

DOCUMENTS CONCERNING THE "TOTONICAPAN REBELLION OF 1820"  
IN THE ARCHIVO NACIONAL DE CENTROAMERICA:  
INTRODUCTION AND TRANSCRIPTS

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The transcripts in this collection were made from facsimile copies of ca. 600 pages of documents in four *legajos* ('files'), numbered 193, 194, 5479, and 5480, in the Archivo Nacional de Centroamérica (formerly Archivo General de Gobierno de Guatemala) in Guatemala City, Guatemala. They were sent to me shortly after I had visited the archive during the summer of 1974. At that time, I was collecting material on colonial and post-colonial indigenous revitalization movements in the Maya area for what eventually became my book entitled *The Indian Christ, the Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Bricker 1981). The civil unrest that occurred in the *partido* ('district') of Totonicapán in the K'iche'-speaking region of highland Guatemala in 1820 became the subject of Chapter 7 in my book.

The documents in the four *legajos* show that the proximate cause of the "rebellion" in Totonicapán was the refusal of the Guatemalan authorities to reinstate the provision of the Constitution of Cádiz that had outlawed the payment of tributes by Indians in the Spanish colonies. This document was drafted in 1810 and promulgated in 1812 after Napoleon had invaded Spain and forced the King (Ferdinand VII) to abdicate his throne. Copies of the Constitution were translated into many indigenous languages spoken in the colonies and distributed widely in the Americas (e.g., Laughlin 2003). Apparently, a K'iche' version of this document had reached Totonicapán in 1812, and the tribute system was abolished at that time. In 1814, the King was restored to the throne, and one of his first acts was to revoke the Constitution of Cádiz. In 1820, he was forced to reinstate the Constitution, but the

authorities in Guatemala ignored his order. The transcripts show that the Indians of Totonicapán were aware of the reinstatement of the Constitution, and their refusal to pay the tributes created the crisis in the district known as the "Totonicapán rebellion" (Contreras 1951). It began in January, 1820, continuing into early August of the same year, when many Indians were arrested. The leaders of the resistance remained in jail until 1822, after the general uprising encompassing all sectors of the population of the colony that began in 1821 made it impractical "to blame anyone for sedition against the Spanish government" (Contreras 1951:52).

Reports of the unrest in Totonicapán and its aftermath were sent to the capital in 13 *expedientes* ('dispatches'); they are now archived in the four *legajos* whose transcripts are presented here (Table 1).

## REFERENCES CITED

- Bricker, Victoria R. 1981. *The Indian Christ, the Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Myth and History*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Contreras, J. Daniel. 1951. *Una rebelión indígena en el partido de Totonicapán en 1820: El indio y la independencia*. Guatemala City: Imprenta Universitaria.
- Laughlin, Robert M. 2003. *Beware the Great Horned Serpent!: Chiapas under the Threat of Napoleon*. Albany, NY: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, University of Albany.

Table 1. Relationship between *expedientes* and *legajos* in the collection of documents concerning the "Totonicapán rebellion of 1820"

<i>Legajo No.</i>	<i>Expediente No.</i>	<i>Number of Original Manuscript Pages</i>
193	3942	147
193	3944	16
193	3945	32
194	4965	28
194	4966	10
5479	47149	9
5480	47151	15
5480	47152	81
5480	47153	9
5480	47154	16
5480	47155	193
5480	47156	11
5480	47157	34