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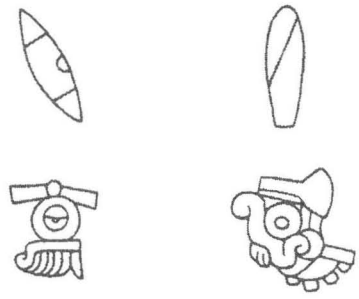
K'iche'an Origins, Symbolic Emulation, and Ethnogenesis in the Maya Highlands



A.D. 1450–1524

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No topic in K'iche'an archaeology and ethnohistory has been the subject of more speculation than the source and timing of central Mexican influence in the central and western highlands of Guatemala. Evidence for an important connection between the two regions is undeniable, and is manifest in indigenous historical accounts such as the *Popol Wuj* (Brasseur de Bourbourg 1861; Saravia E. and Guarchaj 1996) and the *Memorial de Tecpán Atitlán* (Arana Xahilá and Díaz Xebutá Queh 1573–1605),[1] in Postclassic architecture and mural painting, in portable artifacts, in burial practices, and even in the vocabulary and personal names used by K'iche'an peoples.

The foremost concern of archaeologists of K'iche'an culture has been chronology, specifically whether the period of the most-intense intercultural contact was the Early or Late Postclassic (e.g., Lothrop 1933, 1936; Thompson 1943, 1954; Wauchope 1949, 1970, 1975). The goal of this research was to determine if central Mexican cultural traits found in the Guatemalan highlands were more properly associated with a "Toltec" horizon or with the Aztec expansion into Xoconochco. Borhegyi (1965:39–41) saw as many as three waves of intense and intrusive interaction, each characterized by the migration of central Mexicans into the Guatemalan highlands. Each of his conjectured migrations involved groups that he called the Pipil: the Teotihuacan-Pipil of A.D. 400–500, the Pipil-Nicarao (also called the Tajínized-Teotihuacan-Pipil) of A.D. 700–900, and the Nonoalca-Pipil-Toltec-Chichimec of A.D. 1000–1200. Thus, in a complex way, the appearance of central Mexican traits in highland Guatemala also was linked with movements of the Nahua-speaking Pipil and Nicarao into Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. More recently, a variation of Thompson's Putun hypothesis has been championed by ethnohistorians as accounting for a Mexicanized Maya presence in the Guatemalan highlands (e.g., Carmack 1968, 1973, 1981; Fox 1978, 1980, 1991; Fox et al. 1992; Nicholson 1957; Recinos and Goetz 1953). Although these scholars are concerned with temporal issues, their research has focused on reconstructing a migration route for K'iche'an "lineage" founders from the Gulf coast lowlands. Thus, archaeological and ethnohistorical discourse has concentrated on demic diffusion. In contrast, few scholars have considered the economic, social, and political implications of the adoption of a central Mexican cultural veneer by K'iche'an elites (cf. Brown 1983, 1985; Navarrete 1976, 1996); that is, Postclassic interaction rarely has been discussed as an example of elite emulation.

In this chapter, I briefly review the archaeological, linguistic, and ethnohistorical evidence for contact between the highlands of Guatemala and Mexico during the Postclassic period, and conclude that evidence for the long-distance or interregional migration of K'iche'an elites is unconvincing. In contrast, a growing body of archaeological data suggests that K'iche'an peoples originated in the western highlands of Guatemala and entered the central highlands by the beginning of the Early Classic period. I then turn to the social context of central Mexican cultural traits in the K'iche'an realm, and note that it is limited to expressions of elite identity. Finally, I consider the economic and political implications of emulation and the creation of an elite ethnic identity within the framework of factional competition within a house society.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF POSTCLASSIC CONTACTS WITH CENTRAL MEXICO

In two works, Navarrete (1976, 1996) provides an exhaustive list of Postclassic material traits from the highlands of Chiapas, Guatemala, and El Salvador that may

have originated in central Mexico. These include architectural forms and features (such as I-shaped ball courts, twin temples on a single platform, round structures, and sacrificial blocks placed in front of temples), mural paintings (particularly those from Temple 2 of Iximche', in a style reminiscent of Mixteca-Puebla murals; see chapters 23 and 24), sculptural forms (such as two chacmools from El Salvador), ceramics (including Aztec pottery found in Chiapas and El Salvador, and Mixteca-Puebla ceramics from Chiapas and Guatemala), and various other items of material culture.

Several aspects of this list are noteworthy. First, although a few architectural traits and portable objects may date to earlier periods, virtually all the items in Navarrete's list are firmly dated to the Late Postclassic period, particularly after A.D. 1450. Second, most of the portable artifacts are limited in distribution to Chiapas and El Salvador, and hence may be attributable to the physical presence of Nahua speakers in those areas.[2] In fact, no Aztec pottery and only two Mixteca-Puebla style vessels (from Q'umarkaj and an unknown site) have been found in the K'iche'an highlands (Navarrete 1996:328). A second vessel, from Zacualpa, carries images of crossed bones with "star eyes" and a skull with a chert knife embedded in its nasal cavity (Lothrop 1936:33, figure 30). Nonetheless, it is classified as Chinautla Polychrome, an autochthonous ware of the central highlands of Guatemala. Apparently, highland Maya potters only rarely copied foreign motifs.

Third, most of the architectural features of probable central Mexican origin are found at paramount sites such as Saq Ulew, Iximche', and Saqik'ajol Nimakaqapek ("Mixco" Viejo). For the most part, these elements are associated with temple structures, but some range structures of the type known as nimja also have sloping balustrades surmounted by vertical blocks. Although certain architectural forms may be of central Mexican origin, it is uncertain how they were used by the highland Maya. Specifically, it is not known to which gods double pyramids were dedicated, and if round structures should be associated with Ehecatl, a wind deity and avatar of Quetzalcoatl. There is no clear evidence that the highland Maya participated in the pan-Mesoamerican cult of the feathered serpent, so this identification seems unlikely.[3]

Fourth, nearly all features of material culture that may have a central Mexican origin are associated with elite contexts, such as possible royal burials (e.g., feature E 27-A of Iximche' [Guillemín 1961]), and are found in the epicenters of regional "capitals." The ownership, display, and use of items of foreign origin were quite restricted, perhaps even by sumptuary laws. Despite the strong desire of K'iche'an elites to emulate Nahua culture, they apparently had little access to imported status goods.

LOAN WORDS FROM NAHUATL IN K'ICHE'AN LANGUAGES

Also providing evidence for contact between K'iche'an and Nahua peoples are the numerous loan words from Nahuatl found in Colonial documents and dictionaries from the Guatemalan highlands. Campbell (1977: 104–109) has compiled a list of 74 Nahuatl loan words, almost all of which are nouns, that appear in K'iche'an sources. As others have noted (e.g., Carmack 1965, 1968, 1981; Whorf 1943), many of these are related to warfare (e.g., *xkapupul*, 'cotton armor'), religion (e.g., *nawal*, 'spirit' or 'alter ego'), social and territorial organization (e.g., *kalpul*, a social unit), elite architecture (e.g., *tekpan*, 'palace'), and status goods (e.g., *xit*, 'greenstone').

It is tempting to suggest that the elite semantic domain that encompasses these loans mirrors the social context of their borrowing. In fact, such an interpretation is consistent with the argument I make below. But, as Campbell (1977:109) points out, many more loans describe common objects (e.g., *ikom*, 'jug'), domestic architecture (e.g., *xan*, 'adobe'), and especially animals (e.g., *tamasul*, 'toad'), plants (*witzitzil*, a type of tree), and food (e.g., *xunakät*, 'onion'). He suggests that an overemphasis on religious and military terms has caused scholars to miss the more intimate nature of contact between Nahuatl and K'iche'an speakers (Campbell 1977:109). It also may be that by privileging texts that focus on the origin myths and military exploits of elites, ethnohistorians have limited the *apparent* context of Nahuatl loans to an elite semantic realm. The *Popol Wuj* and *Memorial de Tecpán Atitlán*, after all, are texts written by, for, and about the K'iche'an elite.

When and from what region did Nahuatl loans enter the K'iche'an languages? Some probably were adopted during the Colonial period (e.g., *mes*, 'cat'), perhaps from the Tlaxcalans brought to Guatemala by the conquistadors. Others may have come from the Pipil who lived in El Salvador and southern Guatemala during the Postclassic period. But Campbell (1970, 1977:109) suggests that the principal source of loans was a dialect spoken in the Isthmian Gulf Coast.[4] He argues that, as in the Nahuatl of that region, loans in K'iche'an languages are typified by the change of *kwaw-* sequences to *ko-* (e.g., *kot*, the Kaqchikel word for 'eagle', is reduced from the Classical Nahuatl *quauhtli*) and *-iwi-* is changed to *-i-* (e.g., the Classical Nahuatl *chalchihuitl*, 'greenstone,' is reduced to *xit* in Kaqchikel).

This interpretation often is viewed as supporting the conjecture that K'iche'an forefathers, called "Toltec overlords" by Campbell (1977:109), came from the Gulf coast of Tabasco or Veracruz (e.g., Carmack 1981:44–52). But it also is consistent with other kinds of contact

with speakers of Isthmian Nahuatl. In chapter 20 I suggest that during the first part of the Late Postclassic period, sites in Xoconochco received significant quantities of obsidian from the Gulf Coast exchange sphere. At the same time, considerable interaction with the K'iche'an highlands is demonstrated by the presence of Guatemalan obsidian in Xoconochco. It may be that the inhabitants of Xoconochco mediated economic and linguistic exchange between K'iche'an and Isthmian Nahuatl speakers during the first half of the Late Postclassic period.

There is considerable evidence from both Colonial sources (e.g., Torquemada 1969:1:331–333) and contemporary studies (e.g., Bruce S. and Robles Uribe 1969; Campbell 1988:277–281; Knab 1980; Navarrete 1975; Reyes García 1961; van Zantwijk 1963; Vivó 1942) that Nahua was spoken in southwestern Guatemala and southeastern Chiapas before the arrival of the Aztecs in Xoconochco. Several K'iche'an documents discuss Nahua peoples in Xoconochco, including the *Macatlecat* (Mazateca) and the *Ayutlecat* (Ayuteca), both identified as *Yaqui Vinae*: "Nahua people" (Carmack and Mondloch 1983:162–163; Recinos and Goetz 1953:194). Other communities—such as Naguatecat, Tapaltecat, and Xicalapa—are called by Nahuatl names in the *Títulos de la Casa Ixquin-Nehaib Señora del Territorio de Otzoya* (Recinos 1957:79–81). Little is known about the dialect(s) spoken in these towns at the time of conquest, but studies of modern Chiapan Nahuatl provide some information about linguistic affinity. Although the dialectology of modern Chiapan Nahuatl, including Waliwi, is somewhat in doubt, Campbell (1988:280) presents a strong case that it is more closely allied to the Core Nahuatl dialects of Veracruz than to Central American Pipil. In particular, there is evidence of the reduction of *kwaw-* to *ko-* (see entry for "firewood" in Campbell 1988:287). I suggest, therefore, that the source of loans in highland Maya languages may have been pre-Aztec Chiapan Nahuatl, rather than a dialect spoken in the Gulf coast region. Consequently, there is no need to posit a migration from the Gulf coast to the Maya highlands in order to account for the presence of Nahuatl loan words in K'iche'an languages.[5]

MIGRATION MYTHS AND THE PROBLEM OF K'ICHE'AN ORIGINS

With the exception of linguists, most scholars have relied on native documents dating to the Colonial period as the principal source of information on the origins of K'iche'an peoples. There has been a tendency to accept the *Popol Wuj*, the *Memorial de Tecpán Atitlán*, and other documents as texts that, after analysis, yield western-style history. Several documents describe the creation of the mythical founders of K'iche'an civilization, how these ancestors of the K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Chajoma' (also called the Aqajal Winäq or the Sacatepéquez) arrived at a place called Tulan, how they eventually departed, and how after a period of migration settled in their current territories in the western and central highlands of Guatemala. One of the longest and most detailed accounts, the *Memorial de Tecpán Atitlán*, also describes how the ancestors of the Kaqchikel made war against a people called the Nonoalca after leaving the mythical Tulan. The *Popol Wuj* and the *Título de Totonicapán* (Carmack and Mondloch 1983; Recinos and Goetz 1953) both name places in the Verapaz early in their accounts of K'iche' migrations. Thus, these native documents are regarded as presenting strong evidence that the appearance of Postclassic central Mexican cultural patterns was the result of a southerly migration of peoples from the Gulf coast lowlands to the northern and southern highlands of Guatemala.

Ethnohistorians frequently link descriptions of K'iche'an migrations to particular geographical features and archaeological sites, and attempt to trace the route followed by the founders of the elite houses during the Postclassic period. Carmack (1968, 1981), Fox (1980, 1991), and other scholars argue that the forefathers of the K'iche' elite were Ch'ontal-Nahua speakers from the hot lowlands of the Gulf Coast.[6] This interpretation is based on a rather literal and selective reading of certain K'iche'an texts, most notably the *Popol Wuj* and the *Título de Totonicapán*, which are notably vague about the place of K'iche' origin and the location of the mythical Tulan. Some scholars privilege these ambiguous documents over the more specific descriptions of migrations presented in the *Memorial de Tecpán Atitlán* and the *Título de Jilotepeque* (Crespo M. 1956). The first of these two texts describes a journey limited to the highlands and Pacific slopes of northern Central America, and notes that the ancestral founders of the Kaqchikel elite passed through a town called Teozacuanco before fighting the Nonoalca.[7] Teozacuanco, Nonoalco, and Tula all are toponyms from El Salvador, suggesting that the Xajil faction of the Kaqchikel may be describing an expedition into the lands of the Pipil. Thus the Nonoalco of the *Popol Wuj* may not have been located in the lowlands of Veracruz or Tabasco, and we need not turn to a variant of the Putun hypothesis to explain K'iche'an origins. The *Título de Jilotepeque*, the principal document of the Kaqchikel-speaking Chajoma', is even more specific, noting that their place of origin was just north of the Río Motagua in the area of Joyabaj and Zacualpa, two municipios in the department of Quiché.

The problem of K'iche'an migrations has been compounded by the frequent misconception that Tulan was a place of origin. The *Popol Wuj*, the *Memorial de Tecpán Atitlán*, and the *Testamonio de los Xpantzay* (Recinos

1957) all describe how mythical ancestors *arrived* at Tulan and were given images of their gods; that is, Tulan was a place of gathering and legitimization, but not a homeland. Many Mesoamerican peoples claim some ancestry or stay at the fabled Tulan/Tollan/Tula, and assert that they are not native to the places they occupied during the Colonial period. By asserting that their progenitors and the ancestors of their neighbors were at Tulan, the authors of K'iche'an documents contextualize themselves at the center of the Mesoamerican world.[8] A seventeenth-century Kaqchikel legal document, the *Testamonio de los Xpantzay*, illustrates this principle taken a step further. In this work, the Xpantzay claim that they are descendents of Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that they helped build the Tower of Babel. After dispersing from that place, they assembled at Tulan, only to move to the central highlands of Guatemala. Thus, the Xpantzay contextualize and legitimate themselves before both Spanish and Maya audiences.[9]

Which origin story should we use to reconstruct migration routes? The modest and specific migration myth of the Chajoma' recounted in *Título Jilotepeque*, the detailed account of the Kaqchikel Xajil faction described in the *Memorial de Tecpán Atitlán*, or the vague claims laid out in the *Popol Wuj*? Or, for that matter, why not try to reconstruct a migration route from ancient Babylon to Tulan, a journey that the Xpantzay and the authors of the *Título de Totonicapán* claim to have made with other K'iche'an peoples? In the end, the origin and migration stories of the Maya of the Guatemalan highlands are not objective sources of western-style history. These portions of the documents relate much about how Maya people viewed their past. They also show us how certain Kaqchikel and K'iche' factions intended others to perceive their histories. But the documents are not accurate Postclassic road maps (chapter 22).

Linguistic studies provide a very different perspective on the origins of K'iche'an civilization. Most Mayan linguists argue that the homeland of Common Mayan (also called Proto-Mayan) was somewhere in the highlands of western Guatemala or Chiapas, Mexico: the portion of the Maya area that today shows the greatest linguistic diversity, and hence the region that has been occupied by Mayan speakers for the longest time (e.g., Kaufman 1976). Although there is considerable evidence that K'iche'an languages contain loan words from the Ch'olan subgroup of languages, they do not appear to come from Ch'ontal. Instead, the period of borrowing was considerably earlier than the Postclassic period. In particular, it seems most likely that linguistic borrowing was from Southern Classic Mayan, the Classic-period ancestor of Ch'olti' and Ch'orti' (Houston et al. 1998). Thus, if the progenitors of the leading great houses of the K'iche', Kaqchikel, Chajoma', and Tz'utujil did speak Ch'ontal, their descendants completely abandoned the ancestral language.

Lexicostatistical evidence, however controversial, suggests that Greater K'iche'an began to diverge before the current era, and that K'iche'an languages began to separate about A.D. 900–1000 (Kaufman 1976; McQuown 1964).[10] Thus, linguistic studies suggest that the K'iche'an languages evolved in the Maya highlands not far from where K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Tz'utujil are spoken today. Furthermore, if the territorial expansion of K'iche'an languages represents actual population movements, migrations began long before the Postclassic period.

New archaeological data support the model that Greater K'iche'an peoples came from the western highlands of Guatemala and entered the central highlands at the beginning of the Early Classic period. Popenoe de Hatch (1997), analyzing material from the San Jorge section of Kaminaljuyú, describes a punctuated and dramatic break in the ceramic sequence between the Protoclassic Santa Clara phase and the Early Classic Aurora phase. She interprets this sudden and near total ceramic replacement as a case of site-unit intrusion (Popenoe de Hatch 1998). Dramatic changes in settlement patterns, the cessation of the erection of carved monuments, the apparent disappearance of hieroglyphic writing, and the advent of a new stone-tool technology at Kaminaljuyú during the Early Classic period all are consistent with Popenoe de Hatch's conclusion (Braswell 1998b; Braswell and Amador 1999:908–909). For these reasons, it is likely that at about A.D. 200, a new group of settlers entered the Valley of Guatemala and either forced out or rapidly assimilated the previous inhabitants of the region. The same pattern, particularly the replacement of the Las Vacas ceramic tradition by the Solano tradition (Popenoe de Hatch 1998), can be seen throughout the Kaqchikel region (e.g., Braswell 1996; García García 1992; Gárnica Vanegas 1997; Robinson 1990). Since the oldest known examples of Solano-tradition pottery are found in the department of Quiché, Popenoe de Hatch (1997, 1998) has posited that the Classic-period inhabitants of the central highlands came from the northwest.

Were the Classic-period inhabitants of Kaminaljuyú and the central highlands the ancestors of later K'iche'an peoples? The abandonment of Kaminaljuyú at the end of the Late Classic period makes it difficult to establish a direct link between that site and the Postclassic inhabitants of the central highlands. Recent excavations at Chuisac, however, provide important data (Braswell 1996). Located in the mountains of San Martín Jilotepeque between the Late Postclassic capitals of the Chajoma' and Kaqchikel, Chuisac was settled in the Early Classic period by people who made and used Solano ceramics related to those found at contemporary Kaminaljuyú.

Significantly, Solano-tradition ceramics were found in Early Postclassic middens that also contained imported Tohil Plumbate and locally produced micaceous wares and dichromes related to Chinautla Polychrome. Hence, the Early Postclassic inhabitants of Chuisac continued to make Solano ceramics, but also used new wares that became characteristic of the Late Postclassic period. The Classic-to-Postclassic transition at Chuisac is marked by gradual and continuous changes of form, surface treatment, and paste, and not by the sudden and total replacement of one ceramic tradition by another. Fox (1977) and Carmack (1979) have identified Chuisac as O'ch'al Kab'owil Siwan, a site founded by the ancestors of the Xpantzay. Some time in the fifteenth century, O'ch'al Kab'owil Siwan became the capital of the Chajoma'. Thus, a direct link between Late Postclassic K'iche'an groups and Classic Solano-using people has been established (Braswell 1996).

These archaeological and linguistic interpretations, of course, do not preclude the possibility that the Guatemalan highlands saw the arrival of a small, elite population segment during the Postclassic period, or that this segment somehow came to found several of the K'iche'an great houses. Nonetheless, the data suggesting that such a migration occurred—drawn primarily from a few K'iche'an texts—are both slim and contradictory. The presence of Nahuatl loan words in highland Maya languages may be attributed to an elite migration from the Gulf Coast, but is more parsimoniously explained by the fact that Chiapan Nahuatl speakers already were living in close proximity to the highland Maya. Moreover, there is rather a lot of negative evidence. Ch'ontal loan words are, at best, quite rare in K'iche'an languages. Material goods from or inspired by the Gulf Coast generally are absent from Postclassic elite assemblages. Finally, several important ethnohistorical sources describe other places, some quite nearby, as the place of origin of the elite great houses.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF EMULATION AND ETHNOGENESIS

If we rule out migration as an explanation for the Nahuaization of K'iche'an culture during the Late Postclassic, we must conclude that a central Mexican cultural veneer was emulated by K'iche'an peoples. Although interregional interaction led to cultural borrowing in many areas and at many time periods in Mesoamerican prehistory, the degree to which K'iche'an peoples tried to emulated Nahua culture is striking. In two works, Thompson (1943, 1954) argues that in the Late Postclassic period, the Maya of the Guatemalan highlands recast "Mexican innovations" adopted in the Early Postclassic to conform to their own cultural norms. Navarrete (1996:348), in contrast, does not believe this to be the case and asserts that the Late Postclassic process of Nahuaization was a "preamble for a violent intervention interrupted by the Spanish Conquest." Although I hesitate to predict what would have happened had Alvarado not conquered Guatemala, and prefer to consider local reasons for the adoption of central Mexican cultural traits, Navarrete's point is well taken. The Nahuaization of K'iche'an culture was transformative, to the extent that we may consider it an example of ethnogenesis.

Although many Nahuatl loan words in K'iche'an languages pertain to non-elite realms of discourse, the vast majority of central Mexican cultural traits adopted during the Late Postclassic are limited to the social and spatial contexts of the apical elite. These include gold artifacts from burials in Iximche' and Saq Ulew, mural paintings at Temple 2 of Iximche' and the palace at Q'umarkaj, imported and imitation Mexican pottery from Saq Ulew and Q'umarkaj, and cremation burials at all the Late Postclassic capitals. Other examples include titles and names of elite members of the most-powerful great houses (Braswell 2001a). Thus, the social context of symbolic emulation and ethnogenesis was the uppermost class of K'iche'an society.

Why did K'iche'an elite find it advantageous not only to emulate their Nahua neighbors, but also to create a new ethnic identity for themselves? The answer may lie in the factionalized and highly competitive fabric of K'iche'an society. The problem can be addressed from three perspectives: social differences within the great house, factionalization between the great houses, and competition between the various polities of the Maya highlands and Pacific lowlands.

K'iche'an social structure, although stratified, was conceptualized in terms of kinship. The metaphor of kinship acted to undermine the elaboration of class structure. Since K'iche'an origin myths do not propose a separate divine creation for the ruling class (Braswell 2001a, 2001b), alternative distinctions were needed to sustain class structure. Two ways that elites can justify their elevated status is through the monopolization of esoteric knowledge and the adoption of a foreign identity. The fixing of religious titles in certain lines and the creation of a new hybrid Nahua-K'iche'an ethnicity would have served to create social distance between classes and to justify the subordinate status of members of the *alk'ajol* class. The use of imported items, the practice of cremation, the erection of temples and palaces with Mixteca-Puebla–style murals and central Mexican architectural features, and the adoption of Nahuatl-derived names and titles all would have engendered and supported social distinction. In this sense, the genesis of a new elite ethnicity is not different in kind from symbolic emulation, but is novel in intensity. The adoption and

display of a hybrid ethnicity also may have played a role in competition among families within great houses, and particularly in the factional conflict between great houses. If elevated status and Nahuatl-derived titles became associated with a hybrid ethnicity, it would not be surprising for great houses competing for those titles to display a Nahua-K'iche'an identity.

INTERACTION WITH THE AZTECS (A.D. 1501–1519) AND THE PROCESS OF ETHNOGENESIS

It is unfortunate that there are few descriptions of relations between the Aztecs and K'iche'an polities, and that those that do exist are maddeningly terse. The first *entrada* of the Aztecs into the Guatemalan highlands took place in A.D. 1501, during the reign of Ahuitzotl. If Fuentes y Guzmán (1932–1933:6:47–48) and his now-vanished, third-party Pipil text may be relied upon, pochteca sent by Ahuitzotl to the south coast of Guatemala visited Q'umarkaj and then were ordered out of the K'iche' kingdom. Perhaps their presence was viewed as imperiling K'iche' interests in the Pacific region.

The second phase of contact took place in A.D. 1510, after the conquest of Xoconochco. The *Memorial de Tecpán Atitlán* (p. 52) reports the arrival of messengers from *Modecçumatzin* (Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin) on the day 1 Toj, but does not say why they came. The authors of the *Títulos de la Casa Ixquin-Nehaib, Señora del Territorio de Otzoya* (Recinos 1957:84) report that in the same year, K'iche' lords from Quetzaltenango and Momostenango began to pay tribute to Motecuhzoma. It is important to note, as Recinos (1957:84, footnote) does, that this is the only suggestion that the highland Maya ever paid tribute to the Aztecs. An illustration found in the same collection of documents has been interpreted as indicating that the K'iche' were further subordinated by the marriage of two daughters of Motecuhzoma to the lord of Q'umarkaj (Carmack 1973:371, 1981:142–143). This image and the accompanying caption, however, are more reasonably explained as a depiction of Cortés, Alvarado, and their two Mexica concubines (Ridder 1993). Given the lack of corroborating evidence and the appeasing stance that the authors present regarding the payment of Spanish tribute, tribute might not have been paid to the Aztecs. There is little evidence demonstrating that after A.D. 1510 there was a "more or less continuous presence of Mexica representatives in [Q'umarkaj]" (Carmack 1981:143), and we cannot be sure that relations with the Aztecs changed significantly during the last 14 years before the Spanish conquest.

K'iche'an polities and the alliances of great houses of which they were comprised competed with each other and with their Maya and Nahua neighbors for access to the cacao, cotton, fish, salt, and other resources of the Pacific piedmont and coast. The Aztec conquest of Xoconochco must have been viewed by K'iche'an elites as both a threat and an opportunity. On the one hand, K'iche'an elites may have been concerned that encroachment would limit their own access to coastal resources. On the other, the Aztec presence in Xoconochco presented an unrivaled opportunity for trade and the formation of alliances against traditional competitors, some of whom were Nahuatl-speakers. From either perspective, an increase in the pace and intensity of ethnogenesis would have been a pragmatic strategy for K'iche'an elites.

The arrival of the Aztecs greatly increased the movement of goods along the Guatemalan and Salvadoran coasts. Resources from this zone, as well as feathers, jade, obsidian, and other highland goods, became more valuable to K'iche'an elites because of the new proximity of potential trading partners. Moreover, the position of K'iche'an polities between the domains of the Pipil and Aztec Xoconochco gave additional strategic importance to the Pacific piedmont and coast. K'iche'an great houses that controlled lands in the south may have tried to tax or somehow monopolize transportation across their territory, as the Pipil did until conceding that right to the K'iche' and Kaqchikel late in the fifteenth century (Carmack 1981:140).

Cortés's (1961:218–219) fourth letter to the Crown describes a meeting with a delegation of Kaqchikel ambassadors, an encounter that is extraordinary because it took place near Pánuco, in northern Veracruz. These Kaqchikel ambassadors sought an alliance with the Spaniards against the K'iche'. It is reasonable to suspect that other *lolmay* or *lolmet*, as K'iche'an ambassadors were called, visited the Aztecs in Xoconochco for similar political reasons. K'iche'an lords probably viewed the Aztecs as powerful potential allies who could aid them in their own ambitions.

CONCLUSIONS

Evidence for the Nahuaization of K'iche'an culture is extensive and is found in language, social forms and practices, and material culture. The highland Maya engaged in significant, if sporadic, interaction with peoples from central Mexico since at least A.D. 800, when the Nahua migrations to Central America began. Most loan words from Nahuatl do not come from Central American Pipil, but we need look no farther than southeastern Chiapas for a suitable dialect from which the loans were derived. Nonetheless, it is clear that the borrowing of cultural traits reached its greatest intensity during the Late Postclassic, particularly during the 70 years immediately preceding the Spanish conquest. During this period, the transformation of elite culture was so profound that we must either consider the possibility of the arrival and in-

corporation of a new, ethnically distinct elite stratum into highland Maya society, or characterize the process of extreme emulation as ethnogenesis.

Several ethnohistorians (e.g., Carmack 1968, 1973, 1981; Fox 1978, 1980, 1991; Fox et al. 1992; Nicholson 1957; Recinos and Goetz 1953) have preferred the former explanation and have posited the migration of small groups of bellicose "Nonoalca-Pipil-Toltec-Chichimecs" (Borhegyi 1965) or "Epi-Toltec warlords" (Carmack 1981) from the Gulf coast to the Guatemalan highlands. In contrast, most linguists have argued that K'iche'an languages evolved in the highlands, although Campbell (1977:109) once attributed the presence of Nahuatl loan words to a migration of "Toltec overlords" from Tabasco or Veracruz. Migration and conquest, of course, are not the only mechanisms that account for linguistic borrowing, so should be considered only two of several possible scenarios.

Until recently, most archaeologists have been concerned more with the timing of the appearance of foreign traits and less with the mechanisms of their transmittal (e.g., Thompson 1943, 1954; Wauchope 1970, 1975). In more recent years, two archaeologists have challenged the notion of K'iche'an migrations. The first, Navarrete (1976, 1996), does so obliquely by interpreting the process of Nahuaization as a vanguard of Aztec conquest. Brown (1985) explains the appearance of the few foreign items found at K'iche'an sites as an indication of trade with merchants traveling through the southern piedmont, and believes that highland myths about Tulan ultimately may be tied to Teotihuacan. Archaeological research conducted in the past 15 years has cast new light on K'iche'an origins and suggests that the ancestors of the Postclassic Chajoma', Kaqchikel, K'iche, and Tz'utujil were living in the central highlands of Guatemala during the Classic period (Braswell 1996, 1998b; Popenoe de Hatch 1997, 1998). These new data and their interpretation not only are consistent with the body of linguistic evidence, but also are congruent in a general way with important ethnohistorical documents that describe short-distance movements within the highlands of northern Central America. Although it is conceivable that small, elite groups did migrate from the Gulf coast to the Guatemalan highlands during the Postclassic period, there is no compelling evidence supporting this conjecture.

The process of Nahuaization that transformed the elite stratum of K'iche'an society during the Late Postclassic can be seen as a pragmatic adaptive strategy. The emergence of a stratified, class-based society during the Postclassic period necessitated the development of distinctions between commoners and elites belonging to the same great house. The creation of a new, elite identity through the appropriation and display of exotic symbol sets is consistent with the distancing of the ajawa' from the alk'ajola', as is the adoption of foreign names, titles, and ways of behavior. Moreover, competition between the great houses that made up K'iche'an society could have escalated cultural emulation and led to ethnogenesis. Finally, the adoption of a hybrid Nahua-K'iche'an ethnicity would have lessened the cultural distance between the highlanders and their powerful Aztec neighbors in Xoconochco. This may have been seen as a way to foster trade in prestige goods, to build alliances in a factionalized and militarized political climate, and even to forestall an eventual conquest.

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