

Year: 2019
No. 229

The Popular Tradition



USAC
TRICENTENARIA
Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala



DG Dirección General
de Investigación
Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala



CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS
POPULARES
UNIVERSIDAD DE SAN CARLOS DE GUATEMALA

Teaching of the Trades: Pots and *Comales* *Conguaco, Jutiapa*

Aracely Esquivel Vásquez

We present to our readers the new name of the *Centro de Estudios Folklóricos* –CEFOL– [Center for Folkloric Studies in English.] to be *Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala* [Center for the Study of Cultures in Guatemala.]

The *Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala* was created on July 8, 1967 by resolution of the Honorable Superior University Council of the University of San Carlos of Guatemala with the name “*Centro de Estudios Folklóricos*”; over time and according to the social context of different historical events it becomes necessary to make different changes, therefore, after a joint work between investigators, principals of the University Center and other units of USAC, with the support of the chancellor Engineer *Murphy Olympo Paiz Recinos*, the Superior University Council knowns and approves, on July 24, 2019, the new name of CEFOL to *Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala* –CECEG–.

In the journal that you have in your hands you will still find the name of *Centro de Estudios Folklóricos*, this is because this journal that is shown, is the result of investigations carried out by its authors on 2018, however, to all the team we are pleased to announce that now our unit of investigation is called CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS DE LAS CULTURAS EN GUATEMALA.



Teaching of Trades: pots and *comales*. *Conguaco, Jutiapa*

Aracely Esquivel Vásquez

“St. Jeremiah was asked to make a basin. But when he tried to make it, he found that the mud was so dry he could not work it. The saint began to weep and as he wept his tears fell on the mud, moistening it. With this water, he saw that he could work the mud and so he made the basin”

Flora S. Kaplan.

Resumen

En Guatemala, la producción cerámica de origen prehispánico es abundante en varias regiones del oriente y sur oriente de la república. En el presente trabajo se dan a conocer las labores artesanales de las aldeas El Barro, El Bran y caserío El Rodeo, de la aldea El Barro, municipio de Conguaco, Jutiapa, que consiste en la fabricación de ollas y comales. Este tipo de cerámica utilitario únicamente difiere de la de otros grupos culturales, en el molde que utilizan para hacer los comales ya que a diferencia de otras poblaciones, en estos lugares utilizan un molde de arcilla no cocida. Este tipo de molde pierde forma con el constante uso, lo cual obliga a las mujeres a reconstruirlo continuamente. La especialidad artesanal de estas comunidades fue aprendida y transmitida por generación matrilineal. Estas formas artesanales son fabricadas por mujeres; elaboradas a mano con instrumentos simples, desarrollados por las mismas artesanas sin uso de torno y quemadas al aire libre, características principales de la cerámica prehispánica. Se incluye en este estudio información proporcionada por hombres que relataron la labor artesanal de sus abuelas y madres. Este tipo de cerámica no lleva recubrimiento de engobes, es simplemente, barro cocido de buena

calidad que se determina por la cantidad de arcilla, arena y el tiempo de cocción. Así mismo, el artículo contiene datos sobre la obtención de materiales, precios de los productos, lugares de comercialización y las distancias que recorren las artesanas para ir a traer el barro y la arena.

Palabras clave: cerámica prehispánica, ollas, comales, aldeas, barro.

Abstract¹

In Guatemala, ceramic production of pre-hispanic origin is abundant in several regions of the east and south east of the republic. In the present work, the craftwork of the villages *El Barro, El Bran and El Rodeo* hamlet, of *El Barro* village, municipality of *Conguaco, Jutiapa*; which consists of the manufacture of pots and *comales*. This type of utilitarian ceramics only differs from that of other cultural groups, in the mold that they use to make the *comales* since unlike other populations, in these places an uncooked clay mold is used. This type of mold loses shape with constant use, which forces women to rebuild it continuously. The craft specialty of these communities was learned and transmitted by matrilineal generation. These

1 Translation: Anthropologist Mariela Dávila Esquivel

The summary has already been translated and will not be translated again.

artisan shapes are made by women; hand made with simple instruments, developed by the same artisans without the use of lathe and burned outdoors, main characteristics of prehispanic ceramics. This study includes information provided by men who recounted the artisan work of their grandmothers and mothers. This type of ceramic does not have an *engobe* coating, it is simply good quality cooked mud that is determined by the amount of clay, sand and cooking time. Likewise, the article contains data on the obtaining of materials, prices of the products, places of commercialization and the distances that the artisans travel to fetch mud and sand.

Keywords: prehispanic pottery, pots, *comales* villages, mud.

Introduction

This paper presents the traditional handicrafts produced in the villages of the *El Barro*, *El Bran* and the hamlet *El Rodeo*, *Conguaco*, *Jutiapa*. Six ceramists were interviewed, five of them work permanently, one stopped working 20 years ago, all of them keep the traditional designs on the pots and the *comales*^{*} as a cultural expression that identifies the community. Two men were also interviewed, they talked about the handicraft work of their mothers already deceased, and one that helps his wife. Information was obtained about each craftswoman investigated: name, age, education, birthplace, at what age they start the handicraft work and other works.

In this villages, the women keep one of the most conservative and traditional ceramic traditions such as the pots, griddles and censers. The craftswoman works daily as long as they have

the material, and they do it not only for the inherited tradition of their ancestors, but also for the financial incentives, so, even the prices are low, with the sales they help the family budget. Their *comales* and pots are of magnificent quality. With these products they not only supply the need for use by the rural population of the town, but also of other neighboring areas, like the case of the village *Azulco*, *Jalpatagua*, and *Moyuta*, *Jutiapa*.

In order to obtain this information, in some cases it was used the life story technique. As well as interviews, to provide written testimony of their handicraft work and to obtain a more objective view of the conformation of the communities in general. Ceramic homes were visited. The information was obtained from the sources of raw materials; the process of manufacture and the burn of pots and griddles were observed. A photographic record of the processing procedures was made in all of the cases investigated and some small videos were recorded.

A heartfelt thanks is expressed to the people of the studied villages, Ms. and Mrs.: *Angelina Galicia*, *Alba Leticia Gutiérrez Galicia*, *Zulema Angélica García Rodríguez*, *Francisco Gutiérrez Galicia*, *Venancio Gutiérrez Lino*, from the village *El Barro*. *Eva Santos López*, *Verónica Rodríguez*, *Juana Palacios de Galicia*, *Ana Gonzáles*, from the hamlet of *El Rodeo*. *Cristina Paes Trinidad*, *Juana Trinidad Galicia* and *Desidoro García Medina* from the village of *El Bran*. Without their collaboration and kindness at the moment of the interviews made during the field research and the interest to provide extensive information of your handicraft work, work that reflects

^{*}Clay or metal disc used to cook corn tortillas or to toast coffee or cocoa beans.

and contribute a wide diffusion of the traditional folk culture, as a collective heritage that distinguishes and identifies them in their region, it would not be possible for the realization of this work. Also, we thank the people that collaborated with the investigation, providing written, verbal and personal information, Mr: *Luis Ernesto Lobos*, *Gertrudis Corado*, *Guadalupe Ventura* of 102 years old, and *Francisco Palacios*. As well as the student with a closed program in the career of Anthropology, *Mariela Dávila Esquivel*, who accompanied the author through the whole process of field research, photo shooting, videos and transcription of the interviews.

Geographic data of the village of study.

A short ethnography is presented below about the investigated villages.

El Barro

Village of the town of *Conguaco*, *Jutiapa*. It is located at the north-east of the head of the municipality, at an elevation of 1,010 meters above sea level, at latitude 14° 03 '45" and longitude 90° 01' 31". Is composed of the following hamlets: *El Conacaste*, *El Rodeo*, *La Ceiba*, *El Jícaro*, *El Tename*, *La Paja*, *El Pericón* and *La Cebadilla Laguna Seca* (Gall, 2000, p. 187.) The priest of *Conguaco* officiates mass only when the neighbors request it. They made a celebration with a mass on January 31 in honor to the Holy Heart of Jesus, although this is not the official month, but in June. Two to four masses are celebrated during the year. In addition to this figure, they have the Virgin Mary and Eucharist God. There are also three evangelical churches. The most common surnames in the village

are: *Gutiérrez*, *Galicia*, *Lino* y *López*. The climate of the village is temperate.

El Barro has a school with elementary and kindergarten education, with a school population of 110 students. The process of learning it is in charge of four teachers who are from the head of the municipality of *Conguaco*. The village has five stores with sales of basic products, and some medicines like *Tabcin*, *Alka-Seltzer*, *Paracetamol*, etc. and one *COCODE* [Community Development Councils.] Has 108 houses with electricity since 10 years ago, and a population of 580 inhabitants.

According to neighbors' information, the village is calm and is considered a low-crime area because theft has been reported very rarely. Very few people own beef cattle. The milk is sold to the population of *Conguaco*. In the majority of the houses they have poultry: chickens, ducks and turkey, as well as some pigs.

It does not have: health center, bakery, and graveyard. Burials are made at the cemetery of *Conguaco* and they load the coffins on their shoulders along the dirt road. The extension of the village is 32 blocks. They have piped water, which is obtained from a river source and stored in a water catchment tank. Before they had this system, women used to carry the water on clay jugs from a water source that was approximately two kilometers away from their homes.

The gastronomy of the lent season consists in preparing *Pescado Forrado* (dish made with egg-fried battered fish) with tomato sauce and rice, *Pito Cocido* (cut of beef from the diaphragm of a cow) or egg battered. The popular dishes are the

beans, loroco, yucca flower blossoms and vegetables. The people that accompany a wake for a deceased are offered rice, chicken, coffee and bread.

The verbal tradition also has a presence in the village. The following is a transcription of a narrative told by Mr. *Venancio Gutiérrez Lino*:

I was walking one day and behind me there were two men. But I got out of the way and took a different path. When I realized there was no path, it was already about eight o'clock at night and I got lost. And then I fell into a ditch and there I woke up and I could not get out. But I managed to grab hold of a vine and that is how I managed to get out. Another time I saw the *Llorona* who came with a jug for the river, I wanted to go through but she would not leave so I went back [to home.] (*Gutiérrez*. 2018.)

Of the extinct handicrafts of this community, the following are mentioned: braids to tie pigs, palm hats, brooms and the wine jars.

El Bran

Village of the town of Conguaco, Jutiapa. It is located at a distance of 6 kilometers by trail southwest of the head of the municipality. It is located at an elevation of 1,220 meters above sea level, at latitude 14 °02' 05" and longitude 90 °03' 01". Is composed of the following hamlets: El Matocho, El Maxacte, Piedra Redonda y Tierra Colorada. (Gall, 2000, p. 280.)

According to the information of the ceramicist Mrs. *Cristina Paes Trinidad*, of 60 years old, in the past there were a lot of women working the mud but now there are just a few that make the pots and *comales*. The village has a school with elementary education. The teachers who teach the classes are

are from *Conguaco* and *Moyuta*. There is a catholic and evangelical church. The celebration is held in honor of the Virgin of Candelaria on February 2. The sales of candies, target shooting, plastic containers, pots and *comales*, as well as mechanical games are present for the fair.

El Rodeo

Hamlet of the village *El Barro*, town of *Conguaco*, Jutiapa. It is located at the south of the gorge *El Moral*, at the west of the river *Conguaco*. It is located one kilometer and a half away from the Hamlet *La Ceiba* with a dirt road. It has an elevation of 950 above sea level, with latitude 14° 04' 58" and longitude 90° 06' 857" (Gall, 2000, p. 501.) There is a corn flour milling machine, a school with elementary education, piped water which is obtained from the river *Conguaco*. Several years ago, women had to walk two hours to bring water from the property of Mr *Juan Palacios*. The climate is temperate and the most cold months are December, January and February.

In this place there are only five ceramicists. Getting the clay is very complicated, said Mrs *Juana Palacios*, because the roads are stony and rugged, with violent ascents and descents, just as the archbishop *Pedro Cortés y Larraz* mentioned on his pastoral visit to *Conguaco*, in 1770. The women of this hamlet also go to the hill *El Burro*, located between the villages *San Pedro* and *Palo Blanco*, *Conguaco*, *Jutiapa*. To get into this place they have to walk for six hours. According to Mrs *Juana*, there is another road that is closer to them by the hamlet *El Pinito*, but as she said, "It is rough because the road is not favourable, it is very narrow and next to it is a precipice, in some

parts you have to crawl up because if you slip you go down.” (Palacios, 2018.)

Water comes to homes every eight days and in summer it gets more difficult the supply of the vital liquid. But even with those limitations, the ceramicists produce the pots and *comales* with special effort and, especially in the sale process, they are extremely careful since they have to travel two hours on a rocky road, with the products over the head, to reach the village *Azulco*, town of *Jalpatagua*, which is where it is being sold.

For treating upset stomach, the medicinal plants that are used in the village are: Guaco (climbing plant), and Epazote. In both cases the plants are boiled and salt and lemon are added.

Ceramic products.

According to the information of the inhabitants, the former inhabitants of these villages were already involved in the production of ceramic objects. The origin of this art is very old, since the oldest handicraft techniques of humanity are ceramic and weaving of vegetable fibers. The archaeologist investigations attest that this art is very old, since it dates back to very ancient times, which have witnessed the historical trajectory that continues to the present day, offering different styles, forms and sizes as part of the tangible heritage of the localities. Although “it is not known how the ceramic was invented, it is evident that it appeared in several places of the Old and the New World, and that there is no single place from which it would have spread

to the rest of the world.” (Hatch, 1999, p. 438.), the cited author indicates that;

The ceramic, even more than any other archaeological item, reflects the behavior of the society as a whole, its cultural conditioning and evolutionary development. When a pot is observed, a relationship is established with a person who lived some time ago, who had personality, talent and ideas, but it was also subject to the cultural rules of its time. In that case, it is often said that the ceramic “speaks” about the former ceramists and the world that they lived in. (Hatch, 1999, p. 437.)

Guatemala had an important pottery background, therefore, there are excellent and well-documented studies about different forms of pottery that still exist in several urban and rural regions of the country, making variety of forms, decorative and simple, as the ones from *El Barro*, *El Rodeo* and *El Bran*, that make this traditional popular manifestation a cultural reminiscence that has endured as a living expression of the rural ceramists that work in it.

The importance of investigating the ceramic of this population of *Conguaco*, *Jutiapa*, is because through this job you get to know about the identity of the inhabitants, since ceramics are specific to each population. And as rightly in the case of ceramics of archaeological character Hatch (1999) states:

Over time, the ceramic is affected by a process of continuous change that indicates something about the identity of the population. The time it was there, for how long, with whom it kept relations, and the type of changes to which it was

subjected. The ceramic also indicates the function of the site, the organization of the society, and, in some cases, the origin of the population, the direction of the emigrations, if any, if they took place (p. 437.)

In the communities of the town of *Conguaco*, more than 30 families depend on this activity, as a testimony of the traditional pottery expressions of long historical trajectory. This production has been maintained in those groups for many years, therefore, it is part of the cultural identity of the inhabitants. The products are of an excellent quality and have a wide commercial diffusion because the use of the *comal* and the pot is generalized in rural areas and in some urban areas of the Republic of Guatemala.

With the exception of the village of *El Barro*, where the terrain is quite muddy, the other investigated villages do not have sources of raw material. However, in the region there is a hill called *El Burro* where women go to extract clay to elaborate the different objects, and a very few obtain it from the village *Briotis*.

The culture of the rural populations is full of knowledge and tradition, which has taken root among the young generations, thus achieving the continuity of the trade. And although plastic, aluminum, pewter and metal products abound in the markets and the squares, they had not been able to displace the manufacture of mud, mainly because this traditional product is associated with other inherent qualities such as the flavour it imparts to food. The users themselves state that it does not have the same flavour a nixtamalized corn *tortilla* cooked on

on a clay *comal* over a wood fire, to one cooked on a metal *comal*.

Likewise with beans, the ones cooked in a clay pot and the same fuel had more flavour than the ones cooked in a pressure cooker. The ceramic products of these communities are related to the survival of the families that produce them, according to their function, which is purely domestic and utilitarian. The production of these handicrafts means a substantial income for the producers. The preservation of traditional techniques, like hand modeling and open burning, reveals the antiquity of this handicraft.

Both the inhabitants of the villages and of the town of *Conguaco*, are heirs to a tradition that dates back to pre-Hispanic times. They have conserved a magnificent tradition of craftsmanship that can be seen in the village that still conserved the utilitarian function in mainly rural homes. The manufacture of the product is the exclusive work of women, that with an evident knowledge of the technique they produce one by one the *comales* and the pots.

The handicraft activity that is made in these villages leads to infer the importance that this has in the life of most of the inhabitants of these places, since the products are part of the reality of the inhabitants of this rural area of the southeastern of Guatemala.

The production of ceramics in these places plays an important role in satisfying the needs of a considerable number of people, both from the region and other communities nearby like *Azulco* and *Moyuta*. Usually, the production is homogenous, since in the houses they produce

the same: *comales* and pots. The ceramic with ceremonial purpose associated with popular religious worship is made on minimal proportion, since only one artisan who makes incense burners was found in the village of *El Bran*.

Each work they produce has beauty in it, since the pieces reflect the caution, the sensibility and the imagination that the handicrafts can develop as part of their knowledge. Also, for their plastic qualities, the ceramics of this town can be cataloged as popular art that is learned at home and passed from generation to generation, which means, as *Flora Kaplan* states:

In addition to its functionality achieved by a long tradition handed from parents to sons for several generations, it reaches, by its forms, the range of creations of the potters who produce them, those who contribute their expertise and imagination to their work. On the other hand, the traditional techniques of the handmade production, specific to the popular art, maintain a direct relationship between the artisan and the context. Preserving the traditional style by virtue of having been shared and handed down through time. (Kaplan, 1980, p. 7-14.)

The handicrafts are immersed in the Traditional Popular Culture, this is understood as all those manifestations that take place in the heart of the town of a determined country, with their own features which express the conception of the world and the life of those social groups (Lara, 1981, p. 11.). According to the form of production, the socio-cultural aspects of the handicrafts are divided into

whether they are art, crafts or popular industry. Is defined as popular art:

All those cultural expressions of plastic nature, whose roots go deep into the past and preserve the fundamental features that made them characteristic of the people's knowledge, like: being traditional, functional, anonymous and collective. The products of popular art are due to individual activities that take place in the heart of the family and usually, in addition to subsistence activities. The popular art is a manual, personal and domestic trade, it is learned at home with no other guide than the example of the elders and tends to occur in those places where the access to raw material sources is easy. The amount of production is limited to the local market and is characterized, based on the above, by being traditional, functional, anonymous and popular. (*Díaz*, 1980, p 7-9 y *Lara*, 1991, p. 48.)

In addition to the previous concept, it is considered important to add the definition of popular art provided by *Daniel Rubín de la Borbolla*: "The first function of the popular art is its utility and service to people, and when the artisan ceases to fulfill this function, his work will no longer be considered "popular art"" (Rubín, 1974, p. 9.) "Popular art constitutes the raw essence of man's best creations." (Rubín, 1974, p.11.) The cited author refers that, when talking about popular art, one does not always have a clear idea of what the terms mean. Therefore, he states that:

The popular art is closer, more attuned with all the components and structures of the culture and the life of the community, both in its past and in its projection into the

future. It has and shares with other art manifestations several qualities among them: 1. Being the oldest productive manifestation of mankind. 2. Have a considerable flexibility and variability in production through its various handicrafts. 3. Have accumulated the most varied and fruitful technological experiences, which subsequently made possible the birth and prosperity of mechanized industry. 4. The fact that their socio-cultural values are based on the participation of all members of the community, the tribe, the regional population, etc. 5. Preserve, use and pass on all the experience, technological tradition and local, communal and regional artistic. 6. Is self-renewable, self-educating and self-sufficient, in and out the community and the culture, the experiences and modifications that happen from generation to generation enriches it, thus favoring the common use made by artisans. And he concludes: any definition that is tried will be good if to the qualities and characteristics of the “art” are added the specific ones we have just pointed out.” (Rubín, 1974, p. 15-16.)

In summary, according to *Rubín de la Borbolla* (1974, p. 16.), popular art could be defined as:

The most authentic universal art, as it is understood and practiced by the people anonymously, from their origins. Is functional, utilitarian, original, expressive and self-sufficient, educational, economic, renewable, artistic and technically. It is distinguished by its antiquity, technology and artistic values, the ones that constantly inspire its productivity, from generation to generation.

The volume of the production in these villages is destined for daily domestic use. The pots are used to cook beans, *atol* (a traditional hot masa-based beverage of Mexican origin.)

and stews. The use of pots was also mentioned by the chronicler *Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán* at the end of the 17th century, when referring to these utensils, he indicates the use of bain-marie: “In two pots that are placed on fire, one with water and the other dry, which is placed on top of the one with water for the couscous cooking”. (Fuentes, 2012, p.386.) The medium-sized pots are used to cook beans and the *comales* have a variety of uses: to make *tortillas*, brown the corn to prepare *pinol* (fine toasted cornflour), brown sesame seeds and *pepitoria* for *tamales*, browning coffee, as well as for cooking *tascales*², *totopostes*³ and artisan toasts. In the same way, *Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán*, argues that “the corn was toasted in the *comal* to make *atol chilate*” (Fuentes, 2012, p.386.) In his statement he repeatedly mentions the *comal* as “stovetop griddles that they call *comales*.” Utilitarian ceramics tends to be conservative, showing how *Kaplan* indicates (1980, p. 15), “little changes in a certain period of time and is relatively simple.”

Kaplan (1980, p. 117) says that “ceramics is connected to the most important and festive occasions in life, where family and friends, the cult and excesses unite for a moment.” Production has a markedly traditional character, not only from the point of view of elaboration, but also in terms of consumption, since it is acquired by the popular sectors through the individual commercialization.

On the other hand, *Hatch* (1999, p. 437), indicates that “the elaboration of ceramics has represented a means of adaptation to the environment, as

2 Oval tortilla made of tender corn.

3 Extremely thin semi-sweet tortilla that is eaten with coffee.

responde a las necesidades de preparar, almacenar, transportar y servir alimentos. Refleja una larga tradición de técnicas de manufactura, de hábitos culinarios y alimenticios”.

En cuanto a la elaboración de estas artesanías, las técnicas usadas son comunes en todos los centros alfareros de origen prehispánico que existen en el país y requiere, en términos generales, de la obtención del barro, el acarreo de la materia prima hacia la vivienda de la artesana; la limpieza del barro para extraerle piedrecitas y basuritas; la molida y cernida de la arena para obtener un polvo fino y libre de fragmentos duros que le permita a la artista amasarlo sin peligro de lastimar sus manos; la “remojada” del barro para poderlo trabajar y la adición de arena para hacerlo más resistente. Las ollas son elaboradas sin el uso de molde, tienen sobre el suelo una base redonda que puede ser de material vegetal o de barro para asentar la porción de barro para formar la base de la olla y luego levantar las paredes hasta alcanzar el tamaño de la pieza requerida.

La elaboración de los comales, comparados con los que hacen en la aldea Trapiche de Agua, Salamá, Baja Verapaz, difiere únicamente en el uso y forma del molde. Las artesanas de estas aldeas fabrican los moldes con lodo y zacate, el mismo material que se usa para la fabricación de adobes. Colocan la mezcla sobre el suelo y lo extienden con las manos dándole forma esférica hasta el tamaño grande, mediano y pequeño. Lo dejan secar por término de 3 días pues los moldes los hacen al interior de la casa en donde no entran los rayos del sol. Durante ese tiempo, el material va endureciéndose hasta que se endurece y por consiguiente, queda adherido al piso, inmóvil.

Dar forma al barro para producir ollas y comales así como el proceso de cocción, son pasos en extremo delicados que solamente las artesanas que poseen la experiencia en la técnica del oficio, pueden elaborar con sumo cuidado.

Algunas mujeres son tan hábiles que saben calcular al tacto las proporciones exactas de barro y arena. Pues como indican, si lleva mucho barro la pieza se raja y si lleva mucha arena, también. Para hacer un comal se necesita una sola medida de arena para lo cual utilizan una palangana de plástico con capacidad de una libra de peso y la cantidad de barro se calcula la porción con ambas manos.

Esta exactitud se las proporciona la experiencia adquirida en los años de dedicarse a esta labor. Para el acabado final de las ollas y comales, utilizan un olote, para nivelar la orilla. Con la palma de la mano se alisa la base. Con un fragmento de lata raspan las partes abultadas. El raspador puede ser de un bote de bebida azucarada o de lámina de zinc y con una piedrecita que le llaman de rayo, lujan las piezas. Luego se sacan al sol para el secado. Cuando ya están totalmente secos, se vuelve a lujar con la misma piedra de rayo. Y finalmente se queman. El proceso de la cocción es diferente a otras regiones que se han investigado.

En estas aldeas, las mujeres acostumbran quemar las piezas por separado, así lo hacían sus abuelas, sus madres y continúan reproduciendo la misma forma de cocción. La quema la realizan al aire libre. Para quemar un comal, hacen el fuego con leña delgada y “chiriviscos”⁴ que consiguen de ramas que han caído al suelo. Colocan tres piedras algo redondas en forma de

4 Ramas secas de diámetros reducidos.

a triangle and place the *comal* upside down and set it on fire with a fatwood. On top of the *comal* they place more “*Chiriviscos*” that catch fire with the flames that emerge from the fire that burns under the *comal*. This achieves complete cooking of the piece. They also use cattle manure for burning but it is difficult to collect and, according to them, it is very limited.

Stories told by collaborators

This article includes brief life stories of the ceramists interviewed during the fieldwork, as well as the stories told by the sons of two ceramists who have already passed away and were recognized for their craftsmanship in the village *El Barro*. The stories are presented in the order in which the villages were visited and which corresponded to *El Barro*, *El Rodeo* and *El Bran*.

Angelina Galicia López

Her craft has been the elaboration of pots and *comales* that she learned from her mother Mrs. *Petronila López*. Along with her daughter *Alba Leticia Gutiérrez Galicia* and her daughter-in-law *Zulema Angélica García Rodríguez*, they dedicated themselves to the creation of these objects of great value and use in the rural area of Guatemala. At the beginning she stated that it took her a while to learn since her initial products would get ruined at the time of burning for not knowing how to calculate the proportions of sand and mud. Her mom would tell her to calculate the amount of sand carefully. The burning is done the same way as already noted. And depending on the number of *comales*, so will be the fires that are made.

Therefore, if there are seven *comales* to burn, seven fires will be made, but never all together at the same time. Mrs. *Angelina* and her daughter-in-law go out to sell their products in the nearby villages.

A bean pot with one-pound capacity costs Q15.00 (Quetzals), and the one with two-pound capacity costs Q25.00. *Comales* are sold from Q25.00 to Q30.00. Going out to sell the *comales* is an exhausting task for the ceramists. In the past, they used to prepare the load with banana leaves to separate one piece from another to prevent them from being damaged or broken, but unfortunately banana trees were hit by a plague and the plantations were lost. Now they wrap them with a cloth but it has the inconvenience that it does not provide cushioning which was the case with the banana leaves, and in that way they can only carry three *comales* over the head.

It no longer makes wine jars because the “*chicheros*” (The man who makes or sells *chicha*) started to use plastic jars to prepare *chicha* (corn-based alcoholic beverage). Although it tasted better the one prepared in a clay jar than in a plastic jar. With the end of the mills, the production of *chicha* made from sugarcane honey also came to an end. There are still a few *chicheros* who prepare it with corn and *panela* (raw sugar cane cubes). It takes 20 pounds of corn and *panela* to make 10 bottles of *chicha*.

Francisco Gutiérrez Galicia

Born in the village, he has been the sexton of the church for 21 years. His father taught him some handicrafts such as: weaving with agave plant fibers, how to make *matates* (large agave fiber satchel), nets, clotheslines, hammocks, but according to him, those crafts have been gone for several years. A

large weevil-like plague entered the agave and ate the bud and, consequently, the maguey plantation was lost.

Young women were taught the art of working with mud, a trade that they learned from their mothers and grandmothers. They made pots, comales and wine jars. These last ones were used to make *chicha*⁵. In this village few people are dedicated to shaping mud anymore since the older women who used to work it frequently have already passed away, said Mr. *Francisco*. The carrying of the mud to the houses was the work of the men.

Mr. *Francisco* said that the trade of his mom, Mrs. *Atanasia Galicia*, was working with mud and she made pots, comales, beaters for stirring the beans in the fields and flowerpots.

The women of this village have such experience that they do not need to measure the quantities of sand and mud to make either a *comal* or a pot. At the ceramist's house, they always keep five to seven molds for the *comales*.

Venancio Gutiérrez Lino

Born in the village *El Barro*. Studied up to the third grade of elementary school in a double shift from seven to twelve and from two to four in the afternoon. When he was a child, the men were dedicated to the handicrafts made of vegetable fibers obtained from agave stalks. According to him, the mud craft has been the main work in the village. Mr. *Venancia* said that he would go with his mother, Mrs. *Tomasa Lino*, to sell the comales to

the community of *Melchor (Santa Rosa)*. The *comal* used to cost 15 cents. At the present a *comal* costs Q25.00.

The distance to be travelled to sell the product was long. One day before the load was prepared using fodder to protect each *comal* and thus prevent them from breaking in the long journey. Almost always carried 8 *comales* and were put into a net. Mrs. *Tomasa* carried them over the head. They left the village at five o'clock in the morning and would take 8 hours to get to *Melchor*. And they did not walk along the real road that made the road larger, but along paths full of rocky areas. Currently the product is commercialized in the populations of *Azulco*, *Conguaco* and *Moyuta*. Mr. *Venancio's* sisters learned the trade since their mother taught them but nowadays they no longer work with it because it is difficult to prepare the sand, since it has to be ground in stone in order to make it a workable powder.

His mom also made pots. No mold was used for the small ones. For the large ones it is used only on the base. The walls of the pots were raised freehand. There are four styles of pots: for beans, for *tamales*, for *atoles* and for stews. A pot for *tamales* measures 60 centimeters high and 60 centimeters in diameter. They also made pans for rice. The most time-consuming part of the process is the production of *comales*, since the pots, although they still make them, they have been replaced for aluminum and pewter pots.

Juana Palacios de Galicia

Ceramist from the hamlet *El Rodeo*, village *El Barro*. She worked her comales during the morning and worked until approximately ten o'clock in the afternoon. Then

5 In this case it is a fermented beverage based on sugarcane juice.

she is busy making her *tortillas* and preparing lunch. Her speciality are the *comales* and for the burning she uses cow dung and thin sticks. The reason for using sticks or *chiriviscos*, as they call it, and not solid firewood is because it smokes them and the comal remains black.

She has been doing this for 40 years. According to her, she learned this trade on her own initiative since no one taught her. Besides pots and *comales*, she can also make incense burners but people hardly ever buy them.

Eva Santos López

Neighbor and native of the hamlet of *El Rodeo*, is 58 years old and since she was a child she has been working in the production of local handicrafts. She learned the trade from her mother. At the beginning it was difficult to calculate the amount of sand needed for a *comal*. Also, according to her, she found it difficult to grind the sand to pulverize it. The product is sold in the village of *Azulco* on a bridle path that she travels in two hours with his daughter *Verónica Rodríguez*, whom she is already teaching how to make *comales* so that she can earn money when she grows up.

Ana González

Born in the hamlet of *El Rodeo*. Went to the school for only two years. Her specialty is *comales* but she also makes pots. She prefers to burn the products with cow dung, which she collects with her husband during the summer. The cattle owners allow them to enter the paddocks to collect it. As she said, with this fuel the pieces come out “red”.

Cristina Paes Trinidad

Born in the hamlet of *El Matocho*, village of *El Bran*. Learned the trade of making pots at the age of 12. Her mother, Mrs. *Juana Trinidad Galicia*, taught her. The trade of making *comales* and incense burners, she learned it on her own. On the day of the visit, 25 *comales* were exposed to the sun on the roof of the house. Mrs. *Cristina* obtained the mud in the village of *Briotis*, and the hamlet of *Tierra Morada*. But she has the inconvenience that the landowners no longer want her to go digging on the land to get it. In the beginning, the pots were worth five and ten cents. She works only by order.

Juana Trinidad Galicia

Is the oldest ceramist of the village of *El Bran*. She is 80 years old. According to her, she could never make *comales* because they were crooked, so she specialized in the elaboration of pots. She sold her pots in *Moyuta* and in the village of *Santa Cruz*, jurisdiction of *Moyuta*, *Jutiapa*. She stopped working them 20 years ago because she was already suffering from several illnesses, she said.

Desidoro García Medina

Husband of the ceramist of the village of *El Bran*, Mrs. *Cristina Paes Trinidad*. Mr. *Lolo*, as he is known in the community, helps his wife prepare the mud and grind the sand. He also makes wood sculptures to decorate the house.

Final comment

These days, 2018, there are only a few women who make pots and *comales* to bring an income to their homes. In the past, in these places there were many women who worked in this craft, according to the stories told by men and women who collaborated with this research. Unfortunately, the majority of young women have no interest in learning. Fortunately, the artisans who are currently doing this work are teaching their daughters, who are over 8 years old, thus assuring the survival of the pots and *comales* in these communities. These objects of great value of use in Guatemalan cuisine have remained relevant for several years and as long as there is no other object to displace them entirely, they will continue to serve the function of cooking *tortillas* and beans, the primary basis of the diet of the rural Guatemalan population.

In the other hand, considering the poor standard of living of the inhabitants of the communities under study, the difficulties they face to obtain the materials, the long distances that they travel to sell the products they carry on their heads, one can only praise the sacrifice of these women, who, in addition to their domestic chores, also carry out agricultural work and transmit the knowledge of handicraft production from generation to generation as an element of identity of their communities.

Collaborators

Galicia López, Angelina, February 27, 2018.

García Medina, Desidoro, April 26, 2018.

González, Ana, April 26, 2018.

Gutiérrez Galicia, Francisco, February 27, 2018.

Gutiérrez Lino, Venancio, February 27, 2018.

Paes Trinidad, Cristina, April 27, 2018.

Palacios de Galicia, Juana, April 26, 2018.

Santos López, Eva, April 26, 2018.

Trinidad Galicia, Juana, April 26, 2018.

Bibliographic References

De Fuentes y Guzmán, F. (2011). Recordación Florida. Tomo 1. Editorial Universitaria. Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. Guatemala.

Díaz, R.. (1980). Artes y Artesanías Populares en Guatemala. En revista Tradiciones de Guatemala, No. 14 Guatemala. CEFOL/USAC

Hatch, M. (1999) La cerámica arqueológica. Historia General de Guatemala. Tomo 1. Asociación de Amigos del País, Fundación para la Cultura y el Desarrollo.

Lara, C. (1981). Síntesis histórica de las cerámicas populares de Guatemala. Guatemala: Dirección General de Antropología e Historia.

Lara, C. (1991). *Cerámicas populares de Guatemala*. Guatemala: Editorial Artemis Edinter.

Kaplan, F. (1980). *Conocimiento y estilo*. México: un análisis basado en una tradición de

alfarería mexicana. Instituto Indigenista Nacional.

Rubín, D. (1974). *Arte popular mexicano*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica. Primera edición.



Figure 1. Ceramist from the hamlet of *El Rodeo*, in the process of polishing a *comal*. Photograph: *Dávila*, February 2018.



Figure 2: Mrs. *Angelina Galicia* and her daughter *Alba Leticia Gutiérrez* preparing the materials for the burning of the *comales*. Photography: *Esquivel*, february 2018.



Figure 3. Ceramist, Mrs. *Juana Palacios de Galicia* shows a *comal*.
Photography: *Esquivel*, april 2018.



Figure 4: Mrs. *Ana Gonzáles*, with a bean pot, prior to the open-air burning. Photography: *Esquivel*, april 2018.



Figure 5: Artisans, *Evan Santos López* and *Verónica Rodríguez* with their products to sell in the village of *Azulco, Jalpatagua, Jutiapa*. Photography: *Dávila*, march 2018.



Figure 6: Bean pot with a capacity of five pounds.
Photography: *Dávila*, february 2018.



Figure 7: Road leading to the village of El Barro. Photography: Dávila, march 2018.



Figure 8: Pot, comal and raw material. Photography: Esquivel, march 2018.



Figure 9: Home of the artisan Angela Galicia, in the village of El Barro. Photography: Esquivel, 2018.



Figure 10: Ceramist from the hamlet of El Rodeo, village of El Barro, with mud in lump in his hands. Photography: Esquivel, april 2018



Figure 11: traditional potters from the village of El Barro. Photography: Esquivel, 2018.



Figure 12: Comal over a mold, village of El Bran. Photography: Esquivel, 2018.

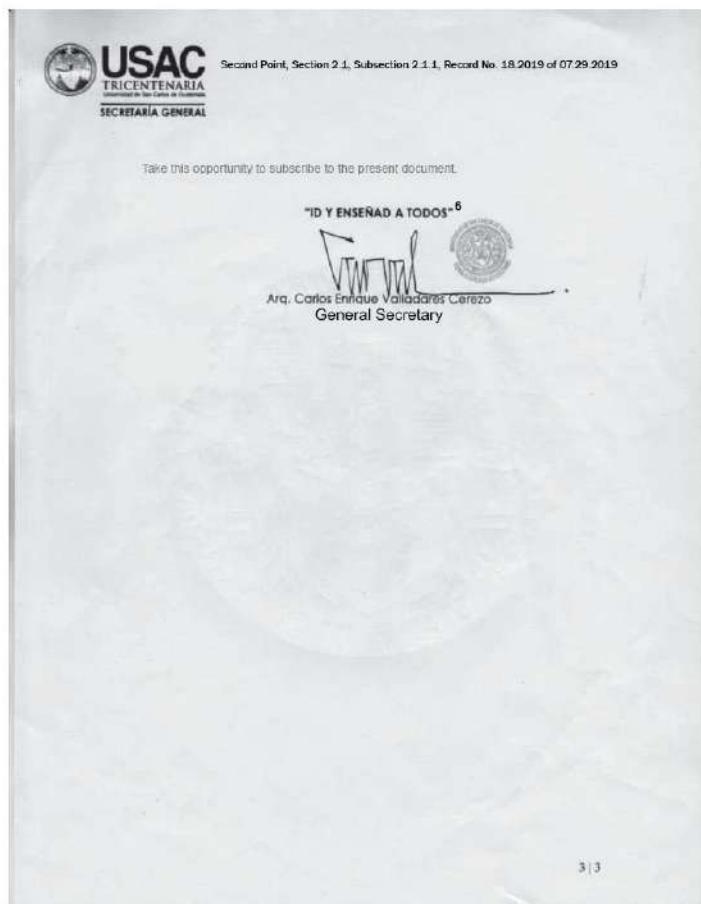
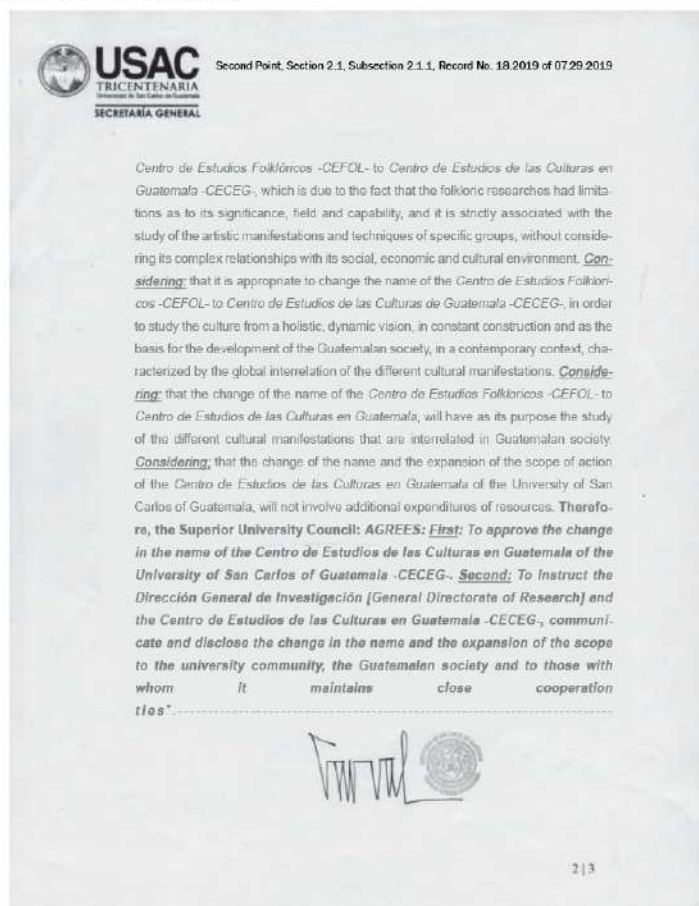
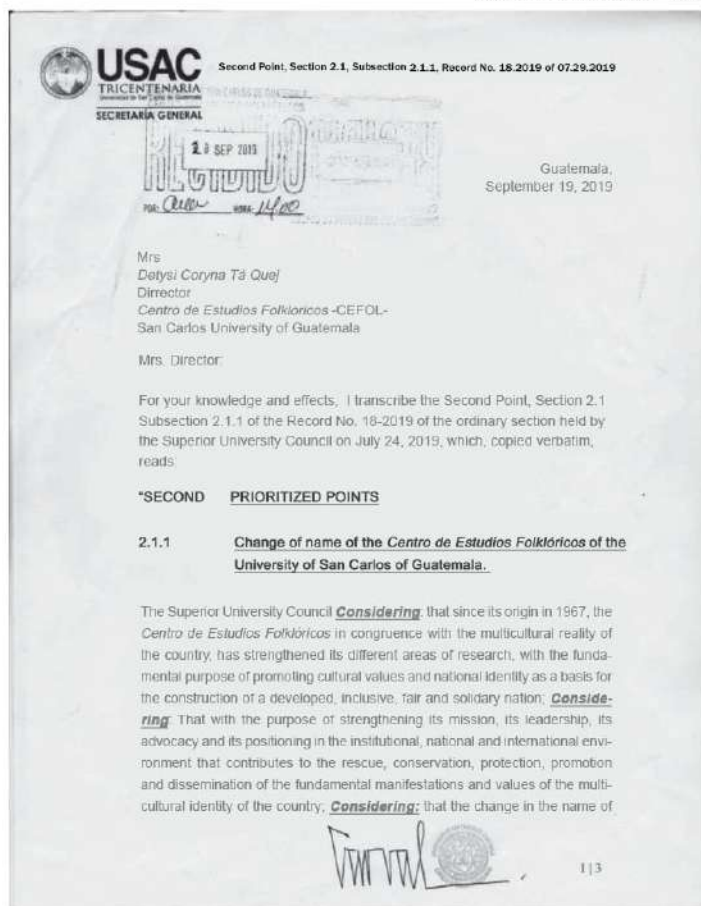


Figure 13: Old house in Conguaco, Jutiapa. Photography: courtesy of the Corado Martínez family, 2018.



Figure 14: Old houses of the rural area of Conguaco. Photography: courtesy of the Corado Martínez Family, 2018.

AGREEMENT OF THE SUPERIOR UNIVERSITY COUNCIL APPROVING THE NAME CHANGE.



This publication was printed at the graphic workshops
of Serviprensa, S.A. in December of 2019.
The edition consists of 500 copies
in 80-gram bond paper.

Directory

San Carlos University Authorities USAC

Chancellor

Murphy Olympo Paiz Recinos

General Secretary

Carlos Enrique Valladares Cerezo

General Director of Research

Felix Alan Douglas Aguilar Carrera

Director of the *Centro de Estudios Folklóricos*

Miguel Ángel Chacón Véliz

Deysi Coryna Tá Quej

Tenured Researchers

Aracely Esquivel Vásquez

Aníbal Dionisio Chajón Flores

Deyvid Paul Molina

Abraham Israel Solórzano Vega

Byron Fernando García Astorga

Interim Researchers

Xochitl Anaité Castro Ramos

Ericka Anel Sagastume García

Erick Fernando García Alvarado

Interior Design

Evelyn Ralda

Roof Assembly

General Directorate of Research

Cover Photograph

Ceramist, Mrs. *Juana Palacios de Galicia*,
Halmet of *El rodeo*, Village of *El Barro*, *Conguaco*, *Jutiapa*.

Aracely Esquivel Vásquez

Avenue La Reforma 0-09, Zona 10

Phone Numbers: 2231-9171 / 2361-9260 / 2360-3952

e-mail: cefol@usac.edu.gt

Web: <http://cefol.usac.edu.gt/>

Facebook: *Centro de Estudios Folklóricos USAC*