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Introduction

Ruling dynasties of the principal Postclassic states spread far and wide across southern Mesoamerica exemplified strong affinity and probably kinship with one another. Unmistakable resemblances extended in other aspects as well. Not only did these various Maya-speaking peoples, such as the notorious Xiu and Itza of Yucatan or the Quiché and Cakchiquel of highland Guatemala, manifest astonishing commonality in archaeological remains, but they maintained firm accordance in their written histories, pointing to a common ancestry. To further distinguish them as a group, their architecture, ceramics, religion and mythology were stoutly cast in a Toltec mold deep within the Maya realm. This study addresses how these Mexican/Mayan peoples acquired their especially hybrid cultural matrix, sudden long-distance migration, intrusion, conquest and intermarriage with indigenous populations, and then how the equally abrupt collapse of apparently mighty state systems occurred. Archaeology has long posed the question: how could such Maya speaking peoples be Toltec and worship variations of Quetzalcoatl? From a theoretical standpoint, how and why did their vigorous states at Chichen Itza, Mayapan, Utatlan, Iximche, and Chiapas unravel and – in some cases – totally collapse? These questions frame this study.

Foremost among these points of inquiry, however, has been archaeology's vexing problem of delineating and accounting for long-distance migration by small groups, often hundreds of kilometers. From archaeology's essentially uniformitarianist underpinnings dating well back to the last century, the notion of dramatic intrusive change versus gradual *in situ* change has been particularly troublesome. I imagine that this epistemological polarity first surfaced in the early decades of Maya studies, when the Mexicanized "new empire" of the Postclassic, based on migratory traditions recounted in some of Maya and Spanish (cf. Landa) chronicles was contrasted with the "old empire" and its spectacular (Classic period) florescence, explained largely as a result of local evolution. To some degree this dichotomized approach is still with us, although new evidence from epigraphy shows a very inter-connected Classic period Maya world as well.

To counter such implicit proclivities, two approaches will be taken. The first is the conjunctive method, in which ethnohistory from the native or Contact period Spanish documents is combined with archaeology to delineate chains of events. The various migratory peoples dealt with herein were coincidentally the most literate of the Postclassic Maya, leaving much if not virtually all of the native writings from that last aboriginal era. This would include roughly one dozen manuscripts in Yucatan, with particular note the various renditions of the *Chilam Balam* prophecies, the twenty odd Quichean

titulos of highland Guatemala, with the official Quiché and Cakchiquel books of state – the *Popol Vuh* and the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* respectively being the most renowned – plus isolated documents from here and there where branches of this migratory stock placed roots.

A second approach is an explicitly comparativist one. That is, rather than focusing on one or several nearby sites in a single region, which would lend itself more to *in situ* explanatory factors, the scope of this study is interregional, comparing assemblages, however small-sized, among peoples with proposed ancestry across sizable distances. In this regard, the archaeological remains of the Itza and Xiu of Yucatan, the Peten Itza, Naco, those of highland Chiapas, and those of the Quiché and Cakchiquel of highland Guatemala not only manifest remarkable comparability with homeland sites in and about Acalan on one hand, but pronounced dissimilarity with local Maya assemblages in each region on the other.

But more than merely archaeological and ethnohistorical comparisons, the complexity of this combined data allows a reconstruction of aspects of cooperation, even marriage, between specific lineages. With such data across widely spaced regions, and for some peoples – notably the Quiché – for the entire six-century duration of the Postclassic, a consistent package of behavioral principles can be outlined. Thus, to a lesser degree but along the same lines, we might see their patterned actions for these remote times as an ethnographer might abstract the normative behavior of living peoples. In a sense, some flesh can be placed on the bones of archaeology.

History of goals and of the conjunctive method

Inquiries concerning how Maya speakers acquired decidedly Mexican architecture and Toltec legends and mythology, as well as the enigmatic comings and goings of the Itza and others across the Maya world, go back almost as far as the history of Maya studies itself. Accordingly, this study has a long pedigree. Only a few milestones along the way need to be singled out to get a feeling for the scope of scholarly attention to these matters. Questions about how the Toltec of Tula became involved at Chichen Itza arose along with systematic work during the Carnegie years between the world wars. From these efforts an undeniable Toltec impress was finely detailed in archaeology at Chichen Itza by Tozzer (1957), and from Roys' (1933, 1957, 1962) no less comprehensive ethnohistorical syntheses for Yucatan in general and Chichen and Mayapan in particular. Parallel queries at Mayapan (Pollock *et al.* 1962) led a trail of Xiu and Itza back to the Gulf lowlands of Tabasco and Campeche. For this strategic hearth region, Scholes and Roys (1948–68) provided a landmark ethnohistoric analysis of one of the major Chontal polities, Acalan, showing that it too was comprised of families of actual mixed Mexican and Mayan genealogy. A quantum leap forward in tracing these various peoples to the Chontalpa of Tabasco and Campeche was afforded by J. Eric S. Thompson's (1970) masterful analysis of the Chontal (Putun) diaspora into Yucatan and Cozumel. In short, as the final coup of the Carnegie generation, Thompson charted the origins of the major Postclassic circum-Yucatecan communities east to Nito and Naco on the very edges of Mesoamerica, inland along the Usumacinta to Seibal, etc., all of which are ultimately

derived from a Gulf frontier region where the Toltec first joined with the Chontal. Thompson also persuasively added a geographical dimension, since the Chontalpa homeland nudged against the wider Mexican culture area, where sustained trading contact (the “port of trade” model, Chapman 1957) was maintained between the Chontal and their then Mexican relatives. Work on early intrusions at Seibal and Altar de Sacrificios (e.g. Sabloff and Willey 1967), that figured prominently in Thompson’s synthesis, has recently continued along the Yucatecan coast at Cozumel (Sabloff and Rathje 1975). Beyond cultural history, though, to explanation, Willey and Sabloff’s comprehensive archaeological investigations delineating a Chontal-like intrusion far inland along the Usumacinta corridor at Seibal, set in motion a still smoldering scholarly debate, which pitted mechanisms for actual intrusion versus those for *in situ* evolution.

On the other hand, there have proven to be other, less elite social strata of Chontal communities who also immigrated, not necessarily around the Yucatecan coastline to lucrative entrepôts with adjoining rich cacao orchards as outlined by Thompson, or to large established communities like Seibal, but into remote mountain ranges of the less prized highlands. Nonetheless, the migratory routes followed were much the same, that is, inland along the major rivers draining the Chontalpa’s broad delta, the Usumacinta and Grijalva in particular. Pioneer settlements of Quiché, Rabinal and Cakchiquel were carved out on almost inaccessible mountain peaks overlooking the very beginnings of Usumacinta (Negro) and Rio Motagua watercourses (the Motagua flows into the Caribbean near Nito and Naco). Also from a conjunctive approach and working essentially independently of Thompson, Willey and Sabloff, though contemporaneously, Edward Calnek (1962) for highland Chiapas and Robert Carmack (1968) for highland Guatemala advanced parallel hypotheses that the Chan and Quichean peoples respectively also had migrated from Acalan specifically (in the case of the Chan) and the Veracruz–Tabasco coast more generally. These were not completely new ideas, for others concurrently were also tracing Mexicanized Maya, like the Quiché and Chiapas peoples from Veracruz, inland and upland along the corridor of the Rio Usumacinta/Negro (e.g. Borhegyi 1965: 40–1). This present study supports these ethnohistorically generated deductions with new survey data showing that archaeological patterning for small rather mundane sites concentrated in the interior hill country of Acalan closely match those of the enclaves pioneered in highland Guatemala and Chiapas; and that the Quiché, Cakchiquel, Rabinal and others were part and parcel of the same Chontal diaspora that has already been established for Chichen Itza and Seibal.

Segmentary lineages and segmentary states

Subsequently, Carmack (1973) added immeasurably to the Quichean ethnohistoric data base by analyzing the documents and even locating several new ones – fully duplicating for the highlands what Roys achieved for the lowlands. But more significantly still, Carmack (1981) has recently shown that the Quiché were organized into segmentary lineages who forged “alliances” with other migrant Chontal-derived peoples into successively higher levels of amalgamation to eventually achieve a segmentary state. By focusing on the interactional dynamics of several score Quiché lineages at Utatlan, a

social organizational dimension is now fleshed out for one of the principal Chontal fissioned peoples. Thereby, a significant departure is signaled from the heretofore rather historical-goaled research tradition.

To my knowledge, this marks the first time that segmentary lineages have been recognized in Mesoamerica. However, without expressly referring to segmentary lineage theory by name, roughly simultaneously, Munro Edmonson (1982) provocatively demonstrated that the Quiché's Yucatecan cousins, the Itza and Xiu again, had quite fractious lineage alliances focused on tun and katun ritual alternatively centered at Mayapan, Chichen Itza or even Potonchan back in the Chontalpa. Edmonson's lineage characteristics for the lowlands also conform to segmentary lineage behavior *sensu stricto*. The present study expands on Carmack's and Edmonson's leads, showing that the Yucatecan lineages exemplified the full range of segmentary lineage behavioral principles, including variants of the segmentary state which summarily and predictably collapsed in accordance with the katun schedule.

Segmentary lineage theory was originally abstracted in ethnographies undertaken by British social anthropology, although good syntheses of the characteristics have appeared on the American side of the Atlantic (e.g. Sahllins 1961). In essence, segmentary lineage polities, as Evans-Pritchard (1940) noted for the Nuer, or Fortes (1945) for the Tallensi, often tend to be "tribal level" congregations of lineages that maintain their own estates. They amalgamate into uneasy successively higher alliances of mechanical solidarity type segments when threatened by other peoples or when penetrating into new territories. In that the reader may not be familiar with the African ethnographic literature, to give a general example about the building of successively larger (or going down to scale in this case) alliances, the following quote reveals the essentially segmental-like structure of the confederated eighteenth-century highland Scottish clans.

The Highlanders are divided into tribes or clans, under chiefs or chieftains, and each clan is again divided into branches from the main stock, who have chieftains over them. These are subdivided into smaller branches of 50 or 60 men, who deduce their original from their particular chieftains, and rely upon them as their more immediate protectors and defenders. The ordinary Highlanders esteem it the most sublime degree of virtue to love their chief and pay him a blind obedience . . . Next to this love of their chief is that of the particular branch whence they sprang; and, in a third degree, to those of the whole clan or name, whom they will assist, right or wrong, against those of any other tribe with which they are at variance. They likewise owe goodwill to such clans as they esteem to be their particular well-wishers. And, lastly, they have an adherence to one another as Highlanders in opposition to the people of the low country . . .

(a 1730 personal correspondence cited in Southall 1956: 257)

To a large measure, outside pressures force confederation of otherwise autonomy gravitating segments. This can be seen when three Quiché segments grouped together on adjoining hilltops upon initial settlement deep within foreboding territory in the Guatemalan highlands. While often an egalitarian ideology pervades, neighboring seg-

ments can be grafted onto the pyramidal grouping of like segments, based again on degrees of common descent, to eventually yield the segmentary state. Like the earlier ethnographic “type” studies, the segmentary state was first described for the Alur of Africa (Southall 1956). As developed in the following chapters, the model applies in total to Chontal-derived polities, and fits the Quiché state centered at Utatlan remarkably well. However, segmentary groupings range, on a scale of complexity, from the temporary coalitions of almost egalitarian, only incipiently ranked polities, whose wider political structure depends more upon the degree of outside pressure precipitating alliance formation, to segmentary states.

But in the segmentary state system . . . within each segment there is a degree of specialized political power, yet the articulated system of such politically specialized segments is still held together by the structured oppositions between them at each level, rather than by the presence of an absolute central authority able to monopolize the use of force. (Southall 1956: 257)

From this perspective, the total disarticulation of segmentary states at Chichen Itza and Mayapan into their constituent lineage segments is no longer an enigma, insofar as this is normative for segmentary lineage organization. But on a more general level, the segmentary state, of course, is hardly the far more widely recognized unitary state, with its fully developed institutions of centralized authority and force (kings, palace guard/police, judiciary, taxes, etc.). The unitary state tends to be commonly accepted in the archaeological literature as somehow following the chiefdom level, which lacks these institutions.

With sufficient data, much of the spectrum of segmentary lineage behavioral norms can be identified from Guatemala to Yucatan. Returning to the mist-enshrouded migration across the Maya world that has puzzled American scholarship for so long, one of the salient behavioral features of segmentary lineage expansion in Africa and elsewhere is what has been coined “leapfrog migration” over great distances to territories with economic conditions compatible with the homeland. While Carmack stopped just short of declaring so, the Quiché notably conform to such long-distance migration commencing in the Gulf homeland. More fine-grained comparisons, moreover, show that leapfrog-type migrations by the Quiché, Xiu, Itza, Chan, lineages at Naco, etc., illustrate a good possibility for the quite orthodox segmentary lineage migratory pattern of rather plebeian warrior lineages actually having preceded higher status lineages in colonizing new territories. When the Early Postclassic, pioneer Quiché warrior lineage colony is conceptualized together with their more elite brethren at the nearby Sacapulas katun center, then the same wider two-tiered settlement hierarchy (i.e. warrior lineage/aristocratic lineages) is evident, replete with the nearly identical distances between them in Guatemala as in Acalan.

The Quiché case thereby provides a standard for explaining segmentary lineage characteristics of other Chontal-derived peoples cast throughout southern Mesoamerica. For not only have lineage dynamics within the state’s center, Utatlan, been thoroughly mapped, but most of nearly 100 settlements (archaeological civic centers) in and about the segmentary state have been surveyed archaeologically and

identified with specific kinship groupings (Fox 1977, 1978). Thus, a rare systems view is afforded with a fully intact Quiché settlement sequence. This developmental sequence traces the minuscule warrior lineage sites pioneered during the Early Postclassic to the urban center, Greater Utatlan, plus the myriad of colonies founded throughout the state as offshoots from the central community. The segmentary state's territorial base can be seen almost in its entirety, with ecological information on each community. Placed within a chronological framework, the point by point unfolding of the state can be plotted according to strict segmentary lineage behavioral patterns. In addition to a conjunctive methodology, the primary method for community analysis will be settlement patterning. The spatial perspective is particularly suited to assessing the number of lineage clusters and their degrees of autonomy versus centralization, which is the key principle of balanced symmetry holding together segmentary polities.

The frontier model

To amplify Thompson's (1970) original application of the frontier to include the Gulf homeland's Mexican/Mayan milieu, segmentary lineages, almost by definition, are prone to develop in frontier settings where one broad-based population dilates against another. Segmentary lineage organization, with its massing tendencies bringing together dispersed lineages into a single military force, has a pronounced selective advantage where several populations are competing for the same living space. Such massing permits short-term mobilization of an entire ethnic grouping, if necessary. Generally speaking, populations along territorial edges have lower population densities than in heartlands, and often spatially expansive economic bases (e.g. swidden cultivation, pastoralism/transhumance) producing a need for additional space with time. Thus, there are built-in tensions that naturally give rise to cultural adaptations along the lines of the segmentary lineages, facilitating demographic expansionism.

As employed in historical or cultural studies, the frontier model has a long and varied development itself. While the frontier model arose more or less simultaneously in history (e.g. Turner 1920 [1893]) and geography (Ratzel 1895), it has only recently been employed in anthropology (e.g. Casagrande, Thompson, and Young 1964, Lewis 1977, South 1977). Its formulation by historians coincides with the closing of the American West to rapid settlement, the final conquest of the American Indians, the expansion of American political and economic interests abroad (cf. Spanish American War, 1897, Boxer Rebellion in China, 1900). And perhaps it coincides with the beginning of the end of the British Empire (e.g. Boer War 1899–1902). Generally speaking, American historians and historical archaeologists have tended to view the frontier from the perspective of a dominant, expanding culture. Paraphrasing Lewis (1977), the frontier has thus been defined as a geographical expanse in which the outer edge of an expanding culture adapts to new physical and cultural environments (see Mitchell 1978: 67, 72–4):

Because of the nature of expansion, the frontier is both spatially and temporally impermanent. It is the zone of transition within which the "wilderness" is occupied and "civilized." . . . because the process of colonization is repetitive in nature, it is also evolutionary in the sense that the sequential pattern of change

that once occurred in the center of a newly settled frontier region tends to be repeated along its periphery as settlement within the region expands.

[Lewis 1977: 153]

Historically, the word “frontier” implied what it suggests etymologically, that is, that which is “in front.” The frontier was not an abstract term or line; on the contrary, it designated an area which was part of a whole, specifically that part which was ahead of the hinterland.

[Kristof 1959: 269]

Because of its expansive nature, the frontier for historians is something that lives, moves geographically, and eventually dies (Webb 1952: 2).

Geographers, in contrast, have tended to view frontiers as physiographic and cultural zones of transition. According to Ratzel, a frontier often consists of “three zones, two of which were the periphery of adjoining states, and the third a central zone where there was a mingling of the two states” (Prescott 1965: 10). For anthropology, a frontier would manifest a unique cultural constellation that combines traditions from its opposite sides (see Watson, LeBlanc and Redman 1971). Frontiers are thus “distinct regions of transition; while it is admitted that all regions are transitional, it is only when the transitional feature is the dominant characteristic that the region is a true frontier” (Fawcett 1918, cited in Prescott 1965: 15). More or less permanent frontiers tend to arise in zones of sharp physiographic demarcation. This has been particularly notable when expanding cultures halt upon reaching a new environment – for example, when an agricultural society encounters desert or steep mountains. Lattimore (1962) argues that Chinese civilization, based on irrigation agriculture, could not be extended north into Mongolia simply for profound climatological reasons. There, a cultural frontier developed in the steppes and deserts of Mongolia between the Eurasian, Russian and Chinese culture areas. Deserts, says Prescott (1965: 13), “formed the best defensive frontiers . . . but were often the habitat of mobile and warlike tribes who plagued the surrounding semi-agricultural tribes.” As Davies (1932: 179) has pointed out, “So long as hungry tribesmen inhabit barren and almost waterless hills, which command open fertile plains, so long will they resort to plundering incursions in order to obtain the necessities of life.”

To link the frontier and segmentary lineage models, it can be argued that segmentary lineage organization tends to develop along broad ethnic frontiers with less marked environmental change, so that one population can readily expand into the territory of another. This seems to have been the case in southern Mesoamerica, where Mexican populations invaded the less densely populated Maya Gulf borderlands during the A.D. 800s, triggering segmentary lineage adaptation among the Chontal Maya (Table 1.1). The northern frontier of Mesoamerica, giving way to desert, was more environmentally demarcated.

Both views of the frontier seem to fit the Postclassic frontiers of southern Mesoamerica. On the one hand, in each situation, a more or less homogeneous culture emerged in a transitional zone between two culture areas in which “the maximum difference is to be sought near the center of gravity of each and not at the frontier where they meet” (Lattimore 1962: 470). On the other hand, the cultural flow was overwhelmingly west to east. Thus, the chapters of this study are organized in three sequential frontiers.

Part I deals with the original Gulf frontier, Part II with the highland frontier where the Quichean lineages settled, and Part III with the eastern frontier, denoting the very easternmost edges of Postclassic southern Mesoamerica. A fourth part, concluding, compares these three frontiers.

This study is thereby organized chronologically and developmentally, beginning with the Gulf frontier homeland during the Epiclassic and then following the peoples who leapfrogged to new secondary and even tertiary frontiers. Following Webb (1973), the Epiclassic is that transitional period, from approximately A.D. 750 till the A.D. early 900s, when what came to be Postclassic cultural patterns, first took form. Within Part I, Chapter 2 presents the historical case, as recalled by the natives, for their ancestral homeland in and about Acalan. Their name for themselves in Acalan, as well as in certain circumstances in new territories, was “Amak Tun,” translated “dispersed lineages of the tun” (or solar calendar, represented as a stone). A case is put forth that each of these widely scattered peripatetic communities was organized according to ten salient segmentary lineage behavioral principles. From a contrastive nonhistoric trade modeling approach, a competing Middle Classic model is summarized as a standard for comparison. It argues for *in situ* development of the Quiché’s Mexican-like features through trading. This, of course, exposes the age-old nerve in archaeology of intrusion versus trade contact. Chapter 3 offers a case that the cult of the feathered serpent became interdigitated with the solar tun (katun), as an ideological mechanism for uniting the erstwhile autonomy-gravitating lineages, when an entourage of migratory Toltec intermarried with Chontal. This enjoyment provided the genealogical basis for the claim by Chontal descendants in Yucatan and Guatemala for actual descent from the Toltec of Tula at about the beginning of the Early Postclassic period. Chapter 4 examines Acalan’s settlement dichotomy between the small warrior-lineage sites forming an outer ring in the hills and larger more propitiously situated centers. This seems to have provided a proxemic “blueprint” for the settlement dichotomy in Guatemala between the Quiché and Cakchiquel pioneer warrior mountaintop sites, and the prestigious acropolis centers in the river valleys. A similar settlement polarity appeared in Naco and Chiapas, although it seems more inferential elsewhere.

In Part II on highland Guatemala, Chapter 5 examines the katun (tun) focused confederacies of the Early Postclassic immigrants, in which outlying warrior lineages (like the Quiché and Cakchiquel) were variously linked to different tun (acropolis) centers. This chapter is a continuation of archaeological comparisons made earlier (Fox 1980) between the highland radial-temple (acropolis) centers, and lowland counterparts like Mayapan and Chichen Itza. Not surprisingly, in both regions the same Xiu family were prominent. Chapter 6 traces the point-by-point development of the Quiché segmentary state during the Late Postclassic, as the Quiché conquered and colonized new territories according to the color-coded four cardinal directions of the tun. This new social organizational analysis follows the chronological sequence outlined in Fox (1977). The Quiché colonies expanded outwards from their original community in concentric circles, with their colonies’ sizes and degree of lineage ranking fairly proportional to distance from their home community, Greater Utatlan. Time and again we see similar settlement configuration established for securing new territories by tightly nucleated Quiché

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Table 1.1. *Communities established by Chontal-descended peoples across southern Mesoamerica*

	Gulf Frontier	Highland Guatemala	Chiapas	Naco	Peten Lakes/ Pasión	Yucatan
Epiclassic period	Puuc-like Chontal (Los Guarixes) Chontal (infusion of Olmeca, Tolteca)	Puuc-like settlements in Río Negro and Río Motagua Valleys (e.g., Chalchitan) (Los Encuentros)			Seibal (Bayal phase)	Puuc
Early Postclassic period	Acalan Xicalango Champton	Acropolis centers: (i.e., Chutinamit-Sacapulas, Tenam-Aguacatan) Warriors sites: Chujuyup Grouping for Quiché: Jakawitz, Uquin Cat, Amak Tam Tzameneb (Rabinal) Paraxone (Cakchiquel)	Nachan Tzequil	facet I	LakeMacanche (e.g. Muralla de Leon)	Chichen Itza
Late Postclassic period	Acalan Champton	Greater Utatlan (Quiché State) Iximche (Cakchiquel State)	Chiapas State	facet III	Tayasal Yalain	Mayapan, 12–14 petty states (cf. San Gervasio, Cozumel; Tulum)

warrior lineages on mountaintops overlooking broad agriculturally fertile plains. This, recalls the pattern in Acalan and the first one established by the immigrant Quiché upon entry into the Guatemalan highlands.

Part III looks at the eastern frontier of Mesoamerica as the last of the Postclassic Chontal-induced Mexican/Mayan frontiers to take form. Chapter 7 looks at development of a homogeneous cultural pattern among diverse ethnic peoples across the frontier zone, and various quantitative measures of lineage ranking and degrees of political centralization as a function of distance from the segmentary states. In this regard, the frontier culture area begins precisely at the edge of the Quiché and Cakchiquel states and moves beyond, where pronounced demographic movements were spawned by Quiché and Cakchiquel colonization. This is an expanded version of an earlier paper (Fox 1981). Chapter 8 looks at the much celebrated ballgame myth (the Third Creation) of the Quiché's *Popol Vuh* as an ideational counterpart to massing of dispersed segmentary lineages against foes lacking the solar (tun) ideology. As such, it is the over-arching myth of the forever advancing frontier.

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Excerpt

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PART I

Chontal segmentary lineage formation
within the Gulf frontier and diasporas
to Yucatan, Chiapas and Guatemala