

The Emergence of the Ancient Maya Kaqchikel Polity as Explained through the Dawn Tradition in the Guatemalan Highlands

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The Late Postclassic period (900-1520 CE) in Mesoamerica is characterized by an increased volume of long-distance exchange, new forms of writing and iconography, population growth, and the proliferation of polities (Smith and Berdan 2003). Despite the well-documented multiplication of political units across Mesoamerica, this process is still poorly understood, especially in the Maya highlands of Guatemala where very few ethnohistorical and archaeological projects have been carried out in the last decade. My research on the emergence of the ancient Kaqchikel polity aims to contribute to this topic from a diachronic and interdisciplinary perspective. In this paper, I explore the early history of the Kaqchikel polity, which is divided in phases or series of “dawns” called saqer/saqarik. Each dawn, according to the Kaqchikel documents, represented a phase in their sociopolitical development. The first dawn experienced by the Kaqchikel was marked by the beginning of an alliance with the K'iche' and their incorporation into the K'iche' administration as military auxiliaries and dependent allies. In order to improve their sociopolitical and economic status, the Kaqchikel and allies made use of various strategies including their specialization in the military field, the establishment of strategic alliances, and marriage arrangements with noblewomen from stronger polities. These strategical practices allowed the Kaqchikel to strengthen their sociopolitical organization and claim from the K'iche' privileges and the right to have their own government and citadel. In ca. 1430 CE, the Kaqchikel government was settled in Chi Awär where the representatives of the four allied confederations—Kaqchikel, Tuquche', Sotz'il, and Aqajal—lived and exalted their own protector deities. Through my understanding of the dawn tradition and the way the K'iche' and Kaqchikel reenacted it, I reconstructed the early history of the Kaqchikel polity and illustrate the centralization of the Kaqchikel sociopolitical organization and the nucleation of their settlements. Although the Kaqchikel started their government in Chi Awär, it was under K'iche' political influence. It was not until they abandoned Chi Awär and moved to Chi Iximche' that they began an independent polity. It is at this site where the dawn is mentioned for the last time.

Key words: Kaqchikel polity, dawn tradition, resistance, Chi Awär, Chichicastenango



Introduction

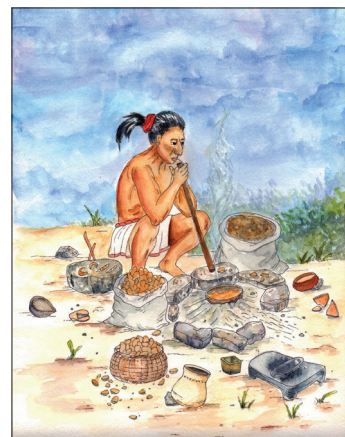
The histories of the Postclassic highland peoples of Guatemala have relied on indigenous texts that were written with the Latin alphabet by members of the Maya nobility during the Colonial period (Christenson 2007a:11; Hill II 2012). These documents were a combination of oral tradition and transcriptions of pictorial cartographic documents narrating the history of highland groups. Their history is usually presented as migrations guided by founding fathers with the purpose of finding lands to settle and multiply. According to the Xajil chronicle, the Kaqchikel were initially organized as an *amaq'* or confederation comprised of four *chinamit*, the Xajil, Q'eqak'uch, B'ak'ajol and Sib'akijay (Maxwell and Hill 2006: 26). The term *chinamit* has been defined in different ways, such as lineage (De Coto 1983:314; Christenson 2007b; Ximénez 1985:195), as a basic territorial unit (Maxwell and Hill 2006: 4), as a social unit linked to a territory (Carrasco 1982:15; Hill II 1984:316), and as leaders of a third order who performed as intermediaries between the political authorities and local peoples (Jones 2016; Ximénez 1975:79). These definitions suggest that this concept did not have a standardized definition, but it was adapting to new forms of sociopolitical organizations among the Kaqchikel and K'iche' peoples. During their journey, members of this confederation stopped at various places temporarily where they established alliances with other *amaq'*, including the Tuquche', Sotz'il and the Aqajal *amaq'*. The term *amaq'* appears interchangeably with *winäq*, which is translated as "human being", but can also be understood as "nation", denoting otherness. These alliances took place when the Kaqchikel still lived in darkness.

In Kaqchikel documents, the dawn is mentioned several times. For the Xajil, the main *chinamit* of the Kaqchikel *amaq'*, they dawned at the following places: Pantzik, Pa Raxone' Yalab'ey Simajijay Pa Sibaqul, Pa Kaweq Kejil; Pan Che', Chi Q'ojom, (Muqb'al sib' and Chuwila'); Chi Awär Tz'upitaq'aj; Nik'aya' and K'otoxul (Maxwell and Hill 2006:150). For the Xpantzay, one *chinamit* of the Sotz'il *amaq'*, they dawned at Chi Awär Tz'upitaq'aj, Ismachi'-Chi Q'umarkaj, Pa Xajil Ya', Chan Puak Ayin che', Tun Ab'aj and Chi Iximche' (Recinos 2001:123). These documents written in the Kaqchikel language do not provide dates of their occupation, either indicating what type of places they were or the order of their occupation. Although I know several of these places because I grew up in the highlands where they are located, I did not know what the word *saqer/saqarik* meant for the ancient Kaqchikel and K'iche' peoples. Once I understood this tradition and how it was reenacted, I finally identified the nature of these places. The list of places provided by the Xajil included both *saqarib'al* (i.e., dawning places) and *tinamit* (i.e., citadel), while the Xpantzay documents listed only the names of *tinamit* starting with Chi Awär. Chi Awär was the first Kaqchikel *tinamit* that resulted from the centralization of their government and the nucleation of their settlements.

The first dawn experienced by the Kaqchikel was marked by the beginning of an alliance with the Kaweq *chinamit* of the K'iche' polity. The close interaction between the Kaqchikel leaders and K'iche' rulers from Q'umarkaj, whose genealogy is better known, allowed me to organize the Kaqchikel places where they dawned in a chronological order. In this paper, the dawn tradition will be presented briefly and how it was reenacted by the Kaqchikel and K'iche' peoples. I then will reconstruct the early history of the Kaqchikel by listing and connecting the events that happened in almost all the places where the Kaqchikel dawned.

The Dawn Tradition

The highland peoples of Guatemala, like other Mesoamerican peoples, maintain a consistent tradition of dividing the history of humankind into successive epochs marked by different suns. According to Lopez Lujan and Lopez Austin (1999), the origin myths of all Postclassic Mesoamerican peoples (900-1524 C.E.) share similar structure that can be divided into three phases: *nocturnal*, *auroral*, and *sunrise*. The *nocturnal* phase consists of the creation of humans by the creator deities. During this stage, all human beings were united as one group, spoke the same language and did not yet know their particular protector deities. In the next *auroral* phase, humans left their places of origin (i.e., Chicomoztoc, Seven Caves, Seven Ravines, Tulan, Apoala, or Tamoanchan) in search of their lands. After they witnessed the dawn, they received their protector deities and consequently their different languages, cultural practices, and professions. In the last, *sunrise* phase, the human groups took possession of the earth, established their settlements and adopted sedentary lifeways. The last two phases—*auroral* and *sunrise*—can be likened to the cultural classifications of *Chichimecayotl* and *Toltecáyotl*. The *Chichimecayotl* condition corresponds to nomadic life, where people had no possessions, were ignorant, and lacked knowledge about cultivating maize. This condition changed to *Toltecáyotl* when they ended their mythical journey, established their settlements, and adopted a sedentary and civilized lifestyle. Therefore, it is during this sunrise phase that lifeways changed from *Chichimecayotl* to *Toltecayotl* (López Austin and López Luján 1999:51–78). In summary, the sunrise marks the transition between two sociocultural categories, where people stop living as nomads to become sedentary, and each social group acquired their own identity defined by the acquisition of different languages, protector deities, and professions. While both the Kaqchikel and the K'iche' followed this tradition, they enacted it within their own cultural parameters. For them, the dawn, also known as the *saqarik/saqer* (i.e., to dawn or to clarify), was connected with ceremonial activities performed before the occupation of new territories and the construction of new settlements. These ceremonies consisted of the placement of four to five foundation altars on hilltops surrounding a new settlement in all four cardinal directions. These altars were called *saqarib'al* (i.e., the dawning place; Carmack and Mondloch 1983:109), but could also have particular names. They were dedicated to the ruling *chinamit* or *amaq'*, and to their protector deities called *K'ab'awil*.



Through the analysis and comparison of documents written in K'iche' and Kaqchikel languages, I organized the list of places mentioned in Xajil and Xpantzay documents chronologically and located the majority of them geographically. Then, I connected the geographical locations with historical events, as each dawn represented a particular stage of Kaqchikel history.

1. Pantzik, Pa Raxone', Simajjay, Pasib'aqul and Pan Kaweq-Kejil, ca. 1380;
2. Panche', Chi Q'ojom, Muqb'al sib', (and Uwila'), ca. 1400;
3. Chi Awär, Pa Xajil Ya' (and Q'umarkaj), ca. 1430;
4. Chi Iximche', ca. 1470.

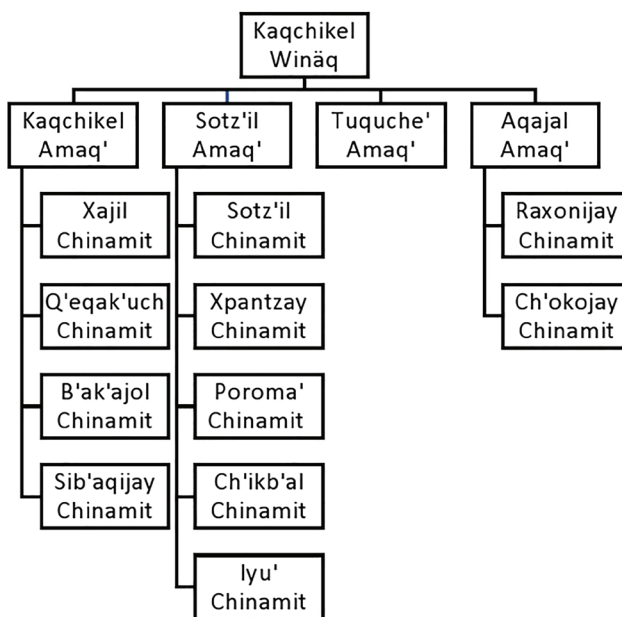


Figure 1. Sociopolitical structure of the Kaqchikel polity.

It is necessary to mention that while there are other sites where the Kaqchikel experienced the dawn when they became a stronger polity, no historical events are connected with them. These may be secondary sites such as Nik'aya' and K'otoxul (according to the Kaqchikel) and Chan Puak Ayin che' and Tun Ab'aj (according to the Sotz'il).

Before the first dawn, while they still lived in darkness, the Kaqchikel were an *amaq'* who began a journey to find new allies. In the middle of the 14th century, the Kaqchikel established alliances with three other confederations: the Tuquche', Sotz'il and two Aqajal *chinamit* (Raxonijay and Ch'okojay) (Figure 1). As the strongest of these four confederations, the Kaqchikel forced the Tuquche' and the ancestor of the ancestors of the Sotz'il to form this alliance (Maxwell and Hill 2006:93). I propose that these two last confederations were settled to the northeast of Lake Atitlan, outside the central highlands. It is very important to mention that even though these four confederations were allies, they still vied for the control of the confederation and for the access to resources. This competition forced them to seek new allies, preferably with stronger polities, not only to avoid future attacks, but also to count on their support to defeat the competition. This was the case of the Kaqchikel, who by the end of the 14th century, established an alliance with the K'iche' polity, specifically with the Kaweq *chinamit*. In this way, the Kaqchikel announced their first dawn.

First Dawn (ca. 1380): Pantzik, Pa Raxone', Simajijay, Pa Sib'aqul, and Pa Kaweq-Kejil

The first dawn experienced by the Kaqchikel was marked by the beginning of an alliance with the K'iche polity around 1380. At this time, the K'iche' was the strongest polity of the highlands and was based in the *tinamit* Q'umarkaj. *Tinamit* is a nahua word derived from *tenamitl* that means

“enclosure” or “fortified town” (Campbell 1983:85). This new alliance was consolidated through marriages between Kaqchikel men and K’iche’ women, and to take possession of this territory between the current town of Sololá and Chichicastenango, the Kaqchikel reenacted the dawn. This involved the location of five *saqarib’al* dedicated to the main *chinamit* or *calpul* of the Kaqchikel confederation. The names of these dawning places were Pan Tzik, Pa Raxone’, Yalab’ey Simajijay, Pa Sibaqul, and Pa Kaweq-Kejil. I postulate that Pan Tzik was the *saqarib’al* of the Xajil, Paraxone’ the *saqarib’al* of the Q’eqak’uch, Yalab’ey Sinajijay the *saqarib’al* of the B’akajol (as identified in the Xajil chronicle; Maxwell and Hill 2006:129), and Sib’aqul the *saqarib’al* of the Sib’aqijay. It is interesting to note that this group of altars also included one—Pa Kaweq-Kejil—dedicated to the Kaweq and the Kejay, the two newly incorporated K’iche’ *chinamit*. These altars surrounded a small settlement named *Nimajay* (i.e., the great house) where representatives of the allied *chinamit* lived, but a dispute between the Xajil and the Bak’ajol forced its abandonment. This site has not been identified yet. No document written in the Kaqchikel language mentions any Kaqchikel protector deity during this dawn.

Second Dawn (ca. 1400): Panche’, Chi Q’ojom, Muqb’al sib’ (and Uwila’/Wila’)

After abandoning *Nimajay*, the Kaqchikel and their allies moved north and settled in villages located in the current municipality of Chichicastenango (Figure 2). Although the Aqajal were part of this alliance, they remained autonomous and stayed in their own lands in what is now the San Martín Jilotepeque municipality (Hill 1998). The Kaqchikel confederation settled in Uwila’/Wila’ while the Sotz’il and Tuquche established themselves in Pan che’, Chi Q’ojom, and Muqb’al Sib’. These territories are also identified as K’iche’ settlements (Carmack and Mondloch 1983:188-189). It is likely that both peoples shared these settlements, producing a bilingual territory

The occupation of this territory coincided with the beginning of the K’iche’ expansionist campaigns led by their ruler Q’ukumatx, who ruled ca. 1400-1425. Q’ukumatx demanded that the Kaqchikel and their allies join his military forces to conquer new towns and territories. The Sotz’il, who lived in Muqb’al sib’, described in their documents that Q’ukumatx asked them to “take arrows and shield” and fight against the K’iche’s vassals and enemies, starting with those from Koja’. The Sotz’il and their allies immediately refused because they had no weapons and they were certain that they would die as they did not know how to fight. After Q’ukumatx ordered them to go for the second time, the Sotz’il, along with the Kaqchikel and Tuquche’ reluctantly left (Recinos 2001:137). This situation coincides with what the Catholic priest Francisco Ximénez (1965) recorded about the military strategies of the K’iche’. Ximénez (1965:47) wrote that the K’iche’ coerced other confederations into alliances in order to overtake lands from their neighbors and that those who dared to oppose them were enslaved and sacrificed in front of their gods, and that if they refused to pay taxes, the sum of their debt was multiplied. Ximénez (1999) also wrote that, during his rulership, Q’ukumatx delimited the borders of his territories and protected them by installing garrison sites occupied by warriors and military leaders. Their main function was to alert K’iche’ rulers of enemy incursions and to gather military forces in times of war (Ximénez 1999:132). Each confederation of the K’iche’ polity had a group of garrison sites called the *o(x)lajuj/(j)olajuj calpuls* (i.e., the thirteen/fifteen *calpuls*; Recinos 2001:54). The inhabitants of these garrison sites were named the

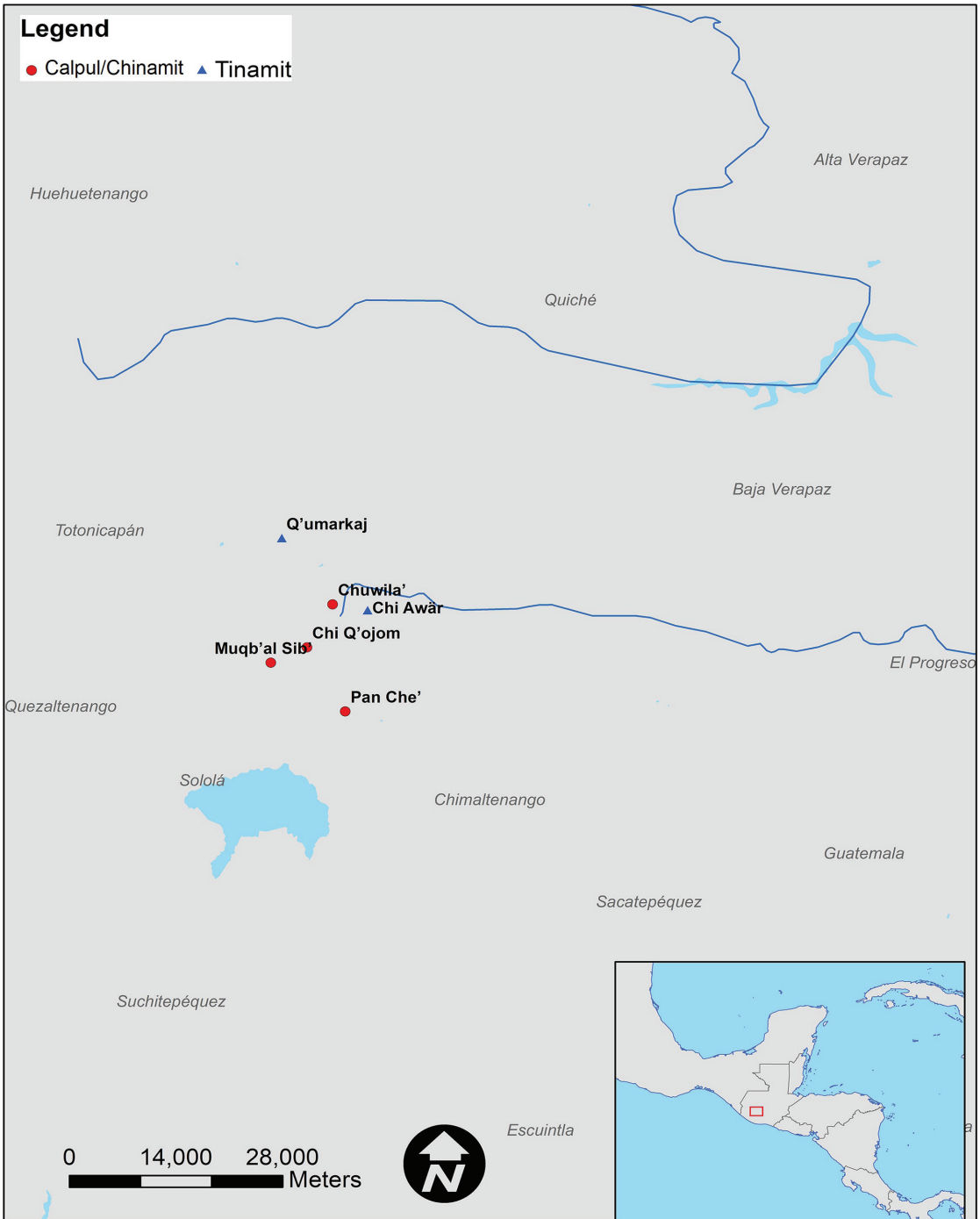
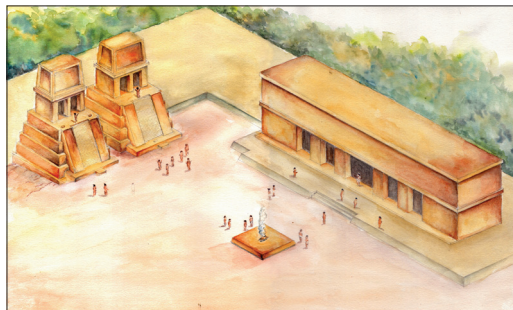


Figure 2. Location of the dawn places during the second dawn in

aj b'anob'al lab'al (i.e., the performers of warfare; Carmack and Mondloch 2009:54), the *chajal juyub'*, *chajal ch'a*, *chajal k'am*, *chajal lab'al* (i.e., the guardians of mountains, the guardians of arrows and rope, and the guardians of warfare; Colop 1999:187). As the K'iche' expanded territorially, the number of *calpuls* also increased. The K'iche' Popol Wuj document lists their principal division of warriors: the *aj Wila'*, *aj Chulimal*, *aj Xajb'akyej*, *aj Chitemaj*, *aj Wajxalajuj*, *aj Kab'raqan*, *aj Ch'ab'iq'aq'*, *chi Junajpu*, *aj Xayab'aj*, *aj Saqakab'aja'*, *aj Siyaja'*, *aj Miq'ina'*, and *aj Xelajuj* (Colop 1999:187,188). This list also included the *Aj Wila'* (i.e., those from *Wila'*) referring to *Uwila'* or *Wila'*, the Kaqchikel's settlement during the second dawn. The Popol Wuj also mentioned that, in the past, *Uwila'* was the territory of the *Kaqchikeleb'* (Colop 1999:185). Although the K'iche' documents do not indicate explicitly that the Kaqchikel aided the K'iche' in the conquest of new towns, their collaboration is inferred by the Kaqchikel occupation of the *Uwila'/Wila' calpul*. In addition, the Kaqchikel claimed to be part of the *Oxlajuj Ch'ob' Ajilab'al* (i.e., the 13 divisions of warriors; Otzoy 1999), who were at the service of the K'iche'.

The K'iche' reinforced their authority over these garrison sites by sending K'iche' captains to lead these small settlements and by imposing several rules. Some of the rules explicitly prohibited the veneration of non-K'iche' deities, rule without the K'iche' elite's assent, and prohibited reenacting the dawn due to its political implications (Colop 2008:202-203; Ximénez 1965:48–50). Despite these rules, the Kaqchikel claimed that they experienced the dawn on multiple occasions, yet were not able to venerate their own protector deities, which were manifestations of autonomy and power. During the reign of Q'ukumatz, the K'iche' and the Kaqchikel conquered several towns and territories in the north-eastern Guatemalan highlands. While the power of the Kaqchikel and their allies was curtailed under the rulership of Q'ukumatz, their situation improved with the next K'iche' government led by K'iq'ab' (ca. 1425-1475). K'iq'ab', unlike Q'ukumatz, made more efforts to reward the support provided by the Kaqchikel, considering that his own people were sometimes reluctant to fight. The success reached by the K'iche' under K'iq'ab's rulership positively impacted Kaqchikel lives, since their status and political position in the highlands improved. One notable change was that K'iq'ab' authorized the leaders of the Kaqchikel confederation and their allies to have their own government and citadel (Otzoy 1999:173).



Third Dawn (ca. 1430): Chi Awär, Pa Xajil Ya', Chi Q'umarkaj

Around 1430, the elite Kaqchikel founded their own citadel, *Chi Awär*. This settlement is located on a small plateau surrounded by deep ravines in the current village of Chontala, 5 km east of the urban area of Chichicastenango (Figure 2 and 3). This citadel is now called *Patz'aq* (i.e., the walled place). The site was designed as a stronghold; it was protected by two deep pits at the south entrance and was surrounded by a bulwark (Fox 1978:189). The site has three principal plazas where the representatives of the Kaqchikel, *Sotz'il*, *Tuquche' amaq'* and some *Aqajal chinamit* lived



Figure 3. Map of Chi Awär or Patz'aq (modified from Fox, 1978: 189)

(Figure 3). Unlike the Kaqchikel, members of the Sotz'il confederation mention Chi Awär as the first place where they experienced the dawn (Recinos 2001:123). This statement is understandable since Chi Awär's occupation allowed them to finally have their own government and follow their own protector deities. The Kaqchikel, as a polity or nation, exalted a common protector deity named Chamalakan, who is represented as a bat (Colop 2008:147–148).

Although the Kaqchikel started their own government in Chi Awär, they were still under the political and cultural influence of the K'iche'. Excavations in three areas of this site and their associated ceramic analyses indicate that Chi Awär was a Late Postclassic site and that its occupation was short (Figure 4). Burial 1 from Chi Awär indicates a strong interaction with Q'umarkaj since this burial contains red monochrome jars with decorations similar to K'iche' vessels excavated in Q'umarkaj. One jar displays an anthropomorphic feline in a squatting position blowing a tube (Cojti Ren 2019) (Figure 5). This is similar to two jars from Q'umarkaj (Figure 6), whose imagery is associated with the practice of metallurgy (Weeks et al. 1977). At both Chi Awär (Gruhn 1973:233) and Q'umarkaj (Babcock 2012; Weeks et al. 1977), copper and gold ornaments have been found (Figure



Figure 4. Ceramic sherds from the Fortress White-on-Red type; a type diagnostic of the Late Postclassic Period.



Figure 5. Red monochrome jar from burial 1, Chi Awär (courtesy of the Chi Awär Archaeological Project).



Figure 6. Urn with a tumbaga lid from Chisalín, Q'umarkaj (courtesy of Dirección General del Patrimonio Cultural y Natural de Guatemala y Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología).

7), indicating that the Kaqchikel also had access to prestigious resources. Archaeological evidence also suggest that members of the Kaqchikel polity lived in Q'umarkaj (Weeks 1980), which coincides with the Sotz'il's statement that they also dawned in this settlement (Recinos 2001:123). The site Pa Xajil Ya' could be the Cantón Río Xajil, which is to the west of Chi Awär.

The K'iche' influence over Chi Awär is also inferred by the existence of double and twin temples in the principal plazas (Figure 8). According to Florence Sloane (n.d.), the K'iche' hegemony over several sites involved the adoption of the cult of Tojil, who was the supreme protector deity of the K'iche', along with the local deity. This duality of protector deities was reflected in the appearance of double or twin temples in the main plazas of Late Postclassic citadels. I agree with Sloane's hypothesis, because the sites where the Kaqchikel dawned for the first time included altars dedicated to the Kaweq and the Kejay, K'iche' *chinamits*. Yet, further investigation is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

The occupation of Chi Awär was short because an internal revolt erupted at Q'umarkaj against the ruler K'iq'ab' and his closest allies, which included the Kaqchikel. K'iq'ab's sons and K'iche' warriors instigated the revolt as they desired their father's resources and his *Nima'q Achi'*. The *Nima'q Achi'* were captives of war, some with high status, who settled in Q'umarkaj as vassals and sustained the K'iche' rulers through the payment of taxes and services (Carmack 2001). The divisions of warriors who participated in the revolt were clearly angered because they were not appropriately rewarded after supporting K'iche' expansionist campaigns. Despite the fact that the Kaqchikel belonged to this warrior division, they were seemingly able to demand and obtain privileges for their services. Certain sectors of the K'iche' polity also witnessed how the Kaqchikel gained more power and saw them as potentially dangerous rivals.

Fourth Dawn (ca. 1470): Chi Iximche

In ca. 1470, the elite members of the Kaqchikel people and one sector of their population abandoned the territories of Chichicastenango and Q'umarkaj to settle in Chi Iximche' (62 km to the south). I propose that the rest of the Kaqchikel population stayed either because they belonged to the K'iche' *calpuls*, or because they were bound to do so since they had contracted marriages with K'iche' people. I also propose that the population that lived in the Chichicastenango territory during



Figure 7. Copper ornament from Chi Awär (courtesy of the Chi Awär Archaeological Project).



Figure 8. One of the twin temples excavated in Chi Awär (courtesy of the Chi Awär Archaeological Project).

the Late Postclassic period was bilingual, which allowed the transference of elements between the two related K'iche'an languages, Kaqchikel and K'iche'. In a stable bilingual context, linguistic elements will transfer from one language to the other and both are mutually influenced (Winford 2005). It is important to note that all of the Eastern Maya languages, including K'iche' and 13 other languages, use long and short vowels (i.e., a, aa, e, ee, i, ii, o, oo, u, uu), with the exception of the Kaqchikel language and the K'iche' dialect of Chichicastenango, which make use of tense and lax vowels (i.e., a, ä, e, ë, i, ï, o, ö, u, ü; Can Pixabaj 2017; Par Sapón and Can Pixabaj 2000).

This vowel system is predominantly found in Sololá and Sacatepéquez (Patal Majzul et al. 2000:169), while other Kaqchikel towns present other variations. Scholars propose that the change in the vocalic system in Chichicastenango resulted from the contact with Kaqchikel people (Ixcoy and Dominga 1994; Par Sapón and Can Pixabaj 2000). I will be more specific by saying that this change occurred when the Kaqchikel spoke K'iche' during their occupation of Chichicastenango during the three dawns. According to Donald Winford, in regards to language contact, lexicons are the easiest to borrow but are less likely to have a long-term effect on the language, while the phonological changes are more stable and occur when the source language is the dominant language of the speaker, from which material is transferred into a recipient language in which the speaker is less proficient (Winford 2005:376–377). In this case, some material transferred from the source language (Kaqchikel) to the recipient language (K'iche'), were the lax and tense vowels, which are still exclusively used by the Chichicastenango K'iche' people. Sankoff (2001) argues that in the context of stable-bilingualism, the transferred elements may be retained through several generations of speakers. At the beginning of the Colonial period, the town of Chichicastenango was founded as a Reducción of several *capuls* in the middle of the 16th century (Cabezas 1974:25). The Spanish administration of this town pushed toward the conversion of this bilingual territory into a monolingual municipality with K'iche' as the predominant language. The loss of linguistic

diversity after the Reducciones was a common result of the implementation of this colonial institution (Richards and Macario 2003:23). The fact that this K'iche' dialect with lax and tense vowels is only spoken within the borders of the Chichicastenango municipality suggests that this colonial institution was involved in its monolingualism and that this dialect can be seen as evidence that, in the past, this territory was occupied by both K'iche' and Kaqchikel people.

Conclusion

The dawn tradition described in indigenous documents marked the beginning of new stages in the history and cultural development of the Kaqchikel polity. Each dawn episode was linked not only to the possession of new territories, but also to the consolidation of new forms of social organizations that resulted from new alliances. The occupation of new territories involved the location of *saqarib'al* and the construction of a *nimajay* where leaders of allied *chinamit* would live. More complex alliances between *amaq'* resulted in the construction of a *Tinamit*, which can include several *nimajay*. The first Kaqchikel *tinamit* was Chi Awär, where representatives of the Kaqchikel, Sotz'il, Tuquche' and Aqajal ruled. According to the Xajil, the K'iche' granted the Kaqchikel the right to have their own government and *tinamit*, however this site still was under the K'iche' cultural and political influence. It was not until the Kaqchikel abandoned the current territory of Chichicastenango and moved to Chi Iximche', that they were totally independent. The Kaqchikel polity expanded to the central highlands and the Pacific coast, where they fought with the local peoples including the Tz'utujil and the Pipil. However, in ca. 1493, an internal revolt occurred in Chi Iximche' following a territorial dispute between the Aqajal and the Tuquche', forcing the latter to abandon their settlement. This case study reveals that the four *amaq'* of the Kaqchikel polity remained united in order to resist K'iche' hegemony and to negotiate privileges. However, once the threat was eliminated, the Kaqchikel unity was at stake because of the internal competition among its confederations. Future archaeological research in the highlands is needed to corroborate this information and to know about Kaqchikel's material culture before the occupation of Chi Awär and Chi Iximche'.

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