Before Kukulkán

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PART II

YAXUNÁ’S DEAD
INTRODUCTION

In the Maya area, the associations between the mortuary record and the behaviors that once prompted them is not straightforward. Thus, caution is necessary when interpreting social realities and mentalities from mortuary contexts of the remote past, as there are many reasons why the dead may have been treated in particular ways. Besides a host of practical and circumstantial considerations, the burial assemblage may account for an individual’s dying wishes, the wishes of the surviving “caretakers” of the deceased, and the acting out of collective ideology and particularly thanatology (Carr 1995; Chesson 2001; Dillehay 1995). Thus, the concern often voiced by scholars conducting mortuary archaeology in all past societies, especially those without eloquent graphic or written information from the distant past, is understandably justified.

The above critique is particularly relevant in the study of the ancient lowland Maya kingdoms, where the data-rich research environment and the continued presence of native life buffers the distance between the observer and the observed. Here, however, the challenge is not the lack of information (to bolster feasible interpretations) but the excess of data and the complexity of mortuary programs. Among the lowland Maya only critical and creative combinations of academic approaches promise to take interpretations beyond simplistic behavioral reconstructions or beyond ethnocentric discussions of autochthonous meanings. Bringing this thought one step further, we pose that any fruitful interdisciplinary scrutiny needs to be anchored within a culturally sensitive (emic) interpretational framework in order to gain any meaningful understanding.

At present, conventional interpretations of archaeologically retrieved burials still rest heavily on the material evidence of offerings, grave composition, the orientation of the dead, and burial location (cf. Ruz Lhuillier 1991). Yet the above-delineated breadth of Maya mortuary conduct and the apparent lack of collectively imposed or followed norms has rendered
the study of mortuary patterning more difficult here than in most other cultural settings. Besides the "background noise," implied by the categorically incomplete nature of the mortuary record (as representing the ancient funerary rite), and the notorious poor preservation of organic remains in the tropic environs of the Maya lowlands, it is this lack of predictability that has complicated most archaeological research on ancient Maya mortuary behavior beyond simple descriptive efforts. As a result, the great majority of burials across the lowlands appear as by-products of field endeavors directed toward other research questions, salvage work aside. In fact, very little work is actually aimed at recovering optimal samples of mortuary remains for analysis—that is, complete excavations of platforms or patio units where the full range of household burials would be included. Thus, it is unsurprising that the vast corpus of available burial information, although represented by an impressive number of recorded contexts, has not yet successfully profiled Maya mortuary behavior across regions or even at specific sites. The aggregate funerary taxonomies, at least, have worked surprisingly well in inferring Maya political complexity, social hierarchy, and gender expressions (Krejci and Culbert 1995; Welsh 1988; Wright 2006). Yet here we are interested in reconstructing and understanding mortuary behavior per se; and we are still at a rudimentary level of understanding given the nature of the current data.

**ARCHAEO THANAT OLOGY AND THE MORTUARY RECORD OF YUCATÁN**

One limitation to the study of human remains in this area of the world has to do with the mortuary taxonomies commonly employed among Mayanists. These rely heavily on static dichotomous classifications of associated artifacts and grave architecture, while neglecting the arrangement of the human remains contained within, thereby greatly limiting the potential of untangling the varied and often protracted posthumous treatments (which the literature commonly reduces to singles and multiples, primary and secondary deposits). We feel that detailed taphonomic recordings of body and bone processing (see Tiesler 2006; Weiss 2011, etc.) still await systemic attention in future regional funerary research.

Recently, broader transdisciplinary endeavors have come to supplement these material reconstructions in mortuary research. As mentioned in the introduction, such an approach is the French-borne *anthropologie de terrain*, now known as archaeothanatology (Duday 1997, 2009). This approach is anchored in the changes of a human corpse within its specific burial environment. In the context of these changes, archaeothanatology examines the precise interaction of biological and cultural components of death, decomposition, and cultural intervention. This line of work emphasizes the active field participation of physical anthropologists or bioarchaeologists who have been trained in archaeological excavation methods. It is in the field that the elaboration and comprehension of detailed visual records of human skeletal assemblages takes place.1 Beyond methodology, archaeothanatology really denotes an academic mindset of how to conduct funerary research and how to think about the archaeology of death and the *au-delà* (the hereafter).
Archaeothanatology also makes an overwhelmingly important contribution to mortuary archaeology in the Maya area, as recent work along this line of research has demonstrated (Novotny 2015; Pereira 2013; Pereira and Michelet 2004; Tiesler 2004; Tiesler and Cucina 2010a; Tiesler et al. 2010b). Given the benefits of this approach, we have chosen to use it to analyze the mortuary reconstruction of Yaxuná, most of which has been previously published by the authors of this volume and other project personnel (Marengo Camacho 2013; Stanton 2011; Stanton et al. 2010; Stanton and Marengo Camacho 2014; Suhler 1996). For our present purposes, we have reinterpreted each of the burials recovered by the Selz Foundation project in the 1990s using the extensive photographic record that was taken on-site and adding further information derived from technical drawings and the skeletal material itself. Those human assemblages that were recovered as part of the 2011 field season (Burials 27 and 28) were recorded and excavated directly by members of the Bioarchaeology and Histology Laboratory of the UADY. The combined taphonomic study is described in detail elsewhere (Tiesler et al. 2012, 2015) and will be taken up and contextualized regionally in the following paragraphs, using a regional database of some ten thousand published or reported burial contexts from different parts of the Maya area, of which some three thousand entries describe peninsular assemblages. These burial descriptions have been entered systematically and adapted to the burial classification put forth by Ruz Lluillier (1991) and Romano (1974).

**THE PRESENT STUDY**

The overall count includes 47 mostly articulated and complete skeletal individuals (table 6.1). Of the total, 13 individuals came from the two tomb chamber contexts and will be described in chapter 7. The remaining individuals from the settlement population were interred in simple pits (N = 10) either covered by vessels or “unprotected,” to use the term introduced by Ruz Lluillier (1991). Note that, of these, two isolated skulls and one complete human deposit were recovered from the ritual rock-shelter on the east side of the North Acropolis. However, the majority of individuals from Yaxuná’s known burials (N = 22) had been placed into lined cist graves, most of which were then covered with slabs. This sort of accommodation appears to have become standard practice among locals during the Terminal Classic period. Two additional deposits (Burials 14 and 22) did not fit into the classification scheme.

The subsequent section will focus on the general burial trends according to the mortuary category (funerary versus nonfunerary) and chronological assignment, using the project classification, which bridges the Early Classic tomb burials described in chapter 7 with the Late and Terminal Classic deposits (table 6.2). These chronologies have been evolving from the initial assignments by the Selz project and are founded on ceramic sequences, which we have combined recently with direct radiocarbon dates from sampled skeletal material and other contexts.

The minimum number of individuals (MNI) was obtained from each burial. Most of the individuals included in this study were recovered in single deposits (N = 22). Only two graves were reused once for a successive placement. One more contained three bodies, which
### Table 6.1. Chronological ranges assigned to the burials of Yaxuná, discussed in this chapter and updated from Stanton et al. (2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burial #</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Grave Architecture</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Decubitus</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Articul.</th>
<th>MNI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burial 5</td>
<td>Yaxuná III (AD 500–700)</td>
<td>Simple Pit</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 12</td>
<td>Yaxuná III (AD 500–700)</td>
<td>Simple Pit</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 14</td>
<td>Yaxuná III (AD 500–700)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Flexed Dorsal</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 20</td>
<td>Yaxuná III (AD 500–700)</td>
<td>Simple Pit</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 21</td>
<td>Yaxuná III (AD 500–700)</td>
<td>Simple Pit</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 28</td>
<td>Yaxuná III (AD 500–700)</td>
<td>Circular Cist</td>
<td>Flexed Seated</td>
<td>NE</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 1</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Cist</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 2/4</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Crypt</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2 (Successive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 6</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Simple Pit</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>W/E</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 7</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Crypt</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 8</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Crypt</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 9</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Crypt</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>NW</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 11</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Simple Pit</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 13</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Crypt</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>E/W</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 15</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Crypt</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>E/W</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 16</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Cist</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>E/W</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 17</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Cist</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 18</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Cist</td>
<td>Flexed Dorsal</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial 25</td>
<td>Yaxuná IV (AD 700–900)</td>
<td>Cist</td>
<td>Extended Dorsal</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
had been laid down in different events, and one other contained the remains of four individuals. In order to compare the taphonomic signatures among the assemblages, we employed a burial inventory jointly with the photographic record, sketches, and the original field notes and publications on the explorations funded by the Selz Foundation. From here, we elaborated on a likely mortuary sequence for each human deposit. This included the original placing, the interment sequence, and further cultural disturbances. Feedback on peri- and postmortem body processing was derived from the principles of human decomposition and disarticulation, along with specific signatures of anthropogenic handling, including fire exposure in different states of decomposition (see table 8.1). These have been described by White (1992), Turner and Turner (1999), and Pijoan Aguadé and Mansilla (1997), among others; some of them adapted to the regional taphonomic conditions and specifically those of the Maya lowlands (Cucina and Tiesler 2008; Tiesler 2007).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHASE</th>
<th>YEAR RANGE</th>
<th>CHRONOLOGICAL PERIOD ASSIGNMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yaxuná Ia</td>
<td>(900–300 BC)</td>
<td>Middle Formative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaxuná Ib</td>
<td>(300–1 BC)</td>
<td>Late Formative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaxuná Ic</td>
<td>(AD 1–250)</td>
<td>Terminal Formative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaxuná II</td>
<td>(AD 250–500)</td>
<td>Early Classic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaxuná III</td>
<td>(AD 500–700)</td>
<td>Late Classic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaxuná IVa</td>
<td>(AD 700–850)</td>
<td>Early Terminal Classic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaxuná IVb</td>
<td>(AD 850–1000)</td>
<td>Late Terminal Classic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaxuná V</td>
<td>(AD 1200–1521)</td>
<td>Late Postclassic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaxuná VI</td>
<td>(AD 1521–1700)</td>
<td>Colonial to Modern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MOURNING THE DEAD OF YAXUNÁ DURING THE LATE CLASSIC

Six mortuary contexts from Yaxuná date to the Late Classic—namely, Burials 5, 12, 14, 20, 21, and 28 (table 6.1). The latter, Burial 28, was retrieved in 2011, while the others had been explored and described two decades earlier by the Selz Foundation project (Stanton et al. 2010).

**BURIAL 5**

This deposit was located in the fill of Str. 5E-59-2nd, a substructure of the primary structure of the lower plaza of the Early Classic (Yaxuná II) palace complex. This complex was also
occupied during Yaxuná III and IVa times. The only extensive excavations in the group have been conducted at Str. 5E-50. The post–Early Classic occupation of this structure was heavily disturbed, and we do not have a good idea concerning what this group looked like and what it may have been used for during the Late and Terminal Classic periods. The ceramics in the fill surrounding Burial 5 were reported as Late/Terminal Classic by the Selz Foundation (Stanton et al. 2010), and a single radiocarbon date from the bone has a range of AD 656–769 (all AMS ranges are presented in two standard deviations), placing it at the transition between Yaxuná III and Yaxuná IVa. Given the associated ceramics, we favor a Late Classic assignation. In any event, Burial 5 was found on the south side of Str. 5E-59 in a liminal area, indicating that it might have some special significance beyond the typical household burial. In fact this structure may have been ritually terminated during Yaxuná IVa, indicating its symbolically charged importance (see Stanton et al. 2010:106).

The individual was a locally born child, who passed away between three and four years of age (figure 6.1). The remains were poorly preserved, but the individual appears to have been placed supine, extended with the head to the north. There was neither a formal crypt nor cist composed of stones, a pattern thought to be indicative of the Late Classic mortuary practices by the end of the Selz Foundation project (Stanton et al. 2010). One single grave good—a heavily eroded Late Classic polychrome bowl—had been placed over the infant’s head. While no slip remained on the bowl, the fabric of the vessel as well as the shape of the bowl indicate that it had been a polychrome vessel (see Johnstone 2001). Likewise, a single documented upper premolar of an adult could be counted among the artifacts offered during interment.
BURYAL 12

This burial was located in proximity of Burial 14, which we think was placed at roughly the same time (figure 6.2). Both contexts were recovered from below the living surface of Str. 4E-22, the southern of two superstructures on the eastern side of a basal platform. This structure is in the western portion of the site. The sole individual in Burial 12 was placed in a simple pit in the platform fill with no stones to delimit the burial space. In life, the occupant was most likely a female. Placed in an extended supine position with the head to the south, isotope analysis indicates that the woman was local. An Arena Red: var. Arena dish was found inverted over her pelvis, a bit of a departure from the norm of dishes placed inverted over the skull.

BURYAL 14

This burial is another unlined, simple interment that was found immediately southeast of Burial 12 (figure 6.2). It contained a local middle-aged male who had been placed on his back just like Burial 12. In this case, however, his body had been bundled tightly prior to interment. In this arrangement, the head of this corpse was placed toward the south. It was covered with an Arena Red: var. Arena dish, before the pit was backfilled. Two molars of a large feline, a serpentine bead, and a bone blood-letter were found in the matrix and most probably formed part of the personal kit of the defunct individual whose dentition had been extravagantly incrusted with large flat and spherical pieces of pyrite. These visible signs of social rank contrast with the attributes of a rather harsh style of living, resulting in premature
arthritis and the arching of the diaphyseal segments of his lower extremities. In the immediate vicinity of the body, a duplicate patella of a much more gracile individual was recovered, probably an adolescent. While we hesitate to assign a second individual to this burial to reclassify it as a multiple burial based on one duplicated bone, the patella may very well indicate that a second individual had once been present, either recovered incompletely prior to Burial 14 (a reduction so to speak) or added to the remains during the act of his interment.

**BURIAL 20**

Forming the east side of the central plaza of Yaxuná’s North Acropolis, the structure that contained this context was much more central than the others previously discussed for this period. Burial 20 was found beneath the floor of the southern room of Str. 6F-4, which faces the main plaza space. While the excavations of this building did not reach contexts that dated prior to the Early Classic, explorations elsewhere on the North Acropolis demonstrate that it was originally constructed as a triadic group during the Late Formative (Stanton and Magnoni 2013). This would indicate that Str. 6F-3 was already one of the flanking buildings of the acropolis by the time Burial 20 was placed. This burial intruded into the floor of the room. An oval cut was made into the plaster, and the individual was laid out extended on its back into the construction fill. As with other burials dated to the Late Classic, capstones were either not used or retrieved later after the corpse had decomposed. The funerary space was probably unfilled at first considering the formation of patina on the bony surfaces and the rodent damage. Eventually, however, the grave was filled with *sascab* (white soil), which also served as a patch of the floor above. The only grave goods to accompany the postmenopausal female occupant of Burial 20 were a series of deer segments that flanked her left side.

**BURIAL 21**

This burial was found in one of the satellite acropolis groups of Yaxuná—concretely, in Str. 4 at Xkanhá, a peripheral acropolis located approximately two kilometers to the northwest of the Yaxuná site center. The Xkanhá acropolis was first constructed in the Early Classic, and a Terminal Classic reoccupation has been reported (Ardren 1997). Burial 21 was located approximately 40 cm below the ground surface in the construction fill of the building. Three ceramic vessels were located in what was interpreted as a cache in the fill; Ardren (1997:122–123) argues that the human remains represent a human head placed with the vessels as a dedicatory offering. The vessels included a much eroded Aguila Orange: var. Aguila plate, a Teabo Red: var. Teabo bowl, and a Tinaja Red: var. Tinaja bowl (Ardren 1997; Johnstone 2001). A small *Spondylus americanus* bead and a carved shell earflare were also recovered from the context. While the articulation of the bone material is not altogether clear, the remains and ceramics appear to come from a restricted area. The human remains are from a foreign-born adult. Stable isotope analyses indicate that this person did not grow up in Yaxuná and may have come from southern Quintana Roo or the Puuc Hills region.
While the remains are poorly preserved, several fragments of long bone were identified among the remains, indicating that this context was likely not a cache of a single head accompanied by ceramic vessels. Further, a radiocarbon date from the bone material yielded a date of AD 575–666, placing it squarely in the Late Classic Yaxuná III complex. Several observations can be made at this time. First, limited reanalysis of the Xkanhá ceramics suggests that a Late Classic occupation may be present. If this is the case, Burial 21 appears to date to this period and follows the Late Classic pattern of burial without a defined crypt or cist. Although the Teabo Red bowl should date to the Terminal Classic, both the Aguila Orange plate and Tinaja Red bowl are earlier. Yet these were the only reported whole vessels that we were not able to reanalyze for this study. Given the modal similarities between Teabo Red and Kinich Orange (the latter is a “Middle Classic” type [see Boucher and Palomo 1995]), all the vessels may actually date to the Early or Late Classic. Only a reanalysis of the vessels will resolve this issue, but we place the burial in Yaxuná III based on the radiocarbon date and the possibility that the vessel identified as Teabo Red is Late Classic. Second, given the inclusion of long bones in the burial, we suggest that this may have been a complete individual whose remains did not preserve well. In many cases across the Maya area artifact caches with no human remains may actually have served as burials, but due to poor preservation all that remains are the grave goods. In many cases the skeletal remains and teeth were either removed and/or decayed beyond recognition. We believe this to be the case with Burial 21.

BURIAL 28

This burial was found in the southern portion of the site core, in the plaza in front of Str. 6E-32, the eastern ancestor temple for the 6E-30 Group. This domestic group is the earliest yet identified at the site, with continued occupation from the Middle Formative through the Terminal Formative (Stanton 2000; Stanton and Ardren 2005). After a hiatus during the Early Classic the group was reoccupied during the Late Classic. This burial dates to this period. A sample of bone from the individual yielded a range of dates between AD 419 and 577, although the two vessels found in the burial context, a Tacopate Black-on-Buff: var. Unspecified bowl and a Kinich Orange: var. Kinich bowl are both Late Classic, indicating that the latter portion of the range, falling in early portion of the Late Classic, should be correct.

The main occupant (Burial 28A) is a man who had died in his fifth or sixth life decade. His bundled corpse was placed in a circular stone-lined cist (figure 6.3). Some 90 cm deep, this burial feature has an inner diameter of some 80 cm and was found capped with flat stones on top. The bundled remains of this individual had been placed into it in a seated position. The body and especially the forehead appear to have been covered with a red substance. After placement, this assemblage was covered with capstones and sealed from above without being filled in with dirt. To the contrary, it appears that efforts were made to protect the body from the dirt on top of the sealing. These efforts must have been successful, as the funerary space had not been infiltrated by sediments until after the corpse decomposed. Within the cavity this process led to the gradual disarticulation and collapse of all bone segments right on top
FIGURE 6.3. (a) In situ distribution of bone segments of Burial 28 within a lined round cist. Arrows = “toward distal end”: (1) Vessel no. 1, (2) skull, (3) forearm segment, (4) right humerus, (5) right femur, (6) right tibia, (7) left femur, (8) left tibia, (9) left fibula, (10) left iliac bone, (11) vessel no. 2. (b) North-south transverse cut (PIPCY; drawing by M. Sánchez).
of the cist floor. As the cranium fell, it came to rest in an inverted position, while the equally inverted mandible had fallen down and landed at a distance to the cranium. All these elements make an unlikely scenario, would the cist have been filled in immediately to gradually replace the skeletal segments of the seated, decomposing corpse with soil. One other element is that a small greenstone bead was recovered near his fibula. In our scenario of a bundled, seated corpse, it is probable that this greenstone bead had been originally deposited in the mouth and that it eventually fell to the location in which it was found as the body decayed in the void space. If this is the case, the individual likely was “facing” the southeast.

Over the following years this funerary space was filled in culturally or gradually filled up as sediment percolated into the void. It is noteworthy that, although isolated and incomplete, the remains of at least two other individuals were contained in the fill of this funerary cist. Individual 28B (CP 15) is represented by the eroded bone scraps of vertebrae, skull, and femurs of at least one adult of unknown sex. No articulation was documented in the field, which suggests a secondary placement together with 28A, or alternatively before or after this deposition. These associated remnants appeared in a matrix that included highly eroded ceramics and chert flakes, which may be transposed Middle Formative materials from the matrix into which the burial pit intruded. The last individual, Burial 28C (CP 16), was represented only by fragments of maxillary bone of a child between the ages of two and three.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Although reduced in number and not representative of the large number of dead bodies to be expected after over 100 years of urban occupation, the six mortuary contexts discussed from Yaxuná show trends that typify common Maya funerary programs during the Classic period on the Yucatán Peninsula and beyond. No clear preference in terms of body orientation was noted, except for a preferred alignment on the north–south axis. Most of the above-described contexts stem from placements of fleshed corpses into lined or simple pits, previously dug into domestic platforms. Once the flexed, bundled, or extended bodies were lowered into the ground, the hollow spaces were either backfilled or were sealed on top, as in the case of Burial 28. At least three of the six assemblages contained supernumerary human remains, either in the form of single bones or incomplete skeletons. These additions either express incomplete removals of prior mortal occupants or a selection of bones of another deceased person. Regardless of their precise origins, the human additions within the mortuary spaces give a collective feeling to the otherwise singly interred bodies. They manifest that mourning and ancestral remembering was by no means directed to individual death, but rather to dead generations of residents and kin. Continued ancestral remembrance reinforced ties with dead kin and procured for the surviving kin continuity of cycling, of space and time (McAnany 1995).

Note that the Selz Foundation project reported that the graves from this period were still lacking stone-walled crypts with capstones (Stanton et al. 2010), which are quite frequent at other sites. Given that these interments date to the time of the construction and
use of Sachbé 1, there was indeed some speculation in the field that they could be typical of Cobá’s mortuary repertory. Unfortunately, burials from Cobá and northern Quintana Roo in general are not well reported for the Late Classic to sustain any particular connection to this area. Regardless, the graves from Yaxuná dated to this period present some interesting patterns. Lourdes Toscano Hernández (personal communication to Stanton 2013) reports another Late Classic circular cist near the ballcourt of Yaxuná that appears similar to Burial 28, described here. Unfortunately, little information concerning the former context is known. Other contemporaneous circular cists with seated occupants are reported from Chac II in the Puuc region (Smyth and Rogart 2004; see also Stanton 2005b), Caucel (Rodríguez Perez 2010), Noh Bec (Rodríguez Pérez 2007), and Río Bec (Pereira 2013), further south, suggesting that these seated interments may be rare but are constant in the mortuary record of the region. Recently, Grégory Pereira (2013:454) has interpreted Classic period seated arrangements from the Río Bec area as “transitional” deposits, signaling the close of occupation or construction on top. These tightly flexed bundles, with their fully flexed legs tied in front of the trunk, either straight or crossed-legged, materialized the native concepts of verticality and change, centrality, axiality, and cycling, as opposed to more horizontal placements of mortals, who would be remembered and commemorated by kin, while residential life went on above. We cannot ascertain with the present evidence at hand if this dual concept applied also at Yaxuná at this time, but it is of interest that the seated cist burial (Burial 28) was sealed only on top, while the horizontal single graves appear to have been filled in after “protecting” some body parts with inverted recipients. Conversely, Burial 28 was not covered with any vessel, a point we will return to below.

MOURNING THE DEAD OF YAXUNÁ DURING THE TERMINAL CLASSIC

Some fourteen additional mortuary contexts date to the Early Terminal Classic (Yaxuná IVa; AD 700-900) at Yaxuná. They contain at least 24 individuals, excavated in different neighborhoods of the settlement, a sizable number of them being pairs or multiples. In the following section, we analyze and discuss the depositional sequences that led to each of the assemblages.

BURIAL 1

This burial was one of two Terminal Classic interments found in Str. 5E-103. This structure is located in the area of a dense Terminal Classic reoccupation of what was an Early Classic palace centuries before. Str. 5E-103 was heavily disturbed during its late resettlement. Classified as a crypt by the excavators, the individual was laid out supine and extended with the head toward the north. There is little taphonomic evidence, however, to determine whether the body was placed in a void (crypt) that filled up over time through a process of filtration of the overlying matrix or was filled intentionally by the people who buried the individual (cist); the absence of patina on the bones might suggest the latter possibility. In any event,
the skeletal remains were those of a child of five to seven years of age; stable isotopes indicate that this was a local individual. Sex was undeterminable and it is unclear whether the child was deposited as a bundle. A single radiocarbon date from the bone of the individual resulted in a range of AD 336–543. The range is particularly early for the Slate Ware ceramics in the context, and we are cautious to use the radiocarbon sample to assign an early date (Yaaxná II or III). The ceramic wares associated to both burials relate Burials 1 and 8 chronologically to Yaaxná IVa. There are early Slate Wares in other parts of the peninsula (e.g., Boucher 1992; Vallo 2002, 2003), but all of the other early ceramic markers such as Chuburná Brown, Arena Red, Maxcanú Buff, Chancnáe Striated, and Batres Red are missing from these contexts.

Several large fragments of broken Slate Ware dishes, including a large fragment of a Sacalum Black-on-Slate dish that covered the left portion of the pelvis and femur, were found covering the lower portion of the skeleton. A single fragment of deer bone was recovered on each side of the body near the legs. Further, a Spondylus americanus shell was found between the upper portions of the legs. Landa (1982) reports that shell was used to cover the genitals of prepubescent children in Yucatán at the time of contact. As will be clear from the following descriptions, children at Yaaxná appear to be buried with bivalves between their legs with frequency at the site, indicating that this regional custom extended back into the Classic period.

Finally, a peculiar conical vase was recovered over the broken dish fragment covering the left side of the pelvis and femur. The exterior of this vase is undecorated and poorly formed, while the interior presents a well-made Chumayel Red-on-Slate: var. Cafetoso Slate Ware surface (figure 6.4). The discrepancy in quality of manufacture of the two sides of the vessel makes it unique in the Yaaxná sample. Vases are commonly found in Terminal Classic burials across the Maya lowlands, although they are typically found in cylindrical or globular forms and with adults. There may be some correlation between the poor manufacture, the unusual conical form of this drinking vessel and the fact that it was found in a subadult interment. Costin (1999) reports poorly made crisoles in burials in coastal Peru as manufactured by the mourners; personalized grave goods materially representing individuals who participated in the burial event. It is possible that this vessel could materialize something similar or that it had been manufactured by a ceramic apprentice.

BURIALS 2 AND 4

Adjacent to Burial 1, this dual-interment was originally classified as two separate cist graves until further scrutiny identified them as a successive multiple instead. In our reanalysis of the contexts, Burial 2 corresponds to the upper of two individuals recovered in the northeastern corner of Str. 5E-105. This building was part of a densely settled area of Terminal Classic habitation surrounding the Early Classic palace. Although the Selz Foundation project classified other burials by mortuary contexts (regardless of how many individuals were present in the burial, each context was classified as a burial), each of the two individuals recovered in this single crypt was given a separate burial number (see Stanton et al. 2010). Its architecture was composed of a single course of roughly cut stones and covered by hardly worked capstones.
The depositional sequence appears to initiate with the interment of Burial 4, the lower individual of the two. For this purpose, an oval crypt grave of one and a half meters in length and only 32 cm wide was excavated and lined with stones. A deceased female teenager was placed on its floor extended on her back and with the head to the south. The burial was found poorly preserved since it was most probably disturbed during reentry of the funerary space years or decades afterward, when a second corpse (Burial 2) was placed. From the field data it is impossible to ascertain whether bones were extracted during this event; regardless, it is conspicuous that the left humerus and right upper arm bones of Burial 4 were entirely missing, while the thorax, the femurs, and the pelvic girdle retained their anatomic association (Freidel et al. 1992). The presence of patina on the bones, the abundance of rodent marks, and the loose arrangement suggested by the technical drawings of this assemblage indicate that Burial 4 had been originally deposited in a void space, which was subsequently filled in. Isotopic analysis suggests that this individual was local to Yaxúná. A dish of the type Sacalum Black-on-Slate was found inverted over her face, while a bivalve shell pendant was recovered in the area of her pelvis. As discussed in chapter 5, these shells were used quite frequently to cover the genitals of prepubescent children still at the time of contact in Yucatán. If the pendant was indeed part of the dress of this individual, it probably marked her as a young girl, still not eligible to marry. In contrast to the proximal perforation in the shell located in Burial 1, this shell has two perforations in this distal end, possibly suggesting a different form of fastening.

Years or decades after the adolescent occupant of Burial 4 had skeletonized in an originally unfilled burial space, the cist was eventually reopened, an occasion during which some
of the anatomic segments, determined to be absent, could have been disturbed or extracted. The burial space was also redimensioned to the size of 140 cm by 37 cm in order to accommodate an adult female corpse between 40 and 45 years with heavy parturition marks. Her corpse came to lie directly on top of the skeletonized remains of the teenager. She was placed extended and supine with her head to the north, inverted from the position of the lower individual. The deteriorated state of preservation limited any secure determination of bundling when placed. As no dental remains were recovered (we have no isotopic data from this individual), we cannot determine whether she was local or not. A deer bone was recovered near her right leg. The Selz Foundation project members believed that there might be a correlation between deer bone and female burials at the site (see Stanton et al. 2010). However, our subsequent analysis of the Yaxuná remains does not indicate that this is really the case. In fact, deer bone is found in burials of both sexes across the peninsula and may be the remains of food consumption at the time of interment. Interestingly, deer bone appears to more often accompany multiple burials across the Maya lowlands, such as this one or others, documented in detail at the coeval site of Xuenkal (Tiesler et al. 2010b). The placement of deer bone usually occurs when a subsequent individual is placed.

Apart from the vessel, the interior of an intact ceramic dish of the type Sacalum Black-on-Slate: var. Cafetoso covered the face of Burial 2, one other common Classic period practice in the Maya lowlands. A Xul Incised: var. Xul bowl was located in a niche near the right leg of the individual. Although the excavators believe this vessel to be associated with the upper individual, it is unclear whether it should instead be associated spatially with the left side of the head of Burial 4. Regardless, this vessel bears an incised ik symbol (plate 6.1). Burial artifacts with ik symbols are widespread geographically, but at the same time rare in general. In other contexts, these wares should have been used for cacao consumption. It is also of interest that teeth with ik-style mutilations, signifying aroma, taste, and/or breath, are seen more often among the upper echelon of Classic period Maya kingdoms than among members of the commoner class (Tiesler 2000b). Apart from the vessel, a shell pendant found near the left leg completed the funerary outfit. While no radiocarbon dates are available from this context, the two ceramic vessels from the cist and the material vestiges within the structure fill indicate a Yaxuná IVa date for both individuals (Shaw 1998).

Once the second body had been placed together with its corresponding grave goods, the cist was again lined and immediately filled in and covered with slabs. The position of the articulated femurs of Burial 2 (in a cross form) and the lack of patina leaves little doubt about the filled quality of the funerary space after the time of this second interment. Occupation continued at the structure until sometime around AD 850, before the residence was abandoned altogether.

**BURIAL 3**

Much less protracted than the Burial 2/4 is the funerary progression of Burial 3, which is represented by a poorly preserved series of long-bone fragments found in the fill of the platform centerline of Str. 5E-75. In this case, no defined burial space was noted by the excavators
and no grave goods accompanied the deteriorated remains. Very little can be said about its human occupant except that the remains represent an adult. The field drawing of the bones suggests that the remains were placed into the fill in an extended position (no patina was noted) with the head to the northeast. A single radiocarbon sample provides a range of AD 695–887, suggesting a Yaxuná IVa date. The Selz Foundation project reports the final occupation of Str. 5E-75 to be Yaxuná III (Shaw 1998; Stanton et al. 2010), suggesting that this interment may be postabandonment.

**BURIAL 6**

The cover slabs of this burial rested only 40 cm below the upper platform floor before the structure was abandoned. Originally reported as a single individual, there appear to have been at least two bodies upon skeletal reanalysis. This conclusion ties in with the original assessment of reentry of the funerary space. Roughly delimited, this narrow cist was only 30 cm high, 170 cm long, and 35 cm wide and, considering the taphonomy of all skeletal vestiges, should have been filled right after placing the first of the two bodies into this assemblage. Located in Str. 6E-31, the principal domestic structure of the 6E-30 Group, this context dates to Yaxuná IVa (figure 6.5). While not the highest residential platform, the 6E-30 Group is by far the most extensive. It is the only residential group yet tested at the site with pure Middle Formative deposits and has a causeway dating to this early period extending off its northern end indicating its importance (Stanton 2000, 2005a; Stanton and Ardren 2005). After an apparent hiatus in use during the Early Classic, it appears that the group was reoccupied toward the end of the Late Classic. Given the stratigraphic placement, Burial 6 may have been originally occupied shortly after this time at the beginning of the Terminal Classic.

The fact that several of the bones were in an anatomical position does suggest indeed there were originally two individuals. Further, there is a clear difference in robusticity in the remains, indicating that more than one individual is represented. While sex and age could not be determined with accuracy due to the state of the skeletal material, both individuals were adults. It appears that the individual that was placed first (Individual 6-2) was put to rest with the head apparently to the west (a pattern that fits for multiple burial contexts in the Maya lowlands), although the remains from both individuals were too deteriorated to distinguish securely between the two during excavation. The upper individual and therefore the one to be interred later in time (Individual 6-1) was placed extended, supine, and with the head to the east.

Given the lack of evidence for degenerative disease for Individual 6-1, it is likely that he or she was under 45 years of age. Although the stature of this individual was under the norm for males, several robusticity indicators suggest that this individual might not be female. Stable isotope analysis of one of the eight teeth found in the crypt indicates a foreign origin for one of the two individuals. We believe the tooth is from Individual 6-1, but given the state of preservation and the misidentification of the burial as a single interment, it is possible that the tooth belongs to the second individual. In any case, the isotope data indicate that the
FIGURE 6.5. (a) Burial 6 during excavation; (b) drawing (Yaxuná Project, Selz Foundation).
owner of the tooth in question is likely from one of two areas, the Puuc Hills region or southern Quintana Roo. Given the ceramic grave goods and the likelihood that the burial dates to the end of the Late Classic or even the beginning of the Terminal Classic, a time that a Puuc influence was heavily felt at the site, the Puuc assignation is appealing. Could one of the two individuals have originated from the Puuc Hills and then came to Yaxuná around the time that this Puuc-style group was built?

The same problems we face in differentiating the skeletal material we also confront in classifying the grave goods. While we believe that most or all of the grave goods pertain to Individual 1, it is quite possible that some of these objects were placed with Individual 2. One grave good that we can clearly assign to Individual 1 is a Sacalum Black-on-Slate: var. Cafetoso dish that was placed over the skull. A second ceramic vessel, a Tabi Gouged and Incised: var. Tabi globular vase is reported to have been found by the left leg of individual 6-1 (figure 6.6). It is possible, however, that this second vessel belonged to Individual 6-2, placing it near the head. In any case, the vessel is decorated with pop symbols, indicating that one or both individuals in Burial 6 are high status. Pop or “mat” symbols were used by the ruling elite in Classic Maya society. A drinking vase with such a symbol included in this interment is a significant issue, considering that the burial contains a foreigner quite possibly from the Puuc Hills region, which may have controlled or in some way administered affairs at Yaxuná during the first phase of the Terminal Classic period.
This context contained a local middle-aged male that was located in Str. 6E-58, toward the southeast of the East Acropolis. The body was placed in the southeast corner of the building after having accommodated a stone-lined crypt or cist with capstones similarly dimensioned as Burial 6 (170 × 40 cm) (figure 6.7). We infer from the rodent marks and patina formation on the bony surfaces that the funerary space had been originally an empty void. The skeletal remains were found supine and extended with the head to the east. The Selz Foundation project reports that the hands were located beneath the pelvis, probably due to a slight flexing of the body to accommodate the ceramic vessel, a poorly made Muna Slate: var. Cafetoso jar recovered next to the left leg. This jar and the ceramics associated with the construction of the building were used to assign the burial to the Terminal Classic. Several faunal remains, identified by the Selz Foundation project, were found in the pelvic area.

### BURIAL 8

Dated directly to the time surrounding the eighth and ninth century (C14: AD 681–883), this burial was found beneath the same floor as Burial 1 in the south room of Str. 5E-103 (figure 6.8). The single individual was identified as a middle-aged female, who had been placed extended and supine in a stone-lined cist with her head to the northeast. An Akil Impressed: var. Cafetoso dish covered the face of the individual as the only grave good recovered during the excavation.

**FIGURE 6.7.** Drawing of the skeletal remains of Burial 7 (Yaxuná Project, Selz Foundation; skeleton redrawn by V. Tiesler).
This burial was located in a crypt in Str. 5E-77, the western structure of the Late Classic elite 5E-73 Group, where Burial 3 had also been found. In contrast to Burial 3, however, Burial 9 is a clearly defined mortuary crypt lined by stones and covered with capstones. The crypt contained the remains of a local child between the ages of three and five. The body had been placed supine and extended with the head to the northwest. The burial space was laid out on a northwest to southeast axis and was lined with natural stones, to be covered with three slabs that delimited an interior space of 92 cm × 30 cm.

Large Terminal Classic Slate Ware fragments from three separate vessels were located on top of the capstones. The patterning of the ceramics is suggestive of termination activity (e.g., Ambrosino et al. 2003; Stanton et al. 2008) rather than of typical mortuary burial patterns. No ceramics were found within the burial space itself. The only grave goods found in association with the skeletal remains were two shells and several faunal remains. The two shells were perforated *Spondylus americanus*; one appears to have been placed in front of the pelvis while the other behind it, perhaps as part of some sort of belt. Again, the use of a shell to cover the genitals of children probably explains the placement of the shell in this burial. Two fragments of deer long-bone were recovered near the left arm, and a fragment of a cranium was found on top of the pelvis.

This context was found in the northern portion of Str. 5E-167, close to the dense area of Terminal Classic habitation near the Early Classic palace (figure 6.9). The individual recovered from this context was a local adult female, although we were not able to assign a specific age range given the lack of adequate osteological remains. This individual had been placed in an oval, stone-lined cist covered by capstones. The skeletal remains were found in an extended
position, supine with her head to the east. The right tibia was found crossing over the left one, perhaps to make space for the ceramic vessel or, alternatively, as a result of rodent activity in a void funerary space.

A Dzibilcal Black-on-Orange: var. Dzibilcal bowl was founded inverted over the face of the individual. On top of this bowl a Sacalum Black-on-Slate: var. Cafetoso jar was recovered.
A third vessel, a Yokat Striated: var. Yokat jar, was located next to the left tibia. While we have designated the burial to Yaxuná IVa, the ceramic grave goods are transitional between the Late and Terminal Classic periods. In fact, a single radiocarbon date (AD 656–769) from the bone of the individual corroborates this transitional date. Finally, a small perforated shell disk (possibly a button forming part of the funerary garb), a blue-painted limestone bead, and an obsidian blade were recovered from this mortuary context.

Obsidian objects are quite rare in mortuary contexts at Yaxuná and at inland sites in the northern lowlands in general. For example, obsidian is reported in only 1.6% (3 of 185) of burials at Dzibilchaltún. This contrasts with coastal sites in the northern lowlands such as Jaina (3.2%, 9 of 283) and Xcambó (4.3%, 25 of 587) that probably had greater access to this scarce resource given their location on coastal trade routes. Sites in the southern lowlands closer to obsidian sources located in the Maya highlands such as Tikal (13.8%, 31 or 225) and Copán (5.6%, 49 of 881) also have higher frequencies of obsidian objects in burials. Such low frequencies are understandable given the distance of Yaxuná and other inland northern Maya sites to these sources. Although we argue that Yaxuná was located on an inland trade route from the Formative, by the Late Classic coastal trade was beginning to eclipse inland trade, and by the Terminal Classic, when most of our burial sample dates, Yaxuná was likely to have had a small part in inland exchange systems, if it played much of a role at all.

**BURIAL 13**

This burial was a complex interment found in the south room of the western Str. 4E-20 of the patio group where the Late Classic Burials 12 and 14 were also recovered. This group looks back on a long occupation (Yaxuná II to IV), the latter of which makes the time frame for this burial. Three individuals, labeled Burials 13A, 13B, and 13C by the Selz Foundation project (Stanton et al. 2010), were recovered from a stone-lined crypt with capstones (figure 6.10). Burial 13 is a typical Terminal Classic multiple burial at Yaxuná and with its interior length of 190 cm and a breadth of 50 cm is a bit larger-dimensioned than the ones described above.

The first individual to be deposited was Burial 13C, a middle-aged or mature female. Her body was placed supine and extended in the crypt with her head to the east. Evidence indicates that the body was placed in void space, which did not fill in until much later, maybe after receiving the last interment (probably Burial 13B, as we argue). The remains were in poor condition, and no grave goods could be associated with this individual, except for a deer-bone fragment.

Burial 13A corresponds to the remains of a local middle-aged or older male, which were placed supine directly on top of the already skeletonized corpse of Burial 13C. Oriented inversely to Burial 13C, his head came to rest to the west. The level of constriction of the shoulders may indicate that the body was wrapped. Several grave goods were assigned to Burial 13A by the excavators. First, a poison bottle of the type Chumayel Red-on-Slate: Cafetoso was recovered in the area of the abdomen (plate 6.2). Several poison bottles were
FIGURE 6.10. (a) Drawing of top slabs; (b) distribution of human remains of Burial 13; (c) bottom of the crypt; (d) excavation photo of upper layer of the crypt (drawings and photos by Yaxuná Project, Selz Foundation; skeleton redrawn by V. Tiesler).
recovered by the Selz Foundation project at Yaxuná, although this was the only one found in a burial context. Poison bottles are found throughout the Maya lowlands but appear to be more common along the coast at sites like Xcambó. Evidence indicates that these vessels may have been containers for tobacco (Zagorevski and Loughmiller-Newman 2011). Second, two vessels were placed between the legs of Burial 13A; a Yokat Striated: var. Yokat jar and a Muna Slate: var. Cafetoso bowl. Third, there was a worked segment of a conch shell with some simple incised designs on the right femur; this artifact could have functioned as a receptacle for liquids. Fourth, a worked human femur with a perforation was interpreted by the excavators as a pectoral. This artifact was found over the thorax. Fifth, a *Spondylus americanus* pectoral and a five-pointed star shell were recovered near the mandible. Finally, Burial 13B was placed on the right femur of Burial 13A.

The skull of Burial 13B, probably the last human remains to be interred, belonged to a young foreign male. Stable isotope analysis indicates that he could have been from the Puuc region or from southern Quintana Roo. The individual was represented only by the cranium and the first four vertebrae. This anatomic representation may indicate that the head had been severed at the height of the neck with the soft tissue still intact, although due to the deteriorated state of preservation we could not detect any indicative anthropogenic marks. While it is not entirely clear whether this head was placed in the crypt together with Burial 13A or sometime after, the lack of evidence for initial soil exposure of Burial 13A suggests that this individual decomposed and disarticulated in a void space and that the crypt was filled and turned into a cist only later, most likely at the time Burial 13B was deposited. If this is correct, Burial 13B was placed years or decades after the initial deposition of Burial 13A. Given the articulated state in which the vertebrae of Burial 13B were found and his foreign status, possibilities run high that this was a trophy head placed as an offering during a last reentry and the filling in of the funerary space. This interpretation is supported also by the skull’s taphonomic surface properties, which indicate direct exposure to organic matter.

### BURIAL 15

The context of Burial 15 is yet another successive multiple burial dating to the Terminal Classic (figure 6.11). It held the remnants of at least four individuals who were placed into this crypt over time. Some of these bodies are represented only by isolated fragments, probably relics or remnants of formerly complete corpses. While there are no radiocarbon dates, the Slate Ware ceramics in the crypt are fairly late Yaxuná IVa, and it is likely that Chichén Itzá was already an urban center at the time this burial was placed, although Sotuta ceramics were not yet in use at Yaxuná. The burial was situated in the northwest portion of the Str. 5F-49 platform off to the west of the site center. This platform had been occupied during the Early Classic only to be reoccupied centuries later, at the beginning of the Terminal Classic (Shaw 1998; Stanton 2000).

Prior to exposing the capstones of the cist, the excavators encountered an offering consisting of a Slate Ware vase containing two small ceramics beads and a miniature ceramic mask.
FIGURE 6.11. (a) Drawing of profile; (b) top slabs; (c) mortuary distribution of Burial 15; (d) excavation photo of bottom of the crypt (Yaxuná Project, Selz Foundation).
(all painted blue), together with a large unpainted stone bead. This cache was placed over the western part of the cists where the head of Burial 15A was located, probably placed here as a postburial offering. The vessel was a Xaya Gouged and Incised: var. Xaya vase depicting a scribe (figure 6.12). It is entirely possible that this vessel was originally part of the funerary context for Burial 15B and was reinterred when Burial 15A was laid to rest. Redeposition of earlier grave goods was common practice in sequential multiple burials such as these across the Maya lowlands during the Classic period. A second cache of fragmented deer bone and two shell pendants were recovered over the cists further to the east. Given the use of shell pendants to cover the genitals of children in the Maya area, the second cache may have belonged to Burial 15D and was replaced when Burial 15A was interred.

The crypt itself, measuring 190 cm long and 45 cm wide, was meant, or eventually adapted, to hold more than one individual. At least seven stone slabs covered this crypt, forming a rectangular cap. Both the anatomic distribution of the complete individuals and the surface properties appear to signal that this funerary space was filled in from the start. The first human occupant was termed Burial 15B, a local adult female who came to rest in an
extended supine position with her head to the east. Given the poor condition of the remains, the age of the individual could not be determined with great accuracy.

The second, or in any case the last, fully fleshed corpse to be placed into the crypt was Burial 15A, a local young- to middle-aged adult male, whose body was placed supine and extended with his head to the west. As with all documented successive multiples from the local domestic contexts, this individual was placed in an inverted position with respect to the first deposition (Burial 15B). An unhealed wound cut off the anterior portion of the left tibia of Burial 15A’s left tibial diaphysis (figure 6.13). We asked ourselves whether this blow was the cause of death of this individual or whether it was inflicted sometime during reentry, given that the mandible was allocated on top of the lower extremities.

The excavators assigned all of the grave goods to Burial 15A. These artifacts included a Chumayel Red-on-Slate: var. Cafetoso tripod dish with slab supports that was inverted over the face. A second vessel, a Ticul Thin Slate: var. Not Designated vase, was found over the femurs. This vessel was covered with stucco and painted with a polychrome design (figure 6.14). Several faunal bones were found inside this vase. These were originally identified as human, but subsequent analysis identified them as large mammal segments (Götz in Stanton et al. 2010). Finally, a bone whistle and awl were encountered in the upper chest area. While the Burial 15 context may very well have been a crypt prior to the deposition of Burial 15A, in any case it was filled at the time of the interment of the final individual or very soon afterward.

Burial 15C, a single mandible from an adult, was found near the proximal end of the right tibia of Burial 15A and appears to be associated with this latter individual. This mandible was

**FIGURE 6.13.** Long bones of Burial 15B, showing probable blow in green-bone in the anterior portion of the left tibia (Yaxuná, Selz Foundation/Bioarchaeology and Histology Laboratory, UADY).
so poorly preserved that any attempts at sexing it were rendered insecure. Mandibles were sometimes used as trophies in Mesoamerica but could be relics as well, treasured objects of ancestor worship. Off to the south of the tibias there were some other skeletal remains that could not be assigned to a particular individual. Burial 15D consisted of the sole fragment of a distal right humerus of a child. This child may have been placed before the last burial with the majority of the bones removed during the reoccupation.

**BURIAL 16**

This context was one of three Terminal Classic burials that were recovered at the 6F-42 platform, a domestic context located immediately to the east of the North Acropolis where important elite activity continued to take place during this period. Burials 16 and 17 were found in the western portion of Str. 6F-43, a rectangular foundation brace located along the northern edge of the basal platform. Neither of the burial contexts was well preserved, although it appears that Burial 16 was the latter of the two as it intruded into, and thereby disturbed, Burial 17. Neither of the burials contained ceramic offerings to date them. Further, the bone submitted for radiocarbon analysis did not contain enough collagen for dates. Regardless, the ceramics from the structure seemingly indicate that both burials are Terminal Classic.

The individual in Burial 16 was a nonlocal adult according to isotope data garnered from a bone sample. Namely, strontium isotope data identified this person as having a probable origin either in the Puuc region or in southern Quintana Roo. Since Yaxuná IVa was
dominated by ties to the Puuc at the site, we would tend to favor the former assignation. Given the appearance of the supraorbital crests and the large mastoids, this individual was likely a male, although this assignment remains insecure due to poor preservation. The burial was heavily disturbed but appears to have been deposited in a supine extended position with the head to the east.

The excavators also reported that several cranial fragments were recovered in the area of the femurs. While the poor preservation of the context prohibits a clear understanding of the depositional sequence and the positive identification of two corpses, we suspect that these “other” cranial fragments represent a second individual that was placed in the inverse direction as the individual reported by the project. This interpretation would make sense considering the tradition of successive multiple burials during the Terminal Classic at Yaxuná. There was some taphonomic difference regarding the ossification of the material that would support this interpretation, but no repeated bones were identified. The only grave good that was found in the context was a small shell bead.

BURIAL 17

This burial was located in the extreme northwestern portion of Str. 6F-43. As mentioned previously, this loosely lined cist had been heavily disturbed by Burial 16. The Selz Foundation project identified only one occupant of the crypt/cist. Yet our analysis revealed that there were at least two individuals. The second individual, here designated Burial 17A, is only represented by a mandible, and we consider it as “associated” remains. Given the poor preservation of the context, it is difficult to assess whether Burial 17 is yet another Terminal Classic successive multiple. What remained of Burial 17A indicates that the individual was an adult (the age range could not be narrowed), most likely a male. The body was deposited supine in an extended position with the head toward the north. The long bones were not present in the context, and it is quite possible that the bones were removed from this individual at a later date. Given the patina on the bones and the rodent damage, it is probable that this context was originally a void space after deposition. The mandible of Burial 17B is robust and may belong to an adult male. No grave goods were recovered from this context.

BURIAL 18

This human assemblage was located in Str. 6F-73, the eastern structure of Platform 6F-42 (figure 6.15). Once again, two individuals were recovered from the context, found in the southeast corner of the northern room. The burial was a typical successive multiple Terminal Classic burial, its reduced dimensions (30 cm in breadth and 110 cm in length) adapted to hold the bodies of subadults. The first individual to be deposited, Burial 18B, was a child between the ages of two and four years, whose body was laid out supine and extended with the head to the north. From the taphonomy of this interment we infer that the funerary space was left void for some time, perhaps until it received the subsequent child body. Burial
18A was the last of the two individuals placed in the crypt/cist before it was filled in and sealed on top. The remains of Burial 18A were of a child who had died between the ages of five and seven, and whose body was laid out supine with the head to the south.

Several grave goods were found in the context, although assigning them to a specific individual was tasking. We believe that the Dzán Composite: var. Cafetoso dish was originally placed over the head of Burial 18A given that it was found in the southern end of the context and dishes were often placed over the faces of the dead in the Maya lowlands. The Yokat Striated: var. Yokat jar was found in the northern portion of the context, although it is not clear when it was placed. Two bivalve shells had been placed in the area of the pelvises of both individuals. It is likely that these shells were placed over the genitals of each individual in response to the pattern found in the Maya area discussed previously. A long bone of a deer was found on the right side of Burial 18A and an unperforated shell was also recovered in the matrix. Bone from Burial 18A yielded a radiocarbon date of AD 639–773. Given the dish found associated with the head of this individual, we are inclined to assign this individual to the latter part of this range.
BURIAL 25

This context was found beneath the floor of the westernmost room of Str. 6F-68, a building identified as a council house that during the Terminal Classic was abutted to the south side of Str. 6F-4 on the North Acropolis (figure 6.16) (Ambrosino 2003, 2007). Str. 6F-68 has a complex basal façade with images associating it with authority. Given this context, we believe that it is highly significant that Burial 25 was placed here, possibly indicating that the individual was of great importance to the elite community living at Yaxuná during this period. The burial itself appears to have been dedicatory but was reentered at the time of the abandonment (Ambrosino 2007; Ardren 1999).

No datable ceramics were found in the stone-lined crypt, yet ceramics from the excavations indicate that the building was first constructed during Yaxuná IVa, and a series of radiocarbon dates suggest that the burial may have been placed during the eighth century AD. A radiocarbon sample from the bone of Burial 25 yielded a span of AD 671–872, a fairly large range. Three wood samples from a burning event associated with the abandonment of the structure, however, yield ranges of AD 655–777, AD 622–766, and AD 671–766.

Given the presence of Sotuta-style ceramics on the floor of this burned structure, these dates should not be representative of its abandonment. They could, however, represent older organic material culture associated with the construction or use of the building that was consumed by the flames when it was abandoned. All three ranges are fairly consistent, with the latter end dating to the beginning of Yaxuná IVa. Thus, we believe it is probable that the building was constructed sometime between AD 700 and AD 760 and that the original wooden vault beams were eventually burned.

The individual inside this crypt had been a young adult upon death. Given the gracile complexion, this person was most likely female, although the on-site stature measurement of 170 cm casts doubts on this assignment. Regardless of sex, the body was placed in the crypt in an extended supine position with the head to the east and left unfilled probably until being reentered at the time of abandonment, as mentioned above.

During reentry, the plaster floor was perforated just above the area of the pelvis and the capstone in this area was removed. It appears as if someone reached their hand in toward the eastern area of the crypt and took out several items, including the skull of the individual. While the cranial portion of the skeleton itself was missing, several teeth were recovered from the place where the skull should have been originally. Likewise, the entire upper torso was disarticulated by this activity, although the lower extremities remained intact, indicating that the removal of material occurred only in the eastern portion of the crypt. A ceramic base for a mirror was found in situ in the area of the pelvis, indicating a person of considerable rank. Several small greenstone beads and some deer bone were also recovered on the eastern side of the crypt, although it would appear that any larger grave goods that were likely located in the eastern area were also removed at this time.

The Selz Foundation project originally interpreted these data as the remains of a desecratory termination ritual undertaken by the conquering forces of Chichén Itzá (Ambrosino
FIGURE 6.16. Drawing of skeletal distribution in the (a) upper and (b) lower portion of Burial 16-1-2; (c) profile of subsequently placed individuals coming to rest at different depths (Bioarchaeology and Histology Laboratory, UADY).
Terminal Classic defensive features were encountered in several areas of the North Acropolis (Ambrosino 2007), and the burning and intentional destruction of the council house in association with Sotuta ceramics indicated that Yaxuná may have fallen to the expanding power located just to the north. While Yaxuná may have very well fallen in a military battle to Chichén Itzá, the data from Burial 25, and from Str. 6F-68 in general, may reflect more than the destruction of the ideological material symbols by the Itzá.

Vallejo Cáliz (2011) has demonstrated that several households at Xuenkal, a Terminal Classic center to the northeast of Chichén Itzá, were gradually abandoned around the time that Sotuta ceramics began to appear outside of Chichén Itzá. We believe that Chichén Itzá, as a large urban development with a new ideological program, began to attract people from across the peninsula. Some elites may have been forced to move to the Itzá center, and we do not doubt that military means were employed in some cases. Yet regardless of the motivations, people moving to this area would have brought some of their important relics with them and may have intentionally terminated some of their own important structures upon abandonment. Thus, while the removal of bone material from Burial 25 and the burning of Str. 6F-68 may have been an act of violence directed against the community of Yaxuná, the data may also indicate an intentional closure of the building by the site’s inhabitants and the extraction of important ancestral bones to be taken to their new home. We will return to this discussion in chapter 9.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The burials dated to the Yaxuná IVa represent more than double the number of excavated mortuary contexts dated to the prior phase. Although they denote continuity with Yaxuná III burials at the site, a shift away from seated bundle burials and toward extended multiples was noted. The Selz Foundation project characterized the interments from this period as being predominantly deposited in stone-lined crypts with slab capstones (Stanton et al. 2010). Paired deposits prevail, with two primary individuals placed inverted after the initial individual had skeletonized, sometimes accompanied by remnants of further individuals. Once the extended bodies were lowered into the ground, the burial context spaces were mostly left empty and were backfilled only once the last body was laid down. No preferred body orientation could be made out among these burials, indicating a lack of standardization. Once again, several assemblages contained isolated remains of additional individuals in the form of mandibles, humeri, or skulls. These additions either express incomplete removals of prior occupants or a selection of bones of another deceased person. Even more than the prior burial cohort, the mortuary assemblage of Yaxuná’s Phase IVa does not denote isolated interment events, but complex and sequenced ancestral behaviors, which comprise most probably more than one single building platform. This period is marked by the appearance of Puuc-style architectural traits and a ceramic complex that is composed primarily by Slate Wares (Suhler et al. 1998b). Considering the possible origins of several of the individuals
from this time period, we believe that this shift toward the Puuc sphere should have gone beyond the material culture to include to some (though not extended) degree population mobility between the east and the west in the Yucatán.

**DISCUSSION**

In this chapter we surveyed the shifting local and regional traditions of body preparation, grave deposition, and posthumous body manipulation in the form of reduction and relict taking. The depth and breadth of collective mortuary treatments at Yaxuná (and beyond) subscribe mostly to the family traditions from the settlement’s domestic compounds. Here, the occupational sequence of the platforms marks time frames for the continually staged mortuary programs, materialized by what Pereira (2013) calls “occupational” burials—those graves accommodated below the floors of residential platforms without structural architectural modifications.

The fact that many of the burials were successive multiples does not come as a surprise, considering that during the Classic period it was common practice among surviving kin in Yucatán to use the same burial contexts for dead kin over long periods of time without substantial evidence for construction to go along with each burial event, as we have argued for “occupational burials.” This means that the floor and dirt above was removed for subsequent deposit, which would lead to complete or partial disturbances of the previously buried bodies, to rearrangements or extractions of their already skeletonized remains. Sometimes, a previously unfilled, sealed initial interment was opened to place a new corpse. Thereafter it was sealed again or simply filled in with earth, as we infer from the differences between the decompositional processes. This form of continued burial occupation is indeed reminiscent of coeval funerary customs, which we previously documented at the Late Classic settlement of Xuenkal, some 60 km north of Yaxuná (Tiesler et al. 2010b). Here, most graves contained more than just one body. Most of the corpses held a supine head-to-toe arrangement, which recalls the funerary accoutrements at Yaxuná. Further, other Classic period peninsular centers, such as Caece (Rodríguez Pérez 2007, 2010), show this sort of reoccupation, which seemingly responds to the generational cycling of young and old kin. Note that only the earlier burial contexts contained flexed individuals, one of them seated (Burial 28). We assume that the latter could have marked the onset of architectural abandonment or renovation, thus ending an occupational phase, as was argued in the corresponding section.

At Xuenkal, the lining-up of successive mortuary events could be prolonged and could have included extensive kin. In one of its central residential units, we documented one grave holding a total of 16 individuals, some of whom were still seen articulated and extended one on top of the other (figure 6.16; Tiesler et al. 2010b). Given the taphonomy and MNI of this massive mortuary deposit, we infer that it accrued gradually over the decades and most probably centuries of residential occupation. It contained men, women, and children, who had been placed extended supine below the central platform axis, giving tangible testimonies
of ongoing residential life and generational cycling in the space above. Needless to say, this multiple assemblage from Xuenkal is very different from the deposit of 12 bodies into Tomb 24 (discussed in chapter 7), whose occupants were put into the chamber most likely in only one or two occasions, which informs about the contingency of the circumstances surrounding the formation of this context.

Yet what happened when the dead were transported from afar or were reassigned a different burial space within the settlement itself? At least six individuals of our local series suggest this possibility and were determined as secondary placements versus 32 confirmed primary interments at the settlement. The former show no articulation and most of them consist of only isolated cranial or mandibular deposits. Although we cannot ascertain if the redepositions were close or spaced far apart, it is noteworthy that two of the four removed bodies with isotopic signatures came from outside the settlement. Likewise, most of the primary deposits show disturbances, either by faunal agents or anthropic activity during subsequent mortuary uses of the funerary space or unrelated construction work.

The architectonic association of some additional burials excavated not from beneath but around residential platform floors is telling. Such is Burial 9, described in the first part of this chapter. This deposit was found close to a step near the entrance of the structure. It is intrusive to Floor 1 and may even be part of some sort of termination activity when the building was abandoned. The Burial 9 context is somewhat similar to the Burial 5 context dating to the end of Yaxuná III. Both harbored small children in liminal areas of large elite platforms. While there are differences in the specifics of these two mortuary contexts and the sample is quite small, they potentially represent broader patterns of Late and Terminal Classic ritual activity, which we will address in chapter 8.