

Chapter 2

Kaxil Uinic: Archaeology at a San Pedro Maya Village in Belize



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2.1 Introduction

In recent years, historical archaeologists have begun to reevaluate and challenge the binary model of acculturation and resistance conventionally used to describe indigenous experiences in colonial contexts (Croucher 2010; Gasco 2005; Liebmann 2005; Meskell 2002; Russell 2004; Stein 2005). This archetype, habitually employed to explain the social, political, economic, and cultural transformations catalyzed by colonization, has received criticism because it generates simplified narratives from archaeological data. Such narratives are problematic, because they dichotomize historical periods into phases of cultural extinction or change versus cultural continuity or persistence that hardly explain the multifaceted nature of Native responses to European colonization as they were experienced or enacted in the past (Dornan 2004).

Such is the case of British–Maya relations in British Honduras, which became Belize in 1981 when it achieved independence, during the late colonial period (ca. 1800–1900). For the sake of consistency, we refer to British Honduras as Belize, except when explicitly referring to the colonial government or quoting another source. Historical sociologist O. Nigel Bolland (2003) divides British–Maya relations into four basic phases of indigenous resistance, avoidance, military conflict, and finally incorporation into the colonial superstructure of British Honduras. During much of that interval, the Caste War in the Yucatán (1847–1901) and its

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© Springer International Publishing AG, part of Springer Nature 2019

C. E. Orser Jr. (ed.), *Archaeologies of the British in Latin America*,

Contributions To Global Historical Archaeology,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95426-4_2

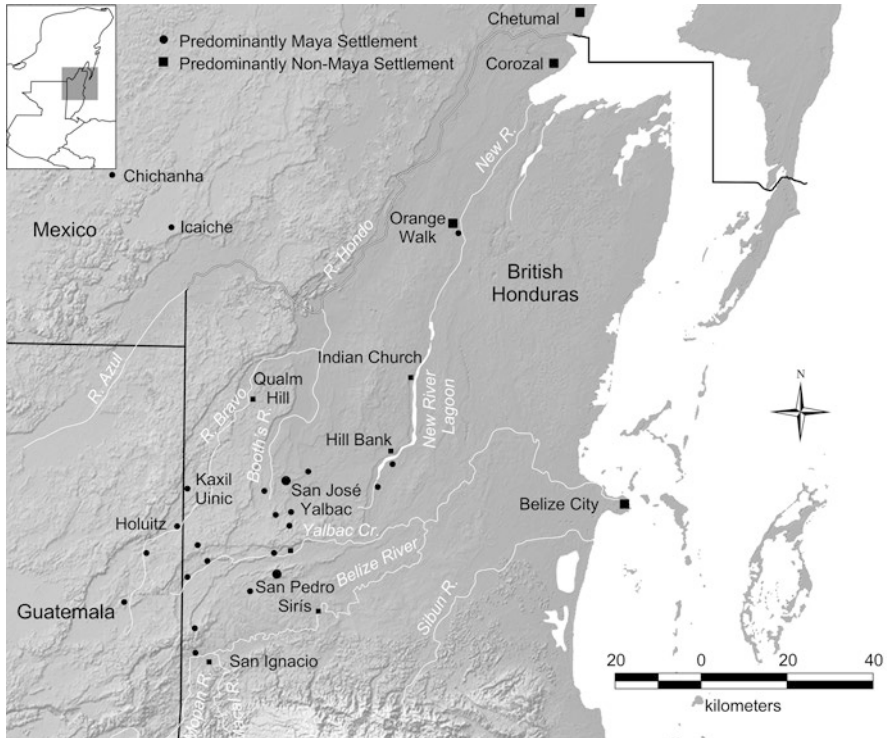


Fig. 2.1 Map of San Pedro Maya sites in and near northern British Honduras. Base map courtesy NASA/JPL-Caltech, SRTM Mission. Site locations after Church et al. (2011, Fig. 9.1) and Jones (1977a, b, Map 5–1)

many social and political complexities profoundly affected populations and politics not in only Mexico but also adjacent parts of Belize and Guatemala as displaced Maya fled the conflict. Although Maya refugees from Mexico settled nearly two dozen small villages in western Belize, only three of those sites have been studied archaeologically: San Pedro Sirís, Holotunich, and Kaxil Uinic (Fig. 2.1). We investigated the latter over the course of two field seasons in 2015 and 2016, and our analysis of both archival and archaeological data from the site challenges Bolland’s (2003, p. 125) assertion that the “consolidation of British jurisdiction over the Maya within Belize and the incorporation of these Maya into the colonial social structure,” resulted in their “[integration] into the capitalist-colonialist society of Belize as a defeated, dispossessed, and dependent people.” Conversely, the data suggest that identities are fluid and constantly negotiated, undermining traditional practices of tracing static patterns of material culture through time by viewing cultural practices and material symbols as dynamic entities (e.g., Croucher 2010, p. 352). This perspective breaks down binary descriptions of the “colonizer” versus the “colonized,” creating a space to examine the ambiguous and sometimes contradictory patterns of material culture associated with colonialism (Liebmann 2005, p. 5).

Identity, therefore, is both strategic and positional, and, as evidence from Kaxil Uinic demonstrates, this deliberation is manifested in the archaeological record.

Rather than accepting the notion that the Maya were passively absorbed into the colonial social structure, we critically analyze both archival and archaeological data to explore the colonial experiences of the San Pedro Maya in northwestern Belize. We view the interactions between the San Pedro Maya villagers and their colonial counterparts as evidence that this indigenous group chose to participate selectively in the colonial economy as it suited their needs, strategically interacting with logging firms, *chicleros* (tappers who extracted resin from sapodilla trees for export to the USA to be used in making chewing gum), and the colonial administration in British Honduras to gain access to imported goods and cash necessary to maintain their social, political, and economic autonomy (Bonorden 2016). Examining the mechanisms and policies utilized by the colonial administration and various corporations that were designed to undermine the San Pedro Maya subsistence economy, we consider the institutions and social structures that both enabled and constrained choices made by the San Pedro Maya by propelling them into wage labor positions amounting to indentured servitude. Contrary to Bolland's (2003, p. 125) description of British–Maya colonial relations from 1872 to 1900, we propose a narrative similar to Grant Jones' (1977a, p. xiii) observation that “lowland Maya society [maintained] a remarkable degree of integrity and autonomy in the face of nearly overwhelming external pressure” from colonial entities.

2.2 Historical Background

The “overwhelming external pressure[s]” to which Jones (1977a, p. xiii) alludes include the factionalism and dislocation of various Maya groups during the Caste War, the expansion of British colonial logging enterprises into territory occupied by the Caste War migrants, and colonial legislation and military action intended systematically to marginalize Maya communities in Belize.

Originally claimed by the Spanish Crown, Belize became a safe haven for English pirates intercepting Spanish ships transporting gold during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Clegern 1967). Declining gold shipments from the New World to Europe, however, ultimately propelled the pirates into the logging industry (Bolland 1987; Simmons Jr. 2001). Over time, an English contraband port in Belize evolved into a British settlement, which formally became a British crown colony in 1862, known as British Honduras (Simmons Jr. 2001).

The British colonization of Belize was therefore almost entirely motivated by economic interests (Cal 1991). Mahogany was used for the construction of ships, luxury furniture, and railway carriages in the late 1700s, and diffuse mahogany stands flourished in Belize at that time. Their sparse distribution and slow growth meant that large tracts of land were easily depleted of commercially viable trees in a short amount of time. As the British stripped most mahogany resources along the coast in the late 1700s and loggers moved farther into the interior of the colony,

conflicts arose among logging companies, the colonial administration, and the Maya inhabiting the area (Cal 1983, 1991).

Following the outbreak of the Caste War in Quintana Roo, Mexico, a group of approximately 1000 Maya moved into northern Guatemala and northern and northwestern Belize between 1857 and 1862 (Bolland 2003; Clegern 1967; Dumond 1977). They were known as the San Pedro Maya, named after their main village established at San Pedro Sirís (Ng 2007). Although the colonial administration in British Honduras aimed to maintain a state of “strategic neutrality” toward the various Maya factions from the Caste War entering their territory, conflicts eventually arose between the San Pedro Maya and loggers in the region as a result of the two groups’ differing uses of the landscape.

Logging companies discouraged agricultural pursuits in northwestern Belize because swidden agriculture (such as the traditional slash and burn farming utilized by the Maya, known as *milpa* farming) destroyed valuable timber resources (Ng 2007). Conversely, the cattle and oxen used by loggers to haul felled timber to nearby rivers wreaked havoc on Maya *milpas* when left unfenced (Cal 1991). The relationship between loggers and the San Pedro Maya was further strained by land rental disagreements. The Maya cited Superintendent Woodhouse’s signature on an 1853 treaty between the *pacíficos del sur* (a coalition of Maya groups at peace with the Mexican government) and Mexico as British recognition of their rightful ownership of land west of the Rio Bravo (Cal 1991; Dornan 2004), reasoning that loggers should set up rental agreements with them for use of land in the disputed zone (Ng 2007). Large logging firms, however, routinely sent teams into this territory with little intention of honoring such terms (Ng 2007). Continuous defaults on lease terms by logging firms ultimately prompted the Maya to coerce forcibly payment from the loggers, resulting in numerous raids on mahogany works in northwestern Belize.

A brief confrontation between British troops and the San Pedro Maya ensued on December 21, 1866, when 42 men from the fourth West Indian Regiment claimed that 400 to 500 “Indians” ambushed them at San Pedro Sirís (Ng 2007, pp. 69–70). When reinforcement troops arrived from Jamaica in January of 1867, the British launched a punitive expedition into San Pedro territory with orders to drive off any hostile “Indians” encountered (Austin 1866; Jones 1977b; Ng 2007). Following this expedition, known as the Battle of San Pedro, Lieutenant Governor Austin issued a decree delegitimizing San Pedro Maya claims to land in northwestern Belize, commanding the Maya to pay rent to the colonial government in order to farm (Church et al. 2011).

As the Anglo-Mexican border was formalized with the ratification of the Spenser-Mariscal Treaty in 1893, British troops were able to occupy the San Pedro Maya settlement area without fear of reprisals from Mexico (Ng 2007). This event, combined with a series of epidemics and drought that severely reduced the populations of San Pedro Maya villages at the turn of the century, considerably diminished San Pedro autonomy (Church et al. 2011; Jones 1977b; Ng 2007).

The sizes of San Pedro settlements dramatically decreased from disease, and the remaining inhabitants of many of the smaller villages and hamlets coalesced into larger settlements. Timber firms, which continued to solidify their control over colo-

nial affairs, displaced or relocated the remaining villages during the 1920s and 1930s (Jones 1977b; Ng 2007). In a twist of fate, the land where the Maya had once taken loggers hostage to demand ransoms was now itself taken hostage through land tenure laws enacted in Belize (Kray et al. 2017). The Honduras Land Titles Act allowed logging companies to purchase most of the land in northwestern Belize, while the Maya were prohibited from owning it.

According to Bolland (2003), the loss of *milpa* farmland, which had sustained Maya self-sufficiency in the colony, forced the Maya to participate in the colonial cash economy, and practically all of the resources previously acquired from *milpas* had to be purchased or acquired through trade (Church et al. 2011). The pressure to obtain cash for paying rent consequently drove large numbers of San Pedro men into the logging or *chicle* industries as wage laborers (Kray et al. 2017). With technological advances in railway transportation that developed in the 1920s, mahogany enterprises increased in efficiency and were able to log previously inaccessible areas (Ng 2007, p. 13). As these firms expanded their territories, even the largest San Pedro Maya settlements were relocated. The inhabitants of Kaxil Uinic village, for example, were forcibly relocated to San José Yalbac by the Belize Estate and Produce Company (BEC) in 1931 (Thompson 1963). The logging companies, which managed vast estates in order to keep the general population of Belize dependent upon them for access to resources and jobs (Bolland 1977a), offered the San Pedro Maya limited opportunities for socioeconomic advancement (Ng 2007), and the repercussions of this institutionalized marginalization are evident in the modern nation of Belize, which continues to suffer from the underdevelopment of its economy and infrastructure (Ng 2007).

Although this historical narrative of colonialism in Belize appears to corroborate Bolland's (2003) characterization of British–Maya relations during the Late Colonial period, the substantiation is largely superficial. Oversimplification of this 200 +/-year period of culture contact obscures the subaltern history of the Maya, as well as the internally variable social, political, and economic agendas of factions within the larger groups of the “colonizers” and the “colonized” (Yaeger 2008, p. 92). Archaeological data allows for a more complete analysis of how the San Pedro Maya negotiated the cultural landscape of Belize and lets us construct a more detailed narrative of Maya–British relations during the nineteenth century. Supplementary data provided by archaeological investigations at Kaxil Uinic village has increased our understanding of the colonial experiences of this disenfranchised group in lieu of historical documentation of events and circumstances from a Maya perspective.

2.3 Kaxil Uinic

As discussed by Church et al. (2011, p. 176), evidence of San Pedro Maya identity is most easily elucidated by the ways in which these individuals “lived their ethnicity.” We subsequently chose to examine aspects of everyday life at Kaxil Uinic

village within the historical context of British–Maya relations during the late colonial period to gain a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic nature of San Pedro Maya identity at Kaxil Uinic. Following a brief description of the archaeological investigations, we examine various aspects of life at the village as illuminated through archival work, survey, mapping, excavations, and artifact analysis.

2.3.1 *Archaeological Investigations*

In 2012, Houk (2012) led a crew from the Chan Chich Archaeological Project to relocate the historic village of Kaxil Uinic, while conducting preliminary archaeological testing at the nearby prehistoric ruins of the same name. Subsequently, Bonorden (2016; see also Bonorden and Kilgore 2015, 2016) directed two seasons of archaeological survey, mapping, and excavation at the historic village in 2015 and 2016. As a component of her investigations, Bonorden and colleagues conducted archival research in Belize, Jamaica, and England (see Bonorden 2016; Bonorden et al. 2017).

The surviving archaeological footprint of the village comprises glass bottles, metal objects, and rock clusters scattered around a small natural pond known as an *aguada* (Fig. 2.2). Hurricane Richard severely damaged the forest in this part of Belize in 2010, and Houk’s team encountered dense secondary brush and numerous tree falls in the vicinity of the village in 2012. The dense vegetation and damaged forest hampered our investigations of the site during the 2015 and 2016 seasons, but our field crews identified 10 hearths and 66 artifact scatters—several of which cover over 170 m²—and opened 30 excavation units (Bonorden and Kilgore 2016). Over the course of this two-year project, Bonorden and Kilgore (2016) analyzed 5320 artifacts from the site. The recovered materials comprise glass ($n = 1070$), ceramics ($n = 1370$), metal ($n = 993$), chipped stone ($n = 1527$), shell ($n = 14$), and animal bone ($n = 343$), as well as a few miscellaneous and plastic objects left by more recent visitors to the site.

2.3.2 *Location and Layout*

Kaxil Uinic village was settled in the 1880s by migrants from Holuitz, another San Pedro Maya village located on the Guatemalan side of the border (Jones 1977b). Ultimately, frustrated by competing designs for resource extraction in northwestern Belize, BEC relocated the residents of Kaxil Uinic to San José Yalbac in 1931. The village was a late addition to the San José Minor cluster (Jones 1977b), and, contrary to Jones’ (1977b, p. 161) conclusion that it was located on the Rio Bravo, Kaxil Uinic sat approximately 3.4 km west of Chan Chich Creek, surrounding a small *aguada* (Houk 2012). The village is described in historical accounts as being located on a direct path from Icaiche in the north to San José Yalbac in the southeast

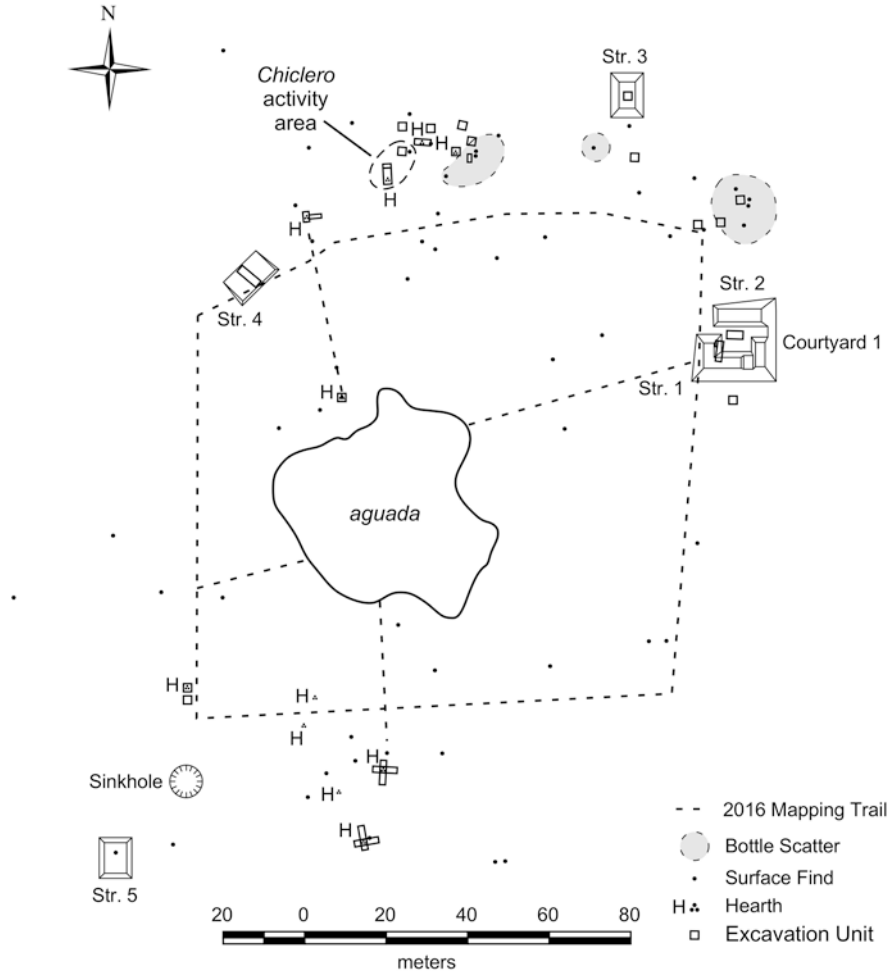


Fig. 2.2 Kaxil Uinic site map showing hearths, surface collections, artifact clusters, and structures

(Jones 1977b), and connected to both Yaloche and the Petén region by a series of paths through the bush (Fig. 2.3), though Teobert Maler (1910) observed that these paths were seemingly untraveled and wholly overgrown in 1910.

Although the inhabitants of Kaxil Uinic believed that their village was in Mexican territory (Cal 1991; Jones 1977b), in reality it was located approximately 1.8 km east of the border between British Honduras and Guatemala. It was therefore subject to Lieutenant Governor John Gardiner Austin’s 1867 regulation stating that “no Indian [would be] at liberty to reside upon or occupy or cultivate any land [in British Honduras] without previous payment or engagement to pay rent whether to the Crown or the owner of the land” (Bolland 2003, p. 122). The Crown Lands Ordinance of 1872 similarly barred the Maya from owning land within the colony (Bolland

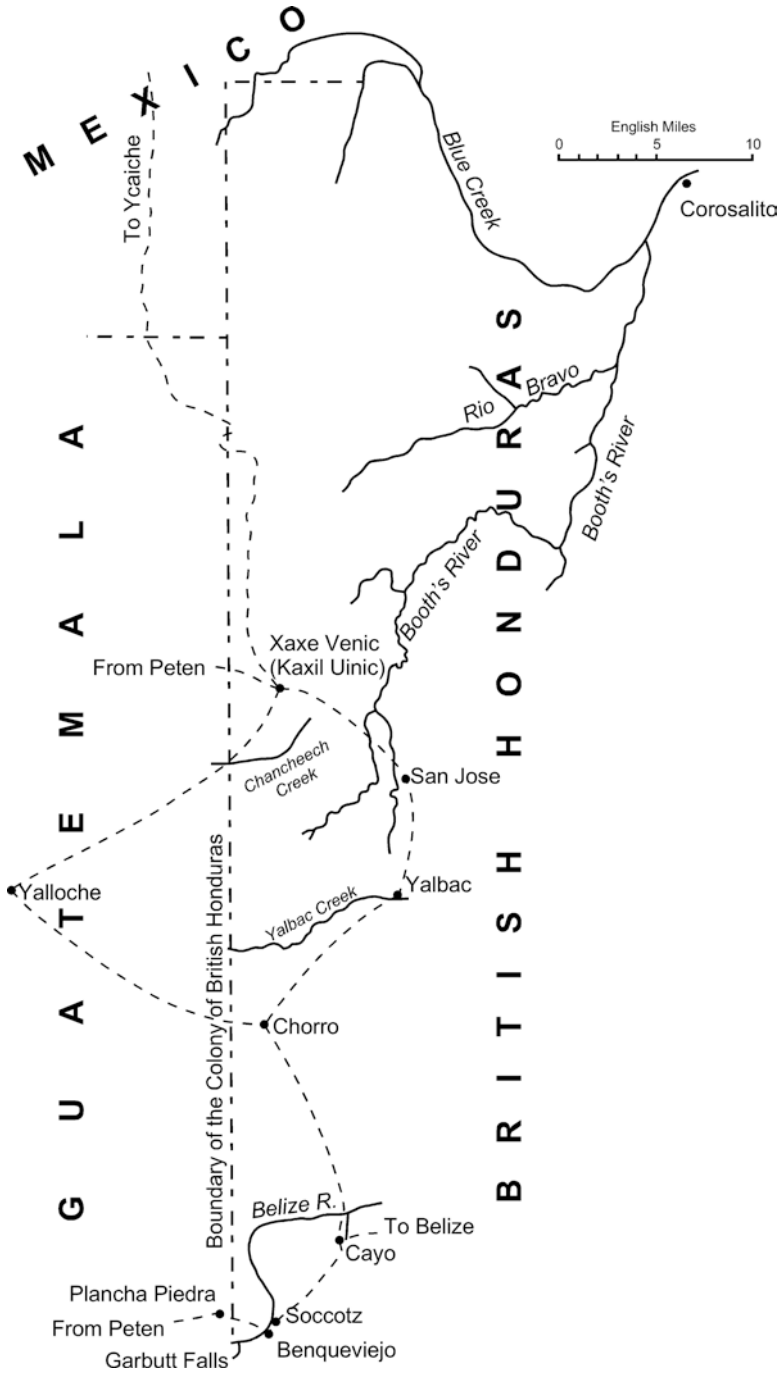


Fig. 2.3 1887 Map of the western frontier of British Honduras. After Miller (1887, p. 421)

2003), and Kaxil Uinic was situated on land that actually belonged to BEC, which logged the vast mahogany forests in the northwestern portion of the country. The villagers, therefore, paid rent to BEC for use of the land (Thompson 1963).

Kaxil Uinic village and its small *aguada* are 500 km south of the main plaza of a group of prehistoric ruins that now share the same name (Houk 2012). The Caste War Maya villages of San Pedro Sirís and Holotunich were also settled in relatively inconspicuous locations near reliable water sources (Dornan 2004; Ng 2007). Based on the descriptions of these villages, it is apparent that military defense and concealment were key factors in San Pedro Maya settlement patterns. As noted by Palka (2005), Maya villages were intentionally hidden in the forests to isolate their residents from colonial contact, conflict, and disease, and to prevent nearby loggers or *chicleros* from stealing their crops.

In 1931, Sir J. Eric S. Thompson (1963, p. 233), who had originally planned to work at the nearby prehistoric ruins before shifting his research to San José, passed through Kaxil Uinic a few weeks after it had been abandoned. He described the village as a “score of huts scattered around a dirty water hole,” which presented a “melancholy” appearance, indicating the presence of approximately 20 huts around the *aguada* (Thompson 1963, p. 233). The village had a court house, or *cabildo* (Conservator of Forests 1930; Colonial Secretary 1931), although we were unable to identify its location archaeologically. Prior to the village’s abandonment, the Office of the Conservator of Forests (1930) suggested that Thompson could base his proposed archaeological project at the court house as it was “quite habitable.”

As for the huts Thompson (1963) observed, ethnohistoric accounts indicate that Caste War Maya houses were typically 4/6 yards (3.6 × 5.5 m) in size, constructed from hardwood posts planted in the ground (e.g., Rugeley 2001). These one-room structures had rounded ends and square, thatched roofs made of palm leaves. Their only openings were the doorways cut out on each side of the structure, which were closed by a door made of sticks fastened together with wicks. Within these houses, the inhabitants slept in hammocks and cooked on three-stone hearths called *k’óoben*. Individual houses were surrounded by a yard, which was enclosed in a tall fence, and trash was randomly discarded around this space (Rugeley 2001).

The two seasons of survey and mapping at Kaxil Uinic documented nine three-stone hearths and a tenth, multi-stone hearth (Fig. 2.4). The three-stone hearths are essentially identical to contemporary features recorded at Tikal (Palka 2005; Meierhoff 2015) and described by the Methodist missionary, Richard Fletcher (in Rugeley 2001, pp. 103–114), at Caste War Maya villages in northern Belize. The distribution of hearths suggests the village encircled the small *aguada*, with the highest concentrations of recorded hearths and artifacts in the southwestern and northeastern portions of the site. Assuming that each hearth represents a house, our investigations only documented about half of the estimated “score” of huts reported by Thompson (1963, p. 233) during his 1931 visit.

The lack of any flat glass recovered from Kaxil Uinic, which could potentially represent window glass, suggests that residential structures in the village were constructed using traditional methods. Conversely, nails and screws were the most abundant forms identified in the metal assemblage from the site



Fig. 2.4 Three-stone hearth located in Subop KUV-01-G

($n = 40$) and recovered from excavation units associated with residential components or middens. Perhaps then, the San Pedro Maya adopted nails in traditional building methods out of convenience. Nails could have also been used to hang items within a household, such as the hammocks in which the San Pedro Maya typically slept. None of the houses we identified had substructural platforms, although some had crude packed marl floors, placed directly on the natural ground surface. No perishable elements of the structures survived, and excavators observed no postholes, which is not surprising given the high rate of bioturbation in the tropical forest.

2.3.3 Governance

Despite being tenants of BEC, inhabitants of Kaxil Uinic expressed a degree of political autonomy, as they had an *alcalde* (mayor) within the village (Colonial Secretary 1931). As Bolland (2003, p. 129, 134) notes, the British adopted this system of indirect rule to cope with Maya resistance and as a pragmatic “response to a situation in which the ability of the colonial administration to maintain order and justice in the rural areas was hopelessly stretched,” and continued to employ it even after the 1872 defeat of the Maya at the Battle of Orange Walk. Likely derived from the Postclassic position of the *batab*, or town chief, the office of *alcalde* came with the San Pedro Maya when they migrated into British Honduras (Bolland 2003).

The *alcalde* of Kaxil Uinic, Antonio Baños, considered his village to be in Mexican territory (Bolland 2003) and became confrontational with a British survey party in the area in the 1880s. The *alcalde* apparently maintained close ties with General Gabriel Tamay of the Icaiche until at least the 1890s (Bolland 2003), despite

assertions that San Pedro Maya autonomy diminished around this time (Church et al. 2011; Jones 1977b; Ng 2007). The *alcalde* system therefore served as a buffer between the San Pedro Maya at Kaxil Uinic and more direct forms of colonial control or political incorporation into colonial British Honduras (Bolland 2003).

The fact that Kaxil Uinic was connected to several major settlements in various regions of Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala at some point in time also implies that the villagers interacted with a wide range of outside groups, perhaps explaining their defiance of the defacto political alliances recognized by the central village of San José Yalbac in 1895 (Bolland 2003; Jones 1977b). Although the *alcalde* of Kaxil Uinic maintained close ties with General Tamay, the residents of San José Yalbac appeared warier of the group (Bolland 2003).

2.3.4 *Alcohol Consumption?*

The majority of glass artifacts recovered from Kaxil Uinic were beer/liquor bottles and patent medicine bottles—the main ingredient of patent medicines was often alcohol. The dominance of alcohol bottles in the glass assemblage at Kaxil Uinic may be explained in three contrasting ways. Firstly, the overwhelming presence of such items corroborates colonial accounts (Cal 1991; Rugeley 2001) that alcoholism was endemic among Maya groups in Belize and the Yucatán, especially those employed by logging firms. Gann (1918, p. 36) asserts that rum was consumed by the Maya “at all times and seasons,” while *balche’*, a traditional mix of fermented honey, water, and roots, was reserved for ceremonial consumption. Similarly, Cal (1991, p. 251) states that “the Icaiche and Santa Cruz Maya immigrants had taken so much to drinking that the field manager of Young, Toledo and Co. was very concerned.” With liquor sold “at every bank in the river,” many Maya laborers apparently died of “drunkenness,” and rum was often paid to planters in lieu of wages (Cal 1991, p. 251). In a 1918 letter from Reverend Tenk of the Catholic Church in the Toledo District, it is also noted that liquor was prohibited in San Antonio, yet it was impossible to prevent the Maya from buying rum when “in town” to bring back home (Tenk 1918). Church et al. (2011), however, note that interviews with locals provided a consensus that San Pedro Maya villages were “dry,” and alcohol consumption was prohibited at Santa Clara de Icaiche, where many San Pedro Maya had previously lived (Cal 1991). Dornan (2004) therefore asserts that the large number of alcohol and patent medicine bottles recovered from San Pedro Sirís could be explained by ethnohistoric accounts of the importance of alcohol in Maya religious ceremonies, including feasts and funeral wakes. Grant Jones (1977b) notes that a serious smallpox epidemic spread through the northern and western districts of Belize from 1891 to 1892, stating that at least 30 individuals died at Kaxil Uinic. Funeral wakes associated with this epidemic alone could have generated numerous alcohol bottles as refuse at Kaxil Uinic, and it is important to note that a peak in the manufacture date range of glass collected from the site corresponds to this time frame (Bonorden 2016, Fig. 7.31), furthering the argument that alcohol

consumption among the San Pedro Maya was more ritualistic in nature. Such epidemics as those that occurred at Kaxil Uinic would have severely reduced the population of smaller San Pedro Maya villages, potentially weakening their subsistence capabilities and resulting in increased participation in the colonial economy of British Honduras by individual Maya.

Alternately, bottles found at San Pedro Sirís could have been obtained from nearby logging camps to be reused as containers for local products (such as honey), for trade, or as a raw material to produce tools, which could be knapped from bottle bases (Church et al. 2011; Kray et al. 2017).

2.3.5 Subsistence

Ethnohistoric accounts (Rugeley 2001) indicate that the Caste War Maya ate a variety of foods, including tortillas; corn cakes; corn bread; soups from ground pumpkin seeds, chile, or beans and chile; wild game; *pibil* (marinated pork baked in a hand-dug pit in the ground for several hours); and corn drinks. The Maya also grew plantains, yams, rice, and other vegetables (Cal 1991, p. 248). According to William Miller (1887), the residents of the San Pedro villages specifically grew maize, rice, and beans, and raised pigs and fowls. Faunal material recovered from Kaxil Uinic corroborates these assertions, as peccary, pig, deer, turkey, and river turtle bone were identified in the faunal assemblage. Yaeger et al. (2005) assert that pig bones, which were also common at San Pedro Sirís, are likely evidence of *pibil*-style roasting. The lack of domestic cow bones in the Kaxil Uinic faunal assemblage is also noteworthy, as it may reflect either an aversion to the consumption of beef or the inability of the villagers to acquire cows (e.g., Palka 2005).

Firearms in archaeological record could have had both military and hunting uses. Excavations at Kaxil Uinic recovered six shotgun shells, one 0.44–0.40 bullet casing, and one shotgun stock. These few artifacts stand in stark contrast to the “many firearm parts” found at San Pedro Sirís (Church et al. 2011, p. 182). Numerous gun barrels recovered from San Pedro Sirís were older models, with crimped or bent barrels, which Yaeger et al. (2005) attribute to the aftermath of the Battle of San Pedro in 1867. The presence of later shotguns and machetes at the village is thus interpreted as military resistance to colonial rule (Dornan 2004) and symbolic of San Pedro Maya agricultural independence (Yaeger et al. 2004a). No evidence of outright conflict with the government, such as incendiary rockets like those found at San Pedro Sirís (Yaeger et al. 2005), was present at Kaxil Uinic, nor was any expected as the village’s founding post-dated the period of military conflict between the Maya and the British. Thus, the shotgun shells recovered from Kaxil Uinic village are interpreted as evidence of hunting wild game or perhaps use in fiestas (see Burdon 1935), while machetes may have been used to cut bush surrounding the village, for *chiclero* activities, and/or to farm (Rugeley 2001). However, the low numbers of arms and ammunition recovered from Kaxil Uinic could also reflect the decreasing ability of the San Pedro Maya to acquire weapons and ammunition from

the British after the Battle of San Pedro (Houk and Bonorden 2015). Palka (2005) suggests that firearms were not desirable among the Maya for hunting game because they were easily destroyed by the jungle humidity and scared away wild game after one shot. Thus, it is difficult to determine which factor or factors account(s) for the striking difference between the assemblages at Kaxil Uinic and San Pedro Sirís.

Although Miller (1887) states that the residents of Kaxil Uinic grew maize, rice, and beans, there is little direct archaeological evidence of *milpa* farming at the site. According to Fletcher (Rugeley 2001), Caste War Maya villagers farmed using a “cutlass and axe.” Several machetes recovered from Kaxil Uinic could have been used for this endeavor, but only one felling axe and a file were found at the site. Alternatively, stone tools may have been used for this traditional endeavor, and there is evidence of lithic tool production at Kaxil Uinic village in the form of debitage, cores, and bifaces from colonial-period components of the site. It is possible that the continued use of such tools, as opposed to metal implements, may reflect either 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 could be acquired without trade. The latter option granted the San Pedro Maya economic autonomy.

Other evidence of consumption habits at Kaxil Uinic comes from the discovery of numerous freshwater bivalve shells on top of a hearth feature. According to Moholy-Nagy (1978) and Ng (2007), freshwater mussels were consumed by the Maya in both ancient and historic times, used in soups, or roasted, and their shells were ground to create lime for maize processing or pottery temper. Several “pepper sauce” bottles similar to those found at Holotunich (Ng 2007) were recovered from Kaxil Uinic. In a study of modern Maya *jute* (*Pachychilus glaphyrus*; a freshwater gastropod with an oblong, tightly coiled shell commonly found in rivers and streams in Belize) consumption in the Cayo District of Belize, Healy et al. (1990) note that these snails were often roasted and eaten with pepper sauce. Although no *jute* shells were recovered from Kaxil Uinic (likely because the site is not located near any streams or rivers), it is not unreasonable to assume that the freshwater bivalve shells identified at the site were consumed in a similar manner.

2.3.6 *Women and Children?*

Despite historic descriptions (Rugeley 2001) of Maya children playing games with pottery disks, bows and arrows, baseballs, marbles, kites, spinning tops, and so forth, no definitive evidence for the presence of children was identified at Kaxil Uinic. Although it is possible that many of these toys were constructed from perishable materials and have therefore not preserved in the archaeological record, Church et al. (2011) found porcelain dolls, tea sets, inkwells, and other items scattered about San Pedro Sirís. They view these artifacts as affirmation of archival documentation of a government-run school in the village. Thus, the lack of toys and inkwells at Kaxil Uinic may indicate that this village did not have a school (Bonorden and Houk 2015).

Kaxil Uinic occupied a much more remote setting than did San Pedro Sirís, and the closest colonial trading partners would have been loggers at nearby banks and camps. Thus, the opportunity to acquire children's toys through barter or trade may have been fairly rare. Kaxil Uinic was settled after the Battle of San Pedro and after the government school presumably ceased operation. Thus, there was also no opportunity to acquire toys from their Maya neighbors.

2.3.7 *Daily Activities*

In Gann's (1918, p. 17) report of Caste War Maya settlements, he states that, among other activities, the women would make pottery each day, but that "among the Indian women of British Honduras, the old customs [were] rapidly dying out...[and] pottery making [was] rendered unnecessary by the introduction of cheap iron cooking pots." At Kaxil Uinic, however, 1256 ceramic sherds recovered from the site were locally produced, while only 114 were imported. It is important to note, though, that most of the locally produced sherds are heavily eroded. It is unclear what percentage of them date to the Classic period—the historic village contained within its limits several Pre-Columbian structures and Classic-period ceramic sherds are commonplace on and near the ground surface around these ancient mounds. Regarding the imported, historic ceramics, Palka (2005) asserts that multicolored earthenware vessels could have been viewed as prestige goods when accounting for their small number at Tikal, and this hypothesis is equally plausible to account for the small quantity of whiteware ceramics at Kaxil Uinic. Yaeger et al. (2005) meanwhile point to the abundance of locally produced earthenware vessels at San Pedro Sirís as evidence of economic self-sufficiency and resistance to colonialism. Due to the small number of identifiable imported vessel forms from the site, it is difficult to make any substantial observations about vessel preference at Kaxil Uinic, but Church et al. (2011) state that the inhabitants of San Pedro Sirís preferred the taste of traditional foods (such as *escabeche* [onion and chicken soup] and *relleno negro* [black turkey stew] soups or roasted *pibils*) simmered in locally produced earthenware pots, but served them in more brightly colored and glazed British vessels either out of preference for those styles (Leventhal et al. 2001; Yaeger et al. 2004b) or because those patterns were the ones available in Belize. The same argument may be made for the residents of Kaxil Uinic, where brightly colored, dipped annular and painted wares dominated the imported ceramic assemblage.

Although the absence of flatware, tableware, or 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). According to Ng (2007), these Maya groups may have chosen to continue using hollowed gourds as plates, cups, and for storage as described in ethnohistoric accounts (Rugeley 2001). Similarly,

Yaeger et al. (2004b) point to the lack of metal eating utensils at San Pedro Sirís as evidence that the residents may have used tortillas to scoop food instead. It appears then, that the San Pedro Maya did not purchase table settings that could substitute for items freely acquired.

Along those lines, as the population of Kaxil Uinic dwindled from smallpox epidemics, the residents probably turned to wage labor as loggers or *chicleros* to participate in the cash economy of British Honduras so that they could pay rent to BEC (Thompson 1963), and probably had less time to produce ceramics themselves, but enough disposable income to buy cheaper metal vessels (as opposed to more expensive imported ceramic ones). The lack of utensils from Kaxil Uinic also echoes the sentiment that those table settings that could be substituted for items acquired freely (such as tortillas for scooping food) were not purchased by the San Pedro Maya.

Although several of the “cheap iron cooking pots” noted by Gann (1918, p. 17) were found at Kaxil Uinic, they were present in significantly smaller numbers than at Holotunich (Ng 2007). Yaeger et al. (2005) assert that these types of pots were likely used to cook food *pibil*-style, with the pots used as bake ovens for pit-roasted meals. According to Dornan (2004), the use of imported cooking vessels reflects the desire of the San Pedro Maya to utilize selectively 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, while simultaneously using American-made hand mills and locally produced *metates* to grind corn.

In his ethnographic account, Gann (1918) also mentions that Yucatec Maya women would prepare cigarettes each morning before gathering cotton and that the older women would smoke as they spun and embroidered garments and other goods. At Kaxil Uinic, evidence of smoking comes from seven fragments of clay pipes. Compared to the numerous pipe fragments found at the nearby historic BEC logging camp of Qualm Hill (see Bonorden 2016), this number of fragments from Kaxil Uinic is relatively miniscule. Cook (1989) states that pipes were the preferred smoking paraphernalia by the British and African Americans, while Hispanic tradition favored the use of cigars and cigarettes over pipes. In pre-Colonial Maya art, pipes are absent, while cigars and cigarettes are commonplace. Similarly, pipes are rare if present at all in the pre-contact archaeological deposits in the Maya area (Robicsek 1978). It may be assumed that the Caste War Maya, who had migrated to Belize from Mexico, favored the use of cigarettes and cigars as described by Cook (1989) and as evidenced by archaeological and ethnohistoric data, although the materials used to produce cigarettes and cigars (tobacco leaves, corn shucks, etc.) would not preserve archaeologically (Robicsek 1978). The clay pipe fragments found at Kaxil Uinic could have been acquired through trade or barter, or they could indicate the presence of non-Maya individuals in the village.

2.3.8 Religion

Although ethnohistoric accounts (Rugeley 2001) imply that the San Pedro Maya practiced a syncretized version of Catholicism, evidence of such practices at Kaxil Uinic are represented by the discovery of a single religious pendant depicting a Catholic saint. The discovery of similar religious relics at San Pedro Sirís is interpreted as a reflection of the connection between the San Pedro Maya and Mexican culture (Yaeger et al. 2005), but Palka (2005) asserts that the Lacandon Maya often agreed to allow missionaries to baptize them in order to receive whatever presents they brought with them for the occasion. Perhaps the San Pedro Maya at Kaxil Uinic also entertained foreign visitors for similar reasons.

At Kaxil Uinic, it appears that the village residents continued to follow a prehistoric Maya religious canon. As previously mentioned, Kaxil Uinic village was positioned relatively close to the prehistoric site of Kaxil Uinic ruin. A few historic artifacts were observed in test excavations of prehistoric mounds scattered around the village, including an *incensario* (incense burner) fragment atop one of the structures and a shell hair comb recovered from the courtyard of another group of buildings (Fig. 2.5). It is possible that these artifacts represent offerings left at the mounds by the San Pedro Maya, similar to those found by Harris (2013) at the base of the stela at the nearby Kaxil Uinic ruins, which he interpreted as evidence of Postclassic or colonial monument veneration. It is not unreasonable to maintain that

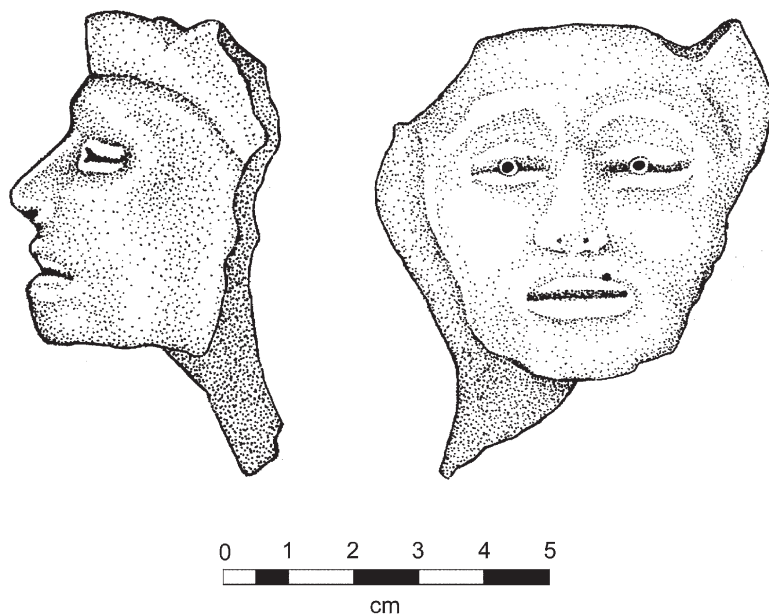


Fig. 2.5 Incensario fragments found at the base of a stela at Kaxil Uinic ruin (after Harris 2013). Illustration by Margaret Greco

the *incensario* fragments recovered from both Kaxil Uinic village and Kaxil Uinic ruin are probably similar to the “clay idols” Methodist missionary Richard Fletcher procured from the Caste War Maya (Rugeley 2001, p. 111). Similarly, Palka (2005) notes that the “ethnographic Lacandon” Maya presented offerings of incense burners with anthropomorphic heads to their deities, while Miller and Farriss (1979) similarly state that pilgrimage centers remained important to the Maya into colonial times.

2.3.9 Chiclero Activity

According to Thompson (1963), BEC relocated the residents of Kaxil Uinic to San José Yalbac in 1931. Thompson (1963) further states that the village was well situated to smuggle *chicle* out of Guatemala without paying export taxes and had been a smuggler’s hangout for many years. Kray et al. (2017) reason that the pressure to obtain cash for paying rent to BEC drove large numbers of San Pedro Maya men into the *chicle* industry as wage laborers. *Chicleros* were gum tappers who extracted resin from sapodilla trees for export to the USA for use in making chewing gum. According to Konrad (1995), a *chiclero* would pass a rope around his waist and the trunk of the tree he intended to climb, leaning back against the rope and using the iron spurs attached to his boots to make his way up the trunk, tapping the tree’s resin with a machete as he climbed. A statement made by Gann (1918, p. 17), however, seems to reinforce the notion of San Pedro Maya autonomy in the face of colonial economic pressures, as he notes that the Maya would often leave employment as woodcutters (and therefore possibly *chicleros*) “as soon as they [had] acquired sufficient money for their immediate needs.”

At Kaxil Uinic, *chicle* harvesting and processing are indicated by the presence of numerous *chicle* pots (Fig. 2.6), machete fragments, a file, and *chiclero* spurs. Although some of the *chiclero* artifacts could be the result of post-1931 reuse of the site, in 2016 we excavated an apparent *chiclero* activity area devoid of any non-colonial artifacts (see Fig. 2.2). Located in the northern part of the village, this activity area included a three-stone hearth with a machete file in its center, a large quantity of wire-drawn nails (possibly indicating the presence of a structure), *chicle* pot fragments, a pair of *chiclero* spurs, an unusual rock alignment visible on the ground surface, a shotgun stock, a machete fragment, and an axe head.

2.4 Discussion

Our analysis of the data from Kaxil Uinic shows that, as time went on, San Pedro Maya participation in the British colonial economy of Belize did increase, at least with respect to the use of certain imported goods, such as metal grinders and service vessels. Based on archaeological and archival data, it seems these items largely

Fig. 2.6 *Chicle* pot fragment (Spec. # KUV1497-01)



replaced locally produced objects to perform more efficiently similar functions in food preparation activities at Kaxil Uinic. As noted by Ng (2007, p. 28), however, “the incorporation of European goods does not simply equate with an embrace of European values,” or “incorporation” into the capitalist social structure of British Honduras. British colonial legislation prevented the San Pedro Maya from owning land, consequently allowing logging companies that maintained vast estates to keep the general population of Belize dependent upon them for access to resources and jobs (Bolland 1977b). The San Pedro Maya were thus unable to subsist solely through traditional *milpa* farming because they needed to participate in the cash economy of the colony to pay rent for the land they inhabited (and diseases had significantly reduced their subsistence potential). With less time to produce goods locally, they chose to participate selectively in the colonial economy of British Honduras as it suited their needs (Yaeger et al. 2004a).

Like at San Pedro Sirís, then, the material record at Kaxil Uinic ultimately reflects an archaeological paradox, 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). Additionally, the presence of imported goods at Kaxil Uinic implies that the villagers enjoyed some amount of disposable income or surplus for bartering with other parties, although the predominance of presumably cheaper enamelware 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 toward the end of the late colonial period. According to Rohe (1996, p. 38), enamelwares were relatively inexpensive, durable, easy to clean, lightweight, and readily available by the late 1800s in the USA. Assuming that they were comparably inexpensive in the Belizean market, their durability and low weight may explain their popularity in the later years of the Caste War. Ng (2007, pp. 266–267)

speculates that enamelwares “are especially susceptible to rust and fragmentation in this climate,” and were thus underrepresented in the archaeological record at Holotunich due to preservation issues, and the same is likely true at Kaxil Uinic.

Although there is some evidence of prehistoric monument veneration at Kaxil Uinic, a single Catholic religious object was recovered from the site, making it difficult to speculate as to the degree to which the San Pedro Maya deviated from Spanish Catholic influences. Miller and Farriss (1979) propose that religious beliefs are not always consciously articulated, and ethnohistoric accounts (Rugeley 2001) of Caste War Maya syncretism must therefore be regarded cautiously, as their authors may have misinterpreted many of their observations regarding ritual behavior. Miller and Farriss (1979) further theorize that the Maya likely accepted Christianity on their own terms, not as a totally new religion, but as a new development or twist to what they already believed, as the concept of resurrection was not unknown in Maya cosmology. Evidence of prehistoric monument veneration at Kaxil Uinic supports these notions, and it is likely that the San Pedro Maya did not think of themselves as incorporating new elements of Catholicism so much as practicing their traditional religion with new objects and symbols borrowed from Christianity along previously established lines.

It is also possible that the residents of Kaxil Uinic temporarily sought employment with logging firms to acquire cash and pay rent to BEC. The San Pedro Maya were not, therefore, fully integrated into the British colonial economy. Conversely, they strategically interacted with logging firms, *chicleros*, and the colonial administration to gain access to imported goods and cash necessary to maintain their social, political, and economic autonomy. As noted by Ng (2007), the San Pedro Maya made such decisions both individually and communally, in ways sometimes inconsistent with the beliefs of their larger group, in order to survive. The archaeological record at Kaxil Uinic therefore reflects a focus on short-term gains versus long-term benefits or consequences, a strategy appearing contradictory at first glance.

2.5 Conclusion

The ultimate goal of this study was to provide a critical analysis of both archival and archaeological data to explore the colonial experiences of the San Pedro Maya in northwestern Belize. More specifically, we aimed to reevaluate the historical model of British–Maya relations during the late colonial period established by Bolland (2003), which is characterized by four basic phases of indigenous resistance, avoidance, military activity, and incorporation in the colonial superstructure of British Honduras. In this scheme, the Maya are treated as either passive recipients of unidirectional influences from British colonizers or violently defiant of British colonial rule. By examining the multifaceted political alliances that existed in Belize during the late colonial period with the addition of archaeological data, the more complex contours of the social landscape emerge, where group interests, goals, and social

strategies often diverge, converge, and evolve (Rogers 2005; Stein 2005), and identity is thus strategically and opportunistically negotiated (Dornan 2004).

The first three phases of Bolland's (2003) historical framework predate the occupation of Kaxil Uinic village (ca. 1880–1931), but the last phase, following final and decisive British victory over the Icaiche Maya at the Battle of Orange Walk (1872), climaxes the long period of hostility between the British and Maya groups over Icaiche claims to territory in Belize (Cal 1991). Bolland (2003, p. 111) designates this shift (ca. 1872–1900) as a period when the British consolidated their jurisdiction over the Maya, ultimately incorporating the Maya into the colonial social structure. This characterization of British–Maya relations appears to be superficially supported by historical documentation. Among other factors, the pressure to obtain cash for paying rent to landowning logging companies drove large numbers of San Pedro Maya men into the logging or *chicle* industries as wage laborers, thus “incorporating” the Maya into the colonial economic and social structure (Kray et al. 2017).

In many ways, this conclusion is accurate—landless and at the mercy of the BEC, the Maya were essentially forced to participate in the affairs of the colony—but, they still “spoke Maya and identified themselves as Indians” (Dumond 1977, p. 106) and they still practiced the *alcalde* system of governance, implying that these groups did not so much integrate into colonial society but exist within it. At Kaxil Uinic, archival and archaeological data suggest that the villagers participated in the colonial cash economy, yet these groups did not adopt many other facets of British colonial social organization or decorum that one might expect from “incorporated” peoples. The fact that the village's earliest inhabitants aided several individuals in evading police capture after committing murders at a mahogany bank by allowing them to escape through the village to Santa Clara de Icaiche (Jones 1977b), for example, implies that the villagers possessed strong Icaiche sympathies or at least little regard for colonial legal structures. Nearly 50 years later, the village remained “a smuggler's hangout” until the BEC closed it in 1931 (Thompson 1963, pp. 233–234).

To conclude, although historical documentation supports the assertion that the San Pedro Maya were “incorporated” into the colonial social structure of British Honduras, archaeological evidence suggests a more complicated reality. It appears that the Maya at Kaxil Uinic were not wholly integrated into the colonial system but were rather selective participants in the colonial cash economy to retain access to their land. According to Lynn Meskell (2002), identification may be both strategic and positional, and, as evidence from Kaxil Uinic proves, this deliberation may be manifested in the archaeological record. It might be reasoned, therefore, that the residents of Kaxil Uinic actively negotiated alliances with various groups in the face of restrictive colonial political and economic policies to better navigate the colonial landscape of British Honduras.

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