

# ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIELDWORK AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

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Anthropologists from the University of Chicago have conducted various intensive fieldwork projects in indigenous Mayan villages since the second half of the 1930s. This paper examines fieldwork organized by Robert Redfield and Sol Tax in villages around Lake Atitlán, Guatemala, in the late 1930s.

This paper will examine the following:

- 1) How the results of this fieldwork have been used in later discussions of anthropological and/or economic development in African and Asian “primitive” villages.
- 2) How information was discarded in the processes of transferring data from fieldwork into an “academic” monograph, and
- 3) What is the problem of this discarding itself, compared with my own fieldwork in the same area of Guatemala.

The first section explains the context and characteristics of fieldwork undertaken in the Atitlán area. I examine how anthropologists have conducted past fieldwork and how they have drawn their conclusions. In the second section, studies based on this fieldwork are discussed in relation to eminent studies of the so-called Third World. Finally, the historical context of the Atitlán area is discussed, with a focus on the southern lowlands and the impoverished peasants who moved between this region and the Atitlán area.

**Keywords:** Indigenous community, Intensive study, Fieldwork assistant, “Moral vs. rational” debate