

## TOPOXTE AND TAYASAL: ETHNOHISTORY IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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*Some questions concerning the Postclassic Peten can be answered by systematic use of ethnohistoric sources with archaeological data. A review and re-analysis of these data for the Itza capital Tayasal are presented. A plausible argument is formulated for a relocation of the ethnohistoric Tayasal as the archaeologically recognized Postclassic site of Topoxte in Lake Yaxha, Guatemala. It is further argued that a closer correlation of the ethnohistoric data with the archaeological record and a complete re-analysis of other pertinent data may prove useful to the archaeologist when confronted with conflicting interpretations or concepts.*

At present, Maya studies suffer from imbalance . . . many archaeologists seldom lift their eyes from their excavations to see how colonial sources can supplement their findings, or are content to satisfy their curiosity with Landa's account of the Maya . . . [Thompson 1970:xvii].

FEW LATE "MAYA" OR ITZA archaeological sites have been related to their historic counterparts. Carmack's (1973) Utatlan and Quiche studies and Guillemin's (1965) work at Iximche represent recent progress in such correlations within the Highland Maya area. The Lowland Itza capital of Tayasal, however, has long been considered to have been identified archaeologically in Lake Peten-Itza. Maler (1910) was the first modern explorer to assign Tayasal to this location (Fig. 1) on the basis of local verbal traditions and his belief that the Itza capital must have been in or on the largest lake in the Peten. Over the years two schools of thought have

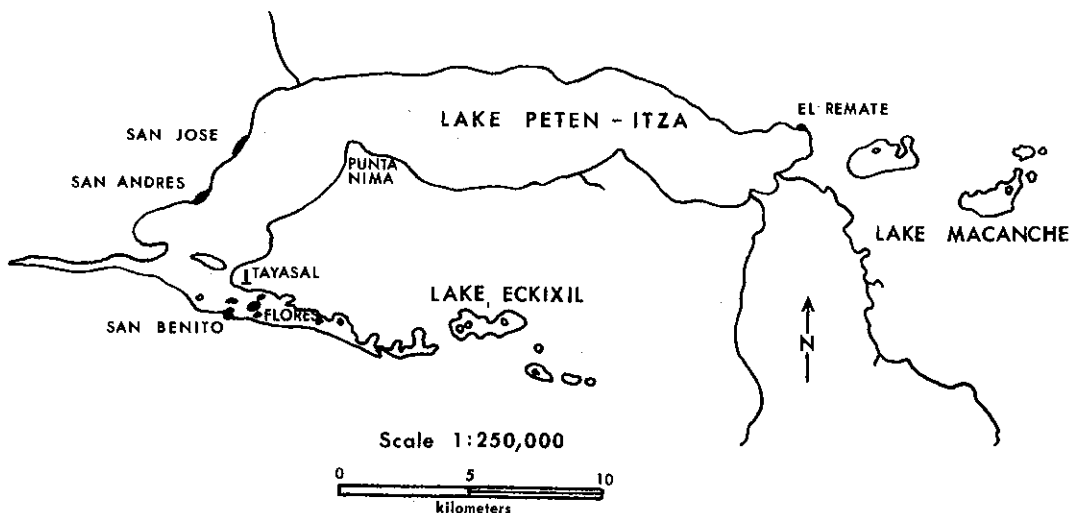


Fig. 1. Map of Lake Peten-Itza.

emerged regarding this placement: one locates the site on the peninsula bearing its name (Reina 1956); the other under the modern city of Flores (Thompson 1951). It is the contention of this paper that a re-examination of both the ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence suggests an alternative location, at Topoxte, 45 km to the east in Lake Yaxha.

As one of the founding fathers of Maya archaeology, Maler's placement and interpretation of sites have rarely been disputed. Maler (1910:168), however, was in conflict with the ethnohistoric

observational data in many of his interpretations. The differences between the colonial sources and Maler's subsequent reworking of the data and relocation of sites are not obvious at first glance. If the differences are reviewed, however, it is surprising how poorly Lake Peten-Itza fits the ethnohistoric requirements. Simultaneously, the fact that the Lakes Yaxha-Sacnab region fit the ethnohistoric data becomes apparent. Both Thompson (1951) and Reina (1956) seriously considered the problem of the placement of Tayasal, but neither seems to have considered the possibility that they were trying to fit the ethnohistoric data to the wrong geographical area.

Tayasal was the last Itza stronghold to fall to the Spanish. It consequently has a long-documented history. Cortez passed through the city in 1525 on his way to Nito, leaving behind a lame horse, which came to be worshipped as the Itza thunder-god (Borhegyi 1963:14). Fuensalida and Orbita, who visited the site in 1618, smashed a stone image of this "horsegod." Many other travelers and priests were also documented visitors to the Itza capital, including Father Delgado who was killed by the Itza in 1623 (Maler 1910:168; Villagutierre 1933:109) and Avendano y Loyola, a Spanish missionary who came to Tayasal in 1695 and again in 1696.

#### TOPOXTE

It was, again, Maler (1908) who named Topoxte and Lake Yaxha in 1904. No historical record exists for the name "Topoxte," although the existence of the site was noted in 1831 by Juan Galindo (1834) in a report to the Society of Antiquaries of London. Galindo, however, probably never saw the site, although Topoxte's earlier name "Islapag" is noted in his records (Graham 1963:24). Maler (1908:70) noted that the lake in which Topoxte is located was called "Yaxha" by the natives and adopted this name as well as the name "Sacnab" for Yaxha's neighboring lake; he also noted that the two lakes were connected by a "natural canal" and that six islands and two islots existed in the western end of Lake Yaxha.

Whether or not it can be identified as Tayasal, Topoxte is a site of great importance in unraveling the Postclassic archaeological record in the Peten. It is one of the few late Postclassic sites there, but its exact chronological position has yet to be established. Bullard (1960, 1970, 1973) has noted, however, that the site has several similarities to late sites of the northern Yucatan, e.g., Mayapan and Tulum. Lundell (1934) made the first rough map of the main island's "ceremonial group" in 1933, and Bullard (1970) excavated at the site for two weeks in 1960. Bullard (1970) remapped the ceremonial group and formulated a new phase, the Isla phase, for the large amount of Topoxte Censer and Topoxte Red ceramic material which he found there. The architecture of Topoxte is definitely different from anything else yet found in the Peten.

In sum, the visible architectural remains of the Isla Phase display a number of features which are characteristic of the Postclassic Period. Probably most indicative are the building plans using columns and the stairway "balustrades" with vertical upper zones, as well as the concentrated settlement pattern and the island location. Certain architectural details—the slot-like basal moldings and the absence of medial moldings are two examples cited—appear to be local features on the basis of the little we know about Postclassic Maya architecture. Certainly, the resemblances between the Topoxte buildings and the known Postclassic buildings in Yucatan and Quintana Roo are not of such an order to support a belief that the Isla Phase represents a direct colonization from either of those areas [Bullard 1970:276].

Surely some type of influence from the Yucatan, if not a direct colonization, could be represented by these distinctive traits.

The site of Topoxte is located on five, at times land-locked islands in the western end of Lake Yaxha (Fig. 2); one small additional uninhabited island also exists in the lake. Bullard (1970:252) places the site on four islands and a peninsula and notes that he found no evidence along the shore for Isla phase-related architecture. A preliminary survey conducted by the author in the Lakes Yaxha-Sacnab area in the summer of 1972, however, turned up several important additional facts. Bullard's peninsula (Fig. 2, Island No. 5) is in fact intensively shored up with a high-walled terrace on its western side and must have been the sixth island noted by Maler in 1908. Furthermore, another Isla phase site on a small peninsula in the extreme northwestern reaches of Lake Yaxha was tentatively defined on the basis of surface ceramic material and structural type; this site was

given the name "Cobanchak." This site indicates that the settlement in the Isla phase was probably more extensive than Bullard thought.

The Postclassic ruins of Topoxte start approximately four meters above the present level of Lake Yaxha. Bullard (1970:252) interprets this as being a "fair indication that the level during ancient times was approximately the same or slightly higher than at present." Postclassic domestic units found by the University of Pennsylvania's Tayasal Project were generally at lake's edge (W. R. Coe and Robert Sharer, personal communication). From this evidence, it can be inferred that late Postclassic occupation existed at water level. Taking this as an index, it can safely be assumed that the water level at Lake Yaxha was indeed higher when Topoxte was occupied. This assumption is also supported by the extreme fluctuation in lake level noted at Lake Yaxha by Maler (1908), Lundell (1934), and Bullard (1960, 1970). With a higher lake level, six islands would be in existence (agreeing with Villagutierre's account), a large amount of land to the southwest of the lake in the Arroyo Ixtinto area would be under water, and Lakes Yaxha and Sacnab would be connected via the natural canal noted by Maler (1908:70). A large body of water would thus be formed about twelve kilometers long and up to five-and-a-half kilometers wide. Three additional lakes also exist to the northwest of Lake Yaxha.

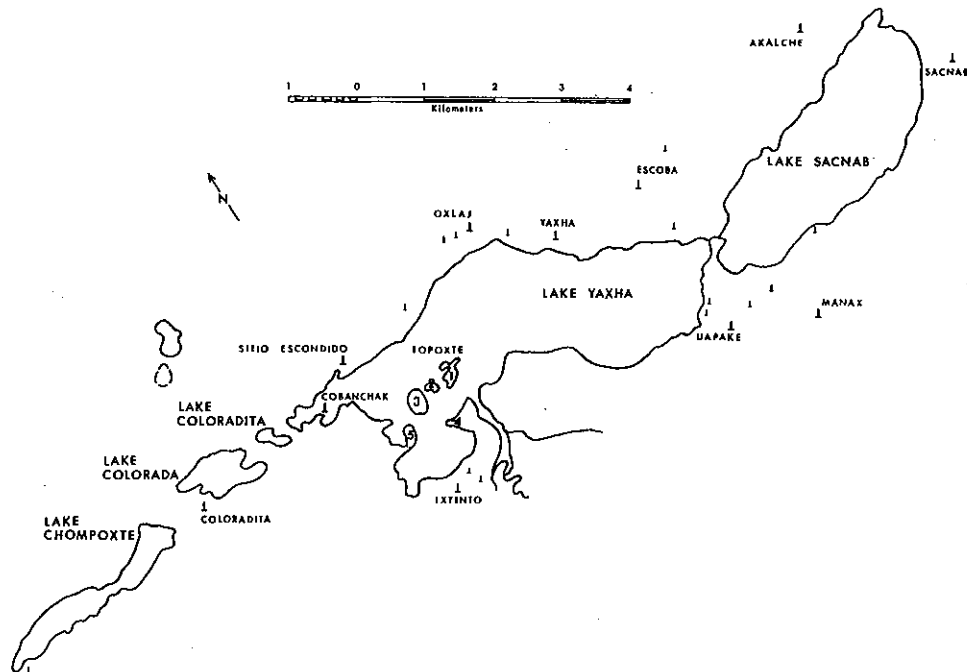


Fig. 2. Map of Lake Yaxha region, the islands of Topoxte, and local sites. Key: Named archaeological sites: (▲); Mounds: (○); Sites numbered 1 to 5 correspond to Topoxte.

Bullard (1970:301) believes that Yaxha did not have any inhabitants in 1618 because Fuensalida and Orbita state that they saw no people at a lake which their Indian guide called "Yaxha." He, therefore, gives this 1618 as the maximum date for the Isla phase. The failure of Fuensalida and Orbita to mention any settlements or to even find any canoes at a lake as large as Yaxha is indeed strange. Cowgill (1963:417), however, doubts that the missionaries ever saw the present-day Lake Yaxha; he thinks that the Indian guides, wishing to make milpa, deliberately

misled the padres. If this is true, it is very probable that Fuensalida and Orbita crossed an entirely different lake, such as Lake Yaloch or Lake Chompoxté. Since this is the only reference to a "Lake Yaxha" in all of the colonial literature, and as it is based on traditional data, it is a weak argument for the abandonment of the present-day Yaxha by 1618.

According to Villagutierre, for a long time during the colonial period, "Tipu" (doubtless Tubusil) in Yucatan, was said to have been the nearest inhabited place to the country of the Itzae. I will remark here by way of parenthesis, that Villagutierre confuses the lakes lying between Tubusil and Lake Peten, i. e., Silbituk, Chanlaguna or others, with those lying east of Lake Peten, i. e., Sacpeten and Yaxha [Maler 1910:168].

This is an instance of Maler's incorrect interpretation of observational data. Villagutierre apparently makes a specific connection between Tayasal and the lakes of the Yaxha region. Unfortunately, Maler ignored Villagutierre's observational data. Cogolludo also noted that Tipu or "Tubusil" was the closest populated settlement between the Caribbean and the Itzae (Willey and others 1965:28). If it is therefore assumed that Villagutierre did not confuse his lakes, it is quite possible that there is a direct correlation between the Itzae and Lake Yaxha. While the observational data points to the probability that Topoxte was the Itza capital Tayasal, the archaeological remains must be the deciding factor.

#### LAKE PETEN-ITZA

Over the years, the questions of the location of Tayasal and of the situation in the Postclassic Peten lured excavators to the supposed Tayasal area of Lake Peten-Itza—from Guthe to Ricketson to Cowgill to W. R. Coe, Sharer, and Loten. Guthe's (1922:318-19) excavations provided little insight into the Postclassic situation in the Peten. During the early 1960s, Cowgill excavated in the main plaza of the town of Flores in an attempt to describe the Postclassic Peten and to gain the missing archaeological sequence between the Maya "collapse" and the Spanish conquest. Cowgill (1963:433) said that:

As far as the sources known to me are concerned, the 18th century in the Peten is a total blank. No doubt this is mainly because scholarly interest has been in the pre-conquest rather than the colonial history of the area.

Cowgill (1963:445) postulates two types of Itza arrival into the Peten: (1) a late arrival of a sizable population with a culture which largely replaced the early Postclassic culture; or (2) "a late arrival of a numerically small aristocracy who imposed their rule and name on a local population, perhaps introducing new religious rites but otherwise having little effect on language and culture." He (1963:5) also noted a lack of work in the vicinity of Lake Peten-Itza, "where ethnographic evidence placed the Itza capital," and that:

... there is not one item of ethnographic data that would enable one to state whether any of the archaeological material so far known for the Postclassic Period in the Peten could be attributed to the 16th and 17th century inhabitants or their immediate ancestors, or whether it might not be substantially earlier [Cowgill 1963:443].

After digging in the plaza at Flores and in other areas, Cowgill found only a single floor and little ceramic material that could tentatively be ascribed to a possible Itza population. He (1963:9) concluded that:

On the whole the results of the field work were disappointing, in that such things as pure Postclassic deposits, stratigraphic data of any value, and data on structures or other non-ceramic culture traits were not obtained.

Although plenty of Paxcaman and Augustine ceramics exist on the lake shore, Cowgill was forced by the lack of late Postclassic ceramics to examine the possibility of both early and late Itza arrivals into the Peten. The Itzae left the Chichen-Itza/Mayapan area in a Katun Eight Ahau, which occurs in either A.D. 1200 or A.D. 1450. A lost entrada of Father Fuensalida places the Itza migration to the Peten at about 1440 (Cowgill 1963:447). Cowgill (1963:446) argues that if the Itza arrived early, "one is free to assume that the bulk of the Postclassic archaeological material found in the Peten was made by the ancestors of the 16th century population," but that if the Itza arrived in sizable numbers late in the history of the Peten (around 1440), "one would expect to find a phase in the ceramic sequence in the Central Peten represented by pottery like that of Late

Postclassic Mayapan, or at least something viewable as a direct outgrowth from it, since Mayapan-like ceramics are found late at Chichen-Itza" (Cowgill 1963:445). Such Mayapan-like ceramics, then, should indicate an "Itza presence." Cowgill (1963:445-46) also noted that it was possible that:

... late refugees from Chichen-Itza no longer made any slipped pottery when they reached the Peten. There is something to be said for this conjecture, and the Mayapan-like coarse unslipped effigy incensarios which are rather widespread in the Peten (and throughout the southern Maya lowlands) could be viewed as representing the Itza immigration either bodily or in terms of the spread of new rituals . . .

In 1971, the University of Pennsylvania excavations at Tayasal and the savanna site of Cenoti disclosed little "late" Postclassic evidence for Itza occupation except for meager censer material at Punta Nima. "Early" Postclassic material was, on the other hand, plentiful (W. R. Coe and R. J. Sharer, personal communication). The site commonly referred to as "Tayasal," located on the Tayasal Peninsula, was also demonstrated to be a Classic Maya site.

#### ETHNOHISTORICAL AND OBSERVATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although the Lake Peten-Itza area does have ten islands, no grouping of any five can fit the ethnohistoric descriptions. Villagutierre and other early chroniclers such as Elorza y Rada clearly state that the Itza capital existed on five islands in a lake known as "Chaltuna" with "more than twenty-six leagues of bordering land or circumference" (Villagutierre 1933:381). Villagutierre (1933:382) states that four other islands a short distance away from the main island were also heavily populated. Villagutierre specifically states that Tayasal was located on five neighboring "islands" and that there was yet another island close by which was uninhabited.

Avendano estimates a population of 24,000 to 25,000 people for the five islands composing Tayasal, and Villagutierre states that this population estimate did not include the villages on the shore (Cowgill 1963:495). While this estimate may be inflated, it must still be assumed from Avendano's observational data that a sizable Itza population did exist on the five islands. Even if no evidence of Itza occupation could be found on Flores due to the extensive present-day city, colonial sources indicate that occupational evidence should be plentiful on at least four other islands. This evidence has not been found in the Lake Peten-Itza area. Neither the islands nor the archaeological record of the Itza, then, exist in Lake Peten-Itza. The absence of such evidence cannot be attributed solely to poor preservation.

The fact that all of the early colonial sources before 1700 place Tayasal on five islands has caused considerable problems for modern scholars, the most recent being Reina (1956). A 1923 topographic survey of the Lake Peten-Itza area by a United States Geological Survey under J. O. Kilmartin conclusively showed that the Tayasal Peninsula could never have been an island because the water could not have risen high enough to have isolated it. Moreover, the survey did not discover four other islands in close proximity to Flores which had been occupied in the Postclassic.

It is believed that the foregoing facts established by the survey and the topographic map clearly prove that the present Peninsulas of San Benito, Candelaria, and Tayasal were not islands as described by Father Avendano in the account of his visits to Lake Peten-Itza in 1695 and 1696. It is more than likely that the present Tayasal was the capital city of the Itza, but certainly it was not located upon an island. The Spanish missionaries were wrong either in their descriptions or in their interpretation of the Maya word *peten* as meaning "island," which latter seems to be the more probable explanation of their confusion in this matter [J. O. Kilmartin in Morley 1938: Vol. 4, p. 357].

The earliest map of Tayasal (Means 1917, Pl. 1), made by Avendano, differs from all other maps of Lake Peten-Itza (Fig. 3), and it is very doubtful that it represents Lake Peten-Itza. Lake Yaxha is not located on any of the early maps of the Peten including those dating from 1825 and 1829 (in *Libro Blanco* 1938). Avendano describes entering the lake containing Tayasal through "a little town called Nich, which consists of about Ten houses" (Means 1917:131). If this "landing place" were on the north side of the lake, then the Postclassic site of Cobanchak, located in the northwestern reaches of Lake Yaxha, may be the small town of Nich. Other research may show that the Chankan-Itzas (Means 1917:129) were located at Lake Chompoxte.

Avendano is generally credited with being the first European to have seen the site of Tikal in

1696 from a small aguada called Tan-xuluc-mul (Means 1917:128). What is more important, however, is that Avendano relates that from this point he traveled 14 leagues in a southeasterly direction in order to arrive at Tayasal (Means 1917:128-31). It is interesting to note that no known site that would fit his description exists today northwest of Lake Peten-Itza, but that Tikal lies northwest of Lake Yaxha (see Fig. 4). Maler made the overland trip from Tikal to Yaxha coming "out at the northern shore of the great Lake Yaxha, having travelled in all about 14 leagues (60 km.)" (Maler 1908:57).

It can be demonstrated that Cortez' 1525 route through the Peten fits the Lake Yaxha region (Fig. 4). For years, archaeologists and historians alike have been unable to explain how Cortez became entangled in a treacherous passage in the Maya Mountains so soon after leaving Lake Peten-Itza. Questions have also been raised as to exactly how Cortez came to Lake Chaltuna and why Cortez' troops had such difficulty getting to the south side of the lake, crossing "a great stretch of swamps up to our waist in water, and sometimes even higher" (Stone 1932:225). Following Maler, most investigators have simply glossed over the geographic problems created by the ethnohistoric records and ignored the possibility that they could be describing something other than the Lake Peten region. If Cortez' route is relocated in the Lake Yaxha area, the ethnohistoric data fits neatly into place. Cortez' troops would indeed have had difficulty in going around Lake Yaxha because the area is composed of rough karst topography on the western and northern sides, and extensive marshy areas exist to the southeast of Lake Sacnab and Lake Yaxha. Lake Yaxha is also much closer to the Maya Mountains than Lake Peten-Itza; this fact can explain Cortez' quick entry into these mountains.

General Ursua built a road from Veracruz into the Tayasal area and went on to his conquest of Tayasal in 1697 armed with a flagship and cannon (Means 1917:184-85). Villagutierre notes that the roadbuilding of 1695 was continued to a point 17 leagues beyond Chuntuqui (Morley 1938[1]:49). The shore of Lake Peten-Itza (San Andres) is much less than 17 leagues overland; Cowgill (1963:426) gives a figure of 16 leagues distance in a straight line. Villagutierre also states that it required the entire year of 1696 to build the road to Tayasal from the point reached in 1695 (Cowgill 1963:426). It may therefore be inferred that Lake Peten-Itza did not contain the city of Tayasal, but rather that Tayasal lay to the east in Lake Yaxha.

Villagutierre (1933:393) vividly described the troops of Ursua explaining the destruction of Tayasal to the people of Guatemala City. Reina (1956:27) stated that "Ursua destroyed the idols and oratories of Tayasal, founded three settlements there with the Maya population, and began the development of a fortress . . ." The Spanish defeat of the Itzae has been related to a sense of fatalism among the Itzae, of which Avendano was aware, that made it useless for them to fight any longer against the incoming "Katun of Change" (Cowgill 1963:167). Although Ursua conquered the main island, it is uncertain whether he conquered the other four inhabited islands. The fact that many of the Itzae threw themselves into the water to swim for safety undermines the argument of those who would see Tayasal as a peninsula in Lake Peten-Itza (Reina 1956:25). There is a lack of data concerning what really happened in the conquest; any data is muddled by apparent justifications and deliberate falsification of the actual events (Villagutierre 1933:393, 404).

There are problems in correlating some of the ethnohistorical sources, but they do not necessarily contradict any of the data stated above. According to Villagutierre (1933:407), Ursua built a fort for a detachment of men at Tayasal:

After careful work in the construction, it was finished by the first days of the month of the year 97. It is located on the center of a plaza at the plain high on the island from where the population, lake, and its environs can be seen. It is square with four bulwarks on a platform with "faginas" and strong pieces of wood and a dry wall or "albarrada" on the outside and is crowned with three pieces of artillery, six large "pedreros," and six other "esmeriles."

Although Borhegyi (1963:16) states that the island of Tayasal "was fortified by the Spanish and made into a penal colony" in "1698," he cites no reference for this date and there are no references to Tayasal in the eighteenth century. It is doubtful, therefore, that Borhegyi's date for the establishment of a penal colony on Tayasal can be substantiated. Elorza y Rada (1930:68-79)

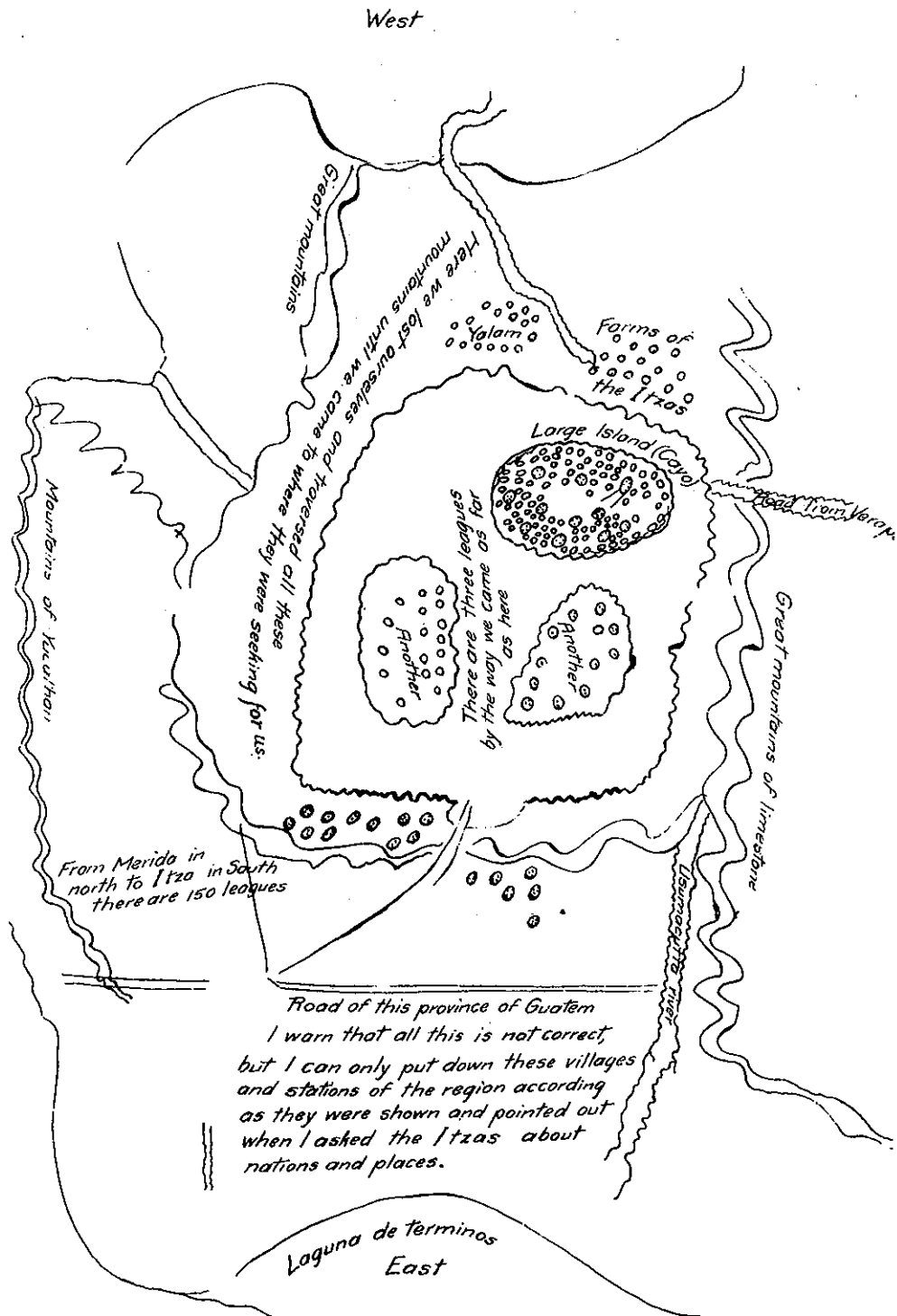


Fig. 3. Earliest known map of Tayasal excerpted from Means (1917, Plate 1). Note that Means has east and west reversed.

implies that this fort was abandoned soon after its establishment, although he does *not* directly say so. The *Pequena Monografia del Peten* (Soza 1957:311) says that the Peten was not colonized by the Spanish until 1700, or three full years after the conquest of Tayasal.

In three years, an unused road from Veracruz to Lake Chaltuna and an abandoned and destroyed city would easily have been reclaimed by a rain-forest environment. A road with such a short use-life would be hard to locate archaeologically after 250 years, but perhaps not so a Spanish fort.

Bullard mapped only what he considered to be the ceremonial center of Topoxte, the ruins on the western half of the island. In a survey of the Yaxha region in 1972, the eastern half of the island was examined keeping in mind the possibility that a Hispanic fort may have been located there. Several large plaza-like areas with Classic and Postclassic ceramics were found on the heights of the eastern part of the main island of Topoxte. Its eastern highpoint overlooks all of Lake Yaxha and would have been a perfect spot for the construction of the temporary Spanish fort.

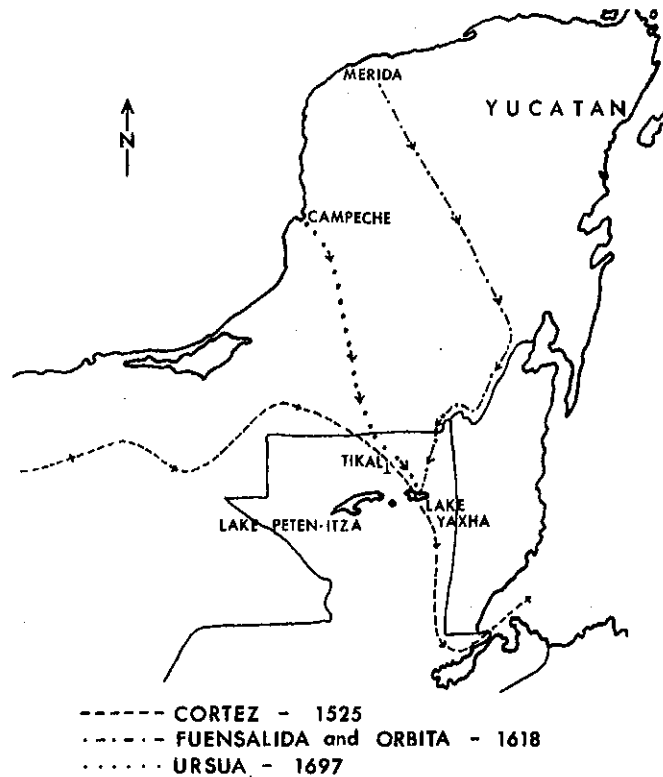


Fig. 4. Map of the Mesoamerican area showing the suggested re-routing of several ethnohistoric travel routes, redrawn after Borhegyi (1963).

#### TOPOXTE AS TAYASAL: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Avendano's description of Tayasal may well be a description of Topoxte; the layout of the ceremonial group on the main island of Topoxte correlates well with the observational data in the ethnohistoric literature (Fig. 5).

There were nine very large buildings for the worship of the said idols, all new, with traces of others which had been burned, although they build them again, as I saw in the case of two which had been rebuilt. All such buildings have a wall about a *vara* and a half high, and a little over four feet thick, the ben or seat all around,



which projects from the middle inwards is about two feet thick, so that both together form two rows of seats around the said churches, and all repainted and polished [Thompson 1951:395].

Structure C of Topoxte (Bullard 1970:255-63) is very much like the main temple of Tayasal as described by Villagutierre (1933:386):

Of the twenty places of worship or "adoratorios" that General Ursua and his men found on the island, the most important and largest one belonged to the head priest Quincanek, King Canek's cousin. It is squared with a beautiful substructure and nine steps all of beautiful rock, each "lienzo" or front of the building being approximately twenty "varas" wide and very tall.

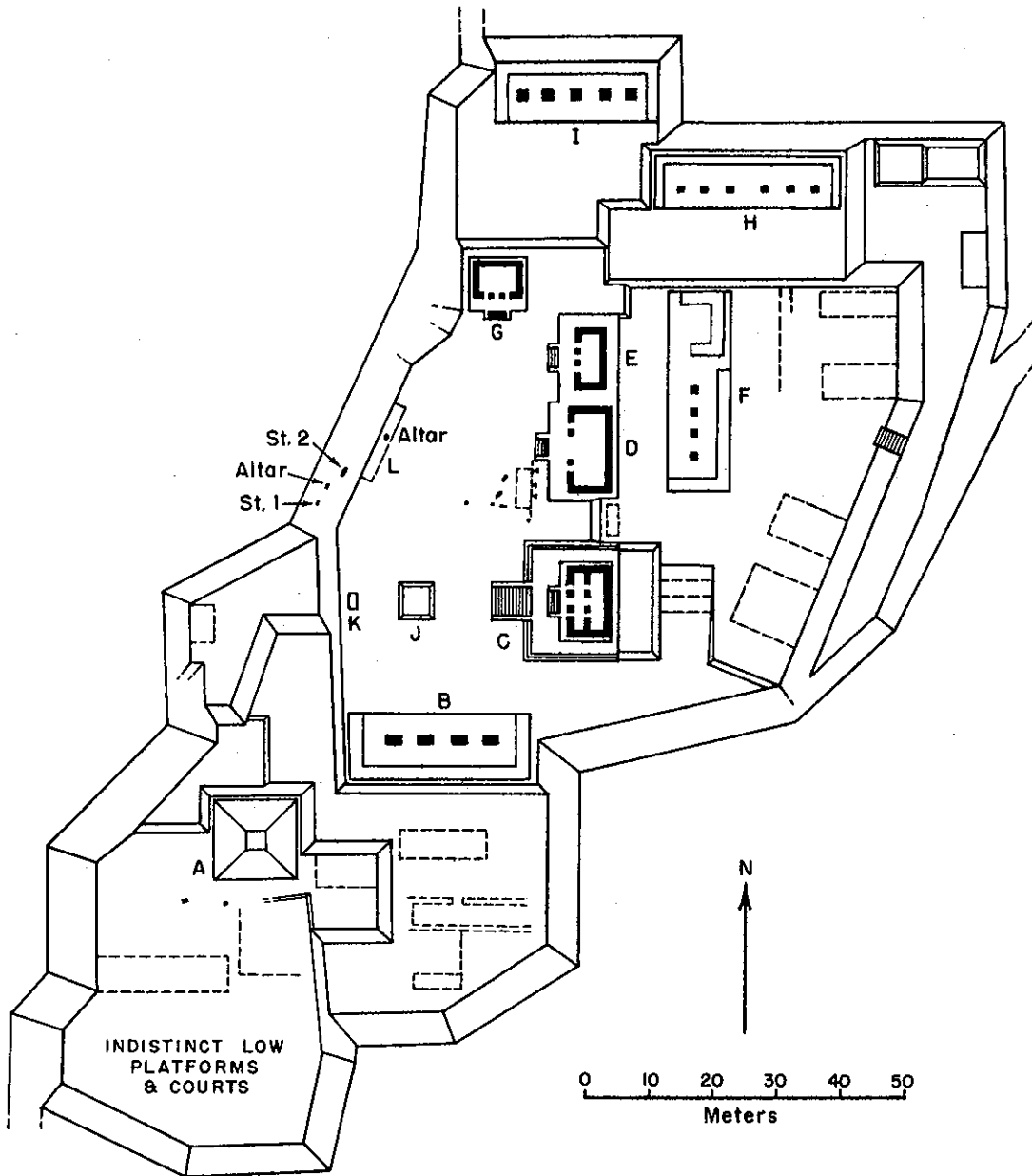


Fig. 5. Plan of the Main Group of Topoxte, after Bullard (1970).

Structure J "is a badly ruined platform in the middle of the plaza directly in front of the stairway of Structure C" (Bullard 1970:267). The location of this structure appears to fit the ethnohistoric description of the residence built on Tayasal for Fuensalida and Orbita (see Fig. 5, Structures C and J):

The House of Canek was some forty paces from the Lake and before it was a small square in which was the House which he had had built for the Religious and with which they were much pleased, seeing how near it was to his own and how easy it would be to communicate with him frequently [Means 1917:71].

Architectural evidence found by Bullard (1970:261) could also be interpreted as supporting an Itza habitation of the site of Topoxte. Cogollodo noted in his study of calendrics that the Itza:

Counted their eras and ages which they put in their books by groups of twenty years and by lustra of four years . . . When these lustra reached five, which is exactly twenty years, they called it a *Katun* and placed a carved [shaped] stone upon another, fixing them with lime and sand in the walls of their temples and houses of their priests [Means 1917:143].

Bullard (1970:261) noted that "both the main doorway [of Structure C] to the exterior and the interior doorway between the front and the back rooms are divided by square masonry columns." Lundell (1934:184) noted that round columns seemed to be inside these square columns. When Bullard (1970:261) excavated the square columns to see if they contained earlier round columns, he found that the round column core consisted of stones of different sizes, which he concluded were utilized simply as a constructional technique. It can be proposed that what Bullard found in this case of "column drums" is archaeological evidence of the ethnohistoric record, which would indicate that at least heavy Itza influence, if not the Itzae themselves, existed at Topoxte.

Bullard's excavations more than adequately demonstrated the close ceramic ties between Topoxte and the late ceramic phases of the northern Yucatan, although he (1960:554) notes that "seemingly missing from the Topoxte sequence is material indicating settlement in the early part of the Postclassic Period." Bullard (1960, 1970) defined two new pottery types, "Topoxte Censer" and "Topoxte Red," for the Isla phase in the Peten. Bullard (1970:300; 1960:553) noted a similarity between these ceramics and late wares from Tulum and Mayapan. This supports Cowgill's (1963:445) hypothesis that an Itza population moved into the Peten area at a late date. If these interpretations stand, Topoxte may represent a continuation of the Mayapan ceramic tradition.

In an attempt to define a Central Peten Postclassic ceramic tradition, Bullard (1973) excavated a single housemound on the island of Macanche. Based on a stratified deposit there, he (1973:231) concluded that Topoxte pottery arrived at the end of Macanche occupation, corresponding to the end of Paxcaman ceramics there. Bullard (1973:229) thereupon divided the Postclassic Peten into four subperiods. The Augustine ceramic group was dated from A.D. 900 to A.D. 1100 with Paxcaman becoming the dominant ceramic group after A.D. 1000 and lasting until the historic period. The Topoxte ceramic group was dated between A.D. 1250 and A.D. 1450; Bullard (1973:232) has it being abandoned in his early Period IV.

Bullard's placement of the Topoxte ceramic group is confusing and he (1973:240) himself notes, "I am only too conscious of the extent to which my current conceptions are based on negative evidence." As the Topoxte ceramic group is found only at Lakes Yaxha and Macanche and as there is no Paxcaman or Augustine at Topoxte, Bullard (1973:237) concluded that there was little or no pottery exchange between Lakes Yaxha and Peten. Bullard (1973:228) also noted that figurine censers of the Topoxte type but with Paxcaman paste have been found at Lake Peten-Itza. If Topoxte, however, supersedes Paxcaman at Macanche and Topoxte-like figurines are in late association with Paxcaman at Lake Peten-Itza, this would argue for a later placement of the Topoxte ceramic group than the relative placement given it by Bullard. If such placement is denied, the Peten must be viewed as a void after about A.D. 1450 in spite of ethnohistoric data to the contrary.

Because of his dating of the Topoxte ceramic group, Bullard (1973:231) was forced to conclude that "the Peten-Itza have yet to be identified as an archaeological complex" and that "no evidence exists from archaeological finds to date" which would validate their presence in the

Peten. There is no reason that the Topoxte ceramic group could not and should not represent the Itza occupation; the evidence presented in this paper overwhelmingly points to this interpretation. A revision of Bullard's Central Peten Postclassic ceramic tradition, illustrating the later placement of the Topoxte ceramic group and a longer extension of both the Augustine and Paxcaman groups, is shown in Fig. 6. The Paxcaman group may have extended well into the late Postclassic period, as Bullard (1973:228) indicated.

As no ceramics have been found at Lake Yaxha representing an early Postclassic tradition, the Yaxha area was probably uninhabited at this time. A late Itza migration would most likely have occupied a "vacant" portion of the Peten rather than one already extensively occupied by native peoples. Thompson (1951:395) offers evidence consistent with the notion of a migration of an

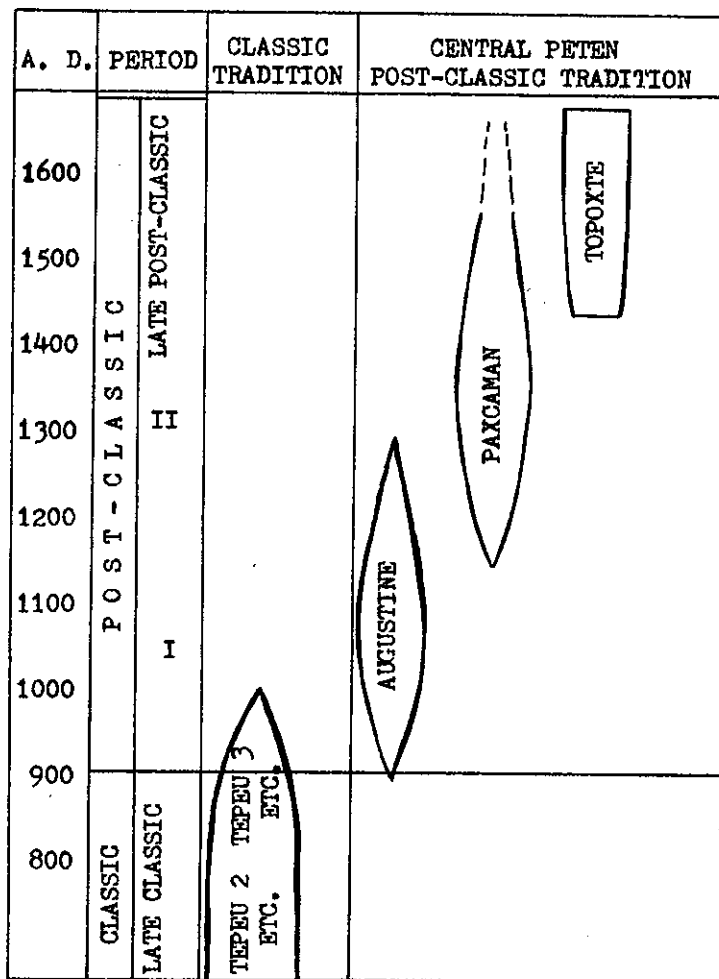


Fig. 6. Hypothesized sequence of Peten Post-Classic periods and ceramic groups accepting Topoxte as ethnohistoric Tayasal-modeled and re-drawn after Bullard (1973).

Itza elite group when he states that the Itza chiefs had private temples while the common people worshipped in woods or caves. These common people may well represent the natives of the area, but only those who were "brought" into the area by an "expansionist, elite" (Bullard 1973:240) group from the north—namely, the Itzae.

Architecturally, Bullard's (1970:275) research demonstrates a close resemblance of Topoxte architecture to that of both Mayapan and Tulum. The colonnaded halls and inset moldings just above the plinth at the base of buildings are strongly representative of Mayapan architecture, while the beam and mortar roofs (Bullard 1970:262) inferred for Topoxte may represent the late coastal Tulum or Isla Civiltuk tradition of architecture.

Perhaps most significant is that in Bullard's excavations of the main temple of Topoxte, Structure C, he found smashed censers and redware littering the floor, very reminiscent of the Spanish conquest in which all the discovered "idols" were broken. Maler (1910:169) noted that after the conquest of Tayasal, the first order of business was "Ursua's order to his men to demolish all images in the temples and elsewhere. This 'work' lasted from half-past eight o'clock in the morning until half-past five in the evening, or for nine hours." Bullard (1970:262-63) also makes the pertinent observation concerning Topoxte's Structure C that "the litter of censers on the floor shows that the roof must have fallen soon after the abandonment--perhaps at the time of the abandonment." The logical question is whether this could have been the result of some overzealousness on the part of Ursua's troops. Ethnohistoric sources such as Villagutierre (1933:393, 405) would lead to this interpretation. The date of May 13, 1697 (Maler 1910:169), the day on which Ursua conquered Tayasal, is offered as the terminus for the Isla phase as well as the Postclassic period in the Peten.

#### INTERPRETATIONS

If Topoxte were Tayasal, reasons must be proposed to explain a shift from Lake Yaxha to Lake Peten-Itza sometime between 1697 and 1700. Structure C at Topoxte may exemplify one reason; if Ursua put Tayasal to ruin, there would have been nothing left as an unifying factor for the Itza people. Means (1917) noted the weakness of the overall Itza political organization. Much emphasis is also placed in the ethnohistoric literature on the lack of people in the Tayasal area immediately following Ursua's takeover of Tayasal. "When in due time Ursua and his men got to Peten Grande, they found nothing but old women and little children there. All who could had fled into and across the lake rather than face the vengeance of the Spaniards" (Means 1917:185). Elorza y Rada (1930:76) also tells of the Itza prisoners' entrance into the town of Verapaz and the city of "Guatemala," but does not date this event although he (1930:77) correlates it with the abandonment of the island due to lack of "a steady supply of foodstuffs." Elorza y Rada (1930:74) also gives the impression that a permanent settlement was not established at Lake Chaltuna until the early part of the eighteenth century as the Royal Chancery of Guatemala "decided that the City and Fortress should be founded on the shore of the Lake upon the Mainland, whence the region would be dominated with less inconvenience than from the Peten or Island . . . ." Between the abandonment of Tayasal and the establishment of Flores, no record exists to describe the events which took place. Thompson (1970:65) points out that Villagutierre makes it obvious that the Spaniards were struck soon after their conquest with sickness which "grew worse with the coming of the rainy season." Sickness and disease, then, combined with other factors, such as a lack of food, probably brought about the abandonment of the Yaxha area by both the Spaniards and Itzae.

Between Tayasal's downfall and the establishment of Flores, then, a population shift took place from the Lake Yaxha region to the Lake Peten region. A map described by Reina (1956:26) as having been found in association with documents dating between 1700 and 1750 clearly represents Lake Peten-Itza. There is confusion as to the date of the founding of the present-day city of Flores; it may be inferred, however, that Flores came into existence sometime between 1700 and 1715. Bullard and Bullard (1965:39) point out that even Tipu, a village well known to the Spanish, "disappears from history about 1700, shortly after the Spanish conquest of the Peten"; its exact location is still a mystery today. If the ethnohistoric city of Tayasal existed in Lake Yaxha, then sometime after 1697, but before the formulation of the above-mentioned map, the Yaxha region had to be abandoned in favor of the Peten-Itza region.

With their leaders in chains and taken away, there may have been a migration of the majority of the Itza population to the Lake Peten-Itza region, an area yet untouched by the Spaniards. Such a large scale population shift would not have been unprecedented, for the Itza had already successfully accomplished one earlier in their history when faced with similar unfavorable circumstances. With no political or religious leadership to hold the fragmented Itza together, any existing organizational principles would have likely fallen completely apart and left the Itza to drift along as individual kin or domestic units who resettled in other areas of the Peten to escape Spanish domination. Probably a combination of the above factors resulted in the relocation of a sizable Itza population around the Lake Peten-Itza area, the same area to which the Spanish settlers of the eighteenth century were drawn. Until the archaeological record of the Postclassic Peten is better understood, however, this phenomenon and its explanation will remain unknown. Whatever the case, all Peten data after about 1715 definitely refer to the existence of Flores in the Lake Peten-Itza area.

Until full research is completed, several alternative possibilities must remain open for Postclassic Topoxte. Topoxte might have been a late Itza outpost which was not Tayasal, or there might have been a preconquest (1697) migration from Yaxha to Peten-Itza. Topoxte may not be Itza at all, but rather Mopan. Cowgill (1963:461), however, notes that the later ethnohistoric division between the Itza and the Mopan may be a false interpretation of the earlier record and that the Itza and the Mopan were in fact the same people. It is submitted, however, that the information available would heavily favor an interpretation of Topoxte being the ethnohistoric Tayasal.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The value of combining ethnohistoric and archaeological evidence is demonstrated in this paper. When a major discrepancy between primary and secondary ethnohistorical literature was noted, a re-analysis of the colonial and modern literature suggested that Tayasal did not fit its assumed location in Lake Peten-Itza. Further, it was discovered that the inferred placement of Tayasal in Lake Peten-Itza was due solely to reliance on interpretational and traditional data and that this location was probably incorrect. The archaeological data supported this conclusion. The conflict was resolved by considering an alternative hypothesis that Tayasal was the Postclassic site of Topoxte in Lake Yaxha. Both the archaeological and observational data were found to be in agreement with this hypothesis. On that basis, new interpretations concerning the later history of the Peten were presented.

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