

UCLA

UCLA Historical Journal

Title

Yaxkukul Revisited: Dating and Categorizing a Controversial Maya Land Document

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/34w5s97x>

Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 11(0)

Author

Restall, Matthew B.

Publication Date

1991

Copyright Information

Copyright 1991 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Yaxkukul Revisited: Dating and Categorizing a Controversial Maya Land Document

Matthew B. Restall

<i>maix bin tan yoc yailob lay</i>	so that no discord shall arise,
<i>tumen cu yalicob tu hahil yolob</i>	they all speak with true hearts
<i>u cilich kaba Dios tulacalob</i>	in the holy name of God ¹

In 1793 a delegation of principal men from the Maya town of Yaxkukul, under the leadership of their *cacique*, a member of the Pech dynasty, presented a lengthy document written in Yucatec Maya to a Spanish judge. The document was a notarial record of a survey of Yaxkukul's territory that allegedly occurred in 1544. A certified copy of 1769 was shown to the colonial authorities and was rejected by them as "having no validity, being in need of the authorization of magistrates and others."² The errors of the document, implied the judge, suggested that it had been fabricated, and without much ingenuity. That judgement is the starting point of this paper.

The submission of 1793 is a part of the manuscript known as *The Chronicle of Yaxkukul*, which claims to be a sixteenth-century record of the role of the Pech nobility in the Conquest, and the granting of *hidalgo* status to the Pech as a reward for their services

Matthew Restall received his B.A. from Oxford University and his M.A. from the University of California, Los Angeles, where he is currently writing his doctoral dissertation, entitled "The World of the Cah: Postconquest Yucatec Maya Society."

--as *indios hidalgos* the Pech enjoyed some of the privileges of Spanish nobility, including exemption from taxation.

Various copies of the Yaxkukul chronicle found their way into the hands of archivists in the nineteenth century, as did copies of its near-identical twin, *The Chronicle of Chicxulub*.³ None of these versions were written down before the eighteenth century, yet scholars tended to accept on face value their claims to be copies of originals dating from between 1542 and 1562,⁴ despite the fact that the vocabulary, genre and historical circumstances of the chronicles strongly suggest post-1700 origins.

Sections of some versions of these chronicles have been reproduced in print, but the publications are often hard to locate, the analyses therein tend to be weak, and none are translations or studies of either chronicle in its entirety. Nor have any scholars attempted to clarify the relationship between the various sections.⁵ Aside from superficial differences of presentation, including the selection and order of events and sub-sections, the only contrast between the two chronicles is that the *Chicxulub* promotes that town and its ruler, Nakuk Pech (christened as Don Pablo Pech), and the *Yaxkukul* promotes its town of origin and its ruler, Ah Macan Pech (christened Don Pedro Pech). The Pech Chronicles compare closely to the Central Mexican genre of annals, their differences reflecting broader contrasts between the two regions.⁶ The purpose of this paper is not to examine these chronicles and their genre, but to focus in on the sections of them which I see as being of a separate genre.

These sections are those describing border surveys of the territory of Chicxulub and Yaxkukul respectively, the latter being presented in litigation of 1793. Twenty years ago Mexican scholars uncovered a second, previously-unknown version of Yaxkukul's border survey, conducted by the principal men of that town on April 30, 1544—less than two years after the Spanish conquerors of Yucatan had founded their capital of Mérida. A transcription published in Mexico in 1984 suggested that the manuscript, retitled by the editor *Documento N^o1 del Deslinde de las Tierras de Yaxkukul*, actually dates from 1554.⁷ While my general remarks will refer to the Pech Chronicles (being the *Chicxulub* and *Yaxkukul* variations), it is this document, which I shall refer to as the Deslinde, upon which our attention will be narrowed in the present study. My argument is that the Deslinde could not possibly date from the sixteenth century; and, as part of my evidence, I compare the characteristics of the document with those of the late-colonial Central Mexican genre of the *título*.

Early Modern Spaniards and, in imitation, the indigenous *escribanos*, or notaries, of New Spain, used the word *título* to describe any document that laid claim, or title, to a piece of land. Modern scholars have adopted the word to label a narrower genre of colonial document, the indigenous-language primordial titles written as informal municipal histories by speakers of Nahuatl, Mixtec, Chontal, Quiche, Cakchiquel and no doubt other Mesoamerican languages.⁸ It is in this sense that I use the word here. *Títulos* from Central Mexico are the best studied, although there is still room for questions regarding their authorship, intent, and cultural roots to be answered with greater precision. The nature of these titles should be clear from the following analysis.

I have drawn ten characteristics of Central Mexican *títulos* from recent scholarship by Stephanie Wood and others on the subject,⁹ and find nine of the ten to apply clearly to the *Deslinde*, while the remaining one applies to its parent pieces, the *Pech Chronicles*.

The Document's Purpose

(1) *Style*. The characteristic upon which the *Deslinde* and the other parts of the *Chronicles* diverge indicates something of the relationship between annals and *títulos*, and thus something of the purpose of the *Deslinde*. Broadly speaking, annals promoted their town (and sometimes dynasty)¹⁰ of authorship via a date-entry narrative of sixteenth-century (and later) events; *títulos* claimed to authenticate that town's territorial rights. The ultimate goal of the two is very similar, and a similar style of writing might therefore be expected. However, the *Deslinde* (unlike a Nahuatl *título*) seems to attempt to address a non-native audience, and thus shows some differences of style. Nahuatl annals and *títulos* were usually not written in the formulaic, tidy style of indigenous *escribanos*; their format is loose, their chronology is often inconsistent, and their orthography and language is sometimes deviant. Such characteristics inadequately describe the *Deslinde*, although they do suit the *Pech Chronicles*, which have something of the feel of a rambling oral performance, replete with the repetition and unconventional chronology that is typical of Mesoamerican discourse.¹¹

Late-eighteenth-century *Pech* notables must have been aware of the discrepancy between these chronicles promoting their version of sixteenth-century events—possibly descendants of the pre-Columbian tradition of self-promotion by the aristocracy—and contemporary notarial documentation considered legitimate by the ju-

dicial officers of the colony. The Deslinde, therefore, may represent an attempt to strip the work of some of its native elements to make it acceptable to the Spanish, while maintaining the essence of its boundary claims and its reaffirmation of Pech status. In structure and style the Deslinde is on the surface a standard Maya notarial product. In fact it contains all of the five defining features of a Maya notarial document: a date of completion, albeit inauthentic; a town of origin; the names of authors and witnesses; an elaborate opening; and an explicit ending.¹²

However, this attempt—if such it was—to Hispanize the Pech document seems to have been a failure, in that the Spanish authorities immediately smelled a native rat, peppering their judgement with phrases like *por carecer de autorizazion* ("for lack of authorization"), *suponiendo* ("supposing"), and *pretendiendo* ("pretending"); or, at the very least, it was only partially successful, in that it retained most of the more specific characteristics of a colonial *título*, to which we now turn.

(2) *Land*. The principal component of a *título* is the description of a sixteenth-century land survey of the lands claimed by the indigenous municipality—the *altepétl*, or, in Yucatan, the *cah*. This is essentially what the Deslinde is: the description of an alleged journey on foot along the boundary of the Yaxkukul lands. Following the introductory phrases and the listing of witnesses, the bulk of the document walks the reader from the first boundary marker—the entrance to the well at Chacnichte—round the territory to the twenty-eighth—a stone marker at Yokmuux—which is adjacent to the first. An excerpt:¹³

*xaman tan yn binel latulah u kuchu
tu cacabil yaxycim nohoch mul tu
lakin yan multun capel ca sutnac
chikin tan u binel layli ah
Kumcheelob yn lake ca kuchuc
yokol chen piste ti yan multuni
cà manac chikin tan...*

I go north until one's arrival
at the settlement at the great
mound of Yaxicim; to its east
are two stone mounds; we turn
westward where my
friends the people of Kumche
are; we arrive at the Piste
well, where there is a stone
mound; we go west...

The journey is described in terms that are similar to those used in numerous colonial-era Maya bills of sale, and Yucatan's topography is monotonously unchanged from century to century, town to town, sale to sale. Yet the Deslinde lacks a certain orderliness.

The point can best be demonstrated by an excerpt from elsewhere in the archives (from, as it happens, the twin towns of Dzibikal and Uman in 1735):¹⁴

<p>...chikin tan u binel u lahcapis alcab multun tu chun copo caye chumuc chikin tan u binel u yoxlahun alcab multun yok canal lum caye chumuc chikin tan u binel u canlahun alcab multun yicnal xan caye chumuc...</p>	<p>...going westward to the 12th stone mound at the base of a fig tree, following the path, going westward to the 13th stone mound on high land, following the path, going westward to the 14th stone mound among palm trees, following the path...</p>
--	---

Two contrasts immediately strike the reader. First, pronominal reference in the Deslinde appears to shift almost at random, between first person singular and plural, and even the occasional third person. In the other example the pronominal reference is consistently third person. Second, the Dzibikal and Uman description is tightly tied to a pattern of repetition that hinges upon the progressive numbering of the stone mounds, the repetition of the cardinal direction whether the orientation of the surveyers has changed or not, and the repetition of the phrase *caye chumuc*. Literally this means "the road in the middle," *caye* being a loan from the Spanish *calle*, but its sense is more like "keep following the path" or "then it goes this way," its purpose being to act as a linguistic marker, a function similar to that of the border's stone mounds. In other examples the Maya use the phrase *bay xan*, "likewise, then also," to itemize a survey.¹⁵ The border description of the Deslinde, on the other hand, is less structured, its rhythm less easily caught.¹⁶ There are hints, in other words, of the style anomalies typical of títulos.

The Deslinde was accompanied by a map, as were its sibling sections in the Pech Chronicles. None of these maps is extant; they would typically have been a bird's-eye view of the land, with straight border-lines dotted with circles to represent stone-mound markers or tree markers, and squares to represent abandoned or seasonal houses. The Deslinde's counterpart in the *Chicxulub* is similar in the description of its border outline, and also accompanied a lost map, but it lacks the Deslinde's introduction, the rhythm of its description seems even less regular, and it emphasizes the presence during the survey of neighbouring *batabob*—the

town governors of Ixil, Conkal, Yaxkukul and Baca, as well as Don Pablo of Chicxulub. Its date-claim is 1542.

The Document and the Spaniards

(3) *Colonial sanction.* The survey of a título should be conducted under official Spanish auspices, resulting in an explicit or implied confirmation of local indigenous territorial holdings by the colonial authorities. The Yaxkukul circumnavigation is legitimized through reference to a number of prominent Spaniards, one of the most significant in point being Tomás López, the *oidor* responsible for initiating in Yucatan the first of the forced population redistributions known as *congregaciones*. At that time López also accompanied the elders of a number of Maya communities on notarized border walks in an effort to prevent territorial disputes arising out of congregaciones. López acquired a certain notoriety as a result of this policy, which, together with a number of tribute reductions, made the *oidor* highly unpopular among the *encomenderos*. Conversely he became a key authority for Maya claimants to cite, to whit a boundary agreement between the Maya governors of Tekom, Tixcacal and Cuncunul in 1600, in which "our territorial limits were determined for us... by the lord *oidor* Tomás López"—*u hol c luumob xotan toon... tumen halach uinic tomas Lopez oydor*.¹⁷ Yaxkukul's reference is similar:¹⁸

ton con g^{or} y alcaldes
Regidoresob y ess^{no} uay ti cah
Sta Crus de mayo yaxkukul lae
y tulacal u nucil uinicob no
xibtacob yohellob u pach u
tocoynailob cahanilob ca talob
uay Sta Crus de mayo Ca tu
yalah Ca yum alcalde mayor Dⁿ
Thomas Lopes tali uattimara lay
ulsavi tal nachil u thanil u
pislahal luumob...

We, the governor, alcaldes, regidors and notary here in the town of Santa Cruz de Mayo Yaxkukul, with all the principal men, the elders, who know the borders of the houses abandoned when they were ordered to come here to Santa Cruz de Mayo by our lord the alcalde mayor Don Tomás López, who came from Guatemala empowered to measure the lands for the sustenance of all residents without exception...

Later in the document, seven Spaniards are named as witnesses who affirmed:¹⁹

<i>u hahil u pislahal luum tumen ca</i>	the truth of the measuring of
<i>yum Juees Dn Thomas Lopes uay</i>	the land here around
<i>tu pach cah yaxkukul lae</i>	Yaxkukul by our lord judge Don Tomás López

References to other Spaniards are also intended to lend the document an air of validity, whether they be the five Spaniards considered most important by the Yaxkukul Maya—the King, the Adelantado, the Governor of the colony, the local encomendero, and the local priest—or Spanish witnesses specifically legitimizing the border survey.²⁰

(4) *Conquest*. Títulos typically make reference to the Conquest but in neutral terms, as simply an event that had some factual bearing on the history of the town and its territorial holdings. As accounts of the Conquest complete with date entries spanning 42 years the Pech Chronicles are consciously concerned with the arrival and impact of the Spaniards on the Pech region and Pech status; description is fairly dispassionate, but subjects such as death in battle are not ignored. Contrastingly, Central Mexican títulos "contain little information on battles," Spaniards are shown "considerable respect," and the Conquest itself is depicted as a distant "cosmic event with only gradual repercussions."²¹ Certainly the Deslinde's references to the Conquest are devoid of any sense of death and destruction, serving largely to anchor the survey in its alleged time-frame, and display the legitimacy of the Pech and their document via mention of their reception of Spanish officials and institutions (such as: clergy and Christianity; encomendero and encomienda; oidor and congregación). These references are somewhat oblique:²²

<i>...tulacal uinicob noxibtacob</i>	all the elders, thirty-five of
<i>hotuckallob layilob cuxanilob</i>	them, alive when the lord
<i>ti ma tac Señor espaniolesob</i>	Spaniards had not yet come
<i>uay tac lumil</i>	here to this land

<i>...cu yahaulil ti Batabil</i>	...who was given a [Christian]
<i>kabansabi uay ti cah lae</i>	name when he was ruling as batab here in this town

The conquerors are described as "Spaniards," which is not the case in Nahua títulos, but, like its Central Mexican cognates, the

Deslinde accords to *the* conqueror the respect of his most important titles: *Señor Dⁿ fran^{co} de montejo g^{or} y Cpⁿ g^l Adelantado*.²³ The presence in Yucatan of these foreigners is apparently a benign one; the Deslinde describes a peace accord between Yaxkukul and those bordering on its lands as being an occasion when:²⁴

*...tu tanil ca yum encomidero tan
u >aic u bendisio ca yum Padre
fran^{co} hernades Clerigo yokol
tulacal uinicob uay ti cah lae*

...before our lord encomendero,
our lord Father Francisco
Hernández, cleric over all the
men of this here town, gave
his blessing

The immediate context of the Deslinde may be the litigation of c.1793 over a section of the border (possibly at the Chacnicte well between the lands of Yaxkukul and Mococho), but its broader context is the Pech Chronicles and the ongoing Pech campaign to maintain *hidalgo* status and secure the political and territorial integrity of Pech-dominated towns. This campaign included a presentation of the Pech role in the Conquest as similar to that of the Tlaxcalans in the Cortes invasion, namely a cooperative one that was not only friendly but invaluable to the Spaniards. Thus the tenor of association implied in the references to the arrival and presence of Spaniards in the Deslinde is a faint carbon of the bold claims of association made explicit in its parent chronicles.

(5) *Congregación*. *Títulos* also tend to make light of another element of the Spanish invasion that by all accounts was disruptive, if not destructive, to native life: congregaciones imposed to facilitate control and conversion by the colonial authorities.²⁵ It has been suggested that those towns receiving resettled families would gain from congregación, a larger population meaning increased prestige.²⁶ Logically it would be these communities rather than the extinguished ones who would later be producing *títulos*. Furthermore, the pain of resettlement would have been numbed by time, and, in Yucatan's case, offset by settlement-agricultural patterns that often required a farmer to work land so far from his home that he would seasonally sleep on site, congregación thus being merely one of several factors contributing to this practice. In support of this line of thought we find only casual mention of congregación in the Deslinde, in the form of reference to the uninhabited properties on the edges of Yaxkukul's lands:²⁷

...tu pach ca tocoynailob lay ...around our abandoned houses,
tux cahantacob to ma tac where [the elders] lived when
espaniolesob uay tac lumil lae the Spaniards had not yet come
 here to this land

Caix ti likon ca binon-tu hool Thus we went to the edge of the
kaax tu pach ca tocoynailob forest around our abandoned
ti maix yocol u yanal houses, without entering the
tocoynailobie other abandoned houses

(6) *Conversion*. In the same vein as the two preceding characteristics, references in títulos to the clergy and the spiritual conquest tend to be neutral, if not benign, as shown in the excerpts from the Deslinde above describing the christening (it happens to be of Macan Pech) and the cleric's blessing (of Yaxkukul and its neighbours). Later the Deslinde declares that Yaxkukul works its lands for the sustenance of its people and to deliver the tributes, which include the feeding of the priests, *ah kinnob*, an unusual use of the Maya term if indeed the reference is to colonial times. It seems to be so, for the passage continues:²⁸

hach yab licil u talel yulellob there were many who came and
uay ti xul u chi u luumil u pach arrived here at the edges of the
cah yaxkukul lae tu yuchucil lands around Yaxkukul, with the
ca yumil ti Dios y ca noh power of our lord God and
ahau Rey ah tepal our great Lord King Ruler

It is unclear whether these new arrivals are settlers of either ethnicity (because of the territorial references) or colonial clergy (because of the references to God and King), but if it is the latter, there is no indication of hostility. The implication may even be the opposite, that Yaxkukul's importance was reflected in the number of priests who came to its lands. Along these lines, títulos characteristically mention the church of the alpetel as a symbol of its prestige, and indeed in the Deslinde's second description of the López survey (quoted above) there is emphasis placed on:²⁹

u pisil u luumil yan hebal Sta the measuring of the land where
yglesia Kuna y yotoch cah y the Holy Church and the town
solarlob uay lae homes and these house-plots were

The Document and the Maya

(7) *Municipal self-promotion.* In order to project the importance of the *altepetl* títulos in Nahuatl often included a wide range of information detailing the size, organization, strengths and achievements of the *altepetl* of provenance. To this end the Xochimilcan títulos drew upon the town's annals for source material;³⁰ as discussed earlier, the Deslinde has a similar relationship to the Pech Chronicles, both being concerned with the status of the *cah* (the Maya municipality), into which the Pech have invested their political stock and future. From other eighteenth-century evidence—primarily testaments in Maya from the Pech town of Ixil—it is clear that Pech dominance in the region had been maintained through extensive landholding and political-marital alliances with the clans (patronym groups) in the *cah* that had greatest wealth and *cabildo* representation.³¹ Although the Pech may have remained in a class of their own in terms of *cah* power, colonial realities prevented them from aspiring to official positions beyond the indigenous *cabildo*. The sole avenues of colonial self-promotion open to the Pech were continued assurance of tax-exempt status (a central part of that campaign are the Pech Chronicles), and defense of the territorial boundaries of the towns under their control—Yaxkukul and Chicxulub being fine examples, likewise Ixil, Conkal and Baca, also protagonists in the narratives of the Chronicles and participants in the Chicxulub equivalent of the Deslinde.

(8) *Class self-promotion.* The question of authorship is complicated by the issue of authenticity only if we are concerned to name the specific creator of each such document. In broader terms, the prominent, if not aristocratic, males of the community are responsible for títulos. The genre defends their interests, in terms of both their sixteenth- and eighteenth-century standing—their earlier status being used (in part, created) to advance their later position.

The heroic central actors and sometime ostensible authors of the Pech Chronicle drama are Nakuk Pech and Macan Pech, and the latter is clearly the most prominent of the notables behind the Deslinde. In an interesting reflection of the collusion (and perhaps priority) of interests that this document represents, the Deslinde lists the Maya signator-witnesses to the record as the seven members of the *cabildo*, followed by the four sons of the town governor, Don Alonso Pech (*testigos yn mehenob*, "[as] witnesses, my sons"), and lastly 31 named Maya males described as *testigosob u nucil*

uinicob, "[as] witnesses, men of importance." No Pech are listed among the 31, although the patronyms on the *cabildo* reappear here. The *hidalgo* status of the Pech sons is made explicit—*lay hidalgos*, "they are *hidalgos*"—and their names are given "don" prefixes, a title reserved in Maya society only for *batabob* (town governors) or *hidalgos*.

(9) *Intra-ethnic rivalry*. The previous two points are essentially about defense—a primary purpose of the genre—and thus by extension a further characteristic element is that of hostility toward neighbouring native groups or individuals of any ethnicity that threaten the interests of the town. The Deslinde's strategic approach towards neighbouring groups involves what might be described as reverse psychology. The author(s) are concerned to demonstrate to the Spaniards that the boundary claimed by Yaxkukul was agreed upon and sanctioned not only by Spanish authorities but also by the townspeople on the other side of the border. My assumption is that the Deslinde was drawn up by Yaxkukul as a result of an eighteenth-century border dispute and was intended to convince colonial judges that peaceable, noble Yaxkukul was not the originator of the trouble.

To this end the Deslinde is full of expressions of friendship for the neighbouring peoples and their representatives on the survey: *ah mocochoab yn lake*, "my friends or companions, those of Mocochoa"; *lakin tan u binel layli nolo yn lake*, "to the east are my friends of Nolo." Asserted friendship with Conkal, Sicpach and Kumcheel may have been genuine, as Pech are named as heads of these towns, the governors of Mocochoa and Nolo being neither mentioned nor named. The border survey is thus a border agreement, culminating in a ritual expression of accord and brotherhood that is both a real event, "holding hands as brothers," *>in sucunil ti mach-lankabil*, before the *encomendero* and cleric as excerpted above, and a linguistic formula. The latter, of course, symbolizes the former; its central phrase is:

hunpelili u chi ca luumil yetelob
Baix ah cumkallob

There is but one border
between our lands and those of
the folk of Conkal

The phrase is repeated, with the name of the group making up the agreeing pair changed each time.³² The border is one, as opposed to two, which would be the case if the two peoples were to assert

different boundary lines. To symbolize the union of each pair in agreement:³³

cacanup u pictunil ti tulacal manic Two by two are all the stone
tu chi kaaxob mounds that pass along the
 forests' borders

The judgement of 1793 mentions survey documents presented by Mococho, strongly suggesting to us that it was this town with which Yaxkukul was in dispute.

(10) *Dating*. Charles Gibson defined a título as representing "an individual or collective memory of lands possessed or once possessed," a memory that "might be misguided or deliberately contrived to support a claim."³⁴ A few remarks have already been made on the subject of the authenticity of the Deslinde. This is really a question of dating: If there truly was an original record of a survey of 1544, the Deslinde and its siblings are authentic, if inaccurate; if such a survey took place (as it most likely did) but no record survived, leading to the manufacture of one three centuries later (necessity spawning invention), then the Deslinde is an authentic eighteenth-century contrivance—a título. It is possible that such a document originated in the seventeenth-century, when there was some recovery of the Maya population,³⁵ and it was subsequently copied periodically as was the Chilam Balam literature. This, however, is speculation. What is more certain is that the Deslinde is not a document of the sixteenth-century, for a number of reasons.

First, no título of Central Mexico is known to date before 1650, and because this knowledge is based on an appraisal of the characteristics of the genre,³⁶ late-colonial provenance is therefore one of those defining elements. Because the Deslinde shows most of the other título features, its date-claim must be suspect. One of these features not yet discussed—the tendency to make glaring historical errors—pertains directly to dating. The oidor Tomás López was not in Yucatan until 1552, this fact alone disqualifying 1544 as a Deslinde source date. If this was merely a copyist's error, as has been speculated,³⁷ the true date might just as easily be 1555, or, for that matter, 1644, as none of the document's witnesses claim to have been present at the time of the López ordinances. In fact, the date on the 1769 copy-version of the Deslinde is clearly 1522, which Barrera Vasquez explains as a not unusual confusion between 2 and 4 "in old documents."³⁸ But whose is the confusion? Earlier in

the 1769 copy of the Chronicle the same notary appears to have had no difficulty distinguishing between the two numbers. Besides, is the "true" date not supposed to be 1554? Surely the point here is not one of error, but of perception and perspective. In the area of chronology "even more than with Spanish personae, offices, and procedural concepts, it seems as if the local people are using the Spanish paraphernalia as magic, as something efficacious rather than understood."³⁹ At least it was the understanding of the Maya that the date served a validating, persuading function even when removed from a linear chronological context.

Furthermore, a comparison of the Deslinde reference to López to that made by Tekom et al. in 1600—both are presented above—reveals a key error on the part of the Deslinde, which not only fails to cite the judge's title of *oidor*, but bestows upon him a "don." In fact López was only a *licenciado* at the time of his official visit to Yucatan, and was never of "don" status; his social status was used by his *encomendero* opponents to ridicule him as an upstart and undermine his credibility as a competent and worthy official of the Crown.⁴⁰ Additional confusion over sixteenth-century Spaniards is evident in the naming of two different *encomenderos* in the different versions of the Yaxkukul border survey, Gonzalo Méndez (no "don") in the Deslinde, and Don Julian Doncel in the 1769 version.⁴¹

The Spanish loan-words used in the Pech Chronicles, such as *conquista* and *historia*, words which do not appear in other Maya texts until the eighteenth-century, point to a later date of origin, as does the use of *españolesob* in the Chronicles and in the Deslinde.⁴² Yaxkukul's Christian name of *Santa Cruz de Mayo* brings to mind the nineteenth-century Maya cross cult; certainly it jars with the normal early-colonial practice of ascribing a patron saint or Virgin to each Maya community.

The two arguments employed by Barrera Vasquez to suggest that the Deslinde is, if not from 1544, still sixteenth-century, in fact are evidence of the contrary. The inconsistent use of diacritics and the irregular spelling of Spanish loan-words are both characteristics of Maya notarial writing from throughout the colonial period; the only generation that may have written Maya as the Franciscans originally taught it would have been the first alphabetically-literate generation after the Conquest. This generation might also have had a better understanding of the Spanish legal terminology that is misspelled and misused in the Deslinde—*ynformasionil derecho*; *ynformasio*; *ynpormasion*; *forma derecho de froseso*; *probision Real*. After the initial literacy campaigns of the

sixteenth-century the notary's skill was passed down from Maya to Maya, while the linguistic reach of Spanish became increasingly compromised by the reach of Maya into the community of Spanish Yucatecans. Thus the process of the acquisition of Spanish loanwords by Maya was partially offset by the increasing Mayanization of those words.⁴³ The low proficiency of the writer of the Deslinde proves very little and it suggests a post-sixteenth century provenance for the document.

The collective memory described by Gibson is present in the Deslinde—*noxibtacob yohellob u pach*, "the old men who know the borders"—and it was not an original recording of that memory that was presented in court in 1793 (and that has been passed down to us). If there ever was an original proof of land ownership, it was converted over time into that particular genre we call the título. The Deslinde of Yaxkukul projects a view of the Conquest that is both immediate, yet distant; it purports to take us back among the events and people of the Contact period, and yet its references to the traumas of that period are vague, politically neutral, devoid of any memory of disruption. The document reflects the Conquest and its aftermath as it was seen from a couple of centuries later, when the Pech were still banking on a past association with the conqueror while simultaneously investing their future in the Maya community and its system of power centering on the *cah* and its territorial integrity. The title of the present paper, then, refers not only to this reappraisal of the Yaxkukul document, but to the eighteenth-century Maya revisitation of sixteenth-century Yaxkukul that the document represents—the Pech manipulation of the past to defend their future.

NOTES

1. Alfredo Barrera Vasquez, *Documento No.1 del Deslinde de Tierras en Yaxkukul, Yucatan*, Mexico City: INAH (Colección científica, Linguística 125), 1984: lines 426-429. All line citations after Barrera Vasquez. All translations mine.

2. Rare Book Collection, Latin American Library, Tulane University (hereafter T-LAL), L497.2051-P365: 16; Barrera Vasquez, *op. cit.*: 98.

3. Chicxulub is a Maya community 14 kilometers north-west of Yaxkukul. Both are in the preconquest province of Ceh Pech, located just north-east of Merida.

4. Daniel Brinton, *The Maya Chronicles*, Philadelphia: Brinton, 1882: 189ff; Barrera Vasquez, *op. cit.*

5. A nineteenth-century copy of *The Chronicle of Chicxulub*, also called *The Chronicle of Chacxulubchen* (the town's older name) and the *Codex* or *Chronicle of Nakuk Pech*, is in T-LAL. The first part is a history of the Conquest of Yucatan, highlighting the role played by the Pech and including a history of Chicxulub; this section was reproduced and translated into English by Brinton (1882) and published in Spanish in Mexico by Hector Pérez Martínez under the title *Ah Nakuk Pech* (1936). The second part of the chronicle consists of a land survey by various Pech batabob, or Maya town governors, a partial list of Yucatan's conquistadors, and a final statement of self-promotion (with a partial history of the Conquest) by Don Pablo Pech. Manuel Encarnación Avila translated the whole MS into Spanish in 1864, but I have been unable to trace a publication, if indeed there was one.

T-LAL possesses various eighteenth- and nineteenth-century copies of *The Chronicle of Yaxkukul*. I use the one of 1769 (Rare Manuscript Collection, #26-1-7), as it is the clearest, it includes a 1769 Spanish translation of the first part, and it was the copy presented as evidence in the border dispute of c.1793. The first part, paralleling the *Chicxulub*, begins with a partial list of conquistadors and presents a history of the Conquest (including a number of date entries between 1511 and 1553) that emphasizes the centrality of Yaxkukul and the key role played by the Pech in the whole drama. It likewise ends with a final statement of self-promotion, dated 1541. I know of no reproduction or translation of these 14 pages of MS. The second part is a land survey by Don Pedro Pech and a number of his relatives. It was reproduced, with Spanish translation, by Juan Martínez Hernandez in Merida, Yucatan (*Crónicas Mayas, Crónica de Yaxkukul*, 1926). As discussed in the body of the paper, a slightly different version of this section was published by Alfredo Barrera Vasquez (1984), who also reproduces Martínez Hernandez' version, retitling them Document N^o1 and N^o2 respectively.

6. See Matthew B. Restall, "The World of the *Cah*: Postconquest Yucatec Maya Society," PhD dissertation, UCLA, MS [1992] for a fuller study of the Pech Chronicles in a comparative context.

7. Barrera Vasquez, op. cit.

8. Stephanie Wood, "The Cosmic Conquest: Late-Colonial Views of the Sword and Cross in Central Mexican Títulos," *Ethnohistory* 38:2 (1991): 176-195. Charles Gibson, "Survey of Middle American Prose Manuscripts in the Native Historical Tradition," *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, 15:4, Guide to Ethnohistorical Sources, ed. Howard F. Cline, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975: 311-21. James Lockhart, *Nahuas and Spaniards*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991: cap.3; *The Nahuas After The Conquest*, MS [1992]: 976-991. William B. Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972. France Scholes and Ralph Roys, *The Maya Chontal Indians of*

Acalan-Tixchel. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press: 1968. Robert Carmack, *Quichean Civilization: The Ethnohistoric, Ethnographic, and Archaeological Sources*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973. Robert M. Hill II, *Colonial Cakchiquels: Highland Maya Adaptations to Spanish Rule 1600-1700*. Orlando: Brace Jovanovich (Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology), 1991. The present essay is the first attempt to add Yucatec Maya to that list. William Hanks, in "Discourse Genres in a Theory of Practice," *American Ethnologist* 14(4), 1987: 668-692, analyzes the Yaxkukul Deslinde, but not in a context of comparison with genres from elsewhere in New Spain and not with a view to redating it. In fact, Hanks' acceptance of a sixteenth-century provenance for the Pech Chronicles (including the Deslinde) is fundamental to his analysis. I do not directly debate in this paper Hanks' position, partly because our approach to the Pech documents is largely different, but I nevertheless dedicate this paper to him as a salvo in an ongoing debate. "Title" refers to the fact that one of the primary occupations of the documents is land; "primordial" was added by nineteenth-century translators to reflect the centuries of tradition that the títulos usually lay claim to.

9. Wood, op.cit.

10. Chimalpahin's promotion of the dynastic line of Tzaqualtitlan Tenanco, for example (Susan Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), compares interestingly with the pro-Pech propaganda of their own Chronicles.

11. There is a further relationship of genre between the chronicles in Maya and the Books of Chilam Balam, which also contain chronological or narrative passages (see note 6).

12. Five features elaborated in Restall, op. cit.: cap.2, after Hanks, op. cit.: 672.

13. Deslinde lines 235-244.

14. *Archivo General de la Nación*, Mexico City (AGN), Tierras, 1419, 2, 1-5.

15. See Restall, op. cit.: cap. 2 on Maya writing style and cap. 6 for details on land description.

16. The form of description is still typically cyclical, but, as the scholar who emphasized these cycles in his study of the Deslinde admitted, "they are not identical, varying somewhat in length, content and order of elements" (Hanks, op. cit.: 674).

17. Ebtun document 5 in Ralph Roys, *The Titles of Ebtun*, Washington DC: Carnegie Institute, 1939: 73.

18. Deslinde lines 39-52.

19. Lines 344-348.

20. References to the King (lines 3, 11, 304-305); the Adelantado Don Francisco de Montejo (lines 9-10); the Governor in Merida (lines 361-362, 398-400); the encomendero Gonzalo Méndez (in the version of the 1769

copy, Don Julián Doncel) (lines 7, 333, 389); the priest, Francisco Hernández (l. 391); the Spanish witnesses (lines 336-343).

21. Wood, op. cit.: 180, 186, 188.

22. Lines 12-15, 30-32. Barrera Vasquez has some difficulty with his numbers here: his footnote (op. cit.: 51) is confused and *hotuckallob* is not 25 but *ho-tu-ca-kal-ob*, five before two twenties, which is 35, the number of extracabildo Maya witnesses (31 "important men" plus four Pech sons).

23. Lines 9-10.

24. Lines 388-393.

25. See Nancy Farriss, *Maya Society Under Colonial Rule*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984: 158-164.

26. Wood, op. cit.: 184.

27. Lines 20-24 and 33-38.

28. Lines 299-305.

29. Lines 349-353. Note that the church is referred to in a typical Spanish-Maya bilingual couplet, with *kuna*, "holy house," essentially being a translation of *santa iglesia*.

30. Wood, op. cit.: 179-180.

31. See Restall, op. cit.: cap. 5.

32. Lines 368-382.

33. Lines 385-386.

34. Gibson, op. cit.: 321.

35. Farriss, op. cit.: 59.

36. Lockhart, *Conquest*: 977-978.

37. Barrera Vasquez, op. cit.: 11, 106.

38. Ibid: 98.

39. Lockhart, *Nahuas and Spaniards*: 61.

40. Hanks, op. cit.: 668-669; Roys, op. cit.; Lockhart, personal communication.

41. The 1769 version is the one named N^o2 by Barrera Vasquez, op. cit.; it mentions both Méndez and Doncel as *u hahil concixtador*, "true conquistadors."

42. Frances Karttunen, *Nahuatl and Maya in Contact with Spanish*, Austin: University of Texas Press (Texas Linguistic Forum 26), 1985: 54. I note that the *Chicxulub* uses *cax* for chicken, a form which appears in the Juan Pio Perez *Diccionario de la Lengua Maya* (Merida, 1866-1877), whose sources are eighteenth- and nineteenth-century, whereas mid-seventeenth-century Maya testaments from Cacalchen (T-LAL, *Libro de Cacalchen*) only use what must be the earlier full form, *caxtilla* (from *castilla*, as chickens were introduced from Castille; Nahuas made the same loan).

43. See Restall, op. cit.: caps. 2 and 7; Farriss, op. cit.: 110-112.