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Guatemala, Central America

1977

INVESTIGATION
REPORT

PAINTED ANICILLOS FROM ZACAPA

Gustavo Adolfo Ruano Balderramos

Introduction

This research was carried out in Guatemala City, Jocotales colony, zone 6, on July 1, 1977, as part of the course on **Folklore Aplicado a la Educación**, offered by the Center for Folkloric Studies of the Universidad San Carlos de Guatemala.

Our informant is originally from the Santa Rosalía village in the Department of Zacapa and is engaged in making painted sweet anicillos. Despite residing in Guatemala City, she preserves the tradition, as we will see later.

Geographic location

In the eastern lands of the republic, 150 kilometers from the capital city, on the banks of the Atlantic highway, is the Santa Rosalía village, which belongs to the municipality of Zacapa, department of the same name.

Description of the field investigation

1. Investigation

.1 No. 1

- .2 Topic: Painted Anicillos¹
- .3 Location: Jocotales hill, zone 6 of the capital city.
- .4 Researcher: Gustavo Adolfo Ruano Balderramos.
- .5 Date: July 1, 1977.

2. Informant's investigation

2.1 Name: Josefa Antonia Sagastume Guzmán.

2.2 Age: 60 years.

2.3 Family group: it is made up of four people: Mrs. Sagastume, her daughter Blanca Alicia Sagastume and two grandchildren, Alicia's children: Jorge and Ingrid.

2.4 Place of origin: Santa Rosalía village, municipality of Zacapa of the Department of Zacapa.

2.5 Address: Avenida Escuintla No. 15, Jocotales colony, zone 6, of this city.

2.6 Social status: People of the lower middle class. The informant's parents were Juan Bautista Sagastume, who worked in agriculture, and Lucinda Guzmán Barahona, dedicated to her housework and making anicillo. The informant was only sent to school for three months, because she was taken out of school and remained illiterate due to a ruler blow given by the teacher for not wanting to march in a parade (a scar is still visible on her leg). From her marriage were born: Aura, Francisco, Blanca Alicia, Floridalma, Urbano and Elvidio. Her daughter, Alicia, the only one who lives with her, was in school for a year but did not learn to read or write.

2.7 From whom she learned the trade: from her mother, who in addition to anicillo made corn husk cigarettes, cigars and coach soap. Her sisters also learned the trade, but one has already passed away (from whom she bought the griddles she works on) and the other, who lives in Santa Rosalía, is dedicated to making anicillo. Antonia Sagastume says that when she was about five or six years old, her mother would say to her: "Come with me, my girl, let's go to Aunt Lucía's to get some hot cachaza² and you can see how the anicillo is made."

1 Anicillo: A candy made from sugar, anise, peanuts, cashew seeds, pepitas (squash seeds), cinnamon, lemon, and food coloring.

2 Cachaza: The foam released by sugar when it is cooked.

But the thing was that her mother was going to see how she learned the trade. The informant says that in her town everyone recognizes that the "inventor of the anicillo" was a woman named Lucía Rivas, also born in the same village of Santa Rosalía. She was the one who taught the other women in the town.

2.8 Main occupation: preparing anicillo and going out to sell it, especially to places where there are fairs or **Corpus Christi**. Along with the anicillo, she sells coconut preserves, which she also knows how to make. With this business she has traveled to many places in the republic and has not seen it made anywhere else.

2.9 Secondary occupation: she does not have one; when she does not go out to sell, she is dedicated to preparing more anicillo and her housework.

2.10 Observations: my informant is a thin woman, of short stature, with calm gestures, lively eyes, dressed modestly.

3. Tradition chain

In the capital's fairs and some departments and municipalities you can buy this delicious sweet at popular prices. It is made at home, although anicillo is also obtained in stores and candy stores, but already made in factories; Mrs. Sagastume says that this is not the same and that it turns ash-colored. The women who are dedicated to this trade are called "anicilleras" (and they say it with great pride). According to what Mrs. Sagastume Guzmán tells me, these sweets were already made in her town when she was very young, with the purpose of delighting the inhabitants themselves and going to see it in other places and earning some money.

Mrs. Sagastume learned the trade from her mother and she in turn taught it to her daughters when they were young: Aura, Blanca Alicia and Floridalma. Of the 3 daughters, 2 are not dedicated to anicillo, although they know how to make it, because now she is married, lives in the capital with her husband and children and is only dedicated to them; Floridalma also got married, but went with her husband to the United States. Only Blanca Alicia, who is the one who lives with her, helps her to make and sell the product.

4. Raw materials

- a) Anise
- b) Sugar
- c) Peanut
- d) Cashew seed
- e) Pepitoria (pumpkin seed)
- f) Cinnamon
- g) Lemon
- h) Vegetable coloring

5. Work system

The work, as can be seen, is completely manual, individual and domestic, since only one person is in charge of doing everything (in this case the informant), occasionally with the help of her daughter Alicia. When she has to go to a fair with a lot of product, she looks for another person to help her. She almost always goes to the “ferias grandes”.³

These big fairs are: Holy Week, which she always spends in Antigua Guatemala and San Felipe; the fair of the Virgen de la Asunción in the month of August, here in the capital; the fair of the city of Tecún Umán; the first Friday of Lent; and the carnival of Mazatenango. She says that she has been told that another big fair is that of **Corpus Christi**, here in the city, but that she unfortunately missed it.

As Mrs. Sagastume is from a warm climate, she almost always looks for appropriate places to sell her product because she says she cannot stand the cold. That is why she does not go to Quetzaltenango, although she has been told that the independence fair there is very good.

Here in the capital, only the informant and her daughter make anicillo (they say), although in her native town entire families are dedicated to this trade. “You have to see now, pure and **ishocas**,⁴ how well they work it” Our informant says that in no other part of the republic do they make anicillo in that way, only in her town; from there they take it to Zacapa, Chiquimula, Esquipulas and many other places, especially in the east.

3 **Ferias grandes:** these people call them that because of their importance or duration.

4 **Ischocas:** girls aged between 8 and 12 years old.

For the preparation of the anicillo, regular-sized “comales”⁵ made of zinc sheets are used, which are placed on top of braziers with little fire, just to give a “smoldering heat.”⁶ With the exception of the griddles, no special utensils are required and any container is very useful.

6. Product elaboration

The informant says that the “medium start” is made with 1/2 of anise, 4 ounces of pepitoria; 4 pounds of peanuts; ½ ounce of cinnamon; 2 pounds of cashew seeds (if available). All this “mensuje”⁷ is placed in a warm griddle over low heat and its “sugar honey” is poured over it with a soup spoon; the first spoonful is dried, the other is added and it continues to be “stirred” until the honey is finished. Care must be taken that the honey does not touch the bottom of the griddle because it will burn, when the anicillo is of a medium size it can be moved with a ladle and as it does not all grow evenly, the largest is removed and separated from the small one.

The next day not all of the beginning is “taken”; half is taken in another griddle with fire and more honey is added throughout the day with the same soup spoon; on the third day it can be worked in two griddles and honey can be added with a ladle.

A On the fourth day, three or four are taken from these two griddles “until 28 or 30 pounds a day are made”; before, beaten egg white was mixed into the anicillo, but now it is not done because eggs are expensive. Once the anicillo is dry, it is dyed with vegetable coloring, green, pink and yellow, which, as already said, has to be brought from El Salvador, because the one made in Guatemala is not good. “To dye the anicillo, I put a little color in a “miserita” of water and add two or three ladles of the same honey, I put the griddle on a bench and add 15 or 20 pounds of anicillos, I pour all that honey in one go and stir it until all that I added takes on its color and I leave it in the air to dry. As I told you for the pink color, the same is done for the green and yellow”

5 **Comales:** circular zinc sheet containers with a flat bottom, with a raised strip around the edge to prevent the ‘anicillo’ from spilling out.

6 **Calor de rescoldo:** They call this the low heat given off by the burning charcoal in the brazier, so that the griddles are kept at a warm temperature.

7 **Mensuje:** Mrs. Sagastume calls the mixture of all the ingredients by that name when putting them on a griddle.

“To prepare the sugar honey, it is poured into a large container (almost always a bath), cold water is added little by little until the sugar dissolves; 5 small basins of water are measured for every 28 pounds of sugar. Then I put it to cook with firewood, adding the juice of a lemon until the honey is "at its point". When it is cooking, you have to be careful to remove the cachaza.”

“My work has no more science than what I am explaining; I am a 60-year-old woman and this is what gives me life, since I am a widow because God took my husband away 17 years ago and I have raised my six children only with my work.” (All these are verbatim words from the informant).

7. Costs (of raw materials, labor, transportation)

The anise is bought at Q1.50 per pound;

The sugar at Q10.30 per quintal;

The peanut at Q0.40 per pound;

The pepitoria at Q0.40 per 4 ounces;

The cashew seed is taken from home and toasted afterwards,

The cinnamon at Q0.40 per ounce;

The vegetable coloring is bought in El Salvador at Q5.00 per bottle;

The net of charcoal at Q3.00;

The load of firewood at Q2.50;

The roll of Manila paper (with which the little bags are made to sell the anicillo) Q1.95

From one quintal of sugar, 3 1/2 arrobas of anicillos are obtained for sale; some sugar is lost because the cachaza has to be removed from the honey when it starts to boil.

Labor is not paid because there are no workers, but when doing her accounts, the anicillera values her own work at Q2.00 for each quintal worked, an amount that she charges the person who helps her if necessary.

The transportation cost of each basket of 5 arrobas depends on the distance, for example: from the capital to the city of Tecún Umán they charge Q1.00 for each basket.

For the stall at the fair they charge per rod or per season. If she goes to the Quiriguá fair, for example, she has to pay Q0.75 for a 3-rod stall and Q1.80 of

electricity for the entire time that the fair lasts. In the Jocotales market she pays ten cents for the place she occupies.

A load of sugar produces 7 arrobas of anicillo and is made in 6 to 8 days; each arroba is sold for Q10.00 quetzales. The pound is sold for 40, 45 or 50 cents or for 2-ounce bags at 5 cents each.

Costs to benefit a load of sugar

Sugar	Q	21.00
Anise	Q	0.75
Firewood and charcoal	Q	5.00
Vegetable coloring	Q	3.00
Labor	Q	4.00
Peanut	Q	0.80
Cashew seed	Q	0.75
Cinnamon	Q	0.40
Pepitoria	Q	0.40

Total	Q	36.10
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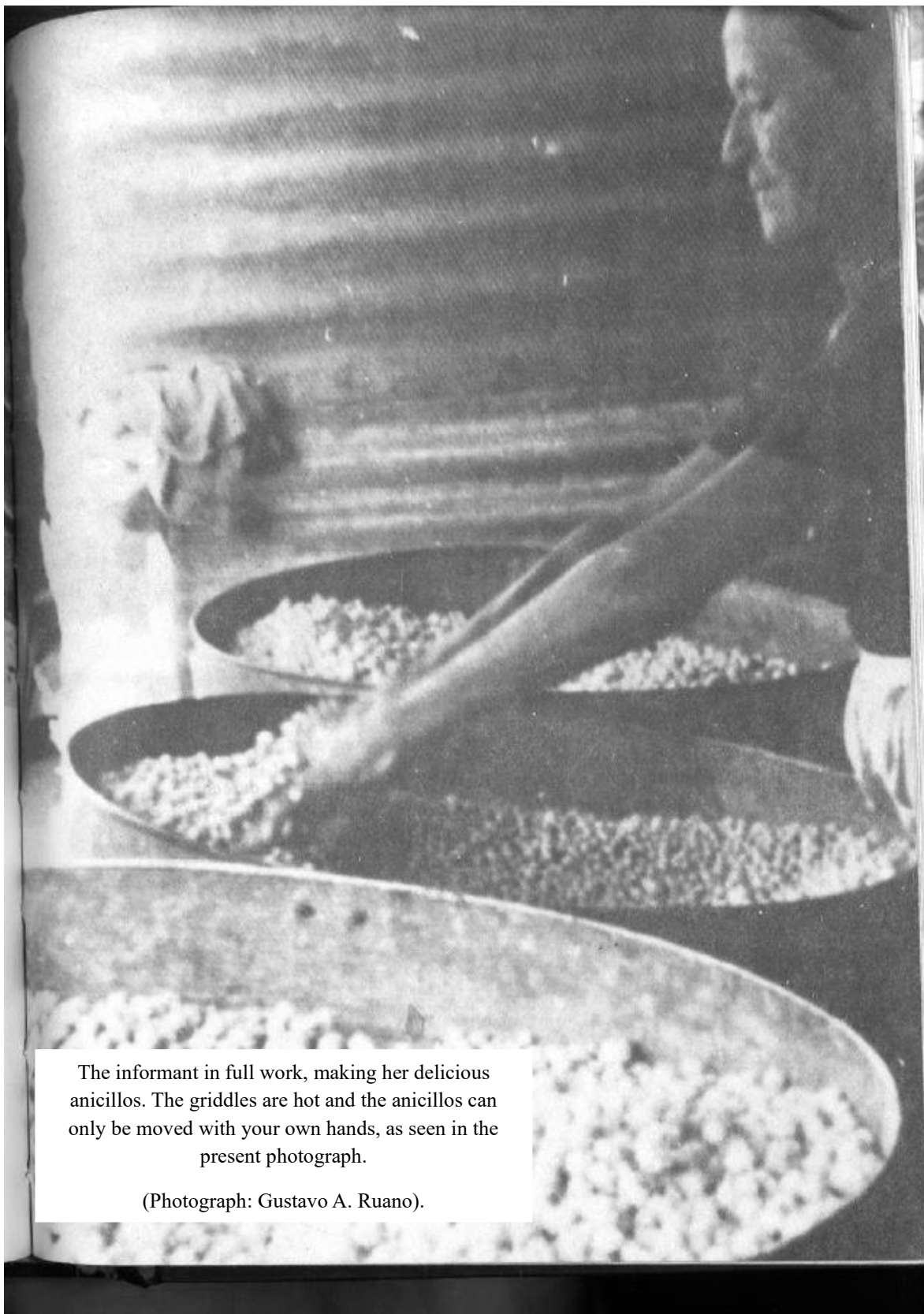
Observations

Despite the fact that the work is somewhat hard and you have to keep your hands inside the hot griddles, it is worth making her anicillos, since she earns 50% or so on the product; when carrying a larger quantity of product, it is clear that her profit is greater, discounting costs, tickets, freight, lodging, food and the stall at the fair.



Josefa Antonia Sagastume.

(Photograph: Gustavo A. Ruano)



The informant in full work, making her delicious anicillos. The griddles are hot and the anicillos can only be moved with your own hands, as seen in the present photograph.

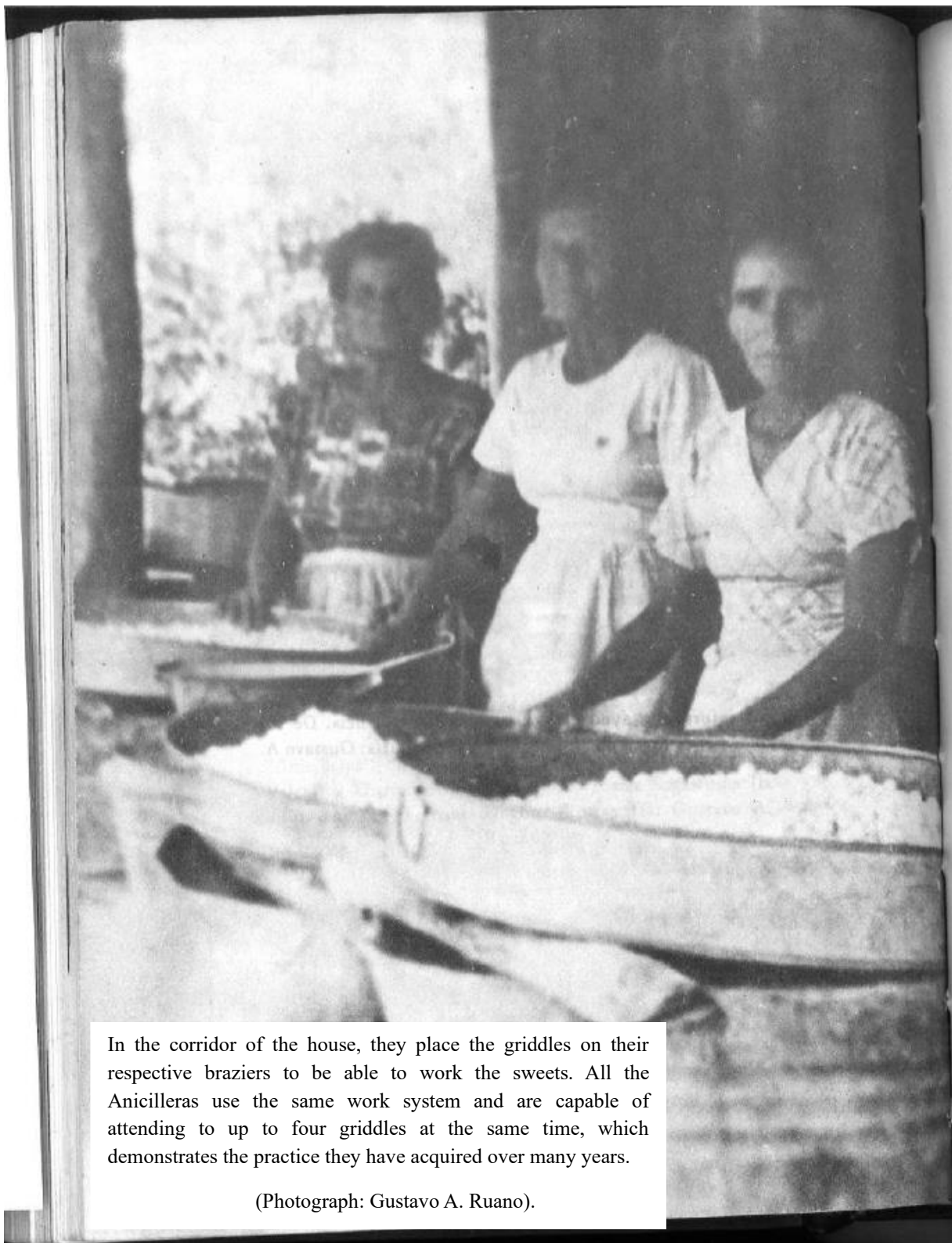
(Photograph: Gustavo A. Ruano).



“Anicilleras” from Santa Rosalía: from left to right, Valentina Guzmán, Cecilia Córdón, Josefa Sagastume (the informant) and Tomasa Aragón. (Photograph: Gustavo A. Ruano).



The informant helped by her daughter Blanca Alicia. Of her children, she is the only one who lives with her. (Photograph: Gustavo A. Ruano).



In the corridor of the house, they place the griddles on their respective braziers to be able to work the sweets. All the Anicilleras use the same work system and are capable of attending to up to four griddles at the same time, which demonstrates the practice they have acquired over many years.

(Photograph: Gustavo A. Ruano).