Colonial Yucatán: Indigenous Experiences and the Persistence of Tradition in Conversion and Conquest

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Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of the Indigenous population of Yucatan during the 16th century when Spanish colonialism began in the region. The primary focus is their conversion to Catholicism. It explores the dynamics of the peninsula before and after the arrival of the Iberians, Indigenous participation in conquest, and Indigenous adoption of Spanish culture. It also conveys that while the Indigenous people accepted and adopted parts of Iberian culture, such as Catholicism, they did not abandon their history or tradition. This thesis explores the traditional worldview of the Indigenous population and expresses that despite conversion, it persisted and adapted. I demonstrate that numerous factors were at play during this period that helped the Indigenous population craft a form of Catholicism that reflected pre-Iberian traditions and history. This Indigenous form of Catholicism and the dynamics that created it establishes that the Indigenous population held great agency during the 16th century and were not merely a subject population to the Spanish.

Reading Against the Grain of Yucatán's History: The Indigenous Throughline to Reality

The conversion to Christianity for the Indigenous people of the Yucatán peninsula was multifaceted and prolonged, never maintaining a particular course during the colonial period. In modern times, the narrative surrounding the Maya has relegated the population to myth and mystery, along with the processes that led the native population to adopt Christianity. Traditional narratives of the conversion process–such as those written by William E. Gates–provide examples and citations and rely on surface evidence from colonial texts and archeology. The result of this was a simplistic story of a repetitive conversation cycle and efficient and inevitable Iberian domination over the Indigenous population of the Yucatán peninsula.

This thesis argues that this dominant interpretation of Indigenous conversion as acquiescence and assimilation into an all-powerful and efficient Spanish Imperium is a misconception. It makes three central claims: First, old narratives fell for the Spanish assertion of a homogenous Mayan identity, overlooking the many players, including Indigenous actors, involved in the conquest and conversion of Indigenous peoples in the Yucatán. Mayan identity, first constructed by early modern Iberians for the Indigenous population of Yucatán, ignores the region's pre-Iberian history and prioritizes the perspective of conquistadors. That is not to say that the Indigenous population's embrace of Mayan identity in modernity is false; instead, it asserts that the origins of said identity ignored the history of the Yucatán peninsula and its peoples before contact with the Iberians. This narrative rendered the agency of Indigenous groups in the process of conquest and conversion invisible.

Second, this thesis shows that the Iberian colonial powers were demographically disadvantaged and dependent on Indigenous cooperation. It also highlights that the Iberians,

albeit of the same geographic background, often had oppositional aims. This division was especially true of the conquistadors who first arrived in 1511 and the Franciscan missionaries who followed them to the region. Attention to the different agendas of these groups undercuts the idea of a well-oiled colonial machine and the inevitability of the conquest. This conclusion parallels Mathew Restall's findings.[1]

Third, this thesis highlights the prolonged and uneven conversion process to Catholicism and the Indigenous role in reshaping Iberian Catholicism in line with pre-contact cosmological notions. In traditional accounts or analyses of conquest by scholars such as George Foster, the Indigenous population is often looked at as having quickly assimilated into Catholicism during the first few decades of the conquest.[2] This stance, however, ignores the copious amounts of evidence that expresses a continued resistance to Iberian colonization and the adaptation of Catholicism by the Indigenous population to their traditional beliefs. It follows the Old Conquest interpretation of Spanish colonization, which is distinctly Euro-centric and emphasizes the superiority of Iberians over inferior Indigenous populations.

To make these arguments, this thesis revisits a widely used source for the history of the Spanish conquest and conversion of the Yucatán but reads the Eurocentric source against the grain and supplements it with other sources, including maps and images. The primary source is the *Relación de las cosas del Yucatán* by Provincial Franciscan Friar Diego de Landa [as translated by historian William Gates], written in 1566. During his time, Landa served as the Provincial Friar of Yucatán and attempted to impose a violent and oppressive administration on the Indigenous population. He was in charge of the Catholic faith and converts of the peninsula, which consisted of modern-day Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Campeche, Chiapas, Tabasco, Belize, and portions of Eastern Guatemala.[3]

Landa's work provides detailed insight into the Indigenous world from an observer unfamiliar with the region's societies, culture, and environment. The topics covered are varied, ranging from spirituality, nuptial matters, social punishments, and warfare to the pre-Hispanic history of the region.[4] Landa's work also examines the period before the arrival of the Franciscan mendicant order to the peninsula, when conquistadors alone maintained imperial authority over the peninsula and its native populations.

Not surprisingly, Landa's account is ethnocentric, meaning he holds deep biases in favor of Iberian culture, technology, and civilization, which are rooted in his upbringing within said society. Regardless, it is possible to extract information about Indigenous culture, which Landa sometimes included almost in spite of himself. By understanding Landa's biases and prejudice and then reading against the grain of *Relación*, the nuanced and often misinterpreted tapestry of events composing the colonial period of Yucatán becomes clear. That means not just looking for what is there but also what is absent or reported elsewhere. When assessing and interpreting Landa's *Relación*, it is essential to note that Landa was on trial in Spain for the mistreatment of Yucatán's Indigenous population and the abuse of his ecclesial powers while he was in the process of writing.[5]

Landa's focus on the Franciscan order in evangelization was thus inseparable from his politically and personally motivated attempt to highlight his and the Franciscan order's importance. He engaged in this effort while downplaying the impact of the conquistadors and the form of Christianity they had brought from their communities in Spain. It is also clear that Landa was attempting to completely write out the religious fervor of the Indigenous population to paint himself as more crucial to the process of Indigenous conversion.

Reading against the grain of Landa's *Relación* produces a more accurate historical image of Yucatán's early modern colonial period. This methodological approach provides insight into the prolonged nature of the conquest and conversion of the Yucatán peninsula and how the Indigenous co-shaped both processes. Landa's political motivation and the ethnocentrism in his *Relación,* along with other documents written by Spaniards at this time, place significant limitations when attempting to forge an accurate depiction of Indigenous societies. Therefore, engaging with and analyzing the documents written by Indigenous authors is an essential additional step.

Combining a critical re-reading of Landa's account with Indigenous sources, this thesis tries to re-center the story of the conquest and conversion of the Yucatán on the experiences and perspectives of the Indigenous population as they interacted with the invading Spanish and converted to Catholicism. Particularly important sources are *The Book of Chumayel*, the *Popul Vuh*, and pictorial evidence, which further helps counter the narratives in sources such as Landa's and form a less one-sided depiction of the past. They allow scholars to engage with the past in a manner that reflects the more nuanced reality of settings such as Colonial Yucatán.

Sources such as these allow for the Indigenous experience and perspective to become the focal point of discussion instead of an afterthought. Combining a critical re-reading of Landa's account with Indigenous sources, this thesis tries to re-center the story of the conquest and conversion of the Yucatán on the experiences and perspectives of the Indigenous population as they interacted with the invading Spanish and converted to Catholicism. Indigenous peoples actively shaped their history before and after the arrival of Spanish conquistadors and missionaries, be it through acts of resistance or the indigenization of Catholic religious practices.

The Maya, a Man-Made Myth

In the process of Imperial conquest and expansion, the Spaniards who had arrived in the Americas during the 16th century imposed the homogenizing category of "Maya" onto the Indigenous populations of the Yucatán Peninsula. This homogenization began with the arrival of conquistadors Gerónimo de Aguilar and Gonzalo Guerrero to the peninsula in 1511, wherein Aguilar dubbed the region's native population the "Maya."[1] Aguilar based the name for the Indigenous population of the peninsula on the language of those people he first contacted, the speakers of Mayat'an.

Despite this initial contact, this nomenclature for the population of Yucatán would not take hold until 1519, when Aguilar conveyed this information to Hernando Cortés, as the native populace had enslaved him and Guerrero for eight years until the arrival of the next Spaniard.[2] It was through Aguilar's limited interaction with the population during his captivity that the Indigenous populace of the Yucatán peninsula became categorically homogenized into the Maya by the Spanish conquistadors who had arrived on their shores.

During his period of captivity, Aguilar gained some familiarity with the language of his captors along with the diversity of the Indigenous tongue, something which would greatly benefit the arriving party of Cortés to the region. Landa noted this benefit in his work, stating:

> The language of this country is all one, a fact which aided greatly in its conversion, although along the coasts there are differences in words and accents. Those living on the coast are thus more polished in their behavior and language…[3]

Although Landa, from his ethnocentric worldview, referred to the languages of the peninsula as "one" within his assessment, he acknowledged the variety throughout the region between the interior and coastal areas. So much so that he expressed the necessity for a secondary translator

of Indigenous descent for the Cortés party, further supporting the variety and heterogeneity of the Yucatán peninsula.[4]

Despite Landa's acknowledgments, the categorical simplification and reduction of Indigenous identities, as a result of Aguilar's early classifications, imposed a narrative of homogeneity that is irreflective of the pre-Iberian structure of the Yucatán Peninsula. Before the arrival of the Iberians to Yucatán, there existed a complex world of various ethnic societies, groups, and peoples who lived within or adjacent to dynamic and structured political states vying for control throughout the region.

Within the peninsula, there existed a total of nineteen independent ethnic polities; among these nineteen were: the Itzas, the Xiu of Maní, the Cocom of Sututa, the Tabascans of Canul, the Ulúa, the Chel of Izamal, the Chuaca, the Covohes of Champotón, the Chan, the polity of Ekab, and Cozumel.[5] Despite inhabiting the same region and maintaining some linguistic overlap, these groups were not unified; instead, their relation to one another was reminiscent of the Italian peninsula's city-states during the 16th century, divided and independent.

The independence of each Indigenous polity did not correlate to isolation, nor did it equate to a lack of cooperation and interaction between the varying political entities. At the moment of the initial arrival of the Spaniards, the Indigenous populations of the region existed within a framework of interconnectedness comparable to, if not surpassing, those aforementioned Italian city-states. In the 23rd section of his *Relación*, Landa noted of the region's Indigenous population that:

> Their favorite occupation was trading, whereby they brought in salt; also cloths and slaves from Tobasco and Ulúa. In their bartering they used cacao and stone counters which they had for money, and with which they bought slaves and other fine and

> beautiful stones, such as the chiefs wore as jewels on festal occasions. They had also certain red shells for use as money and jewels for wearing; these they carried in network purses. In their markets they dealt in all the products of the country; they gave credit, borrowed, and paid promptly without usury.[6]

From Landa's account alone, it is clear that the independent Indigenous polities of the peninsula from the interior to the coast engaged in a vast network of trade and communication, with products from the interior and the coast serving as vital commerce assets. By leveraging individual regional assets, the varying groups of Indigenous peoples created a thriving trade network throughout the peninsula; this trade network engendered economic and social interconnectedness between the various polities.

Aside from the economic ties between the various Indigenous peoples throughout the Yucatán peninsula, the native populations of the region continuously maintained connections to one another through intermarriage and social assimilation. The most apparent case of this process is the Tutul-Xius, who migrated to Yucatán from Southern Mexico around the year 1000, evidenced by the Mexicanization of customs and religion during the period.[7] In the thirteenth section of the *Relación*, Landa elaborated on this process as he described the arrival of the Tutul-Xius:

> Here they began to settle and erect many fine edifices[buildings] in many places; that the inhabitants of Mayapán held most friendly relations with them, and were pleased that they worked the land as they were native to it. In this manner the people of the Tutul-Xiu subjected themselves to the laws of Mayapán, they intermarried, and thus the lord Xiu of the Tutul-Xius came to find himself held in great esteem by all.[8]

Through interactions such as these, by the time of the Spanish invasion at the beginning of the 16th century, the Indigenous peoples of the peninsula asserted and cemented their political and economic positions within the interconnected frame of Yucatán.

The connective tissue of environmental challenges existed alongside these social and economic links, with the peninsula's population remaining connected through shared environmental plights. In Landa's tenth section, the friar acknowledges that the ecological plight of the Indigenous population began before the arrival of the Spanish, beginning with a natural disaster that served to mark a period of decline for the region both in population and organization:

> Succeeding this prosperity, there came on one winter night at about six in the evening a storm that grew into a hurricane of the four winds. The storm blew down all the high trees, causing great slaughter of all kinds of game; it overthrew the high houses, which being thatched and having fires within for the cold, took fire and burned great numbers of the people, while those who escaped were crushed by the timbers.[9]

This hurricane struck the region decades before the arrival of the Aguilar expedition. The aftermath required the independent native populations of the peninsula to reorganize themselves and begin working to reconstruct the pre-disaster societies and networks they had created throughout the region.

This hurricane, unbeknownst to the Indigenous population of Yucatán, was simply the beginning of the ecological problems they would encounter before the arrival of the Spaniards to the peninsula. In this "fifteen-year" period of reconstruction following the catastrophic hurricane, the native population began to find success in restoring their lands, societies, and populations to levels comparable to before the disaster.[10] That was until:

> there came an epidemic of pestilencial fevers[between 1535 and 1541] that lasted for twenty-four hours; then on its abating the bodies of those attacked swelled and broke out full of maggoty sores, so that from this pestilence many people died and most of the crops remained ungathered.[11]

These environmental challenges facing the population of the Yucatán peninsula before the arrival of the Spanish created a circumstance in which the Indigenous people were not at their best concerning their social organization, population, or agricultural stability. This situation would help to provide the foundation for Iberian colonization upon their arrival, as they could exploit the tensions caused by environmental stressors.

Despite these shared environmental challenges, the extensive trade network of the region, and the assimilation of varying groups through intermarriage, it is essential to acknowledge the consistent tensions and rivalries within the peninsula between its independent populations of Indigenous peoples. Landa laid out some of these tensions in his ninth section:

> Between these great princely houses of the Cocoms, Xius and Chels there was a constant feud and enmity, which still continues even though they have become Christians. The Cocoms call the Xius strangers and traitors, murdering their natural lord and plundering his possessions. The Xius say they are as good as the others, as ancient and as noble; they were not traitors but liberators, having slain a tyrant. The Chel said he was as good as the other in lineage, being the descendant of the most renowned priest in Mayapán; that as to himself he was greater than they, because he had known to make himself as much a lord as they were.[12]

These tensions were long-standing well before the arrival of the Spanish to the region, rooted in these varying independent polities making claims for political authority and dominance within the peninsula.

These claims of authority stemmed from their shared history and connection to the ancient city of Mayapán and, in many ways, the city's fall. The fall of Mayapán served as a subject of contention between the various tribes that had formed the political entity and was still relevant by the time of Spanish arrival. That said, much of this pre-Iberian history is contested to this day, and much of what is known comes from Landa's *Relación*, which contains biases in favor of those Indigenous populations whom he maintained connections with, such as the Xiu.[13]

Regardless, the divide held between the Indigenous population of the region is clear from Landa's account:

> The chiefs [of Mayapán] then attached themselves to the party of Tutul-xiu, a man patriotic like his ancestors, and they plotted to kill Cocom. This they did, killing at the same time all of his sons save one who was absent; they sacked his dwelling and possessed themselves all his property, his stores of cacao and other fruits, saying that thus they repaid themselves what had been stolen from them. The struggles between the Cocoms, who claimed they had been unjustly expelled, and the Xius, went on to such an extent that after having been established in this city for more than five hundred years, they abandoned and left it desolate, each going to his own country.[14]

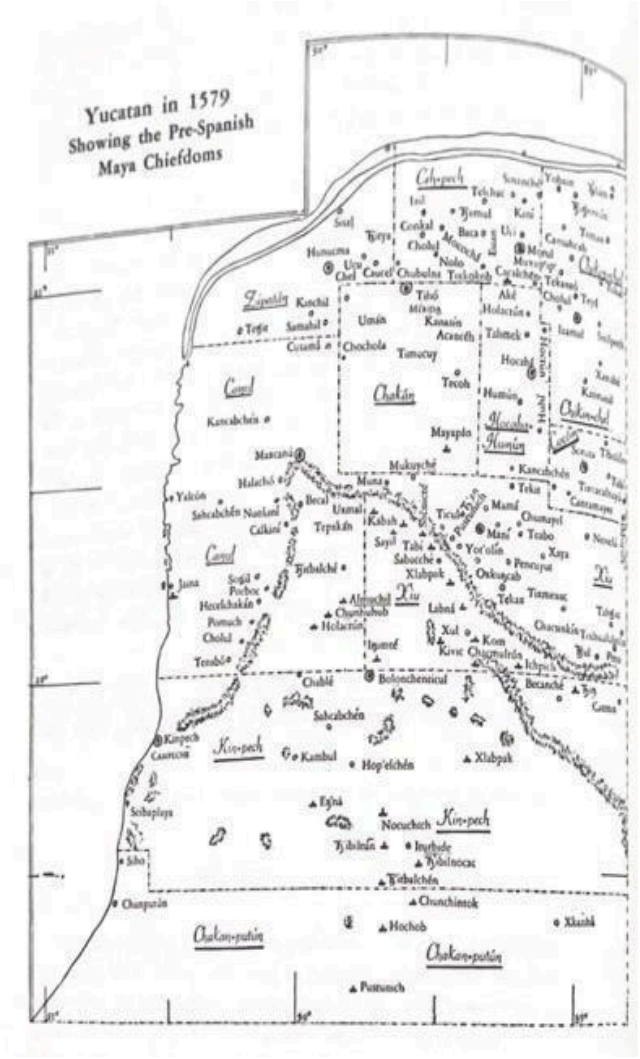
Regardless of historical contention due to the author's biases, it is clear that prior to the arrival of Aguilar and his party in the region, political division was already the circumstance of the Indigenous population due to their history.

In the century following the fall of Mayapán, there was no coalescence of these individual Indigenous groups into a unified political entity, nor had there been an effort to do so. This circumstance is made more evident by the region's pre-Iberian trade networks, which reflected the continued political divisions and tensions of the Yucatán. Within these trade networks were clear embargos between antagonistic groups, with the Friar noting that:

> The quarrel extended even to their food supply, for the Chel, living on the coast would not give fish or salt to the Cocom, making him go a long distance for it; and the Cocom would not permit the Chel to take any game or fruits[from the interior].[15]

This reality, one of division and conflict between individual polities of native peoples, was what defined the Yucatán peninsula and its peoples during the pre-Iberian period, and it was this reality that the Spanish encountered in 1511.

The division of the Yucatán peninsula was something the Spanish could exploit during their invasion of the region, which began in 1527 under the conquistador Admiral Francisco de Montejo. The peninsula's preexisting conditions allowed the conquistadors to make alliances and cooperate with individual polities while waging war against common enemies. The 1579 map below, while produced decades into the colonial period, reflects similar divisions to what Montejo would have encountered upon his arrival to the region.[16]



The map's Eastern segment reflects the peninsula's traditional territorial divisions before the Iberian invasion, as it is not centralized, condensed, or in a grid pattern. This territorial division demonstrates a lack of Spanish presence and control in the region despite the outpost of Valladolid within Cupul territory. Despite this outpost, the map conveys a level of political agency and maintained sovereignty by the East's Indigenous population, as the Iberians could not impart their colonial method of territorial division.

However, the Western portion of the map follows a Hispanicized provincial layout, which indicates a level of assimilation between the Indigenous population and the Iberians in the region. Despite this organization, the continued use of Indigenous names for villages, towns, and cities reveals a level of autonomy for the Indigenous population. Due to the maintenance of Indigenous names, it is clear that the population in the Western portion of the peninsula, although following the Spanish colonial framework, continued to assert a level of local autonomy within these regions.

It is also evident that upon the arrival of the conquistadors, there began to be a further split within the Indigenous population as many began to follow Iberian organization methods instead of traditional means. By the late sixteenth century, the peninsula's native population did not have a unified political body as they continued asserting their local sovereignty over their individual localities. They also remained divided territorially, whether by preexisting divisions or those created following the arrival of the conquistadors. The result of these compounding political and territorial divisions was an Indigenous population more splintered than ever before; in the West, the Hispanicized population, and in the East, the population that resisted Spanish rule by continuing to follow preconquest traditions.

From this framework of division, Montejo came to find his first allies in the region, the Chel and Tutul-Xiu; the Chel allowed the party of Montejo to create an outpost for the beginning of his conquest. In the words of Landa:

> [The Chel] were not as haughty as the others, and hence allowed the admiral to make a settlement for his people, giving him the site of Chichén Itzá for the purpose, an excellent place seven leagues away. From this position he set out to the conquest of the country, a

> task rendered easy by the non-resistance of the people of Akhin-Chel, and the assistance of those of Tutul-xiu, by reason whereof the others offered little resistance.[17]

Landa's ethnocentrism prioritizes the perception of the Indigenous population as obedient to Montejo's demands and Montejo as a great conqueror. Yet it is clear that without the assistance of and freedom granted by the Indigenous peoples of the region, Montejo would not have been able to begin his invasion. Instead, his expedition would likely have ended similarly to the enslaved Aguilar.

This reality becomes clear from the amount of assistance provided to the conquistador and his party by the Indigenous people, who helped construct the Spanish outpost at Chichén Itzá. The amount of labor supplied to the Montejo party by the leaders of Chel numbered between "2000" and "3000" Indigenous laborers, all of whom helped to supplement the measly "500 men" that Montejo had embarked with.[18] That is to say, *500 men,* if all had managed to survive a voyage similar to that which had left Aguilar and his expedition with less than 20 men upon arrival to the peninsula, which is an improbable event.[19] With that distinction made, it is evident that Montejo would not have been able to establish his early outpost or begin his conquest without Indigenous assistance.

The necessity of Indigenous assistance for Spanish establishment and conquest becomes clear through Landa's account, as once the Montejo party began to engage with the Indigenous population from the standpoint of conquerors rather than equals, the Indigenous assistance to their cause provided by the people of Akhin-Chel dissipated. Not only had the assistance vanished, but their relationship with the Spaniards turned from that of allies to enemies, with Landa noting that:

> The Indians feeling it a hardship to serve strangers when they had been the lords, began to be hostile on all sides, although he [Montejo] defended himself with his horses and men, and killed many. Nevertheless the Indians grew stronger every day, so that he found provisions failing, and at last one night he left the city… The party that followed in the direction they had gone caught up with the Spaniards, making a great hue and cry as if in a chase of fugitives.[20]

It was the imbalance caused by the ethnocentrism of the Montejo party within the relationship between the two groups that resulted in the Spanish vacating their stronghold at Chichén Itzá for fear of death.

Despite this conflict between Montejo and the Akhin-Chel, Indigenous assistance and division, yet again, allowed Montejo and the remainder of his party to survive the retaliation. In 1533, through the support of the Christian leader of Dzilán, Namux Chel, who provided a haven to the party in his territory and organized safe passage for them to Campeche, Montejo and his party returned to Cortés in Mexico.[21] Despite a common background as Chel and territorial proximity to the Chel of Tikoch, the polity of Dzilán maintained a separate view and relationship to Montejo and his party from their neighbors due to their leader's conversion to Christianity. By the time the Spanish invasion of Yucatán was underway, the divisions that had defined the territory before their arrival began growing evermore as the populace became introduced to the Iberian religion and society.

Despite these well-defined divisions of political entities throughout the Yucatán peninsula, Geronimo Aguilar's classification of the region’s populace brought to Hernando Cortés through his experience in 1511 took hold. The homogenization of Yucatán’s population took place over time; it was a process that relied heavily on the ethnocentrism of the

conquistadors who had arrived in the region at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Not only did it require ethnocentrism, but it also relied upon a level of rudimentary familiarity with the population's culture, language, and history. The Spanish could succinctly categorize the region's population as Maya through lenses that removed their individuality and ignored their historical divisions in favor of categorization in the process of invasion and colonization.

Nevertheless, despite Spanish homogenization, the Indigenous population continued to maintain a level of political agency and autonomy. Due to the peninsula's preexisting divisions and rivalries, segments of the Indigenous population chose to ally themselves with the conquistadors. In doing this, they retained territorial holdings and autonomy while adopting Iberian culture and methods of territorial organization. This cooperation between the Indigenous population and the Iberians would play a distinct part in the formation of colonial Yucatán, its politics, and its religion.

Spanish Dependency on Indigenous Division and Demographics

Between the Admiral's departure in 1533 and his son Don Francisco de Montejo the Younger, or El Mozo's, arrival in 1540, the peninsula would again face severe ecological struggles; however, at this time, the result was the deepening of divisions among the Indigenous population. Landa noted these further environmental problems in his fourteenth section:

> After the departure of the Spaniards from Yucatán, a drought followed in the land and the corn having been consumed during the wars with the Spaniards they suffered much from famine and were reduced to eating the bark of trees, especially a certain kind called *cumché* (*kunché*), the inside of which is soft and mellow… There was also a plague of locusts for five years, so great that no green thing was left and such a famine ensued that

> they fell dead on the roads and when the Spaniards returned they did not recognize the country.[1]

This famine and plague of locusts continued the ecological problems that had defined the region before the arrival of the Spanish. However, instead of connecting Indigenous communities as other environmental issues had done in the past, these ecological plights became a dividing factor in this period.

One significant effect was the lack of resources within the peninsula due to the twin crises of famine and the plague of locusts. The acute scarcity increased tensions between Indigenous peoples, such as the Cocom and Xiu, who had already been at odds with one another before the Iberians inserted themselves into the peninsula's political dynamic. Landa opens a window into these increased tensions in an account of a conflict between the Xiu of Mani and the Cocom that occurred before the arrival of El Mozo:

> On account of the famine the Xius of Mani undertook to make a solemn sacrifice to the idols, taking certain male and female slaves to cast into the pool at Chichén Itzá. To do this they had to pass by the town of the Cocom chiefs, their mortal enemies, but thinking that ancient quarrels would be forgotten in such times they sent to ask permission to pass through the country. The Cocoms deceived them with a favorable answer, but having lodged them all together in one great building they set fire to it, and slew those who escaped. From this great wars followed.[2]

In this ecological disaster, the Xiu turned to a traditional method of crisis management by visiting a religious site that had served as communal grounds for the Indigenous population of Yucatán. What happened next signaled significant change and clearly surprised the Xiu, who requested their old enemies allow them to use the site during these exceptional times. The

Cocom, however, undercut ("deceived") them in their efforts, transforming a traditionally communal location into a site of conflict. During this period between Spanish expeditions, pre-existing antagonisms, and ecological plight caused ruptures in Indigenous relations.[3]

This strife between the Xiu and Cocom peoples exemplifies the region's transition from traditional dynamics. In spaces where cohesion had been commonplace, a new regime of fragmentation on the peninsula took over. Soon, the increased tensions among the Indigenous would lead many polities to ally with the Spanish in their conquest against the rest of the Yucatán peninsula as El Mozo arrived in 1540.

The 1540 reinvasion and subsequent conquest of the Yucatán peninsula led by El Mozo would not have been possible without the assistance and support of independent Indigenous polities who had already been at odds with other native peoples of Yucatán. Landa, despite his ethnocentric perception of Spanish superiority and Indigenous inferiority, in effect admitted the crucial role of Indigenous allies during the conquest:

> [El Mozo] set out for Yucatán along the rivers of Tobasco, and entered by the lagoons of Dos Bocas…[El Mozo] met no opposition, but was on the contrary supported with his company for two years by the people of the place; during this time he could not advance because of the resistance he encountered. Later he went to Campeche, where he found the inhabitants very friendly, so that with their help and that of the people of Champotón he accomplished the conquest.[4]

The Iberian luck in finding "very friendly" Indigenous allies and accidentally exploiting preexisting political antagonisms finally made the invasion of the Yucatán peninsula possible. Without such support, the conquest of the region by the Younger could, in all likelihood, have followed a similar trajectory to that of his father and Aguilar before him: failure.

For a long time, scholars treated the conquest of the Yucatán peninsula by the Spanish as the inevitable result of Iberian superiority over an uncivilized people. William Gates, for example, viewed the conquest of the "untamed" Yucatán peninsula and the "Indian race" as a result of the "superior arms" and "discipline" of the Spanish, one of the "more sophisticated" races.[5] Scholars holding such views pointed to other statements in Landa's work, which more clearly reflect his pro-Spanish bias and downplayed the role of the Indigenous. Upon closer inspection, those statements often stand side by side with information to the contrary. When Landa describes the resistance to El Mozo, he first says:

> Such resistance as he met was not strong enough to prevent [El Mozo] from reaching Tiho with his army… there he set out to continue his conquest, sending captains in different directions. [El Mozo] sent his cousin Francisco de Montejo [El Sobrino] to Valladolid to pacify the natives who had rebelled somewhat, and to settle the city as it now is.[6]

From such accounts, Indigenous resistance to the conquest seems minimal. Landa and others like him generally sought to portray the conquest as swift and concise, with the conquistadors effortlessly dealing with the weak resistance of the Indigenous by *pacifying* them.

However, in the section immediately following his initial triumphant account of the conquest, Landa, almost despite himself, contradicts the narrative of a swift conquest against weak Indigenous resistance when he recounts El Sobrino's 1546 attempt to subdue the Indigenous in Valladolid, a center of resistance:

> Either led on by their evil way or from their bad treatment by the Spaniards, the Indians of Valladolid conspired to slay the Spaniards when they separated to collect the tribute. In one day they killed 17 Spaniards and 400 servants belonging to those they killed and to

> the others they left alive. Then they sent arms and feet through the whole country in token of what they had done, in order to arouse the rest. [Other Indigenous peoples] however would not respond, and so the admiral was able to send aid to the Spaniards of Valladolid and to punish the Indians.[7]

Landa's account reveals much about the circumstances of the Indigenous population of Valladolid, who "conspired to slay the Spaniards" and, therefore, must have been well organized. Landa also conveys the severity of the treatment the Indigenous population faced at the hands of the Spaniards, as, despite his ethnocentrism, Landa viewed "bad treatment" as a possible justification for Indigenous violence. He recounts the killing of 17 Spaniards. This loss of life was a significant blow to the Spanish population in the region, given demographic imbalances, which will be discussed more fully below.

Landa also reveals that those Spaniards killed were not random and had an essential purpose; they were colonial officials meant to enforce the Spanish practice of tribute collection and were in Valladolid to progress Spanish colonization efforts in the region. The Spanish tax collectors, who were the targets of the resistance, disrupted the native population's traditional social organization and treated the Indigenous people as subjects to a foreign head of state whom they did not recognize as their ruler. This disruption of Indigenous life and subjugation of Valladolid's population culminated in the murder of those 17 Spaniards and the dispersal of their arms and feet throughout the region.

This act of brutality by the Indigenous population of Valladolid was undoubtedly a message sent in response to, and meant to mirror, the Spanish brutalization of the Indigenous population in areas they controlled. Landa elaborates on this brutalization elsewhere:

> Unheard-of cruelties were inflicted [by the Spaniards], cutting off [the population's] noses, hands, arms and legs, and the breasts of their women… If some of those who had been put in chains fell sick or could not keep up with the rest they would cut off their heads among the rest rather than stop to unfasten them. They also kept great numbers of women and men captive in their service, with similar treatment.[8]

The murder of the 17 Spanish tax collectors and their 400 servants by the Indigenous population of Valladolid was not a random act of "rebellion" or "evil," as Landa initially aimed to portray it. It was a targeted act of resistance and a political message to the Spanish in response to their increasing presence in the region and their attempts to change Indigenous lifeways. Despite Landa's best efforts to downplay the persistence and severity of Indigenous resistance in his *Relacíon*, it is clear that Indigenous resistance to the Spanish conquest was a significant threat to the complete subjugation of the region.

In the end, due to the political fragmentation of Yucatán's Indigenous population, the resistance in 1546 never spread further than Valladolid.[9] The division amongst the region's populace was so pervasive that the forces who partook in the suppression of Valladolid under El Sobrino consisted of not only Spaniards but also the Indigenous peoples who had allied themselves with the Iberians.[10] Scholars have found similar dynamics of Indigenous resistance and involvement at play in the campaigns of Conquistadors throughout Latin America, from Mexico to Peru.[11]

As with the rest of the Americas, precise preconquest numbers for the Indigenous population of Yucatán remain contested due to varying methodologies and calculations by modern scholars. Despite this, colonial data conveys that demographic imbalances fueled this dynamic between the Indigenous population and the Iberian invaders. Starting in the 1540s, the

Spaniards began to account for the region's population for purposes of taxation and tribute.[12] Modern scholars have used these colonial sources to estimate the size of the Indigenous population during the first century of Spanish rule.[13] From these estimations, a picture of continued Indigenous demographic dominance over the Spaniards emerges from such works despite the initial losses of life.

In the nearly four-decade period between 1549 and 1586, Yucatán's Indigenous population declined due to foreign diseases and the continuous ecological problems from roughly 250,000 to 170,000 by 1586.[14] Despite this decline in the Indigenous population, the colonial government estimated the number of Spaniards in the region from the same year based on the number of heads of households, which numbered a measly 400. This number of Spanish men starkly contrasts the roughly 50,000 Indigenous heads of households.[15] When put into perspective, these population numbers reflect that Spaniards accounted for only .8% of the peninsula’s population in 1586, a ratio of roughly 125 Indigenous peoples for every Spaniard.

A conquering force this small would not have been capable of invading, subduing, and governing the peninsula without the assistance of Indigenous collaborators throughout the entirety of the process. Following El Mozo's 1540 campaign of conquest, the peninsula's social, political, and spiritual landscape underwent a distinct shift. Despite this, the shift cannot be attributed solely to the perceived Iberian domination of Indigenous people and their pre-Iberian lifeways; instead, the changes seen within the Yucatán peninsula’s structure reflect the Indigenous population's demographic majority and active participation in the region's conquest.

The Indigenous population of Yucatáns demographic majority in the first century of contact required the Spanish to ingratiate themselves within the Indigenous social framework and collaborate with the native population to exert greater control over time and avoid resistance

similar to that they faced in Valladolid and Chichén Itzá. The Indigenous population, in turn, had to adapt and reshape their social, political, and religious landscape in collaboration with the Iberian conquistadors. Together, Spaniards and Indigenous peoples created a new post-conquest framework.

Indigenous and Iberian Compatibility and Conflict

Scholars of Indigenous lifeways prior to the arrival of Iberians, such as William Gates, have characterized Indigenous life in the Yucatán peninsula as entirely "communal." This perspective supposes that the basis of Indigenous social order was the "natural use of nature's resources," wherein they were in a state of "obeisance to the earth, the waters and the sky by which the community [lived]."[1] This viewpoint implies that the political and social organization of Yucatán's Indigenous population was antithetical to that of the Iberians. It overlooks the existence of many Indigenous communities that maintained a political and social structure compatible with the Iberian institutional model the conquistadors brought to the region.

The Cocom are a case in point. This Indigenous group maintained a hierarchical organization centered around a leading figure, the Jaguar Prophet, akin to monarchical Spain.[2] Landa described their hierarchical organization:

> On the departure of Cuculcán the chiefs agreed that for the permanence of the state the house of the Cocoms should exercise the chief authority, it being the oldest and richest, or perhaps because its head was at that time a man of greater power. This done, they ordained that within the enclosure there should only be temples and residences of the chiefs, and of the High Priest; that they should build outside the walls dwellings where

> each of them might keep serving people, and whither the people from the village might come whenever they had business at the city.[3]

Landa's description in this section highlights the traditional Indigenous political structure of Yucatán, one that was organized around a "man of greater power," with "chiefs" and "High" priests beneath him. Landa's inclusion of this information indicates that this hierarchical organization of Indigenous peoples was still relevant in the 16th century, reflecting the structure of the peninsula's independent Indigenous polities.

The organization of a polity like the Cocoms runs counter to the "communalism," scholars like Gates asserted, wherein the "Indian race" maintained no formal hierarchy.[4] Instead, it is clear from Landa's text that at least parts of the population maintained a well-organized and hierarchically oriented society in which power and control were disseminated from the head of state at the top into a social structure down to the rest of society. In this structure, the political leaders of Indigenous polities received their position and authority to rule as a result of the divine right bestowed upon them by a deity.[5]

Within the territory of their control, the authority granted to them through divine right gave Indigenous heads of state the right to organize and divide the Indigenous population spatially and socially. The social and political hierarchy of the Cocom and other Indigenous polities aligned with that of 16th century Spain with its well-defined governmental and bureaucratic hierarchy. Landa further remarked on this similarity in his *Relacíon:*

> In these houses each one placed his mayordomo, who bore his sign of authority a short thick baton, and who was called the Caluac… The Caluac always attended in the chief's house, seeing what was needed and providing it promptly, his house standing as the office

> of his chief… The chiefs appointed the governors and, worthy, confirmed their offices to their sons.[6]

In this bureaucratic structure, the head of the polity was at the very top of the social and political pyramid; beneath him were the spiritual leaders and hereditary social elite, and at the bottom were the laypeople. From the top of this hierarchy, the leaders of these independent Indigenous polities granted powers and authority to those beneath them to manage and organize the lowest rungs of society productively. This social and political stratification of Indigenous polities reflects the well-organized and primarily sedentary lifeway of the peninsula's Indigenous population, one quite similar to that of the invading Spaniards.

The bureaucratic structure of Indigenous polities also maintained a system of taxation and tribute similar to that which the Kingdom of Spain enforced upon its population in Europe. Landa outlined this pre-Iberian taxation system as follows:

> This officer held supervision over the villages and those in charge of them, to whom he sent advices as to the things needed in the chief's establishment, as birds, maize, honey, salt, fish, game, clothing and other things… They enjoined upon them good treatment of the common people, the peace of the community, and that all should be diligent in their own support and that of the lords. Upon all lords rested the duty of honoring, visiting and entertaining Cocom, accompanying and making festivals for him, and of repairing to him in difficult affairs.[7]

This system of taxation and tribute reflects the hierarchical nature of Indigenous polities, wherein the ordinary Indigenous person at the bottom of the social pyramid was beholden to and subject to the head of state, similar to the relationship between common Spaniards and the King of Spain. Again, similar to Spain, situated between the head of state and the laypeople, royally

appointed elites and officials ensured the success of this system as they upheld the order and maintained a successful bureaucracy. As Indigenous polities contained the necessary analogous elements to Iberian society, they presented an environment in which the invading conquistadors needed to impose themselves at the top of the hierarchical ladder to succeed in their aims of colonization.

Basic infrastructure also proved compatible. Beyond just the hierarchical organization of Indigenous society before the arrival of the invading Iberians to the region, the Indigenous population of the Yucatán peninsula was primarily sedentary, well-organized, and agriculturally focused:

> Before the Spaniards subdued the country the Indians lived together in well ordered communities; they kept the ground in excellent condition, free from noxious vegetation and planted with fine trees. The habitation was as follows: in the center of the town were the temples, with beautiful plazas, and around the temples stood the houses of the chiefs and priests, and next those of the leading men. Closest to these came the houses of those who were wealthiest and most esteemed, and at the borders of the town were the houses of the common people… their plantations were set out in the trees for making wine, and sown with cotton, pepper and maize.[8]

This organization of Indigenous towns in Yucatán would not have been dissimilar to what the arriving conquistadors and Franciscans were accustomed to on the Iberian mainland. Scholars like George Foster have made clear that Iberian towns during this period were "relatively formless" and did not reflect the later colonial "grid plan" urban designs.[9]

Moreover, the religious structure of Indigenous polities, in many ways, also aligned with that of 16th-century Spain. In this scheme of things, religious officials were vital to the social fabric of their communities. Landa explained their importance as follows:

> The people of Yucatán were as attentive to matters of religion as of government, and had a High Priest whom they called Ahkin May, or Ahuacan May, meaning the Priest of May, or the High Priest of May. He was held in great reverence by the chiefs, and had no allotment of Indians for himself, the chiefs making presents to him in addition to the offerings, and all the local priests sending him contributions… He and his disciples appointed the priests for the towns, examining them in their sciences and ceremonies; put in their charge the affairs of their office, and the setting of a good example to the people; he provided their books and sent them forth. They in turn attended to the service of the temples, teaching their sciences…[10]

Landa's account clearly shows that, like their Catholic counterparts, Indigenous religious officials were held in high esteem within their communities and received a form of tribute similar to tithes given to the Church. Religion in the Yucatán peninsula was well-structured and hierarchically organized: a head religious figure held the authority to train and appoint lower priests to disseminate religious teachings throughout the territory. These lower priests served as a model for the territory's people, exemplifying how they should worship and live and teaching local people the religious tradition.

The territorial dispersal of Indigenous religious officials, their function in their communities, the reverence held for them, and the hierarchical organization of Indigenous religion is strikingly similar to that of the Catholics in Spain. The Catholic Church in Spain followed a similar territorial dispersal pattern for its priests through the diocesan system.[11] In this

system, the priests appointed to their regions were to spread the faith and serve as model Catholics for the populace. This system also relied upon a stringently hierarchical order that had the Bishop of Spain appoint each lower priest to their respective region in a manner comparable to the way the Ahkin May named his lower priests.[12]

The similarities between Indigenous religion and Catholicism also extended to many practices. Landa made note of many of them:

> Baptism is not found anywhere in the Indies save here in Yucatán, and even with a word meaning to be born anew or a second time, the same as the Latin *renascer*. Thus in the language of Yucatán *sihil* means 'to be born anew,' or a second time, but only however in composition; thus *caput-sihil* means to be reborn. Its origin we have been unable to learn, but it is something they have always used and for which they have had such devotion that no one fails to receive it; they had such reverence for it that those guilty of sins, or who knew they were about to sin, were obliged to confess to a priest, in order to receive it; and they had such faith in it that in no manner did they ever take it a second time.[13]

This description provided by Landa shows that the friar focused on the Indigenous people of Yucatán's religious beliefs that had some similarities to those of the Iberians, even though many of these practices were fundamentally different. For example, Landa interpreted the Indigenous concept of rebirth as the same as Catholic baptism; the Indigenous population's practice of confession to their religious leaders when they believed they had committed transgressions with Catholic confession, and similar to Catholics, he noted that they only received baptism once in their lifetime.

Landa's exploration and explanation of this Indigenous practice of "caput-sihil" was a political decision. As stated, there existed a demographic imbalance in the peninsula between

those of Spanish descent and the Indigenous population.[14] Due to this imbalance, the Franciscans did not have the manpower necessary to properly dispense Catholicism to the entirety of the peninsula. Landa's inclusion of Indigenous traditions that overlapped with those of Catholicism provided the necessary evidence to gather more support for his mission.

Landa aimed to express that the region's Indigenous population was ready for salvation and that the Franciscans needed further support from the Church to achieve their millennial project.[15] Landa, in this instance, leveraged commonalities between Indigenous and Catholic traditions to advocate for more assistance in destroying what aspects of Indigenous life he found to be alien. This inclusion also conveys how powerful the Indigenous societies of the peninsula were at the time. Despite his ethnocentric lens, Landa needed to acknowledge commonalities to gather support, as he would not have the capabilities to evangelize these populations without it. His acknowledgments help convey how the peninsula's Indigenous societies were not simply subjugated populations but were complex, well-organized, and powerful during this period.

To an extent, the form of Catholicism brought to Yucatán in 1533 by Admiral Montejo also shared many similarities to the polytheistic religion of the Indigenous population. Montejo and his fellow conquistadors were not emissaries of the church; they were private individuals financed by the Spanish crown who brought their folk practices and traditions to Yucatán:

> In the sixteenth century… the core devotion [was] the vow and the patron [saint]. For at the root of these devotional acts and relationships is a defenselessness in regard to epidemic disease, plague of locusts, vine blights, hail, and drought that remained unchanged. Religion in the form of bargains with the gods provided a means of control over disasters. The local landscape, urban and rural, had a sacred overlay; special places for contacting the divine were known to everyone… In each place a small band of

> people were professionally dedicated to maintaining and keeping holy the sacred places, and circulating the power of the saints. But everyone, especially town officials, knew that it was a collective responsibility going back in time and ahead into the future to observe the sacred contracts, and that dire consequences could follow lapses.[16]

This form of Catholicism, or local religion, which was popular amongst the layfolk of Spain, was similar to the religious traditions of the Indigenous population. In times of crisis, rather than turning to Orthodox Catholicism, the laypeople of Spain would ask the Saints for help, similar to the Xiu turning to traditional practices when the plague of locusts struck the region between 1533 and 1540. This folk Catholicism Admiral Montejo brought to the Yucatán peninsula maintained a polytheistic emphasis through the veneration of Saints.

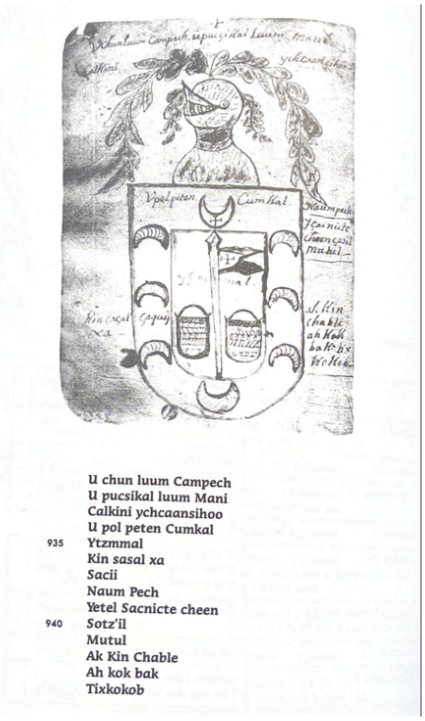
This style of worship would not have been foreign to the Indigenous population, and through conquest, the inclusion of these saints into the Indigenous religious tradition would have been natural. Within the cultural logic of the Indigenous population, the supremacy of conquering deities over traditional gods was established in battle. This dynamic is evidenced by the conflict between the Xiu and Itzá in the first half of the sixteenth century, wherein, due to their defeat, the Xiu acknowledged the supremacy of the Itzá god over their own.[17] This Indigenous worldview, which established the supremacy of gods through battle, and the similarities between Indigenous religion and folk Catholicism, in many ways, explains the adoption of Christianity by those Indigenous leaders and populations who were the first to convert, such as Namux Chel, who had helped Admiral Montejo escape to Mexico.

In regions like Yucatán, where there was such a large imbalance between the Indigenous and Spanish populations, conquistadors like Admiral Montejo would not have been able to expand the Spanish Empire without the assistance of these highly developed Indigenous

populations. The integration of Spaniards into the landscape of Yucatán was partly possible due to these circumstances. The similarities between the lifeways of Yucatán's Indigenous population and those of the arriving conquistadors, coupled with the conquistador's familiarity with the invasion and conquest of independent political states having come out of the Reconquista of the Iberian peninsula, helped in the Iberian cause of conquest in Yucatán.

In this multi-step process, the Iberians would gather Indigenous allies and continue campaigns of conquest throughout the region to insert themselves at the top of the preexisting Indigenous social ladder. In tandem with this, they would take advantage of preexisting Indigenous lifeways and well-organized communities similar to their own to recreate and implant Iberian society on the peninsula. However, integration into the opposing party's structures went both ways between the Indigenous population and the Iberians in the Yucatán peninsula.

An Indigenous coat of arms created during the conquest helps to indicate Indigenous assimilation into Iberian structures:[18]



U chun luum Campech
U pucsikal luum Mani
Calkini ychcaansihoo
U pol peten Cumkal
935 Ytzmmal
Kin sasal xa
Sacii
Naum Pech
Yetel Sacnicte cheen
940 Sotz'il
Mutul
Ak Kin Chable
Ah kok bak
Tixkokob

The figure in this image is in European-style armor and holds a shield reminiscent of those used by the Spanish. This level of armament is unlike what would traditionally be used in warfare by the Indigenous population, who, according to Landa, primarily used shields of "woven reed" and wore "protective jackets of cotton."[19] This artistic representation indicates that the Indigenous communities that created this coat of arms participated in the conquest of the region and perceived themselves as conquistadors.

Inscribed on the coat of arms is a legend containing the names of thirteen Indigenous towns and multiple leaders.[20] The inclusion of these locations and names by the Indigenous communities on this coat of arms expresses the sovereignty of the named rulers over these territories. It also conveys how those communities and rulers who participated in the conquest did not view themselves as subservient to the Spanish. It reveals that they viewed themselves as being on equal footing with the conquistadors they had fought with, who brandished their own coats of arms during the conquest.[21]

A crucial aspect of Indigenous integration into Iberian society and structures, during and after the conquest, was the adoption of Iberian baptismal names and titles. The Xiu, for example, began to adopt Iberian baptismal names starting with their fifth generation sometime during the 1540s, beginning with Don Diego Xiu and Don Juan Xiu.[22] Along with the baptismal names, they carried Iberian titles due to their participation in the conquest of the peninsula. These titles indicated a level of status and nobility and awarded them more rights and privileges than the rest of the Indigenous population. These included, but were not limited to, exemptions from physical labor and taxation, which allowed titled Indigenous people and families to maintain a level of agency not afforded to the rest of the population.[23]

Indigenous people of status also joined the Spanish bureaucracy on the peninsula. They served as governors where they administered towns or entire regions:

> In this office, [Juan Xiu] shall exalt the royal justice in said town and its confines, shall care for all matters pertaining to said office, administering and doing justice in conformity with the royal ordinances, defending the widows, common people and the poor from the powerful, or from other persons also who unjustly oppress them, remitting to us all such matters as we should be advised of…
>
> *Item*: That he take care that order and the Spanish way of government be observed; that the streets lead properly to the church, and that houses and wells of the town be kept repaired…
>
> [Captain General of Yucatán, Francisco de Esquivel] *therefore command* that the alcaldes, regidores and other principal Indians of the said town of Oxkutzcab receive as their Governor the said don Juan Xiu, that they obey, esteem, and respect him, keep and cause to be kept all the honors, graces and exceptions, and the prerogatives which belong to him by said office…[24]

The Indigenous population that assimilated during the conquest, along with their titles, received "office" and became integral to the functioning of the Spanish Empire in the region. Indigenous people of status who held bureaucratic roles ensured the "Spanish way of government" dominated the peninsula. Without their presence, Iberian control would not have been sustainable. Iberians relied heavily on the assimilated Indigenous population to uphold "royal ordinances" and maintain colonial infrastructure.

Through these integration efforts, segments of the Indigenous population maintained their sovereignty and agency throughout the conquest. Assimilation into the Spanish Empire brought

them rights that other Indigenous peoples would not have after the conquest. Their participation in conquest and integration with the Spanish also allowed them to gain territories traditionally belonging to other Indigenous communities.[25] Those Indigenous people who allied themselves with and cooperated with the Spanish took advantage of the situation before them to either maintain or improve their status on the peninsula.

The Indigenous Cosmovision of Yucatán

Before the arrival of Iberians in the sixteenth century, the peninsula known today as Yucatán was known to its population as the Land of Turkey and Deer. This traditional name for the region reflected the worldview and lifeway of the Indigenous population before their interactions with Iberians. Life for the Land of Turkey and Deer's Indigenous population revolved around the peninsula, its flora and fauna, and the celestial bodies visible to the population. The Indigenous worldview reflected their sedentary way of life: large communities organized themselves around ceremonial centers that contained ritual spaces, such as temples, palaces, pyramids, courts, and stelae, with residential areas.[1]

Scholars of pre-contact Indigenous civilizations, like David Carrasco, refer to the Indigenous worldview as a *cosmovision* to capture how the original inhabitants of the peninsula blended ideas about time and space with their cosmological notions.[2] The Indigenous cosmovision consisted of multiple, intricately related components: the division of the cosmos into a dual supernatural reality; Indigenous conceptions of time; and tenets of world-making, world-centering, and world-renewal.[3] Each requires an explanation for later analysis of how the Indigenous population responded to Christianity.

First, the Indigenous view of dual reality assumed a parallelism between the supernatural forces of the world or the macrocosm, on the one hand, and the biological and human patterns of life on earth or the microcosm, on the other.[4] The Indigenous population interpreted the world's construction as a continued and extensive ritual performance, with planting and harvesting playing a pivotal role. The Indigenous understood the process by which their deities created the universe in which they lived and viewed it as mirroring their agricultural practices. In addition, ideas about gender structured the Indigenous cosmovision as seeds were associated with masculinity while linked to fertile soil was feminity. Accordingly, in the Indigenous worldview, the human life cycle and the agricultural practices of the Indigenous population both paralleled and served to replicate the macrocosmic processes of creation.

To express this cosmic parallelism, the Indigenous population constructed ceremonial sites in alignment with celestial bodies. Chichen Itza, for example, was organized as a replica of cosmic geometry to allow the Indigenous community to participate and experience the cosmovision through ritual action. In line with the notion of dual reality, humans and cultural spaces needed to be in tune with celestial bodies to effect the integration of the sky and earth into human society.[5] However, the parallelism between the macro and microcosm did not stop with humanity; it extended into the flora and fauna of the peninsula, with the Indigenous population viewing plants and animals as imbued with sacred powers.[6] In this worldview, the creation of the cosmos, the creation of human life, and the creation of sacred plants, such as corn, were understood as mirroring one another and being of equal importance.

Second, a specific sense of time and calendar system was foundational to the Indigenous cosmovision. The Olmec civilization, which occupied the region between 1500 and 300 BCE, created the so-called Long Count System at its height of influence over the peninsula.[7] While the

Indigenous population inherited this system from those that came before, it became integral to the cosmovision in Yucatán over time. The Long Count System was pivotal in organizing social and ritual life amongst the peninsula's Indigenous communities into multiple cycles.

The first of these cycles, known as Tzolkin, or order of the day, was considered sacred. It lasted for 260 days and helped to decide the daily course of action for the Indigenous population.[8] Due to Tzolkin's length, many scholars consider the human gestation period the basis of this sacred cycle and view it as yet another reflection of the creation of the cosmos. Paired with the Tzolkin was the Haab, or solar year of 365 days, which produced a cycle of 52 years, known as the Caleder Round.[9] The Haab consisted of 18 periods of 20 days to reach this 52-year cycle, and the traditional count began during the period of the Olmecs at 0; the latter expresses a fundamental understanding of the mathematical concept.

Intertwined with these two significant cycles of time, the Indigenous population, beginning with the Olmecs, developed additional calendrical cycles to further structure their societies. Thus, the Indigenous population produced the Kahlay Katunob, the "accounts of war" or the "Katun periods," which codified ritual warfare.[10] Scholars have found the emphasis on ceremonial warfare in the Indigenous societies of the peninsula to be ancient, evidenced by architecture, engravings, and figures.[11] Throughout the region's history, warfare became embedded into the Indigenous worldview.

The Katun periods of ceremonial warfare were the building blocks of another major time cycle of the Indigenous population, the Baktun cycle. The Baktun, or "threaded stone" cycle, consisted of twenty Katuns and served Indigenous communities as a focus of worship and a public method of recording history.[12] Scholars have found that the Baktun cycle became the primary means for Indigenous peoples to record ceremonial events through the lenses of

astronomical phenomena, dynastic change, marriages, accounts of war, political alliances, and life cycles. Time, supernatural and earthly, informed and helped to structure the Indigenous population's worldview. It was a thread that connected the dual realities of the Indigenous population and helped their communities replicate macrocosmic processes on the earthly plain.

Finally, the Indigenous cosmovision rested on world-making, world-centering, and world-renewal pillars. These pillars are best understood through *The Book of Chumayel*, a 16th century Indigenous religious document that was later transcribed in the 18th century by Catholic Indigenous scholars on the peninsula.[13] It served as a book of counsel for the Indigenous population of Chumayel, and they regarded its contents as a part of their "sacred papers."[14] Due to its status and contents, *The Book of Chumayel* is a vital resource that helps to provide insights into these various pillars of cosmovision.

For instance, World-making, at its core, required the Indigenous population to recreate the supernatural world on Earth. The *Book of Chumayel* explores this process of world creation in great detail:

> Eleven Ahau was the katun when they carried him on their backs.
>
> Then the surveyor began to arrive;
>
> This was Ah Ppizte the measurer of the resting places.
>
> And so also Chacte Aban (Walking Staff) came
>
> To mark the distance of the resting places.
>
> Then they came to Chichen Itza
>
> To clear the weeds from the resting places.
>
> When Ah Ppizte (Surveyor) came to the resting places,
>
> That was when the resting places he measured were widened.

> Then began the head of the mat…[15]

In this passage, the author of the *Book of Chumayel* conveys the ritualistic world creation process. This process required an individual to ritualistically walk around the land to confirm its boundaries, another to "mark the distance," and another to clear the land to construct the ceremonial space. To recreate the spiritual plain on earth, the Indigenous population needed to engage in a ritualistic practice mirroring the deities' prolonged creation of the supernatural world. This process of world-creation also reflected the agricultural mindset of the Indigenous population: the described ritual steps are consistent with those for clearing a field before beginning to farm.

The notion of an agricultural creation of the world was prevalent throughout the peninsula. The K'iche, another prominent Indigenous group on the peninsula, maintained a creation myth similar to this in their book of counsel, the *Popul Vuh.* The *Popul Vuh* was initially an oral history until it became transcribed into an 8,000-line poem containing their origin myth during the Spanish period.[16] The *Popul Vuh* illustrates further the agricultural worldview of the Indigenous population:

> Then while [the Gods] meditated, it became clear to them that when dawn would break, man must appear. Then they planned the creation, and the growth of the trees and the thickets and the birth of life and the creation of man…then they conferred about life and light, what they would do so that there would be light and dawn, who it would be who would provide food and sustenance… Then the earth was created by them. So it was, in truth, that they created the earth. Earth! they said, and instantly it was made. Like the mist, like a cloud, and like a cloud of dust was the creation, when the mountains appeared

> from the water; and … the groves of cypresses and pines put forth shoots together on the surface of the earth.[17]

The K'iche origin myth further shows that the peninsula's Indigenous population shared a cosmovision based on agriculture. It also reveals that agriculture's importance was not limited to one segment of the Indigenous population; instead, it was relevant to all living in the region and was the basis of their world.

World-centering followed world-creation, which saw the human body form society's axis mundi or root. *The Book of Chumayel* outlined this process of world-centering around a human nexus point:

> Lord "Sorcerer Rain Priest,"
>
> [And] the governors of the Skyborn Five:
>
> Bird spirit, "Bird," and sun priests
>
> [At] Skyborn Five
>
> Lord Canul (Caretaker) is on the Mat of the Jaguar;
>
> His second in Sun Priest Chable.
>
> [These are] the prophet lords:
>
> Cabal Xiu and sun priests
>
> [Who] governed powerful Uxmal,
>
> Those who used to be the sun priest[s]
>
> When Hapay Can was brought in his canoe.
>
> They raised the sacrificial wall at Uxmal...
>
> They worship His Word and His wisdom
>
> [In] Mayapan (Capital City)...

Then the whole flower was solicited,

Then the white mat was requested,

Then two pieces of cloth were asked for.

Then the first turkey was requested,

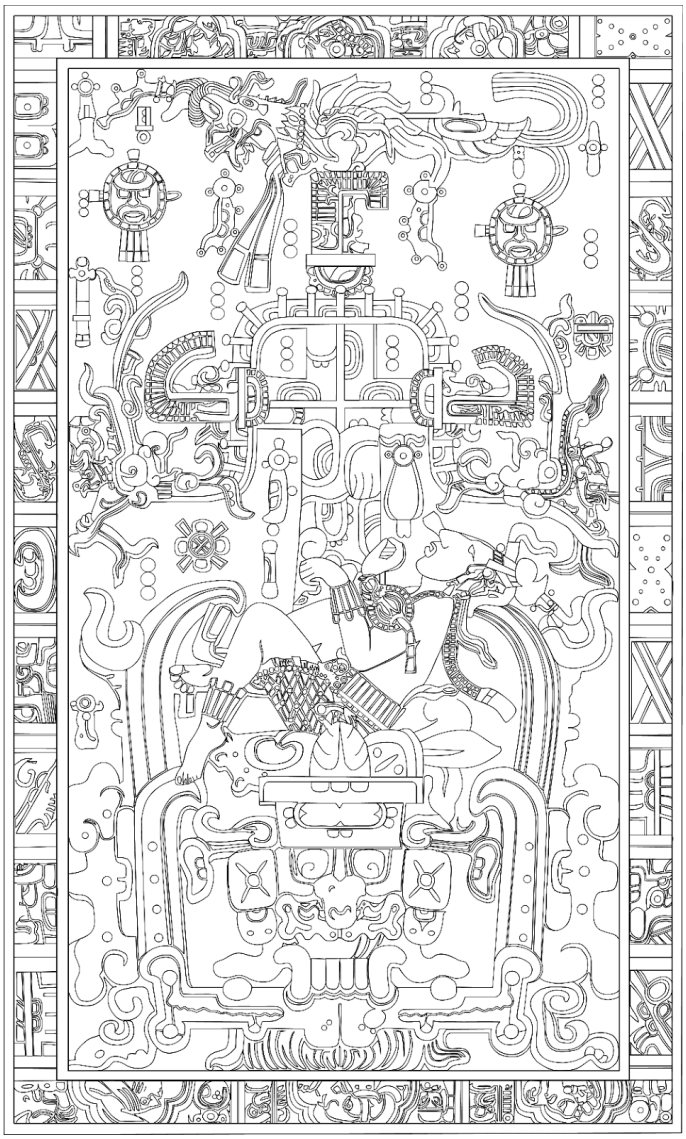
Then rubber was asked for,

Then the white offering vases were requested.[18]

This passage illustrates the efforts of sacred specialists and royal lineages who exerted religious authority ritually and socially ordered Indigenous society around the nexus of the human body.[19] In Mayapan, the "Sorcerer Rain Priest" and his rule, in conjunction with the support of the "Skyborn Five" priests, organized the Indigenous community. Under the leadership of Lord Canul, Mayapan society coalesced around him as the human nexus, produced ritual sites, such as the "sacrificial wall," at his behest, and provided offerings for ritual use. The passage also further underscores the importance of plants to the Indigenous cosmovision: “whole flower” is a metaphor for the Mayapan population itself. This “flower” illustrates how Indigenous people viewed themselves as intrinsically connected to the natural world around them.

Modern scholarship supports this interpretation of the central role of the King as a link to the environment in the Indigenous cosmovision. Research has identified the critical role of the King in the peninsula's Indigenous societies as aligning the social world of humans with the supernatural world of the Gods through ritual practice.[20] The ceremonial center of the community was the world, as discussed above, which in turn paralleled and mirrored the supernatural plain. The King, on the other hand, embodied the nexus of these communities. Accordingly, Indigenous artists emphasized the King’s environmental connection and usually depicted the figure of the king as a World Tree growing through and uniting all plains of existence.

A case in point is the sarcophagus of the Indigenous King Pacal in Palenque, which depicted him as a World Tree with all cosmic levels sprouting from him.[21] During their lifetime, sacred clothing expressed the King's role as the nexus of both the spiritual and physical worlds and likewise drew on the imagery of the tree. For instance, the Apron of the King symbolized the Cosmic tree connecting the plains of existence and signified that he was at the center of the cosmos.[22] The Indigenous process of world-centering thus cast the King as the focal point of the cosmos, the flowering tree that aligned the Indigenous world.



The last important facet of the Indigenous cosmovision was world-renewal, or the daily, monthly, and yearly rejuvenation of society and the cosmos. The Indigenous population expressed and participated in this process through symbols and complex ritual performances.[23] While based on tradition and representing origin myths, these ritual practices and symbols were not stagnant. The Indigenous sense of time implied that the population altered symbolism, rituals, and mythic stories in response to ecological, social, and economic changes and crises. Despite such changes, however, the Indigenous population held steadfast to the symbol of the flowering World Tree to represent both world creation and world renewal.[24]

In sum, the World Tree reflected the trifold nature of the Indigenous cosmovision; it created life through flower blossoms, it served as the nexus as its branches upheld these blossoms, and its life cycle represented continued renewal as those blossoms would become trees unto themselves as the original World Tree would wither and die. The World Tree represented all aspects of their worldview to the Indigenous population. As such, it was the primary symbol of the Indigenous cosmovision. In the Land of Turkey and Deer, the World Tree became enshrined in material ceremonial centers, an intrinsic portion of royal regalia, and synonymous in mythology with the cycle of life, death, and rebirth as a symbol for the cosmovision of the Indigenous population.

Iberian Interpretation and Influence on Indigenous Adaptations

Similar to the processes by which Indigenous society integrated the Iberian conquistadors into pre-existing hierarchies and political dynamics, the religion of Indigenous peoples underwent a transformation that entailed the incorporation of Iberian elements. This

transformation process began with the arrival of Admiral Montejo, his fellow conquistadors, and what one might call their "folk Catholicism" to the peninsula in 1533. However, it would not be until the late 1540s, when the Franciscan order came to the region to evangelize the Indigenous population and administer an elite Catholic faith based on doctrines to Indigenous neophytes, that the transformation process would take greater hold and an Indigenous Catholicism took complete form.

The conquistadors who came to the Yucatán peninsula in the 1530s did not arrive as emissaries of God; instead, they arrived in search of the *encomiendas*–a grant of Indigenous peoples for tribute–titles and powers the Spanish Crown would grant them through their conquest of foreign lands. The dissemination of Catholicism in these moments was second to that of conquest. For example, during the 1545 conquest campaign, the forces of El Mozo established the Villa of Salamanca de Bacalar entirely without a church or cleric.[1] Despite this lack of clerical presence, this villa, by orders of the Crown, was to administer the Catholic faith to the surrounding Indigenous population.

The later arrival of the Franciscan order was a direct response to this lack of effort and the failures of Montejo and his forces to instruct the Indigenous population in the Catholic faith. The Bishop of the Guatemalan suffragan diocese-which at the time included El Salvador, Honduras, Yucatán, and Chiapas-Francisco Marroquin, requested the Franciscan presence due to his familiarity with the order; he was himself subject to the Franciscan Archbishop of Mexico, Juan de Zumarraga.[2] The formal request aside, the Franciscans came to the region willingly because they viewed their missionary work as an opportunity to implement the ideal Christian community that their reform movement also strove to create in Europe.[3]

The Franciscans were not the only mendicant order called upon by Marroquin; the Dominicans, who were also active participants in the European Catholic reform movement, joined as well.[4] In 1540, Dominican friar and officially appointed Protector of the Indians, Bartolomeo de Las Casas, in fact, outlined before the Council of the Indies and the Spanish Crown the failures of the Montejos and those of their fellow conquistadors to effect conversion throughout the Americas. The Crown issued a royal decree on January 9, 1540, in response that spoke directly to the perceived shortcomings of Montejos' efforts and issued a call for proper Christian instruction:

> To my governor of the province of Guatemala and the bishop…I have been informed that in regard to the instruction of the Indians of that province in matters concerning our holy Catholic faith, there has been lacking the diligence necessary for their salvation and for fulfilling the obligations of those to whom they are entrusted. Therefore I command and charge you as your duty to give an order that in every community of Christians of that province, there be a determined a set hour each day in which all the Indians, slaves as well as free ones, and Afro persons within the community, be gathered together to hear the *doctrina cristiana*; and that you appoint someone with the responsibility to teach it; and that you compel all Spanish citizens to send their Indians and Afro persons to learn the *doctrina* without impeding them or occupying them in some other task.[5]

The lack of "diligence" in Yucatán concerning the "holy faith" shown by the Montejos and the conquistadors under their command was a byproduct of their nature as private individuals searching for riches without connection to the ecclesial hierarchy. Montejo and his forces were not primarily or directly concerned with the "salvation" of the Indigenous population or even producing a "community of Christians." To the extent to which the conquistadors disseminated

Catholicism to the Indigenous population, they conveyed a popular version of the faith and its practices. It was essentially the folk Catholicism of the Spanish population, which focused on the power of saints and what these holy figures could provide in daily life.[6] Due to this, the Indigenous population could easily adopt Saints and sacred objects to their pantheon.

During their initial conversion to Christianity, the Indigenous population of Yucatán apparently began to integrate Catholic iconography into their methods of worship and their traditional religious worldview. Landa delivers evidence even as he tries to denigrate the traditional practice of the Indigenous of venerating their gods:

> [The] chiefs, priests, and principal men also had their oratories and idols in their houses for their private offerings and prayers… So many idols did they have that their gods did not suffice them, there being no animal or reptile of which they did not make images, and of these in the form of their gods and goddesses. They had idols of stone (though few in number), others more numerous of wood, but the greatest number of terra cotta. The idols of wood were especially esteemed and reckoned among their inheritances as objects of great value… As regards the images, they knew perfectly that they were made by human hands, perishable, and not divine; but they honored them because of what they represented and the ceremonies that had been performed during their fabrication, especially the wooden ones.[7]

While stigmatizing these Indigenous practices, Landa accidentally conveys an important point: the Indigenous population was fully aware that what he denigrated as idols were representations of the sacred and comparable to European crosses or images of Saints.

The Indigenous population seems to have adopted Catholic Saints and imagery in a way that reflected their polytheistic past and traditions. This transformation of Indigenous spiritual

practices did not destroy the religious traditions of the Indigenous population; instead, the conversion of the Indigenous population would see their traditional practices, such as image veneration, transformed to fit within their new Catholic context.

Along with their traditional practices, the Indigenous population repurposed traditional religious infrastructure. On the one hand, Indigenous communities converted traditional sites into Christian religious sites to reflect the changes in their beliefs. On the other, the maintenance of these sites also expressed the continuous Indigenous nature of their method of worship. Landa again provides evidence:

> Here in Izamal is a building, among the others, of a startling height and beauty… There is no memory of the builders, who seem to have been the first inhabitants… and so in 1549, with some importunity, we had the Indians build a house for St. Anthony on one of these structures. There and all around great benefit has come in its Christianity; so that two good communities have been established in this place, distinct from each other… About two stone-throws distant from this edifice is another very high and beautiful court, containing three finely ornamented pyramids, on top of them chapels, arched in the fashion they were used to employ…. The first of the structures with the four ranges, was given to us by the admiral Montejo, all covered with heavy trees; we cleared it, and there built us a proper monastery all of stone, and a fine church which we called after the Mother of God.[8]

In this instance, Landa attempted to take credit for the construction of this religious site, as though the Indigenous population constructed this addition only at his behest. But then he also records the existence of pyramids underneath the chapels erected by the Indigenous as if to preserve them through integration. All of this happened before the Franciscans even arrived.

Landa thus revealed that the Indigenous population had accepted Christianity and practiced it as something of their own. In addition, even after the Franciscans arrived in the region, their small numbers significantly limited their ability to instill a more doctrinal Catholicism. In 1545, including Landa, only four Franciscans were stationed in the Spanish-controlled areas of Yucatán and charged with the Indigenous conversion and the administration of Catholicism.[9] As was the case for the Spanish conquistadors, this minuscule population of Franciscans could not force the Indigenous population to do anything unless it was a collaborative effort in which a segment of the Indigenous population chose to aid them in transforming traditional religious sites.

This Indigenous acceptance of Catholicism shines through in their cooperation with the Franciscans to transform traditional worship sites into sites reflective of their new faith. This cooperation and acceptance is further evident in the names of the churches: "St. Anthony" and the "Mother of God," which would have been familiar figures for Indigenous neophytes since the conquistadors had already introduced these holy individuals.[10] The refurbished Indigenous Catholic sites expressed continuity and connection to pre-Iberian religious sites while simultaneously revealing the Indigenous population's agency in adopting and accepting the Catholic religion.

As Catholicism became more ingrained in Indigenous society and their traditional religion transformed into Indigenous Catholicism, many Indigenous people, over time, began to recontextualize themselves and their history through the lens of Christianity. This recontextualization was something Landa also explored in his *Relacíon*:

> As the Mexican people had signs and prophecies of the coming of the Spaniards and the end of their power and religion, so also did those of Yucatán some years before they were

> conquered by Admiral Montejo. In the district of Maní, in the province of Tutul-xiu, an Indian named Ah-cambal, filling the office of Chilán[Orator], that is one who has charge of giving out the responses of the demon, told publicly that they would soon be ruled by a foreign race who would preach a God and the virtue of a wood which in their tongue he called vahom-ché, meaning a tree lifted up, of great power against demons. The successor of the Cocoms, called Don Juan Cocom after he became a Christian, was a man of great reputation and very learned in matters and affairs of the country, very wise and well informed. He was on familiar terms with the author of this book, Fray Diego de Landa, recounting to him many ancient things, and showing him a book which belonged to his grandfather, the son of the Cocom whom they killed at Mayapán. In this was painted a deer, and his grandfather told him that there should come into the land large deer (for so they called cows), the worship of the gods would cease; and this had been fulfilled, because the Spaniards brought large cows.[11]

In this passage, Landa engages in the ethnocentric homogenization of the Yucatán's Indigenous population, conflating the beliefs of a Xiu orator with those of the entire peninsula's population. He frames the Spanish conquest as preordained and prophesized, which allows him to justify the continued subjugation of the region. Landa's interpretation ignores the worldview of the Indigenous population and the history of the Xiu. It ignores the multiple instances in which other Indigenous groups had conquered them, and they had to follow the deities of their conquerors. The prophecy of Ah-cambal is dependent on this context, and by ignoring it, Landa crafted a narrative that depicted the Indigenous population as a monolithic entity that was waiting to be conquered.

He then supplemented his homogenizing Xiu story with a tangentially comparable Cocom belief, which he similarly interpreted as referring to the arrival of the conquistadors. Landa thus combined the various beliefs of the heterogeneous Indigenous population into a singular prophecy of the arrival of the Spaniards, although other parts of his account discredit the narrative of a monolithic and homogeneous Indigenous population.

And yet, despite Landa's attempts to homogenize the Indigenous population, he reveals a great deal of information in this passage about the self-perceptions of some Indigenous Catholics. By this point, the Cocom had already begun the conversion process; the leader of their independent polity, Don Juan Cocom, had taken on a baptismal Christian name. The Indigenous acceptance of Catholicism and integration progressed to the point that Landa had to acknowledge their "familiar" relationship with one another.

Landa's inclusion of the Cocom family prophecy reflects this "familiar" relationship and conveys how the Indigenous population began to perceive themselves and their beliefs. Landa, unfamiliar with the Indigenous languages, initially would not have known that the Cocom referred to the Cows that the Spaniards brought with them as "large deer," this is something he learned. It also reflects how the Indigenous people adapted their worldview to address and explain the changes introduced by the Spaniards.

Moreover, the passage conveys Landa's dependence on Indigenous informants. He would not have been able to arrive at the interpretation of Indigenous beliefs regarding the Cocom had the Christian Don Juan not recounted "many ancient things" and shown Landa the "book which belonged to his grandfather." The Catholic Cocom, as we will see, were not the only Indigenous peoples of Yucatán to reconceptualize their history and identity in light of Catholicism.

Indigenous Catholicism

The neophyte Indigenous population of the peninsula began to construct a new identity for themselves and a form of Christianity integrally intertwined with their traditions and history. They adapted Christianity to their pre-Iberian worldview and added new dimensions to their cosmovision. These additions were the practices of pilgrimage and syncretism.[1] The practice of syncretism involved the Catholic Indigenous population bringing together symbols, images, and ritual elements from both traditions.[2] This practice created a distinct identity for the Indigenous Catholics of the region and a form of Christianity that reflected this, their heritage, and their devotion to their new faith. It also led to a fracturing of the Indigenous cosmovision and its unifying effect on the peoples of the Yucatán peninsula. We can understand both the acceptance and refusal of Catholicism by Indigenous groups as an expression of Indigenous agency.[3]

Before the arrival of Iberians, across the peninsula, there had been divisions in the Indigenous population surrounding the Indigenous calendar cycles; however, through shared markers of time brought by Catholicism, the neophyte communities of the peninsula resolved their disagreements.[4] The neophyte Indigenous population at the time reached this resolution by becoming well-versed in medieval Christian theology and literature at Franciscan schools in the region.[5] The Catholic Indigenous population of the peninsula used Catholicism to resolve discrepancies between them and to create a unified Catholic Indigenous sense of time and identity, separate from the non-converted population.

Through their education in medieval Christian theology, the neophyte Indigenous population began to construct their version of Catholicism through the lens of Indigenous tradition. *The Book of Chumayel* displays this construction:

These are the precious stones proclaimed by Our Father Spirit;

This is the first meal, this balche wine,

With which we respect him here,

We, the ruling people.

Great is the exhortation separating the worshippers

From the uncertainties of their gods.

These precious stones are the recognized image of the true god,

Our Father God,

The Father of heaven and earth,

True God.

However, the first gods were mortal gods.[6]

In the tradition of the peninsula's Indigenous people, the ritualistic consumption of balche wine symbolized new beginnings and the ascension of new rulers.[7] In the Catholic tradition, wine represents the blood of Christ or the King of Kings, and the ritualistic consumption of his blood is an integral rite of passage into Christianity.[8] Through this lens, it is clear that the "first meal," or the balche wine, in this passage represents the blood of Christ. Within this context, it is clear that this instance of ritualistic consumption of balche wine for the neophyte Indigenous population was meant to assert the primacy of the Christian God in their cosmovision. As with kings of the past, they ritualistically consumed the wine to represent the ascension of Christ and to confirm their identity as Catholics.

This passage also conveys that despite their conversion, the Indigenous maintained their traditional practice of image veneration: the "precious stones" represented the "image of the true god." Due to their status as representations of the "Father of heaven and earth," these objects were meant to be revered and held sacred by the community, just as this community had done

with their "mortal gods" of the past. This passage illustrates that the neophyte Indigenous population merged their traditional rituals and practices with the themes, symbols, and meanings of medieval Christian theology, which they had acquired through study, and on this basis, produced an Indigenous form of Catholicism that represented them.

This Indigenous Catholic identity, which revolved around the combination of Indigenous tradition and history along with the newly introduced Christianity, was separate from that of non-converted Indigenous peoples. This division is evident in sections of *The Book of Chumayel.* This part discusses the installation of the Jaguar prophet, or "rain priest," in which the traditional story of the founding of Mayapan is re-told:

> The rain priests are not god.
>
> In truth [there is] One True God,
>
> God the Father…
>
> [11,200] was the sprouting of the ancient heretics, the Itza people…
>
> They did not wish to join the foreigners.
>
> "No," [was their reply] to the Christians
>
> They did not want to pay tribute,
>
> The people of the Bird-Sorcerers…
>
> The people of the Jaguar Sorcerers…
>
> There was no sin in their Holy Faith…
>
> This is the beginning of the Two-day chair,
>
> The Two-day rulers…
>
> At the end, then, before our loss of vision and [in] our shame,
>
> Everything will be revealed.

There is no great sky;

There is no prophetic council;

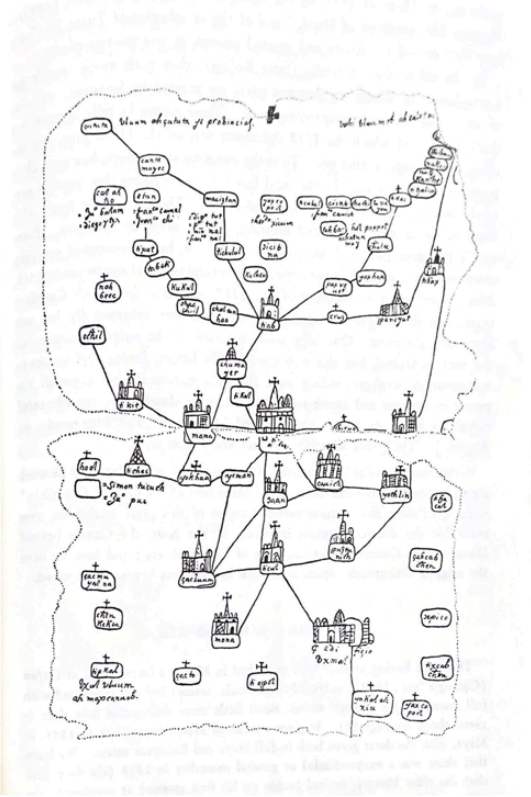
There is no heavenly prophet

To be the one to change the lords who have arrived, truly.[9]

This re-telling marks a distinct break within historical accounts of Mayapan's founding, like in Landa's *Relación*, where the people of Mayapan revered the rain priest as a deity.[10] Unlike those tellings, the author asserts that "rain priests are not god," which signifies the division between neophyte Indigenous populations and those still abiding solely by tradition. In the Indigenous Catholic cosmovision, there was only "One True God," the Christian God. In their perception, "God the Father" had supplanted the traditional Indigenous deities, and they revised their history retroactively through this monotheistic lens.

The conversion of some Indigenous effectively caused a rift in the cosmovision of the peninsula. Two separate Indigenous identities emerged, divided by the acceptance or rejection of Catholicism. The Itza people, in the eyes of Indigenous Catholics, became "heretics" due to their refusal to accept Christianity, Spanish authority, and taxation in favor of maintaining their traditional lifeway. The Itza's refusal of the judgment voiced in *The Book of Chumayel* resulted in the "Two-day chair," a metaphorical expression of two separate Indigenous identities.[11] Indigenous Catholics clearly believed themselves to be correct, as they thought the "end" of days would reveal that traditional Indigenous beliefs, such as the "prophetic council," the Jaguar "prophet," and the "great sky," would be proven false.

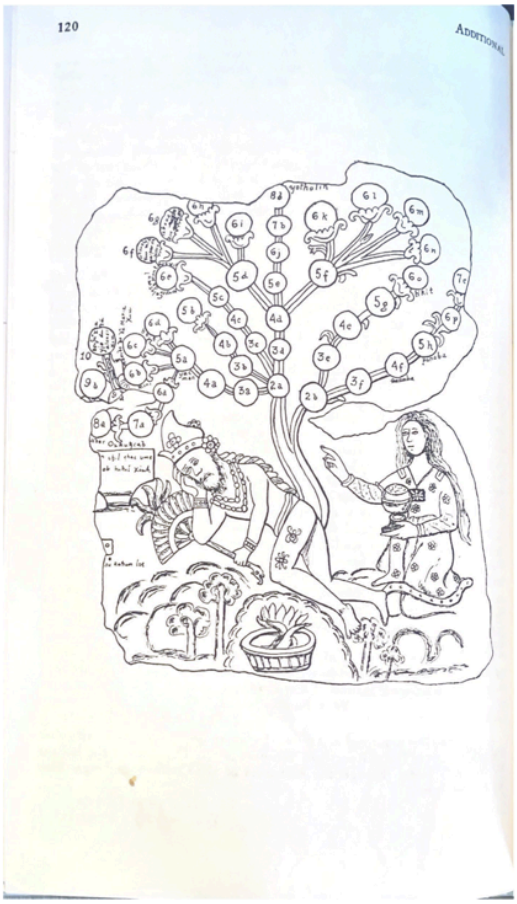
The Indigenous Catholics of the peninsula also began to express their new identity and separation from traditional Indigenous society through representations of their territorial holdings. A map from 1557 provides evidence:[12]



Produced by the Xiu after their conversion during their participation in the conquest of the peninsula, the map shows how the Xiu perceived churches as integral to their territorial boundaries and jurisdiction. Churches are equally crucial in this depiction in expressing a form of local sovereignty as the Indigenous names of the towns and villages beneath them. The seamless inclusion of the Catholic sites in the Indigenous landscape on the map reflects that the neophyte Indigenous population grafted Christianity onto their Indigenous spaces and forged a new Catholic Indigenous conception of Xiu sovereignty.

This map also conveys how the neophyte Indigenous population converted traditional sites to reflect their new faith. The “church” at Uxmal depicted in the map mirrors the facade of the archaeological site known as the “House of Doves.”[13] The consistency between the “long-roof comb” and the arching “passageway” of the site and the church depicted in the 1557 map is uncanny.[14] Although the site's original use is still unknown, the Xiu refurbishment might indicate that the Indigenous population had previously used the site for religious purposes. This mirrored image suggests that in converting to Catholicism, the Xiu repurposed old spiritual sites into new ones that reflected the changes in their cosmovision.

Perhaps the most illustrative depiction of Catholic Indigenous identity, however, is not to be found on maps or in the revisions of history in *The Book of Chumayel* but in a particularly revealing image of the Xiu family tree from 1558:[15]



In this instance, the Xiu artist combined the imagery of the Indigenous World Tree with the Catholic Tree of Jesse, which represented the lineage of Christ, beginning with the father of the prophet David, Jesse. The positioning of Tutul Xiu, the founder of the Xiu lineage, and the style of the tree itself indicates this connection. In this depiction, Xiu, like Jesse, is portrayed as sleeping at the base of the tree with a hand supporting his head with the tree and his descendants emanating from his body.[16] He is also depicted with a beard, similar to the typical depiction of Jesse in Christian artwork. In producing this family tree, the Xiu emphasized Christian iconography and themes in their conceptions of their history and identity.

The Xiu Family Tree represents the merging of Catholic and Indigenous iconography and the Xiu's perception of themselves. Despite their conversion, they still centered their world on their traditions and history. Tutul Xiu is depicted holding a serpent scepter of Indigenous origin that represents the ability of the Xiu to reconcile and communicate change.[17] He is also shown wearing a headdress typical of Indigenous societies in Central Mexico that indicates the foreign-born nature of the Xiu lineage, as they had migrated into the peninsula from Central Mexico under Tutul Xiu's leadership centuries before the image's production.[18]

These combinations of symbols and iconography reflect the centrality of Tutul Xiu to the Xiu family in a manner consistent with the pre-Iberian cosmovision of the Indigenous population. The Xiu Family Tree indicates that as time progressed, the identity of Indigenous Catholics reflected the syncretism between their traditional beliefs and those they had adopted from Iberian Christianity. The continued influence of the Indigenous tradition in the depiction makes clear that despite European Catholic themes and symbols, Indigenous conversion did not distance or alienate them from their tradition and history.

The Indigenous Catholic identity was also distinct from the Iberian Christians who came to the peninsula as conquistadors and friars. *The Book of Chumayel* explores this distinction of identity further:

Then the Christians entered.

Because these true Christians arrived here

And True God,

True Dios…

The beginning of forced labor for the Spaniards,

And the sun priests,

Enslavement by the town chiefs,

Forced labor for the teachers,

Service for the fiscal authorities…

This was the Antichrist over the world, truly…

Perhaps the true fate is coming soon, the day,

The reckoning,

When they arrive with tears in their eyes before God the Father.

The Justice of our Father God will descend…

The destroying spirit

[For] the avaricious ones…

Perhaps an agreement exists wherein there is an end.

Then there would be one spirit between us and the foreigners…[19]

From this passage, it is clear that despite their shared faith, the Indigenous Catholic population of the region did not view themselves as a unified entity with the Christian "Spaniards" who arrived on the peninsula. The "forced labor" and "enslavement" the Indigenous Catholics faced under Spanish rule at the hands of the Iberians and the traditional "sun priests" left them disconnected from both populations. So much so that within the passage, the author inverts Spanish status. Through the account of hardship, Spaniards turned from being "true Christians" to the "avaricious ones" and the "Antichrist," whose destruction the neophyte Indigenous population awaited at the hands of the "destroying spirit." Despite their shared faith in the "True God," Indigenous Catholics did not believe there was "one spirit" unifying them and the "foreigners."

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the Indigenous population of the Yucatán profoundly shaped the course of the Iberian conquest and Catholic conversion. Long before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Indigenous populations of Yucatán had developed complex societies and political affiliations. These societies were independent yet shared a highly developed cosmology and maintained a vast trade network throughout the peninsula that upheld their connection to one another. However, despite what they shared, the peninsula's Indigenous societies harbored antagonisms for one another rooted in their shared history and struggles. These antagonistic dynamics led to intense periods of war and more significant division, and it is in this complicated world the Spanish found themselves–or, better put, lost themselves.

Throughout the colonial period, the Indigenous population maintained a demographic majority in the peninsula. This imbalance, along with Indigenous resistance and agency, played a significant role after the arrival of the Iberians in the region at the beginning of the 16th century. The Spaniards who set out to conquer Yucatán did not have the manpower necessary to dominate the Indigenous people physically or spiritually. This shortage and the conquerors' unfamiliarity with local conditions caused them to rely heavily on Indigenous allies interested in cooperating with the outsiders. Extended contact between Indigenous and Spanish peoples in the peninsula, for the Spanish, would take the form of inserting themselves into the traditional hierarchies of the peninsula and taking advantage of preexisting Indigenous antagonisms and dynamics.

For the Indigenous population, assimilation would see the adoption of Iberian culture, style of government, and religion. However, it would be a mistake to assume that such integration led the Indigenous to abandon all traditions. Notably, even Indigenous converts held firm to their traditional cosmovision. They merged the Catholicism that arrived on the peninsula

with centuries-old ritual and spiritual practices. Certain aspects of Indigenous tradition, such as their traditional deities, were replaced with facets of Catholicism, while others, such as the importance of ceremonial centers, remained almost entirely untouched. The prolonged process of conquest, colonization, and conversion for the Indigenous population of Yucatán resulted in the emergence of a distinct Catholicism steeped in the peninsula's traditions.

To this day, some scholars and theologians debate whether the process of converting the Indigenous population was ever fully completed on the peninsula.[1] What keeps this debate alive are ethnocentric notions of the 'true' form of Catholicism as it originated in Europe and was imported to the Yucatán. This concept of a 'true' Catholicism puts the European variant of Catholicism at the forefront and disregards that of the Indigenous population. It further ignores the influence of 16th century Iberian popular practices, brought by the conquistadors rather than latter-day missionaries, that resonated with the Indigenous population. It defines Catholicism as merely the doctrine prescribed by the Church and represented by clerics like Landa. It also does not acknowledge the creative elaboration of Catholicism by the Indigenous, as evident in the tree of Jesse/Xiu.

These modern debates also extend the homogenization of the Indigenous population, dating back to the arrival of Geronimo Aguilar in 1511. No Indigenous person, in this view, ever had the potential to 'really' convert of their own accord. Or, as scholar James Lockhart described, they suffered from "double mistaken identity" where the Indigenous population was "unaware" of what Catholicism and its traditions meant.[2] Such interpretations fail on a multitude of levels. Lockhart's interpretation ignores the familiarity and knowledge that many in the Indigenous population would have held of Catholic doctrine and theology due to the Franciscan schools in the region. It also does not allow for the Indigenous to pursue Catholicism out of their

interests. As Jennifer Hughes put it, these interpretations continue the narrative that the Christian origin of the Americas began with "the Puritans at Plymouth Rock."[3]

As this thesis has shown, there is clear evidence of multiple Indigenous identities, including converts, that existed simultaneously during the colonial period. These findings complicate the old narrative created by the Spanish at the beginning of the colonial period of a monolithic 'Maya' and today's debates about 'true' conversion. The Indigenous population melded aspects of the Catholic tradition with their own to produce a distinct form of Indigenous Catholicism throughout the colonial period. Already during the 16th century, many neophyte Indigenous communities throughout the peninsula transformed their traditional practice of image veneration upon the introduction of folk Catholicism by conquistadors.[4]

Intriguingly, anthropologist John D. Early found evidence that the Catholic Indigenous population of Zincantán engaged in comparable practices in the 1960s. In Zincantán's community church, 41 statues or images of individual saints, including Saint Anthony and the Virgin Mary, were present.[5] These images served different purposes and reflected the community's various needs. The population venerated these images of Saints in a manner consistent with how they revered their traditional deities before the arrival of the Spaniards. Though many relegate the 'Maya' to myth and believe their traditions and rituals are lost to time, many persist in a new form under the guise of Catholicism as co-created by the Indigenous population after the arrival of Geronimo Aguilar in 1511.

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Notes

Reading Against the Grain of Yucatán's History: The Indigenous Throughline to Reality

1. Restall, Matthew. 2003. *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. New York: Oxford University Press.

2. Foster, George M. (George McClelland). 1960. *Culture and Conquest : America's Spanish Heritage*. New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. 1-9.

3. Roys, Ralph L. (Ralph Loveland). 1972. *The Indian Background of Colonial Yucatán*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 5.

4. Landa, Diego de. 1978. *Yucatán before and after the Conquest*. Translated by William Gates. New York: Dover Publications. 1-2.

5. Ibid. 111-112.

The Maya, a Man-Made Myth

1. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 4.

2. Ibid. 7.

3. Ibid. 8.

4. Ibid. 8.

5. Ibid. 11, 16-19, 21, 136 and 140.

6. Ibid. 37-38.

7. Ibid. 14.

8. Ibid. 14.

9. Ibid. 18.

10. Ibid. 18.

11. Ibid. 18-19; Farriss, Nancy M. (Nancy Marguerite). 1992. *Maya Society under Colonial Rule, The Collective Enterprise of Survival*. 5th print., with Corrections. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press. 65.

12. Ibid. 18.

13. Ibid. III-IV.; Roys, *The Indian Background of Colonial Yucatán*, 123.

14. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 16.

15. Ibid. 18.

16. Ibid. 136-137. The origin of this Map is unknown despite Gates' decision to include it in the "Additional Documents section of his translation. From the style of the map, it is clear that an Indigenous source did not produce it and reflects the Spanish colonial style of map-making.

17. Ibid. 21.

18. Ibid. 21 and 22.

19. Ibid. 4.

20. Ibid. 22.

21. Ibid. 22-23, and 134.

Spanish Dependency on Indigenous Division and Demographics

1. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After,* 23.

2. Ibid. 23.

3. Luxton, Richard N. 1995. *The Book of Chumayel: The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya, 1539-1638.* Laguna Hills, Calif: Aegean Park Press. 232-234. The longstanding communal nature and religious importance of Itza was why the Xiu perceived the Cocom's actions as "deception" rather than a simple act of violence. The Itza site had served as a communal religious site for the region's Indigenous population since the Mayapan period. Here, they could partake in world-renewal through ritual, a vital concept to the Indigenous worldview that will be explained in a later section.

4. Ibid. 24.

5. Ibid. XIII and 139; Wright, John B. *Encounter, Engagement, and Exchange: How Native Populations of the Americas Transformed the World*. Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials, 2011.111-126. muse.jhu.edu/book/111660. Despite Gates' important contributions to the study of Yucatán's Indigenous population, he is a problematic figure due to his association with the Aryan Theosophical Colony in Point Loma. This group held beliefs that stratified humanity along a racial hierarchy and believed in eugenics; as such, the language used by Gates often maintains discriminatory undertones and coincides with narratives that modern scholars attempt to combat. Despite this major shortcoming, his work is extremely useful as he had access to many primary sources that were directly "gifted" to him by Indigenous peoples and communities, which has allowed modern scholars to continue studying colonial Yucatán.

6. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After,* 24.

7. Ibid. 26.

8. Ibid. 24.

9. Early, John D. 2006. *Maya and Catholicism: An Encounter of Worldviews*. 1st ed. Gainesville: UPF. 66.

10. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 24. Throughout his Relación, Landa is consistent in his subtle acknowledgment of Indigenous presence in the conquest and their importance, despite his efforts to downplay this aspect of the conquest.

11. Asselbergs, Florine. *In Conquered Conquistadors: The Lienzo de Quauhquechollan, A Nahua Vision of the Conquest of Guatemala*, 81–122. University Press of Colorado, 2004. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46nv6j.9.

12. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 138.

13. Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule, The Collective Enterprise of Survival*, 58-59; Garcia, Bernal, Manuela Cristina. 1972. *La sociedad de Yucatán, 1700-1750*. Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos; Cook, Sherburne F., and Woodrow Borah. 1972-1979. *Essays in Population History: Mexico and the Caribbean.* 3 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press. Garcia Bernal, Cook, and Borah compiled censuses, audits, and other documents to accurately depict the region's Indigenous population during this period, including for the Yucatán peninsula. Nancy M. Farris further compiled and condensed their data into tables for easier referencing in her historical monograph, "Maya Society Under Colonial Rule."

14. Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule, The Collective Enterprise of Survival*, 58-59.

15. Ibid. 64.

Indigenous and Iberian Compatibility and Conflict

1. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, XIII.

2. Luxton, *The Book of Chumayel: The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya, 1539-1638*, 7.

3. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 12.

4. Ibid VI.

5. Carrasco, David. 1982. *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire : Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Florescano, Enrique. 1999. *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; Miller, Mary Ellen., and Karl A. Taube. 1997. *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*. 1st pbk. ed. New York: Thames and Hudson. In this instance, the deity that bestowed the right to rule for the Cocom house was Cuculcan, who appeared in multiple Mesoamerican

cosmologies under different names and held great importance. Scholars still debate whether Cuculcan was a real person or simply a mythological figure that spread throughout the region due to cultural integrations from migration and invasion. For further research on this subject, explore the sources cited above.

6. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 12.

7. Ibid. 12.

8. Ibid. 26.

9. Foster, *Culture and Conquest: America's Spanish Heritage*. 34, 38-49.

10. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 12-13.

11. Christian, William A. 1981. *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain. Princeton University Press*. 14-18.

12. Ibid. 14-18.

13. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 42-43.

14. Early, *Maya and Catholicism: An Encounter of Worldviews*, 155. The specific demographic imbalance between the Franciscans and the Indigenous population will be further explored in more depth in a later section.

15. Hughes, Jennifer Scheper. *The Church of the Dead: The Epidemic of 1576 and the Birth of Christianity in the Americas*. NYU Press, 2021. 4, 22, 35, and 107. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2tr51j4.10.

16. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, 175-177.

17. Edmonson, Munro S. 1986. *Heaven Born Merida and Its Destiny : The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel.* 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press. 45-54.

18. Luxton, *The Book of Chumayel: The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya, 1539-1638*, 42 and 43.

19. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 50.

20. Luxton, *The Book of Chumayel: The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya, 1539-1638*, 42 and 256.

21. Himmerich y Valencia, Robert, and Joseph P. Sánchez. *The Encomenderos of New Spain, 1521-1555*. University of Texas Press, 1991. 198. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7560/720688.12.

22. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 122-123.

23. Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule, The Collective Enterprise of Survival*, 183-185.

24. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 130-132.

25. Ibid. 134.

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1. Wheatley, Paul. 1971. *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company. 197. Quoted in Carrasco, David. 1990. *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers*. First edition. San Francisco: Harper & Row. XVI.

2. Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers*, XVII.

3. Ibid. 16 and 19-21.

4. Ibid. XVII.

5. Ibid. 37.

6. Ibid. 28.

7. Ibid. XX.

8. Luxton, *The Book of Chumayel: The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya*, *1539-1638*, XI.

9. Ibid. XI.

10. Ibid. XIV.

11. Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica : Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers*, 16.

12. Luxton, *The Book of Chumayel: The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya, 1539-1638*, XIV.

13. Ibid. XVII.

14. Ibid. IX.

15. Ibid. 5.

16. Luhrmann, T. M. *Popul Vuh and Lacan.* Ethos 12, no. 4 (1984): 336. http://www.jstor.org/stable/639978.

17. Goetz, Delia, Sylvanus G. Morley, and Adrian Recinos, trans. *Popul Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiche Maya*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950. 81-84.

18. Luxton, *The Book of Chumayel : The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya, 1539-1638,* 7-9.

19. Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica : Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers*, 20-22.

20. Ibid. 104.

21. Pakal the Great Tomb Lid. Image. Wikimedia Commons. 15 October, 2008. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pakal_the_Great_tomb_lid.png.

22. Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica : Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers*, 106.

23. Ibid. 22.

24. Ibid. 98.

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1. Chamberlain, Robert S. (Robert Stoner). 1948. *The Conquest and Colonization of Yucatán, 1517-1550*. Carnegie Institution of Washington. 234-235.

2. Early, *Maya and Catholicism: An Encounter of Worldviews*, 132

3. Rubial Garcia, Antonio. 1978. *Evangelismo y evangelizacion los primitivos Franciscanos en la Nueva Espana y el ideal del cristianismo primitivo*. Anuario de Historia 10 (1978-79). 95-124.

4. Early, *Maya and Catholicism: An Encounter of Worldviews*, 124.

5. Remesal, Fray Antonio de. 1964. *Historia General de las occidentales y particular de la gobernacion de Chiapa y Guatemala*. Vol.1. Biblioteca de Autores Espanoles No. 175. Madrid: Ediciones Atlas. 246. Quoted in Early, John D, Maya and Catholicism: An Encounter of Worldviews, 115.

6. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, 5 and 20-22.

7. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After,* 47.

8. Ibid. 86-88.

9. Borges Moran, Pedro. El envio de misioneros a America durante La epoca Espanola. Salamanca: Universidad Pontifica. 477-535. Cited in Early, *Maya and Catholicism: An Encounter of Worldviews*, 155. This data comes from a 1977 study by Pedro Moran Borges; while this data is incredibly relevant and revealing, the numbers are very limited overall. The major shortcoming of this data is that it does not account for multiple ventures by the same person or properly represent voyages sponsored by the Franciscan order itself. That said, the numbers provided allow for a better understanding of the region's circumstances and the limited nature of Franciscan presence during the period.

10. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain,* 67-68, 72-73, and 98.

11. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After,* 19.

Indigenous Catholicism

1. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After,* 126.

2. Ibid. 132.

3. Hughes, *The Church of the Dead: The Epidemic of 1576 and the Birth of Christianity in the Americas,* 139.

4. Luxton, *The Book of Chumayel: The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya, 1539-1638,* XIV.

5. Ibid. XVI.

6. Ibid. 75.

7. Ibid. 229.

8. 1 Cor. 23-25; Rev. 17:14; Trese, Leo John. 1959. *The Faith Explained*. London: G. Chapman. 348.

9. Luxton, *The Book of Chumayel: The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya, 1539-1638,* 7 and 35-37.

10. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 10.

11. Luxton, *The Book of Chumayel: The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya, 1539-1638*, 243 and 254.

12. Landa, *Yucatán Before and After*, 133.

13. Heyden, Doris., and Paul Gendrop. 1975. *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica*. New York: H.N. Abrams. 208-210.

14. Katja Schulz from Washington, D. C., USA, CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>, via Wikimedia Commons.

15. Ibid. 120.

16. Cortez, Constance. 1995. "Gaspar Antonio Chi and the Xiu Family Tree." University of California, Los Angeles. 82.

17. Ibid. 171.

18. Ibid. 157-164.

19. Luxton, *The Book of Chumayel: The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya, 1539-1638,* 27-29, and 37.

Conclusion

1. Early, *Maya and Catholicism: An Encounter of Worldviews*, 259-260.

2. Lockhart, James The Nahuas after the Conquest : A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press. 445. Quoted in Early, *Maya and Catholicism: An Encounter of Worldviews*, 260.

3. Hughes, *The Church of the Dead: The Epidemic of 1576 and the Birth of Christianity in the Americas,* 2.

4. Luxton, *The Book of Chumayel: The Counsel Book of the Yucatec Maya,* 1539-1638, 101.

5. Early, *Maya and Catholicism: An Encounter of Worldviews*, 17.

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