



The Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Mercado Colón in Guatemala City.

Deyvid Paul Molina

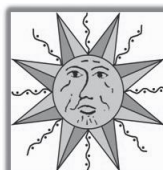
We present to our readers the new name of the Center for Folkloric Studies –CEFOL–, now the Center for the Study of Cultures in Guatemala.

The Center for the Study of Cultures in Guatemala was established on July 8, 1967, by resolution of the Honorable Superior University Council of the University of San Carlos de Guatemala, originally named the “Center for Folkloric Studies.” Over time, and in response to the evolving social context of various historical events, it became necessary to implement changes. Therefore, after joint efforts by researchers, Center directors, and other units of USAC, and with the support of Rector Eng. Murphy Olympo Paiz Recinos, the Superior University Council reviewed and approved, on, July 24, 2019, the remaining of CEFOL to the Study of Cultures in Guatemala –CECEG–.

In the bulletin you are holding, you may still find the name Center for Folkloric Studies. This is because the article presented here is the result of research conducted by its authors in 2018. However, the entire team is pleased to share the news that our research unit is now officially named the CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURES IN GUATEMALA.



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Abstract

Is common in Guatemala for markets to have the **Sacred Heart of Jesus** as their spiritual protector—a practice first adopted by the Central Market in Guatemala City at the end of the 19th century, and later by other marketplaces, including the **Mercado Colón**, located on 13th Avenue, between 6th and 7th Streets in Zone 1 of the capital. Since the 1960s, the Colón Market has held celebrations in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus during the month of June, the time when the Catholic Church traditionally celebrates this devotion. Novenas, Masses, prayers, **raffles**, concerts, foods and drink, among other activities, form part of the major event that unites **vendors** and customers. The celebration becomes such a significant occasion that it transcends the social barriers commonly found in urban societies such as Guatemala City. This work offers the reader a description of the various expressions and traditions centered around the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the patron of one of the most important markets in the historic center of Guatemala City.

Keywords: Sacred Heart, Mercado Colón, raffles, vendors, festival.

Abstract

Is common in Guatemala, that the markets have as spiritual protector the **Sacred Heart of Jesus**, a practice that was adopted first by the Central Market of Guatemala City, at the end of the 19th century, and later to other food centers, between the **Mercado Colón**, located on 13th Avenue, between 6th and 7th streets of zone 1 capital. In the aforementioned market since the 1960s, the celebration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus began during the month of June, in which it is traditionally celebrated by the Catholic Church. Novenas, masses, prayers, **raffles**, concerts, food and drinks, among others, are part of an event among the **tenants** and customers that are part of the Mercado Colón, to such a degree that this **festival** becomes an element that unites everyone those who participate in it, leaving for a moment the social barriers that are common in urban societies such as Guatemala City. In this work the reader will find a description of all those manifestations that revolve around the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as patron of one of the most important markets of the historic center of Guatemala City.

Keywords: Sacred Heart, Mercado Colón, raffles, tenants, festival.

Introduction

Since the dawn of humankind, commercial transactions have played a pivotal role: in addition to supplying daily necessities, they have served as spaces that foster interaction among people of different cultures and social strata. Within humanity's religious imagination there is always a supreme being to whom people turn in particular circumstances—among them, for the protection of merchants. In Guatemala, since the final third of the nineteenth century, that protector has been the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

This study examines the significance of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Mercado Colón of Guatemala City, of which He is the patron. First, it presents a brief overview of the importance that markets have held in the lives of Guatemalans since time immemorial. Then it offers a historical overview of Mercado Colón, one of the main supply centers in the capital's historic center. Subsequently, it examines the relationship between the Sacred Heart of Jesus and markets in general, as well as His patronage over Mercado Colón. Next, it addresses the importance of the Catholic Committee in organizing the patronal celebrations. Finally, it describes the festive activities held during the month of June in honor of the Heart of Jesus.

Markets in the Lives of Guatemalans.

The Exchange of goods and services has been present in the lives of Guatemalans since the pre-Hispanic period. Various archaeologists and historians have noted that within the

Mesoamerican region, there were communities that stood out for the production or crafting of specific goods, which were traded in large open-air plazas. These “represented the rich variety of Indigenous industry, gathered in those places from all corners and climates of Mesoamerica” (Thompson, 1995, p. 263).

With the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in Guatemala in 1524, Mesoamerican trade products were gradually enriched with those brought from Europe, among them wheat. Coins began to be used as a form of payment, although many communities continued practicing bartering. Some colonial chroniclers left references to the markets in their writings. For example, in the early third decade of the 17th century, the Irish Dominican friar—who later converted to Protestantism—Tomás Gage, referring to commercial activities in the Santo Domingo neighborhood in the city of Santiago de Guatemala, wrote:

There is a small market held there every day, where some Indians spend, the whole day selling fruit, herbs and cacao. But around four in the afternoon, it becomes full for about an hour, when the Indian women come to sell delicacies to the Creoles, such as *atole*, *pinole*, *palmitos cocidos*, cacao butter made with corn, and a little chicken or fresh pork seasoned with long sweet chili pepper, which they call *anacatumales* (Gage, 1997, pp. 27-28).

However, for over two centuries, the most important commercial exchange center in Santiago de Guatemala was the Plaza Central or Plaza de Armas, through which all goods passed

Which, in accordance with Spanish legislation, were authorized to be traded. On this matter:

According to the ordinances and regulations repeatedly decreed since the 16th century, all foodstuffs (with the sole exception of cattle and sheep) had to be delivered and sold at the central market of Santiago, located in the Plaza Mayor, without the involvement of intermediaries (Lutz, 1984, p. 338).

When the destroyed city of Santiago de Guatemala was relocated to the Valle de la Ermita, its plaza moved as well, continuing to function as the main center for trade and supply in the new metropolis. Products were offered to buyers at makeshift stalls, called *cajones*, and according to oral tradition, on the morning of September 15, 1821, Dolores Bedoya de Molina used one of them to loudly demand the declaration of Guatemalan independence.

However, it wasn't until the 1860s that the idea of constructing a formal market building was conceived. The chosen site was a plaza located behind the Catedral Metropolitana, which had served as a provisional temple between 1780 and 1787 and later as a cemetery—until, during the government of Mariano Gálvez, it ceased to function as such in 1832 (Chajón, 2012, p. 92). The Gazette of Guatemala, one of the few newspapers of the time, reported in its October 27, 1869 edition on the construction of a market, which came to be known as Cerna, in honor of then—president Vicente Cerna. The project was led by architect Julián Rivera, who completed it in 1871 (Chinchilla, 2002, p. 169), and it was inaugurated by President inaugurated by President Miguel García Granados.

Over the time, its name was changed to Mercado Central, which is still used today. The building was damaged by the earthquakes of 1917-1918 and 1976—the latter prompting its demolition and replacement by a larger one, which opened in 1983, and which has undergone various modifications since then.

However, in many communities across the country, the traditional way of carrying out the commercial Exchange of goods and services continues to take place in open—air plazas or lots, for example, in Chichicastenango (Quiché) or San Francisco El Alto (Totonicapán), every Wednesday, thousands of merchants from various regions of the country gather to buy and sell everything from a pin to livestock—making it the largest open—air market in Central America.

It can be said that for Guatemalans, markets—beyond their strictly commercial function—are spaces of social cohesion, where the multiculturalism that characterizes the country is also lived. For many people, especially in rural areas, going to the markets or town plazas on Thursdays or Sundays is a social activity in itself, where they often take the opportunity to dress in their finest clothes. Visiting markets is also seen as a recreational activity where people meet up with family and friends they seldom see, and it is even an opportunity for lovers to swear eternal love to each other.

Historical Overview of Mercado Colón in Guatemala City

The origins of Mercado Colón date back to the last third of the 18th century, when the city of Santiago de Guatemala was relocated to the

Valle de la Ermita. By 1776, the site currently by Parque Infantil Colón, was designated to serve as a provisional Plaza Mayor, while the design for the permanente one was being finalized (Rodríguez, 2007, p. 93). In 1832, under presidency of Mariano Gálvez, the initiative arose to build a theater in what was then called Plaza Vieja. However, the Project did not begin until twenty years later, during the leadership of Rafael Carrera.

The construction of the new entertainment center was led by the German engineer José Bekers, who followed the original 1832 plan by Miguel Rivera Maestre, adding a portico inspired by the Parthenon of Athens, Greece (Chajón, 2012, p. 103). The building was inaugurated on October 23, 1859, and, having been built during Rafael Carrera's administration, it was known as "Teatro de Carrera". The Gazette of Guatemala, on the occasion of the inauguration, offered a detailed report of the event, highlighting the following:

"Such are the theater and the promenade that today beautify the Plaza-vieja, transforming it into one of the most interesting sites in the Capital, which only a few years ago was nothing more than a heap of rubble and filth. The building and the promenade have cost 115,000 pesos, an amount obtained through successive contracts based on the agreement in August 1852, most of which has been paid with its own interest" (Redactor, 1859, p. 3).

When the liberal governments came to power in 1871, the theater's name was changed to "Nacional". In 1892, as part of the Fourth Centenary of Cristobal Colón arrival in the Americas, it was renamed "Colón". To commemorate the occasion, the Italian community residing in Guatemala donated a

statue of the navigator, created by Francisco Durini, which was placed in front of the building (Rodríguez, 2007, p. 94). The Teatro Colón was the venue for the official premiere of the National Anthem of Guatemala, which took place on March 14, 1897.

For more than 50 years, the Teatro de Carrera, later Colón was the most prestigious artistic stage in Guatemala, hosting theatrical companies, operas, operettas, zarzuelas, and the first ballet dancers ever seen by Guatemalans. The last to dance there, in 1917, was Lochita Monzón, a native of the country (De León, 2003).

The earthquakes of 1917 and 1918 damaged the building; however, in 1920, then—president Manuel Estrada Cabrera ordered its reconstruction, assigning the task to Luis Augusto Fontaine, who reinforced it with concrete columns. Nevertheless, when Estrada Cabrera fell from power, the Works were suspended, and the building was eventually demolished on December 30, 1924:

"The General Directorate of Public Works requests that we inform readers that tomorrow, between 7 and 8 a.m., approximately twenty dynamite blasts will be carried out in the plaza near the Teatro Colón, in order to finish demolishing the columns that still remain in that location. This notice is given to prevent any alarm, as occurred recently, particularly among residents of that neighborhood" (Redactor, 1924, p. 7).

In 1934, the site once occupied by the theater was converted into an improvised market, which according to chronicles of the time, was known for its filth—a condition not uncommon among the other markets in Guatemala City.

In 1945, during the mayorship of Mario Méndez Montenegro in Guatemala City, the initiative arose to relocate Mercado Colón. As a curious note, a newspaper of the time published a piece in which a reader suggested a potential new location for the market:

We now present a reader's proposal regarding the location that could be assigned to Mercado Colón, to once and for all resolve the patchwork that this market represents in its current location. The reader suggests that Mercado Colón could be moved to the premises of the Comandancia de Armas, at 13 avenida y 7^a. Calle, as it currently serves no purpose, and this would fulfill the objective being pursued. Once the market is removed, a theater—like the one that once stood there—could be built, or simply a park as we have just seen with the one built near the Centenario, how much more appealing such a site becomes (Redactor, 1945, p. 9).

It seems the suggestion reached municipal authorities, as shortly thereafter another newspaper published the following on the topic:

“Regarding the former Cuartel No. 3, it will be demolished to build the new facilities for Mercado Colón, whose removal from its current location has been long demanded by every means available. Demolition work began earlier this year; at present, work inside the building is nearly complete, and only the relocation of the Comandancia offices remains before construction of the market can begin. Mayor Méndez Montenegro has contacted the Minister of Defense, major Árbenz, to arrange for this relocation as soon as possible. The construction of the new Mercado Colón on the site of the old barracks will be the first municipal project by the local government.

For this, the Crédito Hipotecario Nacional has already secured 150,000 quetzales in bonds, from which the Municipality can now draw funds as needed for constructions expenses” (Redactor, 1946, p. 1).

Without a doubt, the main reason for relocating the Old Mercado Colón to its current site was the unsanitary conditions that prevailed there. Additionally, municipal authorities decided that once the new market was completed and the relocation was finalized, a park would be built on the former site, aimed at promoting exercise and recreation for children and youth:

“The old building where the Comandancia de Armas operated for several years—and which in recent months was referred to as the Jefatura central de zona—has been completely demolished to make way for a modern cantonal market, which the municipality of the capital is preparing to build shortly. This will eliminate the old and filthy Mercado Colón, on whose former grounds a gymnasium park for children will be constructed. It is well known that the aforementioned Mercado Colón has long been one of the most centrally located centers of filth in our capital, and that due to domestic commercial needs, it has been tolerated despite the serious harm it causes to nearby residents and to public health in general. If the capital's municipal project is carried out, the neighborhood located in that eastern sector of the city will benefit greatly from the construction of a modern market and a gymnasium park that will replace the blight that Mercado Colón has become”. (Redactor, 1946, p. 8).

The site designated for the construction of the new Mercado Colón, was originally occupied

by the Cuartel de Caballería, as known in maps from 1838 and 1870, and was eventually designated as the Comandancia de Armas. (Chajón, 2012).

In October 1946, the now—defunct newspaper *El Imparcial*, published a report announcing that the construction of Mercado Colón would be completed by February of the following year, and it also described how the market spaces would be distributed. The works were led by engineer Manlio Giracca, as follows:

“It was announced today that the cantonal market that will replace Mercado Colón, currently under construction on the site formerly occupied by the Comandancia de Armas, will be completed by the end of February. According to the plans, the building is being constructed using a mixed system, with the following features: The façade along 7^a. calle, is 55 meters long and includes the main entrance, control offices, and storage areas. Along 13 avenida, the front measures 99.83 meters and will include storefronts for external shops, women’s restrooms, and warehouse spaces. Along 14 Avenida, there will be 16 storefronts. Inside, along the sides, there will be 38 shops; 61 spaces for kitchens; and 506 stalls for vendors selling fruits, vegetables, and general foodstuffs. The market also has well—equipped restrooms. One hundred ten workers, under the direction of engineer Manlio Giracca, are working on the project” (Redactor, 1946, p. 1).

However, by February 1947, construction was still ongoing:

“The building is being constructed with iron, brick, cement, and river sand, and it will be inaugurated in September of this year.

The window frames and iron screws are being produced on-site at a cost of 37 cents each, compared to the Q1 charged by importers in the city” (Redactor, 1947, p. 7).

Work continued throughout 1947 and the first half of 1948. By July, the market’s completion was scheduled, with a final estimated value of Q. 200000.00. On this, *El Imparcial* reported:

“Market No.3, modern, spacious, and comfortable—the opposite of that filthy and unaesthetic place known as “Mercado de Colón” which it will replace—is receiving its final touches before opening at the end of the upcoming month. The work on this important project is now in its final stage, as we confirmed yesterday. Four hundred fifty workers, whose efforts are spread throughout the site, are carrying out the work under the supervision of construction chief Nicolás B. Granados, and under the direction of engineer Manlio Giracca, who has overseen the project since its inception. The progress of the work and the accelerated pace of construction—despite being limited to regular working hours—make it certain that the market will be completed next month, almost exactly two years after the preliminary work began in September 1946, starting with the demolition of the old Comandancia de Armas building, which lasted over two months... The exact figures for the total cost will be available upon completion, as the original estimate of Q.100,000, has changed—not only due to modifications made to the design but also due to the rising cost of materials and labor over the past two years, Thus the total cost is currently estimated...”

To be approximately Q.200000.00, and will be officially announced on the date the Project is inaugurated. The work has been a matter of great concern and focus for mayor Méndez Montenegro (Redactor, 1948, pp. 1-9).

The new market was opened to the public on August 14, 1948. The inauguration ceremony was presided over by the mayor of the capital, Mario Méndez Montenegro, and by the metropolitan archbishop, Mariano Rossell y Arellano:

“Amid the well-deserved joy of the humble stallholders and of those who strove to bring into existence a building that would erase from the life of the city the filthy and unaesthetic place known since 1934 as *Mercado de Colón*, today the modern and largest market in the city—Market No. 3—was officially opened. It stands on the grounds formerly occupied by the Comandancia de Armas. The inauguration festivities for this new project—which, not to say so would be unjust—are owed to the efforts and dynamism of the mayor, Bachiller Mario Méndez Montenegro, and of those who have effectively collaborated with him in improving the beautification of “*Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción*”, began today at 8:15 a.m. with a mass celebrated at the monumental altar erected at the center of the market itself. The service was conducted by Mardoqueo García, and present during the liturgical act was the archbishop of Guatemala, his Excellency Monsignor Mariano Rossell y Arellano. At the end of the mass, the archbishop toured all sections of the market to carry out the blessing. In the presence of the head of the executive branch and several members of the cabinet and the municipal council, Mayor Méndez Montenegro officially declared the building inaugurated at 10:30 a.m., after the national anthem was performed by the Banda Marcial. (Redactor, 1948, pp. 1-6).

As had been announced in 1946, on the site occupied by the old Mercado Colón, from 1934 to 1948, the construction of a children’s park was planned, which would include skating tracks. The project was once again assigned to engineer Manlio Giracca, as reported at the time by *El Imparcial*:

“A children’s park, with an estimated cost of approximately Q.60,000, will begin construction tomorrow on the site that had been occupied by the so-called *Mercado de Colón*... The park will feature several circular tracks connected by tangent paths, all intended for roller skating, and at the center, a building will be erected to house a children’s library, which will occupy an area of approximately 298 square meters” (Redactor, 1948, p. 1).

The children’s park was inaugurated on December 25, 1948, along with the school library, and the Durini sculpture—a gift from the Italian community in 1892—was restored to the site (Chajón, 2012, p. 103). Ironically, after the February 4, 1976 earthquake, the park once again functioned as a market, this time temporarily housing vendors from the demolished Mercado Central, who vacated the area when the latter was rebuilt in 1983.

The life of the new Mercado Colón was not free from the typical issues faced by marketplaces, particularly the uncontrolled growth of vendors who settled around its perimeter. By the late 1960s, concerns arose about the market’s rapid expansion, which increasingly strayed from the original design inaugurated two decades earlier. On this matter:

The growth of the population and the vocation and need of thousands of Guatemalans to

Engage in commerce, gradually overwhelmed the stallholders: the overcrowding of goods, supplies, and everything God created began to choke the premises, and its capacity soon spilled over onto the surrounding sidewalks. Moreover, nearby houses became sites for shops, storage facilities, taverns, and so on. (Redactor, 1968, p. 3).

For many years, this issue persisted, and it was not until the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century that significant improvements were made for the benefit of both vendors and buyers. Among these was the creation of the so-called Plaza Nueva, a space to which, in 2008, the vendors who had been selling their products outside the market were relocated.

Today, Mercado Colón is one of the 23 municipal markets in Guatemala City. It houses approximately 400 stalls, distributed across 10 sectors: Plaza Mayor, Plaza Nueva, butcher shops, kitchens, fruits and vegetables, live poultry, clothing, pine and flowers, shoe stores and piñata shops (Alarcón, 2018). The sale of medicinal plants is also noteworthy, which is why the market is considered by researcher Byron García “a space where traditional medicine survives” (García, 2017). Its hours of operation are from 6 am to 6 pm.

Under the protection of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

In most Catholic temples, it is common to find paintings, sculptures, or prints depicting the image of Christ showing His heart to the faithful. Within Catholicism, this representation is known as the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which, according to Presbítero Marco Aurelio González Iriarte, rector of the

Iglesia Beatas de Belén in Guatemala City. Refers to the divine love that Jesus Christ has shown to humanity throughout (González, 2017). Today, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is widespread throughout the world. According to some theologians, its origins date back to the early centuries of Christianity. However, the first exponents and devotees of this devotion emerged during the Middle Ages, among them Saint Bernardo de Claraval, Matilde de Hackeborn, Lutgarda and most notably Gertrudis la Magna, who claimed to have had visions or revelations in which Christ instilled in her a deep love for His Heart. She also published the book *The herald of Divine love (Insinuationes Divinae Pietatis)* which is why she is considered one of the first promoters of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

But without a doubt the popularization of the cult of what is also known as the Heart of Jesus is credited to a nun of the order of the visitation, the French saint Margarita María Alacoque, who between 1673 and 1675 received a series of revelations in which Christ showed her the immense love that his Sacred Heart had shown humanity—only to be met with offenses and ingratitude. Jesus asked her to dedicate every first Friday following the feast of Corpus Christi as a day to offer penance in reparation to His Sacred Heart. Alacoque shared her experiences with her confessor, the Jesuit Saint Claudio de la Colombiere, who quickly fulfilled Christ’s request, becoming the first to consecrate himself to the new devotion. It is known that the Jesuits spread the devotion throughout France, Poland, and Spain—the latter then introducing it to its American colonies throughout the 18th century.

In Guatemala, one of the first documented references dates back to a decree issued on March 21, 1747, by the City Council of Santiago de Guatemala, in which it was ordered that on June 9 of that same year, the annual celebration of the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus would be sworn in at the Church of the Society of Jesus (Pardo, 1944, p. 161).

The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus first took root among the elite criollo families of Santiago de Guatemala, and from there, in the 19th century, the convents and female religious houses played a crucial role in consolidating the devotion, where nuns and lay sisters requested permission to conduct novenas and prayers to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In 1813, the Philharmonic Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was founded with the aim of offering reparation to Christ for the offenses committed by musicians during religious celebrations. By that time, records already show confraternities, brotherhoods, and sacred art dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in towns of the indigenous highlands and southeastern regions in the second half of the 19th century, the figure of Blessed Encarnación Rosal, stands out; she had visions of Christ instructing her to establish a feast in honor of the inner sorrows of His Heart. This celebration has been continuously held at the Beaterio de Belén, in Guatemala City since 1857. Finally, in June 1895, the Archdiocese of Guatemala was consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, making Guatemala the third country in the world to do so, marking the foundational period of this Christian devotion (Molina, 2018).

In Guatemala, there is a particularity that the Sacred Heart of Jesus is one of the most common patrons of various markets, especially

Guatemala City. Historian Artemis Torres notes that the Central Market, Colón, La Re-formita, El Guarda and the annex of El Granero, all have the Sacred Heart as one of their patrons. These markets celebrate His feast on movable dates, especially in June, holding events such as novenas, Masses, concerts, marimba dances, and performances with other instruments. Torres asserts that this patronage over Guatemala's markets originated during the Liberal Reform of 1871, specifically when the Central market was inaugurated. She writes: "During this period, the Sacred Heart of Jesus developed as a new icon—it was the most well-known Catholic figure at the time. It represented the ideal of a triumphant Church and harmonized with the coexistence of science" (Torres, 2013, p. 9).

The Sacred Heart of Jesus, Patron of Mercado Colón

Undoubtedly following the example of the Mercado Central in adopting the Sacred Heart of Jesus as its patron, other marketplaces Mercado Colón among them followed suit. It is said that shortly after the market's inauguration, a committee was formed, and one of its first actions was to purchase an image of the Sacred Heart. According to Nadia Abrego, a member of said committee, the image is a work of the renowned sculptor Julio Dubois (1880- 1960). The statue is made of wood, has movable joints, and features carved hair. It is said that in earlier times, the statue was carried in procession inside the market on the day of its feast, but this tradition has ceased—possibly to protect the image from damage.

The current members of the Catholic Committee recount that the arrival of the image was moment of

great joy for the tenants, who quickly adopted Him as their patron saint. To house the statue, a small chapel was built atop an arch that connects two sections of the first level of the market building, placing the image in clear view of both vendors and shoppers.

For many years, alongside the image of the Sacred Heart, there was a framed print, which is said to be older than the statue itself. During the month of June, as the festivities approached and thanks to the initiative of Cristina Paz, it became customary for this framed print to be carried from stall-to-stall collecting offerings to help fund the celebration. Today, the print is located in the vegetable section, and is cared for by Mrs. Juana Yaquí, who has served as president of the Market Committee (not to be confused with the Catholic Committee).

The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is deeply rooted in Mercado Colón, and both vendors and customers claim to have received miracles through His intercession. One collaborator shares that for a long time, a man would come to pray in front of the framed image asking for employment—a request that was eventually granted (Yaquí, 2018).

For the tenants, having the Sacred Heart as their patron is a source of joy and blessing. As one remarked “We were fortunate to have the Sacred Heart as our patron—definitely, because He is merciful, and there must be a purpose for our lives” (Alarcón, 2018).

As a curious fact, it is said that even people who are not Catholic participate in the celebrations in honor of the Sacred Heart, as they believe that this devotion

Promotes a strong sense of fellowship among the tenants: “We are a community, a family, we are in the market, and we have to support each other”. For that reason, it can be said that the figure of the Sacred Heart of Jesus serves as a tool for social cohesion among the people who are part of Mercado Colón.

Catholic Committee

As previously mentioned, shortly after the inauguration of Mercado Colón, a Catholic Committee was founded. One of its main responsibilities was to care for the image of the Sacred Heart and organize His annual fest. Among its first members were Ingracia Paz, Jesús Larrazábal, Marta and María Meda (Torres, 2003, p. 41) who were responsible for purchasing the image of the patron saint.

As of 2018, the committee was composed of: Silvia Pérez Anleu, Nadia Abrego, Aura Pérez, Juan Gómez and Beatriz Alarcón, who assumed their roles in 2015, although they had previously collaborated with earlier committees, as one of them explained:

“We’ve been in this committee for five years. We’ve always helped—we supported Lety Campos, Cristina Paz and Carmen Castellanos. After they passed away, Lety took charge of the committee, and when she stepped down five years ago, we took over” (Abrego, 2018).

The committee is in charge of maintaining the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, frequently changing the flowers offered by His devotees. Mrs. Silvia Pérez, lights candle daily. The Catholic Committee also organizes the feast day celebrations of

Sacred Heart of Jesus, as well as the celebration held on January 15, in honor of the Lord of Esquipulas, the market's second patron saint. It is said that they receive the support of all the tenants, who contribute what they can, and thanks to their collective efforts, the patronal festivities are always a resounding success.

Both Alarcón and Abrego, mentioned that within the committee, there is a spirit of unity and organization, qualities that have been widely praised by others vendors. The Catholic Committee has also not remained indifferent to the social problems and natural disasters that have affected the country. For example, in January 2015, when it was announced that the Hospital General San Juan de Dios was lacking food supplies, they quickly organized and delivered donations. However, the then Vice President of the Republic, Roxana Baldetti, claimed in a press statement that she had never received the donation from the Mercado Colón vendors. The committee then called a press conference to refute her statements. Eventually, the vice president admitted her mistake and publicly apologized to the market. In June 2018, after the eruption of the Volcán de Fuego on the 3rd of that month, Beatriz Alarcón took the initiative to go stall by stall collecting donations for those affected by the disaster. The generosity of the tenants was immediate, and they personally delivered the donations to one of the shelters in the department of Escuintla.

The committee also takes part in various expressions of religiosity within the Centro Histórico, since several processions pass in front of Mercado Colón due to its location. Among them are the processions of Jesús Nazareno de los Milagros from the nearby

Church of San José, on Holy Tuesday's Silent Procession, as well as the processions of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Guadalupe, held in December and departing from the Catedral Metropolitana and Santuario de Guadalupe, respectively. For these events, the committee creates sawdust and pine needle carpets, using materials donated by the tenants. They also create the Nativity scene that is set up every year in the Plaza Grande of the market, always with the help of their fellow vendors.

Mercado Colón Celebrates the Sacred Heart

In keeping with Catholic Church tradition, the month of June is dedicated to celebrating the Sacred Heart of Jesus at Mercado Colón. According to Beatriz Alarcón, a member of the Catholic Committee, in earlier times, the festivities began with the First Communions of vendor's children, followed by a solemn mass on the main feast day. At the beginning of this century, one of the people in charge of organizing the patronal celebration was Mrs. Carmen Castellanos, who prepared in advance by holding raffles and selling snacks, all to raise funds for the various events (Torres, 2003, p. 42).

Currently, the feast of the Sacred Heart is planned a month in advance, beginning with the raffles. For this purpose, the members of the Catholic Committee create lists, each with 25 numbers sold at Q1 each, which are distributed among members to sell.

A few days before the main celebration of the Sacred Heart, the image is taken down from the spot where it is kept

and is placed in special area where it will receive visits from the faithful. For several years now, the Catholic Committee has relied on the services of Mr. Antonio Herrera, who is responsible for creating the altar where the patron's image will be displayed—flowers, of course, are never missing. These are purchased from Mercado La Terminal, zona 4. The altar maker is also in charge of dressing the statue, and his work is regarded as excellent, having received praise from both vendors and customers at Mercado Colón.

On the main day of the Sacred Heart feast, which is movable but always scheduled for a Friday, when possible, the market is adorned in its finest decoration. Each of the 10 sectors takes responsibility for decorating its respective area. The piñata vendors craft the decorations, typically made of red and yellow tissue paper, which are the traditional colors of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

As in previous years a mass is celebrated in the market on the main day of the feast. It has, times, been presided over by the rector of the Santuario Arquidiocesano del Señor San José. After the mass, it is common for holy cards featuring the patron saint to be distributed among attendees. Many vendors place these cards at their stalls to be venerated throughout the year.

Following the mass, the celebration continues with the live music. It is said that in past years, a marimba group called Del Rosario, led by a man known as Don Mario, would perform. Mercado Colón is known for celebrating its patron saint for two consecutive days: Friday and Saturday. In the past, the second day featured music played on harp, violin and bandolón.

On some occasions, the renowned pianist César Augusto Hernández, known as “Golden Fingers”, would also perform. In recent years, the new committee has regularly hired Julio y su Grupo Sensación, a band from zona 3 of the capital, who delight vendors, buyers, and visitors with their music during the two-day celebration.

On Friday afternoon, raffles are held. Prizes include items such as dinnerware sets, blenders, rice cookers, and pots, which are either purchased by the committee or donated by other vendors or customers of the market.

After the raffles, a social dance takes place within the market itself. Throughout the two-day celebration, vendors from other capital markets—including Central, Jocotales, La Florida and La Presidenta visit Mercado Colón. They are often impressed by how the market honors its patron, a tradition that has remained vibrant over the years. As an elderly vendor from another marketplace recalled:

The Sacred Heart festival used to be celebrated at both Central and Colón markets back in the late 1950s. I worked at the Central one, and it was very lively but Colón's was too, maybe even more! It lasted two days I think it still does... we would go over to greet our friends and sometimes even dance to beautiful marimba pieces (Muñoz, 2018).

In recent years, the Catholic Committee has also offered a toast after the Friday afternoon raffles, as a tribute to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The celebration continues on Saturday, still accompanied by the hired musical group, and concludes with

a snack sponsored by the Catholic Committee as a token of appreciation for the successful completion of another patronal celebration, which was well received by both tenants and customers:

The Sacred Heart of Jesus festival is very joyful there is music, raffles, delicious food... it's a moment that takes us, as shoppers, out of our daily routine, it helps us forget our problems for a while, and what better reason than honoring Jesus, to whom we owe all that we are and have. I love coming to the June celebration, and when I can, I also come to the Señor de Esquipulas feast. These are beautiful events! (Catú, 2018).

After the Sacred Heart festivities, preparations begin for Esquipulas Day, which takes place on January 15 of the following year, with celebrations that share many of the characteristics as those of the main patron.

Final Comment

The Mercado Colón of Guatemala City, in addition to being a commercial exchange center, is a space where different worlds converge, especially during its patronal festival in June dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Acts of faith and devotion arise during the two-day celebration which also includes the profane realm, represented mainly by music and food. During these days, differences between tenants are set aside everyone becomes united in a common cause: honoring their patron. No effort of expense is spared; everyone contributes what they can. Regular customer become active participants in the joyful celebration that vendors offer in gratitude to their patron for their jobs, their health, and the well-being of their loved ones.

The celebration is also a time when tenants from Mercado Colón bond with colleagues from other markets, providing an opportunity to discuss shared challenges, as well as to celebrate achievements and joys. For all these reasons, the Sacred Heart of Jesus festival at Mercado Colón is a living expression of social cohesion and a clear practice of interculturality, making it one of the emblematic representations of popular religiosity among the people of Guatemala.

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Photo 01. Improvised stalls in the plaza of the former Teatro Colón in Guatemala City. First half of the 1940S, Private Collection.



Photo 02. Facade of the current Mercado Colón, 13 avenida y 7 calle de la zona 1, ciudad de Guatemala.
Photo by the author.



Photo 03. Image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, patron of the Mercado Colón. Photo by the author.



Photo 04. Site where the venerated image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Mercado Colón. Photo by the author.



Photo 05. The Sacred Heart of Jesus on its altar during the 2016 celebration. Photo by the author.



Photo 07. Mrs. Juana Yaqui and her husband are in charge of caring for an old painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Photo by the author.

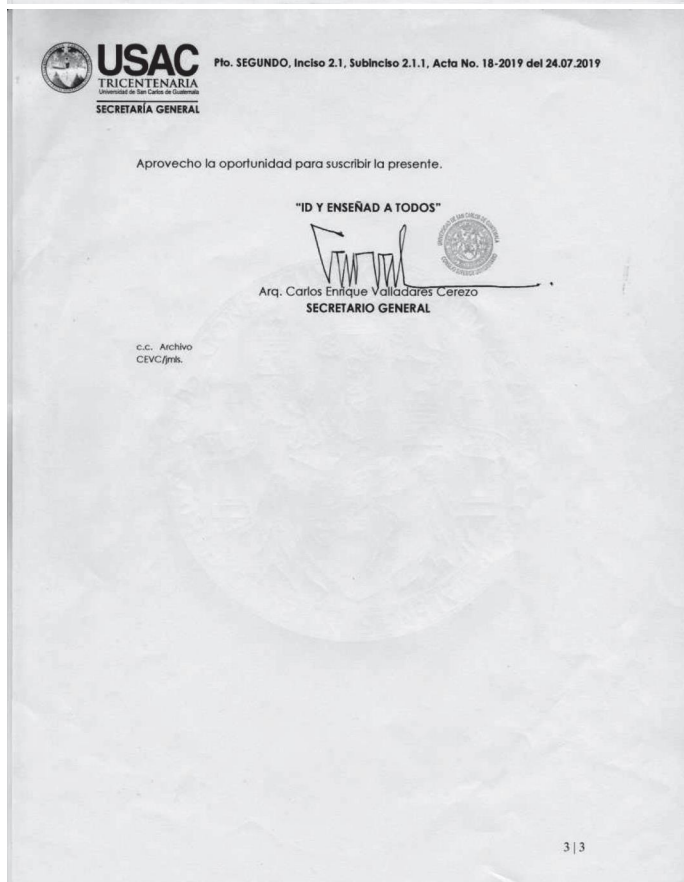
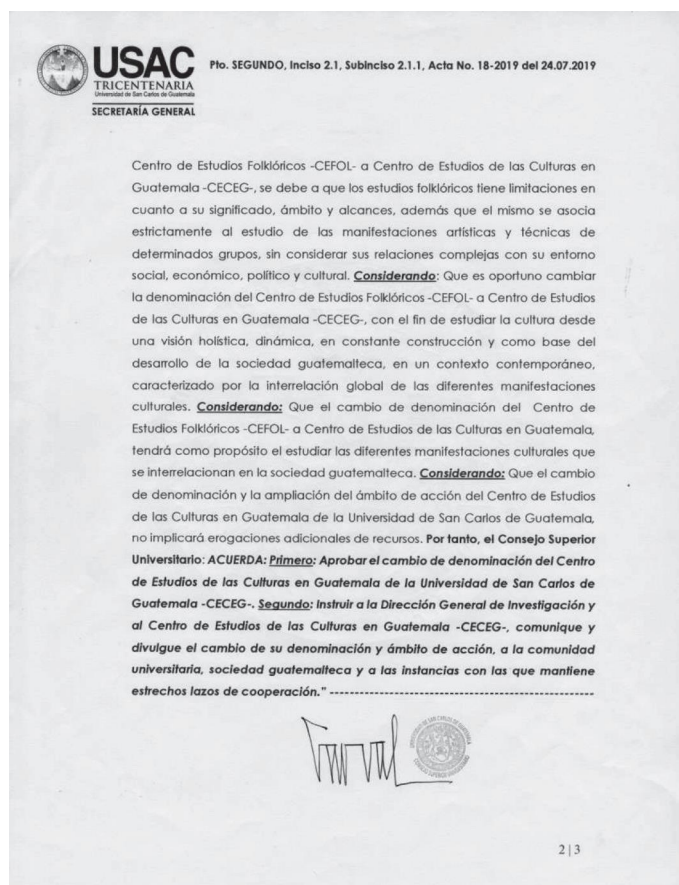
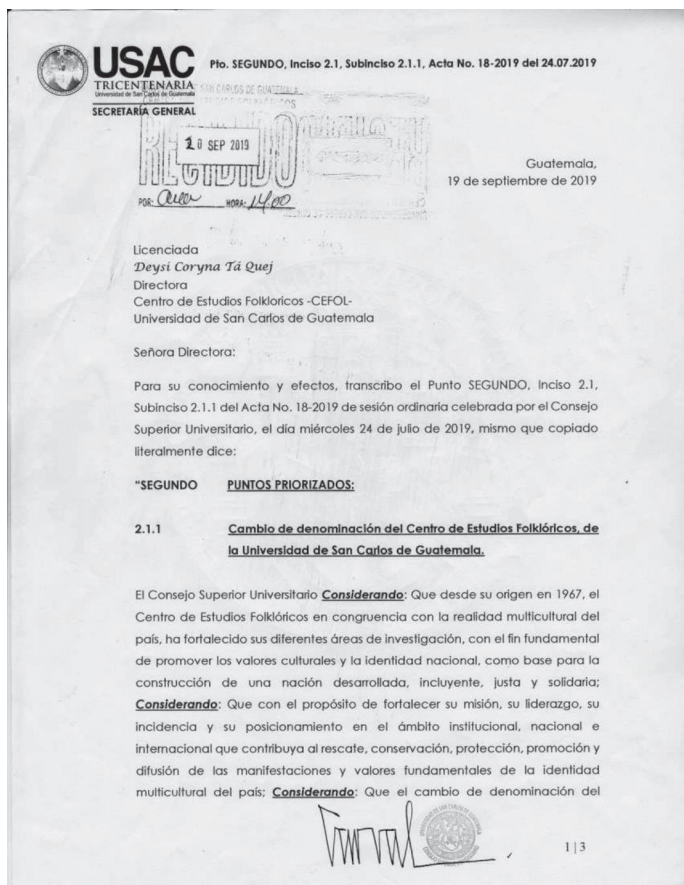


Photo 06. The patronal festivities of Mercado Colón have been enlivened for several years by the music of Julio y su Grupo Sensación. Photo by the author.



Photo 08. Mrs. Silvia Pérez Anleu, Nadia Abrego, Beatriz Alarcón y Aura Pérez, members of the Catholic Committee, who are in charge of organizing the festivities in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Photo by the author.

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