Contact and Missionization at Tayasal, Peten, Guatemala

Timothy W Pugh
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Timothy W. Pugh¹, José Rómulo Sánchez² and Yuko Shiratori³

¹Queens College of the City University of New York, Flushing, New York, ²Centro Universitario del Petén, Santa Elena, Petén, Guatemala, ³Graduate Center of the City University of New York, New York, New York

Until their conquest by the Spanish in 1697, many Itza Maya occupied a large village at Tayasal, Petén, Guatemala. After the conquest, two missions were built there. The village and missions are located within 2 km of modern Flores, which was once Nojpetén, the Itza capital, and later the Spanish presidio (fortified administrative center). Our excavations uncovered the San Bernabé mission on the Tayasal peninsula and defined the Late Postclassic-period (A.D. 1400–1525) occupation of the site. San Bernabé was established in the early 18th century as part of Spanish efforts to control indigenous populations in Petén. Our research demonstrates that the Late Postclassic settlement was larger than indicated by previous research and supported a relatively large ceremonial architectural group. Evidence of indigenous practices was recovered from deposits within the mission, though many elements of Itza religion found in the Late Postclassic group were absent from the mission settlement. These data provide additional evidence of religious syncretism in colonial situations.

Keywords: Maya, Postclassic, cultural contact, missions, colonialism

Introduction

Tayasal lies on a large peninsula in Lake Petén Itza in Petén, Guatemala (FIG. 1). Few scholars are aware of how the site fits into the cultural history of the Petén lakes region. The Proyecto Arqueológico Tayasal (PAT) is investigating the Late Postclassic (A.D. 1400–1525), contact (1525–1697), and colonial (1697–1821) (TABLE 1) periods of the Itza Maya of Petén, Guatemala following previous work by Don and Prudence Rice (D. Rice and P. Rice 1980, 1990; P. Rice and D. Rice 2004, 2009). The primary objective of our project is to explore the shifting role of European material culture in the Itza Maya sociopolitical system during the contact and early colonial periods, and the effect of Spanish conquest and subsequent colonialism on Itza social organization and political power. Petén experienced an extended period of independence following initial contact with the Spaniards, and Tayasal has multiple Late Postclassic through colonial-period components. The new ceramic data from Tayasal help to refine the occupation history of the site as well as the regional chronology. In particular, PAT uncovered the 18th-century mission of San Bernabé and further defined a Middle–Late Postclassic (and possibly contact-period) architectural group in the southern part of the site. These deposits record the cultural history of the area from before contact to the latter part of the colonial period and provide information about colonial processes such as missionization and religious syncretism.

The Middle Postclassic to early colonial-period settlement sits directly across a narrow channel from Flores Island (FIG. 2). The site was misnamed “Tayasal” after the Itza capital of Taítza (or Nojpetén), which lies under modern Flores (Jones et al. 1981), and it is not known if the village had a separate name. Colonial documents contain few references to Tayasal, except to say that the occupants of the Itza capital frequently held rituals there (Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983: 84) and the site contained two 18th-century missions, San Miguel and later San Bernabé (FIG. 3). Previous large-scale work at Tayasal was conducted by the Carnegie Institution of Washington (Guthe 1922; Morley 1938), George Cowgill (1963), the University of Pennsylvania (Chase 1983, 1985), and the Proyecto Maya Colonial (PMC) (Pugh 2001; P. Rice and D. Rice 2004, 2009).

The projects led by Cowgill and the University of Pennsylvania produced the richest information concerning the Postclassic through colonial periods. Cowgill (1963: 43–46) made surface collections from both San Miguel and Tayasal. At the former, he found a large quantity of Postclassic-period ceramics but very few effigy censer sherds. Effigy censers are ceramic incense burners with an effigy (e.g., anthropomorph, zoomorph) attached to the side. In
Table 1  Time periods and ceramic complexes relevant to Tayasal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>A.D. 1700</td>
<td>Colonial</td>
<td>Uaxactun* Chase 1983</td>
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<td>A.D. 1600</td>
<td>Contact</td>
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<td>A.D. 1500</td>
<td>Late Postclassic</td>
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<td>Middle Postclassic</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.D. 1200</td>
<td>Terminal Classic</td>
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<td>A.D. 1100</td>
<td>Late Classic</td>
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<td>A.D. 1000</td>
<td>Early Classic</td>
<td>Tzak'ol</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.D. 900</td>
<td>Late Preclassic</td>
<td>Hoxchunchan</td>
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<td>A.D. 800</td>
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<td>A.D. 700</td>
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<td>A.D. 600</td>
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<td>Chicanel</td>
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<td>Chunzalam</td>
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<td>A.D. 100</td>
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*PMT uses the Uzxactun sequence.

Figure 1  Contact-period political geography of the Petén lakes region. Adapted from Jones 1998: map 3.
Peten, the effigy is usually anthropomorphic and may represent a deity. Cowgill’s collection in the center of Tayasal recovered few Postclassic ceramics. A complete effigy censer was recovered in this area, which Cowgill suggested may have been deposited by worshipers from Nojpetén. He concluded that

Figure 2  Contact and colonial-period settlements at Tayasal.

Figure 3  Colonial-period settlements in Petén in 1740. Adapted from Spain, Ministry of Culture 1740. Reprinted with permission of the Archivo General de Indios, Seville, Spain.
Postclassic settlements existed along the shoreline, but there was little occupation inland and the local residents likely worshiped at temples on the island capital (Cowgill 1963: 46–48).

The work conducted by the University of Pennsylvania and reported in Arlen Chase’s dissertation and other publications (Chase 1976, 1979, 1982, 1983, 1985; A. Chase and D. Chase 1983) made critical contributions to our knowledge of Tayasal. Nevertheless, the ceramic chronology was preliminary and has since been revised. At that time, many believed that the Paxcamán ceramic group (a kind of red slipped pottery that is highly distinctive because its paste has snail inclusions) faded at the beginning of the Late Postclassic period, when it was eclipsed by the Topoxte ceramic group, which has a whitish paste and a distinctive soft feel (Cowgill 1963: 127; Chase 1976: 166, 1982, 1983: 1281–1282). In fact, Cowgill (1963: 125) questioned whether the Paxcamán ceramic group had any connection with the Itza. As documented below and elsewhere, the Paxcamán group continued into the colonial period (Jones et al. 1981: 452–453). The faulty chronological placement of Paxcamán ceramics led to the conclusion that Tayasal as well as Flores had little Late Postclassic occupation and that the Topoxte islands in Lake Yaxhá were the most likely site of the Itza capital (Chase 1976: 166, 1983: 1281–1282).

In 1996, the PMC, directed by Rice and Rice, briefly surveyed Tayasal and further defined the Postclassic buildings in Group 23, which were initially identified by the University of Pennsylvania (Figs. 2, 4). A few years later, Fredy Ramirez (2004) excavated in Structures T95 and T99 recovering evidence of intense Postclassic-period ceremonial activity in the group.

The findings of these earlier projects, especially those of the University of Pennsylvania, allowed the PAT to quickly locate the mission of San Bernabé and probably the mission of San Miguel. Thus, our research builds on the established foundations, with updated knowledge of Late Postclassic material culture and ethnohistorical data compiled by Grant Jones (1998). Furthermore, the emphasis is not only on the Itza, but the history of the colonial encounter that occurred on the Tayasal peninsula between A.D. 1525 and 1821. Tayasal reveals indigenous responses to Spanish strategies of power. Although the conquest of Petén and establishment of missions occurred late in the colonial period, and Spanish colonial strategies changed dramatically from first contact to the end of the colonial period, it is clear that native religious practices persisted and were incorporated into Catholic practice.

The Itza, Contact, and Missionization

Contact and colonialism in the Petén lakes region never involved unified Maya interacting with unified Spaniards—both groups had internal factions that endured after the conquest in 1697. The Late Postclassic period of Petén ended in March 1525 when Hernán Cortés passed through central Petén on his way to Honduras to capture the rebellious Cristóbal de Olid. In Petén, Cortés met with the Itza ruler, Ajaw Kan Ek’, thereby initiating the contact period. Maya interactions with the Spaniards did not have a dramatic impact until 1618 when Friar Juan de Obita desecrated an Itza sacred object, catalyzing Itza efforts to drive the Spaniards from nearby areas (Jones 1998: 58–59). Nevertheless, from 1525 until 1697 some Spanish-style material culture such as glass beads, machetes, and weapons entered Petén and there were occasional direct interactions.

Throughout the contact period, individuals identified as Ajaw Kan Ek’ (ajaw “lord”; Kan was the ruler’s matronym and Ek’ his patronym) ruled the Itza. Ajaw Kan Ek’ was the political head and his parallel cousin (father’s brother’s son) named Aj K’in Kan Ek’ was the religious leader of the Itza. The Kan Ek’ cousins formed the central unit of a five-part social system, which was ruled from Nojpetén. Under the dominion of Nojpetén were four cardinally located (at least conceptually) provinces, each ruled by a pair of lords, one junior and the other senior. In addition to Ajaw Kan Ek’, Aj K’in Kan Ek’, and the eight lords, there were 13 leaders of various towns. These 23 individuals formed the Itza ruling council headed by Ajaw Kan Ek’ and Aj K’in Kan Ek’ (Jones 1998: 60–107). Late Postclassic Itza social organization was likely similar to that of the contact period, though it was certainly not static as the region was rife with internal conflicts, expansionism, and alliances.

The Itza were not the only inhabitants of the Petén lakes region (Fig. 1). They dominated a group called the Mopan to the south. Their principal rivals, the Kowoj, occupied the northeastern lakes area, though the exact nature of the relationship between the Kowoj and Itza is unclear. Aj Kowoj, the Kowoj ruler, was allied with Ajaw B’atab’ K’in Kante’, the uncle of Ajaw Kan Ek’ and ruler of the northern Itza province, and attacked and burned part of Flores Island in 1695. The two groups claimed slightly different ethnic histories: the Itza claimed to have migrated to Petén from Chichen Itza in central Yucatán, Mexico, and the Kowoj came from Mayapan, in northern Yucatán. Recent research has revealed that the Paxcamán ceramic group is linked to the Itza and the Topoxte ceramic group corresponds with the Kowoj (Cecil 2009a: 231–236; Pugh and Rice 2009a: 92).

Before the conquest, the Itza and Kowoj constructed different types of ceremonial groups, though the buildings in each group were similar. Both incorporated open halls, raised shrines, and oratorios. Open, or colonnaded halls are long, narrow
buildings, generally incorporating a bench and medial feature such as a shrine or niche; they were used as council houses (Carmack 1981: 192). Raised shrines are composed of a small superstructure on a low platform; they had a variety of functions, although many were mortuary shrines (Pugh 2003a: 945), as seems to be the case at Tayasal. Oratorios are small temples on low platforms, although their precise use remains unknown. The open hall, raised shrine, and oratorio form an arrangement defined as the “basic ceremonial group” at Mayapan (Proskouriakoff 1962: 90). Open halls appear to be the focal points and define the medial axes of these groups, which are common in the Itza region (FIG. 4: Structures T99A, T99B, and T100). The Kowoj constructed a second type of group, also defined at Mayapan: the “temple assemblage” (Pugh 2003b: 945). This assemblage is a specialized version of the basic ceremonial group that includes a temple (Proskouriakoff 1962: 91), which defines the medial axis. Both types of ceremonial groups disappeared after the conquest as indigenous religions were prohibited and missions became the focal points of communities.

The missionization of the Americas involved competition among religious orders—such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, known as “regular clergy” or “regulars”—as well as the secular clergy. In the northern Maya area, the Franciscan order initially enjoyed an advantage because of close ties with Cortés (Restall 2003: 14-15); they were the first to preach at Nojpetén as part of Cortés’ visit in 1525. They did not play a strong role after the conquest of Petén in 1697; however, Franciscan Friar Juan de Orbita visited Nojpetén in 1616 or 1617, returning with Friar Bartolomé de Fuensalida in 1618 to dedicate the settlement to San Pablo (Jones 1998: 300). Orbita destroyed a statue, which he thought was an idol representing a horse left by Cortés, and this event turned the Itza against the two Franciscans and the Spaniards in general. The missionaries were forced to flee Nojpetén on their next visit in 1619. To counter Spanish expansion, the Itza initiated a period of militarism and borrowed some Spanish methods of control, such as resettling dispersed populations into communities to facilitate “labor exploitation and conversion” (Deagan 2003: 5).

As detailed in Jones (1998), on March 13, 1697, Spaniards under the command of Ursúa y Arizmendi attacked and seized the Itza capital. After the conquest, Ursúa ordered his men to destroy the numerous idols of Nojpetén and established a presidio, or fortified administrative center, on the site. Following the conquest, the Spaniards failed to gain control over anything other than Flores Island. This weakness, in addition to a devastating epidemic, left the embroiled area with internecine conflicts and threats of revolt. To control the local populations, the Spaniards attempted to relocate them to a series of missions surrounding the lakes. They constructed the first of these missions, Arcángel San Miguel (San Miguel), in May 1702 on the Tayasal peninsula (FIG. 3) and made AjChan, an indigenous elite and occasional ally, the leader of the community to attract Maya settlers. The Spaniards founded other missions in the area, both

Figure 4 Group 23, Tayasal, Guatemala.
voluntarily and forcibly, some of which survive as modern communities. Although the community of San Miguel did not play a role in the resistance of 1704, AjChan and other inhabitants deserted the mission, which prompted the Spaniards to station extra soldiers there.

San Bernabé was established by at least 1712 on the Tayasal peninsula west of San Miguel (FIG. 3). In 1712, its population was recorded as 126 individuals compared to 410 at San Miguel (Jones 1998: table 15.4). Initially, neither mission had resident clergy, although both were close enough to the presidio for frequent visits. Aside from censuses, there are few records of the lives of the inhabitants of San Bernabé, although around 1755 an individual from San Bernabé with the Kowoj patronym attempted to rally a group of Maya to overthrow the Spaniards. A 1766 census records a population of 37 for the mission, excluding children (Jones 1998: table 15.5). The decrease in population likely resulted from indigenous flight and a high “infant and child mortality rate” (Jones 1998: 415). San Bernabé was not listed as a parish in 1819 (Schwartz 1990: 47).

Post-conquest evangelization efforts were led by secular clergy and the Mercedarian order, which had friars at the presidio from 1699 until 1704, after which secular clergy staffed the missions. Thus, although the Franciscans and Dominicans established a presence in the area prior to the conquest, they did not retain influence in the Petén lakes region. The Dominicans were ordered to leave all of Petén in 1716 and the Franciscans, who had long been in conflict with ecclesiastical authorities, were excluded from post-conquest Petén.

**Group 23**

To better understand long-term Maya/Spanish interactions at Tayasal, we sampled several locations including a Late Postclassic and possible contact-period ceremonial group (Group 23) and San Bernabé (FIG. 2). The ceremonial core of Group 23 occupies the middle of a probable Late Preclassic-period (300 B.C.–A.D. 200) E-Group, or observatory group defined by Structures T93–T96 (Chase 1983: 367) and is bordered on the north by Late–Terminal Classic-period (A.D. 600–900) elite residential groups (TABLE 1; FIG. 4). The architectural layout incorporates these spaces as well as Late–Terminal Classic monuments.

Group 23 comprises multiple structures on a large basal platform (310 × 210 m). This T-shaped platform varies in height, but averages approximately 8 m tall and is oriented 9°18’ east of true north. Built on a natural rise, the platform construction fill ranges from more than 6.5 m deep near the edges to just a few meters deep in the center. Most of the fill incorporates Chicanel (Late Preclassic) pottery, though Mamom (late Middle Preclassic) pottery is present in some areas. Late Classic through Late Postclassic materials are generally limited to the upper 50 cm of the platform fill.

Project mapping revealed that the central portion of the Postclassic complex of Group 23 is a basic ceremonial group (FIG. 4). An east-facing open hall (Structure T99B) with end rooms on its north and south sides has a raised shrine (Structure T100) centered upon and facing into it. An oratorio stands perpendicular to the north side of the hall, facing south possibly toward a small shrine. Although not clearly depicted on earlier site plans, Structure T99B dates to the Middle–Late Postclassic period (Chase 1983: 1276–1277). The University of Pennsylvania did not excavate this building, but it was surveyed by the PMC in 1996, and Ramirez’s (2004) excavations revealed what the 1996 surveys had suggested: Structure T99B was an open hall occupied in the Late Postclassic period. The building contained concentrations of effigy censer sherds and a burial in a seated position intruded upon one of the stairway balustrades. The dual stairway was bordered by two balustrades and divided in the middle by a third balustrade. In front of the central balustrade stood a blank stela base, Stela 5 (Ramirez 2004: 23–27).

The University of Pennsylvania excavations of Structure T100 revealed that it was vaguely rectangular in plan, though its eastern side was bowed giving it a “pseudo-pentagonal form” (Chase 1983: 371, 1985: fig. 5). The shrine was constructed, then renovated on top of an earlier building of unknown form though probably Postclassic in date. After this earlier building was dismantled the shrine was built, centered upon a cist burial. The burial was seated, flexed, and covered with mortar. The individual faced west toward the open hall, also corresponding with the orientation of the shrine. Abundant censer sherds were strewn upon and around Structure T100 indicating its use in ritual activities and possibly the
veneration of the interred individual. The placement of this individual in the central shrine suggests the person was an ancestor (McAnany 1995: 60–63).

The Postclassic occupants reset Classic-period carved Stela 3 a few meters northeast of Structure T100. The stela shows the lower legs and feet of a standing individual on the front of the monument and glyphs are inscribed on its side, one of which is an Ik’ emblem glyph. An Ik’ emblem glyph is also associated with the site of Motul de San Jose (Marcus 1976: 68, 183–190) and could signify “wind” or a day name, although Alexandre Tokovinine (personal communication 2010) has suggested that it may refer to the ancient name of Lake Petén Itza and a polity associated with the lake and Tayasal.

**Structures T94 and T95**

Structures T94 and T95 are two small constructions on the 5.5 m-tall platform that defines the eastern edge of the ceremonial core of Group 23 (FIG. 4). Although the high platform may once have served as the eastern structure in a Late Preclassic E-Group (Chase 1983: 367), it also played an important role during the Late Postclassic period. On the western edge of L-shaped Structure T94, overlooking the Postclassic group, stands the base of Stela 4 (FIG. 5) with the broken upper fragments littering the adjacent slope. The above-ground portion of Stela 4 experienced surface spalling, caused by the heat of agricultural fires, which probably also contributed to its fragmentation and collapse. Below the ground surface, relief carving was preserved on the base that depicts the ankles and sandaled feet of a standing figure. The stela appears to have been reset into a Terminal Classic plaster floor during the Late Postclassic period. The Postclassic construction included a pavement of flat limestones overlying the plaster floor. These stones were bordered by a row of rectangular-shaped, soft limestones.

The peculiar placement of the stela prompted excavations around it and the nearby slope. These areas contained large quantities of composite (particularly Gotas Composite, Mumul Composite, and La Justa Composite) censers and a moderate frequency of Patojo Modeled: Patojo Variety effigy censer sherds, an assemblage similar to that recovered from Structure T94. Composite censers are hourglass or chalice-shaped vessels with spike, button, and other appliqués. Gotas Composite, the most common variety of composite censer in the stela deposit, was identified as being produced in the Late Postclassic, and possibly contact period (P. Rice 2009: 288). Larger and more concentrated sherds were located adjacent to Stela 4 indicating that this was the focal area of use; most sherds lay west of the row of cut soft limestones. The excavations also revealed concentrations of Augustine Red and Paxcamán Red sherds as well as a number of small obsidian and chert side-notched points. Similar points were found in both ceremonial and domestic areas of Late Postclassic through contact-period Zacpetén, a Kowoj site on nearby Lake Salpetén. The points were often associated with censer sherds in Group 23 suggesting that they played a role in ceremonial activities.

Structure T95 is the central structure of the eastern part of the possible E-Group (FIG. 4). Ramírez (2004: 25) determined that its Postclassic component faced west toward Structure T100 and into Structure T99B. Its size suggests that it was also a raised shrine. The shrine incorporated the upper portion of a stela, possibly part of Stela 3 or 4. A large Lamat or Ek’ glyph is carved on a stela fragment. Lamat and Ek’ can refer to “star,” a day name, or the surname Ek’ (Schele and Mathews 1998: 244–245), although its position seems to suggest that it signifies “war” (“star-war”) (Aldana 2005: 305–313). Ramírez also recovered a lead ball with a diameter of 16–17 mm in the excavation of Structure T95. Lead balls of this size were used in several types of firearms from the arquebus to the flintlock (Deagan 2002: table 13.1). Metal objects, including a lead ball, were cached along the central axes of Groups A and C at Zacpetén (Pugh 2009: 378–381). Given that Structures T100 and T95 define the central axis of Group 23 at Tayasal, the lead ball was also likely intentionally placed along this axis.

**Structures T97 and T1106**

Just southwest of the basic ceremonial group stand Structures T97 and T1106, which were initially thought to be residences. They face one another and are just 2 m apart. Structure T1106 is oriented to the south and has benches. Artifacts were concentrated behind Structure T1106 and included small projectile points and a large quantity of Postclassic sherds, some from tripod vessels. Structure T97 faces north and has an L-shaped bench. Artifacts concentrated behind and to the west of the structure included faunal remains, ceramic figurines, and Postclassic tripod vessel sherds. A burial between the two structures contained a seated adult facing north; the only associated artifact was an obsidian blade near the pelvis. Above the burial was a concentration of Mumul Composite and Patojo Modeled censer sherds. Part of the concentration continues beneath the floor ballast of Structure T97, indicating that the burial predates the construction of this building.

Structures T97 and T1106 are the proper size and form to be classified as oratorios, however, their layout relative to one another is somewhat anomalous. Their proximity suggests that they probably shared a single, perishable roof. If occupied at the
same time, individuals seated on the two benches would have faced each other. The layout could indicate some sort of duality, although the artifacts inside the structure do not reveal the nature of that relationship.

**Summary of Group 23**

Middle Postclassic to contact-period deposits at Tayasal are focused on the southern portion of the peninsula directly opposite Flores Island. These deposits represent a village (Chase 1983: 1221) with at least two large ceremonial groups. In addition to Group 23, a second ceremonial group lies on a platform in the southern part of the peninsula in eastern San Miguel, opposite Flores Island. This group includes an open hall, a raised shrine, and a surrounding community, although the open hall was mostly destroyed by the modern construction of a water tank.

The lack of Mayapan-style temple assemblages densely surrounded by residences, as defined at Topoxte and Zacpeten (D. Rice 1988: 236), led earlier researchers to suggest a Late Postclassic hiatus at Tayasal (Chase 1983: 1223). Like the Topoxte ceramic group, temple assemblages are found in the Kowoj area in Petén, but have not been encountered in the Itza region (Pugh 2003b: 419). Group 23 contains a basic ceremonial group, a layout shared with Mayapan (Proskouriakoff 1962: 90). The apparent lack of residences surrounding the Group 23 ceremonial assemblage may reflect the invisibility of domestic structures to surface detection.

The paucity of effigy censer sherds from the University of Pennsylvania excavations also contributed to the conclusion that the area was not directly impacted by contact with northern Yucatán during the Early and Middle Postclassic periods (Chase 1983: 1280–1281). These earlier excavations, however, may have missed deposits of effigy censers, in which case part of the problem is sampling error. Ramirez (2004: 23) encountered abundant Patojo Modeled censers in his excavations in Structure T99A, and the 2010 excavations revealed a moderate frequency of these sherds. Nevertheless, Tayasal does not contain the quantity of effigy censers seen elsewhere in Petén, particularly in the Kowoj area, and the sherds that are present lack the variability observed at Zacpeten. Patojo Modeled is the only censer type with a high frequency of occurrence at Tayasal and Pitufo Modeled is rare (n=4). A possible cause of this relatively small assemblage is the destruction of idols after the conquest (P. Rice 2009: 277) and the proximity of Tayasal to the presidio. Another possible explanation is Cowgill’s (1963: 46) observation that the site lacks Postclassic temples; at Zacpeten the majority of effigy censers rested inside or near temples (Pugh and Rice 2009b: 169). The lack of temples and infrequency of effigy censers at Tayasal do not preclude ritual or religious activities, since there is much ceremonial architecture and Spanish documents record the existence of temples and deity effigies at Nojpeten (Avendaño 1987 [1696]: 33–34). Instead, this evidence suggests that effigy censers and temples—and possibly interactions with represented deities—were more restricted/centralized in this region than among the Kowoj. Another possibility is that effigy censers were discarded in a location undetected by excavations; censer sherds were collected and placed in special locations at Zacpeten (Pugh and Rice 2009b: 149–150).

Tayasal ceremonialism involved composite censers in a variety of forms. Composite censers were used for ancestor veneration and rituals focused upon reused stelae. The high relative frequencies of Gotas Composite censer sherds and near absence of effigy censers other than Patojo Modeled indicate that Group 23 was occupied during the Late Postclassic period and perhaps later. The group was abandoned during the colonial period, but the position of the lead ball in Structure T95 suggests that the object may have been intentionally cached, indicating deposition during the contact period. The lack of additional European artifacts in Group 23 implies that it was abandoned during the early part of the contact period.

Stelae are documented in four contexts at Group 23, including Stelae 3, 4, and 5, as well as the fragments found in Structure T95. Stela 3 was reset near Structure T100, a Late Postclassic-period raised shrine; Structure T95 also has the form of a raised shrine. Stela 4 was reset into the edge of Structure T94, a building of unknown significance. Stela 5 was reset in front of and centered on the stairway of the open hall. The reuse of monuments at Tayasal may be associated with raised shrines—similar to Stela 4 of Zacpeten, which was encountered in the wall of a shrine (Pugh and Rice 2009a: 103), and Ixlu where stelae were incorporated into a raised shrine. Debate exists about whether Stela 1 in Group 23 at Tayasal was set in the Terminal Classic or Postclassic period, but the former seems to be the case (Chase 1983: 476–478).

In most cases, the reused monuments at Tayasal were placed along the main axis of the ceremonial group. The reuse of Classic-period stelae during the Postclassic period has been noted at multiple sites in the southern lowlands (Graham 1994: 113, 129; Hammond and Bobo 1994: 26–32; Pendergast 1981: 51; Satterthwaite 1958: 75–76). Chan Chen, a site near Santa Rita in Belize, contains a reset Late Classic stela with an altar partially composed of stela...
fragments to its south along with Postclassic censers and offerings (Sidrys 1983: 115–122). Similar stelae placements occurred in the colonial period and have been interpreted as revitalization of the indigenous past (Hammond and Bobo 1994: 31), including two stelae and associated caches placed in the navel of a mission church burned during Itza expansion into Belize (Graham 2011: 213–218; Jones 1998: 53; Pendergast 1998: 60).

Both the Late Postclassic Itza and Kowoj moved and reset Classic-period stelae into ceremonial buildings. Reuse of ancient stelae by the Itza has been documented at Tayasal and Ixlu, and at Zacpetén and Topoxte for the Kowoj. The Tayasal stelae could also signify Itza appropriation of place through the prominent reuse of past objects. Although the Itza were present in Petén during the Terminal Classic period, they also participated in a migration stream from the northern lowlands (Schele and Mathews 1998: 202–204). Consequently, the conspicuous placement of stelae likely reflects efforts to reinforce Itza connections with Tayasal’s past. The Kowoj exhibited similar behaviors in an effort to connect themselves with the ancient history of Petén.

In sum, Group 23 comprises a basic ceremonial group surrounded by domestic structures, most of which are invisible on the surface. The group also contains two oratorios in a configuration that has not been described previously in Petén. Ceremonial activities are marked by the use of small projectile points, a variety of composite censers, and Patojo Modeled effigy censers.

The San Bernabé Mission
The San Bernabé mission was situated in the northwestern portion of the peninsula on Structure T31, a low platform with a chultun (storage pit excavated into the bedrock) in its center (FIGS. 2, 6). Sometime after the site was mapped by the University of Pennsylvania, a large portion of the northern edge of Structure T31 was bulldozed. The University of Pennsylvania excavated buildings in the area and found Spanish-style artifacts that represented refuse from the church. In addition to Structure T31, excavations on nearby Structures T29, T30, T32, T34, T111, and T145 were designed to locate the San Bernabé church, but the attempts were unsuccessful (Chase 1983: 779–792). Excavations in 2010 targeted these buildings as they were situated roughly in the location of San Bernabé on the painted map of 1740 (FIG. 3), and a few historical artifacts had previously been recovered in the area.

The University of Pennsylvania excavations in Structure T31 focused on the chultun (FIG. 6: Chultun 1). No historical artifacts were reported from the chultun other than a horse tooth, which appears to be modern (Chase 1983: 757–758). Our 2010 excavations were situated to the north of the chultun and revealed a moderate amount of Paxcamán ceramic group sherds, and a few colonial artifacts including glass and a majolica (tin-enamed ceramic) sherd. Such ceramics are local imitations of Spanish majolica.

Despite the paucity of Spanish-style objects, excavations revealed that Structure T31 was the church of the San Bernabé mission. As was the case with other Spanish mission excavations (Saunders 1993: 52–53), the San Bernabé church was largely defined by burials beneath its floor (FIG. 7), although architectural features were also present, including a mortared column in the western portion of the excavated area and possible foundations in the south. The burials rested under the floor, which was only visible in profile and appeared as a thin lens of soil combined with ash or powdered lime. We recovered 13 burials from Structure T31, though the church was not completely excavated in 2010. All of the intact burials were extended, supine, and with the heads to the west; the crania were slightly tilted to face east. No wood fragments or nails were recovered that would indicate the use of coffins, but flotation revealed fragments of mineralized cloth (Cameron McNeil, personal communication 2010) suggesting that the bodies were shrouded. Many burials contained multiple individuals; 22 individuals were excavated. When bodies were added to existing graves, the earlier remains were disinterrred, but they were placed back into the grave in an orderly manner. If the burials at San Bernabé were oriented parallel to the church, then the door of the church would have been oriented 25°19’ east of true north (slightly south of true west).

Each grave was separated from the others by 40–50 cm and they appear to have been placed side-by-side in crude rows. The graves were marked and occasionally reopened to deposit new individuals—i.e., they were sepulchers. Perhaps the best example of this style of interment was Burial 6, which included three individuals. All that remained of the earliest skeleton (Individual 6a) were small articulated femurs, tibias, and fibulas representing a juvenile. The position of the legs suggested that the head was pointing to the west. The cranium of Individual 6a rested to the left of the cranium of Individual 6b, an adult with a completely articulated skeleton, possibly with the hands clasped at the waist. The third skeleton (Individual 6c) was a child of less than 10 years of age placed directly on top of Individual 6b with the head on the pelvis and the rest of the skeleton on the legs of Individual 6b. The hands of Individual 6c were clasped at the waist.

When earlier remains were removed, they were not simply thrown back into the grave or incorporated in
the back dirt, but were instead replaced in the grave in an organized and sometimes creative manner. For example, the two crania of earlier occupants of Burial 5 were placed above each foot of the latest interment (Individual 5c), both facing east. In Burial 4, the long bones of the disturbed earlier individual were carefully bundled on the lower legs of the later individual. Patterns in the replacement of disturbed remains may emerge as the sample increases, and these patterns may even be family specific if burial rows contained related individuals. For example, the row of Burials 8, 9, and 10 contained extra crania to one side of the pelvis and facing west.

The arm and hand gestures of articulated skeletons were patterned, although we have not yet determined the significance of the four or five burial gestures identified. Three individuals had the hands clasped at the waist; four had their arms crossed at the waist; two had the hands on the chest with the fingers interlaced; three had the right arm resting on the stomach and the upper left arm raised; and two burials could not be classified as the fingers were not
preserved, although one may have been in a prayer position with the hands on the chest and the other may have had the fingers clasped at the waist.

Offerings and personal possessions were rare in the excavated burials at San Bernabé, as at Tancah (Miller 1982: 34) and Lamanai, but unlike at Tipu (Graham et al. 1989: 1258–1259; Smith et al. 1994). A small, blue glass bead recovered from Burial 12 at San Bernabé was the only Spanish artifact placed as a grave good. Burial 12 also contained a small obsidian projectile point. It is possible that it was accidently incorporated into the grave fill, but because no other points were found in Structure T31 other than in the columnar cache, it was likely a grave good. Several burials contained fragments of obsidian blades near the head and neck; obsidian blades are common in Postclassic-period burials (Smith 1962: 232–253). No shroud pins were recovered, even though small fragments of mineralized cloth in the soil surrounding Burial 2 suggest that a shroud once covered the remains (Cameron McNeil, personal communication 2010).

The column (32 cm diameter) to the west of the burials most likely supported the roof, and its base was encased in mortared masonry. Abundant wood remained in the mortar post mold along with a small fragment of unidentified iron. The mortar bore impressions of the wood indicating that the low masonry mold was built around the standing column. We were unable to determine the depth of the column owing to the discovery of ground water after excavating the upper 78 cm of the post.

An oval feature to the north of the column was initially identified as a trash pit, but was later determined to be a dedicatory cache. The pit contained mammal and fish bones (Carolyn Freiwald, personal communication 2011), freshwater snail shells (Pomacea flagellata and Pachychilus spp.), marine shells, a small obsidian projectile point, Paxcamán Red ceramic sherds, and a nearly complete Picu Incised: Thub Variety ceramic drum (FIG. 8). The soil of the feature contained abundant fish scales suggesting the placement of whole fish, possibly as symbols of Christianity. The cache seems to have had an aquatic theme, though the drum does not fit into this theme. Ceramic drums have been recovered elsewhere in Petén including the two contact-period temples at Zacpetén (Pugh and Rice 2009b: 164). These instruments were played during temple ceremonies. The drum and rattle also became emblematic of the 20-year calendar cycle during the Late Postclassic and contact periods (Roys 1967: 77–78). It is not uncommon for percussion instruments to represent the points of calendrical transition they help to mediate (Needham 1967: 611).

The columnar dedicatory cache demonstrates religious syncretism at San Bernabé. For the Maya, such offerings helped activate ceremonial spaces. Activation imbues them with life or spiritual essence and also signifies that spaces were appropriate for ceremonial activity, generally through their connection with deities (McGee 1998: 42–46). The column helped support the roof of the church and, therefore,
represented the world tree or axis mundi, which played a central role in Maya cosmology and ritual practices. World trees also symbolized house posts that both separated and connected the earth and sky at the four corners and center of the cosmos (Taube 1988: 155, 172; Thompson 1970: 195–196). The cache adjacent to the post evokes the otherworld, especially in light of the aquatic-themed contents. The fish and freshwater snails also suggest sustenance and fertility.

Structure T30

Structure T30 is a low platform standing 42 m southwest of the church (Structure T31) (FIG. 6). Prior to excavation, no superstructure was visible on the platform but excavations revealed a circular, 0.22 m-tall building (Structure T30a) with a diameter of 5.17 m (FIG. 9). The wall was composed of three courses of worked, soft limestone. Although the top of the building and walls were not plastered, a well-preserved, thick plaster-surfaced floor extended from the base of the walls surrounding the structure. The construction fill of the platform suggests that it was originally built during the Late Preclassic period, but the area was reused from the Terminal Classic through the colonial period and was part of the San Bernabé mission.

Circular structures were common during the Late Preclassic period in the Maya lowlands and like such buildings at other sites (Aimers et al. 2000), Structure T30a was reused for the placement of burials and offerings during later periods. It did not contain any material that revealed its function during the Late Preclassic period; however, Aimers and colleagues (2000: 82) argue that circular structures were used for public rituals. Terminated artifacts (ritually broken or destroyed to release their vital force) recovered from excavations in nearby Structure T34 (FIG. 6) (described below) may support this position. A significant amount of material attests to the function of this structure during the Terminal Classic period. Some of the deposits from this period appear to be oriented along the cardinal directions. A large, flat, circular stone, which is probably a displaced chultun lid, sits directly on the plaster floor 1 m west of Structure T30a. The western orientation of this stone relative to the circular structure suggests a directional pattern.

A burial (Feature T30-1) was placed to the south of Structure T30a, on top of the plaster floor. It contained one individual with the head to the east, resting on the back in a tightly flexed position with the legs and head tilted to the right. Some remains were missing, including parts of the pelvis, legs, arms, and hands. These appear to have been removed in antiquity, a frequent practice among the Maya (McAnany 1995: 60–63), as several phalanges were found under a miniature lidded ceramic vessel—probably Terminal Classic in date—indicating good conditions of preservation.

A cached vessel (Feature T30-6) was excavated north of Structure T30a under a small mound of limestone rubble, but on the plaster floor adjacent to the building. Glyphs decorate the rim of the Toro Gouged-Incised cylindrical vessel. Below the glyphs the principal scene is in four panels, two with spider monkeys separated by two with mat motifs. Mat motifs represented “rulership and power” (P. Rice 1983: 877).

The eastern edge of Structure T30a was partially destroyed during the Terminal Classic period, in part the result of the placement of a burial (Feature T30-7). Immediately south of this burial, on the east side of the structure, opposite the chultun lid, additional disturbances caused severe damage to Structure T30a. In the damaged area we recovered multiple figurine fragments as well as a nearly complete pectoral adornment of crudely incised conch shell. It is possible that a burial or cache was removed from this area in antiquity. The incised scene on the pectoral depicts three seated males, each wearing a slightly different headdress (FIG. 10). Each holds up one hand with a clenched fist and the thumb extended. The central figure seems to hold a banner, while the figure on the left is slightly elevated and may be the principal character.

Feature T30-7 dates to the Terminal Classic period. The grave was partially enclosed by a line of stones to the east and Structure T30a to the west. Two large,
flat stones covered the skeleton, an adult lying supine with the head to the east. The arms were poorly preserved, but they appear to have been extended along the sides of the body. The burial also contained two ceramic vessels: a Tinaja Red jar and a Saxche/Polmar Polychrome bowl, both of which had “kill” holes, which are small holes drilled into the vessels to terminate, or ritually kill the objects.

Structure T30 was an important location for special deposits during the Late–Terminal Classic period. In addition, before the caches were placed or perhaps at the same time, Structure T30a was covered with construction fill during a renovation event, which at least partially concealed the circular structure. We do not know if the outline of the circle was visible during the Terminal Classic period. The construction episodes overlying Structure T30a occurred in stages with the northern part of the structure initially covered by Structure T30d, a low platform, followed by the filling in of the southern half. Later, Structure T30b was built to the southeast of the (then) hidden circular structure.

Structure T30b dates sometime between the Middle Postclassic and colonial periods and could have been a residence in the San Bernabé parish, although the small platform did not contain colonial artifacts. A cache was recovered on the north side of the structure, and on the surface above the cache was a small concentration of Paxcama´n Red sherds including tripod supports. Excavations below the concentration of sherds, in the same area, revealed a piece of coral that likely represents the offering that activated the domestic space. Although Structure T30b contained no Spanish-style artifacts, such objects littered the surface of Structure T30. Many were late 19th century to modern artifacts, but several colonial objects were recovered including a fragment of a kaolin pipe bowl, two square nails, and a piece of majolica. We also recovered a bronze ring of undetermined age. The assemblage indicates that the platform supported a colonial residence, probably Structure T30b.

Structure T34
The University of Pennsylvania excavated Structure T34 (FIG. 6) and suggested that it was built either in the Late Preclassic and reused in the Postclassic period, or was constructed in the Postclassic period using material obtained from Late Preclassic-period deposits (Chase 1983: 763). Since the platform stands just 20 m southeast of the mission, a test unit was placed on its southern edge to search for midden deposits. The upper levels of the test unit contained Paxcama´n ceramic group sherds but no Spanish-style objects. At this point, it became evident that the test unit was situated on the edge of an ancient lime quarry. A dense concentration of large Chicanel sherds along with animal bone and broken fragments of plaster, many painted red, rested just below the entrance to the quarry. Other ceramic types included Zapote Striated, Boolay Brown, Boxcay Brown, Flor Cream, Polvero Black, Sierra Red, Iberia Orange, and Caramba Red-Orange, among others. Many of the sherds were large and could be refitted. Thus, they may represent “killed” ceremonial items. It is possible that the deposit in the quarry represents a ritual termination event. The architectural elements likely originated from dismantled buildings, some possibly from Structure T30a. The inhabitants ceremoniously placed these items and the ceramics in the disused quarry, a symbolically charged cave-like feature, in order to represent their death.

Structure T29
The University of Pennsylvania excavated in Structure T29 (FIG. 6), and determined that it was constructed during the Late Preclassic period and reused during the Postclassic period (Chase 1983: 775–776). In keeping with our strategy, we placed excavations on the side of the building to search for colonial-period midden deposits, and were again successful. We recovered 10 majolica sherds, four pieces of glass, a mirror fragment, lead shot, a square nail, four pieces of unidentified iron, a copper alloy ring, and a silver coin. In addition, we obtained a good sample of Paxcamán group sherds as well as Pozo Unslipped sherds. Based on the assemblage, we propose that this platform supported a residence of the San Bernabé parish.

The silver coin (FIG. 11) has a diameter of 1.9 cm, is 0.1 cm thick, and weighs 3 g, suggesting a value equivalent to one unit of Spanish currency. The weight is below that required by royal decree (3.4335 g from A.D. 1535 to 1728 and 3.383 g from 1728 to 1825), but none of the silver coins in the (Spanish Florida) Florida Collection meet these standards (Craig 2000: table 2.1, appendix C). Underweight or “feeble” coins benefited coin producers, but at the expense of the crown (Craig 2000: 15). This coin is a “cob,” meaning that it was shaped by hand from dies, rather than being milled or machine struck. Such coins were produced in Santiago de Guatemala until 1753 (Deagan 2002: 255). One side of the coin depicts crowned
pillars (the Pillars of Hercules) and on the reverse is a Jerusalem Cross with the lion and castle of the shield of Castilla y León. Letters between the pillars read SVL TR, which when completely stamped would have read PLV SVL TRA or Plus Ultra, the national motto of Spain, and Latin for “further beyond.” Below SVL is the last digit in the coin’s date, which could either be a 0 or an 8; the rest of the date is illegible. The position above the TRA in Plus Ultra is often occupied by the assayer’s initial (Craig 2000: 149), which in this case is a “V,” however, we do not know the name of the mint. The coin is a salient artifact in that it demonstrates that San Bernabé was part of the Spanish economic system.

**North of Structure T31**

Although the University of Pennsylvania recovered a substantial colonial deposit north of Structure T31 (FIG. 6), the 2010 excavations recovered only a few historical objects in this area including a majolica sherd and a piece of glass. Our excavations were focused northeast of the mission and it is possible that the community gravitated to the northwest as the earlier project found evidence of late occupation in that area (Chase 1983: 1224).

**San Bernabé Summary**

The San Bernabé mission was built on the northwestern tip of the Tayasal peninsula over a Late Preclassic component that experienced significant reuse in the Late–Terminal Classic period. If the brush were cleared, the colonial-period inhabitants could have seen the San Jerónimo mission (A.D. 1702–1734) across the lake at Nixtun Ch’ich’ (FIG. 2), 2.6 km to the northwest, and San Miguel was an easy walk to the southeast. Although San Bernabé was a Spanish mission probably managed by secular clergy, it reflects many Maya practices. Its inhabitants probably included Itza, Kowoj, other Maya groups, and some people of Spanish heritage. We do not know how the walls or roof of the church were constructed, but the building included substantial wooden columns with mortared masonry molds, which are not a typical Maya construction style. Nevertheless, the columns were dedicated by a cache at their base—a Maya practice. The church, part Spanish and part Maya, stood at the center of the San Bernabé parish.

In the 18th century, European governments became increasingly aware of the connection between human burials and disease (Jenner 2005: 615–616). The Spanish crown decreed that burial locations would be moved away from churches and towns, though these rules were not strongly enforced until the early 19th century (Giffords 2007: 70, 409) after many Latin American nations had already gained independence. The burials recovered in the 2010 excavations define part of the floor area of the San Bernabé mission church. The actual floor is visible in vertical profiles as a lens of ashy soil. Future excavations may locate additional burials outside the walls of the mission as at Tipu (Graham 2011: 232; Jacobi 2000: 14).

All of the burials recovered from the San Bernabé church in 2010 had their heads to the west and feet to the east, similar to the burials of Lamanai, Tipu, Tancab, and Spanish Florida (Graham 2011: 233; Jacobi 2000: 185; Miller 1982: table 3); although not all burials in Spanish colonial missions were similarly positioned (Saunders 1993: fig. 2.9). The orientation was generally determined by the location of the altar (Jacobi 2000: 102–103). Most of the burials recovered from Structure T1, the possible location of the original church of San Miguel, also had their heads to the west (Chase 1983: 856–858). The burials of San Bernabé differ from those of Structure T1 as the latter were buried in nailed coffins whereas the former may have been wrapped in shrouds, though no shroud pins were recovered. Shrouds were also a common burial practice at Tipu and in Spanish Florida (Graham 2011: 233; Jacobi 2000: 185). San Miguel was occupied for a longer period than San Bernabé; therefore, it is possible that the San Miguel burials are later than those from San Bernabé, accounting for the availability of nails. Chase (1983: 861) also argued that the San Miguel burials dated to the 19th century. Church inhumations, western orientations, and a lack of grave goods were typical Christian burial practices in Medieval Europe (Müller-Wille 1993: 10).

Reuse of graves for subsequent interments within the church suggests the use of sepulchers (Jacobi 2000: 34; Stojanowski 2005: 166) and is consistent with burial practices in the cemetery of the second church at Lamanai (Graham 2011: 208). Rules guiding the placement of bodies in sepulchers vary; one would expect a strong tendency toward biological relationships. Previous research on human remains recovered from Spanish missions suggests that rows of burials within the mission contain related individuals (Stojanowski 2005: 175–176). It is also noted that particular burial locations inside and outside the church were reserved for individuals of a particular status or varied in price (Giffords 2007: 70; Jacobi 2000: 172–176).

We recovered majolica sherds and other Spanish-style objects in the excavations at San Bernabé, adding to those collected by the University of Pennsylvania. The majority, if not all, of these objects were manufactured in the Americas (Deagan 2002: 31–33; Erdman Cornavaca 2003: 121–177). The infrequency of majolica indicates that indigenous ceramics were utilized for most purposes. In addition, the low frequencies of composite and effigy censer sherds at San Bernabé suggests that censers were not used during the colonial period.
Conclusions
The recent data from Tayasal provide new insights into the Late Postclassic to contact-period Itza Maya. Specifically, they offer a refined chronology for the Paxcamán ceramic group, which was once thought to have disappeared around A.D. 1450 when it was replaced by Topoxté ceramics (uncommon at Tayasal). Owing to the low frequencies of Topoxté ceramics and censers, Tayasal was thought to have experienced reduced settlement in the Late Postclassic period (Chase 1983: 1223). The new data indicate that the Topoxté ceramic group did appear later, sometime after A.D. 1200, but that it represents a technological style related to the Kowoj (Cecil 2009a: 227), explaining its infrequency in the Itza region. Furthermore, the Puc Incised drum included in a dedicatory cache at San Bernabé, in addition to abundant Paxcamán sherds throughout the surrounding community, confirm that this ceramic style persisted into the 18th century, since it was in use while the mission was occupied. The duration of the Topoxté ceramic group, however, remains unclear. Although small deposits were found in mission contexts at both Nixtun-Ch’ich’ and Tayasal, Zacpetén, which was abandoned in the early 17th century, and Tipu, abandoned at the beginning of the 18th century, contain the latest evidence of significant use of Topoxté ceramics (Cecil 2009a: 231–236, 2009b: 248–252; Jones 1998: 408).

The Paxcamán ceramic group is not diagnostic for the Postclassic period because data from Tayasal indicate its use into the colonial period. Consequently, many of the Paxcamán ceramics recovered from modern San Miguel could represent colonial-period refuse. On the other hand, the platform at San Miguel with polychrome murals, Structure T380 (Chase 1983: 868–877), dates to the Middle–Late Postclassic period, indicating that the area was occupied at this time. It is possible that the Paxcamán sherds that Cowgill encountered “a kilometer or two east of San Miguel” (Cowgill 1963: 48) could represent either a Postclassic village or the colonial settlement of Concepción, which was located in this area.

The Itza and Kowoj shared many ritual practices: both reused Classic-period stelae, possibly in an effort to connect the present with the past. They also exhibit architectural similarities, though the Itza of Tayasal lacked temples and, therefore, temple assemblages. The two groups differed in the use of effigy censers, which are less common at Itza Tayasal than at Kowoj Zacpetén or Topoxté.

The only European object recovered from a contact-period context at Tayasal was a lead ball. A single artifact does not substantiate solid conclusions, but its location is consistent with other metal objects cached at 17th-century Zacpetén, where they appear to have been regarded as religious objects. Metal objects may have been considered to be special, likely because of their rarity and exotic nature. Furthermore, they may have been linked to Spanish military power (Pugh 2009). Indigenous projectile points found as offerings in Structure T94 may have been linked to indigenous militarism. It is possible that firearm projectiles were categorically associated with stone projectile points. In the San Bernabé mission community, Spanish-style objects do not appear to have held the same religious or political significance as the lead ball, since they were deposited in secular middens. It is likely that the value of exotic goods changed over the contact and colonial periods as they became more common.

The new Tayasal data indicate that some Maya religious practices continued at the San Bernabé mission. Similar evidence was documented at Tipu and Lamanai, although these sites are situated in an area that was only marginally under Spanish control (Graham et al. 1989: 1255–1257). San Bernabé is located 1.25 km from the presidio and less than a kilometer from San Miguel, and probably received regular visits from a priest; thus, it was under more direct Spanish influence. Effigy censer sherds were not common at San Bernabé, but caching was. Small chert and obsidian projectile points—the distribution of which overlapped with censers in Group 23—were also absent from the San Bernabé mission, with the exception of obsidian points in two burials. We know little about Itza and Kowoj burial practices during the Late Postclassic and contact periods, except that seated burials were common and urn burials have been found on Flores Island. The burial in Structure T1106 contained an obsidian blade near the pelvis. Although the burials were arranged in Spanish style, extended, supine, and resting in rows and sepulchers, the obsidian points and blade fragments reflect Itza practices. Many of the individuals interred beneath the church lived through the conquest of 1697 and likely preserved traditional cultural practices.

Tayasal was a place of contact, but not one of cohabitation with the Spanish. Priests visited Tayasal, soldiers were sometimes stationed there, and Spanish currency circulated, but otherwise it was an Itza Maya
settlement. The Spaniards resided in the presidio, though they incorporated many indigenous elements into their lifestyles. Emblazoned on the coin recovered from the San Bernabé parish were the words “Plus Ultra,” the motto of Charles V, which became synonymous with Spanish colonial expansion (Padrón 2002: 31; Rosenthal 1971: 227–228). Nevertheless, the coin was minted in the Americas, perhaps in Guatemala, with local silver. Eighteenth-century Tayasal was a similar hybrid, although the Spaniards may have imagined that their colonial influence made a more profound impression. Religious and social syncretism are evident at Tayasal, where the inhabitants of San Bernabé maintained many aspects of their pre-conquest lifeways but integrated Spanish practices.

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Timothy W. Pugh (Ph.D. 2001, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale) is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He is the Director of the PAT and has conducted fieldwork in Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, the Midwestern and Southeastern U.S., and Guam with research interests in architecture, ritual, cultural contact, and the colonial process.

José Rómulo Sánchez (M.A. 2009, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale) is an Instructor of Anthropology at the Centro Universitario del Petén, Guatemala. He is the Co-director of the PAT and has conducted fieldwork in Guatemala and Honduras with research interests in cultural contact and the colonial process.

Yuko Shiratori (M.A. 2004, State University of New York, Albany) is a Doctoral Candidate at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She has conducted fieldwork in Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, Mexico, and Japan with interests in ceramics, trade, and cultural contact.

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