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COFFEE

Comitán, Chiapas

Elizabeth Soney

Jan. 7, 1948

Introduction

In the state of Chiapas, just north of the Guatemala border, live the tribe of Tojolobal Indians, in small scattered villages. According to the official figures of the 1940 Mexico census monolinguals (that is, the population of five years or over) number 6882.

There are many Tojolobal settlements but the little village of Jotaná is the most fertile. The vegetation is a luxurious green almost all the year round. Other villagers come to Jotaná when their crops fail for they know that this fertile valley can usually supply their needs.

One of their chief products is coffee which is being discussed in the following paragraphs.

The data was gathered by observation and information given the writer by her informant, a Tojolobal woman in the village of Jotaná.

COFFEE

One of the products of the Tojolobal Indian is coffee. When the coffee beans are turning from green into shades of red they are either hand picked or knocked off of the taller bushes and trees by long poles. They are then gathered into woven baskets. Sometimes even very green, or some that are still partly white and green are gathered.

The natives knock off the shells by using their heavy grinding stones. The coffee beans are hand-separated from the shells from this point on, usually taken to the river and washed off. The woven baskets which they use act like sieves.

The beans are then dried from two to four days in the hot sun. If the weather is not very dry it may even take as long as a week to dry them sufficiently. They are spread out on grass mats or on sacks. When thoroughly dry the beans are toasted on a clay griddle over a wood fire. They are moved around while toasting to keep them from burning. When they are a rich brown in color, or even blackened somewhat, they grind the toasted beans by the same method the native used for removing the shells. If the natives want the coffee in powder form, which to them is the proper way, it must be ground at least twice. It is now ready for use.