



History of the Valley of Las Mesas Petapa

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In the 16th century the Poqomam population of Popah gave rise to San Miguel Petapa, which was, until the 18th century, one of the most prosperous in the province of Guatemala. Its proximity to the capital made it a place of passage for the southern region and a center of supply of essential products for the maintenance of the city, especially food products such as wheat, corn, vegetables, fruits, fish and crabs.

In addition, due to its climate and topography, it became an ideal site for the cultivation of sugar cane and the consequent production of sugar, panela and liquor. The richness of its soil and climate allowed the region to be oriented, in the 19th and 20th centuries, to two of the main export products: grana, first, and coffee, later, which enriched the country and allowed the construction of ostentatious works of art in the capital.

In the 21st century, this past invites recognition in order to revalue it. Therefore, this document is a brief description of the historical development of the region, which currently comprises four towns: Villa Canales, Santa Inés Petapa, San Miguel Petapa and Villa Nueva, all in the department of Guatemala, as they share a common landscape and a common past that should twin them towards a shared future.

PRE-HISPANIC PERIOD

Human occupation in the Las Mesas Petapa valley dates back millennia. The remains left by ancient generations date back to the Early Preclassic (2000-800 BC).

Ceramic evidence corresponding to the Charcas Phase has been found in the vicinity of the valley, dating back to 1000 BC, when Kaminaljuyú was already an important center. This indicates that there was a cultural influence of the great metropolis of the highlands, probably related to the exchange of obsidian, the main element for the elaboration of cutting tools throughout the entire pre-Hispanic period.

According to the findings reported so far, remains were found that correspond to the Late Preclassic, with a diffusion of ceramics from the Verbena and Arenal Phases, corresponding to the time span from 400 to 100 BC. It was a period in which the influence of Kaminaljuyú was felt with greater intensity in the southern region, precisely in the valley of Las Mesas Petapa. It was the time of the cultural, expansive and commercial boom of the great city, a period in which it is considered that glyphic writing was developed, precisely in Kaminaljuyú.

Sometime later, the Miraflores lagoon, which supplied water to the cultivated fields in Kaminaljuyú, presented a decrease in the water levels until its total disappearance, around 400 AD, which caused a transformation in the entire region. There was also an intrusion of ceramics related to the area of Chimaltenango, Quiché and Quetzaltenango, which was evidenced in the sites of San Antonio Frutal and Mejicanos, in the valley of Petapa, indicating a period of political changes of great importance in the region.

Subsequently, the pottery of the Amatlé Phase, which corresponds to the period between 550 and 800, expanded throughout the region.

For all these reasons, the Petapa region was always exposed to the technological and ideological changes that occurred in Kaminaljuyú. Therefore, it was not free from the process of decay with satisfaction of the great city around 800.¹

After the Epiclassic, the Petapa region suffered a dramatic decline in population. The researcher Carson Murdy² assumes that between 48% and 87% of the population emigrated or died between 1000 and 1200. Although the figure seems exaggerated and based on scattered explorations, it is clear that the region lost economic, social and political importance in that period.

According to the author, the population was settled in small villages, of which the most densely populated were those located in the vicinity of the current settlements of Chinautla, Petapa and Villa Nueva. The language spoken by these people was Poqomam.

Conditions underwent a significant change in the Late Postclassic period, between 1200 and 1524, when the population increased and political entities were formed based on feudal-type family organizations in which loyalty included the payment of tribute and the provision of personal services, especially in war, similar to the nascent states of K'iche'es, Kaqchikeles and Tz'utujiles.

The growth of the political entities, especially the K'iche'es and Kaqchikeles, was based on warlike activities of conquest and expansion. Therefore, the Poqomames suffered the expansionist onslaught of the Kaqchikel, between 1480 and 1497. According to the Kaqchikel chronicles, the Poqomame populations were conquered and began to pay tribute. This could be a fact of self-exaltation, since when the Spaniards arrived in the 16th

century, the Poqomame communities were independent of the Kaqchikel communities.³ It is likely that they were also strategic alliances, for military and commercial purposes.

The social and political organization of the poqomames has been studied based on the dictionaries written by the friars in the early years of the Hispanic period.⁴ Thanks to them we know the political organization of each political entity or "kingdom" based on the family structure, which presented a scale of at least 12 positions in the military structure and the same number for the religious structure.

The highest clan-type group was the molab, which had representation in the decisions of the political entity in confederate-type ties.

Thus organized, the most important lordship was that of Beleh, called Mixcu (today Chinautla Viejo) by the Mexica traders. The name Beleh means "among nine", because there were nine lords of molab who governed the region that, approximately, would configure the current municipalities of Mixco, Chinautla and part of Guatemala.⁵



¹ Shook, Edwin y Marion Hatch: Las tierras altas centrales: períodos Preclásico y Clásico. En Historia General de Guatemala. Tomo I. Asociación de Amigos del País y Fundación para la Cultura y el Desarrollo, Guatemala, 1999. Pages 292-315.

² Murdy, Carson: El período Postclásico en el altiplano central. En: Historia General de Guatemala. Tomo I. Asociación de Amigos y Fundación para la Cultura y El Desarrollo, Guatemala, 1999. Page 319.

³ Murdy, Op. Cit., pages: 319-321.

⁴ Miles, Suzanne: Los pokomames del siglo XVI. Seminario de Integración Social Guatemalteca No. 43, Guatemala, 1983.

⁵ Hill, Robert: Los pokomames. En: Historia General de Guatemala. Tomo I. Asociación de Amigos del País y Fundación para la Cultura y el Desarrollo, Guatemala, 1999. Pages 675-676.

Other well-organized entities were those of Pinula and Petapa, named after Mexica traders. The poqomam name of Petapa was Popah and they have the same meaning: place of mats, in the understanding that pop (mat) is the seat of a ruler, his throne.

The political conditions of the time oriented the strategic, military and commercial alliances of Beleh towards the k'ich'es of Q'umar Ka'aj, possibly due to the expansion of the kaqchiqueles of Chajomá (present-day Jilotepeque Viejo, also called Mixco Viejo); while Popah seems to have oriented his links with the kaqchikeles of Iximche'.

THE CONQUEST

In this political environment, the Castilians arrived in the territory from the recently conquered region of Mexico. The strategy followed by Hernán Cortés, captain of the Castilian troops in Mexica territory, consisted of an alliance with the rulers of the lordships subject to the Mexica empire, who sought their independence and, above all, to free themselves from the regime of political and religious terror on which the Aztecs based their military supremacy, as well as with the declared enemies of Tenochtitlan. This strategy allowed a handful of Castilians to count on the collaboration of thousands of native auxiliaries, among them the Tlaxcalans. In addition, it allowed to conserve the territories under Hispanic dominion, since the native nobles swore fidelity to the Castilian authorities, and they fulfilled it.

According to the writer Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán,⁶ the Popah Poqomames were ruled by Cazhualam, who established an alliance with Pedro de Alvarado in the city of Iximche' in 1524. It is likely that Cazhualam found it profitable to maintain

commercial and political connections with his Kaqchikel allies, while his Beleh neighbors, speakers of the same language, confronted the Castilians because they were allies of the K'iche'es.

The author also says that a "capul", that is to say a molab of Popah, rebelled against the alliance with the Hispanics, during the Kaqchikel rebellion because of the abuses of the conquerors, reason why the warlike actions were prolonged until 1526. Cazhualam continued to be allied with the Spaniards, so that when the military actions ended, Petapa, as it was called by the Mexica, was one of the first towns submitted to the Castilian Crown.⁷

HISPANIC PERIOD

As a consequence of the political and military confrontation, two towns were created. The main town was San Miguel Petapa, awarded as an encomienda to the conquerors. Between 1524 and 1526 Petapa was an entrustment of Pedro de Alvarado and then, from 1529 to 1530, it was assigned to Juan Pérez Dardón. Later, the town was divided in two for the entrustment, one part, from 1530 to 1535, was given to the treasurer Francisco Castellanos, while the other was given to Juan de Galvarro in 1531. In 1542,



⁶ Fuentes y Guzmán, Francisco: Recordación Florida. Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, 1932.

⁷ The diffusion of the Lienzo de Quahuquecholan, in Puebla, has opened new interpretations about the role of the native warriors that helped the Castilians, in this case a Nahuatl group, in which the figure of Jorge de Alvarado stands out and in which the passage of the troops in the area of Popah is described, identified with a glyph of petate.

in recognition of its loyalty, the town was freed from the entrustment and assigned as a direct tributary of the Castilian Crown.⁸

Catechization was assigned to the Dominicans and was among the foundation of towns established by *oidor* Juan Rogel between 1544 and 1548.⁹ It is probable that the town had already been laid out by cord some years before and, by then, it is certain that the Dominicans were in charge of its administration.

On the contrary, the inhabitants who rebelled against the Spaniards were reduced in the town of Santa Inés Petapa.¹⁰ According to Fuentes and Guzmán, Santa Inés was populated by Mexica, who named the adjacent mountain system as Chichimecas, whose meaning in Spanish is "bitter cord". It is probable that the space was assigned to the Mexica to further humiliate the defeated and to avoid creating tensions with the community loyal to the Castilians, that is to say San Miguel. In 1549 the New Laws of 1542 were applied, which ordered the liberation of indigenous slaves, so Santa Inés was established around 1548 or 1549 and also came under the care of the Dominicans.

It is symbolic that the people who voluntarily submitted to the Crown received the name of the chief archangel of the heavenly hosts, while the slaves received the name of a Dominican blessed. Each of the towns received ejido and communal lands.

Ejido lands belonged to the people and were inalienable. They were worked by the *maceguales* or commoners, who were obliged to pay tribute. From these crops they obtained their own income and the resources to pay tribute. They were lands administered by the indigenous town council to improve the economic possibilities of the institution and the town, they could be acquired through purchases, and, on

many occasions, they were leased for the payment of tribute. San Miguel Petapa obtained its land titles before 1559.¹¹

The municipal government was exercised by the descendants of the Poqomam nobility. The indigenous governors of the 16th and 17th centuries were the heirs of Cahualam, who received the surname Cael and, later, Guzmán. The new governors were, in succession, fathers and sons: Francisco Cael, son of Cahualam, until approximately 1575; Francisco de Guzmán, until 1590; Bernabé de Guzmán, until 1625; Pedro de Guzmán, until 1650; Bernabé, until 1685, and Pascual, until 1707, a period in which the Crown diminished the importance of the indigenous nobility.¹²

Due to its proximity to the capital city and its location towards the southern region, San Miguel Petapa became a place of commercial activity. In addition, due to its geographic location, the Spaniards requested land in the region to be used for corn, sugar cane and cattle ranches.



⁸ Luján, Jorge: Las fundaciones en el reino de Guatemala. En: Historia General de Guatemala. Tomo II, Asociación de Amigos del País y Fundación para la cultura y El Desarrollo, Guatemala, 1994. Páginas 553-555.

⁹ Luján Jorge: Urbanismo. En: Historia General de Guatemala. Tomo III. Asociación de Amigos del País y Fundación para Cultura y El Desarrollo, Guatemala, 1995. Page 133.

¹⁰ Luján, Urbanismo... Página 556.

¹¹ Chután Edgar y Joel Hernández: Unidades productivas agrarias en el valle de Petapa, 1570-1680. Tesis de grado. Escuela de Historia, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 2000. Pages 40-49.

¹² Luján, Jorge: Política fundacional en los siglos XVI y XVII en el reino de Guatemala: En: Historia General de Guatemala. Tomo II. Asociación de Amigos del País y Fundación para la Cultura y El Desarrollo, Guatemala, 1994. Page 563.

These lands were granted by the Crown in lands adjacent to the lands of the towns of San Miguel and Santa Inés Petapa, by means of documents called grants¹³. The Spaniards, in order to obtain a royal grant, claimed to be descendants of conquistadors, of the first colonizers or relatives of officials. At the end of the 17th century there were around 60 haciendas in the jurisdiction of Petapa.¹⁴

The ownership of these haciendas made the presence of people of African and mestizo origin necessary for their operation, which enriched the population with people of diverse origins. In such a way that, in the XVII century, a brotherhood of Spaniards, that of the Virgen de Concepción, requested the erection of a parish separate from the indigenous *curato*. This was granted in 1669.

On the other hand, in 1682, the civil administration of both towns was unified under the name of Valle de las Mesas Petapa, to better control the mestizo and mulatto population of the region.¹⁵

DESCRIPTIONS

The town of San Miguel Petapa was described by the Dominican Thomas Gage, between 1625 and 1637.¹⁶

"To the west of the valleys of Mixco and Pinula there are two other towns larger than Mixco and Pinula, called Petapa and Amatitlán, to where there are in the middle of the valley some places where it is necessary to go up and down, which they call ravines or quiebras; where you find streams and beautiful springs, as well as herbs for the sustenance of sheep and cattle. Petapa is a town that has about five hundred very rich inhabitants who allow the Spaniards to live among them, from whom they have learned to live and speak with the people. Through this town is passed to come from Comayagua, San

Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and the frequency of passengers has enriched it. It is considered one of the most pleasant villages of all those belonging to Guatemala, for its proximity to a freshwater lake where there is a lot of fish and, particularly, crabs and another species of fish called mojarra, similar to bream in figure and taste, with the difference of not being so big. There are in this town a certain number of Indians who are in charge of fishing to supply the city of Guatemala, and they are obliged to send every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday the amount of crabs and mojarra, that the Corregidor and the other magistrates, who are eight, have imposed on them for each week".

The Dominican's narration continued as follows:

"There lives a family that is very respectable among the Indians, who claim to be descendants of the ancient kings of the country and that the Spaniards have now honored with the noble surname of Guzmán. From this family is chosen the Governor of the place, which depends on the city and the Chamber of Justice of Guatemala (Court). The one who was Governor when he was in that country was called Don Bernardo (Bernabé) de Guzmán, who had long exercised this office and had conducted himself with much prudence and discretion, until having lost his sight of old age he was replaced by his son Don Pedro de Guzmán, who like his father was feared and respected by the other Indians, and if they had not been given to drunkenness, as are most of the Indians, they



¹³ Chután y Hernández, Op. Cit. Pages 41-42.5

¹⁴ Luján, Política... Página 557.

¹⁵ Gall, Francis (compilador): Diccionario Geográfico de Guatemala. Instituto Geográfico Nacional, Guatemala. Versión electrónica, 1999.

¹⁶ Estas descripciones fueron tomadas de Gall, Op. Cit

could have obtained the government of a city of Spaniards..... The Indians, exercise there also most of the necessary offices in a well-established republic and are found of the same vegetables and the same fruits that are given in the city of Guatemala".

Referring to the curato temple and its feast, he wrote:

"The treasure of the church is also very large, having many brotherhoods of Our Mother and other saints, whose images are decorated with crowns, chains and bracelets of value, in addition to lamps, censers and silver candlesticks that serve for the altars. The main celebration of the place is the day of San Miguel, and there is a fair to which all the merchants of Guatemala come to sell and buy. The afternoon of that day and the next they make bullfights, which serves as entertainment, as well to the Spaniards as to the blacks, who do it on horseback and other Indians on foot, which being subject to get drunk not only risk their lives, but many of them lose their lives. In addition to this fair that is held at that time, every day around five o'clock in the afternoon there is a tianguis or market, where there are only the Indians of the place who trade among themselves".

On productive activity, Gage wrote:

"A half a league from this town there is a rich hacienda and a sugar mill, which belongs to one named Sebastián de Zavaletas, a Biscayan. Every year he manufactures a large quantity of sugar, selling part of it in the country and sending the rest to Spain. Usually, sixty slaves are found on his estate, and he gives very good meals in his house, which makes him appear generous and magnificent; so, it is said that he owns at least five hundred thousand ducats. Half a league from his house is a sugar mill

commonly called trapiche, owned by the Augustinians of Guatemala, where there are about twenty slaves; it is called trapiche because with the machines that exist there you can not grind a quantity of sugar as large as with one of the mills that the Spaniards call ingenious".

Fuentes y Guzmán, at the end of the century, described the town in this way:

"It was very numerous of the people belonging to the lordship of the chief Cashualam, one of the lords who called the four headwaters and as a free prince did not pay fief or knowledge to another; and it was house and lineage that appeared to the kings of Quiche, Cacchiquel and Sotojil. And being as it was one of those who gave peace to Catholic obedience, also for this reason the town of San Miguel Petapa is one of the ancient and first Indian curates that are in the vast expanse of this Valley of Goathemala. Its location lies to the southeast east side with respect to the situation of Goathemala, in a valley surrounded by mountains, which its eminent altitude somewhat astonishes one and makes its place humid, helped with the shady of the participation of the stormy waters of the Sierra de Canales. In this town as in that of Santa Inés and Amatitlán, San Cristóbal Mixco, Pinula, Las Vacas, there is a lot of Spanish neighborhood and other naborío Indians; that these are subject in the spiritual to the priest of the Valley of Las Vacas, which is very old, and before its separation from the Holy Church Cathedral of Goathemala The town of San Miguel Petapa composes its republic of the number of seven hundred and two tributaries, of the nation and pocomán language, in which the religious of Santo Domingo administer them. And for it, these Indians that in many deals, especially in the wheat and corn harvests, continuous sale of fruits, fish, rent of beasts of burden to passengers, for him they make their

journey from the eastern provinces to Goathemala, and in what by their personal work they obtain from the owners of labor bread to carry".

Regarding the temple, Fuentes y Guzman noted:

"They have a distinguished church for the art, as well as for the material that composes it, with excellent bells, and in its facade a costly and great altarpiece of polished symmetry and other collaterals of particular brotherhoods, adorned with rich and neat ornaments and altarpieces, silver lamps, with other pieces of the matter for the service of the church, which does not miss the adornment of others in monstrances, chalices, patens, vinajeras, candlesticks, blandones, ciriales, portable crosses and of sleeve triles and incensarios, with frontal of silver of hammer, as many churches of the Valley have them, and said a devout politician who recently arrived from Mexico, seeing the adornment of the churches of the towns and those of the city of Goathemala, in Mexico the silver is taken out and in Goathemala it is achieved, because he affirmed not to have seen in that kingdom so much wealth in the temples. The convent, which seems so, in how much and large their room, is very ostentatious and very capable, with everything that a great house demands the art, and there with the priest reside two other religious, approved coadjutors. It is a curacy that is ordinarily given to a Father of the Province, or Father Master".

These descriptions correspond to the temple of the Poqomam community of San Miguel Petapa, since there are no surviving accounts of the temple of the Spanish and mestizo community, dedicated to the Virgin of Concepción. However, unlike the temple for the indigenous population, whose construction dates are unknown, it is known that in 1669 the

erection of the building was initiated and concluded in 1673.¹⁷

While on Santa Inés Petapa, the author stated:

"They have (the inhabitants) a very good church, with bells, ornaments and the necessary silver, and a very large tile house for the minister. They are great farmers, and in that exercise they collect what is necessary for the sustenance of their families, payment of tributes and maintenance of their church and brotherhoods".

Regarding the population, Fuentes added:

"These Indians are of a soft and docile nature, very obsequious and polished in the ornamentation of their people, they dress in the Spanish style and they are very applied, more than to the culture of the fields, to the works of hand and cut; As with specialty they cut with specialty of tree leaves of diverse colors on drawing, adorned arches of this kind of imaginary, very exquisite, crimping and embedding with thin thread the colors of leaves that a tiger, a bird or a man demands, that to the truth is admirable work, although it is not precious; They admire more the search for that kind of leaves or buds of *pencas*, than to preserve their pain with all the natural liveliness for all the time of one or two years, until the thread of their sewing, corrupted, releases that exquisite work. These Indians of Santa Inés are believed to be descendants of the Tlaxcaltecos who came to the conquest, and in the Mexican language they use and the costume the Indians wear, they seem to be of that generation".



¹⁷ Solís, Rony: Restauración de la fachada de la iglesia de Los Escombros y revitalización de su entorno inmediato, Villa Canales. Tesis de grado. Facultad de Arquitectura, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 2001.

According to the writer, the process of transformation of clothing and loss of the Mexica language was accelerated.

DESTRUCTION AND RELOCATION

On October 9, 1762, the Tuluja and Petapa (Villalobos) rivers overflowed due to the intensity of the rains, so the town of San Miguel Petapa was buried. The Mayor of Amatitlán Sacatepéquez, sent a report to the Court of the natural disaster:

"Sir, the storm of the 9th of the current caused such havoc... four blocks before the one of (San Miguel) Petapa the three main rivers that flooded it and the hills that surround them collapsed... that in such a way the buildings were submerged, some of them halfway and others up to the limits of the doors and others up to the roofs. In the same way the churches are perceived to have filled with dirt... that causes horror to the sight as well as to the smell the stench that is perceived in the bodies of people and animals drowned in sight... The missing Indian people recognized by the census are twenty-three people, including small children; in the case of the ladinos, it has not been possible to recognize the lack... but about fifty drowned and not a few passengers of all classes... October 17, 1762. Estanislao Ocampo Cróquer".¹⁸

The description of Archbishop Pedro Cortés y Larraz, who visited the site between 1768 and 1769, was as follows:

"This town of Petapa was beautiful, merchant, numerous and rich; its neighborhood was composed of Spaniards, Indians and ladinos. It was located on the banks of the river called Petapa, not plentiful, but plenty of water, which runs from north to south and a short league dies in the lagoon of Amatitlan, which in the year 1762 in the 10 and 11 October (actually it was the 9) had a furious flood that flooded and

destroyed the town, it ruined many buildings, and several people perished. For this reason, they abandoned the site and moved the town to the side of the river, about half a league away and at some height. In this move the Indians and ladinos that made one town, formed two. One of them is the new Petapa and is that of the Indians. The other one is the village of La Concepción and is that of the ladinos, leaving in the ruined town the neighbors and few shutters".¹⁹

Because of the flood, the town was moved the following year, with the separation of the mestizo and Spanish community, giving rise to two towns: San Miguel Petapa and Villa Nueva. On the other hand, the town of Santa Inés Petapa was not abandoned.

SAN MIGUEL PETAPA, SECOND RELOCATION

The Poqomam village of San Miguel Petapa was moved to the site of La Horca, which was part of the town's lands. The streets were laid out by Estanislao Antonio Ocampo Cróquer, Mayor of Amatitlán Sacatepéquez, in 1763.²⁰ It is supposed that the construction of the temple began the following year. In 1783, when an earthquake occurred, damage was reported in the temple and the rectory, which, apparently, were repaired. However, in 1830 another earthquake destroyed the building and a large part of the population, so the government was asked to move the town to a piece of land owned



¹⁸ AGCA A1 Legajo 2132 Expediente 15149. Autos para el traslado del pueblo de San Miguel Petapa. Paleografía de Solís, Op. Cit. Page 152.

¹⁹ Citado por Gall, Op. Cit.

²⁰ Luján, Urbanismo... 469.

by the Arrivillaga family. The government accepted and compensated the owner, María Manuela Arrivillaga, ordering the move in 1831. In that place the construction of the temple was authorized in 1855, which had three naves, and an atrial cross was erected in 1866. The temple was destroyed by the earthquakes of 1917 and 1918.²¹ The church was rebuilt and completed in the 1960s²² and was reconstructed as of 2006.

VILLA NUEVA

The population of Spaniards and mestizos that abandoned San Miguel Petapa requested authorization to settle on land that was owned by Tomás de Barillas, known as Lo de Barillas, which was owned and given by Blas de Rivera. The town was laid out by Estanislao Ocampo Cróquer in 1763.

As it corresponded to a settlement in the Hispanic period, the main building was the temple. The first stone of the church was laid in 1669, and it was inaugurated in 1673. The church was blessed and inaugurated on December 8 of the same year. After the earthquake of 1773, a large part of the population of Santiago de Guatemala took refuge in Villa Nueva, such as the Aycinena, Romá, Micheo, Irungaray and even the beatas of Santa Rosa, who lived in the house of doña Josefa Orantes, next to the City Hall.²³

The commercial success of the valley had been based, until the 18th century, on supplying the city. In the 19th century, the valley became more important due to the development of *Opuntia cochenillifera* nopales, which allowed the breeding of cochineal to produce grana, which fetched good prices in the European market.

According to the priest José María Navarro, who lived in the 19th century in Villa Nueva, grana was introduced by the priest

Mariano Galán in 1820. The process of extracting the dye from the insects was done in boiling water, until it was decided to place them in *comales*, first, and in stoves, starting in 1828, innovations made by the priest Mariano Aparicio. In 1831, improvements were introduced by a French chemist, Juan Capurón. The use of warehouses was introduced by Román Portillo, in 1824, and the covering with cloth to protect insects from wasps, in 1864, by Marcela Guzmán. The prices reached by the grana brought profits of up to 71,000 pesos.

By 1864, coffee plantations had already been introduced in the valley, since in that year coffee was already being exported from the valley, although the value of exports was low compared to grana, at around 2000 pesos per farm. These new plantations caused sugar production to decline.²⁴

SANTA INÉS PETAPA, FINAL RELOCATION

The last transfer that occurred in the region was that of the town of Santa Inés Petapa, whose inhabitants requested a new land for their settlement in 1818. However, it was moved until 1830, when the earthquake that destroyed the town of San Miguel Petapa occurred. The new settlement seems to have had a church under construction around 1847, which was in good condition by 1892.²⁵



²¹ Chacón, José: *Arquitectura conventual en el valle de Las Mesas, San Miguel Petapa (XVI-XVIII)*. Tesis de grado. Facultad de Arquitectura, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1991. Pages 87-96.

²² Dato proporcionado por un testigo en Petapa, julio de 2006.

²³ Chinchilla, Ernesto: *Historia de Villa Nueva*. Academia de Geografía e Historia, Guatemala, 2005. Pages 33-54.

²⁴ Chinchilla, Op. Cit. Pages 59-61.

²⁵ Chacón, Op. Cit. Pages 45-106.

At the present time it has a building of modern construction. The old settlement, today in the vicinity of a coffee plantation, preserved its old church in ruins and became the cemetery of Villa Canales. The numerous pantheons built at the beginning of the 20th century can still be seen, some in neoclassical style and others with Art Deco influence.²⁶

VILLA CANALES

The population that remained in Pueblo Viejo gave rise to a new settlement that in 1912 became a new municipality, to which Santa Inés Petapa was added. The name of this new municipality was Pueblo Viejo. This is how Federico Hernández de León narrated it in 1924: "what was known as Pueblo Viejo was later changed to the name of San Joaquín Villa Canales, as a tribute of affection to Our Lord Don Manuel [Estrada Cabrera]".²⁷

To change the name of the town, the only saint related to the president's mother, Joaquina Cabrera, was used, although a tribute to the toponymy that the mountain had carried since the Hispanic period was added: Canales.

This population began its growth slowly, although it had already benefited from the presence of the railroad that passed next to it.

COFFEE GROWING FAMILIES

The government of Justo Rufino Barrios decided to promote the cultivation of coffee as Guatemala's main export product. To achieve this, in 1877, a law was passed that disentailed ejido lands in the valley of Las Mesas Petapa. That same year, farms were redeemed in favor of José Escamilla and Guillermo Rodríguez. Two years later, Escamilla acquired Rodríguez's properties and began a series of acquisitions that allowed him to achieve success in coffee exports. From this account, in 1882 he acquired lands in

Pumpumay; in 1886, those of Tomás Moreno; in 1896, those of Marcelino Monroy; in 1902 and 1906, part of those of José María Orantes.²⁸

In 1881, Ramón Murga, son of the Conservative period physician Eusebio Murga, acquired from Braulo Novales the lands that belonged to the Arrivillaga family's estate and that had been inherited in 1855 by the Azpuru family,²⁹ which allowed for another successful coffee growing activity in the region.³⁰

Several families dedicated their lands to coffee plantations, among them the Orantes family. This family settled in San Miguel Petapa before 1762. In fact, the first elected mayor of Villa Nueva in 1767 was Captain Manuel Orantes. The first lands of which there is reference are those of the Santa Luisa³¹ farm, acquired around 1860 and destined for the raising of cochineal, although it was soon also dedicated to coffee.

These agricultural activities dedicated to commerce motivated the economic development of the owners based on export products, first cochineal and later coffee, in addition to sugar cane, which had traditionally been planted and processed in the region.



²⁶ According to informants, this cemetery was opened after the epidemic that hit the region in 1919, known as the Spanish flu.

²⁷ Citado por Gall, Op. Cit.

²⁸ AGCA Índice de Tierras, paquete 2, expediente 13, departamento de Amatitlán, 1912. Citado por Chután y Hernández, Op. Cit.

²⁹ Chacón, Op. Cit., Page 76.

³⁰ AGCA Índice de Tierras, paquete 2, expediente 13, departamento de Amatitlán, 1912, con datos sobre las propiedades de Ramón Murga: San Ramón, Santa gertrudis, donde Padilla y El Salitre, por parte del Relleno; El Retiro, El Bejucal, San Eusebio y San José; El Rincón o El Carrizal y el Zapote. Citado por Chután y Hernández, Op. Cit.

³¹ Interview with Mr. Roberto Orantes, July 2006.

Proof of the economic importance of sugar cane is that among the first sugar mills installed in Guatemala, the Santa Teresa sugar mill, owned by the Escamilla family, was established a short distance from the remains of the old church of Concepción de Petapa, in Villa Canales.

FINAL COMMENTARY

Throughout the twentieth century, the towns that gave rise to the original Santa Inés and San Miguel Petapa developed in different ways. The three urban settlements became one of the most populous residential sectors adjacent to the capital city where, unfortunately, most of the population is unaware of the rich past they have inherited. Although most of the population is foreign (including the phenomenon of dormitory neighborhoods), it is important for each person to identify the historical values with which they live, especially the immovable heritage, such as the remains of the temples of San Miguel, Santa Inés and Concepción, which are at risk of accelerated deterioration, precisely due to ignorance of the importance they had in the past, have in the present and can be projected into the future, with economically profitable options such as tourism, for example, which would provide income to the population and ensure the preservation of their heritage for future generations.

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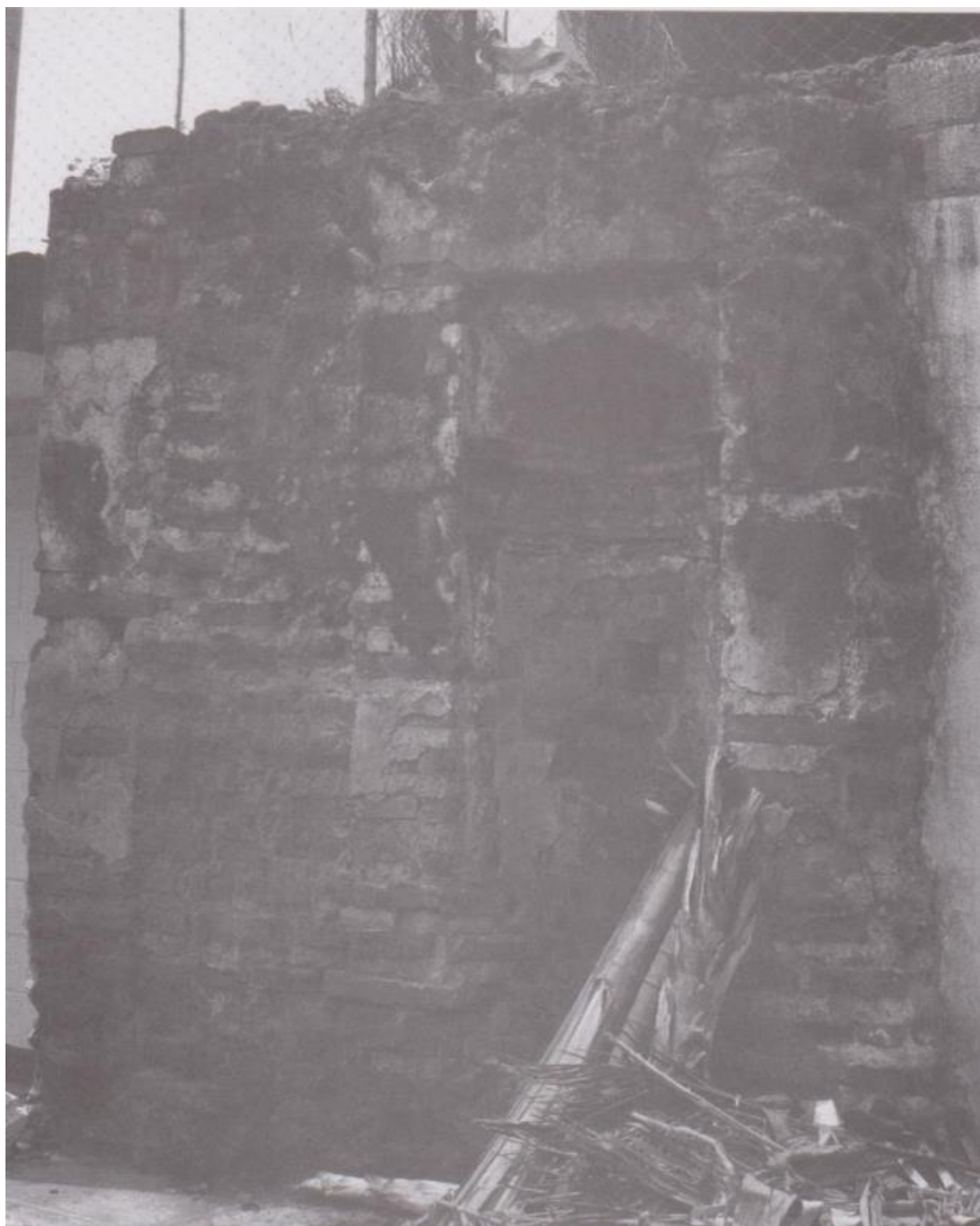
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1. Temple of Concepción Petapa, in the old San Miguel Petapa, today Villa Canales (photo: Anibal Chajón).



2. Remains of the temple of San Miguel Petapa, Villa Canales (photo: Anibal Chajón).



3. Ancient temple of Santa Inés Petapa (photo: Anibal Chajón).



4. Temple of Santa Inés Petapa today (photo: Anibal Chajón).



*5. Temple of San Miguel Petapa, today cemetery of Petapa
(photo: Anibal Chajón).*



*6. Temple of San Miguel Petapa in its actual location
(photo: Anibal Chajón).*



7. Temple of Concepción, Villa Nueva (photo: Anibal Chajón).