21-J	4	# 12											
TOTAL (MNI = 15)			3	1	4	4	1	4	1	4	1	6	1

*individual is 12 years old

**indeterminate adult age

***C4 modification on upper incisors

sizeable Terminal Classic Period site. Large Pre-Columbian elite residential buildings with fine stone door jambs and columns are located about 300 m south of the church (Thompson 1956); old residential platforms sprawl in all directions from the ancient center. The church itself is on a large platform, built originally in the Pre-Columbian era by the addition of fill, retaining walls, and leveling material that converted a natural hillock into a large rectangular feature.

Typologies published for the evolution of church styles in the Yucatan peninsula do not fit well for the Yacman case (Andrews 1991; Hanson 1995; Roys 1952: 170). Early churches at Tancah, Xcaret, Lamanai, and Tipu tend to be oval, rectangular, or to exhibit a half-hexagonal shape at the east end (Graham 2011: 178, figs. 8.1-8.3, map 8.3; Hanson 1995, Fig. 3). These churches are elongated, and congregations sat within wooden walls beneath a thatched roof in the nave space that extended westward from the altar and sanctuary (Graham 2011: 171-172). The pole walls of early churches had low stone wall foundations. Yacman's church does not exhibit this elongated shape (Fig. 2); it is shorter and wider (more square) than other examples of the period and it is enclosed on three sides by wall foundations; partial stone walls also frame the church's fourth side, the western entrance (Fig. 3). Elizabeth Graham (2011: 210) describes a similarly shaped church at Lamanai. This shape at Yacman suggests the small congregation would have been sheltered beneath a thatched roof enclosed by sizeable stone walls that extended partway up the north, west, and south sides of the nave. The east wall (behind the sanctuary) of the Yacman church consists of Spanish style chink and

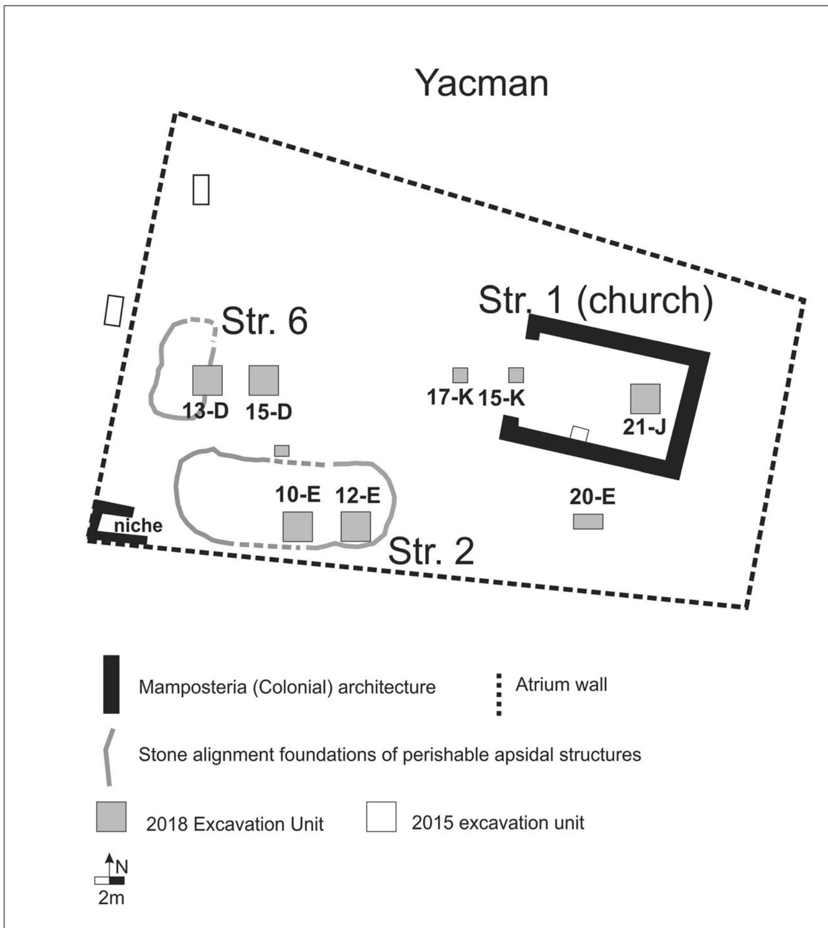

Fig. 2 The walled atrium of Yacman, including the church (Str. 1), two apsidal structures within the walled atrium enclosure (Strs. 2, 6), and excavation units (gray squares) including the mass grave location (21-J)

mortar (*mamposteria*) and it extended as high as the roof. Graham (2011: 173, 176) clarifies that naves were the seating spaces for the congregation that faced the east-end sanctuaries, often more elaborately constructed, from which services were delivered. Chancels were spaces in the sanctuary between the altar and the nave (Graham 2011: 176-177). The Yacman church nave would have had stone walls and a thatch roof, with a small, simple sanctuary, altar, and chancel space. A low, single course wall foundation marks the floor boundary of slightly elevated chancel and sanctuary. Naves were regular places of burial at other early Colonial Maya sites (Hanson 1995; Graham 2011: 232-233).

Yacman's atrium is an enclosed plaza space of 49 x 21 m, delineated by a symmetrical (isosceles) trapezoidal stone wall. It is notably more spacious than contemporary examples at Xcaret, Tancah, and Ek Balam (Hanson 1995: Figs. 3-5). The atrium (see Fig. 2) also enclosed two apsidal structures, one at the southwest corner (Structure 2) and another along the western wall (Structure 6). The larger of the two (Structure 2) has ample interior space (14 x 6 m) and likely housed visiting friars.

Fig 3 Yacman church photo (facing east), showing partially walled, wide entrance (foreground) and taller, *mamposteria* construction wall at the eastern end (background)

Similar perishable, apsidal-shaped buildings also represent friaries in the atria of Calotmul and Dzibilchaltun (Hanson 1995: 20).

Maya laborers built Christian churches (Graham 2011; Hanks 2010: 49, 52; Hanson 1995; Roys 1952: 145), as did their contemporaries in central Mexico (Zeitlin and Palka 2018: 102). They also built affiliated atria and friaries and other public works (such as roads) at Franciscan mission towns. Constructing this sacred built environment was part of the Franciscans' goal to shape the world views of Maya communities and aid the conversion process (Hanson 1995: 15). The collective construction of these new edifices symbolically materialized a new communal symbol, as did the building of monumental works deeper in the Pre-Columbian past (McAnany 2010: 148-150). Although the long axes colonial early churches often align east-west, with the sanctuary to the east and the short axis oriented due north (Andrews 1991), Yacman's church is oriented 14° east of north. It aligns with the atrium wall and the angle of the Pre-Columbian platform on which it rests. Other early colonial churches sometimes depart from Christian norms of strictly east-west oriented churches in favor of alignments with Pre-Columbian features, indicating the influence of Native builders on this aspect of creating mission landscapes (e.g., Quilter 2010:109). The open plaza of the atrium and the construction of church spaces over Pre-Columbian platforms converged with the importance of central plazas in the Pre-Columbian past (Ramirez Barbosa 2016: 282).

Maya builders sometimes sanctified church spaces with caches and offerings of traditional Indigenous objects, such as pottery, figurines, or sculpture (Graham 1991: 324, 2011: 210, 213-223; Miller and Farriss 1979: 233-234; Pendergast 1983: 121; Ramirez Barbosa 2016: 175, 233; Zeitlin and Palka 2018: 102). Churches themselves, built and used according to the designs of Native peoples, have considerable potential to indicate hybridity. The Christian identities of Maya peoples were ever changing throughout the Colonial Period. At Tipu, evidence for reverence and conversion varied

by degrees, and was greater among young people who grew up in Christianized towns (Graham 2011: 22-23). Focusing on influencing young converts born into mission society was an effective strategy for Spanish priests, as were, sometimes, women (Deagan 2004; Tarble de Scaramelli 2011).

Other Indicators of Hybridity at Yacman

The homes of high-status Indigenous persons at colonial settlements sometimes emulated European building choices by using mamposteria materials and incorporating other architectural elements (Warinner et al. 2012: 469). Exhibiting a grander dwelling style was a point of pride for Native lords, and their authority over churchyard construction labor (in the early years of colonial rule) would have easily been transferable to domestic buildings (Zeitlin and Palka 2018: 101). Colonial Maya houses with European styles also existed at the sites of Hunacti, (Peraza Lope et al. 2021; Roys 1952: 156), Oxcutzcab, and Tekal (de la Garza et al. 1983: 356, 444). Yacman has one such house (Structure 7) that likely represents the home of the *cacique*. This house incorporates attributes of Pre-Columbian and European traditions. Its rectangular, multiroom form with a frontal terrace and distinctive double vertical wall foundations are typical of Postclassic style dwellings in the region (Masson et al. 2014: 202; Smith 1962: 217). Yet an eastern room of this structure has a wall of European *mamposteria* construction. Across from the patio from Structure 7 is a traditional household shrine structure (Structure 8).

A handled drinking cup from Yacman resembles a Maya ceramic vessel with a European handle. This mug, found within an interior room of Structure 7, is shaped like an *olla* (tall-necked jar), a form exceedingly common in Pre-Columbian and colonial times. Using this mug would have signaled the privileged status of the *cacique* (or a member of his family) and his role in mediating town affairs with European authorities. European objects widely served as status markers in colonial settings, much the way that other rare valuables did in the past (e.g., Blair and Thomas 2014: 30; Oland and Palka 2016; Smith et al. 1994). The mug exhibits a paste and slip unlike any other material from Yacman. It was likely made elsewhere (perhaps at or near Maní) and was probably a gift from a visiting friar.

At Yacman, fragments of ceramic effigy censers portraying traditional Maya gods lay scattered just below the surface of interior and exterior spaces of the house (Structure 7) and in front of its domestic shrine (Structure 8). These effigies were widely used in the preceding Postclassic Period for calendrical rituals that tied together politics, religion, and geography (Chase 1986; Rice 2004; Russell 2017). Their continued use, along with codex books (ritual manuals) in the early Colonial Period marked resistance to Christian teachings (Chuchiak 2004a, 2004b, 2009). Community and town officials were the ones who hoarded these sacred objects and who practiced traditional religion within the privacy of their homes (Collins 1977; Scholes and Roys 1938; Zeitlin and Palka 2018: 102). Yacman clearly participated in this sort of private ritual invoking traditional beliefs and practices. Early Colonial mission residents differed from place to place in terms of adopting the imagery and style of Spanish newcomers in local production technologies. At some sites, changes occur in attributes of ceramic figurines (Charlton et al. 2005; Graham 1991: 329; Palka 2009: 59-60). At

Yacman, only the colonoware mug from the *cacique* (and/or *maestro cantor*) house reflects hybridity in the ceramic assemblage. One other sherd is present in the Yacman ceramic assemblage that is nonlocal, likely a fragment of early colonial Aztec redware, recovered in the friary of the atrium (Peraza Lope et al. 2021).

Indigenous Mesoamerican Colonial Mortuary Practices

Traditional Maya burials are rare at archaeologically investigated churches in the region. At Tancah, Quintana Roo, one flexed burial (with a jade bead in the mouth) was present in the church cemetery that represented a Pre-Columbian style grave, but the remainder were Christian style Maya burials (Miller and Farriss 1979: 233; see also Jacobi 2000: 54-55). At Tipu, Christian-style extended graves also prevail, even though disturbance and crowding in this cemetery was pronounced (Jacobi 2000: 14, 54, 56, 184, fig. 1.3). Flexed interments at Tipu were likely Pre-Columbian or they postdated the Tipu mission's abandonment (Jacobi 2000: 184). If the latter is true, Tipu may have changing mortuary patterns similar to those of Yacman. Multiple interments, a departure from single individual church burials at a majority of colonial mission cemeteries, occurred elsewhere in Mesoamerican colonial contexts, especially where epidemics may have caused rapid die-offs (Warinner et al. 2012; Zeitlin and Palka 2018: 107). In some more remote modern ethnographic contexts, where Spanish influence was never particularly strong, Indigenous burial practices continued (Zeitlin and Palka 2018: 107). Church burials assumed major importance to Maya peoples of colonial-era northern Yucatan (Restall 1997: 155). This sentiment endured, and ultimately became so strong that Maya townspeople fiercely protested new policies after 1804 that called for burial of the dead at new cemeteries on the edge of town, instead of near the church (Chuchiak 2006: 11; see Zeitlin and Palka 2018: 108 for cases in central Mexico).

Longstanding Pre-Columbian Maya practices of interring burials under house floors, as well in monumental structures, made for easy transference to church burials during the colonial period (Graham 2011: 296, 200). Providing the honored dead, particularly elites, with burials in church naves was also a European tradition of the *longue durée* that may have converged with Maya mortuary customs of interring important persons in prominent shrines, buildings, and sacred spaces (Graham 2011: 300). Graham (2011: 300) suggests that the burial of ancestors in churches was one way to symbolically claim kinship with the divine.

Franciscan mores of austerity discouraged grave goods in the early colonial period, and few accompany the dead at most Maya Christian cemeteries (Chuchiak 2006, chart 2; Musselwhite 2015: 39). The significant impoverishment of certain early mission communities in northern Yucatan was also due in part to waves of locusts, droughts, epidemics, and demands for labor and taxation (Chuchiak IV 1998; Farriss 1984: 229). Quantities of possessions were modest in domestic as well as mortuary contexts of Yacman; the only European artifacts recovered from this site consist of three iron nails from the mass grave. Other mission towns like Tiquibalon, positioned advantageously to supply the Spanish city of Valladolid with lime plaster, fared better and had access to numerous European goods in the late sixteenth century (deFrance and Hanson 2008;

Hanson 2008). Frontier sites of special strategic importance like Tipu (Belize) also had significantly more European goods than Yacman, including items found with burials (Graham 2011: 233). The timing of occupation also influenced the quantity of European goods, and by extension, items worn by the deceased. At Tipu, an intensification of European missionization efforts occurred after the first two decades, correlating with the appearance of artifacts such as glass beads in cemetery contexts (Smith et al. 1994). In contrast to Tipu's significance as an outpost, settlements like Yacman were small nodes amid a plethora of rural *visitas* in the north, many of which had brief occupations (see Fig. 1).

Yacman and Early Colonial Yucatan: The Setting

Yacman was initially known only from Spanish documents (Roys 1957), but Raymond H. Thompson located the site to the south of the modern, rural town of Mahzucil in 1951 (Roys 1957; Thompson 1956). The site is located near two *cenotes*, openings in the caprock that provide access to the underground aquifer. One of these *cenotes* still bears the name Yacman today.

Yacman was likely a small Indigenous hamlet at Spanish contact chosen for establishing a *visita*; many initial *visitas* took advantage of existing Maya settlements (Andrews 1993: 40). Conversion to Christianity at such *visitas* in "old towns" may have been slower to take effect compared to resettled, newly congregated communities (Roys 1952: 13). This site exhibits no infrastructural evidence of a planned colonial town. It was located on a road between more important places (see Fig. 1), including the Franciscan center of Maní (and former capital of Indigenous political unit of the same name) and Tichac (modern Telchaquillo). This road system ultimately linked mission towns to the Spanish colonial capital of Merida, around 52 km north of Yacman. Despite its modest architecture and size, Yacman shows up on a 1557 map of Maní polity towns (Roys 1972, maps 5 and 6, figs. 18, 20). The Xiu (whose homeland was Maní), as well as the Cocom, Chel, and other nobility from ten northwest polities were part of a unitary regional state from around 1185-1448 CE known as Mayapán (Masson and Peraza Lope 2014; Roys 1962). This Pre-Columbian confederated government operated out of an urban capital of the same name, located near the northern edge of the Xiu territory of Maní, about 12 km northeast of Yacman (next to Telchaquillo). Yacman's colonial leaders were of the Xiu family. In fact, Yacman was the residence of the father (during the contact era) of the most influential Native governor under Spanish rule, Francisco de Montejo Xiu, who exercised authority out of the town center of Mani (Roys 1952: 163; Roys 1957: 67).

In choosing to build a major church and *convento* at Maní, Franciscans took advantage of readily available Native labor. They coopted an existing town center that had been a seat of power for one of the most powerful dynasties during the Mayapan era, and which had remained one of the most influential political capitals of the contact period (de Landa 1941: 157-158; Restall 2001). Initial cooperative overtures of Xiu lords to the Spaniards helped to position this polity advantageously in the early colonial years (Scholes and Roys 1938: 590). Soon afterward, Xiu leaders joined with other Maya nobility in acts of rebellion against Spanish authority (Scholes and Roys 1938: 593, 595). For example, 27 persons from Mani schemed to kill two friars, purportedly

because the Spanish outlawed slavery (Collins 1977: 236; Scholes and Roys 1938: 587).

The Grave in the Church at Yacman

Yacman's mass grave is located in the central part of the nave toward the front of the church (see Fig. 2). A 2 x 2 m area (excavated in 2015 and 2018) sampled the grave that extends, as indicated by human remains in the walls, to the south, west, and north, bounded by the elevated chancel wall on the east. Aside from its conspicuous location within the church, the mass grave also dates to the colonial period by association with three, elongated, cut nails recovered from within the comingled human remains. These are the only European artifacts found to date at Yacman. Why are there nails in the mass grave? Their low quantity and large size suggests they are unrelated to funerary hardware. Metal, however, tended to be a precious commodity in the early colonial years (Simmons et al. 2009), and the nails may simply represent valued grave goods or shroud pins. The placement of the nails does not suggest that they were part of coffins, as suggested at Tipu (Graham 2011: 233). Single nails lay near three different clusters of human remains.

The human skeletal material represents at least 15 individuals ranging from infants to adults. Overall, age distributions and mortuary patterns do not suggest catastrophic circumstances, such as epidemics or conflict. However, differences through time, indicated by the lowest layer and subsequent burials above, suggest a more complex scenario. Cranial and tooth modification of the remains of some individuals reflect continued practices from the era just prior to Spanish contact that were key signifiers of Maya social identity.

Depositional Sequence

The human remains are present within a deposit that extends from 40 cm to at least 110 cm below the surface. The skulls represent at least 13 individuals. Two of the skulls (#11, #12) were embedded in the west wall of the unit were not removed. The deepest, earliest human grave is within a cist along the north edge of the unit that housed the remains of two adults (#13, #10) and one infant (Figs. 4, 5). Both were in a supine position, with the body extending east from the skulls. The first burial (#13), an adult female associated with infant bones, was incomplete and was disturbed when the second individual was placed directly over her. The portions of Individual #13 include a skull fragment, vertebral column, a few ribs, and lower limbs (minus the left femur). Bedrock lies below this individual. The overlying remains are those of a complete adult male (#10), which, (as for #13) was in a supine Christian position, with the left arm crossed over the chest and the right arm extended to the side (Fig. 5). The oval stone cist is of a style that has deep time depth in the region.

South and adjacent to the cist burial is a set of seven additional crania aligned and crowded in a north-south row in the western wall of the unit (#2, #5, #9, #6, #7, #11, #12), 5-10 cm higher than #10 in the cist grave (see Fig. 4). Six of the skulls are facing west, with their bodies presumed to extend to the west, beyond the edges of the unit. One individual (#7) faced east, in a supine position parallel to those interred in the cist

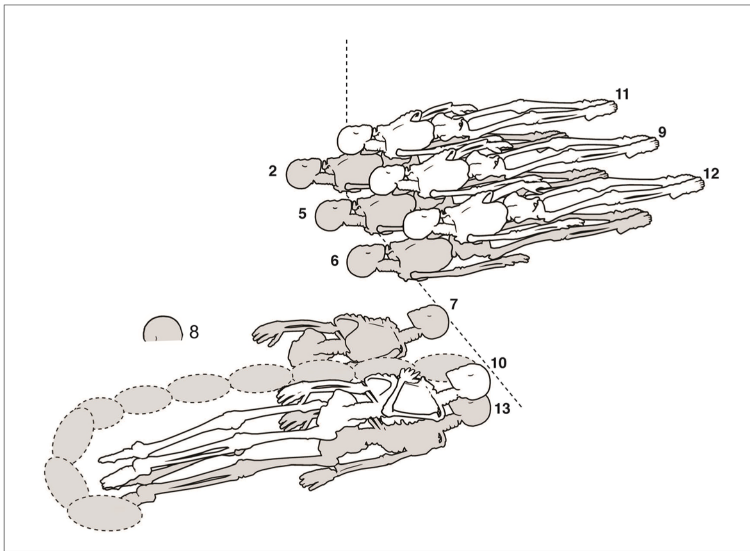

Fig. 4 The relative placement of the earliest burials in the Yacman church cemetery. Individuals 7, 10, and 13 (bottom, left) were completely within the excavated area. The skulls of the other individuals (top, right) were within the excavated area, and their extended postcranial positions (unexcavated) are hypothetical. The dashed line indicates the unit's western edge

grave. Only the torso of #7's postcrania articulated with the skull; with the remainder of the postcranial elements disturbed by subsequent mortuary activities. Clearly, burials of this lower layer conformed to an east-west orientation. They were supine and extended, as reflected by #7, #10, #13, and inferred for wall skulls #2, #5, #6, #9, #11, and #12.

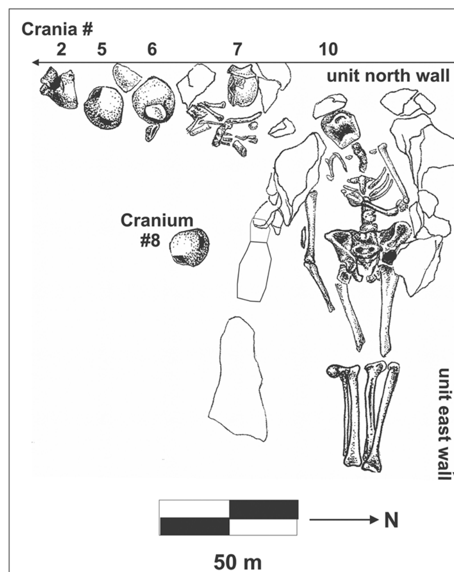

Fig. 5 The second (upper) cist burial (#10), adjacent, extended burial (#17) from the nave cemetery at Yacman, and some of the skulls to the south of these in the west wall of the unit

The use of a stone-lined cist resembling those of Pre-Columbian versions may have been a nod to the deeper Maya past. The tight clustering of the seven interments represented by the skulls in the wall suggests a mass death event early in the use of the grave, perhaps due to one of the epidemic cycles of the early colonial period. The extended position of the two individuals in the cist burial, and #7, adjacent to them, suggests initial practice of Christian mortuary conventions at Yacman. In this deepest layer of human remains, the central area of the unit to the south of the cist was more disturbed, yielding disarticulated bones and an additional disarticulated skull (#8).

The earliest burials in the grave at Yacman are of colonial date, rather than dating to the Pre-Columbian period. Ceramics from the burial fill provide a *terminus post quem* of the Postclassic/Early Colonial period. The platform into which the grave intruded is of Terminal Classic date (800-1000 CE); thus, the burial fill postdates the platform. Further support for their colonial date is that the extended, supine (Christian style) positions of the earliest graves are unlike the flexed burials of the Postclassic Period in northern Yucatan (Masson et al. 2014: 252-257; Rosenswig et al. 2020; Smith 1962). There is no reported case of an extended row of supine burials in the Postclassic Period like those forming the first layer of graves at Yacman.

Above the basal layer of burials, disturbed, disarticulated remains spread throughout the unit (Fig. 6). These bones were comingled and included three additional skulls (#1, #3, #4). Clusters of long bones suggest the arrangement of particular elements during subsequent burials. Femurs were especially prone to arrangement; one pair had femoral heads lying at opposite directions. Other notable concentrations included long bones and a skull (#3) along the north wall, a pelvis and long bone in the northeast corner, and multiple long bones densely packed along the southern edge of the unit. Also in this area, a mandible superimposed over a set of ribs and a vertebral column suggests a partially articulated (seated, flexed, traditional Postclassic style) skeleton that had been disturbed. Three clusters of infant bones were also present.

None of these overlying, later remains exhibited a Christian, extended, supine position. One might expect at least one of the final undisturbed interments to exhibit extended, articulated placement, if Christian funerary traditions persisted at Yacman. All evidence points to a reversion to more traditional Pre-Columbian mortuary practices of bundling interments (likely flexed), as well as the movement of previous remains, and some arrangement of bones, as observed commonly in graves of Postclassic Mayapán (e.g., Smith 1962).

Human Osteology

The 15 individuals represented in the grave by the total number of bones include, minimally (see Table 2), three infants, a 12-year-old, and 11 adults. Adults for which age could be determined were at least 35 years old at death. The presence of five males and four females indicates that sex is nearly equally represented.

One skeleton exhibits evidence of chronic active systemic infection affecting several lower limb bones. Another skeleton displays advanced osteoarthritis of the knees of the sort that may derive from strenuous labor. Preliminary analyses of dental pathologies suggest worsening oral health compared to the Pre- Columbian Postclassic period (Serafin 2010). Healed trauma is present on one male skull (#2), likely incurred from a conflict involving Indigenous weapons; no evidence suggests damage from European metal armaments. It is a blunt, shallow wound. Warfare in the context of the conquest

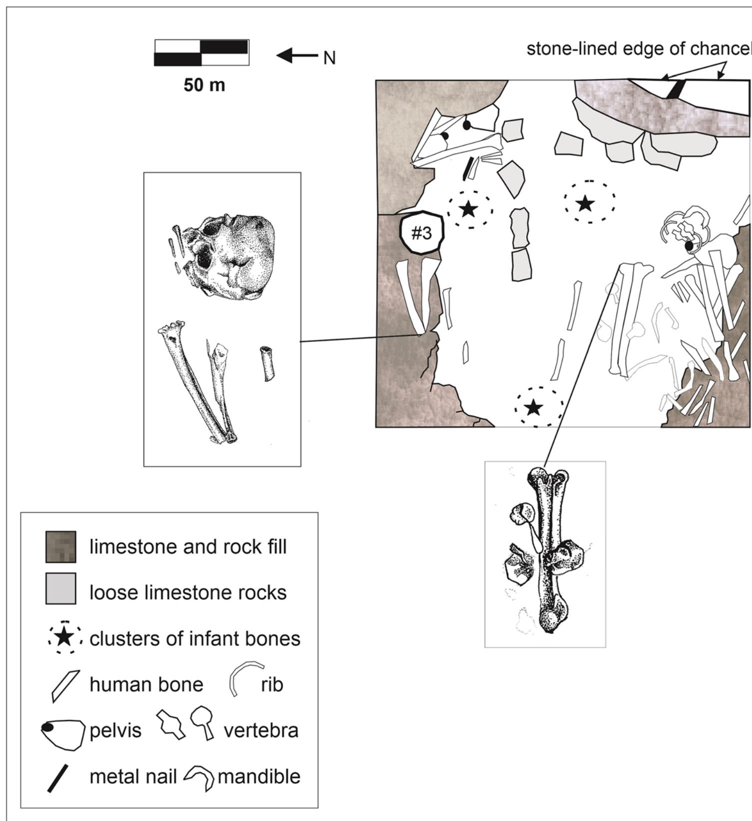

Fig. 6 Examples of disarticulated remains from the second phase of burials in the nave at Yacman, including a skull (#3) associated with long bones, a pair of arranged femurs, and other disarticulated long bones

of Yucatan relied heavily on Native soldiers from the *Nahuatl*-speaking area of Mexico, as well as Africans (Restall 1997: 3, 2009), who would have largely used traditional arms from the Pre-Columbian period given the scarcity of metal in the early New World. The individual represented by Crania #2 was 35-49 years old at the time of death, and was among the earliest, deepest in the grave. If this individual died soon after Yacman was occupied (1557), they would have been a young adult around the time of the conquest 15-20 years earlier (1542). While conjectural, the possibility exists that some of Yacman's deceased lived part of their lives before conquest. Cranial modification is another pattern among the human remains of chronological importance.

Tabular erect cranial modification is present in six of 13 skulls. One old adult female (Crania #7, 50 or more years old) with this skull shape also exhibits upper incisors filed to points (C4 style). These styles of body modification are indistinguishable from those observed at the nearby Late Postclassic Maya site of Mayapan (Serafin 2010), although all but one of the cases of cranial modification are slight. While a diverse population existed in an urban church cemetery at Campeche, dating from the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries (Price et al. 2012), the population was exclusively Indigenous at Yacman. The tabular-erect cranial shaping was much more prevalent, earlier, at

Yacman compared to Campeche, where it was in steep decline among the Indigenous Maya interred there (Tiesler et al. 2010). Tooth filing is present on individuals of both cemeteries. In the Campeche case, the filed teeth belonged to individuals of African descent, in contrast to the Yacman Maya. Body modification was also rare at Tipu despite the latter's exclusively Indigenous makeup (Cohen et al. 1997; Jacobi 2000: 175), further highlighting the early continuities with the past within the Yacman grave. It is possible that some individuals in the Yacman grave were born during the contact period, given that adults exhibiting cranial modification were all over 35 years old at the time of death, and two of these were over 50 years old (see Table 2). Four of these individuals were present in the lowest level of the grave (Crania #5, #6, #7, #8). Three of these individuals are the best candidates for possibly having been born, potentially, during the contact period, given their ages (two were 35-49 at the time of death, and one was 50+). Other individuals may represent continued cranial modification in the early colonial period, including #8, a 12-year old child, as well as #3 and #1, located second, higher layer of disarticulated remains.

Discussion

Mortuary patterns change through time within the Yacman grave. Early in the feature's history, a cist interment of two individuals exhibits Christian traditions of east-west orientation, supine placement, with at least one arm of one individual crossed over the chest. The cause of death of the two individuals in the cist is unknown. Around the same time or soon afterward, the community experienced a mass death affecting at least seven adults represented by a row of tightly packed crania at the base of the unit's west wall. While these individuals are also probably oriented east-west in the Christian manner, their dense proximity suggests a single mass interment due to a catastrophic event, likely disease or conflict. Subsequently, the comingled remains of at least three other adults (crania #1, #3, #4) and three infants overlaid the first graves. This later layer of bones likely includes flexed burials disturbed by intensive and ongoing use of the cemetery. The MNI for this feature is conservative, and the grave extends in three directions beyond the unit (all but east) as indicated by bones in the walls of our excavation.

The re-use and recycling of earlier buildings and sacred places in the Postclassic period prior to contact was common throughout the Maya area (Lorenzen 1995; Zeitlin and Palka 2018). At the second church at Lamanai, the Christian burials lay within an adjacent Pre-Columbian mound, while dense burials lay within nave of the first church at this site (Graham 2011: 218, 297). Appropriating the church as sacred ground at Yacman by Colonial Maya residents echoes a strategy embraced by other Maya mission settlements in the region. The nave represented a preferred location for burials in such settings (Charlton et al. 2005: 59-60; Musselwhite 2015: 43).

Other colonial cemeteries similarly report crowding of church and churchyard spaces, sometimes resulting in the disturbance of prior burials (e.g., Graham 2011: 233; Pendergast 1981: 52), but such comingling has not been specifically linked elsewhere to a cessation of Christian-style practices in favor of traditional ways. Tipu may represent an important exception if its church's flexed burials postdate its mission period (Jacobi 2000: 184). A single flexed burial in the midst of a cemetery at Tancah

also stands in contrast to the majority of other Christian graves and reflects another instance of deviance from colonial norms (Miller and Farriss 1979: 233). At Lamanai, in the YDL II church cemetery, later burials resulted in the arrangement of bones from disturbed graves (Graham 2011: 208). It is probable that the changes through time at Yacman were more common elsewhere than may have been previously emphasized. As John Chuchiak (2006: 5) observes, "the friars brought with them their own notions of proper burial practices… that soon came into open conflict with traditional Maya concepts of death and burial." Given the chronic absence of friars and secular clergymen, early colonial Maya peoples had considerable leeway to enact funerary practices of their choosing (Chuchiak 2006: 8).

Despite the switch to mausoleum-type mortuary practices, the nave at Yacman had assumed the status of sacred ground, indicating the appropriation of Christian space for deeply personal use. This pattern reflects the complex and hybrid nature of early colonial Maya Christianity (see Graham 1991, 2011), which cannot be characterized in terms of either resistance or conversion. Appropriation of Christian space by Maya mission residents is a strategy becoming more widely recognized in the colonial archaeology of the region (Graham 2011: 210-238, 278). This practice was part of a complicated array of dynamically changing decisions enacted by residents of different mission towns (Graham 2011).

As Craig Hanson (1995: 15) argues, the built environment of Franciscan-founded mission settlements was an important tool for the objective of modeling Yucatec Maya behavior and perception. The act of constructing churches and churchyards was a product of "intercultural cooperation" according to Hanson (1995: 15). Community and town leaders oversaw the erection of such architecture, exercising and demonstrating their personal power and status and sometimes incorporating Spanish construction techniques in their homes, as exhibited at Yacman's "*cacique*" house. Maya builders of churches and atria invested in the collective activity of establishing new architectural symbols of community, in the way that Pre- Columbian building and burial projects also materialized a sense of place at the monumental and household scales (McAnany 1995, 2010: 148-150).

Like architectural construction, mortuary practices also establish what Patricia McAnany (1995) identifies as a genealogy of place. Mortuary practices further enliven and ensoul sacred spaces that tie the living to their ancestors, cross-culturally as well as for the Maya area (McAnany 1995; Musselwhite 2015; Ramirez Barbosa 2016). Mortuary rites assert the identity of the living and define their relationship to the built environment in intentional and meaningful ways. Deeper in the Maya past, holy buildings were ensouled through caching of sacred offerings and reverential burials, to the extent that such acts opened up portals of communication to the supernatural realm within architectural features. Classic Period hieroglyphic texts provide evidence of this belief, echoed by parallel sentiments in modern ethnographic cases (Freidel et al. 1993: 240-244). At Classic Maya centers, such connections were writ large and small, in the form of funerary temples as well as domestic group shrines (Becker et al. 1999).

By the tenth century CE, peoples of northern Yucatan did not construct funerary temples. However, mortuary ceremonialism, linked to ancestor veneration, continued to form an essential, recurrent theme that sanctioned public and domestic architecture. At Postclassic Mayapan's ceremonial center, ancestor shrines and oratories commemorated the deceased relatives of important elites of the city's confederacy (Hutchinson 2021;

Peraza Lope and Masson 2014: 73, 109; Smith 1962: 268). These features displayed human bone relics and stucco portraits of ancestors, and frequently housed multiple interments, for example, at Structures Q-88c (Serafin and Peraza Lope 2007: 238), Q-94 (Peraza Lope et al. 2003: 43, 104-105; Serafin et al. 2014: 147), Q-39 (Delgado Kú et al. 2021), and many others (Smith 1962). Mortuary patterns at the metropolitan context of Mayapan were incredibly diverse, however, and monumental center burials differ from humble graves within patio or yard spaces of ordinary houses (Masson et al. 2014: 252-257; Smith 1962). Elite dwellings at this city commonly featured mausoleums. Residents regularly constructed subterranean tomb features at the same time as dwellings in anticipation of future funerary needs (Smith 1962: 268). Once used, these features exhibit combinations of articulated and comingled interments that reflect periodic use and re-entry over time (Smith 1962: 268), as observed for Yacman.

The mass grave in the Yacman church clearly indicates the symbolic significance of this Christian facility to a Maya community. The residents of this town did not fully subscribe to Christianity according to the friars' definition of the faith, especially given its early position in time, the sporadic presence of ecclesiastical authorities at such rural places, and evidence for continued veneration of traditional Maya deities indicated by the presence of effigy censers. Yet, Yacman's residents incorporated selected European conventions by participating in church rites, building at least one Spanish-style residential wall, and obtaining a colonoware cup. They also valued European metal nails as grave inclusions or as shroud pins. Their use of the church itself to establish and affirm a new genealogy of place was a powerful component of family or community scale assertion of social connections at Yacman. The mixture of symbolically charged objects and features described here demonstrates the concept of hybridity and agent-centered social expression from the perspective of a small community.

Hybrid expressions of culture are neither unidirectional or singular (Ramirez Barbosa 2016: 3), and Maya responses to Franciscan and Spanish rule have long been described as ambivalent and involving a mingling of tradition and introduced colonial things and ideas (Clendinnen 2003; Farriss 1984: 154; Ramirez Barbosa 2016: 75). Elizabeth Graham (1991: 334, 2011), however, asserts that we must remain mindful of the powerful effects of conversion, especially for youths growing up with some version of the new faith. Important, subtle variation occurs from place to place in terms of local experiences and short- and long-term materializations of emerging beliefs and social identities. Communities were sometimes reasonably accepting of Christianity at first, only to later abandon their missions in revolt (e.g., Liebmann and Preucel 2007; Jones 1989: 216-218).

As Jacobi (2000: 57) observes, Maya traditions continued to influence mortuary patterns in early colonial Christian churches in various cases across the peninsula. Despite the reversal in burial practices at Yacman during its short occupation, over the longer term, preferences for Christian-style burials in churchyard contexts became the norm in Mesoamerica, even in places abandoned by the friars (Chuchiak 2006; Graham 1991, 2011; Graham et al. 1989; Zeitlin and Palka 2018: 107). In no small part, this was likely due to the power of collective social memory of churches and churchyards as the burial places and homes of ancestral remains (Graham 2011: 259). Some Mesoamerican towns still return at least some of the bones of their deceased relatives to churches or other sacred locations (Zeitlin and Palka 2018: 108). Burials at the oldest church at Lamanai, for example, continued into the twentieth century (Graham 2011: 259). Descendant peoples emphasize particular memories and choose to forget or abandon certain ancient practices

as part of a "moving forward" strategy in colonial settings (Silliman 2009: 223). The Yacman case reveals village scale shifts in mortuary practices in the broader context of the early colonial experience, over the short time span of just a few generations. At this settlement we observe the emergence of new practices and meanings that constituted authentic social identity for Maya visita residents.

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