Guatemalans of Maya ancestry, living in rural communities, possess a wide variety of skills and technologies for the manufacture of domestically needed items. Men and women of each community are known throughout the highlands for the production of one or two of these articles, which are distributed through a well-established market system. Whether the specialty is the manufacture of pottery, textiles, lime, salt, grinding stones, reed mats, gourd utensils, jewelry, baskets or hats, or the cultivation of vegetables or flowers, its anthropological importance lies in each product's position in the culture of the people who create it. From the ethnographic research carried out in this century we have learned that both the way the society is organized and its world view support the specialization of each community and encourage its continuity. The interrelationship of these cultural elements brings about a strong tradition within a definite boundary. To speak of "community" here is to speak of a fundamental principle of social organization. In addition, these differences in specialization are vital to the existence of the region. Through the market system each community has access to a wide range of expertly made products that as an isolated entity it could not enjoy. While homogeneity of product and technique plays a vital role in the makeup of each individual community, differences between communities are essential for the functioning of the regions as a whole. In other words, community specialization can be credited for the level of complexity achieved in this part of the world.

Most children born in a community with a specialization will not only practice the craft when they become men and women but will associate these activities with specific values. To protest or question what one should be or do would only invite
Expedition

Spring 1931

14

radio and contempt to those (respects) such a deep tradition is to live and bring to a concept of vital importance among traditional Maya people. Such pressure for cultural homogeneity therefore limits the choices open to an individual. This situation has a positive side. To follow the prescribed in life is also to enjoy the prestige of craftsmanship considered very esteemed, very old. In this way it is fulfilling, and being integrated into this pattern become in time the overseers and transmitters of the same skills and values their parents had.

This particular activity and knowledge are not perceived solely as means of obtaining practical advantages. They are integral to the history of each group of specialists: a symbol of their existence. Therefore, anyone who takes upon himself the task of bringing about changes in his community's specialization can face serious problems. Their ancestors left them with an identity and an assignment which serve to distinguish them from other groups. The individual who takes up a craft that is the property of a community also selects his identity, becoming as someone from another place. Within the traditional culture that existed long before the arrival of the Spaniards. The document, produced in the context of a land dispute, was for the protection of the rights of the Sacapuccecos to their lands and resources. For this reason, the Titulo of Sacapuccecos is very much concerned with the sources of salt in the area. However, the salt producing area is more than a land deed. It is also an origin myth, which shows the intimate connection between Guatemala at least until the 1860s. Today, no meal is considered complete without salt with the corn tortillas and chiles. Such demand made Sacapuccecos a wealthy community in the past, and continues to make salt production a very profitable enterprise. For scholars interested in the continuity of Maya culture, Sacapuccecos offers an excellent example. A report from the colonial period describes in detail the production of salt in the early 16th century, and a native document, the Titulo of Sacapuccecos, gives us insights into the Maya view of the process. Observations made by the authors in recent years both confirm and elaborate on these early documents. Widespread political and economic changes have not altered the basic structure of values, nor the technology that surrounds saltmaking in Sacapuccecos. To illustrate this, we will begin by discussing some of the early accounts, and follow these with observations and photographs made in the course of our work in the community.

The Titulo of Sacapuccecos

While the text of this document remained untranslated until the colonial period, the an oral tradition that existed long before the arrival of the Spaniards. The document, produced in the context of a land dispute, was for the protection of the rights of the Sacapuccecos to their lands and resources. For this reason, the Titulo of Sacapuccecos is very much concerned with the sources of salt in the area. However, the salt producing area is more than a land deed. It is also an origin myth, which shows the intimate connection between

SALT MAKING IN SACAPUCCECOS

The Maya people of Sacapuccecos operate one of the three ancient salt production centers in northwestern Guatemala. For us, salt is taken for granted as an inexpensive commodity that is always at hand. It is hard to believe that in many areas of the world it is difficult to procure, often at a high price. Some scholars feel this was true for the Maya of antiquity. Noting the lack of suitable salt sources in the Peten, they have even blamed "the Classic Maya Collapse" on the cutoff of this substance. Whatever the merits of this argument for the ancient Maya, it is apparent that salt has always been an important commodity for the Sacapuccecos and in the past it served as a medium of exchange. Father Bartolome de Las Casas reported this in the 1560s and it continued to be true in

Acknowledgment

Visitas have been made to Sacapuccecos every year since 1977. Fieldwork has been sponsored by the gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Maxwell and Robert and Evelyn Holt. Photographs are by Ruben R. Reina with the assistance of Jeffrey Pross.

The Titulo of Sacapuccecos: a Spanish translation of the original title, whose whereabouts are not known. It may still be in the hands of the principal families of Sacapuccecos.

A general view of the "old" and "new" salt pans of Sacapuccecos.

A page in Quiché from the same text as Fig. 4

The Colonial Documents

One of the first Spanish reports of salt production in Sacapuccecos came in 1574, from the reports of a Spanish who worked in an adjacent region. They tell us that lack of resources have with the lives of these people. The writers of the Titulo begin by explaining how their people arrived in the land they occupy. They came, as one of the original seven peoples, “from the other side of the sea, from between the seven caves and six canyons.” They were led by the Maas Canil, who, through his sagacity, or spiritual grace, brought the Sacapuccecos to their land. During their wanderings they fought wars and suffered slavery. Despite all this they arrived at Monte Blanco, the White Mound, or Sac-puccecos. There the rugged sat down, and began to urinate. His urine formed the salt from which the Sacapuccecos were to make their livelihood. He then taught the Sacapuccecos how to recover the salt and assigned this task to them and to all future generations.

The Colonial Documents

One of the first Spanish reports of salt production in Sacapuccecos came in 1574, from reports of a Spanish who worked in an adjacent region. They tell us that lack of salt is a grave problem in their area, and salt must come from the sea, a four day journey. Many Indians from their jurisdiction make this trip, hiring themselves out as laborers in the salt works (minas). As payment they receive a quantity of salt, which they then take back to their own communities to sell for a profit. In 1579 salt production in Sacapuccecos once again appears in colonial documents, in an account written by Martin Alfonso Tovilla, the Alcalde Mayor of the province of Vera Paz, Golfo Dulce, Sacapuccecos and Manchas. Tovilla toured the area of his jurisdiction and set down his impressions in a book entitled Relaciones Historicas Descriptivas. Before going to Sacapuccecos, Tovilla visited the Quiché region a group of Indians related to the Sacapuccecos. He was accompanied there by the grandson of the last Maya ruler, the Al Pope. Together they visited the site of Utialan, the former capital of the powerful Quiché. He was told that in the days before the Spanish conquest by Alvarezo, there were in the region twenty-four leaders, whose wealth and power depended on the tributes from their vassals. The old inhabitants of Utialan had been engaged in wars, expanding their influence through military despotism. In 1579 the Spanish authorities arrived in Sacapuccecos. Tovilla was also told that the Quiché, after capturing members of a rival, Caliche-speaking group, sent them to Sacapuccecos to work at producing salt. These captives were kept in a cave at night, and at dawn were taken to the salt works for a hard day’s work. A great deal of salt was produced, an additional source of power and wealth for the Maya rulers.

Tovilla was extremely curious about the way in which salt was made. Back home in Spain, he had been inspector of the royal salt works in Almeria before coming to the New World. He found the Sacapuccecos method different from anything he had ever seen. The salt was made in a different way. He set down a careful description of the operation, and left us some information on the sociology of the village. According to Tovilla, the area was made up of six parcialidades, or land-holding groups, who each gathered together to form the village of Sacapuccecos. Each group retained its name and identity, as well as its respective portion of land. Even though some groups were geographically uprooted, changes in their economic specializations were minor. For the most part they continued to be farmers.
preparing their maize fields as they had for centuries. Yet, one peculiarity, San Sebastián, from which writers of the Titulo of Sacapulas had come, was different from the rest. These were the people who had been led into the region by the Ahau Canil, and who owned the salt works. Around them the other groups were clustered, and they became, as they continue to be today, the most important group in the pueblo (village).

Tovilla took great care in describing "for those who are curious and wish to entertain themselves," how the Sacapulcoes manufactured salt. He tells us that the portioned into cojetes, small clay containers which were then set over a fire. As the water boiled, the saltmakers occasionally dropped corn dough into the cojetes to thicken the water and form the white salt. Tovilla felt that the work was difficult and the price of one real for fifteen cakes of salt extremely low, considering the amount of wood needed for the firing process. He seems to have found this method of making salt ingenious, and realized its importance in the local economy.

Tovilla's seventeenth-century account gives us an accurate description of the technology involved in the production of

works were set next to the river and were made up of poylos or tracts of land well-scraped and clean. Spread about these poylos were twelve water holes containing hot mineral water. Each morning, saltmakers spread a layer of fine soil over the poylos, wetting it down from time to time as the day passed. In the late afternoon they carefully gathered the soil into piles, knowing that, aided by the sun's heat, it had absorbed the salt from the earth. The mounds were then covered, in case of rain, and the process was repeated using the same soils the following day. When the soil was saturated with salt, it was packed into stout baskets and a large linojo, or clay water vessel, was placed underneath. The saltmakers then poured water from the hot springs into the baskets, leaching out the salt contained in the soil. This leaching process ended when the soil was judged to have lost its "strength." The author goes on to say that the linojo, salt water, was finally

sód in Sacapulas. It is unfortunate that he did not set down more of the social and cultural factors related to salt production. One has the feeling that he may have known more. However, he did show surprise and admiration for the achievement of these people, and recognized the technology as wholly native.

SACAPULAS TODAY

Today, the pueblo of Sacapulas has a population of about two thousand people, organized into several barrios or neighborhoods. Divided among these people are a handful of ladino, non-Indian families who are largely bilingual. Some of these ladino families have been residents in the village for over two centuries, interacting and intermarrying with the Maya. However, it is the Maya who carry on and preserve the Sacapulco identity, and it is they who are the saltmakers. In fact, it is the descendants of the Ahau Canil, still living in the barrio of San Sebastian, who enjoy the rights to the salt sources. Only the people from this barrio own kitchens and sections of the poylos along the river. These men and women were born in the barrios of San Sebastian and are of Sacapulco Maya ancestry.

Flooding from the nearby river has always been a problem for the saltmakers. Poylos cannot be used during the rainy season because they are filled with water. Some years this flooding can be quite serious, as the remains of a protecting wall constructed over sixty years ago by order of one of Guatemala's presidents readily

Illustrate. This situation explains an apparent paradox. The 1992 local census listed fifty full-time saltmakers. Why, considering that salt making continues to be profitable, are a smaller number of saltmakers active today? The answer lies in a disastrous series of floods in the late 1940s and early 1950s. All the poylos were buried under tons of salt and rock. Slowly, people began uncovering their poylos, until today there are eleven kitchens worked by approximately thirty-five full-time saltmakers. The recovery was not complete however. From descriptions given by older saltmakers it is apparent that only about one-fifth as many poylos are operating now as were before the floods. Enlarging a plot by excavating more of the sediment entails a tremendous amount of work; few have the time or means to do so. Still, those families who hold rights to the poylos can point out where their plots are, although they remain buried under five meters of earth and rock.

In the past, salt making was totally a male enterprise, "in the old days," as one saltmaker told us "no woman would come to the poylos. Women were permitted by tradition to bring us our noon meals, but they remained on the hill above the poylos where they were met by the men. It was custom." A seventy year old saltmaker explained why these changes were necessary:

Our ancestors changed some ways to meet their needs. It happened after a great flood when our poylos along the river were ruined, and a large amount of stones and mud were deposited over them. Before this, our poylos were guarded by two nagules, a man and a woman. With the flood, the female naguel left us, going downriver to another place. Who knows why she left? It is said that the salt still flows over the stones where she sits, but the people who live there do not know how to use it. They were not given the knowledge for salt making so they are ignorant on this matter. Because of her departure we have less salt now for after all we only have one guardian, the male naguel (Rahuel Saliam, El Bien Saliam). Since the woman naguel left, our wives may join us in working the salt. There are many women who own kitchens and poylos.

Occasionally, at night, the male naguel can be seen. He is tall, dressed all in white, and wears a wide-brimmed hat. On May third of every year a celebration is held in
his honor. It takes place around the cross set up in the K'animik or heart of the solinos and is directed by one of the oldest ohk ij or shamans, of San Sebastián. The fact that this ceremony takes place in the heart of the solinos is very important. As are all things of great moment in men’s lives, the solino is seen as being animate; it exhibits many of the properties of a living being. It has an immortal soul—heart and soul being the same thing for the Maya—and also has a conscience, the negued, a type of spiritual alter-ego. The negued is an essential part of Maya belief systems, since it is through their negueles that divinities interact with men. Likewise, men have negues, but there are few men who have negues that are strong enough to initiate or sustain such interaction. The ohk ij is one such person, and it is he who asks both pardon of the neguel of the solino for any trespasses the salineros for any trespasses the salineros may have committed, and that he continue supplying them with salt. The ohk ij burns copal, or incense and candles and pours libations of corn liquor at the base of the cross. The corn liquor, normally called guaro, here is called orienton which translates as “a prayer” and is a ritual means of establishing contact between the ohk ij and the neguel of the solino. After the ohk ij has finished, a marimba is brought out, and fireworks are set off. People then begin to dance for the neguel. The older men begin, joined later by the women and younger men. The costs of the celebrations are borne by the active owners of playas, each contributing an equal amount. In recent years, due to the small number of operating playas, the celebration has been less elaborate, a drum being substituted for the expensive marimba, and the amount of food and drink offered being reduced.

Although the census supposedly reports all the Maya owners of playas, we learned that the list is far from complete. Many of the saints in the church are also owners of salt playas. These saints are the objects of veneration of the oh paton, or civil-religious hierarchies. While these playas are now covered over, many of the older salineros can point out their location. They were either worked by the Calzachoel, the leader of the oh paton, or rented to a third party, the proceeds being used to pay for the candles, incense and fireworks used to celebrate the saint’s day.

During the rainy season, people employ this time preparing their milpas, corn fields, and replenishing the stocks of wood used for cooking the salt. The salt that is produced during this time comes from the salty soil they have kept in storage.

To illustrate the steps that the Sacapaltecos take to make salt, we will follow two of our solino friends, Dionisio and Rosa Acetano, as they go about their work at the salinos.

**Preparation of the Playa**

Both Dionisio and his wife are vigorous for their seventy-odd years and are enthusiastic about their craft. They begin each working day at sunrise. A strong pull at a bottle of guaro “gives one strength to begin the day,” Dionisio explains. Before sitting down to the fresh tortillas prepared by Rosa, he gives thanks to Jesus Christ in the church, to the Holy Earth and to our father, the Sun. After eating, Dionisio departs alone for the playas. His wife will join him later in the morning, after she gives proper attention to her household and leaves instructions about the noon meal with her daughters. Today they are to carry it down to the salt kitchens, where all
the members of the family will meet to discuss the day’s events and do justice to the food their salt has purchased.

Dionisio follows the path along the banks of the river to the playas. Each salinero owns a patch of playas, close to three square meters in size. Actually, it is Rosa who owns their playas and kitchen, having inherited the land from her father. Under the strong tropical sun, Dionisio begins by spreading age-cleaned soil over the playas, no more than a centimeter thick. With a finesse that comes from long experience, he takes baskets filled with this special soil and with circular movements of his arm scatters it evenly over his patch, covering every inch. Next, using a half-gourd, he sprinkles the water from the tinaja over the soil. “One needs just the right amount of water,” explained Dionisio, experience alone guiding him in this task. Watering the soil is done the first thing in the morning so that the sun will heat the playas and the salt will rise up through the earth into the soil.”

The soil spread during the morning has already been spread on each of the two preceding days. Just before evening on each of these days it had been gathered into a small mound in a corner of the playas. “After the first day the soil keeps some salt,” Dionisio explains. “To leave it spread would be to lose it as the salt goes back into the earth.” In the morning of the second day the soil is spread again, this time without any water. By the time this is repeated on the third day, the soil is much heavier than before. Once again, as described, it must be sprinkled with water from the spring. “Now,” said Dionisio, “the soil is saturated and cannot lift any more salt from the earth. It is time to bring it into the kitchen for storage or place it in the cajon (wooden blattering box) for leaching.” This whole process of spreading and gathering the soil is known as sombreriza, to save the salt. The salt is seen as brotando, or germinating in the soil. The Sacapulques, being intimately involved with the natural world around them, constantly employ organic metaphors to describe their activities at the salt works, in the same way we use mechanical or industrial metaphors to describe our own actions.

“The soil,” Dionisio tells us, “is something we have received from our forefathers. It is hard to replace because we don’t know where it came from. We lose some throughout the years, but perhaps some is replaced as we scrape the hard bottom of the playas.” Through generations the supply of soil appears to remain constant in the kitchens. Nowadays, no one could begin saltmaking without a supply of soil secured by inheritance or purchase. The more of this soil one possesses, the larger the amount of salted soil one is able to keep in storage during the rainy season. “The kitchen is a bank with money for us,” Rosa joked, “so when we need money at any time during the year we come to the kitchen and make money, salt.”

Kitchens

The kitchens are small, stone-walled rooms of approximately 6 x 8 meters set
deep into the ground, built on the high banks along the river, just above the playas and hot springs. The concentration of these buildings surprises strangers. The area is devoid of residences and these kitchens differ much from the traditional Maya home. At first, this cluster of buildings gives the impression of an abandoned section of the town, overgrown with grass and littered with broken pottery. During the dry season, however, the area bustles with activity.

The stout walls of each kitchen support thick beams upon which a roof of clay tiles is set. Because the kitchens are excavated, like cellars, the roofs are no more than one and a half meters above the ground. Between the roof and the walls is a gap from which smoke and heat escape.

Entrance to the kitchen is by a door fastened loosely to two vertical posts. This leads down to a floor about one meter below ground level, this distance varying with the season, since the floor is made up of a large portion of the salted soil kept in storage. Piled along the walls of the kitchen is also a large quantity of this soil, which is expected to keep its salt content for at least two years. In the center of the kitchen is a platform of packed earth, about 1 x 2 meters, which is used for firing. Evenly distributed across the top of this platform are stone wedges which support the cojones during the firing process. Around the platform the floor is excavated to its greatest depth, so that the solinos can work in a standing position. One wall is set aside for the storage of wood and the large clay vessels that will hold the salt. Most of the stored soil comes from the playas but scattered about are small mounds of spent charcoal dirt clods, about the size of a hand, which have been taken from the firing platform after the last firing. Some salt-laden water always spills on the platform as it pours into the cojones or overflows as it boils. When they are to be used, these clods are broken up and added to the other soil in the cojin when it is time for leaching.

Leaching

All during the day solinos trudge up the hill from the playas with baskets of soil on their backs, supported by the mecapal, or turpentine. At the kitchen area, Dionisio fills the cojin with soil from the...
The cojin is a wooden box, about 1 1/2 by 1 1/2 meters set on top of a mound of earth. A short distance outside the entrance to the kitchen, the mound is about 2 1/2 meters high, high enough so that water poured into the box can drip through a straw mat into a plastered stone basin beneath. It takes several baskets of soil to fill the cojin. This is hard work since the soil is now heavy with salt. Once the cojin is filled, Dionisio climbs into the box and barefooted, carefully walks along the sides, packing the soil as firmly as possible with his own weight. "One must be very careful while doing this," explains Dionisio, "if the soil is packed down too much, no water will filter through. Yet the packing should be firm enough to stop the water from seeping out the sides of the cojin. The soil in the center of the box is not packed and so remains higher than the soil along the sides."

In the center of the cojin Dionisio places a round basket containing the spent charcoal and pulverized clods of earth. "Everything is used in this work," Dionisio tells us. The wooden cojin is now ready to receive the water. He now goes down to the playa and fills a tina at the hot springs, carries it up the hill, then pours it slowly into the cojin. This will be repeated ten times in the next half hour. The contents of the cojin have now become a dark brown mud. Underneath, from the center of the box, clear water filters into the stone basin. As the basin slowly fills, the sulferino shapes a small ball of maize dough and tosses it into the water. The more salt in the water, the faster the ball rises to the surface. As long as it floats, he knows the salt content is satisfactory. His work on the playa has been successful.

Firing

As the amount of filtered water increases, Dionisio ladles it into a tina, which he then carries into the kitchen. There he pours it into a larger tina. It is now mid-morning, and his wife arrives to help with the firing. She immediately sets to work, arranging the wedge-shaped stones on the firing platform. There are thirty-two of them that she lines up in four evenly-spaced rows. Next she examines the twenty small clay cojines in which she will boil the salty water. She has brought these from home, where she made them over a mold then dried them in the sun. They are very fragile since they have not been fired, and must be handled with care. She places

The spent charcoal and pulverized clods of earth from the previous firing, ready to be placed in the cojin.

Pouring water from the hot springs into the cojin.

The contents of the cojin, after the water is added.

Dionisio filling a plastic tina with the salt-laden water from the basin of the cojin.

The cojines placed over the stones of the firing platform. Sticks of ocote project from beneath the cojines.
Lighting the fire

A small quantity of salt water from the basin, mixed with maize dough, is poured into each of the cojotes to seal their walls. The maize dough is added to make the salt finer-grained.

30, 31
Rosa fills the cojotes with salt water, while Dionisio tends the fire. Water must constantly be added as the contents of the cojotes boil away.

Each one on the platform, at a height of about ten centimeters, supported by four of the stones. Both her husband and she test the arrangements, to see that each cojete is in a stable position and will not tip over when the water is added. Following this they place ocote, sticks of resinsous pine, between the stones and under the cojotes. Dionisio starts the fire, and Rosa prays, explaining to God and to the Holy Earth what they are about to do and asking pardon for any trespasses they may have committed. As the fire advances she mixes a handful of tortilla dough with the salt water brought in by Dionisio. A small quantity of this mixture is poured into each of the cojotes, sealing the walls. At the same time the clay of which they are made hardens with the heat of the fire. At this point, some fifteen minutes after the fire was lit, each cojote is filled with salt water from the basin outside. Maize dough has already been mixed with the water, so that "the salt will be fine-grained instead of course," they explained.
By this time, Dionisio has filled all the large clay vessels along the wall with filtered salt water. During this time, Rosa has kept the liquid boiling by adding wood to the fire below the coyotes. The process seems to be going well, and they are able to take a break. Before sitting down, they thank God and the Holy Earth for the success they have been blessed with. While resting in the doorway of the kitchen, they review the progress already made and plan the steps to come. All the while they keep careful watch on the fire, since it is important to keep the heat constant. Dionisio shifts now from carrying water to helping Rosa tend the fire. However, he will continue to filter water through the coyoten until the tortilla dough will no longer float.

During the next several hours, the kitchen heats up and the smoke is heavy at times. As the water boils away, the salt crystallizes on the inside wall of each coyote, turning it snow white. Within two hours after firing began, the coyotes are filled with salt. Husband and wife, using half gourds, scoop this salt into a waiting tinaja. As the salt is removed, the coyotes are filled with salt water, and the boiling continues. This step is carried out with a harmony and efficiency that comes from long cooperation. They direct each other in their native Señupulco, since they find Spanish inadequate for the keen coordination needed to carry out this task. Each knows exactly what to do as they move around the platform scooping out salt and adding water.

The Acietunos will repeat this firing operation twice more during the day, finishing the second batch at one o'clock and the third at three. However, it is not until the first batch has been made that they are able to predict whether or not they will have sufficient salt water to carry out all three operations.

By the time the third boiling is underway, they must decide whether to turn the salt in the tinaja into atonj, small white cakes, or place it back in the coyotes to produce xhupej, black salt. The decision is based on the amount of salt they have produced during the day. Today they have made enough to make both types of salt.

At five o'clock they begin to stoke the fire to generate the additional heat needed to make black salt. Salt from the tinaja is transferred back into coyotes, and pounded with a crude mallet. More salt is added and compressed, until each coyote is filled with a hard cake. The coyotes are fired for three hours until the salt blackens. As the fire pales, a layer of white salt is sprinkled over the black salt “for decoration,” as Rosa explained. Black salt, according to an analysis carried out in the University of Pennsylvania’s Geology Department, contains aphthiilite, a mineral not found in the white salt. We are not sure of its significance, but the Maya favor black over white salt, and it brings a higher price. It is thought to taste better, and is famed for its medicinal properties, especially for the treatment of eye and stomach problems. These are widely held beliefs in Guatemala, and Felix McBride tells us that along the Pacific coast, unscrupulous merchants try to counterfeit black salt by mixing black volcanic beach sand with white sea salt (see Suggested Readings).

For the Acietunos it has been a day of hard work, and they make ready to return home. Nothing is locked up, as their goods and tools are under the protection of God. Before heading home they stop to bathe in the hot springs along the river, to wash off the grime from work in the hot and smoky kitchen.

Early the next morning they are back at the salinas, to add the finishing touches to the salt. Inside the kitchen, Dionisio begins by turning over each of the coyotes that are filled with black salt and breaking their clay walls. The coyotes have served not only to cook the salt, but to mold it as well. While Dionisio has been doing this, Rosa busies herself with the white salt that remained in the tinaja. Cool, it has the consistency of porridge, all the water having evaporated as it had from the black salt. First she removes all the stones from the firing platform, and sweeps it free of ash and charcoal. Next, she sprays a one centimeter thick layer of sand over its clean surface. A small oval, bottomless, wooden mold is set in the sand. The pliable mold is held in shape with a string, which Rosa can release or tighten as she moves the sand from place to place as her husband fills it with the white salt. The water runs out through the sand, and after a few hours these pontos, as they are called, are dry and hard.

MARKETING

In the two days the Acietunos produced approximately two hundred and fifty pounds of salt. They can sell it at an average of fifteen centavos a pound, since the price does fluctuate with the season. Subtracting the cost of the firewood, near one-
third of the gross, they stand to gain twenty-five dollars. In a society where the daily wage for agricultural workers is two dollars, this represents a substantial profit. It is Rosa's job to market the salt. Every Thursday and Sunday, she sets up a stand under one of the large ceiba trees in the plaza. Sacapulco salt is well known in the area; most people, including the ladinos, prefer it over commercial salt. Unlike many communities with a specialization, Sacapulcocos do not have to travel far to market their product. Much is consumed within the boundaries of the municipality; most of what remains goes to the communities of Uspantan and Cuín to the east, and the cäl people to the north. While their salt does get occasional wide distribution when Sacapulcocos travel to visit distant

The salt, known as black salt, now coaxed and hardened into leaves, stacked in the kitchen. Fragments of the ollas which served to cook and mold it lie to one side. Later the sherds will be taken outside and added to the deep piles of broken ollas that have been accumulating for years around the sides of the kitchen.
communities during fiestas, the Ixil have been their steadiest customers for centuries. The Ixil like the salt not only for its taste, but because they feel it makes their animals grow faster. Older Sacapulascos remember well their trips over the hill, by foot and on horseback, to sell salt in the Ixil communities of Chajul and Nebaj. There was no formal market in Nebaj at the time, so they would conduct their business in front of the church. The Sacapulascos traded for money and for maize, something in which they have never been self-sufficient. The trip took about two days, by foot, but a road constructed in 1937 has made the journey much easier by bus. From the other Ixil municipalities, Chajul, groups of ten to fifteen men used to make the trip to Sacapulas, carrying with them maize, which they exchanged for salt. This is still true during the big fiestas in Sacapulas when many outsiders visit.

CONCLUSION
From documentary sources, we know that salt was prepared in the past in exactly the same manner as today. In 1939, Tovilla wrote an overall account of the process. Three hundred and forty years later, we find that salt making is still a community specialization, and remains in the hands of the Maya people from the barrio of San Sebastian. We are accustomed to accept the notion of cultural change. Here we see the other side of the coin: cultural continuity that spans centuries. This craft has survived social, political and economic changes in Guatemala. We must look for an answer to this not in the isolation of Sacapulas, but in the ways that saltmaking meshes with many of the vital principles that give meaning to and guide Sacapulco life. The craft is closely tied with one’s place in the society, community identity, and economic well-being. It is not only a job, but costumbre. It is a mission that has been entrusted to them by the naidul of their leader, the Ahau Canul, and links them with their past. While submitting to Spanish political domination, these Maya people have conserved their cultural values and their system has not yet perished in the face of our industrial age.

Suggested Reading

McDermot, Felix W. 1947 Cultural and Historical Geography of Southwest Guatemala. Smithsonian Institution, Institute of Social Anthropology, Pub. 4 Washington, D.C.

Ruben E. Reina is Curator of Latin American Ethnology in the American Section of the University Museum and Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. He began his ethnographic research in Guatemala in 1963, living with a Pokomam Maya group. His most recently published work (which he wrote with Robert Hill), The Traditional Pottery of Guatemala, is a complete study of pottery making techniques among contemporary Maya Indians.

John Monaghan is a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. He visited Sacapulas in 1979 and 1980, and plans to return there in the near future to continue ethnographic research.

49 Rosa, dressed in her best, at work muddling the white salt into paste. The ribbon around her neck holds rings given to her by admirers who have had their initials engraved on them. The paste is set to dry on the firing platform, which has been swept clean and covered with a layer of sand. Once they are dry and hard, they will be ready for market.