



FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM



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Weaving
cuyuscate
in Tecpán.
Photo by
Darío Morales.
1996.
Ixchel
Museum
Photo
Archive.



NATURAL COLORS

When we think back on the ancient Maya, we assume that their clothes were colorful. Except for a few fragments found in tombs and the Chichén Itzá cenote, ancient Maya textiles have not survived, so we know about Mayan weavings from the paintings on their polychrome pots, in codices, and from the carvings on stela. These sources allow us to surmise that Mayan garments were made of the same plant fibers as those their descendants used in the colonial times--plants that still grow in Guatemala: natural brown and white cotton and agave fibers.

According to Ana Roquero in "Ancient Dyestuffs of the Maya," the colors were generally applied as paint to the textiles. Cinnabar--an orange-red-vermillion--was found painted on textiles in a tomb at Río Azul, but the color could not have been commonplace. Cinnabar

is mercuric sulfide and so poisonous that it would have only been used for garments for the dead.

Of the colors of textiles in the colonial era we know much more. The most important natural dye used on cotton fibers was indigo, which comes directly from the plant, *Indigofera*, and produces a dark blue color. Also called añil, indigo became an important export from Central America before the chemical dyes were created in the 19th century.

Purple was extracted from the secretions of mollusks of the genera *Purpura patula* L., and was another of the natural dyes that worked well on the cellulose fibers of cotton. Traces of it have been found in the ancient textile fragments.

Red came from cochineal, the dried

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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WEARABLE PLANTS is the name of The Morris Arboretum's exhibit of natural colored cotton and natural dyes which runs from October 15th to April 15th, 2002. Friends of the Ixchel Museum has drawn on its own textile collection for the exhibit and is grateful to the University of Pennsylvania Museum for the loan of very beautiful, antique textiles which will be the centerpieces of the exhibit.

PRO-TEJE, the Ixchel Museum's highland Maya weaving project with natural brown cotton, has prospered since "Friends" gave it seed money each year for its first three years. Pro-Teje gives the natural brown cotton thread to the village weavers who return to work at home. There they recreate their own traditional village designs--and each village has different ones--in the beautiful light brown *cuyuscate* weavings.



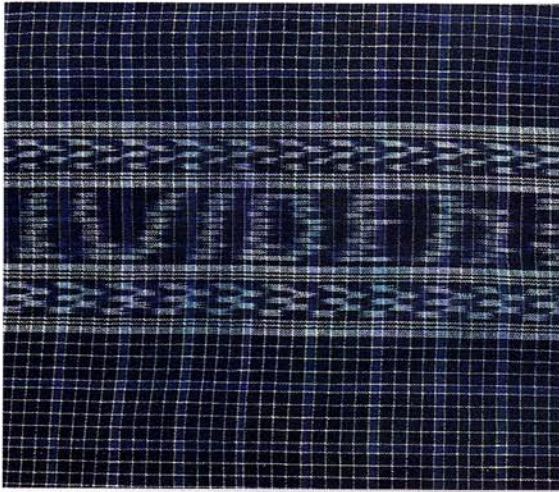
PRESERVING THE TEXTILE ARTS OF GUATEMALA



left:
Cobán ikat
skirt dyed
with indigo.

right:
Almolonga
ceremonial
pants dyed
with cochineal
and pátula
purpura.

both
from the
Ixchel Museum
Textile
Collection



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

female insect *Dactylopius coccus* Costa which lives on the nopal cactus in Mexico and Central America. Cochineal does not dye cotton well but gives an intense color to the wool and silk brought by the Spaniards. Some of the wool blankets and silk embroidery on *huipiles* in the Ixchel Museum are a rich, brilliant red from cochineal.

Black came from Logwood and brown from the bark of the Nance tree.

When synthetic dyes were developed in the mid 19th century, they proved easy to use and produced colors of hitherto unattainable intensity. It is no wonder that they became increasingly popular among the Mayan weavers in the Americas. The weavers were also delighted by synthetic fibers like rayon--which looks like beautiful silk but is less costly--and by glittering metallic threads when they were created.

Today, interestingly enough, there is a growing interest in the natural dyes used by the Maya and also a revival of the use of natural brown cotton. Called *cuyuscate* in Spanish and *kaqo'j* in Kachiquel, the natural brown cotton has been used less in weavings because of the difficulty of finding commercially spun thread. In Guatemala a source of brown cotton thread has been developed, however, and the Ixchel Museum, through a backstrap weaving program named "Pro-Teje," is providing the thread to highland village weavers. The results--placemats and napkins, tablecloths and handbags--are soft cream and light brown. Because the output is selling well, more and more weavers have joined the project; at the moment there are over 125 women weaving for Pro-Teje.

We expect that textiles dyed with soft natural colors will follow suit.



IN THE MUSEUM

THE 2002 CALENDAR, "Color, Festivity and Costume," has photographs of important yearly celebrations in Maya highland villages.

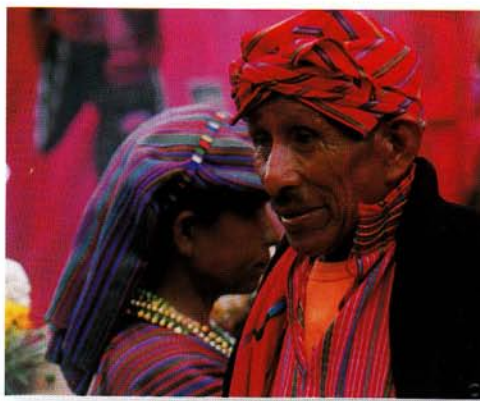
VILLAGE FESTIVALS will be the subjects in 2002 of monthly museum lectures and events. Mannequins in village dress will be arranged in scenes around the galleries and ramp of the museum.

BACKSTRAP WEAVING for adults will be taught in the museum Tuesday mornings and for children on the first Saturday of every month.

TRADITIONAL FIELD GAMES is the subject of the conference in Tokyo, November 2 to 6th. Fabiana de Sáenz, in charge of educational programs at the museum, has been invited to attend by the Ministry of Education of Japan. She will present typical Guatemalan children's outdoor games like *tipaches*, *matado*, and *caracol*.

THE GETTY AND FINNISH GRANTS addressed the management of the textile collection. The Getty grant was for the *huipiles*, *cintas* and *fajas*; the grant from Finland was for the wool garments in the collection. The result is that the Ixchel Museum now has a computerized, photographic inventory of over 60% of its collection. Also, the *huipiles*, *cintas*, *fajas*, and wool garments have been correctly and carefully stored in a state of preservation where they are not being damaged by their storage.

STILL 40% TO INVENTORY. The skirts and ceremonial cloths, or *tzutes*, make up the bulk of the pieces that need to be inventoried, preserved and stored. There are also cotton pants, shirts, shawls, napkins, handkerchiefs.



The 2002
Ixchel
Museum
Calendar
Photo by
Edwin
Castro



Chichicastenango
Cofrade.
Photo by
Anne Girard
de Marroquín.
2001.
Ixchel Museum
Photo Archive.

*Note the bright
commercial dyes
in his ceremonial
headcloth.*

PRESERVATION VS. CONSERVATION. There are some beautiful old textiles that can not be exhibited until they are conserved. Donors can sponsor the conservation of a certain piece and be given credit when that piece is exhibited.

DONATIONS TO FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

Please help Friends of the Ixchel Museum sponsor weaving projects, fund traveling textile exhibits, translate textile research, and support projects to enrich the Ixchel Museum.

Friends of the Ixchel Museum is an American foundation and donations are deductible by the donor for U.S. general income tax purposes. Checks drawn to the name of Friends of the Ixchel Museum, Inc., may be mailed to:

Friends of the Ixchel Museum, Inc., P.O.Box 8055, Radnor PA 19087-8055

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Return Service Requested



Girls from Santa
Catarina Palopó.
Photo by Anne
Girard de
Marroquín 2001.
Ixchel Museum
Photo Archive.

*Note the glittery
metallic threads in
their headdresses.*

