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VICTIMS OF HUMAN SACRIFICE IN MULTIPLE TOMBS OF THE ANCIENT MAYA: A CRITICAL REVIEW

Estella Weiss-Krejci
University of Vienna and University of Oporto

Within the last decades of Mesoamerican mortuary research, it has become increasingly apparent that archaeological deposits with remains of more than one individual constitute complex entities. A series of processes have been held responsible for the formation of multiple burials such as collective secondary funeral rites, ongoing tomb use, human sacrifice, and skeletal curation and reuse of bones (e.g. Chase and Chase 1996; Healy et al. 1998; McAnany 1998: 133-135; Middleton et al. 1998; Welsh 1988: 167-169). Yet, no common methodology exists to distinguish one process from the other. This problem is especially eminent in the Maya area, with regard to the presence of sacrificial victims. In his analysis of 1170 Lowland Maya burials, Welsh (1988: 167) identified 131 burials as sacrificial constituting 11% of the analyzed burial population. Of those, 60 were multiple direct and indirect burials (with and without protective structures). For each burial Welsh simply inferred sacrifice because the remains from more than one person had been found in the grave. The burials consisted of either articulated complete bodies or a combination of articulated complete skeletons surrounded by disarticulated bones. Welsh (1988: 168-169) interpreted the former as sacrifice of orphans and offspring to accompany dead parents and the latter as sacrifice of slaves at death of their masters. Both interpretations were based on accounts of human sacrifice from the 16th century (Tozzer 1941: 117, note 535, 129; note 604).

Apart from inductive inference from a historic source, Welsh like Tozzer (1957: 129-130) and Schele (1984) before him, also used iconographic evidence to back up the existence of human sacrifice in classic Maya funerary ritual. Decapitation and disemboweling scenes on funerary ceramics, stelae, altars and
murals seemed to complement some of the limbless, headless, and allegedly chopped up bodies that were found in individual as well as multiple burial contexts.

In the last decade Welsh’s conclusions considering disarticulated remains in multiple contexts have been successfully challenged (McAnany 1995: 62; McAnany et al. 1999: 132). Disarticulated remains are now seen as the product of a wide variety of behaviors such as bodyprocessing, storage, exhumation and collective reburial, caching of tomb contents, looting and desecration, ritual use of human bones, disturbance of bones, sequential interments in collective crypts and caves, as well as rites of tomb reentry (Becker 1986: 46-47, 1992; Chase 1994; Chase and Chase 1996; Fitzsimmons 1998; Gillespie 2001: 89-90; Healy et al. 1998; Houston et al. 1998: 19; Krejci 1998; McAnany 1995: 62, 1998; McAnany et al. 1999; Weiss-Krejci 2001: 778-779).

A different attitude persists regarding multiple burial deposits in tombs and crypts where no evidence for reentry exists and corpses are more or less complete. Although there is usually no evidence for unnatural death, some bodies are still regarded as sacrificial victims (Harrison 1999: 59; Martin and Grube 2000: 33; Schele and Mathews 1998: 109). The assumption rests on indirect evidence such as age profile, gender and lack of associated objects. Though these patterns resemble those of tombs with evidence for reentry, the simultaneous disposal is attributed to a different funerary tradition and human sacrifice.

In this article I will argue that most of these alleged sacrificial victims in multiple burials crypts and tombs with no evidence for reentry are probably not «primary burials», but people that have most likely died at different times and only were buried simultaneously. In order to develop the argument, in the first part of this article, I will review the evidence for human sacrifice in multiple burial deposits and show how the current views came into being. In the second part I will discuss the issue of «secondary» burial. Though I do not rule out the possibility that ritual sacrificial victims were buried in multiple tombs, I will argue that most of the multiple tombs, that are currently known as sacrificial, hold members of kinship based corporate groups.

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1 I consider the use of death related iconography from ceramics or monuments to explain the state of bones in terms of human sacrifice as rather problematic. Images of the death of Christian martyrs in European churches (decapitation, shooting with arrows etc.) or depictions of scenes of killing and decapitation from the Old Testament for example could never explain the state of the bodies found in the church tombs. Even if one could prove that persons have actually been decapitated or gutted, the analogy would still not work, since decapitation was used in executions and on the battle field and extraction of viscera and the heart was part of mortuary treatment.
Maya Highlands

Although human sacrifice is thought of as a common mesoamerican cultural practice (Kirchoff 1943), archaeologists were late in considering it a Classic Maya trait. Apart from isolated speculations as to the sacrificial status of individuals at Uaxactun and San José (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937: 56; Thompson 1939: 210) large-scale evidence only emerged during archaeological investigations in the Guatemalan highlands. In the 1930s and 1940s archaeologists encountered several tombs with multiple interments at the sites of Tzicuay, Guaytan/San Agustín Acasaguastlan, Kaminaljuyu, Nebaj and Zaculeu (Fig. 1). Hence, the evidence from these sites was ambiguous and interpreted in two ways. Some burials were interpreted as the interment of one principal—usually the adult male—accompanied by sacrificial victims, i.e. children and women, others were seen as the result of reuse of tombs.

Kaminaljuyu

The first «victims of human sacrifice» were discovered at Kaminaljuyu in Tombs III, IV, V, and VI of Mound A and Tombs I, II (Fig. 2), IV, and V of Mound B. Altogether there were 29 individuals in the eight tombs, of which 19 were more or less complete (Table 1). The complete bodies represented 9 adults and 10 subadults (five less than 15 years old, see Table 1). Eight adults were identified as male (one per tomb), one of the subadults was identified as a female. The remaining 10 less complete individuals (5 adults and 5 subadults less than 15 years old) consisted of postcranial scraps of bones (1 individual in Tomb B-IV), 5 skulls (Tombs A-III, A-V, and B-IV; one carved, one painted red), and skull fragments and teeth (4 individuals in Tombs A-V and B-V) (Kidder et al. 1946: 89-90).

Kidder et al. assigned the adult males the status of tomb principals, whereas they came to the conclusion that:

«all skeletons not centrally located were those of victims slaughtered to serve the tomb’s owner in the hereafter. Father Roman y Zamora records that such sacrifices were made during the sixteenth century in Alta Verapaz. And at the Esperanza mounds the facts that the persons in question were all children or adolescents, that some of them were apparently female, and that they possessed few or no adornments lend color to the supposition that they were slaves or concubines» (Kidder et al. 1946: 89-90).

2 I have omitted Kaminaljuyu Tombs B-X, B-III, and Mound E-III, Tomb 1 from the present discussion since they have been heavily disturbed. For the same reason I have also omitted Nebaj Tomb B-III, Tikal Burial 200 and Piedras Negras Burial 10.
Fig. 1.—Map of the Maya area showing sites mentioned in the text.
Fig. 2.—Kaminaljuyu, Mound B, Tomb II (Kidder et al. 1946: figure 32).
Adult skulls or whatever remained of them were considered as trophy heads, but the skulls of subadults, which were «too young to be from enemy warriors» (Kidder et al. 1946: 59) were also considered to be sacrificial victims. However, cranial and postcranial remains of two adults and one child of Tomb B-IV on the other hand were evaluated as reburied, since Tomb B-IV had cut and disturbed the earlier Tomb B-III.

Kidder et al. (1946: 89-90) supported their argument for human sacrifice by using the historic account of Roman y Zamora published in 1575, which had been translated by Thompson (1939: 283-284). It describes how after the death of a chief, male and female slaves were killed and buried with their master. Since Roman y Zamora was never in the New World he had obviously copied the story from Las Casas’ then unpublished Apologética Historia Sumaria (Las Casas 1967). This account was to become a central element in the discussion of Maya human sacrifice from thereon (Ruz 1973: 208-209; Shook and Kidder 1952: 122; Smith and Kidder 1951: 28; Welsh 1988: 169).

Whereas evidence for simultaneous disposal of the dead and rapid tomb filling existed for some of the multiple tombs, two additional tombs (Tomb A-I and A-II) were clearly reused (Kidder et al. 1946: 48-53). The 3 main bodies (2 adults in Tomb A-I and 1 adult female in Tomb A-II) had been buried in an extended supine position and seemed undisturbed. The bodies that were not centrally located (7 in Tomb I and 3 in Tomb II) and had been interred at some earlier point in time, lacked bones or skulls. They belonged to 4 adults and 6 subadults. The evidence for reuse and burial over a longer time period caused problems in interpretation. Since the tomb principals in both tombs had been buried last, Kidder et al. argued that the children in both tombs might have been killed to accompany adults that had been buried previously:

«In the case of A-II the latest occupant, an adult (and it should be recalled that this was perhaps a woman), was certainly not accorded a victim, for the two children, whose more or less disturbed skeletons lay to one side, had obviously been buried long enough before the adult to permit the accumulation over and around them of a layer of earth and rotted material. We believe on the evidence of a bone and a tooth of a second adult, that there had been a prior interment in A-II and that the children were immolated for his benefit» (Kidder et al. 1946: 90).

Between 1947 and 1948 two exceptionally rich Late Preclassic chambers were discovered in Mound E-III. The tombs consisted of a series of benches that stepped in and downward on all four sides to rectangular burial chambers, which had been covered by crossbeams. In Tomb II (Fig. 3), 2 children and 1 adult had been buried in the lower main chamber with rich furnishings. More ceramic offerings and a young adult had been deposited on the upper benches above the roof. The whole space was filled with earth and covered by a floor. Shook and
Kidder (1952: 64) considered all but the main adult in Tomb II as sacrificial victims and the deposition of corpses, roofing and filling as one simultaneous event. Nevertheless, the drawing (Fig. 3) shows that the tomb probably had stood open for a while. The bones of the child in the northwestern part of the chamber were found disarticulated and the articulated arm of the adult buried above the roof on the third bench had fallen down into a bowl on the second bench.

Zaculeu

In a large tomb below Structure 1-D at least 7 individuals were found, some entirely disintegrated (Woodbury and Trik 1953). Of the 2 bodies in the center, at
least 1 was an adult. The other tomb occupants consisted of 1 infant (less than one-year-old), 3 children and 1 young adult (probably female). Some individuals were grouped at the wall, 2 children had been placed by the chamber entrance (Trik 1953: 83-84). Since the «simultaneous natural death of all seven in time for the elaborate funeral rites seems improbable» human sacrifice was «strongly suggested» (Trik 1953: 80).

Hence it was obvious that the tomb had been open for a while. Three separate mud layers had washed over the stairway, and each had been covered with a coat of red paint. Most of the ceramics in the tomb dated to the Early Classic (Atzan Phase), but one Late Classic Polychrome Vase had been put with one of the children at the entrance. The physical anthropologists (Stewart 1953: 301) did not find any evidence for violent death. However, Aubrey Trik suggested that the mud layer was deposited in one rainy season and that «a slightly later date should be given to the Atzan Phase, perhaps about 700 A.D.» (Trik 1953: 24).

Of the other 107 burial deposits at Zaculeu, 42 were multiple and contained remains between 2 and 14 individuals each. Trik (1953: 78-81) interpreted some as reused (e.g. Graves 1-14, 11-1, 13-22), others as possibly sacrificial such as the double burial of an old adult male and a young female (Grave 37-3). The bodiless skulls in Graves 1-14, 1-2 and 13-5 in his opinion may have been reburials from other graves rather than sacrificed victims.

**Nebaj**

Between 1946 and 1949 A. Ledyard Smith encountered six multiple tombs (the tomb in Mound I and Tombs I, II, IIa, IV, VIII in Mound 2) at Nebaj, which dated from the Early Classic, Late Classic and Postclassic periods (Smith and Kidder 1951). The tombs, which held between 2 and 12 bodies each, contained 2 infants, 20 children, 1 adolescent female and 15 adults (Table 1). Like at Kaminaljuyu the pattern of more lavishly dressed adults in the center of the tombs, the differences in burial position and the presence of isolated skulls were seen as signs for sacrifice (Smith 1951: 2).

Evidence at Nebaj existed «of tombs having been kept open for subsequent burials» (Smith 1951: 28) and Kidder's ceramic analysis showed that the tomb in Mound 1 and Tomb I in Mound 2 contained Early and Late Classic ceramics. But he concluded:

«Thus is would appear that all our Early Classic tombs must date from the latter days of that period. It is not improbable, indeed, that they were contemporaneous with the beginning of the Peten Late Classic and that Nebaj, and the western Guatemala highlands in general, lagged somewhat behind in ceramic development» (Kidder 1951: 77).
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At other sites tomb reuse had emerged as the obvious cause for joint existence of ceramics from different time periods, the presence of several bodies and the signs of disturbance. At Tzicuay in the department of El Quiche, the remains of 10 adults and 1 child were found in a tomb under Structure 7. Ceramics indicated sporadic tomb reuse from the Early Classic through the Postclassic period (Smith 1955: 34). Late Classic Tombs II and III of Mound 24 at Guaytan in the Motagua Valley held 11 and 37 adults. The differing degrees of disturbance of skeletons pointed to repeated tomb reentry and sequential deposition of corpses (Espinoza 1952: 34-36; Hammond et al. 1975: 68; Smith and Kidder 1943: 123-129).

At the beginning of the 1950s, Shook and Kidder (1952: 122) reconsidered the evidence for human sacrifice in the Maya Highlands. They came to the conclusion that the tombs at Nebaj and Zaculeu were also reused and not sacrificial, a view later also favored by Hammond et al. (1975: 67). Hence by the beginning of the fifties only one highland site (Kaminaljuyu) was considered to hold large tombs with sacrificial victims. Sacrifice was not supported by any evidence of violent death but merely inferred by historic analogy and the lack of indication for tomb reuse. The Lowland Maya at that time were still seen as «a people that did not supply the dead with servitors, nor use tombs often more than once» (Shook and Kidder 1952: 122). But this view was about to change.

Maya Lowlands

Palenque and Piedras Negras

In 1952 Alberto Ruz discovered a tomb under the Temple of Inscriptions. The chamber with the sarcophagus, which held the skeleton of a person known as Janaab' Pakal I (Martin and Grube 2000: 162), had been sealed with a triangular stone door. Part of the outside of this door formed the northern end of a small box with the remains of 6 young people (Fig. 4). The box measured 1.3 by 1 meter. Its eastern and southern ends were confined by the tunnel wall and its west side by a 36-centimeter-high wall. The archeologists and the Palenque village doctor iden-

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3 Shook and Kidder do not mention two multiple Early Classic tombs that had been discovered at Uaxactun in Structure B-VIII and B-XI (Smith 1950: 101-102). These tombs held only women and children and were unusual for Uaxactun in several respects. Apart from being multiple, a rare feature at Uaxactun, the structures in which they were found had been constructed to serve as mausoleums (Smith 1950: 51-52). Smith did not discuss why these burials were multiple and their existence was conspicuously glossed over in early discussions of multiple Maya burials. By that time multiple burials were also known from other Lowland sites, e.g. Holmul, where several bodies had been buried in the rooms of Building B, Group II (Merwin and Vaillant 1932).
tified some of the burials as «primary», with at least 4 bodies articulated although slightly disturbed. One body closer to the bottom of the box was badly disintegrated and disarticulated and the sixth body was incomplete (Ruz 1955: 84-86). Ruz interpreted all bodies as victims sacrificed to accompany the corpse in the main chamber (Ruz 1955: 102), but admitted that it must have been difficult to fit that many people into such a small box:

«Por lo reducido del espacio, los cuerpos deben haber sido amontonados en al sepultura con dificultad, lo que explicaría la posición forzada de algunos miembros y el desorden en que yacían los huesos» (Ruz 1955: 86).
Indeed, six bodies in the flesh could not have been simultaneously buried in a space less than half a cubic meter. The bodies must have entered the box in either a defleshed state or had been put in one by one over a longer time period.

The evidence that emerged in 1956 from Temple XVIII-A further supported the evidence for human sacrifice as part of ancient Maya funeral. Inside Tomb III the disarticulated remains of a young adult woman were found at the wall whereas a young adult male lay undisturbed in the center. Outside the tomb entrance were the badly destroyed bones of 4 individuals (at least 2 adults and 1 infant) (Ruz 1962: 64-75, 1973: 209).

Burial 5 in the Acropolis of Piedras Negras was also interpreted as possibly sacrificial. It held the badly destroyed remains of 1 male adult and 2 children. All three skeletons had associated objects, although the bulk of material was with the adult. Coe suggested that one of the children's heads was put on the pelvis of the adult, although the child's «skull» consisted of teeth only. The bones held traces of red pigment, which Coe interpreted as a sign for child sacrifice though he admitted that sacrifice was «none too secure» (Coe 1959: 124-125, 131).

Tikal

At the end of the 1950s and beginning 1960s five sacrificial tombs were found at Tikal. Except for Early Classic Burial 160 all tombs (Late Preclassic Burials 166 and 167 and Early Classic Burials 10 and 48) were discovered in the North Acropolis. Burial 166 contained 2 female skeletons. Skeleton A had been buried in an extended supine position, Skeleton B’s parts were distributed at the south part of the burial chamber, the cranium was broken and slumped in the middle of three stacked vessels. Since the skeleton was complete Coe assumed that the woman was «probably mutilated, perhaps even cannibalized» (Coe 1990: 240-241) although no cutmarks could be found. Nevertheless there existed evidence that the chamber was reopened:

«This circumstance indicates a possibility, however unlikely, that the chamber though built as indicated, in fact lay originally empty, then was opened, entered through its N side, stocked, and finally closed by reused masonry installed from outside» (Coe 1990: 238).

Burial 167 held 1 primary extended adult male and the remains of 1 woman and 1 infant who had been buried into two ceramic containers. Some of the woman’s bones had been snapped in two to fit into the bowl. Haviland did not interpret the evidence as one for exhumation of the corpses and triple simultaneous reburial but simultaneous burial as a sign for simultaneous death:
«One might hazard the guess that upon the man's death, his wife and child were killed for interment with him, although there are alternatives to this. One is that a concubine and a child were killed, removing future competitors to the official heir; another is that a favorite female retainer and her child were sacrificed to attend her lord's need after death. All three interpretations imply a subordinate position of the woman to the man» (Haviland 1997: 9).

In Burial 10 (Fig. 5) an adult male (probably the ruler *Yax Nun Ayiiin I*, formerly known as Curl Nose) had been laid out centrally in the chamber and was
accompanied by the remains of 8 subadults. A tenth complete body, a child around seven years old and the youngest of all, had been entered last, and was found in higher fill stratum (Fig. 5, Skeleton J). Nothing in the record of Burial 10 hinted at grave reentry or successive opening. Nevertheless, the skeletons of the subadults in the tomb chamber were smashed by the collapsed roof; osteological evidence did not suggest unnatural death and some ceramics in the tomb were also incomplete (Coe 1990: 480-486; Culbert 1993: fig. 20d).

In Burial 48 the incomplete remains of 1 male adult (possibly Sijaj Chan K’awiil II, formerly known as Stormy Sky) were accompanied by 2 subadults. Evidence for reentry existed:

_quote_Both absence of lithic layers in the fill and presence of the peculiarly situated capstones are bound to remain intrinsically bothersome. Such points admittedly could be used to buttress a case for the original interment’s profound disturbance, but only if there were dire need to invoke reentry in the first place” (Coe 1990: 123)._

The “decided horrifying aspect” (Coe 1965: 29) of Burial 160 in which 2 adolescents were buried with 1 adult is equally questionable. Sacrifice was suggested by the sprawled position of the bones and eccentric flints, which had been scattered about the bodies. The image of these tools as part of sacrificial rites was perpetuated by a scene on Tikal Altar 5, which shows a skull and long bones surrounded by two figures holding a knife and an eccentric flint. Nevertheless, the recent decipherment of Altar 5 suggests a different scenario. It shows Jasaw Chan K’awiil I (Ruler A) of Tikal and a lord from Maasal conducting an exhumation ritual of a high ranking lady, possibly Ruler A’s wife (Martin and Grube 2000: 46).

**Lubaantun, Caracol and Caledonia**

As in the Highlands, in the Maya Lowlands human sacrifice was only one explanation for the presence of multiple individuals. Evidence for reuse of tombs in the Lowlands emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. A Late Classic tomb at Lubaantun discovered in 1970 held at least 18 young and middle-aged adults. Hammond et al. (1975) concluded that the bodies were entered one by one over a time period of approximately a century. A multiple tomb at Caledonia, Belize with bodies of at least 8 adult individuals of both sexes and 1 child also bore signs of reuse (Healy et al. 1998). At Caracol, where multiple-individual interments make up a large portion of the burial sample (Chase and Chase 1996: Table 10.1), several tombs showed ancient entries to place bodies (Chase and Chase 1987, 1996). The lower tomb at Structure A 34 contained a minimum of 4 adults (2 males, 1 fe-
male) who probably were buried over the course of one hundred years. Another tomb in Structure A 38, which displayed signs of reentry despite the absence of a formal entryway, held 3 adult individuals (2 males, 1 female) (Chase and Chase 1996: 66-71).

**PROCESSES OF MULTIPLE BURIAL FORMATION**

By the beginning of the 1990s three kinds of multiple burial deposits had been distinguished. With evidence for ongoing reuse of a burial facility and successive deposition, bodies were not considered as sacrificial victims but sequentially deceased people (e.g. Hammond et al. 1975: 67; Shook and Kidder 1952: 122; Welsh 1988: 35). Among those we find Tombs A-I and A-II at Kaminaljuyu, the tomb in Mound 7 at Tzicuay, Tombs II and III in Mound 24 at Guaytan, Mound 1 Tomb I and Mound 2 Tombs I, II, Iia, IV and VIII at Nebaj, the tomb in Structure 1 at Zaculeu, the tomb in Structure 146 at Lubaantun, several tombs at Caracol (e.g. lower tomb in Structure A 34 and tomb in Structure A 38), the tomb in Structure A 1 at Caledonia (all discussed above), and burials at Mayapan (e.g. Burial 17, Smith 1962: 237, 252-253), Tonina (Burials III-1, IV-3, IV-6 and IV-9, Becquelin and Baudet 1979: 134-151), Chiapa de Corzo (Tombs 2, Mason 1960: 21) and Los Mangales (Burial 5, Sharer and Sedat 1987: 139).

With evidence for one time interment of several, more or less complete bodies, — so called «primary burials» —, accompanying bodies were considered sacrificial victims that had been killed in honor of a principal deceased (e.g. Shook and Kidder 1952: 122; Welsh 1988: 167). Such sacrificial burials derived from direct and indirect contexts. Among them we find Tombs II in Mound E-III-3, Tombs A-IV and A-VI and Tombs I, II, IV and V in Mound B at Kaminaljuyu, Tikal Burials 10 and 48, the cist in front of the chamber at the Temple of Inscriptions and Tomb III in Temple XVIII-A at Palenque, Piedras Negras Acropolis Burial 5, Burial C-8 at San José (Thompson 1939: 210), Burial 6 at Los Mangales (Sharer and Sedat 1987) and Burial XXXVII-3 at Copan (Fash et al. 1992: 111). For Zaculeu double Burial 3 in Structure 37 (Trik 1953: 80), and Chiapa de Corzo double Burial 178/178a (Agrinier 1975: 34) sacrifice was discussed as only one possibility. The triple infant burial at Tonina (Cache IV-1, Becquelin and Baudez 1979: 173) was categorized as a cache.

If isolated body parts and fragmentary bones had been simultaneously buried together (also in direct and indirect contexts) interpretations diverged widely. De-

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4 Becker (1992) discussed the problem of distinguishing between a burial deposit with human skeletal remains and a cache deposit with human skeletal remains. In an emphasis of the structural similarities between burials and caches he concluded «if archaeological evidence may not be able to determine the intent, then the process may not have been differentiated by those who made the deposit» (Becker 1992: 187).
pending on the nature of the deposit (the kind of body parts and whether the burials contained a primary burial) the disarticulated remains were interpreted as either mutilated victims (e.g. Welsh 1988: 169) or reburied bones from earlier disturbed burials. Kaminaljuyu tombs A-III and A-V, Tikal Burials 166 and 167, Cuello Burials 7/8 and Mass burials 1 and 2 (Robin 1989; Robin and Hammond 1991), Seibal Burial 4 (Tourtellot 1990: 133), the burial in Structure 216 at Santa Rita Corozal (Chase 1991: 92), and the Colha skull pit (Massey and Steele 1997) were all discussed in terms of violent death; Chiapa de Corzo Burial 45 (Lowe 1962: 23) and Burials 120, 121 and 122 (Agrinier 1964: 55-61) on the other hand as burials with reburied bones. For a number of burials, including Zaculeu Burials 14 and 2 in Structure 1 and Burial 5 in Structure 13 (Trik 1953: 81), Burial 4 at Nebaj (Smith and Kidd 1951: 26), Burial 41A at Chiapa de Corzo (Lowe 1962: 21-22) and Palenque Burials 3,5, and 7 in Group IV (Rands and Rands 1961: 101) excavators reached no conclusion and offered both explanations as possibilities.

Secondary Burial Rites: Multi-stage Burial Practices, Ancestor Worship, Tomb Reentry and Reused Bones

The simultaneous deposition of partial remains of bodies could also imply processes other than sacrifice or accidental disturbance of older burials. For Chase (1994) and Chase and Chase (1996, 1998) the combined existence of multiple-individual interment in Caracol tombs, removal of tomb contents, caching activities and the collective deposition of articulated and disarticulated bodies suggested the existence of a belief system in which death is not seen as instantaneous. It implies that the ancient Maya like people in many other parts of the world performed two-stage burials.

McAnany (1995, 1998) proposed that ancestor linked protracted treatment of skeletal remains was responsible for the formation of secondary multiple burials. At the site of K’uxob 15 direct burial contexts contained more than one individual ranging from two to nine per context. The combination of primary and secondary burials and age patterns in multiple contexts indicate that these were members of families, some of which had been curated in order to be interred together with other family members at some later time (McAnany et al. 1999: 135). Like Chase and Chase (1996: 77), McAnany et al. (1999: 131) regarded this behavior as embedded in an ideology in which the passage of a person from life to death is only a gradual one.

The view that the ancient Maya performed ceremonies of commemoration, which included tomb reentry and ritual burning, is the combined insight from decipherment of inscriptions and archaeological work. At Piedras Negras triple Burial 13, discovered in 1997, showed that the bones were smoked after the
flesh had decayed. Houston et al. (1998: 19) concluded that Burial 13 might be the grave of Ruler 4, reentered and ritually burned by Ruler 7, 24 years after interment. Burial 10 had also been anciently burned and inscriptions indicate that Ruler 4 obviously was not the only one to be commemorated in such way (Fitzsimmons 1998).

Inscriptions from Tonina and Ceibal indicate similar practices of veneration of the dead (Fitzsimmons 1998; Stuart 1998: 396-399). Ancient reentries, not just to place bodies but to remove bones and artifacts — and in some instance burning — have been archaeologically recorded from Kaminaljuyu, Chiapa de Corzo, Tikal, Altun Ha and Copan (Krejci 1998: 217-218). While Coe (1990: 867-872) and Pendergast (1979: 183-184, 1982: 139) originally regarded these behaviors as acts of desecration and looting, the hieroglyphic evidence now suggests that at least some of these reentries result from ancient rituals.

The Many Meanings of Secondary Burial

Given the complexity of rites of reburial and tomb reentry, the discussion of these phenomena in terms of «secondary burial» seems rather problematic. Among Mayanists various definitions exist. Tiesler (1999: 106) defines a secondary burial as one in which bones are disarticulated. McAnany et al. (1999: 131) see it as «either a primary burial that was exhumed and then reinterred or defleshed skeletal elements that were selectively retained above ground — usually in a shrine or bundle — to be interred at a later date». For Welsh (1988: 35) secondary burial is one «in which the skeleton has been intentionally disarticulated and been moved or manipulated after death, but before burial», whereas a primary burial is as a deposit in which skeletal remains of one or more individuals are more or less complete and articulated. Despite this definition Welsh includes interments of whole bodies in urns or between bowls in the category of secondary burial, whereas he considers headless bodies and those, whose facial bones have been removed as primary. The disarticulated bones in tombs that were successively used are also primary because «though the bundles were found disarticulated, they were not originally intended to be so (Welsh 1988: 35)». As recently discussed by Sievert (2001) disarticulated remains in Maya contexts are ambiguous and «secondary burial» comprises a variety of unrelated phenomena. Middleton et al. (1998) pointed out the problems that arise for the application of terms like «primary burial» (a skeleton is recovered in its original burial context) and «secondary burial» (the skeleton is not in its original burial context) in tombs, where the same burial space has been used repeatedly.
What is a Secondary Burial?

It was Robert Hertz (1907), who first discussed that deposition of the corpse, may not be the endpoint in the funeral but can form a stage in a mortuary program that includes exhumation. Using the example of extended burial rituals in Indonesia and Melanesia, Hertz drew attention to parallel processes of decay, mourning and the changing state of the soul. The body of the deceased while awaiting a second burial is temporarily deposited in a place distinct from the final one. During this time the soul of the deceased is believed to stay close to the body. Once the corpse has decomposed and bones are dry a final rite is held. The soul can enter the land of the dead and the mourning is over. The intermediary period between death and final deposition lasts at least as long as the processes of putrefaction and can vary between a few months and several years. Hertz saw the rotting and dissolution of the soft tissue as a key element of the ritual.

Although Hertz primarily focused on the process of putrefaction and the re-burial of bones, multi-stage burials do not always fit this narrow definition. Putrefaction can be avoided and depending on the method and the number of treatments the corpse can end up in a variety of states. Stripping the flesh and desiccating the body accelerates or bypasses the process of putrefaction and can give a reburied body a «primary» appearance (Duday 1997: 119; Feest 1997: 424; Hutchinson and Aragón 2002: 37). Cremation rituals can also mark the end of a multi-stage funeral cycle (Hutchinson and Aragón 2002: 30-31; Huntington and Metcalf 1991: 101, 137). What ends the liminal phase is not so much the presence of bones, but the absence of putrid matter.

Temporary storage, exhumation and final deposition can take place for a variety of other reasons that do not necessarily carry connotations of prolonged dying, a necessity for completion of putrefaction or a journey of the soul. The long time period that usually elapses between first disposal and the final funeral may allow the survivors to reorganize their social relations and the timing of second funerals can be strongly caused by economic considerations (Hutchinson and Aragón 2002: 30). Among the Merina of Madagascar secondary treatment of the dead is a widespread custom. A famadihana is frequently held to return corpses to the ancestral collective tombs that have been stored elsewhere. During the ceremony other bones are also exhumed from the tomb into which the corpse will be buried. Hence, in contrast to Hertz’s view of secondary funeral the famadihana does not liberate the soul of the dead nor is the ritual linked with the end of the mourning. But like secondary burial in Indonesia it serves as act of separation and increases the distance between the living and the dead (Bloch 1971: 138-171).

In Europe both bones and corpses in the flesh were frequently reburied. When noble people died in distant areas and had to be transported back home, their corpses were reduced to bones through either temporary storage (passive excamation) or boiling and defleshing (active excamation) (Weiss-Krejci 2001, in press). The
bones of the commoners also went through processes of exhumation and reburial. Hence the reburial of their bones from crowded European cemeteries into chamber houses followed purely practical reasons. Whereas in all these European examples the reduction to bones marked the point of reburial, other reasons caused reburial of corpses in varying degrees of decomposition. When buildings, crypts or tombs were not yet ready to house the mortal remains corpses were often stored and later reburied, similar to processes proposed by McAnany (1998: 276) for the ancient Maya. Reburial of body parts or bones happened after enemies had looted tombs.

When families constructed new tombs, older predeceased family members were often exhumed from their original locations and reburied into the new facilities (Weiss-Krejci 2001: 776, in press). These relocations into newly constructed tombs happened frequently among uprising medieval houses (Weiss-Krejci in press), but were also common in post-medieval times among competing houses of lower rank, often in municipal or royal service (Harding 2002: 153). Whether bones or articulated corpses were transported merely depended on the time elapsed since death. Since this postfuneral relocation took place after the funeral it is not part of two-stage burial practices. It conforms to the «gathering together» of ancestral remains as described for K’axob (McAnany and López 1999: 162; McAnany et al. 1999). At this Belizean site secondary multiple interment within a single facility is a hallmark of the Terminal Formative and was probably used by increasingly powerful families «in negotiating a societal shift from the less centralized power structure of Formative villages to an increasingly centralized political environment» (McAnany et al. 1999: 144).

DISCUSSION

Maya burial analysis has been characterized by an individual-oriented perspective, which—despite physical evidence for violent death— has resulted in the interpretation of several collective tombs as sacrificial. As Brown (1995: 4-5) argued, the advantages of individualized mortuary analysis make us forget that collective burials once were more common than they are today. Ethnographic studies from different parts of the world (Ucko 1969) reveal that collective burial into tombs is a hallmark of multigenerational, kinship-based corporate groups. For the ancient Maya these social units have recently been identified as houses 5 (Gillespie 2000, 2001: 94; Joyce and Gillespie 2000). Gillespie (2001: 100) discus-

5 The concept of house was introduced by Lévi-Strauss and defined as «a corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both» (Lévi-Strauss 1982: 174).
singing the Temple of Inscriptions, argues that Janaab' Pakal's tomb may not reflect individual status and aspirations, but was the work of his «house», «whose members invested much of their own identity and prestige in his person and memorialization after his death». Following this argument I would like to propose that the Temple of Inscriptions did not only serve as resting place for the king, but also other members of his house.

The emphasis on the individual, the difficulties of recognizing tomb reentry and our current conception of «secondary burial» as deposition of bones have promoted the identification of sacrificial victims in multiple tombs. Given the similarities between sequential and simultaneous tombs with regard to age and artifact distribution, we may consider most collective Maya tombs as burial places for members of ancient houses.

Simultaneous Deposition

Since secondary interments «can contain complete portions of the skeleton» (McAnany et al. 1999: 131) and a wrapped and preserved corpse can be temporarily stored (McAnany 1998: 276) simultaneous deposition of articulated corpses may be non-sacrificial. The more or less complete skeletons in Kaminaljuyu Tombs A-I and A-VI and B-I, B-II, and B-IV were probably deposited simultaneously (Fig. 2). The bodies had been wrapped and placed in wooden containers. The way in which the bones had spread and settled in the tomb indicates that all occupants, both principals and «inferior» received the same treatment (Kidder et al. 1946: 89). This offers the possibility that the bodies were temporarily stored and that not death but only burial was simultaneous.

In Tikal Burial 167 storage is also suggested. The child in the bowl was complete though slightly disarticulated, and could have been easily moved around in the plate. The woman, however, with too large a body to be stored in such a small container, was incomplete, disarticulated and all her long bones had been snapped in two (Coe 1990: 232). Burial 10 (Fig. 5) was very damaged due to total roof collapse. With most bones out of position and badly preserved an evaluation is difficult. Since there was no evidence for successive opening, Coe claims that the tombs had not been reentered. Hence he does not consider the possibility that it could have just stood open for a while (Coe 1990: 480). On the other hand, what could point to simultaneous reburial are the incomplete ceramics (Coe 1990: 484).

Sequential Deposition

Considering the widespread custom of tomb reuse in Mesoamerica (Cabrero and López 1998: 338; Middleton et al. 1999; Perlstein and Cahue 1999: 267) ar-
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Archaeological evidence (Coe 1990: 123, 240-241) strongly suggests that Tikal Burials 48 and 166 were reentered. Reuse of a burial facility may also form an alternative explanation to sacrifice in the Temple of Inscriptions. The box was too small to simultaneously receive six bodies in the flesh. Only four out of six skeletons were complete, and even those were not entirely articulated (Ruz 1955: 84-86). Since body articulation and completeness decreases from the top to the bottom of the box it is likely that the bodies were entered over an extended period of time. The flesh of earlier burials would have partially decayed allowing space for additional corpses. The existence of stairs leading down to the tomb makes such process even more probable.

As discussed for Preclassic Tomb II in Mound E-III-3 at Kaminaljuyu disturbance has occurred not only after but also before the tomb was filled. One child's bones were disarticulated and the arm of the adult on the bench had fallen down. What could bolster the idea of sacrifice in this tomb is the extended prone position in which two of the corpses were buried. This position was interpreted as evidence for sacrifice for 27 individuals at Chalchuapa (Fowler 1984) and individuals at Los Mangales (Sharer and Sedat 1987: 137). Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that the extended prone position is fairly common in the Maya area and known from many non-sacrificial contexts. Of 117 individuals at Barton Ramie 77 were buried in an extended prone position. Some of those had their legs crossed (BR 1-22, BR 123-19, BR 151-2) resembling a tied body (Willey et al. 1965). Since it is unlikely that all these people were sacrificed (that would be 65 percent of the burial population of Barton Ramie alone) we may assume that there exist alternative non-sacrificial scenarios. The extended prone position was not only a hallmark of the Belize River Valley (16 of 27 individuals at Baking Pot), but also occurs at Altun Ha (69 individuals), Balberta (7 individuals, Arroyo 1990), Ujuxte (7 individuals, Arredondo 1999), Uaxactun (4 individuals) and at several other sites in lower quantities (see Welsh 1988: 35-51).

The most recent example that has been used to back up the presence of human sacrificial victims in multiple contexts comes from Temple XIII-sub in Palenque (Tiesler et al. 2002). In contrast to all other examples so far discussed (with exception of Skeleton 2 in Burial 6 at Los Mangales, see Note 6), the two bodies buried at the sides of the Red Queen (one extended supine child, the other an extended prone young female) show evidence of mutilation. Although the cut marks on the child's neck and the woman's vertebrae could indicate non-ritual killing or postmortem body processing (Curet and Oliver 1998: 223; Tozzer 1941: 130-131) for this Late Classic tomb sacrifice is a possibility.

6 They all were found in the Late Preclassic Structure E7-3 which contained 33 bodies, all adults and almost all male. Some of the extended prone burials looked as if they had been bound at the wrists and ankles. Whereas few grave goods were present 24 bodies had been elaborately wrapped in bark cloth (Fowler 1984). Skeleton 2 in Burial 6 at Los Mangales showed evidence of a depressed fracture on the right parietal bone near the sagittal suture (Sharer and Sedat 1987: 137).
Mortality

In several instances direct double burials do suggest simultaneous death. Contrary to Welsh I do not think that the frequent combination of «adult females and foetuses or very young infants» indicates that the child was sacrificed and the mother had died while giving birth (Welsh 1988: 168), but that both had died during pregnancy or delivery. High infant mortality rates are known from several sites with large burial samples (Storey 1992), but subadults also often died after infancy (Andrews and Andrews 1980: 320; Jacobi 2000: 90; Saul and Saul 1991: 136; Tiesler 1999: 140). Few infants have been included in multiple tombs, but this may be a matter of preservation or indicate that this age group was accorded a different burial treatment and buried elsewhere.

To explain combinations of adults and adolescents in double burials, one should not rule out the possibility that people do die together during accidents or epidemics and therefore are buried together. A definitely non-sacrificial direct double burial has been encountered at the colonial site of Tipu where two females were buried together holding hands (Jacobi 2000: 168).

CONCLUSIONS

A series of reasons cast doubt on the assumption that the inclusion of sacrificial victims in tombs formed a frequent behavior among the ancient Maya. Since completeness and body articulation is a result of treatment, climate, number of reburials and time since death a «secondary burial» could be an articulate body or a bone. With the exception of the persons buried with the «Red Queen» of Palenque and one skeleton at Los Mangales, sacrificial victims usually lack evidence that indicates violent death. Additionally mortality rates from different sites show that subadult mortality beyond infancy is not unnatural. Both sequential and simultaneous tombs hold considerable amounts of subadults. The clustering of subadults and young adult in tombs could indicate that their status within the group was probably too low to give them their own tomb or even funeral. Such clustering of subadults and adult females in multiple contexts is not only documented from house tombs in Europe (Weiss-Krejci 2001), but also a process observed for direct multiple interments at the site of K’axob (McAnany et al. 1999: 134-135).

Maya collective tombs could indicate biological and affinal relations. But only the application of a variety of examination techniques (Whittington and Reed 1997) can contribute to solve the question of sacrificial victims in multiple tombs and enlighten our understanding of ancient Maya society.

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