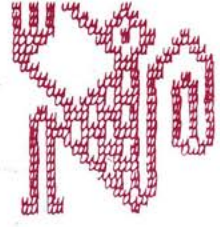


FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM



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The Cofradía: A Vanishing Tradition



Three generations of cofrades wearing the traditional costume of Santo Tomás Chichicastenango, Quiché. Photo by Ricardo Mata. Photo Archives, Ixchel Museum.

We order and decree that in all our Indies, Islands and Territories in the Ocean Sea, that Cofradías be founded with license and authority of the Ecclesiastical Prelate..." Proclamation of Philip III in Aranjuez, May 15, 1600.

The cofradía, a religious brotherhood or sisterhood whose responsibility is the honoring of a particular saint and the care of his or her image, was introduced in the New World by the Spanish in the 16th century. Usually several cofradías were founded in one village, with the cofradía of the village's patron saint being the most important in a rigid hierarchy.

The founding of the first Indian cofradía in Mesoamerica was recorded in 1570 in Chiapas. Of the 2,241 cofradías counted by Archbishop Cortés y Larraz in Guatemala in the 18th century, approximately 1,000 survive, most of them in the western highlands. Their ritual costumes are some of the finest and most beautiful examples of the weaver's art; however, these costumes and the way of life they represent are rapidly vanishing.

Over the years, conflict with the civil authorities in some towns, disagreements with the church in others, the influence of new religions and associations, and the tremendous financial drain of the festivities honoring the saint have all weakened the cofradías. For example, Santa María de Jesús has 18 cofradías, nine of men and nine of women. Years ago, four couples served each saint. Now only one couple carries the economic burden and often they are unable to find successors, so must turn leadership over to their children. For the nine women's cofradías, there are now only eight *tenanzas*

(*capitanas* or heads of the women's cofradías), only seven of whom possess the *sobrehuipil*, the ceremonial overblouse.

The duties of each brotherhood are to celebrate their saint's feast day; care for the saint's image while it remains in the house of each cofrade; maintain the cleanliness, order and safety of the church; and participate in all religious events. The term of service is usually a year, during which time a successor is sought. The cofrades and *capitanas* serve without pay and are obligated to spend large sums of money in festivities honoring the saint, but the positions carry great prestige within the village.

On the saint's day, the new cofrade is presented with the *custodia* (his symbol of office, a silver monstrance bearing the saint's image) and the *capitana* with an elaborately decorated candle. A mass is celebrated in the village church and the saint's image is carried in procession to the cofrade's home, where festivities are held, attended by the other cofradías. The saint's altar is decorated with flowers, leaves, fruit, tissue paper; incense is burned.

In these ceremonies and festivities the Maya can express religious feeling outside the rigorous formality of the Catholic church. Their saints become protectors who defend their devotees; taking the image into their homes removes it from the parish and makes it truly theirs.

The hierarchic form of the cofradía is thought to be prehispanic. In this system men and women serve their community in a ranked series of political and ceremonial positions. Prestige, leadership, and respect are obtained through community service,

IN THE MUSEUM

UNESCO Roundtable for Textile Conservators in Arica, Chile

Rosario Miralbés de Polanco, Curator of the Ixchel Museum, was invited by UNESCO and the Getty Foundation to attend the September 1990 conference on the conservation of precolumbian textiles in Arica, Chile. Although Guatemala does not have precolumbian textiles, Polanco presented one paper on the work of the Ixchel Museum and another on textile conservation at the museum.

"Our publications are well presented and unique in their subject matter," Polanco reported, after seeing what others are doing. "The Ixchel is the only museum documenting modern textiles."

The Ixchel Museum funded Polanco's return via Bolivia and Peru. She was able to visit museums in La Paz with the conservator of the Archaeological Museum. In Lima she went to the Anthropology and Archaeology Museums and was particularly interested in the Amano Museum, a private precolumbian textile museum.

Fulbright Fellow Wins Inter-American Foundation Grant

In 1988, the then-Curator of the Ixchel Museum, Linda Asturias de Barrios, won a Fulbright Fellowship in a competition sponsored in Guatemala by the U.S. Information Service. Her application was supported by the Ixchel Museum and Francisco Marroquín University. From September 1988 to May 1990 Barrios studied at the State University of New York, Albany, under a doctoral committee of four anthropologists, experts in Mesoamerican studies: Dr. Gary Gossen, specialist in the Mayas of Chiapas, Mexico; Dr. Robert Carmack, specialist in the Quichés; Dr. June Nash, expert in Mesoamerica and the Andes; and Dr. Liliana Goldin, specialist in the Quichés.

In May, Barrios returned to the Ixchel Museum as Technical Director. The subject of her dissertation is "Textile Artisan Production in the Guatemalan Highlands," with field investigation centered in Comalapa. Her planned graduation date is May 1992.

The Inter-American Foundation announced in September that Linda Asturias de Barrios had won one of its fourteen Doctoral Fellowship Grants in competition with 100 candidates from U.S. institutions. The grants, which support field work, are for research related to grass-roots development in Latin America and are intended as a contribution to economic development at the lowest economic level. The Ixchel Museum is Barrios' sponsoring institution for this one-year grant, from September 1990 to August 1991.

The photos below and on the facing page represent an important contribution of the Ixchel Museum in preserving the rich traditions of Guatemala. Taken in San Juan Comalapa in the 1950's, the photos show the *cofradías* at the height of their ceremonial splendor. In the photo below, the *capitanas*, carrying "mother candles," and first *mayordomas*, carrying "daughter candles," pose in veils and ceremonial costume. In the photo on the right, the *cofrades* of San Juan Comalapa are gathered: represented are the *cofradías* of Saint John the Evangelist, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Immaculate Conception, and Holy Cross. The *cofrades* wear ceremonial cloaks and carry silver *monstrances*. Both photos were taken by Joya Hairs and are preserved in the Ixchel's photo archives.



PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

Traveling Exhibit of Cofradía Textiles

Friends of the Ixchel Museum would like to create an exhibit of the beautiful and rare ceremonial textiles used by the Indian *cofradías*. The proposal for the exhibit and research booklet have been written and costs have been estimated by Rosario de Polanco, Curator. Funding is being sought.

Letter of Thanks from the Mingei Museum in La Jolla, California

"Our board of directors joins me in thanking Friends of the Ixchel Museum for bringing the exhibit *MAYAN THREADS* to La Jolla, where it has been tremendously appreciated and enjoyed by so many," wrote Martha W. Longenecker, Founder and Director, Mingei International Museum of World Folk Art.

Over 150 textiles from the Ixchel were on display at the Mingei from March 9 to July 29, 1990.

English Translations of Monographs

Friends of the Ixchel Museum has established a revolving fund to print English translations of the Museum's original research. The Comalapa, Sololá, and Colotenango monographs are now available in English; Santa María de Jesús will be available soon; and translation has begun on Zunil.

(continued from Page 1) and the man who rises through all the hierarchic levels becomes the most influential man of the town.

The outward functions of the *cofradía* are to preserve public order, to administer justice, to care for the town hall, the church and the saints' images, to maintain good relations with the supernatural powers, and to provide a body of elders to govern the village. But far more than that, the *cofradía* reaffirms symbolically the integrity of the

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

community through celebrations that bring together villagers from outlying settlements; it defines community membership.

Through the *cofradía*, the Maya recall their past, identify themselves with their own history, define their social universe in a structural and historic framework in which all seems to conspire against the Mayan reality. The Mayan *cofradía* is traditional and conservative, but liberating to the ultimate essence of the man.



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TENANZAS (capitanas, or heads of the women's cofradías) wearing ceremonial costume, Santa María de Jesús. Photo by Linda Asturias de Barrios. Photo archives, Ixchel Museum.