

SETTLEMENT CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE CENTRAL PETEN LAKES REGION: THE CASE OF ZACPETEN

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INTRODUCTION

During the 8th and 9th centuries AD that part of the Maya lowlands which is now the Department of Petén, Guatemala, witnessed dramatic cultural transformations that have traditionally been collectively characterized as the Maya «collapse.» Many large Late Classic (AD 500-900) civic-ceremonial centers were virtually abandoned, as evidenced by the cessation of construction of monumental architecture, a rapid decline in the production of carved altars and stelae, and the disappearance of other arts and crafts commonly associated with Classic Maya elites (Culbert 1973). Scenes of warfare on Cycle 10 (AD 830-1090) sculpted monuments (Schele and Grube 1995), evidence of late Late Classic construction of defensive fortifications at some sites (Demarest 1993; Demarest *et al.* 1995; Inomata, Triadan and Wolley 1993; McNair and Drake 1995; Pugh 1995, 1996), and the apparent general abandonment of Classic-period residential structures throughout the region (Rice and Culbert 1990), have suggested to some scholars that the «collapse» was accompanied by civil and political unrest (Demarest and Valdés 1995), and characterized by dramatic loss of population (Culbert 1988).

Until recently, central Petén was thought to have remained largely uninhabited until late (*ca.* 13th-15th centuries AD) immigration of Maya groups from the northern Yucatán peninsula, as related in Yucatecan native histories recorded after the Spanish conquest (Barrera Vásquez and Morley 1949). These migrations satisfactorily explained for many Mayanists the presence of «Itzá»¹ Maya populations

¹ In this paper we have tried to follow the current orthography guidelines of the Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG) when we refer specifically to Maya language. Therefore, we utilize the form «Itzaj» when we discuss that Maya language group (Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib' 1993: 28). When

encountered by Hernán Cortés when he passed through the region of central Petén in 1525 on his march from Veracruz to the Bay of Honduras to quell a rebellion of Spanish subordinates at Naco (Cortés 1976). Early seminal investigations of Postclassic (*ca.* AD 900-1525) and early Historic (*ca.* AD 1525-1700) period Petén were, therefore, carried out with the implicit assumption that the reality of the myths of Itzá migration would be expressed in archaeological data (Bullard 1970, 1973; Guthe 1921, 1922; Maler 1908; Morley 1937-38; Reina 1966).

Over the past two decades, however, a number of investigators and projects have proposed that there was considerable cultural and demographic continuity from the late Late Classic through Postclassic periods in central Petén, and that this span of eight centuries was marked by increasing economic and sociopolitical regionalization. In historic times the latter processes were exacerbated and then ultimately curtailed by European contact and conquest. Recent archaeological and archival research has also suggested that late Petén population history and political organization were far more complicated than suggested by long-standing interpretations of the native traditions of Yucatán, México (Jones 1989, in press; Rice, Rice and Jones 1993; Schele, Grube and Boot 1995).

Proyecto Maya-Colonial was initiated in 1994 to document the development of post-«collapse» Maya society in central Petén (Rice *et al.* 1996)². The project has taken a «direct historical approach» to this objective, with research informed by 16th- and 17th-century Spanish documents describing European interaction with the Maya of the region, as well as by the details of Yucatecan Maya narratives. Proyecto regional surveys, mapping, surface collection of artifacts, test-excavations, and intensive clearing of structures and open spaces have begun to elucidate Historic period Maya political geography. Moreover, the investigations are revealing architectural and artifactual data that serve as a basis for understanding the formation and transformation of Maya communities during the Postclassic. This paper reports some of these data and preliminary conclusions, with particular focus on the identification of a 17th-century Kowoj lineage settlement in central Petén, the site of Zacpetén.

we refer to Spanish descriptions of the Maya of central Petén and to modern toponyms, we use the Spanish spellings found in historic documents and on modern maps, such as «Itzá» (with an accented «á»). In the cases of all Maya linguistic or political groups discussed, we treat the names as collective nouns in order to reduce grammatical confusion.

² Proyecto Maya-Colonial has been funded by National Science Foundation grants DBS-9222373 and SBR-9515443 to Southern Illinois University at Carbondale-Don S. Rice, Prudence M. Rice, and Grant D. Jones principal investigators, and Rómulo Sánchez Polo field director. The project's research in Petén is being conducted with the permission and support of the Instituto de Antropología e Historia and Ministerio de Cultura of Guatemala, and with the participation of students from the Programa de Arqueología, Centro Universitario de El Petén.

CENTRAL PETEN POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY IN THE 17TH CENTURY

From mid-April, 1525, through mid-March, 1697, the Maya in the region around Lake Petén Itzá (Fig. 1) experienced an increasing number of encounters with Spanish clergy and military, whose objectives were to convert and control the Maya «pagans.» Spanish accounts of their sporadic contact with the inhabitants of central Petén, known to them as the Itzá, convey the intentions, hopes, fears, and reactions of the Europeans during this period of missionization and conquest. At the same time, the documents provide enticing comments about many aspects of Maya life, including the names and descriptions of towns and provinces, of social and political factions and their leaders, and of events that defined indigenous struggles for power and territory.

While uneven in its detail and temporal coverage, this written information does hint at the spatial distribution of distinct Maya groups during the early Historic period, as well as the relationships between these groups, and it permits tentative reconstruction of the political geography of central Petén in the 17th century. Anthropologist and ethnohistorian Grant Jones has attempted to construct such a model, based upon his analyses of 16th-through 18th-century Spanish documents from the Archivo General de Indias in Sevilla, Spain, and the Archivo General de Centroamérica in Guatemala City, Guatemala. Proyecto Maya-Colonial has begun to investigate archaeologically the details of Jones' preliminary syntheses and to document the genesis of this political geography.

Jones has proposed the existence of three distinct administrative provinces, each controlled by a principal lineage or lineages from regional «capitals,» centered upon Lake Petén Itzá at the close of the 17th century (Jones 1996, in press; Rice, Rice, and Jones 1993). The three territorial divisions of this social and political system were (see Fig. 1): the Kan Ek' province (often spelled Canek), around the southern and western shores of Lake Petén Itzá, including the basin of Lake Sacpuy to the west; the Yalain province, incorporating lakes Salpetén and Macanché and extending east from the eastern end of Lake Petén Itzá, in the direction of lakes Yaxhá and Sacnab; and the Kowoj province (also seen as Couoh), encompassing the north shore of Lake Petén Itzá. While occupants of all three territories were speakers of mutually intelligible Maya languages of the Yukatekan branch, perhaps all speaking Itzaj³, it is the Kan Ek' and their allies who are most appropriately called Itzá.

³ Itzaj is spoken today by Maya in the communities of San Andrés and San José on the north shore of Lake Petén Itzá. Linguistic anthropologist Charles A. Hofling, a specialist in Itzaj, suggests (personal communication, 1997) that it is somewhat difficult to assume Itzaj was the language for any specific historic or prehistoric group in Petén. Historic evidence for population continuity into modern times suggests that some 17th-century Maya in the Petén Itzá region were speaking Itzaj, but there are no firm data at present to determine which group or groups, or to suggest that Itzaj was being spoken at any given site.

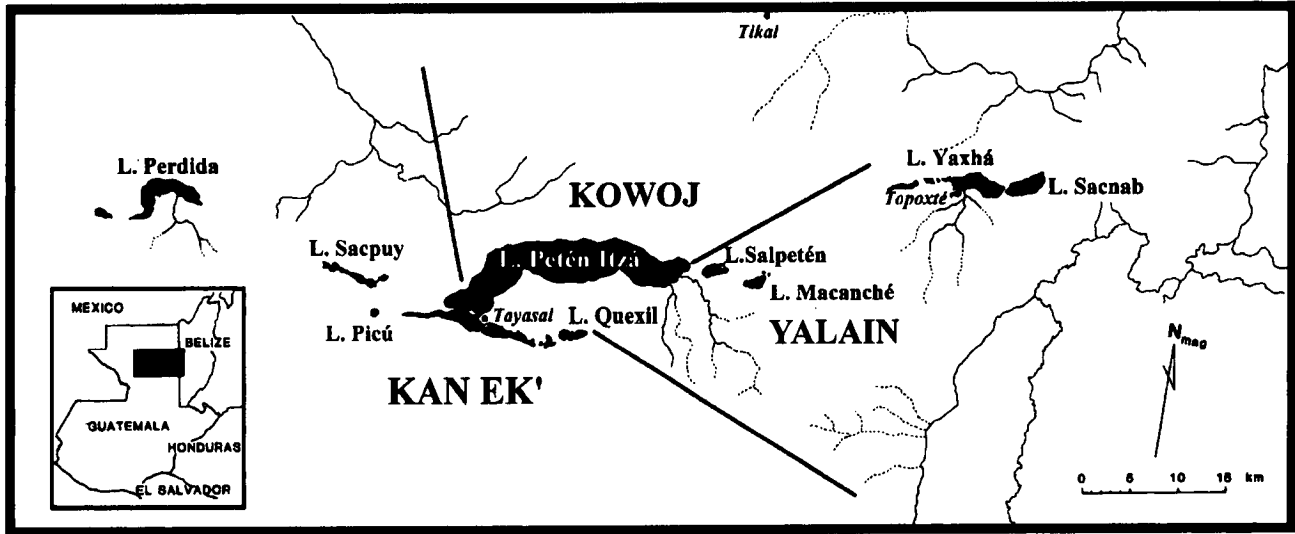


FIG. 1.—Map of the Lake Petén Itzá region with the approximate locations of proposed Postclassic Maya political territories marked.

THE KAN EK' PROVINCE

Members of the Kan Ek' lineage are said to have affirmed that their descendants came from the region of the Early Postclassic (AD 900-1200) community of Chichén Itzá, located in the northern Yucatán peninsula. The Yucatecan chronicles or histories of the *k'atun*, *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (Roys 1967), suggest that Chichén Itzá was abandoned at approximately AD 1200. Nonetheless, the head of the Kan Ek' in 1695 claimed to have genealogical connections with this site, which suggests that relations between Petén and Yucatán may have had a long and significant history.

The early details of this history are presently unknown, but a list of dependent towns and local leaders compiled in 1702 indicates that the Kan Ek' controlled considerable territory west and south of Lake Petén Itzá. The core of their province was centered on the southern arm of Lake Petén Itzá and stretched more than 40 kilometers, from Laguneta El Sos in the west, to Lake Quexil (also spelled Eckixil) to the east. Historical data suggest that the Itzá were aggressively expansionistic, however. At the close of the 17th century Kan Ek' allies were living as far southwest as the modern town of Sayaxché on the Río Pasión and as far east as Lake Yaxhá. Earlier in the century their control may have extended farther east and southeast into Mopan Maya territory, which is in the present-day country of Belize.

The Spaniards called the Kan Ek' province «Taizá» or «Taj Itzá,» the «place of the Itzá» (Cortés 1976:219-283), and to them all Maya encountered in central Petén were members of this polity and called Itzá. The principal head of the Kan Ek' was Aj Kan Ek', the name or dynastic title of each ruler with whom the Spaniards interacted in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Aj Kan Ek' was always encountered in the vicinity of the island of Noj Peten⁴ («large island»), the modern island town of Flores, which served as the capital for a fragile confederation of Kan Ek' lineages and their political allies. One of Cortés' lieutenants, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, referred to the island of Noj Peten as «Tayasal», a name that is commonly used today to refer to the principal settlement of the Itzá.

Jones has determined that the Kan Ek' maintained a system of dual social organization that stressed both matrilineal and patrilineal descent as the basis of high rank or nobility, and of the right to rule (Jones 1996:13-16, in press). The Kan matrilineage controlled, at least symbolically, governance of the capital and the four territorial quarters of the province, and named the ruling council of the capital and province.

⁴ The Maya word *peten*, meaning «isolated location» or «island» does not have an accent on the second «e.»

THE YALAIN PROVINCE

The province of Yalain was situated on the eastern and southeastern shores of Lake Petén Itzá, and farther east away from that lake. At its greatest extent, Yalain appears to have maintained control of territory from the port of Chaltunha', on the easternmost shore of Lake Petén Itzá, to the site of Tipuj in western Belize. *Chaltunha'*, a Yukatekan Maya word that means «a rocky beach» or «a rocky area in the water,» is included in the 18th-century list of Yalain towns. Tipuj is identified with the Late Postclassic and early Historic settlement at the site of Negroman-Tipú on the Macal River tributary of the Belize River (Graham, Jones and Kautz 1985; Jones, Kautz and Graham 1986; Graham and Bennett 1989). Maya speakers of a Yukatekan language occupied Tipuj and the community was located in the indigenous province of Ts'ulwinikob (also spelled Dzuluinicob). Between 1554 and 1707 Ts'ulwinikob was controlled by the Spaniards and Tipuj was the staging area and departure point for Spanish missionaries and soldiers attempting to reach the Itzá of Lake Petén Itzá from Yucatán. The central Petén province of Yalain was, therefore, situated between the Spaniards and the Kan Ek'.

The capital of the territory in the final years of the 17th century was at Yalain (after which Jones designated the province), a name that translates as «lake of the alligator,» although the toponym does not appear to have denoted a body of water. The town was situated on the shores of Lake Mankanche' (modern Lake Macanché), «lake of the *ramada*,» referring to a ritual *ramada* or shelter made of branches of trees. Nonetheless, in Yukatekan Maya *makan* is the past participle of the verb *mak*, «to close,» and *Makan Che'* could refer to an enclosure of wood, a palisade or fortification, perhaps a description of the fortified site Muralla de León⁵ on the northeast shore of the lake. Nothing is known at present about the date(s) of the town of Yalain's occupation, its ruling lineage(s), or its population, but the province of Yalain appears to have been settled by people with different origins and histories than the Kan Ek' or Kowoj. The matronyms and patronyms recorded in 18th-century baptismal records for the region suggest a mixture of Ch'ol, Itzaj, and Mopan peoples. At the same time, it is important to note that there are also matronyms and patronyms shared between the provinces of Kan Ek' and Yalain.

During the period of Spanish contact and conquest, there appears to have been some type of alliance between the Maya of Yalain and the province of Kan Ek', and by extension between the Kan Ek' and Tipuj, alliances cemented by marriage at the highest levels. The Kan Ek' may have dominated the region at the close of the 17th century, with the Yalain province serving as a vanguard of Kan Ek' efforts to protect their frontier against the advances of the Spaniards, as well as

⁵ The Rices assigned the name Muralla de León («Wall of the Lion») to this previously unmapped and unnamed site during Proyecto Lacustre, their historical ecology project in central Petén in the 1980s, based upon the sighting of a jaguar within the walled area (D. Rice and P. Rice 1981).

against incursions of other Maya groups attempting to escape Spanish domination in Yucatán. The last Aj Kan Ek' of Noj Peten may, in fact, have come from Yalain, or more probably Tipuj. His sister, known as Kan Te', was married to a native of Tipuj who served on the governing council at Noj Peten.

THE KOWOJ PROVINCE

In the 17th-century the Kowoj settlements were apparently located in Lake Petén Itzá's northeastern basin, with sub-provincial capitals at Ketz and Saklamakhal (also spelled Sakle'makal and Saclamacal; possibly meaning «wide white shore») on the north and east shores of the lake respectively. It also appears that the Kowoj arrived in the region relatively late. Regarding the migration of the Kowoj to Petén, Spanish Captain Don Marcos de Abalos y Fuentes wrote in 1704:

«Los Kowoj son casi uno y lo mismos que los Itzá porque ellos estaban situados al norte de las orillas de su lago (Petén Itzá). Algunos de ellos son originalmente de Yucatán, los Itsas de Chichén Itzá y los Kowoj de Tankah, 10 o 12 leguas de esta ciudad (Mérida). Ellos (los Kowoj) se retiraron (de acuerdo con lo que ellos dicen) al tiempo de la conquista, y los otros (los Itzaj) más temprano» (Jones 1996:11).

The Kowoj are almost one and the same as the Itzá because they were situated north of the shores of their lake (Petén Itzá). Some of them are originally from Yucatán, the Itsas [*sic.*] from Chichén Itzá and the Kowoj from Tankah, 10 or 12 leagues from this city (Mérida). They (the Kowoj) retreated (in agreement with what they say) at the time of the conquest, and the others (the Itzá) much earlier (translation, D. Rice).

Tankah refers to a «center of population» and the town in question was the central Yucatecan site of Mayapán, «Tancab Mayapan» (Roys 1967:164). *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* indicates that an individual named Kowoj (or perhaps the family) was the guardian of the east gate of Mayapán (*op. cit.* p. 69).

Mayapán ceased to be the capital of a major Yucatecan confederation at approximately 1450, although that does not necessarily mean that the site was completely abandoned, and it is difficult at present to know if part of the Kowoj lineage might have migrated to Petén at this time. The reference to the «conquest» in the cited passage indicates that the migration took place during the Spanish conquest of Yucatán, after 1540, suggesting that the Kowoj remained in the north from 1450 until the middle of the 16th-century. Alternatively, Kowoj may have begun to move south after the collapse of Mayapán, with a major influx occurring when members of the lineage attempted to escape Spanish control.

Spanish documents indicate that Kowoj occupation was focused primarily in the northeastern basin of Lake Petén Itzá, but it is not possible to say at this time whether they settled among or displaced communities that may have been allied

with the Kan Ek' and/or Yalain. Interestingly, their sub-provincial capital of Saklamakhal appears on a Spanish list of 17th-century populations within the Yalain province. It is possible that the Kowoj initially occupied a region larger than Petén Itzá's northeastern shore, including lands east of the lake towards the modern border between Guatemala and Belize, but lost territory to the eastward expansion of the Kan Ek'-Yalain alliance in the 17th-century. Or, they may have begun to expand into the Lake Petén Itzá basin quite late at the expense of the alliance. Two 17th-century rulers of Kowoj sub-provinces are mentioned in Spanish documents, Aj Kowoj (also known as Captain Kowoj) at Saklamakhal and K'ulut Kowoj at Ketz, but their personal and political relations and degree of independence is not clear. They may have been figuratively or literally brothers, given that *k'ulut* means «divine twin», or father and son, or there may have been a non-familial functional and/or hierarchical distinction between the two.

It is certain, however, that the Kowoj were not «*casi uno y los mismos que los Itzá*»/almost one and the same as the Itzá,» as Abalos y Fuentes claimed. They were undoubtedly speakers of a language in the Yukatekan branch, perhaps Itzaj, but they were not part of the Kan Ek' confederation and relatively few Kowoj matronyms and patronyms are shared with the Kan Ek' or Yalain. Aj Chan, a Kan Ek' and the nephew of the last Aj Kan Ek', is said to have married the daughter of Aj Kowoj, which suggests some interaction between the principal lineages at the close of the 17th century. It appears, however, that the Kowoj were otherwise relatively isolated both politically and socially. They were a self-governing group, perhaps with their own governing council.

PETÉN MAYA POLITICS ON THE EVE OF THE SPANISH CONQUEST

Spanish documents describing the Maya of central Petén are understandably focused upon efforts to convert these indigenous populations and control their territory. They are primarily concerned with clerical and military contacts with the Kan Ek' alliance, the Itzá, whom they mistakenly perceived as a unified group, with Aj Kan Ek' the absolute ruler of the entire region. Beginning in *ca.* 1620, in response to Spanish incursions, the Kan Ek' attempted to strengthen their influence in the direction of Tipuj. They may have taken over that town by force in 1638 (Jones 1989:213-240) and by the mid-17th century the Kan Ek' appear to have established direct or indirect hegemony over much of eastern central Petén.

In the late 1690s, however, the last Aj Kan Ek' was making positive overtures to the Spaniards, receiving and protecting their emissaries at Noj Peten, and sending his nephew, Aj Chan, on an embassy to the Spaniards in Mérida in 1695. When news of Aj Chan's trip was received in the larger lake region, Jones (in press) believes that the Kowoj went to war against the Kan Ek' and their allies at the east end of Lake Petén Itzá. They are said to have taken over Petén Itzá's eastern port of Chaltunha' and they may have attacked Yalain itself.

In late 1696 Aj Kowoj did attack and unsuccessfully attempt to burn Noj Peten in an effort to destroy the Kan Ek' confederation (*ibid.*). That alliance was already disintegrating, however, as factions opposed Aj Kan Ek''s pro-Spanish policies. For example, in 1695 K'ix Obon Tut (Aj Tut), a member of Noj Peten's ruling council whose lineage resided in the southern Kan Ek' province, apparently took control of Lake Petén Itzá's western port of Ch'ich' on the peninsula that forms the Ensenada San Jerónimo on the northwestern shores of the lake (Jones 1996:16-17). He was forced by the Spaniards to abandon the site shortly thereafter, however.

The Spaniards occupied Ch'ich' in late 1696 or early 1697 and conquered Noj Peten from that site in March of the latter year. Immediately following that decisive confrontation, the Kan Ek' attempted to regroup briefly in Chun Ajaw, «the place where kings descend,» near Lake Sakupuy (modern Lake Sacpuy). Jones (in press) also notes that Aj Tut went on a murderous rampage in Kowoj territory north of the lake with the assistance of a warrior whose patronym was Pana, and who was closely related to the last Aj Kan Ek' by marriage (Aj Kan Ek''s wife was Chan Pana). Together they set up a short-lived province called Moan Pana near the Classic-period site of Tikal. The eastern end of Lake Petén Itzá and lands to the east continued to be contested by the Kowoj and Itzá (Kan Ek' and/or Yalain), with control of towns apparently changing hands multiple times. By the end of the first decade of the 1700s, however, the Spaniards began to try to consolidate their hold on central Petén through the establishment of missions and *reducciones*. While this attempt was patently unsuccessful (*ibid.*), indigenous Maya political geography was completely disrupted.

PROYECTO MAYA-COLONIAL

In 1994 and 1995 Proyecto Maya-Colonial investigated sectors of the Spanish-defined Kan Ek', Yalain, and Kowoj territories for which there are multiple and internally consistent documentary descriptions of political events, personages, and places (Sánchez Polo *et al.* 1995; D. Rice and Sánchez Polo 1995; D. Rice and P. Rice 1996:25-31). Surveys, mapping, and limited test-excavations were pursued in the Macanché, Salpetén, Petén Itzá, and Sacpuy lake basins, with the project re-visiting known sites in some cases, and in other cases searching anew for evidence of Postclassic and early Historic sites.

Where surveys took place, documentary descriptions, long-standing toponyms, and the archaeological and geographical knowledge of modern local populations guided them. Mapping involved extensive clearing of sites, fine-grained recording of architectural and topographic details with two laser transits, and computer generation of final maps. Proyecto Maya-Colonial was not designed to undertake major architectural clearing and excavations during its first two seasons

of field work, but surface collections were made at most sites and at some locations test-pits were excavated in plazas to establish gross construction chronologies. In late 1995 five distinctly Postclassic structures at two sites were also subjected to clearing operations. These excavations confirmed architectural details, yielded samples of *in situ* artifacts and features, and provided the basis for structuring future, more intensive studies of Postclassic/Historic sites.

The convergence of Spanish descriptions and distinctive Postclassic architecture focused Proyecto Maya-Colonial's efforts on 15 Postclassic and/or early Historic settlements (Fig. 2), at least eight of which are politically significant in the documentary records (Table 1). In the Kan Ek' territory, the islands and peninsula in Lake Sacpuy are believed to correspond to the site of Chun Ajaw (Sánchez Polo 1996c:225-232). On the south shore of Lake Petén Itzá, the sites of Pasajá and Colonia Itzá undoubtedly constituted part of the extensive southern basin settlement noted by the Spaniards during Cortés' visit to Noj Peten in

TABLE 1
Sites Intensively Investigated by Proyecto Maya-Colonial in 1994-95

<i>Site Name</i>	<i>Lake Basin</i>	<i>Territory</i>	<i>Documentary Namey</i>
Sacpuy Islands	Sacpuy	Kan Ek' (Itzá)	Chun Ajaw
Pasajá	Petén Itzá (SW)	Kan Ek' (Itzá)	Unknown
Colonia Itzá	Petén Itzá (SW)	Kan Ek' (Itzá)	Unknown
Nixtun-Ch'ich'	Petén Itzá (W)	Kan Ek' (Itzá)	Ch'ich'
Ixlú	Petén Itzá/Salpetén	Yalain (Itzá; contested by Kowoj in 17 th c.)	Saklamakhal
Río Ixlú mouth	Petén Itzá (east)	Yalain (Itzá; contested by Kowoj in 17 th c.)	Chaltunha'
Zacpetén	Salpetén	Yalain (Itzá; may have been Kowoj in 17 th c.)	Sakpeten
Yalain	Macanché	Yalain (Itzá; perhaps contested by Kowoj in 17 th c.)	Yalain
Muralla de León	Macanché	Yalain (Itzá; may have been Kowoj in 17 th c.)	Makanche'
Chachaclún	Petén Itzá (north)	Kowoj	Unknown
San Pedro	Petén Itzá (north)	Kowoj	Unknown
Uspeten	Petén Itzá (north)	Kowoj	Uspetén
El Astillero	Petén Itzá (north)	Kowoj	Unknown
Jobompiche I	Petén Itzá (north)	Kowoj	Unknown
Piedra Blanca	Petén Itzá (north)	Kowoj	Unknown

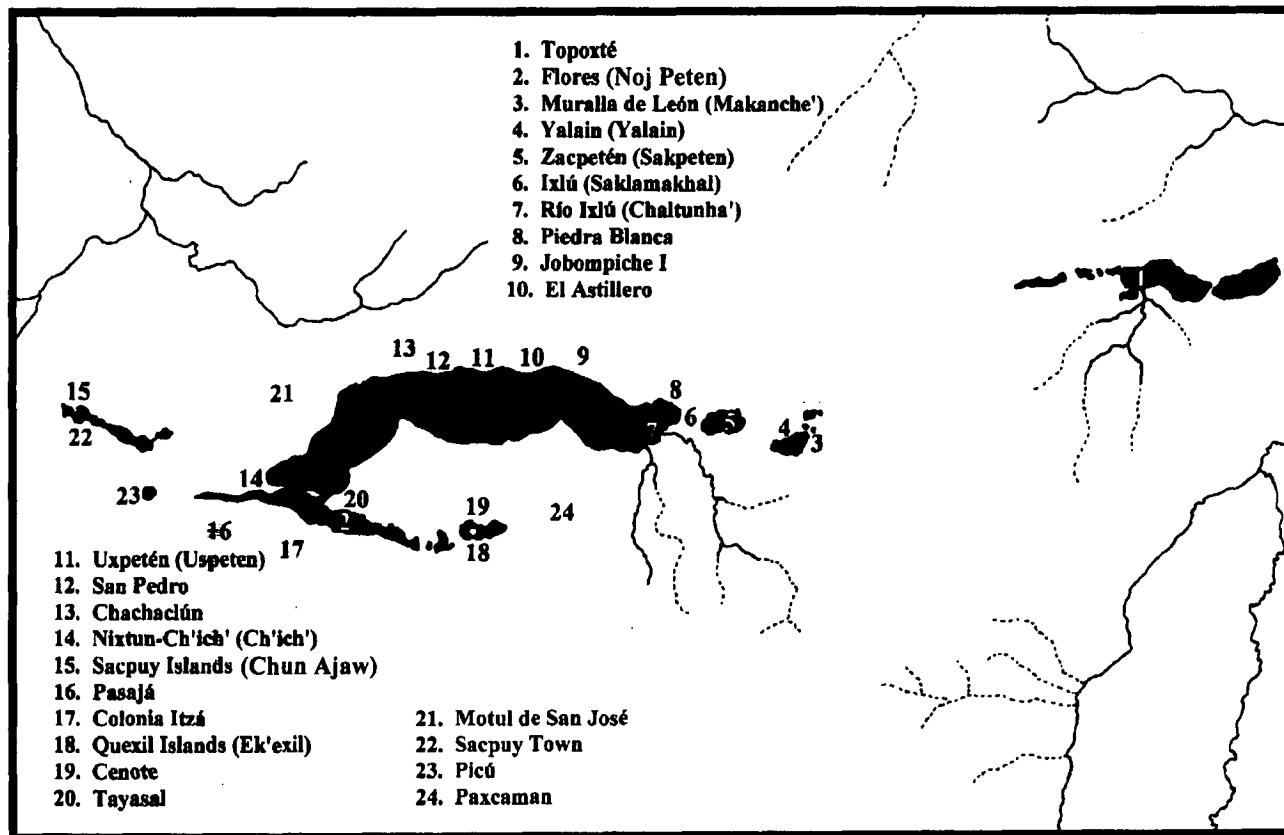


FIG. 2.—Central Petén archaeological sites with confirmed Terminal Classic and/or Postclassic occupation.

1525, much of which has now been covered by the modern towns of San Benito and Santa Elena, or obliterated for cattle ranching (Sánchez Polo 1996 d:233-24).

The Kan Ek'-allied town of Ch'ich', the principal western port of Lake Petén Itzá, is believed to be represented by the site of Nixtun-Ch'ich'⁶ on the Candelaria Peninsula, south of the Ensenada San Jerónimo at the western end of Lake Petén Itzá (D. Rice *et al.* 1996a:177-224). We also feel confident that General Ursúa y Arismendi and his army camped at Nixtun-Ch'ich' during the period January-March, 1697, to build a brigantine and prepare for the assault on Noj Peten.

In the Yalain territory, Postclassic architecture and settlement at the largely Terminal Classic site of Ixlú likely represents the town of Saklamakhal, while the architecturally-modified mouth of the Río Ixlú may well indicate the location of the important 17th-century eastern port or place of embarkation on Lake Petén Itzá, Chaltunha' (D. Rice 1996:100-108, 117-147). A Spanish list of towns in Yalain territory included Sakpeten, lying east of Chaltunha' and west of Makanche', and this is most assuredly the peninsular site of Zacpetén in modern Lake Salpetén, although there is no documentary record of it being on a lake (Pugh 1995, 1996; D. Rice 1981).

Given its architectural features and the density of Postclassic residences in its vicinity, the archaeological site of Yalain on the northwest shore of Lake Macanché is likely to be the late 17th-century Yalain lineage capital of the same name (Jones, Rice and Rice 1981; P. Rice and D. Rice 1985:173-183; Sánchez Polo 1996a:33-38). The listed town of Makanche' is believed to correspond to the fortified (walled) mesa and site of Muralla de León, which evidences Postclassic architecture (D. Rice and P. Rice 1981).

Postclassic ceramics are found all along the north shore of Lake Petén Itzá, Kowoj territory, but evidence of Postclassic or Historic period construction has been more difficult to identify. The north shore of Petén Itzá, like the north shores of most central Petén lakes, is characterized by very high, steep, and broken slopes. Level terrain immediately adjacent to the water is relatively rare, with the settlement alternative being on the upper ridges, as much as 200 meters above the lake. Habitable lakeshore terrain is presently occupied by relatively new communities, hotels, and vacation homes, all of which obscure the archaeological record and make survey difficult.

⁶ Both Arlen Chase (1983) and George Cowgill (1963) previously reported the presence of architecture and Postclassic ceramics on the Candelaria Peninsula, but the site had remained unmapped and unnamed. The name Nixtun-Ch'ich', assigned by Proyecto Maya-Colonial, combines the 17th-century documentary name for Lake Petén Itzá's western port, Ch'ich', with Nixtun, which means «sloping stone» or «stone ramp» in Colonial Yucatéko. Nixtun is derived from the modern name given to the point of the peninsula upon which the site sits (Nijtún on maps) and there is at least one architectural «ramp» at the site, near the shoreline of the Ensenada San Jerónimo.

Nonetheless, six Postclassic sites were located and mapped by Proyecto Maya-Colonial on the north shore (from west-to-east, named by their modern toponyms): Chachaclún, San Pedro, Uspetén (also seen as Uxpetén), El Astillero, Jobompiche I, and Piedra Blanca (Sánchez Polo 1996b:149-176). Only Uspeten is a place name found in Spanish documentary sources, where it is confirmed as a Kowoj town on the shore of the lake. There is no basis for promoting any of the mapped sites as a candidate for Ketz, the Kowoj subprovincial capital, although numbers of structures and volume of architecture would recommend Chachaclún. The toponym Aj Ketz (also seen as Aj Quetzal) can be found on modern maps, but the project found no archaeological evidence of previous settlement in the vicinity presently marked by that place name.

In summary, the locations of some Historic sites investigated by Proyecto Maya-Colonial within the central Petén lakes region satisfactorily conform to Spanish descriptions of specific 17th-century Maya settlements. Proyecto surveys and testing also appear to support the growing sentiment among archaeologists that the Lake Petén Itzá region was one of sustained settlement from the Middle Preclassic through Historic periods. Like the provisional historical model that it was designed to explore, however, the first phase of Proyecto Maya-Colonial was an exercise in identifying geographically and politically important places within the larger Petén sphere. Neither the model nor recovered archaeological data contained sufficient cultural historical detail to answer definitively questions of continuity, development, migration, ethnicity, and function. A comparative analysis of contemporary Postclassic sites was called for, an intensive study of site structures and their genesis.

To accomplish this goal, we have embarked upon a project of extensive clearing and excavation of structures and open spaces at sites mapped in the three proposed lineage territories during the first two seasons of Proyecto Maya-Colonial. The field operations are designed to analyze site architectural and artifactual characteristics and histories from the perspectives of documentary information, the results of the two years of Proyecto surveys, and previous archaeological research in the central Petén lakes region by us and by other archaeologists. The first of the sites to be investigated is Zacpetén, situated on a peninsula on the north shore of the Lake Salpetén basin.

SITE STRUCTURE AND OCCUPATION HISTORY AT ZACPETÉN

LAKE SALPETÉN AND ITS SETTLEMENT

The basin of Lake Salpetén was investigated in 1980 as part of Proyecto Lacustre, a two-year archaeological and ecological project focusing on the natural and cultural history of the central Petén lakes. Objectives of the project centered

on documenting the history of Maya settlement in four lake basins: Macanché, Salpetén, Quexil, and Petenxil (D. Rice 1986, 1988; D. Rice and P. Rice 1990; P. Rice 1986, 1987; P. Rice and D. Rice 1985).

Lake Salpetén, situated 104 masl, lies between Lake Macanché to the east and Lake Petén Itzá to the west. It is oriented approximately east-west, with a total shoreline of 9 km and a maximum depth of 32 m. One of the most noteworthy characteristics of the lake is the composition of its waters, which are very saline. The CaSO_4 concentration is 2.86 g/l^{-1} , as compared to 1.97 g/l^{-1} for Aguada Monifata II, the next most saline body of water in the Petén lake chain. The high CaSO_4 content is attributed to large quantities of gypsum, which make up the geological substrate of the basin. This gypsum appears to have little effect on the fishery potential of the lake, but the waters are not potable for human populations today.

Prior to the Proyecto Lacustre investigations, very little was known about the archaeology of the Salpetén basin apart from limited work at the site of Ixlú, situated on the isthmus between lakes Petén Itzá and Salpetén. The main plaza of Ixlú had been mapped by Franz Blom in 1924 (Morley 1937-38:210a) and Sylvanus Morley (1937-38) reported its two Terminal Classic carved stelae, Stela 1 (10.1.10.0.0 4 Ajaw 13 Kank'in; October 7, 859) and Stela 2 (10.2.10.0.0 2 Ajaw 13 Ch'en; June 24, 869). Morley's original dating of one of these two monuments has recently been revised by Schele and Grube (1995:118) as 10.0.19.4.11 9 Chuen 14 Sip (March 14, 849), but it is unclear which is being corrected (the authors refer to Ixlú Stela 1 in the text, but the accompanying illustration shows Stela 2). And in 1968 William Bullard had excavated two test-pits in the first terrace of the eastern temple of Ixlú's main plaza, recovering late Late Classic ceramics from the construction fill and early Postclassic ceramics on the surface (Bullard 1973:237).

Proyecto Lacustre surveyed three north-south transects (designated «operations»), 500 m wide and 2 km long, in the Lake Salpetén basin in 1980 (Fig. 3). Two of these transects were placed on the steep north shore of the lake and one on the relatively flatter southwestern shore. A total of 152 structures was mapped in the 6+ km² surveyed: 59 in Op. 1; 38 in Op. 2; and 55 in Op. 3. Excavations were carried out at a total of 42 structure loci within the designated survey areas (for a 27.6% sample): 19 on Op. 1; 9 on Op. 2; and 14 on Op. 3. Of these units, six locations gave evidence of Middle Preclassic construction; one of these, Str. 484 on the northeast shore (Op. 1), yielded a sequence of Middle Preclassic floors. Late and Terminal Preclassic ceramics were virtually absent from the tested structures (identifiable in only one location), and only three loci yielded evidence of Early Classic occupation. Nearly all sampled structures (n=38) were occupied in the Late Classic, primarily in the late Late Classic, and 15 loci had evidence of occupation into the Terminal Classic. Only three structures were found to have Early Postclassic constructions, while one other had evidence of Early/Late Postclassic occupation.

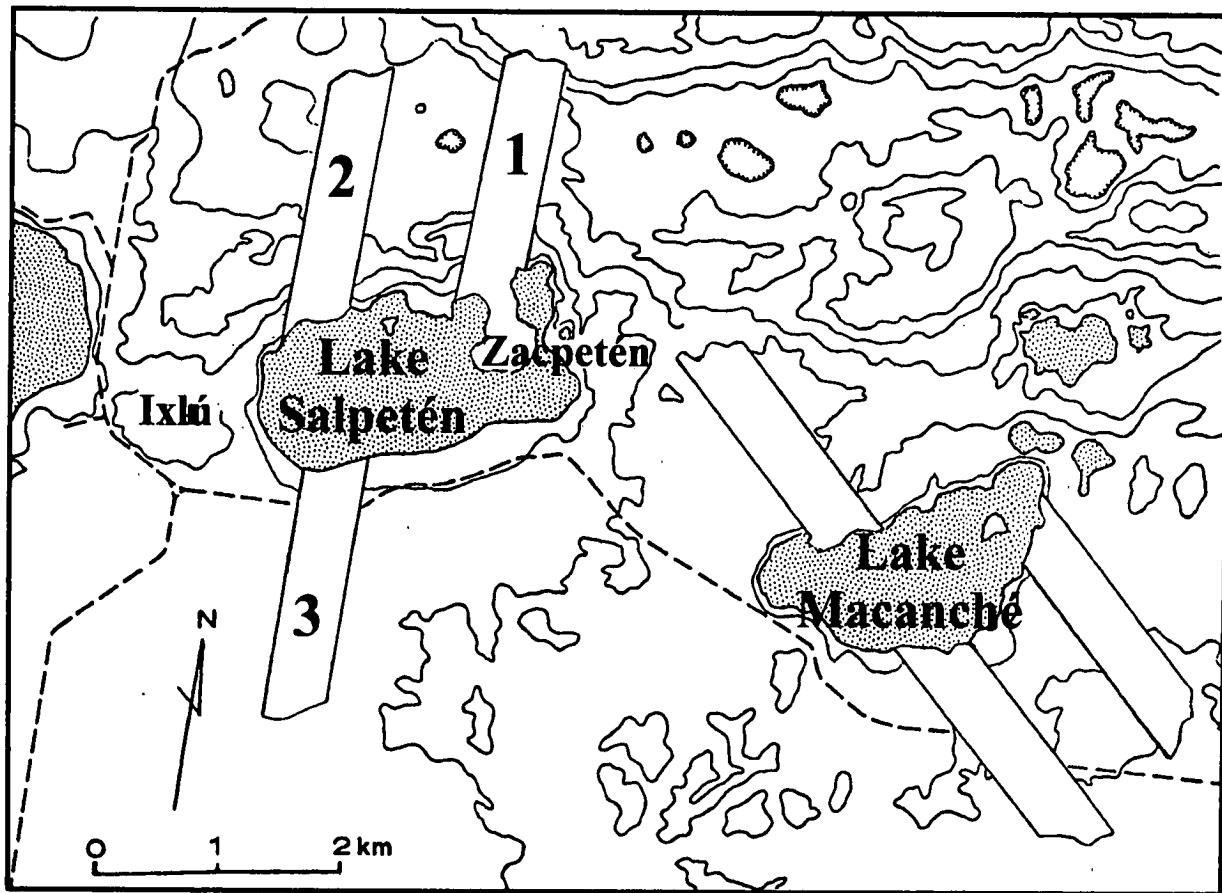


FIG. 3.—Proyecto Lacustre's survey transects in the Lake Salpetén basin.

THE PENINSULAR SITE OF ZACPETÉN

Our interest in the site of Zacpetén began during the 1980 field season of Proyecto Lacustre, when our transect surveys in the Lake Salpetén basin were supplemented with pace mapping of settlement on the peninsula. As initial mapping began, it immediately became apparent that there was a high density of architectural remains, and the surface characteristics of observable individual structures and groups suggested that much of this settlement was Postclassic in date. In 1980, we mapped 190 structures on the peninsula, for a mean structure density of 819 per km², clustered loosely into five groups, A-E (D. Rice 1981). Proyecto Maya-Colonial remapped Zacpetén in 1994 using laser transits (Fig. 4). In addition to confirming the location and number of structures and architectural complexes, this survey also revealed that the peninsula is «protected» on its northern boundary by a system of ditches and walls that cut across the neck west-to-east (Pugh 1996).

TEST EXCAVATIONS

Proyecto Lacustre excavated 17 test-pits at Zacpetén in 1980. Proyecto Maya-Colonial put six test-pits in plazas and excavated the trenches through the northern ditch-wall complex discussed above during the 1994 field season, and cleared halves of two structures in 1995. In 1997 we completely cleared all structures and portions of plaza surfaces of groups A and C, and excavated the structures and architectural terraces of five residential groups situated around these civic-ceremonial complexes.

The total of 17 structure loci test-excavated at Zacpetén in 1980 is an 8.9% sample of the 190 mapped structures. Analysis of recovered materials revealed no evidence for settlement on the peninsula prior to the Early Classic, the latter coming from a test pit in Str. 747 in residential Group D. While only 4 structures yielded Late Classic pottery, 7 had evidence of Terminal Classic occupation, and all loci investigated had occupation/construction in the Postclassic: 7 in the Early Postclassic and 13 in the Late Postclassic. Intensive settlement of the peninsula seems to have begun in the Terminal Classic, coinciding with virtual abandonment of the mainland between roughly AD 900 and 1100.

When Proyecto Maya-Colonial returned to Zacpetén in 1994, work included excavation of six 1 x 2 m test pits in plazas (rather than structures) for purposes of discerning the construction sequences of the groups, plus the trenches in the northern fortification system. The results of these excavations led to a substantial revision of the occupational chronology of the peninsula outlined in 1980.

Test 1 was placed in the eastern half of the plaza of Group A, one of the two temple assemblage complexes, and proceeded to bedrock at 110-130 cm below

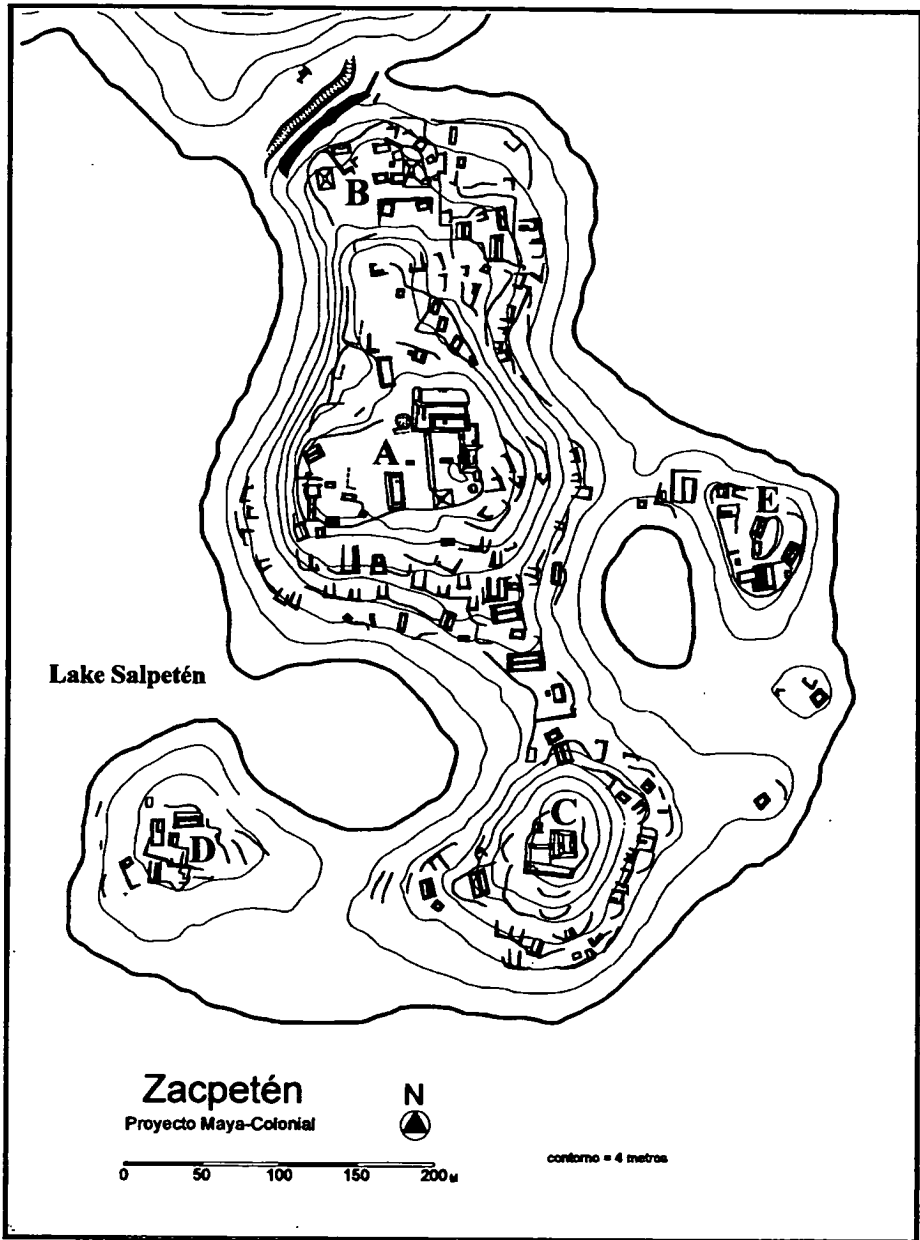


FIG. 4.—Map of the peninsular archaeological site of Zacpetén in Lake Salpetén.

surface. The excavation revealed four episodes of construction. The earliest was a low platform *ca.* 30-50 cm high, built during the Middle Preclassic period (Tzec 1) and topped by a plaster surface. Above was another low, Middle Preclassic (Tzec 2) platform, 45 cm high, also surfaced. This area of the plaza was apparently abandoned for nearly 1000 years, then reoccupied in the late Late Classic period as evidenced by construction fill and a 15-20 cm thick plaza flooring (lying at 22 cm below surface). Above this level was pottery and other evidence of Late Postclassic occupation.

Test 2 was located in the western half of the plaza of Group A and excavated to bedrock at 130-145 cm. Four episodes of construction were revealed, beginning with unpaved leveling of the natural terrain to a height of 20-30 cm above bedrock; the fill yielded sherds dating to the late Late Classic. Above this level was a thick fill layer dating to the Late/Terminal Classic, cut by an unidentified feature (a pit) and then topped by a floor, that was later cut. A series of four thin floors were found above and to the east of this feature, perhaps having butted up to whatever had been placed in the cut. The fill of these floors was Late Preclassic (Chicanel). Above these floors was an Early Postclassic construction, with more Early Postclassic debris in the upper 30 cm of the test pit.

Test 3, in the northern part of the plaza of Group B, yielded no diagnostic artifacts. Test 4 was excavated into the plaza of Group D, on the southwestern corner of the site, behind a residential Postclassic tandem structure (Str. 773); bedrock was encountered at 50 cm. below surface. There were no distinct floors or fill layers in this unit, and all the ceramics were Late Postclassic; the upper 30 cm held numerous censer fragments.

Test 5 was placed into the plaza of Group C, the southernmost of the two temple complexes at the site. The pit was placed south of a low altar (Str. 766) in the plaza formed by the temple (Str. 764) to the east and the open hall (Str. 763) to the south. Three episodes of construction/occupation were encountered in this plaza, which reached bedrock at 140-180 cm. The three lowest levels probably represent Terminal Classic construction, but Middle Preclassic sherds were recovered in the fills. In the southern part of the unit a plaster floor at 70 cm b.s. topped these building episodes. In the northern portion of the unit a burial was encountered with a vase of Jato Black-on-gray. Ceramics in the upper levels of the test pit were of Early Postclassic date.

The sixth of the plaza test excavations, Test 6, was placed in Group E on the east side of the site, situated between two residential C-shaped structures (Strs. 742 and 744). «Bedrock» —actually a layer of marl— was encountered at 70-80 cm below surface. The first of three construction/occupation episodes consisted of Terminal Classic leveling of the terrain to a height of 35 cm b.s. A pit feature intruded through this fill and through the underlying bedrock to a depth of 149 cm, and contained bone, lithics, shell, and four unidentifiable sherds. Above the Terminal Classic fill was another fill deposit, this one yielding eroded Early Post-

classic pottery. The upper 35 cm in this test unit corresponded to Late Postclassic occupation.

THE NORTHERN FORTIFICATION

The peninsular site of Zacpetén was bounded by wall-and-ditch at its narrow junction with the mainland and this feature deserves separate discussion here because of documentary references (both Maya glyphic texts and Spanish documents) to warfare during the Classic and Postclassic/Historic periods. The Zacpetén defensive system covered the steeply sloping northern edge of the site, from the northern edge of Group B at its highest elevation, down to the low neck of land barely above water level.

The defensive works consisted of a large wall, two parapets or terraces separated by a ditch or «canal», and various small and possibly largely perishable fortification walls. This system was investigated by means of two trenches excavated to bedrock (sterile white marl): T-1 was 30 m long by 1 m wide and ran north-south across the wall system (Fig. 5); T-2, a smaller unit at 5x1 m, was located to the northwest of T-1 in order to investigate the canal or moat that crossed the neck of land. This canal is estimated to have been approximately 3 m deep and 4 m wide. Filled with water, it would have turned the Zacpetén peninsula into an artificial island.

Excavations in T-1 revealed that bedrock along this entire northern slope was covered and smoothed with a thin (*ca.* 20 cm) layer of gray clay. Above that was a thicker layer (*ca.* 20-40 cm) of gray to grayish brown clay or sandy clay containing small rocks. Ceramic fragments in these clay layers suggest that the Maya incorporated quantities of Terminal Classic debris, most likely from occupation in and around Group B immediately to the south (uphill). Near the lowest/narrowest portion of the northern peninsula, immediately south of the deep canal excavation uncovered in T-2, the debris and underlying bedrock were cut to make a ditch, *ca.* 1.5 m wide and 75-90 cm deep. The fill was redeposited on either side, and may have served as the footing for a perishable wall. Overlying the Terminal Classic debris and filling the ditch and its surroundings were additional layers of gray-brown clay containing Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic debris. More evidence of Early Postclassic activity lay farther to the south (uphill): a relatively thick sloping layer of construction fill (perhaps a terrace, or support fill for a wall) consisting of gray to grayish brown clay with large quantities of small limestone rocks and Early Postclassic sherds.

Roughly 14 m south (upslope) of the Terminal Classic ditch and foundations for a perishable wall, a Late Postclassic stone wall or terrace facing was constructed. This wall was constructed by cutting into the Early Postclassic terrace to lay footings *ca.* 1.0 m in width. The upper portion of the wall had collapsed, but it

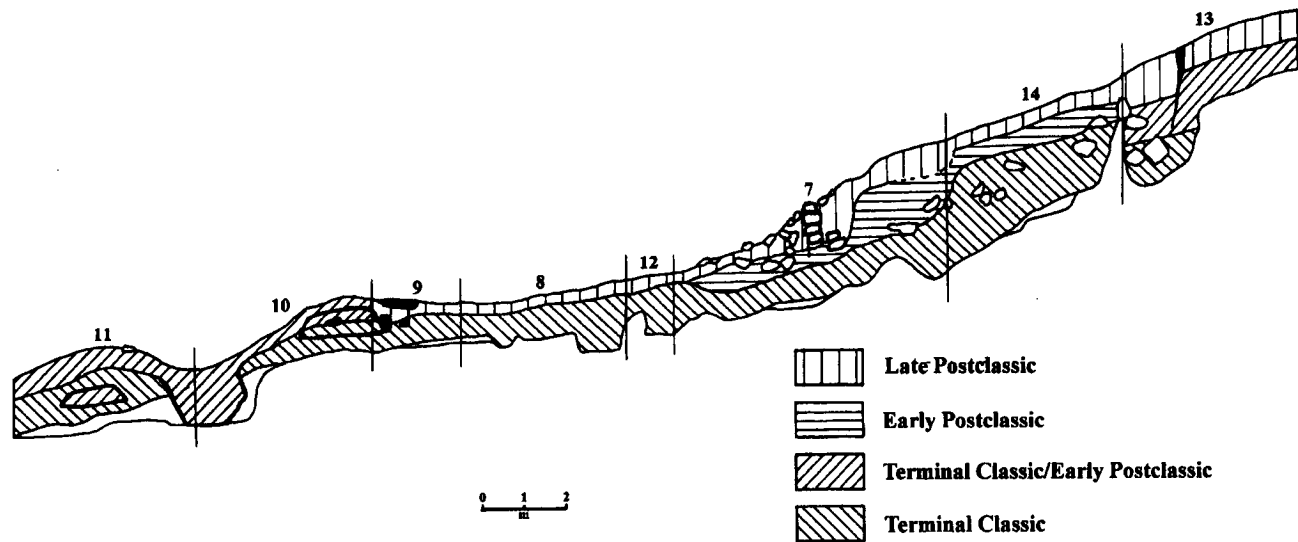


FIG. 5.—Profile of the trench excavation T-1 through Zacpetén's ditch-wall fortification complex.

probably stood at least 1.5 m high. Behind it, the «builder's trench» (i.e., the gap between the wall and the cutaway Early Postclassic construction fill) was filled in with very dark gray-brown clay and humus containing Late Postclassic pottery fragments. The presence of tiny side-notched projectile points, knives, and a lance point in the collapse testify to the military defensive nature of this terrace.

STRUCTURES AND ARCHITECTURAL COMPLEXES

The majority of structures mapped on the Zacpetén peninsula are Postclassic in date, although we know they overlie earlier construction in all parts of the peninsula. They are generally well preserved, as there has been little soil-genesis to obscure them, and their features have been little modified by successive remodeling. They are also distinctive in form compared to earlier Preclassic or Classic period architecture. Typically, most consist of a low, square-to-rectangular, single-level platform for a masonry or perishable superstructure. Masonry superstructural foundations are common and appear to conform to a limited number of plans in Petén (D. Rice 1986:Fig. 9.2; D. Rice 1988:Fig 11.3): a single room or portico composed of a masonry back wall and/or bench, or a back wall with one (L-shaped) or two (C-shaped) side walls and/or benches, and an open front. Some «tandem» structures apparently had a second room of perishable materials constructed directly behind the masonry fore-room, which then created a «false front» portico to the house (Sabloff 1990:135). More elaborate examples may have had perishable roofs underlain by lintels supported by a line (or lines) of pillars. These were called «open halls» at the Postclassic Petén site of Topoxté on the islands in Lake Yaxhá by William Bullard (1970:273-276; 1973:237-238) and they are similar to «colonnaded hall» structures at the Late Postclassic Yucatecan site of Mayapán (Pollock *et al.* 1962). Structures similar to those in Petén have been defined as residences and civic or ceremonial structures at the Late Postclassic Yucatecan site of Cozumel (Freidel 1981; Freidel and Sabloff 1984), as well as at Mayapán (Smith 1962).

While much can be said about the construction of individual structure types investigated by Proyecto Maya-Colonial, it is the non-random arrangement of some of these types in architectural complexes that is of particular interest in this paper. As indicated above, structures at Zacpetén are clustered in five groups, A-E. Groups A and C dominate the higher elevations of the peninsula and they appear to have been civic-ceremonial in plan and function during the Postclassic period, while the mapped buildings of Groups D and E constitute Postclassic residential plazas. Group B (Fig. 6), just south of the ditch-wall fortification, is an arrangement of structures of uncertain date, but it may be a regional or temporal variant of a late Late Classic twin-pyramid group, a plan first identified and best known at the site of Tikal (Jones 1969).

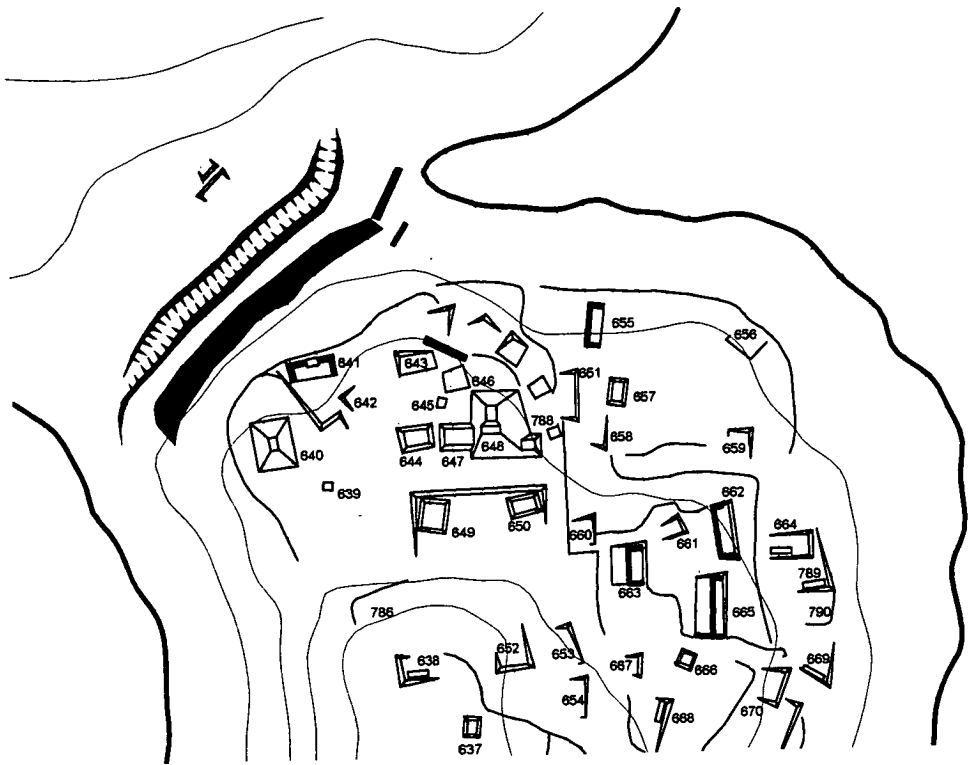


FIG. 6.—Group B at Zacpetén.

Twin-pyramid groups at Tikal each consisted of: eastern and western four-stairway temples, with a line of plain stelae arranged in front (west) of the eastern temple; a «stela enclosure» to the north, a small stone building with a corbel-vault entrance on its south side that housed a carved stela and carved altar; and a nine-doorway palace on the south. The two large pyramids on the eastern (Str. 648) and western (Str. 640) sides of Zacpetén's Group B fit the Tikal pattern and they are the only visible buildings on the peninsula that appear Classic in style. There is no nine-doorway palace on the south side of the plaza, however, and a Postclassic C-shape structure (Str. 641) is the most prominent building on the north, rather than a stela enclosure. Several smaller platforms also intrude on the twin-pyramid template, two adjacent to the eastern temple (Str. 644 and Str. 647).

A small, broken, and eroded carved stela of Terminal Classic form was recovered by Proyecto Lacustre on the edge of the group in 1980 and there is a single plain stela lying at the western base of Str. 648, the eastern temple. Although heavily eroded, the carved monument showed a principal figure standing in profile, facing the viewer's left, performing the «scattering» rite. He held a ceremonial bar diagonally in the crook of the left arm and wears an ornate plumed headdress. Glyph blocks of an inscription may have lined the left margin, but these are no longer visible. In its «wedge» shape and scattering theme, the stone is very similar to Terminal Classic Stela 1 and Stela 2 at Ixlú. The typical twin-pyramid carved altar and additional plain stelae have not been located in or near Group B, but they may be accounted by monuments found in Group A (see below).

Groups A and C at Zacpetén are of primary interest to Proyecto Maya-Colonial because of Kowoj claims that they came to Petén from the site of Mayapán. Not only do these groups contain the largest Postclassic structures at the site, they conform to plans that are identical to Mayapán architectural groupings called «temple assemblages» (Proskouriakoff 1962:90-91).

The temple assemblages at Mayapán have a consistent pattern. The central element of the groups is a temple constructed on a substructure of two or three terraces. Temple superstructures have an antechamber, which leads into a room with a medial altar along the back wall, and the buildings often have serpent motifs on their columns or balustrades. Temples undoubtedly varied in their function, but have been generalized as architectural metaphors for sacred mountains standing, physically and metaphysically, between humans and the supernatural world.

To the right of and facing in the same direction as the temple in a temple assemblage is an oratorio resting on a low platform with a large area of empty space in front of it. Oratorios usually have a C-shaped bench with a medial shrine or niche and there is often a dedicatory burial in front of the shrine. In front of and facing into the temple is a raised shrine, a small building generally composed of a single room and often containing the remnants of stone and stucco statues. There is a great deal of variation within this architectural class, both formally and functionally, and shrines are believed to be associated with the veneration of ancestors and deities. Between the raised shrine and the temple in temple assemblages is usually a smaller shrine upon which rested a statue or statues.

Finally, at right angles to the temple in a Mayapán temple assemblage sits a colonnaded hall, a long narrow structure that generally has a C-shaped bench with a medial shrine. The medial shrine often supported a throne, upon which were seated stucco figures, and the columns of the halls were sometimes decorated with stucco formed in the shape of human figures (Proskouriakoff 1962: 95). Colonnaded halls have most often been identified as lineage and administrative headquarters.

At Zacpetén, constituent structures of groups A and C fulfill the Mayapán temple assemblage plan in both their form and their location. In Group A (Fig. 7)

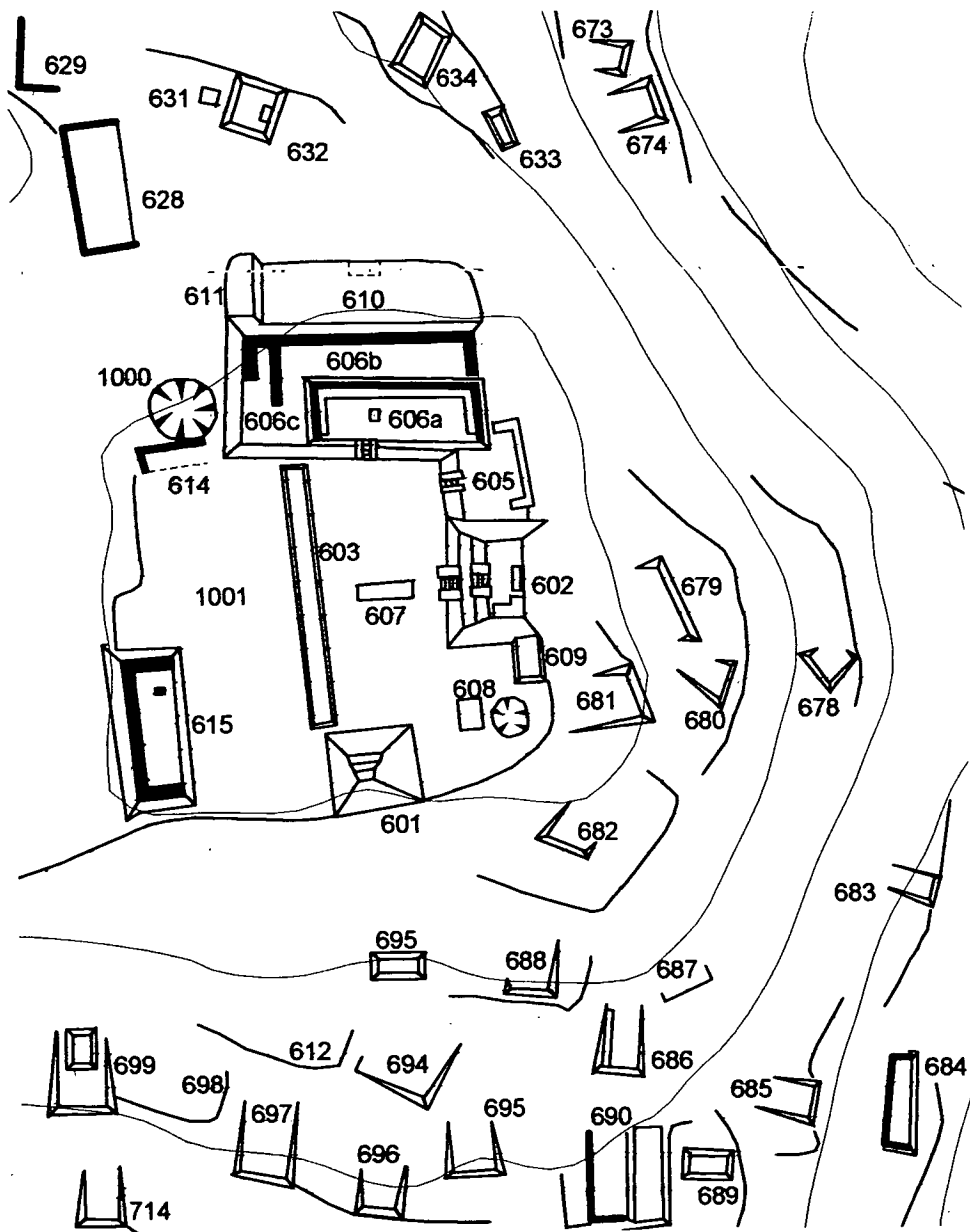


FIG. 7.—Group A at Zacpetén.

a temple (Str. 602) faces west with an oratorio (Str. 605) to its north facing in the same direction. In front of the temple are numerous small shrines (Str. 607, Str. 1001). Statue fragments were associated with Str. 607, the shrine closest to the temple. At a right angle to the temple and oratorio on the north side of the plaza is an open hall, Str. 606a. In Group C (Fig. 8), the temple (Str. 764) and oratorio (Str. 1002) also both face west, with two small shrines (Str. 766) in front of the temple. Structure 767, an open hall, sits on the south side of the plaza at right angle to the temple. While the temple of Group C is nearly identical to that in Group A, the oratorio differs because its platform is natural bedrock and the walls appear to have been constructed of perishable posts.

Zacpetén's temple assemblages do differ from those at Mayapán in several significant ways. First, there is the presence of additional buildings. For example, Group A has a low ceremonial *sakbe* (Str. 603) leading from the open hall on the north to the southern edge of the plaza. This *sakbe* divides the plaza in half and the shrines in front of the temple further divide it into four relatively equal quarters. A second open hall (Str. 615) is also situated in the western part of the plaza.

The presence of additional buildings associated with the group does not alter the basic plan and similarity of the Zacpetén assemblages to those of Mayapán because groups at the latter often had additional buildings as well. However, Late Postclassic temple assemblages at Zacpetén do have an additional feature that is a patterned deviation from the Mayapán complexes. In Zacpetén's Group A, a large shrine on a platform (Str. 601) sits on the south side of the plaza, opposite and facing into the open hall of the temple assemblage (Str. 606a). The pattern is also found in Group C where an additional shrine (Str. 765) faces into the open hall.

It was quite common for open halls at Mayapán to have shrines opposite and facing into them, but only in another recurrent architectural plan, the «basic ceremonial group» (Proskouriakoff 1962:95). Basic ceremonial groups in the Yucatán include: an open hall, a raised shrine, and a central altar or oratorio, with the shrine centered upon and facing the hall, and the oratorio between the two. Because the shrine faces into the open hall, the hall is considered to be the building of central importance in the group. At Zacpetén we believe that a basic ceremonial group consisting of Str. 606b, an open hall, and the shrine Str. 601 pre-dated the building of the temple assemblage. The latter was constructed with the remodeling of Str. 606b with the imposition of Str. 606a, and the construction of the oratorio (Str. 605) and temple (Str. 602). Str. 601, the shrine of the basic ceremonial group, remained in use, however, and may have become part of the generative grammar for Petén temple assemblages (a point we return to below). The Zacpetén Group C temple assemblage was constructed with a shrine facing the open hall.

The second major difference between the ceremonial architecture of Mayapán and Zacpetén is in their symmetry. Mayapán ceremonial architecture is usually bilaterally symmetrical, where comparable buildings at Zacpetén are not. A building is considered to be bilaterally symmetrical if, when divided at the medial axis, the

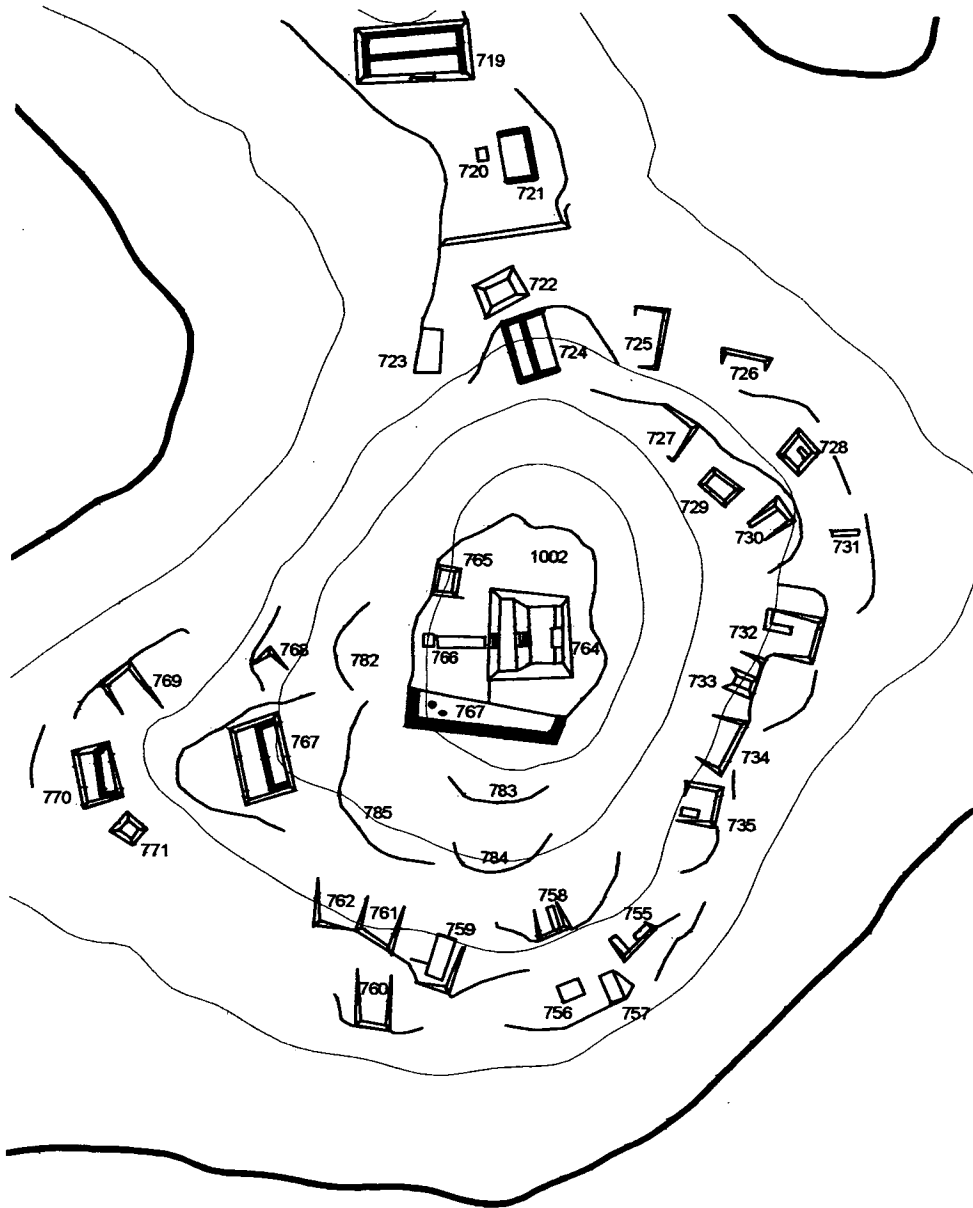


FIG. 8.—Group C at Zacpetén.

two halves tend to be mirror images of one another. Ritual behaviors in ceremonial buildings at Mayapán were organized in relation to such bilateral symmetry, with activities focused upon the medial axes of structures. Censer sherds and caches, therefore, tend to be concentrated along a line running from the base of a building's stairway to its central altar.

With the exception of shrines, all ceremonial buildings excavated at Zacpetén have been slightly asymmetrical. The temple (Str. 602) in Group A is superficially symmetrical, as it has two columns centered on two stairways with a medial altar along the back wall of the superstructure. There is a bench only in the southern half of that superstructure, however. In addition, there is a stairway on the northern part of the structure that is not complemented by one on the southern side.

These minor variations in architecture are matched by an asymmetrical distribution of activity areas. There is evidence for ritual activities along the medial axis—a medial cache, a censer sherd concentration at the top of the stairway, and numerous small cups deposited in front of the altar. There was also a concentration of censer sherds adjacent to the southern bench, however, that was not matched to the north and the northern stairway was a focal point for ritual activity evidenced by the presence of censer sherds, tripod vessels, beads, and gold foil.

Similarly, Group A's oratorio (Str. 605) has C-shaped foundation walls, but the rear bench only exists on the eastern and northern sides. There was a concentration of censer sherds within the medial niche, which follows the tendency for activities to occur along the medial axis. However, we also encountered concentration of projectile points, ground ax heads, and fragments of knives or lance tips in the southern part of the structure, an asymmetrical use of ceremonial space.

This recovery of objects from Str. 605 took place during Proyecto Maya-Colonial's 1995 field season, when broad surface clearing excavations were conducted at the northeast corner of Group A (see Fig. 7), employing a grid of 1 × 1 m resolution superimposed over architecture and open space in which to plot artifacts and features. On the east side of this corner, oratorio Str. 605's C-shaped superstructural foundation wall, ca. 11 m N-S and 6 m E-W, is situated at an angle at the back of a 1 m-high square platform measuring 12 × 12 m. An area of 6 × 8 m was cleared to the floor of the platform over the eastern (rear) half of the structure. Artifacts recovered included the axes, knives, lances, and small projectile points of chert and obsidian mentioned above, in concentrations that suggest the structure had some association with military ritual or preparation for war (Pugh 1996:91). Also found were incised pieces of marine shell, a stingray spine fragment, fragments of turtle shell, and pieces of human long bone (one bearing two incised glyphs). Three K'ulut Modeled human effigy incensarios were found, these manufactured of a distinctive Late Postclassic paste used in Chilo Unslipped pottery. Non-effigy censer fragments (Extranjeros Impressed) were also found.

In 1995 an area of 9 × 12 m was also cleared down to floor level in the western part of Str. 606a. In addition, two test pits were excavated, one in the west

stairway leading to Str. 606a, and the other in the front of the substructure. Artifact recovery in Str. 606a surface clearing was sparse, but included quantities of incensario fragments found in an ashy deposit in the southwest corner of the structure. One of these is a Patojo Modeled censer fragment, manufactured of the snail-inclusion paste used in the Paxcaman and Trapeche slipped groups; the modeled figure on the censer vase appears to be a diving god.

The remaining zones of Str. 605 and Str. 606a were cleared during Proyecto Maya-Colonial's excavations in 1997, as were all other structures in the Late Post-classic temple assemblages of Groups A and C, and large portions of the plaza surfaces of these groups. The structures, patios, and architectural terraces of five residential units were also completely cleared, with all artifacts and features piece-plotted. In addition to the clearing operations, which opened up contiguous areas dating to the last occupation phases of civic-ceremonial groups and residences at Zacpetén, test-pit excavations were undertaken at these structure loci to provide additional data on construction phases. These data will complement information already available from earlier test excavations. The architectural, artifactual, and contextual data from our 1997 investigations are currently being analyzed, and descriptive inventories and definitive construction sequences are not available for inclusion in this presentation.

MONUMENTS

The carved and plain stelae recovered in Group B support the possibility that the arrangement of the eastern (Str. 648) and western (Str. 640) temples in that group represent a Zacpetén variant of Tikal's late Late Classic twin-pyramid complex. The carved monument found in 1980 had no readable text to confirm any relationship between Zacpetén and Tikal, or by which to assign a tentative date to the Zacpetén architectural arrangement. Also, as indicated above, the expected carved altar was not found and only one plain stela was known.

Excavations in Zacpetén's Group A not only confirmed that a number of the Late Postclassic temple assemblage structures are built upon Classic period deposits, but additional Classic monuments were recovered in rather unusual loci. During the construction of the substructure platform that supports open hall structures 606a, 606b, and 606c, two halves of a carved altar (Fig. 9) and at least two plain stelae were incorporated into the lower tier of the building's southern façade. The altar halves were sealed in the wall west of the central stairway, another (perhaps unintentional) example of asymmetry, with their carved surfaces facing the plaza, each half embedded in the façade on either side of a plain stela.

The sculpture on the altar is of unusual design, consisting of a large central image, perhaps a glyph, surrounded by a ring of 20 glyphs. Exterior to this ring the altar's surface is divided into four equal sections by four blocks of four



FIG. 9.— Altar half embedded in the southern substructure façade of the Str. 606 complex in Group A, Zacpetén.

glyphs each, the blocks separated by four large mat elements. The mat design on the altar's edges continues around the sides of the stone. While some of the altar's 36 glyphs and central image appear to have been deliberately effaced in antiquity, Stephen Houston (Brigham Young University) and David Stuart (Peabody Museum, Harvard University) have very graciously offered comments on the text from a drawing and slides we provided. It is their preliminary personal communications that are quoted below.

The dedicatory date and date of the main event of the text is thought to be «9.18.19.8.17 8 Caban, Seating of Cumku» (December 23, 809, and the winter solstice), while there is «implied» Baktun ending of «10.0.0.0.0 7 Ahaw 18 Zip» (March 15, 830) «indirectly mentioned in order to lock in the placement of the 8 Caban 0 Cumku calendar round date.» Houston and Stuart believe that the text probably continues from an unidentified stela formerly associated with the altar, a stela that had the dedicatory date of 10.0.0.0.0.

The altar appears to commemorate the birth of a Zacpetén ruler «K'inich Pa..., 'he Sunny...» (A personal name, introduced by the common K'inich title, which we can basically translate as 'sunny' as an adjective, e.g. K'inich Ajaw, 'Sunny Lord.').» who may carry two titles—»Aj Chak Kalamte', 'he, the Red Kalamte',» and «Aj ? Bak, 'he of ? captive(s)',» or perhaps «a-'K' ATUN'-BAK-ki . . . using the k'atun sign to convey the concept of ?20'.» Stuart indicates that «Kalamte' is a major title for Maya kings, especially at Tikal,» while Houston notes that «?he of the 20 captives' is a relatively common title and . . . is used on Ixlú Altar 1 (B4-A5).»

The Zacpetén lord's mother is named, «Ix K'in» . . . 'Lady Sun...',» and her title is given, «Sak Kay Ajaw, 'the Lord of Sak Kay',» where «Sak Kay, 'white fish' might be a place name, specifying her home town.» The protagonist's father's name is «Bal-aj(?) Chan K'awil, 'Heavenly K'awil is Hidden(?)',» and he is called «4 'K'atun' Ajaw, '(he is) the a four 'k'atun lord',» «Aj Chak ? Te', 'He of the Red ... Tree',» and «Kalomte'.» The text also says of the father «K'ujl-[Mutul?]-Ajaw, '(he is) the Holy Lord of Mutul(?)',» but the emblem glyph has been destroyed.

Houston and Stuart suggest that the emblem glyph was probably that of Tikal, given the Kalamte' title and the K'awil deity name that is possibly the end of the father's personal name phrase. A tentative interpretation, then, is that the father has Tikal connections, and that the son and the father may have been rulers of a Terminal Classic polity that included Zacpetén, although Stuart makes it quite clear that there are no other texts to support this speculation. There may also be a Tikal-Ixlú connection implied in the text of the altar, but this too is speculation.

A second Classic period carved monument was reused by the Late Postclassic occupants of Zacpetén in the construction of the façade of the large shrine on the south side of the plaza of Group A, Str. 601. Here a complete stela was embedded, face out, in the eastern wall of the lowest tier of the substructure (Fig. 10).



FIG. 10.—Stela embedded in the eastern substructure façade of Str. 601 in Group A, Zacpetén.

The eroded carving shows a single figure in profile, facing the viewer's left, possibly «scattering,» and wearing a large headdress and a feathered back ornament. In front of the figure was a column of glyphs, largely destroyed, and above was a dotted scroll possibly holding a human figure (i.e., «cloud scrolls» and a «cloud rider»). Although the monument has parallel sides, rather than being wedge-shaped, the scattering theme and cloud scrolls suggest that the stela is Terminal Classic in date.

Upon receiving Houston's and Stuart's comments on the altar text, described above, we thought this Str. 601 monument would prove to be the stela implicated by and originally associated with that altar. While the stela is eroded and its text is difficult to read, Houston and Stuart have each looked at a drawing and slides of the monument, and they concur that it does not appear to date to 10.0.0.0. Rather, Stuart suggests that it may be a bit earlier than the altar. Therefore, the unreadable stela found in Group B in 1980 is the only known candidate that might originally have been erected with the altar, an association that is intriguing because of the Tikal-style twin-pyramid locale, but a pairing that is impossible to confirm.

While Houston and Stuart were not able to read the Str. 601 stela's text from the printed materials we provided them, Stuart has suggested that the last glyph may be «uht-i Sakpeten (?)» or 'it happened in Sak Peten.' He notes that the place name Sak Peten appears in a passage on Stela 23 at Naranjo (at E21b) that discusses a war by Naranjo's ruler Smoke Squirrel against the site of Yaxhá, and the apparent display of a Yaxhá ruler's bones a few months later at Sak Peten. Assuming that Sak Peten of the text, Sakpeten of the Spanish documents, and archaeological Zacpetén are one and the same place, Stuart's tentative reading that the Yaxhá lord's «skeleton is displayed, (and is) cast down (at) Sak Peten» may indicate that the ritual act documented at Naranjo took place at the peninsular site of Zacpetén.

Identifying ritual activities and loci in the archaeological record is difficult, but identifying a specific ritual referred to in a text from a distant site would seem beyond possibility. In 1997, without knowledge of the Naranjo text, Proyecto Maya-Colonial began to sample deposits in a borrow or quarry pit immediately adjacent to the western side of the Str. 606 complex in Group A. The rationale for the trench excavation was our assumption that the depression, *ca.* 8-10 m in diameter and 6-8 m deep (unexcavated), would contain trash and fragments of ceramics used in Group A activities.

Rather than cultural materials, however, we encountered human remains. Once the post-occupation soils and collapse from Str. 606c above was removed, it became apparent that the quarry pit is full of human bone. Minimal exposure of the deposit suggested to us that multiple individuals had been «cast down» into the pit, that the weight of the total plus that of the overburden had compressed the remains, and that tree roots and burrowing animals had possibly altered the positions of skeletal elements. The number of individuals in the pit is unknown, although the total

is certainly double digits and may be more than 100, nor do we have any idea over how many generations human remains were deposited at this location. The initial trench has been refilled and excavation of the entire pit, plus a similar pit south of a Late Postclassic platform adjacent to the south side of temple Str. 602, will be pursued in coming field seasons when archaeological and bioanthropological specialists can better manage the recovery and analyses of the contents.

In the meantime, we can say that we have identified a location at Zacpetén where human remains were deposited in large numbers, perhaps (even likely, given the proximity of the plaza) during public rituals. We do not know, however, if the Yaxhá lord referenced in Naranjo Stela 23 is among the victims. It must be remembered that the site's ditch-wall fortification was maintained from Terminal Classic through Late Postclassic times, and that Zacpetén was one of a number of sites contested by Maya groups at the close of the 17th century. The remains of weaponry and human bone found in the oratorio, Str. 605, in Group A (see below) support a scenario of Zacpetén's last occupants engaged in conflict.

Our expectation is that many of the individuals in the pit date to that later warfare and the period of Group A's final occupation, although Late Classic sherds were recovered together with Postclassic ceramics in the limited excavation that sampled the deposit. Remains of Late Postclassic sacrificial victims have definitely been identified outside of the pit, in the northwest quadrant of Group A's plaza, where «bundles» of human long bones and «necklaces» of human mandibles were found on the plaza floor north of the shrine Str. 607a. The two pits in Group A may contain the unrecovered parts of these disarticulated skeletons, as well as other human remains dating to the Late Postclassic and earlier periods of Zacpetén's occupation.

TERMINAL CLASSIC CERAMICS

In the course of all of our investigations in the central Petén lakes region, beginning in the mid-1970s, we have, of course, recovered enormous quantities of pottery dating from the Middle Preclassic period (see P. Rice 1979a, 1996a) through the Postclassic period (see P. Rice 1979b, 1987, 1996b). Most recently, Proyecto Maya-Colonial was organized to investigate the development of the political geography of central Petén's Postclassic period. We have taken a direct historical approach to this study in our design of survey and excavation strategies, but documenting the Classic-to-Postclassic transition in central Petén is as important to our mission as finding sites known to the Spaniards. These identifications define relevant data sets and processes. So, while there are many questions to be asked of materials recovered from excavations at Zacpetén, one of the initial and more vexing tasks has been to attempt to identify discrete Terminal Classic deposits.

Analysis of ceramics dating to the Terminal Classic and Early Postclassic periods in the central Petén has proved difficult for several reasons. First, as noted elsewhere (P. Rice 1986:279-281), the content of Terminal Classic ceramic complexes in the Petén lakes area is highly regionalized—even localized—both in types represented and their relative frequencies. Around Lake Macanché, for example, Terminal Classic ceramics on the island differed somewhat from those on the mainland (Rice 1987:295). This ceramic variability appears to be partly a consequence of social and economic disruptions attendant to the Classic Maya «collapse,» and also partly a consequence of the region's peripheral position to three better-known ceramic complexes in surrounding areas: Eznab (Tepeu 3) at Tikal, Uaxactún, and Yaxhá; Spanish Lookout in Barton Ramie and western Belize; and Boca in the Pasión area.

A second problem that emerged from analyses of Terminal Classic pottery in the lakes region is that of reliably distinguishing Terminal Classic deposits from those dating to the Early Postclassic. These deposits are often a mix of Terminal Classic forms, types, and pastes with forms, types, and pastes characteristic of the Postclassic, and most sherds have badly eroded surfaces. It is rare indeed to find any distinct stratigraphic relations among these groups, further muddying the situation. As a result, it has been difficult to determine whether the deposits in which these materials were found should be considered to represent Terminal Classic activity, Early Postclassic activity, or a temporal amalgam of both.

Terminal Classic ceramics in the Macanché/Salpetén area have been used in definition of the Romero Terminal Classic ceramic complex, which is as a peripheral member of the Eznab sphere. The major characteristics of the «transitional» Terminal Classic Romero complex include the following (see Rice 1987:55-89):

1. The occasional early use of «Paxcaman-like pastes,» which are dark gray and silty textured but do not necessarily include snail fragments. The early (late Terminal Classic) appearance of this standard Petén Postclassic slipware paste is particularly notable at the sites of Ixlú and Zacpetén.

2. Large incurving-rim bowls, sometimes with bolstered lip and/or impressed fillet, appear to continue through the Terminal Classic period into and perhaps through the Early Postclassic. They often occur in association with Early Postclassic types of the Paxcaman and Pozo ceramic groups, and rarely in the Trapeche and Augustine groups. These incurving-rim bowls, usually slipped red or brown and usually having ash paste, are one of the most striking comparisons to the Boca complex of the Pasión region and suggest strong continuities of function.

3. There is in the Terminal Classic period in the lakes area a hard («clinky») ash paste (which I have elsewhere named «Canjil» paste), most typically found in sherds suggestive of the large, incurved-rim bowls discussed above. Sherds of this paste exhibit distinctive bright orange and fuschia, and sometimes also gray, colors that, added to their hardness, indicate overfiring. It is possible that these

sherds may have come from a type of «saggar» or protective container used repeatedly for firing fragile fineware pots such as polychromes.

4. Jato Black-on-gray vases and tripods, often with fluting or incised decoration in addition to black rim and basal bands, is the common burial furniture in the Salpetén-Macanché area. For example, in a test pit into Str. 667, an architectural terrace south of Group B at Zacpetén, a Jato Black-on-gray tripod dish was found upside-down over an inverted skull lying on bedrock. Under the skull was a small scatter of shell and jade beads, and a small jade pendant carved with a face.

5. A distinctive component of the Romero complex, perhaps unique to that complex, is a type known as Harina White. First identified at Macanché Island (Rice 1987:55-58), it was recovered in greater quantities at Zacpetén in Terminal Classic deposits at the base of the T-1 defensive wall trench. This material occurs in several forms, including jars with indented bases.

As compared to the Pakoc and Hobo (Tepeu 2-3) and Chilcob (Early Postclassic) ceramic complexes from the Tayasal peninsula and the western part of Lake Petén Itzá (Chase 1983:1208-1214), Chase noted a relative lack of late Late Classic ceramics in the area and the same difficulties in identifying Terminal Classic materials as those noted above. With regard to the Early Postclassic, the Tayasal/Petén Itzá materials included much greater quantities of pottery of the Augustine (red) and Trapeche («pink») groups than in the other lake basins. Augustine was rare at both Macanché and Zacpetén, while Trapeche was common only at Macanché and rare at Zacpetén.

Overall, the Romero ceramic material from Salpetén/Macanché is quite different from Terminal Classic pottery from sites in the Eznab sphere, such as Tikal and Yaxhá. These differences seem to be most readily apparent in the relative paucity of elite serving vessels of the Eznab complexes, such as Tinaja Red slipped plates, bowls, and jars, and various cream polychromes dishes. Otherwise, the Terminal Classic pottery of the central lakes area is more similar to the Eznab sphere, of which it is a peripheral member, than it is to Boca or Spanish Lookout. These ceramic ties, while not strong, are nonetheless reinforced by architectural similarities, such as the existence of what appears to be a variant of a twin-pyramid group at Zacpetén (Group B). Associated primarily with Tikal, twin-pyramid complexes have also been noted at Ixlú and Yaxhá.

Indications of Romero-phase activities were found in small quantities on the islands and peninsulas of the central Petén lakes, where they provide evidence for Classic-to-Postclassic continuity of occupation in these basins. In the Lake Salpetén basin, Romero complex materials were identified in one location on the mainland, but were more common on the Zacpetén peninsula, where Romero occupations/constructions were located in five test pits.

What is particularly interesting about the occurrence of these Terminal Classic and very Early Postclassic deposits and constructions on Zacpetén is that

they have usually been recovered on bedrock, rather than on top of earlier, i.e., Preclassic or Classic, constructions. This tendency supports the notion that settlement of the peninsula was primarily a Terminal Classic phenomenon and probably coincides with the general abandonment of the mainland. A similar phenomenon seems to have occurred at Lake Macanché, though not at Lake Petén Itzá, where Proyecto Maya-Colonial has found numerous Terminal Classic site around the rim of the lake (D. Rice *et al.* 1996).

DATING

While analyses of ceramics to date have provided a preliminary occupational history for Zacpetén, as well as offered insights on cultural and demographic aspects of that occupation, there are non-ceramic data that add detail to this chronology.

As part of a larger study of obsidians in the central Petén lakes region (see P. Rice 1984; P. Rice *et al.* 1985), 35 obsidians (33 from Zacpetén) from Terminal Classic and Postclassic contexts in the Lake Salpetén basin were provenienced by x-ray fluorescence and neutron activation analyses (P. Rice *et al.* 1985). Ten of those from the site of Zacpetén were dated by induced-rate obsidian hydration dating (P. Rice, unpublished data). Because the artifacts for analysis were selected non-randomly, generalizations from the resulting data must be accepted with caution.

All three major Guatemalan obsidian sources were represent among the Postclassic obsidians from the lakes region, with Ixtepeque outnumbering El Chayal and Río Pixcayá roughly 2:1:1. The dominance of the Ixtepeque source seems to begin in the latter part of the Early Postclassic. Zacpetén shares this pattern, and additionally had one fragment sourced to Zacualtipan in Hidalgo, México⁷.

Two structures test-excavated at Zacpetén during the 1980 field season of Proyecto Lacustre appear to have been loci for the removal of blades and/or the manufacture of artifacts. Structure 771, a residential platform lying to the southwest of Group C, yielded chunks, flakes, and tiny bladelets from Ixtepeque and Chayal among Early Postclassic ceramic material and there is an obsidian hydration date of AD 1142+/-35 from this location. Similarly, obsidian was also worked at Str. 715, a small low platform south of Group A. Fourteen obsidians, including bladelets, flakes, chunks, a core fragment, and a projectile point were sourced to Ixtepeque and Río Pixcayá, and an early Late Postclassic occupation date based on ceramics was confirmed by an obsidian hydration date of AD 1234+/-21. The construction materials included Terminal Classic ceramics, ho-

⁷ Interestingly, Lake Macanché did not fit this general lakes pattern, as it had nearly equal amounts of El Chayal and Ixtepeque, with Tajumulco (Terminal Classic) and «Source X» obsidian also represented.

wever, and this mixing was reflected in an additional obsidian hydration date of AD 1007+/-28 on an obviously retouched/re-used bladelet recovered from the platform fill. The latest obsidian date obtained from Zacpetén (and the latest dated obsidian in the lakes region sample) was AD 1532+/-26 and came from a blade found in Str. 730, a residential platform northeast of Group C.

We realize that there is considerable debate about the reliability of obsidian hydration dating (Ridings 1996), and particularly about its utility in the Maya lowlands (Freter 1993). The analyses of obsidians from the central Petén lakes region were undertaken before this debate emerged and the results reported above are obviously subject to the caveats and critiques of the ongoing argument. At the same time these dates are valuable to us because they are, in fact, consistent with chronological assignments suggested by ceramic data and they reinforce that relative framework.

There is one radiocarbon date available from Zacpetén, an AMS analysis of a sample of charred corn kernels (Beta-107791) recovered from a storage jar found intact against the medial wall in the back room of tandem-room Str. 719. The conventional C14 age was determined to be 200+/-40 BP, with calibrated results (2 sigma, 95% probability) of AD 1650-1700 and AD 1720-1820. Intercepts of the radiocarbon age with the calibration curve are AD 1670 and AD 1780, and 1 sigma-calibrated results (68% probability) are AD 1660-1680 and AD 1745-1805.

Structure 719 is a large residential unit situated between Groups A and C (see Fig. 8). It has a formal open front «portico» with a bench that is divided into 13 «niches» or seats by rock and plaster divisions against the western side of the tandem room's medial wall, and an altar against the wall at the eastern end of that bench. The doorway east of the altar leads to a large back room where considerable domestic refuse and specialized tools and raw materials for the making of pigments were recovered. This structure and its associated shrine, Str. 721, show evidence of having been destroyed in one episode. Both buildings were burned and most in situ artifacts, save censers, were smashed by roof and wall collapse. Piece-plotting of the fragments of each identifiable censer (both effigy and non-effigy types) suggests that these were broken where they were being used, with their fragments then strewn throughout the rooms and around the buildings.

Given the conditions of the two buildings and their contents, we feel that the structures were purposefully demolished. This act may have been a product of warfare between Maya groups over territory, or it may be an indication of Spanish efforts to consolidate their control of the region after the conquest of Noj Peten in 1697. Our only evidence for the presence of Spaniards at Zacpetén is a fragment of a European kaolin pipe found on the surface of Str. 721. Under any circumstances, the destruction of Str. 719 and Str. 721 undoubtedly reflects the end of Maya occupation at the site of Zacpetén.

CULTURAL CONTINUITY, CHANGE, AND IDENTITY IN CENTRAL PETEN

Based upon several different types of excavation at Zacpetén, in a number of different loci and contexts, our assessment is that the peninsula was sparsely occupied during the Middle through early Late Classic periods. The majority of the site's construction and its densest occupation occurred in Terminal Classic through Late Postclassic times. Test-excavations within the Lake Salpetén basin do not mirror this settlement history. The area seems to have witnessed a sparse Middle Preclassic occupation followed by abandonment. During the Early Classic, a few settlers moved into the northwest and southwest corners of the lake basin, and basin occupation grew markedly in the Late Classic period. This Late Classic settlement continued into the Terminal Classic period. However, it appears that mainland residences in the Salpetén basin were largely abandoned between *ca.* AD 900 and 1100, when occupation began to be heavily concentrated on the site of Zacpetén.

This late Late Classic shift of settlement focus to peninsular Zacpetén, and the construction of a ditch-wall fortification there, may reflect broader cultural and demographic changes taking place in the vicinity of Lake Petén Itzá. While much of the history of the region is still only sketchily known to us, available data suggest widespread but low density Middle Preclassic occupation, followed by more sporadic settlement focused in fewer locations through the Late Preclassic and early Late Classic periods.

In late Late Classic times population in the Lake Petén Itzá basin rose dramatically, however. Sites with seemingly long and sustained histories continue as loci of Terminal Classic construction, and new communities were founded in previously unoccupied basin locations such as Pasajá, Chachaclún, and in the central Petén savannas to the south. The establishment of new settlements at the end of the Classic period, and the first appearance of characteristic Postclassic structural forms in functional association with Late Classic residential structures (A. Chase 1983; D. Rice 1986, 1988), suggest that this late population growth is the result of in-migration. Geographic sources for the migrants are unclear, although the new architectural types share features with Late Classic/Terminal Classic non-Maya constructions at Seibal (Tourtellot 1988), in the Chontalpa region of México (Fox 1987), and in the Guatemala highlands (Fox 1980, 1981, 1987; Ichon and Grignon 1980). The Terminal Classic fortifications at Nixtun-Ch'ich' and Zacpetén, plus the ubiquity of arrow points in Terminal Classic deposits throughout the Lake Petén Itzá zone, undoubtedly reflect economic, political, and social stresses that accompanied these late population changes in some zones of the central Petén lakes area.

Early Postclassic settlement is also indicated by materials from our surface collections and test excavations throughout the region, but at fewer sites. This re-

duction may be a logical step in a process of population consolidation and reorganization after considerable Terminal Classic in-migration. At Zacpetén there is Early Postclassic remodeling of the ditch-wall fortification, suggesting maintenance of a defensive posture by the site's occupants, and construction dating to this period has been identified in test excavations across the peninsula. The basic ceremonial group in Group A, represented by open hall Str. 606b and shrine Str. 601, may have been built during the Early Postclassic and the reuse of the Classic period monuments in the façades of these buildings likely occurred at this time. We can only speculate, however, on the intent of the Postclassic Maya in their reuse of the stones, or the degree to which they may have understood the original Classic meanings of the images and texts. Similarly, continuity in the ritual deposition of human remains in the pit or pits in Group A, from Late Classic through Postclassic times, is at present a matter of speculation.

It is in the Late Postclassic when Zacpetén reaches its full extent and form, and constitutes the town that we believe corresponds to Sakpeten of the Spanish documents. All site groups are utilized, the fortification at the north end of the peninsula continues to be maintained, and recovered artifact assemblages and contexts lend credence to Spanish descriptions of endemic warfare in the region at the close of the 17th century. While Sakpeten is listed as a Yalain community, we believe that the two Mayapán-style temple assemblages at the site mark the presence of Kowoj or Kowoj-affiliated occupants late in the site's history.

Zacpetén is not the only Late Postclassic site in the central Petén where temple assemblages were constructed. They can be identified in maps of Muralla de León and Topoxté as well, and the assemblages at these sites also feature the shrine—opposite—open hall arrangement observed at Zacpetén. We do not know at this time, however, whether the addition of the shrine is the result of temple assemblages being imposed upon earlier basic ceremonial groups, as in Zacpetén's Group A, or if these assemblages are built according to a distinctly Petén Kowoj «template» that merges the elements of the two plans, as in Zacpetén's Group C. It is possible that the earlier basic ceremonial group plan in Group A represents occupation of the site by a Kan Ek' or Itzá group, but the existence, distribution, dating, and group affiliation of basic ceremonial groups elsewhere remains to be confirmed through extensive excavation at other sites in the central Petén lakes region.

Under any circumstance, we feel that the instances of temple assemblages indicate the late presence of Kowoj groups at lakes Macanché and Yaxhá as well, and that they reflect the most salient Maya political division described by the Spaniards for the late 17th century, that between the Itzá and the Kowoj (D. Rice *et al.* 1996b:319-323). Significantly, the distribution of this Postclassic monumental complex marks a decidedly east-west dichotomy of architectural style in Petén; the civic-ceremonial complexes are found only east of the east end of Lake Petén Itzá.

Some Postclassic ceramic data conform to the geographic division suggested by architecture. Of particular importance is the correspondence of the Topoxté ceramic group with the distribution of temple assemblages: Topoxté ceramics are common in vicinities where these distinctive complexes are located, but they are not common to the south, west, or north shores of Lake Petén Itzá. Also of interest is the fact that Topoxté ceramics are not decorated with identifiable reptilian motifs, while Paxcaman and Trapeche ceramics do carry such serpent imagery. There is some geographic overlap between these groups: Paxcaman and Trapeche ceramics are found with Topoxté ceramics in the basins of lakes Salpetén and Mancanché, and also at Negroman-Tipú, but not on the islands of the site of Topoxté (P. Rice 1989:fig. 21-10). Nonetheless, the distribution of temple assemblages and Topoxté pottery does parallel documentary evidence for the presence of the Kowoj, while Paxcaman and Trapeche ceramics do not. The latter may well stylistically signal the Kan Ek' and Itzá, allied lineages with Kan ('serpent') matronyms.

We believe that the Late Postclassic east-west territorial division of the central Petén lakes district develops and first becomes significant in the late Late Classic period. The regionalization of Petén reflected in Terminal Classic ceramics, discussed above, can also be seen in architectural and monument data. Late Classic «plaza plan 2» residential plans (Becker 1971), plazuelas of four structures with the eastern building being a pyramidal shrine, were first identified at Tikal and their incidence declines with distance from that site, but they are only found east of Lake Petén Itzá. Late Classic twin-pyramid complexes, also a Tikal innovation, are confined in their distribution to the territory east of Petén Itzá. Finally, a constellation of features of carved 10th-cycle stelae —wedge-shape, celebration of calendrical Period Ending dates, «scattering» as the central theme, the presence of «sky figures» or «cloud riders» as a secondary theme, and decorated borders— is found only in the east (P. Rice 1997) and many of these monuments make explicit references to Tikal and its rulers.

The characteristics that mark the eastern half of the Terminal Classic east-west sociopolitical division hypothesized here collectively reflect Tikal's hegemony or influence. While no similar set of Late Classic characteristics or political markers have yet been identified to the west, the Postclassic Kan Ek' domain is western and much of the history of the Itzá appears to have involved alliances, conflict, and/or efforts at expansion to the east. The political geography of Postclassic Petén would seem to have been shaped by this long-term dynamic between east and west, a geography and dynamic that will be better known as Proyecto Maya-Colonial investigates additional sites in both zones.

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