


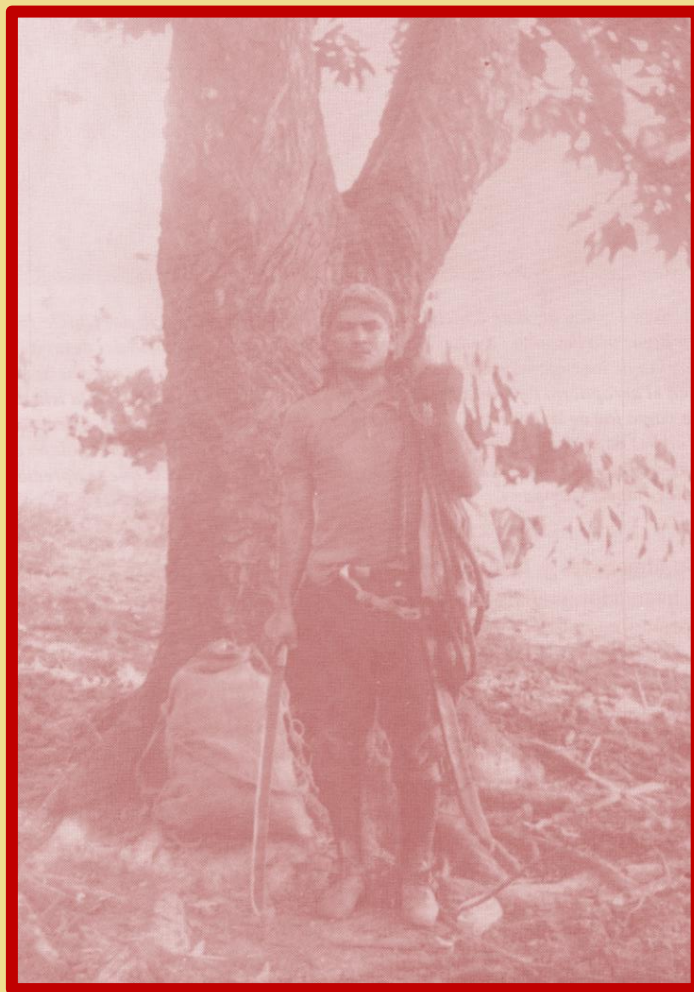
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# La Tradición

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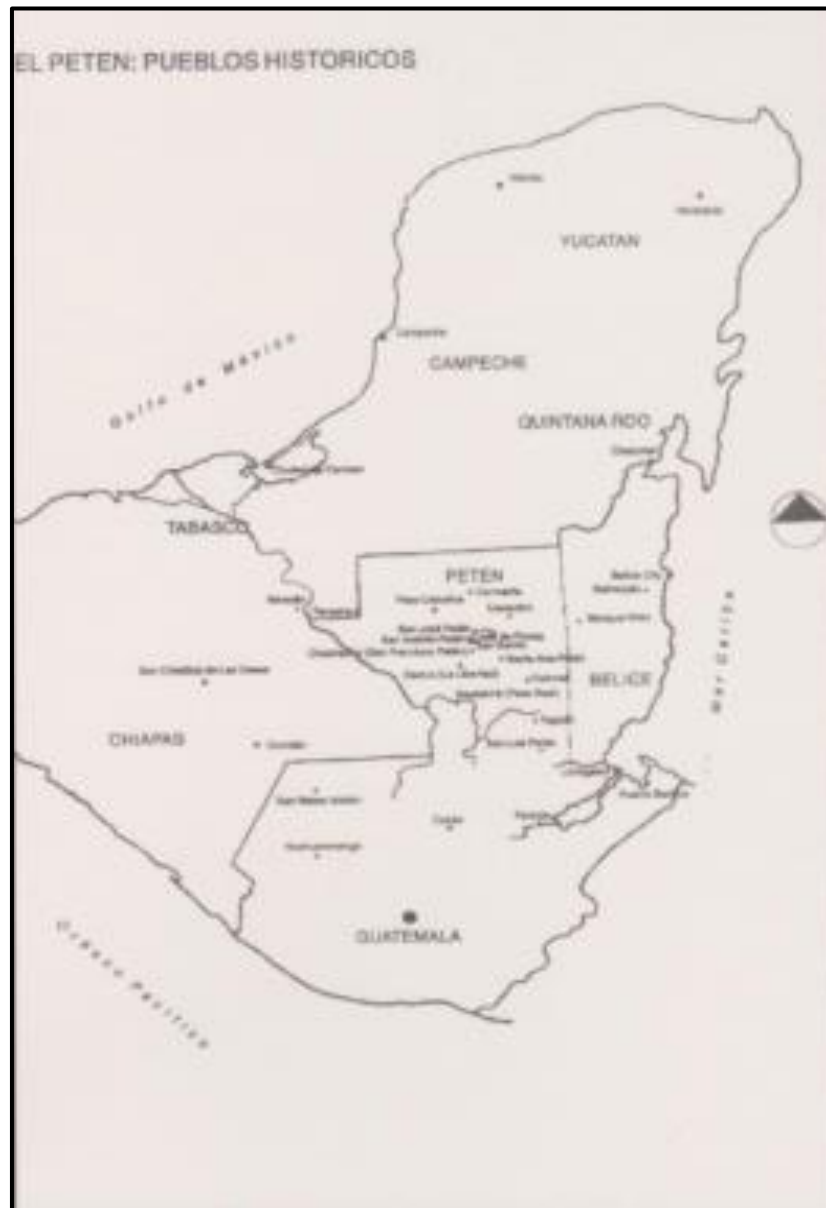
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University of San Carlos de Guatemala



Center for Folklore Studies



“Chiclero: the *chiclería* was a decisive activity throughout this century in Petén; in the cover photo we can see an authentic ‘chiclero’, a person whose job was the extraction of latex of the chicozapote of which the chewing gum is made. We can see their extraction tools: ropes, machetes, spurs (climbing tree tool), and others, as well as the usual working clothes they wore during the mid-20th century

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# The *Chiclería* in Petén<sup>1</sup>

## Cultural uses and modalities

Alfonso Arrivillaga Cortés

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### Introduction

Chicle and the *chiclería*, as we will see, was and is one of the most important regional and national economic activities. Around this activity not only a new era was born but generations helped to build a social imaginary surrounding it. The *chiclería* had an impact beyond its borders, and there are testimonies about this agricultural activity in the northern area of Huehuetenango, Quiché, Alta Verapaz and Izabal; in the territories of Mexico, Honduras and Belize as well. An extensive topic, with little literature, that only now we are approaching, and we are certain more dedication and research is required.

### Antecedents

"Chicle" is an agglutinant resin, milky and sticky, with which chewing gum<sup>2</sup> is industrially manufactured. Sometimes its fruit is also called the same (it is also known as "chico"). The resin is extracted from the "chicozapote" tree (Manilkara zapota); the countrymen in charge of extraction are called "chicleros," and equally "*chiclear*" is defined as the actual

action of chicle extraction (Santamaría: 1988:83).

Timber made from this tree was a resource known and used by the ancient Mayans; proof of this are the lintels of chicozapote, found in various Mayan temples in the area. It is known that the Mayans chewed "chicle" as a saliva stimulant; it was used in ceremonies and for medical reasons (Morley: 1956:141)<sup>3</sup>. The word Chicle derives from the Nahuatl *Tzictle* and from the Mayan *sicte*<sup>4</sup> words now used universally.

Previous to chicle extraction in Petén was Hule (rubber tree) extraction, an activity already documented since 1874. Soza (1970:80) indicates that these workers, after returning from long work seasons, brought with them little figurines in various forms like hearts, doves, and others.

was made in 1893, from the sap of the fir tree. However, it did not last long due to the tree's declining population, for which they were forced to look for a substitute, in which there was also 'jelutong' (*Dyera Costulata*) which was even mixed with chicle itself.

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1. This article is part of a larger study on the forest resources in Petén. It was realized with the support of the Casa Larú Duna (Larú Duna House): Anthropology and Conservation for Development.
  2. The first chewing gum in the United States of North America

3. Currently, some *chicleros* who get infested with *colmoyote* larva (*dermatobia hominis* larvae), use chewed resin to suffocate and force the larva out of their epidermis. Another common illness is the so-called Chiclero Fly, which upon biting the ears or nose, causes great deformation.
4. Konrad (1980:2), points out that the Aztecs used it for hygienic and medicinal purposes. Its public use was forbidden to women, in addition to young women not being able to do so. Only married women and widows could do so in private. It has to be added that chewing chicle in public by men was accepted in Campeche and Yucatan, until 1930. In Guatemala, the patterns of conduct and social habits of its use were penalized and viewed with great reservation. Throughout this century, social perceptions were not well seen. The same occurred in the United States itself, which was the largest consumer. There, feminine garments were made that could hide the tablets of chewing gum.



***Society Petén Ladies: The society of that time got some economic benefits as a result of the chiclería boom. Isla de Flores turned out to be the most important setting of the Petén shining society. We can see in the photo some queens of beauty pageants along with their misses.***

### **Chicle: Its history**

At the end of the last century, the extraction and exportation of chicle was important for the states of Veracruz, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán, and part of what today is known as Quintana Roo, in Mexico, Belize, and the Department of Petén in Guatemala. This extractive system would grow exponentially, achieving great significance in the regional and national economy. Within its development framework, we encounter demographic migrations, the consolidation of human settlements, commercial

routes are cemented, and a collective imaginary is developed regarding the *chiclería* within the local Petén society.

Soza (1970:89) indicates that in 1897 North American scientists arrived in Petén to study the milky properties of certain trees and their surroundings. When they went back, they took chicle models with them. In 1898, businesspeople arriving via Belize indicated to the *Hule* contractors the importance of changing the activity in favor of chicle production, since an important market sector was

developing in the United States of America<sup>5</sup>.

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5. After the small models, small figures were made, which were accompanied by small stamps (Lujan Muñoz: 1967). Until a decade ago it was possible to buy fragmented chicle in the markets; this is becoming less and less frequent. In 1994, I suggested to Cecilia Morales, an EPS (Supervised Professional Practice) student from the School of Biology, USAC, that she propose again to the community its fabrication, with the aim of finding other alternative paths to sustainability.



The first commercial extraction endeavors in Petén accounted for in March 1895. In the San Andrés community, the municipal council session determines the payment of one real (Spanish colonial currency) for each quintal of extracted chicle. In 1900, Chicle was already a significant economic activity for the department, which, together with Yucatán and Belize (known then as British Honduras), consolidated as important recollection and exportation hubs (Soza: 1970:90).

### ***Chiclería: Organization and Production***

The first link in the production and contracting chain happens between transnational companies and national governments. The companies at the same time established relationships with national contractors, which made contractors want to consolidate production into a monopoly. They were the ones in charge of labor force recruitment and securing production to achieve assigned quotas. In contemporary Petén, the middleman phenomenon is generalized. The engagement of countrymen for the job is achieved through payments in advance (Schwartz:sf:7). At that time Wrigley Chicle Development arrived to the granted lands (Schwartz:sf:10). Main camps were built in the middle of the jungle, to the north

of Uaxactún, Paso Caballos, Carmelita, and Dos Lagunas. Here, warehouses and laboratories were installed to analyze raw material to verify its quality. During this period, airstrips were built inside the forested area, and for some time it worked to get the product out to the USA via Mexico.

### ***Aviation and Chiclería***

The production area required infrastructure development for transportation; the introduction of planes was an ideal solution. In October 1929, the famous pilot Charles Lindbergh did a flyover and visited the area; at the time, he was flying for Panamerican Airways<sup>6</sup>, which was looking for new commercial routes. It is obvious the interest of transnational companies to break into the scene of new communication routes in the region. The construction of airstrips increased; by 1930, the Santa Elena beach aerodrome (in front of the Isla de Flores) was finished, and almost all municipal seats had airstrips, San Francisco, La Libertad, Dolores, Melchor de Mencos, as in many chicle recollection centers, deep in the jungle; Uaxactún, Tikal, Carmelitas, Paso Caballos, Dos Lagunas, all located to the north of the department, and the first-class chicle producers alongside those from Santo Toribio and Poptún, where the second-class chicle, also called "*chiquibul*,"

was collected. By the 40's, airlines were well known, like Panamerican, Aerovías, and TACA, time later will appear other air service companies<sup>7</sup>.

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6. The arrival of such a renowned aviator, the first to have made a transatlantic flight, seems to have remained engraved in the historical memory of this town, and the event is still remembered by some elders (Zetina Aldana: 1996:28-29).
  7. I have always maintained the hypothesis that air routes and sustained extraction economies are congruent as mechanisms for the conservation of the environment. In Petén, upon changing this dynamic of air routes, the impacts on the environment have run at a greater speed. environment have run at a greater speed.





*"Aircraft with Chicle Cargo." Between 1890 and 1970 the Chicle business was the key of the economy of Petén, although nowadays it still has a special place, due to its boom and some development of new air routes which allow the transference of extracted resources to the most remote places of the department. We can see in the photo the Aircraft For Trimotor model with its chicle cargo at the airport of Santa Elena, located in front of the Isla de Flores. The 1 kilometer long and 200-meter-wide airstrip was like the one in la Libertad, San Francisco, Dolores, Paso Caballos, Carmelita, Uaxactún, Dos Lagunas, Sogío, Santo Toribio, Poptún, Melchor, key places for the air navigation development. At that time the Aerovías de Guatemala traveled with an American Crew that appears in the photo. The Chicle bags that we can see were destined to Chicago to be delivered to Wrigley Import Company.*

### **Social organization in the *chiclería***

Due to the complexities in social interrelations, we do not pretend to be exact in the description; we want only to point out some elements of their constitution.

#### **The "*Monteo*"**

As we indicated, the previously described logging camp structure was key in the *chiclería*'s

development. The custom of selecting "*monteros*" (this is a term for people skilled in the activity of *monteo*, which is the scouting and selecting suitable forest area for chicle extraction,) for them to select the working fields called "*Hatos*" was a common occurrence in both activities. Zetina Ozaeta (1995:16) talks about the orientation skills they had, during the day using the Sun as a guide and at night the North Star

and the Southern Cross, occasionally with the assistance of a compass. Besides, they could calculate the time of day using the sun's position on the horizon. They were capable of traveling long distances and returning to the starting point after two or three days of walking. They were tasked to mark the *Hatos* that would be used by the hired *chicleros*; hence, they were cautious to choose those with an abundance of chicozapote trees



as well as watering holes and streams for them to have access to the vital liquid.

### The Season

This consists of the timeframe during which the chicleros must be "in the woods" or "out in the mountain". This productive cycle is associated with natural cycles. The *chiclería* required humidity; therefore, it happens in winter (In this tropical context, "winter" refers to the rainy season, which provides the necessary humidity for the chicle latex to flow.). Previously, the seasons were up to 6 and 7 months, spanning June and July, starting in the rainy season, up until January and February. By then, the chiclero knew that once the season started, he would not leave the jungle until it was over, and only for reasons of force majeure would he end up leaving the area. This situation had a psychological impact on the working population, primarily on those who were adventuring for the first time. It was like diving into a ritualistic passage that fed the imaginary for and about the chicleros.

### The Sangrado (The Tapping)

For the chicle extraction, the chicleros went deep into the Humid Tropical Forest, located to the North of Petén (now located within the Maya Biosphere Reserve), with their

extraction tools: ropes, machetes, spurs, and other equipment like hammocks, mosquito nets, cooking gear, rifles, and dogs. They were to survive a long season inside the mountain. There, while settled in a camp, they moved in search of the chicozapote tree to apply their V-shaped<sup>8</sup> incisions (Zetina Ozaeta: 1995:17).

8. It refers to channels made with the machete, which are interconnected and through which the resin pours, which is collected in a cotton bag that is tied at the base of the tree. Most of the time the chiclero cuts some branches from the chicozapote canopy.



*"Chiclero": the chiclería was a decisive activity throughout this century in Petén; in the infographic we can see an authentic 'chiclero', a person whose job was the extraction of latex of the chicozapote of which the chewing gum is made. We can see the extraction tools: ropes, machetes, spurs (climbing tree tool), and others, as well as the usual working clothes they wore during the mid-20th century.*



The daily routine of their work could be summarized as this: it starts very early in the morning. If in the camp there is no cook, at 3 in the morning, maize is ground, and tortillas are made (they can also be flour-based) for the day's "lonche" (a local term for a substantial packed meal taken into the field for midday). Around 6 or 7 in the morning, they leave the camp. Regularly, it is needed to travel several kilometers to reach the job site. There, it is required to pick up the bags from the tapped trees—the "sangrados"—from the previous day, and they will be poured into a bag known as "chivo" or "acaparadoras", that they will carry with them once the workday is over. When the collected latex coagulates at the foot of the tree, it is called "virgin gum," and the consistency prior to coagulation is known as "chiclosa" or gummy. They select trees to be tapped and will make them bleed; for such a task, a rope is used around their waist that also goes around the tree, with a tool called "ropo," and they climb the tree. This same technique is employed by Americans but with spiky boots, although in this region it is uncommon. The chicleros in Petén use spurs. Production and quotas are subject to other factors. Chicleros often work in groups of three or two minimum; this allows them to come to the assistance of the other if required by accident, which could happen

if the main rope fails unexpectedly—this is one of the most common incidents—the bite of a venomous snake, or due to illness. The amount of gum collected by the chiclero depends on different factors: on one hand, time and humidity levels<sup>9</sup>; on the other hand, the skills and techniques employed by the chiclero<sup>10</sup> and the work hours. Chicleros indicate that besides being "handy," "luck" is decisive. Here is the crossroad of the chiclero's wisdom: rainforest survival, know-how for orientation, and the use of medicinal plants, etc.

On weekends, they used to cook the collected resin stored in a large bag known as "depósito." Cooking it is hard and tiresome due to the temperatures needed, which must be sustained for more than two continuous hours, and the thickness and stickiness of the resin. Generally, the chicleros from one camp help each other to cook it. This process allows it to be packaged, as well as sealed using a wooden mold called "the devil's press" (Schwartz:sf:8), which gives an ID to the gum and links it to the chiclero who collected it and their contractor.

### Forms of jobs and supervision

Due to the dispersed and itinerant nature of the activity, proper supervision is hard to achieve. Due to this, the collection processes cannot be directly and

fully supervised by the contractors, and this responsibility relies on the field manager. In some instances, they were also in charge of the supervision of "patachos" (train of mules used for transporting goods and chicle) and "arrias" (a smaller train of six animals). The field manager's task is to supervise and manage tasks related to the relationship between the chiclero and the contractor, that is why they will need to have mathematical skills, with the goal of making reports related to production or to fill out solicitations for groceries, medicine, machetes, and boots as well. He will have to intervene between employees if there are discrepancies and make sure order is kept, and if a *Hato* or camp is not reaching quotas, it will be him who is in charge of "making changes," to move the workers to a high yield working area.

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9. For example, Konrad (1980:17) says that if there is a 'drying wind,' the resin will harden before it can be brought to the large bag and will force the chiclero to wait for better weather.
  10. Knowing how to create the channels is important for good production. If the tree is not well tapped, and the channels penetrate the cambium or the wood of the tree, insects can enter through here and cause the death of the tree (Konrad:1980:17).





Finally, they will need to monitor humidity in order to comply with the quality required by the contractor, and if their time allows them, they can also extract some quintals of the chicle. For all of this, he received a commission, besides a percentage for each quintal produced in the camp and a special price for the extraction done "by his own machete" (Zetina Ozaeta: 1995:17). Many of the field managers, who came from the muleteers and distinguished themselves from their coworkers for their commitment and good management capacity, made a good career for themselves in the *chiclería*<sup>11</sup>.

The control of the transportation means, the *patachos* of the **mules**, are property of individual transporters and sometimes of the contractors, this being the only activity outside the control of the chiclero. Since the lack of control, on occasions a chiclero used to mix the resin with a different type, one called "*Chiquibul*," or with a Ramón resin (*Brosimum alicastrum*). For that, blending recipes exist, aiming at making adulteration undetectable. This variant has a market demand at a lower price, though.

In 1970, the "Conguaco" company built a series of roads within the area, wanting to facilitate the timber industry.

This has helped with access to roads leading to the chiclero camps<sup>12</sup> (although many of these "roads" are closed due to vegetation). Settlements like Uaxactún, Carmelita, and Paso de Caballos are now easier to access through dirt roads. From these towns, a series of roads called "Trocopaz" (an *aportmanteau* of "troco" from tractor and "paz" of peace, roads bulldozed by tractors) extends, and thanks to those, it is easier to arrive at the recollection points. This ease of movement situation has modified the patterns of permanency inside the *Hatos*.

### The chiclero camp

This is made of various shelters, with roofs made of guano leaf palm, constructed by the chicleros themselves and built to survive the season.

Because of their ephemeral purpose, many of these are denominated "*champas*". Some camps used to have cooks<sup>13</sup>, "*maistras*;" they helped alleviate work for the chicleros and *arrieros*, which was tiresome and intense. From the extraction camp to the recollection points, vast distances separated them, up to 12 kilometers; because of this, the cook provided a "*lonche*" for the afternoon. Each month she received a specified number of pounds of chicle; the remaining "*pachochas*" left from the containers were gifted to her by the chicleros. From this luck,

many secured earnings that surpassed those of the chicleros themselves (Zetina Ozaeta: 1995:20). Nowadays, they are paid in cash.

The field manager indicated the end of the season to the chicleros, and they would leave the camp as soon as they could. By then, the *arrieros* were the ones in charge of finishing cooking the collected chicle. While in the middle of the chicle recollection season, these camps were the social center of these countrymen. Here, in some leisure moments, music accompanied by guitar, violin, or accordion could be heard. Now, the use of portable radios seems to be more common (Arrivillaga: 1993:17). At night, fantastic and real stories were narrated. Here, anonymous heroes from the *chiclería* circle were born.

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11. Zetina Ozaeta (1996:24) points out the case of *Don Manuel Carbajal*, who at one time was a field manager for the firm Tager Hnos and who came to achieve the position of Export Agent in Guatemala City.

12. What has not yet been studied is the impact of the roads on a territory where, in addition to the natural corridors, its communications have been by air.

13. The oral tradition indicates that it was a cook who became famous, whom they called '*Chatona*,' and who is often remembered in popular dances with a giantess that bears that name.



The camps were a lair of *duendes* (in Latin American folklore, these are mischievous, goblin-like spirits or gnomes believed to inhabit the wilderness) and *Tzisimites* (a fearsome, ape-like mythical creature from Mayan folklore, said to live in the high mountains and forests), or of the beautiful *Ixtabay* (a seductive female spirit from Mayan mythology), who drove many chicleros insane. Here, the imaginary about chicleros and *chiclerías* grew, which echoed in the populated centers.

In some camps, stories of ghosts are commonplace. It is said they are chicleros, some other thieves or "*wecheros*" (illegal extractors) who died while working or on the run. The Santa María camp, which is very close to a large archaeological site, a "ruin," is famous because there are hauntings. At night, the noise of *arreas* or *patachos* is heard, *arrieros* yelling and voices. The chicleros wake up, shed light on the place where the noise is coming from... and they see nothing. There are *arrieros* who avoid sleeping at that place. If they do, they bring with them blessed water, rue, or they burn chicle. Other famous stories are the ones related to the sighting of large animals, which can be jaguars or pumas, eating at the camp at night, nearby the campfires without fear of people (Cecilia Morales, personal communication: Oct:1997).

The camps received different allusive toponymic names, geographic marks, archaeological sites, situation-related names, or anecdotes, etc. In the area next to Uaxactún, we found the road Biótopo Dos Lagunas Achotal, San Blas, Santa María, Caldero, Cántaro Pulguero, and near the Dos Lagunas from the Parque Nacional El Mirador, the Vitrola camp, La Aguada, and El Ceibo. Zetina Ozaeta (1995:17) adds to this list: El Chilar, La Muerta (The Dead Woman), El Hospital, El Espolón (The Spur), La Unión (The Union), La Linterna, La Bacinica (The Bedpan), Los Pescados, La Pasadita (The Quick Stop), El Habanero, El Palmar (The Palm Grove), and Los Lagartos (The Lizards). Besides the already known Paso Caballos, Carmelita, Yaxha, and Dos Lagunas. In these camps there gathered between 8, 10, and up to 15 people. They shared no kinship ties, and they came from different places of origin.

### Other activities: hunting

The chicleros practiced hunting, although it was not a frequent activity as is commonly thought. If there was some spare time within the daily activities, they would dedicate it to hunting. *Chiclear* (chicle tapping) is demanding work, and it absorbs the majority of the time. Hunting is done on Saturdays or Sundays, or before sunset; if the chiclero

has made his way back sooner for not having had a good day. There is a possibility the chiclero had his rifle on him while working, had the luck to see some animal, and kill it. For that, he makes use of a rifle, with the help of dogs and a "*foco*" (lantern), when he is hunting nocturnal animals. The most precious gain is the dwarf brocket, wild boar, deer, *tepescuintle* (spotted paca), the ocellated turkey known as Petén turkey, crested guan, and pheasant. Hunting has no economic value and is more a contributor to the protein diet of neighboring camps. Another bit of this meat is salted to help extend its preservation. Besides a rifle, they can make use of pre-Hispanic traps made of stone that are used to hunt the *tepescuintle*.

There is no doubt about the skills achieved in this art. Hunters used to use tapescos (elevated hunting blinds or platforms), next to the watering holes. Here, they would spend the night waiting to "spotlight" or "blind with light" and thus dazzle their prey, which was headed to consume water. We also know these countrymen use the "*tigrera*" (a hunting method or trap), known by the Ch'ol ethnic group. Hunting helps to build a special sensation; in a way, there is an aesthetic in the activity, which besides giving joy and enjoyment, provides sustenance. They count on a vast knowledge of the animal population and their behavior.



*"Chicle Tree." Inside the jungle of Petén, we can find chicozapote trees with V-shaped incisions which were made to tap the tree and get latex, the main ingredient of chewing gum. In this same place allspice and xate is extracted, both of them were important in the countryside economy of the department. At the same time fibers of sabal yapa, for basked and medicinal plants, are extracted.*

Meat obtained by the hunter is butchered and prepared by himself unless someone else offers to help him. The prey is regularly shared with other chicleros. When there is hunting, the diet varies, and the animal protein missing from the chiclero diet is supplied. As we stated before, hunting in the *chiclería* is a complementary activity.

#### **Activities derived from the *chiclería*: Tanning and the *Macasino***

There exists a clear relationship between the *chiclería* and tanning. These are the leather workers who elaborate the girths and halters for the arriería, the *macasinos* ( type of traditional, handmade moccasin-style footwear.), the leggings, the straps for the spur, the wide belts used to protect against hernias when lifting heavy weight, the machete sheaths, and other articles used by the chicleros. For

that reason, it is not odd that in the "golden age", the tanneries were of important relevance as qualified work. Burgos and Contreras (22:1993) referred that since the end of the last century, these families were famous for their work in the tanning business: Benita Ayala and sons, Cruz Reinoso and sons, Francisco Morales and son, Jacinto Castellanos, Próspero Pinelo Romero, Jovito Berges, Marcelino Pinelo, Andrés Carío and son, and the Claudio and Feliciano Burgos family. The latter, represented today in *Don Rubén Burgos Fión*, lies a tradition that seems to vanish.

The tanneries were placed on the shore of the Petén Itza lake, due to the requirements of this activity. It 's primary location was on the "*isolote*" known as "la Curtiembre" (today "la garrucha," in San Miguel). In the processes of tanning, there exists an encounter of Indigenous and Spanish techniques, out of which the use of bark stands out, for the leather to gain a better consistency (Burgos y Contreras: 1993:23)<sup>14</sup>. The rest of the

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14. Regarding this, Don Rubén Burgos mentions, for example, that the bark of *chucum* (*Pithecolobium albicans*) and *Tzalam* (*Lysiloma bahamensis*) allows for a great finish on the leathers. The barks are provided by the woodcutters who work for the central area.



The rest of the processes of tanning are the common ones: liming, washing of the leather, and the tanning or the application of the tree bark or rinds, to finally leave the leather soaking. Finally comes the process of drying and polishing, "*alijadores*" (smooth flat-tipped tools, made out of chicozapote wood), which give them the final touch.

Even though in the *chiclería* the most used pieces are from cattle, in the traditional Petén tanning, and mainly in the elaboration of the *macasino*, hides from "forest animals" are used. The origins of this footwear are known to be pre-Columbian. Many travelers have an interest in these goods. The fact that their use has persisted and, in a way, it is an element that identifies Petén, it is hard not to give importance to it. It captures our attention that the tanneries were popular during the golden era. The answer was that this activity required skilled personnel<sup>15</sup>, and that was achieved thanks to the tanneries. Nowadays, the rubber boot is the most common in the market. The sheaths and belts for the spur are still in use.

### The *Arriería*

The *arriería* is a basic component for the success of the *chiclería* operations; that is why we consider it a complementary activity. Although nowadays the demand has decreased due to the

already built roads, this still persists. In the *arriería*, there are two groups: "the *arrea*" which is the group of six beasts, five pack animals and one saddled one, ridden by the *arriero*, in charge of guiding the other animals. Each animal carries two quintals, and it is not convenient to overload them, because the season is extensive and the roads taxing. The other group is "*el patacho*," conformed by twenty mules, six saddled ones, and another called "*campanera*" the bell mare, which is the lead mule, who spearheads the group and is guided by a laborer known as "*jalayegua*" who was the laborer in charge of leading the bell mare. The *arrieros*' control is under a foreman who is also in charge of feeding the pack animals, their cleaning, and taking care of their health. Besides, they oversee the weighing process and the goods taken to the camps (Zetina Ozaeta: 1996:18), and sometimes they will be promoted to be a Field Manager.

He is the one in charge of delivering chicle to the company; that is why they pay special attention to the supervision of the product, especially paying attention to the cooking process and that moisture was low enough. Otherwise, the operation must be repeated. He is accountable for selling the molded blocks. The *arrieros* are in charge of loading the pack

animals in a proper and balanced way. In winter, they are loaded with a "light" load, to be able to maneuver the "lows". In this way, they could pass through the bridle paths, which span five to six miles. After long hours, they will unload the pack animals and remove the tack, give them something to drink, and find an appropriate place for them to drink water. At the end, the *arrieros* will go to "*ramonear*", for which they should locate a ramón tree, to which they climb to cut branches, fruits, and sometimes tree bark, which they use to feed the animals.

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15. Adelaida Herrera, from the School of History, IIHAA, is currently working precisely on this line of research, the connection between the footwear industry as a key element for the development of the *chiclería*. This type of activity and the wildness of the environment forced the population to produce better footwear, unlike other regions of the country. In that sense, the demand was met to a certain extent by local industry. The artisanal tanneries of San Cristóbal and Carchá in Alta Verapaz had better luck. Foreigners arrived here, who in addition to knowing tanning techniques, had a better opportunity to grow in their markets, even taking them to global competition. By 1940, footwear made in Carchá was advertised to the *chiclería* in El Petén.





The "*jalayegua*" always goes in front, and with discipline, he takes care of the animals following him. If they fall in a "bajo" (known by others as "cantelul," "el venado," "salsipuedes," "el quiebraculo"), they must fight to avoid the animal from getting bogged down. For that, they should remove the load and take the animal out of the mudhole. The "*jalayegua*," once he has reached his destination, seeks food and prepares it for the arrival of the *arrieros*. The common dishes: beans, coffee sweetened with panela, at some point a "thin cut" of "wild meat," and a "habanero" chile. At the end of the shift, he should look for a "*paraje*", a stopping place used for an overnight stay, where he will spend his night. If it rains, he will improvise a "*champa*" which is a temporary, improvised shelter; if not, they will spend the night in the open air, using only a hammock and a mosquito net (Zetina Ozaeta: 1996:21).

### The impact of *chiclería* in other spheres

If we read the advertisements in the Revista Petén Itza<sup>16</sup>, the most authentic written media of the mestizos in Petén, we will find instances of chicle. In their news, in their lyrical exaltations of prose and tales, in their recreations, are proof of the impact this activity had within society. Let us carry out the

exercise of this reading through the commercials of one (Revista Petén Itza:1941), of the copies of this magazine. The first advertisement we find, and one of the few from Wrigley Import Company, is "exporters of Chicle, Chicago USA, Uaxactún, Flores, Petén, Guatemala". The other firm that enjoyed a full page was, La Compañía Nacional de Aviación, AEROVÍAS (12 calle poniente No 6). The advertisement indicates that it covered an itinerary that corroborates what was stated in the section on Chicle and aviation. "For Petén: every Tuesday and Friday leaving La Aurora airport, at 8 a.m... the plane will make stops in Flores, Paso Caballos, Carmelita, Dos Lagunas and Uaxactún continuing to Puerto Barrios...". Other firms from Guatemala City itself also appear offering their services through this medium; Santiago Potter G. "... Direct import, unbeatable prices, specialty articles for the *chiclería*... unconditionally at the service of chicle contractors..." S. Potter G. 17 calle oriente, No 38 Guatemala. Another, the Ferretería CASA BLANCA, of F. Koenigsberger & Co (7a. av, sur, between 8a and 9a calle Oriente), makes available: machetes, cables, canvas and assorted complementary articles for *chicleros*.

Among other Petén businesses, the following stand out: La

Esmeralda (in the Petén commercial center), of Julián R. Alvarado, where one could also contact the Aerovías company. It offered articles for *chicleros*: "machetes, axes, whetstone, sharpening files, enameled cast iron pots, jute rope...(and then they add),... La Esmeralda, has put its focus in the *chiclera* business and exports the best chewing gum of the world, *even was awarded with the gold medal during the exhibition festival in 1935...*". The Tager family had have several business, such as "La Estrella Errante" (in the commercial store of Calle Centro América), and they mentioned about Nicolás N. Tager; "he was the owner and chicle contractor who worked with the well known Wrigley Import Co Company, that is why he has all kinds of necessary tools for the *chicleros* job..."

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16. Previously in Petén, El Impulso (1927-29), El Amigo del Pueblo (1928), and Tayasal (1941) had been published. It is in this framework that the edition of the Revista Petén Itza begins, which now celebrates sixty years of life (Arrivillaga 1997). Given its character and included material, it is an obligatory source for the study of the recent history of this Department.



***Isla de Flores: Which was called Itza, then Nuestra Señora de los Remedios village, next San Pablo del Itza to finally bear the name of Isla de Flores. It is located at the centre of the Department of Petén, which was the management center of the department, hence, was very influenced by the boom of the Chiclería in Petén. At this place were located the houses of the most important contractors, as well as commercial business and accommodation.***

The Commercial Center (Av. Democracia, Cda Flores), "...you also can find all kind of tools for the *chiclería* related work..." and Tager Hnos<sup>17</sup> in the big Commercial Center (corner of the calle 10 de noviembre) and avenida La Reforma, Flores, Petén "...*chiclería* implements such as spurs, sharpening files, whetstones, axes, machetes, pewter plates to cook...at the Salón Ideal..." Some of the others business we can mention El Sol of Rosendo Robles B. "...fine footwear and field footwear, spur straps and any other implement for the job at the

*chiclería*, good prices and high quality merchandise..." and "La Moderna," owned by José María Penados Pinel "...every kind of merchandise...with special offers for *chicleros*, due to old credits and a large number of select customers..."

### **Imaginary about the *chiclería***

Given the economic importance of the *chiclería* in the region, it played an important role within Petén society, which contributed to creating a series of representations about the *chicleros*.

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17. Besides this well-known *chicle* contractors, we can mention Rubén and Acisclo Alvarado, Atiliano Cámara, Federico Zetina, Rodrigo Zetina Cano, Antonio Cambranes, José Victor Miss Pacheco, Jesús Baldizon Marroquín, Emilio Dángel, Filadelfo Fisión Garma, Antonio Ortiz. And in Fallabón (today Melchor de Mencos) we have to named Casanova Brothers, Morfín Brothers, and in the Libertad the Barquín Brothers and José Mendoza (Zetina Aldana:1995:20).



We coincide with Schwartz (sf), who points out that these images were positive and negative. Its constant use as a literary resource in the mestizo population exemplifies the dimension of its impact. The most known example is the work *Guayacán* by Virgilio Rodríguez Macal, where the chicleros play a key part in the story.

Older people lived or heard with luxurious detail stories of the famous era of the *chiclería*. The two most important moments of this manifestation were of a public type, so they were lived by other people, these were the beginning and the end of the season because it is remembered that the chicleros achieved economic positions of certain comfort, and that they used to wear good clothes in the days prior to and at the end of the season. It was when they made purchases for the family. What is most remembered were the great parties, the fine liquors they drank, the imported cigarettes, which it is said they would light with bills. To make it short, it was said that great feasts were held and activities contrary to the modesty of the communities were done there. Villages like Melchor de Mencos and El Cayo, in Belize, grew in an exorbitant way as a result of this activity. The beginnings of the season were noticed in La Libertad, in San Andrés, in San Benito, Santa Elena, Flores, in Dolores itself

and Poptún. At that time, proverbs like “too little for a chiclero” were born, which referred to his economic power and value as a man of the mountain. The word *chicle* can also have a figurative use to refer to a person who is clingy, we can see this meaning in the expression “you seem like *chicle*”, which is very common to refer to a person who is always next to another.

People think of them as people of all types, including criminals, good-for-nothings, and capable of the worst atrocities, even murder. This idea will contribute to forming itself from the fact that in the *chiclería* season, in the camps, they live outside the law. During this period many times they would break the law, at that moment violence was common, especially when liquor existed. One of the motives for violence is without a doubt the promiscuity in which they have to live, and the difficult conditions in which the chiclero must remain in the jungle carrying out his work, in the rainiest winters must be added. Also, we had to add to all that, the illnesses, the torturous systems of engagement and credits, the lack of education and illiteracy, conditions that have not changed.

But there are also positive ideas about chicleros, people think of them as experts and the wisdom

of the jungle. In places where for others it is difficult to pass into, the chiclero is capable of venturing alone and surviving with the minimum conditions. He is capable and knows how to endure a hard life, is distinguished by being skillful and intelligent, as bearer of great physical strength to be able to carry out his labors, in the mountain sometimes called “hell”. The chiclero, besides knowing the mountain, knows about fauna and its edible and medicinal plants, about its dangers and secrets, about the behavior of the weather, among other things. The Chiclero has been the ideal pathfinder, accompanying the archaeological discoveries of the Mayan area. Now this is a profession of the countrymen, while dedicating to this they can have a sustainable and rational economy.

Chicleros greatly enjoys stories and are given to seeking the moments to externalize them. Schwartz (sf:23), the solitary of this arduous work, has been reflected through poetry which was collected among some chicleros. Besides, we find a language full of proverbs, like “the chiclero doesn't ask for change”, which remind us of the era of economic prosperity. Their life in the camp had moments for songs, some of them are ‘*venadito*’ and the ‘*mixito*’ are still remembered, as well as the



one of the woodpeckers '*jolonte*' known as the song of the chicleros. To these songs collections must be added the '*rancheras*' of Mexican origin. They are also very given to dirty jokes, which always begin thus: "...there was once a chiclero..."

One of the facts for which the chicleros must bear great courage is because in the jungle inhabits the *Duende*, a species of «*alux*» of Mayan oral tradition. This one manifests with whistles in the mountain, lives in the highlands and throws down the resin collected by the chicleros. The bravest confront him and some dare to make pacts with him, but the costs are of great magnitude, including death.

The inhabitants of Flores and the nearby towns remember "La Partida" (The Leaving) as the moment when large quantities of workers headed to the camps. Those who went to Carmelitas and Paso Caballos headed to San Andrés from where they departed, since many of the contractors' houses were found here. From the beach known as "La Trinidad" left those who were on their way to Uaxactún. Those who went to Yaxha and Fallabón (today Melchor de Mencos) headed to El Remate. Product of the *chiclería* boom, some people bought outboard marine motors, some of great capacity like "El Alfa", "El Atlas" property of Dr. Roberto

Boburg, the "Anahuac" of Juan Nicolau and later other transports property of Tirso Morales Pinelo, José María Penados and Miguel Tager. At the end of the season, once the payments were made, many chicleros went to a great party and the squandering of what was earned was a common thing. It is still remembered (Zetina Ozaeta: 1996:21) that in the Hotel Novedades of Antonio Cambranes "...the whole Chiclerada (the group of chicleros) would crowd in, although the hotel has three levels... Many times, it was not enough to accommodate the chicleros who came from all parts; principally from the municipalities of the department, from Alta and Baja Verapaz, Belize and Mexico, especially from Tabasco, Campeche and Yucatán..."

### Conclusions

The timber exploitation created, in a certain way, conditions that facilitated the *chiclería*. This, leaning on the management logic of that business, the timber exploitation, using its workers, experts of the jungle, as the key vehicle for its development. The positive outcome of chicle in the national economy, with an upward projection, made it an important alternative for subsistence for the peasantry. That economic prosperity was marked in the memory of the chicleros and in the inhabitants of

the urban centers, who in a certain way were beneficiaries.

This framework of economic boom defines new migrations. Population contingents, culturally differentiated from the Petén People, these migrations will arrive throughout this century in search of a better future, which was hoped to be achieved with the extraction of chicle. The system of engagement through debts was without a doubt the main step of the chain through which the hiring of personnel was made. The link with the contractors was through the field manager, who was in charge of the control of the field. The contractors, on the other hand, dealt with the international chicle companies, which meant that these were the main beneficiaries. The impact of these transnationals was decisive in Petén society in general and in the national economy. This was a business that allowed the prosperity of interest groups close to and within power.

Both the organization of this activity and the business spheres related to it at different levels and spaces, allowed for the structuring of precise forms of control. Despite the low homogeneity of the population in the chiclero camp, forms of control were established that allowed the connection of the countrymen. A fundamental part





was constituted by the system of representations that the countryman elaborated on one hand as part of the inheritance of Mayan orality and on the other, the myths that were born mixed from the oral expressions of the new emigrants. The final fact that the *chiclería* was based on a kind of rite of passage, as Schwartz points out, allowed that heterogeneous collectivity to connect under a common symbol: “the *chiclería*”.

The *chiclería* also modified the footwear patterns in the population. The fact of needing footwear, ideally boots and leggings, made much of the population that until that moment had been barefoot, became shod. This situation brought with it the increase of the tanning, which besides providing shoes, also covered the requirements of girths for the pack animals and the belts to practice climbing the trees. Perhaps it was this boom that allowed the expression of Petén footwear known as *macasino* to last until our days.

Another way to approach the reading of that economic boom is by detecting the large number of businesses dedicated to this activity, some from the capital city. In the same way, there is a boom in the development of commercial aviation in the department. This will play a key role in the development of the *chiclería* and will be the way the

product is moved from the collection centers abroad. Aviation also constituted an important form of communication for the Petén people abroad. In the same way, it would allow access to important Chiclero centers in the middle of the jungle. This contributed so that the environmental damage was not as accelerated as on the land routes where the population advances with it in a dynamic proper to the agricultural frontier. In that sense, these settlements can be visualized, given the modalities of production and access, as a forest frontier.

Very far from this scenario was the minds of the youth of the 60s and 70s of Guatemala City and other urban centers that received television signal, was marked by “Chiclet's Adams”, due to its advertising with which consumers identified, besides being the most common in the market. Today, due to the presence of other chewing gums from transnational companies like Wrigley itself, these impacts have diminished.

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#### Notes on the photographic collection of VICTOR M. VADILLO

Sylvia Shaw Arrivillaga<sup>1</sup>

Guatemala is, without a doubt, a privileged country for photography. Demonstrated by the great masters of this art that since the end of the last century and throughout this century has made that this visual expression to have an important place in contemporary Guatemalan art.

In 1987 Alfonso Arrivillaga Cortés found a photographic collection of the master Víctor M. Vadillo in the hands of Marco Tulio Castellanos Pinelo. The negatives were stuck to each other and had a layer of fungus, which made their total destruction imminent. Considering the historical value of the aforesaid files, we proceeded with the rescue and restoration of them, stopping the processes of deterioration as well as preserving the quality of the same<sup>2</sup>. All this with the aim of enhancing management for the collection.

1. Director of Casa Larú Duna, Anthropology and Conservation for Development.
2. Jairo Chollotío, in charge of the Photography Area of the Center for Folklore Studies helped to get these printed copies.



The photographic heritage includes photos of the natural environment, perspectives of the Isla de Flores and of other historical towns. Activities like the *chiclería*, several aspects of social life such as weddings, families, festival queens, civil and military authorities, Petén traditions, as well as on the development of infrastructure.

Víctor Manuel Vadillo was born in Tabasco, Mexico in 1859. He arrived in Petén after having lived in Mexico for 10 years and in Honduras for 5 years. Then he moved to Guatemala and lived in the Ciudad de Flores until the age of 78. During this time, he taught the crafts of photography to his daughters and his wife who would remain in charge of the photography studio. For health reasons due to his advanced age, he was transferred to Guatemala City where he died on May 10, 1965. It seems that many of the photographs attributed to him in his last years were taken by his wife Julia Castellanos de Vadillo.

This photographic work is of great aesthetic quality and with a signature style. It is a work that without doubt has a great documental value and of great utility for the historical work of the region. Vadillo was part of the team that created the Revista Petén, Itza' in 1937 and judging by the records of the magazine, his work was decisive from the

beginning to the present, where it has always been re-edited.

Vadillo's images have been present through generations in the reading public of this renowned magazine. His participation in this project, along with people like Alejandro Martínez, Juan Nicolao, Ezequiel Soza, Julián Pinelo, among others, demonstrates the important work as promoters of art and culture in this region.

The collection of photographs by Víctor M. Vadillo is important for its aesthetic quality (in form and content) and for being a little-known photographic approach of a region, in a determined time (from 1920-1940).

#### TECHNICAL DATA:

Photographic collection of  
Victor M. Vadillo  
Black and White Negatives 5x7  
inches (12.7x17.8cm)  
Owner: Marco Tulio Castellanos  
Pinelo  
Rescue and management of the  
Collection: Sylvia Shaw  
Arrivillaga.  
Casa Laru-Duna  
Anthropology and Conservation  
for Development

**PHOTOS ON THE  
COVER, BACK COVER  
AND INTERIORS:  
Victor M. Vadillo.**



#### **Church of San Francisco**

**This village was known as “*chachaclum*” (red earth); which soon became an important center for trade and transit. That is how San Francisco was created, as was usual in other villages, a church was built in front of an old ceiba pentandra. The architectural features of these kinds of churches, as well as the houses of these villages keep a similar patter throughout the years (Flores, San José, San Andrés, La Libertad and Dolores).**

#### ***“Chicle Tree.”***

***Inside the jungle of Petén, we can find chicozapote trees with V-shaped incisions which were made to tap the tree and get latex, the main ingredient of chewing gum. In this same place allspice and xate are extracted, both of them were important in the countryside economy of the department. At the same time fibers of sabal yapa, for basket and medicinal plants, are extracted.***





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