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Last Rites For The Tipu Maya: Genetic Structuring In A Colonial Cemetery



Synopsis

Jacobi's groundbreaking osteology study uncovers the history of the Tipu Maya of Belize and their subsequent contact with the Spanish conquistadores and missionaries. Two cultures collided at Tipu, Belize, in the 1600s: that of the native Maya and that of the Spanish missionaries, who arrived with an agenda of religious subjugation and, ultimately, political control. Combining historical documentation with the results of an archaeological exploration of a Tipu cemetery, Keith Jacobi provides an account of the meshing of these two cultures and the assimilation of Catholic practices by the Tipu. In particular, Jacobi focuses on the dental remains recovered at this site. A tooth may be the last tangible evidence of a living creature, so teeth can reveal information about an individual's health, diet, cosmetic alteration, trauma, and genetic structure. From the genetic structure the researcher can learn information about an individual's relationship to others in a particular population and between populations. Jacobi's research reveals how these European and Spanish Catholic practices were assimilated by the Tipu Maya and enables the first description of the prevalent attitudes toward death and burial customs. Through this study of Tipu Maya dentition changes through time, Jacobi sheds light on Spanish intermarriage, Maya familial relationships, and the Tipu genetic affinity with other prehistoric, historic, and modern Maya.

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"The greatest strength of this work lies in its rich data set, which will surely be used for years to come by others investigating similar issues in and out of the Maya area."#151Southeastern Archaeology" This is an important case study for understanding one of history's dramatic

confrontations—that of the Spanish and the inheritors of the Precolumbian Maya civilization, presenting information on the colonial fusion of Maya and Spanish from archaeology and dental anthropology that is not available from written documents."—Rebecca Storey, University of Houston

Keith P. Jacobi is Curator of Human Osteology at the Alabama Museum of Natural History and Assistant Professor of Anthropology at The University of Alabama.

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