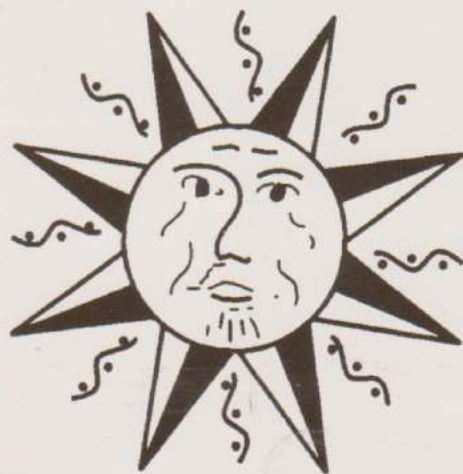




La Tradición Popular

Guatemala: From the Deep Culture of the Magical Wrapper

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Saint Anthony, in his different titles, holds deep significance among subaltern groups of Guatemala, both urban and rural. According to the liturgical calendar, June 13th commemorates Saint Anthony of Padua, who has been, and remains, the quintessential popular saint of all times: the saint of miracles, of the poor, the saint of everyone.

According to his hagiography, he was a preacher and opponent of medieval heresies. Pope Pius XII declared him a Doctor of the Church. He was born in Lisbon in 1196 and died in Padua, Italy, on June 13, 1231.

He was a Franciscan friar who had great influence in his time due to his holiness and pious deeds. He is typically depicted as a man in a cassock holding the Christ Child in one hand and a book with a lily in the other, a symbol of purity and Christian doctrine. Saint Anthony's popular influence has existed since ancient times. Undoubtedly, his miracles were already well known when Christianity arrived in the New World during the 15th and 16th centuries. However, in the



Americas, and especially in Guatemala, his miracle's importance grew and became syncretized during the colonization and evangelization process, solidifying in the second half of the 17th century.

For Guatemalans, Saint Anthony is one of the most devoutly revered saints, both in homes and in old city neighborhoods, as well as in rural villages and towns, since he is attributed with the greatest and most impressive miracles among the anonymous population.

First and foremost, Saint Anthony is the patron of lost causes, and he is "in charge of finding things lost by forgetfulness or carelessness." According to popular tradition, when someone misplaces an object, they should immediately invoke the saint, pray the usual prayers (Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary), and the lost items quickly appear. If the loss is more significant, it is necessary to pray a novena at home or in the nearest temple with an image of Saint Anthony.

At the entrance of every church, one can obtain religious cards with his image and the popular Novena prayer that should be recited for the missing object to reappear. It is worth repeating that he is the most venerated saint in private homes and in Franciscan and other congregational temples, which highlights the profound influence this holy man has within Guatemalan popular religiosity.

In Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción and in the eastern region of the country the miracles of Saint Anthony enjoy great notoriety and acceptance. In the neighborhoods of *La Candelaria*, *La Parroquia*, and *La Ermita*, devotion to "*San Antonio del Monte*" is deeply rooted. In these neighborhoods, novenas and home prayers are performed. Additionally, small prayer gatherings or processions go house to house for nine days visiting the homes of devotees, distributing copper coins to young marriageable girls and spontaneously handing out lilies to perfume home altars.

San Antonio del Monte is a foreign title originating from El Salvador, and it arrived in Guatemala's *Valle de las Vacas* in the mid-17th century via the *Camino Real*, brought by Franciscan friars during their preaching missions. For this reason, it is also found in towns like Palencia, Santa Catarina Pinula, and Guastatoya, places along the *Camino Real*. San Antonio del Monte comes from Sonsonate, a province in El Salvador, where he has a highly venerated chapel, also revered in Honduras and even Guatemala. He is thus a southern Mesoamerican variant, considered the most miraculous of all Saint Anthony's titles in the region's popular religiosity. His worship and rituals can be compared to those of the Black Christ of Esquipulas and Saint Rita of Cascia, the patroness of impossible causes.



Another popular manifestation of Saint Anthony is helping young marriageable women find a suitor since, according to his hagiography, during the late Middle Ages, Saint Anthony made sure that no couple in Central European villages went without the appropriate matrimonial blessing, and that every young person had a partner.

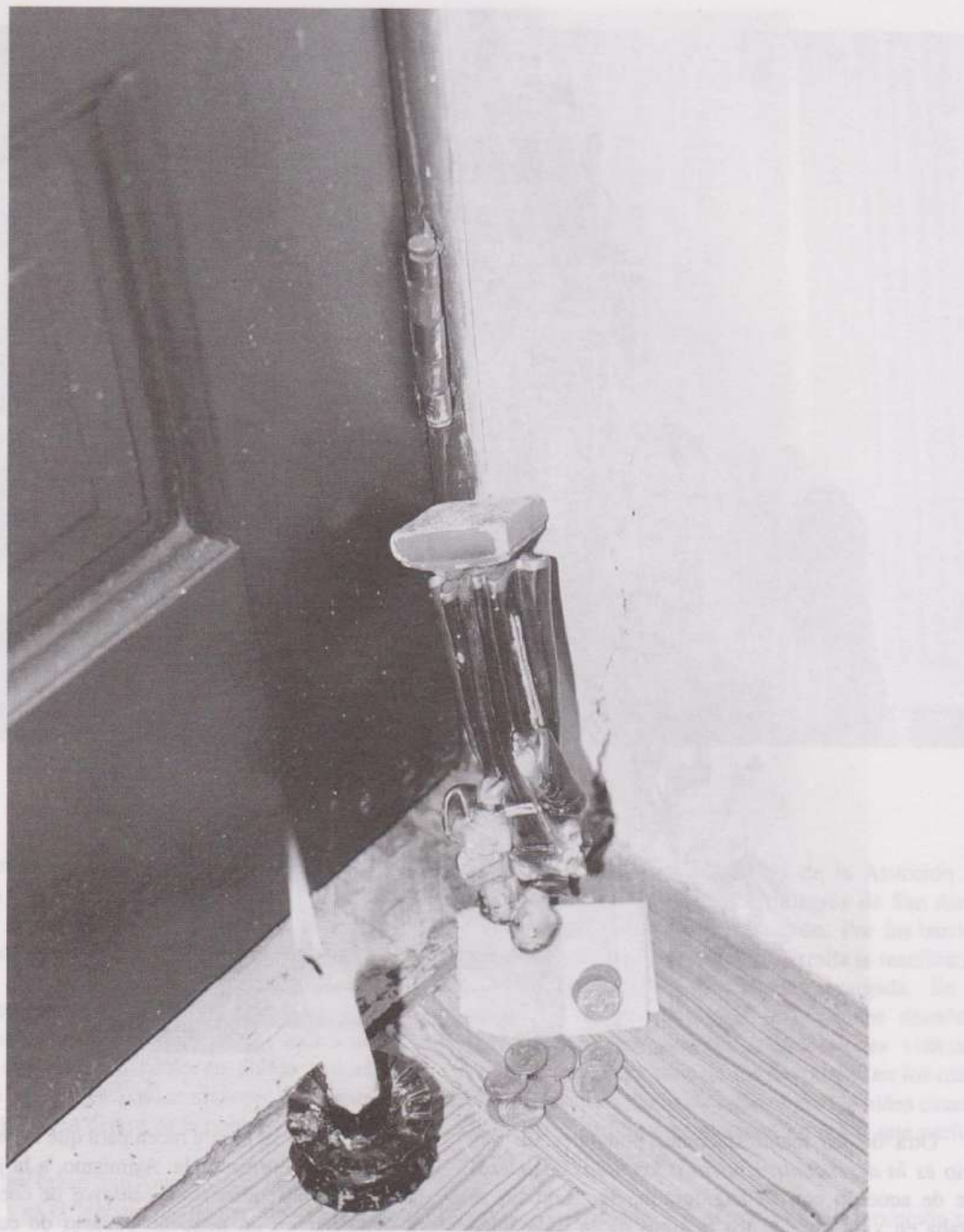
On another note, it is important to mention that Saint Anthony's feast takes place near the summer solstice (June 21st), a time when everything blooms, and which is linked to ancient Greco-Latin fertility rites. These were Christianized by Saint Francis in the early 11th century, and Saint Anthony followed in the footsteps of his congregation's founder.

In revisiting the popular tradition of Saint Anthony as a miracle-working saint it emphasizes that unmarried women who wish to find a partner, and "are getting late," should, on June 13, place Saint Anthony's image upside down behind their bedroom door

and pray for their desired person to reciprocate. Additionally, they should be given thirteen copper coins to deposit in a small, decorated cane basket near the upside-down saint's image. These coins must be given spontaneously, "gifted", and "only work for their intended purpose if they are truly made of copper."

These coins symbolize the dowry that Saint Joseph paid for the Virgin Mary in biblical times. Also, on the saint's feast day, it is customary to buy the famous "*San Antonio* buns," made of flour and similar to the known as "*panes de manteca*," small lard buns, which marriageable women should eat while thinking of the person they hope will return their affections. The traditions surrounding Saint Anthony in Guatemala and southern Mesoamerica are among the most original in the New World.

Moreover, many towns in Guatemala have Saint Anthony as their patron saint and on his feast



day he is carried in procession to bless the streets, alleys, and houses of rural communities across the country.

Finally, on this day, June 13, in the old mestizo towns of the country and even in western Guatemala, the Novena to Saint Anthony begins.

As in medieval times, when he was closely connected to the most dispossessed groups of European society, Saint Anthony continues to protect his devotees and remains one of the most important miracle-working saints in both Christianity and Guatemala, within the hidden threads of the magical wrapping that is our country.



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 Como tipo especial, en el caso de Chiquitilla por
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OF CLOUDSCAPES, SWALLOWS, AND PALM TREES: THE POPULAR TRADITIONS AND STORIES OF ESCUINTLA

Linguistic Groups of Escuintla

Since the 10th century, before the Spanish presence, this region was invaded for a second time by migrants from the central Mexican highlands, who spoke the Nahuatl language.

The previous invasion had been by Nahuatl speakers which later evolved into what became known as Pipil, the language encountered by the Spaniards. Today, Pipil language has disappeared; however, due to proximity to Sacatepéquez and Chimaltenango, and because of temporary or commercial migrations, Kaqchikel is spoken. In Palín, since the 13th century, the Poqomam language has been properly used.

Traditional Material Culture of Escuintla

The department of Escuintla is in the southern part of the Republic. It covers an approximate area of 4,384 square kilometers, with a total population of 386,534 inhabitants according to the 1994 census, of which 6.44% were Indigenous.

It borders to the north with the departments of Chimaltenango, Sacatepéquez, and Guatemala; to the east with Santa Rosa; to the south with the Pacific Ocean; and to the west with Suchitepéquez.

According to historian Francisco Fuentes y Guzmán the word Escuintla comes from the Pipil words *yzquit* (dog) and *tepel* (hill), meaning "hill of dogs," possibly due to the abundance of tepescuintles (lowland paca) in its mountains.

This department is one of the most important from agricultural, livestock, and commercial perspectives, as it is a vital corridor for communication with El Salvador, Mexico, and the Pacific shipping ports. Its topography is quite varied, featuring the volcanic group that includes the Pacaya Volcano, as well as Cerro Alto in San Vicente Pacaya and several other important hills. These cause the elevations of the municipalities to range from 1,680 meters above sea level in San Vicente Pacaya to just 1.98 meters at the Puerto de San José.

Its lands are very fertile being irrigated by several rivers such as the Michatoya, Guacalate, Coyolate, María Linda, Nahualate, and Madre Vieja. Of special note is the Chiquimulilla Canal, which is navigable by small boats and facilitates communication not only within the department but also with Santa Rosa. There are also several lakes like Tecojate,

Quitasmbrero, Los Patos, and Sipacate. Additionally, there are three important ports not only for tourism but also for commerce: San José, Iztapa, and Quetzal.

From a historical standpoint the port of Iztapa is significant because it is where Pedro de Alvarado built the fleet used to launch the conquest of the Mar del Sur. The municipality of La Democracia includes a rich archaeological zone, especially the ruins of Monte Alto and Santa Rosa.

In terms of agricultural production, Escuintla is one of the most important departments due to its cultivation of coffee, sugarcane, bananas, plantains, lemon balm, and a variety of fruits. On a smaller scale, corn, beans, vegetables, and other crops are also grown. Cattle and horse breeding also take place and due to its location by the sea, salt production and fishing are important economic activities.

As a primary agricultural department there is little artisanal development. In the municipality of Palín, however, traditional textiles stand out for its color and beauty; additionally, wooden furniture and leather goods are produced. Industrially, one can mention factories for paper, cardboard, liquor, rubber capes, and sugar mills.

Because the Department of Escuintla is primarily agricultural and livestock-based, most of its municipalities lack popular handicrafts. However, cotton textiles are made in the department, including various types of clothing, as well as leather products such as saddles, cattle gear (bits, nosebands, etc.). Tiles and bricks are also produced, which are used in house construction and roofing, especially in rural areas. Additionally, wooden items are made, especially toys and furniture.

No popular crafts are produced in the following municipalities: Escuintla, Guanagazapa, La Democracia, La Gomera, Nueva Concepción, Masagua, San Vicente Pacaya, Siquinalá, and Tiquisate.

Popular crafts are made in very few municipalities, among which the following stand out:

Iztapa

They make casting nets, fishing harpoons, hooks, gillnets, and fishing lines.

Palín

They make traditional cotton textiles, toy marimbas, wooden furniture, soap, and leather goods.

San José

They produce fishing gear and build canoes; in beachside areas, objects made of seashells and conch shells are crafted, such as bracelets, rings,

ornaments, and toys.

Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa

They make candles in various designs, as well as embroidered art using gold and silver threads.

Traditional social culture of Escuintla. Patron saints feast

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>Patron saint's feast day</u>	<u>Festivity</u>
Escuintla	December 8th	Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary
Guanagazapa	February 15th	Saint Lawrence
Iztapa	December 25th	Nativity
La Democracia	April 4th	Saint Benedict the Moor
	January 1st	Holy Name of Jesus (New Year)
La Gomera	November 12th	Saint Didacus of Alcalá
Masagua	Movable feast	Third Friday of Lent
Nueva Concepción	December 8th	Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary
Palín	July 30th	Saint Christopher
San José	March 19th	Saint Joseph
San Vicente Pacaya	January 22nd	Saint Vincent of Saragossa
Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa	December 13th	Saint Lucy
Siquinalá	November 25th	Saint Catherine of Alexandria
Tiquisate	December 22nd to January 2nd	Christmas and New Year

Confraternities and brotherhoods

The municipality in Escuintla that best preserves its confraternities with deep-rooted traditions is Palín, where the Poqomam people exert strong cultural influence over the population, despite significant cultural opposition from the Ladino (non-Indigenous) community. In the rest of the municipalities, religious brotherhoods and social committees have taken over the organization of patron saint and titular festivals.

Dance culture

Due to its proximity to Sacatepéquez, Escuintla was one of the first regions to be influenced by the emerging culture of 16th-century of Santiago de Guatemala and the earlier Ciudad Vieja in the Valle de Almolonga. As a result, colonial popular theater took root in the region, making Escuintla a center for dramatic performances, such as plays in honor of the Virgin of the Conception, as well as traditional dances. Palín and Siquinalá, for example, became very important centers of dance.

Regarding dances the *Moros y Cristianos* (Moors and Christians) dances were the most deeply established during colonial times, and their practice continues to this day. Thus, when it comes to the Moors and Christians dances some of their variations are practiced in the following municipalities:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>Dances</u>
Palín	Los 12 Pares de Francia – The 12 Peers of France
Siquinalá	El Rey Fernando – King Ferdinand
	Fierabrás – Fierabras
	Rey Azarín – King Azarín
	Rey David – King David
	El Africano – The African
	Santa Catarina – Saint Catherine
	Napoleón – Napoleon

Other dances found in Escuintla include:

Siquinalá	Los Tres Venados (The Three Deer)
Pto. De San José	De Toritos; El Costeño (Little Bulls; The Coastal Man)
Siquinalá	Los Cuatro Toros – The Four Bulls
Siquinalá	La Conquista – The Conquest
Palín	La Invasión Extranjera (La Conquista) – The Foreign Invasion (The Conquest)
Siquinalá	Animalitos; El Tauro – Little Animals; The Bull
Siquinalá	La región de los 24 diablos – The Region of the 24 Devils
	Las siete virtudes – The Seven Virtues

Markets

The market of Escuintla is, without a doubt, the largest market on the southern coast. With an abundance of products, it offers everything from daily household necessities to industrial goods. Its fruit market is extraordinary as is its selection of seafood products. Escuintla receives visitors from across the Central American southern coast, as it is a mandatory stop for the transport of goods traveling across the country from border to border.

Popular languages

The official and common language is Spanish. However, Poqomam is spoken in Palín, and in some areas, K'aqchikel and K'iche' are heard, spoken by migrant workers from Chimaltenango, Sololá, Sacatepéquez, and Baja Verapaz who come to work seasonally along the coast.

Traditional spiritual culture of Escuintla

Oral Literature

Escuintla is one of the most fertile and rich regions of Guatemala, and even of Mesoamerica. Located between the volcanic chain that runs along the southern coast and the Pacific Ocean, its volcanic alluvial fans make it one of the most productive regions for agroindustry.

Since pre-Hispanic times, this territory was considered to possess the most abundant lands. It also served as a passageway for inhabitants from the central Mexican highlands who migrated to southern Mesoamerica at the end of the 13th century, particularly the Pipil people, who became part of its native population. Despite its large pre-Hispanic Indigenous population and its deep connection to the Conquest of Guatemala, Escuintla's population is now highly mestizo due to its historical processes, except for the municipality of Palín (Poqomam) and Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, which has some presence of the K'aqchikel ethnic group.

The historical process and its socioeconomic development have made Escuintla fertile ground for the emergence and persistence of very old Western-style oral traditions. However, these also preserve the roots of the ancestral pre-Hispanic population in most of the department's municipalities.

Nonetheless, traditional oral legacies are highly resemantized and hybridized, making it impossible to separate historical inheritances cleanly. Today, these traditions are also affected by the high socioeconomic development of the department, which has become almost an extension of Guatemala City. Escuintla's oral traditions, as in all of Guatemala, emerge in very specific activities: they are recreated during wakes, nine-day prayer gatherings (novenas), and serve as mnemonic and

entertainment tools in sugarcane fields, sugar mills, and coffee plantations. The stories and legends told on such occasions serve the function of "breaking the monotony" of hot days and the repetitive nature of rural work. As well as in livestock work, such as in Guanagazapa where cowboys and ranch hands gather on porches to "tell stories and tales," or in La Gomera and Nueva Concepción, where people sit along the roadside under leafy trees to share and listen to stories and oral traditions.

In the region, there are two types of storytellers. Neither of them has a specific name, but in most municipalities of Escuintla they are known as cuenteros or palabreros (tale-tellers or word-weavers). These two types are: On one hand, the elders, who hold all the wisdom of their community and possess great storytelling ability. They are invited to wakes and nine-day novena gatherings to entertain people with stories and jokes, so that, as is said in Masagua, "the dead won't leave this world in sorrow." On the other hand, middle-aged individuals who know oral traditions and repeat them regularly. Two particularly versatile storytellers from Escuintla are Don Oswaldo Alfaro, guardian of the Cofradía de las Ánimas (Brotherhood of Souls) in Escuintla City, and Don Antonio Ramírez (also known as Tío Chío or Don Conejo) from the Barrio San Pedro of the same city. It is said that he rarely misses a wake or novena gathering anywhere in Escuintla. Also noteworthy are Don Reginaldo Marín Paraíso from Tiquisate and Doña Zoila Higueros from Siquinalá.

In municipalities with Maya heritage, storytellers are called Ajitz in Palín and Ajtzij Winaq in the highlands of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa (of K'aqchikel heritage). These types are found throughout the department, since the population is highly hybridized, though their origin is Western. Many ancient literary forms are preserved both medieval and Renaissance, which, through constant repetition, have become essentially Guatemalan.

Among the most enduring literary forms are both oral prose—such as legends, myths, anecdotes, and all kinds of folktales—and oral verse, including coplas (four-line stanza), corridos, décimas (ten-line stanza), and ancient romances and short romances, often echoing Moorish and medieval Arabic literature.

Since Escuintla is a region with strong Franciscan devotion, the cult of the Virgin of the Conception is deeply rooted. Consequently, in the Guatemalan popular theater, praises are performed during religious processions as a form of popular drama throughout December. However, these authentic traditional theater troupes do not originate in Escuintla but come from Ciudad Vieja in the department of Sacatepéquez.

This coastal region is one of the Guatemalan areas where all kinds of folktales still flourish prolifically.

For example, in Masagua, they tell the marvelous tale of *El Guardacamino* (The Waykeeper Bird). It is said that there was a man in the town who was very much in love with a woman who paid him no attention. One Saint John's Eve, he went out to the sugarcane fields near town, sat down, removed the kerchief from his head, and laid it before him. A small bird, singing sorrowfully, appeared, this bird is known as *el guardacamino*, and "cries as sadly as a soul in torment," as they say in La Democracia and San Vicente Pacaya. Then the little bird, singing and crying, walked across the kerchief and began to "perform a strange dance." The man became frightened, but he grabbed the kerchief, and from that moment on, women chased after him—"they flocked to him like flies." He always carried the kerchief around his neck or tied to his machete handle, and the women constantly sought him out.

In the municipality of San José, the tale of the Pitío is deeply rooted or as it is known in La Gomera, "*La Flor del Aguilar*" (The Flower of Aguilar). It is about a king who became ill and sent his sons in search of a marvelous flower, the Flower of Aguilar, that would cure him. All three sons set out, but only the youngest succeeded; however, his older brothers murdered him and buried him in a sugarcane field in Escuintla. The king recovered, but a "*pitío*" (a cane flute) warned him that his elder sons had killed the youngest.

Filled with grief, the king punished the older brothers, and God allowed the youngest son to be resurrected and rule the town of Masagua with justice. Tales like this are told in Iztapa, Guanagazapa, and Nueva Concepción. In Tiquisate, the story of *Rosa Flor y Blanca Flor* is especially influential, with a clear medieval origin. In Escuintla, Don Chío tells some of the most beautiful tales of Guatemala's traditional narrative, including *La princesa que cuidaba coches* (The Princess Who Watched Over Carriages) and *El valiente Ricardo* (Brave Richard).

Animal tales abound to a great extent such as *Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote*, and others featuring animals like moles, opossums, horses, and bulls "covered in gold who guard the enchanted hills and water springs." Escuintla keeps alive the stories of fantastic bandits like *Pedro Urdemales*, as he is called there; *Pedro Ardemales* in Tiquisate, *Pedro Tecomate* in Palín, and *Pedro el Malo* in Guanagazapa. Religious tales are highly valued in Escuintla as popular saints are said to live and coexist with the people. For example: In Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, Saint Anthony is a local priest who helps find lost items and helps girls find suitors. In San Vicente Pacaya, Saint Francis rides a horse to bless livestock. In Iztapa, Saint Isidore is a fisherman who sets out to sea each day to gather fish and call for rain in the winter. On the coasts of Nueva Concepción, Saint John is a rancher who appears with his horses and bulls in enchanted pastures, where everlasting grass grows. Each corner of his field sprouts an amate tree and a mint plant that only bloom on Saint John's Day. In La Gomera, Saint Anne is

a midwife who helps women give birth painlessly, just as she did when the Virgin Mary was born. In the caves of San Pedro Mártir, people say Saint Peter comes to bathe in the thermal waters. While in Palín, it is said that Saint Peter, tired from walking through the ages, comes to rest his feet in those miraculous waters. In Escuintla, the storytellers claim that the one who appears in the caves is the Wandering Jew. Many residents of La Gomera say they have seen him deep within the caves.

As for the high praises, these are performed in Escuintla, Siquinalá, in the Pantaleón sugar mill during the days of the harvest, and in the village of Los Tarros where the praises are numerous at the time of the prayer of the Virgin of Conception starting on December 8 of each year.

As for the legends, the ones related to animism abound; in particular, the Sombrerón is famous. But even more the *Cadejo* is well known in Escuintla, La Gomera, and Masagua; it is said that it is a black and woolly dog that guards the drunks in the pastures, the sugar cane fields, the coffee yards, and near the railroad tracks. In Tiquisate, it is said that the *Cadejo* does not allow the drunks to be left lying on the train line, so he drags them and place them so that the train does not pass over them.

The *Siguanaba* is a character of extraordinary validity throughout the department as Iztapa and San Jose. In Escuintla, due to its own economic development, the apparitions and souls in purgatory have adapted to the new conditions. Thus, in La Democracia it is said that the *Siguanaba* "is a woman with the face of a horse that gets on your motorcycle when you go to the coast and takes you off the road", or Siquinalá where van drivers complain that a woman dressed in white gets on the highways and makes them get between the reeds. On the wagons that transport the cane, they also say that the known as *tzipitíos* (similar to dwarves) appear and suck the juice of the cut canes and these rot, that is why in Tiquisate all the wagons carry red rags to chase them away.

In Escuintla, it is said that the swallows that every afternoon invade the trees in the parks and the wires of the power lines, are nothing more than the souls of the grandparents who come to visit to see how their people are behaving. That's why there are so many swallows in the city's palm trees.

As for the oral literature of Mayan origin, which is told in two municipalities of Escuintla, the following can be noted: In Palín, the storytellers, or *Ajitz*, call *chim il sa*, or "star excrement" to some little stars that, in ancient times—when evil did not yet exist—would descend to earth and, upon impact, turn into silver coins. But with the arrival of evil, they stopped becoming "silver coins" and instead turned into "worms."

It is also said that at four in the morning, four stars appear (the *Cruz Chimil*) that guide the sugarcane cutters who descend from Palín to the sugar mills of Escuintla to work in the vast cane fields. The legend of *El Tronchador* is also told here, a wicked man who appears on the trails and roads of the region and kills people from fright due to his diabolical appearance.

In Palín, there is a crossing known as the Devil's Bridge. People say that very strange things used to happen there. Since roadwork machinery was stored nearby, and though they were always left in good condition, many mornings the tractors were found with bent teeth and the mechanical shovels cut in half. In the town, people were convinced it was the devil who came at night to play with the machines and hid under the bridge to laugh at the laborers and foremen, who became very frightened. In this municipality, there are legends about enchanted hills such as *Pan Tereekb'al* (or Candelaria Hill), *Saq Kyej* (or White Horse Hill), and *Pan K'iche pak* (or Pantlaguate, a small mountain where the Lord of the Hill resides). But the most famous is the Rock of Palín, where all the Lords of the Hills are said to be sheltered, guarding the entrance to the Poqomam region, and when an airplane disturbs them too much, the Lords release the hummingbirds, which fly into the aircraft and bring them down.

In Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, where descendants of the K'aqchikel culture live, legends about the Lords of the Hills predominate, they are the faithful guardians of the mountains and volcanoes of Escuintla. Thus, in the Pacaya Volcano dwells *Rajawal Juyú*, the master of this great enchanted hill. It is also said that the volcano will always release smoke, ash, and fire because it is very fierce, and it will only calm down when *Gukumatz* returns and the Heart of the Sky plants maize on its slopes.

Music

The music of the department of Escuintla is very rich in sound traditions. However, due to the industrial development of the department, the music of the Mexican and North American counterculture has prevailed over the music of the oral tradition.

However, there are sonorous expressions that refuse to disappear. Thus, in the municipality of Palín, simple marimba sounds are played and there are also shawm, drum, whistle, and *tzijolaj* (Guatemalan cane flute) sounds.

In Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa are famous double marimbas that give concerts in the bandstand in the park, in the atrium of the church and enliven the civil and social festivities of the community. In San Vicente de Pacaya live whistlers and drummers very appreciated for their musical interpretation. They are hired to perform in different festivities in the municipalities of Escuintla and even in Sacatepéquez.

Military bands accompanying civil ceremonies and Holy Week processions are reported in all municipalities.

Despite the musical richness of the department, in municipalities such as San José, Iztapa and Nueva Concepción, due to their proximity to the sea, public beaches and agricultural areas, northern and tex-mex music rhythms have been introduced to accompany all their daily activities, particularly recreational activities.

Traditional medicine

Due to the proximity of the department of Escuintla to Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción, the capital of the Republic, the health centers solve to some extent the health problems of the population.

However, in remote municipalities and villages, and even in the city of Escuintla itself, there are midwives already trained by the health centers to assist in childbirth and childcare. These "*mujeres componedoras*," as they are called in Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, Guanagazapa and Tiquisate, are in great demand.

In Palín, there are women healers who make use of medicinal herbs and make "spiritual cleansings" against bad luck, the evil eye, the sunken fontanelle, and bad luck in love. In the Democracia the "*hierberos*," who prepare drinks and perfumes with secret plants, of clear western inheritance, that cure all kinds of evils and illnesses. These traditional perfumers of La Democracia are unique in Guatemala as they are almost medieval alchemists because of the technical procedures they use.

In Nueva Concepción, there are "bone setters" who are highly valued throughout the department for "fixing" dislocated joints and fractures. To heal, they apply herbs and techniques passed down from ancient times, which allow them to set bones in place without much difficulty. They are in high demand in the towns of Escuintla because they also "set broken bones" of domestic animals, especially dogs (*chuchos*), as well as cows, horses, and oxen, especially in Siquinalá, where there are also renowned sorcerers and healers who practice both good and evil along the entire southern coast.

Due to the volcanic characteristics of the department, thermal and medicinal waters are abundant, such as those of Patul in the city of Escuintla itself, very close to Plaza Palmeras. There are also the waters of the San Pedro Mártir Caves in the municipality of Escuintla. Religion in the department of Escuintla is highly diverse, as there are not only Catholic festivities but also a profusion of fundamentalist evangelical religions. Nevertheless, within popular religiosity, many religious festivals and ceremonies stand out. Thus, in all municipalities, patron saint festivals are prominent, such

as in Puerto San José, where the procession of the Patron Saint travels through streets, plazas, beaches, and, on some occasions, even reaches the sea, where it is celebrated by fishermen with plenty of fireworks and even carpets made of seashells and flowers. The celebration of the Patron Saint in Palín, dedicated to Saint Christopher, is also splendid; here, drivers or chauffeurs decorate carpets, adorn their vehicles with flowers and pine needles, and accompany the procession with a great display of fireworks. In Palín, it is said that since Saint Christopher was removed from Heaven by the Church and had nowhere to live, they gave him the ceiba tree in the plaza so he could make his home there. From that day on, people say they have seen Saint Christopher sitting in the ceiba tree, "fanning the Christ Child with a palm frond."

One of the most splendid festivities of the region is the celebration of the Virgin of Conception, which is commemorated in December in Escuintla, Siquinalá, and villages and hamlets near the sugar cane mills such as Baúl and Tarros. The Christmas festivities are very joyful and traditional in Escuintla, particularly in Tiquisate, where they still make large nativity scenes, baby Jesus theft, and novenas to the the Magui and celebrate with great joy the posadas and the burning of the devil.

In La Democracia it is said that on January 2nd, the Christ Child stops to come down from the main altar of the church and goes to visit house by house the nativity scenes of the population and plays with the clay shepherds. That is why sometimes the nativity scenes result messed that day and as it is said in Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa, the Child disappears from the nativity scenes, not because he has been stolen but because he goes to bathe in the Agunarcito River and to go for a walk in the mountains of La China or Los Achiotés.

In San Vicente Pacaya, it is said that Saint Vicent Martyr is tied by the heart of the Earth to the crater of the volcano, that is why God punishes the inhabitants of the region so much and does not extinguish the volcano.

In Iztapa they say that for the day of Saint Raphael Archangel they have seen an angel walking on the waves of the sea with outstretched wings. They say it is Saint Raphael coming down from heaven to bless the beaches and the schools of fish.

Other festivities celebrated in the department of Escuintla, are the *Corpus Christi* processions with their carpets of sawdust, canopy, the silver and gold Monstrance, which travel the streets of the city and the towns of the department in the month of June each year.

FROM THE LAND OF TZULTAK'A, LORD OF VALLEYS AND HILLS: STORIES AND FOLK TRADITIONS FROM ALTA VERAPAZ

Alta Verapaz linguistic groups

Originating from the eastern K'iche' branch, the Q'eqchi' and Poqomchi' languages have dominated the linguistic landscape of Alta Verapaz from time immemorial to the present day.

Poqomchi' is currently spoken in the municipalities of Santa Cruz Verapaz, San Cristóbal Verapaz, Tactic, Tamahú and Tucurú. In the rest of the municipalities Q'eqchi' is spoken and since 1540 the use of Spanish began.

Traditional material culture of Alta Verapaz

The department of Alta Verapaz covers an area of approximately 8,686 square kilometers. It was created by the Executive Decree on May 4, 1877 when this territory was divided into Alta and Baja Verapaz. It is bordered to the north by El Petén, to the east by Izabal, to the south by Zacapa and Baja Verapaz; and to the west by Quiché.

This area was recognized as *Tuzulutlán* or *Tezulutlán*, which means "Land of War," due to the difficulty the Spaniards had to conquer it, which Fray Bartolomé de las Casas achieved in 1537 with his evangelizing work, calling it since then "Land of the Verapaz."

According to the 1994 census, the current population of the department was 543,777 inhabitants, of which 88.96% were indigenous people of the Q'eqchi' and Poqomchi' ethnic groups.

This department is connected to the capital by two routes: The first is National Route No. 5, which starts in Guatemala City and passes through the municipalities of San Pedro and San Juan Sacatepéquez, both located in the department of Guatemala; it then enters the municipalities of Granados and El Chol (Baja Verapaz); from that high point, it descends to Rabinal and Salamá. Finally, it heads toward Alta Verapaz through Tactic and Santa Cruz, reaching Cobán. The other route goes north via the Atlantic Highway, which splits at the village of El Rancho in the department of El Progreso, while the main road continues to Puerto Barrios, the fork leads to Salamá, passing through the summit of Santa Elena, and continues on through Tactic and Cobán.

It is crossed by several important rivers, among which are the Polochic and the Cahabón, both born in the territory of Tactic and join in the jurisdiction of Panzós. Another river is the Lanquín, which rises in the caves of the same name and later flows into the Cahabón.

There is also the Chixoy or Negro river, which moves the largest power plant in Guatemala; the Salinas, which in the jurisdiction of El Petén and after receiving the inflow of the Pasión, forms the Usumacinta. There are others such as the Chajmaic, the Cunén and the Icbolay, as well as other subway rivers.

Its orography is quite irregular, constituted especially by the Sierra de Chamá, from where several branches detach, which makes its climate varied. This influences the variety of its agricultural products, as well as flowers, of which stands out the orchid known as Monja Blanca, declared National Flower of Guatemala. Also, its fauna is varied, among its birds is the Quetzal, declared national bird symbol.

In this department there is a great variety of handicrafts, but among them the following stand out:

Textiles

The textiles of Alta Verapaz are very colorful and are made exclusively by women using backstrap looms, in three special techniques: 1) *Picb'il*, which in Q'eqchi' means "pierced" or "perforated," is a technique unique to Cobán; 2) *Tzu'lbil*, meaning "braided" or "twisted," is very common in San Pedro Carchá and San Juan Chamelco; and 3) *Qu'embil*, which in Poqomchi' means "woven," is characteristic of Tactic and Tamahú. The first two are commonly known as gauze-like weaving; the third type is recognized for its many colors and designs, which represent elements of daily life such as butterflies, pacaya leaves, human figures, small jugs, blowpipes, and crosses.

Silverware

Silver craftsmanship is recognized nationally and internationally. Its elaboration is found especially in Cobán, Carchá, Chamelco and Tactic, following a series of phases depending on the object to be produced, such as: manufacture of crucibles, molding, casting, forging, spinning or rolling, polishing or filing, inlaying, chiseling, bleaching, engraving or brushing. The main items produced are: charms, necklaces, rings, earrings, medals and medallions.

Pyrotechnics

Using traditional methods, they make small firecrackers, stick rockets, aerial bombs, "*toritos*" (bull-shaped fireworks), "*cachinflines*" (small whistling rockets), "*escupidores*" (spitters), and fireworks towers. Other crafts produced on a smaller scale, but no less important, include basketry, palm work, musical instruments, masks, clay roof tiles and bricks, and ceramics. In addition, there is a shoe factory in San Cristóbal and a mine in a place called Caquiepec, in Chamelco.

Cotton textiles

Güipiles (embroidered blouses) and *cortes* (skirts) are

made in the municipalities of Chisec, Cobán, San Cristóbal Verapaz, Santa Cruz Verapaz, Tactic, Tamahú, San Juan Chamelco, Tucurú, Panzós, Senahú and Lanquín. Sheep wool weaving in the municipality of Lanquín.

Traditional pottery

Handmade, fired outdoors, and using local clay as raw material, they produce pots, clay pots for *tamales* and *kaq'ik*, griddles, jars, pitchers, and small toy dishes. Ceramics are produced in the municipalities of Chisec, Cobán, San Cristóbal Verapaz, Santa Cruz Verapaz, Tactic, San Juan Chamelco, San Pedro Carchá, Lanquín, Senahú, Cahabón, and Panzós.

Wood products

In the municipalities of San Pedro Carchá, Cahabón, and Senahú, white pine, mahogany, and cedar wood are used to produce masks for ceremonies, dances, and performances. Wood is also used in the production of furniture such as beds, tables, and wardrobes in the municipalities of Cobán, San Cristóbal Verapaz, Tactic, San Juan Chamelco, San Pedro Carchá, Senahú, Cahabón, and Lanquín. Musical instruments are made in Chisec, San Pedro Carchá, San Juan Chamelco, San Cristóbal Verapaz, Tucurú, Senahú, Lanquín, and Cahabón.

Metal products

Wrought iron crafts are made in Cobán, San Pedro Carchá, Senahú, and Cahabón. Copper crafts are produced in Cobán, Tactic, San Juan Chamelco, San Pedro Carchá, Senahú, and Cahabón. Among the silver crafts are items such as *chachales*, which are worn by Cobán women with their ceremonial religious garments and during departmental festivals. Earrings, chains, pendants, jewelry boxes, and bracelets are also made in the municipalities of Cobán, Tactic, San Juan Chamelco, and Cahabón. Gold crafts are produced only in the municipality of San Pedro Carchá.

Pyrotechnics

With pyrotechnic craftsmanship, rocket launchers, stick bombs, and aerial bombs are made in the municipalities of Cobán, San Juan Chamelco, San Pedro Carchá, and Senahú.

Bowls and gourd

Only in Chisec, Lanquín, and Cahabón are crafts made from the morro fruit, used to produce spoons and gourds.

Additionally, basketry, cordage, palm products, candle-making, tulle, leather goods, and construction materials are also produced.

Popular festivities and traditions

Municipalities

Cobán
Cahabón
Chahal
Chisec
Fray Bartolomé de las Casas
Lanquín
Panzós
San Cristóbal Verapaz
San Pedro Carchá
San Juan Chamelco
Santa Cruz Verapaz

Senahú

Tactic

Tamahú

Tucurú

Dates

August 4th
September 6th
August 28th
June 29th
May 3rd
August 28th
August 30th
July 25th
June 29th
June 24th
May 3rd
June 13th
August 13th
January 25th, 2009
September 29th

Patron Saint

Saint Dominic de Guzmán
Nativity of the Virgin Mary
Saint Augustine of Hippo
Feast of Saints Peter and Paul
Feast of the Cross
Saint Augustine of Hippo
Saint Rose of Lima
James the Apostle
Saint Peter the Apostle
Saint John the Baptist
Feast of the Cross
Saint Anthony of Padua
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Saint Paul the Apostle
Saint Michael the Archangel

Confraternities and brotherhoods

Without a doubt, the strongest confraternity, due to its number of members and cohesive structure, is that of Santo Domingo de Guzmán, located in the departmental capital. Other strong confraternities include those of San Pedro Apóstol in Carchá, San Juan Bautista in Chamelco, the Virgen de la Asunción in Tactic, San Pablo Apóstol in Tamahú, and San Miguel Arcángel in Tucurú.

Each one preserves a reservoir of ancestral traditions that modern life has not been able to fully penetrate or dismantle. Added to this is the lush vegetation of the department's forests, hills, and jungles, which offer endless possibilities for magical and religious rituals. The brotherhoods are weakened in comparison to the strength of the confraternities, all of which are in charge of performing their own paabanc. (Paabanc: a specific ritual of petition and gratitude before an image of worship and ancestral religious faith, syncretized with Catholic Christianity and accompanied by sacred food and drink), thus, the largest paabanc in the department is the one held by the confraternity of Santo Domingo de Guzmán, whose chapel for religious worship can accommodate up to two hundred people and also includes designated areas for food consumption.

Markets

As the departmental capital is the main commercial hub of the entire region, its municipal market is the largest and offers every purchasing possibility, since Cobán is the largest commercial city in northern Guatemala. Likewise, regarding traditional dance elements, near San Pedro Carchá, in a mountain range called Sehubub, there is a costume shop (morería) that rents and supplies traditional costumes and masks throughout the department.

Popular languages

Alta Verapaz is the only department in Guatemala where its mestizo inhabitants, also called "ladinos," speak the native language with the largest number of speakers: Q'eqchi', in addition to the common and official language, Spanish. Another surviving language is Poqomchi', spoken in Santa Cruz, San Cristóbal Verapaz, and Tactic, although the "ladinos" do not speak this one. Farther east in the department, along the banks of the Polochic River and nearing the Izabal border, Garífuna can also be heard, though to a lesser extent.

Dance culture

The department's traditional dances are numerous. Some preserve features typical of pre-Hispanic ritual dances, while others represent rituals mixed with medieval colonial elements. Altogether, these dances persist to this day, representing an irreplaceable expression of cultural identity for the people of Alta Verapaz.

These dances include the following:

Dances

El Venado
— The Deer
De Toritos
— Little Bulls
Moros y cristianos
(Rey Tardecindo)
— Moors and Christians
De Diablos
— Of Devils
El Convite
— The Parade
La Catarina
— The Catarina

Municipality

Cobán, Santa Cruz Verapaz,
Cahabón
Santa Cruz Verapaz

San Juan Chamelco

Cobán

Tactic, Tucurú, Lanquín

Cobán

Traditional spiritual culture of Alta Verapaz

The northern region of Guatemala is one of the richest, mysterious, magical and unique areas in the history and anthropology of the country, which makes it different and unique in the context of Guatemalan culture.

The presence of pre-Hispanic Mayan traits in the culture of the Verapaces is significant, as they have remained constant from ancient times to the present, though resemanticized, hybridized, and syncretized, they vigorously preserve the worldview and way of life of the Poqomchi', Q'eqchi', and partially the K'iche' peoples in some municipalities of this vast region.

However, it should be noted that the Q'eqchi ethnic group is one of the four majority ethnic linguistic groups in Guatemala.

The pre-Hispanic population was settled in valleys and mountains, with well-established lordships. During the Spanish conquest and colonization in the 16th century, the Verapaz region played a preponderant role, since its inhabitants presented tenacious and effective resistance to the conquest, which is why the Spaniards named this vast territory *Tezulutlán*, which means "Land of War" in the Q'eqchi' language.

Moreover, during the time of Spanish conquest and colonization, the Verapaz region was the setting for some of the most exceptional experiments in Christian evangelization in the New World during the 16th century. The Peaceful Conquest through Christian evangelization was promoted and carried out by the Dominican friar Fray Bartolomé de las Casas in the early years of the 16th century. This process began with an agreement in 1537, during the governorship of Alonzo de Maldonado in the Kingdom of Goathemala, whereby the territory was placed under the jurisdiction of the Dominican Order and the Crown directly, prohibiting the entry of encomenderos or lay Spanish landowners. This peaceful conquest was implemented gradually. On the other hand, the territory known as *Tezulutlán* by the conquistadors was renamed Verapaz by Emperor Charles V, according to a Royal Decree issued on October 30, 1547.

In the area, on the one hand, the peaceful conversion lasted almost three centuries, until the 18th century, and on the other, the tenacious resistance of the Q'eqchi' people to surrender their world and their culture continued.

In contemporary Q'eqchi' historical memory, the resistance and eventual conversion to Christianity of the last Q'eqchi' Lord, Juan Matalbatz, Cacique of San Juan Chamelco, is still vividly remembered. With this, the indigenous people declared their complete resistance to be over. However, in oral tradition it is now said that Juan Matalbatz still lives, and he has thus become a mythical figure who will one day free his people from the mestizo yoke. Juan Matalbatz has thus become one of the most important mythical figures in the legends of the Verapaz region.

It should also be noted that other historical processes marked the sociocultural development of La Verapaz and its inhabitants, such as the introduction of black African slaves during the colonial period and the establishment of large estates, mills and sugar cane mills such as those of San Jerónimo in Baja Verapaz. As well as the presence of Germans in its territory from the late nineteenth century until before World War II, when intensive coffee cultivation was introduced.

For administrative reasons, the vast territory of the Verapaz was divided into two departments by the Government of Guatemala, according to decree 181 of May 4, 1877, thus creating Alta and Baja Verapaz.

Thus, the culture of the region is deeply amalgamated. The aforementioned historical processes gave it a unique imprint, where the pre-Hispanic heritage of the Mayan Q'eqchi' and Poqomchi' ethnic groups combines with Western culture of Spanish descent, colonial Black influence, and that of other immigrant groups settled and developed in the region, forming an extraordinary and rich cultural miscegenation. However, due to these same historical processes, indigenous culture prevails over other sociocultural forms in the process of cultural symbiosis and religious syncretism, and this is what is currently found in the department of Alta Verapaz.

Therefore, the oral traditions of the department of Alta Verapaz maintain a strong presence of traditional Q'eqchi' and Poqomchi' elements, although there are also Western literary traits and forms that have been heavily resemanticized and nearly absorbed into the Q'eqchi' culture.

The most prevalent oral literary forms in the region are mythical, historical, and animistic legends about ghosts, apparitions, and wandering souls, as well as old types of marvelous folktales about magical bandits, fools and simpletons, animals, and formulaic stories.

So far, no old verse literary forms of Western origin such as ballads, short romances, and couplets have been reported in the vast department, except for the city of Cobán and its neighborhoods, where true gems of this type of literature have been found among its mestizo inhabitants.

In Alta Verapaz, there are several types of traditional storytellers. Among the Q'eqchi', storytellers are called *Aj seereq' najteril na'leb'*; in the Poqomchi' area, they are known as *Aj q'orol re' najtiir laj b'anooj*, and in the mestizo neighborhoods of Cobán, they are referred to as "*lengüeteros*" or "*cuenteros*."

These storytellers are elderly individuals who are highly respected in their communities for the versatility of their narration and the breadth of their knowledge. As in all of Guatemala, storytelling takes place during social situations such as wakes, novena ceremonies, church

courtyards, and town parks. It also takes place in more intimate settings at home, around the family house, in patios, and along the corridors of homes.

In Alta Verapaz, there are also storytellers who stand out for narrating myths only during sacred ceremonies and ritual occasions, embodying all the characteristics of a Mayan priest. Thus, in the Q'eqchi' region, they are respectfully called *Aj k'atol utu'uj*, and among the Poqomchi' they are known as *Aj k'atool*. These dignitaries embody the entire wisdom and history of their people and ethnicity. The literary mythical figure of Alta Verapaz is *Tzultuka*, Lord of the Hills and Valleys of the region.

The term *Tzultak'a* expresses the bisexual nature of the deity, which for the Q'eqchi' is a manifestation of perfection and completeness: *Tzul*, meaning hill, represents the man; and *Tak'a*, meaning valley, represents the woman.

A defining trait of a person or community is their relationship with *Tzultak'a*; when candles or *copal pom* (incense) are offered and the appropriate prayers are made, it is expected that the request will be granted almost immediately. If this does not happen, the person will blame themselves, assuming they did not perform the prayers or rituals properly. Generally, the Q'eqchi' attribute negative events to prayers and rituals not properly carried out.

Tzultak'a holds profound meaning for the Q'eqchi'; it is like the face, the very visage of God—it is the hill, the valley, and the earth, the place where the presence of the World God is most often felt and experienced.

The Q'eqchi' mention that there are thirteen great hills, or great *Tzultakaes*: *Raxón Tzunum*, *Shubyuc*, *Cha*, *Chajcoj*, *Tzunkin*, *Tac'caj*, *Chisguajagua*, *Cubilgüitz*, *Chajmaic*, *Chijal*, *Siab*, *Belebjú*, and *Cojaj*. These are of a masculine nature, with the exception of *Caná Itzám*, the only female among them.

Religious syncretism has led to the identification of the hill deity with the Christian deity; this is why crosses are placed at strategic points in nature to show reverence.

The ethnologist David Saper states that "it is curious to witness the Indian confusion as they simultaneously venerate the god *Tzultak'a* and the god of the Cross," and it is striking to see how they place images of saints and wooden crosses alongside ancient clay or stone idols on their altars, both in churches and in their homes. When the indigenous person remains in the town, they usually address only the Christian God of the Cross; but when going into the countryside—crossing mountains and valleys, traveling through forests, and reaching virgin lands they aim to settle—they then turn exclusively to the god "of hills and valleys" (*Tzultak'a*).

The Q'eqchi' also pray or communicate with *Cacua Sak'e* (Lord Sun), although this is a more transcendent and less frequent aspect of their religious practice, as this deity is perceived as more distant and therefore believed to not always listen. In addition to the god *Tzultak'a* and the Christian god of the Cross, the Q'eqchi' venerate a third deity, the Sun (*Cacua Sak'e*), regarded as the supreme giver and dispenser of all good things for both people and the land.

Within the oral literature and worldview of the region, there appears a figure opposite to *Tzultak'a*: *K'ek* (the black one), considered a malevolent spirit who appears at night in the form of a cow or another animal. This being brings all kinds of misfortunes.

In Chahal and Chisec, Q'eqchi' areas, it is believed that *Tzultak'a* fell in love with a woman named Dominga, to whom he gave a flower as a token of engagement, asking that it be delivered to the girl's father. When "the girl gave her father the flower from *Tzultak'a*, it turned into a silver *Monja Blanca*." Thus, Dominga's father becomes convinced that it is *Tzultak'a* who wishes to marry his daughter. The young woman goes to live with *Tzultak'a* inside the hill, after performing the appropriate ritual ceremonies.

When the "ancient customs" are not followed, such as asking *Tzultak'a* for permission to heal animals, cut down trees, or use water sources, the Lord of the Hill punishes the transgressor. In Cahabón, they say that a man named Juan Cajbón came from other lands and settled in the village of Setacalcab. There, he had good harvests of corn, beans, chili, yucca, and other crops. He liked the area because there were many animals, so Juan began to work. He built his little house, cleared a field, did farm work, and began preparing for hunting. Then one day, he went out with Miguel, his eldest son, who was in charge of guiding the dogs through the hills where deer, pacas, and armadillos live. But they found nothing. They went several times but never found a deer. Every time Juan fired, he missed. He only managed to hunt an armadillo or two.

So one day, they went out determined to hunt a deer no matter what. But the problem was that Juan did not want to follow the custom of burning candles, *copal pom*, and keeping vigil the night before to ask permission at the altar of *Tzultak'a* to enter his lands and go after his animals. *Tzultak'a*, the lord of the hills and valleys in the region, was guarding them carefully. He was supposed to do many things that the Lord of the Hill required: fumigate his dogs with *copal pom*, fumigate his house and weapons, sleep on the ground in front of the altar, but he did none of what the ancestors prescribed, which were commands from the Lord of the Hills. So, Juan and his son Miguel left very early for Julgix hill, followed by two or three of their best hunting dogs, called *ezentzies*. Miguel, who was handling the dogs, entered the underbrush while Juan took a position to intercept the

deer. The chase began, and Miguel shouted to encourage his dogs, but everything went wrong because the dogs didn't bark, and the deer didn't pass where Juan was waiting. Hours passed, and Juan didn't want to go home without his son. But he got tired and assumed Miguel had returned without telling him. When he got home and didn't find him, he went back to the woods, calling and whistling. Even the villagers helped, but Miguel was nowhere to be found. On the third day, Miguel appeared but couldn't speak. They brought him inside, fumigated him with copal pom, and prayed over him until finally, Miguel said that while he was deep in the underbrush, a little boy he didn't recognize appeared and said that his dad wanted to see him. The boy led him to Julgix hill, and at the entrance of a cave, the messenger vanished. Then Miguel followed the path inside the cave until he reached an old man at the back. There, a man was waiting for him in a brightly colored hammock. But looking closely, Miguel realized the hammock was woven from colored snakes, and the furniture was made of animals like armadillos and deer. There were many animals, as if it were a hospital. Then the old man said: "Tell your father to stop bothering my little animals. You can see they're all wounded by you. Watch out, I'm going to take revenge. You'll remember me. I'll send my snakes if you keep disturbing my lands without asking permission."

Later, Miguel fell ill and died three days later. It turned out that no healer was willing to do anything, because it was vengeance from the Lord of the Hill, *Tzultak'a*.

Everything they tried was in vain. No matter how much wealth Juan offered to the famous healers in the area, they refused to come because it was a serious case. The matter was in God's hands, and in the hands of the Lord of the Hills and Valleys, *Tzultak'a*.

Tzultak'a, lord and master of the Q'eqchi' worldview and oral literature, has as his alter ego (his other self) the legend of the *Black Aj K'ek*. In Senahú, they say that the Q'eqchi' laborers working on the coffee plantations fear approaching the processing patios, because the *Aj K'ek* might appear—a very large, black man with a fierce appearance, who, according to the Q'eqchi', is the son of cows and the *sisimite*. At night, he dances and plays drums to guard the coffee beans and sacks so that the Indians don't steal them.

There are also historical legends that refer to the founding of towns and their patron saints. One of the most beautiful and well-known is the legend of *San Cristóbal Verapaz*, which tells that in ancient times, Saint Christopher asked permission from the World God (*Tz'aqol Bitol*) to cross the Cahabón River and leave the Christ Child and his palm tree at the place called *Coyolares*, because he was very tired. He also asked the World God "for permission" to found a town and become its patron saint. *Tz'aqol Bitol* told Saint Christopher, "with pleasure," but that they would have to cross the Child Jesus together over the Cahabón River and both would become the town's patron saints. Saint Christopher

agreed, which is why in the Poqomchi' region, ancestral deities share the same sacred level and hierarchy as Christian patron saints.

In the Verapaz region, there are other ancestral legends of Mayan origin such as "The Wedding of the Sun and the Moon" in Santa Cruz Verapaz, of Poqomchi' descent, which is also known by names like "The Lord Sun, the Lady Moon, the Lord Cloud, and *C'agua' Tsa'* in Chisec. In Lanquín it's called "Loves of the Sun and the Moon"; in Tukurú, "Loves of *C'agua'choc* and *C'ana'po'*"; and in San Juan Chamelco, *C'agua'sa'* who seeks *Cana'po'*. This is one of the most extraordinary legends in Guatemalan oral literature. One of the most important characters in the legends of Alta Verapaz is Juan Noj, a figure associated with rivers and the foothills of mountains, often appearing in misty afternoons or when there's light drizzle (*chipi-chipi*). He features prominently in the Q'eqchi' region of San Pedro Carchá; in Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, he is known as *Juan el Gordo* (Fat Juan), and in Chahal, he is linked to the legend of the *Black Aj K'ek*.

There are also countless legends of ghosts and wandering souls throughout the department. One of the most famous is that of the "*Duende of Lanquín*," which retains all the characteristics of a spirit that lives in caves and bothers women. In Tamahú, they say that the river spirit, or "water animal," scares drunk and amorous men. The legends of *La Siguanaba*, *La Llorona*, and *El Cadejo* are still widely present throughout the Alta Verapaz region, in towns, hamlets, and villages alike.

A very characteristic legend of Alta Verapaz is that of the "Living Well" in Tactic. Elder Poqomchi' people say that long ago a very beautiful woman fell into this well and could not get out because "The Water Spirit" fell in love with her and would not let her go. Since then, the well seems to be boiling and throws out silk handkerchiefs, golden and silver tokens, and *perrajes* (traditional shawls), which are part of the Water Lord's treasure. Whoever tries to collect them falls into the well and never comes back, becoming a servant of the Water Lord's woman.

Another type of oral literature, different from the previous one, has developed in the imperial city of Cobán. Although heavily Mayanized, beautiful Western literary forms survive, such as fairy tales. In this city, in the Santo Domingo neighborhood, Don Mario Sierra, the "storyteller" (*lengüetero*) of the area, tells the story of "The Enchanted Boy," about a young man named Tujab who ran away from home and went with a strange man who ate ashes. The man gave him a place to sleep and a bunch of keys. After many marvelous adventures, young Tujab goes to live at the house of some uncles in Tactic. There, he meets a young woman, gets married, and lives very happily.

In the city of Cobán, other types of fairy tales have been identified, as well as animal stories like those of Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote, stories of Pedro Urdemales, and mythical bandits such as Juan Matalbatz.



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