

ROUTLEDGE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT AMERICAS

# 3,000 Years of War and Peace in the Maya Lowlands

Identity, Politics, and Violence

Edited by Geoffrey E. Braswell



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# 3,000 YEARS OF WAR AND PEACE IN THE MAYA LOWLANDS

*3,000 Years of War and Peace in the Maya Lowlands* presents the cutting-edge research of 25 authors in the fields of archaeology, biological anthropology, art history, ethnohistory, and epigraphy. Together, they explore issues central to ancient Maya identity, political history, and warfare.

The Maya lowlands of Guatemala, Belize, and southeast Mexico have witnessed human occupation for at least 11,000 years, and settled life reliant on agriculture began some 3,100 years ago. From the earliest times, Maya communities expressed their shifting identities through pottery, architecture, stone tools, and other items of material culture. Although it is tempting to think of the Maya as a single unified culture, they were anything but homogeneous, and differences in identity could be expressed through violence. *3,000 Years of War and Peace in the Maya Lowlands* explores the formation of identity, its relationship to politics, and its manifestation in warfare from the earliest pottery-making villages through the late colonial period by studying the material remains and written texts of the Maya.

This volume is an invaluable reference for students and scholars of the ancient Maya, including archaeologists, art historians, and anthropologists.

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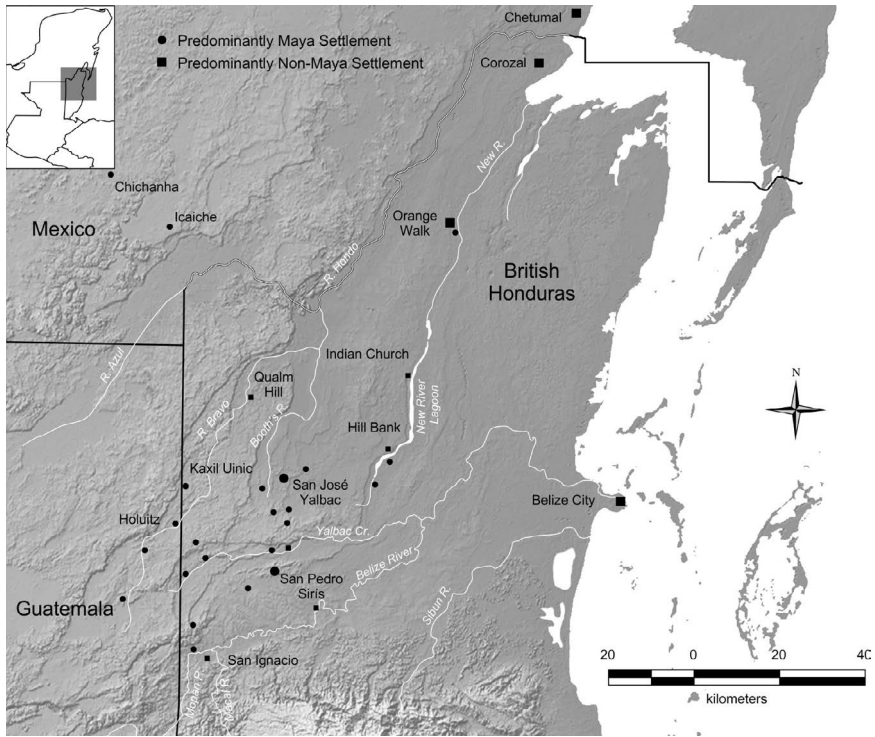
## POWER AND POLITICS ON THE LATE COLONIAL FRONTIER OF BRITISH HONDURAS

*Brooke Bonorden and Brett A. Houk*

Along the western bank of the Rio Bravo in the jungles of northwestern Belize (formerly British Honduras), a scatter of glass bottles, broken dishes, and rusting industrial equipment lies near Cedar Crossing. Approximately 20 km to the southwest, a separate scatter of glass bottles, cooking implements, and curious rock clusters surrounds a lush *aguada* choked with water lettuce. These materials are the vestiges of settlements inhabited by two distinct groups of people: Creole loggers and San Pedro Maya. Although an initial observation of the two sites implies that they are two entirely separate entities with distinct histories, inhabitants, and archaeological assemblages, an exploration of the larger historical context surrounding both sites reveals their intricate relationship within a broader historical framework and how the colonial system in British Honduras intentionally marginalized both groups.

Qualm Hill camp, located on the right bank of the Rio Bravo, served as the seasonal headquarters of British Honduras Company (BHC) throughout the mid-to-late-1800s (Figure 13.1). Kaxil Uinic village, located 2 km from the western Belize–Guatemala border, was settled sometime after 1868 by a group of San Pedro Maya seeking refuge from the Caste War in Yucatan (1847–1901; Jones 1977). The village was included in the land holdings of BHC, later renamed Belize Estate and Produce Company (BEC), and the inhabitants paid rent to the company to use the land for their *milpa* farms (Bonorden and Kilgore 2015). The logging camp at Qualm Hill and the San Pedro Maya village at Kaxil Uinic are thus bound by their associations with BHC/BEC, which ultimately became the largest logging firm in British Honduras (Ng 2007).

The logging labor force in British Honduras largely comprised formerly enslaved Africans, who were prohibited from owning land after their emancipation in 1833 (Ng 2007). As a result, many former slaves ultimately returned to the logging industry, where a system of advanced wages combined with the high



**FIGURE 13.1** Map of colonial period sites in northern British Honduras. Base map courtesy NASA/JPL-Caltech, SRTM Mission. Site locations after Church et al. (2011:Figure 9.1) and Jones (1977:Map 5-1).

price of imported goods forced many of these laborers into a perpetual state of debt servitude to the logging companies that employed them (Cal 1991). Following the Battle of San Pedro between British and Maya forces in 1867, the Lieutenant Governor of British Honduras issued a decree to delegitimize San Pedro Maya claims to land in northwestern British Honduras, undermining their subsistence economy and forcing them to seek similar positions as wage laborers in the *chicle* industry to obtain cash for paying rent to landowning logging companies (Church et al. 2011).

Both the residents of Qualm Hill camp and Kaxil Uinic village were therefore involved with a company that managed to keep the general population of British Honduras dependent upon it for access to resources and jobs (Bolland 1977), offering these disenfranchised groups limited opportunities for socio-economic advancement (Ng 2007). Despite these circumstances, archival and archaeological data from both Qualm Hill camp and Kaxil Uinic village suggest that these two groups combated institutionalized marginalization within the colonial system through their own political and economic devices. The San

Pedro Maya at Kaxil Uinic, for example, selectively participated in the colonial cash economy in ways that allowed them to maintain their autonomy despite being tenants of BEC. This deliberation is evident from data collected at the site, where items purchased from colonial merchants were used in the perpetuation of local practices (Bonorden 2016; Bonorden and Houk 2019). At Qualm Hill, the loggers adopted Maya construction techniques for their buildings and Maya foodways to offset the debts they accrued in the “advance system” implemented by logging companies to create a continuously indentured workforce. It appears, therefore, that these two groups actively negotiated alliances with one another, manipulating the politics and power dynamics of the region in the face of restrictive colonial policies (see also Harrison-Buck et al. 2019).

We synthesize recently collected archival and archaeological data from the two late colonial period (ca. AD 1800–1900) sites to elucidate this interplay between politics, social relations, and materiality. Bonorden directed one season of testing at Qualm Hill camp in 2015 and two seasons of more intensive work at Kaxil Uinic village in 2015 and 2016 under the auspices of the Belize Estates Archaeological Survey Team, directed by Houk. The inhabitants of these two sites cleverly traversed the complex contours of the cultural landscape in British Honduras to determine their places within the colonial system, sometimes in ways inconsistent with corporate group beliefs and alliances or legislative mandates. Evidence of this continuous negotiation is manifested in the archaeological record at both Qualm Hill camp and Kaxil Uinic village.

## A history of power and politics in British Honduras

Archaeological studies of power and politics tend to focus on the establishment and maintenance of formal, large-scale structures (i.e., institutions of “the state”), often overlooking the “practices and social relations that are constituent of these structures and crucial for understanding change and continuity” within the context in which it occurs (Johansen and Bauer 2011:3). Studies of the late colonial period in Belize, for example, generate narratives of the establishment and perpetuation of British colonial supremacy over Maya and Creole groups within the region. Such narratives detail how the “forestocracy” of mahogany industry leaders, together with an oligarchy that controlled the local law-making legislature (the Public Meeting), concentrated lands in western British Honduras into the hands of a few mercantile houses based in England (Cal 1991). Leveraging power over the colonial administration through their advantageous economic position as both the largest employers and tax base in the colony, logging companies were able to influence both the colonial government and its legislative policies (Kray et al. 2017), pushing the political boundaries of the colony to the northwest to take advantage of the poorly defined borders with Mexico and Guatemala (Cal 1991; Houk and Bonorden 2020), ultimately inciting military action against Caste War Maya refugees inhabiting those profitable mahogany forests.



Conflicts inevitably arose between the Maya and logging companies as a result of differing uses of the landscape by the two groups. British mercantile capitalists and colonial administrators lobbied against Maya agricultural pursuits in the region because the traditional *milpa* farming techniques (slash and burn agriculture) destroyed valuable timber resources in the region (Ng 2007). The Maya, meanwhile, perceived British expansion into the previously uninhabited forests of northern British Honduras as a threat to their territory and independence in the midst of the Caste War (Bolland 2003).

A series of contentious treaties between the Maya and the Mexican government, seemingly endorsed by the British colonial administration in British Honduras (Cal 1991), led the Maya to reason that loggers should set up rental agreements with them for use of land in the disputed zone, but larger logging firms had little intention of honoring the terms of such agreements (Ng 2007). Continuous defaults on land rent by logging firms prompted the Maya to forcibly coerce payment from the logging companies, resulting in numerous raids on mahogany works in northwestern British Honduras. One such raid actually took place at Qualm Hill camp in 1866, serving as a catalyst for the Battle of San Pedro (1867), a punitive expedition led by Lieutenant Colonel Robert William Harley into San Pedro territory with orders to drive off any hostile “Indians” his troops encountered (Jones 1977). Although tensions between the Maya and the logging companies diminished to a smolder after the Battle of San Pedro, Maya leader Marcus Canul’s attack on a military barracks in Orange Walk in 1872 reignited hostilities (Eltringham 2010). The Battle of Orange Walk, which resulted in Canul’s death and a Maya retreat, caused relations between the Maya and the British colonial administration to change (Ng 2007).

According to the traditional narrative of events, the formalization of the Anglo-Mexican border with the ratification of the Spenser-Mariscal Treaty in 1893 allowed British troops to occupy the San Pedro Maya settlement area without fear of reprisals from Mexico (Ng 2007). Almost simultaneously, a series of epidemics and drought severely reduced the populations of San Pedro Maya villages, considerably diminishing their autonomy (Church et al. 2011). As the sizes of San Pedro settlements dramatically decreased, the remaining inhabitants of many of the smaller villages and hamlets coalesced into larger settlements, and timber firms displaced or relocated the remaining villages during the 1920s and 1930s (Jones 1977). BEC forcibly relocated the inhabitants of Kaxil Uinic village to San José Yalbac in 1931 (Thompson 1963), possibly due to an estimated loss of \$300,000 in mahogany stands from *milpa* farming activities at Xaxe Venic (Kaxil Uinic) as cited by the company manager, C. S. Brown, in 1935 (Kray et al. 2017). This shift in British-Maya relations (ca. 1872–1900) is typically characterized as a period during which the British colonialists consolidated their jurisdiction over the Maya, and the Maya were ultimately “incorporated into the colonial social structure of British Honduras as a defeated, dispossessed, and dependent people” (Bolland 2003:125). The loss of *milpa* farmland, which had sustained Maya self-sufficiency in colonial British Honduras, forced the Maya to participate in the

colonial cash economy. As a result, practically all of those resources previously acquired from *milpas* had to be imported (Church et al. 2011), and the pressure to obtain cash for paying rent to logging companies drove larger numbers of San Pedro men into the logging or *chicle* industries as wage laborers (Kray et al. 2017).

A similar narrative generally describes experience of Creole loggers in British Honduras. Although the first logging ventures in British Honduras were undertaken by former British buccaneers (known as Baymen) who were seeking new opportunities, the extremely uncomfortable and unhealthy nature of logging meant that only a generation or so of white Baymen extracted wood from British Honduras (Cal 1991). Between 1700 and 1833, slaves of African descent provided most of the logging labor force (Cal 1991). Slaves were brought to British Honduras from Africa via Jamaican markets to cut logwood (Bolland 2003). Along with their descendants, they formed the largest demographic in British Honduras in the early 1800s, although the colony was ruled by an elite Anglo minority (Yaeger et al. 2004).

Since mahogany stands are rather diffuse and sparsely distributed, logging gangs camped in remote areas, which complicated logistics, such as provisioning crews from Belize Town (Cal 1991). The “truck system” was subsequently developed, in which supplies were brought to the logging camps from larger towns in the colony via company trucks. When slavery was abolished in 1833, former slave masters were able to manipulate the truck system to ensure a continued labor supply for their logging enterprises. Known as the “advance system,” this amounted to a state of semi-slavery or debt servitude (Bolland 2003). Many former slaves, who were prohibited from acquiring farmland (Ng 2007), returned to the timber industry as wage laborers after emancipation. These workers were based in Belize Town and given an advance of three month’s wages when hired right before the Christmas season, which they would inevitably spend celebrating with family (Cal 1991). Bound by contract to take half of their wages in goods from their employer (who sold them at exorbitant prices), the workers fell into debt as the logging season progressed and were obligated to continue working until their debts were repaid (Bristowe and Wright 1888). Goods, which often consisted of inferior quality items that British merchants were unable to sell in Belize Town, were trucked in to the company commissary by the employers at marked-up prices and made available on a credit system (Cal 1991), so that the laborers virtually became enslaved for life as they accrued debt at a faster rate than they were able to compensate with labor (Bristowe and Wright 1888). In addition to this economic exploitation and social isolation, improvements in transportation in the 1920s further marginalized the loggers economically, as the increased efficiency that accompanied mechanization of the logging process condensed the traditional nine-month field season to six, severely reducing the income of laborers (Ng 2007).

Although these descriptions of power dynamics during the late colonial period – which are reconstructed from archival data – accurately but superficially reflect the historical narrative of colonialism in British Honduras, they fail to

acknowledge the agency of the Maya and the loggers with whom they interacted in determining or bettering their places within the colonial system despite their *de facto* marginalization by the colonial government. As noted by Ng (2007), “the incorporation of European goods does not simply equate with an embrace of European values” or “incorporation” into the capitalist colonialist social structure of British Honduras. The Maya and their logger counterparts, for example, selectively participated in the colonial economy and strategically interacted with elements of the colonial administration and the “forestocracy” as it suited their needs, making decisions both individually and communally. Sometimes these decisions were inconsistent with the beliefs of their larger groups but allowed them as individuals to survive. Following the theoretical framework laid out by Johansen and Bauer (2011), we view politics as a series of fluid and dynamic social interactions where power relations are continually mediated, challenged, sustained, and reinvented by the actions of people or groups. Through this theoretical lens, even the most commonplace objects can be viewed as indicators of meaningful social struggles, alliances, or transformations (Mullins 2007).

### **Reinterpreting the “incorporation” of subaltern groups into the British social structure**

In the remainder of this chapter, we aim to reevaluate the metanarrative of power and politics in British Honduras during the late colonial period, beginning with the perpetually indentured status of Creole loggers and then turning to the San Pedro Maya. Without undermining the harsh reality of the situation, we present the ways in which both disenfranchised groups combated their systematic marginalization, employing their own agency to actively negotiate their place within the colonial system as opposed to being passively absorbed into it. The following sections examine everyday life at Qualm Hill camp and Kaxil Uinic as revealed by archival and archaeological data. We discuss these data within the historical framework of the late colonial period to provide a more complex understanding of the dynamic nature of power relations under British colonial rule.

#### ***Qualm Hill camp***

Re-located by archaeologists with the Programme for Belize Archaeological Project in 2006 (Cackler et al. 2007), Qualm Hill camp was initially surveyed and mapped by members of the Belize Estates Archaeological Survey Team in 2014 (Sandrock and Willis 2014). Bonorden (2016) spent one additional field season surveying, mapping, and excavating the site. Qualm Hill camp is located roughly 5 km west of a group of prehistoric ruins sharing the same name, in a wooded area approximately 100 m east of Cedar Crossing on the right bank of the Rio Bravo (Sandrock and Willis 2014). Bonorden’s crews identified 60 surface finds, which consisted of several scatters of glass, ceramics, and industrial logging equipment (Bonorden and Smith 2015). Over the course of one field

season, crews opened 19 excavation units and analyzed 1,602 artifacts from the site, including 699 pieces of glass, 336 ceramic sherds, 477 metal artifacts, 24 pieces of chipped stone including tools and debitage, 62 shell artifacts, and two pieces of animal bone.

Although it is unknown precisely when Qualm Hill was established, the logging camp was present as early as 1852. Major Luke Smythe O'Connor (1852) of the First West India Regiment mentioned it in his travelogue written that same year. Although it is unclear from archival data when the camp officially closed, it was obviously sometime before 1970, when BEC went bankrupt (Cal 1991). The manufacture dates of artifacts recovered from Qualm Hill camp indicate that the site was occupied from approximately 1830 to 1920 (Bonorden 2016).

During his expedition, O'Connor (1852) observed that "Betsin's Bank" served as a depot to supply provisions to Qualm Hill camp. Aside from O'Connor's (1852) brief mention of Qualm Hill in his travelogue, accessible historical documentation regarding the logging camp is relatively scarce, save for the numerous accounts of a raid on the camp by the Maya in the 1860s. According to Cal (1991), the raid on Qualm Hill took place on April 27, 1866, shortly before breakfast, when a force of 125 Icaiche Maya troops led by Marcus Canul marched on the camp via Betson's Bank. The company storekeeper at Betson's Bank fired on the Icaiche, and two individuals were killed and another wounded in the skirmish (Cal 1983).

At Qualm Hill, Canul and his troops rounded up all of the women and children before setting two houses on fire and scattering the loggers' provisions (Cal 1983). A Garifuna man nicknamed "Black Devil" was then killed in the fighting, and the Icaiche took 79 to 85 prisoners and 175 head of cattle hostage upon the workers' return from the forest, marching the prisoners to Santa Clara de Icaiche in Mexico (Cal 1983). According to Cal (1983), 53 men, 15 women, and 11 children were among the captives. Sir John Alder Burdon (1935) asserts that the abducted individuals included an English foreman (Mr. Robateau) and a Canadian. Reports of the raid on Qualm Hill mention the presence of a company store, implying that the advance system was in place at the camp by 1866. We recovered no concrete archaeological evidence of the raid on the sawmill, however, as very few weapons were identified in the artifact assemblage, and those present seem to pre- or post-date the raid by several decades (Bonorden 2016). Furthermore, the discovery of numerous burned ceramic sherds at the site is also circumstantial. It is possible that the sawmill was moved after its original location was burned during the raid, and this later location was the one subjected to archaeological investigation. Mahogany camps typically only enjoyed a lifespan of one to three years, so this possibility is reasonable (Kray et al. 2017).

Following the raid, Lieutenant Governor Austin (1866) wrote to Captain Delamere that he should attempt to capture any Maya who participated in it, because Mr. Hodge (the owner of BHC) could only get two laborers to return to the camp unless the government provided military protection. Apart from the various accounts of what occurred during the raid on Qualm Hill camp,

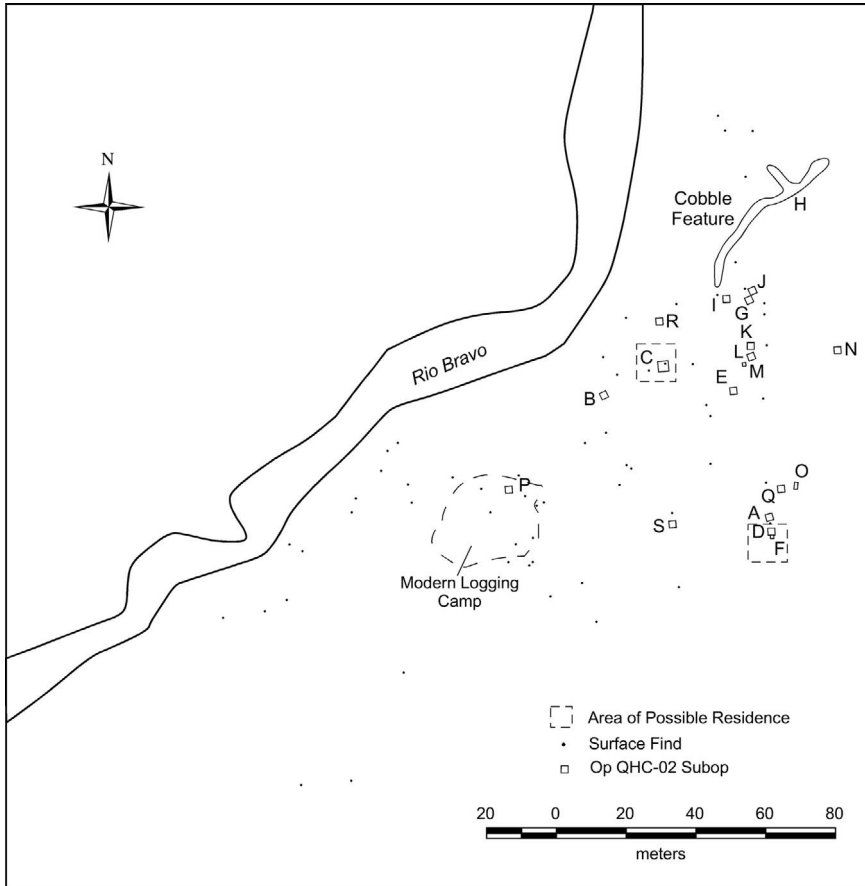
virtually nothing is known of the logging enterprise there or of the nature of the relationship between the mostly Creole labor force and its managers.

Mahogany extraction generally required an organized labor force of 10 to 50 men assigned to specialized activities (Cal 1991; Finamore 1994), often subdivided into smaller groups of 10 to 12 (Bolland 2003). The mahogany industry was thus limited to those individuals with enough resources to garner a large labor force, such as the London merchants who formed the BHC enterprise. Field managers and overseers (mostly British) were appointed to coordinate and supervise these larger endeavors, although the nature of mahogany extraction made direct supervision rather difficult (Cal 1991).

If a given location was likely to yield mahogany for several seasons, small, semi-permanent hamlets were sometimes created, with entire families settling in them (Bolland 2003). The managers did not live side-by-side with the rest of the loggers, however, but usually resided with their families at a considerable distance from the rest of the gang (Ng 2007). The establishment of more permanent camps by wealthier entrepreneurs, although not necessarily the most effective strategy for mahogany activities, allowed these businessmen to manage the structure of social relations among the loggers by controlling the central locus of social intercourse (Finamore 1994). Archival data (Cal 1983) suggests that at least two houses were present at Qualm Hill prior to the 1866 raid, and two areas of the camp subjected to archaeological investigation appear residential in nature (Bonorden 2016). These two areas are located relatively far apart from one another, as well as from the industrial center of the camp (Figure 13.2). The residential area associated with SubOp QHC-02-C is presumed to be within the vicinity of the foreman's residence based on the density and variety of cultural material observed in that location (Bonorden 2016). Because Burdon (1935) refers to both a manager and a Canadian foreman at Qualm Hill, it is possible that the second residential area, where a cooking feature and decorative lamp chimney were recovered at SubOp QHC-02-F, was the second administrator's home (Bonorden 2016). Additionally, the only porcelain fragments recovered from the site were found in the vicinity of the proposed foreman's residence, pointing to class distinctions between the general laborers at the site and the foreman or manager (Bonorden 2016; Ng 2007).

The lack of semi-permanent structures at Qualm Hill indicates that the transient nature of logging compelled the workers to live in huts, likely adopting Maya construction techniques (Finamore 1994). The relatively scant number of nails recovered from Qualm Hill, considering that archival data suggests anywhere from 50 to 85 individuals lived in the camp, supports this assertion (Bonorden 2016). Ng (2007) theorizes that these structures were probably wooden, built on raised blocks or stilts with thatched or wood roofs, and therefore perishable. Alternatively, they were prefabricated structures that were disassembled and moved once the camp closed (Ng 2007).

According to Cal (1991), slaves – and by extension the indentured workers who followed them – exercised a reasonable amount of control over their free



**FIGURE 13.2** Map of Qualm Hill camp showing the locations of 2015 surface finds and excavation units.

time upon completing their assigned tasks. In 1857, mahogany subcontractors reportedly paid their laborers \$7.50 per month, half in goods and half in cash (Cal 1991). This rate did not change until 1888, when it was increased to \$12 per month, including rations. With such low wages, loggers would labor five days a week, hunt wild cattle and hogs on the weekends to supplement the items sold to them at exorbitant prices by logging firms, or “make plantation” by cultivating a small plot of land near the camp to supplement their pork and dough diet, even selling excess produce in Belize Town at the end of the season (Cal 1991). Alternately, some loggers may have plundered food from nearby Maya villages. Luciano Tzuc (*comandante general* of the Chichanha Maya) attacked a mahogany works operated by Young, Toledo, & Company along the east bank of Blue Creek, claiming that the loggers “[took] everything they set eyes on.” This suggests that loggers occasionally stole food from Maya *milpas* to avoid purchasing

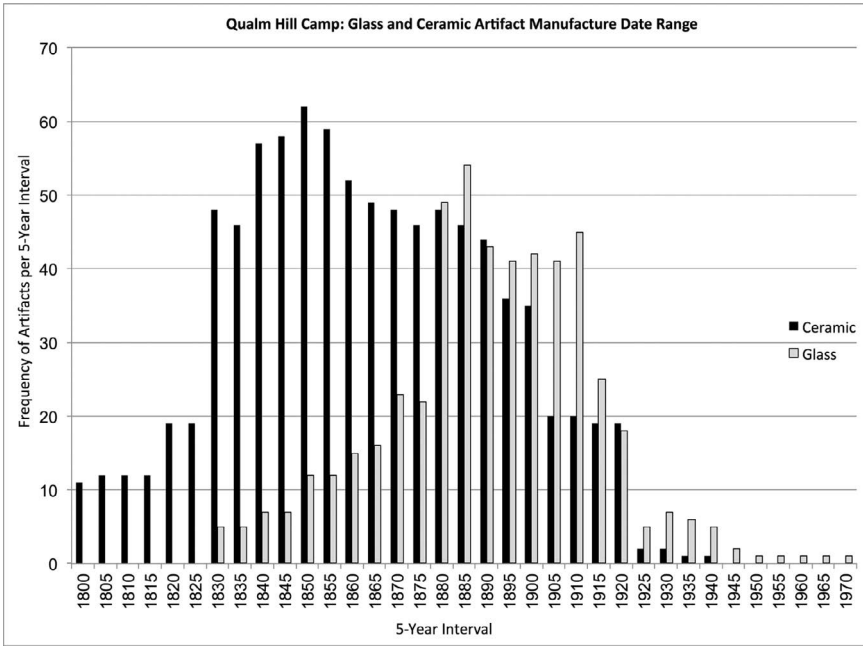
from company stores (Zuc 1856). Such accounts point to the ways in which slaves actively determined their own lives within the limited circumstances permitted, and it appears wage laborers utilized the same opportunities under the advance system (which remained in effect until the 1930s) after emancipation (Cal 1991).

It may thus be assumed that the seasonal inhabitants of Qualm Hill spent their personal time in a similar fashion. At Qualm Hill, we recovered a single mammalian premolar and a fragment of a turtle carapace, providing the only hints about the consumption of wild animals by the loggers (Bonorden 2016). It is possible that loggers dumped their refuse into the nearby Rio Bravo, which could explain the lack of faunal material observed at the site (Finamore 1994). Alternatively, the lack of faunal material at Qualm Hill could indicate an increased reliance on imported foodstuffs via the truck system. Numerous rectangular cans, winding keys, and barrel hoops were found at the site, but only two shotgun shells indicative of hunting were recovered (Bonorden 2016). The dominance of patent pharmaceutical medicine bottles in the Qualm Hill glass assemblage may be interpreted as evidence of the aches and pains of physical labor associated with logging activities (Ng 2007) or the desire of loggers to purge their digestive systems from the monotonous high-starch, high-fat diet they were allotted in the field (Franzen 1995).

Additionally, it appears that loggers consumed *jute* from the nearby Rio Bravo. Most of the specimens of *jute* from the site are spire-lopped, indicating that the shells were boiled so that the meat could be removed and eaten in a thick, spicy soup commonly consumed by the Maya (Bonorden 2016; Healy et al. 1990), or roasted and eaten with pepper sauce (Ng 2007). One pepper sauce-style bottle was recovered from the site. Unlike cultivation, which would not be a feasible subsistence strategy for a gang of highly mobile loggers, aquatic resources were attractive because specialized skills were not necessary to acquire them and it was not a labor- or time-intensive task (Finamore 1994).

Identifiable maker's marks on plates found at Qualm Hill indicate that most of these items were produced in England. Inhabitants of the colony had a narrow range of occupations, and ceramic production was not common. The lack of craftspeople facilitated a reliance on imports for even the most basic household items (Finamore 1994). Restrictions on the availability of manufactured goods and participation in the cash economy of British Honduras also altered consumption habits in isolated logger camps (Miller and Hurry 1983). Ceramics were thus likely acquired as they were available through the truck system, with few options in style and decoration. Furthermore, loggers probably kept their most valuable china at home in Belize City, choosing to bring items with less personal investment to camp where they might be easily broken (Ng 2007). Either of these factors may have shaped the ceramic assemblage at Qualm Hill, where an age disparity is evident between ceramic and glass artifacts observed at the site (Figure 13.3), and no consistent pattern is present among the ceramic vessels identified in the assemblage (Bonorden and Smith 2015).

With the exception of ceramic vessels, there is very little variety in the material culture recovered from Qualm Hill, which reflects the consumption of



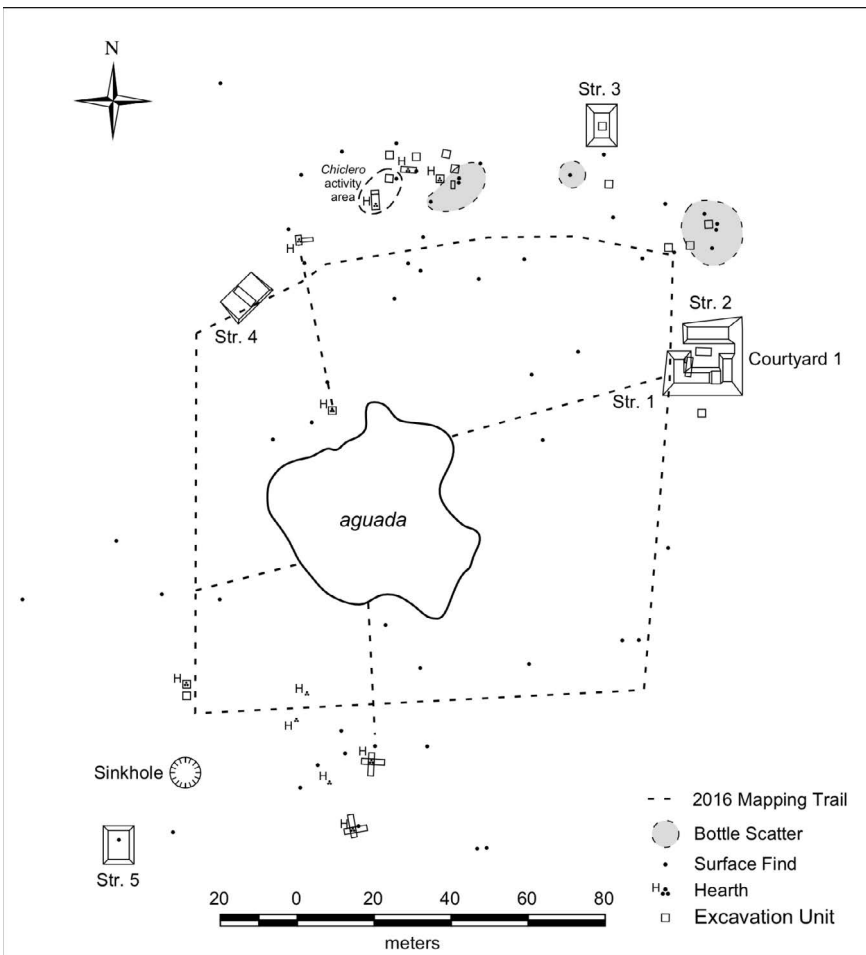
**FIGURE 13.3** Comparison of age ranges for ceramic and glass artifacts from Qualm Hill camp.

mass-produced, commercial commodities available in limited varieties through the truck system (Finamore 1994). The lack of faunal material from the site in comparison to the abundance of tin cans and barrel hoops is also indicative of a subsistence strategy that relied heavily on prepackaged goods, although this may be biased by trash disposal methods at the site. Despite their negligible purchasing power under the advance system, though, it appears that the loggers at Qualm Hill camp sought economic independence by supplementing the foodstuffs acquired at the camp store with local aquatic resources. Since the loggers that inhabited the camp considered Belize City their permanent residence (Cal 1991), it should also be considered that field conditions in remote logging camps likely engendered different consumption patterns among these individuals at work versus at home (as evidenced by the relatively low density of artifacts at Qualm Hill, which is likely due to the transient nature of occupation of the site), and so interpretations of logger participation in the colonial economy might be better studied outside of the working realm. As noted by Hulse (1989), logging camps were managed, constructed, and supplied under company direction and control, and so these sites should be viewed as economic satellites of corporate philosophy rather than reflecting the free behavior of individuals. Therefore, the material culture of Qualm Hill camp must be viewed within an appropriate cultural-historical context when considering the participation of its inhabitants within the colonial economy of British Honduras.



### Kaxil Uinic Village

Bonorden (2016) spent two seasons surveying, mapping, and excavating Kaxil Uinic village (Figure 13.4), initially re-located by Houk (2012). The site surrounds a small *aguada* in the jungle, approximately 1.8 km east of Guatemala. Bonorden's crews identified 10 three-stone hearths and 66 surface finds, which included several large artifact scatters covering over 100 m<sup>2</sup> (Bonorden and Kilgore 2016). Over two seasons, crews opened 30 excavation units and analyzed 5,320 artifacts from the site, including 1,070 pieces of glass, 1,370 ceramic sherds, 993 metal artifacts, 1,527 pieces of chipped stone (including tools and debitage), 14 shell artifacts, and 343 pieces of animal bone.



**FIGURE 13.4** Map of Kaxil Uinic village showing the locations of 2015 and 2016 surface finds, excavation units, and cultural features.

Grant Jones (1977) speculated that Kaxil Uinic was settled in the 1880s by migrants from Holuitz, a San Pedro Maya village to the southwest on the Guatemalan side of the border. Thompson (1963) reported the village was abandoned before Easter in 1931, meaning it was occupied for approximately 40 to 50 years. The manufacture date ranges of artifacts (Figure 13.5) recovered from Kaxil Uinic village reaffirm historic accounts that the village was occupied from approximately 1880 to 1930 (Bonorden 2016; Bonorden and Kilgore 2016). The village was connected by a series of footpaths to Icaiche in the north, San José Yalbac in the southeast (Jones 1977), Yaloch in Guatemala to the southwest, and the Peten region to the west (Miller 1887). Considering its strategically inconspicuous location, Kaxil Uinic village was perhaps intentionally hidden in the forests to isolate the Maya population from colonial contact, conflict, and disease and to prevent nearby loggers or *chicleros* from stealing crops grown by the Maya (Bonorden 2016).

The village appears infrequently in the archival record, but a handful of sources provide a general sketch of its place in the San Pedro Maya political and social structure. The earliest mention of Kaxil Uinic comes from a statement to the Police Inspector of British Honduras in January 1885 (paraphrased in Jones 1977), which mentions that several Mexicans escaped through the village to Icaiche after committing murders at a mahogany bank near San José Yalbac.

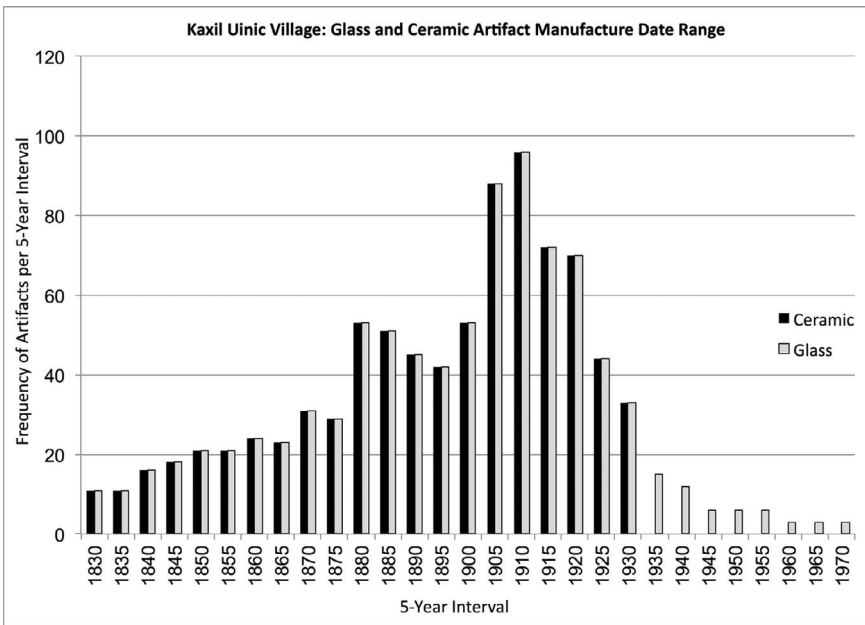


FIGURE 13.5 Comparison of age ranges for ceramic and glass artifacts from Kaxil Uinic village.

On August 18, 1886, J.P.H. Gastrell (1886) noted in a letter to the Earl of Rosebery that an enclosed copy of the “Gavarrete Map” was annotated with the locations of “Ycaiché” Indians, who “[kept] their power or jurisdiction to nearly as far south as Garbutt’s Falls and control . . . Xaxa Venic which [was then] supposed to be within [the] Belize frontier.” This reference to “Xaxa Venic” (Kaxil Uinic) is consistent with observations that the local *alcalde*, Antonio Baños, considered his village to be in Mexican territory (Bolland 2003) and displayed strong Icaiche sympathies the same year (Jones 1977). The village is later illustrated on an 1887 map published by William Miller for his official survey of the British Honduras-Guatemala border in the late 1880s. At the time of the survey (January 17, 1887), however, a regent of Governor Goldsworthy wrote that General Tamay (chief of the Icaiche) referred to the surveyed boundary line as a “tentative” one, emphasizing the strained relations between the British and the Maya concerning the frontier zone (Author Unknown 1887).

Miller (1887) notes that the inhabitants of the villages included on his map “are not savages,” as they “cultivate the soil and grow maize, rice, and beans, and raise pigs and fowls.” They likely sold surplus crops from their *milpas* to nearby loggers or at markets in Orange Walk (Cal 1991). There is little archaeological evidence of *milpa* farming at Kaxil Uinic, but we expect that the archaeological traces of such activity would be faint. Several machetes recovered from Kaxil Uinic could have been used for this endeavor, but only one axe was found at the site. Alternatively, stone tools may have been used for this traditional form of agriculture, and there is ample evidence of lithic tool production at Kaxil Uinic village in the form of debitage, cores, and bifaces. It is possible that the continued use of such tools, as opposed to metal implements, may reflect either cultural continuity in farming techniques – as Duval (1881) states that the Maya did not use plows, hoes, or spades to farm – or the fact that stone tools were cheaper and granted the San Pedro Maya more economic autonomy.

Miller (1887) additionally states that the Maya were considered somewhat dangerous, referencing the 1872 Battle of Orange Walk that took place between Maya forces and the West India Regiments. In contrast to San Pedro Sirís, the principal San Pedro Maya settlement in northwestern British Honduras where numerous crimped or bent gun barrels were recovered in association with the aftermath of the Battle of San Pedro (Yaeger et al. 2005), few weapons or munitions were found at Kaxil Uinic. Over two seasons, Bonorden’s crews recovered only one shotgun stock, six shotgun shells, and one .44–40 bullet casing dating to the historic occupation of the village. The lack of arms or ammunition recovered from Kaxil Uinic may reflect the decreasing ability of the San Pedro Maya to acquire firearms from the British after the Battle of San Pedro (Houk and Bonorden 2015).

From 1891 to 1892, a serious smallpox epidemic spread through the northern and western districts of British Honduras, and according to *The Angelus* (cited by Bolland 2003), at least 30 deaths were reported at Kaxil Uinic by March 1892. When the acting Commissioner of the Cayo District later visited Kaxil Uinic

in 1895, he described the settlement as “a very dirty Indian village . . . claimed by Ycaiche Indians” (quoted in Bolland 2003:149). He also noted that the *alcalde* of Kaxil Uinic still maintained close ties with General Gabriel Tamay of the Icaiche, although the central village of the settlement cluster of Kaxil Uinic (San José Yalbac) appeared somewhat wary of that group (Bolland 2003). As noted by C. H. Eyles (the surgeon of the colony) on May 7, 1897, for the first time since records were kept by the colonial administration, “the number of deaths among the Indian population in the Colony [did] not exceed the births.” That same year, a letter from Icaiche general Gabriel Tamay indicates that he adopted a more cooperative attitude towards the British (Tamay 1897; Wilson 1897).

As previously mentioned, dramatic decreases in the populations of San Pedro Maya settlements rife with diseases led the remaining inhabitants of many smaller villages to coalesce into larger settlements. A letter to the Colonial Secretary from Cayo District Commissioner Rob H. Franklin (1913), for example, mentions that Franklin recently received a report from the *alcalde* of San José stating that “strangers from Xaxe Tenic and elsewhere” wished to settle in San José Yalbac. The following month, Manuel Perez (1913), the *alcalde* of San José, wrote to Franklin that settlers from “Churchquitam” arrived at “Cashiwiniq” (Kaxil Uinic), applying for a place to live. According to Perez (1913), when asked if they planned to obey the laws and regulations of “the company” (BEC), the settlers said that they were willing. This interaction marks a contrast in the level of cooperation exhibited by the inhabitants of Kaxil Uinic during Miller’s survey of the frontier in the 1880s.

Despite the development of a tenuous alliance with colonial authorities, it appears that the attitude of the government in British Honduras towards the Maya remained unsympathetic. In a report from the General Registry of Belize to the Colonial Secretary dated April 7, 1920, “the high death rate among the Indians [was] partly . . . explained by the fact that they [comprised] the most backward section of the population, and [evinced] little desire to effect recovery from disease” (General Registry of Belize April 7, 1920).

The archaeological data help to paint a picture of life at the village. At Kaxil Uinic, alcohol and patent medicine bottles dominate the glass artifact assemblage. These data potentially corroborate colonial accounts (Cal 1991; Rugeley 2001) that alcoholism was endemic among Maya groups in British Honduras and Yucatan. Rum was often paid to planters in lieu of wages. Alternatively, Church et al. (2011) note that interviews with locals provided a consensus that San Pedro Maya villages were “dry.” The large number of alcohol and patent medicine bottles recovered could therefore be explained by ethnohistorical accounts of the importance of alcohol in Maya religious ceremonies, including feasts and funeral wakes, or that empty bottles were obtained from nearby logging camps to be reused as containers for local products (such as honey; Church et al. 2011). Considering that a serious smallpox epidemic spread through the northern and western districts of British Honduras from 1891 to 1892, killing 30 individuals at Kaxil Uinic, funeral wakes associated with this epidemic alone could have generated numerous alcohol bottles as refuse. It is important to note that a peak

in the manufacture date range of glass (see Figure 13.4) collected from the site corresponds to this time frame (Bonorden 2016). Alcohol consumption among the San Pedro Maya, therefore, may have been ritual in nature.

The only physical description of the village comes from Thompson (1963), who described it shortly after its abandonment in 1931 as a “score of huts scattered around a dirty water hole” that presented a “melancholy” appearance. Thompson (1963) also noted that the *aguada* was the only source of drinking water for the villagers and that he did not find the village attractive because there were too many fleas and the hogs wallowed in the drinking water. Twenty or so huts suggest that perhaps the population of the village was around 100 to 120 people prior to relocation of the villagers to San José Yalbac. We know from correspondence between Thompson and government officials earlier in 1931 that the village had a *cabildo*, or court house, and was still governed by an *alcalde* (Colonial Secretary 1931). Bolland (2003) notes that the *alcalde* system, which was a modified, traditional Maya political system stretching back to the Postclassical period in the northern lowlands, was sanctioned by colonial legislation in 1858. Colonial administrators found that this system was a relatively cheap and easy way to govern the Maya because indigenous leaders were essentially unpaid officers who served as a buffer between the Maya and the colonial government. Although no clear evidence of the “court house” was identified during archaeological investigations at Kaxil Uinic, the structure was likely perishable and would not have had a three-stone hearth, the feature type that made identifying structure locations possible at the site (Bonorden 2016).

The Crown Lands Ordinance of 1872 prohibited the Maya from owning land within the colony (Bolland 2003), and Kaxil Uinic was situated on land that belonged to the BEC despite the assertions of residents in 1886 that their village was in Mexican territory. Inhabitants thus probably turned to wage labor as loggers or *chicleros* to acquire cash to pay rent to BEC (see Thompson 1963). *Chiclero* work is reflected archaeologically at Kaxil Uinic by the presence of numerous *chicle* pots, machete fragments, files, and *chiclero* spurs.

Nonetheless, it appears that the Maya may have abandoned their wage-labor positions once they acquired enough cash for their immediate needs, as noted by Gann (1918). We interpret this as a further effort to maintain autonomy in the face of external pressures. Even temporary employment as loggers or *chicleros*, however, impacted the villagers’ ability to continue their traditional *milpa* farming way of life. We discovered several food cans at Kaxil Uinic. These artifacts, combined with the lack of farming implements found at the site, support observations (Bolland 2003; Church et al. 2011) that the loss of *milpa* farmland caused by colonial legislation impelled the San Pedro Maya to import food that they once grew for themselves. Moreover, most of the produce still grown was sold to loggers or in Belize Town in order to acquire cash.

Engagement with the colonial economy also may have impacted other traditional activities to varying degrees. In Gann’s (1918:17) report of Caste War Maya settlements, he states that, among other activities, the women would make

pottery each day but that “the old customs [were] rapidly dying out . . . [and] pottery making [was] rendered unnecessary by the introduction of cheap iron cooking pots.” At Kaxil Uinic, locally produced ceramic forms included bowls, jars, and basin-shaped vessels. Imported vessel types included plates, saucers, and cups/mugs. Like San Pedro Sirís, no complete table settings were recovered from Kaxil Uinic village. Although the absence of flatware, tableware, and imported bowls at Kaxil Uinic does not necessarily equate to evidence, it is possible that the villagers were selective about what types of imported food service items they used. At San Pedro Sirís, such data are interpreted as a reflection of self-sufficiency, with the San Pedro Maya using only those imported vessels that still allowed them to pursue traditional food ways (Church et al. 2011; Leventhal et al. 2001). These Maya groups may have also chosen to continue using hollowed gourds as plates, cups, and storage containers as described in ethnohistoric accounts (Rugeley 2001). Similarly, Yaeger et al. (2004) point to the lack of metal utensils at San Pedro Sirís as evidence that the residents may have instead used tortillas to scoop food. It appears, then, that utensils that could be substituted by items acquired freely were not purchased by the San Pedro Maya.

The artifact assemblage at Kaxil Uinic reflects traditional food preparation techniques and the use of imported tools to perform the same tasks. *Manos* and *metates* were found alongside American-made corn grinders. The Maya may have become increasingly reliant on imported goods following the smallpox epidemics of the 1890s. As the population of Kaxil Uinic dwindled and the residents turned to wage labor as loggers or *chicleros*, they probably had less time to produce locally made ceramics but enough disposable income to buy cheaper metal vessels (as opposed to more expensive imported ceramics). Several of the “cheap iron cooking pots” noted by Gann (1918) were found at Kaxil Uinic. The predominance of cheaper tin vessels at the site in comparison to the large number of imported ceramic vessels at San Pedro Sirís indicates that the ability to purchase the latter may have diminished in the later years of the late colonial period. Tin and enamel wares were relatively inexpensive, durable, easy to clean, lightweight, and readily available, which may explain their popularity in the later years of the Caste War (Rohe 1996).

Yaeger et al. (2005) assert that such vessels were likely used to cook food *pibil*-style, with the pots used as Dutch ovens for pit-roasted meals. According to Dornan (2004), the use of imported cooking vessels reflects the desire of the San Pedro Maya to selectively utilize more efficient, imported technologies while maintaining traditional foodways. The same can likely be said for Kaxil Uinic, where it appears that villagers used cast iron pots and locally produced earthenware vessels to cook traditional meals and both American hand mills and *metates* to grind corn. The material record at Kaxil Uinic ultimately creates an archaeological paradox, then, as most of the items purchased from colonial merchants were used in the perpetuation of local practices – namely foodways – which were markedly different from the customs of other groups in the colony (Church et al. 2011).

Remote as it was within the geography of the colony, Kaxil Uinic was connected to other San Pedro Maya villages in British Honduras, Mexico, and Guatemala (Houk and Bonorden 2020), and it is likely that the residents had direct contact with loggers from Qualm Hill either through formal visits between the village and the camp or through informal contact in the forest (Harrison-Buck et al. 2019). The sources, then, of the imported artifacts at Kaxil Uinic are potentially many because goods could have been acquired from other Maya or from Creole loggers. The presence of six European clay pipe fragments at Kaxil Uinic is perhaps circumstantial evidence for direct contact with Creole loggers, as the Maya preferred to smoke cigars (Cook 1989) and the Creole smoked pipes as evidenced by the large number ( $n=49$ ) of pipe fragments found at Qualm Hill camp. Complicating things further are O'Connor's (1852:516) rumors that the Maya would make away with "axes, machettes [sic], iron pots, and sundry other articles 'too numerous to mention'" as soon as the logging gangs vacated the camps for the season. It is possible that the Maya acquired some objects from empty logging camps; such activity might in part explain the comparatively lower artifact frequencies at Qualm Hill.

## Conclusions

To accurately study late colonial relations and power dynamics in British Honduras, it is necessary to create more contextually detailed illustrations of the political and economic interactions that possibly occurred between the Creole loggers at Qualm Hill and their San Pedro Maya counterparts of Kaxil Uinic (see also Harrison-Buck et al. 2019). Although conflicts arose between the Maya and logging companies as a result of differing uses of the landscape by the two groups, an exploration of the larger historical context surrounding Kaxil Uinic and Qualm Hill highlights their intricate relationship within a broader historical framework and illuminates how both groups were marginalized by the colonial system in British Honduras. The logging labor force, comprised largely of formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants, was prohibited from acquiring farmland following their emancipation in 1833. Similarly, although the Maya were never formally enslaved in British Honduras, they repeatedly faced colonial military action and were prohibited by colonial legislation from owning land.

At Qualm Hill, it appears that despite the Maya raid on the camp, the loggers interacted somewhat peaceably with their Maya neighbors in the following years, adopting Maya construction techniques for their buildings and Maya foodways that offset the debts they accrued in the advance system. At Kaxil Uinic, it is possible that the San Pedro Maya traded locally produced goods with neighboring loggers to acquire imported items, because both groups had limited purchasing power in the colonial cash economy. Although Maya and Creole loggers are commonly perceived as at odds over their differing uses of the forest, we argue that they actively negotiated alliances with one another in the face of restrictive colonial political and economic policies to better navigate the colonial landscape of British Honduras and improve their positions within this system.

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