

[Life in a Guatemalan Indian Village](#)

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Introduction ...



At the southern edge of the broad highland belt that runs through Guatemala, captured in a mountain basin commanded by three towering volcanoes, lies Lake Atitlán. A score of Indian settlements, dwarfed by the mountain backdrop, lie scattered around the twisting shores of the lake that measures twelve miles long and half as wide.

Like the million and a half Indians that make up half of Guatemala's present population, the residents of the Lake Atitlán basin speak dialects of the Maya-Quiche linguistic stock, akin to the language once spoken by the builders of the fabled Maya Empire of lowland Guatemala and Yucatan. The women weave on back strap looms, the men cultivate corn on mountain slopes and valley plots, and the people of different villages exchange goods in open markets. This is part of the pattern that existed before Columbus. But equally marked is the impact of the Spanish conquerors upon their culture. Each village has its courthouse and Catholic Church; coffee has become the indispensable beverage; and cash is the medium of exchange.

In many ways alike, the villages surrounding the lake differ from one another in size, specialized crops, and level of wealth. Each has its characteristic costume, its peculiar dialect, and its distinctive customs, despite centuries of cross contact. Each community has patterned its twin heritage of original Indian and introduced Spanish traditions into a way of life as distinctive from the others as are the personalities of different individuals. Every village may be said to have its own culture. Reliant on spoken rather than written tradition, yet increasingly subject to city ways, these peasant communities combine primitive and civilized features. They may best be described as examples of folk culture.

The following pages present a sketch of the folk culture of San Pedro la Laguna, a cluster of some five hundred adobe houses compactly grouped in blocks around a central square. With a population of 2400, the village is third largest of the lake settlements and occupies a terrace more than a hundred feet above the water at the base of an inactive volcano whose steep sides form part of the agricultural hinterland. Situated about 5,000 feet above sea level, the village enjoys a temperate climate, the annual cycle consisting of a wet and dry season of about equal duration. The title of the village incorporates the name of its patron saint (St. Peter) and indicates its lake location (la Laguna) to distinguish it from other Guatemalan settlements named in honor of the same saint. But for present purposes the name San Pedro will suffice, the term 'Pedranos' referring to the inhabitants.

No roads connect San Pedro with other villages. The people travel on foot and occasionally on horseback along narrow paths winding around precipitous hillsides. They own no vehicles other than native canoes made of hollow logs bulwarked by side boards. These are navigated by a complement of men paddling from erect position, an expert at the stern steering the vessel while the man in the prow breaks the force of the white-capped waves whipped up by sudden winds funneling through mountain gaps. Some privately owned canoes are small enough to be handled by a lone occupant; others are communal property and can carry forty passengers with hundreds of pounds of cargo. One or two large canoes manned by municipal crews make daily trips to the market village of Santiago Atitlán.



There are no electrical, mechanical, or other facilities with the exception of telephone and telegraph installations in the courthouse for transmission of administrative messages. Most houses consist of a single room, a door, and no windows. Walls are made of adobe bricks, although some of the more conservative families use cane stalks, and a few wealthy citizens build their houses with trimmed stone blocks. Pitched roofs are made either of thatch or overlapping tile or, in a few cases, of corrugated sheet metal. Nearly all floors are of hard-packed dirt.

A few families raise pigs that are penned or tethered in the yard, many own horses and mules for transport, and nearly all have chickens and turkeys. Several well-to-do families raise cattle on coastal lands, although an occasional steer is fattened for market on the outskirts of the village and one or two cows are milked for the benefit of non-Indian (ladino) residents temporarily stationed in San Pedro. Dogs serve as pets, and cats are sometimes kept to rid corn bins of mice and rats.

The hearth consists of three stones placed in a corner of the house. In the absence of chimneys the smoke escapes through tile rafters. A minority of dwellings has adjoining kitchens for cooking and eating. People sleep on mats placed on the floor or, more usually, on elevated plank beds. Other standard items include a large vessel for storing water, a considerable variety of clay pots and griddles for cooking and storing food, wooden chests for clothes, and three-legged grinding stones for milling corn, coffee, and chili peppers. Tables and chairs are not generally used; men sit on stools, women and children on the floor. Wealthy families own cupboards and other sophisticated items of furniture.

Customarily there are three meals a day, the men taking lunch and gourds of water to the fields. A large variety of foods—including wild greens and fruits in season—are eaten. Cooked beans are a staple, a shiny black variety being a particular favorite. Beef, pork, fowl, and eggs are relished but are consumed sparingly because of the cost. Squashes are a common item, and tomatoes and green onions are the main vegetables used in cooking meat soups.

But the most important foodstuff by far is corn; it comprises over three quarters of the total diet. Stacks of toasted corn cakes, or tortillas, are eaten at every meal. Corn is also consumed in the form of cooked tamales wrapped in cornhusks, in the form of a thick gruel, in the ear, and in various other ways. No use is made of rice or potatoes, though local bakers purchase wheat flour to bake white breads and rolls that are eaten on festive occasions. With one or two exceptions the natives neither use nor care for milk and dairy products.

In common with other members of the Mongoloid racial stock, the people of San Pedro have straight black hair, dark eyes, well-developed cheekbones in a rounded face, and a bronze cast to the complexion. But they differ somewhat from Indians of the surrounding region. They are taller, have lighter skins, and in general are more appealing as a physical type to outside observers, possibly owing to an admixture of white blood in earlier times. Many of the men and women and most of the children strike visitors as being decidedly handsome, and they have a widespread reputation for dignified amiability and a high sense of honor. In the village population there is, of course, a great range of individual variation.

Men wear gaily-striped shirts tucked into white cotton trousers embroidered with colored figures and held at the waist by a red and black checkered sash. A red kerchief is sometimes worn about the neck. All these items are tailored from cloth woven in the village of yarn purchased from the outside. Men either go barefoot or wear sandals bought from visiting merchants. They buy straw hats to protect them from the sun, and dark blue woolen sack coats to wear over the shirt on holidays. Those who can afford it purchase costly felt hats to replace inexpensive straw hats on festive occasions.

Women weave most of the men's clothes but buy most of their own, including ankle length wrap-around skirts in distinctive blue, green and occasionally red patterns. Women often make blouses of American dry goods, although some women still weave homespun material for a white tunic-like blouse (huipil), slipped on over the head with sides partially stitched and openings left for the arms. A few women even spin their own cotton yarn from the fibers of bush-cotton plants. Broad belts in bright designs for securing the skirt and richly colored shawls for wear whenever women leave the house complete the costume. Women are invariably barefoot and neither sex makes use of undergarments. From infancy, children's dress parallels that of their fathers and mothers.

With this introduction, attention may now be directed to the San Pedro way of life as experienced by the native from infancy to death. The concluding portion deals with the general characteristics of San Pedro culture.

Childhood ...

The childhood period ...



A baby born in San Pedro is destined by his biological inheritance to show physical features marking him as an Indian. But apart from physical appearance and conceivably a slight variation in temperament, the infant is no more predisposed at birth to behave like a Pedrano than to think and act like a Frenchman, a Chinese, or an American. However, all evidence indicates that the child will grow up to speak and act like his parents and friends in San Pedro because of the particular set of circumstances that mold his development from infancy to adulthood.

Though they elude recall in later years, experiences of infancy leave their imprint on the character of the individual. Unpleasant treatment at the outset may affect his capacity to make a satisfactory social adjustment as an adult, though this depends on the kind of culture or society in which he is destined to live out his life.

In general, infants in San Pedro receive good care and escape the frustration of adjusting to fixed feeding schedules and the early demands for cleanliness characteristic of other societies. Babies are well clothed and re-diapered frequently. By day they sleep in a hammock, safely and comfortably, and at night they share their mother's bed. They are offered the breast whenever they cry. If the mother is temporarily absent, an older sister or another woman of the household pacifies a child by picking it up.

Adult attitudes towards infants ...

Both men and women are indulgent and expressive in handling their babies. When time allows, a mother will sit in the hammock, rocking the infant in her arms as she croons a lullaby. After resting on his return from the fields, a father will play affectionately with his baby, bouncing it on his knee and laughing at its antics. Older sisters treat babies entrusted to their care tenderly and share their parents' pride over the accomplishments of the child when it begins to crawl or to take its first steps.

Many precautions are taken to protect the health of the infant. Some of these are practical, and some are based on superstitions. People do not boast about children nor expose them unnecessarily to public view for fear of the "evil-eye." The infant is hidden in the folds of a shawl when carried in the street. Its face is first publicly exposed when it is baptized in the company of other infants, parents, and godparents who assemble in church to take advantage of the periodic visits of the priest.

Baptism is usually delayed until the child is about six months old. The reasons usually given for the delay are difficulty of paying the fee or rarity of the priest's arrival in San Pedro. Actually, parents are reluctant to expose the infant to the crowd at the baptismal font and hence to the chance of "evil-eye" before they are old enough to withstand the danger. Women schoolteachers temporarily stationed in San Pedro are the most common choice for godmothers, since they are not Indians and are considered worldlier in their knowledge.

Babies are introduced early to corn gruel and bits of tortilla, but they continue nursing until they are twelve or eighteen months old. The usual reason for weaning is the advanced pregnancy of the mother. The milk is believed to be injurious to the nursing child when the mother is in the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy.

As a rule the average mother gives birth to a baby every year and a half or two years. She bears from six to a dozen children. But only half (or less) of this number survives, most deaths occurring in early infancy because of infection or other disease. Birth control is not practiced, or at least not countenanced. Some couples remain childless, but these are considered unusual cases attributable either to the "strong blood" of the wife or the unhappy coincidence of "weak blood" in both partners. The concept of blood strength approximates what we might term strength of character or individual forcefulness. Fathers are said metaphorically to carry the fate of their daughters on their backs, mothers to control the destiny of their sons.

Children of crawling age are carried about in a shawl rather than left for long periods on the floor where they are in danger of upsetting pots, getting into the fire, or contracting dysentery and other illnesses from the dirt floor. They are aided in taking their first steps but are not prodded into walking. No effort is made to instruct them in toilet training until they are old enough to walk and talk. When they are two or three years old, they are encouraged to go into the yard when they feel the need. Later they learn to use an outhouse. Beyond occasional shaming devices, no punishment is used to hasten toilet training.

Everything considered, children receive benign treatment during their first year or two of life, enjoying the affectionate and permissive handling now advocated by child psychologists in America. But secure infancy, by itself, is no augury of a model adult personality. Much depends on the nature and tone of subsequent experiences in and outside the home and on the system of values and ideas communicated by the culture. Children in San Pedro grow up to be capable and productive individuals, perhaps as well adjusted as the average run of human beings in most other cultures. But, as we shall see, they are far from devoid of fears, suspicions, and frictions. Part of the explanation may lie in the rather sudden reversal of treatment experienced by children on graduating from infancy to childhood.

The weaned child who sees himself displaced by a nursing infant interprets the loss of constant attention as a mark of rejection and makes his displeasure known through fits of petulance temper tantrums, and swift changes of mood. Busy with household duties,

mothers have little time for older children after tending to the needs of a breast baby. The next youngest child is not actually neglected, but it can no longer be indulged in the style to which it has grown accustomed. Aggravated by the contrast, the child remains resentful until the competing baby in turn is weaned, and the child, now third youngest, achieves a new adjustment by adopting an obedient role toward the mother and a solicitous attitude toward the younger children. Parents and relatives do what they can to ease the frustration of the recently weaned child by offering it fruits and confections and displaying tolerance toward its emotional outbursts. In good time this tolerance will be withdrawn and sterner methods introduced to insure obedience.

By the age of five or six the child learns to submit to authority, to show deference to older members of the household, and to assume responsibility for junior children. He finds that there is reward in duty, not so much in the form of approval as in the avoidance of physical punishment and verbal censure.

Early training ...

Among our own urban families children seldom have occasion to help or to observe their fathers in their specialized occupations. This is not the case in San Pedro. Indian children of both sexes get their training at a very early age by assisting their parents and through games that prepare them for adult activities. Boys accompany their fathers to the fields as soon as their legs are sturdy enough to walk the distance. Even before they are big enough to help actively with the crops, boys of five and six spend long hours in the fields frightening away birds attracted to the newly seeded corn. They return to the village with a bundle of wild hay for the steer or wood for the family fire. Before long they learn to wield the hoe and machete (all-purpose knife) and accompany their fathers on trips to market towns.

Between the ages of four and six, a girl may be given a few pennies and a dish and sent to the butcher to purchase a half-pound of beef. She helps her mother shell corn for the chickens. She sweeps out the house with a short-handled broom. She trails after her mother to the lake, returning with a miniature water jar steadied on her head with one hand until she develops the required sense of balance. She kneels before a small grinding stone to pulverize coffee beans. When she is seven or eight she begins to grind corn for tortillas. At this age, too, she becomes a little mother to a baby sister or brother whom she carries about in a shawl slung over the shoulder.

Another educative mechanism is learning through play participation. Games supply diversion and recreation but by their nature they also provide training for adult life. Children have a few toys such as dolls, dishes, tops, balls, and toy animals bought at markets. But, for the most part, play materials are improvised from objects about the yard. A great many of the play themes are enactments of adult activities. Very young children of both sexes play with dolls. A boy may pretend that the doll is his wife, instructing her to take care of the house while he goes off to work or on a trading trip.

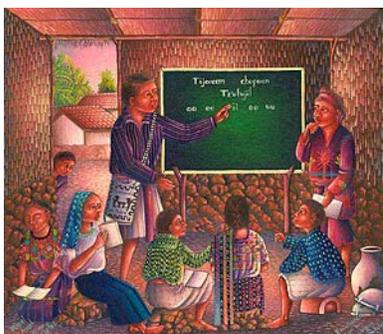
Among favored pastimes are the game of marketing, pottery fragments serving as money; mock religious processions with toy drums and dolls for saints; and the game of sit-on-the mountain. The latter activity centers on the capture and punishment of a wrongdoer. A boy may be accused of having hit his brother. He flees to the top of a volcano represented by a heap of earth. Unable to scale the volcano, the pursuers scoop away dirt until the culprit topples backward from the undermined mountain. He is then whipped for his evil deed.

Little girls busy themselves in the yard with imitation household tasks, fetching water, washing clothes, tending baby dolls, and grinding corn on makeshift stones. They make miniature belts by weaving corn leaf strips on a loom constructed of sticks and twigs. When they are older but not yet adolescent, girls enjoy the game of mock courtship and elopement.

An outside observer paying close attention to informal play activities in San Pedro would gain a great deal of insight into the characteristic occupations and preoccupations, attitudes and ideals of the adult community. Spontaneous enactment of real life activities and dramatization of episodes with moral implications, such as the game of punishing the culprit, prepare children for adult responsibilities and shape their judgments to accord with those of their culture. In this sense, pastimes and children's play amount to an informal but nonetheless real part of the educational system.

Until they are five, boys and girls do the same errands and play the same games. But at this age they become aware of sex differences. Boys begin to balk at doing girls' work. A boy who willingly went alone to make purchases at a village store when he was four, at five demands that a girl companion go along to carry the basket. This is now beneath his dignity. He will continue to clean the yard but will expect that his sister take over the task of sweeping inside the house. Children learn what is appropriate to their sex not only through observation and imitation but also by suffering the taunts of older companions. By the time they are seven or eight, boys and girls not only work at different tasks, but also play apart and attend separate schools.

School days ...



Federal law requires children to attend school until they complete three grades or reach the age of fourteen. The native authorities in San Pedro who regard attendance as an obligation rather than as an opportunity, however, do not rigorously enforce registration. Most parents fail to see practical value in formal education. They feel that as a result of schooling their sons may grow lazy and unaccustomed to fieldwork. And they ask ironically: "Will it help our daughters make better tortillas?" Most children enter school fearfully. The usual teacher knows the culture of the Indian only superficially, has little regard for native custom and does not speak the local language.

Classes are held in a long porticoed building facing the central square. The building is divided into a boys' and a girls' school each consisting of three grades. Children are taught to speak, read and write Spanish, and are given instruction in arithmetic, history, geography, and such topics as plants, animals, and parts of the body. Texts and classroom aids are scarce, and much of the instruction consists of learning by rote lists of objects and definitions unrelated to daily experience.

Only in recent times there have been classes for the younger children in the Tz'utuhil Mayan language, but in 1950 when this article was written, children were not permitted to use Tz'utuhil in the public schools.

There is little opportunity for a bright student to continue his education beyond the third grade. The cost of maintaining a child in a secondary school away from home is prohibitive. On rare occasions one of the few Protestant families in San Pedro may send a son to a subsidized mission school where the boy can complete six grades and possibly become a schoolteacher.

Girls rapidly lose the knowledge of Spanish acquired in school. They have little opportunity to use it and are ridiculed by other women of the town if they try. Boys tend to retain their knowledge of spoken Spanish, finding it useful in commercial dealings with outsiders. But on the whole the San Pedro child gains very little from school in proportion to the time he devotes to it.

The inadequate educational system is a heritage of the dictatorial regime of General Ubico. The present government of Guatemala, anxious to make rural schools useful and purposeful rather than carelessly superficial, has recently initiated a project of teacher training and curriculum revision.

Courtship and marriage ...



Among many peoples of the world with strong family and kinship controls, marriages are arranged by parents who regard factors of social position and economics more important than mutual attraction between the marriage mates. This is not the case in San Pedro. People choose their own partners.

Nevertheless, the elements of romanticism that enter into courtship do not add up to the conception of romantic love entertained in America.

The wooing pattern ...

Boys have few occasions to meet girls. They do not mingle in social activities, and there is no such thing as "dating" or calling on a girl. The established meeting ground is the lakeshore and its connecting paths, an area known as the *playa*. Girls go to the *playa* several times a day to fetch water. Late in the afternoon boys return from the fields and station themselves along the water route waiting for the girls.



Courtship conventions are standardized. The suitor may greet the girl, but he may not touch or detain her as she descends for water. His chance comes as she ascends balancing a heavy water jar on her head. He steps out of a by-path, grasps her wrist from behind, and the two remain standing as he delivers a set speech. Indeed, the girl has little recourse but to remain attentive since movement or resistance would topple her water supply. Perhaps that is why the boy does not try to interfere as she walks down the path encumbered only with an empty jar; she might insist on continuing on her way.

Girls attract suitors when they enter adolescence. This may be as early as the age of twelve or thirteen, but usually they are fifteen or sixteen when courtship begins. Boys are several years older when they start courting. Wooing is a drawn out affair. No girl indicates consent the first or even the second or third time she is petitioned on the *playa*. The usual courtship is prolonged over many months, occasionally over a year. There are good reasons for the girl's hesitancy.

To begin with, the girl is frightened. She is young and has been shielded from boys since early childhood. The first proposal on the *playa* is exciting and flattering but, at the same time, embarrassing. She is bashful and plays the part. Her only reaction at first is shy

passivity. She is immobile as long as her wrist is held and may not utter a word in response to her suitor's pleas. The boy is not dismayed, for he knows that, he will have to repeat his plea day after day before she overcomes her shyness. Sometimes a girl is so frightened by her first courtship experience that she drops her water jug. But this seldom happens, not because it is considered bad taste, but because a broken jar is a serious financial loss for which the girl will be severely scolded by her mother. Moreover, it is a sign of bad luck and the girl may have to eat a fragment of the shattered clay pot to change her luck.

But even after the girl becomes accustomed to courtship she is slow to give her consent, for the prospect of married life is not entrancing. Her burdens will increase, she will be faced with sex demands for which she is not prepared, and she may fear that her mother-in-law will be a harsh taskmaster. Courtship by contrast is a pleasurable experience and the girl has every psychological motivation to protract this episode as long as it is expedient to do so. Never again will she feel so important. By withholding consent she exerts power over men, a privilege unique in her lifetime. Nor is she disposed to encourage the first suitor; others may come along, and she may have a better panel from which to choose.

If a girl is popular three or four swains may woo her simultaneously. Among men there is no expectation of sole possession of the girl during courtship.. If there are several contestants, each awaits his turn as she returns with water. When one finishes his appeal the girl resumes her journey only to be stopped short by another aspirant. Courtship gossip is a favorite topic of conversation among girls. They tell each other who is wooing whom, how many beaux this and that girl has. Later in life women reminisce about their onetime popularity. Some will recall that they were detained two or three hours in climbing the footpath, so many suitors did they have. Boys petition only one girl at a time. If the girl persists indefinitely in maintaining her indifference, the young man may lose hope and transfer his attention to another candidate.

A. Courting Speech. What do the boys say as they stand behind a girl clasping her wrist? They consume little time in romantic adulation and avowal of eternal passion. Such notes may creep in, but major attention is centered on allaying the standard fears attending marriage. The petitioner realizes what every woman knows, that the bright promises of today may soon fade before the harsh realities of wedded life, that she may suffer from neglect and even from want, that she will amount to little more than a servant in another household.

This then is the content of a typical courting speech: "I come to court you. I love you. Let us be married. You are I grown up now. It is time for you to take a husband. I will buy clothes for you; I will purchase earrings and bright shawls. My mother is a kind woman; she will not be cross with you. My father is a good man; he is not severe. We have enough corn; we have enough beans. My mother will give you whatever you need; you will get everything. Why not get married? All women get married. I am a good man; I will not get drunk and beat you. I will come with my parents to your house, and they will

Speak to your parents. Or if you wish, we can elope. My family will receive you well. They will not scold you. I will buy you skirts and blouses."

Variations on this theme may extend the proposal speech for an hour or more. It is much the same on following days. At first the girl does not venture to reply. When she does, her attitude is invariably negative. She will give reasons for not marrying: "I am too young. My mother would get angry." And she will give reasons for not marrying him in particular: "You are an idler and cannot support me. Your mother is mean. Your father is cross. You are too young (or too old). They say you deserted your first wife." And so on.

B. Winning Assent. Far from discouraging the boy, these strictures arouse hope. She now answers. She sounds unwilling and skeptical, but that is the characteristic response of a girl in San Pedro. A yielding attitude would mark her as brazen and immodest, might even scare off her suitor. Perhaps she is little different from the American girl who chides, "You do not love me." Both are bidding for reassurance. The San Pedro suitor goes on dispelling her doubts. The girl continues to voice her distrust. She never says "Yes." But she can indicate assent by indirection, by the passive act of retaining a symbolic gift that is an indispensable item of courtship.

This stylized gift, known by the Spanish term *Brenda*, is a small packet tied up with colored yarn containing two Old Spanish coins, now handed down as heirlooms. It is presented to the girl during courtship on the *playa*. The boy makes no vain effort to persuade her to accept his *Brenda*. He drops it into her blouse at the back of the neck. She cannot extract it without loosening her clothes. Perforce she takes it home with her. She probably does not mention the event to her parents but she sends the coins back to the boy's house, usually by a younger brother or sister. The coins are never kept the first or even the second time they are slipped into her blouse. To accept them at once would betray an improper lack of reserve. The boy continues his pleading on the *playa*. When at last his *Brenda* is not returned, he knows that he has gained consent even though the girl may have said "No" earlier that same day. The next day he detains her by the wrist as before, but only to discuss the method of marriage, whether it is to take place formally through negotiations between their parents or informally by elopement.

Some of the more sophisticated suitors supplement their courtship conversations, which are always carried on in the Indian vernacular, with formal love letters, written in their own hand or by a more literate friend. These, too, conform to pattern but the romantic note is given more stress, as in the example that follows:

Unforgettable Senorita: As I take up my pen to greet you, I hope this humble letter finds you and your worthy family in good health and spirits. And now you must know that I am mad about you. You are the light of my life. This is my second letter, and I beseech you to be so good as to reply so that I may know your answer and that you are thinking of me. I want to marry you, but you have told me you would never get married. No, my pretty one, the opposite is true. Let us get married. We will live in peace and happiness. Never will I do you harm. I will buy you whatever you wish. Don't think I will not do this. I am a good worker. That is all. Your attentive servant, (Signed)

Such letters are ignored or draw negative answers. If no confidante is at hand to read the message for her, a girl unfamiliar with Spanish may burn the letter unread lest it fall into her mother's hands and lead to argument.

Arranging the marriage ...

If the girl indicates that she wishes to marry according to custom, the boy informs his family, and a long series of formal negotiations is begun between the two families. An actual case will best illustrate the procedure.

After four months of courtship on the *plaza*, Tono won Anita's consent and so informed his parents. Tono and his father went to Anita's house in the evening. Anita's father asked them to return on another occasion, since he could make no decision before speaking to Anita who was hiding away at the moment. Tono's father and an older married brother made the second call. This time they were told that no answer could be given until they brought along an outside witness; interested relatives could not always be trusted to act in good faith. Several days later Tono's father and mother, accompanied by a venerable citizen named Milcher, made a third call, but only after sending word of their intended visit so that they might be well received. They were served coffee and bread purchased for the occasion. Milcher opened the formalities by making a ceremonial speech asking for Anita on behalf of the absent suitor and the visiting parents. The girl's father replied with another conventional speech. Then the boy's father and the two mothers spoke in turn. Finally Anita was called in and asked whether she wished of her own free will to marry Tono. She did. Her father then instructed the petitioners to return in three months.



As they were leaving, the visitors left a cash gift of two dollars so that the parents might buy some costume items for the bride. The girl's father tried to refuse the money, remarking that he was not selling anything, but the go-between, Milcher, left the cash on the man's lap, insisting that it would be useful in purchasing earrings or some other little thing for the girl. Each week thereafter the suitor's family sent Anita a five-cent cake of soap.

After the stipulated three months had elapsed, the boy's family dispatched a message stating that they were coming for the bride on a specified evening. The girl's family replied that they would be ready. The delegation for this fourth and final visit was made up of Tono's parents, an older brother, Milcher, and the latter's wife. This time the visitors were given bread and hot chocolate, a drink reserved for ceremonial occasions. After eating, Milcher made a formal speech. Then the bride's father spoke and wept. The remaining three parents as well as the wife of the witness each spoke. The hostess handed over her daughter's clothes to Tono's mother; everyone bade everyone else goodnight; the bride cried and said goodbye to her weeping parents; and they, in turn, told her to be well behaved as she reluctantly left the house.

The party now proceeded to the home of the waiting groom where all were served coffee and bread. Milcher instructed Tono and Anita to drink from the same cup and eat from the same dish and concluded the formalities of the evening by offering them solemn advice. He reminded them of their duties as man and wife and warned them against quarreling. It was late in the evening but in the kitchen women of the house were busily grinding corn for festive tamales. Anita wanted to help with the grinding, but Milcher's wife told her to make her husband's bed instead. Tono's mother showed her where they would sleep.

Early next morning gifts of food were sent to Anita's ' I family, a basket of bread, chocolate, and two pounds of sugar. Bread and chocolate were also sent to Milcher and, his wife in partial payment for his good offices in acting as witness and intermediary. More food was sent at noon, two cooked turkeys, and two baskets of tamales to the home of the bride, and a cooked chicken and a basket of tamales to Milcher's house. But in addition, Milcher and his wife were invited to eat the midday meal with Tono's family. Everyone kissed the hand of Milcher and of his wife in respectful greeting. Again Milcher enjoined the newlyweds to eat from a common dish, and again he delivered words of instruction both before and after sitting down to eat. In honor of the occasion gifts of meat, tamales, and bread were sent to the homes of all the relatives of the groom.

This case differs in detail from others, but the essentials recur in most instances of marriage by formal petition: a series of visits to the home of the girl, always at night, by a group made up of the suitor's elder kinsmen; the involvement of a respected third party to act as go-between and to give moral and practical instructions to the bride and groom; presents of food sent by the boy's household, hospitality extended by the girl's parents; the demonstration of sustained good faith evidenced by repeated gifts of food, trinkets, or, as in this case, soap over an extended period of time; the minor role played by the boy and girl; weeping on the part of the bride and her parents as she leaves to take up a new life. Sometimes there are witnesses on both sides. In many cases the petitioning parents bring along bottles of liquor. Willingness of the bride's parents to join them in drink is construed as an augury of eventual consent.

Preliminary negotiations are always carried on under cover of darkness. People say they would be ashamed to do otherwise. In effect this means that the public should not become aware of the petitioners' intent lest their efforts result in failure and the petitioners lose face. Moreover, the practice of evening calls guards against the interference of malicious gossip that might prejudice the outcome.

Seldom are marriages recorded in the civil registry or sanctified by a Catholic priest. However, it can be seen that the participation of the honored outsider is the social and moral equivalent both of a legal act and a holy sacrament. Should trouble arise between the partners in marriage, kinsmen can be counted on to use their influence in settling the difficulty. Having been active parties to the agreement, they hold themselves responsible for the success of the match.

Should the girl leave her husband, her in-laws can exert pressure on her parents to persuade her to return. If she is maltreated or neglected by her husband, she can appeal to her parents to take her back or defend her cause in case of a civil suit. Or the officiating witness may be called on to compose differences between the spouses of the two families. In short, the elaborate negotiations and interchanges between the two contracting bodies of kinsmen and the involvement of an outside arbiter not only serve to impress the couple with the seriousness of their new responsibilities, but also set up moral machinery to help stabilize the union. This machinery does not always hold the marriage together, but it helps. The system relies more on force of parental authority and fear of shame than on independent judgment and the dictates of conscience.

Sometimes it is the groom who moves in with his wife's family. Such cases happen quite frequently owing to special circumstances that favor such an arrangement. A girl may consent to marriage only on condition that she and her husband live with her parents. If the boy is especially smitten with the girl and can overcome the protestation of his own parents, he complies. But more often the reason is one of expediency. The boy may be an orphan living with relatives or a laborer originally from a neighboring village and may welcome a home with in-laws whose land he can work for a living. Or may come from a poor home and look forward to a greater inheritance if he establishes himself as a good worker in his father-in-law's household, especially if the wife has few brothers.

But whatever the motive, the marriage is again arranged by relatives and witnesses, there is sharing of food and drink, and the newlyweds receive lectures on duty and deportment. Initiative in the negotiations remains with the family of the groom who goes by night to the home of the girl and who deliver the boy rather than call for the girl. Before the marriage is consummated, the groom shows his good faith and demonstrates subservience to his in-laws by sweeping their patio in the morning and bringing to them a load of freshly-cut firewood in the evening. The formalities are less complex than in the more conventional type of marriage described above, but the family obligations and the influence of the witnesses are similarly designed to make the marriage last.

As a matter of fact this alternate pattern is the more likely to insure domestic stability. Adjustment is now the problem of the incoming husband there is less likelihood of friction between a man and his father-in-law than there is between a girl and her new mother-in-law. The two women are thrown into close and continual contact, and, if the newcomer is not by nature accustomed to complete submission, tension may well build up to the point of eventual explosion. But a man working for his father-in-law has more freedom of movement if not of decision; as a man he has contacts outside the home to engage his interests; he does not venture to compete with his mother-in-law in directing the routine duties of her daughter, and he has every reason to avoid trouble with his father-in-law lest he lose his means of livelihood and jeopardize his eventual share of the inheritance.

These then are the two types of family-sponsored marriage in San Pedro. The less frequent form in which the boy takes up his residence in the girl's home may lead to greater harmony but the reverse arrangement remains the more orthodox, since it fits in

with traditional inheritance practices by which land is transmitted from father to sons. Moreover, it is consistent with the spirit of a male-dominated culture, that the burden of adjustment be thrust upon the woman.

But most marriages today conform to neither traditional pattern. Most girls prefer to elope, even at the cost of antagonizing their parents. This always involves conspiracy I against the girl's parents and at least the tacit consent of the boy's parents who must receive the girl into their home.

Elopement ...

On their final day of courtship on the playa the boy and girl who plan to elope agree on an hour and signal. The girl goes home with her jar of water and keeps herself busy at the usual tasks to forestall suspicion. Around bedtime or later she finds a pretext to leave the house, and takes along a bundle of clothing secretly prepared beforehand.

Once outside, she gives the signal, usually by tossing a pebble, to inform the boy that it is she and not another woman of the house. The boy knows there is no surer way of precipitating trouble for himself and the girl than to reveal his presence to the wrong person. When he hears the signal the nervous suitor comes out of his hiding place and the two scurry away as fast as darkness will allow, the girl falling behind the boy and carrying her own bundle of clothing. They try to reach the protection of the boy's home before being overtaken by the girl's parents. With a head start they generally succeed.

The parents of the girl will infer what has happened as soon as they discover her absence, but they may not know in which direction to give chase. From earlier rumors reaching them from the playa, the parents may know that their daughter has a number of suitors and who they are, but they may not be able to guess at once which of the contestants affected the capture. Nevertheless, they rush around frantically, arousing the interest of their neighbors who are eager to take part in any excitement. Angry parents frequently bring suit against their daughter and her "captor" as soon as they establish their whereabouts. The daughter is never returned to her parents, but they gain a minor moral victory in having the court exact a fine from the offending couple.

Married life ...

The Problem of adjustment ...



Whether the girl arrives at her new home by elopement or parental arrangement, her first night is usually an unhappy one. She sits up and weeps or withdraws in moody silence. Added to her fear of her husband, she feels loneliness in the unfamiliar surroundings. Only now, by contrast, does she realize how strongly she has depended for her security on her parents' home. Apart from relatives, the intimacy of her own home has seldom been violated by the intrusion of casual callers. People have come on official

business but have abided by custom and remained politely outside the door. Conversely, she has seldom had occasion to visit in other homes, those of relatives excepted. This almost awesome respect for the privacy of others makes emotional adjustment in a new and unfamiliar home a frightening experience. Despite all logic, she feels lost, ashamed, and threatened at the same time.

She has been a member of girlhood cliques but has never eaten or slept away from her own home. In this respect she differs from adolescent boys who often sleep in the home of a companion, though they do not eat there. If the husband joins his wife's family, it is usually he who finds his wedding night uncommonly long and the fleas unusually active. But his loneliness will not be so acute. In a few days he may actually feel reasonably adjusted.

There is no honeymoon. On the morning after the first night, and every day thereafter, the bride rises at four o'clock, along with the other women of the household, to grind corn for the breakfast tortillas in the flickering light of a kerosene flame. The groom and the other men of the house rise an hour later. When they first meet in the morning, the girl takes the hand of her mother-in-law, makes a gesture of kissing it and greets her with the conventional phrase: "How do you do, my mother-in-law." The latter returns the salutation, calling the girl "my daughter-in-law." The bride exchanges formal greetings with her father-in-law in similar manner. Should both her in-laws appear at the same time, she greets the father first, in accordance with prevailing etiquette. In her parents' home, she has done the same thing daily as a mark of respect for authority. Her husband similarly pays his respects to his own parents on rising. But there is no need for the young man and wife to exchange formal greetings in the morning. In fact, they hardly have occasion to speak to each other during the early part of the marriage.

On the first morning, the mother-in-law instructs her new daughter-in-law to bring her husband some water so that he may rinse his mouth and wash his hands. She then directs her to bring him his breakfast, "for he is your husband, and you need not be shy." The groom and the other men of the house drink their coffee and scoop up black beans with

their tortillas. Soon these men leave for the fields, carrying their lunches. Only after the men have breakfasted do the women eat.

The newlyweds have a bed, or at least a floor mat of their own placed in a separate room if one is available. But many families occupy a single-room dwelling, and the bridal couple must often be content with only the privacy of darkness and a separate corner of the room.

Since children sleep in the same room as do their parents, and often in the same bed. It can be assumed that they do not grow up as innocent of sexual knowledge as their later accounts might lead one to believe. Respect, rather than intimacy, characterizes the relationship between child and parent. Children learn not to ask their elders to clarify bits of sexual knowledge or information that they hear. Shame and the fear of censure effectively block the open expression of any such curiosity. Nor do parents find it necessary to discuss this taboo topic. In the presence of children, or even among themselves, adults will resort to the traditional phrase, "they are talking to each other," in referring to a sexual affair. Children are told that babies are purchased from merchants or visiting foreigners.

Parents try to insure the virtue of their daughter not so much by communicating moral precepts as by shielding her from danger and temptation. Girls learn that good conduct consists of avoiding close contact with men and boys. They are warned that failure to follow this injunction will expose them to dire unnamed consequences. In this the parents are not completely wrong.

Adolescent girls must indeed be better informed than they will ever admit, for men will occasionally become too familiar with such girls, especially when emboldened by liquor during fiestas, and girls will exchange gossip about incidents of this kind. But information about the facts of life so acquired, however avidly absorbed, carries with it an admixture of misinformation and an aura of shame and danger. It is not surprising, therefore, that girls are apprehensive the first night of their marriage.

Wives conceal the fact of menstruation from their husbands. A daughter is warned that if evidence of this condition comes to her husband's attention, he may accuse her of witchcraft and chase her from his home. One may well doubt the presumed ignorance of the men, but the fact remains that the mystery surrounding this question can lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

Sources of friction ...

Apart from the problems of early adjustment, the two most recurrent sources of domestic friction are the social distance between the sexes and the physical proximity of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The gulf between man and woman is scarcely bridged by marriage. The wife continues to be watched, mainly by other women, and the youthful husband, much more of a free agent, continues to spend his spare time in the company of male companions rather than share it with his wife. This is not done out of lack of

consideration but in response to social expectation. A man who is overly attentive to his wife risks ridicule by his companions. Separated in their economic and social activities, man and wife are slow to build up mutual confidence and quick to credit gossip or make false inferences. An actual incident will show how this works.

A few days after her marriage, a young wife chanced to meet one of her male cousins who chided her for marrying a man who was carrying on an affair with another woman. The girl believed this improvised story, not knowing that her cousin bore her husband a grudge. Afraid to confront her husband with the story, she brooded until the groom, his suspicions aroused by her silence, accused her of entertaining an interest in another man. She suspected that his display of anger was meant to cover up his own duplicity. This rift, which was eventually repaired through the help of relatives and a successful libel suit against the malicious cousin, might never have materialized were it not for the characteristic lack of confidence between young husbands and wives.

The constant supervision of the mother-in-law over the actions and movements of her daughter-in-law is another source of friction. The older woman considers it her duty to make the young wife an efficient worker in order that she can keep her and become an asset to her husband. She warns her not to tarry on errands and not to enter into prolonged conversations on the playa, lest she fall into temptation or be misled by mischievous counsel. The young woman does her best to control her feelings toward the dominating mother-in-law until eventually the tension breaks, and squabbles begin. Or the girl may suddenly try to escape and return to the home of her parents.

If several married brothers are living under the same roof, quarrels may develop between sisters-in-law. When conditions in the house become intolerable, and if the couple has been married a year or two and has a baby, the most common solution is to set up a separate residence. With the aid of relatives and neighbors, father and son build a new adobe house for the latter, usually close to his parents' home. The son continues working with his father in the fields; his wife remains in close contact with her in-laws, joining them on trips to the lake for water and laundering and exchanging advice or gossip across the courtyard. But the new family sleeps and eats apart, and the daughter-in-law manages her own house.

About half of all first marriages result in early separation. Not sharing our practice of premarital "dating," young people of San Pedro have their test of compatibility after marriage rather than before. But once a marriage results in children, it is usually permanent.

Only in exceptional cases does a person of San Pedro marry someone from a neighboring village. Such marriages usually take place between local girls and young men who come to San Pedro as hired hands. Some of the families own more land than they can cultivate by themselves and, therefore, employ laborers from poorer villages, paying them in corn or in cash. To feed his workers during busy seasons, a large landowner brings his daughters and other available women of the family to a temporary residence in the fields

where they grind corn and cook meals. If the fields are not too far, the workers may be quartered in the village residence of the employer.

In either case, unmarried daughters have occasion to meet men from other communities and to receive proposals of marriage. Some fathers object to such marriages, considering it beneath the girl's station to marry a landless laborer. But other wealthy fathers, especially if they have few or no sons, welcome such arrangements, subordinating pride to practical considerations. Having spent a lifetime building up an estate in order that he may hand down a comfortable inheritance to his children, the father fears that his daughter may marry a local ne'er-do-well who will neglect the fields and finally be forced to sell them to pay his drinking debts. He knows that a son-in-law who has demonstrated his capacity for hard work as a hired hand is the surest guarantee that his daughter's share of the estate will continue intact.

Adult activities ...

A. Work Habits. Housewives lead remarkably busy lives, waking before dawn and working until shortly after dark when they go to sleep. Grinding corn for tortillas consumes at least four hours of the day. Two hours are devoted to weaving, two more to washing clothes and bringing water from the lake, the remaining hours to cooking, caring for children, feeding chickens and turkeys, and perhaps watering vegetable plots at the edge of the village. Some wives travel by canoe to the market village of Santiago Atitlán to sell tomatoes or other cash produce. Women of poorer families can earn several cents per day carrying water for wealthier families with many hired field hands to feed, or weaving for local merchants who sell native shirts to tourist shops in the capital.

A woman's workday is more tightly scheduled than a man's, and there is less variation from day to day. Still, she manages to take the edge off monotony by humming over the grinding stone or exchanging gossip with other women across the yard while weaving on the porch. Water trips and laundering are strenuous tasks, but they count as relaxation for the opportunity they offer of walking and working with other women and engaging in social chitchat. Bargaining with peddlers provides another source of satisfaction. Animated and protracted haggling helps stretch her small reserve of cash, but a housewife also gains gratification from driving a shrewd bargain.

Men spend most of their time farming. Some walk more than an hour to reach their fields. According to the season, they clear the land of overgrowth; plant corn, beans, squash, and lesser crops; weed, cultivate, and hill-up the corn; harvest and haul the products to their cribs and houses. If they have much land, they hire helpers if they own too little, they work part time for others. They cut and carry home firewood, thresh beans in the courtyard, dry maguey fibers for making ropes, bags, hammocks, and halters, and assist neighbors at house building during the dry season. They travel to near and distant markets to sell chickpeas and other money crops and to purchase farming tools as well as hats and sack coats for formal wear.

In place of farming, or to supplement it, some men earn money as masons, carpenters, small shopkeepers, soap-makers, bakers, and butchers. The village supports four butcher shops, each open in turn for a three-day period during which a carcass of beef is retailed to the public. Each butcher spends part of his nine-day lull journeying to the Pacific lowlands to purchase a steer that he leads back to San Pedro.

B. Diversion. Men find relief from the tedium of hard labor in small talk with companions on the way to work, in seasonal changes of activity, in trading trips to other towns, and in discharging administrative assignments which afford long stretches of leisure about the courthouse. Here they witness lawsuits, hear the latest scandals, listen to the courthouse radio (when the batteries have not gone dead), twirl fibers into rope by rolling them over the bare thigh with the flat of the hand, and knit men's mesh bags with a pair of wooden knitting sticks.

But the major source of diversion is the series of fiestas that punctuate the year. Among the main celebrations are Holy Week, the important titular fiesta of San Pedro, and the six fiestas corresponding to the patron saints of the six lay brotherhoods (*cofradías*). Each festivity lasts a number of days and is enlivened by processions, choirs, drum and marimba music, resounding rockets, chili spiced corn gruel and cane sugar rum. On several of these occasions groups of men and boys stage traditional dances in gaudy and expensive costumes. During the fiesta of San Pedro, visiting merchants form a temporary market in the village square, selling confections, fruits, baubles, and wooden toys.

Members of all the '*cofradías*', as well as the body of municipal employees, enter into all the religious processions, swelling the total of active participants well beyond a hundred, apart from choirs, choruses, musicians, and dancers. Throngs of children scamper after the colorful train, gulping gruel served in gourd cups as the procession, which begins and ends in the church, pauses at each of the '*cofradía*' headquarters scattered throughout the village. Many men not directly involved find fiestas fit occasions for getting drunk. Women leave their houses for brief intervals, lining up along the street to witness the ceremonies, most of which are slow paced and more serious than Joyous. But the popular comment, "How gay it is!" refers not to the tempo or mood of the performance, but to crowds in the street. Gaiety is a function of numbers, not of movement; it is the opposite of loneliness.

Families that can afford the time visit fairs and fiestas in other towns, laboring up steep mountain paths with their children, mingling with the crowds and gazing at the goods in the bazaar, and often returning home with fruits and candies for their neighbors' children.

C. Public service. All men are obliged, periodically, to hold administrative posts, ranging from deputy constable to mayor and judge, and to fill any of a series of graded offices in the ceremonial organization that consists essentially of the six '*cofradías*', or Catholic brotherhoods, established to venerate certain saints and hold celebrations in their honor. Ordinarily, each male citizen between the ages of 18 and 60 serves one year out of every three or four in a civil or ceremonial capacity, his appointments alternating between the two systems. Except for the higher administrative offices that require full-time attendance

at the courthouse, most assignments are part-time appointments. An average man contributes approximately one-eighth of his total working time to the community.

Many of the offices require the expenditure of personal funds as well as time. This is especially true of the higher positions in the religious organization that require heavy outlays for festive food and drink. Men progress systematically from lower to higher offices. By the time they receive the more responsible appointments, their children are sufficiently grown to assist in accumulating the necessary corn and cash. Many nominees accept their duties with reluctance, proclaiming their inability to make the sacrifice but acceding when it is pointed out that all must sacrifice for the common good. They are pushed up the 'servicio' ladder by the pressure of public opinion, but, as they approach the top, they are coaxed up the final difficult rungs by the prospect of enjoying the dignified status of village elder, an honorific office reserved for those who have contributed in full measure to public service. A man's obligation to the community is formally completed when he has successively taken charge of three 'cofradías' with all their attendant display and expense.

The elders foregather on high religious occasions, red kerchiefs tied about their heads to symbolize their status, acknowledging with dignity the deferential greetings and hand kissing by those who meet them. From time to time they convene in special session to deliberate on problems of common concern such as the question of raising funds for repairing the church or the advisability of piping water into the central square. They are summoned to conference by a delegation of municipal deputies, including a drummer that calls at the home of the first elder, then the second, and so on in order of seniority. Ranking elders reach seventy or eighty years of age.

D. Woman's reward. One position in the ceremonial organization is filled by unmarried girls, who are assigned to 'cofradías' to grind corn on the eve of fiestas and to bear candles in religious processions. With this exception, women hold no communal offices in San Pedro. Nevertheless, a woman's sense of importance increases as she grows older, partly owing to greater years, which by itself commands respect, partly through sharing her husband's prestige as he rises in the civil-ceremonial hierarchy, and partly by assuming authority over junior members of her household. In return for submitting to domination as a girl in her mother's house and later as a young wife under the control of her mother-in-law, a woman eventually finds herself on the credit the authority ledger, claiming deference and obedience from children, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren.

Throughout her lifetime, a woman remains formally subordinate to her husband who represents the family before the public. But the husband seldom interferes with the affairs of woman, allowing his wife full sway in domestic management. Money, which she earns through minor sales and services, is hers to spend; allocation of tasks to other women in the house is her responsibility. Some women grow mellow and dignified with increasing importance; others exploit their power, demanding the same strict compliance to which they themselves had once adhered.

Death and hereafter ...



Sickness is combated with patent medicines, herbal remedies, and, in some cases, by prayer and special rites carried out by a shaman. Doctors are not available except at great expense and travel, although the central government supplies some medicines—such as a preparation to drive out intestinal worms, a common affliction of children.

Death is usually attributed to natural causes but is sometimes ascribed to the "malice" of evil neighbors, to "fright" induced by a malicious supernatural power, or to witchcraft. Children may also die of "evil-eye" or because of quarreling parents. In the latter case, avenging ancestral spirits punish the children for the sins of their fathers. The hoot of an owl or the prowling of a cat on the roof over a sick person is construed as an omen of impending death.

The funeral ...

Burial is performed within hours after death. If death occurs during the night, the body is interred the following day. As soon as a person dies, a specialist is summoned to clean the body and dress it for burial. Old people, who are often resigned to the eventuality of death, purchase their wooden coffins in advance. Coffin construction provides the major source of income for the village carpenter. Relatives mourn over the body; neighbors bring candles to burn near the coffin and are given rum to drown their grief. Members of the 'cofradía' organization dig the grave and bear the coffin to the cemetery, a trail of mourners following in their wake. The shrieks of anguish grow louder as the body is lowered into the deep grave. Female relatives particularly are moved to wail and keen, sometimes flinging themselves upon the coffin as it nears the cemetery, especially if the deceased is their father. More restraint is shown at the funeral of a child. Some say that excessive crying delays the child's soul in its journey to heaven.

Before the coffin is covered by the 'cofradía' attendants, each member of the mourning party kisses a handful of fresh earth and flings it into the opening. Women attendants bring jars of water from the lake to moisten the earth over the grave. The bereaved continue to drink after returning from the cemetery.

While the death of a relative evokes genuine lamentation, there is widespread but hidden fear of the spirit that has the body. "Spirit," synonymous with "soul," is conceived as a fluttering dove invisible to mortals. Many gestures are made to assure the rapid departure of the spirit from the village and to placate the soul as insurance against its future return to plague the living. Intimate items such as sandals, a pipe, or a rum bottle, if the deceased was a heavy drinker, are placed in the coffin. Otherwise the man's spirit might return home and frighten people.

The leader of every funeral procession bears a standard depicting white skull-and-cross-bones on black background. This standard is thought to entice the spirit away from the scene of death. Those who bring candles for the coffin say they do so to assure the spirit of their good intentions in order to avert possible misunderstanding and supernatural retaliation. Kissing the earth at the grave is done for the same reasons. Throwing water on the grave packs down the soil and renders it less accessible to werewolves and other dark forces that may be attracted by the corpse.

At various way stations leading to the cemetery, the funeral party halts while the native priest offers prayers. Four stops are made on leaving the house, one at the doorway, one in the yard, one on entering the street, and one at the first street corner. If the deceased is a village elder or an elder's wife, additional prayer-stops are made along the route and in the church. Mourners place pennies on the coffin at every stop. For every money offering, the acting priest, who uses the collection to purchase incense and other ritual necessities, recites a 'paternoster'. But the contributors feel that the essence of the proffered pennies ascends with the soul to purchase its release from a place corresponding to purgatory, but called "jail" by some and "Jerusalem" by others. Prayers and offerings increase 'with the importance of the person whose body is being carried to its final rest.

A. Fused Traditions. San Pedro culture represents a union of indigenous and early Spanish influences. Both influences are discernible in most aspects of the culture but not in the form of separate elements existing side by side. Rather the two traditions have merged in the course of four hundred years to form a culture pattern. The case is similar to that of a child who resembles both its parents yet has a personality and appearance differing from either. Fusion of the two historical streams can be seen in the practices and beliefs surrounding burial. Candies and coffins, pennies and paternosters, hark back to a European heritage; but their symbolic value is a creation of San Pedro culture. The conception of judgment in heaven is adapted to mirror the pattern of justice in the village.

Just as the living person is treated, so the soul is judged and then jailed for its sins. Unable to pay the fine, the soul must suffer the burden of heavy toil. The more money mourners contribute, the sooner the sentence of the soul is commuted. Grateful for his release the spirit repays his living relatives by pleading their cause before the divine powers that manage the destinies of men.

To make assurance doubly sure, wealthier families arrange a special rite several years after the death of an important relative. The local priestly delegate conducts this ritual in church. A candle is lighted not only for the deceased head of the family but for every dead relative whose name can be recalled. For every candle, a penny is contributed and a paternoster recited. This is also done before a final cluster of anonymous candles to make certain that the family does not inadvertently incur the wrath of slighted spirits summoned to the ceremony by the church bells that resound during the entire course of the services.

Since this follows Catholic practice, the shaman attends but does not officiate in church. Nevertheless his prior services are indispensable. Counting off the Maya day-names on his fingers, he selects a propitious day for the ceremony. On the eve of the event he conducts private services at the home of the family, purifying the candles by carefully washing them in sanctified water. Failure to wash a single candle could result in the blindness or deafness of a household member. The shaman prays to the ancestral spirits and to all the religious and occult powers at his command. In a long "bill of particulars," he requests that the living heirs be spared sickness, injury, disaster, and the like. Drinks are passed around before and after, but not during, services in church.

The shaman is repaid by generous gifts of ceremonial food, the lay-priest by the pennies he collects. The spirit of the money hastens the ancestor's release from "jail" and he, in turn, sees that the requests of the pious relatives are granted. The liberated soul may even communicate his gratitude in a dream experienced by one of the dead man's relatives. Through dreams, ancestral guardians can also indicate displeasure over the sale of family property or bickering among brothers over their share of the inheritance.

B. Spirits of the Dead. At best, spirits of the dead can help the living by withholding misfortune. If they interfere on earth, it is usually to bring illness or suffering. In general, the best ancestor is one who stays away. But despite all precautions to lure the spirit from the house when the body leaves, it is thought that the soul hovers about the area for some days before withdrawing. It cannot leave until it has gathered up all the nail pairings, the hair, the spittle, and all the other bodily substances discarded during its lifetime. It must traverse all the paths and repeat all the trips made before soul and body separated. This is the reason given for not spitting into a deep ravine or over the sides of a canoe into the lake. Such careless acts impose extra burdens on the self-collecting spirit. Similar reasons are sometimes given for staying close to the village rather than embarking on distant trips. In fact, however, this notion does not seem to act as a serious deterrent. For the most part people bend to necessity and are less concerned with averting magical consequences than with discerning causes retrospectively when trouble is upon them.

Stigma attaches to violent death. Bodies of those who die by drowning or accident, or by murder or suicide (both extremely rare) are buried without ceremony and in haste. They are transported on a special rack and placed in the grave face-downward. It is believed that there is something unclean and dangerous about them and their spirits are a peril to the living. This attitude is well illustrated by the following story.

A few years before the writer arrived in San Pedro the recovered body of a drowned man was buried beneath a cross near the scene of the tragedy. Each night at the stroke of eight, his spirit appeared to molest the wife he had deserted before he died. As he approached her house, he made a sound, "tin-tin-tin." He stopped at the door. The frightened woman asked, "What are you after, you good-for-nothing? You never worked when you were alive. You abandoned my children and me. Because of your indolence you drowned. Stay away or I will keep you away by burning chili in the pathway." He haunted her for a week and then disappeared, probably into the lake, for the spirits of men who die by

violence are debarred from heaven, staying close to the scene of the accident. Villagers avoid such haunted spots.

The dead are commemorated on All Soul's Day, which falls on November 2, according to Catholic custom. In San Pedro this ceremony extends over three days beginning the first of November, when all families set out baskets of cooked food in the center of their homes for the benefit of the visiting spirits. The offering consists of roasting ears, sweet potatoes, vegetable pears, and other freshly picked fruit of the field. The church bells ring loudly at midday to summon the spirits of the dead who feast on the aroma of the food that is later eaten by the living. Later, relatives set out candles on the graves of their departed, contributing pennies as the lay priest intones a prayer for every soul, moving from grave to grave in a cemetery brought to life by the dancing lights of a thousand candles.

The web of meaning ...

The formal aspects of the fiesta for the dead, the things most readily observed by an outsider, bear the strong imprint of Spanish influence. In other areas of cultural behavior, as in farming techniques, the formal aspect predominantly reflects the persistence of native practices. Midway between these extremes stand such cultural features as house construction, which in San Pedro exhibits both native and Spanish influences in about equal proportion. But the core of a culture lies behind the formal acts that meet the eye, hidden in the minds and hearts of those who carry on their culture. Unlike the visible form, the core of meaning associated with houses or cultivation or rituals for the dead defies an attempt to evaluate the proportions of Spanish and Indian ingredients.

The web of meaning that binds acts and objects into a system of subjective values is not spun out of thin air, however. It is woven from the stuff of history, the experiences of successive generations in adjusting the two strands of their historical tradition to each other, and to the demands of their social and physical environment. This pattern, or "design for living," undergoes continuous and imperceptible change. On the one hand it is a force for conservatism, screening and reworking novel influences to fit them into the existing pattern. On the other hand, the pattern slowly reshapes itself in response to new pressures, like the symmetrical image in a gently jostled kaleidoscope. As the lives of the villagers become increasingly involved in national affairs under the present regime in Guatemala, and as new techniques of production and revitalized education take hold in San Pedro, the value system of the village will transform itself accordingly but without relinquishing the imprint of past experience.

Cultural considerations ...



The culture of San Pedro, in common with other cultures, provides standardized solutions to certain problems basic to all social existence.

To be self-perpetuating, all societies must successfully meet such problems as providing food and other biological needs of their members, conditioning new recruits to carry on the culture of the parent generation, regulating individual behavior in the interest of group cohesion (social organization), supplying goals and motivations to induce effort (incentive system), and allaying concern over uncertainty (security system).

These aspects of culture are separated only in the mind of the analytical observer. The native does not differentiate his activities. Nor can elements of culture be neatly assigned under one or another of the above headings. Any institution or item of conventional behavior can simultaneously answer a multiplicity of needs. Thus a festive house-building party combines features belonging to economic organization, social organization, and the incentive system. The individuality of San Pedro culture arises from the particular ways of meeting the universal requirements of group living and from the manner of integrating the respective need-systems into a unified cultural pattern.

Social organization ...

Social organization in San Pedro comprehends the division of responsibilities between the sexes, the pattern of authority within the family, and the graded 'servicio' system for administering political, judicial, and ceremonial affairs and for allocating prestige to the participants. Underlying all forms and phases of social organization is the fundamental hierarchical principle that defines each individual's place in the dominance-submission structure and regulates his upward movement within this structure.

The hierarchical principle, reflected in the conception of male dominance and the superiority of the older over the younger, is apparent in formal eating arrangements and marching order. Whenever a mixed group walks together along a path, all the males, regardless of age, precede the female contingent and within each sex the oldest leads, and the youngest trails. A younger person who overtakes an older not only exhibits disrespect but also exposes himself to magical punishment. In walking immediately ahead of an older person, he runs the risk of contracting some of the latter's age and of growing prematurely old.

Within the family, boys command younger brothers and obey older brothers. Consistent with this convention, the system of kinship terminology provides a man with no single term for "brother," but rather a set of terms, one meaning "older brother," the other

"younger brother." Women similarly distinguish between older and younger sisters. But age distinctions do not cross sex lines; a girl calls a brother of any age by the same term, and a boy uses a single term to designate a sister of any age. This again is consistent with the conception of male dominance regardless of relative age as between brother and sister.

When two people meet, the younger invariably voices the first greeting; the older acknowledges the salutation. Their greeting terms affirm, respectively, deference and superiority. Each office in the 'servicio' system is clearly ranked with regard to all others, and men who occupy the same office are distinguished by numerical order. Thus, each deputy constable knows whether he is first, second or twelfth deputy, and each 'mayordomo' or junior assistant in a 'cofradía' knows whether he is first, second, or fifth 'mayordomo'. The 'cofradías' themselves, and their respective saints, are likewise graded from first to sixth, corresponding not only to their degree of importance but to their place in religious processions.

So firmly is the hierarchical principle rooted in the minds of the natives that no explanation of the writer's purpose in studying their community, however forthright or ingenious, carried full conviction until he hit upon the simple expedient of adding, "I'm here because my boss sent me here." Obedience to properly constituted authority is the most persuasive of all reasons.

Incentive system ...

The incentive system in San Pedro hinges on two central values or ideals: individual success and community service. The goal of personal success demands unremitting effort to acquire good clothes, well-built houses, horses and steers, and most important, agricultural lands. The struggle for wealth is rationalized in terms of providing children with a respectable estate.

At the same time, men are expected to subordinate personal interest to community welfare. According to this ideal, one should live a blameless life, show proper respect for tradition and authority, and honorably discharge his successive 'servicio' obligations. Motivation to achieve these ends consists of the desire to avoid the sting of ridicule or the penalty of lawsuit, to forestall bad luck by obeying the mandates of the moral and mystical powers. On the positive side, society holds out the reward of exalted status for those who graduate from community service to become village elders.

The ideal of self-advancement ties in with the ideal of community service. One needs to accumulate a surplus of material goods to be able to hold the top offices in the 'cofradía' system. Even some of the higher offices in the administrative organization involve food distribution and other personal expenditures. Moreover, devotion to the village cause puts one in the good graces of the fates and enhance one's luck in private enterprise.

But, just as often, the two values work at cross-purposes. Men are sometimes reluctant to dissipate part of their hard-earned fortune in connection with 'servicio' assignments. Not

infrequently families are forced to sell valuable land to meet 'cofradía' expenses. When one man of middle age renounced Catholicism to join the small body of Protestant converts, his neighbors accused him of doing so in order to escape an imminent cofradía appointment requiring heavy expenditures. Protestant converts in San Pedro avoid contact with the images of the saints that are considered idolatrous. They also foreswear alcohol, cigarettes, and marimba music.

The struggle between self-aggrandizement and self-sacrifice affects every individual. How the two-way tension is resolved depends upon particular circumstances and particular individuals. The two ideals act like a pair of counterweights which prevent an individual from bending too far either in the direction of extreme self-seeking and consequent detriment to the community or to extreme self-sacrifice and consequent deprivation of self.

Many conventional modes of behavior reflect a delicate balance between the tug of competition and the pull of co-operation. This is exemplified in the attitude toward 'servicio' nomination. Refusal would betray a shameful lack of civic concern. Eager acceptance would betray a lack of personal ambition since only a slothful person would welcome escape from the role of family provider. The only compromise is to accept under pressure. A citizen preserves both ideals by saying, "I do not want to (self-interest) but I have to (community obligation)."

Man's destiny ...

In defense against uncertainty, the psychological security system of San Pedro culture takes for granted three levels of causation. On the most immediate level, the fortunes of men are controlled by their own efforts: men have what they work hard to get; and men suffer who shirk their duty.

But all mortal striving is unavailing without the co-operation of the immortal powers. To enlist their aid human beings must earn their good will by following tradition, by obeying authority, and by paying proper respect to the various saints and the occult forces of nature. Men can gain the intercession of the appropriate powers through prayer and expiation, a shaman mediating between client and divinity; vengeful individuals can bring injury to others by supplicating the powers of evil. And so, on a second level, forces unseen control the fortunes of men but yet within reach of human manipulation. Men need not despair if hard work goes unrewarded or misfortune strikes the innocent—they can approach the right powers to alter their fate.

But such is the lot of man that in spite of prayer and repentance, his crops may fail and his children die. To spare such men from the smart of failure and the stigma of incompetence, there is yet a third and final level of causation that lifts the blame from their shoulders. By this ultimate explanation, the fortunes of men are fixed by destiny from the time of birth.

Shamans know the sacred calendar of the ancient Mayas. In essence this consists of recurring cycles of twenty day-names, each man inheriting the peculiar destiny controlled by his day of birth. The outlines of a man's destiny emerge in the course of events. Time reveals whether he is born to fail or prosper, to survive or die, to be bold or timid. Most men are content to glean their fate from the record of their experience. One man lost money trying to raise horses; one after another died. He concluded that he was not destined to raise horses and turned to other enterprises. Another man met an emergency by extracting a neighbor's abscessed tooth with pliers. Others heard of his success and came to ask similar favors. Now everybody knows he is "lucky" at dentistry.

But some, oppressed by adversity, consult a shaman to learn their fate and to receive guidance. Depending on his occult findings—and his good judgment of human character—the shaman advises a client to change his course of action, to take a certain remedy, to supplicate a particular power, to expiate a sin, or to resign himself to the peculiar destiny ordained by his day of birth.

The three dimensions of causation that make up this security system in San Pedro provide a kind of consolation to every human being. The man who is rewarded by his work feels repaid for his industry. The man who meets temporary reverses takes comfort in the hope that higher powers will come to his assistance if he makes the right appeal or shows proper humility. The man who is overpowered by misfortune finds solace in subscribing to the will of destiny. The native sees no inconsistency in falling back on three orders of explanation according to convenience. He wastes no time idly formulating the rules of the universe. But in the, back of his mind all three levels of events are but different aspects of a single cosmic design seen in different perspective, the several aspects in turn calling for effort, humility, and resignation. In the last analysis these are three of the elements that enter into the outlook of man the world over.

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