



MARKET DAY

in

Antigua

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In 1773 La Muy Noble y Muy Leal Ciudad de Santiago de los Caballeros de Goathemala, today La Antigua, Guatemala, was a busy and important symbol of Spanish might and dominion in the New World and an imposing capital city already more than two centuries old. In that year the Volcan de Agua, which is both a sentinal and a spectre above Antigua, awoke from its troubled rest and with earth-jarring force destroyed the city that lay along its western base. Humble house, rich man's mansion, as

well as imposing cathedrals, were tumbled down into a mass of rubble and ruin.

It was not long afterward that the capital was moved from Santiago de los Caballeros into an adjacent valley where, it was hoped, further restive manifestations of the volcanos might not be so severely felt. La Antigua, or "the old one," as now it was called, was partially cleared from the rubble, only to be subsequently shaken and again rebuilt.

Today Antigua lies serenely at the base of its volcano, giving indications of

its former splendor and of its troubled past only in the broken remains of its once patriarchal churches and in the houses that, here and there, still turn their roofless faces toward the heavens.

Within the shattered walls of what was once an imposing Jesuit monastery, church, and college, Antigua holds its main market. Where Spanish fathers once lived, meditated, and taught, there are bought and sold today the plebian necessities of the temporal life—beans and maize, chiles and meat, pineapples

and avocados.

Thousands of years before the coming of the Spaniards, the ancient Indians of Central America had learned to cultivate maize and beans, and to vary their diet with tomatoes and avocados. Could it have been here, millenia ago, in the fertile, volcanic soils surrounding La Antigua, that the progenitors of today's Guatemalans made the initial adventures in the cultivation of plants which laid the agricultural basis for what was to become one of America's most advanced native civilizations?

Those Indians of ancient times must have developed a system of markets to supply food from the countryside to their centers of population. This system was maintained, and doubtless extended, through the 300 years of Spanish occupation, on into the period of independence and down to the present time.

Today, the market is many things to many people—not the least of which, and never to be overlooked or underestimated, is its importance as a meeting place for the country people. Here the news of a vast region may be passed from person to person. The Indians who twice a week bring in their produce from the valleys, mountains, and plains—or even from the slopes of the Volcan de Agua itself—linger long in the congenial atmosphere of the market to talk with friends and to exchange gossip. Amidst the ruins of the old Jesuit monastery, one hears the languages of proud races that

Right: Where once Jesuit fathers lived and meditated, today maize is weighed and sold.



Spanish domination for more than four hundred years has not succeeded in eradicating.

Moreover, it is not only food that may be purchased, sold, or bartered, for the market is the distribution center for many other necessities of the simple life. Hand-woven textiles of both wool and cotton are to be found in great variety. Blankets, shoes, hats, a new hoe, pottery designed for many uses—these and many more are here.

Food remains, however, the most important commodity. Maize and beans are still the basis of the Guatemalan diet, and these two staples are found in every market. Without them, the ancient American civilizations could never have developed, for they supplied then, as

they do for the Indians today, the carbohydrates and proteins vital to a balanced diet.

The selection of foods in Antigua's market is greater now, however, than it was in pre-conquest times. Vegetables and fruits of old world origin are sold side by side with those native to the new world. Among the latter are tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, and avocados. To these, there have now been added cabbages, bananas, peas, oranges, carrots, apples, beets, pears, and many more that flourish in Guatemala's fertile soils and varied climates. It is this great variety of produce that makes the markets of Guatemala a revelation to one accustomed to markets in more temperate climes.



Opposite page: Among the ruins of its former grandeur, Antigua holds its pig market.

Left: Colorful costumes indicate the wearer's native village.

Photographs by the author.



Williams, Louis O. 1961. "Market Day in Antigua." *Bulletin* 32(7), 6–7.

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