

ARCHIVES IN THE GUATEMALAN WESTERN HIGHLANDS*

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The region most often associated with Guatemalan history and culture is the western highlands, known locally as Los Altos. Only thirty miles from the hot Pacific coast, the highlands are located where the sierra rises rapidly to an altitude of three thousand meters, an area of painful beauty captured in Jean-Marie Simon's telling phrase, "eternal spring, eternal tyranny."¹ Amidst volcanoes, lakes, and cloud-covered mountains, Guatemalans struggle to rebuild civil society in the wake of what may have been the worst repression in the hemisphere, eking out a living by farming exhausted corn plots. The majority of Guatemala's twenty-three ethnic groups reside in these western highlands, where anthropologists have catalogued and attempted to interpret Mayan culture. Here also historians of nineteenth-century Guatemala have constructed a national history outlining the commercialization of land and coercion of labor that accompanied the growth of the Guatemalan coffee industry.²

Because of the war raging in the countryside, most historians have limited their research sojourns to the Archivo General de Centro América (AGCA) in Guatemala City, which contains immense holdings of documents pertaining to colonial Central America and republican Guatemala. Despite the country's incredible cultural and historical diversity, Guatemalan historiography has not manifested the growing trend toward regional and local studies taking place in comparable areas like Mexico

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1. Jean-Marie Simon, *Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987).

2. See David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760–1940* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994); Jim Handy, *The Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1984); and *Guatemalan Indians and the State, 1540–1988*, edited by Carol Smith (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

and the Andean countries.³ The existing regional examinations of nineteenth-century Guatemala have relied mostly on documents held by the AGCA. Although important, these studies have been hampered by the partial classification system used for the archivo's holdings on the era since independence. With the civil war apparently winding down, more historians are now venturing out of the capital. Fortunately for those wishing to conduct more specific local research, rich and largely unexplored collections of municipal and ecclesiastical documents are scattered throughout Guatemala.

The city of Quezaltenango and its namesake department have played a crucial role in Guatemalan history. The department became a hotbed of liberalism before and after independence and produced many of the elite families who helped usher in the country's transition to coffee production. The city of Quezaltenango was once the capital of Central America's short-lived sixth state, the Estado de los Altos, and it remains the cultural and political center of both *ladino* and indigenous highland society.⁴ Yet despite its importance, the region has been all but ignored in the historical literature.⁵ This academic neglect is partly due to the fact that Quezaltenango never complied with a governmental decree in 1957 ordering all departments to transfer their historical material to the Archivo General de Centro América.

Described here are seven archives located in or near the city of Quezaltenango, including the departmental archive itself, which was closed until recently. Although these holdings are mostly unknown and unused, their importance for historians of Guatemala cannot be overstated. Archive addresses are provided so that investigators can locate the archives in person. Writing ahead of time for permission is not likely to yield results. Most officials or *encargados* will want to meet investigators personally before granting permission.

Archivo Histórico de Quezaltenango

The most accessible and one of the most important collections, the Archivo Histórico de Quezaltenango (AHQ) is housed in the old depart-

3. Notable exceptions can be cited: Jean Piel, *Sacabaja: Muerte y resurrección de un pueblo de Guatemala, 1500–1970* (Guatemala City: Seminario de Integración Social, 1989); Robert M. Hill and John Monaghan, *Continuities in Highland Social Organization: Ethnohistory in Sacapulas, Guatemala* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); and Robert Carmack's forthcoming study of Momostenango.

4. The term *ladino* in the Guatemalan context connotes nonindigenous culture and society. Unlike the term *mestizo*, *ladino* does not refer to a biological category. Children of indigenous parents as well as those of recent European immigrants may be considered *ladinos*.

5. The region is beginning to attract scholarly attention. See Jorge González, "A History of Los Altos, Guatemala: A Study of Regional Conflict and National Integration, 1750–1885," Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1994.

mental penitentiary, now renamed the Casa de Cultura del Occidente. This archive contains an impressive amount of material related to city administration since Quezaltenango was incorporated in 1806. For much of the nineteenth century, the city was governed by a dual administrative system consisting of the *Municipalidad de Ladinos* and the *Municipalidad de Indígenas*. The AHQ contains documents related to the workings of both of these *cabildos*.

The AHQ consists of three main categories of material. The *Libros de Actas* are leather-bound volumes of the minutes of the meetings of the town's ladino municipality from 1806 to 1947.⁶ The *Copiadores de Oficios*, extending from 1891 to 1931, contain copies of all correspondence sent by the municipality to other local and national authorities. The miscellaneous documents are stored in boxes according to year, 1811 to 1947, with most dating from the nineteenth century. The information ranges from demographic and agricultural surveys to correspondence received by municipal authorities from local and national authorities, including numerous memos from *corregidores* and *jefes políticos*.⁷ A major item is a complete 1811 *padrón* (census) of the region's entire non-Indian population, along with information on occupations and livestock holdings. The towns covered in this survey are Quezaltenango, Ostuncalco, San Antonio and San Pedro Sacatepéquez, San Marcos, San Lorenzo (the hometown of President Justo Rufino Barrios), Tacaná, Valle de Bobós, San Pablo, and Santa Lucía Malacatán. Other important documents include 1830 and 1840 padrones of the city's ladino and indigenous population, an 1876 agricultural survey, and a 1907 commercial and industrial survey. The miscellaneous documents offer important information on regional responses to independence, subsequent annexation to Mexico, and much material on the twice-formed Estado de los Altos.

Finally, the AHQ includes three bound collections of miscellaneous pre-independence documents dated between 1806 and 1811 and four volumes describing the activities of various *cofradías* (religious confraternities): *Libro de cofradías correspondientes a la Iglesia del Espíritu Santo de esta ciudad* (1887–1911); *Libro de Cofradía de la Virgen del Carmen: Misas y guachivales* (1836–1918); *Libro de cofradías* (1888–1927); and *Libro de inventarios de varias cofradías* (1910–1925).

The Archivo Histórico de Quezaltenango is located at the foot of the Parque Central. The address is AHQ, Casa de Cultura, 7^a Calle 11-27, Zona 1, Quezaltenango, Guatemala. The archive is open to the general public from 8 to 12 and from 2 to 6 Monday through Friday. For further information, contact the archivist (there is no telephone).

6. The second volume, which covers the years 1814 to 1821, is missing.

7. When used in the context of post-independence Guatemala, the term *corregidor* is nearly synonymous with *jefe político*, being simply the name given to departmental chiefs from about 1840 to 1871, when Rafael Carrera or his conservative allies ruled Guatemala.

Archivo de Gobernación de Quezaltenango (AGQ)

The most significant collection of documents presented here, the AGQ contains information on the administration of the colonial *corregimiento* and the department of Quezaltenango from independence through the “diez años de primavera” (1944–1954) and into the 1960s. These are the documents that were supposed to have been transferred to the Archivo General de Central América. Scholars who have examined the AGCA’s stacks claim that this group of documents is at least twice as large as any comparable departmental collection in the national archive. It includes some three hundred lineal meters of documents, about a third of them from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although these documents have been organized several times over the years, recurring moves and changes in personnel have not been kind. Many documents are decomposing under the combined onslaught of humidity, fungus, and parasites. Existing *bultos* (packets) do not necessarily correspond to the year indicated at the top, a situation that requires perseverance to plow through this collection. Fortunately, in 1994 the departmental governor began efforts to rescue and reorganize these materials, asking the departmental clerk to spend as much time as possible on this daunting task.⁸

Documentation relates mostly to the offices of the *corregidores*, *jefes políticos*, and *comandantes de las armas* (departmental military commanders), depending on the year. Valuable information can be found here regarding political events such as the formation of the Estado de los Altos and the liberal revolution of 1871 as well as data on land claims, labor conscription, population, and the growth of the coffee industry in the Costa Cuca region of the department. Information on the regional coffee workforce exists in the form of *mozo* rolls, which often detail the age, ethnicity, municipio of origin, and amount of debt for each worker. Judicial *expedientes* (proceedings) contain complaints by workers and finca owners alike about labor abuses. Many *bultos* contain *juicios*, judgments handed down by the military courts and information on the creation and maintenance of an armed force in the region.

The Archivo de Gobernación de Quezaltenango is located in the governor’s office, the Palacio de Gobernación, 13 Avenida, Quezaltenango. It is open Monday through Friday, from 8 to 1 and from 2 to 4:30. For the necessary permission from the governor’s office to use the AGQ, contact the departmental clerk, currently Ana de Rosario Tobar (there is no telephone).⁹

8. Anyone wishing to aid this project may get in touch with either of the authors at our respective universities.

9. In 1994 the governor kindly wrote a letter asking his successors to grant access to the collection to future researchers. A copy of the letter is on file at the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA), in Antigua, Guatemala. Interested scholars

Segundo Registro de la Propiedad Inmueble

Located one block from the governor's office, this registry lists all property transactions for the highland departments of Quezaltenango, Quiché, Totonicapán, Huehuetenango, San Marcos, Retalhuleu, Suchitepéquez, and Sololá from 1877 to the present. A running departmental index, listed alphabetically by last name, gives the volume, finca, and folio numbers for each entry.

The Segundo Registro, on the corner of 7th Street and 13th Avenue, is open to the general public from 8 to 4:30, Monday through Friday. Inquiries should be addressed to the Segundo Registro de Propiedad Inmueble in Quezaltenango.

*Archivo de la Catedral del Espíritu Santo de Quezaltenango*¹⁰

This collection contains three major groups of demographic records. The *libros de bautismos* are divided into two subgroups.¹¹ Those for indígenas consist of two series of 61 volumes covering the years 1758 to 1919. The first series (1758–1789) fills 11 volumes; the second series (1789–1919), 50 volumes. The years 1852 to 1919 are indexed in 4 books. The *libros de bautismos* for ladinos consist of 40 volumes, with the first volume missing. They cover the years 1789 to 1912, with the years from 1829 to 1899 indexed in 2 books.

The *libros de matrimonios* are also subdivided: for indígenas, 20 volumes covering 1739 to 1925; and for ladinos, 12 volumes covering 1740 to 1911.

The *libros de difuntos* are divided into three categories: *adultos indígenas*, 16 volumes covering 1712 to 1889; *adultos ladinos*, 8 volumes covering 1796 to 1890; and *párvulos indígenas y ladinos*, 14 volumes covering 1777 to 1884.

The Archivo is at 7th Street 10-14, Zone 1, and is open Monday through Friday 9 to 12 and 3 to 5, and on Saturday, 9 to 12. The required permission can be obtained from the secretary, Rosario Miranda Morales (telephone 0612539).

may either request a copy of the letter at the CIRMA offices prior to beginning investigations or contact one of us.

10. For a summary of a partial survey of the parish archives around Quezaltenango conducted by a team of Spanish social scientists, see María F. Carbajo Isla, "Interés demográfico de los Archivos Eclesiásticos de la Diócesis de Quezaltenango," *Revista Española de Antropología Americana* 15 (1984):131–46. The survey was halted in 1980 after the Guatemalan Army firebombed the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City. Carbajo Isla's summary mentions a number of books related to church and *cofradía* activity that we did not have the opportunity to view.

11. The authors thank Krista Little-Siebold and Todd Little-Siebold for their help in arranging the volumes.

Archivo Municipal de San Juan de Ostuncalco

Located about ten kilometers west of Quezaltenango, on the road to San Marcos, Ostuncalco is the seat of two archives, one municipal and the other ecclesiastical. During a period beginning shortly after independence until about 1872, Ostuncalco served as the *cabecera* of a political district encompassing all the Mam towns in Quezaltenango, such as Cabricán, Huitán, Cajolá, Sigüilá, Concepción Chiquirichapa, and San Martín, as well as the ladino municipality of Bobós (currently Sibilia). In addition, Ostuncalco administered a large expanse of territory that stretched south from the mountainous ridge of the Sierra Madre through the coffee piedmont to the tropical coastal plains below. As coffee cultivation spread in the 1860s, hundreds of thousands of acres of state and municipal land in the Sotuncalco administrative district passed into private ladino hands. The data in the Ostuncalco archive detail the social, political, and judicial history of this revolution in land tenure and land use.

Holdings begin in 1808 and run up to the present. Unfortunately, however, about 90 percent of the documentation for the twentieth century has not been classified. The fraction of documents that are organized are bundled into legajos by year and subject. "Correspondencia," by far the largest category, covers more than five square meters of shelves, starting with 1808 and continuing through the twentieth century. This correspondence contains communications with the various municipal and sub-municipal officials of the district and with departmental authorities in Quezaltenango. "Diligencias Criminales" begins as a separate grouping in 1850, and noncriminal legal proceedings with the year 1885. "Partes de la Policia Nacional" date back to 1899. Numerous requests for land titles can be found for 1878 and then for the years 1881 to 1929. The civil marriage registry runs from 1880 to the present.

The Archivo Municipal de San Juan de Ostuncalco is housed in the municipal office building and is open weekdays from 9 to 1 and 2 to 4:30. The archive's address is Edificio Municipal, San Juan Ostuncalco, Quezaltenango. For the permission required, contact the municipal secretary, Odilio "Edy" Augusto Castillo Ralda (telephone 0612050).

Archivo Histórico Parroquial de San Juan Ostuncalco

In addition to its role as a political *cabecera*, Ostuncalco also served as the seat of the western parish of Quezaltenango from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth. This parish encompassed the towns of San Martín Sacatepequez, Concepción Chiquirichapa, Sigüilá, and Cajolá.¹² This archive contains books listing baptisms, marriages, and burials

12. See *El Curato de San Juan Ostuncalco*, vol. 1, *Visitas pastorales (1684–1930)*, compiled by

for each of these towns. For San Juan Ostuncalco, the libros de bautismos have been kept since 1679 (86 volumes); libros de matrimonios since 1769 (14 volumes); and libros de entierros from 1774 to 1894 (13 volumes). For San Martín Sacatepéquez, baptisms are listed from 1723 to 1910 (18 volumes); marriages from 1774 to 1893 (7 volumes); and burials from 1782 to 1872 (4 volumes). For Concepción Chiquirichapa, baptisms from 1756 to 1910 (17 volumes); marriages from 1722 to 1899 (6 volumes); and burials from 1773 to 1862 (5 volumes). For San Miguel Sigüilá, baptisms are recorded from 1776 to 1910 (8 volumes); marriages from 1771 to 1885 (5 volumes); and burials from 1824 to 1867 (1 volume). For Santa Cruz Cajolá, baptisms are listed from 1771 to 1910 (15 volumes); marriages from 1798 to 1893 (5 volumes); and burials from 1798 to 1878 (3 volumes).

This archive also contains other nineteenth-century documents, most of them loose papers. Many are notes and certifications relating to marriages or *certificaciones de Cristianidad*. Two Libros de Fábrica exist for the years 1814 to 1887, detailing church income from burials.¹³

The Archivo Parroquial is housed in the parish church in San Juan Ostuncalco, and its hours vary. To obtain the necessary permission to use the archive, contact Padre Miguel Castro, Iglesia Parroquial, San Juan Ostuncalco, Quezaltenango.

Archivo Municipal de Momostenango

Momostenango is known to outsiders for its skillfully dyed and woven woolen handicrafts, but the town is also known for its cultural conservatism and history of rebellion, as described in the work of anthropologists Robert Carmack and Barbara Tedlock.¹⁴ Carmack carried out historical research there in the 1960s and early 1970s, when Momostenango boasted a well-organized archive maintained by municipal secretaries and local enthusiasts. The earthquake in 1976 destroyed the building, sad to say, and the documents were transferred around several times before finding a home in a cramped room in the municipal market. There they languished until recently, relegated to obscurity by the political repression of the 1980s.

Many documents apparently did not survive. Much of the material

Rainer Hostnig (Quetzaltenango: Centro de Capacitación e Investigación Campesina [CCIC], Diócesis de Quetzaltenango, 1994), 1:10. According to Oscar H. Horst, records for San Antonio, Bobós, and Santa Cruz Cabricán and even some records for Santa Cruz Cajolá are found in the parish offices of San Carlos Sija. See Horst, "La utilización de archivos eclesiásticos en la reconstrucción de la historia demográfica de San Juan Ostuncalco," *Mesoamérica*, no. 22 (Dec. 1991):212–14.

13. Those desiring a more detailed breakdown and description of the records found in Ostuncalco's parish archive should consult Hostnig's compilation.

14. Robert M. Carmack, *Historia social de los quichés* (Guatemala City: Editorial José de Pineda Ibarra, 1979); and Barbara Tedlock, *Time and the Highland Maya*, rev. ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992).

cited by Carmack in his *Historia social de los quichés* no longer exists. Yet the municipal archive remains a rich source of information. Nineteenth-century documents (about 3 square meters of shelf space) have been separated and bundled chronologically. The earliest material—typeset copies of governmental decrees—dates from the 1820s. Documentation pertaining specifically to the town begins in the 1850s, growing larger and better with each succeeding decade. Correspondence with national and departmental officials as well as surrounding towns and hamlets accounts for about half of the nineteenth-century materials. The archive also holds a large number of judicial proceedings, marriage records, land titles, and treasury accounts. *Libros de Actas* exist only in fragments and are inconsistent from one year to the next.

The archivo is located at the Edificio Municipal, Momostenango, Totonicapán. It has no set schedule. To obtain permission to use the archive, contact the municipal secretary, currently Eliazar Pineda Jerez (telephone 066507 or 0665199).

These seven archives constitute important new sources of information for ongoing research on nineteenth-century Guatemala. Taken together, they promise significant expansion in empirical data as well as qualitative deepening of historians' understanding of this era. Scholars focusing on liberalism, indigenous culture and society, or the profound agricultural and material transformations that swept Guatemala in the nineteenth century will profit immensely from consulting the archives in and around the city of Quezaltenango.