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8

Guatemala, Central America

1977

REPORTS
OF
RESEARCH

GUATEMALAN CONFECTIONERY: MELCOCHAS, ALBOROTOS AND PIRULES OF ATESCATEMPA, JUTIAPA

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1. Background

1.1 Historical-Geographic Aspects of Jutiapa

The department of Jutiapa is located between 14°17'49" latitude and 89°53'4" longitude.

It is bordered to the north by the departments of Jalapa and Chiquimula. To the west by the department of Santa Rosa and to the east by the Republic of El Salvador, to the south by the Pacific Ocean. Within its territory are found remains of ancient flourishing indigenous cities such as those corresponding to the Popolucas, the Pipiles, and the Xincas.

Among its rivers are the Paz, Tamasulapa, Ostúa, and Chingo. A large part of Lake Güija and a lagoon called Atescatempa belong to it. It has a temperate and healthy climate, especially in the departmental capital. Among its main activities are livestock raising and salt production, as well as trade with El Salvador. Among its indigenous lordships, it is worth mentioning those of Mitlán and Paxá (Pasaco). Jutiapa means "river of jutes".

It comprises the following municipalities: 1) Jutiapa; 2) El Progreso; 3) Santa Catarina Mita; 4) Agua Blanca; 5) Asunción Mita; 6) Yupiltepeque; 7) Atescatempa; 8) Jerez; 9) El Adelanto; 10) Zapotitlán; 11) Coniapa; 12) Jalpatagua; 13) Conguaco; 14) Moyuta; 15) Pasaco; 16) San José Acatempa; 17) Quezada.

Jutiapa was created as a department by decree on May 8, 1852. Its approximate area is 3,219 km² and its population is 282,383 inhabitants with 72.2 inhabitants per Km² according to the 1970 census.

Municipality of Atescatempa

Municipality of the Department of Jutiapa, third category municipality. Approximate area: 68 Km²; borders to the north with the municipality of Asunción Mita; to the south and east with the Republic of El Salvador and to the west with Jerez and Yupiltepeque.

How to get to Atescatempa

On departmental highway 5, which starts from San Cristóbal border and connects with national highway 2 or CA2, there are 9 kilometers to Atescatempa. From there, there are about 7 km to the junction with national route 23 at kilometer 151.42. From this junction to the municipal capital of Jerez, there are 9 km. Starting from the same junction on national highway 23, there are 9 km to the municipal capital of Yupiltepeque, and from that place to the departmental capital of Jutiapa, 24 km, where it connects with national route 2 or CA2. From the municipal capital, bridle paths and trails connect Atescatempa with its villages.

The municipal capital is approximately 700 meters above sea level. Its latitude is 14°10'34" and its longitude 89°44'33". The word Atescatempa comes from atezctl, which means "puddle" or "lagoon," that is, on the shore of the lagoon.

The population of this municipality in 1971 was 9,537 inhabitants, or 140.3 inhabitants per square kilometer.

The patron saint festival of San Nicolás is celebrated from November 3 to 5.

The inhabitants of Atescatempa are engaged in agriculture, cultivating sugarcane, coffee, and tobacco.

The municipality has 1 town, 9 villages, 13 hamlets.

The capital Atescatempa with the category of town and in the following hamlets:

- a) El Pretil

- b) Sansuque
- c) Las Vegas

The villages are:

1) San Cristóbal border with the following hamlets:

- a) Amate Blanco
- b) Amatl
- c) El Manguito
- d) La Pitaya

2) Amatepeque village with these hamlets:

- e) Laguna Seca
- f) Quebrada Seca
- g) El Anono
- h) Rebalse

3) Horcones village with the following hamlets:

- i) El Petén
- j) Tushico

- 4) El Naranjo
- 5) El Sitio
- 6) Contepeque
- 7) El Rosario
- 8) Los Cerros
- 9) El Zapote

Orographic features:

Chingo Volcano
Las Víboras Hill
Hill Sansuque
Hill Cerro Alto
Las Guacamayas Hill
Hill Cerro del Castillo

Hill Cerro Compañía
Hill Cerro Chino

Hydrographic features:

San Cristóbal River
Amatal River
Atescatempa o del pueblo River
San Nicolás River
Río de la Compañía
El Coco River
La Esperanza River

Atescatempa Lagoon
Quebrada de La Pava

The Atescatempa lagoon has an approximate extension of 5.6 km.
El Zapote village borders El Salvador.

2. Traditional sweets of El Zapote village, municipality of Atescatempa, department of Jutiapa

In the municipality of Atescatempa, the inhabitants of El Zapote village are dedicated to making *melcochas* and *chupetes*, also called *pirulíes*, which are made with honey that, being hot and concentrated, is poured onto a plate or container with cold water, which, after kneading it, becomes chewy and whitish in color.

The *chupetes* are sweets that are rolled onto a stick, and the *melcochas* are placed on corn cobs.

Below is a description of how these sweets are made.

JUTIAPA



2.1 Informants

Our informant was Mrs. Verónica Godoy Rodríguez, 34 years old. She is originally from the village of Los Cerros in the municipality of Atescatempa, department of Jutiapa, and resides in El Zapote village in the same municipality.

Her main occupation is "house chores." However, she makes bread, *melcochas*, and *chupetes* or *pirulíes* "on order" or "when she feels like it".

She learned the trade from her mother, María Rodríguez, from a very young age.

She cannot read or write and has never left the boundaries of the department of Jutiapa. She does not know Guatemala City.

In turn, Doña María Rodríguez learned to make *melcochas* and *pirulíes* from her mother Alifonsa Barrera, who is currently 77 years old and is still dedicated to making sweets.

Doña Alifonsa Barrera lives in Los Cerros village, two hours away on foot from El Zapote village, where we conducted our research.

From the information we were able to gather, we know that not only Doña Verónica Godoy Rodríguez "knows how to make *melcochas*." Almost the entire village of El Zapote is dedicated to this trade. However, Mrs. Godoy says that she is the one who knows how to do it best and that she has taught everyone else "because she has few children, is not selfish, and has time for everything". Her sisters-in-law, "acquaintances," and some relatives of the informant corroborated this information.

2.2 Raw Materials

The raw materials used are: sugar, cornmeal, and panela. Doña Verónica Godoy obtains these ingredients in the Jutiapa market, where she goes every Monday, or in the village where she gets them cheaper.

2.3 Equipment

2.3.1 For making *melcochas*

- A hearth with direct fire
- A enamel pot (preferably clay)
- A container with fresh water
- A spoon to test the honey
- A grinding stone
- A large clay pot
- Several cut corn cobs.

2.3.2 For making *alboroto*

- A griddle
- Two deep tin bowls (guacales)
- A pot for making honey
- A spoon

It is important to note that the informant prefers the clay pot to the enamel one. Before placing it on the fire, they smear it with ash, "in case the honey spills" and so that it "doesn't stick to the pot".

The tin bowls (guacales) in which the *alboroto* is cooked must be deep because the cornmeal "jumps and grows" when on the fire.

2.4 Manufacturing Process

2.4.1 To make *melcochas*

Put sugar and 3 cups of water in a pot. For 1 ½ pounds of sugar, mix in the juice of 1 lemon (this is done so it doesn't "crystallize"). Stir well and leave on the fire. This mixture should not be moved. Test the "point" frequently by introducing the spoon with a little honey into the container with fresh water, feel it, and when it

is at the "point," immediately remove it from the fire and pour the mixture onto the grinding stone. A grinding stone is used because it doesn't stick there. A board or a clay pot can be used for the same purpose. While still hot, take parts of the mixture and stretch it with both hands in an enveloping movement. With each stretch, the honey hardens and changes from its initial amber color to ivory and pure white. While the mixture is still warm but already white, stretch it between two people. While one person holds it, the other forms a cord that is then transformed into spirals. These spirals are placed on corn cobs that have been previously cut and placed on a table. The *melcochas* on the corn cobs are piled on a tray or flat plate and are ready to be sold or eaten. Proceed in the same way but quickly with what remains on the stone until all the honey is finished. If it hardens, heat it again, but if it "crystallizes," it is only used to sweeten coffee. Butter is used to stretch the panela *melcocha*.

2.4.2 Alboroto

Select and wash the cornmeal, then put it in the sun to dry. Once completely dry, put a little on a hot griddle, preferably after making tortillas. Cover this amount with a tin bowl and carefully lift it to move the cornmeal with a corn cob. Care must be taken, as with each lift, the hot cornmeal jumps and gets into clothing, but care must be taken not only for that reason but also because a lot of cornmeal is wasted. While the cornmeal is being made, make the honey from panela to the "sticking point" over a separate fire. Once all the cornmeal has been toasted, pour it while still warm into a deep tin bowl where the hot honey is poured. Stir with a spatula and proceed to form balls with both hands.

2.5 Work System

Although the informant told us that the work was individual, we can observe that it is a family work system. Mrs. Godoy Rodríguez says that those who help her "get their hands on the candy are four sisters-in-law, two cousins, a godmother, an aunt, and 'sometimes' children ranging from one to fourteen years old".

Mrs. Godoy also informed us that she only teaches her daughters how to make *melcochas*, as it is not "men's work"

2.6 Product and Function

Mrs. Godoy Rodríguez makes *melcochas*, *alboroto*, and *pirulíes* for two purposes: "to satisfy the family's palate," on the one hand, and "to sell," on the other.

The informant tells us that she "has not seen *malcochas* like the ones she makes anywhere"; however, we found them very similar to those sold in Esquipulas.

According to the informant, the sweets are more in demand when the raw material is cheaper. It is a job "that doesn't pay much." From each pound of sugar, they make about 27 or 28 cents of profit, because from the same amount they make the same number of *melcochas*, which they sell for one cent each.

Now she makes few *melcochas* because sugar is so "expensive".

2.7 Raw Material Costs

Currently (June 1977), a pound of sugar costs Q0.13 in the village and a block of panela costs Q0.35.

Cornmeal is obtained through barter. Corn is given in exchange for cornmeal. Firewood and lemons are obtained in the village.

Producers do not invest anything in transportation because all the

raw material is obtained locally. At most, they pay for passage to Jutiapa when they go on market day. They also do not pay for transportation to sell the product because they distribute it in the same village.

When they make *alboroto*, the income from sales is divided among the daughters, while the profit from the *melcocha* is used by Mrs. Godoy Rodríguez to support the household.

2.8 Product Distribution

The informant's two daughters, Reina Idalma Guevara and Blanca Rosa Guevara, aged 14 and 15 respectively, are in charge of distributing the product in the village. According to Doña Verónica, Reina Idalma is the one who helps her the most and who "knows how to do these things best and likes it".

Her sons take the *melcochas* and other sweets to the stores in Atescatempa and Jutiapa, from where they are distributed to other places, especially Esquipulas.

Our informant adds that she likes to teach her trade to the women of the village so that it will serve them when they get married.