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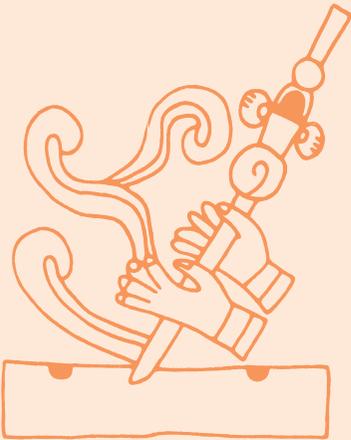
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〈調査研究報告〉

Excavation at Nixtun-Ch'ich', Guatemala: Exploring the Material Culture of the Chak'an Itza

Yuko SHIRATORI *

1 Introduction

Recent excavations conducted by the Proyecto Arqueológico Itza investigated lakeshore structures at Nixtun-Ch'ich', Guatemala. This project is part of the continuous effort to reconstruct the political geography of the Petén lakes region at the time of Spanish Contact (1525-1697 CE) (Pugh et al. 2012, 2016; Rice and Rice 1980, 1990; Rice and Rice 2009, 2018). While archival research by Grant Jones (1998) has already ethnohistorically reconstructed the seventeenth-century political geography, our archaeological research is an attempt at “ground-truthing” those ethnohistory claims. Specifically, it is expected to correlate material culture to ethnohistory.

Could archaeologically recovered materials be in line with ethnohistory? Archaeologists who have worked in the Petén lakes region face difficulties in defining the soil layers of Contact and Colonial periods (1525-1700+ CE). The reasons largely stem from the scarcity of European objects, such as Spanish fine wares (Rice and Cecil 2018:219). The ceramic assemblage cannot distinguish between Contact and Colonial periods, on the one hand, and the Postclassic period, on the other, unless European objects are encountered in the same layer. In addition, since the soil layers of Contact and Colonial periods lie close to the surface, they are easily contaminated and disturbed, and the utility of radiocarbon dating is limited. In that light, a key concern for recent archaeological research on the Postclassic to Contact periods in the Petén lakes region, has been to understand the relationship between variations of material culture and the identities of spatially and politically distinct groups (Pugh et al. 2016; Rice and Rice 2018).

This paper reports the field research at the southwestern shore (Sector PP) of the archaeological site of Nixtun-Ch'ich' and the preliminary analysis of ceramics that took place from July 2019 through March 2020. Our excavation examined whether structures on the shore served as a port or dock during the Postclassic to Contact period. Also, we attempted to identify patterns of ceramics in search of the Chak'an Itza's identity expression in the material culture.

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2 Chak'an Itza and the Port of Nich

Historical documents suggest that the western edge of Lake Petén Itzá was controlled by the Chak'an Itza, a “faction” of the Itza of Petén in the seventeenth century (Avendaño y Loyola 1987; Jones 1998). Spanish Fray Andrés de Avendaño y Loyola visited the Petén lakes region and met the lord of the Itza, Ajaw Kan Ek' (Avendaño y Loyola 1987). Ajaw Kan Ek' was the central lord of four provinces around Lake Petén Itzá, which were centered on the island capital of Tayza/Nojpeten (Figure 1). Each province was governed by a pair of senior-junior lords (*b'atab'oob*). The Chak'an Itza in the western province were under the control of K'in Kante and AjTut (Avendaño y Loyola 1987). Although the senior *b'atab'* of Chak'an Itza, K'in Kante was an uncle of Ajaw Kan Ek' of the Itza, and both rulers were in conflict with each other (Jones 1998). At the eve of the conquest, the Chak'an Itza established an alliance with the Kowoj in the eastern province against Ajaw Kan Ek' (Avendaño y Loyola 1987:50-52; Jones 1998:95). Thus, the “confederacy” of the Itza of Petén was extremely complex in the seventeenth century.

For the Itza confederacy, the location of Chak'an Itza was very important for its proximity to the western (Gulf coast and Yucatán) trading routes. Avendaño y Loyola visited the province of Chak'an Itza in 1696 and described the port of Nich or Ch'ich' on the peninsula (Avendaño y Loyola 1987:29-30; Vayhinger-Scheer 1997:32-33). Nich was a small lakeshore town of about ten houses (Avendaño y Loyola 1987:29; Vayhinger-Scheer 1997:32). Avendaño y Loyola described Nich as the principal town of the Chak'an Itza, governed by AjTut (Avendaño y Loyola 1987:30; Vayhinger-Scheer 1997:33). Avendaño y Loyola took a canoe to Tayza across Lake Petén Itzá from the port of Nich. The following year, when the Spanish conquistador Martín de Ursúa y Arizmendi visited, Nich was already abandoned and Ursúa founded a new town on the same site in order to attack the capital Tayza (Jones 1998). Grant Jones (1998:266) suggests that the inhabitants of Nich had evacuated prior to the arrival of Ursúa's troops.

After the Conquest, the Chak'an Itza established a new capital at Chun Ajaw near Lake Sacpuy (northwest of Nixtun-Ch'ich'). At the site of the former port of Nich, the mission San Jerónimo was established in 1702 and 16 families (36 houses) settled into the mission town (Jones 1998:392-394). However, in 1734 the mission San Jerónimo moved north near present-day San Andrés (Jones 1998:392).

According to Avendaño y Loyola (1987:30), Chak'an Itza was comprised of several settlements with about 600 inhabitants. From his first village in Chak'an Itza to Nich, he traveled about five leagues east (21 km). Since the principal town only contained about 10 houses, other settlements could be the same size or smaller. In his report “*Relación de las dos entradas que hice a la conversión de los gentiles ytzáex, y cehaches,*” Avendaño y Loyola drew a map of Lake Petén Itzá, probably presenting settlements and/or houses as dots and circles in the territory of Chak'an Itza (Avendaño y Loyola 1987; Vayhinger-Scheer 1997).

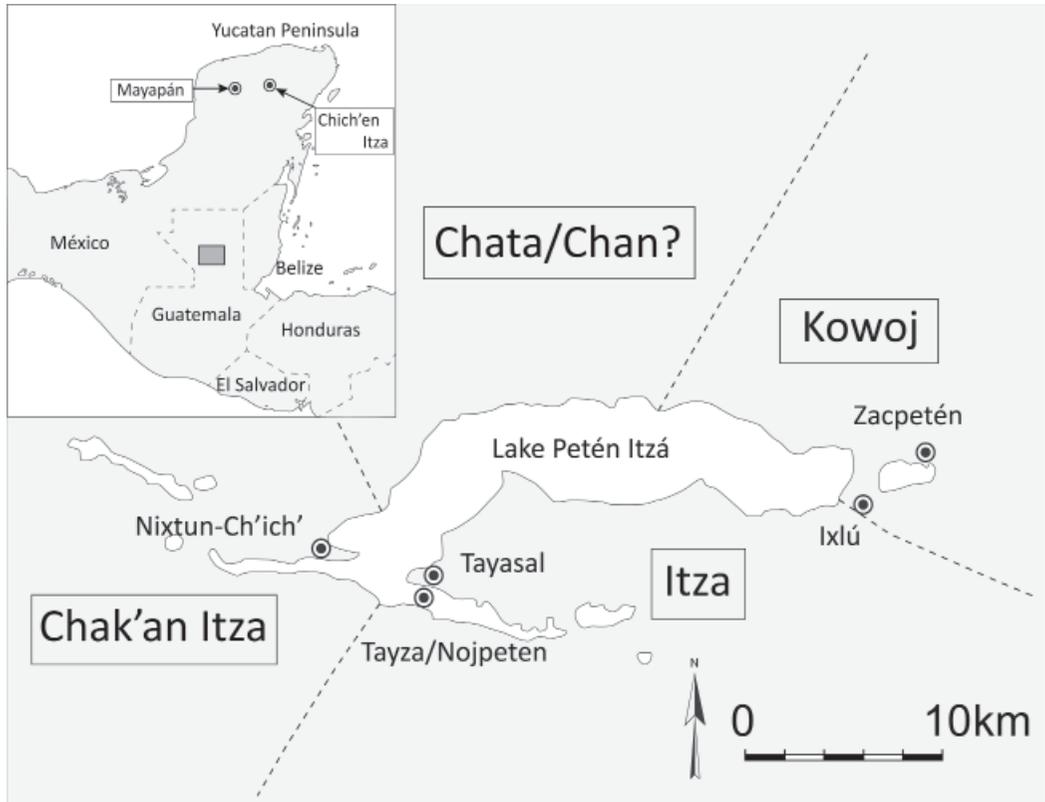


Figure 1 Map of Petén lakes region during the 17th century with suggested regions.

3 Nixtun-Ch'ich'

The archaeological site of Nixtun-Ch'ich' extends southeast over 3 km on the Candelaria Peninsula. Previous research at Nixtun-Ch'ich' revealed that it was occupied from as early as the eleventh century BCE to the eighteenth century CE (Pugh et al. 2016; Rice 2009b). The Postclassic occupation at Nixtun-Ch'ich' has been identified in upper layers across the peninsula, indicating that the site was inhabited widely during the Postclassic period, and possibly to the Contact and Colonial periods. The extensive site area has been divided and labeled by sectors for the purpose of spatial control by the Proyecto Arqueológico Itza (PAI) (Figure 2).

During previous excavations from 1995-2015, several sectors (Sectors CC, PP, QQ, XX, WW, and ZZ) were investigated focusing on the Postclassic to Colonial period along the lakeshore (Pugh et al. 2016; Rice 2009; Rice et al. 2007). Contact and Colonial period materials have been identified in Sectors XX and ZZ, the area east of a “wall and ditch complex,” which rests on the narrow neck of the peninsula (Figure 2). At Sector XX, a 60 x 60 m platform that supports at least five structures was partially excavated and yielded iron

nails (Rice et al. 2007). Although the structures were constructed during the pre-Contact period, they were occupied through the Contact period. At Sector ZZ, a salvage excavation at the tip of the peninsula yielded large numbers of pre-Contact ceramics and Spanish colonial materials such as iron knives, glass beads, and green-glazed “olive jars” at Structure ZZ1 (Rice 2009; Rice and Cecil 2018). With that in mind, Structure ZZ1 was likely a part of the mission San Jerónimo which dates from 1702 as well as a part of the seventeenth-century port of Nich (Pugh et al. 2016; Rice 2009).

Excavation at Structure CC1/1 in Sector CC revealed a 35 x 7 m structure, which appeared to be the Postclassic open hall (Meissner 2007; Pugh and Shiratori 2018). Open halls are common Postclassic constructions and probably functioned as both administrative and civic-ceremonial spaces. The excavator noted the presence of low, rectangular structures in front of the open hall (Structure CC1/1) (Meissner 2007:7-11). Sector WW contained a Postclassic plaza group that included a C-shaped shrine (Carlo 2007). Excavations at Sector QQ on the southern shore of the peninsula revealed a dual open hall construction (Structure QQ1/1) (Pugh et al. 2016). Artifact remains from Structure QQ1/1 contained fragmented Late Postclassic effigy censers, animal sculptures, and a piece of coral (Pugh et al. 2016).

These isolated groups of structures in the vicinity might have been the settlements that Avendaño y Loyola described and noted in his report. Although no European objects have been encountered in Sectors CC, QQ, and WW, the occupation likely continued into the seventeenth century. In search of European objects in the area west of the “wall and ditch complex,” the PAI has explored the south shore to the west of the peninsula (Pugh et al. 2016).

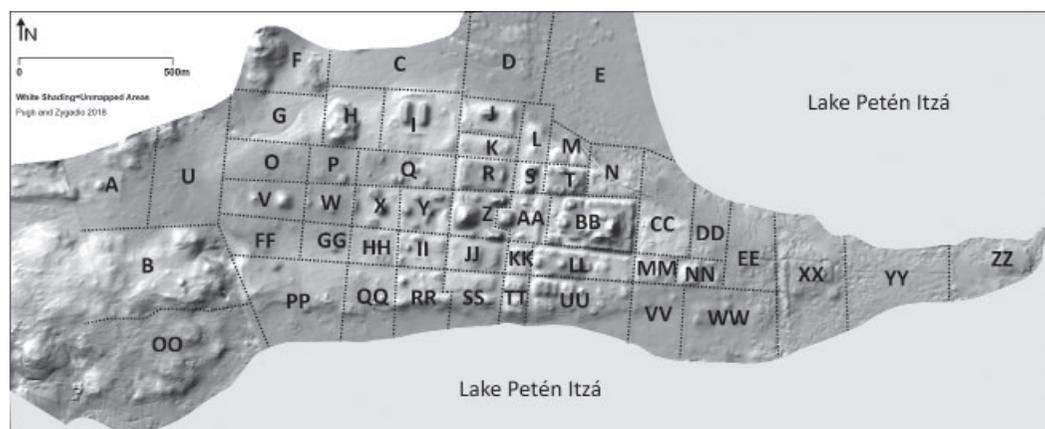


Figure 2 Map of Nixtun-Ch'ich' partitioned by the sectors. Map by Timothy Pugh and Gabriela Zygodlo.

4 Sector PP

Three hundred meters due east from Structure QQ1/1, which held the Postclassic dual open hall, Sector PP is located at the southern shore of the peninsula southwest from the central axis of Nixtun-Ch'ich'. The northern edge of this sector rests on the same terrain on which Structure QQ1/1 sits. The terrain then slopes down to the lake edge in the south of the sector. A congregation of buildings (Structure PP3) is located between the northern edge of the sector and the lake. The distance to the lake changes depending on the water level and was approximately 100 m from the southern edge of Sector PP in 2019.

Sector PP contains at least three structure groups: Structures PP1, PP2, and PP3. Structures PP1 and PP2 are located on the northern edge of the sector on higher terrain, while Structure PP3 lies on the gradual slope to the lake. Mapping by the Total Station shows that Structure PP3 consists of three raised platforms (Structures PP3/1, PP3/2, and PP3/3) constructed on a terrace, extending to the lake edge. This terrace is demarcated by a stone alignment approximately 30 x 50 m in area. The height changes about 1.3 m from the top of the terrace to the bottom. There is drainage along the eastern edge of Structure PP3 from the northern terrain between Structures PP1 and PP2 (Figure 3). If this drainage is artificial, Structure PP3 could have been associated with water management. The western side of Structure PP3 seems to be a ramp, going down to the lake. This ramp-like feature and the adjacent terraced structures gave hints that Structure PP3 was a building complex serving as a port or dock and allowing inhabitants to dock a boat from the lake. If so, then trading objects might have passed through this port, just as they had at the port of Nich at the eastern tip of the peninsula.

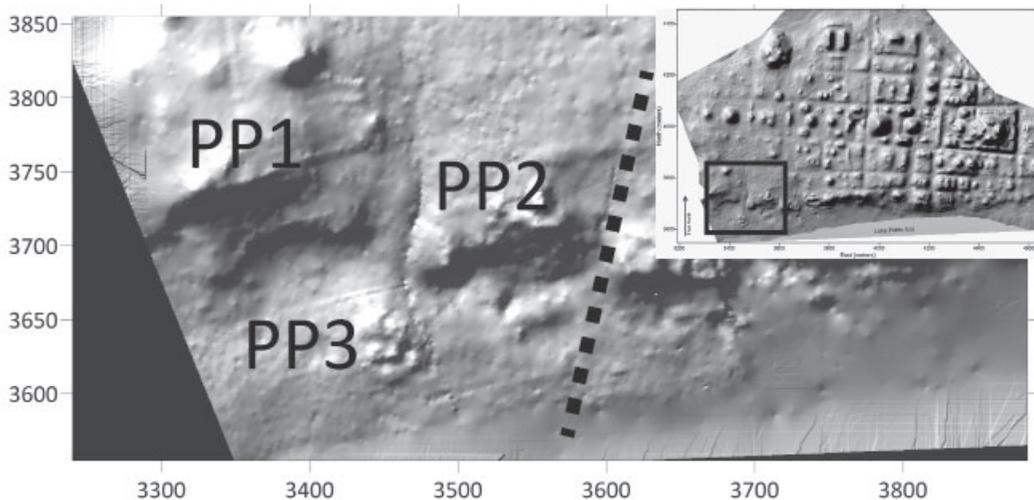


Figure 3 Map of Sector PP, showing Structures PP1, 2, and 3. Map by Timothy Pugh.

In search of a Postclassic occupation, the excavation at Structure PP3 began in 2015, revealing a staircase of a possibly domestic structure with a Postclassic burial (Pugh and Chan Nieto 2016). This discovery prompted further investigation of Postclassic and possibly Contact period-occupation at Structure PP3. The 2019 excavation at Structure PP3 aimed to examine the functions and roles of these lakeshore structures and to acquire materials of the Chak'an Itza at Nixtun-Ch'ich'. Our excavation focused on the northern platform, Structure PP3/1 because this platform was the largest among the three. Additionally, there were large-stone alignments that could have served as the basal stones for buildings. We conducted a trench excavation running through the structures to identify the relationship among the three terrace platforms (Figure 4).

4-1 Structure PP3/1

Structure PP3/1 is the largest platform on Structure PP3 and is located at the northern end of the group. At least three buildings rest upon the platform: Structures PP3/1-1, PP3/1-2, and PP3/1-3. These structures were newly designated in 2019 and numbered from west to east clockwise (Figure 4). Structure PP3/1-1 is located on the western side of the platform. It appeared to be a 3 x 7m rectangular structure running northwest-southeast (150° east of true north). Exposed eastern wall stones were basal stones for a residential building. They are relatively large (30 x 50 cm in size) and their sizes are inconsistent. After excavation cleared the southeast corner, a very thin plaster floor was exposed on top of the construction fill. Beneath the construction fill, another thick layer of plaster floor was exposed.

The northern section of the east wall was removed and exposed a wall alignment running east-west, not associated with Structure PP3/1-1. Since this structure is perpendicular to Structure PP3/1-1, it is likely an earlier construction of Structure PP3/1-2 to the north. The wall alignment of this earlier construction is composed of similarly sized-stones, unlike the upper Structure PP3/1-1. Associated with this earlier construction, a 10 cm-thick plaster floor was recovered in fragments on top of the wall construction. This floor should be contemporaneous to the thick floor exposed on the southeast corner.

There is a scattered distribution of artifacts in Structure PP3/1-1. Ceramics diagnostic of the Postclassic period were recovered mostly near the surface of the northern section. In the meantime, ceramics of the Late Preclassic period were more frequent than those of the Postclassic period. Several small beads of red and green color were recovered in the area to the south of the earlier construction. The excavation further east of Structure PP3/1's east wall revealed a burial dated to the Late Preclassic period (300 BCE-200 CE).

4-2 Burial PP3/1-1

An intrusive burial recovered in the platform of Structure PP3/1 was a seated or flexed burial which was covered by an upside-down vessel. The bones were not well preserved,

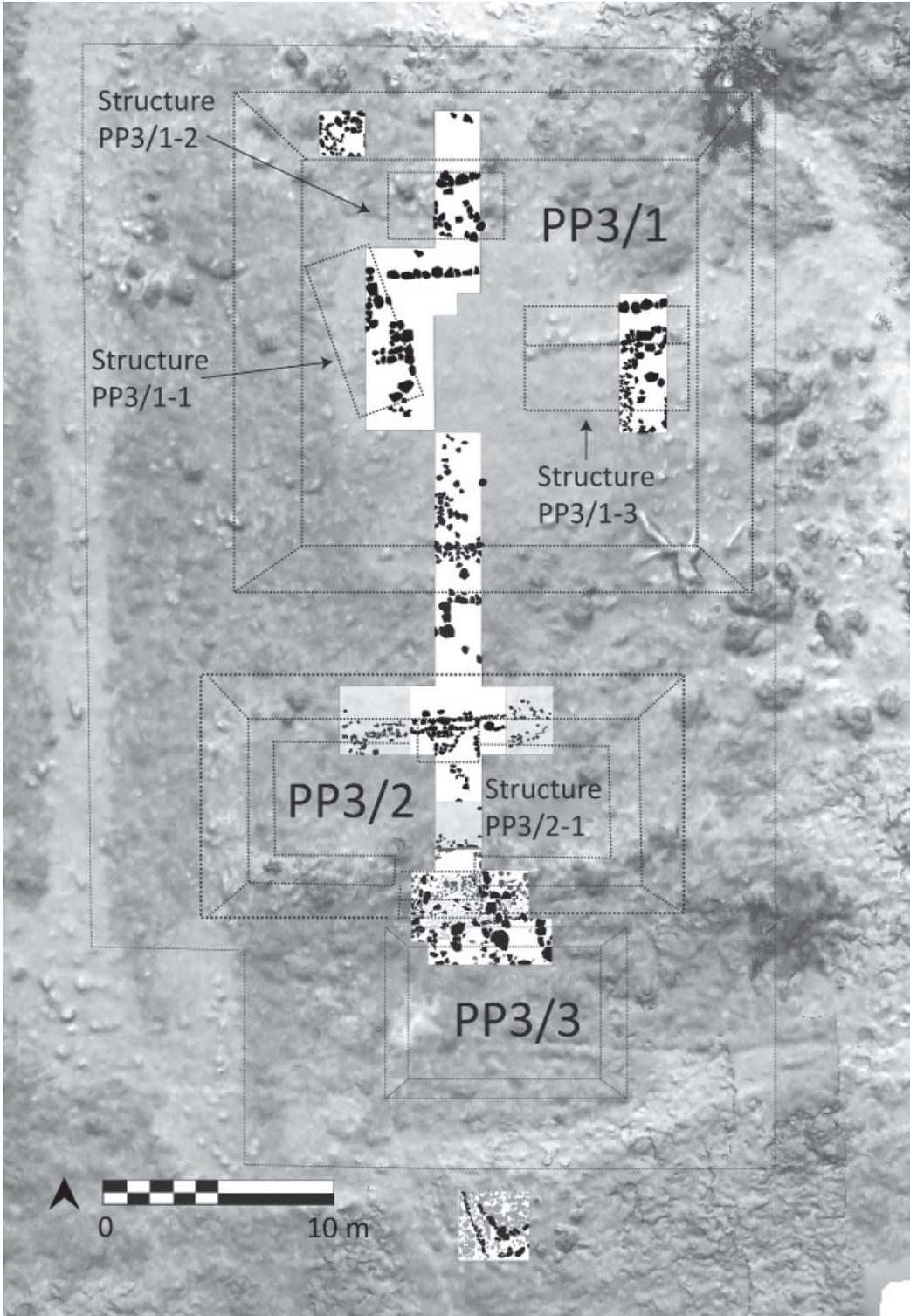


Figure 4 Plan of Structure PP3, showing Structures PP3/1, PP3/2, and PP3/3 with excavated areas.

probably due to the burial's proximity to the surface. The burial was encountered 28 cm below the surface, which is very shallow for a Later Preclassic burial in general. The individual likely faced south in a seated or flexed position and their arms were crossed in front of their torso. The body appeared to have hunched forward toward the head. The cranium was fragmented, and we recovered a fragment of the left mandible with molars. According to the bioarchaeologist, the individual was old (and probably female) based on antemortem tooth loss (Miller-Wolf 2019, personal communication).

The covered vessel was a large, flat-bottom dish with a double incision on the interior lip of its outflared rim (Figure 5). The rim diameter is approximately 42-46 cm. A white to orangish cream slip covers both sides of the surface, and fire-clouds are visible on the base. Based on the paste composition and surface treatment, the vessel is diagnostic of the Late Preclassic period (probably Accordion Incised type). The vessel is missing 20% of its rim and some small fragments. It is unclear if the rim was intentionally missing.

Besides the topped vessel, the burial contained one red-stone and five greenstone beads around the torso. The greenstone beads are flat with a diameter of 1 cm. The red-stone bead is in the shape of a tube 1.2 cm in length. The same kind of flat greenstone beads were recovered outside the burial; they were probably from the same accessory.

We concluded that the Postclassic inhabitants did not reoccupy the Preclassic construction of Structure PP3/1-1, since the Late Preclassic burial was encountered within 30 cm from the surface, and because of the scattered distribution of the Postclassic ceramics in the topsoil.

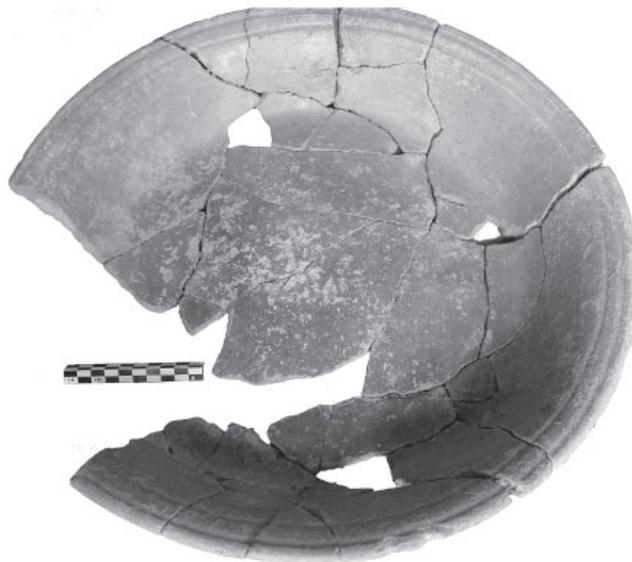


Figure 5 Reconstructed dish from Burial 1 at Structure PP3/1-1.

4-3 Structures PP3/1-2 and PP3/1-3

Structures PP3/1-2 and PP3/1-3 were excavated by a 2 x 6 m trench. Located to the northeast of PP3/1-1 is Structure PP3/1-2, sitting in the middle of the platform and running east-west. Structure PP3/1-2 appears to be a 3 x 5 m-rectangular structure with a front stepped terrace (south). The top of the structure is 2 m-wide, and the front terrace is 1 m-wide. The front terrace was 10-15 cm-high and the edge of the step was constructed of soft, cut stone-blocks.

A 2 x 6 m trench excavation was placed along the axis of Structure PP3 at Structure PP3/1-2. At the southern edge of the trench is the front step of the building, a part of the wall alignment which was encountered near the burial in Structure PP3/1-1. The area between the basal wall alignment and the first step of Structure PP3/1-2 was tightly filled with cobblestones. While it is likely that the Postclassic inhabitants reoccupied Structure PP3/1-2, it is uncertain whether the Postclassic inhabitants were aware of the burial in front of the structure. The back side (north) of Structure PP3/1-2 used cobblestones as a platform fill. This fill contained ceramics diagnostic of both the Preclassic and Postclassic periods, suggesting that the platform behind Structure PP3/1-2 was refilled during the Postclassic period.

Structure PP3/1-3 is located on the east side of Structure PP3/1. A 10 m-alignment of large stones (50-60 x 30-40 cm) was visible on the surface running east to west in the center of Structure PP3/1. One meter to the north and parallel to this alignment are aligned smaller stones (30 x 40 cm). The trench excavation across this alignment of smaller stones revealed a residential structure of the Preclassic period, with a Postclassic occupation above. The form of Structure PP3/1-3 is unknown; it may have been modified and/or had construction materials removed during the Postclassic period. Removal of the large wall stones revealed another parallel alignment below. The southern side of this parallel alignment appears to have a bench construction facing east. This construction had flat limestone on top, indicating a plaster floor above. It is noteworthy that two fragments of metal objects were recovered near the large wall stones.

4-4 Postclassic Midden

While placing stakes for a barb wire, the 2015 excavation encountered abundant apple snail (*pomacea*) shells behind Structure PP3/1-2. This led us to excavate a 2 x 2 m unit in the hope of finding a Postclassic midden. A possible platform edge, running east-west, was exposed in the northern section of the unit. This platform edge had a double row with two courses of medium-sized stones. Although the wall was compactly built on the eastern side, the double row collapsed near the western edge of the unit, probably due to the midden encountered south of the wall.

Many artifacts were concentrated south of the platform edge, extending towards Structure PP3/1-2. These artifacts were mainly complete *pomacea* shells and large

fragments of ceramics and animal bones. This concentration of artifacts was discovered 10-20 cm below the surface. Despite such a proximity to the surface, artifacts were very well preserved in the midden. Most ceramics recovered from the midden were diagnostic of the Postclassic period. Approximately 50% of the ceramics were jar fragments of Pozo Unslipped type of the Postclassic period. Fragments of Postclassic tripod dish were very common and included polychrome and incised vessels (Figure 6). Animal bones and teeth were in good condition. Some of the animal teeth were exported to run isotope analysis. Preliminary analysis of the animal bones shows that recovered animal bones were of dog, peccary, brocket deer, and rabbit (Freiwald 2020, personal communication). Abundant pomacea shells are prominent, compared to the fewer jute shells recovered in the midden. These artifacts indicate a domestic use and are probably refuse from Structure PP3/1-2.

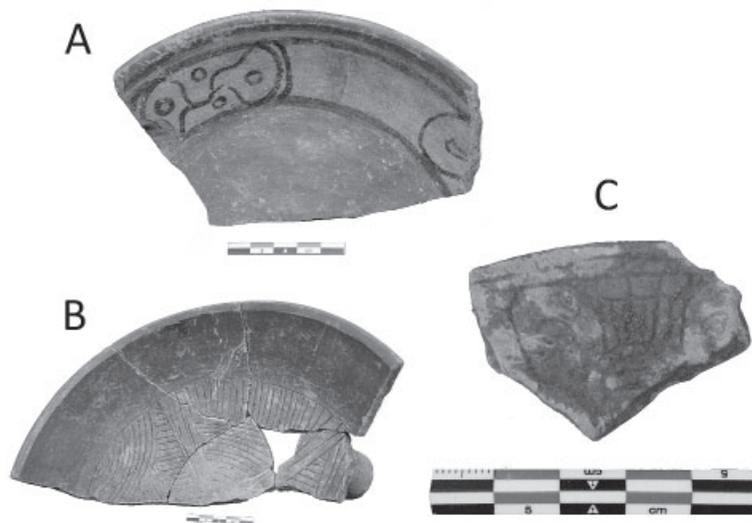


Figure 6 Vessel fragments from the Postclassic midden. A) Ixpop Polychrome, B) Picu Incised; Thub variety “*molcajete*” (grater bowl), C) Picu Incised; Picu variety.

4-5 Trench Excavation

A 2 x 10 m trench was excavated along the central axis of Structure PP3, exposing the edges of Structures PP3/1 and PP3/2. One of the intentions of this trench was to identify the relationship between Structures PP3/1 and PP3/2. The northern section of the trench cleared the southern portion of Structure PP3/1, revealing sparsely scattered artifact remains. This suggests that the southern portion of the platform was maintained clean, and no Postclassic modification was identified on Structure PP3/1’s platform.

The southern edge of Structure PP3/1 was constructed out of two courses of stones. A front terrace and step rests 30 cm below the edge of Structure PP3/1. The terrace is 2

m-wide, and there is a protrusion attached. This terrace appears to be a Preclassic construction, even though Postclassic diagnostic ceramics were recovered upon the terrace. This protruded terrace extends to the west. The front is 30 cm-high from the bottom of the terrace stones. Therefore, Structure PP3/1 is raised 60 cm. The area between the protruded terrace and Structure PP3/2 is 2 m apart. Artifact remains in this area contained a mix of ceramics diagnostic of both the Late Postclassic and Late Preclassic periods. The higher frequency of Late Postclassic ceramics is likely due to the accumulation of refuse from Structure PP3/2, indicating that access to ascend the terrace and Structure PP3/1 was not in use during the Late Postclassic period.

4-6 Structure PP3/2-1

Structure PP3/2 is the second (middle) platform terrace in the group of Structure PP3. Structure PP3/2-1 is a C-shaped structure resting on top of Structure PP3/2 (Figure 4). Since the platforms of Structure PP3 are constructed as a terrace down to the lake, Structure PP3/2 sits approximately 60 cm lower than Structure PP3/1. The platform of Structure PP3/2 is approximately 10 x 21 m, and Structure PP3/2-1 extends approximately 7 x 17 m upon the platform, facing south. Previous excavation revealed that the platform has a staircase that accesses the lower platform Structure PP3/3. The staircase has two steps that are 50 cm-wide, likely extending along the southern side of the platform. The wall of Structure PP3/2-1 encloses the front room, opening south as the front entrance. The excavation exposed the back wall of Structure PP3/2-1. This wall is composed of two rows of small stones (20 x 20 cm) 2 m-wide, filled with pebble stones. The wall is 10 cm-high with a single course of construction. A medial shrine or altar in the center of the bench running along the wall, demarcated by a stone alignment. The C-shaped building holds a 1 m-wide bench along the back wall, covered by a plaster floor. A clayish limestone material, which is burned and has a grayish light green color, was recovered in the area to the east of the medial altar. Unlike the plaster floor, this material was laid unevenly on the surface, and large fragments of tripod dish and incensario were mixed with the clayish material. This indicates that the clayish material was the remnant of ceremonial activity which was conducted upon the bench.

Fragments of Late Postclassic effigy censers were recovered from the back (north) side of Structure PP3/2-1. They were all fragments and possibly the ceremonial refuse of civic-ceremonial activities inside Structure PP3/2-1. Compared to the domestic character of the ceramic assemblage from the midden near Structure PP3/1-2, that of Structure PP3/2-1 is civic-ceremonial and includes effigy censers and tripod dish with basal flange. The ceramic assemblage of Structure PP3/2-1 matches that of Structure PP3/3, the southern platform, which was excavated in 2015.

5 Discussion: Material Culture of Sector PP

The analyses of material remains recovered from Structure PP3 are still in process. Therefore, the following discussion is mainly based on the preliminary result of ceramic analysis. The 2019 excavations at Structure PP3 encountered ceramics diagnostic of the Postclassic period and ceramics were consistent with subsistence activities. Of total 22,931 ceramic sherds recovered from Structure PP3, 12,421 (54%) were Postclassic diagnostic sherds. The minimum number of vessels (MNV) has not been calculated; the sherds counts here are not relative to estimate numbers of individual vessels. Table 1 shows the sherd counts, weight, and the frequency per excavated area (m²).

Table 1 Total sherd counts, weight (g), and the frequency per excavated area (m²) for each excavation and structure. Picu Incised and Ixpop/Saca Polychrome types are in the same SIP ware group of Paxcaman Red, while Hobonmo Incised type is in the VOR ware group of Augustine Red. "Ixpop/Saca Polychrome" includes Ixpop Polychrome, Saca Polychrome, and unidentifiable Ixpop/Saca Polychrome types.

		PP3/1-1	PP3/1-2	PP3/1-3	Trench1	PP3/2-1
Postclassic Types	Total	1234	4794	1240	3855	1298
	Weight (g)	7356.1	43568.5	7213.7	25320.4	21364.5
	Frequency (sherd/ m ²)	15.2	106.5	49.6	77.1	24
Patojo Modeled Type	Total	4	0	0	81	259
	Weight (g)	212	0	0	1990.9	8670.4
	Frequency (sherd/ m ²)	0.05	0	0	1.6	4.8
Paxcaman Red Type	Total	367	1167	445	1240	397
	Weight (g)	2866.5	14472.2	2926.1	8479.3	5391.6
	Frequency (sherd/ m ²)	4.5	25.9	17.8	24.8	7.4
Picu Incised Type (<i>molcajete</i>)	Total	3	35	7	10	1
	Weight (g)	28.3	2029.0	60.6	66.4	1.8
	Frequency (sherd/ m ²)	0.04	0.8	0.3	0.2	0.02
Ixpop/Saca Polychrome Type	Total	4	50	0	5	8
	Weight (g)	46.8	1241.1	0	54.9	84.3
	Frequency (sherd/ m ²)	0.05	1.1	0	0.1	0.1
Augustine Red Type	Total	120	120	41	212	76
	Weight (g)	704.6	1277.4	388.9	1472.2	720.0
	Frequency (sherd/ m ²)	8.7	28.4	15.6	29.4	13.3
Hobonmo Incised Type (<i>molcajete</i>)	Total	0	4	0	1	1
	Weight (g)	0	447.6	0	11.1	45.8
	Frequency (sherd/ m ²)	0	0.09	0	0.02	0.02

5-1 Postclassic Incense Burners

While the upper platform (Structure PP3/1) contained ceramics and artifacts characteristic of domestic activities, the middle platform (Structure PP3/2) recovered ceramics characteristic of civic-ceremonial activities. Relative frequencies of the ceramic types provide us with evidence of the distinction between ceremonial and domestic areas. Ceremonial activities generally incorporated incense burners in both public and private rituals. Incense burners or censers were used until the Spanish conquest.

One of the markers of the Late Postclassic period is the presence of Chen Mul Mayapán-style effigy censers. Effigy censers are most numerous and common at Mayapán, the largest Postclassic center in northern Yucatán during the Hocaba/Tases ceramic complex (1250-1450 CE) (Smith 1971). Effigy censers are hollow standing figures attached in the back to a large pedestal vase. Effigy figures vary from deities to human figures, and represent Chaak, Itzamna, the Maize God (God E), the Merchant God (God M), and so on. The recovering context of effigy censers are burials, special deposits for altars, and open halls of the temple assemblage at Mayapán (Peraza Lope et al. 2006; Smith 1971).

Similar effigy censers have been found widely throughout the northern lowlands (Milbrath and Walker 2016; Milbrath et al. 2008; Rice 2009a; Russell 2000). Studies show that Mayapán-style effigy censers were manufactured locally with local clay (Milbrath and Walker 2016). Stylistic differences between Chen Mul Modeled censers at Mayapán and Mayapán-style effigy censers include differences in the representation of eye pupils (Milbrath et al. 2008). While in Mayapán, Chen Mul Modeled censers have painted pupils, Mayapán-style censers from outside Mayapán (except Chich'en Itza) are perforated. In addition, Chen Mul censers are often taller than Mayapán-style censers, measuring about 50 cm. The widespread of Mayapán-style effigy censers across the lowlands illustrate the extent to which the complex religious iconography was widely shared.

Mayapán-style effigy censers have been identified in the Petén lakes region. The most common ceramic type of effigy censers in the region is Patojo Modeled type (Rice 2009a). Fragments of effigy censers are very common in each Postclassic site, but Topoxté and Zacpetén in the eastern side of Lake Petén Itzá yielded greater quantities of reconstructible effigy censers than found at other sites in the region (Rice 2009a). Both Topoxté and Zacpetén are known to be sites that were controlled by the Kowoj, who were rivals of the Itza. In contrast, excavations at Itza-controlled sites such as Flores and Tayasal rarely have large fragments or partially reconstructible effigy censers (Shiratori 2019). At Nixtun-Ch'ich', previous excavations yielded fragments of effigy censers in Structure QQ1/1, a Postclassic open hall (Pugh et al. 2016). This reconstructed effigy censer depicted the deity Itzamna (or God D) (Pugh et al. 2016). Compared to fragments of effigy censers at Tayasal, the partially reconstructed head of the effigy censer was very rare and significant.

Excavations at Structure PP3/2 yielded non-reconstructable fragments of effigy censers (Table 1). Among them, two fragments of effigy censers depict human faces

(proper right) (Figure 7). They were recovered behind the C-shaped Structure PP3/2-1 on Level 2, and are probably refuse from civic-ceremonial activity inside the building. The complete size is unknown, but both fragments are approximately 10 cm-long. The face fragments are shown wearing a headdress which is displayed by a straight line on the forehead to the upper earlobe. Fragment A has a perforated eye pupil with a protruded eye lid. The mouth is open and has a partial upper tooth. The ear hole is perforated and pierced on the earlobe. There may be an ear ornament hanging on the earlobe. The paste is of an orange-red color and very coarse having inclusion of snails, granular sized calcite and oxidized mineral. The interior of the face is fire-clouded, indicating use as a censer. White stucco is attached to the face around the eye and along the edge of the ear. Fragment B has a protruded eye lid and a missing mouth. The ear hole is perforated, and the broken ear ornament indicates that it had a large, protruding ornament. The paste is similar to that of fragment A, both orange-red color and coarse. There is no sign of fire-clouding on the interior surface.

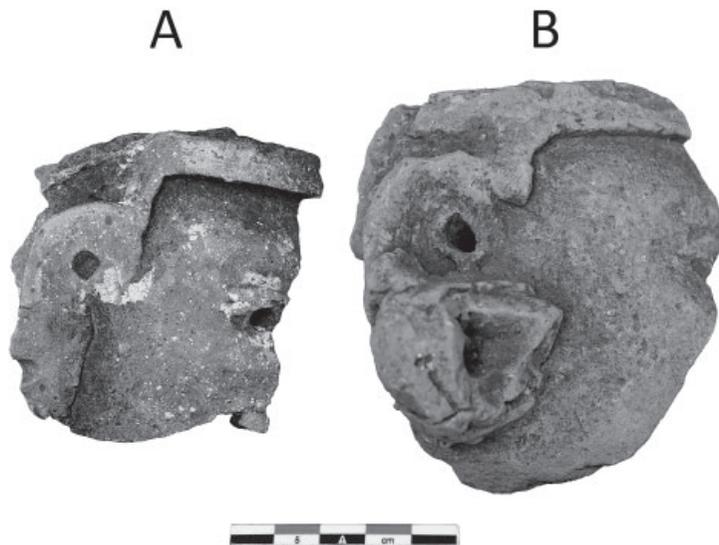


Figure 7 Fragments of effigy censers from Structure PP3/2-1.

Previous excavation at Structure PP3/2 also encountered similar face fragments from effigy censers (Figure 8). Interestingly, these fragments were proper right of the face. Both fragments were recovered in the refuse deposit on the upper staircase of Structure PP3/2. Figure 8A displays a perforated eye pupil with an incised lower eyeline and an open mouth with fang-like teeth. The fang-like teeth are characteristic of Chaak/Tlaloc (Rain God), which is a commonly represented deity on effigy censers at Mayapán (Milbrath et al. 2008). There is no chin below the teeth, making it a very short face. Although the nose is

missing, there is a very short space between the eyes and the upper lip. The lower lip is protruded from the open mouth. The figure wears a headdress and probably an ear ornament. The ear hole is perforated as are the other faces in Structure PP3/2. The paste is similar to the ones from the C-shaped structure; orange-red in color and coarse with inclusion of calcite and snails. The interior surface has no fire-clouding.

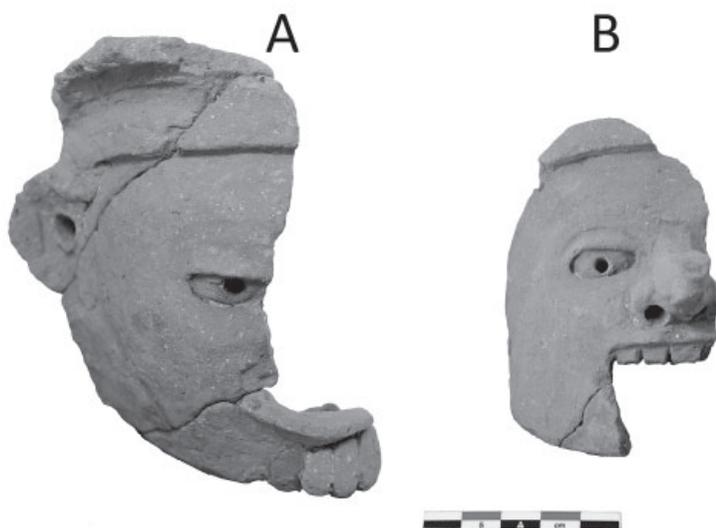


Figure 8 Fragments of effigy censer from the staircase of Structure PP3/2.

Figure 8B is another fragment from the right side of the effigy censer face found in the staircase of Structure PP3/2. The fragment displays a partial headdress, a perforated eye pupil with a dented eyeball, a broken nose, and an open mouth with incised upper teeth. The nose holes are punched but not penetrated. It appears to have had something on the top of the nose. Some traces of stucco are visible around the eyeball and nose. The paste is similar to the other face fragments but appears slightly lighter in color and with more calcite speckles. The exterior surface is smoother than the others, indicating that it was better made. The interior surface shows no sign of fire-clouding.

These four faces from effigy censers are classified as Patojo Modeled type, Patojo variety. While none of them were painted, some had traces of stucco on the surface, indicating a stucco coating. All of them wear headdresses with a straight edge in front. The pupils of all four faces are perforated. Three faces that have an ear also have a perforated ear hole. Three faces that still retain their mouths display an open mouth and teeth. These traits appear to be characteristics of effigy censers at Sector PP, as of the Postclassic effigy censers throughout the lowland. They were in refuse scattered in front of and behind the C-shaped Structure PP3/2-1. Ceremonial activities using effigy censers were the focus of

the Structure PP3/2-1. In general, large fragments of effigy censers are relatively scarce at Nixtun-Ch'ich'. This shows that the Itzamna effigy censer head from Structure QQ1/1-1 was very rare and significant for an understanding of the material culture of Chak'an Itza at Nixtun-Ch'ich'. Not only the morphological variability but also technological and paste variability should be considered to understand the Chak'an Itza's effigy censers. Chemical compositional analysis such as Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis (INAA) could reveal the paste variations in Nixtun-Ch'ich' and the wider Petén lakes region.

Effigy censers that have the form of a human head are reported from other sites in the Petén lakes region (Rice 1987, 2009a). As at Nixtun-Ch'ich', the lack of complete censers and the fragmentary nature of the censer remains are notorious at many other sites in the region (Rice 2009a). At Tayasal, large fragments of effigy censers were rare; instead, partially reconstructible composite censers were abundant (Shiratori 2019). The paste of the Patojo Modeled type from Tayasal is more yellowish brown than the same type from other sites in the region. Compared to those from Tayasal, effigy censers from Sector PP at Nixtun-Ch'ich' have a very orange-red paste. That the Spaniards destroyed effigy censers as pagan "idols" at the Conquest has been postulated as an explanation for their scarcity of effigy censers at Tayasal (Rice 2009a). Alternatively, the Postclassic inhabitants may have not focused on the use of effigy censers in their ceremonial activities.

5-2 Decorated Ceramics

As stated, differences in subsistence activities can be distinguished in the ceramics from Structures PP3/1 and PP3/2. The midden behind Structure PP3/1-2 contained large numbers of decorated ceramics and unslipped jar fragments from the Postclassic period. Decorated Postclassic ceramics in the Petén lakes region are classified into three main paste wares: Snail-Inclusion Paste (SIP), Vitzil Orange-Red (VOR), and Clemencia Cream Paste (CCP) (Rice and Cecil 2009, 2018). Among them, the most common and widespread is Snail-Inclusion Paste ware, which is characterized by its distinctive freshwater snail shell inclusions. The paste color varies from gray to orange-brown, and the monochrome red-slipped type of the Snail-Inclusion Paste ware is Paxcaman Red. Vitzil Orange-Red Paste ware is characterized by reddish-brown calcite paste, and the monochrome red-slipped type is Augustine Red. Clemencia Cream Paste ware is characterized by a fine, marly cream-colored paste, and the monochrome red-slipped type is Topoxte Red. Augustine Red might have been introduced in the Early Postclassic period (900-1250 CE) (Chase and Chase 1983), while Topoxte Red was probably produced from the Early Postclassic to the Contact period (1525-1697 CE) (Cecil 2009).

While Paxcaman Red and Augustine Red are widely found in Nixtun-Ch'ich', Topoxte Red is rarely found. This is the case in the western region of Lake Petén Itzá (Chase and Chase 1983; Rice and Cecil 2018). Likewise, Paxcaman Red and Augustine Red are sparsely found in the eastern region of the lake, such as Topoxté and Zacpetén and the most

common monochrome red-slipped ceramic is Topoxte Red (see Rice and Rice 1985). We now know that Clemencia Cream Paste ware was manufactured in the Kowoj-controlled eastern region (Cecil 2001, 2009, 2013). Thus, manufacture and distribution of Topoxte Red was controlled by the Kowoj in the east. Topoxte Red has been rarely found in Nixtun-Ch'ich'. In Sector PP, previous excavation at the staircase of Structure PP3/2 yielded some Topoxte Red sherds. The exact percentage of Topoxte Red out of the total sherds is currently unknown but our 2019 excavation at Structures PP3/1 and 3/2 did not find any fragment of Topoxte Red. This indicates that Topoxte Red was limited in the refuse at the staircase and the front of Structure PP3/2, but not inside or behind the structure. In addition, it may suggest that Structure PP3/1 was occupied in the Early Postclassic period before the introduction of Topoxte Red. A more complete analysis of the chronology of Structures and Structure PP3/2 requires radiocarbon dating.

The Postclassic midden behind Structure PP3/1-2 yielded well-preserved sherds. There was no complete vessel, but reconstructible vessels included tripod dishes of Paxcaman Red, Picu Incised (incised Paxcaman Red), Ixpop Polychrome (polychrome Paxcaman Red), and Augustine Red (Figure 6). Large jar fragments of Pozo Unslipped type are also prominent. The incised tripod vessels were mainly *molcajete*, grater bowls (Figure 6B). *Molcajetes* occur frequently during the Postclassic period, indicating that grinding on tripod bowls was an important role for domestic and probably civic-ceremonial activities. Fragments of *molcajetes* were mostly recovered in the upper platform, Structure PP3/1 (Table 1). This contradicts the recovery of censer sherds: while they were rarely found in Structure PP3/1, they were abundant in Structure PP3/2. These cases demonstrate that Structure PP3/1 was domestic, and Structure PP3/2 was ceremonial, in function.

Other differences we noticed in the decorated ceramics include that painted tripod dishes, such as Ixpop and Saca polychrome of Paxcaman Red are frequently found in Structure PP3/1, while they were rare in Structure PP3/2 (Table 1). The basal flange with a form of step-fret occurs with both Paxcaman Red and Augustine Red tripod dishes from Structure PP3/2 (Figure 9). The stepped flange was frequently attached to the tripod dishes of Augustine Red in Tayasal and Flores (Shiratori 2019). In Structure PP3/2 at Nixtun-Ch'ich', the stepped flange is seen more often with Paxcaman Red (n=13) than with Augustine Red (n=2). Stepped flange with Paxcaman Red could be a trait of Chak'an Itza. In addition, various forms and sizes of stepped flange exist in Structure PP3/2. Tripod plates with stepped flange might be associated with civic-ceremonial activities in Structure PP3/2.

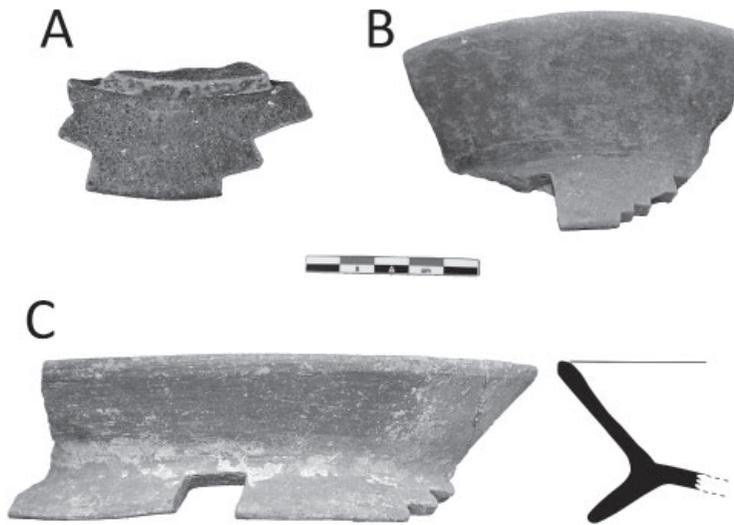


Figure 9 Fragments of step-fret basal flange from Structure PP3/2. A) Paxcaman Red, B) Augustine Red, C) Paxcaman Red

5-3 Artifacts

An analysis of the non-ceramic artifacts from Structures PP3/1 and PP3/2 also aligns with our interpretation of Structure PP3/1 as domestic and Structure PP3/2 as civic-ceremonial structures. Fragments of *mano* and *metate* groundstones were only recovered in the refuse at Structure PP3/1, indicating the presence of food preparation in a domestic structure. Net weights made of Postclassic sherds were mainly (n=34, 94%) recovered from Structure PP3/1. Fishing may have been a part of the domestic activities of Structure PP3/1. However, there were 132 Postclassic net weights recovered in Structure QQ1/1, the open hall ceremonial structure (Rice et al. 2017). Unlike Structure QQ1/1, the data from Structure PP3/1 shows a prevalence of net weights in domestic structure. Further analyses on net weights such as styles, weights, and detailed contexts would provide a deeper understanding of these fishing activities.

Obsidian projectile points were common tools during the Postclassic period. Only two obsidian points were recovered in Structure PP3/1, none in Structure PP3/2. These numbers are too small to use as an indicator of the function of these structures. There was no green obsidian recovered in Structure PP3. Central Mexican green obsidian was rarely recovered in the context of Terminal Classic and Postclassic periods throughout the Petén lakes region, except in San Jeronimo II to the north of Nixtun-Ch'ich' and in Sector QQ in Nixtun-Ch'ich' (Meissner 2014). In order to identify the obsidian source, chemical compositional analysis of obsidian by portable X-fluorescence is still underway.

5-4 Summary of Material Culture at Sector PP

Results of preliminary artifact analyses provide insights into the function of two buildings placed on Structure PP3. The presence of effigy censers suggests its use as a civic-ceremonial space for Structure PP3/2, while the scarcity of censer sherds at Structure PP3/1 suggests a domestic role. The discovery of four similar fragments of effigy censer head from Structure PP3/2 further suggest a characteristic of human effigy censer-style at Structure PP3/2. Since this kind of effigy censer was not found in Structure QQ1/1, the Postclassic open hall, this characteristic might be associated with a civic-ceremonial practice.

Relative frequencies of decorated ceramic types differ between the domestic and ceremonial areas. Topoxte Red type and effigy censers were associated with excavations in Structure PP3/2, especially at the staircase of the platform for Topoxte Red sherds. Since Clemencia Cream Paste ware, the paste ware of Topoxte Red, are Kowoj-specific ceramics from the eastern side of the Petén lakes region, the occurrence of Topoxte Red sherds at the staircase of the civic-ceremonial platform suggests a connection between the Chak'an Itza and the Kowoj at Structure PP3/2. This may support Colonial documents that reported the alliance of K'in Kante, the ruler of Chak'an Itza, and the Kowoj against Ajaw Kan Ek', the lord of the Itza (Avendaño y Loyola 1987:50-52; Jones 1998:95).

On the other hand, Topoxte Red was absent in Structure PP3/1. Instead, polychrome vessels and *molcajete* (grater bowls) were more frequent in Structure PP3/1. The frequent occurrence of polychrome vessels in domestic areas is surprising; they may have been serving wares for special occasions. The lack of Topoxte Red in Structure PP3/1 may indicate that Structure PP3/1 was occupied during the Early Postclassic, rather than the Late Postclassic period. The basal flange that has a various form of step-frets is common on the Paxcaman Red and Augustine Red vessels in Structure PP3/2. In general, stepped basal flange tends to be associated with more Augustine Red than Paxcaman Red in Tayasal and Flores, the other Itza sites. However, Paxcaman Red has a higher frequency of stepped basal flange in Structure PP3/2, as well as in Structure PP3/1. The stepped basal flange with Paxcaman Red could be a characteristic of the Chak'an Itza.

Besides ceramic assemblage, discernible artifacts such as the presence of *mano/metate* for grinding maize and net weights for fishing helped determine platform function. Fragmented *mano* and *metate* were found throughout Structure PP3/1, especially in front of Structure PP3/1. Net weights were made of recycled sherds diagnostic of the Postclassic period. They were associated with Structure PP3/1, indicating that fishing tools were maintained in the domestic structure.

In sum, although our artifact analyses are ongoing, preliminary analysis suggests that there appears to be a diversity in the material culture of the Postclassic period throughout Nixtun-Ch'ich'. For example, the author notes that the occurrence and frequencies of effigy censers and green obsidian at Nixtun-Ch'ich' vary from sector to sector on the

peninsula. Those of Structure PP3 in Sector PP differ from those of Structure QQ1/1 in Sector QQ. The distance between Structure PP3 and Structure QQ1 is approximately 250 m along the southern lakeshore. Both Sectors PP and QQ could be distinct settlements that were drawn on Avendaño y Loyola's map.

6 Conclusion

Excavations at Structure PP3 of Nixtun-Ch'ich' provided an opportunity to investigate the Postclassic occupation associated with the Chak'an Itza, historically known as a "faction" of the Itza of Petén in the seventeenth century. Structure PP3 was a terraced platform that supported three distinct buildings (Structures PP3/1, PP3/2, and PP3/3), extending to the south lakeshore. Excavations revealed that Structure PP3/1 was constructed during the Late Preclassic period (300 BCE-200 CE) and reoccupied in the Early Postclassic period (950-1250 CE). Three domestic structures were identified upon the platform (Structures PP3/1-1, PP3/1-2, and PP3/1-3). A burial dated to the Preclassic period was encountered at 28 cm below the surface near Structure PP3/1-1. This suggests that no disturbance was made after the internment of the burial in the Preclassic period. While Structure PP3/1-1 was only occupied in the Preclassic period, Structures PP3/1-2 and PP3/1-3 were reoccupied with the modification of the buildings in the Early Postclassic period. Structure PP3/1-2 appears to be the principal building on the upper platform during the Postclassic period, as a refuse deposit was encountered behind the building. This midden behind Structure PP3/1-2 contained large fragments of decorated ceramics of the Postclassic period, abundant pomacea shells, and numerous animal bones. This seems to be domestic refuse, indicating that Structure PP3/1-2 was a residential structure.

The middle platform, Structure PP3/2, in the terraced group of Structure PP3 held the C-shaped structure of Structure PP3/2-1. This Postclassic C-shaped structure has interior benches along the walls, opening to the front in the south. A staircase was constructed to the lower platform, Structure PP3/3, on the south side of Structure PP3/2. Fragments of effigy censers were recovered in the areas behind and in front of Structure PP3/2. Moreover, the interior bench had remnants of burning. Thus, Structure PP3/2-1 was used as a ceremonial space burning censers inside the room. A Postclassic burial was encountered at the base of the staircase of Structure PP3/2. The Kowoj-related Topoxte Red sherds were scattered on the staircases. The occurrence of effigy censers and Topoxte Red sherds at Structure PP3/2 suggests that Structure PP3/2 was occupied in the Late Postclassic period. Since the Topoxte Red type of Clemencia Cream Paste ware is an ethno-specific marker of the Kowoj, who were the main rival of the Itza and controlled the eastern region of Lake Petén Itzá, the presence of Topoxte Red at Structure PP3/2 further suggest the Chak'an Itza's connection with the Kowoj.

The excavation and ceramic analysis suggest that Structure PP3 was not a building

complex associated with a Postclassic port or a dock, but a terraced platform that supported both domestic and ceremonial buildings. It was constructed in the Preclassic period, as were most structures at Nixtun-Ch'ich', and later reoccupied in the Postclassic period with some modifications. The material culture of Structure PP3 differs from that of Structure QQ1/1, a civic-ceremonial structure of the Late Postclassic period, located at some 250 m east along the lakeshore. This suggests that several settlements were present on the south shore of the Candelaria peninsula during the Postclassic period. Avendaño y Loyola traveled through Chak'an Itza and estimated the population to be 600 (Avendaño y Loyola 1987:30). His map shows several settlements in Chak'an Itza, besides Nich. Since the principal town of Nich consisted of only 10 houses, other smaller settlements should be expected to have fewer. In that case, Sector QQ and Sector PP, as well as Sectors CC, WW, and XX should have been discrete settlements in the fifteenth century. The occupation of these settlements likely extended into the Contact period of the seventeenth century.

The inhabitants of Sector PP during the Postclassic period were likely the ancestors of the Chak'an Itza whom Avendaño y Loyola encountered in 1696. The basis of this assumption comes from the continuous ceramic assemblage from the Postclassic to the Contact period at Nixtun-Ch'ich' (Pugh et al. 2016; Rice 2009; Rice et al. 2009). Since the prolonged use of Postclassic ceramics into the Contact period has been noted (Rice and Cecil 2018:219), it makes it difficult to distinguish between the Contact period and the Postclassic period. The author has noted the inclusion of a new ceramic type of the Colonial period, Ixkamik Unslipped, from the 2019 excavated ceramics. In addition, two small fragments of metal (probably iron) were encountered in Structure PP3/1-3. Nevertheless, these artifacts need to be further examined. Radiocarbon dating, which is currently underway, could support our assumptions about these artifacts. This paper only reports the results of the preliminary analysis of artifacts. Further analyses of artifacts from Sector PP would provide a better understanding of the settlement's size with a clearer representation of function through material culture.

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