THE "RECENT INDIAN" IN GUATEMALA
1800 TO 1880

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Although Guatemala is one of the Latin American republics with the greatest proportion of more or less "pure" Indians in its population, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the Guatemalan Indian culture of any period between the Spanish Conquest and the very latest times. Some study has been made, to be sure, of the Spanish colonial regime, in which civil and ecclesiastical authorities made a concerted effort to substitute Christianity for Indian paganism, and introduced the Indian to at least some of the technical and cultural elements of European civilization. The process was far from complete, however, and in the eighteenth century, when missionary zeal declined and cooperation between church and state became less effective, the Indian was left more and more to his own devices. One result of this comparative neglect was what Oliver La Farge describes as a new synthesis in which the Indian chose to retain only those elements of European culture that proved useful or meaningful to himself. This synthesis—the culture of "Recent Indian I," in La Farge's terminology—remained largely undisturbed until around the year 1880, when the Liberal dictatorship of Barrios began to bring the Indian increasingly back into the sphere of creole civilization.¹ And it is precisely "Recent Indian I" who has received the least attention from students of Guatemalan society.

Because of this neglect of the greater part of the last century, the cultural anthropologist must find it difficult to place many recent trends in their exact historical perspective, while the typical historian has been reduced to writing of a Guatemala that had meaning only for the white and mixed inhabitants, who constituted a small minority of the total population. Unfortunately, it is probable that this gap can never be wholly filled. The Indians themselves

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¹ Oliver La Farge, "Maya Ethnology," in The Maya and their Neighbors (New York, 1940), 283-285, 287, 391. La Farge's scheme of analysis is also accepted by Antonio Goubaud Carrera in his essay "Del conocimiento del indio guatemalteco," Revista de Guatemala, I, 86-104.
were for the most part incapable of describing their activities on paper, since even a majority of their own local officials were ignorant of Spanish, and the art of writing in Maya or Quiché no longer existed. Whatever written records have been left by "Recent Indian I" must generally be traced to the ladino secretaries who were commonly retained by illiterate Indian magistrates, and they are bound to concern principally the Indians' formal relations with the Guatemalan authorities. The latter would seem to be true also, by and large, of the official records of the national government, which devoted rather little effort either to recording or to solving the Indians' problems. Guatemalan historical literature is still less helpful. It is of course significant merely to observe how infrequently a huge work such as Lorenzo Montúfar's Reseña histórica can mention the Guatemalan Indian, but such evidence is purely negative. Indeed the scorn which so passionate a Liberal as Montúfar pours out upon his Indian compatriots is enough to exclude even the condescending curiosity shown by the early missionary friars toward the heathen ways which they intended to root out. Only Antonio Batres Juáregui, writing almost at the end of the century, has attempted to compose a history of the Indian in his own right, and Batres' discussion becomes brief indeed once he passes beyond the colonial era.

The archaeologist and anthropologist may supplement written data through the study of material remains and folk tradition, but as a general rule—and for reasons that are understandable enough—the one has been concerned with the glories of the ancient Maya, the other with strictly present-day conditions, and neither with "Recent Indian I." In any case, the average historian who seeks to explore this topic, especially if he lives outside Guatemala, is reduced chiefly to analyzing the eye-witness accounts of tourists, visiting scientists, and miscellaneous travelers. These accounts are

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The Guatemalan term ladino, in a strict sense, refers to persons of mixed Spanish and Indian descent—i.e., corresponds to the term mestizo used in most Latin American countries. In practice, however, it is frequently used to denote any non-Indian, even if purely Spanish in origin.


4 Antonio Batres Juáregui, Los indios (Guatemala, 1894).
often highly readable, are sometimes scholarly, and are accessible throughout the world. However, only a few brave travelers such as Scherzer expressly sought out the remote communities where Indian culture was preserved in its purest form, and only Tozzer, early in the present century, made the acquaintance of the wholly independent Lacandones. The widespread interest in Maya ruins did lead some visitors away from the main roads where Indian civilization was constantly influenced by outside elements, but unfortunately at the chief ruins there were no longer any native inhabitants to observe.

Tourist observations, moreover, must often be used with extreme caution. For one thing, it is obvious that not everyone was sure just what an Indian was. Since the "Caribs" who had founded Livingstone early in the century contained a large element of Negro blood, it is not surprising that they have been called both Indians and Honduran Negroes. Likewise such towns as Esquipulas in southwest Guatemala have been classified by some writers as typically Indian, whereas it is more likely that a majority of the individuals observed were true Indians in neither race nor culture. President Carrera himself is a case in point: historical research seems to indicate that his ancestry was more creole than anything else, yet he has generally been passed off as simply another Indian. Still other difficulties are raised by the habit of making vague generalizations about the "Indians of Guatemala" or "Indians of Central America." Such statements may contain valuable information, but it stands to reason that a supposedly "typical" Indian costume which featured a large woolen cloak could not apply to the natives of tierra caliente, who are described elsewhere as clad only in a loincloth. In the case of some clerical observers, moreover, a certain element of wishful thinking sometimes enters in. According to Crowe and Morelet, the Livingstone "Caribs" engaged in generalized polygamy, but shortly thereafter Father Cornette found them orthodox Roman Catholics whose children were modestly clothed with few exceptions.

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6 Chester Lloyd Jones, Guatemala Past and Present (Minneapolis, 1940), 42. To be sure, Carrera was—and apparently still is—regarded by the Indians as one of themselves; see Oliver La Farge, Santa Eulalia (Chicago, 1947), 16.
7 Frederick Crowe, The Gospel in Central America (London, 1859), 49; Arthur
1. Political Relations with the Non-Indian Population

Nevertheless, if one bears always in mind the limitations of the sources, it is possible to reconstruct at least the main characteristics of native culture in the period of "Recent Indian I," 1800 to 1880. It seems advisable, moreover, to begin with the political relationships existing between the Guatemalan Indians and the dominant class of creoles and mestizos. This is at least a subject about which we have trustworthy information; it may serve as a rough indication of the Indians' general cultural autonomy, and it can assist the investigator in defining his problem. However, as suggested already, the evidence of political history is to a considerable extent negative. The Guatemalan authorities had little interest in the Indian, and he had as a rule even less interest in them.

Prior to the attainment of independence in 1821 the political isolation of the Indian population was heightened by the very nature of the Spanish colonial system. The different racial castes into which the Guatemalans were arbitrarily divided all had their distinctive privileges and obligations; most concrete was the distinction between the "tribute" paid by the Indians and the miscellaneous taxes levied on the rest of the population. Local administration of the Indians, furthermore, was kept strictly separate from the government of other races. Members of the white and mixed races were commonly forbidden to reside in Indian villages, and even when Indians and ladinos lived side by side in the same town it was customary for each race to possess its own set of officials. In the case of the Indians the latter often claimed direct descent from a pre-Conquest class of Indian nobles. A particularly favored group was formed of descendants of those Indians who had come from Mexico as auxiliaries of Alvarado in the Conquest: these not only had their own distinct officials but enjoyed the special privilege of exemption from the tribute.8

Following the end of Spanish rule legal distinctions among the racial elements of the population soon broke down, but the Indians' isolation was not seriously diminished as a result. The change in


government meant very little to the Indian population; only three Indians are said to have taken part in the first Central American Constituent Assembly in 1823, and it is rather doubtful that they were true Indians in either a racial or a cultural sense. The change did make a difference, to be sure, to the descendants of Indian conquistadores, who now lost their fiscal exemptions; all Indians, moreover, were assimilated as far as possible to the national tax system, and they did not always feel that the substitution of regular taxes for the tribute was to their advantage. However, the tribute system was later restored in modified form, and the separate system of Indian government always persisted in fact if not in law. In the native towns descendants of Quiché princes and other members of the Indian “nobility” generally continued to dispense their summary and often arbitrary justice; the only difference was that now they administered their affairs in the name of the Republic. Even Indians living on creole haciendas are said to have remained subject to their native authorities. The duplicate magistracies of the mixed towns likewise survived the fall of the Spanish regime.

All in all, outside control over the Indians was weak indeed in most of Guatemala. Towns like Santa Caterina Ixtlahuacán had virtually no contact with the higher authorities, which were content to leave them alone in return for occasional taxes. At Cobán, a number of Indians had fled to the hills in 1803 in protest against increased taxation; their descendants were still there in the 1850's, wholly isolated for most of the year by impassable roads. Only during the dry season an alcalde from Cobán ventured out to gather children to be baptized and couples to be married, and brought them back for a brief visit to the city. A rather similar situation existed at Cahabón on the fringes of the Vera Paz: there the parish register indicated a falling population over half a century, and the explanation given was the readiness of the Indians to retire into the woods to express some great or minor displeasure.

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9 Cie. Bege, Amérique Centrale, III, 22. Two of the three, in fact, were priests.
Most of the "wild" or fully autonomous tribes of the northern selva seem to have settled their accounts with the Guatemalan government some time after independence, but their allegiance was largely nominal. The redoubtable Lacandones did not even accept the pretense of Guatemalan political control. At least two attempts were made to extend control over them in the 1830's, and in 1837 the subtribe of Manches made a pact with the Liberal state regime of Mariano Gálvez by which the Indians agreed to join the republic at the end of six years provided such peculiar institutions as polygamy were not interfered with. Long before the six years were up, however, Gálvez had been deposed by Carrera, and this treaty was not heard of again.\footnote{Ibid., II, 80; Alejandro Marure, Efemérides de los hechos notables (2nd ed., Guatemala, 1895), 94-95; E. G. Squier, The States of Central America (New York, 1858), 54, 554.}

Just as the Guatemalan government exercised fairly little direct control over the Indians, the Indians themselves preferred to ignore the general political development of the country. Their role in the movement for independence was negligible, and by and large the same can be said with regard to the internal strife that followed the withdrawal of Spanish authority. However, the Indians could not turn their backs entirely on Guatemalan civil wars. They were subject on occasion to military conscription, and the Conservatives, at least, were sometimes able to bring the Indians into the fray more or less voluntarily by playing upon their religious sentiments in opposition to the anti-clerical Liberals. This strategem was used with considerable success in the years immediately following independence, leading to a number of minor outbreaks such as the murder of the Liberal leader Cirilo Flores by fanatic Indians in 1826 \footnote{Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Central America (3 vols., San Francisco, 1888-1887), III, 88.} and finally to the full-fledged Indian rebellion under Carrera in 1837.

The latter revolt represents probably the highest point of Indian influence from the Conquest to the present day, although it is certainly incorrect to term it exclusively an Indian affair. Neither was it a wholly spontaneous outburst on the part of those Indians involved. The persecution of individual priests by the Liberal regime which was then in power \footnote{Cf. Stephens, Incidents of Travel, I, 170-171.} might bring the Indian faithful to the rescue, yet few of their villages possessed a permanent
curate. Moreover, as Montúfar shrewdly pointed out, some of the Liberals’ most controversial reforms had little or no meaning for the Indians. Civil marriage, for instance, was only permissive, and was nowhere imposed on unwilling Indian Catholics. Likewise the political measures denounced by the insurgents—such as the introduction of trial by jury and the abolition of capital punishment—were things they would hardly rise up against on their own account. Trial by jury was no great burden, and was abandoned almost as soon as instituted; it may have been thought that perpetual hard labor was even worse than the death penalty that it replaced, but the extreme penalty was of rare occurrence anyway in ordinary judicial procedure. Indeed not one of the Liberal reforms was in itself a major cause of the Indian revolt. The one thing all Indians could understand was the cholera epidemic of 1837, and only when the priests blamed this on the heretical Liberal government were the Indians ready to believe and act.

Be that as it may, the Conservatives were brilliantly successful in the short run. The Liberals were routed, and the Central American confederation was dissolved as a direct result of the movement. It is probably true, however, that even at the time of their victory the creole Conservatives were growing restive beside their Indian allies. Stephens, indeed, believed that the Indians had begun to dream of taking vengeance at last for the Spanish conquest; it thus required the restraining hand of General Carrera, whom the natives regarded as “King of the Indians” and “Son of God,” to prevent a wholesale slaughter of the creole population. Perhaps unnecessarily, moreover, Carrera had encouraged his followers with promises of land, public office, and the remission of taxes. When no permanent benefits were forthcoming and instead the tithes, which the Liberals had abolished, were put back into effect, the same Indian rabble that Carrera had militarized in 1837 expelled him from Guatemala ten years later. Forced labor to deal with a passing grain shortage was one of the immediate causes of the second revolt, which was apparently more spontaneous than the first.

16 Montúfar, Reseña histórica, II, 293-295, III, 74.
17 Stephens, Incidents of Travel, I, 225. It was particularly necessary to find a scapegoat since the cholera was spread through Guatemala by pilgrims returning from the shrine of Esquipulas.
19 Ibid., I, 238-239, II, 135; Montúfar, Reseña histórica, V, 307, 426; Crowe, Gospel in Central America, 177-178.
The revolt of 1847 was a less serious affair, however, and was scarcely a “Liberal” movement even though Liberals and moderates were its temporary beneficiaries. The moderate regime set up in 1847 made a half-hearted attempt to assure the Indians’ loyalty by offering to expand their communal lands, but the new rulers never succeeded in identifying their own cause with that of the Indians to the extent that the Conservatives had done in 1837, and the popular revolt continued even after Carrera had gone. In 1848, furthermore, Carrera returned to power; he kept order with vigor until his death in 1865, and the Indians soon returned to their former passive role. In the Liberal revolt that brought García Granados and Barrios to power, in 1871, there is record of Indian troops on both sides, as inevitably had to be the case in any war that was more than a series of minor skirmishes; but even though the majority of the native population clearly sided with the Conservative administration, the Indians’ part was primarily a passive one. Certainly there was nothing like 1837, and it may well be that both sides—neither of which consistently sought to conscript the Indians for a peace-time army—had learned their lesson too thoroughly ever to make more use of the Indian than was absolutely necessary.

There were, to be sure, a few other occasions on which the Indians took up arms, and did so essentially on their own initiative. Even under the Spanish regime there was a minor native insurrection in 1801 over an increase in the rate of tribute; the protest was put down, but the protest was soon reduced to its former rate. In the first two decades of independence there were also minor skirmishes that arose directly from the Indians’ own grievances. One group of Indians took up arms to prevent the transfer of their cemetery outside the town limits, despite the fact that their cura had given his approval to the move. Others sought to resist threats to their landholdings or abuses in the exaction of forced labor for public building. In 1839, during the aftermath of Carrera’s

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20 Montúfar, Reseña histórica, V, 561-563.
21 Bancroft, Central America, III, 417-418.
22 Cf. Dollus and Mont-Serrat, Voyage géologique, 50. Carrera, by contrast, had preferred not to employ creoles in his army (Stephens, Incidents of Travel, II, 111).
24 Marure, Efemérides, 91-92; Boletín Oficial (Guatemala), 2a. parte, No. 56, February 28, 1834.
revolt, the threat of additional taxation as well as general dislike of radical innovation led the Indians of western Guatemala to put up armed resistance against Liberal efforts to establish an independent Republic of Los Altos with its capital at Quezaltenango.\textsuperscript{25} However, there is no indication that these were anything but isolated outbreaks, of mainly local significance. Even the more serious revolts of 1837 and 1847, for the matter, are merely exceptions to the general rule of Indian indifference.

2. \textit{Social and Religious Isolation}

The political isolation of the Indian population served to re-enforce all other aspects of cultural autonomy, and it need hardly be said that this was wholly to the Indians' liking. Even when public schools were provided for the improvement of their children, they were usually unwilling to make use of them.\textsuperscript{26} And though there is some evidence of increasing infiltration of \textit{ladino} elements into Indian villages after independence removed the legal barriers to such intermingling, non-Indians were often excluded in practice if not in law simply by the natives' hostility.\textsuperscript{27} All writers, in fact, have stressed the strong hostility of the Indian for most \textit{ladinos}. This hostility does not seem to have extended equally to members of the creole aristocracy, perhaps because they usually left the Indians alone; but foreigners very definitely were not exempt. Enough of them were Liberal heretics to arouse general distrust, and as late as the 1870's they were suspected of trying to poison the lakes and rivers of highland Guatemala.\textsuperscript{28}

Only priests, as a rule, were really welcome among the Indians. From some native groups they received the exceptional honor of being addressed in an artificially high voice,\textsuperscript{29} and when permanently stationed in a village they often became the ultimate civil as well as ecclesiastical authority. The Roman Catholic clergy was so inadequate in numbers, however, that most Indian settlements

\textsuperscript{25} Montúfar, \textit{Reseña histórica}, III, 149-164, 402-404; Marure, \textit{Efemérides}, 120.
\textsuperscript{27} Cf. Von Tempsky, \textit{Mitla}, 388.
\textsuperscript{29} Scherzer, "Indianer von Santa Caterina," \textit{loc. cit.}, 230.
probably received their visits only a few times a year if at all. This is a situation that grew steadily worse after independence, for the supply of Spanish priests was for a long time cut off, and the expropriation of church property together with the rise of alternative careers in business and politics combined to make the priestly vocation less attractive. As a result, in the 1850’s one mountain parish of 25,000 souls had only one Christian clergymen to approximately 60 pagan Indian priests.\textsuperscript{30}

Naturally one of the strongest factors working against cultural assimilation of the Indian was the survival of the various Indian languages. Not all survived equally, for certain of the more important tongues such as Quiché were apparently gaining at the expense of minor languages, but enough of them survived so that even neighboring towns frequently found it hard to understand each other, and the multiplicity of languages remained a major inconvenience throughout the period. As for Spanish, in one locality Soll could find only a 6\% infiltration of Spanish words into the native Cakchiquel over a period of 130 years. In most cases Spanish expressions were limited to words of infrequent occurrence such as the higher numerals, although there was also a tendency to express the lower compound numbers with Indian words placed in Spanish order. The one common term that seems everywhere to have been taken over from the Spanish was \textit{Dios}.\textsuperscript{31}

In many cases “\textit{Dios}” seems to have represented just a new deity for whom there was no precise Indian equivalent. His status was not clear, however, for some Quiché-speakers apparently assimilated the Spanish God to their own Good Spirit or God of Light, just as they had also transformed the Virgin Mary into the Moon.\textsuperscript{32} What is certain is simply that the worship of “\textit{Dios}” did not exclude that of sundry other spiritual forces, good and bad, pagan and Christian, for the Indians’ deference toward the Christian clergy was perfectly compatible with a vigorous survival of pagan elements in their religious life. This is one of the few subjects on which there is no lack of contemporary data, since no other aspect of Indian culture so attracted the attention of nineteenth century

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, 234.
observers. It was of course typical of the state of Indian civilization as a whole; and it was especially significant in view of the central role that religion played in the Indians' daily life.

Among the elements of Christian worship that were adopted by the Indians, the patron saints of the Indian villages appear to have been favored as a rule even over the Virgin and the Holy Trinity; when Carrera's hordes took Guatemala City one of their first acts was to set up images of their local patrons on the cathedral altars, and one of the chief drams on an Indian's time and pocketbook was always the honoring of local saints through their respective sodalities or cofradías. The paramount importance of a patron saint could be seen in the fact that a village whose protector failed to ward off disease might discard him for a rival. On the other hand, Christian saints' days were likely to be celebrated with pre-Christian Indian dances, and the totally confused nature of such ceremonies is indicated by the fact that they featured indiscriminately Roman Catholic saints, heathen spirits, "Moors," and Conquistadores. In addition to this strange mixture of religious elements found in ostensibly Catholic celebrations, the pagan deities were still worshipped in their own right also. The most obvious difference was that they now represented paganism in the literal sense, for they had largely withdrawn to the countryside before the advance of Christianity, and had not fully returned despite increasing official indifference.

Because of this very withdrawal it is extremely difficult to reconstruct the practice of pagan rites in detail. The chief exception to our general lack of specific information is the village of Santa Caterina Ixtlahuacán in the mountains not far from Quezaltenango, where both Scherzer and Von Tempsky carried out a careful study of Indian customs with the aid of an enlightened Guatemalan priest. Santa Caterina is perhaps an extreme case, since it was one of the most inaccessible Indian towns in the republic, but it can presumably be taken as a model from which other communities deviated just so far as they felt free from the influence of creole civilization. Before the arrival of the cura Vicente Hernández, the Indians

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53 Stephens, Incidents of Travel, I, 232, 254-255; Montúfar, Reseña histórica, III, 74; Batres, Indios, 136-137.
54 Boddam-Whetham, Across Central America, 109.
55 Ibid., 54-55; Stephens, Incidents of Travel, I, 254.
of Santa Caterina had not even wanted to have a priest in their village; all his immediate predecessors had been expelled for one reason or another, and Don Vicente had two narrow escapes from lynching before he was finally accepted and revered as a superior individual. By the time the two German travelers visited him in the 1850’s he had been among the Indians almost twenty years, and he was admiringly said to have turned them into industrious farmers and shepherds instead of lazy drunkards. He had at least excluded the worst pagan ceremonies from his church, such as the practice of engaging in a drunken orgy before the statue of a saint until the worshiper collapsed as a living offering before the image. The priest admitted, however, that the Indians had not favored his school, and that paganism was still more powerful in the community than his own faith, which was looked upon essentially as a helpful supplement to purely native rites.

Fortunately for the German observers, Don Vicente had taken the trouble to familiarize himself not only with the Indian religious customs but also with many of the pagan Indian priests, of whom he believed there were around sixty in his parish. The most important of them all was a zealous churchgoer whom the cura knew well; he was so obliging as to show Von Temsky his sacerdotal costume, consisting of a white robe and cap, both embroidered in red, although he did not bring along his sacrificial knife. The latter was no mere decoration, for the Indians had a rock off in the mountains where from time to time they made a blood-offering of an Indian child. As a general rule, of course, the Indian priests were content to employ only magic wands and formulas, figurines of stone and wood, and other harmless methods of invoking their deities. Yet in every way they enjoyed precedence over the Roman Catholic priest. When a child was born the first step was to summon the native priest to christen the baby with the name of an animal that was to become his lifelong protector, and to engage in various mystery rites to bring down the favor of the gods upon him; only afterwards was the child presented for baptism at the Christian church. In marriage ceremonies, likewise, Indian dances and more priestly mysteries played a far more important part than the Catholic sacrament. At death, the requiem mass was considered merely a gesture of farewell, while the deceased was more practically equipped for the after-life by the burial of common utensils in his
grave. And fittingly enough, such events were still recorded in some form of the pre-Columbian calendar.  

Santa Caterina was unusual mainly in that isolation permitted the inhabitants to be more open in their paganism; but similar practices had been observed even in localities that were not isolated at all. At Tecpam a revered slab of plain slate was deposited in a coarse bag of cloth upon the main altar of the Catholic church, where Stephens claimed to have risked his life to look at it; perhaps to prevent the repetition of such an outrage the eldest inhabitants forty years later denied ever having heard of the stone. Along the cuesta above Lake Atitlán Indian fathers hung strips of colored cloth from the branches of trees as offerings to win a new-born boy strength and good luck in his later ascents to the higher plateau. The Indians of San Juan Osluncalco, who rose up against the oppression of a heretical Liberal government, carried with them a heathen idol and a jar full of pebbles which allegedly would emit death rays when broken in the midst of battle. It appears that even human sacrifice was not confined to Don Vicente's parishioners, although nowhere else has it been described on such good authority. At San Juan Sacatepéquez it was reported that every year at the start of the rainy season a human victim was sacrificed to the mountain god, apparently to serve about the same purpose as the colored strips of cloth at Lake Atitlán. For three months preceding the rains, we are told, residents hesitated to go out alone for fear that they might be chosen for the sacrifice. At least as regards the Indian inhabitants such fear would suggest some weakening of the ancient faith, since the Indians at Santa Caterina deemed it a privilege to have their children selected, and in fact the whole tale is unverified. Reports of human sacrifice were not, however, limited to these two localities.

3. Economic Organization

Unfortunately the topic that interested nineteenth century observers least of all was how the Guatemalan Indians earned their

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37 Ibid., 231-238; Von Tempsky, Mitla, 363, 367-368, 382-386.
38 Stephens, Incidents of Travel, II, 148-150; Boddam-Whetham, Across Central America, 50.
39 Boddam-Whetham, Across Central America, 100.
40 Marur, Efemérides, 91-92.
living. From scattered evidence, however, a reconstruction of the Indian economy can be made, and once again it is clear that the Indians stood apart as far as possible from the rest of the population. Some Indians, of course, gained their livelihood by working for the non-Indian population; in the larger towns this was quite inevitable. The great majority of Indians, on the other hand, was engaged in agriculture, and prior to the Barrios regime and the permanent expansion of coffee cultivation the hacienda system had little to do with most Indian farmers. There were always some who worked as permanent tenants or more likely as seasonal hired laborers on Guatemalan plantations, but even so the native population as a whole relied on its own lands for subsistence. Moreover, despite occasional friction with land-hungry ladinos, and despite the existence of statutory provisions that could have been used to justify large-scale land-grabbing, no major inroads were made on the Indians’ lands until the final quarter of the century.42

It is of course obvious that the standard of material culture among the Indians remained distinctly primitive. Under the Spanish regime money seems to have been rarely used, and this condition lasted well into independent times. Just as before the Conquest, the Indians’ diet consisted almost exclusively of maize, beans, and chile; meat was seldom eaten, and water was the standard if not necessarily the preferred beverage.43 Clothing was not quite so simple, except in the tropical lowlands: the cotton and woolen garments of the highland Indians allowed room for so much differentiation in detail that a woman’s place of origin could generally be detected from her costume alone. Housing was seldom very comfortable, whether it consisted of thatch and wattle in the tierra caliente or tile and adobe in tierra fría. Parents put their children to work at an early age; and the amenities of life seem to have been limited to religious ceremonies, intermittent drunken

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42 Dunn, Guatemala, 272; Dollfus and Mont-Serrat, Voyage géologique, 48-49. For an allegation of ladino attacks on Indian land see Montáfur, Reseña histórica, V, 307.

One measure that would have led to the loss of many Indian landholdings if really enforced was the decree of 1834 requiring all land titles to be registered with the government within a stated period of time under penalty of being declared invalid (Registro Oficial, No. 34 [1834] and No. 69 [December 9, 1835]); this same technique was used later on with very notable success (cf. La Farge, Santa Eulalia, 4, 139).

43 Most writers give nearly identical accounts of Indian diet, often copied directly from Juarros, Compendio, II, 33.
orgies, and constant personal bathing. For the latter purpose hot springs were much prized, but steam houses were extremely common in the highlands.\textsuperscript{44} Perhaps commerce, however, should be included as a form of recreation as well as an economic activity. Avoiding ladino middlemen, the Indians carried their trading goods throughout the country on their own backs, and it is highly doubtful that some of the longer trips represented an economically productive use of their time.

The main sources of Indian livelihood naturally varied somewhat from region to region, the most typically agricultural inhabitants being those of the Vera Paz. Their fields were scattered through the countryside, and much of the time the Indian farmers lived in relative isolation; some observers would have them dwelling in the towns from the end of harvest to the beginning of spring planting, and others relate that they came to town only for the regional fiestas. Probably tastes varied in the matter, but in any case the 30,000 or more “inhabitants” of a place like San Pedro Carchá were seldom gathered together in one spot.\textsuperscript{45} The crops were the usual maize, beans, and chile, with a scattering of cultivated plantains and fruit trees; some rice was also grown, and towards the end of the period the Indians were increasingly employed on the new coffee plantations. The Indians of the Vera Paz also had their handicrafts, although theirs were not the most highly developed. They created excellent hammocks from agave fibre; they made most of their own garments from the cotton which they either cultivated or gathered wild; and with the hammocks and such regional specialites as carved gourds they carried on a lively trade as far afield as Honduras and Nicaragua. Still others acquired spending money by pursuing the quetzal for its feathers.\textsuperscript{46}

On the lower fringes of the Vera Paz, as at Cahabón, and in the Petén itself, settled agriculture played a less important role in the Indians’ life. The few who could be enticed onto a regular plantation usually deserted before long.\textsuperscript{47} Some practiced shifting agri-

\textsuperscript{44} Juarros, Compendio, II, 33; Karl von Scherzer, Aus dem Natur- und Völkerleben in tropischen Amerika (Leipzig, 1864), 148, 154-155.
\textsuperscript{46} Dollfus and Mont-Serrat, Voyage géologique, 59; P. Alonso de Escobar, “Account of the Province of Vera Paz,” Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, XI (1841), 92.
\textsuperscript{47} Morelet, Amérique Centrale, II, 91.
culture of the cut-and-burn type, clearing their cornfields from the forest and then abandoning them in a year or two after the growth of weeds made it easier to start afresh than to keep the same plot in cultivation. Still others seem to have gathered all their food in the forest without agriculture of any sort, and it is probable that all lowlanders acquired at least a portion of their food by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild fruits or roots. A little commerce existed, however, even in the forests of the Petén. Wild cacao and some cultivated tobacco were regularly exported, and even the uncivilized Lacandones were said to have emerged from the forest from time to time to exchange cacao, vanilla, and tobacco for salt, clothing, and firearms.

In the mountains and high plateaus of western Guatemala settled agriculture was again predominant, but wheat took precedence over maize as soon as one reached the tierra fría, and potatoes now appeared for the first time. Also, forest products dropped out of the Indian economy and pastoral activities entered in. Cattle were of relatively little importance; they were valued almost solely for their milk, which was made into cheese. Sheep, on the other hand, were relied upon to clothe virtually the entire population, since cotton was something of a luxury. Thus Serchil was described as wholly devoted to the weaving of woolen cloth, and at Santa Caterina Ixthlahuacán the shepherds constituted a clearly defined element in society, set apart by the wearing of a checkered apron over the regional costume.

Indian crafts clearly reached their greatest development in the western highlands. Not only woollen cloth but pottery, musical instruments, and other articles were made in considerable quantity and sold to both Indians and ladinos. Specialization by villages seems to have been the general rule. San Francisco Motocinta, for

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49 Boddam-Whetham, Across Central America, 281; Habel, "Sculptures," loc. cit., 5; Squier, Central America, 571. Lacandón trade has, to be sure, been denied by some, and reports of it may possibly refer only to the peaceful "Eastern Lacandones" of the Central Petén. Cf. Juarros, Compendio, II, 97, and Berendt, "Report on explorations," loc. cit., 425.


51 Robert Glasgow Dunlop, Travels in Central America (London, 1847), 338; Boddam-Whetham, Across Central America, 63; Juarros, Compendio, I, 47.
example, was particularly noted for its red mats, while other towns had learned to take advantage of unusual natural resources such as the salt-springs that provided much of the livelihood of the Indians at San Mateo Ixtatán in the vicinity of Huehuetenango. At Santa María Atitlán the Indians still retained their colonial monopoly of selling snow in season from the upper slopes of the Volcán de Agua. Similarly, the natives of Chiantla controlled certain lead mines, which they preferred to work by the most primitive methods rather than resort to the dangerous expedient of calling on outside assistance.

Although the broader outline of economic activities is thus clear in each major region, the exact nature of class and property relations is seldom specified. We do know that class distinctions were everywhere in evidence; they were a major factor in determining the choice of elective officers and also in deciding patterns of clothing, and it was widely assumed that they were more or less hereditary in origin. Perhaps to lend the authority of antiquity to their claims of distinction, the Indian “nobility” adhered more strictly than commoners to pre-Conquest fashions, while the descendants of Indian conquistadores retained a vivid pride in their superior condition long after their legal privileges had disappeared.

We also know that rich Indians did exist—particularly in Los Altos, where some families might own as many as 500 sheep—and such wealth, when inherited, would naturally tend to create a hereditary caste. However, there was no hard and fast rule governing the relationship of birth, wealth, and social or political influence. Certainly wealth, whether inherited or acquired, was not the only prerequisite for advancement: equally important in many respects was a mastery of religious and ceremonial lore. Indeed wealth was a result of social esteem as well as a cause of it, because there is no doubt that Indian head-men often used their political power for the economic exploitation of their fellows.

It is also difficult to generalize regarding the precise system of land tenure among the Indians. Not only had some Indians acquired considerable amounts of land that was held, in practice

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at any rate, as private property, but also the average family in any Indian village received at least a small plot that could be regarded as its own. On the other hand, the theoretical title to the greater part of the Indians' lands was still communal or collective, and a periodic redistribution of individual holdings did occasionally take place. Abuses in the process of land distribution were in fact alleged by critics of the communal system in their pleas for the introduction of full private property rights.\textsuperscript{56} However, the communal system was deeply imbedded in Indian tradition, and had been carefully protected by the Spanish regime. Immediately after independence the new administration saw fit to pledge continuation of the Spanish policy. The Liberals, it is true, objected strongly to communal ownership on the basis of economic thory, but until the time of Barrios they were never in a position to take energetic measures against it. Thus the Indian village of Jocotenango, despite the fact that it was virtually a part of Antiqua Guatemala, retained its communal lands until 1879, when the Barrios regime saw fit to confiscate them in the name of human progress.\textsuperscript{57}

The Barrios administration really marks a transition in the whole economic relationship between the Indian and the rest of the population. Before the Liberals' return to power in the 1870's compulsory Indian labor had been required from time to time for road construction, military transport service, and public building. It was likewise customary for the central authorities to demand that the Indians shelter foreign travelers in their town halls and carry their luggage for an adequate compensation; a word from Carrera was sufficient even to overcome the Indians' reluctance to leave home during Holy Week. And there was much gratuitous labor performed for the parish clergy, on a more or less compulsory basis before independence, and more or less voluntarily afterwards. Yet despite these exactions the Indian population was not subject, save in limited areas, to any large-scale conscription for labor on creole haciendas. Before 1871 the modest needs of hacienda agriculture were still met in most cases by laborers of mixed race and by individual Indians who may have been held in some form of peonage but at least served without the aid of government levies.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56} Cf. Batres, Indios, 130-131.
\textsuperscript{57} Cie. Belge, Amérique Centrale, III, 21; Casimiro D. Rubio, Biografía del General Justo Rufino Barrios (Guatemala, 1935), 378; Von Tempsky, Mišla, 387.
\textsuperscript{58} Batres, Indios, 123-134, 134, 137-144; Jones, Guatemala, 148-149; Morelet,
With the rise of coffee cultivation and the simultaneous return of the Liberal Party in the last third of the century the situation was then radically altered. As economic liberals the new rulers of Guatemala looked askance upon communal systems of land tenure, and as adherents of the Latin American positivist school they looked upon the Indian as a backward creature who could at most be partially civilized by performing some useful service for the rational minority. There was no doubt also an element of destructive reaction against the ways of the preceding Conservative regime, which had sought to reaffirm colonial legislation protecting the Indian, and which had generally shown greater respect than the Liberals for Indian lands. At the same time the new plantation crop created a greater demand for Indian labor than Guatemala had yet seen. Accordingly, the Liberal regime launched a general assault on communal lands, sought to break down the isolation of the Indian population by encouraging ladinos to settle in their villages, and tried to induce the Indians themselves to wear European clothes. And the Liberals made clear precisely why they wanted to rescue the Indian from his backwardness by systematizing and extending the exaction of forced labor for the benefit of the new coffee plantations. The stage was thus set, in effect, for "Recent Indian II," whose culture has been influenced by outside forces to a greater extent than the Indian culture of any other period since the early days of the colonial regime. The difference is that modern technology has replaced the Church as the most important external influence; and though its effects are still far from complete, it is likely to prove in the end even harder to escape.

Amérique Centrale, II, 128-129; Stephens, Incidents of Travel, II, 198-199; Boddam-Whetham, Across Central America, 296.

See Colección de los decretos de observancia general emitidos por la asamblea constitucional del estado de Guatemala en los años de 1839 y 1840 (Guatemala, 1841), 39; Bancroft, Central America, III, 615, note 24; Jones, Guatemala, 150.