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Maxime Lamoureux-St-Hilaire (Editor-in-Chief)
C. Mathew Saunders (Executive Editor)
and Ramón Folch González (Guest Editor)

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20718 Waters Edge Court Cornelius, NC, 28031

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The Editorial

Maxime Lamoureux-St-Hilaire

Mount Royal University; AFAR

maxlamsh@gmail.com

Ramón Folch González

Arizona State University

and

C. Mathew Saunders

Davidson Day School; AFAR

This ninth issue of *The Mayanist* is the first to be entirely dedicated to a specific area of the Maya World, namely the Comitán region. The Comitán region occupies the south-central section of Chiapas and is characterized by both mountainous and lacustrine landscapes—featuring some of the most impressive Mesoamerican lakes. As reflected in this issue, the cultural bounds of this region, forever altered by European colonizers and modern nation-building practices, can actually be pushed into the northern Guatemalan Department of Huehuetenango.

It is a privilege to feature research on a relatively understudied Maya region—a mission which will be extended to the next two issues of *The Mayanist*, which will respectively be centered on the southern Guatemalan highlands and the western Maya Mountains, around the Dolores municipality in Southeastern Petén. Whereas the topics for these next two issues have been defined, we are open to proposal by prospective guest editors; please simply send your special issue idea, or any questions, to the editor-in-chief (email address above).

Issue 9 of *The Mayanist* is guest edited by Ramón Folch González, takes an interdisciplinary look at the material culture and languages of the Comitán region, and contains four research articles. The first two articles, by Angel Sánchez Gamboa, Ramón Folch González, and Martha Cuevas García, and Caitlin Earley and Ulrich Wölfel, study the impressive ceramic urn traditions which have traditionally been associated with the Comitán area and, more specifically, the Classic Maya site of Chinkultic. The following two articles, by Fernando Guerrero Martínez and Cristóbal Pérez Tadeo, and Mary Jill Brody, adopt distinct linguistic lenses to study key toponyms of south-central Chiapas and aspects of the modern transformations of spoken Tojol-ab'al.

We are delighted to feature, for the first time, artwork by the talented artist Lucerito Ochoa

Say. Lucerito, who hails from the municipality of La Esperanza (Quetzaltenango Department, Guatemala), brings back watercolors to our pages, using her distinct and colorful style to create wonderful original artwork for our authors.

As always, our layout maestro Joel Skidmore was instrumental in assembling this issue. Once again, our team features four dedicated copy-editors from Mount Royal University: Kento Ammond, Morea Carle, Robin Gimon Serrano, and Tobias Nakamura. Below, the issue's guest editor, Ramón Folch González, further introduces the Comitán Region and the four research articles.

From Our Guest Editor

The 21st century is finally catching up with The Comitán Valley. This issue of *The Mayanist* will introduce the reader to different approaches to the cultures of the Comitán Valley: a large plateau linking the Highlands of Chiapas and the Cuchumatanes mountains of Highland Guatemala. Important bodies of water exist in the area, particularly the Montebello Lakes, but it is also important to point out that both the Grijalva and Usumacinta River basins originate here. The abundance of water and good soils likely played a key role in the development of human societies in the area, especially regarding its much later “classic collapse”, which occurred centuries later than in other Maya regions. This area hosts unique expressions of Maya art and culture that have not yet been fully recognized in the canon of Maya research. When I was offered the opportunity to be a guest editor for an issue of *The Mayanist* I did not hesitate to suggest this place, which had only been minimally investigated in recent decades. Shockingly, the last relevant publication dedicated to the area, *Comitán: Una Puerta al Sur* (2nd Ed., published by the state of Chiapas), dates to 1999. For the last 24 years, only a few isolated articles, book chapters, and dissertations were published on the area. Thankfully, this year broke the spell twice with this issue and Caitlin Earley's *The Comitán Valley: Sculpture and identity on the Maya Frontier* (2023, University of Texas Press).

Beyond publications, a new and exciting wave of research is happening in the Comitán Valley, led by a generation of scholars pioneered by Earley and followed by Ulrich Wölfel, Elizabeth Paris, Fernando Guerrero Martinez, Angel Sanchez Gamboa, and myself. It is important to mention Paris's project (co-directed by Gabriel Laló Jacinto and Roberto López Bravo) because it includes students from the Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas and the University of Calgary, who are being trained in the field at Teman Puente and could soon become the new specialists. This issue also features seasoned authors who carried out research in the 1970s and 1980s, like Mary Jill Brody and Martha Cuevas. While not every relevant author was available to be included in this issue, our goal was to present work by scholars of different backgrounds (Mexico, Canada, USA, Germany) and disciplines (archaeology, art history, linguistics, ethnography, and museum studies) to introduce the reader to this fascinating place and hopefully spark their curiosity.

Many linguistic groups overlap in this region, mainly the Tojol-ab'al, Tzeltal, and Chuj Maya—something that has long puzzled historians and anthropologists trying to understand which groups inhabited it between the 16th and 19th centuries. Similar complications occur archaeologically. For example, unlike for many Maya sites, the abandonment process for Chinkultic remains unclear: writing is interrupted in 844 A.D., yet the site is inhabited well into the 13th or 14th centuries. The Spanish left almost no written records for most of the 16th century, while 19th century nation-building relegated this area to archival obscurity. The modern international border also severely impacted our understanding of cultures split by these arbitrary lines. The harm goes beyond academic problems, and deeper knowledge of cultures along the frontier will someday contribute to better informed actions to reduce harm done to cultures, heritage, and the environment.

This issue's four contributions touch on both the Pre-Hispanic and contemporary Maya. The first paper, entitled *The Chinkultic Effigy-Urns Complex and How They Made their Way to our Museums*, is an effort by Angel Sánchez Gamboa, myself, and Martha Cuevas García to document and characterize the unique Late Classic effigy-urns found in the Chinkultic and the Montebello Lakes regions. The context of the urns was previously unknown, but newly located documents show how chaotic were the early days of institutionalized cultural management. Documents reveal how some of the urns were found, allowing for more informed interpretations, from the fire cult to the Jaguar God of the Underworld, and touching upon relations with other Maya regions.

This includes the neighboring Chaculá region, in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, which is the topic of the second paper, entitled *Old Collections and New Insights: Recent Research in the Comitán Valley and the Chaculá Region*. Its authors, Caitlin Earley and Ulrich Wölfel, introduce us to the Kanter collection through archival data and five years field research carried by Wölfel's project. The Chaculá region is immediately south of Montebello and shares many similarities with the Comitán Valley. Uniquely detailed information of Chaculá cave archaeology remains important for ceremonies by Chuj Maya people.

Important information can be gained about the Chuj people through the ethnohistoric study of their cultural geography—the topic of Fernando Guerrero Martínez and Cristóbal Pérez Tadeo's paper, entitled *Acercamiento a Algunos Topónimos de la Región de Comitán y los Lagos de Montebello, Chiapas*. This important etymological study of placenames from around the Lakes of Montebello shows the influence of Chuj, Tojol-ab'al, and Tzeltal Mayan languages spoken by those who have inhabited the area for centuries. This paper represents a first step in a more ambitious project to intensively analyze placenames and their significance. Placenames also inform us of crafts and activities that were carried out in certain places, providing us with alternative ways to overcome our common lack of historical documents.

Finally, the modern Tojol-ab'al language is studied in Mary Jill Brody's article entitled *Language Ideologies and Choices: Tojol-ab'al and Spanish in Las Margaritas, Chiapas, Mexico*. The author, who has recorded changes in the way the language has been spoken for almost 50 years, presents how Tojol-ab'al speakers deal with contradicting ideas and realities when speaking their language. This is particularly interesting for a group whose identity relies heavily on a language which name can be translated as "the one true language".

I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to work on this issue and to have to opportunity to share a little bit of the Comitán Valley with a broader audience. I hope that you can experience some of the amazement I continue to feel about this corner of the world.

The Chinkultic Effigy-Urns Complex and How They Made their Way to our Museums

Ángel A. Sánchez Gamboa

Coordinación Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural, INAH

Ramón Folch González

School of Human Evolution and Social Change, Arizona State University

Martha Cuevas García

Coordinación Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural, INAH

For decades, a group of large-format effigy-urns from the Classic Maya site of Chinkultic remained understudied. This can be explained by their perceived marginal location compared to other Maya areas and their lack of scholarly iconographic interest and contextual data. Archival documents and new urns found in Mexican collections allow us to generate a preliminary corpus of six complete and dozens of fragmentary urns and to find out how, where, and when most of them were unearthed. We propose two types (I & II) for these urns and argue that their main iconographic themes are the cult of ancestors, the Jaguar God of the Underworld, ch'ajoom ritual specialists, and monkey-cacao symbolism, all surrounding male and female elite characters.

A central document to this paper is an archival police inquiry narrating how the first two urns were discovered east of the Montebello Lakes. This transcript of interviews with the looter, buyer, and appointed guardian of ruins contextualizes the objects as cave offerings. Further work reveals how the rest of these urns were seized from looters by the military in the same area. The narrow area where these urns were located, and their consistent ritualistic themes strengthen the idea of an effigy-urn workshop controlled by Chinkultic elites to perpetuate their dynasty, religious duties, and memory.

Key words: Chinkultic; effigy-urns; provenance; ch'ajoom; ancestor worship



For decades, a group of effigy-urns from Chinkultic and its vicinity received little attention due to a lack of provenance data. The urns belong to a Late Classic Maya ceramic tradition from the eastern highlands of Chiapas, as defined by Navarrete and colleagues (1999), which includes the neighboring area of Chaculá located in Huehuetenango, Guatemala (Figure 1; see Earley and Wölfel 2023). Earlier Mayanists struggled to study these urns due to a lack in published information on their context and elaborate imagery. Recent studies (Sánchez Gamboa et al. 2022) and newly discovered documents provide contextual information to review this artistic tradition and rightfully place it in Maya research.



In 2019-2020, while a team from the Coordinación Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural (CNCPC) of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) was documenting and restoring the collections of Chiapas's museums, they identified a new Chinkultic stela displaying a monumental, knotted headdress identical to one from an urn from the Museo del Fuerte de San Juan Ulúa (MFSJU) in Veracruz (Figure 6). This first crucial association between the stela and the MFSJU's urn led to the subsequent identification of analogous examples located in the Museo Regional de Chiapas (MRCH), Museo Nacional de Antropología (MNA), Museo Arqueológico de Comitán (MAC), Museo Na Bolom, New World Archaeological Foundation (NAAF), and in private collections in Comitán, Tzimol, and Tziscaco, Chiapas.

Chinkultic lies on the eastern edge of the Comitán plateau, near the present Mexico-Guatemala border, in the Montebello Lakes system, characterized by mixed pine-oak forests and karstic landscape including cenotes, and caves; natural features which likely evoked a symbolic landscape for its ancient inhabitants. The main occupation on the site happened during the Yobnajib phase (700-900 A.D.) in the Late Classic period and coincided with the arrival of one branch of the *Chan ajaw* lineage who ruled for approximately 300 years (Ball 1980:90-95). During this period, the region saw both the dedication of hieroglyphic monuments and the development of the Chinkultic effigy-urn tradition.

These effigy-urns are large clay sculptures with complex appliquéd imagery that can be separated into two main types. The first type (Type I or Andasolos style) comprises tall, cylindrical urns (flat-bottomed bases and straight walls) with anthropomorphic lids (small arms, necklaces, bracelets, and faces on the pull). The urn from Andasolos cave, found in association with smaller vessels with similar appliquéd imagery and effigy lids, is the type example of this style (Figure 2; Navarrete and Martínez 1977). Large characters, ranging from one to three figures, are appliquéd along its walls. The compositional layout of the urn is a central figure paired by smaller identical side figures, surprisingly recalling two contemporary urns from Cacaxtla, central Mexico (Brittenham and Nagao 2014:87-92, Figures 25 and 26).

The second type of effigy-urn (Type II) is characterized by squatting figures, a flat-bottom with straight or diverging walls sided with vertical, rectangular flanges. The squatting figure is perched atop the container, legs bent and elbows resting on the knees. This pan-Mesoamerican posture is associated with sacrifice, ballcourts, and regenerative rituals (Fox 1993:57-60; Earley 2023:51-53). Squatters feature on the ballcourt markers from Tenam Rosario near Chinkultic and in the effigy-urns discussed in this paper (Agrinier 1983:243; Earley 2023:45-55). Scherer and

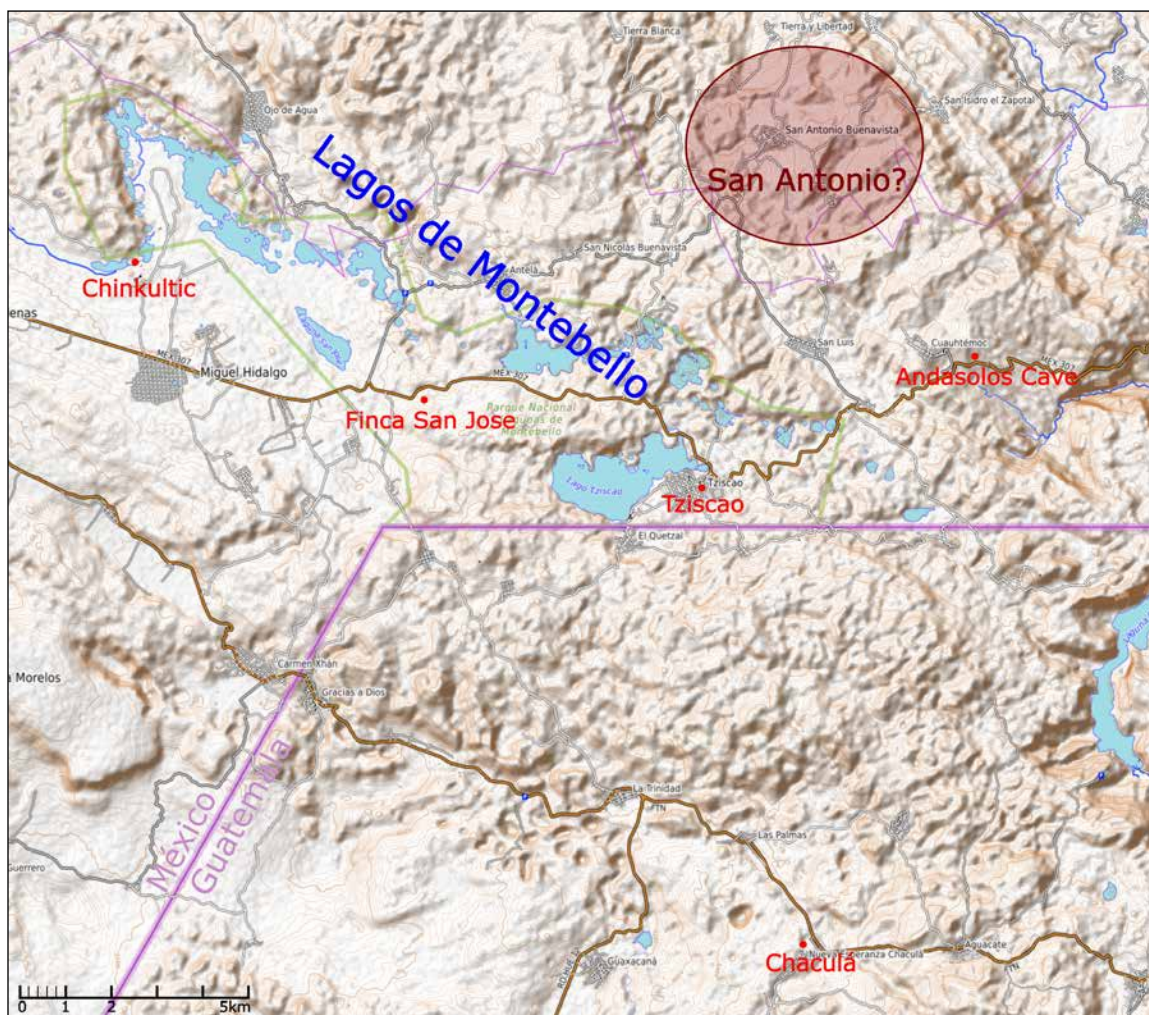


Figure 1. Map of the eastern highlands of Chiapas including Chinkultic, the Montebello Lakes region, and Chaculá (© Openstreetmap.org modified by Folch).

colleagues (2018:183) argue that the “Death God, sacrificers, and the people of central Mexico were all generally rendered as squatters” by Maya artists, a hypothesis that is reinforced by the present analysis. The iconography of the Type II lower containers usually replicates the upper perched beings emerging from the maws of a supernatural creature and tends to incorporate central Mexican imagery, ancestors with simian attributes, and other symbols (Figures 3, 5, 6, and 7). A variation of this type appears in Tomb 1 from Chinkultic, the container being held between the legs of the squatting character (Figure 4). The height of these urns ranges from 12 to 120 cm (Sánchez Gamboa et al. 2022).

The squatting figures usually hold staffs, triangular incense bags, spear-thrower darts, and square mirrors. Male figures impersonate the Jaguar God of the Underworld (JGU) while females



Figure 2. Frontal and lateral views of Andasolos cave's urn (Type 1) with *ch'ajoom* ancestor paired by two old figures, now sheltered in MAC (photos by Jorge Pérez de Lara © CNCPC-INAH).

are associated with central Mexican imagery. Both are ancestors depicted as *ch'ajoom*, ritual specialists associated with censing, fire offerings, bloodletting, human sacrifice, ancestral veneration, and nagualism practices (Sánchez Gamboa et al. 2022). These narratives are complemented by monkey-cacao symbolism in a paradisiac locale surrounded by cacao vines and birds.

New archival information about the Chinkultic effigy-urns provides crucial contextual information, particularly from three effigy-urns which, along with other unprovenanced ones, enrich interpretations about their ritual significance. This investigation provides a documented corpus of effigy-urns, their stylistic and iconographic analyses, and delimits their geographic distribution. Two cultural spheres are proposed: 1) a larger tradition in the Chinkultic and Montebello Lakes region, in the eastern highlands of Chiapas, and 2) a southern tradition around Chaculá and Quen Santo north of Huehuetenango, Guatemala.

The Discoveries of Chinkultic Effigy-Urns

Few Chinkultic effigy-urns have contextual information, since most were looted. Their use-range extends from the Comitán Valley throughout the Montebello Lakes, and south into Chaculá (Figure 1). In the late 19th century, Eduard Seler found the first fragments of squatting body parts and masks depicting the JGU in Quen Santo, Huehuetenango (Seler 2003: Figures 198, 199, 204-208).

Nearby, in Chaculá, Gustav Kanter gathered an important collection of similar fragments including male and female anthropomorphic faces, and sometimes others with simian and feline features (Burkitt 1924; Villacorta and Villacorta 1927; Navarrete 1979; Earley 2023). Unfortunately, Kanter's collection was destroyed in the early 20th century (see Earley and Wölfel, this issue).

In 1931, the first two Type II urns were located in a narrow cave east of the Montebello Lakes in a place called San Antonio (Figure 5 and 6). The male and female effigy-urns were found facing each other in a setting similar to the nearby Andasolos cave. They were found by Eduardo Castellanos, a rancher and owner of Finca San Jose el Arco, sold to Enoch Ortiz, a wealthy Comitán man, and confiscated by Mauro Quintero Brisac, the regional guardian of ruins. The female urn (Figure 5) was sent to Mexico City in 1932 and continually showcased in the MNA (Cat. n° 05.0-00095). The male urn (Figure 6) was accidentally broken and, after sitting in a private collection for decades, was donated in 1992 to the MFSJU in Veracruz.

Enoch Ortiz was ordered by the local judge to stop acquiring antiquities in 1931; yet, he added a third urn by 1943 (Figure 3). Ortiz gifted this urn to President Manuel Ávila Camacho while he was visiting Comitán in 1943, who then donated it to the MRCH (Ceough and Corin 1947:4). The origin of the third urn is debated (Kidder 1954:496, Erben et al. 1954-55: Figure 14; Na Bolom Archive, Frans B. Fotografias), but most likely came from the same region as the first two reported by Quintero.



Figure 3. Frontal and lateral views of effigy-urn (Type II) donated by President Manuel Ávila Camacho to MRCH (photos by Jorge Pérez de Lara © CNCPC-INAH).

Archaeological contexts, military seizures, and private collections

The first urns found by archaeologists come from Yerbabuena, a Late Classic site located northwest of Comitán excavated in 1959 by Patrick Culbert (1965:9-10). A semi-complete Type I urn was placed atop the skeletal remains of a small bird in a dedicatory cache offering in the center of a ballcourt. In Chinkultic in 1966, Stephan de Borhegyi (1968:124) discovered effigy-urn fragments on the surface of Group A and, in 1969, hundreds more were found on the surface and in construction fill. Large quantities were also found in Group C's ballcourt during excavations undertaken in 1970 (Ball 1980: Table 1).

When the road to the Montebello Lakes region was built in 1969, the two-day horseback trip from Comitán became only a few hours by car (Montiel 1990:76-80), facilitating access to looters. A fourth effigy-urn (Type II) was seized by the military in 1972 from Eduardo Díaz Díaz in Comitán

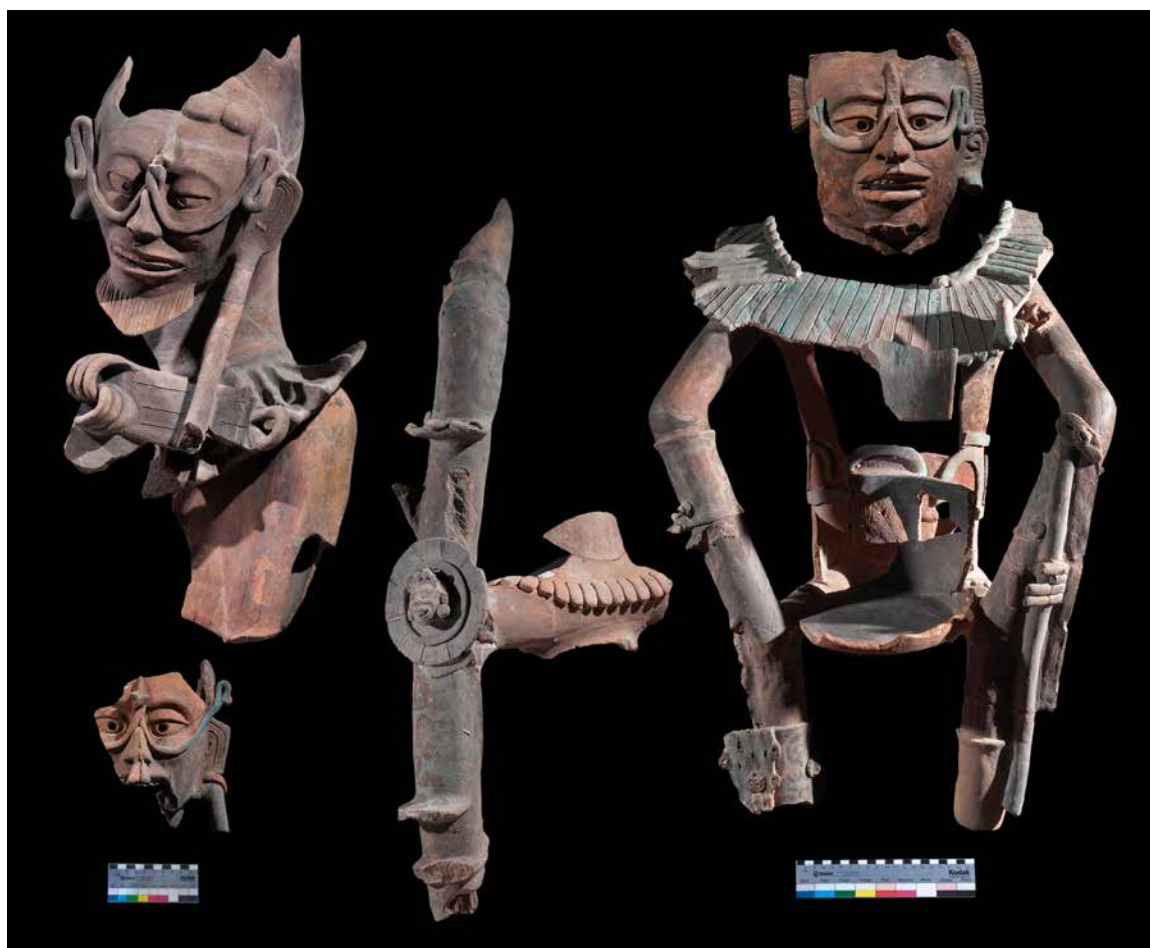


Figure 4. A selection of the fragmented effigy-urns (Type II) discovered in Tomb 1 from Structure 1 of Chinkultic by Carlos Navarrete in 1975-76, now stored in MRCH (photos by Jorge Pérez de Lara © CNCPC-INAH).



Figure 5. Two different photographs of the ‘Indian Queen’ urn (Type II) that was seized from Enoch Ortiz by Mauro Quintero in 1931, now sheltered in the MNA (Cat. n° 05.0-00095, photo by Archivo Digital MNA). Left, historical photograph of female *ch’ajoom* (photo by Berlin State Museum).

and given to the MRCH on September 30, 1972 (Figure 7), according to the museum’s old catalog (Object n°860). The catalog mentions it originally had a “thin layer of limestone” and likely came from a cave. Road construction from Montebello to Colonia Cuauhtémoc also led to the discovery of the Andasolos cave by Carlos Navarrete and Eduardo Martínez (1977: 17) in April 1975, located 15 km east-southeast of Chinkultic. The only semi-complete Type II urns found archaeologically (by Navarrete 1976, 2020) come from Chinkultic Tomb 1, in Structure 1, located atop Group A.

Additional effigy-urn fragments in the MRCH collection were confiscated from looters in 1992 and donated by the military. Among the objects are two large cylindrical urn fragments (Figures 8a, 8d), one zoomorphic lid (Figure 8e), one container with a human face (Figure 8f), and fragments of hairy extremities (Figures 8g-8h) manufactured in Andasolos style (Type I). A torso and an arm holding a staff with a cacao pod from a simian Type II urn complete the lot (Figures 8b-8c), along with fragments of a stone bowl with carved inscriptions recording a new example of Chinkultic’s emblem glyph, suggesting they all came from that general area.

An unprovenanced miniature (12 cm) complete Type II effigy-urn is also found in the MNA (cat. number° 05.0-00045) featuring the characteristic female, elbow-on-knee position holding

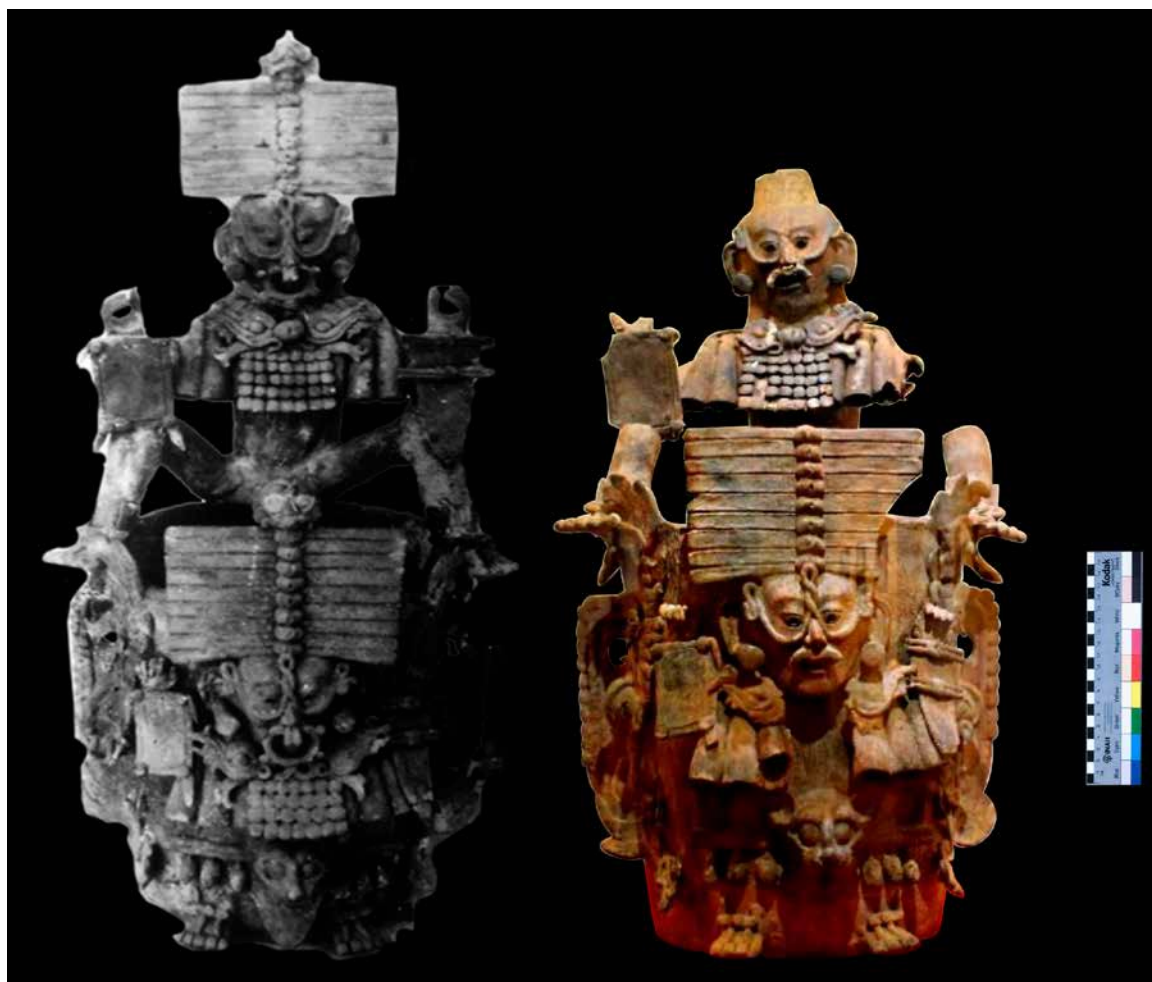


Figure 6. Different photographs of the ‘Indian King’ urn (Type II) seized from Enoch Ortiz and later acquired by Luis Beverido until it was donated in 1992 to the Museo Fuerte de San Juan de Ulúa, now sheltered in MAC. Left, historical photograph when it was more complete (photo by José de Jesús Nuñez © Musée du Quai Brainly). Right: current conservation state of the effigy-urn (photo by Ramón Folch González).

a bag of copal in her left hand (Sánchez Gamboa et al. 2022: Figure 1d). She wears a rope with dangling beads across her forehead and large circular earflares, is crowned by a foliated headdress, and her hair cascades over her shoulders.

A private Comitán collection includes a smaller container and an Andasolos style urn (Type I) with a simian face (Figures 9b-9c). Another private collection in Tzimol, southwest of Comitán, revealed to Ramón Folch on August 12, 2020, features effigy-urn fragments found in the area (Figures 9d-9e). In Tzisco, in the Montebello Lakes region, collections shown to the authors exhibit more affinity to the Chaculá materials: crudely modeled masks with depictions of the JGU and simian faces that are quite different from the more realistic style of the Chinkultic urns tradition.

The Museo Na Bolom in San Cristóbal de las Casas holds a semi-complete Type II male urn. The squatter has a simian face with leaf-shaped earflares, a beaded necklace, and a long beard (Figure 9a). Remnants of thick hair can be seen on the sides of its head; a label on the back reads: “Adquirido en COMITAN obsequio SR. PEDRO UVENCE JULIO 1967”. The Na Bolom archives also include a 1950s catalog card with a photograph of a small container similar to those found along Type I urns, featuring a figure with thick hair holding a bag of copal with a rope circling its head and neck (Figure 9f). Limestone drippings along the vessel walls suggest it came from a cave. The card indicates the piece was in the Übersee Museum in Hamburg, Germany, directed by Helmuth O. Wagner (1950-1962). The name “Hernanz” is also mentioned, and could refer to the brothers who owned a textile factory in San Cristobal at the time and who may have acquired it. More examples will likely be found in collections across Mexico and other countries as research on the urn tradition continues.

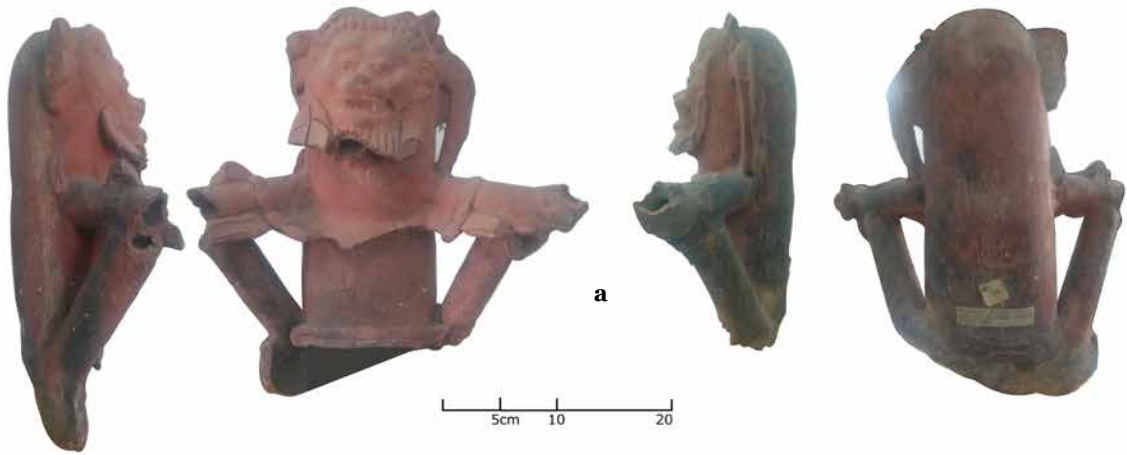


Figure 7. Back and front views of an effigy-urn (Type II) with the representation of a nagual in the shape of a jaguar in a squatting position. It was seized by the military in 1972 and now is stored in the MRCH (photo by Jorge Pérez de Lara © CNCPC-INAH).



Figure 8. Effigy-urn fragments (Type I and II) seized by the military in 1992 and now stored in the MRCH (photos by Ángel A. Sánchez Gamboa © CNCPC-INAH).

Na Bolom Museum



Comitan private coll.



Hamburg urn (Na Bolom Archive)

Tzimol private coll.



Figure 9. A: Na Bolom Museum urn from Comitan. B: Small vessel with a simian face. C: Face with a simian feature from Type I urn, Comitan private collection. D-E: Tzimol urn fragments, private collection. F: Urn from Comitan in Hamburg's Ubersee Museum (Archivo Na Bolom, Frans B. Fotografías).

Repatriation of the San Juan de Ulúa's urn

As mentioned above, while visiting the remodeled MFSJU, Martha Cuevas identified a Type II effigy-urn (Figure 6) wearing a knotted headdress similar to the recently documented Chinkultic stela. This attribute was key to the establishment of a link between the urn and the Chinkultic archaeological site. INAH's documentation indicates the MSFJU urn was in Luis Beverido's possession in 1958 when he solicited his collection to be registered by INAH, which happened until 1974. Beverido's family donated this collection to the MFSJU in 1992.

After publishing a seminal paper in *Arqueología Mexicana* (Sánchez Gamboa et al. 2022) and working alongside the authorities of Centro INAH-Veracruz and the MFSJU, the urn was returned to Chiapas on October 27, 2022, where it is currently stored in the MAC after a 90-year journey (1931-2022).

Soon after, Ramón Folch González located judicial documents from the Procuraduría General de la República in the archives of the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia (BNAH) reporting the confiscation of the first two urns from Comitán. This document linked the female urn in the MNA collection with the male urn at MFSJU (Figures 5 and 6). Most importantly, it provides contextual information of their discovery.

The Enoch Ortiz file: the 1931 confiscation of two urns

The information on the first two Type II Chinkultic urns comes from the transcripts of interviews done by the judge of Comitán with Mauro Quintero, Enoch Ortiz, and Eduardo Castellanos. The interview document was divided in two untitled files: O C3/V1L7/E190/D1 and O C3/V1L7/E636/D1. The protagonists are Mauro Quintero Brisac (1874-1941), guardian of ruins appointed by the Departamento de Monumentos Artísticos, Arqueológicos e Históricos in the Comitán region, Enoch Ortiz (1889-1976), a rich landowner from Comitán, and Eduardo Castellanos (1883-?), owner of Finca San José el Arco, discoverer of the urns. In 1931, Quintero formally accused Ortiz of "stealing two idols that belong to the nation," referred to as an 'Indian Queen' and 'Indian King'. The queen was shipped to the MNA shortly after in 1932 (Figure 5). The King, however, was accidentally shattered to pieces and somehow ended up in Luis Beverido's hands before being donated to the MFSJU (Figure 6; the watercolor accompanying this paper illustrates the accident described in the transcript).

Ortiz's first involvement with archaeology occurred in 1925 when the first Tulane expedition documented Tenam Puente located on his property (Blom and La Farge 1925:423). Some years later he acquired the first two urns and, in his own words, "various stone idols that he has in the garden of the house of his *finca rustica* called 'El Puente.'" Eduardo Castellanos described how he found the urns:

In some virgin mountains about three leagues east of his ranch [...] the place where these figures were is not exactly a cave, rather a [...] hole about one meter or one meter and a half in circumference and the bottom is two meters deep and in the side walls were found the two aforementioned figures [...] In the hole where these figures were, there were no other archaeological jewels [...] the precise location of the hole is about

three leagues distant from the border with Guatemala, in an untraveled place not being able to signal the name of the mountain where the hole is [...] near this place is a place named San Antonio, about 3 or 4 leagues away...

Castellanos suspected the urns were placed in the hole recently, mentioning freshly broken bits, no “parasites” or patina, and that a wooden stairway led down into the cave. Nearby Maya inhabitants could have visited the cave until recent times. It is surprising how similar the setting of the cave is to the Andasolos cave, which was also merely a crack in the rocks. Navarrete and Martínez (1977) could barely fit, yet Andasolos had dozens of offerings deposited while the San Antonio ‘hole’ was devoid of them.

Iconography of the Chinkultic effigy-urns

Chinkultic was a paramount Late Classic court and a seat of a branch of the *chan ajaw* dynasty in the eastern highlands of Chiapas, near the southwestern Maya frontier (Grube 2002:66; Wölfel and Wagner 2010; Carter and Santini 2019:4). It interacted with polities such as Tenam Puente, Tenam Rosario, Lagartero, with lesser-known sites to the south like Guajilar, Los Encuentros, and Piedra Labrada nearing the Sierra Madre de Chiapas, and also with the Chaculá-Quen Santo area in northern Huehuetenango.

Below we present the main visual narratives displayed in these effigy-urns. This iconography is related to the covenants and ceremonial duties of rulers and elites as ritual specialists motivated to perpetuate these religious obligations to ensure the stability of the lineage or dynasty.

The Cha'joom title and the Jaguar God of the Underworld

The main theme in the Chinkultic effigy-urns is the representation of rulers and elites as squatting ancestors. For the Maya, the squat-like position contrasted with the aesthetical and ideal cross-legged position displayed by rulers and elites (Stone and Zender 2011:63). Scherer and colleagues (2018:179-183), associate it with death gods, *ch'ajoom* sacrificers, and “foreignness”, as exemplified in Copan 10L-26-1's outstanding inscription which contrasts cross-legged, Maya full-figure glyphs with squatting, central Mexican-style full-figure glyphs. In the Chinkultic urns, squatting male ancestors impersonate the JGU: a fire deity, a nocturnal aspect of the sun passing through the underworld, and the patron god of war and caves (Stuart 1998:408; Taube 1998:441) shown wearing a diagnostic “cruller” (a twisted rope delimiting his eyes). Meanwhile, squatting female ancestors are associated with foreign imagery related to central Mexican storm gods.

Ancestors are displayed as *ch'ajoom*, a title derived from the word *ch'aj* “incense” and the agentive suffix *-oom*, referring to the ritual specialist charged with casting incense during fire rituals. On a bench from Copan's Sepulturas Group (Group 9N-8) is carved a full-figure **CH'AJOOM** logogram in a squatting position scattering incense into a spiked censer (Sánchez Gamboa et al. 2022: Figure 4c; see K1560 for another example). In this sense, male and female elites bear the *ch'ajoom*-title due to the covenants with ancestors and the supernatural realm (see Monaghan 1995:222-223). Another proposal for the squatting position is related to the act of defecation and

flatulence associated with the Death God (Scherer et al. 2018:181).

Some diagnostic traits of *ch'ajoom* attire include the headband with extruded tendrils or curls, along with a cloak of leaves (Scherer and Houston 2018:118-119; Scherer 2020). Interestingly, these attributes have not yet been detected in the eastern highlands of Chiapas. Instead, other systematic motifs appear, including staffs for fire-drilling ceremonies. The fire-drilling episode is key in the iconography of Chinkultic's urns, where most of the ancestors impersonating the JGU hold staffs. The female *ch'ajoom* also holds them (Figure 5), yet she is associated with predatory birds linked to the Storm God in the guise of a moth. These staffs sport knotted motifs, tagging them as ritual tools.

Another style of Type II urns includes seated *ch'ajoom* ancestors wielding knotted staffs, along with small, rounded shields with frontal stylized depictions of the JGU (Figure 4). They wear jaguar paws on their arms and legs, a garment related to royal attire in Chinkultic's monumental art (e.g., Monuments 2, and 21 in Earley 2020:291-292).

Ancestors wear diagnostic knotted headdresses which are another important feature of *ch'ajoom* (Scherer and Houston 2018:116). The MFSJU effigy-urn (Figure 6) and the aforementioned stela from Chinkultic (Sánchez Gamboa et al. 2022: Figure 3) share an identical, nine-level knotted-headdress related to sacrifice (Schele and Miller 1986:176) or to the ancestral concept of *Baluun Tz'akab Ajaw* "9/Many Ordered Lords" (Wagner 2005:29-36). Sometimes these headdresses are accompanied by knotted ponytails or are wrapped in paper ribbons with blood stains. Occasionally, they hold knives and jaguar-paw flints (Scherer and Houston 2018:122, Figures 5.11a-5.11b). While none of the Chinkultic urns feature weapons, the Chaculá-Quen Santo urns (Burkitt 1924; Villacorta and Villacorta 1927) feature weapons akin to the iconography of Tenam Rosario: shields, spears, and spear-thrower darts (see Agrinier 1983).

Male *ch'ajoom* Type II squatters are usually repeated on the lower container, sometimes emerging from the maws of a supernatural serpent. The urn representing a squatting jaguar has a supernatural *ch'ajoom* male ancestor with simian features in the lower position (Figure 7). *Ch'ajoom*-title bearers are also related to a class of co-essences and spirits known as *way*: the embodiments of different diseases that protected kingdoms and lineages (Grube and Nahm 1994; Helmke and Nielsen 2009; Sheseña 2019). The jaguar wears a death-eye collar with dismembered eyeballs associated with these nefarious creatures (Miller 2022), but also with the Death God (God A) and JGU. The sacrificial scarf is another accessory of *way* creatures, also worn by the Chinkultic rulers (see Monuments 3, 5, 8, 18, 20 and 23 in Navarrete 1984; and Monument 27 in Earley, 2015: Figure 83b).

The female squatting *ch'ajoom* (Figure 5) is associated with an owl attacking its prey. The Storm God's face emerges from the owl's open beak. The Storm God's nose can be reconstructed thanks to historical photographs (Figure 5, left) as a hand holding spear-thrower's darts, which in turn emulates the Lepidoptera's proboscis (Berlo 1983:83; Headrick 2003:151). This is directly associated with the "Black Witch Moth Tlaloc" (Bassie-Sweet 2021:136-142), a deity related to night and fire as well as blood and weaponry, particularly obsidian projectile points, eccentrics, and bloodletters. This Lepidoptera deity is the main headdress worn by local rulers after ca. 750 AD (Guerrero Martínez et al. 2022).

A Paradisiacal Realm: Monkey and Cacao Iconography

Andasolos Cave's main urn (Figure 2) characterizes the "cylindrical" Type I. The lid is crested with a bejeweled male ancestor with bent arms. Along the walls are three squatting anthropomorphic figures with arms folded. The central effigy is a male ancestor situated in a paradisiacal location with birds, likely quetzals, and vines of cacao pods. He wears a jaguar headdress, knotted hair, and the JGU cruller, along with a knotted, tri-lobed necklace pendant (Finamore and Houston 2010:281). He has a swollen belly with a snake-like umbilical cord emerging from his navel. On the sides are two squatting old figures, apparently deceased since their eyes are closed. The central *ch'ajoom* in the guise of the JGU carries a small-sized human figure wearing a sacrificial scarf, probably a reference to child sacrifice as part of their ritual obligations.

Ancestors surrounded by a paradisiacal landscape are associated with monkey and cacao imagery as part of a pan-Mesoamerican narrative of human sacrifice, sustenance, and nourishment (Nájera Coronado 2012:155; Chinchilla 2016:372). Cacao was an important source of wealth in the economic and social affairs of Classic Maya polities (McNeil 2006) and ancient Maya conceptions of life, death, and generational rebirth (Martin 2006:163).

In Maya art, monkeys are portrayed as artists and scribes, sometimes a cultural hero, a trickster, or even as a *way* creature (Coe 1977; Coe and Kerr 1997:106; Grube and Nahm 1994). In Chinkultic urns, howler monkeys, identified by their beard, short limbs, and hook tails (Rice and South 2015:283), are represented wearing cacao pods (Figures 9a-9b) and with cacao vines in their hands or sprouting from their bodies (Figures 8c-8e). Cacao and human heads substitute for one another by using visual metaphors linking the pods with severed heads, captives, and sacrificial victims (Chinchilla, 2016:372). Among the 16th century Pipil, captives meant for sacrifice wore strings of cacao around the neck (García de Palacio 1982:279). Necklaces with severed heads were part of Chinkultic's Late Classic royal regalia (e.g., Monuments 2, 8, 17, 18 in Navarrete 1984; for Monument 2 see Ceough 1945: Figures 67) and are also present in Chaculá-Quen Santo's monumental art (Navarrete 1979: Figures 5, 6, 8, 14, 16; Earley 2023:87-88). The relation between the severed heads necklaces worn by Chinkultic rulers in monumental art and the cacao necklaces worn by simian figures in the effigy-urns from Chinkultic and Chaculá-Quen Santo spheres should be further studied.

Ancestral fruit trees are related to the notion of generational rebirth and lineage (Martin 2006:161-162). On Chinkultic's Monument 11, a deceased ruler impersonates the JGU and transforms into an ancestral fruit tree with vines sprouting from his face (Navarrete 1984: Figures 41-42). In Tenam Rosario's ballcourt markers, leafy elements sprout from male *ch'ajoom* squatters (Agrinier 1983:243).

In sum, monkey and cacao narratives conveyed important religious meanings about sacrifice, feeding the gods, death, and rebirth, and reinforced the ritual obligations of rulers and elites in their *ch'ajoom* roles. The manufacture of Chinkultic effigy-urns and their related ceremonies allowed the *chan ajaw* dynasty to perpetuate a message of rebirth and regeneration through religious practices aimed at ensuring the continuity of their dynasty.

Concluding Remarks

This paper described and analyzed the effigy-urn traditions from the Chinkultic region, whose iconography relates to elite ancestors. These individuals are shown performing religious duties connected to fire and JGU symbolism, incorporating central Mexican imagery. The *chan ajaw* kingdom, settled in Chinkultic in the late 6th century, likely controlled the Late Classic manufacture and distribution of these urns throughout the eastern highlands of Chiapas and in northern

Huhuetenango. This corpus provides a dataset that can enrich interpretations of iconographic themes in other Maya regions. This paper reframes the eastern Chiapas highlands as a point of comparison rather than an isolated region and provides new data regarding the still problematic squatting gesture, JGU's symbolism, central Mexican deities, the *ch'ajoom* title, and ancestor iconography.

Archival research solved some historical gaps regarding the history of effigy-urns, particularly the context of the first two discovered. Due to the lack of any remains inside them, specific use eludes us. With their association with fire, the JGU, and the *ch'ajoom* title, these could have contained mortuary bundles or more simply have been held as relics or heirlooms. Further archaeometric analyses could offer new information about these important ceremonial objects.

In sum, the urns from the Chinkultic and Chaculá-Quen Santo areas share most of the following themes: male and female *ch'ajoom* ancestors, the JGU, central Mexican deities, and the monkey-cacao complex. Two different spheres have minor stylistic differences: 1) the Chinkultic and Montebello Lakes region, plausibly the dominant tradition, and 2) the Chaculá and Quen Santo region, a peripheral tradition. The standardization in the manufacture and production of these effigy-urns, despite size differences, likely wields a political message of rulership, succession, and its ritual obligations, along with the likelihood of a workshop maintained by the elite. The naturalistic style and size of Chinkultic's sphere suggest importance when compared with the crudely modeled faces in the Chaculá-Quen Santo sphere. A thematic distinction is the absence of squatters holding weapons in the Chinkultic sphere. Further study of both traditions will better define them.

The eastern limit of the effigy-urn tradition was likely north of Huehuetenango, Guatemala. The western extent of the Chinkultic influence towards the Comitán plateau remains unclear, notwithstanding the plateau's isolated northwest and southwest cases of Yerbabuena and Tzimol. The absence of these urns in other major political centers such as Tenam Puente, Tenam Rosario, or Lagartero hints at broader geopolitical implications for future research.

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Old Collections and New Insights: Recent Research in the Comitán Valley and the Chaculá Region

Caitlin Earley

University of Washington, Seattle
ccearley@uw.edu

Ulrich Wölfel

Universität Bonn
uwoelfel@uni-bonn.de

The Comitán Valley and neighboring Chaculá region in Guatemala have been investigated by scholars from Eduard Seler to Carlos Navarrete. Scholars working in this region have assembled collections of drawings, photographs, and objects, including ceramics, lithics, and stone sculptures. Careful study of those materials supplements incomplete archaeological information. In this paper we present new research on Comitán-area collections assembled between 1890 and 1945. Centered on the investigative record left by Eduard Seler, Frans Blom, and Richard Ceough, as well as the collection of Gustavo Kanter, we consider newly uncovered photographs, stone and ceramic objects, as well as architectural and archaeological data. Combined, these reveal new information about the material record of the Comitán region, provide a different perspective on existing archaeological interpretations, and suggest cultural connections between diverse area sites.

Key words: Archaeology, collecting, sculpture, ceramics, caves



The Comitán Valley and the adjacent Chaculá region are home to distinctive art and architectural styles (Figure 1). Archaeological sites in this region experienced a long and dynamic settlement history. The area was the subject of investigations by outsiders by the late 19th century. Several scholars, like Eduard Seler and Frans Blom, documented their travels through the region and elements of material culture they encountered, including ceramics, sculpture, and architecture. Other individuals, like Gustavo Kanter, a *finca* owner, assembled physical collections of works from this region. From collection photographs to expedition notes, early researchers in this area created a rich trove of documentation that has not yet been adequately explored.

New research on historical collections and records has led to important new insights on art from the Comitán region and its neighbor, Chaculá. Our research considers the records of early expeditions in conjunction with recent archaeological and art historical investigations. Combined, these sources illuminate elements of Classic and Postclassic period life in the region, highlight how the region has been situated within the field of Mesoamerican studies, and document changes at area archaeological sites from 1900 to the present, especially the removal, fragmentation, and destruction of monuments and archaeological material. In this paper, we present insights from three different eras of historical research in conjunction with recent analyses.

Early investigations: Eduard Seler (1896)

In early 1896, German researchers Eduard and Caecilie Seler came to Comitán as part of their second journey through Mesoamerica, which lasted from October 1895 until May 1897. Their goal



was to conduct research and acquire collections for the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde, today the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin. While travelling through the Mexican state of Oaxaca, they managed to obtain important artifacts from private collectors, which included a large *lienzo* from Coixtlahuaca (known as the Lienzo Seler II; König 2017). The ensuing trip through Chiapas proved much less successful in this respect: Caecilie Seler-Sachs (1900:158) described it as a “chain of disappointments.” Furthermore, while in Mexico, Eduard Seler could not obtain a permit to carry out his own excavations, considered by him to be essential for obtaining “archaeologically useful material by which one could conduct a local delimitation and regional separation of cultures” (Eduard Seler, cited by Eisleb 1973:186-187).

This situation changed dramatically once the couple crossed the border to Guatemala in late March, where they encountered a fellow countryman, Gustavo Kanter. Kanter owned a large estate (*finca*) in the north-western corner of the department of Huehuetenango. It was easy for Seler to obtain permission from Kanter to conduct archaeological excavations, forgoing an official government permit. Taking advantage of the fact that the remoteness of the area helped in keeping government officials away, the Selers set out for two and a half months of intensive research that included the exploration and mapping of sites, as well as the long hoped-for excavation of ancient buildings. Although excavations brought to light interesting features, such as burials and offerings at Uaxac Canal and Pueblo Viejo Quen Santo, digging activities caused damage to the mounds. They do not conform to the standards of modern archaeology, and their published documentation was largely deficient (see Seler 1901:34-42, 54-55, 98-100, for examples). Furthermore, the relatively



Chaculá region and eastern Comitán valley

Drawing: U. Wölfel

Water bodies derived from Landsat 8, borders based on humdata.org (Conred Guatemala),
Relief derived from ASTER GDEM V.2 (ASTER GDEM is a product of METI and NASA).

- ▲ archaeological sites
- Chaculá region
- international border

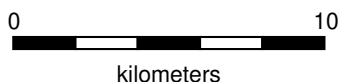
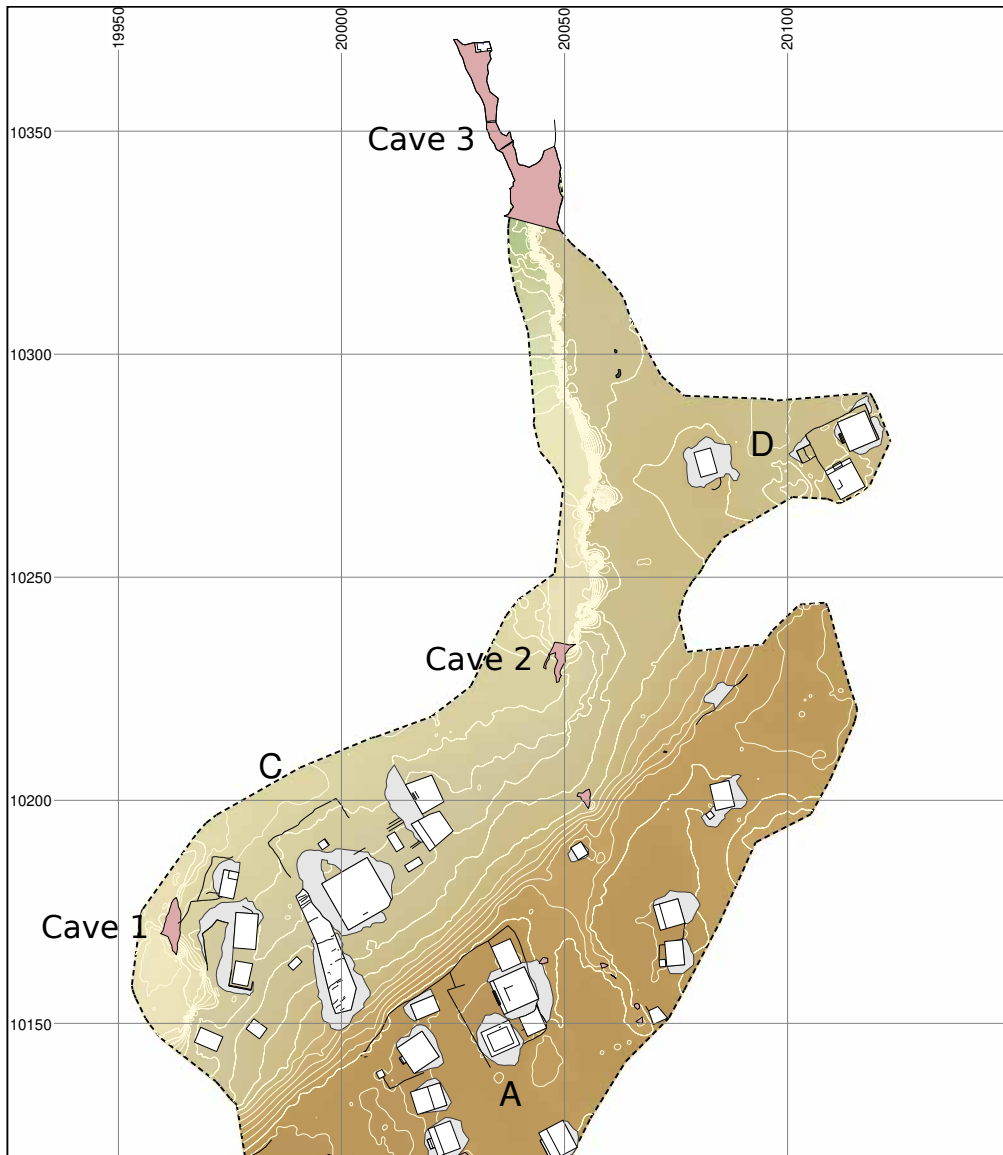


Figure 1. Map of the Chaculá region and the Eastern Comitán Valley (map by Ulrich Wölfel).

short occupational history of area sites (see also Navarrete 1979:49-51) hindered Seler's ability to establish a stratigraphic and thereby cultural sequence.

Recent research in the Chaculá region by the Proyecto Arqueológico de la Región de Chaculá (Wölfel et al. 2016; Wölfel 2022) has clarified some of Seler's original contributions and led to new discoveries at Chaculá and Quen Santo. Excavation and analysis confirmed the short occupation history of both sites, for instance, with settlement dating to the Late Classic to Early Postclassic (Wölfel 2022). Survey also revealed the extent of the Quen Santo archaeological site, stretching



Pueblo Viejo Quen Santo

Groups A, C, D, Caves

Mapping: U. Wölfel and J. Pérez

Drawing: U. Wölfel

Contour interval: 2 meters

— caves
- - - - - limit of survey area

0 100
meters



Figure 2. Map showing the location of Caves I, II, and III underneath Pueblo Viejo Quen Santo (map by Ulrich Wölfel).



Figure 3. View of the Sanctuary inside Cave III at Quen Santo (Photo by Ulrich Wölfel).

across multiple plateaus in addition to the central group, which Seler dubbed Pueblo Viejo Quen Santo.

Twenty-first century research has also helped contextualize some of the information provided by Seler on the caves of Quen Santo, which attracted his particular attention. Located underneath the main architectural group, the complex consists of at least eight caves (see Brady et al. 2009; Wölfel 2022), of which three were investigated in detail by Seler (Figure 2). Although these had been subject to “planless plundering” (Seler 1901:146) a few years earlier, there were still quantities of pottery fragments and several stone sculptures in the caves. Seler correctly identified a small building found inside the main chamber of Cave III as the principal place of worship (Figure 3). Thanks to some pieces kept by Kanter in his house (see below) and the recollections of the *finca*’s *mayordomo*, who was present at the looting event, Seler created a reconstruction drawing of the ritual assemblage with stone sculptures and incense burners inside the building as found in the early 1890s (Figure 4).

Although later researchers dismissed the arrangement reconstructed by Seler as a “hodge-podge of material that does not resemble a functioning ritual assemblage” (Brady et al. 2009: 23), analysis of existing ceramics from the Cave III structure, combined with iconographic comparison, suggests

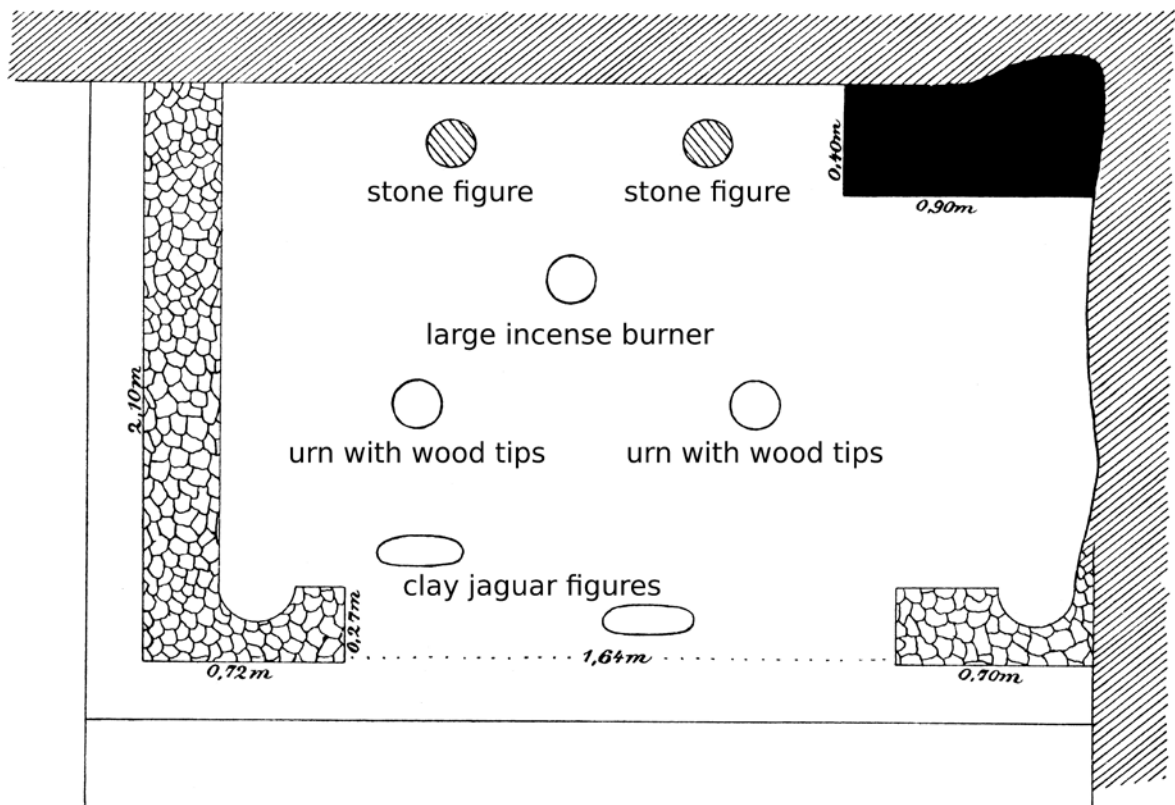


Figure 4. Diagram created by Seler of objects in Cave III, based on discussions with Antonio Romero and other community members (modified by Ulrich Wölfel after Seler 1901:Figure 240).

the diagram accurately reflects Late Classic and Postclassic ritual in the cave. A large *incensario* (height: 52.5 cm) shows the face of the Jaguar God of the Underworld, a theme shared by several other vessels from this cave (Figure 5). It features the typical serpent-like cord that twists into a “cruller” above the nose, spiralling “deity-eyes” (consisting of concentric circles), as well four small legs attached to the side of the face and spiked protrusions all over the face. The eyes and mouth have openings through which incense smoke could pass. An almost identical vessel has made its way to Munich’s Museum of Ethnology (Lehmann 1916). These vessels most likely represent the two objects described by informants at the front of the sanctuary in Cave III. Furthermore, pigments applied to walls and objects in the Cave III sanctuary exhibit a micro-stratigraphy (noted, but not further explored by Seler 1901:169-171): first, dark red hematite was generously applied, then calcification processes deposited an irregular layer of calcite on top, and finally one can observe brush strokes of blue paint, determined at the Rathgen-Forschungslabor Berlin to be Maya Blue. The intermediary calcite layer is evidence of prolonged use, with two periods coded by distinct pigment colours: (1) red for the early phase, likely dedicated to the Jaguar God of the Underworld—a major focus of Late Classic-era ceramics at Quen Santo; and (2) blue representing ritual use during a later



Figure 5. Ceramic vessel from Cave III at Quen Santo, now at the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin, Ca21635 (© Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Photograph by Ulrich Wölfel).

phase, possibly associated with a rain and water deity.

Existing ceramics from Quen Santo revealed surprising aspects of ritual use at the caves. In some cases, calcite as well as Maya Blue extend over fracture surfaces, suggesting that ancient visitors employed fragmented pottery in site rituals. Most fragments were ritually discarded in Cave I, which features large accumulations of broken pottery. Yet pieces recovered by Selser in distinct caves can be joined. From this we can deduce that at some point objects were broken and some of the fragments moved. Significantly, since there are examples found at Caves I and II as well as I and III that join, but never from Caves II and III, we know that Cave I was the final destination for discarded ritually used ceramics.

The Kanter Museum at Chaculá (ca. 1900 - 1915)

Likely inspired by the Selers' visit, Kanter began collecting objects from throughout the Chaculá region, and especially from Quen Santo, with no government oversight and without the permission



Figure 6. Stone sculptures in the collection of Gustavo Kanter
(Courtesy of the Penn Museum, Image #194582)



Figure 7. Various works in the collection of Gustavo Kanter, including ceramic and lithic objects. Visible in the center back is a large ceramic vessel with a figure squatting on the rim, similar to vessels from Chinkultic (Courtesy of the Penn Museum, Image #194569).

of Indigenous communities. Kanter prepared a room in his *finca* house at Chaculá Viejo for the exhibition and safekeeping of his growing archaeological collection. The Kanter Museum impressed *finca* visitors, among them the Guatemalan historian and politician Adrián Recinos, who in 1913 praised its fine collection of Pre-Columbian artifacts (Recinos 1913:205). Contemporary writers considered the collection among the most important in Guatemala (Burkitt 1924:117), where the only national collection, a small museum at the Palacio de la Reforma, was destroyed by earthquakes in 1917 (see Chinchilla Mazariegos 2016). The Kanter collection included stone sculptures, ceramics, stucco fragments, obsidian knives and blades, greenstone objects, and even human remains.

For some ten to fifteen years, the museum prospered, as documented by a set of photographs taken during this time by Kanter's son-in-law, Gustavo Kaehler, and published in part by Robert Burkitt in 1924 (Figures 6 and 7). Numbers visible on the photographs hint at the former presence of a written inventory, whose eventual fortunate recovery may shed light on this issue. It is unknown whether Kanter kept provenience records for his collection.

Photographs of the Kanter collection not only give an overall impression of the quantity and variety of the collected materials, but they also paint a clearer picture of the artistic style associated with the Late Classic and Early Postclassic periods in the Chaculá region. Large stone sculptures featuring figures with crossed arms (Figure 6), some of them documented by Seler from Quen Santo, are particularly characteristic of the area. Fragments of stucco decorations suggest important buildings were richly adorned with sculpture. Large ceramic vessels with modelled anthropomorphic figures squatting on the rim (Figure 7) all have their parallels not only in Seler's collection from the same region, but also in archaeological assemblages from the neighbouring Comitán Plateau (see Sánchez Gamboa et al. 2023; Sánchez Gamboa and Earley 2023), suggesting a close connection between the two areas. Although provenance and archaeological context is unknown for the vast majority of these objects, they nevertheless help us understand the variety of artistic expressions from the larger region. Materials from the Kanter collection present connections to nearby artistic traditions even as they document an artistic style distinct to Quen Santo. The breadth of the collection, meanwhile, indicates a sophisticated artistic tradition flourished in the region, presumably supported by local dynasts at population centers like Quen Santo and Chaculá.

With the acquisition of his *finca* in the early 1890s, Kanter had inherited an almost decade-old conflict with the local Indigenous population over the right to the lands of their ancestors. Everything came to a head in 1913 when Kanter hired Mexican mercenaries to burn down two Chuj villages which he considered illegal occupants of his properties. A leader from El Aguacate, one of the affected villages, sought legal advice in the name of his and neighbouring villages, with the result that the Guatemalan president sent troops to occupy Kanter's *fincas*. Kanter was warned and fled to Mexico. The expulsion of Kanter meant a victory for the Indigenous population over a cruel and avaricious landowner. It also sealed the fate of the museum and the collection it housed. Destruction and looting of the museum by the Guatemalan army as well as neglect by later owners, when Kanter had finally sold his Guatemalan properties, led to the collection's disintegration and dispersal of the objects, some of which ended up in museums around the world, while the majority simply disappeared (Chavarochette 2011:62-67; Navarrete 1979:11-15; Wölfel 2022:37-43).

In the mid-1970s, Guatemalan archaeologist Carlos Navarrete could still document 49 sculptures at Chaculá, rescued from the debris of the museum (Navarrete 1979). This number has been

further reduced to nine sculpture fragments currently kept at the “new” *finca* house that was in construction at the time of the Selers’ visit and now serves as a lodge for a local ecotourism project. Despite the dissolution of the collection, surviving photographs have enabled us to better understand what types of objects comprised the collection and how they were displayed. Photographs of the works exhibited by Kanter have also revealed new connections between works from the Chaculá area and the Comitán Valley (Wölfel and Earley, n.d.).

Early 20th century investigations: Blom and Ceough

The next wave of scholars came in the 1920s, when Frans Blom and Oliver La Farge visited the Comitán region in July 1925 as part of the First Tulane Expedition (Blom and La Farge 1926-27). They stopped at Chinkultic on their way to the Guatemalan border, photographing several monuments and creating a rough map of the site. After a subsequent visit by Enrique Juan Palacios, Blom returned in 1928 with the John Geddings Gray Memorial expedition (Blom 1928). With him was one of Kanter’s sons, listed in the expedition records as a Chuj interpreter. In his second visit to the site, Blom made a fortuitous discovery: the cenote. While previous visitors had climbed the enormous Structure 23 that dominates Group C, closer examination of the monumental stairway (today known as upper Group A) led Blom to the hilltop acropolis, Stela 9, and the cenote itself. “Two hundred feet below the temple square shone a mirror of emerald-green, crystal-clear water – a sacred pool,” wrote Blom (1928:7). “The sight came upon us so suddenly, and its beauty was so perfect, that it haunted us for many days after.” Blom’s fascination with the cenote helped spur later investigations, including a project spearheaded by the Milwaukee Public Museum decades later (de Borhegyi 1968).

Blom’s records of the Comitán region help contextualize Selers’ writings and suggest opportunities for further research in the area. For example, as they moved across the Comitán plateau, Blom and his party documented the site of El Desconsuelo (Figure 8). Located above the Sacchaná Valley, it consists of several platforms and buildings, including a mound of “considerable size” (Blom 1928:21). Blom also recorded at least one plain stela and a ballcourt. Blom and DUBY (1957: 56-57) and later Wölfel (2022: 254) speculate that this site could have been the original location of the Sacchaná stelae, documented by Eduard Selers at the Finca Sacchaná and famous for their late inscriptions. Future research may help confirm this hypothesis.

Blom never published a full report of the Geddings Gray expedition, but he was certainly in contact with other scholars about his findings in the Comitán region. One of them was an amateur archaeologist who went by the name of Richard Ceough. Ceough began visiting the area by 1940, his interest spurred by “a somewhat romantic desire to explore the legend of the ‘Lost City of the Mayans’” (Ceough 1944:1). He worked with Javier Mandujano Solorzano, a schoolteacher in Comitán and guardian of local ruins for the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). Over the course of four field seasons, Ceough and Mandujano reconnoitered Chinkultic and surrounding lakes, documenting archaeological sites, routes of passage, and ritual cave use throughout the Comitán region. Although he was never trained in archaeology or anthropology, Ceough corresponded with many leading scholars of the day.

Reports submitted by Ceough to INAH serve as important records because they are the earliest

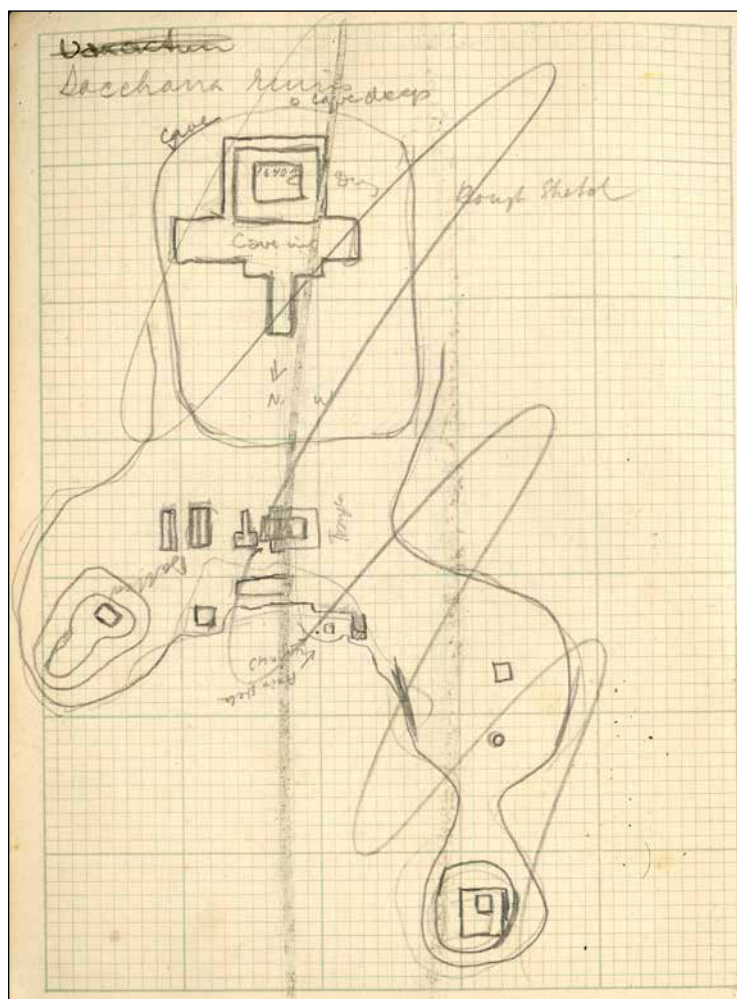


Figure 8. Sketch of El Desconsuelo / Sacchaná ruins by Frans Blom (courtesy of the Latin American Library, Tulane University).

documentation of many sculptures from Chinkultic—including some no longer extant today (duplicate copies of Ceough’s reports have been digitized at the National Museum of the American Indian). On August 1, 1945, for instance, Ceough and his team recovered Stela 11 at the site (Figure 9; Ceough 1945:19). He remarked on the “extremely good condition” of the stone, which depicts a standing individual facing to the viewer’s left. The figure wears the undereye ornament of the Jaguar God of the Underworld, and a jaguar ear sits just above his human one. Ceough also noted the figure’s “remarkably high headdress,” which consists of a tall stack of knotted cloth bands. Attached to the front are two examples of what Stuart (2012:129) calls the *xok* adornment, a motif that appears regularly on the headdresses of rulers. Sitting above the jeweled headband that forms the lower rim of the headdress is a human skull, depicted in profile, facing the same direction as the human figure. A vegetal tendril

curls from the headdress down around the face of the ruler, and finally out in front of him. Feathers emerge from the front and back of the headdress.

Recent research at Chinkultic has put this stone into some context: although the sculpture lacks existing legible hieroglyphs, it most likely depicts a ruler of Chinkultic dressed as a *ch’ajoom*. This title, related to rites of burning and sacrifice, appears throughout the Late Classic Southern Maya Lowlands (Scherer and Houston 2018:117). At Chinkultic, a recently discovered sculpture fragment and a series of ceramic vessels depict individuals wearing similar headdresses made of stacked knots (Sánchez Gamboa et al. 2022; Sánchez Gamboa et al., this volume). The headdress on Stela 11 is particularly similar to one worn by an attendant on Piedras Negras Stela 5 dated to 716 CE; and the headdress worn by a Naranjo king on Stela 11 (c. 788 CE) from that site. Like Chinkultic Stela



Figure 9. Chinkultic Stela 11, photographed by Richard Ceough in 1945 (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 067_001_04_076.tif).



Figure 10. Unnumbered monument documented by Richard Ceough. The subsidiary figure stands on the left. The right leg and a jutting diagonal element at knee level are visible of the figure on the right (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 067_001_05_034.tif).

11, the Naranjo stela includes stacked knotted bands, the *xok* adornment, human skulls, feathers, and a jaguar ear.

Ceough's photographs of stelae from Chinkultic document the continuing breakage and dispersal of the monuments. Monuments 9 and 10, for instance, are shown in Ceough's photographs with additional fragments not present at the site today (Earley 2023:100, 166). The last field report (Ceough and Corin 1947:Figures 48-50) included a fragmented sculpture whose whereabouts are currently unknown (Figure 10). It depicts two standing individuals, one wearing a short cape and feathered headdress and facing to the right. The body of the main figure is mostly lost, but the jutting diagonal elements near the feet are a common and locally distinctive feature of royal dress at Chinkultic (Earley 2023:102). While the majority of monuments from Chinkultic depict a standing

ruler, this sculpture is one of a small corpus of monuments depicting two facing individuals. These sculptures suggest the importance of courtly elites at the site. In doing so, they strengthen iconographic connections with the works of Yaxchilán, where secondary nobles are also heavily featured in stone sculpture (Earley 2023:106; Golden 2010; Sánchez Gamboa and Earley 2023).

In addition to his work at Chinkultic, Ceough visited ritual caves and other archaeological sites in the surrounding region between 1940 and 1946. Descriptions of his travels, and photographs of monuments at sites like El Amparo and Santa Elena Poco Uinic, stand as key records in the historical study of Comitán and Eastern Chiapas.

Cave Research in the Eastern Highlands and Chaculá Region

By the mid-twentieth century, largescale archaeological projects were underway at several sites in the Maya region. In the Comitán area, the New World Archaeological Foundation was beginning its survey work, while in the late 1960s, Stephan de Borhegyi and the Milwaukee Public Museum initiated investigative work in the cenote at Chinkultic, spurred on by Blom (Lowe 1956; de Borhegyi 1968; Gallegos 1976).

Some of the most important records from this era come from reconnaissance work completed by Carlos Navarrete, who also excavated large portions of Chinkultic (Navarrete 1975, 1984, 2020). In addition to his important work at Chinkultic, Navarrete recorded evidence of ritual cave use in the Comitán region that suggests cultural connections with Chaculá. In 1975, Navarrete and Eduardo Martínez (1977) documented a cave called the Cueva de los Andasolos. Inside the cave was an intact ritual assemblage, including one stone sculpture and a large ceramic *incensario*, among other offerings. Recent research on the Comitán and Chaculá areas (Earley 2023; Wölfel 2022) has highlighted the importance of this documentation because the cave connects the material culture of the Chaculá region to that of Chinkultic. One large sculpture discovered in the cave, potentially made of rock taken from within the cave itself (Navarrete and Martínez 1977:25-26), depicts a stylized individual with at least one arm crossed over the chest. As Navarrete and Martínez recognized, this is an example of a sculptural type dubbed “crossed-arm sculptures” by Navarrete (1979:31-33). Although crossed arm sculptures are found throughout the southern Maya region, they are particularly characteristic of Chaculá and Quen Santo (see Navarrete 1979:31-33; Wölfel 2022:248-252; Earley 2023:130). The discovery of a crossed-arm sculpture in the eastern Comitán area links the sculptural styles of the two regions, complementing recent analyses of ceramics, architecture, and bioarchaeological information.



Navarrete and Martínez also documented an enormous ceramic vessel from the Cueva de los Andasolos (Figure 11). As recent research has established, the applique decorations on this vessel place it within a “type” that seems to be distinctive to the eastern Comitán region, and particularly Chinkultic. Other examples of these vessels feature squatting individuals on the rim (see Sánchez Gamboa et al. 2022, 2023). The vessel from Cueva de los Andasolos matches that type because of its attention to figural imagery, the squatting posture of the two individuals on the sides of the vessel,



Ceramic vessel from the Cueva de los Andasolos, now at the Museo Arqueológico de Comitán, Chiapas (Photograph by Caitlin Earley)

and the accoutrements worn by the central figure: the undereye ornament and the pectoral worn by this figure match the regalia of the individual on Chinkultic Stela 11. Similar works were photographed in the Kanter collection (see Figure 5). Navarrete's work at the Cueva de los Andasolos, then, provides a crucial connection between the Comitán and Chaculá regions. Although today separated by a political border, ancient centers on either side were clearly in close contact and shared elements of material and ritual cultures.

Across the border in Guatemala, it was in the early 1970s that interest in the Chaculá region arose again – this time from a group of cavers from various Canadian universities. During their investigations they made a number of contributions to the archaeology of Chaculá and eastern Chiapas. For example, they descended into the large dry sinkhole known as the “Hoyo Cimarrón” and reported modelled human skulls in a cave at the bottom (Mort 1971), indicating ancient visitors used the sinkhole for funerary depositions. They also created a detailed map of Cave III at Quen Santo and documented a drip pool in a side passage. This remains the only known water source at this site and emphasizes the importance of Cave III (Tracey 1972). Finally, they documented an uncarved stone slab in Cave II at Quen Santo. The front of the slab shows a face painted in red pigment, its design visible thanks to decorrelation stretching

(Heitzmann 1976). The painted face seems to show the Jaguar God of the Underworld, judging from the large spiralling “god-eyes” that recall the *incensario* from Cave III described above, as well as the serpent-like cord that passes below the eyes, although the characteristic “cruller” element over the nose is no longer visible (Heitzmann and Wölfel 2023). This last discovery is important since it is one of the only known uncarved stone sculptures in the Maya area with painted iconography. Unfortunately, this unique monument has been broken in more recent years, as documented by a photograph published by Brady et al. (2009:Fig. 5).

Conclusions

Recent archaeological and art historical research in the Comitán and adjacent Chaculá regions has highlighted the distinctive forms of sculpture, ceramics, and architecture used in this region. Crucial to this research are early records like those explored here, which allow for new viewpoints, even on old material. New research on the caves at Quen Santo corroborates observations made by Seler and suggests patterns of ritual use in the Late Classic and Early Postclassic periods. Photographs of the Kanter collection allow us to reconstruct one of Guatemala’s most important historical collections and one with significant ties to the eastern highlands of Chiapas. Reports from the Comitán region, meanwhile, document sculptures, sometimes in their original context, which may no longer exist today. Combined with new research initiatives, understanding the historical collections of the Comitán area—from photographs to expedition reports to objects—allows us a greater understanding of the region and its history.

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Acercamiento a algunos topónimos de la región de Comitán y los Lagos de Montebello, Chiapas

Fernando Guerrero Martínez

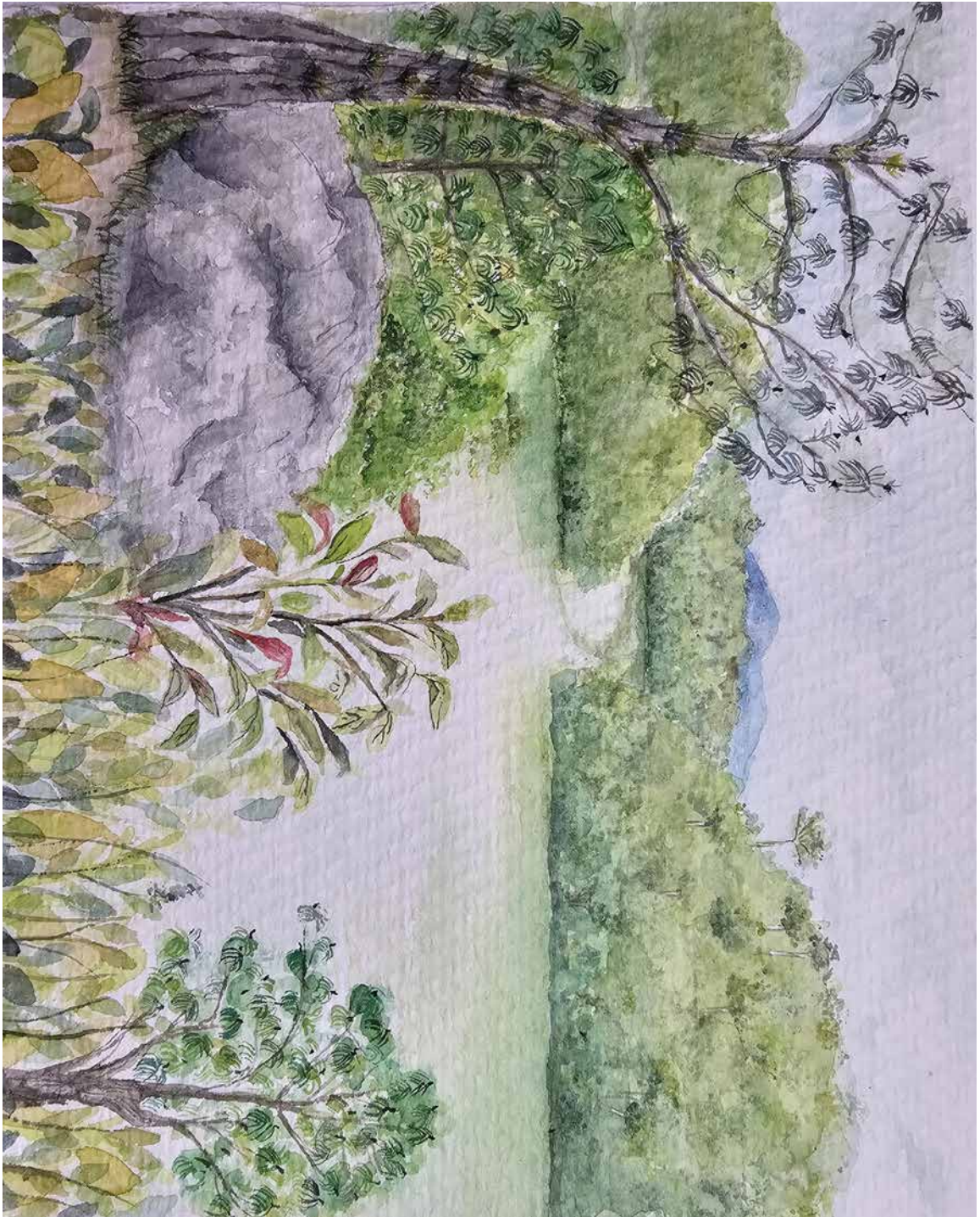
Centro de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias sobre Chiapas y la Frontera Sur
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
fernandoguerrero@comunidad.unam.mx

Cristóbal Pérez Tadeo

Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas / Posgrado en Antropología, UNAM

El estudio de los nombres propios de lugar, o toponimia, es una ventana a la historia de los pueblos y la cosmovisión de sus habitantes. La región de Comitán y los Lagos de Montebello posee un pasado rico en asentamientos humanos, movimientos poblacionales y presencia de diferentes lenguas mayas que han dejado su marca en los diversos espacios que la componen. Más que una zona limítrofe entre pueblos, se puede pensar en la región como un espacio en el que confluyeron hablantes de lenguas como el tojol-ab'al, chuj y tseltal, por lo que los intentos de reducir la región como zona de habla de una sola lengua serán infructuosos. Este hecho se puede advertir con cierta profundidad a través del estudio de los nombres de lugar, de manera que el presente texto aporta una mirada a algunos de los topónimos de la región considerando la diversidad lingüística local, su rica historia sociolingüística y datos etnográficos actuales que lo demuestran.

Palabras clave: toponimia, nombres de lugar, tojolabal, chuj, tseltal.



Introducción

Los nombres de lugar, o topónimos, han sido generados por los seres humanos, como usuarios del lenguaje, en respuesta a la diversidad de ambientes en los que se han desarrollado históricamente, entornos en los que han tenido que mantener su vida y realizar diferentes tipos de actividades, desde recreativas hasta rituales (Taylor 2016). Los topónimos han sido estudiados por la lingüística, geografía, historia, arqueología, antropología y la biología, entre otras disciplinas, por contener información importante para sus propios fines. Existen enfoques que han combinado adecuadamente diversos aspectos teórico-metodológicos de dos o más de estas ciencias, obteniendo resultados de dimensión interdisciplinaria. En ese sentido, Chesnokova (2011:13) argumenta que la toponimia, u *onomástica geográfica*, “estudia los nombres geográficos (topónimos) combinando



las metodologías de los análisis lingüístico, histórico y geográfico, y presenta, consecuentemente una clara muestra de ciencia sintética”. Cabe aclarar aquí que, siguiendo a Salaberri (2014) y Santos (2018), el análisis de los topónimos ha sido desarrollado con mayor profundidad por la lingüística (sin descartar los aportes que han brindado otras ciencias) debido a que su campo de estudio se incluye dentro de la onomástica, rama de la lingüística que estudia los nombres propios, el acto de nombrar y los sistemas de denominación relacionados con el léxico de una lengua. La onomástica se divide, a su vez, en subdisciplinas como la antroponimia (que estudia los nombres propios de personas), la bionimia (que se encarga de los nombres de los seres vivos) o la toponimia propiamente dicha (Salaberri 2014).

Entre la información que provee la investigación sobre nombres propios de lugar se encuentran datos para comprender y explicar movimientos poblacionales antiguos, de los que posiblemente no existan mayores evidencias documentales, así como aspectos sobre migraciones, conflictos, intercambios comerciales y culturales, entre otros (von Mentz 2017). De esta manera, como una porción fundamental del léxico de las lenguas, los topónimos son literalmente huellas de los contactos entre pueblos, cuestión que ha sido planteada por Trapero (1997:242) de forma clara:

Siempre se ha dicho, y con razón, que en la toponimia han quedado preservados, como fósiles, infinidad de elementos lingüísticos característicos de épocas pasadas, no sólo de tipo léxico, sino también de tipo fonológico y ciertos procedimientos gramaticales en la formación de derivados y compuestos léxicos. En ninguna otra parcela del léxico pueden estudiarse mejor que en la toponimia los estratos sucesivos de una lengua histórica; pero no están ahí muertos, desfuncionalizados; por el contrario, la toponimia es un *corpus* léxico vivo, funcional, que se actualiza de continuo en el habla común (con una mayor riqueza e intensidad en el mundo rural).

Los topónimos son más que palabras o frases que describen un lugar, ya que el estudio de los sistemas de nombres de lugares puede revelar muchos detalles sobre las categorías cognitivas mediante las que se organizan los fenómenos ambientales y las maneras en que estos son entendidos (Basso 1996). Por esto se ha dicho que los topónimos son vías para acercarse al pensamiento y a la memoria histórica de los pueblos (Reyes 2022) y, a la vez, “hacen” y “dicen” cosas, de forma que el hecho de *nombrar* también expresa y constituye relaciones sociales, tanto actuales como pretéritas (Randall 2001, Bodenhorn y vom Bruck 2006).

De acuerdo con Sheseña (2021), en las tierras mayas se han realizado varios estudios sobre toponimias. Sin embargo, si consideramos la gran diversidad biocultural del área, que incluye su diversidad cultural, lingüística y biológica (Maffi 2005), es evidente que existen regiones de las que se sabe poco, como es el caso de la región de Comitán y los Lagos de Montebello, en Chiapas. Por tal motivo, el objetivo del presente texto es ofrecer un acercamiento a algunos de los topónimos de la Meseta Comiteca Tojolabal, una región fronteriza que colinda con el departamento de Huehuetenango en Guatemala. Especialmente, nos referiremos a nombres de lugares que actualmente corresponden con el municipio de La Trinitaria en Chiapas. Hablaremos, en primer lugar, de algunas características físicas de la región y aspectos de su historia sociolingüística, para advertir y mostrar la importancia histórica del multilingüismo en el área, el cual se extiende hasta nuestros días. Posteriormente, abordaremos algunos de los topónimos de la región que, a pesar de su importancia local y regional, no han recibido demasiada atención por los especialistas. La información aquí presentada proviene del trabajo etnográfico que los autores han realizado en la región, complementada con datos recabados anteriormente de corte histórico, antropológico y lingüístico.

El sur de la cuenca del Río Grande de Comitán-Lagos de Montebello

Considerada como una de las zonas más bellas del estado de Chiapas y en general de México, los Lagos de Montebello se encuentran en la parte sur de la cuenca del Río Grande de Comitán, la cual es, a su vez, parte de la cuenca del Río Lacantún y Usumacinta (Mora et al. 2016). Es conocida también como subcuenca de Comitán, cuenca o subcuenca Lagunas de Montebello, “dependiendo si se hace énfasis en el sistema lagunar de Montebello o en torno a la corriente o en una parte específica de su geografía” (CONAGUA 2009:8). Este sistema lagunar, compuesto por alrededor de 50 lagos, se ubica en una zona en la que colindan las tres microcuencas que componen la cuenca transfronteriza Montebello-Pojom; esta última se extiende de norte a sur por partes de los municipios mexicanos de Chanal, Comitán, Las Margaritas, La Independencia y La Trinitaria, y los municipios guatemaltecos de Nentón, San Mateo Ixtatán y Barillas, en el departamento de Huehuetenango (CONAGUA 2009:13, mapa 4). El 16 de diciembre de 1959 el gobierno mexicano decretó el Parque Nacional Lagunas de Montebello, debido a su localización en una “región hidrológica prioritaria de alta riqueza biológica” (Ávila 2017:24). Montebello tiene un origen kárstico, es decir, producto de la disolución de rocas por la acción del agua, que en conjunto con sus ecosistemas conformados por bosques de pino, pino-encino, pino-encino-liquidámbar y mesófilo de montaña le ha conferido funciones ecológicas importantes como vaso de captación de agua y regulador climático regional (CONANP 2007:10). También como un corredor biológico con una riqueza específica relevante que permite la dispersión de la flora entre regiones y provee diversos hábitats para numerosas especies faunísticas, especialmente de aves migratorias (Mora et al. 2016:378).

En términos históricos, la región de Comitán y los Lagos de Montebello han sido un escenario pluricultural, fronterizo y de contactos y movimientos poblacionales que le confieren a la región una complejidad que conlleva múltiples dimensiones. La arqueología sitúa la zona como parte de los Altos Orientales de Chiapas, región en la que se tienen registros de asentamientos humanos desde el periodo Preclásico. Es durante los periodos Clásico (700-900 dC) y Epiclásico (900-1200 dC) que existió un desarrollo mayor en sitios como Chinkultic, Tenam Puente y Tenam Rosario, por citar los más sobresalientes (Navarrete 2020; Tovalín y Moscoso 2018; Palka y Lozada 2018).

Dadas las características de estos sitios, Navarrete (2020:20) afirma que “recibieron afluencia de peregrinos y en todos hubo intercambio comercial”, lo que muestra la dinámica poblacional de la región. En los Altos Orientales de Chiapas se registra un abandono de los sitios clásicos más tardío que en aquellos de las Tierras Bajas del área maya, extendiéndose al Posclásico Temprano (Paris et al. 2021), periodo en el que se desarrollan sitios importantes como Comitán, Pantla, Atahuistán y Tecpancoapa. Estos asentamientos, identificados los primeros tres con población tojolabal, vivían su apogeo en el momento de la conquista (Lowe y Álvarez 2007). Aquí conviene citar la opinión de Gudrun Lenkersdorf en tanto a que:

El territorio de los chujes se extendía desde los altos Cuchumatanes hasta los lagos cercanos a Tecpancoapa (hoy llamados lagos de Montebello). Los habitantes de este poblado fueron reubicados e incorporados a Coapa a mediados del siglo XVI. El capitán Juan Morales de Villavicencio, quien dirigió la expedición contra los lacandones en 1586 y luego se apropió de las tierras de Tecpancoapa, fue acusado por los “ixtatanes” (chujes) de no respetar sus mojones (Lenkersdorf, 2001:144, nota 16).

A su vez, los habitantes de Atahuistán (hablantes de tojol-ab’al), y posteriormente de Copaltenango (hablantes de tseltal), fueron trasladados al pueblo de Zapaluta (hoy La Trinitaria), según la política de congregación que llevaron a cabo los dominicos en el siglo XVI, de manera que “al principiar el siglo XVII sólo quedaban en la región dos pueblos, Comitán y Zapaluta, habitados ambos por tseltales y tojolabales” (Viqueira 1997a:125). Esta es una muestra de las diversas situaciones sociales que se dieron durante el periodo colonial en la llamada provincia de Los Llanos, la que Ruz (1992:45) calificó como un “mosaico étnico”. Dicha provincia abarcaba un territorio mayor al de la zona de Comitán-Lagos de Montebello. Según Lenkersdorf (2001:175), tenía su correspondencia con la cuenca del Río Grande de Comitán y reunió fragmentos de los territorios de antiguas naciones que antes estaban organizadas de distinta manera, por lo que “aglomeraba poblaciones de lenguas diferentes”. En el caso particular de la población chuj, ubicada mayoritariamente en Guatemala hoy en día, se sabe que, durante los primeros siglos de la época colonial, mantuvieron el uso agrícola de las tierras bajas que tenían desde épocas antiguas (Piedrasanta 2009:114), territorio que incluía la zona de los Lagos de Montebello.

Para finales del siglo XVIII los chujes vieron invadidas estas tierras por parte de los vecinos hacendados ganaderos de los Llanos de Comitán, por lo que acuden a la Capitanía General de Guatemala para resolver el conflicto. Ante la falta de resolución, deciden atacar haciendas de la zona y mantener sus prácticas agrícolas (Piedrasanta 2014:75-76). A partir de 1870 varios sucesos importantes marcarían la historia de la región, en ese mismo año se funda Tzisco con la llegada de 10 familias chujes originarias de la finca Chaculá, en San Mateo Ixtatán (Hernández 2012:93). En 1873 ocurrió la invasión de varias fincas producto de los conflictos por la propiedad de la tierra y la demarcación de los límites internacionales, en los que tropas guatemaltecas se sirvieron del conocimiento que los chujes tenían del territorio para tratar de apoderarse de tierras, mientras que los últimos trataban de recuperar sus espacios y destruyeron las marcas que habían hecho las autoridades para delimitar el borde (Chavarochette 2013:135). En realidad el estado guatemalteco utilizó a la población chuj de la zona fronteriza para establecer su soberanía, luego se negó a reconocer sus derechos de explotación de las tierras de esta zona tan pronto como estos fueron objeto de

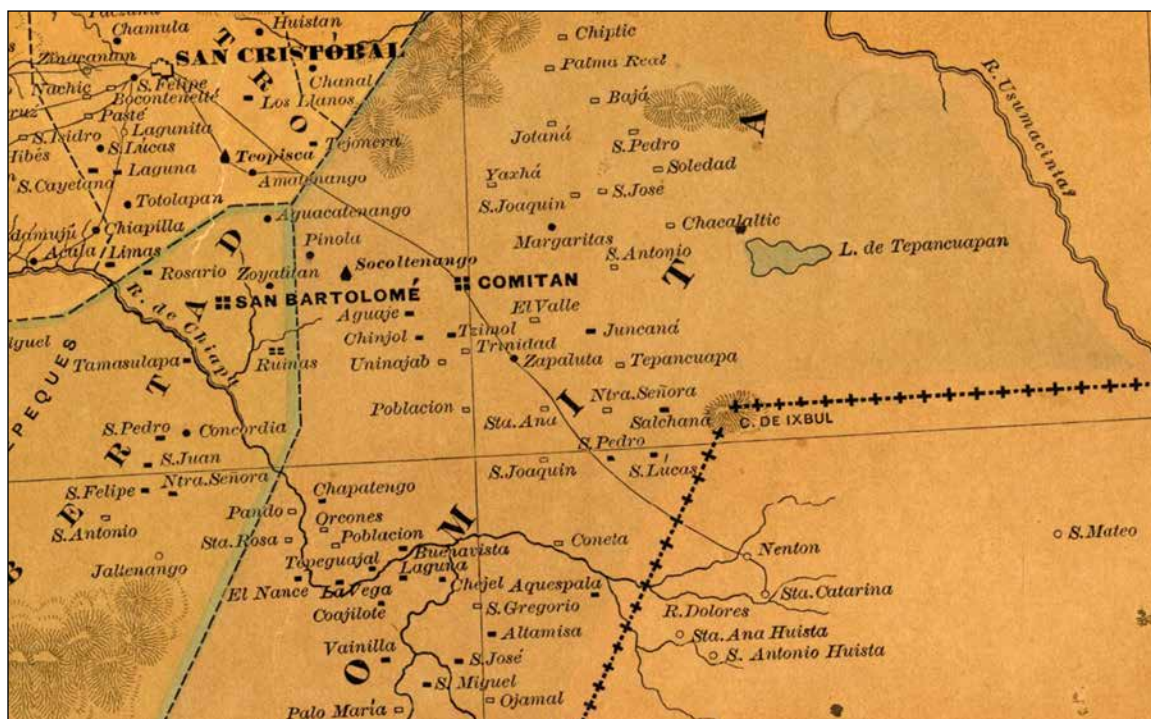


Figura 1. Detalle de la región de Comitán y los Lagos de Montebello en el mapa de Antonio García Cubas de 1884 (tomado de la Mediateca del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia).

una política de colonización y desarrollo de la agroexportación (Chavarochette 2013:136-137). Así, durante el periodo liberal guatemalteco (1871-1944), los chujes, junto con otros pueblos mayas de la región, vieron afectados sus territorios debido a que el gobierno de aquel país impulsó la “privatización de tierras indígenas, la delimitación y demarcación fronteriza, así como la reestructuración de la organización política administrativa, considerando la creación de nuevos departamentos y municipios y las nuevas formas de gobierno local, regional y nacional” (Piedrasanta 2014:70). El establecimiento de la frontera a finales del siglo XIX, y en especial tras la firma del Tratado sobre Límites en 1882, significó para los pueblos chuj, mam, popti’ y q’anjob’al una considerable reducción en sus territorios ancestrales y la condición de quedar divididos entre dos naciones a partir de acuerdos que nunca los tomaron en cuenta (Piedrasanta 2014:70). En la Figura 1 se puede ver el detalle de un mapa de 1884 de Antonio García Cubas, en el que es posible advertir algunos de los lugares que se refieren en este artículo.

Por otra parte, retomando la cuestión lingüística de la región, es relevante mencionar que Seler (2003:169) afirmó a principios del siglo XX que la población habitante de las localidades de Gracias a Dios, Sacchaná, San Cristóbal, Chinkultic, Tepancuapan, Campumá, Santa María, Hun Canal y Zapaluta hablaban tsel’tal, al igual que en Oxchuc, San Martín Teultepec, Cancúc, Ocosingo, Bachajon y Chilum; además señaló que Zapaluta era un tipo de centro para los hablantes de tsel’tal y que ahí había un santo que era referido como *Padre eterno de los Çeldales*. Lyle Campbell



Figura 2. Detalle del mapa 2 de Campbell (1988) sobre la distribución de las lenguas en el sureste de Chiapas.

asignó también a los habitantes de la región de los Lagos de Montebello una variante del tseltal que denominó como tseltal del sureste (Southeastern Tzeltal, SETz), el cual declaró casi extinto y con una distribución que se extendía desde La Trinitaria a los Lagos de Montebello, y de ahí a Carmen Xan en la frontera con Guatemala, además de afirmar contundentemente que “esta área fue tseltal desde hace siglos; estos hablantes de tseltal no son, de ninguna manera, recién llegados a la zona” (Campbell 1988:24). Además, Campbell y Gardner (1988) sugirieron que el tseltal del sureste no es otro que el controvertido coxoh registrado en las fuentes coloniales y que se hablaba en lugares como Coapa, Coneta, Aquespala y Escuintenango en el siglo XVI, y posteriormente en Comitán y Zapaluta en el siglo XVII (Ruz 1983). Sin embargo, Gudrun Lenkersdorf (1986) argumentó, a partir de un análisis muy detallado, que el coxoh era en realidad el mismo tojol-ab’al y no una variante del tseltal. En la Figura 2 se puede observar un detalle del mapa lingüístico de la región mencionada, de acuerdo con el trabajo de Campbell (1988:mapa 2).

Es relevante mencionar que Law (2017) y Gómez (2017) demostraron que el tojol-ab’al es una

lengua mixta o mezclada, producto del contacto entre hablantes de chuj y tseltal, lo que convierte a la región del sur de Comitán y los Lagos de Montebello en un escenario clave para pensar el tipo de contacto particular que se dio entre los hablantes de estas lenguas mayas. Esta situación histórica y lingüística debió dejar huella en la toponimia, de ahí la importancia de su estudio.

Algunos topónimos de la región de Comitán y los Lagos de Montebello

Es importante decir antes de empezar nuestro análisis, que muchos de los topónimos actuales de la región provienen de la lengua náhuatl. No se tiene precisión sobre los momentos históricos en que se asientan los nombres en náhuatl de muchas de las poblaciones mayas en Chiapas, ni se puede asegurar a qué variedades del náhuatl deben su génesis, como las del centro de México, el pipil centroamericano o las de la Costa del Golfo (Campbell 1988:277-280). Lo que se sabe, siguiendo a Viqueira (1997b), es que muchas de las entidades político-territoriales de lo que hoy es Chiapas, durante el periodo Posclásico, mantuvieron vínculos relevantes con la famosa Triple Alianza del centro de México, tanto en forma de alianza, de comercio o de guerra. Parece que nunca hubo una presencia totalmente fija y duradera de hablantes de náhuatl en el área. Aunque no es posible entrar en detalles al respecto, lugares como Comitán, Zapaluta, Coapa, Tepancoapa y otros de la región, así como los vecinos Socoltenango, Copanahuastla, Pinola, Amatenango, Teopisca y varios más, conservaron su denominación náhuatl, paralelamente de muchos de ellos se conoce su nombre en lengua maya, por ejemplo, Teopisca (*Imoxol* en tseltal).

Por otro lado, es preciso mencionar aquí que algunos autores ya han abordado ciertas cuestiones respecto a los nombres de lugar de la región que nos ocupa, es el caso de los trabajos de Becerra (1932), Schumann (1983), Gómez (2014), Nájera (2017), Pérez (2019) y Guerrero (2020), quienes coinciden en reconocer la presencia del idioma chuj en la toponimia de la región de Comitán. Además, se cuentan con algunos estudios sobre las formas en que se construyen lingüísticamente los topónimos en la lengua tseltal (Brown 2008 y Sheseña 2021) y en chuj (Hopkins 1972). Sin embargo, para el caso del tojol-ab'al no se cuenta con un estudio especializado. A continuación, ofrecemos algunos de los topónimos que prevalecen hoy en día en la región, incluyendo notas sobre su etimología y datos etnográficos relevantes. El orden corresponde con su ubicación de oriente a poniente (ver Figura 3).

Yalishao Allende

Lugar ubicado al oriente de La Trinitaria, también conocido como Allende. El nombre parece provenir de la lengua tojol-ab'al, pues *yal* viene del sustantivo *a'al* "agua", pero en específico a aquella agua de la que se puede disponer, al contrario de *ja'*, que es el agua que no pertenece al humano, como la de lluvia y cuerpos de agua (Lenkersdorf 2010:63); además, presenta la marca de posesión de tercera persona singular para sustantivos que comienzan con vocal, que es la /y/. Sigue *ixaw*, que es "luna", por lo que literalmente significaría "su agua de la luna". Lenkersdorf y van der Haar (1998:77) reportan un lugar llamado Yalixaw, anotado como *ya'al ixaw*, que es un arroyo que significa "agua de luna". No obstante, en chuj también existen topónimos que usan *yal* o *ya'al* con el mismo significado de "su agua", y denotan siempre cuerpos de agua o características

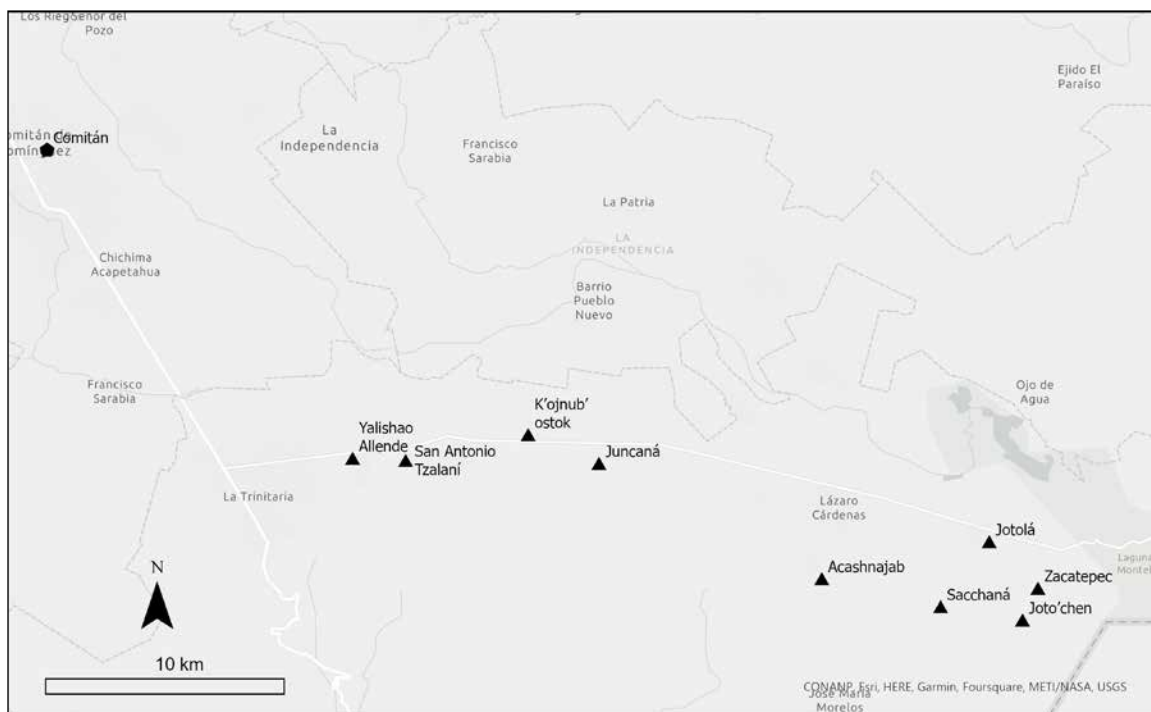


Figura 3. Mapa con los topónimos mencionados en este trabajo (mapa de Maxime Lamoureux-St-Hilaire).

hidrográficas, por ejemplo, Yalchitán, de *yal chitam* “arroyo del cerdo” (Hopkins 1972:172-174).

San Antonio Tzalaní

Es una colonia ubicada inmediatamente al oriente de Yalishao Allende, que está justamente en un pequeño cerro o loma, de donde parece tomar su nombre. Este puede ser del chuj *tzalan* ‘colina’, aunque también refiere en general a algo ligeramente curvado hacia arriba, como un campo con una leve elevación en el medio (Hopkins 2012:361).

K'ojnub' ostok

Es un lugar donde se llegaba a descansar cuando la gente chuj iba de Comitán a San Mateo Ixtatán. Se dice que ahí se juntaban los zopilotes, *ostok* en chuj, porque las personas llevaban carne salada que adquirirían en Comitán. La traducción al español sería “descansadero de zopilotes”. Estos espacios de reposo son comunes en territorio guatemalteco, de modo que hay varios descansaderos que se usan cuando las personas viajan hasta llegar a San Mateo. Cabe mencionar que el topónimo está relacionado con el término *k'ojnub'al*, que refiere justamente a lugares de descanso, pero como una medida de la distancia en el viaje, es decir, es el lugar, pero también la situación de pararse a descansar en un recorrido (Hopkins 2012:179). En ese sentido, *k'ojnub'* refiere específicamente a un lugar para colocar algo, como un banco; Hopkins (2012:179) registró que, en el pasado, había

estantes fuera de las minas de sal en los que se colocaban ollas llenas de agua salada, a los que se refería dicha palabra. Además, es interesante comentar que *ostok* refiere al zopilote de cabeza negra; en tojol-ab'al el nombre para el zopilote de cabeza negra (*Coragyps atratus*) es *usej*, y para el zopilote de cabeza roja (*Cathartes aura*) es *xujlem*. En tseltal para el primero se tiene *hos* y para el segundo *xuhlem* (Polian 2018:254).

Juncaná

Población ubicada al oriente de San Antonio Tzalaní que recibe su nombre de un término calendárico relacionado con otros que llevan el sustantivo *k'ana'* en su forma lingüística en chuj, aunque también en tojol-ab'al "estrella" se dice *k'anal*. En este caso, el topónimo significa "uno estrella" y está asociado con *Balun Canan* "nueve estrella", nombre de Comitán; y Uaxacana (*waxak-k'ana*), 'ocho-estrella', ubicado en el municipio de Nentón, De acuerdo con Lenkersdorf (1986:30), los topónimos calendáricos de este tipo eran característicos en esta región de Chiapas y Guatemala.

Acashnajab

Es una laguna que se encuentra en la colonia Álvaro Obregón, al sur de Lázaro Cárdenas. Su nombre parece provenir del chuj y significa 'laguna del jolote' o 'laguna del guajolote', de *ak'ach* 'jolote, pavo o guajolote [*Meleagris gallopavo*]' (Figura 4) y *nhajab* 'laguna'. Aparece en el mapa de Richard Ceough (1944) como "acashnajab". Es preciso mencionar que se debe usar el clasificador nominal *nok'* para animales antes del término específico *ak'ach* para el guajolote.

Jotolá

Es el antiguo nombre de la colonia Miguel Hidalgo, la cual se encuentra al sur del sitio arqueológico de Chinkultic. Resulta interesante la palabra *jotol*, ya que en tseltal es un adjetivo que significa 'agujereado' (Polian 2018:304); en tojol-ab'al *jotol* significa 'hueco o agujero' (Lenkersdorf 2010:275). Tanto en tojol-ab'al como en tseltal *ja'*, "agua", se usa para denotar características hidrográficas en los nombres de lugar. Es relevante mencionar que actualmente aún hay personas que hablan tojol-ab'al en Hidalgo, y que Carlos Navarrete (comunicación personal) también conoció a gente de lengua tojol-ab'al en el lugar. Además, aquí existen dos lagunas de las que se dice que cada una de estas tiene dueño o guardián, de manera que una está asociada con un venado y la otra con una tortuga. En la *Historia de la colonia Hidalgo* (1998:97) se dice que los dueños de la laguna eran un venado y una serpiente. Como se sabe, el paisaje lagunar de la zona tiene una presencia importante en la historia y la narrativa de tradición oral de la región (Figura 5). Esto se relaciona con la historia del origen de los Lagos de Montebello que registró Straffi (2013) con las autoridades religiosas de La Trinitaria, en la que se cuenta cómo mantuvieron una pelea la gente de Ixtatán y Zapaluta, con la de Comitán y Margaritas, con personajes que ostentaban el poder del rayo, por lo que terminan inundando toda la zona y es el origen del sistema lagunar (véase Guerrero 2020:26-27).



Figura 4. El jolote o guajolote, *Meleagris gallopavo*, que recibe el nombre en Chuj de *nok' ak'ach*. (foto de Cristóbal Pérez Tadeo).

Zacatepec

Este cerro, conocido también como “Cerro Poderoso” (Limón 2007) o “Cerro Milagroso”, se ubica en la comunidad chuj de Nuevo Porvenir. Es un nombre que proviene del náhuatl, de *tepec* ‘en el cerro’, y *zacatl* ‘zacate’, lo que significa ‘en el cerro del zacate’. Es un cerro que no tiene muchos árboles, y aseguran los lugareños que se pueden observar en él los vestigios de escalinatas antiguas entre los pastos. En la cima se encuentran alrededor de tres montículos de piedra que sirven de adoratorio, a los que la gente va a pedir por buenas cosechas, específicamente del maíz, llevando velas y cohetes. Se cuenta que desde tiempos antiguos se realizaba una romería o peregrinación que pasaba por el cerro Zacatepec como un punto importante del trayecto rumbo a las salinas de San Mateo Ixtatán en Guatemala. Esta parada se hacía tanto de ida como de regreso.

Limón (2007:22) reportó que se dice que el Dueño de este cerro se comunica con San Mateo y el Padre Eterno para darle a la gente buenas lluvias. La gente se reunía en el Zacatepec de regreso de la romería, cuando ya se traía la sal, para bendecir las mazorcas de maíz que se plantarían después

en las milpas. Actualmente, por la religión, se considera al Cerro Poderoso o Milagroso como el cerro del Sombrerón o del Diablo, y ya son pocas las personas que conservan la costumbre de ir a rezar y dar ofrendas, y suelen asociarlas a 'brujos'.

Joto'chen

Es un sitio arqueológico abandonado a las orillas de la localidad de Nuevo Porvenir. Es un cerro en donde hay estructuras antiguas, y se han encontrado restos de cerámica, obsidiana y jadeíta. El nombre puede venir del chuj *joto'* que es un verbo que refiere al movimiento que se hace cuando se le da la forma a un objeto, por ejemplo, una olla de barro (Figura 6); y *chen* que significa 'olla'. No hay que confundir el verbo *joto'* en chuj con *jotol* del tselal o tojol-ab'al. El espacio donde están los montículos tiene una planta circular, como si fuera un cenote, y alrededor de este lugar están ubicados los montículos, lo que pensamos pudo dar origen al nombre. Existe una cueva al oriente de este lugar. Una de estas cuevas es usada para pedir muchas cosas, pero se reconoce localmente como un



Figura 5. Paisaje común de los Lagos de Montebello (foto de Fernando Guerrero Martínez).



Figura 6. Elaboración de alfarería de barro en la localidad Ojo de Agua, municipio de La Independencia, en los Lagos de Montebello (foto de Fernando Guerrero Martínez).

espacio para pedir alcohol, se pueden observar muchas ofrendas en su interior, con abundancia de botellas de aguardiente de caña (marca “charrito”).

Sacchaná

Es una pequeña población que se ubica a aproximadamente tres kilómetros al sur de la colonia Miguel Hidalgo (*Jotolá*). Su nombre podría venir del chuj y significar ‘cuatro casas blancas’ (*sak chanha*), en donde *sak* es la palabra para el color blanco, *chanh* la raíz del número cuatro y *nhah* significa casa. Es un lugar donde existe una antigua hacienda y hay un santo que se menciona en algunos rezos.

Reflexión final

Lo que observamos al analizar algunos de los topónimos de la región es que varios pueden deber su etimología a más de una lengua maya. El léxico usado para componer nombres propios de lugar es igual o muy parecido, por ejemplo, en tojol-ab'al, tseltal y chuj, sin embargo, también existen diferencias que pueden dar una idea más adecuada del origen lingüístico de algunos de los topónimos. Esto cobra mayor importancia si se considera la naturaleza mixta del idioma tojol-ab'al, resultado del contacto entre tseltal y chuj. En los casos conocidos de lenguas mixtas de este tipo, se ha visto que la similitud tipológica entre los idiomas involucrados es un aspecto clave, de modo que la estructura gramatical y el vocabulario pueden ser compartidos por éstos (Muysken 2000:127). Esta situación hace complicado discernir si un topónimo determinado es de origen tseltal, chuj o tojol-ab'al, ya que, a pesar de que las primeras dos pertenecen a grupos distintos, todas se ubican en la rama occidental de la familia, lo que significa que comparten muchos rasgos lingüísticos. Es necesario hacer análisis etimológicos más profundos para esclarecer el origen y estructura de los topónimos de la región. Sin embargo, resulta sumamente importante reconocer que esta porción territorial del sureste de Chiapas y noroeste de Guatemala ha sido históricamente multiétnica y multilingüe, en la que se han dado movimientos poblacionales a lo largo de varios siglos que han dejado huella en diferentes aspectos, entre ellos, la toponimia. La frontera política internacional establecida a finales del siglo XIX ha influido en que se piense como un límite entre distintos pueblos, lo cual nos aleja de la realidad e impide reconocer la naturaleza multicultural de la región, primer paso para comenzar a entenderla.



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Language Ideologies and Choices: Tojol-ab'al and Spanish in Las Margaritas, Chiapas, Mexico

Mary Jill Brody

The town of Las Margaritas, Chiapas, is a locus for language contact between Tojol-ab'al and the local dialect of Spanish. Younger speakers are receiving education in Spanish, and the way they speak Tojol-ab'al reflects this. I examine the recorded speech of one young man, who passionately discusses the importance of maintaining Tojol-ab'al language and culture; however, the ways he uses Spanish while speaking Tojol-ab'al reveals several moments of tension between his expressed hopes and desires for the language and his current practice. I focus my analysis on these points of tension. He uses a good deal of Spanish "mixed," as he says, into the Tojol-ab'al he speaks, which goes against traditional Tojol-ab'al principles or ideologies of language use. The ways in which he incorporates Spanish reflect the linguistic structure of Tojol-ab'al. Additionally, on the recording we hear his son's voice calling out to him in Spanish, revealing that bilingual education may not be occurring in his home. It remains to be seen if language use by young Tojol-ab'al speakers represents a trend toward incorporating more Spanish into the language, or if speakers will become more conservative as they become more mature adults.

Key words: Tojol-ab'al, Spanish, language ideology, linguistic purism, bilingualism



Introduction

In this paper I engage an ethnographically informed analysis of the use of Tojol-ab'al and Spanish in the speech of one young bilingual man to reveal general tensions of language ideologies and identities in a bilingual community: the town of Las Margaritas, a municipal center located in the Mexican state of Chiapas, adjacent to the border with Guatemala (Figure 1). The two languages are Tojol-ab'al, a Mayan language (*tojol* means 'true'; *ab'al* means 'language') and the local dialect of Spanish, the national language of Mexico. The linguistic lens I use is the way that he incorporates words and phrases through borrowing from and code-switching into Spanish while speaking Tojol-ab'al. The orthographic norms for Tojol-ab'al were finalized in 2011 (Skujlayub'il). According to England (2017), all Mayan languages are in a state of endangerment, as they are threatened predominately by Spanish, the long-term colonial language of most of the Mayan-speaking area.

In the 2020 Mexican census (INEGI 2020), 67,000 speakers of Tojol-ab'al were counted in Chiapas. In the municipality of Las Margaritas in 2020, 47% of inhabitants were speakers of indigenous languages, 84.5% of which were Tojol-ab'al speakers. 15% of indigenous language speakers were monolingual. In the previous census of 2010 (INEGI 2010), Las Margaritas – which is inhabited by both Tojol-ab'al speakers and Mestizos, who are speakers of Spanish only – registered a population of 20,786; by 2020 it had grown to 24,326 (INEGI 2020) despite considerable out-migration. Some of this growth is due to Tojol-ab'al speaking people migrating into Las Margaritas from the small surrounding villages (Sp. *comunidades*, *colonias*) in search of better economic prospects (Figures 2, 3, 4). They and other inhabitants of Las Margaritas also move away – to Comitán, the nearest city, and to Tuxtla Gutierrez, the state capital; some venture further – to Veracruz, to the so-called Riviera Maya, to Mexico City, and even to the U.S.A., in search of work.



Every linguistic community maintains an ideology regarding their language(s), consisting of the underlying notions that speakers have about the nature, value, and proper use of the community's language(s) (Woolard and Schiefflin 1994). The Tojol-ab'al speaking community has traditionally participated in a language ideology of purism (Brody 2010). Bilinguals avoid code-switching, a language contact phenomenon that commonly occurs in bilingual communities, where speakers move between languages in the same discourse. They also traditionally avoid borrowing words from Spanish while speaking Tojol-ab'al, with the exception of long-term borrowings, which have lost their association with Spanish. The inventory of long-term borrowings in the language sample considered here appears in Table 1. Many of the borrowed words in Table 2 appear with Tojol-ab'al verbal or nominal morphology attached, incorporating these borrowings further into the language, e.g., *jcultura* (*j-cultura* – (Toj.)1e- (Sp.) *cultura*; 'my culture'). In all examples and Tables, the words from Spanish are spelled in Spanish and are underlined, except for the long-term borrowings, see below; abbreviations used are given in the appendix.¹

Another component of the Tojol-ab'al language ideology is pride in their indigenous language; this pride, however, is tainted with ambivalence. The ambivalence is spurred by long-term

¹ The standardized orthography is consonant with that for other Mayan languages. An apostrophe after a consonant indicates that the consonant is glottalized; in between vowels it indicates a glottal stop, also represented as a dash after non-glottalized consonants. The letter x represents the English sound "sh".



Figure 1. Map showing the location of Las Margaritas and other key Chiapas towns (map by Maxime Lamoureux-St-Hilaire).

confrontation with the ideology and actions reflecting the colonial majority Spanish-speakers' general disparagement of indigenous languages and peoples. In Mexico, and other places in Latin America, Spanish is considered the language of prestige by both Spanish-speakers and speakers of indigenous languages, which are sometimes called *dialectos* (Sp. 'dialects') by Mestizos; implying that, unlike Spanish, they are not quite full languages in themselves. In my early fieldwork days (late 1970s) I was chastised by some Mestizos for interacting with "dirty Indians." Pellicer (1996:92) identifies a linguistic and cultural ideology of "fear of diversity" (my translation) held by Mexican Mestizos who are monolingual in Spanish with reference to indigenous languages and cultures. Given that Tojol-ab'al people lived in indentured servitude to wealthy local Mestizo landowners within living memory of the elders (Gómez Hernández and Ruz 1992), they retain a wariness of Spanish as a language of oppression. Concurrently, younger speakers now increasingly receive education in Spanish, and have come to see it as a language of opportunity. There is also a growing interest in English; Tojol-ab'al men and, less frequently, women, have been slower to venture to work across the border in the U.S. than have their Tzeltal and Tsotsil Mayan speaking neighbors. Nevertheless, I have performed court interpretations for dozens of monolingual Tojol-ab'al speakers who have found their way to the U.S.; obviously, these represent a tiny proportion of those Tojol-ab'al speaking people (monolingual or bilingual) residing – most often temporarily – in the U.S. (Brody 2017).

While bilingual education has been nominally mandated in Mexico since 1951 (Modiano 1984),



Figure 2. Traditional Tojol-ab'al community showing houses and cornfields (photo by D. Donne Bryant)



Figure 3. Traditional Tojol-ab'al women carrying wood and cane (photo by D. Donne Bryant).

its implementation has been and continues to be woefully inadequate (de León 2016; Garcia and Velasco 2012; Pellicer 1996). Recent impulses for bilingual / bicultural education have been sporadically applied and are plagued by shortages of materials and insufficient training of bilingual educators. An ongoing problem is the seniority system of teacher placement, resulting in sending bilingual teachers to indigenous communities where a language different from theirs is spoken, as my collaborator and bilingual educator, Esther Sántis Gómez, has lamented to me. The Zapatista uprising in 1994, the epicenter of which was within Tojol-ab'al territory, represented an important turning point in Chiapas for its Mayan residents, and Zapatista demands included educational reform (de León 2016; Pellicer 1996). There is a great deal to say about the rapid shifts the uprising brought about along multiple dimensions; briefly, these have included improving roads, running electricity, and introducing bilingual education to Tojol-ab'al communities.

In 2019, I initiated a project to collect language samples from young speakers of Tojol-ab'al in Las Margaritas. The impetus for this project was two-fold. First was the realization that my corpus of language samples, collected over a span of 40 years, was not representative of the current Tojol-ab'al speaking population in that the voices were, for the most part, those of speakers currently over the age of fifty. Secondly, I realized that with increasingly confident bilingualism, the Tojol-ab'al spoken by the younger generations was undergoing changes. An earlier pilot study I undertook (Brody 2018) showed that, unsurprisingly, younger speakers used more loanword



Figure 4. Women making purchases at a traditional Tojol-ab'al community store (photo by D. Donne Bryant).

borrowings from Spanish than older generations, while continuing to avoid code-switching. This increase in borrowing partially reflects the younger speakers' experiences with a world filled with things and activities for which no Tojol-ab'al words exist. For the present study, recordings were made of young people living in Las Margaritas. My collaborator, Esther Sántis Gómez, mentioned above, collected speech samples from a group of nearly one hundred bilingual speakers ranging in age from 18 to 30. (I have found through experience that people speak more easily and naturally when I am not present.) This was not a systematic sociolinguistic survey, but was based on Sántis Gómez' network of acquaintances; beyond age and gender of speaker, no information was collected regarding factors such as level of education, marital status, or time living in Las Margaritas, although some participants volunteered such biographical data in their accounts.

The prompt for collecting the language samples was open-ended: *a'a walo'il* 'tell your story / a story of yours' (*a'-a-Ø wa-lo'il* – give-tvm-3a 2e-story). Although the speakers who participated are all bilingual to various degrees of confidence, Sántis Gómez had indicated that they would speak in Tojol-ab'al, and the prompt in Tojol-ab'al triggered Tojol-ab'al responses. Topics respondents chose

² For more information on San Caralampio, see the following references provided by Ramón Folch:

Laló, G. (2008). Lo sagrado y lo profano. La entrada de velas y flores de San Caralampio en Comitán, Chiapas. *Diario de Campo*, (98), 36-45.

Navarrete, C. (1990). Documentos para la historia del culto a San Caralampio. Comitán, Chiapas (*Chiapas: Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas, Consejo Estatal de Fomento a la Investigación y Difusión de la Cultura, Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura, 1990*).

Ruíz Beltrán, A., & Limón Aguirre, F. (2019). Presencia tojolabal en las fiestas patronales de Comitán, Chiapas, México. *Nósis. Revista de ciencias sociales*, 28(55), 136-161.

to talk about included their daily lives and Bible stories or folktales; they also related Tojol-ab'al customs or spoke about their education and aspirations for the future. Several respondents chose to recount their family's transition from rural villages in the surrounding municipality to the town of Las Margaritas. The speech sample I will focus on here is representative of this latter category.

Below I analyze three portions of the account related by one young man, who I will refer to by the pseudonym Caralampio—the name of a beloved local saint with a church in the nearby city of Comitán; originally from the Greek Orthodox Saint Charalombos, whose name means “glowing with joy,” resonating with the Hispanicized Caralampio (Sp. ‘shining face’).² As I listened and transcribed the corpus of stories, I noted a great deal of Spanish. Originally, I chose to analyze Caralampio's speech for its content: an impassioned argument for the continued use of Tojol-ab'al and an eloquent articulation of its language ideologies. On careful examination, the form of Caralampio's use of Spanish while speaking Tojol-ab'al proved also to be interesting and rewarding for analysis.

Case Study

I specifically focus here on three instances of tension between the form of Caralampio's speech and its content, with reference to the Tojol-ab'al language ideology of purism in avoiding the use of Spanish while speaking Tojol-ab'al. The underlying tension is that adherence to the ideology of purism seems to be in direct opposition to the frequent Spanish borrowings that appear in Caralampio's speech. Each instance of borrowing is listed in one of the Tables below. The three examples excerpted below highlight the unconscious nature of Caralampio's deviation from traditional Tojol-ab'al purism ideology as it comes into conflict with the actual content of what he is saying. Example 1 occurred early in the recording, Example 2 close to the end, with Example 3 coming shortly after Example 2. Caralampio was about 25 years old at the time of the recording, married, with at least one child. He was recorded at his home on the outskirts of Las Margaritas, where most of the town's growth has occurred; the central part of the town is commercial or inhabited by wealthier Mestizos. After the initial prompt, he spoke for four and a half minutes; the recording was made indoors, and other voices and music can be heard faintly in the background. He was not shy when confronted with the recorder and spoke confidently and passionately to Esther. Like the younger speakers in my earlier pilot study (Brody 2018), his speech is characterized by a considerable number of loanwords from Spanish found also in the speech of the oldest generation of speakers. As mentioned above, Table 1 shows the inventory of long-term borrowings that Caralampio used. The borrowings shown in Table 1A are of Spanish discourse markers: those linguistic signposts that make discourse cohesive (e.g., *kwando* (Sp. *cuando* ‘when’), *pwes* (Spanish *pues* ‘well’), *entonses* (Sp. *entonces* ‘then’), *parake* (Sp. *para que* ‘so that’). It turns out that these are borrowings of very long standing in Tojol-ab'al, in that the youngest and oldest speakers use them at a comparable rate (Brody 2018). For this reason, I use Tojol-ab'al orthography for these discourse markers in Table 1A and in the examples, as well as for other long-term borrowings (see Table 1B), and do not underline them, as I do the more recent borrowings (see Tables 3 and 4).

In the recording, Caralampio begins by talking about his parents having come from a *colonia* or rural community, saying that life is different there than it is in the town of Las Margaritas, where he grew up and now lives. He claims that the traditional ways of the *colonia* are being forgotten, and

A. Discourse Markers		
<i>abeses</i> (Sp. <i>a veces</i> ‘sometimes’)	<i>este</i> (Sp. <i>este</i> ‘this’)	<i>por lo mismo</i> (Sp. <i>por lo mismo</i> ‘at least’)
<i>ai</i> (Sp. <i>ahí</i> ‘there’)	<i>ke</i> (Sp. <i>que</i> ‘that’)	<i>porke</i> (Sp. <i>porque</i> ‘because’)
<i>asta</i> (Sp. <i>hasta</i> ‘until, even’)	<i>komo</i> (Sp. <i>como</i> ‘as, since’)	<i>pwes</i> (Sp. <i>pues</i> ‘well’)
<i>bweno</i> (Sp. <i>bueno</i> ‘good’)	<i>mas</i> (Sp. <i>más</i> ‘more’)	<i>si</i> (Sp. <i>si</i> ‘if’)
<i>entonses</i> (Sp. <i>entonces</i> ‘so, then’)	<i>nada</i> (Sp. <i>nada</i> ‘nothing’)	<i>todo eso</i> (Sp. <i>todo eso</i> ‘all that’)
<i>es de</i> (Sp. <i>es de</i> ‘it’s that’)	<i>pero</i> (Sp. <i>pero</i> ‘but’)	
B. Nouns		
<i>eskwela</i> (Sp. <i>escuela</i> ‘school’)	<i>koloniya</i> (Sp. <i>colonia</i> ‘small community’)	<i>pweblo</i> (Sp. <i>pueblo</i> ‘town’)
<i>kastiya</i> (Sp. <i>castellano</i> ‘Castilian, Spanish’)	<i>kostumbre</i> (Sp. <i>costumbre</i> ‘custom’)	

Table 1. Long-term borrowings from Spanish into Tojol-ab’al in Caralampio’s speech.

<u><i>adelante</i></u> (‘forward’)	<u><i>bilingüe</i></u> (‘bilingual’)	<u><i>calle</i></u> (‘street’)
<u><i>cultura</i></u> (‘culture’)	<u><i>dialecto</i></u> (‘dialect’)	<u><i>experiencia</i></u> (‘experience’)
<u><i>federal</i></u> (‘federal’)	<u><i>gobierno</i></u> (‘government’)	<u><i>mestizo</i></u> (‘Mestizo, Spanish speaker’)
<u><i>nunca</i></u> (‘never’)	<u><i>papá</i></u> (‘dad’)	<u><i>pasado</i></u> (‘past’)
<u><i>revuelto</i></u> (‘mixed’)	<u><i>tarea</i></u> (‘task’)	<u><i>tradición</i></u> (‘tradition’)
<u><i>una vez</i></u> (‘one time’)	<u><i>usos</i></u> (‘uses’)	<u><i>vale</i></u> (‘be worth’)

Table 2. Borrowings from Spanish in Caralampio’s speech (as these are recent borrowings, I use Spanish orthography and underline them).

states that his family is living half in the ways of the *colonia* and half in the ways of the town. This half-and-half existence extends to language, as he goes on to complain that his bilingual companions or age-mates in Las Margaritas do not speak Tojol-ab’al purely. In making this accusation, he uses the same word I introduced earlier in the name of the language Tojol-ab’al – *toj* ‘true, straight, pure’. He says that he knows *jk’umanikon* (j-k’uman-ikon – 1e-language-1epl ‘our language’) and criticizes his companions for speaking Tojol-ab’al mixed with Spanish, which is a violation of the traditional language ideology of purism discussed above. During this critique of his peers’ language

<i>jk'ulan revolver</i> – ‘I mix it’ (Sp. <i>revolver</i> ‘to mix’)
<i>k'ulanik pensar</i> – ‘think (pl) about it’ (Sp. <i>pensar</i> ‘to think’)
<i>ojjk'ulajex exhortar</i> – ‘I will exhort you (pl)’ (Sp. <i>exhortar</i> ‘to exhort’)
<i>ojjk'ulan entender de existió la cultura tojol-ab'al</i> – ‘that it be understood that the Tojol-ab'al culture existed’ (Sp. <i>entender</i> ‘to understand’)
<i>ojjk'ultik fomentar la cultura y nuestro raíz</i> (Sp. – ‘we will encourage the culture and our root(s)’ (Sp. <i>fomentar</i> foment/encourage/promote)
<i>ojjk'uluk awilex contar</i> – ‘I will tell you (pl)’ (Sp. <i>contar</i> ‘to tell’)

Table 3. Borrowing of verbs incorporated with *k'ulan*.

<i>aunque sea un recuerdo</i> – ‘even though it is a memory’	<i>cien porciento</i> – ‘one hundred percent’
<i>el tiempo</i> – ‘the time’	<i>en la misma barca</i> – ‘in the same boat’*
<i>más adelante</i> – ‘further along’	<i>ni modos</i> – ‘never mind’
<i>otra cosa</i> – ‘other thing’	<i>papá te están hablando</i> – ‘Daddy, they are speaking to you’*
<i>que sea un libro un cuento no sé</i> – ‘be it is a book or a story I don’t know’	<i>recuerdo para siempre</i> – ‘memory for always’
<i>sería en este mensaje</i> – ‘it will be in this message’	<i>tipo de</i> – ‘type of’
<i>yo creo</i> ‘I think’	

Table 4. Phrases code-switched from Spanish into Tojol-ab'al (* indicates that these are quotes).

practice, he uses the Spanish verb *revolver* ‘to mix’ rather than the Tojol-ab'al verb *soko* ‘to mix’. He goes on to include himself with those age-mates he is critical of, admitting that he also mixes languages.

Example 1.

asta ke `n wa x-j-k'ulan-Ø- -revolver sok Kastiya sok Tojol-ab'al
 as.for me prog inc-1e do-3a- -to.mix with Spanish with Tojol-ab'al
 ‘as for me I mix Spanish with Tojol-ab'al’

The Spanish verb *revolver* (‘to mix’) is a loanword borrowed into Tojol-ab'al, and it is

grammatically incorporated in the customary manner of verbs borrowed from Spanish (Lenkersdorf 2004), with the Tojol-ab'al verb *k'ulan* 'to do' appropriately conjugated and shown shaded in the examples. In this construction, the Spanish verb is always borrowed in the infinitive form. Caralampio uses this compound as he admits that he himself speaks in a mixed manner. The tension here is demonstrated by Caralampio admitting to engaging in language mixing, a practice that he has just disparaged, by using the Spanish verb *revolver*. The general topic of his discourse shows that Caralampio is aware of both the Tojol-ab'al language ideology of purism and his own general violation of this ideology. However, he is unlikely aware that he is violating that ideology in saying what he said in that specific way. In other words, he does not seem to be participating in what Silverstein (2001) calls metapragmatic awareness (i.e., he does not appear at this moment to be aware that he is violating the ideological norm of Tojol-ab'al language use by using a Spanish loanword in this particular utterance). The tension here is between the Tojol-ab'al linguistic ideology of purism and the actuality of incorporating a Spanish word into Tojol-ab'al.

Additionally, Caralampio laments both linguistic and cultural loss. Meanwhile, he recalls that in the past people were ashamed to speak Tojol-ab'al on the street, which is no longer the case (see below). Furthermore, he emphasizes the importance of teaching Tojol-ab'al to the children so that the language is not lost, and that it is good to speak two languages. It is while he is proclaiming the values of bilingual education that I identify what I call the second point of tension in Caralampio's discourse: he again violates the traditional linguistic ideology of language purism, this time engaging in what appears to be code-switching, moving from speaking in one code – Tojol-ab'al – to speaking in another code – Spanish. The tension is especially notable in that it is in the very midst of championing the use of Tojol-ab'al that he switches into Spanish.

Example 2.

es kwando mas oj jak-tik adelante parake oj jachuk oj k'ul-tik

it's when more fut arrive-1apl forward in.order.that fut thus fut do-1pl

fomentar la cultura y nuestro raíz

foment/encourage/promote the culture and our root(s)

'that's when we [Tojol-ab'al speaking people] will move further forward in order that thus we will encourage the culture and our roots'

The apparent code-switch and the borrowed term *adelante* (Sp. 'forward') are underlined in the text, but the discourse markers from Spanish are not, as they are long-term borrowings (see Table 1A). Caralampio's use of the phrase *fomentar la cultura y nuestro [sic] raíz* ('foment/encourage/promote the culture and our root(s)') appears at first glance to be a full-fledged case of code-switching. On closer examination, however, we can see that Caralampio is actually incorporating the entire verbal phrase in Spanish in the same way that we saw the verb *revolver* (Sp. 'to mix') incorporated in Example 1. Using the verb *k'ulan* 'to do' (highlighted in the example) to incorporate the Spanish infinitive verb *fomentar* 'to foment/encourage/promote', the rest of the phrase in Spanish – *la cultura y nuestro [sic] raíz* ('the culture and our root(s)') – seems to be hitching a ride, constituting a combination of a borrowing and code-switch. This incorporation of a Spanish phrase into Tojol-ab'al is something I had not encountered before analyzing this corpus of young people's speech. See

Table 3 for a comprehensive list of Caralampio’s use of borrowing / code-switching using *k’ulan* ‘to do’ including an additional example of incorporating a verbal phrase.

Caralampio’s apparent code-switch in Example 2 may have been triggered by activities in another part of his household. It seems that someone speaking Spanish has come looking for him at his home. In this part of the recording, we can make out faint voices in the background, most saliently those of his wife and child. The child calls out “*papi*” (Sp. ‘daddy’) to his father, then his wife seems to be instructing the child in Spanish that his “*papi*” is busy. Caralampio is distracted. He repeats a series of discourse markers and then articulates what I identify as the third instance of tension of the situation, shown in Example 3.

Example 3.

k’ela-a=ta komo s-k’uman-Ø ja y-al kerem ay ma’ jak-Ø s-le’-on

notice-2a=already how 3e-speak-3a det 1e-dim boy det who arrive-3a 3e-see-1a

“*papá*” *x-chi-Ø*

“papa” inc-say-3a

ja=xa ke `naj=i “tat” wa x-k-al-Ø- -y-ab’-Ø ja j-tat=i

det=now me=term “father” prog inc-1e-say-3a- -3e-hear-3a det 1e-father=term

‘notice how the little boy says someone has come to see me

“*papá*” he says

as for me I say “*tat*” to my father’

In Example 3, Caralampio calls attention to the fact that his child is speaking to him in Spanish, noting that he speaks to his own father in Tojol-ab’al. At the very moment he is speaking of the importance of teaching Tojol-ab’al to the children so that their language and culture will not be lost, he hears his own child addressing him in Spanish rather than in Tojol-ab’al. Caralampio does not hesitate to use this as an example, this time consciously, of how the Tojol-ab’al language is being lost and how it is not being taught in the schools in Las Margaritas; he goes on to contemplate how the language might somehow be preserved in a book or a story.

With the realization that his own son is speaking to him in Spanish at the very moment when he is lamenting the loss of Tojol-ab’al and promoting teaching it to children, Caralampio seems to come one step closer to a metapragmatic awareness of his family’s use of Tojol-ab’al and Spanish, and the consequences of that practice for the preservation of the language. Caralampio’s speech is rife with Spanish borrowings (see Tables 2, 3, and 4); his inventory of borrowed discourse markers (Table 1A) is higher than that of the younger speakers in the pilot group I investigated earlier (Brody 2018). He and other young bilinguals are caught between the Tojol-ab’al linguistic ideology of purism and the reality of the increasing incursion of Spanish; between valuing Tojol-ab’al and raising a bilingual child who receives education in Spanish. The general underlying tension throughout is that the generation of speakers that is most keenly aware of language change and loss is perhaps not teaching the language to their children. Whether Caralampio and his age cohort will



continue to speak with Spanish loanwords and code-switches, or whether they will become more conservative and purist speakers as they grow older remains to be seen.

At the beginning of his account, Caralampio indexes place with language, with the *colonias* representing Tojol-ab'al speech, and Las Margaritas representing Spanish, his own existence being a mixed experience. Tojol-ab'al speaking people come to live in partial accommodation to the town environment, which includes accommodation to Spanish linguistic practices, and perhaps even ideologies. The situation for individuals' choices is complicated, as Caralampio's words illustrate. As he mentioned, and as has been my experience, in the mid-70s it was in fact uncommon to hear Tojol-ab'al spoken openly in Las Margaritas, except in some market transactions. My attempts to speak Tojol-ab'al to people in public at that time were ignored or rebuffed. Today, in post-Zapatista Las Margaritas, Tojol-ab'al is heard not only in the market, but also in the streets of the town center, at internet venues frequented by bilingual educators (these venues of course did not exist in the 70s), in restaurants, and at the new Aurrera store (a Walmart subsidiary!) It is now easy for me to strike up conversations in Tojol-ab'al in these contexts, and I am even approached on the street as an obvious foreigner by people asking if I am from the U.S. and telling me where they have been to work there. Whether the Tojol-ab'al spoken in these venues is *toj* 'true' or *revuelto* 'mixed' is a matter for further investigation.

Appendix

Abbreviations: 1,2,3a – first, second, third person absolutive; 1,2,3e – first, second, third person ergative; det – determiner; fut – future; inc – incompletive aspect; pl – plural; prog – progressive; term – terminal; tvn – transitive verb marker.

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Ángel A. Sánchez Gamboa is an epigrapher and researcher from Coordinación Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural (CNCPC) from Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). Since 2015 he has been conducting research as part of the documentation and conservation project of the museums of Chiapas including Museo de Sitio de Palenque, Museo de Sitio de Toniná, and Museo Arqueológico de Comitán. His areas of research interest include iconography and epigraphy of the western edge of the Maya Lowlands, particularly of the Highlands of Chiapas, the Classic Maya royal court and its political hierarchy, and provenance studies of archaeological objects looted from Chiapas.

Ramón Folch González is an Archaeology Graduate Student in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change (SHESC) at Arizona State University. He holds a Licenciatura (B.A.) degree from Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (ENAH) in Mexico City.

Martha Cuevas García, Ph.D., is a researcher from Coordinación Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural (CNCPC) from Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), and co-director of the documentation and conservation project of the Museo de Sitio de Palenque, Museo de Sitio de Toniná, and Museo Arqueológico de Comitán.



Caitlin Earley is an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Washington. She is the author of *The Comitán Valley: Sculpture and Identity on the Maya Frontier* (University of Texas Press, 2023). She holds an MA and PhD from the University of Texas at Austin and has conducted research in the Comitán area of Mexico since 2008. Her current research interests include the representation of captives in Classic-period stone sculpture, and the collection and display of highland Maya works of art in the twentieth century.

Ulrich Wölfel is a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Text Database and Dictionary of Classic Mayan Project, Universität Bonn, Abteilung für Altamerikanistik. He is the author of *Contextualización del reconocimiento arqueológico de Eduard Seler en la Región de Chaculá, Departamento de Huehuetenango, Guatemala* (Archaeopress, 2022).



Fernando Guerrero Martínez. Biólogo por la Facultad de Ciencias de la UNAM. Maestro y Doctor en Estudios Mesoamericanos por la misma casa de estudios. Es investigador del Centro de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias sobre Chiapas y la Frontera Sur, de la UNAM. Desde 2009 realiza investigación en el sureste de Chiapas acerca de temas etnobiológicos, antropológicos y lingüísticos, principalmente en relación con los pueblos tojolabal y chuj. Sus líneas de investigación son las relaciones humano-naturaleza, cosmovisión, noción de persona y percepción del ambiente; etnobiología, etnozoología y documentación lingüística.

Cristóbal Pérez Tadeo. Estudiante de Doctorado en Antropología, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.



Mary Jill Brody is Professor Emerita in the Department of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University, where she taught for 40 years. She earned her PhD at Washington University in St. Louis. Her research interests include discourse grammar, discourse structure, word order, language contact phenomena, narrative, conversation, interaction, repetition, discourse markers, literacy, and dialogic syntax in Mayan languages, principally Tojol-ab'al. She serves as a court interpreter for monolingual Tojol-ab'al speakers in the U.S.



The editors (from left to right): C. Mathew Saunders, Maxime Lamoureux-St-Hilaire (photo by Laura Mueller), and Ramón Folch González.

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