The Foundation of San Andrés Huista: A New Light on the Disappearance of the Ancient Maya Village 'Coxho'

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Preface:

This work is the result of ethnographic research conducted in Jacaltenango during 1999 and 2000.

We would like to express our gratitude to the IDB Cultural Center, Guatemala, and ADESCA for the funds provided to carry out this research, and to thank everyone who collaborated with their comments and suggestions.

We hope that this work serves as a starting point for future research on Coxoh, and we encourage other colleagues who have dedicated themselves to studying this topic to continue contributing information.

Introduction:

The ancient Maya village of Coxoh has fascinated many researchers, intrigued by its mysterious disappearance from history; it was once believed to be an extinct community. Its linguistic affiliation within the Maya Family has sparked debates regarding the branch to which it belonged, all based on circumstantial inferences.

Thomas Lee A. W. has proposed that it was a village of the Tzeltalan Branch (currently comprising Tzeltal and Zotzil), arguing that there seems to be continuity among the inhabitants of the region from the Late Preclassic to the arrival of the Spanish. According to Thomas Lee, the Coxoh people are descendants of the ancient centers of Lagartero, Guajilar, and other surrounding sites. His arguments are primarily based on archaeological evidence from his research. From the perspective of material culture, they are well-grounded, although it is difficult to determine the language they spoke solely from this evidence. However, the word "Nen-tón" and other toponyms in northern Huehuetenango are of Tzeltalan origin. This entire area contains sites with characteristics similar to those of eastern Chiapas, particularly during the Classic and Early Postclassic periods. However, sharing many traits in their material culture, especially in elite complexes, does not necessarily mean they shared the same language.

Another perspective, led by Mario Humberto Ruz, identifies them as the ancient Tojolab'al people.

Aligned with this view is Goudru Lekendorf, who conducted ethnohistorical studies in the Comitán area. Carlos

Álvarez carried out several studies in the Postclassic sites of Las Margaritas and Comitán, where he identified remains attributed to the Coxoh. A distinctive feature is the characteristic projectile points, identified by Thomas Lee as "Coxoh points." However, colonial documents refer to the ancient Tojolab'ales as "Q'anab'al," and they also mention the Coxoh people.

Recently, Arturo Lomelí (personal communication) pointed out the correlation between the settlements of the "Huistas" (Jacaltecos) in Chiapas and the ancient region occupied by the Coxoh. In light of the legends about B'alun Q'ana', it is worth exploring this possibility, although these legends explicitly state that he came from the Maya Lowlands, and his dominion seems to have been multi-ethnic (D. Nuttall and Tejada 2000).

All the aforementioned arguments are based on the identification of material remains and the interpretation of colonial documents, but concrete evidence about the language is lacking. Moreover, this remains an academic discussion ultimately intended to satisfy the scientific curiosity of researchers.

A document written in Coxoh, found in the General Archive of the Indies in Seville by Juan Pedro Viqueiras and currently being analyzed by Otto Schuman, may shed light on this controversy and help resolve it definitively.

Without intending to, during 1999-2000, we encountered the descendants of the Coxoh in San Andrés Huista, survivors of the plagues. It was not our intention to get involved in the controversial topic of the Coxoh, but it presented itself directly to us. Upon arriving in Jacaltenango, everyone spoke about the origin of the inhabitants of San Andrés Huista as a group that came from Chiapas. In fact, most people referred to them as "Chamulas," leading us initially to think they were Zotziles.

As more data was gathered, Coneta and the basins of the Lagartero and San Gregorio rivers emerged as the place of origin of this group. The name Coneta and their territory of origin connected them more to the Coxoh than the Zotziles. The inhabitants of San Andrés confirmed the Jacalteco accounts and provided a similar explanation for their departure from their place of origin.

Due to racism from the Ladinos in Chiapas, "Chamula" became a pejorative term to refer to any indigenous person, regardless of their place of origin, which confused the Jacaltecos, who interpreted it as a demonym. However, the Jacaltecos and other inhabitants of the Huehuetenango Department know that the residents of San Andrés Huista came from Chiapas.

In the oral histories of San Andrés and Jacaltenango, there are several accounts that link the current inhabitants of San Andrés Huista to the ancient inhabitants of Coneta.

The analysis of the founding legends of the village provides valuable information

about the fate of the Coxoh and the explanations the natives gave regarding the plagues that decimated the indigenous populations.

The Coxoh in Light of the Oral Tradition of San Andrés Huista and Jacaltenango:

San Andrés Huista is a village in the municipality of Jacaltenango, although it has many differences compared to the others. Firstly, the inhabitants of San Andrés have a different origin from the rest of the inhabitants of Jacaltenango. Originally, the people of San Andrés spoke a different language or, at best, a quite distinct dialect, although they have long since adopted Jacalteco as their language. However, as the municipal authorities of the community informed us, there are still some elders "who still know some words of the old language."

The first references to the village date back to the 18th century, during the Colonial era, when it was a "visiting town" of the Curacy of Jacaltenango.

It is mentioned in the "*Relación Geográfica de Gughutenango*" of 1740 by José de Olavarreta. Archbishop Pedro Cortés y Larráz mentioned it in his "*Descripción de la Arquidiócesis de Guatemala,"* where he detailed the villages he visited during his pastoral tours in the early 1770s. At the end of the century, Joseph Domingo Hidalgo described it in his "*Relación Geográfica de Gueguetenango*" (1796), published in the first volume of the Gazeta de Guatemala in 1797.

The reports agree on the remoteness and ruggedness of the village's location and the isolation of its inhabitants. Interestingly, population data indicates that it remained between 300 and 350 inhabitants throughout the 18th century.

The isolation and the rough path to the village allowed its inhabitants to cultivate tobacco—then a Royal monopoly—without paying anything to the Royal Treasury and to trade it as they pleased.

According to Archbishop Cortés y Larráz, "...in San Andrés Güista, they trade in selling fruits, keep beehives, make paper fuse strings, and clandestinely grow tobacco like the Huistas..."

Subdelegate Joseph Domingo Hidalgo commented that, "despite the vigilance of the Royal Treasury," there was no way to control the clandestine cultivation and trade of tobacco.

Regardless of the Crown's taxation policies and the laws and structures of colonial administration, for the Maya people, tobacco was of great importance and was used for ritual and medicinal purposes, making it impossible to prevent its cultivation and distribution in local indigenous markets.

No data from colonial officials references the founding of the village or the origin of its inhabitants. However, the oral history of Jacaltenango provides several clues that

help clarify events predating the 18th century, linking the inhabitants of San Andrés Huista to the ancient "Coxoh" people who lived in Eastern Chiapas and the Upper Grijalva River Basin during the early years of the Colonial Regime.

Until the 17th century, the area of Rodulfo Figueroa, Coneta, and its surroundings was inhabited by a Maya group known as the "Coxoh," whose language has not been conclusively determined. To this day, there is ongoing controversy about whether they belonged to the Q'anjob'al or Tzeltal linguistic branch. However, a document written in Coxoh, found in the General Archive of the Indies in Seville by Juan Pedro Viqueiras and currently being analyzed by Otto Schuman, may shed light on this controversy and help resolve it definitively. The Coxoh inhabited the Upper Grijalva River Basin at the time of the Spanish arrival, particularly in the sites of Guajilar, Lagartero, and their surroundings (Thomas Lee... personal communication). The first Spaniards to briefly pass through the territory were the conquistadores Pedro de Alvarado, on his route to meet Hernán Cortés on his journey to Honduras in 1525, and Pedro de Portocarrero, sent by Alvarado to settle Comitán in 1527. Portocarrero's stay in Chiapas was brief, and most of the contingent he brought with him moved to San Cristóbal, while others returned to Guatemala.

It was not until the 1540s, after the promulgation of the New Laws, that the Bishop of Chiapas, Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, began a campaign to gather dispersed indigenous populations and establish villages of "converted Indians." Fray Bartolomé sent groups of Dominican friars to found villages and evangelize the natives. The Dominican friars established a series of villages along the Camino Real, conceived as rest and supply points for travelers on the route from Mexico to Guatemala. Over time, the new settlement conditions imposed by the Spaniards, along with their proximity to a frequently traveled route, became key factors in the spread of plagues that decimated the local indigenous populations. Travelers transmitted diseases to which the native peoples had no immunity, and the compact settlement patterns with little space between dwellings facilitated the spread of contagion. Adding to this was the introduction of livestock and pigs, which polluted water sources. In the early 17th century, a plague broke out, wiping out many villages.

The mythical history told in the local traditions of Jacaltenango and San Andrés Huista regarding the founding of the village has implications that clarify certain historical events during the Colonial Period, particularly in the early 17th century, when plagues caused significant population declines, and many villages were abandoned in Chiapas' Central Depression, similar to the fate of the Coxoh.

All the legends from San Andrés Huista and Jacaltenango agree on the foreign origin of San Andrés' current inhabitants, who originally lived around Coneta in the Upper Grijalva Basin in eastern Chiapas.

According to these accounts, the people of this region abandoned their village due to plagues brought about by a sin or an affront to the Church as a consequence of their resistance to converting to Christianity. The Jacaltecos, the people of San Andrés Huista, and the Tzeltal and Zotzil peoples of Chiapas all attribute the emergence of these plagues to this cause, which ravaged the region in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Apart from the locations, the Tzeltal versions from Soyatitán and Socoltenango are very similar to the Jacalteco version of how the people of San Andrés came to settle in their current community. Fray Francisco Ximénez echoes these legends, which helps confirm the timeline of these events in the early 17th century.

According to the inhabitants of San Andrés, the reason they abandoned their original village was due to a plague of bats that ravaged the region after committing an affront against the village priest. The people of San Andrés acknowledge their origins in Chiapas, more specifically Coneta and the confluence of the Lagartero and San Gregorio rivers, in the territory formerly inhabited by the Coxoh peoples.

Like their neighbors, the inhabitants of San Andrés agree that the abandonment of their original village, Coneta, was due to a conflict with the village priest. They also acknowledge that Jacalteco is not their original language and was only adopted after settling in the territory of Jacaltenango. According to the Jacaltecos, the people of San Andrés came from Mexico many years ago, or perhaps centuries[1], fleeing from a catastrophe that resulted from their sins—sexual sins—and their rejection of the Church or Christianity.

The Auxiliary Mayor... recounted the legend of the founding of San Andrés in this way:

"Before, in the village where they lived, there was a woman responsible for preparing food for the priest.

She had a lover, and one day they decided to serve the priest buzzard instead of chicken.

They caught a buzzard, cooked it, and served it to the priest.

He ate it but realized they had served him buzzard and became very angry, 'cursing' the village and telling them he was leaving the place:

The priest told the villagers that many misfortunes would come, and the people

[1]The places described in the legends about the origins of the inhabitants of San Andrés correspond to the territories once occupied by the Coxoh peoples, which were depopulated due to plagues during the early decades of the 17th century. This was an ancient, now-extinct Maya people, which some authors, such as Goudru Lenkersdorf (1986) and Mario Ruz (1986), associate with the Tojolab'al language, while Thomas Lee (1977, 1988, 1992, 1994, 1996) links them to Tzeltal. In the neighboring areas, these languages are still spoken today. If the inhabitants of San Andrés Huista are descendants of the Coxoh, then they were not entirely extinguished as a human group, but they now speak Jacalteco, although with "expressions from the languages of Chiapas," according to informants from neighboring villages.

would die.

After the priest left, a plague of bats came. The survivors abandoned the village and eventually came to San Andrés.

They chose that place because from there, they could see the place they had left behind".

This is the most well-known and accepted version among the town's inhabitants. On clear days, from the town center, one can see La Angostura, in the Upper Grijalva River area.

The Jacaltecos, for their part, recount other versions with similar elements but important variations. However, all share common points; the conflict between the priest and the townspeople is always present. The main difference lies in the cause of the conflict.

The foreign origins of the people of San Andrés and the mythical legend of their arrival in Jacaltenango are sometimes cited to explain certain aspects of their behavior considered strange or inappropriate by the *"true Jacaltecos."*

"The people of San Andrés Huista came from a place called Peb'al. There was a trial there; resin fell, burning many people, which is why they fled." (Don Francisco Morales López, San Marcos).

"The people of San Andrés left Mexico fleeing a rain of burning oil and came here to seek refuge. The church belongs to the Spanish." (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango).

"The people of San Andrés come from a place in Chiapas called Tzisis." (Domingo López, San Marcos).

"Some say the inhabitants of San Andrés lived in a place in Mexico called Pay'ab before coming here." (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango).

For the Jacaltecos, the various events of the flight of the people from their original home to where San Andrés Huista is now located are easily divided into two subtypes: A) the snail version, where this little creature is involved in the story when it speaks to the sinners; B) the bat version, in which the people are punished for their wrongdoing with a plague of these creatures. These two versions appear to be mutually exclusive, although in a Tzeltal version from Socoltenango, the two are integrated into the same narrative, with the additional element of a black bull that stormed into the church snorting. The theme of the bats is the most widespread and is the one recognized by the inhabitants of San Andrés as the cause of their departure from their place of origin. Both versions agree that the people fled Chiapas as a result of their rejection—whether due to ignorance or lack of morality—of Christianity.

In reality, when considering the former inhabitants of Coneta and the neighboring towns from a historical perspective, several reasons for the conflicts with the priest become apparent. They were located

along the route of the Camino Real and had to serve the priest, other clergy traveling the route, as well as Spanish and Ladino travelers and merchants. Consequently, during epidemics, plagues spread along the route, killing the inhabitants of the surrounding towns. The survivors of Coneta sought a remote and isolated place to establish themselves. According to the Jacaltecos, when the refugees from Chiapas arrived, they requested permission from the authorities in Jacaltenango to live where the town of San Andrés Huista is now located. Although they came from afar, the Jacaltecos considered them brothers and welcomed them. In 18th-century records from Jacaltenango, San Andrés Huista is mentioned as a small town with few taxpayers, far from the Camino Real, producing and trafficking tobacco illegally, and engaging in smuggling. From then until now, San Andrés has been known for its isolation and hostility toward outsiders.

The following version belongs to the "snail" group. Additionally, it contains one of the most general elements: the fact that the wrongdoers are in the water when committing the disrespectful act. We do not know why they are in the water; one possibility we have considered is the frequent association between spirits, gods, and other Maya beings with water. Taking this association into account, it seems possible that the legend functions as a metaphor for a struggle between two religious traditions. The people who do not practice Christianity lose, which is consistent with what actually happened in the history of the conquest of the Americas.

The people of San Andrés are from Mexico. There was a town, and a priest went to give mass in this town. Many participated in the First Communion, including a woman who had lovers. "I'm going to attend the mass!" she said to one of her lovers. "Bring me a bit of the host," her lover asked, and she carried it in her mouth. When she took it out of her mouth to give it to her lover, it fell into a little stream, and the two of them went down to look for it but couldn't find it. "It looks like a host," they said and brought a piece to the priest.
"Who is guilty?" asked the priest and began to pray. He started to sink the stream. "I'm not to blame for this; I only told you about it," said the priest, and he left on horseback for his town. Then, the men who arrived at the stream heard the snails called hutes shouting.
"Animals, why are you like this? I can't hear you," said the husband of the guilty woman. And the snails spoke, saying, "Those who flee the town will be saved, and those who don't will die," said the hutes. And little by little, they fled, and the others stayed behind, and a rain of fire came that burned the people. And that's how they came to San Andrés from the other state. The bad woman stayed behind and died, and her husband went to where San Andrés is today. (Andrea Elisabeth Nolasco Nolasco, San Marcos Huista, 15 years old.)

This account is apparently a shortened version of the previous one. Here, the

narrator suggests that the gravest sin was the woman's betrayal of her husband.

There was the husband of a woman who was married but had a lover. She went to mass, received the host, and the lover asked for it. She carried it in her mouth. When she took it out of her mouth, it fell into a stream, and a whirlpool appeared in the water. The next day, the husband went, and a snail wanted to talk to him. "Why are you talking to me?" asked the man. "You don't do that." "Your wife is cheating on you," the snail replied and explained what had happened. The man went to tell the people what had happened, and everyone fled, frightened by the snails. (Sebastián Nolasco, San Marcos Huista). This version, although it does not include the adulterous couple motif, clearly belongs to the same tradition as the two above. It provides information about the place of origin—*"in Chamula, in a place called Peb'al."* The informant believes it is over a hundred years old, although they do not have an exact birth date, showing a very high level of continuity between the versions known by younger and older generations. From the elevated place it describes, one can see the Mexican state of Chiapas. The connection between the inhabitants of San Andrés and Chiapas is just one among the many links that unite the Jacaltecos with the Mexican side of the border.

Before coming to San Andrés, the inhabitants lived in Chamula, in a place called Peb'el. There were some who did not want communion and told their companion to bring it to them. They waited for him by the river, and he brought it. They were about to touch it, but it fell into the river, and suddenly a whirlpool appeared, and the mother of the hute (a type of snail) spoke, saying it would be better to gather their belongings and flee. A fire came that burned many people, but the priest went on his horse, and those who followed him were saved. They arrived in San Andrés, where they chose a site on a hill to have a view of their place of origin. (Marcos Ramírez Pérez, San Marcos Huista, c. 100).

Comparing the geographic data, the place referred to is in the surroundings of the modern settlement of Rodulfo Figueroa, suggesting that for the informant, "Chamula" is equivalent to Chiapas in ancient times. It is worth noting that in the region referred to by these legends, there are several ghost towns whose populations were wiped out by plagues. During the 17th century, the local population was significantly reduced, and many towns in the region were abandoned. In the versions presented below, there are other references to the geographic location of the ancestors of the inhabitants of San Andrés. To maintain continuity in the symbolic analysis of these myths, an analysis of the historical implications of the data presented by these legends is included at the end of the chapter.

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The following are versions of the legend that include the important motif of the plague of bats, which we discuss in more detail below. Taking into account some

historical events that occurred during the Colonial period in Chiapas, plagues of bats were a real phenomenon resulting from the introduction of livestock. These new species and changes in settlement patterns contributed to the spread of these plagues. In the case of the first version, the aspect that sets it apart from the others is the "mountain pig" motif, which passed in front of the church and drew the people's attention. This element bears some resemblance to the black bull mentioned by Fray Francisco Ximénez in reference to the Tzeltal people of Chiapas. Considering that this animal is associated with the *Owner of the Hills* (see below), it is another indication of the possible metaphorical function of the story, dealing with the struggle between the invaders' religion and that of the Indigenous inhabitants. The style of this version demonstrates one of its functions: as a parable, in the same way that the biblical parables of the Judeo-Christian tradition do. The narrator is a very active member of one of the evangelical sects, and perhaps her familiarity with the Bible has influenced her way of storytelling. She commented that in those days, there were only Catholic Christians, so people had to obey the laws of that church in the absence of reformed sects.

In this version, the woman with a lover is not married. The gravest sin, then, is the lack of respect from the people, especially the young woman who stole the host to give it to her lover:

A priest came to preach the word of God in a town in Mexico called Pay'a. During the mass, an animal, a "mountain pig," passed in front of the church, and the people went out to see it, not caring that they were in mass because they were ignorant. This was the first mistake they made.

Later, there was a young woman who had a boyfriend, and the boyfriend didn't know anything about the word of God and asked her to bring him the host. The young woman went to mass and brought the host in her mouth for the boyfriend. They entered the river, and when she was passing the host to the boyfriend, it fell into the river and, upon falling, turned into a crucifix. They tried to retrieve it but couldn't, so they went to the priest, who came and retrieved it. That was the second mistake. The priest cast a curse, and fire came down upon them. They were all burned, but the good people of this town had fled earlier, bringing two horses with a bell. The bell fell into the Lagartero River and is still there. Visitors always come to see it when they enter the town. Long ago, the elders of San Andrés could speak the dialect of the Mexican town. Now everyone speaks Jacalteco. (María Quiñones, Peb'il Pam)

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The other versions cited belong to the narrative of the plague of bats. As they are detailed, they provide data on possible places of origin for the people of San Andrés. In the first of these, the detail of the original sin of the ancestors is missing, but the narrator gives us important information about material culture: "they

make ropes, hammocks, and mats like in Chiapas." It ends with some comments about the characteristics of the people of San Andrés, showing that, although the Jacaltecos consider themselves a very united people, they barely include those from San Andrés within this classification. *The people of San Andrés originally came from Mexico. When they arrived, they had clothing like that of Chiapas. It is said that there was a plague of bats in a place called Tzotzil. They were biting the people, and perhaps at the same time, there was an earthquake, but they left mostly because of the plague of bats. The elders say they used to wear Chiapas clothing —white undergarments, a white shirt, and a palm hat. The huipil from there is different. They make ropes, hammocks, and mats like in Chiapas. The Chamulas are just like them. In Chiapas, there is a type of small bat called a vampire bat, which sucks more from livestock and animals than from people. These animals are found in Mexico and near the border.*

In San Andrés, they had the custom of never wanting to marry people from outside, and they are still like that. They don't sell their goods there but come here instead. They are stingy and keep their things until times of need, when they sell them at higher prices. They produce a lot of fruit, like pineapples, etc. Besides, they are not very studious. They used to go a lot to the coast, just like the people from San Marcos, to work. They have a strange custom, which is that the woman must cut the firewood with her ax and carry it while the man does nothing, only walking ahead of her, or sometimes carrying one of the children. (Don Baltazar Cardenas, Jacaltenango).

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This second version establishes an association between San Andrés and the Río Lagartero, which might serve as a clue to investigate pre-Hispanic or historical migrations or movements. This was a crossing that existed before the arrival of the Spanish and during the colonial period became the route to the Province of Guatemala. This territory was inhabited by the Coxoh indigenous people (see below).

There was once a woman where the people of San Andrés lived. A priest came to give communion to the people, and the woman's lover asked for a piece. She brought it in her mouth, but at the moment she passed it to the man, it fell into the river. The priest came to retrieve it and said what they did was wrong, and everyone was frightened because bats came to bite the people—they say it was due to a curse the priest cast. The inhabitants fled to where they are now located. According to the story, they brought a bell. They were unable to cross the river with the bell, so they left it in the Río Lagartero. The bell rises every Friday. (Don Manuel Montejo Silvestre, Nueva Catarina).

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This version provides clues about where the ancestors of San Andrés lived and also offers an etymological explanation of the word Tzotzil, the ethnic group associated with the story of San Andrés. The site

currently called Rodolfo Figueroa is located near the region of the ancient town of Coneta, whose population disappeared in the early 17th century.

They lived before in Peb'am in the state of Chiapas—possibly where Rudolfo is today. They had a Catholic church, and a Catholic priest visited them occasionally. One day, there was a pair of lovers, both of whom had spouses elsewhere. The day the priest arrived; the bells rang to celebrate the mass.

The lovers were talking at the river, and the man said to the woman, "Go to the mass and bring the communion. I want to try it." He couldn't go into the church because he had a lover. "Bring it in your mouth, take it out in your hand, and we can share it."

"Alright," said the woman. She received the host in her hand and immediately took it out with her hand, left the church, and went to the lover waiting at the river.

When she returned to the river with the host, the woman tried to give it to him, but the host jumped from her hand and fell into the river. They tried to retrieve it, but they couldn't—the host moved to avoid them. This scared them a lot, and the man told the woman to go to the priest and inform him of what had happened. When the priest heard, he went to the church. He dug a hole in the church's doorway and buried the host there, replacing the soil.

The priest said, "For what you have done, I will never visit this town again." And he left. That afternoon, a plague of bats spread. There were so many that people couldn't kill them; they wouldn't let them sleep and bit the people and the animals—pigs, chickens, dogs, horses, cows, etc. That's how the animals started to get rabies.

The people said, "This place is cursed. We cannot live here." They packed their bags, and most went to live in what is now San Juan Chamula in Chiapas. A few families headed southeast looking for a place to live. They settled in a place they called "Corral Ch'en" (now just called "Coral"), which is located further north of San Andrés. They stayed there briefly, trying to build a church, but didn't last long. Soon after, they reached where they are currently. In San Andrés, there is a hill called Peb'am to remember their place of origin.

They asked the Jacaltenango authorities for permission, which at that time consisted of men who were both religious and political authorities.

"Let them stay," they said, "they are brothers." That's why they say "Huixh Ta" (Huista), the brother towns, the neighboring towns of Jacaltenango.

They call the people of San Andrés and their relatives in Chiapas Tzotziles or Sotz'iles, meaning "The people who come from the land of bats." It is possible that those who left Peb'am ended up in Chamula. (Don Antonio Delgado, Jacaltenango.)

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This narrative also provides information about the migration of the original settlers of San Andrés, as well as sociological data on material culture, marriage patterns, and gender roles. There was a woman in a place called Conete who had a lover, although both of them were married. She was Catholic, and one evening before going to Mass the next day, she told the man, "It's better not to be with me tonight because tomorrow I am going to take communion." "What is that?" the man asked. She explained, and he asked her to bring him a piece of the host. She did and brought it to where the man was by the river. The host fell into the river, and an image of Christ appeared. It didn't take long for someone to tell the priest what had happened. "Something bad is going to happen here," he said, and the good Catholics went with him and ended up in Las Margaritas. A plague of bats came and attacked the people, and when they fled the church where they were, it started to rain, but it wasn't normal rain. Instead, it was burning turpentine, and the people were burned. The survivors went to live in Dolores near Chiapas by the Lagartero River, but the river overflowed and destroyed the church. They decided to search for a high place with a water source, and that's how they arrived at where San Andrés is today. They were previously known by a word that means "the Turpentines" in pop'tu (*K'ul: Turpentine*) *and wore different clothing made of pure cotton. They are very different in character, very materialistic. If a woman marries outside the group, they don't give her any land. The founding of San Andrés happened before the Spanish conquest, when the people were organized into tribes.* (Don Herminio Silvestre, Jacaltenango).

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This version of the legend contains all the fundamental aspects.

San Marcos, Santa Ana, San Antonio, and Concepción Huista all trace their origins to the settlement of Jacaltenango, but San Andrés is different. They are Tzotziles who emigrated from Mexico, and they are stricter because in that place, there was a community with a woman who was married, but she sought another man and received the host.

The man requested, "Bring me a piece of what they are going to give." She received a piece and was going to give the host to him, but it fell into the stream.

Because of what they did, there was punishment. Countless bats came to suck the blood of the people. They could no longer live there and emigrated to San Andrés.

And it is true. I collaborated with the priest, and it is a different culture. They don't want to develop like we do. Few want to go to school, and many still cannot speak Spanish. (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango)

In Socoltenango, there is a similar legend to the Jacaltecan version about the destruction and abandonment of Soyatitán, the relocation of the Virgin, the adjustments to the church, and the resettlement of the survivors in Socoltenango. This legend includes

elements such as the pair of lovers, the lover's resistance to conversion, the woman's theft of the host and its subsequent desecration in the river, the priest's curse, and the plague of bats.
In this case, a variant is introduced: a black bull entered the church snorting. As an interesting note, Friar Francisco Ximénez, in his *Historia de la Provincia de San Vicente de Chiapas*, mentions this event. As often happens, real events merge with legend or take on magical proportions due to the need to explain the occurrences. For the indigenous inhabitants, the great suffering and devastation caused by the plagues had to have an explanation, so they attributed it to sins and rejection of the Church and Christian religion. Friar Francisco Ximénez himself suggests that the black bull that entered the church snorting was associated with the Devil.

These legends involved resistance to Christianization as the cause of the misfortunes that led to the destruction and abandonment of the town.
All the previously mentioned legends provide a supernatural explanation for the emergence of the plagues that decimated native populations. Additionally, they offer concrete data that help clarify the fate of the Coxoh people. Evidently, there was a significant loss of life, but some survivors decided to relocate to another area to escape the plagues.

As the legends recount, they sought a suitable place from where they could view their ancestral homeland.
The reasons why they settled in that particular location can only be speculated upon, but it is worth reflecting on this, as the legends and historical events offer several suggestive clues. First, the survivors of Coneta chose to move to the neighboring province of Guatemala rather than remain in Chiapas, where their town was under the Curacy of Comitán. The abandonment of the town was not reported to the priest or the authorities of the Crown, as tax collectors later found a ghost town.

As mentioned in the oral tradition, when they arrived at the site where San Andrés is now located, they asked for permission to settle, and the local authorities allowed them to stay in their jurisdiction. At that time, Jacaltenango was the head of the Curacy in a *República de Indios* under the administration of the Order of Mercy, in contrast to the Province of Chiapas, which was administered by the Dominicans. As Captain Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán states in reference to Jacaltenango: *"...it was the capital of a ruler or the seat and head of chiefs and principal lords..."* These local lords formed the administrative authorities. The Spanish presence was limited to one, sometimes two, friars responsible for overseeing the entire northern territory of what is now the Department of Huehuetenango.

By choosing a remote location in the neighboring province, administered by a different order and far from the Camino Real, the Coxoh people managed to escape the heavy burdens that plagued those living in towns along the Camino Real. The inhabitants of these towns had to serve

in the transportation of goods, provide lodging and food for travelers, and receive little payment in return. When Crown officials or clergy traveled, the expenses were higher and fell on the communities, which were deducted from their tax payments. When it came to religious figures, special attention was given, regardless of whether it was the town priest or another member of the same order. In Coneta, Escuintenango, Coapa, and Aquespala, the Dominicans had built large convents, which were only temporarily inhabited by the priest during visits. Most of the time, they served as accommodations for religious figures and Crown officials traveling along the route.

Friar Antonio de Ciudad Real, who accompanied Father Ponce, Provincial of the Order of Saint Francis, on his journey through the territories of Mexico and Central America in 1586, recounts that: *"many prominent Indians from a town called Coapa welcomed him with trumpet music and offered him chocolate and bouquets of fragrant flowers; ... In that town, the commissioner father was received with such a welcome and such solemnity as if he were the general of the Order of Santo Domingo. From the entrance of the town to the church, the streets were lined with arches, and many Indian dances preceded him, rejoicing and celebrating him; there was much music from flutes, trumpets, and bells, and in the church, the Indian women were arranged in two rows, one on each side of the path the commissioner father was taking, and everyone clearly showed their devotion to our habit and state. The prominent Indians and their wives immediately gathered to see the commissioner father and offered him chickens and eggs; the Indian women of the doctrine did the same with remarkable devotion. That church is called Santo Tomás, and they had him painted on the main altar wearing a king's crown; the commissioner father did not know the reason for this..."*

Later, the Irish Dominican friar Tomás Gage, who became the parish priest of Petapa and Misco, recounted his journey by canoe along the Lagartero River and the hospitality he received from the natives.
Due to its location next to the Lagartero River, a mandatory crossing on the Camino Real, the community had to provide canoes and rowers to transport the numerous travelers who passed through. Added to this was the close proximity of the Comitán Convent and the regular presence of the parish priest.
In the versions from San Andrés, this weariness with so many burdens and obligations to the clergy is evident when the woman decides to serve vulture to the priest instead of killing another chicken for him.

Conclusions:

- All the previously presented versions agree that the inhabitants of San Andrés come from Chiapas. The locality they refer to when they are more specific corresponds to the territory occupied by the ancient Coxoh population. The specific mention of the town of Coneta strengthens the association between the legend of the founding of San Andrés and the actual

abandonment and destruction of a real town.

- The current descendants of the Coxoh, who now reside in San Andrés Huista, represent only a few survivors of the plagues. Most of the Coxoh population perished due to the epidemics, and only a small group managed to survive and relocate.

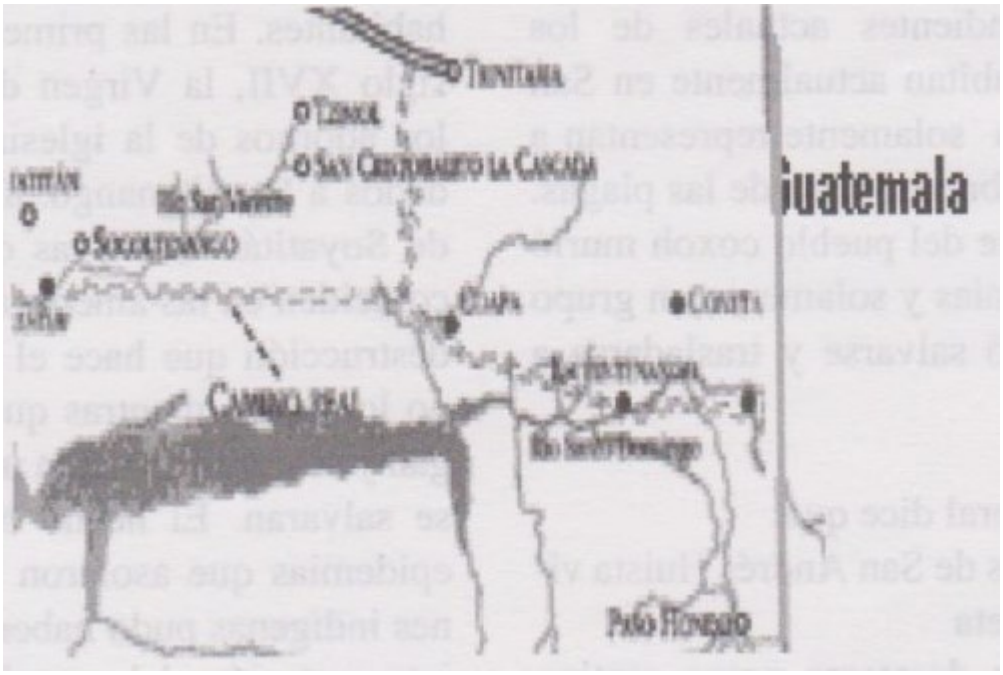
- Oral tradition states that:
  - The inhabitants of San Andrés Huista came from Coneta.
  - The plagues were unleashed as a punishment from God for an affront against Christianity and the Church.
  - Many people died as a result of the plagues.
  - The survivors moved elsewhere.

- The plagues that ravaged the Indigenous peoples during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries left a profound mark on the imagination of the native population. Seeking an explanation for their suffering, they attributed it to divine punishment for their sins. Since the introduction of Christianity and the establishment of "reductions" in the mid-16th century, natives resisted by finding ways to conceal their ancient religion. This resistance to converting to Christianity is evident in the narratives above, where an adulterous couple sometimes commits sacrilege with the Host.

In Soyatitán, there is a similar version that aligns with those of the Coxoh towns. The Tzeltal population of Soyatitán was also decimated by the plagues, and by the early 17th century, it had been reduced to a small number of inhabitants. In the early decades of the 17th century, the Virgin of Candelaria and the church ornaments were transferred to Socoltenango. Both the Soyatitán version and those of Jacaltenango mention the priest threatening condemnation and destruction for those who did not follow him, while promising salvation to those who obeyed and settled in a new town.

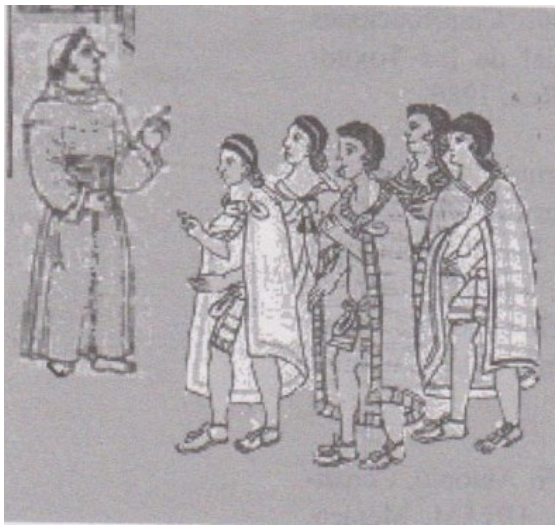
The historical fact of the epidemics that afflicted Indigenous populations likely gave rise to the interpretation of sin as their cause. At that time, friars insisted to the natives that resisting conversion would bring damnation, explaining events like burning resin falling from the sky or bat plagues as divine retribution.

- The people of Jacaltenango, like many other groups, primarily rely on oral resources to record their history. Therefore, it is essential to collect multiple versions of the same sequence of events. Together, these versions can provide historical data about the abandonment and destruction of Coneta and other neighboring towns during the early 17th century. They also offer valuable insights into social relations, identity, territoriality, and notions of proper behavior.



Location of the Coxoh Towns in Chiapas During the
16th and 17th Centuries.

Ruins of the Church and Convent of the Coxoh Town of Coneta.
The town was abandoned in the early decades of the 17th century.



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