

CHINAMIT AND MOLAB:
LATE POSTCLASSIC HIGHLAND
MAYA PRECURSORS OF CLOSED
CORPORATE COMMUNITY

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This article explores the extent to which documentary evidence from the early Colonial period in Guatemala can be used to demonstrate the existence of closed corporate community as an organizing principle of basic Highland Maya socio-cultural units during the Late Postclassic period (*ca.* AD 1200-1524). Our ability to detect various aspects of closed corporate community among the ancient Highland Maya allows a more ethnographic characterization of Late Postclassic society, particularly at the non-elite level. The existence of closed corporate community as a principle of organization both during the Late Postclassic and today also raises questions of continuity and the extent of cultural change brought about as the results of the Spanish conquest and colonization.

The present study takes as its base a concept of culture that is less concerned with so-called traits or elements than it is with the ways in which they are organized. Specifically, culture is thought of here as:

"...the accumulation of human events through *time*, directly experienced by members of a specific social group, from which the living members derive *assumptions* and create *principles* to guide their thinking and behavior". (Reina 1973: xviii).

Principles may be thought of as ways or organizing elements and behavior. Accordingly, individual elements may be substituted for,

or new ones introduced, without necessarily affecting the underlying principles. When individual elements are substituted for others, but incorporated into the culture according to its principles, a change may have occurred. This is not culture change, however, since the principles remain unchanged. The same may be said for new, introduced elements. These may be directly incorporated according to the particular cultural principles. In some cases the new elements and the cultural principles may conflict. If the new elements are altered so as to comply with the principles and then incorporated, culture change could again be said not to have occurred. Therefore, using the concept of culture presented here, *culture change* occurs only when the underlying principles change. Thus, an individual culture can be resilient and flexible when confronted with both everyday stresses and unexpected crisis situations.

From ethnographic studies, we know contemporary highland Maya peasants live in closed corporate communities (*municipios*) which serve as the basic units of their socio-cultural organization. As originally defined by Eric Wolf, closed corporate communities exhibit the following characteristics:

1) indian population; 2) bounded social system corresponding to physical limits of the community (i.e. endogamy); 3) membership in the community based on birth in it; 4) community ownership or jurisdiction over the means of production (land); 5) a hierarchically organized political-religious system which controls social behavior and acts as a "symbol of collective unity" (*Ibid.*: 458). For the highland Maya, at least, one must also include; 6) the institutionalization of social, cultural, and economic forms (community culture) to maintain equilibrium within the community or *costumbre* (Reina 1966: 163; Reina and Hill, 1978: 231-251).

The origin of this type of community has remained obscure. While seeing it as a native response to Spanish-induced pressures, Wolf nonetheless states that the "persistence of 'Indian cultures' (after the Spanish Conquest) seems to have depended primarily on maintenance of this structure" (Wolf 1955: 456). This somewhat cryptic statement begs the question of whether the closed corporate community principle was maintained from before the Spanish conquest, and perhaps reinforced by conditions during the Colonial period. For the major highland Maya groups there do appear to be social units similar to contemporary closed corporate communities.

Sources

Three main kinds of documents contain information pertinent to the present study. These are: 1) Maya-Spanish dictionaries, 2) *Relaciones* written by Spanish administrators and 3) Colonial histories. To summarize, the documents used in this study, although written after the Spanish conquest, contain information regarding the highland Maya during Late Postclassic times. Dictionaries were composed for the specific purpose of understanding Maya languages, as an aid to religious conversion. The early post-conquest dates of composition of the originals of these documents insure that drastic cultural changes had not yet occurred. Thus, information contained in the dictionaries pertains to Late Postclassic times. *Relaciones* and Colonial histories were either written shortly after the conquest, or the authors had access to documents written at that time. Therefore, the descriptions contained in the *Relaciones* and histories used in this study may be said to apply to the highland Maya during the Late Postclassic (See Appendix).

The documents themselves focus on Quiché-Cakchiquel and Pokom Maya linguistic groups. The latter includes both Pokomam and Pokomchí speakers (Miles 1957: 736-738). The effort expended by the Spaniards in amassing the materials reflects the political and territorial dominance of these linguistic groups at the time of the Spanish conquest, and their continuing preeminence in terms of population, tribute, and labor during succeeding periods. Therefore, institutions or cultural principles shared by the Quiché-Cakchiquel and Pokomam-Pokomchí, may with some justification be said to have been general for the Late Postclassic highland Maya.

Analysis focuses on a type social unit called *chinamit* by the Quiché and Cakchiquel and *molab* by the Pokom.¹ Though differing in name, the documentary descriptions point to similar organization and functions of this unit for both linguistic groups, and further indicate the similarity of *chinamit* and *molab* to contemporary closed corporate communities.

Even the most cursory examination of the major native chronicles such as the *Popol Vuh* and the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* cannot

¹ In using the dictionary materials I have, for the sake of clarity, kept only the Spaniard's definitions or other portions of the entries which have a cultural significance for the article. Therefore, portions of some entries dealing with pedagogical-linguistic clarifications of concern to the compilers have been deleted.

fail to demonstrate the importance, if not primacy, of a unit called *chinamit* in socially and politically organizing the Late Postclassic highland Maya. Being concerned with dynastic fortunes as these chronicles were, however, the reader gains only glimpses of the organization and function of this unit, and only at the highest political level.

The importance of *chinamit* was realized by the Spanish friars, particularly by those involved in compiling Quiché and Cakchiquel-Spanish dictionaries. Relatively large amounts of space were devoted to describing and presenting analogies and, in this way, to understanding the *chinamit*. As will be demonstrated, however, the individual Spanish friars never managed to grasp the principles behind the *chinamit*, or its role in organizing highland Maya society. The dictionary data, however, are the basic source of information about the *chinamit* and do allow interpretation as to its function and organization. Analysis must, therefore, begin with examination of this material. Definitions and descriptions from the Maya-Spanish dictionaries are presented below.²

Chinamit — lineage, apellido, o tribu (Vico: 64)

nu chinamital, a chinamital — apellidos de lineage, tienen infinitos, y son nombres de rios, de signos en que nascero; suele ser comunes; de mi parcialidad (Coto: 32).

nu chinamital — casta, lineage (Coto: 77)

chinamital — generacion, lineage, familia (Coto: 201)

chinamital — lineage; parcialidad, o los que son de un mismo apellido y así para deslindar entre ellos sus parentescos, y linages es menester mucho y saver mucha lengua, por la equivocacion que tienen en tratarse como parientes, o, con los nombres de que usan en sus parentescos (Coto: 258r)

Tambien usan del nombre *chinamit* por las parcialidades calpules, que ellos tienen entre si... cada parcialidad esta de por si junta y distinta de las otras... (Coto: 324 under for parcialidad)

chinamital — lineage (*Calepino Grande*: 294)

² For ease of reproduction, the original Parra characters, used to express the different stops present in Maya Languages, have been changed to their standard equivalents.* English translation of the longer Spanish quotations are integrated into the text of preceding paragraphs. Translations from Spanish to English were made by the author.

chinamital — generacion como lineage (*Ibid*: 246)

chinamit — casta, lineage (*Ibid*: 94)

chinamital — abolorio (*Ibid*: 3)

chinamital — apellido de lineage (*Ibid*: 33)

chinamital bi — renombre de lineage (*Ibid*: 391)

The references to "calpules" (Nahuatl *calpulli*) and *parcialidad* in defining *chinamit* are significant, as the same analogies are made for the neighboring Pokom-Maya (Pokomam, Pokomchí).

Quiab — es apellido de lineage y calpul en San Cristóbal (Cahcoh) (Zúñiga: 467)

Bacah — es nombre de un sitio antiguo donde estuvieron los de una parcialidad de pueblo de San Filipe que esta poblado en San Cristobal y de alli tienen el apellido fulano *bacah*. Ah *bacah* los del barrio de *bacah*, los de *bacah* (*Ibid*: 27)

The Pokom term for this "lineage" was *molab*.³

lineage, parentela propia — *molab*, *mobabil* (*Ibid*: 290)

mi venerable padre fray Francisco de Viana lo dige *can Molab* (que dice tribu, parentela)... (*Ibid*: 229)

iglesia, congregacion — *Molab* (*Ibid*: 272)

Descent: A Non-Principle

The Spaniards apparently believed the *chinamit-molab* unit to be a kin group based on a descent principle. Their use of terms such as *lineage*, *casta*, *parentela* and *abolorio* indicate this. By the late 16th — early 17th century these terms were bound up in the idea of descent, especially as it applied to the great families of Spain.

³ A recently published fragment of a Colonial period Kekchí dictionary from the Alta Verapaz contains a cognate term *molam* in a passage illustrating the use of a verb. *Molam* itself is rendered as *barrio* or *parcialidad* by the Spanish compiler (Freeze, 1975:40). This reference would seem to indicate the existence of the *chinamit-molab* unit among the Kekchí, and suggests that it was a principle of organization for most, if not all, highland Maya groups.

Linage — La descendencia de las causas y familias. Dixose a linea porque van decendiendo de padres, hijos y nietos, etc., como por linea recta. (Cobarruvias 1977: 768)

Casta — Vale linage noble y castizo, el que es de buena linea y decendencia, no embargante que dezimos es buena casta y mala casta. Castizos llamamos a los que son de buen linage y casta. (*Ibid*: 316)

Parentela — los parientes de un linage. (*Ibid*: 854)

Abolengo y abolorio — La ascendencia de aguelos y bisaguelos, etc. (*Ibid*: 29)

Perhaps the misunderstanding of descent as the principle behind the *chinamit-molab* was engendered by the use of the same surname or *apellido* by members of the group. For the Spaniards the idea of *apellido* was associated with the concepts of great families and descent.

Under the entry for *Apellidos*:

Y assi los del apellido se juntan y llegan a su parcialidad y de aqui los nombres de las casas principales se llamavan apellidos, porque los demas se allegavan a ellas... (*Ibid*: 130)

Evidence suggests agnatic descent may have been of some importance at the highest level of Maya society with regard to succession to power and inheritance (see below). Other data, however, suggests that principles other than descent or kinship were at work.

Under the entry for *Hani*:

Es de mi chinamital aunque no somos parientes. (*Calepino Grande*: 94)

Under the entry for *Chinamit*:

linage y gente debajo un apellido y de un casique: aunque reconocen a cualquier que se quiera llegar a este linage y hermandad de hente. (*Ibid*: 77).

Several interpretations of this evidence are possible. The last quote, however, suggests a particular kind of organization. It seems likely that the significant criteria of *chinamit* membership was to be subject to, and take the surname of a *cacique* or leader. A core family or lineage (in the anthropological sense) of higher status is suggested, out of whose number came the *cacique*.

atz ch'ame — ... este es el nombre de cabeza de *chinamital* como *atz pop*, *atz qalel* y otros,... (Coto: 30)

atz k'ahol — los que son cabezas de *chinamitales* o calpules (*Ibid*: 132)

ah chinamital — señor de vasallos (*Ibid*: 433)

atz ohinak — cargo de cacique de cierto *chinamital* (*Calepino Grande*: 18)

Mama — los casiques y cabezas de los calpules (*Ibid*: 173) (also the word for grandfather, perhaps a term of address rather than a title)

Nima vinak — Cazique, cabeza de cualquier chinam(ital) (*Ibid*: 217)

A similar internal organization is suggested by Pokom terms for the head of the *molab*.

molabil — "...la cabeza de tal calpul o tribu" (*molab*) (*Zúñiga*: 4)

pop cam ha — "dize hombre constituido e dignidad, cabeza de calpul, principal y en este sentido nunca dicen solo pop in pop sino como otro cam ha, in pop cam ha. 'soy principal, soy hidalgo, soy cabeza de calpul', de molab" (*Ibid*: 457)

The other members of the *chinamit-molab* would have been of lesser status and not necessarily related to the core family. Membership at this level was evidently expressed by adopting the surname of the *cacique*, acknowledging his authority, and by residence in the area under his control.

Political Hierarchy

Some evidence of internal *chinamit* political hierarchy is offered by the Quiché term for *principales*, *ru camahay* (*Calepino Grande*: 359). Not all the functions of these individuals are known. However, they appear to have acted as a body, and elected or selected other minor officials of the *chinamit* such as messengers:

takom camahel, ya ol tzitz, nu k'ultitz naovinak achi —

mandadero, mensajero, recaudero lo eligen los principales cada año, cada *chinamital* lo suyo; para que lleven los recaudos, órdenes a los otros *chinamitales*. . . (Coto: 273)

There is no suggestion of the "*principales*" having a ceremonial as well as political role. Today the two are intimately associated (Tax and Hinshaw 1969: 89).

The core family or lineage may well have been the group the Spaniards focused their observations on, given their predilection to use elite sources and informants elsewhere in Mesoamerica. When Las Casas and others discuss *chinamit* exogamy, they are probably basing their statements on the actions of this leading family, and assuming the rest of the group acted similarly. It will be argued later that such was not the case and that perhaps, aside from the leading family, the *chinamit* was an endogamous unit.

The *chinamit* and *molab*, then, appear to share the same basic characteristics. Affiliation was recognized through the use of a common surname by members of the group. The group was localized in terms of settlement. Both groups were led or governed by a single individual.

Ceremonial Unit

The extent to which the *chinamit-molab* was a ceremonial unit, as well a political and territorial unit, is difficult to access. This should no be surprising, however, as the major interest the Spanish friars had in native Maya religion was in its eradication. Nevertheless, a few Maya-Spanish dictionary entries are suggestive:

moc — parcialidad, junta, congregación, cofradía (Coto: 324)

moc — la parcialidad de cualquier casique (Varela: 187)

molab — iglesia, congregación (Zúñiga: 272)

The apparent equivalence of *parcialidad* with *cofradía* (a type of religious sodality supposedly introduced in the Colonial Period, see Reina 1966: 97-165), and of *molab* as *iglesia* and *congregación* in addition to its other meanings is the only specific evidence of ceremonial functions for the *chinamit-molab*.

Corporateness: Social Responsibility

In terms of corporate responsibility for members actions we find description of the Quiché-Cakchiquel and Pokom term *nut*. According to the *Calepino Cakchiquel* (Varela, s/f) this was the cacao asked for from each house or family of a *chinamit*. Each family gave ten or twenty cacao beans upon the marriage of one of their number, or for the costs of ligation, or for one who is in jail.

nut — el cacao que se pide en cada casa de un *chinamital*, dan diez o veinte cada casa cuando se casa uno de ellos o para su pleyto o esta uno en cárcel (*Calepino Cakchiquel*: 223)

Coto agrees saying it consisted of collecting cacao from house to house among the *chinamitales*. Ten or twenty cacao seeds were collected from each house to help with someone's marriage, or to get him out of jail.

recoger de casa en casa los chinamitales cacao. diez o veinte cacaos de cada casa para ayudar a casar alguno, sacando de la cárcel... este nombre *nut* significa esta junta así, recogimiento de cacao. (Coto: 390)

The same term and behavior was to be found among the Pokom. According to Zúñiga it consisted of the contribution for that which was necessary. Usually or properly it was the contribution made by the relatives and the *molab* to one of their number who married. This was to defray the cost of the celebration, and each person gave a small amount in coin or cacao. In a wider sense *nut* was used to denote the contribution for another purpose such as each family contributing a *real* (a Spanish coin) for some work for the whole group.

nut — la contribucion para aquello que es menester para lo que se pide y se da . . . comunmente o propiamente se dize de la contribución que dan los parientes y el *molab* del que se casa de los suyos para festejar el casamiento, que cada uno da un tanto o tomin, o cacao y largo modo se dize por la derrama o contribucion para otra cosa diferente como si por el pueblo se echase un real cada casa para tal o tal obra comun (Zúñiga: 438)

An additional point of considerable importance is Zúñiga's distinction between the relatives (*parientes*) and fellow *molab* members.

This distinction reinforces the earlier assertion that the *molab* (and by extension the *chinamit*) was not kin or descent based.

Further evidence of corporate responsibility for fellow members' actions in *chinamit-molab* groups comes from Fuentes y Guzmán. Writing about the pre-conquest laws of the Quiché in the *Recordación Florida*, he discussed the penalties for various crimes (Fuentes y Guzmán 1932: 12-13). The punishment for an individual caught stealing a third time was death. However, if he was of a rich family and the *calpul* (*chinamit*) to which he belonged bought him, also paying for him for all the things stolen plus another amount for the treasury of the king, he would remain free.

...pasando a tercer latrocinio, recaía en pena de muerte. Pero si era de familia rica y le compraba el calpul a donde pertenecía, pagando por el todos los hurtos que le probaban y en otra cantidad para el Erario y depósito del Rey, quedaba libre... (*Ibid*: 12)

This responsibility extended to undesirable actions in the field of religion. Fuentes y Guzmán writes that the stealing of sacred articles, the profanation of temples, or disrespect shown to a native priest were severely punished. The perpetrator and his family were thrown into infamy and perpetual slavery. In case of another such infraction, the entire *calpul* (*chinamit*) passed into slavery. A third offense resulted in the individual's death.

Y así, el hurto de los casas sagradas, profanación de los adoratorios, o desacato a los ministros o Papaces de los ídolos, se castigaba con dura mano, despeñando al reo, y todos los de su familia quedaban en linea de infames y en esclavitud perpetua... y por la reincidencia pasaba la esclavitud a comprender a todo el calpul, que es un linaje, y a la tercera vez moría despeñado. (*Ibid*: 13)

Finally, Fuentes y Guzmán tells us that members of the *chinamit* were responsible for their fellows' actions with regard to the relationship with the rules. He states that, in the case of an individual absenting himself from the domain of his lord, his *calpul* (*chinamit*) paid to the lord a quantity of cotton cloth. A second occurrence carried the death penalty for the individual. He goes on to say this law provided that everyone was always subservient and obedient.

...el que se huía, y ausentaba del dominio o señorío de su dueño, pagaba su calpul por él, cierta cantidad de mantas, y reincidien-

do en la culpa era condenado a muerte de horca, procurando siempre que todos estuviesen sujetos y obedientes. (*Ibid*: 13)

Evidence of corporate responsibility for social control by the Pokom *molab* comes from Gage who was the priest of Mixco in the 1630's.⁴ Although a century after the conquest, the Pokomam Indians had retained most of their native ways, including their religion, which Gage was continually at pains to eliminate. This endurance must be ascribed to the fact that very few Spaniards lived in the Valley of Guatemala at this time, the capital of the *Audiencia* and only major center of Spanish colonists being at Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, present day Antigua, some 20 miles away in the Almolonga Valley.

As Gage states:

Among themselves, if any Complaint be made against any Indian, they dare not meddle with him till they call all his kindred, and especially the head of the Tribe (*molabil*) to which he belongs; who if he and the rest (of the *molab*) together find him to deserve imprisonment, or whipping, or any other Punishment, then the Officers of Justice, the *Alcaldes* or *Mayores*, and their brethren the jurates inflict upon him that punishment which all agree upon. (Gage 1929:246)

Community Specialization

The practice of a common specialization (*oficio*) is an important aspect of contemporary highland Maya closed corporate communities. Although limited to two references, evidence for such *oficios* in pre-conquest times is firm and specific. For the Pokom we find a statement by Zúñiga concerning the meaning of the word *xoy*.

According to Zúñiga, *xoy* meant to polish. In the form *xoyemah* it meant to polish stones or lapidary work. By placing the prefix *ah* the term for lapidary was formed. The plural form *ahxoyib* was

⁴ Thomas Gage's *A Survey of the West Indies* is a unique document which does not fit any of the categories of ethnohistorical material presented here. Gage was one of very few non-Spaniards to penetrate the interior of New Spain during the earlier part of the Colonial period. His survey was written on his return to England for English readers. It is thus not properly a *Relación*, but more of a personal memoir. The document does, however, contain some useful references to the condition of the highland Maya during the 1630's.

the name of those belonging to the *calpul* and *parcialidad* (*molab*) of a place called *Xoy* on the Río Chixoy. Before the conquest these people had the *oficio* of lapidaries. Zúñiga goes on to say that he did not deduce this on his own but he found it out from old and learned Indians of San Cristóbal where members of the *xoyib* still lived. His use of *calpul* and *parcialidad* indicate Zúñiga was referring to a *molab*.

xoyemah — significa el verbo esmaltar de diversos colores como el lapidario jaspea y esmalta una piedra y el escultor la esculptura de diversas colores, *xoy* que dize esmalta o jaspea y anteponiéndose *ah*, *ahxoy*, dize el esmaltador el oficial de esmaltar, y *ahxoyib* el plural y así se llaman los del *calpul* y *parcialidad* de aquél sitio del río dicho Zacapula [the Río Chixoy] que en su antigüedad tenían este oficio de esmaltar, no es pensamiento mio aquesto sino sabido de los indios viejos y ladinos de este pueblo de San Cristobal donde hay y esta el *calpul* y *parcialidad* de los *xoyib* (Zúñiga: 502)

xoyabah — ...y pienso que por la misma razon [the presence of polished stones probably serpentine or jade] llaman *xoy* al sitio del paso del rio grande que viene de Zacapula [Sacapulas] que oiras muchas veces decir *chixoy* en el rio *xoy*, y no es nombre de rio; que Tuhalha [Sacapulas] le llaman al rio de Zacapula, y a los de tal sitio llaman *ahxoyib*. devian de esmaltar piedras los de aquel lugar (*Ibid.*)

Evidence for a common specialization among members of a given *chinamit* comes from Tovilla, the *Alcalde Mayor* of the Verapaz in the 1630s. He described the process of salt making in the Quiché-speaking town of Sacapulas, something in which he had both interest and experience, having been administrator of saltworks in Murcia in his native Spain (Tovilla 1960: 218). He went on to report the organization of the town and its salt industry. He said that the town of Sacapulas was divided into six *parcialidades*, and that in each there was a head called *calpul*. The presence of the six groups resulted from the friars bringing together a like number of small settlements to make a larger one (*congregación*). Each *parcialidad* (*chinamit*) retained the name of the settlement from which it came. They also retained their lands in which they made their *milpas*. The *parcialidad* of Sacapulas, was the foremost of the town, its members being indigenous to the place and at one time masters of it. This *parcialidad* had the salt flats and exploited them without allowing any of the others to do so.

Está éste pueblo de Sacapulas dividido en seis parcialidades, y en cada una de ellas hay una cabeza a que llaman *caipul*, porque cuando los padres [friars] los juntaron, como ellos tenían pequeñas poblaciones, traían cuatro o cinco a cada pueblo que hacían para que fuese grande, y así cada parcialidad se quedó con el nombre del pueblo de donde vinieron. Y las tierras que tenían por suyas las gozan hoy y las gozarán para hacer sus milpas y demás menesteres. La parcialidad de Sacapulas como la más principal de este pueblo, que son naturales y señores de él, tiene éstas salinas y las goza sin que los demás vecinos pueden labrar sal. (Tovilla 1960: 18)

This important passage tells us several things. Each *chinamit* was a residential unit (which has already been demonstrated). It held land as a unit. Its members had exclusive rights to exploit these resources which they all seem to have done.

Sub-Summary

To recapitulate, we have to this point attempted to: 1) define *chinamit* and *molab* characteristics; 2) demonstrate that these two terms denote the same institutions; and 3) establish that this unit was essentially similar to the closed corporate community of today. The first two points are most graphically made by listing the characteristics found to be basic in defining both *chinamit* and *molab* groups.

1. Members of both groups recognized and expressed their membership through the use of a group surname.
2. Both groups had a minimal internal governing structure consisting of a head and *principales*.
3. Both groups were localized in terms of settlement.
4. Both groups were land holding units.
5. Members of both groups practiced group-defined economic specializations.
6. Members of both groups felt a common responsibility for other members' actions.

On the basis of these similarities one can equate the *chinamit* and *molab* both structurally and functionally. Part of the argument for interpreting these groups as functional equivalents of contemporary closed corporate communities is made by the last four charac-

teristics listed above. The final characteristic to be discussed is *chinamit-molab* endogamy.

Chinamit-Molab Endogamy

The question of endogamy versus exogamy among *chinamit-molab* groups is perhaps the most difficult to resolve, for a number of reasons. Principal among these is the Spaniards' failure to fully understand the *chinamit-molab* in the first place. Other important problems include demographic changes and the level of society chroniclers studied to learn marriage customs.

Starting again from the dictionaries, the evidence is consistent for an interpretation of *chinamit* exogamy.

... no acostumbran casarse los de un mismo *chinamital* sino raras veces;... (Coto: 201)

... dicen a los que se quieren casar 'sois de diversos linages' y esto se pide por que se conserve su orden de vivir. (Calepino Cakchiquel: 77)

Las Casas discusses marriage customs for the highland Maya generally and states they have the following customs. The first is that on no account would they marry with those of their "tribe", "family", or "kin" in the way they figured it. They did not count as members of their family or their kin the children of the "adjacent tribe" or *linage*, even if the mother originally came from one's own group. He goes on to clarify his position by saying that kinship was attributed to or traced only through men. In this way, if a *señor* gave his daughter in marriage to another *señor* or individual of another town, and although he had no other person to inherit except the children of that daughter, by being in another *pueblo* and being children of it, they would have no part in the inheritance. In a subsequent passage, Las Casas confuses the issue by stating that if a *señor* or the son of a *señor* was to marry, they usually looked for a woman from another town. In this way, he says, they established kinship between the towns, and this was a cause of their living in peace.

Cuanto a los casamientos y matrimonios tenían los usos y costumbres siguientes: la primera es que por ningún caso ni necesidad se casaban con los de su tribu, o familia, o parentesco, a su parecer contado, porque no contaban por de su familia, o

parentesco los hijos que nacían en la tribu o linage ageno, aunque la muger fuese de su linage o tribu... aquel tal parentesco se atribuía a sólo hombres, por manera que si algún señor daba su hija casándola con el señor o persona de otro pueblo, aunque no tuviese otro heredero alguno, sino los hijos de aquella hija, por estar en otro pueblo y ser hijos de aquel no tenían parte alguna en tal herencia. (Las Casas 1909: 624)

Si era señor o hijo de señor el que se casaba, comúnmente le buscaban muger de otro pueblo y así se contraría parentesco entre los pueblos y era causa de vivir siempre muy pacíficos. (*Ibid.*)

Although Las Casas described pre-conquest marriage customs generally, his constant use of the term *señor* (in the sense of ruler) versus *persona* (a commoner), leads one to believe that he based his description on marriages practiced by the *señores* or rulers. He apparently accepted this as being the case for commoners as well. Las Casas would appear to have been following the common practice of early Spanish students of Mesoamerican Indian culture, that of using nobles and other elite-status individuals as informants. While there is little doubt this was the case for the ruling class (the *Popol Vuh* contains many examples), it need not follow that the same applied to commoners.

The crucial reference with regard to pre-conquest marriage customs is in the 17th century *Ramillete manual para los indios sobre la doctrina cristiana* by Fr. Francisco Maldonado (Carrasco 1963). In it, among other things, Maldonado discusses the marriages permitted by the Church, usages of the Cakchiquel Indians in the 17th century, and customs they practiced "anciently" (in pre-conquest times). The key passage exhorts that it is proper that people marry within their *chinamit*. It is not a sin and there is no clerical impediment against it. Maldonado goes so far as to say it is good that one marries with a girl or boy from one's *chinamit*. There evidently was a previous church ban on marriage within the *chinamit*, probably based on the Spaniards misunderstanding of it. This is suggested by Maldonado's statement that it is no longer a sin but that the indians were deceived before the world of God came. His final phrase seems an exhortation to return to the pre-conquest custom of marrying within the *chinamit*.

Es justo que os caseis dentro de vuestro clan [*chinamit*]. No es pecado, no hay impedimento para que os caséis dentro. Bien te casas con la hija de tus parientes clánicos o el hijo de tus pa-

rientes clánicos. Ya no es pecado esto porque estabais engañados antes que viniera la palabra de Dios. *Como entonces hacíais antiguamente cada uno de su clan eran vuestros casados*. (Carrasco 1963: 194. Carrasco's translation from Cakchiquel to Spanish) (My emphasis added).

Here then is the evidence for *chinamit* endogamy. Maldonado's use of the perfect tense, and specific mention of what the custom was "*antiguamente*", stand in marked contrast to all the dictionary entries made in the present tense. Las Casas was probably correct about the customs of the elite members of society, but Maldonado was writing for a general audience, and used the example of pre-conquest customs to make his point.

Summary

The data collected from the various ethnohistorical documents points to the *chinamit-molab* unit as a Late Postclassic Maya counterpart of the ethnographically known closed corporate community. With regard to the specific characteristics of the closed corporate community presented at the beginning of this discussion, it has been demonstrated that the *chinamit-molab* was a social unit, the members of which lived together in a settlement or defined area *vis a vis* other such groups.

Members of the *chinamit-molab* had a corporate or group identity expressed through common ownership of land and other resources, and the recognition of group responsibility for individual members' actions. Responsibility extended from helping defray the cost of marriage festivities, through secular crimes (thievery, desertion of one's lord), to religious offences.

Members of the *chinamit-molab* practiced a common specialization or *oficio*. The existence of such a common specialization indicates the existence of community culture. The *chinamit-molab* was, except perhaps for its core family, an endogamous unit.

Finally there is evidence of an internal political hierarchy and of the *chinamit-molab* as a religious or ceremonial unit. However, it is not possible at this time to demonstrate the interrelations between political and religious organization.

Chinamit-Molab: Previous Interpretations

Several ethnohistorians have attempted to deal with the *chinamit* or *molab* in anthropological terms. Sue Miles, in her study of the Pokom, characterizes the *molab* as a clan, though the criteria for this classification are not explicitly stated (Miles 1957: 759-760). Miles also proposed a sub-clan or lineage principle. Her interpretation in this regard appears based on the Spaniards' use of the word *linaje* when referring to several Maya surnames (*Ibid*: 758). As has been discussed, the word *linaje* does not indicate "lineage" in an anthropological sense, of a descent group, but rather a line of descent. The operative principle seems to have emphasized the individual's place in a line of descent rather than his membership in a descent group. Additionally, these concerns were only of importance for the proportionally small group of rulers.

Similarly, Pedro Carrasco characterized the *chinamit* as an exogamous patrilineal clan (Carrasco 1964: 324). The definition of clan used by Carrasco was not stated. However, he also noted that the *chinamit* "también formaba el núcleo de una subdivisión territorial o barrio bajo la autoridad de un jefe propio" (*Ibid.*). Carrasco noted the important entry in the Varea dictionary defining *chinamit* as "Linaje y gente debajo un apellido y de un cacique aunque recogen a cualquier que se quiera llegar a este linaje y hermandad de gente" (Varea in Carrasco 1964: 325). However, as Carrasco was more concerned with personal names and their transmission, he did not explore the opponent contradictions between the dictionary definitions and his proposed clan-like structure.

Concentrating on the political and cultural Quiché elite of Utatlán, Robert Carmack has come to a different interpretation of the *chinamit* (Carmack 1977: 12-13). Based on dictionary entries, Carmack applies a model of feudal organization in which the members of a *chinamit* constitute the "estate" of a "chief" or lord (*Ibid*: 12). Based on a strict translation of *chinamit* at a "fenced in place" Carmack envisions it as an actual walled-in estate (*Ibid*: 12-13). It is more likely the fenced in place is used figuratively to denote the social insularity of *chinamit* groups. Such an interpretation is supported by the fact that, despite intensive archaeological surveys, no remains of any walled-in state have come to light. From the point of view of the Utatlán ruling elite, such a lord-vassal relationship may indeed represent the interaction between *chinamit* and lord. However, it is not at all sure that all *chinamitales* were so directly

under the control of such highly-placed individuals. Based on the sources consulted, it appears that the "chief" of a *chinamit* could also be interpreted as a much less imposing and more familiar figure than the lords of Uatatlán. Based on references in a Tamub *título*, Carmack goes on to suggest another, higher level of socio-territorial organization based on units referred to as *calpules* (*Ibid.*). This additional level is made necessary in Carmack's scheme due to his interpretation of *chinamit* as a walled-in area. As has been seen in the documents cited, it is more likely that *calpul* was simply used as a synonym for *chinamit*, much in the same way that *parcialidad* and *linaje* were used.

Post Conquest Developments

While the ethnohistorical evidence demonstrates strong similarities between pre-conquest *chinamit-molab* units and contemporary closed corporate communities, the sequence by which the characteristics of the former came to be expressed in the latter remains to be explored. A detailed treatment of this complex topic is beyond the scope of this study. However, the main features of a proposed sequence of events may be sketched tentatively, more as a line of further research than as a definitive statement. Ironically, it appears as if Spanish actions and policies were responsible for both the demise of the traditional *chinamit-molab* groups as well as the survival of the cultural principles underlying them in closed corporate communities.

Before Spaniards ever set foot in the Guatemala highlands, messengers and traders from Mexico had brought the European's diseases to the highland Maya. This area, like much of the Americas, is one where, as MacLeod points out, "many of the major scourges known in the Old World since ancient times were not present... before the arrival of Europeans at the end of the fifteenth century," (MacLeod, 1973: 16). He goes on to list some of the new diseases introduced at this time. They include: plague (both bubonic and pneumonic), smallpox, measles, cholera, yellow fever, typhoid, typhus; tuberculosis, and malaria (*Ibid.*).

The first of three major Central American pandemics struck the Maya highlands in 1519 and 1520, four years before Pedro de Alvarado's conquest of the area. The effects of this unintentional germ warfare were catastrophic.

Given present day knowledge of the impact of smallpox and plague on a people without previous immunities, it is safe, indeed conservative, to say that a third of the Guatemalan highland population died during the holocaust. Knowledge of past epidemics in Europe and of the aftermath of smallpox and plague can also lead us to assert that those who survived were left at least for a year or so in a weakened condition, with greatly lowered resistance to the minor ills, colds, bronchitis, pneumonia, and influenza which carry off so many invalids. It was then in large part the sickly survivors of a disaster whom Alvarado and his men encountered on the Pacific Coast of Central America. (*Ibid*: 41).

The protracted and bloody conquest of the highlands only added to the disaster. In addition to losses of men in battle, deaths of women and children must also be assumed to have been great as a result of presumed reduction of farming activity on the part of the debilitated population. Periodic uprisings by the Cakchiquels (disaffected Spanish allies early in the conquest) and other, only partially subjugated groups, added to the toll.

Even before Spanish domination was everywhere firmly established, another drain was made on the native population. This was in the form of slave labor for gold washing in Honduras and for transisthmian portage work in Panama (*Ibid*: 46-57). This was during the 1530's. During the same period (1532-1534) another pandemic (evidently measles) struck (*Ibid*: 98). From 1545-1548 pneumonic plague ravaged the highland peoples (*Ibid*). "The number of the inhabitants cannot have been more than half of what it was in 1520" (*Ibid*: 110). It struck again barely a generation later from 1576 to 1577 (*Ibid*: 98). "The severe epidemics of the 1570's second in intensity only to those of the 1540's, had drastically and suddenly dropped some Indian populations by as much as 40 percent" (*Ibid*: 185). Using MacLeod's figures we arrive at a total population loss of somewhere near 70 percent, within the span of only 50 years. The Indian population would not stabilize and begin to recover until the beginning of the 18th century (*Ibid*: 343-344).

The Spaniards' initial attempts to deal with this loss of population included the policy of *congregación* or bringing together the remnants of the *chinamit-molab* groups into *pueblos* (*Ibid*: 120-122). As long as the population remained low, there was no pressure to extend or leave the *pueblo*. It is probably during this period when the reorganization of disparate *chinamit-molab* remnants into the closed corporate *pueblo* communities of today occurred.

As the native population began to recover near the end of the 18th century, population pressure on agricultural resources became a problem. This is evidenced in the rise in the number of litigations over land at this time (Carmack 1973: 202-209). It was probably during this period that groups began to leave the *pueblo* communities to form new settlements near the outlying lands of the *pueblo's* jurisdiction. These new settlements, forerunners of the *aldeas*, remained units administratively, religiously, and socio-culturally dependent on the *pueblo*, as they are today.

Because of this process of population dispersal to the *aldeas*, the closed corporate community was no longer just the *pueblo*, but included the *aldeas* as well in the characteristic *municipios* known ethnographically. The extent to which populations moved to the *aldeas* or remained in the *pueblos* probably accounts for the distinctive (vacant town, town nucleus, and combined) types of *municipios* noted by Tax (1937).

Conclusions

The ethnohistorical evidence presented in this paper indicates the Late Postclassic Quiché-Cakchiquel *chinamit* and Pokom *molab* have substantially the same characteristics as ethnographically-known highland Maya closed corporate communities. The similarity strongly suggests more than just historical coincidence. Rather, after the initial shocks of the Spanish conquest, the surviving highland Maya appear to have re-constituted their socio-cultural organization according to pre-conquest principles.

The Spaniards may have unintentionally played an important role in the reorganization according to Maya cultural principles through the program of *congregación*. By bringing together small, scattered remnant groups, the Spaniards formed viably endogamous communities. While some knowledge of the distinct origins of the component groups survived in the *barrio* (ward) organization, the community eventually became the dominant socio-cultural unit. Had the Spanish *congregación* program not been carried out, it is doubtful that such an adjustment could have been made.

The continuity in principles of highland Maya sociocultural organization illustrated here suggests the Spanish conquest and Colonial administration may have less of an effect *culturally* than previously suspected. It may, therefore, prove fruitful to search for traditional

Maya precursors of other institutions supposedly introduced by the Spaniards. The *cofradía* system of religious sodalities comes to mind in this regard (R. E. Reina, personal communication, Vogt 1964, Carrasco 1961). Should future studies indicate further close similarities between pre and post-conquest institutions, the question of cultural continuity may force a re-evaluation or redefinition of the acculturation process as it purportedly occurred in the highland Maya area.

Appendix: Sources

Dictionaries were the most numerous of the documents used. Invariably they were compiled by Spanish missionaries who had spent considerable time learning Maya languages. The dictionaries were in turn used to teach new missionary personnel on their arrival in the *Audiencia*. However, O'Flaherty (1979) has pointed out the majority of the Spanish religious personnel never did master the Maya languages, despite the efforts of compilers and copyists. Dictionaries were subsequently copied and added to by later missionaries, sometimes giving credit to the original author. Thus, while the original may have been lost, in some cases, a 17th or 18th century copy has survived. However, the usefulness of dictionaries for ethno-historical research can be highly variable, depending, it would seem, mostly on the effort of the compiler or copyist to include descriptive definitions of the Maya terms as opposed to merely the approximate equivalents in Spanish.

The originals of the earliest dictionaries, compiled by Parra and Betanzos in the first half of the 16th century are lost to us (Carmack 1973: 116). Carmack, who has attempted to trace the history of the various highland Maya dictionaries, believes most of these two lost works are contained in the Varela dictionary (*Ibid.*). Francisco Varela's *Calepino en lengua Cakchiquel* was probably composed early in the 17th century since he arrived in Guatemala in 1596 and remained until 1630 (*Ibid.*) The copy used in the present research was made by Francisco Zeron in 1699 and is in the collection of the American Philosophical Society. It was donated along with other documents (including the Coto dictionary, see below) in 1836 by the Guatemalan dictator Mariano Gálvez who received membership in the Society in return for his donation.

Also in the American Philosophical Society is Tomas Coto's *Vocabulario de la lengua Cakchiquel y Guatemalteca*. This work was compiled near the end of the 17th century, but drew upon both 50 years of Coto's personal experiences and a 16th century dictionary by Juan de Alonso (*Ibid.*: 120).

The *Calepino Grande Castellano y Quiché* is attributed to Juan de Alonso by Carmack (*Ibid*: 119). Another candidate is Felix Solano. In either case the document in question would have been written in the second half of the 16th century (*Ibid*: 11a.). The copy used in this research was made in the 17th or 18th century and is today part of the collections of the Newberry Library from which a microfilm copy was obtained. Another presumed copy of the Alonso dictionary was made in Sacapulas in 1787 by Fermín José Tirado (*Ibid*: 118). In the latter case the original entries were much shortened by the copyist. The copy Tirado's *Vocabulario de la lengua Kiché* used in this research is a photostat in the Museum Library of the University of Pennsylvania.

Perhaps the earliest of the dictionaries for the highland Maya area is Domingo de Vico's *Vocabulario de la lengua Cakchiquel y Kiché*. This work had to have been completed before 1555, the year of Vico's death. The copy used in the present research was made in the 17th century and is part of the collections of the Newberry Library in Chicago from which a Xerox copy was obtained. (Carmack 1973: 114)

Not mentioned by Carmack is Benito de Villacañas' *Arte y Vocabulario de la lengua Cakchiquel*. The exact date of its compilation is not known, though Villacañas himself died in 1610 at the age of 73 (Remesal 1966: vol. 2:483). Villacañas arrived in the *Audiencia* shortly after taking his vows in Mexico in 1573. His first assignment was to the town of Sacapulas where, among other things, he oversaw the construction of a masonry bridge over the Río Negro. This assignment in Sacapulas appears to have been short, however, as he is credited with spending most of this time with the Cakchiquel Indians of the Sacatepequez area. The history of Villacañas' dictionary is confused. The original is apparently lost, but a copy of it was made in 1692. Berendt copied this volume in New York in 1871 and this became part of the Brinton Collection in the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. A microfilm copy of Berendt's manuscript was made, but the original was lost.

The final dictionary deals with Pokom branch of the Mayance languages as opposed to the very closely related Quiché and Cakchiquel. It was supposedly based on a now lost 16th century dictionary compiled by Francisco de Viana who arrived in the Verapaz in 1556, shortly after its pacification (Carmack 1973: 120). The dictionary was compiled by Dionysius Zúñiga, a student of Viana's, who arrived in the Verapaz in 1597, and began copying his mas-

ter's work after the latter's death in 1608 (*Ibid*: 120-121). Berendt obtained the remaining parts of Zúñiga's *Diccionario Pokomchi-Castellano y Pokomchi de San Cristóbal Cohcoh* at San Cristóbal in 1875 and this subsequently became part of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania where a photocopy was studied for this research. Much of the ethnographic data in this dictionary was assembled by Miles for her innovative study of the Pokom-Maya in the 16th century (Miles, 1957).

Relaciones are descriptions written by Spanish officials and, on occasions, friars. They usually describe a specific area in some detail. Some mention was usually made of the Indian population. Depending on the interests and intellectual curiosity of the reporter, much valuable information on native culture may be presented.

Captain Martin Alfonso Tovilla's *Relación histórica descriptiva de las Provincias de la Verapaz y la del Manche* written in 1635. It is based primarily on information gathered during his five years touring the area in his capacity of *Alcalde Mayor*. The manuscript was apparently used by Fuentes y Guzmán for parts of this history before finally coming to rest in the public library of Toledo, Spain (*Ibid*: 182). The version used in this research was prepared by Scholes and Adams and published in Guatemala (Tovilla 1960). Although written comparatively late it must be remembered that the Verapaz did not come completely under Spanish rule until 1547 and even then the inhabitants were not subdued by force as in the case of most other highland Maya, but peacefully subdued by Spanish missionaries, notably Bartolomé de las Casas (King 1974: 21). In exchange for pacifying the Verapaz, the Dominicans were given control over the area and Spanish colonists were kept out. In this way the disruptive influences of the *encomienda* system and slavery were avoided, allowing the potential for native culture to continue with fewer changes than in other areas.

Two colonial histories contained evidence pertaining to the interests of the present research. Fr. Bartolomé de las Casas' *Apologética His-*

⁵ The primary reliance on elite-status informants by Spanish friars in conducting their inquiries has been noted in México. Olmos, Sahagún, and Torquemada all employed this technique (Franch 1973:266; Nicholson 1973: 207; Wilkerson 1974: 64, 72-73). It is known that Las Casas used the work of Olmos in his *Apologética Historia* (Wilkerson 1974: 75). Thus, while Olmos and Sahagún were Franciscans, it appears there was some exchange of ideas on how to conduct investigations into native culture. Probably more important was a Spanish cultural bias towards working with the elite segments.

toria Sumaria de las Indias... is a monumental work dealing with the entire then-known New World (Las Casas 1909). Thirteen chapters are given over to a description of the highland Maya based largely on Las Casas' own experience among them from 1536 to 1544. His work is important as he was familiar with both major highland linguistic groups, the Quiché-Cakchiquel and the Pokom (Carmack 1973: 101-102).

Another Colonial history was written by a non-cleric, Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán (1932-33). His *Recordación Florida* was finished in 1690, more than 150 years after the conquest. However, Fuentes y Guzmán, as an official of the *audiencia*, had access to its archives. He was thus in a unique position to chronicle the history of the *Audiencia* as seen and reported by secular officials. Ximénez, writing only a few years later takes considerable trouble in pointing out many inaccuracies of Fuentes y Guzmán's account. Ximénez does not, however, take issue with statements on the condition of the Maya in pre-conquest times, a subject with which Ximénez may be said to have been familiar.

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