

**ROUND TABLE ON LATE ARCHAEOLOGY
IN THE SOUTH COASTAL REGION:
DISCUSSION**

Bárbara Arroyo

The Round Table on the South Coastal region was implemented with the purpose of discussing information on recent investigations focused on Late Classic and Postclassic occupations in the region. This event included the participation of Oswaldo Chinchilla, Héctor Neff, Marion P. Hatch, Frederick J. Bove, José Vicente Genovez and Ruud Van Akkeren. They all contributed significant information about the different regions that are being studied by each one of them. Some of the works submitted are published in this section, though unfortunately the following papers were never made available for publication: "Migration and ethnicity: The Nahua-Pipils Project in Pacific Coastal Guatemala" by Frederick J. Bove, and "Postclassic in South Coastal Guatemala: the Nahua-Pipils Revisited" by José Genovez. However, having read their papers at the Round Table, their participation in the discussion that followed the activity was significant. The transcription of this discussion is presented below. The transcription was kindly elaborated by Margarita Cossich, assisted by Federico Paredes, who retrieved it from the video shot by the archaeology student Antonio Portillo, from the University of San Carlos. Occasionally, some phrases may be confusing, as they are the result of literal transcription.

Chairperson and Organizer: Bárbara Arroyo

Panel: Frederick Bove, Ruud Van Akkeren, José Vicente Genovez, Marion Popenoe de Hatch, Oswaldo Chinchilla, and Héctor Neff

Bárbara Arroyo: Basically, I think we have seen plenty of information on exchange and interaction; the works accomplished by Oswaldo Chinchilla and Hector Neff reflect the wealth of information available regarding the interaction of populations between the South Coast and other zones, particularly the case of Cotzumalguapa where there is presence of Bulux Red type ceramics from Totonicapan, and Chama ceramics from Verapaz. Interestingly, the Bulux Red pottery has been documented in Agua Tibia as corresponding to the utilitarian type. This should not come as a surprise, as the site has also shown evidence of pottery from the South Coast, in a way that a two-ways interaction is to be pointed out.

It would be interesting to approach now the subject matter and the meaning of the presence of Bulux Red and Chama ceramics in Cotzumalguapa: is it reflecting visits? Is it reflecting exchange? My attention was very much caught by the fact that the distribution of these pieces was verified close to the causeways of the Cotzumalguapa sites; obviously, the Plumbate issue is also very interesting, particularly because there is one Plumbate that emerges by the end of the Classic – which is San Juan Plumbate-, and then, for the Postclassic, the Tohil Plumbate, one

located in Coastal Guatemala and the other one in the neighboring Coastal Chiapas, respectively. Is this reflecting the movement of groups or different linguistic groups?

Dr. Hatch's work is very interesting in regard to the way she approached the conquest of the K'iche' population in Tak'alik' Ab'aj, and I particularly think that it would be relevant to discuss questions such as: was this a pacific or a violent conquest?, or, what was the nature of it? We are all very interested; the comprehensive work Hatch has accomplished in the field of traditions is as well reflecting ethnic and/or linguistic interactions. The investigations conducted by Dr. Bove and Lic. Genovez are also very significant because of their contribution of novel data on the occupation of the Coast in Postclassic times, particularly in the late part of it, which leads us to the question: what about the earlier part? This is somewhat more extensively discussed in Ruud Van Akkeren's work, who has examined countless ethno-historic documents which, in addition to providing information on the Postclassic issue, has led us a bit further, with references to sites of a remarkable antiquity. Then I am leaving you with this, so that speakers with a specific intervention may participate answering the questions.

Ruud Van Akkeren: What has interested me the most in the accounts if this table has to do with Marion Hatch's paper on the arrival of the K'iche' from the Altiplano to Tak'alik' Ab'aj; what I find interesting is –like she said- that according to the documents, this arrival of the K'iche' took place quite late in the Tak'alik' Ab'aj area, and I have found, precisely, one document at the archive where the descendants –in my view- of Tak'alik' Ab'aj spoke. They were Mam speaking people, who at that time lived in Quetzaltenango, and they talked precisely about the arrival of the K'iche', whom they referred to as Achi, but then with people speaking this tongue (Achi, one version of the K'iche'), who were coming to Quetzaltenango, and in this document we are talking about not more than one hundred years. The people who lived in Tak'alik' Ab'aj may have come from the K'iche' area, but that does not mean they were K'iche' speakers, because the Mam area –according to my investigation- in the Altiplano was of much larger dimensions. What is interesting – and this is what I wanted to discuss with her- is that according to my investigations the K'iche' nation or confederation was precisely founded by Mam people.

Now we must forget about the K'iche' names as paleo-linguistic names; the name K'iche' was given to a nation and it was a political name. And this nation which was founded in the XI century was founded by Mam people. That is what I have found... and that is what I would like to discuss with Dr. Hatch.

Marion P. Hatch: I'm afraid I do not understand what you are saying. What is it that the Mam have founded?

Ruud Van Akkeren: The K'iche' nation was founded by a Mam lineage.

Marion P. Hatch: Well, we cannot know that for sure... what I feel is that at Tak'alik' Ab'aj this is a group that comes from, or either is related to, the Coast (we are talking around 1000 BC). We do not have the slightest idea about how these groups were founded, but they are related with that group and I have always said that we do not know what group, or what language was spoken in Tak'alik' Ab'aj. For the time being,

there is no way we can identify the language they spoke. What we indeed must search for, is a group that could understand the Maya hieroglyphs, a group that had contacts with Cholan groups, this being the hypothesis according to which there were Cholans in Kaminaljuyu, and there is a Popti group in the northern Altiplano of Guatemala that is connected with the Cholans. That is why I believe that possibly they were not Mam. The impression is that they were Mam because they were in the Mam area, but then that would be the easiest conclusion to make.

What I would like to point out about your comment that Tak'alik Ab'aj is the Tooja of the documents –it is not so- because clearly the Kaqchikel conquered Tooja and the Kaqchikel are located in the central Altiplano. And the entering pottery comes from the northwest. This complex, according to the studies accomplished, develops in the northwestern Altiplano, which later integrates the K'iche' area, and not after the Mam group we see in Zaculeu –which has a different pottery.

Ruud Van Akkeren: About this Tooja issue, we certainly know they were conquered by lineages, and that is why I prefer to talk about Tzotzil and Tucuch lineages, which are only Kaqchikel lineages. By the time they were fighting against Tooja they were still mercenaries, and served like soldiers for both the K'iche' and Tooja. That is found in the title of the common wars of the Kaqchikel. However, I believe that the most interesting issue to discuss here is: do the indigenous documents reflect that which ceramics reflect, in other words, ethno-historically and archaeologically? Because it would seem that there is some kind of relationship –in fact, that was the permanent discussion we had with Bove all the time. I find different things than those Fred Bove finds in his studies. That could be because the documents would mostly reflect the image of a small elite group, while pottery is utilitarian and has to do with people.

Frederick J. Bove: This is something we have discussed intensively in recent years. I wish to clarify something I did not say in my paper, two points. 1) As long as we do not find Early Postclassic evidence in the Lower Coast –I am not referring to the boca costa but a bit higher up- then for us it is a great mystery why is there Early Postclassic evidence at the sites of Cihuatán and Las Marías in El Salvador. They are very close. If the Pipil are going through the South Coast, then obviously they must go across Suchitepequez, Escuintla and Santa Rosa, but there is no evidence of this during the Early Postclassic times.

I would want to believe that there is a tradition of movement between Mexico and the South Coast. A long time ago, during a project in Montana, Escuintla, when we found very good evidence of the arrival of people from Central Mexico, or Teotihuacans, we speculated that they were Nahuatl peoples, although this is a different problem as there is no consensus with linguists about the tongue that was spoken in Teotihuacan. Many colleagues are thinking that they possibly spoke Nahuatl or a very late Nahuatl, perhaps around the Middle Classic in Teotihuacan, and others say they spoke Otomi, or some other thing. Then, it indeed can be proved that Nahuatl speaking Teotihuacans are arriving, and strongly, to the South Coast in Middle Classic times, transmitting their lineages etc through the Altiplano. I do not mind about speculating, but proving this think is basically impossible, then we go to the

Late Classic with a great Pipil or Nahuatl influence in the South Coast towards the Altiplano and other places.

In the Terminal Classic, in the Coast, it should be proved that the Late Classic sites with Tiquisate pottery –like Ixtepeque, etc- are Nahuatl or Nahuatl speaking sites, and truth is evidence is not good for such purpose. Then we have a conflict between the archaeological and the ethno-historical evidence in this sense. Right now we are initiating these projects, and we do not know which side we will finally take.

Marion P. Hatch: I have several comments.

- Pottery is not only privative of the people. It is both elite and domestic, and carries information that reaches beyond the domestic.
- One problem that I have, something that deserves to be studied, and I am not at the site, but in my view the Carolina pottery in Escuintla is not Pipil. In the site of Carolina, the ceramics show that it developed as of the Amatlé from the Altiplano, which remains developing on in the Coast. The problem has always been: how can we have a Pipil population in the Coast? We do not have it in Tak'alik Ab'aj, like Fred says, and we neither have it more towards west, but there is a Pipil population there at the coast. I agree with Fred that the new information suggests that we indeed can have Nahuatl in Teotihuacan, and that solves the problem; and I am very impressed with the studies of Oswaldo Chinchilla's evidence on the Pipil elsewhere in the South Coast. We cannot identify Izquintlan to know what kind of pottery they had, but for the time being, we do not have, I have not observed, no one has corroborated to me that we have Pipil pottery in the South Coast.
- In regard to Fred's comment about the absence of defensive sites in the Postclassic, I would like to refer to the comments made by Alvarado on how difficult it was to enter Izquintan, because of its thick forest. To me, this represents a defensive site, and an almost impenetrable one, then, what I want is that we see the issue in a simple way – I like simple, not complicated things.
- Pottery enters the Coast through the beach of La Blanca, Ujuxte, then it reaches Tiquisate, where it probably has permanent contacts with Mexico, and it is at that time that the Teotihuacan influence enters, and this is how we may have Pipil.
- At that time, this helps us to understand why we have a Pipil island in the Postclassic, while the rest of them had already left towards El Salvador.

Bárbara Arroyo: Perhaps Oswaldo, with the works accomplished in the Cotzumalguapa area and his information about the Classic or the end of the Classic, has something to say about the people who inhabited the region.

Oswaldo Chinchilla: In fact, in other works, I have been inclining myself more and more towards understanding the idea that the Nahuatl language must have in fact

existed in Escuintla since the Classic period. Of course, Fred has already pointed out that this is a problem that has to do with the Teotihuacan language, not yet resolved by linguists; however, I have recently seen in their works –mostly those of Karen Dakin and Soren Wichmann- that they tend to accept that the Nahua languages in Central Mexico have an earlier date than thought, and also David Stuart and other authors have found some entries in Maya hieroglyphs that can be read in Nahua. Therefore, that would suggest that since the Classic period, words were being taken from some language of the Nahua family in the Maya area. According to this, I think that we cannot rule out the idea that in Cotzumalguapa some Nahua tongue was being spoken, and needless to say, also in other parts of Escuintla since the Classic, and now Fred's work has come to show that some Postclassic sites that he identifies as Pipil are actually a very different thing. Therefore, from the archaeological point of view, we see a discontinuity there; and this, somehow, comes to contradict the idea. If there was in fact a Nahua population since the Classic period, all right; but they are not the same that were there in the Conquest, so, what we still have is a very complex picture.

Bárbara Arroyo: Questions of the audience.

Matilde Ivic: Which is the ceramic trait that identifies those sites considered to be Pipil? What ceramic? Which is the relationship of ceramics to know or to date...?

Frederick J. Bove: Yes, it obviously is a part of the project; we use the documentary evidence of the colonial towns located very close to the Postclassic centers we are now investigating. We also have a complex of domestic wares that is different, completely different to the one of the north region of the Kaqchikel area and west of the Xinca area. Like Vicente Genovez has already mentioned, it is very consistent all over the area, where we have focused on three or four features:

- the domestic pottery, using *comales* –and there is nothing more domestic than a cooking dish- and the *comales* in this area are different, they are not in the least related to the zone of Cotzumalguapa, K'iche' Kaqchikel and Xinca, they are very different and very consistent in this zone as well.
- about the sites: they are new, they are intrusive, like Vicente already mentioned. Basically, all cultural materials were found within the first 40 cm in the South Coastal area of tractorization, there are no multiple occupations, there are no multiple constructions. Then, obviously, they are recent, they belonged to people very recently arrived, and we are trying to organize the settlement pattern to try to identify features we may link with Mexican groups, perhaps different than the Xinca and the Kaqchikel, but for the moment we are just initiating the analysis.
- one thing that is causing us many problems is that unfortunately there is no real good documentation about the moment of the Conquest, up to the first documents existing in Escuintla. Then we are having many difficulties trying to link directly the archaeological remains with the prehistoric documentation. The *Título de San Andrés*, the *Título de Cerrato*, is the first to speak about the tributes the Pipil peoples are paying. Then we have colonial evidence that

Mexican or Nahua or Pipil is being spoken in these towns. The sites we have found, like Carolina, Gomera, just a few kilometers south of Chipilapa, at the site of Las Playas very close to the colonial town of Montepeque. The site of Costa Rica is very close to the site of Miahuatlan which no longer exists; then, with this type of information and the different pottery in the same package, we are more or less sure that the group we are talking about is a Pipil group.

Héctor Neff: I have a possible explanation for the lack of continuity between the Late Classic and the Late Postclassic period. This has to do with some data about the climate from a recent investigation showing that 2800 years ago the climate was very humid, in other words, the time was suitable for the growing of a population and all that. Around 1000 ago, there was a repeated period of droughts that lasted for approximately 400 years; then, the non-continuity of the Late Classic and Postclassic pottery may be due to the non-continuity of the population, which disappeared 1000 years ago, followed by a migration wave that originated in Mexico possibly around 1400, or the like... of course, this is mere speculation.

Marion P. Hatch: I wish to answer Ruud, and this is a debate we are having for a long time now; undoubtedly, there is no coastal ceramic going upwards. That complex where he has the origins is a very different complex, very easily recognized, one that does not go up to the Altiplano; therefore, if we are going to talk about migration we must eliminate the ceramic argument.

Vicente Genovez: One additional interesting thing is to mention that many of the areas with domestic occupation we could observe in some of the sites, are dozens of places with surface materials we were able to delimit somehow, located on the higher portions of the ground where we could work. Many such areas are extremely sandy, and basically, several persons, some of the families that are settling around the main centers, are settling down in the higher parts, constituted by sand banks. These sand banks belong or were created by the water outflow of the Río La Gomera, probably around the end of the Classic and the beginning of the Postclassic, as we also had the chance to observe late and much eroded Classic materials inside these sand banks, though not too abundantly. The transportation of many of these materials comes from who knows where to that place; and basically, it is in the scarce dark and cultivable lands located in the vicinities where most of the materials we are putting in the Late Postclassic period come from.

It is also interesting to see some comparisons –of a very preliminary nature for the moment- we have made between some *comales* of the area and others that our colleagues from El Salvador –I want to thank them for being here- have been kind enough to show me; and we have as well observed some differences with materials that are presumably earlier in the Postclassic at El Salvador, the Guazapa and Mapazan phases. There is a difference in this sense; some materials –like micaceous and these *comales* manufactured with the sandy paste- we had the opportunity to observe in the Lower Coast at the center of Escuintla, apparently, and because of the paste composition analysis accomplished, are of local manufacture, and the few ones that are found at the boca costa, mainly in Santa Lucia, that we were able to compare, are apparently imported from these centers of the Lower Coast and the other way around, The micaceous we have in the lower part were

manufactured in the upper region, and then there is some degree of exchange, though at a very low scale. We have not seen these *comales* in the Postclassic materials of the Southeastern Coast or other places close to the Central Coast.

Bárbara Arroyo: Words of farewell...