

FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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RESEARCH IN THE WEAVING VILLAGES

Anthropologists vanish from time to time. One imagines them voyaging alone beyond the horizon to do their field work. Months later, when their notebooks are filled and investigation done, they return to write a thesis, a research monograph or an immensely popular book. A distant village will be the subject of a work in a language it does not understand, and it will launch a career it will never know about.

A different relationship exists between the Indian villages and the Ixchel Museum anthropologists who study their weavings. "We take our printed research back to the communities," says Linda de Barrios, Director of Research of the Ixchel Museum and former Fulbright fellow. "It is a small way to repay them for all the warmth they have shown us."



Three *cofrades* from San Juan Sacatepéquez, Guatemala.
Photo by Enrique Martínez. Photo Archives, Ixchel Museum.

The first step in each investigation is to choose the community to be studied. The richness of the textiles, the need for scholarly investigation in the region, the accessibility of the village, and the political situation are all determining factors.

A plan and a focus for the research are worked out; a multidisciplinary team is chosen; and preliminary historical research is done in the museum library. Then the anthropologists travel to the village, where they present letters of introduction to the civil, religious and military authorities. They live with village families and begin their work by seeking out the most skilled weavers.

"In every village, I sit and weave," says Rosario de Polanco, Curator and Technical Director of the Ixchel Museum. "I find someone who will

teach me the weaving techniques of the town and we talk."

A textile expert studies not only the technical aspects of the weaving but also the garments themselves, the occasions on which they are worn, and the wearer--his or her position in the community and economic level. The designs and their significance are recorded.

"I try to discover and transmit the meaning of their dress as they see it--its significance to them," says Barrios. "I think of their costume as a language, a social code of expression. For them their clothes transmit messages and have special meaning."

The anthropologist also relates the traditional costume to other aspects of community life. For example, in San Juan Comalapa, the reflection of the traditional costume in the works of the town's primitive painters was the focus of the monograph. In Sololá, the relationship of costume to the political and religious hierarchy was researched, and in Zunil the economic aspect of weaving was investigated.

Changes in the community's costume in the last 100 years are documented by studying pieces in the museum's collection, requesting information from museums abroad, and talking to the oldest weavers. Although the earliest textiles are generally considered most valuable, Barrios says: "We take an objective position. We do not try to give a value to the pieces."

An exhibit is mounted at the Ixchel Museum using mannequins arranged in village scenes--women weaving, a wedding, a procession, a town festival. Villagers help dress the mannequins and arrange their hair ribbons; they verify that each textile is displayed correctly. Some textiles are new, but most are older pieces from the museum or private col-

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IN THE MUSEUM

KAQCHIKEL AND POQOMAM WEAVINGS

The Ixchel Museum's ninth regional exhibit presents weavings from the Kaqchikel and Poqomam villages within the district of Guatemala--San Juan, San Raymundo, and San Pedro Sacatepéquez, Churranchó, San Pedro Ayampuc, San José Nacahuil, Mixco and Chinautla. Because of their nearness to the capital, these villages are in danger of losing their traditional dress. In Mixco, the traditional costume has not been worn for years, and, in San Pedro Sacatepéquez, backstrap weaving has competition from industrial sewing machine workshops.

The 1991 monograph is the first in a series of shorter investigations which are less expensive to produce and thus more accessible to students and researchers.

FULBRIGHT SCHOLARSHIP

Rosario de Polanco, Curator and Technical Director of the Ixchel Museum, has won a five-month Fulbright scholarship for investigation and study. Her proposal is to study conservation and storage of Guatemalan ethnic textiles, and she will do her work with a US museum from June to November 1991. Fulbright Fellowships are sponsored in Guatemala by the United States Information Service.

(cont. from page 1) lections. Large, backlit photographs of village scenes add color to the exhibit. At the opening, to which representatives of the community are invited, a weaver cuts the ceremonial ribbon. For about a year, the community's finest weavings will be on display in the city.

"Our research gives value to traditional weaving," adds Barrios. "It gives importance to the traditional Indian costume."

The culmination of the project is the presentation to the village of the bright, large-format research monograph. In San Juan Comalapa, it was a day of celebration. Schoolchildren paraded to trumpets and drums and sang the national anthem in Spanish and in Kaqchikel, the Mayan language of the town. Five *cofrades*, heads of the town's religious brotherhoods, who care for the saints of the churches and to whom are entrusted the traditions of their people, stood silently at the back of the crowd in their long, black woolen capes, holding the silver insignias of office. The villagers presented the anthropologist with flowers and a cloth into which they had woven their thanks.

"A year and a half ago we came to your village to ask for your collaboration," said Linda de Barrios. "You made us feel part of Comalapa when you shared your tortillas with us and shared your festivities."

"It is a great honor for Comalapa," said the mayor, "and we thank you that you have made this effort to show the beauty of Comalapa."

As the villagers received their books and turned the pages to find their own stories or pictures, the head of a primary school spoke as any small town school teacher in the world would of her own particular happiness. "We are so proud that the young people can know what beauty we have here and that they need not leave the village to look for it elsewhere."



Linda Asturias de Barrios, Director of Research of the Ixchel Museum.

LIBRARY REORGANIZATION

The Sue Borgatti Textile Library of the Ixchel Museum is being reorganized by María Antonieta Barrios de Mencos, coordinator of the information center of ASIES (Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales). The books have been inventoried and catalogued under a single system--the Dewey Decimal System. Using the UNESCO software CD/Isis program of registry and bibliographic display, Mencos has computerized the library.

The computer registry and card catalog are being expanded to include not only title, author, and subject, but also subtitles pertaining specifically to textiles. For this, Mencos has created a computer dictionary, or specialized vocabulary, of terms used in the Ixchel Museum's textile research. The vocabulary includes words relating to weaving, looms, dyes, and fibers, to Guatemalan Indian clothing, and to ethnic religions, ethnology and sociology. This enrichment of the indices will make the library particularly valuable to students and researchers.

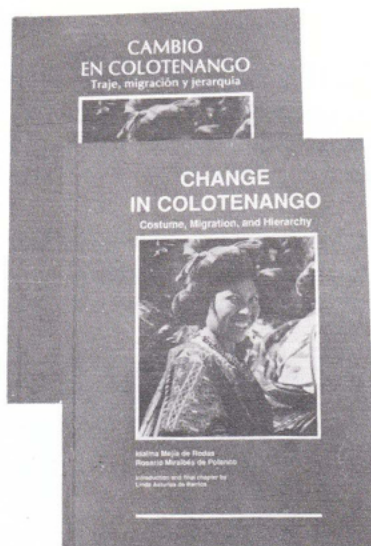
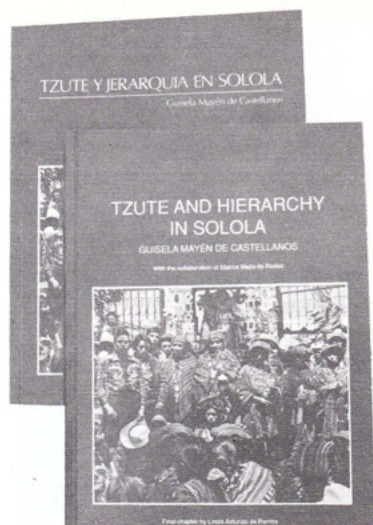


PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

PUBLISHING MONOGRAPHS IN ENGLISH

Friends of the Ixchel Museum has donated US \$5,000 to the Ixchel Museum revolving fund for translating and publishing the research monographs in English. This brings the revolving fund to US \$13,000. The monographs are available in Spanish.

The English translations are done by Ava Navin, a professional editor and translator. The monographs on Comalapa, Sololá and Colotenango are available in English; the English edition of the Santa María de Jesús monograph is in press; and the Zunil monograph is being translated.



COFRADIA EXHIBIT RESEARCH TO BEGIN

Friends of the Ixchel Museum is funding work on an exhibit of textiles used by Indian *cofradías*. Anthropologist Guisela Mayén will write the exhibit catalog, and Ixchel Museum Curator Rosario de Polanco will document the textiles.

EXHIBIT AT THE MUSEUM OF MAN IN 1993-94

The Museum of Man, in San Diego, California, has written to ask for an exhibit of *cofradía* textiles and has set aside December 1993 to May 1994.



Museum anthropologist Guisela Mayén and Curator and Technical Director Rosario de Polanco.

Donations to Friends of the Ixchel Museum

Friends of the Ixchel Museum, Inc., is an American foundation that funds projects to bring the museum's research and exhibits to the attention of Americans. The foundation's aims are to bring Guatemalan textile exhibits to the United States and to translate the museum's research monographs into English.

You can become a supporter of the Ixchel Museum's work by contributing to the Friends of the Ixchel Museum. Friends of the Ixchel Museum is incorporated under the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law of the State of New York and has qualified under the rules of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as an organization to which donations may be made which are deductible by the donor for U.S. Federal income tax purposes. Checks drawn to the name of the Friends of the Ixchel Museum, Inc., may be mailed to:

Friends of the Ixchel Museum, Inc.
P. O. Box 340
Peck Slip Station
New York, NY 10272

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Capitanas of a *cofradía* from San Juan Sacatepéquez, Guatemala.
Photo by Ricardo Mata. Photo Archives, Ixchel Museum.