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Post-Classic Maya Courts of the Guatemalan Highlands: Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Approaches

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When don Pedro de Alvarado entered the highlands of Guatemala in early A.D. 1524, he was searching for a territory that his Tlaxcallan allies called Quahtemallan. The existence of powerful kingdoms[1] in the Guatemalan highlands was known to the Spaniards because a delegation from that region had sought out Hernán Cortés in northern Mexico three years earlier. In less than four months, by skillfully manipulating the extant enmity between indigenous peoples, Alvarado and the Kaqchikel,[2] his temporary allies, were able to defeat the K'iche', Tz'utujil, and Pipil. The first of many revolts led by the Kaqchikel began in August A.D. 1524, but it was quickly suppressed. By late A.D. 1525, three more powerful groups—the Chajoma' (known to the Kaqchikel as the Akajal and also called the Sacatepequez), the Poqomam, and the Mam—all submitted to Spanish domination.

The historical chronicles, *relaciones*, and early Colonial histories that describe the conquest of Guatemala and the events that followed are one of the richest sources of data we have on Maya society at the time of conquest. Historical details are complemented by ethnographic information provided by dictionaries or gleaned from early legal documents and

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Colonial records. Indigenous sources, such as the *Popol Wuj* and the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* (or the *Memorial de Tecpán Atitlán*), afford glimpses of how Maya people remembered and chose to recount their own history. With the notable exception of *relaciones geográficas*, which are quite rare for Guatemala, the diversity and depth of ethnohistorical sources are without parallel in other parts of the Maya region.

Compared to the Maya lowlands, the Maya highlands have seen relatively little archaeological investigation. Unstable political conditions have contributed as much to this neglect as the lack of Classic-period monumental stone architecture and carved monuments with hieroglyphic texts. Nonetheless, the great preponderance of work has focused on Post-Classic sites, especially those that can be linked to ethnohistorical sources. In this respect, too, the highlands of Guatemala are unique in the Maya region.

This chapter summarizes the archaeological and ethnohistorical data that have been brought to bear on questions related to the function and structure of the Late Post-Classic royal courts of the highland Maya. I begin with a brief description, drawn from ethnohistorical sources, of the players that filled the stage of highland Maya courts. Next, I turn to archaeological data on the Post-Classic period. In reviewing this body of work, I focus on interpretations of Maya royal courts as places of interaction rather than as physical spaces. Then I concentrate on two areas of current ethnohistorical research of relevance to Maya courts: social structure and the organization of Late Post-Classic political systems. Although I describe most archaeological projects conducted at Post-Classic sites in the Guatemalan highlands since 1970, my review of ethnohistorical studies is limited in scope because of the quantity of work on the subject.

Dramatis Personae

What kind of people made up Post-Classic highland courts? First, the central precincts of capitals such as Iximche' and Q'umarkaj were homes to individuals from at least three strata of society: slaves (*muna'* in Kaqchikel), vassals (*alk'ajola'*, "sons") and the ruling elite (*ajawa'*, "lords"). People could become slaves in several ways—being captured in war (Coto 1983:206), as a result of committing robbery, because they or a member of their family profaned a temple or priest (Fuentes y Guzmán 1932–1933:6:12–13), or because they married a slave, were born to slave parents, or were sold into slavery by relatives (Las Casas 1909:616–618). Various words for "slave," such as *mun* (which also can mean "laziness," "sloth," or "gluttony"), *alab'itz* ("of bad descent"), and *tz'i'* ("dog") are suggestive of how people became slaves and how slaves were viewed. We are told specifically in Thomás de Coto's (1983:206) dictionary that

"in ancient times 'dog' meant a slave captured in war." We can assume that slaves belonging to the *ajawa'* conducted many of the quotidian chores of the aristocratic court: preparing food, running errands, washing and mending clothes, and even serving as sources of sexual diversion (Carmack 1981:151). Excavations in palace structures at Q'umarkaj have revealed hearths and water tanks where slaves would have worked, and Robert Carmack (1981:Figure 9.11) has identified what he believes to be slaves' quarters within the Kaweq palace complex.

Some vassals lived inside the central precinct of highland capitals and served as warriors, although this occupation was not limited to *alk'ajola'*. As in other Mesoamerican societies, military service was one of the primary ways to achieve social mobility. There are indications that soldiers lived within palace compounds and enjoyed high-earned status (Carmack 1981:294). It may be that young soldiers, of both vassal and noble birth, slept in mens' houses attached to the Kaweq palace.

There also is strong evidence that vassals visited courts for economic reasons. The *Annals of the Cakchiquels*, for example, relates an incident where a Kaqchikel woman named Nimapam Ixkakaw ("Big-belly Lady-Cacao") traveled to Q'umarkaj to sell tortillas. There she was accosted by a resident soldier in the royal guard, an incident that provided the pretext for a revolt among the K'iche' (Arana X. and Díaz X. 1573–1605:41). This kind of saleswoman was called *ajk'ay* or *k'ayil* ("of the market" or "vendor"). Other traveling merchants, some of whom achieved very high status, were called *b'eyom* or *ajb'eyom* ("travelers" or "of the road people"). These itinerant merchants often sold valuable items traded over long distances rather than food or locally produced goods of daily necessity.

Vassals could achieve significant status as musicians. These included *q'ojomanela'* ("drummers" or "instrument players"), *bixanela'* ("singers"), and *xulanela'* ("flautists"). We also know that specialized artisans were attached to the royal court. In general, these were called *ajtoltekat* (literally "of the Toltecs" but figuratively "artisan"). Some may have been vassals of very high earned status; others undoubtedly were *ajawa'*. The *Annals of the Cakchiquels* relates an incident in which an attacking K'iche' army was annihilated by the Kaqchikel. In addition to killing two important K'iche' lords, the *Q'alel Achij* and the *Ajpop Achi'*, four important artisans were executed (Arana X. and Díaz X. 1573–1605:46). The fact that these individuals accompanied an army suggests that their occupations did not exclude them from military service. These artisans were the *ajxit* ("jeweler" or "gem-worker"), *ajpwaq* ("precious metalsmith"), *ajtz'ib'* ("scribe" or "painter"), and *ajk'ot* ("sculptor"). Archaeological evidence for metallurgy has been found in the form of twenty-six mold fragments recovered from Mound 8 of the Reguardo plaza group, located 750 meters southeast of the epicenter of Q'umarkaj (Weeks 1977). Thus, we can associate metalworking directly with the royal court of the K'iche'.

The role of the *ajtz'ib'* is particularly enigmatic. There are no surviving Mayan hieroglyphic texts from the Guatemalan highlands that postdate the Terminal Pre-Classic period.[3] De Palacio (cited by Carmack 1973:127) and several other Colonial authors noted that the highland Maya had "books," but it is not clear if they were written or pictorial manuscripts. Bartolomé de las Casas (1957:346) wrote that highland Maya books contained "figures and characters by which they could signify everything that they desired." Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán (1932–1933:7:108, 112) saw two manuscripts and included a copy of one in his writings. Based on this source, Carmack (1973:13, 127 Footnote 39) suggests that highland Maya manuscripts were similar to Mixteca-Puebla texts. The root *tz'ib'* in K'iche'an languages can be used to mean either "word" or "paint" (Coto 1983:207, 420). We may conclude, therefore, that these texts were not complete representations of spoken language but served as pictorial mnemonic aids for recalling oral narratives. It also may be that the parietal art of the Late Post-Classic, stylistically related to Mixteca-Puebla murals in highland Mexico, was produced by the *ajtz'ib'a'*.

The *ajawa'*, or noble class, contained many named status positions that Carmack (1981:158–159) equates with minimal and principal lineages. Among the Kaqchikel, one of these roles was *lolmay* ("ambassador"). Such emissaries were free to travel long distances. In his fourth letter to the Crown, written in A.D. 1520, Cortés (1961:218–219) mentions that a delegation from Guatemala met with him near Panuco. These Kaqchikel ambassadors sought an alliance with the Spaniards against the K'iche'.

A long list of *ajawa'* status positions is presented in the *Historia Quiché de don Juan de Torres* (Recinos 1957:48–56). Among the titles and names of the Tamub (a factional group of the K'iche') included in this document are: *Maku[p]il Tuch* ("Bracelet Keeper"), *Saqrij Tum* ("Honorable Palm"), *Saqrij Kamachal* ("Honorable Enchanter"), *Popol Winaq Istayol* ("Councilman White Salt [or Heart]"), *Tzuqtzumay* ("Feeder-gourd"), *Su'y* ("Polisher"), *Popol Winaq Xok* ("Councilman Digging Stick"), *Tz'oqoqob Kik'* ("Extractor of Blood"), *Tuj* ("[Lord] Sweatbath"), *Ub'aq'wach Meba Uqalachij* ("Eye of the Orphan of the . . . Men"), *Tz'aqi' Istayol* ("Walls Salt"), *Yakola' Awan* ("Farmer [of the] Mature-Milpa"), *Yakola' Ajbaq* ("Farmer of the Bone"), *Aj Tojil* ("[Lord] of Tohil"), *Yakola' Ixtux* ("Farmer [of the] Female"), *Popol Winaq Tz'ab'* ("Councilman Elect"), *Popol Winaq Pikaxul* ("Flute-Playing Councilman"), and *Nim Chokoj* ("Great Giver-of-Banquets"). Many more *ajawa* titles that do not appear in this list were used by the K'iche' and Kaqchikel. It is particularly important that many K'iche'an titles reflect participation in councils. Kaqchikel and K'iche' courts were places where many men, representing their own great houses as well as larger factional groups, met to make political decisions. The presence of numerous *nimja* (literally "great houses") at highland capitals and secondary centers supports this conclusion.

Comparatively little is known about the structure of K'iche'an religious hierarchies. Presumably this is because Spanish interest in the matter was focused on dismantling the system (Hill and Monaghan 1987:34). Coto (1983), for example, does not include an entry for *sacerdote* or *cura* in his otherwise illuminating dictionary, but does gives four cognates for *brujo*: *ajitz* ("of evil"), *ajq'ij* ("of the day"), *jalom* ("false one"), and *nawal* ("spirit"). Robert Hill (1984:305,308) has noted that one of the meanings of *molab*, the Poqomam equivalent of the *chinamit*, is "church" or "congregation" (Zúñiga 1608:272). It may be that each of these bodies maintained temples and shrines in its area and supported local priests. Given that failure to respect a priest was a serious crime, we may infer that they held high status. The most powerful priests in residence at the capitals of the K'iche' and Kaqchikel were members of the *ajawa'* class. Carmack (1981:Table 6.3) argues that titles such as *Aj Tojil*, *Aj Q'ukumatz*, and *Aj Awilix* were inherited priestly roles. We also may assume that the Tamub *Tz'oqoqob Kik'* ("Extractor of Blood") performed sacrificial rituals. Although many prognostications were undertaken by *ajq'ija'*, prophets were known as a *saqiwachinela'* ("white-faced ones") (Coto 1983:441). The latter commanded high status, but it is doubtful that they were drawn from any particular class of society.

The highest lords of the *ajawa'* class are known to us as kings, although there is little reason to think of them as absolute monarchs. At the Kaqchikel capital of Iximche', two nobles, the *Ajpop Sotz'il* and the *Ajpop Xajil*, shared power. It is likely, however, that the head of the Tuquche' *amaq'* (a large faction within the Kaqchikel polity) may have held an equal position before that faction was expelled from Iximche'. According to las Casas (1909:615–616), the K'iche' were ruled by four lords, including a "king" (*Ajpop*), a "king-elect" (*Ajpop K'amja*, literally "[Lord-]of-the mat Receiving-house"), and two important war captains. Las Casas asserted that the *Ajpop* was succeeded by the *Ajpop K'amja* and that both captains shifted upward in status position. Because these usually were brothers, sons, or other relations of the *Ajpop*, rulership was fixed within the family but did not follow strict rules of primogeniture. In other words, kingly status could pass to different members of the same line or even to more distant affines. Rulership, then, was both inherited and earned, as among the Aztecs. Las Casas noted that whereas the *Ajpop* sat beneath four decorative canopies, the other high lords sat below three, two, and one canopy, further illustrating the hierarchical nature of quadripartite rulership. The *Ajpop* also was distinguished from other *ajawa'* as the only one who wore a particular nosepiece, a tradition that may have been adopted from the Mexican highlands.

In contrast, Pedro de Betanzos (in Carrasco 1967:252–257) claimed that rulership at Q'umarkaj was shared equally between four lords and that their political authority did not extend beyond the city. Carmack (1981:169–171) argues that Betanzos has confused leadership roles in the four "principal lineages" residing in the town with the political statesmen called the *Ajpop*, *Ajpop K'amja*, *Q'alel* ("Judge" or "Courtier"), and *Ajtz'ij Winaq* ("Person of Words"). The point of confusion is that the same individuals often occupied high offices within their own great house and within the K'iche' polity.

Because of the paucity of relevant native sources, we know far less about Tz'utujil rulers. Although the Tz'utujil court contained a complex cast of titled aristocrats, rulership was shared by two individuals: the *Ajpop* and *Ajpop Q'alel*. The qualified title of the second leader suggests that the division of status was not equal; the *Ajpop Q'alel* played lesser king to the *Ajpop*. But we do not know which of the corulers of the various K'iche'an polities held more political power, or even if the division of secular power was institutionalized rather than determined by the ability of the individuals who held office.

It often is assumed that divided rulership is a result of power-sharing alliances between different factions. Carmack (1981), for instance, interprets the complex political structure of the K'iche' as a hierarchically organized division of power among four "principal lineages" he sees as living at Q'umarkaj. Alternatively, it may be that the distinction between power and divine authority was the basis for divided rulership. Kingship often involves two contradictory pressures: the preservation of power and the maintenance of sacred authority. A fully sacred ruler cannot directly exercise force because he is distanced from the populace. Power-sharing can result from the growth of sacred authority at the expense of profane prerogative, that is, if a king adopts a divine role, it becomes more difficult for him to wield earthly power. "Divine kingship" is an oxymoron, and I believe that the opposed centripetal and centrifugal tendencies of sacred rulership were an important source of instability in Maya political systems.

Although we can conclude that K'iche'an society was ruled by an upper stratum of nobles, succession was based not simply on hereditary rank but also on ability, and status was determined not only by seniority and authority but also by military prowess and power. As in Polynesia, K'iche'an status systems were "based on complex patterns representing opposing concepts of ascription and of achievement, of sacred and secular, of formal and pragmatic" (Goldman 1970:7). Rigid models focused on lineage and descent seem too idealized to account for this dynamic between power and position.

Archaeological Research

Until the 1970s, with a few notable exceptions, archaeologists working at Post-Classic sites in the Guatemalan highlands tended to stress the iden-

tification of sites mentioned in ethnohistorical documents. These scholars also were interested in understanding the timing of "Mexican" influence at Post-Classic sites, particularly in discovering whether the source of that influence was the Early Post-Classic Toltecs or the Late Post-Classic Aztecs (e.g., Lothrop 1936; Thompson 1943:122–132). In addition, highland archaeological data were used to evaluate various correlations proposed for lowland Maya calendars (Wauchope 1947, 1948). More recently, trained archaeologists have left the interpretation of Post-Classic sites to ethnohistorians who are less absorbed by chronological issues. Although this has led to more interesting questions being asked of archaeological data, they often are answered without a clear understanding of culture history.

Many of the largest Post-Classic sites of the Guatemalan highlands have seen considerable archaeological investigation. Important centers have been subject to mapping and intensive excavations, such as the Tz'utujil capital of Chwitinamit-Atitlan (Lothrop 1933); the Mam settlement of Saq Ulew (Woodbury and Trik 1953); the Chajoma' capital of Saqik'ajol Nimakaqapek (Lehmann 1968); the Kaqchikel capital of Iximche' (Guillemín 1959, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1977; Guillemín and Anders 1965); the K'iche' capital of Q'umarkaj (de Szecsy 1979; Wallace 1977; Weeks 1977, 1997; Wauchope 1949, 1970) as well as other sites in the Santa Cruz del Quiché region (Fox 1975, 1977; Weeks 1976, 1980, 1983a, 1983b, 1983c); and a series of K'iche' and Achi' towns and fortresses in the Río Chixoy drainage (Breton 1993; Fauvet-Berthelot 1986; Ichon 1979, 1992; Ichon and Grignon C. 1981, 1983; Ichon and Hatch 1982; Ichon et al. 1980, 1996).

Several smaller archaeological projects have looked at Post-Classic highland Maya sites in recent years. *Ri Rusamäj Jilotepeke*, a survey and excavation project conducted in the *municipio* of San Martín Jilotepeque, located and sampled eighty-two sites with Post-Classic components (Braswell 1996, 1998). As part of this project, test excavations were conducted at O'ch'al Kab'owil Siwan, first the seat of the Kaqchikel Xpantzay and later a short-lived capital of the Chajoma' (Braswell 1993, 1996). In 1991, Hill (1996) conducted a brief reconnaissance of the western Chajoma' region and located and mapped several Classic and Post-Classic sites. In 1993, members of the continuing *Proyecto Arqueológico del Área Kaqchikel* conducted exploratory excavations at the Late Post-Classic Kaqchikel site Chitaqtz'aq in the municipio of Sumpango. Ceramics and obsidian artifacts from the site have been studied (Robinson 1997, 1998).

Unfortunately, with the exception of the Saq Ulew and the Río Chixoy reports, most archaeological publications about highland Post-Classic sites are preliminary or incomplete. Lehmann (1968) published a brief guide to the ruins of Saqik'ajol Nimakaqapek and erroneously concluded that it was the Poqomam capital Mixco Viejo (Carmack 1979). The site

still is widely known by this name (e.g., Sharer 1994:427). Lehmann died before completing an excavation report, and most of what we know about the archaeology of the Chajoma' capital is derived from well-documented but small-scale household excavations and analyses of funeral deposits (Fauvet-Berthelot 1986; Fauvet-Berthelot et al. 1996; Ichon and Grignon C. 1984). A brief ceramic report describing materials excavated by Lehmann was prepared by Navarrete (1962), who did not have access to detailed site plans or excavation notes.

Like Lehmann, Jorge Guillemín published only brief and tantalizing descriptions of his extensive excavations at Iximche', the capital of the Kaqchikel polity, but he did not prepare an adequate map of the site. Guillemín's principal contribution was the uncovering and consolidation of two large architectural clusters separated by a low wall. Each includes two temples, a ceremonial plaza with altars, a ballcourt, and a palace complex. A third, more modest group containing smaller palace and temple structures witnessed limited excavations, and a fourth similar cluster was tentatively identified. Guillemín (1977) argued that the larger two of these complexes should be assigned to the *Ajpop Xajil* and *Ajpop Sotz'il*, whereas the smaller two belonged to the *Ajuchan* and the *Q'alel Achi'* (two lesser rulers). In other words, the repetitive architectural pattern of Iximche' reflects what Guillemín interpreted to be a quadripartite division of rulership among four lords. Although quadripartite rulership was once a part of the Xajil *amaq'* (a major faction of the Kaqchikel), the Kaqchikel polity seems to have been ruled by only two kings (Arana X. and Díaz X. 1573–1605:36 and 44). Thus, if Iximche' really does consist of four repetitive groups, it must do so for another reason.

Guillemín's ceramics from Palace Complex I and II have been analyzed (Nance 1998). Whittington and Reed (1998) have included a sample of skeletal materials from Iximche' in a recent study of paleodiet. For the most part, however, materials excavated from the site remain unstudied because we lack information on context. Guillemín (1967) was of the opinion that artifact analyses, particularly ceramic studies, were of little importance for understanding a protohistorical site. For this reason, much of his material from Iximche' is provenienced only by major architectural group or year of excavation (C. Roger Nance, personal communication, 1992).

Results of the State University of New York at Albany's Quiché Project, including brief summaries of exploratory excavations conducted in what is thought to be the Kaweq palace of Q'umarkaj (Carmack 1981; Wallace 1977) and more extensive descriptions of work at Chisalin (Weeks 1983b), have been published. Kenneth Brown, however, has not published the results of his three seasons of extensive excavations in the center of Q'umarkaj (Weeks 1997). Thus, a detailed map of the site (Wallace 1977:Figure 4) and illustrations of two mural fragments (Carmack 1981:Figures

9.12 and 9.13) are the most tangible advances in Q'umarkaj archaeology since the days of Wauchope (1949, 1970). We still lack an adequate understanding of the ceramic chronology and construction sequence of the central precinct and royal court of the K'iche' capital. Excavation and artifact analyses have contributed little to our understanding of the function of the buildings and the activities conducted in the K'iche' royal court.

Nonetheless, ethnohistorians working at Q'umarkaj have formulated many conclusions about the architecture and history of the site. Individual buildings have been identified by interpreting ethnohistorical accounts (Carmack 1981:264–272). The Temple of Tojil, described clearly in an account by fray Francisco Ximénez (1929–1931:1:74–75), is the most securely identified structure at the site. The spatial arrangement of buildings, understood from surface architectural features and limited excavations, also has been an important focus of speculation. Wallace (1977) identifies what he interprets as "ritual-council-palace" complexes. Apparent divisions between these complexes, inferred from the site map, are thought to be boundaries between "moiety wards" (Carmack and Wallace 1977; Wallace 1977) and even "lineage precincts" (Carmack 1981; Fox 1994).[4] The subjective nature of these assignments is demonstrated by the fact that project members do not agree on the location of such divisions or which lineage should be assigned to which architectural group (Carmack 1981:222–228; Wallace 1977). The association of these arbitrary divisions with particular kinship groups seems entirely conjectural. More to the point, the correlation of structures in the K'iche' royal court with particular segments of society is not derived from archaeological evidence.

John Fox, although principally an ethnohistorian, uses architectural patterns to draw conclusions about the political and ideological geography of K'iche'an society. First, he describes certain architectural complexes that he calls K'iche' "conquest-administrative enclaves" and Kaqchikel "garrison plazas" (Fox 1977:95). The presence of "garrison plaza" groups at Saqik'ajol Nimakaqapek and at Chinautla Viejo, for example, is interpreted as indicating conquest of those Chajoma' and Poqomam capitals by the Kaqchikel (Fox 1981). But because the complex that Fox associates with the K'iche' is found not only at K'iche' but also at Mam and Kaqchikel sites, and because his characteristic Kaqchikel pattern is found at Kaqchikel, K'iche', Poqomam, and Chajoma' centers, we might conclude that these two architectural configurations do not correlate well with particular ethnic groups and their political expansion.

Fox (1994) recently has used structure, lineage precinct, and moiety-ward identifications to interpret the architectural patterning of Q'umarkaj as a large, counterclockwise-rotating K'iche'an cosmogram. Astronomical alignments—particularly with conjunctions of Venus and solstitial sunsets—are seen as supporting evidence for this interpretation, as well as indicating broad structural symmetries of domination versus

subordination, day versus night, and the rainy fertile summer versus the dry death of winter. Fox (1994:167–170) sees this cosmogram—centered at Q'umarkaj—replicated over the entire central highlands. To him, the actions of individuals and political factions were determined by a calendar-derived "ideological calculus" patterned in the human occupation of the landscape (Fox 1994:158). My experience as an archaeologist suggests that it is not easy to determine precise alignments from unexcavated buildings that have been thoroughly stripped of facing stones. Moreover, I hesitate to accept that the entire history of the Post-Classic highlands, including factional conflicts led by thinking individuals, was subject to a cosmological predestination encrypted in settlement patterns.

Many archaeologists and ethnohistorians agree that certain long range structures characteristic of Post-Classic highland sites served as "council houses" (e.g., Arnauld 1997; Carmack 1981; Wallace 1977). Carmack (1981:159–160, 289) calls all such range structures *nimja* ("great house"), and suggests that they were used for the lectures, bride-price giving, and feasting associated with marriages. They also were the meeting places of councils, the locations of the court of lineage chiefs, and the places where rulers sat in judgment. In some cases, he concludes, *nimja* were used by more than one lineage. In short, *nimja* were the *salones de usos múltiples* of the Post-Classic highland Maya. Alternatively, as Hill (1996) suggests, we should equate long structures not with clans or lineages but with individual *chinamit*, the fundamental unit of Post-Classic highland land tenure.

Reports detailing excavations of these range structures are few, but urn burials have been found in council houses at Q'umarkaj (Carmack 1981:287), Saqik'ajol Nimakaqapek (Fauvet-Berthelot et al. 1996), and Kawinal (Ichon et al. 1980:203), and also are known from O'ch'al Kab'owil Siwan (Braswell 1996:334). We can conclude, therefore, that this burial pattern was practiced not only by the K'iche' but also by the Chajoma' and Kaqchikel. Carmack (1981:288) points out that this is consistent with López Medel's claim that just rulers were buried beneath the place where they sat in judgment.

Arnauld (1997) has added an interesting twist to the interpretation of these common features of Post-Classic courts. She notes that in the eastern portion of the central highlands there is a distinction between *nimja* (with stairs on only one facade of the supporting platform) and true council houses (with stairs on all four facades). The latter, she argues, are derived from the *popol na* ("mat house") of the northern lowlands (Arnauld 1997:122–123). She goes on to define an archaeological complex characteristic of the Verapaz that consists of a central temple-pyramid (often with stairs on all four sides), council houses oriented to the central temple-pyramid, and *nimja* oriented with the topographic relief of the landscape. These "Verapaz plazas" are common at Achi', Chajoma', and Poqomam sites. Arnauld defines a second architectonic con-

figuration, called the "radial pyramid-temple complex," that consists of combined *nimja*–council houses and laterally positioned temple-pyramids. This second complex is characteristic of the western portion of the central highlands and commonly is associated with the K'iche' and Kaqchikel. Both the eastern and western patterns, she argues, are derived from the basic plan of Chichen Itza and Mayapan (Arnauld 1997:123–124).

Ethnohistorical Approaches to Social and Political Structure

Ethnohistorians long have relied on three basic sources of data for their interpretations of Post-Classic highland Maya courts. These are postconquest native accounts, early Colonial dictionaries, and a variety of Spanish documents including histories, *relaciones*, and legal documents (see Carmack [1973] for a discussion of most of these important sources). The *Popol Wuj*, the *Annals of the Cakchiquels*, and the *Rabinal Achi'* are the best-known and longest of the indigenous narratives, but legal documents and petitions written in both Spanish and Mayan languages have been particularly useful for understanding political geography. It is notable that the vast majority of indigenous Colonial documents were written by either the K'iche' or Kaqchikel. There is only one extant early document in Tz'utujil (the *Título San Bartolomé*), and two others survive in Spanish (the *Relación de los Caciques y Principales del Pueblo Atitlán* and the *Testamento Ajpopolajay*). I know of only three early Colonial documents written from the perspective of the Q'eq'chi' (the *Título Cacoj*, the *Título Chamelco*, and the *Testamento Magdalena Hernández*), only one of which is in that language. A single document is written in Poqomchi (the *Título Chama*), and only one very brief Spanish manuscript (the *Título Mam*) provides a Mam perspective on pre-Conquest and early Colonial events.

Colonial dictionaries always have been used as tools for understanding native Maya documents, but some researchers (Miles 1957; Feldman 1985; Hill 1984; Hill and Monaghan 1987) also use them extensively as sources of ethnohistorical data. Unfortunately, many of the earliest and most important dictionaries have yet to be published (e.g., Vico ca. 1550; Morán 1720; Zúñiga 1608). Colonial dictionaries are particularly important for clarifying issues of social and political structure, as well as occupational specialty. For example, although the morpheme *mun* survives today in Kaqchikel words like *munil* ("sloth" or "laziness") and *muninïk* ("to crave" or "to covet"), in the Tz'tujil *muninem* ("to be gluttonous"), and in the K'iche' *munixik* ("to desire to eat" or "to covet a role"), it has lost its original meaning of "slave" or "disobedient one" in many highland Mayan languages.

The Chinamit *and Other Units of Social Integration*

The basic unit of group organization among the Kaqchikel and K'iche' was the *chinamit*, called the *molab* in Poqomam. Debates concerning the nature of the *chinamit* have focused on whether it was essentially a descent group or a territorial unit. Carmack (1977:12–13; 1981:164–165) has argued that the *chinamit* was a feudal estate headed by a hereditary chief of a dominant lineage. Others have directly equated *chinamita'* with patrilineal lineages (e.g., Carrasco 1964:324). This second identification, however, is unlikely for two reasons. First, *chinamita'* could be large groups containing thousands of members. It is difficult to see how a structure as fragile and prone to conflict as the patrilineal descent group could have grown to this size. Second, the *chinamit* was fundamentally endogamous. Hence, common descent probably did not serve as an organizing principle (Hill 1984).

Hill (1984, 1996; Hill and Monaghan 1987) views the *chinamit* as a territorial unit with many similarities to the Aztec *calpulli* and modern closed corporate communities. He does not consider kinship to be a critical factor in determining group membership. We must recognize, however, that leadership roles in some *chinamita'* became fixed within certain families and particular lines for several generations. A suitable analogy may be found in Victor Goldkind's (1965, 1966) reanalysis of Chan Kom. Although political control over contemporary *ejido* lands theoretically cannot be established in one line, it often becomes so because of the ambitions of a particular man or family. I suggest, then, that the heads of *chinamita'* might have been "*caciques*" in Goldkind's sense. They tried and often were successful at maintaining a politically powerful role in their descent line for more than one generation. Thus, concurring with Hill, I am not convinced that the lineage was a particularly consequential structure. But I do see both the line and a larger, *metaphoric* sense of kinship as two foundations of K'iche'an society.

A fourth possibility is raised by a new and exciting body of work that argues that Formative and Classic peoples of southern Mesoamerica were organized as "house societies" (e.g., Gillespie 1995; Gillespie and Joyce 1997, 2000; Joyce 1996, 1999a). Most recently, this model has been applied to the Late Post-Classic Maya of the northern lowlands (Joyce 1999b; Ringle and Bey, Chapter 9 in this volume). It may be that the *chinamit* of the Late Post-Classic highlands was a kind of fictional kin group that included many families loosely bound by the "the language of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both" (Lévi-Strauss 1983:174). These corporate bodies, called "houses" (Lévi-Strauss 1983, 1987), potentially could include the thousands of individuals who made up the *chinamita'*. The use of "*nimja*" to describe the range structures associated with the *chinamita'* may reflect the conflation of the name for a social unit with the

structure where that group conducted its business. There even was an important K'iche' group known as the *nijaib* ("people of the great houses"). Therefore the *chinamit*, although fundamentally a corporate group based on land tenure, may have used the metaphor of kinship to build group solidarity. This is consistent with Hill's (1984:307) supposition that lesser members of a *chinamit* may have adopted the family name of the *cacique* as an acknowledgment of his authority and control over an area. As I will outline below, there are other aspects of the house society model that are consistent with K'iche'an society.

Most members of a *chinamit* practiced endogamous marriage, but more powerful individuals married into prominent families in other *chinamita'*. According to Hill (1996:63), alliances between *chinamita'*—called *amaq'i'*—were formed and strengthened by such marriages. In this model, leadership roles in K'iche'an society were divided among *amaq'i'*. For this reason, after the Tuquche' *amaq'* was eliminated from the Kaqchikel polity, rulership was divided between the *Ajpop Sotz'il* and the *Ajpop Xajil*, the leading aristocrats of the remaining two Kaqchikel *amaq'i'*. John W. Fox and Garrett Cook (1996:811–812) see *amaq'i'* as community segments tied together by kinship. In their model, major lineages, including those that ruled at Q'umarkaj, contained more than one *amaq'i'*. Thus, Hill views the *amaq'* as the largest unit of organization within each K'iche'an polity, whereas Fox and Cook (1996) and Carmack (1981:Table 6.2) see major lineages and moieties as still larger units. But there is no ethnographic evidence supporting the contention that the highland Maya ever were organized in moieties.

Above the *chinamit* level, models of highland social organization proposed by Carmack (1981), Fox and Cook (1996), and Hill (1984, 1996; Hill and Monaghan 1987) all suffer from the overidealization of a rather chaotic reality. It is difficult to see how the carefully nested hierarchies of these models are expressed in Colonial documents. *Chinamita'*, *amaq'i'*, and the great houses described in the *Popol Wuj* may be more synonymous than most ethnohistorians have supposed. Alternatively, *amaq'i'* may have been large factional units that cross-cut descent and territorial units. An important question for which there is no clear answer is: Could members of the same *chinamit* belong to different *amaq'i'*?

The word "*Amaq'*" has ethnic connotations and often is translated as "tribe." Many K'iche'an nobles claimed to be recently arrived conquerors. In some cases, *amaq'* was used to describe commoners living outside of K'iche'an capitals. Perhaps, then, it refers to the descendants of people who already were living in a particular territory when the K'iche'an elite arrived. Larger units of social identity, therefore, may have had an ethnic component. Coto (1983:LXXXV) defines *amaq'* as "stranger" or "place." The first can have ethnic implications, and the second suggests something akin to a territorial unit. In particular, the morpheme can be combined to

form a verb meaning "to settle as a neighbor," which has both the sense of place and otherness. The root often is used to describe something lasting or permanent and, in Colonial times, could be combined to form *amaq'ib'äl*, meaning "old or former household." This last definition is particularly intriguing. If we suppose that the sense of antiquity implied in *amaq'ib'äl* refers to a Pre-Columbian past, it may be that the *amaq'* was a kind of social house that ceased to exist after the Conquest. Thus, the hierarchical and qualitative distinctions between *amaq'*, *chinamit*, and *nimja* are not particularly clear. According to Dennis Tedlock (personal communication, 1998), there is "no good evidence that *chinamit* labels a category that is not subsumed under *nimja/amaq'* terminology."

Political Organization

The nature of K'iche'an political organization also has been a focus of ethnohistorical research. An important contribution to Maya studies is the proposal that the K'iche'an political system was a segmentary state. The first explicit use of Aiden Southall's (1956, 1988) model to describe Post-Classic highland polities is attributable to Fox (1987), but it is apparent from earlier writings that other scholars considered K'iche'an society to be organized in segmentary lineages (e.g., Carmack 1981; Fox 1981; Wallace 1977).

Although K'iche'an society was in no way monolithic, it is not clear that segmentation always followed lineage boundaries (e.g., Braswell 1996; Hill 1984; Hill and Monaghan 1987). But segmentary states need not be partitioned according to kinship principles (Southall 1988:71). In the K'iche'an case, it might be productive to consider segmentation along factional boundaries. I am thinking specifically of Elizabeth Brumfiel's (1994:4) definition of factions as "structurally and functionally similar groups which, by virtue of their similarity, compete for resources and positions of power or prestige." The conflict between the Tuquche' and the other *amaq'i'* of the Kaqchikel, which resulted in the expulsion and the *kamib'äl* ("death") of the Tuquche'(Arana X. and Díaz X. 1573–1605:49–50), can be interpreted as a factional conflict.

It is not universally accepted that the various K'iche'an kingdoms formed a segmentary state. Brown (1983, 1985; Fox et al. 1992:Note 1) agrees that the K'iche' polity was segmented along lineage lines but regards it as an advanced chiefdom. Marcus (1993), citing Southall (1991:91), notes that segmentary states are not state-level societies. Instead, she points out that the segmentary state is an intermediate category between acephalous societies and unitary states. The Alur, then, were a ranked society, but not any kind of state.

From a different perspective, it is unclear if Southall's (1988:52) recent definition of the segmentary state as "one in which the spheres of ritual

suzerainty and political sovereignty do not coincide" fits the K'iche'an case. We simply do not know enough about the ritual role of the K'iche' and Kaqchikel kings to say that this definition is satisfied. If las Casas (1909:615–616) was correct in his assertion that the rulers of the Kaqchikel, Achi', and Tz'utujil had to be confirmed in office by the *Ajpop* of Q'umarkaj, then perhaps the definition would hold. Las Casas's informants were K'iche', so it is natural that their perspective emphasized the importance of their own ruler. The issue is further complicated by tribute; what is viewed as required tribute by the receiver may be considered a gift by the provider. There is no doubt that items were exchanged between the rulers of the Kaqchikel, K'iche', and Tz'utujil. But gift-giving between rulers may have solidified their ritual and political status in several apparently contradictory ways. The acts of both giving and receiving can be manipulated to reinforce status.

The prime sanction held by K'iche'an kings was "control over the means of destruction" (Goody 1971). The numerous rebellions by K'iche' and Kaqchikel factions reported in documents like the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* attest that this sanction was both frequently needed and regularly employed. The necessary exertion of destructive power is not particularly consistent with ritual suzerainty. Instead, K'iche'an kings seem more like the heads of large factions defined, in part, by ethnic criteria. Their rulership was based more on military prowess and threat than on any ritual authority. The setting of a highland capital often was chosen because of its strategic value as a defensive location or as a place from which raids could be launched, not because of its central position in the political landscape. For this reason, I consider sites like Q'umarkaj and Iximche' more as military and logistical strongholds than as true political or economic central places. The abandonment of O'ch'al Kab'owil Siwan by the Chajoma' sovereign Amolaq' Lajuj No'j and subsequent founding of Saqik'ajol Nimakaqapek are consistent with this interpretation of K'iche'an capitals (Braswell 1996:330). In this case, the Chajoma' royal court was moved to be closer to four smaller communities that had staged an unsuccessful rebellion.

Were Post-Classic K'iche'an polities organized as one or more states? To a great degree, the answer depends on how one chooses to define the state. According to a recent operational definition, archaic states are characterized by:

> (1) a change in the settlement hierarchy from three to four levels; (2) a change in the decision-making hierarchy from two to three (or more levels); (3) a fundamental change in the ideology of stratification and descent, such that rulers were conceded a sacred supernatural origin (establishing their divine right to rule) while commoners were seen as having a separate descent of nondivine origin; (4) the emergence of two endogamous strata, the result of severing the bonds of kinship that had once linked the leaders to followers in a branching continuum of relationships; (5) the evolution of the palace as the ruler's official residence; (6) the change from a single centralized leader (e.g., a chief) to a government that employed legal force while denying its citizens the use of personal, individual force; and (7) the establishment of governmental laws and the ability to enforce them. (Marcus and Feinman 1998:16–17)

Current archaeological research sheds some light on the first of these seven criteria. Settlement surveys in the eastern (Hill 1996) and western (Braswell 1996, 1998) portions of the Chajoma' kingdom reveal a simple settlement hierarchy consisting of three levels. The smallest sites are simple sherd and lithic scatters, most of which represent isolated households. Intermediate-sized sites contain isolated structures or small groups, usually consisting of earthen or *laja*-faced earthen platforms. Only four multigroup sites are known: O'ch'al Kab'owil Siwan (Braswell 1996:Figures B.7-B.15), Saqik'ajol Nimakaqapek, Las Vegas, and El Horno. The first two were sequential capitals of the Chajoma'. The last two, which are much smaller and best considered as second-tier sites, have yet to be subject to archaeological scrutiny (Hill 1996:70–73). Survey within the territory dominated by the Kaqchikel polity also has revealed just three levels of settlement: Iximche', second-tier sites such as Chitaqtz'aq, and artifact scatters (Robinson 1990, 1997, 1998).[5] The K'iche' capital of Q'umarkaj is neither significantly larger nor more elaborate than Iximche' or Saqik'ajol Nimakaqapek. Thus, there is no reason to posit that the settlement hierarchy of the entire K'iche'an world consisted of more than three levels.

The number of levels in K'iche'an decision-making hierarchies is less clear, reflecting as much about the idealized and unrealistic formulation of the concept as about the organization of Maya administration. Ethnohistorical sources do not describe individuals or councils that made metadecisions. Rather than formulating procedures and policies about administration, K'iche'an elites participated directly in decision making. Particular issues of sufficient moment were passed upward within the political system. If the identification of *nimja* as the seats of *chinamita'* is correct, we can conclude that some administrative activities were conducted at these structures by individual leaders. More important decisions may have been made by *chinamit* councils that also met in these structures. The repetitive titles held by the lords of groups like the Xajil, Sotz'il, and Tuquche' suggest that each contained both individuals and councils that made decisions. At the top of the hierarchy were individuals and councils representing each of these larger alliances, as well as the king and his council of advisers. It is conceivable, therefore, that a particular administrative decision might pass through as many as six or seven levels within a decision-making hierarchy.

The degree to which the *ajawa'*, particularly rulers, were distinguished from commoners is somewhat ambiguous. Society contained three essentially endogamous strata (*ajawa'*, *alk'ajola'*, and *muna'*). But creation and migration myths do not imply distinct supernatural origins for the ancestors of rulers. The *Popol Wuj* gives primacy to the creation of the founders of the four great clans of the K'iche', but there is no qualitative difference in how they and other mortals were created: All mankind was made of water and white and yellow maize. Furthermore, the creator gods were unhappy with the divine powers of the founders and so weakened them. This accentuates the difference between the members of the four great clans and their divine creators, and serves to identify the founders as human. The corresponding portion of the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* relates a slightly different story but also fails to stress a separate and divine creation of the kingly line. K'iche'an society, then, was based on both kinship and class. This is consistent with the house society model, formulated to describe societies that appear to be transitional between kinship- and class-based.

There is no doubt that K'iche'an rulers lived in palaces. Webster (1997; Chapter 5 in Volume 1) has proposed that Classic-period centers were little more than large palaces or the location of royal courts. In fact, Post-Classic centers such as Q'umarkaj, Saqikajol Nimakaqapek, Saq Ulew, and Iximche' fit his model much better than do highly urbanized Classic cities like Calakmul (Braswell et al. 2001). The stages upon which the royal courts of the Post-Classic highland Maya performed are profitably seen as the entirety of these sites, and not as small portions of more complex and metropolitan wholes. In other words, Post-Classic highland capitals were elaborate great houses or conglomerations of several great houses.

Behavior was codified in K'iche'an society in ways that can be construed as lawlike, also consistent with the house society model. For example, punishments for crimes like theft and the disrespect of priests were firmly established, and the government was obliged and empowered to enforce standards of behavior. Yet it is less certain that the exertion of force was monopolized by a central government. Coercive power seems to have been the license of whoever could control and maintain it. Conflict and violence, which in at least one case resulted in the overthrow of a K'iche' king, was justified by victorious factions in their official histories.

K'iche'an political systems, therefore, fulfill some of the defining criteria of the archaic state but fail to meet others. The dichotomy of "chiefdom" and "state" is not a productive way to conceive of their organization and function. Instead, the house society model, particularly its emphasis on both class and kinship as organizing principles, seems a more fruitful approach to understanding K'iche'an political systems.

Marcus (1993, 1998) describes one way that such "semistates" can form. In her Dynamic Model, autonomous polities with some of the attributes of

archaic states (particularly the notion of kingship) emerge while former provinces of a decaying state gain their independence. Such *cacicazgos* or *señoriales* control much smaller territories than their parent state and resemble principalities. This process may explain the proliferation of small Maya kingdoms in the Late Classic period but cannot describe the emergence of K'iche'an polities during the Late Post-Classic. The central Maya highlands were never organized as a large Classic or Early Post-Classic state, so the K'iche', Kaqchikel, Chajoma', and other Late Post-Classic kingdoms cannot be viewed as products of political disintegration.

Two alternative models for the formation of semistates might apply to K'iche'an kingdoms. The first is that they are the product of autochthonous development. Cultural evolutionists may wish to interpret K'iche'an kingdoms as "maximal chiefdoms" on the way to becoming archaic states. But ethnohistorical data do not support this position. The century before the arrival of Pedro de Alvarado was not a time of consolidation but of fission and the budding-off of new polities—a process more consistent with ranked societies than with potential states. A second possibility is that K'iche'an polities acquired some of the trappings of statehood through emulation (Braswell 2001). This is much more likely, especially since many of the *ajawa'* titles are borrowed from Nahua.[6] As has been documented (e.g., Navarrete 1996), the last century before the Spanish Conquest saw not only the emergence of K'iche'an kingdoms, but also the introduction of many aspects of highland Mexican culture.

Conclusions

Archaeological data—for the most part derived from architectural maps and not from subsurface explorations—have been used in three distinct ways to understand Post-Classic Maya courts. First, the function of individual buildings has been posited from their basic form. Range structures are lineage houses or buildings where landholding groups resolved their affairs; they were places of judgment and marriage rituals; they were council houses and sepulchers for the burned remains of leaders. They also may have been part-time or permanent residences, especially if a title or office became fixed in a particular family. Temples, in contrast, are tall and often have square bases. Altars are low and associated with temples and open plazas. Palaces are low compounds with many rooms. In short, archaeologists of the Maya highlands have used the same simple criteria for determining building function as many of their counterparts in the lowlands. Unfortunately, these assumptions hardly ever are subject to testing (cf. Nance 1998). Detailed site maps, carefully checked through excavation, are uncommon in the highlands. Clear accounts of the artifacts recovered from primary contexts in Post-Classic buildings are even rarer.

Second, the frequent and repetitive nature of some architectonic complexes—such as Wallace's (1977) "ritual-council-palace" group, Guillemín's (1977) "palace-temples-altars" group, Fox's (1977) "garrison plaza" and "conquest-administrative enclaves," and Arnauld's (1997) "Verapaz plaza" and "radial pyramid-temple" complexes—are seen as keys to political and social organization. The presence of multiple examples of these complexes at a single site frequently is assumed to replicate the decentralized or segmented nature of Post-Classic rule. At Iximche', for example, the replication of architectural form is seen as indicating quadripartite rule (Guillemín 1977). At Q'umarkaj, a perceived four-part division in site plan is interpreted as indicating the presence of the four great lineage groups of the K'iche' (Carmack 1981). The appearance of particular arrangements at various sites is seen by Fox (1977) as indicating the imposition of Kaqchikel or K'iche' dominance. Arnauld (1997) suggests that two distinct architectural complexes tend to be associated with different ethnic groups, but both are derived from antecedents in the northern Maya lowlands.

Third, Fox (1994) has used astronomical alignments to interpret Post-Classic Maya courts, regional settlement patterns, and even the actions of individuals and factions in terms of a complex set of cosmological principles. Archaeoastronomy is not new to the Maya area, but Fox's notion that K'iche'an political history is encoded in architectural plans and settlement patterns is unique.

Unfortunately, much of this analysis remains speculative. Site maps, often only crude plans, are not adequate for determining building functions. Detailed analyses of the artifact assemblages recovered from middens associated with different structures have not been used to infer building function, with the exception of Nance's (1998) recent study of ceramics from Iximche'. His conclusions, however, are tentative because Guillemín rarely kept adequate provenience data. Nevertheless, this work is exemplary of the kind of study archaeologists need to conduct in order to formulate more convincing narratives of the kinds of activities that took place in the royal courts of the Post-Classic highland Maya.

Ethnohistorical studies, rather than focusing on the interpretation of the architectural remains of Post-Classic highland royal courts, instead have concentrated on two anthropological issues: social structure and political organization. Several models of K'iche'an social structure have emphasized a hierarchical arrangement of greater and lesser lineages (e.g., Carmack 1981). Other researchers have considered the fundamental building-block of K'iche'an society to be the *chinamit*, a unit of territorial control similar to closed corporate communities and the Aztec *calpulli* (e.g., Hill 1984; Hill and Monaghan 1987). In this model, larger structures called *amaq'i'* were formed by alliances between *chinamita'*, and the major K'iche'an polities were confederations of *amaq'i'*. I see both idealizations

as too rigidly organized and hierarchical, and I am not certain that all these terms referred to distinct kinds of social groups. In particular, I believe that there has been an overemphasis on the lineage concept and in interpreting K'iche'an society in terms of real, rather than metaphoric, kinship. There is no doubt that the building blocks of K'iche'an society "sound like lineages" (Tedlock 1989:498). But it seems more profitable to consider the K'iche' and their neighbors as house societies, particularly because the emic term for one kind of social unit means "great house." In other words, the social fabric of the Post-Classic Maya might have been determined as much by marriage and fictive kinship as by blood, and more by territory than by descent. Finally, I see factional competition as central to understanding the dynamics of large-scale social interaction.

Ethnohistorical studies of political organization have focused on the application of the segmentary state model and, by and large, have considered lineage structure as forming the basis of segmentation. Discourse concerning the political organization of ancient societies often becomes mired in attempts to pigeonhole them as either "chiefdoms" or "states," and the K'iche'an case is no exception. In our quest to patch Elman Service's worn-out classification scheme, we have looked too hard for categories that span the gap between these two types. Whether or not the Post-Classic highland Maya had crossed an illusory Rubicon between two ideal categories is irrelevant. It is more important to stress that in K'iche'an polities power was neither absolute nor organized in a simple hierarchical fashion. Principles of aristocracy, based on both ascribed and earned status, were used to determine the occupants of high-status roles. A complex balance was maintained between various groups whose membership fluctuated and was not determined solely by rules of kinship.

The complicated manner in which the titles of members of the K'iche'an royal courts were regulated by both kinship and merit is reminiscent of Polynesian aristocratic systems. In Samoa, primogeniture determined only the slight honor of *ulumatua*, or "first-born status." A first-born son inherited his father's rank as head of the household, but his father's higher public titles were conferred by the *fono*, or "village council" (Goldman 1970:252). Thus, rank in the *aiga*, or "extended family," was correlated rather than equated with titled status. In Tonga, the rule governing the inheritance of political titles was male primogeniture. This ideal was more exactly adhered to for more important titles, although the highest positions, *Tui Takalaua* and *Tui Kanokupolu*, often were greatly contested. Despite the strictness of the rule of primogeniture in Tongan society, in later times the *Tui Kanokupolu* was appointed by high-ranking chiefs in the Samoan manner (Goldman 1970:289). The K'iche'an case lies somewhere between the Samoan and Tongan rules for status inheritance. On a local level, the numerous councils of K'iche'an society may have

elected the leaders of the *chinamita'*, albeit from important families with a history of leadership. Higher-status offices, particularly those of the titled aristocrats who dwelled in royal courts, may have been more firmly rooted in particular clans and descent lines.

Despite a long history of both ethnohistorical and archaeological research in the central Maya highlands, these two sources of data rarely have been used in a truly conjunctive manner. Few ethnohistorians find the questions asked by archaeologists relevant, and many have attempted to use archaeological data without a thorough understanding of regional culture history. The wealth of ethnohistorical data only serves to underline the critical need to conduct problem-oriented archaeological investigation at Post-Classic highland sites. The players of the royal courts are richly costumed, but the stage remains bare.

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Notes

1. K'iche'an polities have been called "kingdoms" and their rulers "kings" since the sixteenth century. This convention is followed here, but is not meant to imply that K'iche'an polities were states.

2. Throughout this chapter, I endeavor to use the orthographic system proposed by the Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala and approved by the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes (Acuerdo Gubernativo 1046–87) and the Congreso de la República (Decreto Legislativo 65–90:Ley de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala) as the only legal way to represent the Mayan languages of Guatemala in Latin characters. More recently, many publications, particularly in K'iche', have used duplication to indicate long vowels (e.g., *K'ichee'* instead of *K'iche'*). I have not followed this convention.

3. Some Late Classic (A.D. 600–1000) carved stone monuments in the Guatemalan highlands do contain brief inscriptions (numbers and names), but they are written using the "Mexican"-like glyphs of Cotzumalguapan art (e.g., Robinson 1993).

4. Married K'iche'an men lived with their wives in a pattern of weak patrilo-

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