

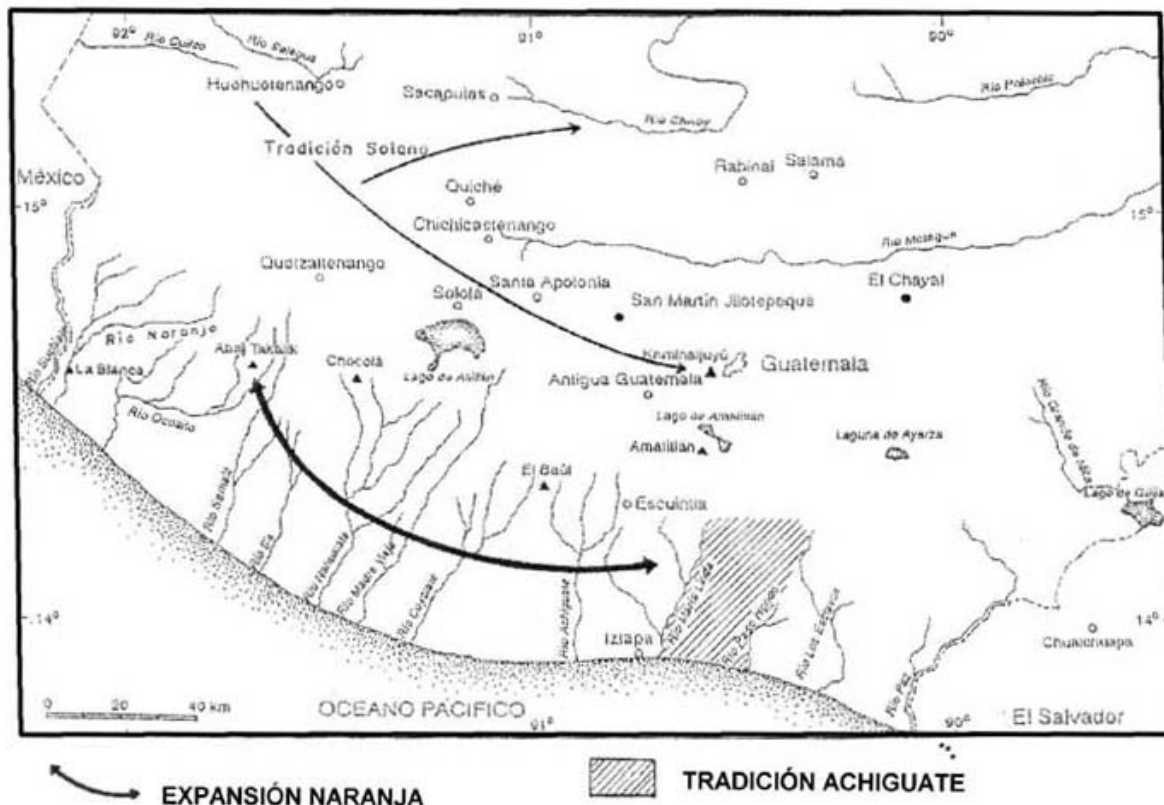
## THE KAMINALJUYU PARK ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT: PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE CERAMIC ANALYSIS

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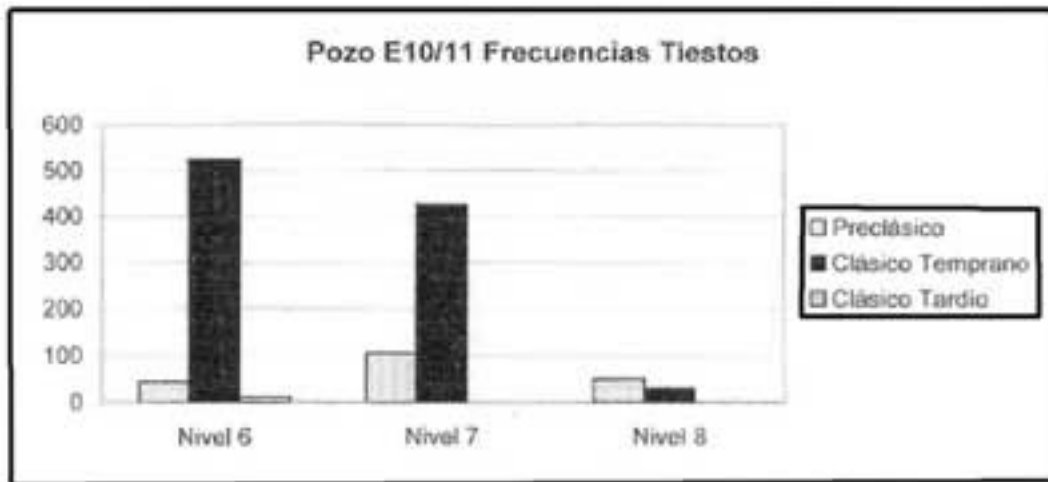
The ceramic analysis of the recent excavations at the Kaminaljuyu Park comes to reinforce the conclusions established in the Kaminaljuyu San Jorge and Kaminaljuyu Miraflores II projects, conducted during the 1980's and 1990's (Popenoe de Hatch 1997, 2000), when it was said that an intruder population had taken control over Kaminaljuyu, and that such event had quickly taken place at the end of the Late Preclassic period, during the Santa Clara phase. This population has been identified as the group that expanded from the Northwestern Highlands towards the Central Highlands in Guatemala. They established themselves in a large settlement presently known as Solano, southwest of the Guatemala Valley, and it would seem that from that place they made their way in and took control over Kaminaljuyu at the beginning of the Early Classic period (Figure 1). That is why the name Solano Ceramic Tradition is used to refer to the pottery used by the intruder population. Their arrival to Kaminaljuyu was abrupt, and their ceramic types do not have local antecedents.

The conquest of Kaminaljuyu does not seem to have been violent or of warfare-like nature. Evidence suggests that during the Santa Clara phase the site was already undergoing economic, political and ecological decay. The great Lake Miraflores had dried up, and the sophisticated San Jorge and Miraflores canal system was no longer operational. It is evident that by the end of the Preclassic period, pottery showed a remarkable decline, both in the number of types and the quality of manufacture, suggesting that the center was under economic and sociopolitical tension. Apparently, the population of Solano took advantage of such weak situation and began to move in along the borders. Solano is strategically located between the valley and a narrow space that communicates the pass with Escuintla, on the South Coast. The position of Solano on an elevated ground above that pass, may have allowed them to cut the exchange between both regions, thus producing an increased tension in Kaminaljuyú. Besides, we should not disregard the aggressive expansion of the population associated with the Orange Ceramic Tradition through the South Coast, which was interrupting the commercial networks. Given such a tremendous crisis, it seems that most of the population fled the site and probably headed to the Motagua Valley, in the southeastern region of Guatemala.



**Figure 1. The expansion of the Solano Ceramic Tradition into the Northwestern Highlands and that of the Naranja Ceramic Tradition into the South Coast, during the Early Classic period.**

The excavations at the Kaminaljuyu Park indicate that the Early Classic builders were not in the area for too long a time before they began with a huge construction project where the Kaminaljuyu Park is presently located. The chart in Figure 2 shows that the Solano complex made an abrupt entrance in this zone, and that the construction of their buildings was quickly initiated. This place, which had once been a residential area with a dense Late Preclassic occupation, was almost entirely leveled by the newcomers and rebuilt in extended and very large platforms that supported a major civic and administrative center. In some areas, the refill goes down to a depth of 5 or 6 m. The Early Classic refuse, contemporary to the construction moment, is found mixed with the Late Preclassic refill obtained from the previously demolished buildings. Apparently, the Early Classic builders destroyed the Preclassic remains, leaving the old refill at the sides and later using it again to rebuild both the structures and associated plazas. Such works implied a large labor force, but at this stage of our research it is not possible to ascertain the percentage of local workers that remained there and that were a part of the previous occupation, and how many were part of the newly arrived population.



	Nivel 6	Nivel 7	Nivel 8
Preclásico	44	105	50
Clásico Temprano	524	426	31
Clásico Tardío	12		

**Figure 2. Chart of sherd frequencies in the E10/11 Excavation. The sherds of the Solano Ceramic Tradition enter abruptly at the beginning of the Early Classic period, and very rapidly become predominant in Kaminaljuyu.**

The depth of the plaza refill (3 m, approximately), points to the huge volume of constructions initiated at the park in the Early Classic period. Nevertheless, the sherds of this period were not abundant at that time, suggesting that the new dwellers had not been long enough in the area to accumulate a large amount of garbage of their own around the construction area. The absence of household pottery, such as griddles and other kitchen wares, shows that the Early Classic builders were not residing in the areas adjacent to the Acropolis and La Palangana. It would seem that the present Kaminaljuyu Park served civic and administrative functions at that time. The presence of censers in several Early Classic levels would also suggest that during that timeframe, they were used for public and ceremonial matters.

### **THE TEOTIHUACAN “PRESENCE” IN KAMINALJUYU**

In spite of the presence of talud-tablero architecture at the Kaminaljuyu Park, the Early Classic structures have not virtually produced pottery of the Teotihuacan style. We suspect that these foreign imports were only in the hands of the highest rank of the elite and government. Most burials, deposited in that which probably were their households, were found in Mounds A and B excavated by Edwin Shook in 1941 and 1942 (Kidder, Jennings and Shook 1946). Inside these burials, the majority of the Teotihuacan tripod cylinders known in Kaminaljuyu were recovered. In contrast, the Early Classic structures at the Kaminaljuyu Park were not designed to function as elite households, or to accommodate their burials. However, the style of censers with

abundant appliqués for decoration is similar though not identical to that of Teotihuacan.

The architecture of the Acropolis during the Early Classic period displays a degree of sophistication in engineering techniques not seen in earlier or later times, but even though they have similar construction methods, the details vary (Stephen Houston, personal communication 2003). It is probable that a number of advisers and visitors arrived in Kaminaljuyu from Teotihuacan, but there are no traces of a large Teotihuacan population residing in the area, or signs suggesting that the site was subjected to some kind of control from Mexico. It is possible as well that these “counselors” were accommodated in the residencies of Mounds A and B, and that they gave their hosts the Teotihuacan vases as a gift. The ceramic evidence continues to show that the so-called Teotihuacan influence was taken to Kaminaljuyu by the Solano people, who had an extended history of contacts with Mexico and who were already connected with the Teotihuacans, or were in the process of closing agreements with them. They were responsible for carrying the new styles with them, either in the form of imported items or imitations manufactured with local resources.

## **THE EARLY CLASSIC TO LATE CLASSIC TRANSITION IN KAMINALJUYU**

The nature of the transition from the Early Classic to the Late Classic periods in Kaminaljuyu is one of the main research subjects in the ceramic analysis underway. The excavations have showed that during the Late Classic, once again the Acropolis witnessed a huge volume of reconstruction works. This structure was heavily modified, apparently to be used as residence of elite individuals, perhaps to accommodate a new ruling group. Around the Acropolis there is substantial amount of Late Classic residential garbage, consisting of griddles and other kitchen vessels, together with bowls and cups to eat. Up to now, in the excavations conducted at the Park only a very small amount of Early Classic pottery was found, which makes one think that the use of the area for dwelling began at the end of that period, and continued throughout the Late Classic. Recently, a very interesting material was discovered in the areas at the north and northwest of the Acropolis, which reflects the Early Classic to Late Classic transition in Kaminaljuyu. In this area, the excavations yielded domestic garbage (griddles and jars for example) corresponding to the end of the Esperanza phase (Early Classic) and the beginning of the Amatle phase (Late Classic). The presence of habitation within this timeframe is consistent with the remodeling of the Acropolis, probably to be used as a palace or a residence.

On the other hand, the plaza and the structures in La Palangana show little Late Classic modifications. There is only a narrow level of garbage accumulation, though clearly the architectural complex was still being used, as well as the Acropolis. However, the wall –or platform- around La Palangana, although already present in the Early Classic period, was substantially enlarged during the Late Classic, indicating that some function was still being served; however, and for the time being, it is not possible to fully understand why it was built.

The evolution of the Early Classic to the Late Classic ceramics, both from the Esperanza Flesh to the Amatle ware, and from the Prisma ware to Alegría suggests

that the same population continued to reside at the site throughout the whole Classic period. Nonetheless, the Early Classic censer was replaced in the Late Classic by a simpler cylindrical form. Besides, the extensive reconstruction of the Acropolis involved as well different and less sophisticated architectural techniques than those of the Early Classic time span. When gathering all this body of evidence, one is under the impression that even though the population remained at the site, they somehow rejected the activities, styles and religious practices of the Early Classic period.

There is little doubt that Kaminaljuyu became highly decentralized in its final period; one indication in this sense is the presence of 11 Ballcourts across the entire site. The hypothesis set forth by the Pennsylvania State University that the site was split among several lineage heads (Michels 1979) might be a suitable explanation for the absence of centralization. During the Late Classic, the Acropolis and its surrounding area may have served as residence and operation headquarters of one of the important Late Classic lineages.

Earlier publications have argued that the Solano Ceramic Tradition probably represented the Major K'iche' linguistic group which was dispersed in the Guatemalan Highlands at the beginning of the Early Classic period, to remain in the area during the rest of the Classic and the entire Postclassic period. Archaeological investigations in the region of Uatatlán carried out during the 1970's by the New York State University at Albany, show that the ceramic development in this region was gradual and continued during the Classic and the Postclassic periods, with no evidence of any major ceramic intrusion (Brown 1982:45). The only trajectory worth noticing consisted in a trend towards the nucleation of settlements in the subsequent periods, whereby Uatatlán, during the Late Postclassic period, was finally turned into a regional capital. Something similar happened at other areas of the zone, like Zacualpa (Wauchope 1975) and sites close to the Cotzal River (Adams 1972). The archaeological studies imply that these populations underwent no radical changes throughout the Late Classic and Postclassic periods.

Then, it is evident that the sole major intrusion in the Northwestern and Central Highlands took place at the beginning of the Early Classic period. In this sense, a statement in the *Título de los Indios de Santa Clara La Laguna (Deed of the Indians of Santa Clara La Laguna)*, a K'iche' document written in 1583 is of interest. In their land claims of the northwestern section of Guatemala, and referring to their families' ancestries, they declare that "*It was from this place that in antiquity their mothers and fathers departed. Their grandparents and parents arrived one thousand and four hundred years ago, oh, sons and brothers of ours!*" (Recinos 1957:179). In subtracting 1400 years to 1583, we obtain the date of AD183, a time that is closely consistent with the Early Classic expansion in the Guatemalan Highlands.

If the ceramic studies show that the sole intrusion of populations in the Northwestern and Central Guatemalan Highlands took place during the Early Classic period and that the cultural development was gradual along the Postclassic, then the sole possible conclusion is that the original populations associated with the Solano Ceramic Tradition were still in the region of northwestern Guatemala at the time of

the Spanish Conquest. The constant evolution of the local pottery indicates that these populations lived in the overall area for an extended period of time. Therefore, one may conclude that the group associated with the Solano Tradition that began their move into the Central Highlands during the Early classic period, must have been Major K'iche' speakers.

There is general consensus that the K'iche' and Kakchikel languages already existed around AD 900-1000 (Kaufman 1976: 103). In coincidence with the separation of the Major K'iche population into three subdivisions during the Late Classic, the ceramic as well begins to be separated into three different complexes. Around AD 1000, or maybe shortly after, the three linguistic groups, K'iche', Kaqchikel and Tz'utujil may be identified as closely related with one another, but each one of them reflects different ethnic groups and lineages with slight differences in their ceramic complexes.

As to tradition, the population associated to the Solano pottery maintained close links with Chiapas and Central Mexico. Therefore, it is no surprise to discover that when this group arrived in Kaminaljuyu it already had links with Teotihuacan, and probably received some kind of help to gain control over the Guatemalan Highlands. The collapse suffered by Teotihuacan reflected in Kaminaljuyu with the re-emergence of local styles in architecture, and sociopolitical decentralization. In the Postclassic period, Kaminaljuyu was abandoned, and the Poqom moved into the valley. However, and already on the Northwestern Highlands, once again links were established with Mexican groups such as the Toltecs and the Aztecs. The groups of the Major K'iche' had been associated with Mexican groups probably even before the Teotihuacan times, and the Mexican ideology and sociopolitical organization were expressed in their habits, in their memories of ancient times, and in their ethnohistorical accounts. It is not necessary to interpret, literally, that their rulers came from Mexico, be it during the Early Classic or the Postclassic period, to dominate and assume control over the Guatemalan Highlands.

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Figure 1 The expansion of the Solano Ceramic Tradition into the Northwestern Highlands and of the Orange Ceramic Tradition into the South Coast during the Early Classic period.

Figure 2 Chart of sherd frequency in excavation E10/11. The sherds of the Solano Ceramic Tradition enter abruptly at the beginning of the Early Classic period and quickly dominate Kaminaljuyu.