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Introduction

Highland Maya Land Titles

The *Title of Totonicapán* was completed in 1554 as a land title written by surviving members of the K'iche' nobility, a branch of the Maya that dominated the highlands of western Guatemala prior to the arrival of the Spanish conquerors in 1524. Titles of this kind were relatively common for Maya communities in the Guatemalan highlands in the first century after the Spanish Conquest as a means of asserting land rights and privileges for its leaders. Such claims were often recognized by the Spanish Crown, particularly in the mid-sixteenth century when indigenous rulers were supported by the Dominican clergy who administered the K'iche' region of Guatemala (Sparks 2017, 214). It was in the interest of Spanish authorities to maintain a vigorous indigenous upper class with vassal lords to stabilize society, maintain control, and ensure the regular collection of taxes and tribute (Matsumoto 2017, 20). Yet Colonial-era highland Maya land titles, particularly the earliest ones such as the *Title of Totonicapán*, were not limited to elite claims for territorial boundaries, tribute rights, or status. They were often assertions of national identity, containing significant passages describing the creation of the world, the origin and migrations of their first ancestors, their religious beliefs, their relationship with the gods, their sociopolitical organization, and the source—often supernatural—of their right to rule. The *Title of Totonicapán* is among the richest of the highland Maya texts in this kind of cultural detail, far exceeding the background that would have been necessary to assert land claims in court. Matsumoto (6) suggests that documents such as the *Title of Totonicapán* may never have played a significant role in Spanish courts,

particularly considering the “ambiguous territorial boundaries and inexact measurements they often cited in defining indigenous land claims.” Indeed, the *Title of Totonicapán* contains numerous passages that show reverence for the ancient gods and unapologetic descriptions of ceremonial practices such as human sacrifice and bloodletting that would have offended Spanish authorities. This suggests that the document may have been written primarily for use by the authors’ own indigenous community.

The *Title of Totonicapán* was written in the K’iche’ language utilizing a modified Latin script developed by Spanish missionaries soon after the Conquest (see pp. 49–52). As an official document, it was duly signed by the ruling lords of all three major K’iche’ lineages—the Kaweqib’, Nijayib’, and Ajaw K’iche’—as a testament to its veracity. The names of the signatories appear at the end of the document, although being a later copy, it does not display any actual signatures (p. 185–186). The final page of the document declares that it is the “Act” of K’iq’ab’ Nima Yax, the ruler of Chuwi’ Miq’ina’, an important fortified citadel also known by its Tlaxcalan name of Totonicapán.¹ K’iq’ab’ Nima Yax was the K’iche’ nobleman who conquered the Totonicapán region on behalf of the ruling K’iche’ lords in the mid-fifteenth century (pp. 173–177). He would have long since died, but the document served as a legal land title based on right of conquest.

The composition of the Totonicapán document most likely took place slightly before that of the *Popol Vuh*, the more famous contemporary K’iche’ text, which is dated to approximately 1554–1558 (see figure 1). Like the *Popol Vuh*, the *Title of Totonicapán* is written in the elevated court language of the Early Colonial period and eloquently describes the mythic origins and history of the K’iche’ people. For the most part, the *Title of Totonicapán* agrees with the *Popol Vuh*’s version of K’iche’ history and cosmology, providing a complementary account that attests traditions that must have been widely known and understood. But in many instances, the Totonicapán document is richer in detail and departs from the *Popol Vuh*’s more cursory description of history, genealogy, and political organization. In other instances, it contradicts assertions made by the authors of the *Popol Vuh*, perhaps a reflection of internal dissent and jealousy between rival lineages within the K’iche’ hierarchy. It also contains significant passages of cosmology and history that do not appear in any other highland Maya text.

The authors of the *Title of Totonicapán* chose to begin their account with a lengthy description of Old Testament theology and history harmonized with their own uniquely Maya worldview. This section of the text is based to a large degree on

¹ Totonicapán is the name recognized by Spanish authorities in Guatemala. As with many major highland Maya cities, Chuwi’ Miq’ina’ was given the new name of Totonicapán by the Tlaxcalan allies of the Spaniards during the Conquest period.

ARE V XE OHER ESTE ES, EL PRINCIPIO DE LAS
 BIK varal quiche vbi. antiguas historias agiten el quiche.
 Varal xechic hankwi xchilca. Agui es erigir remas, y omperar en las
 kumbia vi oher bhi, vharibab. antiguas historias el, supinici, plog, y camien-
 vrenabab puch ranohol xban. so de lo lo lo que fue hecho en el pueblo de
 pahnaant quiche, ramacqui- el quiche, su pueblo de los indios quichees;
 che vinnac; qrecah xchicacac. y de aqui tomaremos su origen declarado, y
 vi vcah misapi, vcalahobiza- mani formado, y su ser relatado, la esconde-
 xic, vbiho xic puch xua xibol. dura, y a la dura por el formador, y cri-
 za quibab rumal hacol bital. ador: madre, y Padre que se llaman, han
 alom, gahelom. quib' han ah- apun vuchi. han ahpu vbi. saquinima hgi.
 pu vuchi. han ahpu vbi. za- tepou. qucumah: vgu xho. vgu xpallo (con-
 quinnac hgi, tepou qucumah. bres, a ahpu bres. y hgu xho. vbi ho xpallo, tan-
 vgu xho. vgu xpallo, ah ra- asin. un brader coyofo. blanco. pigafe. for-
 xalab, ah ra xalab chu xha- fuor se cubre bra. corazon de la laguna. ra-
 xic, xachib' xic, xach xho xic. raxon de el mar. elde el verde. raxek, el
 ra' xion. mamom xpi xiaoc. de la verde. h'icane sonlla modes. y san-
 xomucane. vbi, manganol chu- mon se or dicho, y habido de a quella. du-
 gaenol. camul xrom, camul- ola, y abuelo. q'sella maban. xpi xiaoc, y
 mamom xchupha xic pa quiche. xomucane. nombro propicio. en para do-
 2. Bih. ha xquib' hoh. ranohol. rap, y cubridores adveser abuela, y del
 raq x quibab chie chiga qail. vezos abuelo son dichos en las historias. qui-
 galem, za quil bhi vae xchi- chees. q' comunica n todo con las his-
 ca xchic. chupan chit vga- orar dos pueros en el estado de la claridad
 bal. Dico pa chris hano il chie. y en la palabra. de claridad. y esto ori-
 xchiquale xak. rumal maha- uiremos. ya en la ley. de Dios, en la cri-
 bi chie. il bal re papa vuk. il- hianidad, lo sacaron a pui. y a na ay li-
 bal qac. pelenae huca palo. bro. comur, original donde venlo. de la
 vbiho xic. camuhibal il bal q- ohapatz de el mar es venlo donde vea
 gaslen. chupha xic. go nabe. visto; y en dicho. su ser en la vida. no es
 vuhil. p'hor xibem puch. za. obicundad. con la m'adura. de la clari-
 oval vuch. il bal re. bital re. vida. antigua mon te aia libro original
 min xper xic, vbiho xic puch. q' se orculo antigua mente; pino q' es-
 ta chigui. bhi ranohol cak. ta orculo. alq' lo mira, y alq' lo piensa
 vlen, vcah huc xic, vcah. grande era venida, y su ser en el estado.
 xacuh xic. xchic xic, vcah. q' se acabo de formar. todo el ciclo, y la
 che xio, vme h' cana xic, vme. honra, su ser en el estado, su ser repa-
 camaxic vpacab, vpa v'lon. en cuahio partes, su ser seña la do, su ser
 cak huc, cak xic. cu h' chupha. a m'adura de los orfices, su ser medida a
 xic rumal m' h'acol bital. mecatas, orcuor d'is, y su ser es bra de la
 vchach, vcah au gaslen. vi- cuerda en objeto, y en la tierra; y en di-
 na quirem, abanoh, quila- cho de cuahio orquinas, y cuahio la des-
 mel, alay xech, quila x- por el formador, y criador. su b' h' y en Pl.
 resh. za quil. ama quil, za- de la vida. y de la creacion. q' da r'api-
 quil. ah, za quil. gahol, ah- p'ion, y remello, pan'ida, y cu' i' d'ador, de
 biq, ahnaoh. ch'ic xch ranohol. la paz. claridad de los b' h' ser, ponia de q' en-

Figure 1. Initial page of the Popol Vuh. Courtesy, Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.

a contemporary treatise, the first volume of the *Theologia Indorum*, composed in K'iche' between 1551 and 1553 by a Dominican priest named Domingo de Vico in collaboration with K'iche' advisers (Carmack and Mondloch 1983, 13; Sparks 2019, 149, 239). But the Totonicapán version is replete with variants that modify, alter, and even directly contradict Vico's writings. The *Title of Totonicapán*, the *Theologia Indorum*, and the *Popol Vuh* were all written within a few brief years of each other and can best be seen as literary arguments among Maya and Spanish Christian intellectuals with very different beliefs regarding the nature of deity and how the world of the sacred interacts with that of humankind.

Unlike the *Popol Vuh*, which was written anonymously and apparently not intended for non-Maya eyes (Christenson 2007, 64), the *Title of Totonicapán* was written as a legal document and signed by the most important K'iche' rulers of the time. The latter portion of the text focuses on the boundaries of the K'iche' realm, particularly those established by K'iq'ab' Nima Yax, the K'iche' lord who conquered the Totonicapán valley in the mid-fifteenth century (figure 2).

We do not know whether the Totonicapán document was used in any specific court case in the Early Colonial period; however, the principal signatory, Don Juan de Rojas, was involved in a land dispute in 1550 in which he asserted his right to collect tribute from merchants in the Q'umarkaj area based on the claim that he was the rightful lord of that region (Lutz 1994, 25–26, n. 28). This is just the type of legal claim for which a land title would have been valuable. In his mature years as a *cacique* (an indigenous ruler), he collected tribute, carried out censuses, provided labor to his Spanish overlords, enforced Christian church attendance and instruction, and acted as the principal judge in local disputes (Carmack 1981, 313). He would have come into frequent contact with both secular and ecclesiastical Spanish authorities. According to Ximénez, Juan de Rojas was given a special hall at the Royal Palace of Guatemala next to the king's representative. Here, he administered the affairs of the Maya as the vassal lord of the Spaniards (Ximénez 1929–1931, I.xxviii.79). I think it is highly probable that Rojas would have used the Totonicapán document as a testament to his territorial and sovereignty rights not only before Spanish officials but in disputes with fellow highland Maya as well. He was the principal signatory of the document and no doubt recognized its potential benefits as a bolster to his own authority based on historical precedent.

If the *Title of Totonicapán* was ever used to defend land and tribute claims in Spanish courts, the authors of the text would have had to walk a very fine line. To assert territorial rights and privileges, Pre-Columbian history and practices had to be laid out to document the K'iche' elite's right to rule. At the same time, descriptions of the ancient gods and ceremonialism of their Pre-Columbian ancestors, which were so closely woven into the fabric of their society, had to be handled



Figure 2. The valley of Totoncapán. The modern city can be seen in the distance.

cautiously so as not to offend the sensibilities of their Christian overlords or raise questions concerning their conversion to the new faith. This inevitably led to contradictions where the authors tried to express reverence for their ancestors and at the same time condemn them for their idolatry should the document ever be seen by Spanish authorities. In the following passage, the progenitors of the K'iche' people are described as powerful, wise, and honorable:

Then the enchanted people contemplated their journey. From far away they arrived in their obscurity in the sky and on the land. There are none to equal them. They saw everything beneath the sky. They were great sages. They led all of the Seven Nations as well as the tribes. (p. 92–93)

The authors used the term *nawal winaq* (“enchanted, wondrous, magical, or miraculous people”) to describe the first K'iche' ancestors. Previously, they had used the same term *nawal* to describe the power of God to create the world and to perform miracles in Egypt (p. 81, n. 118). There is no hint of condemnation in this description. On the contrary, their very natures bear a patina of sanctity otherwise ascribed to the Christian God, then only recently introduced among the K'iche' following the Spanish invasion of their lands.

Tulan, the mythic place of origin for K'iche' power and authority, is at times equated with the Paradisiacal Garden of Eden (p. 89) and at other times with Egypt

or Babylonia, thus identifying the ancient K'iche' with the Israelites fleeing bondage in the time of Moses (pp. 83, n. 123; 89, n. 173) or returning to the Promised Land from exile in Babylon (pp. 88, 184). In this example, the journey from Tulan is described as sanctioned by God himself, linking the Christian deity with the Pre-Columbian creator gods Tz'aqol and B'itol:

Surely this was the love of God for them because there was only one, Tz'aqol B'itol, that they called upon in the center of the sky and the earth they say. (p. 97)

Tz'aqol ("Framer") and B'itol ("Shaper") are paired creator deities in ancient K'iche' tradition. In other indigenous K'iche' texts, they are listed as two among many Pre-Columbian Maya deities venerated by the K'iche' (Christenson 2007, 60–63; Maxwell and Hill 2006, 11–12). In the *Popol Vuh*, they are described as the first of several luminous beings who initiated the creation of the world:

All alone are Tz'aqol [Framer] and B'itol [Shaper], Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent, They Who Have Borne Children and They Who Have Begotten Sons. Luminous they are in the water, wrapped in quetzal feathers and cotinga feathers. Thus they are called Quetzal Serpent. In their essence, they are great sages, great possessors of knowledge. (Christenson 2007, 68–69)

Despite the nature of Tz'aqol and B'itol as a pair of deities, one female and the other male, Domingo de Vico and other Dominican missionaries used their names as equivalents for the one Christian God, perhaps in an effort to make the newly introduced deity more understandable to the K'iche' (Sparks 2017, 13, 112; 2019, 155). On this point the Dominicans differed sharply from the Franciscan order, which insisted that the Spanish word Dios ("God") should be used to avoid the taint of Pre-Columbian religious practices. In the *Theologia Indorum*, composed by the Dominican priest Domingo de Vico, Tz'aqol B'itol are frequently equated with God as the only true deity: *xa tuqel tçakol bitol Dios nimahau ubi* ("merely alone Tz'akol B'itol are God, Great Lord is his name") (Vico 1605 [1553], folio 98r); *xahutçakol bitol. kachuch kakahau. xbano cah xbano vleu* ("only one, Tz'aqol B'itol, our mother and our father, made the heavens and made the earth") (folio 168r).

The K'iche' Maya authors of the *Title of Totonicapán* are less consistent in their references to Tz'aqol and B'itol. The passage cited above is the last appearance of Tz'aqol B'itol in the text as monotheistic. After this, the authors transition toward a more consistently indigenous view of K'iche' history, and Tz'aqol and B'itol appear as two separate deities alongside other indigenous gods (see pp. 125, 140).

In contrast to this positive view of their ancestors and gods, in other sections the authors of the *Title of Totonicapán* describe their forebears as idolators and sinners justly condemned for their excesses (pp. 86, 88, 143). Immediately after describing

their departure from Tulan, they felt it necessary to add that their ancestors were condemned for worshipping the ancient gods:

It was then that they festered in lies. They spoke to the sun and to the moon. They called the one “Young Boy,” and they called the other “Maiden.” Junajpu they called the sun; Xb’alankej was called the moon by them. “Cigars of K’iq’ab” the stars were called. (p. 91)

The *Title of Totonicapán* claims territorial rights based on right of conquest, and much of the latter part of the text describes the various campaigns made by the K’iche’, particularly in the valley of Totonicapán (pp. 168–177). Again, this presents a dilemma. The authors must accurately document these wars of conquest to establish their claims, but they also wish to convey to the Spanish authorities that they are now opposed to war and are a peaceful people. Perhaps this explains why the military campaigns that began soon after their ancestors’ arrival from Tulan are preceded by a reminder that they were also God’s chosen people, that war was wrong, and God justly punished them for it:

These, therefore, are our roots, our existence, our journey here from the the place where the sun emerges.

Hear ye therefore, give heed to me, and I shall declare it to you all. It was in war that they were lost, they, our grandfathers and our fathers. We are their grandsons, the sons of Adam and Eve, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was because they forgot their God. Therefore, they were abandoned by God, the Great Lord. (p. 87–88)

There are no claims of descent from biblical figures in any of the more traditional texts such as the *Popol Vuh*, the *Annals of the Kaqchikels*, or the *Titulo K’oyoy*. A few early Spanish missionaries taught this idea as an aid to their evangelization efforts, including Father Domingo de Vico. In chapter 101 of the *Theologia Indorum*, Vico (1605 [1553], folio 168r) writes, *ahisrael yx petinak ui yxcamic umam vqahol Abram. Ysaac. Jacob* (“you are Israelites, you have come; this day you are the grandsons and the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”), specifically descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel.

No doubt some Maya, including the authors of this section of the *Title of Totonicapán*, saw the claim that they were descendents of Israel as a means of avoiding persecution during the post-Conquest period or of demonstrating the sincerity of their conversion to Christianity. But subsequent to the passage cited above, the wars waged by the K’iche’ in the Guatemalan highlands are described as glorious and with no suggestion of condemnation, including the attendant practices of bloodletting, prayer to the ancient gods, veneration of Pre-Columbian deities and their images, and human sacrifice:

Armed, then, were the men in the buildings of the bloodletters and the sacrificers, they who were our grandfathers and our fathers; of we, the Kaweqib', the Nijayib', and the Ajaw K'iche'. Ik'i B'alam had died in his youth.

Tojil was the god of B'alam K'itze'. Awilix was the god of B'alam Aq'ab'. Jaqawitz was the god of Majukotaj. It was at K'wal Ab'aj that the Bundled Glory, which had come from the place where the sun emerges, was unbound on Jaqawitz. Glory and sovereignty came to be theirs over the Seven Nations and the tribes. (p. 104–105)

There is no evidence as to whether the *Title of Totonicapán* was actually used within the Spanish Colonial legal system in the sixteenth century. If it was, it would have been fascinating to be a fly on the wall of the court chambers to hear how this intricate dance of simultaneously condemning their ancestors and glorifying them played out.

The authors of the *Title of Totonicapán* chose to include mostly passages from the *Theologia* that focus on the creation of the world (pp. 61–69)—Adam and Eve as the first people (pp. 70–77), Moses as the founder of Israelite society (pp. 80–83), and the migration of the Israelites out of Egypt toward the Promised Land (pp. 84–89). This follows the highland Maya precedent of beginning major works of literature with the creative actions carried out by the ancient gods, the creation of the founders of the major K'iche' lineages, and their migration from their mythic origins in Tulan until they established their centers of power. The best example of this pattern is seen in the *Popol Vuh*, which begins with a lengthy account of the creation of the world (Christenson 2007, 59–90), the work of the gods in establishing the order of the seasons and the life cycle of humankind (91–191), the creation of the first human beings who founded K'iche' society and political power (192–208), and the migration from their mythic place of origin, Tulan, into the Guatemalan highlands (209–222).

The *Title of Totonicapán* follows this traditional highland Maya precedent, but repeated twice—first in a modified Christian version based on the *Theologia Indorum* and then again according to their own highland Maya traditions beginning on folio page 7r (p. 90). But unlike the *Theologia Indorum*, which was composed as a theological interpretation of the Bible, here the authors of the Totonicapán document use relevant elements of the *Theologia* to bolster their own claims of authority, extending back to the creation of the world. What mattered most was not to produce a facsimile of Catholic doctrine as taught to them by Father Vico and other Christian missionaries but to present the Christian version of the world's history in a way that would best resonate with uniquely Maya traditions. This is no doubt why the authors of the Totonicapán document claimed descent from biblical figures such as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and the exiled Israelites coming out of Babylon, interwoven with references to their own purely indigenous mythic sources of power—Tulan and its ruler Nakxik:

These then were their residences, their abodes, because of God, the Great Lord. These were the conquests of the Canaanites, the Hebrews, and the Israelites. Three, then, were their names: Israelites, Canaanites, and Hebrews they were called. They are our grandfathers and our fathers . . .

Within the Earthly Paradise we were framed and we were shaped by God, the Great Lord . . .

In this division of the word I shall speak of the establishment of lordship and the root as well of authority—the account of the Very Abundant Mountain, the Very Verdant Mountain. This was at Pa Sewan and Pa Tulan, as told in the writings of Pek, the writings of Sewan Tulan, as they said . . .

We are the grandsons, we are the sons, of the Israelites and of Saint Moses. From the lands of the Israelites departed our grandfathers and our fathers. They came from the place where the sun emerges, there in Babylonia. The powerful Lord Naxsik was the root of our ancestry, of our parentage. (pp. 87–92)

As direct descendants of the ancient chosen people of the Christian God, the K'iche' could claim co-inheritance with the Spanish Christians for God's divine favor and authority. The authors' choice to include the Christian version of the creation may be a genuine expression of their religious conversion, but it may also represent the appropriation of Christian doctrine to use as a weapon in defending their own indigenous rights and legitimacy as rulers. It allowed them to claim the religious underpinnings of Spanish domination and superiority as equally their own. This strategy was used in other areas of the Maya world as well. The indigenous authors of the various *Books of Chilam Balam* and the *Teabo Manuscript* used the creation account in Genesis to explain and validate the spiritual and political authority of their community leaders (Christensen 2016, 11–26). The relationship between the Maya and their Spanish-Christian overlords was complex and dynamic, a constant negotiation between resistance and conformity.

K'ICHE' HISTORY

The present population of K'iche' people in Guatemala who speak the language and maintain traditional clothing and customs to one degree or another is nearly 2 million, although many more have intermarried over the centuries with other Maya groups or with those of Spanish descent. Many have also emigrated to other countries, particularly Mexico, Belize, and the United States. They are the most numerous of the twenty-two major highland Maya groups in Guatemala, and in many communities they comprise the majority of the population. The K'iche' people live primarily in a series of market towns and smaller agricultural villages in the modern Guatemalan states of Quiché, Totonicapán, and Quetzaltenango.



Figure 3. K'iche' women in traditional dress, Totonicapán, 1977

Their homeland is some of the most beautiful country in the world, dominated by a range of high mountains, volcanoes, and steep-walled plateaus blanketed with green pine forests and watered by numerous rivers and waterfalls. Its high elevation keeps the climate comfortably cool in the summer, while its location in the tropics prevents the extreme cold temperatures usually associated with mountainous environments. Guatemala's boast of being the "Land of Eternal Spring" is no exaggeration.

Although the highland Maya have lived in this area for thousands of years, post-Conquest K'iche'an texts—including the *Title of Totonicapán*, the *Popol Vuh*, the *Annals of the Kaqchikels*, the Nijayib' documents, and the *Título K'oyoy*—are united in their assertion that the region came to be dominated by a militaristic confederation, led by the four progenitors of the principal K'iche' lineages. The first was B'alam K'itze', founder of the ruling Kaweq lineage; second was B'alam Aq'ab', founder of the Nijayib' lineage; and third was Majukotaj, founder of the Ajaw K'iche'. Together, these three lineages comprised the Nima K'iche' ("Great K'iche'"). The fourth progenitor was Ik'i B'alam who died in his youth and thus did not found a lineage. These four ancestors are described in the *Popol Vuh* as the first men created by the gods, endowed with great power and magical abilities:

It is said that they were merely given frame and shape. They had no mother. They had no father. They were merely lone men, as we would say. No woman gave them



Figure 4. Highlands above Cunén, Guatemala

birth. Nor were they begotten by the Framer or the Shaper, by She Who Has Borne Childen or He Who Has Begotten Sons. Their frame and shape were merely brought about by the miraculous power, and the spirit essence of the Framer and the Shaper, of She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons, of Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent . . . Perfect was their sight, and perfect was their knowledge of everything beneath the sky. (Christenson 2007, 197)

The *Title of Totonicapán* also describes the four K'iche' progenitors as wise and magical beings:

They did great wonders and demonstrations of strength. There they showed their stride, their miraculous power, and their spirit essence . . . Truly this was also the origin of the manifestation of glory and sovereignty by the K'iche' people before all of the warriors. Their greatness came forth. (pp. 108–109)

Despite their miraculous power, the first ancestors of the K'iche' were described as poor, pitifully exposed to the elements, and bordering on starvation before they arrived in the Guatemalan highlands:

When they came here they were uncovered. They were naked when they came. They only had their spears and their leafy tunics when they arrived at the shore of the sea . . . There was no food, no water. They would merely sniff the heads of their staffs to console their hearts. (p. 96–97)

The *Title of Totonicapán* and other highland Maya texts claim that the first ancestors of the K'iche' people received their authority to rule at a great city called Tulan, located "across the sea" in the East where the sun emerges (pp. 90, 93–96). Tulan is a Nahuatl word, the language of central Mexico, meaning "place of reeds." According to these texts, Tulan was ruled by a king called Nakxit (or Nakxik in the *Title of Totonicapán*) (p. 92, n. 185). In the *Popol Vuh*, Nakxit gave the four K'iche' progenitors their gods and their political legitimacy:

Then they passed over the sea, arriving there in the East. They went there to receive their lordship. This, then, is the name of the lord, the lord of the East, when they arrived: Then they arrived before the face of the lord, whose name was Nakxit. He was the only judge over a great dominion. He then gave to them the signs and symbols of their lordship. (Christenson 2007, 256–257)

The *Annals of the Kaqchikels* give a similar description:

They [the K'iche'an progenitors] came before Mevac and Naxxit, who was a great king . . . Then they dressed them, they pierced their noses, and they gave them their offices and the flowers called *Cinpual*. Truly he made himself beloved by all the warriors. And turning to all of them, the Lord Naxxit said: "Climb up to these columns of stone, enter into my house. I will give you sovereignty." (Recinos and Goetz 1953, 64–65; see also Maxwell and Hill 2006, 67–69)

The name Nakxit is derived from the Nahuatl words *nawi* ("four") and *ikxit* ("foot") (Campbell 1983, 84), perhaps referring to the extent of his power, extending to the four cardinal directions of the earth. Nakxit is also one of the titles for the feathered serpent deity known as Kukulcan in the Maya lowlands and as Quetzalcoatl in central Mexico (Recinos and Goetz 1950, 207, n. 3; Roys 1967, 83; Edmonson 1982 16, n. 220; Nicholson 2001, 228). Nakxit was apparently one of the titles used by Maya rulers at both Chichen Itza and Mayapan, indicating their attempts to claim central Mexican authority as an important component of their own right to rule (Nicholson 2001, 228–229).

Tulan is a common term for Mexican-influenced centers of power. It is therefore difficult to identify which Tulan the K'iche' saw as the origin of their authority, although it may have been linked to one of the major lowland Maya centers on the Yucatán Peninsula (Carmack 1981, 481; Akkeren 2003). Chichen Itza or its successor, Mayapan, are good possibilities for this Tulan.

Tulan may have been an actual location that held prestige as a pilgrimage center for Maya groups aspiring to political power at a time of social unrest, but it may also have been a purely mythic place of origin. Tulan's location "across the sea" where "the sun emerges" places it within the realm of otherworldly time and space.



Figure 5. View of the Castillo, Chichen Itza



Figure 6. View of Mayapan

Frauke Sachse (2008; Sachse and Christenson 2005) has written convincingly that the description of Tulan is consistent with metaphors for supernatural places of origin that appear throughout Mesoamerica. Even Carmack (1981, 44), who asserts that at least some aspects of the migration stories in K'iche' texts are historical,

cautions that highland Maya migration tales often “turn out to be myths that serve to rationalize the occupation of a territory or a connection with some prestigious authority source.” In the *Title of Totonicapán* and other highland Maya texts, “dawn” and the “emergence of the sun” are not merely celestial events but rather are indicative of the establishment of political sovereignty (Chinchilla Mazariegos 2013, 694; Christenson 2016, 116–127; Cojti Ren 2021). Thus the “first” dawn for the K’iche’ took place atop the mountain Jaqawitz, where they had established their fortified citadel after defeating their enemies in the region (see pp. 123–127). Immediately following this first dawn of the sun, the ancestors of the K’iche’ address their children, describing the event in terms of political and military power:

You, our sons, you have achieved completion. You have multiplied. Receive then this Bundled Glory. Watch over and keep it. We have not yet found our mountain place. You will achieve glory and sovereignty there and then you will open this as a sign of your lordship. It came from the place where the sun emerges. You will engender the [titles of rulership] Ajpop, Ajpop K’amja, and Q’alel Atzij Winaq. You will attain glory; sovereignty will come to be. (p. 128)

Carmack (1981, 46–48, 121–123) suggests that the founders of the K’iche’ ruling lineages first established their centers of power in highland Guatemala about the time of Chichen Itza’s collapse, which Yucatec Maya histories date around 1220–1225 CE. More recent archaeological evidence suggests that the final downfall of Chichen Itza was preceded by a long period of decline after the tenth century (Morley et al. 1983, 167; Schele and Mathews 1998, 197–255; Akkeren 2000, 314–315), although it may have maintained its prestige as a pilgrimage center for many centuries afterward. Chichen Itza had been the dominant force in the lowland Maya world. Its collapse disrupted the political alliances and interregional trade in the area, resulting in the displacement of numerous groups of people seeking new power bases and economic opportunities (Fox 1978, 1–2). Many of these groups claimed authority based on Mexican-influenced symbols of power and prestige (Roys 1967, 88–98; Schele and Mathews 1998). It is possible that elements of what would become the K’iche’ and related highland Maya groups were part of this human wave.

Archaeologically, there is evidence in the K’iche’ region of architectural and cultural changes that may correspond to the apex of this “migration” during the transition between the Early and Late Postclassic phase, ca. 1200 CE (Rands and Smith 1965; Fox 1978, 270–275; Carmack 1981, 48–49). At this time, many of the most important Maya ruling lineages in the region were heavily influenced by ideas from beyond their borders, particularly the people of the Maya lowlands to the north and east and Nahuatl speakers from Mexico. According to Bernardino de Sahagún

(1950–1963, X.170), a Spanish priest who worked among the Mexica soon after the Spanish Conquest, the lowland Maya area was known as Nonoualcate (“Land of the Dumb”) because it was occupied by non-Nahuatl speakers, although he acknowledged that many could speak Nahuatl as a second language.

The highland Maya in particular remembered the legendary Toltecs, the ruling class of central Mexico in the Early Postclassic period, as the greatest artists and sages. The *Popol Vuh* claims that the divine creators who formed the first ancestors of the K’iche’ were *Aj Toltecat* (“Toltecs”) (Christenson 2007, 80, n. 102) and emphasized that the K’iche’ people were “brothers” with the Yaki, the K’iche’ term for groups of Mexican descent who spoke Nahuatl (231). The *Popol Vuh* goes as far as to say that the principal god of the K’iche’, Tojil, was equivalent to the Mexican god Quetzalcoatl (Nahuatl: “Feathered Serpent”) (231). By the time of the Spanish Invasion, the K’iche’ had allied themselves with a number of Nahuatl-speaking Yaki groups along the Pacific Coast who established military outposts to guard the southwestern borders of K’iche’ territory (pp. 105, n. 507; 180, n. 687; 182, n. 690).

This affinity for foreign Mexican culture helps explain the numerous Nahuatl loanwords in the *Title of Totonicapán* and other highland Maya texts (Carmack and Mondloch 1983, 17–18; Campbell 1970, 8). These include personal names, toponyms, and objects linked to political power and authority, reflective of the prestige of Mexican and Mexican-influenced institutions in the eyes of the K’iche’ hierarchy. At least twenty-seven such loanwords from the Nahuatl language appear in the *Totonicapán* text. For example, the K’iche’ used the word *tepew* for “sovereignty,” derived from the Nahuatl term *tepehualiztli* (“to conquer; to cast down”) (see p. 105, n. 247). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the K’iche’ could speak Nahuatl fluently. The Nahuatl loanwords that appear in the *Title of Totonicapán* and other early K’iche’ texts are heavily “Mayanized,” altering spelling to conform to the K’iche’ language. The authors of the *Popol Vuh* acknowledge that after they left Tulán, they could no longer speak the language of the Yaquis, their name for Nahuatl speakers:

Then all the nations entered therein—the Rabinals, the Cakchiquels, and the Ah Tziquinahas, along with the Yaqui people, as they are called today. It was there that the languages of the nations were changed. Their languages came to be different. They did not hear each other clearly when they came from Tulán, thus they split apart. (Christenson 2007, 213; see also 230–231)

In a later passage from the *Popol Vuh*, the founders of the K’iche’ hegemony lamented that they had become separated from their Yaqui “brothers”:

“We were separated there at Tulán Zuyva. We left them to come here. But we were complete before we came here.”

This they said among themselves when they remembered their older brothers and their younger brothers, the Yaqui people. These dawned there in Mexico, as it is called today. (Christenson 2007, 230–231)

As described in the *Title of Totonicapán*, the K'iche' forefathers were gradually able to dominate most of western Guatemala and set up their own militaristic kingdom that ultimately extended from the Pacific Coast in the west to the borders of the Petén rainforest in the east. K'iche' accounts of a simultaneous mass migration of all the major K'iche'an lineage groups into the Guatemalan highlands should not be taken literally. Rather, this was more likely a slow process carried out over a period of several centuries involving a complex series of historical and social interactions (Carmack 1981, 43–74). Indeed, many of these lineages had always lived in the highlands, although the symbols of their authority to exercise military or political authority during the Late Postclassic period may have been obtained from outside centers of power, exemplified by the legendary Tulan. The confederation of people known as the K'iche' was more likely a complex and linguistically diverse group of lineages composed of native highland Maya, Mexicanized clans from nearby Pacific Coastal areas, and immigrants from the Maya lowlands (Akkeren 2000). The interrelationship between these groups was dynamic and changed significantly over time.

The *Title of Totonicapán* does not contain what we might call “objective history” (if such a thing is possible). It is instead a collection of traditions, based in part in historical fact and in part on mythic interpretation. It describes the rise to power of their ancestral lineages, specifically that of the ruling Kaweq lineage of the K'iche' who came to dominate the highland Maya region in the centuries prior to the Spanish Conquest. By ca. 1250 CE, the K'iche' confederation under the leadership of the Kaweq lineage had established strongholds within the central and western highlands of Guatemala, slowly expanding their territory by means of conquest and strategic alliances. By ca. 1450, Lord K'iq'ab' had extended K'iche' control throughout the highlands as well as the Pacific Coast near the present-day border with Chiapas.

Soon after K'iq'ab's successes in a series of campaigns described in detail in the *Title of Totonicapán*, K'iche' control of its newly won territories began to weaken. During the annual rites honoring the god Tojil at the K'iche' capital Q'umarkaj (ca. 1470), an attempted coup directed at K'iq'ab was carried out by rebel K'iche' factions including two of K'iq'ab's sons, supported by the Ajtz'ikinaja and other rival lineages (Recinos and Goetz 1953, 94–97; Maxwell and Hill 2006, 166–180). Although K'iq'ab survived, the incident severely weakened the K'iche' and inaugurated a prolonged series of disastrous wars. The Kaqchikel, who had been allied with the K'iche' for generations, broke away and established a new center at Iximche'.



Figure 7. The site of Iximché'

The ensuing conflict involved nearly all the highland Maya in a tangled web of rapidly shifting alliances and betrayals.

Weakened by decades of internecine conflict, plague, and unusually poor harvests and drought, the kingdoms of highland Guatemala were reduced to a shadow of their former strength; this was the state of affairs the Spanish invaders encountered when they initiated a war of conquest against them in 1524. After the Mexica capital Tenochtitlan fell to Spanish forces led by Hernán Cortés in 1521, the major ruling lineages in the Guatemalan highlands sent envoys to Cortés offering fealty to the new ruler of Mexico. In his fourth letter to the Spanish Crown, Cortés wrote:

While returning from the province of Pánuco, in a city called Tuzapan, two Spaniards arrived whom I had sent with some of the natives of the city of Temixtitan and others from the province of Soconusco (which lies up the coast on the shores of the Southern Sea, toward where Pedro Arias de Ávila resides as your Highness's governor, two hundred leagues from this great city of Temixtitan) to two cities, called Uclaclán [Utatlan, the capital of the K'iche'] and Guatemala [the capital of the rival Kaqchikel], of which I had known for some while and which lie another seventy leagues from this province of

Soconusco. With these Spaniards there came some hundred natives of those cities sent by their lords to offer themselves as the subjects and vassals of Your Caesarean Majesty. I received them in Your Royal name and assured them that if they remained true to their promise they would be very well treated and honored by me and all my company in Your Highness's Royal name. (Cortés 1986, 301)

No doubt, both the K'iche' and the Kaqchikel sought to gain advantage in their ongoing war with one another by securing the alliance of the Spaniards following their military successes in central Mexico. Cortés came to doubt these envoys' sincerity, however. In the same letter, Cortés (1986, 301) wrote that soon after the arrival of the highland Maya envoys, he was informed that they had "not maintained that goodwill which they showed at first; on the contrary, they are said to have harassed those villages of Soconusco because they are our allies."

Once he had consolidated his victories in central Mexico, Cortés sent one of his captains, Pedro de Alvarado, to subdue any potential resistance from the Maya highlands and to claim the area for the Spanish Crown. In his first letter to Cortés, Alvarado (1979, 105, author translation) described Guatemala as "the wildest land and people that has ever been seen . . . We are so far from help that if Our Lady does not aid us, no one can." The K'iche' tried to arrange a hasty alliance with other highland Maya groups to meet the Spanish threat, but they were rebuffed. The Kaqchikel ultimately allied themselves to the Spaniards, whereas the Ajtz'ikinaja replied that they could defend themselves without help. Following a brief yet bloody battle in the valley of Quetzaltenango near present-day Olinstepeque (see figure 8), Alvarado entered the K'iche' capital of Q'umarkaj (also known by its Nahuatl name, Uatatlán) without resistance on March 7, 1524, at the invitation of the K'iche' rulers Oxib' Kej and B'elejeb' Tz'i'.

Once inside the city, Alvarado suspected a trap and ordered the arrest and execution of its lords:

As I knew them [the K'iche' lords] to have such ill will toward the service of His Majesty, and for the good and tranquility of the land, I burned them, and I commanded to be burned the town of Uatatlán to its foundations, for it was dangerous and strong . . . All they that were taken prisoners of war were branded and made slaves. (Alvarado 1979, 102–103)

The Kaqchikel version of this incident, as recorded in the *Annals of the Kaqchikels*, confirms that the K'iche' lords were burned: "Then [the Spaniards] went forth to the city of Gumarcaah, where they were received by the kings, the Ahpop and the Ahpop Qamahay, and the Quichés paid them tribute. Soon the kings were tortured by Tunatiuh. On the day 4 Qat [March 7, 1524] the kings Ahpop and Ahpop



Figure 8. Spanish battle against highland Maya. From Diego Muñoz Camargo, “Historia de Tlaxcala.” By permission of University of Glasgow Library, Archives Special Collections, Glasgow, Scotland.

Qamahay were burned by Tunatiuh [Alvarado]. The heart of Tunatiuh was without compassion for the people during the war” (Recinos and Goetz 1953, 120).

It is unclear whether Alvarado’s suspicion of treachery was well-founded; however, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas believed the K’iche’ lords were executed for failing to satisfy Alvarado’s demand for gold, which is rare in Guatemala: “Guiltless of other fault and without trial or sentence, he immediately ordered them to be burned alive. They killed all the others with lances and knives; they threw them to savage dogs, that tore them to pieces and ate them; and when they came across some lord, they accorded him the honour of burning in live flames. This butchery lasted about seven years from 1524 to 1531. From this may be judged what numbers of people they destroyed” (in MacNutt 1909, 352–353). This version of events is supported by the sixteenth-century account of the trip to Spain by Don Juan Cortés in 1557, in which Alvarado is accused of burning Don Juan’s grandfather because he “did not give him gold” (in Carrasco 1967, 253).

The authors of the *Popol Vuh* wrote that Alvarado hanged the K’iche’ rulers (Christenson 2007, 295). This “hanging” refers not to the execution of the lords, which was by flame, but rather to the torture and elicitation of confessions mentioned

by both Alvarado and the Kaqchikel document. Dennis E. Tedlock (1996, 334, n. 195) notes that the method for obtaining such confessions, according to the Spanish methods of the time, was to hang a prisoner by the wrists while inflicting various types of torture. Undoubtedly, this must have been done in a very public way to have impressed the authors of the *Popol Vuh* writing decades after the event.

It is estimated that there were approximately 2 million Maya inhabitants in Guatemala at the time of the Spanish Invasion. By 1595, less than a century later, the population had fallen to 133,280, a decline of more than 93 percent as a result of war, forced labor, and disease (Early 2006, 148–150). Fortunately, Alonso López de Cerrato, a successor to Pedro de Alvarado, was more tolerant and somewhat eased the burdens of the highland Maya as described in the *Annals of the Kaqchikels*:

During this year [1549] the Lord President Cerrado [*sic*] arrived . . . When he arrived, he condemned the Spaniards, he liberated the slaves and vassals of the Spaniards, he cut the taxes in two, he suspended forced labor and made the Spaniards pay all men, great and small. The Lord Cerrado truly alleviated the sufferings of the people. I myself saw him, oh, my sons! (Recinos and Goetz 1953, 137)

Christianity was formally established in Guatemala in 1534 under Bishop Francisco Marroquín, who sent priests with portable altars to the various highland towns and villages to baptize the Maya and destroy any remnants of “idolatry” and “paganism” that might have survived the Spanish Invasion. To aid in the process of conversion, missionary priests gathered the Maya into towns, each with a church to administer Catholic rites and instruct them in the Christian faith. Because Q’umarkaj had been all but destroyed during the war, the remnants of its population were moved to a new settlement nearby in ca. 1555, which the Spanish authorities called Santa Cruz del Quiché (“Holy Cross of the K’iche’”).

AUTHORSHIP OF THE *TITLE OF TOTONICAPÁN*

The *Title of Totonicapán* appears to have been composed by multiple authors. Although the core elements of K’iche’ history outlined in the text are consistent with other highland Maya documents, minor historical inconsistencies even within the document itself suggest that individuals with different perspectives and perhaps agendas contributed to the text as we now have it.

It is unclear if any of the lords who signed the *Title of Totonicapán* participated in the composition of the text or if they merely appended their names to verify its contents. The first of these signatories was Don Juan de Rojas, the son of Tekum Belejeb’ B’alam and the fourteenth successor to the founding ancestor, B’alam K’itze’, of the ruling Kaweq lineage. His father had been hanged in 1540 for sedition, although

by the time he signed the Totonicapán manuscript in 1554, Don Juan de Rojas had established the right to receive tribute payments and was recognized as the Ajpop, or ruling lord, of the K'iche'. He certainly would have been an authoritative source for genealogical information regarding the dynastic line of the Kaweq lineage. A certain Don Cristobal appears among the list of signatories who identifies himself as the *escribano cabildo* ("scribe of the town hall") (p. 186). He may have contributed to the contents of the document, although it is more likely that he only acted as scribe or counter-signed the document as an important town official, something like a notary.

Only one author is clearly identified by name in the *Title of Totonicapán* (see p. 117), Don Diego Reynoso, a K'iche' nobleman who accepted Christianity and worked closely with the Spanish clergy a decade or so after the destruction of the K'iche' capital of Q'umarkaj in 1524 (Akkeren 2011, 104–106; Sparks 2019, 100, 273). Reynoso was the son of Lajuj No'j, who served at the K'iche' royal court at Q'umarkaj (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 94–95). We do not know his indigenous Maya name. Diego Reynoso was the name he adopted following baptism. Bishop Marroquín brought Reynoso to the Spanish administrative capital of Santiago de Guatemala in 1539 where he was "taught to read and write" (Ximénez 1929, I. xl.119; Anonymous 1935 [ca. 1700], II.iv.191). We do not know how old he was at the time, however the anonymous Dominican author of the *Isagoge Histórica Apologética* (1700–1711) writes that he was already an *indio principal* (an indigenous leader) when he arrived in Santiago de Guatemala, so he must have been a person of sufficient maturity to warrant a position among the K'iche' nobility (Anonymous 1935 [ca. 1700], II.iv.191). He was undoubtedly born prior to the Spanish Conquest of 1524 and could recall the major ceremonial practices in his home city of Q'umarkaj, the royal capital, that he witnessed growing up. Reynoso at some point prior to the 1550s received the title Popol Winaq, an honorific given to members of the K'iche' governing council (Carmack and Mondloch 1983, 182).

Soon after he arrived at the Spanish capital under the auspices of Bishop Marroquín, Reynoso began to work with Roman Catholic missionaries from Spain, helping them compose religious tracts in the K'iche' language for use in their evangelization efforts. One of these is a now-lost manuscript on the Passion of Christ and a history of the Spanish Conquest that was quoted by both the anonymous author of the *Isagoge* as well as Francisco Ximénez more than a century later (Anonymous 1935 [ca. 1700], 2.4.191; Christenson 2016, 114).

In the section of the *Title of Totonicapán* written by Diego Reynoso, he describes the second generation of K'iche' lords making a pilgrimage to Tulan in the East to obtain tokens of power and sovereignty. Reynoso's contribution immediately follows an account of the same event by the principal authors of the text that differs significantly from his. In Reynoso's version, the twin sons of the first progenitor

B'alam K'itze', K'oka'ib' and K'okawib', returned to Tulan to obtain titles and symbols of authority that legitimized their right to rule. Reynoso's account is consistent with that of the *Popol Vuh* in that the two conducted themselves honorably, completed their journey to Tulan by crossing the sea in the East, and subsequently held the two highest positions of rulership with no question of their legitimacy:

Then they arrived before Lord Nakxik. They pleaded for their authority from Lord Nakxik. Thus they were given lordship by Lord Nakxik. And so K'oka'ib' and K'okawib' returned. Along with the Nim Ch'okoj Kaweq they arrived here. They delivered their authority. "It has been accomplished. We have done it. They have come; these signs of authority have come," they said. Then they delivered their authority. (p. 118)

Yet in the section immediately preceding Reynoso's account, the Totoncapán text contradicts this version of events:

And so they were sent, the two sons of B'alam K'itze'. These, then are the names of the two sons of B'alam K'itze', they who were given their task—K'oka'ib' and K'okawib'. They went to the place where the sun emerges to obtain lordship. One went under orders to the place where the sun emerges. The other went to the place where the sun sets. K'oka'ib' went to the place where the sun emerges. K'okawib' went to the place where the sun sets. K'oka'ib' quickly went straight to the place where the sun emerges. But he, K'okawib', merely returned from the sea. He did not cross the sea, but returned from Mexico. Then he diminished his heart. He lay in secret with his sister-in-law, the wife of K'oka'ib'. He engendered a son. Surely it was he, B'alam K'okawib'. (p. 113)

In this version of events, the illegitimate son of K'okawib' and the wife of K'oka'ib', B'alam K'onache, held the secondary office of Ajpop K'amja, a claim made both before (p. 116–117) and after (p. 154) the chapter composed by Diego Reynoso. In Diego Reynoso's account, there is no hint of K'okawib's adulterous affair, and it does not appear in the *Popol Vuh*. The *Popol Vuh* also insists that B'alam K'onache held the highest ruling office among the K'iche', that of Ajpop (Christenson 2007, 262). The *Popol Vuh* was written by court noblemen who would understandably have avoided any hint of scandal that would have challenged the legitimacy of one of their ancestors and their own right to rule.

It is curious that the same text would give two radically different versions of such an important event in the founding of K'iche' sovereignty. Reynoso's version of events may have been a deliberate attempt to "correct" the record and assert the legitimacy of the K'iche' rulers within the Kaweq lineage. This would explain Reynoso's pointed assertion that his was a truthful version of events, emphasizing that he would speak with "esteem" about the character of the persons involved,

including K'okawib'. Perhaps to establish his credentials as a qualified source, he also declared his own parentage and title as a Kaweq nobleman:

Hear ye the straightforward truth. The account shall be told. I shall speak with esteem of their natures. I shall write then, I Diego Reynoso, Popol Winaq, son of Laju No'j. We shall begin now the tale of their journey, they the three enchanted people. For a second time they went to the place where the sun emerges. These were their names—K'oka'ib', K'okawib', and K'o'akul Akutaq'. These went to the place where the sun emerges before the face of Lord Naxkik. They received their lordship. (p. 117)

Although we may never know, I suggest that Reynoso's account was inserted by officials at some later date to refute the assertions of the main body of the text, which taints the memory of one of their founding dynasts and may even question the legitimacy of that branch of the Kaweq lineage's right to rule. It is therefore clear that Diego Reynoso did not compose the entire document and probably only had a hand in the brief section that specifically bears his name. The authorship of the bulk of the text therefore remains a mystery.

There are good reasons to believe that the contemporary *Popol Vuh* was composed by anonymous noblemen from the three highest K'iche' lineages who held the title Nim Ch'okoj ("Great Steward"). The *Popol Vuh* refers to them as the "mothers of the word, and the fathers of the word" (Christenson 2007, 305). "The word" is used in the text to describe the *Popol Vuh* itself (59), indicating that the Nim Ch'okoj were most likely the authors of the book (D. Tedlock 1996, 56–57; Akkeren 2003; Christenson 2007, 36–37).

Nim Ch'okoj was an important position within the K'iche' nobility, charged with certain duties at royal banquets—perhaps including the recitation of tales dealing with the gods, heroes, and past rulers of the K'iche' nation. The *Title of Totonicapán* also singles out the Nim Ch'okoj for their importance. They are the only class of noblemen identified as having accompanied the brothers K'oka'ib' and K'okawib' in their pilgrimage to Tulan, and they are said to have received their authority directly from Naxkik himself (p. 118), an extraordinary claim for a titled class of noblemen that did not have sovereign power.

The Ximénez dictionary (1985 [1701], 201) glosses *chocol* as "to put in order or to seat someone." In the same dictionary, the related verbal form *chocola* is to "gather food or drink for consumption among many people" (201). In the Sáenz de Santa María (1940, 97) dictionary, the equivalent term *choqola* refers to a "popular banquet in which each one contributes 20 grains of cacao," and *choqolaaj* is to "invite people to a banquet or to community work." Ritual feasting is a major component of Maya ceremonialism as a symbol of unity between participants and their gods (Christenson 2010; see figure 9). The places where invited persons sit are determined



Figure 9. Oration at a ceremonial meal, Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, 2010

by their position within the social hierarchy. This is why thrones and benches often function as a metaphor for the position of those who sit on them (see pp. 121-122, 135, 167, 169). The Nim Ch'okoj held important positions within the K'iche' hierarchy, organizing feasts and determining the seating order of invited dignitaries. In the *Popol Vuh*, they are described as "great," but in "a small way": "These three stewards [Nim Ch'okoj] gathered together as the givers of birth, the mothers of the word, and the fathers of the word. Great, in a small way, is the essence of these three stewards" (Christenson 2007, 305).

One of the signatories of the *Title of Totonicapán* identifies himself as Don Cristóbal Velasco, Nim Ch'okoj Kaweq (p. 186). This same Don Cristóbal Velasco was probably one of the unnamed authors of the *Popol Vuh*, specifically the Nim Chokoj of the ruling Kaweq lineage who held this title in the mid-sixteenth century (D. Tedlock 1985, 61; Christenson 2007, 47). It may be that Don Cristóbal Velasco had a hand in writing the Totonicapán document as well, although there is no explicit evidence to prove it conclusively. In stark contrast, the section composed by Diego Reynoso goes out of its way to demean and even insult the Nim Ch'okoj. On page 118, he refers to them as "mere bench sitters, (a play on words referring to the meaning of *ch'okoj* as 'to seat')" who were not considered "leaders, or great fasters

or penitents. Neither did they have their lordship.” Perhaps Reynoso is engaging in a bit of ill-tempered rivalry with the principal authors of the *Title of Totonicapán*. Certainly, he goes out of his way to distinguish his view of history from that of the other authors of the Totonicapán text.

Whoever they may have been, the authors of the *Title of Totonicapán* manuscript were trained in the use of European letters. Soon after the formal establishment of Christianity in highland Guatemala, Roman Catholic missionaries began to teach representatives of the various Maya lineages of Guatemala to read and write their languages using a modified Latin script developed by Fr. Francisco de la Parra (Campbell 1971; Álvarez Sánchez 2014). The first bishop of Guatemala, Francisco Marroquín, strongly advocated this policy as a means of aiding the conversion effort to Christianity. The authors of the *Title of Totonicapán* undoubtedly learned to read and write with the Latin alphabet under the direction of Christian missionaries who were actively establishing schools for this purpose in major Maya towns.

HISTORY OF THE *TITLE OF TOTONICAPÁN* MANUSCRIPT

The final folio page of the *Title of Totonicapán* as it exists today is missing its upper section and is heavily damaged along its right edge. A fragmentary phrase at the beginning of the remaining portion of the page can be read “today . . . in the year 155 . . .” Fortunately, a copy of the text was made in 1834 either from this same manuscript before the damage occurred or from an intact copy, allowing the missing date to be recovered as September 28, 1554 (Recinos and Goetz 1953, 194).

The original mid-sixteenth-century manuscript is lost. The oldest known copy is privately owned by a prominent K’iche’ family in the Totonicapán area. In 1973, the family allowed Robert Carmack to view the contents of their lineage chest, and he found that it held at least seven Colonial-era texts, including a copy of the *Title of Totonicapán* (Carmack and Mondloch 1983, 9). The manuscript was in good condition, with few tears and with the text intact other than the final page.² The tears that did appear on other folio pages were apparently present at the time the copy was made, as the scribe avoided those areas when writing the text (10).

Carmack was allowed to photocopy all thirty-one folios of the Totonicapán document front and back using an old machine in the town (sixty-four pages in all). He subsequently returned three times to consult the manuscript, to transcribe areas missed by the first photocopies, and to take photographs. On his third visit,

² Garry Sparks (personal communication, 2020) suggests that there may have been one or more pages missing at the beginning of the text as it seems to be lacking an opening statement, commonly seen in other K’iche’ notarial documents.



VAE VCabizih nima bixel Vae bdi
 Paray yio Terrenal Ruleual Ea
 nal Raxal — — —

chu chaxic hita. Varamic xchin biih chi
 uel. Vgoheic Parayisoterenal xahunch
 tzih xchin biih chine ch gouu vcho. otahic
 vxihi: xbandim chunchi sunot xumal
 Tios nima akau: Vnab vae congo.
 xu vinakiricah nima cak ridi os ni
 ma akau: 'humes vab: h belegta zdi
 lah xgacc xumal di g ntu vbel hichal
 que iclou chiri h v. eue que cantu puch
 hironono hel Eich ula kutaz gut di
 alabie: hunclic cubul rochoin utina.
 mit chirono he. Eini Ro Eich xucunaki
 ticah xononal huyubta Eah che abah
 x'go he xonohci pamar de = Mic gof
 vcah Eich Eich ghumil xyaquicakil ru
 Dios ntu vnima kil qhu mil xug Eich
 y9 xetal cak xetal aEab = fue bes
 Ro Eich xbinokir u carpuha cug gwin
 vinakir u ghuticah riima car =

Figure 10. First page (folio 1r) of the *Title of Totoncapán*. Courtesy, Robert M. Carmack.

he was allowed to photocopy the manuscript again in its entirety using a newer machine. This later copy was subsequently published in 1983 as a facsimile³ under the title *El Título de Totonicapán*, along with a transcription of the K'iche' text and a Spanish translation prepared in collaboration with James L. Mondloch (Carmack and Mondloch 1983, 2007).

Carmack made drawings of several of the watermarks from the manuscript and showed them to the Guatemalan historian René Acuña, who concluded that at least one of the marks could not have belonged to the sixteenth century and likely dated to between 1650 and 1725 (Carmack and Mondloch 1983, 11). The location of the original sixteenth-century document, if it still exists, is unknown. It is also unknown how many stages of copying separate this manuscript from the original. Numerous examples of scribal errors are apparent throughout the manuscript. Where these affect the translation of the text, they have been marked with a footnote in the modern orthographic transcription. These errors might have resulted from inconsistencies in applying an alphabetic script to the K'iche' language by the original sixteenth-century authors. They may also have been the result of errors creeping into the text by later copyists. Without the original manuscript for comparison, it is impossible to know.

Little is known of the history of the Totonicapán document until 1834, when it was presented before a municipal judge in Totonicapán as evidence in a land dispute. This was only thirteen years after Guatemala declared its independence from Spain, and territorial claims were no doubt common throughout the country. The judge asked a local priest, Father Dionisio Chonay, to translate the text from K'iche' to Spanish so it could be used in court. Chonay described the document as consisting of thirty-one folio pages. This is the same length as the manuscript shown to Robert Carmack, and it is very likely that it is the same document translated by Chonay 150 years earlier (Carmack and Mondloch 1983, 9–10).

Father Chonay completed his translation in three weeks, although he noted that it was not an easy task:

By this date I have been able to finish the commission you made me in your letter of August 21 [1834]. I should have liked to serve you and the interested parties in two or three days; but despite this desire I have spent three entire weeks, because of the difficulty of understanding a thing so full of words or terms that are no longer used and of things we do not know. I hope that it will be of some use to the interested parties, and that you will have the goodness to overlook and correct the defects. (Recinos and Goetz 1953, 166)

³ The only exception was folio page 14v, which didn't come out when photocopied the second time. The earlier photocopy of the page was published in its place.



Figure 11. K'iche' confraternity leaders, Totoncapán, 1902. Photograph by Gustavus A. Eisen.

Chonay chose not to include the first seven folios because they had no bearing on the court case, containing as he described it an account of “the creation of the world, of Adam, the Earthly Paradise in which Eve was deceived not by a serpent but by Lucifer himself, as an Angel of Light. It deals with the posterity of Adam, following in every respect the same order as in Genesis and the sacred books as far as the captivity of Babylonia” (Recinos and Goetz 1953, 166–167).

Father Chonay did a remarkable job of translating the text in such a short time, although when one compares it with the original manuscript, there are numerous errors in both transcription and translation. These errors would have had little bearing on the court case. Chonay is also likely responsible for numbering many of the pages and for writing *Capítulo 2°* (“Chapter 2nd” in Spanish) in the left margin of page 10r, continuing into the space between lines two and three. This is written in a distinct hand, and it is the only place in the document that is marked as a “*Capítulo*” in Spanish. It appears at the point where Chonay apparently believed a new section began.

Following the legal proceeding, the original K'iche' manuscript was presumably returned to its K'iche' owners, and Father Chonay's translation remained in the municipal archives. Chonay's abbreviated translation was discovered in 1860 by the antiquarian Abbé Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg,⁴ who copied the Spanish translation and took it with him to Paris. Following his death in 1874, Brasseur's copy of the Chonay Spanish translation came into the possession of Charles-Félix-Hyacinthe Gouhier, comte de Charencey, who translated it into French and published the text in both French and Spanish under the title *Título de los señores de Totonicapán* in 1885. Brasseur's copy of the Chonay translation was eventually acquired by the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), where it resides today as Manuscrit Américain 77. The location of the Spanish manuscript written in Chonay's hand is unknown.

Adrián Recinos published a Spanish translation of the *Annals of the Kaqchikels* in 1950 and included Brasseur de Bourbourg's copy (now at the BnF) of Chonay's Spanish text of the Totonicapán document. In 1953, Recinos published an English translation of this compilation prepared by Delia Goetz titled *The Annals of the Cakchiquels and the Title of the Lords of Totonicapán*.

FR. DOMINGO DE VICO AND THE *THEOLOGIA INDORUM*

The first fourteen pages of the *Title of Totonicapán* manuscript are based to one degree or another on a fascinating text, the *Theologia Indorum* (Latin for “Theology of/for the Indians”), composed in the K'iche' language by the Dominican missionary Domingo de Vico, most likely with the collaboration of early K'iche' converts to the Roman Catholic faith (Akkeren 2011, 95–97; Sparks 2017, 32; 2019, 4). The *Theologia Indorum* is a massive theological text written in the K'iche' Maya language between 1551 and 1554. Part one was completed in February 1553, a little over a year before the signing of the *Title of Totonicapán*. It consists of a redaction of Old Testament history and doctrine from the creation of the world until the coming of Christ. According to Garry Sparks (2017, 30; 2019, 309–312), the first volume of the *Theologia Indorum*, specifically chapters 1–24, align very closely with St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*. The second part was completed the following year, in 1554, and outlines doctrines from the *Summa Theologica* as well as treatises on the sacraments and prayer, New Testament history, the Last Judgment, and the lives of various saints (Sparks 2019, 117). The full text of the *Theologia Indorum* has never been published and only exists today in the form of handwritten copies.

⁴ Brasseur also collected the oldest known copy of the *Popol Vuh*, the *Rabinal Achi*, and numerous other important documents during his travels in Guatemala.



Figure 12. Fr. Domingo de Vico, Dominican Convent, Guatemala City. Photograph by Ruud van Akkeren.

The original manuscript of the *Theologia Indorum* is lost; however, numerous copies were made, and many of these have survived. Sparks (2019, 118, table 3.2) has identified at least eighteen partial copies of the *Theologia Indorum*. These were mostly composed in K'iche', although there are also translations in other highland Maya languages such as Kaqchikel, Tz'utujil, and Q'eqchi' scattered in various archives in Europe and the United States (Sparks 2017, 31). Although no single manuscript contains the entire text, enough is accessible in the various copies to reconstruct the contents and organization of the original with some confidence.

The *Theologia Indorum* was highly influential in highland Guatemala during the Early Colonial period and was widely used by Christian missionaries in their evangelization efforts. It can be assumed that the authors of the *Title of Totonicapán* had

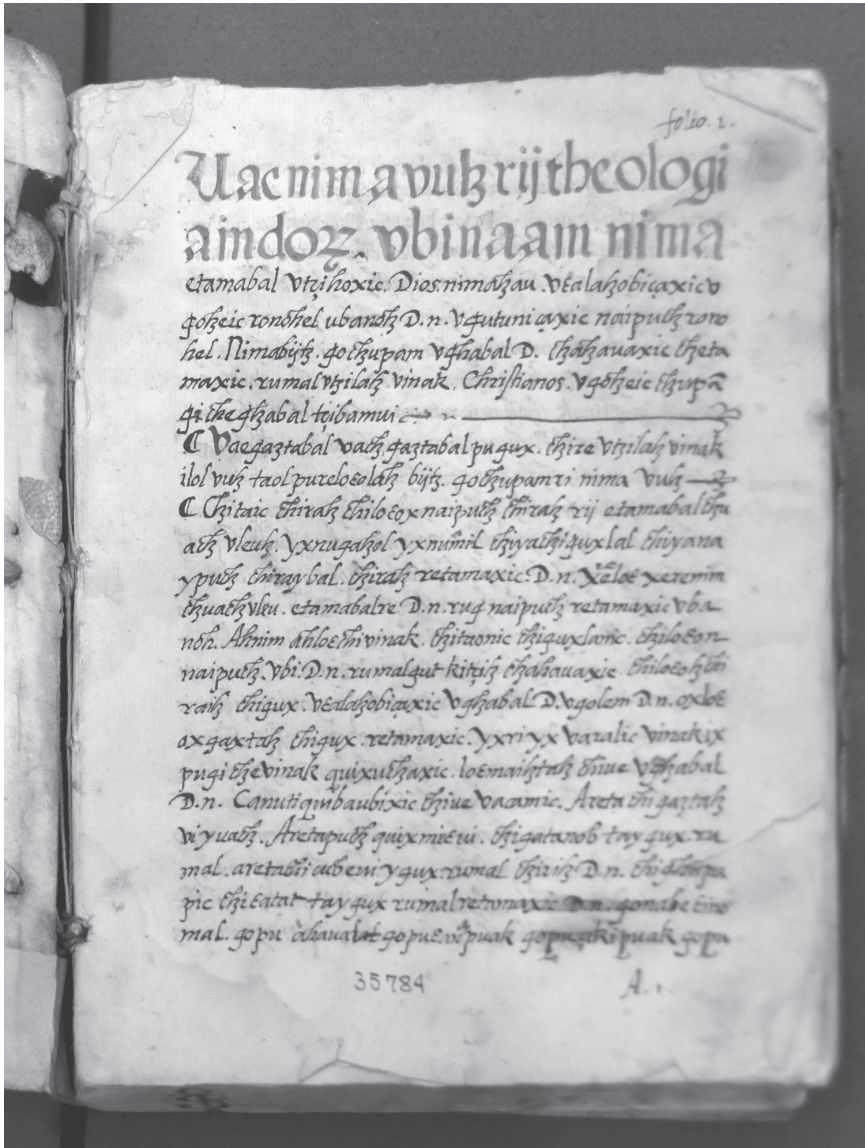


Figure 13. First page of the *Theologia Indorum*. Courtesy, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

at least a partial copy to work from when they composed the first section of their work. I think it is very likely that one or more of the authors of the Totonicapán text also worked with Vico in the preparation of his *Theologia*. Diego Reynoso is known

to have aided early Christian missionaries in highland Guatemala in their efforts and must have known Father Vico well (Akkeren 2011, 106; Sparks 2019, 100).

Although the biblical narratives serve as the foundation for the *Theologia Indorum*, Vico goes well beyond this to interpret the Old Testament through the lens of sixteenth-century Roman Catholicism. This was an ambitious undertaking that most likely began in the late 1540s and ultimately resulted in nearly 900 manuscript pages of text. Sparks (2017, 32; 2019, 117–119) characterizes it as a *Summa*, akin to the *Summa Theologica* by St. Thomas Aquinas, in that it is intended to be “a systematic theological summary or compendium.” It is the first original work of Christian theology written in the Americas and the longest single text of any kind written in an indigenous language during the Colonial era (Sparks 2019, 4).

In some cases, the authors of the Totonicapán document quote the *Theologia Indorum* nearly word for word, but more often they paraphrase or modify the text to better reflect K’iche’ cosmology. They also ignore large sections of the *Theologia Indorum*, particularly the passages of doctrinal interpretation. In other passages, the *Title of Totonicapán* uses the *Theologia* merely as a springboard to introduce material that is entirely unique and not found in any other known text. In other words, the authors of the Totonicapán text did not simply copy directly from the *Theologia Indorum*. Rather, it is a synthesis of the Christian narrative contained in the *Theologia* harmonized by K’iche’ Maya intellectuals with their own distinctive worldview. Elements of Christian doctrine that did not resonate were ignored or altered. Where consistency of belief could be found, the K’iche’ authors dovetailed these passages with their own traditions. The *Title of Totonicapán* is a window into the minds of literate K’iche’ Maya noblemen grappling with the tenets of the newly introduced Christian theology and attempting to fit them into their own centuries-old beliefs.

Vico studied theology at the University of Salamanca and the Dominican Convent of San Esteban while residing in the adjacent Convent of Santo Domingo de la Cruz in Salamanca, Spain. At that time, the chair of theology was Francisco de Vitoria, who introduced the scholasticism of St. Thomas Aquinas blended with a humanistic understanding of the inherent dignity of all people, both Christian and non-Christian (Sparks 2017, 25–27; 2019, 13). Vitoria asserted that the indigenous people of the New World were free individuals who could not be legally forced to submit to the Spanish Crown:

The conclusion of all that has been said is that the barbarians undoubtedly possessed as true dominion, both public and private, as any Christians. That is to say, they could not be robbed of their property either as private citizens or as princes, on the grounds that they were not true masters (*ueri domini*). It would be harsh to deny to them,



Figure 14. Monument to Francisco de Vitoria, Convent of San Esteban, Salamanca, Spain

who have never done us any wrong, the rights we concede to Saracens and Jews, who have been continual enemies of the Christian religion. (Vitoria 1991 [1539], 250–251)

Under Vitoria's influence, missionaries trained in the philosophy of the "School of Salamanca" believed that evangelization efforts should be made through persuasion and rational argumentation rather than compulsion:

My fourth conclusion is that if the Christian faith is set before the barbarians in a probable fashion, that is with provable and rational arguments and accompanied by manners both decent and observant of the law of nature, such as are themselves a great argument for the truth of the faith, and if this is done not once or in a perfunctory way, but diligently and observantly, then the barbarians are obliged to accept the faith of Christ. (Vitoria 1991 [1539], 271)

Vico's *Theologia Indorum* was written with just this kind of "rational argument" in mind. Bartolomé de Las Casas recruited Domingo de Vico as a missionary to the Maya of Guatemala. Las Casas had been appointed the "Protector of the Indians" in 1516, and in March 1544 he was consecrated as the first resident bishop of Chiapas and northern Guatemala. Vico was one of forty-six Dominican missionaries to leave for New Spain with Las Casas soon thereafter (Torre 1985, 22, 59–60; Sparks

2019, 96–97). This was the largest contingent of Dominicans to sail to the New World in the sixteenth century. Las Casas agreed fully with Vitoria's approach to the evangelization of indigenous people. In his defense of the Indians presented at the Council of Valladolid in 1550, Las Casas (1992 [1552], 40) echoed Vitoria's assertion that the indigenous people of the New World were free citizens, and if they are sought out "gently, mildly, quietly, humanely, and in a Christian manner you may instruct them in the word of God and by our labor bring them to Christ's flock, imprinting the gentle Christ on their minds."

By 1545, Vico had arrived in western Guatemala. Late in his ministry, he was among the first of the Dominican missionaries to undertake the peaceful evangelization of the Verapaz region. In other words, he came into contact with highland Maya communities that were still governed by indigenous rulers and practiced ancient Pre-Columbian ceremonies before the region was converted to Christianity. Vico's linguistic skills were extraordinary. According to Fr. Antonio de Remesal, O.P., who published a history of the early missionary efforts of the Dominican order in Guatemala and Chiapas in 1619, Vico dedicated himself to learning the languages of indigenous people wherever he went and spoke seven Maya languages:

He came to Guatemala and became a teacher in that province. He hadn't set foot in a town more than three or four days before he knew their language as well as if it were his first and mother tongue, even though it was a rare and unusual language. And with this perfection he came to know seven different languages. (Remesal 1966, X.viii.2.297; see also X.vi.1.289, author translation)

Despite Remesal's obvious exaggerations, Vico's language abilities were unquestionable. Fr. Francisco Ximénez (1929–1932, I. xxiii.57–58) noted that Vico had written treatises on Christian doctrine in Kaqchikel, K'iche', Tz'utujil, Q'eqchi', Pokomam, and Lacandon that were still used in various communities in his day, at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

From 1551 through 1554, Father Vico served as the prior of the Dominican Convent in the Spanish administrative capital city of Santiago de Guatemala. In this capacity, he was tasked by Bishop Marroquín to teach the children of Maya lords Christian doctrine as well as how to read and write using Latin characters. Vico was not the first such teacher. Bishop Marroquín himself brought Diego Reynoso, the son of a K'iche' lord from Q'umarkaj, to Santiago de Guatemala to teach him to read and write (Ximénez 1999, I.171). At least two Franciscan priests, Fr. Pedro de Betanzos and Fr. Francisco de la Parra, also taught highland Maya youths in the years that followed, the latter adapting the Latin alphabet for use in writing highland Maya languages—a system followed by Maya scribes for centuries (Álvarez Sánchez 2014). This modified-Latin script was used with some variation to



Figure 15. Dominican Monastery of Santiago de Guatemala, now Antigua, where Domingo de Vico taught

compose all the known indigenous Maya texts of the Early Colonial period, including the *Popol Vuh* and the *Title of Totonicapán*.

Vico's school followed the established policy of Spanish authorities to teach the youths of highland Maya nobility not only Christian doctrine but also literacy in European modes of writing. Among those who attended the school in the Dominican convent were undoubtedly some of the future authors of such important early K'iche' texts as the *Popol Vuh* and the *Title of Totonicapán*. The *Annals of the Kaqchikels*, composed by members of the Kaqchikel nobility, noted the death of Vico in 1555 and asserted that *qitzij chi nima ajtij qatata'* ("truly a great teacher [was] our father") (Maxwell and Hill 2006, 301, author translation).

Alonso de Zorita, judge of the Audiencia of Mexico, was particularly impressed with Vico's character and determination to teach the Maya in their own language:

In the monastery of Santo Domingo de Guatimala, I particularly worked with Fray Domingo de Bico while I was *Oidor*, a man highly esteemed by all for his devotion and exemplary life even though he was continually ill from the great acts of penitence he performed and his tireless work in preaching to the Spaniards and in teaching and converting the indigenous people of that land . . . Because he never wished to be idle, he had the habitual custom of writing three sheets of paper [daily] of doctrine and

sermons in the language of the Indians to be used in preaching to them. (Zorita 1999, 708, author translation)

At the beginning of 1553, there was a major struggle between the Franciscan and Dominican orders over ecclesiastical control of the provinces in highland Guatemala. The Dominicans had planned to found monasteries in the territories of both Quetzaltenango and Sacapulas in that year, but the Franciscans claimed that because they had arrived first as missionaries, the Dominicans had no authority to expand into their areas of influence. Ultimately, the Dominicans yielded to the Franciscans with regard to Quetzaltenango and the Franciscans acquiesced to the Dominican claims on the territory of Sacapulas. In effect, this gave the Dominicans control of the central region of the old K'iche' kingdom, including the ancient capital city of Q'umarkaj, Totonicapán, and Chichicastenango where many of the surviving members of the K'iche' nobility came to reside. In the remaining year of his service, Vico would have been intimately involved in the ecclesiastical affairs of the central K'iche' area, giving him ample opportunities to further his collaboration with indigenous K'iche' noblemen.

Sections of the *Theologia Indorum* contain a wealth of information on K'iche' Maya cosmology, including references to deities and myths that do not appear in any other known K'iche' text. This suggests that Vico collaborated closely with living K'iche' sources or had access to texts that are now lost. Chapter 25 of the *Theologia Indorum* concerns the "idolatry" of the highland Maya. In this chapter Vico lists the denizens of Xib'alb'a, the K'iche' otherworld, which Vico associated with the Christian hell:

nim chi 4ux xibalba nim chi 4ux = hunahpu xbalanqueh. taçul hurakan eçeteb pubaix. Hun hunahpu. vukub hunahpu hun came vukub came quia re. quia r'ix4ak. mam y3 choa. voc hunahpu. Are xicabauilaj ober.

Great in your hearts was Xib'alb'a and great in your hearts were Junajpu, Xb'alankej, Tasul, Juraqan, Q'eteb' Pub'a'ix, Jun Junajpu, Wuqub' Junajpu, Jun Kame, Wuqub' Kame, Kik' Re', Kik' Rixk'aq, Mam, Ik' Choa, Wok, and Junajpu. These you venerated anciently. (Vico 1605 [1553] XXV, folio 33r lines 20–23, author translation)

Some of the gods listed here also appear in indigenous K'iche' texts, particularly the *Title of Totonicapán* and the *Popol Vuh*. These include Tojil (patron god of the Kaweq K'iche' lineage), Q'eteb' Pub'a'ix, Junajpu, and Xb'alankej. In K'iche' tradition, Junajpu and Xb'alankej defeated the lords of death in Xib'alb'a prior to being apotheosed as the sun and moon (see p. 91, Christenson 2007, 158–191). Xb'alankej appears in the *Title of Totonicapán* with the same spelling as in the *Theologia Indorum*, suggesting a common source (p. 91), whereas the *Popol Vuh* consistently

spells the name Xb'alanke, without the final j. Other gods listed in chapter 25 of Vico's text do not appear in the *Title of Totonicapán* but are listed in the *Popol Vuh*. These include Jun Junajpu ("One Junajpu"), Wuqub' Junajpu ("Seven Junajpu"), Jun Kame ("One Death"), Wuqub' Kame ("Seven Death"), Kik' Re' ("Bloody Teeth"), and Kik' Rixk'aq ("Bloody Claws").

There are four other lists of ancient K'iche' gods in the *Theologia Indorum*. Most of these deities are otherwise known only from the *Popol Vuh*, although Ch'ipi Kaqulja and Raxa Kaqulja also appear in the *Title of Totonicapán* (p. 184, n. 698). In addition to the gods listed above, Vico (1605 [1553]) mentions Juraqan (chapter 25, folio 33v, line 19; chapter 82, folio 127v, line 17), one of the deities the ancient K'iche' venerated under the name "Heart of Sky" (Christenson 2007, 70); Ch'amiya B'aq ("Bone Staff") (chapter 48, folio 70r, line 14); Ch'amiya Jolom ("Skull Staff") (line 15); Ch'ipi Kaqulja ("Littlest Thunderbolt") (chapter 72, folio 109r, line 16; chapter 82, folio 127v, lines 18–19); Raxa Kaqulja ("Sudden Thunderbolt") (chapter 82, folio 127v, lines 18–19); T'epew ("Sovereign") (chapter 72, folio 109r, lines 17–18); and Q'ukumatz ("Quetzal Serpent") (line 18). Although most of these gods only appear in the *Theologia Indorum* and the *Popol Vuh*, this does not mean Vico had access to the text of the *Popol Vuh* itself, at least not in the form that survives today. Based on internal evidence, the *Popol Vuh* was compiled sometime between 1554 and 1558 (D. Tedlock 1996, 56; Christenson 2003, 37–38). Vico completed this portion of the *Theologia Indorum* by 1553. He subsequently left Santiago de Guatemala for the Alta Verapaz region in 1554 and was martyred the following year at the hands of the Ch'ol while working in the Lacandon region. He could not, therefore, have seen the completed manuscript of the *Popol Vuh* text.

There are also deity names that appear in Vico's *Theologia* that do not appear in any known indigenous K'iche' text. These include Tasul in chapter 25, folio 33r, line 21, folio 33v, line 19, chapter 72, folio 109r, line 16, and chapter 82, folio 127v, line 17; Mam ("Grandfather or Ancient One") in chapter 25, folio 33r, line 23, chapter 25, folio 33v, line 22, and chapter 48, folio 70r, line 14 (the god Mam is also mentioned as a deity in Yucatán [López de Cogolludo 1957 (1688), IV.5.185]); Ik' Chuaj (most likely a variant of Ek' Chuaj, a Yucatec Maya merchant deity) in chapter 25, folio 33r, line 23, chapter 25, folio 33v, line 23, and chapter 48, folio 70r, line 14; Wok ("Falcon") in chapter 25, folio 33r, line 23, chapter 25, folio 33v, line 20, chapter 48, folio 70r, line 12, and chapter 82, folio 127v, line 17; Kab'lajuj Kame ("Twelve Death") in chapter 48, folio 70r, line 13; Oyayax Meb'a (an unknown deity) in chapter 72, folio 109r, line 17; Tzitzimit, a female central Mexican deity who early Christian missionaries linked with the devil (Sahagún 1950–1963, 6.14.vii.163, 8.14.ix.34; Chimalpahin Quahlehuantzin 1997, 82–83; Molina 2001 [1571]) in chapter 82, folio 127v, line 18; and K'ulel ("Enemy," a K'iche' word that was chosen by early

Christian missionaries as one of the principal names for the devil; Sparks [personal communication, 2020] suggests that it may have been an attempt to literally translate “Satan,” which means “adversary” in Hebrew) in chapter 82, folio 127v, line 18.

Because these gods appear only in the *Theologia Indorum*, Vico’s Maya theogony could not have been based entirely on knowledge gleaned from any known highland Maya text. Further, this would not have been necessary to account for the deity names in Vico’s manuscript. In addition to Reynoso, Vico undoubtedly consulted a number of K’iche’ noblemen in his school or as part of his ministerial work on points of K’iche’ religious belief. Among the noble class, this type of knowledge would have been common knowledge.

THE POETIC STRUCTURE OF THE *TITLE OF TOTONICAPÁN*

K’iche’ poetry is not based on rhyme or metric rhythms but rather on the arrangement of concepts into innovative and even ornate parallel structures. Seldom are the authors content with expressing a single idea without embellishing it with synonymous concepts, metaphors, or descriptive epithets. The K’iche’ poet is much like the composer of classical music who begins with a simple melody and then weaves into it both complementary and contrasting harmonies to give it interest and depth. Thus endless variations on a given theme are possible.

I have arranged the literal translation of the *Title of Totonicapán* according to its poetic structure beginning on p. 187. Lines that are parallel in form or concept have been indented an equal number of spaces from the left margin of the page.

TYPES OF PARALLELISM IN THE *TITLE OF TOTONICAPÁN*

1. *Identical Parallelism*: The repetition of identical elements. Example, p. 229, lines 1189–1190:

xa raqan b’alam	only its pawprints jaguar
xa raqan utiw	only its pawprints coyote

2. *Synonymous Parallelism*: The repetition of elements that are similar in meaning or significance. Example, p. 297, lines 3218–3219:

wa’e loq’olaj tinamit	this esteemed citadel
mayjalaj tinamit	admirable citadel

3. *Antithetic Parallelism*: The contrast of one element with an opposite or antithetical element. Example, p. 243, lines 1630–1631:

jun xb'è chikej chi relib'al q'ij	one went by order to its coming out place sun
jun k'ut xb'è chuqajib'al q'ij	one thus went to its setting place sun

4. *Associative Parallelism*: The correlation of elements that are complementary to one another. This association may be material, familial, functional, gender-based, or color-based.

- a. Material association, in which the substance of the elements is similar in nature. Example, p. 290, lines 2995–2996:

ajuwa cho	they of its shore lake
ajuwa palo	they of its shore sea

- b. Familial association, in which elements are related by kinship. Example, p. 229, lines 1195–1196:

e qamam	they their grandfathers
qaqajaw	their fathers

- c. Functional association, in which two elements act in a similar manner. Example, p. 223, lines 1020–1021:

e ajk'ix	they bloodletters
e ajkaj	they sacrificers

- d. Gender association, in which two elements are paired based on gender. Example, p. 280, lines 2705–2706:

chaya' ta qami'al	give then our daughters
qak'ajol	our sons

- e. Color association, in which two elements are paired based on color. Example, p. 260, lines 2102–2103:

q'analaj juyub'	very yellow mountain
raxalaj juyub'	very green mountain

- f. Quantitative association, in which two elements are paired based on numbers. Example, p. 250, lines 1826–1827:

b'elej winaq	nine periods of twenty days
oxlaju winaq	thirteen periods of twenty days

5. *Augmentive Parallelism*: Parallel elements in which one word or phrase clarifies or augments the meaning of another. Example, p. 268, lines 2339–2340:

xawi chiri' xkisik'ij [j]un **ab'aj**
 xkik'ab'awilaj **k'wal ab'aj**

merely there they called on a **stone**
 they venerated **precious stone**

6. **Causative Parallelism:** Parallel elements in which the first word or phrase directly affects or precipitates the associated words or phrases. Example, p. 287, lines 2904–2905:

chulk'ama' ri alit
chipe k'amol re

may they arrive to take the girl
may they come as takers of her

7. **Epithetic Parallelism:** The association of an element with a complementary noun or adjective that serves to define the nature of that element. Example, p. 225, lines 1083–1084:

kich'akatajik **ri e wuq amaq'**
ajlab'a[I]

their being defeated **the seven nations**
warriors

8. **Alliterative Parallelism:** Elements that parallel one another in sound when read aloud. On p. 290, lines 3017–3018, the nouns *achib'al* and *wachib'al* were apparently chosen for their similar sounds:

kumal **qachib'al**
qawachib'al

by them **our image**
our visage

9. **Grammatical Parallelism:** Elements that are grammatically parallel in construction, such as the following example from p. 255, lines 1963–1964, in which the same concept is expressed using transitive and intransitive verb forms, respectively:

xkik'ajolaj
xek'ajolan

they engendered [transitive] sons
they engendered [intransitive] sons

10. **Clarifying Parallelism:** A couplet in which the second line clarifies or defines the previous line. Example, p. 240, lines 1513–1514:

chikech

to them

wa'e q'apojib'

these maidens

11. **Agentive Parallelism:** A couplet in which an action is described in the first line, followed by the agent who carried out that action in the second line. Example, p. 234, lines 1340–1341:

k'ate k'ut xjaqataj sokob'

then thus **were opened great pots**

kumal xoq'ojawab' rixiqil

by them esteemed their wives

12. **Translation Parallelism:** A couplet in which an element is given in one language and then translated into another. In the following example on p. 210, lines 647–648, *marakow* is a toponym borrowed from the *Theologia Indorum*, the biblical Mara, which means “bitter water” in Hebrew. In the second line, the word is translated into K’iche’ as *k’aylaj ja’* (“bitter water”).

chi marakow	at marakow
k’aylaj ja’	bitter water

13. **Toponymic Parallelism:** A couplet in which a single toponym, or place name, is identified by its original name, followed by the name by which it is known by another group. In the following example on p. 187, Q’umarkaaaj is the capital of the K’iche’ as it was known prior to the Spanish Conquest. Santa Cruz is the name given to the same place by the Spaniards:

chi q’u[m]arkaj,	chi q’u[m]arkaj,
Santa Cruz kuchax kamik	Santa Cruz it is called today

14. **Merismus:** The expression of a broad concept by a pair of complementary elements that are narrower in meaning. Thus on p. 217, lines 851–852, “**sky-earth**” represents the world as a whole; on p. 190, lines 35–36, “**mountain-valley**” refers to the face of the earth; on p. 222, lines 976–977, “**trees-bushes**” refers to all plants; on p. 222, lines 978–979, “**food-water**” refers to all consumables; on p. 213, lines 716–717, “**wood-stone**” refers to all sculpted images of deities; on p. 228, lines 1176–1176, “**daughters-sons**” refers to all children; on p. 214, lines 756–757, “**grandfathers-fathers**” refers to all ancestors.

STROPHIC ARRANGEMENTS IN THE *TITLE OF TOTONICAPÁN*

1. **Alternative Parallelism:** Parallelism in which elements appear in an alternating arrangement, such as the following example from p. 270, lines 2399–2404, with the first three lines listing the major lineages of the K’iche’ hierarchy, followed by the founders of those lineages in the same order, giving the arrangement ABCA’B’C’:

xawi kuk’am kib’ chi kaweq	merely they united themselves kaweq
chi nijayib’	and nijayib’
chi ajaw k’iche’	and ajaw k’iche’
ri B’alam k’itze’	the B’alam k’itze’

b'alam aq'ab'

majukotaj

b'alam aq'ab'

majukotaj

2. **Chiasmus, or Reverse Parallelism:** Parallelism in which the first element of a strophe parallels the last, the second element parallels the next to last, and so on. These may be simple four-line chiasms or may extend over an entire section. On p. 264, lines 2217–2220 is an example of the simpler type, arranged in the form ABB'A':

chi ma wi wa

chi ma wi ja'

ta xe'opan chi kak

chi wa'ij

now **not food**

now **not water**

then they arrived **in thirst**

in hunger

The first chiasm I was able to identify in highland Maya literature appears in lines 32–35 of the *Popol Vuh*:

I'yom,

Mamom,

Xpiyacok,

Xmucane, ub'i,

Midwife,

Patriarch,

Xpiyacoc,

Xmuqane, their names,

(Christenson 2003, 14)

The name of the “Midwife” in line 32 is Xmucane, which appears in line 35. The name of the “Patriarch” in line 33 is Xpiyacoc, which appears in line 34. The descriptions and proper names of this couple thus appear in a chiastic arrangement. Munro S. Edmonson (1971, 5n35), who believed the *Popol Vuh* is arranged entirely in paired couplets, was confused by the order of the names Xpiyacoc and Xmucane: “It is odd that this frequent couplet places the male first, the reverse of the usual K'iche' order; indeed, if the reconstructed forms are correct, they would make better sense reversed.” Recognition of the chiasmus in this passage clears up the confusion. This example from the *Popol Vuh* also elucidates a tendency in the *Title of Totonicapán* to list paired deities or ancestors with their associated epithets given in reverse order, as on pp. 216–217, lines 823–828:

ta xecha'

chirech ri q'ij

ik'

jun q'apoj

then **they said**

to the **sun**

to the **moon**

one **maiden**

jun k'ajol	one young boy
xecha'	they said

In K'iche' literature and discourse, female names and titles appear before their male counterparts when paired in parallel couplets. The major exception is where they appear in chiastic form, as here where the male sun precedes the female moon and their titles as maiden and young boy are given in reverse order.

Chiasms may extend for several lines, as in the following seven-line example on pp. 222–223, lines 999–1005, which is arranged in the form ABCDC'BA':

ta xe'ul chi k'u chiri' chi xpa'ch	then they arrived again thus there chi xpa'ch
xkiya'	they gave
retal	its sign
pa ja ayin ab'aj	pa ja ayin ab'aj
retal	its sign
xkiya'o	they gave
ta kipetik chi k'ut chila'	then their coming again thus there

Chiasmus is a rather common poetic form in sixteenth-century Maya literature, particularly in the Guatemalan highlands. However, none of the known documents composed after 1580 contain passages of chiasmus (Christenson 2012, 330–334). Several of these later texts might otherwise be expected to contain ancient poetic forms, since they include significant sections of Pre-Columbian history and culture. Among them are the *Título Zapotitlan*, the *Título Santa Clara*, the *Título Chauchituj*, and the *Título Uchabaja*. By 1580, however, the older poetic literary forms utilized in Early Colonial indigenous texts were already forgotten or had fallen into disuse.

3. **Envelope Parallelism:** The repetition of parallel elements at the beginning and end of a long stanza or section of poetry. This has the effect of tying together the introduction and conclusion of a passage to set it apart from that which precedes and follows it. Example, p. 250, lines 1811–1820 which begins and ends a section with the couplet “they delivered it/their authority”:

xkimolob'a' k'ut	they delivered it thus
kitaqikil	their authority

xb'anataj	it has been done
xqab'ano	we did it
xpe	it has come
wa'e ajawarem	this lordship
retal	its sign
xpetik xecha'	it has come they said
ta xkimolob'a'	then they delivered it
kitaqikil	their authority

4. **Monocolon:** An isolated line that does not parallel any associated line, thus standing on its own. Because monocolons are relatively rare in the *Title of Totonicapán*, they are all the more powerful when they do occur. In general, they are used when the authors desire to give extra emphasis to a passage. In this example on p. 288, line 2925, the authors give the terse statement that their ruler's bride arrived at their capital, further emphasizing the singularity of the phrase by adding two slash marks, used in the text to mark the end of a section.

ta xulik //	then she arrived //
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STROPHIC LENGTHS

The various types of parallelism in the *Title of Totonicapán* may appear within a pair of lines, or they may extend through multiple lines of text. While the parallel couplet is the standard poetic form in the *Title of Totonicapán*, it is by no means the only one. Dennis E. Tedlock (1983, 230) recognized this in his work with highland Maya literature: “To measure all Mayan texts by the single standard of the couplet is to miss the very essence of Mayan verse rhythms, which move in twos, and sometimes threes, and once in a while arch over to produce a four.” I would only add that such verse rhythms may also extend beyond four lines to form cinquains, sestets, septets, and even longer arrangements.

The following are examples of the various strophic types in terms of length found in the *Title of Totonicapán*:

- 1. **Parallel Couplets:** By far the most common strophic length in the *Title*

of *Totonicapán* is the couplet, consisting of two parallel lines. Example, p. 281, lines 2713–2714:

at relib'al q'ij	you its coming out place sun
at raq'anib'al q'ij	you its rising up place sun

In modern K'iche' speech, formal prayers and discourses also tend to utilize parallel couplets. The following selection is from a prayer made by a K'iche' priest-shaman in Momostenango as recorded by Barbara Tedlock (1982, 197). The translation, orthography, and punctuation have not been altered from Tedlock's transcription, although I have arranged the prayer into couplet form:

Pardon my sin God.	Sachaj la numac Tiox.
Pardon my sin Earth.	Sachaj la numac Mundo.
I am giving my fine, my present	Quinya'o ri numulta, nu presenta
before you God, before you Earth.	chiwäch la Tiox, chiwäch la Mundo.
I am giving my wax candle, my stake	Quinya'o wa' jun nucracandela, nu tac'alibal
toward the legs arms of God	pa ri akän k'äb la Tiox
at the rising of the sun, at the setting of the sun	chirelebal k'ij, chukajibal k'ij
the four corners of sky, the four corners of earth.	cajxucut kaj, cajxucut ulew.
Come here then my work, my service.	Sa'j la rech c'ut nuchac, nupatan.

2. **Parallel Tercets:** Three parallel lines of text. Example, p. 224, lines

1054–1056:

ta xkich'ak kitzij	then they achieved their lighting fire
ta xkitikib'a' k'ut ub'aqik kiq'aq'	then they began thus its igniting their fire
nab'e k'ut xel kiq'aq'	first thus it came forth their fire

3. **Parallel Quatrains:** Four parallel lines of text. Example, p. 232, lines 1293–1296

jun sokob' q'awonon:	one great pot bumblebees:
jun sokob' sital	one great pot wasps
jun sokob' q'atz'itij:	one great pot hornets:
jun sokob' wonon —	one great pot bees —

4. **Longer Parallel Series:** The following is an example of a parallel cinquain on p. 253, lines 1892–1896:

ta xulik q'alelay tem	then arrived q'alelay bench
atzij winaqil tem	atzij winaqil bench
nim ch'okojil tem	nim ch'okojil bench
q'ale k'amja'il tem	q'ale k'amja'il bench
nima k'amja'il tem	nima k'amja'il bench

The *Title of Totonicapán* is fundamentally based on these various forms of parallelism. Recognition of the presence of parallelism in a given text helps focus attention on what the authors feel is important. By pairing each thought with complementary ones, the authors are able to develop their ideas with greater clarity. They may compare elements, contrast them, elaborate on their significance, or add layers of meaning that would not otherwise be obvious.

Parallelism is also the primary means used by K'iche' authors to give order to their thoughts. The words of the *Title of Totonicapán* were not arranged into sentences and paragraphs as in modern literature. They seldom use periods, commas, or capitalization to separate independent concepts. When they do appear, they are inconsistent in purpose, reflecting the authors' lack of familiarity with European devices for punctuation. Parallelism provided a means of structuring the book's ideas into distinct and coherent entities.

Much of K'iche' literature was based in whole or in part on oral tradition. Parallelism is a common mnemonic device used in many ancient cultures to help narrators remember the flow and direction of their tale. This is particularly true of the

chiastic type of parallelism, which may give order to large sections of a story. It also gives listeners an opportunity to hear a recapitulation in reverse order of what had been said while reminding them of the central themes that are of special importance.

The presence of parallelism in the *Title of Totonicapán* is also a tremendous, though unintended, boon to modern translators. By comparing an ambiguous word or passage with its associated line, its general meaning is often clarified. This is especially important when interpreting a word that has more than one possible meaning or is poorly transcribed through scribal error.

Perhaps the most important reason I have stressed the poetic nature of the *Title of Totonicapán* in this translation is for the insight it gives into the mind of the ancient K'iche' authors. We can see how they organized their thoughts as they took pen or brush in hand to set them down in permanent form. Far from the random musings of unlearned storytellers, the *Title of Totonicapán* can be appreciated as the eloquent creation of master poets with a sophisticated literary heritage.

ORTHOGRAPHY AND PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

The *Title of Totonicapán* was written using a modified Latin alphabet to represent K'iche' sounds that was first developed by the Franciscan mendicant friar Francisco de la Parra ca. 1545. The orthography is therefore consistent with the writing system taught by Christian missionaries during the Early Spanish Colonial period. Although most of the characters used in the script developed by Parra to write K'iche'an languages were based on the Latin alphabet, two characters were borrowed from Arabic. The glottalized palatal (ʔ in the sixteenth-century manuscript of the *Title of Totonicapán*, and k' in modern K'iche' orthography) is derived from the Arabic letter ʔ (*waw*), and the glottalized uvular (ε in the manuscript, and q' in modern K'iche') is derived from the Arabic letter ʕ (*ayn* or *a'yn*) (Chinchilla Mazariegos and Helena 1993, xii). Neither of these Arabic characters bears any relationship to the phonetic sound of the K'iche' letters for which they substitute, and thus they may have been chosen arbitrarily to represent K'iche' sounds with which the early Spanish missionaries were unfamiliar. It is possible, however, that the choice was less arbitrary than it would appear at first glance. The Arabic letter ʕ (*qaf*) has the same basic shape as *waw* but with two dots over the primary symbol. There is no equivalent to this sound in the English or Latin languages. It is similar to the initial k in *karma* or *kayak* but pronounced from further back in the soft palatal area. Similarly, the Arabic letter ʕ (*ghayn*) follows the same basic shape as the ʕ (*ayn*) but with a single dot on top. This letter is similar to the sound of the g in *ghost* or *gift* but pronounced from further back in the throat, something like a more guttural pronunciation of the Parisian French

r. In both cases, the Arabic characters chosen by Francisco de la Parra represent non-Latin consonants, like their K'iche' counterparts, when the dots above the letters are added. Since none of the characters used by Parra for his K'iche' alphabet utilize dots or other diacritical marks, it is entirely possible that he removed them for convenience of use.

Father Parra came from the Andalucía region of southern Spain where the Iberian Muslim presence was strong. He would have been intimately acquainted with Arabic characters and their pronunciation. Unfortunately, Parra's original writings concerning the alphabet he constructed to record highland Maya languages have not survived, making it difficult to reconstruct his thoughts on the matter.

The K'iche' authors who composed the *Title of Totonicapán* in the sixteenth century were pioneers in the use of a foreign alphabet to represent their language in written form. They did not have the luxury of officially recognized dictionaries with standardized spellings, and they did not have computers to scan for errors. In light of the enormous difficulties involved in its composition, the orthography of the *Title of Totonicapán* is remarkably consistent, although scribal errors and discrepancies in spelling inevitably appear in the text. Variant spellings of words occur throughout the manuscript, and glottalized sounds in particular are haphazardly distinguished at best. Nevertheless, the Totonicapán document is more consistent in its use of the Parra alphabet than many other texts composed afterward, including the *Popol Vuh* (Christenson 2007, 53).

The K'iche' language utilizes both a palatal stop (*k*) and a uvular stop (*q*). The authors of the *Title of Totonicapán* tended to overuse the glottalized *q'* form in words that should have carried the un-glottalized form *q*. They also often substituted *s* for *x*, although these generally appear in both forms as variant spellings. This may reflect the fact that there was a sound shift in the Spanish language such that these same letters are often interchanged in contemporary Spanish documents as well. In the Parra alphabet transcription, I have preserved the original spellings, including variants and apparent scribal errors. In the modern orthographic transcription, these spellings have been standardized and corrected to be consistent with modern usage where appropriate.

Glottalized vowels, common in the K'iche' language, are rarely distinguished in any Colonial-era texts. Thus there is no difference between the written form of *che* ("toward him/her") and *che'* ("tree"). Long and short vowels are treated as separate letters in K'iche' but are generally not distinguished in this text. For example, the word transcribed as *vach* might be read with a long vowel *vaach* ("my companion") or with a short vowel *vach* ("my face").

For the most part, the writing in the original manuscript is clear, and there are few lacunae until the final page. There are always the inherent difficulties in reading a handwritten text, particularly one that is hundreds of years old, and this manuscript

is no exception. The letters a and e may not have a completely closed loop at the top, making them appear as a u or a c. The tail on the letter ç can be left off by mistake or it can be masked by a tall letter beneath it, making it appear as a c. The neck of an h may be a bit short, making it appear to be an n. All these are rather frequent annoyances; however, context usually helps make the interpretation clear.

It is impossible to know how many errors may have crept into the text when its contents were copied by scribes after its original composition in the mid-sixteenth century. The extant manuscript appears to have been written sometime between 1650 and 1725 based on the type of paper used and the form of its watermarks (Carmack and Mondloch 1983, 11). It is unknown if this copy was based on the original or on another copy. Without the original document, a perfect reading of the text is impossible to verify.

Since the sixteenth century, a number of writing systems have been invented for K'iche'an languages in an attempt to avoid the confusion inherent in the Parra alphabet. In 1986 the Guatemalan Ministry of Public Education set up a commission to standardize alphabets for the twenty-two recognized highland Maya languages. This standardization effort had become particularly important due to the Guatemalan government's proposed "Program of Bilingual Education" in Maya communities, designed to improve literacy and promote Native American cultures and languages. This program included the publication of bilingual dictionaries, school textbooks, and official translations of the Guatemalan Constitution in the various highland Maya languages. The results of this commission were officially endorsed by the Guatemalan government and signed into law as Governmental Decree Number 1046-87 by President Marco Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo on November 23, 1987.

The following is a list of the modified Latin letters developed by Parra as used in the *Title of Totonicapán* text, along with the modern orthographic equivalents and a guide to pronunciation.

Parra	Modern	
a, aa	a	As in the <i>a</i> of "father."
a	ä	As in the <i>o</i> of "mother."
b	b'	Similar to the English <i>b</i> , but pronounced with the lips tightly closed before the air is more forcefully expelled.
c, qu	k	Palatal stop, as in the <i>k</i> of "king."
g	k'	Pronounced with the back of the tongue in the same position as for the <i>k</i> , but the air is more forcefully expelled.
ç, s, z	s	As in the <i>s</i> of "same."

continued on next page

<i>Parra</i>	<i>Modern</i>	
ch	ch	As in the <i>ch</i> of “child.”
ɬh	ch’	Pronounced with the tongue placed against the roof of the mouth in the same position as for <i>ch</i> , but the air is more forcefully expelled.
e, ee	e	As in the <i>a</i> of “late.”
h, j	j	Pronounced like the English <i>h</i> , but further back in the throat. Similar to the Spanish <i>j</i> or the German <i>ch</i> (as in the proper name “Bach”).
i, ii	i	As in the <i>ee</i> of “eel.”
k	q	Uvular stop, pronounced from further back in the throat than the letter <i>k</i> , similar to the <i>kh</i> in the Egyptian word <i>ankh</i> .
ε	q’	Pronounced the same as the <i>q</i> , but the throat is closed and air forcefully expelled.
l, ll	l	As in the <i>l</i> of “linger.”
m	m	As in the <i>m</i> of “mat.”
n	n	As in the <i>n</i> of “net.”
o, oo	o	As in the <i>o</i> of “home.”
p	p	Pronounced like the English <i>p</i> but shortened in length.
r	r	Similar to the Spanish <i>r</i> , pronounced with a brief tap of the tongue against the roof of the mouth.
t	t	Similar to the English <i>t</i> but shortened in length.
tt	t’	Pronounced with the tongue in the same position as for the <i>t</i> , but the tongue is pressed more tightly against the palate and air forcefully expelled.
tz	tz	As in the <i>ts</i> of “mats.”
g	tz’	Pronounced with the tongue in the same position as for the <i>tz</i> , but the tongue is pressed more tightly against the palate and air forcefully expelled.
u, uu	u	As in the <i>oo</i> of “root.”
v	w	As in the <i>w</i> of “wind.”
x	x	Pronounced like the <i>sh</i> in “shy.”
y	y	When preceding a vowel, it is pronounced like the <i>y</i> of “yellow.” Otherwise it is pronounced like the <i>i</i> (see above).
	‘	Glottalization mark for vowels. For example, <i>a’</i> would be similar to the pronunciation of the <i>ott</i> in the Scottish pronunciation of “bottle.” There is no equivalent for glottalized vowels in the <i>Title of Totonicapán</i> .

When pronouncing Maya words, the emphasis is always on the final syllable. When pronouncing Nahuatl words, the emphasis is always on the next to last syllable.